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Where to dine in Istanbul

DECIPHERING A MENU

It is often said (by Turks) that the world's three essential cuisines are French, Chinese and Turkish. Turkish food is rich in flavors, belying the commonly held belief that it resembles Middle Eastern cuisine or all comes down to kebab.

Turkey offers a rich variety of fresh produce: the Ottoman Empire is the reference for the cuisine in which meat, especially lamb, played an integral role. Turks devour lamb, minced beef, raw meat dishes (*çiğ köfte*), sausages (*sucuk*) and even tripe (*işkembe*) and sweetbreads (*uykuluk*). Seafood dishes are also key- no surprise in a country surrounded by seas. Fresh fish, caught daily, are simply grilled and sprinkled with salt. Meze are the highlight of the cuisine. Essential starters, they make for a generous meal on their own, washed down with raki and enjoyed in good company.

Turks love long meals but thrive on cooking for the hurried: many *esnaf lokantası* (tradesmen's restaurants) offer *ev yemeği* (home-cooked meals) and a Turkish-style buffet. Young chefs, back from studies abroad, are updating traditional fare using local seasonal ingredients in an Istanbul-style Farm to Table movement. And Istanbul's delicacies everywhere, from Ottoman dishes to street food, hip new restaurants to holes in the wall, foodie havens to experimental bistros. **But for most Turks, their mother is always the best chef. Ever.**

The Turkish word for starter, *başlangıç*, is usually used to describe hot or cold appetizers, and the word *arasıcak* usually refers to a hot appetizer only. *Ana yemek* is the term used for a main course and *tatlı* means dessert. Used throughout the region, meze is the general term used to describe all types of appetizers. In Turkey, they bring color to every meal. They can be brought to you on a wooden tray, for you to choose from, or simply placed on the table. It is always a good idea to ask for the menu, however, especially at seafood restaurants, where they may try to cook up far-fetched prices for fresh fish. You'll find the word *patlıcan* (eggplant) very useful to know, as the vegetable is a favorite in Turkey, especially as a meze such as *patlıcan salatası*, silky puree of smoked eggplant with olive oil and lemon. You will also find it stuffed, stewed and smoked, and it is a permanent fixture at seafood restaurants, along with *beyaz peynir* (Turkey's answer to Greek feta) and *kavun* (melon) washed down with raki. Other *patlıcan* appetizers are *şakşuka* (fried slices of eggplant in tomato sauce) and *köpoğlu* (pan-fried eggplant cubes and green peppers mixed in garlicky yogurt). Yogurt itself, a Turkish staple, is also used very often in meze.

Many meze consist of vegetable dishes called *zeytinyağlı*. The vegetables are cooked in olive oil, sprinkled with lemon juice and served cold. Among the most popular *zeytinyağlı* dishes are *enginar* (artichoke heart), *pilaki/barbunya* (broad beans cooked with tomato sauce), *kereviz* (celery root often cooked with a splash of orange juice), *taze fasulye* (fresh beans), *pırasa* (leeks) and *taze bakla* (fresh lima beans). *Sarma* (wrapped) and *dolma* (stuffed) are also typical cold meze: the first consists of grape leaves, and sometimes cabbage, stuffed with rice, onion, spices, currants and pine nuts; the second refers to all sorts of vegetables (small peppers, onions, eggplant) stuffed using the same mix.

You'll find lots of meze at seafood restaurants: *ahtapot* (octopus), *kalamar* (squid) and *karides* (shrimp) are served as cold salads or grilled. *Lakerda*, cured bonito, is a local delicacy, served with a wedge of red onion; the same goes for tarama (buttery, salty fish roe). Turks love meat, so they adore kebab: the kebab ritual is called *ocakbaşı*. After meze, order hot appetizers such as *fındık lahmacun* (a mini "Turkish pizza, topped with ground meat, chopped tomato and parsley) and *içli köfte*, known as kibbeh in the Middle East. These are meatballs covered in a crispy bulgur wheat shell and filled with spiced ground beef and walnuts.

For dessert, menus will feature *kadayıf* (like baklava) and *krem brule* (*Crème brûlée*) alongside *ayva* (quince) and *kabak* (pumpkin) cooked in syrup topped with *kaymak* (local double cream)



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Takksim, Beyoglu, Karakoy, Galata, Cihangir

MIKLA (Panoramic views, fusion) **Expensive** **Dress casual-chic** **Reservations required**

Mesrutiyet Cad. No. 15, Beyoglu Tel: 0212 293 56 56

Istanbul has no shortage of restaurants in four-and five- star hotels or places to eat with a great, even panoramic, view. So why climb up to this spot, especially given that the neighborhood is no great shape? In addition to the splendid view, it offers refined décor, a mixed clientele (affecting a nonchalant Western style and fashion) and a menu that cheekily mixes Mediterranean and Turkish traditions with, in addition, an unusual Scandinavian dimension. The reason? Chef Mehmet Gurs is half Finnish and Swedish, grew up in Stockholm and Istanbul and is a leading light of fusion cuisine in Turkey. Reservations are a must, as Mikla remains distinctive. The monkfish with lemon and fennel risotto and lamb shank with smoked eggplant, chard, *sucuk* (traditional sausage) and peas will have you coming back for more. If you've forgotten to book, head for the cocktail bar, where there's an incredible selection of Turkish and international wine, and the view is breathtaking. High up on the roof terrace, the pool is a great place to cool off- or warm things up- on summer evenings.

MEZE BY LEMON TREE (Inventive meze) **Moderate/Expensive** **Dress casual** **Reservations necessary** Asmalimescit Mah. Mesrutiyet Caddesi No. 83/B Beyoglu 0212 252 8302

It is easy to overdose on meze in Istanbul, but at this cozy, unpretentious restaurant chef Gencay Ucok has found a way to give them a light, fresh touch. Try the eggplant stuffed with pistachios and feta cheese, sea-bass ceviche or Turkish paella made from cracked wheat and grated green apples. Each dish is a revelation, and each meal promises new seasonal discoveries. Ucok runs this tiny place opposite Pera Palace. Having covered every corner of Turkey and skimmed Istanbul's markets as a gourmet tour guide, he decided to fulfill his desire to become a chef. Therefore finding the best produce possible at his restaurant is no surprise. Regulars recommend not looking at the menu to order, but having Ucok come along and happily make suggestions. Besides, the best dishes are not on the menu but are cooked up in his mind every morning as he does the shopping.

NICOLE (Gourmet & Minimalist) **Expensive** **Dress casual** **Reservations necessary** ****Closed on Sundays**** Tomtom Suites, Bogazkesen Caddesi, Tomtom Kaptan Sokak No.18, Beyoglu Tel: 212 292 44 67

If there is a gourmet reason to visit Istanbul, dinner at Nicole is it. Overlooking the Old City in the distance, this minimalist, top-floor restaurant is anything but pretentious. Behind the kitchen window, chefs Kaan Sakarya and Aylin Yazicioglu busily compose an enticing seasonal menu that changes every six weeks; exquisite dishes are made exclusively using organic produce from local farmers and such markets as the Ferikoy Organic Market, and carefully prepared with daily local seafood, local meat and free-range poultry. The bread, ice cream and chocolate are all prepared or baked on the premises, for a complete gourmet experience. In an array of explosive colors, the reinterpretations of classic Mediterranean and Turkish dishes speak for themselves: salad of carrot, feta, cumin and citrus; goose with beetroot, quince and rosehip *jus*; lamb served with white bean stew, salsa verde and samphire. The tasting menus pair your meal with Turkish wine. Unique.

MUNFERIT (New Turkish & Meze) **Moderate/Expensive** **Dress casual** **Reservations required**

Firuzaga Mahallesi, Yeni Carsi Cad. No. 19, Galatasaray, Beyoglu Tel: 0212 252 50 67

Run by Ferit Sarper, Munferit livens up old recipes, adding new textures and flavors to familiar dishes. The likeable sarper, who has a passion for cooking, is a jack-of-all-trades: he's a talented DJ, a young entrepreneur with his own raki brand (Beylerbeyi), and he is married to Seyhan Özdemir, one of the Autoban 212 design duo. Located on the heights of Galata, the place adds an alternative atmosphere to the incomparable musical mix at weekends. Its magnetic bar and excellent food attracts night owls and gourmet alike. The meze menu will pep up any palate with grilled eel and bottarga, marinated John Dory fillet, couscous with squid in its ink, or melted feta and porcini with a dash of truffle oil. For dessert, the assortment of homemade ice cream is particularly successful with its mastic, rosemary and tahini flavors. Munferit is an Istanbul standard in the evening, especially when you are sipping a Bitter Gold Cocktail.



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TABLA ISTANBUL (Neo Turkish, contemporary) **Expensive** **Dress casual** **Reservations required** Mesrutiyet Caddesi No. 67, Tepebasi, Pera, Beyoglu Mob: 0539 696 1701

Tabla Istanbul is the result of a cook used to work in Michelin-starred restaurants who decided to combine his valuable experience with his love of Turkish street food. Whether it's the classic Adana kebab or a simple soup that the chef puts his skilled hands to, you're sure to be delighted by the interesting take he puts on his dishes. Comfort food' is a word that doesn't really have a direct Turkish equivalent. This should not come as a surprise considering its nuance – a food with an emotional connection that has the ability to make you feel good when you're down. Tabla Istanbul, without making any such bold claims, does exactly this, serving traditional and familiar Turkish guilty pleasures while adding a special extra flavor that makes the palate revel in pleasant surprise. This is exactly the kind of modern twist we've come to expect from chef Cihan Kıpçak, since his time at the Gile and Akali restaurants. To design the menu, Kıpçak took inspiration from the quick snacks and lunchtime treats that line any Turkish street as his intention is to serve simple meals to enjoy at leisure. The kitchens are run by Melih Demirel, a chef who has worked in renowned restaurants in the US such as Gramercy, Daniel, French Laundry and Istanbul's much loved Gile (which we gave four stars back in 2013). Demirel has personalized every dish – and given them original names that hint at a personal story.

LOKANTA MAYA (Neo Turkish, contemporary) **Moderate/Expensive** **Dress casual** **Reservations required** ****Closed on Sundays**** Kemankes Cad. 35A Karakoy Tel: 0212 252 6884

In a space designed by Cem Kocaciklioglu with a Scandinavian look, young chef Didem Senol, who studied sociology before taking a course at the French Culinary Institute in New York, runs the show here. In this décor of walnut shells she concocts tasty courgette fritters, celery stew, cracked wheat and pomegranate salad, chicken marinated in yogurt, and beetroot and orange salad, prepared with a freshness and creativity that promise a bright future. The food is not fancy, but the quality of the products, inventive regional cuisine with savors of the Aegean and simple, unfussy recipes produce superb results, which you'll also find at her new fine foods store, Gram Pera. A contemporary gem.

KARAKOY LOKANTASI (Diner, chic) **Moderate/Expensive** **Dress casual** **Reservations required** ****Closed at noon on Sundays**** Kemankes Cad. No:37/A, Karakoy Tel: 0212 292 44 55

Karakoy may be the neighborhood on the rise, compared to Eminonu, but Karakoy Lokantasi keeps it even further ahead when it comes to meyhane (a traditional meze restaurant). Turquoise ceramic tiles inspired by the famous restaurant Pandeli in the Spice Market, starched white tablecloths and brass light fittings create the timeless chic of a favorite local spot. Always buzzing, the restaurant is filled with regulars, businessman and young hipsters. The wrought-iron staircase lends vitality to the space, and the wide marble bar, lined with shelves groaning with raki bottles, remains the centre of attention. There you can order fillets of bonito in oil, sea-bass ceviche, artichoke hearts and vegetable meze (peppers, eggplant, cardoons and cucumber). Displayed in a colorful assortment in a refrigerated glass cabinet, these starters sit alongside the catch of the day and baked octopus. Karakoy Lokantasi will be as much a vibrant feature of this district tomorrow as it has always been.

MA'NA (Meyhane) **Expensive** **Dress casual-chic** **Reservations required** Kemankes Caddesi No. 53/8, Karakoy Tel: 212 293 09 93

There's something nostalgic about this lovely *meyhane*, or Turkish tavern, in the heart of fully reviving Karakoy. On the bright walls, maps and lithographs evoke the grandeur of the Ottoman Empire and its once distant borders. The scattering of odd, bargain-hunted objects gives a warm character to this neighborhood hangout seating about sixty and lit by an imposing chandelier dating to 1838. You can eat fine traditional meze prepared up to the minute to ensure their quality and freshness – a flagship of Turkey's rich cuisine. There is a wide choice, but go for the famous *enginar* (artichokes cooked in olive oil), *topik* (mashed chickpea, onions, red currants, cumin and tahini), *mucver* (courette fritters with dill yogurt) or a very fine *sigara boregi* (melted cheese wrapped in filo pastry). Not to mention the *yaprak sarma*, tasty vine leaves stuffed with rice, species and cinnamon. If you like offal, the *ciger* (beef liver with herbs and species) is also a must. The menu of thirty types of raki – the aniseed liquor that is to Turkey what ouzo is to Greece – helps brighten it all up.



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FERAHFEZA (Contemporary Mediterranean) **Moderate** **Dress casual** **Reservations required**

Union of Architect's building, Kemankes Cad. No. 31, 5th floor, Karakoy Tel: 0212 243 5154

Karakoy, Istanbul's hip, up-and-coming neighborhood, is the hotspot for creative types, where gallery spaces are opening up and the restaurant scene is exploring new ground. Designed by I-AM Istanbul, a Turkish design company founded by Emre Kuzlu and Jonathan Blakeney, with offices in Istanbul and London, FerahFeza overlooks the neighborhood and the Golden Horn, merging the best of two worlds from its fifth-floor terrace. Run by the team behind the successful Leb-I Derya, the establishment mixes brass countertops with Tom Dixon's Etch suspension lights in the bar area, oak paneling and wood plank floors in the main room, and warmly upholstered brown-and-grey chairs and banquettes.

The coppery mesh ceiling gives the whole place an industrial look, but FerahFeza feels airy nonetheless on the terrace: concrete walls with metallic paneling and sleek grey marble slates reflect the sky, mimicking the deck of an elegant yacht.

Serving local fare with a contemporary twist, FerahFeza updates classics such as delicious samphire served with red cabbage, roasted eggplant with truffle oil, casserole of grilled octopus over beans, and aged *tulum* cheese sourced from a small Anatolian village. For trendy types, this spot is creating a stir, perking things up even more in Karakoy on Thursday evenings with live jazz gigs.

BALTAZAR (Burgers & steaks) **Moderate** **Dress casual** **Reservations required**

Kilic Ali Pasa Mescidi, No. 12/A Karakoy Tel: 0212 243 64 42

Strictly not for vegetarians. No dishes –not even salads- are served without meat. This cosy meat and drinks restaurant is custom-designed for carnivores. There is even a huge ox drawn on a slate above the open kitchen, with the name of each cut of meat in Turkish and English.

A showcase just beside it displays the same pieces of bright red meat, aged to perfection. The walls are brick, the geometric tiles have a good patina, and a metal bay window opens in summer onto the local life of a small street.

There, old faces and trades try to hold out against the rapid transportation of Karakoy into a hipster haunt. Sit at one of the tables picked up second-hand from nearby Cukurcuma. The young regulars tuck into a starter of grilled onions, the house *kofte*, the Baltazar burger (with caramelized onions and smoked cheddar) or a delicious *fillet lokoum*- the Turkish name for the thinnest and tenderest piece of beef. As velvety as Turkish delight!

AHESTE (Vibrant & bohemian) **Moderate** **Dress casual** **Reservations required** ****Closed on**

Sundays** Meşrutiyet Cad., 107F, Şişhane Tel: 0212 245 43 45

Opening onto a paved street in trendy Galata, Aheste (which means "slow" in Ottoman Turkish) takes slow food seriously. With home baked bread, market fresh organic vegetables, spices from the area of Antakya, bouquets of wild flowers on the tables and terracotta containers, it is committed to respecting natural cycles and seasons. Aheste's half-dozen tables, decorative ceramic tile floor, deep chesterfield and the backlit silhouette of a tree on the entrance wall all invite you to take your time. Steep yourself in other cultures, as the young owner Sara Tabrizi prepares unique dishes from her own Turkish-Iranian origins. Try the spicy rice pilaf with dried fruit, artichoke salad, hazelnuts and *tulum* cheese, the tandoori-cooked lamb and the tabbouleh with pomegranate, along with other dishes from Greek and Armenian traditions.

JASH (Armenian) **Moderate** **Dress Casual** **Reservations Recommended**

Cihangir Caddesi No. 9 Cihangir Tel: (0212) 244 30 42

This tiny, classic-looking restaurant is an extension of Armenia in the heart of Cihangir, serving traditional regional cuisine in a mixture of Armenian, Ottoman and Greek dishes. In fine weather, the owners, a couple of Armenian origin, put tables and chairs on the pavement, amid the greenery. On festive nights there are songs with accordion accompaniment.



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Besiktas, Harbiye, Nisantasi

SIDIKA MEZE RESTAURANT (Aegean, Mediterranean & Turkish) **Moderate** **Dress casual**

Reservations required ****Closed Sundays**** Şair Nedim Cad. 38 Beşiktaş Tel: 0212 259 7232
Sidika (also the name of the restaurant's owner) serves salads and pastas, but it's the restaurant's Aegean-style mezes and sea-food dishes, served with an array of traditional herbs and spices which attracts a crowd. The restaurant's simple, warm décor and relaxing music are definitely of a different style. The owner and chef, Sidika, chooses the freshest ingredients for all recipes, and as an environmentalist, all glass, plastic and cardboard waste at the restaurant is recycled.

GILE RESTAURANT (Gourmet Turkish) **Moderate/Expensive** **Dress smart** **Reservations required** Sair Nedim Caddesi Akaretler Sıra Evleri E-Blok 14 Akaretler/Besiktas Tel: 0212 327 1166

Gile is one of Istanbul's high points. Chefs Cihan Kipcak and Uryan Dogmus used to man the stoves at La Mouette before embarking on their joint adventure. It is surprising to note how French techniques and culinary inspiration are giving a creative patina to Turkish ingredients and flavors. Try a traditional Aegean or Anatolian dish such as *kusleme*, a lamb fillet wrapped in filo pastry, accompanied by dabs of concentrated purees of blackened eggplant, beetroot, hummus and roasted pepper, or octopus accompanied with celery leaves, lemon confit and braised leeks. The wine displayed along the wall features fine Bordeaux and Burgundy, as well as their excellent Anatolian or Thracian cousins, to pair with these dishes. A new seasonal expression of Turkish cuisine.

BOGAZICI BORSA (Classic, inspired) **Expensive** **Dress smart** **Reservations required**

Lutfu Kirdar Kongre ve Sergi Sarayi (Istanbul Convention/Exhibition Centre) Harbiye 0212 232 4201
This traditional restaurant under Lutfu Kirdar concert hall was redesigned in 2012 by Autoban 212. Huge paintings by contemporary Turkish artists conjure visions of faraway places. Rasim Ozkanca took over this 1927 former station café more than 20 years ago and turned into a restaurant complete with white tablecloths, serving lighter, refined versions of classic fare. The highly respected Ozkanca travels the country in search of historic recipes that he updates to suit modern palates, Try the *kuzu tandir*, roast lamb stuffed with eggplant purée and rice flavored with cinnamon and raisins. Perfect for a classy clientele that clearly loves the place and its terrace with panoramic views of the Bosphorus.

KANTIN (Fashionable, garden) **Moderate** **Dress casual** **Reservations required** ****Closed after 9 pm**** ****Closed on Sundays**** Akkavak Sok. No. 30, Nisantasi Tel: 0212 219 3114

Personally making sure everyone has what they want, the young owner, Sema Denizsel, glides between the tables, playing the part of mistress of the house to perfection, although she is equally at home serving and preparing the food. Her pampered customers are mostly journalists and advertising, marketing and PR execs. To make sure that every dish reflects the richness and diversity of Turkish cuisine, she mixes organic ingredients, seasonal recipes, vegetarian salads and a revisited version of chicken schnitzel with oatmeal. Go for *citir*, a very fine crisp pizza covered with pear and cream cheese or vegetables. To accompany it, order a house *ayran* or ginger ale that you can enjoy on the terrace at the back, in a miraculous little downtown garden. After the huge interest in its boutique deli on the lower floor (which offers salads, cooked dishes, breads and pastries).

HUNKAR (Turkish favorites) **Moderate** **Dress casual** **Reservations required**

Mim Kemal Oke Cad., No. 21 Nisantasi Tel: 0212 296 38 11
An institution since 1950, Hunkar serves the very best traditional Turkish cuisine. In a modern setting decorated with street signs from its two former locations before it moved to Nisantasi, customers choose from among the specialties prepared by chef Feridun Ugumu, which are lined up behind a display window. You must try *hunkar begendi*, sautéed beef on a bed of mashed smoked eggplant, as well as a seasonal dish such as *yaprak sarma* with grape leaves (or *lahana sarma* wrapped in blanched cabbage leaves) stuffed with rice, spices and minced beef, and served warm with a spoonful of yogurt. For desserts, check out the shop windows with their *kazandibi*, a cream of caramelized milk and *kabak tatlisi*, a slice of pumpkin confit sprinkled with crushed walnuts. A must visit Istanbul restaurant.



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KOSEBASI (Anatolian, contemporary) **Moderate** **Dress casual** **Reservations required**

Bronz Sok., No.5 Macka / Nisantasi Tel: 0212 230 38 68

Kosebasi, where reservations are a must, is the only chain of Anatolian restaurants as popular with the locals as it is with non-locals. It's the Turkish equivalent of an Italian trattoria, so make yourself at home and order a plate of *gavurdag* (tomato and onion salad with spices and lemon juice) or *toros* (watercress, rocket, mint and spring onion salad with pomegranate dressing) before enjoying warm bread or *pide* with eggplant straight out of the oven. The grill menu features every kind of kebab imaginable, on a skewer or thinly sliced. And for those who don't mind waddling home as round as a barrel, *dondurmali irmik* is a supposedly "light" dessert made with semolina browned in butter, with pine nuts, ice cream and pistachio. Servings are generous and service is efficient. Going from strength to strength, Kosebasi, has opened a new branch on Amsteldijk in Amsterdam and more recently has spread throughout the Middle East.

Eminonu, Sirkeci, Sultanahmet (The Old City), Edirnekapi

HAMDI (Kebabs) **Moderate** **Dress casual** **Reservations required**

Tahmis Cad. Kalcin Sok. 17 Eminonu Tel: 0212 528 0390

The restaurant's popular terrace views of the Galata Tower and Golden Horn add to the convenience of the location, and you can move to the cozy sark (oriental-style seating area) for your after-dinner cup of coffee or tea. Specialties of the house include the *erikli kebab*, minced meat from a suckling lamb where all of the fat has been cooked out, and the showcase *testi kebab*, a stew of diced meat, tomatoes, shallots, garlic, and green pepper cooked over an open fire and served tableside by breaking the terra-cotta pot.

Hamdi caters to vegetarians with the vegetable kebab, spiced with parsley and garlic; don't pass up the *yuvarlama*, a flavorful yogurt soup with tiny rice balls served only at dinnertime.

CAN OBA (FISH SOUP SEASONAL MENU) **Moderate** **Dress casual** **Reservations required**

****Closed Sundays**** Hocapasa Mah., Hocapasa Sok. 10 Sirkeci. Tel: 0212 522 1215

Tucked away among the Sirkeci tourist traps, this unsuspecting little restaurant offers a sophisticated menu that is a pleasant surprise given the neighborhood. The fish soup is one of its classics, but ask the chef and owner Can Oba for advice first before choosing as the menu is highly seasonal.

ASITANE (Ottoman heritage dishes) **Expensive** **Dress smart** **Reservations required**

Kariye Camii Sok. No.6 Edirnekapi Tel: 0212 635 7997

Asitane, next to the Saint Saviour in Chora Church museum, serves Ottoman cuisine sourced in forgotten recipes dug up from the archives of the kitchens of Topkapi Palace. You can eat on the terrace in summer under the trees. It's perfect, except for the almost exclusive clientele of tourists.

GIRITLI (Greco-Turkish tavern) **Expensive** **Dress casual** **Reservations required**

Keresteci Hakki Sok. No. 8 Cankurtaran Mah., Sultanahmet Tel: 0212 458 22 70

Nestling in a quiet street close to Sultanahmet, away from the hordes of tourists, this *meyhane* (tavern) is masterfully run by Ayse Sensilay, who gets her supplies every morning before dawn in Kumkapi, the city's largest market. Once inside the *kosk* (traditional) wooden house, have a good look at the traditional décor and painted ceilings on the first floor, and the checkered red-and-white tablecloths in the shady garden. The Sensilay family arrived from Crete in 1905 and grew up among Greek, Jewish and Armenian minorities. So it's only natural to find recipes handed down by their ancestors, including *patates salatasi* (potato salad with molasses and onions) and *giritli meze* (small green olives, feta cheese and walnuts) along with fried squid, grilled octopus and fish –sea bass, red mullet, bonito –depending on the day's catch and the season. There's no choice (except at lunch) so you eat a fixed menu with drinks that ends with an assortment of Turkish-Greek desserts and a house liqueur.



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SABAHATTIN (Fish, Seafood) **Expensive** **Dress casual** **Reservations required**

Seyit Hasan Kuyu Sok., No.1, Cankurtaran Mah., Sultanahmet Tel: 0212 458 18 24

This famous fish restaurant, hidden away in a quiet street just a ten minute walk from Hagia Sophia and the Blue Mosque, was founded in 1927 and is not on the tourist circuit. Located in a carefully renovated wooden Ottoman villa, the restaurant offers a wide selection of freshly caught fish and seafood displayed on a huge ice bed at the entrance. Sharing his passion with his diners Sabahattin personally recommends the best fillets and dishes depending on the day's catch. Specialties include *izgara kalamar* (grilled squid), *midyeli pilav* (spicy mussel rice with raisins and pine nuts), *levrek marin* (marinated sea bass) and *fenek kavurma* (roasted monkfish). In summer, try to sit out on the covered terrace; in winter, enjoy the authentic atmosphere inside. One of the few great places in Sultanahmet.

FINE DINE ISTANBUL (Turkish & Ottoman Fusion) **Moderate** **Dress casual** **Reservations required**

Arcadia Blue Hotel, Dr. Imran Oktem Cad. 4 Sultanahmet 0212 516 9696

Fine Dine Istanbul offers elegant dishes of fusion cuisine for those who like Ottoman and Turkish cuisines. The restaurant has also a magnificent view of the Old City, Sultanahmet which significantly increases the joy of meals taken at the restaurant. If you want to try something different while including tastes from Ottoman and Turkish cuisines at the same time in the Old City, Sultanahmet; you can make your reservation at Fine Dine Istanbul and have a quite nice experience.

The roof terrace might be available to enjoy a drink accompanied by even a more extensive view.

Ulus

ULUS 29 (Fusion, International) **Expensive** **Dress smart** **Reservations required**

Adnan Saygun Cad., Ulus Parki ici No: 71/1 Ulus Tel: 0212 358 29 29

Opened by famed Turkish restaurateur Metin Fadillioglu on one of the hills overlooking the Bosphorus Ulus 29 has been elegantly decorated by Fadillioglu's wife, the unclassifiable Zeynep Fadillioglu, whose contemporary mosque in Sakirin is on everyone's mind. Indian and Moroccan styles tinged with a hint of Italy blend here in a happy patchwork, with a unique, verdant panorama to frame them. Metin Fadillioglu's cooking covers international (sushi, sashimi, lobster and salads) and Turkish flavours (a light *lahmacun*, duck *borek* with a pomegranate sauce and a dessert scented with mastic), and all dishes are presented in a refined style for a sophisticated local and international clientele. The multiple-award-winning French head sommelier Stéphane Vattepain has selected a fine list of Turkish wine, drawing on his knowledge of French cellarmasters who now operate in many Turkish vineyards to offer a unique range of food and wine pairings. The huge terrace bar fills up in summer, especially when the moon is out, and the adjacent club offers a perfect finale to this mecca of Istanbul nightlife.

Along The Bosphorus

BALIKCI KAHRAMAN (Seafood, local favorite) **Expensive** **Casual-chic** **Reservations required**

Iskele Cad., No.15 Rumelikavagi Tel: 0212 242 98 99

In a seaside neighborhood bordering Bosphorus and Black Sea, Balikci Kahraman is a phenomenon. It is far from the centre and expensive but it's worth every minute of travel and every penny spent. The no-fuss interior sets the tone, with fishnets hanging from the ceiling and photos of the celebs and local notables who frequent the place as fans. The owner, Kahraman, a fisherman since childhood, could write a book on *kalkan* (turbot), a flatfish Turks love. Some of the best come from the Black Sea and the inland Sea of Marmara. Though available year around, *kalkan* is best from January through March when, in freezing cold water, it gets fatter and juicier, a true delight. Don't miss the meze: delicious bread, baked on site, and cornbread with anchovies, almost as decadent as the silky *kalkan* liver. Try the popular meze *midye tava* (local pan-seared mussels), served golden and crispy with homemade *tarator* (a condiment made with stale bread, walnuts, garlic and yogurt). The piece de résistance, *kalkan tandir* or turbot tandoori, is slowly baked to perfection. The spot is perpetually full, especially on Sunday afternoon. Don't expect to be right on the water as the restaurant is inland.



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Phone: (02) 9904 1239 Fax: (02) 9904 1809 Toll Free Phone: 1800 671 610

travtour@timeless.com.au

www.timeless.com.au

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KIYI RESTAURANT (Fish traditional) **Expensive** **Casual-chic** **Reservations required**

Haydar Aliyev Cad., No. 186/A Tarabya Tel: 0212 262 00 02

Seeking an iconic seafood experience on the Bosphorus? Look no further than Kiyi. Since 1966 it has been a landmark of Tarabya where Istanbul's jet set whiles away Sunday afternoons over delicious meze and fish cooked to perfection. At the entrance, Greco-Turkish owner Yorgi Sabuncu personally greets guests, most of whom are regulars. Paintings and photographs of renowned Turkish artists overlook crisp white tablecloths and most tables have a unique view of the beautiful Tarabya Bay. In this setting of wealth and fame order the house-prepared meze; *pilaki* (jumbo beans cooked in tomato sauce and served warm), *midye dolma* (stuffed mussels) and the fresh fish that you can see laid out on ice in the restaurant. Finish your meal with an exquisite dessert of *ayva tatlisi* (quince) and *kabak tatlisi* (pumpkin), prepared using the same recipe for forty years.

ISMET BABA (Traditional, Seafood) on the Asian side **Expensive** **Dress casual** **Reservations required** Carsi Cad., No. 1/A Kuzguncuk Tel: 0216 553 1232

Ismet Baba, named after its founder, is one of those rare Istanbul spots that remains timeless. It has overlooked the Bosphorus since 1951. Décor is simple, there is no music, the food is no-nonsense and the longstanding staff wait on a distinguished crowd. The city's prominent movers and shakers are repeat guests, whether for a date, dinner with friends or a power lunch. Do as the Turks do and enjoy a wedge of feta cheese and melon that will be served with your first round of raki – inseparable companions to the beloved drink. The menu features delicious smoked octopus salad, *lakerda* (cured bonito) and potato *borek* (lightly fried filo dough filled with potato and cheese). Just trust your waiter's suggestion for catch of the day and its preparation. The old-fashioned Ismet Baba is among the best.

Kadikoy, Moda, Uskudar – Asian side of the city

CIYA SOFRASI (Traditional diner) **Moderate** **Dress casual** **Reservations required**

Caferaga Mah., Guneslibahce Sok. No. 43, Kadikoy Tel: 0216 330 31 90

This popular place has been in this pedestrian street in the Kadikoy district since 1988, but there's nothing special to indicate to the casual passerby that this is genuine treat for the taste buds. Well off the tourist track, it serves some hard-to-find specialties, such as chicken and rice timbales baked in wafer-thin pastry, soup flavored with artichoke and saffron, lamb and courgette, or sweet chestnut and garlic. Not to mention the delicious candied vegetables (eggplant, olives, tomatoes, pumpkins with nut cream, bitter orange), best washed down with thyme-scented tea. Dishes from Mesopotamia, the Balkans and Asia are brought together under the watchful eye of Musa Dagdeviren, Ciya Sofrasi's reputed chef and owner, who also runs two other local restaurants, Ciya and Ciya Kebab II. Apparently, Ciya can mean "unattainable summit". Well, they sometimes reach it here.

KOCO (Traditional tavern) **Moderate** **Dress casual** **Reservations required**

Moda Cad. 171, Kadikoy Tel: 0216 336 0795

This Greek tavern doubles up as a Byzantine prayer corner dedicated to St. Catherine, which attracts devotees from the area. People come to this local institution mostly for the meze and fish.

KANAAT LOKANTASI (Traditional, Ottoman) **Moderate** **Dress casual** **Reservations required** Selmanipak Cad.9 Uskudar Tel: 0216 5533791

Having dinner at Kanaat is rather like taking a Turkish cooking course. Not only can everything be tasted-and indeed it should- but the bubbling cooking pots are enough to make anyone want to don an apron and get behind the stove themselves. Although the décor is spartan, the rich aromas waft their way into every corner to make it special. Established in 1993, this place alone is worth making the trip across to the Asian side of the Bosphorus. After sumptuous meze followed by a specialty meat dish, such as *elbasan tava* (beef with vegetables and cheese), be sure to leave room for the delicious dessert. Standing moist and plump beneath their glistening sugary surface, they are a treat for the eye as well as the taste buds: surrender to *keskul*, rice pudding with almonds, apricots and figs, thickened with *kaymak*, buffalo cream.



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Raki Balik and how to drink it

Raki is to Turkey what ouzo is to Greece - the national alcoholic drink. The origin and history of this aniseed-flavored liquor are somewhat murky. Some say it is only 300 years old while others claim that raki is an old as wine or beer. In fact it was most plausibly invented in Iraq (hence the name, from Iraki) and then spread throughout the Middle East as far as Serbia, each country giving it a different name. It is made by distilling grapes, figs, plums and star anise.

In Turkey *rakı* (pronounced rak-er) is drunk all the time but *rakı balik* remains an art that is practised on Sundays when there's lots of free time. After a long walk along the Bosphorus banks with family or friends, Turks like to sit down and tuck into an avalanche of meze - especially *beyaz peynir* and green melon, artichokes in oil, smoked eggplant puree, pickled John Dory etc. and order a bottle from the dozens of more or less strong, more or less fragrant raki brands. As it is high in alcohol, most people cut their raki with water, changing it from a colorless liquid into an opalescent white drink rather like pastis. But when it is very fresh, some drink it straight, which was how it was consumed originally. Wait until everyone is served and someone makes a toast before starting to drink. Unless you feel superior you shouldn't raise your glass higher than the individual opposite you. Never mix raki with other alcoholic beverages nor is it drunk in one gulp - sip it slowly. After meze it is fashionable to chat with the restaurant owner about the day's catch and then order a grilled squid, or a bonito or turbot.

As the dishes come and go, the hours pass, conversations become increasingly animated and passionate, musicians sometimes stroll among the tables.... well, how about another bottle of raki?

Wine Grapes of Turkey

Öküzgözü This precious grape originated in the provinces of Elazığ and Malatya. The grape, which ripens from mid-September to mid-October, has black color and large berries. Öküzgözü was used for wine making as a table grape by Armenians for thousands of years. Wines produced from these grapes have soft tannins, high acidity, good balance, richness and elegance. They reveal red fruits aromas (cherry, sour cherry, jam), black mulberry and earthy aromas. Both young and ageable wines can be produced from Öküzgözü. This grape is suitable for oak maturation.

Çalkarası Çalkarası is one of the wine grapes grown in Denizli-Çal region of Aegean. The vines grow in the low fertile, clayish, chalky, sandy soil of the tablelands of the Denizli district, 750-1200 meters above sea level. Even so, this area is affected by the climate of Mediterranean. Çalkarası is mostly used in rose wine production. It is a light-colored, fleshy, juicy red wine grape. Once matured, its acidity is very good. The specific aromas of the wine produced from Çalkarası are strawberry, raspberry and rose. The wine is well balanced, fruity with medium to high acidity.

Kalecik Karası Kalecik Karası is a Central Anatolian high-quality wine grape which is grown in Kalecik district in Kızılırmak basin. Kalecik Karası is round, bluish-black, thin-skinned wine-grape. The wines produced from this grape is medium intensity red in color; reveals pronounced red fruits aromas and it has low to medium tannin with high acidity. The most pronounced aromas of the grape are strawberry, raspberry and cherry. They are suitable for aging in oak barrels. The maturation and aging process in the oak barrels imparts a complex aroma of spice, dried fruit and coffee. This grape is suitable for making both young and aged wines.

Narince Narince is an indigenous Anatolian grape variety originated in Tokat. Tokat is the transition zone where the Black Sea climate ends and turns into continental climate. Citrus fruits (orange, grapefruit, lemon), pear, mineral (limy-earthly) and floral (white flowers) aromas are pronounced for Narince. Narince is an exceptional Anatolian white grape that can be matured in oak barrels. Wine produced from the Narince grape has a richness, creaminess and good balance.

With thanks to our colleagues at Credo Tours, Istanbul.

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