ŞANLIURFA

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WORLD REGION OF GASTRONOMY

ŞANLIURFA CANDIDATE 2029

Sixth Sitting

ABUNDANCE

The Journey From the Soil to the Plate

The Grammar of Cuisine

Geography defines the character of a cuisine. Şanlıurfa's food culture has evolved from the requirements of a parched environment into a sophisticated system. Bulgur-based dishes form the backbone, dried vegetables and fruits make their way from the pantry to the table in winter.

This cuisine stands on four pillars: sadeyağ (the region's famous Urfa butter), isot (Urfa pepper), bulgur, and frenk suyu (tomato paste). Other spices and grains come after the main staples, followed by vegetables. All of which are treated with such care that every bit is consumed. A chard leaf is stuffed, a broken one goes into a sauté, and its stem goes into boranı. The first and most important unwritten rule of this cuisine is, **nothing goes to waste**.



Signature Flavors

In a city were **37 of 50 geographical indications are dishes, breads, desserts and drinks**, some dishes are far more than food. They carry myths, seasons and the customs of the table. This section follows the dishes that define Şanlıurfa's cuisine, and the occasions they belong to.

Çiğ Köfte Traditionally, boneless lamb, beef or venison is pounded on a flat stone, then kneaded by hand in a tinned copper bowl with isot, onion, fresh garlic, salt and spices, with bulgur worked in gradually, tomato paste added later, and ice-cold water to soften it, until the friction and the heat of the isot "cook" it without fire, before it is shaped into small portions and finished with green onion and parsley.



Biber Dolması Fresh red or green peppers in summer, or summer-dried ones in winter, are hollowed and filled, a finger's width short of the top, with diced or minced meat, bulgur or rice, onion, tomato, parsley, tomato paste, isot and spices. Sealed with tomato slices and weighted by a dolma stone, they cook slowly. Dried peppers get pomegranate molasses or unripe grape juice for tartness. Served with unripe grape salad or cacık.



Urfa Kebabı Minced to rice-grain size with a zırh, a crescent-shaped iron blade, the meat is kneaded with salt alone, skewered and grilled over charcoal. Heat comes not from the meat but from roasted peppers and isot alongside; it is eaten year-round with lavash, dried onion, greens and ayran. Locals say “a kebab is only a kebab with Viranşehir or Harran ram, Birecik eggplant, Cülap tomatoes, Paşabağı peppers, Akziyaret onions and Karacadağ charcoal.”

Ciğer Kebabı Eaten any time, from breakfast to late night and Ramadan sahur. Fresh lamb’s liver and tail fat, cut hazelnut-sized, are threaded onto short thin skewers and cooked over charcoal. A board and knife come to the table so diners chop their own onion, parsley and mint, then slide the liver into lavash with roasted peppers. A registered geographical indication.

Patlıcan Kebabı A late-summer kebab, made July to September with Birecik eggplants. Walnut-sized pieces of zırh-minced, salted meat and two-finger-thick eggplant slices alternate on skewers, cooking over flameless coals until the skin darkens and the flesh softens. Then comes tenge yatırmak: resting 15–20 minutes in a covered pan sprinkled with water or pomegranate juice. Served with lavash, roasted peppers, onion and ayran. Eggplant Kebab and Birecik Eggplant are separate registered geographical indications.

Kıymalı Ekmeği Kıymalı means abundance at weddings and comfort in mourning: Urfa families serve it to visitors for three days after a death. Named from the Arabic for “meat and dough”, it is unleavened dough topped with minced meat, usually baked in market bakeries and eaten with ayran, plus radish and lemon in winter or roasted eggplant (ölü balcan) in summer. It is a registered geographical indication as “Kıymalı Ekmeği” (minced meat bread).

Ağzı Yumuk Dough is filled with minced meat sautéed with onion and walnuts, and the edges are gathered and sealed. The sealed side goes into the hot oil first so the parcel stays closed. It is usually eaten with bostana. It is a registered geographical indication.

Ağzı Açık Minced meat seasoned with isot is set in the middle of a flattened round of dough, and the edges are folded and pinched, leaving the centre open. They are usually made fifty at a time and eaten hot or cold. It is a registered geographical indication.

Semsek Also called samsa or sembusek: pastries filled with minced meat or cheese, their edges crimped by hand, usually eaten with ayran. With honey or molasses, the cheese version becomes a dessert.



İçli Köfte A dish for guests more than for every day: it is served to relatives who bring gifts after a wedding, at mawlid gatherings and whenever guests are expected. The shell is made of stone-pounded dark meat, fine köfte bulgur and red pepper flakes, and filled with seasoned minced meat. It is a registered geographical indication.

Dolma ve Yaprak Sarması Zucchini, eggplant, peppers, acur (a kind of muskmelon) and winter squash are stuffed fresh in summer and dried in winter, with bulgur rather than rice; zucchini is soured with pomegranate molasses, lemon or unripe grape juice. For sarma, a sour bulgur-and-meat filling is rolled in vine leaves, fresh in spring and summer, pickled or dried in winter. Favourites include erikli yarpağ sarma, cooked with fresh green plums, and stuffed chard.

Ekşili / Sıhtışor Known locally as sulu kıyma, sıhtışor is a meatless, sour çiğ köfte mixture thinned with pomegranate molasses and water. It is eaten with a spoon, with lettuce, or wrapped in yufka. It is not to be confused with eşkili, a grape vinegar steeped with chili peppers.

Boranı Urfa’s most laborious and prestigious feast dish. Fried chickpea-sized meatballs of bulgur, pounded meat, isot and flour join chard stalks sautéed in sadeyağ, and chickpeas and black-eyed peas cooked in bone broth with lamb. Topped with garlic yogurt, it is served hot with rice. Chard, broad bean and keme (desert truffle) versions exist; keme boranı is served as the groom is dressed.



Lıklık Köfte Lamb fat, onion and pepper are wrapped in a bulgur shell and boiled. The name comes from the sizzle of the hot fat inside. It must be eaten at once, before the fat sets.

Keme Aşı ve Çağla Aşı From March to May, keme, the wild desert truffle, becomes keme aşı (a hot stew), keme boranı and keme kebab, cooked with lamb and sadeyağ. Bereketli Hilal’in Kalbi lists about ten keme dishes, from keme kavurma to keme bostana. In the same season, çağla, unripe green almonds, become çağla aşı, with lamb, sadeyağ and garlic.

Söğülme A dish of summer. Birecik eggplant is roasted, peeled, chopped fine and spread on a plate, then topped with minced lamb sautéed in sadeyağ.



Tirit The “Prophet’s dish”, the main course at circumcision feasts and on holiday mornings. Lavash soaked in broth is topped with boiled lamb and garlic yogurt, finished with isot and lemon. On holiday mornings, people who have fallen out make peace over it at the Halil İbrahim Sofrası, and the oldest job of food, bringing people back together, is still done here. It is a registered geographical indication.

Bostana Tomato, pepper, onion and greens are chopped as fine as “a fly’s wing”. The sour note follows the year: unripe grape juice in early summer, pomegranate juice in late summer, pomegranate molasses from late autumn on. Named after the bostan, the kitchen garden, it is the natural partner of çiğ köfte, kebab and söğülme. It is a registered geographical indication.

Çorba and Pilafs Urfa meals open with soup: lebeni (yogurt, pounded wheat, mint), hamırlı (minced meat) or pıtpıt (yellow lentil). Pilaf suits the occasion: turmeric- or saffron-coloured kuzu içi, with lamb and pistachios, for weddings and celebrations; sweet-savoury üzlemeli, plain rice topped with pounded chickpeas and molasses-cooked raisins, for evening feasts and Hajj returns. Freekeh, duvaklı and meyhane pilafs, liver bulgur and broad bean bulgur complete the family.

Şıllık Served after çiğ köfte at sıra nights and weddings. Thin sheets are cooked from a runny batter on a griddle and stacked with walnuts between them, then soaked in syrup and cut into lozenges or stars. It is a registered geographical indication.



Peynirli Kadayıf Made with fresh, unsaled Urfa cheese and sadeyağ. It is related to the künefe of Hatay, but has a character of its own: a long conversation between cheese and butter. It is a registered geographical indication.

Peynirli Helva Served at mawlid ceremonies, on the third day after a death, and in spring. Flour is browned in sadeyağ until fragrant, and unsalted Urfa cheese is melted into it. Locals call it “heavenly mud”. The importance of unsalted cheese shows in a saying: “Why are you wobbling like unsalted halva?” It is a registered geographical indication.

Zerde A yellow sweet of rice, sugar, saffron and rose water, zerde ends the süpha, the wedding feast that feeds a large number of people: lamb ribs and üzlemeli pilaf, then zerde, while the house stays open to all, known or unknown. Returning Hajj pilgrims serve it for three days with Zamzam water and dates. It is a registered geographical indication.



Döğmeç Dry yufka is crumbled and kneaded with chopped cheese, green pepper, peeled tomato, onion, tomato paste, chili and cinnamon. Once the bread softens, green onion, parsley and mint are worked in, and the mixture is shaped by hand. It is eaten with ayran, mint, cucumber and tomato.

Küncülü Akıt A sweet for sıra nights, women’s gatherings and long winter evenings. Roasted sesame is cooked with gün molasses and walnuts and set in a tray. The name joins küncü, the local word for sesame, with the Arabic aqd.



Mırra Reserved for weddings, mawlid gatherings and other great occasions, mırra (from Arabic murr, “bitter”) is a bitter cardamom coffee boiled for hours and filtered repeatedly. A kilo yields only a few litres, so it was once kept for the agha. Poured into small handleless cups, it passes from eldest to youngest; the cup must never touch the floor, or whoever drops it must marry if single, or fill the cup with gold if married.

Meyan Şerbeti Poured cold from a vendor’s jug, licorice sherbet is the drink of hot summer afternoons. Both mırra and licorice sherbet are candidates for the national Intangible Cultural Heritage inventory.

Birecik Patlıcanı A long, slender eggplant grown along the Euphrates, especially around the village of Mezra in Birecik, ripening in July. Beyond eggplant kebab, it goes into söğülme and kazan kebabı, and is fried and rolled in lavash for breakfast. It is a registered geographical indication.



Urfa Peyniri İvesi (Awassi) sheep’s milk is warmed to 40–50 °C, cultured and rested for two hours; the curd is shaped into balls in cheesecloth, salted, rested for three days, softened in hot water and jarred with nigella seed. Fresh unsalted cheese goes into cheese halva, kadayıf and semsek; brined cheese into breakfast and döğmeç. The same milk’s yogurt makes sadeyağ (see 6.4). Şanlıurfa Cheese is a registered geographical indication.

Nar ve Nar Ekşisi Karaköprü pomegranates have large, round, tart seeds locals call “camel’s teeth”; Evliya Çelebi called the fruit “as big as a man’s head”. Siverek’s Katina, on the Slow Food Ark of Taste, and Suruç pomegranates are related local varieties. In autumn, sour pomegranates are pressed and their juice boiled and sun-thickened into pomegranate molasses, many kilos of fruit per litre. Karaköprü and Suruç pomegranates are registered geographical indications.

Pekmez ve Bulgur Sun-dried grape molasses is made by leaving grape juice in trays in the sun for days. Black grape molasses is made by boiling it in a cauldron. It is used as a sweetener for küncülü akıt, fruit leather, and winter snacks. Bulgur, made from Harran’s durum wheat, is more popular than rice in Urfa cuisine. The hard wheat is boiled and dried in cauldrons, then crushed and sifted using stones called “carcar”. It is ground to different sizes for pilaf, köfte and other dishes. Hasenik Molasses is a registered geographical indication.

Karagül A dark, almost black rose that blooms on the banks of the Euphrates at Halfeti, thanks to a microclimate of its own. It is the emblem of Halfeti, the “land of black roses”. Halfeti Karagül is a registered geographical indication.



Eğriburun Zeytini A local olive grown on the east bank of the Euphrates between Halfeti and Birecik. Its fruit is small, oval, slightly crooked and rich in oil, and it is used both for oil and as green and black table olives. It is listed in the Slow Food Ark of Taste, which names climate change and the ageing of the countryside as its main threats.



Fıstık Nearly half of Türkiye’s pistachios grow in Şanlıurfa (47% of the 2024 crop and 45% of the orchard area), from Birecik (half the province’s crop) to Halfeti, Bozova, Siverek, Hilvan, Suruç and the centre. Emerald pistachios picked unsplit in July–August go to baklava; split ones, picked late August–September, are for eating. Families, mostly women, harvest and sun-dry them on racks for baklava, kadayıf, şıllık, lamb pilaf and pistachio kebab. Urfa Keten Köyneği Pistachio is a registered geographical indication; keten köyneği means thin-skinned, and also names a thin-skinned Urfa fig.

Karacadağ Pirinci Karacadağ rice grows in stony basalt fields watered by snowmelt through natural channels, with minimal tillage, no chemicals, and rice returning to a field only every two to seven years. Sown in May, sickle-cut in autumn and sun-dried, it is a mixed local population grown by small family farms. Cooked, it smells of mint and thyme. A designation of origin since 2018, its area includes Siverek and Viranşehir.

And the list goes on: isot aşı, aşır aşı, palıza, zingil, kuymak and many more fill out the “forty dishes” of the Halil İbrahim Sofrası.

Isot: The Biography of a Spice

Sown in February or March, the peppers fruit in July, and from August to November Urfa's courtyards, rooftops, terraces and balconies turn red. Picked in the morning cool, they are sorted, stemmed and seeded by neighbours and relatives, singing as they work. Sun-dried by day and covered at night to sweat in their own heat, they give isot its deep purple-black colour and smoky, sweetish heat; eight to ten long, curved, fleshy peppers make a kilo. Locals say isot is sweet and sour, like life.

Pounded or ground on stone with about 4 kg of olive oil and salt combined for every 100 kg of peppers, isot (locals derive the name from ısı and ot, "heat" and "herb") comes red for kebabs and stews, and dark for çiğ köfte. Helpers go home with a plate of it (Ark of Taste entry: see 6.6).

Registered as "Urfa İsot Biberi", it gives çiğ köfte and lahmacun their colour and character, and travels far as a prized gift that takes long work to make. It also supports low-income families, especially women: the Harran University project "Developing Home Production with Women's Hands" (Kadın Ellerle Evsel Üretimi Geliştirme), backed by the GAP Regional Development Administration, trained thirty women in hygiene and safety to modernize home production, a model the 2029 programme will scale up.



Opheus Mosaic,

Milk, Sadeyağ and Cheese: The Legacy of the Dairy

The story of sadeyağ (Urfa butter), a pillar of Urfa cuisine, begins with İvesi sheep grazing herbs and wildflowers on the Harran Plain, Tektek Mountains and Karacadağ steppe. In spring, when milk is richest, it is cultured into yogurt, thinned into ayran, churned (once in goat- or lamb-skin churns, now also by machine) and slowly clarified over fire into clear, golden butter with a delicate floral scent. A proverb honours it: "if it smells, it smells of butter, for its origin is ayran."

Tray bakes, pilafs, boranı, pastries, tirit, baklava, şıllık and cheese halva depend on it; the book Bereketli Hilal'in Kalbi calls it "Urfa Sadeyağı" throughout. Traditionally women's work in villages and herding camps, from milking to clarifying, it was stored in leather öke bags, glazed pots, then bazaar-made tins; today it is also made at the TİGEM Ceylanpınar Agricultural Enterprise and by private producers. The GAP Regional Development Administration has distributed 400 cream separators to sheep and goat farmers to ease women's labour, and the 2029 programme will scale the model up (see Chapter 9). Urfa Sadeyağ is a registered geographical indication.

The cheese story runs just as deep. Siverek's Karacadağ highlands give four cheeses: burma, basma, çubuk and the rich Karacadağ cheese. Villages still make fırşık rennet from a young kid's stomach with honey, ginger and whey, ripen sirikli in ram skins on stone with one herb at a time, and ferment çanak in clay. Older producers remember vanished breeds: an unwritten academy feeding the 2029 producer programmes.



Registered Cuisine: Fifty Geographical Indications

Şanlıurfa registers its heritage, and the instinct is old: Joshua the Stylite recorded wheat prices in a famine, and Ottoman deeds recorded the meat in a soup kitchen's cauldron. Today the province holds **50 geographical indications**, among the most of any Turkish province. Thirty-seven of them are dishes, breads, desserts and drinks, such as tirit and haşhaş kebabı, protecting not only produce but the knowledge that turns it into a meal.

Food

- Çiğ Köfte
- İçli Köfte
- Aya Köftesi
- Yumurtalı Köfte
- Patlıcanlı Kebap
- Haşhaş Kebabı
- Soğan Kebabı
- Ciğer Kebabı
- Kazan Kebabı
- Tepsi Kebabı
- Miftahi Tas Kebabı
- Sac Kavurma
- Kıymalı Söğürme
- Tirit
- Üzlemeli Pilav
- Keme Boranisi
- Pencer (Pazı) Boranisi
- Bostana
- Lebeni
- Eşkili
- Ağzı Açık
- Ağzı Yumuk
- Su Kabağı Yemeği
- Lolaz Dürümü
- İsot Çömleği
- Frenk Çömleği
- Sini Taraklığı
- Siverek Tavası

Bread

- Kıymalı (Lahmacun)
- Tırnaklı Ekmek
- Açık Ekmek
- Külünçe

Desserts & Drinks

- Şıllık
- Peynirli Helva
- Peynirli Kadayıf
- Zerde
- Meyan Şerbeti

Agricultural Products

- Urfa İsot Biberi
- Urfa Sadeyağı
- Şanlıurfa Peyniri
- Urfa Keten Köyneği Fıstığı
- Birecik Patlıcanı
- Suruç Narı
- Karaköprü Narı
- Karaköprü Tat Karpuzu
- Halfeti Karagül (Siyah Gül)
- Hasenik Pekmezi
- Hasenik Pestili
- Şanlıurfa Pamuğu
- Külünçe

Handicrafts

- Şanlıurfa Culha Dokuması



The flagship products include isot and sadeyağ, two of the kitchen's four pillars, alongside Şanlıurfa cheese, Birecik eggplant, the pomegranates of Suruç and Karaköprü, and Halfeti's black rose. Suruç pomegranate is also registered in the EU. A second register runs alongside: since 2008, the provincial SOKÜM committee has inventoried 17 elements of intangible heritage, four of them on UNESCO lists (the sıra night, lavash culture, the minstrel tradition and the Mevlevi sema). Tirit, çiğ köfte, lahmacun, liver kebab, licorice sherbet and mırra are under national review. Halfeti has been a Cittaslow member since 2013.

For 2029, the aim is to make registration work: promoting and monitoring registered names, adding Edene pepper, sirikli cheese and the Karacadağ cheeses, and seeking further EU registrations.

Slow Food Urfa: Slow Wheat Event, Ark of Taste and Heirloom Seeds

Slow Food's "good, clean and fair food" names an old habit here. Şanlıurfa has three entries in its Ark of Taste of endangered foods: isot, Siverek's Katina pomegranate and the Eğriburun olive. The isot entry records sun-drying by day, "sweating" under cover by night, and salting and grinding with neighbours. It names two threats: home-production rules that are too strict, and producers switching to higher-yield varieties. It treats the flavour as a cultural treasure and a vulnerable inheritance at once.

Katina, entered by the GAP Agricultural Research Institute in 2020, bears large yellow, pink-blushed fruit with tart seeds, eaten fresh or made into juice, syrup and sour sauce. Eğriburun, grown on the Euphrates' east bank between Halfeti and Birecik, has a small stone and is rich in oil, pressed for oil or cured as green and black table olives. Both face the same threats: industrial crops, climate change and young people leaving the countryside. Together, the three entries record internationally that Şanlıurfa's biodiversity is as fragile as it is valuable.

Here the einkorn story that began in Karacadağ comes full circle. Since 2022 the Metropolitan Municipality has held a Wheat Festival of nearly a hundred traditional dishes. On 13–15 June 2025, Slow Food Urfa, Slow Food Türkiye and the Municipality held Türkiye's first Slow Wheat gathering at Göbeklitepe, Karahantepe and in the city, themed "From the Cradle of Civilization to the Future of Food". It combined visits to rain-fed local wheat fields, a seed exchange in a wheat biodiversity garden and a farmers' forum. The aim was a national wheat producers' network meeting every two years.



The event report records:

- about 80 guests (chefs, producers, academics, journalists and civil society) from Türkiye, Jordan, Iran, the UK, the US, Italy and Germany;
- more than 15 speakers on seeds and diversity, wheat landscapes, and community, health and wheat;
- events across the city that drew large crowds.



Sofraya buyurun.



Take your seat
at the table.