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EATING

top picks

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İstanbul is a food-lover's paradise. Teeming with affordable fast-food joints, cafés and restaurants, it leaves visitors spoiled for choice when it comes to choosing a venue. Best of all, it's proud of its national cuisine. And oh, what a great cuisine it is! The city's restaurants vie with each other to produce the best damn meze, the freshest possible seafood and the most succulent kebabs in town, all appreciated by legions of locals for whom eating out is a way of life and a true passion. There are other cuisines on offer (you can eat fusion dishes in Western-style brasseries and sample cuisines as diverse as Russian, Italian and Thai), but the best places to eat are the lokantas, meyhanes and Ottoman-style restaurants that the locals frequent.

Unfortunately, Sultanahmet has the least impressive range of eating options in the city. Rather than eating here at night, we recommend crossing the Galata Bridge and joining the locals in Beyoğlu, Ortaköy and the Bosphorus suburbs. Absolutely nothing can beat the enjoyment of spending a night in a meyhanes on Nevizade Sokak or in the Asmalımescit quarter (both in Beyoğlu), or dining at one of the swish restaurants on the Bosphorus. There are other pockets of town worth investigating – Eminönü has the enjoyable Hamdi et Lokantası (p161) and Zinhan Kebap House at Storks (p161), Samatya is home to the best kebabs in town at Develi (p163), and Edirnekapı has the excellent Asitane (p163) – but on the whole you will be well served by making your way across the Galata Bridge every night. As the Turks say, *afiyet olsun!* (*bon appétit!*).

For recommendations of places to eat on the Bosphorus, see the Excursions chapter.

HOW İSTANBULLUS EAT

Mealtime in İstanbul is treated with respect. The idea of eating in front of a TV or from a freezer is absolute anathema to Turks. Friends, family and communal tables are as essential to the cuisine as its staple foodstuffs and signature dishes. Restaurants in İstanbul are always full of large groups sharing not only mezes, but conversation and belly laughs, usually over a bottle or two of the national tittle, raki.

The day starts with *sabahları* (morning food) or *kahvaltı* (breakfast), usually eaten between 6am and 8am. *Öğle yemeği* (lunch) kicks off around noon, is usually consumed quickly and is often enjoyed in a lokanta, pideci or kebabçı. *Akşam yemeği* (dinner), which is eaten any time after 6pm, is where the meyhanes or *restoran* comes into its own; in İstanbul many of these places serve until midnight and meals can be drawn out over a long period.

ETIQUETTE

It's not considered very important that everyone eats the same courses at the same pace, so the kitchen will deliver dishes as they are ready: it's quite normal for all the chicken dishes to arrive and then, five minutes later, all the lamb. You don't have to wait for everyone's food to arrive to begin eating.

Turkish waiters have a habit of snatching your plate away before you've finished. This

may be due to a rule of Eastern etiquette that holds that it is impolite to leave a finished plate sitting in front of a guest. Saying *kalsın* (let it stay) may slow them down. When you have finished, put your knife and fork together to indicate that the waiter can take the plate. If this has no effect (or you don't have a knife), say *'biti, alabilirsin'* (finished, you can take it) to the waiter.

It's not unusual for people to smoke while others are eating, and you will rarely find non-smoking areas in restaurants. Opting for outdoor seating can be a good way of avoiding the fumes.

Toothpicking should be done behind your hands, but you don't need to be particularly discrete. Try to avoid blowing your nose in public; sniff or excuse yourself if you need to do this.

WHERE TO EAT

Balık Restoran

Near the city's fish markets and along the Bosphorus you'll find the popular *balık* (fish) restaurants. Sometimes the fish on offer is displayed, but usually you'll need to ask the waiter what's fresh and ask to see the fish. This is important, as the occasional dodgy restaurant may try to serve you old fish. This trick is not just pulled out for foreigners – most locals ask to check the fish is fresh, so don't be embarrassed to do the same. The eyes should

be clear and the flesh under the gill slits near the eyes should be bright red, not burgundy. After your fish has been given the all clear, ask the approximate price. The fish will be weighed, and the price computed at the day's per-kilogram rate.

Börekçi

Börek (sweet and savoury pastries) are distinguished by their filling, cooking method and shape: they are square and cheesy, cigar shaped and meaty, plain and moist, pointy and potato chunky. *Kol böreği* is long and arm-shaped, and comes filled with cheese (*peynirli börek*), spinach (*ispanaklı börek*), potatoes (*patates börek*) or meat. For the juicy *su böreği* (water börek), *yufka* (filo pastry) is boiled first, making it very soft. Then the *börek* cooks, it's flipped to a golden brown. *Su böreği* are a cross between a pastry and a lasagne – the good ones are succulent, not too oily and full of punchy flavour.

First-time visitors to İstanbul often become deeply infatuated with *börekçis*. Often a tiny window in the wall or a cupboard-sized kiosk with a few stools and benches, they offer a few types of *börek*, tea, instant coffee and a small selection of cold drinks, *ayran* always among them. They're a great place for a quick dirt-cheap breakfast or lunch, or a between-meal carbo tweak. *Börekçi* stock is often sold out by mid-afternoon, and the best time to sample their wares is in the early morning, when the pastries have just come out of the oven.

Büfes

The büfe is a kiosk, a food stand and a shop all rolled into one. It's a place where you can buy cigarettes, crisps, ice cream and confectionery, but where you can also snack on a *tost* (toasted sandwich), döner kebab, freshly squeezed orange juice, *ayran* and even alcohol. Many have stools where you can perch while eating your snack.

Cafés

Chic café-bars are nearly as easy to find in İstanbul as they are in Paris, London or New York. Most are clustered in Beyoğlu, but others are dotted in the suburbs on both sides of the Bosphorus and in other well-heeled neighbourhoods. Finding one in the Old City can be a challenge, though. Most serve coffee,

a variety of teas (including herbal infusions) and food such as sandwiches, salads and pasta. Some also serve alcohol.

The ubiquitous *çay bahçesi* (tea garden) is found throughout the city. It is usually an outdoor, leafy garden serving tea, coffee and occasionally snacks (no alcohol), frequented by clusters of moustached gents playing backgammon, students lazing around a nargileh (water pipe), courting couples and families.

The Drinking chapter recommends cafés and *çay bahçesi* throughout the city.

Kebapçıs & Köftecis

Kebapçıs are low-key, cheap eateries focused on grilled or roasted meat, but usually offering soup, simple salads, cold drinks and *ayran* as well. Don't expect tablecloths or watterly flourishes – these are quick-fire joints, specialising in high turnover and no-frills nourishment. A köfteci is similar in style, but the food staple is grilled meatballs rather than grilled kebabs. If you spot the word *ocakbaşı* in the menu or the eatery's signage, it means the food will be cooked in front of you. Order your main meat course by the portion: *bir porsiyon* (one portion) if you're not overly hungry; *bir buçuk porsiyon* (one and a half) if you are, and *duble porsiyon* (double) if you're ravenous.

Lokantas

This is the basic Turkish restaurant, varying from starkly simple to homely and charming. The food on offer is mostly cheap *hazır yemek* (ready food) laid out in dishes kept warm in a bain-marie. More often than not the kitchen is open and visible, right behind the food.

Your table may be covered with butcher's paper or a tablecloth; water and bread will arrive and keep on coming as long as you sit there. Even if there is a menu (and usually there isn't), you should go up and choose whatever takes your fancy. Don't feel the need to pile up a plate straight away. It's fine to choose one or two dishes and go back for more as you feel like it.

Most of the time the dishes won't be labelled, so you can practise your Turkish or take pot luck. A normal spread will include a soup, an eggplant dish, a chickpea stew, maybe some beans, a few meat stews (perhaps one chicken and a couple of lamb) and roast chicken. Look out for seasonal vegetable dishes, which are delicious with garlic yogurt. There will always be *pilav* available, either rice,

FANCY SOME BACTERIA WITH THAT?

Street vendors pound pavements across İstanbul, pushing carts laden with artfully arranged snacks to satisfy the appetites of commuters. You'll see these vendors next to ferry and bus stations, on busy streets and squares, even on the city's bridges.

Some of their snacks are innocuous – freshly baked *simit*, golden roasted corn on the cob, refreshing chilled and peeled cucumber – but others score high on the 'you must be mad!' scale. Sample these local treats and you're risking a major dose of the sultan's revenge (diarrhoea). Major offenders:

Midye dolma (stuffed mussels) Delicious, exotic and packed with more bacteria than a Petri dish. Only for those who want to live very, very dangerously.

Pis pilav (rice and chickpeas) Displayed in a glass cabinet, this rice dish often comes with boiled chicken. The direct translation is 'dirty rice', which gains a whole new meaning when you realise that the stuff often sits in the sun all day.

Çiğ köfte (raw meatball) Raw meat kneaded by hand for hours with wheat, onion, clove, cinnamon, salt and hot black pepper and then formed into patties, usually by a profusely perspiring man with a cigarette in his other hand. Enough said.

Kokoreç (lamb's intestines cooked with herbs and spices) The Turkish version of black pudding; locals love to snack on this smelly stuff. We feel queasy even thinking about it.

Balık ekmek (fish sandwich) Best sourced on the quay at Eminönü, this is the quintessential İstanbul snack. They're innocuous and utterly delectable when freshly prepared, dangerous when not. Worth the risk.

bulgur or both. Though you can't count on getting dessert in a lokanta, it's fairly common to find *kadayıf* (shredded pastry baked in syrup and often filled with nuts, clotted cream or cheese) and *fırın sütlaç* (rice pudding).

The core trade of lokantas in İstanbul is working people and shoppers looking for lunch. Some lokantas close in the late afternoon or offer a smaller selection for dinner (often left-overs from lunch).

Meyhanes

Imagine an Irish pub crossed with a tapas bar and a dash of Turkish wedding party thrown in and you've conjured up a meyhane in İstanbul. Carousing at a meyhane is something that all visitors to the city should do (see p167). Packed on weekends, these are the places where groups of locals gather to spend the evening, usually ending up drunk as sailors. Musicians strumming *fasıl* (folk music) sometimes move from table to table entertaining the guests and playing requests. Revellers sing along, throw their arms around each other, clap boisterously and break into dance. Food is usually ordered a couple of dishes at a time – always mezes, often fish and occasionally meat dishes, too. There are usually no menus, so you'll need to look and point. Everything will taste delicious, particularly after you've downed a few of the obligatory glasses of raki that accompany a meyhane meal.

Pideci

The Turkish version of the pizza parlour is a slice of heaven if you're after a quick and tasty meal. Choose from cheese and various meat toppings and sit back with an *ayran* or a cola, or get a *pide paket* (wrapped to go). Look for woodfire ovens – the *pide* always tastes better. *Pideci*s in İstanbul often also function as kebabçıs, in which case there will be a sign on the shopfront saying '*Pide ve Kebab*'.

Restoran

The line between a *restoran* and a lokanta can be blurry – a low-end *restoran* is pretty much a lokanta under an alias. But, as you move up the price scale, closed kitchens, menus and alcohol will appear. And where there is alcohol, there is usually *meze*. There's a lot of cross-over between main dishes at a lokanta and a *restoran*, but you're more likely to find *pirzola* (chops), *bifteç* (steak) and 'international' meat dishes such as schnitzel at a *restoran*.

At the upper end of the scale are the many classy restaurants around town serving Ottoman, fusion, Mediterranean-influenced dishes and more. Ottoman restaurants specialise in *saray* (palace) cuisine refined over centuries in the kitchens of the sultans. It's delicately flavoured, beautifully presented and if done well, totally delectable.

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Tatlıcı & Pastane

It's considered normal for a main meal at a restaurant to lead onto the *tatlıcı*, a specialist dessert place. As well as the classic *tatlıcı*, where you can overdose on baklava, *helva* (sweet prepared with sesame oil, cereals and honey or syrup) and *lokum* (Turkish delight), look out for the pastane (or *pastanesi* or *baklavacı*), which tempts you with its baklava, European-style cakes and ice cream, and the *muhallebici*, which specialises in milk-based puddings.

VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

Though it's normal for Turks to eat a vegetarian meal, the concept of vegetarianism is quite foreign. Say you're a vegan and Turks will either look mystified or assume that you're 'fessing up to some strain of socially aberrant behaviour. There is a sprinkling of vegetarian restaurants in Beyoğlu, a couple of which serve some vegan meals, but the travelling vegetarian certainly can't rely on specialist restaurants.

Meze is usually vegetable-based, and meat-free salads, soups, pastas, omelettes and *börek*s, as well as hearty vegetable dishes, are all readily available. Ask '*etsiz yemekler var mı?*' (is there something to eat that has no meat?) to see what's on offer.

The main source of inadvertent meat eating is *et suyu* (meat stock), which is often used to make otherwise vegetarian *pilav*s, soups and vegetable dishes. Your hosts may not even consider *et suyu* to be meat, so they will reassure you that the dish is vegetarian; ask '*et suyu var mı?*' (is there meat stock in it?) to check.

COOKING COURSES

Cooking Alaturca (☎ 0536 338 0896; www.cookingalaturca.com; classes €45) runs excellent, hands-on Turkish cooking classes. The delicious results are enjoyed over lunch.

The well-regarded **İstanbul Food Workshop** (Map p94; ☎ 212-534 4788; www.istanbulfoodworkshop.com; Yıldırım Caddesi 111, Fener) runs walking tours for foodies as well as cooking classes focusing on both Turkish and Ottoman cuisine.

PRACTICALITIES

Opening Hours

Most eateries in İstanbul are open for long hours every day of the week; occasionally

they will close on a Sunday or Monday. Some lokantas and all *börekçis* and büfes open for early breakfasts; cafés open around 9am and serve into the night; and *pideci*s, kebabçıs, meyhanes, cafés and restaurants all open for lunch and dinner. Their average closing time will be 11pm, though many stay open later, particularly on Friday and Saturday evenings.

How Much?

You can spend a fortune or a pittance on a meal in İstanbul, but most visitors will spend something in between. The cheapest meals are those served in *pideci*s, kebabçıs and lokantas – it's quite usual for a meal to cost under YTL10 in these joints. A toasted sandwich or döner kebab and fresh juice in a büfe will usually cost even less. And one of the city's most famous meals – a delicious fish sandwich on the quay at Eminönü or Üsküdar – costs a bargain basement YTL3. Cafés are pricey in comparison, with a cappuccino costing as much as a lokanta meal in some instances. Restaurants where alcohol is served are in another league again; a meyhane meal will cost around YTL40 including alcohol, and a meal in one of the swish Western-style eateries in town can cost up to double that.

Booking Tables

İstanbulllus like to eat out and they often book ahead, which means that you should, too. On Friday and Saturday nights it's very difficult to get a table anywhere popular if you haven't booked. Restaurants with views almost inevitably expect diners to reserve; if you want to ensure a table with a view, be very sure to specify this when you book.

Some of the more glamorous places in town will have more than one sitting in an evening. This means that you may be offered a table at 6pm or 10pm, and be told that there's nothing available in between. Fortunately this is quite uncommon.

Price Guide

Our guide to the per-person price of a meal consisting of meze/starter and main dish without alcohol is as follows:

€€€	more than YTL50
€€	YTL16 to YTL50
€	YTL15 or under

Tipping

Tipping is expected in all places where table service is given. Ten per cent is the norm. A few of the more touristy establishments include an extra service charge in the bill (look for the words *servis dahil*), but as is the case in many European countries, you are usually expected to tip on top of this.

Self-Catering

İstanbul has many small supermarkets (eg DIA, Gima, Makro) sprinkled through the streets around Beyoğlu, with giant cousins (eg Migros) in the suburbs. These sell most of the items you will need if you plan to self-cater. Then there is the ubiquitous *bakkal* (corner shop), which stocks bread, milk, basic groceries and usually fruit and vegetables. Some of these also sell *süt* (fresh milk) – look for the term ‘pasteurised’ on the label and you’ll know it’s fresh rather than long-life.

The best places to purchase fresh produce are undoubtedly the street markets. Down in Eminönü, the streets around the Spice Bazaar (Map p78) sell fish, meats, vegetables, fruit, spices, sweets and much more. The best stuff is available at the street stalls on Tahmis Caddesi on the market’s west wall. In Beyoğlu, the Balık Pazar (Fish Market) next to the Çiçek Pasajı (Map p107) on İstiklal Caddesi is a great, if expensive, little market. As well as its many fish stalls, it has small shops selling freshly baked bread, greengrocers selling a wide range of fruit and vegetables, and delicatessens (*şarküteri*) selling cheeses, dried meats such as *pastırma* (pastrami), pickled fish, olives, jams and preserves. You can even get imported goods such as French jams, Iranian caviar and English tea here. Larger produce markets are found opposite the ferry terminals in Kadıköy and Beşiktaş – Kadıköy is known for its delicatessens and bakeries, and Beşiktaş for its fruit and vegetable stalls.

SULTANAHMET

It really is a shame that the quality of food served up in Sultanahmet’s eateries is so mediocre. Some of the local restaurants have lovely settings and great views, but boy-oh-boy their food is disappointing (disgraceful is a word that frequently comes to mind). We’ve eaten our way through the neighbourhood, and are forced to limit our recommendations to those below. Once or twice, we have listed a place because its setting is so wonderful that

it doesn’t matter too much that its food isn’t. Around here places close early and there is no food strip as such.

BALIKÇI SABAHATTIN

Map p50 Seafood €€€
☎ 212-458 1824; Seyit Hasan Koyu Sokak 1, Cankurtaran; mains YTL28-50; ☎ noon-1am; ☑ Sultanahmet

The solid stream of chauffeur-driven limousines stopping outside Balıkçı Sabahattin is testament to its enduring popularity with the city’s establishment. One of the few top-notch restaurants in Sultanahmet, it’s set in a restored wooden Ottoman house tucked away in a ramshackle street just near the train line. The menu comprises a limited range of mezes and top-quality fresh fish, and there’s also a delicious *buğlama* (fish soup). In summer, grab a table in the garden with the politicians and industrialists, and try to guess whether the glamorous women at their tables are wives, daughters or mistresses. We know where we’d put our bets.

GİRİTLİ Map p50 Seafood €€€
☎ 212-458 2270; Keresteci Hakkı Sokak, Cankurtaran; set menu YTL75; ☎ 11am-11pm; ☑ Sultanahmet

You’ll find this restaurant tucked away in a deathly quiet corner of Cankurtaran. Serving top-notch Cretan seafood dishes, it’s the type of place that polarises people – some don’t mind the idea of paying this much money for a huge seafood set menu with alcohol included; others balk at the idea and are affronted by the fact that the waiters can be very rude if you ask to order à la carte (been there, done that...). Summer service is in a pretty garden; winter meals are enjoyed in a dilapidated Ottoman building.

TERAS RESTAURANT

Map p50 Modern Turkish €€€
☎ 212-638 1370; Hotel Armada, Ahırkapı Sokak, Cankurtaran; degustation menu YTL58, starter tray YTL21, mains YTL19-31; ☎ 7-11pm; ☑ Sultanahmet

The chef at this posh [hotel](#) (p199) restaurant came up with an inspired idea when he devised his Turkish degustation menu. Six sampling courses of ‘İstanbul cuisine’ feature, and they are wonderfully complemented by an excellent (and affordable)

wine list. If you decide to order à la carte, you can expect treats such as *bademli patlıcan çorbaşı* (aubergine soup with almonds) and can order specialities such as the *şefin çilinger sofrası* (chef’s traditional starters tray), which features eight different seasonal mezes. With a killer view of the Blue Mosque and Sea of Marmara, as well as very comfortable seating and occasional live Turkish music, this place is quite possibly the best eating option in Sultanahmet.

RAMİ Map p50 Anatolian & Ottoman €€
☎ 212-517 6593; Utangaç Sokak 6, Cankurtaran; starters YTL13-17, mains YTL27-28; ☎ noon-11pm; ☑ Sultanahmet

This restored Ottoman house has several quaint dining rooms that are decorated with impressionist-style paintings by Turkish painter Rami Uluer (1913–88), but the favoured spot for dinner is the rooftop terrace, which has a full view of the Blue Mosque. Make sure you request a table there when you book. Ottoman specialities such as *kağıt kebab* (lamb and vegetables cooked in a paper pouch) dominate the menu and although the food is nothing to get excited about, the view and the decent wine list certainly compensate. No credit cards.

HOUSE OF MEDUSA Map p50 Anatolian €€

☎ 212-511 4116; Muhtereme Fendi Sokak, off Yerebatan Caddesi, Sultanahmet; meze YTL9-16, mains YTL18-28; ☎ noon-10pm; ☑ Sultanahmet
Medusa’s charming shaded courtyard beckons guests off Yerebatan Caddesi. It’s a lovely spot to relax after a morning spent sightseeing, which is why we’ve decided to include it here. The food’s nothing special – acceptable executions of Turkish dishes such as kebabs and stews – but if you order a mixed meze plate and an ice-cold beer, you’ll be happy.

ALBURA CAFÉ & RESTAURANT

Map p50 Modern Turkish & International €€
☎ 212-517 9031; Akbıyık Caddesi 26, Cankurtaran; starters YTL9-18.50, mains YTL16-21; ☎ noon-11pm; ☑ Sultanahmet

This newcomer is a welcome addition to the otherwise mediocre array of restaurants along Akbıyık Caddesi. Its pretty streetside tables are usually occupied by tourists sampling Turkish dishes such as *hünkar beğendi* (lamb or beef goulash served on a mound of rich aubergine puree) or opting for

international favourites such as tortellini with mushrooms and basil. The food is decent, but we’ve been unimpressed by the house wine (dreadful and overpriced) – stick to bottles, and check that the prices on the bill match those on the menu.

DUBB Map p50 Indian €€
☎ 212-513 7308; İncili Çavuş Sokak, Alemdar; mains YTL8.30, curries YTL11.50-21.50, thalis YTL29.50-32.50; ☎ noon-3pm & 6-10.30pm; ☑ Sultanahmet

One of İstanbul’s few Indian restaurants and the only one worthy of a recommendation, Dubb is a little piece of the Subcontinent slap-bang in the middle of Sultanahmet. Specialising in tandoori dishes (the breads are great, as are the tandoori kebabs), it also serves the full complement of fragrant curries, including a wide range of vegetarian choices. Its *thalis*, which offer small serves of a number of dishes including dessert, are particularly popular. The outdoor terrace on the 4th floor offers fabulous views of Aya Sofya and the Sea of Marmara – request a table there when you book.

MOZAIK

Map p50 Modern Turkish & International €€
☎ 212-512 4177; İncirli Çavuş Sokak 1, off Divan Yolu Caddesi; pastas YTL12-16, mains YTL15-27; ☎ 9am-midnight; ☑ Sultanahmet

Over the years Mozaik has built a reputation as the most stylish restaurant in this part of town. Housed in a romantic Ottoman building dating from 1878 and with plenty of streetside tables, it has a huge menu that offers pastas and international dishes but specialises in dishes from different regions of Turkey – try the *kara erik yahnisi* (black plum and lamb stew) or the *kuzu sultan* (lamb marinated with thyme and served with a pilaf of rice, lamb liver, cinnamon, pinenuts and raisins). There’s a great salad selection (perfect for lunch), a good wine list and attentive service.

LALE RESTAURANT (PUDDING SHOP)

Map p50 Lokanta €€
☎ 212-522 2970; Divan Yolu Caddesi 6; portion YTL5-9; ☎ 7am-11pm; ☑ Sultanahmet
It’s a long time since the Pudding Shop served up fare to the hippies who made it famous, but its fame still drags in backpackers travelling in their parents’ footsteps.

Appearing for the prosecution: the stodgy, badly cooked food. For the defence: the fact that it has wi-fi and booze.

AYASOFYA KEBAP HOUSE

Map p50 Kebabçı €

☎ 212-458 3653; Küçük Aya Sofya Sokak; kebaps YTL7-12; 🕒 11am-11pm; 📍 Sultanahmet This neighbourhood kebabçı serves lots of tourists, but it also provides plenty of locals with belly fuel. You can grab a table on the street or order to take-away – either way you'll get a perfectly adequate kebab dinner for under YTL10, or a quick lunch of *mercimek çorbası* (lentil soup) or *sulu köfte* (meat balls filled with rice and cooked in a tomato-based sauce) for considerably less. You can also order a beer or glass of wine here.

TARİHİ SULTANAHMET KÖFTECİSİ

SELİM USTA Map p50 Köfteci €

☎ 212-511 3960; Divan Yolu Caddesi 4; meal YTL13; 🕒 11am-11pm; 📍 Sultanahmet This is one of the most famous eateries in the city, and to be frank, we're at a total loss to understand why. The ever-present queues of locals obviously adore its rubbery *köfte* (meatballs) served with bread, beans, salad and pickled chillies, but we have always been underwhelmed. Why not try it yourself, though? The place is certainly clean, cheap and cheerful.

KARADENİZ AİLE PİDE VE KEBAP SALONU

Map p50 Pideci & Kebabçı €

☎ 212-528 6290; Hacı Tahsinbey Sokak 1, off Divan Yolu Caddesi; pides YTL7-8.50; 🕒 11am-11pm; 📍 Sultanahmet This friendly place serves super-fresh soup, kebaps and *pide*. If you sit inside you'll be able to watch the cooks make your food; sit on the street tables and you'll have to put up with passers-by hungrily eying off your delicious-looking meal. Either way, you should order a *karaşık* (mixed) *pide* and prepare to enjoy a great cheap eat.

CANKURTARAN SOSYAL TESİSLERİ

Map p50 Anatolian €

Saraçhane Sokak, Cankurtaran; soup YTL2, salads YTL2.50, kebaps YTL6-9; 🕒 9am-10pm; 📍 Sultanahmet Literally built into Theodosius' walls, with views over busy Sahil Yolu to the Sea of Marmara, this terrace restaurant and *çay*

bahçesi near the Cankurtaran train station is very popular with families. It's set in a landscaped garden and has a small playground. Simple dishes such as soup, salads and kebaps feature.

ÇİĞDEM PASTANESİ

Map p50 Pastane €

☎ 212-526 8859; Divan Yolu Caddesi 62A; cappuccino YTL4, tea YTL1.50, pastries YTL0.50-3.50; 🕒 8am-11pm; 📍 Sultanahmet Customers have been ordering tea and baklava here since 1961. Çiğdem serves a cappuccino that could hold its head high on the Via Veneto in Rome, well-priced *portakal suyu* (fresh orange juice) and a wide range of cakes, pastries and puddings. No wonder it's always crammed with students from nearby Istanbul University.

TOPKAPI PALACE & AROUND

Eating options around the palace are relatively thin on the ground, but Sultanahmet and Eminönü are only a hop, skip and jump away.

KONYALI

Map p64 Anatolian €€

☎ 212-513 9696; Topkapı Palace; mains YTL21-26; 🕒 10am-5pm Wed-Mon; 📍 Gülhane Fabulously positioned in the grounds of Topkapı Palace (p62) and emanating a charmingly down-at-heel Riviera feel, Konyalı is usually swamped with tourists but is still worth a visit, particularly as it's the only eatery in the palace. Try and bag a table overlooking the Golden Horn and Sea of Marmara (phone ahead and reserve one) and consider sampling an Ottoman sherbet with your meal – you'll see their bright colours glinting from the large glass decanters on display. Food is stock-standard cafeteria-style fare.

SULTANAHMET FISH HOUSE

Map p63 Seafood €€

☎ 212-527 4445; Prof. Kazım İsmail Gürkan Caddesi 14, Cağaloğlu; fish soup YTL4, mains YTL15-30; 🕒 noon-11pm; 📍 Gülhane If you're the fishy type, traditionally there have been only three viable dining options in the Old City: heading down to Kumkapı (see boxed text, p163), grabbing a fish sandwich on the dock at Eminönü or booking a table at the pricey *Balıkçı Sabahattin* (p158). But with the opening of this casual restaurant

in Cağaloğlu, another option has been unveiled, and an interesting one at that. What makes this joint distinctive are its prices, which are remarkably low for what's on offer. Take the set lunch for example – fish soup, salad, fresh fish of the day and a dessert for YTL9! Wine is also well priced, and everything is squeaky clean. Wow.

CAFERAĞA MEDRESESİ

Map p63 Anatolian €

☎ 212-513 3601; Caferiye Sokak; soup YTL2.50, köfte YTL9; 🕒 8.30am-6pm; 📍 Sultanahmet In Sultanahmet, it's rare to nosh in stylish surrounds without paying through the nose for the privilege. That's why this teensy lokanta in the gorgeous courtyard of this Sinan-designed *medrese* near Topkapı Palace is such a find. The food isn't anything to write home about, but it's fresh and cheap as chips, so who's complaining?

SEFA RESTAURANT

Map p63 Lokanta €

☎ 212-520 0670; Nuruosmaniye Caddesi 17, Cağaloğlu; soup YTL2.50, portion YTL5-11, kebaps YTL6.50-16; 🕒 8am-7pm Mon-Sat; 📍 Sultanahmet Locals rate this place near the bazaar highly, and after sampling the dishes on offer you'll realise why. It describes its cuisine as Ottoman, but what's really on offer here are top-quality lokanta dishes and kebaps at extremely reasonable prices. You can order from an English menu or choose from the *bain marie* – the vegetable dishes are particularly appetising and they'll let you order half portions if you ask nicely.

BUHARA RESTAURANT & OCAKBAŞI

Map p63 Kebabçı €€

☎ 212-527 5133; Nuruosmaniye Caddesi 7A, Cağaloğlu; kebaps YTL7-11; 🕒 11am-10pm; 📍 Sultanahmet It ain't glam (quite the contrary), but Buhara has built a loyal local following over many years for its well-cooked kebaps. It's busy at lunch but usually quiet at night, so you shouldn't have trouble bagging a table. You can order an Efes to accompany your meal.

HAFİZ MUSTAFA ŞEKERLEMELERİ

Map p63 Pastane & Börekçi €

☎ 212-526 5627; Hamidiye Caddesi 84-86, Eminönü; 🕒 8am-9pm Mon-Sat, 9am-9pm Sun; 📍 Eminönü

If you walk up the steep staircase at the rear of this excellent *börek*, pastry and

Turkish-delight shop, you'll find a tiny café secreted under the roof. Here locals eat all-day snacks of melt-in-your-mouth cheese *börek*, peppery *ispanaklı börek* (spinach *börek*) and delicious biscuits and sweet pastries, all washed down with tea and coffee. Breakfast will set you back a mere two or three lira.

BAZAAR DISTRICT

Generations of shoppers have worked up an appetite around the Grand Bazaar, and fortunately there have always been eateries to meet this need, including a range of great lokantas such as Havuzlu and Subaşı. A little further away is the tranquil Şehzade Mehmed Sofrası, one of our favourite spots in the Old City. Down near the water there aren't too many choices – a delicious fish sandwich on the quay at Eminönü is your best bet. At night, make sure you a meal served with views at Hamdi et Lokantası or Zinhan Kebab House.

ZİNHAN KEBAP HOUSE AT STORKS

Map p78 Anatolian & International €€

☎ 212-512 4275; Ragıpğümüştapa Caddesi 2-5, Eminönü; meze YTL4-6, kebaps YTL13-21; 🕒 noon-11pm; 📍 Eminönü Zinhan's regal position next to the Galata Bridge (p74) means that every İstanbullu knows it. Unfortunately (for them, that is) most haven't eaten here. If you buck this trend, you'll enjoy an excellent meal on one of the most impressive roof terraces in the city – the views from here are simply sensational. Best is the fact that there are lots of tables in prime positions, meaning that you won't have to book weeks ahead as is often the case at places such as Hamdi (below). You'll sit on comfortable chairs at huge, well-spaced tables to enjoy tasty mezes such as *humus pastırmalı* (hummus with *pastırma*) and sophisticated kebab dishes such as *ali nazik* (spicy kebab on a bed of broiled eggplant salad with garlic yogurt). Also on offer are international dishes such as Tournados Rossini and a well-priced wine list.

HAMDİ ET LOKANTASI

Map p78 Anatolian €€

Hamdi Restaurant; ☎ 212-528 0390; Kalçın Sokak 17, off Tahmis Caddesi, Eminönü; kebaps YTL12-16; 🕒 noon-11pm; 📍 Eminönü

It's a hard call to make in a city with as many fabulous eateries as İstanbul, but if

forced to list our top five Turkish restaurants, Hamdi would certainly be one of them. Its setting (on a rooftop with panoramic views across to Galata, down the Golden Horn and back to the Old İstanbul skyline) is wonderful, and its food is among the best in town. Try the *hayari* (yogurt with roasted eggplant and garlic), the *içli köfte* (meatballs rolled in *bulgur*) and the *patıcanlı kebab* (lamb kebab with eggplant) and you'll see what we mean. Any place this good is always going to be busy, so make sure you book, and don't forget to request a rooftop table with a view (outside if the weather is hot). If you get there early (around 6pm), you might be able to score one of these without booking. Enter through the ground-floor baklava shop.

ŞEHZADE MEHMED SOFRASI

Map p78 Anatolian €€

☎ 212-526 2668; Şehzadebaşı Caddesi, Fatih; kebabs & mains YTL10-19, pides YTL8-12; ☎ 9am-10pm; 🍴 Üniversite

Locations don't come any better than this. You'll find this welcoming restaurant and *çay bahçesi* in the magnificent *küllüye* (mosque complex) of the **Şehzade Mehmed Camii** (p81). After a tasty meal of *köfte*, *tavuk kavurma* (roast chicken), kebab or *pide* you can settle back on one of the Turkish couches and relax over a *Türk kahvesi* (Turkish coffee) and narghile. Enter from the garden at the rear of the mosque.

BAB-İ HAYAT Map p78 Anatolian €

☎ 212-520 7878; Mısır Çarşısı, 47; pides YTL6.50-7.50, kebabs YTL8-12.50; ☎ 7.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat; 🍴 Eminönü

It took seven months for a team headed by one of the conservation architects from Topkapı Palace to restore and decorate this vaulted space over the eastern entrance to the Spice Bazaar. Hand-painted ceilings and tiled window frames provide an atmospheric setting in which to sample decent kebabs and adequate *pides* and *hazır yemek* dishes. The ultra-friendly service stands in stark contrast to that at neighbouring Pandeli (which we've elected not to review), and you can even get a beer if you ask discreetly. Enter through the Serhadoğlu fast-food shop.

SUBAŞI LOKANTASI Map p77 Lokanta €

☎ 212-522 4762; Kılıççılar Sokak 48; portion YTL5-12; ☎ 11am-5pm Mon-Sat; 🍴 Çemberlitaş

This place first opened its doors in 1959 and it's been feeding a constant stream of the Grand Bazaar's shopkeepers and customers ever since. Choose from the spread of excellent hot food in the kitchen on the right as you enter and then grab a seat at a table on one of the two floors. Don't let the waiters cajole you into ordering an expensive mixed plate; instead check out the price list at the door and order by the portion. You'll find it near the Nuruosmaniye gate.

HAVUZLU RESTAURANT

Map p77 Anatolian €

☎ 212-527 3346; Gani Çelebi Sokak 3, Grand Bazaar; portions YTL4-10, kebabs YTL10-12; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat; 🍴 Beyazıt

There are few more pleasant experiences than parking your shopping bags and enjoying a meal at the best eatery at the Grand Bazaar. A lovely space with a vaulted ceiling, pale lemon walls and an ornate central light fitting, Havuzlu serves up excellent fare to hungry hordes of tourists and shopkeepers. Try the spinach and yogurt dish or the one of the excellent kebabs, and don't even *think* of leaving without sampling the delights of the figs stuffed with walnuts and served with *kaymak* (clotted cream).

MESHUR KURU FASÜLYECİ

Map p78 Anatolian €

Prof. Sıddık Sokak 11, Süleymaniye; fasülyeci YTL5.50; ☎ 11am-4pm; 🍴 Üniversite

This popular local lokanta in the former *medrese* of the **Süleymaniye Camii** (p80) serves its famous spicy *fasülyeci* (broad beans) and rice to hordes of hungry locals from the theological college and nearby commercial areas.

NİMLA PASTIRMACI Map p78 Delicatessen €

☎ 212-511 6393; Hasırçılar Caddesi 14, Eminönü; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Sat; 🍴 Eminönü

Nimla's mouth-watering selection of cheese, *pastırma* (pastrami) and mezes is known throughout the city. The take-away *pastırma* rolls are delicious and there's also an upstairs cafeteria where you can grab a tasty light lunch.

İMREN LOKANTASI Map p78 Lokanta €

☎ 212-513 3601; Kadırga Meydanı; soup YTL2, portion YTL3-6; ☎ 8.30am-6pm; 🍴 Sultanahmet

We've eaten here many times and have always been the only non-Turk doing so (something that's bound to change now that we're listing it here). A neighbourhood lokanta with only five (shared) tables, it's a fab place to grab a delicious quick lunch. You can order a portion of döner kebab or choose from the range of hot dishes on offer – the *guvec* (stew) cooked in a terracotta pot is our favourite. Waiters will bring you a towering basket of bread so that you can mop up your food à la Turca, and you can finish up with a speedy glass of *çay*. Great stuff.

WESTERN DISTRICTS

There aren't too many eateries of note in this area, but it is home to one of the city's best restaurants, Asitane. The suburbs here are quiet at night, so you're probably best off sampling the delights of this place at lunch after visiting the Chora Church (p93).

ASİTANE Map p94 Ottoman €€

☎ 212-534 8414; Kariye Oteli, Kariye Camii Sokak 18, Edirnekapi; mains YTL22-35; ☎ 8am-11pm; 🍴 Edirnekapi

It's not often that you'll get the opportunity to sample Ottoman dishes devised especially for a 16th century royal circumcision feast, but this is what's on offer at this popular restaurant. The food is magnificent – try the *vişne yalancı dolması* (vine leaves stuffed with morello cherries) and *yufkada kuzu incik marmarına'li* (baked lamb with pureed spinach and cheese on a plate of flaky pastry); we're sure that Süleyman the Magnificent would have approved of them as much as we do. The surrounds are mod-

ern and elegant, featuring a pale-lemon colour scheme, comfortable seating, pristine napery and an outdoor courtyard for summer dining. Vegetarians are well catered for.

DEVELİ Map pp46-7 Kebabçı €

☎ 212-529 0833; Gümüşyüzük Sokak 7, Samatya; kebabs YTL10-15; ☎ noon-midnight

Near the Wall at Samatya, on the Sea of Marmara, the five floors (including a roof terrace) of Develi are always full of happy punters enjoying the flavours of southeastern Anatolia. It's been serving up kebabs to hungry locals since 1912, so Develi really knows what it's doing when it comes to the national dish. Try the *çiğ köfte* (raw ground lamb, *bulgur*, onions and spices) and the *fıstıklı* (pistachio) *kebab* and you'll feel happy too. To get there from Sultanahmet, catch a taxi along Kennedy Caddesi or take the train from Cankurtaran Station (get off at Mustafa Paşa Station). You'll find Develi inland from the station on a plaza filled with parked cars.

GALATA & TOPHANE

This part of town once had a very unsavoury reputation; it's still reasonably quiet at night, so be a bit careful walking around after dark. The enclave of eateries near the Karaköy ferry terminal is well worth checking out, as is the café at the stylish İstanbul Modern (p102). There are also a few good eateries around Galata Tower.

İSTANBUL MODERN CAFE

Map p103 Modern International €€

☎ 212-249 9680; İstanbul Modern, Meclis-i Mebusan Caddesi, Tophane; sandwiches YTL13-15, salads YTL11-20, mains YTL13-45; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun, 10am-8pm Thu; 🍴 Tophane

KUMKAPI

In Byzantine times, the fishers' harbour called Kontoscalion was due south of Beyazıt. The gate into the city from that port came to be called Kumkapi (Sand Gate) by the Turks. Though the gate is long gone, the district is still filled with fishermen, who moor their boats in a more modern version of the old harbour. And around this harbour cobbled laneways are filled with seafood restaurants and meyhanes. A few years ago the district was always packed with large groups of locals enjoying a boozy night on the town, but these days the attractions of Nevizade and Soyadı Sokaks in Beyoğlu (p165) have caused its star to wane and its streets are only full of hawkers trying to lure passers-by into establishments that are rarely even half full. Still, the surrounds and the quality of the seafood in a few of the longer-standing eateries make it worth a visit when you're in town. On the Sea of Marmara just inside the Wall, it's a quick taxi ride from Sultanahmet. Alternatively, you can walk all the way down Tiyatro Caddesi from Beyazıt. When there, wander around and see which establishment takes your fancy. We usually gravitate towards **Kör Agop Restaurant** (Map p78; ☎ 212-517 2334; Ördekli Bakkal Sokak 7, Kumkapi; fish meze YTL8-13, fish YTL15-40; ☎ 11am-2am), which was established in 1938 and has one of the best fasıl bands around. It also serves excellent fresh fish.

A New York-style 'industrial arty' vibe and great views over the water to Sultanahmet (when there are no moored cruise ships in the way), make the café at İstanbul's pre-eminent contemporary art museum a perfect place for lunch. Some dishes have a Turkish influence – try the grilled eggplant puree with aged parmesan cheese cracker – but most have an international flavour, with snacks such as chicken club sandwiches with caesar sauce.

TARIHI KARAKÖY BALIK LOKANTASI

Map p103 Seafood €€

☎ 212-251 1371; Karaköy; fish soup YTL5, mains YTL24; ☎ 11.30am-3.30pm Mon-Sat; 🚶 Karaköy Walk through the run-down quarter behind the Karaköy Balıkçılar Çarşısı (Karaköy Fish Market) and you'll come upon this utter gem, one of the few old-style fish restaurants left on the Golden Horn. There's no other word for the food here except fabulous, with the dirt-cheap fish soup possibly being the best you'll ever eat. Everything is so fresh it's almost writhing and the staff are happy to point out what's particularly good on the day. With seafood being such an expensive proposition in most of İstanbul's restaurants, it's incredibly refreshing to encounter top class, perfectly prepared dishes that are within everyone's budget. Go.

GALATA HOUSE Map p103 Georgian €€

☎ 212-245 1861; Galata Kulesi Sokak 61, Galata; mains YTL14-18; ☎ noon-midnight Tue-Sun; 🚶 Karaköy

This would have to be one of the most eccentric restaurants in town. Run by the utterly charming husband-and-wife team of Nadire and Mete Göktuğ, it is housed in the Old British Jail, just down from Galata Tower. The jail functioned from 1904 to 1919, and has been sympathetically but comfortably restored by Mete, who is one of İstanbul's most prominent heritage architects. Nadire uses recipes handed down from her Georgian mother to concoct great comfort food – the *hingali* (meat-filled dumplings in tomato sauce) are absolutely delicious. She also plays the piano for guests.

GALATA KONAK PATISSERIE CAFÉ

Map p103 Anatolian & Pastane €€

☎ 212-252 5346; Hacı Ali Sokak 2/2, Galata; breakfast YTL5-13, cakes YTL6-7, pastas YTL10-12, kebabs YTL13-22; ☎ 9am-9pm; 🚶 Karaköy

After checking out the pastries and cakes on sale in the ground-floor patisserie, make your way up the stairs to the roof terrace café, where you can order anything that has taken your fancy downstairs or choose from a large and varied menu. For breakfast try the excellent *menemen* (eggs cooked with tomatoes, peppers and white cheese) or the super-fresh *poğaca* (breakfast buns); there are also decadent cakes for morning and afternoon pick-me-ups and kebabs and pastas for lunch. The view, which includes the Sultanahmet skyline, down the Bosphorus and over the Golden Horn, is fabulous.

KARAKÖYÜM CAFÉ & RESTAURANT

Map p103 Anatolian €€

☎ 212-244 6808; Kemeraltı Caddesi 4, Karaköy; mains YTL6-11; ☎ 10.30am-midnight; 🚶 Karaköy The elegant lady owners will greet you personally when you enter this popular rooftop restaurant. Everyone in town knows the secret of the success here – put simply, the women in the kitchen are wonderful home-style cooks. Try Anatolian favourites such as the utterly delicious *dürüm köfte* (*köfte* wrapped in pastry and served with yogurt and tomato sauce) and we're confident that you'll become an instant devotee. There's a terrace with views of Topkapı Palace, and a wine list that is well priced.

GÜNEY RESTAURANT Map p103 Lokanta €€

☎ 212-249 0393; Kuledibi Şah Kapısı 6, Tünel; soup YTL2.50, portions YTL3.50-7, kebabs YTL7-18; ☎ 7am-10pm Mon-Sat; 🚶 Karaköy

You'll be lucky if you can fight your way through the crowds of hungry locals to claim a lunchtime table at this bustling eatery directly opposite Galata Tower. Friendly waiters will set you up with a basket of fresh bread and point you towards the array of meze and hot dishes on offer. It's also a great place to grab a hearty bowl of *çorba* (soup) for breakfast.

NAMLI Map p103 Delicatessen €€

☎ 212-293 6880; Rıhtım Caddesi, Karaköy; ☎ 7am-10pm; 🚶 Karaköy

As well as being one of the best delicatessens in the city (check out that cheese selection!), Namli also stocks hard-to-find Asian ingredients, imported tea and other treats. Take away your choice from the impressive salad and meze selection, or grab one of the tables at the front and eat in.

KARAKÖY GÜLLÜGLU Map p103 Pastane €€

☎ 212-249 9680; Mumhane Caddesi 171, Karaköy; YTL20-25 per kilo; ☎ 10.30am-midnight; 🚶 Karaköy

This is a place where waistlines are destroyed and dentists get rich, but no-one cares because they're all sitting at the funky 1960s Arabesque-style outdoor seating and gobbling the best *baklava* in the city, washed down by tea or coffee. Utter bliss.

SEBO BÖREK Map p103 Börekçi €€

☎ 212-244 8787; Rıhtım Caddesi 9, Karaköy; ☎ 7am-6pm; 🚶 Karaköy

This Karaköy branch of a popular *börek* chain serves an array of freshly made *börek* that makes a perfect mid-morning snack.

İSTİKLAL & AROUND

The streets in the Asmalımescit district, with their raft of good-quality meyhanes packing the crowds in every Friday and Saturday night, are giving the famous Nevizade Sokak a run for its money these days, but they're not the only establishments off İstiklal doing well. This is, without doubt, the best neighbourhood in town in which to eat, drink and be merry. You would be mad if you didn't make your way here at least once during your visit.

CHANGA Map p107 Modern International €€€

☎ 212-249 1348; Sıraselvililer Caddesi 47, Taksim; starters YTL19-25, mains YTL32-55; ☎ 6pm-1am Mon-Sat Nov-Jun; 🚶 Kabataş, then funicular to Taksim

İstanbul's most controversial eatery has fans and detractors. At issue is Peter Gordon's handling of fusion dishes: do they work? Try the salmon and wasabi tortellini with grilled porcini and creamed lemon-grass sauce and see what you think. One dish that no-one would question is the soft meringue of strawberries, lychees and fresh cheese with a strawberry and raspberry sauce – delicious. The décor is stark modern, featuring Eames chairs and a stylish bar, with the quirky touch of a glass floor looking down on the kitchen. The wine list is superb. In summer all action moves to Changa's second restaurant, the wonderful *Müzedechanga* (p220).

MİKLA Map p107 Modern Mediterranean €€€

☎ 212-293 5656; Marmara Pera, Meşrutiyet Caddesi 1, Tepebaşı; starters YTL17-27, mains

YTL29-55; ☎ noon-11.30pm; 🚶 Karaköy, then funicular to Tünel

Among the big guns of İstanbul's top-end dining scene, one place reigns supreme in our minds, and that's Mikla. On the top floor of the Marmara Pera hotel, this sleek operation serves up excellent Mod Med cuisine to a truly international clientele. The chefs here embrace top-notch ingredients and simple execution and the results speak for themselves: try the absolutely delicious grilled tenderloin with roasted garlic potato cream, parmesan baked fennel and goat's cheese butter; or the wonderful lightly smoked lamb loin with pinenut-sauteed French beans, walnut pistou and white bean puree. Service and the wine list are impressive, and the view is quite simply to die for. Ask for a table on the terrace overlooking the Old City.

360 Map p107 Modern International €€

☎ 212-251 1042; Mısır Apartmanı, İstiklal Caddesi 311, Kat 8; pizzas YTL17-23, pastas & risottos YTL17-30, mains YTL21-32; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner daily; 🚶 Kabataş, then funicular to Taksim

It's the most hyped restaurant-bar in the city, and quite frankly we don't think it deserves its reputation. Though its stylish fitout and knockout views make it a fabulous spot for a drink, the food here is trying too hard – and falling flat as a result. If you order simply you'll enjoy your meal, but beware the fussy mains, which often have flavours that clash. We suggest opting for the Miss Piggy pizza, which features prosciutto, fresh rocket, parmesan, tomato and mozzarella, or for an uncomplicated risotto or pasta. Fortunately, the desserts live up to the hype – try the sensational crystallised coconut rice pudding with mango-ginger parfait.

NU TERAS Map p107 Modern Mediterranean €€

☎ 212-245 6070; Meşrutiyet Caddesi 149/7, Tepebaşı; pizzas YTL19-23, pasta YTL18-23, mains YTL22-34; ☎ noon-11.30pm July-Oct; 🚶 Karaköy, then funicular to Tünel

Nu Teras is the summer project of the much-loved *Lokanta* (p166), a long-standing showcase of casual chic and Mod Med food. On the roof of the Lokanta building, this terrace bar-restaurant isn't quite as glam as it was in its heyday, but that's good news because it means ordinary

mortals can now score a table. The extraordinary views over the Golden Horn should be appreciated over a pre-dinner drink at the bar before you move onto a table and make your choice from the menu of huge and very tasty pizzas, a wide array of pasta dishes and mains such as roasted cod with tomatoes, capers, currents and pine nuts served with potato salad. We suggest opting for the pizzas and pastas, as mains can sometimes be disappointing.

LOKANTA Map p107 Modern Mediterranean €€
☎ 212-245 6070; Meşrutiyet Caddesi 149/1, Tepebaşı; pizzas YTL19-23, pasta YTL18-23, mains YTL22-34; 🕒 noon-11.30pm Nov-Jun; 🚶 Karaköy, then funicular to Tünel

This cool-weather venue is the twin of Nu Teras (p165), and serves an almost identical menu.

CEZAYİR Map p107 Modern Turkish €€
☎ 212-245 9980; Hayriye Caddesi 16, Galatasaray; starters YTL9-15, mains YTL18-28; 🕒 noon-11.30pm; 🚶 Kabataş, then funicular to Taksim

After reading that Cezayir showcased 'experimental Turkish cuisine' we visited with a great deal of trepidation; fortunately, our delicious meal would more rightly be categorised as Modern Mediterranean with Turkish accents. One of the most popular restaurant-bars in Beyoğlu, this place is housed in an old school building that has been sympathetically and glamorously renovated to provide inside and outside dining areas and two bars. The décor is traditional with a twist and the crowd is middle-aged and arty. Great fun.

LEB-I DERYA Map p107 Modern Turkish €€
☎ 212-244 1886; Kumbaracı Yokuşu 115/7; starters YTL9-23, mains YTL17-28; 🕒 11am-2am Mon-Fri & 8.30am-3am Sat & Sun; 🚶 Karaköy, then funicular to Tünel

The magnificent views are here to stay, but some of our recent meals here have been disappointing. It's still a great spot for a weekend brunch, though, particularly when the food is washed down by a therapeutic Bloody Mary or two.

SAF' ORGANIC BISTRO
Map p107 Vegetarian & Vegan €€
☎ 212-245 9515; Ensiz Sokak 1A; starters YTL12-17, mains YTL20-24, tasting menus YTL40-70; 🕒 noon-11pm Mon-Sat; 🚶; 🚶 Karaköy, then funicular to Tünel

Supremely stylish Saf' is planets away from the earnest but oh-so-boring tofu-dominated restaurants that vegetarians often have to make do with. Here, the menu is creative and delicious in equal parts, with dishes such as mushroom ravioli with marinated beetroot, wild mushrooms, porcini cream and a balsamic fig compote featuring. There are five- and three-course tasting menus that match each course with a glass of organic wine, as well as a fabulous array of cocktails – try the expat harem (vodka, fresh cucumber, home-made ginger beer and fresh apple juice, YTL18). All ingredients are organic and vegans are catered for.

REFİK Map p107 Meyhane €€
☎ 212-245 7879; Sofyalı Sokak 7; meze YTL5-12, fish YTL15-30; 🕒 noon-midnight Mon-Sat, 6.30pm-midnight Sun; 🚶 Karaköy, then funicular to Tünel
Refik is the original meyhane in the Asmalimescit area and it's always full of large groups of liquored-up locals enjoying the convivial (and noisy) atmosphere and decent meyhane food. There are two dining areas (on each side of the street) and loads of streetside tables. Try the excellent *çacık* (yogurt and mint salad).

KREPENDEKİ İMROZ RESTAURANT
Map p107 Meyhane €€
☎ 212-249 9073; Nevzade Sokak 24; meze YTL4-9, fish YTL15-25; 🕒 noon-midnight; 🚶 Kabataş, then funicular to Taksim

The minute you see the waiters heaving around their enormous meze-laden trays in this popular meyhane you'll know you've made the right dinner choice. With outdoor tables on both sides of the street, you'll also have a slightly better chance of scoring a spot in the middle of the action – to make sure, ring ahead and book. The food is typical of the island of Gökceada (İmroz) and is top-class; those in the know always include the octopus salad and pickled anchovies in their meze choices.

BONCUK RESTAURANT
Map p107 Meyhane €€
☎ 212-243 1219; Nevzade Sokak 19; meze YTL4-9, fish YTL15-25; 🕒 noon-2am; 🚶 Kabataş, then funicular to Taksim
Armenian specialities differentiate Boncuk from its Nevzade neighbours. Try the excellent *topik* (meze made with chickpeas,

MEYHANES – THE BIGGEST PARTY IN TOWN

If you only have one night out on the town when you visit İstanbul, make sure you spend it at one of the meyhanes on Nevzade or Sofyalı Sokaks in Beyoğlu. On any night of the week, meyhanes such as **Sofyalı 9** (below), **Refik** (opposite), **Boncuk** (opposite) and **Krependedeki İmroz** (opposite) will be full of chattering locals sampling the dizzying array of meze and fresh fried fish on offer, washed down with a never-ending supply of raki. On Friday and Saturday summer evenings the streets literally heave with people looking for a table, grabbing a drink at one of the many bars along the strips or just wandering past. You'd be mad if you didn't join them.

pistachios, onion, flour, currants, cumin and salt) and the very tasty *börek*. To ensure that you get a table on the street, where all the action is, get there early or call ahead and book.

SOFYALI 9 Map p107 Meyhane €€
☎ 212-245 0362; Sofyalı Sokak 9; cold meze YTL1.50-3.50, hot meze YTL2-8, kebabs YTL8-13; 🕒 noon-midnight Mon-Sat; 🚶 Karaköy, then funicular to Tünel

Tables here are hot property on a Friday or Saturday night, and no wonder. This gem of a place serves up some of the best meyhane food in all of İstanbul, and does so in surroundings that are as welcoming as they are attractive. It's a bit like eating in a close friend's home, except here you're offered a large array of meze and a wealth of grills and fresh fried fish along with the bonhomie. The *köpeoğlu* (eggplant and tomato with yogurt and garlic) and *semizotu* (green purslane with yogurt and garlic) are among the best we've ever eaten and the *kaşarlı börek* (cheese pastries) and *kalamar* (fried calamari with garlic sauce) are damn fine, too. Regulars swear by the *Anavut ciğeri* (Albanian fried liver).

HOUSE CAFÉ Map p107 Modern International €€
☎ 212-2459515; Sofyalı Sokak 9/1; sandwiches YTL16.50-20, mains YTL14.50-28; 🕒 8am-2am Mon-Sat, 8am-11pm Sun; 🚶 Karaköy, then funicular to Tünel

This stylish café would look equally at home in Soho, Seattle or Sydney. On the city's most happening street, its casual but chic interior is invariably packed with ladies

lunching, young couples courting and businesspeople meeting over coffee. The food is resolutely international in flavour and execution; you can choose from a menu including sandwiches, pizzas, salads and light dishes such as Thai chicken noodle soup and a 'House burger' with wedges. We'd describe the food as adequate rather than inspired and feel compelled to say that the waiters can display more attitude than aptitude. Sunday brunch is the best bet.

KAFE ARA Map p107 Modern International €€
☎ 212-245 4104; Tosbağ Sokak 8A; pastas YTL11-12.50, mains YTL16-18; 🕒 8am-midnight; 🚶 Karaköy, then funicular to Tünel

In the Beyoğlu popularity stakes one café stands head and shoulders above the rest – Kafe Ara. A converted garage with tables and chairs spilling out into a wide laneway opposite the Galatasaray Lycée, this is boho central, a casual and welcoming place where you can sample well-priced paninis, salads and pastas in a convivial atmosphere. The emphasis here is on top-quality, super-fresh ingredients and simple Mediterranean-slanted dishes, though it's also possible to order Turkish favourites such as *mantı* (Turkish-style ravioli filled with minced meat and served with a sauce of yogurt, garlic, hot butter and spices). There's no alcohol.

LOKAL Map p107 Modern International €€
☎ 212-245 5743/4; Müeyyet Sokak 9, off İstiklal Caddesi; Thai soups TYL8-21, salads YTL12-19, mains YTL12-20; 🕒 noon-10.30pm; 🚶 Karaköy, then funicular to Tünel

This funky place just off İstiklal Caddesi has only seven tables inside and five outside, and these are always full of bright young things ordering from the eclectic menu and admiring the Warhol-clone screenprints on the walls. Some of the cooks are Asian and this is reflected in the number of curries that feature – try the Thai green chicken curry with its creamy coconut base and fragrant herbs or the succulent tandoori lamb chops with yogurt and tamarind sauce. The weekday lunch menus (YTL10 to YTL19) are fabulous value. We concur with the restaurant's slogan: 'Think global, eat Lokal'.

HACI ABDULLAH Map p107 Lokanta €€
☎ 212-293 8561; Sakızağacı Caddesi 17; meze YTL5-7, portions YTL5-15; 🕒 11am-10pm; 🚶 Kabataş, then funicular to Taksim

Just contemplating the sensational *imam bayıldı* (the imam fainted) at Hacı Abdullah's makes our tastebuds go into overdrive. This İstanbul institution – it was established in 1888 – is probably the best lokanta in the city and is one of the essential gastronomic stops you should make when in town. You'll find all the traditional favourites, as well as a wide selection of desserts, including home-bottled fruit compote and a damn fine *künefe* (shredded wheat pastry with pistachios, honey and sugar). The elegant surrounds feature bottle upon bottle of pickled vegetables and comfortable banquet seating. No alcohol is served.

ZENCEFİL NATURE & PEACE

Map p107 Vegetarian €
☎ 212-243 8234; Kurabiye Sokak 8; salads YTL7.50-10.50, mains YTL9-10.50; ☎ 10am-10.30pm Mon-Sat; ☎; ☎ Kabataş, then funicular to Taksim

We're not surprised that this new-wave vegetarian café has a loyal following. Its interior is comfortable and stylish, with a lovely glassed courtyard and funky lime-green colour scheme, and its food is fresh, cheap and varied. Bread is home-made and there's a wide range of herbal teas. Proof that it's not a haven for old-style hippies lies in its drinks menu, which includes treats such as freshly made *limonata* (lemonade) with Absolut vodka. Anyone hoping for a non-smoking area will be disappointed – this is Turkey, after all.

FLAMM Map p107

Anatolian €

☎ 212-245 7604; Sofyalı Sokak 16/1; mains YTL8-12; ☎ 11am-midnight; ☎ Karaköy, then funicular to Tünel

Once a stylish Mod Med bistro, Flamm has morphed into a well-priced Turkish eatery that has retained its sense of style but lowered its prices. In the centre of the hopping Asmalimesic precinct, its outdoor tables are good spots to soak up the scene and sample simple dishes such as *mantı* and *ızgara köfte* (grilled meatballs).

CANIM CİĞERİM İLHAN USTA

Map p107 Anatolian €

☎ 212-252 6060; Minare Sokak 1; fixed menu YTL12; ☎ 10am-midnight; ☎ Karaköy, then funicular to Tünel

The name means 'my soul, my liver', and this small place behind the Ali Hoca Türbesi

specialises in grilled liver served with herbs, *ezme* (spicy tomato sauce) and grilled vegetables. If you can't bring yourself to eat offal, fear not – you can substitute the liver with beef if you so choose. Locals rate this place highly and no wonder, as this is fabulous, cheap food served in a really friendly atmosphere. No alcohol, but *ayran* is the perfect accompaniment.

KONAK Map p107

Pideci & Kebapçı €

☎ 212-244 4281; İstiklal Caddesi 259; kebabs YTL8-12, pide YTL6-8; ☎ 9am-9pm; ☎ Kabataş, then funicular to Taksim

The waiters run rather than walk at this frantically busy place on İstiklal Caddesi. You'll understand why they're so busy as soon as you taste the sensational *İskender kebab*, the excellent *yoğurtlu kebab* and the melt-in-your-mouth *pide*. The setting is a cut above, too, with ornate gilded ceiling, chandeliers and banquettes covered in rich brocade.

HELVETICA LOKANTA Map p107 Lokanta €

☎ 212-245 8780; Sümbül Sokak; soup YTL3, salads YTL4.50-5.50; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, 8am-11am Sun; ☎; ☎ Karaköy, then funicular to Tünel

This hip *lokanta* is popular with locals (particularly of the vegetarian variety), who pop in here for fresh, tasty and cheap-as-chips soups, salads and bean dishes. Start with a yogurt or tomato soup and follow up with your choice from the daily salads spread.

İNCİ PASTANESİ Map p107

Pastane €

İstiklal Caddesi 124; ☎ 9am-9pm; ☎ Karaköy, then funicular to Tünel

A Beyoğlu institution, İnci is famous throughout the city for its delicious profiteroles. You'll have to fight through the crowds to reach the counter at this tiny shop but believe us, it's worth the effort.

SARAY MUHALLEBİCİSİ

Map p107 Muhallebici & Pastane €

☎ 212-292 3434; İstiklal Caddesi 102-104; ☎ 8am-11pm; ☎ Kabataş, then funicular to Taksim

A *muhallebici* (pudding purveyor) that's been serving puddings to appreciative sweet-tooths since 1935, Saray is still going strong. You can pop in for a *poğaç* (breakfast bun) in the morning and a köfte sandwich for lunch, but it's most famous for sweet milk-based puddings such as *fırın sütlaç* and *tavuk göyüsü* (chicken pudding).

There's also a recently opened branch in Eminönü (Map p63).

BEŞİKTAŞ & ORTAKÖY

The cafés, bars and restaurants around the waterside road İskele Square in Ortaköy form a bustling entertainment precinct that's particularly busy on Friday and Saturday evenings and on weekend days. Be aware that getting here by taxi during these times can be a nightmare due to the horrendous traffic along Çırağan Caddesi.

BANYAN Map p117

Asian €€€

☎ 212-259 9060; Salhane Sokak 3, Ortaköy; starters YTL12-20, mains YTL25-40; ☎ noon-2am; ☎; ☎ Ortaköy

The menu here travels around Asia, featuring Thai, Japanese, Vietnamese and Chinese dishes. There is even the occasional fusion number: why not try the grilled vegetables and warm goat's cheese with pea *paratha* and green mandarin and ginger-infused olive oil and see if it works for you? If it does – and the food here claims to be good for the soul – you can enjoy it while soaking up the exceptional views of the Ortaköy mosque and Fatih Bridge from the terrace. There's another branch on *Abdi İpekçi Caddesi* (Map p115) in Nişantaşı.

HOUSE CAFÉ Map p117 Modern International €€

☎ 212-227 2639; Salhane Sokak 1, Ortaköy; sandwiches YTL18.50-21.50, mains YTL17-29.50; ☎ 9am-2am Mon-Thu & Sun, 8am-2am Fri & Sat; ☎ Ortaköy

This is İstanbul's hottest spot for Sunday brunch. A huge place right on the waterfront at Ortaköy, it offers a good-quality all-you-can-eat buffet spread for YTL45 between 9am and 2pm. The style here is casual chic and the clientele is young professional, though everyone will feel welcome.

ÇINAR Map p117

Seafood €€

☎ 212-261 5818; İskele Square 42, Ortaköy; meze YTL5-11, mains YTL15-35; ☎ noon-2am; ☎ 56

With loads of outdoor tables and waiters running around with loaded trays, this long-standing favourite resembles a busy French brasserie. The views over the water and of the bustling square are great, and the food is quite good, too. Seafood mezes feature and you can choose your own fish

for mains. The perfect place to spend a summer's evening.

MADO Map p117

Ice-Cream Parlour €

☎ 212-227 3876; İskele Square, Ortaköy; ☎ 7am-2am; ☎ Ortaköy

Next to Çınar, this branch of the popular ice-cream chain is packed on weekends, when locals stop by after checking out the flea market. The views are great and the people-watching opportunities unrivalled. Oh, and the ice cream goes down a treat. There are also Mado branches in locations such as *Üsküdar* (Selmanipek Caddesi) and *Beyoğlu* (☎ 212-244 1781; 188 İstiklal Caddesi).

ÜSKÜDAR

One of the city's most conservative areas, Üsküdar is not the place to come if you're looking for a boozy night on the town. During the day, the myriad kebab joints and pastanes in the street around the ferry terminal do a bustling trade.

NİYAZİBEY Map p122

Anatolian €

☎ 216-310 4821; Ahmediye Meydanı; perde pilavı YTL5, kebaps YTL9-16, pides YTL2-9; ☎ 11am-9pm; ☎ Üsküdar

Niyazibey specialises in *perde pilavı*, a dish that it describes as hen and rooster meat (symbolising the bride and groom) cooked with rice (for blessing) and almonds (for children) and encased in pastry sheets (symbolising the home). Anything so loaded with Turkish symbolism immediately whets our interest, and when we first tasted this very traditional dish we were beside ourselves with excitement because it was delicious as well. A problem arose on our second visit, though. Would we reprise our first meal, or opt for an alternative such as *fırın şış kebab* (kebab and cheese cooked in *pide* dough) or a *dürüm döner* (thin slices of lamb cooked in pastry)? Everything at this comfortable place is great, and it's fantastic value as well. There's another branch at *Halitağa Caddesi 5B* (Map p122) in Kadıköy – neither sell alcohol.

KANAAT LOKANTESİ Map p122

Lokanta €

☎ 216-310 4821; Ahmediye Meydanı; soup YTL2.50-3, portions YTL4.50-10, kebaps YTL7.50-10; ☎ 11am-9pm; ☎ Üsküdar

This barn-like place near the ferry terminal has been serving up competent *hazır*

yemek (bistro food) since 1933. It's recently been spruced up, and now has an understated but pleasing décor featuring framed photographs of old street scenes. Service is brusque but efficient and the food passes our 'do we want seconds?' test, but only just. There's a huge dessert list.

ÇAMLICA RESTAURANT

off Map p122

Anatolian €

Küçük Çamlıca Köşkleri; ☎ 216-443 2199; Büyük Çamlıca; 🕒 9am-midnight; 📍 Üsküdar

Should you take the time to visit Üsküdar, this charming kiosk on the hill is a great spot to savour a coffee or a snack. Marble floors are covered by rugs, and seating is on small stools clustered around brass tray tables. In winter there's a log fire, and in summer the windows looking out over the park provide an attractively airy feel.

KADIKÖY

We reckon that when you add the lure of a meal at Çiya to a lovely ferry trip and a wander around one of the city's best fresh produce markets, you have the ingredients for a perfect İstanbul day.

ÇIYA SOFRASI

Map p127

Lokanta €

☎ 216-330 3190; Güneşlibahçe Sokak 43; meze plate YTL5-10; 🕒 10am-midnight; 📍 Kadiköy

We're going to go out on a limb here, and say that this is our favourite lokanta in the city. We love the simple modern interior and ever-friendly staff, and we adore the food – everything from the yogurt soup to the stuffed artichokes to the *perde pilavı* (traditional chicken dish). The self-service meze array is a fabulous idea (and so cheap!) and the milk puddings and crystallised fruit are perfect finales to a meal. Next-door *Çiya Kebapçı* is owned and run by the same people, and is just as impressive. If these places served alcohol, we'd move in permanently.

BAYLAN PASTAHANE

Map p127

Pastane €

☎ 216-336 2881; Muvakkithane Caddesi 19; coffee YTL5-7, cakes YTL3-6.50; 🕒 10am-10pm; 📍 Kadiköy

Baylan has been serving its home-made pastries, *dondurma* (Turkish ice cream) and cakes to appreciative İstanbullular since 1923. This branch dates from 1925, but had its last facelift in 1961, making it a truly funky decorative time capsule. To the rear of the shop there's a courtyard complete with astroturf and a profusion of hanging baskets – a great spot to scoff a fabulous *caffe glace* (iced coffee with *dondurma*), a top-notch espresso or a plate of profiteroles.