

Around the World with Norman Rockwell

1955: Istanbul, Beirut and Karachi

by William C. House III
Part 3.

Two scenes from these three cities made the cut. The one to the right and four little camels (below) that you might have missed in the [first ad](#). Karachi didn't make it, which is indeed unfortunate because Norman had big plans for Karachi as you will see on the next page. [Istanbul](#) has had a remarkable history down through the ages. Its former names were Byzantium and [Constantinople](#) and is home to the famous [Sultan Ahmed Mosque](#) or Blue Mosque which Rockwell included in his sketch to the right. Beirut was the next stop. From after WWII until the civil war in 1975, Beirut was a beautiful, wonderful city to visit. The newly formed Muslim state of Pakistan and its city of Karachi was still going through growing pains. Today [Karachi](#) is one of the world's largest cities. Here we begin the story in Istanbul as told by my father with some interesting sidebars by Norman Rockwell. One thing to keep in mind as they describe their trip all the way to Hong Kong, the year is 1955:

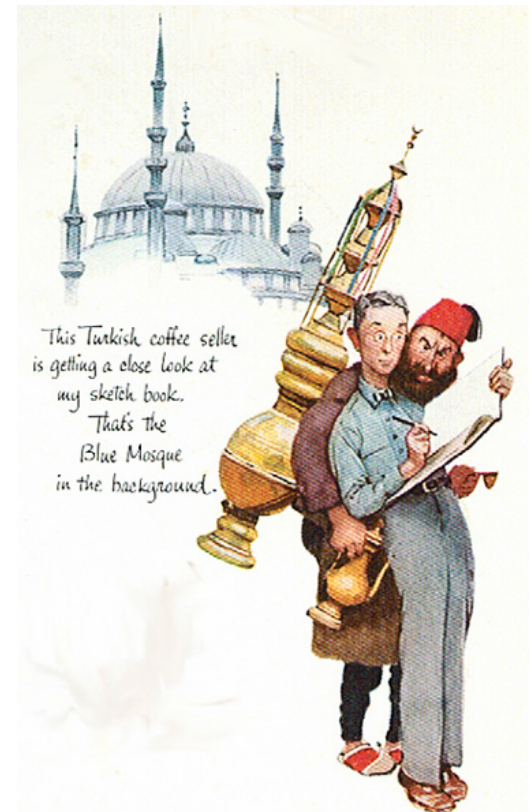
BILL HOUSE: "We left the Hilton one morning by cab, went down to the [Galata Bridge](#) which spans Europe with Asia. Here we found many multi-colored boats. A one-man ferryboat rowed us from one side to the other while we took some pictures. After this was done, we went over to photograph the shoeshine boys with their colorful boxes decorated with brass. We also saw some men with their tin-type cameras and took some shots over by the mosque on the other side of the Bosphorous.

Istanbul fascinated me because although it isn't the half-way mark of our trip around the world, nevertheless, it represents the division of east and west. This feeling comes over you the moment you leave Europe and you go to Asia over the Galata Bridge. On the European side of the bridge, you have the business houses which give you the feeling of Europe, when you cross over the bridge there are noisy crowds, the mosques, and all Asia crowds in on you. I felt that this is, in one way, half-way around the world, certainly not in distance, but in the feeling of moving from Europe to Asia.

We had lunch at a place called Liman which overlooks the waterfront harbor with colorful native boats going by. The Liman Restaurant is government owned on the fifth floor of a former office building overlooking the [Golden Horn](#). The restaurant has a strictly continental atmosphere, although it serves all the wonderful native dishes of Turkey. We had swordfish steak which is broiled on skewers wrapped in bay leaves over a charcoal spit. It's a typical dish because the swordfish is a native fish of the Bosphorous. You can also get other kinds of Turkish dishes, such as shish kebab, which is lamb cooked over the coals on a skewer, and different kinds of pilaf. They have all kinds of Turkish delights, such as Turkish sweet meats and also, of course, the everlasting Turkish coffee and you can be sure you never finish a cup to the last drop. Every cup of Turkish coffee has at least a half an inch of sediment on the bottom. If you happen to drink the whole cup like I did, you get the bitter end of it.

After lunch, we went over again into Asia. Here we found a little mosque where there is extensive work being done uncovering Byzantine mosaics and some wonderful frescos from the eleventh century. The frescos are very strong in color. The color looks like it was just put on the other day. You are not allowed to photograph it. The vivid colors leave an imprint in your mind.

After visiting the little mosque, we went back to the Hilton, where we had cocktails on the roof. It is a wonderful room nine stories up with a good orchestra. We had a few drinks there and then went down into town, to a wonderful eating place called The Abdullah. It is right on the main street of Istanbul. You are mistaken if you think your waiter speaks English because after you've ordered your dinner in English, you find out he hasn't had the faintest idea of what you have been talking about. Here again, they serve wonderful Turkish shish kebab, kebab, and pilaf. They make delicious egg plant with a yogurt sauce over it."



My dad and Norman in a one man ferryboat crossing the Bosphorous.

"The night life in Istanbul could be more interesting. There is a street that runs parallel to the main street which is called the Six and a Half street and a lot of strange sights go on here. Not good copy, I don't think, but very interesting anyway. We were in one way unfortunate in Istanbul because we arrived there during the time of marshal law, as everyone had to be off the streets at midnight. However, in the Hilton Hotel there is a wonderful night club, they have a floor show, dancing, and nice dining. The climax of the floor show is the ever present middle-eastern belly dancer. Not as good, perhaps, as it will be when we get to Beirut, but she was not bad at all. One of the other fabulous things in Istanbul is the bazaar. The bazaar was burned down to the ground about a year ago. Now they have it in an old mosque. You walk down these little narrow corridors where they show everything from diamonds to gold jewelry. They're wonderful goldsmiths. You can buy all sorts of brass ware and any amount of different kinds of antiques. The

trick here is never pay a fellow what he asks you. You have to bargain with him and figure out the price you would like to pay him, and then offer him that and stick to it, because they will give you some of the highest prices for things and yet you can buy them for about a third less.

One of the other very exciting things to do in Istanbul, is to take one of the steamers which goes from the downtown part of the city up the Bosphorous. You go up for about an hour and a half, perhaps fifteen minutes longer. It is sort of a ferryboat and the thing to do is to have a car meet you at the stop. There is a wonderful old restaurant right there when you get off the ferry boat, and if you have the driver of the taxi meet you, then he can take you back to the Asiatic side, back into Istanbul. This takes about a half a day, you pass by the fishermen and the Sultan's Palace. Going up the Bosphorous, you see these flocks of swallows which fly very low. Each swallow is supposed to be the soul of a Turkish fisherman who was lost at sea.

In summing up Istanbul, it is a very attractive city in its own way, with these wonderful mosques, great restaurants, the magnificent Hilton Hotel, not to mention the ride up the Bosphorous, the mosaics and the frescoes. The people are nice and it has a delightful climate, and the bazaar is wonderful for shopping. There is a very favorable rate of exchange, if you know how to exchange your money. It is not an expensive place like Paris or some of the other European capitals. It is a nice place to spend three or four days, and see something a little different, do some shopping and see some things that you would not see any other place in Europe.

Getting back to the Blue Mosque, we went there one day and we all put on slippers covering our shoes and walked in. The tremendous floor and ceiling reach way, way up. The floor was covered with mats and on top of that, they had oriental rugs. The people were in alcoves kneeling and praying. They kneel down without using their hands, and can also get up the same way."

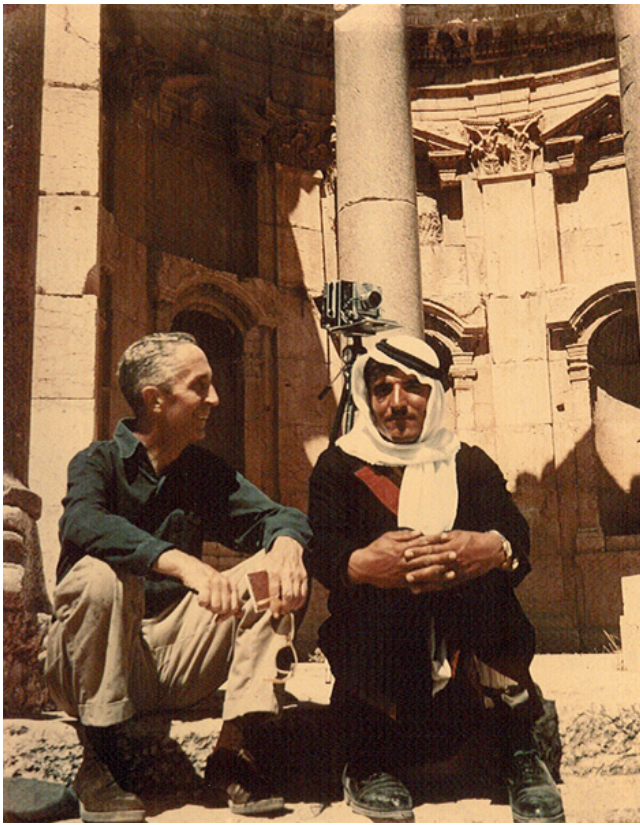


"Entering Beirut, we went through customs in a breeze, arrived at the Excelsior Hotel which is right on the Mediterranean. It reminded me of Nice. After a good night's sleep we took a tour of the town, went way up on the mountain that overlooked the city, came back down and sat in several of the cafes shooting pictures for Norman. The people here are very friendly, more so than Turkey.

I was talking with the cultural attaché of the embassy here and he said that the whole country, and the city of Beirut particularly, are doing everything they can to make this a real tourist center. You can see the results everywhere, the people are so courteous to you. They speak English and they help you as much as possible. It is a real haven. Beirut is a modern city built on a very steep hillside facing the Mediterranean. The water here is the real blue Mediterranean with a pink haze in the sky. You see many of the different Arab tribes in varied colorful dress, with their bed sheets and turned up toes. Strange looking policeman (to the western eye) were on many corners and were very friendly and very willing to help the tourist.

The next day we drove up over the mountain and down into the valley to a town called [Baalbek](#). It is here where the Roman ruins [*to the left and below*] stand and they are in better shape than those in Rome. We wandered throughout the Temple of Jupiter and found an Arab and used him as a model. We took calendar pictures and also scrap pictures for Norm. The ruins fascinated me. I know very little about the ancient history here, but they were intensely interesting. The thing I liked most was going into the town of Baalbek, for they are used to tourists. Everybody there wears their native costume. They don't put on an act for the tourists, but on the other hand, they understand that the tourist does want to take pictures and is fascinated by costumes, and they are willing and eager to pose for you.

When you come down the main street of Baalbek and you hear the camel driver calling out his strange calls, the children running back and forth across



Here are three pictures of [Baalbek](#) in the Bekaa Valley, named for Baal of course. The city may be at least 9,000 years old. When Alexander conquered this city, he named it [Heliopolis](#).
Editor

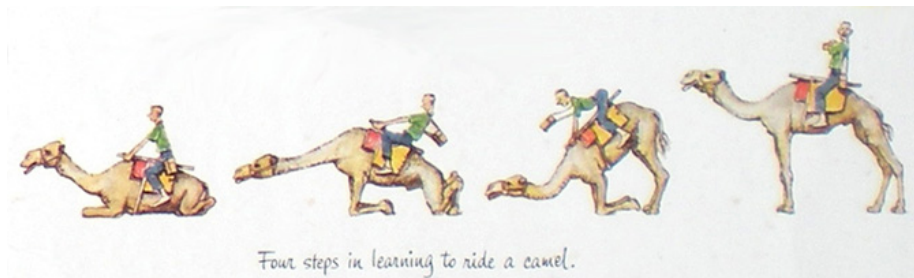
the street, and the coppersmith hawking his wares; Norman Rockwell, otherwise known as the "whip" was really in his glory in Baalbek saying, "Shoot this, shoot that." We had the cameras going like crazy. There was so much material there, little girls carrying big trays of tomatoes, old men going by with their bed sheets strapped around them, riding on little donkeys and little children coming to the spring to get water. It really took you back two thousand years into the old Roman Empire. The ruins here are really very well preserved, about twenty-five hundred years old with an enormous set of five gigantic polished marble columns with sculptured stone of lions and intricate designs, strange things that you don't actually see in Rome. It is ideal for anyone who wants to take pictures."



Istanbul or Beirut



Norman and Blackie: Karachi Harbor



Four steps in learning to ride a camel.
(From the ad on the [first page](#), kind of tucked away.)

BILL HOUSE: "I was on a camel this afternoon and what an experience that is. We found the camel, and right away Norman and Blackie said, "Alright, House, you're elected." So I got on this beast while he was down and going up was like riding on the scenic railway. Coming down was even worse.

After taking all the shots of Baalbek, we started back and on the road to Beirut, turned off to a little town for lunch. The restaurant, being open air, was nestled in a very wonderful little valley covered with trees, surrounded by steep mountains. Right through this little valley ran a stream. Tables were set on both sides. For lunch we started off with some ice cold watermelon and then had a local drink called [arak](#) which is a very potent almond flavored drink. Then the waiters came in with about thirty different Arabic dishes. Arabic hors d'oeuvres, consisting of yogurt, beans, nuts, and all kinds of strange vegetables. After hors d'oeuvres, we had some pounded raw veal mixed up with some sort of a salad. No one really knew what they were eating but it was very tasty and after that we had the regular shish kebab with another salad and sliced tomatoes. Everything was very unusual but very delicious. After a very wonderful Turkish coffee, we started back for Beirut. The check for lunch for four people, with endless dishes was \$6.00 including tip."



"After about four days in Beirut, we took off on the Pan American flight around the world headed for Karachi. We flew along the Persian Gulf, passed over the Garden of Eden, over the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Sea, Persian Sea and finally getting to Karachi. It was a wonderful flight even though it was a long overnighter. In the morning we saw the Arab Dhows which slowly made their way from Mombassa in Africa to Karachi and its wonderful harbor. The Dhows are the same old ships, with the same lateen sails, that the Arabs have been using for 4,000 years. It is nothing very much, except a few planks and boards. They sit over the side with a few sails, but somehow they seem to get there.

Karachi is the capital of Pakistan. Pakistan is a new country which started around 1947 when most of the Moslems migrated from India. It has the aspects of a typical frontier town. When we arrived it was around 10 am and it was quite warm, in fact, 104 degrees. We had Pan American employees there to help us get through customs and a Pan American car drove us to our hotel, the Metropole. The ride to the Metropole was interesting, we saw camels again only this time they were pulling carts."

ROCKWELL: "Of course, I am getting a tremendous kick out of this whole trip and I certainly thank Pan American for the opportunity of doing it. It was very exciting and picturesque driving from the airport. The country was absolutely flat, there were no hills of any kind, terrific heat, native men wearing turbans, women wearing saris and veils. You see very few of the European dress.

When we got to the hotel, we had wonderful luck meeting up with a Pan Am cadre. This group was here to help the people of Pakistan develop commercial airlines. They invited us to eat at their mess upstairs in the hotel, a great help because the food that was generally served in the main dining room was not up to standard, especially when you are used to the good old American pork and beans."

BILL HOUSE: "One humorous occurrence as we arrived at the hotel, we had about fifteen bags and it took fifteen men to carry them upstairs. At first glance you would think the Metropole had been built many years ago, however, it was built around 1950, fashioned after the English style. It was built with a courtyard having balconies running completely around the interior. In the center were tables for dinner and dancing. The orchestra would play to the wee hours of the morning, keeping you awake. This was much after the Kipling atmosphere of years ago."

ROCKWELL: "Karachi is greatly overcrowded and as I understand it, there were only 70,000 people here several years ago and then the Moslem refugees came in from all over India and they now have something like two million. [*Now it's over 15 million. Editor*]

The first night after the orchestra stopped about 2:30 in the morning, I heard another sound that seemed like building going on right outside the window. I finally got to sleep only to be awakened a little while later, about 6 o'clock by a snake charmer outside my window piping his pipes. Blackie and Bill came into my room and we watched this spectacle. Blackie was not presentable at the moment, but I wanted to go down and photograph the snake charmer. The snake charmer got out a cobra, boa constrictor, python and many other snakes. The natives gathered around him and I was afraid we wouldn't see another one, but as you will hear later on, there were plenty of snake charmers and all that type of thing."

BILL HOUSE: "We met an old friend of Blackie Kronfeld's, Nelson Price of the Standard Oil Co. He invited us to his beach house about 16 miles from Karachi. We drove out to his place past the smelly native villages along the beach front and stopped at a fishing village. Nets were strung out over the

ground being mended and dried, and the fisherman were getting their boats in shape. This is where we picked up lobsters for our dinners. We continued on to his place, changed into our swimsuits and went swimming in The Arabian Sea. Norman has something to say about the fishing village.

ROCKWELL: "This fishing village is very primitive and the thing that impressed me about it is that there was not a single thing about that village that was not right out of Biblical times. The costumes they wore, children, everyone, wore just what they wore during the time of Christ, and it was really very interesting. The men wore white turbans, white short bed sheets and the children, what they did wear, were in bright colors. As we were sitting there, a fishing boat came in, they have an out rig where a man sits on the side of the boat in order to balance it."

BILL HOUSE: "Nelson Price's little shack on the beach was set up on a high cliff. We walked down through a series of steps cut in the side of the sandstone cliff and went swimming in the sea. There was a wonderful surf and we all had a lot of fun riding the waves in. Norman and I were trying to catch some fiddler crabs. There were thousands of them running up and down the beach. We chased them around but we couldn't catch one. So we had to eat lobsters and buffalo steaks for dinner instead. After our meal, we motored back and got ready for our flight to India."



*These two pictures are either Pakistan or India.
The guy on the left looks like he could be Pakistani. Editor*



Next, Part Four: [Asia](#)
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