

## GREETINGS FROM MT RAINIER and MT BAKER - TURKEY

Dear friends and family,

May 2011

This unexpected week in the Antalya/Cappadocia region of Turkey resulted from a promotion offered to Le Monde subscribers. So my friend leaped at the opportunity for us. For approximately 400 Euros we had air fare, hotels, full board, tour guide and entrance fees for a week.

I was aware of the famous rock formations of Cappadocia but had no idea of their geologic ancestry, nor that we would be surrounded by the ancient perpetrators – the snow covered volcanoes Hasan Dagi (3268 m tall) and Erciyes (3916 m). Respectively, to me, they look like Mt Rainier and Mt Baker which loom over Seattle to the southeast and north.



Fifty to seventy-five million years ago, these volcanoes (and a whole ring of others) deposited an ash known as tufa, 100 – 150 meters deep, which was then covered and sealed by black lava. Over the millenia cracks occurred, and erosion began.

By the time of recorded history people in the area were digging into the tufa to create dwellings and later (6th to 12th C) complete churches with beautiful wall paintings inside. The churches located above ground are visible, while those below ground only began to be discovered in the 20th C. In the Urgup/Nevsehir/Avanos triangle they are now protected by UNESCO World Heritage status.

One lovely effect was the call to prayer at noon time echoing off the rock formations.





We were encouraged to envision creatures from the rock formations – one for me looked like a group of seals sunning themselves on rocks.



There are also whole communities located underground for protection from invaders, animals, and weather. The corridors are narrow and serpentine and can be closed off by large stones as doors. There are complete systems for ventilation and wells for water.



At Saratli the ultimate exit is actually several kilometers away from where we entered!



En route we visited a caravanserie in the process of restoration, and observed typical small town Turkish cafe life.



Our week of blue skies and crisp pure air ran from March 13-20, but those who visited just the week before found the ground covered with snow and the sky overcast! The area is fascinating with a coastal mountain range, Taurus, still snow covered when we passed through, between the Mediterranean and the interior, both areas blessed with 300 days of sunshine per year. Every building was using solar panels for heating water.

En route we stopped in Konya to visit the Mevlana Museum of the Whirling Dervishes.



Between the volcanoes, instead of inland waterways and evergreen forests as in the Seattle area, there are these incredible rock formations and areas resembling the steppes of Central Asia, all in a rain shadow with less than 400 mm of rain per year and virtually no trees, as can be seen in the volcano photos above.



Tourism is now the major industry.



Traditional crafts based on local materials are still practiced, such as pottery from the clay of Avanos, Turkish carpets from the local sheep's wool and locally-cultivated silk, and wine.

Watching the women knotting the carpets (same technique as in Morocco except a double « gordion » knot) brought back many memories of Moroccan women weaving in their homes. The carpets are

magnificent with flowered patterns as well as geometrics. The silks can have up to 225 knots per square cm and take up to a year to weave one square meter. These are very detailed scenes, incredible works of art.

Our final day was spent in Aspendos, site of an ancient Greek then Roman town. The amazing theater (2<sup>nd</sup> C AD) and portions of the aqueduct still remain. The theater seated 15 – 20,000 persons with incredible accoustics resulting from the arches at the top level. It is used for performances today.



Antalya itself is a lovely town of good weather (temperatures similar to Agadir), winding streets and an old port. The beach resort communities are actually 50 km to the south and east.



Our tour guide spoke perfect French and because of the nature of the group (Le Monde subscribers) the questions and conversations were very detailed and sophisticated.

Unlike the Senegal trip where we moved every day, we were based four nights in a 4\* hotel in Urgup, and the first night and final 3 nights in a 5\* resort east of Antalya. A much more relaxing itinerary. The group totalled 22 people and were very companionable, one couple having lived in Morocco for many years and another in Togo.

As I am writing this letter to you I am actually in Agadir, after spending a month in northern India. So, that will be the next travelogue you will receive. Sending love to you and your loved ones.



*Marilee*