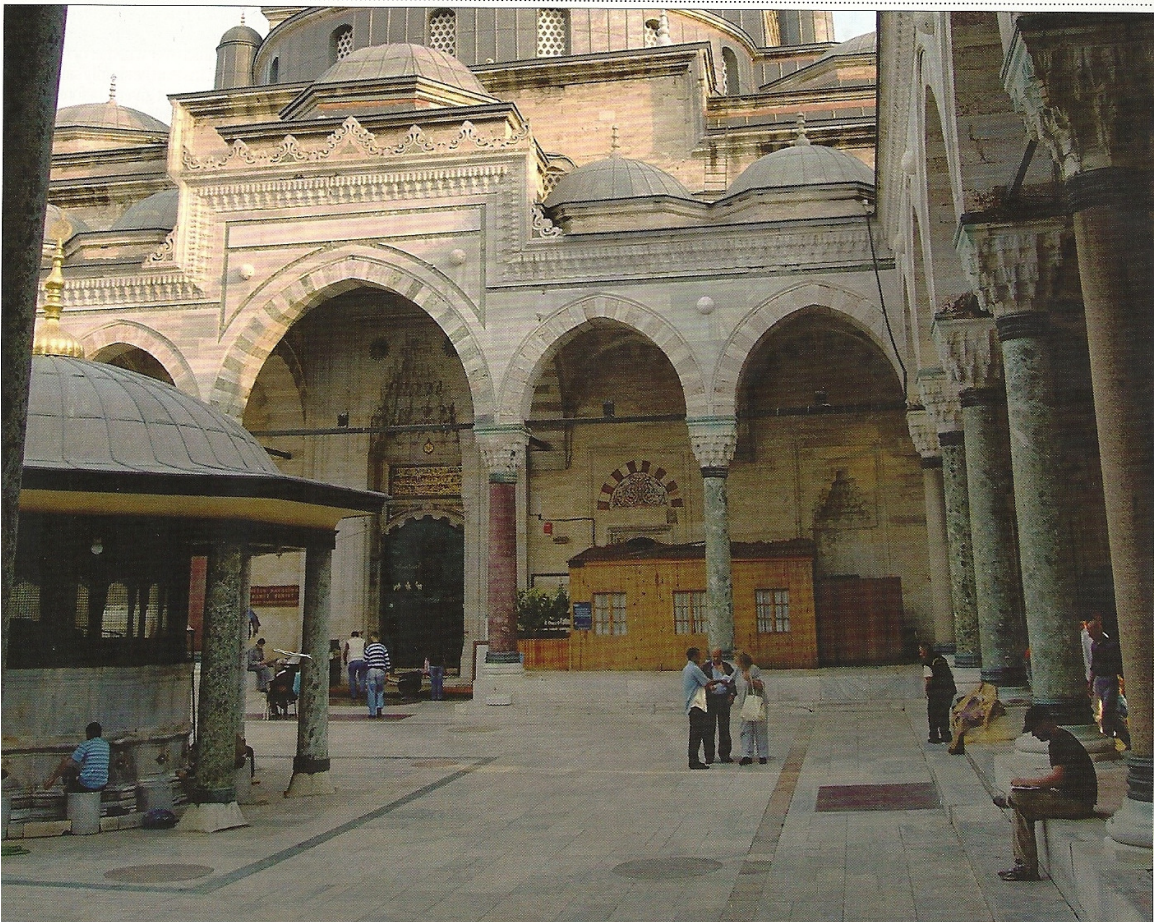


10 things

10 things you didn't know about Beyazid Mosque

In their enthusiasm to hit the shops of the Kapalı Çarşı (Grand Bazaar), visitors sometimes overlook the beautiful mosque just a few steps away from them. **Rich Carriero** explains why this is a big mistake. Photos by **Scott Newman**.



1

In the heart of the ancient city

Beyazid Mosque is located in the eponymous Beyazid Square, a 10-minute walk from Aya Sofya and Sultanahmet Camii down the Mese (Divan Yolu), the main drag of ancient Constantinople. Beyazid Square was, during the Byzantine era, the forum built by the Emperor Theodosius, the last man to rule both the Eastern and Western Empires.

2

In the heart of the modern city

The Beyazid Mosque overlooks Divan Yolu, a historic street lined with nargile cafes, shops and restaurants. The mosque is situated beside the prominent entrance to Istanbul University. Next to the mosque on its eastern side is the sahaflar çarşısı (book bazaar), a tent city in which sellers hawk Turkish university texts alongside Islamic books and translations of popular novels. The high volume of pedestrian traffic means that Beyazid Mosque is a well-used religious building like Yeni (New) Camii in Eminönü.

3

Sole survivor

Beyazid Camii was built between 1501 and 1506 by the architect Yakub shah ibn Sultan shah on the orders of Beyazid II, son of Mehmet the Conqueror. Although Sultan Mehmet built Fatih Camii (the Mosque of the Conqueror) during the 15th century, a major earthquake levelled this historic building in 1766, leaving Beyazid Camii as the oldest surviving major mosque in Istanbul.

4

An Ottoman classic

Beyazid Mosque is an exceedingly important work of Ottoman architecture. It contains many of the elements of the grand Istanbul mosques such as a prominent dome flanked by half domes, a design that allows the floral pattern and kufic script on the painted ceiling to be seen from any vantage point - a conscious imitation of Aya Sofya. The Beyazid also has a courtyard surrounded by an arcade of Moorish arches formed by alternating white lime and red sandstone. The courtyard is a relaxing place where the swaying of trees and cool Marmara breezes evoke a feeling of sanctuary. The courtyard also contains a working şadırvan (ablutions fountain).

5

Same but different

The design of Beyazid Camii departs from that of traditional Ottoman mosques in a few significant ways. Most notable are its side aisles, which are

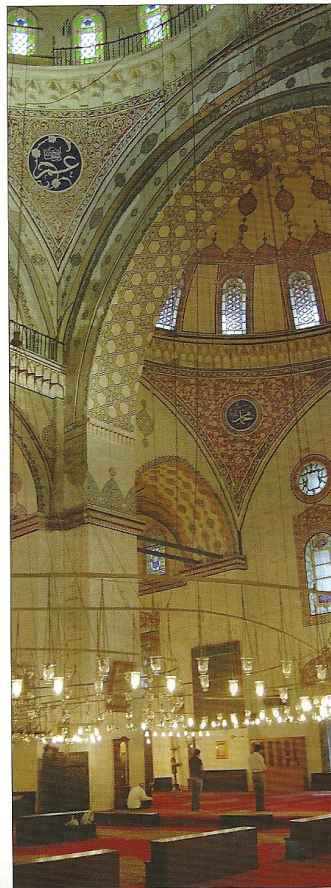
separated from the main nave by massive piers and columns. A few elegant stained-glass windows situated along these aisles and containing pastel panes of green, blue and pink admit an ethereal light. The aisles in turn support the mosque's two minarets, which are placed far from the main body at both ends of the exceptionally long axis that separates the mosque from its courtyard.

This scheme differs from other mosques like Sultanahmet, which place their minarets at the corners of the grand courtyard and the mosque itself. Rather than the traditional cube of space created by other mosque plans, the Beyazid is wider and more compartmentalised like a basilica.

6

Bling, bling

Beyazid II gave specific instructions that his mosque was to contain as much rare stone as possible. The columns, arches and piers of the Beyazid Camii are composed of marble, rare granite, porphyry and verd antique in an assemblage of startling colour that rivals the painted designs



inscribed on the ceiling. The courtyard is a forest of plum-red porphyry columns as well as faded green marble and verd antique columns. The two colossal columns that hold the dome up inside the mosque are a solid dove-grey granite.

7

Civic center

Built in a former Byzantine forum, Beyazid Camii has traditionally been a bustling place. The mosque complex was constructed to include a medrese (Islamic school), hamam (bath house), turbes (tombs) and a public kitchen. Ottoman Sultans constructed such complexes as public works projects to enrich the city and encourage other rich and powerful Ottomans to do the same. Mosques like Beyazid Camii formed the nucleus of the surrounding neighbourhood, which, as Istanbul grew, became one of the busiest in the city.

8

Public space

In addition to hosting a steady traffic of the faithful, the Beyazid's courtyard and surrounding grounds are a veritable outdoor shopping mall with peddlers selling Islamic prayer beads, souvenirs, clothes, handbags and whatever else they can carry and lay out on a blanket. Separated from Istanbul University by only a few hundred yards of public square, the mosque has also witnessed the celebrations and often colourful protests that take place outside the great school.

9

Prepare to be awed

Beyazid Camii lacks the size of Sultanahmet and the opulence of Süleyman Camii but has its own unique charm. It is exceedingly colourful due to its rare stone and vibrant yet delicate Islamic décor of geometric design and script. The mosque has a certain dimness appropriate to a place of worship but this is counterbalanced by the light admitted through its stained glass, and, for this reason perhaps, it comes closest to recreating the atmosphere of Aya Sofya. The age of the Beyazid Mosque literally oozes from the walls in the best possible way; its occasional crack and water stains are almost poetic touches. Beyazid Camii is a symbol of the Ottomans' transition from warrior nomads to proud possessors of an empire - a metamorphosis apparent in the mosque's composite design.

10

Getting there

Finding Beyazid Camii is a cinch. You can take the tram to the Beyazid stop or simply walk down Divan Yolu from Aya Sofya and Sultanahmet. As at all Istanbul mosques, there is no entry fee but please take off your shoes, wear long trousers and, ladies, cover your head and shoulders. Typical mosque etiquette also requires that you do not enter during prayers.