

# Istanbul TURKEY

Istanbul's Bosphorus strait divides Europe and Asia and, thanks to such varied influences, is a food lover's dream destination. There are spice bazaars, great wine and hole-in-the-wall kebab shops. There's also a new spate of trendsetting restaurants combining traditional Turkish dishes with modern European cooking as well as a back-to-basics re-discovery of centuries-old Ottoman and Anatolian cuisine. Words ROGER NORUM

## ■ EAT

The **best kebab spot** in town is the classic and simple **Emine Ana**. Try a tantuni, chopped lamb or beef stir-fried in spices and juice and rolled into a pancake served with chillies (£1.50). (Siraselviler Caddesi, Billurcu Sokak 5, Beyoğlu; 0090 21 2292 8430)

**Çiya Sofrası** is an unassuming Kurdish restaurant that's very popular with locals. The chef prepares hundreds of long-forgotten Turkish dishes, including light, herby stews such as yoğurtlu kenger aşısı (beef with yogurt, mint and milk thistle). Mezes from £2. (ciya.com.tr)

The **House Café's** executive chef worked at London's River Café and Fifteen, so expect contemporary menus using excellent Turkish produce, such as grilled sea bass fillets served with tapenade sauce and rocket leaves. Mains from £7. (thehousecafe.com.tr)

The baroque décor of velvet and candelabra at **5.Kat** provides a glamorous backdrop for the tankers and trawlers seen slinking their way along the Bosphorus below. The £27 three-course menu includes unmissable Turkish mains such as chicken, prunes and olives marinated in wine. (5kat.com)

Kiwi chef Peter Gordon's ultra-stylish **Müzedechanga** serves Istanbul's best fusion dishes. Favourites include grilled octopus with black olive paste and caperberry sauce, and a

fresh soft cheese, mulberry syrup and cumin shortbread. Mains from £11.50. (changa-istanbul.com) Sultan Mehmet II's favourite meals in the 15th century included pistachio pıruhi (filo pastries) served with spicy butter sauce and thyme, and lamb kulbastı, a charcoal-grilled lamb loin accompanied by smoked walnut and eggplant purée and pomegranate syrup. Both dishes are served at the award-winning **Tuğra**, where dishes from the imperial court are served on a terrace with Bosphorus views. Set menus from £66. (ciraganpalace.com) Opened last summer, **Lavanta** is now one of Istanbul's hotspots for young locals, serving great Mediterranean dishes such as vermicelli-wrapped shrimp, and steak with celery mash. Be sure to try the fresh lemonade. From £41 for three courses and wine. (lavanta.com.tr)

## ■ DRINK

The aniseed-flavoured raki, Turkey's national drink, is an excellent accompaniment to meze and fish dishes. For wine, try the floral and dry 2005 vintages from Corvus Vineyards, harvested off the island of Bozcaada, which go well with meat or game. The bars off Taksim's İstiklal Caddesi and in nearby Tünel offer great atmosphere, or try **Gizli Bahçe**, where draught local lager Efes is £2, and raki is £3.30. (Nevizade Sokak 27, Beyoğlu; 0090 21 2249 2192)

There are spectacular views from the **roof bar** at the **Swissôtel** (Bayıldım Caddesi 2, Beşiktaş),



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Efes, £6.30, cocktails from £12.50. Also try the chilli hot chocolate (£2.50) or Turkish coffee (£2) at **J'adore** (İstiklal Caddesi, Emir Nevruz Sokak 22), tucked into the attic of an old building next to a Taksim church.

## ■ SHOP

Hone your haggling skills at the Grand Bazaar then come to Eminönü's less-touristy Egyptian Spice Bazaar for an afternoon of culinary exoticism. Great finds here include honeycomb and mature eski kaşar (sheep's milk) cheese at Erzincanlılar (shop no 14); **pistachios, figs and honey-dipped mulberries** at **Papağan** (shop no 65); and the **country's best coffee** at **Kurukahveci Mehmet Efendi** (Tahmis Caddesi 66).

For **şarap** (wine), try **Kavaklıdere Wines** (Mihtapşa Mahallesi, Kirac Sokak 3, Kemerburgaz), also Turkey's oldest wine producer.

## ■ MUST DO

To taste how Istanbul's hoi polloi has been eating for centuries, head down to the Bosphorus. Try **balık ekmek**, fresh mackerel that's caught and filleted then cooked and sandwiched between two pieces of bread, often sold from small boats moored near the Galata Bridge (£1). At Bosphorus quay, try **midye dolma** (20p) mussels stuffed with rice, pine nuts, raisins and spices. Snack on **simit** (30p) small, sesame-topped rings of baked dough sold from street vendors all over the city.

## ■ LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

It's always best to reserve a table (especially on weekends), as most locals will book ahead when they dine out – and they dine out a lot. It's okay to start eating once your course arrives, even if others at your table haven't yet received theirs – dishes are brought as they're ready. Turks say 'no' with an upward movement of the head (and a raise of the eyebrows) that comes strikingly close to what the rest of the world understands as yes. Yes is

**Clockwise from top left: a Kebab stall in Istanbul; Ortakoy Mosque overlooking Bosphorus Bridge; spice stall at Misir Carsisi in Eminönü; Müzedechanga**

equally confusing: they cock their head downward, sometimes while closing their eyes.

■ **SLEEP**  
Outstanding service and a gorgeous terrace add to the **Hotel Peninsula's** appeal.

Best, though, are the delightful homemade yogurt and pastries for breakfast. Doubles from £39. (hotelpeninsula.com) Nineteenth-century **Hotel Poem** offers 17 rooms, views of the straits and is close to some of Istanbul's best coffee shops. Doubles from £61. (hotelpoem.com)

A restored sultan's palace, the resplendent **Çırağan Palace Kempinski** is now home to one of the most spectacular restaurants in Istanbul, Tuğra. Doubles from £185. (ciraganpalace.com) Journey Anatolia offers a guided three-night Eat Istanbul tour from £425pp, including accommodation, excluding flights and meals. (journeyanatolia.com)

## ■ GET THERE

Pegasus Airlines (flypgs.com/en) has flights from Stansted to Istanbul from £79.98 return, inclusive of taxes and charges. British Airways (ba.com) and EasyJet (easyjet.com) also fly direct.

## A £165 WEEKEND FOR TWO\*

### SATURDAY

★ **EAT**  
**Lunch** balık ekmek, £1 each  
**Dinner** three-course dinner menu at 5.Kat, £27 each  
★ **DRINK** beer and a raki from Gizli Bahçe, £5.30 each  
★ **STAY** double with breakfast at Hotel Peninsula, £39

### SUNDAY

★ **EAT**  
**Lunch** four meze dishes to share from Çiya Sofrası, £8  
**Dinner** tantuni kebab from Emine Ana £1.50 each  
★ **DRINK** chilli hot chocolate from J'adore, £2.50 each  
★ **STAY** double with breakfast at Hotel Peninsula, £39

## TOTAL £160.60

\* Flights not included. All prices correct at time of going to press