

Turkey by Hotel Berlingo via Romania, Balkans

24. August to 3. October
2008



Background

After visiting Morocco last year, we felt that a **Tour of Turkey** would be a good '**Encore**' for us. We had made brief visits to Turkey before (on package tours), but we did not know much else about travelling in this huge and for most of us unknown, even strange country.

Goals and Strategy

- Just go with our '**Hotel Berlingo**' and see where we get to within 6 weeks time!
- Peggy wanted to visit the Black Sea Coast; I wanted to see Mount Ararat!
- Just take things as they happen and do what is possible with the weather of the day!
- Minimum luggage and equipment to survive and also avoid unnecessary cost.
- Also spend some time on the transit journey via Romania and the Balkans!
- See the life countryside -> **do not** use motorways if not absolutely necessary.

Results

We had covered all areas we wanted to visit and more, we gathered thousands of beautiful and valuable impressions! One disappointment for me: the Mount Ararat was invisible behind a thick layer of haze!

Still - we really enjoyed the trip!

Facts

- **Total trip:** 41 days 13'139 km (less than 10% motorways)
CH - Istanbul 9d/3589km Istanbul – Istanbul 22d/5971km Istanbul – CH 10d/3579km
Nights spent: 40 (39 in car /1 private) 7 at campings/car parks 32 anywhere (see diary:-)
- **Costs (CHF)** 2750.- food 800.- / fuel (745 l) 1700.- / div road 80.- / night 100.- / entrance 70.-
- **Weather:** Mostly nice and warm late summer weather until 19. Sept. (Eskisehir), but too hot and humid along Eastern Mediterranean Area (Antalya / Adana)
Then we had more or less cool and often wet autumn weather until home.
- **Health:** Fine.
- **Equipment:** Hotel Berlingo, bed on planks (mattress, single sleeping bag in duvet, pillows), camping table/chairs, small table for inside, gas cooker, and kitchen gear.

Roads

During the whole trip we had mostly reasonable to very good roads. There were a few dozen km in Romania and Bulgaria on very rough secondary or local roads. In Turkey we found the main-road network very good and fast (90 km/h), but often interrupted with very long rough and dusty building-sites. We also ventured some distances on small roads – but there you may stay in 1st and 2nd gear for hours. Our Berlingo did all that but about half way (near Van) the gearbox started to moan – probably a bearing – and I felt very uneasy at times.

Accommodation

As usually we slept very well in our car.

We had expected that camping sites might not be available in some areas. As it turned out, we hardly found any and if and open, then not at the right time at the right place. So we just stayed a few times at campsites when we really needed a shower. Usually we just washed ourselves, which was easy as there was plenty of water available everywhere. Most nights we parked and slept beside restaurants or petrol stations (we always asked first) or then wild at most beautiful spots. We never had any problems except in Sofia where a senseless security agent sent us into the rainy night at 1.30 am. But then one night in Eskisehir, we stayed at a young Turkish couple's home that did not accept us to sleep 'on the street'.

Food and Beverage

During the whole trip we never had problems finding something to eat. Where available, we sometimes went to simple restaurants (we dressed casual – so to speak) where we usually ate well. Due to Ramazan we prepared our own meals more often than expected. We made bbq a few times, grilling enough meat for 2 days or then we had sumptuous picnics - all these sausages (beef, lamb), cheese (often sheep), very fresh vegetables, fruit (from market or right from trees e.g. figs and apples:-), nuts.

Everywhere in Turkey we found bakers making delicious bread of all kinds: round, oval, flat, rings, any size, some sesame, fine inside, moist/chewy, fine/crusty etc.... Wine and beer were not available everywhere in Turkey but in bigger towns you will find Migros (not Swiss) and Carrefour supermarkets with an alcohol section.

Sightseeing and Walking

We did less walking and sightseeing than usual, because on one hand we knew that we had a long way to go but also because with age we are getting a bit saturated of all the thousands of exciting things we have already seen in our life. But Turkey is really easy and attractive for sightseeing and walking. Furthermore we think that the area of Siebenbürgen in Romania could also offer to spend a good, inexpensive, active holiday.

Lasting impressions

Fortunately we did not experience any severe incidents! In the following just a few events or aspects which stand out in our memory (some of them are described in more detail in the diary):

- The first day we drove to Chiemsee near Munich. The lovely place we stayed at brought us right back into enjoying **our gipsy-life again!**
- It was good to cross the Hungarian Puszta and Romania to get impressions of a big region, now part of the European Union. **Siebenbürgen** with its nice towns and sceneries and the backwaters of the Danube estuary are now well anchored in our memories
- What a feeling to drive across to **Asia in our own car** and then follow the splendid **Black Sea Coast** to Sinop (the curve you notice on your screen when flying across during long nights)!
- Being on the way leisurely (mostly) for 13'000 km and to sleep in the Hotel Berlingo at **most beautiful spots**, often watching sunset (after or with a good meal) or sunrise (with a nice warm coffee and breakfast).
- The **kind people in Turkey**, who were always good natured and helpful with us. Also they left us in peace when we liked to be quiet (unlike our experience in Morocco).
- Enjoying all these **different sceneries** with fortresses, mosques and impressions of **how people life** differently from simplest villages in mountains, on plateaus, at the sea, to cities like tolerant Antakya, youngest Eskisehir, traditional Sanliurfa and Bursa, authentic Bitlis, splendid and bustling Istanbul and then the Europe-side territories.
- Figs, apples, hazelnuts, melons, wheat crop, cotton etc, - **food produce in abundance!**
- Last but not least we very much enjoyed the 24h with the young couple, **Yekta and Murat**, whom we visited in Eskisehir, an attractive city with population of 500'000 of which 100'000 students.

Writing the Trip Reports

I write these trip reports primarily for my own future memory. While writing, I live the trip again, sometimes even more intensively than during the real trip. While writing, I also enjoy sharing our experience with the potential readers, who are my dear daughter and son, maybe close family and friends.

Also sometimes people ask me details about our journeys and then I may just give them the Internet address instead of long explanations I know, in most cases they will be too lazy to go and look and read.... tough luck for them:-).

Ah... just one more thing! Often I had to use Google Earth to go and see where we actually stayed, what the village, church/mosque/castle or anything we saw is called. Sometimes it helped to look at the pictures of particular spots and then you see this car park where you parked, the promenade you walked, the restaurant where you enjoyed your meal. Of course I also used Google and Wikipedia for information.

Note: For my own records, I have added the exact coordinates of some places where we spent the nights or where something noteworthy happened. If you wish you may just copy and paste them in the Google Earth field: 'Fly to: _____' and you will get there too – accuracy better than 1 meter!

Acknowledgement

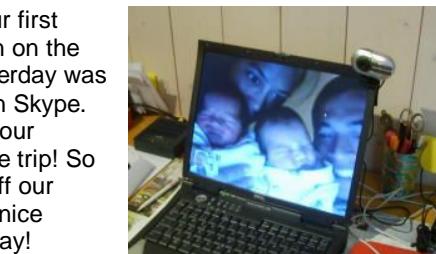
I wish to express my gratitude to Peggy who as usually did wonders in managing our household logistics in our tiny Hotel Berlingo and who put up with the hardship of simplest life while appreciating the enjoyment and satisfaction of self-achievement and successful survival!

DIARY

24th August Start: **Ipsach**

Océane and Laetitia, our first grandchildren were born on the 20th August 2008. Yesterday was their first appearance on Skype. This picture followed in our camera during the whole trip! So we were able to show-off our grandchildren to all the nice people we met on the way!

Also saying bye to our daughter Evelyne and Rafa (taking the picture). The 'Berlingo Hotel' is ready and we, old grandparents look once more forward to a long gipsy trip:-).



End: **Gstadt (Chiemsee)**



Today: 527 km
47°53'8.95"N / 12°24'43.81"E
We also said bye-bye to my old mother (93) hoping to find her in good shape 6 weeks later.



Ready to go!

Easy drive past Bregenz and Munich to Chiemsee. After turning around for a while we found the best scenic spot on a hill above Gstadt to park and sleep. Had a good simple dinner with a local beer after a stroll along the lake.



Got back to the car in the sunset and had a socialising chat with our neighbour, a camper from Esslingen. People from Munich asked us how we found this best and only spot to park and see the lake free of charge without 'camping verboten!' **Yes, we have started well again!**

25th August Start: **Gstadt**

End: **Neusiedl am See (Neusiedlersee)**

Had breakfast (our daily coffee) in the car with sunrise over the Chiemsee! Long but lovely drive, all on main road, passing Traunstein, Salzburg, Wolfgangsee, Leoben, Semmering ending up at Neusiedlersee. Unexpectedly and immediately found this casual parking behind the Yachtclub at Neusiedl where we had our picnic before going for a stroll to the shore to enjoy the sunset on this late summer evening. Went to sleep at 9.30 pm.

To drive in Austria on the main road is a bit tricky as all signposts try to put you on the motorways.

Today: 447 km
47°55'53.36"N / 16°50'8.04"E



26th August Start: **Neusiedl am See** End: **Oradea (Romania)**

Very good sleep! Left at 7 am after breakfast.

Drove on local roads across to Hungary to follow the Danube to Esztergom where we visited the impressive Basilika (pic), the mother of all churches in Hungary, from where one has a great view over the Danube to Slovakia. Continued along the Danube and enjoyed our picnic right beside the river before entering and crossing the center of Budapest, which took us 2h. Then we got back to the main road towards Szolnok where we crossed the Tisza (Theiss) and entered the endless plains of the Puszta. Without any major event we entered Romania at Oradea. As evening was close we looked right away for a campsite at Baila, a wellness resort. There we stayed at a very small campsite and had a picnic from our reserve stock as we did not find any butcher nearby and it was too late to venture back to the city.

Today: 514 km
46°59'50.89"N / 21°59'39.32"E



27th August Start: **Oradea**

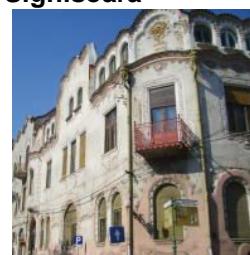
End: after **Sighisoara**

Enjoyed to take it easy this morning. A Romanian camper gave us some good advice for things to see the next few days. At first we went to see Oradea. We had not expected much, but that more we were enchanted by the many stately and some unusually shaped buildings. We felt a bit reminded of Gaudi-Buildings in Barcelona.

Then drove slowly through lovely and hilly countryside and enjoyed the villages and the looks of all sorts of buildings of varying traditional styles.

Also churches looked rich, both outside and inside. This was our first good impression of Siebenbürgen. Just had a glance at the city Cluj while driving through and then went on to Sighisoara where we stopped to walk up to the fortified old town with a very nice clock tower! Sighisoara is already a touristic attraction but the glossy renovation has only just started:-).

Continued in the dusk and stopped at a simple roadside restaurant and then slept on the car park beside the road.



Today: 343 km



28th August Start: after **Sighisoara** End: before **Gaesti**

The night was very noisy from international truck traffic. Nevertheless we slept well and soon we reached Brasov, the large city of Siebenbürgen with the famous Black Church (fire in the 17th) (pic). By mistake we drove up to Pojana Brasov a big glamorous ski resort in a nice 'alpage' setting (now we know). Then we passed-by Count Dracula's (very touristic) Bran Castle on the way over the southern Carpathian mountains followed by a detour to Curtea de Arges with its famous cathedral.

The city is at the center of an attractive recreation area still in Siebenbürgen.

After Pitesti and before Gaesti we stopped for dinner at a romantic roadside garden restaurant. This was also a nightclub and the boss needed a bit of convincing to let us sleep in his enclosed car park (toilet available the whole night:-). Had a reasonable meal - soup and mititei - with a few cool beers and enjoyed the warm summer evening:-)



29th August Start: before **Gaesti** End: **Butoju** (between Urziceni and Slobizia)

Relaxed night, once in a while with music. Early morning drive through many villages over a rather boring plain to Bucharest. After Siebenbürgen this area made quite a shabby impression.

Originally we wanted to stay one night on a campsite in Bucharest. After driving around and getting stuck for 1h in a traffic-jam we found the campsite but then decided to drive to the city centre in our car. Bucharest is a big city with many great parks and pompous palaces, monuments and a few exciting churches (very holy worshiping). The boulevards and streets are still very far from top standards. Yet there are many building sites and things will change.

But Romanians consider 'here' to be the navel of the world (km 0), 'Romania' has inherited the Roman legacy – see: Romulus and Remus sculpture! It was good to visit Bucharest, but after 3 hours (including a nice draft beer and a good chat with a Belgian, who had travelled to Beijing by bicycle) we got back to the car and left the city in direction of Urziceni.

Looking for a camping near Butoju (closed down), we stopped at a road station with a self-service grill looking very tempting, as there was a long queue of local people for the yammie Mititei (minced meat sticks). 1 Lei (0.5 E) for a Mititei and 1.50 Lei for 0.5l of draft beer - that was our great feast with bedside a few meters away on the car park!



30th August Start: **Butoju**

End: (near) **Murighiol** (Danube Estuary)

Today: 301 km

45° 1'54.22"N / 29° 8'49.14"E

After goof night we drove into the rising sun towards the Danube estuary, crossing endless flat land to Braila. Here we saw the Danube again the 1st time after Budapest – celebrated this 'Wiedersehen' with a nice brunch! Big surprise – we could only go on to Tulcea by crossing the Danube by ferry (17 Lei – 8 Euro for 300m!). Very nice drive with many beautiful types of scenery to Tulcea beside the Ukrainian border! Forgot to take pictures!

Then drove on a small road to Murighiol close to the Danube and 25 km from the Black Sea. A bad and a closed campsites, both not near the Danube made us continue until, a few km later we dropped to a very lonely place along a small lagoon. There had a very nice bbq. As there was strong wind, I used the little table to protect the fire. We took it easy and after a long evening walk around the lake we stayed for the night. When we got up at mid-night, we saw the clearest million star sky and the milky way that we had seen for years (2005 in Madoi at 4300m)!



31st August Start: (near) **Murighiol**

End: **Sozopol** (Bulgaria)

Today: 481 km

42°25'1.48"N / 27°38'56.53"E

Got up in first dim light in the morning. What an atmosphere for breakfast with warm coffee until the sun rose!

Then drove along small roads (soso standard) through several small villages with farmer-women dressed up for Sunday church! All the villages had nice wells (forgot to take pictures) and we also enjoyed approaching the Black Sea (pic).

At Babadag we joined the main road and continued via Constanta to the Bulgarian border, which we crossed easily (CH with EU gate:-).

Then continued on a good main road joining the now more attractive shore before Varna where I changed Euro to Leva (cash machines out of service on Sundays!). On the way to Burgas we did a brief turn in tourist trap Nesebar (famous Sonnenstrand) and eventually found a campsite at Sozopol. Quite large campsite on a nice beach (pic) mainly with wind- and kite-surfers. Quite shabby installations but clean enough for us.



1st Sept. (1st day Ramazan) Start: **Sozopol** End: **Sile** on Black Sea (Turkey)

Today: 444 km
41°10'37.47"N / 29°37'24.06"E

Today we intended to get well behind Istanbul to Sile on the Black Sea coast (we intended to visit Istanbul, where Peggy had been with the kids 15 years ago, on the way back). So we started early. Great road along the shore with strange hotels (pic) until the road turns inland and soon becomes narrow and very rough, running through the low mountains to the border of Turkey.

15 min out of BG – 15 min into TK – no problem, **we were in Turkey!**

Surprise right from the border - wide and fast roads! Drove into the first small town, Kirkclareli, to get money with the cash card – no problem! The main road was so good that we decided to take it easy and enjoy, instead of racing to Istanbul on the motorway.

So we got past Silivry and got to see and follow the Marmara Sea (pic) too! Before the airport we joined the Motorway to cross Istanbul and the Bosphorus as quickly as possible. There were some nice views of the hilly suburbs but in the end Peggy was very crossed with me – as we got stuck 30 min in a traffic congestion, had to pay 30 YTL (20 Euro) for crossing the bridge (of which 15 YTL penalty for having no vignette) while she felt sorry for not having passed the city centre and the other bridge instead!

Anyway, in the end we got to Sile as planned and the coast there is very nice indeed! Now only, did we realise that all restaurants and kebab places were closed / not yet open because of Ramazan. So we bought a delicious fresh round flat bread from a small bakery and after admiring the sea-view for a while, we left the town and immediately found this lonely spot on the cliffs to have our picnic and then sleep through the night in one go with little noise only from the light surf!



2nd September Start: **Sile**

End: **Kilimli** near Zonguldak

Today: 309 km

41°29'42.67"N / 31°50'30.86"E



Breakfast with sunrise and then start on our Black Sea route (SMS from Eric – it's still a long way to Trabzon:-). I will not repeat again: the whole drive today was beautiful and exciting! Got to Kandira first along the sea (sahill) and then through Tuscany-like countryside (but with mosques and hazelnut:-). Then back at the coast after Kefken, at a huge dune there was no road as shown on the map. So we got lost and turned for 1h around in circles over very rough roads (asking 6 times for the way) until we were back on track on the shore to Karasu.



We had nice encounters with tortoises and people and somewhere (pic) the farmers stopped us to give us a bag full of hazelnuts. Hazelnut plantations are a major source of income along the coastal regions. Enjoyed lunch at a beach near Denizköy (almost like Birubi Beach, Anna Bay (OZ).



Crossed city of Zonguldak and then it was time to look for a restaurant, which we tried to do at Kilimli. Same story: closed or not yet open! Stopped at the little port and had dinner from our reserve stock and Peggy cooked couscous:-). Sunset followed by early Ramazan moonset. Later we realised that there was a small eating place just across which had opened only at dusk.... would have been nice to mix with the locals.

3rd September Start: **Kilimli**

End: **Bosköy Plajı** near Amasra

Today: 244 km

41°46'29.02"N / 32°28'7.35"E

Undisturbed night and breakfast. Extremely nice drive along the coast and surprisingly bumped into ancient Hellenic ruins (Filyos). Nearby I had bought bread and the baker did not even allow me to pay. We really seemed to look like beggars! Here we realised, we would find fresh water supply everywhere along the way – therefore have no problems for coffee and for cleaning ourselves on the way if no shower was available. Later we turned inland through wild country-side for a detour via Karabük and Safranbolu



Safranbolu is famous for its well maintained traditional Ottoman Houses (17th to 19th) but for our taste already a bit much open-air museum. We got back to the coast at Amasra and a few km later by intuition we turned into a small track leading down to a cosy beach. It was so nice here, that we decided to stay, have a leisurely bbq (with a ice cold beer), enjoy the beach and then sleep. At 9.30 knocking at our window! Police! Just checked our passports, then apologised politely and wished us good night. Fortunately one of them spoke a few words of English.



4th September Start: **Bosköy Plajı**

End: Bay before Gerze

Today: 362 km

41°49'18.50"N / 35°10'17.45"E

Now we felt very well protected and we fell asleep quickly again and had a quiet night!

Sea-view breakfast and early start for a long and beautiful coastal drive again! 300 km of winding road with very entertaining sights and sceneries – had figs a-go-go (could not look at them any more) – saw nice bays and beaches, had a look at this village and that little town with various traditional houses.



Late afternoon we reached Sinop at the Ince Burnu, the northern-most cape of the bent southern Black Sea coast standing out on all big maps! Sinop is a busy attractive town, but we left soon again because the fish restaurants down at the port would not serve food before dusk! So we continued looking for somewhere suitable to stop. Just after sunset at the end of a long beach before Gerze we noticed a restaurant overlooking the sea. Let's try!



The young couple had not really expected guests but they were willing to grill fish and serve us a share of their Ramazan chicken dinner. They even served us cold beer! Since they let us park for the night on their seaside meadow behind the restaurant, we enjoyed a most relaxed and romantic dinner with view over the bay to Sinop.

Le clou: desert was offered by the house – figs from the restaurant's garden:-)

5th September Start: before Gerze End: Besikdüzü (50km before Trabzon)

Today: 436 km
41° 3'49.55"N / 39°13'5.54"E

After a good sleep had breakfast with sunrise. Easy but a bit monotonous drive via Samsun to Unye, from where we made the detour on the old road to pass Yasun Burnu. When we got there we realised that this cape is devoted to Jason and the Argonauts who apparently stopped here on the way back from stealing the Golden Fleece. Here it was so nice and quiet that we stopped for lunch and to stroll around and visited the Jason Church (Cows like at Furka with Kathrin:-).



Soon after we joined the main road, a 4 to 6 lane expressway built on the shoreline, spoiling the coast for over 100 km until Trabzon. We even became concerned that we would not find a good spot to stop for today. About 50 km before Trabzon we saw a closed leisure park and asked if we could stay for the night. We then had lovely bbq on the stone beach when suddenly the clerk came back and with apologies asked us to leave after the meal. Well then – but soon after we found this tiny fishing port and stopped beside the hut of the caretaker who not only welcomed us to stay but also offered us to join him for a fish dinner. We declined the offer, because we just had finished our bbq. Later we felt sorry, we had just missed a good opportunity to join local life. Before sleeping we went for a romantic stroll around the lonely port to the big mole under a dramatic sky until it was completely dark.



6th September Start: Besikdüzü End: near Maçka (near Sümela)

Today: 118 km

At 2 am – bang bang bang at the window. Police! They seemed more confused than we and after looking at our passports and being told that we are tourists they saluted apologetically. Feeling most safe again – we went back to sleep ok:-).



Now today at **Trabzon** we considered reaching a major milestone of the trip. We had travelled by car to the city where most people fly to for touring Eastern Turkey down to Mediterranean Adana from where they would fly back home. Here we joined the itinerary of Eric and Ruth Jeannerat who had joined such this 2-weeks tour 2 years earlier. Their detailed itinerary plan was useful to us and we followed it in great lines (merci). We paid a short visit to Trabzon (e.g. Hagia Sophia) but essentially just drove through the centre and the old town.

Then went on to the famous Sümela Monastery, the promised highlight of any east Turkey trip.

The wild 'alpine' valley is nice and we stopped the car about 3 km before to walk to the bottom of the monastery and then up on a footpath. This Greek-Orthodox monastery was still in use until after the defeat of the Greeks in the 20s. Now it is a extremely impressive edifice virtually seen from below like stuck to the rocks, but once you get up there you see just the protective wall and inside (5 Euro) there are just a few rooms with frescoes to see. The whole rest of the monastery is empty and dead. I found this part a bit disappointing and spent only 20 min. Nice walk back down and to the car.



A few kms downstream we stopped at an empty guesthouse/camping: had a good shower and a sumptuous picnic, with dessert from the apple tree under which we then slept.

7th September Start: near Maçka End: near Tartun

Today: 354 km

Lovely early mountain breakfast beside gurgling creek. Not being observed we filled our apple stock from the trees around. Beautiful drive up an 'alpine' valley to the Geçidi Pass (tunnel) and then many ups and downs until we reached the high plateau leading to Erzurum (1950m). On the way we climbed up to a fort on a steep hill and went around the authentic town Bayburt dominated by a huge citadel.



Erzurum is a big bustling city where the older people look very traditional. The main street looked modern and business and the young people on this Sunday seemed to enjoy and relax on their free day like anywhere in the modern world. Of course we had a look at some of the many mosques, medersas and also at the fort from where one had a nice view over the plain. On the way out heading in the direction of Artvin we passed-by a Migros supermarket, an opportunity to replenish our stocks of food, wine and beer. We also bought kebab-lamb and some spiced mince for a bbq.



Then as we got closer to the mountains we noticed a little track leading to a creek – the place for relaxing and bbq. While we enjoyed our rest, there were 3 times people coming our way to drive into the river to wash their cars. That did not bother us but then more and more flies enjoyed our presence and food. Suddenly, at 6 pm, Peggy could no longer stand the flies, so we left this nice spot and continued towards the mountains.

At dusk, in the gorges near Tartun we parked beside a canteen-type restaurant at a truck stop. It was just time for breaking the fast and all these Muslims spread themselves over the self-service buffet and their dishes (like the flies over ours' earlier on). Of course we felt sorry to miss out this feast! So we just joined the party to have çay until we went to sleep at 8 pm.



8th September Start: near Tartun End: beside Lake Cildir

Somehow that night seemed long, but we could use the (really) luxury toilets for a good wash etc.

We left early for a long exciting drive. During the first hours we drove into small side valleys with traditional villages to see old Christian churches (Haho and Oskvank). Later we continued through great valleys, many wild gorges and along lakes. We skipped the well-known holiday resort Yusufeli singled out as place with alpine looks.



Today: 370 km



After crossing the high Gecidi Pass (2640m) we reached Ardahan, where in the centre we stopped to buy yammie bread. While parked, people asked us to wait just for a moment. To our surprise they brought us a piece of local cheese (tel peynir - a tasty cheese with the texture of fibres!). Very happy we drove on and just before we got to Lake Cildir we noticed a side valley with an awesome castle perched over a gorge—'Devil's Castle', but it was too late in the evening to visit.



Soon after we had reached the lake (1959m), we found this lonely spot for the night and had one of those sumptuous dinner picnics: Peggy's mixed salad with fresh sheep cheese, lamb kebab (from yesterday's bbq), salam, sesame bread rings and crackers, the local cheese (from Ardahan) with self-plucked figs, wine (last bottle from Denner) and beer (from Turkish Migros). At night we had a short but violent thunderstorm, but from SMS we knew that Eric & Ruth follow us on the map and that the Grand-Twins were fine.



9th September Start: Lake Cildir End: near Tusluca

Windy and cool morning with hot coffee in the car. Then we decided to drive back to visit the Seytan Kalesi (Devil's Castle). Very nice walk, first through the early morning village with all the geese, turkeys, horses, donkeys, cattle, cats, dogs etc. and then follow a narrow path above the gorge (with growling dogs) until we reached the castle after crossing a small ridge. A truly singular atmosphere and great scenery!

Today: 226 km



Later we enjoyed the drive along the big Lake Cildir and on to Kars.

Kars is not a big city but it has an interesting flavour of Armenian, Turkmenish, Russian and Curd culture. One of the visible signs of foreign rules are the dozens of grey stone-buildings of the Russian period 1880-1920. Also Kars is dominated by an impressive fortress.



Now, the main reason for travellers to pass Kars is to visit nearby Ani, built as an Armenian capital city in the 10th century. In the 12th century it was damaged and neglected by the Mongols and eventually destroyed by earthquakes.

The many remaining ruins are still very impressive and the setting beside the big canyon, forming the border with Armenia makes it an important historical site and a great place to visit.



When we got back to the car we saw a few curious people poking their noses at our windows, so we showed them our Hotel Berlingo. This started a little conversation with a young couple that then insisted that we should visit them in Eskisehir on our way back to Istanbul.

We had asked a minibus driver if, instead of backtracking via Kars, it would be possible for us to take a short cut on small roads along the Armenian border. So we went for uncounted ups and downs on very rough and dusty tracks, forced many times to asking for the way in this lonely land. After 40 km driving in 1st and 2nd gear, we joined back the main road to Tusluca. But we enjoyed this real backcountry ride. At some place (where we had lost the way again) a lorry driver asked us to stay at his home for the night.

We now feel it a pity that we did not accept any of these offers from these very kind and simple people. It was mainly the language barrier, which kept us off, but unprepared it would also take time to go through such a decision. Time you do not take easily while sitting at the steering wheel.

It was high time to stop and suddenly we saw this little food tent and a small meadow in front.

Aha - the owner spoke a couple of words in German and he called his mother who had been living in Cologne! So it was easy to order food - home cooked fried roast beef, mixed salad and this yammie round flat bread and a couple of cold beers (during Ramazan)! Of course we were allowed to sleep here on the meadow!



10th September Start: near **Tusluca**

End: **Resadiye - Lake Van (near Tatvan)**

Today: 395 km

We had a good quiet night and I had been looking forward to reach **Mount Ararat** (5137m) today.

After a good start with the usual breakfast, yesterday's haze became ever thicker (view 1 to 5 km) and later even obscured the sun. Indeed, we had an easy drive to Dogubayazit and up to the famous Ishak Pasha Palace, but we did not even see a shade of Mt Ararat! We had done 6000 km – my biggest single motivation for doing this long drive, was to reach Mt Ararat.



Ok, the Ishak Pasha Palace was nice and especially its setting in the hills above the plain is fabulous, but without the view to Ararat right in front....? Later I learned that one might see Ararat uncovered for less than 10% of the time – so much for consolation.

The palace was built by a Curd prince in the 17th century. The many different styles giving it this 1001-nights appearance.



Later we drove over the Tendürek Pass (2644m) and through huge, wild lava fields and after a short stop at the Muradiye falls we reached lake Van. Pity, the whole way was still covered in haze. In Van we went to see the fort and then I wanted to take a detour via Hakkari to enjoy great mountainous sceneries along the Irak-Curdish border, but then the road to leave Van in this direction was blocked due to a building site and also I felt very depressed and also the car had started to behave strangely when starting uphill and also made worrying noises in low gear.

So I changed my mind and we continued along the lake and did not stop to visit the famous church on Akdamar Island because of the haze.

Towards the end of lake Van we noticed this small bay with a large meadow and that was perfect for us to stay for picnic and the night. By that time I had started to feel unwell and feverish and this time I was very happy that we had come the easy way!

The small yacht behind had been lifted up by the bulldozer to enable the exchange of the damaged turbine. The owner was aware that we stayed for the night.



11th September Start: **Resadiye - Lake Van**

End: **near Midyat**

Today: 356 km

At midnight we had a very long dry thunderstorm over the lake with continuing lightning. I still slept quite well and felt much better in the morning after the breakfast coffee with nearly clear weather.



Continued along the lake via modern and a bit posh Tatvan and on to Bitlis. To our surprise this small town was very attractive. Bitlis is squeezed between hills and dominated by its fortress. We liked Bitlis for its authentic character with small streets and the traditional shops where Peggy had a good go for replenishing our food supplies. On top of one of the hills I even saw a ski lift! The fountain beside the mosque was a bijou!

On the way to Hasankeyf we passed some oil fields before joining the Tigris. Hasankeyf is an impressive natural and cultural monument indeed with many carved caves and an old decayed bridge. Right here the Turks plan to build a dam and there is great local and international resistance also because of an unsuitable relocation scheme for the population.



Near Midyat we visited a 'Syrian-Orthodox' monastery (started 397 AD). It is very well maintained and the cupola sponsored by the Byzantine Empress Theodora has an incredible acoustic! Here we met a very young Aramenian lady living in Switzerland, who spent her vacation here with her family! For stupid reasons, I declined her invitation to stay with her relatives – I was impatient to have the lamb from Bitlis on my grill – thus spoiling an absolutely unique opportunity to get in close contact with this interesting traditional minority! Senile!



A few km and minutes later we were back to this place we had seen before on the way and where I was striving to stay for bbq and the night. It was to be the best lamb kebap we've ever had. But then the landlord and 2 other men turned up and insisted (by signs and mimic) in very friendly manor not to stay here for sleeping due to terrorist danger ('Alamans' had been kidnapped a few weeks ago)! This was only time we became personally aware of any security problems in Turkey! Of course one realises that there are some problems as one gets through gendarme checks regularly. Sometimes they even searched the car for whatever.

So we packed up and drove closer to Midyat and parked at a petrol station / restaurant.



12th September Start: near **Midyat**

End: near **Sanliurfa**

At 2 am a young waiter from the restaurant banged on the window, but when he realised that we are foreigners he said 'pardon' and left us alone.

After breakfast we got very early into awakening Midyat and we strolled around the lovely old traditional town in the morning sun. Small streets with many nice old houses, some with beds on the roof, others with small stone ovens for baking bread in front or in the yard.



Today: 209 km



On the way to Mardin we took a detour through a lovely small and very fertile valley and visited Savur (pic), a very small, unspoilt traditional town perched on a hill. Here the world was still in order: men sitting along the small main street and women busy with the life's practicalities! A paradise! Later we crossed large fields and children swimming in a pond beside the road who gave us some fresh grapes and then we almost drove over a huge tortoise.



The view of Mardin (pic) spread over the slope of a hill was very nice and we had a good 2h stroll through the busy streets with nice buildings and mosques and the dark shady bazaar.



Unfortunately all EFES-beer places were closed because of Ramazan – Mardin is truly a traditional but also quite a touristic place. Also the food places were either closed or then the pre-cooked food looked already cold or soggy.

So we left for Deir As Zafaran, another old monastery. We were very kindly welcomed by a 'professor' who spoke fluent German. He was so deeply revered to by the students and monks that we wondered whom he might be! The monastery is still in use and we also viewed the throne of the Metropolit (for 100 believers:-) before we made friends with 2 Turkish movie stars on the way out. I wonder - had they invited me - they did not!



Moving on, we had to cross Mardin once more and on the way out we passed-by a MMM (Migros) with plenty of beer available:-). Then we crossed an endless, fertile plain extending to Syria towards Sanliurfa, our next target.



With last night's experience Peggy did not want to take any chances and so we stopped at a huge road station (petrol, restaurant, shops and even a praying hall with water taps for washing). We parked (view to plain - pic left) beside a convoy of lorries with pipes destined for a pipeline in Iraq (pic right). After our customary sumptuous picnic (grilled lamb kebap from yesterday's bbq) we suddenly saw every lorry passing on the street turning in to park.



It was Ramazan time and the drivers rushed by to eat at the restaurant. Suddenly the parking was absolutely congested. Had an entertaining evening with a few words left and right. Our parking neighbours (son and father) were on the way home to Gaziantep. The son slept on the goods in the van and father on a mat outside on the grass. It was a noisy night but it was another experience of roadside life.

13th September Start: near **Sanliurfa**

End: **Karadut** (near Nemrut Dagi)

Sunrise with breakfast. Then drove to Harran where Abraham has lived for some time. Apart from small houses with 'honey-bee-basket-roofs' and a decayed wall and tower there was not much to see! Although we arrived very early, there were already people bothering us, telling us where to go to park in order to take their guide-services. We just drove away then approached again via alternative paths to take a few pictures. We became aware that we faced Arab-type population in this area near Syria.



Today: 368 km



Sanliurfa is a very busy town, but it has its charms by its mix of traditional, modern and a bit of touristic flavour. We strolled around for 3h in the main street, the nice bazaar, the park with Mosques and fishponds and also had a nice kebap. Peggy was not adequately dressed to visit a mosque but a young local lady helped her to borrow a long skirt and a scarf (Peggy with white scarf)!



Nice drive through fertile plains again with amongst many other things huge cotton fields and also pistachio plantations. Eventually we reached the impressive Atatürk Barrage (pic), which retains the water of the big Euphrates River for irrigation of the fertile plains over very long distances. Then we surrounded the big lake and the scenery changed to more arid land becoming hilly and mountainous as we approached the Nemrut Dagi area.



After crossing Adyaman (here we bought very good bread again to make sure we have something to eat in case) and a bit shabby Kahta we drove a long way east on a scenic road to the ferry stop crossing the lake. We had hoped to find a good place here to eat at a restaurant and stop. But there was no restaurant and not enough privacy for relaxed picnic. So we drove back and turned into the valley leading to Nemrut Dagi where after a gorge we stopped at a small pension (Camp Tur) near Karadut. As it was dark already we ordered a small meal after making sure that we would be allowed to park for the night and use the shower. The food was just ok, but the owner took much time to explain how to visit the Nemrut Dagi area –he also gave us some useful leaflets!

14th September Start: **Karadut**

End: **Akbez** (near Hassa)

Today: 332 km

Very quiet night. Peggy got up in the dark to take a shower and I took my turn after her. When I got back, breakfast (with good bread from yesterday) was ready and coffee water boiled 5 mins later!

After a nice drive we reached the top of Nemrut Dagi (2206m). It was a bit overcast but with the early morning light we saw awesome scenery. This highest peak being formed by an enormous heap of stones and sided by platforms with huge statues. King Antiochos I (69 - 36 BC) built all this for his mausoleum. The heads had fallen-off centuries ago mainly from earthquakes. Peggy and I were reminded of the statues on Easter Island (visited 1975). We stayed quite a while here to grasp the atmosphere.

Later we drove down a small very steep road (track) through a gorge to see other marvels nearby. Arsameia with sculptures of Appollo and Antiochos with Herakles and enormous inscriptions, daring Yeni Castle and wild gorge, the impressive well-preserved Septimus Severus Bridge over the Cendere, the Eagle Statue at Karakus Tumulus. We had not known and expected anything of this Nemrut Dagi area. We enjoyed it!



Then we had to drive back via Kahta and Adyaman (Migros). Here a little anecdote:

We stopped in a side street in the shade of a small block to have our little lunch picnic. I had the map and the Lonely Planet in my hands to see if we want to make the detour via Antakya or go straight on to Adana! Soon a very kind man came and asked me if I need help. Here we started a 10-minutes conversation of 2 people not understanding each other! I tried in countless ways to explain that I am just about finding out whether or not I want to go to Antakya. He told me each time that I just have to turn right to go to Antakya - which I knew, of course! As he did not give up telling me to go right, I did not give up explaining my question!

In the end we were both a bit worn down and we split under the eyes of his nice young wife having watched us from the balcony on the 1st floor. In fact he then invited us for tea – I declined because we wanted to move on – another chance gone to meet nice people!

In the end we decided to visit Antakya (of course we turned right:-) and had an enjoyable drive via Gölbaşı and Türkoglu through rich plains and large fertile valleys, circumnavigating the big city of Gaziantep. At 5 pm we just happened to pass a roadside restaurant where we stopped for a good meal with cool beer. Then we just sat for a while to relax and watch the 'Ramazan' evening with pop music on TV. It was quite hot now close to the Mediterranean Sea.

We went to bed after 8 pm just in front of the restaurant and hoped it would get quieter and also cooler during the night.



15th September Start: **Akbez**

End: **Cevlik** (near Antakya)

Today: 125 km

36° 7'52.25"N / 35°54'46.75"E

The night was very busy (Ramazan), noisy and hot. We left in the dark and drove a few km to stop somewhere for breakfast and to wait for the daylight.



After a short drive we reached Antakya and went for a stroll in the nice old town with many mosques, churches of all confessions and synagogues. In particular we visited the catholic church where a lady speaking fluent French welcomed us. At the orthodox church a father and his son, who lives in US, guided and instructed us, also on matters of Antakya.



Then we had a good time in the bazaar where we also enjoyed a few yammie tidbits and bought a grilled chicken for dinner.

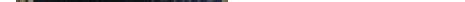
The visit (8 YTL) of the St Peter's Cave where St Peter preached in Antiochus and for the first time called his community by the name of Christians was a bit disappointing. Just a cave, a wall and a group of exciting Japanese all over the place. The view outside over the city beneath the rocky mountain range reconciled us a bit.



In the afternoon we went to the museum to see the famous roman mosaics. We were really impressed by the size and the quality of the mosaics. We saw a few pictures of Okeanos and Tethys and thought of our new grand-twins in Sydney, Océane and Laetitia. Later drove to the sea via Samandagi, partly on very rough roads to Cevlik, a local sea-resort.

Driving on beyond the village we reached a lonely place on the cliffs right on the water and decided to relax and stay.

Now thinking back we realized how relaxed and open-minded people were in Antakya. Even the EFES-Pub was open at 10 am (still Ramazan). And so we had this delicious succulent roast chicken wrapped in pide (thin dough skin) with all the other picnic goodies while enjoying the coast scenery in the setting sun over the Eastern Mediterranean Sea and lightning and rolling thunder over the hills.



16th September Start: **Cevlik**

End: **Kumkuyu** (near Silifke)

Today: 343 km

36°31'10.49"N / 34°12'43.01"E

Very hot night with almost full moon reflecting in the sea! We even slept with open doors – not worried!

After a relaxed breakfast with moonset, we drove 30 km on a rough track along the lonely wild coast in morning atmosphere - only fishing boats here and there. Eventually we reached a little village (Kale) where I asked people sitting on terrace for the way to continue. They insisted for us to sit with them and have some grapes hanging from their pergola.



Although we could not understand each other, we spent a good while with them – in fact they wanted us to stay for the day and for the night. We took a few pictures and promised to send them some. The house lady did not want to be photographed at first but after much insistence from all sides she gave in.

The drive to Iskenderun was nice too. There we joined the main road to Adana, which was a bit monotonous beside endless dockyards. After a fertile plain with large old castles on top of some hills we reached and passed Adana.



As we did not feel like walking in a big city while it was so hot and humid, we merely stopped to take a picture of the enormous new Mosque, the Sabano Merkez Cami (pic), built by the richest Turk who died 2004. After we reached the coast again at Mersin we started to look for a camps-site since we desperately needed to take a shower today.

At first we passed a few camp-sites which where either closed or not just not serviced (grusig) but then at 3 pm near Kumkuyu, we found what we had looked for: A very simple quiet and clean place with showers and parking right beside the water. As we were early, Peggy had the time to clear up the household and do the (hand-wash) laundry. It was still very warm and so we could enjoy a lengthy picnic with the 2nd part of yesterday's roast chicken wrapped in Pide played a major role beside the yammie vegetable couscous and other 'contorni'.



We sat there alone until dark (even the supervisor had left). A swim in lukewarm water, a nice shower and then we watched the beautiful moonrise. If you do not envy us here, then you will never!

17th September Start: **Kumkuyu**

End: near **Karaman**

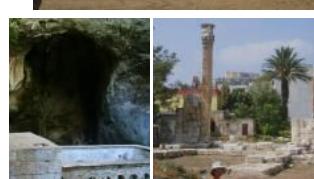
Today: 279 km

Hot night again and Peggy keeps hunting mosquitoes. Then leisurely breakfast with sunrise at the same spot the moon rose last night! We took it easy looking after our bodies and Peggy even went for a swim. When it was my turn, another supervisor arrived and wanted us to pay once more for the new day! Well I thought that 10 YTL is a bit much for a short swim and so we left immediately!



The next target was the sea castle 'Kizkalesi' (Girls' Castle), supposed to be the highlight of Turkish Tourism. Ok – if you like!

But we left soon as there were many other attractive things to see in this region, which we merely scratched on the surface! But at the Heaven and Hell Caves (Cennet ve Cehennem) I scratched quite deep down. In a huge 100 m deep chasm you find an ancient chapel (500 AD) in front of a big and deep cool cave. It was very dark inside and the steps very slippery and I was alone – mmhh. When I got out my glasses went blind and back up to the rim of the chasm I was soaked in sweat again!



Nice drive back down to the coast and then on to Silifke dominated by its large castle. We also went to see the ancient Jupiter temple on an abandoned piece of land in town!



On the way inland we chose to follow the scenic detour via Uzuncaburç.

Along the road up the slope one notices several big ancient graves before reaching a network of valleys and gorges with a side-road leading to Uzuncaburç (Hellenic Olba and roman Diocaesarea). Amongst other ruins one admires the Zeus Temple (pic), the theatre, the town gate, a large Hellenic tower (pic) and a vast nekropol (pic) in a wild rocky valley!



After a nice cool EFES at the little village shop we wanted to see some more ruins, but my careless 3-point turn resulted in the gutter! The right front wheel was spinning in the gutter and the car's body rested on a big stone! This had to happen exactly at 36°35'2.59"N / 33°55'24.90"E! A couple of minutes later a small van stopped and a young couple got out and offered help (hand signs and smiles).



I just had my rope out and attached to my car's hinge, when a tractor turned up! The farmer without first stopping drove right in position to attach my rope and then pulled me out! 5 minutes later we thanked them and were ready to leave!

Still shocked but relieved, we continued on a most exciting drive to Mut through and over wild rocky mountain ranges with deep gorges, bizarre rock formations, traditional villages, nice forests. In Mut we joined the main road to Karaman leading over the Sertavul Pass (1650m) as an excellent 4-lane road all the way. Again very nice scenery in the late afternoon sun also when we joined the plateau with golden yellow harvested wheat fields. Now we knew where all that good bread comes from! Slowly had to start looking for a place to eat. Since we did not come across a suitable restaurant we parked at a petrol station and had our usual sumptuous picnic, with sunset first and then with the bright car park's lighting.

Again we were the only people around apart from the pump station employee.



18th September Start: near Karaman End: near Sultandagi

Breakfast with view to red rocks in the sunrise!

Early drive over the plain towards Konya, but 45 km before we turned off eastwards to Akören to make a detour to Gökyurt / Kilystra an off-the beaten-track 'Kappadokia'. Very nice scenery to get there and to be there with all the bizarre rocks, some of which have caves where people used to live.

When we walked through the nearby village we dropped into the filming of a Turkish TV-series 'Tek Turkiye' (One Turkey) - part 39. This TV-series intends to motivate the many different ethnological groups to participate positively in Turk citizenship by knowing each other better! The young man (pic) explained us everything and even had us cai (tea) served! He also asked us to stay with them for the day. He has our mail address - I hope he will mail some day! Again, we now feel sorry, we did not take the opportunity to stay with them even more so as we had an English speaking person taking care of us!

During the nice drive to Konya, we stopped at a fountain to clean our very, very dirty car.

In Konya (1 million) we just stopped for a kebab since we had visited this city a few years ago on the way to Kappadokia. On the way out we crossed impressive modern residential suburbs spreading out between smooth hills into the big plain.

In Aksehir, we went to a butcher and bought steaks, hoping that later we would find a good place to stay at the nearby lake.

Aksehir is the hometown of a popular writer Hodscha, who lived in the 13th and is famous for his funny stories, reflected in sculptures all over the region (here sitting back to front on a donkey). Then after various attempts to reach the shore of the lake we realised that it was too difficult. The low water level had made the shallow lake retiring too far from any access point.

So we continued and soon after a short detour to Sultandagi to see the ancient Kervansaray (caravan station) we stopped at a petrol station with a closed restaurant to fry (for once) our steaks. The night was routine.



Today: 366 km



19th September Start: near Sultandagi End: Eskisehir

Breakfast was routine and shortly later we reached Afyon in the early morning.

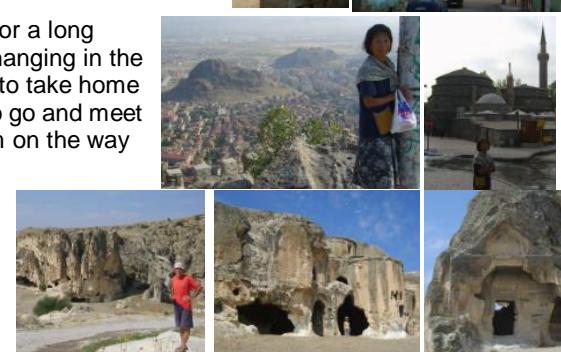
Our first sight in town was a beautiful minaret clad in twisted rows of tiles. We liked Afyon right away. We strolled through the old town with many nice traditional (and natural) Osman houses with sight to a daring citadel towering behind in the morning light. Eventually we reached the bottom of narrow stairs leading 226m up to the citadel through nearly vertical rocks.

We enjoyed the splendid 360-degree view, still in the morning light for a long while. Back in town we could not resist to buy 2 of those sausages hanging in the windows of every food shop and butchery along the narrow streets (to take home to CH:-). We then took the road to Eskisehir, this time determined to go and meet the young couple that had invited us 10 days ago in Ani to visit them on the way home.

On the way we then realised that the road leads through a very attractive Kappadokia-like countryside and so we made a small side-trip to Ayazini. This village had been built right into a landscape of bizarre rocks with lots of carved caves for dwellings, chapels and graves. There were absolutely no signs of tourism and so we were left alone to fully enjoy these sites in peace.



Today: 226 km



Back to continue on the main road, I then unfortunately missed the turn to Midas Sehri, another of the many interesting sites of this beautiful area (I only noticed 30 km later – when we had picnic with yammie fresh bread).

In Eskisehir (pop 600'000) we then really went to look for the Varuna Café where we were supposed to find Yekta and Murat. With some assistance we found them and they welcomed us warmly and they immediately took care of us. They own a homely backpackers lounge with a travel library (worldwide material), a very busy bar serving alcohol and snacks and a cosy cafe - no alcohol. After getting to know each other a bit better they took us out. Went for a stroll through pedestrian Hammam Street and along the canal with modern street cafés (left to right: Murat, Peggy, Yekta and their Spanish friend Txisela from Valencia).



First we had nice dinner at the food center of a very modern shopping mall and then they took us to a local brewery for beer tasting (a bit similar to the 'Tramdepot', but expensive, even by Swiss-standards!).

Finally we rounded up our evening at the Varuna Bar (pic) with a (couple?) nice draft EFES before Murat took us to their home and convinced us to sleep in the guest room. This was the only night we did not sleep in our hotel Berlingol! Then Murat went back to join Yekta to finish work.



20th September Start: **Eskisehir**

End: near **Kestel**

After a comfortable night (unusually getting out at 10 am instead of 6 am) we had then a sumptuous Turkish breakfast together, with view to the canal with a 'gondola' just passing-by. Then Yekta and Murat took us for an extensive walk and we enjoyed their company and very much appreciated their explanations on every aspect of life! Eskisehir is a modern and young city with over 100'000 university students. One feels easily like anywhere in modern Western Europe. There are also dozens of bronze statues illustrating the spirit of the city, e.g. for 'open-mindedness' - a group of musicians from obviously different backgrounds (pic).

Eskisehir is also famous for handicraft using 'Meerschaum', a material that is found in the region. Meerschaum is known worldwide from Meerschaum Pipes (pic). Before having a last drink at the Varuna cafe we visited the old town with many nicely restored traditional Osman houses. Yekta and Murat consider converting the house behind into a guesthouse (next time:-). We then said bye-bye in the Varuna Café. We are world citizens - **keep in touch!**



It was then a short and quite nice and easy drive towards Bursa, but the weather deteriorated and for the first time since we left home we had the feeling of cool and bad weather. In Kestel we took the last chance before Bursa to stop for the night at a petrol station (the people here were a bit wondering and we fed them on info and a little Swiss chokky).

Routine picnic in the car and then went back to sleep in our beds!

Now getting close to Istanbul and with this grey and soggy weather I started to realise that we were on the way home.

21st September Start: near **Kestel**

End: near **Körfes**

At 2 am it started to rain continuously and the rain only stopped for 1h when we reached Bursa, time enough to visit this large town, very quiet on this Sunday morning. Otherwise Bursa is quite nice, as it is located on a slope, a bit like Locarno. Much of the Bazaar is underground and we were almost alone as the stalls were closed. But then we enjoyed the visit of the very massive and impressive Ulu Cami. As we got back to the car the rain started again and since we had parked in front of a small bakery we bought some yammie fresh bread (you never know what will happen later).

In spite of the rain we decided to make the detour via Amutlu and the Boz Burnu (Cape Boz) to see a portion of the Marmara Sea. It was a still a nice drive and Amutlu has some touristic flair but it was too early to stop (and in the rain). Then after the cape, we reached a stretch of road under construction and we were asked by a road worker to stop and wait. All I saw, was that 300m downward a bus was tied to a bulldozer. Not understanding and not aware of the problem and seeing another impatient driver continuing, I continued too! In the heavy rain the road had become so muddy that it was like driving in deep snow with summer tyres. The car became almost uncontrollable and the wheels spinning almost freely; a few meters more of that and we would have been waiting for the bulldozer too!



Today: 255 km

Otherwise the coast road was nice and since we decided to stop for the night before reaching Istanbul and not knowing where that would be, we bought one of the roast chickens sizzling at a butcher shop over the road (noticed by Peggy's nose or her eyes?).

Then we had to be patient when we were caught in long queues around the end of the bay until after Körfes, where we stopped at a petrol station with a car park overlooking the bay – that was our 'standard' to have a nice chicken-picnic.



22nd September Start: near **Körfes**

End: **Kumkapi (Istanbul)**

Rush hour congestions on the way to Istanbul, but when we got to Kadiköy and Üsküdar we had free way to enjoy the view to the European side and the Bosphorus bridge (pic). We also were surprised how easily we passed Besiktas and surrounded the city-center to drive West towards the airport where we expected to find a campsite in Yesilköy.



Today: 130 km

41° 0'4.76"N / 28°58'38.25"E

No campsite anywhere, so we gave up and turned back to look for a car park to stay as close as possible to the center. There could not be a better place than the one we found for 10 YTL per 24h in Kumkapi: 400m from Blue Mosque, 20m from the Bosphorus.

Then we went to sightseeing: the obelisks, the blue mosque (Peggy was popular with the Turk ladies), Hagia Sophia, Topkapi (visited the park only) then we went on to the Bazaar and the Beyazit Area. Hungry, we slowly looked for somewhere to eat and we passed dozens of restaurants in the food streets of Kumkapi. There was too much choice and finally we ended up at the seaside fish market and had delicious fried fish (sardines and mackerel).



Only 1 km to walk along the quay in the dusk to get back to our car where we had a little nip while watching a surprising spectacle: a continuous arrival and departure of cars which went to park at the seashore for a short or long while. This business last most of the night until about 2 or 3 am. Of course they had to pay and there were several parking supervisors guiding them. We could not feel safer than that!

Later we were told that young Turk couples are not really allowed to be close together before marriage. So they use the privacy of their cars to be alone – the view of the Bosphorus helps them of course to feel romantic!

23rd September Start: **Kumkapi** (Istanbul) End: **Kumkapi** (Istanbul)

Today: 0 km
41° 0'4.76"N / 28°58'38.25"E

This was the only place we stayed for 2 nights! It was a bit noisy but we were ok. Early morning after breakfast we walked up past the Blue Mosque to have coffee at the McDonalds to have a good wash etc. Then we continued down to the Galata Bridge (pic) after visiting the old train station nearby. Great morning atmosphere when we crossed the bridge over to the Beyoglu side and then up to the Galata Tower. Beyoglu is the modern part of Istanbul (beginning of 19th century) with many nice buildings of that glorious period when Istanbul was still capital. (Reminds me a bit of Nidaugasse:-).



Unfortunately it was raining quite heavily for a while but then the sky cleared up and we could continue.

We spent several hours strolling through the pedestrian streets all the way to the Taksim Square (pic). The old Tram reminded us a bit of Hongkong. Eventually we got hungry and wanted to eat something else than a kebab..... In this area there are hundreds of places to eat and then we dropped into this small off-track place where we had delicious Beyin Salata (brain salad) and Iskembe (tripe soup). Later we found out that these are authentic specialities - usually not much appreciated by foreigners..



At Taksim Square where we met a Hongkongese couple living in Toronto. They had been warned of bombs to the extent that they did not dare to go anywhere else in Turkey. They were a bit wondering about us:-)

Back to the Sultanahmet-side we much enjoyed to visit the Yeni Cami – New Mosque (Peggy's favorite, 400 years old); I agree that it gives a breath-taking feeling inside. Peggy took here the opportunity to wash her feed again to stay a bit longer.



Then we strolled through the spices market and adjacent market streets where at last I could not resist the temptation for a few Turkish delights – far too sweet for our taste!

On the way back to Kumkapi we visited the enormous Süleymaniye Mosque, which was under restauration and unfortunately closed. So we had short go at the Big Bazaar; we have seen so many of them already!



Then we had more fun walking through Kumkapi looking for something to eat, but then we had a tidy draught EFES first (pic). Satisfied we bought delicious roast lamb kebab and fried sardines to take back to the car for an enjoyable meal with a glass of wine overlooking the Bosphorus.

Before we had our meal we just walked a few steps on the pier to enjoy the view and when passed some locals fishing there, they asked us kindly to join their dinner picnic. Of course we had to decline as we had our own dinner ready but we joined them later for hot çai (tea). Here we said bye to Istanbul and Turkey - we had spent a very good time in a beautiful country with many nice people!



See you again!

24th September Start: **Kumkapi** (Istanbul) End: **Popovica** (near Plovdiv -BG)

Today: 464 km

Breakfast with sunrise over Üsküdar and a huge cruise ship sailing into Bosphorus. Easy drive along the Marmara Coast to Tekirdag in nice weather. Then we cut inland to Edirne via Hayrabolu and Uzunköprü where we crossed the world's longest stone bridge (1200m / 15th). Last kind gesture in Turkey: when I took fuel we were given 3 melons as a present. Stopped in Edirne for last food shopping in Turkey and then crossed the border with the usual relay (BG vignette 20 Leva /10 E for all roads).



Drove towards Plovdiv with a stopover at Haskova where we did some more shopping at a Kaufland Supermarket (good standard and cheaper wine and beer:-). At Popovica we stopped at an OMV road station for picnic and the night.

25th September Start: **Popovica** End: **Sofia** (outside)

Today: 275 km

42°42'24.75"N / 23°28'3.76"E

The night was ok, but continuous rain started at midnight and lasted until we reached Plovdiv in the early and very cool morning. The rain just stopped when we parked and so we had a good stroll through the pedestrian main street and the old town with very holy and richly decorated churches and stately restored houses. The 2 Roman theatres are noteworthy. The smaller one is 'integrated' in the main street, the large one is quite impressive and now used for opera spectacles. Just when we finished our round it started raining again and so we went to McDö for our 'routine' procedures.



Later we drove North past Karlovo to make a detour to visit the highly praised traditional village Koprivista. It was very cold by now and still raining and the place was dead. Nicely restored houses in a very nice valley but the feeling of an open-air museum in a morose atmosphere.



Easy drive to Sofia, where after a long time trying in vain to find a roadside restaurant with a good place to sleep, we just stopped and parked at a petrol station.

It continued to rain heavily and so we had our picnic resorting to reserve supplies from Turkey and finding consolation with Bulgarian wine & beer. Peggy cooked some pasta to warm us up. We finished at 6.30 and then waited for going to sleep at 8 pm.

26th September Start: **Sofia** (start twice) End: **Usoyka** (near Rila Monastery)

Today: 203 km

42°11'35.17"N / 23° 3'36.69"E

1.30 am! Bangbang! This time there was a nasty looking security agent outside speaking Bulgarian. He did not want to know anything – and after he realized that we are foreigners, he just barked ‘go’ – and again ‘go Motel’. It was awful weather! To drive in the dark in a million city with signposts in cyrillic writing only! He then said ‘bandit’ which I interpreted as meaning that we would not be safe because of bandits! So I shrugged and drove onto the expressway having stayed in my pyjama. I was still drowsy and it was extremely dangerous to drive in these conditions. After 3-4 km, I pulled out and parked at the next OMV road station – sod off everybody – even bandits!

After a long while we managed to sleep again until 6 am! It still rained but in the daylight we drove closer to the city to have our breakfast. Near the center we then passed a drive-in McDo where we went to be convenient.

Then parked in a small street and walked into the center to find something to see (we had no guide). After straying for a long while through not very attractive streets we reached the huge and impressive Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, the only place to visit I was aware of (from a travel brochure). It was built 100 years ago in honor to the Russian soldiers who died during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, as a result of which Bulgaria was liberated from Ottoman rule. We also visited the Russian St Nicolas Church nearby and the monument of Tsar Alexander II.



The early Christian Church of St George, behind the Sheraton Hotel in the midst of roman ruins of Serdica was built in the 4th century AD and features frescoes of the 12th to 14th century.

When we got back to our car after 2 hours – the left front wheel was **clamped** (in einen Bügel gespannt) and a lovely pink ticket in cyrillic was stuck under the wiper! So I grabbed a passer-by and showed him the ticket. He fortunately spoke some English and I managed to have him call the number. He was ashamed by the disregard of the police. After half hour the police turned up and freed the car after I paid the fine of 10 Leva. It was supposed to be a blue zone but there were no blue marks! 42°41'57.50"N / 23°18'39.70"E



It was along drive out of the capital (**I don't think we will return**). At least the rain stopped and by the time we reached Dupnica on the way to visit the famous Rila Monastery the sun sent a few beams. But when we drove back into the mountains it got very dark and the rain started pouring again and we were quite apprehensive about another tourist trap.

Now what we saw there did fully compensate for the negative experiences that day. This **Rila Monastery** is splendid! It was founded in the 10th century by a monk (Rilsky) but the impressive buildings and the overwhelming artworks originate from the 18th and 19th century. Especially the inside of the church is so rich with woodcarvings and paintings that there is not 1 mm of undecorated surface left!



Had a good chat with a French couple having traveled in their camper without problems through Albania and Macedonia. Then drove back to the main valley hoping to find somewhere to spend a relaxed night (after last night's experience). There was not much choice and the campsite shown on the map did not exist. But then we settled for a small roadside restaurant in a little village. Bingo! Peggy had the best-ever fried pork liver and I had various styles of grilled minced meat and cool local beer. Later we just went to sleep on the car park beside and nobody bothered.

27th September Start: **Usoyka**

End: **Lake Cacak** (Serbia)

Today: 435 km

43°54'47.04"N / 20°14'7.19"E

We had a very relaxed (a bit noisy) night and so had the birds on the tree! We had their Bulgarian souvenirs until we got home! After relaxed breakfast (we still had enough cream for coffee) we drove via small roads through lovely valleys and villages to the border to Serbia at Dolno Ujno. Even the border was small – almost intimate and very relaxed on both sides. The drive on the Serb side to join the main road to Nis was also very lovely. Then we followed the main road through a wide valley and took the detour via Leskovac with a huge market even with a china town (which we did not visit). When we joined the main road we soon realized that we were driving on a toll road. We got off as quickly as possible but where already charged 3E for 18 km. Then we drove mostly on secondary roads again via Prokuplje and Brus after which we started to wonder as the road was getting very narrow and elevating us into the clouds. Finally we reached the glamorous health resort Vrnjacka Banja and were on track again to Kraljevo and Cacak. Time to think about the night. Soon we reached a lake and there was a big parking with view over the lake! Tomato/Pepperoni couscous, Turkish sausage and Turkish cheese with apples that we had picked on the way! Good night!



28th September Start: **Lake Cacak**

End: before **Tivat** (Montenegro)

Today: 401 km

42°22'52.78"N / 18°44'53.46"E

After a reasonable night we had breakfast with lake emerging out of the dark. Easy drive through lovely countryside (under low clouds unfortunately) to the border with Montenegro through 3 tunnels in a narrow gorge separating the 2 ‘new’ countries. The Serb officer admired our Hotel Berlingo and wished us a good journey!



To enter Montenegro there was only paying the vignette (15E) that mattered to them.

Otherwise Montenegro is a small but beautiful country with wild mountains, big and small valleys and gorges, lakes and wild coastlines with beaches, medieval towns like Kotor and its ‘fjord’, old monasteries and churches etc. By the way – the Euro is official currency although Mne is not in the EU!

After the border we drove through a high valley past Bijelo Polje and after Babljak the road makes a deep drop to a lower valley where, before another wild gorge, one passes the Moraca Monastery and 2 churches with beautiful frescoes. This seems to be a very holy place with a many of the believers kissing pictures, figurines and other objects.



The gorge seems never ending and leads finally all the way to the small capital, Podgorica where we just made a loop with the car to continue to the coast.

On the way we passed the big lake Scutari before climbing over another wild range of hills to the coast at Petrovac. As we did not see any suitable place for us to stay, we continued. Actually we saw a dream place but Peggy felt that it was too exposed to curious looks and we had decided to eat at a restaurant today. So we then passed-by the lovely Sveti Stefan Peninsula (pic) and Budva. Before Tivat we spotted a roadside restaurant with a garage beside, where we were allowed to park for the night. Had a good meal - steak, white beans with homemade sausages and tripe.



This afternoon the sun had made it through properly for the first time since we had entered Bulgaria on 24th September. So spirits were high and we went to sleep with good feelings.

29th September Start: before Tivat End: Mlini (near Dubrovnik)

Today: 110 km
42°37'25.79"N / 18°12'23.92"E

And it was a very relaxed night. At breakfast we run out of gas and so we reverted to our spirit fondue heater we held in reserve:-).

The bay of Kotor is something very special and we decided to do it the whole way. First we drove to Lepetany where we entered the inner bays through a gap of 300-700m (there is a ferry) and then along a very narrow scenic road through traditional villages with houses built of massive stone blocks. From here we also saw the 2 little islands (Gospa od Škrpjela and Sveti Đorđe) for the first of 3 times. Then we visited early morning Kotor, a well-maintained medieval fortress town, protected by the bay in front and the vertical slopes in the back!



Beautiful drive around the bays and after 50 km we were on the other side, 500m from where we entered at Lepetany. We got through the Croatian border with a big welcome (tourism is a top priority in HR) and soon we saw Dubrovnik from far away.

As we had decided to rest at a campsite today, we stopped before Dubrovnik in Mlini where we found a simple but very comfortable campsite, very suitable for us to relax. Clearing up the mess, shave and shower 1st time since Eskisehir – we truly felt like newborn! Now we were ready for a great bbq – local sausage and 2 huge T-bone steaks we had bought in Kotor – followed by a nice cheese and the afternoon was passed.



Went for an evening walk down to the village and along the beaches and got back in the dark, ready for a good sleep. Another nice day had passed – not many more to go but still 1700 km.

30th September Start: Mlini End: Marina (near Split)

Today: 281 km
43°30'36.83"N / 16° 7'15.16"E

Slow outdoor breakfast and then we left for Dubrovnik. Soon we reached a viewpoint (42°38'0.82"N / 18° 8'13.41"E) with a splendid view to Dubrovnik and Lokrum with a 5-master vessel right in front of us. We realized that it would not be too far to walk and so we left the car behind and walked the 3 km to Dubrovnik enjoying the great sights on the way. Then entered the city and walked in every direction also visiting some of the nice churches and the port in front. The city looks very uniform, cool and museum-like. Not very charming.



I had been camping for 3 weeks in Dubrovnik in 1967! Of course I did not remember things in detail, but this time I was no more so exited about this famous place, which seems to have been worn-off by dozens of millions of tourists' eyes. So we left again after about 2 hours and enjoyed our walk back to the car!



The drive to Split is very nice – too grandiose for me to take good photos:-).



It was a nightmare to drive to the center of Split in rush hour and to get a free parking but it was worthwhile indeed. We had not expected much to see but Split was just the opposite of Dubrovnik. No spectacular sight from outside but inside a great variety of buildings and styles and little streets in any angle and cosy cafés and restaurants and shops. In short, Split is a very charming place!



It was quite late and so we could not stay as long as we would have liked.



We now drove into the setting sun hoping we would find somewhere to stay before it got dark. After rejecting a few possibilities, Peggy suddenly saw a few Campers parked behind a little port.



That was the ideal place! Another beautiful picnic dinner. While we waited in the dark for the time to go to sleep a Bavarian came to ask us into his Camper for a genuine Bavarian beer (nach dem Reinheitsgebot). We had good fun and we also drank some local beer although our host rejected the second glass and went back to his! The party ended at 11 pm – late for us:-)

1st October Start: Marina

End: near Postojna (Slovenia)

Today: 404 km

Lovely breakfast with sunrise – everybody else still sleeping, while we drive off through the little port of Marina (pic) and on towards Sibenik passing-by Primosten.



Still morning, we enter the medieval walled town Sibenik with a labyrinth of small streets and stairs and many churches and chapels.

The most famous attraction is the Cathedral of St. James (UNESCO World Heritage) built completely in stone in the 15th and 16th centuries, both in Gothic and in Renaissance style. Nice walk back to the car along the little port and then we were off towards Rijeka. After bypassing Zadar and crossing the big bridge at Maslenica the weather became rough although we still enjoyed nice views until we reached Senj (pic before Senj).



So we decided not to stay here (we had visited this region around Crikvenica 3 years ago) and continued. We then crossed the center of Italian-style Rijeka (part of sightseeing). Bypassing Opatija we then reached the border to Slovenia at Rupa and continued on a secondary road towards Postojna. Somehow we almost felt being in CH already! Before Postojna (near Prem?) we stopped and parked for the night at a roadside restaurant. Had a simple meal and a good draught local beer and then a relaxed but rainy night.

2nd October Start: near **Postojna** End: **Passo di Costalunga** (Karrerpass) Today: 424 km

Indoors breakfast in first daylight and then lovely drive in crisp morning atmosphere through little winding valleys to Postojna famous for its caves (2nd biggest in the world). We did not stop because we still had a long way to go since we intended to reach CH via the Dolomites.

And it was to be a long day! Unfortunately the sky was mostly covered, it was cold and it rained repeatedly. So we did not feel like stopping anywhere! A bit of a waste!

After crossing the Predil Pass (with a big Austrian monument of Napoleon's times) and the Italian border to Tarvisio, we continued via Tolmezzo and the Mauria Pass to Auronzo and the Tre Croci Pass to Cortina d'Ampezzo. Then crossed the Falzarego Pass (pic) and the Pordoi Pass.



On top of the Pordoi pass we saw a large empty car park and we were tempted to stay the night. But it was rather cold at 2200m and we were not equipped for cold weather, we had only one thin cover, just ok for nights down to 5 degrees. With 2 covers we have already gone well below 0!

So we drove down to Canazei and then onward in direction of Bolzano and nowhere we saw any good place to stop until we reached the Costalunga Pass (still at 1700m). A small hut with a panel 'Bikers Treff' and a small car park behind – why not? So we had Kraut with Würstel and Pommes and South Tirolian white wine. In the end we were the only guests and nobody disturbed us on the car park.

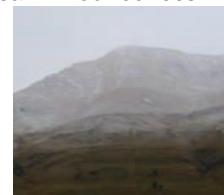
By the way: Tonight I had a quick glance at a German South Tirolian newspaper and I noticed that tomorrow it will snow to 1500m. So we changed our plans and decided to go home via the Valtelina and Ticino instead of the Engadine and crossing the Fuorn Pass (2100m) and the Flüela Pass (2300m).

3rd October Start: **Passo di Costalunga** End: **Ipsach** (home)

Today: 582 km

The night was very windy but before the coming cold front quite mild. Had breakfast with our last cream in our coffees.

Easy and nice drive down to Bolzano and then a very exciting road up to the Mendola Pass. After that we crossed the beautiful Val di Non (Nonstal) with millions of apple trees ready to be stripped of their apples and then up the Val di Sole (Sulztal) to the Tonale Pass (1900m). 200m before the top we emerged out of the very thick fog; lucky for the fox, taking it so easy crossing the road that I had to stop and even wait. It was only 9 am but we had to leave the top immediately as the announced snow-fall had already started and with the worn-off summer tires it would have been impossible to drive down on the steep snow-covered road.



Long drive past the low Aprica Pass and then through the lovely Valtelina to lake Como, where we stopped to have a lunch picnic with a splendid view over the lake and to the snow falls in the surrounding mountains.



Now we thought we would be home in no time but then we got caught in various traffic congestions before Porlezza, in Lugano and in Airolo, but we managed to get to Biel / Bözingen to shop for dinner shortly before closing and we were home at 9 pm! Home cooking, our shower, our bed!

THE END

The next day we had the famous and **delicious sausages from Afyon!**



*And then
Our Grand Twins after our Return*



