

### **Sunday September 17<sup>th</sup> – shopping in Bursa**

We have a totally necessary sleep-in the in Anatolia hotel. Even though this is a four star hotel, not everything is great. While we were staying at the Bella in Selcuk, the bed was poor and the air conditioning great, here it's just the opposite. There is a huge noisy AC unit in the room which Barbara thinks just adds more heat to the room, and I am inclined to agree. I leave the window open but at some point in the middle of the night I have to close it since the air is so damn foul! It's a real problem in the big Turkish cities, the air pollution is worse than LA, and that is saying a lot.

We take a long relaxed breakfast, and I am reveling in the fact that I won't have to drive anywhere today. The breakfast is the usual Turkish fare on steroids – better breads, some western touches likes eggs sunny side up, and some rather strange things indeed.

One of these interesting foods is a kind of pastry roll with meat, with a tomato sauce with what looks like carrots in it. However, it turns out that the carrots are actually frankfurters! Whoa, mighty, mighty strange indeed. They still serve out all the usual good things, including some delicious cherry juice, which I appreciate a lot. I also can resist taking some kids breakfast thing that is a chocolate spread that you put on toast. Good but strange first thing in the morning, and bound to give Junior ADHD if he eats too much of it.

Its getting near the end of our trip and we realize we haven't bought enough gifts to take back to our friends so we decide to head to the Grand Bazaar. This is of course smaller than the bazaar in Istanbul, but its supposed to be very nice and a little more manageable. We take a cab downtown and decide to visit one of the mosques first. Its funny, we must have seen 3000



mosques here on our travels, but haven't gone into that many of them.

This is the second oldest mosque in Bursa, dating to 1399 and it is a different style than some of the others we have seen.

The interior is painted in a tan background, with many ornamental touches added in paint rather than in plaster as we have seen before. In the center there is a lovely fountain where the worshipers can gather and I assume wash their feet before they pray. This is

directly below a dome made of clear panels of glass that gives the interior a great deal of light.

It's a lovely building in all, very peaceful and at Barbara's suggestion we stand and silently pray that at some point Muslims and Jews will be able to live in harmony, not strife. What a better world this would be!

We continue onto the market, stopping to look at the half timbered City Hall. This is the only half timbered style building we can recall seeing in Turkey, so it really stands out.

We stop and take a picture of a little fountain just because the tile work is so exquisite on it, something you see so often in Turkey that its easy to take it for granted. I can't wait to see the tiles we bought for our kitchen once we get home!

We wander into the market itself, and enjoy as always looking at the food that is on display. As in Italy, we don't see any fruit or vegetables that are not right at their peak for eating, and such variety! There are many herbal remedies for most any thing you can imagine, so traditional medicine is not gone from this place.

Once again I am reminded how bad corporate farming is for our country. As I have said before, it makes a real difference in my mind on the pride you take in your work when you are not working for some multi-national conglomerate, but for yourself. You can see it in the care that is taken with the presentation of the food for sale, as much as in the quality of the food itself.



We continue on to other areas of the market, still not yet in the covered bazaar area which is the oldest section, yet there are many interesting things to see. One of the windows that catches my eye is from a store that sells the outfits for a boys circumcision ceremony. This is as I understand it a really big deal in a young Muslim boy's life . I believe this happens when the boy is about 12 years old, about the same age as a Bar Mitzvah. The outfits are really something, extremely fancy white capes, pants and crowns, all festooned with sequins, fancy embroidery and highlights in red satin. Quite something, and there are several stores here that look like this is pretty

much all they sell, so I assume there is a huge market for this. I have to wonder if there is any comparable ceremony for Muslim girls. Personally, give me a bris any day, at least when that happens to you don't remember it!



We also see a number of stores that sell school outfits, at least for girls. The stores list the names of the schools they provide uniforms for, and they are very conservative, usually dark green plaid patterns. To me, they look for all the world like Catholic school uniforms.

As we continue down the rows of shops, we notice that many of them are closed, and wonder if it's just because the call to prayer has recently sounded and so they close for about an hour and a half. It's still hot and we go back out of the market to an open air café, tables under umbrellas and get a drink, for it's still quite hot. Since it was on the menu, I just

had to try what was reputed to be a hamburger – guess I was a bit homesick.

When it was served, it actually looked like a hamburger – the classic bun, with pickle, ketchup and mustard on it and a painfully thin piece of ground beef – well, it was just an experiment and for two lira (maybe a buck twenty) what did I expect?

One other thing Barbara and I discuss, and it's how places like this café, and the many other outdoor spaces designed for people and not for cars, are sadly missing in American cities. I think of the contrast with Portland for instance with Pioneer square, which is basically a dead square

We head back towards the market, and still the vast majority of the shops are closed. We finally find someone that speaks English, and it turns out the covered bazaar is closed today. We don't know if this is always the case, or if it is some kind of religious holiday, but that really puts a kink in our plans to buy presents for our friends.

Still some shops are open so we look around a bit more. Bursa seems to be a more religiously oriented city than Istanbul, judging by the greater number of conservatively dressed men and especially women that we see. We notice a store that only sells scarves – not hats, or shoes or accessories, just scarves. In a country where many women habitually at least cover their hair, this makes a lot of sense. Certainly you see an amazing amount of creativity put into the design of the scarves, quite stunning many of them. I guess keeping your hair out of sight is not taken to mean that you can't have some adornment.

One other measure of how serious this city is as far as Islam is the great number of religious bookshops that are near the mosque we toured. They have what must be the Koran on display in a huge number of different styles, plus much other literature in Turkish that appears to be religious in nature.

One other general comment here: in most of our interactions in the market place, the hotel, cafes or any store we are always with only one exception dealing with men. Not that there is anything wrong with this I guess, but it does affect the character of the Turkish experience, and I find myself being a bit careful not to try and interact with any of the traditionally dressed women for fear of offending them. I don't know the customs, so I play it safe. Still, it seems that the society misses a lot by this division of the sexes, but I am an outsider so I guess its not my place to judge.

We finally give up on the bazaar and decide to hike up the hill to the citadel. This was as you can guess a military establishment from hundreds of years ago, and we read that you can have a great view of the city here from the heights.

Our guidebook gives us directions, which, since we are in Turkey, are a bit difficult to follow. Once again I am struck by just how terrible it is to drive in the cities here, and I'm just walking! Scary. We do find the way and after a short hike we are up at the top of the hill. There are fine views of the city, and it is obvious why you would set up a fort here, since it would be a commanding position to see and respond to any attackers. It is also obvious from this vantage point just how polluted the air is here: that yellowish brown tinge I remember so well from growing up in LA, and its no wonder, since the exhaust from thousands of cars, not to mention two stroke motorbikes, would choke any city. I understand that Bursa is a big center of auto manufacturing, so that would also contribute I would think.

Regardless, it's a pleasant scene, with many families out with their kids to enjoy a sunny afternoon. There are people selling food of course, and men renting binoculars to overlook the city. As I have noticed in other countries, the cities here don't really look like US cities. Even if you took away the obvious difference of all the mosques, the general building style is different, quite pleasing to me with the red tile roofs that remind me of the buildings in my hometown.

Barbara is now hungry, since she didn't have a "hamburger" so we wander over to the Haci Dayi, a kebab and lahmacun restaurant. This place is really stunning: more of the wonderful woodwork we are accustomed to, plus the patio we are seated on has trees growing thru it, and the leaves and branches wind overhead to make a cool green canopy.



Even the elegant chairs are carved from the same wood as the rest of the

building, very classy indeed. We still have a great view of the city – it doesn't get much more pleasant than this.

Barbara gets a typically delicious lamb kabob, but since I'm not very hungry, I opt for some lentil soup and a lahmacun. The soup comes out first, and it's not quite what I expected: it has been pureed, and there is the distinct flavor of mint, which Barbara tells me is quite typical of soups in the part of the world. Certainly it is delicious. We are also served the lahmacun, which is yet another type of flatbread, different from what we had at the Solder café at the Seven Sleepers, covered with a ground mixture of spicy vegetables and meat. We love it, and can't believe we haven't had this particular dish in all these weeks in Turkey. Instead of the usual Efes beer, we have the other thing we have been drinking constantly in Turkey, which is Cappy brand fruit juice. This comes in many flavors, and all of them are quite delicious. Being a product of the coca cola company, you would wonder if you could get it over here in the states, but no dice. Too bad, it's quite tasty.



We still need to buy some gifts, and with some regret on my part we decide to head for the Zafar mall, the first mall built in Bursa. On the way we wander thru what must be the oldest part of the city, with even tinier winding streets and lots of hotels built in old houses call konaks. The konak style of building is distinctive since the second story overhangs

the first. Many of these are quite charming, and I wish we could have stayed here rather than at the Anatolia, much more our speed but hindsight and all that.



We walk back down the hill and are faced with the daunting prospect of crossing Attaturk Chadessi, which is not as crowded as Friday night, which I think would be impossible, but its still no joke. We look for an underground crossing but instead find one of the rare marked and traffic signaled crosswalks and use that instead. It is nice that the light turns green and also gives you a countdown of the seconds you have left until, basically, you will lose your life if you are not safely to the sidewalk on the far side.

The most remarkable thing about the Zafar mall is that it is built under a large, blue glass pyramid. It is deceptive in size, not that huge in area until you realize the whole thing spans two different mall areas separated by a plaza, and the stores go down four stories. There a lot of stores here, with many of the same boring brands you will see in the states, including stores that sell cheap house wares from China. I don't know why this seems desirable to the Turks, but I guess it is a definite change from the bazaar, and it is air conditioned, which is a real plus as far as we are concerned. We do find some more traditional Turkish gifts to buy, and of course I find a record store and drop some cash there. I don't have many other chances to buy Turkish music, and trust me, you can't buy almost any of this great music in the states, it just doesn't make it here at all.

You know what happens when you shop, you need to rest and have a little something, right? Just like in any mall there is a food court, although the selections are not what you would see in the states. Yes, there is a McDonalds here, but even that offers food that is quite different that then junk you get here. For all I know, its just as bad as here, but I am not about to try it. I won't eat that junk in the states, I'm not gonna bother here, OK? In any event, what Barbara wants is a latte, and I have spotted one of my horrible weaknesses, a napoleon, or what I call a napoleon anyway: a custard filled pastry with chocolate on the top.

It is interesting to note that our eating habits are different here. There isn't a lot of the typical western junk food like potato chips or candy bars on every shelf. No wonder we didn't see a lot of overweight people as is so common at home.

Our food comes out with a surprise: my napoleon is on a plate, with chocolate sauce spooned over it, and a dusting of ground pistachio nuts. Yummy.

We do a bit more shopping, and are surprised to find among other things a pet store, the first we have seen, as well as a full on supermarket. A huge mall indeed.

We grab a cab back to the Anatolian, and pretty much collapse on the bed. We don't need any dinner tonight, but I do risk life and limb to grab us a couple of cold Efes beers at a local store. We watch some more weird Turkish TV. I realize we should be leaving for home soon, since we are beginning to recognize some of the truly awful music videos they play here. As I have thought for years, the worst thing that ever happened to music was MTV and its imitators – what a bunch of crap they push! All this wonderful Turkish traditional music and all you see is other versions of lousy dance music, tired tired tired, or junk from the states like Beyonce, which after watching some of here videos I am now calling BSlutty. Its like this on the radio too, haven't had much luck, although on occasion we have heard some of the truly wonderful Turkish vocal stylings overlaid on some forgettable disco tracks. We go to sleep, knowing that tomorrow we will be journeying back to Istanbul for one night and then home to the states. I know that we are both homesick now, ready to go back home and stop living out of suitcases.

### ***Monday, September 18<sup>th</sup> – back to Istanbul, the last ferry ride.***

Another breakfast in the hotel restaurant, almost empty now on a Monday, and thankfully no smokers for once – we can just enjoy the food.

At the desk we make as careful inquires as possible about how to exit Bursa and head to Yalov, where the ferries depart for Istanbul. Even though the auto ferry is not cheap, 52 lira, it will save us at least an hour and a half, say more than a couple of hours, in driving time. The less driving I have to do in the cities, the better.

Luckily for us, there has been an improvement to the Bursa street system, which is not on the map, and we can head for Yalov without having to head back downtown. Hurray! We still need to get gas and even this can be a bit complicated, since the gas stations also sell diesel, and its hard to tell. I get it sorted with the help of the attendant and another 30 lira is gone from my wallet. Gas is not cheap here, for sure.

We head off to Yalov, and for once we drive almost straight there, which makes us feel pretty good. There are many ferries that head to different destinations in the Istanbul area, and we are directed to the Yenkipoi ferry which will put us in the neighborhood of the airport, which is a good thing since our hotel is somewhere near there too.

We have some time to kill, about an hour and a half, so we park the car and head over to the little shops that are clustered around the ferry area. You can buy food of course and magazines, that sort of thing. Barbara wants some tea and I decide to have what they call "tost" which is available everywhere. Basically it's a bun with some meat and cheese inside. They take this and place it in a hot, heavy press that squashes everything and melts the cheese. A nice little treat. I look at the magazines, and am

surprised to find copies of a magazine that is really a live DVD of classical music, big names too – a nice concept but unless its opera, looking at classical music being performed is not as compelling as simply listening to it so I pass for once.

I get a call on my cell phone, certainly a surprise since its not like I know a lot of people in Turkey. Turns out it is Mustafa, the nice clerk from the Sari Konak that we told we would give this cell phone to on our last day in Istanbul. He kindly offers to pick us up at the Istanbul side and drive us to our hotel. A real gent. I explain we have the car and we would meet in there in a couple of hours and ring off.

Back at the table Barbara is mistaken, not for the first time, by a gentleman that assumes she is German – a reasonable mistake considering her heritage. They begin to converse in German, and of course I am just sitting there mute, wishing for the umpteenth time that I spoke more than one language.

Turns out that this man worked as a truck driver for many years in Cologne, and Barbara says his German is perfect. He is just another of the endless examples of friendly and curious Turks, and I am still marveling just how friendly these people are. Where did all the bad impression of the Turks come from anyway? I think most Americans think that Turkey is like what you say in the movie Midnight Express – it certainly wasn't my experience, of course I wasn't smuggling drugs, but still.....

We say our goodbyes to the gentleman and head over to board the ferry. Its amazing how many cars these boats can hold, and it takes some time to disgorge all the passengers and autos.

We get the nod to move, and I drive the Renault up a steep ramp and around a sharp curve to the upper level of the car storage. I am asked to re-park the small car, so another small car can get in next to me. I have to exit from the passenger side and we head to the lounge.

We are surprised that there is no outside seating, a shame since it's another nice sunny day here in Turkey. We grab seats at the front of the cabin and watch Turkish TV while we wait to get underway. This is a pretty nice ferry, better than I would have expected for a ship that only does these hour and a half crossings to Istanbul. The high backed chairs lean back, and look like airplane seats but of course, are more comfortable, since nothing is worse to sit on in this world than an airplane seat.

We are comfortable and are settling in as the boat gets underway. What we didn't realize is that the seats are numbered, and soon the people with the real claim to the seats ask us to move; no big deal, I was just very surprised at assigned seating, since none of the many other ferries we traveled on had any assigned seats.

The crossing itself was not very memorable, since the windows didn't give us a lot to look at. We did have a very tasty snack, some filo dough surrounding pasta and cheese – I think it's the first pasta in any form we have had since Greece. I am beginning to miss pasta and home cooking. We arrive at the Istanbul side and now we are heading towards our hotel. Back in Bursa we had gotten some assistance from the hotel, who called the

hotel and asked for some better directions. We had high hopes that with the new directions and the map from the hotel we wouldn't get too lost. We started off in the right direction and were looking for a landmark, an overpass with a road off the overpass with a particular exit sign. We did see an overpass, but of course this is Turkey and the sign we were looking for did not exist. We get off at the next exit, quite a ways, and try to find our way toward the hotel. We did have some other place names, but of course the map the hotel gave us only gave some street names, but none of the critical turns that were actually near the hotel.

At one point we are stopped and I get a call on my cell phone from Mustafa, wondering where we are. Me too. I explain we are kind of lost. Mustafa tells me that he is at the hotel, but that it was very difficult for him to find also. I tell him to give us a bit more time, as we feel that we are close and should be there soon.

Oh, were that only so! This area of Istanbul is as unmarked and confusing as the rest, and after another period of frustrating wandering we decide to find a gas station and ask directions. It takes some time, and some crazy maneuvering, to finally reach a gas station.

It's a huge place, and I have to move the car a couple of times so that I am out of the way of all the traffic in the station. No one speaks much English, but I try my best to make myself understood. I go back to the car and right then Mustafa calls again. I explain where I am, or try to, and Mustafa says he needs to get back to his house soon, since he works the night shift at the hotel and needs some sleep. Since I am still not sure about where the hell I am supposed to go, he suggests that I walk back into the convenience store where I just got directions and let Mustafa talk with the guy I got directions from.

Sounds like a plan. They talk for some long minutes, but finally someone has the bright idea of having Mustafa come there, to the station, and we could follow him back to the hotel. Sounds like a better plan to me.

I walk back to the car where Barbara is waiting and there are half a dozen men from the gas station, along with a man in a suit that speaks English. He kindly asks me if I need any help, and I explain my friend is coming to lead us to the hotel. Can you see what I mean about how friendly and helpful the Turks are? This makes up for any traffic hassles are far as I am concerned. I get back in the car and we wait for some time for Mustafa to show up, and we are both very glad to see him.

Mustafa tells us again just how difficult it was to find this hotel. What he tells me is that this area is not someplace he is familiar with, and I realize that in Istanbul, you probably know how to get around your neighborhood, and to work, and that's it. Makes sense since there aren't any street signs!

Mustafa drives out of the garage and we follow into the crazy streets. We take a very long and round about route, actually retracing most of the steps that we took to get to the gas station. I am getting a little worried, but I am thinking the Mustafa has to lead us as if we are coming from his house, which would be the only way he would know to get to the hotel.

We end up going in quite a few strange directions, and end up in a part of town that has some of the smallest streets I have seen yet. At one point we

have to go up a street that is one way, the wrong way, until the street turns into a two way street. Nuts, just nuts.

Somehow or other we finally get to the hotel. I park outside, overjoyed that I a) didn't kill anyone, which in Istanbul is a distinct possibility, and b) that we didn't get in any kind of accident with the rental car. As if to underscore the dangers of driving here, just after I park I have to move the car since two other cars are somewhat parked ahead of me, after being in a fender bender. Amazing as it seems, this is the only accident, or the aftermath of an accident, that I have actually seen. I don't know how or why the streets are littered with totally battered vehicles and masses of people on crutches. We get our room, and it really is terrible – lousy bed, lousy shower and everything in a poor state of repair. Well, its only one night, our last night in this amazing country.

We sit and have a drink with Mustafa, a truly nice man, and I give him the little pink cell-phone that I find out later he gives to his father since his sister didn't care for it for some reason. Its nice to have a chance to chat with him, but he can't stay long, he has to get to work and with the adventure of helping us to find our hotel, he is already late. We make fond goodbyes, and has him to please come and look us up should he ever make it to the US again. It would be a pleasure to see him anytime.

Barbara lays down for a bit of a rest, and I walk out into the rainy afternoon to find a cash machine. This is a very confusing neighborhood with lots of run down streets veering off at odd angles, but I find a machine and at the same time, see a place that looks good for dinner. Even here, in a not so nice section of Istanbul, there is a certain charm, with the small shops and cafes that are so unlike their corporate American cousins. It's a more human scale that I am quite fond of.

I return to the hotel and we head out for a truly wonderful dinner: more lamancun, tremendous flat bread, and of course some lamb kabobs – inexpensive, healthy and delicious. I wish I could have some right now! And like most every place we went, the people in the restaurant were much more friendly than I could ever have expected – except in Turkey.

All in all, this is as good a vacation as I have ever had, wonderful people, superb food, truly exotic sites and some hair raising driving. What could better? I know we will come back again, there is so much more to explore....and next time, I just won't drive.

The last word: Turkey – go there whenever you can. It will be so *much* better than I can *ever* describe.