

Snapshot from...



Acting as a bridge between the East and the West, the modern republic of Turkey is gifted with exceptional cultural and historical wealth. Perhaps best known for once being the heart of the Ottoman Empire, this popular holiday destination is also renowned as the location for two of the Wonders of the Ancient World, the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus and The Mausoleum of Halicarnasus. In more recent times, Turkey became the famed eastern destination of the iconic train, the Orient-Express and 2013 saw the opening of the Marmaray rail tunnel under the Bosphorus connecting Asia and Europe.



St Nicholas



Arguably one of the most recognisable faces of the modern world, St. Nicholas, Santa Claus, Father Christmas, has his origins in Turkey. Born in Patara, now present-day Turkey, circa 280, St Nicholas lost both his parents at a young age and devoted his life and his inheritance to helping the poor and needy. He served as a bishop in Myra, now called Demre, on the coast of modern-day Turkey.

There are many legends surrounding the famous St Nicholas. One story tells how he helped three poor sisters, whose impoverished father thought of selling them into servitude because he could not afford their dowries. As each of the daughters came of age, St Nicholas secretly placed a bag of money in their house. When the turn of the third daughter was nearing, the father stood guard outside their house so that he could identify the source of these donations. He saw St Nicholas approaching and thanked him for his kindness.

After his death in 343, the stories of St Nicholas' miracles spread to other parts of the world, leading to a legacy being created of him being a gift-giver and protector of children.

Ulu Cami of Diyarbakir

At the beginning of the Muslim rule of Diyarbakir in 639, an ancient religious site was converted into a mosque, which subsequently fell into ruin due to disuse years later. In 1091, the reigning Sultan Malik-Shah directed the local governor to rebuild the mosque out of locally found basalt rock, drawing influence from neighboring countries.

This reconstruction gave rise to the current Ulu Cami (Great Mosque), which is the oldest and considered to be the one of the most significant in the Anatolian region. It can accommodate up to 5,000 worshippers and is widely regarded to be the fifth holiest site in Islam.



The mosque faces the main street of the city and is formed out of a complex of buildings around a highly decorated courtyard. It boasts of a magnificent prayer hall which makes up the entire south wall of the courtyard. The centre of the courtyard has an Ottoman fountain and a platform for praying, added in 1849.

The western façade of the courtyard was rebuilt between 1117 and 1125 following an earthquake and fire in 1115. It reuses parts from a Roman theatre, including columns which combine classical design with precise Islamic geometric patterns. This ornate feature is one of the most stunning and distinguishing aspects of the Great Mosque.

Turkish Coffee



The role of coffee in Turkish lifestyle and culture is as important now as it was during the rule of the Ottoman Empire. Consumption and serving of coffee has had a significant role in social interaction, prayer and hospitality customs throughout the years. Many of the rituals coffee helped to establish are not prevalent in modern Turkish society anymore, but the drink has remained an integral part of the culture.

Coffee was brought to Turkey over four and a half centuries ago by an Ottoman governor who visited Yemen. It became part of elaborate ceremonies where coffee makers, who sometimes earned the title of Chief Coffee Maker, prepared and served coffee for the sultan with the help of dozens of assistants.

Women also received intensive training to teach them the proper technique of preparing Turkish coffee and this was one of the skills upon which they would be judged on when looking for a husband.

For both men and women, coffee has been at the centre of social interaction. During the Ottoman period, women socialised with each other over coffee and sweets, whilst men met in coffee houses to discuss politics and to play backgammon. Over the years, Turkish coffee houses have become a social hub, providing an environment for people to meet and talk, showing how modern culture continues to embrace elements from the past.

Turkish Dance

Turkish dance emerged from the harems, a part of the house set apart exclusively for the women in the family, during the Ottoman empire. The Sultan's harem was usually large, often housing several hundred women, some of whom were wives, sisters, daughters and servants. There, female dancers would entertain the women in the harem through belly dance, however they would hardly ever appear in public.

This style of dance and the associated harem music moved from the sultan's private living quarters to the public through male street entertainers and hired dancers, which led to it becoming a popular form of entertainment. These male dancers performed publicly for wedding celebrations, feasts and festivals.

Modern oriental dance in Turkey is derived from this tradition. It is however more flamboyant and dynamic, with the predominant movement being a hip lift, the style also showcases bold moves such as hair tosses, spins and kicks. Today's belly dancers are known for their adept use of finger cymbals, or zils, as instruments.



The Turkish Art Market

As well as being a country with a rich history and a lot of tradition, Turkey also has more modern offerings, such as a booming art market. In the recent years, Turkish artists have witnessed a huge increase in the popularity of their work, as well as a rise in the value of their pieces.

Traditionally, large families are the biggest art patrons in Turkey, opening up galleries such as the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art which has introduced many Turks to a vast number of Turkish contemporary artists. Due to the growing popularity of modern art in Turkey, art patronage has extended to private collectors, with many independent galleries appearing in Downtown Istanbul in recent years.

The influence has even expanded outside of the Turkish borders: in 2009, Sotheby's in London held its first auction of Turkish modern art, grossing more than \$2 million (£1.3 million, 4.4 million Turkish Lira), an illustration of the large global interest in the expanding Turkish art market.

Dominika Chmurzynska -

On behalf of the New Silk Road Forum