

Country/Town visited: Istanbul/Gallipoli, Turkey

Date of stay: 23rd April 2012 (4 days)

Where you stayed: Tour accommodation

Tour or pre planned: Tour – [Travel Shop Turkey](#)

First day in Turkey – 23/04/2012

My first day in Turkey and the traffic in Istanbul is insane, people must be killed everyday either in crashes or just plain being run over, there doesn't seem to be any real road rules and even when the traffic lights are green you'll still get people trying to T-Bone you, I would never ever drive here. There are about 18 million people that live in Istanbul and 4 million cars and it's not a huge place in comparison to other cities I've been to & very wisely no-one rides bikes.

Our bus drove out of the city and towards the Gallipoli Peninsula, we stopped half way for a break and I found my first experience of dealing with the Turkish toilets, basically a hole in the floor that you need to try and pee into, a lot harder than it looks and you just know that the liquid on the floor you are standing in isn't just water, not my preferred choice of facilities. Eventually we arrived in the town of Eceabat, we stopped for lunch and later caught the ferry across to Canakkale to stay for the night.

The restaurant we stopped for lunch was not the best, we all paid 23TL each for a set lunch. We were told that there was other option so we had to get it, everyone felt pretty ripped off with what we got, some rice, lettuce, tomato, cabbage, cold chips (about 5), and six 1 inch sausage things in tin foil.

After that experience, we went to ANZAC cove and this was fantastic to go there before the event although I would have preferred it maybe a week earlier to see the place without the stadium seating etc. The first thing that blew my mind was the cliffs that our boys (New Zealanders and Australian's) had to climb up, the thick scrub to battle through to get up there would be hard enough let alone carrying all their gear and also getting shot at, they must have been gnarly guys, just amazing, and the NZ boys got the highest, right to the top and they held it for a brief time before all being killed.

We visited a couple of the cemeteries that were on the water's edge, and I was more than impressed with the upkeep of the graves, in between each one there were flowers planted, the grass was lush and the trees were all in full spring bloom, amazing time of year to go.

We stopped and looked at the Australian Lone Pine Memorial, the Turkish 57th Regiment Memorial and then lastly on the top of the hill was the NZ Memorial. Right up the top of the hill they have restored some of the Turkish trenches back to how they were so they were really neat to see and to know that our guys held them for a short time.

After a whirlwind and very tiring day, we headed back to Eceabat to catch the ferry across to Canakkale for the night. Canakkale is a really beautiful little town on the Dardanelles, we all felt like spoiling ourselves so we went to a lovely restaurant on the water's edge, they

didn't speak English so they took us into the kitchen area to show us what was on the menu.

I got Calamari and whole Sea Bream, the Bream was flame cooked I think, completely whole and was so delicious, it didn't come with any real sides but it was plenty enough. The beer to drink in Turkey is called Efes, very similar to NZ lager, and for a decent glass the prices range from 4.50TL to 7.50TL depending on the place.

24/04/2012

Today was very cruisy, we started at 11am and made our way to Troy, we weren't there for that long and then headed back to Canakkale, on the way back we stopped at a supermarket to stock up for the long haul night of staying at ANZAC cove, I got myself some chips, olives, bananas, chocolate & water, was crazy trying to find your way around a supermarket when it's all in Turkish and they eat quite different foods.

We had free time for the rest of the day till 6.30pm so we all went and had some beers on the water front and I tried the Turkish Coffee. The coffee was black with sugar in it, it came in tiny porcelain cups and you can only really drink 2/3s of a cup cause 1/3 of it is a brown sludge, but it's definitely drinkable and all good if you just need a coffee hit. We had a fantastic kebab at a place opposite our hotel (ANZAC Hotel) too.

6.30pm we headed towards Gallipoli on the ferry again, but we first had to stop for the BBQ party dinner for those that had booked it, and once again it was held at the place where we had lunch. The price was 15 euros per person, I didn't get it as I wasn't too pleased with the meal we had there before, and I am glad I didn't as it was very similar to lunch and most of the group were disappointed.

We got to the cove at about 10pm and went through security like at an airport, they had scanners and went through everyone's bags. Then we received cool welcome packs, with a wrist band, beanie, poncho, programme of events guide, history book & pencil.

Unfortunately all the grass area was already taken, there were thousands of people lying like sardines next to each other and there seemed to be no hope of finding a spot. I left the group I walked in with as I was more likely to find somewhere on my own and I found a slither of grass on the edge of the walkway next to an Aussie girl who was fast asleep by the time I got there. Her boyfriend was awake though and asked if I could squeeze in, they had no issues so I began setting up camp. I got out my poncho and laid that down first, then I got out my emergency bivvy (like an emergency blanket but shaped like a sleeping bag) and my sleeping bag. Once in my sleeping bag I got inside the bivvy and used my jacket and backpack as a pillow. I was super warm and comfy, a couple from the tour, Liz & Brian, walked past me and managed to find a tiny patch of grass to squeeze into so they lay down behind me.

After a couple of hours sleep I woke up to the Australian army band who pumped out a few songs at 1.30am, there were documentaries running all night on the big screens which I'd wake up and watch then fall asleep to. At one point they played the next part of a symphony being put together ready for the 2015 anniversary, they got composers from OZ, NZ & Turkey to put 2 minutes or so towards a song, every year for the past 7 years they have added to the song. They played the song so far then played the new bit for 2012. With all the lights off we listened to this spine chilling beautiful music while staring up at the million stars above our heads, I couldn't help but think that these same stars were looking down on our ANZACs as they battled here 97 years ago.

I fell asleep again and woke up an hour or so later, I put my hands between my bivvy and sleeping bag and realised that it was so toasty warm that it had created condensation and my bag was getting wet, so I got out and lay my bag on top of the bivvy, then laid my NZ flags over my bag to protect it from the dew. I didn't get cold once and I only used my puffy jacket in the morning when we were standing up a lot but really it wasn't freezing like in previous years.

There were over 7000 people there last year (2011) and this year there was only about 4500. But believe me it was still crammed full and I'm not sure how they are going to cope with 20,000 expected for 2015, I'd say that if you are going to go then do it in 2013 or 2014 because it will be quieter and you'll enjoy the experience so much more.

At about 4am everyone began to stir, the official dawn service began at 5.30am and was a very touching & emotional service. The karakea by the Maori women brought a tear to my eye, the sun had not come up yet and the energy in the cove was, well I'd like to say electric, but not sure that's the right way to describe it.

Julia Gillard got up and spoke, then the representative for Turkey, lastly the NZ rep got up and shed some tears while doing so and that got me going again. Finally after everything they had the last post, and I don't think there was one dry eye in that cove at that point, the sound of the bugle just went right through you and everyone else around you, it was like it echoed off the cliffs behind us and we could feel that cove was full of the spirits of those fallen ANZACS & Turks, we all knew they were there with us and it was overwhelming to feel them by your side.

The sun slowly rose and the cliffs behind us where we lost those men were lit up, everytime I looked up at them I just had an overwhelming feeling of disbelief that a) we even attempted to battle up those hills and b) that we managed to get to the top of them!

I didn't end up eating anything the whole night because I was so comfy and sleeping, so after the dawn service I had to pack up everything and throw away my food because I was not carting that up those hills.

With the masses I began walking with the couple that slept behind me, firstly along the coast until I came to the turn off to Shrapnel Valley Cemetery where my Great Great Uncle Frank Binns is buried. I had seen a few cemeteries a few days earlier and thought they were beautiful but this one took the cake for sure, flowers between each grave then 3-4 trees in bright purple blossom, what an incredible place to have as your final resting place, just stunning.

I spent a while in here taking lots of photos and spending time next to Frank, I placed a poppy on his grave and said goodbye and that I'd see him again soon then left to continue up the hill.

Liz really needed to find her Great Uncles grave also, he was buried in the 4th regiment cemetery and it was so hard to find, so we asked some local police looking guys who couldn't speak English then this Aussie voice behind us said 'Why do you want to go there?', we explained why and he asked us 'Are you ok with going bush?', of course we were so we followed him along his shortcut up the mountain.

We went completely bush, there was a slight track but if you were on your own you'd have

no clue where to go, and we followed the Shrapnel Valley up the hills. To our left we looked down into the valley where Simpson carried the water to the ANZAC's, he pointed out all the places where we were fighting including where we were walking was right in the thick of it. I kept my eyes peeled for a bullet shell but no such luck. We looked down on Shrapnel Valley Cemetery and got some amazing photos of the cemetery from a distance, but it was just so special to be taken up the hill the way our guys went, not on a tar sealed road.

Eventually we got to the 4th battalion cemetery where we found his grave, no one was in the cemetery but us because to get to it from the other side was off the beaten track, so we chilled out here for a while in the shade and I kept looking for shells, still nothing. After 10 mins or so Rebecca came into the cemetery, a girl who was on our tour but in a different bus, she's a kiwi chick from Timaru. I then stuck with Bec and started heading towards the NZ memorial and Liz & Brian headed to the Aussie one at Lone Pine, we had a wee friend to accompany us along the way, a friendly stray dog walked the whole way up the hill with us. We stopped in at all the cemeteries along the way, some with incredible views down the mountain and out to sea, and our dog kept by our side as we did so, not sure when she decided to leave but one moment she was there and the next she was gone.

The NZ service was good, just like the dawn services we have at home except at lunch time instead, the only problem was there was not enough seating for all the NZ'ers, the stadium seating was only for about 500 people and there was easily 1000 kiwis there, so those that couldn't get into the stadium seating around the memorial sat on the grass outside & watched it on big screen.

After it was all over we went to the meeting point to catch our bus, it's the same point for everyone so there was a few thousand there, the NZ army band set up and played a few tunes for everyone which was nice. Still the sun beamed down on us and I'm so glad I had my flags with me to keep the sun off my arms, also a must is a hat, sunnies just don't cut it. I was so glad to get in that air-conditioned bus and head to the town to get some food by the end of it.

The only thing I would change if I went again would be to take a bigger backpack with me, you need food during the day and lots of water and it sux if you can't carry it.

The experience of being a part of the Gallipoli ANZAC memorial is something that I believe is a pilgrimage that every Australian & New Zealander needs to do once in their lifetime. To see first-hand where our guys fought gives you a greater appreciation and understanding of what happened on the 25th of April 1915 and what continued for months after. To see the cemeteries where our men now rest is something very special, they are beautiful and there are many across the landscape to walk through. It was an experience I will never forget and I hope to return there another time to experience it again.

26/04/2012

Our last day of the tour and everyone was pretty tired, but we still managed to rally enough energy to do a few hours around Istanbul. Firstly we visited the Blue Mosque, called that by tourists cause of the amount of blue tiles used to decorate the inside. My chosen attire for the day wasn't quite appropriate for a mosque, I had a dress on, so they gave me something to cover my legs and I had a cardi on so my arms were covered and they didn't require you to cover your head. Outside the mosque they have lots of taps with seats in front of them where everyone washes before going inside to pray, they have a special

routine they do before starting with the right side of their body.

The inside was so beautiful, but it was packed with tourists and because we had to take our shoes off the place smelt like smelly feet.

Next we walked through the hippodrome, where back in the day they used to have chariot racing etc, unfortunately most of the structures were destroyed in one of the many earthquakes Turkey gets, but there are still a couple of things there.

The spice markets was next on the list, I made sure I had my bag on the front of me as the place was crowded, every stall they tried so hard to get you in to their shop and they'll say anything to do so. The funniest one was 'Excuse me you dropped something', so you'd turn around to look then accidentally get eye contact and they'll try to drag you into their shop, but after the 5th time you just start laughing at them.

After the Spice Markets our tour was over and everyone went their separate ways. The tour was great, we saw many things and learnt a lot, the guides were knowledgeable and you left knowing more about what happened and in turn more in touch with why we can never forget.

I had a great time in Turkey and it is definitely a country I would love to explore more.

Rating system:

Would you recommend this destination: **Yes**

Would you recommend your accommodation: **Yes**

Overall rating: **3 out of 5**

By: Samantha