

## **Beyoglu: A Soho in the Heart of Istanbul**

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*In our October cover story, Pico Iyer writes of the wonders of Istanbul, the "City of the Future." Writer Emilie Harting just returned from a visit herself, and delves deeper into the neighborhood of Beyoglu.*



"Stay in Beyoglu," advised my Turkish friend Haldun when I was planning a trip to Istanbul, his hometown. The historic district quiets down at night. In Beyoglu you'll be in the midst of restaurants, cafes, and shops."

Haldun's advice was perfect. For ten days we stayed in Beyoglu, which is in the center of the European side of the city, north of the Golden Horn, the waterway that separates the "old" from the "new" parts of European Istanbul ([see a clickable](#)

[map of the city here](#)). Quickly, we learned that the above ground metro goes back and forth to the "Old City," where top sites like the Hagia Sophia, Blue Mosque, Topkapi Palace, the Hippodrome, and the Grand Bazaar are clustered together. But with all that was happening in the neighborhood, we found plenty of time to explore.

In the late 1800s, Beyoglu was the city's fashionable embassy neighborhood. It then fell into a decline, and is now emerging as Istanbul's Soho (the New York version, that is). The wide pedestrian street Istiklal Caddesi runs southwest to Tune and is best explored by walking, entering churchyards, and noting the consulates with their spacious fenced-in grounds; it's also fun to take the historic tram that runs up and down the street's center. Chain stores are gradually moving in along the street, so many of the independent artisans, cutting-edge design shops, restaurants, and cafes are moving south. Some of the best fish restaurants are just north in a warren of alleys branching off to the northwest across from the Swedish Consulate. The fish market and jewelry markets are to the east, and can be reached via small streets.



Here's a way to explore the new, hip Beyoglu. Go south on Kumbaraci Street near the Russian Consulate. Peek into the first floor of artisans' quarters in centuries-old homes, and then wind back up to Istiklal Caddesi on small streets. Then walk south

starting at Postacilar Sokak and down to Tomtom Kaptan Sokak, passing some of the oldest houses in the city. Italian and French families came here to settle after the Crusades. Be sure to stroll on Yeni Carsi Caddesi to check out the many new restaurants and cafes opening up. Find the "Algerian Street of Desire," [Cezayir Sokak](#), a steep, winding alley of nightclubs and shops east of Yeni Caddesi.

There's a lot more to see if you have time, like the [Museum of the Whirling Dervishes](#), being renovated and set to reopen in 2011; the [French Cultural Institute](#); many small mosques and churches; and the [Pera Museum](#), which happens to be next to the [Istanbul Culinary Institute](#) and its excellent restaurant [Enstitü](#), noted for outstanding contemporary food with seasonal ingredients and cooking classes for travelers. Wandering around, you begin to feel attuned to the neighborhood: the lines of the architecture, the buzz of conversations in outdoor cafes, and the energy of shoppers and residents as they walk about.

And of course you must eat: Try [Haci Abdullah](#), a centuries-old restaurant with an Ottoman-Turkish kitchen just off Istiklal Caddesi. Mikla is situated at the top of the [Marmara Pera Hotel](#), and offers Mediterranean cuisine created by the talented young chef Mehmet Gurs. [Asitane](#) is just a short taxi ride outside the city, near the Chora Church; it's known for its classical Ottoman recipes. [Refik](#), an old fashioned *meyhane* (Turkish tavern), is popular with journalists (and has the best eggplant appetizer in Turkey, I swear). And Max Thomae, the award-winning German chef at [Agatha](#) (as in Christie), serves up tastes of France, Venice, and Istanbul at the Pera Palace Hotel, which has been [recently restored](#) to its Orient Express-era opulence.

*Photos: Top, Riding the streetcar along Istiklal Caddesi in Beyoglu. Bottom, A cat lounges on a bookstore's offerings in Beyoglu. David Yoder/ NGS for the October issue of National Geographic Traveler. See more of Yoder's photos in our [online gallery](#).*