
CULTURAL HERITAGE AND ISTANBUL

In order to promote cultural and natural assets of universal value, regarded as the common heritage of all humanity; to raise public awareness for the protection of this universal heritage; and to ensure the necessary cooperation for the preservation of cultural and natural values that have been damaged or lost for various reasons, the **Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage** was adopted on **16 November 1972** during the **17th General Conference of UNESCO**, held in Paris between **17 October and 21 November 1972**.

Türkiye's participation in this Convention was approved by **Law No. 2658 dated 14 April 1982**, ratified by the **Council of Ministers Decision No. 8/4788 dated 23 May 1982**, and published in the **Official Gazette No. 17959 dated 14 February 1983**.

Natural formations, monuments, and sites of international significance that are deemed worthy of appreciation and protection are granted **World Heritage** status. Following an application by the States Parties to UNESCO, candidate properties undergo an evaluation process conducted by experts from the **International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)** and the **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)**. Upon completion of this process, properties are inscribed on the World Heritage List by decision of the **World Heritage Committee**.

One of Türkiye's **19 properties** inscribed on the **UNESCO World Heritage List** is the **Historic Areas of Istanbul**, which were inscribed in **1985**.

In 1985, Istanbul was included on the UNESCO World Heritage List as **four distinct areas**:

- The **Sultanahmet Urban Archaeological Site**, encompassing the Hippodrome, Hagia Sophia, Hagia Irene, Little Hagia Sophia Mosque, and Topkapı Palace;
- The **Süleymaniye Conservation Area**, including the Süleymaniye Mosque and its surroundings;
- The **Zeyrek Conservation Area**, including the Zeyrek Mosque and its surroundings;
- The **Istanbul Land Walls Conservation Area**.

THE ISTANBUL LAND WALLS

The walls surrounding Istanbul were first constructed beginning in the **7th century** and underwent four major phases of destruction and reconstruction. Their final construction dates back to **after 408 AD**. During the reign of **Theodosius II (408–450)**, the walls extended from Sarayburnu along the Golden Horn to Ayvansaray, and from the Marmara coastline to Yedikule, continuing from Yedikule to Topkapı and from Topkapı back to Ayvansaray.

The total length of the walls is **22 km**, comprising **5.5 km** along the Golden Horn, **6.5 km** of land walls, and **9 km** along the Marmara Sea. The land walls consist of three sections: the

moat, the **outer wall**, and the **inner wall**. Today, the moats have largely become agricultural areas.

Along the land walls, at intervals of approximately **50 meters**, there are **96 towers**, many of which are damaged or partially collapsed. These towers extend **10 meters** outward from the main wall, are predominantly square in plan, and reach heights of approximately **25 meters**.

THE GOLDEN HORN

The **Golden Horn** (known in Western sources as *Golden Horn*) is a natural inlet of Istanbul. The term refers to a bay formed at the mouth of a river. According to Greek legend, the Megarians named it after **Keroessa**, the mother of their king Byzas.

Colonization during the Byzantine period began in this area, which also served as the maritime center of the **Byzantine Empire**. Defensive walls along the shoreline were constructed to protect the city from naval attacks. At the entrance of the Golden Horn, a massive chain was stretched from the city to a tower located near the northeastern end of the former Galata Tower to prevent unwanted ships from entering.

This tower was severely damaged during the **Fourth Crusade in 1204** by Latin crusaders. Subsequently, the Genoese constructed a new tower nearby, known today as the **Galata Tower**, built in **1348** and called *Christea Turris* (Tower of Christ).

During the Ottoman period, the area was home to a dense **Bektashi population**, with numerous Bektashi lodges such as **Karaağaç Tekke**, **Karyağdı Baba Tekke**, and **Giresunlu Tekke**.

TOPKAPI PALACE

Topkapı Palace is one of the **oldest and largest surviving palaces in the world**. It is located on the historic acropolis hill, overlooking the Golden Horn, the Bosphorus, and the Sea of Marmara—the original settlement point of Istanbul.

Situated at the tip of the Historic Peninsula, the palace complex is surrounded by **5 km of walls** and covers an area of approximately **700,000 m²**. Resembling a small city rather than a single palace, Topkapı Palace served as the administrative center of the Ottoman Empire for over **500 years**.

After the Ottoman sultans moved to **Dolmabahçe Palace**, Topkapı Palace was neglected for a long period. Restoration efforts during the Republican era restored much of its former grandeur, and today it functions as a museum.

Among the most valuable items displayed are relics attributed to **Prophet Muhammad**, including his cloak, tooth, footprint, and sword, which were brought from Cairo during the

reign of **Sultan Selim I**. Other notable artifacts include the famous **Spoonmaker's Diamond** and the **Topkapı Dagger**.

GALATA TOWER

Located in the Galata district of Beyoğlu, the tower was originally built in **528 AD** by Byzantine Emperor **Anastasius**. After being heavily damaged during the Fourth Crusade in **1204**, it was rebuilt by the Genoese in **1348** as the *Tower of Christ* and incorporated into the Galata city walls.

The lower three floors bear Genoese architectural features, while the upper levels reflect Ottoman influences. A **16-line inscription** at the entrance, written during the reign of **Sultan Mahmud II**, commemorates restoration works carried out during that period.

In **2013**, Galata Tower was included in Türkiye's **UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List** as part of the nomination titled "*Fortresses and Walled Settlements from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea along the Genoese Trade Route.*" Today, Galata Square, located next to the tower, is one of the city's most vibrant public spaces.

TAKSIM SQUARE

The name **Taksim** derives from the Ottoman-era function of the area as a distribution point where water was allocated to the public. Originally a narrow residential district, it evolved into a square after urban expansion.

Today, **Taksim Square** serves as a major ceremonial and gathering space. The **Republic Monument**, designed by Italian sculptor **Pietro Canonica** and erected in **1928**, stands at the center of the square. It was completed over **2.5 years** using stone and bronze and represents one of the earliest figurative monuments of the Republican era, symbolizing Atatürk and the new Republic.

A nostalgic tramway operates between Taksim Square and Tünel.

HAGIA SOPHIA MOSQUE

Hagia Sophia, meaning "**Holy Wisdom**", officially known today as **Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque**, is a former basilica, cathedral, mosque, and museum located in Istanbul.

Commissioned by Byzantine Emperor **Justinian I** and constructed between **532 and 537**, it served as the principal cathedral of Eastern Christianity for nearly **1,000 years**. Following the Ottoman conquest of Istanbul in **1453**, it was converted into a mosque by **Sultan Mehmed II**.

In **1934**, a decree issued under **Mustafa Kemal Atatürk** initiated restoration works, and in **1947**, Hagia Sophia was converted into a museum, remaining so until **2020**, when it was reconverted into a mosque.

Architecturally, Hagia Sophia represents a major milestone in architectural history with its domed basilica plan, innovative structural system, and monumental scale. Its central dome collapsed once in **558 AD** but has remained intact since reinforcements were added by **Mimar Sinan** during the Ottoman period.

SULTAN AHMED MOSQUE (BLUE MOSQUE)

The **Sultan Ahmed Mosque**, commonly known as the **Blue Mosque**, was built between **1609 and 1617** by order of **Sultan Ahmed I** and designed by **Architect Sedefkâr Mehmed Ağa**.

The mosque is renowned for its more than **20,000 Iznik tiles** in blue, green, and white hues, as well as its six minarets—making it the first six-minaret mosque in Türkiye. The central dome rises **43 meters** high with a diameter of **23.5 meters**, and the interior is illuminated by over **200 stained-glass windows**.

The mosque complex includes medreses, a royal pavilion, shops, fountains, tombs, and other structures, forming one of Istanbul's most significant architectural ensembles.

MAIDEN'S TOWER (KIZ KULESİ)

The Maiden's Tower, located on a small islet off the coast of Üsküdar, has a history dating back to **408 BC**, when an observation station was built by the Athenian general **Alcibiades**.

Throughout history, the tower has served various functions, including a customs station, defense structure, quarantine station, and lighthouse. It was reconstructed multiple times following earthquakes and fires, notably after the **1509 earthquake** and again in **1763**, when it was rebuilt in stone.

The tower underwent significant restoration in **2000**, converting it into a restaurant. A comprehensive restoration initiated by the **Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Culture and Tourism** in **2021** was completed in **May 2023**, and the tower was reopened with a laser light show on **11 May 2023**.

RULES OF CONDUCT AT CULTURAL HERITAGE SITES

To enhance your experience and to help preserve Türkiye's cultural heritage for future generations, **please observe the following rules:**

- At places of worship, wearing clothing that exposes knees or shoulders, speaking loudly, or listening to music is prohibited.
- Please ask for permission before taking photographs or videos of religious leaders, children, or individuals you do not know. Unauthorized photography is prohibited.
- Sitting on, leaning against, or damaging monuments and fragile historic structures is prohibited.
- Altering, moving, touching, or trading archaeological artifacts is strictly prohibited.
- Consuming alcohol or smoking in designated no-smoking/no-alcohol areas is prohibited.
- Giving money or sweets to children encourages begging. If you wish to help children, please donate to recognized charitable organizations.
- Public indecent exposure is strictly prohibited and subject to legal penalties.
- Avoid purchasing illegal products or souvenirs made from threatened wildlife species.
- Littering or harming the environment and nature is strictly prohibited and subject to penalties.