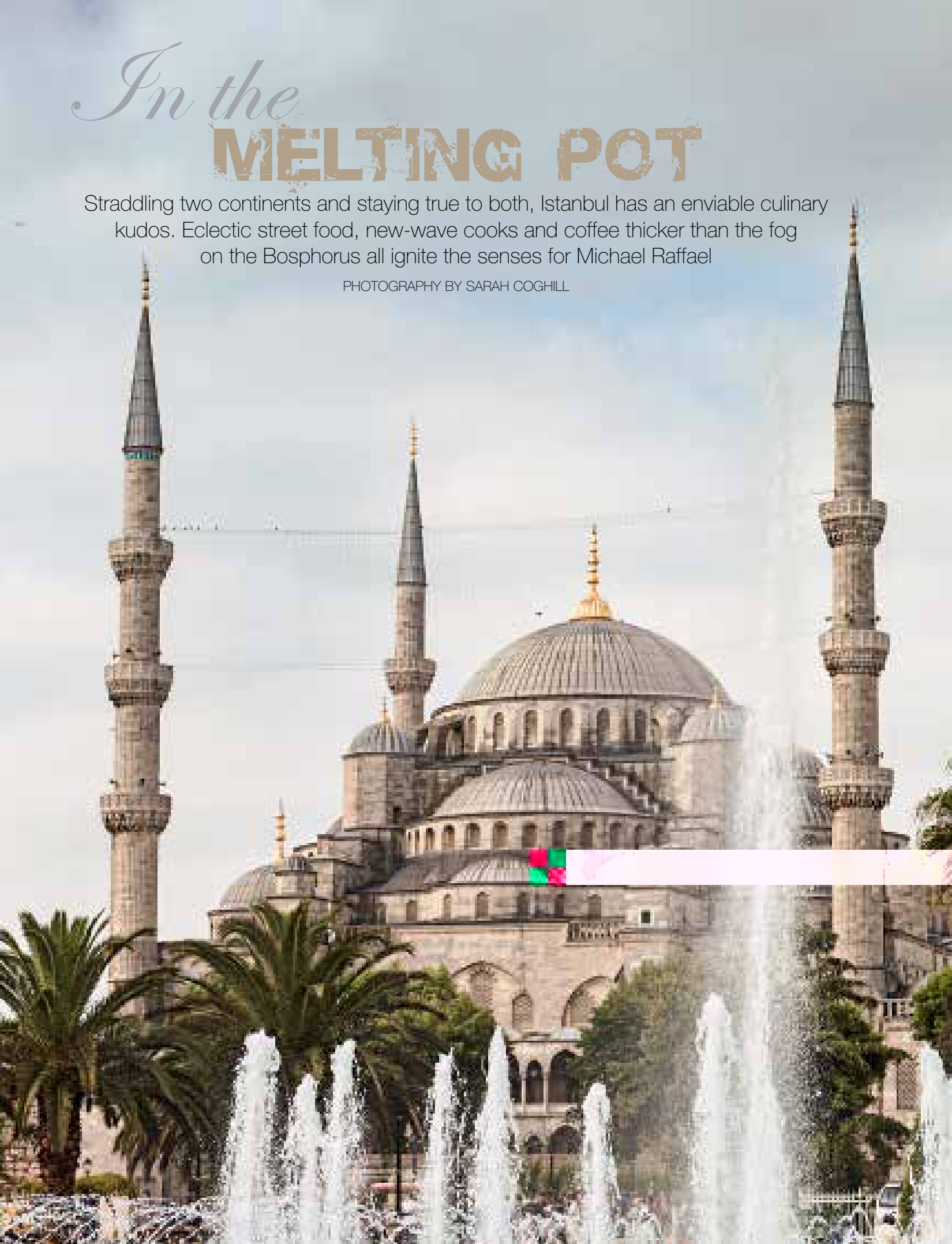


# *In the* **MELTING POT**

Straddling two continents and staying true to both, Istanbul has an enviable culinary kudos. Eclectic street food, new-wave cooks and coffee thicker than the fog on the Bosphorus all ignite the senses for Michael Raffael

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SARAH COGHILL







Previous page:  
the Sultan Ahmed  
Mosque; its interior.  
Below: view from  
the ferry. Opposite,  
clockwise from top:  
the terrace at Mikla; its  
red mullet with bulgur  
and fennel; the dining  
room; the view; tea  
is a national pastime;  
eating at Yeni Lokanta;  
its owner, Civan Er



GOURMET TRAVELLER  
ISTANBUL

## Travel information

The currency of Turkey is the lira. Time is two hours ahead of the UK, and flights from the UK take about four hours. The climate in April is generally mild, with average highs of 15°C and average lows of 8°C.

### GETTING THERE

**Turkish Airlines** offers daily flights from London Heathrow and London Gatwick to Istanbul Ataturk. [turkishairlines.com](http://turkishairlines.com)  
**Pegasus Airlines** flies from London Gatwick and London Stansted to Istanbul Sabiha Gokcen. [flypgs.com](http://flypgs.com)

### RESOURCES

**gototurkey.co.uk** is the official website of the Turkish Culture and Tourism Office in the UK. Plan your trip and explore all that Turkey has to offer, with practical advice, sightseeing ideas and much more.

### FURTHER READING

**Istanbul: memories of a city** by Orhan Pamuk (Faber & Faber, £8.24). The Nobel Prize winner – Istanbul's most famous literary son – brings to life the colourful characters, famous monuments and hidden back streets of this ancient metropolis with aplomb.

**Istanbul** by Rebecca Seal (Hardie Grant, £19.99). Spicy eggs for breakfast, citrusy ceviches for lunch, and pistachio-packed pastries for pudding all appear in this ode to eating. Mouthwatering recipes and photos transport the city to your plate.

### CARBON COUNTING

To offset your emissions, visit [climatecare.org](http://climatecare.org) – return flights from London Heathrow to Istanbul Ataturk airport produce 0.55 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>. The cost for this trip is £4.14, and donations go towards supporting environmental projects around the world.

It's Ramazan in Istanbul. As the sun sets, a string of light bulbs draped between the minarets of the New Mosque next to Galata Bridge shines the message '*Oruc tut sihhat bul*', meaning 'Fast to be healthy'. In fact, there's little sign that the rank and file has given up food and drink. The stuffed-mussel sellers in the bus station opposite are doing good business. So are the roasted-chestnut hawkers. Carts selling *simit*, sesame-coated quoits of bread, have been out all day. Only the restaurants are quieter than normal. Turkey is still, at heart, a secular country.

Straddling the Bosphorus, the city has one plump thigh in Europe and another in Asia Minor. It zigzags effortlessly between cultures, too. When it was a village, Cengelkoy was famous for its slim cucumbers. It's an inner suburb now. You can sip tea and nibble on savoury *borek* (stuffed pastries) under an ancient plane tree at restaurant Tarihi Cinaralti Aile Cay Bahcesi. Across the bay in European Nisantasi, where Prada's boutique vies with Gucci's, a vodka, lime and ginger syrup cocktail at Nopa seems a world away.

Piece by piece, Istanbul is redefining itself. Balat was a Jewish ghetto, then a rundown slum, and has now started to gentrify. Karakoy went from being a banking quarter to a neighbourhood of hardware stores. Now it's the go-to spot for café culture. Not all change has popular support. Plans to turn Gezi Park off Taksim Square into a shopping mall sparked protests and sit-ins that ended in a violent police clampdown. Commuting to Kadikoy can take an hour or more by car. By ferry, it's still only half an hour.

Istiklal Caddesi, Independence Avenue, funnels into Taksim. Pedestrianised, bar the tram, it's an Oxford Street-style gullet where doner kebab jousts with Burger King. Kizilkayalar, the wet hamburger stall at its apex, is an institution. Trust the man on the till who claims it sells 12,000 a day. The bread has the texture of wet flannel. The meat is seasoned with garlic, cumin and pepper. The trick is to buy them in pairs, as pick-me-ups after a few glasses of





## Where to eat

*Prices are for three courses, excluding wine, unless otherwise stated.*

**Ciya** Sample food both from the kebab shop on one side of the street and the restaurant on the other. No English is spoken, so if your Turkish isn't up to scratch you could point or look at the website, which has useful images that help when it comes to ordering. £15. *Guneslibahce Sokak 43/44/48b, 00 90 216 418 5115, ciya.com.tr*

**Duble Meze** Work your way through a list of about 40 meze, all original takes on classics. If you have room for dessert, try the chocolate soufflé with a scrumptious blob of tahini in the middle. Meze start from about £3.50 each; a 70cl bottle of raki costs £28. *Mesrutiyet Caddesi 85, 00 90 212 244 0188, dublemezebar.com*

**Lokanta Maya** One wall is lined completely with walnuts at this stylish but not overly expensive address. Reassuringly, it always seems to be packed with young, discerning foodies. £45. *Kemankes Caddesi 35a, 00 90 212 252 6884, lokantamaya.com*

**Mikla** Be sure to discuss the list of Turkish and international wines with manager Sabiha Apaydin when ordering. The cooking is great at this flagship of New Anatolian and the panorama a bit special, too. £60. *Mesrutiyet Caddesi 15, 00 90 212 293 5656, miklarestaurant.com*

**Nopa** This fashionable Nisantasi cocktail bar and restaurant is the latest incarnation of the House Cafés, a successful city chain of modern hangouts. £40. *Harbiye Mahallesi, Atiye Sokak, 00 90 212 327 5868, noparestaurant.com*

**Yeni Lokanta** This place has super-tasty food, it's chic and, by European standards, cheap. During the day, you can walk in off the street, but book ahead in the evenings. The beautiful ingredients used here are enhanced by simple presentation. £25 at lunch; £35 at night. *Kumbaraci Yokusu 66, 00 90 212 292 2550, lokantayeni.com*

**Ziya Sark Sofrasi** A stop-by bistro near Topkapi, where lahmacun and pide are baked to order in a wood-fired oven. £10 for lahmacun and drinks. *Fevzipasa Caddesi, 00 90 212 531 3003, ziyasark.com.tr*

Top to bottom:  
Lokanta Maya  
draws young  
gourmands; Mikla  
dessert of *kaymak*  
ice cream with  
sour cherry

**'Capa has turned meze on its head: smoked green pepper, condensed yoghurt, spices and virgin olive oil; goat's cheese and pastrami pastry; charcoal-smoked aubergine with tahini, dates and honey'**

cloudy, aniseed raki. In side streets off the main drag, *meyhanes* (taverns) and other eating places feed the collective appetite for meze. A squeeze of lemon juice, a sprinkling of chilli flakes and raw onion turn the most humble *kofte* (meatballs) into soul food.

According to Emre Capa, this isn't good enough for his generation of young Turks. On a rooftop close to the medieval Galata Tower, he opened Duble Meze. Keen to respect tradition (his father is a restaurateur), he has stripped down and revitalised recipes that had become stagnant. It's not, he says, in a spirit of iconoclasm.

'I would never say that I've explored more about food than my mother and father, because they taught me it is ABC; it's that knowledge that lets you take things further,' he adds.

Capa has turned the concept of the meze on its head. 'They were always the backing group. I've turned them into the lead singer.' Each plate is fresh and punchy: smoked green pepper, condensed yoghurt, spices and virgin olive oil; *paçanga* (goat's cheese and pastrami pastry); charcoal-smoked aubergine with tahini, dates and honey. 'Ciger (liver) and *kokorec* (spiced tripe) were generally regarded as street food. You didn't see them in a smart place, but we adapted the recipes. I wouldn't say ours is better but Turks who would turn their noses up at them are eating them like crazy.'

That's understandable. Two ribbons of chargrilled calf's liver come with halloumi crisps, croutons and red onions. Served like bruschetta on toasted sourdough, the spiced lamb's chitterlings are fine-diced with peppers, tomato and oregano.

Capa's conviction neatly fits the tenets of the 'New Anatolian Kitchen' movement. Started by chef Mehmet Gurs, it comes complete with a manifesto that kicks off with: 'Dare to look at the traditional habits, products and techniques with a new and fresh perspective.' Mikla, Gurs' restaurant capping The Marmara Pera hotel, makes a telling ambassador.

The view from here across the curling estuary of the Golden Horn is stunning. Mikla's glitzy, clever cooking handles all the tricks of a modern chef's craft. Everything eats as well as it looks. *Ekmek balık*, translated as 'bread-fish', is a twist on the no-nonsense fish sandwich: two fillets of Black Sea anchovy glistening between gauze-like Melba toast. Plum pesto and wild garlic accompany slow-cooked knuckle of Thracian lamb. Red mullet and fennel shavings swaddle smoky *fırık* (cracked wheat). Sour cherry compote stirred into bulgur, toasted almonds, mulberry tuile and sun-dried cherries come with an ice cream of honey and



Clockwise from top left: shopping in the Grand Bazaar; mint liqueur at Sumahan hotel; Lokanta Maya's *tulum* cheese pâté; shepherd's salad, Sumahan; Lokanta Maya; city vista; fresh plate at Mikla; pear creation from Vault; Noah's pudding; Cengelkoy bread seller







Left to right: an old-fashioned tram; doner kebab meat; bread and pastry cart. Below: *lahmacun*, Turkish pizza. Opposite, clockwise from top left: at the Spice Market; late-night snack stall; back streets; bird's nest baklava; the market in full swing

‘Cay, without milk, is the national drink. Hasn’t Unesco added it to its list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity along with Mongolian calligraphy?’

## Food glossary

**Baklava** Small sweet pastries made with as many as 50 layers of *yufka* pastry and dripping with syrup or honey.

**Balik ekmek** Fish sandwich.

**Borek** Savoury pastries filled with meat, cheese or vegetables.

**Cay** Tea.

**Ciger** (liver) and **kokorec** (lamb chitterlings) – street-food offal.

**Dondurma** Turkish ice cream.

**Gozleme** A flatbread baked on a round griddle.

**Kahve** Coffee.

**Kebap** or Kebab. Dozens of different versions, some on skewers but far from all.

**Kofte** Ground meat, usually lamb, always spiced.

**Lahmacun** Thin-crust, wood-fired dough that's topped with a fine layer of meat and vegetables. You squeeze lemon juice on it, add parsley, roll it up and crunch.

**Lavas** Puffed up like a balloon, it's pitta-like and coated in sesame.

**Lokum** Turkish delight.

**Manti** Similar to ravioli but made only with minced meat.

**Midye dolma** Stuffed mussels.

**Pide** Boat-shaped and pizza-like with assorted fillings.

**Simit** Freshly baked rings of bread sold on the street.



clotted cream. *Kaymak*, its Turkish name, made from buffalo or cow's milk, was once a common breakfast dish. Pandelli Shestakof, 92, was a legend of the dish, skimming it for 16 hours and selling it at his Besiktas shop. Recently, he was forced out, a victim of the area's gentrification. Those stories remain though.

Food writer and blogger at *istanbulfood.com* Tuba Satana flits between ancient and modern, almost mid-sentence. The Turkish epigram 'Eat sweet, talk sweet' was coined with an affable personality like hers in mind. She lives on the Asian side in Kadikoy, where her favourite traditional eating house is Ciya. It's in two halves on opposite sides of the street close to the market. One specialises in kebabs. 'Foreigners think we are always eating them,' she says, trying to dispell a common myth about the ubiquitous meat dishes, 'but we don't eat them in our homes. My husband and I go out to eat them maybe once a month in a restaurant.'

The other Ciya draws on a rich repertoire of regional food. Describing the pots of lamb simmered with apricots, the stuffed vine leaves, baked aubergine and artichokes stuffed with dill-scented rice, Satana admits that words can fail her. 'All those different ingredients and dishes. Sometimes I don't even know how to pronounce their names.' And what about the up-and-coming breed of new places? 'They add variety. Sometimes a restaurant has a backbone and sometimes not. You know what I mean.'

At the end of the meal, a waiter brings glasses of tea. *Cay*, without milk, is the national drink. Not Turkish coffee? Hasn't Unesco added it to its list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity along with shrimp fishing on horseback and Mongolian calligraphy?

Coffee is about leisured social interaction. It has its mysteries, its quirks and special coffee houses such as Mandabatmaz, whose name hints at what a good cuppa should be. It means: 'So thick a water buffalo wouldn't sink in it'. Thick foam slick shimmers on the surface. Black sludge forms in the bottom. Divination by coffee grounds is a ritual in itself. Once popular in the harem it's what career girls do when looking for Mr Right. You leave a little coffee with the grounds and invert the cup on the saucer. You let it set, then you read the future. A square means a happy marriage; a man, money; a flag, danger. Bubbles are a sign of the evil eye and have to be pricked. Baristas at the café-cum-micro-roastery Kronotrop don't rate Turkish *kahve*. It's brewed at too high a temperature, they say, and made from low-quality Brazilian beans. Kronotrop sources from Central America, mainly from Guatemala and







**‘For breakfast, my grandmother used to prepare tahini with grape molasses, and gave this to me to make me fat. Now we bake pumpkin in molasses and serve it with walnuts’**

El Salvador. Yep, it's for coffee snobs, but it's the best in town.

Finding the perfect ingredient is what drives the fast-moving restaurant scene. Civan Er studied international relations before turning himself into a chef. Before opening Yeni Lokanta, he spent a year scouring the country for suppliers. He's not trying to compete with traditions. 'We are not doing radical food. We want it to be easy for people to understand. When a lady in her seventies tells us she likes our food and comes back, we're touched.' He doesn't rely on sous-vide cuisine à la water-bath. 'I need to hear the butter sizzling,' he says. *Lokma* fritters (custard cubes coated in crumbled *kadaif* noodles) are both crisp and gooey. Samphire and green plum salad is exquisite without any overt attempts at design.

Er's friend at Lokanta Maya, Didem Senol, shares this passion for cooking that reflects the Anatolian spirit. Armed with a psychology degree and a year's cookery schooling, she talked her way into the kitchens of Eleven Madison Park in New York before returning to Turkey. Her eureka moment happened at her father's farm and olive grove. 'They had methods in the village like burying cheese in pots, and that's how I decided to stop working with products from abroad and use only homegrown ingredients,' she says. 'For breakfast, my grandmother used to prepare tahini with grape molasses, which we call day honey, and gave this to me to make me fat. Now we bake pumpkin in molasses and serve it with walnuts.'

Turkey has more than 800 grape varieties. 'New Anatolian' hones

in on indigenous wines. The Vault hotel in Karakoy pairs them with local cheeses in its former bank vault. Duble Meze serves a unique Hatay from the southernmost province. Mikla's list includes Nodus, a chardonnay blended with narince. Sarafin sauvignon at Lokanta Maya matches a giant Black Sea prawn. The downside is that a basket of laws makes it harder for wineries to promote their wines and restaurants to sell them. It isn't prohibition, but it has cut growth.

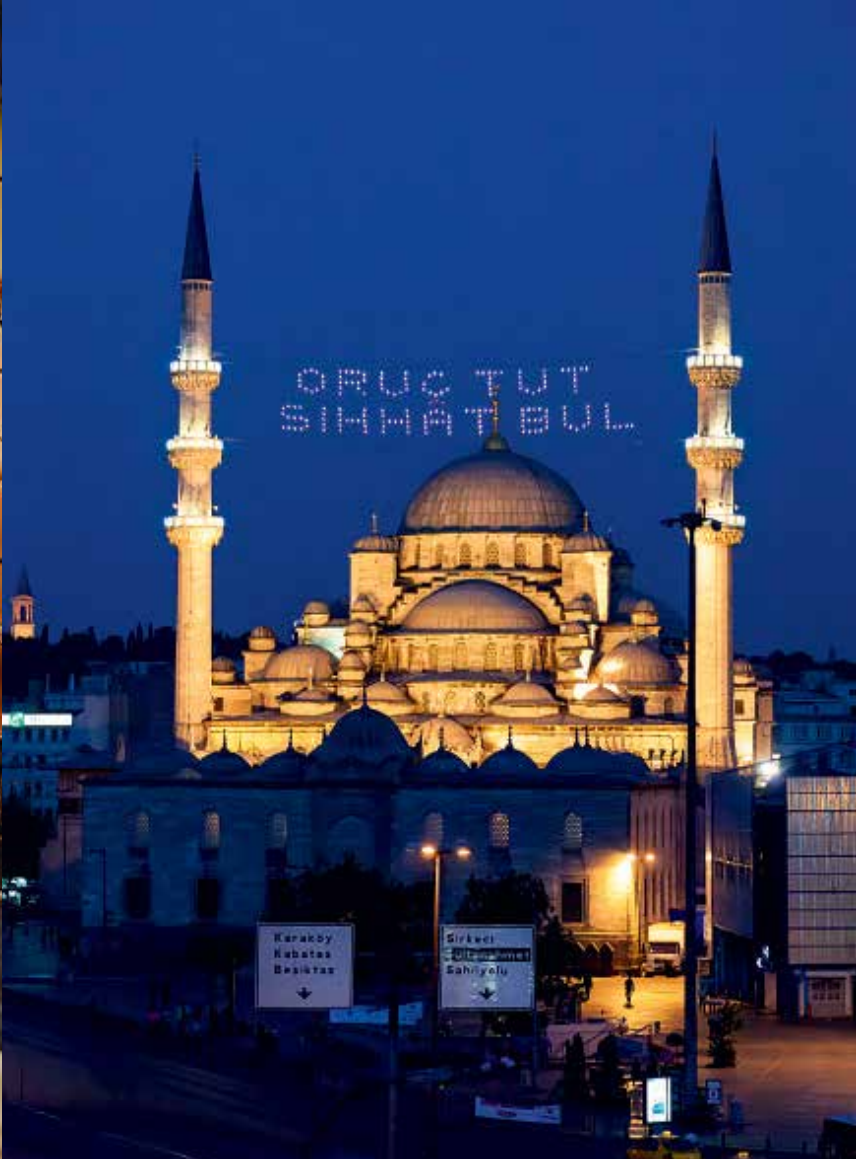
Senol says that a very small minority of overseas visitors hunt out her restaurant. On the Karakoy wharf, maybe 100m away, a cruise ship is parked for a stopover. Passengers will bus to the old city, gallop round the Topkapi Palace, visit Aya Sofya and shop in the Grand Bazaar. The more adventurous may head into the Spice Market and leave with *lokum*, aka Turkish delight. With luck they will have sampled *lahmacun* (better than any pizza or Breton crêpe), and a buttery, pistachio-filled baklava with pastry that makes filo seem coarse. They won't realise that the ice cream they bought contains *salep*, derived from an orchid root. Will they have a sense of how a city that has tripled in size in a generation is changing? Only those living here have an idea of its subtle mood shifts.

Ask Tuba Satana what she thinks about Istanbul today. Her response is succinct: 'It's my home.' □

Michael Raffael and Sarah Coghill travelled courtesy of the Turkish Culture and Tourism Office. [gototurkey.co.uk](http://gototurkey.co.uk)



Clockwise from top left: Duble Meze's panorama; stuffed artichoke at Ciya; sunset from Mikla; fava with black olive, Duble Meze. Opposite, clockwise from top left: making *gozleme* bread; Surplus restaurant's view; Circassian chicken pâté, Duble Meze; its dining room; pomegranate Turkish delight; beef liver with halloumi; tiles; beef sausage







## Where to stay

**Georges Hotel** A discreet boutique hotel on a Galata side street with a French restaurant, Le Fumoir. A few doors down, also dine at Aheste which serves one of the best breakfasts in town. Doubles from £105. *Sedar-I Ekrem Sokak 24, 00 90 212 244 2423, georges.com*

**Pera Palace** Famous for its Orient Express association and recently overhauled, this is the grande dame of Istanbul hotels. Doubles from £150. *Mesrutiyet Caddesi 52, 00 90 212 377 4000, jumeirah.com*

**Vault Karakoy, The House Hotel** A bank turned boutique hotel. The rooms have an old-fashioned but elegant feel and the service is obliging and friendly. The food is nice, especially the breakfasts. Doubles from £110. *Bankalar Caddesi 5, 00 90 212 244 6434, thehousehotel.com*

**Sub** This industrial-chic option is located close to Karakoy's restaurants, and has rooms that are cool without being scarily luxurious. Hardwood floors contrast with iron-framed beds inspired by ships. Doubles from £80. *Necatibey Caddesi 91, 00 90 212 243 0005, subkarakoy.com*

**Sumahan On The Water** On the Asian side, this boutique hotel offers free boat transport across the Bosphorus, and has its own hammam and masseur. There's a fine open-air restaurant too. Doubles from £140. *Kuleli Caddesi 43, 00 90 216 422 8000, sumahan.com*

**Yesil Ev** Close to Aya Sofya, this renowned boutique hotel has a lovely garden café and Ottoman-style rooms. Doubles from £80. *Kabasakal Caddesi 5, 00 90 212 517 6785, yesilev.com.tr*

## Don't miss

**Cafer Erol** A top-of-the-range confectioner selling marzipan and *lokum*. It has several branches in Istanbul. *sekericafererol.com*

**Inanc** Spices are everywhere in Istanbul, but this little stall outside the Spice Market is better than those found in it and has some great mixes for sprinkling on salads and grilled meats, containing rose petals, sumac and other exotics. *Tahmis Sokak 39/41*

**Kadikoy Fish Market** Not really a fish market at all but a street of great food shops. Look out for the pickles and the dried groceries – and the wild pistachio soap. *Guneslibahce Sokak*

**Karakoy Gulluoglu** Selling baklava, *kadaifi* and other pastries made with organic ewe's milk butter, as well as proper *yufka* pastry and the finest pistachios, this company has several outlets. However, its factory in Karakoy has the freshest produce. *Mumhane Caddesi 171, 00 90 212 249 9680, karakoygulluoglu.com*

**Kilic Ali Pasa** Istanbul's most beautiful hammam, or Turkish bath. The building was designed by the celebrated Ottoman architect Mimar Sinan in the 16th century, but the modern interior is pristine and the service excellent. *Kemankes Mahallesi, Hamam Sokak 1, 00 90 212 393 8010, kilicalipasahamami.com*

**Kronotrop** This coffee bar and roaster is well worth checking out for the best Turkish and non-Turkish coffee in town. *Kuloglu Mahallesi, Firuzaga Cami Sokak 2, kronotrop.com.tr*



Top: wine and cheese at the Vault hotel; the telephone; cocktails at Nopa. Middle: Vault Karakoy bedroom; lamb kebab, Ciya; Sub hotel. Bottom: taxis; *kofte* at Ziya Sark Sofrasi; pickles; an array of spices

