# Guide to Eating at Mediterranean Restaurants (Greek, Lebanese, Turkish, & Israeli)

Eating Kosher Without Compromise

Mediterranean restaurants—whether Greek tavernas, Lebanese cafes, Turkish grills, or modern "Mediterranean fusion" spots—are some of the easiest places to eat 100% kosher without a hechsher. These cuisines are full of simple vegetables, grains, legumes, and olive oilbased dishes, and most of the halachic concerns simply don't apply.

This guide shows you what you can eat, what to ask, and what to avoid.

### **✓** Kosher-Friendly (No Questions Needed)

These items are generally fine as-is and don't require asking:

- Horiatiki / Israeli / Shepherd's Salad Tomatoes, cucumbers, onions, olives, lemon, and olive oil.
- Dolmades / Warak Enab (Stuffed Grape Leaves) Vegetarian versions (with rice and herbs) are fine. Just avoid meat-stuffed versions.
- **Hummus** Chickpeas, tahini, lemon, garlic. Always pareve.
- Baba Ghanoush / Eggplant Dip Roasted eggplant, lemon, garlic. No concerns.

- Tzatziki / Labneh with herbs / Cacik Yogurt-based dips are allowed. No issue with yogurt or gelatin.
- Falafel Fried chickpea balls, usually fine if not mixed with meat.
- Pita / Laffa / Phyllo Dough Breads Usually commercially made; pas palter is permitted.
- Skordalia (Garlic Mashed Potatoes) Made with olive oil and garlic. No issues.
- **Grilled or Roasted Vegetables** Zucchini, eggplant, peppers, onions. Just confirm not grilled with meat.
- Salmon or Other Kosher Fish (Fins and Scales) Kosher species like salmon,
   branzino, sea bass, sardines, or mullet are fine.

Ask how it's prepared—especially about sauces or any additions that could be problematic.

# **Solution** Ask Before Eating

These may be kosher depending on preparation, but a quick question helps:

- Feta / Nabulsi / Turkish Cheese Ask if made with vegetarian or microbial rennet. If yes, it's fine.
- Spanakopita / Bourekas / Savory Pastries Ask if vegetarian (no meat). Baked items are pas palter and fully permitted.

- Soups (Lentil, Chickpea, etc.) Ask about the broth (must not be chicken or beef).
- French Fries / Batata Harra Ask if fried in vegetarian oil (not shared with meat or seafood).
- Shakshuka Tomatoes, peppers, eggs—fine if no meat or non-kosher cheese is added.
- Fresh Sardines or Other Fish Kosher if they have fins and scales, but ask how they're
  prepared.

## X Avoid These

These are not kosher and should be skipped:

- Meat Dishes Gyros, shawarma, kofta, kebabs, souvlaki (typically pork, lamb, or mixed meat).
- Seafood Shrimp, calamari, mussels, octopus, and other non-kosher species.
- **Meat-and-Dairy Combos** e.g., Turkish moussaka with lamb and béchamel.
- Unverified Cheeses Especially in mixed dishes or salads unless you confirm the rennet source.

#### **Drinks**

• Water, soda, black coffee, espresso, tea – No concerns.

- Fresh juices Always fine. Nothing problematic is added in a clean restaurant.
- Mint tea / Turkish tea / Lebanese-style tea Completely fine.
- **Ayran (yogurt drink)** Yogurt and gelatin are fine.
- Beer, vodka, gin, whiskey, ouzo, arak, raki All are fine, including aged or winebased liquors.
- Cocktails No issue, even if they contain small amounts of wine-based ingredients.

#### Note:

The only drinks that may be a halachic issue are **actual wines** (red, white, rosé, prosecco), unless specifically kosher-certified.

**But** if wine is used as an ingredient in a dish or mixed into a drink, it is generally **batel** (halachically nullified) and **not a problem**.

Drinking wine = may be a problem. Tiny amounts in food or cocktails = not a problem.

#### **Halachic Notes**

- **Bishul Akum**: Most items are either **exempt** (can be eaten raw or are not fit for a king's table), **cooked in commercial settings**, or **fall under safek derabanan** (a rabbinic doubt)—and are therefore permitted.
- Pas Palter: Commercial baked goods like pita, phyllo pastries, and bourekas are permitted. No stringency is required.
- Yogurt and Gelatin: Both are permitted under these guidelines.
- Mar'it Ayin: There is no halachic concern with being seen in a non-kosher restaurant eating kosher food. This has never been the standard in halacha.