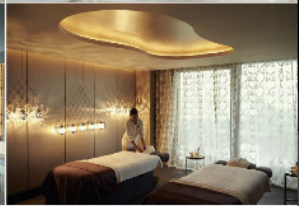
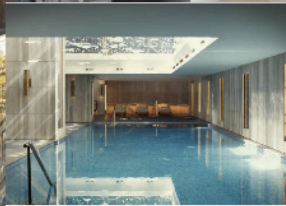
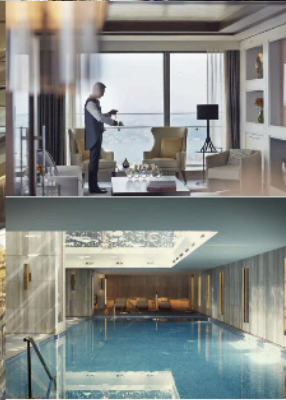




TURKISH DELIGHTS

*Private Air Explores The Epitome of Asian Luxury
In The Intoxicating, Ancient City Of Istanbul*

By: Celine Samantia



There is nothing subtle about Istanbul. It is a city that pulses with energy and thrives on its ancient, multicultural and diverse, and commands attention. The only city in the world to be cradled by two continents, Istanbul is partially Asian, partially European, wholly exotic. She is completely intoxicating. Vibrant.

From the city's birth and earliest days as Byzantium, through life as Constantinople, and now as a formidable power in today's modern world, the bustling metropolis is steadfast in her position deep within the epicenter of civilization. A city of contrasts that is as rich with ancient history as she is rich with timeless luxury. This is Istanbul.

A global center for art, culture, shopping and tourism, Istanbul's intriguing days first melt into evening. Here, restaurants, bars, casinos, theaters and the electric energy of the city's open-air squares all continue to thrive after the sun goes down. It is only in the wee, small hours before dawn that she seems to sleep. After such brief respite, the sound of Istanbul waking to greet the morning is unmistakable. Piercing the thin, blue light of dawn come the first, ethereal notes of the *Fatih* – the morning call to

prayer. The hauntingly beautiful, melismatic sound reaches to every corner of the city, enveloping her mystery and shagging off the outlines of the night to herald a new day in Istanbul.

As morning unfolds, Istanbul begins her daily passage. Ferries dot the shores of the Bosphorus as they prepare to deliver passengers from the Asian side of the city to the European, fishermen busily arranging their catch in the market, and vendor position carts on the busy streets to sell their wares of pastries and cheeses, pencils and toys. Morning has broken in the "city of the world's desires" and with it, a serene call to explore the vast offerings.

In a city with more than 2,800 mosques, so be noted among the most beautiful, is indeed a privilege. In what is referred to as the "Old Town", Istanbul's breathtaking Sultan Ahmed Mosque – more commonly known as the Blue Mosque – stands the first. A staggering example of breathtaking architecture, the domes and spires of the Blue Mosque are instantly recognizable in the Istanbul skyline. Near by is the equally stunning Hagia Sophia. Having served as both a Greek patriarchal basilica and an imperial mosque, the glorious landmark is now a brilliant museum.



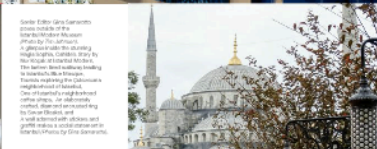
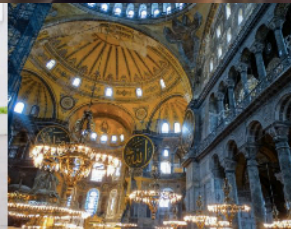
paying homage not only to Turkish culture, but also to world religion. The "Old Tower" brings to life the images of Istanbul most readily conjured by the imagination. Her winding streets and hills afford visitors the opportunity to explore the underground labyrinth of the Basilica Cistern, the frenetic activity of the Grand Bazaar and spice market, formidable monuments including the Istanbul Modern, and the countless delights that await discovery within ancient imperial palaces.

Of the city's many charms, one of the newest and most luxurious is undoubtedly the Raffles Istanbul. Located near the Bosphorus where it meanders the bridge and a short distance from the Old Town, the hotel is a main component of the recently defined, unmissable park Zorlu Center. In a location that affords guests a peaceful oasis in a city that is never more than minutes away. The Zorlu Center also houses Turkey's largest performing arts theater, upscale office space, exclusive residences, a plethora of fine dining options and indulgent retail including Bulgari, Louis Vuitton and L'Oréal. "In Istanbul, Raffles and the Zorlu Center have helped create what is only a destination within a destination," explains Denise Mey, Raffles Istanbul Director of Marketing.

In keeping with the brand's established penchant for luxury, this newest gem in the hotel group's crown is undeniably special. The grand entrance to Raffles and the Zorlu Center is a mere thirty minutes away from Istanbul's Ataturk Airport by private car. Guests may also elect to make use of the hotel's helipad, a particularly attractive accommodation for private air travelers. Upon arrival, guests are ushered past crystal-handled doors and through an impeccable entry into a vast, gleaming lobby. Designed by Hans Holter Associates (HBA), the lobby is lit by magnificent chandeliers and flanked by two reflecting pools, one of which is anchored by a massive bronze sculpture entitled "Lattisim," by artist Martin Dusek. Stylized with alluring, large-scale pieces of furniture upholstered in rich fabrics, the lobby and its seating areas are art as a spectacle, hyper-phosphorescent backdrops depicting a surreal interpretation of the Dolmabahçe Palace by French artist Jean-François Rauter. Collectively, the space immediately immerses guests into the designer's evocative "Dream of Istanbul."

"In creating the Raffles Istanbul," explains Emma Bando, Vice President of Brand Strategy, "It was important that

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the property be allowed to tell its own story and have a well-defined sense of place while at the same time providing the very essence of our brand - the luxury and discreet service that signifies Raffles to our guests."

The defined sense of place is elegantly apparent throughout the hotel. Beautifully appointed rooms and luxurious suites provide stunning views of the Bosphorus, the city and the neighboring Asian continent through walks of glass, and from vantage points provided by expansive terraces. In both the public and private areas of the property - including the sumptuous spa and the hotel's seven notable restaurants and lounges - a decidedly Middle Eastern influence is woven through the aesthetic. Well-crafted maps, Turkish art and artifacts, elegant furnishings and finishes, arabesque patterns and byzantine mosaics are incorporated throughout the spaces. Thoughtful touches like the finely woven cushions left draped invitingly near pools down lead a sense of homely, emotional luxury while in the spacious baths, enormous soaking tubs are centered so as to overlook the magical city - reminding you yet again that you are in a magical foreign land. Everywhere there is the shape of luxury synonymous with Raffles, and the "Dream of Istanbul" they've created here, dreams

the hotel in a deliciously quiet oasis.

The Raffles tradition of quintessential luxury began with their legendary Singapore property in 1887, and is alive and well in Istanbul. As with all the Raffles properties, what is arguably the most coveted of all the many indulgences is the impeccable butler service offered. Available to accommodate nearly any need or request, the butler may be called upon to register guests directly from the comfort of their suite, personally pack and unpack luggage, press garments, or share the perfect book (complete with a selection of amber-scented soaps, slippers, and scents specifically curated to complement the Istanbul experience). It's an indulgence that sets the hotel apart and a level of service that once experienced, guests find themselves loath to leave.

Istanbul is a place you experience rather than merely visit. Amid the art, the culture, the cuisine, and the service, it captivates and captivates you. Completely foreign, yet utterly welcoming, it's a place where one can spend a lifetime and still years for more. ☺

Istanbul's big dreams... Begin in Istanbul.

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