



Photo courtesy of Aynur Aytin

# TANTALISINGLY TURKISH

A CULINARY JOURNEY ALONG THE SILK ROADS  
OF ANATOLIA



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In the great cities of the world, fashionable chefs vie to produce innovative dishes for jaded pallets. The result has not only been the proliferation of ethnic restaurants in most major cities around the world, but the attempt to take it all a step further by combining elements from different culinary traditions. The product of this blending of traditions has been called fusion cooking. But here in Turkey, we have been doing it for centuries. Fusion in Turkey is no contrivance, it is the kind of blend that only happens naturally, through time. Anatolia has been the heart of Empires since ancient times; it has been an artery for trade and the crossroads of cultures for 12,000 years. More than that, the heart of this journey is the very place where agriculture was born back in prehistory. Yes, we really have been doing it for that long...

Our exceptional tour takes you from Gaziantep, across the Euphrates, to Urfa and the 12,000-year-old site of Göbekli Tepe, on to Mt. Nemrut with the 2000-year-old mountain top funerary monument to Antiochus, a forgotten king, and then to Diyarbakir and Mardin. This section of the

tour circumnavigates the Karaca Dağ region which is the area from which the very first domesticated wheat originates and which is the cradle of our modern world. From Mardin, we progress across the Tigris to Tatvan on the western shore of Lake Van and then to Van, once the capital of the Empire of Urartu. After Van, we head north across the Tendurek shield volcano to traverse the foothills of Mt.



Ararat to Kars for a finishing cultural extravaganza. Each region has distinct culinary traditions, all of which contribute to the unique flavour and blend of the Turkish Kitchen.

In the course of our journey you will traverse three distinct cultural, geographic and climate regions and experience the foundations and the complexities of the culinary environment of Anatolia. While you will see and taste things you won't be able to reproduce at home, we can guarantee that you will be able to take away with you practical and applicable ideas that will make your dinner table the talk of your social circle.

Some food tours will take in Gaziantep in south east Turkey as it is, after Istanbul, a major centre for exceptional cuisine. However, for us it's not simply an added thought to give a little colour to an old idea, it's the gateway to a whole new world of the tastes and the smells that are to come, and it's where we start.

We will not restrict ourselves to any particular restaurants or food districts but our choices will change based on who's hot and who's not.





## THE THREE DISTINCT REGIONS ON THIS TOUR THAT MOST TRAVELLERS RARELY SEE ARE:

### SOUTH EAST REGION: GAZIANTEP, ŞANLIURFA, DIYARBAKIR & MARDIN

The cities of this region have been home to some of the oldest civilizations in the world. This ancient heritage and the astonishing fertility of the land has both attracted civilisations and been the basis for their growth, prosperity and sophistication. The diversity and variety of produce available due to its geographical

position mean the region has developed a unique cuisine with its own distinctive flavours which are much imitated but rarely matched. The region is famous for its pistachios, growing here as wild trees since prehistoric times, and for the delicious, sweet baklava for which the area is renowned.



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### THE EASTERN REGION: TATVAN, VAN & DOĞUBAYAZIT

This eastern part of Anatolia is dominated by mountains and the beautiful Lake Van. The first city we come to is Tatvan, lying at the base of Nemrut Caldera and the western shore of Lake Van, it still retains the bustling exotic excitement of a frontier town. As a highland area, the landscape is elemental, winters harsh and summers short, but the food is outstanding, from succulent meat – mostly lamb - to fabulous dairy products and, above all, the honey, produced by itinerant bee keepers who set their hives up in mountain pastures and valleys in early Spring. One of the many highlights of the Van region is the simply



awesome Van breakfast. In a country where breakfasts set a very high benchmark, the Van breakfast is in a league of its own. Downtown Van even has

a “Breakfast Street” so the competition to serve the best is fierce. The northern part of the region is dominated by Tendurek Shield Volcano and Mt. Ararat.





## THE NORTH EAST REGION: KARS

Kars, to the north of Ararat has a steppe like appearance and in the winter, blasted by winds from the Caucasus, is bone chillingly cold, an environment that has produced a culinary tradition of hearty soups and stews along with a very different style of kebab. The cultural mix has infused Kars cookery with a unique flavour with influences from a period of Russian occupation in the latter part of the 19th century along with Caucasian

refugees produced by Russian Imperial expansion in the 1860's. The economy is heavily based on livestock and dairy production and Kars is rightly famous for its cheeses and honey. Goose features on the menu along with Piti, Kars' own take on the kebab.... this is beef and chickpea slow cooked and served in a rich broth with a thin pastry and served with the heavenly local yoghurt.



## HISTORY

If this wasn't enough, all along the route of Anatolia's Silk Road, we will try to take your minds off the food – for a while at least - with visits to some of Turkey's most iconic cultural and historical sites and sights. We will visit the Zeugma Mosaic Museum in Gaziantep and we'll cross the Euphrates. In Şanlıurfa, the ancient city of Edessa, we will visit the stunning



archaeological site of Göbekli Tepe, the 12,000-year-old Neolithic sanctuary, where all this bounty began, and the outstanding Archaeological Museum in the city centre. We will see the sunset from the summit of Nemrut, Mountain of the Gods, and then enjoy a day exploring Diyarbakir with its ancient city walls, mosques and churches. From there, it's just a short journey to Mardin, a town so full of architectural gems that the whole city was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site. From Mardin we will cross the Tigris and head up the Bitlis valley to Lake Van, the island of Akdamar with its 10th century Armenian Church, and the city of Van, once the capital of the ancient Kingdom of Urartu, known in the Bible simply as "the



Lands of Ararat." We will visit Van Citadel which was originally constructed in about 850 BC and saw almost continuous use, in one form or another, as different civilisations came and went, right up to the end of World War I. As we travel north, we will skirt the foothills of the Biblical Mountain of Noah, Ararat, and on to Kars where we will spend a morning exploring the ruins of the great medieval Armenian city of Ani.



*Along the way we enjoy whatever cultural and social opportunities that may present themselves. The programme is designed to ensure that you have the time not to miss anything. The highlights are:*



### GAZIANTEP:

Zeugma Mosaic Museum, Antep Markets, Cookery Lesson at Mutfak Sanatları Merkezi, Antep's College of Culinary Arts.



### ŞANLIURFA:

Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum, Covered Bazaar, 16th century Gümrük Hanı, Pools of Abraham, Göbekli Tepe (10,000 BC).



### NEMRUT:

Mountain of the Gods, Country Cooking class.



### DIYARBAKIR:

City Walls, Ulu Camii, Sülüklühan Assyrian Winery, 16th century Hasan Paşa Hanı.



### MARDIN:

Mardin Markets, Old Town, Ulu Camii, Kasimiye Medresesi (15th century), Saffron Monastery.



### VAN:

Akdamar Island and the Church of the Holy Cross, Lake Van, (10th century), Citadel of Van (Urartian 8th century BC to present), Traditional village country feast with cooking lessons.



### DOĞUBAYAZIT:

Ishak Paşa Palace, Mt Ararat.



### KARS:

City Tour & markets, Holy Apostles Church (11th century) now a mosque, Fatih Mosque, Ancient Armenian City of Ani (9th- 13th centuries), Kars Cooking Lesson, Cultural Event.





## ITINERARY

\*DENOTES A COOKING CLASS OR DEMONSTRATION

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### DAY 1

Gaziantep Arrival. Known by the locals simply as Antep, this bustling metropolis in Southern Anatolia is an eclectic mixture of Kurdish, Arab and Turkish influences and it has the kitchen to match; it is the gateway to an Anatolian kitchen that few outsiders see.

You will be collected from the airport and will be brought to your hotel for dinner and a chance to meet us and your fellow gastronomists.

**Overnight: Gaziantep**



### DAY 2\*

Antep: City centre sightseeing before lunch at a selected city centre restaurant for your first experience into the culinary world of

this ancient city. The blend we're offering you for your introduction will be savoury soups and spicy meat dishes. Your sweet

course will come later, after a visit to the Zeugma Mosaic Museum which houses an outstanding collection Roman period mosaics recovered from the now flooded city of Zeugma. From the Mosaic museum we will visit one of Antep's premier makers of Baklava to see how it is made and to taste Antep's signature sweet dish. After, pause for a brief period of rest and reflection, we will go to the Mutfak Sanatları Merkezi, Antep's College of Culinary Arts, for a master class in one of Antep's famous dishes.

**Overnight: Gaziantep**







## DAY 3

After a hearty breakfast we will leave Gaziantep and head across the great River Euphrates and on to the even more ancient city of Şanlıurfa to visit the archaeological site of Göbekli Tepe. This site, dated to around 10,000 years BC, is the earliest example of monumental architecture yet discovered. In a country full of superlatives, this site is truly extraordinary.

From Göbekli Tepe we will go to Urfa in time for a light lunch before visiting the Archaeological Museum and the covered

bazaar with its central Gümrük Hanı, built by the great Ottoman Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent in 1563 as a Customs Post and distribution point for goods on this section of the Silk Road. It's the ideal place to sit and enjoy the shade and the goings on of market traders and passers-by. In the evening we will enjoy gardens and fountains of the Pools of Abraham followed by dinner.

**Overnight: Şanlıurfa**



## DAY 4\*

After breakfast we head north to Mt. Nemrut stopping for a light picnic lunch at the Ataturk Dam. At the summit of Adiyaman's Mt. Nemrut, with the giant statues erected as part of King Antiochus' funerary monument, we will watch the sun setting. Coming off the mountain we will

stay in a mountain village pension and learn how to make Turkish pide, a traditional savoury Turkish flatbread dish somewhat like pizza. This is something you'll definitely be taking home with you.

**Overnight: Nemrut Mountain**





## DAY 5\*

From Nemrut we head to Diyarbakir across the Euphrates again, just past the Karaca Dağ shield volcano and on into Diyarbakir, surrounded by its giant 2,000-year-old, five-and-a-half-kilometre black basalt defensive walls made of stone from Karaca Dağ. Diyarbakir is known for rich dishes of spicy lamb and for its liver kebabs. The most famous specialty dish from Diyarbakir is Kaburga Dolması which is a dish of slow baked lamb's ribs stuffed with rice, almonds and many spices. Diyarbakir is also known for its watermelons, celebrated by a monument and an annual

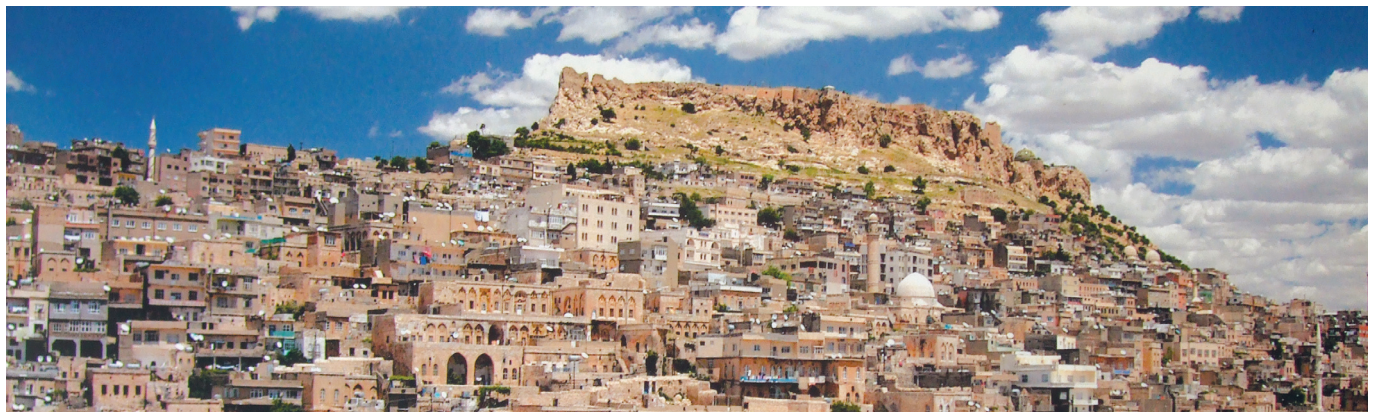


Watermelon Festival.

On arrival and after a light lunch we'll start our city tour including the walls, the 16th century Hasan Paşa Hanı and the Great Mosque and central square which exactly replicate the ancient Roman Forum and Basilica, both in form and layout. We will

visit the Sülüklühan Assyrian Winery and we'll follow that by going to a famous local restaurant to see the preparation of Diyarbakir's famous kaburga before tucking in.

**Overnight: Diyarbakir**

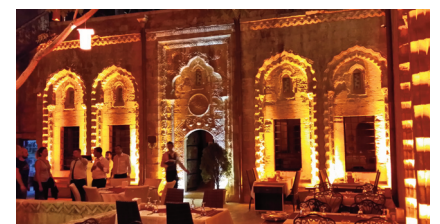


## DAY 6

Before departing Diyarbakir, we will head back to Hasan Paşa Hanı (in front of Ulu Camii) for a traditional Diyarbakir breakfast of roasted egg and liver... or even soup, if you prefer. After breakfast we head south to Mardin.

Mardin is known it is known for the Turkomen/Artuklid architecture of its old city, and for its strategic location on a rocky hill near the Tigris and overlooking the

plains south towards Syria. Mardin is a visual feast as well as a culinary and cultural one. We will explore the backstreets and markets, visit the Great Mosque, the Kasimiye Medresesi before going on to visit the Syriac Saffron Monastery and the 1,000-year BC Temple of the Sun hidden beneath it. On our return to Mardin we will visit one of Mardin's top restaurants for a feast of traditional local



meze and Syriac wine tasting.

**Overnight: Mardin**





## DAY 7

From Mardin we will head east across the Tigris at Hasankeyf where we will enjoy a boat ride on this iconic river and then up to Batman for lunch, then up the Bitlis Gorge into the Eastern Anatolian high lands to Tatvan on the western shore of Lake Van. On the way we will stop to visit the El

Aman Hanı, one of the many Caravanserais along Anatolia's Silk Road. This restored 16th century Caravanserai now serves the local community as an arts and recreation centre.

**Overnight: Tatvan**



## DAY 8\*

From Tatvan we head east along the southern shore of Lake Van stopping at the village of Reşadiye for a hearty village breakfast and a cooking demonstration in the essential skills for making the iconic Anatolian flatbread. From here we continue on to the regional capital of Van where we will visit the Citadel of Van to watch the sun set over Lake Van. Built on a large lozenge shaped outcrop the fortifications, started in around 850 BC by the Urartians, the citadel has been adapted and added to almost continually ever since by Assyrians, Persians, Romans, Byzantines, Armenians, Turkomen, Seljuks, Ottomans and for a brief period during WWI, the Russians. This fortress is possibly the oldest continuously used military fortification in the world.

**Overnight: Van**







## DAY 9\*

After breakfast, we head to Gevaş for a traditional local feast in a local country garden where everybody will participate in food preparations. We will, however, take a break, and while the ladies of the house stir the pots and turn the meats, we will head to the lake for a boat ride to visit the

beautiful island of Akdamar with its exquisite 10th century Armenian Church. Once souls and spirits have been refreshed, we will return to Gevaş to replenish our bodies.

**Overnight: Van**



## DAY 10\*

After breakfast we will visit Annemin Vefa Sofrası to prepare our lunch under the expert and fun filled guidance of the ladies at this local family eatery, where mother definitely knows best. While lunch is cooking, we will visit Urartu Carpets where beautiful carpets and kilims are woven by

members of a local Women's Collective. After lunch there will be free time for relaxation or shopping but there will be an optional tour to Van's new Archaeological museum.

**Overnight: Van**





## DAY 11

After another hearty Van breakfast, we depart Van and head north along the eastern shore of Lake Van and then past Mt. Suphan, across the Tendurek Shield Volcano and into Doğubayazıt where we will have a light lunch before visiting the

pleasure Palace of Ishak Paşa overlooking the Plains of Ararat. From Doğubayazıt we will continue north around the eastern flank of Ararat and on to the city of Kars.

**Overnight: Kars**



## DAY 12\*

After breakfast we will head east to visit the ruins of the medieval Armenian city of Ani, protected on its western side with huge city walls and on its eastern flank by a bend in the Arpaçay River gorge which is the border with Armenia. In the afternoon we will return to Kars for a city tour and a break. In the evening we will prepare our supper which will be Piti Kebab, a version of this international dish specific to Kars and as a final reminder that a kebab is not just meat on a stick.

**Overnight: Kars**



**DAY 13** DEPART FROM KARS AIRPORT FOR YOUR HOMEWARD JOURNEY. AFIYET OLSUN!





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