

ISTANBUL AND BUDAPEST

MINARETS, MOSQUES & MAGYARS

a. AN ARMCHAIR TOUR OF ISTANBUL

Here east meets west at the Golden Horn. We examine a many layered city which dates back to ancient Byzantium and the Greek speaking Christian city of Constantinople, now known as Istanbul. We visit the great cathedral of St Sophia or Hagia Sophia which after the conquest by Ottoman Turks became a mosque and then visit one of the most important sites of early Constantinople, the Byzantine architecture of the Karye Church with its truly wonderful frescoes and mosaics. Then we visit the Blue Mosque with its magnificent tiles, the Suliman mosque and the beautiful little tomb Suliman built for his wife, Roxanne, a monument to love. We tour the narrow picturesque streets of Istanbul, see the water-carriers, watch tile painters at work and end with a boat ride along the Bosphorus with its distinctive wooden houses, explore their rich interiors and visit small picturesque fish restaurants in this most fascinating of cities.

b. THE PALACE OF TOPKAPI SARAY AND THE HAREM

Topkapi is arranged around a series of courtyards containing magnificent museums devoted to Turkish decorative arts and the finest of Chinese porcelains, displayed in the old kitchens of a palace that once housed over a thousand servants and courtiers. In the harem quarters we see how the women lived and prayed they might get to spend a night with the Sultan and bear him a son and become the next sultana, of feuds and children put to death or kept inside the 'caged' room. We hear about Suleiman the Magnificent, see his robes and daggers, hear about Sultan Mirad the III who ate nothing but 'aphrodisiac foods' and sired 20 sons and 35 daughter by over one hundred wives and concubines. From Topkapi Palace we visit the 19th century Dolmabache Palace where



ISTANBUL: HARBUR SOPHIA



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BUDAPEST: MUSEUM OF FINE ART



BUDAPEST: MUSEUM OF FINE ART

Kemal Ataturk died with its 300 magnificent rooms filled with French and Italian antiques and its staircase with balustrades of French crystal, designed to impress visiting foreign dignitaries, a palace so expensive to build that it made the Sultan who built it heavily in debt to Western banks and hastened the end of the Ottoman Empire.

c. FASCINATING BUDAPEST – CONQUERED BY TURKS AND MAGYARS FALLS UNDER HAPSBURG RULE.

Our armchair tour starts with the Danube, the river that divides Buda from Pest. Buda is ensconced on a rocky outcrop on the right bank while Pest lies below on the far side of the river. We take the funicular railway up to Buda and Ober Buda and from the castle we look down on Pest, one of Europe's most magnificent views. We visit the National Museum with its wonderful collection of pinnacled altarpieces removed from war damaged and crumbling churches. See what remains of the invading Turks in the luxurious Turkish baths, reminders that the city was once under Turkish rule. We learn how the Turks were repulsed by Prince Eugene acting on the orders of the Hapsburgs and how the Empress Maria Theresa ordered a palace to be built but only spent one night there preferring her palace at Schonbrunn. Its great opera house rivals that of Paris or Vienna. We visit the neo Gothic Parliament based on the House of Parliament in London with the curious anomaly of a Renaissance dome based on the design of Brunelleschi in Florence. We tour the magnificent classically inspired Museum of Fine Arts with its fine collection of European paintings once owned by the Hapsburgs and several great Hungarian families (some of which were stolen by the Nazis) We examine the havoc wrecked on Budapest during World War Two, the eventual rebuilding of the Chain Bridge and other major landmarks in this fascinating and historic city which very briefly if time remains, we compare with the medieval romantic city of Prague which also came under Hapsburg rule.



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