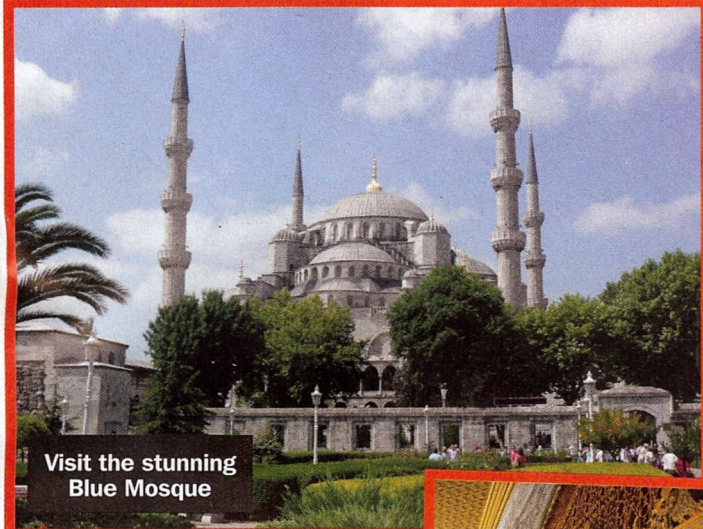


Malls, mosques and markets

Bored of the beach? **new!** ditches the sunlounger and checks out three contrasting city breaks...



Visit the stunning Blue Mosque

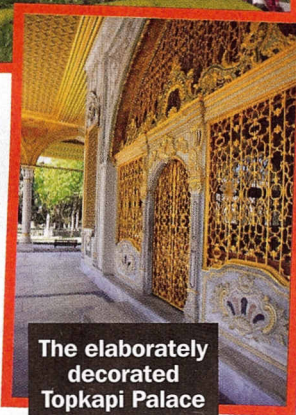
Istanbul

We started our tour of Turkey's largest city at Topkapi Palace, a huge

Ottoman palace with extraordinary interiors (gold-plated beds, stained-glass windows) and its own royal jewellery collection. We then tottered over to the nearby Grand Bazaar, which is one of the largest covered markets in the world. We found its endless alleyways – crammed with shops selling jewellery, rugs and pots – incredibly atmospheric. And it put us in the mood for more shopping, so we also checked out Istanbul's answer to Oxford Street, Istiklal Caddesi – retail heaven!

To give our credit card a rest, we hopped on board a boat tour round the picturesque bay, then visited the iconic Blue Mosque. And we rounded it off with a blissful steam and body scrub – called a kese – at the stunning historic Çemberlitas Hamami hammam (Turkish bath).

Grab a bite: The area around Taksim Square has countless little eateries offering tasty local fare. But it was the



The elaborately decorated Topkapi Palace

360 restaurant that blew us away. It has a real buzz about it and offers panoramic views across the city with a live band and delicious Turkish and European food. For lunch, we sampled traditional cuisine – and great wine – at Dai Pera, close to Istiklal Caddesi.

Catch some zeds: If you want luxurious, cutting-edge décor, a convenient location and a fantastic spa, there is only one option: W Istanbul (www.wistanbul.com.tr). It's the best service we've ever experienced and with a bed so comfortable we didn't want to get out of it! Rooms start at £238 per night.

Celeb fans: Rihanna, Nicole Scherzinger and Sarah Jessica Parker have all visited Istanbul.

How to get there: Pegasus Airlines flies daily from Stansted to Istanbul's Sabiha Gökçen International Airport. Prices start at £53.10. Visit www.flypgs.com/en.



Nicole has spent time in Istanbul