



Istanbul “Run from Asia to Europe” Marathon Trip Notes November 10-20, 2013

It was www.MarathonTours.com that lured me into Istanbul as after all where else can you run from one continent to another? Asia to Europe all in one day! This was a most unique trip for me.

It was Samsung that screwed me royally by totally bombing my hard drive with my rather complete and, if I say so myself, my excellent and extensive trip report. Daily I was loyal to writing my impressions, adding pictures, researching the sights, and then the last day of my 10 days – POOF! It was all gone. After many efforts I have given up getting my report off the broken hard drive. I am now the new owner of a ThinkPad combo PC and tablet. I am also now in the mode that (1) I'd rather travel than be slaved to writing, (2) recognizing or hoping that I do travels for ME and not the headline, so (3) I'm not going to recreate.

The following therefore are the notes I sent from my iPhone to Tom and a few friends who asked for daily updates and not much more.

Observations on the marathon

- Controlled studied chaos - surprisingly it works as this is their 35th annual. I did not find this chaos to be disconcerting but rather quaintly what the Turks are all about.
- Registration online was easy and cheap. Pricing of the five day tour was uniquely cheap especially for all we got.
- The expo is 30 to 40 minutes out of town and would have been a challenge to get to by a foreigner.
- There was a stall to show your passport and get your number. Then another stall to get your bib. Then another stall to get your T-shirt. Then another stall to get a bag of food. There was no official merchandise.
- The T-shirt and backpack and medal were all very nice quality. The telecom sponsor gave away both headgear buffs and little red warm caps.
- Starting line - Included kiosks and hawkers and even buses coming through in the wrong direction
- The national anthem was played by a band and honored by everyone who sang along. Then everyone chanted something that sounded very nationalistic. This is obviously peoples very loyal to their country.
- Warm-ups included groups bouncing around. It reminded me of how the Germans dance.
- Fluid stations were not offered until about the 6 km mark. But there were plenty of hawkers selling bottled water. Such a good way to limit trash.
- Over 100,000 people joined the fun run. They were advised not to run and they were started at different intervals because of a concern that the bridge Vibrations would be a problem and the newspaper reported that it was. It was sweet to see big mama sans in their scarves and long robes with a bib.



- The only food I saw on the course was cut up apples in big bins of water. There were sponge stations again in big bins of water. Also tubs of ice. Obviously the Turks are not as concerned about germs as are the Americans and this I think will help them survive longer.
- Finish lines were as chaotic as the traffic. Going through the 10K finish line was nearly impossible both to get through the crowds and to figure out where the course was. There were tents at the 15 K finish line with crowds who did not know how to line up. I think they were getting their finishers certificate.
- The finisher's medal is given to you in a plastic goodie bag that includes a generous amount of food and drink.
- While I finished at around 11:30 - which might be my record slowness - I went on to walk the marathon course toward the hotel and beyond until about 1:30.
- There were timing chip mats on the course for the throwaway chip but there were not mats at the turnaround which might explain why I saw some Tubbies running at the 40km mark with the fast boys. Some things are universal and I suppose cheating is one of them.



Observations on the Turks

- Clearly they are good drivers because they drive so extremely crazy in a chaotic traffic pattern yet I never saw an accident.
- Slim and trim and nice looking they appear to be a very healthy group. Maybe all the vegetables in their diet helps. Maybe the shortage of American fast food places helps.
- The English language is very common and with very little accent.
- Homeless is said to be nonexistent. There are next to no beggars on the streets. There are a lot of hawkers so this is a group of people who are willing to work.
- The prime minister has big ideas and a lot of development plans. Though that has led to some discontent it obviously also leads to employment and growth of their city. They do not limit investment and as a result big house prices have gone up to the 30 million range. I'd be curious to know why they did not get the Olympics in lieu of Tokyo being chosen.
- Tourist costs are very reasonable. Any currencies from their lira to American dollars to the euro are readily accepted.



The markets are teeming with colorful stuff. Well, the markets are just plain teeming and day and night. It was all so fascinating that it's no wonder Las Vegas is building a Grand Bazaar of their own. See the hotel "Broken Column?" Not all translations work.



My hotel was at the Old Wall and this was a view from my room. (This was likely the old wall in the old city where the American gal was killed earlier in the year.) The hotel was new but in old style with bird cages and shoe shine stalls. The breakfast room was light and airy with a view to the water off one side and to the Blue Mosque to the other.



The hotel had canaries singing everywhere, caged in lovely brass and spotless cages.



From the hotel's dining room terrace to the Blue Mosque. Yet just a wee bit to the right were some quite small homes/apartments with lots of 'international flags' flying – i.e., laundry.



At Princes' Island even those in burkas got a carriage ride. I saw less burkas and head-scarves than I expected.



They love their animals and the animals are amazingly calm and well fed. Here are cats and birds eating together which was not a unique sight. I felt these dogs were the Ying/Yang pair.



There are no motorized vehicles on Princes' Island so the sight of a horse drawn trailer of tires was a bit of a mystery. The boats were common as were fishermen. See the bicycle as a moving van?



Still on Princes' Island this dear man was fixing up a pigeon's foot that had been caught in a web of fishing lines. From one extreme to the other, this character was from Pakistan and on our tour; he

was simply into doing and experiencing everything. He was as much entertainment as the island. The decorative boat was one of many on the mainland that were gold gilded floating restaurants.



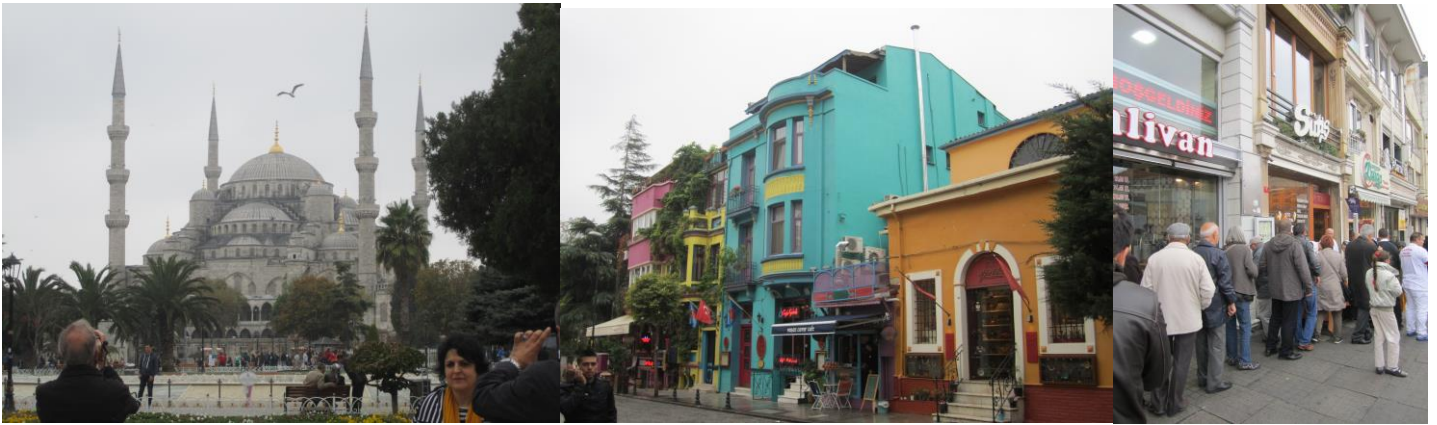
Always animals whether in back alleys or in ritzy areas they belong and are treated well. When I walked the exclusive shopping street on the way to Taksim Square I realized how the shopping is rather extreme from high end modern shopping centers with rich merchandise to the alleyways right next door. They were always clean and pristine with never trash or dog poop.



The main shopping street had been Embassy Row until the capital was moved to Ankara. The Turks eat well. Fresh produce abounds everywhere as do lovely restaurants both modern and as this one is – in a historically significant old building.



The world is flat and thus it's universal to have street music. It's also universal to have cell phones – there were smart phones everywhere so why these cute little umbrella style telephone booths I don't know. And of course there has to be shops for belly-dance costumes; I'm told the Grand Bazaar is primarily frequented by the cruise ship folks.



Such a mixture: from the Blue Mosque that was near to my hotel in the Old Town, to these colorful townhouse/businesses. See that soup line? It was on the ritzy street of old embassies and stores for the wealthy and the restaurant appeared to be giving out soup to any and every one. Either that or I looked needy.



Inside the Blue Mosque took up a big chunk of the day learning about it but not before stopping by “One of 1,000 places to see before you die” – a Turkish bath frequented by the rich and famous but probably not as many women because the lovely part was reserved for men. I learned later that these bath procedures were nearly painful in the scrubbing off of the top layer of skin.



We were taken to a top notch rug maker and given not only a demonstration of the knot tying but some education as to why some rugs are worth \$200 and some worth \$20,000. I’m not sure that I can be educated sufficient so it’s a good thing I don’t need a rug. The little one I liked the best was \$10,000. It might be best to buy one of the many Evil Eyes to ward off the devil before entering into a rug shop. Some of the rugs are made in China.



In the old Palace we had a separate tour of the Harem and learned the political dealings that went on there. So it was only appropriate to remember that a harem needed a bed too so we went to that section also. It's a huge hill top grounds and with a park that I'd return to.



The Turks loyalty to their country and their founder Ataturk would strike me as special over and over again. And to pigeons which were fed in front of mosques along with bread stalls and street vendors. Yes, that's a platter of bagel type breads and a scene that was quite common. They are skinnier than bagels and dipped in molasses and coated with sesame seeds. I indulged more than once, but I never bought a Turkish flag or fed the pigeons.



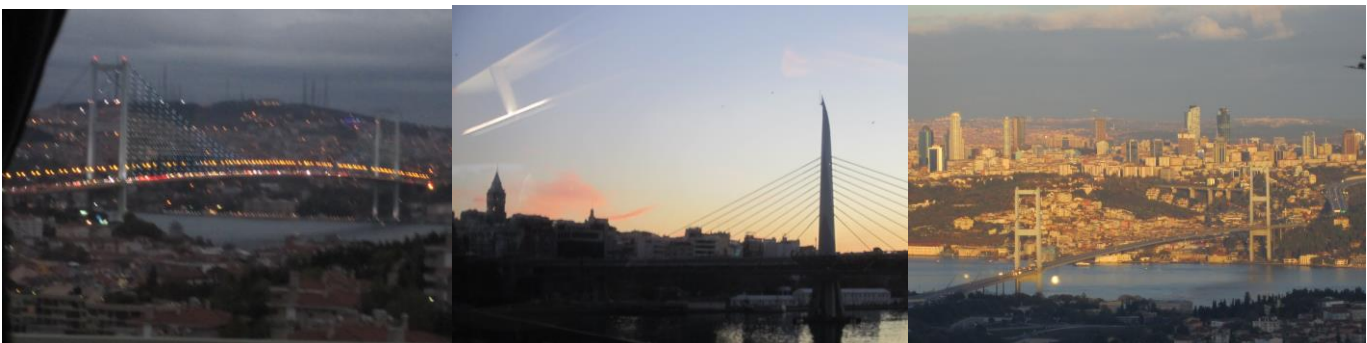
There are many types of Turkish coffee sets and I would later learn more when I got my own Turkish Coffee making certificate. Smile. Spices, Turkish Delight, and more spices, some said to be worthy of labeling a “Turkish Viagra.”



I was very struck by the incongruity of Turkish Aphrodisiac, Turkish slippers and all the shop keepers standing around on their Smart Phones. Those might be pigs feet and they were no unusual.



These are not black and white photos: it was about this grey during a lot of my time. I had two water tours/cruises and one went out nearly to the Black Sea and reminded me how much Istanbul is built on water. In some areas the shore is lined with huge lovely estates and in other areas its park land and still others looks like Hong Kong’s resettlement area. Oddly there is next to no tide so houses and even the palace are built directly on the water.



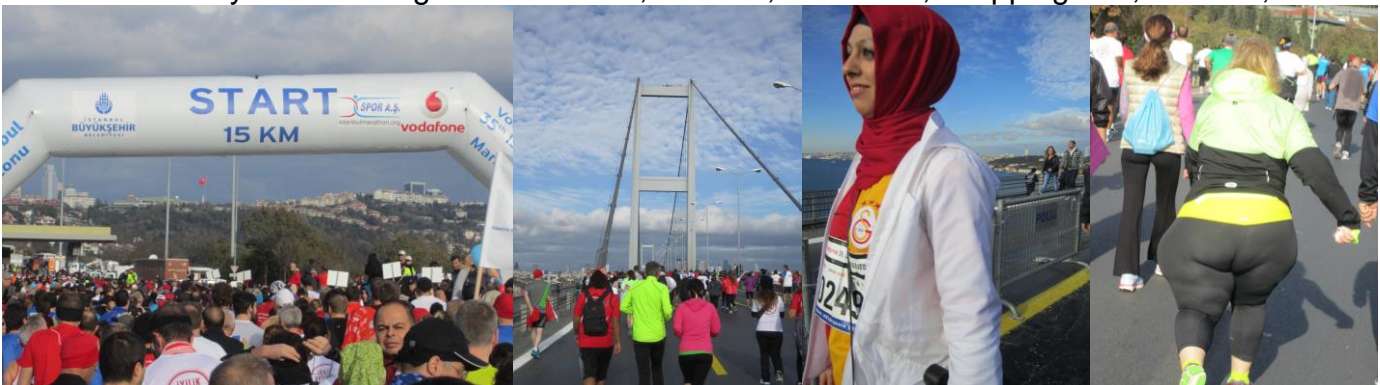
I had opportunity to be up on the highest hill the night before the marathon and then as the sun rose the morning of the marathon. That's our bridge! It has a light show and of course connects Asia to Europe but it's ALL in Istanbul.



The start lines are separate for the full, the 15K, the 10K and supposedly for the Fun Run. Within the starting corrals were push carts with food and drinks plus packed with costumed folks, many of them jumping up and down in their warm ups. I don't think there was any fluid offered free which sure cuts down on the trash and need for porta-potties.



A jumbled mess at the start. I later learned that it was not a rumor that there might be too many runners for the bridge to take the vibrations so they encouraged the fun run folks to start at various times. Thus they were among us – in burkas, scarves, costumes, shopping cart, strollers, etc.



The last picture is just to remind you that anybody can do it



The wheel chair participation was a first ever for me. They are either pushed or more often pulled by the arms and with huge hoopla and encouragement. Some things are universal but why such huge sponges I can't imagine. Along the course was the cruise ship docking.



Cruise ships and of course everybody needs used hub caps? Then the finish with one of their sesame type bagels. I would go on to watch the winners come over the 40K line and the next morning watch the finish line tents being taken down from the Hippodrome.



There's a lot more to this Turkish Coffee than I'd ever heard. Thick stuff, potent, and all that sludge in the bottom has still another purpose: fortune telling. I learned that this is a studied profession with books explaining the blots that are left first in the cup and then later in the saucer. Quite more precise than any fortune telling I've known.



I was in the Grand Bazaar and also the Spice Bazaar any number of times, and our first coffee stop was nearby. The use of coals was rather primitive but important in the coffee and hooka cafes. Here also is in one of the oldest courtyards of the Grand Bazaar where I was taken through some alleyways and into the gold smelting operation. I had no idea these gold bars would be so heavy. In between we found the pharmacy for leaches. Honest – jars of them.



Coffee stop number 2 or 3 was enough to make me really shaky so the consumption of Turkish Delight in the oldest candy shop as well as various types of bachlava was appreciated before we would go onto the last stop where I was to learn to make my own Turkish coffee. And drink it.



They kindly didn't take the picture of me letting my boiled coffee, set down into the hot sand, percolate over the top. They did allow me to serve and took pictures of the two guides presenting me with my honorary Turkish Coffee Making Certificate.



The next and last day would be considerably calmer and easier on my pulse rate. I spent the day walking in the palace park and then through the four buildings of the famous archeological museum.



The last walk home was via one of the prettier and calmer streets that I'd seen. Cats taking dinner with strangers and cobblestone streets in one of the older quarters. It was a fitting way to say goodbye.

I have maybe found a way to return to Turkey for a hike.

Daily notes

Sunday - starting my ten day adventure to Istanbul.

TSA pre-check would be perfect if I didn't get the random check. It's happened twice now. So much for keeping shoes and jackets on and computers stored.

I'd originally booked on United's new direct from Newark to Istanbul. Thinking a lie flat seat for 12 hours would ease the long flight. But alas the route was canceled last month so I accepted going through Frankfurt and using Lufthansa and Turkish air for the short legs. Still it's 9 and 3 hours and two or three for connection.

Why am I off to Istanbul? There is a marathon that runs across the Bosphorus bridge from Europe to Asia. Istanbul is the only city in the world with a footprint in two continents. Surprisingly it is said to be the third largest tourist attracting city in the world.

Upon landing at Frankfurt airport the adventure continued. I was surprised to see no jetway but rather a series of stairs and then a bus with a long ride to a very old terminal in dire need of updating.

Even though I asked many people I could find no way to not exit. There was no way for connecting flights without going through passport control and then through security. The line for security even though I was in a first-class line was slow and tedious. You know the Germans and how precise they must be. I was unfortunately carrying duty-free liquor. I had been assured that with a connecting flight and the sealed bag that there would be no problem. Not.

It will not surprise you that I refused to leave my bottle of Johnny Walker with the security people. I insisted on someone who spoke English to explain to me why everyone had told me I could go through but they were now confiscating my liquor. Finally someone gave me my bottle in the sealed bag and escorted me to the door and pointed down to the ticket counter where I could check my bag with the bottle inside.

But alas it didn't stop there because the Lufthansa counter said they could not check my bag. (I had a Lufthansa flight but operated by Turkish air.). I had to go what seemed a couple blocks more to the Turkish air ticket counter. It was with great regret that I left my bag behind. Fortunately both ticket counter people were very kind and sympathetic.

Then I got lost but that just gave me some more exercise. Recognize that I was walking against the traffic and against the signs in order to get back into the security area the second time.

All in all it was nearly one hour and 15 minutes between landing and lounge because of course I had to go to the security line again and passport control. But all turned out well with a very nice and luxurious lounge complete with drinks and food galore.

All that woke me up rather quickly. I did sleep on the plane maybe about two hours. We had boarded for a 7:10pm departure and maybe I was fed by 9pm and I slept maybe a couple hours before waking up for breakfast. Sometimes I think paying up for business first is a waste because you really are not on the plane long enough to eat and sleep both.

I am now working on figuring out what to see in Istanbul. I have two additional books with me. One is the big DK eyewitness travel book and the other is called "strolling through Istanbul: the classic guide to the city."

Monday from Frankfurt to Istanbul.

I made it and my suitcase made it and the hotel is plenty fine. What more could I ask for?

Turkish Airlines has recently been rated very high. I can tell you that the Turkish Airlines that I was on from Frankfurt to Istanbul was nothing to write home about. They did feed as reasonably well with a series of appetizers that were Turkish and wines and liquor that is Turkish and then a main course

such as moussaka. I was served but at least half of the first-class cabin was not. There was such extreme turbulence that I was glad to have avoided any red wine. Food and drinks went flying and they had to cease serving and we had to try to hold on to what we had. Obviously everything ended just fine but I am surprised they flew in what was apparently bad weather.

Back to ewr to Frankfurt: Standing in line to board I counted 19 men. No women. After boarding an attendant and I laughed about it being a boys club in first class. Of 8 rows of 5 across there was only one slip of a person who might have been female.

The first-class seating on Turkish air was the same as economy. It was three and three seating with the middle seats blocked off with a bit of a table. Pretty cheapy.

The flight attendants were quite amusing in their dress also. The main attendant was dressed in one of those white hats that I think you call a toque and a big white wraparound apron like a butcher would wear and it was maybe about that clean. They were all as cute or as pretty as can be which I find the Turkish people are with their dark hair big dark eyes and dark creamy skin.

One good thing about having to visit the Turkish ticket counter in Frankfurt is that they gave me a fast pass for passport and customs control. And my suitcase was there when I got to baggage claim. I found an ATM for local currency and quite quickly found my driver who was in a new comfortable van and gave me a tour on the way to the hotel. It might have been 20 to 30 minute drive.

My hotel room is in a very good area right at the old wall on the edge of the sea and with a view. Was it the old wall where the American girl was killed? The concierge claimed I was safe walking at night so I did.

I went up the hill to the blue Mosque. The cobblestones are to be expected and are very rough. I found a neighborhood full of very nice looking restaurants. The call to prayer was loud and also Enough to give you goose-bumps. Yet no one stopped. But me and not to pray: to gawk at all the cats. Today's look makes me feel that I haven't been anywhere so foreign since back alleys of China.

Tomorrow I am taking a day trip to the Princes' Island. I'll be up at 6 and have the hotel breakfast first. We will go by boat and see where the rich people spend their summer time. The island is said to be a beautiful woodsy island with small village atmosphere. No cars are allowed so anything other than on the foot will be by horse and carriage.

I am anxious to have a regular walking tour of istanbul but that is provided to me by the marathon tour company and starts on Thursday.

And now I am going to find a little bit of drink and probably collapse because I have been up for a very long time.

Tuesday - first full day in Istanbul

I watched the sun rise over the Marmara Sea out my window. The days are short and it's dark by 5pm with sun only coming up around 7am. I slept like the dead from 8:30pm to 6:30am (that's what missing a night's sleep can do) and only once turned over with a start worried that my home bedside alarm had lost electricity since it was dark. It's not unusual for me to wake and wonder where I am. Imagine that.

The hotel posed a new but very pleasant challenge figuring out what to eat for breakfast. On their rooftop is a lovely Terrace with a view on one side to the sea and on the other side to the blue

Mosque and that is where we take breakfast. All around the hotel including in the dining room are cages of canaries that constantly sing.

One might think I am a world traveler but I confess that most everything on the breakfast buffet was foreign to me. Dried fruits and spinach wrapped in FILO dough and all kinds of new cheeses. A tall honeycomb dripping honey and a large press with a huge bowl of oranges in order to make one's own juice. A lot of jellied sweets and nut based concoctions as well as a myriad of olive types. I stocked up on water since learning that we cannot drink out of the tap. (Good excuse for more wine.).

The days tour to Prince's island where there are Nine inhabited islands with one of them only hosting a single family. Visited the largest one called Buyukada taking a 90 minute boat ride to get there. I couldn't eat enough ginger to not feel green despite sitting in middle of boat first in the open air and later down below. The number of vendor hawkers was impressive. Especially on the boat selling everything imaginable from perfumes to toy tops and even Pinocchio on a slinky chain.

The island had a calming effect with 6 thousand population now but goes up to 80 thousand during season. No cars allowed so horse driven carriages only. We went four per carriage for a 45 minute tour to include high on their hill within woods and even cows. I expect some of these carriages topple over. Mine felt close and I cringed at the whip. Seeing a horse pulling a trailer of tires was my best and most mysterious picture.

Istanbul has sixteen million residents with ten million of them on Asian side. Three million registered vehicles. Watching the Asian side go by from the boat is jaw dropping to see the heavy concentration. November is at end of tourist season and generally wet but we have unseasonably good weather of around mid-60s down into high 40s. Gads but the downtown cruise ship area is awful. We saw the apartments that looked like Hong Kong's resettlement area yet along the Bosphorus were single residential homes that ALL start at \$2 million. The amount of Boat traffic from fishermen to huge tankers was mind boggling. Yet the waterways are huge and probably safely room for them all. The view from the boat included all major sites of palaces and mosques in the old city but the smog or fog prohibited a decent picture.

Head scarves not as common as expected but even some burkas. I was pleased to see husbands of those in headscarves fawning over their women and taking their pictures. It was helpful having read the book about the Tehran book club where the wearing of headscarves was explored in detail. Some women preferred the safety of them even after being "liberated" so to speak. The population overall seems trim and healthy and mostly very nice looking. I suppose anything after American fatties would look good.

Lunch at Milto restaurant seaside overlooking the Asian continent. Meal included a full plate selection of appetizers, salad, then a whole sea bass grilled and finished up with a big tangerine. I added a 14 lira (\$7) local white wine while enjoying conversation with a couple of overly extroverted Pakistani men who were a hoot and also a refined and sophisticated couple from New Zealand and past from Cape Town. He had accomplished the comrades 56k run across the desert three times.

I walked the opposite direction from the tourists and found fishermen and a surprisingly large number of houses in need of renovation. Also more cats and they didn't know how to take handouts. Later found a man feeding and fixing up injured pigeons. There is a large population of birds of all types and the island sounds alive like a sanctuary. I watched birds and cats eating together and I mean side by side. Even the many dogs seem fed and even banded on their ears so someone officially takes care of them. Like in Athens?

Seagulls were swarming and eating out of hands from the boat. Aren't they supposed to follow boats for the seafood the wakes provide? Not the pretzels in hands! They seem able to hover like helicopters. The word Hoover seemed as apt.

All over the island Crowns of flowers are sold like leis in Hawaii. Cute to see them over a burka. Bicycle rental shops are common as are horses loose in the streets. It's no Capri but its quaint and charming.

After the boat ride back to Istanbul, then started the really interesting part of the day: a mini bus ride of 1 1/2 hours in city rush hour traffic to return us to our respective hotels. I thought China and Hong Kong had heavy traffic. I thought the Italians were crazy and dangerous drivers. I thought it was the Japanese who were kamikaze pilots. Well the Turks have one up on all of them. They drive like they are suicidal. They drive like they are in a tiny smart car versus a big minivan. They honk all the time and they push their way into traffic where there's no way to get out. They play chicken with other drivers all the time and worse yet they play chicken with the pedestrians. I saw a lot of territory and a lot of absolutely crazy driving and gasped quite a few times. I think I will walk tomorrow.

On a somewhat different subject but maybe somewhat related, I just realized that my toilet - yes I said toilet - is a combination toilet and bidet. Dangerous. Gotta be careful what button you push.

Four o'clock syndrome is alive and well despite refusing to succumb to jet lag. At 6pm I'm thinking that I will stay in and go to the hotel's tango show another evening. Fortunately I have a few evenings left.

Wednesday - my second full day in Istanbul

While it is 30° and snowing in New Jersey I am experiencing mid 60s lovely weather. However this morning the fog rolled in but that just reminds me of my home area of San Francisco so it places no damper on my day.

I have grown fond of my hotel room despite its small size. It is very well appointed with everything I need and plenty of little cubbyholes to stash stuff. It is modern and plenty luxurious despite its very low cost of under €100 per day. I see the sunrise from my room and I see the sunset from the terrace.

My second breakfast remains interesting. I find enough to make a sort of cereal where I add yogurt and cut up pieces of fruit. I am tasting new things and learned that a breakfast staple is something that looks like half of a big pretzel or a skinny bagel but it has some sweetener to it plus it's coated with sesame seeds. Then there is the big very thin crust pizza covered with tomato, some different cheese and a bit of egg. Both of these items are also seen at street vendors. I can't resist some of the big olives and also collect up many different dried fruits I have never seen before. One is a sweetened flattened carrot with pistachios and maybe a grated nut sprinkled over-the-top.

Today was to be a lie-in since many of the remaining days require an early rise. But alas the 4 o'clock syndrome caught me again this morning. Unfortunately I was up until midnight last night reading and reviewing some of Istanbul history. The writer Orhan Pamuk is a favorite and writes of growing up in a rapidly changing city.

The destination for my six hour walk today was to be Taksim square. I did finally make it there but only after being hopelessly lost and who knows where I ended up but with some friendly Turks helping I found it eventually. But as Ellen says, some of my best adventures have been while I was lost and this time was no exception. It's always nice to have locals offer to help you.

Taksim square has been in the news because the Turks didn't want the government to develop their last remaining bit of green and the park that is surrounding it. I wanted to see it because I admired the Turks for standing up to the government. Yet after seeing it and its state of disrepair I suppose it makes sense that the government wanted to develop. While there is no trouble there now there is a heavy state police guard and the police here carry machine guns.

I saw a number of monuments on my way there and then crossed over the Galata bridge. Fisherman line the bridge but I read that they are very disgruntled that the government is going to require not only licensing but also classes so they can continue. I went on to the Galata tower and now I understand why people were surprised I wasn't taking the funicular up. There are seven hills in Istanbul and I found a few of them today. I eventually got myself onto the big beautiful pedestrian way with elegant shops. It used to be the row of embassies but now that the capital has moved they are consular offices.

I went by Hagia Sophia, a huge mosque said to be one of world's greatest architectural achievements and 1400 years old and then also Topkapi Palace, both where we will tour tomorrow. On the way back was through the spice bazaar or market. Such a cacophony of sounds and sea of humanity. Hawkers galore.

I was near to the Dolmahahce Palace but it was getting late and the hotel suggested I should either return before dark or take a taxi. Plus I have a local orientation tour at 7:30pm with the Marathon Tours guide.

Incentivized to walk fast by the wet fog and wind I made good time but had to be guarded by steps and loose cobblestones not to mention all the people. Not since Jerusalem or Bethlehem have I seen so much junk for sale. The Turks are prone towards what I call gaudy.

This evening gave a two hour tour of the hotel area. The tour guide that we will have for the next two days gave this tour and he was filled full of tips of where to eat, what kind of money you should spend and not, what are the specialties, and a general overview of how to survive the next few days. Though much of it was elementary for me since I've been here two days and because I have traveled to other countries, at least he was there to answer questions.

He too said to me "What, you walked all the way to that Square?" Yep that's the best way to see a city and learn about the people.

It is late and we start a day's worth of walking tomorrow morning to see the sights.

Thursday – my third full day in Istanbul and the start of a walking tour.

Today attests to the ability of the body to adapt and recover. I was very ill last night, didn't calm down until after 3 AM and wondered what I was going to do about today. Today I'm fine. Between chills and then heat and all the coughing I finally reverted to taking a Benadryl tablet plus my cough syrup with codeine and maybe fell asleep by 3:30 knowing that my alarm clock goes off at 6:30. When I got up in the morning I still had a balance issue but by breakfast time I was totally well.

A friend I had met while in Stockholm for the marathon last July is here and his name is Michael and he's quite the character. It turns out that he is Armenian and his grandfather who lived to age 105 had been born and lived here so this trip had much more meaning to him than most of us. I met up with Michael and his roommate Bill at breakfast and he is looking for a private tour to the Armenian neighborhood of which I am willing to go to also.

I know that our itinerary said that we would have a full day walking sightseeing tour of the old city but I don't guess I really thought it was going to be all day. It was. We learn some history and we learned some personalities of their Emperors called sultans. The blue Mosque was quite a surprise at the size of it but it wasn't as old as the Hagia Sophia that we went to afterwards because it is 1400 years old. The mosque have been taken over in most cases by the government and now serve as museums however they do continue to pray in them. This is so there is no argument between the religions. But on the subject of arguments the Hagia Sophia was a Christian church from the sixth century and it was converted into a mosque at one point. It remains the fourth largest church built in the world. In between we walked and discussed the ancient hippodrome which was an enormous public entertainment center. It will be the finish line of the marathon on Sunday.

We went downstairs so to speak in an underground palace which is also known as the Basilica cistern. Because it was always in some kind of war they built this permanent water supply that could hold them for a whole year. Now tourists get to walk through it on platforms and there are grass carp living in it to keep the water clean.

What tour would be complete without having a few stops to buy something. So we had a 30 minute explanation and demonstration about the different types of Turkish rugs that are available. Boy did I learn a lot. I learned that it is dangerous to buy what you think of it as a Persian or Turkish rug without knowing what you're paying for. Some of the more beautiful rugs were only a few hundred dollars and some of the ugly ones were \$30,000. But there was one small one that was sure beautiful in my book and it was also \$30,000. There's a lot of business and rugs in the city.

After a rather amusing restaurants stop at the pudding shop, and there's more story to that later, we went on to the grand bazaar where I made maybe my only touristy investment; a pashmina. There are \$10 ones and there are \$250 ones and like pearls in China you have to find your understanding level as well as your \$ tolerance level. I spent \$70.

Back to the Pudding Shop. Apparently during the hippy days Istanbul was known for the inhabitation by many of them. They took over the pudding shop and there was a yellow bus parked out in the front which took many of them on trips to Nepal. Pictures of hippies such as an early Bill Clinton adorn the walls and they are allegedly world-famous with a lot written about this shop which really is a restaurant.

This was the evening of our welcome reception. That's a little odd since we have now spent a day and a half together. But it means an open bar and tidbits of food and of course I can't resist food when I've already paid for it and booze of course over did. So when the group was off on their way to a restaurant I declined. Not only because I missed last night sleeping but because it had been a very long day already.

I didn't think I was the oldest person here but some of those that I thought was older than me have now revealed their age. Am I kidding myself but I think I look a lot younger than those who are in there very early 60s. So as it turns out I probably am by far the oldest person here. I hope that is a sufficient excuse for copping out on dinner because on that I'm going to say good night.

Friday – my fourth full day in Istanbul

How time flies. In some ways I feel I have learned so much about the city and other ways there is so much yet to see. I'm wondering if I can return with the hiking company to see some of the outlying sites. Yes I know that within a 10 day timeframe many people would have managed to see all of the outlying cities and sites. I'm rather stubbornly sticking to my method of seeing an area more extensively.

At breakfast I learned that the group went up the hill via the tunnel funicular for dinner last night had a wonderful time. I didn't say to them but I couldn't help but think they really missed the real city atmosphere by going in a tunnel to get there instead of walking up the hill. We all have different needs in our travel and different goals.

But later I learned how mistaken I was. There is a new underwater tunnel and that is what they went through. (The funicular is also called a tunnel was the reason I was confused.)

One couple waxed on and on about their wonderful dinner the night before which took 3 to 3 1/2 hours to consume. While it sounded good, that too is not my priority for traveling but maybe that is because I eat so well when I am with Tom.

Yesterday we went to the 300 year old Turkish bath constructed during the Ottoman Empire. This bath house is listed in the book of 1000 places to see before you die. The day before we saw another and older one recently outfitted more for the tourist. As it is next to the Four Seasons Hotel it also has a higher price point.

While I have zero interest in getting into any hot steamy bath and being scrubbed of the top layer of skin I did have a lot of interest in the building in addition to all the famous guests who had been there. The architecture was quite unique to me and pretty quaint.

Along the same subject while in the grand bazaar our tour guide took us to the alleyway that is filled full of items for a Turkish bath. Now I know what the silver bowl is for in my bathroom and I equally understand the commonalities of the Turkish bath with the Japanese bath. There must be something to it if only for a meditative purpose but it's nothing that I think I'm going to indulge in. And maybe that is good because the price goes up to €270 for the full treatment.

Famous guest include Florence Nightingale, George Soros, Tony Curtis, John Travolta, Chevy Chase, Kate Moss, Rudolph Nureyev, and on and on. I noted that the good-looking room is not available to the women since there is a separate section for women.

On the subject of women, when we were in the Blue Mosque we learned that while women cannot pray in the main area, there is a new effort by the women liberators to have half women and half men in the same area. We laughed when our guide explained how you wouldn't want a woman leaning over in front of you to pray because it might take your mind off praying but if they were to the side of you maybe that would be okay.

The Blue Mosque has the women's scarf police in force. We had one of our women who kept dropping her scarf off as she just didn't want to wear it and every time the police would come to remind her. I frankly thought that was extremely rude of her by not honoring their religion as she is a guest in their country.

The weather has been foggy and maybe some people would call it dreary but I call that lucky since this is the rainy season and it has done no more than give us a light mist. Fortunately I saw the sun come up out my hotel window the first day because the sun has not been seen since.

I guess it is this dampness and the wind that causes me to be so cold. The weather is from mid 50s to near 60° but it feels quite chilly and I have been wrapped into jackets and a scarf all along.

Typical of tour groups we were to meet at quarter till nine and sure enough we didn't get out until 9:15. There's always somebody who is a last-minute lost cause.

We started out with a walk to the palace which is called Topkapi. This is practically a small city within itself and gave us about a half day tour within it. It is where the Ottoman sultans ruled from about mid-1400s and where as many as 5000 servants and harem took care of him. The complex contains a series of pavilions and for enormous courtyards and apparently a kitchen that is worth returning to see when it is renovated. We had special tickets to get into the Harlem. Fortunately our guide gave us a whole different view of the importance of a harem and how different it is from say that of concubines of Asia. I think we could have spent the entire day there but in our half day visit we were able to see the treasury and the library and I went into the Imperial costumes exhibit and a number of pavilions.

The pavilion with the sacred treasures is almost hard to believe. The mantle that was worn by the Prophet Mohammed? There one hears and then sees some holy man who is continuously chanting from the Koran. Items from Moses? An 86 carat diamond? Bones of St. John the Baptist?

A bus then delivered us to the spice market area and home of what they refer to as the new mosque. A mere 300 years old. Lunch on that square was sort of simple in that it's not unusual to have cafeteria style here. Who knows what I ate but it was okay.

In the spice market we had a lot of samples and in particular a candy item called Turkish delight. Most of our people bought quite a bit of it. I have no interest in trying to carry any contraband through customs when I go home and I don't know how they're going to answer the customs form asking if they have any nuts fruit or meats.

Some got into the shopping enough that they failed to get out in time and missed the bus taking us to the boat cruise. I have been concerned about the boat because we had wind gust of 25 30 mph but the boat was huge and stable. I saw a big part of the cruise views on my first day when I went out to the islands.

Our last stop of the day was a bus trip to the expo which is 30 to 45 minutes out of town toward the airport. I suppose I could have handled this marathon on my own but I really wouldn't have wanted to. It's rather foreign here and it would have been a challenge to get there. I was pleased to have a guide.

The expo didn't have any official merchandise – it is almost a joke to think that any of us thought we needed another T-shirt. We went one place to get our number and had to show our passport to get it. Then we went to another place to get our chip. Then another stop to get our T-shirt where they gave us a backpack also, a red Buff and a little red cap. The last stop was a bag of food stuff which I presume they intend us to use as our Finish line food.

We really were not back to the hotel till seven or 7:30 and yet I felt like a party pooper to say no I don't want to go to the baths and the spa and no I don't want to go to the Irish pub. Especially since I turned down their evening out last night too and thank heavens I did because they didn't get back until 130 in the morning. Maybe that's why they slept through the cruise.

I studied the tour brochures and have booked the next Palace tour for tomorrow afternoon. That gives me time to sleep in for Saturday morning. This Dolmabahce Palace was much later in the mid-1800s and is said to have more European influence.

Emails with Ellen about Istanbul

Thank you for this. I'm sooooo glad to hear that the area is very prosperous and that the country has changed dramatically. Yes, yes, yes. That's wonderful - for the country, and for the people. I could watch the cripples pushing carts and see the long lines of grey people standing in a line blocks long.

But the sight of that boy broke my heart. If that was his idea of “hope”, I just couldn’t cope. I just had to get back on the ship. It sounds like “grey” has been banished from the area and maybe from the city - and that’s truly WONDERFUL news. Ellen

The spice market has been in the same place since the beginning of time. It is an exceptionally busy place frequented by locals as much or more than the residents, whereas the Grand Bazaar which is not seaside is more so frequented by tourists. Fortunately it is a very prosperous looking place now and extremely busy each of the three times I have been there. I was also in the very close vicinity the fourth time when we finished the half marathon in its area. Just another bit of indication that life here has changed dramatically and how wonderful for the country that is so. Such the observation that only you can make. That the young boy was practicing being a donkey like his father. Diana

Thanks for the thought, but I’m not sure my ship was anchored there. It was a relatively small ship of less than 100 passengers. The area immediately off the ship was not particularly tacky. It was a series of incidents that made me need to get back on the ship and stay there. One took place about two blocks from the ship. A cab driver on a normal-looking street rear ended a car. The cab driver got out and started screaming at the man he hit, flailing his arms and creating a big scene. Two police officers approached. They surveyed the situation and told the cab driver to get in his car. He kept right on flailing his arms, screaming at the innocent man he hit, and causing a huge scene. So the cop hit him with his billy-club and told him to get into his car. The cab driver totally ignored him. The second cop hit him with his billy-club. The cab driver completely ignored both officers. They both started hitting him with their billy-clubs and the cab driver acted like they were flies on the end of his nose. He made no response of any kind and just continued screaming and flailing his arms as if the police weren’t there. I was afraid they were going to kill him and could not imagine how he could ignore two Policemen beating him with billy-clubs. I just had to get out of there. Years later I told a friend that story. He said, “The cab driver was likely on drugs, and didn’t feel a thing”. A short distance from the ship was a spice market: Spices being sold on the street from big barrels. There was a stream of people pushing flat-bed wheel-barrel sized carts through the spice market, up the hill till they found a place to park among hundreds of people with similar carts loaded with some kind of merchandise for sale. Some were crippled. All were poor. Nobody was buying from any of them. Then a man, bent over carrying 4 sofas piled high on his back came along with his 11 year old son (I’m guessing) following along behind him practicing walking bent over like his father. That did it for me. I couldn’t cope with a city where all this boy had to look forward to was being a human donkey like his father. I needed to get on the ship and stay there. Ellen

Saturday – an easy day.

I am so upset that I had what I thought was an interesting report of the day and I just lost the entire freaking thing. So here goes again in the heat of the moment.

Quite differently today started very easy. I needed and took what I call a lie in. It’s important both physically and mentally to every once in a while wake from natural causes. Fortunately the breakfast in the hotel goes until 10:30 AM which allowed me that Lie in. It also meant that breakfast served as lunch. Between lunch and my 2 o’clock pick up for the tour I was able to do a little computer work and answer some emails and enjoy a small walk around the old town neighborhood of my hotel.

The tour company had agreed that I would be back around 5:30pm and at the very latest they assured me I would be back by 6pm for my dinner. That very quickly appeared most unlikely to occur.

The focus of the tour was to go to the newer palace of the sultan. It would have been the last palace before the sultans were kicked out of turkey. Now that I have seen the decadence of the palace it is no wonder they were kicked out. Can you imagine a palace that required and included 14 tons of gold

in the form of gold leaf? And it was easily large enough to accommodate the 1200 women in the Harem.

I have seen palaces in many countries and I have seen Versailles. But I have never seen anything as wildly extravagant as this. Maybe Russia and St. Petersburg is more decadent but I would be surprised. Fortunately the sultans made an effort to go somewhat European so the wild colors and what I think of as tacky design is not so prevalent in this palace.

How about the largest crystal chandelier in the world? That is until Dubai created their own recently. How about the largest Haikiji rug in the world? Or however you say it. That is the rugs that has the most knots per square inch and is the most expensive known in the world. I recently saw a very small throw rug made by the same village and it went for \$30,000.

The porcelain examples were worth the trip. There were French made porcelains of a deep blue that looked like it had a white lace doily on it. But it was drawn into the porcelain. When this palace was built in mid-1800s it cost 5 million Ottoman gold coins which was the equivalent of 35 tons of gold.

Look up Dolmabahce Palace if you're curious. I won't be able to send any pictures of the interior because photos were not allowed. We also could not walk through on our own and had to be tightly knit in with our guide.

In addition to the palace we had a drive-by a number of other sites before we drove over the Bosphorus Bridge. This is the famous bridge that we will run across from the Asian side over to the European side where we reside.

I'd seen this bridge two times from the water tour but this time I was able to see it lit at night and the multitude of changing colors. I also saw the extreme traffic.

I was pretty tiffed that we were still high up on a hill on the Asian side at 5:45 after I should have already been back to my hotel. But the tour company somewhat redeemed themselves by offering me a taxi as soon as we got back over the bridge. That is another story.

Can you imagine that at least seven taxis refused to give me a ride. Apparently the guide was offering what a local would pay but the taxi drivers wanted to hold out for a tourist. I watched this happen. Then I wasn't so sure what I thought of the guide finding a unmarked taxi who agreed to take me. I had visions of being absconded and never been seen again. But it all turned out fine and I got into the hotel about 6:30 PM.

Did I write about the pasta dinner? That was probably the report I lost. It was in the hotel's top floor terrace room. We had much more food than anybody expected and I only missed the first course. I was back into my hotel room by about 8:15 in order to clean up from my day's activities and lay out my clothes and breakfast for the morning.

Our bus leaves in the morning at 6:30 so I will be up about 5am. I'm not so sure we need to leave that early but they are concerned about traffic. Also the good thing is the bus we have hired will hopefully stay with us if it is cold at the start line.

So on that and since I am finally calmed down from being angry at my iPhone for losing my day's notes I will sign off and not - repeat not - read this again for corrections. It is just too late and it needs finalized so I can get to bed before 10pm.

Sunday - race day

I use that term race loosely. I'm prone to be lazy and only get it done though I do like to tax the body for half or a third of it. I'll stop. I'll dawdle. I'll take beaucoup pictures. If there's food I'll consume and I've even been known to beg from spectators.

When we caught our private bus at 6:30 it was a still 50 degrees out but wind up to 15mph is expected and only 54 degrees max. It should have been warmer but it should have been raining too. That's what November does.

Our guide surprised us with a Morning guided tour. Since the official buses don't leave until 7:30 I was wondering why we were going so early. Apparently said to be sure that we didn't get caught up in closed roads. I would later see the logic to this because the official buses actually came right onto the marathon course and right through where everyone was standing for the start. Coming towards us was plenty disconcerting.

On our ride we would watch the sunrise over both densely populated areas and then areas of dense woods. The Asian side has more extremes. We could see off in the distance the Black Sea while going way out of our way to cross the Trans European bridge.

It had recently been reinforced and during that time traffic would back up for so many hours that food and water were brought out. That went on for months. I suspect the Turks are sort of used to it. The story would prepare me for what I'd see at the marathon start.

The destination for our morning tour was the top of the highest mountain in Istanbul - Calmica - also known as Pine Tree Mountain. It was where I was last night to see the lights of the city from this 900 foot high hill.

Today gave us clear skies with the fog finally gone and temperatures of about 50. From the top of the hill we could look over at the Trans Asia bridge or looked down at the Bosphorus bridge where we would be running and also see the area of the start line. We had about 45 minutes up on the hill this morning before driving down as far as we could towards the start line. Then about a 20 to 30 minute walk to the beginning of the starting areas.

If the Turks are noted for a cacophony of sounds they should also be noted for an extreme disarray of organization. Yet it all seems to work and is almost a delight and I'm glad it is there disarray and not ours. They had buses to carry the luggage to the finish line but I never did find the buses except for the 10K. Not the 15K and not the marathon. Fortunately I never use bag check preferring to have everything with me that I might need.

On that subject I thought maybe many people were carrying their bags in the race because they couldn't find where to drop them. I changed my mind when I realized that they were very creative and they were doing clothes shopping along the way. There were no dropped clothes left because they had all been picked up by the runners.

Then there were all the Hawkers. Whether they are in rolling carts or in shopping carts they were selling their sesame type of bagels or water bottles or coffee or other miscellaneous things. This was done with in the middle of the waiting area of the runners and this was done after the start area and all along the course sometimes in the middle of the course. After I got more accustomed to seeing the buses come straight the crowds then it seemed less odd that the coffee sellers or the water bottles sellers were in the middle of the crowd too.

And until we had passed about the 6K marker I was rather convinced that the only water on the course would be these Hawkers who were selling water bottles. This would be a creative way to

keep down the trash and also not necessitate having any porta potties on the course. Because there weren't. If the water is free people take it. If they have to buy it they didn't. So there was no trash. There were no porta potty needs. By the same token there was not any peeing in the bushes either.

I'm still amazed that the Turks can pull all this off but they do. When I went through the 10K finish line to continue my 15K I found it not only confusing but absolutely congested and no way to know what direction to go. At the 15K finish line it was again much confusion and loads of people not waiting in line but just crammed up to get into the tents whatever giveaway there was.

I kept looking for the finisher's metals and didn't find them at all and finally realized that in the plastic bag of goodies was where they put the medal. Later I heard that the finish line at the marathon was a lot of disorganization also.

Note: Both the T-shirt and the backpack and the metal are all quality merchandise. Their telecom company is a major sponsor and they gave out red headgear buffs as well as little red warm hats/caps.

There was no food on the course except that which to purchase and I could see they'd had apples. They did have fluid stations with water bottles after about 6K but never a Gatorade. There were some rather giant sponges available at two places and also tubs of ice.

The Turks will probably end up out living us because they don't worry about germs. The apples had been in tubs of water and the sponges were washed out in big tubs of water and the ice was just to grab with your hands. I bet they don't use antibacterial stuff.

After taking a couple hundred pictures and going off course on a number of alleyways, the proof that I was in no hurry was coming in something around 2 1/2 hours. That was 11:30 at which time I proceeded to walk back along the marathon course which was the long way back to my hotel. I must of gotten too excited over all those sexy male legs because I missed my turn off and then had to ask for directions. My circuitous route home took me until 1:30 and fortunately through some new territory.

Does my continuously moving and being on my feet from 8am until 1:30 count as a marathon? Nope didn't think so and that's fine with me. As I write this I am feeling super lazy having had an unusually nice nap and now thinking of doing nothing until tomorrow morning. There is plenty yet to do in Istanbul and it's just deciding which museum or which tour to take.

Monday – a lazy day – this is getting to be a habit

I was not the only one indulging in a late breakfast. Other marathoners did also. We compared marathon stories and also gave sympathy to those that had to get a car at 2:30 in the morning for their 5am flight. That will be me Wednesday morning.

I had mistakenly thought that most all of the marathon tours participants were leaving this morning. In fact what happened is that many were leaving this hotel to go across town to a cheaper hotel. Gee, I thought €94 was pretty cheap here. I met up with some of them in the breakfast room and some later in the lobby. And we compared marathon stories.

Then I headed out to the bazaar area of the blue Mosque. I had walked around that area my first night so really only saw it well in the dark and then when I took a tour of the blue Mosque with our guide.

Then my early afternoon was consumed with a Turkish coffee trail tour. I have been on the list for the evening eating/sampling tour but apparently it will not happen.

We walked the back streets and into a university area for the first stop. I was to learn how coffee making is done in Turkey and I did sufficiently to even get a certificate of having completed a Turkish coffee making course. No it doesn't sound like anything I need but something that I should know about. The Turkish coffee makers, like French waiters, go to school for seven years.

The first stop seemed more like a student hang out with all the smokers. Fueled by coal and tough on the eyes, my private guide offered me an indoor no smoking area but I figured it couldn't hurt me for just one afternoon.

We went to the oldest coffeehouses of Istanbul in addition to the oldest coffee shop. We will also visit one in the spice bazaar and it was my third time there but the famous and very historical coffee house had been missed. There is what is called a historical coffee route where we had some more coffees and also tastings of what they call the Turkish delight in the oldest Turkish delight shop in the city. That too I have experienced. And that too I didn't mind experiencing again.

The young guide asked if it was okay for her friend to meet up with us and that too was an experience talking to two mid-twenties gals about their boyfriends, family acceptance and even religion.

Wow the caffeine! It would seem that I might not sleep so well tonight with all that caffeine. Pretty wired. There is an electrical charge that the body sometimes gives and I have now decided that it is fueled by caffeine.

We also went to an old print shop museum as well as an artist exhibit plus a doll collection of costumes. I went into my first cemetery and given an explanation as to why the Turrets and why the openings in their gravestones. They not only want a watering hole for the birds to come visit them but they want an opening so that the rain water will come in and wash their cares away. Another surprise is that people are buried wrapped in white cloth and not in coffins. From Earth to earth.

Delightfully different afternoon resulting in a rather formal looking certificate of Turkish coffee mastership having been done on the Turkish coffee trail tour by Istanbul walks.

There are museums such as the archaeological museum that I wanted to go to but it is closed on Monday as are many of the museums and palaces. This will be my goal for the last day in Istanbul - tomorrow.

Yet I have already looked up the hiking tour that goes through parts of turkey and run by country walkers.

Emails with Ellen

I'm just guessing about what the caffeine experience you're having feels like, but I remember when I was having Hypoglycemia problems, if my blood sugar went high, I'd feel like I had hold of a live electric wire. My doctor/chiropractor/healer prescribed Gymnema Sylvestre (an Indian herb used in Ayurvedic medicine) tabs as a supplement. I'd chew two tabs and the discomfort would begin to dissipate almost immediately. I haven't needed it for a long time, but I still keep it around - in case. You can also flood your system with water which will dilute the caffeine in your blood stream and carry it out of your body. Drink at least two glasses. That also works if you find yourself feeling inebriated. I used to go to lunches at the downtown men's clubs put on by companies for brokers. There was always an open bar. Because I essentially don't drink, I'd order a gin and tonic, light on the gin. One day, the bar-tender got it backwards. He handed me a glass of gin with very little tonic.

I drank it and suddenly couldn't see my feet. I went into the ladies room, dumped the rest down the drain, filled the glass with water and drank about three glasses. My head started to clear immediately. I filled the glass again, put the ice cubes back in the glass and joined the group, sipping on water and ice cubes. It worked. This is interesting. Tomorrow I'm invited to a lecture at UCLA on Istanbul's neoliberal transformation - outrageous development. The write-up indicated that the speaker doesn't think this is a good thing. I know nothing about this. More later. Ellen

You are very kind. I know that I rattle on. Yes, I've enjoyed the trip very much and surprisingly have felt quite safe. My young gal guide today confirmed that street people and crime are very rare here. In the 70s, when we lived in Belgium, Tom took an official trip to Turkey and came back with similar thoughts as you share. There has clearly been a lot of change here in those few years. More later. Thinking a drink might help slow down the caffeine effect! Report of today explains the caffeine. Diana

Sounds like a very interesting day. Congratulations on your coffee making certificate. Hang it on your wall in some interesting conversation provoking place! I once accepted an invitation to go visit a mutual friend's Turkish friends (professor at USC and his gracious wife). They served Turkish coffee. Since I'm allergic to the caffeine in coffee, drinking this was an act of social stretching in honor of cultural acceptance and hostess graciousness. I think my hair stood on end! Diana, I don't know how you survived that afternoon. Turkish coffee in multiple places coupled with Turkish delight. I looked at a recipe for Turkish delight and its pure sugar mixed with corn syrup, gelatin, and some orange juice. That, mixed with multiple cups of Turkish coffee must have put your blood sugar level over the moon! Sounds like you got a buzz, but no serious damage. Also sounds like you already planning to come back to Turkey, Friends I've traveled with went to parts of rural Turkey and loved the trip. They said the people were extremely gracious. Ellen

Tuesday – my last full day

My computer died last night. Total died. I would be hysterical yet I have hopes that my young computer Turks (nothing to do with Turkey) will be able to save the day when I get home. All of my travel notes are on that PC. All my future travel notes are on that PC. Wow but maybe I should be hysterical.

Yet I want to get on with enjoying my last day and a delightful one that starts out with full sun and next to perfect weather. It's hard to believe that there is so much water all around Istanbul and I get to fully enjoy it from a glassed in temple in the sky where I have breakfast. This morning we opened the windows wide.

Yesterday as part of my Turkish coffee tour I had my fortune told from the sludge left in the bottom of the cup. They didn't need to tell me what good fortune I have.

I have been reading Istanbul's English language newspaper each day. It is a good combination to the history tours I was on. I'm reminded that the world is flat and some things are universal. Yet it's only fair to say that the Turks have been especially kind to the Syrians and allowed an unprecedented number into their country. This comes at great expense with the most recent headline being the polio cases that have been brought with the immigration. So the Turks have sprung into action and are planning to vaccinate about 1 million children along the border towns.

Tiger Woods shot a golf ball from Asia to Europe on the Bosphorus bridge that I ran on and that happened just two days before I arrived. The day before I arrived they had the anniversary at Ataturk's death. It is interesting how very patriotic they remain to Ataturk. There are posters everywhere and I heard that on the anniversary of his death there is a moment of silence and everybody stops and all car horns erupt in a cacophony of sound. Tomorrow the royals of

Luxembourg make a landmark visit Turkey. A new high-speed rail opens in a few months between Ankara and Istanbul. It seems that transport is good in the main cities but very little available between cities currently. That lack of transportation and the riots in Taksim Square maybe the two main reasons that Tokyo got the 2020 Olympics and instead of Istanbul. Syria being so near wouldn't have helped.

Turkey is concerned about the environment and has recently planted over 8 million trees. I read that the Army has been mobilized to plant an additional 3 million trees and the government is commissioning a study and plan on environmental changes. My guide yesterday was part of the protest at Taksim Square. They were concerned about development and the loss of trees and parks. But if truth be told they are probably more concerned about government over-control. See how universal news is? Even the concern about boosted school grades resonates with us.

Resonates? I'm surprised that I didn't mention not only going into an ancient printing press museum but also into a back alley gold melting business where I watched the coals melting chunks of 22 karat gold and then poured into blocks. Once dropped into cold water these blocks are deceptively heavy. It gave me goose-bumps to hold one block.

I was on my way to the archaeological Museum complex when I spotted the palace park and a hill. One never wants to miss a hill because who knows what's going to be on the top of it. The museum could wait and it did have to wait over an hour after I walked the length of this rather large park and then had to completely turn around to go back to the museum area.

The museum is claimed to be one of the top seven museums in the world. While the Ottoman style of art and these ancient relics are hard for me to appreciate, it was all very exciting nevertheless and I listen to every single thing available on the audio set. I sat in the sunshine watching all the little cats scurry around and my heart was ready to burst with happiness to be in such a historically significant place.

I spent much of the day involved in that walk through the park and the archaeological Museum's complex of three buildings. On the way there and then on the way home I found a number of small alleyways with some filled full of little tiny restaurants and some with craft shops, most of the shops being the same type of Turkish merchandise. I'm indulged in a full meal to include dessert and a glass of wine and that will probably be an early dinner since I leave at 2:30am to the airport for a 5am flight.

My ankles are still a little bit tender from Sunday's event. I'm not used to cobblestones nor even asphalt since I generally stay on the dirt or grass so it's no surprise.

I'm a real candidate for an e-reader because I keep running out of books and this time was a bit expensive. A book that I would order for \$12 shipping included is about \$23 here. I'm told that anything coming in from outside the country includes large taxation. I checked and it was the same at all the bookstores I found. My new endeavor is "Turkish reflections: a biography of a place" by Mary Lee settle who has since died and her book is now out if print. I would have had Orhan Pamuk's book called "My name is red" but I can get it at home.

There is a lot I like about these people, but I dislike their being overly pushy. So much so that even to the nice bookseller I had to say "don't push anymore." I walk away when I can and try to smile as I do. They are like the typical carpet seller who follows you asking "where are you from" and on and on.

I've heard from both Tom and from Ellen about their being here in the 70s and how rough and tough and gray and dismal it was. It's like a whole different planet now. And yet I have to wonder if what I

am seeing is the norm. Because I asked my guide "are there any black people?" It was like oh yes but they are in another part of town. Does that sound familiar?

On that and since I need to get up in about six hours I will say good night and confess that I have been here long enough and I am really missing Tom and glad to be going home tomorrow.

From GoTurkey.com - Turkish coffee, one of the most popular flavors of the Turkish cuisine, has been included on UNESCO'S Intangible Cultural Heritage list. Well-known for its delightful taste and consumed around the globe Turkish coffee is Turkey's 11th intangible cultural heritage included on the list. It has been mentioned that efforts are being made for the inclusion of Ebru (the Turkish art of marbling) on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list in 2014.

Las Vegas, the world's largest hub of entertainment famous for its night life and structures that are replicas of unique constructs from around the world is building a new structure inspired from the bazaars of Istanbul. It has been stated that a new shopping center will be built taking the Grand Bazaar as model including a spice market and many stores selling the products of top trademarks.

Itinerary

Time zone: Eastern European time i.e., 7 hours ahead of Eastern Standard time

Sun Nov 10 – Day 1

7:10pm Depart Newark EWR via UA50 (8:05 hrs)

Mon Nov 11 – Day 2

9:15am Arrive Frankfurt FRA for plane change

11:40am Depart Frankfurt FRA via LH7062 operated by Turkish Airlines (2:55 hrs)

3:40pm Arrive Istanbul IST

Transport Arranged for private car through hotel; meet at main exit with a sign or if not there, go to Info Desk and ask them to call the hotel – payment will be made through hotel bill

Hotel The Armada Istanbul Old City Hotel
Ahirkapi Sok. No:24, Old City Sultanahmet, 34122 Istanbul Tel 011 90 212 455 4455
http://www.armadahotel.com.tr/pg_en/ Free Wi-Fi and coffee in room plus mini-bar
Conf#159358011 for 2 nights on own in superior room

Tue and Wed Nov 12 and 13 – Day 3 and 4

Free days, arriving prior to rest of tour group

Summary from www.marathontours.com - Only one marathon in the world allows you to run on two continents in the same race, the Istanbul Eurasian Marathon on November 17. The Marathon, 15Km, and 8Km races both start on the Asian side, cross the Bosphorus and Golden Horn Bridges, pass under the Aqueduct and follow the Marmara Sea beach, to the finish line on the European side at the Hippodrome, one of the oldest race tracks in the world, situated in the historical district of Sultanahmet, famous for its ancient monuments and mosques.

This 2012 event had 3,838 participants in the marathon; 5,469 in the 15K and 3,669 in the 8K representing 88 countries.

Wed Nov 13 – Day 4

Tour group - Arrive at Ataturk International Airport (IST) in Istanbul. Meet your local guide and transfer to The Armada Hotel. This charming hotel is located in the old city center, in walking distance to all the sites.

Located in the heart of Istanbul's historic peninsula and boasting striking views, the Armada hotel offers guests a unique experience. A 10-minute walk from Topkapi Palace, Armada Istanbul Old City features a rooftop terrace restaurant with views of the Hagia Sophia, the Blue Mosque and the Sea of Marmara. Rooms at the Armada have decorated wooden panels and traditional fabrics. Each includes a flat-screen TV, minibar and modern bathroom with organic bath products. The healthy breakfast buffet offers homemade breads, jams and pastries. The fresh and dried fruits are organic and provide an energetic way to start the day. Guests can enjoy their meals at the Armada Terrace Restaurant and Bar on the rooftop with magnificent views. Drinks can be enjoyed at the Guest Lounge, which organizes a permanent display of 50's and 60's radios. Old City Hotel Armada offers 24-hour room service, free Wi-Fi and a guest relations desk. Guests can take a 10-minute walk to Sultanahmet Square or enjoy a 20-minute walk to Grand Bazaar.

Upon arrival enjoy a welcome briefing and orientation walking tour of the hotel area. Your guide will show you nearby restaurants, shops and sites. Time permitting, runners can go to the Marathon

Expo to pick up your race packages today. Otherwise, we'll find time tomorrow or Saturday. The remainder of the day is at leisure.

Thu Nov 14 – Day 5

After breakfast at the hotel, meet in lobby at 8:45am to depart at 9am for a full-day walking sightseeing tour of the Old City. We have two days to explore Istanbul, the capital of three legendary empires. While we go from one site to the other, we stroll in the streets of this old town enjoying its different moods and sentiments. If you feel energetic and enthusiastic enough, we are happy to expand the tour to include other interesting sights hidden in the less touristy areas of the district.

Hippodrome: The ancient Hippodrome, an enormous public entertainment arena that once seated as many as 100,000 zealous fans witnessing chariot races, executions, and mock battles. Once the center of Byzantine civic life, it is still decorated by the Egyptian Obelisk, the Bronze Serpentine Column, and the Column of Constantine.

Blue Mosque: With its massive central dome flanked by six slender minarets, the Blue Mosque stands as the single most recognizable monument on the Istanbul skyline. Built between 1609 and 1616, during the reign of Ottoman Sultan Ahmet I, the enormous complex also included a hospital, caravansary, public kitchen, marketplace, schools and the Mausoleum of Sultan Ahmet I. The mosque's immense interior, flooded with sunlight streaming through 260 windows, is decorated with more than 20,000 precious Iznik tiles detailing traditional flowers of Ottoman design. In fact, it is the deep blue glow of the tiles in sunlight that gives the building its name.

Ayasofya (Hagia Sophia): This famous basilica was constructed in the 6th century A.D. It is often described as the greatest work of Byzantine architecture. Once the Church of Holy Wisdom, Christendom's crowning glory, and now a museum, the church once glittered with mosaics, and art treasures filled every corner. Today, Hagia Sophia is the fourth largest building constructed as a church in the world. It was dedicated to Hagia Sophia which means Divine Wisdom, an attribute of Christ.

After this visit stop for lunch on your own at one of Sultanahmet's many local restaurants, and then continue to the Basilica Cistern.

Basilica Cistern or Underground Palace: Istanbul was one of the most often besieged cities in the world and has always needed permanent water supplies. As a result, many underground cisterns were built during the Byzantine Empire. Water was brought to these big reservoirs from far away sources through aqueducts. The largest and most ornate of these cisterns is Yerebatan Sarayı. In its construction, columns and capitals of earlier temples were used and this provides a very decorative appearance.

Grand Bazaar: The area of the Grand Bazaar was a trade center during the Byzantine period. Two bedestens (domed masonry structures) were built by Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror to enrich the economic life in the city. Later on as people needed more places for trade, they added other buildings outside these structures. Today, the atmosphere of the Grand Bazaar is very interesting and has consequently become a very popular place for visitors to explore a labyrinth of streets and passages housing eighteen entrances and more than 4,000 shops. In late afternoon, return to the hotel for some time at leisure.

5:30pm Welcome reception at Armada Hotel to 7:00pm

Fri Nov 15 – Day 6

This morning we meet again for another full day of sightseeing. Meet in lobby at 8:45am. Our first visit is to Topkapi Palace, a pleasant and cozy oriental style palace, once home of the Ottoman Sultans who ruled their vast empire spread across three continents from this very place. This complex is a museum today, housing the spectacular artifacts found in the palace, such as the famous treasury of the sultans, their exquisite robes (kaftans), beautifully ornamented weapons and huge collection of Chinese and Japanese porcelain. We will also visit the famous Harem. After several hours exploring the extensive grounds, we continue to the Spice Market.

The Spice Market was built as part of the Yeni Cami complex and has since been an exciting covered market filled with the fragrant scent of spices from the Orient. This is a great place to buy nuts and other edible gifts. After this visit, you can have lunch on your own at one of the near-by restaurants, overlooking Golden Horn Bay, which separates the old city from the modern city center.

Our day continues as we embark on a local boat and start a one and a half hour cruise on the Bosphorus Strait. The Bosphorus is a narrow, navigable strait between Europe and Asia connecting the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara. This boat ride takes us past late Ottoman palaces as well as beautiful wooden mansions and modern villas of the 19th and 20th centuries which form this elegant section of the city. In a very relaxing and enjoyable way we have an insight to the past, present and the future of Istanbul. The silhouette of the old city at distance summarizes what we have already seen in this tour. The solemn and subtle beauty of the old mansions which once belonged to the Ottoman pashas can be seen side by side with the loudly decorated ones owned by rich industrialists of today. We observe the details of a 15th century fortress from the shadow of a very modern suspension bridge connecting two continents.....another view of the bridge will run across tomorrow!!

After the boat ride we all go to the marathon Expo to pick up bibs, chips and t-shirts. Later, transfer back to the hotel for an evening at leisure.

Sat Nov 16 – Day 7

Today is a free day to explore Istanbul at your leisure. There is so much to see and do and we are happy to make suggestions. Some of the neighborhoods you should explore on your own include Ortakoy and Beyoglu/Istiklal Street.

Ortakoy: Ortakoy is a picturesque sea-front old city quarter located at European side of the Bosphorus Strait. Because of its very special location, it has been favored by Istanbul residents since Ottoman times. Among historical buildings there are the baroque-style Ortakoy Mosque, Esma Sultan Palace, built for an extraordinary Ottoman princess, and the remains of Etz Ahayim Synagogue. Now the lively streets of Ortakoy are dominated by various craft-work sellers, restaurants and cafes. Great place for a walk along the Bosphorus and a meal at a café.

Between Galata and Taksim Square, you'll find the Beyoglu neighborhood's Istiklal Street: This pedestrian street is the heart of Istanbul's city center, where one can feel the dynamic vibe of metropolitan life. Perhaps every resident of Istanbul had a date starting at Istiklal. On both sides of Istiklal Street there are many shops, restaurants, bars and night clubs which are the most favored entertainment options for locals and guests in the city. The small side streets of this area are filled with bohemian pubs and cafes, preferred by local intelligencia.

Istanbul's Istiklal Avenue — the name means "independence" in Turkish — the beat goes on. It's a distinctly global rhythm. About two million locals come to this three-kilometre pedestrian strip every new generation eager to embrace Western culture is turning a once run-down district into a buzzing cosmopolitan hub. "It's a place where you see a girl wearing an Islamic head scarf walking arm-in-arm with a girl with a nose ring and the latest Levi's jeans.

If you like, end the day with dinner on your own at the historic Flower Passage. The Flower Passage has this name because it once was one of the great flower markets of Istanbul (remember, the Turks invented tulips). An inscription above the entrance reads "Cite de Pera". During the Ottoman Empire, this district of Pera was the home of foreign embassies, and there remain many examples of typically French architecture to delight those who avert their gaze from street level to the buildings' upper stories and roofs. The Flower Passage itself is a small L-shaped galleria, four stories high with a glass roof. One end of the L opens on Istiklal Street, the other on a long covered alley which is one of the great delights of Istanbul. It is both market and dining area: first there is about 100 feet of traditional fast food, then comes a glorious fruit and vegetable market which is open till midnight, and finally about 60 busy restaurants, with gypsy bands performing in many of the restaurants in a raucous cacophony. Here we suggest that you have a typical Istanbul dinner and then return to your hotel for overnight.

6:00pm Pre-race Pasta dinner at Armada Hotel

Hotel Armada Hotel in Istanbul

Included meals: (B, D)

Sun Nov 17 – Day 8

5:30am Breakfast served in the hotel lobby to 6:30am. Transportation included to the start of the race; meet in the hotel lobby at 6:30am. The finish line is just near to the hotel.

9:00 am Istanbul Eurasia Marathon Day! <http://www.istanbulmarathon.org/en>
Same start time for 15K and 10K.

Transportation included to the start of the race. Signed up for 15K and received bib#6440
Every runner receives a medal and commemorative T-shirt.

Course: The start area distance is 300 meter to the Bosphorus Bridge's. The Marathon will be finished in front of the Sultanahmet Mosque in Sultanahmet Square near to the hotel.
The 15K will be finished in front of Istanbul Commerce University in Eminonu.

Weather: Average temperatures range between 50F-65F.

Time Limit: Timing by Championship and is limited to 5 1/2 hours before moving to sidewalk. Timed to 6:20 in 2012.

Expo on Nov 14 to 16 at Sinan Erdem Dome, Olimpiyat Evi Yani, 4. Kisim Sonu, 34158
ATAKOY/ISTANBUL from 10:30am to 7:30pm.

6:30pm Post-race celebration dinner: Meet Thom and Anita in the hotel lobby for a group celebration dinner. You will need to confirm your attendance with Thom or Anita at the Welcome Cocktail Reception; restaurant location will be announced at the reception. Dinner and drinks are at your own expense.

Mon Nov 18 – Day 9

Rest of tour group will have a transfer to the airport for flight home today.

Package includes but maybe not included in text?

- Five nights accommodations at the Armada Hotel in the center of Istanbul from Nov. 13-18

- Full breakfast daily
- Welcome cocktail reception
- Two full days of Sightseeing in Istanbul as described in the itinerary
- Pre-race pasta dinner
- Transportation to the race start
- Arrival and Departure transfers on the group dates
- All hotel taxes and gratuities
- Hosted by Marathon Tours staff
- Race entry fee is additional

Hotel Armada Hotel as above for additional two nights
Conf#159358724 on own for superior room

Wed Nov 20 – Day 11

time? Arranged through hotel for a private driver

5:05am Depart Istanbul IST via Lufthansa LH1305 (3:15 hrs)

7:20am Arrive Frankfurt FRA for plane change

8:45am Depart Frankfurt FRA via UA#118 (9:35 hrs)

12:20pm Arrive Newark

Pack: Scarf for cover up, European plug adapters, passport

Tourist notes:

From NYTimes 4/21/13 about 9 walks - In Istanbul, the Golden Horn - Turkey is a majority Muslim country, but Istanbul's religious history remains multicultural. Evidence of this is visible during a two-and-a-half-hour walk along the Halic, or Golden Horn, which separates the Old City from the more contemporary Beyoglu. At the Fener ("lighthouse") bus stop, cross Abdulezelpasa Caddesi — the main shore road — and walk past the trinket shops to the walled compound that includes the Church of St. George, seat of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Inside, you'll find the ivory-inlaid throne of the patriarch, Bartholomew, and a wall of gilded icons. Farther up the main avenue is the golden-domed Church of St. Stephen of the Bulgars, constructed of iron panels that were cast in Vienna, barged down the Danube and pieced together here in the late 1800s.

Continue along Murselpasa Caddesi for a meatball break at Kofteci Arnavut (look for a Mavi Kose sign), then duck into the Jewish neighborhood of Balat to reach the intersection with Leblebiciler Sokak (the Sellers of Roasted Chickpeas Street). Straight ahead is the Yanbol Synagogue, named for a town in Bulgaria. Continuing deeper into Balat takes you to the Ahrida Synagogue, with its restored wooden interior dome.

Head back to the main road and walk along the waterside parks where Turkish families picnic. Pass under the highway bridge, past Feshane, a former Ottoman fez factory, cross the boulevard and walk past the souvenir market to the Eyup Sultan Mosque and the tomb of the standard-bearer for the Prophet Muhammad. Here you can see brides in lacy gowns praying and boys parading in white capes and caps as part of their circumcision rituals.

To the left is a passageway uphill through a tulip-accented cemetery to the Pierre Loti Cafe, named for the French naval officer and novelist. From the cafe, over pistachio ice cream and coffee (still brewed over hot coals), you can see all the way to Topkapi Palace.

Links:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantinople>

www.goturkey.com