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Journal of the Bahá'í Community of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
Volume 19, No.6 – Nov/Dec, 2002 / 159BE

 LARGE PRINT / Standard Print.Sacred Tour to Turkey

Sacred Tour to Turkey

ON MONDAY, September 2, together with some forty-five friends, I left Heathrow for a week on the Sacred Tour to Turkey. On arrival in Istanbul, a coach was waiting for us and took us straight to Edirne, some three hours away, where we stayed for the next three nights. We had a Bahá'í guide with us, Shahab Afnan, throughout the trip who was indispensable. The hotel in Edirne was adequate not luxurious. But, just as well, because I

for one wouldn't have felt very easy remembering what conditions Bahá'u'lláh lived in when He stayed there. We found out that this one was after all one of the better hotels in Edirne.

Anyway, nothing could have taken the excitement away from us that we were staying in such an important and eventful place in Bahá'í history; Bahá'u'lláh called it the "Land of Mystery." He spent nearly five years there in at least five different addresses, of which only two

The friends who travelled to Edirne and Istanbul

are accessible to visitors, within thirty yards of each other and very close to Sultan Selim mosque. Of these two houses only one stands intact, the other having been demolished in an earthquake early last century. The ruins are still there, and the House of Justice have asked for it to remain as it is for the moment, and that a structure be built at the bottom of the garden.

Sultan Selim mosque is of great importance as we know, Bahá'u'lláh must have gone there on a number of occasions. Once was when His brother, Yahyá, was supposed to turn up and both discuss and prove his claims, but Yahyá never did attend. The time Bahá'u'lláh spent in Edirne was full of difficulties, yet fundamental in the spread of His Word and the beginning and development of the Bahá'í community. At least thirty tablets were revealed during this time, including Tablets to the Kings, Tablet of Ahmad, Kitáb-i-Badí and Tablets for the Fast. We had the opportunity to visit the houses twice and the feeling was no less powerful and special than visiting the Holy Land. It was rather sad leaving Edirne, but Istanbul was calling and we had to go.

What a contrast! We were now staying in a four star hotel at the heart of the biggest and probably noisiest city in Europe. The only places with connection to the Faith that we saw were two

bridges which Bahá'u'lláh crossed on his way from Istanbul to Edirne. Bahá'u'lláh stayed in Istanbul for four months at two addresses, neither of which one can visit. Therefore we had plenty of time to do sightseeing and

shopping, and there was so much to see. The Blue Mosque, St. Sophia and Topcapi museums should be on everyone's list visiting Istanbul, and a trip on a boat along the Bosphorus is highly recommended. As a part of the tour, we went to a town called Bursa, a couple of hours from Istanbul, where, we did more shopping and had a nice snack under an ancient tree, very much like villages north of Tehran. I think I speak for everyone by saying that it was a wonderful tour, well organised and in true Bahá'í spirit.



One of the houses once occupied by Bahá'u'lláh in Edirne

It was an experience that was very precious and I won't forget it for a long time. We have Mrs Alaei to thank for that. She was totally devoted to her task, always smiling and never complaining about anything. This was the seventh time she had run this tour, and quite a few were on their second or third time with her. Everyone said they would go again. What I'm hoping will happen is an increase in the number of these tours to more than once a year, and if more youth take part in this tour, one can combine it with some travel teaching in Turkey and also in Bulgaria and Greece, as they are so close and accessible. Needless to say, everything is very cheap in Turkey and it seemed like a safe place and people were most hospitable. When we met the Bahá'ís in Edirne, someone asked what do they want us to do for them, and they said tell more friends to come. I wish and pray that every one of you gets the chance to go there.

Mrs Alaei can be contacted via 27 Rutland Gate.

Hamid Jahanpour

