

OUT AND ABOUT

While waiting for the IATA AGM to start, why not visit the sights of this fascinating city. Marcelle Nethersole describes her top 10 attractions in Istanbul

Istanbul, formally known as Constantinople the capital of the Ottoman Empire, revels in history. A visit to the famous Blue Mosque is a must, as is a visit to TopKapi Palace, the former home of the Ottoman sultans.

Get lost in the Grand Bazaar with around 4,000 merchants selling their wares. And make sure you don't leave without trying a real Turkish kebab!

1 THE BLUE MOSQUE (SULTAN AHMET CAMII)

This stunning mosque is one of the most prominent landmarks in Istanbul. The mosque was founded by Sultan Ahmet I who asked architect Mehmed Aga to begin construction in 1609. It is purposely located opposite the Church of Hagia Sophia as Sultan Ahmet was trying to compete with its splendour and show the world Ottomans could compete with Christians. It can hold 10,000 people and was completed in 1616.

Today tourists flock to see its stunning architecture, including six minarets, a beautiful courtyard and the stunning interior of its huge dome and pillars with striking blue Iznik tiles – which give the mosque its name.

This historic building is still in use as a mosque, so please dress appropriately. Prayers are said five times a day, so the mosque will be closed to tourists then. It's best to visit mid-morning, between dawn and noon prayers.

2 TOPKAPI PALACE

This work of architecture was the home of all Ottoman

sultans for nearly 400 years. Located on the Seraglio Point, it overlooks both the Marmara Sea and the Bosphorus. The palace no longer serves as a residence but is now a popular museum with many treasures on display.

3 & 4 THE CHURCH OF HAGIA SOPHIA AND POINT ZERO

Byzantine architecture mainly consists of churches, and this is by far the most magnificent of them. Covered by a huge dome, the church is packed with mosaics, one of which depicts Jesus sitting on a throne with Emperor Leon VII kneeling before him.

Opposite to Hagia Sophia you will find a stone, Point Zero, which indicated the centre of the known universe during the era of the Eastern Roman Empire.

5 THE GRAND BAZAAR

Shop until you drop at this huge bustling bazaar with over 4,000 merchants selling everything from gold, silver, Turkish carpets, slippers, leather goods, spices and much more.

Delegates should note that the merchants – like Airbus and Boeing – even expect you to haggle – they actually appear to enjoy it. It



might also test your patience as they seem to want to haggle for as long as possible. To hurry things along offer your final price and start to walk away, you'll soon hear them shouting for you to come back and agreeing that sum.

6 THE HIPPODROME

This huge amphitheatre, which can hold 10,000 people, was first built by the Roman Emperor Septimius Severus in 203 AD and occupied an important place in Byzantine life. In Roman times the great chariot races were big social events here, and in Ottoman times polo games were popular, as were circumcision ceremonies of the crown princes!

7 TAKE A CRUISE UP THE BOSPHORUS

If you're finding walking around Istanbul too chaotic, a great way to view the city is by boat.

State-owned Turkish Maritime Lines (TDI) is well reputed for cruises and takes you past all the historic and cultural sights,

including on the Asian side, up towards the Black Sea. Boats depart from Eminonu.

8 TAKE A DIP!

Delegates who want stress relief should indulge in a traditional Turkish Bath or Hammam where you can soak, steam or have a massage. They are dotted all over the city so take your pick, but it might be wise to take your own towel, slippers and soap.

9 CHEERS!

One way to forget a day at the show is by sampling the local tippie Raki. The distilled liquor is made with anise and grapes and can be quite potent.

10 THAT'S A WRAP

You should sample the local food, it is delicious! A good first choice is a kebab which is a typical South Eastern Turkish dish. This is a traditional kebab cooled over a flame or grill and served with fresh salad and garlic sauce. ■