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Turkish Treasure On The Town, On A Budget

By: Brian Austin with Paula Markowitz Wittlin
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Word is out—as evidenced by late night lines—the recently opened Turkish Cuisine Westchester is rapidly gaining popularity. The restaurant's slogan states, "Best Mediterranean Food In Town," and you'll have to travel significantly further to find a challenger. Or at least to Mamaroneck, where co-owner Apo Kilic's more lavish Turkish Meze restaurant is located.



Co-owners Apo Kilic (above) and Vahide Meric have one of the coziest spots in town
Photo credit: Paula Markowitz Wittlin



Vahide ("Rita") Meric

Photo credit: Paula Markowitz Wittlin

The new venture, which Mr. Kilic opened with Vahide ("Rita") Meric, is in the spot formerly occupied by Lou's Texas Chili. Behind the counter you'll find the upbeat Richard Viscone, who stayed on from Lou's. It's a small spot and customers feel warmly welcomed in the dining room, sitting at the counter, or grabbing take-out.

A Mediterranean diet is said to be the healthiest, but it's hard to resist the impulse to overindulge at Turkish Cuisine Westchester, where everything we sampled was exceptional.

The falafel sandwich is the most popular offering, according to Ms. Meric, and it's wonderful. Some falafel exacts a penalty, but here it's made per-order with fresh oil, which Mr. Kilic credits for its easy-on-the-stomach addictiveness. Preparation may take a bit longer, but it's worth the wait.

For customers not familiar with Mediterranean food, the menu offers detailed descriptions of every dish (also listed on the Web site). Whether you're a vegetarian or a carnivore, there are delights to be sampled.

Starters

The stuffed grape leaves (dolma), prepared without meat, is sublime. We've been back several times—happily working our way through the menu—enjoying baba ganoush (traditional smoked eggplant dish), hummus and tabouleh and planning to try more next time.

Carnivore Cravings

If it's meat you crave, choose between gyros made from chicken or a combination of lamb and beef. We can enthusiastically vouch for the chicken, the only gyro we've tried thus far. The grilled lamb kebab teases with a savory sauce as you bite through a crunchy exterior, unleashing the heady taste. The nuanced accompanying aromatic rice preps the palette for another bite. There are twelve meat dishes to sample, and even more vegetarian choices.

During the restaurant's first weeks, menu items were added by the day. Soups were a later addition; the red lentil soup (mercimek corbas) is not to be missed.

Java and dessert afficianados can top off the meal with baklava and Turkish coffee. The former—a sublimely sweet traditional filo dough pastry with pistachios and honey—reaches heights other desserts only aspire to. The strong and spicy coffee kicks the caffeine rush up several notches if you take a spoon to the thick residue after draining a cup. If you want to forgo the wired vibrations (*but why would you?*), leave the bottom alone.



Richard Viscone works both sides of the counter with an easy charm.

Photo credit: Paula Markowitz Wittlin

Turkish Cuisine Westchester

116 Mamaroneck Ave.
683-6161 • turkishcuisineny.com
Mon.-Fri.: 11 a.m.-9 p.m.
Sat.: 11 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Closed Sundays

Two-fers

White Plains on a budget doesn't have to hurt. Combining a gallery visit and dinner, we enjoyed a great show (the animation exhibit at the Arts Exchange) and a first class meal. Champagne taste on a beer budget indeed.

- Animation Exhibit: Free
- Dinner For Two: \$25 (with tip)

*Add a bottle of Astica Torrentes for \$7.

Turkish Cuisine has a BYOB policy; on a recent visit we brought beer, which paired deliciously with everything. We decided not to wing it regarding wine, and asked the expert, Stu Levine, owner of VINO 100 (and our wine columnist.) Wine pairs well with the unique flavors and textures in Middle Eastern cuisine. Stu recommends light, fruity wines, saying full-bodied wines overpower delicate flavors. While enjoying a lamb dish with tzatziki (a refreshing yogurt and cucumber sauce) try a light fruity pinot noir or Spanish grenache blend. Having hummus or baba ganoush? Try a white wine like Grüner Veltliner from Austria or a dry riesling from Alsace. In keeping with our low-budget mission—and choosing white—we stopped by the shop and Mathias Holzacker set us up with a marvelous Astica Torrentes from Argentina (\$7). Perfecto!

With free delivery in White Plains you can get adventurous while kicking back at home (or slaving away at the office). But do take the opportunity to stop in for a warm friendly welcome at Turkish Cuisine Westchester.

Photo credit:

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