

04/15/10 - Turkey, Arrival and First Day

Butterflies in ones stomach are an indication of excitement anticipation, fear, in trepidation, worrying about leaving my husband Michael for two weeks. All these emotions are jumbled up in my stomach butterflies as I sit in the back of the limousine on the way to the airport. Los Angeles, more specifically Beverly Hills is such a pleasant place to live , the weather, the convenience, the plethora of life's best that is available is a hard thing to leave behind.



OK enough sentimentality, we are at the curbside drop off and the driver is setting my luggage out on the curb. It is showtime. I think I am just a bit nervous about traveling alone. I will meet my sister Barbara in the hotel in ISTANBUL!!Well that is the surprise, we are going on a two week trip starting in Istanbul, heading to Galipoli, Tekirdag, Canakali, and then down the coast with our own driver. We will arrive in Marmaris, take the hydrofoil across that bit of the Aegean sea to Rhodes, Greece and spend several days absorbing the Island vibe. Then back across and on to Izmir to spend some time with long lost cousins. Next after a little touring we plan to fly back to Istanbul and spend about 4 days there before returning home.

After a very long flight including a four hour lay over in Paris, I deplaned one of

those terrible little planes that passes for a jet on Inter Europe flights. Have you ever taken one? They have a business class section that is no more than a vacant seat between you and the fellow you share the row with.

I quickly went through passport control and went to the baggage claim area. Unlike most of Europe you must pay to get one of those carts to load your bags onto. I had changed money in Los Angeles and had Turkish Lira in my possession but not in coins which was what the cart machine required. It took some doing but I found the currency exchange and then was able to get my cart. It was now around 12:30pm and the airport was becoming quite deserted.

All the Turkish phrases I studied had long since left my head and I relied on reading signs while trying not to be conspicuous as I made my way to the exit and out to the curb. How could a fivefoot nine inch red head women all alone in the airport in Istanbul Not Be conspicuous?

The moment I stepped outside the night mist with a strong sense of the marine left its clammy coolness on my skin while the aroma of strong tobacco mixed with jet fuel assailed my nostrils. I hopped into the first yellow cab in the line and asked the cabbie to call the hotel for directions. The cabbie said it would take about one half hour to reach the hotel, not bad for a city of 16 million residents.

The cabbie sped down a winding road, mostly lining the Bosphorus as he headed into the city. The building were growing ever more dense and in some of the high ceiling-ed apartments I could see lit chandeliers casting shadows on the rich hued walls. Soon there were spires from the minnerets of many mosques on the skyline. The Haggia Sophia was to my left and all lit up as it should be. The cabbie turned off the main road and headed up a steep incline through tortured streets, connecting like a spider web to the small boutique hotel where my sister was already waiting for me.

The bellman ushered me into the revolving doors as I bid goodbye to the cabbie. Room 804 the size of a postage stamp had a nice clean bed waiting for me. It was very hard to fall asleep with visions of adventures dancing in my mind.

Next morning our lovely tour guide Irfan and our driver Osman meet us at the hotel. As we head out of town, the daylight reveals the landscape that looked so mysterious in last nights mist. We start heading farther into the European side of Turkey, west of Istanbul through beautiful verdant green rolling hills planted in wheat or bulgur the staff of life. Oh wait I did not tell you what Istanbul looks like from the backseat of a Renault. The city is built on many hills with winding streets and

numerous waterways. I can hardly wait to return and explore it when we return next week.

We approached a town we specifically requested to visit trace part of our families journey. Like many other Jewish families we have been wandering in the diaspora for many many generations. We know our family arrived in Turkey sometime after the expulsion edict was issued in Spain in 1492. Next stop Small towns on the Turkish coast like Tekirdag, Galipoli, Chanakali, Izmir..... At one time there was a thriving community in this town and today we were able to see some wooden houses and the ritual bath house which is now the local Hamam or steam bath, Turkish bath house if you will. The most impressive thing was the cemetery. The grave stones that we could read had names like, Benezra, Altarus, Amon, Barocas and Muscatel. All surnames familiar to us growing up Seattle's Sephardic community. The cemetery was in quite a state of disrepair and to our sadness



Our guide was very knowledgeable and spoke great English. Well it was time to leave and go forward to the next part of the day. We drove further and after noticing that Tekirdag is most famous for its koftesi or Koftes or Kuftes (meatballs fried or grilled) we stopped for a wonderful roadside lunch. Tekirdag's koftesi (plural in Turkish) are made with ground lamb, bread crumbs, fresh herbs like parsley and mint and spice mixes like Baharat. They are formed into balls and flattened or finger

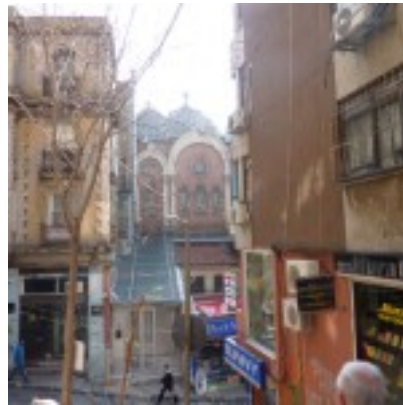


Our lunch consisted of salad, red lentils with bulgur, yogurt, fresh local bread and some baklava for desert. A very yummy vegetarian lunch.

Next on to Galipoli to see the site of battle and understand the faulty logistics of the war of 1915 in which around 250,000 soldiers perished in bloody violent fighting in an 8 month period. It was getting late and we drove to the ferry on the European side of the Dardanelles. We boarded the ferry and took a short ride across to Chanakali and rove to our hotel for the evenings stay. You think we would have been tired but Barbie and I managed to eat dinner and then find the famous steam bath and massage spa in the hotel and sign ourselves or treatments at 8:30 at night. The Turkish people are very into scrubbing and washing, massage and steam, Wonderful. OK goodnight



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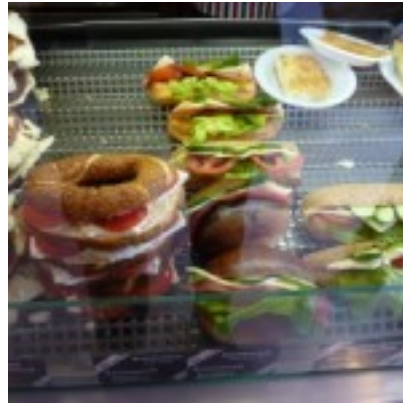
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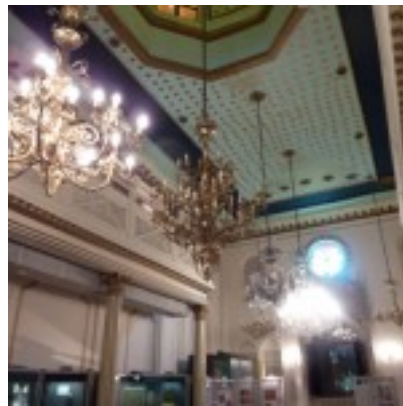
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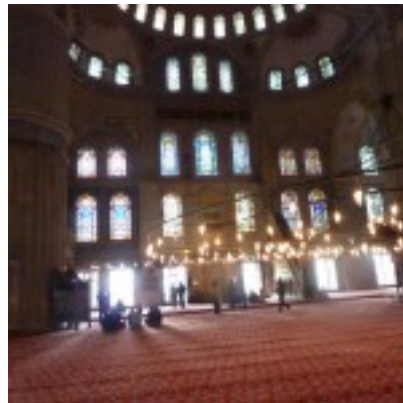
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