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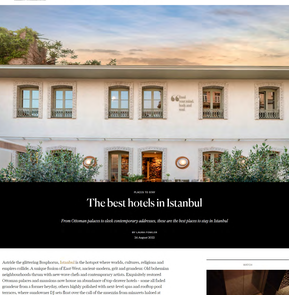


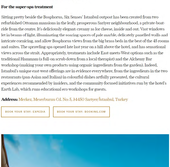
PLACES TO STAY

# The best hotels in Istanbul

*From Ottoman palaces to slick contemporary addresses, these are the best places to stay in Istanbul*

BY CHRIS COBLER
28 August 2022

Astride the glittering Bosphorus, Istanbul is the hotspot where wealth, cultures, religions and empires collide. A unique fusion of East West, ancient modern, grit and grandeur. Old Ottoman neighbourhoods thrum with new wave chefs and emergency artists. Exquisitely restored Ottoman palaces and mansions now house an abundance of top-drawer hotels – some all-faded splendour, others slick contemporary. Whichever you choose, you'll be rewarded with a cocktail of textures, where sandstone Lil pots floor over the cell of the mosaics from ancient Byzantine of golden leaves. For the latest spots worthy of a stay, these are the best hotels in Istanbul.



## 1. Six Senses Kocataş Mansions, Sariyer

**For the super-spa treatment**

Sitting pretty beside the Bosphorus, Six Senses' Istanbul outpost has been created from two refurbished Ottoman mansions in the leafy, prosperous Sariyer neighborhood, a picture-boat ride from the centre. It's deliciously elegant, creamy in its hues and soft on the eyes, with a nautical bent to its decor and, of course, the Bosphorus never far from view. Rooms are called Suites and have a lounge area, and allow Bosphorus views from the big bow-bels in the best of the 40 rooms and suites. The sprawling spa spread just last year on a hill above the hotel, and has sensational views across the strait. Appropriately, treatments include Kose aaseri Wint options such as the traditional Hammam to full six-week detox from a local therapist and the Alchemy Bar workshop making your own products using organic ingredients from the garden. Indeed, Istanbul's unique ease were offerings are in evidence everywhere. From the ingredients in the two restaurants (pan Asian and Italian) to colourful dishes artfully presented, the cultural amalgamation continues. Guests can also take part in Istanbul-based initiatives run by the hotel's Earth Lab, which runs educational eco workshops for guests.

**Address:** Meclis, Mesebasma Cd. No:15, 34457 Sariyer/Istanbul, Turkey

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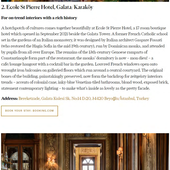

## 2. Ecole St Pierre Hotel, Galata, Karaköy

**For our favourite interiors with a rich history**

A lovingly-lit collection comes together beautifully at Ecole St Pierre Hotel, a 12-room boutique hotel in Karaköy, a short walk from the Galata Tower. Its 19th-century Ottoman-era building, set in the gardens of an Italian monastery, it was designed by Italian architect Giuseppe Fiscarelli (who restored the Hagia Sofia in the mid-19th century), run by Dominican monks, and attended by pupils from all over Europe. The remains of the 14th-century Genoese mosque of Constantinople form part of the restaurant, the monks' dormitory is now – sans dorm! – a cells lounge lounge with a cocktail bar by the garden. Louvered French windows open onto wrought iron balconies on gallerled floors which run around a central courtyard. The original bones of the building, and original detail preserved, now form the backdrop for stripped-back interior trends – accents of colonial rust, inky blue Venetian-style bathrooms, hand-wood, exposed brick, statement contemporary lighting – to make which inside is lovely as the pretty Karaköy.

**Address:** Bereketzade, Galata Kulesi Sk, No:14 D:20, 34421 Beyoğlu/Istanbul, Turkey

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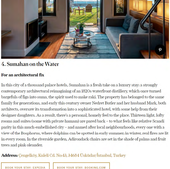

SOHO HOUSE

## 3. Soho House Istanbul, Beyoğlu

**For growy grandeur**

A 19th-century Ottoman palace turned US Consulate finds itself perfectly to the Soho House aesthetic. When it opened, Soho House Istanbul was the group's most ambitious yet, and for many, it's still the most beautiful, all the original detail preserved, painted and panelled walls, frescoed and embellished ceilings, intricate Art Nouveau brasswork, and marble staircases leading to the 40 rooms and suites. Rooms are decorated in a mix of Ottoman and Mediterranean and eastern furniture, armchairs in leather, velvet and rose – ashed up with elements from the Soho antique Turkish rugs, and hammas in the spa. Up top, the palazzo operates a green crop of trees offering sun-dappled shade over Aphrodite Terrace. Its head-over-sole Mediterranean restaurant, where Mykonos chef Athinagoras Kostakis has devised a menu of punchy Mediterranean cuisine with a Mexican twist. Fittingly for a hotel in Beyoğlu, the bohemian neighborhood where Orhan Pamuk set his novels, vibrant with restaurants and bars, independent galleries and boutiques.

**Address:** Büyükparmakkapı Cd. No:35, 34430 Beyoğlu/Istanbul, Turkey

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## 4. Nomahan on the Water

**For an architectural fix**

In this city of a thousand palace hotels, Nomahan is a fresh take on a luxury stay: a strongly contemporary boutique hotel with a nautical bent. Its 18 rooms and suites have the intimate hospitality of big-ship cruises, the spirit need to make ship. The property has belonged to the same family for generations, and early 19th-century owner Nedret Beder and her husband Halil, both architects, oversaw its transformation into a sophisticated hotel, with some help from their designer daughters. As a result, there's a personal, homely feel to the place. Thirteen light, lofty rooms and suites come with private balconies and pared back – so what feels like relative beach purity in this much-embellished city – and sound after local neighbourhoods, every one with a view of the Bosphorus, where dolphins can be spotted nearly summer in summer, cool floors can do in every room, in the riverside gardens, Adirondack chairs are set in the shade of pillas and fruit trees and pink oleanders.

**Address:** Cengelkoy, Kefeli Cd. No:43, 34684 Üsküdar/Istanbul, Turkey

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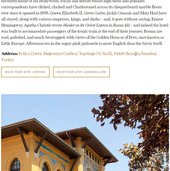

MARRIOTT BONVOY

## 5. Splendid Palace Hotel, Büyükada

**For time-warm charm**

Istanbul has its own archipelago – who knew? The Princes' Islands, where unpopular rentals land also, incidentally. Leon Trotsky were sure exiled. By the 20th-century the archipelago had become a summer retreat for wealthy Istanbulites escaping the city swelter for the Ottoman palaces and little Egeian mansions set in its green and peaceful shores. Perhaps the most magnificent of the lot is the Splendid Palace, a 19th-century Ottoman mansion set in a pine forest overlooking Aleppo cottages. It's Moo-ish ceiling inside and out – a 1908 symphony of Moorish art nouveau and Eastern embellishment in the colours of the Turkish flag, topped with twin onion domes. Bulb of brilliant red – shutters, screens, strip ceasers – blaze against the all-white building. Bar an Anish Kapoor installation (interior on a little touched and faded just so, original detailing intact, from the giant king Hippery of ceilings to the wooden lobby desk and 1920s pineapple lamp. These pulleried stories: 49 rooms wrap around a tiled courtyard, with its fountain and parcel pines, pared pillas and rose furniture, and red and white striped sun loungers line the pool terrace.

**Address:** Büyükada, Adalar, Türkiye, Nizam Cd. No:39, 34970, Adalar/Istanbul, Turkey

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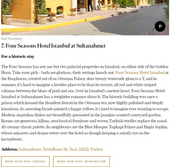

## 6. Pera Palace Hotel

**For just-up glamour**

Pera Palace is to Istanbul what The Savoy is to London – a grande dame of the Belle Époque, furnished based of old Hollywood, crush and literal whose high beds and polished correspondence lure clicked, clacked and Clarkstressed across its characteristic marble floors, ever since it opened in 1892. Queen Elizabeth II, Greta Garbo, Jackie Onassis and Mata Hari have all stood, along with various emperors, kings, and dukes – and, it goes without saying, Ernest Hemingway. Agatha Christie wrote Murder on the Orient Express in Room 411 – and indeed the hotel was built to accommodate passengers of the Orient Express at the end of the Istanbul line. Its restaurant, Antikahve, and cocktail lounge, with views of the cobbled streets of Pera, are famous in Little Europe. Afternoon tea is the super-posh patisserie to meet English from the Sweet Stuff.

**Address:** Meşrutiyet Caddesi, Tepebaşı/Cd. No:52, 34430 Beyoğlu/Istanbul, Turkey

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FOUR SEASONS

## 7. Four Seasons Hotel Istanbul at Sultanahmet

**For a historic stay**

The Four Seasons has not one but two palatial properties in Istanbul, an either side of the Golden Horn. Take your pick – both are gorgeous, their settings launch out. Four Seasons Hotel Istanbul at the Bosphorus, created out of an Ottoman Palace, does luxury waterside glam to T, and its sumptuous rooms and suites, many with balconies, offer the most romantic of Bosphorus vistas, between the Maiden's Tower and, on a clear day, Istanbul's ancient heart. Four Seasons Hotel Istanbul at Sultanahmet has a weightier romance about it. The historic building was once a palace which housed the chamber literal in the Ottoman era, now lushly painted and deeply luxurious. Its arresting facade painted a happy yellow, it's hard to imagine ever wanting to escape. Modern Anatolian dishes are beautifully presented in the jasmine-scented courtyard garden. Rooms are generous, lilies, artwork and furniture and worm Turkish textiles replace the usual 40 creamy-classic palaces. Its neighbours are the Blue Mosque, Topkapi Palace and Hagia Sophia, whose minarets and domes tower over the hotel as though keeping a saintly eye on the incomers.

**Address:** Sultanahmet, Terbiyikoz Sk, No:1, 34122, Turkey

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## 8. Raffles Istanbul, Besiktas

**For contemporary luxury**

What's this? A five-star Istanbul hotel with not a jot of faded Ottoman splendour to be seen... Yet Raffles is Istanbul through and through – a new moneyed side to the city that's all gilt glass and Gucci, set as it is within the Zorlu Center (a sort of Dubai-does-Westfield on a giant scale) on a hilltop in Besiktas. Overstated glamour is the name of the game here. Vast crystal chandeliers dominate its sparkly atria and gourmet restaurants. Swimming pools glitter inside and out – in the extensive spa and in Lounge 6, a summertime rooftop pool bar showcasing long-reaching views and the work of the world's leading cosmetic surgeons. The Long Bar is a wine-red Turkish take on the Singapore original which, as well as the signature Sling, shakes up uniquely Istanbul concoctions (the bourbon, cumin and baklava Topkapi Palace, for example). 181 contemporary rooms and penthouse suites, all with butler service, are stacked in high-rise towers, the best with views across the city to the strait beyond. Rest assured, the helipad is heated in winter.

**Address:** Levazım, Zorlu Center, Koru Sokağı, 34340 Beşiktaş/İstanbul, Turkey

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## 9. The Bank Hotel Istanbul, Karaköy

**For good-value style**

When it opened as House Hotels' Vault Karakoy, this smart little hotel was one of the pioneers of Istanbul's new wave of contemporary boutique stays. Now it's joined Marriott Bonvoy, but thankfully its understatedly stylish bedrooms remain unchanged, with wooden desks in every room, old iron radiators and arched windows overlooking the affluent Karakoy street. It was once a bank built in the 19th-century in Eclectic style, and elements of its original incarnation survived the careful restoration – spot cash registers, a safe-turned-drinks cabinet in the bar, and a wine cellar in the original vault.

**Address:** Azapkapı, Bankalar Cd. No:5 D:1, 34421 Beyoğlu/İstanbul, Turkey

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## 10. Ciragan Palace Kempinski

**For regal Ottoman splendour**

You might recognise Ciragan Palace's own marble arch: ornately carved, white stone framing the blue Bosphorus, it's the star of a gazillion Instagram posts. And yet it's dwarfed by the vast and completely breathtaking Ciragan Palace itself. Built as a Sultan's residence – the last palace of the Ottoman empire – it sits above the water, as ivory and fanciful as a wedding cake, with its columns and classic Ottoman decoration. After a fire in 1910 it lay in ruins until the 1980s, when restoration began; and now it shines once more. Inside, embellishment from top to toe: domed, corniced ceilings; Moorish painted walls; marble doorways and balustrades and pillars so intricately carved they might be paper cut-outs. There are shiny marble atria, stately drawing rooms, ballrooms, several restaurants, from a street-food truck in the garden to posh Tugra, serving Ottoman dishes on a terrace beneath the marble pillars overlooking the Bosphorus. The best bedrooms are in the palace itself (just 11 of them; the other 299 rooms are in modern neighbouring blocks), wrapped in mahogany and with canopied emperor beds fit for a sultan.

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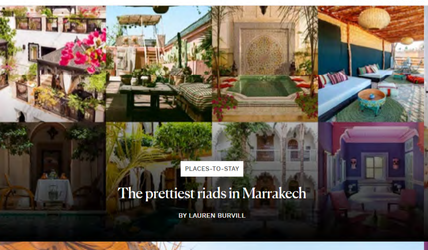

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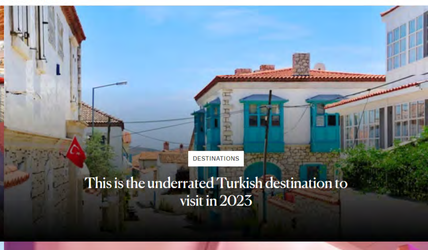

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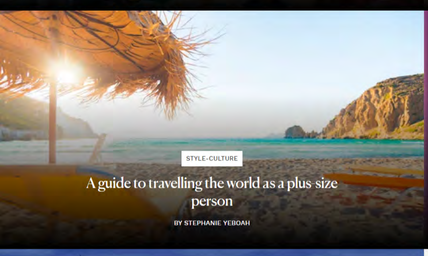

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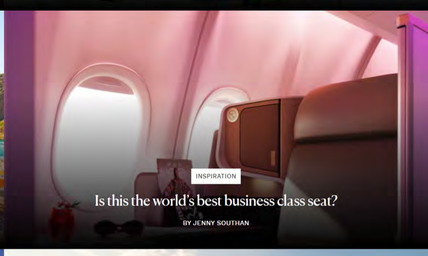

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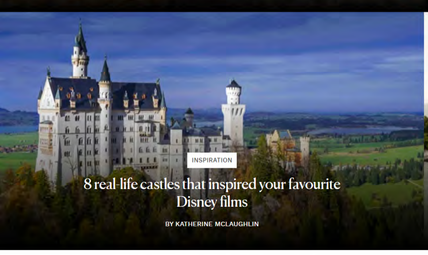

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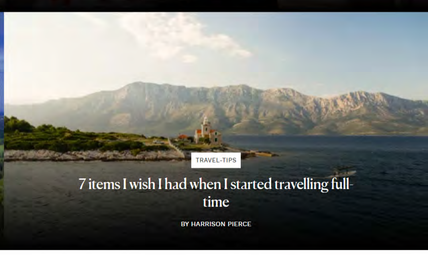

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