

Ben bir vejeteryanım – “I am a vegetarian.”

A Reflection on Türkiye’s Vegetarian Cuisine

Claudia Perez

Without a doubt, Türkiye’s cuisine is one of the most culturally vibrant and, dare I say, recognizable of them all, an effect of being situated at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. Yet, while the country boasts having a variety of cuisines to offer, the concept of vegetarianism is not one that seems to be wholly embraced.

The Turkish meal is generally composed of a variety of generous dishes, offering an outstanding opportunity to try bits and pieces of varied ingredients. These dishes, while beautiful in presentation and allure, can at times seem a bit overwhelming to an individual who pays close attention to what they can and cannot consume (whether due to health or personal reasons), and this is particularly true for vegetarian visitors and travelers. As such it is important to show appreciation for the Turkish vegetarian dishes that were readily available and delicious.

Reflecting on Turkish breakfast plates (kahvaltı) in particular, I considered this meal to have been one of the easiest to design and personalize as there is great variation and selection of choices to pick from. An example is Gözleme which looks like a mix between a pancake and a quesadilla and is usually filled with cheese and other savory ingredients that do not encompass meat. Pide was one of my personal favorites, a sort of Turkish pizza that, even though it was made only from dough and cheese, was a savory and delicious experience. I will note with pleasure that Türkiye is heaven for sweets. Lokum, or Turkish delight was just divine to consume. The often-cubed jelly fixtures were flavored in many intricate ingredients ranking from pomegranate and pistachio to cookies and cream and even rosewater.

It can be at times difficult to distinguish what cuisines are appropriate to consume based on one’s personal needs. At such these are some vitals phrases to practice in preparation for an enjoyable dining experience while in Türkiye:

- Tavuk, et ve balık yemem. – I do not eat chicken, meat and fish.

- Etsiz – Without meat
- Et var mı? – Is there meat?
- Etsiz yemek var mı? – Do you have any dishes without meat?
- And of course, Ben bir vejeteryanım – I am a vegetarian.

While the dining experience for a vegetarian can be challenging at times in Türkiye, it is important to stress the value of respecting and appreciating traditional cultural dishes. One can learn a lot about a country from its cuisine, and this is true in Türkiye with or without dietary limitations.