

As a food writer, when I travel to a new city, of course where to eat figures very high on my agenda. Especially the unique places, the local favorites, the spots with history. Istanbul—a city with more food-obsessed people than I have encountered in a while—is packed full of these places. And it's also home to some of the most amazing ruins, landmarks, buildings, and such deep history. I knew I wanted to learn as much as I could about lokum (Turkish delight) as the Hagia Sofia, and was thrilled to find a guide that would be able to help me navigate both: Erkut Aldeniz!

It was great to walk around the city with Erkut, who was able to take me to a respected profiterole shop, make sure we would get into the Topkapi Palace at the right time, and where to have a dinner with some of the best mezes in town, all with ease. My days with him in Istanbul were so well strategized, and I know I got so much more out of the city due to his excellent logistics and knowledge of how the city works. He taught me a lot about Turkish cuisine, and helped me understand the ingredients, traditions, and how to pour a glass of raki properly. He has excellent taste in food, and tailored our excursions based on my palate and interests.

Erkut was also able to provide access to some remarkable experiences, from meeting chefs to arranging a private tour of a baklava-making business—the best in town! Due to Erkut's deep contacts, he also made recommendations and helped me with contacts in other cities on my trip, which really enhanced my vacation. I also appreciate that he is a modern Turkish man, so as a solo female traveler and an American, I didn't feel an ideology gap—we were able to talk about many cultural things with ease—and he provided a great deal of insight as well.

I am so grateful for being introduced to Erkut, and my trip to Turkey was very memorable due to his guidance, time, and expertise—and shared love of food!

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