

**Women's Travel Group: Caucasus**  
**Istanbul Pre Tour**  
Arranged by experts at MIR Corp. customized for our group.  
October 6-10, 2021



**Overview Daily Itinerary**

Day 1, Wed, Oct 6	Depart USA
Day 2, Thu, Oct 7	Arrive Istanbul, Turkey
Day 3, Fri, Oct 8	Istanbul
Day 4, Sat, Oct 9	Istanbul
Day 5, Sun, Oct 10	Istanbul • fly to Baku, Azerbaijan

**Daily Itinerary**

<b>Day 1, Wed, Oct 6</b>	<b>Depart USA</b>
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Set out today on flights bound for Istanbul, Turkey.

*Meals: in flight*

### **Day 2, Thu, Oct 7                    Arrive Istanbul, Turkey**

Upon arrival to Istanbul, transfer to the hotel for check in. Gather in the evening for a walking orientation tour with your guide and a **welcome to Turkey dinner**.

*Meals: in flight, D*

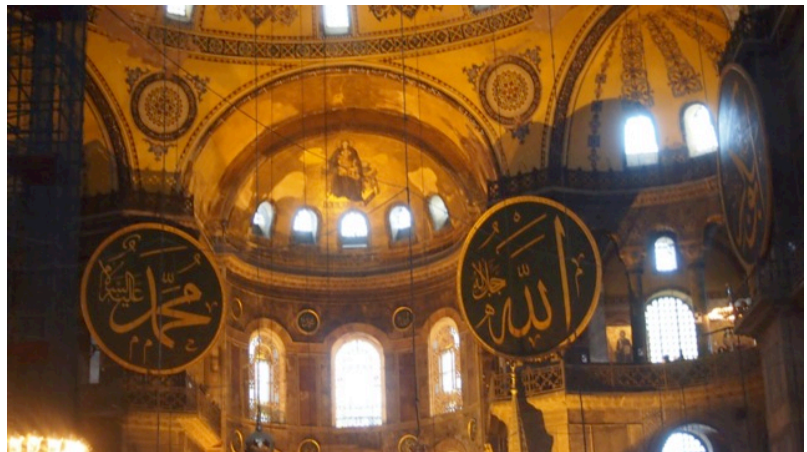
#### *Novotel Bosphorus or similar*

*Located on the shores of the Bosphorus within a short walking distance of the Old Town, Galata Tower and the Pera District, the centrally located Novotel Bosphorus hotel features a pool, fitness center, and bar. Rooms feature free wifi, air conditioning, safe, room service, flat screen TV, minibar and hairdryers.*

### **Day 3, Fri, Oct 8                    Istanbul**

The **Hippodrome of Constantinople** was originally built in 203, back when the city was still known as Byzantium. Enlarged by Constantine the Great until it could hold 10,000 spectators, the Hippodrome was used for chariot races and public gatherings. Little remains of the Hippodrome, but one of its sights is the almost 2,500-year-old Serpentine Column, an ancient Greek sacrificial object from the Persian War of 479 BC.

The **Basilica of Hagia Sophia**, Holy Wisdom, was originally built by Byzantine Emperor Justinian around 537. Its immense dome stands 55 meters above the ground, supported by 40 huge ribs made of special hollow bricks. Colored stone from around the world was brought to Constantinople to decorate the church, and 30 million tiny mosaic tiles adorn the interior. When the Ottomans conquered the city in 1453, they converted the church into a mosque, covering the mosaics with plaster and adding Islamic features. In 1935, Kemal Ataturk made the mosque into a museum and in the 21st century it has received some much-needed repairs.



Visit **Topkapi Palace**, the Great Palace of the Ottoman Sultans from the 15th-19th centuries. Mehmet the Conqueror began the palace complex soon after he won the city from the Byzantine Empire, and it grew and changed over the hundreds of years that it was in use. There are four main courtyards, including the treasury and the palace kitchens, which display a wonderful collection of Chinese celadon porcelain.

After lunch, continue to **Istanbul's Blue Mosque**, as Sultan Ahmed Mosque is known. Built between 1609 and 1616 at the behest of Ottoman emperor Ahmed I, the mosque was purposely situated on the site of the former Byzantine emperors' Great Palace. Its spacious interior is decorated with blue porcelain tiles.

Istanbul's **Grand Bazaar** began in the 15th century, under Mehmet the Conqueror, appearing near the Golden Horn where ships from foreign lands used to unload their goods. The artisans' stalls under the domed masonry structures (called *bedestans*) underwent fires, earthquakes and renovations, gradually taking the form that they have today. One of the largest covered markets in the world, the Grand Bazaar offers everything from fine silk carpets to jewelry and T-shirts.

Dinner this evening will be at a local restaurant.

*Meals: B, L, D*



#### **Day 4, Sat, Oct 9                      Istanbul**

Start the morning with a visit to the **11th century Church of St. Savior of Chora** - the second most important Byzantine monument in Istanbul. The walls are decorated with quite superb 14th century frescoes and mosaics on gold backgrounds.

The magnificent **16th century Suleymaniye Mosque** dominates the Istanbul skyline along the west bank of the Golden Horn. Built at the behest of Suleyman the Magnificent by the most renowned Ottoman architect of his age, Mimar Sinan, the Suleymaniye echoes and refers to elements of Hagia Sofia, built 1,000 years before. The ensemble contains the mausoleum of Suleyman, his wife, Roxelana and the architect, Sinan.

Istanbul's **Spice Bazaar** (also called the Egyptian Bazaar) has been delighting the senses of city dwellers with the smells of faraway lands since around 1660. Dried, exotic spices are the specialty here, though dried fruits, nuts, Turkish Delight sweets and other things can also be found in the covered shopping area.

**Hop aboard a boat for a private sight-seeing cruise on the Bosphorus**, taking in panoramic views of the city and the surrounding area. The Bosphorus Strait that joins the Sea of Marmara and Istanbul with the Black Sea are some 16 miles long and average around just over half a mile in width. The shores are today, and have been for many centuries, favorite dwelling places of Istanbul's wealthier community.

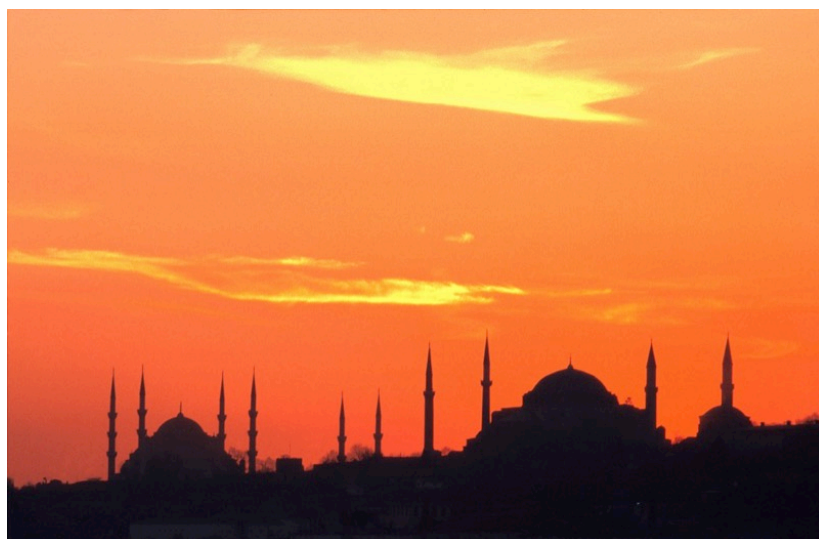


Karakoy is the modern name for the trendy **Galata neighborhood**, running from up at the Genoese Galata Tower down steep cobbled streets to the former docks across the Golden Horn from Old Istanbul. Some of the city's best shopping is found here. Take a walk along famed **Istiklal Street**, a pedestrian street running from medieval Galata Tower all the way to Taksim Square. The renovated Ottoman-era street is lined with little shops, restaurants, boutiques, cafés and bakeries, and its historic tram has been re-installed.

Make an optional visit this evening to **Small Projects Istanbul**, an independent NGO project that aims to help displaced Syrian families, particularly women and children, by providing supplemental Turkish-language education and homework support. Their center also arranges other activities with the purpose of developing a sense of community and belonging. Enjoy venturing off-the-beaten-path to visit the center. You will enjoy a delicious meal prepared by the women of the center, and will have a chance to learn more about their story.

Enjoy an evening at leisure to explore the culinary scene of Istanbul.

*Meals: B, L*



#### **Day 5, Sun, Oct 10 Istanbul • fly to Baku, Azerbaijan**

Transfer mid morning to the airport for an early afternoon flight to Baku, Azerbaijan. Upon arrival to Baku, transfer to the hotel. The evening is at leisure and the main tour group program begins on Monday, October 11.

*Meals: B, in flight*

***\*Istanbul-Baku flight is not included to the program cost***

*Photo Credit: Mike Belton, Turkish Ministry of Culture & Tourism*

#### **LAND TOUR COSTS**

**\$1,200 land tour cost per person, double occupancy**

**Single room supplement \$345**

#### **Inclusions:**

- All accommodation based on double occupancy per itinerary with breakfast daily, local service charge and tax (standard hotel check-in/out times apply): Istanbul (3 nights)
- Private vehicle transfers for travelers arriving to Istanbul on the trip start date (October 7)

and departing Istanbul on the tour end date (October 10). Travelers arriving early or departing later can arrange transfers at additional cost

- Transportation per itinerary by private vehicle and driver
- All sightseeing and excursions including entrance fees per itinerary
- English speaking escorting guide who will be with travelers from arrival at the Istanbul airport on Day 2 until departure on Day 5
- Welcome to Turkey dinner, including 1 alcoholic drink per person (local beer or wine)
- Meals as listed in itinerary, breakfast daily, 2 lunches, 2 dinners
- Bottled/purified water with meals and in the vehicles during transfers and touring days
- Baggage handling at the hotel
- Destination preparation information packet

**Not Included:**

- International airfare between the U.S. and the start and ending cities; air taxes or fuel surcharges; increases in local taxes/VAT; pre- or post-tour services; gratuities to escorting guides and drivers; visa or passport fees; medical and trip interruption insurance; evacuation costs; food or beverages not included in group meals; items of a personal nature such as laundry, alcohol, telephone expense, excess baggage fees, photo/video expenses inside museums (where allowed); other items not expressly listed as included.
- Istanbul-Baku flight on Day 5; this flight should be booked along with your flights from/to the United States. We are happy to assist with flight arrangements.

**Important Notes**

- Rates are based on receiving a deposit and the final payment in advance by check, ACH or wire transfer in USD. Final payments by credit card will incur a 3% processing fee.
- **Turkey e visas are required for this itinerary.** The e visa cost is not included to the package. The visa process is simple and travelers can purchase the Turkish e visa directly from the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs at <https://www.evisa.gov.tr/en/>. MIR can assist travelers with the process on an individual basis.

*We recommend that you read the U.S. State Department's Country Information regarding travel to the destinations on your itinerary. Check <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel.html> for up-to-date travel information.*

*Travelers should consider enrolling in STEP, Smart Traveler Enrollment Program, a free service to enroll your trip with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. For more information: <https://step.state.gov/step/>*