



TURKEY WINTER EXPEDITION

December 2021



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CONTENT

Content.....	1
Intro	2
Expedition day by day	3
Day 1: 11.12.2021 Rokyta – Bratislava (SK) – Budapest (HU) – Sirig (SRB)	3
Day 2: 12.12.2021 Sirig – Belgrade – Sofia - Degirmenkoy Golu.....	4
Day 3: 13.12.2021 Degirmenkoy Golu – Istanbul – Hagia Sofia – 7 Lakes NP	7
Day 4: 14.12.2021 Seven lakes NP – Amasra – Mountain pass (Sinop)	11
Day 5: 15.12.2021 Sinop – Samsun – Caka Plaji – Trabzon – Sumela Monastery	13
Day 6: 16.12.2021 Sumela Monastery – Bayburt – Erzurum - Yukarisivri Yaylasi	16
Day 7: 17.12.2021 Yukarisivri Yaylasi – Fairy chimneys – Cidir Lake – Kars – Ani ruins	21
Day 8: 18.12.2021 Ani Ruins – Igdir – Dogubayazit – Ishak Pasha Palace – Van Lake	25
Day 9: 19.12.2021 Van Lake – Botan valley NP – Hasankyef - Nusabin	30
Day 10: 20.12.2021 Nusabin – Dara Ruins – Mount Nermut – Mardin - Rumkale.....	33
Day 11: 21.12.2021 Rumkale – Yavuzeli kebab – Göreme National park	36
Day 12: 22.12.2021 Göreme National Park – Lost car key – Hotel - End of Expedition?.....	40
Day 13: 23.12.2021 Göreme – Found key – Tuz Gölü – Ankara – Altinbesik Cave.....	45
Day 14: 24.12.2021 Altinbesik Cave – Aspendos – Antalya – Saklikent canyon.....	49
Day 15: 25.12.2021 Saklikent canyon – Babadag – Ölüdeniz - Pamukkale	52
Day 16: 26.12.2021 Pamukkale – Efes – Izmir – Cunda Adasi.....	56
Day 17: 27.12.2021 Cunda Adasi – Dardanely – Gelibolu - Edirne.....	61
Day 18: 28.12.2021 Edirne – Sofia – Belgrade – Budapest – Bratislava – Prague - Rokyta	63
Turkey in the shortcut.....	64
Statistics and costs of the expedition.....	67
Driving distances:	67
Fuel costs	68
Toll costs	69
Expedition map	69

INTRO

It was year 2021 the dark year for most of the expeditions and travels. Over two years since the Coronavirus broke up. Luckily, we always had found a way to escape out of Czechia abroad to explore new horizons. It was a December, mostly grey and cold month at least in the central Europe. Also, it's the time of in my understanding a commercial holiday also known as Christmas. That usually gives an opportunity in combination with free days to escape the rush for couple of weeks towards some adventures.

This year the draw came to a northern African country Morocco. The country with high snowy mountains as well as vast sandy dunes full of off-roading opportunities. Planning was going quite well, almost everything was arranged. Despite I was against all the shitty vaccinations the entry rule for the morocco was clear – vaccination for Covid or nothing! Therefore, I took a decision to get myself injected. You can't even imagine how pissed off I was when 2 weeks before the start of the expedition Morocco announced the boarders will get closed... Hmmm, at least the maps and points of interest are ready for the next time.

It was quite a hassle to decide a new destination attractive enough, cost effective and joy effective in such a long time. There were countries like Vietnam, Peru, Aconcagua, or Iceland in the game, but after review of prices of flight tickets which got multiplied by 3 from the figures known two years ago those destinations had to be declined. There was also a strong need to travel by the car, to go off-road and to sleep in the rooftop tent. There were not so many opportunities anymore to the final decision was TURKEY.

Asia? That's what came to my thoughts after looking in the map. Hell yeah! Boarder conditions OK, Travel distance OK, off-roading OK, wild camping OK. Why not? Let's go! Standard „work time“ planning funded by Faurecia showed us some eyebrow lifting facts. The circle we've put together had quite astonishing 6600km. If we sum it together with journey from Czechia to Istanbul (2000km) and back, we get in return over 10.000km. Normally I usually add around 10-20% more just for route finding and around driving and we are on at least 11.000km. That means over 500km a day! Map of the plan is possible to see in the map section.

EXPEDITION DAY BY DAY

DAY 1: 11.12.2021

ROKYTA – BRATISLAVA (SK) – BUDAPEST (HU) – SIRIG (SRB)

It didn't take long, and 11th of December 2021 was here. The Day D of the „Turkey winter expedition 2021.“ Packing of myself was unexpectedly quick and dirty. Considering we were planning to ascend the biblical mountain Ararat I was quite light. Saturday morning, I woke up early and drove to Rokytá where the troubles started. Second expeditioner came naked and barefoot still sleeping and totally unprepared to open the gate. That time I knew it won't be so easy.

The travel hype got suddenly unhyped now when I saw the car outside without any tent which was still hanging in the garage. The batwing was taken apart from the roof rack standing in the corner. Wtf, then I saw the lazy father drinking naked the coffee. At this moment I knew I must start here again from zero.

Ok, I've installed the Columbus alone, fixed the fridge alone, stuffed the ARB drawers with all the stuffy stuff like kitchen, cutlery, compressor, tools, saw, axe, whatever. The trunk was filled also with the Webasto heater, water canister, diesel canister, and box for the food. The front seats were filled with clothes, table, chairs, toilet (Hajzlišák), snow axe, crampons, poles, boots and cats and boots and cats and boots and cats and boots and cats.

The time to start the expedition is the best time to figure out that the front winch and the fridge is not working. Great, the first friction is here. Fortunately, after some trials we made the winch work and the fridge too. Well it was a just some minutes after the noon and we managed to leave the house. That time we were „only“ 6 hours late.

There was a stop on the Petrol station in Mnichovo Hradiště to replenish the diesel, canister, and the heater tank as well as the AdBlue stuff. The next stop for some technical items like gasoline for cooking, new 12V plug for the fridge, and phone holder for the cabin. The last stop on Czechia we were of course fucked when the idea to buy the AdBlue for the entire trip (20l) costed us 1800kč which was in comparison with the last stop for AdBlue 3 times more. Thank You Prague and please not to see you soon.

The first expectation of entertainment was on the Slovakian boarder of Malacky. Slovakia was in the humanitarian crisis when the overflowing hospitals from Covid were collapsing. Maybe that was the reason of not seeing a single person at the border, so we could pass without any papers. It was enough just to pay the highway toll. The next fuck up we were

expecting on the borders south of Bratislava with Hungary, but even here was supersmooth. Even smoother as we bought the vignette online.

The rule of transiting of Hungary is just driving and no stop. That would be quite boring, so we took a chance to visit a shop to buy some Klobász Csabai hot and other delicious stuff to get energized for the long transit through the Hungary. In the end there was a strong need for us and our car to stop more often also on the forbidden „no transfer“ places. After long 760km from home we reached Hungarian – Serbian borders near Szeged.

What a smart idea by Hungarians and Serbians to open just two gates for passport checks for the main highway of Balkan? Yes, leaving the EU was a nightmare! I count we could spend approximately over 3 hours fighting for a place in a 1,5km long queue. And we learned a lot about the nature of Serbians and Bulgarians. The position in a queue doesn't mean anything especially for those who are overtaking and lane splitting in a frozen two lanes queue.

We tried to block it, but suddenly we were approached with a Serbian primitive guy, trying to explain us nervously that overtaking is OK. „MY friends are in the front, so let me pass.“, „You can just go aside and I will pass.“, „You will wait here without passing 5 hours.“ or in the end „Just go in front and cut the line.“ Well in the end it ended up in a painfully long waiting to just show our passports. No Covid check, we are still just transiting and until now this story works!

We were already too tired at 4:00 am so we tried to find a place to sleep. Unfortunately, the flat countryside with no trees and heavy rain made it much more difficult. After 870km and 14 hours on the road we couldn't effort to drive longer so we just left the highway somewhere between the borders and Novi Sad to search for the place. Somewhere behind Sirig village we found a spot in the mud near some river.

It was raining that time when we arrived, so it was quite unpleasant even to open the tent and setup the heater. The long pipe in the heater was a bit unproductive and it lost a lot of heat on the way. The rain turned into a snowstorm. The wind was moving the tent left and right, but all the components withstand all the shit. The biggest problem was the hole in the tent on the bottom which is just conceptual mistake. This thing provided us enough snow inside the tent that night.

DAY 2: 12.12.2021

SIRIG – BELGRADE – SOFIA - DEGIRMENKOY GOLU

The morning brought us the temperatures around zero with lovely snowfall. Nobody had enough courage to go out of the tent, but when the moment came it was a suffer. Despite it was just about to hide the heater and to close the tent we could let our hands freeze enough.

This time we already knew that the snow would complicate our lives. Not only the horizontal snowing and the strong wind gusts, but I was more worried what will this lovely weather do with the traffic on Serbian roads.

At the moment when we entered the highway again, we knew that the traffic service in Serbia is not the top of their priorities. Heavy snowfall was making the cruise even more difficult and roads unpassable. Sometimes two lanes highway turned into a half lane trail where the skiing could be more effective way of travel. We also had to wait some time for the trucks to be rescued as they were completely stuck in deep 10-20cm of a new snow.



Snow on Serbian highway

As the main highway around Belgrade was completely blocked, we were lucky to escape fast and by the coincidence were forced to take a countryside road to bypass the Belgrade. On the road south of we met couple of unlucky people with crashed cars.

Cevapi. A magic word with even more magical taste. Cevapcici – grilled minced meat Balkan style in a bread with a sauce and onion. Thank You lady in the fast food, thanks for reminding me of this taste and to let me speak with You in Serbian. I believe we both enjoyed the lessons of Cyrillic letters. The town named Vrčin provided us also some sweets and coffee before we joined the highway again.

The snowy evil was over at the moment when we reached again the highway and the journey was quite smooth. We passed Jagodina, Niš and continued south over the mountains to city Pirot and further to the state borders over the town Dimitrovgrad. Finally, the borders were quick and straightforward, so in 20 minutes max we were done and continued with a new vignette south towards Bulgarian capital Sofia.

Luckily Bulgaria is empty. Well if we do not consider all the cars with German, Swiss, Netherlands or British licence plates. Wow, here are more Germans than in the Germany itself. So many foreigners? No just Turkish, Bosnian, Serbian, or Bulgarian workers from Germany. Hmm some of them maybe drug smugglers, because all of them have so fancy Audis or BMWs... Strange. Nevertheless, the thru drive the Bulgaria was very empty, and the highway was surprisingly in a good shape.

Temperature was rising as we were getting closer to the Turkish borders. Already 8 degrees around the town Svilengard at the Bulgarian-Turkish borders. We filled some registration form to enter the Turkey, Covid tests and QR codes ready, fake hotel reservation too... I can say so we were ready to proceed to finally drive in!

We never saw such a huge boarder complex. Gates everywhere trucks everywhere, but no personal cars at all. Demonstration of the power – note 1. Straightforwardness – note 1. Yes, we went thru maybe like 5 checkpoints, but all of them having fun not trying to fuck us up, no check of Covid, no check of the registration form. Turks are good. No issue at all, so we were in!

The last problem of the day was to obtain a vignette and find a place to sleep. First two vignette shops were sold out, next one was closed, so we drove onto a highway having fun we were a black passengers. During discussions what we going to say and how we are going to react when we will need to drive out of the highway or when they will catch us, we stopped at the shop where we could buy one. We have no clue how it works because it might be an electronic toll collection, but we paid 15 EUR for the sticker, so from now on I consider the toll ticket as paid for ever...

+2 hours from our home time, that was the toll to pay for the border crossing. It's suddenly 2 a.m. when we passed, but to gain some more kilometres we drove still over 160 kilometres direction Istanbul. We tried to find a place to sleep next to some lake nearby the highway. As a dejavu again the rain started to bother us. We escaped the highway without any issues with the vignette and we found after some off-road an abandoned ruined houses nearby the lake Degirmenkoy Golu.

DAY 3: 13.12.2021

DEGIRMENKOY GOLU – ISTANBUL – HAGIA SOFIA – 7 LAKES NP

The night was warm as hell after the modification of the Webasto position and the pipe leading the heat to the car. I got even stopped couple of times at night due to overheating of the tent which means that the outside temperature is already high enough. Morning was again rainy, so we were forced to pack again quickly, look around the ruined houses, admire the rubbish on the ground, the pale distant lake and start the car and drive further towards Istanbul.

The empty highway soon turned into a traffic jam leading us slowly in the centre of Istanbul. We were surprised how advanced the town was, skyscrapers everywhere like nowhere else in Europe. I have to say Turkey is visibly much more rich than European states or at least is developing faster. The first planned stop was near Hagia Sofia to see the monument.

Hagia Sofia and the Blue mosque, two main sights of Istanbul. From outside both looked very magnificent and surprisingly there weren't too many people around so I could enjoy some nice angles around the place. I was a bit sad to see that they don't take care too much about the monuments, some of the walls were naked, the colour was fading nevertheless it was breathing with an old ancient smell which I enjoyed.



Hagia Sofia

Despite I'm not that much into Islam I took a chance to enter the first the Blue Mosque. I was standing in the row with strange people, women with hijab, men speaking strangely „haram“, „haram“. Haram or not I was pissed I had to take down my boots to enter that thing. It was creepy and scary place completely dark, women separated from Men. Due to the restoration the mosque the dome was not visible, and the rest was not at all decorated... Silly why Islam doesn't make those places at least a bit pleasant to be in. If the entrance wouldn't be for free I would be upset to enter such a crap. I could lock myself into the dark cellar without being in the Istanbul.

The Hagia Sofia was much different. No queue, more colourful and more friendly. After taking down the boots I stepped thru an old door gate leading into a huge hall with covered in a soft carpet. I wouldn't like to vacuum clean this place. Many lights inside hanging from the ceiling, one major dome decorated with geometrical ornaments with small windows. Other smaller domes on peripheries gave the space even bigger feel. Huge circular black boards on the walls with something written in Islam Arabic snakes and dots together with a prayers played loud gave the place an Islamic taste.

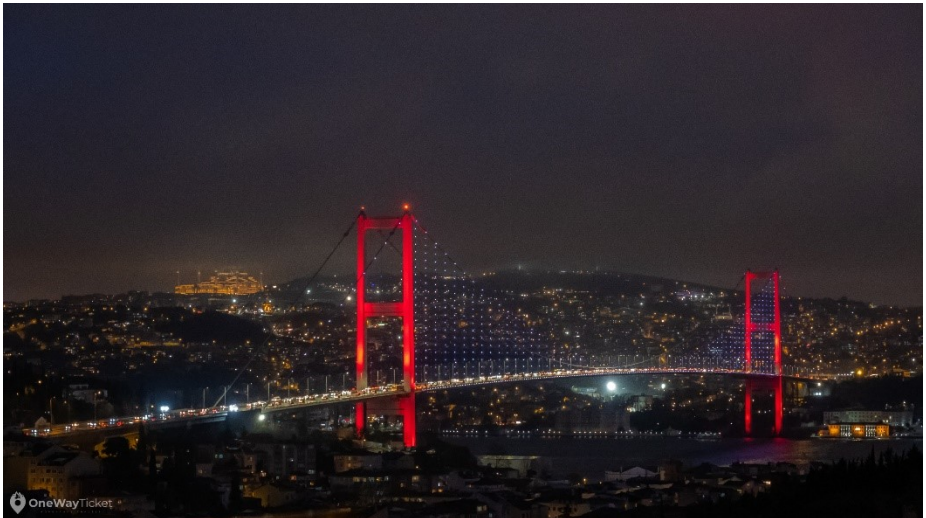


Hagia Sofia inside

What an experience to speak with Turkish people who are always trying to first friendly speak with You, but in a few seconds, they try to sell you their products or bring You to their shop. I had much more important things to do like taking pictures of Hagia Sophia, so I was resisting hard. Because father had forgotten his sleeping bag at home, we set off to the city to search for one.

We stopped near Besiktas area where the outdoor shops were placed and started to search. We had one shop in where they had a good one, but after couple of minutes we've found a better one. 10.000 TRY for sleeping bag, backpack, and a jacket what a price we were singing. Oh Yeah divide the price by two and you are on the Czech crowns. 5000kč for all of it? Great. Well, both faces got a bit green after the purchase when we found out we have multiplied the price by x1,7... We were even laughing why such a small amount of money is so big amount of paper while we were withdrawing the money as the maximum value of the bank note is 100 TRY. Even the tasty durum was not that tasty anymore after this finding.

The drive further over the famous bridge Bogazici Koprusu to cross the Bosphorus strait was the big moment. The first overland cross to the Asia! What I consider as a different from Asian part from the European part of Istanbul is much bigger number of skyscrapers. Even the famous developer Emaar brought some Saudi Arabian skyscraper architecture to Istanbul. We had a lot of time in the car while sitting in the traffic jam to admire different shapes and sizes of those mega structures.



Bogazici Koprusu bridge



Emaar skyscrapers in Istanbul

What is worth mentioning is the complexity of local highways. For me as the normal middle European villager I simply cannot follow all the turns and bend on highway's crossroads. I can't read it from the map and I can't follow how to not get lost. Despite we have 3 map devices and 12 map applications it's not possible to navigate in Turkey on highways. Also, there is a prime in the world and it's to have two parallel highways maybe 50 kilometres just for fun... We slowly started to call this wasting phenomenon „Turkish economy“.

We managed to escape the rush of the huge Istanbul and full of new expectations we were driving on the 4-lane highway towards Ankara. The plan was to drive approximately 200 kilometres east over the towns Dilovasi, Kocaeli and Bolu to turn to the mountains where we want to sleep in the Seven lakes National park. When we reached the park with winding roads and we saw it already from the distance quite disappointed of how much light does this NP emits. Luckily it was just a public lamps and nobody was there. We found a place next to some vacation houses and set up the tent for a night.

DAY 4: 14.12.2021**SEVEN LAKES NP – AMASRA – MOUNTAIN PASS (SINOP)**

The rain started again over the night so the dream about getting dry got dissolved in the amount of water fallen. It was again like the copy of any other days. Pack the tent, pack the heating, sit in the car, and try to run away from the rain again.

The seven lakes NP. We had a huge plans to walk around the park, but in such a weather we did just a car sightseeing and we could see some lakes yes. The oak tree forest surrounding the blueish lakes. I Believe it can be beautiful in some other time of the year. They made a lot of picnic areas with wooden boardwalks around the lakes to spend a romantic day in the National Park. They are usually also asking some money to be paid as an entrance fee, but today all gates were empty as well as all the restaurants in the park. We warmly welcomed not seeing an alive human during our visit.

On the way down from the mountains we passed couple of very poor looking villages full of similar dogs, goats, cows, and cats. People also looked poor and I'm sure this wouldn't be a place you'd like to live. What's interesting like is the way how they do the waste management. If You have a pile of scrap from building of your house no issue, just drop it next to the road! If You need to get rid of the rubbish the best place to throw it is beside the road or into the forest. The good news is that the nature is not harmed by that as we could see new plant growing in between of the rubbish. Turkish nature is strong one.

The funny part of the day was when we stopped near by the river in kind of a picnic place. We found there a chairs, sofa, table, and a sink. At the moment when we stopped the car the mother dog and two puppies came out of the doghouse placed literally places in the middle of nowhere. Thea reason to be here was to cook eggs for a breakfast, so the starving slim dogs came at the best moment. The pork knee bone was the best surprise we could give them and to entertain ourselves with their dogy behaviour.

Another entertaining think we found here in the forest. The picknick place was in terrible place. Dirty next to the dirty river with dirty table, but what was interesting was the sink. Ok, sink we need to clean the dishes after we ate, but it was not the sink as normal people know. It was the Turkish sink. The water pipe with the valve was coming out of the tree. Yes, it was just coming out of the big tree and if the valve was turned on the water came immediately out. The innovative soul of Turk is endless.

The target of the day was to reach Amasra the summer retreat for Turkish people at the Black sea. This time in December it reminded again the ghost town. Megalomaniac hotels and buildings around with plenty of restaurants at the shore, but surprisingly small beach for such

an amount of the potential people. The city centre was showing kind of a fame of the great past times, but today not that attractive as presented on the internet. I was wondering if also a foreigners are coming here or if it's just for the Turks.



Amasra coastal town

The mistake of the day was a visit of a local fancy restaurant. Fish everywhere? Why not to try the local cuisine. Turkish lady not equipped with any foreign language serving in a restaurant offered us a „fresh“ fish with a salad. Ok, let's try her choice. They have brought a bread, oil and other spices and after the salad. I don't know if it was because we were foreigners or if they eat this, but the salad floating in a vinegar? I can take a lot, but this was definitely a danger for my stomach. The highlight of Amasran culinary was the fresh fish. First of all, how can the fish be fresh when I saw the sea before with the oil spill? Anyways deep fried 10 pieces of 6cm long fish like looking crisps was definitely not worth of the fancy restaurant. We swallowed an Efes beer to fix the taste and left without any tips.

It's winter so it's not the best time for traveling. The sun rises late and sets even earlier, so we had to drive again quite a distance in the dark. Complete journey from Amasra over Cide, Kastamonu, Boyabat to the place we slept was covered in the dark but fairly quickly, but I have to complain a bit about Turkish was of driving. They are good drivers, but the signalization of the direction is something they forgot to buy for their cars. The roads are great, or at least were great around Istanbul, the 4 lane empty highways were really good. Here they have two lanes,

but bumpy road in combination with rain you never know if you get aquaplaning or crash your suspensions into the hole.

The good thing on this period of the time for the Turkey travels is that so far, we haven't met any campers or even any foreign travellers if I do not count Istanbul. Just us and Turkish people. I believe there will be some on the south coast in Cappadocia, but on the coast of the Black sea just nobody. I was also wondering why they build so many new houses if I can see there is a huge percentage of them mostly empty or abandoned. Who builds the house and let it empty to not get the money in return?

After 470 kilometres we decided to get some sleep somewhere in the mountains between Boyabat and Sinop, just before the road drops back to the black sea. The idea to go above the highway's tunnel was not so bad, but the problem was the heavy rain again. I do not know if this is a Turkish standard weather, but I have to say it hasn't stopped raining since we crossed the borders and it was already a 4th day in a row. The camping place on the top of the mountain was very well placed with amazing views, the problem was the heavy rain again which made the soil so muddy, but not so muddy, but so muddy. This mud was so sticky that it got stuck onto our shoe soles in a layer of 5+ centimetres and no chance to get rid of it.

DAY 5: 15.12.2021

SINOP – SAMSUN – CAKA PLAJI – TRABZON – SUMELA MONASTERY

Good morning mud. The night was good. I tried to wake up the group early to start with the sunrise so I've set the alarm for 6 am Turkish time, but that time I looked out of the tent it was still dark... WTF? I've been prolonging the alarm +20 minutes, +20 minutes and again +20 minutes, but nothing. Silly, we got out of the tent packed, tried to get rid of the mud and set off for the next adventures at the coastline of the black sea.

Oto vs. Auto, Otel vs. Hotel? What's correct and its meaning? In the first beginning I thought they just don't use the H in the words, but probably not. Some hotels are named with the h in the beginning some just an otel. The same thing is with an Auto and an Oto. Is it for foreigners to understand? Or is the otel cheaper version of a hotel and an auto the more expensive version of the oto? I do not know, but at least it's funny.

Driving in Turkey has its own specifics too. Personal cars are allowed to drive in some areas in the town 82 km/h, vans 60 km/h and trucks 60 km/h. Why 82 km/h for personal cars I have no clue where this calculus comes from. Anyways 82 km/h is just orientation value. Most of the cars go between 100-120 km/h. People never enter the road even when they are on the zebra and naturally cars never stop. Driving in the opposite direction is not very often but tolerated even by police.

The road checks by police are quite common. I've been stopped almost couple of times, but every time they see the foreign registration plate, they start hysterically show the opposite way back to go back to the main lane. Why? Maybe they don't want to bother with non-Turkish speakers I suppose. Another thing to mention is missing road signs at some not important crossroads, so the drivers just enter the crossroad from all the directions and just fighting who is braver to put the nose closer to each other, but surprisingly no scratches so far.

The road at the coast was perfect again so we could cover the distance between our camping place and Samsun quite quick and at the same time enjoy the sunrise. Actually, the first time we saw the sun in Turkey. The next stop was again to get some delicious stuff in the town called Fatsa. Adana durum kebab with smell of the goat, that's the taste of the Turkey.

The young man waving on us from his shop with such a piles of minced meat. Maybe minced meat? Let's buy some who knows what it is? Kofte. Tried to explain him we want 300g, but the measure is different here they use „one handful“ as a unit. So, we bought don't know like maybe 20 handfuls of something? He gave us for 20TL also some tortillas and package of cabbage or some kind veggies. Great deal! Later on, in the evening we found out that it was not the meat at all, but something like couscous with mixture of whatever. I'd call it maybe falafel. We tried to fry it, but it dissolved inside the oil into a strange looking pancake. Hunger is hunger.

Next interesting stop was at the seaside. Caka Plaji promoted as the best beach at the black sea, so why not to take a dip. Of course, completely empty just a few dogs, so we took a chance to do some beach driving. It this is the best beach at the Black sea in Turkey I'm really sorry for them. There is a cliff and some nice big waves. The temperature of the sea was bearable so the first shower since the beginning of the expedition was pleasant.

Trabzon, also a point on our map. Most probably for the castle, but I haven't found it too interesting. Maybe we took a wrong part of the town, but it was way too dark and not that bustling I'd expect, so after a short walk we kicked the car and continued via the town Macka towards Sumela monastery. At Sumela monastery there were no people just some dogs again, so the best possible situation for the night.



Caka Plajı



Trabzon castle

DAY 6: 16.12.2021

SUMELA MONASTERY – BAYBURT – ERZURUM - YUKARISIVRI YAYLASI

We were woken up by dogs, so we shared a breakfast with them. Later on, some workers came around, but unfortunately telling us that the monastery is closed for restoration. Well, we took almost 4000 kilometres to see probably the only great Christian monument in Turkey?

A 400 meters walk to the monastery with a dog was a disappointment when we couldn't even see the main building of the monastery. We played a bit around walked onto an aqueduct and luckily later on we saw that the construction workers forgot to shut the door. Slowly we entered hoping to not be seen. The inner old monastery revealed to us, coloured walls, but suddenly we heard them shouting no, no, no and took us out also together with the dog.

Never mind, we searched for a place where we could see the outer and newer building of the Sumela monastery literally hanging on the walls of the rock above the gorge. Why the monks were building such a structures in places like that? I mean it's great and nice, but definitely not so practical. Maybe they were getting enough money from Christians to feed themselves without any extra effort.



Sumela monastery

Next challenge was the off-road crossing of the main ridge to get behind the mountains. Yesterday when I asked the guy on the petrol station with words: „Jde to?“ (Is it possible in Czech.) He replied „Jde to!“ So it must be possible. Maybe he forgot to tell us that it is possible, but not in the wintertime.

We drove very wide road up the hill, and it was without any issues for very long time. Even at the moment we reached the first village where was already enough snow on the hills around. The mountains here are without any trees which I like and also it seems not so rainy here, I think. Also, now there is not much snow, just some small amount of powder snow on the hills. Very nice place to be alone.



Crossroads in the mountains

We´ve crossed many small villages where we didn´t see a single person. All the houses were quite maintained, windows closed, so definitely not abandoned. I think they are not living here all year round, some maybe for shepherds, as many of the houses has fences around, but in wintertime seems they are not accessible. Maybe some of them belong to people who own them as a summer retreat from the heat of Turkey.

We continued to the pass in approximately 2500 meters above the sea level, but then suddenly we were stopped by the blown snow on the road. We weren´t so brave to go through it when the steep slopes down from the mountain looked really dangerous. The rollover would be fatal for sure. We had to go slowly back and search for another solution, but from this moment it became really adventurous.

After the check of the map the decision was to not give up as we saw the road a bit lower below the snowy one. Unfortunately, the approach to this lower road was through a small village where there were only a rocky narrow roads with no guarantee of success. We had to pass! The engine cover came into a crash in one bend on the stone. Good we have it, I wouldn't like to see leaking oil from the car on top of the mountains where is no life where the eye sees.

The most critical part of the off-road adventure was at the top of the small ridge where we drove inside a deep snow and the Toyota got stuck. A steep slope on one side downhill, second side steep uphill, so no manoeuvre space for anything. The car was hanging on its belly just desperately spinning the wheel around. The only choice was to dig it out. Luckily, we took a small shovel especially for this reason.

After some time of shovelling the car was still sitting and no progress done. We wouldn't like to overnight here in 2400 meters with a big chance to get another snowfall. We had an idea to use the winch, but in the mountains, where are no trees is hard. For our sake there was an electricity pylon nearby. After resolving a small issue with the winch, we tangled the rope around it and luckily winched the car out.



The place we got stuck

We got finally to the pass where we didn't even expect we will get. Yes, we are halfway through. Fortunately, we could descent without any newer snowy fields. Also, there were already some two guys in the town with the car on the correct side of the mountains so there was a hope. They were staring like „what the fuck?“ Where did you come from, but we were there. And got after the hassle safely down.

Yes, we made it but if we made it once, why not to try another time? Stupid idea which brought us into even more serious troubles... The decision was to shorten the way over another 2400 m.a.s.l. pass. If we did 2500 m before the 2400 m will be with the finger in the ass no? In the beginning it was really picturesque valley with nice road surrounded by the steep mountains. Really place to be.

Soon we got back to the snow troubles. The first quick solution was to drive partially on the grass next to the snowy road until we reach the crossroads. Far in the distance we saw that the road gets clogged even more. There was an alternative solution going down with another valley via a small village. It was possible, but again we took a decision to drive off-road on the grass. Down in the village we jumped a small gap down onto the road. Wow, very impressive, but let's wait later, the first rule of off-road driving just broken. „Never drive down the route which is obviously not driveable up.“

We continued through the blown snow piles, sometimes helping us with a shovel and with a help of the external outside navigator leading the car by walking in front of it. At one moment we realized that we cannot continue due to very deep snow and we have to go back if we don't want to get stuck forever, or at least till the next year's spring. The deep wheel traces were a good sign to return. Especially when we already had the experience from the last time when we were stuck.

We could go back more or less smoothly until the place where we did the down drop. Ok, lets drive on the road up, but suddenly we ended up in the snow again. We can go backward, but how to drive up over the hill to the valley we came from? It took us some time until we found another place, we could drive the drop up to reach the ridge and then go down to the valley. It was a bit stressful so than we haven't got any other super stupid ideas. Also, after this lovely experience I've decided we will skip the most dangerous mountain pass Bayburt of Yolu and also to skip the POI Uzungol and continue more east.



Snow fields in the mountains

Bayburt, the town with the castle on top of the hill, new buildings, and great food. How can it be that all the buildings in Bayburt are new? The architecture also changed from the coastal one. It got even more Asian, or Chinese like. Let's call it developed Asian architecture. I can now understand where all the people from the mountain villages went to because I do like town too. It's placed in the middle of the mountains slightly covered with the snow, the castle on top of the hill and the food...

I think I need to open another culinary window and now is the time. Visiting a restaurant is always a great experience. The restaurant, where of course with English you are lost, so come to the lady and point on the things you want and say all the food you want in Turkish you know. That works until one moment when they start to bring things which were not ordered. Not bad by the way, so why to send them away.

Grilled meat is so good especially the sheep or goat one it's amazing. They had brought tortillas, salads, chilli, tea, plenty of meat for 4 persons and even some Lahmacun. There came a guy who became our personal food provider and preparer. After some time of trying to speak Turkish and I spoke to him in Czech. He soon came up with the lovely Kofti, the famous handful of something. He came and put a lemon on top of it and forced us to eat it. When we did and told him it was good despite it wasn't that good as our expression was, he came with another portion and literally put the chunks inside of our mouth.

Soon they've brought the plate full of meat and Lahmacun. Lahmacun is just a very slim pizza with very slim tase. Again, the guy came and showed u show to eat Lahmacun, put the salad inside roll lit and eat. When You finish again! That time we rather explained him we are full and if he can pack it. Saying some strange things in Turkish, so we rather called the lady in hijab and mask, so hard to say if cute or not, but let's hope she is. She understood we need to pack the load of the stuff to take away.

Happy with result we set off again back on the road and continued over the Kop mountain national park where we crossed the pass in height of 2500 m.a.s.l. this time without any snow issues. Next drive thru town was Erzurum. In Erzurum they are having a good life. University, ski resort with night skiing and on top of all of it even two ski jumps. Nice colourful town indeed. Pity we were here at night and haven't found a time to explore a bit in detail.

We continued further on the road to Tortum. Complete time we were mostly in altitudes ranging from 1500 m to 2000 m, so we definitely reached the altiplano and mountain area of eastern Turkey. We tried to search for the place to sleep next to some lake, but in the end, it showed up it's not a lake, but just a water for cows. We had another idea to drive bit higher to approximately 2100 m.a.s.l. to a small again abandoned village Yukarisivri Yaylasi we spent a night. There were many footprints from some animals on the way up in the snow and after the closer look it looked like a wolf traces, so let's hope they will let us survive. With an axe in the tent I felt much safer.

DAY 7: 17.12.2021

YUKARISIVRI YAYLASI – FAIRY CHIMNEYS – CIDIR LAKE – KARS – ANI RUINS

It was quite cold at night and despite we were pushing our Webasto heater it was fresh. The outside temperatures were definitely below 0. -2 to -4 I suppose and also some more snow came at night. Luckily the Turkish snowfall is not so hard in this period of the time, so we were not stuck on the top of the hill but got only a surprise in nice looking hills powdered with a thin layer of the snow.

Turkish tree planting. It's nice to see that also this nations takes care of the natural environment not only by wasting rubbish in forests, but also by cultivating forests. The way they do it is funny. They can plant a huge areas of trees on steep hills and mountains and it's very visual. They plant the trees at the exact lines following the horizontal lines so afterwards the mountain look like the pancake made of trees. Nice demonstration of the effort.

Narman fairy chimneys the next stop or point of the interest. Despite it was found on the map by a chance from iOverlander and the place is definitely not listed in any of the tourist attraction list of Turkey, it was a good stop. For the natural beauties lovers this is the heaven. They have even built a visitor centre and the parking lot next to it. Luckily the tourism in Turkey in this area is sporadic, so we were alone in entire valley.

Fairy chimneys are red sediment rock formed by erosion into unbelievable pile formations. There are some most visited formations which are standing out of the average and they are great, but there is an entire valley full of those beautiful rocks. One can walk around and explore, climb play even the entire day. This play is super spot for nature photography lovers. In summertime or in the tourist period we could see that they provide here horse rides to feel like an Indians in America. Also, what I like is the freedom, you can even drive a car there around the place and camp, make a fires. Nothing like the European dictate, but I think it will be just a question of the time.



The Narman Fairy chimneys

We took a chance and took quite a long walk far to the valley where most of the tourists do not go, climbed on top of the valley ridge and then we could enjoy amazing views over the valley and far to snowy mountains. It was good again to feel free and even better was that nobody was around. Just us and the nature. We walked down on the grassy side of the valley slowly descending down to the car. It was a nice descent the last steep scree.



The Narman Fairy chimneys valley

I've also made a great picture describing exactly the Turkey's current political, social, and natural situation in one. It shows how great natural wonder the Turkey is on the background. It also shows how luxury the roads, infrastructure and living standard can be locally, but as soon as the country interests are gone it goes to the gravel road. So, it also with the social differences in Turkey. On one side very high class and luxury cities, but on the other side poor countryside and their habitants.

We stink so much after 8 day on the road that we had to get some kind of shower. The pick was a big lake Cidir which is normally a beautiful lake surrounded by mountains with lot of opportunities to spend a time in the nature. The water was 1 °C and the air was 0 °C, snow around and difficult access to the water. These were our input parameters. Ok, first dip fine, but after the putting the soap in the hair and the rest of the body it was not so pleasant anymore. To wash the soap from the head was painful like hell. I do not know why the head always aches when dipped into the cold water. Anyways we are now clean ready to hit the party.



Luxury and misery

The tea party we entered was in the town Kars. Kars is pretty bustling city with some truisical attractions. The main one was for sure the old fort on the top of the mountain. We climbed up there everything so nice and full of light, sometimes the light was even blinding, but with a good overview of the town. Who knows, who built the fort, but if I look into the city of Kars, I could also see some European style architecture. I believe this could be built by British or some Europeans, but today the Turkish red flag is hanging above it.

After the trip to the Fort of course the hunger was here so we ate in a local restaurant. Afterwards we were feeling like a party, but in Turkey? Cai/Tea party? Coffee party? How they can live without a beer? Fortunately, we found a shop with surprisingly English-speaking guys selling beers. They sold us 4 Efes beers, but they pack it for us in the black plastic bag like we want to smuggle something. I would like to know what would happen if I drink it on the public and get completely wasted in front of the mosque? Maybe not worth to try and provoke already very friendly Turks.

Let's drink the beer somewhere in the private. The next point of our interest are Ani ruins. We have no chance to see them today as it's already dark, so we took a short off-road into the valley where we found a flat area to spend the night.



The Kars castle

DAY 8: 18.12.2021

ANI RUINS – IGDİR – DOGUBAYAZIT – ISHAK PASHA PALACE – VAN LAKE

Surprisingly discovered we were sleeping in the middle of the rocks with carved rooms inside so in the past there must have been some settlement. No surprise there was a river and flat area obviously used for farming as the soil was free of stones. One of the Ani ruin was above our heads on the plateau. Great place for the breakfast only the weather was misty.

We didn't want to rush to the UNESCO site that quickly because we could see on the map there are more ruins maybe not so famous and visited as the Ani town. It took approximately 7 kilometres off-road on the fields and last 1 kilometre quite rough off-road on the stones. There was a meandering river Akhurian which is a border between Turkey and Armenia. Both of the countries are building watchtowers and its own side of the river and waving with their flags on each other.

Monastery of Horomos was the name of the ruin on the hill where we could easily reach with the car, so we started the excursion here. Quite a big church with a tower, but unfortunately partially collapsed. There were some inscriptions on the walls in Armenian letter, so I suppose those sites were belonging to Armenia before. Who know who built them really?

Romans or Greeks? Definitely not Turkish. The walls were covered with solid flat stones, but inside was just a soil with small stones. That might be an explanation why they are collapsing. They were built sometime between 10th and 12th century, so minimum 800 years old.



The Monastery of Horomos

I found a courage to enter inside the monastery of Horomos and was surprised how solid and robust the pylons were. Also, the dome was quite complex and decorated. Pity they do not invest more in the preservation of this site. It could have been much nicer and not that dangerous as it is now. Currently it looked like the only sheep are using it as a shelter and birds are using the dome for placing their nests.

We walked a bit down to other two ruins which were on the small hill surrounded by a blind shoulder of a former meander of the Akhurian river. One church was the Saint George church and the second one was Saint Minas church, both not so magnificent as the monastery before, but they were settled in the very nice surrounding. Later on, we've found out on the map that it was a former minefield. Luckily no explosion occurred.

After that we drove back to the main parking lot where there were already a few buses and cars with visitors as well as a handful of kid beggars. Despite we knew how to enter the ruins for free we were a good visitor and supported the lazy guys. 22 Turkish Liras per person was not that much in the end. What was interesting was that despite there were not many people visiting the site there were two guys at the cashier and another four guys were pending around.

the entrance building where they had already a gate which lets the people enter only with the ticket, so if I count good there were at least 5 guys for nothing.

Nevertheless, Ani Town is an ancient town which is now in the real ruins, so the name Ani ruins is describing the place very correctly. The main attraction which can be seen on most of the pictures the Holy Saviour church built in 1035 A.D. Today is the main interest of UNESCO as it was restored in 1912 and still standing in 1957 when it partially collapsed. Currently the restoration is funded by U.S. ministry of foreign affairs. Now the church looks terrible with all the support structures from all the sides. I do not believe they will ever restore it to a visitable status.

Maybe the most preserved structure of the Ani ancient town was the Church of the Saint Gregory built sometime between 11th and 12th century. The Christian church on the steep slope falling into the gorge of the boarder Akhurian river is well preserved and also the inner painting of a Jesus and other holy people were nicely visible despite they are over 800 years old.



The Church of the Saint Gregory

To not be overloaded with the amount of the Christian churches and buildings of course after the Islam people came to conquer it, they had to also build their mosque with the minaret. Of course, the architecture wasn't that complex and beautiful, but at least now they put the maximum effort to keep it in shape. They equipped the building with a glass doors and put the carpet for the people to pray.

The rest of the Ani ruins were all just a ruins. Ruins of houses, ruins of an old Bazaar and other churches and buildings. Some preserved some already fallen. The oldest remaining of a temple were dated to sometime around the 4th century A.D. which, so there were people even those times. Again, pity they do not put more effort to restore the site. It would need just a bit and not so much specialized workers to make the site more attractive. For example, those 5 useless guys at the entrance would make the job, but I'm worried that they would be able to damage the site even more. Let's hope they come to an enlighten before all the ruins will fall down for good.

Movement further south direction Dogubayazit was full of mist, so we didn't have much fun during the drive. The minimum entertainment was watching of the military vehicles and soldiers on every fortified checkpoint. They like to show the power or maybe they just don't trust each other as the neighbours. The checkpoints started already at the border with Georgia continuing around Armenia and next to the Iran it got even worse. Luckily when they see the European registration plate and two idiots in the car with the tent on the top of the car, they let us go easily. Maybe it's because they just do not want to discuss in English.

Crossing the famous Igdir was quick and dirty so we didn't stop. What was more interesting was the pass between the Igdir and Dogubayazit where we finally escaped from the bothering mist. On the left side we had the famous Ararat mountain and also on top of this pass we reached the easternmost point of the journey: **N39°47'6" E44°8'49"**. As the celebration we cooked a köftesi which is just a minced meat with potatoes, and we were waiting if the Ararat will show up. From this point on we can say we are actually returning back home.

In the plan we had to ascent the Ararat mountain (5020 m.a.s.l.). The biblical mountain where was the last hideout for the Noah's ark. After the experience with the Turkish weather, also with connection with time press and unsatisfactory health state (the knee pain) of one of the expeditioner we had to decide to skip this adventure. Could have been good, but we would need another two days and no guarantee of success and most probably we would climb complete time in the mist, so thank you Ararat!

There was also another interesting point just a few kilometres above Dogubayazit with a superb view over the valley and the hidden Ararat mountain. The Ishak Pasha palace the unique palace structure of Ottoman empire built in AD 1784. It was a centre of the former old town. It was very complex palace with many different rooms and a big harem. To be fair they didn't fuck only but also built a mosque with nice dome inscription and also decorated from outside as well as the minaret.



The Ishak Pasha Palace

You can make some lovely pictures there and also from the parking lot above it were you can shot a picture of the entire palace in the front, Dogubayazit down at the altiplano and the mountain Ararat in the background if you're lucky. But... We weren't, so we had to continue direction Van. We witnessed a heavy snowfall at the pass on the road leading us south in approximately 2500 m.a.s.l. There were many of the trucks stuck on the steep road trying to get thru. Thanks, Erdogan, for building such a wide roads so we could zig zag between them and continue further on.

Van, the eastern town close to Iran and Syria boarder, but so far, the most western town we saw. Those guys would definitely not want an Islamic state. Living standard better than in Czechia. Shopping malls everywhere, luxury shops with different known brands. Restaurants, Burger kings, flashy streets decorations. Expensive cars in the streets. Really a big surprise how the Turkey is evolving. Every time we think we can discover anything new we are surprised. I felt like the poorest person there with my torn jacket and dirty pants. Adana and Kusbasi kebab were the diner before driving approximately 30 kilometres behind Van to the lake shore to set up a tent.

DAY 9: 19.12.2021

VAN LAKE – BOTAN VALLEY NP – HASANKYEF - NUSABIN

The morning at the shore near the village Dilkaya surprised us with great views of the largest Turkish lake Van surrounded by three thousanders covered with the fresh snow. It felt like being in the Norwegian fjord. The plan was to catch the small boat to the well-known Akdamar island. Unfortunately, the guy told us even there must be minimum 15 people or we have to pay the special price for all missing people. The choice was clear we have to continue.

Another disappointment was the climb to Mont Nermut crater. It's actually a caldera from the volcano with a lake inside. Could have been nice if the last night was not snowing like hell and we couldn't even drive in the altitude of 2000 m. Considering that the crater is in 3000 m surely, we had to give up. I'm starting to think, that wintertime is not the best time for traveling in Turkey. Since we started the expedition there was not a single day when shits were not falling from the sky.

Driving down from the Altiplano was full of bestial rain almost entire way to the town Sirit. There the weather finally became better and also temperatures got over 10°C. The reason we drove there was a deep canyon carved into the soft rock by the river Botan. Not it's also a National park so called Milli Parki in Turkish. The Botan valley National Park worth to see definitely one of the best natural wonder in Turkey so far, we saw.

We even had to pay to enter the parking lot and a picnic area at the Rasil Hacar Tepesi. The young guy with two more companions asked us: „Where are You from?“ We told him: „Czechia.“ He said: „Hm, but I'm Kurdistan!“ Thanks mate here you have yours 10 Lira and let us see the canyon. They also made quite a solid fence around the deep gorge for the people to not fall down, but obviously it's not for the Turkish nature, so some of them were climbing over the fence and taking pictures behind the bars and so did I.

There was a wonderful natural arc where you can see the river down below, I count minimum 300-400 meters deep. It's not a Grand Canyon, but Canyon for sure. From the view platform You can admire the surrounding mountains. The river below is already connected with its shoulder into the big dam which is filled by the epic Tigris river. Pity they didn't create here some hiking trail to observe the canyon from more angles.



Botan gorge

On the way to the archeologic area we had a really cultural insert. The lunch in so called plastic slum. Kebap, but we were sitting really in some kind of the slum house. Ok the house was built from bricks with the metal roof, but old stinky sofas, gravel floor and the wood burning in the drum. Well who cares, but what I like is that anytime we come somewhere the waiter, or the personnel always have a need to entertain us no matter how. The teeth less guy without any language of course was trying to speak so we had some fun. We ate the Kebap with Ayran and the tea all of this three times for just 35 TL.

With full bellies we continued further on to the shore of the dam on Tigris which is really huge. The target was the well-known ancient town Hasankeyf. On the right side of the river it was a new strange looking town Hasankeyf with only white houses and full of mosques

and too geometrical streets. We didn't even bother to stop there because the most interesting site in this area was on the other side of the shore. The high bridge took us on the other side of the Tigris river. Before we reached the Hasankeyf we had to pass the constructions of a new road. Quite an off-road around all the trucks and heavy-duty machines, but we did it.

What we saw was something what you do not see daily. The ancient town with a huge settlement starting already 10 century B.C. from Hellenistic age. The huge complex of cave underground structures. Some poor rooms, but some very huge mansion like 6-rooms complexes with windows with a wonderful views over the river Tigris. A place where you can spend hours of exploring.



Hasankeyf

People were living here for a very long time as beside a Christian places of worship and a huge cemeteries they got a time even to build two mosques, so it had to be not earlier than 6th century A.D. I count it could have been constructed in 10th century A.D. So minimum 1000 years of the settlement. Again it's pity they do not care about the preservation and if yes, they start to work on a Muslim structures, but the old houses which has for sure the greatest values they let without a touch and let people to litter the place.

In the past there were also some houses closer to the river which had for sure an archaeological value, but now the gigantic Ilisu water reservoir which is carving the interesting complex shoulders into the rocky landscape creating different gorges and canyons took those place for good under the waters of the river Tigris. Later on, we've found out that this was one

of the biggest scars on the Turkish – Kurdish relationship as the Hasankeyf town was fully Kurdish and of course Turkish government haven't treated them so good. Building fully new ugly right-angled town on the other bank of the river will not save the relations.

Before we were leaving the Hasankeyf came a truck and maybe 5 guys with automatic guns jumped off. They were looking at us like they would love to take out Toyota, but later on they rather took their cooking stuff, backpacks and mattresses and went to the ancient town to camp, probably local Jandarma guys. Another interesting point was at the way back we had to cross a small village, where people were living, but it was broken like after the attack of Islamic state. I had to literally remove the heavy stones from the road to continue to the off-road pass over the mountains.

It didn't take long to pass and we decided to have a diner in the Midyat town to get some kebab and also some Baklava. After that pleasant stop we continued further south to the Syrian border. Maybe 10 kilometres from them we found a good place to stop for a night. Unfortunately, it was raining again like hell during the night.

DAY 10: 20.12.2021

NUSABIN – DARA RUINS – MOUNT NERMUT – MARDIN - RUMKALE

At the day of my birthday the morning was in the Syrian mood. It was a great expectation and also an experience to enter the Nusaybin town. The town lying exactly at the border with Syria. I can almost say the two cities Nusaybin and the known terrorist Islamic state town Kamišlí are one town. It's only split by the high wall and plenty of sharp fences. I can imagine that couple of years ago when the Islamic state was at the top there could be some bullets flying in the air.

Some of the frontal buildings at the borders has a holes in their walls from bullets and obviously poor and empty city is giving an impression there were some fights. Now there are no soldiers anymore in the streets of Nusaybin, but along the borders there are sometimes as much as 3 layers of fortified walls and huge number of different fences to prevent Islamists and refugees to escape their own made heaven. Well seems that the good times of Mesopotamia is over these days.

Mesopotamia, the fertile area ranging from Turkey over Syria and Iraq. Vast flat lands in the middle of the two rivers Euphrat And Tigris giving this area enough water to supply its needs for the agriculture which gave the area enough good well-being to develop a rich empire starting already two thousand years before the Christ. Turks knew the power of those rivers, so

therefore they had built water reservoirs on each of the river. One on the Euphrat river and the bigger one named Ataturk barraji and the smaller on the Tigris river Ilisu Baraj.

We could see some remaining ruins from the age of Mesopotamia not far from the Nusaybin. The Dara ruins was the perfect demonstration of the capabilities of an ancient people. They were able to build great structures of fortification, mill, robust bridges over the river and many of smaller houses. The biggest structure was for sure the church with the cistern inside for 2000 m³ for watering the lands around the Dara town. No surprise that the town was crossing one of the main vein of the Silk road that time. This time the town is pretty off the beaten path.



Dara ruins

But again. People now are treating the place in such a shitty way. This wouldn't happen even in India, maybe the Islamic state in Syria can do worse, but here? It would be great to invest a bit for the conservation of such a jewel of history. People here are using the old houses as pits for the rubbish and some of them are even using them as a bases for the new structures of their homes. Well nothing against the taste, at least the town is still living as ages ago. For example, the old mill was used until year 1980 until the river got dry.

Mardin town stretching around the hilltop above the fertile land. The old city of Mardin looks ancient and the other side of the pass was a modern town with all the needs for the modern life. High buildings, modern restaurants and decorations with Erdogan's pictures as

well as Erdogan's park. What will happen when Erdogan will lose his position? Will be a plenty of work to remove all his pictures around the Turkey. Maybe he is strong enough to prevent other to candidate on his position.

Shopping in Turkey is easy. Sometimes it's hard to decide where to go for a dinner in Czechia because we have so less restaurants and shops. Here there is shop with everything much more specialized then in Czech. Shops with kebab, shops with baklava, shops with beers (well this we have too), shops with honey, shops with cheese. Everything for the best service of the customer nice and flashy with large pictures. After the purchase everything packed minimum into a plastic bag or even to kind of a box. What I like despite I do not smoke is the cigarettes market. They are all black with terrible pictures and descriptions what the smoking will do to You. No brands, no adverts for smoking... This is definitely further before the Europe.

Next Archaeological site we wanted to visit was the Mount Nemrut which is a UNESCO world heritage site in altitude of 2100 meters. The tall statues of gods and who knows what else. Yes, who know what else because I do not now! Why? The fucking snow again. It was already a third thing which we had to skip due to the weather. I wouldn't be so desperately upset I haven't seen the snow plough going down the hill while we were ascending. The motherfucker didn't finish the entire way and let the big pile of the snow in the middle of the street. We were a short time fighting with the snow with the car, but in 20 to 30 centimetres of the wet snow and in altitude of 1600 metres with still 500 metres to go it was impossible to win the battle.

We haven't seen a shit from the well-known UNESCO site Mount Nemrut. Thank You again! On the way back down, we took a different road steep and full of snow, so it was another stress to drive down. Luckily, we drove around another much smaller and unknown archaeological site Arsemeia. Probably Greek ancient town where the biggest attraction was the Herakles statue relief in size of 3,8 metres and very deep cave together with inscriptions of the letter in the stones.

Now let's open some reflections window. I had to listen a complains how selfish I am at the day of my birthday so, Happy Birthday! But what to say? I had to learn it somewhere and from someone. With some people You can travel, but with some people just a few days. How to find it out in advance? Do not know, but about some I'm sure would be impossible to spend months on the road together. At least I know that at the moment you start to count the days left something wrong is going on. Something like when the travel is losing its juice and crispiness.

It was maybe wrongly selected route, but the last 66 kilometres were endless. Crossing villages and winding narrow roads until we reached the important river Euftrat with the castle on the shore of the Birecik water reservoir. It was quite a big resort with lot of parking spots, so we found ourselves an easy spot. We cooked a dinner. Unfortunately for us the taste of the

minced meat was way too disgusting to digest. Fortunately for the local Persian cat she was in the right moment at the right place.

DAY 11: 21.12.2021

RUMKALE – YAVUZELI KEBAP – GÖREME NATIONAL PARK

As usual we've woken up into another rainy day and we felt desperate again that it will be another day is bestial rainfall. We drove up to the parking lot with an amating view with the glass platform. First, we had to pay 5TL each for the entrance to the park. Initially we thought the guy will keep it for himself, but later he honestly gave us a receipt for the entrance fee.

The Rumkale Cam Teras was very entertaining park regardless on the weather. The metal structure placed on the upper edge of the rocky canyon. The floor of the Terrace was made of the glass, so everywhere you step you could see the 200 meters drop under your feet. Very uncommon feeling. The platform was providing superb angle of view over the castle Rumkale on the other side of the water. The blind shoulder of the reservoir made the impression that the Rumkale is situated in the middle of the meandering river Euprat or Firat as Turkish are calling it.



Rumkale

Rumkale itself is an old fortress partially carved inside the soft rock and partially built from stones. Strategically placed on the shore of the river Euphrat bringing there a farming opportunity, boat traffic and wealth. The castle was built so smartly, that despite it's down in the valley in comparison with the surrounding land, they couldn't be reached from land. The ridge is providing natural fortification. Probably they were supplying the city across the river or there could have been a bridge in the valley before the dam creating the Birecik water reservoir was erected.

Down at the water side were couple of ships calmly swinging at the surface of the water. We drove down to look at them and maybe to get some ride. At the moment we got out of the car the rain was already pretty strong and we were approached by the owner of the ship. Maybe owner maybe just a driver but definitely a sea wolf. He was offering us a ride to three or four different places in one-hour ride for just 250 Turkish Lira which was approximately 400 CZK. The ship was with the roof, so why not.

He ignited 6-cylinder diesel engine and put the throttle on. The surprise was how the water of the Euphrat was clean and blue. The first stop of our cruise was at the small village partially flooded by water named Eski Savasan Koyu. The main attraction of this village was the minaret looking out of the water surface. Of course, the pilot of the ship was feeling erudite enough to give us a basic explanation where we are and what do we see. He pointed on the minaret and said something in Turkish. I case we haven't yet seen it now we know it.

He drifted around and took set sails south down the river Euphrat. At the moment we were passing the Rumkale, he said: "Rumkale." And continued further south until we reached much bigger village, maybe already a town Shimaliye Mah with a big modern hotel on the top of the hill and many of the restaurants on the shore with a big mosque. I can imagine people having a lot of summer fun in the lake when the temperatures are maybe tripled or quadrupled (considering its 7°C now) than today.

On the way back he was so generous that he let us drive the boat. We didn't have any better idea, then to put the full throttle and turn left and right like idiots. It was responding quite fast, but we didn't want to ruin his Turkish economy by burning too much of the diesel so we want back to 1500 RPMs. On the way back we were overtaken by some ship with a loud music on. Also, the weather got a bit better and we could see the sun for a short while. As we landed, we gave him his 250 TL and left the man for good.



Ride on the boat around Rumkale

We couldn't resist the strange feeling of the glass platform and before we left let's give it another try. Well the real reason was the comfortable non-Turkish toilet inside the cafeteria. On the way back to the highway we stopped in the town named Yavuzeli which gave us a great Turkish experience of their cuisine, hospitality, and culture. We speak about the Kebap in the town.

The Altin Tike Kebap run by Mahmut Usta was a good experience. We ordered standardly Adana, Kusbasi and chicken grilled meat. The surprise of the day was their Ayran, which was not from the plastic as usually, but from the special circulating device which gave the Ayran original mousse and the taste. As the welcome taste of his kitchen was something like the we do in Czechia jitrnice and its prejt, but considering they can't eat pigs I suppose it was from another animal. Or, he is doing the pig blood like we do in jitrnice and silently selling to all Muslim guys who love it and are also silent.

Mahmut had everything precisely arranged and brought us the full plates of the great food. After we ate it all he came with another portion of a chicken wings despite we refused his offer. He was not like the other guys in restaurants pushing to entertain us, but he was very polite, nice and it was a pleasure to sit with him, communicate and drink a tea. He gave us the contact took a lot of pictures together and we had some fun.



Mahmut Usta Kebab

In the end when we ate everything, he didn't know what more to offer to us to keep us with him, so he came up with another speciality he wanted to present. A true magic! He squeezed the juice out of the lemon and put a lot of salt in it. After he gave us the cup and brought the sparkling water, poured the water in and at the moment it started the reaction we had to drink it. Very impressive, almost like the Copperfield.

He really didn't know what more, so he was trying an Ayran we refused, so we had to drink at least the tea with him. We showed him a 100 CZK note. He was giving this to his son, and he ran away with it to show to their mother or who. Meanwhile we paid him for this big entertainment only 150 TL and later when the son came back with the bank note, so we gave it to him as a present. We all hugged like the ages long friends and kissed for goodbye. For sure the best Turkish kebab so far!

Another example of Turkish hospitality we've experienced during the drive over the Alpine looking mountains stuffed with the snow in the town of Goksun. We were buying some stuff in the local supermarket Bim and afterwards we cooked a coffee in front of the market. Suddenly a guy from the shop came with a bowl of something whiteish. He told us to taste it. It was a pasta in a yoghurt, quite good for a hungry people, but we ate today already that much. I didn't feel comfortable to tell him to take it back and despite I was full like hell we had to eat it to not behave disrespectfully. The Turkish hospitality is great, but not anymore today please.

Last 100 kilometres to the Göreme national park known better in the world like Cappadocia was terrible temperatures were dropping down to -9 °C and it was heavily snowing. The highway was covered with black ice. Breaking was not a chance and many of the cars were crashed or out of the road. We rather stopped for a while at the petrol station where we bought the most disgusting carpaccio ever. Turkish taste of the kit for windows. At least the smell was the same as the kit non potable for sure and expensive like hell.

When we reached the Cappadocia I've chosen the ridge just a bit below the Aktepe mountain. It's actually a great spot for sunset and for the sunrise and there were no people at all. It was only -7 °C so it was a good night and the Webasto had a great time buffing all the time.

DAY 12: 22.12.2021

GÖREME NATIONAL PARK – LOST CAR KEY – HOTEL - END OF EXPEDITION?

The next day morning was a like in the fairy tale. We were literally woken up by dozens of air balloons passing above our heads. I do not lie there could be more than 50 air balloons starting down in the valley of the Göreme and Cavasin town. It was very new experience to enjoy the rising sun above the Cappadocia with the air balloons floating all around the area. The sky was crystal clear, and we already knew this will be a good day. Well let's see.



Göreme National Park

We made the great plan to walk around the central massif and to visit all the main attractions of Cappadocia. The first ascent was to the highest point of the entire Göreme National Park the Akdag mountain 1324 metres high. It was very cold and freezing, but the views were amazing, so the trip was very entertaining. Cappadocia is quite dry place there was no snow at all just a bit of frozen soil. We walked on the top of the high plateau until the place where we could see the next open-air museum Zelve Acik.

There was a solution to go around the longer official route and then for sure to pay an entrance fee, or we could descent the off-road down. It was very soft soil and it was frozen, so luckily, we haven't any mud in our way. We descended to the unearthly looking valley. There were spike-like formations or even better described like a needles made of very soft brownish soil. It was the endless maze of the needle formations with valleys in between of them. The hardest challenge was to descend down to the bottom of the main valley to reach the museum.

During the descend we reached couple of dead ends which were falling down too steeply to get over it. Suddenly we found a narrow path and the fence. It wasn't hard to jump it over but then we saw a guard of the park. It was still too early to enter the park as we didn't see any visitors so far. We were sneaking slowly down and keeping low at the ground waiting what will come. We had no guns, so the attack was impossible. Maybe the guard saw us because I think he was walking around to find us. In one moment, a big bus came, and a lot of people came inside the museum. We waited a bit on the ground until they came closer to us. At one moment we run to the main path and have assimilated with the group of the tourists and were in for good and for free. 25 TL per person saved.

Zelve open-air museum is one of the best attractions of the Göreme national park, also part of the UNESCO world heritage. The Zelve park located on the northern slope of the Aktepe mountain and is stretching over three valleys surrounded by the spikes. There is an uncountable number of houses carved into the sandstone. The high walls of the rock were full of those small rooms in many stocks. Sometimes I was wondering how they were climbing up to the rooms? Some of them had a tunnel inside, but some of them not. The rooms in the hights were called pigeon houses.



Zelve open air museum

The most interesting structure of the entire Zelve valley town is the dome shaped Christian Monastery complex. The Monastery is full of tunnels and at least 4-5 storeys, but unfortunately the cave complex was closed for the public due to the unstable and dangerous static of the rock. The next of course a big structure is the mosque. The Christian structures were much older, but the mosque not even carved inside the rock is an important structure of course, well depending for what religion you belong to.

The trip continued clockwise around the mountain through the wine yards to another touristic thing. This time was not an old carved town into the rock, maybe a little bit, but there were monumental piles of rocks known from all the Turkish pictures. The name of the place was three headed chimneys. Some bad tongues may call those natural formations dicks. I'd rather call it mushrooms. People were happily walking around the mushrooms with their official ticket, while we were happily walking around those dicks for free. Another 25 TL per person saved.

The path continued in the rugged chimneys up and down around a gorges with a magnificent views of the distant mountains and other rock formations. The sky was clear practically perfect time for the hike no problems, the life and the souls were filled with the sun until we reached the town Cavusin, where I heard a desperate call of my name: "Leoši!!!" I got out of the historical house staring at my father dropping all his stuff and clothes on the ground with the face of the helpless guy.



Cappadocia

I was watching pretty entertained the guy nervously touching and searching all his pockets and parts of body. The entertainment was over at one point when I heard the next sentence: “I have no car keys!” I’m sure he even checked the space around his balls inside his pants whether it’s there or not, but nothing. The last untouched part was the ass, but I didn’t expect him to put the keys inside the ass, but the keys were gone. Literally in the ass.

We thought we left the car unlocked and with keys inside the car while he was changing the clothes for the hike. The first mistake was clear, and we have to all take a lesson learned from it. If You’ve lost the key or whatever that important go back and follow your steps back. We didn’t and instead of this we walked the shortest way back to the car to check if the hypothesis of unlocked car is true or not. We quickly crossed the Rose valley and ascended really quickly up to the ridge where the car was parked. I’ve never seen my father can run uphill too.

The good news was the car was still there. The first question I got was: “Are the ears open?” That means are the side mirrors open, because if the mirrors are folded towards the body of the car that means the car is locked. Guess what? The ears were folded. The car was locked hermetically sealed and not able to open. The weather was still sunny, but the souls and life were not so much flooded with the sun anymore. Let’s be strong anyways and put an effort in the car searching expedition.

The plan was clear. Hungry, thirsty after already 10 kilometers of the hike we are going to make a second circuit. We set off with eyes wide opened again on the top of the mountain following our traces. It was quite funny and entertaining to follow our own footprints. I've realized that very often you do not see all the details on one trip. In the second trip I've seen and noticed many more new things. It should be mandatory for all the hikers and tourists to walk the path twice for a better experience. The same theory can be applied for visiting the sights and monuments, but probably doesn't work with visiting work, doctors, and toilet.

Another free entry to the Zelve park where I was expecting to find the key as we were playing the silly game of soldiers entering the enemy area, where we were so smartly rolling on the ground and hiding. Luck was not with us today. No keys here. We even asked the enemy guard of the park and they haven't heard or seen any car keys. All the caves flats and places were visited again, but no result. The next point where I was expecting to find the key the most was at the next fairy chimneys park, where we were again sneaking under the fence to get inside for free. Unfortunately, again nothing.

After the place of the last hope I was getting silent a bit. We finalized the complete trail until the place where the problem was found, so we did the circle twice and still without the key. The dream to sleep today at night back inside the tent dissolved like the clouds when the darkness came, and the frost came back to Cappadocia. Now let's make the plan B, which was still not developed.

First of all, we entered the hotel where we got at least the place for the night. Nice cave suits with an English-speaking guy named Ali. He gave us the tea to speak about the problem to have at least someone's shoulder to cry on. We had three options. 1) Ask Toyota service how long it takes to make a key – minimum 14 days. That's not an option. 2) I will fly back to Czechia and back to bring the key, but the passports are in the car. That's not an option too. 3) Ask someone to come to bring the key. That might work, so later on, we agreed to ask Lenka to come and bring the spare key. Fortunately, she agreed to come. Of course, there were shitloads of Covid restrictions and so on, but let's hope for the best and the things will go smoothly.

The evening we spent inside the restaurant just a few steps from the hotel where we got the so-called local pottery kebab. There was a good puppy dog with whom I had a lot of fun, but soon he became a pain in the ass especially when he was jumping on the table. The dog is the same as the owner they say. The owner brought some two vases of pottery with the fire on it. What is this? Traditional kebab?

He gave it to us and came up with the long sword-like knife and told me hit the groove in the vase. I did so hard, that the pottery got smashed into the pieces when the brown sauce and a beef meat came out in the pieces of broken ceramic. This is not any kebab this is a normal German goulash with pomes frites and rice! What to say? The most expensive food in Turkey so far, but the most weird and nontraditional from all. I do not believe him a shit that this is a local Cappadocia kebab.

We've spent some time with our host and his nephew drinking a tea and discussing, how we will get to the airport for Lenka tomorrow afternoon. They are nice and friendly, and we agreed to pay a taxi and be driven there, as our documents and passports are in the car and due to everywhere present Jandarma could be difficult to pass to Ankara as well as to rent a car here. The rest of the day we've spent in our over-heated room having fun with dubbing Turkish television and making fun from their TV programs. Of course, we felt motivated for tomorrow to find the key from the car after we wake up.

DAY 13: 23.12.2021**GÖREME – FOUND KEY – TUZ GÖLÜ – ANKARA – ALTINBESIK CAVE**

The hotel prepared for us a great breakfast. Eggs, vegetable, cheese, but also pomes frites and other fried stuff. The price for all of the luxury was 600 TL which is not a skyrocketing price for all the service we got. Before we left, we've bought the flight ticket for Lenka, put all the clothes on and went for another circuit around the Cappadocian massif.

It was very boring to walk it again knowing that there is just a little chance to get the key back. Also, the cold and cloudy weather was describing the mood we currently had. We walked all the way to the mushroom dick park to the famous fence where we dived under it. I was already so bored, that I started to search the key properly. Suddenly, the sun and warmth filled my body and I had to scream: "I found the key! I found the key!" Everyone from the park had to see us we were sneaked inside under the fence, but it didn't mind at all. Impossible and unreal became reality! We have the KEY! Congratulations came immediately.

What to take from this experience? First of all, the risks must be managed and not always to put all in for the one horse. There is an option to always take two keys and each person has one of them. Second any maybe better option is to put the secondary key without battery and hide it somewhere inside the frame of the car into the waterproof box. In case this shit happens to plug just a battery and let the party go on. Secondly the passports and things necessary for survival must be take even on a short trip and this rule is more important further you are away from the house.

We walked back to the car and it was a feeling of a victory when the ears got open. On the way back we visited maybe the main attraction of the entire Cappadocia the Churches of Göreme. Expensive entrance 100 TL per person to enter the touristic shit. The complex of Christian churches luckily with no mosque around. The churches were nicely painted inside with colorful paintings of a saint people. Unfortunately, it was a ban of photography, so what was the better fun then trying to take the picture with the guard. I managed to make some, but I got a kick from the woman sitting there. The last drop of my patience was when they've asked extra 30 TL to enter the Dark church.



Göreme churches

Much bigger fun was in front of the entrance for the park and it was an ice-cream salesman. Despite it was not much cheaper than the park it was way too entertaining. We could do miracles with the ice cream. He was turning in over and around, then also giving you only the cookie, but in the end for 30 TL per the dose he gives you. Applause and we continue further.

We came back to the hotel in Cavusin with heads up like the conquerors of the entire Turkey. The taxi driver, who was waiting already in the hotel wasn't that happy when he saw us coming in the car. Nevertheless, we returned the key from the hotel, deinked the tea and continued towards next adventures.

The best opportunity for such an adventure was right next to the Göreme town. They are allowing people to drive horses, ATVs, and other vehicles around all those chimneys. Of course, we drove there our car and the polygon was very well made to test the limits of the car. We could make some nice off-roading pictures with a great background of Cappadocian nature. As was said, the life is somehow a bit more joyful with the Toyota.



Toyota Heavy duty

As the next stop we've chosen the Salt Lake Tuz lake. For all the luck the lake was on the way to Ankara. After an hour of drive we reached the flat plain as far as one's eye can see and on the flat plain was something white snow like looking, but it wasn't a snow. It was pretty big lake it could be 40 kilometers long and 20 kilometers wide. We wanted to cross it, but at the moment we were driving to the gates of some factory I was already thinking that it won't fly. But the gate keeper asked: "Bozan?" Yes, the village on the other side of the Salt Lake. He wrote Bozan on the paper with the stamp and lifted the gate.

Soon we arrived at the salt factory. The trucks were lifting there and loading trucks with megatons of salt. Salt, white salt, NaCl everywhere. I couldn't resist to pick at least a pot full of the real original Turkish salt. So tasty! We continued on the barrage between the lake with water and probably the evaporating side. They probably pump the salty water to the

smaller lake and then just wait until the water evaporates and voila, we have a salt. Purification and let's overdose and damage our kidneys.



Tuz lake salt mine

We've enjoyed the sunset over the great plain while we were reorganizing the car for another expeditioner to have a space to sit. After that we stopped in the city Kulu for the kebab before continuing on the highway direction Ankara's airport. Finally, we understood the system of highway toll. At one gate a guy asked 33 TL. The HGS sticker is prepaid and we simply used all of our initial 15 EUR we paid in the beginning. In conclusion the highway toll is not a skyrocketing amount for such a high standard road.

Ankara. Surprisingly modest in comparison with the megalomaniac structures in Istanbul. The traffic was great. No stops, no traffic jams, very easy and fluent traffic. Nice city of Erdogan. Only the police a bit crazy. The problems of the stomach were back again here so I begged to stop to jump outside next to the road to empty the belly. At the moment the police came and started to shout on us via amplifier something in Turkish. I understood, that shitting next to the road is forbidden. Maybe it was just because of the parking on no-parking sign. Nevertheless, there are plenty of real police guys in Ankara.

The time schedule was maximally precise and the pick-up of Lenka was very smooth and suddenly we were three. Driving south started already after 350 kilometers again thru Ankara and south direction Konya. Approximately 100 kilometers south of Konya we broke the minimum temperature record -23 °C. It couldn't come in the better moment than now when we

will have quite an issue with the heating of our cozy dens, at the moment when the tent will come to an action for the first time.

After 850 kilometers we arrived at the parking lot in front of the attraction Altinbesik cave. It was already after 4 a.m. so it was the highest time to set up a tent and go to sleep. Luckily the temperature increased to only -5 °C which was sleep able OK temperature.

DAY 14: 24.12.2021**ALTINBESIK CAVE – ASPENDOS – ANTALYA – SAKLIKENT CANYON**

We all woke up into the Merry Christmas sunny day and because we were just a walking distance from our first attraction, we didn't rush at all. Kahve, breakfast and packing of all the stuff. Of course, when we have to build another tent and pack all the insulations and sleeping bags it takes much longer than the rooftop tent, but unfortunately there is no other chance.

When we came to the Altinbesik cave there were already 5 guys boiling a tea and eating some food for the breakfast. All of them with the broken English of course were greeting us. The cave itself looked small and dark, the water was crystal clear and sky-like blue. Interesting fact was that the cave was explored by the Czech speleologists. There were some gummi boats to take a trip inside. Of course, we want here and now!

20 TL per person + 30 TL for parking in total 90 TL is not anymore a Turkish price for such a small attraction. If I remember the Rumkale boat ride 1 hour of the ride with the diesel ship for 250 TL. Southern we go the prices are higher and more prepared they are with the tourist traps. Also, the ticket issuing guy refused to give us the boat only for us we had to have a captain. After we entered the boat I didn't have a feeling that the captain is capable to drive it, therefore I took the lead and was captain myself. Can't imagine what this guy would do in case of someone falling overboard. Probably just staring and screaming like the lady.

The cave itself was not large, but very interesting. They said it's the 3rd largest underground lake which I do not really believe, but ok it was explored by Czechs, so I believe it. The cave has many stories and it's a big complex, but not for the normal tourists. The tourists are welcome just to use the boat to have a small ride. Inside is a big natural stone bridge and plenty of stalagmites and stalactites made of the long influence of the water and melting minerals. At the end of the cave's lake is a waterfall. But most of all I was impressed by the blueish transparent and warm water in the cave.



Altınbesik cave

We still want to reach the sea today, so no wasting of the time and let's go further. During the drive over the countryside there were many fruit tree plantations. We couldn't have better idea than to steal mandarins and oranges direct from the trees and it was definitely worth it. So sweet and fresh taste like never experienced before. I believe they are producing some of the best citruses in the world. That time we had already +15 °C on our thermometer. That means in comparison with yesterday's record -25 °C it's a difference of 40 °C within one day and not so far from each other. I think it was less than 100 kilometers.

The next stop was a historical place named Aspendos. The roman empire town from 3rd century A.D. where the main attraction is very well-maintained theatre. Now when it's in the middle of the touristic hot spot of entire Turkey suddenly the sights can be maintained. Other very impressive structure was the aqueduct bringing the water from 3 kilometers away source. The next very big structure was the cathedral to keep the people religious and calm.



Aspendos theatre



Aspendos aqueduct

The big entertainment were the people trying to sell us something. The most fun I had was with the guy trying to sell me for sure fake Roman coin for 200 TL. I explained him that this is crazy and I'm not stupid and know the world a little bit, so he gave up and at least we had quite a good speech. Another fun and successful trade I made with the lady offering necklaces from pyrite. After long negotiations I traded with her 3 shells from the sea for two oranges. What a success.

A lunch was in the restaurant where we took köfte and later on we drove to the city Antalya to see the sea. Terrible expensive fancy city full of hotels. Full of tourists. I do not like Antalya at all. The guy the day before in the kebab was telling us Antalya is not good, haram, only drinking and cocaine. He was right. I can't imagine spending two weeks holiday here. I miss the real Turkey we were passing last two weeks, but closer we are getting back the influence of the western culture brought by cheap holidays in Turkey is terrible.

Rather than this we drove further on to the National park of the great canyon Saklikent. Where we had some fun exploring the empty campsite and finding the best place to stay. The tree houses were in the terrible state, so we rather built a tent and cooked a Christmas dinner together with local dogs so at least we gave them a dinner too, so they were happy. No trees, no presents.

DAY 15: 25.12.2021

SAKLIKENT CANYON – BABADAG – ÖLÜDENİZ - PAMUKKALE

Despite we were almost at the seaside the weather at night was rainy. In the morning the dogs have doubled their amount probably the rumors about the generous white people has spread around the empty touristic village full of lone dogs. We ate a breakfast and wasted all the leftover into the dogs. They are not only eating everything, but also the brown one is also drinking a Peruvian rum.

As we agreed with the parking lot keeper and the canyon entrance gate keeper yesterday that he let us go in we came to the gate and he was there. 10 TL per person and 15 TL parking in total 45 TL was finally the Turkish price. He gave us a yellow helmet and asked us to walk only 200 meters in the board walk and back. The first 200 meters were on the bottom of the Saklikent canyon formed by two vertical walls falling down into the grey river.



Saklikent canyon

In the end of the boardwalk was the chance to continue over the river deeper into the canyon. The river flowing out of the rock was surprisingly warm. The air could have maybe 7 °C or 8 °C, but I measured as much as 13 °C of the water so it was a great opportunity to enjoy and play naked in the water. I crossed also the main stream to look further into the canyon, but the main stream was much colder than the side stream so considering you have to walk some kilometers always crossing the river was not a nice image, so I rather gave up and returned to playing in the water naked.

The pack of the fellow dogs were still waiting in front of the gate when we returned with some other hungry friends. Sorry guys we are not a salvation army. Let's try another off-

road to the well-known mountain Babadag. Initially it went good as always soon from the brick laid road become a dirt road an after another few kilometers even a sharp rock road. At one moment we reached the dead end at some camping place. We had to turn back and search for an alternative route.

The alternative was quite narrow and climbing up leading us to the summit of Babadag. At the moment I first saw the snow was about 1000 meters of the altitude. That time I was thinking that we might not be able to reach the summit. The height of the snow was rising with every meter of altitude, but we were ascending pretty confidently as there were also a trace of other cars trying to climb the mountain before us.

At an altitude of approximately 1500 meters the wheels were spinning almost constantly when at about 1600 meters in the right return bend we got stuck. Differential locks were not working, and we had to get out of the snow and turn over. Again, next defeat by the Turkish mountain. It's already a third or fourth place we couldn't reach due to the snow conditions, but this time I could see some cars did that before us. I start to doubt about the off-road capabilities of the famous Toyota Landcruiser.

We had to descent with an alternative road down to the seaside to the town Ölüdeniz where is the most famous beach in the entire Turkey. The long beach with mountains around and the lagoon is a perfect spot for tourists who like to spend life on the beach. We had one in the car so the mandatory stop at the beach was clear. Despite the town was completely empty they asked 50 TL for the parking. That's even more than anywhere else in the normal world. Let's swim quickly and run away from this tourist shit spot and leave it for the summer vacation guys.

The drive from the Mediterranean Sea to the tourist hot spot Pamukkale was tiring as the road was winding over the mountains and the progress was slow due to the state of the road. A stop for a Kokorec and Kofte was in the small rural town Cameli and it was maybe the worst experience so far with the Turkish cuisine. The guys were incredibly slow we made an order, but they started to procure with the vegetables right after, so actually they've sold something what they didn't yet have. In the end it wasn't that bad.

We reached the Pamukkale at about 8 P.M. After I explained to the local Turk, that drinking is a Haram after he offered me German wine and after I explained him I'm from Nusaybin he let me go. I had a wonderful idea to enter the wonder at night and see if we can swim. We started in a lower park where there was no admittance fee and were sneaking closer to the white wall flooded with artificial light. Probably for guards to see who is entering there.

Down at the park there was just one box with the guard and very cranky fence which didn't appear as a barrier for anyone. The guy in the box was not paying any attention at all so after we entered the into the darker area it was the right moment to start climbing up the white chalk cliff. The material from which is the Pamukkale cliff made is very adhesive and there is very little chance of being slippery even when it's wet, so the ascent was very quick.

At the place where the light was becoming a risk for the further ascent. We had to take a bit more dangerous path on the dark side, but with much steeper and higher cliff. We reached probably unseen the top of the cliff where we made a surprising discovery. The water coming out of the earth is warm. Not hot, not cold, but pleasantly warm. We couldn't see much at the dark, but some of the ponds were filled with the water with the haze coming out of it, so let's try.

At the moment I was almost about to take my pants down I felt a sharp light in my eyes. The party is over, we were grasped by the guard. It was a lady who put proverbially our face down in the dust shouting on us: "Closed, ticket, closed!" There was another guy coming later on after the radio call she did. She was a hero btw, but they really didn't know what to do with us. We were there walking up in a forbidden off route track.

She ordered us to take down the shoes and walk at the edge of the cliff. She said: "Go down this way, it's dangerous and slippery and go to the next guard on the other side of the cliff." It was actually the great punishment to let us walk down barefoot. The surface was already very cold and some of the areas were really sharp. She was so generous that she gave us a dog on the way down. It was nice to have so many guides for us and for free.

At the lower gate we were picked by another guard, he was also bare foot and walked us down to the path where we could put the shoes on. Another woman at the gate was asking how did we enter? After we explained her the big adventure she started to laugh, that the problem of the guarding was not on her side. We wished her a good night and she released us without any more problems.

The night we spent at the hilltop just over the road where we had a great view of the Pamukkale cliff.



DAY 16: 26.12.2021

PAMUKKALE – EFES – IZMIR – CUNDA ADASI

6:44 was the wakeup alarm. I was already too anxious to see the Pamukkale with light and without a threat of being caught by the guards. This time we rather went to the parking spot at the South Byzantine gate where we paid about 20 TL per car so we could proceed to the gate. The entrance fee was 110 TL per person, but still the entry ticket was combined with Hierapolis, so it was a fair price I'd say.

Pamukkale is maybe the first or second biggest wonder of Turkey and is definitely on every map of each traveler who goes to Turkey. It was visited by people already a few thousands of years before us. The reason of its popularity is a simple thing a mineralized warm water flowing out of the earth here. The sedimentation and buildup of the minerals over a many hundreds of years have created wonderful huge pile of a white chalk. Small, medium, and big white unearthly looking ponds as known as travertines and giving this place its genuine.



Pamukkale

The first stop was again at the place we were caught yesterday at the place where the warm water was leaking out of the earth. There was a small space where the bathing was allowed so of course we jumped in. The water had 32 °C so despite outside was below 10 °C it was bearable to stay inside for a long time and travel inside the travertines. At the moment the people started to come to see the attraction it was time to go out and get naked in front of them.

It's amazing how they are directing the flow of the mineralized water to the places where they need it. This practice is not new. I could see here very long channels and old channels already brown and dark completely outside of the park. It seems, that they were trying to build a fortification walls out of this material. Now they are directing the flow to the places where they need a new buildup, to fix some broken ones or just where they want to have tourists. Now probably for the summer season they have made a lot of big pools under the decorative ones for the loads of tourists who want to bath in. Currently the best-looking ones are fortunately not for bathing.



Pamukkale

Just in the end where no tourists are coming I've found a very good-looking travertines with a hot water and at the moment where the first ones were already full of people those were completely empty and perfect for photography. The sun was playing a nice game of light, so it was a great moment to enjoy the places from the best angles. Even for me it's one of the best natural wonders here in Turkey and at least now in the winter the number of tourists wasn't that terrible.

The Romans were not stupid, and they knew that this place is a marvel therefore they've built a huge roman town Hierapolis just above the Pamukkale. Currently it's very well-preserved town and part of the UNESCO world heritage. It was very well decorated, and the museum showed us many beautiful statues all around 2nd century A.D. The big attraction of the town was for sure the Cleopatra antique pools where is the stream of the warm water. Even now the people can dip into a warm water. It was looking now very antique because there were pieces of the pilons inside of it.



Pamukkale

Undisputedly the main attraction of the entire Hierapolis was the Roman theatre. The huge half circular stairs full of sitting places looking down to the main show. Again, the decoration was amazing and considering it's over 1800 years old I have to say good job Turkish. I have to take back my words, that they do not care about the cultural leftovers from other civilization or at least about some not. On the way back to the car I met a guard who wanted to speak English, so we had a good chat about his life.



Hierapolis theatre

The next stop was the one of the seven wonders the Temple of Artemis in Efes. Despite it had to be one of the seven wonders of the world in was terrible. For sure it was faked. The only tower standing was placed on the metal concrete platform, so the tower was built again. I haven't good feeling from this place. It was also for free means they do not care anymore about the wonder of the world.

We have still driven about a hundred kilometers north thru the Izmir city as far to the island called Cunda Adasi. It was a small off-road up to the hill where we slept next to dozens of beehives. Let's hope they sleep too.



The Temple of Artemis

DAY 17: 27.12.2021

CUNDA ADASI – DARDANELY – GELIBOLU - EDİRNE

Bees were kind to us and haven't done any offensive action during the night so we slept nicely and long. It was not cold in the morning, but the strong wind gusts persist so no swimming in the sea. Going back to the highway and continue again north to the Dardanelles strait where we plan to cross the sea from Asia back to the Europe.

We took a ferry from Canakkale to Eceabat the crossing was 75 TL for the car and three people, and the cruise took a little bit over half of the hour. On the other side in the Europe we could feel much relaxed approach to the alcohol sales. Also, we could see a rise of prices of everything. As it was very hard to spend 200 TL for a big dinner now we could spend 300 TL just for a kind of a small lunch. I can say I miss Kurdistan.

The peninsula Gallipoli was the place of the big battle during the first world war between British, French, Indian vs. Turkish and Germans. We had to visit the monument of this almost a year lasting battle in 1915. We were in Turkey and despite both sides has almost the same amount of deaths and wounded they've presented the battle the way Turkish won. Yes, the British had to retreat after the battle came to the long-lasting position warfare in a trench, but it was more like 50:50 I would say.



Gallipoli cemetery

After the visit of the Turkish well-maintained cemetery boasting with a great description we had to also visit a bit more modest cemetery of the British guys. On the way back to Eceabat we could see also a former hospital with a figure made of wax. This museum was picturing the battle more like a bloody and loads of wounded guys than a victory.

The European side of the Turkey is pretty boring so the only thing what we could do was to waste the left money in the city Gelibolu. So, street Kokorec for a goodbye, Adana, Kusbasi in very delicious restaurant and of course 1,5 kilos of Baklava for the journey back home. The last stop was at the supermarket for presents. Turkish coffee, tea, sweets, shits and so on... Let's go.

We drove to the westernmost Turkish town Edirne, which lies exactly at the borders. We were searching for a place to sleep, but the first spot was not possible, the second we took successfully. It was the last night in Turkey so I can almost say goodbye Turkey!

DAY 18: 28.12.2021**EDIRNE – SOFIA – BELGRADE – BUDAPEST – BRATISLAVA – PRAGUE - ROKYTA**

We didn't hurry with waking up and we started our last day of the expedition quite late around 9:00 A.M of the Turkish time. And pack all the stuff and drove to the last petrol station to buy the diesel for the good price and 20 liters of the AdBlue to get the return for all the spending at least in the AdBlue.

The boarder guys were easy going at least on the Turkish side. The only silly thing they did to us on the Bulgarian side was that they sprayed some stinky liquid on our car. They call it disinfection. Ok, enjoy even if it can dissolve all the sealings of the car window, but the zenith of the immodesty of the Bulgarians was to ask 3€ for this unwanted service. I was trying on the lady to wipe it off, that we do not want it, but she was just shaking her goofy head and craned forward her hand for the money. They had also checked our car and tent pretty well maybe we could have some drugs. Maybe, but they haven't found any.

Bulgaria was boring as hell the only contact with a Bulgarian gypsy only confirmed the theory, that Bulgarians are strange. He approached us at the petrol station asking if we can't help him. He needs to drive to Romania and if we wouldn't give him 10 liters of Diesel. I don't know these situations are happening so often, that I do not trust anymore to these stories anymore. So, we gave him 5€. He even didn't thank for it, so it's clear it's a game and he wasn't in the emergency and he does it daily.

Next country Serbia. Nothing again just a highway. One highlight of the Serbia of course the well-known town Vršin. The place we know from the last time when we traveled towards the Turkey. The town or village more like settlement has one precious place. The small fast-food corner, where they make very good Cevapi.

Back to the EU to the Hungary, cross the rainy Hungary and enter the Slovakia. That time we had already 1400 kilometers which is my record driven in one day. Czechia or exactly Moravia has welcomed us with a heavy snowfall and in the Brno we drove already 50 km/h on the highway. Thank You. After Jihlava the road was better and despite we didn't expect to push the car in one day from Turkey to the Czech Republic we did that and after 1696 kilometers we reached the Rokyta with the total kilometer count 10.005.

TURKEY IN THE SHORTCUT

In this moment I can say we know something about the very interesting country Turkey, and we have some basic outline of its natural, political, and cultural specifics. Definitely I cannot say I know a lot. To get a deeper knowledge we would need to spend here months maybe years really to get the deeper understanding. In this moment I can say it's very dynamic, quickly developing, friendly and safe country with huge social differences amongst its inhabitants.

There are also things I do not like for sure, but it's maybe because I was just raised in the European culture. One of them is for sure the littering topic. Despite I was enjoying it for the first few days, I couldn't keep on doing that. It's simply idiotic to waste your trash in the nature. Second thing what I do not understand is the behavior towards the old wonders. They let it stay like it is, no protection no restoration nothing. You can step on it or even take it home and nobody will say a word. Even the famous Hagia Sofia where the red facade is falling down. It's pure disrespect to those old structures and at the moment of realization it will be already too late.

It's a cheap country! Despite the big inflation and Turkish people complaining about the prices for us it's still very cheap country. A liter of diesel is around 10 TL which is 16-17 CZK per. That's still a half of the current price in Czechia. The food prices are also very friendly. For a big lunch for two people it's hardly ever over 150 TL. Also, can be for 35 TL if you like to eat in a plastic shelter. What I like is that Turkish are fair. They do not try to swindle you or overexaggerate the prices for the further negotiations. They put the same prices for tourists same as for the locals and not like in China or India and the entrance fees for the monuments are very friendly. There are some beggars, but it's same as everywhere. To sleep in the car, drive a few kilometers a day and eating in the cheap restaurants, then the trip becomes cheaper per day than living a daily life in the Europe.

There are huge differences between people in their living standards. The difference between poor and rich are definitely much wider than in the Europe. Some people living on the south of the Turkey on the country sides are literally living in the animal shelters. On the other hand, some people in big cities are living in the skyscrapers and driving very expensive German cars. Those big differences are visible also amongst cities. One city is boasting with a futuristic sky-high skyscrapers and flashy streets full shopping malls and the other ones are contrasting with a lifestyle like a hundred years ago with dogs and cats next to the road eating the garbage.

Development is on a rise and Turkey is rushing to be very modern. Building of the endless thousands of kilometers of highways which are currently empty as well as building a lot of new houses and block of flats, universities, and hospitals. I can say they get inspiration from the Chinese urban architecture, because the majority of new houses are really megalomaniac

structures. Only the mosques are not inspired by Chinese, but those are in every town, village and sometimes I have a feeling that every house has its own mosque.

Driving in Turkey is also a special experience, but not so far from the European style. Turkey has a perfect infrastructure of wide highways and luxury roads. Some are empty and you have them only for yourself. Turkish are not a pirate of the roads, but some specifics must be respected. Get used to and learn to drive on the red sign. It's not an issue in the empty roads. Maximum speed is 90 km/h, so prepare for oversteering. Sometimes there are simply no road signs and you have to adapt for the rule the bigger and quicker has the right of the way. Sometimes they horn or flash the lights, but that's only a safety measure to let you know – I'm here and you be careful, because I'm not!

Zebra. Normally you have to stop and let the people to cross, but not here. Zebra is just because they've seen it in television, but didn't understand the meaning. People are waiting at zebras, but not the cars. On return the people are not jumping under the wheel and are very cautious to give up living for a Zebra. Some people are driving also on the opposite ways, but there is no surprise. Erdogan's understanding of the highway crossroads is strange. Some of them are very, very, very complicated and tangled. Also, to save a money for the bridges and crossroads there are often roundabouts on the highways, but not those with the right of the way! The ones on the roundabout have to wait!

The last specific of the driving in Turkey is police and army checkpoints. Let's take it from the funniest to the most frightening ones. There are loads of plastic pictures of police cars aside the road with an artificial policeman flashing the light to scare you. Then there are real police checkpoints, but not so dangerous for the foreigners. The scariest are the soldiers with machine guns checking the cars with their almost tank beside the road. They are with helmets and hiding inside the fortified posts. Those guys are mostly next to the Armenian, Iraq, and Syrian border. Again, very friendly to the tourists, but don't give a ride to any of refugees you could get a bullet!

Food is a god's gift in Turkey. Really delicious! Every food! Sis Kebap – grilled meat definitely the top of the choice: Adana – the sheep/goat meat, Kusbasi – the beef, then there are chicken, livers, and other things. For the vegetarians there are Kofti – something without meat like the couscous with other stuff, but very well spiced that it tastes. For the poorer ones Kokorec. Cut meat inside the bread with some veggie inside. Also, a lot of soups and other sauces. Balik, that's a Turkish expression for the fish.

During the dinner forget the beer and alcohol. There are some places where it's possible, but most of the Turkish don't drink. At least not on the public. The main drink is of course Ayran. A dairy product a bit denser than the milk, but less than kefir and a bit salt. Very

good combination with the green spicy paprikas. Also, a big part of the cuisine is a lot of vegetables.

After a good dinner get ready for some delicious stuff. Baklava and other sweets. Turkish like sweet stuff. Baklava for sure the most popular. The baked stuff with a lot of sugar and maybe also a honey filled by nuts and other great tastes. If You take one or two get ready you will get one or two kilos more. Tea so called chai you have to take after every food it's like the national sport. If You can find pubs to drink beers here, they are having Cai shops, where the men are sitting eating sweets smoking and drinking tea. Last is the Turkish coffee named Kahve. Grinded coffee boiled in the water than drink still with the coffee inside the water. Very kicking stuff.

Weather. I can't say much right now as we know the Turkey on in the wintertime. They say it's hot, but I don't think so. I think we've chosen probably the worst period of the year to visit the county. Minimum what we experienced during the December in the Turkey was -23 °C. The conclusion from my side is that I can't really advice to travel to the Turkey in December unless You are a psycho

Fauna? I haven't seen any large wild mammal. There are foxes. Foxes are really a lot crossing highways in a big group but are shy. I saw also rabbits, but that all. Domestic animals are a different story. Goats, Sheep, horses, geese, chicken, simply walking kebab. Dogs are a chapter for its own. There are two main breeds of dogs you can find across the Turkey many of them living on the street. Often friendly, happy when they get some food, but shy. The city dogs are having a special earring to be registered and a sign they are safe. Cats are poor. Not really over numbering dogs but living in symbiosis. People are kicking cats, so cats are very shy.

Overall, I think the country despite its current hyperinflation is getting very modern and will soon enter the interesting era. I do not understand now why the Turkish people are fleeing to the Germany, because sooner or later I think the time will come when they will start to miss their country and will start returning to their homeland. Who knows, maybe one day the Turkey will become even stronger than Germany and will take the lead.

For more information regarding the trip, more map data, GPX files and more pictures or to download the book in pdf or to read it online please visit expedition club website:

www.onewayticket.team/turkey-winter-expedition

STATISTICS AND COSTS OF THE EXPEDITION

DRIVING DISTANCES:

date	km driven	air distance	min altitude	max altitude	driven total	km remaining	average day	itinerary
11.12.2021	766		150	578	766	9239	766	Rokyta - Brno - Bratislava - Gyor - Budapest - Szeget - Novisad
12.12.2021	1002		150	841	1768	8237	884	Novi Sad - Belgrade - Niš - Sofia - Turkey
13.12.2021	464		0	1696	2232	7773	744	Istanbul - Koceli - 7 lakes NP
14.12.2021	477	275	0	1308	2709	9528	677	7 lakes NP - Bartin - Amasra - Kastamonu - mountain
15.12.2021	559	412	0	1308	3268	6737	654	Mountain pass - Sinop - Samsun - Trabzon - Sumela monastery
16.12.2021	356	173	1288	2499	3624	6381	604	Sumela Monastery - Bayburt - Erzurum - Yukairisivri Yaylasi
17.12.2021	379	163	1109	2389	4003	6002	572	Yukairisivri Yaylasi - Narman Fairy chimneys - Cidir lake - Kars - Ani
18.12.2021	430	241	850	2574	4433	5572	554	Ani ruins - Igdir - Dogubayazit - Ishak Pasha Palace - Van Lake
19.12.2021	450	204	519	2016	4883	5122	543	Van Lake - Botan valley NP - Hasankyef - Nusabin
20.12.2021	543	308	412	1678	5426	4579	543	Nusaibin - Dara ruins - Mardin - Mount Nemrut - Rumkale
21.12.2021	467	302	408	1890	5893	4112	536	Rumkale - Yavuzeli Kebap - Goreme National Park
22.12.2021	0	0	0	0	5893	4112	491	Goreme National Park
23.12.2021	853	336	449	1825	6746	3259	519	Goreme National Park - Ankara - Konya - Altinbesik cave
24.12.2021	345	208	0	1560	7091	2914	507	Altinbesik cave - Aspendos - Antalya - Saklient canyon
25.12.2021	284	162	0	1661	7375	2630	492	Saklient canyon - Ölüdeniz - Pamukkale
26.12.2021	439	269	0	371	7814	2191	488	Pamukkale - Efes - Izmir - Cunda Adasi
27.12.2021	495	261	0	440	8309	1696	489	Cunda Adasi - Gallipoli - Edirne
28.12.2021	1696	1289	43	841	10005	0	556	Edirne - Sofia - Belgrade - Budapest - Bratislava - Rokyta
TOTAL			0	2574	10005		556	

FUEL COSTS

date	place	litres	price	price/L	ccy	price CZK	odo	km	cons. L.
11.12.2021	Mnichovo Hradiště (CZE)	75	2700	36,00	kč	2700	65929	716	10,5
11.12.2021	Kiskunfélegyháza (HU)	76	35000	460,53	ft	2415	66579	650	11,7
12.11.2021	Slivnitsa (BG)	78,2	198,7	2,54	bgn	2570,5	67286	707	10,8
13.11.2021	Kocaeli (TUR)	76,4	790	10,34	TL	1271,9	67993	684	10,8
14.11.2021	Boyabat (TUR)	74	725	9,80	TL	1167,3	68677	588	10,6
15.11.2021	Macka (TUR)	62,4	656,5	10,52	TL	1056,9	69265	560	13
17.12.2021	Ardahan (TUR)	72,8	767,3	10,54	TL	1235,4	69825	729	9,44
19.12.2021	Tatvan (TUR)	68,8	780	11,34	TL	1255,8	70554	729	10,1
20.12.2021	Kahta (TUR)	73,5	826,8	11,25	TL	1331,1	71283	665	11,5
23.12.2021	Nevsehir (TUR)	76,2	845,1	11,09	TL	1360,5	71948	660	10,7
23.12.2021	Erenkaya (TUR)	70,3	820	11,66	TL	1320,2	72608	656	11,7
25.12.2021	Cameli (TUR)	77	856,2	11,11	TL	1378,4	73264	752	9,9
27.12.2021	Eceabat (TUR)	74,6	866	11,61	TL	1394,3	74016	315	10,2
28.12.2021	Drinopol (TUR)	32	600	18,75	TL	966,0	74331	638	12,1
28.12.2021	Niš (SRB)	77,3	13409	173,40	RSD	2950,0	74969	556	13,4
28.12.2021	Gyor (HU)	74,4	35719	480,09	ft	2464,6	75525	405	11
TOTAL		1139				26838		10010	11,08

TOLL COSTS

date	place	item	price	currency	price in CZK
11.12.2021	Border CZ-SK	vignette SK 1 month	10	EUR	253,5
11.12.2021	Border SK-HU	vignette HU 1 month	15	EUR	380,3
12.12.2021	Border HU-Sirig (SER)	highway toll	330	RSD	72,6
12.12.2021	Belgard	highway toll	310	RSD	68,2
12.12.2021	Belgrad - Dimitrovgard	highway toll	1310	RSD	288,2
12.12.2021	Border SER-BG	vignette BG 1 month	18	EUR	456,3
13.12.2021	Border BG-TUR	HGS	15	EUR	380,25
23.12.2021	Ankara (TUR)	HGS	33	TL	53,1
26.12.2021	Izmir (TUR)	HGS	33	TL	53,1
27.12.2021	Canakkale - Eceabat	ferry	75	TL	120,8
28.12.2021	Border BG - Belgrade	highway toll	1310	RSD	288,2
28.12.2021	Belgrade - Border HU	highway toll	640	RSD	140,8
TOTAL					2555,3

EXPEDITION MAP

