

DIARY OF FF CORNWALL EXCHANGE TO FF URLA, IZMIR AND ISTANBUL TURKEY, APRIL 2013

Day 1

The whole group set off from Cornwall in the morning by car. One car load stopped at Exeter and had homemade pasties! All five cars arrived safely at the Acorn Lodge near Gatwick where we spent the night after having a meal at the local Ring o' Bells pub.

Day 2.

After an early breakfast at Acorn Lodge we were transferred in relay to Gatwick Airport, the first group leaving at 07.35 the next two at 15 min intervals. As we were early and in front of the crowds we cleared check in and Customs very quickly giving us time for coffee and to browse the duty free shops before time to board our flight to Istanbul. The formalities from arrivals at Istanbul to departures for Izmir took quite a bit longer. A coach collected us from Izmir Airport to take us to Urla where our hosts were waiting to meet us. As we arrived at our meeting place, we were also greeted by the Islam call to prayer.

Day 3

It was a beautiful day with sunshine but a cool wind. We met for the bus which was our transport for the week. Our first stop was a pretty fishing village called Ildira. We saw the fishermen making their nets and were given cups of Turkish coffee or apple tea. After a wander around here we headed for Cisme - a very elegant town with a large marina and a castle. We had an hour to explore the town here and Janet and I went into the castle.

Lunch was provided by a restaurant on the waterfront of a wind surfing resort.

After another little tour around the older part of Cisme we returned to our hosts. There was little time to change for the evening festivities before we were whisked off to a hall for our welcome party. Everyone had made a dish.

The food was really delicious. Such wonderful flavours. Turks specialise in vegetarian dishes though there was a plate of beef burgers.

After some singing and dancing we returned to our homes for a welcomed night's sleep.

Day 4



An early start today to travel to the ancient city of Ephesus where we met Volkan, our English speaking guide. Ephesus was the centre of travel and commerce and one of the greatest sea ports of the ancient world but due to the surrounding area becoming silted the city now stands 6 Km from the sea. The ancient city was actually rebuilt 4 times in its history and the Ephesus we walked around was the 3rd one. During Roman times it had a population of 250,000 with a sewerage system which was very advanced for its time and was one of the first cities in the world to be lit at night. The distance through the site is 1.5 Km of which only 20% has been excavated.

Starting our tour we were shown 3 different types of underground pipe work. Each system of pipework carried water either for domestic use, heating systems or sewerage, the water being brought from 43 Km away by aqueduct. We then continued past the Odeon (small theatre), Basilica and The Palace of The Council used by the governing body of the province and stopped by the Temple of Domitian. This was a building containing warehouses and shops on the 1st floor and the Temple on the 2nd floor. Continuing down through the main street Volkan pointed out various statues next to buildings which commemorated the people who had been responsible for either the construction of the building, its restoration or the actual owner such as a doctor. We were also shown the positions for the lamps which lit the street at night. High on the left hand side could be seen a large covered area under which excavations were being carried out on recently discovered terraced houses. Opposite this were the public baths restored by Skolastica, a rich Roman woman whose headless statue

can be seen by the entrance. Next to the baths are the remains of the public toilets and the brothel. From here we could see the facade of the Library of Celcus which is all that remains of this once magnificent building. We now followed the main street, known as Marble Street to the Great Theatre which was built into the rock with the spectators facing the sea. This building had a capacity of 25,000 and was used for all types of public discussions and gladiatorial and animal fights. It was also where St Paul tried to preach Christianity to the Ephesians which eventually ended with him being imprisoned on a hill nearby.



On exiting the site we boarded the coach and made our way to St Jean Basilica which was on a hill nearby. Volkan told us that on the Apostle John's death he was buried in a very simple grave on Ayasuluk Hill. In the 5th century a wooden roofed basilica was built over the grave but this was later replaced by the Emperor Justinian in the 6th century with a domed basilica. When the Ephesians moved from the 3rd Ephesus to Ayasuluk St John's Basilica and the hill were enclosed by perimeter walls. We then walked around the site and saw frescoes of Jesus, his mother and the Apostle John and the Baptistry which was built in 700 AD.

After thanking Volkan for his wonderful tour and knowledge of the area we again boarded the coach and went to a restaurant for lunch.

We arrived at a restaurant in the Turkmen Carpet Weaving centre where we had a lovely lunch and some rest after a hectic morning. After lunch the owner, who had spent a number

of years in the UK showed us around his weaving centre in 3 women were weaving handmade carpets. The carpets appeared to us to be of very intricate design and the weavers were working at speed using different types of knots. The factory uses mainly outworkers and the women we saw were actually being trained. We were then shown a huge bowl of silkworm chrysalis in water and shown how the individual chrysalis are spun together to make silk thread.

We were then taken into a large room with seating all round the walls and offered Turkish tea to drink before being shown many different styles of carpets in many different colours. It was amazing to see the colours of the carpets change as the assistants rolled them out and then spun them round. Although there were some wonderful carpets on view no one to my knowledge actually bought one.

Onto the coach once more we made our way to the House of the Virgin Mary. The house was discovered in the 18th century by a French priest who had read the writings of a German nun who had visions about the exact whereabouts of the house in which the Virgin Mary had lived her last days. When Jesus was on the cross he spoke to the Apostle John and asked him to look after his mother. When John came to Ephesus he brought Mary with him and she lived in this house on Mount Bulbul until her death. In the 1980's Pope John Paul II visited the house and declared it a place of pilgrimage for Christians. The site is a place of peace and quiet especially when entering the small chapel of St Mary.

The coach trip then ended with a visit to a leather factory where we were invited to a fashion show of leather wear by the factories own models plus others! The fashion show was extremely well presented and rapturous applause was given to the models especially Angela and Mac who had both been persuaded to take part in the modelling. This was followed by a visit to the showrooms where one could purchase any leather goods on show.

After an exhilarating day our time schedule had gone somewhat awry but when we eventually arrived back in Urla we ended the day with a splendid meal prepared by our hosts.

Day 5

Our first visit of the morning was to one of only three quarantine islands in the world. Built in 1865 to eliminate diseases such as cholera and diphtheria, all ships coming to Turkey were unloaded of cargo and passengers. Men and women were separated and taken in carts on rails to be stripped of their clothing and showered with disinfectant. After a medical examination they were only allowed onto the mainland if in good health. A bag of gold was presented to the ships captain if not more than one of his passengers was ill on arrival. We were shown how seawater was distilled for use in giant washers (a special one for silks) and dryers.



Our next visit was to a boat yard used to reconstruct antique sea vessels for scientific research. Archaeological excavation began in 1979 when parts of a vessel dated 6000BC used for transporting olive oil, was discovered on the site. Replicas of vessels up to 3000 years old are being constructed and studied, with a recent sailing from Ismir to Marseille taking two years.

Wonderful, gnarled olive trees fill the countryside and from ancient times olive oil production has been huge business at home and for export. We were shown how the oil used to be extracted in a working museum opened in 2005. Having rescued the plant from ruin, we could view the old process and see storage jars (with pointed bases to sit in the sand) used for the olive oil and wine to be decanted into barrels once it was on board ship.

To add to a fascinating morning, we then had an engaging time with pupils of 6 – 13 years in the art class of their Elementary school. The children were producing paintings saying 'Canım Annem' (*'My favourite Mother'*) for the following days' Children's Day on 23 April, a holiday in Turkey when children are celebrated.



Lunch was a relaxing affair in a garden restaurant. We watched as three ladies made crepes using a charcoal oven. Our crepes were accompanied by salad and yoghurt drinks. We strolled on a nearby beach and then drank Turkish tea before being taken to a vast Botanical Garden. Begun 16 years ago and covering 200 hectares the nursery and arboretum sells olive trees, Cyprus topiary, succulents, herbs and 54 kinds of palms. 80% of the garden is organic and we were shown one palm which is 600 years old and grows 1cm a year.

Our afternoon concluded with a visit to a vineyard for a tour of the processing plant and a tasting. Having seen row upon row of vines, we arrived at the spotless contemporary building. We donned plastic coverings for our shoes and began our tour of the washing, drying, crushing stages and then saw the barrel storage and bottling areas. Ten kinds of grapes are grown; nine types of wine are produced, six red and three white totalling around 1500 bottles. The unique soils and micro climate of Urla has meant that from 7th c BC some of the most desired wine in the Mediterranean area has been produced here and shipped in unique clay vessels for export from the Ionian city. An ancient art is now combined with a thoroughly modern approach; new vines, young grapes, electronic regulation of temperature in the tanks and new barrels. Harvesting still takes place from the end of August to the end of October and we tasted the fruits of the pickers labour.

With energy restored, the Ambassadors took our Hosts out to a splendid fish restaurant on the quayside.

Day6

Another warm and sunny day - just right for our boat trip to the Urla islands. We arrived at German Island, so named after being purchased by a German man after the last war. Lots of beach combing – lounging around and a couple of brave swimmers (Christine and Ruth!). Fish lunch on the boat, trip around the bay and a few more brave swimmers – water cold (apparently!).

A very pleasant evening dinner was given for us and our hosts by the English Consular and his wife is now joining Friendship Force!

Day 7

A day in Izmir

Cigdem, one of our hosts, acted as our guide for our day in Izmir leading us through Konak Square with its clock tower, a gift from the Germans, to the maze of alleyways of the bazaar. We were treated to tastes of exotic fruit, nuts, sweets, chewy carob beans and lokmas which were bite size doughnuts traditionally served after a death. After a refreshing cup of apple tea we visited the local mosque, which together with a church and a synagogue welcomed traders from all countries to Izmir's bazaar for centuries. Shopping purchases included spices, china dishes, Pinocchio puppets, scarves, handbags, cotton bedding and a beautiful yellow rose. None of us were tempted by the circumcision suits for young boys which were a mixture of flamboyant Elvis Presley and Batman outfits. We had lunch at the top of the civic building which was the tallest in the city when built in 1964, and were welcomed by two deputy mayors and received generous gifts. We walked through a delightful park to a local craft and food fair before driving along the huge bay to take a previously water powered lift to enjoy sunny vistas of the city and bay. Home for an evening with hosts was the perfect end to a fascinating day.

Day 8

A measure of the health of a nation is the state of its youth. Our visits to the Hakan Ceken High School and the Izmir Institute of High Technology left us in no doubt that Turkey's future is secure. We arrived early morning to be greeted with eager students, who gave a word perfect presentation about their High School. Specialising in English and Science, the highly intelligent boys and girls took us on a guided tour, offering their arms as we climbed the stairs, attentive and solicitous, treating us to a late breakfast of sweetmeats and drinks. Their welcome and enthusiasm was so overwhelming that we invited them to visit us – and it looks very likely that several of them will come to Cornwall this Summer.



FF Urla is involved in the preservation of an historic street of artists in the old town and we enjoyed a leisurely stroll through, ending in a kebab restaurant for lunch. Kostem's Olive Farm in the depths of the country offered us a haven of calm in the brilliant sunshine and the fledgling Olive Museum gave us an insight into a major industry of the region. On to the older students in the impressive University Campus, who put on a dazzling and clever Folklore show with amazing energy and skill.

To round off a superb day, the Farewell Party in a restaurant at the water's edge was a riot of dancing and singing, cementing a lasting friendship between the two clubs.

Day 9

We arrived at our departure point at the allotted time and much to our surprise the coach was late, I think some of us were hoping that it might not turn up as we had enjoyed ourselves so much with our hosts. Several minutes were spent embracing and saying our fond farewells, we had such an amazing time with our new friends at Urla that we were experiencing mixed emotions. Sad to be saying goodbye and yet looking forward to our time in Istanbul. After the usual Airport waiting around etc. we boarded our plane to Istanbul and on arrival were transferred to our hotel. The location of the hotel was perfect being right in the heart of all the important sights, we expected nothing less as Robin had been the Chief negotiator and booking Agent. The hotel was basic, very clean and completely adequate for our visit. The location of the Star Hotel was ideal – central and convenient – the dining room

overlooked the Blue Mosque!! The Manager, Altin, and his staff were helpful and friendly and also liaised with the tour company organising our visits on Saturday and Sunday. After unpacking and a quick look around to establish our whereabouts we all went to a Fish Restaurant for our evening meal.

Day10

Our first full day in Istanbul was an all day tour including a boat ride on the Bosphorus. We began at 8.45 am, with our tour guide, Tuba,(meaning Tree of Life). Leaving the hotel by coach, we passed the train station that used to be the terminus of the Orient Express which now terminates at Venice. Our first stop was the Rustempasha Mosque, built in 1560 by the imperial architect Rustem Pasha, son-in-law and grand vizier of Sultan Soliman the Magnificent. It is adorned in side with the, Isnik, blue and white porcelain tiles highly valued by the Ottomans.

Next, it was a short walk to the famous indoor Spice Bazaar. Built between 1597 and 1664, it is the second largest covered bazaar in the city. We were mesmerised by the many varieties of spices, Turkish delight, dried fruits, seeds and nuts, on display. One proprietor gave us apple or pomegranate tea; then many of us bought some, as well as Turkish delight, spices and flavoured teas.

We were then taken to the docks to board a sightseeing boat on the Bosphorus strait which connects the Sea of Marmara to the Black Sea, and separates Europe from Asia, making Istanbul one of the most beautiful cities in the world, and the only one built astride two continents. We cruised upriver, on the European side, past the Dolmabahce palace towards the Black Sea, and under the first Bosphorus Bridge. At the narrowest part of the Bosphorus are strong tides and the Rumelihisari Fortress, built by Sultan Mehmed II between 1451 and 1452 in order to control the sea traffic on the Bosphorus strait and prevent aid from the Black Sea to reach Constantinople during the Turkish siege of the city in 1453. With the second, Fatih Sultan Mahmet Bridge, which crosses over to Asia in the background, we returned via the Asian side of the strait.

Back on the coach we travelled through Ortakoy, a cosmopolitan area, bordering the waters of the Bosphorus, with communities of Turks, Greeks, Armenians and Jews, with their corresponding religious structures, and over the first Bosphorus Bridge to Çamlıca Hill, which means Pine Grove, and is the highest point in Istanbul. We lunched at the Sefa restaurant and walked up the hill to get magnificent views of Istanbul.

We finished the day with a guided tour of the Dolmabahçe Palace. The Ottoman Empire's 31st Sultan, Abdülmecid I, had it built between the years 1843 and 1856. Previously, the Sultan and his family had lived at the Topkapı Palace, but as Topkapı was lacking in up-to-date luxury and style, Abdülmecid decided to build the Dolmabahçe Palace near the site of the former Beşiktaş Palace on the Bosphorus, which was demolished. Whereas the Topkapı has exquisite examples of Iznik tiles and Ottoman carving, the Dolmabahçe Palace contains much gold and crystal. Tourists are free to wander Topkapı at their leisure, while the only way to see the interior of Dolmabahçe is with a guided tour. Fourteen tonnes of gold in the form of gold leaf were used to gild the ceilings. The world's largest Bohemian crystal chandelier is in the centre hall. The chandelier, a gift from Queen Victoria, has 750 lamps and weighs 4.5 tonnes. Dolmabahçe has the largest collection of Bohemian and Baccarat crystal chandeliers in the world, and one of the great staircases has balusters of Baccarat crystal.

After a very busy day, we all had a free evening to relax.

Day 11

Accompanied by our guides from Turista, Tuba and Mustafa, we boarded the ferry for the hour long ride to the Princes' Islands in the Sea of Marmara. These range from small and uninhabited to Buyukada, the big one, where we disembarked. After a horse-drawn carriage to the highest point to take photos of the views we had lunch in a restaurant overlooking the busy harbour. There were many Turkish families also enjoying a day out but the crowds soon thinned as we strolled along the seafront admiring the displays of fish for the restaurants. Then Carole and I dashed off to see if we could find some of the old, weatherboard clad houses, which Caroline and Clive had been admiring, before a lazy return journey back, sunbathing on the upper deck.

Day 12

A quiet leisurely start to the day... unusual! The group were heading off in different directions - Basilica Cistern, Bazaar, gift buying, sightseeing. I just love the Blue Mosque, delicate minarets peeping above the green-leaved horse chestnut trees. Walked through the colourful, yet hilly, narrow paved backstreets to the Bazaar. Bargained for an attractive porcelain Turkish plate which would remind me of Istanbul when I returned home. Collapsed into a coffee area - Americano coffee with 2 delicious dark Turkish chocolates.

Onto the exciting, invigorating Turkish Baths to meet up with the rest of the adventurous FF gang! Steaming Turkish Baths, exfoliating skin scrubs, then oil with a massage! We all looked like new women as we ventured out into the bright sunshine!!



To cap it all, as a grand finale on the last night, a peek into the real world of the Arabian nights. A belly dancing extravaganza starring none other than the amazing Shirley and Gavin from Cornwall FF. Who would have imagined it?



Day 13

Sadly this is our last day in Istanbul - this amazing, vibrant city which straddles the Bosphorus and joins Europe to Asia! We rose early despite our noisy and hilarious visit yesterday evening to a Turkish night-club for a display of Belly Dancing and Folk Dancing, where Gavin supported our club laurels with style and panache when he became Sultan for the evening!

We had two mini coaches outside, across the tram way from our little hotel and its friendly, helpful, Albanian manager. They transferred us to the airport alternating high speed with dead slow along a superb five lane motorway with magnificently planted and maintained floral displays for a large part of the way. We set out at about nine a.m. for a flight to Gatwick at 12.20hrs in an Airbus 320, which was comfortable and where we ate well, within

the expected standards of airline meals. The trip was uneventful and the company of good, Cornish FF Friends both reassuring and enjoyable. We talked happily of our superb experiences in Turkey and the friendly welcome we had all had from FF Urla.

We arrived on time at Gatwick, still in bright sunshine, though fresher than Istanbul, and here our ways parted. Happily for us we travelled back to Truro with Robin and Josie in their car - so having their pleasant and interesting company for a few more hours. We stopped for a pleasurable break and a tasty sandwich at Wayne's Cafe on the A303 at Camel Cross, near West Camel, Somerset. We were all agreed that this was quite a fortuitous stop, not having been there before - it is smart, and good food.

The Exchange to Urla was a great success and we do hope that we will meet up again with our new friends in the near future, and that they will come to Cornwall.

We must all give our heartiest Congratulations to Shirley for being such a good E,D, and to Robin for his comprehensive organisational skills and to Gavin for being an effective Sultan and Power in the background.