

A DELICIOUS TALE OF TWO CONTINENTS

Bite into the good life with ERKUT ALDENIZ as he takes you on a scrumptious taste trail — in the ace destination of Turkey.



TOP
Dinner at a restaurant
by the Bosphorus

Where to holiday is one of the toughest choices to make: does one opt for a sea escapade, an epicurean treat or a destination brimming with historical heritage? Rarely can you choose one that covers all bases but Turkey is in that league of rare gems.

Here in Europe's Capital of Culture you get to bask in the rich and stupendous architecture and history of the Byzantine era and the Ottoman empire in the Old Quarter of Istanbul. And when one is ready for a well-earned lunch — there is the option of travelling from the continent of Europe to Asia — in 20 minutes flat.

Only İstanbul can offer you such a unique inter-continental crossing. We head to the other side of this magnificent city that nestles in the continent of Asia via ferry — across the sparkling blue waters of the Bosphorus — destination, Kadikoy, where Greek philosophers and statesman presided in previous centuries.

We head to chef Musa Dagdeviren's Ciya Sofrasi, established in 1998. This restaurant is a revolt against processed, fast food. It's a standout, one-of-a-kind establishment that showcases a fusion of Mesopotamian and Anatolian culinary cuisine that yokes together Arab, Assyrian, Ottoman, Jewish and other culinary cultures that thrived in Turkey over the centuries.

And the best way to enjoy this cosmopolitan fusion is to order the 'sampler menu' — a scoop of each dish that Musa cooked to perfection that day. Our choice proffers a parade of culinary treats that includes sour okra stew, saffron potatoes, meatballs with Morella cherries, stuffed grape vines and stuffed sun dried eggplant. The grand finale is candied walnuts, pumpkins and eggplant, served with creme fraiche.

It's not just a visual treat but a finger-licking feast as every single dish here is the result of careful research by the chef who masterfully



combines the ingredients in an attempt to elicit the best combination of flavours imaginable.

To work off the meal, we take a leisurely stroll back to the harbour — detouring just a tad to stop at a historical treasure of an edible sort — Ali Muhittin Haci Bekir's shop. For a perfect pop of candy this place is it. It has been manufacturing Turkish Delights for the past 234 years. The profusion of flavours and colours available could make you dizzy when trying to pare down your order to just a few choices.

We ferry back to the section of Istanbul located in Europe and spend the afternoon lazily lounging at Istiklal Caddesi, or the La Grande Rue Pera. One of the most famous avenues in Istanbul, it houses exquisite boutiques, music stores, bookstores, art galleries, cinemas, theatres, libraries, cafés, pubs, night clubs with live music, historical patisseries, chocolateries and restaurants. It's the hub of modern Istanbul and we languidly sip Turkey's signature beverage,



TOP
A dessert named kerebic made from pistachios with a foamy cream made from a herb that grows around Antiochus

RIGHT
Mixed platter of stuffed eggplants, stuffed peppers, humus, kisir, muammara and mountain thyme salad

BOTTOM LEFT
Turkish coffee

BOTTOM RIGHT
A profusion of Turkish Delights

Turkish coffee, while watching the Turks promenade here into the wee hours of the night.

The next morning we fly to Cappadocia (in eastern Anatolia). On arriving at Kayseri, we explore off the beaten paths to meet the natives and experience Cappadocian cuisine first-hand. For a taste of unadulterated agrarian cuisine we stop by Aravan Evi, an old acquaintance's





TOP
A mother's stand-in
kitchen, Aravan Evi in
Cappadocia

ABOVE
Organic dessert of
grape flour stewed in
grape molasses

BOTTOM RIGHT
Finger-licking sirloin
cooked in the tandoor

restaurant. And we're in luck — Okan and his family are preparing for a wedding — so we get to sample a full-on celebratory feast up close and personal with the villagers.

They have been preparing for the do since six a.m. There's the familiar smell of finger-licking sirloin being slowly roasted in a hand-made tandoori brick oven built by Okan's father. Okan meanwhile heads to the family orchard, a short walk away from their house, on the outskirts of their village, to pick some fresh tomatoes, parsley, dill and other fresh herbs to prepare what is to be an exceptional salad.

Anatolia has been the home of farming communities ever since the dawn of time, thus the people who live here have an obsession for the best and freshest ingredients and the healthiest methods of cooking such as the brick oven. The cumulative result is an indelible cuisine at Aravan Evi. It's no run-of-the-mill commercial establishment concerned about bottom line profits, but a stand-in for a 'mother's kitchen' brimming with sumptuous treats.

When all is ready the table is laden with tantalising dishes: stuffed grape leaves, purslane dressed in yogurt, and the best lettuce salad ever, with Okan personally dishing out a traditional cheese pie. There's also baked haricot beans,

stewed bulgur wheat and the oven-cooked sirloin, all part and parcel of a sumptuous, traditional Cappadocian meal.

And to cap it off, we are served possibly the most exquisite, local dessert: organic wheat flour stewed in grape molasses with a side of sun dried apricots from their orchard that's also stewed in grape molasses. It's a dessert to die for.

Every single mouth-watering dish served here is an authentic farm to fork product — freshly cooked in Aravan Evi's traditional kitchen — using the ingredients that Cappadocia's generous land bestows upon Okan's family.

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