

# Turkey National Day Special

## A historic city of abundant sights and stories

Istanbul, Byzantium, Nova Roma, Constantinople —Turkey's largest city has had many names through its long history. Since its founding in the seventh century, the city has often been one of the most important in the world. Whether part of the Roman Empire, a main stop on the Silk Road, the capital of the Byzantine Empire or the seat of the Ottoman Caliphate, the story of Istanbul has many chapters.

Straddling two continents, Europe and Asia, Istanbul has a character unlike any other city. Its heart is the Fatih District (named after the Ottoman Emperor Fatih Sultan Mehmed, also known as Mehmed the Conqueror), where a visitor can walk through Sultanahmet Square and see both the Hagia Sophia and Blue Mosque.

The former is perhaps the grandest remnant of the Byzantine Empire, while the latter is the largest of the Ottoman era mosques. Consecrated by Emperor Justinian in 537, the name Hagia Sophia means "Church of Divine Wisdom." Mosaics on the walls depict Justinian and images important to the early Christian church. The prayer hall's central dome sits 56

meters above and was added during the Ottoman days, after being converted by Mehmet II in 1453. The Blue Mosque is named after the tens of thousands of blue Iznik tiles that decorate the interior. Like the Hagia Sophia, it is an active place of worship. Dating from the reign of Sultan Ahmet I, the six minarets stand above the many domes that show the scale of ambition held by the Ottomans.

The friendly vendors of the Spice Bazaar have been there since the 1660s to sell dried herbs, nuts, honey, Turkish Delight (*lokum*) and tourist souvenirs. The sights, sounds, smells and tastes of what is locally known as the Egyptian Market continue to attract visitors, even if they are different from the halcyon days of the Silk Road, where this was the final stop for the camel caravans of the day. Fresh foods from all over Turkey, locally crafted kitchenware and Istanbul's most well-known coffee supplier are also on the premises.

Spanning the Bosphorus and linking two continents is the Galata Bridge, a place where local residents come to fish, eat and drink, and visitors can enjoy a view of the



**The six minarets of the Blue Mosque rise above Istanbul at sunset.** GETTY IMAGES

seven hills of the city, punctuated by the minarets of its mosques, and the grand sights of the Golden Horn. The underside of the bridge houses many cafes, where strong cups of Turkish tea are enjoyed alongside hookah smoking pipes.

*This content references excerpts from the official Istanbul tourism website. For more information, please visit <https://visit.istanbul/en/>.*

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to the People  
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of  
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on the Occasion  
of  
Their National Day



JAPAN TOBACCO INC.

Kamiyacho Trust Tower, 1-1, Toranomom 4-chome, Minato-ku, Tokyo 105-6927 JAPAN  
Phone:(03)6636-2914 FAX:(03)6772-0495 URL:<http://www.jt.com>

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