



The Hippodrome was an enormous ancient stadium. It was completed by Constantine in 330BC. It was built for horse-racing events. It held up to 60,000 spectators. Today, only the tall obelisks that stood in the middle of the stadium remain. The side walls are completely gone. The Ottomans used the stones for building material.



The Blue Mosque is next to the Hippodrome. Its domed roof and its six minarets are visible from many parts of the city. It is called "Blue" because of the blue tiles inside. Before entering, people must remove their shoes, as the mosque is still used as a place of worship.



A must-see in Istanbul is the Basilica Cistern. It was built in the sixth century to supply water for the palaces nearby. It can hold approximately 80,000 cubic metres of water. We go down 52 stone steps to a spooky underground chamber.



The Topkapi Palace holds the remaining treasures of the Ottoman Empire. As we stroll around the palace and grounds, we are immersed in history. In the harem, we see the 40 rooms that belonged to the sultan's mother. The treasury is full of magnificent artefacts. The priceless Spoonmaker's Diamond, one of the world's biggest diamonds, is the most dazzling of all.



Some people say the Hagia Sophia is the eighth Wonder of the World. Its huge domed ceiling is 55 metres high and 31 metres wide. There are thousands of brilliant mosaics. They picture religious scenes and Byzantine emperors from when it was used as a Christian church. The Ottomans turned this church into a mosque. In 1935, Atatürk turned it into a museum. Now the magnificent Hagia Sophia can be admired by everyone. We lose track of time as we gaze at this breathtaking place.



Our last stop for the day is at a Turkish bath, or hammam. Turkish baths go back to the time of the Romans. The hammam we go to was built in 1557. There are separate baths for men and women.

We sit on a hot stone slab. It is very steamy. It is just the right thing after walking and gazing around all day. What a refreshing way to end our tour of Istanbul!



The Spoonmaker's Diamond is pear-shaped. It is set among 49 smaller diamonds.