

Turkey ...By Chris Kneeland

Figs, mangoes, aubergine ~

Sun-drenched turquoise coasts and cobalt blue waters ~

Mosques and the five-times-daily "call to prayer" ~

Coffee, tea, backgammon ~

Quick, easy smiles and welcoming gestures ~

Colorful markets with silks, rugs and brilliant spices ~

Termessos, Ephesus, the Lycian Way ~

Turkish baths and abulation fountains ~

The best of traveling companions ...

It's the cornucopia of fruits and vegetables, nuts, yogurt, *kebab* cooked in savory spices; daily life being lived on the sidewalks, under the shade of trees, sipping tea; the splendor of the more than 1,000 ancient ruins; the dichotomies endemic in the dress and structures of a country that is 99% Muslim and, yet, is a secular society; a capitol city with a foot on two continents, a country mostly in the east but reaching westward; traditional gullet boats with masts high, sailing in and around the beautiful coves of the Aegean and Mediterranean - all of which make visiting Turkey a feast. This summer my husband, Bill our daughter, Julia and I traveled to Turkey to celebrate Julia's graduation from law school. It was wonderful.

Constantinople evokes images of caravans traveling from east to west on the Silk Road; a bustling center of culture. Today's Istanbul is definitely bustling with its population of ten million people and everywhere are vestiges of its unique gateway location. In the *Haghia Sophia*, a basilica-turned-mosque structure dating from 532 AD, Christian and Muslim tiled images are juxtaposed. The old part of the city, *Sultanahmet*, is cobblestoned with narrow streets and alleyways. The new part of the city is a myriad of young people poured into wide streets with dress ranging from conservative Islam to contemporary western. We spent several days drinking in the sights, sounds, food and experiences of Istanbul. While there, Julia and I also indulged in the storied *hamam*, a Turkish bath.

The southern and western coasts of Turkey offer a dramatically beautiful coastline, refreshing sea waters and ubiquitous ancient ruins. We had knowledgeable local guides, some of whom were archeologists that we had arranged for in advance, others we hired on the spot. We hiked to the partially excavated city of *Termessos*, perched high in the mountains with beautiful views and explored other ruins along the *Lycian Way*. We toured the fascinating ancient city of *Ephesus*. We hired a local fisherman and his boat to take us to the underwater ruins of *Kekova*, after which he asked us if we would like to swim in a most beautiful spot, which we did, and he took us to a small cove where we spent the rest of the afternoon.

One of the most delightful parts of our trip was the sense of humor, warmth and friendliness of the Turks we encountered. English, increasingly becoming a universal second language, was spoken, to at least some degree, more than we had expected. We were happy that we had learned a few Turkish words, but "hello", "please", "thank you" don't take you very far in a conversation. We were often invited to join people for afternoon tea. We were frequently presented with small gifts.

Accommodations were lovely. We stayed in quiet small hotels, including a bougainvillea-covered villa hotel near the village of Kas on the Mediterranean. We ate every delicious breakfast, lunch and dinner outside. We swam and snorkeled in the clear, gorgeous Mediterranean...

All the while, against the backdrop of this fascinating place, my traveling companions and I had hours and hours to do what is done when traveling – reflect on and talk about how life must have been through the ages and how it is being lived now, what is common and universal and what is unique and new and how it all connects us and fits and what we can learn about ourselves and each other.

