

# ISTANBUL

## Complete Guide

for Visiting Teams & Delegations

International Geography Olympiad 2026  
ITU Ayazaga Campus - Istanbul, Turkey

AIRPORTS	METRO	EMERGENCY	CURRENCY
IST & SAW	M2 / M11	CALL 112	~45 TRY/USD

*Prepared for iGeo 2026 delegations - Information current as of July 2026*

## 1 - GETTING HERE FROM THE AIRPORTS

Istanbul is served by two international airports. **Istanbul Airport (IST)** on the European side is the closest to ITU Ayazaga Campus. **Sabiha Gokcen Airport (SAW)** is on the Asian side and requires a longer journey.

### Istanbul Airport (IST) to ITU Ayazaga [Recommended]

IST is directly connected to Ayazaga via the **M11 metro line**. The metro station entrance is opposite **Gate 11** of the arrivals hall (approx. 300 m from the terminal exit), on the B2 floor.

Option	Route	Time	Cost
Metro (Best)	M11 to Gayrettepe - transfer M2 to ITU Ayazaga	45-55 min	~38 TRY
Havaist Shuttle	IST to 4. Levent - then M2 (2 stops) to ITU Ayazaga	50-70 min	~200-300 TRY
Taxi / Uber	Direct to ITU Ayazaga campus (Ari Kapi gate)	25-40 min	~700-900 TRY

#### Step-by-step metro route (cheapest and most reliable):

- Go to floor B2 (public transport level). Buy / load your Istanbulkart at the yellow Biletmatik machines.
- Board **M11** direction Gayrettepe / Halkali. Ride approx. 30 min to **Gayrettepe**.
- At Gayrettepe: transfer to **M2** direction Haciosman. Ride 2 stops to **ITU Ayazaga**.
- Exit and follow signs to 'Ari Kapi' — the main pedestrian entrance of ITU.

**Tip: The M11 charges ~66 TRY at the turnstile. Tap your Istanbulkart again at the REFUND MACHINES at Gayrettepe to get the transfer discount back (~38 TRY net). Do not skip this step!**

### Sabiha Gokcen Airport (SAW) to ITU Ayazaga

SAW is on the Asian side of Istanbul. The M4 metro now links SAW to the city, but a transfer to the European side is still required.

Option	Route	Time	Cost
Metro + Transfer	M4 to Ayriulik Cesmesi - Marmaray to Yenikapi - M2 to ITU Ayazaga	75-95 min	~40 TRY
Havabus Shuttle	SAW to Taksim - then M2 to ITU Ayazaga (7 stops)	90-120 min	~350-500 TRY
E-3 Bus	SAW to 4. Levent Metro - then M2 to ITU Ayazaga	80-100 min	~30-40 TRY
Taxi / Uber	Direct to ITU Ayazaga campus (Ari Kapi gate)	30-50 min*	~1800-2200 TRY

*i \* Taxi time from SAW is highly traffic-dependent. Allow extra time during rush hours (07:00-10:00 and 17:00-20:00).*

### Step-by-step recommended route from SAW:

- Take the **E-3 bus** (direction: 4. Levent Metro). Runs every 15-30 min, 05:30-01:00.
- Ride to final stop **4. Levent Metro** (approx. 80-100 min).
- Board **M2** direction Haciosman. Ride 2 stops to **ITU Ayazaga**.

**Tip: Alternative via Havabus: bus to Taksim Square, then M2 toward Haciosman — get off at ITU Ayazaga (8th stop from Taksim, ~15 min).**

**Tell your taxi / Uber driver:** "Istanbul Teknik Universitesi, Ayazaga Kampusu, Ari Kapi" — or show them on your phone: **ITU Ayazaga, Maslak, Istanbul**

## 2 - ISTANBULKART — YOUR TRANSPORT CARD

The **Istanbulkart** is the rechargeable smart card used on ALL public transport in Istanbul: metro, tram, bus, Metrobus, ferries, and Marmaray. Without it, travel is significantly more expensive. One card can be tapped for up to 5 people.

### Where to Buy

- **Istanbul Airport (IST):** Yellow Biletmatik machines on the B2 floor (public transport level) and at Havaist shuttle desks.
- **Sabiha Gokcen (SAW):** Kiosk at street level across from the arrivals exit, and at IETT bus stations.
- **Any metro / tram station:** Yellow Biletmatik machines throughout the network.
- **Small kiosks (bufe):** Many newsagent stands sell them at the official price.

### Costs

Item	Approx. Price
Anonymous (Anonim) Istanbulkart — card fee	~130-165 TRY
Top-up credit (you choose the amount)	Any amount in TRY
Single metro / tram / bus ride	~12-20 TRY
M11 airport metro (IST to Gayrettepe, net after refund)	~38 TRY
Tourist unlimited day pass (Blue City Card option)	Available at select desks

### How to Use a Biletmatik Vending Machine

- Machines accept cash: 50, 100, 200 TRY banknotes. Newer machines also accept credit cards.
- Select 'Istanbulkart' on the screen, pay the card fee, then add credit for trips.

- The card fee (~130-165 TRY) is non-refundable. Remaining balance can be refunded but requires a visit to an IETT office.

### Mobile App Top-Up

Download **Istanbulkart Mobile** to top up via credit card and check your balance — avoids queuing at machines entirely.

**Tip: Load at least 200-300 TRY when you arrive to cover the first day comfortably without hunting for machines.**

## 3 - MOBILE CONNECTIVITY & SIM CARDS

Turkey has three major mobile operators: **Turkcell** (largest, best coverage), **Vodafone**, and **Turk Telekom**. All sell tourist SIM cards at both airports. **A valid passport is required** for registration.

Airport SIM prices are significantly higher than city-centre prices. If you do not need data immediately, buy a SIM in the city (e.g. Taksim area) for much better value.

Operator	Airport Package (approx.)	Notes
Turkcell	From ~3,200 TRY / 20 GB (30 days)	Best rural and nationwide coverage
Vodafone	From ~1,890 TRY / various GB (28 days)	Strong urban coverage
Turk Telekom	From ~850 TRY / 25 GB (7 days)	Good city coverage; short validity at airport

### eSIM — Recommended for Short Stays

If your phone supports eSIM, buying a virtual SIM online before travel is usually cheaper and faster. Providers such as Airalo, Holafly, and Nomad offer Turkey data eSIMs from approx. 8-15 USD for 5-10 GB.

### Free Wi-Fi Options

- **Istanbul Airport (IST):** Connect to '\_IST WiFi GROUND INTERNET' — free, no login required.
- **Metro stations:** Free IBB Wi-Fi at many stations across the network.
- **Shopping malls and cafes:** Free Wi-Fi widely available.
- **ITU campus:** Eduroam available for participating institutions; guest Wi-Fi available for event attendees.

## 4 - USEFUL APPS

App	Category	Why You Need It
Google Maps	Navigation	Transit directions, walking, offline maps. Download Istanbul offline before arriving.
Moovit	Public Transit	Real-time bus / metro arrivals, live service alerts.

Trafi	Public Transit	Real-time transit + ferry pier timetables.
Istanbulkart Mobile	Transport Card	Top up Istanbulkart by card; check balance; view history.
BiTaksi	Taxi	Book licensed Istanbul taxis. Shows price upfront; pay by card.
Uber	Ride-hailing	Works in Istanbul (uses licensed taxis). English interface; card payment.
Marti	Scooter + Car	Electric scooters for short hops; car ride option too.
inDrive	Ride-hailing	Negotiate fares directly with drivers.
Getir / Trendyol Go	Delivery	Grocery and food delivery in minutes — useful for late-night supplies.
Yandex Maps	Navigation	Offline maps and strong traffic layer; popular with locals.
IGA Airport App	Airport	Istanbul Airport indoor navigation, flight info, transport options.
WhatsApp	Communication	Universally used in Turkey — hotels, restaurants, guides all use it.

**Tip: Download offline maps of Istanbul on Google Maps or Yandex before you travel — saves data and works in areas with weak signal.**

## 5 - ELECTRICITY & POWER ADAPTERS

Specification	Turkey Standard
Voltage	220-230 V
Frequency	50 Hz
Socket Types	Type C (Europlug) and Type F (Schuko / German)
Plug Shape	Two round pins (Type C) or two round pins + side grounding clips (Type F)

Turkey uses the same system as most of continental Europe. Visitors from non-European countries should check their devices and bring an adapter.

Your Country	Need Adapter?	Need Voltage Converter?
Continental Europe (EU / non-UK)	No	No
UK / Ireland	Yes — UK Type G to Type F	No (UK devices run at 230V)

USA / Canada	Yes — Type A/B to Type F	Usually No — most laptops, phones, and chargers are dual-voltage (100-240V). Check the small print on your power brick. Old appliances may need a converter.
Australia / NZ	Yes — Type I to Type F	No (devices support 220-240V)
India (Type C/D/M)	Usually No — Type C fits	No
Japan	Yes	Yes — Japan uses 100V / 60Hz

*i Most modern smartphones, laptops, and cameras are auto-switching (100-240V, 50-60Hz) and work fine in Turkey with just a plug adapter — no voltage converter needed. Always verify on the power brick label before plugging in.*

**Tip: A universal travel adapter with USB ports is the most practical solution for delegations carrying multiple devices.**

## 6 - CURRENCY & MONEY

Turkey's currency is the **Turkish Lira (TRY / TL)**. Approximate exchange rates as of June-July 2026:

Currency	Approx. Rate	Example
1 USD (US Dollar)	~45 TRY	100 USD
1 EUR (Euro)	~49-51 TRY	100 EUR
1 GBP (British Pound)	~57-60 TRY	100 GBP
1 JPY (Japanese Yen)	~0.30 TRY	10,000 JPY
1 AUD (Australian Dollar)	~28-30 TRY	100 AUD

*i Exchange rates fluctuate daily. Check a live source (Google, XE.com, or your bank app) on arrival. The Lira has been gradually depreciating.*

### Where to Exchange Money

- **Doviz Burolari (Exchange Offices):** Best rates in Istanbul. Licensed shops display live rates on a board — found in the Grand Bazaar area, Taksim, and near most tourist districts. Avoid airport exchange desks.
- **ATMs (Bankamatik):** Widely available. Use ATMs of major Turkish banks (Garanti, Is Bankasi, Yapi Kredi, Ziraat). Always choose to be charged in LOCAL CURRENCY (TRY) — never in your home currency. Choosing your home currency activates dynamic conversion with a poor rate.
- **Banks:** Open Mon-Fri 09:00-17:00. Exchange available but rates are usually less competitive than doviz offices.
- **At the airport:** Convenient but worst exchange rates. Only exchange a small emergency amount here if necessary.

### Paying in Istanbul

- Credit / debit cards (Visa, Mastercard) are accepted almost everywhere — restaurants, shops, supermarkets, hotels.
- Small street stalls, market vendors, and public transport still prefer cash.
- Ride-hailing and delivery apps accept international cards, reducing the need for cash.

**Tip: Best strategy: use ATMs of major Turkish banks and always select TRY. Avoid airport exchange. Doviz offices in the city give the best rates for cash.**

## 7 - EMERGENCY NUMBERS

**In any emergency in Turkey, call 112.** This single number dispatches police, ambulance, and fire services. Operators speak multiple languages. All three-digit emergency numbers are FREE of charge, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

NUMBER	SERVICE
<b>112</b>	General Emergency — Police / Ambulance / Fire (use this first)
<b>110</b>	Fire Department — direct line
<b>155</b>	Police — direct line
<b>156</b>	Gendarmerie (rural areas outside cities)
<b>158</b>	Coast Guard
<b>177</b>	Forest Fire
<b>184</b>	Health Consultation Hotline (ALO Saglik)
<b>153</b>	Municipal Police (Zabita) — noise, parking, local violations
<b>157</b>	Tourist Information Helpline (Ministry of Culture & Tourism)

### Nearest Hospitals to ITU Ayazaga Campus

Hospital	Notes
Sisli Hamidiye Etfal Training & Research Hospital	~4 km south — major public hospital
Baskent University Istanbul Hospital (private)	~5 km — English-speaking staff
Acibadem Atakent Hospital (private)	~5 km — Atakent — English-speaking staff
American Hospital Istanbul (Amerikan Hastanesi)	~10 km — English-speaking, accepts international insurance

## Useful Phrases for Emergencies

English	Turkish	Pronunciation
Help!	Imdat!	eem-DAHT
Call an ambulance	Ambulans cagirin	am-boo-LANS cha-uh-RUN
I need a doctor	Doktora ihtiyacim var	dok-TO-ra eeh-tee-YA-jum var
Police!	Polis!	po-LEES
Fire!	Yangin var!	yan-GUN var
Hospital	Hastane	has-TA-neh
I am lost	Kayboldum	KAY-bol-doom

## 8 - AROUND ITU AYAZAGA CAMPUS

The ITU Ayazaga Campus sits in the modern **Maslak-Ayazaga** district, one of Istanbul's major business and commercial hubs. Everything you need is within a short walk or one metro stop.

### Shopping Malls (within 2-5 km)

Mall	Distance	Highlights
Istinye Park	~3 km (taxi or bus)	Luxury and international brands, restaurants, cinema. Reachable via M2 from ITU Ayazaga station.
Vadistanbul	~1.5 km or next M2 stop (Ataturk Oto Sanayi)	500+ shops, restaurants, cafes, ice skating, open-air area.
UNIQ Istanbul	~0.5 km walk	Open-air cultural and entertainment complex directly next to campus — live events, food, art.
Maslak 1453	~1 km	Shopping and lifestyle centre in the Maslak business district.
Istanbul Sapphire Tower	~4 km via M2 to Levent	54-storey skyscraper mall with restaurants and panoramic views.

### Dining Near Campus

- **Campus canteen (Yemekhane):** Affordable Turkish food on campus — open to guests during events.
- **Maslak district:** Numerous cafes, fast-food, and restaurants along Buyukdere Caddesi, 5 min walk.
- **UNIQ Istanbul:** Mix of restaurants, coffee shops, and food trucks at the campus edge.
- **Vadistanbul mall:** Large food court with Turkish and international cuisine.
- **Istinye Park:** Upscale dining options including well-known Turkish restaurant brands.

- **Local neighbourhood:** Resitpasa Mahallesi east of campus has authentic local restaurants and tea gardens (cay bahcesi).

### Things to Do Near Campus

- **Elgiz Museum (Contemporary Art Museum):** ~2 km, excellent modern art collection, low-cost entry.
- **Istanbul Sapphire observation deck:** ~4 km via M2 — panoramic 360-degree views of the city.
- **Belgrade Forest (Belgrad Ormani):** ~12 km north — Istanbul's largest urban forest; great for jogging and picnics.
- **Emirgan Park:** ~5 km — beautiful Bosphorus-side park, free entry, famous for tulips in spring.
- **Bosphorus waterfront (Tarabya / Sariyer):** ~8 km north by bus — seafood restaurants, ferry piers, scenic walk.
- **Supermarkets:** Migros, CarrefourSA, BIM, A101 all within 10 min of campus for everyday supplies.

### Key Metro Connections from ITU Ayazaga

Destination	Direction on M2	Travel Time
Taksim Square (city centre)	Yenikapi direction	~15-18 min
Levent (shopping, finance)	Yenikapi direction	~5 min
Gayrettepe (M11 for IST airport)	Yenikapi direction	~8 min
4. Levent (SAW bus terminal)	Yenikapi direction	~3 min
Vadistanbul (Ataturk Oto Sanayi)	Haciosman direction	~3 min (1 stop)
Haciosman (M2 terminus)	Haciosman direction	~5 min

## 9 - ISTANBUL SIGHTSEEING — MUST-SEE ATTRACTIONS

Istanbul is one of the world's great cities — the only metropolis straddling two continents, with over 2,000 years of Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman history. Most major attractions cluster in the **Sultanahmet** district, reachable from ITU Ayazaga in approximately 30-40 minutes by metro and tram.

**Route from campus:** M2 to Taksim (or Vezneciler) - T1 Tram to Sultanahmet. Journey time approx. 35 min total. Use your Istanbulkart throughout.

### Historic Sultanahmet District (30-40 min from campus)

**Hagia Sophia (Ayasofya)** — One of the world's greatest buildings — a 1,500-year-old church-turned-mosque. Free entry to the mosque area; a fee applies to museum sections. Book online to avoid queues.

**Blue Mosque (Sultanahmet Camii)** — The iconic 6-minaret mosque. Free entry; modest dress required. Closed during prayer times (~20 min, 5 times daily).

**Topkapi Palace** — Spectacular palace of the Ottoman sultans for 400 years. Houses legendary treasures and the Harem. Allow 3-4 hours. Book online.

**Basilica Cistern (Yerebatan Sarnici)** — Ancient underground Roman water reservoir — beautifully lit, atmospheric. Book online.

**Grand Bazaar (Kapali Carsi)** — One of the world's oldest and largest covered markets — 4,000+ shops. Open Mon-Sat. Bargaining is expected; start at ~50% of asking price.

**Spice Bazaar (Misir Carsisi)** — Smaller than the Grand Bazaar and easier to navigate. Famous for spices, Turkish delight, dried fruits, and souvenirs.

**Istanbul Archaeological Museum** — World-class collection of Greek, Roman, and Ottoman artefacts. Near Topkapi Palace.

### **Beyoglu & Modern Istanbul (~20 min from campus)**

- **Istiklal Avenue:** Istanbul's famous 1.4 km pedestrian street — shops, cafes, restaurants, theatres, and the historic Nostalgic Tram.
- **Galata Tower:** 14th-century Genoese tower with panoramic views. Book online; views are spectacular at sunset.
- **Karakoy & Galata neighbourhood:** Trendy cafes, galleries, and the famous Balik-Ekmek (fish sandwich) by Galata Bridge.
- **Taksim Square:** Istanbul's main modern plaza — shopping, restaurants, major transport hub.

### **Bosphorus & Waterfront**

- **Bosphorus Cruise:** Take a public ferry from Eminonu or Besiktas for the cheapest option (~25 TRY), or book a tour cruise. Passes palaces, forts, and bridges.
- **Dolmabahce Palace:** Magnificent 19th-century waterfront palace in European style. Near Besiktas, reachable by bus from Taksim.
- **Princes' Islands (Adalar):** Car-free islands in the Sea of Marmara — ferry from Kabatas (~1 hr). Horse-drawn carriages, seafood restaurants, peaceful beaches.
- **Pierre Loti Hill & Eyup:** Hillside cable car and tea gardens with Golden Horn views; historic Eyup Sultan Mosque.

### **Practical Sightseeing Tips**

- Most museums are closed on **Mondays**. Plan your days accordingly.
- Book Hagia Sophia, Topkapi Palace, and Basilica Cistern **online in advance** — walk-up queues can be 1-2 hours.
- The **Museum Pass Istanbul** gives discounted combined entry to major attractions — worth it for 3+ sites.
- Dress modestly for mosque visits: shoulders and knees covered. Women should carry a headscarf.
- Best time to visit: early morning (08:00-10:00) to beat crowds at popular sites.

## **10 - PRACTICAL TIPS**

### **Time Zone**

Turkey uses **TRT — Turkey Time (UTC+3)** year-round. Turkey does not observe daylight saving time. In summer, Istanbul is 3 hours ahead of UTC, 6 hours ahead of US Eastern time.

## Weather (July-August)

July-August in Istanbul is hot and humid. Average highs of **28-32 C (82-90 F)** with occasional afternoon thunderstorms. Wear lightweight, breathable clothing. Carry a small reusable water bottle — drinking fountains are common in parks.

## Language

Official language: **Turkish**. English is widely spoken in tourist areas, hotels, airports, and major restaurants. In local neighbourhoods, Google Translate with the camera function is very helpful. A few Turkish phrases go a long way.

English	Turkish (simplified spelling)	Pronunciation
Hello	Merhaba	Mehr-ha-BAH
Thank you	Tesekkur ederim	Teh-shek-KYER ed-eh-REEM
Please	Lutfen	LEWT-fen
Yes / No	Evet / Hayir	EH-vet / HAY-ur
Excuse me	Affedersiniz	Af-feh-dehr-see-NEEZ
Where is ... ?	... nerede?	Neh-REH-deh
How much?	Ne kadar?	Neh kah-DAR
Water	Su	SOO
Restaurant	Restoran	Res-to-RAN
Help!	Imdat!	eem-DAHT

## Tipping

- **Restaurants:** 10-15% is appreciated. Check if 'servis ucreti' (service charge) is already included on the bill.
- **Taxis:** Rounding up the fare is appreciated but not obligatory.
- **Hotels:** 20-50 TRY per bag for porters; 50-100 TRY per night for housekeeping is generous.
- **Tour guides:** 100-200 TRY per person per day is customary.

## Safety

Istanbul is generally safe for tourists. As in any major city, remain aware of your surroundings in crowded areas where pickpocketing can occur.

- Keep bags zipped and in front of you at metro stations and in the Grand Bazaar.
- Only use licensed yellow taxis or app-based BiTaksi/Uber — avoid unlicensed drivers at the airport.
- Never change money with individuals on the street — use banks, ATMs, or official doviz offices.
- Keep a photo of your passport on your phone and note your country's embassy contact number.

## Cultural Respect

- During the call to prayer (ezan — 5 times daily), be respectful near mosques. You may enter mosques between prayers.
- Remove shoes before entering a mosque. Dress modestly (no shorts or sleeveless tops).
- Bargaining is common and expected at bazaars; not appropriate in regular shops or restaurants.
- Smoking is prohibited indoors in all public places — strictly enforced.

## Water & Food

Istanbul tap water is treated, but most locals and visitors drink bottled water. Bottled water is very cheap (5-10 TRY for 0.5 L). Street food is generally safe and delicious — try simit (sesame bread ring), balik-ekmek (fish sandwich from Galata Bridge vendors), and fresh pomegranate juice.

## Banking Hours

Banks open Monday-Friday, 09:00-17:00. ATMs operate 24/7 and are abundant throughout the city.

### Welcome to Istanbul and to iGeo 2026!

Istanbul is a city of extraordinary history, warmth, and energy. We hope your time here — on the ITU Ayazaga campus and across this magnificent city — is both inspiring and unforgettable.

*Hos geldiniz!* (Welcome!)