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THE ARTS

top picks

- Proje41/Elgiz Museum of Contemporary Art (p186)
- Atatürk Cultural Centre (p188)
- Akbank Culture & Arts Centre (p188)
- Aya İrini (p188)
- Galerist (p186)
- santralistanbul (p186)

When the EU designated İstanbul one of its European Cultural Capitals for 2010, no-one here was surprised. Pleased, yes, but İstanbullular hadn't failed to note the fact that over the past decade their city had built considerably on its formidable cultural infrastructure and been gifted a whole new generation of museums and galleries, including the İstanbul Modern (p102), Pera Museum (p110), Sakıp Sabancı Museum (p218), Proje4L/Elgiz Museum of Contemporary Art (below) and santralistanbul (below). Fortunately, this proliferation of venues isn't short of exciting new work to show, with the city's contemporary arts practice going from strength to strength and its visual artists finally starting to take their place on the international stage alongside their musician, writer and filmmaker peers.

ART GALLERIES

İstanbul has a thriving art scene. As well as cultural centres (p188), most of which have excellent exhibition spaces, numerous small independent galleries exhibit the work of local and international visual and multimedia artists. Most upmarket private galleries are in the shopping areas of Teşvikiye and Nişantaşı, whereas the high-profile contemporary spaces funded by banks and other companies are on İstiklal Caddesi in Beyoğlu. Small galleries exhibiting the work of young local and international artists are often found in the sidestreets off İstiklal Caddesi (Map p107). For larger art museums, such as İstanbul Modern (p102), see individual entries in the Neighbourhoods chapter.

The big visual arts event on the calendar is the International İstanbul Biennial (p17).

GALERI NEV Map p107

☎ 212-252 1525; Meşrutiyet Caddesi 59, Tepebaşı; www.galerinev.com; ☎ 11am-6.30pm Mon-Sat; 📍 Karaköy, then funicular to Tünel

This long-established commercial gallery shows painting, sculpture and installation works by contemporary Turkish artists.

GALERIST Map p107

☎ 212-244 8230; www.galerist.com.tr; İstiklal Caddesi 311/4, Galatasaray; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat; 📍 Karaköy, then funicular to Tünel

In the fashionable Mısır Apartmanı Building on İstiklal (home to 360, see p165), this excellent commercial gallery shows young Turkish artists living at home and abroad working in a variety of media.

PLATFORM GARANTI CONTEMPORARY ART CENTRE Map p107

☎ 212-293 2361; www.platformgaranti.blogspot.com; İstiklal Caddesi 136, Beyoğlu; ☎ 1-8pm

Tue-Thu, 1-10pm Fri & Sat; 📍 Kabataş, then funicular to Taksim

A minimalist space funded by the Garanti Bank, Platform shows the very best of international contemporary art, with an emphasis on installation and multimedia work.

PROJE4L/ELGİZ MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Elgiz Çağdaş Sanat Müzesi, İstanbul; ☎ 212-281 5150; www.elgizmuseum.org; Harman Sokak, Harmancı Giz Plaza, Levent; ☎ 11am-7pm Tue-Sat; 📍 Kabataş, then funicular to Taksim, then metro to Levent

Established by local architect and property developer Can Elgiz to further the understanding of experimental art in the city, Proje4L is super cool and programmes cutting-edge exhibitions mainly sourced from Europe. It occupies an annex of a tower block in Levent and is well worth a visit. You'll find it near Kanyon (p143).

SANTRALİSTANBUL

Eski Silahtarağa Elektrik Santrali; ☎ 212-311 5000; www.santralistanbul.com; Kazım Karabekir Caddesi 1, Eyüp; ☎ 10am-10pm Tue-Sun; 📍 Eyüp İstanbul's version of the Tate Modern, santralistanbul is a contemporary art gallery housed in a converted power station. It opened in September 2007 with an exhibition entitled 'Modern and Beyond' surveying the history of Turkish art from 1950 through to 2000, and promises to deliver an ongoing program of survey shows, artist-in-residence programs and workshops. Get there on the Haliç (Golden Horn) ferry from Eminönü or catch the free shuttle bus from the Atatürk Cultural Centre in Taksim; these leave every 30 minutes from 9am to 8pm.

SCHNEIDERTEMPEL ART CENTER

Map p103

Schneidertempel Sanat Merkezi; ☎ 212-252 5157; Felek Sokak 1, Karaköy; ☎ 10.30am-5.30pm Tue-Sat, noon-4pm Sun; 📍 Karaköy Housed in an old synagogue, the Schneidertempel exhibits work by local Jewish artists, as well as frequent exhibitions from abroad. Quality varies, but we've seen some excellent photographic exhibitions here, as well as extremely moving exhibitions of historical work from the Holocaust. Security here is tight and opening hours are irregular. Treat those given above as a guide only.

CINEMAS

İstiklal Caddesi is the centre of İstanbul's cinema (*sinema*) district. During April's İstanbul International Film Festival (p16) every corner of Beyoğlu is filled with enthusiastic cinemagoers keen to see the latest Hollywood blockbuster or major European release, as well as home-grown products. Tickets to this festival are hot numbers – you'll need to book way in advance.

During the rest of the year, the enthusiasm for flicks remains. Films are mostly shown in English with Turkish subtitles, but double-check at the box office in case the film has Turkish (*Türkçe*) dubbing, as this sometimes happens with blockbusters. For movie listings, see the *Turkish Daily News*.

When possible, buy your tickets a few hours in advance. Depending on the venue, tickets cost between YTL10 and YTL15 – many places offer reduced rates before 6pm, to students, and all day on Monday and Wednesday.

The usher will expect a small tip for showing you to your seat.

AFM AKMERKEZ

☎ 444 1 AFM; Akmerkez Shopping Centre, Nispetiye Caddesi 76/1, Etiler; 📍 Kabataş, then funicular to Taksim, then metro to Akmerkez This multiplex is pricey, but its comfortable surrounds are a good place to rest after a big day shopping.

AFM FİTAŞ Map p107

☎ 444 1 AFM; İstiklal Caddesi 24-26, Fitaş Pasajı, Beyoğlu; 📍 Kabataş, then funicular to Taksim This multiplex has 11 screens and all the Hollywood trimmings.

ALKAZAR SİNEMA MERKEZİ Map p107

☎ 212-293 2466; İstiklal Caddesi 179; 📍 Kabataş, then funicular to Taksim First a porn cinema, then an arthouse joint, Alkazar has now given in to Hollywood, though it still occasionally programmes an arthouse hit. There are three screens and a plush and cosy interior.

ATLAS SİNEMALARI Map p107

☎ 212-252 8576; İstiklal Caddesi 209, Atlas Pasajı; 📍 Kabataş, then funicular to Taksim On the 1st floor of one of the historic arcades along İstiklal, Atlas is always bustling. There are three screens and the programming is eclectic. İstanbul Film Festival screenings also happen here.

EMEK Map p107

☎ 212-293 8439; Yeşilçam Sokak 5, Beyoğlu; 📍 Kabataş, then funicular to Taksim Functioning since the 1920s, this barn of a cinema is one of the oldest in the city. It's not the most comfortable on offer, but has managed to retain a bit of the glamour it had during Pera's heyday. It's another venue for the İstanbul International Film Festival.

KANYON MARS CINEMA

☎ 212-353 0814; www.marssinema.com; Kanyon Shopping Mall, Levent; 📍 Kabataş, then funicular to Taksim, then metro to Levent

In the city's most glamorous shopping mall, this multiplex is a comfortable place to enjoy a flick. It screens some, but not all, films in original languages.

REXX Map p127

☎ 216-336 0112; Sakızyülü Sokak 20-22, Kadıköy; 📍 Kadıköy

We've sheltered here from bad weather before risking a ferry back to town more than once. On the Asian side of İstanbul, the REXX's program usually lacks surprises. The only exception is in April, when it screens part of the İstanbul International Film Festival.

ŞAFAK SİNEMALARI Map p50

☎ 212-516 2660; Divan Yolu Caddesi 134, Çemberlitaş; 📍 Çemberlitaş

This seven-screen cinema is the closest to Sultanahmet, only a 10-minute walk along Divan Yolu. It screens Hollywood blockbusters and is beloved of heavy petters, who sit at the back.

CLASSICAL MUSIC & OPERA

İstanbul has a lively Western classical music scene and its own headline act, the İstanbul State Symphony Orchestra. There are also regular visits by international orchestras and chamber ensembles (for venues, see below).

In summer, concerts are also held in the atmospheric amphitheatre at Rumeli Hisarı, (p217), at Yedikule Hisarı Müzesi (p128) and in the watery cavern of the Basilica Cistern (p58).

During the International İstanbul Music Festival (p16) there is a wealth of classical music and opera on offer, including performances in the extraordinarily atmospheric Aya İrini (p65).

The İstanbul State Opera & Ballet has a season running from October to May, with some extra performances during the International İstanbul Music Festival. Most performances take place at the Atatürk Cultural Centre (right).

CULTURAL CENTRES & PERFORMANCE VENUES

There's big money behind the arts in İstanbul, with banks leading the way in funding the major arts companies and festivals. There are also plenty of impressive venues around town where the sponsors can schmooze and the dignitaries can party after the performance. Most of these venues are cultural centres hosting a number of different art forms – it's not unusual for these places to host an opera one night, a jazz performance the next, a ballet on the night after that and an exhibition in the foyer the whole time.

To get an overview of what's on where, refer to the monthly listings in *Time Out İstanbul*. Tickets are usually available through Biletix (☎ 216-454 1555, 216-556 9800; www.biletix.com).

AKBANK CULTURE & ARTS CENTRE

Map p107
☎ 212-252 3500; www.akbanksanat.com; Zambak Sokak 1, Beyoğlu; 🚶 Kabataş, then funicular to Taksim

This small venue, funded entirely by the Turkish bank of the same name, hosts classical and jazz music recitals, as well as exhibitions of the work of local artists.

ATATÜRK CULTURAL CENTRE Map p107
AKM, Atatürk Kültür ve Sanat Merkezi; ☎ 212-251 5600; www.idobale.com in Turkish; Taksim Square; 🚶 box office 10am-6pm; 🚶 Kabataş, then funicular to Taksim

At night the lights of the city's major cultural centre glow behind its stylised steel grill, providing a welcome sight in the otherwise unprepossessing Taksim Square. Unfortunately, during the day the building isn't quite as beguiling. Being the home of the city's major theatre, ballet and opera companies, it hosts more than its fair share of opening nights and acclaimed performances. The centre includes five performance halls in addition to a gallery and a cinema. Tickets are almost always affordable.

AYA İRİNİ

Map p63
Hagia Eirene, Church of Divine Peace; First Court of Topkapı Palace; 🚶 Sultanahmet

Big-name classical events make the most of the acoustics in this ancient venue (see p62), particularly during the International İstanbul Music Festival. During the festival a board outside lists upcoming events and contact details; tickets are available through Biletix or at the festival ticket box at the Atatürk Cultural Centre.

BORUSAN ARTS & CULTURE CENTER

Map p107
Borusan Kültür ve Sanat Merkezi; ☎ 212-292 0655; www.borusansanat.com; İstiklal Caddesi 421; 🚶 gallery 10.30am-7pm Tue-Sat; 🚶 Kabataş, then funicular to Taksim

This well-regarded arts centre has an established gallery showcasing the work of local artists, with the occasional high-profile international show. It also hosts concerts and recitals by artists of the calibre of world-famous Turkish pianist, Fazıl Say.

CEMAL REŞİT REY CONCERT HALL

Map p115
Cemal Reşit Rey Konser Salonu; ☎ 212-232 9830; www.crrks.org in Turkish; Gümüs Sokak, Harbiye; 🚶 box office 10am-7.30pm; 🚶 Kabataş, then funicular to Taksim

With its great acoustics and comfortable chairs, this concert hall is a popular venue for dance, classical and Ottoman music, and the occasional jazz gig. Its handy monthly guides list upcoming events and prices in English, and are available around town (they're everywhere on İstiklal Caddesi).

İŞ ART & CULTURAL CENTRE

İş Sanat Kültür Merkezi; ☎ 212-316 1083; www.issanat.com; İş Kuleleri 4, Levent; 🚶 box office 9am-6pm; 🚶 Kabataş, then funicular to Taksim, then metro to Levent (Plazalar exit)

This sleek venue in the İş Towers hosts international acts, poetry readings and performances of live jazz, Ottoman music and world music. A free shuttle service to here leaves from outside the Atatürk Cultural Centre (opposite) in Taksim at 6.30pm.

ITALIAN CULTURAL CENTRE

Map p107
İtalyan Kültür Merkezi, Istituto Italiano di Cultura; ☎ 212-293 9848; www.iicist.org.tr; Meşrutiyet Caddesi 161, Tepebaşı; 🚶 Karaköy, then funicular to Tünel

In summer this centre hosts low-key performances and recitals mainly organised by the Borusan Arts & Culture Centre (opposite).

LÜTFİ KIRDAR CONCERT HALL

Map p115
Convention Centre, Lütfi Kırdar Kongre ve Sergi Salonu; ☎ 212-296 3055; Darülbeyaz Sokak, Harbiye; 🚶 Kabataş, then funicular to Taksim

Originally built for the 1948 World Wrestling Championships, this huge refurbished concert hall hosts conferences, the Borusan İstanbul Philharmonic Orchestra, and events for the International İstanbul Music Festival and İstanbul Film Festival (p16).

TARİK ZAFER TUNAYA KÜLTÜR MERKEZİ

Map p107
Tarık Zafer Tunaya Cultural Centre; ☎ 212-293 1270; Şahkulu Bostanı Sokak 8, Tünel; 🚶 Karaköy, then funicular to Tünel

As well as its regular screenings of Turkish flicks and informative lectures on Turkish culture, this centre hosts music events, including occasional performances of Ottoman music.

DANCE FOLK DANCE

Many people immediately think of belly dancing when they hear the term 'Turkish folk dance', but there are other, far more authentic, traditional dance forms in the country. Although belly dancing has a long, wobbly and undulating history, contrary to popular belief it's not strictly a Turkish dance. It's said to have originated in Egypt as a meditative-erotic dance to entertain the elite in life and death, and was

brought to Turkey during the Ottoman Empire. Today in İstanbul it's mainly tourist fodder, and although it's entertaining – and pretty sexy – the dancers are usually second-rate and you won't see a performance of the art at anywhere near its best.

As well as belly dancing, other dances can be seen at the cheery, touristy 'Turkish Shows' around town. These provide a snapshot of Turkey's folk dances (with belly dancing), usually accompanied by dinner. Beloved by package-tour operators, they are expensive and the food is usually mediocre at best. Still, if you are keen to see some folk dance while you're in town these are usually the only places you'll be able to do it.

Finally, check with the cultural centres to see if any special folk dance performances are programmed. If you're lucky enough to be in town when they are, snap up a ticket.

DANCE OF COLOURS

Map p78
☎ 212-517 8692; www.dancesofcolours.com; FKM Fırat Culture Centre, Divan Yolu Caddesi, Çemberlitaş; YTL31; 🚶 7.30pm Tue, Thu & Sat; 🚶 Çemberlitaş

This popular performance features dances from 10 different regions of Turkey. If you want to see a dervish whirl, a belly dancer undulate and lots more, this one-hour show is for you. Colourful costumes and professional dancers make for a good evening's fun, with the added bonus that you don't have to fork out for an indifferent meal. It's possible to arrange a hotel pick-up if you request this when booking.

ORIENT HOUSE

Map p78
☎ 212-517 6163; www.orienthouseistanbul.com; Tiyatro Caddesi 27, Beyazıt; adult/child 5-9/child under 5 YTL128/64/free; 🚶 8.30pm-midnight; 🚶 Beyazıt
Orient House is popular mainly because it's close to Sultanahmet and its spruikers have sprinkled brochures and the promise of attractive commissions around many Sultanahmet hotels. Still, its live Ottoman janissary band, ersatz traditional wedding and Sufi *sema*, belly dancers and folk dancers seem to be exactly what its audiences like. The price includes a three-course dinner with drinks.

BALLET

Like opera, ballet has a keen following among the moneyed elite in İstanbul. There are occasional performances by home-grown and

international artists, usually at the Atatürk Cultural Centre (p188). The city's major company is the **İstanbul State Opera & Ballet** (☎ 212-251 1023; www.idobale.com), based at the Atatürk Cultural Centre.

THEATRE

The Turks are enthusiastic theatregoers and have a special genius for dramatic art. The problem for the foreign visitor is language, as most performances are in Turkish. Your best chance of seeing theatre in English is during April's International İstanbul Theatre Festival (p16), where some English-language plays are

staged, often sponsored by cultural organisations such as the British Council.

One form of theatre that is accessible to foreign visitors is the famous *karagöz* (shadow-puppet theatre). Although the country's main troupe is based in Bursa, it also performs in İstanbul. The puppets (10cm to 50cm tall) are cut from hide pieces, coated with oil to promote translucency and decorated with colourful paints. Most have movable arms and legs, and some have movable heads. During the performances they prance behind a white sheet enacting stories. The best time to see *karagöz* is in May each year, when the city hosts the International Ülker Puppet Festival İstanbul (p16).

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SPORTS & ACTIVITIES

top picks

- Çırağan Palace Hotel Kempinski (p192) Top pool
- Orsepi Royal Hotel (p192) Top gym
- Ambassador Hotel Spa Center (p192) Top massage
- Çemberlitaş Hamamı (p193) Top hamam
- Yeşildirek Hamamı (p195) Top gay hamam

SPORTS & ACTIVITIES

There's plenty to do in İstanbul when you want a break from the sights. You can check out the summer social scene beside a five-star hotel swimming pool, succumb to the steam and a soapy scrub in one of the city's historic hamams, or scream yourself hoarse with the rest of the crowd at a Super League football match. Whichever you choose, you're bound to enjoy yourself.

HEALTH & FITNESS

In summer, going to a swimming pool here is more about seeing and being seen than getting fit, which is why the pools at the five-star hotels are so popular with locals. These hotels probably offer the best options for those travellers craving a gym workout, too.

SWIMMING

Swimming in the Bosphorus is only an option for those who have a death wish. Those with a hankering for the water can head to the beaches at Yeşilköy and Florya (you can get to these by train from Sirkeci Railway Station) – but only to paddle. The water around the Princes' Islands is relatively clean, though the tiny beaches are crammed bottom-to-bottom in summer.

Most of İstanbul's pool facilities are privately owned and open to members only. However, it's possible to organise a pricey day pass to use the leisure facilities at many of the city's luxury hotels, and there's much to be said for the idea of spending a day poolside at one of these places, particularly when good eateries, a health club and Bosphorus views come as part of the package. Here's a list of top hotel pools:

Çırağan Palace Hotel Kempinski (Map p115; ☎ 212-326 4646; Çırağan Caddesi 32, Beşiktaş; weekdays YTL115, weekends YTL175; 🕒 7am-11pm; 🚿 56).

Hotel Les Ottomans (☎ 212-359 1500; Muallim Naci Caddesi 68, Kuruçeşme; YTL100; 🕒 9am-7pm; 🚿 25E, 25T, 40)

Istanbul Hilton (Map p115; ☎ 212-3156000; Cumhuriyet Caddesi, Harbiye; weekdays YTL70, weekends YTL110; 🕒 8am-8pm; 🚿 Kabataş then funicular to Taksim)

Swissôtel İstanbul the Bosphorus (Map p117; ☎ 212-326 1100; Bayıldım Caddesi 2, Maçka; weekdays YTL80, weekends YTL100; 🕒 8am-7pm; 🚿 25E, 25T, 40)

GYMS

Many of the local gyms are testosterone-packed joints full of muscles and attitude.

The equipment is usually fairly limited too, so it's probably worth forking out a bit more and paying for a day pass at one of the big international hotels.

ORSEP ROYAL HOTEL Map p63

☎ 212-511 8585; www.orseproyalhotel.com; Nöbethane Caddesi 10, Sirkeci; day pass YTL30; 🕒 9am-9pm; 🚿 Sirkeci

Conveniently located behind Sirkeci Railway Station, this hotel has an excellent gym and wellness centre with an indoor pool, hamam, sauna, steambath, Jacuzzi and new exercise equipment. There's also a rooftop pool with fabulous panoramic views.

ACTIVITIES

Sightseeing is the activity you'll indulge in most while in İstanbul, but while you're here it's worth forgoing the sights for a few hours and surrendering your body to the steamy environs of the hamam. If you're here over a weekend, it's also worth thinking about attending a football match. Just try to make sure it's one where Galatasaray, Fenerbahçe or Beşiktaş are playing, because these are the most exciting.

HAMAMS

We run the danger of sounding like your mum here, but frankly, we just don't think it's advisable for you to leave İstanbul without having a bath. A Turkish bath, that is...

AMBASSADOR HOTEL SPA CENTER

Map p50

☎ 212-512 0002; www.hotelambassador.com; Ticarethane Sokak 19, Sultanahmet; Turkish bath with soap & oil massage YTL50; 🕒 8am-10pm; 🚿 Sultanahmet

We reckon the best hamam experience in the city is on offer at this shabby modern hotel just off Divan Yolu. There's no atmosphere to speak of, but the bath and

massage packages are excellent value. Best of all, you get the pretty (but small) hamam all to yourself. The 75-minute Turkish massage treatment gives you the same package that you get in the big hamams (bath, scrub and soap massage), but what makes this place superior is the 30-minute oil massage after the bath, which is given by Zeki Ulusoy. Zeki is trained in sports, remedial and aromatherapy massage and he really knows his stuff – you'll float out of here at the end of your session. You can also book the hamam for private use (YTL17 per person per hour).

CAĞALOĞLU HAMAMI Map p63

☎ 212-522 2424; www.cagaloluhamami.com.tr; Yerebatan Caddesi 34, Cağaloğlu; standard/luxury bath, scrub & massage YTL54/72, bath only YTL24; 🕒 8am-10pm men, 8am-8pm women; 🚿 Sultanahmet

Built over three centuries ago, this is one of the city's most beautiful hamams. It boasts (without evidence) that King Edward VIII, Kaiser Wilhelm II, Franz Liszt, Cameron Diaz and Florence Nightingale have enjoyed its pleasures, no doubt at the same time and with Elvis in attendance. It's pricey, but the surroundings are so impressive that they've featured in everything from soap ads to an *Indiana Jones* film. Separate baths each have a large *camekan* (reception area), where it's possible to have a nap or a tea at the end of your bath. Be warned: staff here have a reputation for hassling for tips.

ÇEMBERLİTAŞ HAMAMI Map p50

☎ 212-522 7974; Vezir Hanı Caddesi 8, Çemberlitaş; bath, scrub & soap massage YTL40, bath YTL28, 30-min oil massage YTL28; 🕒 6am-midnight; 🚿 Çemberlitaş

There won't be too many times in your life when you'll get the opportunity to have a Turkish bath in a building dating back to 1584, so now might well be the time to do it. Commissioned by Nurbanu Sultan, wife of Selim II and mother of Murat III, this hamam was designed by the great architect Sinan and is among the most beautiful in the city. Just off Divan Yolu near the Grand Bazaar, it's a double hamam (separate baths for men and women) that's particularly popular with tourists. Although the splendid *camekan* is unfortunately for men only (women must put up with a utilitarian corridor filled with lockers and

benches), the *sıcaklık* (hot room) in each section is a glorious space with a large marble *göbektaşı* (raised platform above the heating source) and domed ceilings with star-like apertures admitting filtered light. In the women's *sıcaklık* it's not unusual for one of the masseuses to break into song. For your money you'll get lots of heat and a thorough and very soapy massage. There's a 20% discount for ISIC student-card holders.

SÜLEYMANIYE HAMAMI Map p78

☎ 212-519 5569; www.suleymaniyehamami.com; Mimar Sinan Caddesi 20, Süleymaniye; from the Old City YTL51, from Beyoğlu YTL60; 🕒 6am-midnight; 🚿 Beyazıt

Another hamam designed by Sinan, though this one's not as impressive as the Çemberlitaş and is a mixed bath with only male masseurs, meaning that some women will not feel comfortable here. The price includes bath, scrub and soap massage, as well as a free pick-up and drop off from your hotel. It has to be said that the fact that the hamam proudly advertises that life insurance is included in the price of its hamam treatment is slightly disconcerting!

TARİHİ GALATASARAY HAMAMI

Map p107

Historic Galatasaray Turkish Bath; ☎ 212-522 4242; Turnacıbaşı Sokak 24, Çukurcuma; full treatment YTL63, bath YTL30; 🕒 men 6am-10pm, women 8am-8pm; 🚿 Kabataş, then funicular to Taksim

Though not as pretty as many Old İstanbul hamams (it dates from 1964), this quiet place off İstiklal Caddesi is one of the city's best, with lots of marble decoration, small cubicles for resting and sipping tea after the bath, pretty fountains and even a shoeshine service. Parts of the building date from 1481, but it has been rebuilt several times. The interiors are much nicer in the men's section than the women's. It's famous for having one of the hottest *göbektaşı* in town (that sounds rude but we mean it literally).

GAY HAMAMS & SAUNAS

Stuff goes on at these places that the *imam* sure ain't going to approve of. All are for men only.

HAMAM ETIQUETTE

The concept of the steam bath was passed from the Romans to the Byzantines and then on to the Turks, who named it the hamam and have relished it ever since. They've even exported the concept throughout the world, hence the term Turkish bath. Until recent decades, many homes in İstanbul didn't have washing facilities and, due to Islam's emphasis on personal squeaky-cleanliness, the community relied on the hundreds of hamams that were constructed throughout the city, often as part of the mosque complex. Of course, it wasn't only personal hygiene that was attended to in the hamam. It was the perfect place for a prospective mother-in-law to eye off, and pinch and prod a prospective daughter-in-law, for instance, and it was equally good for catching up on the neighbourhood gossip. Now that many people have bathrooms in İstanbul, hamams are nowhere near as popular as they used to be, but some carry on, no doubt due to their role as local meeting places. Others have become extremely successful tourist attractions.

The city's hamams vary enormously. Some are dank dives where you may come out dirtier than you went in (remember – Turks call cockroaches 'hamam insects'); others are plain and clean, servicing a predominantly local clientele. An increasing number are building a reputation as gay meeting places (we're talking truly steamy here) and a handful are geared exclusively towards tourists. If you're only going to visit one or two when you're in town, we suggest you choose the 'Big Two' – **Cağaloğlu** and **Çemberlitaş** (see p193). Sure, they're touristy, but they're also gorgeous, historic buildings where most of the clientele will be having their first experience of a hamam, so you won't feel out of place. They're also clean and have some English-speaking staff.

Bath Procedure

Upon entry you are shown to a *camekan* (entrance hall or space) where you will be allocated a dressing *halvet* (cubicle) or locker and given a *peştemal* (bath-wrap) and *nailn* (wooden sandals). Store your clothes and don the *peştemal* and *nailn*. An attendant will then lead you through the *soğukluk* (intermediate section) to the *sıcaklık* (hot section), where you sit and sweat for a while, relaxing and loosening up, perhaps on the *göbektaş* (central, raised platform atop the heating source).

Soon you will be half-asleep and as soft as putty from the steamy heat. The cheapest bath is the one you do yourself, having brought your own soap, shampoo and towel. But the real Turkish bath experience is to have a *tellak* (attendant) wash, scrub and massage you.

If you have opted for the latter, an attendant douses you with warm water and lathers you with a sudsy swab. Next you are scrubbed with a coarse cloth mitten loosening dirt you never suspected you had. After a massage (these yo-yo between being enjoyable, limp-wristed or mortally dangerous) comes a shampoo and another dousing with warm water, followed by one with cool water.

When the scrubbing is over, stay in the *sıcaklık* relaxing or head for the cool room and grab a towel. You then go back to your locker or cubicle to get dressed – if you've got a *halvet* you can even have a rest or order something to drink. If you want to nap, tell the attendant when to wake you. The average hamam experience takes around one hour.

Modesty

Traditional Turkish baths have separate sections for men and women, or have only one set of facilities and admit men or women at different times. Bath etiquette requires that men remain clothed with the bath-wrap at all times. In the women's section, women sometimes wear their underwear (but not their bra). It's up to you – most tourists seem not to do this. During the bathing, everyone washes their private parts themselves, without removing the bath-wrap or underclothes.

In touristy areas, some baths now accept that foreign men and women like to bathe together. No Turkish woman would let a masseur touch her (it must be a masseuse), but masseurs are usually the only massagers available in these foreign-oriented baths. We suggest that women willing to accept a masseur should have the massage within view of male companions or other friends.

Practicalities

Soap, shampoo and towels are provided at all of the hamams we've reviewed; if you're just having a bath, you'll need to pay for the soap and shampoo separately – it's usually included in the cost of full treatments. Çemberlitaş is the only hamam where the price includes tips; others will tell you that tipping is at your discretion, but frankly, you've got as much of a chance of leaving without tipping as you have of approaching the Blue Mosque and being ignored by the touts selling postcards. We suggest giving 10% to 20% of the total fee (depending on service). You'll get drenched, so make sure you take a comb, toiletries, make-up and (if you choose to wear underwear during the massage) a dry pair of replacement knickers.

AĞA HAMAMI Map p107

☎ 212-249 5027; Turnacıbaşı Sokak 66, Çukurcuma, Beyoğlu; bath YTL20, with massage YTL30; ☎ 5pm-5am; 🚗 Kabataş, then funicular to Taksim This historical hamam is down the street from İstanbul's premier chicks-with-dicks club, Sahra. Though it has been closely and beautifully restored to its original Ottoman glory, we have to say that it's not the antique ambience that brings the boys here in the early morning hours, especially during the weekend – the attraction is undoubtedly what they can do under the sleepy eyes of the bathhouse attendants.

AQUARIUS Map p107

☎ 212-251 8925; Sadri Alisik Sokak 29/1, Beyoğlu; admission YTL30, massage per hr YTL50; ☎ 24hr; 🚗 Kabataş, then funicular to Taksim Unabashedly proclaiming itself as 'the only gay sauna in İstanbul', Aquarius can also lay claim to having the only swimming pool in its premises, which means it comes closest to what most Western gay sauna habitués are used to – most notably a clean environment. An added attraction is the stable of 14 hunky, delicious masseurs who take you into the private cubicles for a massage – be sure to negotiate the price and the service parameters clearly. Note: what goes on here should remain here.

ÇEŞME HAMAMI Map p103

☎ 212-252 3441; Yeni Çeşme Sokak 9, off Perşembe Pazarı Caddesi, Karaköy; with/without massage YTL15/25; ☎ 8am-7pm; 🚗 Karaköy Its maze-like location in a backstreet behind the hardware stores that litter this part of town often discourages the non-local bathhouse action seekers. But this favourite hamam of bears and pot-bellied moustachioed types is worth finding because of the relaxed attitude of the management. Just be careful you don't stick out like a pink thumb or you'll incite a feeding frenzy.

YEŞİLDİREK HAMAMI Map p103

Tersane Caddesi 74, Azapkapı; bath YTL20, with massage YTL30; ☎ 6am-9pm; 🚗 Karaköy This spacious, well-maintained hamam (located across from Azapkapı Sokollu Mehmet Paşa Camii at the base of the Atatürk Bridge) with all the traditional trappings is crowded with testosterone-laden bathhouse lovers – among them expats

and in-the-know tourists – who have been displaced from other bathing areas in the city where vigilance has become the norm. The need for discretion cannot be over-emphasised here.

SPECTATOR SPORTS

In İstanbul, there's only one spectator sport worth mentioning, and that's the football (soccer). If you're a football fan, attending a match here will be one of the highlights of your stay. And even if you're not sport-mad, these events can provide a fascinating insight into the city's psyche.

FOOTBALL

The Big Three (*Üç Büyükler*) teams in the national Super League (*Turkcell Süper Lig*) are Galatasaray, Fenerbahçe and Beşiktaş. All are based in İstanbul, and locals are extravagantly proud of them. Indeed, when Galatasaray became the first Turkish team to win a UEFA Cup (in 2000), locals went wild with excitement – in many eyes it was probably the most significant event since the Conquest. When the national team reached the semifinals of the World Cup in 2002 and ended up in third place, an estimated 1.5 million people came out on İstanbul's streets to congratulate the players on their return. As most of the team members were sourced from the ranks of the city's big three clubs, it was seen as a local triumph as well as a national victory.

There are two other teams based in the city: Kasımpaşa SK and İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi.

Many of the İstanbul teams have strong roots in local or ethnic communities. Translated, Fenerbahçe means 'Garden of the Lighthouse', a clear reference to the Greek community in old Phanar (today's Fener); and Galatasaray was formed by Muslim students of the French-run Galatasaray Lycée.

For the 24 hours preceding a big match, team scarves are worn, flags are flutter and hotted-up testosterone-motors bounce up and down at red lights before screeching off dragging team colours behind them. At the end of the game, traffic around Beyoğlu crawls to a halt as merrymakers head to Taksim Square to celebrate. Here, the crowds sway, chant club anthems, wave club flags and clamber all over each other, while many still find time to ogle passing women (football is strictly a male concern).

THE BIG THREE

- **Beşiktaş** (www.bjk.com.tr) Home stadium: İnönü Stadyumu, Beşiktaş. Colours: black and white.
- **Fenerbahçe** (www.fenerbahce.org.tr) Home stadium: Rüşti Saraçoğlu Stadyumu, Kadıköy. Colours: yellow and blue.
- **Galatasaray** (www.galatasaray.org.tr) Home stadium: Ali Sami Yen Stadyum, Mecidiyeköy (about 3km northeast of Taksim). Colours: yellow and red.

Eighteen teams from all over Turkey compete from August to May. Each season three move up from the second league into the first

and three get demoted. The top team of the first league plays in the UEFA Cup. Matches are usually held on the weekend, often on a Saturday night. Tickets are sold at the stadium (*stadyum*) on the day of the match, but most fans purchase them ahead of time through **Biletix** (☎ 216-454 1555, 216-556 9800; www.biletix.com). Open seating is affordable; covered seating – which has the best views – can be very pricey.

Although violence at home games is not unknown, most matches are fine. If you're worried, avoid the Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe clashes, as the supporters of these arch rivals can become overly excited and throw a few punches around.