

everybody is on the move in turkey



while their parents get around on bikes and buses, turkish kids ride a homemade wagon to greet the yalova ferry crowd

the Turks are going someplace. Constantly. On feet, donkeys, bikes, third-hand U.S. cars and their speciality, *dolmushes*, these vigorous, intense people are in perpetual motion.

They start early. Each dawn, eerie chants wail from minarets to hustle the faithful to the first of the day's five prayers in icon-less but splendidly carpeted mosques, where barefoot men kneel, bow and prostrate themselves in a fast-paced expression of reverence. Since women are prohibited from the holy section, only a few of the most persistent pee from behind curtains in the rear.

Few of the 98 percent of the citizenry claiming to be Moslem follow this proscribed ritual, but almost everyone spills out of red-tiled huts in a horse-clomping, pans-clanging flurry. Roaming through piles of wares, gesticulating wildly while bargaining, dashing across the road to embrace a friend, sauntering arm in arm to tea houses, or herding sheep through the main thoroughfare, they convey the antithesis of the proverbial "sleepy village."

Perhaps this energy and communal fervor heightened the success of Ataturk's westernization of the '20s. Revolutions, after all, do not spring from folks rocking sedately on private porches. Certainly that phenomenal revolution has been a continuing stimulus. Improved transportation-communication systems, compulsory education, expanded higher education, and the concept of national unity have spurred even the villagers to explore their Texas-sized land.

Often the humblest peasant can describe the otherworldly moonscape of the Goreme Valley; the crystal waters and endless beaches of the Mediterranean, Aegean, and Black Seas; the magnificent ruins of Ephesus, Troy, Pergamon, and the Antalya areas; and the modern westernness of Ankara, as opposed to more eastern Istanbul farther west. With the proud devotion of a new parent, he shares his country. His desire to have foreigners, especially Americans, understand, appreciate and love it as he does is unmatched.

To best achieve this understanding, appreciation and love, ride along with the Turks, not merely past them. True, convenient and ample taxis will take you anyplace to want to go. But if your goal is into the exotic and fascinating culture, hop into their ubiquitous public transports and you are already there. You say donkey rides aren't what you had in mind and you've outgrown bikes and '50s Fords? There are pleasant alternatives.

a sample trip, one of the easiest for short-term visitors, is the two-hour express ferry crossing the Marmara Sea at least twice daily to Yalova, from which you may venture in several directions.

Get to Galata Bridge on the Golden Horn in time to purchase your nine lire (about 60¢) ticket and wander. Leave your Taxim-tourist mind in the taxi.

Fires blazing in the myriad tiny skiffs cook some of the tasty benita before it makes shore; others are heaped on wooden trays guarded by crinkled old men in embroidered caps, or serious kids who couldn't find a job in one of the cheap-but-okay *lokani* (cafe) that pack the floating wharf below. Descend, choose one and sit awhile, soaking up seaside life. But when it's time for the ship to leave, be on it. This is one of the few things that run on schedule, and while I have raced to it, suitcase in hand, and leaped over the water with a sigh, I don't recommend it.

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Since the *vapur* (ship) is "the" mode of travel for the locals, it will probably be jammed, especially on weekends, when Istanbulites evacuate the city and small-townners invade it, thrusting anachronistic veils amid the miniskirted urbanites. Squeeze right in between the old lady swaddled in black and the men intent on their ancient board game. Notice the relish with which the family across the way gobbles their feast of bread (abundant always in this wheat-laden land), crumbly white goat's cheese and miniscule bananas. The natives will notice you in return, and some will invariably attempt to communicate, particularly if you invite it with the greeting "*Merhaba.*"

Besides being outstandingly curious and gregarious, most Turks (at least the ones you'll meet) have a real quest for learning English and grab any opportunity to fumble with it. For many, it is a ticket to increased commerce; bargaining is difficult, though by no means impossible, in two different languages. Since post-Ataturk schools require five years of French or English and many workers seek prosperity in Germany and return, along with mounting hoards of German tourists, most Turks can speak at least a little English, French, or German. However, they are ecstatically amazed when you try their language.

down the pew-like benches, "worry" or "prayer beads" dangle from every masculine hand, leading you to wonder if only one sex worries or prays. In spite of the exorbitant illiteracy rate, most faces are buried behind newspapers, their pictorial pages as chaotically crammed as everything else. Before long the rattle of delicate glasses announces *cay* time (pronounced *chī*) and all plink down one lire for the world's best hot tea. Do likewise, until a new friend insists on gifting you with this traditional drink of hospitality. Graciously accept and reciprocate with an American cigaret, a cherished commodity.

Although most of the females will be wrapped from head to foot, scarved if not veiled, they may also be sucking the last drag of a potent butt down to their "liberated" tar-stained fingers. The long way they have come is not far enough. Social norms still stringently separate the sexes, in spite of equalizing post-revolution laws. Most women avoid public contact with any man, including their husbands, who spend endless hours with their cronies in the local *cay* houses. The farther from the cities, the slower the change, naturally. Yet, affectionate kissing, hugging, handholding and dancing among members of the same gender is common to an extent that sometimes surprises even the demonstrative Italians.

Dozers may be awakened by loud barkers selling hand-made toys and gadgets. Or by musicians playing carved flutes (5 lire in any shop) or tambourines. Amble out on deck and join a group of dark-haired students spontaneously lost in the songs of their fathers.

Just when you think you could spend the night here, the ship thuds to dock and the masses gush out into the bustling circle spinning with four wheelers whose drivers scream for your business. A firm "*Yok*" (no) should divert them. A dramatic statue of the omnipresent Ataturk (probably the best) is a constant reminder that this was one of the leader's favorite spots. You'll be equally enraptured by the outdoor vendors and craft shops, old fishermen and uniformed school children who skip through the mules and wagons to surround

you. Loll on the sandy beach awhile, and wonder that you have traveled so far in so few miles.

If it's Saturday, you will find an open market that dulls Istanbul's. Not because of the copper and bronzeware, onyx vases, hand-woven and Angora rugs, suede coats or meerschau pipes. That's all inside the shops and much less expensive than in Istanbul's Grand Bazaar. You can, in fact, have quality leather goods made across from the PTT (post office) and shoes cobbled around the block for almost nothing.

From Yalova, you can easily reach three musts: internationally famous indoor and outdoor baths at Termal Resort (only 15 minutes away); quaint, historic Nicia, now Isnik (45 minutes); and the silk and towel city of Bursa (one hour). Again, sacrifice comfort for experience, and getting there will be as rewarding as being there.

Return to that frenzied circle, especially during ferry docking when the buses multiply and inhale the throngs like suction. Don't panic when you aren't aggressive enough to push your way onto the first few. There will be more. In this whirlwind there are always more.

Even more earthy and available than the larger *otobuses* (buses) are the tin can vans fittingly named *dolmush*, from *dolma* — to stuff. These mini buses, though admittedly unsafe at any speed, do provide a practical and unusual service. They squeal down the highways and through every hamlet, picking up anyone along the way who flags them down: mothers returning from market with larger than life sacks of vittles for the week or a "purse" full of squawking hens; farmers with skins for the tanner or an angelic lamb for the butcher. What can't be stuffed inside will tower on top, and there is always room for one more. The driver yells the end destination out the front window while his assistant (usually a preteenager) does the same in the rear with stunt man gestures. You could zig zag through most of Turkey in a *dolmush* at about 10¢ an hour. Cheap thrills.

Gradually you become less a tourist, and more like one of the crowd. "Hold my chicken a minute, will ya?" asks the owner of the elbow in your side. It's the next best thing to barging into the villagers living rooms. And who would be home anyway?

After at least a week, joining in local folk dancing at Termal, meandering through the ruins and museum at Isnik, selecting your treasures and marveling at the architecture at Bursa, you may return to Istanbul, again on the express ferry (from Yalova). Stop off on Bukada, the largest of the lush Prince's Islands, and find out how the wealthy fraction of the populous lives. No honking or exhaust fumes here, since motored vehicles are forbidden. It's a pleasant place filled with more western, more reserved, but often just as friendly Turks. You will enjoy the comparison. And lest we lose perspective, all this contrast is within a hundred very varied miles that span two continents and many worlds, all in a mere corner of Western Turkey.

Eventually you will climb aboard a plush silver jet, press your button to recline, shiver a bit from the air conditioning, and sip, perhaps, champagne. Measure the success of your adventure by your yearning for *cay* and camaraderie. Recollect how special you felt with the folks who welcome best strangers who refuse to stay strange. Chances are you'll return as I have, secure in the promise that there will always be warmth in a *dolmush*.*