

COMMENTS ON TEACHER STUDY TOURS'09 – GROUP I

Wow...what a trip! There is so much that I learned that I can use in my ninth and tenth grade global history classes! I can especially use the information in my ninth grade class, which covers world history from prehistory through 1600 CE. I have always felt that the Ottomans were shortchanged in our curriculum, for example. Now I can give the Ottomans their full due with documentation and pictures. Specifically, I can take my students on a tour of the palace in Istanbul with the pictures I took. All in all, I loved this tour, learned a lot and had a great time! Thanks!

Jim Daley, Poughkeepsie, NY, USA

For me as someone trained in geography what stands out about this tour is the holistic experience. We are exposed to Turkey as a multi-faceted entity. Simultaneously we see the cultural landscape, learn about political-economy and history as well as the physical geography of the region. It is a moving experience to have such an integrative and intellectual "classroom" experience. I have a real sense of place now and it is so far removed from the uni-dimensional focus of U.S. history survey texts which basically paint Turkey as "Justinian" "Hagia Sophia" Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! I filled a journal and then some just with commentary from our super tour guide!!

Karen Nichols, Pleasant Valley, NY, USA

What an amazing adventure! Each day of this trip could be a stand-alone trip. To see so much history in such a short time has been fantastic. The trip has been extremely well-balanced and has offered me the opportunity to be exposed to the diverse elements of Turkish culture. From the marble demonstration to the Iznik tile factory visit and ceramics workshop visit I have gained an appreciation for Turkish craftsmanship and arts. The opportunity to hear a live, classical music performance and to be introduced to different forms of music, dancing and food have helped to deepen my appreciation for Turkish culture. This experience will enhance my teaching of each unit of my global course. From ancient civilizations and the advent of settlement to 20th century Cold War politics and the European Union, Turkey's history is a vital part of my course. Having a deeper sense of each of these time periods will faster my ability to help my students understand Turkey and the world.

I think I was most impressed over all with the size and scope of everything we saw. To stand under Hellenistic columns, Roman arches, the Blue Mosque and the Hagia Sophia is to appreciate and understand the massive size and scope of these architectural masterpieces. The trip to Ephesus was particularly significant in this regard. To be able to get a firsthand look at a Roman city was remarkable. In the states Roman artifacts are tucked away in museums and one can get a glimpse of an idea or artist's rendering of a model city. To be able to walk the streets and climb over an aqueduct gave me a whole new level of appreciation for the imperial majesty of a Roman city. Walking through the forum and amphitheater and experiencing the perspective and relationship of the buildings to one another is the best way to appreciate the facets of Roman engineering.

Maryann Williams, Poughkeepsie, NY, USA

As an economics educator, I am always most interested in identifying a country's resources and its allocation of those resources. By far Turkey's greatest asset is its people. Physical capital and infrastructure can be acquired, but the entrepreneurial spirit cannot. I find the Turk's business orientation to be earnest, pragmatic and aggressive; paired with the proper capital investment and an effective universal educational institution; these attributes have historically led to rapid and sustained growth. If Turkey's labor force is allowed to flourish, I believe the economic capacity of this nation can reach the heights of its cultural achievements.

Marlene Colonna, Hudson Valley, NY, USA

The Turkish Study Tour this summer has totally exceeded all my expectations. Throughout this trek across Turkey, I have been amazed by the sights, the food, the comfort and the endearing welcomeness of this great nation. The Study Tour has been incredibly valuable in exposing me to this heretofore unknown country and my life and my teaching will be changed forever as a result.

First and foremost, the Turkish Study Tour showed off Turkey for all the amazing wonders it offers, both on the beaten path and off of it. Of course, the history books are littered with references to the Hagia Sophia and the majesty of Ephesus, but our itinerary exposed us to so many of the amazing nooks and crannies of this great country, taking us to fascinating sites like the Caravanserai in the middle of the desert plains or the Rumi Mevlana, to see ancient Ottoman tombs.

Each day thrust us into a new period of history, whether the Neolithic period through Çatalhöyük, the Byzantine period at Aphrodisias or the Ottoman period at the Topkapı Palace. Personal highlights include the Blue Mosque, Hagia Sophia, and Archeological Museum (totally undersold) of Istanbul, the ongoing research at Çatalhöyük and the hand carved churches of Cappadocia. The tour proved that Turkey is filled with sites which leave it unparalleled amongst the world's nations for historical importance. The country offers a portal into so many different eras and this Study Tour highlighted it, in all its glory.

The tour additionally left us enough free time to expose ourselves to the modern life of Turkey. The itinerary gave us the freedom to haggle over goods in the Spice Market and Grand Bazaar, to trek up to the Galata Tower to capture sweeping views of Istanbul, or to peek around a corner in Konya to discover a raucous Kurdish Engagement ceremony. I really feel as a result of this tour that I have experienced a small taste of what Turkish life is like.

Visiting the various schools gave us another portal into Turkish life. Over the course of the trip we visited four very different schools and got a real snapshot on the different experiences students are exposed to in Turkey. The Darüşşafaka School and Bahçesehir Science Technology School showed off the great educational strides that are being made in Turkey. These schools had top-notch facilities and enthusiastic staff to show it off, whether by showing us their great projection systems in the classroom or bedazzling us with their planetarium and science museum, these schools showed us how education can be done right. The other two schools showed the great efforts that are being made to provide students with the best education possible. One school was dedicated to the education of those who lost family members to the tragic earthquake of ten years ago, while the other was an incredibly rural town where energetic students clicked away at educational games on computers donated by a grant. Memories of the smiling faces in each of these schools will stay with me for a very long time.

The support staff on this trip was incredible. To begin with, Orhan was a walking encyclopedia on his country, constantly making clear how extensively he knew his country and the sights in it. He would deliver insightful and completely off-the cuff descriptions of both contemporary and ancient Turkey. His level of scholarship was incredibly high. In addition, he was extremely personable and made the trip a lot more fun for all involved. Hulya was excellent as well in the role of trip coordinator. She was always on site and made sure all our needs were being met. Metin and Ali were a great team to ensure that our ride was smooth, efficient and most importantly safe. They did an excellent job providing a good coach experience.

The food was excellent throughout the trip. Unlike previous group trips I have taken, the food varied from location to location. Each dinner offered a new aspect of the varied cuisines Turkey offers.

Highlights include the Asitane Restaurant in Istanbul which offered ancient Ottoman dishes accompanied by Ottoman music, the baklava of the Mansions restaurant of Istanbul and the hearty and spicy meal of the Dedeman Hotel in Konya. As a vegetarian, I had certain dietary needs and my eating needs were met above and beyond what I could have expected. The tastes and flavors of Turkey were a highlight and were stay with me for a long time. Overall, this study tour has been an amazing experience. I have become personally acquainted with many great sights, excellent teaching practices, and invaluable cultural experiences in Turkey. I have forged connections with teachers across my own country and have immeasurably improved my teaching. I am tremendously grateful and wish the best for this amazing nation.

Patrick Healy, Poughkeepsie, NY, USA

Turkey is a land of great beauty. This beauty can be found in its variety of landforms, its people, food, architecture and history. Each region we have visited has stimulated all of my senses. This trip has opened my eyes to a region of the world that is not well understood or appreciated in my country. It is my sincere hope that through my tales of this journey that my fellow countrymen will be inspired to visit this magnificent land.

Colleen Breen, Royersford, PA, USA

The 2009 teacher study tour has been a life changing experience. As an educator, the rich cultural heritage and vast history available in Turkey defies description. I applied for the tour after reading the itinerary and speaking to other people about their travels in Turkey. I read a few of the recommended texts. Day one we started with a breath taking cruise on the Bosphorus and every experience since has been more incredible and more awe inspiring as those first views.

My perspective of Turkey has changed. Turkey is a country rich in history and active in current world affairs. Modern Turkey is obviously caught up in a current of change. Secular interests compete with religious undercurrent, historical art forms integrate 21st century techniques, and new and old exist and evolve together. This experience offered me a taste of Turkey, a taste so rich and exotic that I end the tour, looking for ways to share with others some of the things that I have learned and am inspired to go on and learn more.

Kathleen Ellis, Reading, PA, USA

When I first arrived in Turkey, I thought to myself, 'What ever am I doing here?' It took me a few days in Istanbul to get acclimated to my surroundings. It did not take long to fall in love with the city. The Turkish people could not have been more welcoming. I was hesitant before the trip because I had heard that the Turks were not friendly - how untrue. I was most impressed with our tour of Ephesus. I only hoped more information was given on Saint Paul. Another fascinating site was the Göreme Open Air Museum. I felt a spiritual connection there and probably would have been able to get a better sense of the holiness and determination of the people to express their prayers save for all the visitors. As I am a religion teacher, these are the areas of the tour that are most valuable. The landscape and the vastness of Turkey is amazing to me - I am in complete awe. I will use the information I learned about the Byzantine Empire and Justinians rule as this is part of my Social Science curriculum - not as much detail of course. The Grand Mosque in Bursa was beautiful in its simplicity and meaning to me. As our tour is coming to an end, sadness is setting in. I feel very comfortable here and I am quite proud of myself for learning a 'few' Turkish words! I will definitely go back home as an ambassador for this diverse country and I am very grateful for having been given this wonderful, once in a lifetime opportunity to study here.

Marcia D'Ambrosio, Allentown, PA, USA

The mystery and allure of Turkey has always intrigued me - the beauty of Turkish art and architecture is evident, but, what about the personality of an obscure culture other than what has been introduced to most Americans through Hollywood films, novels and... misinformation? When the teachers study tour of Turkey was offered through our local world affairs council - sponsored by and funded through the Turkish Cultural Foundations. I was exiting to apply for acceptance on the tour. This culture has been neglected, in my opinion in the fine arts department other than the mention of a few examples of calligraphic arts, the Hagia Sophia and perhaps Çatalhöyük.

The study tour has opened my eyes and my heart to the beauty and history of Turkey. Not only the beauty of its arts forms, but to the beauty of the people. Once more, I am reminded as to how different we are - yet how much a like we all are. My experiences have been too numerable to mention - but, I would be remiss if I did not mention just a few.

Firstly, the helpfulness and friendliness of Turkish people made a great initial impression. Seeing cultural sites firsthand - not in my textbooks over the past 40 years cannot be expressed in words; the cuisine which is subtle and then powerful - so fresh and exhilarating. From the passionate portrayal by Orhan - our tour guide - without whom Turkey would not have been so meaningful to the sites themselves in all their splendor. It will not be difficult for me to bring to my school - it students and staff a new understanding of Turkey. I am planning a Turkish festival for my A.P. Art History students and perhaps my colleague who also travelled on this tour from the social studies department. I will also introduce the many textiles I have seen in Turkey. I would like to have my librarian add resources on Turkey to our school library. The Family and Consumer Science class will benefit from my study tour in the Cultural Cuisine around the World elective. I intend to also introduce my music department to Turkish music - the part it plays - not only in entertainment, but also in religion and everyday life.

In closing, as tears welled in my eyes - standing on the remains of Çatalhöyük - 9,000 B.C. feeling the life that had been their - knowing that my present life was changed - will be paramount in my memory as long as my mind remains clear. My heart has been touched by the children's large eyes and prideful faces in the village school - my sincere gratitude to all concerned. I hope I can do justice to your dedication and hard work when I attempt to bring the mystery, allure and true understanding of beautiful Turkey to my high school.

M. Evelyn A. Braun, Temple, PA, USA

Before this experience my knowledge of Turkey was a curiosity of the Hagia Sophia and some basic knowledge of the civilizations that crossed this region through history. How my eyes have been opened by this opportunity... As I reflect on the past ten days and think about my teaching curriculum, there will be little that will not be impacted by my time in Turkey. I have seen art and architecture from the earliest periods of history and it has been presented by the most knowledgeable scholars within a context that connects it to the contemporary (and everything in between). While I expected to see historical sites, the visits to Turkish schools were informative and fascinating; giving me perspective on my own teaching system in the US. The amount of information that I have absorbed over the course of the tour would not have been possible were it not for the organization and effort to create the highest quality experience with the fewest distractions possible. This reflects the fantastic job the Turkish Cultural Foundation did with this daunting task. Not only did you see the most important and pivotal sites and objects in Turkey's history but we also found such authentic experiences as we ate and observed the present Turkish society. I will be forever grateful to have been provided this opportunity.

Michael L. Miller, West Reading, PA, USA

Turkey has come alive for me through the Teacher's Study Tour 2009! Where do I begin? Every day was overflowing with invaluable experiences and information that I will use to restructure my ancient history curriculum.

I have traveled on many organized tours, but can honestly say that I have new experiences such as well planned comprehensive educational trip. No stone was left unturned. Each day presented itself with a variety of activities that introduced us to all aspects of Turkish customs, history beliefs and culture. This trip was a perfectly planned lesson. The balance between historical lectures, site-seeing and activities in the arts kept me engaged and energized throughout the entire trip.

My eyes have been opened to a beautiful country and my level of understanding deepened through this experience. Thank you Turkish Cultural Foundations for one of the finest professional development opportunities that I have experienced.

Gigi Dawson, Columbia, SC, USA

Traveling around Turkey, experiencing the sights, sounds, and tastes of this gorgeous and hospitable country has been an incredible experience. Now I feel better prepared to share information with my students and make it come alive.

The Turkish Cultural Foundation studied tour = priceless

Janelle Bondor, Columbia, SC, USA

To begin, this has been a wonderful experience both professionally and personally. Let me begin with the first category.

As a World History, Current Events, US History and Middle Eastern Studies teacher, there are few places that rival Turkey for breath of historical relevancy. The trip begins with look at Istanbul, center of the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires. The trip gets a wonderful start with an outstanding hotel view of two wonders of architecture, the Blue Mosque and the Hagia Sophia. The first few days are spent viewing the Istanbul sights augmented by the incredible knowledge of our tour guide, Orhan Sezener. And this is just the beginning. From the oldest inhabited settlements to Greco-Roman marvels in Ephesus, to monasteries and homes carved out of mountains in Cappadocia, one is treated to some of the greatest marvels in human history, a personal experience brought to life beyond the photographs and knowledge glimpsed out of books,

Along with the sights goes the organization. There is so much to see and some days the process is almost overwhelming. However, the staff aided by Bonnie Joy and the indefatigable Hulya Yurtsever make sure that the senses are not overloaded. There are rest stops, cultural activities, and lodging in beautiful accommodations. Every day brings a new wonder from cuisine to architecture, from pottery to rug making. I have so much material that I am dying to bring back to the classroom.

Personally, among the many pleasures of the trip are the bonds formed between the people on the trip, from the organizers who enjoy a great repartee with each other to the amazing backgrounds of the teacher participants. All display a thirst and love for knowledge. I feel I have traveled and lived in many countries, but this case is true with everyone. The travel experiences of this group are phenomenal, and their sharing that richness of experiences a treasure I have never encountered.

John DeKoven Pulford, Columbia, SC, USA

My overall impression of the Turkey study tour has been one of awe - I never realized the wealth of cultural sites that were in this country. Even reading about them in a history book or a tour book does not prepare you for the sense of wonder that fills you when you realize that humans stood in the same spot as you over 9,000 years ago, or that the marble road on which you are walking was traveled by the ancient Romans. More significantly there seems to be an almost spiritual connection to the plea we've visited, not just the religious ones, rather the connection stems from the recognition of all that humanity has in common, no matter what ethnicity or time. We grieve and bury our dead, we use art to express our inexpressible feelings and we form communities to assist one another with survival.

As a science and engineering teacher, there is a wealth of information here for me to share with my students in a way that draws them into my subjects. From the comparison of the foundations of Hagia Sophia and the Blue Mosque to a chemical analysis of the Pamukkale Springs, I have encountered endless possibilities to engage my students. I would whole heartedly recommend this trip to other science or engineering teachers for I believe interdisciplinary studies such as this tour are the key to our student's understanding our subjects. It was also informative to visit similar schools in Turkey and share our subjects, successes and common challenges, and realize that our students aren't so different after all.

Kristin Bullington, Elgin, SC, USA

I will have to start by saying that the Teacher's Study Tour of Turkey has been one of the best experiences of my life. As a teacher, this has been the opportunity of a lifetime. We have been exposed to the many wonderful sides of Turkish Culture. I have learned about Turkish art, architecture, history and many other things. I have visited places in Turkey I never thought I would. I would highly recommend this study tour to teachers of all disciplines. More specifically, I believe social studies teachers would benefit from this study tour. As a world history teacher, I have learned about so many different topics and time periods directly related to my world history curriculum. This study tour has helped me grow as a teacher and become more knowledgeable on various topics that I teach. Some of the places we visited were Çatalhöyük, Ephesus and Topkapı Palace. We have studied Turkey from the Neolithic Period through the Ottoman Empire and after. As teachers, we constantly need to learn new information to become better teachers for our students and this study tour is a wonderful way to do this.

Melony Sanford, Irmo, SC, USA

From a landscape which is just as diverse as its people. Turkey has slowly sketched many of its faces into my heart. I personally have learned from this opportunity that the history of Turkey goes back much further than what I've been exposed to on CNN or any other international news channel. The history to this country is one which is full of pride, culture and riches of humanity. I feel that this Turkish Cultural Program has made the world a little smaller yet better understanding to me. I can now say that my worldview has now been forever changed.

Fernando M. Branch, Memphis, TN, USA

When I began telling my friends about this wonderful opportunity I had received, many of them asked, 'Why Turkey?' It is a question based in lack of knowledge and/or misguided information as well as stereotypes. Unfortunately, I did not possess the skills and knowledge to adequately refute their connotations. The biggest thing I will take away from this trip is the newly acquired understanding of what Turkey represents and all that its people have to offer. Therefore the question will not be 'Why Turkey?' but rather 'Why not Turkey?' Thank you Turkish Cultural Foundation!

J.B. Smith, McMinnville, TN, USA

It was the adventure of a lifetime for me to teach school in Turkey from 2004-2009, but these months were filled with work, grading papers, lesson planning and weekend excursions with *The Lonely Planet - Turkey* guidebook. I realized, only after returning to the USA that I had only scratched the surface. I had not had time to really explore the history, culture and political, social and economic issues of the country. What I did learn was that the Turkish people are the most gracious and generous people I have met anywhere in the world. I knew I wanted to come back. It felt more like home than my home in the states.

So the Turkish Cultural Foundation has afforded me the opportunity to explain the richness of this country - a country whose history goes back 15,000 years, whose land has been inhabited for 376 generations. Our guide Orhan, has led us to the worlds of the Hittites, the Romans, the Byzantine and Ottoman dynasty. We have talked of gods and goddesses from mythology, the journeys of the Apostle Paul, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. We have seen tile making in Iznik, carpet-making in Cappadocia and the art of ebru in Üsküdar, the silks of Bursa. We have explored Turkish music of all kinds and sampled innumerable traditional Turkish foods.

Highlights for me include the wonders of Istanbul -the Hagia Sophia, the Blue Mosque, the cistern and the fascinating spice bazaar; the archaeological sites of Çatalhöyük dating back to Neolithic times; the geography and natural splendor of Cappadocia and the unique beauty of Pamukkale with the blue ponds and blue sky in dramatic contrast to the white calcium deposits covering the steep slopes.

Most of all I treasure my encounters with the Turkish people. Whether offering a cup of *çay*, giving directions, helping me learn a Turkish word or phrase, allowing me to take a coveted photo, or explaining their educational system, they are genuine, caring, and gracious.

I am pleased to have visited a number of schools, my favorite the village school in Enka. I am anxious to take all that I have learned back to my school and my community. As more and more people come to see Turkey as it really is rather than how the media often portrays it, relations between the two countries will improve and the relationship will be mutually beneficial. I appreciate all that Turkey is, and no more a part of me than ever before. I am happy to be an ambassador for this gem - Türkiye. Thanks to everyone who had a part in providing this experience.

Marie Maddox, Maryville, TN, USA

I did not realize until this opportunity presented itself that I knew so little about Turkey. Its history, its people, its customs and its direction for the future has captivated my intellect but most importantly my heart. As we visited each new locale, it became my favorite: Istanbul - one of the most beautiful cities in the world, Iznik - my eyes feast on the tradition of tile making and Bursa with the silk markets; Ephesus - a city with marble presenting itself as center of culture, religion and mosaics.

Each day held new treasures to be revealed. The Neolithic site of Çatalhöyük and the churches carved into the rocks of Cappadocia encourage me to continue my education, hopefully in archaeology, because the more I know, the more I can teach. A special highlight has been the people of Turkey. Visiting area schools and seeing the smiles on the children's faces give way for a future of promise, hope and understanding.

Peggy Fragopoulos, Cookville, TN, USA

What has impressed me most? Everything! I will name only a few of the standouts.

Starting with Istanbul, the architecture and antiquities were astounding. The Ottoman period, the Byzantine period, the mosques Topkapı Palace were overwhelmingly beautiful. Their examples of calligraphy, mosaics and tiles, minarets, costumes and jewelry were all fine examples of these periods. No other country could compare with these unique styles.

The visitations to the schools was enlightening. I loved the one in the country that showed rural curriculum and the boys who met us. The people here are so kind and loving. Their faces show something in them that elicits deep compassion for suffering and joy.

All of the ruins at Ephesus and Aphrodisias especially, opened my eyes to the remarkable mixing of cultures and history that these people have shared with European history. I had not realized this before.

The art, the crafts, the food, the landscapes, the architecture, the seas, the people, the long history of industry and survival, the traditions, the language, and the religion all make up a tapestry as complicated and beautiful as a Turkish carpet.

I will be teaching lessons this year using my tile from Iznik. We will make shadow puppets like those we saw in Bursa. We will make pots with Turkish patterns and schema. We will do paper marbling (*Ebru*) as developed in Turkey.

I will become an ambassador for Turkey. Orhan and Hülya have exposed me to a whole new world.

Prilla Faye Watts, Silver Point, TN, USA

I have absolutely loved my trip to Turkey!!! The knowledge gleaned from my 10 day stay in this beautiful country will, no doubt, benefit me and my community in many years to come. I am grateful for this opportunity and consider it an honor and a true privilege to have taken part!!!

Timothy Drinkwine, Nashville, TN, USA