

Yayın Adı: Hürriyet Daily News&Economic Review City Brief Tarihi: 01.07.2011

Referans No: 15561285

Etki: Olumlu

Renk: Renkli

STxCM: 260,00

Küpür Sayfa: 1

Tiraj: 5710

Reklam E de eri: 260,00

CITY BRIEF | 05
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ISTANBULEATS



Gilan Cafe: Sweet Home Iran

From IstanbulEats.com

I stumbled home from a day of managing wild middle schoolers and started to open the fridge for a mediating Efes Dark only to find a magnet near the handle that read, "Gilan Cafe, Iranian Cuisine. Kadıköy."

I did a double take. Yes, yes, it said Iranian. Iranian! How long have I searched for a decent Iranian restaurant in Istanbul? The address was just up the road and so my fiancée and I hit the sidewalk and after about five measly minutes, found the unprepossessing little cafe tucked among the apartment buildings of the Acıbadem neighborhood.

The cafe had an outdoor patio with heaters and a cozy room inside simply decorated with red tablecloths and pictures of Persepolis. Among Darius' ruins, a new display of framed newspaper clippings sang the praises of the little restaurant. In the background, Iranian music by the famous Persian musician, Hayde, played from a laptop manned by our waiter.

We were soon met by Fetiha, a sharp, down-to-earth woman who had lived for 30 years with her Iranian husband in the Gilan province of Iran (thus the restaurant's name). "It was like the Iranian Black Sea," she told us. "With the blue water of the Caspian Sea in front of you and the



Gilan Cafe in Kadıköy district is one of the best venues that serves Iranian food. The cafe had an outdoor patio and a cozy room inside simply decorated and pictures of Persepolis

mountains at your back. Ahh, a gorgeous place." We ordered a starter of "Ashe Doogh" – billed as "Ayran Soup" in Turkish. It was a hearty, creamy yogurt based soup with tiny meat balls, fava beans, rice, and a hint of herbs. A swirl of bright green thyme oil adorned the top. Fetiha also brought out a complimentary salad of mint, cucumbers and tomatoes with a basket of thin lavaş bread.

For my main dish, I order "fesenjan," a rich walnut and pomegranate sauce over slow cooked köfte. My fiancée goes with "ghormeh sebz," a creamy spinach-based dish that reminds me of In-

dian "saag." It has chicken, peas, and tiny köfte, with a rich sauce flavored with dill, cumin, and a diminutive Persian lime. "All of my ingredients from the spices to the lime come directly from Iran," Fetiha explains. "You can't find this kind of rice in Turkey." Unlike Turkish rice, our hostess tells us, Persian rice is cooked without oil because you are supposed to pour the sauces of your main dish on top. For drinks, we had Iranian ayran, a chilled version of Turkey's classic yogurt drink flavored with crushed herbs. It was light, creamy, and refreshing.

