

Travel

Roam

Back in the Saddle The spirit of Turkey's greatest adventurer rides once again



FOUR HUNDRED YEARS after he was born, the 17th century Ottoman traveler Evliya Celebi (*Celebi* being an honorific title that roughly corresponds with esquire) is making a

long-overdue comeback. Explorer, peace broker, tax collector, court raconteur, war chronicler, gourmand, mystic and, by his own description, “boon companion to mankind,” Evliya spent 40 years traversing the breadth of the Ottoman Empire and beyond—from present-day Austria to Egypt, Sudan to Poland—and writing about it. His 10-volume *Seyahatname*, or Book of Travels, is an epic travelogue that provides a fascinating account of everyday life in the 17th century.

Though previously little known outside of Turkey, Evliya is finally going global. UNESCO decreed him Man of the Year in 2011 and the recent publication of *An Ottoman Traveller: Selections from the Book of Travels of Evliya Celebi* allows English-language readers to discover his magnum opus. But the more adventurously inclined will want to celebrate him on the new cross-country route that allows horse riders, walkers and bikers to trace the early stages of Evliya's 1671 journey from Istanbul to Mecca. Following Roman roads, goat paths, country byways and cobbled Ottoman lanes, the Evliya Celebi Way runs 600 km through verdant western Turkey, ending near Kutahya, Evliya's ancestral city.

Although the route can be done on foot, it is traveling on horseback, I discovered, that truly conjures up Evliya's ghost—even if, like me, you have never been near a horse before. There is the landscape, little changed since Evliya's era, of ancient pine forests, streams and hamlets where vine-picked tomatoes dry on rooftops and the smell of bread wafts out of wood-fired ovens.



“The joy of this ride is that Turkey's countryside is still largely virgin,” says Susan Kierkegard, a retired social worker from Melbourne making the journey. “You get huge, expansive views and open fields.”

Then there are the horses. Ottoman nobles were renowned for their horsemanship, and Evliya was no exception. When he left in 1671, his entourage included 15 pedigree mounts. In fact, thoroughbreds across the world can trace their lineage back to Turkish sires, whose modern counterparts are lively, sturdy and quick compared with horses in Europe or the U.S.—so says Caroline Finkel, an Ottoman historian who spent a lot of time in the saddle while co-plotting the route for a guidebook published last month.

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The 600-km Evliya Celebi Way passes through a landscape little changed, in many places, from that of earlier times

And then there's the food. Evliya loved eating and wrote in detail of regional specialties he sampled. With good reason, as we found out. En route, we were greeted daily with glasses of tea, rustic bread and local cheeses. We picked plums, peaches and figs on horseback. Farmers delivered watermelons, while women brought over pastries warm from the oven. It is this constant flow of warmth that makes this route worth discovering. As Evliya wrote: “I gave thanks to God, mindful of the proverb, ‘First the companion, then the road.’”

To ride the Evliya Celebi Way, visit akhal-tekehorsecenter.com. For other Turkish trails, see cultureroutesinturkey.com. —PELIN TURGUT

On Show

Poetry in Motion. An interactive celebration of Scotland's great bard

The year-old Robert Burns Birthplace Museum is full of rodents. Tiny mice enliven a set of weathervane scenes from Burns' narrative poem “Tam o' Shanter,” rats run through a video illustrating 18th century life, and furry mammals feature in a kinetic exhibit and a 2-m-high mouse sculpture—all echoing Burns' famed 1785 poem “To a Mouse.”

A poet and lyricist whose work, in both Scots and English, embraced landscape, universal brotherhood and political reform, Burns has struck a far-reaching chord, influencing William Wordsworth, John Keats, even Bob Dylan. The title of John Steinbeck's 1937 *Of Mice and Men* was plucked from “To a Mouse”; romantics quote regularly from “A Red, Red Rose”; and New Year's Eve mainstay “Auld Lang Syne” is by Burns. Across the world, Scottish communities annually celebrate the poet's life on Burns Night, held around Jan. 25.

Although Alloway, the village where Scotland's national poet was born in 1759, has been a tourist destination for more than 200 years (a Burns monument and collection were

established soon after his death in 1796), today's museum is a dynamic combination of historic and modern buildings that taps into the elements that fired the poet's imagination.

Explore the cottage in which Burns was born, then go to the graveyard where his fictional farmer, Tam o' Shanter, got spooked by witches and warlocks. Across the street is a modern building where original manuscripts and books rub shoulders with interactive fun. There's a jukebox (“Auld Lang Syne” is filed under Floor Fillers) and a video installation, “Burning Issues,” featuring animations of Burns commenting on hot topics (taxation, revolution and emigration). Another installation, “Man o' Parts,” features minidoors that open to reveal myriad contents: a letter Burns wrote complaining of ill health six months before his death; a 1970 ad for Robbie Burns Famed Old Scotch Whisky; a lock of Burns' hair. It's Burns and his work brought to tangible life. Thankfully, they haven't done the same for those mice.

Visit burnsmuseum.org.uk for details. —DANEET STEFFENS



Portrait of a poet Though he was just 37 when he died, Burns left a legacy that resounds to this day