



# ISTANBUL FOOD PARADISE

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This was our third visit to Istanbul and this time it had a different focus, the food and wine and in particular trying some of the highly rated " Modern Turkish" restaurants that I had been reading about.

That is not to say we hadn't always enjoyed the food and wine on previous visits, we had, but it was kind of secondary to seeing the major sites. Advance booking for three of our restaurants still left plenty of time to visit other less upmarket places for lunch and dinner in our six days and some homework on grape types and labels to look for meant we were armed for a great culinary experience.



Ciya in Kadikoy – Istanbul



Grand Bazaar – Istanbul



Kadikoy Food Market – Istanbul



Lokanta Maya Restaurant – Istanbul



Lokanta Maya – Istanbul



Meze at Lemon Tree – Istanbul



Lokanta Maya Restaurant – Istanbul



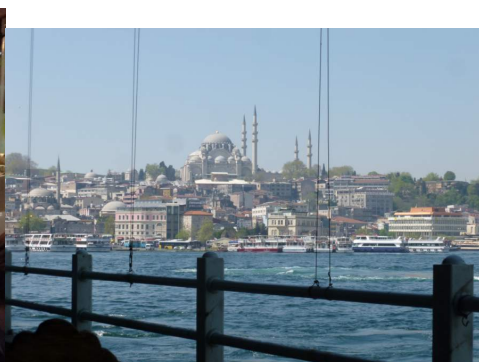
Lokanta Maya – Istanbul



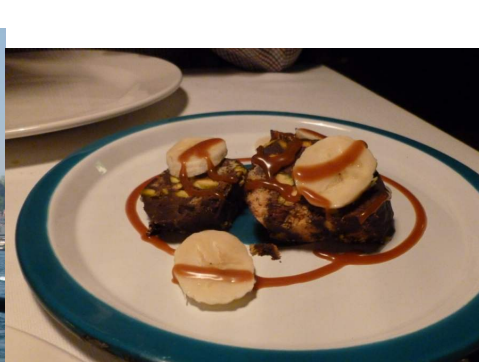
Meze at Lemon Tree – Istanbul



Pick your Fish – Istanbul



View from Galata Bridge – Istanbul



Yeni Lokanta Dessert – Istanbul



Pick your Fish – Istanbul



View from Galata Bridge – Istanbul



Yeni Lokanta Dessert – Istanbul

First of the modern Turkish restaurants was Lokanta Maya, [www.lokantamaya.com](http://www.lokantamaya.com)

which is in the Tophane area, close to the Istanbul Modern and a really interesting area to explore, with old fashioned nargile cafes, galleries and some other interesting cafes and restaurants. The restaurant itself is very modern with stylish décor, we started with two offal dishes, liver with an onion relish and tongue with anchovy aioli, both good. The stars however were the two mains, caramelised sea bass with chard and orange, and sea bream in papillote with artichoke and fennel. We debated which was the best and in the end decided it was a draw, with a bottle of Turkish sauvignon blanc a definite hit. In the main the service was top notch with a couple of minor slips but overcome with a complimentary offering of zucchini fritters. The price at home would bring you an average to good meal, this was excellent especially considering that the wine is so much more expensive than the food.

Our second advance booking was for Meze at Lemon Tree, [www.mezze.com.tr](http://www.mezze.com.tr) in the Pera district of Beyoğlu, buzzing on a Saturday evening. The restaurant is small and simply decorated and furnished more in the style of a meyahne, a traditional bar and restaurant. We chose a couple of starters from the range of cold meze on display on the counter and they were all so very different from the normal choice, sweet green peppers stuffed with avocado and a pomegranate and gazpacho salad, this was followed by one hot starter fried calamari with a walnut tarator sauce, a traditional Balkan accompaniment to fish. This evening we were in a meat eating mood and chose marinated beef slices on a skewer with greens and grilled vegetables, and pan roasted beef with shredded potatoes and a tomato and yoghurt sauce. To do these justice there was bottle of excellent Turkish shiraz. Although we probably shouldn't have we shared a hazelnut pudding topped with tahini and mulberry molasses, no regrets. Attentive service and a very reasonable bill left us happy to wander the lively streets.

Our last modern Turkish was a late booking after reading some articles, Yeni Lokanta [www.lokantayeni.com](http://www.lokantayeni.com) just off Iskital Caddesi, is a beautifully designed modern bar and restaurant presided over by the owner chef Civan Er who watches every plate and bit of service and engages with the customers. The starters were grouped in threes, we chose the warm option, courgette fritters, meatballs, that does not do them justice – they were just the best, and finally dumplings filled with aubergine, cheese, and red pepper, they were out of this world. We also had a small dish of Turkish sausage with a puree of berlotti beans which was followed by roast ribs in a spiced sauce on bread,

an amazing flavour experience. How we managed to share a chocolate cake with banana and salted caramel I do not know but perhaps it was just to finish off the excellent bottle of Turkish

merlot. Incredible service, wonderful food, slightly more expensive than the other two but this edges it to being our best eating experience in Istanbul.

Simpler eating shouldn't be forgotten and for good reason Asmali Cavit, Asmalmescit Caddesi 16, just off Iskital Caddesi, is reputed to be the best meyhane in Istanbul. You have to book either by phone or pop on as we did and got the last table on a Tuesday evening. Lucky enough to be served by the owner, we chose from the cold meze selection, a smaller choice and much better quality than the average meyhane. The stuffed vine leaves, best ever, shrimps and purslane and yoghurt were all simple but so fresh and wonderful tasting. Mains of lamb chops and lamb shish were excellent cooked to perfection and served with salad and potatoes, great with a bottle of the excellent house red. The bill was a delight for the quality of food and the service.

There were some excellent other eating places which deserve a mention, Kasabim, Simsirci Sokak, Cihangir, is a local restaurant owned by people who also own two nearby butchers shops. They specialise in steaks and burgers but also do other dishes, the meatballs and the chicken salad were both good and incredibly reasonably priced, nice guys who served us, probably unlicensed.

Dehliz, Vezirhan Caddesi, is just outside the grand bazaar and a great place to refuel after bargaining for all your purchases, it is an excellent example of a lokanta, a tradesman's restaurant. Choose your dishes from the range on display such as stuffed potatoes, filled peppers and numerous vegetable dishes, not licensed. The staff are really helpful and it is incredibly cheap. In Beyogu try Armada at 231 Iskital Caddesi a slightly wider range of dishes is on offer.

Ficcin, Kallavi Soka, off Iskital Caddesi, have three or four places in the same street, and produce dishes from the Caucasus region and was recently mentioned in an article as one of the top ten lokantas in the city. Sit outside and try the traditional dishes including minced meat in pastry, sip a beer and watch the world go by, two mains and two beers just over £10.

Lastly whatever you do you must take the ferry over to Kadikoy on the Asian shore, is it home to the very well known restaurant Ciya, [www.ciya.com.tr](http://www.ciya.com.tr), that should really be three restaurants as they have 3 locations in Guneslibahce Sokak. All three are unlicensed, two are more menu based, the third you choose from the dishes on display. We were fortunate to have first visited six years ago with locals, when there was no English menu because there were so few visitors. This has

changed and while reports say it is not as good as before our lamb kebabs, two different types, were as good as I remember, the service can be abrupt, the prices have gone up but are still incredibly reasonable. The same street has some wonderful food stalls, fish, vegetables, olives, all such fresh produce it is a delight to wander and soak up the atmosphere. Check out [www.cityhaunts.co.uk](http://www.cityhaunts.co.uk) Istanbul page for more information on other places to eat and the excellent bar scene in the area.

Enjoy the food and wine delights of Istanbul.

