

# On the Road in Turkey

By KAREN STORY

*This is part of a series of articles in which readers tell us about their favorite trips and destinations. Send us your suggestions at next@wsj.com.*

My partner and I have long been fascinated by the history of Turkey, as well as its crafts, food and exotic tales. When we finally journeyed there two years ago, we found the country to be one of the friendliest we have visited, as well as one of the safest. Friends who have been there recently say that's still the case: Turkey has largely escaped the current turmoil in the Middle East.

Our two-week trip began in Istanbul, just a two-hour flight from Amsterdam. The October weather was idyllic. From our hotel in Sultanahmet, Istanbul's old town, it was a short walk to the Hagia Sophia and the Blue Mosque, past shops overflowing with carpets and ceramics. To entice us to enter, salesmen offered tulip-shaped glasses of tea.

## Bobbing on the Bosphorus

The highlights of our four days in this city that straddles Europe and Asia included Topkapi Palace, the Spice Bazaar and the public ferry up the Bosphorus to the Black Sea. We were entranced by a whirling-dervish performance, ubiquitous blue-glass "evil eye" charms (meant to ward off bad luck) and the haunting calls to prayer.

The other highlight was the food. Hotel breakfasts included breads, cheeses, olives, cucumber, tomatoes and thick yogurt. During the day, we would duck into small eateries to sample eggplant dishes, gözleme (a savory pastry), ayran (a refreshing salted yogurt drink), and our favorite, iskender kebab—slivers of roasted lamb or beef drizzled with tomato sauce and ladled over cubes of bread doused with yogurt. (Yes, yogurt is a Turkish favorite.)

The country is easy to navigate via



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Greek and Roman ruins in Ephesus include the Temple of Hadrian

affordable internal flights and an efficient bus system. We opted for a combination of flying and driving.

We flew south to Izmir, rented a car, and spent two days in Selçuk, a quiet base from which to visit the Greek and Roman ruins of Ephesus, the charming hillside town of Sirince, and nearly empty Pamucak Beach.

From Selçuk it was a delightful day's drive through pine forests to Kas, a small town on the south coast where we spent two days ogling Lycian cliff tombs, hiking and swimming in the warm, blue Mediterranean.

## Silk Road Truck Stop

A two-day drive took us over the Taurus Mountains and across the high, brown Anatolian steppes to the Cappadocia region, where erosion has carved the rock into fanciful shapes. Along the way we visited the Roman ruins of Sagalassos, and a 13th-century caravansary—like a truck stop for Silk Road traders and their camels.

The nearly empty roads were well-marked and well-maintained, gas sta-

tions were clean and modern, and the scenery was spectacular—fall colors, donkey carts, honey and olive stands, mounds of just-harvested apples, potatoes, squash and cabbage.

During our three days in Cappadocia we explored ancient frescoed churches and houses carved into the soft, volcanic rock. We wished we had brought boots and trekking poles to better enjoy the extensive trails.

A one-hour flight took us back to Istanbul.

We can't wait to return to Turkey. For travelers on a tight budget, it offers wonderful value. Our hotel room in Istanbul cost under \$50 a night, meals were less than \$10 each, and our rental car cost about \$600 for 10 days.

Next time we'll go in the spring, when poppies and tulips coat the hillsides, and we'll head for the Black Sea coast and the even more exotic eastern half of this captivating country.

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