



**I N S I**

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For a genuine taste of Istanbul, ditch the tourist trail and opt for tours that offer a local perspective, says **Kathryn Tomsetti**

**I S T A**

**N B U L**





**W**ith more than 10 million visitors a year, Istanbul's tourist trail is well trodden. Once you've ticked off the main attractions – the Hagia Sophia, the Grand Bazaar and the Topkapı Palace – why not opt for a tour from a local perspective? Whether you prefer food markets in Kadıköy and Moda, bargain buys in Sultanahmet, a boat ride on the Bosphorous or a bike ride around the Golden Horn, these Istanbul insiders have your itinerary sorted.

#### ◆ TAKE A PERSONAL SHOPPER AROUND SULTANAHMET

Istanbul was one of the principal stops along the Silk Route and Sultanahmet, the city's original Old Town, was a focal point for international trade. The world's earliest shopping malls, the Grand Bazaar and the Spice Market, are still there today. The best way to approach this vibrant neighbourhood is via a specially arranged shopping spree.

Former journalist Kathy Hamilton runs Istanbul Personal Shopper. American-born, she has been resident since 1998, having been enchanted by the city since her first visit more than 30 years ago. "My main focus is on the Grand Bazaar and the surrounding *hans* [ancient inns]", she says. "Instead of focusing on the tourist stores, we go to where locals shop to get the best prices for gold, ceramics and so on. Clients get an age-old view of the ancient Bazaar."

Those wanting to experience the final stop on the legendary Silk Road trading route include celebrities, royalty and A-list actors. "Some want to experience the Bazaar, but without the hassle of merchants bothering them. Others come with shopping lists, ready for a day of fast and furious shopping. The most popular items are carpets, leather jackets, scarves and shawls."

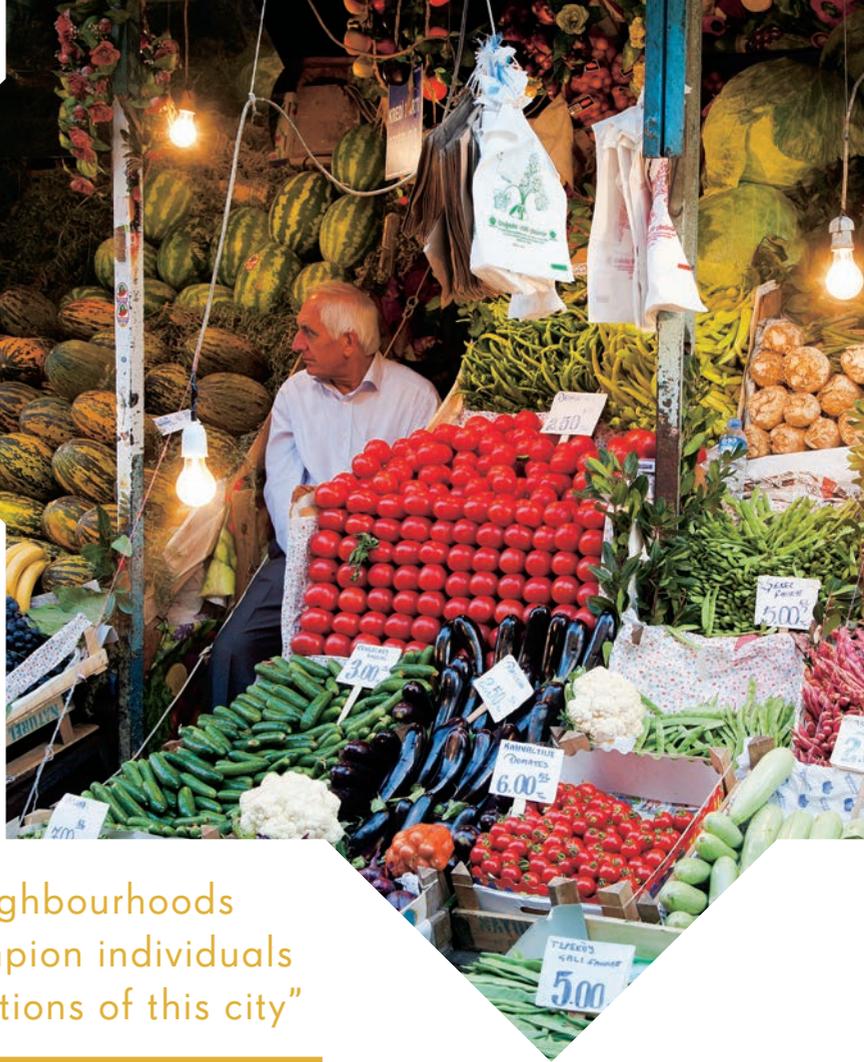
*A personalised shopping experience is TRY500 (€185) for a group of up to four people. Each trip is tailored to your specific interests. [istanbulpersonalshopper.com](http://istanbulpersonalshopper.com)*



**Above:** The Grand Bazaar is the world's oldest shopping mall. **Here:** One of Istanbul's most visited attractions, the Spice Market.



Here: a boat trip on the Bosphorus is one of the best ways to see Istanbul. Right: Kadıköy's daily market.



“We tell the stories of the neighbourhoods through the people. We champion individuals who protect the culinary traditions of this city”

#### ◆ POSTCARD VIEWS ON THE BOSPHORUS BOAT TOUR

The Bosphorus Straits, arguably the world's most fabulous waterway, forms part of the boundary between Europe and Asia. It connects the Black Sea with the Marmara Sea, which in turn leads to the Aegean and the Mediterranean. It is also the perfect backdrop for Istanbul's magnificent sights.

Each morning, crowds cluster along Eminönü's ferry docks near the Topkapı Palace. Commuters zip to and from the city's Asian shores, while visitors – Turkish and foreign alike – queue up for one of the day-long Bosphorus Boat Tours.

Your trip gifts a postcard-perfect view of the medieval Genoese Galata Tower, and the Ottoman opulence of the Dolmabahçe Palace, home to European-influenced sultans in the 19th century. Gaze at wealthy waterside villages such as Arnavutköy and Yeniköy, lined with the wooden *yalı* seashore villas of Istanbul's richest residents. For the best views, bag a seat on the left side of the boat during your outbound journey.

*Şehir Hatları* operates one daily Bosphorus Boat Tour year round, departing at 10.35am from Eminönü and returning at 4.25pm. It costs TRY25 (€9.25) per person. The tour makes a three-hour lunch and sightseeing stop (noon-3pm) in the northern town of Anadolu Kavağı, before heading south again to Eminönü. [sehirhatlari.com.tr](http://sehirhatlari.com.tr)

#### ◆ RARE FLAVOURS TO SAVOUR

Although Istanbul has a foot in both Europe and Asia, many visitors never quite find the time to hop across to its eastern shores. Yet Istanbul's most delicious flavours are found in the less crowded neighbourhoods of Kadıköy and nearby Moda.

Global guide Culinary Backstreets offers foodie visitors an inside peek at Asian Istanbul through its Two Markets, Two Continents walking tour. After taking in the lively bustle of Kadıköy's daily market – which includes artisanal bakers, cheese vendors and fishmongers – the tour heads into residential Moda, a quieter district boasting a scattering of superb local restaurants.

Culinary Backstreets' co-founder Ansel Mullins, originally from Chicago, describes the ethos of the company, which also covers cities such as Athens and Barcelona. “Beyond the food, we aim to tell the stories of the neighbourhoods through the people at each of our stops. We always like to champion those individuals who've dedicated their lives – whether they see it in these terms or not – to protecting the culinary traditions of this city.”

His favourite stop along the tour? “Hands down, the *Gaziantep katmer* [paper-thin pastry stuffed with pistachios and cream] at Serger in Moda,” claims Mullins. “Of course, in wintertime the *sahlep* [a sweet, hot beverage made from a type of orchid root] at Ali Usta is a close second.” Our mouths are watering already.

*Two Markets, Two Continents* runs from 9.30am to 3pm. It costs TRY250 (€92) per person; this fee covers all food, drinks and nibbles consumed throughout the duration of the tour. Group size ranges from two to seven participants. [culinarybackstreets.com](http://culinarybackstreets.com)



**Left:** Views of the city from the Golden Horn.  
**Bottom left:** Get on your bike and explore a less touristy neighbourhood.



PHOTO BY ROBERT HARDING

#### ◆ THE GOLDEN HORN BY BIKE

Snaking its way west from the Bosphorus Straits, the Golden Horn is a surging waterway that cleaves European Istanbul in two. This eight-kilometre inlet is trimmed by residential neighbourhoods, such as historical Greek Fener, trendy Silaharağa, newly hip Fatih and the former Jewish enclave of Hasköy.

With Istanbul On Bike, you can explore this lesser-known area on two wheels. “Of all of our excursions, our personal favourite is the Golden Horn Tour,” says planner Dario De Santis. “It takes you to the very traditional districts of the city, in a quieter and less touristy area.”

The four-hour tour pedals from Istanbul’s Sirkeci Train Station (the terminus of the legendary Orient Express) westwards along the Golden Horn’s banks. It takes in the Eyüp Sultan Mosque, the city’s ancient Byzantine walls and the Bulgarian St Stephen Church (which was flatpacked in Vienna and floated to its reassembly point in Istanbul in the 1890s).

Each tour is adjusted to match the fitness levels of individual clients. Dario explains: “Our customers include couples, groups of friends, professionals and families. Usually they are averagely fit people who practise some sports or ride a bike back home.” *The Golden Horn Tour costs TRY136 (€50) per person, based on four participants. The tour lasts around four hours, and includes bike rental, helmets, drinks and snacks, and return journey by boat.* [istanbulonbike.com](http://istanbulonbike.com)