

## **Istanbul's Street Food: Multicultural Cuisine in Turkey**

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Istanbul, Turkey, has always been a city known for its multicultural history. As the Ottoman Empire evolved and expanded, so did the cuisine in the country. Throughout the duration of our time in Istanbul, the group encountered a multitude of vendors selling everything from Simit, a circular bread covered in sesame seeds, to Koçan and Közde Mısır, boiled and grilled corn. As we went through different areas of Istanbul, we were able to taste and learn more about the different kinds of street foods that were popular among both locals and tourists in the area. One of the biggest takeaways when observing Istanbul's gastronomy and street vendors in particular, is that the history and culture of the city is so heavily embedded in all areas of cuisine and street food has become a major part of Istanbul's identity as a city. Visitors and locals alike frequent the stands throughout the city and are able to purchase snacks or full meals for a low price, making it easy to get a meal on-the-go. On social media, Turkish coffee and Turkish ice cream vendors have gone viral, gathering hundreds of thousands of views as visitors post their interactions with sellers throughout the city. Serving as a meeting point for East and West, the city of Istanbul has become a major melting pot for cultures across the region and time. Its street food has become known internationally and tourists often visit the city with the aim of trying out different cuisines. The street foods were an incredible avenue for cultural exchange and Turkey is able to harness this power by using gastro-diplomacy and promoting street vendors to tourists. These stalls allow for this exchange to happen on a smaller scale than those in restaurants, but provide visitors and locals with accessible opportunities to try out the different kinds of foods available in the city. Street food in Istanbul has the potential to be an incredibly powerful tool for Turkey to harness in its diplomatic endeavors; it is delicious, rich in cultural history, and accessible – qualities that many tourists would love to experience.