

An American in Istanbul....

Or: How The Turks are Poised to Help Win the Future of Green Building in Europe, Asia and the Middle East



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On Istanbul:

Istanbul is a unique place. Located physically on two continents - Europe and Asia - its Middle East credentials are clear when you realize that three of Turkey's eight borderline countries are Iraq, Iran and Syria. At close to 14,000,000 occupants, Istanbul is the largest and fastest growing city in Europe, and Turkey as a whole has remarkably vibrant economic activity. Termed an "upper middle income country" by the World Bank because of its high per capita GDP, Turkey experienced GDP growth of over 7% in 2010.

Indeed Istanbul's citizens have reason to be proud, and they are. As you may recall from your high school or college history, the city has served as the capital of the Roman Empire (330–c.395), Byzantine Empire (c.395–1204 & 1261–1453), the Latin Empire (1204–1261), and the Ottoman Empire (1453–1922). The only city they feel is even worthy of being called a competitor, historically, is Rome. A little known fact about the Istanbul of *today* is that it has the fourth largest number of billionaires after New York, Moscow and London. It's fair to say that for thousands of years, people with power and vision have chosen to reside there.

On the macro-political stage, Turkey also remains very relevant. It has the second largest army in NATO and is increasingly seen as a model of (relative) political and economic stability amid the growing crisis of legitimacy among governments in the region. About 98% of the country's citizens are officially Muslim, although strong separation of church and state is one of the hallmarks of 20th and 21st century Turkish history, following the founding of the Republic in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.