Miranda Wickham Feels at Home in Istanbul, Turkey

For the past three months, I have been studying abroad in the beautiful city of Istanbul, Turkey. I study at Bogazici University, which is located in a residential area of Istanbul, and overlooks the Bosphorus. As a political science major at Bogazici, I am taking a variety of courses. My schedule includes Introduction to European Integration, which is very interesting to learn about in Turkey, as the pending addition of Turkey to the European Union is a main theme of the class. I am also enrolled in Turkish Literature in English Translation. In this class, we are reading everything from classical and modern Turkish poetry to The Black Book by Orhan Pamuk, and A Mind at Peace by Ahmet Hamdi Tanpinar. In the course, we learn about Turkish history and also modern Turkey through literature. Additionally, I am taking two language courses, Intermediate Turkish and Advanced German Literature.

The two main campuses are North and South Campus. The South Campus has a beautiful view of the Bosphorus, which is called the overlook. Turkish and international students spend many hours at the overlook, just talking or doing homework, and enjoying the Bosphorus. Additionally, the university has its own beach campus, with a free shuttle that leaves from the main campuses.

At Bogazici, I have met students from all around the world. I live with three Turkish girls, which has been a great way to practice my Turkish. Through classes and different events held by the university, I have had the opportunity to get to know the Turkish students. There are also around 500 international students studying at Bogazici.

It is especially interesting to be in Istanbul, during Turkey's current political situation. Experiencing what is happening in Turkey, though the eyes of university students has been very enlightening. I have talked for hours with different Turkish friends, all of whom have different opinions about what is taking place in their country. There are demonstrations at the University, and the main set of stairs is painted in rainbow colors as a sign of protest, because many students believe that Erdogan only sees things in black and white.

Two very important parts of Turkish culture include Chi (tea) and Kahvalti (breakfast). In Turkey, people drink many cups of Turkish tea a day. There are many small cafes that just serve tea, where people spend hours, and drink cup after cup of tea. Turkish breakfast or brunch is also a very important part of the day. On the weekends, people will spend hours enjoying a delicious Turkish breakfast by the Bosphorus. A Turkish breakfast usually includes olives, tomatoes, cucumbers, boiled eggs, white and yellow cheese, menemen (Turkish scrambled eggs), and different types of Turkish bread. The cafeteria at Bogazici offers a traditional Turkish breakfast for only 75 cents.

I have also been able to travel a lot throughout Turkey. During Bayram (a religious vacation), I traveled with a group of friends to Izmir, Ephesus, Pamukkale, and Konya. Izmir is one of the largest cities in Turkey and is along the coast. We spent two days in Izmir enjoying the large shopping Bazaar and castle ruins, and took a day trip to Cesme, a small seaside town. Then we went to see Ephesus, which is the ruins of an ancient Greek city. Next, we traveled to Pamukkale. Pamukkale is a national park, located just outside of a city called Denizli. Pamukkale means, “cotton castle.” Pamukkale formed from travertine, which was...
deposited by water from hot springs. The terraces of Pamukkale look like snow, but are actually hard, with many hot springs. At the top of Pamukkale, there are ancient ruins, including an amphitheater.

After Pamukkale, we headed south to the city of Konya. Konya is a much more traditional, conservative, and religious Turkish city. The renowned poet and philosopher, Rumi, is buried in Konya. Konya is also very famous for the Mevlevi Sufi order of Islam, now known as the whirling dervishes. The whirling dervishes perform a religious ceremony, which people travel from around the world to see.

Throughout my time in Turkey, what stands out to me most is the hospitality of the Turkish people. If you ask someone for directions and they are not sure about where something is, they immediately pull out their phones to find out or look it up on the internet. Meeting a new friend at a café can turn into an evening at his or her house, learning about Turkish culture and drinking tea. My efforts at speaking Turkish are always rewarded with excitement, as I try to have conversations and learn the language. Istanbul really has welcomed me, and become my home.

Miranda Wickham is a junior in Political Science and German at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She is very interested in the political situation within the Middle East, especially in Turkey, and also Turkey’s relationship with Germany.