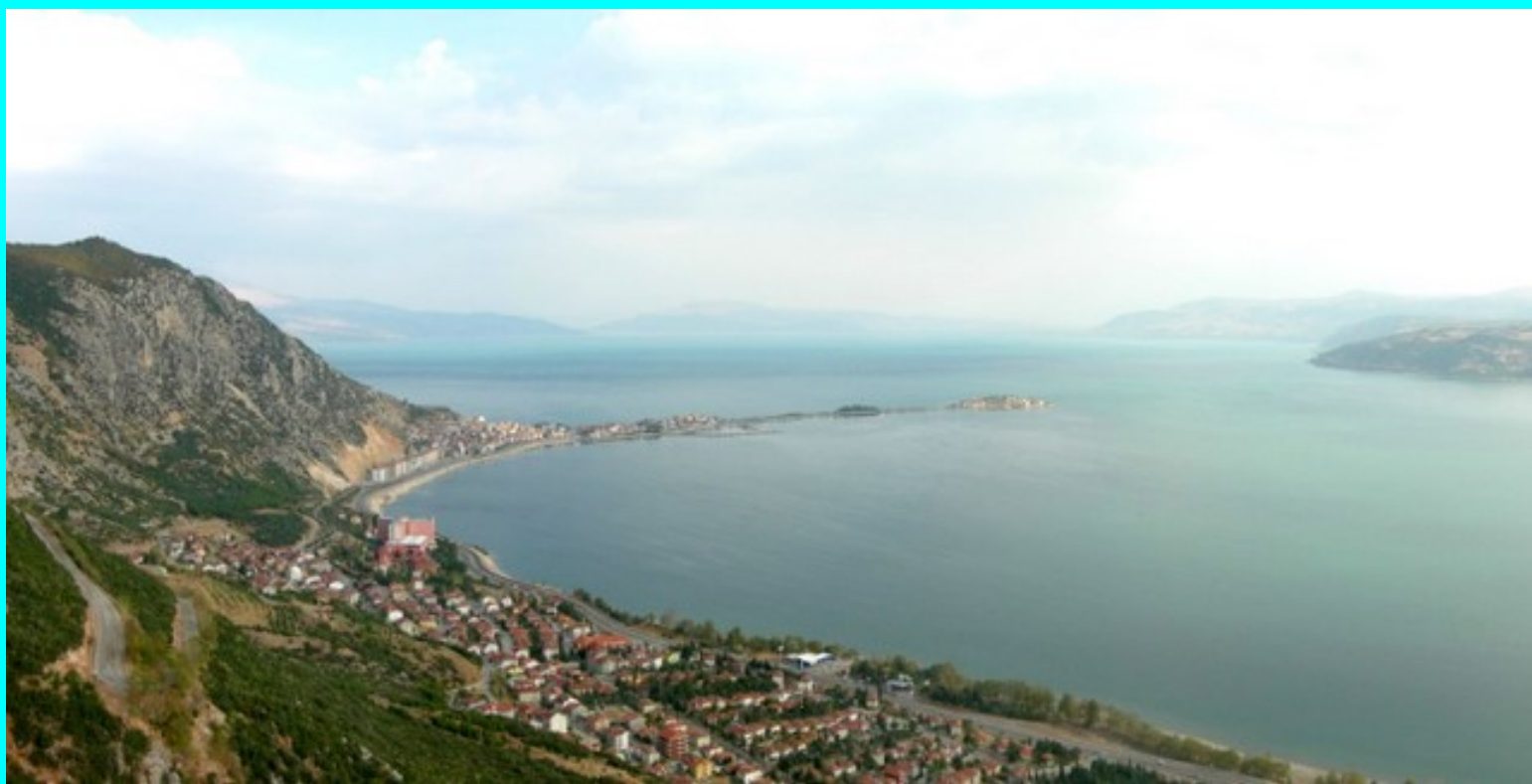


November 2, 2007

Early Wednesday, October 3, we rented a car with our cruising friends, John and Sharon, and departed on a seven day road trip to Cappadocia, located in the interior of Turkey. As it was around 550 miles to Cappadocia, we spent two days on the road each way. The first day we drove from time to time along scenic mountainous roads to the small town of Egirdir, located in the Lake District near Isparta. Egirdir, situated along the shore of Lake Egirdir and protruding out into the lake, was joined by a causeway to two islets. We spent our first night on the furthestmost islet in a lovely small family pension.



The next day we continued on to Cappadocia. It was apple harvest time, and our route took us along the eastern shore of Lake Egirdir where huge piles of apples were stacked along the road waiting to be sorted for market by workers. The drive from Egirdir to Konya also took us by many small Turkish villages. Approaching the city of Konya the terrain changed as we were now in the Anatolian steppe.



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Konya stood out in the middle of the barren landscape, almost like a caravan oasis of days gone by except that it now was a huge, sprawling city of 800,000 people. The city had been inhabited since Hittite times, but it was at its peak during the 13th century when it was the capital of Seljuk Sultanate of Rum. In Konya, we visited the Mevlana Museum. Celaleddin Rumi, one of Islam's greatest mystic philosophers, had lived in Seljuk-ruled Konya during the 13th century. Rumi, also called Mevlana, founded the Mevlevi dervish sect, known today to tourists as the Whirling Dervishes due to their sema (ceremony) ritual involving whirling climaxes. During the Ottoman era, dervish orders had become influential. Ataturk, considering them a threat to his idea of a secular state, banned all dervish orders in 1925. At the Mevlana Museum we visited Mevlana's tomb, a shrine for Muslims, plus toured parts of the former lodge where the dervishes (monks) had lived. Most interesting were the dervish paraphernalia.



Along our drive from Konya to Cappadocia we saw wheat, sugar beets, potatoes, and squash being harvested and taken to market. Mostly Kurds from southeast Turkey had come to work the fields, and their tents could be seen periodically alongside the road. During our drive we passed a sugar processing plant where rows of trucks, all full of sugar beets, were waiting to be unloaded. This highway was also part of the Roman-Byzantine road system known as the Silk Road, and it was on this road that Marco Polo traveled in the 13th century. During Seljuk times, many hans (storage depots) and caravanserais (inns) were built along this route, and every so often we spotted the ruins of one.

Halfway between Konya and Goreme (where our pension was located in Cappadocia) we visited one of the best preserved Seljuk caravanserais, Sultanhanı. It was built in 1229 and recently restored. It had been well-fortified, and its one entrance displayed the Seljuk ornamental exterior portal design of the 13th century. Inside was a courtyard with a small raised prayer room in the center. On the left side were accommodations for the travelers and on the right a covered area to provide shelter from the hot sun. At the back was a storage hall where goods could be safely stored by the caravans. We walked inside this hall and were astonished by its huge size. After visiting Sultanhanı we continued on to Cappadocia, arriving at our pension just after dark.



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*Storage Hall*



We spent three full days exploring Cappadocia. Over millions of years, wind and water had eroded this region's hardened volcanic ash (tuff) into extraordinary formations, creating a surreal landscape. In late afternoons, the many colors of the tuff, ranging from reds and yellows to greens and grays, would become intensely vibrant. While in Cappadocia we stayed in Goreme village, a magical setting amid cones and pinnacles of volcanic tuff, also known as "fairy chimneys." For ages man had created caves out of the tuff due to its unique qualities, soft during excavation but then hard after being exposed to the air. Caves also had a more constant temperature than other dwellings, making them well suited for Cappadocia's cold winters and hot summers. During our stay we actually stayed in the bottom room (cave) of a fairy chimney.



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The Islamic holy month of Ramadan, called Ramazan in Turkey, was taking place during our trip. In Cappadocia, even though only about 5 to 10% of Muslims still prayed five times a day, almost everyone fasted during Ramazan from sunrise to sunset. At sunset, cannon fire would announce the start of feasting. We had heard this sound back in Marmaris. However, it wasn't until Goreme that we heard for the first time the Ramadan drummer, a tradition dating back to the age before alarm clocks. As our room faced the street, every day around 3:30 am we would be awakened briefly by the rat-a-tat-tat of the drummer as he traveled the streets, letting those know who wished to eat before sunrise that they needed to arise.

Our first day in Cappadocia we hired a guide, named Mustafa, to show us around the Goreme Open-Air Museum, the Underground City of Kaymakli, and the Hacı Bektaş Museum. In Goreme Valley, where Goreme village was located, early Christians had built a cluster of Byzantine churches, chapels, and monasteries, over 30 in all, mostly dating from the 9th century onwards. Known as the Goreme Open-Air Museum, this area now was a World Heritage Site. At one time, the interiors of many of these churches had been completely covered with Byzantine paintings depicting stories from the Bible, primarily the life of Christ, as paintings were an important teaching aid in early Christianity. Now, in most of the rock-cut churches only portions of the paintings existed, but in Karanlık Kilise, built at the end of the 12th century, these exquisite Byzantine paintings with their vivid colors had been well-preserved due to the lack of light inside. Seeing the inside of this church was undeniably awe-inspiring.



*Our Guide "Mustafa"*



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On our walk around the Goreme Open-Air Museum, we saw exposed just to the right of Karanlik Kilise the interior of an earlier church whose exterior walls had fallen away. Further down, we saw many hallowed-out monasteries embedded in the rock formations where monks used to live and work. Across the way, clusters of rock-cut holes could be seen high up on the valley wall. These had once served as pigeon houses, and farmers would put grain in each of the holes to entice the pigeons. Even as late as the 1990's, farmers in Cappadocia use to keep these birds for their droppings, supposedly nature's best fertilizer for grapes.



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We next traveled to Kaymakli to see its underground city. This city was one of 36 known underground cities, but only one of a few that had been extensively excavated. Between 2000 and 1000 BC, the Hittites made Cappadocia the center of their empire, and it was then that these underground cities were started. However, it was in the 7th century AD that these cities gained their present shape when Christian people needed a place to retreat during times of invasion. In peace the people lived above ground, but in times of attack they could survive for up to six months underground. In the Underground City of Kaymakli, a maze of narrow tunnels led down to the different levels. We explored three of the five levels opened and were amazed at what we saw: living quarters, stables, wells, ventilation shafts, food storage rooms, communal kitchens, and troughs for pressing grapes. Especially impressive were the huge stone rolling doors, almost five feet in diameter, that they used to seal off their dwellings from the enemy.

Last, we visited the Haci Bektas Museum. Our guide Mustafa suggested this as we were all interested in learning more about Islam. Haci Bektas Veli was another one of Islam's great mystic and spiritual philosophers from Turkey and, like Mevlana, lived in the 13th century. Haci Bektas founded the Bektasi dervish sect, and at the Haci Bektas Museum we saw his tomb and the former dervish lodge containing the order's kitchen, initiation cells, artifacts, and graveyard. Given Mustafa's wealth of



We enjoyed two more days in Cappadocia. The Ihlara Valley, being remote, was a favorite refuge of the Byzantine monks, and twelve painted churches had been carved into the sides of its gorge. We visited two of the churches during our walk along the valley's riverbed. In Dervant Valley, we came upon many strange and interesting formations, some in the shape of animals like the camel. In Avanos, we visited a pottery studio workshop, culminating with our purchase of a Hittite wine decanter. Ever since Hittite times pottery had been made in this area molded from the river's red clay. Both at Uchisar Castle and Aktepe Hill we enjoyed watching the change in the Cappadocian landscape during the late afternoon and at sunset.



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Throughout our drives and walks we captured many special snapshots of Cappadocia. A few of our favorites: shepherds standing along the road, a man collecting seeds from squash (Turks eat only the seeds with the squash fed to the livestock), a Turkish village near Ihlara Valley, a man and his wagon, and some Muslim women enjoying the quiet of the afternoon in Goreme.



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As Cappadocia's weather conditions were especially favorable for hot-air balloon flying, our last morning we enjoyed this thrilling adventure. All flights took place at dawn before the wind came up. With an amazingly capable pilot at the helm of our 18 passenger hot-air balloon, we drifted over the landscape, traveling wherever the wind took us. Able only to control the altitude and the rotation of the balloon, our pilot maneuvered us low into the valleys and in-between the rock formations, truly making our flight a most unforgettable experience.



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*Our Pilot*



Early Monday, October 8, we departed Cappadocia and headed back toward Marmaris, spending the night in the city of Antalya on Turkey's Mediterranean coastline. Antalya had at different times been under Roman, Seljuk, and Ottoman rule, and landmarks from each period could still be seen today. Visible along the city's waterfront were Hadrian's Gate, built in honor of Emperor Hadrian's visit in 130 AD; the 13th century Seljuk Fluted Minaret (Yivli Minare), the symbol of Antalya; and the historic district of Kaleici with its restored Ottoman houses and narrow streets. We stayed the night in Kaleici, and Tuesday morning before departing for Marmaris we visited the Antalya Museum, one of the best archeological museums in Turkey. Our arrival back in Marmaris late Tuesday afternoon marked the end of our unforgettable trip into Turkey's heartland. It certainly had exceeded all of our



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