

SMART IN THE CITY

From top to bottom, left to right: a view of the Bosphorus; the bar at Mikla; a tram at night; Mikla; a view of the city from the Beyoğlu district; cafés in the Sofyalı Sokak area



ISTANBUL ...NIGHTLIFE

Istanbul's very modern nightlife is steeped in the ancient culture of its traditional taverns, known as *meyhanes*. *Mey* is an old Persian word for wine, but it is, in fact, *raki* – a clear, anise-flavoured, grape-based drink – that forms the core of the *meyhane* experience.



Since *raki* is meant to be drunk very slowly over many hours, inebriation is rarely the aim of Turkish revellers. In abstemious Ottoman times, *meyhanes* were in non-Muslim neighbourhoods, particularly the area known today as Beyoğlu, which remains the centre of Istanbul's nightlife. The taverns often combine eating and drinking with live music, singing and dancing. Similarly, most Istanbul venues are entertainment Venn diagrams – café-bars overlap with restaurants, while restaurants morph into clubs. The following is my personal pick of Beyoğlu's best.

The bohemian enclave of Cihangir is renowned for its cafés, but **White Mill** (www.whitemillcafe.com) stands out. An unassuming entrance leads to a spacious back garden prized by small-screen stars fleeing the paparazzi. Highlights from the Mediterranean menu include *çentik kebab* (thin slices of beef with aubergine purée and yogurt salsa), and Busara-style linguine with prawns. Segue into the night with a White Mill Deluxe (gin, lime juice and cucumber slices, decorated with red grapes), a Whisky Passion or a glass of good Turkish wine, such as Egeo Cabernet Sauvignon or Kavaklıdere Selection. Seemingly balanced on top of the

Marmara Pera hotel, **Mikla** (www.miklarestaurant.com) is the brainchild of Scandinavian-Turkish chef *célèbre* Mehmet Gürs, who produces new Anatolian dishes such as *balık ekmek* (crispy sardines served with olive-oil bread and lemon mousse). But its secret draw is the rooftop bar with vertiginous views of the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn. Established in 1954, **Refik Restaurant** (www.refikrestaurant.com) is the quintessential Beyoğlu *meyhane*. Order a bottle of *raki* and choose from wonderful cold and hot mezze. Refik's specialties are *yaprak ciğer* (fried slices of liver), *işkembe süğüş* (cold, chopped tripe served in oil and vinegar), and *hamsi buğulama* (poached anchovies) during the fish season. The unpretentious decor includes framed mementos from Turkish artists and intellectuals, such as painter Abidin Dino and author Aziz Nesin, who have long called Refik home. Since it opened in 2010, cosy **Lokanta Maya** (www.lokantamaya.com) has been the must-go destination for foodies. Trained at New York's French Culinary Institute, chef Didem Senol's menu features dishes such as *müçver* (aubergine fritters with cardamom-yogurt sauce) and caramelised sea bass with sautéed chard. **Münferit** (00 90 212 252 5067) is ostensibly a *meyhane*, but the cold and hot mezze, such as cold octopus salad with lemon-potato mash, and unusual desserts such as sage-tahini-orchid-root ice cream introduce a modern twist. At weekends, the tables are cleared at 11.30pm and the place is transformed into a stylish club favoured by well-heeled hipsters. Since it opened in 1999, **Babylon** (00 90 212 292 7368) has established a global reputation as the best live-music venue in Istanbul, with a wide range of stellar international acts (Patti Smith, Manu Chao) performing on its tiny stage. Next door, **Babylon Lounge** is a cool, laid-back DJ venue, where concert-goers mix with artists at intimate after-parties. SEVIL DELIN

'From the packed bars and clubs of Beyoğlu to the posh places along the Bosphorus, Istanbul has managed to create its own distinctive brand of nightlife. It's always exciting, always creative and always thoroughly enjoyable, from dusk till dawn' DJ Yakuza, Münferit