

Ep #182: Points Talk Squad Takes Budapest and Istanbul



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

Alex Payne, Jess Field, and Pam Lorg

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Alex: Every year, my mom, Jess, and I take a vacation together. This year, Points Talk® Squad took on Budapest and Istanbul. Stay tuned to hear all about it.

Welcome to Points Talk®. We are three moms who've discovered how to leverage credit card welcome offers to get hundreds of thousands of dollars of travel expenses for nearly free. We've used credit card points and miles to take vacations to places like Hawaii, Paris, Greece, Maldives, Japan, and so much more. And the best part? We each still have 800 plus credit scores. Imagine being able to take the vacation of your dreams for nearly free. It's totally possible, and we're here to show you how.

Alex: Hey. I'm Alex.

Pam: And I'm Pam, Alex's mom.

Jess: And I'm Jess. Let's talk points. So we have done Singapore and Kuala Lumpur together. Last year, we did Madrid and Barcelona. This year, it was Budapest and Istanbul.

The funny thing is that each year, the first city we visited has been our favorite, and this year is no exception. Spoiler, we love them both. But Budapest really surprised us all, I think, and we really enjoyed our time there. So first, we are gonna talk about how we got there. So, Pam, why don't you kick it off with how you and Alex got to Budapest?

Pam: And so the few of you that are watching this, instead of just listening or what, what the heck is going on with Pam today, I had some skin cancer removed. I have a huge bandage over my nose. So now all these people who don't watch it are all gonna run and watch it so they can look at this.

Alex: Hey, Maybe We'll get a lot of YouTube views.

Pam: That's right. We're gonna see if this increases for this episode because everybody's going, what does Pam look like? But, anyway, my PSA is always keep up with your dermatology appointments. This was, actually wasn't seen on my annual one. I noticed it. So if you notice something weird on your face, go in there and get it done. Get it taken care of. Okay.

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So our flights, we went separately. Alex and I flew together to Budapest, and Jess flew on another flight, and she's gonna talk about that in a little bit. We positioned to Atlanta. I was on United. She was on Delta. Let me tell you that this was a rough positioning day for me because I had just gotten back from Roatan. I had this crazy experience with my daughter having kidney stones. There was a lot of stress involved with that. I'd only been home for a few days. I know you guys hear me say this all the time, but... and then...

Alex: And let the record show that this trip was booked way before Roatan.

Pam: Yes. Yes.

And then she's like, I'm gonna go plan a trip to Roatan. And I'm like she says, do you wanna come? And I said, absolutely not. That is like two days, we get home two days before we leave on this trip. Yeah.

Pam: But my husband was going fishing in Argentina for 10 days. I don't like to be completely alone at night. I don't sleep good, so I thought, well, I might as well go somewhere. But I really didn't think the back end of it is I'm gonna be really tired from that trip, and I certainly didn't consider that my daughter would get kidney stones, and we'd be dealing with that for the last two days of the trip. So I flew to Atlanta.

I was absolutely exhausted. And so we had about I've had about a 6-hour layover. It might have even been 7 hours there before our flight was leaving.

Alex: Well, our flight got delayed a little bit.

Pam: Yes. And then it got delayed, so it was two more. So I was really on the struggle bus. And I said, I am gonna quit doing this. I am going to go the day before and staying in a hotel so I get a good night's sleep instead of having to be at the airport all day.

The trouble with that idea is when a flight is at nighttime, you can only stay so long at the air, at the hotel anyway. And then when it gets delayed Yeah. It doesn't really help.

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Alex: Well, that's what she said. She's like, oh, I really should have come the night before and stayed in Atlanta. I was like, mom, I got here, like, at 05:30, and I still had to wait for forever. You'd still be sitting at the airport for forever.

Pam: It's a tough one, you know? Those positioning flights can be a little rough. But we managed it. We got into the Centurion® Lounge in Atlanta, which is, by the way, absolutely gorgeous. It's huge. It was so nice. Once we could get into that, everything changed. In fact, actually, some of our Priority Pass™ perks, which we've I've never done either of these. So we went to Express Spa, and we... it was a yeah, Express Spa.

Alex: It was either Express or Be Relax or Relax. One of those ones. One of the Priority Pass. I'm not sure which one, but.

Pam: And so we each got, I think I had 20 minutes on a water massage bed, and Alex had 30 minutes...

Alex: I had 30 minutes on, like, a zero-gravity massage chair.

Pam: Yeah. So we did that. I mean, we were trying to figure out what to do during all this time till we could get into the lounge. And then right next to that was a Minute Suites. I've never done Minute Suites before.

And so we, I think we were allowed an hour in there. Yeah. And I was more interested in seeing what it was like than actually really doing much in it. It's pretty basic. There was a couch that had kind of little trundle bed thing that came out, you know, underneath it, and a TV, and you definitely got a quieter place.

Alex: A desk.

Pam: Yeah. A place where you could do some work. The thing that surprised me is there was no blankets. So I'm thinking...

Alex: Or pillows.

Pam: Yeah. So what are you supposed to do? So I don't know if they if you have to rent those too, if you have to bring them, if you have to buy them, how that goes. But, you know, it was interesting. And as tired as I was, if you hadn't

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gotten there, I probably would have rented one, got my free first hour, then rented it for a few hours and gotten a couple, few hours sleep. So, anyway, that was interesting.

But we did finally get on our Turkish flight that we had booked through United for 80k. And that's that was a Saver Award because I think normally it would have been 88k and a mere \$13.20. We loved our flight. So once I was on that flight, I was a happy camper. It was an almost brand new 787 plane. I mean, I think it had been in use for, like, 6 months or something.

Alex: It was, like, 6 or 9 months. On the Flighty app, it, like, says your plane and how old it was. And it was like, oh, this is only 9 months, 6 or 9 months old.

Pam: Yeah. One thing that I did learn on that flight is that I didn't pick the right seat. So the trick on these flights, now we both chose window seats because we kinda like that privacy.

Alex: Because we were just gonna be sleeping. Yeah.

Pam: Yeah. Yeah. So you have two choices. And one has an area that has...

Alex: Like a table.

Pam: Yeah. A seat and then your table. So you're more exposed to the aisle and to the people around and the people that are walking around. The other has the table and then your seat, so that is a lot more privacy. Alex chose correctly. I chose incorrectly. But let me tell you, it was no problem for me. I was so exhausted from my previous trip for being in Atlanta all the time. I did not even have the meal. I skipped it as soon. As I could, I made my flight my seat flat, put on my eye mask, put in earplugs, and I slept. And this is kinda sad because, honestly, I missed Turkish. Their meals are amazing. They have delicious catering. It's probably some of my favorite.

I mean, you get a little tea light. I mean, and then you get the little dessert trolley, and, you know, it really is amazing. And so that was, that just shows you just how exhausted I was. Super exhausted. Now, if you want to be with the person that you're traveling with, then certainly, I would take the middle seats. That's what most couples were doing. I don't mind even if I'm with my husband. I'll pick

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the window seats. I'm not trying to talk. I'm trying to sleep on these overnight flights. And so you just have it's just a lot quieter, and it just feels better. So that's what I do.

Attendants on this flight, amazing. Their flight attendants are great. They make up the bed with a mattress for you. They can't do enough for you. I mean, it's just absolutely superb service. Whenever I can fly on a Turkish Airlines flight, even the old ones, if I'm with someone, so I don't have to climb over the person because they're in a 2-2-2 configuration, whereas ours was a 1-2-1 configuration. But if I'm with someone, they're a lot, on the old style, you're way open, but you got tons of room. I will even do that. Just love them.

So we did that to get to Istanbul. Sadly, because we were so delayed in Atlanta, we were not able to do go to the amazing Turkish lounge in Istanbul, but I did that on the way home. We flew business also from Istanbul to Budapest. That was more like a domestic first-class flight.

Alex: I would say it's even more like an international premium plus.

Pam: Yes. Yes.

Alex: Where you have, like, it reclines and you have a footrest. And a lot of times when you're in Europe, it's like normal economy seat with a blocked middle seat. So this was light-years better.

Pam: Oh, so so much better. And the other thing, you know, I hadn't eaten on that first flight. I was pretty darn hungry, and then we didn't have time to go to the Turkish lounge. Well, we got this was only an hour and 40-minute flight, and we had an amazing catered meal. I think I had swordfish on it. It was delicious. And that has been my experience with Istanbul, that even on a short intra Europe flight, you they if you're in business class, you're gonna get great catering. So loved it. One of my favorite ways to fly, and it was a good start to really exhausting beginning in Atlanta.

So Jess, how did you fly? Because you didn't you weren't with us. We met Jess in Budapest. In fact, she had, like, 6 hours to herself to wander the city before we even got there.

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Jess: Yeah. So I flew on British Airways, and I flew from Houston to Budapest with a stop in London. And so it was a 110,000 Avios and \$500 in taxes and fees. That was for business class for both flights. So, quite a bit more than the 80,000 that Alex and Pam paid, and a lot more in taxes. The plus is I didn't have to position. And so I flew straight from Houston. So, you know.

Alex: And weren't you sitting on some miles, and you were like, I have all these miles here. I don't wanna, like, transfer somewhere else. Like, I'm just gonna use these.

Jess: You know, I'm in Houston, which is a major international hub. So like, if I don't have to position, I avoid it at all costs basically. And I was like, I would rather pay more and just be able to have like, I left way after Pam and Alex left for Atlanta, and I got to Budapest way before they got to Budapest.

And so I was like, Yeah, I paid more, but I also my day was a lot shorter. My flight experience was not near as nice.

Alex: You left at like 3, so it was harder to sleep.

Jess: Yeah. So, you know, I had my seat all picked out on this flight, this British Airways flight.

And then the day before, I got my little Flightly notification that was like, the aircraft has changed for your flight. So I went on to British Airways, and sure enough, they had switched it to their older 787 business class. And so it was like a 2-3-2 configuration, and the two on the aisles face each other. The two seats face each other, which actually like...

Alex: So awkward.

Jess: If you're traveling with someone else, it's actually a pretty great setup. I was not. And so, like Alex, we could have made some bomb reels in that setup if we had been traveling together. I was facing a stranger. They do have a divider, but the divider has to be down for takeoff and landing. So, like, for the first half hour of the flight, I'm sitting there so close to a stranger and facing him. So, you know

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Alex: I'm just thinking of all the hysterical reels you could make of like, this, if we were to get like this person won't stop staring at me on my business class flight. It would be so funny.

Jess: I will say the service was great, the food was great, but if you wanna talk about exposed, I felt like I was sleeping in the middle of the aisle. I might as well have just made a pallet on the floor. Like that is how I was sleeping. And so I did not get, it left... Yeah, my flight left at like 3:30 in the afternoon. So it was already touch and go as to whether I was gonna get any sleep at all. And then, like people kept bumping into me as they were walking to the bathroom. And so, yeah, it wasn't, I mean, look, it's a lie flat seat in the sky. I'm always gonna take that. But it just, you know, compared to the Turkish Airlines experience, it was, it was not that.

Alex: Yeah. One thing I wanna say too about, like, the price you paid is I think sometimes people see like, oh, \$500 in taxes and fees. Like, that's crazy. But what people don't consider is, yes, if you're using points to position, that's great, but not all the, but I'm not always doing that.

Like, I probably paid \$300 to get a one-way flight from Salt Lake to Atlanta. They were ridiculously expensive. And so you have to factor in that as well, like, for yourself, to not have to pay for a positioning flight. You probably didn't pay like, I think that's not bad on the taxes and fees to get yourself all the way to Budapest from your home airport.

Jess: A lot of it is that it's British Airways and London.

Alex: It's British Airways, yeah.

Jess: And that's always, you know, higher on the taxes and fees. And then I think I had, I was delirious at this point. I went to the lounge in London. I don't really remember much of it. It was nice. It was a nice lounge. I ate some food.

And then the flight from London to Budapest was, like y'all were saying, it was just the regular, basically, economy with the middle seat blocked. And I pretty much as soon as we got into the air, I put my eye mask on, I reclined my seat, and I fell asleep the entire flight because I didn't get much sleep on the first leg.

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And so I have no commentary about the service or the food because I did not partake in any of that. I basically woke up when they came on, saying we began our descent into Budapest.

So, but yeah. I mean, like they said, though, I got to Budapest about 6 or 7 hours before they did, headed to the hotel, took a nap there, you know, recharged, walked around a bit. So all in all, it was a good it was a good travel day.

Pam: Yeah. Okay. And then coming home, we all flew Turkish back, but we booked on Turkish Airlines. 65k plus \$200, thanks to a Thrifty Traveler alert. And, I mean, again, we were on, I was I was on the same type of airplane that I came over on.

This was a treat for me because I got to go from Istanbul all the way to Denver. No stopovers. No nothing. It was just, you know, so nice. I also it's like about a 13, 14-hour flight, and so I could so nice to be able to just sit there and enjoy business class because usually, I'm like, I gotta get to sleep. I gotta hurry and get to sleep. So I, you know, hit the ground running, and this was like, oh, I think I watched three movies. I had two meals. I got a little bit of a nap and, you know, got to Denver, and it was great.

Now, Alex and Jess didn't do that. They had a different flight. They left a few hours later than me. They went from Istanbul to EWR, and they got there so late they couldn't get flights back to their homes. So they spent a night at the Marriott and then went home. And any wonderful things or horrible things you wanna tell us about your flights?

Alex: Wait, what was the plane we were on, Jess? The A3...?

Jess: We were on the A350. Were on the A350, and this is this whole trip came about because of this Thrifty Traveler alert. Like, we knew that we were ending up in Istanbul because we got this alert about these this availability, and we were like, okay, let's... so we booked our flight home before we booked anything else for this trip.

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We had our flight home. We knew we were gonna end up in Istanbul one way or the other. But, yeah, we were on the A... and we purposely booked this route, Istanbul to Newark, because they have the A350. And so we flew the A350, and Alex was I have flown the A350 from Denver before, but Alex had never flown it. And we walked on, and she was like, I didn't know we were getting this.

Alex: Yeah. Like, it was, it's like enclosed suites. It kinda reminded me of Qsuite a little bit. So it was, it was nice.

Pam: Yeah, I haven't flown that either.

Jess: We were in the middle. So Alex and I were in the middle. So we did make some reels that we have since posted on Instagram on the plane. But, yeah, I have nothing. I have nothing bad to say. The flight was great. The food was great. The service was great. The Marriott was very convenient to the Newark Airport. And so, you know, we just took the shuttle over.

Alex: The shuttle was really smooth. It came like every 15 minutes, like super easy.

Jess: Yeah. We basically got there, took showers and rinsed off, got into bed, slept for 5 hours, and then got up, got back on the shuttle, went back to the airport.

Alex: Yep. That was it. Okay. Now, getting to Budapest, what you've all probably been waiting for. We stayed at the Parisi Udvar Budapest, which we booked with Hyatt points. We paid 40,000 points a night for the Hexagon two-bedroom, two-bathroom suite, which was just unbelievable. With Hyatt's new redemption prices, you'll have to see what it's looking like now. But if you can find prices around this, like even more, I think this, I think 40,000 points for this two-bedroom, two-bathroom suite is a steal. It was so nice.

So you walk in and you literally have a hallway that you walk down. It opens up to a living room with, like, couch seating area. And then there's two identical bedrooms. You can go see our reel on Instagram, where my mom walks you through it. But king beds, full bathrooms, gorgeous, gorgeous hotel.

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Like, when we told the guy, our tour guide, the next day where we were staying, he's like, oh, wow. Like, he couldn't believe we were staying in such a nice place. And I almost wanted to, but don't worry, we didn't pay for it. We used points, like.

Jess: No, he literally said he was like, his eyes got huge, and he goes, "That's the nicest hotel in Budapest." And I was like, oh, okay. I really do think, though, this is one of our best redemptions ever.

Pam: Oh, it is amazing.

Jess: To have this huge suite for 40,000 points. And we split, you know, with the three of us, we split 40,000 points a night 3 ways.

Alex: Yeah. It would be so good for a family. So so good for families. So great for a girls' trip. I know it sleeps at least four. I'm not sure if it sleeps five. I would doubt it, but I do think you saw something, maybe, Jess, that you can have a rollaway.

Jess: Well, I saw on the description, it was like rollaways are permitted. I don't know. Like, if I if you search five, it doesn't come up as a result. But if you have a family of five, I would inquire about, like, paying for the roll-away. You know, like booking the suite. Like, can I pay for the roll-away for my kid and see what they say? Because there's definitely room for a roll-away. It's just, you know, whether they allow it.

Alex: There's room for five people, just yeah, if they allow it.

Pam: Well, the rooms were huge. The rooms were huge. The bathrooms, we had two huge bathrooms, a middle area. I mean, you could put a rollaway in that huge hall. It was it honestly...

Alex: You could fit so many rollaways in that room.

Pam: Yes. Honestly, this has crept up to being one of my very favorite hotels I've ever stayed at. It felt like I was in the Great Gatsby era. I mean, every time I walked in, I just was, you know, could not believe how gorgeous this hotel...

Alex: Yeah, the lobby and restaurant are unbelievable.

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Pam: Just absolutely gorgeous. I mean, I would pay a heck of a lot more to stay here. In fact, my whole thoughts are anytime I go somewhere to Europe, how can I manage to just go sneak over to Budapest for two nights and just stay in that hotel? I don't even care if I do anything. Just sit in the hotel.

Jess: It's amazing. I know. And I think Pam looked up the cash rates, and that suite was like \$2,800 a night.

Pam: Yes. Crazy. What a redemption.

Jess: So 40,000 points for a suite that goes for \$2,800.

Alex: Yeah. And it is a premium suite, so you can't use a suite upgrade. So that's why, like, we didn't do that. We just booked straight into the premium suite. We did get breakfast included with our Globalist status, but it typically only covers two adults, but they covered it for all 3 of us. Breakfast option, there was a buffet, plus you could order eggs and pancakes.

We ordered the waffles. The waffles were so good. They had whipped cream, Nutella, and different fruits on the waffles. Like, just in the presentation itself was just beautiful. So can't say enough good things about the hotel. Highly recommend.

Pam: What was it? What about the little lady that was making those, what was that? Does anybody remember the name of what she...

Alex: Oh, that was, no, that was in Istanbul.

Pam: Oh, that's right. That's right. I'm getting confused.

Alex: We'll cover that, though.

Pam: Okay. Don't forget.

Jess: Okay. Alright. Well, this show, Points Talk, focuses on evergreen content. But if you want the latest Points and Miles news, some behind-the-scenes sneak peeks, that's all over on Points Talk Premium. Subscribe now using the link in the show notes or at pointstalk.supercast.com.

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Alright. So let's get to the activities that we did in Budapest. I was sort of in charge of planning this aspect of the trip. And so one of the things we did, I am going to butcher some of these names. I apologize in advance.

We went to the Széchenyi Thermal Baths. Thermal baths are a really big deal in Budapest. I chose this one for us. People online were like, if it's your first time in Budapest, you have to go to this one. So we went to this one.

The cost was around €237 for all three of us, so less than a \$100 a person. I booked us, they have these, like, packages that you can book. I booked the lazy days chill and cocktail package. It came with a private changing room, a robe, a towel, flip flops, fruit bowls, cocktail or mocktail for each of us in like a little private garden area. I thought it was 100% worth it.

If you're gonna go, you should book one of these packages. If not, only for if you don't book it, you have to bring your own flip flops and towel, and I think you have like a shared changing area. I think it was worth it for the private changing room, the robe, the flip flops, and the towel alone. Like, I don't want to be...

Alex: Yeah, just to be able to leave our stuff somewhere and not worry about it.

Jess: Not like bring a towel, like, what bring a towel from the hotel. You know? Like, what are we gonna do? So but

Alex: And it was cold, so it was really nice having the robes too.

Jess: Yes, it was really nice having the robes. They have a ton of different they have indoor, outdoor. They have, like, little pools that are kind of all different temperatures. Outdoors, they have a big lap pool that was actually closed while we were there, but that was fine. I was not there to swim laps. And then some other outdoor pools that had like a whirlpool, and we called it an adult lazy river. That was our favorite area, the Whirlpool and the adult lazy river.

Pam was like, these people are having so much fun because it was just so this thermal bath is ages 14 and up, so there were no little kids there. It was all adults acting like little kids, basically, going in this lazy... yeah, Pam loved it.

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Pam: I thought it cutest thing. I mean, you see all these people, and they're just squealing, and they're going back to being, you know, seven or eight years old in the water, and it was just so much fun. I just absolutely loved that.

Alex: And it's cool too, because everybody's tourists from all over Europe and stuff. And so it's just all these people having the greatest time of their lives, from all different countries.

Pam: And it was beautiful. I mean, was absolutely the setting. The outdoor setting was like being in a palace grounds. It was it was it was amazing.

Jess: So I highly recommend doing a thermal bath if you go to Budapest, and we can recommend this one. I would say we were, I mean, you could spend, I think, if you get this package, you can go from 9 AM to 6 PM. Like, if you wanted to spend all day there, you could. Think we were there for probably three and a half to four hours, and I thought that was a good amount of time to be there.

Alex: Yeah. Our guide was like, you the next day, he's like, you guys were only there for that long? You're supposed to stay for, like, seven hours. It is the thing to do, you guys. It is the thing to do there, and they take their thermal bathing serious.

Jess: Yeah. And then we got there via the metro. We actually rode the metro quite a bit while we were in Budapest. Super easy to navigate. It was really cute. The stations were clean. The cars were clean. They were cute. They were it reminded me of the Hogwarts Express. Like, that's it's just a really cute, easy-to-use metro system, very inexpensive.

I think it was less than \$2 each way for us to take the metro. They actually just rolled out the ability to use, like, to tap your card and go. They're still working out some kinks with that. There were it was basically like we tapped onto the machine, and then a human came over to verify. Anyways, I think they're working the kinks out, and it should get better.

But, you know, the ability to just tap and not have to purchase a physical ticket is really nice. The next day, we did a tour of, like, a walking slash we did use the metro and the bus quite a bit on this tour, but we booked it through Airbnb

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Experiences. Our guide's name was George. I will link all of this, by the way, in the show notes. We did a private tour.

We paid around \$275 for our private tour. It was around 4 hours long. And he showed us he said he was gonna show us 90% of what we needed to see in Budapest, and he did not lie. He took us to all the sites. He took us to parliament. He took us to the Opera House. He took us to Buda Castle. So we covered a lot of ground, and we saw a lot. And I thought it was great. I highly, highly recommend this tour. George was great.

Alex: Yeah, it was such... yes, he was great.

Pam: Yeah, George is amazing.

Alex: He was very personable and very, like, courteous of where we were. Like, making sure we were finding traffic. Well, you don't even have to worry about traffic there, you guys. The drivers there stop because we'd be, like, waiting for a car to stop. He's like, "Oh, you just can walk. They'll stop for you." And we're like, oh, they don't do that in the States. You've gotta stop and make sure no one's, look both ways, like, three times, so no one runs you over.

Pam: They didn't do that in Istanbul.

Alex: No. They did not.

Pam: And we were used to Budapest, so we almost got in trouble a couple times.

Alex: Yeah. So he was great. He actually also purchased all-day transport tickets for us, and I don't remember how much they were, but they were very cheap. So that's an option too. And I believe, Mom, you didn't even need one because if you're over what? 65 or something?

Pam: Yeah. When you're old, you get a few perks.

Alex: So, yeah, you don't have to, you get free. Just he he had her bring her passport, though. So, because there are people at stations who check to make sure you have a ticket in case she needed to verify her age, but we had no issues.

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Jess: And I think it was kids under 6 also, is what he told us are free on the metro and on the buses. So

Alex: Yeah. But he was fantastic. I would highly recommend a tour with him. Like, we had a great time. Like, multiple times, we're like, oh, this is so good. Like, Jess, thanks for finding him. He did so good.

Jess: So we started. the hotel that we're staying at. We started in the Pest side, and we ended on the other side of the river on the Buda side. And so I had booked us reservations at a restaurant called Ramazuri Bistronomy. Again, we'll link it in the show notes. Highly recommend. The food was delicious.

Alex: So good.

Jess: And it was a perfect location based on where the tour ended. If you wanted to kind of follow our itinerary. That night, we had a full day, man. We had lunch. We went back to the hotel to relax for a few hours, and then we had a sunset boat tour that I booked. Highly recommend some sort of tour boat tour while you're in Budapest. I booked ours through Floating Lotus. It was around \$40 for each of us. It came with, like, an unlimited Aperol spritz, I think.

And so Alex and Pam really took advantage of that. They really got their money's worth. But no, I think they had like lemonade and water. You know, they had nonalcoholic options too. We felt like we had the boat to ourselves.

I think we were there on a week we were there on a weeknight, so I'm sure that that helped. But there were not that many people on our boat.

Alex: Was actually crazy. I was like, is this it? Like, the boat was huge. And I think there was probably, like, maybe 20 people on the top deck with us. Maybe.

Jess: Yeah. We went there's a there's a few different times you can book. I chose the sunset, which for us, while we were there, was the 06:45. I think we were we were on the boat from, like, 06:45 to 8. It was, like, a little over an hour. And so we were there, we were on the tour for golden hour, which we all agreed was awesome. Just seeing the architecture and the buildings from the water, especially the Parliament Building, which is beautiful, was amazing. And I actually liked all the buildings lit up, like, with the golden hour sun. There's the

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nighttime tour, which I think leaves at 08:15, is also really popular to see all the buildings lit up when it's completely dark outside.

Alex: Yeah. The lines were a lot longer. So I think you're gonna have a more crowded experience if you're going on the nighttime tour.

Jess: Yeah. So, but we thought the golden hour was great. Like, no issues with I thought for \$40 each, like, was a great deal.

Alex: And it was kid-friendly. Like, we saw there was kids on our boat. So definitely friendly for the kids as well.

Pam: And a unique way to see the city. I mean, yeah. You can walking around was great, but then to go on the boat afterwards and see it from, you know, a more scenic view was amazing. You kinda put it all together. Like, the Parliament House. Is that the building that I was like, oh my goodness, that is so gorgeous. The only thing that I felt like it was a little bit cold that night. These guys didn't have any trouble. I'm there all wrapped up in a blanket.

Alex: Yeah, and they did have blankets.

Pam: They did provide some blankets. And after a while, I went downstairs where they had heaters on. Was nice and warm. So but, yeah, I would definitely not forego that. It was great.

Jess: And then we wrapped up our last night in Budapest with dinner at Tom George Osteria. It is an Italian restaurant within walking distance of Parisi Udvar. I ate there twice, actually. I ate there the night that, you know, I was waiting on Pam and Alex.

I had dinner there, and then I took them back, and it was really good. Pizza, pasta, you know, all that stuff. It was really good. So highly recommend that. We'll link that in the show notes as well.

And then the next day, we flew to Istanbul. So we made our way back to the airport. We flew on Turkish Airlines from Budapest to Istanbul. We booked this one with points. It was 10,000 Turkish miles and around \$60 in taxes for this

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flight. And so, again, it was a I think we were in the air less than two hours, pretty quick flight to Istanbul.

Pam: Economy.

Jess: And you know, economy on Turkish Airlines. Pam wanted to upgrade to business, but I was like, I'm not doing that. It's a two-hour flight. So we all just got on economy.

Alex: It was like the exact same flight that we took over, and it was like, that was so nice. But I think our \$50, I think that maybe included choosing our seat. Right? Because we were the very first row of economy, right after business class.

Pam: It was nice.

Alex: Yeah, it was nice. I was, what shocked me is even in economy, they served us a full meal. Now it wasn't as great as the business class meal. Was just a like a cold sandwich, a little salad, and some pudding or something. But I was like, like, we're lucky if we get a soda and some Cheez-its on...

Jess: You're like, Southwest could never.

Alex: Yeah. So it was, I was really like, what airline gives you a full meal on an hour and 45-minute flight? Like, that's just crazy.

Pam: Okay. So on to Istanbul. We stayed at the Park Hyatt Istanbul for 25,000 points a night, Hyatt points, and we did use a suite upgrade award here. And it was really funny because we got in there, and the guy that checked us in, they said, oh, yeah, are you... I think he asked if we were celebrating. So we said they said it was my birthday is in was in a couple weeks. So they said something, and he just talked to us, and he was the nicest guy. He made it seem like he was really gonna, you know, do something.

Alex: Well, then he was like, thanks so much for being Globalist. I was like, well, all three of us are Globalists, actually. And he's like, oh, that's just incredible. Like, so over the top. Like, yeah, complementing us.

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Pam: And I'm going to find something great for, let me see what I can find, and we are all excited. We think we're gonna get another two-bedroom suite here.

Alex: We're getting the penthouse suite here, is what we're thinking.

Pam: Yes. And so he comes. He's, oh, I think I found something for you. And we're all just all excited and all giddy. And then he tells us he's found a room that's higher, on a higher floor, and then it normally would be a \$1,200 a night upgrade, but he can give it to us for \$600. And at first, we thought \$600 for the whole thing. So \$200? And he goes, no, \$600 a night. And we were all like, okay, no. We're gonna pass on that. So

Alex: The best, though, is my mom goes, oh, we will take whatever you can give us. We will not say no because she's thinking it's gonna be free. And then he says that, and then we're like, um, no, thank you. We will be fine with our regular suite.

Pam: Exactly. So we were, I think it was called the spa suite, and it was huge. I mean, we had this big, long, um, again, big, long entry hall kind of where we could put, I ended up with a rollaway bed, and they had a king bed. We could move my rollaway bed down there, and I could feel like I was in my own room.

Alex: Yeah. But I think, well, how much was the rollaway? €50 a night? We did have to pay for that.

Pam: Okay. Okay. And so the interesting thing about it that I thought is, it really was when they called it the spa room suite, it's like there was a sauna. There was an actual sauna in there that we could have used.

Jess: It was a steam room.

Pam: A steam room.

Jess: I would have done it if it was a sauna, but I'm not a huge steam room fan.

Pam: Okay. It was a steam room. And they also had this little, I didn't quite get it, but it they something like this do it yourself mini hammam where you could sit on a seat and get all this warm water, and then you pour it over your head because

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that's kind of the first part of a hammam. And you could pour it all over. We didn't do that either. I don't, we didn't...

Alex: We could have made some interesting content, though.

Jess: I tried to get Pam to let me do it to her for real, but she said no. So.

Pam: Yeah. So, you know, now my thoughts, I am a huge fan of Park Hyatts. I wasn't a huge fan of this room. And I don't know. You guys, I never even told you guys, and you guys may think completely different than I did. So I wanna hear, but I wasn't a huge fan of... the hotel itself, I liked. The room, I wasn't a huge fan. I felt like it was, it's an older hotel, or it felt like it. So it felt a little dated. It was very dark. I mean, it was huge. The size of it was amazing. It fit all of us just wonderfully. But you know? And I think maybe I would have liked it more if I hadn't just been at the other hotel.

Alex: Yeah, I think that's a huge to part of it.

Pam: Yeah. It's really hard to live up to that last hotel that was, you know, all whites and grays and just bright and so much light. And this just seemed so dark to me. And so I think that that was kind of the problem with it. What were you?

Alex: I think for me, when I see 25,000 points a night for a Park Hyatt that I'm not that kinda sets my expectations a little bit because it's not like, you know, 40. It's not a category 8 hotel. And so I'm kinda like, okay. Well, this is gonna be nice, good service. It's a Park Hyatt, but it's not gonna be, like, the best Park Hyatt I've ever stayed in. But it was a nice hotel. It was definitely a nice hotel. I just... but I see what you mean. Like, it's just not quite maybe your style as much as the other hotel was. I think it's a personal preference.

Pam: Yeah. The time before I stayed in Istanbul, I stayed at the Ritz-Carlton using points, and it was really bright. And so I think that's my thing. I think I'm not a huge fan of really dark hotels, but then again, we stayed at the Park Hyatt Marrakesh. It was dark, you know, wood and black and everything, but it was also modern and so new. And I loved it that way. So yeah. So yeah.

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I mean, not to say I'm not gonna, I'm not really saying this is a bad hotel because it was huge, and it was you know, the service was impeccable. It just wasn't my favorite one.

But I'll tell you what was one of my favorite things was the Globalist breakfast. The Globalist breakfast was amazing. They have it in their Greek restaurant, which we ate at the Greek restaurant the first night, and it was delicious.

And I was kinda dragging my feet about the whole thing about going and just eating there, and I don't know, It doesn't sound like it has any food that I'm gonna really like. And they had some they had fish. I love fish, and it was amazing. The Globalist breakfast was a buffet, but you also could order off the menu too. Again, we fell in love with the waffles they had, Nutella, some sort of a cream, fruits. Every day had that. It was delicious.

And this is where we had this sweet little lady, this little lady who was from Istanbul, and she had ... I assume she looked Istanbul-ish. I don't know what it is. But she had these little dough things. I don't know what to me, it looked like, you know, she was going to make cinnamon rolls or something, but she would roll them out. She would put them on this heat plate, and she would fill them with delicious things.

Like, you could get cheese. You could get potatoes. You could get meat. To me, it tasted exactly like a crepe. And so the first day I got Nutella, and it was delicious. And, but she was just really cute. She was so excited to see us when we were there. What is, does anybody know the name of what it is that she made?

Jess: I looked it up. I mean, I know how to I know if I I could spell it, but I was like, I don't know how to pronounce this. Apparently, it's pronounced gözleme. And it's kinda like a crepe or like quesadilla-ish. But I would get one every... This woman was the sweetest woman. We turned the corner, her face just lit up. She was so excited to make this for us. And I would get spinach, feta, and potato in mine, and it was so good. I could eat that every single day. Like, I need her to just move in with me.

Alex: Yeah, they were so good.

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Jess: So that was my favorite part.

Alex: And it's a it's like a traditional thing there. Like, we also had it on our tour, which Jess is gonna talk about a little bit later.

Pam: Well, and like you said, you could have it. It's very filling. We had it on our tour one day around lunchtime. We didn't even have dinner that night. So yeah, very good.

Jess: I actually liked, this might be controversial. I liked the breakfast at the Park Hyatt more than I did at Parisi Udvar.

Pam: I think I did too

Alex: I think I would agree.

Pam: I think I do too.

Alex: Because of the...

Pam: Because of that.

Alex: ...whatever things are called.

Jess: Because of that. Because of the gözleme.

Alex: Yeah. Because of the gözleme.

Pam: Well, and I also liked I think I actually like the waffles even a little better. I don't know. The waffles were so good at both places, but yeah, amazing. Okay.

So we're gonna take let our tour guide, Jess, take over with our activities that we did.

Jess: So I, this was my second time in Istanbul. This was also Pam's second time in Istanbul. It was Alex's first time. So last time I went to Istanbul, we had done this Airbnb Experience tour. If you're not if you don't know it yet, I love my Airbnb Experience tours. So I had done this tour previously with some friends, and I was like, I really liked it. I think we should I think we should do it again.

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So we booked it through Airbnb. We did a group tour. I think there were 10 people total on the tour. So seven other people and then the guide, Sela, who is so great, so funny. It was \$45 for each of us. I thought that was such a steal. We were on this tour for like 5 hours.

Alex: No. I did not know it was that cheap. Like, that's a crazy good price. And he, I mean, he was an amazing tour guide as well. I was so glad that you had already, like, done this and knew who to go to. Hands down, I'm gonna recommend him. He's pretty funny. Like, he's got, like, a more dry sense of humor, and he kinda, like, teases people a little bit. And it was really, really funny. Like, he was fantastic. And he remembered Jess. It was really cute.

Jess: He did. And I didn't, it was October 2023 that I was there last and went on his tour. So I was fully not expecting him to remember me. But I said, oh, I've actually done your tour before. And he looked at me, and he was like, you're the one that was here with her 3 friends and does the tricks with the credit cards, aren't you? I was like, how did you remember that? But yes, the credit card tricks, that is me. So we did that.

And then of course, you cannot go to Istanbul without visiting a hammam. Many of you probably remember Pam's story about her disintegrating paper bikini at the hammam. She wanted, she took us back to the same hammam. She was like, I'm I want a do-over.

Alex: She wasn't that embarrassed by having to wear a paper bikini, I guess.

Jess: She was like, I want a do-over.

Pam: I was just not gonna take that again. There was no way they were talking me into a paper bikini.

Jess: Well, the best part is we each came prepared with our regular bikinis. You know, like we get there, we're like, oh, yeah, we're not wearing the paper bikinis. We have our regular bikinis. And then they proceeded to take mine and Pam's tops off because I guess they covered too much

Alex: Of their stomachs. Yeah. Mine they left on. But.

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Jess: So if you want to be able to wear your bikini the entire time, you gotta get one that like doesn't cover very much like Alex's. She had just like a like a sporty top.

Alex: Yeah. It was like a tube top, kind of one, yeah.

Pam: And mine was a tankini, so it did cover.

Alex: She did, like, move my straps down and would, like, move stuff a little bit, but they completely took your tops off, and then they put a towel over them. Then they would adjust the towel. But I don't know if that towel was on all the time.

Jess: I said, Pam, you used to be a nurse, so I assume you've seen worse. And yeah. So it was an experience, but it was, like, I love hammams so much. I would, this one was different than the one I went to the last time. It was beautiful. It was clean. I thought the service was great. The hammam treatment was great, and then we got massages afterwards. Those were great.

Alex: Maybe like walk through for anybody listening, that is like, I don't even know what a hammam, like, what is a hammam? Like, explain kind of what the process was like.

Jess: So they took us into a room that had these tubs of warm water and, like, these dishes that you kind of, you washed yourself, and it was a it was kinda hot. It was like a heated room. So we did that for about 10 minutes.

Alex: It wasn't kinda hot. It was stifling. I was pouring cold water on myself because I was like, oh, I'm gonna pass out. I'm so hot in here.

Jess: So we did that. We washed ourselves for about 10 minutes, and then they took us into this, like, bigger open room that had a marble, large marble slab in the middle with, like, washing stations on the perimeter, and they scrubbed the crap out of us. They exfoliated our entire body.

I told Alex and Pam, I have not been this clean since they washed me in the hospital as a newborn. That is how clean they get you. So they scrub you all over. They exfoliate your entire body. Then they rinse you off. Then they put,

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then you lie down on the marble slab. So we were like all on there. And they put these like bubbles all over you, and they kind of massage the bubbles into you, and then they rinse them off. And then at the end, they wash your hair. They take you back to the washing station. They shampoo and condition your hair, and then they very meanly dump ice-cold water all over you. And I was not expecting that.

And so she was like, are you ready? Like, she's filling up the, she's filling up the pitcher, and she said, are you ready? And I'm like, yeah. Am I ready for what? Like, you're just gonna give me a final rinse. Right? This was ice-cold water. So I gasped. But it did feel good.

Alex: I knew it was coming because I heard you gasp. And so I was prepared. I like, and I actually thought it felt really good afterwards because it's still really hot in that room. So, but at the initial, you're like, I'm gonna scream.

Pam: One thing I wanna say is that this is a lot of hammams are you go certain days of the week for the men, certain days of the week for the women. This is a coed hammam. Now we were very fortunate that when we were there, there was only the three of us that set. Had that not been the case, if it had been coed, there is no way I would let her take my top off, you know, whether she was doing the stuff.

So that, it is, it's I don't know. It's such a great hammam. I think we were really fortunate that we didn't have any guys with us right after us, a group of guys came in. So maybe they just kind of...

Jess: I wonder if they kind of stagger it. You know? Like, they have appointments.

Pam: Yeah. When I was there the first time, there were a couple men in there, and I'm in there in that paper bikini not making eye contact with anybody. And I think that was probably the most embarrassing moment of my life. So I was really glad, but I, so I was surprised when she started taking off our my top. I'm going, I'm feeling so comfortable here. What are you doing? So but if there have been men there, no way would that have happened.

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Alex: Yeah. So get yourself, like, an actual bikini, not a tankini, not a bikini top that goes lower.

Pam: Not a one-piece like I did the first time.

Alex: Yeah, you need a true bikini unless you wanna get naked.

Jess: So then after that, they, like, dried us off, toweled off our hair, put us in robes or, like, in a towel, and then they took us for our I think it was like a 40 or 50 minute massage. Great way to just like so relaxing, great way to end the day. As far as price goes, it was around \$200 each plus tip. I thought that's a very fair price for how long we were there and how involved it was.

Pam: We had 20 minutes before the massage of just relaxing in this nice little room. They gave us some nuts, some Turkish delights, some blueberry herbal tea, some water, and you just kind of relax afterwards. So that's kind of nice too.

Alex: Yeah. It was really nice. I would have 100% go back here. I loved it.

Jess: And then we walked over to Karaköy to look for an Umbrella Street that apparently no longer exists. So we did not find the Umbrella Street, but we did grab dinner in that area, got some gelato afterwards. Of course, mine and, Pam and I have to get our gelato and then just took a just took an Uber back to the hotel. So it was a great day, and, yeah, I really enjoyed it.

Now Alex is gonna compare the two cities. So I, so this was our all of our first time to Budapest. But like I said, Pam and I had been to Istanbul before. So Alex, tell us what you think.

Alex: Okay. So, as a first timer, would I return to either? Okay. Here's the thing. I'm not like a giant returner unless I, like, am blown away, and I'm like, I gotta take my family back here. I gotta do this, you know.

Jess: Unless it's Hawaii.

Alex: Unless it's Hawaii. Then I will return every year. Hawaii is just so easy, you guys.

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But I really liked them. I really loved Budapest. I preferred Budapest to Istanbul, which I think we all did, which we kind of teased at the beginning of the episode. Budapest, I don't feel like I need to go back because it is smaller, and we already saw 90% of the city. Thanks to our wonderful guy, George.

But I wouldn't be opposed if it was like, we kind of were all talking a fantastic trip would be Vienna, Prague, and Budapest. Like, if you wanted to hit all three of those in one trip, it'd be a fantastic trip. So I would be totally happy to do that same to go back to Budapest if I was going with people who hadn't been yet, like, with, like, my sisters or something. And it's like, hey, we're going to Prague and Vienna, and they wanna go to Budapest too. I'd be totally on board, and it would be fantastic.

Now, part of the reason why I preferred Budapest to Istanbul is Budapest just felt much more quaint, smaller, less busy. The public transportation was easy to navigate. The taxi system, they have Bolt and Uber there in Budapest, and it was very easy to use. We were able to get where we wanted to go very quickly.

Istanbul was not the case. It was, they have Uber. It's not, and they also have, like, what is it called? The taxi app.

Jess: BiTaksi?

Alex: BiTaksi. So the thing with that is and you want to use those. You don't wanna just hail a taxi because you might get scammed. They will sometimes charge, like our guide, Sela, told us, you know, use these apps because they will sometimes charge you more than they should be charging you.

The problem with Istanbul, or what I didn't love about it as much, was it's just so much busier. I felt like the air felt like there was more like smog or pollution in the air. The taxis were just kind of like I just felt like I was in a taxi a lot. And I get carsick kind of easily, where I just like, I don't like ever throw up or anything, thank the heavens, but I just don't feel very good. And I'm like, as soon as I like to call cars torture chambers.

So I'm just like, sometimes I'm getting in these taxis. I'm like, here we go in the torture chamber again, because it would take probably 20 to 30 minutes to get

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anywhere that we were trying to go, because these roads are like one-lane roads that go through the buildings and alleyways, and there was a lot of congestion everywhere. So that, and I remember Jess, you kinda had mentioned the taxi system and the roads there were, that's how it was the last time you were there as well. Yeah. So that was my issue with that.

I really enjoyed our lunch, loved the hamman. Our tour with Sela was fantastic. I loved seeing it all, but I don't feel like I need to go back and do it again. I actually was like, wow. These guys were willing to come back here and do this again.

I was surprised after being there that you wouldn't have been like, okay, guys. Let's go somewhere else, and then we'll fly to Istanbul to go home. I'm actually surprised that you guys were fine going back.

Jess: Well, Pam had to redo her hamman experience.

Pam: Yeah.

Alex: That's true.

Pam: To be honest, once we were there, I'm going, I've already seen these things. It's like I could remember my tour had been on before. And I think, and then when we got to Karaköy, I wanted to see the Umbrella Street and go down that, and that had gotten so much bigger, and the Umbrella Street wasn't there anymore.

And that was one of my favorite things. Now I will say I love the hammam. That was great. But I agree. There's some places that you go to, it's a one-and-done. Yeah. And I don't need to do that again.

I wouldn't say that there's anything in Budapest, although I just loved Budapest, that I need to return to, other than that hotel.

Jess: What about the chimney cakes?

Alex: Oh, we forgot about chimney cakes.

Pam: We didn't talk about chimney cakes. And you know what else we also didn't talk about? That New York cafe that we went to.

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Jess: Well, the food there was eh.

Alex: Yeah, but I don't think the New York cafe was worth talking about.

Pam: Well, the food wasn't very good, but it is a gorgeous building.

Alex: Yeah. It is a gorgeous building. Just walk in.

Pam: Chimney cakes.

Alex: Yeah. Chimney cakes.

Pam: Found a brand new, unbelievable treat. So in Budapest, on every corner.

Alex: What is the place we went to? The chimney cake we place we went to? I don't remember, but if you leave the hotel, take a right, take a left, you'll run into it. It's like this... It's really... it was really good.

Jess: Okay. It was gelateria... Gelateria Pichler. We'll link it in the show notes.

Pam: Yeah.

Alex: Yeah. It was really good.

Pam: But what they are is they take some dough. Again, it kind of is like a something you make cinnamon rolls with, and they make a little, it's kinda like a funnel...

Alex: Cylinder.

Pam: Cylinder.

Alex: Like a cone.

Pam: And then they cover that with different things. It can be...

Alex: Like cinnamon sugar.

Pam: Like the cinnamon sugar. They had some with pistachios and stuff. But it gets even better because then they can, they took Nutella and put that around the top and down inside, and they have other things they can do. They have

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custards or different things they could do. And then you can have gelato in it. I mean, I was obsessed. I am..

Alex: Yeah. I could go for one of those. Those were good.

Pam: I would go to back to Budapest for the chimney cakes and for the hotel. And I could just sit there and enjoy myself.

Alex: You know what? I would go to Budapest for, like, the Christmas markets too. They're like a huge ice, like, this huge area that they put an ice rink in, and then they have their Christmas markets there and ice skating. And it just, I was envisioning it in my head, and I like, that would be so cute. So I would go back for that and get some chimney cakes.

Pam: Just because I wouldn't go back doesn't mean that I think people shouldn't go, because I think Budapest is one of the most amazing European cities I've been to.

Alex: Yeah. Jess, what did you think of going back to Istanbul?

Jess: I liked it. I mean, I really enjoyed going back to a hammam. I enjoyed doing Sela's tour again because, like I said, while we were on the tour, was like, man, I don't remember any of this. So I thought it was interesting, but like, I don't feel the need to go a third time. Unless I'm like flying, you know, I'll take a I'll take a Turkish deal. So, but it would be one of those things where I like fly in, stay one night, and then fly out.

Alex: 100%. I would go back to Istanbul Airport to fly to where I need to go because Turkish Airlines is fantastic. And I kinda think maybe I had in my mind because Turkish Airlines is so great that I was like, to me, it's like Turkish Airlines, Qatar, Emirates, those are like, and Etihad, like, all of those are kinda like the high standard of airline business class, you know, luxury flights. I was kind of thinking maybe Istanbul was gonna be more like those Middle Eastern countries a little bit, and it's not.

And so maybe I just, like, didn't have the right expectations. But I know, but I loved the history. Like, I'm a history buff, so learning about all the history there, it

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was really awesome. So I'm really glad we went. I'm just not like, oh, I need to go back there. I would be great to never go in another taxi in Istanbul.

Pam: Stay at the airport. Yeah. Okay. So, as usual, we had so much fun on our PTS team trip. Istanbul was fun, but Budapest stole our hearts.

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