

June 23

Bourne End to Istanbul



Bright, sunny and quiet at Bourne End

I had set two alarm clocks but needed neither as I was awake long before they were due to go off. The walk to the station was warm and sunny as was the wait when I got there. The train arrived and departed on schedule and I then discovered that the "old" train ticket that I had thrown away last night was the one for today's trip. That gave the guard a lot of entertainment and cost me nearly £10.

The remainder of the journey was uneventful and I arrived at Heathrow on the dot of 08.30. A ten minute walk got me to the chaos of check-in. I'm not sure why I did it on-line when I still had to leap through all of the usual hoops before handing my bag over. My hip set off the alarm but I was soon through security, about 40 minutes after the train had pulled in.

I had been uncertain whether or not to write a diary on this trip and wasn't feeling particularly enthusiastic so didn't bother with photos.



A decent breakfast - brilliant poached eggs

Once I had settled into the pub, however, I decided to proceed as normal so ordered a large - not enormous in spite of the price - breakfast. With nothing much in the way of food scheduled until dinner about eight this evening, it made sense to eat while I could. The coffee was OK and the poached eggs near perfect. I wish I could cook them as well. The service was excellent. The airport food outlets do seem to have improved dramatically over the years.



I photographed a plane - probably mine

Terminal 2 is smart and new. I made my way to the gate, photographed some planes and sat on a seat to while away some time before boarding.



Clever graphics in Terminal 2

I had another coffee, a good one, and waited until we started to board, chaotically, at 11.10. There is no way you can board a 777 in 20 minutes. We finally got the doors closed about 12.00, 30 minutes late. This, of course, meant that we missed our take off slot and had to wait 90 minutes for another one. Not good. Complete incompetence in fact. Don't fly Turkish Airlines is the lesson.

The flight was fraught, with lots of passengers worried about onward connections, but otherwise uneventful. The food was OK and the service equally so. The announcements were in both Turkish and English but the latter were so fast and the sound system so poor that they might as well all have been in Turkish!

We landed 90 minutes late but the formalities were reasonably efficient and I was landside with my bag in about half an hour. I spotted Valerie, who had also arrived very late but who had been able to find the tour guide, even though he knew nothing the arrangement to meet at the Vodafone shop.

The guide, who claimed to be called Genghis Khan, soon gave us a written list of all our collection times and places, which Valerie filed safely away, never to be seen again, and then gave us a hard sell on a balloon flight in Cappadocia and a river cruise in Istanbul. Valerie accepted the former but we both prevaricated about the latter.



Dull, murky and uninspiring

We were ushered outside into a typically busy but uninspiring airport scene, while we waited for a mini bus to arrive. It was cloudy, breezy and not over warm.

The mini bus collected us and we drove for about 30 minutes, much of the time along the coast, passing huge castle walls, until we climbed steeply up cobbled streets into the old part of the city. We arrived at the hotel, unloaded and found a small room upstairs. The safe was locked and the corridor light wasn't working but everything else seemed to function well enough.

As it was now about 8pm, we did a quick turn around and walked out of the hotel onto a cobbled street lined with restaurants. We selected one at random and had a very touristy meal of a stew contained in a sealed



A testi kebab

earthenware pot, which was rolled around in a fire, ceremonially opened and poured into a bowl. Nice enough but not exciting. The salad and bread which accompanied it were good, as was the Turkish tea which followed. I even allowed myself a couple of Efes beers. The weather was now warm and still, perfect for eating on the street.



A good salad ...



... and I loved the local tea

We walked back to the hotel, all of about two minutes away, and collapsed after a stressful day.