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Hatay Has Kral Sofrası: Kebab's Krib

Hatay Has Kral Sofrası, a zany kebab restaurant in a part of the Aksaray district filled with lots of other restaurants selling food from throughout the southeast region. The restaurant serves dishes from traditional cuisine, such as mezes from Hatay and kebabs. There is a tempting desert menu, including candied unripe eggplants and walnuts

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In our imaginary primetime lineup, a reality show called "Pimp My Kebab Salon" transforms a drab kebab shop into a grill palace suited to the tastes of the latter day Sultans. Surfaces are suddenly gilded in gold, fountains appear, and everything is reupholstered under the watchful eye of the boisterous host with tacky taste. If this TV series existed, a much-loved classic episode would take place at Hatay Has Kral Sofrası, a zany kebab restaurant in a part of the Aksaray district filled with lots of other restaurants selling food from throughout the southeast region of Turkey.

Entering through the hall lined with photos of esteemed guests our attention hung on the huge wall-covered grotto, the likes of which, we haven't seen outside of natural history museums. We won't get into the ceramic bas-reliefs of Anatolian construction through the ages featuring Greek temples, Ottoman mosques and soaring office towers that adorn the other walls, or other such subtle details. Let the over-the-top grotto, with its stuffed doe and gurgling brook, stand as a

symbol for the glory of all things at Has Kral, including the food.

Looking at the menu, we spotted many similarities to one of our favorite restaurants, Akdeniz Hatay Sofrası, which also serves the cuisine of Turkey's Hatay area, near the southern border with Syria. Has Kral has the metrelik kebab, sheesh served by the meter, a sporting man's choice. We also noticed the hallmark of Hatay whimsy, chicken or lamb baked in a salt dome and set ablaze at the table. Both are excellent at Akdeniz, but require advance order so we could not sample Has Kral's version.

We started our meal with a number of meze that we know and love from the Hatay kitchen, a zingy "zahtar" (fresh thyme) salad, "fattush," or green salad riddled

with crunchy fried chips, and "lubnan ezmesi," which is combined with a salty soft cheese with roasted eggplant yogurt and dried red peppers. The starters, along with one of our favorite guilty pleasures between courses, içli köfte, were delicious. Selecting from the list of kebabs is an overwhelming part of a meal at Has Kral. However poetic, items with names like "the dance of kebab" didn't help us make a decision. Two of the three kebabs were shockingly good.

The third, a "çöp şiş," was very good by any normal measure but paled in comparison to its compatriots on the plate. One of those, made of fatty ground lamb shot

through with bright green pistachios and shreds of red pepper, was crumbly and almost sweet. There is a tempting desert menu, including candied unripe eggplants and walnuts, but by the end of the kebab course the atmosphere of Has Kral can get a little heavy. We suggest wandering the little streets around Has Kral, in search of that perfectly plain "künefe" shack.

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