

Cradled by Triton (Part IV): An Island in Turkey

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The second last stop for our Greek island cruise was at Kusadasi, a Turkish island which was a small fishing village in the 1970's, but now a popular resort for the wealthy. Our Turkish guide told us that "Kusadasi" meant abode of birds. True to this name, a stone-structure with flying birds greeted us as we disembarked from the bus that had taken us there from the ship and walked towards a small shopping plaza. We followed our guide all morning through the ruins of a once-thriving twelfth century port city, Ephesus, about 20 kilometers north of Kusadasi. It was a leading commercial center, where citizens lived, entertained the sea-faring business people in their city, worshipped 'Artemis' or Diana in her enormous temple, and utilized the Library of Celsus – in ruins now, but still quite impressive. There were bathhouses and brothels – all connected by underground tunnels for the discrete convenience of male trades-people on business trips. Non-verbal picture signs (no, we cannot claim to have invented them) to these places are still carved on the side-walks. We saw stainless steel rings that were used to hold lamp-posts up, still attached to big stone slabs of the side-walks.

Water stored in big reservoirs on the hill flowed through the clay pipes (still there) to wash and cool the city three times a day. There was an excellent sewer system that also utilized flowing water; it washed the pipes under the stone-toilets in public washrooms that looked like basic commodes. Stone-paved straight streets lined with majestic pillars, stone mosaics and long seats on the side walks for the use of exhausted travelers could still be seen. Carved arches of a temple for "Nike" and a broken image of the winged goddess of victory were there. We were told that a big 25,000 seat auditorium was still used by rock stars (like Mick Jagger) who were invited for concerts. Ruins of residential houses had been excavated but at the time we went, they were not accessible. We could only see them from a distance. A lot was yet to be excavated, with the Austrian government's help.

Next, we were taken to a carpet emporium and served hot apple cider as a token of the merchants' hospitality. The salespeople then displayed hundreds of gorgeous carpets made of wool, cotton and silk, explained their quality with reference to the number of knots per square inch, the delicacy and types of designs, and of course, craftsmanship. We (our cruise-friend and I) were almost ready to part with a big amount from our purses to become the proud owners of two small silk carpets, but finally, were able to resist the temptation. We roamed around for a while on our own and did some souvenir-shopping. A young salesperson seemed particularly interested in our daughter, and they exchanged addresses before we boarded the bus!

All in all, it was a genuinely impressive tour of the island. A great part of the credit was due to the expertise of our tour-guide who seemed passionately proud of her heritage. She kept describing the various scenes of the old city and asked us to visualize them, and we tried. Wild flowers including red poppies were in bloom everywhere.

This brings to the end of my narrative of our wonderful, memorable trip to Athens and the Greek islands (plus one Turkish island). I would always cherish the memories!



Above: A stone structure showing birds at play.
Below: Non-verbal signs carved on side-walks to guide to the bathhouses and brothels – notice the carved picture of a woman on the right side



Above: Intricate carved designs in one of the excavated buildings.
Below: Ruins of the Library of Celsus
(Photos by the author)