



European
Joint
Support Unit

Welcome to Istanbul





WELCOME

Congratulations on your posting to Istanbul. It will be a memorable tour! There are just 5 UK MoD posts in Istanbul and so you are joining a very select group, positioned at the fringe of NATO and living on the very edge of Europe. Turkey is a fascinating country at many levels - historic, cultural, organisational – and quite unlike any western European country you may have visited. It literally and socially sits astride 2 continents and at least 2 cultures, and is ambitious for its place in this region. Still a relatively young administration (the Republic was only created in 1923, less than 100 years ago), it has thrived economically recently however, remember the phrase ‘Byzantine complexity’ was invented here. The people are charming and helpful, Istanbul is truly a World City where there is always something going on, whilst outside of Istanbul there is even more to see, do and experience.

This guide is designed for orientation and expectation management. It highlights many of the points that past and present personnel have found useful in the run up and move to a non-regular place such as Istanbul. Although it cannot be a ‘definitive’ policy guide, if you apply your own situation to what you read, you should arrive without too much hassle, with everything you need, and with sense of humour intact. Some of the information highlights the ‘gotchas’ you need to be aware of and includes signposts to official policy references for the processes you will have to follow. The detail relating to travel and subsistence arrangements for postings is changing all the time and you must seek latest versions from your local admin staff. Moreover, this guide cannot be used as an authority for claims or provision of services. After you have been here a couple of months you will no doubt be asked to update the text with any useful tips/information from your own experience for the benefit of subsequent arrivals; it is an interactive document.

To supplement the information contained in this guide you may wish to consider a recce to Istanbul; flights can be relatively inexpensive and your predecessor will be happy to accommodate you. Those personnel currently in Istanbul who carried out a recce found it invaluable to orientate themselves and to help plan their move out; equally, others (who perhaps have less complicated lives or are happy just to ‘go with the flow’) have settled happily without.

The 3 most important contacts in your move will be: your predecessor; our Locally Employed Civilian (LEC) Mr Irfan Gunal who runs the UK NSE (see below); and your mentor, one of the other UK officers who will help you through the first months of your tour. Do make every effort to contact them as soon as possible.

UK National Support Element (NSE)

The UK NSE provides local administrative support. The NSE is located on Camp and consists of an office with internet access and a DII laptop terminal and Irfan who acts as a translator and a highly effective fixer. Contact detail:

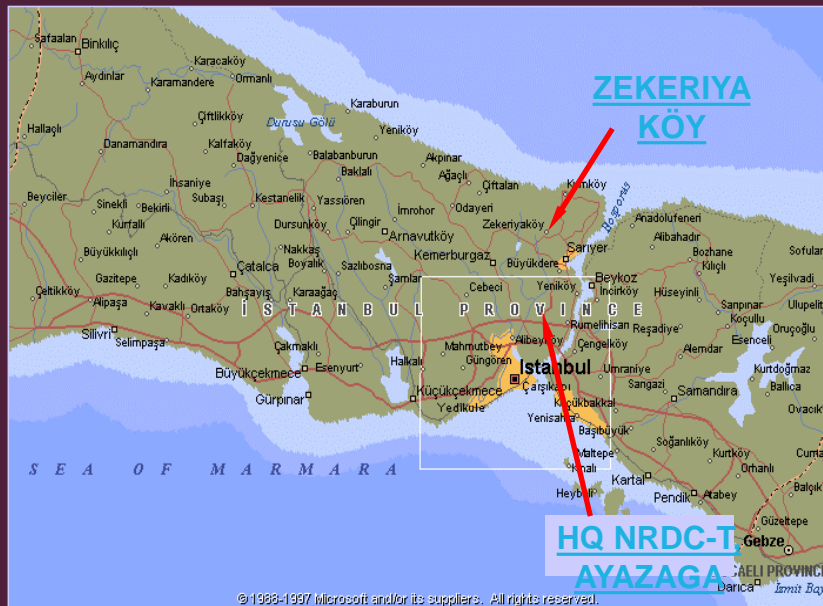
Irfan Gunal Email: irfan.gunal100@mod.gov.uk

UK NSE Email: gso-ejsu-turkey-nse-mailbox@mod.gov.uk



TURKEY / ISTANBUL

Istanbul is split by the Bosphorus: you will live and work on the European side of the city. The 2 key locations for your early orientation are the village of Zekeriya köy where we are all accommodated, and the HQ NRDC-T, a 30 minute drive towards the City. Ankara is a 5-hour drive and Izmir 4 1/2 hours by car. Both are one hour's flight away from Istanbul.



Modern Turkey occupies a key geographical and strategic position in the world, linking Europe with Asia and the Middle East. It has long coastlines along the Black Sea in the north, the Aegean in the west and the Mediterranean in the south. It shares land borders with Greece, Bulgaria, Armenia, Georgia, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Asian and European Turkey are separated by the Turkish Straits (Istanbul Strait or Bosphorus, the Sea of Marmara, and the Çanakkale Strait or the Dardanelles), which together form a vital sea link between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean.

The country is huge: it would stretch from Berlin to Madrid. The countryside varies from high mountains to flat arable plains, from dense forests to deserts and from rocky shores to sandy beaches. Climatic conditions range from continental extremes in the central and eastern regions to less changeable conditions on the Mediterranean coast.

Historically, as Asia Minor, this area has seen civilisations come and go and from the earliest times waves of conquerors have passed over the land. Very early city-states gave way to the Assyrians and then to the Hittites who ruled the country for nearly 2000 years before being overthrown by the Phrygians. They were followed in turn by Lydians, the Carians, the Dorians and the Greeks. Alexander the Great occupied most of the country on his way to Persia. Next came the Romans, and during this period St Paul made his several missionary journeys and was shipwrecked at Smyrna (now Izmir).



The Turkish occupation of the country began in the 11th century and the Ottoman Empire developed from there, occupying most of the Mediterranean, North Africa and penetrating as far as Austria at the peak of its power. The present Republic and its boundaries were established in the early 1920s when the country was united behind Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk) who set out to modernise Turkey and bring it more into line with Western Europe. At the time of writing the ruling party is the AKP, a conservative party formed as an offshoot from an Islamist party closed down by the courts in 1998. The AKP is led by Mr Recep Tayip Erdoğan, who was Prime Minister from 2002 until he was elected President in August 2014.

The population of Turkey is about 80 million with the majority being Muslim; compared to much of the Middle East perhaps, it is at the liberal end of the Islamic spectrum. The Turkish economy has grown strongly over the past decade and largely escaped the EU banking crisis and subsequent recession. It is based on agriculture and raw materials, though manufacturing industries and tourism are becoming more important. However, there is little industrialisation outside the major cities and the people there depend mostly on agrarian subsistence farming. Construction is endemic.

Ankara (population ~5m) has been the official capital since 1923, when the Republic was declared, and houses all major Government Departments and Embassies. Istanbul is the commercial, financial, industrial, media, maritime and cultural centre of Turkey. With an official population of about 15 million (it is said in reality to be closer to 17 million), Istanbul is by far the largest urban conglomeration in the country, and is one of the largest cities in the world. Izmir (population ~3 million) is the 3rd largest city in Turkey and sits on the Aegean coast in the west of Turkey. It is home to NATO's HQ Land Command where approx 30 UK MoD staff work; you will probably visit at some stage.

Istanbul (originally Byzantium, then Constantinople) is a city built around water and the only city in the world that sits astride two continents: Europe and Asia. The Bosphorus, the Golden Horn and the Sea of Marmara, with their constant bustle of water-borne traffic of every variety, lend a special character to the city and are the focus of much of its activity and recreation. The older part of the city, contained within the still substantial Byzantine walls, has incomparable monuments from the Byzantine and Ottoman eras coexisting in a maze of picturesque wooden houses, modern flats and shops, and some fine modern buildings. Across the Golden Horn, the central business and residential districts (Galata, Beyoğlu, Nişantaşı) consist mainly of modern buildings on the main roads, with the flavour of the old city still remaining in the steep and narrow, roughly cobbled, side streets.

There are a great many restaurants all over the city, which range from very expensive to wonderfully cheap. A cultural centre stages operas, concerts and plays of a high standard. The Grand Bazaar is one of the most exciting shopping experiences in the world and the City has a good collection of outlet shops for the bargain hunter. There are many very good museums. You can also take a ferry to one of the islands in the Sea of Marmara or cruise the Bosphorus.

In the outer suburbs of Istanbul, blocks of bland modern flats dominate the scene. Gardens and open spaces are rare, hence an obsession with picnicking, often on road verges. City traffic is very heavy and the quality of the roads variable; robust cars with 'road presence' do bring a certain peace of mind in these conditions. Driving takes some practice and some confidence. There are lots of traffic jams, and you will need to constantly expect the unexpected;



Istanbul drivers are renowned for giving no quarter to other road users, although malice or 'road rage' appears rare. The road systems are quite complex and it is very easy to get lost or swept off miles in the wrong direction. A good map is essential, and these can be bought locally. SatNav systems and Google Maps now cover the majority of Turkey, certainly where you will be going, and are a godsend when driving alone.

Beyond Istanbul itself, Turkey has a huge amount to offer to those interested in travel, archaeology, history, culture, birdwatching, walking or just spectacular scenery. There are also beautiful holiday areas with outstanding beaches, and many resort hotels in all price ranges. Sailing cruises and diving are available in summer and skiing in winter. Turkey is a very popular holiday centre, and over 2 million British tourists visit the country every year. Whatever Turkey might be (and hopefully you will enjoy your tour despite the sometimes challenging bureaucracy and living environment), it certainly can never be described as 'dull'!

CLIMATE

Generally, Istanbul has four distinct seasons. In summer (May to Oct) the weather is hot (max temps usually in the early 30s in July & Aug) and can be humid. Although the summers are relatively dry, rain does occur all year round. During winter (Dec & Jan) it is cold, wet and grey. Snowfalls, although infrequent, can be heavy, but temperatures rarely drop as low as freezing point for more than 24 hours.

COMMUNICATIONS

Air Travel. Istanbul is served by two airports: Istanbul airport which has been recently opened on the European side (code IST) and Sabiha Gökçen (code SAW) across the Bosphorus on the Asian side. Both are around 40 minutes from the Headquarters and 60 minutes from where you will live in Zekeriyaköy. (However, travelling times are very much subject to the vagaries of the Istanbul road systems and an hour's journey can easily turn into twice that, especially noting choke points such as the bridges, tunnels and ferries by which vehicles can cross the Bosphorous.) Flights to Europe are reasonably priced, but you will need to shop around especially if you need a late booking or a summer high season. Internal flights with Turkish Airlines or Pegasus are plentiful and relatively cheap. British Airways fly three times a day to / from Heathrow and Turkish Airlines operate many daily flights direct to and from Heathrow, Gatwick, Birmingham, Manchester and Edinburgh. Low cost airlines also fly between the UK and Istanbul (for example, EasyJet flies between Luton and Sabiha Gökçen airport while Air Pegasus and Anadolu Jet fly between Stansted and Sabiha Gökçen.) During the summer tourist season, other routes and schedules spring up.

Roads. The roads throughout Turkey could best be described as 'of variable condition'. The main roads and the Trans European Motorway (TEM) are all reasonable. Many other main roads between cities and major towns are being upgraded to good dual carriageways. However, on plenty of more rural roads the standard is often not so good with the added challenge of livestock grazing on verges and central reservations. Driving at night can be a slow business. Large sections of motorways involve a toll system (HGS).



Rail. The rail network inside such a large country as Turkey is far from comprehensive. Journeys can be slow, but First Class travel is reasonably comfortable and trains connect Istanbul to Bulgaria and Greece. Rail routes to the countries south and south east are more problematic just now and not recommended! Overnight sleeper trains can be taken to Ankara.

National Buses. Turkey has a first class intercity bus service. At the main Bus Station in Istanbul there are over 100 bus companies providing a competitive service throughout Turkey. The buses are modern and often have waiter service and internet access.

Istanbul Public Transport. Public transport is crowded but plentiful. There are regular buses on routes to and from the city, taxis are easy to find and relatively cheap to use, and the Dolmuş, or 'shared taxi' (a small bus which runs on set routes, but has no schedule and can be flagged down or dismantled anywhere on its route) charges a fixed rate for seats (or room to stand!) and is a good, flexible way to get around the city. Ferry boats also sail back and forth on the Bosphorus and are reasonably priced. Finally, there is a modern underground railway system ('Metro') which serves the centre of the city. This is very good indeed, very cheap, constantly being expanded and the nearest station to Zekeriyaköy is approx 20 minutes' drive away (with cheap all-day parking). You should buy an IstanbulKart on arrival which gives cheap and easy payment for the metro, buses and ferries – very much like London's Oyster card.

TELEPHONES/ POST/ INTERNET

Fixed telephony. You may be able to use your UK or German handset in Turkey – success has been mixed. Alternatively a wide range is available locally. Fixed line telephony is provided by TurkTelecom. As at January 2023, about 110TL per month buys you a package offering:

500 minutes of calls to Turkish, European and UK landlines numbers.

Unlimited data, within a reasonable use policy (the first 75Gb are delivered at 24Mbps; if you exceed that the rate slows until the end of the month). Extension packages / rates are also available. The internet connection is reliable and stable.

Mobile Phones. You can use your current mobile phone immediately on arrival, and there is good coverage (including 4G) throughout Istanbul. Since the cessation of roaming charges for UK mobiles in 2017, this may be regarded as a good long-term solution. You have essentially three options:

a. Keep your Germany / UK account and rack up the charges. Even if you decide to adopt (b) or (c) below, you might choose to keep your UK phone / SIM in any case to use when you go back to Blighty.

b. Buy a Turkish handset and SIM. Handsets are roughly the same price in Turkey as in UK (August 2020). Reasonable SIM deals are available, although you will not be eligible for a 'plan' and will require 'Pay As You Go'.

c. Keep your 'foreign' handset and buy a Turkish SIM. Local laws will block the handset after 120 days from its first use in Turkey, unless it has been licensed. This procedure will cost about 6100 TL at Jan 2023



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BFPO Post. The BFPO service is operated through the Consulate General in Istanbul. Mail arrives / departs once a week. Full details of how what works and what can or cannot be used are at Chapter 8.

Turkish Mail. The Turkish mail system is perfectly acceptable, with mail often being delivered to or from UK within 5 to 7 days. There is a 'sub-post office' in the village 10 minutes' walk from Cansit where you can complete most transactions you need. Turkish mail is delivered to the gatehouse of the compound in which you will live and the guard will give it to you next time you enter / exit. Parcels may be sent from overseas to Turkey but if the contents exceed €100, you will have to pay between 5 – 15% Tax (which would not apply through BFPO). In this event your parcel will be held by the central postal depot near the centre of Istanbul and you will be sent a letter advising you accordingly. Collecting your parcel will involve driving into town and then visiting up to 7 desks within the postal depot to pay your tax; a time-consuming affair. The person sending the parcel would be well advised to check the Royal Mail website for their list of prohibited articles for Turkey.

With respect to mail you are therefore advised:

- a. For letters and small parcels (slow but secure), use the BFPO 5403 address
- b. For fast air mail (nothing valuable) and any information that you want urgently such as weekly papers, use your Turkish address (perhaps by courier).
- c. Convert as much of your administration as you can to e-mail / Internet by all means, but beware with financial matters. Turkey is suspected of being one of the financial e-Fraud centres of the world, so you are advised only to use established UK encoded systems or vendors.
- d. Some officers currently use the civilian Turkish mail exclusively and have experienced no problems.
- e. The HQ of course has its own postal address but it is not to be used for personal mail or for anything not related to HQ business.

CURRENCY

The currency is Turkish Lira (TL) but very often you will find US dollars or Euro cash can be used in some bigger shops although the exchange rate will be poor. Many cashpoints will allow you to withdraw in any of those 3 currencies. There is no good reason not to use TL as your day-to-day currency. Inflation is officially reported as about 25% for 2020. Indicatively, the Jan 23 rate was approx. 23.10 TL / 1GBP.

READING REFERENCES

There is much to read on Turkey and its history and the following have all been recommended:

- a. Turkey (Lonely Planet Country Guide).
- b. "Time Out" Istanbul (Time Out Istanbul).
- c. The Rough Guide to Turkey.
- d. Turkey Unveiled: A History of Modern Turkey by Nicole Pope and Hugh Pope. ISBN: 978-1585670963.
- e. The Turks Today: Turkey after Atatürk by Andrew Mango. ISBN: 978-0719565953
- f. The Ottoman Centuries by Lord Kinross. ISBN: 0-688-03093-6
- g. Constantinople: City of the World's Desire, 1453-1924 by Philip Mansel
- h. Turkey: What Everyone Needs to Know by Andrew Finkel

TIME ZONES

The Turkish local time is always 3 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time, i.e. 2 hours ahead of UK during the summer (BST) and 3 hours ahead of UK during the winter.