

## Unit 11: Crossroads of the World

**Narrator:** Turkey sits on the border of Europe and Asia, creating a fusion of Eastern and Western culture. This culminates in the cultural heart of the country, Istanbul.

With a population of around 15 million, Istanbul is Turkey's largest and perhaps most famous city. Its long, intriguing history, together with its unique geographical location mean that the 13 million tourists who visit every year have no shortage of sites to take in.

The Bosphorus strait is a bustling waterway that runs through the center of the city. The strait forms part of the continental boundary between Europe and Asia and divides Istanbul in two. Taking a boat ride along the strait gives a stunning view of the city.

Istanbul's beautiful skyline is a mix of contrasting architectural styles, with influences from a diverse range of historic cultures and time periods. Byzantine churches, decorated mosques, and Ottoman palaces blend together to create a truly unique spectacle.

One of the most dominating sites of the skyline is the Galata Tower. When it was built in 1348, the tower was the city's tallest structure. Modern-day visitors can climb 67 meters to the top and enjoy spectacular panoramic views of the city.

Perhaps the most famous, and arguably most beautiful, building in Istanbul is the Hagia Sophia museum. Built between 532-537 A.D, originally as a church, it was once the largest cathedral in the world and became the symbol of the Byzantine Empire.

Following the Ottoman conquest, the building was turned into a mosque, and the walls were plastered over and decorated in Ottoman-style art. In 1935, the Hagia Sophia became the museum it is today.

The Kizkulesi (Maiden's) Tower is another stunning piece of architecture. Located at the southern entrance to the Bosphorus Strait, the tower was built on a small islet in the 5th century BC as a checkpoint for goods entering and leaving the city.

In the late 1990s, the tower was renovated. Now it has a cafe, restaurant and is a popular setting for weddings. The tower also appeared in the James Bond movie, *The World is Not Enough*.

No visit to Istanbul is complete without a visit to the Suleymaniye Mosque. This incredible building was constructed between 1550 and 1557 under the command of Suleyman the Magnificent, whose grave is located in the garden behind the mosque. The building is a great showcase of the work of the renowned Ottoman architect Sinan.

Today, the mosque remains one of the world's greatest pieces of Islamic architecture, and is one of Istanbul's most iconic buildings.