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## APPETITES

# Grand Bazaar: come for the shopping, stay for the food

From IstanbulEats.com

**W**e like to think of Istanbul's Grand Bazaar – open since 1461 – as the world's oldest shopping mall. If that's the case, shouldn't the Grand Bazaar be home to the world's oldest food court? That may be taking the analogy too far, but for us, the Grand Bazaar can be as much a food destination as a shopping one. As we see it, one of the hidden pleasures of going to the bazaar (once you get past the overzealous shopkeepers hawking souvenirs) is exploring some of its quieter back alleys and interior courtyards for new dining possibilities, especially some of the smaller restaurants that cater not to tourists but rather to the locals that work in the sprawling marketplace.

Below is a list of some favorites:

## KARA MEHMET KEBAP SALONU

This is one of our favorite places – not only in the Grand Bazaar, but in all of Istanbul. The restaurant, a tiny hole-in-the-wall, serves the usual assortment of kebabs (including, for the daring, kidney and liver kebabs), all expertly grilled by the mustachioed usta. As a testament to the appeal of Kara Mehmet's kebabs, we recently went there with a vegetarian friend who was so taken with the restaurant's Adana kebab that he ended up taking his first bite of meat in 30 years.

Food aside, what really draws us to Kara Mehmet is its location, deep inside the open-air courtyard of the Cebeci Han, one of the Grand Bazaar's numerous out-of-the-way caravanserais. Compared to the bustle in the rest of the bazaar, Cebeci Han is an oasis of peace and



calm, mostly filled with small shops where people repair rugs, rather than sell them. Even the owner of the one actual rug shop inside the courtyard seems more interested in playing backgammon with his friends than moving carpets. When you're done with your kebab, order Kara Mehmet's delicious künefe and a tea from the small teahouse next door and enjoy the behind-the-scenes look at bazaar life.

Address: İç Cebeci Han No.92, Grand Bazaar  
Telephone: 0 212 527 05 33

## GAZİANTEP BURÇ OCAKBAŞI

A friend recently directed us to this small Grand Bazaar eatery and we are now forever in her debt. Located on a narrow side street off one of the bazaar's busier thoroughfares, this unassuming grillhouse serves up very tasty Gaziantep-style food (Gaziantep, a city in Turkey's southeast, is considered one of the country's culinary capitals). Our Ali Nazik, tender morsels of marinated beef sitting on a bed of a garlicky yogurt-eggplant puree, was perfectly made. The delicious shepherd's salad served

on the side, topped with chopped walnuts and zingy pomegranate molasses, was impeccably fresh. We were even more excited about the restaurant's specialty – extremely flavorful dolmas, made out of the shells of dried eggplants and red peppers that are rehydrated and then stuffed with a rice and herb mixture and served with yoghurt on the side.

Gaziantep Burç Ocakbaşı only has a few tables, which are lined up along the length of the alleyway that is the restaurant's home. The ambience is provided by the strings of dried eggplant and peppers that hang



above the tables, the smoke and sizzle coming from the grill and the thrum of the bazaar activity all around. We're already looking for excuses to go back to the Grand Bazaar so that we can stop in at Gaziantep Burç Ocakbaşı again.

Address: Parçacılar Sk. No. 12, Grand Bazaar  
Telephone: 0 212 527 15 16

## HAVUZLU

Figuring out what to eat is easy here. A large steam table at the front of the restaurant's open kitchen holds a daily assortment of some 25 dishes, including a variety of meat and vegetable stews that we like to think of as

Turkish soul food – homey, well made and fresh. After you make your selection, waiters in black vests and matching ties swiftly bring the food to your table in the slightly tacky 500-year-old dining hall, which has large Ottoman-style blown glass chandeliers hanging from its vaulted ceilings.

In a certain way, Havuzlu – named after the small havuz (water fountain) in front of the restaurant – makes us think of what a Denny's restaurant might have looked like in Ottoman times, a well-oiled machine serving up comfort food for weary travelers. Of course, rather than burgers, grilled cheese sandwiches and Grand Slam breakfasts, they serve spinach stew with yogurt, döner, creamed eggplant and, for dessert, stewed figs with kaymak (Turkish clotted cream). The only proper sit-down place in the Grand Bazaar, Havuzlu may no longer be a secret, but its location, on a quiet corner of the market, gives it the feeling of a refuge – a place to hide out once the shopping has worn you down.

Address: Gani Celebi Sk No.3, Grand Bazaar  
Telephone: 0 212 527 33 46

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