From Hollywood to Istanbul: “Building Bridges Through Storytelling” Conference

Sixty American writers, bloggers and fans of Turkish TV series visit studios and meet stars in Istanbul to promote Turkey in the US

Los Angeles, Jun 28, 2018 (Issuewire.com) - JUNE, 2018 – There is a new phenomenon taking place in the US: Hundreds of thousands of American women have fallen in love with Turkish TV shows since they started airing on Netflix in December 2016. Some, like Eve Lambert, a conference attendee, now only watch Turkish TV shows. “I lost my husband recently and I relied heavily on the Turkish series to pull me through. Turkish storytelling was the only thing that made me feel alive.”

Organized by volunteers from Facebook group Turkish Dramas Appreciation Group (TDAG) in conjunction with Pulsar Media in Los Angeles, the Hollywood to Istanbul Conference, “Building Bridges through Storytelling” hosted 60 American women travelling in Turkey for dialogue and cultural exchange. During the two-week educational trip (April 15 to April 29), attendees participated in a unique blend of culture, history and entertainment in Istanbul, Cappadocia and Ephesus.

The sponsors of the trip included Turkish Airlines and Hilton Hotels and the conference was hosted by Sadia Ashraf, an American novelist, TDAG creator Emma Sheen, and Houston resident and writer, Marlena Gibson, who believe Turkish TV series have universal appeal. “Turkish storytelling is so lyrical and beautiful, and it can change the way Americans perceive other cultures,” says Gibson.

The conference attendees not only toured historic sites but watched live entertainment shows and met with studios, actors, producers and directors to talk about the growing need for Turkish dramas to be shown in the US. Ashraf says, “After the US, Turkey is the second largest original programming content producer of TV in the world. Our mission is to create a long-term exchange between the two
countries through entertainment.” The unique event connected TV critics, bloggers, writers and fans of Turkish television with local studios in Istanbul.

Although historically, relations between the two countries have been friendly, recent political and social events have affected the way US citizens view Turkish people and Muslims in general. However, after meeting fellow fans and discussing Turkish television with them, Ashraf and Gibson noted how the stories countered stereotypes and opened viewer minds. They determined that Turkey’s unique way of telling stories could be a significant method of promoting peace between the cultures and volunteered to assist with the trip.

While in Istanbul, attendees were treated to an up close and personal look at the Turkish TV industry. Selin ARAT, Director of International Operations, Tims & B Stüdyo, arranged a visit to the set of Soz (2018) with the conference attendees. Actors Tolga Saritas, Aybüke Pusat, Aytaç ?a?maz, ?layda Ild?r and Ya?mur Ün were surprised to learn how many America eagerly await their shows on YouTube every week. “We wish the shows were subtitled,” Emma Sheen told them, “and many of our members are trying to learn Turkish in order to truly enjoy the shows.”

Actor, Ça?lar Ertu?rul, also met with the attendees and was surprised so many Americans enjoy his show Fazilat Hanim ve Kizlari. “Thank you for your love and support in America. I had no idea.”

The group also had dinner with actors Hazal Kaya, Kaan Urganc?o?lu, Melissa Asli Pamuk and famed Turkish Director/international Emmy-Award winner, Hilal Saral (Fatmagül'ün Suçu Ne, Kurt Seyit ve ?ura, Kara Sevda, Kuzey Güney). On meeting the attendees, Hilal said, “I can’t believe the love in this room tonight. We knew Turkish dramas were popular in the Middle East and South America, but it is an exciting new development to see so many American women loving our shows.”

Representatives from Turkish Airlines also met and spent the day with attendees and provided souvenir gifts. They expressed happiness at the interest being shown in Istanbul and Turkey.

After a ten day stay in Istanbul, the conference attendees saw the top sights of Cappadocia and Ephesus before returning home. Fascinated with the colours and customs of the beautiful country, many determined to return for additional trips. One attendee reported, “When I go home, I am on a mission. My mission is to educate people and promote tolerance and diversity. I am a southern, Christian white woman and I have learned so much about the Muslim religion and culture through these shows and now this trip. I simply will not stand by and allow anyone to speak with hate and intolerance. I will be kind, but I will be firm.”
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