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FOOD MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR

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Theo Randall's favourite pasta dish

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The recipes every cook needs to know

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- New vegetarian recipes



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*Bea* **better cook**

- Step by step: Moroccan pastries
- Get it right: mayo, meringue, bread dough



**hungry traveller.**



A word to the wise: don't visit Alaçatı's Saturday market if you're hungry – which, on this sunny morning,

I most definitely was. Producers from all around Turkey's Aegean coast converge on the place, plying everything from huge scaly artichoke heads to honey-drenched, golden-brown pistachio pastries. Plump red mullet and octopus are auctioned off from a giant marble slab. Within minutes of arriving I was juggling jars of giant caperberries and quince jam, while guzzling a glass of sweet pomegranate juice. And the day had only just begun.

The former fishing village of Alaçatı is 70km west of Izmir, Turkey's third-largest city. Until 15 years ago, modern life took one look at Alaçatı – then rolled on by. Today, things have changed. Windsurfers were the first to come here, drawn by the steady northerly breezes and clear water. Now friends of mine in Istanbul pop down for weekends and rave about the village's chic boutiques and cool beach clubs. Bougainvillea-shaded pavement cafés and pretty guesthouses grace the town's cobblestone streets. But it was when I heard about Alaçatı's culinary scene – a tantalising mix of traditional Aegean and modern Turkish, finished with foraged wild herbs and Michelin-level execution – that I booked my flight.

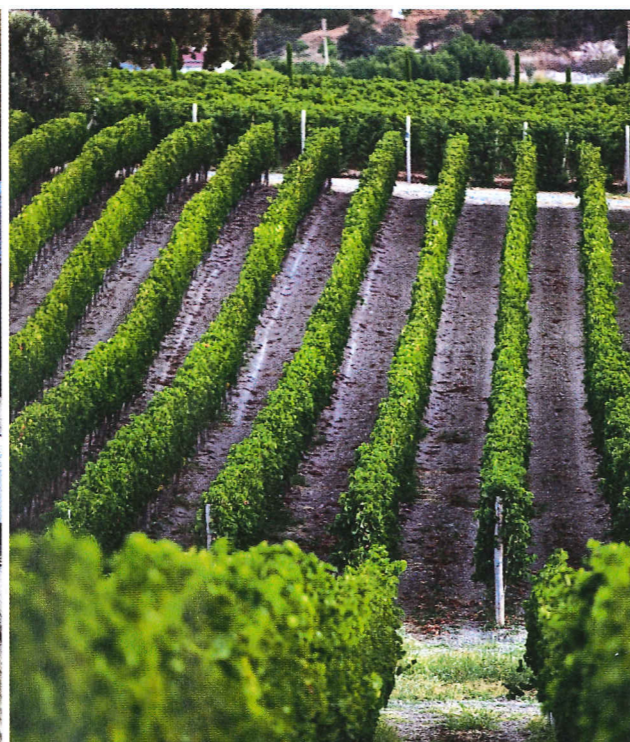
**IN THE KNOW**

To get the lowdown on the region's culinary history, I met up with longtime Alaçatı resident Gökçen Adar ([gokcenadar.com](http://gokcenadar.com)). The author of 13 cookbooks, he's spent decades gathering and preserving thousands of ancient local recipes. He also runs cooking workshops (in Turkish), and may start teaching English-language sessions in the future.

Alaçatı is just a hop across the Aegean from the Greek island of Chios, so it's no surprise to find plenty of Greek and Turkish overlap in the regional cuisine, from »

# TURKEY'S NEWEST FOOD HOTSPOT

Welcome to Alaçatı, says Kathryn Tomasetti – it's a town on the Aegean coast that's transformed itself from sleepy fishing village to chic destination. The great news is, food is the main draw



AEGEAN DREAM With alfresco dining in cobble streets and tucked-away courtyards, hip delis and pioneering winemakers, Alaçatı has become a food lovers' haven



TURKISH DELIGHTS, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP The fig tree-shaded courtyard of Asma Yaprığı restaurant; early morning in Alaçatı; the Urla Şarapçılık wine estate

stuffed vine leaves to baklava (in fact, the town had been a Greek settlement until World War I). But what really defines the area's traditional cuisine? "Local ingredients are key," Gökçen explained. "We make use of dozens of wild herbs, such as the much-prized root of milk thistle."

Visitors keen to try these age-old flavours may want to plan their visit to coincide with the new **Forgotten Delicacies Festival** ([kaybolanlezzetler.com](http://kaybolanlezzetler.com)). Gökçen was one of the founders of this three-day celebration, which now takes place twice a year, in June and

October. Activities include cooking demonstrations and talks on the local gastronomy and its history, as well as exhibitions of antique kitchen gadgets. Equally delectable is April's **Alaçatı Herb Festival**, an annual fair that also includes a wild herb foraging competition.

### FEASTING AL FRESCO

Local recommendations in my pocket (Turks are nothing if not passionately opinionated about food) and my appetite whetted, I hit Alaçatı's whitewashed streets. First up was **Dutlu Kahve** (2001 Sokak), a short stroll from the main square, which for decades was the village's archetypal coffee (kahve) bar. It's where the town's elders gathered beneath the towering mulberry trees for cup after cup of thick Turkish coffee, served as a side to endless rounds of backgammon. Completely renovated in 2014, the low-key restaurant retains its chequerboard-tiled interior and a traditional feel. Seasonal dishes may include courgettes with fried garlic and walnuts, puréed fava beans scattered with paper-thin slices of red onion, or sweet roasted quince spiked with orange zest, cinnamon and cloves.

Around the corner, **Asma Yaprığı** looks like it's been styled

for a Vogue fashion shoot. This family-run restaurant's magical courtyard is as enchanting as its menu. Tables are dotted beneath fig trees, jasmine vines and a tangle of fairy lights; the wooden chairs are painted the classic Aegean blue. Diners first pop into Asma's kitchen to select a few mezza starters, each one traditionally displayed on a large country-style table. Next, there are strictly seasonal offerings, such as garlicky wild leeks (also known as ramps) in tomato stew, pumpkin cake and slow-cooked lamb roasted with whole garlic cloves, served up on an envy-inducing collection of enamelware. Fruits and vegetables are picked fresh from their garden, and milk and fresh goat's cheese come from the next-door neighbour.

In Alaçatı's marina, some 3km from the village centre, **Ferdi Baba** ([ferdibababalik.com](http://ferdibababalik.com)) is the seafood restaurant par excellence. Local families dine alongside chic couples from Izmir and Istanbul, each table indulging in classic regional cuisine: fat olives stuffed with almonds, white peynir cheese with spinach, charred octopus kebabs, or preserved tuna topped with red onion. Meals are traditionally chased down with icy glasses of anise-flavoured rakı, Turkey's indigenous firewater. From spring until late autumn, the restaurant's retractable roof peels back to reveal the star-studded sky, utterly unmarred by light pollution.

### MEETING THE MAKERS: JAM AND WINE

The next morning, aided by a cool breeze, I set out to meet some of the stars of the town's culinary food scene. I called in on Osman Poshor, who's been making his own jams since 1995, when his high-flying wife Sabahat was working for a development bank in London. Today the couple own one of Alaçatı's loveliest guesthouses, **Incirliiev** ([incirliiev.com](http://incirliiev.com)), where Osman serves up his creations, such as bergamot and Italian plum, or lemon and lavender, each day

### SEFERIHSAR: TURKEY'S FIRST 'SLOW CITY'

An hour's drive east of Alaçatı – and well worth a day trip – Seferihisar is Turkey's first Cittaslow, or 'Slow City' (Ludlow was the UK's first). A spin-off from Italy's Slow Food Movement, the Cittaslow ethos promotes individuality, responsible travel and local traditions, as well as environmentally responsible and ethically sourced nutritious food. Seferihisar's Sunday market, held along the 16th-century streets of Sigacik citadel, is a case in point. There's no fee for residents to set up a market stall. The only catch is that everything they sell must be produced locally – from sweet wildflower honey and sticky pomegranate molasses to embroidered tops and felt handbags. As souvenirs go, the bounty here is irresistible.

at breakfast. All the fruit comes from within a 10km radius and Osman picks most of it himself, including the plump figs that grow on the tree in the courtyard (Incirliiev means Fig House). "It's my therapy," he says with a smile.

Osman occasionally even welcomes hotel guests who wish to join him on an impromptu (English-language) jam-making session. He's definitely a purist, though, eschewing spices such as vanilla or cardamom. "You need just five ingredients to make jam," confides the master. "Good fruit, sugar, lemon, sunshine and passion."

In the gently rolling hills beyond Alaçatı, a scattering of new vineyards has begun attracting oenophiles in recent years. Turkish winemaking goes back five millennia, but until recently its reputation was mediocre. My hotel paired me with a driver for a vineyard tour I'll never forget.

The key – as always in Turkey – is getting local experts to point you in the right direction. In this case, that meant the **Urla Şarapçılık** wine estate ([urlasarapcilik.com.tr](http://urlasarapcilik.com.tr); free tastings for small groups, arranged in advance), 52km east of Alaçatı. (A taxi costs around £30 and takes approximately 40 minutes.) The new wines have been winning accolades from the likes of *Financial Times* wine critic Jancis Robinson and *Decanter* magazine.

"I fell in love with Urla's thousand-year-old olive trees 18 years ago, and couldn't resist purchasing the lot," explained owner-winemaker Can Ortabaş. "It was only afterwards that I discovered the ancient vineyard terraces and 2,000-year-old wine amphorae embedded in the land."

The ancient vine terraces and terracotta amphorae, which were used to ferment and age wine before wooden barrels were introduced, got him thinking that he was onto something very special – and got him thinking big. With three long-time friends, Can set about planting 35 hectares of vines in the hillsides, a mix of robust

international varieties such as cabernet sauvignon and merlot along with the local bogazkere variety. Their wines, Vourla and Tempus, hit the international market, to acclaim, in 2010. Pick up a bottle after a vineyard tour, or look out for it in local restaurants.

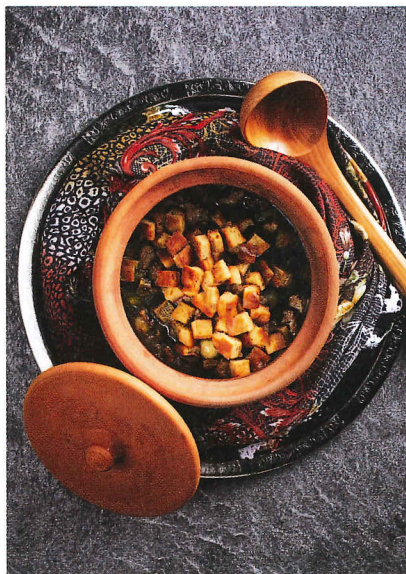
### REACHING FOR THE STARS

Like any foodie savouring a final meal before home, I hoped I'd saved the tastiest morsel for last. I closed out my Alaçatı eating extravaganza at **Alancha** ([alancha.com](http://alancha.com)), owned by ex-professional windsurfer and self-taught chef Kemal Demiral. Cresting the village's highest hilltop, Kemal's open kitchen is

a simple glass cube, giving patrons glorious front-row seats to witness the creation of the restaurant's contemporary-Turkish dishes.

Although the Michelin guide doesn't stretch to Turkey (yet), I'd wager that Alancha's impressive set menu would be in line for at least one star. Amuse-bouches include smoked beef jerky sprinkled with wild herb seeds, nine-day sourdough bread, and nasturtium flowers stuffed with vegetable pâté. Followed by 10 courses. That's right, 10 – each one taking inspiration from a different part of Turkey, and each one better than the last. Pistachio cream from Gaziantep (in southeast Turkey, >>

CHIC RETREATS, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT A dish created by chef Kemal Demiral in his glass-cube kitchen at Alancha restaurant; dinner and the swimming pool at Alavya hotel



PHOTOGRAPHS: EXPLOREALACATI.COM, SEREN DAL, THINKSTOCK

## hungry traveller.

one of the longest inhabited places in the world) is topped with lemon thyme and pistachio crumble. Smoked chickpeas from Mardin in eastern Turkey are served in a bowl of frozen ice, then drizzled in yogurt sauce and brown butter. From the Datça Peninsula, south of Alacati, comes pickled green almonds with asparagus, and the sweetbreads with berry vinegar and wild edible flowers are inspired by Istanbul's street food.

Over dessert of sesame tahini foam, fig molasses and chocolate-dipped local herbs, chef Kemal gave me the background to his unusual culinary philosophy. "I'm inspired by Nordic cooking methods, smoked and pickled ingredients," he told me. "But luckily for me, our foraged foods and local produce are unrivalled and absolutely abundant." How lucky for me too. *Kathryn Tomasetti travelled as a guest of the Turkish Board of Tourism (gototurkey.co.uk) and explorealacati.com*

### WHERE TO STAY

- **Imren Han** The largest of Alaçati's boutique hotels, Imren Han offers traditional guestrooms and small villas. The 20-platter Turkish breakfast is served beside the central swimming pool. [alacatiimrenhanotel.com](http://alacatiimrenhanotel.com); doubles from £58 B&B
- **Alavya** A courtyard oasis off Alaçati's central thoroughfare, Alavya has ultra-luxurious rooms with exposed stone walls and private balconies. Also on site are the excellent Mitu Bistro, a sleek swimming pool and a yoga shala. [alavya.com.tr](http://alavya.com.tr); doubles from £152 B&B
- **2Rooms** If you decide to turn your vineyard visit into an overnight stay, try Turkey's smallest boutique hotel, above Urla Şarapçılık's winery. Two contemporary guestrooms stocked with L'Occitane products overlook the vines. [2roomshotel.com](http://2roomshotel.com); doubles and vineyard tour from £140 B&B

### GETTING THERE

Your hotel can arrange transfer from Izmir Airport to Alaçati. The journey takes an hour and costs around £50 (about 200 Turkish lira). Alternatively, frequent buses run the hour-long route between Izmir city centre and Alaçati (£4/15 Turkish lira).



Try this at home...

### Gökçen Adar's sea bass with potatoes and swiss chard

SERVES 2

HANDS-ON TIME 25 MIN

"We use milk in traditional Aegean cooking to balance the acidic flavour of the olive oil," says Gökçen.

**MAKE AHEAD** Make the crushed potato up to 24 hours ahead. Chill, covered, then reheat on the hob or in the microwave to serve.

- 2-3 tbsp olive oil
- 2 sustainably sourced sea bass fillets, skin-on
- 2 tbsp flour
- 2 tbsp lemon juice, plus wedges to serve
- 120ml whole milk
- 2 tbsp capers in brine, drained
- 2 tbsp chopped fresh dill

FOR THE POTATOES AND CHARD

- 2 large potatoes, chopped
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 5 swiss chard leaves, shredded

1. For the potatoes and chard, put the potatoes into a pan of salted cold water, bring to the boil, then simmer

for around 10-12 minutes. Drain and crush the potatoes slightly.

2. Heat a small frying pan with 2 tbsp of the olive oil over a medium heat. Fry the onion for around 5 minutes or until translucent, stirring occasionally. Add the swiss chard leaves, then add the potatoes and season with salt and pepper. Keep cooking until the chard has wilted, then set aside but keep warm (or see Make Ahead).

3. Meanwhile heat a large frying pan with 2-3 tbsp oil on a medium-high heat. When hot, lightly dust the fish fillets in flour on both sides, then add to the pan skin-side down. Cook for 3 minutes, then season and flip over the fillets. Add the lemon juice and cook for another 3 minutes, then add the milk, dill and capers. Cook for 1-2 minutes more, then remove the fish from the pan using a fish slice. Serve with the potatoes and chard, lemon wedges and some of the capers and dill from the pan.

**PER SERVING** 455kcal, 26.6g fat (4g saturated), 32.8g protein, 21g carbs (4g sugars), 0.5g salt, 2.3g fibre

**WINE EDITOR'S CHOICE** A gently flavoured wine such as an Alsace pinot blanc or unoaked white rioja. For clever ways to use up swiss chard, see Loose Ends