

LOVE on the Bosphorus

BY DAN AVILA

With one foot in Europe and the other in Asia, Istanbul's cultural marvels are a photographer's dream.

RUGGED UP

From top: Raffles Istanbul is the height of opulence. Utterly contemporary yet distinctly Turkish, the hotel is a veritable art gallery; A Turkish carpet is the ultimate souvenir. Every region of the country has a unique style and design with meaning to each elaborate pattern.

Opening image: This is Istanbul, with culture at every turn. The sounds, smells, sights and sense of history is all encompassing.

Istanbul is a dynamic, modern metropolis steeped in history like no other. A city of continuous global significance for thousands of years, it connects Asia and Europe, straddling the Bosphorus Strait, remaining an epicentre for culture, art and trade.

As the fifth most visited city by tourists last year and the largest city in Europe, Istanbul is on many bucket lists and rightly so. It certainly was on mine and a recent visit did not disappoint, although the thought of being one of the 13 million tourists per year trying to get a glimpse of the must-see sights was a little daunting. Visiting the city in the depths of winter however made for a vastly different experience, with very few tourists and no congestion in hotspots. It also provided the chance to photograph the city in the snow which was exciting for a travel photographer looking for a different take on this much photographed city.

Visiting Istanbul's wonderfully preserved historic buildings and monuments gave me a renewed sense of awe for the engineering marvels and architectural competence of the ancient world. The Hagia Sophia for example, takes some time to absorb. The painstaking attention to detail and dedication to building strength, longevity and undeniable beauty is truly inspiring.

The Blue Mosque is also a must visit. In peak tourist season the queue to get a brief view inside is significant, so expect to wait several hours. In winter this is not the case and there were no queues, just a handful of other intrepid tourists who felt equally lucky to share unpressured time inside this magnificent place. The Blue Mosque is not a museum, but an operating mosque and in respect for those visiting for prayer and solace, tourists must leave during scheduled prayer times. Additionally, tripods are not allowed in any of the main galleries and monuments in Istanbul, which provided challenges given the low light situations. I found myself getting a little creative using bags and scarfs as makeshift stabilisers to get the shots.

A small, non-descript building is the entry to ancient Roman cisterns. The perfectly preserved, subterranean monument is testimony to Roman building techniques. The scale and beauty of the construction made to simply store water is stunning.

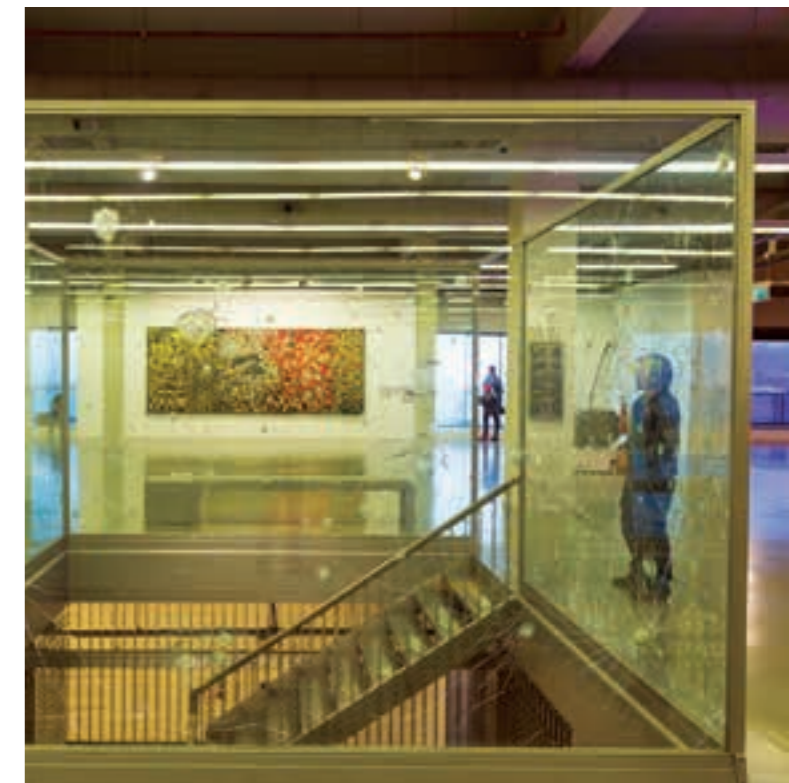
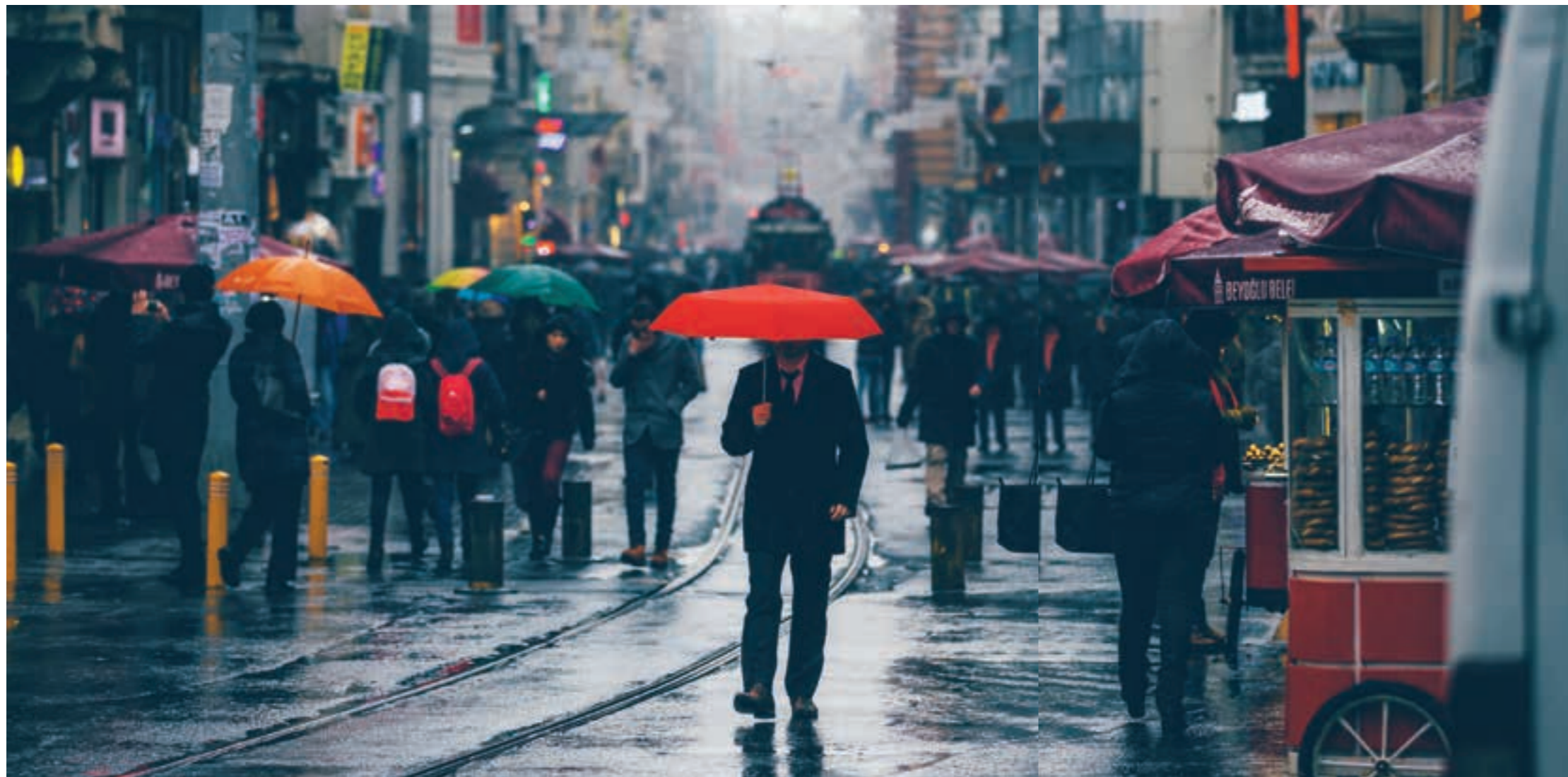
This city of 14 million is truly a fusion of the beautiful and ancient, juxtaposed with the modern and dynamic. Now ticked off my bucket list, this is certainly not the last time I will visit beautiful Istanbul. •

Dan used a pair of Canon 5D Mark III's with 3 lenses; Canon 70-200mm L f/2.8 II IS, Canon 24-70 L f/2.8 II and a Canon 17mm L TS-E f/4 tilt-shift.



UNDER THE DOME

Clockwise from left: The oldest covered market in the world, the Grand Bazaar is a heaving, scintillating experience with 4,000 shops employing over 30,000 people and attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors daily; An installation of suspended books at The Istanbul Modern Art Museum; The interior of the Hagia Sophia is breathtaking. Built from 537 until 1453 it is the epitome of Byzantine architecture; The Roman Basilica Cistern known as 'the Sunken Palace' is the largest of hundreds built during the 6th century under the reign of Byzantine Emperor Justinian.



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IN SPIRED

Clockwise from above: Courtyard outside the 400-year-old Sultan Ahmed Mosque, known as The Blue Mosque; In the midst of sub-zero winter conditions locals go about their business on the Grande Rue de Pera with the 19th-century *pera*, a traditional tram, trundling along in the distance; One of the many chambers inside the Hagia Sophia.

EAT PRAY LOVE

Right, from top: Istanbul Modern; A local student heads home; Inside the Blue Mosque the sense of scale and ornate detail are utterly mesmerising. Wonderfully uncrowded during winter.