

## Istanbul

### Turkish Hospitality In The Shadow of Minarets

On 10<sup>th</sup> of July 2012, while waiting for the connecting flight to Ankara, I took a chance to spend my morning in Istanbul, which is also famously known as the city of exquisite mosques. In order for me to visit the architectural monuments, I opted for tram and yellow cab as my mode of transportation. To my surprise, from the moment I stepped into Istanbul, I was welcomed with traditional hospitality and friendliness. This is because in every corner of the city, a greeting like “*Selam*” (Arabic: Peace Be Upon You) would be cordially offered to me. Despite the language barrier, the smiling faces and warm sincerity through every communication with the Turkish have made me feel like I deserved to be welcomed in this city not only as a guest, but also as a friend. The graciousness was so apparent to an extent that I was offered to share a piece of *doner kebab* sandwich while I was in a cab, by the driver himself! It was a cab ride that I will never forget.

My first sacred destination was the magnificent 17<sup>th</sup> century mosque, **Sultan Ahmed Mosque**. It is also universally acknowledged as the Blue Mosque due to the 20,000 handmade blue tiles decorated in its interior building. Another uniqueness of the mosque is its six slender minarets, as most of the mosques are often complemented with four, two, or just one minaret. Back then, the six minarets have caused quite an issue as the Haram Mosque in Mecca also had six minarets. The issue was solved when the Sultan sent his architect to Mecca to build the seventh minaret.

Opposite the Blue Mosque is **Hagia Sophia** which is a former church, later a mosque, and now being converted into a museum by the Turkish president, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Inside the museum, I could be able to observe the religious art of Christian and Muslim. For instance, 9<sup>th</sup> century mosaic of Virgin and Child could be seen located in between of Allah and Muhammad’s plagues. Later that day, my last stop was the 16<sup>th</sup> century mosque, **Süleymaniye Mosque** (Mosque of Suleyman The Magnificent). While savoring every inch of its beauty, the tranquility of the inside and outside of the mosque has made me felt very serene and peaceful.

Friendly people, beautiful buildings, authenticity; someday I will find my way to this city again!



Morning traffic in Istanbul



Mesmerizing interior of Süleymaniye Mosque



The 17<sup>th</sup> century Blue Mosque