



Clockwise from top: Maloney at the silver shop Sait Asil. Detail of a rug from Günes Öztarakçi. A Turkish weaving.



Details

The country code is 90; the city code is 212.

• **Required reading:** Jason Goodwin's *Lord of the Horizons* provides a good overview of the Ottoman Empire. Knopf's guide to Istanbul gives all the need-to-know basics. For a behind-the-scenes look, see John Freely's *Inside the Seraglio—Private Lives of the Sultans in Istanbul*.

• **Food:** Classic Turkish cuisine, which was developed for the sultans, is subtle and refined. For those who like eggplant, Istanbul will rate as a little piece of heaven. The city is also famous for its waterfront seafood restaurants.

• **Hotels:** Stay in the Sultanahmet neighborhood if possible—the Four Seasons Hotel Istanbul (638-82-00), which has a lovely central courtyard, is perfect.

• **Metalwork:** Sait Asil (527-27-56) sells sterling silver by the pound. We assembled a large pile of vases, bowls, and picture frames for a grand total of \$250. (Inexplicably, we didn't buy any of the handsome brass and copperware we saw around town.)

• **Islamic calligraphy:** Hermes and I didn't pursue the high-quality stuff (we'll do our homework for our next trip), but we did pick up some great-looking decorative pieces in the bazaar.

• **Pottery:** I fantasized about putting together a set of mixed patterns of beautiful Turkish pottery for our country house. I ended up buying just two bowls for Pancho's food and water (hardly the dinner service for 24 I'd imagined).

• **Rugs:** Textiles have long been a major industry in the Islamic world. Although most of the first-rate antique rugs were long ago exported to Europe and America, we did some research, visited only reputable dealers, and saw some primo old carpets. Günes Öztarakçi had a huge 19th-century cherry-red wool Oushak. Erkal Aksoy's *A la Turca Kilim House* (245-29-33) carries fine antique rugs and furniture.

• **Textiles:** We picked up several *tulus*, sort of hippie-looking goat-hair throws, at *Maison du Tapis d'Orient* (517-68-08), which also sells ikats, small refined weavings in jewel-like colors. We bought *suzanis*, big embroidered pieces covered in swirling sun and moon patterns that make terrific bedspreads, at H. Celal Açikgöz (512-29-41).

• **Evil eyes:** A Turkish talisman believed to ward off bad luck, the evil eye is everywhere in Istanbul. Jewelry shop Hilal (520-01-71) made a glam pair of 24-karat evil-eye cuff links for me.

Süleyman the Magnificent in 1557 is nearby, as is the sixth-century wonder of the world, the Hagia Sofia, which was first Christendom's greatest church and then Islam's grandest mosque. Now it's a museum. Next door is the Topkapi Palace, a 170-acre royal complex that was home to the Ottoman sultans and centuries of noble intrigue. Courtyards lead you through the sultan's House of Felicity, the Aviary Gate, and the Circumcision Room (we like the names). We also lucked into lunch on a fab private boat sailing the Bosphorus, where sprawling 19th-century palaces cascade down the slopes to bustling marinas.

Finally, we got to shop. I hate currency like the Turkish lira that comes in millions. Wads of bills fill your wallet and pockets. That said, it goes a long way. Hermes and I began our buying spree at the Grand Bazaar, one of the top shopping destinations in the world. We were chronically lost in this maze of more than 3,000 stands, but the seemingly aimless wandering did allow for the discovery of top-notch pottery, metalwork, textiles, and silver. During negotiations, tradition dictates long, tea-infused conversations, but we just wanted to be polite and get in and out. So we often pleaded a pressing appointment and quickly agreed to a price. One item I wasn't able to get was a custom minifez for my Chihuahua, Pancho. Bad idea to show the fez man a photo of your dog—he recoiled, declaring Pancho "unclean!" (dogs are largely shunned by Muslims).

Hermes and I showed uncharacteristic restraint in limiting our excursion to Istanbul. There is so much more to do in Turkey—cruising the Aegean and Mediterranean coasts, touring dozens more archaeological sites, and shopping for the copperware, pottery, and brass objects we missed the first time around. "Next trip" is the constant refrain. ■

