

Konya, Turkey

and the Annual Whirling Dervish Festival

BY RITA COOK

Recently my colleague and I were asked to visit Konya, Turkey to experience the annual festival there highlighting a most important Sufi philosophy, Mevlanism. With this in mind we were driven around enjoying the city and learning about the idea that Mevlana (an order of Sufism) and its message can be applied to all humanity.

For those who have no idea about Sufism you might be more familiar with the whirling dervishes. I had never seen the dervishes in Turkey before this trip, having only seen the dance once in Egypt during a trip there a few years ago.

However, as steeped in history as this city of Konya is (this local festival goes back many years) the government in Konya was also eager for us to get an idea of the city's move into the future too. Not only are they putting in high speed rail from Konya to Istanbul this year, but also to Turkey's capital city of Ankara. The city also exports many of the Swedish and German automaker parts regularly, aka Volkswagen, Mercedes, BMW and Volvo.

What is Sufism

Like a light in the night, Sufism might be a part of Islam, but the Sufi Ideology is like one person on the trip described it "a light in the night giving a message of tolerance for all."

At the Mevlana Museum while on the trip I met and had a chat with a descendant of Mevlana, Esin Çelebi. When I called the order Sufi, she corrected me saying it is called Mevlanism founded by the Persian mystical character, Mevlana Jalaluddin



PHOTOS BY: GUILLAUME de VAUDREY

Rumi from the 13th century. This current Mevlana Order was founded in 1273 by the followers of Rumi.

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The Mevlana Museum in Konya is actually the mausoleum of Rumi and it was in 1926 that the mausoleum and the former dervish lodge (Dergah) were turned into a museum, which opened in 1927. It did not get the name “Mevlana Museum” until 1954.

When you enter the museum you go through a main gate (Devisan Kapısı) into a breathtaking courtyard that is paved with marble. In the museum you can see dervish cells, the kitchen, the sadirvan, which is a washing fountain in the middle of the courtyard and further in there is

the mausoleum and a small mosque further in through the Tomb gate. The sarcophagus of Mevlana is located under the green dome (Kıbab'ulaktab) and is covered by gold embroidered brocade with verses from the Koran. There is also a hall where you can see musical instruments like the kemence, a small violin with three strings; a keman, which is a larger violin; a small cymbal; the daire, a kind of tambourine, and the flute that Mevlana actually played. There are also ancient praying rugs, dervish clothes and four crystal mosque lamps.

Whirling Dervishes

The Mevlana festival is actually called Seb-i Arus (Nuptial Night) and it is at this festival that many folks witness the whirling dervishes. At the festival I attended the dervishes presented themselves to the crowd spinning for about 30 minutes. The overall idea about the spinning is that the left hand is pointed down and the right up and the dance is called Sema a part of

the custom and history representing the mystical journey of man's spiritual ascent through mind and love to perfect divinity. This dance enables dancers to reach perfection and a being at one.

The Mevlana Festival is held every year on December 17 in Konya and it runs for a fortnight. It is technically the death of Mevlana, depicted as the anniversary of Mevlâna's 'wedding night' with Allah.

Konya Carpets and More

Konya is actually the 7th largest province in Turkey in terms of population, but more importantly it is the first one in terms of landmass. Oftentimes when folks think of Turkey they think of great carpets. I visited one amazing carpet shop and had coffee with the owner. My tour guide also read my coffee grounds after we finished the coffee and it was a very wonderful experience and natural in the midst of this perfect setting.

Konya also has the largest Science Center in the Province too. It opened in the spring of 2014 with all sorts of exhibits and educational resources. You can also watch a variety of shows in the theatre. Real state of the art, reportedly the num-

ber of guests it has generated since opening has even begun to rival the Mevlana Museum.

Another must is the beautifully restored Tile Museum. The entire interior of the central dome of this building, which was the former Seljuk theological school from 1251, highlights the amazingly preserved blue-and-white Seljuk tilework. There is also a collection of ceramics on display that include octagonal Seljuk tiles that were found during excavations at Kubad Abad Palace on Lake Beyşehir. A man named Emir Celaleddin Karatay, a Seljuk general, vizier and statesman, is also buried onsite here.

Thoughts on the Food

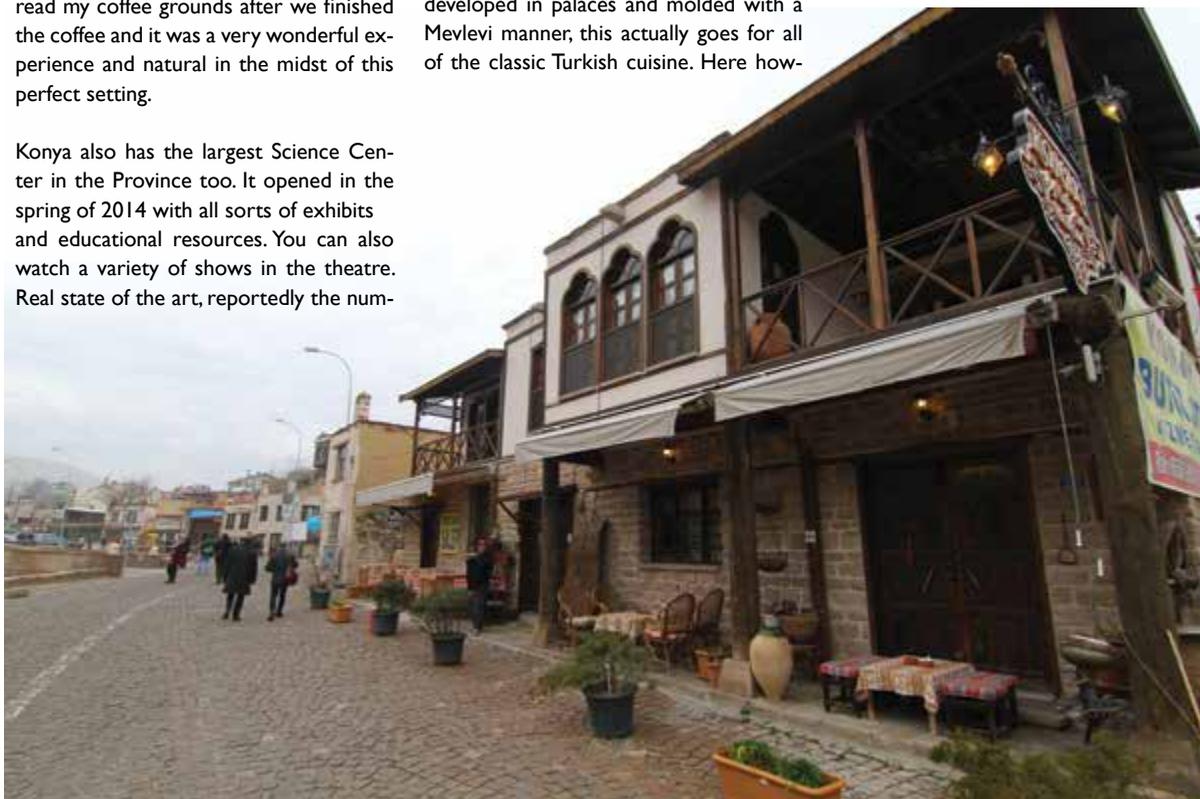
The traditional cuisine of Konya was developed in palaces and molded with a Mevlevi manner; this actually goes for all of the classic Turkish cuisine. Here how-

ever, you can expect oven kebabi, etli ekmekek, which is bread with mince meat on top and also peynirli pide, a bread with cheese layered on top. Always look on the menu for dishes such as Ekmek Salması, Etli Yaprak Sarması and Demirhindi Serbeti (tamarind sherbert).

I fell in love with Konya's most treasured dish called Erliemkek. It is like a pizza only Turkish style and the crust is thin, the mince meat cleavered and the vegetables kneaded. Hard to explain, but it would be sheer negligence for you to visit Konya and not try this dish.

Getting There

I was thrilled when my Turkish contacts said I would be flying on Turkish Airlines. It would be my second time and I love this





airline. If you haven't noticed yet, Turkish Airlines is opening hubs in a number of US cities and they have the best prices for flying overseas than any other airline right now. If you ask me, I recommend Turkish Airlines for prices and comfort over just about any other airline these days.

The airline has also been voted Europe's best airline for the third year and they currently have six hubs in the United States; New York; Los Angeles; Chicago; Houston; Washington, D.C.; and Boston. A member of the Star Alliance, it was reported in a press release by Turkish Airlines that in the first quarter of 2014 alone, the airline carried 12 million passengers.

From a personal standpoint on my two flights, I had the pleasure of sitting in Business Class and while I fly a lot of miles both Business and Economy, the experi-

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ence both times was exceptional. I particularly like the small touches this airline adds like at dinnertime when flight attendants bring little candles out with a LED bulb – no fire – and they make the dining experience so pleasurable. The airline has excellent food and a chef on board who takes the time to serve the passengers the specially-prepared food that is reminiscent of both local and international fare.

I flew nonstop to Istanbul from Houston

on my first trip and the second time from Chicago, both were brilliant experiences. Kudos to the staff making it a friendly time from boarding until debarkation and while in-flight the seats are comfortable and the movie selection good. In fact, so good that I didn't sleep as much as I should have because I couldn't stop watching movies and taking advantage of the five-star service.

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