

“The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia – Ancient and Mystical, but not exactly a Tourist Destination”

In November of 1995, I travelled to Saudi Arabia to conduct a GIS training class for technical staff of the Exploration Department at ARAMCO. (Saudi Arabian Oil Company, formerly known as the Arabian-American Oil Company) *{It is one of the world's largest companies with an annual revenue of \$230 billion and proven oil reserves of more than 270 billion barrels!}* The flight from Los Angeles took me to Frankfurt and then on to Istanbul, where I had a five hour layover before continuing to Athens and Bahrain. After arriving in Istanbul early the next morning, I spent the time relaxing in the beautiful “Bosporus” Business Class lounge – a very pleasant time with drinks and snacks. Later I heard the boarding announcement for the Gulf Airlines flight to Bahrain via Athens. It was a delightful flight to Athens in business class, but upon landing we encountered miserable weather at the airport. In addition, the toilets onboard the aircraft suddenly stopped working, along with having no running water! The repairs to the aircraft led to a five hour delay departing Athens! Luckily, my business class ticket permitted me to spend the time in the “Acropolis” lounge, and although it was rather crowded due to a lot of delayed flights, it was a whole lot better than sitting for five hours at the gate. (the best reason for having a business class ticket!) By the time we finally departed Athens, I had missed my connecting flight in Bahrain to Dhahran airport in Saudi Arabia, my final destination. As a result, Gulf Airlines arranged accommodation for me at the 5 star “Gulf International Hotel” across the street from a large, beautiful mosque.



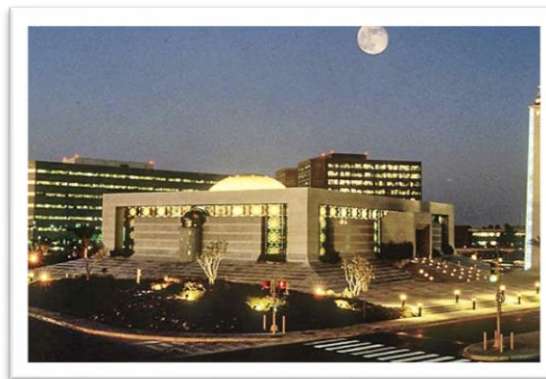
The next morning, rather than waiting several hours for the 20 minute flight to Dhahran, I was advised by the hotel staff to hire a private car for the 35 km (22 miles) trip across the causeway connecting the island of Bahrain with the Arabian peninsula. (even at \$125 it was the best choice in order to arrive at the ARAMCO headquarters on time) As we came to the border crossing in the middle of the causeway, I encountered lots of formalities, including a “detailed” inspection of my luggage. The Saudi customs officer opened every bag, looking for drugs, alcohol, and pornographic material. (note: in the country even magazines like Time and Newsweek were “edited” to “blackout” any photos that displayed an unacceptable amount of women’s bare skin!) During the inspection process, my bottle of Champagne, a gift from the Delta Airlines flight attendants on the LA to Frankfurt flight, was confiscated! (later, I learned that the Saudi customs agents never let any of the confiscated items “go to waste”, and it was rumored they have some very lively “parties”) Once we were beyond the border post, I saw nothing but barren desert for as far as the eye could see. And yet, the weather was not only quite hot, it was also very humid – not what one would expect in the middle of a desert environment. (apparently the humid condition was the result of being on the edge of the Persian Gulf)

Eventually the driver took me to the “Dhahran International Hotel”, a beautiful 5 star hotel near the airport. The hotel lobby was gorgeously decorated in traditional Arabic design and very quiet. My room was exceptionally large and very well appointed, including a “self service bar” that had everything, except alcoholic beverages, although there was something labeled “malt beverage” – basically “non-alcoholic beer”. It tasted “something” like beer, but it wasn’t the real deal – however, it was better than nothing.



During the time I conducted the training class, I observed some “unique” aspects about ARAMCO.

- Virtually all of the professional and technical positions were held by “ex-patriots”, mostly American and European, while the upper management was exclusively Saudi!
- The “expats” lived in a huge “compound” provided and managed by ARAMCO, with its own housing, essential facilities, and regulations
- ARAMCO is a huge bureaucracy that instituted very strict security measures. When I first arrived, I was fingerprinted and photographed for a temporary ID badge, and every day as I entered the main security gate, my briefcase was thoroughly inspected. (also upon exiting at the end of the day)
- My training class was held in the Exploration Engineering Building, where I discovered there were two different toilets for men (western and eastern), the latter being nothing more than a hole in the floor. Whereas, it appeared there was only one toilet for women, the inside of which I never saw, but the times for cleaning were posted clearly on the door!



ARAMCO Headquarters - Dhahran

One day, the entire computer network went down, which effectively stopped work on the training exercises. However, I had to continue my lectures without the benefit of practical exercises. (not the

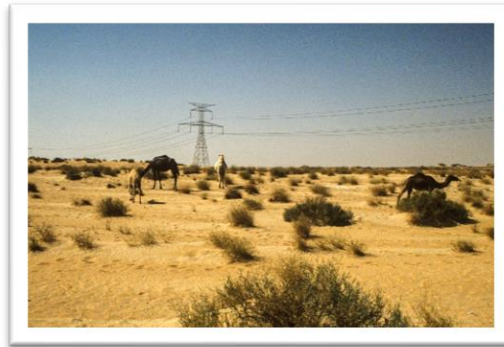
best for learning, but there was no choice) That evening, when I returned to the hotel, I enjoyed a fantastic dinner, starting with chicken satay in a spicy peanut sauce, followed by a very tasty south Indian dish of curried shrimp that had a lot of interesting herbs and spices. My delicious dinner was accompanied by a glass of “malt beverage”, instead of a cold Indian beer that I would have preferred. As I sat in the hotel lounge after dinner, I saw a large group of British soldiers in the lobby. I suspected they were here for training exercises, though I would never know for sure. About that same time, all the shops in the hotel closed briefly for the Muslim evening prayer, even though the shops were operated by Indian and Pakistani staff. Later, I noticed that virtually all of the hotel staff were Indian or Filipino. When the shops reopened, I found a small “tourist” guidebook to the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. And although its contents were sparse regarding “tourist” sites, it did have an extensive “directory” of shops and services available in the region! As I perused the guidebook, it was pretty clear that Saudi Arabia definitely did not “encourage” tourism, despite the fact the Kingdom has a very long and rich history.

The next morning, I woke up to find much cooler weather, a result of strong winds from the north. The temperature during the day dropped dramatically from the upper 90’s to the lower 80’s. Suddenly, in the middle of the afternoon, a massive power surge caused a “meltdown” in the main power distribution center, resulting in a complete shutdown of all computer systems for almost 24 hours! (there was no information or explanation from ARAMCO management) Needless to say, my training class ended early and everyone went home. That evening, I had dinner in the hotel restaurant again, where I enjoyed another delicious meal of curried chicken and rice. I noticed there was a separate area of the restaurant located behind large partitions that was reserved for Saudi families. (it led me to wonder how the Saudi women manage to eat while wearing a full veil covering their face, but I guess I’ll never know)

During the two weeks of training at ARAMCO, I saw the company had several canteens serving an incredible and diverse variety of foods at extremely low prices. As a result, I always looked forward to the lunch hour, not just for the delicious food, but also as a very welcome break in the middle of the workday. While I stayed at the Dhahran International Hotel, the Royal Saudi Air Force often “scrambled” their jet fighters precisely at 5:00 am in the morning from their airbase adjacent to the hotel! (it often became my “wakeup call”) One afternoon, as I returned to the hotel, I discovered a large display case in the lobby that had the remains of an American “Patriot” missile from the recent “Gulf War” with Iraq. And next to the missile fragments was a large photo of American General Swartzkoff.

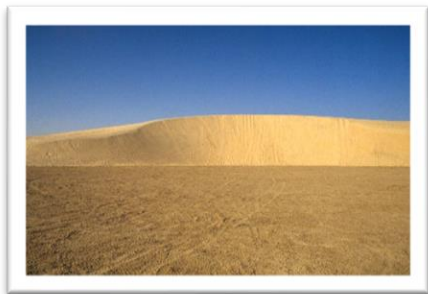
Then at last, I had a day off from the training class and one of the students named Jerry invited me for a trip in his Toyota 4WD into the desert south of Dhahran, an area labeled on the map of Saudi Arabia as the “Empty Quarter”. (Jerry was an American expat from San Diego, and an expert in the subject of sand dunes – in other words, an “aeolian geologist”. Among the places we visited that day were:

- A large salt/sand marsh where a “perched” saline water table was just below the surface of the sand. We began searching for large beautiful pink and white salt crystals known as “sand roses”.
- Beyond the salt/sand marsh, near the edge of the Persian Gulf, we encountered a large group of men scraping salt from shallow pools of sea water in order to dry the salt crystals in the hot sun.
- As we drove inland again, we came to an extensive region of huge sand dunes, known as the “Sabakh”. Among the sand dunes we saw a group of Bedouins with their camels, wandering across the barren desert where virtually nothing but very sparse vegetation existed.



Around mid-day, Jerry stopped to fix lunch near a small group of Bedouins and their camels. But soon we were besieged by scores of nasty flies, which made lunch a bit miserable. (I am still amazed that hordes of flies can exist in the middle of the desert) After a “quick” lunch, Jerry drove back to the coast and a popular beach known as “Half Moon Bay” where many Saudi families were picnicking and playing in the ocean. I couldn’t help but notice that all the women were covered from head to toe in black “chadors”. My first thought was how difficult it must have been for them to “swim”. The scene reminded me of some old photos of American women in the 1920’s as they were clothed in “bathing suits” that covered them from head to toe! (not any different from today in Saudi Arabia) Later, Jerry told me about a “run in” he had with the “Matcuwah” (the religious police). His wife, who was from Romania, was considered to be his “property” according to Saudi law, and therefore he was responsible for her conduct. But his wife was very independent and not keen on observing the Kingdom’s rules. Jerry confided that it caused both he and his wife great frustration. He also told me about the huge disparities between how foreign workers were treated in the country. As an example, if an American or British worker committed a serious crime, they would be immediately put on a plane home, whereas, a Pakistani or Indian would most likely be executed!

In the late afternoon, Jerry drove to the top of a huge dune, and then abruptly charged straight down the steep slope – scary but fun! (a sport known as “dune bashing”)



Then it was time to return to the hotel, where the theme for the restaurant buffet that evening was “East meets West”, a huge collection of delicious dishes from Thailand, China, Japan, Europe, and North America! The restaurant was packed with many expat families enjoying a “night out”. I sampled as many of the diverse offerings as possible, but it would have taken more than one evening to cover the whole buffet. As I was leaving the restaurant, I saw a large group of Filipino men waiting in the lobby with their luggage. I suspected they were most probably “contract” workers heading home to the Philippines. Over the course of the next two days, my routine remained the same – training class, lunch in the ARAMCO canteen, dinner in the hotel restaurant. But, one day there was a terrorist bombing at the US military office in Riyadh! Fortunately, no one was killed in the attack, however, it sent a clear message to Washington. At the same time, we experienced another significant change in the weather as the “cold winds” of winter arrived, while the skies remained clear every day. As a result, the daytime temperature dropped from the mid-90’s to a more comfortable mid-70’s. Meanwhile, every evening, dinner at the hotel featured world class cuisine from a different part of the world – something I really appreciated and looked forward to after a long day of teaching! And every morning, my ARAMCO driver, Qureshi, picked me up at the hotel for the short 5 minute drive to ARAMCO. Then he proceeded to drive around the huge ARAMCO parking area for another 5 – 10 minutes searching for a parking space close to the main gate. But he always ended up parking in the same spot at the rear of the lot!

At last, the final day of the training class came – thank goodness, because by that time I was really exhausted! Khalid Al-Moammar, the owner of the Esri office in Saudi Arabia, joined me for lunch in the ARAMCO canteen. He expressed his great appreciation for my work in conducting the class and invited me to return again in the future. Then the students in the class presented me with a very special gift, a beautiful wooden box decorated with inlaid “mother of pearl”, as an expression of their appreciation! That evening, Jerry invited me for dinner at a very nice little Italian restaurant in downtown Dhahran. Strangely, it was located above a number of small shops, all selling identical computer equipment. We enjoyed a delicious dinner of classic Italian dishes, but without the accompaniment of wine! (oh well, it was Saudi Arabia anyway) After dinner, we visited a large shopping mall in the Al-Khobar neighborhood, and the first thing I noticed were a number of small computer shops selling Chinese “pirated” CD’s loaded with over 60 software programs. There was everything from Microsoft Windows to the latest multi-media games, all at extremely cheap prices, and all of which were clearly illegal!

Back at the hotel that evening, I finished packing my bags for departure in the morning – including the beautiful “sand roses” that Jerry and I had picked up on our trip in the desert. I was able to get a few hours sleep before the wake-up call at 2:30 am for the hotel shuttle to the airport and check in for the 3:30 am Singapore Airlines flight to Istanbul. No sooner had I gotten out of the shuttle than an Indian porter grabbed my bags and proceeded to push his way to the front of a long queue of passengers waiting to have their bags inspected! As a result, I was able to check in for the flight within the space of

5 minutes, despite the huge crowd. However, there were a lot of unhappy people behind me! (the \$10 tip to the porter was money well spent) Unfortunately, upon passing through immigration and customs, I found a very dreary departure waiting area, with virtually no facilities for the comfort of passengers, and most disappointing was the absence of a business class lounge! Finally, there was the announcement for the departure of Singapore Airlines flight 770 to Singapore via Istanbul. The four hour flight to Istanbul was very nice, despite being nearly overbooked. The inflight movie was “Clueless”, a stupid film about dumb American “valley girls”! We arrived in Istanbul just before sunrise and I breezed through immigration and customs in short order. At that point, I decided to change my Delta Airlines flight to Los Angeles and depart two days later so as to enjoy some of the historic sights of the city. Once the change was confirmed, I took a taxi to the “Polat Renaissance Hotel” on the coast of the Marmara Sea near the airport. The hotel is a gorgeous 5 star property overlooking the sea, where I had stayed once before on a previous trip to Istanbul. As we approached the hotel, the brilliant sunrise turned the clouds into a golden yellow and orange hue that was reflected on the wet pavement, as well as in the raindrops trickling down the taxi’s windshield! (a brief but spectacular moment – the only thing missing was a photograph)



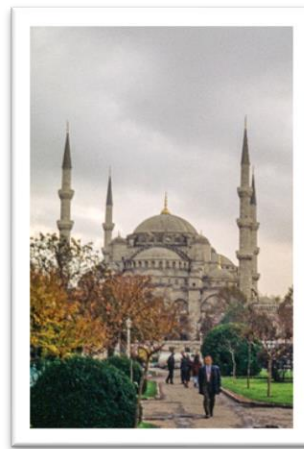
After checking in, I went to the “Daphne Restaurant and Grill” for breakfast, overlooking the Sea of Marmara. Heavy dark clouds and large whitecaps surrounded huge cargo ships as they sailed slowly toward the entrance of the Bosphorus Strait. I was hoping the weather would improve during the day, and sure enough, after a couple of hours the wind and rain subsided. That’s when I decided to take a walk along the shore, following a winding brick promenade just outside the hotel. Along the way, I encountered a lot of cats hanging around, all of whom seemed to be well fed, and having very similar black and white markings. The sun began to “peek” through the heavy clouds as I continued walking, revealing beautiful views of the sea. Upon returning to the hotel in the early afternoon, I had a delicious dish of chicken satay for lunch before meeting up with a tour company shuttle bus for an afternoon tour of the “old city”. As I waited outside the hotel for the shuttle bus, the sun suddenly burst forth from the dark clouds and revealed a beautiful clear blue sky. I felt it was a sure sign that I would enjoy good weather for my short time in old Istanbul. But the longer I waited, the more I began to wonder if I had misunderstood the pickup time I had been told over the phone – was it quarter to one or quarter past one? By then it was almost half past one, so I decided to call the travel agency to confirm the time. They radioed the driver and found out he was just 5 minutes from the hotel. When he finally arrived, he made a “mad” dash down the coast road toward the city center, which gave me a full taste of the “chaotic” Turkish traffic – excessive speeding and constant “near misses” being common! Along the coast road I had a great view of at least 30 – 40 large cargo ships anchored in the Sea of Marmara. My driver/guide told me that the Turkish Maritime Authorities “reverse” the flow of ship traffic through the very narrow Bosphorus Strait to the Black Sea every 12 hours, obviously for safety reasons. As a result, a ship may have to set anchor and wait for up to 12 hours before it can resume its journey. As we approached the center of the old city, the road passed through a large section of an ancient Roman wall and aqueduct that once protected the city. It was in various states of disrepair, but still a

magnificent sight to behold. I could see many places where people had used parts of the 1500 year old stone structure to build their own houses, and in some cases, to build their house into the old wall or even on top of it! (a most unique building technique that has survived for centuries)



Just beyond the old Roman wall was a huge open air fresh fish market, surrounded by dozens of seafood restaurants, cafes, and bars. It was a very lively area, and one I would have liked to visit longer, but the tour of the old city had to move on.

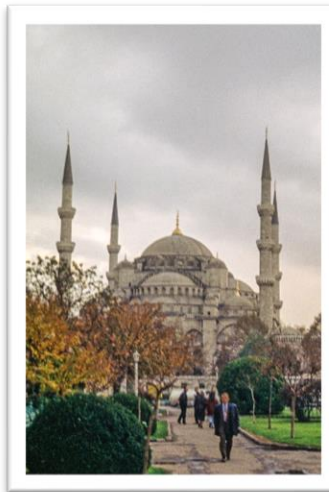
It wasn't long before I saw the tall, slender minarets of the spectacular "Blue Mosque" sitting high on a hill above us. Shortly afterwards, we rounded a sharp bend in the coast road and were struck by a magnificent view of the Asian side of Istanbul, connected to the European continent by a huge new bridge. Apparently, we were on a large peninsula known as the "golden Horn". We parked on a hill above the Bosphorus Strait and watched dozens of old ferries slowly making their way across the narrow strait carrying passengers between the "continents" of Europe and Asia. (it was an amazing image that still remains in mind when I think of Istanbul)



Soon, we left the coast road and onto the city's main road, "bumping" our way through the heavy, chaotic traffic, before arriving at a lovely seaside restaurant called "Miladys". There we had a delicious lunch of traditional Turkish dishes as we sat on the terrace with a gorgeous view of the Bosphorus Strait under brilliant blue skies! After lunch, we joined five other people who had been on a different morning tour. For the rest of the afternoon, we were scheduled to visit the "Sokollu Mehmet Pasha Mosque", better known as the "Mosque of Suleyman the Magnificent". On the way to the mosque, we passed the famous "Sirkeci" railway station where the legendary "Orient Express" used to arrive from Paris. (when the train reached this station in Istanbul, the railway carriages were transferred onto a railroad ferry for the trip across the Bosphorus Strait to the Asian side to continue the journey to Palestine and Egypt)

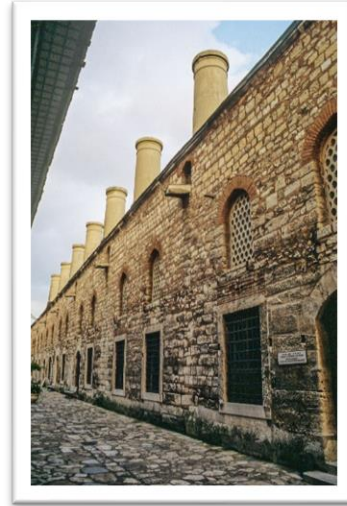


Nearby the historic old railway station was an ancient Roman aqueduct which supplied water to the city from a source over 20 km (12 miles) away in the mountains to the north. It was amazing to see the old stone aqueduct still existed after 1500 years, and it apparently remained functional until the mid-20th century! (an incredible testament to the quality of Roman engineering) A short time later, we arrived at the mosque – a gorgeous symmetrical stone structure with four tall, slender minarets, so typical of the Turkish style. As we entered the mosque, we stood beneath a massive dome ceiling supported by four huge stone pillars. The walls and ceiling were beautifully decorated with colorful, intricate geometric designs, the predominant color being blue. The floor was gorgeous white marble and covered in many places with traditional Arabic prayer mats, all of which faced toward Mecca. Throughout the great mosque were exquisite, finely detailed, colorful stained glass windows, all in “full bloom” from the brilliant sunshine outside. Meanwhile, our guide explained the history of the mosque and Suleyman the Magnificent himself, after which we had to leave the mosque because it was time for the mid-day prayer. Our guide led us to the tomb of Suleyman and his family, a huge stone “kiosk” located behind the mosque. The tomb was beautifully decorated with blue tiles of many floral and geometric designs, so typical of traditional Arabic artwork.



It was now late afternoon, so our mini-bus made its way back to my hotel, slowly avoiding heavy traffic by way of an alternate route that took us over some very old, narrow winding cobblestone streets, when suddenly we came face to face with a huge truck! But with the skill of both our mini-bus driver and the truck driver, as well as the judicious movement of many pedestrians to get out of the way, both vehicles managed to safely pass each other, but only with mere “inches” to spare! Back in the hotel, I enjoyed a local “Efes” beer in the “Bierstube”, a German pub, as I wrote of the day’s experiences in my journal. The next day, I had enough time to take another tour of Istanbul, which included a drive to the summit of one of the city’s highest hills, where we had a beautiful view of “Sukulu Mehmet Pasha Mosque”, as well as the huge “Topkapi Palace” beyond. When we arrived at the Palace, our guide gave us a

fascinating lecture on its history and that of the Sultan, as well as a detailed description of the layout of the ancient structure, now a national museum. He also gave us his best recommendations of what to see in the short time we had available, since it would take several days to explore the entire palace. Apparently, the Sultan had a staff of more than 5,000 people working in the palace, which was designed like a fortress to protect the Sultan.



One of the most fascinating areas of the palace was the “kitchen” where huge iron pots were used to prepare meals for the Sultan, his family and staff. As I looked around the massive kitchens, I saw at least 20 tall brick chimneys and fireplaces used for cooking. Over 1,000 people were employed every day to cook and serve meals when the Sultan was residing in the palace. Some of the huge cooking pots were at least 3 – 4 feet in diameter! In a room adjacent to the kitchens was a display of beautiful, delicate Japanese porcelain the Sultan used for important “state” dinners. There was also an exhibit of beautiful silverware from Asia and exquisite china tea and coffee services from around the world, as well as delicate crystal stemware and colorful decorative handmade glassware, all of them having been gifts to the Sultan.

From the immense kitchen area, we entered a secure room where there were many spectacular displays of royal jewelry, including a huge 86 carat diamond, the 4th largest in the world! But for me, the most impressive exhibit was the “Treasures and Holy Relics of Islam”. Among the ancient relics on display were:

- Several items that were remains from the body of the prophet Mohammad, such as a tooth, a hair from his beard, and a small bone from his hand
- A few things the prophet had in his possession during his brief lifetime on earth, such as a comb made from camel bone, one of his swords, and a cloak he wore
- Two items were especially historic and valued – a bronze cast of his footprint, and an autographed letter known as the “Sacred Trust”

While I found the displays to be incredibly fascinating, I thought one would have to have a strong faith to believe these were truly from the great Prophet.

Suddenly, a large Japanese tour group entered the room and completely disrupted the solemn atmosphere with their loud noise. It was quite obvious they had little appreciation for the religious significance of the exhibit. It was sad, and more important, the fault of their guide! After our group left the exhibit, I walked to a terrace overlooking the Bosphorus Strait and the Sea of Marmara, where there were spectacular views as evening approached. Further along the terrace, I came upon an absolutely gorgeous view of the old city skyline, dominated by silhouettes of immense domes and tall,

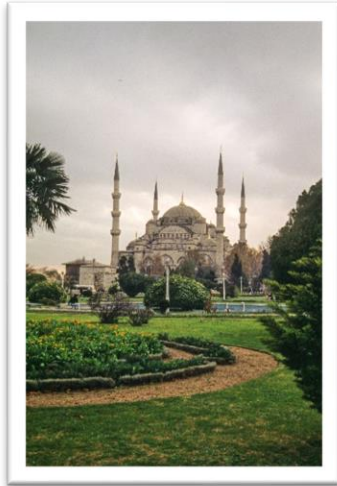
slender minarets of several large mosques situated against the background of a soft, orange glow from the sunset!



As I stood on the terrace, mesmerized by the gorgeous view, I felt it was worth the entire day in Istanbul, the memory of which remains with me to this day! Walking around the terrace in the glow of the sunset, I became aware of a large number of cats slowly emerging from the shadows of the palace grounds. Shortly afterwards, many people arrived and began feeding them. It seemed to be a daily ritual.

Back in the innermost palace courtyard, our guide told us about the “Harem Quarters” that had 400 rooms which housed different categories of women for the “pleasure” of the Sultan and his sons. Management of the Harem was the sole responsibility of the Sultan’s mother. There were four “official” wives of the Sultan, and a level below them were hundreds of “concubines” – official “gifts” to the Sultan from rulers of various regions in the extensive Ottoman Empire. (the name Ottoman originated from the name of the first ruling family named “Osman”) The Harem was guarded by black “eunuchs” who were “enlisted” as young boys from regions of Nubia and North Africa during the expansion of the Ottoman Empire. They were castrated, so as not to impregnate any of the women in the Harem and were the only men allowed to enter the Harem quarters, with the exception of the Sultan and his sons. Strangely, upon rare occasions, a white eunuch was selected from slaves captured during the empire wars. Eunuchs also guarded the innermost rooms of the palace, and a few of them who guarded the Sultan were made deaf and dumb, so they could not hear anything said by the Sultan or repeat it to anyone else! Our guide then told us more about the Ottoman history of how young boys were captured during battles and brought to Istanbul to be schooled and trained as mercenary soldiers for the empire. Before leaving the palace grounds, we saw a small “kiosk” where the Sultan sat on his throne to hold audiences with visiting dignitaries. At the side of the Sultan’s throne was a large fountain so that the noise of the flowing water would “mask” the sound of their conversations as they held sensitive “secret” negotiations.





Before leaving the palace, I purchased a lovely ceramic tile with exquisite Arabic script, the message of which was “May the Prophet Allah bless and protect you and your house”. (it still hangs on my living room wall) As we walked back to our mini-bus, we were treated to a gorgeous sunset – hues of golden yellow and orange, beautifully reflected in the clouds on the horizon! It brought to a close a memorable day in Istanbul.

Upon returning to the hotel, I headed to the Bierstube downstairs for a cold glass of Efes, an excellent beer brewed in the classic northern German style. Afterwards I went upstairs to the “Mangol Restaurant” for dinner. The restaurant was exquisitely decorated with old Turkish artifacts, traditional folk costumes, and Arabic motifs. Dinner began with a large plate of Turkish appetizers called “mezzes, served from a silver cart. They were all delicious and some were quite spicy. I ordered a chilled glass of local Turkish white wine which was very nice and pleasantly dry. For the main dish, I chose lamb filets, grilled over charcoal and seasoned with a variety of Turkish spices – very tender and delicious. My server recommended a glass of local “Yakut” red wine that was light and dry – a perfect match with the lamb. (although Turkey is a predominately Muslim country, it is fairly liberal with respect to different cultural values, and accounts for the availability of locally produced beer and wine) As I finished my main dish, the dessert cart suddenly appeared! From the large selection, I chose a couple of small pastries filled with tapioca and soaked in honey – they were crunchy on the outside and creamy in the center. (absolutely to die for!) But my server wouldn’t let me finish dinner without a small serving of a traditional Turkish cream pudding that was delicate and delicious, along with an unusual pastry made with grape leaves soaked in honey and stuffed with marzipan! The “finishing touch” was a small cup of very strong, thick black Turkish coffee, sweetened with just a dash of sugar. Sitting beside the cup was a small brass dish that had two pieces of classic nougat known the world over as “Turkish Delight”! Not only was dinner unforgettable, the service was very attentive and extremely professional. Throughout dinner, a quartet of musicians played traditional Turkish folk music which seemed to be influenced by both Arabic and Persian styles, as well as European at times. Their music was a delightful accompaniment to dinner.

After dinner, I talked with one of the young Turkish servers about Turkish cultural customs compared to those of Saudi Arabia, both being Muslim countries. Although he was a devout Muslim, he had a much more “liberal” interpretation of his faith. He also told me about some of the history of the country, in which the earliest settlements in the region were of ancient Greek origin, mainly because the Greeks were sailors, whereas the Turks migrated overland from the steppes of Asia Minor, modern day Kazakhstan. So, the city of Istanbul, formerly Constantinople, became a “meeting place” between the continents of Europe and Asia. It also explained why virtually all the islands along the coast of Turkey are

part of Greece. However, long before the “invasion” of the Turks, Greece had occupied most of the territory along the coast of modern-day Turkey, which explained the abundance of ancient Greek ruins in Turkey today, the most impressive being the remains of Troy and Ephesus. (I was absolutely fascinated by the history of Istanbul and the country of Turkey)

The next morning, I took the hotel shuttle to the airport for my return flight to Atlanta and on to Los Angeles. As I sat in the Bosphorus Business Class Lounge with a cup of Turkish coffee, I reflected upon the time I had spent at ARAMCO in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, and the short but fascinating stopover in Istanbul – a wonderful city I looked forward to returning someday. And as it turned out, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to visit Istanbul and Turkey several times in the future on business trips. Turkey remains one of my favorite places in the world to visit!