

INTERNATIONAL DESTINATIONS



Straddling Europe and Asia, Istanbul offers rich cultural and culinary treasures.

## Balancing Act

IF THERE IS ONE CITY THAT KNOWS HOW TO WALK THE LINE BETWEEN THE UNUSUAL AND THE FAMILIAR, IT'S ISTANBUL

— BY ALEX PALMER —

When it comes to cultural offerings, it's hard to beat the richness and variety of Istanbul. With part of the city in Asia and part in Europe, bisected by one of the world's busiest waterways — the Bosphorus Strait — swirls with influences more diverse than perhaps any other place on earth. The history going back 8,500 years is reflected in Istanbul's buildings, museums, and even the landscape.

Add in the unbeatable shopping, entertainment, and culinary offerings in the city (a meze outing is a must), and a planner might think it would be hard to get much work done here. But while Istanbul is often thought of as an incentive destination, its meetings offerings are world class.

"Istanbul is the ideal MICE destination with its vibrancy, modernity, swathe of new infrastructure, and enviable geographical position," says Orgül Ozkan Yavuz, general manager for Istanbul Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Indeed, since 2010, Istanbul has been

named one of the "World's Top 10 Congress Destinations" by the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), and earned the No. 12 spot on Cvent's "Top 25 European Cities" list for 2015.

The city boasts seven convention centers and three exhibition centers, not to mention unique spaces ranging from historic venues, palaces, and museums to high-tech, cutting-edge locations that can accommodate everything "from bespoke incentives to meetings of up to 30,000 delegates," says Yavuz. Last year alone it hosted 145 international congresses — most from the U.S., followed by Belgium and the U.K. With more than 100,000 beds and almost 200 four- and five-star hotels, it also has no shortage of properties for guests.

Of course, the destination has faced its share of challenges recently, with the recent terror attacks, its southeastern border with Syria, and its accompanying instability.

"We are all aware lately, all world cities have been dealing with security threats and

we are faced with a serious global threat to all world cities and moreover to all humanity," says Yavuz. "The most crucial support to the fight against terrorism is to maintain our economic life and to continue our travel plans."

She adds that Turkey's General Directorate of Security Affairs has put in place a wide range of measures to further ensure the security and safety of visitors coming to Istanbul and the wider country. "As Istanbul CVB, we will continue hosting the international events planned in Istanbul and will be awaiting our visitors," she says.

The city's confidence as a meetings destination can be seen in the continued development happening here. The coming years will see more than 100 new four- and five-star properties, such as the new Elite World Europe Hotel, the Marriott West Hotel & Conference Center, and a new Fairmont Hotel. Among the recent openings are Radisson Blu Istanbul Ataköy, The Public Hotel, Pullman Istanbul Airport, Novotel Karaköy, and Hampton by Hilton.

Other upcoming projects include the ongoing build of the Istanbul Grand Airport



The innovative new Elite World Europe Hotel

(the city's third international airport), expected to be complete in 2019, with a capacity of 150 million passengers — the world's largest passenger volume. ■ *Questions or comments? Email [apalmer@ntmlc.com](mailto:apalmer@ntmlc.com)*

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