

Greece-Turkey-Iran-UAE-Oman Tour Trip report

29 November 2002 > 6 January 2003

At last we could start our big adventure!

After some very busy and stressful weeks we finally were ready to start our journey. In the weeks before we had to make our new car suitable to make this journey with. From our (former) hometown we first went to Belgium, and from here to France. Once in France we mainly drove on minor roads in the direction of the Alps, went through the Tunnel du Frejus to arrive in Italy on the 2. of December. Driving in Italy we decided to take the motorway to the south of Italy along the Adriatic coast in order to take the ferry from Bari to Igoumenitsa in Greece. In the early morning of 4. December we arrived in Igoumenitsa, Greece.

As we arrived in Greece we hoped for some finer weather, the main reason to drive a bit quicker to the southern parts of Europe! But once in Greece the weather was even worse as when we left the Netherlands.

From Igoumenitsa we went in northerly direction, because we visited Greece many times before we always can find nice places to stay for the night and also on this occasion we went to a place we were before. It was near an old and abandoned monastery called Zoodogos Pigi.

This area is also nice to make walks in, which we did the following morning. After all this driving we and our dog needed to stretch our legs a bit!

On the 5. of December we arrived in Kalambaka, a town in the heart of the Greek mainland. From here you can visit the spectacular Meteora monasteries, which are built on top of huge solitary rocks. We decided to stay here for the night, and from this place we had a beautiful view over the monasteries and the only sound of the clinging bells for the evening prayer! The following morning we visited the 2 monasteries we did not visit on earlier travels in Greece. After this visit we went for a search for an internet café, because this is the way we keep in contact with our family and friends. Because we never did do this before we still had to get used to this way of communication. But our first attempt was successful. From the Meteora we went further in north easterly direction towards the city of Thessaloniki, and from here eastward to the border of Turkey. Once in the northern parts of Greece the weather got worse and worse.....

After we found a place to stay for the night near the sea and close to the border on 8. December, we found ourselves the following morning in a real blizzard!! That night temperatures dropped below zero C.°, together with heavy snowfall!! Also this morning our car would not start anymore, due to a flat battery. Luckily we have a pair of extra batteries, and after a jumpstart we could try to get away from this place. Since our car is a permanent four-wheel drive we were also able to get some experience under these conditions. And we are very satisfied with it!! This car gives you a very solid feeling! After some last shopping in Greece we arrived at the border in the early afternoon, on the

Turkish side there is the normal chaos although they now use a totally new border since our last visit. Hopefully they join the EU soon, it will be a lot easier than to cross this border!

After crossing the border we still drove through a severe blizzard in easterly direction. The road conditions are getting worse, several cars have slid off the road. And we are even more happy we have chosen for this permanent 4WD.! After a while we continued in southerly direction towards the Dardanelles, the narrow connection between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. In Eceabat we took the ferry to Cannakkale on the other side. Snowfall had stopped! From Cannakkale we drove along the western coastline in southerly direction towards the city of Izmir. Somewhere along the coast we found another place to stay for the night, this also was a place we knew from earlier trips. By the time we went sleeping there was a knock on the door! It were a couple of Jandarma men, the military police of Turkey. Of course they wanted to know what we were doing here, and after explaining why we were standing in this place they wished us a good night and went off.

The next day, 11 December, we carried on along the coast. After some km. we filled up our water tanks at a well along the road. You can find these wells all over Turkey and Greece, and we almost always fill up our tanks from this source and had never problems with this water. Of course we always cook the water first when we use it for consumption. In the town of Altinoluk we went to a supermarket to do some shopping, here we meet Ahmet a Turkish guy who is born and lives in the Netherlands. His parents have a house in this town, and he is here together with his mother for a holiday. After showing us the local internet-café he invites us to his home, and after a nice afternoon together with his mother and some friends we returned to our place to stay for the night. This place is in the middle of an olive grove near the sea, and in winter the olives are harvested by the local men who climb up in the trees and hit the branches with a stick in order to get the olives off. The women then sort the olives sitting on the ground, which is hard labour.

The next day we arrived near Kusadasi, a well-known tourist town. Here we found a place on the beach to stay for the night, in summer this beach is probably crowded with people but now it is totally deserted. Only a few stray dogs walk around on this beach now.

The following day the sun was shining for the first time during this trip! We went on through Kusadasi, with no tourist in sight, to the Samsundagi National Park. We wanted to have walk there, but when we arrived at the entrance gate we had to pay 12€ to get inside. We thought this is too much to have a walk, so we returned to a dirt track which brought us along the border of the national park. From here we crossed the delta of the Menderes river, to get to the Bafa lake were we found another place to stay for the night at the lakeshore. Here we saw a group of flamingos near the shore.

The next day we went for a walk to the ruins of an old Greek monastery, but we were not lucky this day and could not find the monastery. But we had a pleasant walk in fine weather though. We also got a problem with our Wallas hot plate, we could not use it anymore for cooking, a temperature sensor failed. Luckily we also have a hot plate which runs on gas, so we could still make a meal. After several telephone calls to the shop where we bought the hot plate, the decision was made to send a new temp. sensor from the Netherlands to Antalya.

On 16. December we arrived in Antalya, we first went to find an internet-café to send some e-mails. In the internet-café we met Huseyin, a Turkish guy who normally lived in Germany and spoke perfect German. He helped us to find the office where the new temp. sensor was sent to.

While we were in Antalya we got an e-mail from the Dutch travel agency who was arranging the visa for Iran for us that we needed to send a copy of our passports with the pages containing the visa for the Emirates. They were needed as a proof for the Iranian officials that we were indeed going to Oman. But the big problem was that we did not have visa for the Emirates already in our passport, since citizens of the EU. get visa for the Emirates when they enter the country!

We decided to go to Ankara, we had to go there anyway to get the visa for Iran, we then could go as well to the embassy of the Emirates. But first we had to wait for the temp. sensor, and the 19. December we departed for Ankara. As soon as you leave the coastline you drive up into the mountains, and because of this temperatures dropped and a lot of snow had fallen!

We decided to stay for the night on the shores of the beautiful lake Egirdir, also a place we visited before. Over snow covered roads we managed to find this place again. The next morning it started snowing again, and we decided to leave as quickly as possible because we were afraid to get stuck in this place! As soon as we reached the road again a severe blizzard started, and as a result we could hardly see where we were driving! After some time things got even worse, and at one point we had to go back. From here we had to choose for another road to get to Ankara. But also on this road we could hardly drive, and many other cars got in serious trouble. At several points we had a total white-out, we could not see anything anymore!! This is really a strange experience, you cannot say if you are still driving or that you have stopped!

After, as we experienced it, a very long time we arrived in the city of Konya and from here on the snowfall was less and we decided to stop at a petrol station to stay for the night. Soon we were surrounded by trucks who had stopped here too to stay for the night.

The next morning the sun was shining and we were able to see where we were. The road was cleared from snow and on the 21. December we reached Ankara. We first went for a search for the embassies, they are concentrated mainly in one part of the city. After an extensive search we found both the Iranian and the Emirates embassy. We decided to come back here the next day because it was too late to visit the embassies. Outside the city we found a place to stay for the night, luckily we have a heating system in the car because this night temperatures dropped to -18C°!! But in the middle of the night we got wake due to the cold, and we decided to go back to Ankara where it would be less cold. We found a place between some high buildings in the heart of the city, and indeed temperatures were better here and we could go on sleeping!

The next day we went to the Emirates embassy, in the first instance the man who helped us said that it would be easy to obtain the visa but when he came back after he had made copies of our passports he said he could not give us the visa, he had to contact the Ministry in the Emirates to get permission. This would certainly take a week, he said. After this disappointment we decided to go back to the Mediterranean coast where temperatures would be better. In the evening of 23. December we returned at the south coast after a 600km. drive.

Christmas day starts with sun, we even can have breakfast outside. We also had to repair some water fittings, some of them were damaged due to the frost.

Next day we went to the so called Koprulu Kanyon, a river gorge some 40km. off the coast. Unfortunately it started to rain after a while, so we could not make a walk where we hoped for. We stayed in this area for the night, the whole night it kept raining. Next morning we drove further inland, sun was shining again and we now could see the beauty of this area. After several km. on a muddy track we decided to turn because this track became very muddy and slippery, and you and your car can easily slide into the deep!! On this occasion we could test the differential locks of the car, everything worked well. After this mud experience we had to clean the car, it had changed colours! We found a well along the road, and after a while we could see the real colours again.

In the afternoon of 27. December we returned back at the seaside again, this time we went to a spot we knew from earlier visits. Its a place in a forested dune area, in our home country these kind of places would be highly protected nature areas but here in Turkey they look more like a junkyard, it looks like every visitor has left his rubbish. We often wonder how long this can go on, before the world is one big junkyard. There is still a lot of work to do on this matter.

Also in this area is a well, so next day we could wash some of our clothes. These things you have to do as well when you are on the road! The following night we were waked by the sound of rain, our freshly washed clothes were still drying outside! We quickly took all clothes in, and could go sleeping

again. Next day it kept on raining, and our washed clothes were still not dry enough. We knew there was an abandoned building right next to the beach, and here inside we hung out our clothes again. Because of the draft this worked very well.

On 30. December we once go to Antalya to do some shopping and visit an internet café, we also phone the Emirates embassy to ask about our visa. But no visa...

The last day of this year we again drive up into the mountains, we fill up our water tanks again do some walking and we even can have a shower outside due to the nice weather. In the evening we return to the seaside again near the city of Manavgat, the rest of this evening we spend drinking coffee with baklava and after a while something stronger. And again this year ends with in the far distance the usual explosions telling us its midnight.....

HAPPY NEWYEAR!!

Because we listened to a programme on our short wave radio we had a start of a new year twice because of the time difference! The first day of this new year we spend to find a new spot where we can stay for the rest of the day and coming night. We found a new spot near Side, a very well-known touristy place with all kinds of hotels and resorts. This spot is in a pine forest close to the sea, and were still no hotels have been build. Although its winter there are quite some tourists around here, we wonder if they regret they came here because this day again was rainy and even stormy. In the evening we play some computer games and do some writing and listen to the radio. We also phone our mothers to wish them a happy new year.

On the 2. January we do some shopping in Manavgat and visit the internet –café to read all the e-mails wishing us a happy new year. Today we also decide to return to Ankara, we are tired of waiting. In the evening we arrive at the still frozen Mogan lake, just outside Ankara. We were here also during our first visit, and the group of stray dogs welcomes us again.

Tomorrow we hope to get the visa for the Emirates!

First thing we did the morning of the 3. January was going to the Emirates embassy to see if our visa were ready, but again there were no visa! Now they said it could take another week before they could give us the visa, so we were very disappointed! We also got the impression that they not really were willing to help us. Because in the first instance we had applied for a double entry visa, the Iranian authorities wanted that we should have the visa for the Emirates as well. So the only thing we could do is to ask for a normal tourist visa, and after having contact with the travel agency in the Netherlands we decided that they should try to get this normal visa for us. And of course this would take again more time..... Because we had to wait anyway we visited several internet-cafes to see if someone was able to help us with our website. Before we started this journey a friend in the Netherlands helped us to build a website, and we agreed he would do the maintenance of this

website. But once on our way he let us know he did not want to help us anymore for reasons we do not understand until this day! So, together with the visa problems we had to face this problem as well.

Finally after visiting several internet-cafes we found the right person, it was Engin, a young man who worked for the Ankara internet club. This is a normal internet-café, but they also sell computers and all kinds of other hardware. After explaining our problem he was willing to help us, and after spending the whole afternoon behind the computer he managed to get the text of our travel journal on our website! A great relief for us!

Because we wanted our pictures we took also to be placed on the site and this was a bit too complicated, we agreed with Engin that he would ask a friend who could help us with this.

The next day we had to come back, and Engin told us his friend Ufuk was willing to help us. We went to the office of Ufuk, which was nearby, and after explaining what we wanted he said he was willing to help us and he also wanted to do some redesigning as well! Ufuk Sabah runs, together with his sister and a companion, the Forsis company. They are specialized in web design and hosting, web management, e-commerce and marketing and also do translation services. After a few days we visited him again, and he showed us the new design of our website and we were and still are very pleased with this result! We think he did a wonderful job!!

After this problem solved we were still worried about the visa for Iran. After some phone calls to the UAE embassy it became clear they would not give us visa before entering the UAE! Also on this same day (10.january)we received an e-mail from the travel agency saying that the visa for Iran had been refused again!!

This could be the end of our journey!!!

The only thing we could do now was to visit the Iranian embassy in Ankara and hope for the best. And we were lucky!! They gave us transit visa valid for 7 days, and everything was arranged in a matter of hours!

After a last visit to Ufuk Sabah we continued our journey on the 12.January to Oman.