

## Friday June 14 - Saturday June 15

All ready and packed in the morning. Had brunch of chappathy and egg at 10am. East Bay shuttle arrived at 10:30am. Driver was from Bulgaria. So he knew about Greece and Turkey. We got to listen to some Greek and Bulgarian music. He said that he loved Indian movies and 'elephant, my friend' was his favorite. Indian movies he said were pure fun. No need to think and no serious matters. Amazing how popular Indian movies are outside India. Best export, I think. There were Hindi movies dubbed in German on the flight and dubbed in Greek on TV in Athens. Reached San Francisco rather early. Checked in, got some Euros, went through security and then just waited. Learned some Greek words like 'efharisto' for thank you, 'yassas' for hello, 'kalimere' for good morning, 'kalinichto' for good night and 'parakalo' for please. The weirdest was that for yes it was 'neh'. The flight was at 2:55pm. It was A380 and we boarded from multiple gates upstairs and downstairs. Inside it looked quite a bit like the Boeing 777 with good personal TVs. Leg room seemed a bit better. There were many movies to choose from. We all watched quite a few. Had dinner and tried to sleep a bit. Flight landed in Frankfurt at 11 in the morning. We got out and soon found Gabi, Chris, and Vincent. We walked to an indoor square nearby. It was an office area built in the middle of the auto bahn next to the airport. It had tall clear glass ceiling that was perfectly sound proof. So we could see but not hear the planes taking off just above. The mirror like floors in certain parts were quite interesting too. We went to the Paulaner restaurant which had typical Bavarian food. The sausages were good. Vincent was quite friendly after being shy initially. But soon he got tired and cranky. We walked back to the airport and then said bye to them. We slept a bit while sitting and waiting for the next flight. Walked to gates once they were announced. Frankfurt is a sprawling and not very nice airport. Had some coffee and cookies. Got on the Aegean flight 833 to Athens. It was not a long flight. Had pasta for dinner on the plane. We landed 10 minutes ahead of schedule. While approaching, Athens looked like any other city by the water with city lights and the dots of lights on the water from ships. First big board we saw on landing was the familiar Ikea sign, not very Greek! There were no immigration checks. So we walked to the baggage claim. Thankfully luggage came fast. We walked out and found the taxi stand. It was warm and nice. Lots of folks smoking though. Taxi ride took about 30 minutes to the hotel. The Crowne Plaza was in the city center amongst other tall

apartment type buildings. We checked in quickly. The place had a Vegas look with its red carpets and neon lighting in the hallways. Room was big and comfortable. Good bathroom too with a square toilet! Took a shower and tried to sleep.

## Sunday June 16

Woke up much earlier than we wanted to. Watched some TV. There were a few English channels. We watched Nickelodeon. Got dressed and went to a small cafe nearby for breakfast. Had chocolate croissant, sausage, and some other pastry for breakfast. There were fearless pigeons all over. Walked back to the hotel and got ready for the day's sight seeing. We walked to the Metro station. The city reminded us of Indian cities with crooked sidewalks, parks with scraggly lawns, concrete buildings with paint peeling on some, stray dogs and so on. There was graffiti everywhere. We got tickets at the Moussikis metro station and took the short ride to Syntagma square. Daddy was planning to follow the walking tour he saw on the Lonely Planet guide book. It started at the Syntagma fountain which was not working. To one side was the famous Grand Bretagne hotel. The place to stay in Athens, for important people since long ago. We crossed the street to see the old Palace which was now the Parliament building. Big but not too impressive. We took pictures in the front, along with the traditionally dressed and very still guard, and just at the tomb for the unknown soldier. We then walked through the National Gardens. It was quite green and nice. Only thing is that some flowering tree made our noses itch. On one end was the Zappeion palace. It was used to house athletes during the first Olympics. Played at the nearby kids playground. There was a nice web climbing structure. Walked on to the stadium used for the first modern Olympics in 1896. All the seats were made of marble. Marble is used in plenty throughout the city including to pave streets. It was beginning to get really hot. We got strawberry and lemon slushies. That was good. From there, we got our first glimpse of the Parthenon on top of a hill. On the other side was Mount Lykabettos which we could see from our hotel room window too. We walked back past Zappeion palace and the fountain in front, to the remains of the Temple of Zeus, the largest of the ancient temples. A temple in some form existed there from 6th century BC. The last grand temple was completed by Emperor Hadrian. Out of the 104 columns only 16 were still standing. Few were lying just there with one looking like it was neatly sliced. We rested for a while under the olive trees. Lots of swallows flew around. We walked under Hadrian's gate, crossed the road and walked through some narrow streets towards Plaka. We stopped at a shop and bought some souvenirs. Soon we saw streets with lots of shops. We popped into a church where a baptism was going on. we decided to have lunch at Eris restaurant. We had kabab, souvlaki, and grilled

chicken. Really yum. Also they had free wifi, so made use of that to check and send some emails. After lunch we continued through the narrow streets. Climbed some stairs and came to the part with the cute island style houses built by the folks from Anafi island who came to Athens to help build the palace. Interestingly, the houses were till occupied by real Athenians. They maintained small pretty gardens and pets that wandered or rather lazed (cats) around. At certain spots there was a good view of the Athens rooftops below. We passed the old University building. Soon we came to the site of the Roman Agora and Tower of the Winds. Continuing on we came to the site of Hadrian's library. Now we were in Monastiraki, kind of a market area. We stopped at Yogolicious for some good Greek yogurt. That was good. Daddy made conversation with some locals. We took the metro back to the hotel. All of us napped for a while. Woke up around 5 with great difficulty and went to the small roof top pool. That was fun. After showers we took a cab back to Plaka. Walked around a bit and then had dinner at a traditional Greek restaurant called Scholarhio. We could choose 7 dishes for the four of us. It was good. We had meatballs, fried sardines, moussaka, spanakopita, stuffed tomato and bell pepper, Greek salad, tsatziki, and then a semolina dessert. Daddy tried their drink, Ouzo. We were stuffed. We were seated on a balcony with grape wines hanging on the sides. It was beautiful. In between some street music wafted up. After dinner we walked around a bit more, bought some souvenirs, and then grabbed a taxi back to the hotel. Got a glimpse of Zeus temple and Hadrian's gate floodlit. They looked more impressive. Athens seems to come to life late. It was more crowded and lively at 9pm. Back in the hotel, Daddy read aloud what we would see the next day at the Acropolis. Went to bed around midnight.

## Monday 17 June

Woke up early but not as bad as the day before. Ate some snacks while waiting for everyone to wake up. Dressed up and had breakfast at the same cafe nearby. Took a cab to Acropolis. The driver was smoking! When we reached the Acropolis, we saw a bus of tourists with red caps with words written in Malayalam. We slowly started walking up the marble steps. First thing we saw were the remains of the Odeon of Herodes Atticus. We continued the climb and reached the steps leading to the Propylaia the main entrance to the Panathenaic Way. To its side was the small but more intact looking Temple of Athena Nike. Walking through the gate we reached the top of the hill where the Parthenon stood. Restoration work was going on and the Parthenon had cranes and scaffolding all over. It was nice to sit in its shade on the marble stones. Nicer looking was the Erechtheion to one side of the Parthenon. It had almost intact looking columns with maidens on it. It is supposed to be standing on the location where Poseidon struck his trident to create a horse and Athena produced an olive tree. That was the competition that Athena won and got the city named after her. We sat under the few trees on top of the hill before walking down. Only Daddy and Becca went to see the theater of Dionysos. Then we walked down the hill through the Ancient Agora grounds. Stopped at the Agora museum in the reconstructed Stoa of Attalos. It was an old shopping arcade which now housed several old statues. Most were missing their heads. We saw the Temple of Hephaestus from a distance. We walked over the railway line to Monastraki. Stopped at the first restaurant. They had fans that sent sprays of water. We had cold drinks and some bread and Greek appetizers for lunch. Then we walked on, took the Metro and got back to the hotel. Had a relaxing afternoon, watching TV. Only Daddy went to the pool. Leah tried the complimentary hot chocolate and loved it. Around 6pm we took a cab to the Mount Lykabettos funicular. It was a short, steep funicular. On the top there was a restaurant and a church. One could get a 360 degree view of the city of Athens. It was almost uniformly covered in white concrete buildings. The ancient structures stuck out from between them. On one side was the Mediterranean. There was a nice breeze up there. At 7 we took the funicular back down. The cabs there quoted very high prices. So we walked down the hill and got a cab from the taxi stand below. We went to the Attikos Greek House near Acropolis for dinner. It was a rooftop restaurant with a good view of the Acropolis. Only problem was that the sun was still up and rather

bright. Once the sun went down it was pleasant. We had lamb and beef with potatoes and smoked salmon pasta. All were good. By the time we were done it got dark and the Parthenon and other structures of the Acropolis could be seen all lit up from inside. It was beautiful. Thankfully we had to walk only a little distance before we got a cab. Back at the hotel to read a little, relax, and retire for the last night in Athens.

## Tuesday June 18

Last day in Athens. Walked to a Starbucks we found round the corner from the hotel, for breakfast. Everyone was pleased with breakfast. Only problem, not enough time to try out everything there. Walked back to the hotel stopping on the way to get some snacks. Made use of the hotel internet center to catch up on email. Packed up and put the bags in storage. Then took a cab to the Acropolis museum. The new museum is well done. We walk on top of clear glass on top of excavation sites as we walk in. The first part of the museum is dedicated to the slope of the acropolis. Remnants of very old pottery and stuff. Next level had statues from the first Temple on the Acropolis. Most were made whole by using plaster for the missing parts. All women were fully clothed while men had no clothes on. Women seemed to have played an important part in that society, including being warriors. Lots of statues of Athena, of course. We went to the restaurant on the second level for lunch. Had to wait 10 minutes because lunch did not start till noon. Had good gyros and pasta. Got a view of Dionysius theater that all except Daddy missed the previous day, from the terrace. Then we went up to the third floor. We saw a movie about the Parthenon. The third floor is made to replicate the Parthenon with the same number of columns, these ones in steel, and all the parts found of the frescoes and statues placed on their right spots. After the museum, we stopped at a souvenir shop. Saw small boys playing the harmonium to make money, on the road. We took a cab to the hotel, picked up our luggage and drive to the port at Piraeus. The ferry, blue Star Paros, was already there. It was unloading huge trucks! It was a huge ship. We waited in the waiting room and had some ice cream. Then at 4, we boarded the ferry. We got nice seating. Not much to do on the 6 hour ride. Convinced Daddy to buy wi-fi access and watched some cooking shows on YouTube. Slept a little too. Ate burgers from the ferry cafe for dinner. When the boat stopped at Paros, went out to the deck and got a glimpse of the island and of people and vehicles embarking and disembarking. Reached Naxos a bit late. Elevators were really crowded to get off. The hotel van was waiting outside. We climbed into it along with a Swedish family. It was a short ride to the hotel in Agios Prokopios. We were greeted by Effie. Our room was in the ground floor with a veranda overlooking the pool. We hit the bed round 1am.

## Wednesday June 19

It was a pretty sight looking out of the veranda when we woke up. The hotel and all buildings around were all white with blue doors and windows. The usual Cycladic island style. We had the hotel buffet for breakfast. It was ok. The sausages were good and so was the strawberry jam. There was a cat trying to get some food. He already had jam all over him! After breakfast, we changed and headed to the beach. It was just a short walk away. The Mediterranean sea looked beautiful. The beach was nice though the sand was coarse. We rented a beach umbrella with two seats. Mommy just read while the rest swam and played in the sea. Crossed the street to Barbounis restaurant for lunch. Daddy had a fresh Dorado fish. We had Naxos pizza, fried calamari, and Greek salad. The restaurant owner insisted that we have some water melon for dessert too. We were super full. We headed back to the hotel. Checked email, and then rested. Mommy gave some laundry for washing. Leah and Becca made an iMovie for a pizza commercial. Had fun dressing up and putting on accents while talking. Then it was pool time. It was a decent sized pool and we had fun playing games. We bought goggles in the morning, that made water time more fun. Around 6 in the evening, after showers we decided to go to Naxos town. We bought bus tickets and waited at the bus stop. The bus came half an hour late and then it was full. So we took a cab. We got dropped at the town square. Kind of a small place. We walked along the road by the sea. It was lined with restaurants and gift shops. We got some frozen yogurt to keep us going. We walked across and then up a small hill to the ruins of the Apollo temple from 5th century BC. It was very windy there and ocean sprays sometimes got you wet. We sat up on the hill and watched the sun set. That was pretty. By the time we walked back to the town, we were tired. Had dinner at one of the restaurants there. Food was good but in usual Greek style, service was slow and we were tired and sleepy. We walked towards the taxi stand and saw the bus just leaving. Daddy flagged the bus down and it stopped in the middle of the road. It was standing room only but we got to use our bus tickets after all. Walked back to the hotel from the bus stop and slept soon after. Mommy put away the washed laundry and Daddy enjoyed some quiet time on the verandah sipping on a Greek coffee.



## Thursday June 20

Leah and mommy woke up first and had breakfast. Leah spent some time in the pool, trying hand stands and making different contraptions out of the pool and beach toys. Mommy and Daddy went for a walk to the beach. Tried to watch some shows but the Internet was down. Played cards sitting by the pool, instead. The taxi came at 11:45am for the short ride to the port. We got the tickets and then stopped for lunch at a roadside restaurant. Had Gyros and yogurt from MyYoo. Leah's yogurt machine wouldn't stop and she got a lot. But we finished it amongst ourselves. The Naxos special chocolate sauce with biscuit crumbs was really good. The Gyros were really good too. Daddy was really pleased with them. We sat there till we saw the ferry arrive. Bought a cap for Daddy and then ran to board the ferry. Met two girls from Los Angeles who had disembarked thinking it was Santorini. Thankfully they realized their mistake before the boat left. The ferry, Blue Star Patmos was newer and had nicer seats. The ride was just two hours. There was a stop at Ios on the way. Didn't look too interesting. The port at Santorini was unique. It was just a strip with the cliffs rising up very high immediately behind. The Studios had arranged a mini bus to pick us up. It was interesting to see the Caldera, the port, the ships, the tiny volcanic islands as we rose higher and higher up the winding road. We passed the main town of Fira and soon arrived in Imerovigli. It was a small village. We had to walk a short distance from where the bus stopped to the place we were staying. Popi from Merovigla Studios came out to receive us. Our studio was nice and colorful next to a white and blue church. Daddy and Mommy went and bought some groceries from the minimart nearby. After some rest and Daddy had a dip in the pool, we walked down to Firostefani along the winding cobbled paths on the side of the mountain. There were restaurants, houses, shops, churches, hotels, and more perched on the side of the mountain. Beautiful views into the caldera too. At many points we could see across to the Mediterranean on the other side too. We stopped at an Italian restaurant for dinner. Later walked back. It looked lovely with the lights on after sunset, especially with the occasional shimmering blue from tiny pools set on edge. It was breezy and cool.

## Friday June 21

Mommy went for a walk at 6 in the morning. The village was empty and the sun was just coming up. Beautiful. Mommy made scrambled eggs in the studio. Had eggs, bread, and yogurt for breakfast. Watched some Tom & Jerry while Daddy and Mommy went to get a rental car. We got a tiny red Nissan. We drove down to the South end of the island. We wanted to go to Perissa but ended up at the Red beach. Had to scramble up and down a rocky path to get to the beach. The beach was surrounded by red cliffs. Interestingly it was just a small area. Beyond that there were white cliffs where the white beach was. On the other side were the volcanic black beaches. The first sight of the red beach was breathtaking with the turquoise blue waters against the red. Mommy forgot part of Becca's swimsuit. So she was hesitant to get into the water with swim top and underwear. But soon she followed Daddy and Leah for another swim in the sea. The highlight was swimming up to a rock some ways off the beach. The beach itself had no sand but red and black pebbles. Stayed there till noon. On the walk back got fresh corn on the cob and ice cream.

A short ride away we saw signs for restaurants. So stopped. We climbed down some steps to Nimeli restaurant on the black sand Akrotiri beach. The setting was beautiful. The food took time to come as usual but was good. Daddy's fish came in an aluminum foil bag. The spaghetti, and salmon dishes were good too. Enjoyed the appetizer which was a local special - fava bean paste with sun dried tomatoes and capers. Daddy and Mommy got a complimentary local drink after the meal. It was a very sweet alcohol shot called Chios Mastiha made from a plant grown in the island of Chios. From Akrotiri we drove to the southern tip of the island where the old lighthouse stood. On the way we stopped at a local store. They were drying tomatoes in front to make sundried tomatoes. Mommy bought a local snack made of peanuts and sesame seed. It tasted like kappalandi mottai. We walked around the lighthouse, looked at the beautiful views and then drove back to Imerovigli. Spent time at the pool that afternoon. Leah was practicing for her upcoming race with Daddy. In the evening we drove to the northernmost village, Oia. It was a picturesque town. We were all hot by the time we got to the town from the parking spot. So got some fresh gelato - Tutti Fruity and Pineapple. Both were yummy. Walked along the paths of Oia with beautiful views as expected. There was a big church at the main square. We got some pies and crepes for dinner so we could eat quickly and go see the

sunset. Being summer solstice, sun set was only at 8:40. For a while we couldn't figure out from where we could see the sun set. But finally we walked up some path and got a spot. It was very crowded but we did get a glimpse as the sun went down behind the misty mountains rising from the sea. We then walked back to the car. Dogs and cats roamed around all over the place. Some of the kittens were really cute. On reaching back the studio we watched some episodes for a little while before going to bed. Mommy and Daddy went for a short walk to take some pictures. Daddy got an espresso too.

## Saturday June 22

Lazy morning. Woke up late. Breakfast at the studio again. Daddy and Mommy went and returned the car. Hung out near the pool for a while. Met an old couple from Sweden. They have been coming to Santorini every summer for 25 years. Mommy and Daddy went for a short walk. Went for lunch at Estia in Imerovigli square. Had lamb chops, sardines and chicken souvlaki. Really good. We then waited at the bus stop. Thankfully this time the bus came fast. We got down at Fira and walked into town. Stopped at some shops selling local goods, just to browse. We walked uphill to the main square and shopping alleys. There was a big church there. Lighted a candle. Then walked towards the cable car. On the way saw the steps going down to the Old Port. Daddy thought we could go down the steps since it was all downhill. It was fine till we reached the donkey station. Then it was stinky and dirty. We still kept going but soon the donkeys were blocking the way. Also we couldn't see an end to the stinkiness. So we walked back to the cable car. This time uphill. It was hot, stinky, and dirty. Not a fun climb. Thankfully there were no lines to go downhill on the cable car. Leah was a bit scared to go in it. It was quite a big drop to the port. But it was slow and not scary at all. Since we were early at the port, we just waited. Saw lots of people disembark from the cruise ship anchored near by. Leah got an ice cream. It was dark chocolate and Becca didn't like it. Our boat Thalassia arrived at 3:30. It was a big smart looking sailing ship modeled after an old pirate ship. About 60 people were going on the trip. Once abroad, we set sail. First stop was the newest volcanic island of Nea Kameni. The island looked all black and made of charcoal as we neared it. The ship docked and we went on a hike to the top of the island. It was really hot. Leah was tired, so Leah and Daddy turned back after point A. The guide Christine explained the history of Santorini from the time it was called Strongili, meaning round in prehistoric times. A volcano eruption 3600 years back made parts of the island collapse and the sea to run in, to form the caldera as it is today. Subsequent eruptions brought up new islands. The last eruption on Nea Kameni was in 1950s. So it is an active volcano. We could see fissures in the ground from where steam was escaping. It was really really hot if you put your hand in. You could smell the gases too. As we climbed higher there was a strong breeze which made it less hot. At one point one man's hat blew away. He climbed down and got it before it went very far. We saw many hats down that slope, lost by folks like him. The view from the top was nice.

We could see the entire caldera side of Santorini from Oia to the lighthouse. From Nea Kameni we sailed to the older volcanic island that is now dormant, called Palea Kameni. The ship anchored not far from the island and then we had to jump into the Aegean Sea and swim to the hot springs near the island. All of us except Mommy did it. The water was orange near the hot springs because of iron oxide and it made our swimsuits orange. After some rest we swam back to the boat. Next we sailed towards the island of Thalassia. That is the only inhabited island amongst the little ones around Santorini. About fifty inhabitants or so, mostly living in old style cave houses. We anchored near it and got another opportunity for a dip in the Aegean. Tried diving into the sea from ship. Soon the crew had arranged a buffet of Greek food for us to enjoy. It was really good. We then sailed closer to Oia and waited for the sunset. It was beautiful. A full moon came up above the island of Santorini at the same time. Met a lady from Australia with the name Leah. She took our family picture! It was 9pm by the time we got to the port. We took the cable car up to Fira and walked to the bus stop. Stopped on the way to buy some Santorini nuts (peanuts covered in caramel and sesame seeds). Didn't have to wait too long for the bus and the ride to Imerovigli was short. Walked to the studio and went to bed.

## Sunday June 23

Time to say goodbye to Santorini. Had showers in the morning. Ate yogurt for breakfast. A van took us to the airport. There were others too and the van was packed. But it was a short ride. At the airport the lines were really long and unorganized. Leah started getting really nervous. But the lines did move faster than we thought and we went through check in and security with time to spare. Bought some chicken nuggets and sandwiches for lunch. Daddy got a bottle of Ouzo. We had to take a bus to the flight. It was a short 30 minute flight. We got some very soft chocolate chip cookies. So had that in addition to the lunch we bought. In Athens we had to go through passport control and security to get to the gate for the next flight. We had time to spare. The flight to Istanbul was not very crowded with lots of empty seats. Had a nap on that flight. Got a lunch box with sandwich and yogurt with honey. We landed in Istanbul on time. Withdrew some Turkish Lira from an ATM machine. Then stood in a long line for immigration. The officer did not even look at the visa papers. Our luggage came quickly. We walked out to find someone holding a sign with Daddy's name. They made us wait for the driver to arrive. Becca was very thirsty, so went to buy some water. We were told our driver had arrived, so we rushed out. The van was parked kind of in the middle of the road. We got in and took off along the road bordering the Sea of Marmara. In half an hour or so we turned into cobblestones roads as we entered the old Istanbul area. We got a warm welcome when we reached our hotel Best Western Acropolis Suites. The hotel was located in a busy street lined with restaurants very close to the main sights. Our room was room 303. It overlooked the Akbiyik Cadesi street and one could even see a bit of Hagia Sophia from the window. The room was actually divided into two. The front part had two sofa beds and the inner one had two beds. There were TVs in both rooms. After resting for a while we walked out towards the Blue Mosque. We were attacked by folks from every single restaurant and shop on the way asking us to check out their place. Daddy went through many menus. We stopped at a street vendor selling nuts and tried some varieties he had. Finally bought a bag full of two kind of nuts. Walking on we reached the Blue Mosque after passing through a small bazaar area. We put on our head covers as we walked in the big gates. The mosque was huge. It was unique that it had six minarets. First we entered into a courtyard inside the mosque. We walked up to the visitor entrance and it was closed. Then someone told us to use the regular entrance. Becca

had noticed that people who didn't look like locals were entering through there. We took off our shoes and entered the mosque. It looked huge from inside too. There was a big chandelier hanging from the middle of the big dome. Daddy and Becca tried to go to the middle of the mosque and got stopped by a guard. Later we realized only men could go in. So only Daddy went around. The carpets were nice and soft to sit on. We walked out of the mosque and into the Sultanahmet meydanı between the Blue mosque and Aya Sofia. It was a very lively place. Lots of people were sitting there. We decided to eat at the Dervish cafe nearby. We had crepes and a beef Donner plate. The crepes weren't that great. The Dervish one was too sweet. Daddy got a water pipe. Cappuccino flavored. He enjoyed it. Mommy and Becca tried it. At intervals the singers came on stage and then the Dervish dancer performed. He spun around on a single spot for a long time. After dinner we walked back to the hotel. The street still looked like a big party place. We went up, watched some TV and then went to bed.

## Monday June 24

Planned to wake up early but was up only by 8:30. We got ready really quickly. Went down for breakfast. There was quite a spread. We couldn't enjoy it completely. Anyways we tried quite a few things and then walked to the Topkapi Palace. It was just a short walk up. Within the gates was a large garden like setting with buildings spread around. We had museum passes but when we reached the gates we were told Leah needs to actually have a free ticket. So Daddy went and got it. Thankfully the queue wasn't too bad. First we visited the Treasury building. The first chamber had Sultans clothes. They were huge kaftans and salwars. Next we saw all the jewelry and they had a lot of impressive pieces full of emeralds, rubies, and diamonds. Highlights included the famous Topkapi dagger and a 86 carat diamond. One room was full of various thrones that were also encrusted with lots of rare gems. In between we came to an open verandah overlooking the Bosphorus. After the Treasury we visited the Harem where the Sultan and his concubines lived. There were a lot of rooms in there mostly decorated with blue Iznik tiles. The later Sultans made rooms decorated in European style. After walking out of the Harem we went to the Cafe and had lunch. The apple pie dessert was good. It was getting really hot by then. We walked through some of the other buildings where princes were educated, the grand vizier held his court etc. Then we walked back to the hotel. Leah and Becca decided to stay there and just read and relax while Mommy and Daddy went on the Bosphorus cruise. Mommy and Daddy took a taxi to Eminonu where the ferry was from. While looking for the ferry, a private cruise operator offered a quick two hour tour. So went for that. We were taken to the boat near the Galata bridge in a van. We had to wait for a while but soon the boat was full and ready to go. We sat on the top deck where they pulled on a cloth shading so we didn't get hit by the sun. Anyways there was a nice breeze once the boat started. The deck was lined with artificial grass which was rather nice. Turkish music was played non stop quite loudly throughout the trip. It was rather nice. We met a couple from London. Many others looked Turkish. There were folks with tiny babies. The boat first went under the Galata bridge. The opening of the bridge wasn't too wide. On both sides under the bridge there were shops. Soon we went out of the Golden Horn and into the Bosphorus. We could see all the main landmarks of old Istanbul right there. Especially the minarets. The Maiden tower was in the middle of the Bosphorus right there. Nothing big. We went up the strait keeping close



to the European side. The first big landmark was the Dolmabahce palace. Later we saw many other palaces made by different sultans in European styles. We went up to the second bridge across the Bosphorus as it neared the Black sea. Near the second bridge was the Rumeli fort. While cruising along we saw people fishing from the banks and from tiny boats. There were some swimmers including young boys in the water too, amongst the boats and big tanker and cruise ships! The city looked nice from the boat as the high rises of the city changed to nice looking homes and some greenery on hilly slopes. After we turned back we went close to the Asian side. We saw the old Military school which was the first high school in Istanbul. As we neared the Golden Horn again, we saw the Maiden tower closer. After disembarking we caught a taxi back to the hotel. The driver said that he was Kurdish. Couldn't speak much English so the conversation did not go far. Becca and Leah loved the relaxing afternoon. After showers we went for a short walk to see the Hippodrome. There we saw columns and obelisk from the Roman times. We walked back and went to the Anatolian restaurant just opposite our hotel called Albura Kathisma. The food was good but spicier than we expected. We tried the big lavash bread. We got milk pudding for dessert. It was good but Leah was upset that we didn't get the chocolate soufflé. We sat up on their terrace facing our hotel room! After dinner we sprinted across to our hotel avoiding Irfan from our hotel who kept insisting that we eat there. Daddy wanted to go for a stroll seeing how lively the streets were but everyone else was tired. So off to bed. He watched some Turkish reality shows and soccer and boxing on TV.

## Tuesday June 25

Woke up at a leisurely pace. Happy birthday to Mommy. Presented her with an Ottoman egg shaped jewelry case replica. In red and white with gold work. Very very pretty. Ate the buffet downstairs at a more leisurely pace. Enjoyed trying all their little things. After breakfast we walked up to the Hagia Sophia. There was a line for tickets but we could bypass thanks to the museum card. It was quite impressive once we entered the old church that was converted to a mosque and now was a museum. Amazing how huge it was. The oldest church we have been to. What remained of the mosaic paintings were very impressive. Restoration work was still going on. There were other things like a huge urn carved out of a single marble piece, tombs, records of a Synod carved on marble etc. We climbed to the second floor gallery for a view from there. From Hagia Sophia we crossed a street to go see the Basilica Cistern. It was quite cool down there. It was a quick tour with the highlight being Medusas heads. We walked back to the hotel and had lunch there. We had vegetable pizza, Meatballs with roasted potatoes and rice, and linguine Alfredo. It was quite good. Leah and Becca stayed in the room again while mommy and Daddy went sightseeing. Took a cab to Chora Church or Kariye museum. it was a small but really old church. Built just outside the walls of Constantine's. It had lots of mosaic paintings depicting Christ's life. Some still quite bright and clear. From there we took a cab to Sulemaniye mosque. We passed through a normal busy road full of shops. Looked like we were driving through Ernakulam. The number of wedding dress shops was amazing. Got a glimpse of the Valens aqueduct from the cab. The mosque looked quite similar to others from outside. But from inside it was much prettier than the Blue Mosque. From there we walked back to the hotel, passing through the Grand Bazaar. The bazaar was like a colorful maze of shops. Bought some Turkish delight boxes. The girls made an amazing iMovie that afternoon. Leah broke a tea cup in the process and the insect bite boil on Becca's hand burst. So they had a few unpleasant moments. But still rested. After bath we set out for the special dinner at a highly rated Ottoman restaurant near Sirkeci. We were told that a cab would take much longer than walking. So we set out on foot. It took us only 15 minutes to reach Pasazade restaurant. It was elegantly done up with the inside made to look like we were on a cute little street. We got some free appetizers along with the bread and dip. We had lamb, beef and chicken. The Ottoman cuisine was more on the sweeter side with fruits and nuts in

the dishes. We didn't order dessert but enjoyed the free Turkish delight. After dinner we walked on to the Hodjapasha center. The dance show was held in a small round room. The musicians sat on the stage on one side. The dances were performed in the middle. The dancers were really good, especially the belly dancers. They wore colorful costumes and the accompanying music was lively. All in all it was a fun show. There was a short interval in between when they served free tea. After the show we walked back to the hotel. Surprisingly there were lots of people on the streets even at 11pm. It was pleasant to walk then. Once we reached the hotel, we went to bed.

## Wednesday June 26

Woke up at leisure. Enjoyed the buffet breakfast. Then walked up hill to Topkapi grounds and to the Archeological Museum complex. First we visited the museum of the Ancient Orient. It was not very big. Had some interesting artifacts from Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Anatolian regions. Saw the oldest love poem written in cuneiform, the Kadesh treaty etc. Next we went to the main museum. The building itself was rather impressive. It was set up as a museum during the Ottoman times. The initial halls held many sarcophagi. The carvings on them were impressive and most were still rather intact. The most famous one was that of a king of Sidon, called Alexander sarcophagus. That one had a battle scene with Alexander inscribed on it and hence the name. The king was expressing his gratitude to Alexander for helping him ward off his enemies. The colors were almost all gone but the carvings still looked perfect. Another sarcophagus was the mourning women one. There were ancient pieces all over the museum grounds even near the bathrooms. To our surprise most of the toilets there were the Indian style ground ones. We went to the second floor of the museum and saw the exhibits on Istanbul through the ages. As we were beginning to get hungry, we got out of the museum and walked back. Got some watermelon in front of the Topkapi gates. Leah wanted to have the same pasta as the day before. So we went to our hotel for lunch. Daddy went in search of a good seafood lunch. We had linguini and the meatball dish we had the day before. We also got a chocolate soufflé that Leah had been asking for for two days. It took a while to arrive but was polished off quickly. By then Daddy was back too. We relaxed in our room that afternoon. Around 5 we walked to the Grand bazaar because Becca wanted to see it. Leah thought it was an utter waste of time and energy. We got couple bracelets at the bazaar. Daddy wanted to buy a painting he saw the day before but that shop was too far. We walked back and sat in the Hippodrome for a while. Becca was hoping the street vendor who sold a naan like bread with nutella would come by but he didn't. So we started walking back in search of a place to eat. Daddy wanted to try Trea Elegance that he had read about on Trip Advisor. We reached the restaurant to find it empty but then a guy came by and said food was being served at the rooftop and one had to go up the stairs or elevator in the back. So off we went. From up there we could see the Bosphoros. Also glimpses of Hagia Sophia and Blue Mosque. The girls ordered a kabab roll which was super good. Daddy had shish kabab, and Mommy had the mezze plate. All tasted

good. Much to Becca 's delight their bread was kind of like naan. We finished off our final meal in Istanbul with baklava and ice cream dessert. Daddy topped it off with a Turkish coffee too. Back in the hotel, we packed up and tried to sleep early, while outside we could hear the usual sounds of the partying in Old Istanbul at night. It was a good trip!

## Thursday June 27

Up at 3 in the morning. Got dressed and packed quickly. Cab came pretty fast after we went down. At the airport, we had to go through security to enter it. The check in was slow because there were only two counters open. After checking in we stopped at a Starbucks for a quick breakfast. Then walked to the gates. We did not have to wait long there. Soon we were on the Lufthansa flight to Munich. Breakfast was served on the flight but most of us were too sleepy to eat. Also it looked rather unappetizing. So only Mommy had it. In two short hours we landed in Munich. It was partly cloudy and not very cheerful. Sat and read books for a while. Then went out and caught a bus to the village of Freising. It was a short 20 minute ride. It was very green all around, with fields and a river on the way. We got off at the train station in Freising. It looked like any other German village or town. We walked around the main area a little bit, argued about where to have lunch and finally went to a restaurant in a hotel to have some German food. We had wiener schnitzel, sausages, salad, and Hungarian rice. After lunch we took the bus back to the airport, and waited for our flight. Becca and Leah walked around and checked out the nearby shops, especially the one with massage equipment. The long flight back was on a smaller plane than the A380 but thankfully had personal TVs. Once we landed in SFO, we went through immigration and got our bags. We called the shuttle and it came pretty quickly. In an hour we were back at home sweet home!

# Pictures

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