

Five reasons to love Istanbul this week

- 1 The small but cozy bar Parantez, in Asmalimesci, offers homemade cherry liquor for 8 Turkish Liras. In this freezing winter weather it would be a good idea to stop by this location and warm up.
- 2 With Christmas and New Year's fast approaching it is time to get pampered. Step into a French movie upon entering the J'adore Chocolatier Café, which opened on Beyoğlu's Emir Nevruz Street. The smell of the chocolates and cakes attracts customers from all over.



- 3 Go and see the biggest aquarium in town at Forum Istanbul, a newly opened shopping mall and entertainment complex. The aquarium displays underwater creatures from around the world and is called Turkuazoo.
- 4 Visit the Pantokrator Monastery, which is known today as the Zeyrek Mosque. The monument still stands from the Roman era. After Hagia Sophia, it is the second biggest church that was not destroyed. The location has a perfect view of Balat and is well worth visiting.
- 5 Snow! Even the remotest possibility of flying flurries encircling Istanbul heightens the holiday atmosphere, and last week's freezing temperatures offers hope that a blanket of white might cover the city.

ONE-WAY TICKET

Orient Express:



The end of history

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On Dec. 14, in a heavy rain, the Orient Express pulled into its eastern terminus for the last time. Although more of a central European regional train, as the route was shortened to just a run connecting Strasbourg and Vienna, the famed line enjoyed continuous service for over 125 years. In its day the Orient Express was a symbol of luxury and cutting-edge technology and easily the most famous train line in the world. At its maximum extent it connected the continent from Paris to Istanbul and was responsible for the advent of large-scale tourism in the latter. Unfortunately, the availability of discount airfares and rapid rail technology has forced Euro Night rail services to retire the line. With the end of the Orient Express, the world is losing another potent symbol of a by-gone age. Like the telegraph and transatlantic shipping, it has been rendered obsolete by more convenient technology. Unable to compete, it dies a rightful death but as a symbol of a time when the rich, famous and

mysterious rode comfortably through dark and treacherous Balkan passes in plush, smoke-filled cars. The line also deserves an obituary and a moment of recognition from a city that it impacted profoundly. In 1882 Georges Nagelmackers of the Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits invited guests on a test run of a direct service between Paris and Vienna. The train, which included four sleeping coaches, two baggage cars and a restaurant car

servicing oysters, turbot with green sauce and chocolate pudding, made the overnight trip on schedule and was a rousing success. The next year the Express d'Orient began service for the general public. In subsequent years the route expanded east, reaching Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and finally the Ottoman Empire. The early trains required ferry and carriage services to connect certain railheads but on June 1, 1889 the Orient Express ran non-stop from

Paris to Istanbul for the first time. Istanbul finally had a prestigious luxury train line to complete its connection with Europe and the effect was immediate. In 1890 the Ottomans completed a magnificent station with stained glass windows and handsome waiting rooms at Sirkeci. Most of the great hotels in Pera also date to this period; both the Büyük Londres and Pera Palace hotels were built in 1892. Before the Orient Express, there had already been something of a foreign community in Beyoğlu, which was

home to most embassies and expatriate communities. With the arrival of the luxury train, however, Istanbul was suddenly open to more than just the adventurous and the diplomatic corps. In an affluent industrial world, global tourism was newly beginning and Istanbul became an exceedingly popular destination. To the general public the Orient Express was something like the Concorde jets of the 1980s – a fast yet luxurious mode of transport for

On Dec. 14, Orient Express line became a part of history. Those, who would like to meet the legend, can visit the rail museum at Sirkeci train station in Eminönü



The historical 'Orient Express' train was a synonym of luxury and class.

switches and uniforms from the original Orient Express. The private Simplon Orient Express runs a few trains per year, offering deluxe service and a complete period experience – but only to the wealthiest of travelers: Two tickets on the Istanbul-Venice line currently cost 11,240 euros. For the more modest traveler, the entire length can be traveled in sections. Perhaps the easiest and cheapest way to experience the Orient Express, however, is through the words of the great authors who wrote about it.

Today, although there will no longer be an official Orient Express, there are still ways to recapture something of its mystique. Sirkeci Station maintains a railroad museum that displays signs, bells, snow bank for some days – providing her with the setting and circumstance for a bizarre murder mystery. Writing in her suite at the Pera Palace, which is preserved as a museum in her honor, she crafted one of the finest detective novels ever written. Today, although there will no longer be an official Orient Express, there are still ways to recapture something of its mystique. Sirkeci Station maintains a railroad museum that displays signs, bells,

Writers recognized the train as an ideal setting for suspense. In Bram Stoker's Dracula, Van Helsing rides the Express in his attempt to beat the Count to Transylvania. Ian Fleming also worked the train into one of his James Bond novels. Of course, the story for which the luxury line is most famous is Agatha Christie's "Murder on the Orient Express." The idea came to Christie after an incident in 1929 when the train was trapped in a