

Culture Wise **TURKEY**

The Essential Guide to Culture,
Customs & Business Etiquette

Robbie Forrester-Atilgan





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& Business Etiquette

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THE AUTHOR

Robbi Forrester Atilgan was born in the UK and has worked as a journalist for many years. She spent her early career in the music press, travelling around the world with rock acts such as Ozzy Osbourne and Bon Jovi, before settling for the more sedate world of freelance editing. Robbi first visited Turkey in the mid-'90s, and was soon tempted back to live there. She became a citizen through marriage in 2001 and now considers herself to be at least half Turkish. As well as writing for a living, Robbi has worked as a tour and airport representative, English teacher, estate agent and business owner. Robbi is married to Erden and divides her time between the UK and their Turkish home in Dalyan, a small riverside town near the Mediterranean coast. Robbi is the co-author of *Life in the UK: Test & Study Guide*, also published by Survival Books.

What readers & reviewers have said about Survival Books:

‘If you need to find out how France works then this book is indispensable. Native French people probably have a less thorough understanding of how their country functions.’

Living France

‘It’s everything you always wanted to ask but didn’t for fear of the contemptuous put down. The best English-language guide. Its pages are stuffed with practical information on everyday subjects and are designed to compliment the traditional guidebook.’

Swiss News

‘Rarely has a ‘survival guide’ contained such useful advice – This book dispels doubts for first-time travellers, yet is also useful for seasoned globetrotters. In a word, if you’re planning to move to the US or go there for a long-term stay, then buy this book both for general reading and as a ready-reference.’

American Citizens Abroad

‘Let’s say it at once. David Hampshire’s Living and Working in France is the best handbook ever produced for visitors and foreign residents in this country; indeed, my discussion with locals showed that it has much to teach even those born and bred in l’Hexagone – It is Hampshire’s meticulous detail which lifts his work way beyond the range of other books with similar titles. Often you think of a supplementary question and search for the answer in vain. With Hampshire this is rarely the case. – He writes with great clarity (and gives French equivalents of all key terms), a touch of humour and a ready eye for the odd (and often illuminating) fact. – This book is absolutely indispensable.’

The Riviera Reporter

‘A must for all future expats. I invested in several books but this is the only one you need. Every issue and concern is covered, every daft question you have but are frightened to ask is answered honestly without pulling any punches. Highly recommended.’

Reader

‘In answer to the desert island question about the one how-to book on France, this book would be it.’

The Recorder

‘The ultimate reference book. Every subject imaginable is exhaustively explained in simple terms. An excellent introduction to fully enjoy all that this fine country has to offer and save time and money in the process.’

American Club of Zurich

'The amount of information covered is not short of incredible. I thought I knew enough about my birth country. This book has proved me wrong. Don't go to France without it. Big mistake if you do. Absolutely priceless!'

Reader

'When you buy a model plane for your child, a video recorder, or some new computer gizmo, you get with it a leaflet or booklet pleading 'Read Me First', or bearing large friendly letters or bold type saying 'IMPORTANT - follow the instructions carefully'. This book should be similarly supplied to all those entering France with anything more durable than a 5-day return ticket. – It is worth reading even if you are just visiting briefly, or if you have lived here for years and feel totally knowledgeable and secure. But if you need to find out how France works then it is indispensable. Native French people probably have a less thorough understanding of how their country functions. – Where it is most essential, the book is most up to the minute.'

Living France

A comprehensive guide to all things French, written in a highly readable and amusing style, for anyone planning to live, work or retire in France.

The Times

Covers every conceivable question that might be asked concerning everyday life – I know of no other book that could take the place of this one.

France in Print

A concise, thorough account of the Do's and DONT's for a foreigner in Switzerland – Crammed with useful information and lightened with humorous quips which make the facts more readable.

American Citizens Abroad

'I found this a wonderful book crammed with facts and figures, with a straightforward approach to the problems and pitfalls you are likely to encounter. The whole laced with humour and a thorough understanding of what's involved. Gets my vote!'

Reader

'A vital tool in the war against real estate sharks; don't even think of buying without reading this book first!'

Everything Spain

'We would like to congratulate you on this work: it is really super! We hand it out to our expatriates and they read it with great interest and pleasure.'

ICI (Switzerland) AG



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Blue Mosque, Istanbul

INTRODUCTION

If you're planning a trip to Turkey or just want to learn more about the country, you'll find the information contained in *Culture Wise Turkey* invaluable.

Whether you're travelling on business or pleasure, visiting for a few days or planning to stay for a lifetime, Culture Wise guides enable you to quickly find your feet by removing the anxiety factor when dealing with a foreign culture.

Adjusting to a different environment and culture in any foreign country can be a traumatic and stressful experience, and Turkey is no exception. You need to adapt to new customs and traditions, and discover the Turkish way of doing things; whether it's sharing a polite afternoon of *çay* and *pasta* with neighbours or toasting a colleague's success with copious glasses of *raki* at a *meyhane*, learning the rules of *tavla* played at lightning speed or sweating out your stress at the *hamam*, watching a young boy's (painful) coming of age at his *sünnet* or wishing a couple '*Mutluluklar*' in their new married life. Whatever you do, it's sure to involve a little bit of *kader* and a large amount of *keyif*.

Turkey is a land where many things are done differently: where strangers are welcomed as guests (as long as they only stay for three days) and nobody needs an excuse to dance, where people eat olives and cucumber for breakfast and ladies' thighs and twisted turbans for lunch, where camels wrestle and Dervishes whirl and people live in fairy chimneys – and where the entire population stands silent to honour the memory of a leader who died before the Second World War.

Culture Wise Turkey is essential reading for anyone planning to visit Turkey, including tourists (particularly travellers planning to stay a number of weeks or months), business people, migrants, retirees, holiday homeowners and transferees. It's designed to help newcomers avoid cultural and social gaffes; make friends and influence people; improve communications (both verbal and non-verbal); and enhance your understanding of Turkey and the Turkish people. It explains what to expect, how to behave in most situations, and how to get along with the locals and feel at home – rather than feeling like a fish out of water. It isn't, however, simply a monologue of dry facts and figures, but a practical and entertaining look at life in Turkey – as it really is – and not necessarily as the tourist brochures would have you believe.

A period spent in Turkey is a wonderful way to enrich your life, broaden your horizons, and hopefully expand your circle of friends. We trust this book will help you avoid the pitfalls of visiting or living in Turkey and smooth your way to a happy and rewarding stay.

İyi şanslar! (good luck!)

Rabbi Forrester Atilgan

February 2009



mosaic detail, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul

1.

A CHANGE OF CULTURE

With almost daily advances in technology, ever-cheaper flights and knowledge about almost anywhere in the world at our fingertips, travelling, living, working and retiring abroad have never been more accessible, and current migration patterns suggest that it has never been more popular. But, although globalisation means the world has ‘shrunk’, every country is still a world of its own with a unique culture.

Some people find it impossible to adapt to a new life in a different culture – for reasons which are many and varied. According to statistics, partner dissatisfaction is the most common cause, as non-working spouses frequently find themselves without a role in the new country and sometimes with little to do other than think about what they would be doing if they were at home. Family concerns – which may include the children’s education and worries about loved ones at home – can also deeply affect those living abroad.

Many factors contribute to how well you adapt to a new culture – for example your personality, education, foreign language skills, mental health, maturity, socio-economic situation, travel experience, and family and social support systems. How you handle the stress of change and bring balance and meaning to your life is the principal indicator of how well you’ll adjust to a different country, culture and business environment.

TURKEY IS DIFFERENT

Many people underestimate the cultural isolation that can be experienced in a foreign country, particularly one with a different language. Even in a country where you speak the language fluently you’ll find that many aspects of the culture are surprisingly foreign (despite the cosy familiarity that can be engendered by cinema, television and books).

Turkey is a world away from Europe (although it’s often considered to be a European country and is a member of many European institutions, most of the country is physically situated in Asia) or America. Not only is it a Muslim country, where religion is an integral part of daily life, but its development, while rapid, is still years behind that of North America and western Europe. The further you go from Istanbul and the tourist resorts, the more devout – and

‘There are no foreign lands. It is the traveller only who is foreign.’

Robert Louis Stevenson
(Scottish writer)

superstitious – the people are, and the more backward life appears to be.

Turkey is popularly perceived by many foreigners – particularly the British, Dutch and Germans – as a fairly easy expatriate option because of the well-established foreign communities on its Mediterranean and Aegean coasts, and the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Istanbul. They see it as a place where they can live the good life on a budget – with access to some, if not all, of the comforts of home.

However, despite the availability of foreign television, Dutch cheese and German newspapers, sooner or later they come up against the real Turkey, in the form of an obstinate bureaucrat, an untrustworthy property developer or a Turkish acquaintance who cannot afford medical care for his sick child. The blinkers drop away and they realise that they're no longer on holiday but living in a country where they will always be a *yabancı* (stranger or foreigner) and where life, for many people, is exceedingly tough. It's at this point that some book their plane ticket home.

'Burası Türkiye!' ('This is Turkey!') is an expression of despair, resignation and not a little pride, which you will hear many Turks exclaim when the bus breaks down, the vezne (cashier) closes his counter 15 minutes early or the electricity goes off for the fourth time that day.

Life isn't supposed to be comfortable in Turkey, when the unexpected is taken for granted. Westerners who are used to a life of order and predictability find this

difficult to comprehend. The fatalistic attitude of many Turks when faced with discomfort or adversity is especially difficult to come to terms with. Some foreigners, particularly those who have juggled a family and business and developed a 'can do' attitude, cannot comprehend how the Turks simply accept (or appear even to enjoy) the inefficiency of their civil servants, the chaos of their road system or the ineptitude of their plumbers. The only way to cope is to 'let go'.

Before you try to get to grips with Turkish culture, however, you first need to adapt to a totally new environment and new challenges, which may include a new job, a new home and a new physical environment, which can be overwhelming.

Turkey experiences extremes of climate and weather, and you mustn't underestimate the effects that these can have on you. Intense heat and cold can lead to a lack of energy, poor sleep and dehydration. In the summer in many parts of the country, temperatures rise to a physically draining 50°C (122°F). In winter, Istanbul usually grinds to a halt for a while, under a blanket of snow, while even the Mediterranean coast can be damp and depressing, especially if you live in an open-plan villa with no central heating.

Those who move to a new job or attempt to start a business in Turkey may encounter a (very) steep learning curve – indeed, even finding a job can be a struggle, as the Turks put their own people first. The chances are that you've left a job in your home country where you held a senior position, were extremely competent and knew all your colleagues. In Turkey, you may be virtually a trainee (especially if your



Turkish isn't fluent) and not know any of your colleagues. The sensation that you're starting from scratch can be demoralising.

Even if you move to a part of Turkey with a well-established expatriate community, such as the resort towns of Antalya, Fethiye or Marmaris, items that you're used to and took for granted in your home country may not be available, e.g. certain kinds of food (pork is forbidden by Islam), opportunities to engage in your favourite hobby or sport, and books and magazines in your language. The lack of 'home comforts' can wear you down. You'll also have to contend with the lack of a local support network. At home you had a circle of friends, acquaintances, colleagues and possibly relatives who you could rely on for help and support. In Turkey, there may be no such network, which can leave you feeling isolated and vulnerable.

Turkey attracts a great number of older people and retirees from western Europe, partly due to its low cost of living. However, many miscalculate the level of loneliness they will feel in a community of people who don't speak their language nor understand that people aged 60-plus can have a lot of life left in them. In Turkey, the average life expectancy for a man is 70, while a woman can expect to live to 75. To the Turks, many of whom expect to retire at 50, anyone who makes it into their seventh decade is decidedly elderly. This means that foreign 'snowbirds' may struggle to find Turks of their own age to socialise with and end up spending much of their time with each other – or with expatriates of their own age, which makes it more difficult to integrate with the community.

The degree of isolation you feel usually depends on how long you plan to spend in Turkey and what you'll be doing there. If you're simply going on a short holiday you may not even be aware of many of the cultural differences, although if you are it will enhance your enjoyment and may save you a few embarrassing or confusing moments. However, if you're planning a business trip or intend to spend an extended period in Turkey, perhaps working, studying or even living there permanently, it's essential to understand the culture, customs and etiquette at the earliest opportunity.

CULTURE SHOCK

Culture shock is the term used to describe the psychological and physical state felt by people when arriving in a foreign country or even moving to a new environment in their home country



(where the culture and in some cases language may vary considerably by region or social class). Culture shock can be experienced when travelling, living, working or studying abroad, when in addition to adapting to new social rules and values, you may need to adjust to a different climate, food and dress code. It manifests itself in a lack of direction and the feeling of not knowing what to do or how to do things, not knowing what's appropriate or inappropriate. You literally feel like a fish out of water.

Culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all familiar rules of behaviour and cues to social intercourse – the thousand and one clues to accepted behaviour in everyday situations: when to shake hands and what to say when you meet people; how to buy goods and services; when and how much to tip; how to use a cash machine or the telephone; when to accept and refuse invitations; and when to take statements seriously and when not to. These cues, which may be words, gestures or facial expressions, are acquired in the course of our life and are as much a part of our culture and customs as the language we speak and our beliefs. Our peace of mind and

social efficiency depends on these cues, most of which are unconsciously recognised.

The symptoms of culture shock are essentially psychological – although you can experience physical pain from culture shock – and are caused by the sense of alienation you feel when you're bombarded on a daily basis by cultural

challenges in an environment where there are few, if any, familiar references. However, there are also physical symptoms including an increased incidence of minor illnesses (e.g. colds and headaches) and more serious psychosomatic illnesses brought on by depression. You shouldn't underestimate the consequences of culture shock, although the effects can be lessened if you accept the condition rather than deny it.

'When you travel, remember that a foreign country is not designed to make you comfortable. It is designed to make its own people comfortable.'

Clifton Fadiman (American writer)

Foreigners are often attracted to tourism-based businesses or end up in relationships with people who work in tourism, but many underestimate the pressure of working in this fickle industry, where many people work 18-hour days, dealing with high expectations and trying to earn enough money to survive through the off-season. Physical exhaustion and

depression are common complaints. A doctor in a small Turkish Mediterranean tourist village revealed that roughly half the population took anti-depressants during the winter.

Stages of Culture Shock

Severe culture shock – often experienced when moving to a country with a different language – usually follows a number of stages. The names of these may vary, as may the symptoms and effects, but a typical progression is as follows:

1. The first stage is commonly known as the ‘honeymoon’ stage and usually lasts from a few days to a few weeks after arrival (although it can last longer, particularly if you’re insulated from the pressures of ‘normal’ life). This stage is essentially a positive (even euphoric) one, when a newcomer finds everything an exciting and interesting novelty. The feeling is similar to being on holiday or a short trip abroad, when you generally experience only the positive effects of culture shock (although this depends very much on where you’re from and the country you’re visiting – see box).
2. The second (rejection or distress) stage is usually completely opposite to the first and is essentially a negative stage, a period of crisis, as the initial excitement and holiday feeling wears off and you start to cope with the realities of daily life – a life that is nothing like anything you’ve previously experienced. This can happen after only a few weeks. The distress stage is characterised by a general

feeling of disorientation, confusion and loneliness. Physical exhaustion brought on by a change of time zone, extremes of hot or cold, and the strain of having hundreds of settling-in tasks to accomplish is a recognised symptom. You may also experience regression, where you spend much of your time speaking your own language, watching television programmes and reading newspapers from your home country, eating food from home and socialising with expatriates who speak your language.

What are the most annoying aspects of living in Turkey?
Comments from clients collected by a Mediterranean-based estate agent reveal these top ten gripes:

1. Bureaucracy
2. Death-wish driving
3. Complete disregard for time-keeping
4. Pushy salesmen & restaurant touts
5. Bungling workmen
6. Being charged ‘tourist prices’
7. Unfinished buildings, roads & pavements
8. Attitude to street animals
9. Noise – car horns, wedding drums, the call to prayer at 5am
10. Insensitive, know-it-all foreigners

You may also spend a lot of time complaining about the host country and its culture. Your home environment suddenly assumes a tremendous importance and is irrationally glorified. All difficulties and problems are forgotten and

only the good things back home are remembered. Some expats in Turkey exhibit a ‘we and they’ mentality, in which ‘we’ (the foreigners) are constantly trying to educate ‘them’ (the Turks) about the ‘right’ way to do things – an endeavour which is doomed to end in disappointment.

3. The third stage is often known as the ‘flight’ stage (because of the overwhelming desire to escape) and is usually the one that lasts the longest and is the most difficult to cope with.

During this period you may feel depressed and angry, as well as resentful towards the new country and its people. You may experience difficulties, such as not being understood and feelings of discontent, impatience, frustration, sadness and incompetence. These feelings are inevitable when you’re trying to adapt to a new culture that’s very different from that of your home country, and they’re exacerbated by the fact that you can see nothing positive or good about the new country and focus exclusively on the negative aspects. You may become hostile and develop an aggressive attitude towards the country. Other people will sense this and, in many cases, either respond in a confrontational manner or try to avoid you.

There may be problems with the language, your house, job or children’s school, transportation ... even simple tasks like shopping may be fraught with problems, and the fact that the local people are largely indifferent to these only makes matter worse.

They may try to help but they just don’t understand your concerns, and you conclude that they must be insensitive and unsympathetic to you and your problems.

Relinquishing your old customs and adopting those of your new country is difficult and takes time. During this process there can be strong feelings of dissatisfaction. The period of readjustment can last six months, although there are expatriates who adjust earlier and those (few) who never get over the ‘flight’ stage and are forced to return home.

Many expatriates who have stayed the course in Turkey have a love-hate relationship with the country. They love the people but accept that there are aspects of Turkish life which they strongly dislike and will never understand – such as the Turks’ submission in the face of authority or the ‘it’ll do’ attitude, whereby things are never quite finished. Accepting these uncomfortable differences is a key stage in overcoming culture shock.

4. The fourth (recovery or autonomy) stage is where you begin to integrate and adjust to the new culture and accept the customs



of the country as simply another way of living. **The environment doesn't change – what changes is your attitude towards it.** You become more competent with the language and you also feel more comfortable with the customs of the host country and can move around without feeling anxiety.

You still have problems with some of the social cues and you don't understand everything people say, particularly colloquialisms and idioms. Nevertheless, you've largely adjusted to the new culture and are starting to feel more familiar with the country and your place in it – more at home – and you begin to realise that it has its good as well as bad points.

The above-mentioned estate agent also revealed the top ten reasons why people fall in love with Turkey:

1. Generous, hospitable people
2. Laid-back attitude to life
3. Long summers & short winters
4. Low cost of living
5. Family values
6. Cheap, fresh fruit & vegetables
7. Politeness
8. Feeling safe & secure
9. Glorious countryside & ancient sites
10. Spontaneity

5. The fifth stage is termed 'reverse culture shock' and occurs when you return home. You may find that many things have changed (you'll also have changed) and that you feel like a foreigner in your own country. If you've been away for a long time and

have become comfortable with the habits and customs of a new lifestyle, you may find that you no longer feel at ease in your homeland. Reverse culture shock can be difficult to deal with and some people find it impossible to re-adapt to their home country after living abroad for a number of years.

The above stages occur at different times depending on the individual and his circumstances, and everyone has his own way of reacting to them, with the result that some stages may last longer and are more difficult to cope with than others, while others are shorter and easier to overcome.

Reducing the Effects

Experts agree that almost everyone suffers from culture shock and there's no escaping the phenomenon; however, its negative effects can be reduced considerably by the following – some of which can be done even before you leave home:

- **Positive attitude** – The key to reducing the negative effects of culture shock is a positive attitude towards Turkey (whether you're visiting or planning to live there) – if you don't look forward to a holiday or relocation, you should question why you're doing it. There's no greater guarantee for unhappiness in a foreign environment than taking your negative prejudices with you. It's important when trying to adapt to a new culture to be sensitive to the locals' feelings and try to put yourself in their shoes wherever possible, which will help you

understand why they behave as they do. Bear in mind that they have a strong, in-bred cultural code, just as you do, and react in certain ways because they're culturally 'trained' to do so. If you find yourself frustrated by an aspect of the local culture or behaviour, the chances are that they will be equally puzzled by yours.

Turks often complain that foreigners are distant and aloof – they find many westerners difficult to get to know. For example, even those who have visited the UK many times, speak excellent English and have many foreign friends often describe the British as 'cold'. Try to see yourself as the Turks see you and avoid giving the wrong signals.

- **Research** – Discover as much as possible about Turkey before you go, so that your arrival and settling-in period doesn't spring as many surprises as it might otherwise. Reading about Turkey and its culture before you leave home will help familiarise yourself with the local customs and language, and make the country and its people seem less strange on arrival. You'll be aware of many of the differences between your home country and Turkey and be better prepared to deal with them. This will help you avoid being upset by real or imaginary cultural slights and also reduce the chance of your inadvertently offending the locals. Being prepared for a certain amount of disorientation and confusion (or worse) makes it easier to cope with it.

This book will go a long way towards enlightening you. For further details, there are literally hundreds of publications about Turkey as well as dozens of websites for expatriates (see **Appendices B** and **C**). Many sites provide access to expatriates already living in Turkey who can answer questions and provide useful advice. There are also 'notice boards' and 'forums' on many websites where you can post messages or questions.

- **Visit Turkey first** – If you're planning to live or work in Turkey for a number of years, or even permanently, it's important to visit the country to see whether you think you'd enjoy living there and be able to cope with the culture before making the leap. Before you go, try to find people who have visited Turkey and talk to them about it. Some companies organise briefings for families before departure. Rent a property before buying a home and don't burn your bridges until you're certain that you've made the right decision. The Turkish property boom from 2003 onwards has attracted many would-be foreign investors, many of whom came on holiday, bought a home the same week and leapt into the Turkish lifestyle, without thinking about the consequences. Some even sold up in their home country. Many of those holiday homes ended up back on the market when their owners found they couldn't cope with life in Turkey. However, selling isn't as easy as buying, and they've found climbing back onto the property ladder in their own country an uphill struggle.
- **Learn Turkish** – Along with adopting a positive attitude,



overcoming the language barrier will probably be your most powerful weapon in combating culture shock and the key to enjoying your time in Turkey. The ability to speak Turkish isn't just a useful tool (allowing you to buy what you need, find your way around, etc.) but the passport to understanding Turkey and its culture. If you can speak the language, even at a low level, your scope for making friends is immediately widened beyond the limited expatriate circle. Obviously not everyone is a linguist and learning a language can take time and requires motivation. However, with sufficient perseverance virtually anyone can learn enough of another language to participate in the local way of life.

Certainly the effort will pay off, and expatriates who manage to overcome the language barrier find their experience in Turkey much richer and more rewarding

than those who don't. The Turks realise that their language is difficult for westerners and are always honoured by a foreigner's attempts to use it. If you make an effort at communicating with the local people in their own language, you'll also find them far more receptive to you and your needs.

'Americans who travel abroad for the first time are often shocked to discover that, despite all the progress that has been made in the last 30 years, many foreign people still speak in foreign languages.'

Dave Barry (American writer & humorist)

- **Be proactive** – Make an effort to get involved in your new culture and go out of your way to make friends. Join



in the activities of the local people, which could be a religious holiday, local festival or social activity. The Turks will make an effort to invite you to events which are important to them but may be strange to you, such as circumcisions – take a deep breath and accept. There are often local clubs where you can play sport or keep fit, draw and paint, learn to cook regional dishes, make handicrafts, etc. Not only will this fill some of your spare time, giving you less time to miss home, but you'll also meet people and make new friends. If you feel you cannot join a local club, perhaps because the language barrier is too great, you can always participate in activities for expatriates, of which there are many in the most popular destinations. Look upon a period spent abroad as an opportunity to redefine your

life objectives and acquire new perspectives. Culture shock can help you develop a better understanding of yourself and stimulate your creativity.

- **Talk to other expatriates –**

Although they may deny it, all expatriates have been through exactly what you're experiencing. Even if they cannot give you advice, it helps to know that you aren't alone and that the effects of culture shock lessen with time. However, don't make the mistake of mixing only with expatriates as this will alienate you from the local people and make it much harder to integrate. Don't rely on social contact with your compatriots to carry you through, because it won't.

- **Keep in touch with home –**

Keeping in touch with your family and friends at home and around the world by telephone, email and letters will help reduce and overcome the effects of culture shock.

- **Be happy –**

Don't rely others to make you happy; otherwise you won't find true and lasting happiness. There are certain things in life which only you can change. Every day we are surrounded by things over which we have little or no control but moaning about them only makes us unhappier. So be your own best friend and nurture your capacity for happiness.

Culture shock is an unavoidable part of travelling, living and working abroad, but if you're aware of it and take steps to lessen its effects before you go and while you're abroad, the period of adjustment will be shortened and its

negative and depressing consequences reduced.

FAMILIES IN TURKEY

Family life may be completely different in Turkey from what you're used to, and although you may not adopt the ways of a Turkish family, you'll have to adapt to certain unfamiliar conditions. For example, your new home may scarcely resemble your previous one (it may be much more luxurious or significantly smaller) and the climate may be dramatically different from that of your home country. The stress of adapting to a new environment can strain family relationships – especially if they were under tension before you moved to Turkey. If possible, you should prepare yourself for as many aspects of the new situation as you can and explain to your children the differences they're likely to encounter, while at the same time dispelling their fears.

**'Travellers never think that THEY
are the foreigners.'**

Mason Cooley (American aphorist)

In a situation where one spouse is working (usually the husband) and the other not, it's generally the latter (and any children) who is more affected by the change of culture. The husband has his work to occupy him and his activities may not differ much from what he had been accustomed to at home. On the other hand, the wife has to operate in a totally new environment,

which differs considerably from what she's used to. She will find herself alone more often, as there will be no close relatives or friends on hand. However, if you're aware that this situation may arise, you can take action to reduce its effects. Working spouses should pay special attention to the needs and feelings of their non-working partners and children, as the success of a family relocation depends largely on the ability of the wife and children to adapt to the new culture.

Breadwinners can take refuge in the office but at-home spouses are in the front line of Turkey's cultural assault, when neighbours keep visiting, bringing unfamiliar food, intrusive questions and the full force of their curiosity. On the other hand, working women may find the Turkish 'men at work and women at home' mindset difficult to deal with.

Good communication between family members is vital and you should make time to discuss your experiences and feelings, both as a couple and as a family. Questions should always be raised and if possible answered, particularly when asked by children. However difficult your situation may appear at the beginning, it will help to bear in mind that it's by no means



unique and that most expatriate families experience exactly the same problems, and manage to triumph over them and thoroughly enjoy their stay abroad.

A NEW LIFE

Although you may find some of the information in this chapter a bit daunting, don't be discouraged by the foregoing catalogue of depression and despair; the negative aspects of travelling and living abroad have been highlighted only in order to help you prepare for and adjust to your new life. The vast majority of people who travel and live abroad naturally experience occasional feelings of discomfort and disorientation, **but most never suffer the debilitating effects of culture shock.**

As with settling in and making friends anywhere, even in your home country, the most important thing is to be considerate, kind, open, humble and genuine – qualities that are valued the world over. Selfishness, brashness and arrogance will get you nowhere

in Turkey or any other country. Treat Turkey and its people with respect and they will reciprocate.

The majority of people living in Turkey would agree that, all things considered, they love living there – and are in no hurry to return home. A period spent in Turkey is a wonderful way to enrich your life, broaden your horizons, make new friends and maybe even please your bank manager. We trust that this book will help you avoid some of the pitfalls of Turkish life and smooth your way to a happy and rewarding future in your new home.

'Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbour. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.'

Mark Twain (American author)

