



WELCOME HOME

It took Turkish chef Fatih Tutak years of travelling and experimenting with global cuisines before realising that what he really wanted to cook was the food of his homeland. Today, as chef patron of TURK, he brings his vision of New Turkish cuisine to life.

Traditional Turkish food is the legacy of the country's unique position straddling both Europe and Asia combined with its complex history. Legions of conquering empires have left their mark on the landscape, with layers of diverse influences and cultures cultivated on the country's fertile soil. With this rich culinary foundation, it's little wonder that superstar chef and restaurateur Yotam Ottolenghi calls Turkish cuisine "one of the most exciting and accomplished in the world." And in Fatih Tutak's hands, with a CV that includes a four-month stagiaire in Tokyo at three Miche-

lin-starred Nihonryori Ryugin and stints in Copenhagen at Noma under Rene Redzepi, this is most certainly the case.

Eureka!

Fatih's vision for TURK was born during his 2015 tenure as Director of Culinary Operations at Bangkok's The Dining Room of The House on Sathorn, when he served a one-off tribute dish he called "From my Mom." Starring his take on manti (Turkish dumplings), guests were blown away: this was his Eureka! moment. It was time to explore his roots and motherland, it was time to go home. "I need-

ed to smell, touch, and feel the real Turkey, to be part of the people. The only way to feed my mind and heart was to go back,” he says.

Fatih’s home city of Istanbul is a wondrous place, and he is the most charming guide. In order to bring his vision for TURK to life, Fatih shares some of his foodie city secrets. Where best to start than Istanbul’s world-famous markets?

Labyrinthine streets, alive with organised chaos, buzz with the hustle of specialist traders who deal in everything from organ meat (roast goat heads are displayed with finesse) to olives, energised by street food bites such as mussels stuffed with rice. This is where one can appreciate the culinary diversity for which Istanbul is famous. It’s also where Fatih has sought inspiration for some of his menu, explaining how said snack of mussels and rice is reimagined at TURK with tamarind and seaweed, nestled inside a delicate shell-shaped squid ink tuile. Over in the spice market, we’re directed to Hayfene at no 51, his preferred spice and nut merchant selling pistachios as big as raw emeralds and magic blends of seasoning that evoke the punchy scent of Turkish kitchens.

Turkish delight

It’s these quintessential smells of Istanbul that emanate from Adana Ocakbasi Kurtulus (aka the best kebab shop in town), where whole animals are butchered so as not to waste a scrap and a pair of grafting chefs roll out plate after plate of smoky lamb chops, spicy Adana kebabs, and refreshing Bostana salads. It’s traditional Turkish casual dining – a style that has been exported successfully around the world – enjoyed here at its most magnificent.

“We have an unbelievable amount of culinary history and yet people still just talk about kebab,” says Fatih. “But we are so much more than that. I have to make people wake up. The most important thing I’ve learned from my travels is how other cultures respect their traditions. This is very important here but no one was doing it in a fine dining fashion before I came back.”

Tradition and heritage are the pillars of Anatolian restaurant Sade, famous for its indulgent breakfasts and brunches that showcase some of Turkey’s lesser-known dishes. Greek and Middle Eastern influences abound on a table groaning with the familiar – meat, cheese, olives, eggs, tomatoes, cucumbers – and, on



“Turks are asking me where I’ve been? They say they’ve missed me!”

closer inspection, the more unusual. There’s ajuka – a moreish walnut and tomato paste – a scented dish of potato cooked with dill stems marinated in grape molasses, hawthorn berry and rosehip jam, honeys in rich ochres and saffron red, and a sort of pancake cooked with a fine layer of potato. It’s an exceptional spread, its impact rivalled only by Sade’s stylish proprietor. Jewelled with fat rings and sporting an immaculate moustache, Cüneyt Asan is more a rock star than restaurateur. But having spent 35 years in the hospitality business (he used to own a place in Berlin) there’s no disputing the latter. President of the Anatolian Cuisine Society, which preserves and celebrates food traditions and cuisine from this region of Turkey, Cüneyt has found an ally in Fatih.

“Fatih is the future of our gastronomy. He’s obsessive in his dedication to finding the best ingredients and his mission is to express the depth of Turkish cuisine to the world. Fatih doesn’t care about trends,” says Cüneyt, “he’s going in deep and innovating with respect.”

From scouring the country for a rare native duck and dry ageing the meat in a nod to an ancient Ottoman recipe, to reworking a traditional tarhana (a soup made from fermented grains and dairy) with wild mushrooms found 40km from the restaurant, and sourcing veg from specialists at Damlica Farm, Fatih approaches every facet of his research and development with the same exacting standards. “There are so many ingredients that we can use with our traditional techniques to create new flavours,” he explains.

Here to stay

At TURK, it’s not just the menu that’s been executed with style and precision. Echoing Turkey’s famously warm hospitality, the welcoming restaurant interior is rendered in a palette of cosy, neutral tones furnished with natural materials such as wood and leather, offset by bespoke ceramics and artwork. Simplicity, clean lines, and craftsmanship are at the heart of this design, complimented by a vast open kitchen and fire with counter seating for guests looking for front row action. It’s here that we are treated to nine courses (the standard offering is four) of Fatih’s other-worldly food. There’s a fabulous starter of tuna, kohlrabi, and tarama, celeriac cooked in its own juice, fermented and fried with a sauce of cultured cream, sorrel, and walnut, grouper with sunchoke, burnt rice, and artichoke – and of course those Eureka! moment manti. These flavours are one-of-a-kind, at once serious and playful and all absolutely delicious. I can’t imagine a more beautiful and intriguing way to showcase New Turkish cuisine. Fatih’s food is authentic yet innovative, the ultimate tribute to his homeland. So, what have the locals made of TURK – are they onboard with his mission?

“The feedback has been overwhelming,” says Fatih. “Turks are saying where have you been? We’ve missed you.” With food and context this exciting, it’s fair to say that New Turkish cuisine has landed. Make it your mission to find it.

Turkft.com



Opulent dining at TURK