

## HIGHLIGHTS OF ISTANBUL (Duration: 7 hours including lunch)



Your private tour of Istanbul begins with a visit to the **Hippodrome**, once one of the largest chariot racegrounds in the Byzantine Empire. Afterwards, you will take a short walk to the **Blue Mosque**, so named for the blue Iznik tiles that adorn the interior. Completed in 1616, this architectural triumph of harmony, proportion and elegance was the central part of a larger complex that included tombs, fountains, and a hamam (public bath).

Visit the magnificent **Topkapi Palace**, the residence of the sultans and the administrative heart of the Ottoman Empire for almost three centuries. It is located on the promontory jutting out between the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn. The construction of Topkapi Palace was completed between 1465 and 1478. In the **Treasury** section, you will see breathtaking displays of the empire's wealth, including the 7th largest diamond in the world, the "Spoonmaker's Diamond" as well as the **Harem** - a vast labyrinth of rooms and corridors once occupied by eunuchs, concubines, the Sultan's mother and the Sultan himself.

A delicious and leisurely lunch will be served in the garden a traditional Ottoman konak (house).

After lunch, you will visit Hagia **Sophia/St. Sophia**, also known as the Church of the Divine Wisdom. Built during the reign of Emperor Justinian (537 AD), it remained a church for 916 years until the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 by Sultan Mehmet II, when it was converted into a mosque. In 1934, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern-day Turkey, proclaimed it a museum. The immense dome is an architectural marvel, as it seems to hover overhead, and, at one time, the Hagia Sophia was once the largest enclosed space in the world. You will have a chance to view the magnificent mosaics in the upper galleries.

Explore the 61 covered streets of the world-famous **Grand Bazaar**, the largest and oldest covered market in Turkey with over 3,000 shops. A variety of handicrafts, carpets, ceramics, copperware, rare jewels, antiques, and souvenirs are all to be found here! While you venture into the hidden courtyards or hans, be on the lookout for marble fountains and ornate kiosks. Streets are named according to various goods and trades, such as hat making, antique bookselling and goldsmithing.

At the end of your day, you will return to the port to board your ship.

(NOTE: Contact us for half-day tour options.)