



Turkey

WHERE ON EARTH

Yummy ISTANBUL

by ELYSE GLICKMAN

THIS PHOTO Beyoğlu
streetcar.

WITH A CITY AS SPRAWLING AS ISTANBUL, following conventional wisdom — booking tours of “essential” sites like Hagia Sophia, Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul Grand Bazaar and The Spice Bazaar — isn’t always a good idea if you are new to the city. Whether one comes for a 24-hour stopover, a few days, or longer, focusing on a small area can make a big difference in how you will remember Istanbul and approach it when you come back.

Korhan and Leisa Karakoyun, founders of Yummy Istanbul, established in 2013, understand this as do their team of guides. Bahri, the guide leading its three-hour Taksim Square-to-Karaköy tour, is a firm believer that less is definitely more if one is in town for a short layover given the geographic nature of the city. In the same vein, selecting Yummy Istanbul’s six-hour, ten-stop daytime tour with curated stops on both the European and Asian side provides a superb foundation for a longer stay in town.

While four main stops doesn’t seem like much on paper, Bahri’s enthusiasm for hidden gems tucked into Istanbul’s busiest neighbourhoods and the proprietors’ generous portions — including full-sized sandwiches — makes for a most satisfying introduction to Istanbul’s sprawling food scene. Even with Taksim and Karaköy packed with international visitors day and night, his discourse provides useful information on how to weed out places beyond conventional wisdom experienced travellers follow (i.e. avoiding places with large sidewalk signs in English; aggressive customer flaggers outside the front door).

It’s a propos, therefore, that the meeting place opposite the Taksim Square Metro station is a branch of the famous confectioner Hafiz Mustafa 1864. While food tour meeting points are often at or near the first stop, he cleverly points out after his introduction that there are better places for baklava and Turkish delight, and we will be concluding the tour at one of them. From there, we filter through the crowds in Taksim Square and shift into Beyoğlu neighbourhood. Once on main shopping boulevard İstiklal Caddesi (“Independence Avenue”), he warns us about ice cream vendors tucked between fast fashion chain stores, who use acrobatic techniques to “authentically” pile flattened scoops onto cones and cups.

As a contrast to Hafiz Mustafa, he points out Ali Muhiddin Haci Bekir Lokumları, a respected Turkish Delight and confectionery established in 1777 at the height of the Ottoman Empire. Although it draws curious sweets lovers with its apothecary-like ambience and ornate gift packaging, the samples reflect a straightforward approach to the craft, where sweetness is balanced with the natural flavours of the other ingredients.

According to Bahri, cafes, coffee bars, pubs, bakeries and ice cream shops frequented by locals are more likely to be found in the more



MAKES 64 PIECES

Turkish Delight *Lokum*

TURKISH DELIGHT is one of the most popular souvenirs that visitors to Istanbul bring home but if you’re not travelling, you can easily make it at home. It’s the perfect partner for a cup of Turkish coffee.

Sugar

1 cup

Cold Water

1 ½ cups, divided

Plain Gelatine

3 envelopes

Freshly Squeezed Lemon Juice

½ cup

Cornstarch

¾ cup

Rose Water

5 tsp

Red Food Colouring

3 drops (optional)

Icing Sugar

for dusting

1 MAKE a simple syrup: Combine the sugar and 1 cup water in a small saucepan and heat, stirring until the sugar has completely dissolved.

2 SOAK the gelatine in the lemon juice.

3 MIX the cornstarch with the remaining ½ cup of cold water then add to the sugar syrup in the saucepan. Cook until very thick, take off the heat and add the gelatine and lemon juice. Stir until melted, then add the rose water and food colouring, if using.

4 SPRINKLE icing sugar in an 8-inch pan, pour in the mixture and let it set. This takes an hour or two.

5 SPRINKLE with additional icing sugar and cut into 1-inch squares. Roll in more sugar, if desired and store in a container with an airtight cover.


**PHOTOS THIS SPREAD
CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT**

Bahri recommends;
Köşkeroğlu interior;
Baklava.

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«upmarket Nişantaşı section alongside art galleries and antique shops on narrow streets, “owned by people who care about coffee bars and good food, while local nightlife is more likely to be found pedestrian street Nevidade.” Furthermore, he adds that it’s possible to have an eat-like-a-local experience by picking up a few things from small markets and enjoying them alongside friendly local cats in Gezi Park without the Hagia Sophia crowds.

Where a narrow alley bends into Katip Mustafa Çelebi street, we begin Bahri’s curated feast at Suat Usta (“Master Suat”) Tantuni, specializing in long, thin lavosh wraps filled with beef, lamb or chicken originating from Mersin Province and seasoned with a house-made spice mix. The wrap is delicate, with fresh tomatoes, peppers and greens stuffed inside it. It needs to be bent into a “U” shape so nothing spills out of either end or falls apart. I file this place into memory for future visits to Istanbul.

As this was effectively a full meal and not a sampling, the necessity to work up an appetite again prompts Bahri to have us weave back and forth across İstiklal Caddesi downhill toward Karaköy. We pass by and through several architectural masterpieces such as the Hidiva Palace, completed around 1910 in the “Art Nouveau” style, and the Çiçek Pasajı/Cité de Péra, an opulent structure built in 1876 that now houses manicured cafes and specialty shops best known for being a visual feast and a fun place for people-watching. Crossing through that building’s galleria, we head down narrow streets and alleys favoured by the area’s young professionals and workers.

The second stop, about midway downhill, is Nevizade Kokoreç — Erdal Usta, which dives deeper into the Turkish street food canon, beyond kababs and other familiar edibles. Bahri describes *kokoreç* (lamb or goat intestines grilled over a charcoal fire, chopped, piled into a sandwich roll, and seasoned with cumin,

oregano and chili flakes), and explains that if we eat hot dogs, there is no reason why we would not like this popular street food. I initially predict I may classify it as a “glad I tried this” experience, along with the stuffed mussels and fried mussel skewers also served. Instead, I am instantly obsessed with the sandwich’s spices and texture and compelled to dig into the stuffed mussels, which are tender, juicy, and seasoned to the point where they become a different animal entirely.

A leisurely stop at Asmaili Mescit Durucu embodies what Bahri says locals and long-time expats look for in a local hangout, from its intimate space to quirky decor, selection of craft beers, wines, and arak, and its extensive mezze (small bites) and *dürümler* (kabab and sandwich) menu mixing traditional preparations and unexpected modern twists on favourites. Bahri orders classic-leaning sandwiches with beef and chicken that allow the venue’s secret sauces and spice mixes to stand out.

After a short tram ride downhill into the heart of Karaköy along Istanbul’s waterfront, we take a shortcut through a brightly lit deli and market Bahri recommends for its breakfasts that reminds me of many Jewish deli and Greek coffee house feasts I enjoyed in Chicago and Los Angeles as a younger adult. The back entrance deposits us onto Kemankeş Mahallesi, a narrow street dominated by fish sandwich vendors who all lay claim to inventing the fish wrap. Bahri stresses that Galata Fish Mekan is the real deal among competitors displaying nearly identical signs, counters, table cards, and colour schemes. Here, we get our own whitefish wrap, delicately seasoned and wrapped in perfectly toasted flatbread.

Bahri selects Köşkeroğlu 1946 for a sweet ending to our tour, ordering traditional baklava as well as the kitchen’s take on tiramisu prepared in baklava style. The shop and attached patio blend visual flavours of the Belle Epoque and Jazz Age but also underscore the international appeal of Istanbul in the twenty-first century, with people from all walks of life clustered around tables to dig into the just-sweet-enough versions of baklava and contemplate where they will dine the next day. Although Istanbul is a very intense city in which to spend just 24 hours — even when avoiding obvious tourist spots — Bahri makes it clear when he shows



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FERNANDO STANKUN



TÜRKİYE

SERVES 1

Turkish Coffee

TURKISH COFFEE has a unique flavour that comes from boiling the grounds to remove acidity.

Water
½ cup

Sugar
1 tsp

Powdered Turkish Coffee
1 heaping tsp

1 IN a straight-sided Turkish coffee pot, boil the water with the sugar until clear. Add the powdered Turkish coffee and stir well. Let boil up three times.

2 TAKE off the stove, add a few drops of cold water to settle the grounds. Pour immediately into a small cup.

3 FOR two, repeat the procedure.

us his own extensive “restaurants to try” list, that the city demands another visit in the future. If only time and logistics allowed for Yummy Istanbul’s six-hour exploration of the city’s Asian and European sides.

“I love Istanbul, and I’m very happy when I have the opportunity to show guests the real Istanbul through its history, especially as Jews, Armenians, Russians, Dutch, Germans and Greeks brought something to the character of Istanbul, from their synagogues and churches to their architecture, food, and cooking techniques,” Bahri affirms. “With this tour, I’m taking them to the sidewalks and side streets to show what we know to be the real Istanbul from experience.” 

www.yummyistanbul.com

