

# GOING TO Istanbul

By ANNA SUSSMAN

## Why Go Now

After getting a green light in December to negotiate entry into the European Union, Turkey is buzzing with change. Turkey has reinvented its currency as the new lira, opened a new modern art museum and is feeling a new burst of confidence. Shakeups at the political level have led to a merged Ministry of Culture and Tourism and larger budgets for the arts, a move designed to push Turkey's cultural profile into the international news, even as Istanbul grabs headlines with its human rights reforms.

The new Istanbul Museum of Modern Art makes an unmistakable statement about Istanbul's self-perception as a major cultural capital. The gravel courtyard and warehouse-like exterior are reminiscent of P.S. 1 in Long Island City, Queens, and the interior—with its industrial feel and long, fluorescently lit hallways lined with amply spaced paintings—brings to mind the Pompidou Center in Paris.

The lively cafe culture in the artsy Beyoglu district reflects this renewed energy. Beyoglu was a renowned intellectual center in the 1960's and 70's, and, despite a period of decline, the narrow streets again resemble the Beyoglu of 350 years ago, which the



Dining on the terrace at Hotel Anemon Galata, near the 15th-century tower.

contemporary travel writer Evliya Celebi described as a place where "the word *guhna*, temptation, is most particularly applied... because there all kinds of playing and dancing boys, mimics and fools, flock together and delight themselves day and night."

## Where to Stay

Try running the names of hotels through a search engine before you book; some travel agencies' Web sites offer lower rates than those quoted below. In winter, prices can drop by as much as 50 percent.

Film directors, actors and writers thrive in the rundown, eccentric atmosphere of the **Buyuk Londra Hotel**, with its threadbare wine-red carpeting and old crystal chandeliers in the lobby. The hotel, at Mesrutiyet Caddesi 117, (90-212) 245 0670 or (90-212) 293 1619, has recently redone some of its rooms with water views and added such amenities as televisions and air-conditioning and is billing them as "special rooms." The owner has an interesting collection of antique radios. Special rooms are \$82 to \$295, at \$1.37 to the euro; old rooms are sometimes discounted to \$41 to \$55.

Up the street, at Mesrutiyet Caddesi 130, **Ansen 130 Suites**, (90-212) 245 8808, at [www.ansensuite.com](http://www.ansensuite.com), is a new boutique hotel in an ornate, creamy building that dates back to Ottoman times. It has 10 suites, each bigger than many Manhattan one-bedrooms, furnished in glass, steel and sleek wood, and equipped with wireless Internet access and a full kitchen, for

Most of the rooms at the charming **Anemon Galata**, Buyukhendek Caddesi 11, (90-212) 293 2343, [www.anemonhotels.com](http://www.anemonhotels.com), have a view of either the 15th-century Galata Tower or the Bosphorus. Rooms at the ends of the floor have fine views, but if you don't get one of those, spend some time in



A pan of baklava at Gulluoglu near the Istanbul Modern Museum.

the restaurant on the top floor. Its floor-to-ceiling windows offer a spectacular panorama. Doubles for \$215 a night.

On the Asian side of the Bosphorus, the new **Ajla hotel**, Ciftoklu Caddesi 27, (90-212) 413 8390, [www.ajlahotel.com](http://www.ajlahotel.com), brings elegant modern design to a sleepy little fishing village. The 19 rooms and 6 suites in the restored mansion are tucked behind the coastal road, with a dining room and terraces perched on the water. The luxury comes at a price; doubles begin at \$341, plus tax and breakfast.

## Where to Eat

Just up the hill from Taksim Square in Harbiye is **Loft**, located in the Istanbul Convention and Exhibition Center, (90-212) 219 6384 or (90-212) 219 8385, on the Web at [www.fcoc.org/rumelimed.htm](http://www.fcoc.org/rumelimed.htm). The Mediterranean cuisine is flawless and the service impeccable; the menu includes excellent seafood pancakes, tender filet mignon, and homemade goat cheese ravioli. Dinner for two, with wine, about \$140.

The new cafe at the Istanbul Modern museum overlooking the Bosphorus is operated by the managers of Loft. Elements of the Loft menu have made the move, but the excellent service and painstaking care in the kitchen seem to have been lost along the way. Spoonfuls of the Turkish baked rice pudding, however, which emphasizes milky pudding over rice, will ease thoughts of the forgetful waiter from your mind. Lunch for two, \$35.

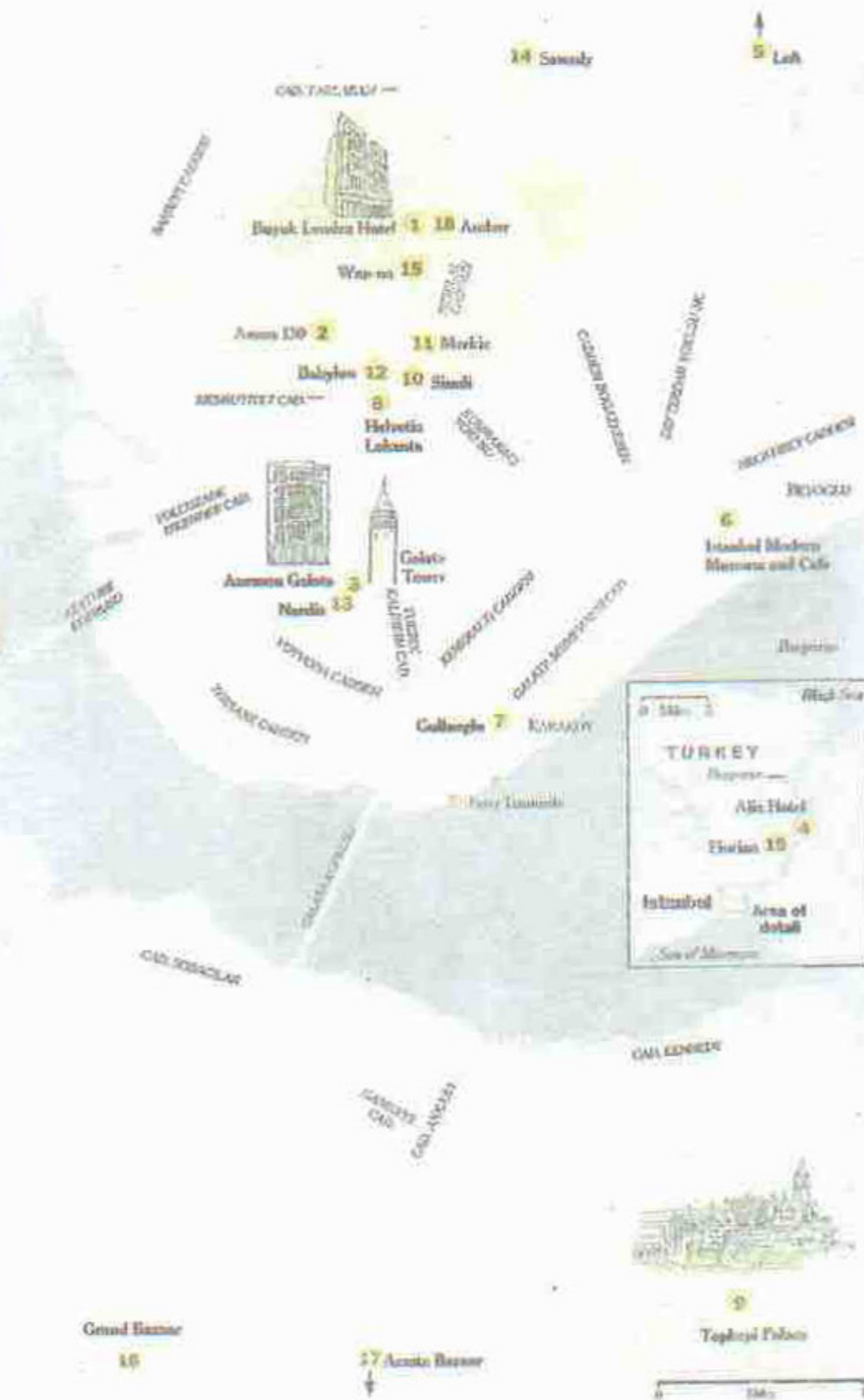
Or, save your new lira (one new lira is a million old lira) and get a quick bite at **Gulluoglu**, Munkhane Caddesi 171, (90-212) 249 9680 in Karakoy, a few blocks from the Modern. It's known for the best pastry in Is-



Tourists and local people eat seafood near the fish bazaar in Beyoglu.

tanbul, and a superior *su borek*, a lasagne without meat and sauce, made from sheets of pasta layered with cheese and covered with a flaky pastry crust (\$2). Eat inside at the freestanding counter to get a glimpse of big-bellied Turkish men attempting to stretch their mouths wide enough for the large diamonds of unfathomably rich sweet baklava to pass through whole. A plate of assorted pastry goes for around \$4.

Back in Beyoglu, **Helvetia Lokanta**, Gen. Yuzgan Sokak 12, (90-212) 245 8780, is the perfect neighborhood restaurant. The



small open kitchen takes up about a third of the restaurant, while the other two-thirds is occupied by hipsters craving mom's home cooking. The small, handwritten menu of Turkish specialties changes daily. Dinner for two, \$25.

## What to Do During the Day

Istanbul's main attraction has always been the stunning Old City, with its breathtaking mosques and palaces. For an Ottoman-era "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" experience, nothing beats the **Topkapi Palace** (90-212) 512 0480, on the Web at [www.ee.bilkent.edu.tr/~history/topkapi.html](http://www.ee.bilkent.edu.tr/~history/topkapi.html). Its four treasury rooms, containing too many golf-ball sized emeralds and diamonds to count, are mind-boggling. Admission to the Palace, with treasury rooms, is \$17 at 1.35 new lira to the dollar, or \$9.30 without. Open daily except Tuesday. Cross back over the bridge to Beyoglu, where newer-fangled diversions await. The new **Istanbul Modern museum**, Mecidiyekoy Caddesi Liman Sahasi Antrepo 4, (90-212) 334 7300, on the Web at [www.istanbulmodern.org](http://www.istanbulmodern.org), shows the work of prominent and emerging Turkish artists, with a strong photography show on the bottom floor. Admission is \$3.87.

Relax and enjoy **Simdi**, Asmal Mescit 9, (90-212) 252 5443, the platonic ideal of a cafe, with its comfy chairs, high ceilings, and brilliant selection of magazines ranging from *Wallpaper* to *New Africa*. Or inhale the 1930's Art Nouveau atmosphere of **Markiz**, 362 Istiklal Caddesi, (90-212) 245

3394, over a cup of *shilep* (\$1.55), a creamy winter drink made from wild orchid root and sprinkled with cinnamon, before emerging back onto the street.

## What to Do at Night

Istanbulians emerge in droves on the weekends, so reserve a table or buy a ticket in advance. See [www.biletix.com](http://www.biletix.com) for concert listings.

**Babylon**, Seybender Sokak 3 (90-212) 292 7368, [www.babylon.com.tr](http://www.babylon.com.tr), is a gorgeous, legendary and blissfully well-ventilated place with acts ranging from mildly politicized Turkish hip-hop to live jazz and Turkish folk music. Winding over to **Nardis**, Galata Kulesi Sokak 14 (90-212) 244



A salesman awaits customers at his clothing shop in the Grand Bazaar.