

GEMINI DUO TRIP THROUGH THE AEGEAN 2009 PART 1

Turkey – Istanbul to the Aegean

After our trip down the Danube in 2008, *Gemini Duo* spent the winter in Atakoy Marina in Istanbul. While **Istanbul** is a vibrant exciting city with much to see and do, and Atakoy is convenient for the airport, both Istanbul and the marina are very expensive. However security was good, the staff friendly and the man who cleaned our boat every fortnight did a great job ensuring she was not totally covered in seagull poo and city grime.

In April we came out to Istanbul for a week to get the engine serviced and the boat lifted out of the water to have her bottom pressure washed. We were amazed at the amount of weed growth on the hull and the enormous build up of barnacles on the propeller which had to be scraped off. Barnacles are a big problem in the Sea of Marmara because of the dirty water.

The start of our Aegean cruise was delayed by Roger's shoulder operation. However he made a speedier than expected recovery and we returned to Istanbul on 23rd May. After stocking the boat and saying farewell to Turkish boaters we had befriended in the marina, we started our voyage on 27th May. Weather was warm and sunny with a light wind.

The Sea of Marmara is surrounded on all sides by Turkey and most ports are industrial. The first night, we stopped 32 miles west along the north coast at the small fishing town of **Silivri** where locals painting their boats took our ropes and tied us up alongside the rough concrete quay. The town seems quite prosperous with several restaurants, shops and a new promenade. We ate a rather expensive meal in the nearby fish restaurant where no prices were shown on the menu! The port was peaceful apart from the noisy disco opposite, but we were not charged for the mooring.

45 miles south-west the next day brought us to **Port Marmara** on Marmara Island, famous for its marble quarries. We dropped our anchor mid harbour and backed up to the quay where the harbour master took our ropes. The whole mooring operation was executed rather well considering this was our first-ever stern-to mooring on anchor. The cost for the mooring including electricity was 25 YTLs (£10) which was a bargain as the town was a little gem. We bought fresh fruit and veg and tasty local cheese from the nearby market. The shops, although small, were well stocked and we acquired several bottles of good local wine at just 5YTLs (£2) a bottle, plus small round batteries for our passerelle remote control from a tiny shop selling curios and watches.

After a quiet night we lifted the anchor and set off west on what was going to be a 7 hour voyage through the rest of the Sea of Marmara and into the Dardanelles. An hour into our trip we were thrilled to be joined by a pod of dolphins that swam alongside leaping clear of the sea. More dolphins were sighted later. Fantastic!

This is a busy route for enormous cargo ships between the Aegean and the Black Sea. Like the English Channel, there are dedicated east-west shipping lanes which slower small craft need to cross with caution. It is surprising how fast those huge lumbering vessels bear down on small boats! On entering the 40 mile long Dardanelles – or Canakkale Straits – which is only a mile wide at its narrowest, we soon arrived in the town of Canakkale, gateway for visiting Troy and the Gallipoli peninsula.

Canakkale is quite a big tourist centre for Turks and for the large number of Antipodeans who come to visit their WW1 memorials. The town is not particularly attractive but is well provided with restaurants, shops and even a Carrefour supermarket. The small marina was fine but rather expensive at 75 YTL (£30) a night, even though they had the best tasting water we have found so far in Turkey. *Gemini Duo* looked rather superior amongst the smaller yachts in the marina, until day 2 when a huge 67ft brand new Princess power boat moored alongside us, blocking our light! The British owners let their Turkish crew do all the hard mooring work that Diane has to do on her own!

We had a guided tour of the Anzac and Turkish memorials and battle sites on the **Gallipoli** peninsula. The experience was very moving, and the Mel Gibson film *Gallipoli* authentically depicted the battle scenes. 200,000 soldiers died in the 9 month campaign, over half Turkish and the rest British, Australian, New Zealand and Indian troops. However, it is the 30,000 dead Antipodean soldiers Gallipoli is remembered for, especially on Anzac day.

After three nights, and having met several British yachties, we set off on 1st June, aided by a 4 knot current, down into the Aegean. A large buoy in the middle of our channel puzzled us as it was not shown on our chart. Drawing closer we realised it was moving – it turned out to be a Turkish submarine heading towards us! It looked rather sinister so we moved out of the way quickly.

The Aegean Sea is beautiful with clear blue water. On the tiny island of **Bozcaada**, only 3 hours cruise from Canakkale, the harbour water was so clean we could see the bottom 8 metres down. Hundreds of little fish clustered round the boat eating the weed the hull had collected in Istanbul. Bozcaada is one of only two inhabited Turkish islands in the Aegean, the rest being Greek. It is a charming place with a thriving wine industry, a large well preserved fortress protecting the harbour and narrow cobbled streets behind the town. During July and August Bozcaada is full of Turkish holidaymakers who come over from the mainland by ferry, but in early June it is wonderfully quiet.

An even bigger Princess power boat moored alongside us and the Turkish owner told us they had left Istanbul that morning. It had taken them just 7 hours to do a trip it took us 4 days to cover! A van arrived and off-loaded 25 cases of local wine onboard, and later a fuel lorry appeared to replenish their twin tanks after which the owner handed over a brick-size wad of cash from his shorts pocket.

Day 2 was spent exploring the fortress, shopping and doing general boat jobs, until late afternoon when a strong wind began to skew *Gemini Duo* sideways and slop up and down fairly violently. We had just fixed some extra long ropes to spread the strain when the harbour master appeared on his scooter and said “big wind” was coming tonight and we needed to move quickly to the protected inner harbour. He jumped on board and directed us alongside a large fishing boat where the fishermen were sorting their catch including the biggest lobster we’ve ever seen – 5kgs they told us!

We had a peaceful night, although rather smelly as Turkish fishing boats are very old wooden tubs impregnated with the odours of decades of their catches. The next day was stormy and no fishing boats ventured out until late afternoon when much juggling and moving about took place. We also had to move, so we again attempted to return to the

marina in the outer harbour but again we had to pull up the anchor and return to tie up against an even smellier fishing boat which was going out the next morning at 5am.

We rose at 4.30am when the Imam called to the faithful from the town mosque, and were greeted by an electric storm. Luckily it passed before we left Bozcaada in the dark shortly after 5am on our trip to the Greek islands. The sea was rather rough and we bounced around rather a lot for the first 4 hours. We arrived safely in Limnos at lunchtime and our next blog will cover our travels round the Greek islands.

In the meantime, if anyone knows of any little Greek island gems in the Aegean please advise us.

Anchors up!

Diane and Roger

