

2024 Participation in 23 April Children's Day Dance Festival in Ankara, TURKIYE

Our 5th annual visit to this festival proved to be as exciting and enjoyable as previous visits. This year the festival featured 29 countries, all staying in the same, very big hotel! That's around 500 children!

Tuesday 17th April The group assembled at school at 8.am and bid farewell to parents. We flew to Ankara via Istanbul and arrived late in the evening. Our Hotel, the Armada Grannos, was to be home for the next 8 days, and after a delicious bowl of soup (the restaurant was now closed!) the group finally settled into their rooms around 1am. We had arrived!



Wednesday 18th April Up feeling refreshed we headed for the restaurant. The Turkish Breakfast is rightly famous, and we were delighted to find a huge selection of hot and cold dishes. Delicious! We met Cagla, our guide for the week, who directed us to our 'Team Bus', along with the group from Albania. We drove to Ankara for a day of sightseeing; firstly the Museum of Anatolia and



Ankara Castle, with its magnificent views of the capital. Then a stroll and souvenir shop through the old town Cankaya, and a visit to a 'Digital Zoo', featuring 3D animals. The restaurant in the evening was busy as all the groups had arrived, but luckily the buffet was enormous, and we all enjoyed a good feast!

Friday 19th April This day was set aside for shopping, so we shopped, and shopped, and shopped. We did manage an hour in a kids play area as well, so we spent all our energy as well as lots of money! This evening rehearsals began, with filming and interviews by TRT, the Turkish TV Corporation. Holmleigh Kids getting to be celebrities, broadcast all over Turkiye, and worldwide on the Internet!



Saturday 20th April



In the morning, (after another huge breakfast!) the children changed into their costumes for the first time altogether. We then set off for Anitkabir, the tomb of Türkiye's former leader and national hero Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. This involved the festival participants from all 29 countries, and included a very interesting visit to the Atatürk Museum. Then, off to the TV headquarters and studios of TRT, where Lily delivered her speech live on TV in front of the 'Children's Parliament'. She did a great job! Back to the hotel for dinner and a rehearsal – tomorrow being our Park Dance performance, in front of thousands in the park, and millions on TV! Get a good night's sleep kids!

Sunday 21st April



A beautiful sunny day, and we set off early for the bus journey into Ankara. On arrival at the huge park we were given our place near the front of the parade. There were thousands of people lining the route of the parade through the park to the festival stage. We were 4th on the list to perform, and despite a few nerves the Holmleigh kids went on that stage and 'smashed it'! They danced brilliantly and got a really great applause from the crowd.

We knew the parents back in London were watching as messages of congratulation began arriving in our group chat immediately! We had a sandwich lunch and headed to the front of the stage to watch the other countries perform some spectacular dances. Then back to the hotel for a lovely dinner and a good sleep! Well done Holmleigh kids!



Monday 22nd April Today was the big Gala rehearsal day, and we spent most of it in the Gala Theatre watching the rehearsals,



which included all the TV presenters and the big opening song, in which Essa and Eleanor took part. We got our chance to rehearse on the big stage, including how to get backstage, how to go on and off, where to wave to the crowd, and so on. Then Hotel for a good sleep – tomorrow being the BIG day!!

Tuesday 23rd April



This was it – the gala dance day, all 29 countries ready to perform in a 3 hour show live on Turkish TV and the internet. A National Children’s Day holiday in Turkiye – that’s why we were here! Were we nervous? You wouldn’t know it! As the huge theatre filled up we waited our turn, 16th in line, watching the TV broadcast on huge screens and the live performances on the stage. And then our turn came, and guess what? Holmleigh kids smashed it again with our Gala Dance, 1500 miles from home, proudly representing the United Kingdom. The three adults in the group, Mr Ward, Ms Ercan and Ms Elena, were so impressed by the style and discipline in the dance, and the smiles and enthusiasm of the dancers! A flawless performance! Well done all!



Wednesday 24th April

A free day after all the excitement, so we went shopping! Lovely Cankaya in the centre of Ankara, perfect for buying souvenirs and wandering through the old streets in the sunshine. A nice reward for yesterday’s hard work and excitement. And today was Dalal’s birthday! We celebrated with a HUGE cake!



Thursday 25th April Home! Two really good flights and a late night journey

back to Hackney from Heathrow, and there were the parents, nearly 1am and cheering us off the 149 bus at the top of Dunsmore Road. A wonderful homecoming! Let’s hope we can do it all again next year!



Previous participations; 2016 Antalya 2018 Bursa 2019 Samsun 2023 Istanbul 2024 Ankara