

## The Other Turkeys

Although many tourists visit the Western part of Turkey, relatively few visit the “other” Turkeys. In Northern Cyprus, there is the tension of a divided country. Eastern Turkey is dominated by the Kurds which have a different culture than that of the Turks. Thus, the eastern part feels much different than the western. The “other” Turkeys are worth going out of one’s way for.

North Cyprus, which is only recognized by Turkey, is split from the southern Republic of Cyprus which is a part of the European Union. The Northern Cyprus capital city of Nicosia is split into two as well with a more historical, North Cyprus side and a more modern Republic of Cyprus side. Due to European Union financial support, southern Nicosia is more affluent. The main site in Turkish Nicosia is the Selimiye Mosque, previously called Saint Sophia because of its French medieval church design. Its interior includes a Northern Cyprus flag and corresponding white and red carpet. St. Catherine’s is another combination church and mosque and there are several other religious buildings in the area including an Armenian Church, the restored St. Nickolas Church and the Arabahmet Mosque, next to the Communist Party headquarters.

There are several other non-religious but historical buildings in the city. The Sultan Mehmet library holds many books from the time of this famous leader. The Byurek center is a trading center from 1570 and includes many present-day places to shop. A historic, aristocratic house turned into a museum includes clothes, lamps, socks, purses, wedding gowns and head scarves. There are other smaller attractions such as a Venetian column and Turkish bath.

The trip to the northern city of Girne, Cyprus has an interesting political statement tied to it. On one tall hill along the main road is a painted depiction of the Northern Cyprus flag which has a white background and a red crescent moon. It is basically the Turkish flag, but the colors are inverted. The idea is as the Cypriots in the south look to the north they will be reminded that their northern neighbors are not with them.

Girne is a pleasant port city including a new and old port that is used for passenger and commercial purposes. Near the old port is a promenade that has gullets which are old war ships but are now used for tourist purposes. There are also several Ottoman style houses in the area. Furthermore, there are casinos



in the city which are outlawed in Turkey but allowed in Northern Cyprus. Heading to the hills, there are several nice views overlooking the city from various restaurants and a historic Italian Catholic church.

This split between west and east Turkey is creeping into Turkish politics as well as Islamic fundamentalists popular in the east are challenging the secular west. Despite a constitution that clearly separates church and state, fundamentalists have gained power in the government. The current Prime Minister, Recep Erdogan, and his party have introduced bills that would generally move Turkey away from democracy and secularism. Erdogan had been imprisoned in 1997 for reciting a speech that was a call to arms for religious fundamentalists. The speech equated minarets to guns and mosque domes to battle helmets. Five years later, Erdogan became Prime Minister.

East Turkey is largely Kurdish territory and feels like the Middle East while west Turkey feels more like Europe. Trabzon has a more Russian feel as it is close to the Caucasus which was



controlled by the Soviets. Kars has an interesting fortress and welcoming citizens who were willing to help me find my hotel when I got lost. Moving from Kars to Van one passes Mt. Ararat where Noah's Ark may have landed but the location is questionable and getting to it is difficult. In Van, there is a heavy Kurdish influence and when I was there, there was a Kurdish festival. The lively festival included music and dancing largely hand holding, stepping to and fro, small hops and clapping while in a circle.

Diyarbakir's most famous claim to fame is her city walls which are the second longest contiguous defensive wall after the Great Wall of China. Within the city walls, is the Prophet Mosque which is of Moorish design and an attractive old city with cobblestone streets. There was also fire in the streets as some people had lit garbage in the middle of the road. A large police force and other random people were called in to put out the fire. It was the first hint of the Kurdish problem that I would encounter in which a Turkish police officer or government official was killed on a regular basis. The Kurds in Turkey are attempting to gain independence, but the Turkish government is resisting. The degree of Kurdish resistance varies but in the summer of 2010, it was quite active and violent but not targeted towards tourists.

Urfa is historically important as the place of Abraham's birth which is commemorated in Golbasi Park. The complex has Abraham's cave, daisies, marigold and ponds with fish and a

series of mosques with the most prominent being Melvid mosque. The area is where Abraham was to have died after jumping off the citadel overlooking the complex. Abraham was having a fight with the Assyrian king, Nimrod, when he jumped. Pilgrims can enter the small cave where he was supposedly born but have to stop at a barrier made of glass. Most people pray while some snap photos. The overlooking citadel has some old Roman ruins and a Muslim cemetery. Away from the park, there is not much to see except for a replica of a small spiral ziggurat which were the ancient temples.



The “other Turkey” make for a bit more adventurous trip than to western Turkey. Despite the violence in eastern Turkey, the culture of the Kurds, rolling hills and important cities make for an interesting visit. Northern Cyprus also has a rebel mentality and has things that are not in Turkey proper, like casinos.