

VENUE

Özkonak: The real pudding shop of Istanbul hides in Cihangir



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Regulars at Özkonak, a well-loved fixture in Cihangir's ever-changing restaurant scene, must duck in disapproval at the sight of a new generation of customers who walk right past the pudding display at the front and head for the steam table and its selection of prepared savory dishes in back. Though the lunch specials here are quite tasty, Özkonak is a pudding shop at heart and should be approached accordingly. To fill up on stuffed eggplant and beans before dessert is to deny yourself the milky sweet pleasures that have defined this a neighborhood institution for almost fifty years.

Tavuk göğsü, chicken breast pudding, is most often mentioned in travelers tales alongside salted Oaxacan iguana and deep-fried Vietnamese cobra. But unlike so many other bizarre edibles, the

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pudding doesn't taste like chicken at all. The chicken is merely an agent of texture in this thick, milky pudding roll, bringing an unexpected – though pleasant – fibrous feel to what you'd expect to be smooth. However, we prefer Tavuk göğsü's poultry-less cousin, kazandibi ("bottom of the cauldron" in Turkish), whose caramelized bottom layer gives it firmness and a smoky-sweet finish.

We hold Turkey's rice pudding, firin sutlaç, in high regard but Özkonak's is a bit too sugary for our taste, so we often opt for keşkül, an almond-based custard colored day-



PUDDING SHOP: Özkonak lies in the narrow streets of Istanbul's historical district Cihangir. Even though the venue also serves delicious lunch dishes, it is a pudding shop and famous for its chicken breast pudding.

glo yellow. Just watching the seemingly radioactive pudding arrive at the table is exciting. Dusted with crushed almonds, keşkül and a tea is a perfect mid-afternoon snack. If you still have room for a main course after a couple of rounds of dessert, make your way to the back and you'll find the steam table, stocked with well-made old standards. Stuffed cabbage, stewed vegetables, baked meatballs with fingerling potatoes and pilav are usually on offer.

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