

Barcelona, Spain, Europe

OVERVIEW

Introduction

A visit to any Barcelona gift shop will immediately alert you to the city's No. 1 icon: the huge, fantastic and unfinished church Sagrada Familia, which was designed by Antoni Gaudi. It's a good symbol for the city and not just because it looks flashy on a postcard. Like the church, Barcelona takes traditional ideas and presents them in new, even outrageous, forms. And the city's bursts of building and innovation give the impression that it's still being conceived. Both cathedral and city can be tough places to get a handle on, and yet their complexity is invigorating rather than forbidding.

Since the city hosted the Summer Olympics in 1992, Barcelona has been on the hot list of European destinations. Such popularity may make it harder to land a hotel room, but it has only added to the sense that Barcelona is a place to be, as much for its energetic, cosmopolitan character as for its unusual attractions.

History

As with many places in Europe, Barcelona's history has much to do with invasions and conquest. The Romans founded the original settlement—named Barcino—in 133 BC, and the town was later held by the Visigoths, the Hispano-Muslims and the Christian Carolingian Empire. In 988, Barcelona won independence from the Carolingian kings and became the dominant political and military force in the region later known as Catalonia. (Much of the city's character stems from the fact that it identifies itself more as part of Catalonia than of Spain.)

By the late 1400s, Catalonia was politically linked with other regions of Spain, but the region continued to enjoy autonomous rights and privileges until the early 1700s. That changed after the War of Succession, when Catalonia backed the losing side. Spain's King Philip V abolished Catalonia's government and laws and made Castilian (Spanish) the language of official business, rather than Catalan. This was to be but one of many conflicts between Catalonia and the central authority of Spain.

By the late 1800s, Barcelona had become one of Spain's most industrialized areas, and the factories spawned significant wealth and a dynamic middle class. Industrial profits underwrote the *modernisme* movement in architecture—Barcelona's version of art nouveau—which was spearheaded by architect Antoni Gaudi. The industrial riches did not trickle down to the working class, however, and radical movements—especially anarchism—found willing converts in the city's poorer districts. A violent uprising in 1909 was a precursor to the upheaval unleashed by the Spanish Civil War in the late 1930s, when Barcelona was ruled by leftist trade unions for several years.

The city remained a stronghold of the losing Republican cause until the end of the war and paid the price afterward. During the long reign of Francisco Franco, 1939-1975, the Catalan identity and language were viciously suppressed.

Catalonian home rule was restored soon after Franco's death in 1975, and the Catalan language was declared co-official with Castilian. Beginning in the late 1970s, a forward-looking urban policy was adopted in Barcelona, and the regeneration reached its peak in preparation for the 1992 Summer Olympics. Its popularity as a tourist and recreation center has continued to grow since then.

Geography

Barcelona is a large city with many districts, but the most popular attractions are found in a handful of areas that, for the most part, flow into one another. Beginning on the waterfront, Port Vell (Old Port) encompasses the harbor area and Barceloneta, a neighborhood that was once home to fishermen and has recently been

renovated. The Vila Olímpica (Olympic Village) lies just east of Port Vell. It, too, has undergone extensive renovation in the past decade or so and is now the city's seaside recreation area.

La Rambla, Barcelona's famous boulevard and almost a district unto itself, begins at Port Vell and extends inland to Placa Catalunya. La Rambla is the heart of the central city, and it forms the boundary between El Raval, the neighborhood to the west of the boulevard, and the Barri Gotic, the Gothic Quarter, which lies to the east. The Barri Gotic, the oldest part of Barcelona, has many bars, restaurants, museums and historic sites.

If you continue inland from the Barri Gotic, you'll enter the Eixample, an upscale shopping and residential area where many of the *modernista* buildings are located. Farther out is Gracia, which has many pleasant restaurants. Beyond Gracia, the city climbs the lower slope of Mount Tibidabo.

Montjuic, a large parklike expanse west of Port Vell, is easily visible from the central city. Museums and other attractions are found on this high ground.

Must See or Do

Sights—La Sagrada Familia; La Pedrera; Barri Gotic; the Cathedral; Parc Guell; Santa Maria del Mar.

Museums—Museu Picasso; Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya; Museu d'Historia de la Ciutat; Museu Maritim.

Memorable Meals—Lunch at Escriba Xiringuito on the seafront; high-end Mediterranean fare at Neichel; seafood at Botafumeiro; fashionable, inventive dishes at Semproniana.

Late Night—Flamenco at Los Tarantos in summer; drinks and a view at Mirablau; wine at La Vinya del Senora; dancing at La Paloma.

Walks—La Rambla and the Barri Gotic; along the waterfront; around Vila Olimpica.

Especially For Kids—Zoo de Barcelona; L'Aquarium de Barcelona; a ride on the Blue Tram to Tibidabo amusement park.

Sightseeing

Sooner or later, you must take a walk down La Rambla, Barcelona's famous thoroughfare, so you may as well make it sooner. It's a good introduction to the city, and it will put you in good position to see other nearby attractions. If you head northeast from La Rambla, you'll enter the twisting, ancient streets of the Barri Gotic (Gothic Quarter). Find your way to the cathedral as you explore the district. Nearby is the Museu d'Historia de la Ciutat (City History Museum). The Barri Gotic also holds several other treasures, so you may want to plan more than one day in the area. The highlights are Museu Picasso and another church, Santa Maria del Mar. It's fun just to amble through the streets, however, especially in the evening, when you can sample the district's many restaurants and bars.

You'll need at least a day to take in the famous sights from the *modernisme* movement in architecture. Begin at Mansana de la Discordia, on Passeig de Gracia in the Eixample district, where you can get an exterior look at three adjacent buildings built by the best-known architects of the movement. One of the buildings, Casa Amatller (Passeig de Gracia 41), contains the Ruta del Modernisme office, where you can get maps, brochures and a pass for discounted admission to the other major *modernisme* sights. Next, head a few blocks north to La Pedrera, Antoni Gaudi's amazing apartment building, which now houses several museums. Plan at least two hours to see them and to walk around among the rooftop sculptures. From the roof, you'll be able to see the spires of Sagrada Familia in the distance, and that's your next stop. (You can walk there in a leisurely half-hour jaunt or catch the metro's blue line at the Diagonal Station near La Pedrera.) Close out the day at Gaudi's incredible church. Be sure to go up in the spires for a vertigo-inducing look at the church and the city. A visit to Gaudi's Parc Guell, on the northern side of the city, is also in order, though you will probably have to fit it into another day.

Montjuic, the promontory rising southwest of the city center, merits a day of its own. Both the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya and Fundacio Joan Miro are found on Montjuic, as are several lesser attractions, including Poble Espanyol (a "theme" attraction with shops and restaurants), the Olympic stadium and Pavello Barcelona. Just strolling around this green area is pleasant, and it offers some nice views of the city

below. Figure your route ahead of time, however, as Montjuic covers a lot of territory and the attractions are widely spaced.

Landmarks and Historic Sites

Esglesia Catedral Basilica de Barcelona

The heart of the Old City, this Gothic monster was mostly built between 1298 and 1448 on the site that once held a Roman temple and later a mosque. The facade was not completed until the 1890s, and some feel that its neo-Gothic style is jarring, although it looks nice illuminated at night. Very spacious and soothing, the interior is notable for its volume, with three naves of almost equal width. The crypt of Barcelona's first patron saint, early martyr Santa Eulalia, lies behind the altar. You can see some of the older furnishings in the church's Sala Capitular (Chapter House Museum). Above all, don't miss the open-air cloister with its gently splashing fountain and restful garden patrolled by white geese. Cathedral open daily 8 am-1:15 pm and 5-7:30 pm. Cloister open daily 9 am-1 pm and 5-7 pm. Chapter House Museum open daily 10 am-12:45 pm and 5-6:45 pm. Cathedral admission is free except for 1:30-4 pm when the charge is 4 euros. Admission to the choir is 1.50 euros. Admission to the museum is 1 euro. Placa de la Seu 3, Barri Gotic, Barcelona. Phone 93-315-1554. <http://www.catedralbcn.org>.

Hospital de Sant Pau

Designed by Domenech i Montaner, who was one of the most renowned architects of the *modernisme* movement, this unusual hospital complex was built between 1902 and 1930. Located on the site of the old Santa Creu Hospital, which dates back to 1401, the Hospital de Sant Pau is the largest single example of Catalan *modernista* architecture. Packed with sculptures and mosaics, it was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1997. However, it still functions as a hospital and only the courtyards and gardens are open to visitors. There are guided visits in English on Saturday and Sunday 10 am-2 pm. 4.20 euros. Sant Antoni Maria Claret 167, Eixample, Barcelona. Phone 93-488-2078 for information regarding guided visits.

La Rambla

This tree-dappled avenue is the heart, soul and central hub of Barcelona, not to mention a world-famous thoroughfare lined with remarkably diverse architectural styles. At least once during your visit, you should plan to stroll its full length, from Placa Catalunya to the statue of Christopher Columbus presiding over the port. Day and night it surges with people of all shapes and sizes and offers a variety of amusements. Street performers line the boulevard, the most common being the human statues of one sort or another. You'll see mimes, jugglers and puppet theaters, too. There are also flower and bird vendors and lots of outdoor cafes where you can take a seat and watch the informal parade flow past you. The end near the port has an open-air artisan market where you can find attractive gifts and souvenirs 10:30 am till dusk on Saturday and Sunday.

Santa Maria del Mar

Soaring Catalan-Gothic church in the heart of the medieval city's maritime district. Designed by the architect Berenguer de Montagut, this structure is considered by many to be Barcelona's most beautiful church. The foundation stone was laid to celebrate the conquest of Cerdena, which completed the Catalan domination of the region. Its relatively swift construction, between 1329 and 1384, made for an unusual unity of style. The interior, too, is uplifting in its exquisite simplicity and elegance, partly because its baroque trappings were burned during the Spanish Civil War. It also has perfect acoustics and serves as a wonderful setting for concerts and choir recitals. Daily 9 am-1:30 pm and 4:30-8 pm. Placa Santa Maria 1, Barri Gotic, Barcelona. Phone 93-310-2390.

Neighborhoods and Districts

Barri Gotic

This, the Gothic Quarter, is the oldest portion of Barcelona, a warren of narrow streets on the northeast side of La Rambla. It was originally the site of the Roman settlement and later the area encompassed by the medieval walls. Now it's one of the city's most interesting districts, packed with shops, bars and restaurants, many of them occupying centuries-old buildings. Sights of note include the cathedral, a number of museums (including the Picasso) and surviving bits of the Roman walls. The nerve center of the old city, Placa Sant Jaume, goes back to Roman times, when it formed the intersection of the north-south and east-west roads. It's an excellent starting point from which to explore the rest of the Gothic Quarter.

Eixample

This area of the city was first built in the mid-1800s after the medieval walls were demolished and Barcelona was allowed to expand. The Eixample (pronounced *eye-SHAAM-pla*) was laid out according to a plan drawn up by Ildefons Cerda and is made up of a uniform grid with the corners of each block "flattened" or pushed in to make a hexagon out of a square—it's easy to identify on maps. The Eixample quickly became a

fashionable residential and shopping area (which it remains). It's the prime area in which to view the buildings of the *modernisme* movement. At the western edge of the Eixample is the Parc Joan Miro with the colorful totemic landmark of Miro's *Woman and Bird* rising from a small lake. It's especially pretty when lit up at night.

El Raval

On the opposite side of La Rambla from the Barri Gotic, El Raval once had a reputation as a famous red-light district (also known as the Barrio Chino, or Barri Xino). In a sense it still is: Prostitutes, both male and female (though both try to appear female), aren't an uncommon sight. But the area is also undergoing extensive revamping, making it a fascinating mixture of the old and the ultramodern. One of Gaudi's buildings, the Palau Guell, lies just a half block off of La Rambla. This area can still be a bit dicey at times, so you're better off visiting in the daylight hours.

Port Vell

The Old Port area, which surrounds the point where La Rambla meets the sea, doesn't appear old: It has been the site of renovation in recent decades, especially for the Olympics. The statue of Columbus at the foot of La Rambla makes a convenient starting point for exploring this area. Nearby, in the old royal shipyard building, is the Museu Maritim. To the northeast is Barceloneta, the traditional fishermen's district and home to the best seafood restaurants in town. (For practical purposes, Barceloneta can be thought of as part of Port Vell, though it's sometimes referred to as a place unto itself.)

Vila Olimpica

Little more than a decade ago a wasteland of derelict factories, railroad tracks and warehouses, the Olympic Village is now a stylish residential district. With its fountains and gardens, shopping malls and cinema complexes, it is also a popular leisure space for locals and visitors alike. It includes 2.5 mi/4 km of beach and the Port Olympic, packed with restaurants, bars and discos. On Sundays it seems like the whole of Barcelona is down in the Vila Olimpica area and the restaurants are crammed, so if you can go there on another day, you'll be better off.

Dining

Catalan cuisine resembles that of other Mediterranean countries and makes use of nuts, garlic, olive oil, tomatoes and herbs. One of the simplest and yet most delicious dishes (the one Catalans particularly yearn for when abroad) is *pa amb tomaquet*: a large slice of fresh country bread (toasted or not) rubbed with tomato and drizzled with virgin olive oil. It may be topped with Iberian ham, cheese and anchovies or served along with meat, chicken or fish *a la brasa* (cooked over a charcoal fire). Other local specialties include *esqueixada* (a salad of raw salt cod with onions and peppers), *espinacs a la catalana* (spinach sauteed with raisins and pine nuts) and *bacalla a la llauna* (salt cod with tomato, garlic and parsley). If you have a sweet tooth, *crema catalana* (a cinnamon- and lemon-flavored custard) is a must for dessert.

Many restaurants announce themselves as serving *cuina de mercat* or *cocina de mercado*, meaning they use whatever is in season at the local market: Freshness is of the essence. There are restaurants serving dishes from other regions of Spain, too. Galician cuisine, in particular, is popular and available at the superb (and pricey) Botafumeiro as well as neighborhood bars. Restaurants specializing in the cuisine of other countries are also common, but during a brief stay in the city, we generally prefer to eat local dishes.

You can eat well anywhere in the city, although many of the most emblematic restaurants are clustered in the Barri Gotic and the Raval, with Barceloneta and the Olympic Port being a must for seafood and the sheer pleasure of eating outdoors. Gracia, too, is full of eating places, many of them very inexpensive because they're more off the beaten tourist track.

Like most Europeans, the Catalans begin their day with a light breakfast that may include *bollos* (rolls), *churros* (fried fritters) and pastries. Lunch is served about 1:30 pm at the very earliest, with peak time being 2-4 pm. *Berenar* or *merienda* is an afternoon snack taken at around 4 or 5 pm to get you through to a late dinner, which isn't served until 9 pm or after. The best bargains are available at lunch, when most restaurants offer the *menu del dia* or set lunch. Even the most basic (for little over 6 euros) offer a choice of starter course, main course of meat or fish and dessert, plus a drink.

Shopping

The industrious Catalans have often been dubbed a nation of shopkeepers, and Barcelona does have a staggering number of shops—of every kind and in every neighborhood. Barri Gotic and El Raval, in particular, have many quirky little shops with long family traditions, clinging to survival in the face of the malls and big-name merchants. Of course, Barcelona has its malls and department stores, as well. A little

shopping time spent around Placa Catalunya will introduce you to El Corte Ingles department store and El Triangle shopping mall.

Large or small, many of the city's merchants play to the city's love of design. In clothes, look for Catalan designers such as Toni Miro and Adolfo Dominguez. Leather shoes, bags, wallets and belts can be particularly stunning and a good value.

Some of the best choices are the Spanish brands: Loewe, Yanko, Farrutx and Camper. Even if you never set foot in a store, you'll get to appreciate the city's sense of style by strolling past the elaborate window displays.

Food and drink are also highly prized in Barcelona and make a good souvenir of your trip. Stock up on olives and cheese at La Boqueria market on La Rambla and cold-pressed virgin olive oil and Spanish wine at a large grocer, such as Colmado Quilez. If you don't mind carting heavy parcels home, treat yourself to an earthenware cooking pot, a cast iron *plantxa* or the more portable ceramic tapas dishes.

To guide you through this cornucopia, the city has mapped out the 3-mi-/5-km-long Shopping Line linking up different shopping areas that also happen to be dotted with many of the most interesting tourist sights. The comfortable TombBus links the areas, running from Placa Catalunya to El Corte Ingles store at the top end of the Diagonal and back. The Barcelona Card transportation pass will give you a discount at a number of shops on the route: They're identified by the Shopping Line logo—four colored diamonds in a white circle within a blue circle.

Shopping Hours: Generally, Monday-Saturday 9 or 10 am to 1 or 2 pm and 4 or 5 pm to 8 or 9 pm. Many neighborhood food stores and bakeries open at the crack of dawn, have a long break at lunch and are open again 5-9 pm. The department stores, shopping malls and many of the larger stores on the main shopping streets stay open at lunchtime. In summer, many shops close on Saturday afternoons. Sunday opening is strictly regulated: The big stores and malls are allowed to open on eight Sundays each year, including the four Sundays before Christmas. Otherwise, you'll mostly find only convenience stores and gift shops open on Sunday.

Shopping Areas

El Triangle

Smart mall in Placa Catalunya, with a combination of small shops and big-name stores. Monday-Saturday 10 am-10 pm. Placa Catalunya 4, Barcelona. Phone 93-318-0108.

L'Illa

Housed in the unmistakable white building known as the "Recumbent Skyscraper," this elegant and airy commercial center has a food market, lots of superb little stalls, coffee bars and eateries, and a huge branch of the Caprabo supermarket. Monday-Friday 10 am-9:30 pm. Caprabo is open Monday-Saturday 9:30 am-9:30 pm. Avinguda Diagonal 545, Barcelona. Phone 93-444-0000.

Personal Safety

In general, Barcelona is a reasonably safe city to walk around in, even late at night. The biggest danger is petty crime—pickpocketing, bag snatching and assorted scams. Thieves tend to ply their trades in the busy tourist spots such as La Rambla, the Barri Gotic, down by the port, on the metro and on the buses. A few precautions will help keep you out of trouble: Don't carry money, credit cards or documents in back pockets, breast pockets or backpacks. Leave valuables in a safe-deposit box at your hotel. Wear purses, bags and cameras slung around your neck or across your chest and keep them close to your body in crowds. Never leave any item of value unattended or inside of a parked car.

If you should be the victim of a crime, report it at a police station—Comisaria de Policia—as you will need a copy of the report to make an insurance claim (don't expect that your property will be recovered). The main police station is at Via Laietana 49. Phone 93-290-3000. A better option is to go to the Centro de Atencion Policial at Rambla 43, a station specially designed for tourists, where English is spoken. It's open 24 hours a day in summer.

Etiquette

Spain has continued to make steady economic progress in recent decades and is now a vital member of the

European Union. Business travelers will find a moderately affluent country, in step with the age of high technology but still maintaining many of its traditions.

Personal Introductions—Handshakes are the typical greeting. Last names with the appropriate Spanish title are used. If your acquaintance has a professional title, you will learn it when introduced; if not, *senor* (male), *senora* (married female) and *senorita* (unmarried female) are appropriate. The title and the person's last name should be used until you are instructed otherwise. Note that it is typical for Spanish people to have two surnames, one from their father and one from their mother. The father's surname will be given first during the introduction, and that's the name that is used to address or speak of the person.

Thus, "Senor Federico Garcia Lorca " would be addressed as "Senor Garcia." Invest in business cards with the information printed in English on one side and Spanish on the other.

Negotiating—Business is typically preceded by small talk and pleasantries. Negotiations can be a more extended process than in northern European countries. Companies tend to be hierarchical, so focus on those individuals of your equal rank or higher. At the same time, the opinion of everyone in the company is important. You are an outsider and must ingratiate yourself. Thus, expect many questions about your business, background and family. Intuition, as much as objective fact, is important in their impression of you, so remain warm and friendly in your demeanor. Anticipate that many of the people important to a decision may not be present in any given meeting.

Body Language—Conversations take place at close quarters, and polite conversational touching may be practiced. The "OK" gesture, with the thumb and index finger forming a circle, is considered obscene in Spain.

Conversation—If you don't speak Spanish, try to learn at least a few phrases well. Spanish culture is always a good topic, as is Spanish literature, if you are knowledgeable. Sports and travel are good topics. Do not criticize bullfighting should the topic arise. Be aware that, in many regards, Spain is still a country of regions: Many people will identify more strongly with their local area than with the country as a whole.

Tipping

There are no set rules for tipping in Barcelona. As a guideline, for restaurants and taxis, 5%-10% of the bill will suffice, depending, of course, on the quality of service. Locals may leave the change or just a few small coins after having a drink at a bar or after a meal. If you're using a car, note that it's customary to tip gas-station attendants who pump your gas about 5% of the total sale.

What to Wear

It won't take you long to learn that Barcelona is a style-conscious city, so it's a good idea to have some options other than jeans and T-shirts. For the heat of summer, take along the coolest clothes possible. Fashionable long shorts and sleeveless tops are fine, but bathing gear is strictly for the beach. Sunscreen and a hat will be two useful accessories. In autumn and spring, it can be chilly in the morning and evening, so take along a jacket and sweater. In the relatively mild winter, you are unlikely to need hats, gloves, scarves, boots or heavy overcoats, but do have a sweater and a warm jacket or coat for the cold spells. Business visitors should stick to plain, conservative business suits with ties for the men: dark colors in winter, lighter in summer. Above all, pack comfortable walking shoes.

Italy, Europe

OVERVIEW

Introduction

As we hiked in the mountains, we were drawn by the tinkling sound of cowbells to a meadow where we came upon a breathtaking vista: a cluster of velvet-brown cows grazing among wildflowers, with the rugged limestone peaks of the Dolomites in the background. And just as entrancing as the view was the smell of freshly cooked pasta wafting our way from a *rifugio*, a traditional alpine shelter offering protection from sudden storms, hearty rustic fare and, in this case, a bed for the night. There, perched along a steep cliff at the edge of the meadow, we were soon seated at a table on the balcony, taking in the view along with one of the best meals we've ever had.

That kind of total sensory experience, as much as Italy's better-known wonders of art and architecture, reveals what is so fascinating about the country. A visit to Italy is a lesson in living well. Open-air vegetable and fruit markets, neighborhood bakeries and fresh cheeses made daily are fixtures of Italian life. Tradition reigns: Neighbors still meet in the piazza to discuss the day, laundry is still line-dried, even in the largest of cities, and the *passeggiata* (leisurely stroll) is still made in the evening air—preferably with a gelato in hand. From the mountains to the coasts, the emphasis is on simple pleasures and high quality.

History

Some say that the people of Italy have civilized Europe twice, once in ancient times and again after the Middle Ages. Under the Roman Republic and later the Roman Empire, Rome ruled much of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East for nearly a thousand years, until the Visigoths sacked Rome in AD 476 and the western empire fell. Greek ideals and Roman justice were spread throughout the Mediterranean region by the empire's legions. Today, Rome's legal, cultural and scientific legacies endure throughout the world. Places as diverse as Japan, Louisiana and Brazil are ruled by modern versions of Roman law, and the Romance languages (including French, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish), as well as scientific terminology, are derived from Latin. At its height, Rome controlled lands from the Irish Sea to the Caspian Sea; Roman ruins can be found from Great Britain to Morocco, Turkey and Jordan. During the Renaissance, Italy rose to the forefront of Western civilization again, when such notable citizens as Galileo, Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci made enormous contributions to science, art and architecture.

Though the Roman legal system and famous Roman roads gave Europe a vision of cultural unity, Italy itself only achieved political unity in 1870. Before then, modern-day Italy was a collection of squabbling kingdoms, dukedoms and city-states that were often dominated by outside forces. Although currently unified under the government in Rome, the country is still divided into 20 distinct regions, each with its own landscape, history, dialects, artistic styles, foods and architecture. For many visitors, it is Italy's diversity that lends the country its most distinctive charms.

In the past 100 years, Italy has gone from monarchy to parliamentary system to fascism to a seemingly unending series of coalition governments—an average of one a year since 1946. The political situation, however, appears to have stabilized a bit in recent years. After a half-decade under the leftist Ulivo coalition, there has been a backlash to the right. In 2001, the country elected Silvio Berlusconi, the controversial media magnate and leader of the Forza Italia coalition. However, the general shift toward the right (particularly in the north) is not as important as Italy's new obligations to the European Union. Infrastructure, law, labor policies and finance are rapidly being made more efficient in order to comply with E.U. standards.

Geography

Italy resembles a boot about to kick the Sicilian "football," with the island of Sardinia already in the air. One of the most densely populated countries in Europe, Italy is characterized by rugged, mountainous terrain and thousands of miles of coastline. The Alps form a barrier to the north (blocking bad weather more successfully than they ever did invaders), and the Apennines run the length of the boot. Only in the north, in the Po River valley, is there relatively flat land. No place is very far from the sea. To the east is the Adriatic, to the southeast the Ionian and to the west the Tyrrhenian.

Snapshot

Italy's primary attractions include culture (modern, old and ancient), fabulous regional cuisine, historic sites, varied and stunning scenery, beaches, jagged coastline, architecture, world-class skiing, opera, watersports, elegant health and beauty spas, picturesque ruins, and shopping (for high-quality clothing, shoes, ceramics and designer goods).

Those who want a diverse, fairly informal vacation, who are romantics, and who love art, history and lovely settings will enjoy Italy. The air of blithe inefficiency in some parts of the country may be disconcerting for travelers who demand the correct, crisp efficiency of northern European countries: A timetable may be treated more as a romantic ideal than as an attainable goal.

Potpourri

During high season, some museums in major cities, such as the Brera Gallery in Milan, the Capitoline Museums in Rome and the Archaeological Museum in Naples, are open as late as 10 pm or even midnight, allowing visitors the chance to pack in more sightseeing during what is generally down time. To avoid disappointment, always check museum hours and guidelines in advance. At many of the most visited museums, like Florence's Uffizi and Galleria dell'Accademia, you can avoid long lines by placing a reservation for a specific time.

Italy has taken steps to protect some of its monuments from acts of defacement and wear and tear. Following attacks on Michelangelo's magnificent *David* and the *Pieta*, glass barriers were erected to protect some of Italy's most famous works of art. To protect Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece *The Last Supper* in Milan, the number of visitors is strictly limited; those admitted must pass through two separate glass cabins that control air quality and humidity levels. And in Florence, the doors of the Baptistry and other treasures have been moved to the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo.

Rumor has it that the colorful uniforms of the Vatican's Swiss guard were designed by Michelangelo. But don't think the guard is just there for ceremonial purposes or to look pretty—it's a highly trained security force sworn to protect the pope.

Cigar smokers should try the curious Tuscan cigar, the *Toscano vecchio*. Made in Lucca of all-natural tobacco, it comes twisted together in groups of three and is sold all over Italy.

Italy's ski industry is highly developed. The ski lifts in the resorts around Trentino can whisk more than 300,000 people up the slopes every hour. Posh ski towns like Cortina d'Ampezzo offer spectacular hiking possibilities in the summer.

The Slow Food movement, born in Italy in 1986, protects distinctive regional foods and wine and promotes the art of savoring them. It's now an international organization that also is concerned with ecology and biodiversity issues.

Opera is in full swing December-June in major Italian cities, but summer also boasts memorable performances. Verona is famous for opera staged in the Roman Arena, and the massive ruins of the Baths of Caracalla in Rome provide a dramatic setting.

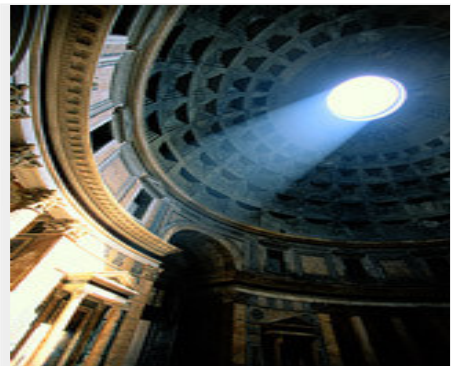
Rome, Italy, Europe

OVERVIEW

Introduction

Rome seems to have its own gravitational pull, attracting not only millions of tourists each year, but also the most creative artists and thinkers of every era. All that surrounds a visitor in Rome—the stunning art and architecture, the terrible traffic, the grandeur of scale and the lively (almost hyperanimated) citizens—guarantees an unforgettable visit. Rome as we find it is a supreme palimpsest. The ruins of pagan temples have become the foundation of Christian churches, ancient theaters have been made into medieval family fortresses, and Corinthian columns have become part of new walls. Layers of the ages exist, one on top of the other, but the flow of Roman life is ever forward, with a respect for its glorious past.

Rome wasn't built in a day, and don't expect to see it in one. You could spend a full day seeing everything in the area of the ancient center: the Michelangelo-designed Campidoglio, the Palatine Hill (with its charming little museum) and the Roman Forum, as well as the nearby Colosseum. The basilicas take a little longer because they are spread out around the city. If it's views you're after, climb the dome of St. Peter's or admire the panorama from the top of the Spanish Steps (better yet, from the Pincio Gardens above it) at sunset, or walk around the Colosseum to catch a glimpse of the Forum. From these vantage points you'd well understand why Rome is called the Eternal City. Bustling, beautiful Rome, sprawling among its seven hills, is fascinating for both its ancient and its modern wonders.



Oculus and Dome of the Pantheon

This is not to say that everyone will like Rome: Some people are put off by the city's untidiness and seeming disorganization. Keep in mind that most lovers of Rome fall in love with what they see along the way to the grand sights. Either you'll never go back or you'll plan your return trip on the way home.

History

Rome is known as the Eternal City not because it has merely survived for nearly 3,000 years, but because it has retained political, religious and artistic significance throughout that time. Legend has it that Rome was founded by Romulus in 753 BC, but archaeologists have found evidence of a much earlier Etruscan settlement. Fact and myth are difficult to untangle regarding the early periods of Rome, but it's clear that by the time the Roman Republic was founded in 509 BC, Rome had already become the major power in Latium. And by the first century AD, through military conquest, cunning diplomacy and innovative political organization, Rome had become the dominant power in the Mediterranean world.

During the period of the late Republic, Julius Caesar and other generals extended the boundaries and glory of Rome while simultaneously destroying its principles of government. The Roman Empire followed, remaining a serious power for hundreds of years. During the early years of the Empire, literature began to flourish, giving rise to great writers such as Cicero, Virgil, Catullus and Ovid.

As literature bloomed, however, political structure crumbled, and squabbles and coups (as well as increasing debauchery) eventually led to the empire's division and fall. In the first century AD, the Christian apostles Peter and Paul came to the largest city of the day to spread the Christian faith, but they were martyred, along with hundreds of other Christians, during Emperor Nero's persecutions (begun after the fire of Rome in AD 64). Persecutions continued, on and off, until Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity in AD 312. The first Christian emperor also gave the Catholic Church its first temporal powers, beginning the papal state, which continued until the end of the 19th century (with occasional periods of foreign occupation). Papal coffers funded the projects of Michelangelo, Raphael and Bernini, the university of Rome and the city's infrastructure—as well as the infamous Inquisition.

Benito Mussolini descended on Rome in 1922 and formed the world's first fascist government. When World War II broke out, Italy allied itself with Nazi Germany, but the *partigiani* (Italian resistance) soon convinced the majority of Italians to support the Allies. The fact that Rome was declared an open city spared it from being destroyed by bombing but did little to stop the massacres and pillaging by the Germans. When American troops liberated Rome on 4 June 1944, Rome and Italy were destitute. But the economic boom of the 1950s revived both the city and the country.

Rome became the center of government and continued to grow as the country's political and cultural capital. Funds dispersed by the Vatican to the city for its monumental 2000 Jubilee, together with the city council's own revitalized urban plan, improved infrastructure and supported massive restoration projects. This has boosted the awareness and appreciation of art, architecture and culture in the city.

Geography

For urban planners and traffic managers, Rome is a headache. Fortunately, visitors need only focus on navigating the city, not solving its traffic problems. The city's historic center is the Centro Storico—it's on the left bank (east side) of the Tiber River (called the Tevere in Italian), and most of the original seven hills are located there. The ancient political, spiritual and commercial heart of this area is the Campidoglio (Capitoline Hill) and the adjacent Foro Romano (Roman Forum). Nearby are the most important monuments of ancient Rome, including Trajan's Markets, the Imperial Forum, the Colosseum and the Arches of Constantine, Septimius Severus and Titus. To the south are Palatine Hill, Circus Maximus and, a bit farther, the Baths of Caracalla, the Appian Way and the Christian catacombs.

The city's main piazzas are also helpful for orientation. Piazza Venezia and the adjoining Piazza Campidoglio are just northwest of the Roman Forum, and Piazza Navona is still farther northwest. Piazza del Popolo is on the western edge of Villa Borghese, a large park northeast of the Centro Storico. Piazza di Spagna and the Spanish Steps are just south of Piazza del Popolo. Connecting Via del Popolo and Piazza Venezia is Via del Corso, the city's main street.

On the right (west) bank of the Tiber, west of the Centro Storico, is Vatican City. To the south of the Vatican are Villa Doria Pamphilj and Gianicolo (Janiculum Hill). The medieval neighborhood of Trastevere (literally, "across the river") is between the Gianicolo and the river, nestled in the westward bend of the river across from Isola Tiberina, an island in the Tiber. On the east side of Tiberina is the old Jewish ghetto, which contains one of the largest synagogues in Europe along with some of the best restaurants serving traditional Roman fare.

SEE AND DO

Must See or Do

Sights—The ancient Forums, the Palatine Hill, Trajan's Markets, the Campidoglio and the Colosseum; St. Peter's Basilica; the fountains of Piazza Navona; the Spanish Steps; the Pantheon; Trevi Fountain; Circus Maximus; the Column of Marcus Aurelius; the catacombs and monuments along the ancient Appian Way; Piazza del Popolo and the Pincio gardens above it; Castel Sant'Angelo.

Museums—The Vatican Museums and the Sistine Chapel; sculptures, frescoes and the Tabularium of the Capitoline Museums; phenomenal art at the Galleria Borghese; the privately owned Galleria Doria Pamphilj; the modern works at the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna.

Walks—A stroll in Piazza Navona; a leisurely walk from the top of the Spanish Steps to the Pincio Gardens at dusk; a daytime walk through the outdoor market at Campo dei Fiori; the pedestrian walk from the Trevi Fountain to the Pantheon before or after dinner; the picturesque open spaces of Villa Borghese and Villa Pamphilj.

Sightseeing

The city is a great open-air museum with a high concentration of monuments, churches and artwork. Even the smallest courtyard hidden in the narrowest street typically holds a tiny, wonderful detail—a decorated sidewalk or a stray column, fresco or fountain. To get the most out of your visit, you'll need to walk—a lot. Before setting off, stop by one of the information kiosks that dispenses maps, brochures and advice in several languages.

Start in the historic heart of the city, called the Centro Storico. That's where you'll find the Imperial Forums, including the Roman Forum, Trajan's Column and Markets, and the Palatine Hill. Nearby are the Arch of Constantine, the Colosseum and, farther away, the Circus Maximus. Exploring the area between the Forums and Piazza del Popolo is like taking a course in European art history: You'll pass the facades of noble palaces and churches and stroll through elegant squares. Along the way, be sure to turn off the Via del Corso to visit the Pantheon.

Once you reach Piazza del Popolo, take time to enjoy the green expanse of the Pincio gardens. The nearby Villa Borghese is home not only to umbrella pines but also to three world-class museums: Galleria Borghese, Galleria Nazionale di Arte Moderna and Museo Nazionale di Villa Giulia. The palaces around Piazza del Campidoglio, which make up the Capitoline Museum complex, are also well worth visiting.

World-famous examples of Christian and pre-Christian art and architecture are contained in St. Peter's Basilica and the Vatican Museums in Vatican City. The medieval district of Trastevere has one of the oldest churches in Christendom, Santa Maria. The district itself is a great place to stroll, dine or shop, especially at night, when the streets come alive. Back across the river, on the left bank, the Jewish Ghetto is another medieval area full of ambience. If time permits, you can also visit the Catacombs of San Callisto or, invariably, one more church.

Be forewarned: Hours of admission for museums and historic sights sometimes change without notice. Save yourself stress and call to check times or reserve a time slot for something that is important to you. As a rule, most churches are open in the morning, close around 12:30 pm for lunch, and reopen at 3:30 pm. Keep these guidelines in mind and you'll avoid the dreaded "Chiuso" (closed) sign.

Landmarks and Historic Sites

Arch of Constantine

On this triple triumphal arch immediately outside the Colosseum, sculptural friezes commemorate the first Christian emperor's important military victory over Maxentius in AD 312. Many of the sculptures and medallions were taken from earlier monuments. The arch stands at the west side of the Colosseum, where the piazza meets Via di San Gregorio VII.

Basilica di San Pietro

The opulent, gilt-encrusted St. Peter's is the most imposing church in Christendom and the ultimate destination for pilgrims and visitors interested in masterpieces of art and architecture. The dome, designed

by Michelangelo, is one of the largest in the world, but when you approach it through Bernini's monumental Piazza San Pietro, the dome seems to sink behind the church's high facade, which was designed by Stefano Maderno after Michelangelo's death.

The basilica contains magnificent works of art, including Michelangelo's *Pieta*, the tomb of Clement XIII by Canova and a stunning mosaic by Giotto. The incredible amount of gold mosaic work and Bernini's enormous, ornate bronze baldachino are striking, as is the sheer size of the building. On the lower level is a crypt where many popes (and four women) are buried. The scale and amount of art can be overwhelming—we suggest you take a free tour with one of the volunteer guides. Ninety-minute tours are led in English Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday at 3 pm. They start at the information desk to the right as you enter the portico of the basilica. Try this perspective trick: Stand on one of the round porphyry disks on either side of the obelisk (they're the darkest disks in the pavement) and see how Bernini's four column-wide colonnades line up to form a single row.

When the pope is in residence, he usually blesses the crowds in Piazza San Pietro at noon on Sunday. With a little planning, it's possible to also attend a papal audience, held Wednesday at 10:30 am in Piazza San Pietro (or in the Paul VI Audience Hall in the winter). Free admission tickets can be ordered in advance by writing. You can also go to the Portone di Bronzo (bronze doors) and ask the Swiss Guards there for tickets to the next audience (standing room only). To get a reserved seat, ask the guard for the Prefettura (the office that handles the audiences), where you can fill out a form requesting a seat. The Prefettura is open Monday-Friday 9 am-1:30 pm. Contact your local Catholic priest for more information.

The Scavi are the remarkably intact excavations of the necropolis buried underneath St. Peter's. They contain a first-century street with tombs, including what is believed to be the burial place of St. Peter himself. The site lies below the basement crypt of the popes. Visits are strictly monitored, currently allowing only a few 1.5-hour tours a day, but it's well worth trying to reserve a spot. Apply in person or in writing to the Uffici de Scavi at the Arco della Compagnie (Arch of the Bells), to the left of the basilica. Again, tell the Swiss Guards what you want and they will direct you to the office, which is open Monday-Friday 9 am-5 pm. Phone 06-6988-5318. Fax 06-6988-5518. Tickets are 9 euros for adults.

The dress code for all indoor areas at the Vatican is strictly enforced: Both men and women must have their knees and shoulders covered. The basilica is open daily 7 am-7 pm (till 6 pm in winter). Mass is held by visiting priests on Sunday at 7, 8, 9 and 10 am. Admission to the basilica is free; ascending to the dome is 4 euros by foot or 5 euros by elevator. Piazza San Pietro (take the metro to Ottaviano for the basilica and to Cipro-Musei Vaticani for the museums), Rome. Phone 06-6988-3114 for the Prefettura.
<http://www.vatican.va>.

Basilica di Santa Maria in Trastevere

This 12th-century church, built over a third-century church, is one of the oldest churches in Rome and the first church dedicated to the Virgin Mary. It has been adorned with stunning mosaics, 22 ancient columns, frescoes and entire chapels from several centuries. The gold mosaic apse is particularly impressive. Piazza Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome.

Castel Sant'Angelo

This round fortress rises over the banks of the Tiber, a cannonball shot from the Vatican. Originally constructed by Emperor Hadrian as his mausoleum in AD 123, it was converted later into a papal stronghold and was connected to the Vatican by a concealed passageway in the defensive walls. Strolling around its many levels, ages and stages—both dark and glorious—is fun. There is also an interesting museum inside and a lovely park, too. The fortifications are famous as the setting for the third act of Puccini's *Tosca*, in which the heroine throws herself over the parapet. Tuesday-Sunday 9 am-8 pm. 5 euros; a separate fee is charged for a tour of the prisons and the secret passage (only at certain times of the year). Lungotevere Castello 50, Rome. Phone 06-681-9111 For information and reservations, call 06-3996-7700.

Catacombs of San Callisto

These five floors of intricate passageways were the first official cemetery of the Roman church between the second and eighth centuries. Guided tours include a look at early Christian frescoes and imagery (but no bones—the remains were either stolen or long since transferred to the Pantheon). Thursday-Tuesday 8:30 am-noon and 2:30-5 pm, until 5:30 in the summer. Closed the month of February. 5 euros. Via Appia Antica 110 (take Bus 218 from Piazza San Giovanni in Laterano, a 15-minute ride), Rome. Phone 06-5130-1580. <http://www.catacombe.roma.it>.

Chiesa di San Clemente

This Irish Dominican church is a microcosm of Rome, with the many layers of Roman history visible in its structure. At street level is a 12th-century church with Renaissance and baroque additions. Below this church are excavations of a fourth-century basilica, which in turn was constructed on top of a Roman house

from the time of Nero and a Mithraic temple from the first century BC. The church also has magnificent mosaics, frescoes and mosaic pavements. All in all, it illustrates the evolution of Christian art between the first and 19th centuries. Its enclosed medieval courtyard is a quiet oasis from the roaring traffic outside. The Dominicans give explanatory tours and run a bookshop. Daily 9 am-12:30 pm and 3-6 pm. You can enter the street-level church for free, but a visit to the lower levels costs about 2 euros. Piazza di San Clemente on Via di San Giovanni (around the corner from the Colosseum), Rome. Phone 06-7045-0944.

Chiesa di Sant'Ignazio di Loyola

This church was commissioned by the Jesuits at the height of the baroque period, but their funds were exhausted before they had finished the vault of the dome. Instead, they painted the ceilings with some of the most striking trompe l'oeil work you'll ever see. It's easy to strain your neck looking at it all. Andrea Pozzo's *Triumph of St. Ignatius* is a triumph of light and perspective. A mass in English takes place every Sunday at 11 am. Daily 7:30 am-12:30 pm and 3-7 pm. Piazza de Sant'Ignazio on Via del Seminario, Rome. Phone 06-679-4560.

Chiesa di Santa Maria in Cosmedin

This basilica is famous for *La Bocca della Verita* (Mouth of Truth). It's a huge marble disk in the shape of a face that was originally a Roman sewer cover and is now embedded in the portico wall of the church. According to tradition, the mouth will bite off a liar's hand. The church itself is often overlooked, but its early medieval architecture, frescoes, mosaic floors and Masonic imagery inside are well worth a look. Daily 10 am-1 pm and 3-5 pm. Piazza della Bocca della Verita 18 (between the Circo Massimo and the Tiber), Rome. Phone 06-678-1419.

Chiesa di Santa Maria sopra Minerva

Under this church lies a Roman temple to the goddess Minerva. Inside you can see stunning lapis and gold ceiling mosaics and Michelangelo's statue, *The Redeemer*. Bernini's playful elephant sculpture, which contains Rome's smallest obelisk, is the centerpiece of the piazza in front of the church, where the ongoing excavations of the temple below can be observed. Daily 8 am-7 pm. Piazza della Minerva (near the Pantheon), Rome.

Chiesa Santa Maria della Concezione

Don't miss the church itself, with its painting of St. Michael and the devil, but the big draw here is the adjoining Cimiterio dei Cappuccini—the church's crypts. These five rooms are filled with intricate ornamentation, mosaics and sculptures, all made with the bones of the Capuchin friars who served the church over the centuries. It's a spooky but fascinating sight. Daily except Thursday 9 am-noon and 3-6 pm. A voluntary contribution is requested. Via Veneto 27, Rome. Phone 06-487-1185. <http://www.cappucciniviaveneto.it>.

Circo Massimo

The Circus Maximus was built in 600 BC. One of the largest structures ever dedicated to entertainment, it could hold an audience of 385,000. The long, oval field was used for chariot races and contests between gladiators and wild beasts. Today, all that remains is a large, oval park—the ancient chariot course now trod only by joggers. It is still occasionally used for large concerts and important political protests. It is best seen from the Palatine Hill, which provides an emperor's-eye view. Between Palatine and Aventine Hills, Rome.

Colosseo

Originally called the Flavian Amphitheater and the site of gladiatorial combat, the Colosseum is the most frequently evoked symbol of Rome. Unfortunately, it became a handy source of marble for various popes who stripped it for their building projects. Even so, its size and history are still quite breathtaking. You'll generally see a handful of people out front in gladiator costumes trying to make a few euros off the tourists. From mid July to the end of September, plays are staged in and around the Colosseum. Daily 9 am until one hour before sunset. Tours in English (45 minutes long), audio tours and guided archaeological tours are available. Admission 8 euros (the same ticket gains you entrance to a small museum, as well as to the Palatine Hill), with an additional 1.50 euros for preregistration (no line). At the southern end of Via dei Fori Imperiali, Rome. Phone 06-3996-7700. <http://www.pierreci.it> for reservations.

Domus Aurea

Emperor Nero had this enormous residence built after Rome burned in AD 64. Named for the precious metal used decoratively throughout the building, his "Golden House" once covered nearly one-third of the city, between the Caelian and Palatine Hills, but only a portion of the structure remains. The frescoes in this palace, rediscovered in the Renaissance, later inspired such artists as Michelangelo and Raphael. One of the finest palaces of the early Empire still in existence, it has only recently reopened to visitors. Advance booking required. Daily except Tuesday 9 am-7:45 pm. 6.50 euros (5 euros for the ticket and 1.50 euros for the obligatory booking fee). English tours offered every 80 minutes for an additional 3.50 euros. Viale della Domus Aurea, Rome. Phone 06-3996-7700. <http://www.pierreci.it>.

Foro Romano

Once the political and religious epicenter of the Western world, the Roman Forum today appears as fragmented columns and ancient streets. However, even in ruins, the Forum has become a testament to Roman and, indeed, all Western, civilization. The best view is at night, thanks to the skillfully placed lighting. Within the Forum are the Sacred Way, the Via Trionfale (an avenue where victorious generals paraded with their soldiers and prisoners) and the Arch of Titus. On the south side of the Forum is the Palatine Museum. The Forum ruins are open daily 9 am to one hour before sunset. Free. One-hour tours in English are offered daily at 10:30 am for 3.50 euros; audio tours are available for 4 euros. Largo Romolo e Remo and Via dei Fori Imperiali, Rome. Phone 06-3996-7700.

Pantheon

A monumental round temple dedicated to all the Roman gods, built in the second century AD by emperor-architect Hadrian, the Pantheon is considered the best-preserved ancient Roman structure. Its famed dome, one of the largest masonry domes ever built, was a technical achievement of the highest order.

The bronze coating of the roof was later melted down by Pope Urban VIII Barberini to make papal cannons and Bernini's famous baldacchino over the high altar of St. Peter's. The Pantheon's interior, with the 30-ft/9-m oculus at the top, is stunning, especially when a light rain falls through the opening. (Some visitors claim they've seen a rainbow formed inside.) The painter Raphael and the first king of Italy, Victor Emanuel II, are buried inside, along with hundreds of early Christian martyrs whose remains were transferred from the catacombs in the seventh century, when the pagan temple was dedicated as a church, Santa Maria ad Martyres. Monday-Saturday 8:30 am-7:30 pm, Sunday 9 am-6 pm, holidays 9 am-1 pm. Mass is held Saturday at 5 pm and Sunday at 10:30 am and 4:30 pm. Free. Piazza della Rotonda, Rome. Phone 06-6830-0230.

Piazza del Campidoglio

This is one of the most historically significant sites in the world: Here Petrarch was crowned poet laureate, Cola di Rienzo was lynched, and according to legend, Romulus killed his brother Remus. The historic, spiritual and political center of the city of Rome, it has witnessed all the major cultural and political changes of the Roman Republic, the Roman Empire, the Papal States and the foundation of the Republic of Italy. Michelangelo designed the famous Cordonata staircase that leads to the current piazza and the surrounding palaces, incorporating elements that remained from ancient Rome. Guarding the entrance to the piazza, at the top of the staircase, are gigantic statues of Castor and Pollux. The circular star set in the pavement at the top of the hill leads your eye to the gilded bronze equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius (a copy—the original is on view in the Capitoline Museums). From the church perched above the piazza, Santa Maria in Ara Coeli, you can get a good view of Rome, and on the road to the right (south) side of the piazza, you'll find one of the best views of the Forum. On Capitoline Hill (behind Piazza Venezia and the Vittoriano Monument), Rome.

Piazza del Popolo

Together with the Porto del Popolo (the arched gateway leading into this vast, well-designed square), this was the first sight 18th-century travelers from the north had of Rome. Today, it borders a popular shopping area. Three major arteries that radiate from the piazza around two matching baroque churches give the area its name, the Tridente. In the center of the piazza are an obelisk and lion statues spitting water. A third church, Santa Maria del Popolo, contains masterpieces representing the full range of the Renaissance, with frescoes by Pinturicchio, two masterpieces by Caravaggio and a marble statue, *Daniel and the Lion*, by Bernini. At the western end of Villa Borghese, Rome.

Piazza di Spagna and the Spanish Steps

The piazza is the heart of Rome's most fashionable shopping area, familiar to residents and visitors alike because of the distinctive steps ascending grandly from it. They're a great—if crowded—place to rest and watch street musicians, vendors, young lovers and other tourists. Young people gather there to see and be seen, chatting in groups or on their ubiquitous *telefonini* (cell phones). The steps are at their most impressive in spring, when the staircases are decorated with brilliant azaleas—it's really something to behold. At the base sits a fountain by Bernini (father and son), and John Keats' house (now a museum) overlooks the steps. At the top there's a grand view of the city. South of Piazza del Popolo, near Villa Borghese, Rome.

Piazza Navona

This serene piazza was originally laid out as Emperor Domitian's athletic stadium in AD 90, and it still retains its distinctive shape. Today you can savor the play of light on terra-cotta and other stucco buildings and admire Borromini's baroque church dedicated to St. Agnes. You can't miss Bernini's Fountain of the Moor and his legendary Fountain of the Four Rivers, whose colossal figures represent four great rivers and their continents. A third fountain has a 19th-century rendering of Neptune. Once the scene of great aquatic competitions (for which the square was flooded), Piazza Navona today is always entertaining: It's the

perfect spot for eating *gelato tartufo* and people-watching. There are street artists, clowns, toy peddlers and every type of vendor imaginable, and during the Christmas season, there's a fair with numerous stalls. Just west of the Pantheon, Rome.

Piazza Venezia and the Vittoriano

A huge and bustling square and the heart of the city's main traffic arteries is framed by Palazzo Venezia (from the balcony, Mussolini harangued the crowds below), Palazzo San Marco and the vastly different Vittoriano Monument. This multitiered memorial to the Unknown Soldier and Italy's first king, Vittorio Emanuele II, inaugurated in 1911, houses a museum of the Risorgimento, the Italian unification movement. It's popularly known as the Wedding Cake and has only recently opened to the public. There are great views of Rome from the higher levels and its cafe terrace. A tourist information office is housed around the left side (as you face the front of the monument). Tuesday-Sunday 9:30 am-5:30 pm (until 4:30 in winter). Free. At the south end of Via del Corso, just north of the Roman Forum, Rome.

San Giovanni in Laterano

Saint John Lateran holds the distinction of being both the cathedral of Rome as well as her oldest basilica. It has, of course, been rebuilt many times over the centuries, but its fourth-century floor plan is still honored. Borromini is responsible for much of the interior as we see it today; the coffered, carved and painted ceiling and the Cosmati mosaic floors are spectacular. Outside, the octagonal Baptistry dates from the fourth century. The famous Scala Sancta (sacred steps) are also at this piazza. Some who still venerate it as the staircase from Pilate's house, which Jesus ascended, still climb it on their knees, praying at each step. All that remains of the 16th-century Lateran Palace is the staircase and the papal chapel at its top. Piazza San Giovanni in Laterano (southeast of the Colosseum), Rome. Phone 06-483-195.

Santa Maria Maggiore

As one of the four major basilicas of Rome (fifth century), this one, between Piazza della Repubblica and Saint John Lateran, deserves a look. Among its many transformations and additions are a glorious gold coffered ceiling, 13th-century mosaics and two splendid chapels: Paolina (for Pope Paul V) and Sforza (designed by Michelangelo). Via Liberiana 27 (at Piazza Santa Maria Maggiore), Rome. Phone 06-483-195.

Therma de Caracalla

The ruins of these baths evoke the majesty of ancient times, when aristocratic Romans bathed, lifted weights, wrestled, had massages and socialized there in hot baths and saunas. Guided tours explain the extensive, sophisticated heating and plumbing systems, as well as the social function of the baths. Call to make a reservation. You can also wander through the beautiful gardens surrounding the ruins. Tuesday-Sunday 9 am until one hour before sunset, Monday 9 am-2 pm. The ticket office shuts down an hour before closing. About 5 euros. Viale delle Terme di Caracalla 52, Rome. Phone 06-3996-7700.

<http://www.pierreci.com>.

Trevi Fountain

The iconic, highly theatrical fountain is usually thronged with tourist groups repeating the long-standing tradition of throwing in a coin before leaving Rome. Turn your back to the fountain, toss a coin over your shoulder and into the water, and your return to the city is assured. Even with the crowds, you should be able to get a good view of the mighty god Neptune riding his winged chariot through gushing waters supplied by the ancient Acqua Vergine aqueduct. Nicely illuminated at night. Two blocks east of the Corso and Piazza Colonna, Rome.

Shopping

If you tire of sightseeing, it's unlikely you'll find time to rest—Rome's selection of trendy stores with the latest fashions is just too tempting. Fans of Armani, Fendi, Ferragamo, Gucci or Krizia will not be disappointed, but big-name designer boutiques are merely the tip of the iceberg. The true joy of shopping in Rome lies in discovering one-of-a-kind items in specialty shops. The city is filled with stores where custom-made goods, particularly shoes and clothing accessories, are produced on-site, often using centuries-old techniques. And each shop gives you the opportunity to take a piece of that ubiquitous Italian stylishness home with you.

If you want to venture beyond the world of high fashion, you can check out the upscale second-hand shops on Via del Governo Vecchio, the produce and sundry markets at Campo dei Fiori or the city's flea market at Porta Portese. Each outdoor market has its own style: The colorful and inviting Campo offers cheeses, spices, flowers and some clothing and kitchenwares, while the Porta Portese is not for the faint of heart—shoppers are packed in so tightly it becomes an effort just to make a stop or change sides of the street. Go early and beware of pickpockets.

Shopping Hours: Stores are open Monday-Saturday 9 am-1 pm and 4:30-7:30 pm. Most stores are closed all day Sunday, and some are closed Monday morning. The exception is the Centro Storico: Some shops there are open all day, even on Sunday. In winter, many shops have reduced hours.

Personal Safety

Rome, like most big cities, has its share of crime. Petty thievery takes place in crowded areas, such as in the Centro Storico and on public buses. All buses connecting Termini Station to St. Peter's are literally moving dens of pickpockets. Don't tempt thieves with flashy, expensive jewelry, dangling or open purses, easily accessible wallets or unlocked cars. Hold on tightly to purses and briefcases as you walk and keep away from the side of the sidewalk nearest traffic (purse snatchers sometimes operate from the back of a motorbike).

Rome is among the cities plagued by "gypsies" (who are not necessarily of Gypsy origin). Children will surround a tourist, often holding out a newspaper or piece of cardboard. If you see one of these gangs coming, you must grab hold of your wallet or purse and protect it with great determination.

Destinations in Italy

Naples, Italy, Europe

OVERVIEW

Introduction

Although it's a fairly dirty port city, Naples has always impressed travelers with its beautiful bay and setting. Nearby **Mount Vesuvius** forms the backdrop to the city and bay. Naples is the home of Pulcinella (the ancestor of Punch and Judy), the Great Caruso and pizza. It has benefited in recent years from an energetic mayor who has instituted a number of tourist-friendly programs, including closing off a number of piazzas to vehicular traffic, extending museum hours and cleaning up the main port of Molo Beverello, where boats leave for the nearby islands.

Not to be missed are a walk through the historic center, where you'll see the church of Santa Chiara and its gorgeous majolica-tiled cloister; the chapel of San Saero, with its superb marble statuary; the beautiful 16th-century church of San Giacomo degli Spagnoli; and the street of San Gregoria Armeno, where craftspeople create the famous Neapolitan creche figures.

Naples has many museums that are worth a visit. Among the standouts are the National Archaeological Museum (Greek artifacts and Roman murals, coins and pottery, much of it from nearby Pompeii), the Museo Nazionale della Ceramica (pottery) and the Museo and Galleria di Capodimonte with works by Renaissance and baroque masters (note the impressive ceiling). There are also several castles of note (including Maschio Angioino, Castel dell'Ovo and Sant'Elmo) and two royal palaces (one at Piazza Plebiscito, where you can visit the royal apartments, and another at Capodimonte, where you can see a good museum and walk through the manicured grounds).

Unfortunately, the city does merit a few words of warning. Pickpocketing and purse snatching are rampant. Do not wear flashy jewelry, carry much cash in your wallet (or even carry a purse or wallet at all, for that matter) or wander around after dark. And we don't recommend driving in Naples, because it can sometimes be a scary experience. If you do decide to bring a car into the city, make sure you leave nothing of value in it, not even in the trunk. Break-ins are common.

You could easily spend up to two nights touring Naples, although it can be seen on day trips if you're staying elsewhere on the Sorrentine Peninsula. For most people, no trip to Naples would be complete without a trip to Mount Vesuvius and Pompeii or Herculaneum. Just north of Naples in the town of **Caserta**, you'll find an impressive Bourbon palace, built in the 1700s, that rivals Versailles. The medieval town of **Caserta Vecchia** nearby has an 11th-century castle and a 12th-century cathedral. Take time to walk through its ancient streets. Also nearby are the islands of Capri, Ischia and Procida. *Naples is 144 mi/232 km southeast of Rome.*

Capri

Once infamous as the "Island of Sin," the island of Capri is now known as a desirable place to visit and a romantic spot for honeymooners. (Its name literally means *goats*, and you'll see plenty of them.) For centuries, it was a retreat of sorts. Pirates hid their loot there, and Emperor Tiberius used to hold orgies on the island. (Visit the ruins of Villa Jovis, the first-century villa where he spent the last, debauched years of his reign, and read Robert Graves' *I, Claudius* to get an idea of what went on.) These days, it's a retreat for the young jet set and assorted Hollywood celebrities. Don't expect lush tropical scenery. But do expect old-world charm, gorgeous grottoes and silver- and rose-colored cliffs plunging straight into clear blue water. Also expect superb restaurants, good shopping, watersports, castles, churches, wonderful streets in which to stroll and some of the highest prices in Italy.

The main village on the island, where most of the shops and restaurants are found, is also called Capri. It is very chic to have an after-dinner drink in the famous *piazzetta*, the small square in the center of town. Higher up in the hills is another exclusive little village, called **Anacapri**. There you can take a chairlift to Mount Solaro, one of the island's highest peaks, and enjoy breathtaking, expansive views over the sea and the Bay of Naples.

Also in Anacapri is the exotic Villa San Michele, which houses the art collection and spectacular garden of Swedish doctor Axel Munthe. (Read his wonderful autobiography, *The Story of San Michele*, for a good introduction to the island and the special significance of the villa itself.)

Visit and swim at the justly famous Blue Grotto and the Natural Arch. To visit Capri's lesser-known grottoes, hire a fisherman's boat from Marina Piccola. Although there are no sandy beaches on Capri, there are thin rocky strips at Marina Piccola and at the Faraglioni (picturesque rock formations off the eastern tip of the island, where the Romans would light beacons for sailors). At both places you can lie out on the rocks and swim safely.

Even though the people (called Capresi) have seen many tourists come and go, you'll find them surprisingly nice and helpful. Capri is informal, but not *that* informal—bring a coat and tie if you plan to dine in the nicer restaurants. And, although there are topless beaches, total nudity is not accepted. The best months to visit Capri are May, June and September. In July and August, the island tends to be overwhelmed by tourists, foreigners and Italians alike, especially huge tour groups. Though Capri can be seen on a day trip from the mainland, two nights are really preferable.

If you've already been to Capri, consider heading to its lesser-known but equally captivating sister island, Ischia. Both islands can be reached by ferry or hydrofoil from Naples or Sorrento. *15 mi/25 km south of Naples, in the Bay of Naples.*

Sorrentine Peninsula

About 20 mi/32 km south of Naples, this area is one of the most romantic and beautiful in Italy. The peninsula (especially the Amalfi coastal drive) is spectacular. Begin in **Sorrento** (at the northern end) and continue to **Vietri Sul Mare**, on the southeast coast (or vice versa). It's only 40 mi/64 km, but en route you'll find secluded beaches, reefs, citrus groves, clear blue water, exquisite scenery, excellent restaurants and a hair-raising, narrow cliff road along the seaside. (Local residents truly drive as if they're crazy, so be prepared—and don't drive at night.)

There are some nice towns on the way (best seen by parking and walking through them). **Sorrento** is a busy garden-filled resort town on cliffs overlooking the sea. You catch the ferry there to Capri or Ischia, making it a bit too touristy for those seeking the serenity and beauty of the area. In charming **Amalfi**, visit the impressive, Arabian-style Paradise Cloister and Gothic Arsenal. Amalfi has exceptional crystal-blue water, almost Caribbean in quality. An early-morning swim there with the sun on the mountainside is quite an experience. (There's even an ice-blue cocktail—practically undrinkable—served at the Hotel Santa Caterina in honor of the water.)

Also visit ultra-elegant **Ravello** (see two glorious villas perched on this 350-ft-/109-m-high cliff—Villa Cimbone, now a hotel, and Villa Rufolo, once the home of composer Richard Wagner), tiny seaside **Atrani** (fairly deserted; see the Santa Maria Madalena Church) and **Positano** (a beautiful resort with gardens and villas overlooking terraced hillsides). Capri can be seen in the distance from outside Punta Campanella, at the western end of the peninsula. A week in the area isn't too much: You can take day trips into Naples, Pompeii, Herculaneum, **Paestum** (Greek temples), Capri and Ischia. Some hotels are closed from November to April. *160 mi/258 km southeast of Rome.*

Dining

Italians are quick to tell you there's no such thing as Italian food. Rather, each city or region has its own distinct cuisine. In the north of the country, you'll find risotto, polenta and cream sauces that are not at all native to the south. The south offers spicier foods, the original version of the pizza (from Naples) and buffalo mozzarella. Always try the specialties of a region—they are often absent from menus elsewhere, or of a lesser quality. In Tuscany, for example, one generally finds more gamey foods, such as pheasant (*fagiano*), wild boar (*cinghiale*) and truffles (*tartufi*). You can't visit Genoa without trying real pesto, traditionally served with a mixture of pasta, potatoes and green beans. Roman food is typically less refined, with such dishes as spaghetti carbonara, *bucatini all'amatriciana* (pasta with a spicy tomato-and-bacon sauce) and *trippa* (tripe), which, if cooked well, can be delicious. Many visitors are already familiar with Parma's famed prosciutto di Parma and Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese. For spicy food try anything from Reggio di Calabria, but in particular the ultra-hot salami, *salsiccia piccante*, that's sold everywhere.

Sicily, the birthplace of Italian pasta and gelato, has synthesized the culinary traditions of the many different cultures that have passed through the island. Overall, Italian chefs continue to remain faithful to seasonal produce, which is one reason everything tastes so good.

As prosaic as it may sound, one of our favorite meals is pizza and gelato (ice cream). Check out where the locals eat and join them for lunch or dinner at a pizzeria. The standard tomato, basil and cheese variety is called a *margherita*, but there are so many more choices, you'll want to try a few. The best restaurant pizza is cooked in a wood-burning oven: Look for the sign, "Forno al Legno" outside. For pizza in a more casual setting, the best is *pizza rustica*. After you select your pizza from large trays, it's cut and heated in a hot oven, giving it a crisp bite. Then take a walk around the block, gelato in hand. It is, in and of itself, a reason to visit the country.

Wine in Italy is excellent and comparatively inexpensive. Two categorizations that are helpful to know are D.O.C. (*Denominazione d'Origine Controllata*, meaning that it has been inspected and guaranteed by the government) and *vino da tavola* (table wine). Wines and spirits with the D.O.C. label are generally of superior quality, but table wine is usually very drinkable and is sometimes preferable—especially in Tuscany. Red wines are made just about everywhere, while the Piemonte and Veneto regions in the north are better for white wine. Nice local wines, which evoke the place they're made, include Chianti Classico Riserva, Vernaccia di San Gimignano, Orvieto Classico, Pinot Grigio and Montepulciano d'Abbruzzo. Stop by an *enoteca* (wine shop and bar) in any major city and you will find bottles from all over the country and knowledgeable clerks to help you. In an *enoteca* you can also pick up some of Italy's unique liqueurs. Besides amaretto, which is primarily from the north, other popular choices are *limoncello*, a sweet, lemon liqueur made in the south around Naples, Sorrento, Amalfi and on the island of Capri; *amaro*, a bitter liqueur produced throughout Italy; and grappa, a stronger *digestivo* (digestive liqueur) made in several regions.

There are three categories of restaurants: From most expensive to least, the classes are *ristorante*, *trattoria* (a more casual ambience and style of cooking) and *osteria*. Eat a meal in each category—just because it's cheap doesn't mean it's bad, and each has its own atmosphere. To eat like an Italian, have a nearly vaporous breakfast in the morning (consisting of cappuccino or espresso and a pastry, eaten standing at a neighborhood bar), a normal lunch around 1 pm (restaurants close from 3 pm until dinnertime, so don't wait) and a full dinner at night (often not before 8 or 9 pm). For a light snack between meals, head to a cafe, where you can pick up something to drink and *panini* (sandwiches) or other light fare.

Shopping

Shop for leather goods (Florence, Rome and Milan), silks (Como), truffles (Spoleto and Rome), antiques, clothing, wood carvings, embroidery and lace, silver and gold jewelry, violins, ceramics, objects of marble and alabaster, glass (Venice), decorative paper (Florence and Venice), food products, and wine or liqueur. Also fun to buy are ingenious kitchen utensils/accessories. In Vatican City, look over Vatican postage stamps and a wide variety of religious products (including relics).

Clothing, both men's and women's, is often of excellent quality, with a high style quotient (and often the price tag to match). Custom-made suits can be good buys, and many people consider shoes the best thing to take home from a trip to Italy.

For true bargain hunters, many designer outlets (think Prada, Fendi, Gucci and Armani) dot the northern provinces, especially outside Florence, Como and Milan. McArthur Glen opened the first true outlet mall in 2001 at Serravalle, between Milan and Genoa.

It was so successful the company has opened another in Castel Romano, south of Rome, and plans to open a third outside Florence in late 2004. (Florence already has one designer outlet mall, near Leccio Reggello.)

Shopping Hours: Monday-Saturday 9 am-1 pm and 4-7:30 pm. In the north, some shops take a shorter break at midday and close earlier. Many shops in bigger cities stay open throughout the day.

Etiquette

Contrary to the relaxed image many have of Italy, the Italian business world emphasizes formality and procedure. Get assistance from a local contact, go through proper channels, and always present yourself and your firm as well-polished and accomplished.

Punctuality is expected throughout the country. Your Italian counterparts may or may not be as prompt: Those in the northern part of the country generally are; those to the south are less so.

Personal Introductions—Greet others with a handshake and a slight nod. Titles are important: Use any professional titles that are supplied on introduction or, better yet, ask for a list of the participants and their official titles in advance of the meeting. Continue to use the title and last name unless you are instructed otherwise.

Negotiating—The pace of negotiations is slow, and final decisions are not made by lower-level functionaries. The chain of command in Italian business is both vertical and horizontal, and decision-making can take a long time. Last-minute demands can be made by a person who enters the negotiations late in the game. In fact, this is sometimes used as a negotiating tool. Remain patient and calm at all times.

Body Language—Italians typically converse while standing close to one another. Handshakes can extend longer than in other cultures, and Italians tend to gesture when talking. There is an entire system of hand signs that they use all the time, though none are likely to be made by a foreigner inadvertently. More often, visitors to Italy will start to imitate the gestures used by the locals without understanding the precise meanings of the movements—a practice we'd caution against.

Gift Giving—Small but high-quality gifts are appropriate in some situations: Ask your intermediary for advice. If you are invited to someone's home, take flowers or chocolates. Exercise caution in giving wine: Many Italians are experts; if you're not, you may want to select a different gift.

Conversation—Very little is off-limits in Italian conversation, but avoid being critical of Italian society and culture, even if your host is. Soccer is a passion and an easy topic, as are art, travel and Italian culture. The less positive side of Italy, including Mussolini, World War II and the Mafia, are probably better avoided.

Dos and Don'ts

Don't be surprised by Italy's two-hour lunch break (generally 1:30-3:30 pm), when most businesses and shops close down.

Do dress appropriately and be respectful when visiting churches. The official dress code in all churches requires that your shoulders, knees and midriff must be covered. Women should cover their heads upon entering a church. While some small towns are not very strict, at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, you must pass three sets of inspectors to enter. Absolutely no exceptions are made.

Don't eat and do turn off all cell phones when visiting churches, art galleries and museums.

Don't be surprised by the excessive hotel taxes, additional charges and requests for payment for extras. Sometimes these taxes or service charges are included in room rates; check upon arrival.

Do wear good-quality, stylish clothing: It's essential if you want to be perceived as competent and successful in business situations.

Do attempt to pronounce Italian words correctly. Just remember that the letter "c" followed by an "i" or "e" has the English "ch" sound, while a "ch" followed by an "i" or "e" has the English "k" sound. Thus, *che citta!* (what a town!) is pronounced *KAY chee-TAH*.

Tipping

Do expect a 10%-15% service charge to be added to your restaurant bill (they may also expect you to leave a little more). Tip taxi drivers about 1 euro (more if it's an especially large fare).

Venice, Italy, Europe

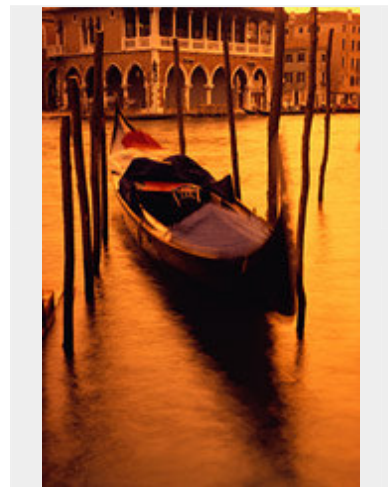
OVERVIEW

Introduction

Everywhere you look in Venice there's an archetypal romantic scene: a short bridge arching over a canal, a gondola gliding by, the moon reflecting off the water. Its winding, narrow streets can be eerily quiet and mysterious, particularly on a foggy night. Without a city's usual traffic noise, you can hear the laughter of children from your window as well as the mysterious sound of footsteps seemingly just around the corner.

Set on islands connected by bridges, Venice's main street—the Grand Canal—is traversed by an assortment of watercraft, from rowboats and waterbuses to yachts and cargo vessels. During Carnevale (10 days in late February or March), its waterfront is lit by torches at night as colorfully masked and costumed revelers overrun the city's ancient palaces and public squares.

No wonder Venice is one of the most-visited cities on the planet. Within this charming city is a plethora of world-famous museums and artistic treasures. Don't miss highlights like San Marco (with its spectacular Golden Altar and St. Mark's treasure), the infamous Palazzo Ducale (the Doge's Palace) and its romantic Bridge of Sighs (where prisoners about to enter the dark jail on the other side would stop to enjoy one last glimpse of the beautiful city) or a visit to the fascinating glass factories. Pick a few museums, like the Gallerie dell'Accademia (art of the 14th-18th centuries) or the Peggy Guggenheim Collection (20th century art). But just because you'll be bumping into thousands of other visitors there, don't be fooled into thinking it's just a museum of architecture and art. We were delighted to see Venetians chatting with friends in the piazzas and sharing a bottle of wine in the *osterie*.



Gondola at Sunset, Venice, Italy

The city does have its share of problems, too. It is, famously, sinking—and no one can agree on what should be done about it. Venice draws as many as 200,000 visitors a day, but the resident population has declined to less than 70,000. Many young people have moved to the mainland, where rents and real-estate prices

are lower. (To minimize visitor waits at various attractions during peak summer and holiday periods, the city has introduced a multipurpose tourist pass known as the Venice Card.) Parts of downtown are dirty and run-down—and rather smelly in summer heat. People can be brusque. And the prices of virtually everything smack of highway robbery. Even so, it remains a treasure to be savored—and not just by lovers.

History

As invaders swept down from the Alps in the 5th century AD, the farmers and fishermen living along what is now Italy's northeastern coast sought refuge on nearby scrub-covered islands. From the safety of their lagoon in the Adriatic, Venetians began building a powerful trading empire. By the 9th century, religious and political power had moved from Torcello to the island of Rivoaltum, where the Venetian leader, or *doge*, began clearing the land and driving wooden piles into the mud beneath the water—laying the foundations of modern Venice. The city's merchants and traders (who included Marco Polo) amassed huge fortunes, which they, in turn, invested in the city, building grand palaces and huge churches and collecting precious art (some still adorns the Basilica di San Marco and the Doge's Palace).

At its peak in the 1400s, the Repubblica Serenissima (the Most Serene Republic, as it was known) ruled the Adriatic and eastern Mediterranean—its democratic-style government served as an international model for centuries. But the republic soon began to decay, weakened by expansion wars, famines, plagues and finally by invading French troops, led by Napoleon in 1797. French control ended when Venice was annexed by the Hapsburg Empire. It switched hands again, joining the Kingdom of Italy in 1866.

Today, Venice is the capital of Italy's Veneto region and one of the country's most visited cities. Its watery setting and tourism-based economy bring modern challenges, such as structural erosion caused by motorboat wakes and a steadily decreasing population as younger generations move to bigger cities with more job opportunities. The proud Venetians are not ones to give in easily, though, and as measures are being taken to protect this fragile city, more travelers from around the world will have the opportunity to discover the treasures hidden within it.

Geography

Venice sprawls over several low-lying islands in a lagoon in the northern crescent of the Adriatic Sea. A single bridge links it to the mainland city of Mestre. Traffic ends at Piazzale Roma, making the city serenely free of buses, cars and motorcycles.

The main thoroughfare of the city is the Grand Canal. The islands are also crisscrossed by 177 smaller canals and connected by 354 pedestrian bridges (only three of which cross the Grand Canal). Streets are narrow and winding—some little more than sidewalks between buildings. The city is divided into six *sestieri* (districts): Cannaregio, San Polo, San Marco, Dorsoduro, Castello and Santa Croce.

A map of the city looks like a labyrinth, but surprisingly it is not too difficult to find your way to the main attractions. Yellow signs are posted on the buildings at most major intersections, with arrows directing you to Piazzale Roma, la Ferrovia (the train station, Santa Lucia), Rialto Bridge, Accademia Bridge and Piazza San Marco.

Specific addresses can be hard to find, however, as many streets are so small they aren't on maps. The phone directory isn't much help either, because it lists addresses by the name of the *sestiere*, plus the number of the building, with no reference to a street. The easiest way to find a shop or restaurant is often to ask; most people are helpful and speak English. Hotel employees and shopkeepers are usually quite knowledgeable about their neighborhoods.

Several islands in the lagoon are also part of the city area or connected to the city by regular public boats. In addition to Giudecca (the large island across from Piazza San Marco) and Lido (where you'll find beaches), the best known are the glass-making island of Murano, colorful Burano and the lagoon's original seat of power, Torcello. The airport is on the mainland, north of Mestre.

Must See or Do

Sights—San Marco's Basilica, Piazza San Marco and the Doge's Palace; the Grand Canal by boat or gondola.

Museums—Gallerie dell'Accademia; Correr Museum; Peggy Guggenheim Collection.

Walks—Crossing the Rialto Bridge; getting lost in the sestiere of San Marco; wandering down Via Garibaldi.

Sightseeing

The best introduction to Venice is a boat ride on the Grand Canal, and it doesn't really matter whether the vessel is a velvet-cushioned gondola or a utilitarian *vaporetto* (public water bus). The S-shaped canal slices the city in half; lining each side is an astonishing collection of buildings dating back to the 12th century. Some of the baroque palaces look as elegant as they did when the doges ruled the city, while other architectural gems are crumbling into the murky sea.

As you travel along Venice's Grand Canal, you'll also see what life is like in a city without automobiles. Cargo barges ply the narrow waterway along with police and fireboats. Classic wooden cabin cruisers take tourists to luxury hotels, while skilled gondoliers serenade lovers as they negotiate the sleek black vessels under bridges and around bends. Venice's canals are a visual parade that shouldn't be missed.

Once you have oriented yourself to the waterways, set out on foot. Pick up a map, but expect to get lost—it's an inevitable part of the experience. Streets meander across canals, through plazas and around buildings, changing names as well as direction. If that isn't confusing enough, some streets are flooded in the winter because of *aqua alta*—high water.

You'll want to spend most of a day seeing the sights around the Piazza San Marco. The Doge's Palace offers a fascinating look at how the city's leaders lived and managed the republic, while the colorful religious mosaics at the San Marco's Basilica are some of the most stunning in the world. Take in the view from the top of the Campanile if it's a sunny day. (Beware of the plaza's most aggressive residents—the pigeons that delight in dive-bombing unsuspecting newcomers on the ground.)

From the piazza it's an easy walk to the Rialto Bridge, where you can browse the shops and enjoy views of the canal. Across the Grand Canal from San Marco is Dorsoduro, where you'll find two very different museums. The Gallerie dell'Accademia is the city's signature art repository, containing the best works of the prolific Italian Renaissance painters. A few blocks away but worlds apart is the Guggenheim Collection, a canal-front palazzo that was fashioned into a modern and avant-garde art gallery by an American heiress.

There's a host of other sights to visit—from the Jewish Ghetto to the city's many ornate churches, along with the islands of Murano and Burano—but we find that a moonlit walk along a canal or an early-morning stroll through the winding streets of a secluded residential area can prove just as illuminating as a tour of the city's major attractions.

Landmarks and Historic Sites

Basilica di San Marco

San Marco's Basilica embodies Venice's historical role as a bridge between East and West. Its five cupolas laid out in a cross pattern are strikingly Byzantine, while details both inside and out reflect the Romanesque period as well as the Renaissance. Under the overlay of mosaics, patterns of colorful marble and innumerable carvings, the main architectural influences are Gothic. Don't wait for your neck to start aching before you pass up the exterior mosaics and move to the gold-lined interior of the basilica. You'll find every inch of this structure filled with delicious decorations that were used to awe the public with the might of the church as well as teach the illiterate the stories of the Bible and saints.

Among the treasures within the basilica are more than 500 columns adorned with sculptures, a marble floor covered with allegorical mosaics, Gothic arches and extravagant bronze lamps. Behind the altar is the Pala d'Oro, a screen of precious stones, gold and enamel objects dating back to the AD 976. This is one of the world's most valuable works of art. The Tesoro (treasury) contains items stolen from Constantinople in 1204, including several gem-studded gold and silver caskets. Tapestries, paintings and the original bronze horses that adorned the church's facade (they were trophies from the 4th Crusade) are housed in the Galleria. From the Galleria you can step onto a balcony for views of the square and the replicas that replaced the original horses. Monday-Friday 9:45 am-4 pm, Saturday, Sunday and holidays 2-4:30 pm. Open an extra hour in the summer. Viewing the basilica is free, but the Pala d'Oro is about 1.50 euros, the Tesoro is about 2 euros and the Galleria is about 1.50 euros. Piazza San Marco, Venice. Phone 041-522-5205.

Campanile di San Marco

St. Mark's bell tower, the tallest (322 ft/98 m) structure on the piazza, offers magnificent views of the city on a clear day. The present tower was built in 1912, replacing the original that was begun in the 9th century and completed in the 16th century; it had tumbled to the ground in 1902. Daily 9:45 am-5 pm (later in summer). About 6 euros. Piazza San Marco, Venice. Phone 041-522-4064.

Chiesa dei Santi Giovanni e Paolo

Dedicated to Saints John and Paul, this cavernous church is one of the largest in Venice. It's called "the Pantheon of Venice" because of the doges' tombs within. An important stop on the art-history circuit, paintings to see include Bellini's *The Polittico di San Vincenzo Ferreri*, Lotto's *Saint Anthony's Charity* and three by Paolo Veronese. The *Monument to Doge Pasquale Mocenigo* is a masterpiece by sculptor Pietro Lombardo. In the square out front stands Andrea Verrocchio's monument to *Bartolomeo Colleoni*. This famous mercenary requested a statue in San Marco as his battle payment from Venice. The clever doge agreed, but instead of putting the figure on the piazza, he had it placed in front of the *Scuola di San Marco* instead! Daily 7:30 am-12:30 pm and 3:30-7 pm. Free entry. Campo dei Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Castello, Venice. Phone 041-523-7510.

Palazzo Ducale

The Doge's Palace served as the seat of the government of the Repubblica Serenissima, the Palace of Justice and the residence of the Doge. The original palace was built in the 9th century AD; several fires made a complete reconstruction necessary in the 14th century. The Venetian use of geometric designs across the facade arrests the eye, and the use of arches along the bottom rather than the top of the building creates a lace-like effect. Its main gate, the *Porta della Carta*, is the picture of Venetian Gothic architecture. Another masterpiece is the marble *Scala dei Giganti* (Giants' Stairs), designed by Renaissance architect Antonio Rizzo. Many rooms are decorated with paintings by Tintoretto, Veronese, Titian and Tiepolo. One wall of the main salon (*Sala del Maggior Consiglio*) is entirely covered with Tintoretto's enormous *Paradiso*.

From the palace, you can cross the Bridge of Sighs to the doge's prisons and see an arresting display of ancient arms. 1 November-31 March, 9 am-5 pm, last admission 3:30 pm; 1 April-31 October, 9 am-7 pm, last admission 5:30 pm. Closed 25 December and 1 January. About 11 euros. Single ticket allows entrance to the Doge's Palace, Correr Museum, Archaeological Museum and Monuments Halls of Marciana Library. Piazza San Marco, Venice. Phone 041-522-4951.

Piazza San Marco

Where else is there a picture more gorgeously framed than Piazza San Marco? With three sides of the Piazza lined by dignified palazzos with elaborate marble facades and the fourth showcasing San Marco's Basilica with its four bronze horses and crown of Byzantine domes, this is, as Napoleon put it, the "finest drawing room in Europe."

Of the palazzos, the northern side is composed by the Procuratie Vecchie (the old city administrative offices), built in the 16th century, and the southern side by the Procuratie Nuove (new city administrative offices) built in the 17th century. Across from the Basilica is Napoleon's addition (1810), now part of the Correr Museum.

The more human side of the Piazza can be found in the chairs and tables spilling into the open plaza, the serenading orchestras and the arched porticos sheltering expensive shops and cafes. In the summer the plaza is flooded with humanity and flocks of pigeons, but Carnevale takes crowding to new heights as waves of revelers fill the Piazza. Winter brings *aqua alta* and raised walkways that allow strolling even when the sea floods the plaza.

The Venetians boast that there is only one *piazza* in Venice, while all of the other squares are known as *campi* (fields); when you compare them you can see why. Filled with splendid works such as the Campanile, clock tower (two bronze figures, the "Moors," strike the hour) and two Syrian pillars (brought to Venice in 1256), the Piazza San Marco is a feast for the eyes. Don't miss the Piazzetta di San Marco in front of the Doge's Palace, which contains the Marciana Library (built in the 1530s) and the two monolithic columns holding symbols of the city, the lion of Saint Mark and Saint Theodore riding a dragon; or the Piazzetta dei Leoncini on the other side of the Basilica with its two small red marble lions.

Ponte dei Sospiri

The path of prisoners on their way to meet the State inquisitors, the Bridge of Sighs was aptly named. From the ornate marble bridge just to one side of the Doge's Palace, you can look up at the Bridge of Sighs. Dwarfed by the palace and the prisons, this marble structure seems to peer out from the two lonely eyes of its windows at the open water. While touring the Doge's Palace, you can walk across the bridge yourself and look out at the canal from within. At the head of Riva degli Schiavoni, San Marco, Venice.

Ponte di Rialto

Originally little more than a bunch of boats spanning the Grand Canal, the now massive Rialto Bridge was built in marble by architect Antonio Da Ponte in 1588-1591. Halfway down the Grand Canal, it lies just about midway between the train station and Piazza San Marco; it is by far the most elaborate and memorable of the three bridges that cross the Grand Canal. Two rows of tiny shops line the span, and you will find an illuminating view of the very active canal at the top.

Neighborhoods and Districts

Jewish Ghetto

Venice has the dubious distinction of having the oldest Jewish ghetto in the world, dating back to 1516. The Jewish population was required to remain within the ghetto boundaries, adhere to strict curfews and follow many other harsh regulations. Five synagogues, each representing a different ethnic group, were built between the 16th and 17th centuries. You can learn more about the area's history by visiting the Museo Ebraico (Jewish Museum), where you can join a guided tour of the area.

At the center of the district, on the Campo del Ghetto Nuovo in Cannaregio, you'll see Arbit Blatas's moving bronze wall-tablet memorializing the victims of the Holocaust. The area also comprises the Ghetto Vecchio and the Ghetto Novissimo. San Polo 2766 (From the train station take Lista di Spagna over the bridge Ponte delle Guglie and turn left onto the Cannaregio; at the third street, turn right and you will be in the Ghetto Vecchio), Venice. Phone 041-710-200.

Sestiere di San Marco

This district is where most of the notable sights of Venice are located. It contains the cluster of Piazza San Marco, San Marco's Basilica, the Doge's Palace and the Bridge of Sighs as well as the opera house La Fenice and the Palazzo Contarini del Bovolo. The designer shopping streets of the Frezzeria and San Moise round out the picture.

Via Garibaldi

Step into another dimension by taking a twilight stroll down Via Garibaldi. The villagelike feel of this Castello neighborhood is particularly poignant in the evening when locals come out to catch up on the day's happenings and children play in the street. Don't expect many signs of tourists. After the late Italian dinner hour, this part of town shuts down for the night.

Dining

With such a prolific number of places to get a meal in Venice, it may be hard to find the dining experience you were hoping for. There are a number of good places to eat, though, especially if you're in the market for seafood or regional dishes. If you're looking for a break from Italian food, your choices are quite lessened.

Seafood is king of the table in traditional Venetian cuisine. The local delicacy *sarde in saor* (fresh sardines, marinated in onion, vinegar and raisins, then fried) gives an idea of the strong and tasty flavors to be found in Venice. *Baccala* (salt cod) dishes are on many menus, as is crab (variably called *granseole*, *moleche* and other names) when in season, as well as exotic seafood salads and squid. Risottos of all colors are common.

Don't look for genuine Venetian recipes in restaurants with a menu of the day prominently displayed in four languages. You'll find better meals elsewhere, usually just off the main streets. If you are on a budget (or even if you aren't), follow the locals to a *bacaro* (small bar/pub/restaurant). The delicious *cicheti* (little appetizers often made of fish or meat) and *ombre* (glasses of wine) are too good to pass up. There are quite a few choices around the Rialto area.

Vegetarians don't have it easy in Venice, but many pasta dishes, salads and pizzas are made without meat. If you drop by a *bacaro*, you'll also find a variety of Venetian-style vegetables to choose from. Kids will gravitate to pizzerias, which really aren't just for children and will probably offer more variety in toppings than you expect. Pizza is a common meal for adults and children alike. Restaurants are generally open for lunch 12:30-2 pm, and for dinner 7-10:30 pm, and many close one or two days a week.

For coffee and pastry shops, as well as *bacari*, you'll find two prices for every item on the menu—the standing price and the sitting price. Often you will see a sign added to the price list letting you know that it refers to products consumed at the bar only.

Shopping

It's hard to convey just how many shops there are in Venice—the sheer number of establishments is overwhelming. You really don't have to go out of your way to find gifts or souvenirs, at least in the well-traveled areas of town. Deciding what to buy is the bigger problem. Many of the shops carry the same stuff—Murano glass in dizzying variety, Carnevale masks, lace (much of which isn't even made in Venice), leather and silk goods ranging from inexpensive to luxurious. Since you'll see the same merchandise over and over, it can be difficult to buckle down and actually make your purchases. But you'll kick yourself later if you leave empty-handed.

Lots of high-dollar boutiques are clustered around the area just west of Piazza San Marco. You'll also find plenty of souvenir shops around San Marco, though stores in the Rialto Bridge area may be a bit less expensive. Traveling to the islands of Murano and Burano won't lead to the kinds of bargains you might think, but you may find larger selections of glass and lace, respectively. And while there are hundreds of small stores and boutiques, and even a department store or two, you'll have to travel to the mainland to find a mall.

In Italy, tax is legally included in the price of the merchandise, and stores are required to post a price for everything being sold. Even in expensive boutiques there will be a card in the window listing the prices of the items on display. This doesn't mean the prices are inflexible, however. In smaller stores you will often find the person waiting on you to be the owner and ready to cut you a deal if it will help make their sale.

Giorgio Armani, Gucci, Roberto Cavalli, Prada, Valentino, Versace, Versus Versace—Venice hosts a collection of some of the top names in Italian fashion. The area around Piazza San Marco, especially Calle Vallaresso and Frezzaria, has a particularly high number of *alta moda* shops. Whichever you choose, be prepared to pay.

You'll also find plenty of souvenir shops around San Marco's Basilica, though stores in the Rialto Bridge area may be a bit cheaper.

Shopping Hours: Generally Monday-Saturday 9 am-12:30 or 1 pm, and from 3:30-7:30 pm in winter or 4-8 pm in summer. In high season, some places stay open on Sunday and through lunch. Souvenir shops are often open later in the evening and closed on Monday morning.

Shopping Areas

Mercatino di Rialto

The little shops lining the Rialto Bridge and surrounding area are usually less expensive than similar places in the San Marco area. When you cross the bridge, walk the inside route—you'll find stands and little shops with jewelry, masks, Murano glass and much more. An interesting side trip is the nearby fish market, which is busy in the morning (except Monday). Most shops near the bridge are open daily 9 am-7 pm.

Personal Safety

In Venice, as in most major tourist cities, the main danger is having your pocket picked or your purse stolen. Be sure to secure your wallet and bags while visiting crowded sites, including the area near the Rialto Bridge, Piazza San Marco and Ponte della Paglia (in front of the Bridge of Sighs). Places where tourists stop to contemplate the city's beauty are favorite "working areas" of pickpockets. We recommend carrying a pouch-style bag covered by a T-shirt or pullover. Keep your wallet in the front pocket of your trousers or jacket, especially if you are on a boat during rush hour. Do not leave backpacks or other bags unattended on boats or in public places.

This is Italy, and attractive women and girls will draw stares. While this may sometimes be uncomfortable, it's not a threat. Remember that a sharp look or word will almost always deter undesired Romeos.

Etiquette

Contrary to the relaxed image many have of Italy, the Italian business world emphasizes formality and

procedure. Get assistance from a local contact, go through proper channels and always present yourself and your firm as well polished and accomplished.

Personal Introductions—Greet others with a handshake and a slight nod. Titles are important: Use any professional titles that are supplied on introduction or, better yet, ask for a list of the participants and their official titles in advance of the meeting. Continue to use the title and last name unless you are instructed otherwise.

Negotiating—The pace of negotiations is slow, and final decisions are not made by lower-level functionaries. The chain of command in Italian business is both vertical and horizontal, and decision-making can take a long time. Last-minute demands can be made by a person who enters the negotiations late in the game. In fact, this is sometimes used as a negotiating tool. Remain patient and calm at all times.

Body Language—Italians typically converse while standing close to one another. They tend to gesture when talking, and handshakes can extend longer than in other cultures.

Conversation—Very little is off limits in Italian conversation, but avoid being critical of Italian society and culture, even if your host is. Soccer is a passion and an easy topic, as are art, travel and Italian culture. The less positive side of Italy, including Mussolini, World War II and the mafia are probably better avoided.

Tipping

Tipping is not obligatory in Venice restaurants and hotels, as service is often included in your bill (check first). But in some cases, tips are expected and not tipping might mean that you are dissatisfied. It is usual to tip the hotel porter about 0.50 euros per piece of luggage. At the end of a gondola tour, especially if you had a singer and accordion music, tip the musicians (10%-20% of the trip price). While visiting a small church, a guide may show you around. He won't ask for money, but will greatly appreciate a donation for the church.

What to Wear

The city's hot summers and cold winters seem even more extreme because of high humidity levels. In the hottest months, July and August, lightweight cotton clothes are preferable. Be sure to wear a hat and apply insect repellent and sunscreen before venturing out in the heat of the day.

Comfortable shoes are essential in Venice, whether you are there on business or for pleasure. Walking is often the only way to get around the city, so women should avoid thin heels that may get caught between the stones that pave the streets.

Communication

Telephone

The majority of Italian public phones accept phone cards, which can be purchased at tobacco shops or newsstands in units of about 2.50 euros, 5.50 euros and 8 euros. (You'll have to tear off the perforated corner before inserting the card into a phone for it to work.) Prepaid international phone cards are generally available and a good bargain.

To make a local call, be sure to dial the city code first (in Venice it's 041; we've included it in our listings), then the number itself, which is often seven digits but not always. For long-distance calls within Italy, start with the particular city code, which should begin with a 0, then the number itself. For international calls, you'll need to know the country code for wherever you're calling. For international phone assistance, dial 170; for Italian directory assistance, dial 12.

Transportation

Transportation in Venice means transportation by water. Everything in the city is moved either by boat or on foot. No cars are allowed and you won't see any bicycles or mopeds, except on the Lido.

Traveling the length of the Grand Canal on a *vaporetto*, or water bus, from the train station to Piazza San Marco, is a lovely way to get a sense of how the city functions. But you can also take a water taxi or gondola. The *vaporetti* are analogous to city buses in other cities—but cost more than you'd expect. If you are staying for any length of time, or plan on taking them a lot, consider one of the money-saving passes

available. The water taxis are just like auto taxis on terra firma. They carry two to four passengers—again, for a higher fee than you'd think possible.

Gondolas are the most expensive boating option. But if you don't want to shell out the fees asked for a romantic gondola ride, you can step aboard the gondola's simpler cousin, the *traghetto*. Used often by Venetians to save shoe leather, they are the same type of boat, but their sole purpose is to cross the Grand Canal when there is no bridge nearby. You can sit or stand for the journey, which takes all of three minutes and costs about 0.40 euros.

Crossing the Grand Canal without backtracking to one of the three bridges is the point of the *traghetto*, but the same thing can be accomplished via the *vaporetti*. Successive stops are on alternate sides of the Grand Canal, so if you only travel one stop, you'll pay a reduced fee of about 1.50 euros and end up a little up or down stream, on the other side.

Additional

Like so many other tourists, you may find the urge to be ferried around in a gondola irresistible. It's one of those things to be done in a lifetime. Just think of paying through the nose as part of the experience. The main gondola stand is at Bacino Orseolo, near Piazza San Marco. Gondoliers are required to remain in particular areas, so if there is a certain area like the Grand Canal or out front of Piazza San Marco that you'd like to traverse, choose a gondolier in that zone. Gondola fees depend primarily on the duration of the trip, and bargaining does come into play. Fees vary according to season and are generally about 62 euros for the first 50 minutes, for up to six people, and about 31 euros for each additional 25 minutes. It goes up to 77.45 euros 8 pm-8 am, 38.75 euros for each additional 25 minutes. For better or worse, you won't be automatically serenaded. That's an extra fee and should be agreed on before you shove off.

Croatia, Europe

OVERVIEW

Introduction

For travelers, watching Croatia reopen its attractions to the world can be a memorable experience. The country's hard-won independence from Yugoslavia and its escape from the cocoon of communism still seem fresh, and there are lingering wounds to heal. But the conflict in Croatia has been over for years, and most of the war damage to Dubrovnik and other cities has been repaired.

Every year, more and more visitors are vacationing in this friendly, picturesque country along the Adriatic coast. Croatia has much to offer: good food, good wine, beautiful beaches, clean water, gorgeous scenery, historic cities, charming villages, striking architecture, Roman ruins and well-preserved antiquities.



Seaside Resort Town.

History

If Croatia seems replete with foreign influences—Roman amphitheaters, Venetian palaces, Hapsburg castles, Italian food—it's because the area's history has been marked by periods of foreign domination. Seeds of the recent conflict in the former Yugoslavia date from the division of the Roman Empire in AD 395. The Western Empire, ruled from Rome, fell to northern barbarians, but it left a legacy of Roman Catholicism in its former territories, including what became the nation of Croatia. The Eastern Empire, ruled from Byzantium (later Constantinople, and now Istanbul), bequeathed Orthodox Christianity to its territories, including what is now Serbia. Later, Turks conquered the region to the south of Croatia and introduced Islam. The religious, cultural and ethnic divisions fomented friction but also created a fascinating multicultural atmosphere still evident in the region.

The idea of Yugoslavia, or "Land of the Southern Slavs," was created at the beginning of the 20th century. In spite of religious differences, most of the people in the area between Austria and Albania are of common ancestry. Idealists thought it logical that all should unite in one country. The Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was created at the end of World War I but collapsed when the German Nazis invaded during World War II and set up a puppet state of Croatia, which constructed concentration camps for Serbs, Gypsies and Jews. The Nazis were driven out by the Partisans, a multiethnic army lead by Croatian-born Joseph Broz Tito. Tito downplayed sectarian differences and ruled a united Yugoslavia—with an authoritarian intolerance for regional chauvinism—for 34 years. Communism in the former Yugoslavia was not exactly the type experienced by many Eastern bloc countries. Many Yugoslavs owned appliances and cars, traveled, spoke other languages and worked in the country's tourism industry. After Tito's death in 1980, ethnic differences once again rose to the surface, and by the end of the decade had polarized the country. Concerned about Serbian nationalism and spurred on by its own nationalist leader, Franjo Tudjman, Croatia declared its independence in 1991. Backed by the Yugoslavian Armed Forces, Serbia invaded and, after a bloody struggle, occupied a fourth of the country. Serbia's policy of "ethnic cleansing," as well as its siege of Dubrovnik and the destruction of the city of Vukovar, turned international opinion in favor of the Croats. The fighting ended after a cease-fire was signed in 1992, and the Serbs turned their attention to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Though divided, Croatia remained fairly stable until mid-1995, when the government launched two attacks against Serb rebels. First, the Croats invaded the region of western Slavonia and quickly reconquered the area. The Croats then launched an attack against the rebel stronghold of Knin in the Krajina. Within a few days the army had routed the rebels and taken the capital. The defeat sent about 120,000 Croatian Serb refugees into neighboring Bosnia and Herzegovina. With these two victories, Croatia had reclaimed all rebel-held territory, except for the portion of eastern Slavonia that borders Serbia—an area ceded to Croatia by the 1995 Dayton peace accords.

Croatia has worked hard to define itself as an independent country, but it also is striving to become part of the European Union. As a result, prices have risen to the level of those in other European countries—Croatia is no longer the bargain it once was. But most travelers will find that discovering the country's long-hidden treasures is well worth the cost.

Geography

Croatia borders Slovenia, Hungary, and Bosnia and Herzegovina and is close to Austria and Italy. In the interior of the country are mountains dotted with vineyards, castles, lakes and waterfalls. Zagreb, the capital, is situated in the north-central part of the country. The rugged Dalmatia coast is simply spectacular, with towering mountains forming a backdrop for the long, narrow strip of land and rock that is washed by the clear waters of the Adriatic. Offshore, there are more than a thousand islands, some uninhabited and others endowed with ancient villages. Travelers can choose their favorites for sunbathing, swimming or exploring. Istria (or Istra to locals) is the triangular peninsula that forms the northwestern part of the Croatian coast. Its proximity to the Italian border has long made it a popular resort area for European aristocracy.

Snapshot

Croatia's main attractions are beaches, Dubrovnik, spectacular coastal and mountain scenery, picturesque towns, museums, ancient islands, lakes, historical sites, fishing, gorges, yachting, marvelous churches and monasteries, folk arts, fascinating culture, Zagreb and health spas.

Potpourri

The restoration of Dubrovnik following the war has been an international project, with contributions coming in from around the world. For example, the new red tiles that replaced those destroyed by shelling came from France. And Italian artisans did much of the reconstruction of bas-relief sculptures on the cathedral.

You'll see a number of lion sculptures affixed to buildings in Croatian cities that were once under Venetian rule. Usually, a sculpted book rests under one of the lion's paws. If the book is open, that means the city was at peace when the sculpture was made. If closed, the work was commissioned during a time of war.

Caves near the towns of Krapina and Vindija, near Zagreb, hold evidence of habitation by Neanderthals, the early humanoid species. Some of the discoveries from the caves are on display at Zagreb's Croatia Natural History Museum.

If you are in Dubrovnik, have a drink at the Troubadour Bar near the cathedral. Marco, the bar's owner, was the founder of a well-known Croatian rock group in the 1960s called the Troubadours. (They had mop tops, wore Renaissance outfits and sang rock 'n' roll versions of ancient Croatian folk tunes.) The bar is set in a labyrinth of narrow alleys, creating great ambience for the jazz bands that play there.

Dubrovnik is believed to be the location of Shakespeare's play, *Twelfth Night*.

Both the ballpoint pen and the fountain pen were invented in Zagreb.

The modern man's tie is a direct descendant of the red scarves worn by Croatian soldiers in the 17th century. The scarves came to be known as cravats—a corruption of the word *hrvatska*, meaning Croatia.

Europe's largest nudist camp is Koversada, near the town of Vrsar (west of Rijeka).

Destinations in Croatia

Dubrovnik

Set on a peninsula jutting into the Adriatic, Dubrovnik has a spellbinding atmosphere that makes it one of our favorite places in central Europe. This medieval walled city is 1,000 years old and an architectural marvel. Entering its gates is like a step back in time: You cross a wooden bridge past gate towers, wend your way through the inner gate and enter onto the Placa (or Stradun, as it also is known), the gleaming limestone street that runs straight to the entrance gates at the other end of town. Tourists who walk along the Placa seem anachronistic when surrounded by an old town that is so completely untouched by the modern world: The present structure of the city dates from the rebuilding that followed a devastating earthquake in 1667. After a stroll down the Placa, take a tour of the city walls.

Built in the 11th century, the walls are 20 ft/6 m thick in places and provide a gorgeous view of the Adriatic, as well as an unforgettable glimpse of the city they surround: the tiled roofs, the narrow pathways adorned with window boxes, the small orange grove and field of a monastery, anglers at home darning their nets. During your walk along the wall, you can enter an interesting maritime museum and small aquarium built within the St. John fortress.

For the most part, the external damage from the siege of 1991-92 has been repaired. A map at the entrance to the walls of the old city shows the buildings that were shelled: More than half the city's structures were hit. And as you stand on a high point along the wall, you can tell which buildings have been repaired. The new bright-red tile roofs stand out dramatically from the ancient verdigris tiles that escaped damage.

Other sites in the old town include the Dominican and Franciscan monasteries (the Franciscan Monastery contains one of the oldest pharmacies in the world), Rector's Palace, the Bell Tower clock, Orlando's Column and the Rose Square in the Sponza Palace (16th century). Take a look at the statue of St. Blaise, the city's patron saint, over the north city wall and the painting of the saint on display in the Dominican monastery. (In both, he cradles a model of the city. According to legend, it was once used to help reconstruction efforts.) You also can view his relics, including his silver-encased skull, on display in the cathedral.

There is more to Dubrovnik than the old town, but the rest isn't particularly interesting. The cornice to the south of town leads to a number of hotels, some of which have been repaired and renovated since the war. The Hotel Argentina has a large terrace with a peerless view of the old town. (CNN videotaped the siege from there in 1991.) There are some new hotels being built. More and more jumbo cruisers are including Dubrovnik harbor into their travel plans, and a new and bigger harbor is to be built.

If you want to take a dip in the Adriatic, try the pebbly beach between the old town and the hotels, or exit the western side of the city walls and follow the stairs down the cliff face to the water, where you can see bathers cliff diving, Acapulco-style. The nearby tree-covered island of **Lokrum** is another good bathing spot. (Nude bathing is allowed on the western end.) Lokrum is becoming a set for some theatrical productions.

Take a day excursion to the village of **Cavtat**, which has a lovely sea-front plaza bordering a pine forest and a striking art-deco chapel, the Racic Mausoleum, which was designed by sculptor Ivan Mestrovic. If possible, visit the city during its summer arts festival in July and August, which fills the streets with music, theater and art. (Plays are performed with one of the fortresses as a backdrop.)

Day trips may be made to the shrine in Medugorje, the pilgrimage site in Bosnia and Herzegovina where six children are believed to have witnessed the appearance of the Virgin Mary on a hillside. There are organized tours and regular buses from Dubrovnik to Medugorje, and the ride is fantastic, especially the part along the Neretva River. *Dubrovnik is 245 mi/395 km southeast of Zagreb.*

Dining

Croatian food is generally very good and very hearty. In the country's interior, starchy foods are common. Traditional Balkan dishes such as *duvec* (vegetables and meat), moussaka (eggplant and minced meat), *sarma* (minced meat and rice) and *raznjici* (grilled veal or pork) are found on many menus. Apple strudel, a vestige of the Austrian influence in Croatian desserts, is divine.

At restaurants along the Adriatic coast, you'll find excellent seafood, especially oysters, scampi (prawns), *prstaci* (date mussels) and Dalmatian *brodet* (various types of fish, stewed with rice). Italian pizzas and pastas are readily available throughout Croatia at reasonable prices.

Locally made *pelinkovac* (herbal liqueur), maraschino (superb cherry liqueur from Zadar), *sljivovica* (plum brandy) and *travarica* (herbal brandy) are highly recommended. If you enjoy red wine, try Dingac or Postup: Both are excellent.

Shopping

Shop for Dalmatian lace, woodcarvings, ceramics, woolens, wines, art, tapestries, embroidery, leather boxes, filigree jewelry, handmade carpets and other locally made items. Narodna Radinost shops, specializing in folk crafts, are good places to begin shopping. Croatia's thriving folk-art industry and a favorable exchange rate make crafts attractive purchases. You can find good deals on handicrafts at the central market in Zagreb.

Bargain whenever you feel it's appropriate, especially at markets and souvenir shops. Croatia has a long tradition of tourism, so don't be surprised that sales staffs can be quite adept at judging at first glance how much money you are ready to spend.

Shopping Hours: Generally Monday-Friday 8 am-8 pm, Saturday 8 am-2 pm. During summer, some shops stay open later or close for an afternoon break noon-4 pm.

Personal Safety

The crime rate is relatively low, but displays of wealth—particularly around bus or train stations—increase your chances of becoming the victim of a pickpocket or mugger.

Health

The sun can be strong, especially along the coast, so use a high-SPF sunscreen liberally and wear a hat. Don't forget a comfortable pair of walking shoes. Most of the beaches in Croatia are covered with pebbles and stones rather than sand, so wearing beach sandals is advisable. In larger cities, the water and food are safe. In smaller towns and rural areas, stick with bottled or

boiled drinks.

Dos and Don'ts

Do expect Croatians to be sensitive about the subject of the war—almost everyone in the country was directly affected. Many have harrowing or heroic war stories to tell. And don't refer to it as a civil war—it's officially recognized as aggression by the Yugoslav army.

Don't be surprised by the high quality of wines produced in Croatia. Unfortunately, the country doesn't yet produce enough wine for a big export business, so you'll have to do most of your sampling there.

Do listen to the local folk music, and pick up a recording. Though you may not understand the words, the harmonies are haunting and convey the song's emotion. (A Croatian friend translated most of the songs to mean "He misses his girlfriend.") The group Mastreal is one of our favorites.

PRACTICALITIES

Tipping

In restaurants, round the total up to the nearest kuna when paying. Taxi drivers don't expect tips, but they appreciate the ones they get.

Weather

May-October is an excellent time to visit, as it's the warmest and driest time—great beach weather. During March, a cold north wind, the *bura*, can chill to the bone. You may need a sweater in the evenings, even in summer. The winters are cold, often drizzly, snowy and windy, especially in the interior and the north.

Greece, Europe

OVERVIEW

Introduction

At the ancient site of Delphi, where the Greeks once consulted the Oracle about the future, there's a small round sculpture. It's known as the *omphalos*—the cosmic belly button. The Greeks believed that Delphi was the very center of the world—the place where it all came into being. Indeed, many aspects of Western culture came into being in Greece—drama, art, philosophy and science.

It's a heady feeling to walk on stones that may have been trod by Plato, Homer or Agamemnon. But at many places in Greece, where ancient ruins are surrounded by the noise and smells of traffic, or where pristine island beaches are packed by topless sunbathers, it's apparent that the influence works the other way as well: Greece, it sometimes seems, has been overtaken by the modern world it spawned.



Church Spire in Greece

The trick for travelers in Greece is to find the golden mean—in this case, the balance between environment and history, between crowds and quiet, between ancient and modern. With a bit of planning (and maybe a query to the Oracle), you can find beautiful settings that can soothe your soul, while centuries of art and history invigorate your mind. And very likely, you'll be as charmed by the Greek people as you are by their landscape. During our last trip, we learned the Greek shortcut to communication—dancing. Growing frustrated with our attempts to speak in rudimentary Greek, an elderly Greek woman in a small island village grabbed us by the arm and began dancing. It was late at night, and we whirled around the terrace by moonlight, barriers dropping by the second.

History

The impact of ancient Greece on the Western world can't be overstated. The rediscovery of Greek classics of philosophy, science and literature in the 14th and 15th centuries had a profound influence on the development of Western thought, leading Europe into the Renaissance. The effects of those revelations are still with us today. The notion of democracy, the concept of the atom, the image of the Earth as round, the scientific method itself—all these and more had their birth in the writings of ancient Greece.

Though its recorded history goes back thousands of years, modern-day Greece was largely shaped by the past several centuries. The Ottoman Empire took control of Greece in the 15th century and governed until 1821, when the War of Independence began. A monarchy, installed in 1832 under Prince Otto of Bavaria, was abolished and reinstated twice during the 20th century. A military junta took power in 1967, but was booted out in 1974. That year, the nation finally returned to democracy, a concept that was born there two and a half millennia earlier.

The following years brought a period of political stability and economic development. Greece obtained full membership into the European Community in 1981, and replaced the drachmai with the euro in 2002.

Geography

The landscape of Greece is surprisingly varied, ranging from the cool, wet mountain regions of the northwest and the coastal hills of the Peloponnese, to the plains of Macedonia and the sun-drenched, rocky islands that lie in three different seas off the coast. Off the western coast, in the Ionian Sea, are the Ionian Islands (Cephalonia, Corfu, Ithaca, Lefkada, Paxi and Zakynthos). Islands off the eastern coast, in the Aegean, include the Dodecanese Islands (Kalimnos, Kos, Patmos and Rhodes), the Cyclades (220 islands, including Paros, Delos, Ios, Mykonos, Naxos, Santorini, Siros and Tinos), the Sporades (Skiathos, Skopelos and Skyros) and the large islands of Samos, Icaria, Chios, Lesbos, Limnos and Samothrace. Just off the southern coast are the Saronic Islands (Aegina, Poros, Spetses, Hydra and Kythira). The island of Crete, with the warmest weather in Greece, lies far to the south, in the Mediterranean—it's Europe's southernmost border.

Potpourri

"Name" days—the days commemorating the saints for whom people are named—are more important than birthdays in Greece.

Construction work for Athens' subway uncovered a number of ancient ruins, including an aqueduct, Byzantine storage bins, tombs dating from the Christian era and a large Roman-era public bath. These priceless discoveries were painstakingly photographed, cataloged—and then removed or bulldozed to make way for the subway. Some salvaged artifacts are on display in Metro stations.

Entrance to all public museums, archaeological sites and other places of national heritage is free on Sundays. Museums and archaeological sites usually close earlier in the day during the winter months.

Here's a *very* quick guide to Greek mythology: The home of the gods was high above the clouds on Mt. Olympus, where Zeus, chief of the Olympian gods, ruled (or, as some would say, was ruled by Hera, his wife). Other notables include Athena, goddess of wisdom; Poseidon, god of the sea and brother of Zeus; Dionysus, god of wine and son of Zeus; Apollo, god of beauty, poetry, music and the sun; and Artemis, goddess of the moon and twin sister to Apollo.

Jason began the quest for the golden fleece from the town of **Platamona**, north of Athens. Crete was the starting point of Icarus' ill-fated flight to the mainland. And **Aulis** was the launching point of the Greek expedition against Troy (and also the site of the sacrifice of Iphigenia, Agamemnon's daughter).

The island of Rhodes was an important grammatical "standard" in ancient Greek and Latin. You were "in" a place if it were smaller than Rhodes, and "at" a place if it were larger. Thus, Caesar was "in" the city of Rome, which was located "at" Italy.

Before the invention of soap, the ancient Greeks used to soak in water and then daub themselves with olive oil. The oil (and accumulated grime) was then scraped off with a curved implement.

There are nude and topless beaches throughout Greece. They probably have nothing to do with the fact that ancient Olympic athletes competed in the nude.

Destinations in Greece

Athens, Greece, Europe

OVERVIEW

Introduction

Athens, the cradle of democracy and Western civilization, remains a must-see on any European tour. The ancient and modern merge in this city in ways that are fascinating and (on a bad day) overwhelming. Pollution wreathes the golden stones of the Acropolis and obscures views of the Saronic Gulf. Cars bleat and belch among ranks of concrete high-rises. Then visitors turn down a cobbled lane, discovering vine-swathed tavernas, tortoises trundling through ancient ruins and bazaars teeming with dusty treasures. Or perhaps they encounter a sleek cafe, a new art gallery or an outdoor cinema that serves ouzo under the stars. Greece's capital has been reinventing itself, and as the Olympic Games in 2004 showed the world, the results could not be more charming.



"Temple of Poseidon, Attica. "

The metro routes are longer now, and the stations dazzle with marble and antiquities. The new international airport is open at nearby Spata, and congested downtown streets have been turned into pedestrian walkways, greatly reducing the city's notorious smog and noise. Hotels, museums and archaeological sites have been revamped. Newly gentrified districts—such as Psiri and Gazi—host cafes, clubs and chic restaurants, which even boast smoke-free sections.

Greeks are proud of their Olympic history, their renovated capital city and—most of all—their proven ability to surmount obstacles and come off with flying colors. Athens should remain firmly on the travel map, prized for both its ancient charms and its modern makeover.

History

Once a fortified village entirely contained atop the Acropolis, Athens grew into one of the most powerful

city-states in the ancient world. As a successful trading city with its own port, it became Greece's leading metropolis. The fifth century BC ushered in Athens' Golden Age, the classical period that has had such a profound effect on the development of Western thought. The city's government evolved into the world's first democracy. Its leaders rebuilt the city's monuments in marble—the Parthenon, the Erechtheion, the Odeon. Socrates and then Plato shaped the world of philosophy. Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes wrote their seminal dramatic works and saw them performed.

Athens' Golden Age was influential but short-lived. The Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC) against rival Sparta was disastrous. Soon, the powerful Greek city-states fell apart and into the hands of Philip of Macedon, then to his son Alexander the Great. The three centuries following Alexander the Great's death are known as the Hellenistic period, when the arts, literature and science flourished. The Roman Empire took control in 146 BC, but Athens was highly respected and treated well. Integration into the Byzantine Empire was more radical. Venetians ruled in the 13th century and the Turks took over in 1453, holding power in Greece until the 19th century.

Greece became an independent country in 1829, and Athens was named the capital in 1833. It was the seat of monarchies and democracies and the scene of uprisings and civil war in the 20th century, as the country struggled to join the ranks of developing nations. Since the country's bid for economic and political stability, the city has become a popular destination, both for its historic sites and its proximity to the Greek islands. Long-needed improvements to the city's transportation system are finally being implemented.

Geography

Athens sits in a basin in southeastern Greece, closed in by the mountains of Pendeli, Parnitha, Imitos and Egaleo and opening toward the Saronic Gulf to the west.

The Acropolis remains the city's massive, gracious centerpiece. The Plaka area, or old Athens, lies directly below, and its labyrinth of walkways acts almost as a shield, protecting the sacred hill from the modern city. At the outskirts of the Plaka, to the northeast, is Syntagma Square. The city's business center—with its offices, stores and hotels—begins there as one corner of the commercial triangle (the downtown pedestrian zone). The other two corners of the triangle are roughly Omonia Square and Monastiraki Square (site of the famous flea market). Ermou Street, the "base" of the triangle, is one of the city's main shopping concourses.

Most of the major archaeological sites and museums are within a 2.5-mi/4-km radius of Syntagma Square. The neighborhoods of Psiri, Thissio and Gazi to the north of the Acropolis have been transformed into trendy entertainment areas with traditional tavernas, elegant gourmet restaurants, fashionable nightspots and art galleries. Farther north along Kifissias Avenue are the upper-class residential suburbs and upscale commercial areas such as Psychico, Filothei, Maroussi, Kifissia and Ekali—favorite locations for foreign embassies, consulates and companies, and for schools and colleges.

The city extends southwest to the coast, encompassing the sprawling port of Piraeus, and to its south, the upper-class coastal suburbs and beaches of Faliro, Kalamaki, Glyfada, Voula and Vouliagmeni. Just off this coast, 30 minutes to two hours away by ferry or hovercraft, are the nearby islands of the Saronic Gulf: Aegina, Poros, Hydra and Spetses.

The Athens Olympic Sports Complex, at the Irimi metro stop, was the main site for the 2004 Olympic Games. Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava redesigned the stadium, which will continue to host cultural and sporting events.

Must See or Do

Sights—The Acropolis; the ancient Agora (marketplace) and the Temple of Olympian Zeus; the changing of the evzone guards outside Parliament in Syntagma Square; Lykavittos hill; a day trip to Cape Sounion for the sunset; and, if you have time, a one-day cruise around the Saronic Islands.

Museums—The Acropolis Museum; the Agora Museum; the Benaki Museum; the Museum of Cycladic and Ancient Greek Art; The National Archaeological Museum.

Memorable Meals—The spectacular view of the Acropolis and the creative cuisine at Orizontes Lykavittou; the mind-boggling variety of traditional Greek dishes served at Ta Kioupia; bustling brunch in Psiri; rooftop dining in Thissio; the revival of ancient Greek cuisine at Archeon Gefsis; award-winning seafood specialties at Varoulko.

Late Night—*Rembetiko* music at Stoa Athanaton; outdoor cinemas during summer; Greek and international jazz and blues at Half Note Jazz Club; live rock acts at the Gagarin 205 club; bars and clubs in the Psiri neighborhood; open-air summer dance clubs by the sea; a Hellenic Festival performance in the ancient Odeon of Herod Atticus.

Walks—Through the Plaka (old Athens) and the flea market in the Monastiraki area; along the traffic-free "archaeological promenade" Apostolou Pavlou in Thissio; around the perimeter of Mikrolimano Bay with its fish restaurants and yacht club close to Piraeus; through the hilly Kastella suburb close to Piraeus.

Especially For Kids—The virtual-reality presentations at the Hellenic Cosmos; the bird collection at the Attica Zoological Park; the Hellenic Children's Museum in the Plaka; the excellent beach clubs in the southern suburb of Vouliagmeni.

Port Information

Location

Cruise ships moor in the terminal at the port of Piraeus, approximately 6 mi/10 km southwest of Athens city center. With 11 berths, three of which were constructed in preparation for the 2004 Olympics, the terminal can accommodate even the largest vessels (the *Queen Mary II*, the biggest cruiser in the world, served as a floating hotel, along with several other ships, during the Olympics).

Internal shuttle buses deliver passengers from the individual berths to the international-passengers terminal, where facilities include duty-free shops, exchange offices and a bank, plus a large car park. Metro Line 1 connects Monastiraki and Omonia Square in central Athens with the harbor.

Shore Excursions

Excursions include sightseeing tours of the city, a half-day trip to Sounio, a full-day tour of Delphi and more.

Sightseeing

A trip to Athens must start with a visit to the Acropolis. The site, one of the earliest settlements in Greece and the epicenter of Greek genius during the Golden Age, never fails to impress. Exploring it is awe-inspiring for first-time and repeat visitors alike. Even the scaffolding won't dampen your enthusiasm. Among the structures to admire on the Acropolis are the Parthenon, the small Ionian temple of Athena Nike and the Erechtheion Temple. Nearby is the Acropolis Museum, which contains all of the portable objects removed from the site since 1834. (The Elgin Marbles, the most famous artifacts from the Parthenon, remain in London despite pleas to return them.)

An archaeological park surrounds the Acropolis, so take time to appreciate the ruins you'll pass on your climb, including the amphitheaters on the south slope. And be sure to pause to take in the various views of the city (the layer of brown smog is seen less frequently than in the past).

From the Acropolis, you need walk only a couple of miles/kilometers in any direction to see most of the major archaeological sites and museums in Athens. Start by taking a trip to the top of the Hill of Philopappou for a great view of the city. From there, head north to the Agora, which was the center of ancient Athens' city life. Nearby you will find the Roman Forum and the graceful Tower of the Winds. Continue east through the frenetic-yet-delightful Plaka neighborhood to Hadrian's Arch and the Temple of Zeus. Watch the skirted soldiers (called *evzones*) perform a changing-of-the-guard ceremony in front of

the Parliament in Syntagma Square. Afterward, relax at the Zappeion, a beautiful garden with shaded benches.

Make time to see some of the city's many wonderful museums. The best is the National Archaeological Museum, filled with an unsurpassed collection of Greek art and artifacts. The Benaki Museum and the Greek Folk Art Museum are two of our favorites.

If you aren't planning to visit any of the Greek isles on your trip, spend a day at one of the numerous beach clubs in the city's southern suburbs. These clubs have sandy beaches, watersports facilities and a range of other amenities.

Before you set out to see all you can, pick up a free map from the Greek National Tourist Organization at the airport or Syntagma Square at 26 Leoforos Amalias.

Landmarks and Historic Sites

Children, students and senior citizens are eligible for discounts on admission (usually 50%) at most archaeological sites.

Acropolis

This hill was a sacred site for ancient Athenians. To reach the plateau, you enter through an immense portal, and at the top are the ruins of three temples built in the fifth century BC. From the top of the Acropolis, you also get a sweeping view of Athens and the Saronic Gulf. There are two paths leading up to the Acropolis: One is off Dionysiou Areopagitou Street, and the other is off Theorias Street in Plaka. Wear sturdy shoes and take plenty of water for the ascent, which is steep, slippery and scorching hot midday. Authorities plan to add an elevator but, at the moment, no disabled access is available.

Propylaea. This monumental gateway is your reward for winding your way to the top of the Acropolis. (Be forewarned, however, that the steps are steep and slippery.) As you enter the small, rectangular hall, stop for a moment to marvel at the six Doric columns. Built of pure marble, this was the first building to combine Ionic and Doric styles.

Temple of Athena Nike. Also called the Temple of the Wingless Victory. On the south side of the Propylaea, this small temple once contained a sanctuary and an altar for animal sacrifices. The temple is currently being restored to its former splendor.

Parthenon. The largest building on the Acropolis is one of the world's most awe-inspiring man-made sites. The Parthenon (built by Pericles to honor the goddess of wisdom, Athena, patron of the city) has been the model for thousands of buildings throughout the world. Except for its roof, which was made of wood, the Parthenon was constructed of marble. The temple stood intact for millennia, until the ruling Ottomans used it to store gunpowder, which was ignited by a Venetian bomb in 1687. Most of the artifacts from the temple are housed in the Acropolis Museum nearby, except for the controversial friezes in the British Museum.

Erechtheion. Ahead and to the left as you face the Parthenon. Built on the site of the legendary contest between Athena and Poseidon, the temple was a shrine to Athena and the twin deity Poseidon-Erechtheus. Its most distinctive feature was the ingenious design of the six support columns on the south side—carved in the shape of maidens, or caryatids. The originals have been replaced by models, but three genuine caryatids are on display in the Acropolis Museum a few yards away.

Acropolis Museum. This small museum lies hidden behind the Parthenon. It houses some marvelous sculptures and other findings from the Acropolis. The new and much larger Acropolis Museum is currently under construction a few hundred yards to the south. Open daily 8 am-7:30 pm (closed earlier in winter). The entrance fee of 12 euros for adults includes the Acropolis archaeological sites and museums (Theater of Dionysus, Agora site and museum, Temple of Olympian Zeus, Roman Forum, and the Kerameikos site and museum). Phone 210-321-0219 (archaeological site); 210-323-6665 (museum). <http://www.culture.gr>.

Agora

Just below the Acropolis, the Agora (or market) was the commercial and public center of ancient Athens. This is where Socrates spent his days in rational debate and where Western philosophy and politics were born. The site's museum, housed inside the splendidly restored Attalos Arcade, features many of the artifacts found in the area. The Theseion, within the Agora, is the best-preserved ancient temple in Greece. Built in the fifth century BC, it honors Athena and Hephaestus. The American School of Classical Studies excavates the site and offers ample information online. Daily 8:30 am-7 pm (closed earlier in winter). Admission to the Agora and museum costs 4 euros. A 12-euro multipass covers this site, as well as the Acropolis, Temple of Olympian Zeus, Roman Forum, Theater of Dionysus and Kerameikos. There are two entrances: at 24 Adrianou St. in Monastiraki and at the west end of Polygnotou Street in Plaka, Athens. Phone 210-321-0185. <http://www.culture.gr>.

Areopagus

This low hill, named for the war god Ares, is near the Acropolis. It was the site of the supreme court of ancient Greece, where St. Paul addressed the Athenians in AD 51. It's not much to look at now: As you come down from the Acropolis, turn right at the ticket booth. After approximately 150 ft/45 m, you will reach the slippery steps carved into the rock that will take you to the top of the hill.

Byzantine Churches

Several Byzantine churches, built between the 11th and 12th centuries AD, are scattered around the city. We think the following are worth seeing from the inside as well as the outside:

Panagia Gorgoepikoos. The humble Byzantine church standing beside the large Metropolis Cathedral has a much longer history than its majestic neighbor. It was built in the 12th century on the ruins of an ancient temple. The temple and other ancient buildings served as a source of building material when the church was constructed. This explains why the walls incorporate many marble murals, such as the one from the fourth century BC showing the signs of the 12 months. Mitropoleos Square (at the junction of Mitropoleos and Agias Filotheis streets), Plaka.

Agias Triadas. This church on Filellinon Street was constructed in 1031 and, after being destroyed, was rebuilt in 1835. Since 1852, it has been operating as a Russian Orthodox church. Monday-Friday 8 am-noon, Saturday 4-8 pm, Sunday 7 am-noon. 21 Filellinon St., near Syntagma Square. Phone 210-323-1090.

Kapnikarea. Located halfway down Ermou Street from Syntagma Square.

Agii Apostoli. In the Agora area south of Stoa of Attalos.

Agii Theodori. On the Dragatsaniou Street side of Klathmonos Square on Stadiou Street. Churches are open to the public when services are being held and a few hours afterward, on Sunday and holidays. Also open for daily prayers 7 am-1 pm and 4-6:30 pm (depending on the whim of the parish priest).

Hadrian's Arch

Standing beside the Temple of Olympian Zeus, this tall marble structure used to be the city gate connecting the original town of Athens (present-day Plaka) with the Roman quarters. It was built in AD 131 to honor the Roman emperor Hadrian. Free. At the intersection of Olgas and Amalias avenues, Athens.

Kerameikos

The city's ancient cemetery dates to the fifth century BC. Throughout this site are many beautiful tombstones with depictions of the dead along with mythological scenes. The ancient city walls, the Dipylon Gate and the Sacred Gate can be found near the site. The cemetery is named after the ceramists who operated their workshops at this location for many centuries. The numerous findings of their craft are on display in the small museum, including a splendid collection of sculptures. Tuesday-Sunday 8:30 am-3 pm, Monday 11 am-3 pm. 2 euros. A 12-euro multipass covers this site, as well as the Acropolis, Temple of Olympian Zeus, Roman Forum, Theater of Dionysus and Ancient Agora. 148 Ermou St., Thissio, Athens. Phone 210-346-3552.

Lykavittos Hill

An absolute must for any visitor to Athens—especially for those on a rush visit. Lykavittos is the tallest hill in the Athens basin with an altitude of 968 ft/295 m, offering sweeping views of the city. It's located in the Kolonaki area of central Athens. In one hour, you can "see" the central landmarks of the city (including the Acropolis and the Olympic Stadium) as well as the coast and surrounding mountains. Coin-operated binoculars are available.

The tiny, quaint orthodox chapel of St. George crowns the hill, which is the highest point in the city. Energetic visitors can walk to the top on a well-trod footpath, and the less adventurous can take a short taxi ride. Or take the *teleferik* (funicular railway), which is a two-minute train ride through a hillside tunnel leading to the top of Lykavittos. The funicular runs every 30 minutes 9 am-3 am and departs at the corner of Aristippou and Ploutarchou streets in Kolonaki. In addition to the chapel, the Orizontes Lykavittou complex resides on the hill and consists of a gourmet restaurant, bar and outdoor cafe. The Lykavittos Theatre, overlooking the city, is used for concerts and other performances during the summer. Information on the funicular and the Orizontes complex is available by calling 210-722-7065. The hill is in the center of the city, Kolonaki, Athens.

Lysikrates Monument

Noted for its six Corinthian columns and marble dome, this monument was built to house the prize awarded to the winners of a drama competition in 334 BC. Later the monument was incorporated into the library of a Capuchin monastery, where it was known as the Lantern of Demosthenes. Lord Byron once stayed at the monastery and is said to have written part of *Childe Harold* while sitting between the monument's columns. Epimenidi and Vryonos streets (just east of the Acropolis), Plaka, Athens.

Odeon of Herod Atticus

This amphitheater, which is on the south slope of the Acropolis and can be viewed from above, was built next to the Theater of Dionysus by the Roman ruler Herod Atticus in AD 161. Regular tours aren't permitted, but the site hosts performances during the summer Hellenic Festival. The seats in the amphitheater are marble, and the stage is built from archaic stone formations. As you take your seat, the lighted Acropolis stands behind you. Tickets are sold 15 days prior to each event. Box office open 9 am-2 pm and 6-9 pm weekly. Phone 210-928-2900. <http://www.hellenicfestival.gr>.

Panathinaiko Stadium

This all-marble stadium was the site of the first modern Olympics in 1896. It was constructed on the site of the stone original, which was built in 330 BC. Vassilissis Konstantinou and Agras (across from the National Garden), Athens.

Philopappou Hill

Also known as the Hill of the Muses, this pinnacle offers wonderful views over Athens and the Saronic Gulf on a clear day. A monument to the philanthropic Roman Philopappus is on the summit. Directly across from the Acropolis, on Dionysiou Aeropagitou, Athens.

Pnyx

One of the city's major heritage sites and the so-called birthplace of democracy. It's a semicircular terrace where ancient Athenians met in democratic assembly; it could accommodate 10,000 people. On the west side of Philopappou Hill, Athens.

Presidential Palace

When Greece was ruled by a monarchy, this was the Royal Palace. Now it's used by the President of the Greek Republic to host dignitaries. No tours. Irodou Attikou Street, Athens.

Roman Forum

The Roman Forum excavations can be seen best from Polignotou Street. On the northeast corner is the Tower of the Winds, built in the first century BC, which served as a sundial, water clock and weather vane. Daily 8:30 am-7 pm (closed earlier in winter). 2 euros. A 12-euro multipass covers this site, as well as the Acropolis, Temple of Olympian Zeus, Ancient Agora, Theater of Dionysus and Kerameikos. Just east of the Ancient Agora, Athens. Phone 210-324-5220.

Syntagma Square

The center of the city and the best spot for new visitors to orient themselves. The evzones, dressed in traditional garb, guard the monument to the unknown soldier, which stands in the forecourt of the Greek

Parliament. The changing-of-the-guard ceremony takes place every hour on the hour. It sounds sedate, until you witness the choreographed high kicks, all executed by soldiers in short, pleated skirts and clogs with pom-poms. In the metro station just beneath Syntagma Square is an exhibition of archaeological finds that were unearthed during the construction of the city's two new metro lines.

Temple of Olympian Zeus

The ruins of this temple lie just behind Hadrian's Arch to the east of the Acropolis. It was once one of the largest temples in ancient Greece. The construction of this huge marble building commenced in 515 BC, but it continued for almost seven centuries and was eventually completed under the Roman emperor Hadrian in AD 132. Its perimeter included a total of 104 Corinthian columns, with additional columns inside the building that housed a gargantuan gold-and-ivory statue of Zeus. After the temple's destruction by invaders in the fourth century AD, the marble was removed from the ruins and used as construction material in newer buildings. Now, only some of the temple's columns can be seen. Their immense height is a testimony to the dimensions of this sanctuary. Daily 8 am-7 pm (closed earlier in winter). 2 euros. A 12-euro multipass covers this site, as well as the Acropolis, Ancient Agora, Roman Forum, Theater of Dionysus and Kerameikos. Vasilissis Olgas Avenue (entrance on Olgas), Plaka, Athens. Phone 210-922-6330.

Theater of Dionysus

The oldest Greek theater, built in the fifth century BC, is on the south slope of the Acropolis. It's the first archaeological site you'll see as you walk up Dionysiou Areopagitou Street from Hadrian's Arch. The plays of Aristophanes, Euripides, Aeschylus and Sophocles were first performed there. The theater held some 17,000 spectators. No guided tours, but a book in English about the theater's history is available for about 8.80 euros. Daily 8:30 am-7 pm (closed earlier in winter). 2 euros. A 12-euro multipass covers this site, as well as the Acropolis, Temple of Olympian Zeus, Roman Forum, Ancient Agora and Kerameikos. Dionysiou Areopagitou Street, Athens. Phone 210-322-4625.

Neighborhoods and Districts

The Apollo Coast

The Apollo Coast is one of the city's major entertainment districts. It starts in Piraeus and ends at Cape Sounion on the southern tip of the Attica peninsula. The suburbs of Palio Faliro, Glyfada and Vouliagmeni are major leisure destinations along the coastal road. They feature a choice of beaches, yacht marinas, restaurants and nightclubs. Glyfada has excellent shopping and a golf course. Vouliagmeni is renowned for its luxurious resort hotels, sophisticated restaurants and sailing clubs.

Gazi

The former industrial district west of Monastiraki has evolved into the city's trendiest neighborhood. Large nightclubs and impressively styled restaurants can be found inside old warehouses and factories. This area took its name from the former huge gas complex; it has been transformed into the Technopolis cultural center.

Kifissia

The most exclusive residential area of Athens is in the northern suburb of Kifissia, easily accessible by the metro. The district's historic landmark hotels, excellent French restaurants and exclusive boutiques are the best way to spend money in style.

Monastiraki

The narrow streets between Monastiraki Square, the ancient Agora marketplace and Assomaton Square are the site of the Monastiraki Flea Market. Overlooking Monastiraki Square is the Tzisdarakis Mosque, featuring a splendid pottery collection. A short stroll away is the Central Market located on Athinas Street, offering an overwhelming variety of seafood, meat and vegetables.

Piraeus

The industrial town of Piraeus has served as the port of Athens since the fifth century BC. Occupying a peninsula 6 mi/10 km southwest of the city center, it has become part of Athens' growing metropolitan area.

Dominated by one of the largest harbors in the Mediterranean, Piraeus retains the charm of a bygone era in the southern part of the peninsula, featuring two natural harbors, a yacht marina and a coastal promenade lined with restaurants and cafes (the classic 1960 film *Never on Sunday* was set in this atmospheric port). Piraeus can be easily reached from Athens. The Metro Line 1 connects Monastiraki and Omonia Square in central Athens with the passenger-ship section of the harbor.

Plaka

Nestled below the northern and eastern slopes of the Acropolis, this is the oldest quarter in Athens. Cars are banned from most of the area because of its narrow and winding streets—but beware of the motorcycles and scooters, which are everywhere. The Plaka is packed with ancient monuments, Byzantine churches, mosques, stately 19th-century houses and a dozen museums. There is even a tiny Cycladic village consisting of picturesque whitewashed houses, known as the Anafiotika settlement. The Plaka can be peaceful and serene by day, but its tavernas and cafes are hopping at night.

Psiri

Many Athenians head each evening to Psiri just north of Monastiraki. This district used to be a run-down neighborhood, but it has recently been transformed into the trendiest entertainment destination in Athens. Its narrow streets are teeming with traditional tavernas, elegant restaurants, fashionable bars and art galleries.

Thissio

A stone's throw from the Agora is Thissio, one of the oldest neighborhoods of Athens. Beautifully restored mansions now house gourmet restaurants, hot nightspots and cozy cafes. Linger over a cocktail and gaze at the Acropolis—without the tourism barrage of Plaka.

Parks and Gardens

National Garden and Zappeion Park

The National Garden is a sprawling, peaceful stretch of green amid the noise and traffic of central Athens. You'll find peacocks, a playground and a small zoo. The National Garden is open sunrise to dusk. Main entrance on Amalias Avenue, next to the Parliament, Athens.

Zoos and Wildlife

Attica Zoological Park

The zoo features more than 270 bird species, such as penguins, flamingos and tropical birds, as well as reptiles, butterflies, kangaroos, seals, llamas and other mammals. There is also a cafeteria on the premises, along with a picnic area and a playground. Allow at least two hours to visit the park. Daily 9 am-sunset. 11 euros adults, 9 euros children ages 3-12. Yalou (near the airport), Spata. Phone 210-663-4724. <http://www.atticapark.gr>.

Other Options

Hellenic Cosmos

A choice of virtual-reality presentations will take you back to ancient Greece. You can visit the majestic Zeus Temple in Olympia or a Byzantine palace. Monday, Tuesday and Thursday 9 am-2 pm, Wednesday and Friday 9 am-9 pm, Sunday 10 am-3 pm. Exhibitions related to Greek history are also held regularly at the Hellenic Cosmos. Show times vary. Virtual-reality presentations cost 7.75 euros adults, 5 euros children. 254 Pireos St., Tavros, Athens. Phone 210-483-5300. <http://www.fhw.gr>.

Metro Stations

A treasure trove of antiquities was unearthed under Athens during the recent expansion of the subway system. Many of the artifacts are displayed in three consecutive metro stations: Acropolis, Syntagma and Evangelismos. The archaeological displays are freely accessible daily 5 am-midnight.

Recreation

Just because Athens is a sprawling, urban city doesn't mean there's nowhere to get a little recreation in. If you're nautically inclined, you can charter yachts easily, and the sea also allows for diving excursions. Within easy reach by car, taxi or bus are numerous beaches in the southern suburbs of Palio Faliro,

Alimos, Elliniko, Glyfada, Voula, Vouliagmeni and Varkiza. Some of them are freely accessible, such as the ones in Palio Faliro and Glyfada, and others operate as beach clubs charging an admission fee. The drive to the seaside resort of Varkiza, 45 minutes southwest of downtown, offers panoramic views.

Beaches

The Athenian seaside, long overshadowed by island glory, is gaining popularity. A few public beaches offer free sand and surf around the clock. Private resorts lard on the amenities, such as umbrellas, chairs, restrooms, changing cabins, showers, playgrounds, snack bars and lifeguards. Admission fees range up to 12 euros on weekends. Some, such as Astir, even offer extreme watersports.

Astir Beach Club Vouliagmeni

The most cosmopolitan of all Athens beach clubs, integrated into the luxurious Astir Palace Resort complex in Vouliagmeni. Beach chairs and umbrellas are provided at the beach together with lockers, changing cabins, showers, a snack bar and an ancient temple of Apollo. The Beach Club offers a full range of motorized and nonmotorized watersports such as windsurfing, waterskiing, parachuting and sailing. Daily 8 am-sunset. Admission is 15 euros on weekends, 10 euros on weekdays. Big spenders can access the hotel facilities (including the swimming pool and private beach) for 45 euros on weekends and 30 on weekdays. Apollonos Street, Vouliagmeni, Athens. Phone 210-890-2000.

Beach Club Varkiza

This large stretch of sand is very popular with Athenians. Sometimes it seems that the whole city has dropped by for a swim at this fine-sand beach backed by carefully tended gardens. Facilities such as cabanas (for day and/or night use), changing cabins, showers, snack bars, umbrellas and beach chairs may be used by bathers. Motorized and nonmotorized watersports are available nearby. Daily 8 am-8 pm May-September. 5 euros. Athinon-Souniou Road, Varkiza, Athens. Phone 210-897-2402.

EOT Beach Club Vouliagmeni

The classic summer hangout. This half-moon-shaped sand beach is one of the most scenic bathing spots in the Athens area. Bathers can use the beach club's umbrellas and beach chairs (for an additional fee), changing cabins and shower facilities and eat at the taverna or snack bar. In addition to watersports, the club offers tennis, basketball and volleyball courts, as well as a waterslide and a children's playground. May-September daily 8 am-8 pm. 4 euros. Possidonos Avenue, Vouliagmeni, Athens. Phone 210-896-0012.

Grand Beach Lagonissi

The five-star Grand Resort Lagonissi has developed one of its fine sandy beaches into the most luxurious beach club in the Athens area. Standard amenities, such as beach chairs and umbrellas, are complemented by several eateries and bars (including one in the water). A full range of water activities, as well as beach volleyball, soccer, basketball and tennis courts, are provided. DJs entertain bathers on summer weekends, and there are a variety of concerts, beach parties and other happenings scheduled throughout the season. Daily 8 am-8 pm early May-late October. 14 euros on weekends (free for children 6 and younger), 8 euros on weekdays (free for children 12 and younger). Athens-Sounion Road (25 mi/40 km south of Athens), Athens. Phone 229-107-6222.

Golf

Glyfada Golf Course and Club

If you like to do your walking on the links, head to the Glyfada Golf Course and Club, just 20 minutes from downtown. The 18-hole, par-72 championship course is the pride of the Attica region (in terms of golf, that is). Greens fee for 18 holes is 75 euros. Terma Pronois, Glyfada, Athens. Phone 210-894-6820.

Hiking and Walking

The National Garden is a good spot in downtown Athens for a hike on level ground or an early-morning jog. Not as green, but still a pleasant place to hike, is Philopappou Hill. There are some good uphill trails there, and it's hard to get lost—the Acropolis is always behind you. Those who are serious about hiking tours should contact Athens Hiking Club, 45 Zaimi, Exarhia, Athens. Phone 210-821-8401.

Dining

Whether dining at a neighborhood taverna or an elegant restaurant, Greeks take their time over food. The cuisine is delightfully uncomplicated and quite different from what's served in Greek or Cypriot restaurants abroad. Much of the cooking relies on simple seasonings of fresh meat and vegetables.

For breakfast, Greeks rarely eat more than bread or bakery-fresh *tiropites* (flaky cheese-filled pastries). Lunch is served in the late afternoon, generally between 2 and 4 pm, and dinner around 10 or 11 pm. To stave off hunger between meals, they enjoy snacking on souvlaki (garlic-marinated lamb kebabs) or *tiropites* bought from a street vendor.

It's common to make a lunch of *mezedes*, or hors d'oeuvres. Typical dishes include fried meatballs, squash balls, octopus, shrimp, squid, cheese, olives, stuffed grape leaves, *tzatziki* (garlicky yogurt and cucumbers), eggplant dip, small sausages and giant beans. You can find *mezedes* at an *ouzeri* (a bar serving ouzo) or at a *mezedopolio* (a bar serving locally produced wine or beer).

If you're having a full meal, make sure it includes one of the following local specialties: moussaka (lamb and eggplant in bechamel sauce), kebabs, pastitsio (lamb or goat meat with macaroni and tomatoes), *stifado* (braised beef with onions), *paithakia* (grilled lamb or goat chops), *melitzanosalata* (eggplant salad), *revithia soupa* (chickpea soup), spanakopita (spinach pie), *chtapodi* (octopus salad) and *tiropita* (cheese pie). Don't leave Greece without trying baklava and other pastries made from phyllo dough, nuts and honey. Strong Greek coffee (similar to Turkish coffee—but don't tell that to the Greeks) is usually quite good. Ask for it *sketo* (black), *metrio* (semisweet) or *glyko* (sweet).

The traditional alcoholic drinks of Greece are quite distinctive and pack a strong punch. Ouzo, the popular aperitif, is anise-flavored and turns cloudy when mixed with water, as is often done. *Metaxa*, a brandy, is graded in quality and priced according to stars, with three being the cheapest. Retsina is an acquired taste (imagine a pine tree marinated in wine). *Mavrodaphne* is very sweet—it's more like a dessert wine.

The past two decades have seen a renaissance of the age-old Greek wine-making tradition. The introduction of new vines and the use of better techniques have resulted in some excellent reds and whites on par with the world's best wines.

When selecting a restaurant, know that *estiatorion* are the more expensive conventional restaurants; taverna are informal, family-run establishments; *psistaria* offer mostly grilled meats; and *psarotaverna* specialize in seafood dishes. Many restaurants close during the summer or move to another location.

Shopping

It's nearly impossible to stroll through the old city without being tempted to buy something. Shops are so tiny that many vendors display their colorful wares outside along the narrow streets. Much of what you'll see are touristy trinkets made elsewhere, but you'll also find plenty of shops selling gold jewelry with traditional Greek designs, handwoven tablecloths and unusual pottery. Shops also sell everything from leather goods and designer labels to religious icons and fine antiques. T-shirt shops are everywhere.

Be aware that vendors in the old city and at the markets are aggressive—once you get inside a shop, it's often difficult to get out without leaving some money behind. But don't forget to bargain in the souvenir shops and the flea market. Museum gift shops are also a good place to look for high-quality souvenirs that are often reproductions of museum pieces.

Don't miss the Monastiraki Flea Market, particularly if you're in town on a Sunday. For high-quality goods, head to Ermou Street off Syntagma Square or to the streets around Kolonaki Square.

Shopping Hours: Most shops have hours as follows: Monday, Wednesday and Saturday 9 am-3 pm; Tuesday, Thursday and Friday 9 am-2:30 pm and 5-8:30 pm. All department stores and supermarkets and many larger shops now stay open through the day, and some stay open until 6 pm on Saturday. Many shops in the Plaka area are open daily 9 am-9 pm.

Markets

Laiki Markets

The name means "people's" or "farmers" market. Each district of Athens hosts one at least once a week, offering a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables as well as household goods. One of the liveliest markets can be found each Saturday morning on Kallidromiou Street in Exarhia, a 20-minute walk from Syntagma Square.

Monastiraki Flea Market

Visitors flock to this market at the edge of the Plaka to sample everything from the modern to the ancient, all in less than 1 sq mi/2.6 sq km. The best day to visit the flea market is Sunday. Visitors will find everything from military uniforms to Mickey Mouse clocks to mock Roman helmets in the narrow alleyways and streets. Bargaining is quite acceptable in the individual stalls, so don't settle on the asked-for price. Daily 9 am-9 pm. The main shopping areas are Pandrossou and Ifaistou streets near the Acropolis, Athens.

Shopping Areas

Ermou Street

This pedestrian-only street off Syntagma Square shouldn't be missed if shopping is among your travel objectives. It has always been Athens' busiest shopping street and is packed with clothing, accessory and shoe shops.

Kolonaki

This fashionable neighborhood at the foot of Lykavittos Hill is the chicest place to shop in Athens. It's teeming with boutiques—Gucci, Lanvin, Bulgari, Lancel, Vuitton. Tsakalof Street is Kolonaki's most famous thoroughfare (it's reportedly rated among the six most expensive streets in the world). When you need a break from shopping, there are plenty of trendy coffee shops and restaurants around Kolonaki Square.

Personal Safety

The crime rate in Athens is relatively low. You can walk safely down almost any street, day or night. But take precautions against pickpockets when strolling in the Omonia Square area late at night. If you are unfortunate enough to be riding a trolley or subway at rush hour, make sure your wallet or handbag is secure. Ladies should also avoid holding their handbags with the street-side hand as there have been several incidents of bikers snatching them. Such petty theft is on the rise, unfortunately (as are instances of rape and disorderliness on the islands).

Strikes and demonstrations frequently choke downtown traffic. Avoid getting swept up in these marches, which sometimes end with a rain of molotov cocktails on the American Embassy. Although animosity toward U.S. foreign policy runs high, visitors from the U.S. aren't usually harassed.

Canadian Travel Advisory Line—Phone: 613-944-6788. Toll-free: 800-267-6788.
<http://www.voyage.gc.ca>.

U.S. Department of State, Overseas Citizens Services—Phone: 202-647-5225. Toll-free: 888-407-4747. <http://travel.state.gov/travel/warnings.html>.

Health

Sanitation standards in Athens are generally similar to those in Western Europe. Medical facilities also are acceptable. Tap water is safe to drink, but it's so heavily chlorinated that most travelers prefer bottled water. We suggest you stick to prepackaged drinks—but dispose of the plastic bottles properly. (Bottled water and other drinks are so popular that disposing of the containers has become a problem, particularly on the islands.) Snacks sold by street vendors are generally safe to eat, but the golden rule is to buy from vendors patronized by locals. If you're out and need a restroom, look for a hotel rather than a restaurant. (As a rule, hotel restrooms are cleaner.) Athens' air can be very polluted and may aggravate existing

respiratory ailments. Antihistamines are recommended for those with allergies. Don't forget a comfortable pair of walking shoes. Sunscreen and a hat are a must.

If you're in need of medical care, your hotel concierge should be able to contact a doctor for you (or ring SOS-Doctors on 1016). Hospitals and pharmacies stay open additional hours on a rotating basis. Call the Tourist Police (phone 171), ambulance service (phone 166) or check the weekly English-language newspaper, *Athens News*, to find out which are open after hours and all night (the newspaper is published every Friday). Otherwise, your hotel reception should be able to supply a recommendation. Most pharmacies post a list in the window with the addresses of the closest pharmacies that are open after-hours. Newspaper kiosks often sell aspirin and condoms.

Health Canada—Phone: 613-957-2991. <http://www.travelhealth.gc.ca>.

U.S. CDC International Travel Information—Toll-free: 877-394-8747. <http://www.cdc.gov/travel>.

Etiquette

Although many laud Greece as the birthplace of democracy, the country's heritage as a place of trade and business is also rich. Visitors from North America will find many of the country's practices and customs to be familiar.

Personal Introductions—A handshake and a brief nod are the typical greeting. First meetings are formal, using the last name of the new acquaintance. Arrive with a two-sided business card, one side in Greek, the other in English.

Negotiating—There is an emphasis on the value of senior statesmen and advisers. Negotiating styles tend to be similar to those in other parts of Europe and North America, if a bit slower than in northern Europe. Personal feelings and subjective criteria can be as important as objective facts to a Greek businessperson.

Body Language—Avoid using head gestures or interpreting them. At one time, the Greek head gesture for "no" was an upward nod of the head and a raised eyebrow, which looks much like the gesture for "yes" in many other countries. The Greek gesture for yes was similarly confusing. These days, many in Greece tend to use more standard head gestures, but you can never be sure. Try to get a verbal answer to avoid confusion. Do not use the "OK" gesture with the thumb and index finger forming a circle, as this will be interpreted as an insult. The "thumbs-up" gesture may be used to signal "OK." Cheek kisses are a common greeting and goodbye among acquaintances.

Evil Eye—Country superstitions still linger in the capital. Don't coo over an infant or praise anything excessively, as this could draw evil spirits, according to local tradition. Greeks counteract the risk by spitting on the object or (more hygienically) just saying "ftou-ftou-ftou." Cobalt charms, usually a flat, staring eye, ward away the bad luck.

Gift Giving—Gifts are appreciated, but avoid gifts that are merely opportunities to expose your company's logo. Flowers are a good gift to take to a home, if invited. Be cautious about showing great admiration for a possession of your acquaintance: He or she may try to give it to you.

Conversation—Greeks are effusive and their conversation lively. In early encounters, avoid the topics of Turkey (Greece's primary rival) and especially the island of Cyprus (divided between Greece and Turkey). Also know that Greeks have always objected to the succession of occupiers that have at one time or another intruded in Greek affairs. Visitors may be startled by bold inquiries about their marital status, weight, ethnicity, salary and home value: This is typical talk in Athens, as are lengthy descriptions of physical ailments.

What to Wear

Dress for men and women is casual in summer, though never extremely so. To blend in with local

residents, women should wear skirts and slacks, and men should wear long pants. It's acceptable for women to wear shorts in the summer but not when visiting churches or monasteries. Women should wear conservative dresses or skirts (no slacks are permitted) and modest blouses (no cleavage, and backs should be covered up to the shoulder blades) when visiting a church.

Communication

Telephone

A new telephone numbering system has been introduced in Greece. All numbers throughout the country now have 10 digits, including the former city code. When dialing a phone number from outside Greece, dial your international access code, then Greece's country code (30), followed by the number listed. Toll-free numbers may have only three or four digits, though.

Most phone booths require a phone card, which costs 4 euros (100 units) and can be purchased at kiosks, certain hotels or any telephone office. The cards can be used for both local and long-distance calls. For long-distance calls, cards of 500 units (about 12 euros) are available.

North American tri-band cell phones work there. Purchase a "pay-as-you-go" Greek SIM card for around 15 euros. Germanos sells packages and top-up cards (from 9 euros) at 10 Stadiou St. Phone 210-3223-6000.

Internet Access

Internet cafes are sprouting up all over Athens, particularly around Syntagma Square and Omonia Square. Cost of access is usually about 4.50 euros per hour, though rates vary.

Public Transportation

Athens' public transportation system, run by the Athens Urban Transport Organization, was once one of the worst in Europe but has improved with the addition of two new subway lines. The bus network is still confusing for many visitors, but it reaches all areas of the city.

A 2.90-euro Daily Card (also known as an Airport Ticket) permits 24 hours of unlimited travel on all Athenian public transportation systems (metro, buses and trolleys).

Buses

For most of the day, buses are absolutely packed. Flag down the vehicle as you would a cab (full buses won't stop, however). Drivers rarely speak English. Purchase a ticket before the trip and validate it in the orange machine onboard. Tickets priced at 0.45 euros are available at special blue booths, near bus stops and at kiosks throughout the city. Comprehensive advice, routes and timetables are available at <http://www.oasa.gr>. Phone 185 or 210-883-6076.

Subways

The subway system now has three lines, and further expansions are planned. The red line (No. 2) connects the suburb of Agios Dimitrios in the southeast with Agios Antonios in the northwest. The blue line (No. 3) runs from Monastiraki, in the Plaka, to Ethniki Amyna, in the eastern part of the city with some, but not all, trains continuing all the way to the airport in Spata. The old green line (No. 1) still runs between northern Kifissia and the port of Piraeus. Maps are available at stations.

Trains run every three minutes during rush hour and every 10 minutes the rest of the day. Tickets must be purchased before entering the subway and punched in the orange machines before entering the train platform. Inspectors sometimes enter trains, and fines are issued for passengers riding without properly validated tickets. If you forget to stamp before boarding, write the time and date on your ticket—and hope for the best. The green line operates 5 am-12:30 am; the red and blue lines 5 am-midnight. Tickets cost about 0.70 euros (the 0.60-euro ticket allows limited travel on Line 1 only and is best avoided entirely). Children age 5 and under ride free. Phone 210-679-2399. <http://www.ametro.gr>.

Taxi

All Greek taxis are privately owned and cheap—compared with those in the rest of Europe. However, most drivers do not speak English and may not have a firm grasp of city geography, a map or even the wherewithal to read yours. There are three ways to catch a cab: Flag one down on the street (shouting out your destination helps), wait for one outside a major hotel or make a reservation. Ask at your hotel what the cost of a taxi ride to your destination should be—it's not unusual for visitors to be overcharged. Passengers can share a flagged cab, but unless they are picked up together and heading to the same destination, each will be charged the full fare. It's common for a driver to stop for another passenger while you are in the cab, although the fares will be calculated separately. Expect to pay a small luggage surcharge and a late-night surcharge if you are riding between midnight and 6 am. The minimum fee is 1.50 euros. Expect tiny additional tariffs to the airport, ports, bus and train stations.

Many drivers belong to a radio-controlled co-operative and will accept reservations for early-morning or late-night fares. A small fee is charged for this service. Nevertheless, if arriving on time is critical, paying the surcharge for a radio taxi is a good idea.

Address complaints to the tourist police (phone 171). Record the driver's license number. Disputes are frequent on the airport run: Don't hesitate to argue if you're overcharged, once you're at the terminal.

Wave the rate card (which legally must be displayed) and haggle until an agreement is reached.

Hellas

Radio-controlled co-operative. Phone 210-645-7000.

Parthenon

Radio-controlled co-operative. Phone 210-532-3300 or 210-532-1560.

Turkey, Asia

OVERVIEW

Introduction

Turkey has exoticism to spare, with its covered bazaars, whirling dervishes, sultans' treasures and Byzantine mosaics. And its natural beauty is abundant, with great stretches of sandy beaches and romantic rocky coves. Travelers will find Turks to be exceptionally gracious hosts, which makes sense given the country's place as a crossroads between Europe and Asia. Over the past two decades, the country has dramatically improved its tourist infrastructure, too.

This appealing mix does have a few drawbacks—increasing prices (though it's still an inexpensive place to travel); sprawling new development; and growing crowds—but they're hardly enough to spoil a visit. Our advice is to take your time in discovering the country. It's best experienced in leisurely excursions to places of remarkable history and beauty (such as Cappadocia and Ephesus) and in extended visits to fascinating and energetic cities (such as Istanbul).



Resort in Gamceua Kiris, Turkey

History

One look at the names of its ancient cities confirms Turkey's place in the history of human civilization:

Constantinople (Byzantium), Troy, Midas, Antioch, Philadelphia, Halicarnassus, Mount Ararat. The land has a rich and complicated history—and the people known as the Turks have only been there for about a thousand years.

The Asian side of Turkey, known as Anatolia or Asia Minor, was settled as early as 7000 BC, but historians don't really know much about the people who lived there until the Hittites arrived around 2000 BC. The Hittites managed to control a good portion of Anatolia, but their rule was interrupted and overthrown by a succession of smaller states, including the Phrygians, the Lydians and Lycians. Eventually, the great empires of Greece and Persia showed up, too, followed by the Romans.

Constantinople (formerly Byzantium and later Istanbul) was founded in the fourth century AD. It soon came to rival Rome as the seat of the Christian world, and the city flourished in this position for hundreds of years. Not until the formal split between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy (AD 1054) and the arrival of the Selcuks (Turks) in the late 11th century did the city begin to lose its luster.

Until this time, most of Turkey's rulers had come from the west, but that changed with the arrival of the Selcuks, who were descended from the Turkish people of East Asia. They had a different language and religion (Islam). Various groups of Turks had been making their way westward for centuries, but the Selcuks were the first to dominate central Anatolia. They were soon followed by the Mongols and then the Ottomans, who arrived in the region around AD 1300. The Ottomans ultimately created a new empire, taking Constantinople in 1453 and spreading their rule through much of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa.

The Ottoman Empire slowly crumbled over two centuries, finally expiring at the end of World War I. Into the void stepped Mustafa Kemal, later known as Ataturk. A hero at the battle of Gallipoli, Ataturk drove out the Greeks and other peoples who had been awarded parts of the old empire after World War I. In doing so, he established the country's modern borders and renamed it "Turkey." A secular, democratic government was established, with Ataturk as the first president. Ataturk moved the capital to Ankara.

Modern Turkey straddles east and west, which sometimes makes for an uncomfortable ride. During the 1990s, the country struggled with a series of weak coalition governments, two disastrous earthquakes in northeastern Anatolia that killed nearly 20,000 people in 1999, and a long-running struggle with the PKK, a militant Kurdish group that sought independence for southeastern Turkey by means of violence. The absolute low point came in 2001, when the Turkish lira collapsed in value, throwing thousands out of work and creating economic chaos. The result was an election in 2002 that swept out almost all of the old political parties in favor of a modern Islamic government. Under Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey is pursuing membership in the European Union, with the goal of becoming an EU member in 2008.

Geography

Turkey is one of the geographical links between Europe and Asia. The waterway that connects the Aegean and Black seas (by way of the Dardanelles, the Sea of Marmara and the Bosphorus) also divides Europe and Asia, and Turkey has territory on both sides. The country is bordered by Greece, Bulgaria, Georgia, Armenia, Iran, Iraq and Syria.

Turkey's landscape varies dramatically. It has more than 5,000 mi/8,000 km of coastline along the Aegean, Mediterranean and Black seas. Eastern Turkey is mountainous, with volcanic peaks capped by snow year-round. The lava layers from ancient volcanoes in central Anatolia created a landscape of gorges and "fairy chimneys" in Cappadocia. Moving west, the mountains give way to rolling steppe and fertile plains before reaching the coast. Although the steppe area can seem desolate, especially in high summer, parts of western Turkey are surprisingly green. The southern part of the country is much drier than the north.

Snapshot

Turkey offers beaches, historical sites, museums, shopping, palaces, mosques, architecture, good food, spas, beautiful and varied scenery, and watersports.

Turkey will appeal to adventurous, well-traveled people who enjoy the combination of exotic cities, beautiful beaches and historical attractions. Standards in accommodations have increased dramatically in the past few years, although travelers who seek every Western comfort and a high degree of predictability and organization may be more comfortable if they confine their trips to major cities and tourist resorts.

Potpourri

The people originally known as the Turks are thought to have migrated from an area in the eastern part of Siberia.

The origin of the word *meander* is from the Meander River, the ancient name of Turkey's Menderes River, which twists and turns its way to the Aegean Sea.

Agatha Christie wrote *Murder on the Orient Express* in Room 411 of the Pera Palas, Istanbul's landmark hotel. It is also where she experienced her mysterious "lost" days—11 days that neither she nor anyone else could account for.

Tulips are originally from Turkey. The blooms were exported to the Netherlands in the 17th century.

Florence Nightingale pioneered modern nursing in Istanbul during the Crimean War in 1854.

Legend holds that the founders of Istanbul (ancient Byzantium) had been told by a seer to settle across the water from the "city of the blind men." On one side of the Golden Horn, the adventurers found a perfect site for a city: It had a good water supply, an excellent harbor and cooling breezes, but no one lived there. However, just across the straits was a town built on marshy ground that had no natural advantages. Rightly deeming the others to be figuratively blind, the newcomers established Byzantium.

Van cats have pure white fur and one blue and one yellow eye. In theory they are able to swim, but in practice they are so valuable that their owners rarely let them out of their sight.

The Seven Churches of Asia Minor were in Ephesus, Laodicea, Pergamon (now Bergama), Philadelphia (Alasehir), Sardes, Smyrna (Izmir) and Thyatira.

Although the croissant is generally considered to be a product of French bakeries, its origin is Turkish (it's said to be the shape of the Islamic crescent). Another item Turkey introduced to the rest of Europe was coffee. Supposedly, Europeans first learned of coffee and croissants during the siege of Vienna in 1683. When the Ottoman army retreated, they left both behind.

To see camel wrestling matches (lots of snorting and head butting), travel to the provinces of Aydin, Denizli, Izmir or Mugla on a Sunday from December to February.

Destinations in Turkey

Izmir

Izmir (pop. 2,230,000) is the unofficial capital of the Turkish Aegean area. This busy port claims to be the birthplace of Homer, and it also has one of the Seven Churches of Asia Minor (this one was rebuilt after a 1922 fire). Visit the bazaar; the Kemeralti, Sadirvan and Hisar mosques; the 17th-century caravansary; the archaeological museum (ancient sculptures and other displays); the Agora (marketplace); and Kadifekale (the "Velvet Castle" atop Mount Pagus, with a spectacular view). Day trips from Izmir include historical sites at Didyma, Miletus and Priene. Izmir can also be used as a base for visiting the historic towns of Ephesus, Kusadasi, Sardes and Selcuk, although most people find Izmir too big and confusing to want to linger in the city itself. *210 mi/340 km southwest of Istanbul.*

Ephesus

Of all the ruins in Turkey, the grandest and best restored are at Ephesus. This prominent ancient capital was founded in the 10th century BC by the Ionian Greeks and flourished between 600 BC and AD 500 (it

once had a population of 300,000). Biblical scholars may know the town as the inspiration for St. Paul's *Epistle to the Ephesians*, and it was the site of one of the Seven Churches of Asia Minor. Archaeologists have reconstructed much of the ancient city, including the beautiful two-story Library of Celsus, the Temple of Hadrian and the 24,000-seat Great Amphitheater (which until recently was still used for open-air concerts). The downside? The crowds that mob Ephesus, especially on days when cruise ships dock at Kusadasi.

The charming town of **Selcuk** (about 5 mi/8 km northeast) is the best base for touring Ephesus. Selcuk also has a few sites of its own. On the way to Ephesus is a piece of the Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. At one time, the temple had 129 columns and was the size of a football field, but now a single column topped by a stork's nest is all that remains of the ancient wonder. Just outside of town is the brick house believed to be the home of the Virgin Mary, who lived there after the death of Jesus (the site was discovered by a German visionary in the 18th century who had never visited the region). Another New Testament notable believed to be buried in town is St. John the Evangelist, who did most of his writing while he lived there. His grave is in the ruined Basilica of St. John, which is in the town's acropolis. The town's archaeological museum is also worth a visit (be sure to see the two elaborate statues of Artemis). There's also a decent beach at nearby **Pamucak**. In the hills east of Selcuk is the pleasant formerly Greek village of **Sirince**, known for its lace-makers and good wine, which offers wonderful accommodations in old Greek houses. *Ephesus is 260 mi/420 km southwest of Istanbul.*

Istanbul

For the best part of two millennia, Istanbul has been one of the greatest cities in the world. Though no longer a world metropolis, it's still one of the most vibrant and magical places in Europe and the Middle East, as well as a bustling commercial capital. Istanbul's centuries of empire have left an extraordinary collection of palaces, churches, mosques and markets from every period of history. Its unique position as a city that straddles two continents, Europe and Asia, has given the city an unmistakably cosmopolitan atmosphere. Alongside all the life and color of the Middle East, it has a high standard of living with many of the accoutrements of a European capital, such as shopping malls and upscale international restaurants. But the place's charm is that despite its great history, it has not become a static museum-city like its historic rival, Venice. Istanbul is very much a living city, and although its traffic jams, air pollution and high-rise buildings lack the grace of its venerable landmarks, they're proof that Istanbul remains the hub of Turkey, a vital metropolis that's made up of more than ancient palaces and smoky bazaars.

Istanbul, Turkey, Asia

OVERVIEW

History

The city's roots can be traced to the mid-seventh century BC when, according to legend, a Greek explorer named Byzas was told by the Oracle at Delphi to sail up the Bosphorus and found a city. The city-state of Byzantium was the result, and over the next thousand years, it became an important center of trade and commerce. In the early fourth century AD, the emperor Constantine made it the new capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, renaming it Constantinople. Like Rome, the new capital was built on seven hills, but unlike Rome, Constantinople was protected by water on two sides, making it easier to defend.



Galata Tower Rising Above Buildings in Istanbul

As the Western Roman Empire fell to successive waves of barbarian invasions in the fifth and sixth centuries, the eastern half, known as the Byzantine Empire, remained to become Rome's successor. For the next 1,000 years, the empire's fortunes waxed and

waned. In 1453, the city finally fell to the Ottoman Turks, led by Mehmet II ("the Conqueror"), after a hard-fought siege. Mehmet renamed the city Istanbul and began at once to rebuild and repopulate it. Greeks, Armenians and Spanish Jews were encouraged to immigrate there. Successive sultans used wealth gained in further conquests to fund the construction of impressive palaces, mosques and bazaars.

As the Ottoman Empire grew to include all of the Middle East, North Africa and much of the Balkans, Istanbul became a melting pot of nationalities. Yet what was once among the most powerful and cosmopolitan cities on Earth began a slow decline. By the 1800s, Istanbul had lost most of its former glory. A nationalist movement began gaining steam in the early 20th century, culminating in the overthrow of the sultan in 1922 and the establishment of the Turkish Republic.

After the War of Independence, the nationalist leader Mustafa Kemal Ataturk created a new capital in Ankara, a small provincial town in central Anatolia. Istanbul remained the nation's cultural and commercial center, however. Ataturk's ambitious modernization plans began a large-scale transformation of Turkish life, and the city began its sometimes bumpy ride toward industrialization and secularization. In 1980, the Turkish government fell to a military coup, but power was ceded to an elected democracy a few years later. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, elected in 2003, has been the first leader in more than a decade to govern without coalition parties; he has moved quickly to promote Turkey's application to join the European Union. In October 2005, Turkey began formal accession negotiations with the EU, and is expected to join it within the next decade.

Geography

The Bosphorus Strait divides the city into two sections, one in Europe and one in Asia. The European side of Istanbul is divided again by the Golden Horn, a 4-mi/7-km inlet from the sea that is spanned by a pair of bridges.

On the southern side of the Golden Horn is the Old City, which in ancient times constituted the entirety of Byzantium. It is there that most of the Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman monuments are found. The Old City has several districts. Sultanahmet lies on the eastern edge, along the Bosphorus and the Sea of Marmora, and is the site of many of Istanbul's most famous sights. Beyazit is to the west (inland) from Sultanahmet, and Sirkeci is to the north, along the waters of the Golden Horn.

Just across the Golden Horn are Beyoglu and Galata, commercial districts that once were enclaves for foreigners. North of Beyoglu are Taksim, Harbiye and Tesvikiye, where many of Istanbul's largest hotels and convention centers are located. Also on the north side of the Bosphorus are Dolmabahce, Besiktas and Ortakoy.

The Asian side of the city is not as developed and has a more relaxed atmosphere. Kadikoy and Uskudar, the most touristed parts of Asian Istanbul, are architecturally more open and spacious than many areas of the European city but still maintain a noticeable buzz of activity.

Must See or Do

Sights—The ancient grandeur of Ayasofya (Hagia Sophia); the Ottoman architectural masterpiece Sultanahmet Camii (the Blue Mosque); the lavish home of the Sultans, Topkapi Palace; the newer but no less lavish Dolmabahce Palace; the color and bustle of Kapali Carsi (Grand Bazaar), the finest bazaar in the Middle East; the Byzantine mosaics of Kariye Camii (the Church of the Holy Savior in Chora).

Museums—The tiles and artifacts of the Arkeoloji Muzesi (the Archaeological Museum); carpets and ethnographical objects in the Turk ve Islam Eserleri Muzesi (Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum); the mosaics of the Buyuksaray Mosaik Muzesi (Great Palace Mosaic Museum); the sultan's sleek boats on display in the Deniz Musezi (Naval Museum).

Memorable Meals—Dinner with a view at Ulus 29; a seafood lunch at Pandeli's; stylish food and people at 360; dinner at a pavement *meyhane* restaurant on Nevzade Sokak.

Late Night—Cocktails in the bar of the Pera Palas Hotel; hobnobbing with the beautiful people by the waters of the Bosphorus at Laila.

Walks—A weekend stroll through Ortakoy's waterside cafes; a walk along Sahil Yolu (the street that runs along the Sea of Marmara near Sultanahmet); a turn along Divan Yolu, from the Grand Bazaar to Sultanahmet Square; an evening walk along jam-packed, stylish Istiklal Caddesi.

Especially For Kids—Bird's-eye views of the city's major monuments in miniature at Miniaturk; a cruise through the Bosphorus Strait.

Port Information

Location

Cruise ships dock close to the Galata Bridge, which marks the entry to the Golden Horn, in Karakoy. The passenger terminal there is badly in need of modernization and is short on amenities (even the tourist office is sleepy).

Potpourri

Istanbul's stray dogs are a distinctive breed—large, shaggy and yellow—and have been a fixture of the city since ancient times. The Byzantine author Procopius describes them in his scandal-mongering *Anecdota*, or *Secret History*, a scurrilous account of the reign of Emperor Justinian and his wife Theodora.

The Basilica cistern, just by Ayasofya, is just one of 17 major cisterns that dot the Old City. Istanbul's cisterns were once fed by a complex of aqueducts more than 37 mi/60 km long. The best-preserved ones stand on the edge of the Belgrade forest near the town of Kemer.

Although the Turks conquered the city in 1453, Istanbul remained a mostly Christian city until well in the 1920s, when many Armenians and Greeks were forced to leave.

Because of rural migration, the population of Istanbul has grown from 800,000 in the early 1950s to more than 12 million today.

SEE AND DO

Sightseeing

Exploring all of the city's vast offerings could take many days, if not weeks, so it's best to be selective. Fortunately, many of the city's best sights are grouped near one another. Begin in Sultanahmet, in the heart of the Old City. The four must-sees in this quarter are practically side by side: Ayasofya (or Hagia Sophia, the Church of Holy Wisdom), Sultanahmet Camii (the Blue Mosque), the Yerebatan Sarayi (Basilica Cistern) and Topkapi Palace. Plan on more than a single day for this quartet, however. You can easily spend an entire day in and around the Topkapi Palace alone, seeing, among other things, the Courtyard of the Black Eunuchs, the Harem Baths and the nearby Arkeoloji Muzesi (Archaeological Museum). The remains of the Roman Hippodrome are also found near Sultanahmet Square, next to Ayasofya and Sultanahmet Camii.

Another whole day could be spent exploring Kapali Carsi, the Grand Bazaar, which is in Beyazit next to one of the main buildings of Istanbul University. It's considered among the most extraordinary bazaar quarters of any city in the world. There you'll find exotic goods spilling out of crowded shops and merchants ready to haggle down to the last lira.

Take a little time to venture northwest of Sultanahmet to see Kariye Camii (Church of the Holy Savior in Chora) and its superb Byzantine mosaics. A bit farther afield, northeast of the Golden Horn in the Besiktas area, is Dolmabahce Sarayi. Although not as old as many of Istanbul's other landmarks, this opulent palace is a masterpiece of 19th-century kitsch.

When you need a break from walking, take a gentle boat ride down the Bosphorus, which shows you another side of Istanbul and its environs: waterside suburbs and grand residences with waterfront entrances.

Landmarks and Historic Sites

Ayasofya

Also known as Hagia Sophia, this structure is an immense, vaulted place of worship that was and remains one of the architectural marvels of its time. It was inaugurated as a church in AD 537 by the Byzantine emperor Justinian. Its dome was the largest unsupported stone dome in the world until the 16th century, when it was surpassed by St. Peter's in Rome. With the Ottoman conquest in 1453, however, the magnificent building was changed into a mosque. Today it is a museum containing wonderful Byzantine mosaics that were plastered over during the Ottoman period. Among the many wonderful things to admire are the early Byzantine frieze of sheep that dates back to a church that stood on the spot before Ayasofya was built over it; a mosaic of the Empress Zoe and the last of her three husbands in an upstairs gallery; and the adjacent baptistery that now serves as the tomb of two Ottoman sultans. (The church has withstood many earthquakes over the past 14 centuries. You'll see many earthquake meters that have been fitted into the walls at various points.) Behind Ayasofya stands the mausoleum of Selim II, which was completed in 1577. It is beautifully decorated with Iznik tiles. Tuesday-Sunday 9:30 am-5 pm. 15 TL. Ayasofya Meydani, Sultanahmet, Istanbul. Phone 0212-522-0989.

Beylerbey Sarayi

On the Asian shore of the Bosphorus stands what was once a building of the Dolmabahce Palace, where important guests of the Ottoman sultan would stay. The palace and its decor, which date from the mid-19th century, may seem overblown, but its waterside quay and tea garden are very inviting on a hot day. Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday-Sunday 9:30 am-4:30 pm. 5 TL. Abdullah Aga Caddesi, Uskudar, Istanbul. Phone 0216-321-9320.

Bulgar Kilisesi

Located in a small, attractive park along the west bank of the Golden Horn, the Church of St. Stephen of the Bulgars is a spiky Victorian Gothic church that would not look out of place in a New England university town. The city's Bulgarian community, which had broken away from the Greek Orthodox church in 1871, ordered the church to be constructed in Vienna entirely of cast iron. It was then disassembled and shipped on barges down the Danube to its new site on the Golden Horn, where it was bolted together. The church is still used by the Bulgarian community for religious services, and several of the fathers of the local Bulgarian Orthodox Church are buried there. To take a peek inside, you may have to tip the caretaker. Daily 9 am-4 pm. Free. Mursel Pasa Caddesi 85, Balat, Istanbul. Phone 0212-521-1121.

Dolmabahce Sarayi

Designed for Sultan Abdul Mecit in 1856, Dolmabahce Palace is among the most extraordinary residences of Europe. Although the Ottoman Empire was already in decline at the time of its construction, no expense was spared, thanks in part to loans from Continental bankers that ultimately bankrupted the Ottoman treasury. The architect for the palace had cut his teeth designing sets for operettas in Paris: The result is a camp pastiche of a European palace. You can visit the palace only by taking one of two guided tours. One covers the men's section, staterooms and the vast ceremonial hall, and the other visits the harem section, including the living quarters of the Sultan. If you can take only one tour, visit the fabulous ceremonial hall—designed to hold 2,500 people—and note the superb decoration of the dome and the English chandelier. Also check out the main bathroom, or *hamam*, the walls of which are fitted with splendid Egyptian alabaster and solid silver taps. Attentive visitors will notice that all the clocks in the palace read 9:05 am at all times. This is because Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey, died in his bedroom in the palace at 9:05 am on 10 November 1938. On Tuesdays during the summer, the Turkish army band, dressed in the costumes of the famous Janissaries, performs traditional music outside the Imperial Gate. Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday-Sunday 9 am-4 pm. Admission 15 TL. Dolmabahce Caddesi (along the Bosphorus), Besiktas, Istanbul. Phone 0212-236-9000.

Galata Kulesi

Built in 1348 by the Genoese to protect their ethnic enclave, the Galata Tower stands 205 ft/62 m high, crowned and fortified by a conical "witch's hat" roof. It's one of the most distinctive sights of Istanbul's skyline and offers one of the best views of the city, with a panorama stretching across to the Princes' Islands. During the Ottoman Empire, this structure was used as a watchtower, but today it is a tourist

attraction with a restaurant and nightclub on the eighth and ninth floors (though we don't recommend you eat there). For those who don't want to climb the narrow spiral staircase, an elevator is available. Daily 9 am-8 pm (restaurant and nightclub till midnight). Admission 6 TL. Galata Meydani, Beyoglu, Istanbul. Phone 0212-245-1160. <http://www.galatatower.net>.

Hidiv Kasri

High above the Bosphorus at Kanlica, the Hidiv Kasri (the khedive's villa) was built as a summer home for the Egyptian khedive in the 19th century. It has some beautiful art-nouveau details, and the grounds are a wonderful place to drink tea on hot days. Daily 9 am-9 pm. Free. Kafadar Sokak, Cubuklu (Kanlica), Istanbul. Phone 0216-413-9644.

Kariye Camii

Better known as the Church of the Holy Savior in Chora, this unassuming late Byzantine church is famous for its mosaics, which are among the finest surviving works of Byzantine art in the world. Originally constructed in the fourth century AD, it was rebuilt by Theodore Melitoches, the Byzantine Grand Logothete, or Imperial Chancellor, at the beginning of the 14th century. It's now a museum well worth a visit, especially for its wonderfully preserved mosaic and fresco cycles depicting the life of the Virgin Mary, the Passion and the Last Judgment. Above the doorway is a portrait of Melitoches himself, presenting the church to the Virgin enthroned. The church represents the final flowering of Byzantine art before the empire entered its death throes, and the mosaic figures also show the influence of early Renaissance art. Thursday-Tuesday 9 am-4:30 pm. Admission 10 TL. Kariye Camii Sokak, Edirnekapi, Istanbul. Phone 0212-631-9241.

Roman Hippodrome

Though now a crumbled relic of its former glory, the Hippodrome was once the hub of Byzantine cultural life. In addition to a modest section of the original wall, the only remaining parts of this ancient arena are a fine pair of granite obelisks brought from Egypt and a column depicting entwined snakes that was brought from Greece and dates from the fifth century BC. The Hippodrome was the site of horse and chariot races from Byzantine times up to the early Ottoman period. It was later used for annual processions of the city's guilds. Free. Atmeydani Square, Sultanahmet (in front of the Sultanahmet Camii), Istanbul.

Rumeli Hisari

A spectacular hillside castle built by Mehmet the Conqueror in 1453 as he prepared to seize Constantinople from the Byzantines. The castle's gardens are well worth exploring, and in summer, big-name Turkish performers present excellent open-air concerts on the grounds. Thursday-Tuesday 8:30 am-5 pm. Admission 4 TL. Yahya Kemal Caddesi 42, Istanbul. Phone 0212-263-5305.

Rustem Pasa Camii

Tucked away in the maze of streets near the Spice Bazaar is this wonderful mosque built by the great Ottoman architect Sinan in 1560. The walls, both inside and out, are encased in glorious Iznik tiles, many painted in a striking tomato-red hue. It is open to visitors outside of prayer times. Hasircilar Caddesi, Tahtakale, Istanbul. Phone 0212-526-7310.

Suleymaniye Camii

This hilltop mosque is one of the masterpieces of Sinan, the Ottoman Empire's greatest architect. It was constructed in the 1500s on the orders of Suleyman the Magnificent, the empire's greatest sultan. The result was, as would be expected, magnificent. In addition to the mosque, the Suleymaniye complex includes a library, hospital and soup kitchens that fed thousands of the city's poor, regardless of their religion. (Ironically, the street between the mosque and the charitable buildings once held cafes that sold both opium and hashish, earning it the moniker "Addict's Alley.") The tombs of Suleyman, his wife Roxelana, his daughter Mihrimah and his two successors, Suleyman II and Ahmet II, are in the main mosque, but the tomb of Sinan himself is just outside the building's walls. The mosque's central prayer hall, a huge, domed rectangle, is truly awe-inspiring. Daily 9 am-5 pm. Free. Prof. Siddik Sami Onar Caddesi (just north of Istanbul University), Beyazit, Istanbul. Phone 0212-514-0139.

Sultanahmet Camii

Familiarly known as the Blue Mosque, this famous mosque is one of the world's most beautiful. Built on the orders of Sultan Ahmet I (1603-17) and designed by imperial architect Mehmet Aga, it gets its name from the blue Iznik tiles that cover its walls. From the time it was built, the mosque was at the center of controversy because it had six towering minarets—most mosques have two or four—and was therefore

considered sacrilegious by some who saw it as rivaling Mecca. It is still used for religious worship at prayer times, but visitors can enter when services are not being held. More than 250 windows let subdued light into the mosque, though most of the original 17th-century stained glass is no longer in place. After you visit, you may wish to see the small Vakıflar Carpet Museum that is housed in the Imperial Pavilion on one side of the mosque. There is also a sound-and-light show daily after dusk May-September. Daily 9 am-5 pm. Free. Sultanahmet Medani (Sultanahmet), Istanbul. Phone 0212-518-1319.

Topkapi Palace

A little more than a decade after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, Mehmet II ordered the construction of the immense and fittingly regal Topkapi Palace in an area between Ayasofya and a point facing the Bosphorus, on the site of the old Byzantine Imperial Palace. Completed in 1478, the palace is a sprawling series of pavilions within four courtyards. Topkapi was opened to the public as a museum in 1924, giving the world insight into the opulence and lifestyle of the Ottomans. Each section of the museum is a separate delight. You will see kitchens that catered to thousands, as well as a particularly fine collection of Chinese porcelain that the sultan took great delight in collecting. Other sections feature costumes, arms, armor and exquisitely wrought miniatures—both Persian and Turkish. (The royal collection contains 13,000 works, only a tiny fraction of which is on display.) The interior array of throne rooms, dining halls, bedrooms, mosques, dormitories, libraries and stables appear strangely haphazard to a Western visitor, but the palace's lack of monumentalism and the casual arrangement of rooms give it a unique charm. The most interesting part of the palace, only viewed by guided tour, is the harem, a maze of enchanting rooms where the sultan's 400 wives and concubines used to live. In the Fourth Court, don't miss the tulip garden, marble pool and circumcision room. The recently restored Imperial Treasury contains some of the most opulent specimens from the Ottoman jewel collection. The restaurant is always crowded but offers splendid views. We recommend a minimum of three hours to visit (and you can easily spend much longer than that). Wednesday-Monday 9 am-5 pm. Admission 32 TL (includes the Harem and the Treasury). Sogukcesme Sokak (Sultanahmet), Istanbul. Phone 0212-512-0480.

Yerebatan Sarayı

Also known as the Basilica Cistern or the Underground Palace, this is an immense subterranean reservoir that long ago provided water to the Grand Palace of the Byzantines and, later, the Ottomans' Topkapi Palace. The Ottomans, in fact, didn't discover the cistern until a century after the conquest of Constantinople, when it was revealed that people could collect water by lowering buckets through holes in their basements. In 1987, after years of restoration, Yerebatan Sarayı was reopened to the public. It is a breathtaking example of Byzantine design, with some 300 columns more than 25 ft/8 m high supporting the cistern's roof. Two columns in one corner rest on bases shaped like Medusa heads, which were, like all the cistern's mismatched columns, taken from other structures. Daily 9:30 am-5:30 pm. Admission 12 TL. 13 Yerebatan Caddesi (Sultanahmet), Istanbul. Phone 0212-522-1259.

Yıldız Parkı

Yıldız Park, Yıldız Palace and the Sale Pavilion are a set of royal enclaves from the Ottoman era. This palace is really a group of pavilions and villas built by the Sultan Abdul Hamit II, who was paranoid about a sea-based attack on the Dolmabahçe Palace. The buildings include the Yıldız Palace museum, housed in the former palace carpentry workshop; the city museum, located across from the former armory; and the Yıldız Palace Theater, built in Western style in 1889 by Abdul Hamit. Today, the theater is a museum of playbills, costumes and stage sets. Sale Pavilion, the jewel of the park, was designed in three stages and styles. It has served as guest quarters for such visiting dignitaries as Kaiser Wilhelm II, Winston Churchill, Charles de Gaulle and the Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu. Slightly less impressive are the elegant Malta and Cadir pavilions, which were built during the reign of Abdul Aziz (1861-76). Both served as prisons at one point; it seems far more appropriate that the Malta Pavilion now houses a restaurant. The circular lake on the palace grounds has an island that, in Ottoman days, housed tigers, lions, giraffes and zebras. Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday-Sunday 9 am-5 pm. Admission 2 TL. Ciragan Caddesi, Besiktas, Istanbul. Phone 0212-261-8460.

Museums

Arkeoloji Müzesi

Situated in the First Court of Topkapi Palace, the Archaeological Museum has one of the world's richest collections of classical artifacts—the Sumerian, Assyrian and Hittite exhibits are rare and impressive. Dozens of galleries also hold Greek, Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman tiles, ceramics, mosaics and other treasures (some objects aren't very well displayed, and the galleries are not always open). Among the

highlights are the Treaty of Kadesh, said to be the world's earliest surviving peace treaty, and a carved sarcophagus from Sidon, Lebanon, that, according to legend, held the remains of Alexander the Great. There's also an educational section especially for children. Tuesday-Sunday 9:30 am-5 pm. Admission 5 TL. Osman Hamdi Bey Yokusu, Sultanahmet, Istanbul. Phone 0212-520-7740.

Askeri Musezi

Even if you aren't interested in military things, the Military Museum is still interesting for its fantastic collection of embroidered tents used by the Ottoman army when it was on the move. What's more, if you visit around 3 pm, you will be able to watch the Ottoman Mehter Band going through its paces—a colorful and rousing spectacle. Wednesday-Sunday 9 am-5 pm. Admission 2 TL. Vali Konagi Caddesi, Harbiye, Istanbul. Phone 0212-233-2720.

Buyuksarai Mosaik Musezi

Every so often, odd traces of the Byzantine emperors' palaces come to light when building work is going on in Sultanahmet. Perhaps the finest surviving clue is the spectacular mosaic of hunting scenes in the Great Palace Mosaic Museum, near the Arasta Bazaar (below the Blue Mosque). The mosaic dates to around AD 500. Tuesday-Sunday 9 am-4:30 pm. Admission 4 TL. Torun Sokak, Sultanahmet, Istanbul. Phone 0212-518-1205.

Deniz Musezi

The Naval Museum on the shores of the Bosphorus at Besiktas contains a fairly predictable collection of maritime artifacts—but it is well worth a visit to see the sleek boats that once ferried the sultans and other notables along the waters. The museum also contains a piece of the chain the Byzantines placed across the Bosphorus in their efforts to thwart Ottoman ships from attacking the capital. Friday-Tuesday 9 am-12:30 pm, 1:30-5:30 pm. Admission 2 TL. Cezayir and Besiktas Caddesi, Besiktas, Istanbul. Phone 0212-261-0040.

Istanbul Modern

An exciting new museum dedicated to contemporary Turkish art in a converted warehouse on the Bosphorus. It's worth seeing for the location alone, though it has excellent rotating exhibitions and a very good cafe. Tuesday-Sunday 9:30 am-5:30 pm. Admission 4 TL. Meclis-i Mebusan Caddesi, Liman Sahasy Antrepo 4, Karakoy, Istanbul. Phone 0212-334-7300. <http://www.istanbulmodern.org>.

Pera Museum

An eccentric private collection of Turkish art, including a fascinating exhibit of weights and measures from Anatolia (more interesting than it sounds) and the recently purchased *Tortoise Trainer* by Ottoman painter Osman Hamdi Bey. Upstairs is some good contemporary Turkish art. Tuesday-Sunday 9:30 am-5:30 pm. Admission 5 TL. Mesrutiyet Caddesi 141, Beyoglu, Istanbul. Phone 0212-334-9900.

Rahmi M. Koc Muzesi

The wealthy industrialist Rahmi Koc has given his name to Turkey's first industrial museum, housed in what was once a shipyard on the northern shore of the Golden Horn. Among other things, you can see some old Ottoman caiques, Sultan Abdul Aziz's glorious coach, several reconstructed shops and a large collection of vintage cars. Tuesday-Friday 10 am-5 pm, Saturday and Sunday 10 am-7 pm. Admission 5 TL. Haskoy Caddesi 27, Haskoy, Istanbul. Phone 0212-256-7153.

Sakip Sabanci Muzesi

One of Istanbul's newest and most interesting private museums, the Sabanci boasts a definitive collection of Turkish early-modern art as well as five-centuries worth of calligraphy. The collection is housed in an old Ottoman mansion and an avant-garde new wing. Curator Nazan Olcer has also created groundbreaking exhibits that explore the identity of Turks and how they've been seen through European eyes. Tuesday-Friday 10 am-5 pm. Admission 8 TL. Istinye Caddesi 22, Emirgan, Istanbul. Phone 0212-277-2200. <http://www.muze.sabanciuniv.edu>.

Turk ve Islam Eserleri Muzesi

The name translates as the Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum. Located in the Ibrahim Pasa Palace, former home of one of Suleyman the Magnificent's grand viziers, it contains artifacts ranging from the earliest period of Islam through modern times. Begun in the 19th century, the collection now has more than 40,000 items, including beautifully displayed Islamic sculptures, works of art, silks and carpets. Strolling among the rooms of the museum, you'll pass through different eras of historical and geographical significance in the Islamic world. Tuesday-Sunday 9 am-4:30 pm. Admission 4 TL. Atmeydani Sokagi, Sultanahmet, Istanbul. Phone 0212-518-1805.

Vakiflar Hali Muzesi

Situated next to Sultanahmet Camii (the Blue Mosque) along what was once the Imperial Pavilion, the Vakiflar Carpet and Kilim Museum is a testament to Turkey's history of producing world-class carpets that are truly works of art. Most of the specimens displayed there date from the 1500s to the 1800s, many from the royal collection. Monday-Friday 9 am-noon and 1-4 pm. Admission 3.5 TL. Next to Sultanahmet Camii, Sultanahmet, Istanbul. Phone 0212-518-1330.

Neighborhoods and Districts

Beyoglu

Located on the other side of the Golden Horn from Eminonu and the Old City, now-fashionable Beyoglu has seen its fortunes rise, fall and rise again over the centuries. For much of its history, this area was the European quarter of Istanbul; in the 1800s, it became home to grand foreign embassies, ornate luxury hotels and fancy boulevards. When Ataturk moved the Turkish capital to Ankara in the 1920s, the embassies moved, too, and the neighborhood slowly fell into disrepair and seediness. However, in 1990 the government began a renovation and clean-up project. Many of the grand buildings have been restored. The main artery is Istiklal Caddesi, a wide pedestrian boulevard running from just north of Galata Tower to Taksim Square, which is the place for young people to congregate in the evening. The street contains all kinds of clothing stores, good restaurants in all price brackets, sidewalk cafes and movie theaters. The various side streets are worth checking out, too. One particularly famed street is Cicek Pasaj, a glass-ceilinged alley of restaurants and cafes modeled after a Parisian arcade. Behind it is the Nevizade Sokak, a street full of small restaurants whose tables spill onto the pavement, which is a great place for a night out. Just down the hill from Istiklal is the famous Pera Palas Hotel, where Agatha Christie penned *Murder on the Orient Express* and whose bar is the epitome of old-world elegance, and the tony Lokanta/NoPera restaurant and nightclub. East of Istiklal Caddesi is "French Street" (Cezayir/Algeria Street), a recent attempt to re-create a slice of Paris in Istanbul. It's not particularly authentic, but it's a happening place to visit.

Ortakoy

A popular area along the Bosphorus, north of central Istanbul. Located at the foot of the Bosphorus Bridge, Ortakoy has upscale modern apartments interspersed with very small old houses. The narrow streets are home to churches, synagogues and mosques, along with art galleries, boutiques and stylish cafes and bars where the young and trendy meet. Ortakoy Square, the heart of the district, is where you will find the greatest concentration of nightspots and traditional Turkish cafes. On weekends, the square is home to a charming flea market. Many fine hotels and some of the city's best seafood restaurants are there, too. At the Ortakoy waterfront, you can hire small boats to take you for a short Bosphorus trip. Ortakoy is generally a 10-minute cab ride from Taksim, although on weekends this popular district can get jammed with traffic. Another option is to take the 20-minute ferry ride from the Eminonu Terminal, though this service only operates during work hours.

Uskudar and Kadikoy

The Asian side of Istanbul was home to the city's first settlers (in the eighth century BC) and formed the starting point for the trade routes to Asia. It has a more relaxed pace and a more down-home feel than its European counterpart. Uskudar, to the north, has several impressive mosques (including the Atik Valide Mosque, one of the most extensive religious complexes in all of Istanbul) and the Selimiye Barracks, where Florence Nightingale set up her first hospital during the Crimean War. Farther south along the coast is Kadikoy. One of the main drags there is Soguk Cesme Caddesi, which has a number of shops and a few malls. The narrow side streets contain bookshops, markets and some old Greek and Armenian churches. Kadikoy is also where you'll find Bagdat Caddesi, one of Istanbul's best-known shopping boulevards. Most of the world's top clothing brands are sold along that street, as well as the finest in furniture, decorative art, paintings and antiques. For those famished by bargain hunting, there are a number of very nice cafes and restaurants. Also in Kadikoy is the stately Haydarpasa railway station, built by German engineers in the 1800s at the behest of Kaiser Wilhelm. Both Uskudar and Kadikoy are accessible by the ferries that leave from Eminonu (also known as Sirkeci), on the European side.

Parks and Gardens

Gulhane Park

For a break from the hustle and bustle of the bazaar quarter, escape into Gulhane Park, at the foot of the Topkapi Palace hill, where there were once the gardens of the Byzantine and Ottoman emperors.

Enclosed by Byzantine palace walls, the park is a tranquil refuge of giant plane trees and quiet, dusty paths.

Recreation

On the Asian side of the Bosphorus, you can rent rowboats at Fenerbahce, next to the yacht club, and row around the little bay, which empties into the Sea of Marmara, as you watch the larger craft sail by. Hours are irregular, but boats are usually available all summer.

Our favorite form of recreation (if we can call it that) is a traditional Turkish bath (hammam). Many visitors find their first bath a bit unsettling, but we highly recommend the experience. (Traditionally, women and men bathe in separate chambers, which are staffed by same-sex body scrubbers and masseurs, but in tourist areas, mixed bathing with male masseurs is becoming more common.) Typically, you begin by stripping naked and donning a towel. Thus clad, you head off to a steam room, from which you will emerge feeling, well, steamed. You then proceed into another room where you lie on a marble slab and are soaked, soaped and massaged by an attendant who usually has the physique of a professional weight lifter. Next comes a session with a loofah, which is rubbed on your body to remove all dead skin. It is not an experience for the timid and often leaves you feeling as though you've gone six rounds with a prizefighter.

After the massage, you will be soaped and rinsed, after which you can rest or stagger out and get dressed. The usual bath session lasts about 90 minutes. Because this is a long time to be exposed to such hot temperatures, we recommend periodically splashing on some cold water. As you leave, be sure to tip the staff near the exit. A common tip is about 10% of the cost of the bath. Historic baths such as Cagaloglu Hamam or Cemberlitas Hamam are beautiful, but they are also the most frequented by tourists, which means they can be expensive and the massage can be mediocre. For a more authentic experience, you will have to brave a smaller local hammam.

DINING

Befitting a city astride two continents, Istanbul has restaurants serving the best in international—not to mention Turkish—cuisine. All around Istanbul are kebab houses and informal *lokantas* that serve popular local dishes such as *kofte* (grilled lamb meatballs) and *pide* (a slab of thin dough covered with various ingredients that was the original inspiration for Italian pizza). A traditional favorite is *lahmacun*—minced meat, onions and tomato sauce on paper-thin bread.

Visitors should also be sure to try one or more of Istanbul's fine seafood restaurants, the best of which tend to be found—appropriately—along the Bosphorus, generally in outlying areas such as Kurucemesi, past the first Bosphorus Bridge. (It pays to be a bit careful with your bill at these restaurants, because they are not regulated by the local authority—inflated prices and billing errors are not unknown.) Less pricey, though also good, are restaurants in the Kumkapi district of the Old City, which are very popular for outdoor dining. A number of these restaurants enliven the atmosphere with Turkish music and/or belly dancers. In summer, they do a brisk business, so reservations are rarely taken.

Whatever you're having, most Turkish meals begin with a selection of mezes (appetizers), which come in dozens of varieties with new ones being concocted all the time. The most well-known are dolmas (stuffed grape leaves), but also popular are mussels, stuffed vegetables (often eggplant) and *borek*, flaky pastries filled with cheese. A common accompaniment to any meal is raki, a potent clear liqueur that's flavored with aniseed (dilute it with some water, which will turn it a milky color). Traditional desserts include fresh fruit, syrup-soaked pastries and milk puddings. Halvah (flaked sesame seeds in honey) is also an authentic Turkish delight.

Breakfast is typically served 7-10 am, lunch noon-2 pm. Dinner usually takes place well into the evening, especially in summer. Don't plan on eating before 8 pm—most restaurants don't get busy until 9 pm or

later. (The late hours are well-matched to the Turkish custom of making dinner an extended form of entertainment, fueled by musicians, many plates of mezes and lots of wine and raki.)

ENTERTAINMENT

Nightlife

When it comes to nightlife, things tend to get going fairly late in Istanbul. Many bars don't fill up until midnight, and a lot of patrons stay well past 3 am. Beyoglu is the liveliest district in town, with a wide range of bars, dance clubs and other hangouts. Unaccompanied men will find that some bars have security at the door who will not let them in. Unaccompanied women, however, have carte blanche everywhere. There is an excellent selection of live music in Istanbul, as well as plenty of disco and techno clubs. In addition, many restaurants and cafes have music, which they crank up after midnight. Such places allow you to combine dinner with dancing without changing location.

For a more sedate experience, the bars at upscale hotels in Istanbul are generally comfortable, and many are popular with both Turks and foreign visitors. They can give you the chance to meet Istanbul natives while enjoying the ease of ordering from an English-speaking staff.

SHOPPING

Do not for any reason miss the fabled bazaars of Istanbul, especially the immense Kapali Carsi, or Grand Bazaar (also called the Covered Bazaar). Contained within a labyrinth of roofed-over passages, this market hosts literally thousands of shops selling practically everything that Turkey produces.

Unfortunately, a trip down the aisles of shopkeepers may feel like you're running the gauntlet—Turkish shopkeepers can be extremely persistent salespeople who will always come up with a reason for you to look at and buy their goods.

Next to the Grand Bazaar is the impressive Book Bazaar, where you'll find ancient tomes, modern magazines and everything in between. Misir Carsisi, also known as the "Spice" or "Egyptian" Bazaar, in Sirkeci, dates back to the 1600s.

Istanbul also has a number of outdoor swap meets and street markets, such as the Wednesday Market (next to the Fatih Mosque), a neighborhood gathering with lots of fresh produce, household goods and flowers, and the Ortakoy Handicrafts Market, which takes place on weekends. On the Asian side is the frantically busy Kadikoy Street Market, held on Tuesday.

Antiques and carpet sellers are also legendary—and numerous. They will offer you a chance to refine your bargaining skills—or at least enjoy the obligatory free cup of tea. Jewelry, handicrafts, pottery, metal, glassware and leather goods are also abundant, so always be sure to check the competition's prices: A free cup of tea rarely serves as a remedy for buyer's remorse.

When bargaining to buy merchandise, begin by offering around 50%-60% of the asking price. Once you've haggled for an item, it is considered extremely rude if you don't buy it, assuming your price has been met. However, don't be surprised to find an increasing number of shops offering goods at fixed prices.

Shopping Hours: Shopping malls and department stores are usually open daily 10 am-10 pm. The Grand Bazaar and the Spice Bazaar are open Monday-Saturday 9 am-7 pm. Other shops that cater to tourists often stay open until the last potential customer has disappeared.

SECURITY

Personal Safety

In general, Istanbul is relatively safe for visitors, and there's a heavy police presence in the city. In the wake of bombings in 2003 and 2004, however, be careful around buildings that represent Western interests, such as banks or embassies.

Pickpockets and bag snatchers can be active, especially around tourist areas and the Tunel and Galata areas of Beyoglu: Carry your possessions in such a way as to minimize temptation. Avoid parks and deserted streets at night. Be cautious of strangers who attempt to befriend you and invite you to have a drink or a meal—travelers have reported being drugged and then robbed. Unaccompanied women may receive unwanted attention from men: The best response is no response at all.

For more information, contact your country's travel-advisory agency.

Health

Don't drink the tap water. Stick with bottled water, which is widely available. Larger restaurants almost always use bottled water; you might want to ask specifically for it in smaller eateries. Food is generally very safe to eat because most restaurants have their own strict sanitation rules. In general, sanitation in Istanbul is higher than in many Mediterranean cities such as Rome, Nice or Tel Aviv. No vaccinations are required to enter Turkey, although you might consider getting a hepatitis A vaccine.

Be advised that many doctors in Turkey cannot speak English, even in large state hospitals. Medical problems should therefore be addressed to either the American Hospital, the German Hospital or the International Hospital, all of which have English-speaking staff. Many upscale hotels have an English-speaking doctor on call 24 hours a day.

In addition to filling prescriptions, Turkish pharmacies (*eczane*) are qualified to provide certain medical services such as taking blood pressure, giving injections, bandaging minor injuries and suggesting medicine for common ailments. If you need to visit a pharmacy after normal business hours, there is usually one open in each district. The names and addresses of the 24-hour pharmacies will be listed on a sign in the window of other pharmacies.

Etiquette

Turkey's culture matches its geography—in between the traditions of the Middle East and the practices of Western Europe and North America. As such, it's perhaps the most accommodating Islamic country for visitors from the West, though the country's customs and religion will require you to take care in the way you present yourself, especially in a business context.

Personal Introductions—A handshake is the normal form of greeting. Maintain eye contact but not too intensely. It is customary to address the eldest person first. As part of the many changes that swept the country in the 20th century, many Turks adopted Western-style surnames. Nevertheless, you'll usually hear Turks addressing each other by their first name followed by the honorific *bey* (for example, a man named Mustafa Koruturk will be addressed as "Mustafa Bey"). For foreigners, your second name (the surname) will be preceded by the title *Bay* for a man or *Bayan* for woman. Note that the word *effendi*, literally meaning "lord," is actually used with a person's first name as a way of showing respect to a person of lowly status. Don't confuse it with *Beyeffendi*, which means "sir." If the person has a professional title, such as "Professor," use that alone, without a surname. Military officers are customarily addressed by their first name followed by the honorific *Pasha* (as in "Cevik Pasha").

Body Language—Turkey is an Islamic country, though it is less rigid than many others in following traditional Islamic customs. Use only your right hand when greeting someone, when accepting and offering items and when eating. Avoid sitting in any manner that would permit the sole of your shoe or foot to be seen, which would be taken as an insult. It is considered rude to point, especially with your foot. Even though a nod means *yes*, Turks indicate *no* by raising and tilting their heads backward slightly and

closing their eyes. Do not cross your arms when in conversation with another, nor should you keep your hands in your pockets. Public displays of affection between the sexes are frowned upon.

Gift Giving—Gifts are not always given, but they are appreciated. You should give gifts of alcohol only if you know that your acquaintance drinks (the traditional Muslim prohibition against alcohol is not enforced or observed as strictly in Turkey as it is elsewhere in the Islamic world).

Conversation—The Turkish people are fine conversationalists and will display an interest in you as an individual. Sports, travel, and Turkish culture and history will be welcome topics. Politics, particularly in relation to Cyprus, Greece, the Kurds and Iraq, can be troublesome. Be careful not to say anything that is dismissive or critical of Islam.

Other Information—Women should dress modestly, avoiding low-cut tops or short skirts. It is not necessary to cover your head, arms and shoulders unless you are visiting a mosque or other holy site. Generally, the more modestly you dress, the less unwanted attention you will attract. Be aware that when entering someone's home you are generally expected to remove your shoes and, in some cases, wear slippers reserved for guests. Smoking is a national pastime, but it is still polite to ask for permission before smoking. You should also ask permission before taking photographs of people or of mosques.

Dos and Don'ts

Do praise Turkey at every possible instance. Turks are very proud of their country and will often ask you if you like it there. Express enthusiasm, and don't join in if they express criticism of the country—they'll be offended if you agree.

Don't be afraid to brush off aggressive vendors or people who pester you on the street. A good firm but polite phrase is "*Yeter! Luften!*" ("that's enough, please!").

Do contact an English-speaking person if you have to report a crime at the police station. Almost all Turkish police don't speak English and are rather inefficient. Call your hotel—they'll usually send someone to help you out (don't forget to tip this person).

Do try grilled street food, especially *kokorec*, which is grilled sheep intestines. It's better than it sounds, and hygiene standards are actually quite high.

Do remember to look where you're going. Istanbul sidewalks are notorious for manholes and especially dangerous entrances to cellar-level workshops. The architecture above may be magnificent, but stop walking to look at it or you may fall into a hole.

PRACTICALITIES

Geostats

Passport/Visa Requirements: Citizens of Canada and the U.S. need a passport and a visa. The visa is available on arrival (at Ataturk airport, a special booth for visas can be found just to the left of passport control). Reconfirm travel document requirements with your carrier before departure.

Metropolitan Population: 9,760,000.

Languages: Turkish.

Predominant Religions: Islamic.

Time Zone: 2 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (+2 GMT). Daylight Saving Time is observed from the last Sunday in March to the last Sunday in October.

Voltage Requirements: 220 volts.

Telephone Codes: 9, country code; 0216, city code for Istanbul Asya (Asian side); 0212, city code for Istanbul Avrupa (European side).

Money

Currency Exchange

Until the past few years, the Turkish lira has had a bumpy ride: It experienced years of horrific inflation, as well as one of the lowest currency values in the world. Millions of lire were considered small change, to the consternation of locals and tourists alike. The inflation has subsided, and in January 2005, the government dropped six zeros from the lira and reintroduced the former *kurus* (one-hundredth of a lira) coins. A million old Turkish lire will equal 1 new lira, and the lira is made up of 100 *kurus*. Beware that the old currency is no longer accepted except at state banks.

ATMs are the best way to obtain Turkish currency, and they're now found all over the city—there are more than 90 on Istiklal Caddesi alone. (Be careful of using an ATM in an isolated area, because they have been the focus of attacks.) If you can't access an ATM, use one of the exchange bureaus, which often give better rates than the banks. To compare bank and exchange-bureau rates, consider both commission and rate. Currency exchange bureaus claim to be commission-free but tend to offer a poorer rate of exchange. Banks generally charge a commission but offer a better rate. Generally, currency exchange bureau hours are Monday-Saturday 9 am-6 pm.

Taxes

In Turkey, there is a 17% value-added tax on practically all goods (referred to there as KDV). Visitors to Turkey can claim their tax money back at the airport or port if they get a tax-free receipt (*KDV iade ozel fatura*) when they purchase goods. Give the receipt to a customs officer at the airport or other exit point, and in theory, he or she will file the paperwork for a refund. However, there is no guarantee that the check will ever arrive.

Tipping

Tipping is not necessary for taxi drivers, although rounding the fare up is customary. Tip 10% in restaurants. 3 TL-5 TL is sufficient for a porter. Tour guides will generally expect about 10 TL-15 TL.

Weather

The best time to visit Istanbul is April-June or September-October. Temperatures are relatively comfortable then, with average highs of 60-77 F/16-25 C and relatively little rain. Winters rarely get cold enough for snow, but plenty of rain falls (about 11-13 in/28-33 cm November-January) and the damp air can feel very chilly. Summers are hot and humid, but not unbearable if you're near the water (traffic pollution can make July and August unpleasant if you're inland). A sweater or rain jacket is useful year-round.

What to Wear

Istanbul is a cosmopolitan city, and the range of dress, especially for women, is vast. You'll see everything from women hidden under black burkas to teenage girls in headscarves and miniskirts. As a visitor, you don't need to cover yourself from head to toe, but stick to relatively modest attire (no spaghetti straps or bare midriffs). To blend in, men should avoid wearing shorts. At mosques, men and women should dress modestly, with shoulders and legs covered. Women should carry a light scarf to wrap around their heads in case of an unexpected mosque visit (although some of the more popular mosques have scarves available).

Communication

Telephone

Two city codes are used in Istanbul. The code 0212 is for numbers on the European side, and the code 0216 is used for numbers on the Asian side. Those prefixes are required only when dialing the opposite side of the city. (Note that the initial 0 is dropped when dialing from outside Turkey.)

There are no coin telephones in Istanbul. Street phones require phone cards, which can be bought at most newsstands, tobacconists and hotel kiosks. Phone cards can also be purchased at post offices. Some street kiosks also have *kontorlu telefons*, which have meters—you are charged for the number of *kontors*, or tokens, you use. Most big towns now have Turk Telekom shops that offer a similar service.

Dial 118 to be connected with Turkey Directories.

Internet Access

Internet cafes have sprung up all over town, but the biggest concentration is around Taksim Square and around the tourist hotels of Sultanahmet. In addition, the hotels themselves—even the small ones—usually provide Internet access. Prices are generally 2 TL-4 TL per hour.

Transportation

Getting around Istanbul can be a struggle, but it will be considerably easier if you can learn to pronounce the name of your destination in Turkish. Failing that, have your hotel concierge write the name of your destination on paper so that you can show it to your bus driver, cab driver or fellow train passengers in case you need assistance. Turks are extremely friendly, helpful people, and many will go out of their way to get you to your destination if they know where it is.

Istanbul is an enormous city, and you'll probably need to make use of public transportation to see it. The tram is inexpensive and easier to use than city buses but covers much less ground. Taxis are plentiful, but Istanbul's horrific traffic congestion sometimes renders them useless. If you're staying in Sultanahmet, you can walk to many of the city's best sights, including the Blue Mosque, Ayasofya and Topkapi Palace.

Taxi

In Turkey, taxis are individually owned, so there is no taxi company to call. Cabs can be hailed very easily on the street, however. They are all yellow and hold four passengers. The airport and most five-star hotels have their own taxi services. These are generally more reliable, and the drivers usually speak a little English. In general, taxi drivers are honest and the meters reliable, but a favorite trick is to take tourists on roundabout routes. You can usually avoid this by showing the driver where you want to go on a map, which will let him know that you are aware of the general direction of your destination. Another ruse is to not reset the meter when a new passenger gets in (the starting fare is usually around 1.25 TL; after that it's 1 TL a kilometer). During the day, the meter should flash *gunduz* to show that the daytime rate is being charged; after midnight it will say *gece* (night), and the rate will be 50% higher.

Don't expect taxi drivers to know the city—being a cabbie is traditionally the first job young men get when they arrive in the city from their villages in Anatolia. If you're a woman alone, sit in the back, and if the driver's chat is making you uncomfortable just tell him to stop (opening the door will help get the message across). If you think you're being overcharged, just give the driver what you think is fair and walk away. Or, you can ask the driver to take you to the police (*Polis*). Tourists are treated carefully in Turkey, and drivers can get into big trouble if a complaint is lodged—they'll usually back down. Do not accept taxi drivers' suggestions for great clubs, hotels and restaurants—they're doing it for kickbacks. Be aware that Topkapi is not only the name of the Ottoman Palace in Sultanahmet, but also of an outlying area of the city. Many a tourist has ended up in Topkapi—the suburb—after a driver pretends not to know they actually wanted the palace (Topkapi Sarayi).
