

CHAPTER 5

Food tour in South-Eastern Turkey – in the search of culinary heritage

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Keywords: Food tourism, Culinary tourism, Turkey, Culinary Heritage, Anatolia

Introduction

Culinary tourism is the subset of Cultural tourism. Culinary tourism (food tourism) is experiencing the food of the country, region or area, and is now considered a vital component of the tourism experience. Dining out is common among tourists and “food is believed to rank alongside climate, accommodation, and scenery” in importance to tourists. World Food Travel Association defined culinary tourism as “The pursuit and enjoyment of unique and memo-

rable food and drink experiences, both far and near.” Food tourism is usually linked with other subsets of cultural tourism e.g. heritage tourism. According to Lucy M. Long (2004) ‘culinary tourism is about food as a subject and medium, destination and vehicle for tourism. It is about individuals exploring foods new to them as well as using food to explore new cultures and ways of being. [...] Finally, it is about the experiencing of food in a mode that is out of the ordinary, that steps outside the normal routine to notice difference and the power of food to represent and negotiate that difference’.

Culinary experience is inevitable part of any journey, for pleasure or for business. However only small number of tourists seeks for real local food. It is not so easy to find it in tourism destinations, where restaurants are tourist-oriented. You need to go off beaten sightseeing track, make some internet researches before or have a local friend or colleague, who will help to discover authentic tastes in places oriented for locals. It is not so easy like eating in international chains restaurants or multi stars hotels. Sometimes menu is only in local language and restaurants owners or waiters don’t speak English at all or their knowledge is very limited, therefore at least basic knowledge of food vocabulary is useful. Sometimes in local establishments visited occasionally by foreign tourist a copy of menu with handwritten explanations can be found, sometimes not very accurate and clear (Fig. 1). On the other hand, probability to get “tourist oriented” menu with double or triple prices at such places is virtually nonexistent, though it does not guaranty some “touristic inflation” in places without detailed menu. Thus pre-travel preparations are important. Since it takes time, not so many tourists are determined enough to do so and finally experience of the vast majority of tourists with authentic food at destination is non-existent. In general, visiting non touristic places guarantees the lowest prices for the same quality of products. For example oltu peynir (Van style cheese) in Batman, with no tourism at all is half as expensive as the one in slightly more touristic Mardin, say nothing about Istanbul or Antalya.

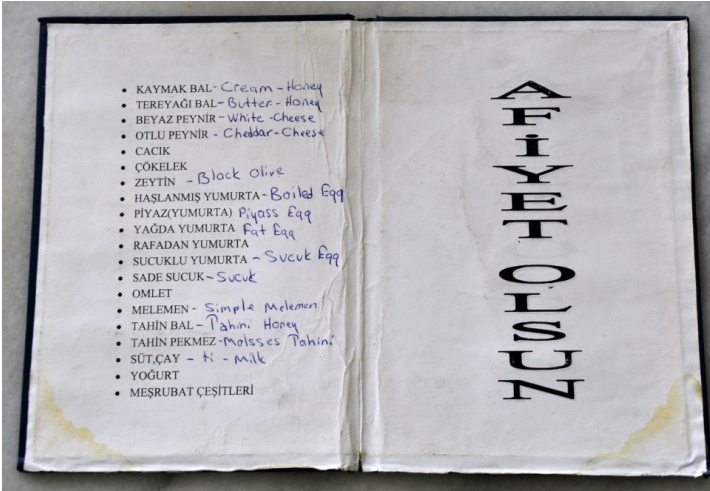


Figure 1. Menu in breakfast restaurant in Van, Turkey.

Interesting case of attitudes towards local foods was international conference ‘Local Food and Tourism’, held in Cyprus in November 2000. Despite conference topic, the lunches provided at the conference were served in the hotel dining room and featured a mixture of local and international dishes. The organizers claimed that it is ‘easier, quicker, and more convenient to eat in the hotel’, and that the open buffet allowed for each participant to choose according to his/her own tastes. In the evenings, the participants ate in the tourism area of Larnaka, and chose dishes from Multilanguage menus. Only two meals were organized in ‘tavernas’, but clearly “only for tourists” ones. On both occasions, the food was chosen by the Cypriot hosts. A survey among the participants revealed that most of them did not eat independently even once in a local restaurant that was not tourism-oriented. Clearly, even for experts in the field, ‘local food’ is rather theoretical term and becomes acceptable only if it is to some extent transformed (Cohen, Avieli 2004).

Existing literature about food travels is generally concerned with the gastronomic offerings in Western World and some other, touristically developed destinations (e.g. Žuromskaite 2009).

In the popular, and especially the promotional tourism literature, food at a prospective destination is generally presented as an attraction eg. the peculiar ethnic cuisines of exotic and far-away destinations. Whole countries or individual cities are promoted for their unique culinary attractions (Dann 199; Noguchi 1992). But in fact experience of majority travelers with culinary heritage will be equal to zero.

Tourists on a trip are generally more curious and ready to take greater risks than in their ordinary life. The trip may awake their neophylic tendencies, motivating them to try novel and strange dishes and drinks (as well as drugs). But even those who are open to new culinary experiences may be repelled by the local culinary situation (hygienic standards) and reluctant to eat food served in local establishments, particularly in less developed countries. Fear of illness may be the main reason for tourists' suspicion of local dishes.

Only few publications mostly deal with food in tourism as a significant attraction (Hjalager and Richards 2002). Curiously eating and drinking, and more accurately taste, the most bodily of the senses, remained virtually unexplored in the sociological and anthropological study of tourism, despite of their obvious centrality in the experience (Cohen, Avieli 2004).

Culinary Heritage of Turkey

Turkey is a country located on the eastern end of the Mediterranean occupying a peninsula called Asia Minor. Turkey has always been the meeting point for European and Middle Eastern Cultures, becoming an important link between east and west. Over the centuries many civilizations ruled the area, amongst them the Hittites, Seljuks, Persians, Greeks and Romans. Thanks to it extremely rich cultural heritage can be experienced in this country.

Despite the influence of western cuisines and existence of global fast food chains in the larger cities, Turkey eagerly preserves her culinary heritage. Turkey's varied geography conditions allows cultivation of various crops, fruits and vegetables eg. tea in the cool north and hot pepper and melon plantings in the south. Turkey is for example largest producer of Apricots and Hazelnuts in the world (796 000 and 660 000 tons in 2012 respectively; source: FAOSTAT).



Fig. 2 String of dried eggplant in shop in Şanlıurfa

Turkish cuisine is characterized by use of fresh ingredients, and ease of basic cooking techniques. Dishes are usually not hidden under sauces. The most common seasonings are: dill, mint, parsley, cinnamon, garlic, and the lemony sumac. Yogurt is a common side condiment. Another southern condiment are pepper flakes, called in Turkish '*pul biber*'.



Fig. 3 Ezme salad

Turkish cuisine also has many regional variations: eg. there are at least forty ways to prepare eggplant alone. Unique are the strings of dried, hollowed out eggplant, which can be seen in markets and small vegetable shops (Fig. 2).

The first meal of the day is breakfast. A typical Turkish breakfast consists fresh tomatoes and cucumbers, white ‘feta’ style cheese, black olives and bread.

Dinners will most commonly start with appetizers called *mezeler* [singular: *meze*]. Typical Mezeler are roasted pureed eggplant, fine chopped salads and least but not last *Ezme*. *Ezme* is a very typical Turkish dish, served in *lokantas* (restaurants) throughout the country. This salad primarily based on tomatoes, hot peppers, onions and parsley (Fig. 3).

During the day the popular drink is tea, served in small tulip shaped glasses. Tea houses (Çay Evi) are popular among the men, both in rural and urban areas.

Culinary trip to South-Eastern Turkey

This paper reflects Authors' experiences with culinary heritage of South-Eastern Anatolia. Trips took place in 2010, 2011 and 2014. Different parts of region was visited (Fig. 4). The very southern part of the visited region, e.g. environs of city of Mardin, at least locally, is being perceived as part of Mesopotamia.

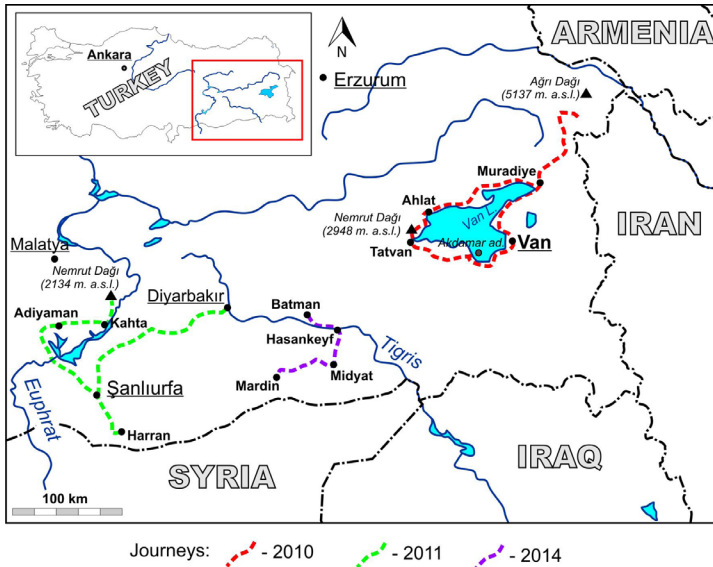


Fig. 4 Authors' culinary trips to South-Eastern Turkey

The main ingredients typical for Southeastern Anatolia Region are meat, wheat products and vegetables. Tomato paste, onions, garlic, crushed red pepper and parsley are used to season the dishes. There are some differences between particular regions. Meat – especially lamb and mutton - plays an important role in Diyarbakir cuisine. Many dishes are spicy or sour, and are prepared with plenty of oil. Pastrami, cured meat, cheese, tomato paste and pickles are prepared as winter provisions. Examples of typical dishes are: *Kaburga dolmas* (stuffed lamb or goat ribs) or *Meftune*. Mardin cuisine reflects

the climate and lifestyle of the region and is based on local ingredients. Like the rest of Southern and Eastern Anatolian cuisine, Mardin dishes are rather spicy, and generally meat-based. Two of the most popular dishes are ‘çiğ köfte’ (spicy raw meatballs) and rice. Cracked bulgur wheat also plays an important role in the Mardin cuisine.



Fig. 5 Homemade otlu peyniri from village of Serinbayir

Van is famous for city’s breakfast culture and is dotted with single-purpose *kahvalti salonu* (breakfast restaurants).

In most *kahvalti salonu*, you can see on windows display: bins of glistening olives, Honey with slabs of honeycomb, blocks of cheese and plates stacked with delicate sheets of fresh kaymak, Turkish-style clotted cream made by skimming the fat that rises to the top of vats of boiling milk (sheep’s milk is used in Van). Fresh, traditionally prepared *kaymak* is delicious. Absolutely must-eat while visiting the Van region.

Van's most iconic cheese known as *otlu peynir* in East Anatolia, is a firm white salty cheese that is flavored with *otlar* (wild herbs) gathered in the spring from the slopes of mountains. The herby cheese produced in Van is also produced in other cities such as Diyarbakir, Mus and Bitlis. The local production started more than 200 years ago. The herbs mainly consisting of wild garlic (*allium*) species are believed to be added to Van cheese as flavorings, antimicrobial preservatives and as well as vitamin-rich sources to be eaten during severe winter conditions of high mountain areas when fresh fruits and vegetables are no longer available to the villagers. Purpose is to raise the resistance of the population to diseases (Çelik 2008). The herbs, which can also include wild fennel, thyme, mint) and the esoteric 'Mustafa's flower', are soaked for at least a week in a salt brine and then being added to the cheese, (Eckhardt, Hagerman 2010). In the traditional way of *otlu peynir* making, the milk is filtered and renneted. After coagulation, it is cut into small pieces and whey is removed. The chopped herbs are added at a ratio of 0.5–3.0 kg per curd obtained from 100 kg milk. Then the curd is mixed well to get a homogenous distribution of herbs. The cheese making is completed by pressing, breaking down into blocks by hand, salting, filling into containers. Last stage is ripening for 3 months (Çelik 2008). Van province produces more than 5 000 tons of *otlu peynir* a year, exporting it also to other regions of Turkey.

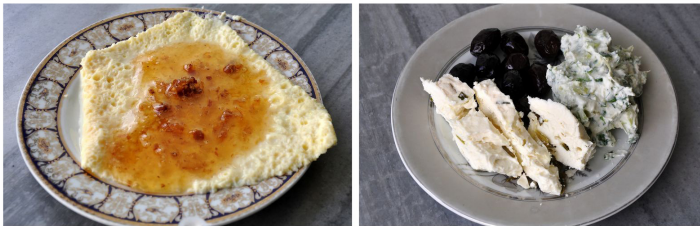


Fig. 6 Kaymak with honey and SE Anatolia cheeses with olives

One of special culinary experiences was breakfast in house of Kurdish family in village Serinbayır Köyü at the foot of the volcano Nemrut Dağı, between the mountain and Lake Van. In ambient atmosphere of sunny garden young Kurdish women welcomed us with homemade Van cheese (*Van otlu peyniri*) with freshly baked flatbread (Fig. 5).

Kaymak Bal (kaymak with honey) in Kahvaltı salonu in the center of Van was another great treat not to be missed when visiting this Region. Cheeses with olives (*beyaz peynir*, *çökelek* and *zeytin*) was very tasty too (Fig. 6).

When staying in Mardin we were accommodated in *Sahmeran Otantik Pension*, located in the heart of Mardin old town, set in a historical stone building harmonious with the local architecture. In the inner yard garden we had breakfast consisting of fresh cheese, honey and flatbread (*pide*) straight from the oven (Fig. 7). All from small local market (*Pazar*), located in side alley off the main street of Mardin old town (Fig. 8).



Fig. 7 Breakfast in Mardin

The opportunity to visit and experience the wonderful sights, smells, sounds and tastes of the markets (*Pazars* or *çarşılar*) is another great idea for culinary tourist (Fig. 8). It is possible to enjoy the various shapes of naturally grown vegetables. So different from the unified species grown in greenhouses of eg. Netherlands, which often are resembling plastic dummies. Remarkable are the colorful stalls of spices shining in the sun. Stands of dairy products are also tempting, full of a variety of naturally produced cheeses. Vendors are always happy to let you try them. They are delicious and affordable. On the market in Batman kilogram of Van-style feta (*otlu peyniri*) cost less than 2 Euro.



Fig. 8 Markets in Batman (top and middle) and Mardin (bottom)

An interesting experience is the ability to observe the procedure of meals preparation - from raw ingredients to finished product. It is advised to pry chef at work as it will help in recreating dishes after returning home. Such possibility was in restaurant Rido in Mardin. On the ground floor you can observe the process of preparing meat for *adana kebab*. Then application on the spit and grilling over an open fire with company of hot green peppers. (Fig. 9). The place was extremely popular among the local population. At the peak of lunch time there was about 20 people on the street in front of Rido waiting for a table. This demonstrates the excellent quality of the served food. It is worth to note such facts when choosing places to lunch or dine. It is better to wait for a table few minutes than to eat in nearly empty place. Local knows and it is worth to watch and follow them.



Fig. 9 Adana Kebab from raw product to ready-to-eat delicacy

However, the greatest culinary spectacle we saw occurred in Midyat. In a small restaurant with few tables located within the old city. Order of *saç kavurma* turned out to be a hit.

The restaurant owner prepared the dish on the grill located outdoor. Before our eyes, small pieces of lamb accompanied by onions, peppers and tomatoes, seasoned only with salt and *pul biber* (pepper flakes) turned into a masterpiece of Turkish cuisine (Fig. 10).



Fig. 10 Preparation of saç kavurma.



Fig. 11 Güveç served in Nehir et Lokantasi, Hasankyef

Another great stews, you can try in South-Eastern Turkey (and in other regions as well) are *güveç* (type of casserole) (Fig 11) and eggplant moussaka (*Patlican Musakka*), which in contrary to Greek version is not layered. Instead, it is prepared with sautéed eggplant, green peppers, tomatoes, onions, garlic and minced meat, usually beef (Fig 12).



Fig. 12 Patlican Musakka in one of Diyarbakir restaurants

Since Turkey is an Islamic country, alcohol beverages are not so popular like in Western World countries. Most popular drink is tea. Wherever you will go, you will find small teahouses (*çay Evi*). They can be found everywhere - in every village, town square, seaside, hilltops and crossroads. Just any conceivable place with a view, to provide opportunity to watch other people (Fig. 15).



Fig. 13 Game of okey in Çay Evi in Mardin.

The teahouses of Turkey play role of social clubs. In Turkey's more conservative regions, like South-East, *çay evi* is a cultural artefact claimed exclusively by males. It's owned by men, staffed by men and younger boys, who deliver orders beyond, and frequented by men. They are places where men gather all day long, especially in the evenings to meet their friends, chat, gossip, play okey (Fig. 13) cards, backgammon or dominoes while being served hot Turkish tea in tulip shaped glasses. 'They're where, if you are a retired Turkish gentleman, you might go to get away from the house, because the house is where the women are' (Eckhardt 2010).



Fig. 14 Tea served in *çay evi* on the shore of Lake Van. (Photo: R. Stańczyk)

When sightseeing in Turkey it is a must stop from time to time in tea house or outside on small distinctive stool in the sun or in the shadow sipping slowly black tea and observing Turkish neighbors playing games. An unforgettable moment was the visit to the *çay evi* on the shore of Lake Van, somewhere between Akdamar Island and Tatvan where we were served by the ‘magician’, who was able to keep in one hand 7 glasses of hot tea along with saucers (Fig. 14).



Fig. 15 Tea houses (*Çay Evi*) in Van, Hasankeyf and Mardin.

Summary

South Eastern Turkey is perfect destination for cultural tourists. Local air companies like eg. “Anadolu Jet” provides perfect and cheap connections from major Turkish cities to even relatively small local centres like Mardin or Adiyaman. Local public bus lines guarantee affordable and frequent journeys around the area. Region is safe and natives are very friendly. Prices are low, culture is rich and different from remaining Turkey.

Wealthy historical heritage, friendly natives, beautiful landscapes, local crafts like silver or gold jewelry and of course great local cuisine makes this region one of the best destinations for a people who don't seek just non-sophisticated sea & sun resorts. The opportunities to become acquainted with places still pursuing their traditional life styles in not so remote parts of the planet is disappearing in our fast changing globalised world. South Eastern Turkey is still one of the best chances to do this for people enjoying real cultural tourism but not having big funding for this. Social transformation processes, which clearly are taking place in this region as well (areas of multi-storey apartment houses are growing around ancient city cores), will eventually diminish differences of local life styles but the beauty and charm of this land will stay.

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