



The new classic

Forgo the tourist hubs for a taste of high-end tradition at **Raffles Istanbul**

Words: Rebecca Haddad

Istanbul has always been a city that bucks the status quo. Where every other metropolis is content with staying on one continent, Istanbul straddles two. Where many luxury hotels stick to the touristic, most scenic of places, the new Raffles Istanbul has parked itself in the heart of Şişli, a residential and business hub worlds away from bustling İstiklal Avenue in Beyoğlu and the old district across the Golden Horn beyond.

But it sure makes up for it with the view; a sprawling cityscape of narrow office blocks, apartment towers, small housing complexes and glimpses of the Bosphorus beyond, which can be seen from the floor-to-ceiling windows of my Urban Suite on the 21st floor of the hotel. Above me is the EUR 25,000-a-night (US \$31,800) Raffles Suite, with private helipad, though my spacious lodgings are more than satisfactory. Like all other rooms in the hotel, the aesthetic is restrained-chic with hints of Turkish culture. A beige and dark wood palette extends from the hallway through to the cavernous living area, creating an illusion of space. Though, at 158 square metres, the suite doesn't need it.

Dark wood shelves support traditional vases and ornaments, and a selection of Turkish-themed tomes, which team with a patterned teal rug underfoot to offer colour to the space. The rug, I notice, thoughtfully matches the colour of the complimentary cotton pashmina draped over the couch awaiting my use, and the stationery set found in the desk behind the couch.

The walls are adorned with paintings and sketches — just some of the suite's art and part of a wider collection of some 200-plus works commissioned

exclusively for the hotel. In the bedroom, a king-size bed with golden duvet awaits, illuminated by lamp shades featuring Mars-like rock sculptures embedded into the lamp posts — a creative nod to Byzantine times. The bed head is replaced by a blurred, almost eerie digital print of chandeliers by Tanja Rector and an iPad sits on the bedside table ready for my use.

Leading on from the bedroom is the marble bathroom with dual-head shower, double vanities stocked with Ortigia amenities and a mirror TV. A Villeroy & Boch tub in the centre faces out on to those glorious views; the perfect spot for an afternoon soak if the hotel's impressive hammam facilities don't tempt you. Post relaxation time, indulge in some shopping at the adjoining Zorlu Center before stopping for creative tapas at Spanish restaurant Arola, with Michelin-starred chef Sergi Arola at the helm.

No stay at Raffles is complete without a visit to the legendary Long Bar. At this local branch, plates of peanuts and Singapore Slings are replaced by trays of olives, vegetable crisps and tingling Bosphorus Slings. After all, this is Istanbul. ■

The important bit

What: Urban Suite 2104

Where: Raffles Istanbul
Zorlu Center, Zincirlikuyu, Istanbul

Price: from US \$750 per night

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www.raffles.com