

## AEGEAN TONIC

You can wake up every morning in a different bay and every evening, eat fish freshly caught by a charming sailor. Hettie Harvey messes about on a Turkish gulet

It was with more than a little trepidation that I set out on a sailing holiday, I can tell you. Even one that promised to "pamper you... whilst you relax on the sun deck". In my mind, sailing had rather more to do with being trapped on an uncomfortably small boat with no hope of escape, with some ruddy-faced Englishman in deck shoes and oilskins (it's always bucketing with rain, naturally), yelling at me to hoist something-or-other, or trim something-or-other else at high speed - whilst I desperately tried to dodge dangerously heavy bits of rigging flying towards my head from every direction - than with relaxing. It would invariably end in tears and long, stony silences and unsurprisingly, as a result I had never once, not even for one teeny tiny milli-milli-millisecond, considered that it could ever be transformed into anything remotely resembling a holiday.

But then, I'd never been greeted by a four-man crew in sparkling, immaculately ironed white uniforms before. Or been given a glass of champagne as I kicked my shoes off five minutes later. Or had a cabin with a double bed and en-suite bathroom. 'Ah, life on the ocean wave,' I thought to myself after approximately seven and a half minutes. 'Yes, I could definitely get used to this.'

And to be honest, it just got better from there. We had met the boat - the Randa - in Gümüslük, a tiny, picture-postcard fishing village on the south west corner of Turkey, but by the time the bell went for breakfast next morning and I dopily emerged from below deck (you see, before you know it, you find yourself talking the talk), we were anchored in a tiny bay, tucked away out of sight from the rest of the world, with nothing and no one to disturb the peace and quiet. It was too good to be true. Barely 24 hours earlier I'd been woken by builders drilling next door and rain drumming on the pavement and now here I was, seemingly in the middle of nowhere, on a beautiful, 28-metre (that's nice and spacious, in case you're wondering) wooden gulet, with nothing to worry about but finding my sunglasses to defend against the glare of the pristine white table cloth in the bright sun. Not a bad start to a Sunday morning.

Of course, I wasn't alone - even I couldn't really justify having four crew and a 16-berth yacht all to myself, although I'd be very happy to give it a go.

Tussock Cruising, the company behind my holiday, charter their yachts (which range from six to 16 berths) to groups and it's up to you whether you fill a boat with friends and family, or trust them to put you on one with like-minded souls. If you do take the latter route, as I did, they take great pains to make sure that they put you on a boat with people they think you'll get on with (there is extensive telephone 'interviewing' when you book) so there's no need to worry about being stuck with a bunch of

retired German bird-watchers if what you're looking for is a non-stop party with 15 hot singletons - or vice-versa. It does take a bit of getting used to if, like me, you've never holidayed with strangers before, but there was plenty of room for everyone to spread out and snooze or sunbathe as we sailed along.

We spent the week cruising from bay to bay, stopping for lunch and a swim, or for those looking for something a little more active, the boat had a sailboard and canoe on board, and one word to the crew and they were immediately readied for action. Or we could lazily snorkel along the rocks, looking out for octopus or perhaps a swordfish for supper. Tuncay, our captain was a particularly keen fisherman and one day pattered off in the yacht's small launch, reappearing an hour or so later, having caught lunch.

Now and then we stopped in a sleepy village: Bozburun, where the road was an assault course of goats and chickens, and the market at Selimiye, a short bus ride away, where I stocked up on honey and sesame coated peanuts, cooking pots and cushion covers (while carefully stepping around the vicious-looking farm implements, replacement axe heads and sickles piled high along the ground). And Datca where I found myself a couple of sarongs and a tablecloth and one of my fellow travellers haggled for the ultimate trophy - a Turkish rug. But, to be honest, the boat was so comfortable and the crew so attentive and accommodating that I only really got off so that I could post a gloating postcard or two home - the souvenirs were just a bonus.

Our meals were cooked as we sailed along by chef and second-in-command, Mustafa, who would abandon his chopping and stirring the moment the captain shouted the order, to leap into position with the other crew members as they heaved on some rope (apparently, if I had wanted to join in with all the heave-ho-ing, I would only have had to say the word but, well, you know...). Once or twice, when the sailing was smooth, he would hold an informal cooking lesson so that we could learn how to recreate our favourite dishes back at home, before we'd anchor again in another hidden bay and settle down for dinner - always remarking how hungry we were after a tough day at sea. The crew, of course, were far too polite to comment.

One evening, we anchored as usual in a peaceful, secluded spot; a tiny cove with a pebble beach and a densely forested gorge rising sharply up behind it, like something out of King Kong. The wind dropped so that the sunset was still and magical, and the crew started piling boxes of plates and saucepans, along with a couple of tables, carefully wrapped salt and pepper pots, glasses and bottles of wine into the little launch. For a second we thought perhaps they were abandoning us, but then noticed that, over on the beach, the captain had quietly been gathering firewood and had lit a small fire among the rocks at the water's edge.

A short while later, we were all seated on cushions around the table (now immaculately laid and decorated with a small vase of wild flowers), eating our delicious barbecue supper and drinking probably far too much wine as

the sun disappeared below the horizon and a full moon rose in its place. I don't remember anything like that happening in the Solent.

## Need to know: Tussock Cruising

### The boat

All Tussock boats are built of wood and very carefully looked after. You are asked to go barefoot on board, as sandy or dusty shoes act like sandpaper on the deck, and watch out after a hard day's sailing that you don't get drenched by a bucket of cold water as the crew wash the salt off the deck. Of all the cruising companies in this part of Turkey, Tussock is really the only one that sails at every opportunity, rather than motoring.

### Rooms

Tussock's boats range in size from six to 16 berths; all are standard gulets (traditional wooden yachts) other than the smallest, which is a classic tirhandil (an older type of gulet). All the boats are divided into two-person cabins; most have a double bed with a single bunk above as well. The cabins are pretty cosy for two, but if you're travelling alone are perfectly comfortable. As you might expect, things are basic but the cabins all have a hanging wardrobe and a couple of drawers so you can unpack, and every room has a power point - although you can only use it when the captain has turned on the generator.

### Bathrooms

These are also basic but they have a loo and a basin, the tap of which pulls out on an extending pipe so that you can have a shower, too.

### Food

All meals are prepared on board by the cook, using fresh, local ingredients, and you eat out in a restaurant for one lunch and one dinner each week. Every meal is a feast, even breakfast, when everything from cheese and ham to fresh fruit and yoghurt, bread and honey or sour cherry jam (delicious) is laid out, along with pots of fresh coffee and Turkish tea, which you drink from small glasses, with or without a little sugar but never any milk. Lunch and dinner consist of starters such as dolmas or sigara boregi (rolls of fine pastry filled with feta and herbs), fresh fish or meat dishes with couscous and vegetables - stuffed peppers, green beans and aubergines are favourites. The boats have a drinks fridge from which guests can help themselves 24 hours a day at no extra charge - everything from wine and beer to water, fruit juice and fizzy drinks.

### Trip ideas

Tussock arrange week-long themed trips - with everything from wildlife-watching (seals, dolphins and turtles are all native to this corner of Turkey) to cookery, painting, archaeology, photography, Turkish language and even beauty therapy a possibility - so you can be pretty sure that you'll be at sea with like-minded travellers. You can also charter a whole boat privately.

### Tariff

Individual prices for a week's cruise range from £200 to £315 per person. Meals and drinks on board add up to £193 per week. Flights and transfers are extra.

Tussock Cruising (020 8510 9292; [www.tussockcruising.com](http://www.tussockcruising.com))

Out and about: Bodrum and the Datca peninsula

Getting there

It is currently only possible to fly direct from London to Bodrum with charter airlines, including First Choice ([www.firstchoice.co.uk](http://www.firstchoice.co.uk)) and Thomas Cook ([www.flythomascook.com](http://www.flythomascook.com)). Alternatively, British Airways ([www.ba.com](http://www.ba.com)) fly direct from Gatwick to Izmir from £149 return, plus taxes ([www.ba.com](http://www.ba.com)).

>From there, there is a regular bus service or you can take a taxi to Bodrum.

What to do

There are several world-reknowned archaeological sites in Turkey, including Ephesus with its famous library, further up the west coast, and the Lycian tombs carved into the cliffs near Fethiye, further to the south. But on the Datca peninsula, the ruined Hellenic city of Knidos is well worth a visit.

Once a thriving port with two natural harbours, the streets, temples, houses and two amphitheatres can still clearly be made out. With almost no signs of modern life in sight, it is a fascinating step back in time, and wildlife lovers will be intrigued by the numerous huge lizards lazing in the sun, multi-coloured crickets and unusual butterflies. At the ruined monastery on the tiny island of Kameriye, one of Turkey's only Christian churches still stands, although it has long since stopped being used and little remains except some damaged frescos and pebble mosaics. The view alone is remarkable. The Museum of Underwater Archaeology, in Bodrum's castle, is worth a visit if you have time to kill in what is otherwise an overcrowded, touristy town consisting of little more than discos and beach bars. The museum displays raised shipwrecks and contains well-preserved objects from as far as 5,000 years ago.

Celeb spotting

Tina Turner, Pamela Anderson and David Bowie have all been spotted cruising along the Turkish coast.

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