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TURKEY



A typical anchorage
for a Tussock gulet



ANCIENT WATERS

This May, *Steffan Meyric Hughes* shipped aboard a Turkish gulet called *Randa* to travel along the shores of Turkey's Aegean coast with Tussock Cruising

You eat wholesomely. You drink wantonly. You sail along the Turkish coast in a traditional wooden schooner with a friendly crew to look after everything, anchoring every night in a different bay. Your cabin, with en-suite shower, has room to stand, room to stow, and room to dress. You choose whether or not you want to help sail the boat.

It sounded different to my version of sailing: cold pork pies, boats that are dry only in the prohibition sense of the word, snoring shipmates and sitting on the windward side of the boom, a row of cold pigeons, soured by freezing spray every third wave. A Tussock cruise is about sun, scenery and relaxation – no relative of the Tussock caramel bar, the red-and-gold-wrapped treats found only in cold places (yacht cabins and Scotland). No Sir. This is probably the best way to hoodwink the woman in your life into thinking that sailing is far more enjoyable than it actually is.



Top left: Swimming time; Top right: Breakfast – enough choice for all tastes



After a four-hour flight to Bodrum, a two-hour time gain and a thrilling minibus transfer organised by Tussock, we arrived at the boat, moored in the picture-postcard village of Gümüslük on Turkey's Datça Peninsula. After stowing luggage in our cabins, we went up on deck and introduced ourselves over glasses of bubbly, cold and potent in the warm Mediterranean night. If you don't charter the boat, you share with up to 17 other people, though usually fewer. This time there were some other journalists on board reviewing the cruise for publications ranging from *The Scotsman* to *Vogue*. There were also people with real jobs. Loes Douze, owner and director of the company, was on board for our trip and explained how she matches customers to ensure harmony among strangers. If you want to sip wine and visit archaeological ruins for a week you'll not be lumped with the stag party from Moscow. It's not, in any sense, a singles

thing, but Loes's thoughtful social engineering has resulted in some couples meeting on Tussock cruises.

We slipped our lines the next day, the boat's diesel waking the last slumberers from their new homes to emerge blinking onto the large afterdeck, where breakfast had been laid out. After a briefing from the boat's captain, Tuncay, a daily post-breakfast ritual over the chart, we set off. *Randa* does not have any winches at all. The crew grab the halyards and leap up, lifting the weight of their bodies off the deck, dangling in a balancing act to get the 8,029sqft (740m²) of sail aloft. It's a well-practised routine, done with a minimum of fuss. Drinks are shifted an inch or two to enable the process, but passengers are left otherwise undisturbed. This is probably the bit you can join in with. I thought about it – for a moment. I imagined the

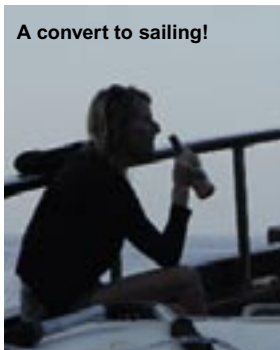
“What would the woman from Vogue think?!”

embarrassing charade, the crew smiling politely as I slowed everything down, dangling off the end of a halyard, as useless as a one-legged man at a butt-kicking party, and as unnecessary as yet another male volunteer cook at a barbecue. *What would the woman from Vogue think?* I declined.

We soon settled into our own rituals of life on board. There was enough space on the boat for everyone always to find a private corner. This, combined with daily trips ashore in the evening and sometimes at lunch, with regular stops for swimming, is enough to stave off cabin fever – even, I suspect, for the most claustrophobic, resolute misanthrope. Typically the mornings were used for reading, chatting and contemplating lunch.

I spent a long time by the wheel with Captain Tuncay, talking about sailing and fishing the Turkish coast. Tuncay was a fisherman before joining Tussock, and

remains so to this day as a frighteningly effective amateur. He loves to sail, and enjoys racing the company's gulets competitively in the annual Bodrum Regatta. Clearly, Loes picks crew – all Turkish – for their affability as well as their efficiency, and, on *Randa* at least, they walk the most delicate of lines with unerring balance:



A convert to sailing!

Captain Tuncay, cook Mustafa, and mates Gökhan and Nejdet were helpful but not obsequious, friendly but not intrusive, laid back, but quietly efficient. It was a privilege to get to know them, and gain an insight into the Turkish character – something you would miss with a foreign crew.

That first day, we anchored in an empty inlet for lunch. One of the joys of Turkish food aboard Tussock's boats is the predominance of fresh, local vegetables. Lunch is often vegetarian, and supper

would typically be a performance in parts: six or seven dishes might include grilled meat or fish (sometimes caught by the crew), with vegetable 'patés' like hummus and *baba ganoush* (smoked aubergine mash), and a hot vegetable dish or two, like green beans in a tomato sauce. There is always plenty of salad. Each boat

carries a windsurfer and kayak, and after lunch, we spent a playful afternoon diving off the boat into the clear blue sea, experimenting with the kayak and watching a braver passenger – 'Ian the oil guy' – fail utterly to gain mastery of the windsurfer.

Later, we set sail for the village of Selimiye. Sometimes the only sounds on board are a faint high-pitched whine from the spinning prop as the boat approaches 7

knots, the occasional tremble of the genoa's leech, and the white noise of the bows of a 100-ton boat surging through the sea at up to 10 knots, punctuated occasionally as a larger wave is thrown outside the wake.

Turkey's share of the Aegean coastline is surprisingly wild and empty considering its growing popularity. Rocky grey hills, generously landscaped and wooded with pine and olive trees, rise steeply from the water. We slip by lands occupied over the millennia by Hittites, Romans, Byzantines and Ottomans: it's a land saturated with the legacies of ancient civilisations, and here

"This is where Odysseus travelled after the battle of Troy"

and there can be found ruins of rock staircases, buildings and amphitheatres, uncondoned and unsung. This is the coast Odysseus travelled after the battle of Troy. You

certainly get a feeling for the word Mediterranean. The land feels like the centre of the earth, the legatee of civic history. Today, the implacability of the landscape

The gulet

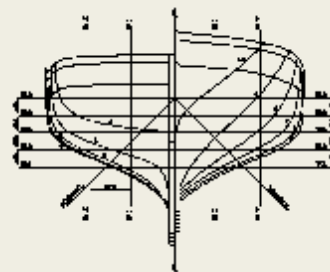
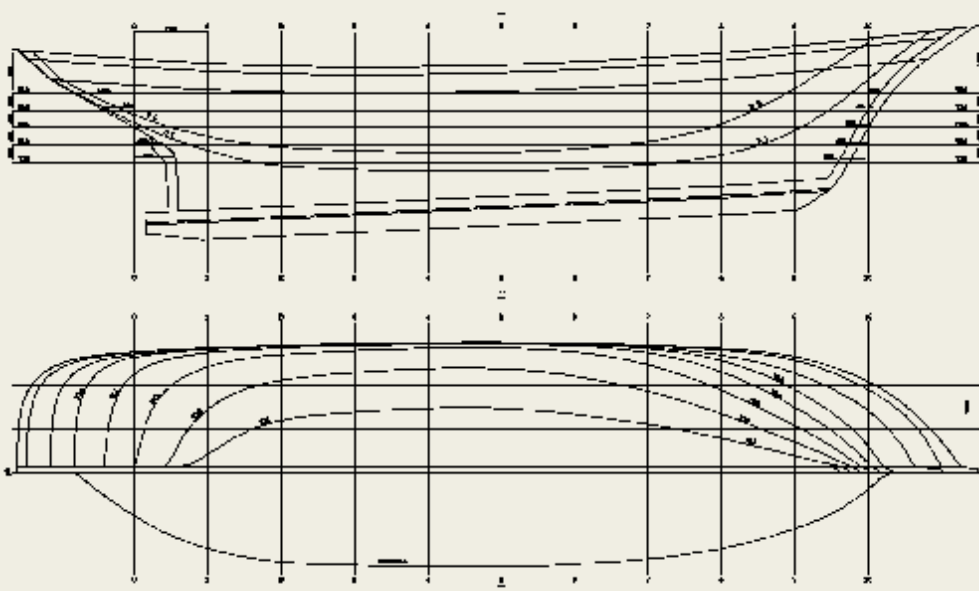
The *gulet* (pronounced goo-lay) is a 100-year-old Turkish ship design. In the days of sail, they were used for fishing and the transportation of cargo. The term 'gulet' is a moveable feast: it refers broadly to a hull shape characterised by wide beam, deep draught, bluff bows and, particularly, the rounded stern. The same characteristics – wide decks, stability and size – that made gulets good load carriers make them ideal for cruising today.

Most are still built of wood, usually pine, which gives them a short lifespan of up to 30 years before a major overhaul, which will usually involve replanking. The pine is renewable, however, and very cheap. A 60ft (18m) handbuilt wooden gulet can be had from a Turkish boatyard for as little as €150,000 (£100,000). This would include an engine, and typically, a good level of equipment.

"The term 'gulet' is a moveable feast"

Tussock's gulets have a Dutch-designed wishbone bermudan schooner rig, carried on two box-section, deck-stepped wooden masts. We seldom sailed at less than 7 knots, and sometimes at as much as 10, and the engine (apart from water-heating duties for morning showers) was only used once.

Tussock describe the cabins as 'not luxurious', a statement which belongs in the same category as describing shellfish risotto as 'homely cooking'. They are extremely comfortable, as everyone on board agreed. Drinks on all Tussock schooners are available from a cooler on deck. All boats, except the smallest, a six-person *tirandhil* (another traditional Turkish workboat) carry a rigid tender for trips ashore, a kayak and a windsurfer. Some offer waterskiing.



RANDA DIMENSIONS

- LOA: 92ft (28m)
- Beam: 22ft 4in (6.8m)
- Draught: 10ft 6in (3.2m)
- Upwind sail area: 8,029sqft (740m²)
- Auxiliary: 360hp Daff diesel
- Capacity: 16 berths in 8 cabins



Inset: Tuncay outlining the day's sail after breakfast



The foredeck, with its sun loungers, is a good place to read and listen to the sea



Local piyades fly the flag at every harbour


gives no clue to whether it belongs to Greece or Turkey, a traditionally antagonistic relationship, which has in recent years been enjoying a period of relative détente. In principle it's easy: the islands are Greek, the mainland Turkish. In practice, often the only clue is the beeping of mobile phones switching allegiance from one of these possible custodians to the other.

We stopped twice the next day: once to see a 13th-century Byzantine church just a short scramble from the shore. There were no information boards or staff, but we had a Turkish guide with us for the day, a retired schoolteacher booked by Tussock. Later, we reached Selimiye, a small village with a string of boatyards along the water's edge, mostly still building workboats out of the local pine. Hunchbacked peasant women stood outside houses feeding corn to their animals. A group of old men played a prayer call from a speaker on a veranda, a sort of makeshift minaret.

Turkey is not a voraciously modern country. For all its much-discussed ambition to join the EU, and veneration of modern Turkey's founding father, Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk), one gets the sense of an ancient culture still comfortable in its own hide of history and civilisation. The country, though increasingly moderate in terms of faith and gender equality, retains much of its cultural heritage, and workboats are still built from wood: all boats in Turkey, from dinghy to cruise-liner, fly the wonderfully villainous red Turkish flag.

The next day I ask Tuncay about gulets. He thinks there may be as many as 1,000 in the Bodrum region alone, mostly wooden. They are heavy, and difficult to sail, which partly explains why so few of them do. Tuncay and Loes can't think of another company that sails its gulets, and we certainly didn't see any others sailing during the week we were there. The masts of many gulets are merely decorative:

Talking Turkey

 Tussock Cruising is an Anglo-Dutch company established in 1983. It owns nine gulets, with capacity for 6-18 passengers on each. Singles, couples and whole-boat charter represent roughly equal shares of Tussock's clients. Routes are flexible, and take in Turkey and the Greek Islands. Some educative trips are offered, which include cookery, nature and photography. Bespoke cruises can also be arranged. Lecturers are of a high calibre. Families are welcome.

Cost

The price of an eight-day cruise starts at £468. This includes all breakfasts, lunches, unlimited drinks on board and five dinners. The remaining two are eaten ashore. Discounts apply to charter and longer trips. www.tussockcruising.com Tel: 0208 510 9292 Email: info@tussock.co.uk

boomless, trackless poles. It seemed a sorry waste, as we had perfect conditions most of our time: Force 3 to 4, cloudless blue skies and warm sunshine. That afternoon, we sailed 40 degrees off the wind at over 9 knots. Speeds of 10 knots or more are often seen on the log. For such a beamy craft, *Randa* moves surprisingly fast; the feeling of speed, on such a big boat, is that of a flying carpet – or a bargain-price Turkish rug.

That evening, Gökhan made a powerful mud-coloured cocktail from blue Curaçao and cherry juice, coating the glasses' rims in sugar. I liked Gökhan, and told him it was delicious. Privately, I nicknamed it the Blackwater. Later we played a loud, convivial version of Jenga which Gökhan won; but then he hadn't drunk any of the Blackwater.


“The feeling of speed is that of a flying carpet”

The next day we paid a visit to the ruined city of Knidos. At the extreme tip of the Datça peninsula, the settlement still boasts two natural harbours, one on the Aegean Sea and one on the Mediterranean. The 2,500-year-old city bears the ruins of its successive civilisations: Greek, Roman and Byzantine. Again, there were no cordons, no fee and very few fellow tourists – just a few information boards fading in the sun. We saw a wild tortoise, and women tended to the crops on the plain below. I wondered if humans will still inhabit the earth in another 2,500 years.

Loes sang a jolly singsong for us in the amphitheatre, a tiny Dutch figure framed by the ever-present electric blue sea behind her, her arms waving by her sides. In two

days our trip would be over, and we would start decompressing in the desolate Costasque hustle of Bodrum, thinking about going home to reality.

The last night we had our supper in a small, empty cove. The crew filled empty beer bottles with wild flowers, and we watched the sun set behind *Randa*. Later, a full moon rose behind the hills, and a bright moonbeam shone through a gap, lighting up our midnight feast.

A fellow passenger sipped a cold beer on the aft deck on the last evening, and wondered if she could hide somewhere on the boat, to emerge later as a jack-in-the-box and do it all again. I knew exactly how she felt. Loes told us that tears are frequent when people have to leave. Maybe that's why two thirds of them return. With so much left to see, I know I would. 



A nomadic fishing couple at Knidos



Knidos: Not a fellow tourist in sight

Turkey: Boatbuilding

It seems the Turks (at least on the Aegean coast) remain unconvinced by GRP for smaller boats. Gulets are still for the most part built in wood, with the exception of some 120ft+ 'super gulets' being built in steel with price tags of £2 million or more. The local workboats unique to the Bodrum region are built exclusively of wood. These are the *piyades*, and they throng every harbour, beachfront and anchorage we visited. They come in a range of sizes with any number of DIY additions. They are built by small boatyards on beaches, of the sort we saw in Selimiye. The size of a *piyade* can vary, but typically they are about 9m (30ft) long, narrow-transomed or double-ended, and of carvel construction with

closely-spaced ribs. All scantlings are fashioned from the local pine, which works well in the high salinity of the Mediterranean.

Because of their softwood construction, *piyades* have a short lifespan – typically 20-30 years for a well-looked-after boat, but maintenance is presumably cheap due to turnover. A new 30ft *piyade* costs about €10,000, without an engine. Tuncay owns a *piyade* and cites the advantages of its wooden construction to be cost (it's still the cheapest way to build one of these boats), ease of maintenance, increased buoyancy for carrying loads and higher strength. He also mentions comfort to the touch, which must be an issue in the high temperatures of summer.



A typical *piyade* work/fishing boat



A gulet being replanked in a Bodrum boatyard



A *piyade* at a small beachfront yard