

Turkey: more than just a good kebab to offer.

Whilst my previous articles have been of a purely Human Rights nature, this one is going to have a slightly cheerier outlook. However, not without first mentioning a few base facts. Turkey, in the run up to European Union accession, is attempting to address its serious human rights issues by introducing Law No. 4744, the 'mini democracy package'. Turkey is part of the European Convention on Human Rights, which outlaws torture, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment. Yet, the police and gendarmerie are accused of illegally detaining, often incommunicado, human rights workers, lawyers, writers, journalists, politicians, anyone who had spoken out on subjects such as the Kurds and Islam. Detainees are subjected to beatings, electric shocks, are stripped naked, blindfolded and hosed with pressurized ice-cold water, sexual assault and death threats. Despite this constitutional reform, little is really being done to allow basic freedom of speech for Turkish citizens.

That said, when a friend of mine, realizing that her last summer of unrestrained pleasure before entering into careerdom was upon her, asked me to take her on an adventure, I thought what better place to go for a little culture and excitement than the crossroads between Europe and Asia, (plus I had listened to Brad babble on about his outer body experiences there for the past year). So, with LP in hand, Kate and I found ourselves walking towards the Duty Free liquor store in Istanbul airport's arrival lounge!!!

Turkey has it all, Wonders of the Ancient World, settings from Greek Mythology, the Virgin Mary's retirement home, skiing, snorkeling, climbing, boat cruises, World War Two memorial battle sites, my two very good Turkish friends, *Tarkan* (the darling of Turkish pop music who sang the original 'Kiss Kiss', before the Holly Valance rip-off) and good, very good food. To avoid listing off, in mind-numbing fashion, all the places of outstanding beauty and interest I visited in our three-week trip, I'd instead like to tell you a few choice tales hoping to incite your curiosity enough to make you go there yourselves.

Tale #1: Istanbul, truly the gateway to Asia, or Europe, depending on which side of the Bosphorous Strait you're standing on. At the center of the civilized world for over thirteen centuries it has survived many changes in ruling authorities, from the Hittites, Alexander the Great, the Celts, the Roman,

Byzantine, and Ottoman Empires to the present day Republic. Although Ankara became the capital in the 1920s under *Ataturk*, the founder of modern Turkey, Istanbul has remained the cultural heart of the country. With a shore of the river in each continent this cosmopolitan city is a liberal mix of hotpanted tourists, westernized flashy Turkish women, head-dressed long-sleeved long-skirted Turkish women, and of course the overwhelmingly friendly men, all rubbing shoulders surrounded by buildings and history dating back to before the Old Testament. Tea houses, carpets shops and *Nargil* (water pipe) smoking bars are everywhere and you cannot get far without being offered free cups of tea or Turkish delight, such is the warm Turkish hospitality. I felt quite at home in Istanbul, the only annoyance being the incessant chat from men as Kate and I walked down the street, an example of which is: 'Excuse me, excuse me, you dropped something!' goes the Turkish guy who had spotted us yards down the road. Kate looks down thinking she has dropped her purse and what a nice man he must be to tell her, but then he says, 'You've dropped my heart'. We walk off but he continues beside us, 'Excuse me, excuse me, where are you from, where are you from, excuse me, excuse me, etc, etc Can I have my heart back?' Kate finally screams 'Go back and @*¥#\$\$%* pick it up yourself!' Now, as a one off, this could have been quite amusing but fifty times a day would test anyone's nerves.

Tale #2: Oludeniz, the only place on Turkey's Mediterranean coast serving 'full English breakfast'. Yep, Union Jack shorts were spotted and enough gold jewelry to sink a battle ship. The setting was breathe taking as descending into the valley on a dodgy *dolmush* local bus we saw an aqua blue turquoise and green bay with a backdrop of huge green mountains all around. Then we got to the bottom and discovered a bunch of British package tour holidaymakers had taken over the place. This was the only place we found that had just about succumbed to the tourist invasion. But even then, it was nothing compared to the likes of Benidorm or Faliraki, the hotels limited to two stories and most places being backpacker style tree houses. The bar street was only one strip long and there were no unconscious, brawling tourists lining the streets, only moderately drunk ones. So, as the saying goes, when in Rome, we joined in and got rather tipsy on cocktails with a couple from Hartlepool who took advantage of what seemed to be our personal all night happy hour, (the waiter fancied Kate).

Tale #3: Cappadocia, supposedly used as a locations for filming in the movie 'Star Wars'. This central region is covered in what are known as Fairy Chimneys, rock cones like enormous wizard's hats formed by the erosion of the *tufa* layer of rock and sculptured by water and wind. These chimneys are used as houses, pensions, churches, bars, and of course carpet shops. It is spectacular, and so impressive you feel it must be of another world, or at least be a movie set. Then, reaching downwards in the opposite direction to the chimneys, there is a group of equally impressive underground cities. When the locals had to hide from various enemies they built a series of rooms and paths eight floors down and stretching for miles so they could disappear for months storing food, using underground streams, building kitchens and wine cellars, bedrooms and even a mortuary. Four days in this wonderland setting were finished off with a night drinking Turkish *raki* (a very dangerous substance) and watching traditional dancing whilst eating kebabs, what more could a girl ask for... (A Turkish man)?!

This article could not do justice to Turkey's wealth of culture and history, nor to its equally impressive political and economical problems. However, this was just an aperitif, to whet your appetite and coax you into ordering the main dish. If you're planning a trip round Europe whatever you do not miss Turkey off your list...and make sure you try the meatballs!

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