**MONEY**

**Essential Information**

Magnificent Istanbul is not only the capital of Turkey, but it’s also the only metropolis that lies on two continents. Both Europe and Asia have influenced its face over the millennia as you can see in the countless historical buildings and ancient sites like the Hagia Sophia or Suleymaniye Mosque. The bazaars and markets complete the image of Istanbul as a city steeped in history.

At the same time, however, Istanbul is a modern, contemporary city. Majestic congress centres and hip art galleries are open only during the day, but the countless restaurants, bars and clubs are witnesses to the city’s vibrant nightlife. It seems like the city has sprung to life recently, and a single visit to the Galata district will convince you of this. Our final bit of advice is – dive in and don’t look back.

**Time Zone**

EET (UTC+2), observes DST.

**Contacts**

Tourist Contacts
- Traffic Center – 154
- Tourism Information – 170

**Currency**

Turkish Lira, 1 TL = 100 kuruş.

You can exchange currency at banks or exchange offices which are abundant in the city and at the airport. In fact, the airport exchange office offers very good rates. You can also simply withdraw money from ATMs if you want to save yourself the trouble of going to a bank or exchange office – they also offer better exchange rates. ATMs are abundant in Istanbul, so you’ll have no trouble finding them. Make sure you find an ATM with a Maestro or similar sticker on it; otherwise, it may be not connected to your bank.

Most establishments also accept credit or debit cards (mostly Visa or Mastercard); however, it is best to always carry at least a small amount of cash around, since not all places accept cards.

Traveller’s cheques must be exchanged at a bank or a post office.

**Tax Refunds**

VAT refunds are available for travellers. There are two different VAT rates. One is 18% (for jewellery, electronics and accessories), in which case you need to spend at least 118 TL to qualify for the refund, the other is 8% (for textile and leather) and you need to spend at least 108 TL.

Make sure you get a VAT refund form from the store at the time of your purchase. Fill out the form, attached your receipt and show the completed forms and the items you purchased upon your final departure from Turkey. The customs authorities will stamp your documents. Make sure not to put the purchased items in your checked luggage. Then claim the refund through the store’s affiliate. These companies have their offices at the airport, so you can get your money back immediately.

**Prices**

Although Istanbul is no longer the bargain destination it used to be, the prices are still good by Western standards.

- Meal, inexpensive restaurant – 12 TL
- Meal for 2, mid-range restaurant, three-course – 55 TL
- Big Mac combo meal – 11.50 TL
- Bottle of water at supermarket (1.5 litres) – 1 TL
- Domestic beer (0.5 liter, draught) – 5.50 TL
- Gasoline (1 liter) – 4.50 TL
- Hostels (average price/night) – 35-60 TL
- 4* hotel (average price/night) – 200-350 TL
- Car-hire (medium-sized car/day) – 110 TL

**Tipping**

Tipping is customary in Turkey; however, not everyone is tipped. Do tip in restaurants (around 10% if the service was good) and in hotels (a few TL for the staff, the porter, etc.). Definitely do tip barbers and hamam staff – 15% should do. Do not tip taxi drivers; round up the fare if you were satisfied. You can tip in liras or in foreign currency; use only bank notes in that case.
Electricity
The standard electricity supply in Turkey is 220 volt – 50 Hz AC. The plugs have two round pins. Remember to bring an adapter or converter if you need it.

Languages
Turkish is the official language. However, you will find that many locals working in the travel industry speak English, so you can get by with zero knowledge of Turkish. However, learning some basic phrases could help you a lot while getting around. Arabic, Kurdish and other languages are also spoken in Istanbul.

Mobile Phones
The whole country is covered by the GSM 900/1800 /GPRS/HSPDA network. European mobile phones should work fine; visitors from the US and Asia might need to check compatibility. There are a total of three operators running the network – Turkcell, Vodafone and Avea.

If you’d like to stay in touch while visiting Istanbul, you might consider renting a phone at the airport or getting yourself a local SIM card for much better rates. The international access code for Turkey is +90, the city codes for Istanbul are 212 (European side) and 216 (Asian side).

Internet
Istanbul is a well-connected city. Most hotels and hostels offer their own Wi-Fi connection for guests; always check if it’s paid or not. Alternatively, you can visit an internet café (which are abundant and inexpensive) or just sit down at a restaurant or café and take advantage of their free Wi-Fi. Internet is also available at the airport.

All of Sultanahmet Square is a Wi-Fi hotspot run by the city government.

Internet Resources
- Istanbul visitor’s bureau official website (www.icvb.org)
- Turkey’s official tourist website (www.goturkey.com)

Holidays
- January 1 – New Year’s Day
- April 23 – National Sovereignty and Children’s Day
- May 1 – Labour and Solidarity Day
- May 19 – Commemoration of Atatürk, Youth and Sports Day
- Ramadan Feast (after the end of Ramadan)
- August 30 – Victory Day
- Sacrifice Feast (70 days after Ramadan)
- October 29 – Republic Day

Opening Hours
Shops are generally open from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. or until 10 p.m. in the shopping areas. Supermarkets also stay open until 10 p.m. The Grand Bazaar is open until 7 p.m. and closed on Sunday. Banks are open from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and from 1:30 p.m. to 5 p.m. every day of the week. Shops and banks close for public holidays, except for Ramadan.

Museums and other sights are generally open from 9-10 a.m. to around 5 or 7 p.m. However, on some days, museums might stay open longer, close completely or have shorter opening times. Always check the museum’s website, since the closing times are specific for each one. Museums in general also close on public holidays, except for Ramadan.
Public Transportation

Public transport in Istanbul is not integrated and therefore you have to pay a new fare every time you transfer. A single token costs 3 TL. However, you can use the Akbil electronic ticket which is available for a refundable 6 TL deposit. It can then be loaded with credit and used on the go. A single ride costs 1.95 TL no matter where you are going. However, the Akbil ticket is being phased out in the favour of Istanbulkart (skart.iett.gov.tr) which works the same. The passes and tickets are sold at kiosks and in major stations and can be recharged at the fare machines there, too.

- "Metro": http://istanbul-ulasim.com.tr/rayl%C4%B1-ak%20metler/m1-aksaray-%E2%80%93-atat%C3%BCrk-havaliman%C4%B1.aspx - there are two lines connecting different parts of the city; several more lines are under construction.
- Rail (istanbul-ulasim.com.tr) – connects to the metro system and is probably the most used mode of transport, so it can get crowded. Also runs to the airport.
- Bus (www.iett.gov.tr) – run by the IETT and by private companies. You can use the Istanbulkart on both of these, but the tokens are only valid on the IETT-operated buses. The Metrobus is a great way of saving time since it runs in its own lane. Some of the bus lines (including the one to the airport) operate 24 hours a day, but be prepared for long intervals between buses.
- A number of maps are available at the Istanbul Ulasim website (www.istanbul-ulasim.com.tr)
- Ferry (ido.com.tr) – a good way of crossing from one side of Istanbul to another. Private ferries also operate within the city and can be paid for with the Istanbulkart.
- Dolmuş: a shared taxi that operates on a specific route and is a good alternative to public transport. It needs to be filled with 8 people. Most of the lines run from Taksim.

Taxis

Taxis are a cheap way of getting around; you just need to watch out for scams (see Safety). Take only the yellow licensed taxis and always insist on using the meter. You can find them in taxi ranks or hail them on the street. The start rate is 2.70 TL and each kilometre costs 1.7 TL. There is no night rate. You may have to pay the bridge toll when crossing over the river.
- Can Taksi – +90 216 540 77 01
- Konak Taksi – +90 212 281 56 19
- Oruçlar Taksi – +90 216 347 34 45

Regional Transportation

The city is served by Istanbul Atatürk Airport. There is also the Sabiha Gökçen International Airport located on Istanbul’s Anatolian side. You can use taxis, airport shuttles or public transport to get to the city.

As for trains (www.tcdd.gov.tr) all long-distance lines are suspended until 2015 when the Bosporus Rail Tunnel and other construction works will be finished. If you would like to travel further east, you will need to go to Ankara first. Trains to Europe leave from the border, but you can get there by bus.

Esenler Otogar serves as the main station for buses going to and from Europe; you can easily get to the Balkan peninsula from here. The bus station on the Anatolian side is named Harem Otogar; many buses from Esenler Ottoigar stop here, too.

You can also travel by ferry to Greece, Italy, Cyprus and through the Dardanelles to Asia.

Driving

- Speed limit in cities – 50 km/h
- Outside the cities – 90 km/h
- Interstate highways – 120 km/h
- Blood alcohol limit – 0.05 BAC
- Passengers must always wear a seatbelt in the front seat.
- Children under 12 years are not permitted to sit in the front seat. Children under 1.35 metres and 36 kilograms must use child or booster seats.
- Touching a cell phone while driving is illegal – use a hands-free or a mounter and do not text.
- Drive on the right.

Driving in Istanbul can be a challenge if you have never been here before or are not used to the driving style of the residents of the city. Expect a stressful ride with horn-honking and plenty of traffic jams. Parking is expensive and hard to find; the bridges are tolled and often jammed, and street signs are very rare. If you decide to drive, get a good map and ask the locals for directions if you get lost. Public transport is your best bet for getting around Istanbul if you do not plan to venture outside the city.

To drive a car in Turkey, you need to be over 17 years old and have an international driving license. However, you can only rent a car only if you’re over 19.

Walkability

Istanbul’s neighbourhoods are walkable, but moving between them is best done by public transport. However, it is easy to get lost in the maze of streets, so take a map if you’d like to get around on foot. The Sultanahmet district, where most of the sights are, is easily walkable on its own and you might discover some hidden gems that way.
Food

- Search for the best döners in residential neighborhoods.
- Kumkapi is a whole district filled with fish and seafood restaurants, since Istanbul lies by the sea. Taste the balık-ekmek (fish and bread) sandwich here.
- Iskembe is a thick soup and a hangover remedy, should you need it.
- The simit, a sort of spiced donut, is a great snack while exploring the city.
- Köfte, roasted beef or lamb meat with spices, eggs and vegetables, makes for a filling lunch.
- Sherbet is a delicious, ice cream-like dessert made from fruit and rose water.

Turkish teas and coffee are a must-try if you are coming to the city – expect nothing you are used to. Also try ayran – the local salty, yoghurt-like drink. Rakı is an anise-flavoured aperitif and more or less the national drink. Local beers and wines are also worth a try.

Legal Age

You need to be at least 18 years old to drink alcohol in Turkey. There is no official closing time for bars and pubs – and some close as late as 6 a.m. Smoking is banned in public spaces.

Events during the Year

February
- If Istanbul (www.ifistanbul.com) – a film festival

April
- Tulip Festival – flowers fill the Emirgan Park
- International Istanbul Film Festival (film.iksv.org)
- International Istanbul Theatre Festival (tiyatro.iksv.org)

May
- Hidrellez (www.hidrellez.org) – a religious holiday and a celebration of coming spring
- International Istanbul Puppet Festival (www.kuklaistanbul.org)
- Conquest Week Celebrations – celebration of the conquest of Constantinople

June
- International Istanbul Music Festival (muzik.iksv.org)

July
- Efes Pilsen One Love Festival (www.efespilsenonelove.com) – a music festival
- Rock’n Coke (www.rockncoke.com) – another music festival
- Electronica Festival Istanbul (www.electronicafest.com)

September
- Istanbul Design Week (www.istanbuldesignweek.com)

October
- Akbank Jazz Festival (www.akbanksanat.com)
- Filmekimi (filmekimi.iksv.org)
- Phonem Electronic Music Plateau – open-air electronic music and more

November
- Contemporary Istanbul (www.contemporaryistanbul.com) – an art fair
- Istanbul Book Fair (www.istanbulbookfair.com)
Free Things To Do

- Check when the museums are open for free. Some of them, like Atatürk Museum, have completely free admission.
- The Suleymaniye Mosque and the Blue Mosque are a must, and also free.
- The majestic Basilica Cistern is worth a visit – many movies were shot here.
- Visit the Ortakoy open-air market and enjoy its atmosphere.
- The Egyptian Bazaar is also a great atmospheric choice for a visit.
- Stop by the local beaches and the parks – Gülhane Park, aka the royal gardens, is a good place to start. Then you can move on to Yıldız Park.
- Visit the Galata Bridge and watch fishermen go about their day.

Shopping

Turkey is a rewarding destination for souvenirs as there is so much to choose from. Turkish rugs, carpets and leather are world-famous for their quality. As far as crafts go, you also shouldn’t forget about the typical Turkish painted porcelain. Silk scarves sold at the Grand Bazaar are a great gift, too. Foodies can bring home Turkish delight and coffee. And if you feel the need for extra protection, buy the ‘evil eye’ that will ward off evil.

DO visit a tea garden or the Turkish baths.
DO keep your eye on your belongings at all times.
DO cover yourself when visiting mosques or other holy places.
DO respect the national symbols – Turks are very sensitive when it comes to this subject.
DO NOT buy anything without haggling first.
DO NOT hesitate to ask for help if you are lost – the locals are friendly and will help you.
DO NOT accept drinks from strangers while clubbing.

Safety

Istanbul is a big city and therefore you should take the usual precautions against pickpockets. Always be aware of your belongings, keep your wallet in a safe place and keep your hands on your purse so that it cannot be snatched. This applies especially to tourist areas (where you will probably be staying) and on public transport.

Another piece of general advice – look out for scams. They are widespread in Istanbul, but nothing easy to fall for if you use your common sense. Private tours are most probably scams and unknown people inviting you somewhere (bars, restaurants) are likely scammers. While in clubs, look out for overpriced and spiked drinks. Shoe polishers are also often scammers.

Taxi scams are frequent in Istanbul. Keep in mind that taxis should be inexpensive by Western standards. Make sure the taxi you are using is licensed and associated with a particular company. Be sure the meter is running and sit in the front seat to ensure it is running properly the whole ride. Ask for the fare before you get inside. Research your route. Watch out for money swapping – sometimes the drivers switch 5 lira notes for 50 and claim you’ve not given them enough money. If you have been scammed, get upset at the driver – most of the time they will let go, since they generally go for easy prey.

As far as street safety goes, if you’re a woman, you should be prepared that men will stare at you. Your best bet is to ignore them – most of the time they will leave you alone. If they bother you, shout loudly at them. Learning a few Turkish phrases for this occasion might be useful. Most of Istanbul’s neighbourhoods are safe, but try to avoid Aksaray and Tarlabası.

The tap water in Turkey is safe to drink in major cities, but it is heavily chlorinated and not very tasty, so bottled water is preferred.
**ACTIVITIES**

**A. Hagia Sophia / Aya Sofya**
One of the most astounding buildings of Istanbul used to serve as an Orthodox basilica, a mosque and as a museum. An absolute must see!

Sultanahmet Meydani, Eminonu, Yusuapaşa, Istanbul, Turkey  
GPS: N41.00852, E28.97986  
Phone: +90 212 528 4500  
Opening hours:  
Apr 15th – Oct: 9 a.m. – 7 p.m. (last tickets sold at 6 p.m.)  
Oct 1st – Apr 14th: 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. (last tickets sold at 4 p.m.)  
Hagia Sophia Museum is not available for visiting in the first days of Ramadan and Sacrifice Festivals for half time.  
Admission:  
General admission: 25 TL  
Children under 12: free

**B. Topkapi Palace**
Built in the 15th century, this palace used to be the sultans' residence. Nowadays, it houses collections of various precious artifacts.

Cankurtaran Mh., 34122 Istanbul, Turkey  
GPS: N41.01188, E28.98414  
Phone: +90 212 512 0480  
Opening hours:  
Apr 15th – Oct: Wed – Mon: 9 a.m. – 7 p.m.  
Oct 1st – Apr 14th: Wed – Mon: 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.  
Admission:  
General admission: 25 TL  
The visit to Harem requires an additional ticket for 15 TL.
**ACTIVITIES**

**Basilica Cistern**
This enormous underground chamber stored water for the whole city. It has 336 columns, two of them are in the shape of the mythical Medusa.

Alemdar Mh., Yerebatan Caddesi 13, Istanbul, Turkey
GPS: N41.00839, E28.97791

**Phone:**
+90 212 522 1259

**Opening hours:**
Daily: 9 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.

**Admission:**
General admission: 10 TL
Citizens of Turkey: 5 TL

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**Grand Bazaar / Kapalıçarşı**
Major shopping location where you can hunt for fairly priced souvenirs, smashing golden jewelry or clothes. More than 4000 shops!

Beyazıt Mh., Zenneçiler Sk, 34126 Istanbul, Turkey
GPS: N41.01055, E28.96794

**Opening hours:**
Mon – Sat: 9 a.m. – 7 p.m.

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**Egyptian Bazaar / Misir Carsisi**
At this covered bazaar, you can buy many various kinds of spices, tea, Turkish delight, souvenirs and a lot more.

İstiklal Mh., Zenneçiler Sk, 34116 Istanbul, Turkey
GPS: N41.01595, E28.97110

**Phone:**
+90 212 513 6597

**Opening hours:**
Daily: 8 a.m. – 7:30 p.m.
Closed on Oct 29th and during religious holidays.

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**Sultan Ahmed Mosque / Sultan Ahmet Camii**
One of the dominants of the old part of Istanbul is also known as the Blue Mosque. Its interior is decorated with blue ornamental tiles.

Sultanahmet, Istanbul, Turkey
GPS: N41.00534, E28.97721

**Opening hours:**
Daily: 9 a.m. – 6 p.m. except for times of prayer and Fri midday.

**Admission:**
Free admission.

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**Suleymaniye Mosque**
Designed by the famous architect Mimar Sinan, this mosque is a spectacular example of Ottoman architecture. What a marvel!

Süleymaniye Mh., Profesör Siddik Sami Onar Caddesi 1, Istanbul, Turkey
GPS: N41.01561, E28.96342

**Opening hours:**
Daily: 9:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

**Admission:**
Free admission.

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**Galata Tower**
Completed in the 14th century, this former control tower features an observation platform and offers panoramic views of the city.

Bereketzade Mh., 34420 Istanbul, Turkey
GPS: N41.02565, E28.97417

**Opening hours:**
Daily: 9 a.m. – 7 p.m.

**Admission:**
General admission: 17.50 TL

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**Hippodrome**
The main square of the ancient Constantinople where charriot races were organized. You can still see its monuments, such as obelisks here.

GPS: N41.00538, E28.97482
**Cistern of Philoxenos** / Binbirdirek Cistern
Although smaller than the famous Basilica Cistern, this underground water reservoir is still astounding. It is supported by 224 columns.
Klodfärer Caddesi, 34410 Istanbul, Turkey
GPS: N41.00718, E28.97321
Phone: +90 212 638 2238
Opening hours:
Summer Season (April 15th – September 30th):
Daily: 9 a.m. – 7 p.m.
Winter Season (October 1st – April 14th):
Thu – Tue: 9 a.m. – 6 p.m.
Admission:
General admission: 10 TL

**Little Hagia Sophia** / Kucuk Ayasofya Camii
An Eastern Orthodox church which has been converted into a mosque. Its interior is beautifully decorated with ornaments and inscriptions.
Küçükayasofya Mahallesi Demirci resit Sokak No : 28, Sultanahmet, 34400 Fatih/Istanbul, Turkey
GPS: N41.00282, E28.97196
Phone: +90 212 516 9446
Admission:
Free entrance.

**Valens Aqueduct** / Bozdogan Kemerı
Dating back to the 4th century, this aqueduct provided water for the whole city in the past. It is still well-preserved.
Atatürk Blv., 34410 Istanbul, Turkey
GPS: N41.01597, E28.95552

**Galata Bridge** / Galata Köprüsü
The iconic bridge which links the two parts of Istanbul is a must-see. Great views and lively atmosphere aren’t its only perks.
GPS: N41.02000, E28.97306

**Dolmabahce Palace** / Dolmabahce Sarayı
The majestic palace complex in European style consists of official and harem sections. Its well-maintained garden has a great view of the sea.
Vişnezade Mh., 34357 Istanbul, Turkey
GPS: N41.03879, E28.99904
Phone: +90 212 236 90 00
Opening hours:
Tue – Sun (except Thu): 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Admission:
General admission: 30 TL
Harem: 20 TL
Combined ticket: 40 TL

**Taksim Square**
Dominated by a sculpture named The Republic Monument, this extensive square is the centre of the modern part of Istanbul.
Şht. Muhtar Mh., 34440 Istanbul, Turkey
GPS: N41.03683, E28.98432

**Golden Horn**
This 7.5 kilometres long natural bay has served as a harbour for centuries and has appeared in many works of art.
Hobyar Eminönü Mh., Istanbul, Turkey
GPS: N41.01825, E28.97279

**Golden Horn**
This 7.5 kilometres long natural bay has served as a harbour for centuries and has appeared in many works of art.
Hobyar Eminönü Mh., Istanbul, Turkey
GPS: N41.01825, E28.97279
**Istanbul Archaeology Museums** / Arkeoloji Müzesi
The three sections of this museum exhibit a vast array of ancient artifacts, such as sarcophagi and artworks, and also various everyday items.

Cankurtaran Mh., 34122 Istanbul, Turkey
GPS: N41.01096, E28.98153

**Phone:** +90 212 527 27 00

**Opening hours:**
Tue – Sun: 9 a.m. – 7 p.m.

**Admission:**
General admission: 10 TL
Children under 12: free

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**New Mosque** / Yeni Cami
Completed in the 17th century, this large mosque features 66 domes, a nice courtyard and an ornate interior.

Eminönü, Istanbul/Aegean Coast, Turkey
GPS: N41.01684, E28.97200

**Opening hours:**
Daily: 7 a.m. – dusk

**Admission:**
Free entrance.

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**Gulhane Park**
Established in 1912, this park has become a favourite place of relaxation for both locals and tourists. You can spot parrots here!

Hoca Paşa Mh., Nöbethane Caddesi 1, 34112 Istanbul, Turkey
GPS: N41.01341, E28.98159

**Phone:** +90 212 519 6868

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**Bayezid II Mosque** / Beyazıt Camii
The interior of this mosque is similar to the Hagia Sofia. Sultan Bayezid II, his daughter and grand vizier are buried in its garden.

Süleymaniye Mh., Istanbul, Turkey
GPS: N41.01017, E28.96500

**Admission:**
Free admission.

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**Istiklal Street**
One of the busiest boulevards of Istanbul is bustling with life at any time of the day or night. There are many shops, restaurants and bars around.

GPS: N41.03454, E28.97984

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**Rustem Pasha Mosque** / Rüstem Pasha Mosque
Projected by Mimar Sinan, this 16th century mosque features astounding interior decorations made of Anatolian tiles.

Hasircilar Carsisi–Eminonu, Istanbul, Turkey
GPS: N41.01765, E28.96869

**Phone:** +90 212 258 7760

**Admission:**
Free admission.

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**Arasta Bazaar**
If you want to buy some traditional Turkish items, come to this small bazaar! Carpets, jewellery, ceramics and a lot more are sold here.

Arasta Bazaar No. 57, Istanbul, Turkey
GPS: N41.00549, E28.97843
Sogukcesme Sokak
Marvel at the beautiful Ottoman-style houses while walking down this pedestrian street. You can also visit some of them.
Cankurtaran Mh., 34122 Istanbul, Turkey
GPS: N41.00931, E28.98024

Chora Church
One of the world's leading showcases of Byzantine art with astonishing frescoes and mosaics. The church features 6 domes.
Kariye Müzesi, Avcıbey Mh., Kariye Türbesi Sokak 16, Istanbul, Turkey
GPS: N41.03126, E28.93924
Phone: +90 212 631 9241
Opening hours:
Summer Season (Apr 15th – Sep 30th):
Daily: 9 a.m. – 7 p.m.
Winter Season (Oct 1st – Apr 14th):
Thu - Tue: 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Admission:
General admission: 15 TL

Whirling Dervishes at Hodjapasha
Enjoy spectacular performances of legendary whirling dervishes in this cultural venue, which is a former hamam.
Ankara Caddesi Hocapasa Hamam, Sok No: 5-9D Sirkeci, 34110 Istanbul, Turkey
GPS: N41.01535, E28.97597
Phone: +90 212 511 4626
Opening hours:
The show runs daily at 7 p.m. and 9 p.m. (except for Sun).
Admission:
Adult: 60 TL
Child: 40 TL
Thursday show: 70 TL
It is recommended to book the ticket ahead through the website.