DON'T BE A CHICKEN. GO TO TURKEY

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Category: Opinions

By Jirair Tutunjian, 23 April 2021

Now retired, Jan Morris was from the Sixties to the Nineties the premiere travel writer in Britain, if not the world. The author of more than 20 travel books, Morris wrote a series of articles for *Rolling Stones* magazine in the late Seventies. One of the articles (in1978) was titled *City of Yok*. It was about Istanbul. This is how she started the article:

"The favorite epithet of Istanbul seems to be *yok*. I don't speak Turkish, but *yok* appears to be sort of general-purpose discouragement, to imply that (for instance) it can't be done, she isn't home, the shop's shut, the train's left, take it or leave it, you can't come this way or there's no good making a fuss about it, that's the way it is. *Yok* (at least in my interpretation) is like *nyet* in Moscow."

Morris described the Istanbulis as drably dressed in "browns, grays and in grubby blacks." The markets were not picturesque. There were armies of stray dogs and mangy cats everywhere. She talked about how Turks mask the sinister and ruthless side of their nature. She also mentioned that bear-baiting is still popular in Turkey.

The following year, *Canadian Motorist* travel magazine published an article titled "Don't be a chicken, go to Turkey" by travel writer Steve Howe. Informed by the *Midnight Express* movie, Howe criticized Turkish prisons and pointed out how Turkish narcotics agents plant drugs on innocent tourists. With his tongue firmly in his cheek, Howe wrote: "Turkey is best known for its military expertise. Alone and unaided while the world was busy with the First World War, the fearless Turks marched on hapless Armenians and in the face of almost insurmountable odds, managed to massacre a million men, women and children."

The above articles reflected traditional Western perceptions. A booklet can be published containing Western sayings and impressions of Turks, Turkey, and the Ottoman Empire—almost all negative. Until recently, European mothers "disciplined" their children by threatening them that if they didn't behave, the big, bad Turk would take them. Everyone from Shakespeare's contemporary playwright Christopher Marlowe to Edmund Burke to Lord Byron and Mark Twain has carved a niche on the barbarian Ottoman Empire. Twain wrote (1869) in *Innocents Abroad*: "I wish Europe would let Russia annihilate Turkey a little—not much, but enough to make it difficult to find the place again, without a divining rod or a diving bell."

Forty years later (1907), Gertrude Bell described Turkey as "monotonous, colorless, lifeless…" Two centuries earlier (1717), Lady Mary W. Montague, the wife of the English ambassador to the Ottomans, wrote to Alexander Pope: "But what can you expect from such a country as this which muses have fled from, from which letters seem eternally banished…"

Turkish bureaucrats must have finally received the message that they and their country were not liked in the West. But since Turkey was in desperate need of financial infusion, the sly bureaucrats of dingy and dull Ankara decided Turkey could grab a slice of the booming international tourism

markets. Thus, Turkey launched its charm offensive to make Turkey a hot tourist destination. Henceforth, Turks would mask their scowls with smiles as genuine as that of flight attendants. Turks would beam. Turks would be friendly. Turks would be hospitable. Turks would hug the *gavoor* tourist to grab the tourist mark, franc, lira, pound. Whatever. Butter wouldn't melt in Turkish mouths when they met the European tourist.

Turkish Airlines, largely-owned by the state, provided a million complimentary seats to travel writers while hotels and motels furnished free accommodation to the journalist and tourist sites offered free admission to junketing writers. Stranger to common courtesy and polite, professional distancing, the Turkish waiter would repel the tourist through uninvited and overly-familiar ways: "Madam, did you ask for a glass of cold water? Here are two glasses of cold water… and here's a picture of my family…Oh, you are not married? I am so sorry."

The forced smile campaign went national. If you didn't smile to the infidel tourists, you were not doing your national duty as a Turk. Ataturk would not forgive you. Erdogan's agents would make note of your behavior.

The "charm offensive" worked. By 2015, Turkey was among the 10 most popular tourist destinations in the world. In 2019 some 45 million (other sources say 51 million) tourists visited Turkey bringing in $34.5 billion in revenues (12% of the economy).

What were Turkey's "attractions" other than the inane, stunted, insincere smiles? According to the Turkish tourism promotion page on the internet, the following are the top tourist draws:

Pamukkele spas. Nothing Turkish about them.They have been operating since Roman times;

Hagia Sophia, a Byzantine cathedral which shameless Erdogan converted to a mosque;

Dolmabahche Palace which was built by the Armenian Balian architects;

Mount Nimrud ruins. The city was built by the a dynasty related to the Armenian royal family;

Ephesus, an ancient Greek city;

Sumela Monastery in Trebizond. Greek;

Cappadocia hermit caves: natural formations;

Topkapi Palace where the Sultans kept thousands of concubines, practised fratricide, and tossed the bodies of unruly concubines into the Bosporus;

Mosques which are copies of Arab and Iranian mosques;

The Grand Bazaar—a giant emporium of million polished junk;

The Galata Tower—Byzantine;

Istanbul's three bridges: all built by foreigners;

Mediterranean resorts which rely on the blue water to attract tourists.



Cappadocia Hermit Caves

But eventually the Turks couldn't maintain their smiles. Their facial muscles hurt from the forced smiles. They had also become spoiled by the flow of billions of *gavoor money* into Turkey. To make things worse, China exported COVID-19 to Erdoganland without asking for Mr. Irate's permission. Tourism took a precipitous dive. From 50 million tourists (2020), the number sank to 12 million (a 72% decrease) and the Grand Bazaar shopkeepers began "killing flies", as Armenians say, instead of peddling made-in-China souvenirs. Tourism honcho Firuz Bagilikaya would be ecstatic if in 2021 tourist numbers rise to 25 million. But the chances are slim that Bagilikaya and his friends would reach anywhere close to that target when, on the average, 200 Turks are dying every day from the exotic virus.

Adding to the calamity is Erdogan's violent bragadacchio, his anti-feminism, his hostility to anyone

who is not a Turk or Turkic, his sponsorship of Jihadi terrorists, his threat to release "Syrian" refugees to Europe, his alliance with Russia, his threats to attack Greece, his insults of practically every European leader…and the most recent icing on the cake…President Joe Biden's recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

Turks had been ordered to wear a friendly mask to appeal to European tourists. No sooner they had ripped that onerous mask, they were ordered to wear COVID-19 masks. With 13,700 Turks contracting the virus typically on a single day, they have no choice but to obey. But it's not that bad: on the plus side is the fact that now—behind their masks--they can scowl to their heart's natural content and mutter curses against the Armenians, Assyrians, Syrians, Greeks, Kurds, Egyptians, Yezidis, Alevis, Israelis, Iraqis, Saudis, Yemenis…and Americans.

Teaser image*:* ***Library*** **of** ***Celsus,*** **an ancient Roman building in** ***Ephesus***

There are no comments yet.