

Leaving the Old World

Seems like only 62 days since I touched down in Romania; trading the hot rocks and sandstone for green trees and rain.

Tonight I depart Europe, with a somewhat heavy heart. While the sights have been wonderful, the reality is that they come at a price my thinning wallet struggled to pay for. Eastern Europe definitely has a more appealing exchange rate, but in the end, “cheaper” is still a relative term. While the “free food” of Krakow was lovely, it was an anomaly...I guess that’s why people work, to afford a proper vacation, with more creature comforts, like food.

This European “semester” has taken me from the Painted Monasteries of northern Romania, past the “Salty Turd” of Cluj-Napoca, to the Old Town of Bucharest. I would have stopped in Budapest anyway, but getting to hang out at the “Palace of Dave” was a highlight.

My “Long Weekend” in Bratislava was just that; a quick dumpling stop with some Slovaks who mocked my few Slavic words. Then it was on to the Czech Republic where the bedrock memories of previous visits were battered by the onrushing surf of modern Prague...but I got my shots and had a great time clambering amongst the cobblestones.

Seeking budgetary “relief” I bussed it to Krakow where my fantasy of a sausage filled existence came true. Then it was a flight to Istanbul, at the southern edge of Europe.

My two weeks in Istanbul have been a whirlwind. You can buy this “museum pass” for about \$20 that lets you skip the lines at eleven sites around town. At first I didn’t think the lines would be any big deal, but then the tram dumped me off in front of the Hagia Sophia and I saw the benefit immediately...huge lines everywhere...and being frugal, I made it a point to see all eleven museums...I had the time.

Istanbul is a crazy quilt of ethnicity and religion laid over a ring of hills and harbors in and around the Bosphorus Strait, separating Europe from Asia. I quickly learned the metro system and have been taking trains to different areas daily to mingle with the locals rather than my tourist brethren.

There is kebab here, lots of kebab; Donar, Durham, Adano...big spits rotating wheels of meat, sweating off artery-clogging fat with a tantalizing smell that should be outlawed by the World Medical authorities. I have done well here to repel the aroma, but there are almost daily “weak spots” where my resolve is sorely tested. But there are burgers here too, and a canoe-shaped pizza-like thing that you buy from a bakery when it comes out of the oven...lovely.

Photographically it’s been an adventure. I had so dreamed of standing inside the Blue Mosque and Hagia Sophia, my wide angle lens in hand, but sadly, both are undergoing renovations. I got some “shots” but nothing like what I was expecting to get.

My road trip to Cappadocia was a winner. The big ticket item there is the hot air balloon rides at dawn. As testament to my steeled reality, I barely flinched when told the price; 130 Euros, \$150. And

sometimes you just get in the balloon...you MUST get in the balloon. I was "working" the entire hour we were up there, my trigger finger got plenty of exercise, but what a spectacular place

Capp pictures

Back in Istanbul, I did exciting things like getting a haircut and finally seeing the movie "Eagle Huntress" about the golden eagle festival in Mongolia. Only 2yrs late. And then another late night "canoe pizza" and a few Efes Pilsners ended my night.

There are many wonderful neighborhoods in Istanbul, with Turkish coffee, and Turkish delight around every corner. There are guys in elaborate fez' swirling the most delectable ice-cream while doing a side-show routine with both the ice-cream and the cone...expensive, but it's the theater of it.

Some Thoughts:

The dollar was very strong during my visit, but in recent days, it has begun to weaken, so that's my cue to skidoo..

They have these automated messages that play when you go thru a turnstyle to exit something...sounds like theyre saying "nice sandwiches"...

There are pretzels here, but they're on the lower end, and barely any salt...almost like it doesn't count.

After scientific measurement on two busses, the distance between the seat back and the back of the seat in front of you is exactly two inches shorter than your dupa-to-knee measurement...

There are cats everywhere in Istanbul. Happy, well-fed lazy cats who can often be found sunning themselves on the roofs of cars...the shop owners feign being annoyed by their presence, yet feed them often.

I am off to Sri Lanka tonight, land of elephants and coastline..is this a "vacation" from my travels? Probably not, there just so much to see...