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# Finding the Beat; the Nightlife of Istanbul

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Istanbul is a city where not only the view amazes. As day turns to night, many locals and visitors head out for a night on the town that in 2007 Newsweek called "the coolest in the world." Istanbul goes to bed really late, and sometimes never sleeps at all.

At the right place, you can lose yourself until the wee hours of the morning. Even a novice can find a harmonious place within the various vibrant clubs and bars ubiquitous throughout this historic city.

The most affluent clubs are located along the Bosphorus near Kurucesme, on the European side. Reina, ([www.reina.com.tr](http://www.reina.com.tr)) located on the Bosphorus with a spectacular view of the bridge, opened in 2002 and is still going strong. Popular especially in the summer, Reina is multi-storied, with five or more different high end restaurants located inside.

Vastly redecorated every year, Reina never looks the same two years in a row. This restaurant/bar/club also can be accessed by boat, and what better way to make a grand entrance? Not many nightspots in America offer these options. The only drawback is that most of the people inside prefer people-watching to dancing. However, given the celebrities and glitterati who play here, I find that people-watching is pretty fun to do at Reina.

Not far from Reina is the Kurucesme arena, an outdoor concert venue on the Bosphorus. Sting and Shakira are two of the biggest names to let their voices float over the water in this exceptional venue. Check [www.biletix.com](http://www.biletix.com), (the Turkish Ticketmaster) for concert listings and ticket information, and try to catch a concert here if you can. The website also has an English option, so you can also see what's playing in various venues throughout the city.

## ORTAKOY

Closer to the Bosphorus Bridge is the district of Ortakoy, which recently emerged as a nightlife hotspot. This quaint, artistic neighborhood is perfect for a day or evening stroll, with many eccentric and interesting shops and cafes to check out. After hours, head to JC's, a wonderful jazz club that should be taken advantage of. JC's, ([www.istanbuljazz.com](http://www.istanbuljazz.com)) an Ortakoy favorite, has a fantastic jazz lineup, an open and relaxing interior, and decent food. Entrance fees vary with each performer, but rest assured that whatever the price, JC's is worth it.

Things get wilder nearer the center of the city. Stop in at Cahide Cabaret ([www.cahidecabaret.com](http://www.cahidecabaret.com)), located in the Macka district of Istanbul, not far from Taksim Square. Cahide is famous for its lively staff and cabaret shows. The inside is colorfully vintage, and even the patrons add to the décor. Many people wear costumes here, and the place has a lively, energetic feel. The crowd is much more upbeat, and the experience is loads of fun.

The best place to really feel the beat of Istanbul is undoubtedly Taksim Square. Taksim and adjacent Beyoglu have something for everyone. Located on the square near the Marmara Hotel is the Ataturk Kultur Merkezi (AKM) where you can almost always catch an opera, ballet, or orchestra concert for a very affordable price. Bustling Istiklal Avenue never sleeps, and as you walk down the crowded, pedestrian street, be prepared to be assailed by an eclectic symphony created from the music of the various bars, clubs and cafes that line the street.

Those who prefer wine should head to Pano and Viktor Levi ([www.viktorlevi1914.com](http://www.viktorlevi1914.com)), two landmark Istanbul wine houses located near the Galatasaray High School and personal favorites of mine. These neighboring, historic establishments have standing wine bars on the first floor, and dinner seating in the basement and balcony levels. This is a perfect place to go to start your evening. The food is good, and the local wines delectable.

## ROCK VENUES

If you like variety, head to Asmalimescit Street for a fantastic dining experience. From raw to Mexican, almost every kind of restaurant can be found within this area. Babylon, a pioneer rock venue in an old warehouse, is located here, and worth checking out. Babylon ([www.babylon.com.tr](http://www.babylon.com.tr)) features both Turkish and foreign performing artists; the slate varies from week to week.

Taksim and Beyoglu have so many bars and clubs, and every local has his or her favorite. These include Roxy, Yeni Melek, and Life Roof, to name a few. Venues are small, smoky, and crowded, with a live band and a DJ. Most places stay open until 4 or 5 a.m., so feel free to dance the night away as long as you wish. Cover charges are minimal, and usually include one free drink in the price. Turkish people love to dance and at first a foreigner may feel intimidated when watching how intricately they dance with their wrists, arms, and hips. Imitating it will earn you lots of points so don't hesitate to try, and don't be surprised if people nearby enthusiastically offer to teach you some moves.

Belly dancing is common in Turkey, and the Galata Tower ([www.galatatower.net](http://www.galatatower.net)) has a wonderful program loved by tourists and Turks alike. Located at the top of the historic tower that overlooks the golden Horn, guests are treated to a

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scenic view mixed with sultry belly dance performances. Be prepared to be pulled up for impromptu lessons!

#### A FASIL NIGHT

To experience traditional music, check out various places that offer "fasil" music. Nevizade and the Cicek Pasaji in Beyoglu have street musicians who play and the crowd often dances as well. Usually performed at a meyhané, patrons sit at a large table for a long, relaxing dinner accompanied by many hot and cold appetizers (meze) and raki, the anis-flavored alcoholic drink of Turkey. Fasil music is performed by at least four musicians playing the oud, the clarinet, fiddle, and the kanun, a zither-like instrument. One of the best places to experience fasil (although a bit pricey) is at Woks Ziyade Fasil ([www.ziyadefasil.com](http://www.ziyadefasil.com)) in Levent, a short taxi ride from Taksim Square. The musicians are fabulous, and the experience is wonderful. A fasil night is a truly Turkish experience, and shouldn't be missed. As the night progresses, people at neighboring tables and complete strangers will be pulling you up to dance, and teaching you the words to many of the beloved songs.

Many Turkish people love to top off the evening with a visit to a nargile café. These old-fashioned water pipes come in flavors ranging from apple to cappuccino, and have made a comeback in the past few years. The best place to smoke one is in Tophane, a district just a short tram ride away from Taksim. Here several cafes provide a haven from the hustle and bustle of Istiklal Avenue. Recline in a stuffed chair and smoke with friends while playing backgammon. Beginners should try the apple flavored nargile, washed down with sweet apple tea.

Istanbul nightlife is truly a world of its own, and an experience worth a few sleepless nights. For those looking for a different scene from that presented in New York and Miami, Istanbul definitely has merit. Clubs that can be entered by boat, dining and dancing under bridges spanning two continents, smoking water pipes in the shadow of ruins are all characteristics that make Istanbul truly one of the "coolest cities in the world."

#### WHEN GOING OUT&hellip;

Although Istanbul is generally a safe city, please always exercise caution when going out at night. Traveling in groups is highly recommended. Women should never enter bars/clubs alone, and should travel with a male companion if possible. If you do encounter trouble, contact the police by calling 155.

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