

## June 24

### Istanbul

I didn't sleep too well and then discovered after my shower that I had left half of my razor in my other soap bag. We must look for a chemist while we are out and about. The breakfast buffet had breads, pastries and lots of Turkish cheeses. Very good. Also salads, dried fruits and scrambled eggs.

We returned upstairs and the list of pick up times etc appeared in a pocket in one of my bags. I'm sure I didn't put it there!



*We set off along narrow streets ...*



*... past the unusual fountain*

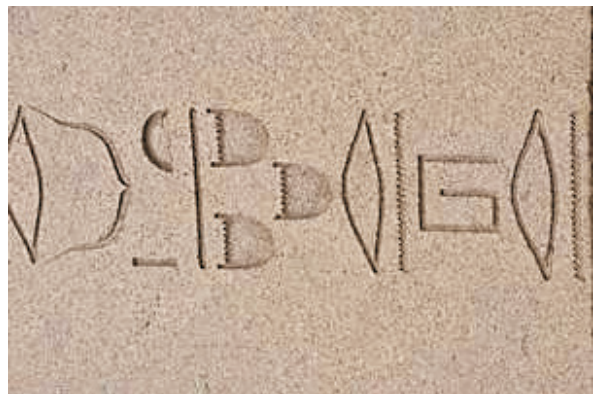
We were summoned downstairs, where our tour guide had arrived early, and were escorted a few hundred metres to where the mini bus had been able to park. We walked through a maze of narrow streets with lots of shops, restaurants etc and an unusual water fountain.

We boarded the bus, joined couples from Switzerland and Belgium, and drove for a few minutes through more hilly, cobbled streets. We then stopped and waited for the remaining passengers. The weather was dull but humid and, it being early on a Sunday morning, most of the shops were shut.



*One and a half pillars*

We disembarked at the Hippodrome, the original Roman race track, which had room for 30,000 spectators but is now a huge open space housing three ancient pillars, all of them pinched from elsewhere. One of them was from the Egypt of 3,000 years ago. It was particularly well preserved and the sides were covered in hieroglyphics.



*Hieroglyphics?*

We had a little time to kill before the Blue Mosque opened so looked in some of the tourist shops. The lira is so low that most things seemed cheap.



*In the shop but not for sale*

At 10, we joined hundreds of others in removing our shoes, donning head scarves - the ladies only - and entering the Mosque. It is a huge building although the impact is lessened by the temporary formwork while the builders are in residence. Every old building we entered was undergoing major renovations. Rather like the UK much of the time. Photography was allowed so I tried to take advantage.



*A carpet with a purpose*

Our excellent guide, Oz, demonstrated how the pattern in the carpet aided the worshipers in placing their feet in the right place and facing in the right direction.



*We queued up with lots of others ...*



*... and joined them inside*



*A huge internal space*



*Glorious tiles*

One of the features of both this and most of the other buildings that we visited were the wonderful ceramic wall tiles. In the UK we tend to associate them with Italy but the Turks also have a considerable skill.



*The Blue Mosque - difficult to photograph*

There were dogs lying around all over the place. They all have ear tags to indicate that they have been tested for nasty diseases and the locals seem only too happy to feed them.

At the entrance to the Topkapi Palace is a magnificent building, which used to be a very ornate fountain.



*A better shot of the Blue Mosque*



*Sleeping dog with ear tag*

We passed through an airport style security checkpoint, walked through gardens full of roses and then entered another security gate. I passed through without my hip upsetting anything.



*A very ornate fountain*

The buildings vary greatly as each Emperor added new bits in his preferred style. I can't remember many of the details we were given but there was some amazing architecture. Good photography was always difficult as there were too many people walking through every shot and most of mine were terrible. There was also a huge amount of restoration in progress.



*Along the rose lined path*



*Lots of gilt ornamentation*



*Topkapi*



*Classical elegance*



*More wonderful tiles*



*Roses again*



*Stunning interiors*



*Up the harbour towards the bridge*

The terrace offered magnificent views over two continents, a unique place in the world. It also offered two continents worth of wind. Wellington has a rival!



*The view from Asia to Europe*

The harbour had lots of ships moving around and the European bank, opposite, showed signs of being the financial and business powerhouse of the city.



*Yet another architectural style*



*Fine timber houses*

We finally left the Museum and walked past a row of beautiful timber houses, which backed onto the palace walls and were being refurbished.



*We dodged the trams*



*Into the restaurants*



*Another flaming kebab*

Oz led us through some back streets and into another area of wall to wall restaurants. She took us to one which she said served the best kebabs in town. We ate and drank well, one of the party having a clay pot meal, the same as we had last night. I videoed the process of the pot being opened. Not sure how I can transfer that to the print media!



*A strange local hair dryer*

On the way to our next stop, I spotted some phone boxes which looked just like commercial hair dryers.

Hagia Sophia started life in the 6th century as the largest church in the world. It served as the Eastern Orthodox Cathedral almost continuously until 1453, when it was converted into a mosque. Finally, in 1935 it became a museum and is now the second most visited museum in the country.

The building is huge, with lots of mosaics, murals, tiles and other ornate decorations. As ever, there was lots of building work in evidence.

We walked up a ramp, not stairs, to reach a gallery at first floor level. This enabled us to look down on the crowds below.



*Hagia Sophia*



*The view from on high*



*Hagia Sophia*



*Unusual lighting*

We finally left, somewhat overwhelmed by the place and were taken up some more cobbled streets to a small carpet factory. We were given a demonstration of hand carpet weaving - the knots still can't be tied by machine - and Valerie and I both made purchases.

A Turkish delight shop had some which was supposedly sugar free so I bought a little. The final stages of the walk home brought more excitement as Valerie tripped over a step and damaged her bad back still further.



*Carpets ...*



*The trams run through the shoppers*



*... and Turkish Delight*



*Wot a good game*

Once back at the hotel, I left her to rest while I went in search of a razor to replace the one I had left in the UK. This took me through a busy shopping area, large crowds and traffic chaos.

Dinner was good and included yet more wonderful salad. My "sole fish" certainly wasn't sole but it tasted good so who cares!



*Dull and choppy at the waterfront*



*Not sole but it tasted good*

The waterfront was busy, this area mainly being terminals for the ferries which cross the channel. I watched them for a bit and then meandered back to the hotel.

We walked back via the shops, did a reconnoitre for tomorrow and finally returned to the hotel. Valerie went to bed early and I wrote my diary on a sofa downstairs.

After a rest, Valerie's back had recovered sufficiently for her to walk a short distance to a fish restaurant. En route, we passed some kittens playing a wonderful game in the gutter. They do seem to like animals here.