



NEWSLETTER OF ASSOCIATION SUISSE TURQUIE

No 50

December 2025

We would like to finish this year with a tribute to Istanbul's cats – the city's soft-footed guardians, philosophers, entertainers and quiet companions. They reveal themselves in the gentle curl of a tail around your ankle outside a bakery, in the sight of a tabby stretched out on a ferry bench, and in another poised like a miniature sultan on a mosque wall. Modern estimates speak of well over a hundred thousand street cats in Istanbul, yet not one of them is truly ownerless; they belong to the neighbourhood, woven into the city as naturally as its call to prayer.

This affection is old. In late 2025, Topkapı Palace restored and reopened the Harem's kedi kapı, the tiny "cat door" in the Karaağaçlar Quarters. It once allowed palace cats to roam freely through storerooms and archives, protecting manuscripts from mice while padding about as unofficial court staff. Reports on the restoration emphasised the same delightful truth: even inside the splendour of the Ottoman court, cats were expected, welcomed and granted architectural privileges. This ties into a broader cultural reverence. Cats, unlike dogs, are considered ritually clean under Islamic tradition; the Prophet is said to have blessed them, and their natural hygiene made them ideal companions in homes, mosques and palaces. To care for a cat was both virtuous and sensible.

Stepping beyond palace grounds, history reveals an entire infrastructure of compassion. Ottoman Istanbul had around 20,000 vakıfs (charitable endowments), and many were dedicated specifically to animals – feeding cats, birds and even wild creatures. Out of this world emerged the *mancacis*, men who walked the streets carrying long poles strung with liver, feeding neighbourhood cats with donations collected from the public.

One of the earliest written glimpses of this tradition comes from Domenico Hierosolimitano, a 16th-century physician who described lively scenes around Sultan Bayezid Mosque. He watched citizens buy half-grilled liver not for themselves but to toss to the gathered cats, who appeared as if summoned by an invisible bell. That Renaissance snapshot is almost indistinguishable from scenes today: people pausing mid-errand to crouch, call "pisi pisi," and feed the local feline republic. Foreign observers later confirmed the depth of this relationship. In 1835, the Prussian field marshal Helmuth von Moltke noted a "cat hospital" in Üsküdar and special spaces for pigeons by Beyazıt Mosque, marvelling at Istanbul's organised kindness toward animals. Two decades later, in 1853, the French writer Alphonse de Lamartine praised the water bowls left at street corners and the city's determination to coexist harmoniously with all living beings. Their testimonies echo what Istanbul's residents still insist: the city is not just tolerant of animals; it is built for them.

Today, this legacy lives vibrantly on. The BBC affectionately calls Istanbul Catstanbul, “the city where cats rule the streets,” describing felines that nap in lecture halls, stroll onto ferries and treat café terraces as personal thrones. Municipality machines exchange recycling for pet food, volunteers maintain small shelters, and on social media the Topkapı cats stride proudly through their newly restored door, as if resuming duties paused for a few centuries (full BBC article: <https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20251118-istanbul-turkey-inside-the-city-where-cats-rule-the-streets>).

As the year closes, Istanbul’s cats stand as gentle symbols of continuity. Vakıfs, mancassis, Domenico’s tales, von Moltke’s notes and Lamartine’s poetry all point to the same enduring truth: empires rise and fall, skylines transform, yet the cats remain – elegant, clean, beloved – padding through history as only Istanbul’s cats can.

We wish you all very happy holidays and a great 2026!!!

Bezen Hong

Please keep us posted on events and news that you would like to share at
assosuisseturquie@gmail.com

DECEMBER AND JANUARY EVENTS

Association Events

Happy Hour – December 10 from 6pm
Geneva

We will celebrate the end of the year together and raise our glasses to the new one!!
RSVP at assosuisseturquie@gmail.com

Save the Date – Fondue Night - February 5
Geneva

More details to follow

For future Association events: www.assochtr.ch

Other Events

Carouge Magique – from 22.11 to 15.01
Carouge (Geneva)

The old town turns into a winter light trail, with huge illuminated animals, a rink on Place de Sardaigne, a Christmas market and Sunday shopping – basically a small, very Swiss fairy-tale town.
More info: <https://www.tempslibre.ch/gen-ve/expositions/431137-carouge-magique>

“L’Exposition Incontournable” – ongoing

Lausanne

The Musée Historique's permanent exhibition is billed as *the* key show to understand Lausanne's history – ideal for a rainy winter afternoon in town. More info: <https://www.tempslibre.ch>.

Religion et militantisme pour la paix en Israël–Palestine – December 8, 18:30–20:00

Geneva (Graduate Institute, Maison de la Paix)

Public lecture (in French) by Caterina Bandini for the Yves Oltramare Chair, on religious mobilisations for peace in Israel–Palestine and how they rethink colonialism, nationalism and decolonisation. More info: <https://www.graduateinstitute.ch/communications/events/religion-et-militantisme-pour-la-paix-en-israel-palestine>

International Migration Dynamics: Ongoing Paradigms and Emerging Realities – December 9, 18:15–19:00

Geneva (Graduate Institute & online)

Migration talk with Dr Şebnem Köşer Akçapar (Ankara), looking at how contemporary migration reshapes politics and societies, with a strong focus on Turkey and wider Eurasian routes. More info: <https://www.graduateinstitute.ch/communications/events/international-migration-dynamics-ongoing-paradigms-and-emerging-realities>

Fête de l’Escalade – December 12 – 14, with the Cortège on the 14th

Geneva

Historic city-wide fiesta commemorating Geneva's 1602 victory over the Duke of Savoy, with parades, hot vegetable soup in chocolate cauldrons and a very local carnival vibe. More info: <https://www.1602.ch/>

“Dark World” – Film on Âşık Veysel – until 14.12

Istanbul (SALT Galata)

Screenings of a film on legendary Anatolian bard Âşık Veysel in one of Istanbul's coolest cultural spaces, right by the Golden Horn. More info: <https://www.cornucopia.net/events>

Nardis Jazz Club – December – every night till 31.12

Istanbul (Beyoğlu)

Cornucopia's jazz critic curates the month's programme at Nardis: intimate late-night sets by some of Turkey's best jazz players in a classic Galata club. More info: <https://www.cornucopia.net/events>

Festival Black Movie – January 16-25

Geneva

Independent film festival spotlighting edgy cinema from the Global South and off-beat European productions, with plenty of late-night screenings. More info: <https://blackmovie.ch/interedition/>

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Donations

Our association makes regular donations to various foundations and schools both in Switzerland and Türkiye. Our website has a specific page on these: <https://www.assochtr.ch/fr/yardimlarimiz>

“Lausanne Bizim Lozan”

100th year Edition

The much praised book published by our Association is available for purchase at:

Online on our website www.assochtr.ch

Bookstore Boyut Yayınevi (<https://www.boyutstore.com/bizim-lozan-lausanne>)

and at D&R in Türkiye

We believe it will be a very much appreciated gift by your friends and family!

Cornucopia Magazine

Our annual sponsor and the source of many events that take place in Türkiye and around the world, is now also digital and includes all the past editions.

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<http://www.cornucopia.net/store/subscriptions/>

RECENT HIGHLIGHTS

On November 1st We Celebrated in Company of Cor des Alpes

This year, one hundred and forty of our members gathered to celebrate the 102nd anniversary of the Republic of Türkiye and the 100th anniversary of the Switzerland–Türkiye Friendship Treaty, all in the beautiful surroundings of the Hotel des Bergues Four Seasons in Geneva.



UN Tourism’s “Best Tourism Villages 2025” in Türkiye

Four Turkish villages — Akyaka, Barbaros, Anıtlı and Kale Üçğiz — were added to the UN Tourism *Best Tourism Villages 2025* list, announced in Huzhou on 17 October. The label honours rural communities that protect their architecture, craftsmanship and traditional way of life while welcoming visitors sustainably. Launched in 2021, the programme highlights models of tourism that strengthen, rather than disrupt, local culture.

Lycian Way — Ranked Best in the World (2025)

The 540 km-long Lycian Way, stretching from Ölüdeniz (Fethiye) to Geyikbayırı (near Antalya), has just been named by Time Out as the world's most beautiful hiking trail. With its mix of ancient Lycian ruins, medieval villages, steep cliffs, hidden coves and crystal-blue lagoons, the path offers a rare blend of history, culture and jaw-dropping coastal nature. The full trek takes roughly 30–40 days, but many hikers enjoy parts of it — especially in autumn (September–November), when weather and scenery align perfectly.

The Lycians were an ancient Anatolian people (not Hellenic) who flourished in southwest Türkiye along the Mediterranean coast from roughly the 2nd millennium BCE until their gradual integration into the Persian, then Hellenistic, and finally Roman worlds. They are known for their distinctive rock-cut tombs, sarcophagi and funerary architecture, as well as their unusually early form of democratic governance, the Lycian League, which later inspired political thinkers including Montesquieu and the framers of the U.S. Constitution.

Switzerland in the UNESCO Committee Seat

In November 2025, Switzerland was elected to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, giving it a role in deciding which cultural and natural sites worldwide get added to the list.

Cultural-heritage tradition: Alpine pasture season in Fribourg and beyond

The seasonal practice of alpine pasture farming (“the Alpine pasture season”) is recognised as UNESCO intangible cultural heritage of humanity, offering a living link to centuries of mountain-farming traditions. Traditional and intergenerational events are permanent fixtures on the Fribourg calendar and help keep this age-old culture alive.

ARTS UPDATE sponsored by Cornucopia Magazine

Exhibitions

Suzanne Lacy

Sakıp Sabancı Museum

Until December 14

<https://www.cornucopia.net/events/suzanne-lacy-at-the-sakip-sabanci-museum/>

Yan Yana (Side by Side) - Melahat and Eşref Üren with Eren and Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu

İşbank Museum of Painting and Sculpture, Beyoğlu

Until July 10, 2026

<https://www.cornucopia.net/events/yan-yana-side-by-side/>

Rich Pickings from the Cornucopia Bookshop

Painters of the Ottoman World

Vol I: British, Maltese and Levantine Artists in the Ömer Koç Collection

Vol II: European Artists in the Ömer Koç Collection

<https://www.cornucopia.net/store/books/painters-of-the-ottoman-world/>

Fausto Zonaro: The Sultan's Italian Court Painter

Erol Makzume with a foreword by Philip Mansel

The beautifully printed book dedicated to the life and works of Fausto Zonaro (1854-1929), does full justice to the works of an Italian artist best known for his paintings of life and history of the Ottoman Empire. Erol Makzume is the leading authority on the artist, and the volume contains a foreword by the historian Philip Mansel. Makzume provides an account of the artist's life and fascinating excerpts from the personal diary of the artist's beloved youngest sister, Leonia, which is introduced by her great grandson, Giovanni Gaidoni.

<https://www.cornucopia.net/store/books/fausto-zonaro-the-sultans-italian-court-painter/>

City Cats of Istanbul by Marcel Heijnen (2025)

For the cat lovers!

<https://www.cornucopia.net/store/books/city-cats-of-istanbul/>

The Palace Lady's Summerhouse and other inside stories from a vanishing Turkey

By Patricia Daunt

From Istanbul's palatial old embassies to its glorious Bosphorus summerhouses, from Ottoman Paris to Ankara's Art Deco, from rainforest mansions to a mad mosque in the mountains... a diplomat's wife reveals surprising secret histories. This book brings together essays by Patricia Daunt written for Cornucopia Magazine over the past twenty-five years. It concludes with her latest article, on the magnificent ruins of Aphrodisias, newly listed as a World Heritage Site, but long one of her greatest loves.

<https://www.cornucopia.net/store/books/the-palace-ladys-summerhouse/>

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