

# ISTANBUL FOR KIDS

Burçak Gürün Muraben

Illustrated by Uğur Altun





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## FOREWORD AND THANKS

My beloved Istanbul. I was born and bred here. Wonderful friends, lots of chaos, ubiquitous street cats, red tulips, flocks of cormorants and many, many adventures. A husband, two children and another continent later, I am now a Sydneysider.

I wondered how I could pass on my love of Istanbul to my children and their friends. The books I found ‘dumbed down’ the information or were just infuriatingly wrong. I decided to write a book that had really high quality information, but was quirky and fun, and appealed to both children and adults – an insider’s view with and understanding of little outsiders.

I hope it inspires you to find out more, and to come back. I wish you lots of fun and adventure.

Hannah Fink made me feel, the way great friends do, that I can do anything. Big thanks to Banu Akarsu for lots of support and a great collection of books on

Istanbul. Taciser Belge, Jennifer Lianos, Mary Alta-  
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Thank you Samiye Öz and İpek Şoran for making it all  
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blessed.

Aslı Özyar, my life-long anchor, helped me see  
the Museum of Archaeology through her loving and  
capable eyes. She has had an immeasurable impact  
on this book.

Thanks also to Frances at Waverly library who  
said that instead of borrowing books about writing,  
I should just do it. The staff at Newtown library (the  
libraries in Sydney are just wonderful) were support-  
ive all the way.

The boring bits are all my fault and believe me  
they would have been much worse if it were not for  
Yaz Muraben, Lilah Shapiro and Maya Muraben.

One does need a bit of time away from kids when  
writing a book and grandmas are made for times like  
this. Huge thanks to Ida Muraben for that.

And Yusuf, I would have never thought I would  
say this but ‘Thank you for correcting my English’ and  
lightening things up for all of us – no matter what.







## THE GALATA TOWER

The Genoese (from Genoa in Italy) built the Galata Tower in 1348. They had ended up in Constantinople after the 4th Crusade in 1204 led by their arch-enemies the Venetians. When the Byzantines re-captured their capital after a 60 year Latin (Roman Catholic) rule, they gave Galata to the Genoese in return for their loyalty and support. By the 1300s, the privileged Genoese were controlling sea trade and flourishing as the Byzantine Empire got steadily weaker.

The 9 storey tower sets you 50m above ground when you are on the observation deck. It used to be surrounded by a moat. The Turkish word for moat is 'hendek'. Have a look around to see if you can find this word in or around the tower.

In 1453, the Genoese presented the keys to their city to the new Sultan – Mehmet the Conqueror. He was only 21 at the time!

The tower was used as a prison for a while. It was conveniently positioned near the dockyards where prisoners could be used as slaves. Eventually it was turned into an observation tower protecting Istanbul from one of its greatest dangers: fire!

### **I spy with my little eye from the Galata Tower**

Still standing proud after 650 years, this medieval tower is where you get a bird's-eye view of the city. Once you figure out the layout of the Golden Horn and the Bosphorus, you get Istanbul. Now climb up the tower and see how many of the following landmarks you can spot:

#### **The Galata Bridge**

The current bridge is the 5th to be built on this spot. Nowadays it is covered with fishermen trying out their luck, and it has had a notable history. Michelangelo and Leonardo Da Vinci were both asked to design a bridge. A model of Da Vinci's design, which was rejected, was recently built in Norway. It would have been the longest bridge in the world at the time.

#### **The Golden Horn**

This natural harbour used to have a huge chain across it in Byzantine times. You can still see parts of it in the Museum of Archaeology and the Military Museum. In 1453 the Ottomans got their ships across by rolling them on logs over land, straight into the harbour.

### **Topkapı Palace**

This palace was home to Ottoman Sultans for 400 years. It would cover over 1,000 football fields. If you could buy it, it would cost over \$10 billion US dollars!

### **The Maiden's Tower**

The Maiden's Tower has been used as a lighthouse and quarantine area. It has also been seen in many movies, including two James Bond films. Nowadays it has a restaurant and café.

### **The Blue Mosque**

The Blue Mosque is the only mosque in the world with six minarets. The reason it got its name was for the beautiful blue tiles inside.

### **Hagia Sophia**

Instead of the tallest building, the challenge in the past used to be the biggest dome. Three famous churches managed to surpass the 30 metre size of the dome of the Hagia Sophia hundreds of years later; any ideas which ones?

St Pauls Cathedral in London, St Peter's Cathedral in Rome and the Duomo in Milan.

### **The Bosphorus Bridge**

Venus Williams played a tennis match on the bridge in 2005, the only match ever to be played between two continents.

### **Süleymaniye Mosque**

The great architect Sinan took on many challenges

including that of Hagia Sophia's dome. Although he didn't make the dome bigger, he managed to make the space underneath the dome bigger in the Süleymaniye Mosque with ingenious design.

## HEZARFEN AHMET ÇELEBİ THE FLYING SCIENTIST

Did you know that you are standing on the actual spot where the ancient dream of flying became reality?

Hezarfen Ahmet Çelebi flew from the top of the Galata Tower and landed in Üsküdar across the Bosphorus using the prevailing winds. This made him not only the first man to fly but also the first man to fly between two continents, from Europe to Asia, and in the 17th century! How cool is that? He studied Leonardo da Vinci's notes on flight of birds and practised flying with wings made of eagle feathers at an archery range.

Evliya Çelebi, the Turkish Marco Polo of the same century talks about the event in his diary. Legend and folklore have given his works a magical quality. He loved travelling and wrote about the customs, buildings and colourful characters he came across.

The Sultan at the time, Murad IV, was in the au-

dience for the flight. He awarded Hezarfen a sack of gold coins and then expelled him! His out-of-the-box thinking was deemed too dangerous. He was sent to Algeria where he died when he was only 31. Very much like Galileo who was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1633 for his brilliant mind. Both politicians and priests found it hard to deal with people centuries ahead of their time.

Initially the Genovese were not allowed to build city walls. Instead they built tall, solid houses next to one another to get around the rule and have some form of defence. The Galata Tower (Tower of Christ) on the northern boundary of the colony was the tallest building in the city when it was completed.

Hezarfen, meaning ‘a thousand sciences’ comes from the Persian ‘hazar’ meaning thousand and the Arabic ‘fann’ meaning science. Persian and Arabic were common languages in the Ottoman Empire.

A favourite subject of Evliya Çelebi was vampire stories. He has written quite a few, and they are some of the earliest vampire stories known!





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Explore the layers of thousands of years of history, through many empires, and what they have become today in the vibrant, multicultural and enigmatic city we know as Istanbul.



Burçak Gürün Muraben mixes history and fable in this engaging and light-hearted guide to Istanbul. Adults seem to enjoy this book as much as children as it has been written in an easy-to-read but not 'dumbed down' way. The stories and history bring the city and its treasure trove of historic sites, monuments and relics to life. The stories of grandeur and nobility are mixed with gore and scandal in a compelling book which you will read time and time again.



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