

Our Turkey-Lurkey Adventure



a travelogue by
David Christopher

“Good news! I’ve snagged a probably-permanent, temp gig.” As I bound into the kitchen with this pronouncement, Mac shook his head, waved a spatula at me, “Isn’t that an oxymoron?”

“Well, they told me that this job could last indefinitely, as I’d be replacing a secretary who is a permanent. So, I might be asked to stay there as her permanent replacement.”

I was working for Office Temp, so all the jobs I’d been sent on were just short term, and I’d have to go to a new place every week or so. Some of the places they sent me were quite unpleasant, and I was happy to leave. But some were fun, and I’d meet nice people, but have to say ‘goodbye’ just as I was getting good at the job. And, of course, there were weeks when they didn’t have anything for me at all.

I had started doing temp work because, after almost 20 years of doing quite well, my Acting Studio was no longer paying the bills. All through the 80s, my Studio thrived with folks of all ages wanting to do something for their inner selves, so dabbling in acting was quite popular. But now in the mid-90s, people were more interested in making money, so registration for something so frivolous decreased every term.

Mac (short for his middle name, McAlpine), was my partner of 16 years. He had a good business restoring antique clocks, but it was erratic, so we couldn’t count on his income by itself. I wasn’t happy about this “temp-typing” job, as it reminded me of my early days in New York as an actor, when I did “temp-typing” to survive. Reverting to this in my late 50s felt like a regression, and I wasn’t at all happy about it. However, since I started, I was getting a paycheck almost every week, so we suddenly felt like millionaires, not the paupers we’d been feeling like.

“I suppose that job could be really good for you,” Mac said, “and you like working at Merck, don’t you?”

“I do, and this position could be challenging, which God knows, the others haven’t been.” Mac smiled and nodded his approval and went back to fixing dinner. “Oh, and one other thing,” I said, “I won’t begin this secretary gig until October 1st, so we might be able to take a couple weeks off and have a little vacation in September before I begin.”

“Hmmm” said Mac, “I’ll give that some thought.” Which he must have been doing while he cooked, because as he brought out dessert he said, “You know, we haven’t taken a real trip in a long time. What would you think about a couple weeks in Europe?”

“Whoa! I know that my getting this temp work has made us feel rich, but Europe?”

“We’ve caught up on our bills for now and I have a clock restoration that’s done and will bring in a good price. We can find someplace that isn’t too expensive. I think we deserve it, after the rough time we’ve been going through.”

Both Mac and I love to travel, so over our time together we’d both been to Europe several times. Sometimes with each other, sometimes alone, or with our mothers. Mostly, we’d visited Great Britain or France, and once we went to Italy together.

Mac has always been the one to research places for us to go for short or long trips, so I let him do his magic. The next morning at breakfast, he gave me this proposal. “I’ve found the two places that have the best dollar exchange rate in Europe: Portugal and Turkey. These two places also have the least expensive hotels and restaurants. Places like France and England are much more expensive.”

I thought about this and said, “But do we really want to see those two places? I’ve never heard much about either of them.”

“Well, Portugal is the most European, but from what I can gather it’s very Catholic and the most “touristy” things to see are their cathedrals.”

“Ugh, that really doesn’t interest me, for sure. But what about Turkey? I don’t know anyone who’s gone there.”

“You’re right, not many Americans go to Turkey, but the rate of exchange is terrific, and we’d certainly see things we’ve never seen.”

He seemed really excited about this prospect, so I let him investigate it more. I had another temp job at Merck, so I rushed out, and let him deal with this vacation idea, not really expecting anything to come of it.

I had lunch with Arthur, another temp guy, and I mentioned the possibility of going to Turkey. “Yikes,” he sputtered into his soup, “have you ever seen *Midnight Express*? Those nasty, cruel Turks throw poor, cute, American student, Brad Davis, into the grossest jail, for like – forever!”

This shakes me a bit, but I say, “Oh, I’m sure that’s not what they do to every tourist.”

“And look how that Turkish soldier treated Peter O’Toole in *Laurence of Arabia*! You wouldn’t catch me ever going to that hell-hole.”

“Well, we probably won’t be going, either. It’s just a thought, because it’s pretty cheap, and we can’t afford much of a vacation.”

When I got home, Mac was waiting for me with the New York Times travel section. “Look at this. Here’s a way to get really cheap air flights to Istanbul. There are these “bucket shops” who sell cheap seats. It’s because foreign airlines can’t sell tickets from New York to Europe, if the plane’s final destination is to another country, like China. So, they turn over the partial flights to these “bucket shops” who sell for them at a much cheaper rate.”

“You’re really thinking about a Turkey-Lurkey trip, aren’t you?”

He always liked my musical comedy references, so he just chuckled, “I sure am, I think it sounds exciting. We both like adventures where we’re surprised by seeing new things. I can’t imagine anything more interesting than a country that we know nothing about.”

“But it could be awful.” He shook his head and said, with that sexy smile of his, “But it could be wonderful.”

So, that’s how our Turkey-Lurkey adventure began, and we were both right.

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It was three weeks before we could leave, so over that time we did some reading about Turkey, and Istanbul, particularly. From the travel books, it seemed exotic and intriguing, if a bit intimidating. We’d never been to an Islamic country, which would be a change from all the Catholic countries we had visited, and that would be a relief to me.

On Monday morning, Mac went into the city to one of these ‘bucket-shops’ to arrange our airline tickets. He came back that afternoon and said, “Whoa, that was quite an experience! It was in a sleazy office on the fourth floor on 43rd Street. I almost walked out when I saw it, but they urged me to come in and convinced me that it was a legitimate operation.”

“So, you actually got our tickets.” I said, “What airline?”

“Yep, on Pakistani Airlines.”

“Ugh! That doesn’t sound too good”, I cried, “Are you sure they have planes that can fly that far?”

He patted me on my head, and chuckled, “Yes, cutie, they can fly that far. I’ve researched the airline and found that they have excellent planes and travel all over the world. The weird thing is that our names will not be on the tickets until the day we depart, it will only say this booking agent’s name. But we definitely have two seats on a flight to Istanbul, and it was half the price of any other airline.”

“Alright, then, I trust you. And you know what? I’m getting excited about this adventure. So, we have two weeks to prepare everything, and pack. Oh, what do I pack?” I’ve always been nervous of what to take on a trip, and packing is a traumatic experience for me.

“The travel books say that the weather there is warmer than here, more like Florida, and we’ll be going in the Spring, so we should be able to travel light.”

On the day we left, we had an difficult task before we even got on the plane. We lived in New Jersey, so getting to the JFK Airport was an arduous schlep. We had to leave at 7:00 AM to take a train to New York, then a long subway ride to Howard Beach, Queens, then a free shuttle bus to the airport. The trip took about 2 ½ hours, so we were exhausted by the time we got there.

The international terminal was very crowded, but we found the gate for Pakistani Airlines and waited for boarding. I looked around the waiting area, “Do you notice how everyone seems to be from India or Pakistan?” The colorful saris on many of the women were quite cheerful, but we noticed that almost all the men were smoking. “I hope they haven’t put us in the smoking section!” In those days, airplanes still had smoking and non-smoking sections.

When we finally boarded and were led to our seats, we found to our horror that we were seated in the smoking section. And even worse, we were in the middle of the middle section, with people on all sides of us. Next to me was a large Indian man puffing on a cigarette, with his tiny wife sitting next to him. And next to Mac was another similar couple. I whispered, “Oh God, do you imagine that they will be smoking the whole way?” He just shook his head in dismay and looked down at his lap. He hated smoking even more than I did. We had a 12-hour flight ahead of us and the prospects of a night’s sleep were looking grim.

I won't go into details of this ghastly flight, except to say that there were several hours that we spent standing in the aisles of the non-smoking area, just to get away from the clouds of smoke around us. And that the movie that was shown on a single screen in front of our section was a Bollywood extravaganza that we couldn't understand. Well, I admit that the musical numbers were fun.

I was never happier getting off an airplane in my life, before or since. And here we were in Istanbul's Havalimani airport, not knowing what on earth would happen to us now. We shakily presented our passports to immigration, gathered our luggage, and got easily through customs, then emerged into the crowded waiting room. On the verge of panic, I scanned the crowd, hoping to see the promised transportation to our hotel.

Mac tugged my arm, "Look, that guy over there has a sign with our names on it. Come on, I knew this would work out okay." He's the one who had booked our hotel in Istanbul and he'd told me that a driver from the hotel would pick us up at the airport. And sure enough, there was this smiling man, in a white linen, pajama-like garment, waving our names in the air. When we approached him, his smile grew even bigger and he said, in surprisingly good English, "Hello, fine Americans, we welcome you to glorious Istanbul. I know your stay here will be full of joy."

He grabbed our luggage and led us to his dented, white DeSoto in the parking lot. In his cheerful chatter he told us that his name was Çinop (pronounced "Chin-up), an ex-tourist guide, a current rug seller (our first of many), and a driver for the hotel. He gave us a non-stop, jovial narration about everything we passed on the entire 45-minute trip. It was obvious that he had been a terrific tour guide.

During this drive into Istanbul, we fell in love with the city.

The route took us along the Bosphorus River, with hordes of Turks enjoying their day off in the waterfront parks. The carefree, happy look on these people's faces was as good an indication of what we would experience here as anything else. As we viewed the approaching city from the highway, Mac exclaimed, "Just look at those stunning minarets poking into the skyline. I've never seen anything more beautiful!"

Our initial reaction to the city was completely different from what we expected, and we felt that this was going to be one remarkable town. When we got into the city proper, Çinop drove up the hill into the old part of town, the Sultanhamet section, to the Ayasofya Pensyons, our first hotel in Turkey.

It was the only hotel we booked in advance, because we wanted a nice place to go when we first arrived in this strange town. It was also the most expensive (\$100 for a double room). It is located behind the Ayasofya Museum and literally on the walls of the Topkapi Palace grounds. A whole block of old Ottoman houses were converted and fixed up by the Automobile Association creating an unusual hotel made up of 10 individual houses. Each house has a parlor and living room on the first floor, decorated in the Ottoman style with rich rugs and antique furniture; then the bedrooms are on two floors above. Each floor has a bathroom and toilet.



When Çinop dropped us off, we thanked him for an excellent guided introduction to Istanbul, and Mac tipped him generously. “So many grateful thanks to you boys,” he said handing us his card, “and please come visit me in my shop.” The card was a colorful rug, with the name and address of his rug store.

I looked up at the wooden house attached to the huge wall of the Topkapi Palace, “What a quaint type of hotel. I hope it’s as cozy as it looks.” When we stepped into the parlor, admiring all the old furnishings, “This is going to be wonderful.”

Just then a woman in a burka strode into the room. “Aha! You must be the Americans. Many welcomes to Ayasofya Pensyons. I believe you are the first from your country to honor us with a visit. We get many from Great Britain, however. Let me show you to your room.” She crossed through the living room area, leading us up a creaky, wooden staircase. The bedroom on the first floor, turned out to be quite small, but nicely furnished. The double bed was a four-poster, with a down duvet covered with a brightly colored cloth. It seemed a bit hot to have a duvet, but we just thought we’d deal with that later.

“Are you tired right now? asked Mac after we unpacked. “I’m psyched to see some of this city, and it’s 5:30, so I could use some dinner, too.”

“What the hell,” I said, “we haven’t slept in 22 hours, but don’t think I could nap if I wanted to. It’s all too exciting.” So, we put on some shorts and tee-shirts and went back downstairs. After dropping off the key to our landlady, we headed out into the street.

A cobblestone road ran in front of our house, along the high wall, down the hill past the other Ottoman houses that were part of our hotel. At the end of the wall, there was a park, which seemed to be kind of an amusement park, which we found out later was part of the Topkapi Palace grounds.

I peered into the park but hung back from entering. “Oh, come on, David, we have to check this out. It looks like a real local hang-out, not a tourist trap.”

“Yeah, but is it safe for tourists? And look, as hot as it is, nobody is in shorts!”

“Well, we’ll be the first. Come on. And maybe they’ll have something for us to eat for dinner.”

As we stepped into the park, we saw that it was definitely not a tourist place, but a recreational park for working class Turkish families. It had a "zoo" (one camel, some ducks, and a goat), some simple games (a string with balloons tied between two trees to shoot at with BB guns), food (pop corn, cotton candy and something unrecognizable), and a couple pathetic rides.

I whispered to Mac, “I think we’ve discovered the ‘Truly, Tacky Turkey’, and I love it!” We wandered about, watching as the children rode on the hand-cranked, four-seat merry-go-round, fathers impressed their wives when they shot a balloon, and a little boy who screamed and wrapped himself in his mother's skirt, when the camel snorted in his face. It was utterly delightful.

Even though it was an extremely low-grade affair, we never felt it was dangerous. The people seemed to accept our presence, smiling occasionally, but never engaging in contact. I only regretted that we were the only ones in shorts. Since we had brought some Turkish money, we did buy a kind of pretzel thing to munch on, but it wasn’t a place for dinner.

After we’d seen enough, we left the park and looked for a proper restaurant. As we left, Mac said, “That was the perfect introduction to our Turkey-Lurkey Adventure.” And I had to agree.

When we returned to our room in the hotel, we were exhausted and finally ready to get some much-needed sleep in the lovely, four-poster bed. Unfortunately, that was not to be.

The first problem was with mosquitoes. It seemed that screens were not the norm and our room had several of the damn things buzzing around. So, our first job was to seek them out and swat them on the wall, or wherever they finally landed. We also closed the window, even though it was hot, in order to keep more from coming in.

Now, the duvet is a European custom that we've never been happy with. It was obviously more than we needed as covers, but there was no sheet. So, we ended up pulling the thick comforter out of its colorful wrapping and using that as a sheet.

With the room finally clear of the buzzing beasts, we settled back into the bed, but as the night progressed another hinderance made sleep impossible for me.

"Mac are you asleep?" "No", he murmured. "Do you hear all those dogs barking?" "Yes, they're very annoying, but try to get some sleep."

I've always had trouble sleeping with any unusual noises, and this continual yapping was going to be a real problem. It turns out that the Topkapi grounds, as well as the surrounding streets, were full of stray dogs, which carried on barking contests all night long. So, try as I might, I never fell asleep the entire night.

But Mac had another problem. Sometime around 2:00 in the morning, he began wheezing, and proceeded to have an asthma attack. He rarely had them anymore, since his childhood, and only in cold weather. I was awake, so I asked, "Oh dear, why do you think this is happening now?"

"This old building is full of mildew, I smelled it when we came in, but I'd hoped it wouldn't be a problem. Well, obviously it is. I wish I had brought an inhaler with me, but I only need it in the winter." The rest of the night, he had moments when his breathing would become congested, and he'd have to sit up for a while to relax his lungs.

By 6:00am we couldn't bear to stay in that room another minute, so we got up, dressed, and ventured out into the street for something to eat. We staggered down the hill into the more touristy area to find some coffee and a muffin, or something.

It was buzzing with activity, even at that hour, and we found a place that seemed to be sort of a café. Sitting outside (as we found was the norm) we ordered coffee and a roll. When it came, it was in an espresso cup, much to our disappointment, but we were used to this from our previous European travels. I put plenty of sugar in the little cup, but there wasn't any cream, which is all that Mac uses. Tentatively we both took a sip, and simultaneously spit it back into the cup.

"Yuck!" I whispered to him, "This is horrible!" I was much stronger than regular espresso and even from that small sip, our mouths were full of bitter coffee grounds.

"Maybe we can ask for 'Americano' coffee, like in Italy." Mac said, and he gestured for the ancient waiter to come over. "Americano?" he said, pointing to the espresso cup. The waiter smiled, revealing a mouth full of brown teeth, nodded and took our cups away.

To get the grounds out of my mouth I was munching on the roll, which was actually quite good, when he returned with two large cups of coffee and a pitcher of milk. "Americano", he chuckled as he walked away. This was our first important lesson in this country: Only order Americano coffee, because Turkish coffee is undrinkable.

We sat quietly in this café for about an hour, ordering more coffee and rolls. Finally, Mac said, "We can't stay in that room another night." Thinking the same thing, I eagerly agreed. "Yes, somewhere far from barking dogs!"

"So, let's spend the morning looking for somewhere better to stay, and we'll decide what to do about that horrible place when we find one." He picked up the bill that the waiter had put on our table. "Ha, only 235,000 lira. That's a reasonable enough breakfast. I hope you have the Turkish money in your wallet?"

I laughed and pulled out the colorful money that we had been given at the airport. We knew that \$1.00 was equal to 47,000 Turkish lira (tl). But for the whole 10 days we were in Turkey, we never got used to it when we paid a bill. When a hotel costs 2 million lira a night, it's a shock, even though that's just under \$50.

Leaving the money on the table, as I'd seen other people do, we set out to find a new hotel. As we continued our walk, we found this to be a more touristy area than up on the hill. I pointed to a modern building that had a neon sign saying, **ENGLISH HOTEL**. "Oh! Let's check this out," I said excitedly.

Entering the clean, brightly colored lobby, a handsome young man behind the desk, smiled broadly as we came in. “Greetings, welcome to the English Hotel. What can I do for you?” He was dressed in Western-style clothes and spoke with very little accent. “I would guess that you gentlemen are from the States, am I correct?”

In our exhausted and grubby state, we were relieved to find someone who might help us and a hotel that would give us a good night’s sleep. “Yes, indeed, and we’re in need of some help. Would you have a room for us, starting tonight?”

“To be sure, on the 3rd floor is a beautiful room just for you. Where are your bags?” We explained about our horrible night at the Ayasofya Pensyons. “Ah, I understand completely. If you want, I can send a boy to pick up your bags.”

“Oh, thank you,” Mac said, “that won’t be necessary. We have to settle up with the landlady. We’re booked for one more night there, but we’ll try to get out of it if we can. But whether we get our money back for tonight or not, we want to move here today.”

“Very good. My name is Ahmed, and I’m at your service. Would you like to see your room before you gather your luggage?”

With great relief, I sighed, “Oh, very much!” We got into the small, but modern elevator, squeezing in with Amed (which was quite pleasant). On the third floor we got out and he opened the door to the room, which was beyond beautiful to our weary eyes. It was modern and clean, with a large double bed, screens on the window, and a balcony that looked out over the neighborhood. I looked at Mac, “This is going to be heaven.”

We went down to the lobby and paid for the room, which was only \$40 a night, (compared to the \$100 pension), but was equivalent to 1,880,000 tl, which we happily gave to handsome Amed, via credit card.

Back up the hill we went, and after Mac explained about his asthma attack, the landlady grumbled, but gave us back our 2nd nights fee. It was funny watching him acting out his breathing problems because of her limited English. We didn’t have to explain about the dogs and mosquitoes too.

We ended up joyfully staying in the English Hotel for the whole week we were in Istanbul.

We brought our bags up to the new room and after a quick shower, in an *en suite* bathroom (unlike down-the-hall at the pension), we decided to take a nap. I immediately fell asleep and didn't awaken until after lunchtime.

"Boy, you were out like a light, I thought you'd never wake up." Yawning, I said, "God, that felt good. Now I'm ready to do some exploring." Mac agreed and we dressed in shorts and tee-shirt, because it was extremely hot, and descended in the elevator to the lobby.

Behind the counter, Amed grinned and said, "I hope you gentlemen had a good rest in your new room. Now it is time to encounter our glorious city."

"It certainly is, where do suggest we go?" Mac said, "And by the way, how do you speak such excellent English?"

"Thank you, it is because I studied in London for two years after I graduated high school. That is a wonderful city, but I wanted to come back to Istanbul, which I consider my home."

Looking into his dark, brown eyes, I said, "Well, you certainly speak English beautifully. It is a relief for us, who only know a few words of Turkish."

Ahmed said, "You will find that many people you meet will speak English, at least in this tourist area." Which we found to be true. So, we didn't much at all need to use the phrases that we memorized at home and on the plane coming over, at least in Istanbul.

Then I asked, "What do you suggest we visit first today?"

"Oh, that is easy. You should see the Blue Mosque first, it is our treasure. When you come to the park down the street, you will be able to see the minarets, and just follow them to the mosque."

"Great", Mac said, "that's where we'll begin. Thank you so much for your help." Amed grinned his charming grin and bid us good luck.

Refreshed, we ventured out into the city with fresh eyes, and were dazzled. The walk to the Hippodrome Park was bustling with activity. There were some women in burkas, but for the most part everyone else wore modern clothing. They seemed to be cheerfully getting on with their afternoon chores. The park was not big, but full of people.

Mac pointed at several men sitting on stools with writing equipment in their laps. “What do you think those guys are up to?” Just then a woman approached one of the men and sat down on a stool in front of him. She proceeded to dictate to him, and he took down her words on a piece of paper. When she finished, she paid him and took her paper. “I suspect he writes letters for people who are illiterate, or who want their letter to be beautifully scripted. It seems to be quite a business.”



Just then a young man came up to us, “Hi, where are you gentlemen from?” We were a bit leery at first, but I said, “New York”. (When abroad we usually said New York rather than New Jersey because people recognized it more.) The man smiled broadly, “Americans! How wonderful. I don’t meet many, so I’m pleased to talk with you. My name is Yusuf. Do you live in Manhattan? My brother has been there and was much impressed with that city.”

Mac seemed ready to leave, but I felt the guy was being genuinely friendly, so I said, “No, actually we live in a suburb of New York. But we go into the city often.”

“I am told that the Metropolitan Museum is one of the wonders of the city. Have you been there?” This began a conversation that went on for about 5 minutes. He was curious about New York and he answered many questions we asked about Istanbul. But as we were about to leave, he pulled out a card and handed it to us. “You must come and visit our rug shop. It has been in my family for three generations. You don’t have to buy anything, but come, have some tea and learn how the rugs are made, you will enjoy it.”

We said that we would try (adding this card to the one Çinop gave us) and parted from this truly friendly fellow. Over our time in Istanbul, we met several young men (many of them quite good looking) who were ultimately hawking their

rug shops, but who also seemed genuinely interested in conversing with us. We never felt pressured, and always left with a good feeling about these chats and adding their cards to our stack. Often, they would begin the conversation with, “Do you speak English?” Then, one time when we were getting tired of these hawkers, Mac responded “*Mais non.*” So, the guy proceeded in perfect French. We had to leave quickly before we broke up laughing.

Ahmed was right. From this park we could easily see the minarets of the Blue Mosque, so that is where we headed next. But it was midafternoon, and we hadn’t eaten lunch and my stomach began to growl. “I’ve got to eat something, let’s grab a bite before we hit the mosque.”



Walking up a commercial street next to the park, we found a restaurant that had all the food offerings displayed in the window. This seemed a good idea, since we were unfamiliar with the local cuisine. Looking over the various dishes, we each chose something that looked appealing. Stepping into the restaurant, the waiter indicated that we should point at what we wanted, and then sit at a table outside. When the food came, we found that both dishes were absolutely delicious. One was with lamb, the other beef in creamy gravy, over noodles. And the bill came to 282,000 lira (\$6.00)

But my favorite thing about that lunch was the appearance of 2 cats that wandered into our area. They were feral cats, but quite clean and friendly. They didn’t beg for food, but probably wouldn’t say “no” to a scrap, if offered. “Don’t give them anything,” Mac admonished, “you’ll never get rid of them.”

But I couldn’t resist ripping off a piece of the fresh bread that came with the meal and placing it on the ground. With great dignity, the tabby cat strolled over to the bread, sniffed it, and walked away. The black cat, however, was not as snooty and he gobbled it right up. He gave a meow, rubbed my leg, and lay down at my feet.

That was our introduction to the cats of Istanbul. Rarely did we have a meal that wasn't accompanied by one or two cats, often sitting in a chair with us at the table. They were everywhere, beloved and cared for by the city's inhabitants. All these cats made our time in this city especially pleasant, since we missed our two cats at home. They didn't seem to be owned by anyone, but seemed like a separate population of Istanbul. There is even a 2016 documentary about them, called "Kedi: The Street Cats of Istanbul".



Feeling full from our delicious lunch, we proceeded to visit the Blue Mosque. On our first night we'd seen the minarets lit up beautifully against the sky. Before lunch we'd been closer to it and saw the magnificent structure beyond the park. But nothing really prepared us for what we encountered close up. As we approached the entrance, the entire structure was overwhelming in its beauty. So different from the cathedrals we'd visited elsewhere.

As we were about to enter the vestibule, a scowling, little man came up to us with two cloth skirts. I asked him, "What are we supposed to do with these?" Not speaking English, he just pushed them into our hands.

"Oh," Mac said, "they are to cover up our legs, because we're wearing shorts." And he wrapped his skirt around his waist. I followed suit, but the little man wasn't satisfied, pointing to our sneakers. "We have to take off our shoes, too." Which we did and the little man smiled one of those terrible-teeth smiles and opened the door for us. Mac whispered to me as we entered, "Next time we visit one of these; long pants!"

Once we stepped inside, we realized why it was called the Blue Mosque. The ornate tile work and the stained-glass windows were predominantly blue, giving the whole interior a shimmering, cool and glorious feeling. Hanging from the high dome

were hundreds of wires that suspended metal lamps with one bulb in each. And hanging in the center was a huge wrought iron chandelier. All the lamps and the chandelier hung so low, that a tall person would have to duck his head to walk under them. The floor was covered with Turkish rugs on which several worshipers were kneeling. Tourist were not allowed beyond a certain point, so a railing blocks off this main area, but even from this vantage point, the whole thing was awe-inspiring.

Ahmed was right, it was a perfect way to begin our exploration of Istanbul.



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For the rest of the week, we began each morning with a fabulous breakfast on the rooftop terrace of our hotel. For 200,000 lira (about \$4), we got a typically abundant, all-you-can-eat Turkish breakfast, including hard boiled eggs, delicious soft bread, jam and honey, tomatoes, feta cheese, and lots of olives, plus tea or "tourist coffee".

One day we viewed the Ayasofya Museum, which was once the largest Christian Cathedral in Constantinople, then was converted to the largest mosque (until the Blue Mosque was built), and finally turned into a museum, to display the artwork from both buildings. It was interesting to see the ancient Christian art on one wall, and on the opposite one, Islamic calligraphy.

Then we trudged up the hill to another big mosque, the Beyazit, this time wearing long pants. However, it was here that Mac made an embarrassing *faux pas*. All the mosques had clocks scatter around, so that the worshipers would know when their prayer time was over. Most of the clocks were old, but rarely of interest to 'clock mavins', like Mac.

But in the Beyazit he spotted a clock that really interested him. "Oh, I have to get a closer look at that great clock." And he set out across the rugs to examine it.

Immediately a large, rather scary looking man hissed and gestured at him. But Mac was too involved, examining the clock.

“Mac,” I shouted, “Get back here!”, pointing to the man, who was obviously angry. Mac finally realized his goof and tip-toed back behind the tourist barrier. “So, so sorry,” he said to the man, and we scurried out of the mosque, almost forgetting to gather our shoes.

At breakfast one day, while he was leafing through his guidebook, Mac said, “I think we should venture out of the tourist areas. There must be some fascinating things to see, not in this book.”

With my mouth full of bread and honey, I mumbled, “But don’t you think it could be dangerous?”

But, always more adventurous than me, he shook his head, “I don’t feel threatened this city, and it will be part of our adventure.” I cautiously nodded, and off we went into the Fatih district of Istanbul.

This could definitely be labelled a slum, with these decrepit, old Ottoman houses, often looking like they would fall over with a puff of wind. Nevertheless, not once did we feel uncomfortable in this neighborhood. The inhabitants minded their own business and paid little attention to us. At one point a frail, old woman approached us, and we expected her to beg for money. But instead, she held out a handmade scarf, offering us to buy it from her.

This gave me an opportunity to use one of the Turkish phrases I’d learned, “Hayır teşekkürler” (no, thank you), pronouncing it badly I’m sure. But she must have gathered my meaning, because she smiled, nodded, and hobbled away. We found that in all of Turkey, no one ever begged for money, as they did so much in Italy, but they would often try to sell us things. And if we said, “Hayır teşekkürler” they would immediately leave.

I followed Mac down one street that seemed to be the hardware district, which fascinated him, if not me. “Don’t you think it’s lunch time, Mac, let’s go back to our hotel street, there are lots of restaurants there?”

“Oh, no, let’s see what’s around here. We’ll get some real authentic Turkish cooking.” And sure enough, he saw a place where working class folks were eating, and he found us a table. Since kabobs were on display in the window, we pointed to that and the waiter (who was probably the owner) brought it to us. He seemed proud that we were eating at his establishment, making a fuss over us. The kabobs

were delicious, one of the best meals we had in Turkey. Halfway through the meal, one of the 3 cats that seemed to live in this establishment, leapt onto my lap, purred when I stroked its head, curled up and went to sleep. When we were done, the waiter, brought us 2 servings of an apple crisp dessert that blew our minds, it was so good.

When we left, we paid him the meager amount of the check and added a nice tip, saying, “Teşekkür ederim, Teşekkür ederim” (Thank you, thank you). He grinned, a pleasant smile, bowed to us and said, “Rica Ederim” (You’re welcome). It was so nice to have our first “conversation” in Turkish, as well as a tasty lunch.



It was a bright sunny morning and we wanted to take a cruise on the Bosphorus River that runs through Istanbul. It divides the city and on one side you’re in Europe, the other side in Asia. When we told our hotel friend, Ahmed, we were going on the advertised “River Cruise”, he exclaimed, “No! Don’t go on that expensive tour. You must take the public ferry that runs up and down the river. It is much cheaper and more of a real Turkish experience.”

So, we took his advice, went down to the river, and found pier for the ferry. Along the edge of the river there were fishing boats and the fishermen were hawking sandwiches made of fresh fish they had just caught. The smell of the grills was very tempting, and Mac said, “Hey, it’s almost lunchtime and that smells great. Let’s try it.” The fisherman “brown-tooth” grinned at us and slapped a roasted, bone-less fish on a thick hunk of bread, added some tomatoes and a green chili pepper (for Mac, not me). It was scrumptious.

After devouring that sandwich, we purchased a round-trip ferry ticket for 175,000 lira (\$3.20) each and joined the locals who were taking the ferry to various places upriver. It was crowded and I can’t say there were comfortable seats, but this

trip was fascinating the entire 3-hour, round-trip journey. We passed extravagant homes, Sultan's palaces, Roman structures, and medieval forts along both shores. No one else paid any attention to the passing scenery, but we were enthralled.

At one point I said to Mac, "I have to pee, do you think there's a loo on this boat?" He pointed down the hall where he'd seen some guys go and come back from. "Try over there." So, off I went. Sure enough, a door was marked with a "WC" and I went in. The odor that bombarded me was the foulest smell I'd ever experienced. I saw a filthy hole in the floor, and that was it. I really had to go, so I held my nose and aimed as well as I could for the hole. Bursting out of the room as fast as I could, I went back to Mac, "DON'T GO IN THERE!" He laughed and chose to wait until we found a better WC.

Before we came on this trip, I was afraid that everywhere the restrooms would be like that, but it was the only "hole-in-the-floor" toilet we encountered and modern facilities were every place else. Just don't go in the ferry WCs!



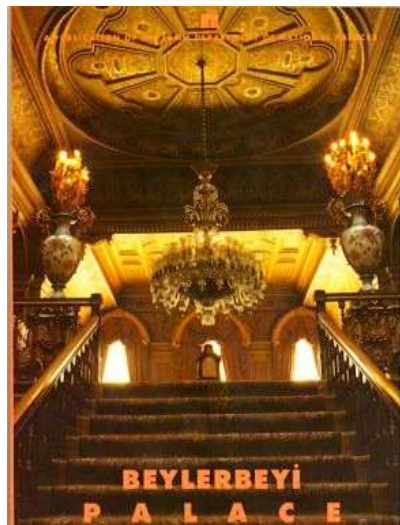
When the ferry arrived at the northern-most stop, we got off on the opposite side of the river than where we'd gotten on. As we stepped off, Mac shouted, "This is great, it's our first trip to Asia!" We were in a tiny fishing village called Kavagi, which specialized in seafood restaurants for tourists, but we didn't need food then, after our yummy fish sandwich.

So, we chose to climb the hill behind the village, toward a Roman fort. When we reached the top, the view was spectacular, because fort looked out over the Black Sea. We asked a fellow tourist if he would take a photo of us, and that would be our last picture of us in Asia for many years.

It was still light when we went back down the river. The ferry was much less crowded, so the return journey was more pleasant, ending a truly memorable day.



The next day we planned to visit two, vastly different palaces of past Sultans. First the Beylerbeyi Palace, which turned out to be marvelous to behold. Although there have been palaces on this site since the 17th century, the stone palace that is there now was built in the mid-19th century and is not so much Turkish style as European Victorian Excess, with a hint of Turkey. It is room after room of incredible opulence and fanatically detailed decoration. We walked around from room to room with our mouths open in awe. We couldn't take pictures, but we bought a book, which displays its marvels very well.



When we left that amazing place I said to Mac, “Now, we have to go to the Topkapi Palace. I’m so excited to see it, because of one of my favorite movies, *Topkapi*.” “Never saw it.”, was his answer.

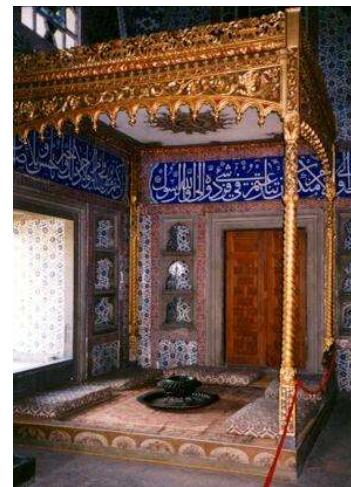
“Oh, it’s so good. It’s about this sexy, Greek Melina Mercouri, who burglars the famous Topkapi diamond, with the bumbling help of Peter Ustinov. It’s both funny and exciting. They end up breaking into the museum from the rooftop.

I want to see the diamond, which must still be exhibited there.” So, off we went back to our first hotel, which was right next to the entrance to the grounds and the museum.

We remember the crowds of tourists that were pouring into the gates on the day we left the hotel. And sure enough, tourist busses were still lined up to get in. The gate is so small, and the road so bumpy, that the buses had to go very slowly, or they'd lose their side mirrors, and we pedestrians had to wait for them to go through before could enter.

This palace/museum is primarily a series of gardens and buildings. First, we took the tour of the Harim (harem) which was the most spectacular of the buildings on the grounds. Many of the other buildings much plainer but displayed the Treasury of the Sultan. Glass cases were full of jeweled swords & daggers, elegant china & pottery, golden utensils, and of course the famous, huge diamond, that Melina “stole” so cleverly.

It took most of the afternoon to explore the entire grounds and buildings. At the terrace cafe, overlooking the Bosphorus River and the Harbor, we had a bit of lunch; the view was awesome and the museum food delicious. We both enjoyed everything about this famous tourist destination.



After a day of exploring the Berlerbyi and Topkapi Palaces, we decided to take quick mini trip on a train. (I know, but we were young.) The train went to the edge of the old city, where the ancient city walls began. Around the train station, we discovered was a district for fancy seafood restaurants, so we vowed to have dinner there when we came back from our excursion. The train was old and rickety, with woven straw seats, but the trip wasn't long, so we didn't mind.

We arrived right at closing time to view the fortress, but when an old, man started to close the door, Mac smiled at him, in that sexy way he has, and said, “Lutfen” (please), and the kindly gate keeper let us in anyway. His Turkish answer was probably, “Hurry, smarty-pants English, but only for a few minutes.” I find it’s amazing how speaking in the native tongue, even badly, often softens hearts of locals around the world.

This meant that we were alone to view these ancient walls at sundown, and it was an eerie feeling climbing these antediluvian battlements as the sun lowered in the sky. Suddenly it began to drizzle, and a rainbow appeared in a full arc (I don't remember ever seeing one go from one horizon to another), it was quite spectacular. Then the drizzle surprisingly stopped and we were greeted with a stunning sunset.



After that, we quickly exited, thanking the old man in our meager Turkish. The train trip back to center city was uneventful, and it let us off at the restaurant area. Hawkers were in front of every establishment, welcoming us, urging us to choose their place over the others. Looking at the menus outside we could tell that they were all expensive.

Choosing one that had many customers, we ordered an appetizer and a main course. After waiting a LONG time, the tiny appetizers appeared, and sometime after that, a small portion of fish (with little else) was put down in front of two very hungry guys. The bill was outrageous for Turkey (2 million lira for both, about \$45), the most we spent for any meal on the whole trip. The only good thing was that the restaurant offered to give us a ride back up the hill to our hotel, and I'm glad they did; it would have been a hell of a walk on so little food.

When we got back to the hotel, Ahmed asked how our day was. We told him about the two palaces, the train ride, the rainbow, and the exorbitant meal. He shook his head, “In Turkey the best food tends to be found in the cheapest restaurants and vice versa.” I nodded, “We can certainly vouch for that.” And off to bed we went, quite exhausted.

“Hey, have you boys ever been to a Turkish Bath?” Ahmed’s smiling, gorgeous face greeted us as we came the down elevator one morning. We had noticed that the young men of Turkey could be breathtakingly handsome, but we never saw good-looking older men. In fact, they were almost always quite homely. We wondered what happened to these good-looking guys when they matured. We actually coined the phrase “Young Turk”, when we now see someone cute.

“No,” said Mac, “do they still have them here in Istanbul?”

“Oh, yes. It’s an ancient tradition that continues today. One of the oldest and most famous baths is not too far from here, and you must try it.” He took out a tourist map and showed us where to find this place, “It’s an experience you’ll never forget.”

As we left the hotel, I asked Mac, “Did you see the look on his face when we said we’d try it. It looked like a friendly smirk, to me. This could be awful.”

Mac just laughed, “But it’s part of our Turkey-Lurkey adventure. Of course, we’ll try it.”

The Çemberlitas Hamami (Bath) was built in 1584 and is still used today. There are two separate, domed rooms, one for men, one for women. The domes have holes in the top to let light in, and there are beautifully tiled cubicles all around each room, with low sinks in them. The predominate feature is a huge, circular, polished, marble slab in the center of the room, that is heated from below to a pleasantly warm temperature. The room is not as hot as a steam room or a sauna, but quite warm, none the less.

When we got to the bathhouse, we found an old woman sitting at a table in front of the entrance. She barely looked at us as she held out her hand for the entrance fee. A sign said “94,000 tl” (\$2.00), which Mac gave her, and she nodded with her head for us to enter. In the vestibule, were two doors, the right one indicating “Kadin”, the left “Erkekler”. Fortunately, I remembered that “erkekler” meant “men”, so I pointed to that door, which we entered.

We found ourselves in the huge round room, with doors all around the perimeter. We stood there for a moment not knowing what to do next. There were two other men in the room, sitting on benches with a towel around their waist, who

watched us as we were trying to figure out what to do. A pudgy, little guy approached us and spoke some harsh Turkish at us. When we looked at him blankly, he sighed and pointed to one of the rooms on the side and pantomimed removing our clothes.

“I guess, this is where we strip,” Mac said, “are you ready for this?”

I chuckled, “Sure, why not, I’ve never been shy. I wonder if this is anything like the baths in New York?”

“Well, I guess we’ll find out soon enough.”

When we exited our private room, covered with a towel, I saw one of the other men look over at us with a glint in his eye. But I didn’t have time to react, because a big, bald, burly Turk beckoned us over to the hot, stone slab in the middle of the room. He indicated for us to lie down on our backs.

“Here we go.” I said to Mac. The massive masseuse, or whatever you call him, indicated for Mac lie back and wait while he worked on me. And I really mean, “worked on me!”

The first thing he did to me was remove my towel and cover me with suds, squeezed from a pillowcase-like sack. He then proceeded to scrub me all over, roughly flipping me over like a piece of meat, when necessary. Then he began the scraping with a rough cloth; he rubbed everywhere, but the privates – despite all this physical contact, it never felt sexual. Then came the massage, where every muscle and bone I had was tugged, squeezed, pummeled, and scrunched (he really found my back tension and squeezed it out of me).

I looked over to Mac, who was lying on his back watching all of this. “That was great, Mac, you’re going to love it.” But the look on his face was doubtful.

Next the brute took me into a little cubicle to rinse me off, by pouring warm and cold water over me from a bowl, while I sat towel-less on a stool. He then indicated for me to wrap my towel around my waist and go back on the stone slab and lie on my back, while he work on Mac. I lay there feeling amazingly relaxed and, even on that hard stone, quite comfortable.

As I lay there, I heard Mac grunt and grown, while he was being manipulated, and I found it quite amusing, since it was his idea to begin with. After he was finished being massaged and went in for the rinsing, we were both led into the final

room where someone dried us off. We were given two new towels, one of which was wound around our head by the guy that dried us.

“I feel like Carmine Miranda.”, I giggled, as we went back into our private rooms. “But don’t you feel terrific?”

Mac grumbled, “I certainly feel clean, but I don’t think I have a bone left intact. It really hurt when he flipped me over.”

“Oh, I was hoping to come here one more time before we leave Istanbul.”

“No way am I going through that again.” And we didn’t come back, but I’m glad I experienced an authentic Turkish Bath.



6

During breakfast on our last full day in Istanbul, I mentioned to Mac, “We haven’t really bought anything yet, and I’d like to get some gifts for my mother and other people. Let’s go shopping.”

“Well, I don’t want to go to those little touristy shops, so let’s go to the Grand Bazaar.”

“Oh, I’m afraid it will be intimidating with all those merchants hard-selling and haggling. That place is supposed to be huge.”

“Nonsense. All the sellers we’ve encountered have tried to sell us things, but they weren’t too pushy. I think the Grand Bazaar will be a hoot. But first, I’ve another idea.” He pulled out his wallet and in it he found the card that was given to us by young Yusuf, in the garden across from the Blue Mosque.

He handed it to me, “Remember that cute guy who was so nice to us that first day? He wanted us to go to his family’s rug store.”

“Right. And I don’t think we should leave Turkey without seeing one of these rug stores that people are always trying to send us to. We probably won’t buy one, but it will be interesting seeing how they’re made.”

“That sounds fun. And maybe we can afford a small one. Let’s go find this place, and maybe young Yusuf will be there, too.” And off we went.

With our hotel map, we had no trouble finding the address on the card, although it was on a tiny, crooked street we’d never been on before. There were colorful rugs hanging outside the shop, so it was easy to spot. As we approached and started looking at the rugs, a rugged, older man immediately emerged from the dark interior. He said something to us in Turkish, so Mac handed him the card and said, “Yusuf gave us this card.”

The man grinned (again showing brown teeth) and said, “Ah, Yusuf! He my son.” And he turned toward the shop and shouted, “Yusuf, buraya gel”, which we gathered to mean “come here” or something like that.

Out came Yusuf, looking as good as he had in the garden. “Ah, my American friends! You are most welcome to our family store. Please come in, and I will show you around.” He spoke to his father in Turkish, who then rushed off down the street.

Yusuf took us through the cluttered front room, with rugs stacked high on every surface. Mac told him that we might be interested in buying a rug before we left Istanbul and were interested in seeing what he had to offer. There was nowhere to sit, in this room, but Yusuf indicated that we were to go up the metal, spiral staircase that was in the middle of the room.

When we got to the second floor, there were soft cushioned chairs around a low, round table on one side of the room. Yusuf said, “Sit, sit, sit. There will be tea coming soon and I will show you some of our fine rugs.” Just then his father appeared with a tray, with a teapot and 3 glasses. He put it on the table and poured us the apple tea that we’d grown to love. Then he ran downstairs to fetch some rugs for us to see.

While he was gone, Yusuf told us that all the rugs we were to see were hand-made by members of their family and the workers they had hired. No rugs were machine-made or from other factories. He showed us pictures of the weaving looms, explaining the process. Throughout this showing, the father would run up and down stairs bringing different rugs for us to examine.

He started with the all-wool *kilims*, which are the cheapest, and worked up to the glorious silk rugs. We had seen enough of them before to know that the *kilims* were very crude looking and not what we wanted.

Of course, we fell in love with the silk ones, as he waved them before us to show us how the patterns shimmered and changed with the light; they were truly exquisite. When we finally pinned him down to the price of one of those, it was in the thousands (of dollars) and so not for us.

Mac told Yusuf, "We aren't American millionaires, so I'm afraid these are impossible for us. Could you show us some good quality, cotton or wool prayer rugs?" He told his father to bring some prayer rugs up, that were smaller and considerably cheaper. And he finally brought one up that we fell in love with. And it was in our price range (at least with my credit card). Now in Turkey, we knew that one never takes the first price offered, it would be insulting. So, Mac said, "We never make a decision like this on an empty stomach, so we're going to grab some lunch, discuss it, and we'll come back after that."

Yusuf probably thought that we wouldn't be back, but he smiled and said, "Come back any time." And we left for a pizza lunch.

While out, we checked the price with another dealer and it was comparable, so we returned to the shop. Yusef grinned and brought out the rug we had liked. Mac took the rug, examined it closely, then gave him the "I'm-still-not-sure" look. So naturally, Yusef smiling, lowered the price. Everyone was happy as we gave him a credit card and he handed us this beautiful prayer rug. For years it hung in our house on the bathroom door, and now resides on the floor of our New York apartment.

One last thing, since we were now purchasers with a fancy certificate of origin and credit card receipt in hand, we were led to the back of the room and down a marble staircase to the street. Before we had climbed up and down the spiral stairs in the middle of the shop (on which Munro scratched his arm, rather badly). But there was a more elegant exit for the buyers – we were impressed.



“OK, now on to the Grand Bazaar!” Mac exclaimed after we deposited our rug back at the hotel.

It was just a short walk from our hotel, but we’d never been in this neighborhood before. As we got closer, the crowds became larger and larger, and we could hear the cacophony of shoppers and sellers, haggling over price. At the shrouded entrance, I stopped, preparing myself for an ordeal. “Oh, boy,” I muttered.

I was right, the place was enormous and like a rabbit warren with aisles going every which way. Every path was lined on both sides with shops selling everything you can imagine. But Mac was correct, too, because even with all the crowds and noise it wasn’t intimidating. When we would stop to admire something, a friendly shopkeeper would immediately be at our side “helping us decide”, but if we shook our heads, they didn’t push any further.

My gift buying went quite smoothly, because I found small, easy to pack, items that were authentically Turkish (not made in China). I particularly liked the Blue Eyes, that were meant to ward off evil. They were pretty, inexpensive, and exotic; I bought several for friends back home. But I also found a beautiful carved box for my mother and a stunning “Sultan’s plate” for our kitchen (a few years later, the plate fell off the wall and smashed, and I was extremely sad).



Mac, on the other hand, was browsing for clocks, as usual. He wanted one with a Turkish dial, as many good French and English clocks were sold to the Turks

and are quite valuable now. The ones he saw in most of the shops, with the dial he wanted, were inferior clocks, so they didn't interest him.

In one shop that had several of these clocks, the old merchant saw Mac scrutinizing his wares. He over went to Mac, nodded his head and said, "I think I know what you are interested in. Follow me."

We did, and he led us through the maze of paths to a tiny shop that had several clocks in it. The old man pointed to a clock that was on a shelf at the back of the shop. He winked at the owner of this shop and quickly returned to his place. The clock was an exceptional, beautifully gilded, French, skeleton clock, with a flawless movement and Turkish dial.

"Wow. Could I have a closer look at that clock, lutfen", said Mac to the dour-looking merchant.

But the grouchy fellow shook his head and pointed to some other clocks on the shelf. "Much better for you," he said.

"But I really like that one on the shelf, could I see it, LUFTEN?" implored Mac, "And could you tell me the price?"

"Is too expensive for tourist, you look at this other one, please. Is fine clock," said the merchant, bringing a much inferior one down and putting it in front of Mac. We were surprised that the merchant said it was too expensive, as this was certainly not the normal way they acted in Istanbul. I got the impression that many "tourists" had looked at this clock, but when they heard the price, always declined.

But after Mac shook his head and pointed at the French clock, the shopkeeper took it off the shelf and put it in front of Mac. After examining the clock further, he sighed, and said, "How much do you want for this beauty?"

The man shook his head and said, "94 million Turkish lira. That would be 2,000 in your currency."

I gasped, but kept my mouth shut. The price of \$2,000 made Munro's heart leap, because it was less than half of what the clock was would be worth, in the States. So, Mac nodded his head said, "That's about right."

When the shopkeeper at last realized that Mac was serious, he called a boy from the back of the shop, who ran out and got us some apple tea. The two of them discussed the virtues of the clock, but also the possibility of a lower price. I got the feeling that it was a treasure of the merchant's and he didn't really want to let it go. He hemmed and hawed but did not lower the price.

Mac frowned, "How will I take it home?" At which time, the merchant realized that Mac might seriously buy the clock, so he sent his little runner next door and he brought back a piece of Benetton luggage. When Mac saw that, he couldn't stand it anymore, "I'll take it!"

At that point, the two of them were smiling and talking about the quality of the clock. The shopkeeper brought out some tools and together they began taking it apart, wrapping the pieces carefully and putting them in the (free) Benetton bag. So, I told Mac that I would wander about and do some more shopping while they did this.

This was actually when I found the box for my mother, but in my wandering, I had gone up and down many paths and now had no idea how to get back to the shop. As I tried to retrace my steps, it became clear that I was totally lost, and became rather frantic. Just then, the dealer from a shop I'd not been in, walked up to me and said, "You must be with the guy who bought the gold clock. I know where it is. Follow me." It seemed that the Americans who purchased this famous clock had become major gossip throughout the bazaar. So, to my great relief, he led me back to the shop. When I arrived, I found Mac and the shopkeeper laughing like old friends and weren't worried about me at all.

By the time we got back to our hotel with our purchases in hand, I was pooped. Mac told me that even though it would take a long time to pay off the credit card (it took 2 years), he was happy he had made the purchase. "If I had left that clock back there, I would have regretted it all my life."



7

It was now time for us to leave Istanbul and we wanted to explore other parts of Turkey in the week we had left. But we hadn't really made any specific plans. So, we asked our friend at the hotel desk. "Ah, I know just the place for you to start," Ahmed said, "Kuşadası."

"Ka-what?", I asked.

"Koo-shah-da-see.", he laughed, "It's a seaside resort that many foreign tourist visit. The name is often shortened to just 'Shah-da-see'. I think you would love it there. And it offers many tours into surrounding attractions, like Selcuk Efes, which the English call Ephesus, and Pamukkale, the renowned hot springs."

Mac smiled, "That sounds perfect. How far away is it, and how would we get there?"

"It's quite far, around 550 kilometers, about 350 miles. You could always rent a car, but that would be expensive. If I were going, I would take the bus."

"Definitely the bus, then. This sounds exciting. Let's get packing!"

Putting all our things in 2 suitcases was easy, but we also had the heavy bag with the clock in it to contend with. But we were quickly ready to go. Ahmed gave us directions to the bus terminal, we thanked him profusely for all his help. And we set off for our new Turkey-Lurkey adventure. And quite an adventure it turned out to be, with both the 'wonderful' and 'awful' aspects of it.

Finding the bus station was easy but purchasing the ticket and getting on the bus proved more difficult. This was a local people kind of bus, not meant for tourists

at all, so no one spoke English. Fortunately, Ahmed had written down the name of the town for us, so Mac looked in his wallet and found the paper. When he handed it to the ticket seller, he nodded and asked for the money. We had no idea what he said, so he wrote it down for us, and then we paid him. He pointed toward the busses, but we had no idea which bus to take.

I remembered how Ahmed pronounced the town, so I went up to several people and said “Koo-shah-da-see?” Finally, one guy pointed to a bus that had the door open. I repeated name to the bus driver, and he nodded, took our tickets, and indicated for us to take a seat. “Whew!” I said, as we sank into quite comfortable seats.

The trip took about 6 hours stopping at many places along the way. The scenery was great, so the time passed quickly. They even had a sort of steward on the bus, who handed us water bottles and hot towels to wipe our hands. Happily, there was a clean toilet on the bus. All-in-all it wasn't a bad trip.

It was dark when the bus driver hollered, “Kuşadası.” Glad to finally be there, we gathered our things and got off of the bus. But we were surprised that we weren't in the town proper, but on a road outside the town. There were no streetlights, but the sky was fairly bright with the moon and stars, so we had no trouble following the road that led into town.

At last, we saw commercial lights and the first place we came that had a sign reading, “**BIG BEER 50,000 TR**”. This was the first English we'd encountered all day, so it gave us some hope that we wouldn't be stranded in a town where no one spoke English.

We were ready to collapse when we saw the first hotel and went in. Mac strode over to the clerk, “Have you a room for us, tonight?” But the clerk rattled off some answer, that turned out to be in German! Luckily, I had taken German in college, so I dredged up from my memory the phrase, “Haben sie ein zimmer?” The clerk nodded and handed us a key, taking payment for one night, 1,115,00 tl (\$45). We climbed the stairs to our room and went right to sleep.

Refreshed the next morning, we set out to explore ‘Shadasee and found it to be a typical European, seaside resort. Several beaches, lots of seafood restaurants, and plenty of tourists. We also discovered that there were individual hotels for different nationalities, meaning that our “German” hotel was just for German tourists. We quickly located an “English” hotel and booked it for the rest of our stay.

After an excellent fish lunch, accompanied by 3 friendly cats, Mac ask me, “Do you feel like a swim?”

“Sure” I said, so we changed into swimsuits and went to the closest beach. But walking out to the water we realized that the beach was all rocks and no sand, so it was difficult to maneuver. Plunging into the sea was nice but trying to stand up on these jagged rocks was extremely uncomfortable. “I don’t really like this, Mac. Let’s go back to the hotel and change.” He agreed and that was our last swim in Turkey.

On the way back to our hotel, we saw a sad and odd site. Sitting in front of a shabby house, a young boy who had a stuffed goat (with a tiny kitten underneath), and a cup for coins next to him. He looked miserable but seemed hopeful that we would pay to look at his stuffed goat. I dropped some coins in his bowl just to see him smile, which he did.



By afternoon, we’d done about all there was to do in this town, so Mac said, “Let’s check out the tours for the next couple of days were here. Ahmed told us that there were some good ones.”

A tourist office was on the corner of the main square and the man behind the counter, who spoke perfect English much to our relief, showed us the possible tours. We ended up booking two all-day tours, both with English speaking guides.

Thus, began the “wonderful/awful” parts of our second week in Turkey.

8

We boarded a clean, modern bus the next morning for our first tour, which was to the ancient Greek city of Ephesus. After everyone was boarded, our tour guide came on. He was a slim, young man, with black hair, a small Clark Gable mustache, and a pain expression on his face. “Hello, I name Burak. I be your guide for this tour.”

I whispered to Mac, “He’s good looking enough, but he seems in pain. I hope he’ll be okay for the whole day’s tour.”

Then Burak spoke into the microphone, “I sorry, I do not feel well, I have toothache. When we get to Efes, another, much experience guide will show you that important city. I go dentist and come back after your tour.” And he sat down.

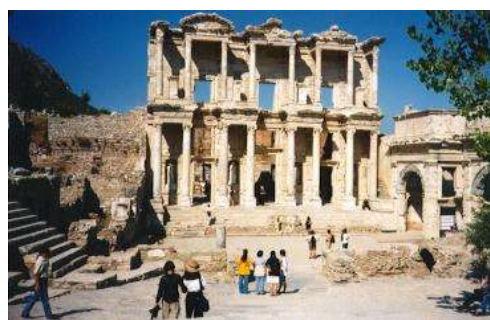
It was only a 20-minute ride to the city of Selcuk Efes, which surrounds the ruined city of Ephesus. Our guide didn’t give any explanation along the way, but we attributed that to his toothache.

On arrival, we got off the bus and Burak turned us over to a smiling, old man and left in a hurry to the dentist, we assumed. The new guide gathered us around him and said, “Hello, dear people. My name is Muhammed Ali, but I am not a famous boxer.” That got a laugh from the Americans particularly.

“I have the honor to be able to show you all one of the most historical and magnificent places in all of Turkey.” We were glad to have this jolly man as our guide, and he turned out to be one of the best I’ve ever experienced. With great humor and clear explanations, he brought the city of Ephesus alive for us, as we strolled around viewing these ancient ruins.

Efes (in Turkish) was a seaport beginning around 300 BC, where it remained a modest shipping center. But around 50 BC the Romans took it over and enlarged it and built an impressive city on the Aegean coast. Years later, around 300 AD the Meander River, which flowed into the Efesian bay, silted it up, moving the ocean far away from the city, so the inhabitants abandoned the city.

In modern times, archeologists have been uncovering Ephesus and have found extensive treasures from the Greek and Roman period. Most of the great sculptures and artifacts were removed to big European museums, particularly Berlin (much to the Turk's fury), but the remains of the buildings and the foundations of the town are still there, in all their glory.



At the end of the tour, we thanked Muhammed Ali profusely, giving him a good tip, because this tour had been a highlight to our Turkey adventure. When we got back on the bus, Burak was there looking less pained. He greeted us all and said, “Now bus take us to café for good lunch, before you go to next attraction.”

We didn’t particularly want to see the next attraction, which was called “The House of the Virgin Mary”, but then we wouldn’t have gotten a free lunch, so of course we signed up for it. It also meant that we wouldn’t have met Burak that day.

On the bus ride, Burak made comments as we passed through various towns. But his English was so limited, that he made several mistakes that confused the tourists. “This city has pottery fabric and auto fabric.” He meant factory and he seemed to want us to know that Turkey was an industrial country. But he said precious little else about these villages.

Mac whispered to me, “I’m so glad he wasn’t our guide for Ephesus, we wouldn’t have learned a thing about that amazing place, except where the ‘fabrics’ were.”

The lunch turned out to be mediocre as we all sat on hard stools, around a long picnic table, and a wooden bowl with watery lamb stew was placed before us. The other tourists were not very friendly, so there was no pleasant chatter, and we were relieved to get back on the bus.

By far the most worthwhile part of this afternoon excursion was the bus ride up the mountain. As the road climbed up the steep grade, there were incredible vistas of the countryside. But it was a quite scary as it climbed higher and higher, because it looked impossible for this large bus to go around the hairpin curves, without a railing. But we made it to the top and were now at one of the most bizarre tourist attractions I’ve ever seen.

We learned from our guide that we were visiting what was supposed to be the final home of Mother Mary (Meremana). What we saw when we got off the bus, was a small, stone building with a thatched roof, that looked like the pictures of small dwellings in Bible stories.

“How was this old lady supposed to get up this mountain?” I said to Mac. “And once up here, how did she get her supplies?”

“I know!” he giggled, “But more important, why did she decide to come up this particular mountain in Turkey, to begin with. It’s just ridiculous.”

Well, ridiculous or not, hundreds of tourists come up this mountain every day to visit this shrine, believing that this was really the home of the Virgin Mary. While we were there, a loud mass was being held outside this tiny house, with tourists from our bus, and two other busses, enthralled. As if this shack was the very spot ‘Meremana’ lived in 50 AD, or so. We shook our heads in disbelief.

The gift store, of course, sold hundreds of different Catholic souvenirs. We took a (free) brochure and read the history, and it added to the unbelievable tale.

It seems that a blind, German nun envisioned this house in a dream, on this particular mountain. Then, devout monks (or something) scoured the countryside of Turkey (why Turkey?) searching for a mountain that fit the nun’s description, with a dwelling on top. They found this one and built this shrine.

“So, this is the retirement condo of the Virgin Mary.” Mac whispered, completely cracking me up.

Our guide seemed as uninterested in the Christian shrine as we were, giving almost no information about it, he just wandered off allowing his charges to explore it (and the gift store) on their own.

We followed him and as a small group of us waited for the rest of our group, we received the most interesting and passionate speech that we had heard from Burak all day. He began to talk about the social problems of Turkey and how the people are being cheated by the government and how it was going to be no different after elections, etc., etc. His English was still poor, but at least he was telling us information in an animated way, albeit not very tour-guideish information. However, on the journey back to Kuşadası, he said almost nothing the whole way.

We were early to bed to get ready for our longer bus tour the next day, and the continuation of the Bizarre Tour Guide Saga.

After a tasty breakfast, we waited to board the bus for the day’s tour to the famous hot springs, Pamukkale. Much to our disappointment, the guide for this tour was weird Burak again. I decided to be friendly to open him up a bit, and said, “How is your toothache?”

He looked at me, puzzled for a moment, then seemed to remember his visit to the dentist the day before and said, “Is good. Dentist fix.” And quickly ushered us onto the bus.

After we were seated, I whispered to Mac, “I don’t think he had a toothache at all. I just think he didn’t want to lead the Ephesus tour. He probably doesn’t know much about that place at all, and certainly couldn’t communicate it well.”

We now had a three-and-a-half-hour bus ride ahead of us that should have been enhanced by the guide's comments, but Burak only mentioned some of the city names as we went through, again telling us about the 'fabrics' that existed there.

When we went through a particularly poor section of farm country, with peasants in shacks, he said with a sneer, "You see here too much Greece people." Several other times that day he mentioned, with obvious hatred, the "Greece people". He often made the error using ‘too much’ instead of ‘too many’; like 'this town has too much restaurants’ or “too much people out of work”.



During this long ride, some of the mountainous scenery was fine and the towns were interesting to some degree, but our guide was no help making the long trip more interesting. I actually brought a book and read most of the journey.

There was a half hour rest stop for food and whatever. During the stop, I had another chat with our guide, and I mention to him (ever the speech teacher) about the difference between 'too much' and 'too many'; he seemed pleased with the knowledge. “I try improve my English. I desire go to London someday.”

“It’s a great city, I’m sure you will enjoy it.”

Then he got angry and almost shouted, “But can not go, because government have Tax for leaving country, very expensive!”

Trying to calm him down, I said, “Oh, that’s too bad. But you have good job as a tour guide, so maybe you can save up enough money for that.”

“NO! Tourist season over in three weeks, out of job. How I going to support family?”

Mac came over and joined us then and I decided to get on the bus to stop Burak’s tirade. After we were seated, I said to Mac, “He seems to resent the tourists, but tries to cover it up with a smile, occasionally. It’s really creepy.”

Everything we’d read about the Pamukkale Thermal Pools sounded amazing. It is basically the result of thousands of years of saltwater springs flowing over cliffs and forming terraces of salt, with warm pools of water filling the hollows. Visitors were encouraged to bring bathing suits and “play” in the mineral waters, letting them relax and heal them.



When we reached Pamukkale the guide told us that we would have two luxurious rooms in a hotel to change into our bathing suits, one for men and one for women. Well, they weren't at all 'luxurious', just basic motel rooms, and having 20 men trying to change clothes in one room was not a joy.

Burak made a point of telling us to keep all our valuables in our rooms, not to take them to the springs or to the pool, that he would be there to protect them. Now, he said this in his halting English and many of the people on our bus were German, so not everyone understood him. But we happily complied.

Anyway, the famous White Springs of Pamukkale were a bit of a disappointment at this time. The beautiful white, salt-solid waterfalls, with the pools of warm spring water were still there, but a bit greyer, because very little water was left in the springs. Still, it was full of tourists sitting in the shallow pools, walking on the white salt formations, and mostly taking pictures.

After we had waded in the water, taking our own photographs, Mac said, "I've seen enough. It's very pretty, but I'd like a nice swim in the pool back at the motel, to get all this salt off me." I agreed, so we made our way back to the pool.

Since we had our bathing suits on already, we didn't bother to go back to the room. but after a refreshing swim I asked Mac, "Hey honey, could you go back to the room to get some money, so we can buy a drink and a snack. I think Burak has the key to the room, so find him to let you in." And obligingly, off he went.

A few minutes later, he came running back with a panicked look on his face. As he tossed my wallet at me, "Take a look at this! We've been fucking robbed!" I opened it and found that all the money (dollars or lira) was gone.

"My money's missing too" Mac said, "and my American Express credit card."

"Oh, at least my bank and credit cards are still there," I said somewhat relieved. "Let's find our guide and maybe he can do something."

"Ha! He's nowhere in sight. The room key was just sitting on the hotel front desk. The clerk said that he left the key there about a half hour ago, and he hasn't seen him since."

We were returned to the room and found some other men of our group looking agitated. Mac asked them, "Have you guys been robbed, too?" Some of them who understood the guides instruction said that they had, but some others who had taken their money with them, hadn't.

So, this group of angry tourists stormed the hotel front desk, where they received no help from anyone there. So, we all went back to the bus to wait for the rest of the group. When everyone returned, we found that a few others had been robbed, and there was no sign of Burak. The bus driver, who didn't speak English, went to look for him, but returned shrugging his shoulders.

None of us knew what to do, but finally an English-speaking guide from another tour, but with the same Tour Agency, came on board. She was fluent in English and German and told us that our guide had been in an auto accident and that our bus driver would take us back to Kusadasi.

When we told her about our robbery, she was shocked. She told us to meet with her at the rest stop, where she would call the Agency. So, that was all we could do. Everyone just sat on the bus in uncomfortable silence, as it traveled back to the rest stop.

That 2 hours ride was not pleasant. We were thirsty and hungry and mad. We actually hadn't lost that much money (about \$50 in lira and \$20 in dollars) but the feeling was that we had been betrayed by this creepy tour guide. And the missing credit card was also worry for us.

Mac summed it up to me, "He obviously wanted to make a strike before he was laid off for the season. Because the Germans didn't understand his instructions, or were too smart to follow them, he got less on his heist than he hoped."

"Yeah, and he can't go back to the agency for any more tours to rob."

At the rest stop, I saw the woman guide on the phone, extremely agitated, pacing back and forth -- it was obviously a big shock to everyone at the Agency.

As the others were buying drinks and food, we felt extremely deprived that we had no cash to buy anything. A nice British couple offered to lend us some money, but it felt uncomfortable since we wouldn't be seeing them again, so we declined.

That last hour and a half on the bus was even more unpleasant. I noticed that the bus driver was going another route, going into different towns, and I said to Mac, "I think that the whole bus load was being abducted!"

He just shook his head and said, "No, silly, just look at the mountains and the scenery that we didn't see coming out, it's 'the scenic route' back to 'Shadasi.'"

After stopping off at many hotels to drop the other passengers off, we finally reached our hotel. We were met by an apologetic Tour Agency person who told us to come immediately to their office. We went to our room first for a drink of bottled water and a wash up. "Are you able to do this on your own?" Mac asked, "I'm in no mood to handle these people, and I have a killer headache."

The people at the Agency couldn't have been nicer. They cashed some credit card money for me because the banks were closed, they took my statement and vowed to follow up the best they could. They called American Express in Istanbul to cancel DM's credit card.

And they offered us a free meal at the Toy Restaurant, across the street. I woke Mac up and took him to the Toy and we had a delicious, expensive dinner on the agency. As we were finishing up a sweet, honey dessert, I said, "Mac, I don't want this incident spoil our trip, or our feelings about Turkey. If nothing else, we will have a good story to tell." He smiled and agreed.

But we still had one more thing to accomplish the next day. We had to go to the local police to report the incident in case Mac's credit card was used. Unlike the "Midnight Express" police, they were extremely friendly and encouraging about the whole thing, although they couldn't be much help, because it didn't happen in their district. But they did record the robbery, for the credit card people.

On our way back to the hotel, a carpet seller, that we had talked to the day before, stopped to asked, "I see much excitement last night. What happened?" When we told him, he said, "I am most sorry for you to have a bad experience in my town." And everyone who heard about the robbery, told us that this was an unusual incident, that you expect these things to happen in Italy or Spain, but not Turkey.

Anyway, as I said, we put it behind us and prepared for our last full day in Turkey, which turned out to be one of the best of all.

10

Mac roused me early the next morning, "I want to leave as early as possible today. We've got a lot to see on our way to Istanbul. You pack up while I go and rent the car." We planned to take a day to drive a car up to Izmir for a flight to Istanbul, where we would take a hotel near the airport for our early flight home the next morning. For our day with a car, Mac had researched several places with Roman and Greek ruins for us to view.

When I got downstairs with all the luggage, he pulled up in a boxy, brown car, which he told me was a Tofaş Şahin, a popular Turkish automobile. It wasn't particularly big or comfortable, but it fit all our stuff and was fine. I took the wheel first, and it was nice to be driving ourselves, without a bus load of German tourists and a creepy guide.

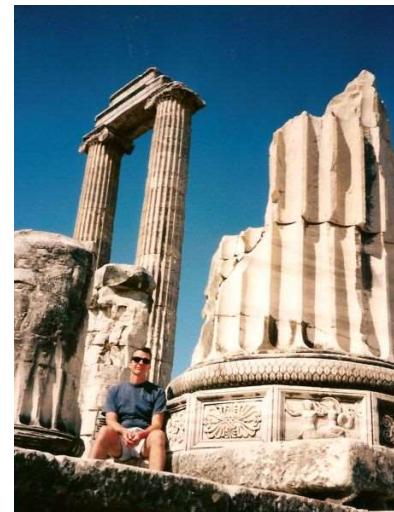
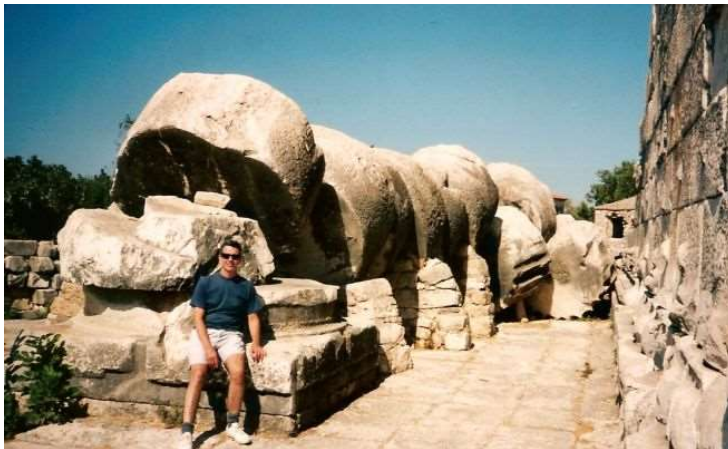
Our first destination was a little town called Didim, down the coast. It was a lovely drive through quaint villages and farmland, with the blue Aegean always off to the right.

As I drove, Mac read to me from a guidebook. "In the middle of Didim lies a Greek temple of Apollo. It has 103 of the original 109 pillars, but only 3 are standing upright to their full height. It is one of the finest examples of Greek architecture in Turkey."

When we arrived in Didim, we found the temple and were simply blown away. These huge pillars, whether lying on the ground, partially upright or standing to their full height, were superbly decorated and the most awe-inspiring archeological site I've ever seen (including Ephesus).

The flutes on all these columns were amazingly deep and large, like a dinner plate-size scoop was used to cut into the whole length of the marble. And the bases were enormous and each one was ornately and differently decorated. Even though this dates back hundreds of years BC, the detail in much of the carving was impeccable, not worn at all.

One pillar had fallen, and they had left the huge sections of it laying like a whole line of dominoes, with each circular section, a 6 feet wide and 2 1/2 feet thick slab of marble. There was also a large face of Medusa that was quite stunning.



Our next goal was to go to a tiny village on Lake Latmos, called Heracleia, where there was an ancient monastery. In this case, getting there definitely was half the fun. We drove over, around and through the most magnificent mountains we had

seen in all our travels. Many of them looked like gigantic rock piles, where some volcano had pushed up these boulders and just left them there. There wasn't any vegetation, just these bizarrely shaped boulders, it was quite 'other worldly'.

It was a long, twisty drive to this little town, but every new turn presented a splendid vista, and we weren't in any hurry to get there. We stopped at a roadside restaurant by Lake Latmos for a lunch break, which turned out to be excellent.

“Mac, check out the map, I think we missed the turn-off to the village.” Sure enough, we back-track about a mile and found the tiny road that led around the lake to the village, Heracleia.

It turned out not to be much of a village. “Wow, it’s a good thing we didn’t wait to eat lunch here.” I said as we looked around.

Just then a cute boy, about 10, approached us babbling happily in Turkish. Obviously, he wanted to be our guide, though he spoke no English. He was so charming that we couldn’t be irritated by his pestering, but he finally realize that we weren’t going to use his services, so he shrugged and went on his way.

“Where are these Roman ruins and the monastery you read about? This town isn’t that big, but I don’t see anything like that. Maybe we should have let the kid show us.”

“I know, but I didn’t know how to ask him what we wanted to see. Let’s go up that hill and see what’s on the other side.” As we started up a path, that seemed to lead nowhere, an old woman came out of a doorway and beckoned for us to follow her.

“Well, why not?” Mac said, so we did.

We wended our way down a narrow path, to a hidden ruin, and she waited as we viewed it and waved us on. As we started down another path, she stopped and offered us some lace to buy. Mac said, “Hayır teşekkürler” (no, thank you), and she shrugged and led us to some more Roman ruins. We were planning to give this woman a tip, but while we were looking at a Roman fountain, she wandered off.

Following the path further up a hill, we came across a large, square building, most likely Roman. Then from inside, came a scrawny, little man with big glasses and a white hat. He must have heard us talking because he handed me a card in English that said:

“HELLO, I AM ÖMER FARUK AND I AM THE KEEPER OF THIS ROMAN FORT. I KEEP THE ROCKS SAFE AND FEED THE DOGS. MY NEEDS ARE FEW, BUT THIS IS MY ONLY JOB. FEEL FREE TO EXPLORE THE FORT AND IF YOU CAN HELP ME AND MY DOGS, IT WOULD BE APPRECIATED.”

We thanked him and continued to explore this building. It was not particularly beautiful, but the thought of it being so ancient still made it amazing. We also liked that the dogs were friendly, following us around. “I suppose you’d like some tasty scraps.” I said, scratching one behind his ears. “Sorry, buddy, we’ve nothing to give you.”

When we’d finished with the fort, Omer brought us down to the edge of a lake and pointed to the monastery on the island. It was unreachable, but certainly picturesque across the lake.

As we left, we gave him some lira and expressed our thanks. He smiled (again with the brown teeth) and as we were walking back to the car, I said, “I can’t get over how nice and friendly the Turkish people are. It certainly will be something to tell our friends back home, to correct the stereotype they all have.”



It was time to drive north again to Izmir to catch our flight. It would take over 2 hours, but that was alright because our flight to Istanbul wasn’t until 7:30.

As I was driving through more marvelous mountains and tiny villages, I remarked, “Wow, it seems like everywhere you look there are remnants of the Romans or the Greeks, it’s almost become routine.”

“True, and there’s one more place I want to go before we hit the highway. I think the turn off is right up ahead.”

I turned into a stone road that was obviously not used much. We bumped over the rocky road until we came to a deep gully, and our road led onto a stone bridge.

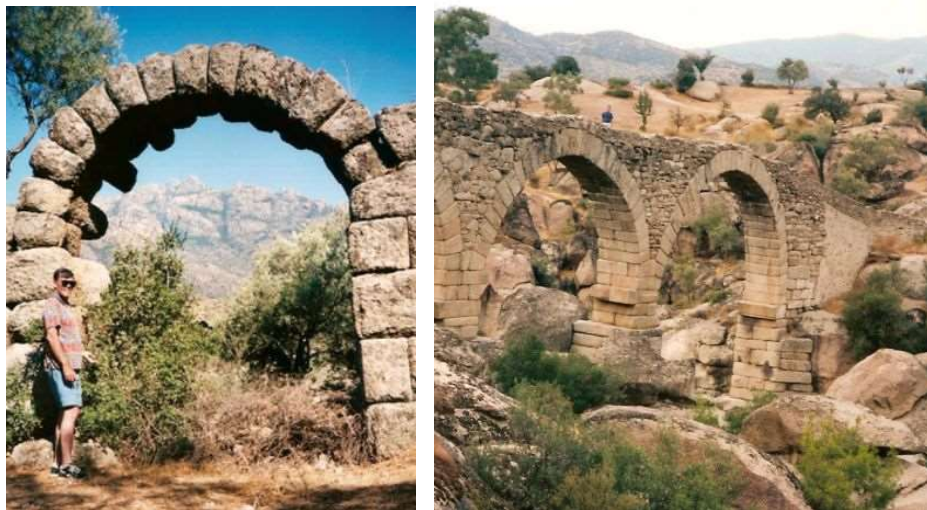
“That doesn’t look safe for our car to cross.”

“No, just stop here and take a look at this bridge. It’s definitely Roman.”

When we got out of the car, we realized how big this stone bridge was, with two giant arches to span this ravine. It was huge, and yet it looked solid. Shaking his head, Mac said, “This has been standing like this for hundreds of years, and it looks like people are still using it.”

“Not with cars, I hope,” I laughed, “but walking or with carts and things. Amazing!”

We took photos and admired it for quite some time, but finally we realized we had to get to the highway. It was a perfect way to end our Roman Ruins tour.



Our trip up to Izmir was uneventful as was our flight to Istanbul. After a night’s sleep in a noisy hotel near the airport, we asked the hotel concierge to get us a ride to the airport.

Unfortunately, the driver dropped us off at the domestic terminal, but we didn’t realize it until after he left.

“This isn’t the International terminal,” said Mac, “I hope we can get a transfer bus, or something. We only have 45 minutes before our plane leaves.”

Just then, a wizened, little man ran up to us, looked us over for a second, nodded, grabbed our luggage, and started running towards a group of trees. “What the hell?” I cried as he took off with both our bags.

Mac, clutching his precious clock bag, said, “I think he’s a porter, just follow him.” So, we ran along behind the guy, who entered the crop of trees, lugging our bags as if they were light as a feather.

Sure enough, on the other side of the trees was the International terminal. The little porter didn’t stop until we were inside the terminal at the check-in counters. He dropped our bags, gave us our last, brown-toothed grin, and held his hand out for his tip. “Give him a good one, he deserves it.” So, I emptied out my wallet of the Turkish lira I had left and gave it all to our little savior.

The flight back to JFK was not as bad as coming over, and we actually got some sleep on this one. After the arduous flight, we were confronted with getting back to New Jersey, with bus, subway, and train.

Stumbling up our front stairs into the house, we collapsed on the couch, exhausted and happy to be home. But we knew that our Turkey-Lurkey adventure would be one we would remember the rest of our lives.

THE END