



FOOTSTEPS OF PAUL TOUR

JUNE, 2015

Athens
Corinth
Delphi
Thessaloniki
Philippi
Troy
Colossae
Revelation Cities
Istanbul



I did so much preparation for this trip, yet once I got on the plane, I felt so unprepared! This should pass. I actually spent the entire week between school and this trip studying, though that studying was really light on St. Paul, the Apostle (the stated purpose of this trip). I mostly studied our route, the hotels, and the sites we would be visiting. Looking at the itinerary, Paul might only figure into the trip about half the time, since it's hard to connect all the Paul stuff and miss anything else of historic importance on the way. There are so many layers of history with what we will be seeing and Paul is but one layer! I'll let the tour guide and Pastor John concentrate on the Paul aspects of this trip and I will concentrate on the historical stuff: Greece, Turkey, Alexander the Great, Rome and Suleiman the Magnificent. My goal is to make the stones speak – to provide meaning of all the “rubble” we will see on a daily basis. My fear is that the group will get into “rubble overload,” since in most cases; we'll be looking at the historic remains of Greek sites, which are approximately 2500 years old. To combat some of this overload, I gave out site descriptions, maps and site reconstructions of every place we will visit to the group so they could orient themselves and see what the city would have looked like at its peak, usually before or during the time of St. Paul.



Money and books for the trip

6/14 – Jeffrey had come to California a few days early so he could leave with us from SFO. He mostly played video games with his friends while he was here. On Sunday, he and I played in the church band. An hour after church was over, we were on the way to the airport. We carpooled with Ray, who will join us on this trip, but not today. My family was going to Greece via Turkey a day early so I could see some sites not on the trip itinerary. I am a history teacher after all, and Athens has some major history that figures into my 10th grade curriculum. I wanted to concentrate on pure Greek (Athenian) history on our one additional day.

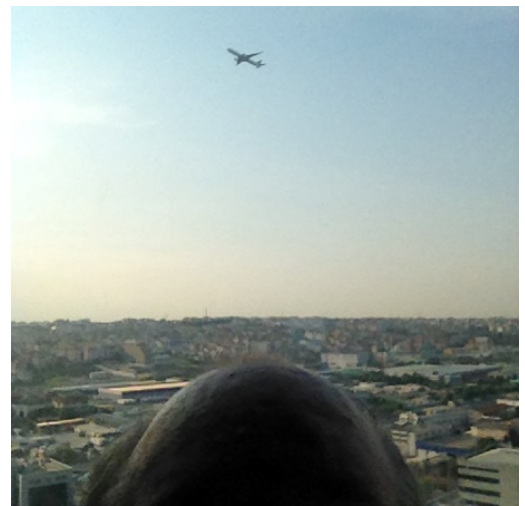
Boarding on this Air France flight to Paris was much more of a massive rush to the gate than anything organized. I had seen the Germans do this on Lufthansa last time I went to Europe and it struck me as strange that the Germans would do this since they liked lines as much as Americans did. With the French, I was less surprised. Some research has been done in the last few years about the best way to get on a plane, and it turns out that this massive rush is the fastest, most efficient way to do it by far. Who knew? Anyway, somehow we got in the family line (hey, we're a family), so we got on first even though none of our kids were under whatever age limit they were proposing. With the crowds the way they were, if we had gotten out of this line, we would have been last on the plane.

The plane was thoroughly modern with on-demand movies, three external plane cameras for us to view during the flight and a USB charger for every seat. And since this was Air France, we were given champagne soon after boarding and a fine meal paired with a fine French wine. To pass the time, I watched, *Kingsmen*, *John Wick*, *The Hobbit* and parts of *Avatar* and *Dirty Dancing*. The 10.5 hour flight went quickly and comfortably. We were surrounded by an EF tour group of kids going to Istanbul like us, so there was a lot of youthful exuberance all around.

Alas, when we got to CDG (Paris), there was an airport worker's strike. It took us 30 minutes to deplane because there were no jetway operators and by that time, our next flight was boarding. It took us a while to get from the M wing to the L wing of this airport via tram and when we got there, we had to go through security again. The line was very long. Fortunately, they put all the Istanbul people in a special line, and yet, this whole episode was still very messy and time-consuming. None of us had planned on going through security again so I had water in my bag and Courtney had packed all the things she didn't eat on the plane. The yogurt she had packed was now all over her pack and the security guard checking her bag was not happy (neither was I – who puts a half-eaten yogurt with an open container in a backpack?). Security was also very slow and very thorough in inspecting all our bags. By the time we got through security, the plane should have already taken off. Fortunately for us, the plane was not going to leave without that EF tour group of 30 or so kids and they were behind us. It took us, and the EF group, a while to get to the gate because it was the last gate in this terminal, and more than half a mile away. I was so sweaty by the time I got there and my foot really ached. (I should mention at this point that I got a bad case of plantar fasciitis about a month before this trip and I'm still in a great deal of pain. The doctor says that I should stay off of my right foot as much as possible – ya, right. He also gave me something stronger than Advil for the trip. It's mostly an anti-inflammatory and not so much a pain killer. I will try to keep the foot pain commentary to a minimum, because no one wants to read about foot pain.)

This second flight definitely had a domestic feel to it – tight seat pitch and no entertainment. It was a 3.5 hour cattle car ride to Istanbul.

When we arrived in Istanbul, Courtney kept hiding her passport, which we needed often. She was also now missing all her liquids (thanks to the Paris security check?) so she had no toothpaste, facial scrub or rubbing alcohol. It looks like we'll do some shopping in Athens or Corinth tomorrow to get these supplies (not tonight, we still have a flight to Athens tomorrow). Her backpack is also a mess (so is Jeff's). Neither chose to use packing squares or some sort of packing, folding or rolling method. They seem to be using



A dome in Istanbul

the “stuff” method. My fear is that some gate agent or security guard will now think that their bags are too big or heavy and then we’ll have to pay stowed luggage fees. I must admit that I got mad at Courtney a couple of times today because she just isn’t thinking like an international traveler and it’s costing us time. Part of this is inexperience, but darn it, she attended the packing classes and she’s been on numerous trips with me before; this should not be new for her! Anyway, back to Istanbul – when we got off the plane, the first thing that greeted us was a mile-long corridor with uphill ramps. My foot was already sore from Paris (and I was in agonizing pain the entire flight to Istanbul). Now I was hobbling. The line for passport control also seemed like it was more than a mile long, though neatly wrapped in serpentine fashion to hide the fact. When we finally got out of the airport, we had a choice of waiting 40 minutes for the hotel shuttle bus or grabbing a cab. We chose the latter. Our cab driver was awesome, weaving in and out of rush hour traffic as he did. Our hotel was pretty decent – not super high-end, but the hotel staff was friendly and they comp’d us a second room because our “family suite” was not really meant for four, as hotels.com would have us believe. We got connecting rooms instead. They also fixed our stay here for when we come back in a month. Well, the sun is setting here in Istanbul, so it’s off to bed for us. No time for us to see anything around here. There’s not much to see in this neighborhood anyhow. Tomorrow early morning, we get to fly to Greece and begin our month of being tourists.

6/15 – Barbara found Courtney’s liquids deep inside her backpack while cleaning out the yogurt, so yeah! I was up at 2:30 so I watched the rest of our team take off from SFO via the internet. It seemed strange to me that I would go back to sleep a while longer, wake up and take a flight to Greece, and spend a full day in Athens all before they landed.

I was so anxious to start my day that I got up at three. My family was packed and downstairs by 4:30. The hotel gave us bag breakfasts which were delicious (baguette sandwiches!). The shuttle took us to the airport. We had abundant time because the two security checks didn’t have lines at 5AM so we chilled at the Starbucks and window shopped. Courtney got a cute picture of her and a shop owner both wearing fezzes. The Turkish Airlines flight was awesome. I watched *Hercules*, so I felt very “Greek” by the time we landed. Passport control took 30 minutes. We deposited our bags at the bag storage place near baggage claim and got on the Metro. I fully expected to pay a lot for long distance and local tickets for each of us, but the gate lady said that with three combo tickets (at half the price!) we’d be good for the day. You see, no one seems to check these tickets and there are no turnstiles. You’re basically on the honor system and so long as you have a validated ticket of some type, you’re good to go (this worked too!).



Zeus (or Poseidon)

Our first stop was to the National History Museum. The Metro stop was a fair distance to this place so we walked through a rather nice and somewhat work-a-day neighborhood to get there. It’s a good thing I knew where this place was – there was no signage anywhere.

The museum was truly filled with Greece’s best stuff. I was hoping for even more than we saw, but it was definitely impressive. I recognized many items from my textbooks. I suspect that the rest of Greece’s cultural gems are to be found at the new Acropolis Museum downtown.

Again, the walk from the museum was almost as fun as the museum itself (we took a different route back): very culturally interesting and not frequented by tourists so far as I could tell.

We opted to skip museum #2, the Acropolis Museum, because the line was very long and it was not under shade on this 105 degree day. We moved on to see the theater and the Odeon. Up on a nearby hill was the Pnyx – the place where democracy began. This is also not a well-touristed area, so we



Me on the Pnyx shooting a video for class

were mostly alone with a spectacular view of the city. I took the opportunity to create a class video there, since I teach Ancient Greece in school. It was fun to do on-site, but I had to wait for some German tourists to move, or at least stop talking over my videos, since they only moved to shade about 20 feet away and then decided to picnic. Down the hill, we could see the place where ceramics began... but we couldn't find it in the tangle of streets once we got down there, so we gave up and found a café. Our crepes and frappes were excellent. The café was nice too because it sprayed mist on us, which sure knocked down that 105 degree temperature.

We next went to the Library of Hadrian. My family was more in a shopping mood. They shopped; I took pictures. When we stumbled on the brand new, just-opened Hard Rock Café, I also shopped. I got a shirt. Down the street, Jeffrey got some Greek Urn replicas. Courtney bought a hat (and named it Phillip). Barbara also bought a hat and a selfie-stick. The next stop, The Tower of the Winds, was under canvas because it was being restored (darn it!). We bypassed the ancient Agora/Forum because we were tired, and because there was a chance we'd be seeing it tomorrow anyway. It was almost time to meet up with our tour bus, so we headed to our rendezvous – a hotel with easy bus access. By the time we got to that hotel, we had almost completely circled the Acropolis. It's a truly impressive hunk of rock. We'll go up to see it tomorrow on the tour.

All day today, we've been seeing a ton of graffiti. I guess this is what the youth of Athens are doing in their free time, since most don't have jobs. Graffiti also lines the railways; you can see it on the sides of buildings, near monuments, along the highways. Graffiti seems to be a bigger thing in Europe than in America, judging by my past trips, but I've never seen this much density before. There must be a lot of unrest (and there is!). A lot of the work is amazing – art even – but it's also so pervasive that it's sort of an eye-sore.



Graffiti on the Agora walls

We had ice cream while we waited for the bus, and then it arrived and we got on board. The tour company wanted us to leave Athens early just in case there was traffic on the way to the airport. There wasn't, so we got to the airport an hour early. It also took our group an hour to get through security, so we had plenty of time on our hands (to see the



airport? It's pretty small by international standards). We got our luggage out of that storage place, put it on the bus, and then talked with our bus driver, Dimitri, and our transfer agent, Christos, for a very long time. Dimitri would be our bus driver in Greece, but our tour guide, Andy (female), would not show up until tomorrow morning at our Corinthian hotel. Once our group arrived, we all got on the bus and took a 1.5 hour ride to the resort in Loutraki along the Ionian Sea near Corinth. Beautiful Resort! The rooms were dolled-

out; we dropped our bags in our rooms, and headed to an outstanding buffet near the hotel's casino. After that fine dinner, Barb and I went out to the beach with all the kids so we could touch the Ionian Sea. It was a beautiful evening and the grounds of this resort are simply stunning. The beach was not well-lit like the hotel grounds were, so we used our iPhones to light the way. All the kids got sand everywhere (OK, not really kids, since the range is from 14-24), so Barbara had them rinse off at the convenient beachside shower before going back to the resort. We called it a night after that because it was 11PM.



The kids rinse off at the beach

6/16 – I was definitely up before my alarm, so I got up to take some early morning photos of this amazing hotel. I wasn't



Our hotel on the Ionian Sea... with Morgan also taking pictures

the only one out either – several of my travel partners were out shooting photos as well. At 7:30, they opened up the breakfast buffet. It was hard to resist all that wonderful food. Eventually, the time came to meet Andy and get on the bus. Courtney was missing because she had gone to the bathroom but didn't tell anybody. When she got on the bus, we all clapped.

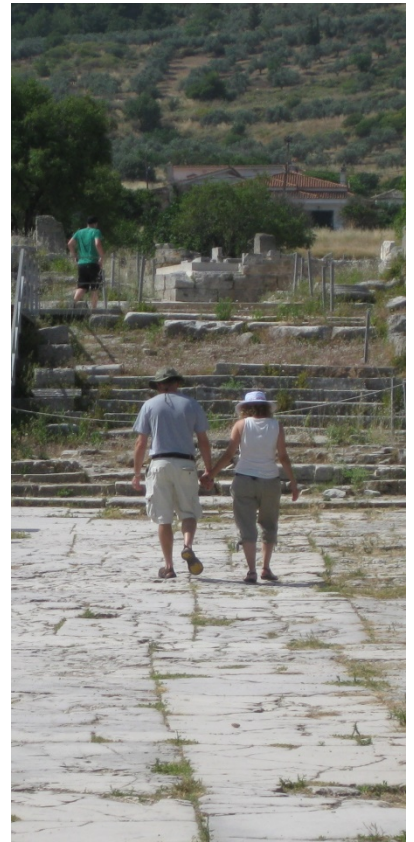
Our group was a little more alert this morning, so they had a chance to fully realize how tricky it is to drive a bus around here. Dimitri is amazing.

When we got to Corinth, our first stop, it was already hot. We toured from shade



Our first "Footstep of Paul"

tree to shade tree. The complex at Corinth was huge - far larger than we had thought. There was plenty to see around here. Our highlight was where we had our first "St. Paul" moment. We knew from reading our Bible that Paul had stood at a pillar by the Bema (a raised platform or rock formation from which government leaders speak in an official capacity) when addressing the town's governor. That pillar was still there, as was the Bema, so we had our first literal "Footstep of Paul" moment. We also knew that Paul, Pricilla and Aquila had a tent shop in the nearby Agora. As we walked along that Agora, we just knew that one of the still mostly existing stalls had once been theirs. It was also sweet to see our Pastor and wife (John & Paula) holding hands as they strolled along the Agora shops. It was really cute.



I was hoping that the tour would include the Acrocorinth (the Greek stuff on top of the massive hill), but no luck. Our tour guide, Andy, is incredibly knowledgeable. Our group was really impressed with her. She helped us understand this



The Acrocorinth as seen from the temple of Apollo in lower Corinth

site on so many levels (biblical, historical, commercial). The little museum that accompanied the site was also quite nice at the end of the tour. It featured headless body statues. In the old days, if you wanted your statue done quickly, they did your face and plopped it on an appropriate body. This would cut down on costs, for those who did not want to pose for the full body. It was also there that I did a little tour-guiding of my own, since I knew a lot about the Greek statues,

mosaics and pottery that were there. The group slowly assembled under a big shade tree near the entrance, along with several napping dogs, and then we got on the bus (which Dimitri had cooled down – thanks Dimitri!). I believe the high for today is supposed to be 106. It already feels like it!



Courtney & Renée wait in the shade



Our next stop was to a ~~tourist-trap~~ authentic ceramic shop. They explained to us how they made the ceramics. I wasn't going to buy anything, but I found a piece that I really liked and simply had to have (I wonder if I can get a teacher tax deduction for this?). Unfortunately, this purchase wiped-out our supply of Euros because the place doesn't take credit cards for "small" purchases. I'll need to get to an ATM soon. We learned in this place that "Delphi," a site we would visit tomorrow, meant "dolphin" and there was a standard dolphin design for that city. Most city states had their own design. I chose an Athenian design. The Hacketts loved the dolphins. We also learned that "freestyle" pottery could be done in a day, but historic replicas took weeks to produce and were therefore more expensive.

We next stopped at a cheap lunch place near the Corinth Canal. This Canal was something that I wanted to see very much. Before the canal existed, people dragged ships across this four mile stretch of land to save time in getting around the rather dangerous Peloponnesian Peninsula. This is what made Corinth rich so very long ago. Nero had the idea to build the canal, but it was Napoleon who finally succeeded. Some of my tour buddies were afraid to get on the bridge across this canal, so I grabbed their cameras and took pictures for them. The water is so blue and beautiful! I wanted to dive off this bridge! (but alas, I had my mates' cameras, so I resisted the urge)



The Corinth Canal that separates the mainland from the Peloponnesian Peninsula

It took an hour to get to Athens from there. When we got off the bus for a brief peek at the Panathenaic Stadium (where the 1896, 1906 & 2004 Olympics took place in part, also, it's the only stadium made entirely out of marble), a local sign told us that it was "only" 102 degrees out. We took things really slow due to the heat. Not everyone had enough water. Andy put us into a shop between the bus and the Acropolis so people could use the bathroom and load up on liquids. As we went up towards the Acropolis, Andy told us the history of the Acropolis. I found her description to be very basic (especially after her



The Panathenaic Stadium

amazing analysis of Corinth this morning) and really not too helpful. I guess I was just anxious to get to the top of the hill. Still, her explanations were enough for most, and due to its 20 minute length, it did give us a break before climbing 600 feet up to the top of the Acropolis. Three in our group barely made it to the bottom of the Acropolis, so they stayed behind while the rest of us went up. I was not surprised, because it was hot out and this is the most “athletic” day of our trip. Still, I was concerned that if they couldn’t get to the base of the Acropolis, they may not be able to make it to other spots on our trip. I don’t want anyone to *not* have a great time!



There was a great deal that our guide did not tell us about the Acropolis site itself, since she concentrated exclusively on St. Paul in Athens, and, since there is no mention of him ever being on top of the Acropolis (though I’m sure he went up at some point), I guess she didn’t feel a need. She mostly talked about Mars Hill instead, which we could see as we climbed. Except for its tie to Paul, and its important function in ancient Greece as a meeting place, Mars Hill is nothing more than a slippery hunk of marble.

No one in our group seemed to care about knowing anything about the sites on the Acropolis (though I did offer to lead a mini-tour up here), so

they wandered, unenlightened, and I did my own thing. Andy stayed at the entrance with all the other tour guides. I must admit that I was mostly unimpressed with the Parthenon as presented to us, “the tourists”: there was very little in the way of signage or explanation and the biggest sites were roped off so you couldn’t get near them. Truthfully, I was more excited about seeing the Temple of Hera down the hill in the Agora because it was more complete, it didn’t have cranes everywhere, and you could touch it. I did like the Erechtheum, but the “exciting part” of it was under construction so we were pushed even further away than usual around the Caryatid Porch (the area you would actually want to see – those six female pillars). At the big Greek flag, there was a really nice view of the Temple of Zeus down below (Man, that place would have been massive, if only it had been completed!). If nothing else, the views of the city were pretty impressive from here – each house with its silver water heater on the roof making the whole city sparkle.

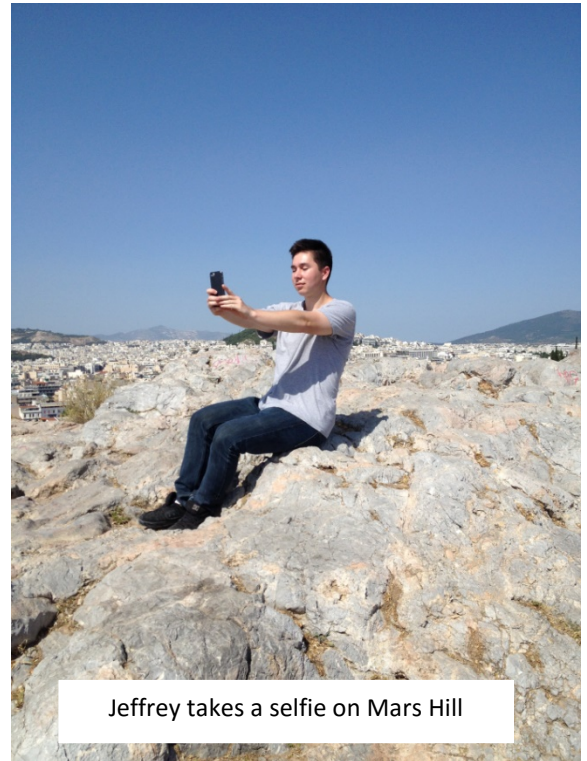


As close to the Erechtheum as we could get

Bernadette tried to take a selfie in front of the Parthenon and a secret police (no uniform) started yelling at her. Evidently, Greece doesn't allow people to take selfies in front of monuments, though taking a picture of the monument itself is fine. Earlier today, we tried to get a group shot with a Milpitas Post in front of the Temple of Apollo in Corinth but before we could gather all the people we were yelled at again. "Political" newspapers might also not be allowed (?).

After seeing the Acropolis, some of us went down to Mars Hill. It was mildly interesting, and very slippery. This was our second "Footstep of Paul" moment today, since we know from the Bible that he talked to the Aeropagus at this site. At the base of Mars Hill was a shop that sold ices (slurpees). This was more interesting to some than Mars Hill. It certainly cooled us down while we waited for everyone to gather. As I drank my slurpee, I sat with locals and their families who were also here to beat the heat.

We picked up the three who did not climb up the Acropolis on the way back to the bus. I thought we were going to the Agora next, but instead, we went to our hotel. I was a little perturbed about this because our brochure said that we would see the Agora. I had purposely not taken my family to the Agora yesterday because we were going to see it today. I was wrong. I mentioned this to Andy and she said that we never go to this place, which is why it says "see" rather than "visit" in the brochure. We had "seen" the Agora when Andy said "look, there's the Agora" as we were standing near the top of the Acropolis. I was very disappointed but there also wasn't a lot I could do about it. When we got to the hotel, Christos gave me a call to see if he could do anything about my misunderstanding. I told him I had now broken the code on the brochure ("see" versus "visit"), but I had wished it wasn't so vague. To me, if you're going to "see" something, it would be up close. I guess I'll have to see the Temple of Hera and the schools of Socrates and Plato next trip... whenever that is.



The meal at the hotel was very bland. The hotel was also very bland. Still, it had an awesome rooftop pool and bar, so it wasn't a total loss (Courtney & Jeffrey went swimming), and although the food was bland, the desserts were not – they were awesome. Barbara loved the "sweet bulgur" dessert. Having said that, none of our group liked this hotel. I told them that, based on my research, this was the worst hotel we would see on this trip (it was too). I guess the group expected a hotel more like the one we had yesterday, which was spectacular. The thing I didn't like about this hotel was its location. It was four miles away from the Acropolis, so no possibility of getting back to the Agora, there were no ATMs anywhere nearby, and it was a mile away from the ocean where the ancient site of the Piraeus was (Athens' ancient seaport for its navy). There was no way I was walking to the Piraeus in the dark, even though the hotel folks told us that it was possible. This hotel was in a dead zone on a busy street in the middle of hotels and apartment buildings. It was noisy and even the rooftop views were pretty blah.



Exciting TP in our bland hotel (it's a girl!)

6/17 – I got up too early. Breakfast was bland, but eating outdoors was nice.

Today would be our longest drive at seven hours total. We managed to get out of a very busy Athens and headed north. Almost immediately, things got much greener (and far less graffiti'd). We were in a forest of sorts with cave-filled craggy mountains. Our break stop at Livadia, just before climbing Mt. Parnassus, was excellent. I had a frappe. Along the way, we had learned that ancient "Koine" Greek is way different than Modern Greek and that Ancient Greek was required in school up until around 20 years ago. You still need to know Ancient Greek to get into law school today so aspiring lawyers now have a tutor. I guess when I teach Greek roots in school, I'm using Ancient Greek, not Modern Greek. Also, being a socialist country, education is free in Greece all the way through college, but you have to be smart to get into college. If you aren't smart, but you have money, you can still go to a private university.

It started to rain – hard. When we got to Delphi, it had let up a little bit so we went for it. The rain had cleared out all the tourists so we had the place mostly to ourselves. There is so much history here! If I had to pick one spot in Greece to visit, this would be it. We saw the important bits, and then many of us hiked up to the stadium, 2400 feet above the temple of Apollo. It was worth the hike. On the way down, we saw tour groups coming up. They were sometimes hard to navigate through. We got out of the ruins and went to the Archaeological Museum. It was a pretty good museum. The charioteer bronze and the omphalos (the "navel" of the world – since Delphi was considered the center of the world in ancient Greek times) were the two big attractions. Once we got out of the museum, it was lunchtime. Lunch at the Omphalos Restaurant was good. Among my appetizers was a deep-fried piece of cheese with a cheese crust. It was very good.



The path to the temple of Apollo at Delphi



The Stadium at Delphi



The Omphalos (navel)



For the next four hours, we drove down curvy roads, but not on the same bus. After two hours, Dimitri met up with another bus and driver. Tomorrow is Dimitri's day off because, by law, he can only drive so many days in a row. He headed back to Athens. The new bus was easy to spot because it had my name on it. For the next two hours, we went over a couple of mountains and across some spectacular fertile valleys where Gypsies worked the land (and in that valley we passed Thermopylae, where 300 Spartans died, but we did not stop there. Sigh...). Eventually, we got to our hotel for the evening; more like a Swiss

mountain chalet and monastery than a hotel. The place was wonderful and we even got our own balcony along with two other couples (really, we could jump over the low fence and go into each other's rooms. The sound of birds was everywhere. Downstairs, the pool was Olympic sized, but it was now cold and rainy, so no one went swimming. Dinner was excellent, so I can hardly wait for breakfast!

6/18 – I was up with the birds this morning at dawn. I thought for sure that Barb and I would be the first ones into the breakfast site but even our own kids beat us there! Man, what a spread! My favorite thing was this custard filled phyllo dough thing. So yummy! Truly awesome! Most of our group wants to stay here for a while. This hotel is awesome.

Awesome might also describe our day. We started our day by going to an icon workshop. We learned how icons were made while eating Greek Delight and sipping local wine and ouzo (I had both). I really wanted an icon of Paul as a memento of our trip and found one I really liked. Barbara found silver and gold jewelry, which set us back a bit, but it does look really good on her. She chose a "meander" pattern, which symbolizes eternity. The pattern comes from the Meander River in Ancient Greece, which we will visit later in Turkey (the Turkish coast was Ancient Greece). Jeffrey bought a beautiful silver icon and later, a cup that drains entirely if you put too much liquid into it. He says he's going to give it to one of his alcoholic friends. When we got on the bus, there was a raffle for more icons. Barb and I won one of those raffled icons, so now we have two!



The Icon Shop



As we traveled along, we had a couple of folks in our group who like to tell stories, and they spent a great deal of time trying to top each other's stories and factoids. It was entertaining, but some in our group simply wanted peace and quiet so they were quite happy when one of them fell asleep. Everyone seems sleepy. It was getting to be a long day.

Next stop was to the hanging monasteries of Meteora. I knew that this would be a highlight for many, myself included, because of the sheer beauty and uniqueness of the place and we were not disappointed. That and it's a James Bond site from "For Your Eyes Only." The stratification of the rocks and monasteries themselves were breathtaking. At first, we were taking pictures from afar, but then we got to go close to one of the monasteries, climbing up their staircases and getting right up to the door. We also got to see a more modern version of how the monks get up to these perches – one of the monasteries had an electric winch that pulled up a payload of rocks. In ancient times, it would have been a rope and a basket. There were many dogs and cats at this site: so many pictures that day included animals.



A "community dog" waits to be fed. These community pets are all over!



After the "smooth curves" (as Andy puts it) to the valley floor of Macedonia (Andy: the *real* Macedonia, not the "fake" country to the north who tried to steal away the heritage and greatness of Alexander the Great by naming their country Macedonia. The folks up north aren't even Greek!), we went to the town of Veringa for a special plate of lamb. It was indeed special. Everything else was wonderful as well. A little after lunch, I asked Andy if there was any way I could try some Retsina wine at one of these restaurants, because I had been advised to try some. Our server overheard this, got all puffed-up and handed me a free glass of the local white wine to try (an excellent Chablis type of wine). Pastor got a glass too. It turns out that Retsina wine was made in Athens and where we were in Macedonia is considered the Napa Valley of Greece. I offended our hosts, but hey, I got a free glass of really good wine out of it (and no Retsina).



Shrines to those who have died.

As we drove to Veria (Berea), we saw all kinds of shrines. This section of road must be very dangerous! We had seen these shrines all over Greece, but nowhere near as many as here. If you haven't guessed already, each shrine represents where someone has died on the road (memorial shrine), or barely survived (celebration shrine), but they were every few feet along this stretch of road. Survivors and loved ones would keep candles lit in these shrines and there would be mementos as well.

At Veria, we didn't get to see the tomb of Philip II (darn it! – this tomb of Alexander the Great's dad was a highlight of the region!), but we got to see sections of the Egnatian Way where Paul had traveled, and some bema steps where Paul likely



"Footstep" moment in Ancient Berea

preached from. After 1.5 days without a "footstep" moment, it was nice to get back on track.

I dozed in and out of consciousness for the next two hours as we drove to tonight's home base in Thessaloniki. (Here's how Thessaloniki got its name: There was a region called Thessalon, which is where Meteora is. Philip II defeated an army there. When Philip's daughter was born, he named her after this victory, and later, the town after her. Thessaloniki, the daughter, was the half-sister of Alexander the Great... and his wife.) These days, Thessaloniki is a college town, so it's full of college kids. The town is a million strong and 150K of them go to the local university, which I understand is the biggest and best around.



The White Tower

As part of the orientation to this town, the bus driver took us around to the white tower (a big tower along the seaport), the Roman forum, a few Greek churches and mosques (all closed) and we went into a basilica plan Greek Church. It was a nice church, but we got absolutely mugged by beggars on the way out (remember, Greece has 25% unemployment right now). Andy went on a rant about the "laid-back" style of Thessaloniki, with cars double and triple parked everywhere – that would never happen in Athens! Athens is black and white when it comes to the law!

At the hotel (Rooms – very nice!... even though the exterior and surrounding city looked pretty slummy from the outside.), Barb and I did

laundry. What we didn't know was that everyone was waiting for us to arrive downstairs so a three course meal could be served. No one had called us for dinner! The meal was only so-so. Barb and I went for a walk after that to the arch of Galerius, which was said to be a highlight of this city (and not on our tour). It was a pretty great Roman arch, but it was getting dark, so it didn't photograph well. Since we had walked more than a mile to reach it, we decided to take a taxi back. The ride was pretty wild, and surprisingly quick. The Taxi double parked to let us out. This hotel has no car entry... or curb – the door is right on the street.

The Arch of Galerius



6/19 – I'm so glad that breakfast was buffet style. The wait staff is not friendly here. At least with a buffet, they can only silently stare at us with contempt, which they did at every opportunity. Barb likes the spinach-filled phyllo pastry.



Stop number one for today was to the city walls near Thessaloniki's Acropolis (where Jason's house was in Acts 17). It was a lovely view. The city walls weren't bad either. I really liked how the ancient walls still held much of the city, and how the city kept an open space for the walls by making a continuous park from the top of the hill to the bottom. And again, since this was a tourist stop, we had a fair amount of beggars. The economy is really bad here, yet the Euro keeps prices high. Being in the EU really doesn't help these Greek people at all!

Stop number two was a long time later at a rest stop, where there was lots of baklava and coffee. I sat outside next to an ashtray with a no smoking sign on the inside of it. What is the message here?



People taking pictures of Pastor John as he wades in the water.

Our big stop for today would be Philippi, but first, just outside the city walls, is where Paul baptized Lydia (the first European baptism for Paul, and perhaps for Christianity). A whole complex was built around this Lydia site – all of it modern. The only ancient item here was a Roman graveyard. The rather stunning church we visited was only weeks old – having just been built. Many pictures were taken because the church was lovely. Not wanting to miss an opportunity like this, Pastor John waded into the water where the baptism had been performed. Everyone else took pictures. Courtney and Renée played with community pets in the little store.



Philippi proper is a great big pile of rocks, but you could see how big the forum area was back in the day – it was huge! It, apparently, had been converted into a stadium in more modern times (Roman?). The theater had been reconstructed so it could be used. Andy told us that this Greek stadium was one of only a few that got converted in Roman times into a gladiator and animal ring. For some reason, Andy launched into a 30 minute retelling of Oedipus Rex, though it didn't connect with anything happening here, and certainly not St. Paul. Weird. I wandered around until she finished, as did some of the kids (we all read Oedipus Rex in high school recently). At the far end of the complex there's a bit of mosaic stating that a

Bishop had a cathedral here in honor of St. Paul. That church was 4th century. This complex also had a cistern that most Christians believe was the prison of St. Paul and Silas. It looked very deep, cramped and dark.



On to our next stop, which was the waterfront of Kavala (ancient Neapolis) What a lovely city! We had a mostly seafood lunch under a large tented area along the wharf. I had octopus, grilled feta, bread and some of that Athenian Retsina wine finally (white wine with pine sap added). Not surprisingly, it tasted like trees. It did not go with the seafood. The cheese was great. Everything else benefitted by drinking that wine – it covered the taste. Andy came over with a glass of Retsina that was Athenian (rather than the local imitation I had ordered). This Retsina was crisp and light, and not at all like drinking a pine tree, though there was some sappy flavor in there still. This was good!

What wasn't good though was our wait staff – they were very gruff with us. I wound up with that awful octopus because the waiter kept telling me that I couldn't order other stuff I did want. He also yelled at Courtney for ordering shrimp, stating that it would take too long to cook, yet Morgan ordered the same dish and it arrived in a reasonable amount of time. It was all so strange – neither Courtney nor I had done anything wrong that we could tell. I'm thinking that this waiter simply didn't like Americans, or perhaps the Knitter family.



Finally! Retsina Wine



After lunch, a group of us hiked up to the Roman Aqueduct that still supplied water to the city 1900 years later (not a part of the tour). Cool! I also got some shots of the waterfront, which was quite lovely. Our hotel for the night had a commanding view of the city. Jeffrey and Joel got an ocean view. Barb and I got a view of a road and an air conditioner that didn't work. The A/C for the Hacketts didn't work either. We complained to the hotel – a lot, because it was very hot out – but there was nothing the hotel staff could do because the hotel was fully booked. They told us that the A/C would eventually work once the sun set. In the meantime, the Knitters and Hacketts spent time on the comfy couches near the elevators on our floor. At least this area was cool.

Our waiters this evening were much nicer. The food was only OK though. All the kids decided to walk down the hill back to the waterfront, which was about 1.5 miles away from us. I hope they get back.

Yeah, the A/C is now working! It only took 3 hours to cool the room. We'll sleep after all.

6/20 – The 6AM wake-up call was early for most, but I was up at 4. For breakfast, the first thing I did was spill coffee on my white shirt. I ran upstairs and washed the shirt so nothing would set in. This mostly worked, but my shirt, and by extension me, was wet for much of the day. Today was the first day that Barb and I had a meal with our co-hosts, John & Paula. Both of us "hosts" were trying to sit with different people every day, as good hosts do, so we had never gotten around to sitting together. My breakfast with them lasted 10 minutes, due to the coffee spill.

The kids did indeed get home alright. They had gone swimming in the ocean and then hiked back up the hill soaking wet at about midnight (Sure, unaccompanied kids wandering the streets at night – what could go wrong? Actually, nothing – Europe is extremely safe).



The beautiful city of Kavala (as seen from our son's balcony)

It was raining this morning, but that was OK because we had a couple of hours to get to the Greek-Turkish border. Once there, we would need to change busses because Greek busses can only operate in Greece and Turkish busses can only operate in Turkey. Same goes for our tour guides, so we would say good-bye to Andy, and get ourselves a new guide.

At the border, we unloaded all of our stuff and said good-bye to Andy and Telles (our newer bus driver). We got on a transfer bus that would take us across a no man's land to the Turkish side. While crossing a couple of bridges in this area, Courtney was showing me that her new cellphone had a video problem – vertical bars rather than a picture. I knew this was trouble so I asked her to shut the phone off for now and we'd try the phone later.

We met our new guide Gigi and our bus driver Genghis on the Turkish side and we were off. This was a very nice bus! Ten minutes into the trip though, Barbara told me that Courtney had left her cellphone on the transfer bus. She had turned the phone off, but then stuck it in a seat pocket. In her mind, this was no big deal because the phone was broken anyway. (This attitude, BTW, drives parents crazy!). Never mind that we're still paying for this phone, which was a replacement for the phone she had broken previously. The next phone we got her would cost the full amount – \$650 – if we didn't have a phone to trade in. The phone was still under warranty! After a few calls, the phone was found and it would be sent to our hotel in Istanbul.

Turkey is a beautiful country! One thing we learned from our guide is that the primary income in Turkey is agriculture (Turkey is one of eight countries in the world that is 100% self-sufficient. America is another). Turkey's #2 income source comes from making cars, even though Turkey has no car companies of its own. #3 is tourism.

We saw our first Ataturk statue (hero of Turkey) as we arrived



in Gallipoli and the Dardanelles. At the ferry terminal, there was an awesome open air museum about the WWI battle of Gallipoli (where 500K mostly Anzacs lost their lives in an 8 month period; this win for the Turks made Atatürk famous, even though this is the only victory he/they won in the war). The ride across the Dardanelles strait (and from Europe to Asia) was pleasant. We hung out on different decks and in the bus. I looked at the Gallipoli battle site a bit and we also looked at the many seagulls that were following this ferry. Barb learned how to use a squat toilet. I expected to see Brad Pitt's Trojan Horse (from the movie *Troy*) upon arrival, because it was supposed to be near the ferry terminal, but it was several blocks away, so not so close. We did get to see Troy though...



Troy was a nice pile of rocks. I will admit that this is a very hard site to understand unless you know your history and had a map handy (which I had supplied pre-trip to everyone). That's because Troy has been rebuilt 9 or 10 times. We were going to see the Troy of St. Paul, known as Troas, but there was also the Troy of Homer's time, which drew more attention. Our guide Gigi did a good job, but unlike with Andy (who holds a Master's degree in Philosophy from a U.S. college), I felt a need to add commentary after almost every stop along the way. Gigi was more your run-of-the-mill tour guide. (BTW – both guides know that I'm a historian and a tour guide myself, so they both gave me *carte blanche* to add anything to their canned presentations – I was pre-approved!). At every stop in Troy, Gigi would ask me if there was anything I wanted to add. Most stops, I did. About half way through Troy, she told me how impressed she was with my geographic and historical knowledge. She thought for sure that I had been to Turkey several times before because I had such a familiarity with everything in Troy and because I could read the Turkish signs correctly, even though I don't speak Turkish (I see Turkish as sort of a modified German as far as pronunciation goes, so not that difficult). I knew all this stuff only because I had studied a lot. I just figured that in adding



my commentary, the group would benefit and Gigi could then use my *shtick* (presentation/info) for her future tours. Truthfully, listening to other guides' presentations is how most guides learn their own information, and I have stolen from the best myself.

Our hotel (Ibis) is right on the beach at Canakkale, and it has a pool. The kids found the pool first.

I forgot to mention this earlier: At the rest stops so far in Turkey, my family has tried coffee cola, Turkish coffee, Turkish tea and lentil soup. They've loved them all. Turkey has awesome rest stop food and drink!

The internet sucks here at the Ibis, but the A/C works, so I'm happy.



Aside: stuff we have learned so far

Due to many wars over territory, and because Turkey once occupied Greece, and because they still occupy Ancient Greece, the two countries don't like each other. They are traditional and seemingly eternal enemies. For the sake of tourism, they have learned to tolerate each other, especially for popular "Footsteps of Paul" trips like ours, but the arrangements in making it happen are pretty funky. We must have a Greek tour guide, bus, and bus driver in Greece and a Turkish tour guide, bus, and bus driver in Turkey. There is a "no man's land" between the two countries that use a neutral bus.

99% Greeks are Christian

99% Turks are Muslim

In changing countries, we went from a devout and knowledgeable Christian guide who knows and cares about St. Paul to a Muslim guide with limited comprehension of who Paul is and what Christianity is all about. It really changed the whole focus of the tour. Nothing against Gigi – she's awesome in her own way and is simply doing her job – but once we got into Turkey, Paul sightings suddenly became rare and the largely Ancient Greek sites we saw were treated as ancient archaeological digs, and not so much as Christian pilgrimage sites with a Paul emphasis, which is more appropriate for this trip. From this point on, we had to make our own connections and discoveries. Our trip became more about our hotels and food (which is actually normal).

Barbara has noticed that (Greek Orthodox Christian) Greeks are much more laid back and almost lazy about anything they do or believe in. Even our tour guide Andy felt that the younger generation doesn't really seek God or search deep into their faith. As a crisis arises, and many do in Greece, they expect their government to handle it. They seem to whine a lot about the inequities of life and they always seem to be looking for a governmental handout. It does not help that unemployment is high and prices are not cheap due to the Euro. Streets are pretty dirty and graffiti is everywhere. The store clerks are sometimes pushy.

In contrast, Muslims in Turkey take great pride in who they are. They are well disciplined with their prayer hours and have an extremely strong work ethic. In the Turkish airports we found prayer rooms, separate for men and women, shoes left at the entrance or lined up outside. The whole floor inside was colorfully carpeted. Minarets went off on schedule throughout the day.

The Turkish shops and streets are not at all dirty. When you enter a store, the attendants are ready, willing and available to answer any questions, but are not pushy. They serve you apple tea and often a snack. You are treated like an honored guest. As a country, laziness is not tolerated and the people have no expectation that their (limited, secular) government will hand anything out to them. They are a nation of self-sufficient people.

Now, on the downside, because the Turkish government is small, they do not spend a great deal of money on excavating or maintaining the Ancient Greek sites that we are visiting. They seem to have little interest in promoting Greek anything. The sites are excavated, rebuilt and maintained by European groups or American groups or University kids studying archaeology. Because of this, we are seeing more examples of "rubble" than in Greece. Some sites haven't been gotten to yet; other sites suffer neglect from time to time. Part of this difference also stems from the amount of money the two countries get from tourist dollars. Everyone seems to love Greece and fear Turkey so Greece is highly reliant on tourist dollars. Turkey, not so much. Really, people should be flocking to Turkey. It's simply a better place for tourism... though for our purposes, it could use a few more Christian guides with a deep knowledge and love of Ancient Greece. Good luck with that!

Barbara has really enjoyed the strong black tea of Turkey with lots of sugar, or the apple tea and Brian continues to enjoy that "muddy" coffee with grounds at the bottom of the cup (with regards to coffee, there is Greek coffee and Turkish coffee and they are absolutely identical. The national drink in both countries, anise liquor, is called *ouzo* in Greece and *Raki* in Turkey. Gyros in Greece is Donnor in Turkey, and again, the same. These guys must really not like each other to even argue over food!

The "evil eye" is everywhere in Turkey! Apparently, you hang it up in your house, car, store etc. to keep jealousy away.

Barb and I have been really concerned for the Hacketts on this trip. Cheryl has a cold/flu and it also affects her diabetes. At one of our first Turkish road stops, Barbara made Cheryl some "lemon juice and honey hot water," which she serves me when I have cold/flu/allergy issues. They let the liquid cool and then put it in a water bottle for Cheryl to sip when she felt a cough coming on. Gigi was very helpful in getting Barb the ingredients. It seemed to work well. Cheryl never complained or wanted to be a burden to anyone on this whole trip. Danny, her husband, could have joined us in many cases, but chose to stay lovingly by his wife's side. It's not the trip they planned for sure. Sigh...

Dinner was amazing. Some of the kids went swimming in the Dardanelles as the sun set. The adults hung out at the outdoor café watching the sun set. Pastor John and I took a lot of pictures while sipping various beverages under a big umbrella. I liked seeing all the big Russian freighters going by. John and I started using various filters to see what kinds of images we could come up with. We were both pleased with our results. It was a very colorful sunset.



6/21 – It was an earlier start than usual because we had so far to drive – 3 hours to our first site. Our team was sad to leave this hotel with its amazing view of the Dardanelles. I may need to come back to this hotel someday as part of my “research” on the (futile) battle of Gallipoli – a subject I teach every year in World History. Ya, I can justify that!

The further south we went, the more arid and mountainous the view. We went from forest views to wheat fields & sheep grazing on grassy hills. At our first rest stop, Courtney and I just sat back and had a Turkish coffee while everyone else went shopping. The tea room (at a Shell station no less!) was secluded, so secluded that most of our travel companions never found us! There was a fish tank in this room and the attendant let Courtney feed the fish.

Stop #2 was at a (rare) Christian-run onyx and jewelry shop (99% of this country is Muslim). All the semi-transparent onyx was made on site. It was all lovely to



Me and Ataturk

behold, especially when a candle was placed inside. I liked the turquoise and opal jewelry in the next room. Barbara found some earrings she liked made out of a rock that changes color depending on the light. The stone is called “sultanate” and this particular set of earrings set me back \$90. As was the custom, we were given apple tea while we shopped.

Oh ya, I moved to the back of the bus today to get a little peace and quiet, but wound up having a blast playing a game with Barb and the kids for 3 hours. Barbara had moved to the back of the bus several days ago so the “kids wouldn’t get lonely” (also figuring that I’d be hanging out with the guides, as I often do). We had to name a city, state, region or country and the last letter of that word became the first letter of the next person’s word. I totally owned this game, having amassed a lot of knowledge about geography.



Americans love to queue



Pastor John risks a long fall down the theater

Lunch was shish-kabobs and Turkish pizza. It was very popular.

After lunch, we arrived at Pergamum. They no longer allow busses to drive up to the Acropolis, so we took a gondola to the top. Morgan was apprehensive about the ride since she doesn't like heights. The site was pretty spectacular.



The theater at Pergamum

A lot of this site has been reconstructed by Germans (who also paid to take the Temple of Zeus to Berlin a long time ago). The theater on the side of the hill, the tallest/longest in ancient Greece, was amazing... and steep! The tunnel leading to it was also very impressive. Even with the temple of Zeus removed, its site was still pretty awesome. You could see the square foundation and the first five steps that would have led to the rather large square temple, now in Berlin.

Upon returning to the gondola area, I saw two things: my son going native in a turban and a very dark cloud on the horizon on this otherwise beautiful day. As we drove to the lower site (the Asclepion), we saw merchants pulling their wares off



The remains of the Temple of Zeus

the street. And then it rained. We figured that the rain was not so bad so we walked the long corridor that led to the Asclepion. The further we walked along this colonnade, the harder it began to rain. It started to pour with lightening all around as we neared the first tunnel. My socks were wet inside my shoes and I began to get concerned about my technology (cell phone and camera) and passport because the pants I had on were not waterproof – not even close! We moved quickly to tunnel #2 (where ancient people used to get “cured” from syphilis). The rain was now coming down at a 45 degree angle. The main part of this lower city was still ahead, just up the stairs that had sheets of water pouring down the sides of them. We took turns running out into the open, taking a few quick photos, then running back inside. I don’t really remember what I took a picture of – it was all too fast. We got even more soaked on the way back. I had water in my shoes and in my pockets.



Jeffrey goes native

We slowly dried on the bus on the way to Smyrna.

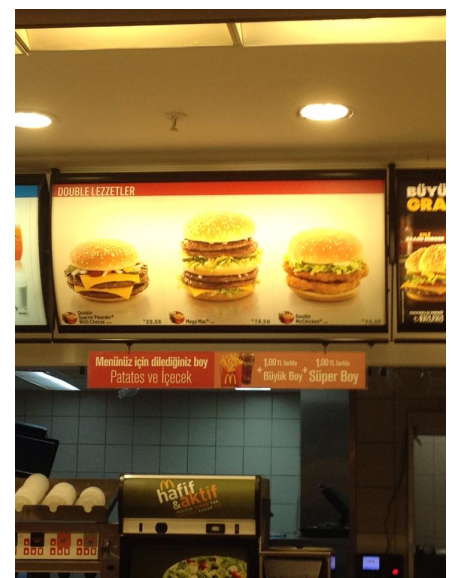


Our group huddles in a semi-dry underground tunnel

At our next break, I gave 5 Lira to the lady at the gas station for some coffee. The bill was very wet – dripping in fact – which got me a curious look. I was so happy that all my tech still worked. Alas, Barbara wasn’t so lucky: her camera was ruined, though not her SIM card.

It was hard to get to Smyrna, Homer’s birthplace, because it was in the middle of the city of Izmir during rush hour. When we got there, it was actually more impressive to watch Genghis do a series of Y-Turns in a small intersection to turn the bus around than it was to see the site of Smyrna itself.

Our hotel was a fancy, modern place in Izmir that was much taller than anything else around it. My hotel room had a curtain wall of glass looking out over the bay. The salmon at dinnertime was good and I don’t usually like salmon. After dinner, six of us went to the mall next door. We lost half of our group at Starbucks. Barb and I were about to set off alone, but Ray didn’t have anyone to walk with so he joined us. Eventually, I got cranky, possibly from being wet all day, but also because we got a running commentary on everything that was wrong with this country from Ray, who was also possibly cranky from being wet all day. He just couldn’t see the good in this country at this time. I really like this country! Eventually, Barb and I went upstairs to look at a Turkish food court and Ray went back to the hotel to go to sleep. Half of the places in this food court were U.S. companies and half were unrecognizable. I liked the “MegaMac” at the McDonalds. It had four patties.

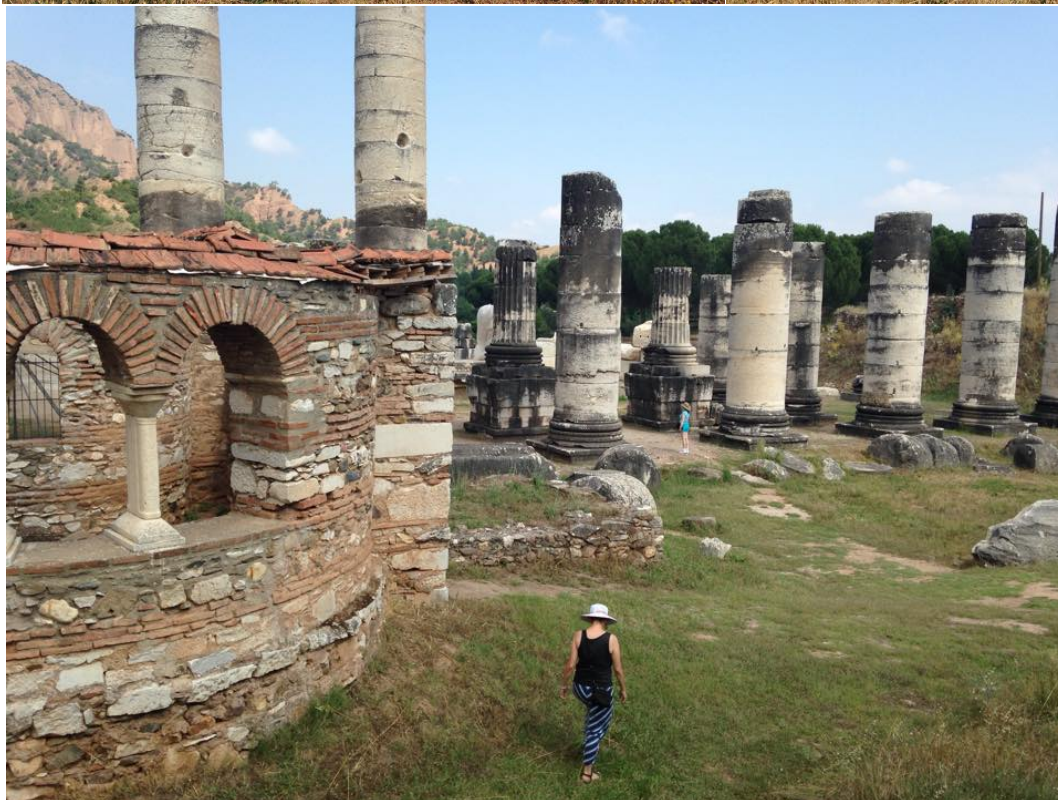


6/22 – I was up at 4:45 to watch the sunrise (remember, glass wall). I took several panoramic shots over the next 20 minutes. None of them came out. The panoramic window was dirty and my camera kept focusing on dirt.

The shampoo in the shower smelled like chocolate. I smell so good I could just eat myself! The brand name of this shampoo is Zen, so apparently, Zen is chocolate.

We got up earlier today so we could be on the bus by 7:30. I was the first one in the lobby in the entire hotel it seemed. I had to wait for breakfast to begin. It was a great breakfast, so worth the wait. I loved the pepperoni, which was a beef with chili powder combination. I had a lot of time to kill after breakfast so I went outside and took pictures.

The drive this morning was interesting. We are now back in a green and mountainous region and there is a lot of rain all around us, encircling us, yet no rain on us so far. Sardis, our first stop, is stunning. The site was largely reconstructed by Americans, and it is pretty complete so you don't need a lot of imagination to figure this one out. The highlights are the Byzantine synagogue and the Roman bath. Wow! This is really impressive architecture. Paula did an impromptu exercise workout / video in front of the gymnasium (how apt) and got most of the women on our trip to join her.



On the other side of the very high acropolis is an impressive Greek temple of Artemis. This temple of Artemis was supposed to be even grander than the one in Ephesus (one of the seven wonders of the ancient world) but it got “too hard” to build so they changed the plan to a hemi-column structure (half the columns), but even this proved to be too hard. I’m not sure the temple ever got completed, but what remains is massive, with the biggest columns I’ve ever seen.



Anyway... lunch was finally at the type of place that I like – home style / “street food.” Gigi kept apologizing about the quality of the food, but this is where I wanted to be! My lentil soup and kofti kabob was out of this world! At that lunch place, John and I noticed a cart filled with Kyrgyz memorabilia (a Yurt, Kyrgyz hat, flag, etc...). It turned out that the owner lived in Kyrgyzstan for a long time. Many Turks do.

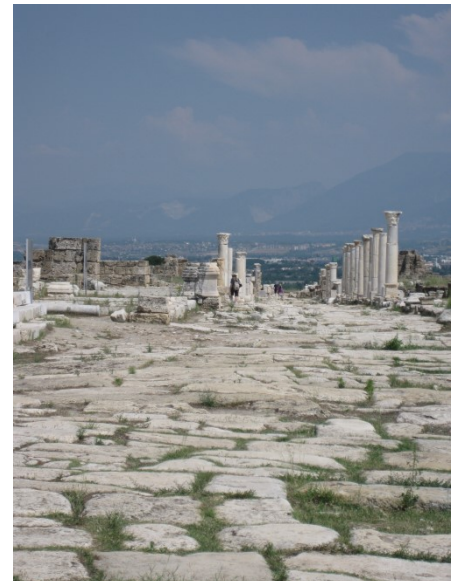
Philadelphia was a short stop but a good stop. There were three massive transept pillars where a dome once stood at this ancient church site. I’m thinking that the base of the dome would have been 50 feet off the ground, and maybe 80 feet at its peak. No telling how long or wide the church would have been because we only have the transept left and some foundation work. All of it was massive and made of Roman/Byzantine stone.



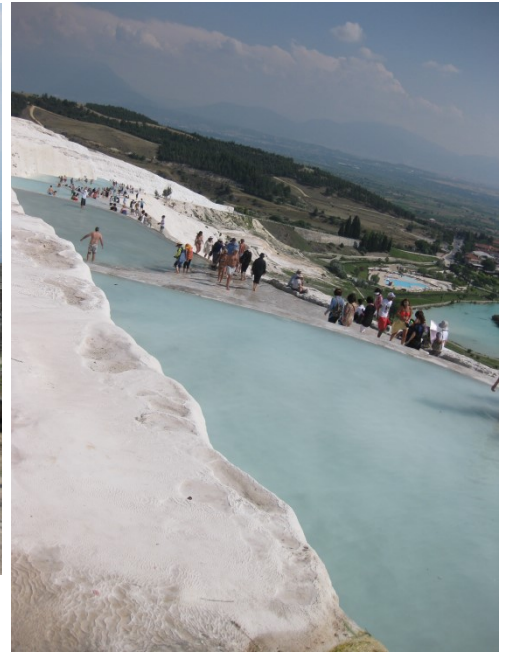
On the way out of town, I posted a picture of the town of Philadelphia and posted it on Facebook with the caption “West Philadelphia...” Only two people got the reference to *Fresh Prince of Bel Air*. Perhaps the reference was too obscure. It made me laugh though... It would have been a very different *Fresh Prince*.



The next stop, Laodicea, was a really impressive complex with a lot of white marble. The long Greek (and later Roman) road with side streets was impressive. Gigi says that all this we see – the restored columns and walls – were not here eight months ago. Local college students have been working on this project every day of the year. From what I understand, because of the remoteness of the place, no one used the ruins as a quarry, so much of the original stone remains. This makes it much easier to put back together.



Our next impressive site not far away was Hierapolis, with its hot spring and white cliff pools. Laodicea was a huge complex, maybe 3/4th of a mile

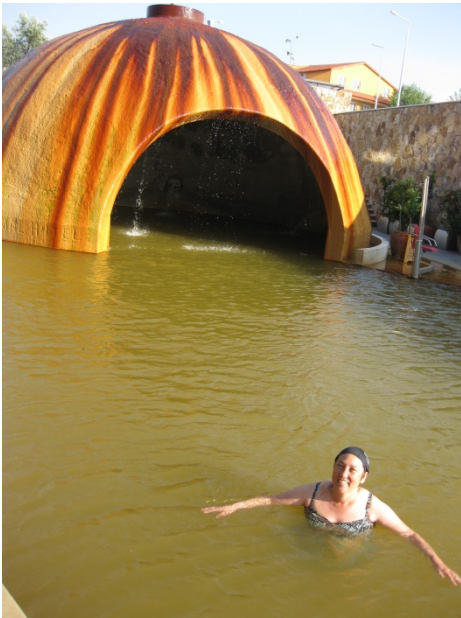


long and wide, but Hierapolis was even bigger, maybe 2 miles long and wide. There was no way we could see so much in such a short time. We all started with the white cliffs, which were mostly dry this time of the year (and these days, they're all "fake" because there is plumbing that directs the water flow and now they make pools using brick and then having the water wash over it, creating these calcium pools. It's still mighty impressive though...). Our group split up after that. Barbara and I walked around the old city walls and ran into the "kids." We walked to the old thermal baths, but



about half way there, Barbara felt a need to get ice cream (it was hot, but then every day on this trip has been hot!), so the kids left us. We did eventually get to the thermal baths, which had been modernized for today's tourists. There wasn't much time left, and my feet hurt from walking so much, so we headed back to the bus – maybe two miles away.

The hotel was just down the hill and it was a brand new, just opened, spa hotel. For some reason, the massive indoor pool that covered the entire lobby area was "under construction" even though it looked fine and functional to me. Barb and the girls went to the thermal springs outside while I watched their stuff. Going into 130 degree water on a 100 degree day made no sense to me. Over time, more of our group arrived at the spa. Barb and the girls went to the sauna and showers



in the hotel's lowest floor. I went to dinner, which was yummy even though very little of the food was recognizable to me. I'm thinking this must be authentic Turkish food for this region. I had a double Raki as well (the national drink of Turkey; also the same drink as Ouzo from Greece, their national drink. Both are anise liquors).

After dinner, I went to the shower & sauna place since the girls had been raving about it. The sauna was just like a sauna – hot and smelled of wood. I didn't stay long. The shower though... that was something else. It was an "environmental shower" which was like being in a rainforest. Some parts of this shower were hot, some cold, a

bit of mist, some of the settings tickled quite a lot (sometimes uncomfortably so). Birds chirped in the background. It was quite a sensation! I dried off in the sauna then went back to my room. Soon after that, Barbara came back with things she had bought in town. All in all, it was a very tiring day, but a good day.



John & Paula in front of St. John's tomb

Ephesus. These days, a stork camps out on top of it. Up above St. John's was a Medieval (crusader) castle, which seemed much more complete than anything else around here.

The drive from the first area (designated as "site 1" for the Temple of Artemis and "site 5" for St. John's) to "site 3," the main Ephesus area by the ancient seaport was not far. Our guide took us on what she called the "normal" path to site 3 – the site everyone uses – because, although there

6/23 – Our two hour drive today would take us to Ephesus. Hot air balloons were over the Hierapolis (Pamukkale) pools as we left. We followed along the Meander River and Meander Valley to our destination.

Our first stop was to the church of St. John where John is supposedly buried. It was in impressive ruin of a 6th century Basilica plan church. Down the hill, we could see the lone column of what was once one of the seven wonders of the ancient world – the Temple of Artemis at



were cruise ships in the area, it did not appear that they had made it to Ephesus yet. I think she also took us on this road because there was a major Turkish rug maker there. We got the whole rug demonstration, and a free lunch, and then were enticed to buy “cheap” Turkish rugs. Many of us did.

They were not cheap. Let’s just say that Barb and I maxed-out our credit card for three very nice rugs that we didn’t really need. I guess I didn’t need that new car after all.

Even though we were still ahead of the cruise crowd, it was still crowded when we got to Ephesus. Three in our group decided to stay on board the bus because they weren’t feeling very well. The bus would take them to the exit, where we would meet them.



The place where I lost all my money



There were two major attractions here: the Library of Celsus and the Theater. We marched down the long colonnaded path, finding temples to Artemis, Trajan, Hadrian & Minerva / Medusa along the way. We also saw a nice Nike pediment. The library of Celsus, in particular, was simply spectacular. Our guide told me that you used to be able to see the tomb of Celsus himself at the base of the library, encased in glass, but somebody broke the glass and attempted to steal the coffin. Now Celsus is covered in dirt. Celsus, by the way, is only allowed to be buried within the city limits because he was a hero. No one else is allowed to be buried within the city limits.

On the way to the theater, we passed by that “come hither” advertisement for the brothels (a sandal print in the pavement that pointed the way). The theater was nice, a lot like the other theaters we had seen, but this one had more biblical value because this is where Paul got kicked out of the city as people chanted “great is Artemis of the Ephesians.”



The theater where the chanting happened

Our next stop was to the airport at Izmir. Our group didn’t exactly get through the checks efficiently, but we did make it through eventually. They changed our gate at one point, but only announced it in Turkish. If it weren’t for Gigi, we would have missed the flight.

The flight itself was uneventful. When we arrived in Istanbul, our group really seemed to like the airport (it is a favorite of mine as well), and they loved the views as well. There were many oohs and aahs as we drove across town to our hotel. The group absolutely loved the hotel (Marriott Shislye). It was the best hotel we had been to so far, and we've been to a lot of really nice hotels on this trip. Barb and I were put in an executive suite on the 32nd floor. Again, our entire wall was made of glass – even the bathroom. Our dinner was gourmet. The chefs at this place really know how to cook! Right after dinner, it was time for bed (no time for washing laundry, I guess). This was also by far the most comfortable room I have been in so far: great bed, great pillows, and the A/C worked fantastically!



The view from our bathroom

6/25 – Cool - another wedding anniversary overseas (27 years and counting)! Excellent breakfast: I think that's the best pancake I've ever had in my life! Because cruise ships were docking in the city, Gigi opted to see the Blue Mosque first. OK, first we saw the Hippodrome, though we barely stopped at the monuments and very little commentary was given on them, but enough for this group. The Blue Mosque seemed better to me this time around. Perhaps it was the time of day. Along the way to Topkapi, we met up with our bus driver so he could hand out listening devices, which are apparently required at some of the sites we'll see today.



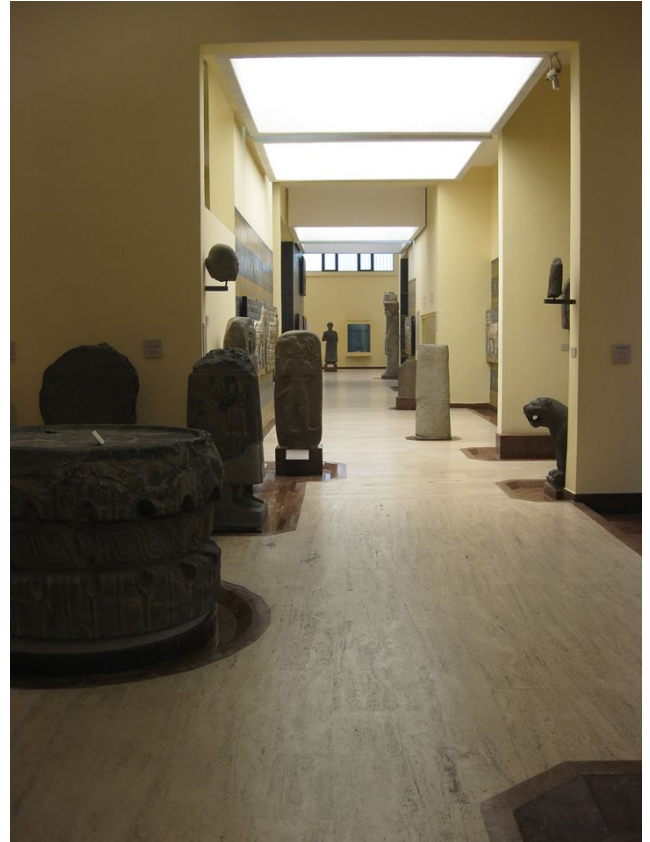
We passed S. Irene cathedral, the site of one of the 2nd ecumenical council where they had finalized the Nicene Creed, and Gigi said that it had just reopened after a couple of decades of repairs. I wanted to go in so I worked out a meeting place with her. First we would see Topkapi though. It looked the same, but with fewer people this time around. I saw what I wanted to see and then took the youth with me... except Courtney, who was not feeling well. S. Irene was awesome, but all the marble had been stripped away. I tried to paint a mental picture of what it would look like for the youth. They mostly liked the musty smell and the "oldness" of the place. It reminded me of my grandfather's basement garage. It was so cool to sit in the same seats as some of our early church fathers, provided that those seats didn't get destroyed in the Nika revolt in the 6th century or the massive earthquake in the 8th century.



We had some time before we needed to meet up with the group so I took our group down the hill to the restaurant row that I had traveled last time I was here. We went into a Donner place. Joel didn't like it because of the veggies and tzatziki. He just wanted meat. The rest of us liked the food just fine (Donner = Gyros by the way). Morgan finished Joel's Donner sandwich.

We got up the hill just in time to meet the group (we heard them coming first on those audio devices we had in our ears) and then it was down the hill again to go to the Museum of Archaeology. Last time I was here, half the place was closed. This time, the place I toured last time was closed and the other half was open. This would be a new experience for me, and only half an experience for the rest of the group. There was still so much to see! I got tired going up and down three flights of stairs to see all the stuff. My favorite item was the head of the Delphi Snake (whose body is in the Hippodrome)

With that done, we went to Hagia Sophia, which was a highlight for many. I showed Barbara all my favorite sites and spots. What an amazing church/mosque/museum. Alas, there was still scaffolding in a large section of the church (six years later!).



I wanted to go to Sargirous & Bacchus church next, but Gigi was having none of that – she didn't want my little sub group that far away from her. She was getting cranky, maybe because I wasn't following her prescribed path. I compromised (sort of) – I asked about the cisterns instead (which I was planning to go to anyway after Sargirous & Bacchus because it's



on the way). She agreed. Since the cisterns were on the way to the Grand Bazaar, we stopped off to see if we could get discount tickets for 10 of us. We could, but only if Gigi came with us. Gigi decided that we would all go to the Grand Bazaar and then 10 of us would go back early. It was not early enough for all of us non-shoppers. After some cursory walking about, we hung out just outside the Grand Bazaar for what seemed like an eternity before Gigi showed up. She walked us back to the Cistern, we all went in, and then she escaped out the exit to return to the Bazaar to gather the rest of our group. My group of 10 were duly impressed. For me, it was good to see the place again.

Dinner was mostly amazing, except surprisingly, the main course (a steak). It was dry and bland. With dinner done, I said goodbye to those in our group who I wouldn't see for a few weeks, and then led a group of three to go find the Hard Rock Café in a trendy section of town. For Jeffrey and I, this had always been the plan. Since Joel also wanted to go just to get out of the hotel, he joined us. One thing we learned in a hurry – Joel does not like suicidal taxi rides. He had his eyes shut the whole time. The taxi

dropped us off in the wrong spot and we spent a lot of time walking around in vain looking for the correct road. We took another taxi to the right road, which was far, far away from where the last taxi driver had taken us. The second taxi driver told us that the first driver had dropped us off at a transfer spot and that we were supposed to take another taxi to the final spot. I didn't get why, but that's how we got lost in the first place. Oh well. After walking a mile or so on the correct road, we found our Hard Rock Café. Wouldn't you know it, there was only one XX shirt design in the entire store. I didn't like the shirt one bit, but I was determined to leave the store with an Istanbul Hard Rock shirt, so I bought it anyway. Joel wanted a McFlurry at the McDonalds down the street so we bought one and went up to the third floor of this very vertical McDonalds. I had a really good strawberry shake. One scary cab ride later and we were home (we almost didn't make it because we told our driver to go to the Marriott Hotel, and he replied with, "which one? There are five." Fortunately, he was able to rattle off the districts and I recognized the last one he named as ours.). It was now time for bed because tomorrow would be a long day for the Knitter family, and it would begin early with our departure at 3:30AM.



Joel DOES NOT like this taxi ride!

I was sleeping pretty soundly when Julie called at 12:30AM from our house in California. A fuse had blown and she couldn't find the fuse box. What a way to end the tour portion of our trip!

After the trip, we got in the Milpitas Post!



Want to see a video of this trip?

Watch Morgan's video of the trip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9kUfzKDREc>