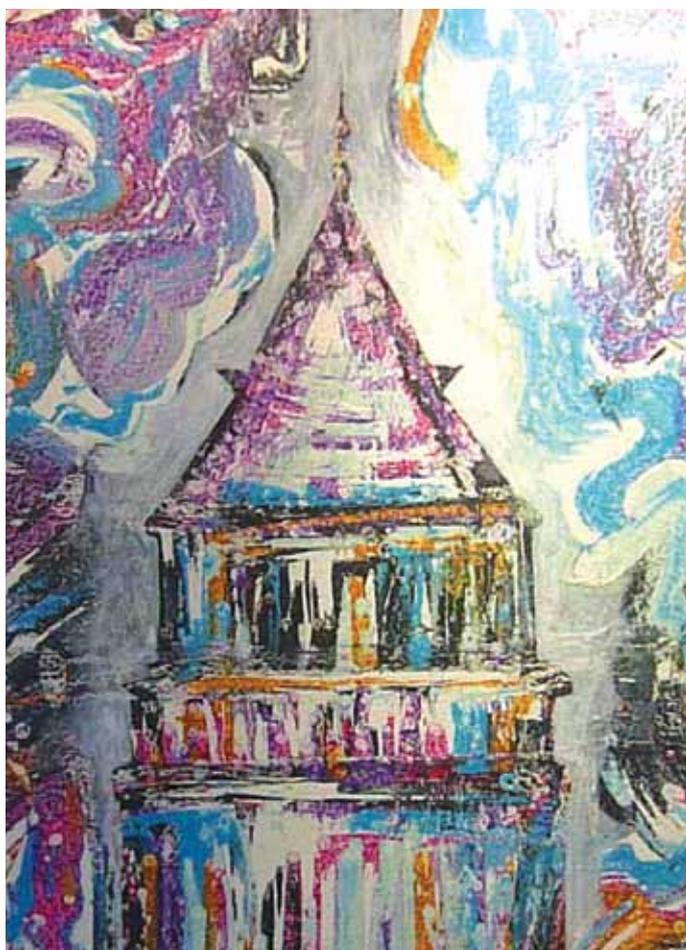




TERRACE WITH A VIEW

Christine Cunanan discovers the perfect pied-a-terre in Istanbul



In Istanbul for the nth time in the past three years, I was looking for a hotel that was out of the tourist route but at the same time convenient for it. Over the last 12 months alone, I'd visited the Topkapi Palace and the Aya Sofia four times; so I reckoned I could live without seeing these landmarks this time, on a three-day stopover in Turkey on my way to Europe. However, just in case I felt like popping over to the old town on a whim, I wanted to stay at a hotel that would not make a sudden trek impossible.

In this sense, the luxury boutique hotel Tomtom Suites – don't let the strange name turn you off, as this is actually the name of the street it's on – fit my criteria perfectly. It's been reworked from an old aristocrat's turn-of-the-20th-century home and filled with every modern technological convenience and dozens of colorful modern artworks that interpret Istanbul's many stimulating sights and sounds.

THE RIGHT PLACE

The other attraction is its location, just off the Istiklal Caddesi, Istanbul's main pedestrian thoroughfare and the center of most leisure activity, just in front of the Italian consulate and several minutes' walk from the Istanbul Modern, Istanbul's excellent modern art museum. It's also a short stroll from both the tram station and the artsy nightlife areas; and yet it's in one of the quietest neighborhoods of Beyoglu, among the oldest and most fascinating districts of Istanbul. Perhaps best of all, the hotel has a beautiful view of the Bosphorus and the Old Town in the distance, if you're lucky enough to stay on the top floor.



HOME SWEET HOME

I was lucky. My set of rooms – the hotel’s equivalent of the presidential suite – occupied the place of honor on top of the building, on the best side for views of the Old Town. It was love at first sight. The suite had an incredibly tasteful and modern living room with comfortable furniture, a small and user-friendly kitchenette, and shelves filled with books I would have loved to read if I was staying for a month.

The adjoining bedroom, too, was fitted out with cotton linens and blond wood furnishings which invited peace, calm and utter relaxation. The bathroom had a big round jacuzzi and a power shower that made me look forward to waking up every morning. Everything was just right and perfectly understated in taste and luxury. If I had to choose a pied-a-terre in Istanbul, this would certainly be it.

OUTDOORS IN STYLE

But perhaps the suite’s real piece de resistance was its truly massive terrace; it was disproportionally large compared to the room but so wonderful to have and relax in that it made all the difference to my Istanbul stay. This terrace could have easily held a cocktail party for 40 people – and what a fantastic venue it would have made – with its quiet, its privacy and yet its million-Turkish lira view.

When I wasn’t out sightseeing or shopping, I was spending every possible minute on this terrace – made all the more perfect by comfortable lounging beds and a very strong WiFi connection that made me feel I was both out of this world and yet so connected to it. Talk about enjoying the best of everything.

DINNER INTERRUPTED

This terrace prompted me to cancel all my plans to check out Istanbul’s latest restaurants. Instead, I ordered room service every night from La Mouette, the hotel’s excellent restaurant conveniently located next door, and had it set up on the dining table of my terrace. I eat out almost every day of the year in some part of the world, after all, so another haute cuisine or molecular gastronomy dinner in another trendy restaurant carved out of another abandoned

warehouse in another cosmopolitan city is nice, but nothing new. What was special to me was this wonderful opportunity to have a delicious dinner in private, on one of the loveliest terraces in the city, in an apartment I would call home in a minute if I could, in one of my favorite cities in the world. Few restaurants can provide similar experiences.

TALENTS AT THE TOP

I was also too fortunate, as the hotel restaurant is run by Uryan Bey and Cihan Bey, two talented young chefs who dabble in molecular gastronomy and focus on creating Turkish fusion with local ingredients. I only found out later that La Mouette is considered one of the best (and most romantic) upscale restaurants in Istanbul, even for the locals. Apparently it’s a favorite place to pop the ultimate question in this city as well. So, yes, I did have my cake (or perhaps I should say Turkish delight) and eat it too.

I heavily favor classic cooking; but if I were to eat modern, these two young chefs – who are currently creating a buzz in Istanbul’s foodie scene -- do exactly the kind I like: tasty courses with just enough of a hint of molecular gastronomy so that your senses are excited but you still know exactly what you are eating. There were no food guessing games here.

Istanbul is a city with a very old soul, so it’s best savored slowly. To attempt to cover everything in three days would be a sensory overkill, although unfortunately that’s how most people tackle this city. At the same time, it can be such a touristy destination that it’s almost essential to try and discover the local side of it for some balance. In this sense, Tomtom Suites is the perfect sanctuary for discovering the best of Istanbul’s glorious history, and at the same time seeking some refuge from it via real life. ■

Tomtom Suites
www.tomtomsuites.com