SUMAHAN ON THE WATER

Sleep in a loft suite in a converted Ottoman distillery in Istanbul

TAKE THE MAHOGANY water taxi across the Bosphorus Canal to Sumahan on the Water, and you leave the cacaphony of Istanbul for another world. The boutique hotel's complimentary boat service transports you in 30 minutes from Istanbul's cosmopolitan European side, past ancient palaces and mosques, to the less-touristy Asian side. After sightseeing all day, you feel the fatigue melt away as you step ashore into the calm oasis that is Sumahan on the Water.

Its architect owners transformed what was once a 19th century Ottoman distillery into the present-day hotel in 2005. Details of the building's historical past were preserved inside – like black painted metal girders and exposed brick walls – adding an industrial design edge.

We loved our two-storey loft suite. Upstairs was a king-size bed and huge grey-and-white marble bathroom with walk-in shower. Downstairs, French doors opened from the ground-floor living room onto the hotel's lawn and garden. In summer, guests sit out under the trees

and read or watch the boat traffic along the Bosphorus. In winter, a fireplace makes it cozy for enjoying the ever-changing watery panorama.

For breakfast (included in the rate), the terrace is open in warm weather – you can linger over cappuccino while eyeing ferries and tankers gliding by. For dinner, Sumahan's ultra-chic waterside Tapasuma restaurant features fresh fish and Turkish mezzes displayed tapas-style on a 26-foot marble bar.

The hotel is expertly run (the gracious general manager has been with Sumahan since pre-opening) and service is warm. Book lovers will appreciate its cozy water-view library, well-stocked with books on Turkey. A Turkish hammam offers traditional bath-and-massage treatments too.

A delightful way to visit Istanbul is to split your time, spending half your stay close to the buzz of the city's attractions, and half your stay at Sumahan for a restful retreat. www.sumahan.com

— JANICE AND GEORGE MUCALOV