



Clockwise from top: The Hagia Sofia, inside the Topkapı Palace, Carey Maloney and Hermes Mallea, The entry to the Grand Bazaar.

Turkish Delight

Old Constantinople's sumptuous sultanic glories beckon two tastemakers to shop till they drop in Istanbul

Text by Carey Maloney · Photography by Hermes Mallea



Everyone has a must-visit list. One place my partner, architect Hermes Mallea, and I had always wanted to see was Istanbul. Recently, we made it there—and we loved it. The city is significant both for its role as the hub of the Byzantine and Ottoman empires and for its strategic location on the Strait of Bosphorus, the narrow waterway between Europe and Asia. For millennia it was the most cosmopolitan city in the world, and its star is rising again. Present-day Istanbul has grand hotels, charming people, and a hot cultural scene. Plus, it's a shopper's paradise. What's not to like?

We went in late October, when the summer rush was over (our mantra is "Avoid crowds") and the weather was still nice. Home base was the Four Seasons Hotel Istanbul, in the heart of the Sultanahmet neighborhood and just steps from key sights like the Topkapı Palace, Hagia >

treasure hunt



Sofia, and Blue Mosque. Within a few minutes' walk, you're at one of the best bazaars in town. Staying in this area proved critical, because traffic's tough. A trip across town can take 20 minutes or two hours.

On day one of our visit, we headed to the Turkish *hammans* (baths), which everyone raves about. Hermes figured we'd check out the Çemberlitas Hamami baths (built in 1584) early on in case we wanted to indulge daily. Not the case. Slap, grunt, grunt again—the hellishly hot rooms were staffed by brutish, minimally towelied, muttering men. Not knowing what to expect, we furtively looked for examples to follow but saw only other disoriented tourists. We stole out of the caldarium just in time to realize the final insult—our services ended with being wrapped in an appalling mishmash of plaid and striped towels and having to scurry up a flight of stairs to dress. We know it gets better 'than that.

Hermes, my perennial guide, and I started a more delightful part of our trip—an architectural tour of the city—at the Obelisk of Theodosius in the Hippodrome, a huge piece of granite inscribed with Egyptian, Greek, and Roman lettering and erected around 1500 B.C. Just opposite is the Blue Mosque, with its fragile minarets, vast domes, and expanses of blue-and-white Iznik tiles. The serene Süleymaniye Mosque, built for >



Clockwise from top: Malia and Maloney's friend Nadia Martayan shopping for ikats at the *Maison du Tapis d'Orient*. Hanging lanterns. Jewelry at *Hilat*. Courtyard of the Four Seasons Hotel Istanbul.



Clockwise from top: Maloney at the silver shop Sait Asil. Detail of a rug from Günes Öztarakçı. A Turkish weaving.



Details

The country code is 90; the city code is 212.

- **Required reading:** Jason Goodwin's *Lord of the Horizons* provides a good overview of the Ottoman Empire. Knopf's guide to Istanbul gives all the need-to-know basics. For a behind-the-scenes look, see John Freely's *Inside the Seraglio—Private Lives of the Sultans in Istanbul*.
- **Food:** Classic Turkish cuisine, which was developed for the sultans, is subtle and refined. For those who like eggplant, Istanbul will rate as a little piece of heaven. The city is also famous for its waterfront seafood restaurants.
- **Hotels:** Stay in the Sultanahmet neighborhood if possible—the Four Seasons Hotel Istanbul (638-82-00), which has a lovely central courtyard, is perfect.
- **Metalwork:** Sait Asil (527-27-56) sells sterling silver by the pound. We assembled a large pile of vases, bowls, and picture frames for a grand total of \$250. (Inexplicably, we didn't buy any of the handsome brass and copperware we saw around town.)
- **Islamic calligraphy:** Hermes and I didn't pursue the high-quality stuff (we'll do our homework for our next trip), but we did pick up some great-looking decorative pieces in the bazaar.

- **Pottery:** I fantasized about putting together a set of mixed patterns of beautiful Turkish pottery for our country house. I ended up buying just two bowls for Pancho's food and water (hardly the dinner service for 24 I'd imagined).
- **Rugs:** Textiles have long been a major industry in the Islamic world. Although most of the first-rate antique rugs were long ago exported to Europe and America, we did some research, visited only reputable dealers, and saw some primo old carpets. Günes Öztarakçı had a huge 19th-century cherry-red wool Oushak. Erkal Aksoy's A la Turca Kilim House (245-29-13) carries fine antique rugs and furniture.
- **Textiles:** We picked up several tulus, sort of hippie-looking goat-hair throws, at Maison du Tapis d'Orient (517-68-08), which also sells ikats, small refined weavings in jewel-like colors. We bought suzams, big embroidered pieces covered in swirling sun and moon patterns that make terrific bedspreads, at H. Celal Açıköz (512-29-41).
- **Evil eyes:** A Turkish talisman believed to ward off bad luck, the evil eye is everywhere in Istanbul. Jewelry shop Hilal (520-01-71) made a glam pair of 24-karat evil-eye cuff links for me.

Süleyman the Magnificent in 1557 is nearby, as is the sixth-century wonder of the world, the Hagia Sofia, which was first Christendom's greatest church and then Islam's grandest mosque. Now it's a museum. Next door is the Topkapı Palace, a 170-acre royal complex that was home to the Ottoman sultans and centuries of noble intrigue. Courtyards lead you through the sultan's House of Felicity, the Aviary Gate, and the Circumcision Room (we like the names). We also lucked into lunch on a fab private boat sailing the Bosphorus, where sprawling 19th-century palaces cascade down the slopes to bustling marinas.

Finally, we got to shop. I hate currency like the Turkish lira that comes in millions. Wads of bills fill your wallet and pockets. That said, it goes a long way. Hermes and I began our buying spree at the Grand Bazaar, one of the top shopping destinations in the world. We were chronically lost in this maze of more than 3,000 stands, but the seemingly aimless wandering did allow for the discovery of top-notch pottery, metalwork, textiles, and silver. During negotiations, tradition dictates long, tea-infused conversations, but we just wanted to be polite and get in and out. So we often pleaded a pressing appointment and quickly agreed to a price. One item I wasn't able to get was a custom minifez for my Chihuahua, Pancho. Bad idea to show the fez man a photo of your dog—he recoiled, declaring Pancho "unclean!" (dogs are largely shunned by Muslims).

Hermes and I showed uncharacteristic restraint in limiting our excursion to Istanbul. There is so much more to do in Turkey—cruising the Aegean and Mediterranean coasts, touring dozens more archaeological sites, and shopping for the copperware, pottery, and brass objects we missed the first time around. "Next trip" is the constant refrain. ■

