

Hundreds of flights grounded as snow blankets Istanbul

January 1 2016, by Dilay Gundogan



People walk their dogs through snow in Istanbul's the Blue Mosque district on December 31, 2015

Hundreds of flights were cancelled on Thursday from Istanbul's two main airports after the city was hit by a picturesque but troublesome snowfall on the last day of the year.

The heavy snowfall left the historic capital of the Ottoman Empire

veiled under a curtain of white with snow covering the domes of mosques and the hills by the Bosphorus.

Tourists flocked to take pictures of the [city](#) at its most wintry. But conditions were far less attractive for residents making their way around the metropolis or travelling for the New Year.

National carrier Turkish Airlines said it had cancelled 265 domestic and international flights from Istanbul's Ataturk Airport as well as 37 at Sabiha Gokcen airport on the Asian side of the city.

Private carrier Pegasus Airlines also cancelled 34 flights in-and-out of Sabiha Gokcen.

Some planes circled above Istanbul for more than two hours before landing at Ataturk Airport, while others queued for extended periods waiting to take off, Dogan news agency said.

Istanbul had a thick covering of snow by early Thursday, while almost 30 centimetres (12 inches) fell in some parts of the city, causing disruptions to transport services and the closure of several roads.



Tourists pull their luggage through snow in the Hagia Sofia district in Istanbul on December 31, 2015

All ferry services across the Bosphorus which bisects the European and Asian sides of Istanbul have been cancelled, city authorities said, warning citizens against non-essential travel.

At least one person was killed and dozens of others injured in a pile-up of 20 vehicles on a major highway in Istanbul, Dogan news agency said.

According to Istanbul's Disaster Coordination Center (AKOM), at least 73 accidents have occurred in Istanbul since the snowfall began Wednesday.



An Istanbul street during the snowfall on December 31, 2015

Schools have also been shut down in more than 30 provinces across Turkey, including Istanbul.

In addition to the situation in Istanbul, roads to more than 1,000 villages were closed in eastern Anatolia due to heavy snowfall while 765 villages and 191 neighbourhoods were inaccessible in northeastern Turkey.

The local authorities in Istanbul, who were heavily criticised over a slow response to a heavy snowfall in February, have mobilised 5,450 workers to deal with the situation and laid down almost 12 tonnes of salt.



People pose for a selfie during a snowfall in Istanbul on December 31, 2015

Temperatures across the eastern part of the country Thursday will drop to as low as minus 20 degrees, weather authorities said.

The snowfall is expected to last until midday on New Year's Day.



Children play in the snow in Istanbul on December 31, 2015

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