Turkish Delight

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Do you believe in love at first sight? I think I do. From the first day, the first moment, I was enchanted by the Blue of the Bosphorus, touched by the friendliness of the people, and captivated by the vibrancy of the colours and the seamless blend of old and new, east and west. It was definitely a case of love at first sight or should I say 'first visit' and within four days, I found myself completely in love with Turkey or more specifically the charming city of Istanbul.

Over the last few years, fate appears to have been conspiring against us as every time we tried to organise a trip to Turkey, something or the other would occur and our plans would never materialise. This year our luck must have changed and we finally managed to get ourselves to Turkey and back without a hitch. All I can say is it was definitely worth the wait. Having been thwarted in my previous efforts, this holiday was planned with military precision. All the tours and cruises had been booked in advance and nothing was left to chance.

Camera, check. Walking shoes, check. Bottles of water, check. Map, check. Hats forgot and had to buy them from a roadside vendor. Sometimes you just have to give into your inner tourist. It was with great excitement that we set out on our discovery of a city that not only boasts a rich historical and cultural heritage but also has the privilege of being situated within two continents (both Europe and Asia). The skyline of Istanbul is stunning and manages to encompass and reflect the architectural changes having taken place over the centuries. Everywhere you look there are magnificent mosques or palaces cradled between modern day structures having endured the test of time.

With its sheer volume of mosques Dhaka has garnered the title 'the city of mosques' and you can hear the 'azaan' or call for prayer from multiple minarets almost anywhere in the city. But for me, Istanbul has the most beautiful mosques I have ever come across. One of the mosques that was not included in our tour was the Suleymaniye Mosque so we decided to explore the city on foot and discover it for ourselves. The Suleymaniye Mosque sits on the third hill of Istanbul (which is made up of seven hills) and is said to be its most important mosque as both a memorial to its founder Suleyman the Magnificent and also its renowned imperial architect Mimar Sinan although it does not seem to feature very prominently in the tours on offer.

The moment you walk through the gates, you realise how enormous the compound is surrounding the actual mosque which manages to reflect the magnificence of the Ottoman Empire. The Suleymaniye Mosque was not just used as a place of worship but also as a charitable foundation and is surrounded by what used to be its hospital, soup kitchen, caravanserai, schools and bath houses. According to some travel guides, the complex was said to provide a welfare system that fed over one thousand of the city's poorest people each day.

Before we entered the mosque we sat in the colonnaded courtyard with its columns of marble and granite and just took in the grandeur of our surroundings. We then made our way inside and the first thing that struck all of us was the sense of space and light. The interior was made up of one huge prayer hall made possible by its architect's ingenuity by hiding the massive buttresses that support the dome and incorporating them into



Suleymaniye Mosque