



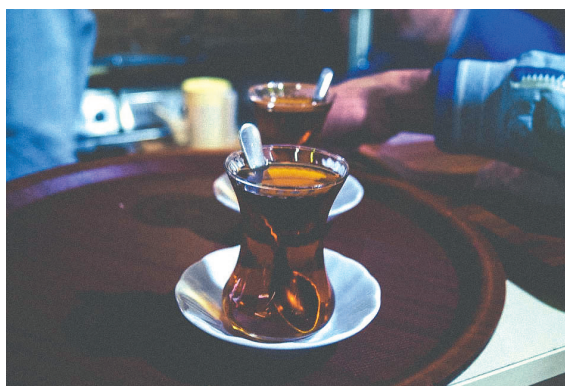
Chai Me Away

words & photos by Taahira Ayoob

When I lived in Izmir, the third largest city in Turkey, for four months, I moved from being a foreigner, to a traveller, to a visitor, and finally to a friend of the country. One thing that kept and keeps me tied to this wonderful country is its language. Turkish is a language that is spoken only in Turkey. While it does borrow words from Arabic, Urdu, and Hindi, the language itself is unique to Turkish culture. So each time I learnt a new word, I also learnt about their culture. It seemed to me that the best way of remembering Turkey was to hold on to its language, for it was a keen reflection of their way of life, which I didn't want to let go off.

Hoş Geldiniz (Hosh gal-den-iz)

Hoş geldiniz was my first introduction to the Turkish language. I first saw it in flashing red on the overheard boards of the arrival gates at Istanbul Ataturk Airport: "Türkiye'ye hoş geldiniz". I assumed it meant Welcome to Turkey, or Turkey Welcomes You, or something in that fashion. Little did I know how extensive this phrase was: I continued to hear it in shops from shop owners, in school from teachers, in cafés from waiters, and even in homes when I met new families. I learned that the letter "ş" caused the word to sound like *hosh geldiniz*, a lot like flowers rustling in the wind to welcome someone new.



TOP: TURKISH TEA (CHAI) SERVED STEAMING HOT AT MELISA WAFFLES, A POPULAR WAFFLE JOINT AT KONAK

BOTTOM: MENEMEN – A CONCOCTION OF EGGS, TOMATOES, ONION, CHILLI, AND CHEESE. THIS MEAL IS USUALLY EATEN IN THE MORNING WITH BREAD



ABOVE: THE ICONIC
CLOCK TOWER IN
KONAK SQUARE, IZMIR.

RIGHT: THE MAN
WHO MAINTAINS
THE CLOCK TOWER.



Buyrun (Bui-roon)

Hoş geldiniz may simply be translated as ‘welcome’. But at a deeper level, it is also an open invitation from Turkish people to visitors: *Hoş geldiniz*, *buyrun* always worked hand in hand. Accompanied by these very prevalent and prominent phrases, I walked into *chai* shops to warm myself with steaming cups of Turkish tea and cigarettes abundant enough to last long winter nights.

Buyrun also saw me through my culinary experiences in Turkey. Shopkeepers were always keen to teach me how meat was used in *menemen*, and about the different kinds of breads (*pide*, *pilav*, *simit*), or introduce different varieties of sweet Turkish desserts (*gozleme*, *lokum*, *baklava*).

Zaman Var (Za-man Var)

There is a quote that goes: “time you enjoy wasting isn’t wasted time”. Turkish people never say there is no time (*zaman yok*), but rather that time will come / there will always be time (*zaman var*). At Konak, I found the heart of the city resting by the clock tower facing the sea: Time stood by the people, in the form of tall, respectful clock tower, but no one was rushed by its passing.

I had the fortune of meeting the man who maintained the iconic building in Izmir as I was wandering around the busy markets of Kemeralti. Mr Watch Man told me stories about keeping the machines strong, about how he cleaned the small and long hands within the clock. He spoke gently but with a firm sense of knowledge of his craft. He reminded me very much of my father, because my father too owned a watch shop. ►



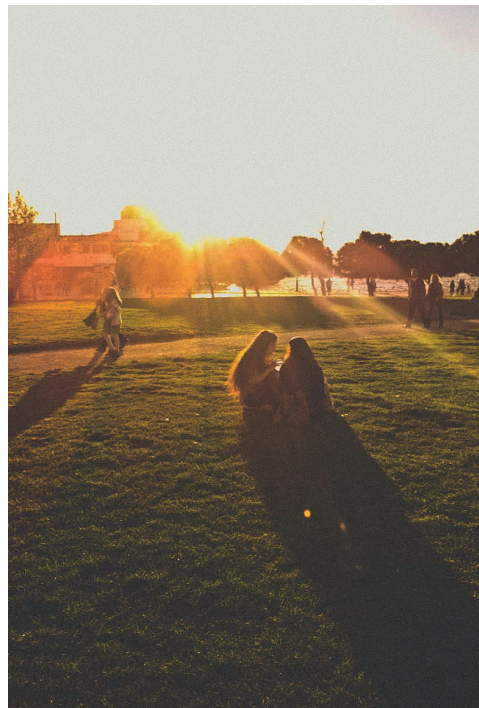
Çok Güzel (Chok Gu-zel)

Çok güzel: a common phrase used by Turkish people to describe moments of happiness or enjoyment. It can mean “good”, “great”, “beautiful”, or anything similar. As a native English speaker used to a scale of good to brilliant, I initially found the phrase limiting. But the Turkish people were contented with *çok güzel*. Only when something was truly magnificent and out of this world did they use phrases like *harika* (wonderful). I always felt compelled to tell Turkish people how *harika* they were to me when they gave in to my requests for *öğrenci indirim* (student discounts) or wrote the names of locations on my hands to make sure I wouldn't get lost.

Their hospitality and generousness amazed me. I was humbled by how much they could give without thinking it a loss to themselves. At first, it seemed like I was only being treated well because I was a foreigner, but the Turkish people were in general helpful towards one another as well. I

saw how they greeted people they met with *İyi günler* (have a good day), and even let supermarket patrons nick fruits from baskets because of the Turkish phrase “you have the right to eat anything your eyes see”. *Çok güzel* indeed.





Afiyet Olsun (Ah-fi-yat Ol-sun)

Afiyet olsun became one of my favourite Turkish phrases because it was so commonly used and well-intended – “to bring health and happiness” to the person who was going to eat or had eaten. None of the other phrases I knew, like “let’s makan” or “Bon Appétit”, matched up to *afiyet olsun*. The selflessness innate in the language won me over into believing that it was truly an untranslatable phrase. I had so much to tell my Turkish friends in response to all they had taught me. But by that time, my time in Turkey was slowly coming to an end as people interchanged their goodbyes and hugs with the phrase *kendineye bak*.

Kendineye Bak (Kan-da-nayie-bark)

When I hugged my friends goodbye and told them I would come back to Turkey sometime in the future, they assured me that Izmir would always be home to me. They also told me *kendineye bak*, which essentially meant to take care of myself when they were not there to take care of me. Those were also my last words to all my Turkish friends because they had taken care of and loved me like their own. I hoped that they too would always be content when I wasn’t there to remind them of how beautiful they are. 🇹🇷

Taahira believes in stories and in laughter, amongst many other things.

