

“Careful Ah.”

words & photos by Joyce Ng



I am often paranoid about the people I meet. Perhaps this is because of Mother's constant refrain: "Careful ah when you travel. Don't get too friendly with strangers. Later get kidnapped then how." Her paranoia really shows in her reluctance to converse even with friendly taxi drivers, always cautioning me in Hokkien: "Don't talk so much."

My friends and I were hiking in Sognali Valley, Turkey when we stumbled upon a four-generational Turkish family having a picnic. They invited us for some *chai*, and we agreed. Somehow, amidst the animated hand gestures and frantic flipping of the Turkish phrasebook, we managed to communicate. We figured out that they wanted to take photos with us. We also managed to figure out that they wanted us to follow them to find a spot to watch the sunset. And we even managed to figure out that they were inviting us, strangers they had just met, to their home for dinner (until today, I am still amazed at how we accurately deduced all that without the help of Google Translate).

I paused, and was reminded of Mother's refrain. In my head I countered it with another, "都来到这里了 [Since you are already here, you might as well go with it]." And so I went.

We were invited into their home, provided with a meal, and even offered a place to rest. Their hospitality and generosity were humbling. Their openness showed me the extent of trust and understanding that had been built in those few moments. We were strangers, foreigners in their country; yet they invited us to experience a slice of their lives.

The same could be said of the many Turks that I met: the school girls that warmly welcomed me into their country, the park ranger that brought us around Ihlara Valley, showing us how he cared for the birds, the old man that guided us to the right place to catch our bus, and Master Galip, the world-famous ceramic master, who figured that we could not afford his exquisite pieces, but guided us around his gallery and offered us homemade wine nonetheless.

This is how the Turks treat their travellers – the guests in their country. And perhaps, in this instance, there really was nothing to fear at all. ●

Joyce is perpetually planning for her next trip out of our sunny island. In the meantime, she blogs about her travels at: www.portraitofacity.tumblr.com



