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JULY 2010

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CYCLE TORQUE FEATURE – TOURING TURKEY

Turkish Delight



HERE I am in Istanbul, Turkey, about to embark on the Ferris Wheels 'Turkish Treasures' motorcycle tour. Owned and operated by Mike and Denise Ferris, the first tour started with Mike and a group of Australians 15 years ago across the Himalayas and has grown from there to include Morocco, Nepal, Bhutan, Shangri-la, Inca, Rajasthan, the Andes and Dalmatia. All the tours are approximately three weeks in duration and the bike hire, fuel, mechanic, support bus with driver and tour guide (all local), accommodation and meals are covered in the cost.

This was my first bike trip in a country unfamiliar to me, on a bike that doesn't belong to me. All my riding has been inside of Australia, unless you class the one from WA to my homeland 'Tasmania' as overseas, just kidding! So the first thing to suss out

was if the bikes on this particular tour would be suitable for me as I am somewhat vertically challenged standing at a height of 5'1". After ping-ponging a few emails with Mike and Denise we decide that the Aprilia Pegaso 650 would be my best option, the other being a Suzuki V-Strom 650 (low seat height but bulky up front), and the mechanic would drop the forks for me as well.

We arrive in Istanbul in the morning after about 18 hours of hideous flying, which, let's face it, no-one likes. We're picked up by 'Team Ferris', in this case Denise and her trusty bus driver Ali and tour guide Baris, as Mike is off doing the Moroccan Magic tour. We spend the morning meeting the rest of the group, 12 all up, while taking in some of the sights including The Blue Mosque. We have some lunch together and then have the

afternoon to do as we please. At the end of the day the bikes have been delivered and we meet the owners and suppliers of the bikes and their team, sign the paperwork and get familiarised with our bikes. The mechanics, of which one, Shakru, will spend the duration of the tour with us, are very thorough and make any adjustments possible to ensure your comfort. We have a bit of a briefing on what the general go is whilst on the tour and what to do if you get lost or have any dramas, but the main question on our lips is "if the 70kph speed limit imposed on motorcycles in Turkey is heavily enforced, what the?" The answer leaves us not so mortified and though we did get pulled up, we all came out unscathed. We were prepared with cash, however, as if you pay them cash on the spot they are somewhat negotiable on

the exact price! Who knows how Keenan Sofuoglu learned to ride so fast!

The next morning we're suited up and ready to go by nine, most mornings of the tour are an eight-thirty or nine start with a couple of earlier ones thrown amongst it. It is cold, but a gorgeous clear, sunny day and we head west out of Istanbul trying to get used to staying on the right side of the road and practising the 'corner-marking' method used so, hopefully, no-one is lost or left behind. We're heading through The Marmara Region and for the next week and a half we will follow the coast through The Aegean and Mediterranean Regions, with the occasional inland detour. Today is about 300 km and at the end of the day we will be in Gelibolu (Gallipoli). Turkey

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CYCLE TORQUE FEATURE – TOURING TURKEY ... CONTINUED

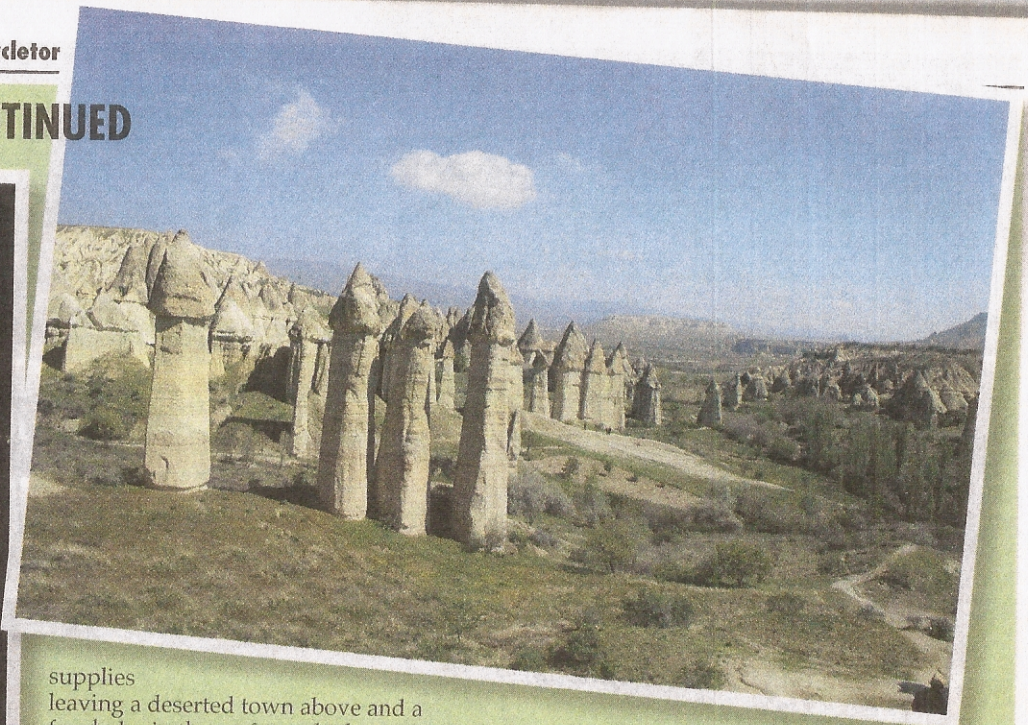


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is rich in history and as we make our way along the coast we go through The Historic National Park of Gallipoli Peninsula visiting monuments, memorials, and cemeteries, which was established to honour the 500,000 who lost their lives there. We also visit Troy and its archaeological excavations, the ruins of Ephesus and its ancient theatre, Agora and baths and Celsus Library, Pamukkale (inland) and its thermal springs and picturesque seaside towns like Kusadasi and Kas. The coastline is awesome. The roads are well maintained and there are often roadworks in progress to be aware of. Lots of winding and twisting to be had, the odd semi rolled on its side, obviously enjoying himself a tad too much! And you can be

guaranteed to come face to face with the odd vehicle coming the other way that decides he wants the whole road to himself! The scenery is breathtaking. Staying focused on the road? Difficult!

We say goodbye to the Med and start heading across Cappadocia and Central Anatolia where the scenery is like you rode into another planet. Volcanic ash solidified into a material called tuff which is easily eroded compared to the hard volcanic rock layered on top and has created a vast and unique landscape of 'fairy chimneys' and distinctive formations. A hot air balloon ride will give you a bird's eye view of the surface but there are cities to be found underground. Known as 'troglydite' dwellings, where, in not so peaceful times, the residents would retreat to, complete with their animals and



supplies leaving a deserted town above and a few holes in the surface which were unlikely to be discovered or investigated. When we next head off it's across the Anatolian Plains towards the Black Sea coast.

This region is Turkey's wettest and the climate moderate even in summer, in our lingo it was 'bloody freezing' and yet a few lunatics managed to go for a swim! We did, however, score dry weather; the only bad weather on the whole trip was a storm as we neared Cappadocia. The coastline offers even more fantastic riding through lush forests and thriving farming areas. Stopping in Safranbolu, which means 'Big Saffron' it's pretty self explanatory what's been growing here for centuries, but it is also famous for its Turkish Delight. We make our way back to Istanbul where we hand back the bikes and celebrate a safe and incident free trip and perhaps do some more shopping at the Grand Bazaar.

In general the accommodation was all good, apart from being jipped by one hotel and having to find last minute

accommodation, leaving a few of us with the odd cold shower, which Chief Wigham was most unimpressed about, but you'd expect that from a coppa! The food was delicious with lots of fresh breads, meats and salads. Everything was well organised and as we were provided with maps and a list of our hotels with their numbers we could go at our own pace and stop if we wanted to have a look at something. The only times we were required to stay together was to get through major cities so there wasn't too much time wasted searching for lost souls! I'm certainly planning on doing another of Ferris Wheels tours as I know I could not have seen as much as I did in that space of time on my own or been looked after yet still have freedom to wander on my own. The only way to travel? Bike.

For more information about Ferris Wheels motorcycle safaris ring 02 9970 6370 or email safari@ferriswheels.com.au

– Sarah Wright

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