

Istanbul, Turkey

City Facts

Status: Major City
Population: 13.8 million
Crime Rate: 2
Threat Level: 3

City Overview

Historic Istanbul is situated at the mouth of the Bosphorus Straits, at the point where Europe meets Asia. This ancient city is symbolic of the confluence of East and West. Islamic prayer calls echoing from the city's minarets can be heard alongside the noisy haggling of street vendors, who sell everything from key chains to leather jackets to sandalwood jewelry. Istanbul is also Turkey's main commercial, industrial and intellectual center. Remnants of the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires can be viewed in all their grandeur and elegance in Istanbul. The city's numerous mosques, churches, palaces, castles and museums in addition to numerous shopping opportunities make it an ideal place for the tourist. The famous Covered Bazaar, a mazelike shopping center consisting of some 4,000 stores, is a shopper's haven. The city also abounds with restaurants, and the tantalizing aromas of Turkish specialties, such as vegetable-beef kebabs and spicy rice pilaf, fill the air.

Security Issues

- Crime
- Protests /Demonstrations
- Terrorism
- City Tips

Crime, particularly opportunistic theft, is the most likely security concern to affect travelers to Turkey. Periodic demonstrations occur in various cities and may affect security for travelers. The threat of terrorism remains a significant concern across the country. This threat extends from both domestic militants such as Kurdish separatists and political extremists and militant Islamists such as those affiliated with or inspired by al Qaeda. There are concerns related specifically to the crisis in Syria; These apply primarily to areas of southern Turkey that are located close to the Syrian border.


Crime

Travelers to Turkey are frequently affected by crime, particularly in larger urban areas such as Istanbul and Ankara. Most incidents affecting travelers are nonviolent crimes of opportunity, such as petty theft and vehicle breakins. In particular, incidents of petty theft are most likely to occur at tourist attractions, crowded markets and other public areas where there are large gatherings of people. Travelers should employ basic security precautions such as avoiding ostentatious displays of wealth, keeping valuables hidden out of sight and avoiding walking alone at night to guard against becoming a victim of crime.

Demonstrations

Demonstrations occur regularly in Turkey, but are most frequent in major urban centers such as Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. Protests in smaller towns where the economy is based primarily on tourism are infrequent. Traditionally, most Demonstrations are related to domestic factors, such as the economic situation, the status of the Kurdish population, or policies restricting religious expression in educational institutions. Most protests are directed against the Turkish Government, although protesters sometimes voice anti-U.S. and anti-Western sentiments. Demonstrations are typically peaceful, but police officers often intervene to forcibly disperse protesters and may not differentiate between participants and bystanders. Demonstrations are most often relatively small, attracting only a few hundred people. However large demonstrations with thousands of participants occasionally develop. More than 70 cities across Turkey experienced antigovernment protests in May-June 2013. Turkey's largest cities Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir were the most affected by the unrest. Protests have since abated, but periodic flare-ups continue to occur.





Terrorism

Domestic Terrorism


Turkey faces a continuing though possibly declining threat of terrorism perpetrated by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), an insurgent group that has waged a decades-long campaign for an autonomous Kurdish state. The group has carried out bombing attacks targeting civilians in western Turkey and has staged attacks on Turkish soldiers in the southeastern part of the country. In March 2013 the jailed leader of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan, declared a ceasefire of the group's military action and ordered all PKK fighters to leave Turkish territory. The Turkish government acknowledged this as an important step, but significant uncertainty remains over both sides' willingness and ability to maintain the ceasefire as the PKK has called off at least one previous ceasefire. Despite the declared ceasefire, PKK militants periodically clash with Turkish security forces in the country's southeast. In addition to Kurdish separatist groups, leftist militant groups have also carried out attacks in Turkey. Recently, most of these attacks have been conducted by the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front (DHKP/C), a banned leftist militant group, in Ankara. In early 2013 the group conducted several bombing attacks against a political party headquarters, the Turkish Ministry of Justice and the U.S. Embassy. Turkish authorities have warned that both Turkish and non-Turkish facilities and citizens are possible targets of DHKPC attacks

Transnational Terrorism

The threat of terrorism perpetrated by transnational terrorist groups represents a longstanding threat in Turkey as well. Evidence of this threat includes occasional militant activity and the frequent arrests of militants on suspicion of plotting attacks. In particular, Turkey faces a significant threat from the Islamic State (IS) a radical Islamist group that has operations in neighboring Iraq and Syria and several recent incidents highlight this threat. For example, in March 2014 three IS militants opened fire on security forces after being stopped at a highway checkpoint in Nigde province, located in central southern Turkey; four people were killed in the shooting. On 11 June, IS militants attacked the Turkish consul in the Iraqi city of Mosul and kidnapped 49 staff members; However, the victims were released in September. IS has threatened to continue targeting Turkish interests, both domestically and abroad. Turkey's close relations with the United States and its strong tradition of secularism make the country a potential target for militants motivated by anti-Western sentiment and a desire to impose religion based regimes in Muslim countries. There are longstanding concerns that Turkey's location at the crossroads between the Middle East and Europe may facilitate a terrorist strike. Illegal immigrants from countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria and other countries in the region regularly enter Turkey in transit to Western Europe. It is possible that militants could infiltrate the country in a similar manner. The Turkish government exerts a substantial effort to prevent terrorist attacks. However, the factors addressed above remain concerns, and the possibility of further terrorist attacks exists. Tourist sites, facilities frequented by foreign travelers and government interests both Turkish and foreign remain likely terrorist targets. Attacks may occur in major urban centers, such as Istanbul and Ankara, or in tourist towns along Turkey's Aegean coast.

Syrian Crisis

The ongoing crisis in Syria has affected the security situation in areas of southern Turkey located close to the Syrian border. One major concern is the threat of terrorist attacks. In past years, this threat emanated primarily from elements of Syrian President Bashar alAssad's regime in response to Turkey's antigovernment stance during the war. However, recent gains made by IS militants in the Syrian Turkish border region have heightened concerns that such an attack might be carried out by this group, or that associated violence may spill over into Turkish territory. Thus far, the most significant incident to affect Turkey occurred in Reyhanli, Hatay province, in May 2013, when two car bombs exploded, killing more than 40 people and injuring more than 100 others. On several occasions since then, Turkish authorities have issued information about foiled bombing plots and attempts to smuggle explosives into Turkey from Syria. As Turkey has received approximately 1 million Syrian migrants thus far, and security officials are concerned that would be militants can relatively easily enter Turkish territory by posing as refugees. Public venues and facilities related to the Turkish government, especially the security forces, are potential terrorism targets. Protests related to developments in Syria are also most likely in southern Turkey, but can and have occurred in other parts of the country. Most recently, from 7 to 10 October 2014, Turkey experienced particularly violent nationwide protests against the government's abstention from fighting IS militants in northern Syria. Although most of these actions occurred in southeastern Turkey, protests took place in Istanbul and other urban centers in the northern and



western parts of the country. Travelers and expatriates should avoid protests due to the possibility of violence, which can collaterally affect individuals in the vicinity of the protest area. (See also Demonstrations section above). When faced with the possibility of an internationally-led military strike on government targets in Syria, Turkish authorities were concerned about the possibility of direct military retaliation. In response to this threat, Turkish officials deployed additional troops to areas near the border and conducted exercises relating to a possible chemical attack. However, given the relatively diminished capabilities of the Syrian military and the unlikelihood of the international community targeting government facilities at this point, these concerns have largely abated.

City Tips

- Turkish and foreign government and military facilities, as well as areas frequented by tourists, are possible terrorist targets. Travelers should also exercise caution at and around these types of facilities.
- Local regulations prohibit taking photographs of military, police and certain government installations.
- Despite relative improvements in the security situation in the southeast, visitors should avoid travel to this part of the country, especially due to the situation in Syria.
- Due to reckless driving by Turkish drivers, travelers should avoid driving at night and should be highly defensive during the day. There is a ban on smoking and talking on cellular phones while driving.
- Penalties for drug trafficking are severe. Foreigners can face extreme difficulties due to the strictness of Turkish drug laws, even if falsely accused.
- Turks are very respectful and proud of the memory of their country's founder, Kemal Ataturk. Visitors should not show him disrespect.

Customs/Immigration

The Entry Requirements section reflects the most correct and up-to-date information to the best knowledge of United Healthcare Global. Setting requirements for entry into the country is the sole prerogative of each country's government, and requirements may change, sometimes with little or no prior notice. Travelers should always contact the diplomatic representation of the country prior to departure to verify entry requirements Passports are required for entry into Turkey except for travelers holding one of the following: Laissez Passer issued by the United Nations or any individual country; National identity card issued to nationals of Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Spain or Switzerland; German identity card for children (Kinderausweis); Seaman Book issued to nationals of Albania, Bangladesh, Egypt, Iraq, Malaysia, Morocco and Serbia (if travelling on duty); Travel document issued to refugees in accordance with the Geneva Convention of 1951; and travelers holding a military identity card issued by a NATO country (if traveling on NATO orders).

Nationals of the following countries may enter Turkey with a passport that has expired within five years of arrival: Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Spain and Switzerland. Nationals or passport holders from the following countries do not require a visa for stays of up to 90 days: Albania, Andorra, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Brunei, Bulgaria, Chile, China (Hong Kong), Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ecuador, El Salvador, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Honduras, Iceland, Iran, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kosovo, Lebanon, Libya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Romania, San Marino, Serbia, Singapore, Slovenia, South Korea, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Trinidad & Tobago, Tunisia, Uruguay and Venezuela. Nationals of the following countries do not need a visa for a maximum stay of 30 days: Azerbaijan, China (Macao), Costa Rica, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Mongolia, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. There are additional visa exemptions to holders of diplomatic or other types of passports depending on the country of issuance. Nationals of the United States may obtain a visa upon arrival for a fee of approximately US\$20. Effective since 11 April 2014, foreign nationals are no longer able to obtain a visa upon arrival. Foreign travelers are required to obtain their visas from Turkish missions abroad. Those who are entering Turkey for tourism or commerce can acquire an e-visa prior to travel; However, there have been some reports of tourists being denied entry into the country despite holding an e-visa. Travelers who require a visa to enter Turkey must also hold documents and tickets required for onward or return travel. Travelers may also be required to show proof of a hotel reservation. Turkish authorities may refuse entry to travelers who do not have a clean appearance and sufficient funds.



Departure Taxes

There are no entry or departure taxes levied on international travelers at Turkish airports. However, Turkish nationals travelling abroad are subject to a TRY15 departure tax.

Health

No vaccinations are required to enter Turkey from any country.

Currency

The official currency of Turkey is the Turkish Lira (TL). Banknotes are available in denominations of 5, 10, 20, 50, 100 and 200 Turkish Lira. One Turkish Lira is equal to 100 Kurus (Kr). Coins are available in 1, 5, 10, 25, 50 Kurus and 1 Turkish Lira. Local currency is readily available through ATMs. Travelers' checks can usually be cashed immediately upon proof of identity. Major credit cards are also accepted. Caution is warranted if using credit cards due to high rates of credit card fraud in Turkey.

Communications

To make a call from a public phone, travelers can use either a calling card, a debit card or tokens, which can be purchased at post offices and street booths. There is no charge for 800 numbers. Some public phones operate with international credit cards. The number to reach an English speaking international operator is 115 Turkey Country Code: 90

European and Asian Istanbul have different area codes.

European Istanbul City Code: 212

Asian Istanbul City Code: 216

Ankara City Code: 312

Calling Turkey landline from abroad: Country exit code + 90 + city code + phone number

Calling Turkey mobile phone from abroad: Country exit code + 90 + mobile code* + phone number

Calling Turkey landline from within country: 0 + city code + phone number

Calling Turkey mobile phone from within country: 0 + mobile code* + phone number

Making international calls from Turkey: 00 + country code + city code + phone number

*Mobile code varies by call recipient's provider but always begins with "5."


Cultural Information

Language

Turkish is the official language in the country, although Arabic and German are common. English is widely understood in the larger cities.

Cultural Tips

- Turkish authorities strictly enforce laws that limit public comments which are considered insulting to "Turkish identity," including the government and army. Although these restrictions have been relaxed to some extent in recent years, foreign visitors should be careful not to transgress these limitations due to possible legal repercussions.
- Turks jealously guard the memory of Kemal Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey. Visitors should not show him disrespect and may be detained or harassed for such actions.
- Although Turkey is officially a secular state, Islam remains an important influence in society. For this reason, visitors should remain sensitive to Islamic customs and practices, which are stronger in rural areas.
- Foreign tourists who visit bars or nightclubs should be aware that Turkish men generally treat women in such places with considerable respect. Anyone who behaves in a manner that is considered impolite or offensive may be confronted by other patrons or the club manager.



Tips for Female Travelers

Female travelers are often seen by criminals as particularly vulnerable targets. In highly conservative cultures, foreign women may be perceived as promiscuous, inviting unwelcome or violent advances. Female travelers, in turn, are likely to encounter cultural mores that may initially seem startling or offensive. The purpose of this section is to apprise female travelers of such attitudes and customs, offer means to respond without giving offense, and promote a heightened sense for security among female travelers. The information offered below is not intended as advice, nor is it necessarily comprehensive in presenting the challenges female travelers may face. United Health care Global encourages female travelers to thoroughly research the areas to which they travel to determine what precautionary measures to take and what to do should they become victims of crime while traveling.

- Although standards for women's dress are more liberal in Turkey than in other Islamic countries, conservative attire is still recommended, especially in rural areas. Women who are traveling alone and are dressed in a less than conservative manner are sometimes harassed by young Turkish men.
- Most mosques in Turkey are open to the public; Women visiting these mosques should avoid bare arms and legs, and men should avoid wearing shorts. Women should also wear a headscarf. Both sexes should remove their shoes. Friday noon prayers are particularly crowded; it is best to avoid visiting during this time.

Regional Attitudes toward Women

Middle Eastern culture holds conservative views regarding sex and women. Islam, especially in its more orthodox forms, imposes various constraints on women in dress, behavior, social habits, and personal freedoms. Unaccompanied women who do not show respect for Islamic norms are more likely to be ill-treated and perceived as morally decadent. Conversely, unaccompanied women who defer to regional norms may find themselves treated with extra sympathy due to their perceived vulnerability.

Tips for Turkey

- Turkey is less conservative than many of the other Middle Eastern countries, maintaining a strictly secular state. However, lone female travelers may still feel isolated and conspicuous in some areas. The areas most frequented by tourists such as Istanbul, northwestern Turkey, the Aegean and Mediterranean coasts, Cappadocia, and Ankara are more accommodating toward women traveling alone.
- Light makeup is acceptable for business settings in major cities or tourist areas. In the countryside or in less tourist-frequented areas, female travelers should keep their hair covered and minimize makeup or jewelry.
- Both men and women shake hands upon introduction in a business setting.
- If invited to a home, visitors should bring flowers for the lady of the house, or candy for the children.
- In more conservative areas, women wishing to eat in Turkish restaurants should look for the aile salonu sign. This denotes a separate area for women and families, and single men may not enter. A single woman will be just as unwelcome in a men-only main restaurant. Foreign women, especially lone travelers, attract attention in Turkey. Catcalls and other forms of verbal harassment are to be expected, but physical harassment is rare

Health and Hospital

Despite major improvements to private facilities in urban areas such as Istanbul, the quality of care in Turkey varies significantly throughout the country, both in the public and private sectors, including at university hospitals. Adequate medical care is available in major urban centers and tourist areas, including Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir and Antalya, as well as in coastal areas between Izmir and the end of the southern Riviera, but is in many cases below international standards. Many public hospital facilities in Turkey are overcrowded, understaffed and offer only basic specialties. Especially in rural areas, public hospitals are characterized by uncomfortable hospital accommodations, a general lack of up-to-date equipment and shortages of basic medical supplies. University hospitals serve as referral centers for the region in which they are located, as they are the most developed clinical centers in their region. However, the quality and the range of services vary from facility to facility. The quality of medical care in Turkey's private hospital facilities has improved significantly in recent years, particularly in Istanbul. Most private hospitals

are located in cities with large populations. Health care standards are lower in small cities. United Healthcare Global recommends that travelers and foreign visitors seek care in private facilities in larger cities, particularly Istanbul.

Name	City	Address	Phone Number
Istanbul SSK Hospital	Istanbul	Samatya- Istanbul	0212 632 0060
Istanbul University Cerrahpasa Hospital	Istanbul	Cerrahpasa Caddesi Cerrahpasa- Istanbul	0212 414 3000

Airports & Ground Transportation

The airport has two terminals, one international and one domestic. There is a free shuttle service between the international and domestic terminals (approximate walking time between the two is 10 minutes). International passengers first go through immigration, baggage claim and customs before heading into the main arrivals area. A bank, ATM, currency exchange, post office and travel center is available in this area, as is ground transportation. There is no separate terminal for corporate aircraft, but VIP lounges are available. Apron shuttles or VIP cars take the passengers and crew arriving on corporate aircraft to the terminal building. The procedures for passport and customs control are the same as those for passengers arriving on commercial aircraft. If departing from this airport, travelers should arrive well in advance due to time consuming security checks.

Transportation

Atatürk Airport is located approximately 15 mi/25 km west south west of central Istanbul. Travel time from the airport to the city center is approximately one hour, depending on traffic. Taxis, shuttle buses and rental cars are available for travel into the city.

Security

Corporate aircraft use the international terminal. Apron shuttles or VIP cars take passengers and crew arriving on corporate aircraft to the terminal building. Passport and customs control procedures are the same as those for passengers arriving on commercial aircraft. The military and Turkish National Police provide security at the airport. Police officers guard particular points of the tarmac and maintain 24hour regular and random patrols. The military assists the police force if authorities determine that an unusually high threat to security exists. The facility is surrounded by a steel-wire fence topped with barbed wire and is in good condition. Lighting throughout the facility is adequate. Entrance to the tarmac is through three access gates, and police officers guard all of these gates. Only staff members with an airport ID card are permitted to enter the tarmac area. Authorities search vehicles at a checkpoint prior to allowing them to enter the airport grounds. Large corporate aircraft are parked on the main apron, together with commercial aircraft. The parking area is located near the international terminal. Smaller aircraft are parked at the West 2 area, located 550660 yd/500600 m away from the tower. The corporate parking area is monitored by cameras and from police watchtowers.

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