

Diary of my time in Türkiye and Cyprus:



By Josephine Forsythe

Thanks go to the sponsors of the Roger Short Memorial Fund, without whom this journey could not have taken place

DAY 1: SWINDON TO DALAMAN

Waking up at 5 a.m., we grabbed a quick breakfast before heading to the Swindon train station to catch our 6.32am train to London Paddington. The early morning train was filled with commuters, and we sat eagerly anticipating the fortnight before us. We then transferred to the Stansted Express to get to Stansted Airport, noting the chill in the air and joking that we should have brought coats.

We made our way through security, trusting that our hold luggage would be reunited with us a few thousand miles away. Deciding that to fit what was essentially 3 weeks of activities into two weeks due to time constraints, as a result of which we would have to be walking with our luggage, we had squeezed all of it into one 60-litre hiking rucksack and a 15-litre rucksack with a smaller rucksack for day hikes. After perusing the Stansted airport duty-free zone for an hour, it was time to go. Using the four-hour flight to recover some sleep (as we were too high above the clouds to see anything of note) the flight, was over quickly. Beautiful mountains rose up to meet us from below; the vast creviced landscape decked out beneath us looked truly enchanting.

After landing, we went straight to customs which was packed as Russian, French and British tourists thronged around us. Then, onto a Muttaş bus to travel from Dalaman to Fethiye. The darkness this far further south than England came on quickly, and we watched the sun sink behind the looming peaks.

Arriving at Fethiye Central Bus Station, we decided to walk to the hotel, thinking it couldn't be too far. However, the 1.5 miles turned out to seem much further with our heavy bags. On the bright side, it provided an education in Turkish pedestrian etiquette, as we daringly followed locals across crossings, trusting in their intuition. We noted many dolmuş locations too, for our expedition tomorrow. Despite not being too far away from the touristy seaside front, the town felt vastly different. Passing a large MMM Migros, and restaurants filled with locals, the dimly lit streets provided a stark contrast to the busy brightly lit tourist centre we were about to enter.



Figure 1 - Flying over mountains upon entering Turkey



Figure 2 - Driving to Fethiye

The bright lights of the night market and the streets littered with English speakers felt almost like a different world, and after unpacking quickly in our hotel room, we set off to explore. Even though it was getting late, the market was still filled with people trying to sell and haggle. But we turned off the bustling path to try our first MM Migros. The small store was similar to any other small supermarket in Central Europe with its fresh selection of foods.

The idle store was a good opportunity to try the Turkish I had been learning in preparation, asking for 100 g of olives, to which the store clerk immediately inquired where I was from; an indication that my Turkish pronunciation needed some improvement. But we continued in Turkish, and I was successful in my first purchase.

We decided to then try our first Turkish Döner, as it was one of the only places open so late and stepped into a small Döner shop. It was owned by two brothers, who seemed very friendly and chatted to us about what we planned to do and offered their recommendations for the area. They also gave us directions to where it would be best to get a dolmuş and wished us good luck on our journey.

We headed back to the apartment, and after showering off the day of travel, we tucked into our food. Finishing our day by watching a rather absurd Turkish soap opera, we headed to bed ready for what awaited us.

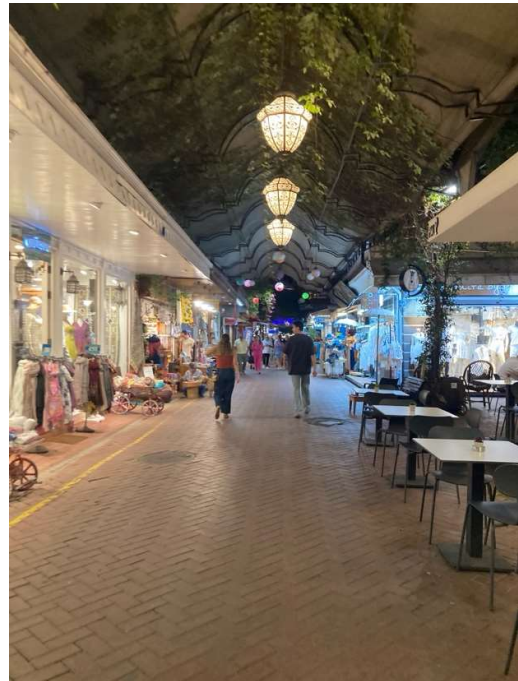


Figure 3 - Night market near the hotel

DAY 2: SAKLIKENT, KAYAKOY AND LYCIAN TOMBS FOLLOWED BY DINNER

Waking up 5:30 am UK time was a bit of a struggle but made a lot better by the amazing view of the bay from the window. We quickly planned out the possible plans for the day while enjoying a breakfast of pastries, our plans greatly dependent on weather – as there were thunderstorms expected for later that day.

We decided we had better head to Saklikent gorge first and set off to find a dolmuş. Through a bit of luck, we found one completely empty, waiting for its first customers exactly where the brothers had pointed us to. After paying the driver, he set off: clearly anticipating more customers along the route. The journey was pleasant, the air temperature still cool in the morning and the dolmuş trundled through the suburbia of Fethiye. The driver picking up and putting down passengers left, right and centre, while lurching ever closer to the huge mountains sprawled across the horizon. Soon it was just us and the driver as we travelled deep into the valley.



Figure 4 - View from dolmuş on our way to Saklikent Gorge



Figure 5 - Standing in Saklikent Gorge, gives you an idea of the size of it

Spying a sliver of light and water through the mountain, we were brimming with anticipation as we were set down by the driver. We headed into the gorge, past the turnstile and followed the rickety balcony above roaring waters. Coming out onto the small restaurant island, with benches and tables parked in the low flowing river, we observed people of all ages marvelling at how the light trickled down between the cleft.

We then set off into the gorge, trying not to stumble as we clambered through the rocky stream. Gasping at the cold, in stark contrast to the humid air, the gorge led us deeper into the mountains. Craning our necks, we could just see the crack of light above us. However, as we got closer to the waterfall hidden within the gorge, we came across two security guards. They warned us that no one was allowed further due to the thunderstorm, as the possibility of a flash flood was too high. Feeling somewhat disappointed, we returned to the exit.

Now lunchtime, we headed to the famed Saklikent gorge trout restaurant. The fish was freshly caught and smoked with a serving of rice and steamed vegetables, and we took our place on a floating table in the stream. As there were few tourists at this point of the day, we enjoyed the quiet atmosphere while we tucked into our fish. The water passing under us, a useful way to cool down as the sun began pounding down.

When the next dolmuş arrived, we hopped onboard, hoping to swiftly head back to Fethiye. However, the hot and steamy vehicle, proceeded to slowly meander through the countryside. Worried we had caught the wrong bus, we waited anxiously as more people got on and we headed to the northern outskirts of Fethiye. Thankfully, the driver then returned to his course to Fethiye bus station, and we landed back in the bustling centre.



Figure 6 - Trying the smoked fish mid-river



Figure 7 - Exploring Kayaköy, the sun shining through empty windows

We then joined a busy bus stop eagerly competing for a space on the next bus to Kayaköy. Here, locals would step into the way of oncoming dolmuş, for the driver to hold up three fingers, to which there was a scramble to see who the first three people to board were. Finally, making our way to the front of the queue, we managed to board an already full bus and headed out into the countryside once more. Passing through Ölüdeniz, we saw a packed tourist town, appearing to target primarily English tourists, with real-fake merchandise (counterfeit goods).

Further into the countryside, we departed the bus and attempted to enter Kayaköy. Struggling to find the real entrance, we scaled and descended numerous locations of the eerily tranquil ruins. We could observe old streets and passed in and out what once must have been busy family homes. Remnants of colour still clung to corners of a room or by an old fireplace, reminding us of the life that once filled these houses. Here, the wiry bushes sprouting between pave stones, the scuttling of ants and the occasional cat emanated the feeling that the forcibly abandoned town had been lost to time. After our



Figure 8 - An empty chimney



Figure 9 - Wandering through the streets

third detour, we finally found the official entrance to the town, its renovated paving in stark contrast to the rubble we had just observed.

Here, the official path led you past old churches and past homes scrawled with modern graffiti until you reached the high point. An old, abandoned church or lighthouse, standing atop the peak, looking over at a glimmering turquoise bay.

The sunlit houses glared an empty white, as I imagined

what the town would once have looked like. Barren streets where children would have run between market stalls, women hanging their washing between windows and the sounds of life now quiet.

We then jumped on another dolmuş back to Fethiye bus station and once we arrived, began walking back through Fethiye. Quickly setting, the sun lit up Fethiye in a soft golden glow, and we began hurrying to make it to the ancient Lycian tombs before



Figure 11 - Close-up of a Lycian tomb

dark. Still and hauntingly beautiful, they towered over Fethiye. The town was spread beneath us in a splash of colour, minarets rising between houses. We took a moment to admire this stunning landscape.

After this, we headed down to a restaurant that had been recommended by our hotel owner on our arrival. Here, to try as many of the local dishes as possible, we ordered more than we perhaps could manage. The sumptuous mezze dishes were delicious, particularly in the backdrop of a cosy lamplit street. The

roasted aubergine yoghurt, the lamb liver skewers along with appetising Gözleme were the perfect treat after an exhausting day. Filled, we strolled back to the hotel, ready for the day of travel.



Figure 10 - View from a window



Figure 12 - A street-lit meal

DAY 3: HEADING TO GELEMIS



Figure 13 - View out of Bay window

Luckily, we had arrived on the day of Kalkan's weekly market and wandered off to investigate. The market stalls were a greenhouse of smells and heat. Fending off the advances of the sellers, we entered the fruit section of the market and took the time to try my Turkish at haggling. Purchasing some figs and watermelon we decided to combine this with some pancakes from a nearby stall.

Here, I had one of the best experiences with my Turkish. I successfully started chatting to one of the pancake sellers and using a garbled mix of my knowledge and google translate we discovered they were a family of pancake makers and sellers, who travelled to each local



Figure 15 - Family of pancake sellers, busy at work

market from Gelemiss each day. They had been working for over 15 years and were happy to show us how they made the pancakes, with different family members trying to help communicate. It was an amazing experience of learning about how people in tourist-centred towns, deal with the temperamental nature of seasonal selling.



Figure 14 - Haggling at the market

We then moved on and walked down the hillside to the port Old Town. Changing from modern to older and more original



Figure 16 - Kalkan's Old Town

architecture, the houses became more columnated and painted in an apparently unique Kalkan style. Amongst the crooked alleyways, we found an old church that had been re-envisioned as a mosque. Peering in through the door, we could see the ghost of Christian structures against the clearly Muslim ones. This was our first encounter of the remodification of churches that we began to see a pattern of throughout our time in Türkiye.

Two dolmuşes later, we arrived in Gelemiş and after checking in and cooling down in the hotel pool, we strolled to the high street. Here, we made the mistake of going to a tourist-trap restaurant, where the food was a mishmash of bland and undercooked, the waiters failing to remember we existed and the only other

customers were also British tourists. (See picture attached)

Vowing to not make the same mistake again, we headed back to the hotel and showered off the day of travel.



Figure 17 – Very bland food

DAY 4: XANTHOS AND PATARA BEACH

Stocking up on the generous amounts of breakfast, we planned the day ahead of us and asked the opinion of the hotel owner's son on how to get to Xanthos as there seemed to be few options on Google Maps. After he sent us a picture of the local bus timetable, we went to go grab a dolmuş.

While waiting, a family of 3 stopped their car laden with beach tools and asked us where we were going. Having heard of the culture of hitch hiking amongst the youth of Türkiye, we wondered whether they would offer us a lift. They promptly did, and they set off with us in the back, I a bit more worried than Andrew, who was travelling with me. Chatting about their plans and their work, we made our way towards Xanthos. However, after a miscommunication error, they dropped us off on the side of a crossroad, 4 km away from it and drove away.

Confused and disorientated we watched in horror as soon after, the only dolmuş for another hour drove past us. Dejected at this sudden change of events, we decided that as the sun was not too high in the sky, we should just try and walk the rest of the way. Trundling onwards, we realised that although not the worst outcome, it would be unlikely for us to also make our way to the Letoon sanctuary as it was not only disconnected from public transport but also quite a distance away.



Figure 18 – Before and after being offered a chair

After stopping and deciding to take our chances with catching the next dolmuş, we stopped and sat under the shade of the trees on the roadside. Surprisingly, a small elderly man came out from his porch, and instead of chasing us off, placed down two plastic chairs for us to sit on. Even more surprising was that when he returned a few moments later, he beckoned us into his home. There he and his wife had laid out an entire spread of breakfast and lunch treats, with fresh tea and spreads. Confused, we asked what was going on and said we were only waiting for the bus.



Figure 19 - Second Breakfast

He nodded and encouraged us to eat instead. After numerous confused communication attempts including help from locals passing by, we pieced together that he was offering to drive us to Xanthos after we had eaten our fill. Chatting to him, we learnt about his family and that his name was Salim. After eating the second tray of snacks and tea, he asked us whether we would like to stay with him over our hotel. We politely refused but he asked

He nodded and encouraged us to eat instead. After numerous confused communication attempts including help from locals passing by, we



Figure 20 - Salim and his wife



Figure 21 - View from Amphitheatre

whether we couldn't cancel it and stay with him anyway. Again, we refused, and this time, asked if we could get underway. Agreeing with us, we said our goodbyes and drove to Xanthos.

This ancient town had been home to numerous civilisations, Lycian, Persians, Romans and Byzantines. This town was sprawled across a valley and had been once the site of the Nereid Monument now at the British Museum. The sparse landscape was covered in ancient

homes and streets leading to nowhere. Reading about the multiple mass suicides the town had committed instead of surrendering to armed forces was both moving and horrifying to imagine occurring along the paved marble streets. Passing ancient doorways that would once have been marred with blood and fire was shocking in contrast to the bare sun that beat down upon the still landscape. It was strangely empty of tourists, appearing forgotten compared to later sites.

A symbol of the multicultural atmosphere of this place was the Xanthian Obelisk; its funerary message repeated in 3 different languages (Ancient Greek, Milyan and Lycian). Xanthos' stoic marble imprint on the rocky and bare hillside, left a lasting mental image with me, especially with the knowledge that this was once the capital of a bustling empire, now abandoned and crumbling. The huge



Figure 22 - Multilingual Obelisk

forums, baths and marketplaces spoke of a thriving culture and people now forgotten; their history whispered by the wind rolling through its valley.



Figure 23 - High Street

Leaving here and heading down into the town, we grabbed some more water before heading to the Patara Ruins. Completely in contrast to Xanthos, this was far more tourist centred with a much steeper entrance fee.

Beginning at the outskirts of the town, passing the ancient pottery houses and tombs, we entered through the huge gates into the town. From here, we could see Nero's lighthouse being rebuilt as well as huge baths and amphitheatres coming from what would have been the city centre. This port town would once have been a vital pulse point of the Roman empire, and the size of the buildings only highlighted the wealth of the city.



Figure 24 - Gates to town

Passing through here, we then encountered our first Turkish beach. Sadly, we had chosen one of the windiest days to visit, and we spent much of our time being battered by the sand and spray. We had to be careful once in the water too as the



Figure 27 - Pides

underflow was strong and would quickly whisk you along the beachfront if you weren't careful.

After, cooling down, we tiredly walked back to the ruins, being careful to avoid the turtle nesting grounds. Walking through the ruins at sunset offered an entirely different perspective of the city and left me in awe of how many others would have passed under the city gates, and what they would have

seen on their journeys here too.

Learning from our meal choices from the night before, we followed the locals to a bustling Pida restaurant and enjoyed a great many of them. We asked the baker if we could watch him prepare one and watched with anticipation as he fired and chopped them. Then, exhausted but satisfied, we headed back to the hotel, once more prepared for another day of travel.



Figure 26 - Patara Beach



Figure 28 - Pides being created

DAY 5: GELEMIS TO CIRALI VIA MYRA

Having now figured out the bus timetable, we made our way onto a bus heading to the Patara junction, hailing another to Kalkan and then taking one more to Antalya. Again, we stopped on our journey, this time at Myra, the home of St Nicholas. At the small bus centre, we bumped into a couple of Turkish university students studying Tourism nearby. We chatted to them about what they would recommend and decided to use our few hours here to explore. We initially headed towards the Lycian tombs, almost identical to the ones we had seen in Fethiye, before heading back into town



Figure 29 - On the way to Myra



Figure 30 - St Nicholas' Church

to find the Byzantine church that St Nicholas had once been buried in. Half sunken into the sand and surrounded by intense security, the beating heat around the church was in stark contrast to the statue of Santa Claus in winter gear. We learnt that St Nicholas, had been a wealthy man and travelled around the Mediterranean, including to Cyprus where we would be heading shortly. However, his bones were no longer interred here and had been stolen and taken to Venice and Bali in Italy, where they currently remain.

After a quick lunch nearby, under the thankful coolness of a fan, we headed back to the bus centre to hopefully catch one of the heaving buses to Antalya. This journey was hot and packed, with numerous stops. But I made friends with my fellow bus companion after she offered me some of the snacks she had bought at the petrol station. Continuing onwards we came to the Olympos junction, where we managed to not get off at the wrong stop and were able to make it to the correct dolmuş layby. When the bus driver decided there would be no more customers arriving, we set off down the steep slopes towards the golden Çıralı coastline. Jumping off at our stop, we headed to our Panisyon to check in. Our room here was very much a room with a bed, but it had air conditioning and after a hot day of travel that was all we needed.

A brief unpacking later, we headed down to the beach excited to catch the last of the sun's rays and enjoyed the warm waters as we watched the sun set, its golden and pink rays lighting up the towering Mount Olympos behind us. Floating in the water was the perfect ending to such a hectic day of travel.

Consulting Google Maps reviews, we found what appeared to be a hidden gem of a restaurant, farther down the path into the valley and headed off. However, we quickly began to wonder if we had become lost as the road was dark and we couldn't see where we were going. After watching others pass through a garden ahead of us, we followed them in to see the entire restaurant lit up with candles. We were curious as to what was going, but the owner of the restaurant, a wonderful woman who made us feel



Figure 32 - Sunset at the beach

greatly at home, explained that the area often struggled with power cuts, due to the infrastructure overtaking the supply of electricity. This only added to the ambience however and we helped ourselves to the freshly made local dishes under candle lit trees.



Figure 34 - Spiced tomato lamb paste stuffed inside roasted aubergine with courgette yoghurt and dill

Nearby, we heard a couple of local women sharing stories about their childhoods growing up in Türkiye and how their experiences differed with the opening up of access to the western markets. They were joined by some British tourists who debated the effects of Westernisation and the conversation and Raki were flowing. It was hard not to listen to the stories, and they provided an additional backstory to the village we were staying in.

We then returned to the hotel to check the weather for the next day.

This was crucial as we were planning on hiking down from Mount Olympus and the future weeks threatened stormy skies.



Figure 31 – Çıralı Junction with Mount Olympus in background

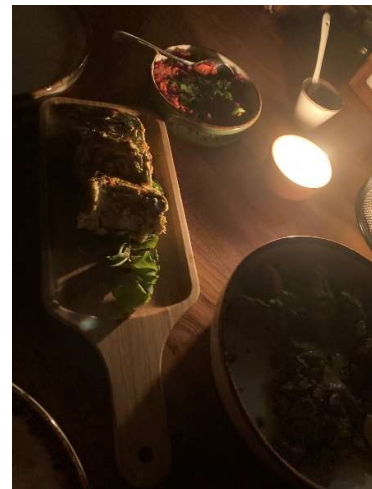


Figure 33 - Candlelight dinner

DAY 6: OLYMPOS AND CHIMAERA

The day began with some worrying news, storm clouds threatened to break for most of the morning and likely the rest of the day too. With this in mind, we walked the 1.5 kilometres down the pebble beach to the ancient city of Olympos. This was one of the best ruins we visited on our trip.

Being buried under the silt filled moor filled by the meandering stream sourced by mountain springs had left the town in impeccably good condition. Entire houses and streets remained mostly intact, with second and third floors clearly visibly from the empty beam post holes. You could wander down the streets with houses getting ever larger and more spacious as you walked the path to the palace and cathedral. Banks of stone showed how the stream had once been controlled and flowed peacefully through the town. Multiple baths, amphitheatres and temples boasted of the rich and wealthy inhabitants and had caused Cicero to describe it as a rich and highly decorated city. A city that



Figure 35 - Temple entrance

was also captured by a young Julius Caesar.

Walking through the palace leads you to the Roman temple façade that had been created for Emperor Hadrian's visit. This wealth and power could be felt even



Figure 37 - Streets in Olympos

our time to enjoy one of the best beaches we had visited, lapping up the summer sun.

Before sunrise, we headed off to Chimaera, walking the hour to the base of the hill where the fires burned. This

in death, as the necropolis boasted several huge mausoleums. You could feel the echoes of the people who had once lived here, the mill where the daily bread could be bought, the baths for poor or wealthy and worn-down stone paths. Clambering through the bush, you could find ruins of more houses buried under thick bushes and trees in a rather more dilapidated state.

Returning to the beach, we could see Mount Olympus shrouded in thick cloud and decided to save our strength for the climb to the Chimaera fires later. We utilised



Figure 36 - Ancient duck found on wall



Figure 38 - Mt. Olympos wreathed in cloud



Figure 39 - Chimaera fires

long path led us through the countryside and the shade of the hills kept us cool. Once we had made it to the base, we began the climb. Hurrying now, we realised we would have to be quick if we were to make it before sunset. The marked out 1,000 metre markers kept us going and we made it in time to watch the sun set behind the hills.

After taking in the atmosphere and sulphurous smell of the fires, we foolishly made the mistake of believing we could make it to the next set of fires that Google told us were not too far. However, as we began to climb, the hillside was quickly swept into darkness as

the evening progressed and despite climbing up the poorly marked and uncared for path for 20 minutes, we were no closer to the fires. Now, in almost darkness, we decided to make the wise decision to descend the hillside while we knew people were below us, rather than to continue on to possible further fires. Down we descended, our pace stalling as we slowly made our way down the treacherous path, strewn with fallen trees and steep falls. Happily, we made it back to the first set of fires, still filled with people roasting marshmallows and continued descending. After making it back to the base, we decided to walk the path back, which was eerily still, the only break in the silence came from the baying of goats and the barking of guard dogs. A stark contrast to when we returned to the tourist section of the town, brightly lit up with fluorescent lights.

However, we decided to return to the restaurant from the day before and chatted more with the hostess. We trialled our broken Turkish to order us two small Rakis, and she amused us with her attempts to correct us here and there. After a delicious meal, finished with amazing pistachio baklava spirals, we headed back to pack.



Figure 40 - Sunset witnessed before further ascent



Figure 41 - Back at our new favourite restaurant

DAY 7: GELEMIS TO NICOSIA

Our day relied on catching numerous dolmuş, to the airport, trusting that the Turkish transport system would get us there on time. We managed to grab a dolmuş back onto the motorway junction where we were just in time to jump onto a filled coach unloading other tourists onto the side of the motorway. Thankful for the surprisingly smooth transition, it provided us with the time to spend a few hours exploring Antalya.

Not having any small enough change in Lira, the ticket machine wouldn't accept our money (it required notes smaller than 100 Lira). Struggling to buy a ticket on the tube, we were helped by kind people



Figure 43 - More views

who helped us get onto the right tram, paying for us themselves.

Underestimating the size of Antalya, we got off at the wrong stop and ended up in the middle of the city, surrounded by locals busy going to work. With our extra time on our hands, we used this to explore what a large Turkish city looks like away from the tourist-centred sites.

The streets appeared to stretch on miles and the corner of each large block usually had a different restaurant or shop selling hot food. After crossing numerous large and busy junctions, we found one a place to stop for lunch and enjoyed eating our first Iskender kebab. The sheer quantity of yoghurt was overwhelming and after filling our stomachs, we headed off to

another tram stop.

Again, we struggled at the machine, but seeing us struggling again, people stopped and helped us paying for the ticket themselves and again refusing our offers of payment. They led us to the correct stop and told us how many to stops to wait and wished us good luck on our travels.

Pulling into the airport, we hurried to our gate and sat there, anticipating what Northern Cyprus would be like.

Due to regulations between phone companies, neither of our phones would provide roaming data, calls or texts in Northern Cyprus, so we prepared as much as we could before lift-off. This would be another rather interesting perspective from the trip, having to use paper copies of maps or signing with our hands to communicate, it was rather different than having the internet as a crutch.

On board seemed to be a group of young men travelling together either for sports or as some team. Andrew got chatting to one of the men sat next to us. Although expected, it was still



Figure 42 - Views from exploring Antalya

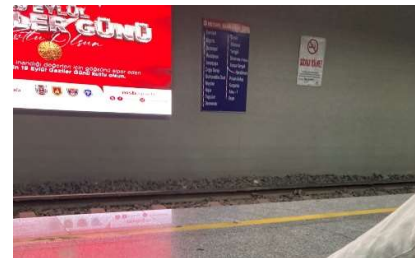


Figure 44 - Number of stops till Airport

strange to be one of the few non-Turkish people on board the flight, and we enjoyed the free snack for dinner during the very brief 45-minute flight.

Arriving at the airport, we found a dolmuş heading into the city and jumped aboard it. We started chatting to a Turkish student our age, who was living here for university and asked him about where we should go in Nicosia. Getting to our hotel was a trial, however. With no live Google Maps or google translate, we struggled to explain where we were going to the driver who spoke no English. After thinking we wanted him to head to Southern Nicosia or to somewhere else, he just nodded and began driving. It was quite scary as there were only 2 other men onboard, and when we asked where we headed, they just repeated, 'We're taking you to sleep' and laughed, while we headed now back out of the city. Thankfully, after these men were dropped off, the driver headed back into the city dropping us off near our hotel and then left, shaking his head, and laughing.

Deciding to explore the city in the morning, we unpacked quickly and went to bed.

DAY 8: NICOSIA AND GIRNE

Waking up and enjoying the free breakfast from the hotel, we decided to explore Nicosia before heading to Girne or Kyrenia. We had primarily bought water for this trip as this seemed to be what everyone else did, but we asked the hotel staff if this was the case in Cyprus too. He quickly agreed saying that no-one drinks the tap water as it is not safe or clean enough to drink. With this knowledge in hand, we filled up from the water cooler and headed out.

Luckily, we had started right in the centre, so we explored the mosques and crumbling Armenian monastery, as we walked parallel to the wall dividing Nicosia. The checkpoint of which was surprisingly close, just off the main market. Peering through what looked to all other purposes like a barn with multiple armed forces we could see through to the other side. After reading online although possible to cross over and back, we decided it was reasonable not to: due to it technically being an illegal



Figure 45 - Exploring Nicosia



Figure 46 - Armenian Monastery

entry and some reviews saying that it can lead to difficulties. We therefore travelled around the sights in the centre, where the whirling Dervishes perform, and visited the Büyük Han; the largest 'travelling Inn' on Northern Cyprus.

Then travelling to Girne or Kyrenia, we passed through the famous 5 finger mountain range. The dolmuş picked up another traveller, who had been hiking down from one of the Venetian Castles we had intended to visit. However, speaking to him he warned us that the only way to get up and down is via taxi as there was a military base halfway up the hike and you were not permitted to hike

up on foot. Taking this on board, we decided to go to the Kyrenia castle.

Dumping our luggage off in the ticket office, we explored the huge coastal fortress. The pivotal location of this port town meant that with every conquest of this town the castle had been upgraded too, from Roman to British control. Huge



Figure 47 - Büyük Han



Figure 48 - Ancient ship

bastions, metres thick, encircled a square courtyard with huge rooms for garrisons and royal quarters. Inside the shipwreck museum in the courtyard, lay an ancient ship that had been raised from the bottom of the sea. It was over 2,000 years old and had seen around 80 years of use when it sank. Ancient olive piths found aboard were used to identify this via carbon-dating. They also found the remnants of crockery pots the crew had used to eat their final meals, with pots and spoons and a communal cooking pot.

Most disturbingly, you could explore deep into the dungeons using only a flashlight; these had been used to torture and kill rebellion leaders from all eras. There was a disturbing tale where, when the king left on campaign, his pregnant concubine was locked in the dungeons by the queen. The queen then tortured and starved the concubine until word reached the king who ordered her to stop. To think of how many people's fates had been ended in these dungeons was terrifying.

Leaving here, we then found a taxi to take us to Bellapais monastery, renowned for its stunning views and tumultuous history of being raided and used, at one point the only sanctioned church on Cyprus under the Ottomans. Taking in the stunning views, we decided to walk back into Kyrenia which was a long walk, but coming down from the mountains afforded a staggering view of the sunset lighting up the Mediterranean Sea.

We followed this up by trying a form of Turkish dumpling called Manti,



Figure 50 - View from the top of the hill

covered in spicy yoghurt, which was delicious and surprisingly filling. Using the hotel's pool, we cooled off in the evening as the temperature only fell to a minimum of 27°C.



Figure 49 - Bellapais monastery

DAY 9: FAMAGUSTA

Originally, we thought getting to Famagusta would be simple, as the dolmuş system in Türkiye had been surprisingly efficient. However, we soon realised that this was not so much the case in North Cyprus. The dolmuş we could see were either going to neighbouring towns a 30-minute drive away or back to the Capital – not so helpful for travelling 60 miles southeast.

Acknowledging this, we set off back to Nicosia, hoping to find a dolmuş heading to Famagusta.

After asking an old lady at the dolmuş stop, she instructed us



Figure 53 - Amphitheatre at Salamis

that they travelled along that road and to follow it and we might catch one. Fortunately, after waiting 20 minutes in the heat, we saw one and ran to flag it down. Slowly, trundling along one of the few main roads through Cyprus, we noted how flat the land was and how it was mostly grass-growing farmland. Arriving in Famagusta, we attempted to head to the ancient town of Salamis which had once been a stronghold of Cyprus, before being destroyed by pirates and earthquakes.



Figure 51 – Landscape of Northern Cyprus

After hopping into a taxi, we arrived at the ancient town. Passing huge baths, an amphitheatre that would have held over 15,000 spectators and a gymnasium that had its own baths with mosaics still intact on the curved roofs. Heading deeper into the town, we followed one of the ancient, still paved roads towards the city centre. Here, we found huge forums with ancient cisterns and cathedrals. The scale of this town must have been enormous, the forum itself was over a hundred metres long and would have been the



Figure 55 - Outer view of the baths

lifeforce of the town. Passing through the overgrown wilderness, doorways and furnaces could be seen poking out, hidden villas waiting to be rediscovered.



Figure 54 - Mosaics at baths

Through a mix of taxi and walking we then travelled to the old town of Famagusta. The ancient town was protected by enormous bastions, an average of 30 feet thick, packed with solid earth and brick. Entering the inner sanctum, you could observe crumbling ruins of churches and houses, a yellow post box and a STOP sign marking the British rule, with modern houses straddling this mix. Right in the centre of the town, locals seemed to enter and leave as if there were no difference to the rest of the town, bar the narrowed roads.



Figure 56 - Bastions at Famagusta

Heading back, we managed to make into Nicosia in time to grab the final bus back to Girne or Kyrenia, a stressful situation involving running across half of Nicosia to avoid paying for an extortionate taxi.

DAY 10: EXPLORING THE TOWN

Following the stressful day of travel, we decided to have a more relaxed day exploring the rest of Kyrenia. After heading to the seafront in search of museums, we sadly found that they seemed to be mostly closed. We then wandered the streets trialling different sweet and food shops before trying to find an early Christian settlement about which we had heard.



Figure 58 - Market place

Trying to get there led us to a closed off military camp, with big signs warning us about the armed forces there. These military zones seemed to be everywhere and ran along almost every major road that wasn't farmland.

We then set to planning out our time in Istanbul, on account of our limited time and the vast quantity of places we wanted to see. We wisely did so over a cup of Kahve in a quiet market square out of the sun's reach.



Figure 57 - Turkish coffee

DAY 11: TRAVELLING TO ISTANBUL

Having booked an official coach to the airport the journey to Ercan airport was much less stressful. The airport itself was almost completely empty despite its huge size, and we spent the excess time we had sat wandering the huge empty halls,



Figure 60 - Arriving in Istanbul

due to our early start from to not trusting the buses.

We set off on our flight, arriving early and hoping to head straight into Istanbul. However, our bags were delayed upon arrival, the bus was late and it had set us down further from the hotel than expected. So, after

wandering through Istanbul on foot, discovering how surprisingly hilly Istanbul is, we didn't make it to our hotel till late. This meant our exploring time was restricted to

wandering the main open-air sites at night. I was surprised that the Hagia Sofya wasn't lit up as much as the Blue Mosque, but hearing the evening call to prayers through the courtyard was something else.

We then headed to one of the restaurants I was most excited about, the old 1920s Koftecisi selling traditional kofte. The walls were covered in the thankful, celebratory reviews from food critics who had come to visit over the last century. The food was amazing, and the atmosphere was packed with people here for a quick bite before heading back out.



Figure 62 - Hagia Sofya

We strolled along the hippodrome taking in the sites at night before heading back to the hotel.

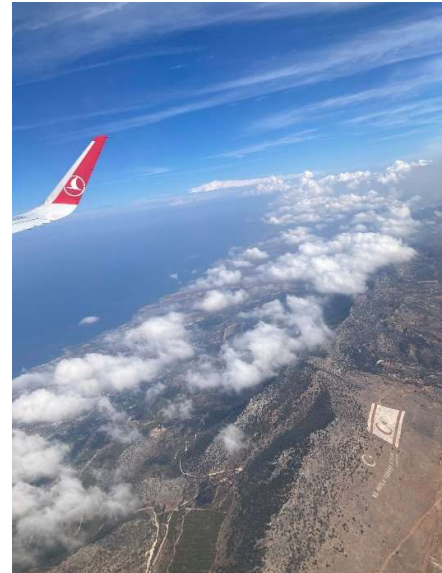


Figure 59 - Leaving North Cyprus



Figure 61 - Traditional kofte

DAY 12: TOPKAPI PALACE

We began our day early to ensure we fitted in as many activities as possible and rushed over to the Blue Mosque after morning prayers had finished. I was at once in awe at the grandeur and size of the mosque, its repeating blue and red patterns decorating the entire



Figure 64 - From the courtyard

building. The sight of the huge pillars was majestic, and people were using them to bless their injured limbs and to say prayers.

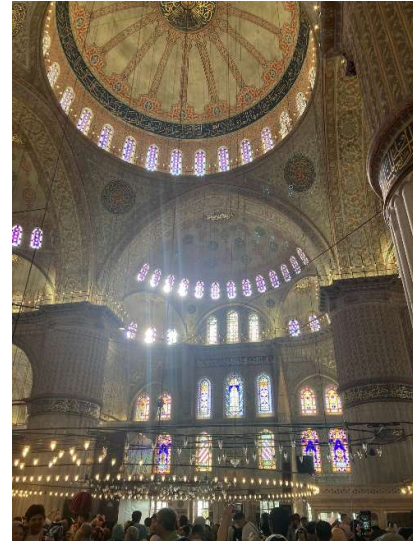


Figure 63 - Blue Mosque

I greatly enjoyed this time to reflect on everything I had seen and how fortunate I had been to be able to experience such amazing sights and people. Watching others walk in and out while we sat in the courtyard, I was happy to experience what so many others had seen and was grateful for my time here. Reflecting on the history of this bustling square, I sat and thought about how much this mosque had seen.



Figure 65 - Different highlights from within the Palace

From here, we left to visit Topkapi Palace. While here, we spent many hours as the grounds were enormous and the palace itself intricately spiralled in on itself, with winding corridors and hallways leading you ever on. The different hierarchies were very interesting to learn about, with different baths in different quarters as well as the heights of beds in the shared sleeping quarters. Gold was splashed on almost every surface when visiting the royal quarters, with different summer houses in the courtyards designed by different sultans.

I was particularly in awe of the size of the royal kitchens, stretching on alongside the walls. An entire huge room for sweet making alone, highlighted the importance of sugary desserts. For example, the legend behind the creation of Tavukgöğsü, a sweet chicken and milk dessert, when a Sultan demanded something sweet in the middle of the night.

The sheer quantity of relics and jewels in the palace was remarkable, though sadly the library was much smaller than I was expecting. The view across the Golden Horn, with huge storm clouds brewing built an atmosphere of a palace that had seen much.



Figure 66 - Different jewellery

Venturing into the Hagia Irene, the oldest known church structure in Istanbul, sparked a conversation about the history of churches being used with alternative purposes in Türkiye.



Figure 67 - Hagia Irene

Here, the Hagia Irene had never been converted from a Byzantine church to a mosque as it was instead used as a weapons storage area. Likewise, we had spotted numerous Greek Orthodox churches now being used as museums, tourist centres and mosques. Interested, we decided that when we went to visit the Theodosian walls the next day we should try to find the Greek Orthodox patriarchate.

Having lunch in a nearby restaurant, we chatted to the restaurant owners about their time in Turkey, as one of them had only recently moved from India to live in Turkey. Speaking about their time moving here, they said they had enjoyed the past 5 years and were hoping to open another shop in the future.



Figure 68 - A tomb depicting a battle with Alexander the Great and the tomb owner

We then left to visit the Archaeological Museum nearby as we had heard incredible reviews of it. Perusing the main aisles, we learnt about how there a push had been made to uncover archaeological artefacts in the 1930s to increase national pride. This led to remarkable new artefacts being found, which we observed in the museum. Sadly, we tried to visit the other buildings of the museum, ones which held

objects such as the chain that had crossed the Golden Horn but found they had been all closed for renovation.

Using this new extra time, we set out to explore the Grand Bazaar and its different sections. In the warren-like tunnels, we turned back on ourselves multiple times, but managed to successfully haggle in Turkish which we found had a remarkable effect on decreasing prices.

We then entered the nearby Nuruosmaniye Mosque for a time of reflection after the busy day.

Leaving here, we went to find a restaurant not far from the Sultanahmet Square. This led to the scariest experience I personally had on the trip. Being in a busy square, Andrew left to fetch some money from the hotel only a 3-minute walk away. I stayed alone, as the sun was only beginning to set, and tourists were still walking the streets. Waiting alone, I paced the street in an attempt to look busy, however various people asked me if I was lost. Attempting to not look as vulnerable, I walked back to the brighter lit streets but noticed that a man on a motorbike had begun to follow me, I stopped, believing it was only my imagination. But then he began to drive very slowly up and down the street, multiple times, before stopping before me and walking towards me. At this point, I had no intention of believing staying outside in a well-lit street was safe and decided to hide next to the doorman of some fancy hotel. To this, the man slowed but still stood watching me. He then went back to his motorbike and stood there. Luckily, Andrew had now seen my texts and was headed back towards me, so I was able to slip past and make my escape away to him. This was a stark reminder that although I was fully covered in a jumper and long skirt, being alone as a woman on the streets at night is not always a risk to take.



Figure 69 - Grand bazaar

DAY 13: TRAVELLING OUT OF THE CENTRE

On our final full day, we purchased an Istanbul metro card, so that we would be able to make it to the outer walls and have a smoother and cheaper journey to the airport the next day.



Figure 70 - Istanbul in the Storm

We then began the walk to the Theodosian walls, believing that walking away from the tourist centre and finding smaller streets would provide a different perspective of the bustling city. That led to us being caught out in the street during a sudden thunderstorm. Thankfully, making it under a covered street, we watched as the rain began crashing down, with lightning flashing and the dark skies rumbling.

After 30 minutes of this, we decided to risk the rain to make it to the Fatih Mosque. This was another huge mosque that towered over the skyline and was surrounded by large courtyards. This added to the feeling of no longer

being in a busy metropolis but instead some peaceful retreat.

Descending the hill, back to the river, passing the ancient aqueduct Valens, we headed to the Greek Orthodox patriarchate. This was the first active church we had come across and also the first Greek Orthodox church I

had ever been to.



Figure 71 - Valens Aqueduct

However, after leaving here, we found a small local café to have lunch in before continuing onwards to the walls, observing a local fish seller wheeling his wares surrounded by a throng of cats. We then explored the wall museum, where the surviving Byzantine building, once one of the larger palaces, had gone through many different histories, as a pottery house, a brothel and a Jewish refuge point.



Figure 72 - Fish seller

We then exited the walls and walked a bit past them, to see whether the houses became less close together and to see the roads become much wider.

It was along this walk that we also found the gate house, where the gate had supposedly been left open, which led to the end of the siege.

Heading back using the bus and tram system, we made it before sunset to walk through some of the streets to hunt down one of the final items on my bucket list, a dessert shop.



Figure 73 - Our yummy desserts

Here, we enjoyed dense and rich baklavas as well as a delicious ganache cake. The experience was really enjoyable, and we returned to the hotel sated and slightly overly full.

DAY 14: SAYING GOODBYE

Before leaving, we headed to the Binbirdirek cistern to see if it was open. Sadly, it was shut, so we headed to the Basilica Cistern instead stomaching the higher prices as it was one of the few open and we desperately wanted to experience the labyrinthine underworld that lurks beneath Istanbul, which it was, with its towering pillars and watery floor extending onwards. It seemed like another world, deathly quiet compared to the already brimming world above. The roof above was covered in holes, and after enquiring about them, we discovered that locals used them for hundreds of years as well openings into the cistern. This was despite the knowledge of the cistern becoming forgotten over time as the Ottomans moved away from still water.

Leaving here, we ran back to grab our bags and jump on the underground to the Airport. This was a long journey in one direction and over an hour went by while we just sat in the carriage. Finally, we made it to the airport and sat waiting for our plane.

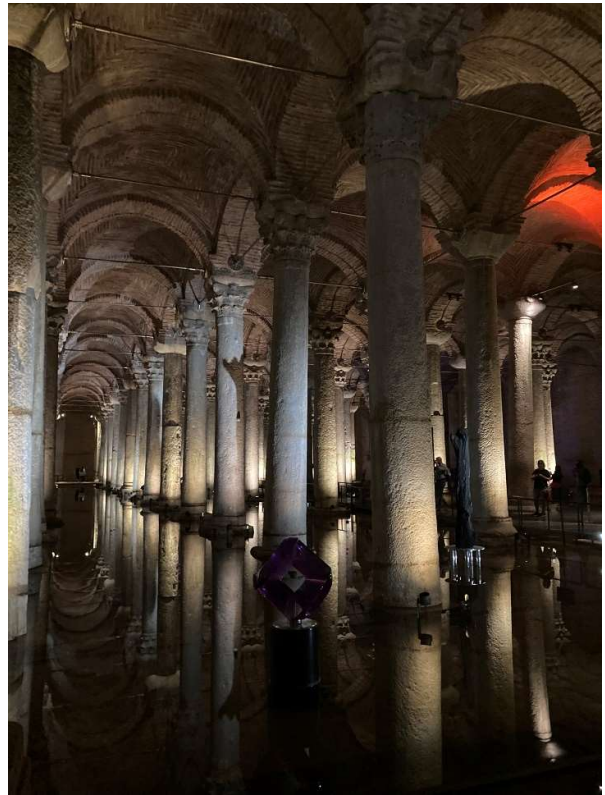


Figure 74 - Basilica Cistern

Perhaps due to the military action occurring in Lebanon or otherwise, our gate was changed



Figure 75 - Basilica Cistern

twice with additional swabbing and detection procedures at all these gates. But then it was time to set off, and before we knew it, we were landing back into the UK. I headed off to grab a coach to Swindon, while Andrew took a train to Newcastle.

Looking back on our journey, we had seen and done so much and had met some wonderful people. My takeaway being that most meaningful interactions had occurred over food and that sharing food is a language in itself. I'll always fondly remember my time in Türkiye and how kind the people were, willing to stop and spend their time helping you. Such generosity inspired me, and if I could choose one thing to bring back home to the UK, it would be that.