

Tuesday (con't) – PART 2

After our balloon ride, Ramazan picked us up to begin another day of touring. We began by going to the village where he was born, Mustafapasa (previously called Sinasos) and where he still lives with his wife, brother, sister-in-law and nephew, and his parents.

There are many cave homes here in Mustafapasa. Ramazan was born here in a cave house which he now owns. He is in the process of remodeling it into a hotel. He toured us through the rooms, explaining and pointing, showing us where in each bed, each Jacuzzi tub, each table will find its rightful place. And I could picture it exactly as it will be. As everywhere in the world, his biggest hold-up is getting a permit. He lost two years due to corruption in the permit office. But he is hopeful that he will soon be allowed to continue and once



the permits are given, he could finish in 10 months. We have a standing invitation to come back and be his guest at what I have called: Rama's Rooms: A Boutique Cave Hotel. It works in English, but I'm not sure if it works in Turkish. I told him we would be back with our children and grandchildren as Ari is the same



age as his nephew and they can play together and be friends. I have no doubt that Ramazan will succeed and that his hotel will become a reality. And sometime in the next few years, I will be sending you all pictures of the finished, opened hotel.



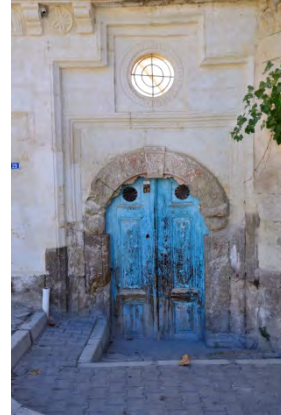
But in the meantime, here are the pre pictures of some of the cave rooms and the fabulous view from the hotel.



Like many of the people here, Ramazan is a non-practicing Muslim. There are 70 million people in Turkey; 90% are Muslim. Of those, maybe 40% pray five times a day and of those, 20% go to the mosque. The rest are secular. Mustafapasa however, was predominantly Christian throughout the Seljuk and early Ottoman periods, although the Muslim population increased from then on. The Byzantine Greek population in the area kept alive their language over the centuries and even developed their own unique dialect. Sinasos, the Greek name for the town, became wealthy by trading with Istanbul, and some splendid old stone Greek houses rich in decoratively carved symbols can still be seen here. And everywhere you look – caves.

I loved walking around this town as it felt less touristy than many. Yes, there were souvenir shops all around the square (selling evil eyes, Hittite wine jugs, pashminas, t-shirts, jewelry, apple tea etc etc. I did get a baseball cap to shield my eyes from the strong sun, and I did buy some gifts and souvenirs. Why not give the

money to the locals...), but there seemed to be more local people going about their daily lives. There is a vocational college here so the town square is filled with young people having their coffee and smoking while the older men sit with their tea (in glasses of course) playing a form of dominoes or backgammon. There was an older woman selling things out of her van while her husband napped in the front seat. There was a store selling local wines. There were women sweeping and women chopping kindle. There were beautiful doors, many of them blue for good luck (evil eye) which reminded me of the blue houses of Safed (in Israel). The mosque here had two minarets, the old type where someone would climb up and the new, electronic type. As everywhere in the world – the old and the new.





This excursion was not on our original itinerary, but the wonderful thing about Ramazan is that he kept adding more and more stops of things he thought we would enjoy. And he was right.

We sat in the square for a while, having our tea (in glasses of course) and watching the locals. But we still had a full day ahead of us, so as lovely as it was, we forced ourselves to hit the road again.