

Food for Thought

A cultural exchange visit
to the Fertile Crescent
and Cradle of Civilisation
Southeastern Anatolia
Turkey

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Report by

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The exchange programme

Gezen güzel; oturan gazel olur
Travelling makes you beautiful; staying at home withers you

This cultural exchange visit to Eastern Turkey was organised by Arch, a Scottish NGO promoting learning and development in natural and cultural heritage between Scotland and other European countries. The week-long visit is one of Arch's Innovation in Cultural Heritage Interpretation exchanges and is funded by the Leonardo da Vinci programme.



This programme is only achievable through partnership with local hosting organisations. For Southeastern Anatolia, this is GEGED (Gaziantep Training & Youth Association), led by Ali Aslan Özasan and Kays Tumkaya. Our host and excellent guide for the week was the enthusiastic and extremely knowledgeable Filiz Hosükoğlu, and it was an added bonus to be accompanied for the week by Arch's Sheila Roberts.

My fellow travellers

One of the great delights of the exchange was not only to meet our Turkish hosts, but to have time to get to know my fellow exchangees. The group brought a wide range of skills to the Turkish table, and I was both surprised and pleased to find I was the only person working specifically in interpretation. My new friends and colleagues are (left to right):



- Iain McGregor of the Scottish Agricultural College
- Sheila Roberts of Arch Network
- Lyn Wall of Scottish National Museums
- Filiz Hosükoğlu, fount of all culinary knowledge
- Carole Inglis, food consultant to the Scottish Government (and Skye chocolate maker)

We were also carefully shepherded from place to place each day by Mehmet Demir, our driver.

Our destination

Gaziantep, where we were based, is one of the oldest continually inhabited cities in the world. It is the sixth largest in Turkey and the biggest in the Southeastern Anatolia region.

Close to the Syrian border as well as the Mediterranean, Gaziantep's culture is enriched by both. The region's history is long and fascinating – boasting the world's oldest known temple at Göbekli Tepe, the birthplace of Abraham at Urfa and the internationally significant Zeugma mosaics to name just a few – and it wears its history and colourful traditions with great local pride. Particularly distinctive is its cuisine, reflecting both Arabic and Mediterranean influences and yet unique. Traditional local dishes



make great use of the high quality meat, dairy products, fruit, vegetables and spices that the region's climate and terrain support.

Gaziantep's highly regarded local produce includes pistachios (indeed, the Turkish for pistachio translates as 'Antep nut'); red pepper paste and powder; olive oil; pomegranate molasses; grapes; cheeses; and its delicious range of sweet pastries including baklava and katmer.



Gaziantep is also known for its handmade copperware, distinctive leather 'Yemeni' slippers, mother of pearl inlaid wooden products, kilims and kutnu (a colourful handwoven fabric made from artificial silk and cotton).

Our programme

Karnım doydu, gözüm doymadı
My stomach is full but I can't keep my eyes off the food

It was the aim of our programme to give us a taste of all these elements, discovering local produce from farm to fork, traditional skills and materials, and savouring the rich cultural and natural sites alongside these. We were also privileged to meet a wide range of passionate and patriotic people along the way, from restaurateurs and farmers to businessmen and women and charity and community leaders.

The exchange is intended to highlight good practice in interpretation and food tourism, to provide us with inspiration in Turkey for our own projects back in Scotland and the UK, and to identify opportunities for partnerships and to share our own knowledge and experience with those we met.

I can safely say there was no shortage of inspiration on this trip, beginning before I even left the UK, and I have a legacy of experience, discoveries and reflections that it will now be my pleasure to share with fellow interpreters and other cultural and natural heritage colleagues in the coming months. I begin that reflection here.



Local ingredients, traditional recipes



Katmer (pistachio wedding pastries)

Make your pastry the day before you need it. Mix flour, salt and water into a fine dough and leave to prove overnight. Knead it lightly, then roll out by hand and spin it over your head until the pastry is as thin as a cigarette paper. Tear off the thicker edges to form a large square. Sprinkle with finely chopped pistachios, sugar and clotted cream made from local sheep's milk. Fold the corners in twice to form a smaller square. Bake for five minutes until the pastry is crisp and golden.

It takes many years of training to become a master katmer maker. It's worth the investment.

We ate vast quantities of truly delicious food during our week in Southeastern Anatolia. Restaurants ranged from the modern and cosmopolitan Orkide, with our generous host Mustafa Özgüler, famed for its katmer and fabulous selection of chocolates, cakes and biscuits, to the traditional Imam Çağdaş, specialist in kebabs and baklava, and trading on that site since 1887.

The joy of the food for me was threefold: high quality ingredients, traditional recipes and the added ingredient of great pride in both. The ingredients also included foodstuffs I had not encountered before, which help give the area its distinctive flavours. For example, sugar was not traditionally grown in the region so sweetness comes from other sources, including grape must and fruit molasses. The thick sweet-sour of pomegranate molasses, used to bring a zing to simple, finely chopped salads is particularly delicious, especially with a sprinkle of sweet local walnuts. This food, I discovered, was 'dişimin harcı': exactly to my taste¹.

This is a bountiful area, increasingly so as the land is irrigated using vast new dams and water networks. The trick has traditionally been to find ways to ensure this bounty is available throughout the winters. Here the grape must (the skins, pulp, seeds, and stems) comes into its own, being cooked down into syrupy molasses. These are used to preserve nuts into glistening sweet strings for the winter, like tarred and knotted ropes. Indeed, not a part of the grapevine is wasted in Turkey, from providing wood for the fire, fruit and vine leaves for cooking, the juice for drinking and the remaining must used for molasses or distilled for the infamous aniseed-flavoured firewater, raki.



The other distinctive feature in all the markets which represents forward planning for the winter is the curtains of colourful strings of dried peppers, aubergines and other vegetables. Halved and hollowed out, these wait in suspended animation until they are boiled back to life and stuffed with bulgur, meat, tomatoes and herbs. The bright scarlet of the local peppers and tomatoes feature in many dishes and again both are also prepared for later use, as fiery red pepper powder and rich red pastes.

¹ Literally translated: Fitting to my teeth!

Getting hands-on



Omaç

In a large flat dish gather together finely chopped onion, garlic, parsley, fresh tomatoes, some red and green peppers and some grated cheese. Also add red pepper paste, spicy red pepper powder, salt, pepper and olive oil. Combine the ingredients by hand, kneading together so that the ingredients are well mixed and bound. Then add bite-size pieces of fine crisp flatbread (lavaş) – you could use split and toasted pitta bread instead² – and continue to mix well. Lastly, shape the mixture into bite-sized balls. Don't make this dish too far in advance as it will spoil the crispy texture of the bread.

Some things are so much more effective when done by hand. You get a better feel for the food.

We didn't only enjoy eating the local dishes; we were also able to see them being made and even have a go ourselves. Again we experienced both ends of spectrum, from cluttering up the kitchen of the endlessly patient head chef at the spectacular Zirve Park restaurant above Gaziantep to the peaceful and elegant homes of Filiz's friends and fellow cookery experts, Belgin Yetkin and Sabahat Küpelikılıç.



Belgin (shown left) lives in an apartment above a fantastically well-stocked open-plan greengrocers, bulging with fresh fruit, vegetables and great, scented piles of wild and cultivated herbs and leaves. No wonder her food tasted so good.

I was intrigued by purslane (semizotü) at the stall, a wild herb I had heard of but never seen. Filiz bought a large bag to take upstairs to Belgin, who calmly turned the unexpected arrival into a delicious salad. The succulent leaves have little scent but taste like beetroot tops once shredded. I was delighted to be able to buy purslane seeds later on at Gaziantep's covered market to bring back home to try growing here.

These seeds were not all I imported. I have brought back other unfamiliar ingredients, like the molasses and firik (see below), and new recipes from Gaziantep's traditional larder. Most importantly, I have also returned with a new enthusiasm for fresh local produce and regional cuisine, and want to see a similar passion for these in the UK.

² There's a recipe for lavaş at <http://allrecipes.co.uk/recipe/1774/lavash.aspx>

While there are pockets of such passion – such as Castle Douglas Food Town in southwest Scotland, Hadrian’s Wall Country’s Locally Produced scheme, East Anglia’s Taste of Anglia – there still seems to be an emphasis more often on highlighting produce of any kind that is grown or reared in the area rather than on *traditional* produce, cooking techniques or recipes.

That said, I have come across some great examples where local produce and tradition meet head-on, such as the fascinating Slack House Farm in Gilsland, Cumbria, just off the line of Hadrian’s Wall. Here you can sit in their little farmhouse café and watch cheese being made by hand from their own milk while tucking into Ancient Roman-style spelt salads and bread. There’s also nothing like reading about the scandal of Charles, 2nd Earl Grey, and his affair with the Duchess of Devonshire, as you drink the tea that was specially blended for him at Howick Hall in Northumberland, his family home. They even make a deliciously fruity traditional tea loaf on site, steeped – not surprisingly – in Earl Grey. And what about tasting original medieval meals at The Garden Museum’s delectable vegetarian cafe in London, while you discover monastic planting practice and browse ancient herbals?

This is good interpretation: the visitor can literally immerse themselves in good stories about special places, not just absorbing through their eyes and ears but literally discovering the smells and tastes of the past. These sensory experiences are unique and unforgettable.

The common denominator



Firik (smoked wheat)

Sauté an onion in olive oil until transparent. Add four cups of boiling water. Add one cup of firik and one cup of bulgur, cooked chickpeas and chopped fresh herbs. Bring back to the boil and then simmer, covered, for 20 minutes. No need to stir.

Serve hot or warm.

Pick the wheat grains while they are young and green, ready to absorb the smoky flavours

Food breaks the language barrier. ‘Mmmm’ and ‘aaah’ – surely the universal sounds of contentment and delight – need no translation. And for the overwhelmingly hospitable Turks, welcoming guests and sharing food is as natural as breathing.

Food is the common denominator. It brings people together, nourishing body and soul. No wonder then that we instinctively brought foodie gifts from home – shortbread, chocolate, Earl Grey tea – for our hosts. We also received many gifts in return, from spicy red pepper to dried thyme and bagfuls of nuts, demonstrating a generosity of spirit that we seem largely to have lost at home.

Wherever we went we were offered tea and coffee. Plates of biscuits, savoury nibbles or sweet pastries appeared. When we browsed the markets, we were invariably invited to taste whatever was on display: wild pistachios, sticky Turkish delight, tart dried wild cherries. We were shown how to crack walnuts in our hands and peel the thick outer shell off pistachios.

Shopping, cooking and eating together cemented us as a group and brought us instantly close to the local people who shared their produce, skills and enthusiasm.

In Kilis, on the Syrian border, we shared fresh juice and cookies with Orhan Tayşi and Yasemen Özlem of the Silk Road Development Agency, as they showed us their presentation on attracting investment to the town. It seemed like a great opportunity to invest in Kilis, with its natural resources of olives and grapes, its cheap land and trading opportunities. But Orhan and Yasemen were frustrated – we were guinea pigs for their presentation because no-one else seems interested in the opportunity to invest, despite the support and resources being provided by the Agency.

Kilis

A small, rural city of around 80,000 people, which sits about 60km south of Gaziantep and just 5km from the Syrian border. It is renowned for its grapes, olives and katmeri desserts as well as its ancient mosques and Dervish lodges.



'The attitude here,' Yasemen told us with a sigh, 'Is to be contented with your lot. Kilis people are happy just to have enough money to live on; they have no desire to progress.' The irony is that many of the local people are making their modest income by trading illegally with Syria.

But there were some people in Kilis who weren't content with their lot and were definitely making progress: the delightful ladies of ÇATOM, the Multi-Purpose Community Centre in Kilis, led by determined entrepreneur Nimet Taş. The women provide support and guidance for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in the town, offering tailor-made programmes with



a particular emphasis on empowering women socially, economically and culturally and supporting children and families in the community. The centre is a happy place and we shared a delicious lunch there, before visiting a community centre ÇATOM had set up, where children were learning computer skills, getting help with their homework and playing together. It was an inspiring afternoon.

As Mustafa Kemal Atatürk said, 'Ülkenizin gelişimi için kadınlarınızı eğetin'. If you want to develop your country, invest in your women.

A flavour of history



Is this ALL for me?

Yoghurt with spinach

Mix strained yoghurt with lightly cooked spinach leaves, finely chopped red pepper and olive oil.

Serve with deep fried bulgur balls, made with egg, bulgur and potato.

People have been enjoying bulgur for at least 8,000 years³. Good things never go out of fashion.

³ Check out this Neolithic Bulgarian bulgur discovery <http://dsc.discovery.com/news/2008/10/24/cereal-neolithic.html>

There is a sense of history in Southeastern Anatolian food. The dishes we tried have been eaten here for centuries, making the most of the local climate and resources. Some foods are quite extraordinary: who would have thought of making tarhana, the 'mother of all ready-made soups', by mixing wheat grains and yoghurt, letting the mix ferment and then drying it for later use on straw mats!?

But, strange as tarhana may seem to our modern British taste, the similar milky cracked wheat porridge called 'frumenty' was a staple food in western Europe from Neolithic to medieval times. In fact, frumenty is still traditionally eaten in the West Country on Mothering Sunday⁴.

Kahramanmaraş

This small city at the foot of the Taurus Mountains is well known for its tarhana, as well as its distinctive goat's milk ice cream (thickened with 'salep', a flour made from dried orchid tubers, for which the town is also famous). At the local Chamber of Commerce we met the charming Şahin Balcı, whose factory produces a version of the spicy red pepper powder we saw everywhere.



Gaziantep's Emine Göğüş Culinary Museum celebrates the history and traditions of the local food (including the curious tarhana). It is a traditional house and courtyard, built in 1905 close to the city's castle, and its displays feature ingredients and recipes, cooking utensils, traditional preparation and storage techniques, family meals and celebration feasts.

The culinary museum is a great concept and full of stories that relate to local people and provide a direct link to the flavours of this special place for tourists. But there are so many ungrasped opportunities to turn it into a fully sensory experience, which is what sharing food is all about. We had the great benefit of exploring the culinary museum in the expert company of Filiz, who had been a consultant on the project, and who then took us onto the markets, great restaurants and private homes where we could smell, touch and devour the food we had just been reading about. For the average visitor, the museum is an interesting but passive 'looking and reading' experience, whereas there could so easily (and cheaply) be pots of fragrant herbs growing in the courtyard, sacks of dried pulses to touch, spices to sniff, traditional snacks to sample, and the little cafe should be a place to demonstrate cooking techniques rather than the hidden-away counter from where, suddenly, plates of food appear.

Overall I found that the museums we visited tended to provide rather passive experiences in this way, with missed opportunities to help people engage with the places, stories and collections. By contrast, our experiences of the museums were always made lively and memorable by having fantastically personable and knowledgeable guides.

It is unfair to judge the Town Museum in Gaziantep, since it is just being stripped of its mosaic collection for the new Zeugma Mosaic Museum nearby, but the remaining galleries are as traditional as they come. One of the great highlights of the collection are the tens of thousands of individual seals that have been found at Zeugma, an indication of its importance as a Roman trading post and the scale of its population. These intricate stamps, lined up in gloomy cases, left a unique 'signature' on documentation.

I longed for a bit of plasticine and a few replica stamps so I could try them out for myself... Such a simple interactive, but one that would have transformed my experience and extended my understanding.

⁴ If you're a Hardy buff, you'll also know an alcohol-laced version played a key role in Michael Henchard's downfall in his 1886 Wessex novel, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*!

By contrast, we were very fortunate to be in Gaziantep the very week that the new Zeugma Mosaic Museum opened – indeed, we visited on the day of the press launch. Extraordinarily, the museum has been designed by the man who oversees the restoration of the mosaics: Celaleddin Küçük is quite the Renaissance man! The museum is a thing of beauty, the perfect place to celebrate the mosaics that look as fresh and new as the day they were made. It is a shrine to their art, designed to hint at the site from which they came but also to display and light them as treasures in a gallery. There are labels and graphic panels; computer interactives to chase fish, complete mosaics and find matching pairs; there are touchscreens for site maps and additional information; there is a children's crafts area.

Zeugma

In 300BC a city was built beside the Euphrates. Zeugma was of great strategic importance to the Roman Empire and became hugely wealthy as a military outpost and trading centre.



Many of the sumptuous villas of the city's elite were excavated when the area was threatened by a new dam. The villas were decorated with intricate mosaics and frescoes, many of which can be seen at Gaziantep's brand new Mosaic Museum.

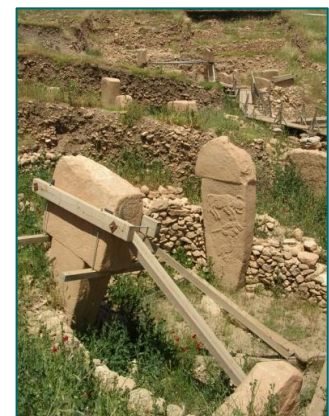
Audio guides and a guidebook are planned and the museum staff will be trained as guides and interpreters. Once again, we had the benefit of the insights of both the museum designer and the local archaeologist; I'm much less sure how other, less fortunate visitors will find their way around and understand these treasures until the audio tours and museum guides are ready.



Significantly, however, there is no sense at all at the museum as yet of the people who so carefully created the mosaics nor the military and mercantile families whose homes the mosaics and frescoes graced. However, in the coming months, the adjacent building where the collections are carefully conserved and restored will become part of the visitor experience, offering a fascinating glimpse of how the mosaics were constructed and how they are being looked after for the future. I will watch with interest to see whether the

human stories behind the mosaics – the skilled craftsmen and the opulent owners – will ever be told on this site.

We may never know the stories of the craftsmen and worshippers at Göbekli Tepe, near Şanlıurfa, either; this time simply because their 10,000 year old culture may never be fully understood. But, standing on the sunbaked hilltop viewpoint beneath a shady mulberry tree, it was easy to see why the people of that time had chosen this place for communal worship.



This extraordinary site, excavated by a team of German archaeologists, is believed to be the oldest place of worship in the world and represents the point of change between nomadic hunter-gatherer societies and the beginnings of settlement and farming. This collection of massive stone monoliths is carved with reliefs of snakes, foxes, wild boar and birds. Even more intriguingly, this cluster represents only a tiny percentage of what has been uncovered so far and the associated settlement has not yet been found.



Once again, it was the weather-beaten, always-grinning local farmer, who grew up on this land, who brought the story of the site to life.

'See the damage to the top of that stone?' he asked us, through Filiz. 'Only the very top of it used to poke out of the soil. That's where my brothers and I used to bash it when we were children. We had no idea what was underneath!'

He has been offered money for this site. He would, he said, prefer some other land instead. What use is a farmer without land?

This was just one of a number of significant spiritual sites we visited. Religious tourism is a growing part of the local economy, much as I had seen previously while working in Saudi Arabia. The city of Şanlıurfa has an extraordinary place in the tradition of pilgrimage, said to be the biblical city of Ur as well as birthplace of Job and, more importantly, Abraham, who is significant to Judaism, Islam and Christianity.

You can – if appropriately dressed – visit the cave where Abraham was born and see the pillars on the citadel which represent the point from which he was catapulted into a pyre by the cruel King Nimrod. Fortunately, God intervened just then, turning the fire to water and the burning wood into fish and thus saving the prophet. The fish remain today at The Pool of Sacred Fish (Balıkligöl), one of the pretty waterways beside the mosque complex and cave. It is unlucky to harm them but you are invited to feed them.

Şanlıurfa is also the headquarters of the Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP), where we met Mehmet Açıkgöz, the regional director, and his colleagues. GAP is an ambitious programme to develop the whole region economically and socially, through developing infrastructure and increasing institutional capacity. It has achieved considerable success already, coordinating and implementing many projects with its \$32 billion budget, from irrigation and green energy to increasing school attendance and developing tourist attractions.

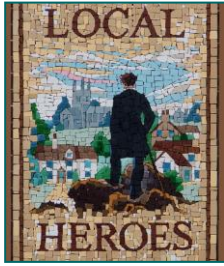


Şanlıurfa

Urfa was one of the most important junctions on the historic Silk Road, and settlement here dates back to 11,500BC. Known as 'the city of prophets', different faiths have long coexisted here. Today the local economy is based mainly on agriculture and livestock, but industry and tourism are growing.

Initially, GAP's focus was on land and water resources but has now realised it needs parallel development in other sectors. It is currently preparing a tourism masterplan, with a focus on cultural, religious and eco-tourism. Its aim is to relieve the load of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in the region and to help support and coordinate programmes on the ground.

While some of its major projects have resulted in huge benefits but are also controversial – such as the relocation of villages and archaeological resources to build new dams – some of GAP's smaller projects have had a significant positive impact at local level. For example, GAP helped highlight the unique heritage at Mardin through restoring part of the old quarter as a centre for local handicrafts. This has given the townspeople a renewed sense of ownership and they are now maintaining the historic fabric and showcasing their traditional skills themselves. This project has also inspired other towns to do the same.



I discovered a similar 'self-help' scheme, with a strong link to local foods and produce, during my research before the trip to Gaziantep. The Local Heroes initiative in Harleston in Norfolk, coordinated by Retail Revival⁵, is a free programme of seminars and activities for people working in shops and services in Harleston and the surrounding area, providing participants with the tools, knowledge and motivation to benefit from tourism and increase visitor spend. These include marketing, customer service, interpretation and sustainable tourism.

A highlight is the Creative Kitchen, where an empty shop in the town is transformed into a working kitchen with a full programme of events, including cooking demonstrations, developing creative menus, showcasing local suppliers and sharing local recipes. This latter has proved such a success that similar events are being held in other towns in East Anglia.

A recipe for change



Thyme tea

Put one pinch of dried thyme in a small sieve. Pour boiling water over the thyme so that it drains into your tea glass. Serve hot with a cube of sugar.

Do not steep the thyme as your tea will soon become bitter.

Thyme tea aids the digestion. Even the best food sometimes needs a little help to settle.

Towards the end of our trip we met again with our colleagues at GEGED, Gaziantep Training & Youth Association. We had been impressed by their work earlier in the week, hearing from young volunteers from different parts of Europe who had come to the city to develop their own skills and discover more about Turkey while working on local projects for disadvantaged families and people with special needs. GEGED are involved in a number of worthy projects, bringing people together from different cultural backgrounds and giving them an intimate insight into this area while making a real difference to the lives of local people. I admired the project leaders and the volunteers, recalling with discomfit my own hedonistic and slothful travels post-university...

GEGED hosted a workshop for our group, plus members of Gaziantep and Zirve Universities and some of the European volunteers⁶, on the theme of Sustainable Tourism. This was a lively and provocative session, where we explored the nature of the visitor experience to Southeastern Turkey in the light of our own experiences. The key areas of debate were:

- The need for better welcome, orientation and customer service in the area for tourists
- A greater awareness, on both sides, of cultural differences

⁵ Download the Local Heroes programme at <http://www.retailrevival.org.uk/media/DR5498%20LOCAL%20HEROES%20PRO.pdf>


⁶ Dr Raffaella Bianchi, Tuba Kutoğlu, Çağrı Aslan, Adrian Boloveschi, Francesco Scanporino

- Balancing a wish for development and improvements amongst local people with the tourist's wish to see the historic and traditional
- The benefits and losses of enforcing change (imposing traffic rules for safety v. the loss of the cultural experience of chaotic Turkish driving; the fear of loss of business but the greater health benefits of the UK smoking ban)
- The need to begin education for change with children and an awareness that big changes can take a lifetime (Keep Britain Tidy campaign took 20 years to become ingrained)
- The opportunities for change, e.g. funding available for green energy, are there but not being taken up
- The need for partnerships, including industry, tourism and education, and to identify opportunities for more vocational training
- The wish and expectation of modern tourists for an experience that is unique, individual and personal, and how we can meet this in Turkey and elsewhere

Importantly, our group felt, in the main, that the people we had met during our trip were well placed to tackle some of these issues and were keen to see development to benefit local people but without losing sight of the unique heritage that makes this a great place to visit. There were one or two we met who seemed unduly focused on the negative aspects of the region but, overall, there was plenty of evidence of both a well-balanced desire for change and of appropriate developments in progress. We saw new museums being completed, clusters of traditional skills being showcased, irrigation projects greening the countryside, partnerships being pushed forward and charitable projects changing lives.

We left the workshop with Filiz's wise words ringing in our ears: *Karanlığa kötü söyleyeceğihe, bir mum yak.* Don't curse the darkness, light a candle.

Food for thought



Zahterli ekmek (spicy bread)

For breakfast, dip pieces of flatbread in olive oil and then into zahter spice.

This tasty mix should traditionally contain at least 40 ingredients, including thyme, black and white sesame seeds, cumin, watermelon seeds, chickpeas, wild pistachios and sumac.

The seeds and spices should all be roasted and ground separately and mixed together afterwards.

Every spice has its own unique flavour. Bring them together and you get something extraordinary.

I wasn't entirely sure what to expect about this cultural exchange. I knew I would have some exciting experiences and expected to eat some great food. I knew I would meet some interesting people and hoped, from them, I'd make some new friends. I knew I'd see some fantastic cultural sites but suspected I might not learn a great deal more about interpretation at them. I knew I'd be inspired to think about how we can use food more effectively as an interpretive tool and hoped I'd see a way to apply this to my own work. And I already knew I wanted to share all these experiences with friends and colleagues.

I think most of my expectations and aspirations were met – I certainly ate well, saw some amazing places and made some great new friends. There were inevitably some frustrations; we spent an awful lot of time sitting in meetings in true Turkish fashion, drinking tea and exchanging pleasantries, and as a result a few key sites slipped from the programme. I would dearly have loved to see Gaziantep Castle and to get up close and personal with a pistachio tree (but I can do that next time, because I am quite sure there will be one).

I was also right that I might not come across some inspiring new approaches to interpretation. Even the fabulous new Mosaic Museum isn't really breaking new interpretive ground, at least as yet. But it has the most glorious and accessible collection so perhaps there isn't a need to gild that particular lily.

But I did learn some useful lessons or, at least, reconfirm some things that I already knew:

- **People are the best interpreters.** Most of all, this trip has reconfirmed for me that you simply can't beat person-to-person interpretation. Every site, artefact, dish, restaurant, market or street corner we visited was brought to life by the people we met, from archaeologists and artisans to chefs and market traders
- **Food is the heart and soul of a place.** You get to the soul of a place through its food, and to its heart through the people who prepare, share and eat it. Food stories, tastes and flavours are central to our experience of the world and are common currency for bringing people together and sharing special times and places. For a great example of this, have a look at Margate's Pie Days and Holidays project to see how sharing food stories has brought a community together (www.pie-days.co.uk)
- **Tastes make memories.** The smells and flavours of a place embody its history and culture. What's more, you can relive your experiences through that food afterwards; how often has cooking a holiday recipe afterwards at home taken you straight back to those precious lazy days on the beach, or rubbing fresh herbs between your fingers taken you instantly back to your childhood garden? This is central to a good interpretive experience, where appealing to the senses is always best practice
- **It's important to take time out to think.** I hadn't really appreciated how important personal development is in giving you time to think about what you do and how it relates to what other people are doing. These sorts of programmes are invaluable for giving yourself permission to stop working for others – albeit briefly – and do a bit of work on yourself
- **Southeastern Anatolia is a great destination.** Forget the touristy beaches and commercialised centres in western Turkey and head east to Antep! You might not be lucky enough to have the very personal insights we experienced, but you will be blown away by the food, the friendliness and the amazing archaeological, historical and cultural sites. And you can't beat the market shopping experience either!

Most importantly, this experience has given me the invigorated inspiration about the relationship between food and interpretation that I had hoped for. I am full of ideas about how to integrate food, flavours and recipes into my interpretive projects, and am hungry to try them out.

Jo Scott
June 2011