

## Turkey Trip Reflections

The study abroad trip to Turkey has been one the greatest and of the most highlighted experiences of my life so far. I enjoyed the culture, people, excursions, and most importantly, the lessons I learned over the short time span of three weeks. This trip was not my first experience out of the country. In 2010, I went with a choir to the United Kingdom to perform at various sites and events for a period of ten days. It was a wonderful experience; to be only 16 years old and be able to travel with others around the world for something I loved to do. Although it was my first experience out of the United States, I felt that there was something missing from the experience. The study abroad trip to Turkey gave me what I was missing: a chance to grow and gain personal knowledge, experiences, and relationships.

Now that I am 20, I have more ability to perceive the world in my own views and beliefs. During this trip, I was able to talk about several interesting topics with many people. Whether it was the African-American experience versus the African experience, the Turkish customs in comparison to American ways, and other topics including education, music, history, economics... you name it. In the short time I was in Turkey, I covered many topics with different people. Before going to Turkey, I thought moderately open minded, but now, I feel that I can think even more openly. I want to adopt some of the customs in my life, not only for myself, but my family, friends, and my community. One of the customs that seems very simple to the rest of the world but means a lot to me is the Turkish style of hugging and kissing. The men in the country are very devoted to brotherhood and love, so they embrace one another in a more affectionate way. I also feel the same way about the people around me, which is why I am implementing this way of greeting and leaving people for the rest of my life.

I felt so much energy and life in the cities that we visited. It inspired me to stay on the path to becoming successful, so that one day I will be able to come back and enjoy Turkey for an extended stay. All of the deans, department heads, faculty, and especially the students and families were so kind. As I reflected on the genuine kindness and love that Turkish people showed to us, it nearly brought tears to my eyes the day that we left the country. It was amazing to witness people, who didn't know anything about us, were so kind to all of us. They made me feel that I was a full time student at their schools, and as if I was one of their relatives visiting them at their home. The young people at each university are a lot like I and the rest of the TSU students. No matter the religious, ethnic, or cultural background, we are all young trying to find our purpose in life and our personal set of beliefs. The friends that I made along the journey will be missed greatly.

As for Dr. Sekmen and Ms. Miller, they were such a blessing to have as teachers, mentors, tour guides, and mother/father figures on the trip. He did an excellent job of planning class times, study hours, breaks, excursions, Turkish friends and families, and the hotels. Each hotel was different than the next, and it was very special for us to receive the privilege of staying in the luxurious places. Whenever there was a problem or concern, Dr. Sekmen and Ms. Miller did their best to evaluate and find solutions to the situation. I could not think of or ask for any other people to escort us along the trip. I have no complaints about either one of them, especially Dr. Sekmen. He is the best Department Head at TSU. He has shown that he cares about his students and who he represents. He has a passion for educating

people of all cultural and academic backgrounds. He has taught and instilled so many values in me. He reminded me that I represent many people besides just myself and TSU, that my colleagues and I represent our homes, religions/customs, and America as a whole. There is not enough time or words I can say that can truly show how much I appreciate him for what he has done for all of his students. I'd like to thank Dr. Sekmen, Ms. Miller, The College of Engineering of TSU, Izmir Economic University, Antalya International University, Bilkent University, and especially all of the Turkish buddies/friends and families. Your generosity, patience, and kindness will never be forgotten.