Shopping in Istanbul

This magical meeting place of East and West has more attractions than it has minarets (and that’s a lot). It’s also a place where the locals have perfected the art of shopping – join them with our tips on top boutiques.

3rd Culture
(3rdcultureproject.com)
Having returned to the city after many years living and working around the globe, siblings Emre and Zeynep Lale Rende opened concept store specialising in homewares and furniture made in Istanbul, inspired by their global travels, too. There’s much to tempt shoppers, including limited-edition photographs by Emre, who is a photojournalist by profession.

Altan Şekerleme
(Kble Çeşme Caddesi 68)
Kids aren’t the only ones who like sweet shops. Istanbulites of all ages have been coming to this place in the Küçük Pazar (Little Bazaar) precinct below the Süleymaniye Mosque since 1865, lured by its cheap and delectable lokum (Turkish Delight), helva (sweet made from sesame seeds) and akide (hard sweets).

Epoque
(Sandal Bedesten Sokak 38)
Serious antique shoppers should make their way to this old-fashioned business near the bazaar’s Nurúsmaniye Gate. Silver candlesticks and trays, enamelled cigarette cases, jewellery, watches and an extraordinary range of icons are on offer in the elegant shop. The elderly owner and sales people are happy to welcome browsers.

Hiç
(hiccrafts.com)
Interior designer Emel Güntaş is one of Istanbul’s style icons and this recently opened contemporary crafts shop in Tophane is a favourite destination for the city’s design lovers. The stock includes cushions, carpets, kilims (pileless woven rugs), silk scarves, lamps, furniture, glassware, porcelain and felt crafts. Everything is artisan-made and absolutely gorgeous.

Iznik Classics
(Utağan Sokak 13-17)
Iznik Classics is one of the best places in town to source hand-painted collectable ceramics made with real quartz and using metal oxides for pigments. There are also branches in the Arasta Bazaar and Grand Bazaar.

Jennifer’s Hamam
(jennifershamam.com)
Owned by Canadian Jennifer Gaudet, this shop stocks top-quality hammam items, including towels, robes and peştetemals (bath wraps) made with organic cotton and silk on old-style shuttled looms. It also sells natural soaps and keses (coarse mittens for exfoliation). Prices are set; no bargaining.

Nahıl
(Bekar Sokak 17)
The felting, lacework, embroidery, all-natural soaps and soft toys in this lovely shop are made by economically disadvantaged women in Turkey’s rural areas. All profits are returned to them, ensuring that they and their families have better lives.

Necef Antik & Gold
(Şerifağa Sokak 123, İç Bedesten)
Owner Haluk Botasun has been handcrafting 24-carat gold jewellery in his tiny shop for decades, making attractive pieces in Byzantine and Ottoman styles. The earrings and cufflinks featuring delicate mosaics are particularly desirable.

Özlem Tuna
(Çukurcuma Caddesi 36)
A leader in Turkey’s contemporary-design movement, Özlem Tuna makes super-stylish jewellery and homewares and sells them from her retail space near Orhan Pamuk’s Museum of Innocence. Her pieces use forms and colours that reference Istanbul’s history and culture (tulips, seagulls, Byzantine mosaics, nazar boncuk ‘evil eye’ charms) and include hammam bowls, coffee and tea sets, coasters, rings, earrings, cufflinks and necklaces.

Ucuzcular Baharat
(ucuzcular.com.tr)
A showcase of colourful and fragrant spices, Ucuzcular concocts its own blends and will vacuum pack them for travellers who are keen to add them to their luggage to take home.

Don’t miss

Having lived in Istanbul for many years, photographer Monica Fritz now shares some of the many secrets she has learned about the city on her Alternative City Tours (alternativecitytours.com). Her informed and enjoyable tours include one of the Grand Bazaar that introduces participants to hidden hans (caravanserais) and passages, as well as taking to the roof (below) à la James Bond in Skyfall. Other unique offerings include a Grand Bazaar scavenger hunt for kids, a tour of the city’s hidden synagogues, and a cruise on a private yacht going to the Princes’ Islands or other interesting places along the Bosphorus.
Sleeping

**Marmara Guesthouse**
Best for a warm welcome
(Terbiyik Sokak 15)
Few of Sultanahmet’s family-run pensions can compete with the Marmara’s cleanliness, comfort and thoughtful details. Owner Elif and team go out of their way to welcome guests, offering advice aplenty and serving a delicious breakfast on the vine-covered, sea-facing roof terrace. Rooms have comfortable beds, good bathrooms (small in some cases) and double-glazed windows.

**Hotel Empress Zoe**
Best for historic atmosphere
(emzoe.com)
Named after the powerful Byzantine empress, this is one of Istanbul’s most impressive boutique hotels. Four buildings house 26 diverse rooms: the garden suites overlook a 15th-century hammam and the flower-filled courtyard, where breakfast is served in warm weather. You can enjoy an early evening drink there, or admiring the sea view from the terrace.

**Armaggan Bosphorus**
Best for pure escapism
(armagganbosphorus.com)
If you’re in Istanbul to relax, rather than indulge in an orgy of sightseeing, consider this intimate hotel occupying three painstakingly restored 19th-century mansions. Affiliated with two Armaggan stores that sell art, design, jewellery and accessories (guests can indulge in after-hours shopping trips), the hotel offers 18 suites fit for a pasha (general or governor).

**FURTHER READING**
For shorter stays, choose our *Pocket Istanbul* (£7.99); for further immersion, try the *Istanbul* city guide (£14.99; shop.lonelyplanet.com).