

## **GEMINI DUO TRIP TO TURKEY, 2008**

### **Part 6 – The Black Sea – Constanta to Istanbul**

#### **7 - 14 August 2008**

After more than two months on European inland waterways, we popped out of the busy Port of Constanta into the Black Sea and met the new experience of “waves and swell”!

We had originally planned to stay at the marina of Port Tomis, north of Constanta, but while searching on the internet we found a new marina at Eforie Nord which had all the facilities including fuel and is in the right direction for Istanbul. Ana Marina is only 8nms south and en-route a pod of dolphins welcomed us into the bay. The chart reference given on the internet was incorrect but we knew the marina belonged to the Europa Hotel. It wasn't too difficult to spot as the hotel is a huge 20 storey block overlooking the beach which, being August, was packed with holidaymakers.

By 2pm we were berthed up stern-to and for the first time used our electric gangplank to reach the quay. While we were washing the boat two Romanian Frontier Police arrived to inspect our passports and papers. The officers were charming and the formalities were completed in 10 minutes. Before leaving they made an appointment for colleagues to visit the boat an hour before our departure for the exit formalities – again a quick and easy procedure.

We had decided on a three night stop as we needed a bit of R & R and had to do passage planning, boat stocking and sitting in the sun not doing a lot. The marina has its own convenient little beach and the crystal clear and current-free sea was a joy after hanging onto a line for dear life of the back of the boat in the river Danube!

While Ana Marina is very smart with many expensive boats, and even a landing pad where we watched some rich Romanian boat owners arrive by helicopter, the town of Eforie Nord is something else. We went out to explore and were greeted by thousands of tourists in various states of undress many sporting tattoos and beer bellies. It was hard to find any food shops but there were hundreds of souvenir stalls selling blue china dolphins and stuffed toys. The beach discos seemed to thump out their music 24 hours a day but we were fortunately anaesthetised enough by the local wine to sleep through it all.

Constanta, the largest Romanian city on the Black Sea, was a taxi ride away and we felt we should take a look. However, the road traffic was terrible and the journey took longer than expected so we returned to the boat after visiting the Orthodox Cathedral and the waterfront for lunch. Like Bulgaria, it seems that the national dish of Romania is pizza!

The local weather over the past two weeks had been very changeable and we had experienced some big storms with high winds. We abandoned our plan to refuel the boat on the second day as the high winds would have made re-berthing difficult. The following morning the wind was lighter and we took on 700litres of diesel. Not bad considering we had travelled 1430km since we previously filled up in Budapest in Hungary. There was the added bonus of the price which worked out at around £1 per litre.

Our plan to depart the next day looked in jeopardy as the high winds returned during the afternoon and night, but we set our alarm for 6am to find a calm morning. Shortly after the Romanian immigration officers had visited, we set off for Varna in Bulgaria, a passage of 81nm (143km). The wind was moderate but the sea was still very choppy. The prevailing wind on this part of the Black Sea during the summer is from the north but it was blowing from the east on our port beam, causing us to roll. However by lunchtime the wind dropped away and we were able to enjoy the spectacle of several pods of dolphins around us. In the afternoon the wind started to blow from the south, reaching Force 5, and within 20 miles of Varna waves were breaking over the front and we shut all windows and the windscreen wipers were going continuously.

Shortly after entering Bulgarian waters when we were 2 ½ miles off shore, the VHF sprung to life asking us to identify ourselves! The border Police had spotted us from their lookout on the cliffs.. Before entering Varna port we radioed the Harbour Master who directed us to the Passenger Ship terminal where we tied up and were visited by Bulgarian Immigration Officers. By this time the wind was howling, it was pouring with rain and a storm was over us. It made for interesting stern to mooring in the very tight space available in the nearby marina. Although the space was for a much smaller boat, we really had to have it and were very relieved when we were safely berthed with the help of other boaters before the thunder and lightning hit.

The storm passed over and the next day dawned sunny and calm and we made our way to the chandlery for some local charts. They were very helpful and even arranged for one of their staff to drive us to the big supermarket in town where we stocked up with more excellent Bulgarian wine and food.

We made all our preparations to set off early the next morning having booked the Immigration Police for 7.15am. They were a bit late and were accompanied by a greasy little man with wrap-round sunglasses and slicked back hair who said he worked for the Port Authority. The Police finished quickly and departed but the grease-ball stayed behind to demand €93 for “administration services” and mooring charge. We had already paid the mooring charge the day before and were at a loss to know what the other charges were for. It turned out he was an agent who was trying it on. When we produced the business card of the man who owned the marina, the charges fell to zero and he said we could leave straightaway! We had read that Varna was a good place for conmen!

The next leg to Igneada in Turkey was again virtually due south and the winds were very light, the sea was calm and it was a very good but long day at sea, taking 9 hours to do 92nm (162km). We could go much faster but it would use too much fuel! At one stage we were 40 miles from the coast crossing Burgas Bay and we saw hardly any shipping all day.

We knew that Igneada is not an official Port of Entry into Turkey, but there was no alternative unless we drove on through the night. We entered this fishing harbour and were waved at by several uniformed Coast Guards to tie up to their quay behind their gun boat. We were a bit non-plussed when these young men who spoke no English signed to us that we couldn't stay the night. While we were wondering what to do a charming English-speaking officer arrived and told us that officially we couldn't stay. After looking at our passports he said that as long as we didn't step

onto Turkish soil, we could stay the night. We had a very secure berth next to the armed coast guards!

The next morning we left early on the final leg of the Black Sea to the entrance of the Bosphorus. After an hour the wind got up to Force 5, again with wind and waves on our port beam and we had an uncomfortable 70nm (123km) journey. We had seen no ships en route so were surprised when 10nms from the Bosphorus the Black Sea turned into a giant shipping parking lot! There must have been over 100 vast ships at anchor waiting to take their turn to travel south down the Bosphorus. Entry to the Bosphorus is managed by the Turkeli Control tower on VHF Channel 11 who had many irate conversations in fractured English with ship's captains from all over the world who were trying to jump the queue or enter from the wrong direction or too fast. We were amused by the English in a wide variety of foreign accents. How they understood one another is a mystery.

Our boat, being tiny and insignificant, was completely ignored by the controller and we crept round the parked vessels and the rocky corner and went into the harbour of Turkeli Feneri. It was packed with fishing boats, none of which Diane fancied mooring to, but Roger had noticed an old scruffy private 50ft motor boat to which we tied up for the night. It wasn't the most scenic place to stop in front of the abandoned Shellfish plant, and the harbour was noisy and oily, but in the event we had a very quiet undisturbed night.

The next morning, sunny and calm, we just had the final 20nm (32km) to do southwards down the Bosphorus. As soon as we set off we realised that all the big ships were coming up towards us, and we assume they operate a one-way system as nothing big was going in the same direction as us. At its narrowest point the channel is only ½ mile wide but up to 85m deep with vast ships appearing around some pretty tight bends. It was a real pleasure to pass under the two huge suspension bridges which span the Bosphorus and to see the many famous sights of Topkapi, Aya Sophia and the Blue Mosque from our own boat. Istanbul certainly ranks alongside Paris and London for dramatic views from the water. The two main hazards to watch out for are the numerous high powered catamaran ferries whizzing past creating big wash and the width restriction at the southern end of the Bosphorus where vast floating cranes are moored. A tunnel is being built for the Metro line.

This final leg only took 2 ½ hours and by 11am we were berthed at Atakoy Marina on the European side of Istanbul 6 miles west of the entrance to the Bosphorus. The marina, which is very large and accommodates boats up to 40m, has all facilities. You are met by staff in an inflatable and led to a berth where they tie you up. Excellent welcome and service, but then this is an expensive place as we found when we paid for our year-long berth.

We cracked open a bottle of champagne for lunch and went out in the evening for dinner to celebrate the successful completion of our long voyage from Holland to Turkey. We toasted *Gemini Duo* who had done amazingly well for her maiden voyage. She is a very comfortable live-aboard being spacious and well-equipped. The engine had not missed a beat, had used just a cup-full of oil and had been very frugal on fuel. The navigation system had proved invaluable and everything on the boat had worked with the exception of the air conditioning. This we hope to get sorted before next year as Turkey is very hot in the summer.

After 10 weeks, travelling more than 3500 km through ten countries, we have reached the end of our journey in Istanbul. *Gemini Duo* will be left at Atakoy Marina for the winter and we will continue our cruise round the Sea of Marmara and out into the Aegean next year.

## **SOME FACTS AND FIGURES**

### ***Gemini Duo***

Built by Neptune Marine in Aalst in Holland. Launched in November 2007.

Dimensions: 13.8m long, 4.25m wide, draught 1.2m, air draft 3.5m. Weight 16 tons gross.

Capacities: Fuel tank 1500 litres, fresh water tank 800 litres, black water tank 150 litres.

Fuel used on voyage – over 3300 litres of diesel, a quarter of which was used in the first 470 km going against the strong current on the Rhine!

### **Cozens' Voyage**

Departed UK on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2008 (by car). Left Aalst in *Gemini Duo* on 5<sup>th</sup> June. Arrived in Istanbul on 14<sup>th</sup> August.

Travelled 3673 km on rivers Maas, Rhine, Main, the Main-Danube Canal, the Danube River, the Danube-Black Sea Canal, the Black Sea, the Bosphorus and the Sea of Marmara, through Holland, Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria to Turkey. In the process went through 72 locks, the biggest being the Danube's Iron Gates at 310mx34m by 30m drop.

Highlights: travelling in our boat through some of the great cities of the world, as well as gorges, ravines, wide open spaces and seeing the stars at night. Meeting interesting people and receiving amazing kindness, hospitality and help from strangers.

Lowlights: Serbian border controls (although the Serbs are really nice people) and running aground on rocks in Regensburg.

We've said enough, so over and out!

Diane and Roger

