SAILING THE EMERALD COAST OF TURKEY

Twenty-five years ago I traveled with my grandson Ben, who was then about 18, to Turkey. Most of the trip was on a large sailboat (a “gulet”) along the south coast of Turkey, but we also visited inland sites. After a night in Istanbul we met our landside guide, Mahmut, in Izmir, from where we went to Ephesus, the Greco-Roman site where St. Paul preached to the Romans. The city is known for temples dedicated to various goddesses – Cybele, Artemis, and later, Diana. We saw magnificent ruins of the ancient Greek and Roman world here and later in the tour at other sites -- Perge, Aspendos (the finest surviving theater of the ancient world), Aphrodisias (dedicated to Aphrodite), etc. The Romans loved spectacles and built large amphitheaters wherever they settled -- an almost complete one is still in Perge. Even laid low by earthquakes, wars, and time, the sites were immensely impressive – some of them, such as Perge still have substantial stone structures, the remains of the bustling cities they once were.

In Kusadasi we saw beautiful rugs being woven and I bought one for each of us (I have recently given mine to Ben because Heritage feared I might trip on it).

We boarded our gulet – a traditional wooden Turkish sailing vessel -- in Marmaris. For the next ten days we visited more than 20 fascinating sites, sometimes sailing, other times on land expeditions. We traveled about 120 miles eastward from the eastern edge of the Dodecanese Islands (think Rhodes) to Antalya on the southern coast – this shoreline is called the Emerald Coast for its beauty, and is a world-renowned yachting venue. At various stops we hiked ashore, and at some we anchored alongside half-submerged ruins, including Cleopatra’s Baths and a temple where Ben snorkled between submerged columns. At one site we bathed in warm mud, washing off in a lake (well, Ben did – not for me!).

When we got to the market town of Fethiye the boat stocked up on wine, and we went on a shoreside excursion to explore Fethiye, Lydae, and the ghost town of Kayakoy, destroyed by Ataturk in 1923. At sunset that day we had wine on the top of Gemiler Island – a treasured experience, the photo of which is on the wall of my apartment. The next day we went inland to Kalkan and Xanthos, whose famous reliefs reside in the Xanthian Room of the British Museum in London (unless they are among the looted treasures being returned recently).

We sailed on to Kas, Aperlai, Kalekoy, and Myra, the home of Santa Claus (the Tomb of St.Nicholas is there). We hiked up the mountain to see the Chimaera, the eternal flame mentioned in Homer’s Iliad (it’s a natural gas vent that still burns).

We left the gulet in Antalya -- whose history is said to have started with the mass exodus from the fall of Troy – and from there we flew back to Istanbul, where we stayed two nights in a pensione converted from old Ottoman houses. We saw the breathtaking Hagia Sophia, the Blue Mosque, the Topkaki museums, and the 6th c. Byzantine Cisterns. Then a cruise up the Bosphorus and dinner, and the next day it was back to the USA.