

Kavala Kourabies

I knew very little about Kavala, but my Arabic teacher told me it's the homeland of Muḥammad Ali, pasha and viceroy of Egypt, founder of the dynasty that ruled Egypt from the beginning of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th. His family was involved in tobacco production, which used to be one of the main industries of this region, empty warehouses are still dominating the cityscape of Kavala. Yet another connection with Egypt will appear in my story a bit later.

On the 24th of August, I took a plane from Stockholm to Thessaloniki via Vienna. On an Austrian Airlines plane they played Strauss, my friend made a joke: "Good it's not Wagner!" referring to Wagner chief Y. Prigozhin's plane crash a day before.

After an intense teaching semester in Cairo and a bizarre month in Russia, I was looking forward to focusing on my work. I decided to go smoothly into my Greek mood by taking a city bus from Thessaloniki airport to a bus terminal.

The old-fashioned ticket machine on the bus confused me, but friendly guys got me a ticket. The bus from Thessaloniki to Kavala took 2,5 hours. We drove through heavy rain, leaving the pillar of massive smoke outside the city behind us.

I arrived at Swedish House late afternoon with a beautiful light. Leif took me into my room and theatrically opened the window. The view took my breath away just like the amazing interior of the House with gorgeous art deco furniture. I felt that I entered Agatha Christie's novel.

The House was occupied by an interesting bunch of people, they kept arriving and departing, we made friends, and we said goodbye. The spirit of Agatha Christie was very present in The House due to the diversity of the guests. Philosopher, sociologist, crime writer, doctor, pedagogue, composer, archeologist/specialist in mass graves, organizational psychologist, librarian, painter, and your humble servant/photographer - perfect murder mystery material... But nothing criminal happened except the mysterious disappearance of avocado and pitch.

The day usually started with swimming, I soon recognized every single person on the beach, because every day they used to occupy the same spots: adults, children, and even street dogs. My legs were sore from all these stairs. The House garden was blissful and full of fragrant herbs and curious cats, not to mention a couple of turtles making this place cutely weird. The House atmosphere was perfect for productive intellectual work: beautiful library, amazing terrace facing the sea, and the rooftop made for the night cup. The city was friendly and easygoing, full of smells. You walk the narrow streets in the old town and you can sense spicy eggplants, and garlic, so strong that you want to follow this smell and invite yourself for dinner. Sometimes it was a bakery smell, which enswathes you with its tasty aroma. On one of the bakery's trips, I experienced the local specialty called Kavala Kourabie, an almond butter cookie that has a strong resemblance to the Egyptian Kakh cookie that is usually eaten at the end of Ramadan, talking about the Ottoman Empire aftermath...

It was also a full moon concert at the Basilica of Philippi, one of the major ancient Greek cities. Soprano on the ruins, classic opera and jazz, looked like the entire city gathered there on this beautiful night with children, dogs, and picnic baskets.

Kavala days were full of this very rare state of normality, which creates a sense of miracle and complete relaxation, something similar to a childhood memory when you are yourself and you don't expect anything bad to happen to you.

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