

TURKEY

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TURKEY

Part I - 12.09.09 - 18.11.09 - **1561 km - 2 months and 7 days**

Part II - 3.03.10 - 27.03.10 - **1023 km - 3 weeks**

Part III - 4.05.10 - 30.05.10, **1200 km - 3 weeks**

Part IV - 25.10.10 - 30.10.10 - **111 km - 5 days**

Total: 4 months, 3895 km

Our stay in this country can be summed up - "Cok güzel" and "problem yok!" - which means "very beautiful" and "no problem!" Turkey has charmed us in every way. Beautiful nature, great scenery, great weather, great food and great people with great hearts - a wonderful Turkey :-)

CULTURE DIFFERENCES

In fact - no problems at all!

The biggest "problem" we had was when we were offered to often to have tea, a meal or a chat with locals. If we have taken up all the invitations, we would probably still be in Turkey now:-)

The funny thing is that most Turks in the big cities will show you the way even if they don't know it.

We don't know why they do that. May be they are ashamed to admit that they have no clue...To make sure that you are heading to a right direction, better ask at least three different people.

The good thing is that when they are sure about the way, which is most of the time, they will jump on their scooters and lead you to your destination.

If you don't want to use your hand, take toilet paper with you when going to the toilet.

Turks are mostly Muslims. Respect their religion and culture. Take care to keep to proper dress code while visiting mosques and other places of worship.

STEREOTYPES - FACTS AND MYTHS

"Turkey is a conservative Islamic country."

It's not true. Most of the Turks are Muslims but they are not conservative! In our opinion they respect a lot other religions and cultures. You can be sure that you'll experience more respect from Turkish Muslims towards Christians than from Christians in Europe towards Muslims.

"Turks are Arabs and they speak Arabic"

Turks are a separate ethnic group. They are not Arabs. They used to have Arabic alphabet but since 1928 (Kemal Atatürk revolution), they've been using Turkish language based on Latin alphabet.

"All women in Turkey wear headscarf. If you travel there, you'll have to cover your head, legs and

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arms”

There is no obligation in Turkey to cover your head. In cities you can see women dressed like in Europe. I was cycling all the way in my tight cycling clothes and it never caused any problems. Nobody ever made me feel strange by staring at me or by making any comments on my dress. The only place where you have to cover up is at the mosque.

“Turkey is a dangerous country”

We’ve never felt safer in any country before as in Turkey! During four months of our trip across this country, we’ve never felt any trace of any danger. We were walking anywhere we wanted, in the day and night time. We were leaving our bikes unattended many times and nothing was ever stolen. In our opinion Turkey is very hospitable and safe country.

DANGERS

The only danger we can think of are dogs. They appear suddenly and run after you. The best way to get rid of them is just to pour some water on their heads. Fortunately it worked every time. So stay vigilant and keep your cycling bottle with water topped up and to hand.

LANGUAGE

The official language is Turkish. It’s based on Latin alphabet. In the big cities some people can speak English, but don’t expect it in the countryside. You should learn at least some basic – food, numbers, directions etc. It’s not difficult to learn when everybody speaks to you Turkish:-)

VISA

EU citizens can buy a Turkish visa at the border. It costs 15€ or 20\$ (October 2010). You can only pay for the visa with these two currencies. How long the visa is valid for, will vary according to which country you are from - can be from one to three months. Check at your embassy’s website. You have to be careful because very often officials at the border will give you the wrong sticker in your passport. For example I got a sticker with a 3 months visa, even though I have right to stay in Turkey only for 1 month. I spoke to the Polish consul and he told me that if I had stayed in Turkey for 3 months then I would be punished at the departure, even though it was the mistake of border officials to give me the 3 months visa. There is also a misunderstanding widely spread on internet and between travellers - that you can prolong tourist visa in any police station. We’ve been also told so at the border. But it turned out to be rubbish! You can’t do that unless you are a student or have a working contract in Turkey. The Polish consul warned us that when you arrive to Turkey officials at the border seem not to be very familiar with law and regulations but at the departure they suddenly emerge to know very well which type of visa you are entitled to. The conclusion is – wherever you go out of EU, it’s better to check for yourself all regulations regarding border crossing, instead of trusting guys at the border or rumours from other travellers. And one more thing – check it in reliable sources like embassy’s webpage rather than in internet forums.

If you want to cycle across Turkey but your visa is too short, you can always “escape” to one of the neighbouring countries. We did it 4 times: from Istanbul the boys took a bus to Bulgaria. They had a dinner at the border and then they came back same day with new visas. We “escaped” also to Greek islands – from Kuşadası, near to Ephesus, to Samos Island. From Çesme, near Izmir, to Chios Island and from Mersin to the Republic of Northern Cyprus (you can also take a ferry from Taşucu). The total cost of a new visa and the ferry return was about 50 € (2009).

OVERNIGHT/ CAMPING

It’s not a problem to camp wild in Turkey. Nobody ever bothered us in the night. Except of course those who were coming to offer us an overnight in their homes. But that’s kind of a nice disturbance:-) A couple of times we slept at the back of petrol stations. We were also hosted by Turkish people plenty of times.

WATER

We’ve never faced any problems with safe drinking water in. In the cities you can obtain it in every mosque. There are also a lot of fountains with drinking water. In the countryside, you will find numerous springs beside the road. You can also ask people in villages or the staff at petrol stations to give you safe water. We were also drinking ordinary tap water which mostly tastes good. We never had any stomach problems in Turkey.

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ROADS/ TRAFFIC

Roads in Turkey are in very good condition. We've never been cycling on an unpaved road. Asphalt is very good and roadsides are sometimes very wide. It's also very well signposted, so it's easy to find the right way.

Apart from 3 cities - Istanbul (crazy taxi drivers), Adana (generally over congested) and Mersin (crazy bus drivers), we didn't find Turkish traffic very frightening for cyclists. You just need to get used to some drivers going against the traffic flow. Just stay relaxed and flexible:-) Maybe you should be more careful as a pedestrian. When you are crossing the street, even on a "zebra crossing", don't expect anyone to stop. You have to watch the locals and run together with them :-)

MAPS

It's not easy to buy not a good, but ANY map in Turkey. We had our map from Poland. For those regions which were not covered by our map, we were using maps from tourist information offices. Tourist information in Turkey is very well organized. You can find it in every city. They have very nice brochures with quite good maps attached, so you shouldn't be worry too much about getting lost. In fact, you can cross all Turkey using only maps from tourist information.

CURRENCY

The currency is Turkish Lira (TL or TRY).

1 EUR = 2TL

1 US \$ = 1.3 TL

1 PLN = 0.5 TL

(October 2010)

PRICES

1.5L water - 1 TL,

bread - 0.5 TL,

tea 0.5 - 1 TL,

1 kg tomatoes - 1 TL,

1 kg cucumbers - 1 TL,

1 kg oranges - 1TL,

1 kg onion - 2 TL,

ayran - 0.5 TL,

2L yogurt - 2,5 TL,

0.5 kg helva - 5 TL,

1L petrol - 3.7 TL,

1L diesel - 3 TL

Don't forget that you will have to bargain in Turkey. When you go to a market, usually the prices are not displayed, so it's better to get first some idea about right prices before you shop. Turkish vendors might give you an impression that they want to cheat you, but they rarely really do. Bargaining is just a part of their culture.

CURRENCY EXCHANGE

In bigger cities there are a lot of money exchange offices. There is no commission for transactions. You can also exchange money in hotels but probably the rate won't be very good.

BANKS/ CARDS/ CASH MACHINES

We have never used banks or cash machines in Turkey but we've seen plenty. Visa and MasterCard are widely recognized. Paying with card shouldn't be a problem in bigger shops and supermarkets.

INTERNET

It's very easy to find an internet café in Turkey. If you have your own laptop, you can find wireless connection in some café's, restaurants, petrol stations and hotels. In those places you can use it for free. The interesting thing is that YouTube and MySpace are forbidden as they might have some contents which can be insulting to the Muslim religion and which in local terms are politically incorrect. Anyway, everybody knows how to access YouTube so if you need to, just ask some young people.

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BIKE SHOPS

It's better if you have all you need with you. Don't rely on finding these in Turkey. When we needed some spare parts we were looking for good bike shops in every city. It was a disaster. You will see a lot of bikes for sale, on nearly every corner, but don't get deluded into thinking that you will find any parts! They just sell bikes, but you can't buy any parts or even a helmet. Eventually, we found a professional bike shop. It is located in Izmir..... You can also find some parts in Grand Bazaar in Istanbul. We saw there even Schwalbe Marathon tires. Adela bought her back rack and speedometer in Istanbul.

<http://cyclingizmir.blogspot.com/> [4]

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