

# **Across the Aegean:**

## **A Geological and Cultural Journey from Greece to Turkey**

*To the summer that carried my footsteps across the sea,  
goodbye and thank you for the light.*

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**Course:** DPhil in Earth Sciences

**Travel Period:** 15 September – 3 October 2025 (Summer Vacation)

### **Preface**

As Robert Louis Stevenson once wrote, “To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive.”

We often think the scenery will stay the same, yet forget that we will not, and that the courage to set out does not last forever. I’m deeply grateful to have received the Roger Short Travel Scholarship, which gave me the chance to travel across the Aegean — from Greece to Turkey — and to see with my own eyes the Mediterranean world that once lived only in books and imagination.

The uniqueness of the Mediterranean world seems to have been shaped from the very beginning — written in its geology. This is where Africa, Europe, and Asia meet, where great tectonic plates collide and fold the earth’s crust into a landscape of striking contrasts: mountains, faults, fjords, and islands all coexisting within the same sea. The Greek islands scattered across the Aegean look like fragments of the crust scattered across the deep blue sea, while Turkey stretches across Asia and Europe, becoming a natural bridge that connects continents as well as cultures. Frequent earthquakes have made local people more aware of the importance of structure and stability, which explains the extensive use of stone, arches and domes. These designs are not only for beauty, but also a response to the power of nature.

In terms of climate, the Mediterranean is known for its hot, dry summers and mild, wet winters, with sunshine almost all year round. Light and warmth have shaped the “trinity” of olives, grapes and wheat,

and also the blue-and-white architecture that defines the region. Natural conditions influence daily life too — people walk slowly under the heat, then gather in the cool evening breeze to talk and share food. Life here is both close to the land and open to the sea — practical yet full of freedom.

This natural pattern has deeply influenced the spirit of the Mediterranean. The rationality and sense of proportion in ancient Greece grew from people's sharp observation of light and landscape, while the art of Turkey and the eastern coast reflects layers of cultural exchange between Asia and Europe, full of symbols and patterns. Greek reason and myth, Roman order and power, Byzantine faith and glory, Ottoman elegance and tolerance — all coexist on this sunlit land, forming the layers of Mediterranean history.

Here, architecture seeks order, sculpture aims for harmony and writing values simplicity and grace. The people themselves share a similar temperament — passionate yet proud, open yet resilient. The Mediterranean is more than a sea; it is a symbol of civilisation. Geography became the origin of culture, climate shaped the outline of spirit, and history, written in light and stone, left humanity's earliest reflections on beauty and survival.

Perhaps that was why, setting foot on this land of light and sea, I felt almost like a pilgrim. From the islands of the Aegean to the valleys of Anatolia, from the ruins of ancient Greece to the spires of Istanbul, I hoped to see and to feel with my own eyes how this meeting place of civilisations continues to move with the rhythm of time.

## **Athens**

My first stop was Athens, a city often called the cradle of Western civilisation. Thousands of years ago, it was the centre of Greek politics, philosophy, and art. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle once walked these same streets, exploring the ideas of reason and order, and it was here that the earliest form of democracy began to take shape. Walking through the city today, it feels as if every stone beneath my feet still carries the weight of history.

I visited the Acropolis, the sacred hill rising above the city, a symbol of the ancient Greeks' pursuit of wisdom and divinity. The most striking of all is the Parthenon, built in the fifth century BC to honour Athena, the goddess who protects the city. The white marble shines with a golden hue under the sun, and the strict yet graceful proportions of its columns reflect the rationality and order that define Greek architecture. Standing among the ruins, I could almost hear the passage of time. The solemnity and stillness of that place fill one with awe.

On the streets of Athens, I also tried some of the city's traditional food — gyros, Greek salad, and honey-drenched desserts. The flavours were simple and bright, tasting of the sun and the soil.

What struck me most was how advanced ancient Greece already was — capable of building such magnificent temples and thinking so deeply about philosophy thousands of years ago. Standing on the remains of the Parthenon felt like holding a quiet conversation with history itself. Yet I couldn't help

feeling a touch of sadness: the Greece of today no longer has the splendour of its past. The civilisation that once shone so brightly now lingers only in ruins and legends.

After a few days in Athens, I felt ready to move on — to leave behind the marble hills and follow the line of the sea eastward towards a new horizon. So I chose to travel by sea, to see the islands unfold one by one



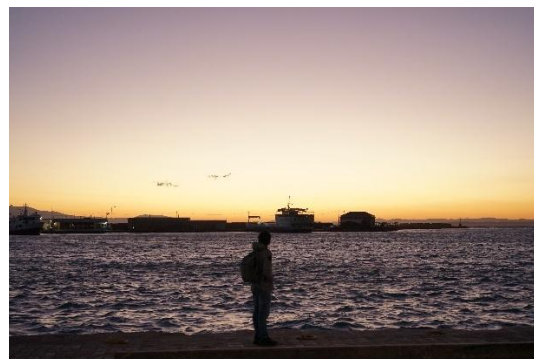
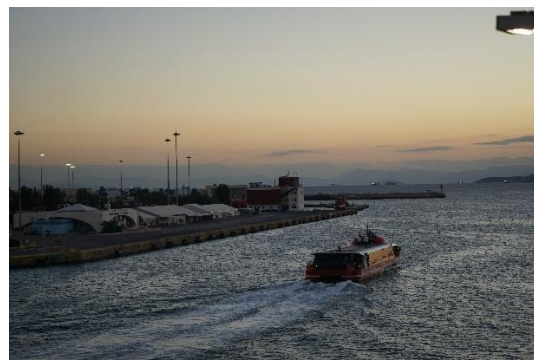
### **Crossing the Aegean**

It was my first time on such a large ship. Coming from an inland city, I had always imagined sea travel to be glamorous — until I discovered that most of it involved waiting, wind, and a great deal of swaying. However, everything on board felt new — there were restaurants, lounges, and wide decks where passengers wandered under the night sky. The hum of the engine mixed with the sound of waves, and the air was filled with the smell of salt and engine oil. As the ferry slowly left the port of Athens, I suddenly thought of the film *Titanic* — except there was no cinematic romance here, only the quiet excitement of

something real and new, and hopefully no icebergs. It was a slower kind of travel, a different way to understand the Mediterranean.

In the early hours of the morning, the ferry stopped at Chios, a small island in the eastern Aegean Sea, only seven kilometres from the Turkish coast. The sky was beginning to pale, and the first light of dawn spread slowly over the horizon. From the deck, I watched the sun rise behind the hills, turning the water into shifting bands of gold and blue. The island was small but full of life — fishing boats moved quietly in the harbour, and the air smelled of seaweed and fresh bread from the port cafés.

Lying in the middle of the strait between Greece and Turkey, Chios is part of the Aegean island arc, formed by the subduction of the African and Eurasian plates. The island's rocks are mainly limestone and volcanic deposits, the land rises and falls sharply, and the coastline twists and folds. Much of the surface is bare rock and thin soil, so vegetation is sparse — from a distance, the island looks pale and almost bald. This landscape is the joint result of its geology and climate: long, hot summers and little rain have caused severe erosion, while the stony surface cannot hold water. Only hardy shrubs and small olive trees manage to survive on the slopes. For this reason, people here have long relied on seafaring and animal husbandry rather than farming.





Despite its barren look, Chios holds an important place in history. It was once a key trading point between Greece and Asia Minor, and is believed to be the birthplace of Homer, the legendary poet of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

At the port, I had a simple breakfast — a piece of bread and a cup of strong Greek coffee, the kind that could probably wake the gods on Mount Olympus — before boarding the ferry again for the final stretch eastward. Leaving Athens behind, I began to notice how geology was not just shaping land, but also the rhythms of life along the Aegean.

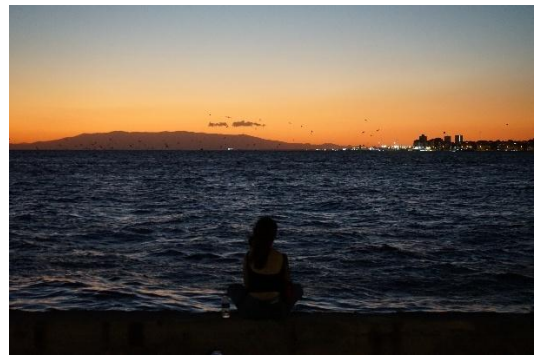
Soon the outline of the coast came into view. Low hills appeared, dotted with slender minarets. That was Çeşme, my next stop. As the ship slowly approached the harbour, I realised that I was stepping onto Asian soil for the first time.

### **An Encounter in Izmir**

After passing through customs in Çeşme, I was ready to move on — until I realised that my wallet was full of euros but no Turkish lira. The coach ticket office didn't take cards, and after a few minutes of enthusiastic hand gestures, the lady at the counter finally accepted my euros without giving any change. I took it as a small “foreign exchange fee” and was just glad to be on the bus.

*(Lesson learned: geography may make countries neighbours, but money keeps them apart.)*





In Izmir, I met Sena, Busra and their mother. They were very friendly and kindly showed me around the city, sharing stories about local life and reminding me to stay safe while travelling.

After a short ride from Çeşme, I arrived in Izmir, the third largest city in Turkey, often called “the Pearl of the Aegean.” As the bus entered the city, the sea breeze carried a faint scent of salt, and rows of palm trees lined the streets beside soft-coloured European-style buildings. But almost as soon as I got off, I ran into a small problem — I had no idea how to take the local bus and couldn’t read the signs. Just as I was standing there a little lost, two young girls and their mother came over with bright smiles. In slightly accented English, they asked if I needed help.

Thanks to them, I soon found my way to the city centre, and what began as a brief encounter turned into an unexpected friendship. They took me to the Izmir Archaeological Museum, where artefacts from ancient Greece, Rome and the Ottoman Empire were on display: fragments of marble columns, mosaics, bronze statues. Each piece seemed to whisper its own story of this land’s long history. Later, we visited the lively bazaar. The narrow lanes were filled with the smell of spices and grilled meat; stalls overflowed with colourful pottery, handmade carpets and the famous blue-eye charms said to ward off bad luck.

In a small teahouse at the corner of the market, they insisted on buying me a glass of traditional Turkish tea. It was served in a tulip-shaped glass, deep red like amber, slightly bitter but with a sweet aftertaste. As we talked, they told me about an old tradition called “Turkish coffee fortune-telling.” After drinking a cup of thick coffee, people turn the cup upside down, let the grounds dry, and then read the shapes left inside to see their future. This simple yet mysterious practice reflects something deeper — the Turkish way of blending fate, life and romance into everyday rituals.

We talked about everything — culture, daily life, Turkey’s economy and tourism, Chinese festivals and food. The language wasn’t perfect, but laughter and curiosity bridged every gap. In that moment, I truly felt the warmth and openness of Mediterranean people — their joy in meeting strangers and sharing stories.

At sunset we walked together to the seaside. The coastline of Izmir glowed gold in the fading light; waves broke against the rocks, and the outline of the city shimmered faintly in the mist. At that moment, all the knowledge from books about geography and culture turned into something real — faces, voices and the feeling of standing there, surrounded by the sea.

### **Istanbul – A Meeting with Mrs Victoria Short**

After a brief night in Izmir, I took a flight north to Istanbul, the city that bridges two continents. That afternoon, the city was wrapped in golden light, and the sea breeze carried a faint smell of salt. I went to visit Mrs Victoria Short, who has long supported the Roger Short Memorial Fund, established in memory of her late husband, Roger Short, the British Consul-General in Istanbul. She invited me to her rooftop for a beer. The building was an old apartment with a terrace overlooking the whole Istanbul harbour. The sunset glowed over the water, ships moved slowly in and out of the port, and the minarets of distant mosques stood quietly against the evening sky.



On the rooftop, I met with Mrs. Victoria Short, and together we viewed the night scenery of Istanbul

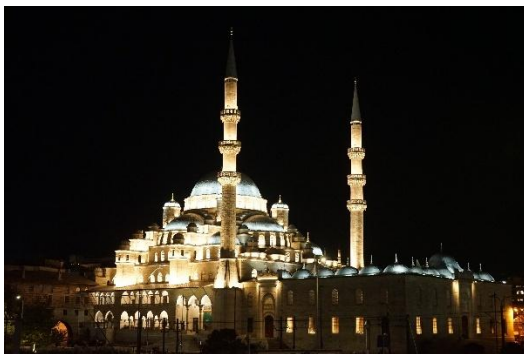
We sat at a small table on the rooftop, each with a bottle of beer. She asked about my journey, and I told her about my experiences from Athens to Çeşme. She listened carefully, then began to tell me stories of her own life in Istanbul. She had lived in Istanbul for many years and had seen the city change—yet somehow remain the same. She said that the streets, the harbour, even the wind still felt familiar, but people and the pace of life had changed completely. Her voice was calm, as if she were talking about an old friend.

She also showed me around her home. The rooms were filled with old photographs and travel souvenirs. She brought out some rose-flavoured Turkish sweets — sweet, but not in the tragic British way. I gave her a small fridge magnet from Beijing as a gift. She smiled, said thank you, and we took a photo together

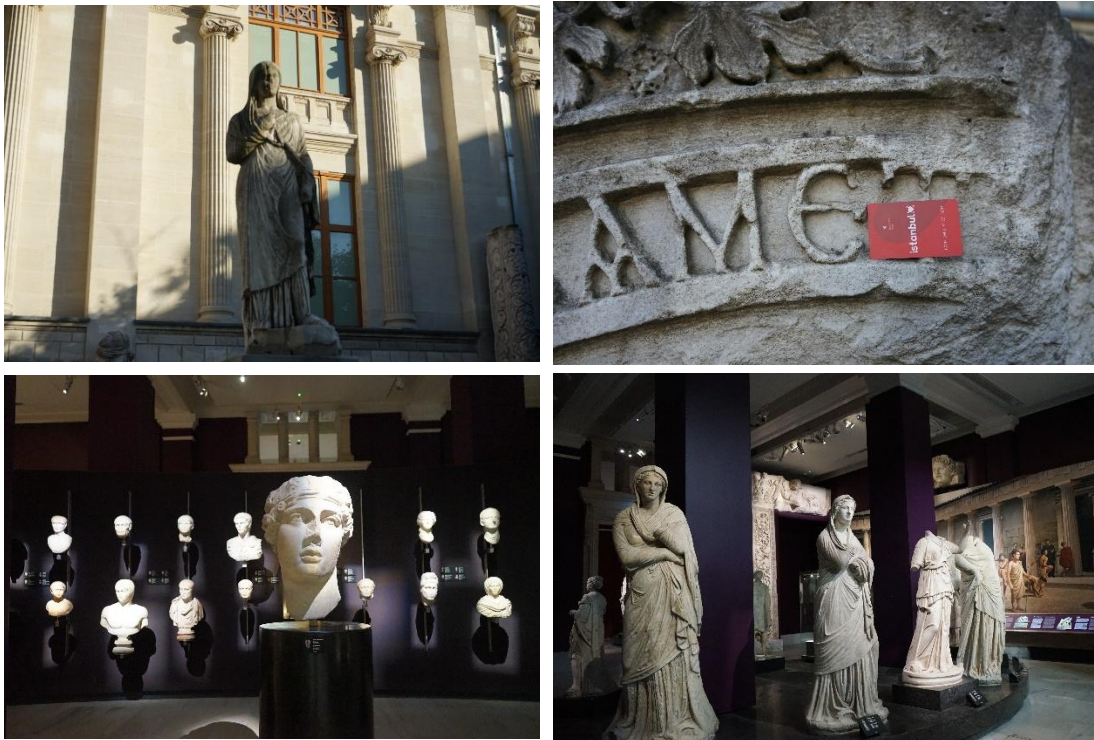
on the balcony. At that moment I realised that the most touching part of travelling often lies in these simple, genuine encounters.

Later that night, back in my hotel room, I opened the window and heard a distant call to prayer drifting through the city. Thoughts I hadn't spoken aloud returned to my mind: perhaps everyone believes they are clever enough to know when to speak and when to stay silent; but sometimes, progress in this world depends on those who are not so clever, those who still dare to tell the truth.

The next day, I visited Hagia Sophia on my own. The building was under renovation, and scaffolding reached high into the dome. Sunlight came through the windows and fell on the mosaics, making the golden fragments sparkle. Once a church, later a mosque, it has now become a symbol of something beyond either—a reminder of faith, power and time. As I walked out, I turned back once more and felt quietly overwhelmed. Not far away stood the Blue Mosque, its domes and minarets mirroring those of Hagia Sophia across the square. Inside, the blue tiles glowed softly in the filtered light, and the air was filled with the murmur of prayer.



In the afternoon, I walked through the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, past statues, reliefs and sarcophagi from ancient Greece and Rome. Surrounded by fragments of older worlds, I felt that modern Turkey stands apart from those civilisations, separated by a long, unspoken silence of time.



In the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, there are numerous sculptures made of marble and limestone, mostly dating from the ancient Greek and Roman periods. These rocks are primarily composed of calcium carbonate. Due to their stable chemical properties, they can be preserved for a long time as long as they are protected from rain. Although the rocks are very hard, the figures appear remarkably lifelike, demonstrating the highly advanced carving techniques of that era.

A few days later, I took a boat along the Bosphorus towards the Black Sea. The wind was cool and salty. On the deck were travellers from all over the world — some talking, some singing, others simply staring at the sea.

I had finally reached the Black Sea — the one that had appeared endlessly in school geography lessons. I left Istanbul too late, and by the time I arrived at Rumelifeneri, night had already fallen. The sea had lived up to its name: it was completely “black”. I refused to leave without proof and ordered a grilled sea bass — overpriced, underwhelming, but technically dinner by the Black Sea. Before leaving, I posed for photos with the restaurant staff, partly to make up for the price of that dinner. Apparently, an East Asian traveller is a rare sight in this quiet town, and the waiters were delighted to take pictures with me, though unfortunately not delighted enough to offer a discount.

*Lesson learned: pretty views make expensive dinners.*



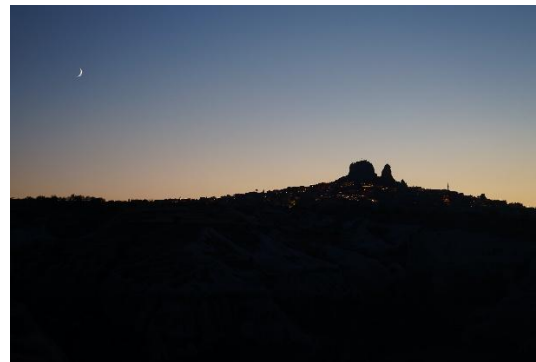
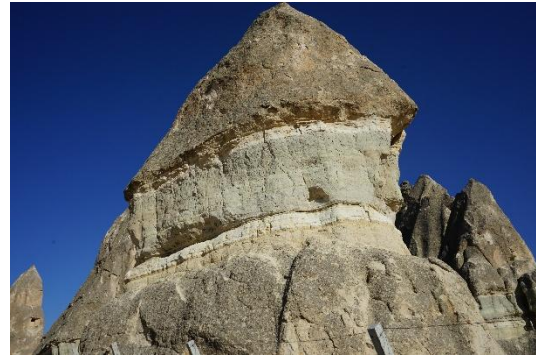
## Cappadocia – Land of Fire and Stone

After that expensive dinner by the Black Sea, I decided to save money by taking a night bus straight to Cappadocia — though I’m only half serious when I say that. To my surprise, the night bus was actually quite comfortable, far better than a budget flight. In Turkey, the last row is usually empty, so if you’re lucky, you can have five seats all to yourself and sleep like royalty.

The first sight of Cappadocia came just after dawn. From the bus window, the familiar flatlands faded into pale cliffs and ridges, their shapes already hinting at the otherworldly landscape ahead. The landscape here is unlike anything I’ve ever seen, as if I had stepped onto another planet. The whole region is covered with strange rock pillars, cone-shaped hills and deep valleys; these “fairy chimneys” are the most iconic feature of Cappadocia.

From a geological point of view, this area lies in the centre of the Anatolian Plateau. Millions of years

ago, several volcanoes, including Mount Erciyes and Mount Hasan, erupted repeatedly. Layers of volcanic ash and lava accumulated and cooled, forming a soft rock known as tuff. Because the rock is relatively fragile, it has been sculpted over time by wind and rain into unique forms such as cones, towers and even mushroom shapes. This softness also allowed ancient people to carve homes, churches and entire underground cities into the cliffs. Here, geography and human life overlap perfectly, as nature itself has shaped the form of civilisation.



At dawn, Cappadocia looks like something out of a dream. Before sunrise, the air is cold and smells faintly of volcanic dust. Dozens of hot-air balloons slowly rise from the valleys, their flames lighting up the envelopes like sparks before daylight. Standing on a hill, watching them float into the golden morning light, I felt as if the whole world had fallen silent — only the sound of the wind and my own heartbeat remained.



In the open landscapes of Cappadocia, many rock were formed by the accumulation of volcanic ash. The presence of lightweight pumice and dark-coloured minerals within these deposits indicates their volcanic origin. Distinct layering can often be seen in the cliffs, recording successive eruptions and intervals of sedimentation over millions of years. Over time, weathering processes such as rain, wind, and surface runoff have sculpted these deposits into the region's characteristic valleys and "fairy chimneys." Because the tuff layers are relatively soft, they can be easily excavated to form dwellings and churches. However, this same softness makes the rocks unstable, and rockfalls and landslides remain a persistent geological hazard throughout the area. The weathering that shapes the landscape also erases it; many traces of earlier structures and geological features have already been lost to time.

It was here that I met Mr Liu, a man in his fifties with a bright smile and clear eyes. When he heard that I was doing a geological study, he laughed and said he loved mountains too — he had once climbed Mount Everest! It was both an adventure and a turning point in his life. Despite his family’s objections, he went anyway, and now he is fulfilling his dream of travelling the world on foot, from China across the Middle East all the way to South Africa.

We immediately got along and decided to hike together through Rose Valley. The canyon was tinted pink and orange by the sunlight, its soft rock walls changing colour with the wind. Along the way we talked about geology, travel, and life. It was surprising how easily a twenty-something student and a fifty-something mountaineer could connect — that kind of understanding across ages felt rare and precious. During the hike, I closely observed the volcanic ash layers, vesicular textures and basalt interbeds in the rocks — clear geological evidence of Cappadocia’s volcanic origin.

By the time we reached the end of the valley, the sun was already setting. The last light of day spread across the land, and the distant town began to glow, one light after another, like a river of stars sinking into the night. I wished time could slow down, just for a moment, so that the peace and vastness could last a little longer.



**Left:** Mr. Liu, an explorer who has climbed Mount Everest.



**Right:** Musicians I met by chance on a mountaintop in Cappadocia; they asked me to take their photo.



**Left:** My hostel host, who was very friendly and humorous.



**Right:** The restaurant owner demonstrating how to prepare traditional Turkish kebab.

Gradually, I realised that I preferred these small earth-coloured villages to busy cities. The people here live simply and kindly, quietly proud of their town, never overcharging, and often offering gentle advice about where not to go. It felt like being looked after by friends rather than strangers. My host at the guesthouse was Ali, a cheerful middle-aged man with a round face and a kind heart. On my last night, he invited me and a few other travellers to a barbecue. The next morning, he insisted on driving me to the bus station, helped me check my ticket and carried my bag. When I said goodbye, I told Ali that I would return to Cappadocia someday. He grinned and told me that next time I should come back with my family to see this beautiful place again... "It's good for both friendship and business," he added with a laugh. What a wonderful and friendly place it is!

### **Pamukkale – The White Terraces of Time**

After leaving Cappadocia, I travelled to one of Turkey's most remarkable landscapes, Pamukkale. Getting there was not easy. I first had to reach the city of Denizli and then transfer to a small minibus, but after 11 p.m. there were no more services. Fortunately, I met a young man who was also heading to Pamukkale. He kindly offered me a ride, and by the time we arrived it was already late at night.

The effort of getting there was soon forgotten when I saw the view. The next morning, from a distance, the white terraces gleamed in the sunlight, as if the mountain itself were a piece of heaven laid upon the earth.

Pamukkale is famous not only for its beauty but also for its geological wonder. The hot spring water here is rich in calcium carbonate. When it flows down the slopes and comes into contact with the air, carbon dioxide escapes and calcium carbonates rapidly precipitates, forming the white *travertine* steps. The process is surprisingly fast — new layers of rock can appear in just a few years, or even months. Because of these natural conditions, people have used the springs for bathing and building since ancient times. As early as the 2nd century BC, the ancient Greeks built the city of Hierapolis on the hilltop, turning it into a place of healing and worship for the elite. The springs were believed to have divine powers of purification, and the city was filled with baths, temples and theatres. But frequent earthquakes destroyed and rebuilt it many times, and by the Middle Ages the city was abandoned, leaving behind the white slopes and silent ruins.



Upon close observation of these calcareous sedimentary rocks, one can see that they often encase numerous plant roots and stems. This indicates that the rocks can form quite rapidly—within about a year. Distinct growth layers are also clearly visible. Similarly, when examining the stones used in nearby buildings, one can notice comparable patterns and textures. This suggests that the calcareous hot springs of Pamukkale not only served as therapeutic baths but also provided the ancient Greeks with a continuous source of building materials.

I climbed the stone steps, observing the delicate texture and stratified layers of the travertine pools. According to geological records, this type of limestone is light yet strong, and ancient builders did use such spring deposits as construction material — easy to shape but durable. Here again, nature and civilisation overlap: the city, in a sense, grew out of the hot springs themselves.

What fascinated me most, however, was not only the white landscape but also the ruins of Hierapolis on the hilltop. Along the path stood the remains of theatres, colonnades and churches. The ancient theatre was built on the hillside, with its wide stone seats facing the sun; the colonnades, though partly broken,

still looked majestic. As the sun set, the golden light fell across the columns, and the long shadows made the ruins glow as if the gods had returned to touch them once more. At that moment, I understood why the Greeks told so many myths here — a view like this truly carries something sacred, beyond the reach of reality.



After Pamukkale, I began to face my own little version of Turkey’s economic problem — a rapidly shrinking budget. The biggest surprise came when I was about to leave the town, I met three Chinese girls on a road trip from Istanbul who kindly gave me a lift and refused to take any money. They planned to drive south along the coast and kindly offered me a seat. I gladly accepted; not only did it save time, but it also gave me the chance to travel along the famous D400 coastal road.

When they heard that I studied geology, they asked me to explain the rocks and landscapes along the way, so I turned into their personal tour guide, giving a mini geology lecture while reading the map. It was the most practical use of my degree so far, more successful than any job interview. Maybe I should become a tour guide after graduation.

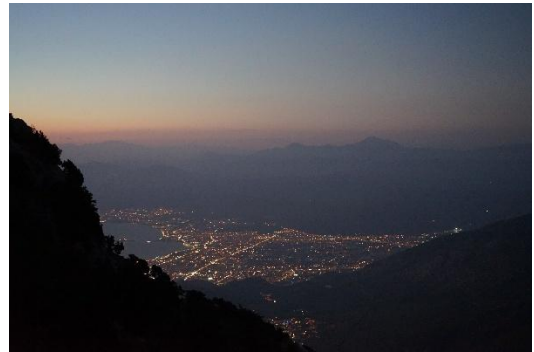
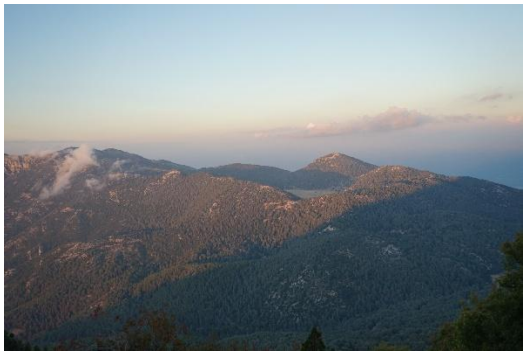


While hiking on the slopes of Pamukkale, I met three Chinese travellers — Ms Chen, Ms Meng and Ms Pan. We started talking, and I shared my journey and some of the discoveries I had made along the way. They found the stories interesting, and when they learned that I had no convenient way to leave the town, they kindly invited me to join them on their drive to southern Turkey. They also asked me to include their names here, as a small memory of our brief but happy journey together.

### **Along the D400 – The Mediterranean Road to Antalya**

The D400 is often called “the most beautiful coastal road in Turkey.” It winds from Antalya to the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, with the blue sea on one side and steep cliffs on the other. To start a new journey on such a road felt almost as if fate had quietly arranged the next chapter of my travels.

Travelling along the D400 coastal road with the three girls was the happiest part of my time in Turkey. We talked about everything — the landscapes along the way, our own lives, the differences between Turkey and China, and my experiences studying in the UK. The differences in language and culture never felt like barriers; instead, they made our conversations even more interesting.



We followed the D400 southwards, first stopping at the hills of Fethiye to watch the sunset. The sea breeze had cleared the sky, and as the sun sank slowly into the water, the clouds turned orange and red — so beautiful that it was hard to blink. Later we went to the beach near Fes, walking barefoot on the soft sand while the cool waves touched our feet, as if reminding us that all of this was real.

We also visited Antalya's seaside park, the long public beach, and the ancient town of Side. We took

countless photos, sailed on a local “pirate ship,” and swam in the sea, surrounded by sun, wind, and salt — a feeling of pure freedom. For lunch we often stopped at roadside cafés for freshly baked flatbread and kebabs, simple but delicious.

I didn’t forget my geological curiosity either. The rocks along the road were mostly sedimentary limestone, their layers and folds clearly visible. These deformations are the result of the long collision between the African and Eurasian plates — the same forces that created the mountains and coastlines of the Mediterranean. Thinking about this gave the journey another layer of meaning: behind every landscape lies the slow breath of the earth over millions of years.



I climbed the highest mountain near Fethiye, Turkey, where I observed vast layers of hard limestone showing intense folding, faulting, and steep fault scarps. These geological features indicate that since the Tertiary period, the region has undergone significant tectonic activity — as the African Plate has continued to subduct beneath and compress the Eurasian Plate, the crust has been uplifted and fractured, giving rise to the steep mountains and nearby islands seen today. Fethiye lies along the active Fethiye–Burdur Fault Zone, whose movements have shaped the dramatic coastline and mountain relief while recording the evolution of the Mediterranean collision zone. Thus, this mountain stands as a microcosm of continental collision and mountain-building processes, vividly revealing the dynamic power that shapes our planet.

### **Farewell — Saying Goodbye to Summer**

Standing by the sea in Antalya, I finally understood that this journey across the Aegean was not just a passage through space but through layers of the Earth’s memory and human history.

From the marble of the Acropolis to the volcanic tuff of Cappadocia, from the white terraces of Pamukkale to the folded limestones along the coast, every stone carried both the mark of tectonic force and the trace of civilisation. The same collisions that lifted mountains also shaped temples and cities. The same fragile rocks, worn by wind and rain, taught people to build arches, domes, and faith that could endure time.

In the end, all these places, the stones, the ruins, the stories, become part of us, just as we become part of them. The Aegean is not only a line between countries but a meeting point of history, nature, and people, where the slow rhythm of the earth still shapes how life unfolds above it.

I thought of a song from home, *Farewell* by Li Shutong:

*Beyond the pavilion, by the ancient way,  
The grass is green, the sky is gray.  
The breeze caresses willow's bend,  
And sunset hills to sunset send.  
To heaven's end, to earth's extreme,  
Our bosom friends like drifting dream.  
With wine we toast the fleeting cheer,  
Tonight apart, our dreams turn drear.*

Reading it far from home, I understood a little more about change and letting go. Travel, like the earth itself, leaves quiet layers in us. To move forward, something must always shift or break. And maybe that is what travel teaches most: how to say goodbye to the people we meet, the places we pass, and the person we were when we began.



The sea remained the same, but I was not. I stayed for a while, watching the waves come and go, and then quietly turned to leave.

## **Acknowledgement**

This journey was made possible through the generous support of the Roger Short Memorial Trust, established with the seed endowment of Richard and Anna Morgan, and supported by many Univ alumni and friends. I am also grateful to Mrs Victoria Short for her warm hospitality, and to all those I met along the way whose kindness made this journey unforgettable.

## **Tip for future travellers:**

1. **Money matters:** Always change money before crossing a border, no matter how close the next country looks on the map. Many small cafés and bus stations in Turkey accept only cash, so keep some Turkish lira at hand even if most tourist sites take cards.
2. **Travel logistics:** Intercity coaches in Turkey are punctual and comfortable, but local minibuses (dolmuş) may stop running after 11 p.m. Plan late connections in advance.
3. **Food and water:** Avoid the restaurants right by the water — they tend to be expensive and not particularly good. Instead, look for small family-run places a few streets back; they often serve the most authentic meals. Turkish street food is excellent and safe, but always carry bottled water, especially when travelling in the heat.
4. **Timing your visits:** Go early in the morning or near sunset when visiting Cappadocia and Pamukkale. The light is softer, the crowds thinner, and the scenery unforgettable.
5. **Cultural etiquette:** When visiting mosques, dress modestly and remove your shoes before entering. Accepting a glass of tea is a gesture of hospitality — it often leads to warm conversations.
6. **Geology lovers:** Turkey is a natural classroom. Look for volcanic tuff in Cappadocia, travertine terraces in Pamukkale, and folded limestone along the Mediterranean coast — each landscape tells a geological story millions of years in the making.
7. **People and communication:** English is not widely spoken outside major cities, but kindness bridges every language barrier. Learn a few Turkish phrases — even a simple teşekkür ederim (“thank you”) goes a long way.