

# RESTAURANTS, CAFÉS AND BARS

Istanbul's restaurants range from the informal *lokanta* and kebab house, which are found on almost every street corner, to the gourmet restaurants (*restoran*) of large hotels. There are a variety of international restaurants in the city offering fare from France to Japan at middle to high prices. Pages 194–7 illustrate the most typical Turkish dishes and the phrase book on pages 279–80 will help you tackle the menu. On page 197 you will find a guide to



Simit seller

drinks available. The restaurants listed on pages 198–207 have been chosen from the best that Istanbul has to offer across all price ranges, from casual eateries to award-winning restaurants. They have been recommended for their quality of food, service and value for money. A detailed description is provided with examples of signature dishes. Light meals and snacks sold by street vendors and served in cafés and bars are described on pages 208–9.

## WHERE TO LOOK

Istanbul's smartest and most expensive restaurants are concentrated in the European parts of the city: along the Bosphorus in Ortaköy; in and around Taksim; in the chic shopping districts of Nişantaşı, Maçka, Bebek and Teşvikiye; and in the modern residential suburbs of Levent and Etiler, west of the Bosphorus. The best gourmet restaurants for both Western and Turkish food are usually in five-star hotels.

Beyoğlu district has the liveliest restaurants, cafés and fast-food eateries, particularly around İstiklal Caddesi (see pp102–3), which cater for a young crowd.

Sultanahmet, and the neighbouring districts of Sirkeci, Eminönü and Beyazıt, are full of cheap restaurants serving the local population. There are also some stylish restaurants with modern decor in

these areas. Further afield, in areas such as Fatih, Fener, Balat and Eyüp, there are plenty of cheap restaurants, cafés and bakeries.

## TYPES OF RESTAURANT

The most common type of restaurant is the traditional *lokanta*. This is an ordinary restaurant offering a variety of dishes, often listed by the entrance. Home-made dishes comprise hot meat and vegetable dishes displayed in steel containers. Other options on the menu may be *sulu yemek* (a stew) and *et* (meat – meaning grilled meat and kebabs).

Equally ubiquitous is the Turkish kebab house (*kebabçı* or *ocakbaşı*). As well as grilled meats, almost every kebab house serves *lahmacun*, a very thin dough base with minced meat, onions and tomato sauce on top (see p194).



Pierre Loti café in Eyüp (see p120)

Cheaper restaurants and kebab houses also serve *pide*, a flattened bread base, served with various toppings such as eggs, cheese or lamb. There are also a few specialist *pide* restaurants.

If you have had too much to drink you may welcome a tripe soup (*ışkembe*), a Turkish cure for a hangover, before going to bed. *İşkembe* restaurants stay open until the early hours of the morning.

The atmosphere is always informal and lively in Istanbul's innumerable fish restaurants (*balık lokantası*). The best of these are located on the shores of the Bosphorus (see pp205–7) and in Kumkapı, on the Sea of Marmara, which is like one large open-air restaurant in summer. A typical fish restaurant will offer a large variety of mezes (see p196) before you order your main course from the day's catch. Skipjack tuna (*palamut*), fresh sardines (*sardalya*) and sea bass (*levrek*) are the most



Poseidon, a luxury restaurant overlooking the Bosphorus (see p206)



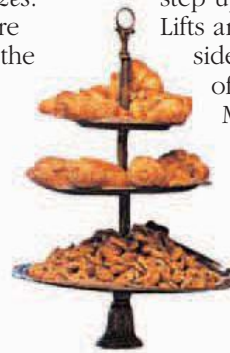
Diners eating at the Konyalı Restaurant in Topkapı Palace (see p198)

popular fish. Also popular are Black Sea *bamsi* (a kind of anchovy), *istavrit* (bluefin) and *mezgit* (whiting). However, as fish are becoming scarcer and more expensive, farmed fish has become more widely accepted, particularly *alabalik* (trout) and a type of bream known as *çipura*. Fish is served fried or grilled and often accompanied by a large plate of salad and a bottle of rakı (see p197). The majority of fish restaurants in these busy and popular areas will not accept reservations. However, if you cannot find a table at one restaurant, you will probably find one at another nearby.

International culinary experiences are encouraging local chefs to be more adventurous and innovative; the best are crafting superb, original food in a beautiful ambience. Wealthier Turks frequent the foreign restaurants found in a number of Istanbul

neighbourhoods, while global icons such as Starbucks and Gloria Jean's are increasingly part of everyday life.

A *meyhane* is more like a tavern, serving alcohol and a large choice of *mezes*. They are usually more casual than some of the traditional restaurants and often attract a younger crowd. The accent is mostly on drinking and there is almost always *fasıl* music and musicians who play atmospheric tunes on a zither or drum.



A selection of pastries

## OPENING HOURS

Turks eat lunch between 12:30 and 2pm and have dinner around 8pm. Ordinary restaurants and kebab houses are open from about 11am to 11pm, while fish restaurants serve all day but stay open later. International restaurants have strict opening hours, usually from noon to 3:30pm and 7:30pm to midnight. *Meyhanes* will be open from 7pm until well after midnight. Most restaurants are open daily, but some are closed on either Sunday or Monday. During Ramadan (see p47), when Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset, many restaurants are closed. Some only shut during daylight hours and then serve special Ramadan meals, while others, especially in religious

areas such as Fatih and Eyüp, will close altogether for the whole month. In sightseeing areas, however, you will always find somewhere open.

## WHAT TO EXPECT

Since July 2009 smoking has been banned in all indoor establishments, although illegal lighting up is not unheard of.

When choosing a place to eat, bear in mind that some cheaper restaurants and kebab houses do not serve alcoholic drinks. When alcohol is served, it can be expensive.

Accessibility for wheelchairs is somewhat hit or miss.

Restaurants are often multi-level with family rooms on the upper floors, and ground-floor restaurants often have a step up to the entrance.

Lifts are not common outside of large hotels and office buildings.

Many restaurants offer options for vegetarians.

In local Turkish restaurants in conservative parts of the city and outside Istanbul, women should look for the *aile salonu* sign. This denotes

an area set aside for women and children, and single women will be unwelcome in the main restaurant.

Turks are proud of their hospitality and service. Good service is always found in the upmarket restaurants, but you may find that the same standards do not always apply to the cheaper places.

## SERVICE AND PAYING

The major credit cards are widely accepted, except in the cheaper restaurants, kebab houses, local *bufês* (snack kiosks) and some *lokantas*. Restaurants usually display the credit card sign or symbol at the entrance if they accept this form of payment. Value-added tax (KDV in Turkish) is always included. Some places add 10 per cent for service while others leave it to the discretion of the customer.



Delicious fried and grilled mackerel sold on Eminönü quayside (see p208)