

e-Postcard from Sultanahmet

June 21, 2004

Hello to all,

Yesterday we rode off the western end of the Asian continent and onto the eastern end of the European continent by crossing the bridge over the Bosphorus. Those of you who were excellent students of geography will know the Bosphorus connects the Sea of Marmara with the Black Sea, home to Russia's only warm water ports, and splits the ancient city of Constantinople, perhaps the most strategically located capital city in the world. Those of you who were excellent students of history will recall that Constantinople was founded by Constantine, the first Christian Roman Emperor, and served as the capital of the Roman Empire, then the Eastern Roman Empire during the Byzantine era, then the Ottoman Empire during the reign of the Islamic Ottoman Sultans. Those of you who are excellent students of Middle Eastern history and modern history will know that Constantinople was sacked by the Roman Catholic Christian Crusaders while under control of the Eastern Orthodox Christian Byzantines, was renamed Istanbul by the Ottomans and lost its status as the capital city of the rulers of most of the known world when the remainder of the Ottoman empire was carved up by the French and British after WWI.

And these are just a few of the things we've learned after 6,368 miles touring Turkey, Syria and Jordan. After riding 31 out of our 39 days in the region, we are back at the Blue House Hotel in Istanbul. We averaged 205 miles for every day of riding, stayed in 30 different hotels in 30 different cities, had zero traffic accidents, used 1.5 quarts of oil, met thousands of friendly, welcoming people, experienced overwhelming hospitality, enjoyed delicious food and had countless fantastic experiences.

How do you celebrate the end of a tour of discovery through a fascinating and rewarding region?



With a glass of raki, the national drink of Turkey. (Raki must be consumed following a strictly enforced social code. It is only allowed before, during, after and between meals, all other times are forbidden.)



And a kiss!

So what do you do after riding 6,368 miles on a motorcycle through strange roads, chaotic traffic, camels, donkeys, horses, hand carts, bicycles, scooters, giant tour busses, cars, city busses, taxis, mini-van busses, trucks, geese, chickens, dogs, cats, street vendors, goats, sheep, cattle and pedestrians? You go for another ride! Today we're exploring the shores of the Bosphorus with our friends Kemal, our guide for the first portion of our trip, and his girlfriend Isil (pronounced somewhat like ooshel). If the previous 6,368 miles are any indication, many adventures are in store.

I deliver the bike to the air freight company for shipping to LAX tomorrow and we'll be back home in a few days after testing our bargaining mettle with the carpet vendors of Istanbul.

Once home, Steph will settle in for some rest, recovery and relaxation. Meanwhile, I'm scheduled for a ride from Canada to Mexico down the Continental Divide with my longtime Baja riding buddy Bob Mueller. When I return from that jaunt, Steph and I tour Japan for a month on our bike, on our own, then join our good friends Kathy and Dennis Stajic and our trusty "last rogue adventurer" guide from India and Bhutan, Patrick Moffet, for a motorcycle tour of China on rental bikes. We're looking forward to exploring the eastern end of the Asian continent after seeing so much of the western end over the last two months. We'll wrap up this segment of our travels sometime in October, just in time to start shopping for the holidays.

We've got some more writing and a lot of pictures to get posted over the coming days.

Until then,

Be well,
Doug