



The Med's new food hotspot

bite-size break.

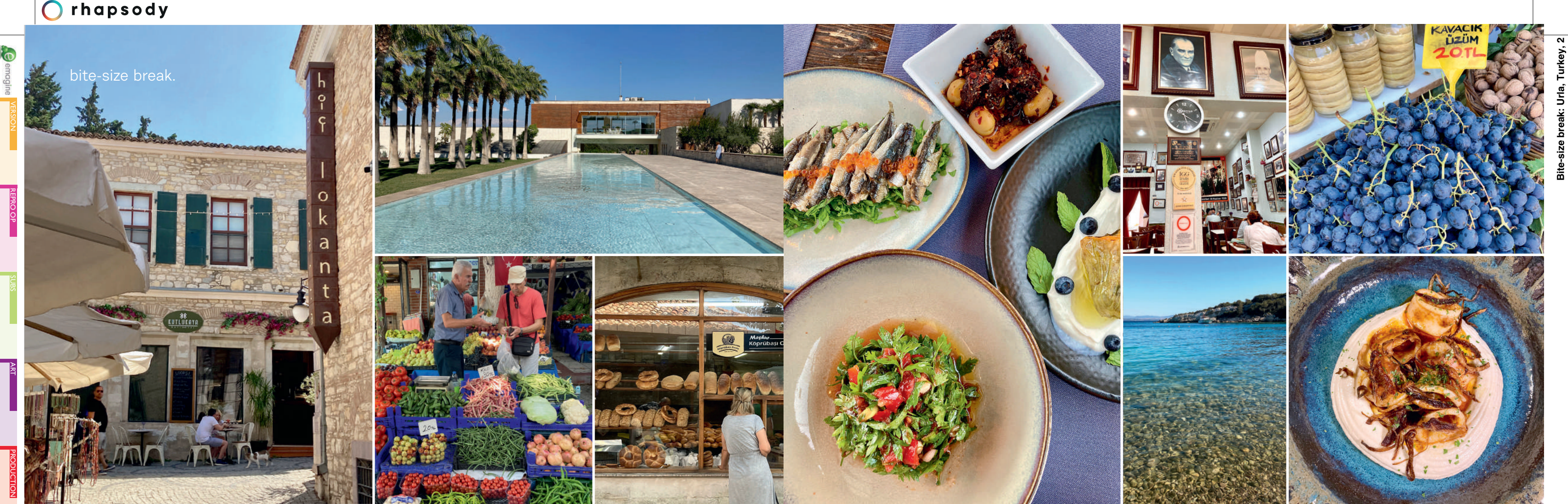
Turkey needs visitors this year more than ever, and a world away from recent events, Urla is where food lovers should head. With its olive groves, wine country and hip food scene, says Susan Low, it's like a Turkish Tuscany

Looking out onto the calm waters of the Aegean, here on the Çeşme Peninsula, Urla's port is a place to breathe out and relax – but this is a town of two parts, and first, food lovers need to get to grips with the bustle of the inland Old Town. Start off in pedestrian-only **Sanat Sokogi** (Artisan Street) and the **Malgaca Pazari**, an Ottoman-era marketplace. They buzz with cafés, bakeries and stalls selling colourful piles of local produce.

Eating in atmospheric café **Beğendik Abi** (facebook.com/begendikabi), run by Handan Kaygusuzer, is like dining at a friend's house. Her home-style cooking – stuffed vegetables, hearty soups, slow-cooked meat and sweets such as kadayıflı muhallebi (a creamy, crunchy-topped milk pudding) will put a beatific smile on your face.

The walls of nearby **Şafak Lokantasi** (instagram.com/safak_lokantasi), a tradesman's caff, are adorned with black and white photos that have hung there since 1974. It serves a huge variety of breakfasts and lunches, from meaty güveç stews to buttery pilau rice and yogurt-laced veg →

BESIDE THE SEA
Enjoy views of
the Aegean sea
with waterfront
dining in Urla's
laid-back port



bite-size break.

Bite-size break: Urla, Turkey, 2

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Urla's cobbled Old Town; the ultra-modern Urla Winery; a seafood spread at Yengeç; Şafak Lokantasi cafe; local grapes in Urla Old Town farmers' market; calamari at Ma Urla; Deniz Yazildi beach; one of the many artisan bakeries in the Old Town; Malgaca Pazari market

dishes. The cooking is incredible; you'll eat like a sultan for a fiver. Thoroughly modern Hiç Lokanta (hicurla.com), in a renovated 160-year-old theatre, is run on sustainable principles by Duygu Özerson Elakdar and her husband Taha. They serve fish sausages made from the invasive lionfish, sous-vide goat and imaginative veg dishes enhanced by wild herbs and plants from their olive forest. They also make excellent oil, and you can book foraging and cooking classes, tastings and olive-harvest tours.

THE HOTTEST ICE CREAM AND COOLEST PEPPER Tiny İrmik Hanım Patisserie (irmikhanim.com), run by Cordon Bleu-trained Esra Özkulter, serves gelato-style goat's milk ice cream. Go for the one flavoured with mastic, a rare, expensive resin from a tree that grows only on the Çeşme peninsula and on the nearby Greek island of Chios. Each Friday, Urla's bus station

"Come at dusk and sip a cold glass of rakı in one of the waterfront bars before embarking on a seafood feast"

is transformed into a **farmers' market** that overflows with fresh produce from the surrounding countryside. Get there before noon and feast your eyes on mounds of fragrant herbs, courgettes and artichokes, along with tahini ground to order, halva and fresh cheeses. The bargain souvenir: bright-red dried urfa pepper flakes, which sell for 50p for 100g and will add pop to your dishes for months (move over, aleppo pepper coveters!).

SEAFOOD AND FIRE-COOKING In Urla Iskele, the fishing port a three-mile drive north, you can fill your lungs with sea air. Stroll by the water past dozens of fish restaurants, bars and hotels. Come at dusk and sip a cold glass of rakı in one of the waterfront bars before

embarking on a seafood feast.

At Yengeç (yengec-restaurant.com), owner Oguz Özer has encyclopaedic knowledge of the local seafood and serves a spread that might include bluetail prawns with tomato and olive oil, fried anchovies dressed with salmon roe, grilled calamari with garlic and lemon... Pour the white wine and get stuck in.

Some of Turkey's top culinary talent is working in Urla. In an olive grove between town and port, Osman Senezzer cooks a nine-course tasting menu (Lira 1,100; £50) over a wood fire at OD Urla (odurla.com). Grab a stool at the chef's table (or outside under the olive trees) and be treated to plate after gorgeous plate – maybe sea bass tartare with Aegean herbs, asparagus with courgette & pea

purée or a 12-hour oxtail.

Also tucked away in the same olive grove is sister restaurant Ma Urla (maurla.com), which has a similar ethos, serving beautifully prepared Aegean seafood.

OUT OF TOWN: A VINE LIFE

Urla's wine country stretches south from town. Here among the vines, chef Osman Serdaroglu runs Teruar (teruarurla.com), a chic new restaurant with rooms. The İzmir native fled an IT course for Italy to pursue his true love of cooking, then brought it all back home. There's an Italian touch in dishes such as tortellini in tomato sauce flavoured with fig leaf. His seven-course tasting menu (Lira 980; £45) might include grilled beef fillet with smoked aubergine purée and roasted peach, and pears in rakı with fennel ice cream.

Wine has been made in this region since Roman times. Now, new wineries are putting Turkish wine back on the map, and the Urla Wine Route (vineyards,

goturkiye.com/urla-vineyard-route) makes it easy to find your way. Sleek Urla Winery (urlasapcilik.com.tr) is turning out excellent bottles, increasingly based on Turkish grapes such as bornova misketi and the local urla karası.

At bucolic Urlice (urlice.com), Bilge Bengisu Ögünlü and husband Reha got into making wine for a greener life away from the city, and they turn out sustainable chardonnay, syrah and cabernet sauvignon. The organic wines at USCA (usca.co.mtr) are also expertly made – poetically, you could say, as each is named after one of Shakespeare's sonnets.

You can't spend your entire time eating and drinking, and when the beach calls, the area's best, 12 miles south of Urla, is Altınköy. Wide with golden sand and clear blue water, it has a chilled atmosphere. You can rent beach beds and there are cafés nearby – around here, good food is never far away. ④

WHERE TO STAY

• **Otel Fiori** In the Old Town, with a quiet terrace and garden. Rooms are tasteful and Scandi-like in their simplicity. Doubles from £67 B&B. otelz.com
• **Teruar** Big-time luxury amid the vineyards. The seven bedrooms are spacious and beautifully designed, and the price includes an incredible Turkish breakfast. B&B from £216. booking.com.

HOW TO GET THERE

Pegasus and Easyjet fly from Stansted and Gatwick to Izmir (from around £150 at skyscanner.net), with Urla a 45-minute drive. Car hire from Izmir airport costs from around £15 per day.

Susan Low travelled courtesy of Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency. The east of Turkey, hundreds of miles from Urla, suffered devastating earthquakes last month. See globalgiving.org to donate to the disaster fund.

NEXT MONTH Visit the 'garden of Wales' with a weekend in Carmarthenshire