

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Nar Lokanta

While I very much enjoy Turkish food, it is only on rare occasions that I get particularly excited about a Turkish restaurant. So I knew, when I could not stop raving about Nar Lokanta to anyone who would listen, that I had come across a very special place indeed. Nar Gourmet's first restaurant venture, Nar Lokanta is housed in the building of luxury retailer Armaggan. Located in the heart of Sultanahmet by the Grand Bazaar's Nuruosmaniye gate, it is truly a sight to behold, with seven floors that include shops, an art gallery, a café, and, of course, Nar Lokanta.

Nar Gourmet specializes in all-natural regional products from throughout Anatolia. Nar Lokanta offers a platform from which to showcase these products as well as excellent Anatolian cuisine. This restaurant specializes in traditional Turkish food at its freshest and lightest, run by the team that used to manage the Feriye restaurant, including chef Vedat Başaran.

Once you've entered Armaggan's stunning showroom and made your way past all the gorgeous jewelry and home art, the elevator takes you up to the fifth floor, where the restaurant is located.

The atmosphere here is fairly formal, but not stuffy. The décor inside is very classic, featuring lots of marble and paintings by contemporary Turkish artists. At the back of the restaurant there are beautiful turquoise tiles surrounding

the traditional stone oven where they bake their fresh pide bread. The most striking aspect of the décor is the vertical garden at the back of the restaurant. Hanging down to the floor below, covering two stories of the building, the various plants and flowers form an undulating pattern: a living work of art. There is also a large terrace surrounded by plants and ivy, with a gentle breeze keeping things cool.

The menu features familiar Turkish classics as well as a number of less common regional dishes, covering everything from Ottoman palace dishes to humble village fare. All dishes are prepared using Nar's own olive oils, which have exceptionally low acidity, giving them a very pure and almost sweet flavor. While Nar Gourmet offers olive oils from all over Turkey, their most popular variety comes from the Ayvalık region on the Aegean coast, widely considered to be the best area in the country for olives.

Our meal started with a basket of their freshly baked bread, including the light and fluffy pide. This was served with a selection of Nar's olive oils, including variations infused with flavors such as red pepper, and some aromatic herbs, such as dried mint and oregano, for sprinkling. Along with the bread

came a small creamy ball of something that looked and tasted rather like cheese, but was actually made from strained yoghurt.

To accompany the range of Turkish cuisine is an extensive wine list that exclusively features Turkish wines, including a number of bottles from boutique vineyards. The *mezes* on offer include a variety of regional olive oil dishes, while the mains focus on lamb and beef, with a couple of chicken dishes also on the menu.

Not being a big red-meat eater, I decided to sample a few of the *mezes* and warm starters for my meal. These included the *maş piyazı*, a light and simple dish of mung beans with fresh onions and herbs, dressed with a pomegranate sauce that gave it a wonderful tangy flavor. The *çerkez tavuk* is another classic, and was light and flavorful. For hot starters, we also selected the *sembusek*, a pide stuffed with cheese and tarragon leaves, with a slightly sweet finish. To round off my meal, I ordered the *saray mantı*, a traditional dish of little dumplings stuffed with spiced



meat, served with a sauce of butter and garlic yogurt, and topped with a generous dusting of dried mint, sumac, and red chili flakes: the ultimate comfort food. Meanwhile, my companion had the *beğendili kebab*, a classic Turkish dish in which chunks of beef are stewed in a tomato

sauce and served on a bed of eggplant puree. Nar's *beğendi* was perfectly smoky and creamy, making it the ideal base for the tender pieces of meat.

After such a hearty meal we had little room for desert, but could not resist Nar's version of *şekerpare*, which was prepared with poppy seeds that added an unusual flavor twist and was accompanied by Turkish coffee and fig-flavored *lokum*. While everything we ate was delicious, we found that the simplest foods, such as the breads and olive oils, made the biggest impression on us. With its deliciously light Turkish fare, excellent service, and tasteful setting, Nar Lokanta has filled a real gap in the market, as there are not many places in this area where you can enjoy a high-quality meal in an upmarket setting — and at reasonable prices, no less. Given this long list of positive attributes, Nar Lokanta has now made it to the top of my list of places to visit when in the Sultanahmet area.

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By Yeşim Yemni