

ISTANBUL and NORTHERN CYPRUS



Because of a last minute switch of dates, we had to book into a 4th Class hotel in Istanbul which was all we could find while in London. On arrival at Istanbul airport we found a taxi and after a scary drive (our taxi driver seemed to drive at great speed while looking out of the back window and /or talking to us on the back seat), we arrived at the hotel. It looked very run down, was on a main road which was very noisy, and too far away from The Old Quarter which was where we wanted to be. The manager came out to greet us and a great argument ensued between him, the taxi driver and Paul, who of course couldn't speak their language. They understood very little of what Paul was saying. During the altercations our luggage was dumped on the pavement and lifted, or thrown back into the taxi several times. In the end, it turned out they didn't have our booking and were full. Phone calls were then made and our helpful but madly neurotic taxi driver took us to a hotel not much better, but slightly more conveniently situated. It was clean and the electricity and shower worked although there were no plugs in the basin or bath.

Undaunted by all the bother over the hotel, Paul wanted to do his walkabout immediately. This was what he always did on arrival at a new place and when he started to get ideas about his subjects for illustrations. Seeing it for the first time, The Grand Bazaar was a great shock to me. It was larger, more labyrinthine, more beautiful and exciting than I could have imagined. The merchants and tradesmen whose families had worked there for centuries, their names appearing on the streets and Gates, have seemingly always used the covered arcades of workshops and retail outlets for their thriving businesses, attracting throngs of shoppers.



Here tradition lives on. We passed through Sahaflar Carsisi, a marvellous market of second-hand booksellers. Paul was determined to draw this. The problem was, 'Where was the best place ?' This is a recurring problem for an artist, especially in foreign lands. The place he chose was right next to a stinking lavatory, and there he settled down on his artist's stool and with his drawing board and pencils, rubbers, etc. While he was attracting a lot of attention, I wandered off and looked into the courtyard of a nearby mosque where men were washing their feet in a central fountain. I soon realised I shouldn't be there as it seemed to be a male enclave, so I quickly beat a retreat and returned to Paul whose admiring crowd had grown. There, I was not so conspicuous, and was very amused when Paul politely asked a large Turk to move so he could see something properly, & got the reply, in English "D'ye mean I can't 'ave a piss because of your bloody admirers?" It raised a

laugh from those who understood.



For a brief moment in time, toilets dogged us in Istanbul. In Durrell's books 'Tunc' and 'Nunquam', there is a house called Avalon which had to be found and drawn. Paul worried about finding Avalon. He devoured the passages in the books describing this house. If we had time to sit down, I would read some of these passages out loud. Paul cursed himself for not getting in touch with the Consul in London before we left to see if he could help with some of the locations including this one. We rang Larry (Lawrence Durrell) to try and jog his memory as to where the house might be. He could not remember, but talking to Paul they decided perhaps it might not even be in Istanbul but in Turkish Cyprus. So much for our efforts! We'd been looking in an area called Old Pera. Looking again at the map something clicked, and we realised that that area stretched right down to the Bosphorous, so ever hopeful we took a taxi, although we didn't know where to get off. Seeing the fragments of a Byzantine fort, we thought this could be the answer, so got the taxi to dump us on the dual highway. It was obviously not the actual house, but Paul thought he could make it fit the description. Daringly, taking our lives in our hands, we crossed the road to get nearer the building, only to find it had been made into a public toilet! Nevertheless, Paul said he would draw it and see how it turned out. As we were in a sort of wilderness, I could not hang around by the side of the road for a couple of hours, so Paul came with me to find a friendly café. In this deserted place and going up some steps, we encountered two gypsies with two bears on leads. Did we want to photograph them? 'No,' said I. But Paul (stupidly I thought) said he'd like to draw them. He did a quick sketch, and they demanded payment.



Paul put his hand in his pocket and drew out the equivalent of about £2. They were horrified and demanded £10. This was a huge amount of money in that country at that time. They started manipulating the bears who became rather menacing it seemed to me. Turning to me, they asked me what money I had. My hand went quickly to my purse, and I drew out about £5 which I gave them, whereupon we made a hasty exit up the steps. They followed us for some distance, but eventually gave up, much to my relief as I had visions of the bears being let loose on us. I have to say that at that time I knew something, but not the full extent of the misery that the bears were going through. I don't know if this torture is still allowed to happen in the streets of Istanbul, but I do hope not. Later we again came across the gypsies with their bears in a crowded part of the town

and witnessed an American tourist taking photographs. We heard the American being asked for £20 or equivalent which he gave them! To return to Avalon, we found a café where Paul left me drinking excellent Turkish coffee while he went back to the Byzantine toilet, returning an hour and a half later with the makings of a very good Avalon.

The Golden Horn and the Galata Bridge were subjects that needed to be drawn. Finding an elevated position would be ideal for this so we ventured out to the Galata Tower and Paul decided that this high tower would be a wonderful vantage point for this scene. Happily there was a restaurant right at the top, so we went up there. Encircling the restaurant there is a platform with a small railing about three feet high. Rather rashly, (I thought) Paul wanted to go out there. I knew that he had suffered from vertigo in the past, but he seemed quite confident about going out there. I watched him go out with his portfolio, get everything out, and start drawing. I got on with writing up my diary. After a few minutes, I looked up and saw his anguished face. I dashed out and found him frozen with fear. He could barely speak. 'Portfolio...' he managed to get out. I grabbed it and his paper and pencil. 'I can't get back' he mumbled. 'Turn round and face the wall' I told him. Slowly he managed that, and clinging onto the bare wall, shuffled back. After a strong cup of coffee, he was able to resume his drawing, but from the security of the restaurant.

Apart from walking, taxis were the only means of getting about. They created their own problem, not because of the price, which was ridiculously cheap, or because of scarcity, for there were plenty of them, but because they were difficult to flag down in the turmoil of traffic. Then if they did stop, they didn't always want us as customers for various reasons, the main ones being the journey was too far, or not far enough, or they were not facing the right way and turning was impossible. On those occasions we had to cross the road which was a hair-raising experience. We learnt quickly. We planned our journeys so that we knew which side of the road we had to be to get a taxi to take us to our destination.

Walking around some of the less desirable areas was not a happy experience. The poverty was terrible. Young kids raking through and picking things out of garbage strewn over large areas. Boys polishing shoes, blackened by boot polish (was Dickens far away?). An elderly bag-man literally bent at right angles carrying his bag. Beggars with varying disabilities - a woman sitting on a wall with her wooden leg propped up beside her, a thalidomide or some such lump of a person dumped on a cloth in the middle of the pavement, a woman with a baby which I could not make out whether dead, alive, or a doll.



In complete contrast were the wonderful mosques, Sophia Hagia and the Blue Mosque in particular, great landmarks on the skyline and weighed down with riches and splendour. I spent some time taking in the glories of these magnificent buildings, then on to Topkapi Palace which took me half a day to look round. It was a Palace of great beauty and splendour with tiled walls, wonderful ceilings, pavilions, a harem, and, bristling with police, the Treasury, which displayed jewellery, pendants and swords, all decorated with diamonds, emeralds and sapphires larger than I had ever seen. Continuing on the tourist trail I also visited the Carpet Museum, full of the richest of 17th, 18th and 19th century carpets. I made friends with one carpet-selling boy called Ahmed, who tried relentlessly to sell me a carpet. I left without one which I since regretted, so beautiful were they and at such a bargain of a price. But would it have actually have followed me all the way back to London? I couldn't make up my mind. Although it might have done, as Ahmed's girl-friend lived in Croydon and he made visits there.

Near to Topkapi Palace and the mosques was the hotel where we spent the last two nights. Fed up

with trekking back to our hotel every night we wanted to stay in a little more comfort, and we knew about one called The Yesil Ev, a new architect-designed hotel with a beautiful tree-lined garden, a fountain and a glass tearoom. Known to taxi drivers as The Green House, we would have no problem getting taxis to take us to or from it. It was in a good area, and the taxi drivers would have the certainty of a decent tip. We turned up and asked if they had a room, but sadly they were full. We could however, have a meal, so we settled for that along with our first taste of wine on the whole trip. Food and wine had not been high on our agenda and the local family restaurants we had been using, did not serve alcohol. All our energies had been spent getting from one place to another in this large and sprawling city. While we were having our delightful meal, the reception manager obviously read an article from 'The Observer' about 'The Mediterranean Shore', (the book we were working on), Lawrence Durrell and our trip, which Paul had given him, and when we came to pay the bill, we were told we could stay there for two nights. It lives in my memory as a most delightful place.

One other place stands out in our visit there. For me it was difficult, as I got caught up in a funeral at a mosque. Paul wanted to draw tombstones and we took a taxi to Eyub some way out of Istanbul where there is a large graveyard with remarkable turbaned gravestones. Not sure whether he would be allowed to draw there, Paul decided to do his chameleon act and disappear into the background, i.e. get lost in the gravestones. Obviously I couldn't draw attention to him by staying close. All the roads surrounding the mosque seemed to be being repaired and fraught with possible danger, so my only option was to go into the mosque. There were dozens of people there, women as well as men. All the women wore headgear, and although I didn't have a hat or a scarf, fortunately my jacket had a hood, so I was able to cover my head. I then realised I would have to take my shoes off, so, hood up and shoes off I joined what I discovered was a funeral service and knelt with palms raised in prayer, following what everyone else was doing. Although I felt very conspicuous, I don't know if anyone noticed this intruder in their midst. Then the mosque suddenly emptied and everyone gathered in the courtyard. After that they processed to the graveside. I did not follow them but I did notice that they buried the body upright. Finding Paul again (not easy!), we wondered how to get back. No taxis here. There was nothing else to do but walk. After about ten minutes a car driven by a man offered us a lift. I wasn't keen, but Paul said 'yes'. The man said he was an army officer although I thought it unlikely. As we got near the town centre, something, I didn't know what, alarmed Paul and he asked our driver to let us out. He didn't seem keen 'We want to look at the shops' said Paul - a likely tale as neither of us had the slightest interest in doing so. The car was in a traffic jam and Paul gave me a nudge, opened the door and leapt out, quickly followed by me, both of us muttering thanks as we slammed the car door. We hailed the nearest taxi. I immediately realised I'd left behind the canvas bag I'd had great pride in haggling for in The Grand Bazaar, and in which were my research notes for the trip and our Blue Guide of Istanbul. However the trip was just about over, and we were leaving the next day. When I asked Paul about the Army officer he mumbled something about not trusting him, which had been my first impression, but we could neither of us put our finger on why we felt this way.

The next stage of this trip was to Northern Cyprus. For some reason, we'd had to change our flight but had been unable to let the Dome Hotel in Kyrenia know. We could only hope that they still had our booking. We were driven to Istanbul airport at 8pm by a frustrated racing driver in the guise of a taxi-driver who was in such a hurry that he deposited us at the wrong terminal. We had to drag our luggage to the right terminal and only just caught our plane which got us to Ercan airport near Nicosia at 11pm. It was a long drive over the hills to Kyrenia on the north coast, where we arrived at 12.30am. Our room at the hotel had gone but they had one on the fourth floor. The lift was not working (by now a familiar event in some countries) and by the second floor, there was no light. However, the kindly porter who was helping us with our luggage had a candle. By the time we got to the fourth floor, we found ourselves on the flat roof of the hotel! With candle and luggage we were led across this to a corridor which we went down and found our accommodation. I tried to put the light on, but nothing happened, and when I gave a gesture of despair, the porter went to the window and opened it as if to say 'Light from the moon'. Meanwhile, Paul had been rummaging about in his luggage and produced a torch which he switched on and we all burst out laughing!

Next morning having discovered we did not have to cross the roof in order to go downstairs, and while having breakfast in the large dining-room, we were able to observe the colonial types who

were exactly as Durrell describes them in 'Bitter Lemons', which was the book that had taken us there. There was an air of peace and calm in this part of the hotel. Here, the troubles of the world could be washed away. The hotel was by the beach and the clarity of the sea, where one could see every stone and rock and fish, lulled one into a dream-like trance belying the troubles that had riven the island for so long. (In the 1950s when Durrell was there, Eoka, an underground movement, was seeking to end British rule. There was Greek/Turkish fighting throughout the 1960s and the Turks invaded and occupied the northern half of the island in 1974.) It wasn't until Paul went out after breakfast that he felt any sense of military presence. He wanted to draw Kyrenia harbour. 'Do you know what happened?' he asked 'I got stopped by the military police'. So he'd packed up his portfolio and had a coffee. Never daunted and very determined, he'd then found a more secluded spot and finished the drawing quickly, making notes about colour. He was rather nervous when he came to draw the nearby fort however as the implications of the military presence began to sink in.

After that, with our usual clapped out Mediterranean hired car, we went to less controversial locations. Bellapaix, the village where Durrell had lived, was delightful, with its Tree of Idleness in the central square. The patron of the cafe was calling out 'Orange juice, beer, tea, Turkish coffee', and we introduced ourselves. Word went round about our connection with Durrell and the villagers wanted to meet us. They couldn't have been more friendly and helpful. For Paul however, sometimes rather too helpful. Although he welcomed their help in finding Durrell's house and being shown the Abbey, he did not like being told where to draw the Abbey from! He always liked to find his own positions. However, as they had been so kind, he did what everyone wanted and started drawing it from what they thought was the best position. But after a while he gave up. 'It hasn't worked' he said. 'I'll have to go down the hill and draw it from below'. Later when I caught up with him he was happy. 'It;s worked' he said. When he showed it to me, I expressed surprise. 'Oh' he said 'it was no good from down below so I went back to the original spot'!

Sometimes Paul had to dig deep to overcome the irritation he felt when people watched him draw. Admiring crowds were one thing, but buoyant children were another. Later in the day we went back to Durrells' house, an important image, and Paul found a convenient wall to sit on in order to draw it. No sooner had he started on the drawing when a young boy appeared and became very nosy about what Paul was doing. Seeing my camera which I had in my hand he kept making a 'click click' sound. 'Oh take his photo and perhaps he'll go' said Paul. I took it, and go he did, but only to spread the news around. Back he came, with several small girls all dressed in red and white gingham who also wanted their photographs taken. This I did and managed to keep them away from Paul for a while, although they kept creeping back. Then the young boy dashed away again and came back holding a kitten followed by a woman who turned out to be his mother, holding a baby girl. They all surrounded Paul including the kitten who was becoming dangerously interested in the movement of Paul's pencil. Click click, and more photographs and I kept them amused for a bit. Then they all started giggling and the mother plonked the baby down right beside Paul who started fiddling with his pencil box. He was trying not to offend, but his patience was stretched to the limit. 'I'll have to give up' he said. So reluctantly, he packed up his things, shook hands with the mother, said goodbye to the children, and we moved off. Fortunately, it was not a difficult drawing, and Paul was so practised in the skill of getting things down on paper quickly, that it turned out to be a good picture.

Hilarion was another place to be drawn. A beautiful fairy-tale castle in three tiers on a high, craggy and rocky hill, it posed problems of accessibility. Driving up to it, there was always a sheer drop either on one side or the other of the narrow road. Added to this was the familiar unreliability of the hired car both of which led to an attack of nerves and vertigo from Paul and he decided before we got there, to draw it before we reached the top. Another hazard of driving along these staggering beautiful mountain roads was the heavy military presence. One was not allowed to stop or take photographs, let alone draw, which were exactly the things we wanted to do. Somehow we got away with it, and Paul managed to get enough down on paper to make a drawing which could be finished later.

We also spent time at Famagusta south of ancient Salamis, once known as Constancia, and one of the wealthiest towns in the Mediterranean, but which had suffered from earthquakes around

BC/AD. Here Paul drew the Fort and the Othello tower, while I learned about the buried treasure which was inaccessible because houses had deliberately been built over it for centuries so no invader could get it. Some restoration had been done in recent years on the ancient theatre, which could hold 15,000 people, but not much on anything else. Marble pillars and statues, central heating conduits, latrines, tiles and mosaics all stood there in deathly silence as if a plaintive reminder of the past glories of an earlier and perhaps a more ordered and cultured civilization. Sea-divers had found a ship (one of many in the bay) with jars intact and a statue with head and hands ON, which they were planning to bring up. The problems of excavation involved money, and settling arguments between Greeks and Turks.

While in Northern Cyprus, there was one other important place to be visited, and that was the Turkish part of Nicosia, which was divided in half in the same way that Berlin was. But time was running out. Never mind, thought Paul, we're going to the Greek part of the island, and we can cross over the border and I can do the drawing then. So back we flew to the U.K. And about six weeks later made our visit to the southern and Greek part of the island. But what we hadn't realised at that time, was that it was almost impossible to visit both parts of the island by simply going over the border.

However there was one place where it was possible for tourists to cross the border and that was at the Ledra Palace Hotel in Nicosia. It was not possible for locals. So one day, six weeks after our earlier visit and from the Greek part of the island, we went along to the checkpoint in Nicosia. By now, realising that we might have a problem, Paul thought that I should make the initial enquiry. At the checkpoint I went to 'Information' with my Turkish map of Nicosia where we had identified the building which Paul needed to draw. 'Where did you get this?' the girl behind the counter demanded. I had to explain that we had been in the northern part of the island. This upset her a lot. She became very suspicious of me, and I wondered if she would give me any information and even thought she might alert the military who might prevent us from crossing over the border. I realised that from her point of view, it was a sin to have been there. (It was later I was to learn more about the deep hatred of the two sides and how indelible and ineradicable the scars were). Somehow I managed to calm her down and explain what we were doing which thankfully she seemed to accept.

By now, Paul had joined me, and we got through the Greek checkpoint after they had examined Paul's portfolio. But we had another hurdle at the Turkish checkpoint. The guard we saw was very suspicious about the fact that Paul wanted to DRAW. Paul kept on talking, and was very patient, but I could see that he had almost given up any hope of being allowed through. The head guard was called. He listened to what we had to say with an impassive face, then said 'Well, as long as you're not drawing Kyrenia harbour, I suppose it's all right'. I couldn't believe he'd said that. My face was as impassive as his, and I 'm sure Paul's was too. Thank God we'd been back to the UK and no longer had the incriminating drawing of Kyrenia Harbour with us! So we were allowed through.

The Turkish half of Nicosia was in great contrast to the Greek part where people seemed happy and prosperous. I was reminded of parts of Istanbul when we moved into the Turkish part. The people seemed poverty stricken, and there was an air of suspicion and despair against a background of dilapidated buildings

Once through the checkpoint, we took a taxi to where Paul wanted to draw which didn't go unnoticed. While he was drawing I had to do something and decided to go into a nearby mosque. The custodian approached me and asked 'Where was my husband and what was he drawing?' Word had obviously got around. In talking to him, I learned that he was a victim of the troubles, having come from Larnaca in the south where he had worked in the Shell refinery for 20 years. He talked with nostalgia of the south.

Returning to Paul who had thankfully finished his drawing, we decided to go back. We had used up all our Turkish money on the taxi to get us there, didn't have enough to get a coffee or even a glass of water, and had to walk back to the checkpoint. It was quite a long way and we were unsure of the route, having come by taxi, and it was a relief when we got there, remembering the words of a friendly Greek guard in our ears warning us 'Be careful, there is danger there'.

Diana Hogarth.