THE
Traveling Cow
– Travel by Viktor –

YOUR PERSONAL TRAVEL PLAN

Three days, two continents.

Istanbul · 3 days / 2 nights



For 2 adults

2027-05-14 – 2027-05-16 · 2 adults · Budapest (BUD)

Prepared by: Viktor

A sample travel plan with fictional dates and real places. Flights, timetables, ticket prices and rooms for these dates in 2027 have not yet been checked. Booking links lead to providers' homepages; daily timings are suggestions. Optional daily itineraries are included too.

You have a helping hand, and the freedom stays with you.

THE TRAVEL ESSENTIALS

Flight options

DESTINATION
Istanbul · 3 days / 2 nights

TRAVELLERS
2 adults

Budapest (BUD) - Istanbul Sabiha Gökçen (SAW) - Budapest

Dates and times

14-16 May 2027. Exact departure and arrival times depend on the flight you choose.

Depends on your chosen fare; check cabin baggage and checked luggage separately. · Current return fare per person, as shown on the airline's website.

Good to know

Airport

Sabiha Gökçen (SAW). Pegasus offers a route between Budapest and this airport.

Which flight times work best?

An early arrival and a late flight home make the most of three days. Once you choose your flights, we'll adjust the first and last days around them.

Keep in mind

IST is a different Istanbul airport. The airport transport instructions in this guide are for SAW.

flypgs.com

SOMEWHERE TO FEEL AT HOME

A place to stay

Sirkeci Mansion

Sirkeci · Taya Hatun Sokak 5

Why it could suit you

A good fit if you'd like to explore the historic neighbourhood on foot. The hotel is near Gülhane Park; according to its website, Hagia Sophia and Topkapı Palace are a short walk away too. A handy base for the days in this plan.

Something to bear in mind

This is a central, popular area. If you're a light sleeper, ask for a quieter room. That's a request, rather than a guaranteed room feature.

Check when booking

One double or twin room, 2 adults, 2 nights. Check breakfast, taxes and the cancellation deadline in the specific room offer; free cancellation is not assumed.

booking.com

You book and pay directly with your chosen provider. Check the cancellation terms and final price.

SOMEWHERE TO FEEL AT HOME

A place to stay

Hotel Yaşmak Sultan

Sirkeci · Ebusuud Caddesi 12

Why it could suit you

Worth considering if being close to historic sights and transport matters to you. It’s in Sirkeci, and the hotel lists Hagia Sophia, the Blue Mosque and the Basilica Cistern as within walking distance.

Something to bear in mind

The central location is practical, but this isn’t a secluded retreat. Views and room sizes may differ between categories.

Check when booking

Compare offers for 2 people and 2 nights with the same meal plan and cancellation flexibility. Include any separately payable charges in the total.

booking.com

You book and pay directly with your chosen provider. Check the cancellation terms and final price.

SOMEWHERE TO FEEL AT HOME

A place to stay

Amiral Palace Hotel

Sultanahmet / Cankurtaran · Bayram Fırını Sokak 3

Why it could suit you

On the southern side of the historic peninsula, with its own rooftop restaurant and views towards the Sea of Marmara. A good alternative for exploring the Blue Mosque and Sultanahmet.

Something to bear in mind

It’s a longer walk from Sirkeci station, partly uphill. With a large suitcase, the T1 tram followed by a shorter walk, or a private transfer, may be more comfortable.

Check when booking

Price, meals, prepayment and cancellation depend on the room category you choose. A restaurant with a sea view doesn’t mean every room has one.

booking.com

You book and pay directly with your chosen provider. Check the cancellation terms and final price.

YOUR PLAN IN DETAIL

Start here

Hello! Over three days, I'll show you some of Istanbul's loveliest sides, with time for coffee and an unhurried stroll too. We'll use Sirkeci or Sultanahmet as a base: plenty of places are within walking distance.

What's in this plan?

A flight option, 3 places to stay, airport journeys in both directions, a private transfer option, a car hire alternative, sights and daily itineraries.

What does Essential include?

Flight research, 3 accommodation options, airport transport, transfer and car hire options, plus a short selection of sights.

What can you add?

The three detailed daily itineraries are optional extras. Essential: HUF 21,990. Three itinerary days: 3 × HUF 3,790. Total planning fee: HUF 33,360.

How to use it

Choose your accommodation first, then look for its name in the transport sections. From there, follow the route for your hotel in each daily plan. The airport journeys out and back each have their own section.

Where the daily walks begin

I've worked through the days from **Sirkeci Mansion**, so you can follow a specific route from the hotel door. There are separate connecting directions for the other two hotels. Once you choose your accommodation, your personal plan will keep only the route for the hotel you book.

YOUR PLAN IN DETAIL

From the airport into the city

From Sabiha Gökçen Airport to the historic centre, I suggest the **M4 metro and Marmaray** combination. There's one change, and you avoid the traffic. With a large suitcase, a late arrival, or if you'd rather not change trains on your first day, a transfer booked to your hotel is more comfortable. You'll find that option in the plan too.

From the terminal to the M4

After baggage reclaim and customs, look for the **Metro / M4** signs in the arrivals hall. The station is called **Sabiha Gökçen Havalimanı**. The airport lists three metro entrances; entrance 3 serves the terminal. Follow the metro signs to the ticket machines and then the gates. Don't go through yet: sort out your travel card first.

Which ticket should you buy?

For this journey, I suggest a rechargeable **anonymous Istanbulkart**. It isn't a day pass: you load money onto it, and a fare is deducted each time you enter a service. Buy and top up the card at the station's **Biletmatik** machines. For two adults, I'd choose two separate cards, so each person uses their own balance. The cost of the card and the travel credit you add are separate.

Buying and using it for the first time

Choose a language you understand at the machine, then the option to buy a new Istanbulkart. Add travel credit afterwards; if you already have a card, choose the top-up option. The screen shows the amount due and the payment methods that machine accepts. Carry some Turkish lira as well as a bank card. After topping up, check the displayed balance. Tap the card on the gate reader and wait for a successful signal before walking through.

M4: towards Kadıköy

On the platform, look for **Kadıköy** as the destination. Board that metro and get off at **Ayrılık Çeşmesi**. This is the station before Kadıköy; you don't need to go all the way there. Watch the station names on the train's display.

Changing to Marmaray

After leaving the train, follow the **Marmaray** signs. There is a new entry and a separate fare between the two networks, so you'll use your Istanbulkart again. Choose a train towards **Halkalı**. The next station is Üsküdar, followed by **Sirkeci**, where you get off. Metro and Marmaray fares may differ; you need enough credit to enter Marmaray. With an anonymous card, don't count on personalised transfer discounts or a distance-based refund.

Arriving at Sirkeci

Follow signs for **Sirkeci / railway station / T1** up to street level. Don't change to the other line towards Kazlıçeşme. The last stretch to your hotel is on the next page. I'd allow **90-120 minutes** from the airport to your hotel, including waiting and walking; this is a planning estimate.

metro.istanbul

YOUR PLAN IN DETAIL

From Sirkeci to your hotel

Marmaray arrives deep underground at Sirkeci. First make your way to street level and find the **T1 Sirkeci tram stop**, our shared reference point. Follow only the directions for your own hotel below. Walking times are estimates and may be longer with luggage.

Sirkeci Mansion

Follow the T1 tracks towards **Gülhane / Sultanahmet** along **Alemdar Caddesi**. Near Gülhane stop, look for **Taya Hatun Sokak 5**, the hotel's address. Allow around **10-15 minutes on foot** from Sirkeci's street-level stop. Enter the full hotel name and address into your phone's map and select walking directions; several hotels nearby have similar names.

Hotel Yaşmak Sultan

Follow the tram line towards Gülhane, then head for **Ebusuud Caddesi 12**. It's about **8-12 minutes on foot**. Keep the address handy, and make sure you haven't selected another hotel with Yaşmak in its name.

Amiral Palace Hotel

With a suitcase, I'd take the **T1 tram**. At Sirkeci stop, use the platform towards **Bağcılar**. Tap your Istanbulkart at the gate; this is another paid journey. After Gülhane, get off at **Sultanahmet**, two stops from Sirkeci. Walk towards the square between Hagia Sophia and the Blue Mosque, then towards **Akbıyık Caddesi**. Your destination is Amiral Palace at **Bayram Fırını Sokak 3**. Allow around **10-15 minutes** for this walk.

If you've had enough travelling

A pre-arranged hotel transfer replaces both the trains and this walk. Some old-town streets have vehicle restrictions; when booking, ask whether you'll be dropped at the door or a nearby meeting point. These walking routes have not been assessed for step-free accessibility.

metro.istanbul

YOUR PLAN IN DETAIL

Back to the airport

The return journey reverses the same connection, but you'll look for **a different destination on both trains**. Your airport is still **Sabiha Gökçen (SAW)**, not Istanbul Airport (IST).

From your hotel to Sirkeci

From Sirkeci Mansion, head from Taya Hatun Sokak down Alemdar Caddesi, following the tram line towards Sirkeci. From Yaşmak Sultan, join this route via Ebusuud Caddesi. From Amiral Palace, walk back to Sultanahmet stop and take the **T1 towards Kabataş** to **Sirkeci**. Gülhane is the only intermediate stop. Pay again with your Istanbulkart at the tram gate.

Marmaray: towards Gebze

At Sirkeci, find the entrance to **Marmaray**. Check your Istanbulkart balance and top it up at a machine if needed, then tap it at the gate. Board a train towards **Gebze**. After Üsküdar comes **Ayrılık Çeşmesi**, where you get off.

M4: Sabiha Gökçen Havalimanı

Follow the signs for the **M4** connection. Entry to the metro is another separately paid journey. Look for **Sabiha Gökçen Havalimanı** as the destination, rather than Kadıköy. Stay on the metro to the airport terminus. After getting off, follow signs for the terminal and then **Departures / Gidiş**.

When should you leave?

Work backwards from your flight time: allow **3 hours at the airport**, then **90-120 minutes for transport** from your hotel, plus time to collect your bags. This is a comfortable planning allowance; you must still meet your airline's check-in and boarding deadlines. For an early or late flight, check the operating hours of both train services first. If either isn't running, book a transfer: one line still operating isn't enough.

metro.istanbul

YOUR PLAN IN DETAIL

Using the T1 tram

You can cover most of the daily routes on foot. When your feet need a break, the **T1 tram** connects the historic centre. The **Istanbulkart** you use for Marmaray works here too; you don't need a separate tourist pass for this plan.

Boarding and paying

Find the named T1 stop and tap your Istanbulkart on the reader at the platform entrance gate. If you're short of credit, top up at a machine before boarding. Then wait for a tram going in the right direction. You don't buy a paper ticket from the driver. Each new entry is another journey; your earlier metro or tram fare isn't a day pass.

Which direction?

Towards Bağcılar: Karaköy, Eminönü, Sirkeci, Gülhane, Sultanahmet, Çemberlitaş and Beyazıt-Kapalıçarşı come in that order as you head towards the bazaar.
Towards Kabataş: the same stops in reverse, from the bazaar towards the waterfront. Each day's instructions name your stop. Check it on the vehicle's display, so you don't have to guess how many stops remain.

After getting off

Leave through the platform exit and cross the tracks only at a designated crossing. If you go one stop too far, don't cut back along the tracks. Find your bearings at the next safe exit and return on foot or with a new tram journey.

metro.istanbul

YOUR PLAN IN DETAIL

If you'd prefer an easier journey

Private airport transfer

A driver meets you at an agreed point and takes you to your accommodation. It may be more comfortable with large suitcases or a late arrival.

1. Give these details when booking

SAW Airport to your chosen hotel, 2 people and the actual number of bags. For the return: hotel to SAW Airport.

2. Confirm these details

The total price, meeting point, waiting allowance and cancellation terms. Ask separately about the return fare too.

3. Allow this much time

At least 60-120 minutes by road, and longer at rush hour. In historic streets, a drop-off right outside the hotel isn't always possible.

Where to look

Welcome Pickups offers SAW airport transfers. The price depends on the date and address.

welcomepickups.com

YOUR PLAN IN DETAIL

Will you need a car?

A useful tip

I wouldn’t hire a car for these three days of sightseeing. Walking, the metro and the tram make it easier to reach the places in this plan.

If you do choose a car

SIXT’s SAW airport office operates by domestic arrivals. Your booking confirmation gives the exact collection and return location.

Check before booking

Total rental price; deposit; excess; accepted payment card; mileage allowance; fuel policy; tolls; and parking at your hotel.

What are the deposit and excess?

The deposit is an amount held on your card as security. The excess is the amount you may have to pay if there is damage, depending on your chosen terms.

You don’t need both

An airport transfer and a hire car are alternatives. Choose whichever suits your trip better.

sixt.com

YOUR PLAN IN DETAIL

Places worth setting out for

Sultanahmet and the Blue Mosque

Domes, a spacious courtyard and one of historic Istanbul's loveliest squares. This is an active place of worship, so plan around prayer times and visitor access. Bring clothing that covers shoulders and knees.

Hagia Sophia

A striking meeting of the city's layers of history. This plan includes seeing it from outside; an interior visit can be added separately after checking the current visitor entrance and ticket rules.

Basilica Cistern

Columns, water and atmospheric lighting underground. Allow around 45-60 minutes inside, plus queuing time. Opening hours and admission prices need checking before you travel.

Gülhane, Eminönü and Galata Bridge

The park is a lovely pause among the stone walls, while the waterfront shows another side of the city. You can take a short walk across Galata Bridge towards Karaköy too. The T1 tram can bring you back towards Sirkeci or Sultanahmet.

Grand Bazaar

Think of it as a place to browse, rather than a compulsory shopping stop. It's planned for Saturday, but weekly and holiday opening hours still need checking. If it feels like too much, skip it: your trip will still feel complete.

Topkapı Palace could replace the bazaar and cistern as a separate visit lasting several hours. Fitting every major interior into three days would, to me, feel more like an endurance challenge.

goturkiye.com

DAY BY DAY · DAY 1

Arrive, then ease into Istanbul

Morning

Friday, 14 May.
Arrive and follow the SAW airport route described earlier. Only start the first walk if you've reached the hotel and dropped off your bags by early afternoon. Arrange luggage storage with the hotel beforehand; early room access is not assumed.

Afternoon / evening

Your first walk from the hotel

If you've arrived by early afternoon, set off around 15:00. From **Sirkeci Mansion**, walk to the entrance of Gülhane Park; the hotel and park are close neighbours. From Yaşmak Sultan, take Ebusuud Caddesi to Alemdar Caddesi and continue towards the park. From Amiral Palace, walk through Sultanahmet Square and down Alemdar Caddesi. These are walking routes, so no transport ticket is needed.

Allow 45-60 minutes for the park. Then leave by the main entrance onto Alemdar Caddesi and follow the tram line towards Sirkeci, then **Eminönü's waterfront**. The walk from the park to the water is around 15-20 minutes. From there, you can cross **Galata Bridge** to Karaköy using the pedestrian walkway.

Back from the waterfront

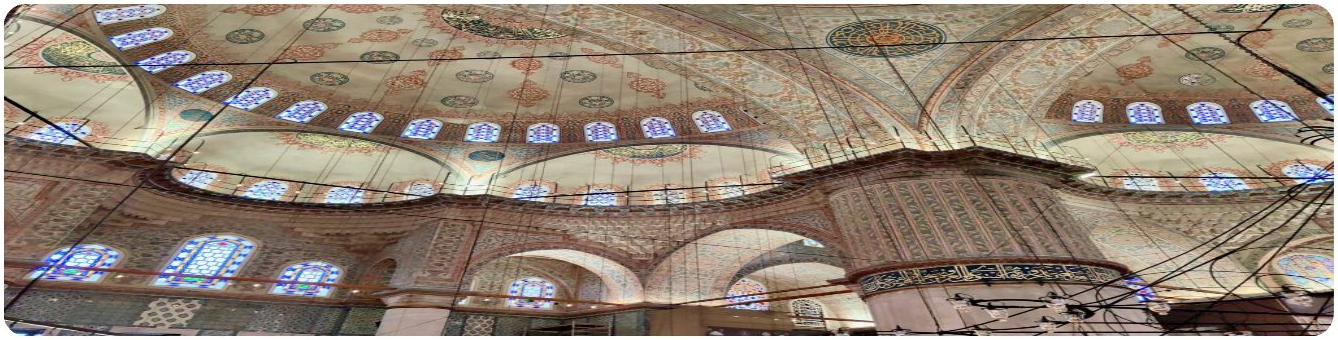
If you've reached Karaköy, find **T1 Karaköy** stop at the north end of the bridge. Board towards **Bağcılar**, paying with your Istanbulkart at the gate. Get off at **Gülhane** for Mansion and Yaşmak, or **Sultanahmet** for Amiral Palace. Follow your familiar walk back to the hotel. If you stayed in Eminönü, join the same direction at **T1 Eminönü**. For a hotel near Sirkeci, walking is a good option too, around 15-20 minutes.

A useful tip

Timings are suggestions. If you arrive late, have dinner nearby and save the waterfront for tomorrow evening. There's no prepaid activity today for a delay to spoil.

DAY BY DAY · DAY 2

Sultanahmet, one step at a time



Morning

Morning: from your hotel to Sultanahmet

Saturday, 15 May. I'd aim to start in the square around 09:00. From Sirkeci Mansion, head to **Gülhane** stop, then walk uphill along **Alemdar Caddesi** towards **Sultanahmet**, around 15-20 minutes. From Yaşmak Sultan, join the route via Ebusuud Caddesi. From Amiral Palace, head via Akbıyık Caddesi towards the Blue Mosque, around 10-15 minutes. Your destination is **Sultanahmet Square / the Hippodrome**.

If you'd prefer the tram, from Mansion and Yaşmak take **T1 at Gülhane towards Bağcılar**, one stop to **Sultanahmet**. Use your Istanbulkart at the gate; no separate ticket is needed.

Allow 30-45 minutes for the Hippodrome and square, then visit the **Blue Mosque**, working around prayer times. Walk across the square to **Hagia Sophia**, which we're viewing from outside in this plan. No further transport is needed.

Afternoon / evening

After lunch: the cistern and bazaar

From Hagia Sophia, find the **Yerebatan Sarnıcı / Basilica Cistern** entrance at **Yerebatan Caddesi 1-3**, a few minutes' walk from the square. You need a separate admission ticket; your transport fare doesn't cover entry. At the ticket office, ask for two standard adult admission tickets for an independent visit. If booking online, check the date and valid visiting period. Allow at least an hour including the queue.

From the cistern, return to **Sultanahmet T1** stop. Travel towards **Bağcılar** for the bazaar: after **Çemberlitaş** comes **Beyazıt-Kapalıçarşı**, where you get off. Pay with your Istanbulkart at the platform gate. Follow **Kapalıçarşı / Grand Bazaar** signs for the short walk to the bazaar. You can also walk from Sultanahmet along Divanyolu Caddesi in around 20-25 minutes.

Home from the bazaar

Return to **Beyazıt-Kapalıçarşı T1** stop. This time, board towards **Kabataş**. For Amiral Palace, get off at **Sultanahmet**; for Mansion and Yaşmak, use the next stop, **Gülhane**. Pay another fare with your Istanbulkart at the gate. The remaining walk is your morning route in reverse.

A useful tip

All walking times are estimates. For ticketed sights, use the current official ticket seller; the suggested time isn't a reserved entry slot. If it rains, shorten the outdoor walk rather than adding another museum.

DAY BY DAY · DAY 3

One more morning stroll, then home

Morning

Sunday, 16 May. Only plan this walk if your flight home is late. After breakfast and check-out, leave your luggage at the hotel only if you've arranged this with them.

From Sirkeci Mansion, head via Gülhane; from Yaşmak Sultan, take Ebusuud Caddesi to the tram line, then walk through Sirkeci to **Eminönü's** waterfront. From Amiral Palace, walk to Sultanahmet and take the **T1 towards Kabataş** to **Eminönü**, paying with your Istanbulkart at the stop's gate. You can then walk across Galata Bridge to **Karaköy**. Allow 60-90 minutes, including coffee.

Afternoon / evening

At Karaköy, take the **T1 from Karaköy** stop beside the bridge back towards **Bağcılar**, using your Istanbulkart at the gate. Get off at **Gülhane** for Mansion and Yaşmak, or **Sultanahmet** for Amiral Palace. Walk back to collect your bags.

The airport journey is a different route: follow the **Back to the airport** section. From Sirkeci, take Marmaray towards **Gebze** to **Ayrılık Çeşmesi**, then the M4 to **Sabiha Gökçen Havalimanı** terminus. Entry to each network is paid separately. Work backwards from your actual flight time to decide when to leave the hotel; skip the morning walk if it eats into your airport allowance.

A useful tip

I wouldn't book a paid attraction on the day you fly home. One last coffee is a lovely ending; catching your flight is even better.

BEFORE YOU GO

Good to know before you go

SOURCES CHECKED: 7 NOVEMBER 2026

SOURCES Pegasus: flypgs.com/en/campaigns/2027-summer-season-international-flights-from-11-euro-taxes-on-the-mobile-app
sirkecimansion.com · homepage and Contact
hotelyasmaksultan.com · Our hotel and Contact
amiralpalacehotel.com · Location
metro.istanbul/en/Hatlarimiz/HatDetay?hat=M4
metro.istanbul/en/Hatlarimiz/HatDetay?hat=T1
tcddtasimacilik.gov.tr/marmaray/tr/neredennereye
welcomepickups.com/istanbul/sabiha-gokcen-airport-transfer-to-city/
sixt.com/car-rental/turkey/istanbul/istanbul-sabiha-gokcen-airport/
goturkiye.com/routes/2-day-itinerary-istanbul-historic-peninsula
tursab.org.tr/duyurular/yerebatan-sarnici-ziyaret-saatleri-hakkinda-duyuru-1

Photos

Cover: Courtyard of the Blue Mosque, Istanbul. (54505628417), Mustang Joe, Wikimedia Commons, CC0 1.0.
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Photo licence: creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/
Images have been resized and cropped to fit. They show real places; they do not illustrate hotel rooms.

Before booking

Check the current entry requirements for your travel documents, your insurance and whether your mobile data plan covers Türkiye. At the personal handover, we'll talk through any remaining questions. The final decisions, bookings and payments to providers are yours.

Additional sources checked for the detailed transport guide (7 November 2026):
metro.istanbul/Home/SikcaSorulanSorular?q=5
visit.istanbul/istanbul-card
istanbulseninhaber.ibb.istanbul/haber-detay/istanbulkartinizi-simdi-kisisellestirin
sabihagokcen.aero/passengers-and-visitors/transport-and-parking/transportation/metro-en
yerebatan.com