

The Country of Turkey

Jim and Emmy's Travel Journal

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1989

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We arrived in Frankfurt, Germany on March 10, drove across Luxembourg, visited Paris again! After a couple days in Germany we entered Switzerland. Spent a month in Italy and San Marino including a drive south along the western coast of Italy, to catch a ferry to Sicily. We returned to Italy, toured along the "foot" and camped on a ship for our trip to Greece. A week or so later we cruised to a few Greek Islands, including a stop in Kusadasi, Turkey.

We returned to the ship for lunch, then rested as we sailed to Ephesus (Efes), on the coast in Turkey. We landed at the port of Kusadasi, Turkey, and negotiated for a taxi to take us to the local sights. The first man wanted too much, and when he finally got his price down to where it was not too bad, his attitude was such we didn't want to spend two hours with him. The second man insisted that his driver spoke English, but we doubted it, and after the price was agreed to, as we started to get in the taxi, the price was suddenly raised! So off we went again.

Finally, one man agreed to drive us, and since he seemed friendly, and spoke good English, off we went for 5,500 dr (\$33) for two hours. (Even though this is Turkey, they took our Greek money. The hatred is mutual between the countries, but money is universal!) At one point Jim made the mistake of saying "Greece" when he should have said "Turkey" and it was obvious the driver didn't like that. Most of the taxis in Kusadasi are 20 to 25 year old Chevrolets, but they are kept in good condition.

Cousin Fina had told us we must see "Mary's house," near Ephesus. The taxi driver wasn't too happy about that, and said the price would be less without the extra destination. We drove 12 miles or so, to near Selçuk and passed the ruins of Ephesus, then started up the mountain.

Now it was easy to see why they asked for more money to visit Mary's house. It was located at the top of a high hill. A long twisty steep, not very good road, and since the old Chevrolet Taxi had to work hard, it was overheating as it climbed the mountain to Mary's house. (This was no difficulty at all when compared to our famous overheated-taxi ride up the mountain in El Salvador a few years ago).

As we were going up the mountain, Emmy saw a large field of red poppies, and asked the Turkish taxi driver if they were wild, or planted. He

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misunderstood and thought Emmy was interested in opium poppies, and he was very concerned she was trying to get him involved in the drug trade somehow! When he finally understood what she was asking, he told her these poppies were grown to produce poppy seeds. After seeing so many fields of poppies, why didn't we know poppy seeds have to be grown somewhere!

Their story is that Mary came to Ephesus with John who was to take care of her, and she died here. Others say she died in Jerusalem, but this place is striking, none the less. The building itself is rather new, and follows the basic architecture style of the Greek Orthodox, but it's (maybe) built on the original foundation.

Near "Mary's house" is a row of pipes with running water. From what we understood, this is "holy water" something like the water at Lourdes, France. Our driver was most likely in his fifties, and appeared to be a nice Moslem family man, not a fanatic of any kind, was not trying to sell us anything, but his story is inspiring.

At one time he was the driver for a General in the Turkish Army, and was wounded in the leg during a war in the 1950's. The wound would not heal, in spite of what the doctors and hospitals did, so he managed to visit here, did something with this water, and his leg healed. There was no doubt in his mind about this, and at all times his demeanor was such we know he was serious, and it actually happened the way he told it. (By the way, the people who went on the ship's tour spent a lot more money, and never visited this place.)

He then drove down the hill to the entrance to Ephesus. The driver let us out, and made arrangements to meet in 30 minutes at the entrance on the other side of Ephesus, on the downhill side. A very good idea, as the walk through town was a slight downhill slope. Ephesus is about the most stunning old city ruin we've seen. We believe it's nicer than anything similar we saw in Greece or Italy. The whole town is not excavated, and most likely won't be. Why spend money for more of the same. The streets, the old buildings with marble pillars, and a huge theater, all parts of what must have been a magnificent city, centuries ago. Some buildings were more complete than any from a similar period, that we have seen elsewhere.

The drive back to Kusadasi was uneventful, and he dropped us near the shopping area. Stores of all kinds, and here the storekeepers were in the street trying to get us into their store. When we ignored one man, he then started picking on the US. He was unhappy we didn't spend money in his store, and said Americans only spend money on guns so people can kill each other. Funny, as throughout history (and in the 1950's and 1970's in Cyprus) the Turks are known as a fierce war-like people who have killed millions of people, many of them long before there was an America! We enjoyed his town anyhow!

Tonight's dinner was very Greek, and while Emmy ate too much, Jim didn't even stay in the dining room. (No problem, he always has emergency rations. A few years ago he ate eggs two or three meals most days, on our ten day trip on the Polish ship.)

We returned to the SS City of Rhodes and continued our tour of the Greek Islands. A few days later, on the way to the Black Sea, the SS Odysseus passed

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through the Dardanelles, Sea of Marmara, and the Bosphorus, with a stop in Istanbul.

SS Odysseus, May 26, Fri Between Míkonos and Istanbul

We left Míkonos sometime during the night, and had a smooth ride across the Aegean Sea, through the Dardanelles, to Turkey.

The small portion of Turkey, north of the Dardanelles, the Sea of Marmara, and the Bosphorus, is on the continent of Europe. The major portion of Turkey, east of here, is in Asia. The Dardanelles and Bosphorus are both very narrow, perhaps a mile or less at the widest. As best we can remember, we could see land all the time we were in the Sea of Marmara.

There were several people from Australia and New Zealand on the Odysseus, and they had a special interest in some monuments we saw along the shore line. In WW I, Churchill and the British leaders planned to capture this part of Turkey, just as others have planned a thousand times. Turkey was allied with Germany, and the allies wanted our ally, Russia, to get her Navy out of the Black Sea. Churchill, and others, tried to land an Army in Gallipoli, Turkey, and as a result of almost complete stupidity on the part of all the leaders, thousands of men, many of them from Australia and New Zealand, were killed.

This morning we had a briefing by the ship's entertainment staff, and find we are going to miss Bulgaria altogether, and may also miss going through the Dióriga Korínthou (Corinth Canal) after the ship returns to Greece. We will arrive in Istanbul at about 8:30 PM tonight, and the ship has made arrangements for everyone to go to a nightclub to see the dancing girls.

We rode the bus to the nightclub, intending to just walk around and see Istanbul, rather than the nightclub. After visiting the Hilton Hotel and getting some money changed, we decided to go to the nightclub rather than walk in the rain on the dark streets. Jim's cold still exists, so no sense in making it worse. The chance to see the dancing girls had nothing to do with that decision, believe it!

The Istanbul nightclub wasn't to our liking, with all the crowds, noise, and what they called entertainment. It wasn't worth the cost in time, effort, or money, and it was free. Later the bus toured the city for awhile, then across the bridge to Asia, and back to the ship by about 1:00 AM. The tour guide made a big deal out of the fact this is the only place where two continents are connected by a bridge. That's not such a big deal when you consider that North and South America, and Africa and Asia join without a bridge (if we ignore the man-made Suez canal), and Asia and Europe in the Soviet Union join for thousands of miles.

They said that before the bridge was opened it took 20 minutes to cross by ferryboat, and now it takes 45 minutes to drive across the bridge, there's so much traffic. Our ship sailed under this bridge twice, and each time it was jammed with traffic.

SS Odysseus, May 27, Sat, In the port of Istanbul

Istanbul (named in 1930) began as a fishing village in about 1000 BC. It was first called Byzantium, then was named Constantinople by the Roman Emperor Constantine in about 330 AD.

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At one time this city was conquered by the Ottoman's who ruled for 700 years. Several people we talked to in Greece, still call it Constantinople. The multi-domed St. Mark's in Venice, and the similar Cathedral, St. Frontius in Perigueux, France, are constructed in the Byzantine architectural style, originally from Turkey.

Our ship is docked on the north side of the Golden Horn (a waterway on the European side). We are near the bridge crossing the Golden Horn to the old city, where we can see domed mosques with many minarets, situated on the low hills.

We left the ship at 8:00 this morning to sightsee on our own. Outside the port building, a long line of busses are waiting for those who paid for a tour of Istanbul. Before we crossed the bridge over the Golden Horn this morning, we walked past a line of sidewalk vendors selling bread and other kinds of pastry, and fishing boats offering fish for sale. There's a ferryboat terminal, disgorging crowds of people. Both the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn are filled with boats of all kinds and sizes, and many of them appear to be passenger boats.

The bridge over the Golden Horn is two-level, and we don't believe even small ferryboats can get under it, but perhaps at one place they can. Cars, trucks, and busses cross the Golden Horn on the bridge, but on the lower level there are restaurants, one after the other. Some are fancy with tablecloths, and others are not so fancy, and there are a few stores selling tourist goods.

The streets of Old Istanbul, on the "other" side of the bridge, are very busy, but there's a pedestrian tunnel to get under the first big main street. At the west end of the tunnel there is a mosque with a maybe a dozen curved stair steps. Our photo shows pigeons by the hundreds, perfectly lined on the edge of each stair, almost as if they had been placed there by a drill sergeant! When we returned here a few hours later, one man was selling slices of watermelon, and from the looks of the trash pile, had been selling successfully.

As we walk into the shopping area of Old Istanbul, there are little shops and sidewalk vendors everywhere, even more than in Athens. Most of these shops sell one product only, but they appear to have every size, shape, and color of whatever it is they are selling. It's still a little early for some of the stores to be open, but the street scenes are bustling.

We walked through the Grand Bazaar, on our way to see the Blue Mosque and the St. Sophia Mosque. We'll return here on our way back to the ship. As we walk the streets, we find the little restaurants and shops lively, but not too tempting. Tourists are often concerned about "native" restaurants in places like this, but the people all look reasonably well off. We don't remember any beggar or drunk, or anyone at all just laying on the street in Istanbul, or approaching us for a handout.

A nice young man stopped and talked with us. He said he had worked for NATO for 12 years, and is now a tailor, and this is his day off. He ask if we were taking a tour of the city, and we thought he was about to try and sell his services. But not at all, he was just a friendly young man, happy to answer the questions of American tourists.

Emmy wanted to buy a Coke to take a pill. He got her a glass of water at a little restaurant. She was afraid to drink the water, but didn't want to hurt his

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feelings. He understood her unasked question, and said, "Everyone can drink Istanbul water," and she did, and she didn't get sick.

We have never had a problem with drinking water, anywhere! We even drink from street fountains in Rome and in Prague, and wash fruit at the spigot in the Venice marketplace. A couple of times over the years, there has been a sign saying the water is not drinkable, and sometimes it just tastes bad, and in either case, we buy drinking water. We know several people, including Emmy's doctor cousin, who have gotten sick from just "looking" at the water, well almost.

The famous Süleyman Mosque (Sultan Ahmed), is best known as the Blue Mosque, for the blue tile in the interior. Before we entered the Mosque, we had to take off our shoes and leave them on a shelf at the entrance, with hundreds of others. Wonder if everyone always takes the same shoes when they leave?

Inside, the Süleyman Mosque (Blue Mosque) is huge, and huge, and huge! We don't know how else to describe it. The floors are covered with hundreds and hundreds of rugs, (would you believe Turkish rugs?) and there is blue tile everywhere. That just is not a sufficient description! But what can we say? There are several domes (counting the little ones, perhaps a couple of dozen), and six tall, slender minarets. Tourists are in awe as they walk here and there in this fantastic place. We could have spent days just to see a summary of the place, but if we spend more than 30 minutes today, we will miss too many other splendid things to see in this magnificent city. We must be back to the ship before lunch!

There is one more bit of blue in the Blue Mosque, information not discussed in other tourist books, a scoop for this Travel Journal! Remember the blue sun-visors Jim bought in Athens, well one of them was lost somewhere in the Blue Mosque in Istanbul! When we got back to the ship, we were told that one of the tour leaders found a blue sun-visor, and had tried to find its owner!

The St. Sophia Mosque, originally a Byzantine Christian church, became a mosque in 1453, and the mosaic murals of saints and angels were covered with colored plaster. In 1935 (500 years later), the plaster was carefully removed when the Turkish government declared it a museum. The dome of St. Sophia Mosque is huge, and high, and old, and so large that building engineers say it can't be built, and will not stay in one piece if it were. Another one of the "bumblebee" buildings that has existed 'lo these many centuries. The green marble columns inside are said to have been moved here from Ephesus.

These two huge mosques are next to each other, but the buildings and the grounds around them must cover a square mile. It's difficult to describe their size, so "enormous" will just have to suffice.

In back of St. Sophia Mosque there's a block or so of wooden houses that look a little like they belong in San Francisco. Talked to some people who were just leaving one building, and they told us the houses were originally built by an English Company, for their workers. The buildings have been remodeled, and now serve as a hotel.

We went to visit Topkapi, the huge palace where 4,000 people once lived and worked. Didn't find it too appealing, at least not as interesting as the things we

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saw in the rest of Istanbul. Not nearly as interesting as many of the castles and palaces we have seen in Northern Europe. (For more information, just visit your local library!)

Jim is unusually tired today, unbelievably tired, when we consider his usual travel-energy, and amazingly tired when we remember we are in Istanbul, and for the first time! In addition to the last remains of a cold, he has an awful back-ache just above the belt, on the left. He never had such a pain before.

We walked back to the Grand Bazaar and spent a couple of hours walking and talking to people, and buying some things. Istanbul's Grand Bazaar includes miles of roofed and cobblestoned passages lined with tiny shops. Over 4,000 stores line dozens of little streets, all under a huge roof. Maybe it's really many little buildings built next to each other, we're not sure.

Emmy was shocked to see how hard the laborers had to work to move huge carts loaded to overflowing with carpets, clothes, pots and pans, and the other thousands of products that are sold in Istanbul's huge market. Many times the huge pile of "goods" were just loaded on the back of some hard-working man. (That's not a sexist remark, we didn't see any women doing this!) Of course there is no way motor vehicles could be used in these close quarters, and the stores must be stocked with things to sell.

While Emmy would look for things to buy in Istanbul's Grand Bazaar, Jim would look for a place to sit and work on the ache in his back. Just as Emmy was buying a dozen sweaters, Jim remembered that the ache was in a muscle just above his wallet—must be from reaching for it so often. Emmy thinks the soreness is because Jim's wallet muscle just hasn't been used enough. Now believe it, the ache, its location, and the location of the wallet are really true, but who knows about the cause!

A few years ago, without Jim's knowledge or permission, Emmy gave our friend Bob a cane Jim had purchased on the island of Majorca, Spain. It took years of ridicule before Bob returned the cane. Bob's ancestors lived in Turkey, so we felt this would be the place to buy a replacement cane for him. We found a beautiful rosewood cane in Istanbul, with inlaid detail in brass, but when we heard the price, \$75, Jim said, "Bob's not that good of a friend!" The one we bought, inlaid with a silver-colored metal, is still more expensive than any in Jim's collection! (Come to think of it, that \$75 cane would look nice in the collection, and for that purpose, the price is right! Now, about that return trip to Istanbul!)

We walked back to the ship, as we wanted to take more pictures, and we couldn't take pictures if we rode in a Taxi. As we crossed the bridge over the Golden Horn, it was nearing lunch time, the restaurants were becoming crowded, the fishermen were still selling fish, the street stands were still selling pastries, the ferryboat terminal was still disgorging passengers, and those same street scenes will continue until we return some day soon!

SS Odysseus, May 28, Sun Between Istanbul and Odessa

It's too bad the weather is not better as we entered, and now as we leave Istanbul.

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We have sailed into and out of a dozen major ports in various parts of the world, and we believe Istanbul must have the most breath-taking setting of any harbor. As we left the harbor, headed east, on the left (European side) the huge domes and minarets of the mosques were on top of the hill, and the palace, and other fortress-like buildings are still in view.

East of the Golden Horn, still on the European side, were the major buildings of downtown new Istanbul, including the Hilton Hotel and the Sheraton Hotel, again on the low hills. On the right, is Asia, more hills, and both office buildings and what looks like older fortress/palace type architecture. (These are not really high steep hills, but have a gentle slope.)

Since we were so late leaving Mikonos the other day, we will not be able to visit Bulgaria at all, and will be in Odessa on a Sunday afternoon, instead of Saturday evening, when the visit to the Ballet was scheduled. As we sail through the Bosphorus, we went under the bridge we crossed in the bus the other night, and under another bridge further east, just recently completed. We can see wooden houses, mosques, forts, and all kinds of buildings, as we pass through this narrow waterway. The channel is filled with ships of all size and shapes, and ferryboats going back and forth between Europe and Asia.

We are told that apartments or houses along the Bosphorus can rent for as much as \$10,000 per month, while in a more normal location an apartment will rent for more like \$200. It's considered a status symbol to have a large chandelier in a home, and as we rode through Istanbul on the bus the other night, we could see plenty of them. (We saw a lot of chandeliers in stores in Athens, but don't remember seeing them in the Greek homes.)

The SS Odysseus continued into the Black Sea, and on to the Soviet Union. After that visit, we returned through the Bosphorus, past Istanbul (on both sides of the waterway), on our way to Athens.

SS Odysseus, May 30, Tue Between Yalta and Istanbul

Today was spent at sea, on our way back to Athens. About 11:00 AM we entered the Bosphorus, and by noon we were passing (rapidly) downtown Istanbul, with all the beautiful mosques and minarets on the hills.

There was a Soviet submarine sailing on the surface toward the Black Sea, and the Bosphorus, near the Golden Horn, was filled with ferryboats, and other ships and boats of all sizes. It's a shame the weather is still cloudy and not nice at all. It's cold and very windy, almost too windy to stand on the deck and enjoy the sights. But enjoy them we must! A fascinating city!

The SS Odysseus continued through the Sea of Marmara, on its way to Athens. After a few days more in Greece, we spent 10 days traveling the western part of Yugoslavia, from the Greek border to Austria. We re-entered Germany for a night or two, into France for a day, then back to Toni's in Mettlach. We returned to the US on July 2.