

Personal Guide to Conquering the Istanbul Baths

Written by Jill Kerr Tepe

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Ahh, Istanbul. Between the music drifting from the baglama and a skyline featuring a thousand minarets,

you can distinctly hear the ancient Turkish baths calling your name.



And while the ultimate form of relaxation is appealing by nature, pondering the nitty-gritty details and a fear of the unknown can curb many a tourist's curiosity.

First off, let's discuss the difference between a Turkish bath house in Istanbul, called a "hamam", or say a "Turkish-style" bath in Budapest. I had visions of floating in hot baths in ancient buildings, like my sister experienced at the [Szechenyi Baths](#), but Istanbul is far different. A Turkish bath in Istanbul consists of steam slab time, wash/exfoliation time, massage time, dry time, and cool down time. At no point was I submerged in any pool or hot tub. It's a refreshing and relaxing experience, but just different than what I had envisioned.

Istanbul offers a variety of traditional Turkish bath house experiences, but only you can decide which option matches your style. There's the uber-traditional, where men only bathe with men, and women only bathe with women. There's the less-foreign, more day-spa-inspired hamam offered by luxury hotels like the [Gaia Spa at Grand Hyatt](#), or, if like me and my husband, you wanted to experience the traditional ritual of the baths but as a couple or family, there is really only one place that offers it, the [Suleymaniye Hamam](#)

. This hamam was designed by famed architect Sinan and was constructed for Sultan Süleyman, ruler of the Ottoman Empire between 1520 and 1566, so the sultan himself actually bathed in this beautiful domed space. Can't get any more historic than that.

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On an iPhone? View Jill's Suleymaniye Hammam video at: <http://vimeo.com/35386577>