Brief History of Istanbul

The city has been conquered, fought over and rebuilt many times over the centuries. The earliest known settlements in Istanbul date back to around the 13th Century BC, and Byzas the Megarian named the city Byzantine in 700 BC. A small colony of Greeks inhabited the area until 300 BC, and over the next 1000 years it became a thriving trading and commercial centre. It continued to act as a trading centre when it became incorporated into the Roman Empire after it was conquered by Emperor Septimus Severus in 193 AD. During the 4th century, the Roman Emperor Constantine left Rome and selected Istanbul to be his new capital. It was a strategic choice: Built on seven surrounding hills – echoing that of Rome – the city had control of the Bosphorus and easy access to the harbour of the Golden Horn. The city was re-organised within six years, during which its ramparts widened and many temples, official buildings, palaces, hamams, and the hippodrome were built.

In 330 AD, the city host a great ceremony as it was officially renamed Constantinople and declared as the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire. It remained the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantine) for many centuries, and by the sixth century, under Emperor Justinian, the population exceeded half a million and enjoyed a golden age.

The Byzantine Empire's history was full of palace and church intrigue, and was attacked by the Arabs in the 7th and 8th centuries, the Bulgars in the 9th and 10th, and eventually fell to the Crusaders in 1204. They destroyed and raided it for many more years - including churches, monasteries, and monuments, which led to a decline in the population. The Byzantine Empire regained control of the city 1261, but they were never able to achieve their former level of wealth and prosperity. The Byzantine Empire came to a final end in 1453 when the Turks conquered Istanbul after a 53-day siege.

The city was renamed Istanbul and became the capital city of the Ottoman Empire. The city under the Ottoman rule saw a population increase with immigrants, such as Greeks, Armenians and Jews, who enjoyed religious freedom and social rights. Mehmet the Conqueror began rebuilt the city with a new palace and mosque (Fatih Camii) and tried to inject new life into the economy.

Süleyman the Magnificent (1520-66) was considered the greatest of all the Ottoman leaders. His military conquests brought great wealth into the empire, and this led to glorious building projects, many under the direction of the great architect Mimar Sinan. The city was also became the center of the Islamic world, where domes and minarets from hundreds of mosques sprung up to dot the skyline.

A century after the death of Süleyman, the Empire began to decline. By the end of the 18th century the empire had lost a great deal of territory to the West, and the sultans were becoming more interested in Western institutional models. There was a short-lived Ottoman parliament and constitution in 1876, and by the end of the World War I, during which allied troops occupied the city, the once-great empire was in shambles.

This changed radically with the emergence of a prominent commander in the Turkish army, who struggled for the Turkish nation. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, already considered a hero after several military campaigns that he had either been involved in or commanded, led the 4-year long War of Independence, after which he established the Republic of Turkey in 1923. When he moved the capital to Ankara, then a small provincial town in Anatolia, Istanbul retained its status as a commercial and cultural center, and continues to this day to flourish as one of the biggest and most vibrant cities of Europe and Asia.
Registered Cultural and Natural Heritages in Istanbul

Sites
Archaeological Sites: 14
Urban Sites: 14
Natural Sites: 11
Historical Sites: -

Other Sites
Archaeological and Natural Sites: 8
Historical and Natural Sites: 4
Archaeological and Urban Sites: 2
Historical and Urban Sites: 1
Natural and Urban Sites: 4
Total: 58
Cultural (at Single Construction Scale) and Natural Heritages: 19512