

Dai Pera

★★★★★

Meaning 'he who invites to dinner' in Ottoman, Dai Pera focuses on an Istanbul palate that has been somewhat forgotten with the spread of Italian, Far Eastern and Chinese cuisine.

Dai Pera, located immediately to your right after passing 45'lik next to the Galatasaray High School, came into being from a demand, among busy business people and students, for a restaurant that makes homemade meals. Unable to find these kinds of meals around Cihangir unless she made them herself at home, Dai Pera's owner, Arzu Gürdamar, has instantly drawn not only locals, but also visitors to the city from outside the country. In fact, the regulars of the locale are mostly foreigners, who come both to get their fill of Turkish culinary pleasures and to lunch and sup over wine in a friendly environment. Ms. Gürdamar has taken combining Istanbul cuisine with alcohol – wine, in particular – to a new level; through an arrangement with Consensus wines, she has coupled the dishes on her menu with select wines. She is present at the restaurant to serve guests and to offer them suggestions concerning the best wines for their menu choices.

The dishes at Dai Pera are cooked daily with pressed olive oil brought in from Ayvalık; the menu is therefore not fixed but changes every day, as well as from lunch to dinner. Note that



some dishes are available on a steady basis. During the day, homemade meals are served on tiny tables covered with floral tablecloths, while in the evenings, the atmosphere changes dramatically with the dimming of the lights, taking on a romantic ambience. Instead of homemade meals, the menu is made up of a rich variety of cheeses, Turkish olive-oil dishes, homemade smoked meats, squash patties, and cheese soufflés, accompanied by wine. Meat-stuffed grape leaves, pit roasted lamb and rice with onions, nuts, diced liver and currants, bulgur rice with sweet basil-spiced meat, and *manth* with chickpeas are among Dai Pera's favourites. After work is also a perfect time to stop in and wind down over a glass of wine and a cheese plate.

We recommend you try the honeyed sirloin steak off the evening menu as well.

The décor is eclectic. Arzu Hanım has taken an original approach, having tables and shelves made out of logs and other pieces she's bought and collected. At first glance from outside, the wallpaper on the back wall creates a striking impression. A vivid variety of colours and designs are aptly juxtaposed with simple objects to affect a whole. Even if you don't see Dai Pera's mascot, the orange-beaked Indian nightingale, it is impossible to miss from the sound he makes, which is distinctive enough to notice from outside – and thus his name: "Bipbip (like "beep beep")", after the sound he makes. This may wear on someone who's there every day, after a while,



but for those like us who stop in from time to time, there is no doubting the liveliness this adds to the ambience. On Fridays and Saturdays, there are evenings of music that conveniently drown out Bipbip. Two street musicians who are here to visit Istanbul lend a thoroughly unique atmosphere when they play in the evenings. Ideal for throwing off the day's stress after work! *Merve Arkunlar & Ayşe Şahin*

Menu:

Artichokes in olive oil 9.50 TL
Squash patty plate 11 TL
Homemade manth 12 TL
Honeyed sirloin steak 24 TL
Homemade baklava 8 TL
Cheese plates 15 TL

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(0212) 252 80 99 *Yeni Çarşı Caddesi 54, Galatasaray. Open weekdays from 09.00-24.00, from 09.00-04.00 Fri-Sat, and from 10.00-04.00 Sun.*

A Hint of Spice

The secrets of Turkish home cuisine are revealed. *Maria Eliades*

"Go ahead," Selin Rozanes winks at me by a pot of rice mixed with cinnamon, tiny sultanas, allspice, lots of dill and a touch of lemon prepared grape leaf dolma she's teaching 3 women and I to make. The sweet, moist and slightly piquant filling is flavourful and balanced.

Rozanes' culinary tour and "seasoned" company, Turkish Flavours, started in that very kitchen four years ago when her friends told her that they wanted to learn how she cooks Chinese, Indian, French and Sephardic cuisine. At the end of the classes, they insisted that she should do it professionally. So she launched into a second career. "I thought of starting something new, but not a travel agency," Rozanes says. "I knew my country well. I knew travel organizations very well. I put all my experience together to start Turkish Flavours."

The company, which started with classes like the one I attended,



Rozanes and students

expanded into culinary tours around Istanbul and Turkey, giving travellers and locals loads of options. Around Istanbul, one can be led around the Kadıköy markets and end with a meal at the renowned, Çiya, or follow Rozanes around the Egyptian Spice Market to her favourite shop who supplies her with the spices she uses in her own kitchen. She also organizes food tours to Cappadocia and to Erenler Sofrası in Bodrum (as part of her "Slice of Bodrum" tour).

While Rozanes does have the

occasional help from teammates Aylin Öney Tan (an acclaimed food critic) and Annie Gelmuyden Pertan (a film director and cookbook writer), she leads the majority of her events by herself. People come a knockin' for her warmth and expertise. "It's not only the cooking," she says. "It's the whole experience of being welcomed into a Turkish home."

That experience of entering her home like a relative is exactly the unforgettable flavour which remains in your memory even after you've left. If Cappadocia, Istanbul and Bodrum aren't enough, she also does tours to the Gülloğlu baklava factory and trips to Ayvalık, Safranbolu, Hatay, Antakya and Gaziantep.

Back in her flat, the ladies, Rozanes and I sit under her massive chandelier to a table set with the dishes we've made together. The large

ceiling, the distinguishing feature of the house her grandfather built, accommodates the light in our glasses and on the dishes of pickled red peppers, eggplant *ezme*, *revani* (dessert), *dolma*, clay-cooked shrimp and *hünkar beğendi*. The meal, with Rozanes seated at the head of the table, is perfect. She has plans to expand her tours, but with a giggle, she says she won't tell me

exactly with what before divulging that she'd like to include a meze tour in someplace like Asmalimescit and possibly a wine tour, but not until the new year. For now, she's content conducting her business at the pace of her tours – slowly but with time to taste each unique flavour. Tour costs vary and are available upon request. Turkish Flavours, *Valikonağı Caddesi 14/3 Uğur Apt. Nişantaşı.* www.turkishflavours.com

