

October 31, 2015 Saturday

When you come to Istanbul, you have to visit the Blue Mosque, the Hagia Sophia, take a tour in the Topkapi Palace, visit the Grand Bazaar and Spice Market. But if you have visited before, while you could still go back to contemplate the beauty of Blue Mosque, revisit the magnificent Hagia Sophia, shop some more in the markets, you could also do something new. Like take a cooking class.

This was our second visit to Istanbul, so, with the recommendation of a friend recently here (you know who you are – THANK YOU), we signed up for a cooking class. Andy and I have done this before. In Morocco we learned to cook tanjin. In Arles we learned to make a mean tarte tartin. What would we learn in Istanbul?

The school was Cooking Alaturka in the beautiful old Sultanahmet area of Istanbul. Unfortunately we were staying in the more modern part of town, near Taksim square. This was closer to the convention center, and I was here for a meeting after all. So, along with our friend Leon, we jumped into a cab which made its way across the Bosphorus, through the narrow one-way streets lined with carpet shops and lamp stores, and deposited us in front of small building, labeled Turkish Cooking Classes and Restaurant. We were in the right place.



We made our way in, were greeted by the owner/chef Rocco Strazzeria and met two other young couples there to learn to cook Turkish food. One was from France, the other from Istanbul, but living in Austria. We all sat in a living room area, drinking tea or coffee or water, and Rocco gave us a copy of the recipes and a preview of what we would be cooking, and eating of course. He has been a chef for close to 25 years, but only took over the school about 6 months ago. Originally from Sicily, he had beautiful smile and a wonderful way with people.



We then donned our aprons, grabbed a knife and went to work.



The menu included yogurt soup, stuffed eggplant, bulgur, zucchini pancakes, green beans and walnut stuffed figs cooked in syrup. We used lots of cumin, and chili flakes, and salt. We used lots of butter and olive oil. We



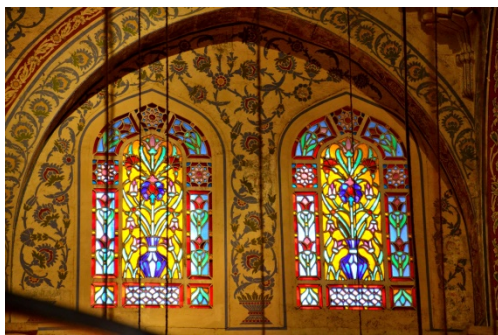
peeled and chopped tomatoes. We peeled and chopped garlic. We minced mint and parsley. We shredded zucchini. We stirred and whisked. We stuffed the baked eggplant learning how to fill it just right so it would not look lean but also not leak over the sides. We massaged the figs so they looked like little sombreros. We had fun.



And then it was time to feast on our labors. Along with a glass or two of Turkish wine, we ate our five course meal. Will we make it again at home? Likely. Perhaps with a few modifications, but we learned the basics. And we learned about the Turkish way of enjoying a meal.



There was still time before my first meeting was to begin, so we did walk around. And we did visit the Blue Mosque again. You really can never get too much of beauty. There was no time for the other sights (although we did pass the hotel – the Blue House - we stayed at years ago at our first visit with Phyllis Zee, Ben Zee, Jennifer Martin and David Israel) , so we got a cab and headed back through the narrow streets, back across the Bosphorous and back to the hotel.



On the way we noticed a few things about modern day Istanbul. There is lots of construction going on, but it is all covered with what looks like fabric imprinted with a photo of what the finished product will look like. Makes for a prettier city. The Turkish flag was everywhere. I don't know if that was for Election Day or if it is always flying from buildings, windows, across streets and anywhere else one can fly a flag.

After my meeting we went to dinner with Tamar Shochat and her husband, Leon (our cooking companion that morning). They took us to a restaurant that had come highly recommended to them, and where they had eaten the night before, but liked it so much, went again. The restaurant, Lebi Deyra, was down a narrow street, not far from our hotel, on the top floor of a building, and if you didn't know it, you would never find it.



The view was beautiful. The food superb (I had sea bass). The company wonderful. We then walked back along the pedestrian street, İstiklal Avenue, through Taksim square, back to the hotel. And crashed.

A few more words. Tomorrow is election day in Turkey. Some people canceled and were afraid to come to Istanbul. But it is business as usual here. The streets are full of people and of tourists. But there are some differences, for example, there will be no alcohol sold the entire day tomorrow.

We will see what tomorrow shall bring.

Sunday

Not much to say for today. Gave my plenary talk. Moderated a symposium. Came back to hotel. Crashed and slept all afternoon. Was absolutely exhausted. Had dinner in the hotel which was fabulous. The big news was election day today. The election resulted in the [Justice and Development Party \(AKP\)](#) regaining a [Parliamentary majority](#) following a 'shock' victory, having lost it five months earlier in the [June 2015 general election](#). People say they need stability back in their lives and they think he can restore that. 87% of the Turkish public voted.