

Turkey Tour – Day 1 – Tuesday September 16 – Travel Day

Today Marie and Kal Tinka and Marcia and Jim Elving (that's me!) start a 19 day tour of the country of Turkey. This will be the 16th International trip that the four of us have enjoyed together over the past eleven years. Joining us on this tour are Kal's brother Mike and Mike's friend Helene. Mike traveled with the four of us all around Switzerland in 2007 and we are looking forward to seeing him again.



The Republic of Turkey is a large country of 303,000 square miles (about 20% larger than our state of Texas). Northwestern Turkey is in the Balkan region of Europe but the bulk of Turkey is in western Asia, an area called Anatolia. Turkey's population is 77,000,000. About three quarters of the population are ethnic Turks and about a fifth ethnic Kurds. The vast majority of the population is Muslim. The official language of Turkey is Turkish. Turkey is proud of its "secular" tradition. Unlike most other Muslim countries, freedom of religion is guaranteed and women have equal rights...no requirement for them to wear head scarfs or Burkas.



Turkey is a democratic, constitutional republic. Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been Turkey's Prime Minister for twelve years and has been term limited. So, he recently ran for President, formerly a ceremonial position, and was easily elected. He now plans to work with his majority AP Party in Congress and change Turkey's constitution to increase the power of the President. He is very popular in the rural areas but less so in the cities where the younger populace fears he will try to move Turkey from its more secular foundation and towards becoming more of an Islamic state.

Turkey is a member of USA led NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization whose members are pledged to protect each other from foreign attacks) and has applied for membership to the EU (the European Union). On the above map Turkey is shown in light blue while the current members of the EU are shown in dark blue. Turkey is bordered by eight countries, Bulgaria, Greece, Georgia, Armenia, Iran, Azerbaijani, Iraq and Syria. The Mediterranean Sea is to the south, the Aegean Sea to the west and the Black Sea to the north. The Sea of Marmara, the Bosphorus Straits, and the Dardanelles define the boundary between European Turkey and its larger Asian part.

Why are we going to Turkey? Turkey is one of the oldest continuously populated areas in the world. In more recent times the Greeks under Alexander the Great completed their conquest and settling of the

area in 334 BC. In 324 AD Constantine I chose Byzantium to be the new capital of the Roman Empire, naming it New Rome. Constantinople became the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire. In 1200 AD the Mongols from central Asia started attacking the Romans in what is today's western Turkey. In 1453 they completed their conquest of the "Byzantine Empire" by capturing the capital Constantinople which they renamed Istanbul. The "Ottoman Empire" expanded over the next few centuries to take control of Northern Africa, Arabia, the Balkan region of Europe and even southern Spain. In World War I they were part of the Axis (with Germany and Austria-Hungary). Following their defeat in WWI (part of which was depicted in the excellent film *Lawrence of Arabia*) Turkey was reduced to their present boundaries. After a war with Greece the Republic Of Turkey was formed in 1922 under the revered first President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. We are looking forward to visiting and exploring Greek and Roman ruins, ancient Christian Cathedrals and more recent Muslin Mosques. We will be spending several days in Istanbul, said to be the most visited tourist city in the world, and then spending time along the Mediterranean coast

and in the mountainous central area of Turkey. We have read that the people of Turkey are very friendly and welcoming. We will not be traveling to Turkey's border areas with Syria, Iran and Iraq. We are sure that we will be safe.

We will be on an organized tour with a Boston based travel company *Odysseys*



Unlimited on their "Legendary Turkey" tour. They are known for organizing great tours with small group



sizes, good itineraries, excellent Tour Guides and very nice accommodations. The four of us have previously been on OU tours in Northern Italy, China, Croatia, Costa Rica and Southern Africa. All were excellent. The map on the left shows our tour route. We will spend four days in Istanbul then visit the WWI site at Gallipoli before seeing the ancient ruins at Troy. Then onto to the ruins at Izmir (Ephesus) before what we believe will be a highlight of the

tour.....a four day cruise along the "Turquoise Coast" on a Gulet yacht. Then we will visit Antalya, the central region of Cappadocia, before traveling to Turkey's capital of Ankara.

Turkey Tour – Day 2 – Wednesday September 17 – Arrive Istanbul Turkey

Today is the second day of our vacation. It starts at midnight with Marie, Kal, Marcia and I flying over the East Coast of the USA on our 10+ hour direct flight from Chicago to Istanbul Turkey. We left Chicago at 10:15 PM yesterday and should land in Istanbul at 5 PM today. We will be gaining 7 hours. Turkish time is 7 hours ahead of the US Eastern Time Zone so when it is Noon at home it will be 7 PM for us in Turkey.

We think we have chosen a good time of year for our vacation. Turkey can be very hot in the summer...high temps of 100 degrees on many days...and quite crowded with European and Russian tourists. During our trip high temperatures should be around 80 degrees and lows around 60 degrees. The sun will rise at 7 AM and set at 7 PM.

Turkey's currency is the Turkish Lira. Right now, 1 US Dollar will convert to 2.15 Turkish Lira.

Our tour company, Odysseys Unlimited, always sends out a "Tour Member List" prior to departure so we know there will be 22 people in our tour, all from the USA. 8 couples and 6 single ladies. From comments on the OU message board we know that in addition to the "six of us" traveling together, the two couples from South Dakota have frequently traveled together, often on OU trips, as have the two single ladies from Texas. We also have been told that our Tour Director will be Mr. Ali Dogan, an experienced tour guide and a native of Turkey.



We will be landing at Istanbul's Ataturk International Airport. To the left is a photo copied from Wikipedia. 46 million air travelers land at this airport each year.

We've read that Istanbul is the largest city in Turkey with a population of over 16 million people and is the region's economic, cultural and historical heart. It forms the largest urban area in Europe

and is the fifth-largest city in the world (by population within city limits). The city covers a very large



area of 2063 square miles and is a "transcontinental" city as it straddles the Bosphorus, one of the world's busiest waterways. To the left is a satellite view of Istanbul. 2/3rds of Istanbul's population live on its European side (to the left or west of the Bosphorus Strait) while 1/3rd live on the eastern, Asia side.

About 12 million foreign visitors come to Istanbul each year, making it the world's fifth most popular tourist destination.

Istanbul's biggest draw remains its historic area of ancient churches, mosques and museums. These are partially shown in this pictured copied from Wikipedia.



We land in Istanbul at 4:20 PM, about an hour early due to good tailwinds. Our 10+ hour flight on Turkish Airlines was smooth and the cabin service good. The seats were a bit uncomfortable and none of us got any real sleep. However, we all feel quite good for now.

We clear passport control, claim our checked bags, and meet our Tour Director Ali Dogan in the main terminal. Several other of the folks on our tour were on our flight. We wait for the arrival for the flight from New York and several more tour mates join us including Mike and Helene. We board a new full-size Mercedes Motor Coach, which we will be using for all the road travel on our tour, and depart the airport for our hotel at 6 PM. A normal 1/2 hour trip takes us an hour-and-a-half due to the rush hour traffic. It is interesting watching busy Istanbul. It has started to rain. The temperature is about 70 degrees.

We arrive at our hotel for the next four nights. It is the *Hilton Bosphorus Istanbul* located in the New City section of the European part of Istanbul. Ali tells us that this Hilton was the first 5 Star Hotel in Istanbul. It was built 60 years ago and is the oldest operating Hilton outside of the USA. It has gone thru several renovations and the public areas appear to be first rate. Our rooms are spacious and all have large balconies. We think we will be quite comfortable.

Turkey Tour – Day 3 – Thursday September 18 - Istanbul

Today is the first full day of our vacation in Turkey. This is the first day we wake up “in country”. We are awoken by loud thunder. It is raining. Our 2nd floor room looks out on a 3000 seat modern amphitheater. Last night it hosted an outdoor music concert that did not end until past midnight. Some of us thought the noise bothered our sound sleep!

We enjoy the included fancy buffet breakfast in the Hilton's restaurant.

At 8 AM our tour group meets for the first time in one of the hotel's conference rooms. Ali has each of us introduce ourselves to the group, tell them a little bit about ourselves and why we have chosen to tour Turkey. It looks like we will have an interesting and energetic tour group. Ali then goes through

some good information about the tour and answers questions. He gives each of us "whisperer", headsets which we will wear when visiting crowded sites so that we will be able to hear his commentary without standing right next to him.

At 9 AM we board our motor coach to drive to *Old Istanbul*. Old Istanbul was originally a Greek settled seaport named Byzantium. In 322 AD Roman emperor Constantine established the Roman capital here. In 330 AD the city was renamed Constantinople and became a world class center of learning and culture. In 1453 Constantinople was conquered by the Ottoman Turks and eventually renamed Istanbul. On the map, below, our hotel is just off the upper right (above the green area of Taksim Park). Old Istanbul is the area dominating the center of the map. Our motor coach crosses the Golden Horn channel on the Ataturk Bridge and we see the ruins of the walls that used to surround the old city.



Below is a picture, copied from Wikipedia, of Old Istanbul and The Golden Horn waterway.



Our first destination is the *Kariye Museum* which was originally built in the 5th century as the Chora Byzantine Church. It is said to be one of the best surviving examples of a Byzantine (Christian) church.



The interior walls are covered with mosaics and frescos. We learn that when the church was converted to a mosque by the Turks in the 1400s the mosaics and frescos were covered over with plaster since Islam prohibits the portrayal of humans or animals in mosques. In 1948 it ceased to be a mosque and the restoration of the original interior commenced.





We next
drive to
the
Spice
Bazaar
area



and first visit *Rustem Pasha* a beautiful mosque with an



interior of Iznik tiles set in beautiful floral and geometric designs. As this is an active mosque we have been instructed to dress respectfully (no shorts and covered arms for the women). We must all take off our shoes before entering and the women have to cover their hair with scarves.

Then we walk through the *Spice Bazaar* and view the exotic spices, nuts, and dried fruits from around the world. Ali has one of the shop owners describe to us his products and he passes around samples for us to enjoy.

It continues to rain and drizzle with the temperature struggling to reach 70 degrees. It is not a good day weather wise. We now have 2+ hours of free time. We spend it walking through more of the bazaar and then having lunch on our own. We eat at a restaurant recommended by Ali and enjoy good food.

At 2 PM we board our ship for a private cruise on the *Bosphorus Strait*, the body of water that separates Europe from Asia.

We start our cruise right between the Galata and Ataturk bridges on the Old Istanbul side of the Golden Horn and travel northeast up the European side of the Bosphorus before returning down the Asian side. Although the weather remains rather poor we enjoy the sites. We see old ruins, summer homes built for the Sultans, the Military High School and many homes. Ali tells us that nice homes with a view of the Bosphorus can cost 50 million dollars.



At 4:30 PM we return to our hotel and have some free time before dinner.

At 6:30 PM the tour group meets and walks a few blocks (in the rain) to a local Turkish restaurant for our included "Welcome Dinner". We dine on traditional Turkish food grilled over a charcoal fire. The food is really excellent.



Tomorrow we explore more of Istanbul.



Turkey Tour – Day 4 – Friday September 19 – Istanbul

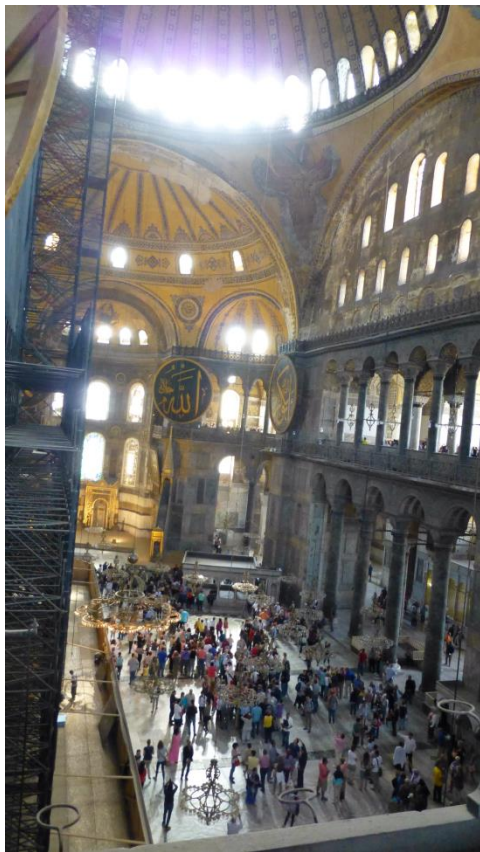
We wake this morning to clearing skies. It is going to be a sunny day! At 8:30 AM we board our motor coach and it takes us over the Galata Bridge back into Old Istanbul. Our first stop is at *Sultan Ahmet Square* and the site of the old *Roman Hippodrome* which was built by Constantine in the



third century. It was the sporting (think chariot races) and social center of Constantinople. All that remains today are small ruins.

Better preserved is the *Obelisk of Theodosius*. It was built by the Pharaoh Tutmoses III in Egypt in 1450 BC and brought from Alexandria to Constantinople in the 4th century AD. Another artifact is the bronze *Serpent Column*. The column, originally nine feet tall, was made by the Greeks in 479 BC to celebrate their victory over the Persians. It was brought to Constantinople in 324 AD.

We now visit *Hagia Sophia*. We learn that it was built in 537 AD. With its central dome standing 160 feet high, it was the world's largest cathedral for almost the next 1000 years. After the Ottoman's capture of Constantinople in 1453 it was converted into a mosque. It became a museum in 1935 and today displays both Christian and Islamic artwork. The Christian artwork is all done with exquisite mosaic tiles.



We now walk to a local restaurant for an included lunch and enjoy more traditional Turkish food.

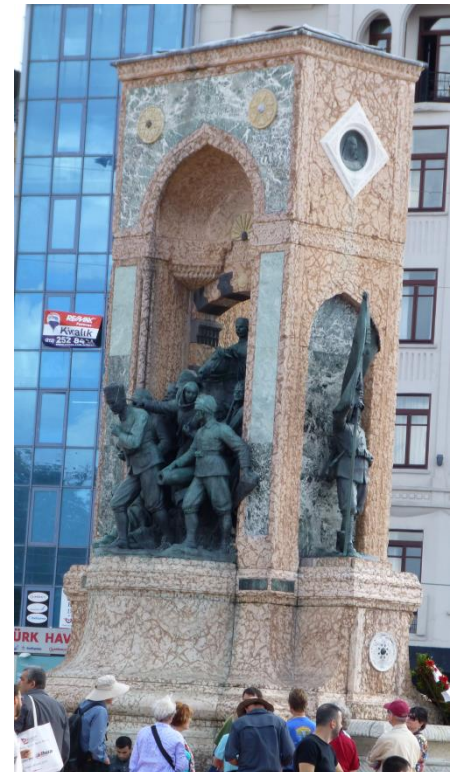
After lunch we walk to the entrance to the *Basilica Cistern*. All of these historical sites are crowded.

There are several huge cruise ships currently docked at Istanbul, some with over 5000 passengers. There

is a long line to enter the cistern. As always, Ali has pre-bought our entrance tickets and takes us through a special entry with no waiting. The cistern was built in 532 AM by Emperor Justinian, the same Emperor who built Hagia Sophia. This huge underground reservoir was built so that the city would always have enough water to withstand a long siege. It was fed by 12 miles of aqueducts, supported by 336 columns and could hold 21 million gallons of water. It is a wonderful underground oasis filled with the sounds of water and flutes. The picture on the left is of a line of columns rising from the water. The one on the right is a picture of Marcia and a column with Medusa's face engraved at an angle.



We now drive to *Taksim Square*, near our hotel, and start a walking tour of an interesting part of the city. We start out in the square where the student protests in June of 2013 stopped the government from paving over the adjacent green park to build a shopping mall. We see the *Independence Monument* celebrating the founding of modern Turkey in 1922.





Ali next takes us on a two mile walk down Istakal (Independence) street. This pedestrian street is lined with boutiques, galleries, restaurants and Ottoman era buildings. Ali stops at several storefronts and explains to us the unique nature of the foods and products being displayed. The street is packed with residents, most of them young. Ali tells us Turkey is a young nation. 75% of its population is between the ages of 17 and 55. Our motor coach picks us up at the end of the street and returns us to our hotel.

At 5:30 PM the six of us meet at the Executive Lounge on the top floor of the Hilton. We enjoy some free refreshments, good conversation and great views of the Bosphorus Straight.

Dinner is on our own tonight. The six of us walk a few blocks to a restaurant recommended by Ali, the Kurkculer. 18 of the 22 folks in our group end up eating here. The food is excellent. Mike and I try our first "Turkish Hamburger" and the other four in our group have good pasta dishes.

Turkey Tour – Day 5 – Saturday September 20 – Istanbul

Today is our last full day in Istanbul, Turkey. This looks like it will be another great weather day. It is forecast to be sunny with highs in the mid-70s.



We leave our hotel at 8:30 AM for the drive to the old city. Even though it is Saturday the roads are jammed; mostly with motor coaches filled with cruise ship passengers. There are four huge ships in port and we see

a ship on its way to port. Ali has rearranged our schedule to deal with the crowds.

Our first stop is at the *Grand Bazaar*, perhaps the world's largest covered marketplace with over 5000 shops and stalls. We learn that construction of the Grand Bazaar started in 1455 AD after the Ottoman Turks conquered Constantinople. It was initially centered on textiles and rugs but now sells almost everything including jewelry, pottery, leather and Turkish food.

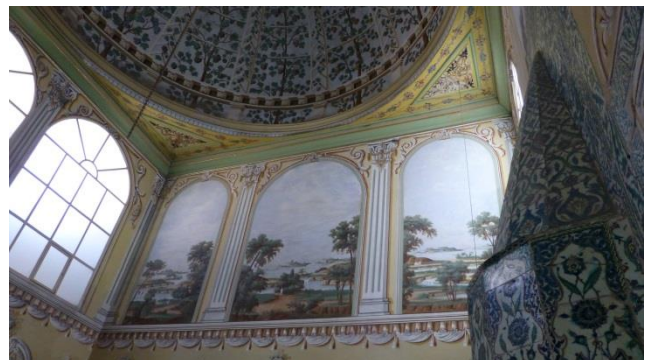


We next visit the amazing *Topkapi Palace*. It is set on a promontory with great views of the Bosphorus



Strait. We learn that the palace was built in the 1470s and served as the home of the Ottoman Sultans, housing as many as 4000 royals and courtiers. In addition to serving as a residence it also served as the administrative offices...the treasury, mint, libraries, a university, medical facilities, and the all-important harem. We learn that the

harem area consisted of 400 rooms and was presided over by the Sultan's mother and guarded by Eunuchs. We enjoy touring the grounds and the many rooms in the palace and seeing the paintings, jewel-encrusted swords and porcelains. We enjoy walking through the four courtyards.



We now have three hours of free time for lunch and more exploration. We have lunch on a restaurant overlooking the Bosphorus and enjoy the views.

At 3 PM we meet and walk over to the *Blue Mosque*. It was built in the 16th century and features six minarets. It, too is very crowded. Ali finds a comfortable area for us to sit and tells us the history of the mosque.

In addition to the cruise ship passengers there are other visitors from around the world. Many are from Muslim countries and it was interesting to see the variation in the women's dress. The most conservatively dressed were those from the Arabian Peninsula. They were dressed in black from head to toe with a narrow slit for their eyes. It was funny to see them wearing a pair of designer sunglasses outside their hood and covering their eyes. Their husbands would be dressed in a baseball cap, jeans, tennis shoes and frequently a tee shirt with "western style" logos and writing on it. Go figure.



We return to our hotel and later have a light dinner at the veranda restaurant. Tomorrow we will depart Istanbul early for the Asian part of Turkey.



Turkey Tour – Day 6 – Sunday September 21 – Istanbul to Assos

Today we leave Istanbul after four most enjoyable days. We enjoyed our stay at the Hilton. We will be on our motor coach for much of the day as we pass from “European” Turkey into “Asian” Turkey but we are looking forward to the two stops we will be making at historical sites.

We first head west out of Istanbul, above the Sea of Marmara, and drive down the Gallipoli peninsula. We are driving on a modern freeway (the first one we have seen in Turkey) in light Sunday morning traffic. Ali gives us lots of good historical information on Turkey over the motor coaches PA system. The 22 of us travelers are very comfortably spread out on our 44 passenger motor coach. Ali shows us a DVD about the life of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk; the father of modern Turkey. It is very well done and gives us a good overview of the history of Turkey from the 1880s until almost current times.

The country we are driving through is mostly hilly, fertile farmland. We pass by the Aegean Sea on our way to Gallipoli on the Dardanelles. We have a rest stop at a gas station and enjoy walking through their



small zoo. We arrive at Gallipoli around mid-day.

Gallipoli was the site of the famous 10 month long campaign fought during World War I in 1915 and 1916. The Ottoman Turks were on the side of the Central Powers (Germany and Austria-Hungary) fighting against, at that point, the British Empire, France, Italy and Russia. In 1915 the war had bogged down to static fronts and trench warfare. 40 year old Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, pushed for opening a new front in Turkey to break the standstill and support the Russian allies. The first attempt was to try to breach the Dardanelles Strait, drive past Istanbul and enter the Black Sea and hook up with Russia. Seven older British battleships attempted to run the straits but failed when they were either destroyed or turned back by Turkish mines and shore based artillery.

The next attempt was a landing by the allies, mostly troops from Britain, French colonies, Australia, New Zealand and India on Turkey's Gallipoli peninsula. The allied troops were poorly led by the British commanders. The Turks controlled the high ground and fought bravely to defend their country. After 10 months an appalling 250,000 troops were casualties on both the allied and axis sides. The allies withdrew from Turkey.

It was a tragic campaign but a formative one for three countries. Australia and New Zealand were newly independent countries but still part of the British Empire and they supplied the majority of the allied troops for the Gallipoli campaign. Their troops fought valiantly but suffered under incompetent British

leadership. This was the first time their troops had battled overseas and their bravery and what they endured are remembered each year on April 25th on ANZAC Day (Australia – New Zealand Army Corp) in Australia and New Zealand. We are approaching the 100 year anniversary.

For the country of Turkey these battles are perhaps an even more important historical event. At the start of World War I the Ottoman Empire was seen as a failing state. It was called “the sick man of Europe”. The Turkish defense of the Gallipoli peninsula surprised the world. The Ottoman army at Gallipoli was led to victory by Lieutenant-Colonel Mustafa Kemal. He later took the name Ataturk (which means “Father of Turkey”) and, in 1922, formed Turkey’s constitutional republic. He is the revered founder of modern Turkey, as he founded the secular state (separating Islam from politics), encouraged “western” style dress and replaced the Arabic alphabet with western letters.

At the battlefield site, surrounded by gravestones of allied and Ottoman troops, we view a monument dedicated on the 10th anniversary of the start of the campaign by Ataturk:



“Those heroes that shed their blood and lost their lives.....You are now lying in the soil of a friendly country. Therefore rest in peace. There is no difference between the Johnnies and the Mehmets to us where they lay side by side here in this country of ours.....You, the mothers, who sent your sons from far away countries wipe away your tears; your sons are now lying in our bosom and are in peace. After having lost their lives on this land they have become

our sons as well” Ataturk 1934



Viewing the burial site and the headstones of the ANZAC casualties is an emotional experience.



Here is a photo showing the well defended heights the ANZACs were trying to capture. They were landed at the wrong beach.



We have a nice included lunch on the porch of a seaside cafe.

At 2 PM we board a ferry for a 25 minute ride across the Dardanelles. We travel from Europe onto the Asian part of

Turkey (where we will spend the rest of our tour). Exiting the ferry we drive through a city past the Trojan Horse used in the recent movie "Troy".



We arrive at the site of the ancient city of *Troy*. For centuries Troy (and the Trojan horse) were believed to be a myth; only documented in Homer's epic poem. In 1870 the German Heinrich Schliemann discovered the real Troy. Excavations have revealed the remnants of at least nine civilizations, each built on top of the preceding one, dating back 5000 years. It is now believed that the Trojan War between Troy and Greece is a historic fact. During the war, around 1200 BC, the Greeks offered a large wooden horse as a gift to the Trojans. It was filled with Greek soldiers who took over Troy. Tour Director Ali does a great job of walking us around the ancient site and explaining what we are seeing. We check out the ruins and verify that they are old!





Back on our motor coach we head for destination for the night, the town of Assos on the west coast of Turkey and on the Aegean Sea. We have a one hour drive to Assos. The last half hour is on a steeply descending secondary road. Our motor coach must park short of the town. A shuttle bus takes our overnight bags the last half mile down to our oceanside hotel. Most all of us walk down the last half mile and enjoy the views of the Aegean Sea.

Assos was founded about 1000 BC by Greeks. By 350 BC the people of Assos had built a large temple and encouraged philosophers to come to their city. Aristotle lived here for three years. Assos is now a small fishing village and off-the-beaten-path tourist stop.

Our hotel for our one night stay in Assos is the Nazlihan. It is small and "different". It was built in the 1890s as an acorn storage house and renovated as a hotel in the 1990s. Our rooms are tiny but the location, right on the small town harbor, is quite nice.



We enjoy a nice included dinner outdoors in front of the hotel right on the harbor. The entree is charcoal grilled fish.

Turkey Tour – Day 7 – Monday September 22 – Assos to Izmar



We enjoy a good night's sleep at the Nazilhan Hotel on the shore of the Aegean Sea. What a great location! We have breakfast and depart the hotel at 8:30 A.M.

We continue our motor coach ride down the western Asiatic coast of Turkey getting great views of the Aegean Sea and the country side. Many groves of olive trees. Ali gives us an excellent overview of the state of the Turkish economy and recent politics.

We enjoyed Istanbul but are now happy to be out in the country and away from the busy city.



We stop for a good included lunch at a Turkish "kabob" restaurant. Our Tour Director Ali is a former Turkish folk musician and he and the owner of the restaurant entertain us with a couple of songs. Ali is playing his 7 string Turkish guitar. It is called a Saz.

Our first stop of the day is at *Pergamum*, said to be one of the premier ancient Greek sites in Turkey. At its height the city contained 150,000 people. It is famous for an ancient library that contained 200,000 volumes. It was said to have been so large that it challenged the world's greatest library in Alexandria, Egypt. Afraid of losing scholars to the library in Pergamum, the Egyptians cut off their supply of papyrus (made from reeds) for making paper and forced the Greeks to invent parchment paper which is made from animal hides. The city was at its height in 325 BC.

The city was built on top of a 1500 foot high mountain, both for defensive purposes and to display its beauty to those in the valley. We ride a gondola to the top. It is about 85 degrees today but there is a nice breeze and a bit of a haze up top so is most comfortable.



We see some of the few remaining ruins. A German railroad engineer received permission from local authorities in 1870 to ship much of the ruins of the buildings back to Germany. They stand, today,



reassembled in Berlin in their Pergamum Museum.

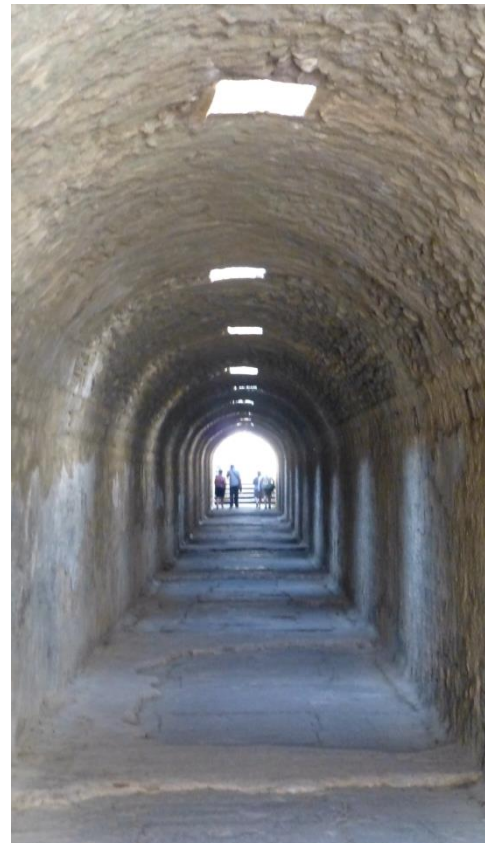
We see the ruins of a great theater seating 10,000 (said to have the steepest seating angle of any ancient amphitheater) and the marbled columns of the Temple of Trajan.



Next we visit the Temple of Dionysus and the Altar of Zeus.

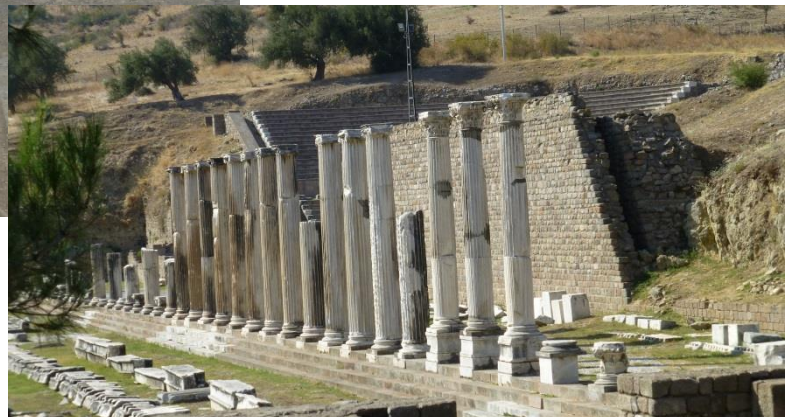
We walk through an arched underground passageway. Ali does his usual great job of describing and explaining what we are seeing.

He shows us the model of how Pergamum used to look.





We continue down the coast and at 3 PM visit the ancient site of *Asclepieum* which we learn was a sanctuary and healing center built in the 4th century BC by the Greeks. Most of the ruins that remain today were built during the reign of the Roman Emperor Hadrian in 117 – 138 AD.





Our Doctor, Helene, poses beside the ancient "snake" symbol for healing. We see the healing springs and walk through the healing tunnel.

We have some time for souvenir shopping outside the exit. Many shops and the vendors are not very pushy. I almost stop in the "Genuine Fake Watch" shop.

At 4 PM we depart for a two hour drive to Izmir, Turkey's third largest city.

At 6 PM we check into our 5 Star hotel, the Swissotel Grand Efes. It is one block from the shoreline of the Aegean Sea. Our rooms are great.

We have a nice included group dinner on a covered veranda at our hotel. Tomorrow we explore Ephesus, said to be the world's best preserved ancient city.



Turkey Tour – Day 8 – Tuesday September 23 – Izmir/Ephesus



We board our motor coach at 8:30 AM for a one hour drive south. We pass by fertile farm fields, many growing citrus crops. The motor coach stops at a pharmacy and Ali takes in those needing medications. About half of our travelers go in with him. There has been some stomach distress going around (I have just gotten over my issues).

We believe today will be one of the real highlights of our trip, our visit to *Ephesus* which is acknowledged to be the world's best preserved ancient city. Marie, Kal, Marcia and I

were supposed to visit Ephesus ten years ago (on our first international trip together) on the second half of our tour of Greece...during the cruise through the Greek islands. Our ship could not stop at Ephesus as the cruise line was in arrears on paying Turkey landing fees! Some of us were quite upset! Our tour operator, Insight Travel, tried to make it up to us by flying us to Crete and giving us a nice tour and an excellent dinner, but seeing Ephesus is something we've always kept on "our list".

We've learned that Ephesus was founded by Ionian Greeks in the 10th century BC. It was later conquered and controlled by the Persians. In 334 BC the Greek Alexander the Great liberated Ephesus. By the 1st



century BC the Roman Empire controlled Ephesus and the city entered a long period of prosperity. Population grew to 250,000 and it became an important provincial capital. From 395 to 1308 AD Ephesus was part of the Byzantine Empire (the Greek speaking and Christian Eastern Roman Empire). An important Christian community flourished. The Ottoman Empire and later Turkey has controlled Ephesus since the 14th century.

Ephesus once contained the Temple of Diana, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The temple was excavated in the late 1880s and reassembled in the British Museum in London. Today the Ephesus ruins attract hordes of visitors from around the world. It is a popular stop for large cruise ships.

We see the theater that can hold 24,000 people and is still in use today. It was built by the Greeks in the 3rd century BC and expanded later by the Romans. The seating area stands three stories high.

Ali does his usual exceptional job of escorting us around while explaining the historical significance of



the ruins. He is frequently helped by one of the many cats that peacefully roam Turkey.

We walk along the Sacred Way and see the Roman Latrines.



The



ruins of the *Library of Celsus*, which at one time held 12,000 ancient scrolls, is probably the signature building in Ephesus. The front façade (shown in our picture) was rebuilt in the mid-1900s. It is considered to be a prime example of Roman architecture. Ali takes a picture of the group with the façade as a background.



Ephesus is hot and crowded but Ali frequently takes us to shaded areas for rest and a historical talk. The "whisperers" earphones are great. We don't need to stand right next to him to hear his good commentary.

Ali has bought us special tickets and we now visit the *Terrace Houses*, the ancient "houses of the wealthy" during the Roman period that were built on the slopes of Bulbul Mountain. The houses were



tall structures with open interior courtyards. Rooms were heated by hot air carried by clay pipes beneath the floors and behind the walls. Hot and cold water was supplied. There were toilets and kitchens. Restoration is underway on several of the houses.

Leaving Ephesus we drive up a mountain to the scenic, rustic village of *Sirince*. We have an excellent



lunch at a family owned restaurant. We enjoy their home grown vegetables, fresh baked bread and homemade wine.

After lunch we stop and tour a 14th century mosque, *Isabey Mosque*.



We return to our hotel and later go out for a good dinner at a restaurant along the shore in Izmir.

Late tomorrow afternoon we will be boarding our Gulet Yacht for a four day cruise. There may be no internet access so it will be a few days before we can upload more daily updates to our web site.



Turkey Tour – Day 9 – Wednesday September 24 – Izmir/Gocek

At 9 AM we depart from the Swissotel Efes in Izmir after a two night stay. Today will be a long day on the road in our motor coach as we drive south from Izmir to Gocek. In Gocek we will board *Gulet Yachts* for our eagerly anticipated four day cruise along southern Turkey's Mediterranean coast.

Ali uses the coach's PA system to talk to us about some Turkish social traditions like the circumcision ceremony for eight year old boys...ten days when they are treated like kings. He tells us military service is compulsory for men at the age of 20, but is delayed if they are in college (18 months in the first case, six months in the second). Ali describes for us the courtship and marriage rituals and processes in the urban and rural areas.

An hour and a half into our drive we stop for a tour of a "carpet factory". Some of us (like me!) dread these types of stops on tours where the main emphasis seems to be on trying to sell you something. We

are in the small village of Camlik and find it a nice change of pace from the more crowded historical sites that we visited on previous days.



We first see a demonstration of Turkish rug weaving and learn that it can take an experienced weaver 10 months to weave a "fine" 30" x 55" rug. What we find interesting is that a local organization named *Sultamkoy* works with local farming villages and the rug factory to train young women aged 15+ in the art of rug weaving. The women are paid as they learn. Buses pick them up in their villages in the morning and return them late afternoon. They are given lunch and can even bring along young children. The rug factory ends up getting productive workers and the art of Turkish rug weaving is passed on to a new generation. We also learn about how they dye the rug fibers and weave silk from silk worm pods.

It is a beautiful day and a peaceful setting. We now have a presentation about the different types of Turkish rugs. We probably have about a hundred different rugs shown and explained to us. Their rugs are of very high quality (and very high prices). Our guide Ilky, who is the owner of this operation, is very articulate and informative. Now we have some time to shop and seven or eight folks in our tour group make purchases including Helene and Mike.



We have lunch outdoors at their facility and enjoy home grown produce and grilled beef and chicken.



Late afternoon we arrive near Gocek, a small port town on the Gulf of Fethiye. The land is very hilly and mountainous. We descend a steep winding road to sea level.

At 6 PM the 22 folks in our tour group board two 12 passenger *Gulets*. These are replicas of a traditional Turkish fishing boat. The decks measure about 85 feet in length and 21 feet in width.

The boats seem larger than we were expecting. On deck there are nice sitting areas with comfortable cushions in the bow and stern. There is a large table near the stern where we will have our meals. Our Tour Director will stay on the other Gulet the first two days and on our boat the third and fourth days.



Each of our cabins have a bathroom with shower and toilet. The bed takes up most of the room and looks comfortable. There is no air conditioning. We are told we can sleep up on the deck on cushions at



night if the cabins are too warm. The ship is made of beautiful wood, mostly teak.

We meet the three man crew, Captain, Sailor (a 22 year old) and Cook (son in law).

The three man crew works together to prepare our dinner which is served family-style; we help ourselves from large plates that are passed around. Salad, appetizers, grilled fish and desert. They run a tab for each of us for any alcohol or sodas consumed. These prices are reasonable.

The sails on the Gulets are mostly for show. The captain nearly always uses the motor to move around. We travel to a pretty cove and anchor for the night. We spend the evening chatting, looking at the great views, and settling in to life on our boat. We continue to find all of our fellow travelers on this tour most enjoyable people and fun to be with. We are in a remote area with no lights and a clear sky so the star viewing is excellent. We retire for the night. The cabins are very hot but cool off as the night progresses. One of our folks does sleep up on deck for most of the night.

Turkey Tour – Day 10 – Thursday September 25 – Cruising/Cleopatra Baths

The sun rises at 7AM. Most of us slept well after the winds came in through the portholes and cooled off the cabins. A good breakfast is served to us by the crew.



Our Gulet Yachts now motor to the south along Turkey's Mediterranean coast (also known as the "Turquoise Coast" due to the brilliant color of the clear water) and anchor in Aga Limani cove. At 9 AM the hikers are transferred to shore by the Gulet's small motorboats and we start a three hour hike. 11 of the 22 folks on our tour have opted for the hike which has been described as somewhat challenging. The other 11 will stay on the Gulets as they motor along the coast to the cove we will be hiking to.



The trail we are on follows the ancient *Lycian Way*, the old route across Anatolia from Asia to Europe. We initially climb to 600 feet in height. The trail brings us to *Lydea*, an interesting Greco-Roman site.





We also visit a Roman era cistern that is still in use today. We go inside. It is used for storing water. Rainwater flows through the holes in the domed roof and collects.

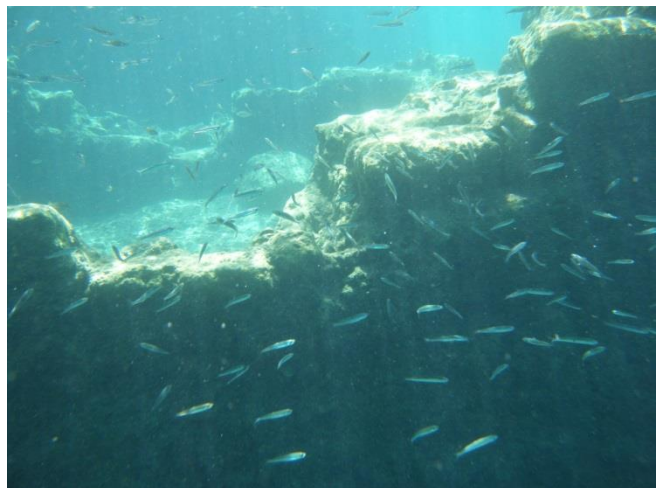


Ali, our Tour Director, has arranged for us to visit a farming family that lives in this rural area. They primarily raise goats and the wife makes necklaces and goat-bells to sell to hikers. They let us look around their house

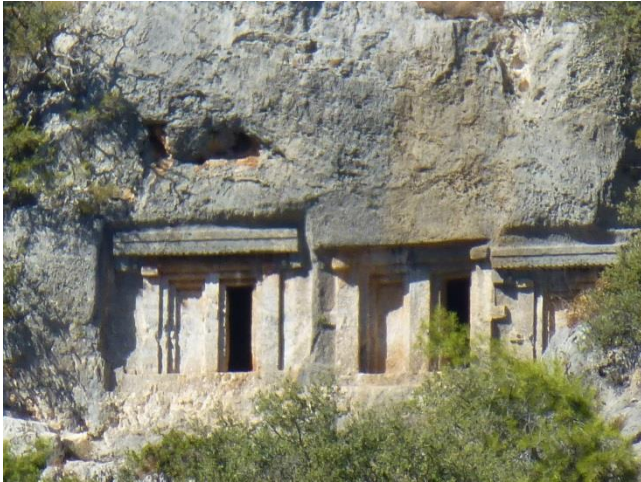




We see turkeys (in Turkey) roaming goats and donkeys on our hike. It is not an easy hike. In addition to steep ups and downs the trail itself is very rocky. Our hike ends at another cove on the Mediterranean Sea. This is where the *Sunken Baths of Cleopatra* are. These are said to have been built by Mark Antony for the last Egyptian pharaoh. While we have been hiking, our Gulets have motored from where we started to this cove. Marcia and I now swim to the Sunken Baths. The water is warm and very salty! I am able to get some photos of the underwater ruins and small fish. We enjoy our refreshing swim.



After lunch the captain motors out of the cove. It is windy; probably gusting over 25 mph. The crew raises our sails and we cruise back up the coast for a couple of hours. We see 4th century BC rock tombs in the sides of cliffs.



What a pleasant day...this is paradise. We anchor in another cove for the night. We are served our afternoon tea and then have time for swimming. Ali comes over from the other Gulet with a nautical map and shows us the route we have been taking and where we will be going tomorrow.

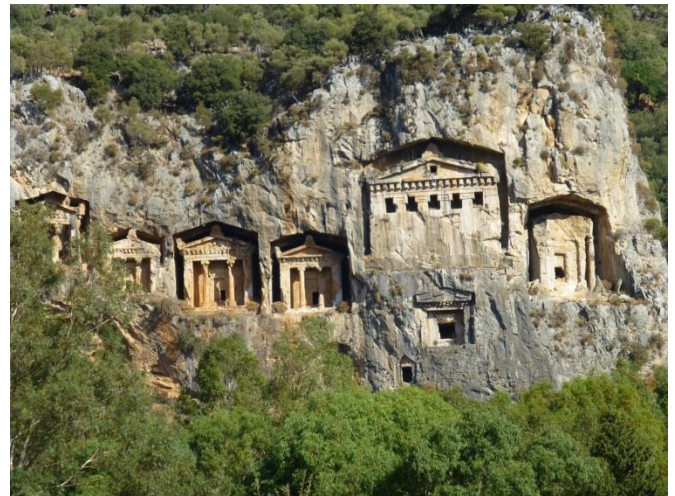
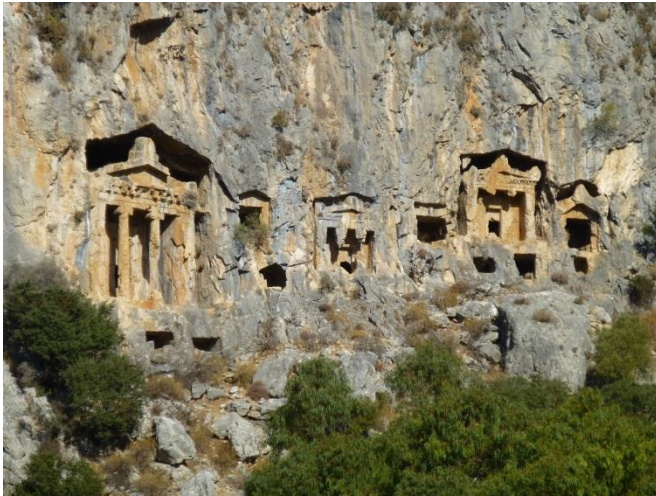


We are served another great dinner by the crew. The entree is charcoal grilled chicken and it is delicious. Many vegetable side dishes and, as always, fruit for desert. We retire for the night.

Turkey Tour – Day 11 – Friday September 26 – Cruising – Ekincik/Dalyan River

After breakfast we raise anchor, leave our cove, and head to the port of Gocek.

At 8:45 AM we leave our Gulets and travel by motor coach about a half hour north to the town of *Dalyan*. We board a small boat for a cruise down the river through a group of marshy, reedy channels. Dalyan is famous for the endangered Loggerhead Turtles that breed on its beaches in the spring. At the Lake of Koycegiz we see 4th century BC Lycian Rock Tombs carved into the sides of travertine rock cliffs rising high above the water. Near the spot where the river empties into the Aegean Sea we spot the heads of loggerhead turtles poking above the water's surface. It is a nice weather day; warm and sunny.



Ali stops and visits with a fisherman he knows and buys a bunch of recently caught blue crabs. It is another great weather day. It is warm and sunny.

We have lunch at a local restaurant. The food is great and Ali has his friends at the restaurant cook and prepare the blue crabs he just bought and they serve them to us as another appetizer. We enjoy the restaurant's Wi-Fi access. Ali tells us that there are many British citizens living in the area. They like the climate and the low cost of living.

When we check our e-mail at the restaurant we find we have an update from the USA State Department. Prior to our trip Marcia had registered with them. They are just warning that with the bombing of ISIL in Syria to be on the alert for any unusual activities, especially in the southeast of Turkey (which we will not be near). We are safe where we are traveling and we are keeping up with the news each day via the internet. We have heard that Turkey is experiencing quite a refugee crisis. 200,000 Syrians have crossed into Turkey over the past three years and have been dispersed around the country. Now, more Iraqi refugees are coming to Turkey.



We return to our Gulets and motor past Shipyard Island and then to a protected cove and anchor for the night. Some of our folks enjoy a swim in the sea. Ali moves onto our ship (from the other boat) for our last two days on the Gulets. He shows us his nautical chart, where we have been and where we are going. A storm is expected tomorrow so he has changed our itinerary. The crew serves us at Tea Time. Later they serve us fresh popped popcorn.



Ali has brought with him some of the blue crabs that he purchased earlier in the day. These are for the crews to have with their dinner. Ali entertains us with Turkish folk songs and his saz guitar, which the crew and all of us really enjoy, while the Captain grills the blue crab.



protective cove.

Our Gulets are the only two anchored in our cove. At 6 PM two more Gulets pull in and anchor. They are the Odysseys Unlimited tour that started two days behind ours. They are filled with alumni of Bryn Mahr College.

We enjoy a great dinner. Small spicy hamburgs are the entree. Also hand sliced french fries, many other vegetables and fruit for desert. Many hilarious conversations with our traveling companions. We retire for the night, safely anchored in a

Turkey Tour – Day 12 – Saturday September 27 - Gemiler Island/Kayakoy

At 12:30 AM we are awakened by flashes of lightning and the pounding of feet on the deck above our cabins. The crew is preparing our Gulet for the storm that is starting early. At 12:45 AM our boat is being rocked by high winds. It is raining. We are anchored from our bow and our stern is tied to a large rock on the shore line. From the window in our cabin it appears that we are dragging our anchor and being pushed towards shore. The Captain starts our engine while the crew cuts the line tying us to the shore and raises our anchor. Our Gulet motors out of the cove and races on through the pounding rain and rough seas. At 2 AM we reach the protected harbor of Gocek and anchor.



In the morning we see that no damage has been done to our boat. Things are just a little wet up on deck. We enjoy another good breakfast.

Due to the weather we have altered our route and we are skipping our visit to *Gemiler Island* and proceeding directly to Kayakoy (after retrieving the stern line we left behind early this morning). We have been told that Gemiler Island is also known as “Saint Nicholas Island”. Archaeologists believe

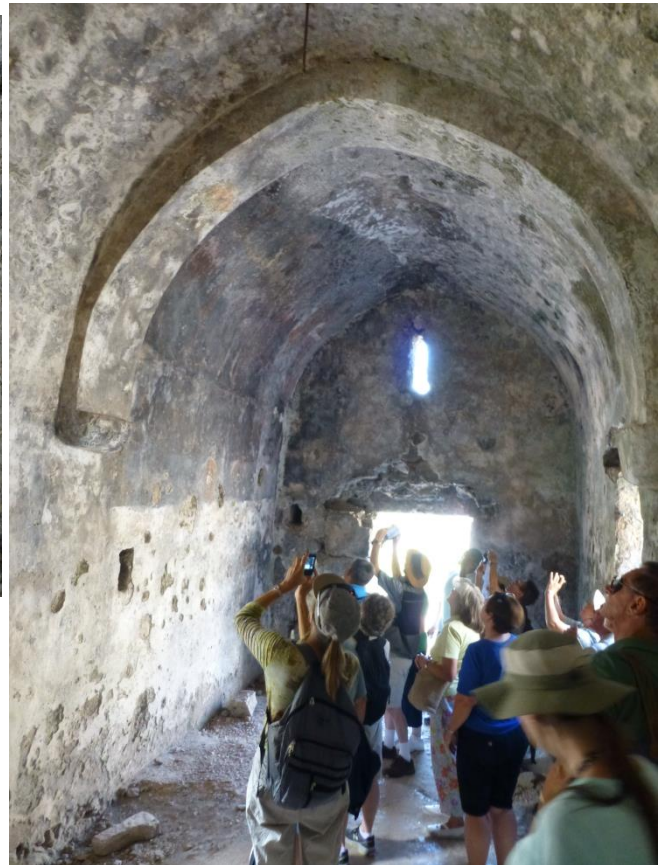


the island to be the location of the tomb of St. Nicholas. He was, of course, known as a gift giver and was the model for Santa Claus. If you are confused about why Santa Claus was in Turkey remember that this whole region was part of the Byzantine Empire, the Greek-speaking and Christian eastern part of the Roman Empire from about the third century AD until the Mongols/Ottomans/Turks conquered all of Turkey in 1453, so this was a Christian region prior to that time.

At 9 AM we disembark the Gulets and drive for 40 minutes to near the top of a mountain and arrive at the Greek “ghost town” of *Kayakoy*. Ali leads us to a small restaurant and serves us Turkish Tea (side comment: Turkey's favorite drink is tea served in a small shaped glass; very few Turks drink coffee). We sit down and for the next few minutes Ali gives us background on Kayakoy and the 1923 Greek/Turk population exchange.

All during the time of the Islamic Ottoman Empire the Turks controlled much more area than they do today, Northern Africa, large parts of Eastern Europe and the “Holy Lands”. They were known for letting each area pretty much govern themselves (as long as they sent their taxes to the Sultan) and maintain their religions. Much of the coastal areas of the old Ottoman Turkey had been settled and dominated by Greeks for centuries. Following the Central Powers (which included the Ottoman Empire) defeat at the end of World War I in 1918, Greece, which was on the winning side, invaded Turkey in an attempt to take over large areas of territory in Turkey that had been traditionally inhabited by Greeks. Surprising much of the world, Turkey, under the leadership of Ataturk won the war in 1922. This led to the formation of the modern Turkey democracy in 1923. After this war a lot of people’s lives were even more disrupted. As outlined in the treaty signed in January of 1923, the “*Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations*” forced 1.5 million rural Greek Orthodox Christians to move from Turkey to Greece and 500,000 Turkish Muslims to move from Greece to Turkey. Ali says this exchange was promoted by the Greeks whose population was down to 3 million people vs. the 20 million Turks. The folks to be moved were given one year’s notice to leave. This exchange left towns like Kayakoy abandoned. Turks did not want to live in mountainous Kayakoy as they were mostly farmers and the fertile land was in the valleys and along the coasts.

We walk through the abandon town of Kayakoy seeing many of the 2000 empty houses and the deserted churches. A significant earthquake in 1957 damaged structures in much of the area. The town has been partially restored and is being preserved as a historic monument by the Turkey government.





We see a house that was occupied by a Turkish man until five years ago.

We return to our Gulet and enjoy lunch. It is predicted to storm again today at 3 PM. The crew prepares



the boat for rain while some of our fellow travelers take a siesta on the comfortable lounges at the rear of the boat.

At 3:15 PM the rain has started. We raise anchor, retrieve our shore line and motor out of our protective cove. After a cruise of three quarters of an hour we anchor for the night in the protected harbor of the city of Fethiye. It continues to rain and we spend the afternoon chatting with our nice fellow travelers, getting updates from Ali, enjoying

afternoon tea and then the popcorn.

Another great dinner featuring sea bass and calamari. Off to bed for our last nights sleep on our Gulet.



Turkey Tour – Day 13 – Sunday September 28 – Fethiye/Antalya



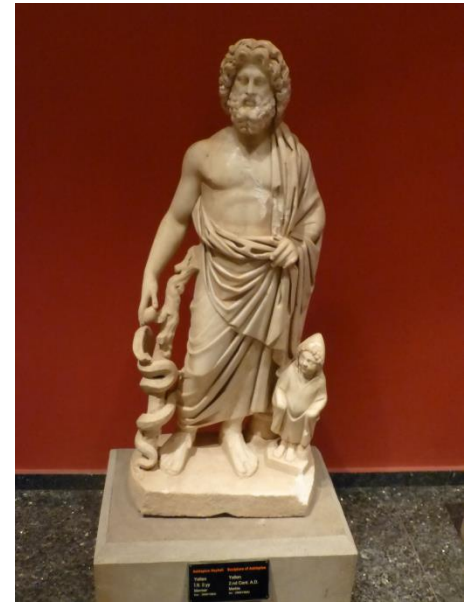
Today we say goodbye to our crew and leave our Gulet after four enjoyable days cruising along the Turquoise Coast. This morning our boat ties up to the docks of Fethiye, a city of 100,000. At 8:30 AM we are on board our motor coach for a 3 hour, 100 mile drive to the resort town of Antalya on the Mediterranean Sea on the south coast of Turkey. We drive through fertile farming land and over the Taurus Mountains. At our high point we are over 5000 feet above sea level. We leave the sun and it becomes overcast. Rain starts to fall as we get up top.



It is only 58 degrees.

We arrive in Antalya a little after noon and enjoy an included lunch at a kabob restaurant overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. It is now in the mid-70s and sunny but windy. Antalya is a modern city of over a million people and sits in the center of what is called Turkey's "Riviera".

After lunch we spend time at the *Archaeological Museum*. Ali gives us an extensive overview of the archaeological history of the region and then we have an hour and a half to walk through the exhibits.



They cover the history of the Mediterranean and Pamphylia regions of Anatolia.

Most amazing are the hundred or so marble statues recovered from the ruins at nearby Perge (which we will visit tomorrow morning). We see statues of Aphrodite, Athena and many others and the Sarcophagus of Hercules.

The prize of the museum is the statue of Hercules. It was discovered in the ruins of Perge in the 1980's. The top half of the statue was somehow smuggled into the United States and ended

up at the Boston Museum of Art. After years of negotiations the top half was returned to Turkey two years ago and reunited with the bottom half. I guess this kind of return does not happen very often and Turkey is said to very grateful to the USA for this.

At 3 PM we drive downtown and Ali takes us on a one hour walking tour of *Kaleici* (Old Town). We see the harbor, the National Square, Hadrian's Gate (built in honor of the emperor's visit in 130 AD) and other ruins from the 2nd century AD, old Ottoman era houses and many shops. It is fun seeing the Turkish families out and about enjoying a nice Sunday afternoon.



At 4:30 PM we check into our hotel for the next two nights, the quite luxurious Rixos Antalya Downtown. While we visited the Archeological Museum Ali had gone ahead and picked up our room keys, had our luggage delivered to our rooms, and made sure we all got rooms with great views of the Mediterranean Sea.

The six of us had a light dinner on our own on the covered veranda of a hotel restaurant.



Turkey Tour – Day 14 – Monday September 29 – Antalya/Perge

We wake up to what is sure to be a great weather day. I am sitting on the balcony of our room at the 5 Star Rixos Antalya Downtown hotel, typing these words, while watching the sun rise and illuminate the city, the Taurus Mountains and the Mediterranean.



This morning we visit the ruins of the ancient Roman city of *Perge* on the outskirts of Antalya. We are told that Perge was first established around 1000 BC and really flourished during the reign of Alexander the Great between 356 and 323 BC. Most of the statues that we saw yesterday at the museum and the ruins we will see today date from the Roman period in the 2nd century AD.



Some of the ruins that we explore are the shopping arcade, a large pool, a 12,000 seat stadium with seating supported by exterior arches, the adjoining palestra where the



athletes would train, eat, bathe and socialize, and streets lined with columns. As at most of these types of sites, Ali has a "before and after" book and he can show us how a ruin looks now and how it looked in

the 2nd century AD. All of these stones walls were once covered with polished marble. In some of the rooms there was a gap between the walls and the marble and hot air or water circulated to keep the rooms warm. Fresh water pipes and sewage pipes serviced the entire complex. While not as extensive many feel these ruins rival those at Ephesus.

It is a warm day but a nice breeze keeps us comfortable as we tour the ruins.



The afternoon is free time. Helene, Mike, Marie and Kal enjoy the hotel gardens, the nearby park, have a light lunch and do some shopping. Marcia and I relax by the hotel pool for a while. Later I walk over to the private tennis club next to the hotel and watch some old guys (my age!) play doubles. After a while one walks over to me and introduces himself. They are all Turks. We chat for a while. He invites me to come over at 8 AM tomorrow and play tennis with them. They will find me shoes and a racquet! I decline as we will be

leaving town early tomorrow. This is typical of the friendliness we have experienced in Turkey.

Tonight is Odysseys Unlimited's farewell dinner as this is the last day of the standard portion of the tour. Six of our fellow travelers will fly home tomorrow while the remaining sixteen of us are going on a four day tour extension to Cappadocia and Ankara.

Tour Director Ali gives us a recap of the tour at the hotel and then takes us to a restaurant high up on a cliff with great views of the area. We dine on great food on an outdoor deck. A musician friend of Ali's arrives. He is an accomplished violinist in the orchestra. He plays five diverse tunes for us. The great sound and skill amaze us.





Back to our hotel and we retire for the night. Tomorrow will be a long day in our motor coach as we drive from Antalya to Cappadocia.

Turkey Tour – Day 15 – Tuesday September 30 – Drive to Cappadocia



Sixteen tour members, including the six of us, are going on a four day tour extension along with Ali our Tour Director. Our other six tour members will fly back to the USA today.

We are told that we will be spending most of the day on our motor coach as we have to travel quite a long way from Antalya to Cappadocia. The scenery should be interesting as we will be driving through the mountainous central plateau of Anatolian Turkey.

We board our motor coach at 7:15 AM. We travel down the coast for a ways then turn north into the Taurus mountains. We stop and Ali buys Turkish bananas for all of us. After several hours we cross the spine of the mountain range at 6000 feet. We have brilliant sunshine but it is only 37 degrees due to the altitude. Ali says that for the remainder of our tour, until we reach Ankara, we will never be below 4200

feet above sea level.



About noontime we arrive in Konya, a city of 1.2 million people. Ali says this area is much more Islamic than where we have been and indeed nearly all of the women we see on the streets are wearing head scarfs unlike the previous coastal cities we have visited, Istanbul, Izmir and Antalya. We have a good lunch at a nice restaurant. It is very comfortable traveling in a full size, 44 passenger motor coach when there are only 16 folks.

We next visit the *Mevlana Museum*. This is the religious home of Turkey's *Whirling Dervishes*. We are told that this is an order whose members dance and twirl wildly to free themselves from earthly bondage.



We now continue our drive to Cappadocia in central Turkey. We are on a flat desert like plateau for much of the drive. We spot the snow capped peak of Mt. Hassan. It is an extinct volcano. At 10,700 feet it is the second highest mountain in central Turkey.



Ali tells us that Cappadocia is famous for its unique natural rock formations. Due to the varying erosion rates of the different kinds of volcanic deposits, unique landscapes have been created. Cappadocia was a haven for the early Christians and they carved more than 3000 residences and churches, and even a complete underground village, into the porous rock.

We arrive at our hotel for the next three nights, the Uchisar Kaya, at 5:30 PM. It was built in the mid 1960s as a Club Med and is partially dug into the side of a mountain. Our great Tour Director Ali has done it again. He has secured for all of us rooms on the top floor looking out onto "Dolphin Valley" which is filled with weird geological formations and caves carved into the mountain sides. We can see the formations and caves in the Dolphin Valley from our room balconies.

We have a good included buffet at the hotel restaurant and turn in early for the night. We will be up very early for what we believe will be an

exciting event.





Turkey Tour – Day 16 – Wednesday October 1 – Cappadocia

We meet in our hotel lobby at 5:05 AM. We are excited as we are going to take a sunrise hot air balloon ride over the geological formations at Cappadocia. We have all of our clothes on as it is cold, perhaps 40 degrees, but there is no breeze. After driving to the launch site we meet our balloon pilot Ismail. Ali has told us that he is the most experienced pilot in the area. He is President of the Turkey Hot Air Balloon Organization and heads up Turkey's balloon competition team. I asked Ismail if he has every ballooned in the USA, like at the Albuquerque festival. He laughs and says "many times; I was there last year and will be there next year". Then he lifted up his jacket and showed me his large silver belt buckle saying "New Mexico".



We watch the crew inflate our balloon in the dark. We climb in and enjoy a great one hour flight. We skim over the rocks, soar up high and see the other balloons. We are one of a hundred balloons (they limit the daily launches to 100 balloons). It is quite comfortable in the basket as we are warmed by the hot flames. What a great experience!





We return to the Uchisar Kaya hotel for breakfast and then board our motor coach at 9:10 AM for today's explorations. As is typical in Cappadocia we are enjoying a crystal clear weather day.

On the way to our first stop we view the village of Gore that was abandoned in 1923 during the Greek-Turk population exchange. We also stop and watch the local folks make molasses. Some, including Marcia, buy hand made head scarfs from local women.

Our first stop is at the amazing underground city of *Kaymakli*. First discovered in 1965 it covers 1.5 square miles and is eight stories deep. Part of the complex dates from the 5th century BC.

It was used by the local residents to hide from invaders.



They built camouflaged pits to trap enemies used large stones to block entrances. 3000 people could live underground for up to 2-1/2 months. Ventilation shafts enabled them to breathe. Smoke from their fires was vented two mile away to confuse the invaders, We walk

down to the fifth level, often passing through long narrow passage ways 50 feet long and only 4 feet high.

We next spend time walking through *Monk's Valley* and see some of the best geological formations in the area.



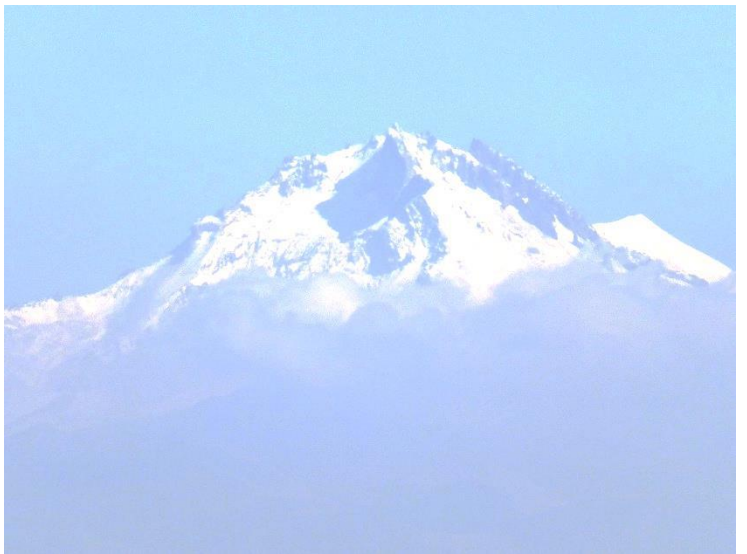
We stop for an included lunch. All the food here has been great but this is perhaps our favorite lunch. Ali always picks the best restaurants and selections. The entree is goulash delivered to our table "in flames".

After lunch we travel to *Uchisar Kalesi* castle. It was carved into a mountain, the highest one in the immediate area, by the Byzantines in the sixth century AD. We stop at the entrance and



Ali shows and explains all of the local nuts and fruit for sales by vendors.

We climb to the top of the castle and get great views of the valleys and of the highest mountain in the region, Mt. Erciyes at 12,850 feet.



Now we follow Ali on a tour of *Old Town*. More great views of the valley and old buildings.



Next we are off for a walk through the *Zelve Valley* where people lived in cave homes until the 1950s. The area was created by early Christians. Ali shows us homes, churches and a mill all dug into the sides of mountains.



We enjoy another good included dinner at a local restaurant by a large river. This has been a long day but most on the trip say it's been the best day of the tour.

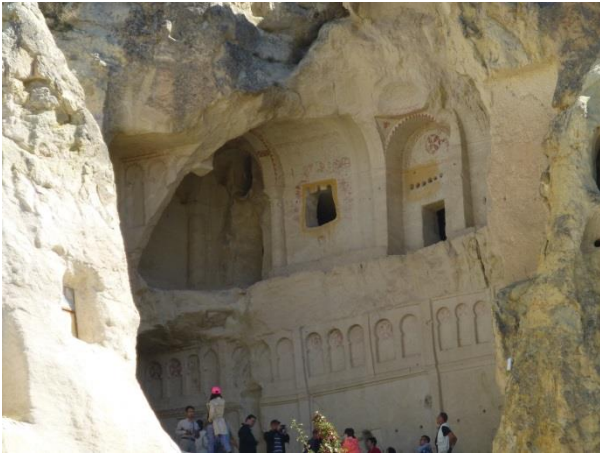
Turkey Tour Day 17 – Thursday October 2 – Cappadocia

I am up at 3 AM after our first night's sleep at the Uchisar Kaya hotel in Cappadocia. I get up to start tracking the score of the Pirates/Giants baseball wild card game that starts at 8 PM in Pittsburgh. I am not a "happy camper" when the game ends in a 8-0 Pirates loss. The season is over. As the sun rises the skies in front of our hotel are filled with hot air balloons. It will be another crystal clear weather day.



At 9 AM Ali leads us on a relatively easy 1-3/4 hour hike along the rim of the *Goreme Valley* and down into the old village of *Goreme*. We then have some time for souvenir shopping.





Next Ali takes us through the *Open Air Museum at Goreme*. The houses and churches were built in the third and fourth century AD by the early Christians. They dug the buildings into the rock faces of the mountains to insure that they had protection from the Pagans and Arabs. They were safer after 330 AD when Christianity was made the official religion of the Roman Empire. There are about 100 churches in the area. We go through four of them. The interior walls of the churches display the original frescos. We are not allowed to take pictures inside of the churches. We also see a convent and a refectory where food was prepared and served to the monks.

After another nice included lunch at a Turkish restaurant we drive to Avanos where we are taken to a ceramics store. Here we watch a pottery making demonstration, are entertained by musicians and are led to the sales rooms.

The hand colored ceramics are pretty amazing. They are also very expensive. This is not a place where you would buy a place setting of dishes but maybe one piece, perhaps a vase or plate for display. Several folks in our group do purchase item. In most cases to be shipped back to the USA. Marcia and I choose not to buy anything so as to have enough money for our next vacation!



We return to our hotel at 4:30 PM. We see on the news that the Turkish Parliament has just passed legislation approving the use of Turkish ground troops to fight ISIS in Syria and Iraq. This was not an easy decision as Turkey has been fighting Kurdish rebels in eastern Turkey for 30 years. Their troops will now be fighting to save the Kurds in northern Syria and Iraq. As 160,000 Kurdish refugees have streamed into Turkey in the past few weeks the defeat of ISIS will probably be required to prevent more Kurds from immigrating.

At 7 PM we meet for an included buffet dinner in the hotel restaurant.



Tomorrow will be our last full day in Turkey. We will be driving to Ankara, the capital of Turkey.

Turkey Tour – Day 18 – Friday October 3 – Travel to Ankara

Today will be our last full day in Turkey. We will **leave** Cappadocia on a half-day drive to Ankara, the capital of Turkey. We enjoyed our two night stay at the Uchisar Kaya hotel. There are many pictures hanging on the walls of the hotel showing it under construction in the mid-1960s. The "back half" of the hotel was dug into the side of the mountain. From our third floor balconies we had great views of the geological formations in the Pigeon Valley and we enjoyed seeing the hot air balloons sail past at



sunrise.

We board our motor coach and leave Cappadocia at 8 AM. Ali tells us that today is the start of a holiday weekend in Turkey and the roads and rest stops will be busy. The holiday is a religious one, Eid al-Adha, the Fast of Sacrifice.

After forty-five minutes we stop and tour a very large building constructed by the Seljuk Turks between 1231-1239 AD. It is called *Agzikarahan* and was built as an overnight rest stop for the camel caravans traversing the Silk Road between China and Europe. It was also used as a fortress during times of war. The massive building contains a mosque, and rooms for a veterinarian, a Turkish bath, a library and cooking facilities. The camels, donkeys and horses slept on the floors and the trekkers on the raised portions. Ali takes us on a walk past ruins of some of the old outer buildings. We enjoyed seeing this



unique structure. It was great that there were no other tourists in the area.

We drive on a modern freeway across the central plateau. We stop for a quick lunch. We see many farmer's fields and herds of sheep. Ali tells us more about the Turkish economy. The minimum wage is about 400 US\$. In these cases more than one family member needs to work. The official unemployment



rate is 10% but the real rate may be closer to 20%.

We enter Ankara at 1 PM. Ali tells us that Ankara is the second largest city in Turkey with a population of over 5 million. It is the capital of Turkey and has many universities that attract students from all over the



country. It is known as a city of "bureaucrats and students". Ankara is a very modern city and it looks like a European one. Head scarfs are on only about 50% of the women we see on the streets.

We now visit the *Museum of Anatolian Civilizations*. This museum covers the whole history of the people that have inhabited central Turkey, from the earliest known people through the Urartu, Hattie, Phrygian, and Assyrian civilizations. Ali first gives us an overview of the Anatolian/Asia Minor/Central Turkey from Neolithic times to today. This really is a "birthplace of civilization". Ali than takes us around the museum and points out key exhibits. Then we have another hour to view the museum on our own.

The museum building dates from the 15th century and is a restored covered market. It is the top museum in Turkey and was named Europe's Best Museum in 1997. Many interesting exhibits. We see the first mirror (5500 BC), a wood table from 800 BC, a lion pedestal from 1000 BC, and a display of the first "safety pins" for holding clothes together.

At 4 PM we check into our 5 Star hotel, the Ankara Hilton. We have nice views from our window.



At 6:30 PM we all meet in the lobby. Ali has arranged refreshments for us and recaps what we have all done on the Cappadocia extension. Then we go into the hotel restaurant and have our included farewell dinner. We say our goodbyes. Tomorrow we return the USA!

Turkey Tour – Day 19 – Saturday October 4 – Travel back to the USA

Today our *Legendary Turkey Tour* ends and we fly back home. We will first have an hour flight from Ankara to Istanbul. Then Marie, Kal, Marcia and I will have an eleven and a half hour direct flight to Chicago. We will be regaining the seven hours we lost on the way over, so we will arrive in Chicago around 5:25 PM. From Chicago we have direct flights to Dayton and Pittsburgh that will get us home late evening. Helene and Mike have a direct flight from Istanbul to New York City. From there they will fly to

Tampa Bay and get home also late in evening.

The six of us plus two other tour members and Tour Director Ali leave the Hilton Ankara hotel at 6:45 AM for the airport in a comfortable van. Today is the official start of the Eid al-Adha (Feast of Sacrifice) holiday. This is one of two important Muslim holidays in Turkey (the other is Ramadan). It is important that practicing Muslims attend morning mosque today. There is a lot of



traffic on the roads on a Saturday morning for that reason. We near a mosque and traffic slows to a crawl. Cars are triple-parked in front of the mosque restricting through traffic to one lane. The mosque is packed. With no room inside people are on the mosque steps and on the sidewalks bowing to Mecca. This is my first "Mosque Jam". A normal half an hour trip to the airport take almost an hour but we make our flight to Istanbul with no problems.

Our eleven and a half hour flight from Istanbul to Chicago goes well. We are on a different Turkish Airways Airbus A330 than we had on the way over and our seats and legroom seem better. Service from the crew is very good.

Comments on the Tour:

Itinerary: The Odysseys Unlimited itinerary was excellent. A nice mix of cities, countryside, the sea, hikes and walks, ruins, churches, mosques, and museums. Marcia would have liked a little more time to shop at the souvenir stands around all of the attractions instead of so much time in the attractions and maybe a little less time at the Carpet Factory and Ceramics Factory (although the Carpet Factory visit was very well done).

Tour Pace: We thought the pace was very good. A lot of good activities and some free time. Very few really early starts.

Tour Group Members: We've enjoyed being with nearly every one of the tour members on our previous five Odysseys Unlimited tours. The folks on this tour were great! Intelligent, funny and well-traveled. They were enjoyable to be with. Always punctual. You had to "be early or you would be late".

Accommodations: A nice mix of Deluxe (Hilton Istanbul, Swissotel Izmir, Rixos Antalya, Hilton Ankara) and Quirky (Nazlihan, Gulet Yacht, Uchisar Kaya.....but these all had great views/locations). The only negative was the bizarre lack of maid service at the Swissotel. We enjoyed free Wi-Fi at all the hotels. There was no Wi-Fi on the Gulets but it is available, after the second night on the boat, at the restaurant we had lunch at.

Food and Beverages: Turkish food is wonderful. Lots of fruits and vegetables (desert is typically fruit). Their specialties....sea bass, kabobs, lamb are excellent. Our many included meals were great. Ali always did a good job of explaining our options and the contents of what we were eating. When we ate on our own he always directed us to good restaurants. Beer and Wine are readily available but relatively expensive as the increasingly Islamic government has steadily raised taxes on alcohol over the past ten years.

Gulet Yacht: Great fun. The cabins are a little small and sometimes warm but our four days on our boat were most enjoyable. Our three man crew was very good and the meals that they prepared for us were great and the beer and wine relatively inexpensive. There was no real rocking motion so no fear of seasickness.

Motor Coach: Our new Mercedes motor coach was most comfortable. 22 (or 16 on the extension) people on a 44 seat full size coach means plenty of room and quick on-and-offs. The heating/air

conditioning and PA system worked well. Ali claims that we drove 2400 miles on this tour in our motor coach. None of us believe that we could have possibly driven that far. Maybe Ali is correct and we were just very comfortable on this motor coach.

Driver: Our driver (also named Ali) was outstanding. We were amazed at the tight spots he was able to get in and out of. He always drove the coach to minimize any passenger discomfort.

Weather: We had a couple of cloudy/rainy days early on in Istanbul and on our last two days on the Gulet. All other days had excellent weather. We believe we picked a good time of the year to visit Turkey.

Currency: We never had any problems using our USA issued credit cards. We were surprised at how accepted (and sometimes preferred) US dollars were. ATMs are easy to find and sometimes were programmed to dispense US dollars in addition to Turkish Lira.

Restroom Facilities: The ones we found on the road would vary in quality although Tour Director Ali always assured that everyone received enough rest breaks and made sure the facilities he directed us to were the best available.

The Country of Turkey: Although we probably interacted mostly with "service industry" people, we were delighted with the friendliness of all of the Turks we met. English is widely spoken. Ali was always around to translate if needed. Turkey surprised us with its geographical diversity and beauty. The cities were, for the most part, clean and modern. We always felt safe. We never were in an area where we felt any unease. We saw very few beggars. The vendors were respectful and not pushy. We hope that Turkey can maintain its secular traditions pioneered by Ataturk in 1923.

Our Tour Director: Tour Director Ali Dogan is probably the best we've had on any of our 16 international trips (and we think we've always had mostly great ones). His knowledge, delivery, demeanor, people management skills and personality clearly mark him as at the top of his profession. His detailed initial overviews at each of the sites we visited were excellent background for the subsequent tour. The "whispers" ear phones he used were great as were the "before and after" books he used at the various ruin sites.