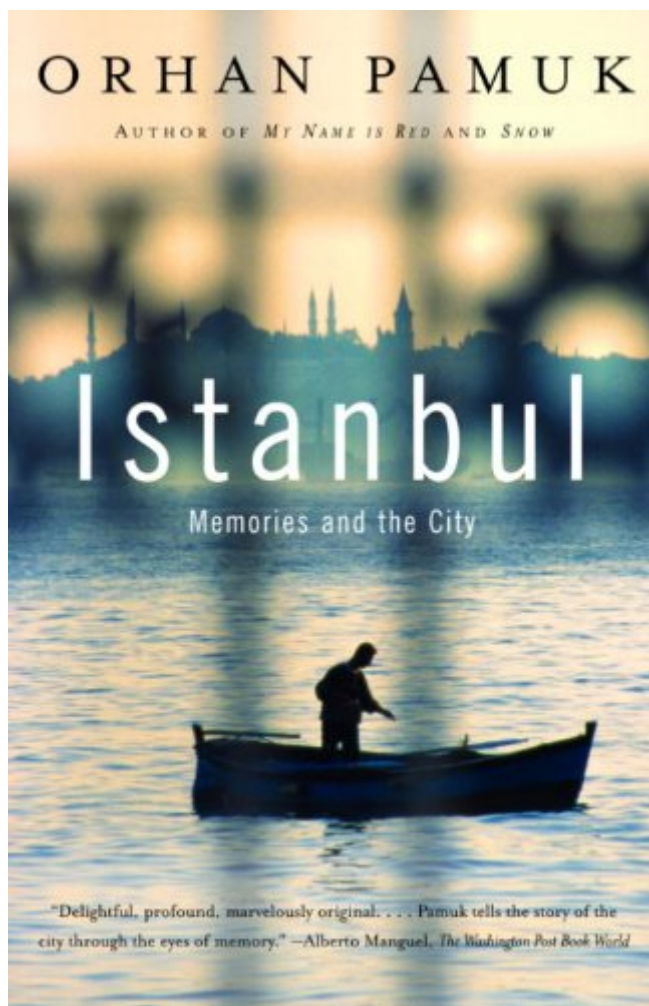




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Istanbul (Vintage International)



Synopsis

A shimmering evocation, by turns intimate and panoramic, of one of the world's great cities, by its foremost writer. Orhan Pamuk was born in Istanbul and still lives in the family apartment building where his mother first held him in her arms. His portrait of his city is thus also a self-portrait, refracted by memory and the melancholy that all Istanbulis share: the sadness that comes of living amid the ruins of a lost empire. With cinematic fluidity, Pamuk moves from his glamorous, unhappy parents to the gorgeous, decrepit mansions overlooking the Bosphorus; from the dawning of his self-consciousness to the writers and painters both Turkish and foreign who would shape his consciousness of his city. Like Joyce's Dublin and Borges's Buenos Aires, Pamuk's Istanbul is a triumphant encounter of place and sensibility, beautifully written and immensely moving.

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Customer Reviews

Orhan Pamuk decided to write an autobiographical account of his decision to be a writer disguised as a book about a city. Growing up in Istanbul, with a formerly wealthy family that had to move

several times as their fortunes waned, Pamuk was initially inclined to be a painter. He starts by describing the city through the eyes of other painters and writers, starting with the Europeans (mostly French) who visited the city from the eighteenth century on. Later he turns to the writings of Turkish authors, mostly journalists, who document the decline of the city after the end of the Ottoman Empire. A key uniting concept for these authors is *huzun* (Turkish for a particular type of melancholy). Another is the difficulty of reconciling the westernizing thrust of the government policies initiated under Ataturk and the nostalgia for doing things the old way. There are also many black and white photographs of the city interspersed through the text, some by the author and mainly of the city in the 1950s and 1960s when the author was still a boy. That city was beautiful when seen from the shores of the Bosphorus but some of its neighborhoods had rotted or burnt out wooden buildings and packs of wild dogs roaming the streets. The young Pamuk grows to love these neighborhoods and spends a lot of time painting them. I read this book after returning from a trip to Turkey. It helped me to understand better the city that I experienced for a short time as a tourist. The writing here is a bit long-winded and self-indulgent but I persisted and in the end I had a good opinion of the book and its writer. My friends who read this before me said I should have started with *My Name is Red*. Oh well.

In this beautifully crafted memoir, Nobel prize winner Orhan Pamuk guides us through his home city of Istanbul. But rather than merely encounter the place of his birth, we find a city and people thriving beneath the struggle of their own sense of melancholy. We find life in its most organic and most fragile. *Memories and the City* is a string of memoirs, a historiography and art history chronicle that covers subjects ranging in topic from the emotional, linguistic, and even topographical. Pamuk spares no detail in this rich, lush portrait of a city that is nostalgic for the former grandeur of pashas, harems, and sultans--while coping with the despondency that accompanies poverty in all its incomprehensible brutality. But the poverty of Istanbul is different from that of other cities and locales. Pamuk illustrates that In Istanbul, the citizens revel in their state of hardship. They wear melancholia with honor and pride--that they too suffer, but will overcome. Istanbul's poverty or sense of *hüzün*--a Turkish term for a sort of despondency that settles over a location like a blanket of snow. *Hüzün* is not so much depression or outright dejection as it is a state of being--a collective gloom Istanbul's inhabitants have come to associate with themselves and their city. It is their heart. It is their collective consciousness. Replete with gorgeous photographs culled from personal family collections and the works of renowned Turkish photojournalist, Ara Güler, Pamuk takes his reader on a locals-only tour of the city of his birth. And rather than boast the former

glory of an empire that is no longer, rather than show us the monuments and cultural touchstones that don the touristic Istanbul skyline, he takes us down back-alleys to the crumbling remnants of days long past. He shows us at once, the embodiment of the bold face of transition and the impending consequences of westernization. However, Pamuk establishes a position on his city that is far from despair. Like his city, he too revels in the sense of *Hâfâ zâfâ n*. He celebrates the collective melancholy and dolefulness of Istanbul by reminding us that the true beauty of a location lies not in the glory of its architectural feats, but rather in the exquisite minds and souls of its inhabitants. Part memoir, part history lesson, *Istanbul - Memories and the City* is the perfect read for the would-be travelers, the culturally curious, and the arm-chair escapists, hungry to set their sights on landscapes that are simultaneously foreign and yet deeply personal.

I visited Istanbul briefly recently without knowing what to expect. I was stunned by its beauty, history and allure. I came home wanting to know more. I could not have picked a better book than this one. Nobel Laureate Orhan Pamuk's beautiful book, "Istanbul, Memories and the City", combines a bracing and poignant memoir of family and childhood with a fascinating, selective but quirky history of Istanbul. Known for his novels that speak to the tensions and opportunities of East meets West stories, that theme pervades this book also. I especially liked the chapters about Nerval, Gautier, and Flaubert's experiences in Istanbul in the 19th century. As a teenager Pamuk decided to paint and by the end of the book he has dropped out of college to "become an artist". In the last chapter his mother lectures him about the need to finish school and become an architect and the misery he will endure as an artist. He leaves the apartment angrily to walk the city's streets at night as he often does. In the last line of the book he decides not to become an artist but to become a writer! Can anyone relate? Beautifully illustrated with black and white photographs and drawings and with a wonderfully produced Audiobook narrated by John Lee (which I listened to as I read the Kindlebook). Read/listen to this book and go to Istanbul to see for yourself. I know I plan to return.

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