

EATING

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EATING

İstanbul love to eat. For them, food is much more than mere fuel. Instead, it's a celebration of community. Here, meals unfurl with great ceremony – they are joyful, boisterous and almost inevitably communal.

The national cuisine has been refined over centuries and is treated more reverently than any museum collection in the country. That's not to say it's fussy, because what differentiates Turkish food from other national noshes is its rustic and honest base. Here meze are simple, kebabs uncomplicated, salads unstructured and seafood unsauced. Flavours explode in your mouth because ingredients are used when they are in season – being a locavore is something taken for granted by Turks.

The dishes served in restaurants throughout İstanbul are the same as those in eateries around the country in all but one important respect – they're better. This is where the country's best chefs come to perfect their art and where the greatest number of cuisines are showcased. In Beyoğlu, you're as likely to encounter an innovative take on an Italian pasta dish as you are a classic meze selection or a fabulously fresh grilled fish. Feel like sushi or a Thai red curry? You'll get it here. Have a yen to challenge your tastebuds with an edgy fusion dish conceived and prepared by a European- or Australasian-trained master of the kitchen? No problem – the city has plenty of options.

The city's best eateries are in Beyoğlu. This is where you should come to sample a progression of hot and cold meze dishes in a *meyhane* (tavern), watch your meat being grilled over charcoal in an *ocakbaşı* (barbecue restaurant) or take your pick from a scrumptious array of Anatolian dishes on display in a *lokanta* (restaurant serving ready-made food). It's also where you should come to eat at top Western-style restaurants.

Away from Beyoğlu, you should seek out the national dish – kebabs – in Eminönü or further afield, or investigate a *balık restoran* (fish restaurant) along the Bosphorus. For recommendations of places to eat on the Bosphorus and Golden Horn (Haliç), see the Ferry Trips chapter.

As the Turks say, *afiyet olsun!* (bon appétit!).

LOCAL CUISINE

The day starts with *sabahları* (morning food) or *kahvaltı* (breakfast), usually eaten between 6am and 8am; one of the most popular breakfast snacks is *börek* (sweet or savoury pastry), which comes in versions stuffed with cheese, meat, potato or spinach. *Öğle yemeği* (lunch) kicks off around noon and is usually consumed quickly, often in a *lokanta*, *kebabçı* (kebab joint) or *pideci* (Turkish pizza parlour). *Akşam yemeği* (dinner) is eaten any time after 6pm and is where the *meyhane*, *ocakbaşı* and *restoran* (restaurant) come into their own; in İstanbul many of these places

serve until midnight and meals can be drawn out over a long period.

Bread

Bread (*ekmek*) is an essential part of any Turkish meal. The day will start with a sesame-encrusted *simit* (bread ring) or crusty white loaf to accompany cheese and olives. Lunch may be a *pide* or *lahmacun* – both are Turkish versions of the pizza: *lahmacun* has a thin, crispy base; *pide* has a standard pizza base. Dinner is always served with baskets of bread to mop up meze and wrap around morsels of meat. Light and airy *lavaş* (thin crispy bread) is often served with the house speciality at kebab restaurants.

Meze

Meze isn't just a type of dish, it's an eating experience. In a household, your host may put out a few lovingly prepared dishes to nibble on before the main meal. If you choose to spend a few hours in a Beyoğlu *meyhane*, beckoning the waiter over so that you can choose 'just a

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 TL50
€€	TL16 to TL50
€	TL15 or under