

Eurolink

Capturing the Magic of Turkey

Newsletter May 2011



Dear Travellers

“Oh to be in Istanbul now that Spring is here” Tulips out and Plane trees in bud the city was a picture and not so crowded in May. Stunning views over the Marmara Sea at breakfast and we even saw dolphins. With a shady wee courtyard garden we were happy with our digs in the renovated old Ottoman House but as always in Turkey you have to watch your steps wherever you go! Ten of us ate (great to have some keen foodies in the group) drank and photographed our way around Blue Mosque, Topkapi Palace and we all marveled at the Underground Cistern a delightful surprise under the city. We flew to Ankara and it was a full day of history at the Museum and Ataturks Mausoleum then the fascinating geography of the steppelands with a stop and a paddle in the salt lake and suddenly that magical sight of Cappadocia the strangest moonscape of fairy chimneys and cave houses. One of our group cried when she saw her room in the cave it really was that beautiful. The day was topped off with an impromptu Sufi concert in a cave church. There we were sipping mulled wine by candlelight listening to 12th century music in a first century church relaxing enough to put some people to

sleep! Next morning there were at least 60 balloons in the air hovering over this incredible landscape. We delved into Cappadocia, under it, climbed on top of it then came our turn to coast over it in our own Butterfly Balloon. We skimmed over this magical landscape feeling like we could touch it and even saw a fox or two. Another balloon had children aboard and they launched a teddy over the side and we watched him float gently down with his parachute on. I hope they had a GPS on him! Fun and laughter at Mehmet's carpet shop and a few happy people headed home with a new/old/ancient carpet.

Rain in the Ihlara valley added to its natural drama of towering cliffs and raging river and some discovered hidden churches up up in the rock face.

In Antalya we made the long journey way across town to a Hamam where we were ordered onto the slab for a good rub down and a good scrub up. The slab was so slippery one slap and you whooshed across to the other side!

A free day here to do the swimming pool, shops, museum, beach or police station! One of our group was the heroine of the day fending off a would be thief and getting all her belongings back!

Another of our group got a good squeeze by a wrestling shopkeeper and another was swept off her feet by the same hulky bloke –that was all in good fun!

The climb up to the flames of Olimpos was worth it especially to have the toasted marshmallows cooked over these mysterious flames continually burning since antiquity. The sea was warm enough for a dip and the sand hot enough to singe your soles.

In Kas we chanced upon a children's festival of dance and the costumes were gorgeous. The jewellery delighted us, and the food was divine especially our Turkish nibbles on the terrace looking out over the turquoise Med.

The synchronised swim team probably wont get to the Olympics this year but we did have some very fit mountain goats who climbed all the way up to the castle at Kale for stunning views and an accelerated heart rate.

Pervan joined us in Dalyan and gave everyone a gift - a lovely Turkish custom. It was wonderful having her there for 2 days to answer our questions about life in general in Turkey. A huge thunderstorm ensured some of us got up close and personal under the umbrellas and it was pretty exciting to see a real live loggerhead out near the breeding ground. And those evenings just sitting in Dalyan gazing at the floodlit tombs is unforgettable. Slopping around in radioactive mud was pretty funny as well. It wasn't as much fun getting it off as it was getting it on!

Pamukkale was a beautiful walk littered with poppies all the way through the largest necropolis in Asia Minor. Then through the Roman Appalacian way to

the Thermal pool then down the calcified travertines back to Umi and Mehmet's warm hospitality. That night there was a very unusual bed to try - still waiting on feedback about that.

We shot off the beaten track to Afrodisius Ruins where the best Roman carvers and sculptors worked.

The Stadium was huge and you could almost hear the lions roaring and the gladiators clashing. This was a real highlight and we will be putting this one on the itinerary in the future thanks for suggesting it!

Ephesus in the late afternoon meant we had it to ourselves so not a huge audience for the singing in the amphitheatre, which holds 25,000. and plenty of space and time in the latrines to sit and have a chat.

Assos was another wild thunderstorm and an invitation to lunch with our Turkish friends. We loved the walk around their farm and a wee taste of the warm bread just coming out of the woodfire oven and we ate the best rice pudding made by TJs Mum.

Gallipoli was sobering as always and we reverently placed our poppies where we felt drawn to place them. Afterwards the welcome dip in the sea helped cleanse away some of the grief of this traumatic history.

Then it was back to Istanbul and Sultanhamet was alive with tour buses and San Sofia in all her glory awaited us. What a fitting finale and we were glad we saved it until last.

We had so many laughs with a caring special group. Thanks for a great tour. We would love to travel with you again.