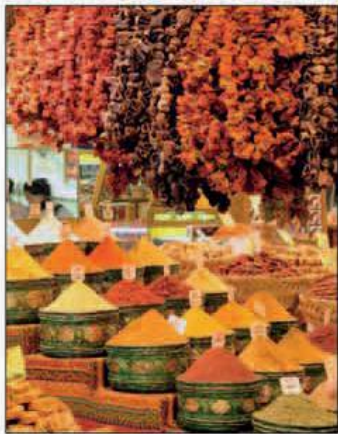


The Flavours of Istanbul

The wide range of climatic zones across Turkey make it one of the few countries that can grow all its own food. Tea is cultivated in the mountains by the Black Sea and bananas in the sultry south. The Anatolian plain in between is criss-crossed by wheat fields and rich grasslands on which cattle graze, providing top quality meat and dairy produce. Fruit and vegetables flourish everywhere and fish abound in the salty seas that lap the nation's shores. Freshness is the hallmark of this varied cuisine, drawn from the many cultures that were subject to nearly five centuries of Ottoman rule.



A stall in the Spice Bazaar, one of Istanbul's oldest markets

THE ANATOLIAN STEPPE

The steppe stretching from Central Asia to Anatolia is one of the oldest inhabited regions of the world. Dishes from this vast area are as varied as the different ethnic groups that live here, but are mainly traditional and simple. To fit in with a mainly nomadic way of life, food generally needed to be

quick and easy to prepare. Turkey's most famous culinary staples, yogurt, flat bread and the kebab, originate in this region. The common use of fruits, such as pomegranates, figs and apricots, in Turkish savoury dishes stems from Persian influences, filtering down with the tribes that came from the north of the steppe. From the Middle East, further south, nomads

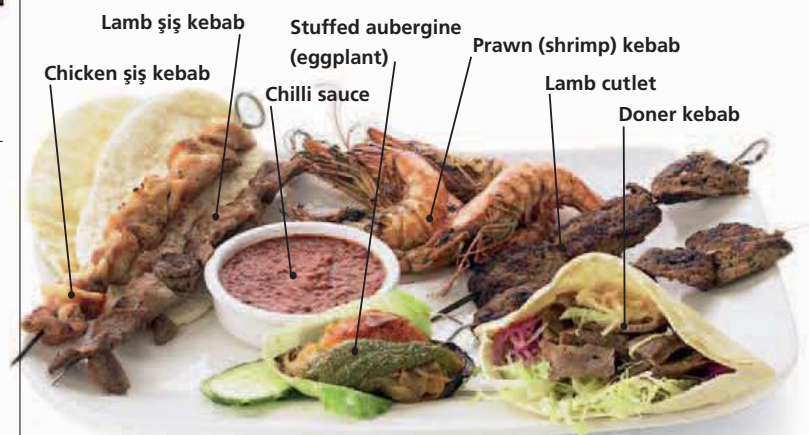


Nar (pomegranates)

introduced the occasional fiery blast of chilli. Its use was once an essential aid to preserving meat in the searing desert heat.

OTTOMAN CUISINE

It was in the vast, steamy kitchens of the Topkapı Palace that a repertoire of mouthwatering dishes to rival the celebrated cuisines of France and China grew



A selection of typical Turkish kebabs

LOCAL DISHES AND SPECIALITIES



Turkish Delight

Because of Istanbul's proximity to the sea, fresh fish is readily available and is a key ingredient on the city's menus. Since ancient times the Bosphorus has been known for its excellent fishing. In the winter months especially, there is a bounty of oil-rich fish, such as bluefish, bream, bonito tuna, sea bass, mullet and mackerel, waiting to be reeled in. From the Black Sea, Istanbul is also provided with a steady supply of juicy mussels and *bamsi*, a type of anchovy. Sweets are also popular and eaten throughout the day, not just after a meal. They are sold in shops, on stalls and by street vendors. Istanbul is renowned for its *baklava*, sweet pastries coated with syrup and often filled with nuts.



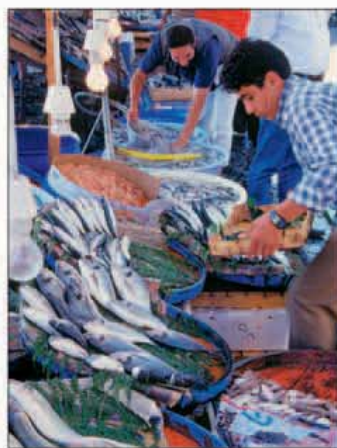
Midye dolmasi Mussels are stuffed with a spiced rice mixture, steamed and served with a squirt of lemon juice.



A splendid array of fruit, vegetables and dried goods in the Spice Bazaar

up. At the height of the Ottoman Empire, in the 16th and 17th centuries, legions of kitchen staff slaved away on the Sultan's behalf. Court cooks usually specialized in particular dishes. Some prepared soups, while others just grilled meats or fish, or dreamed up combinations of vegetables, or baked breads, or made puddings and sherberts. As Ottoman rule expanded to North Africa, the Balkans and parts of southern Russia, influences from these far-flung places crept into the Turkish imperial kitchens. Complex dishes of finely seasoned stuffed meats and vegetables, often with such fanciful names as "lady's lips", "Vizier's fingers" and the "fainting Imam", appeared. This imperial tradition lives on in many of Istanbul's

restaurants, where dishes such as *karniyarik* (halved aubergines (eggplant) stuffed with minced lamb, pine nuts and dried fruit) and *hünkar beğendili köfte* (meatballs served with a smooth purée of smoked aubergine and cheese) grace the menu.



Fresh catch from the Bosphorus on a fish stall in Karaköy

BAZAAR CULTURE

A visit to the market that spills out around Istanbul's Spice Bazaar (*see p88*) is an absolute must. A cornucopia of fine ingredients is brought here daily from farms that surround the city. Apricots, watermelons, cherries and figs sit alongside staple vegetables, such as peppers, onions, aubergines and tomatoes. Fine cuts of lamb and beef, cheeses, pickles, herbs, spices and honey-drenched pastries and puddings are also on offer.

KNOW YOUR FISH

The profusion of different species in the waters around Istanbul makes the city a paradise for fish lovers:

Barbunya Red mullet

Çupra Sea bream

Dilbalığı Sole

Hamsi Anchovy

Kalamar Squid

Kalkan Turbot

Kefal Grey mullet

Kiliç Swordfish

Levrek Sea bass

Lüfer Bluefish

Midye Mussels

Palamut Bonito tuna

Uskumru Mackerel



Imam bayildi Aubergines, stuffed with tomatoes, garlic and onions, are baked in the oven until meltingly soft.



Levrek pilakisi This stew is made by simmering sea bass fillets with potatoes, carrots, tomatoes, onions and garlic.



Kadayif Rounds of shredded filo pastry are stuffed with nuts and doused with honey to make a sumptuous dessert.

Mezes

As in many southern European countries, a Turkish meal begins with a selection of appetizing starters known as *mezes*, which are placed in the middle of the table for sharing. In a basic *meyhane* restaurant, you may be offered olives, cheese and slices of melon, but in a grander establishment the choice will be enormous. Mainly consisting of cold vegetables and salads of various kinds, *mezes* can also include a number of hot dishes, such as *börek* (cheese pastries), fried mussels and squid. *Mezes* are eaten with bread and traditionally washed down with *rakı* (a clear, anise-flavoured spirit).



Humus with *pide* bread



Zeytinyağlı
(artichokes)

Çoban salatası (tomato, red onion and cucumber salad)

Ayşe fasulye
(green beans with tomato sauce)

Melon with beyaz peynir
(melon with a creamy, feta-like cheese)

Yalancı yaprak dolması
(stuffed vine leaves)

Tarama (a dip made with cod's roe, garlic and olive oil)

TURKISH BREADS

Bread is the cornerstone of every meal in Turkey and comes in a wide range of shapes and styles. Besides *ekmek* (crusty white loaves) the other most common types of Turkish bread are *yufka* and *pide*. *Yufka*, the typical bread of nomadic communities, is made from thinly rolled sheets of dough which are cooked on a griddle, and dried to help preserve them. They can then be heated up and served to accompany any main meal as required. *Pide* is the type of flat bread that is usually served with *mezes* and kebabs in restaurants. It consists of a flattened circle or oval of dough, sometimes brushed with beaten egg and sprinkled with sesame seeds or black cumin, that is baked in an oven. It is a staple during many religious festivals. In the month of Ramadan, no meal is considered complete without *pide*. Another popular bread is *simit*, a crisp, ring-shaped savoury loaf that comes covered in sesame seeds.



A delivery of freshly baked *simit* loaves