

and, relax...

A week sans smartphone – and the stress that goes with it – sounds dreamy, right? If it's a digital detox (and a whole lot of sun) you need, a week or two sailing the Eastern Mediterranean is the perfect unwind.

BAREFOOT HOLIDAY: WHILE ON BOARD, STOW YOUR SHOES AWAY AND PAD AROUND IN BEACH GEAR THANKS TO PERPETUALLY SUNNY WEATHER

The South West coast of Turkey might be the most magical coastline of the Aegean. And that's not an exaggeration – it's called the Turquoise Coast for a reason. This section of the Mediterranean – between Turkey and Greece – with its fantasy-blue ocean and little islands surrounded by sea, is bucket-list holiday stuff. But before you think it's just for Zen-seeking travellers, the area's historic sights and rich culture make for an interesting holiday too. And, Turkey comes with a budget bonus for South Africans; no pricey visa required. You'll need to fill out an online version (and take a copy on holiday with you), but that's as taxing as it gets.

Looking for a cold season solution? Swap an icy Joburg or rain-soaked Cape Town for this perpetually sunny region. The Turkish sailing season kicks off in April – seemingly early for the European summer – but things don't really wind down till the end of October, with temperate sea swimming right through. The real secret is to visit in the months of May (expect temperatures of mid-to-high 20s), June, September and October. These months are deliciously balmy (yes, you'll get a tan) but free from peak European summer holiday chaos.

Even if you need no encouragement to travel to Turkey, it's an even better idea to do it by boat. Not only is sailing a great way to dodge herds of tourists shuffling through popular harbour towns, it's also a sun and sea holiday without being holed up in a pricey beach hotel.

A luxe yet relaxed sailing option comes in the form of SCIC Sailing (Sailing Cruises in Comfort), a floating boutique hotel from which



to explore. And it's anything but the enormous cruise ship-style sailing that the word 'cruise' conjures up. SCIC's Turkish gulets – wooden sail boats – accommodate a select group of fellow travellers. The smallest yacht in the fleet sleeps eight and the largest, 16 (in both double or twin cabins), and so while, yes, you're essentially sailing with strangers, it's a great way to meet like-minded explorers. If that isn't your vibe, chartering a yacht with family or friends (all cruises are child-friendly) for a special celebration holiday means the boat is all yours. Each yacht sails to its own itinerary, so where you go (and that includes some of the Greek islands) is up to you, the captain and, of course, the weather. The company is

TOP: THE COASTLINE IS ALWAYS WITHIN SIGHT AND REACH

ABOVE: SEA TEMPERATURES ARE PERFECT FOR SWIMMING THROUGHOUT THE SAILING SEASON

THIS PIC: EVENINGS DOCKED IN EMPTY BAYS MEAN NO FIGHTING THE HOARDS FOR A VIEW OF THE SUNSET

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FOR AN AUTHENTIC SEAFARING EXPERIENCE, THE YACHTS SAIL WITHOUT A MOTOR WHENEVER POSSIBLE



SNORKELING EQUIPMENT AND CANOES MAKE EXPLORING ALL THE MORE FUN

very proud to be one of the few that favours sails rather than engines, so for the most part, sailing is done to a soundtrack of creaking wood and slapping waves.

Essentially this is a ‘do nothing’ type of holiday, with sporadic bursts of adventure for those wanting more than sun lounging, Kindle in hand. Based in the glam holiday town of Bodrum (the yachts also set sail from Marmaris, Göcek, Kos or Rhodes, depending on where you’re headed), the journey begins in a bustling Med harbour. But as you sail away, the bustle magically disappears and is replaced by secluded rocky bays that are pure Facebook holiday envy. Once you’ve had your fill of quiet coastline, you can up the pace with a spot of sightseeing. Recommended stop-offs (ask if it’s on the itinerary)



THE VILLAGES ARE AMONG THE QUAINTEST AND QUIETEST ON THE MED

WHEN IN TURKEY... GO TO GREECE!

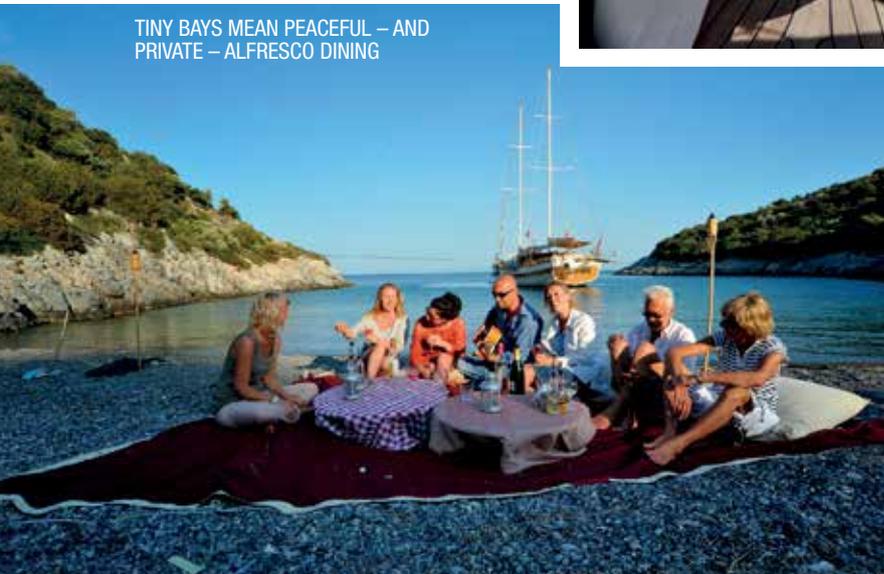
Less than an hour’s ferry ride from Marmaris (where many of SCIC’s cruises end), a trip to the Greek isle of Rhodes will set you back about €50. Spend a day or two exploring before hiring a car (approx €50) and driving to holiday resort town Lindos. Then hop on a flight to Athens.

RHODES Book a room right in the heart of the old town and all historic sights are within walking distance. Once the home of the knight charged with guarding the gate of St. John, Kokkini Porta Rossa is now a boutique hotel. Just steps from the front door is the Church of St. John, built circa 1470.

LINDOS After your history lesson, kick back in Lindos. St. Paul’s Bay is its go-to beach, and with the Acropolis towering above, a 300 BC ruin is your view. The Melenos Lindos Hotel (melenoslindos.com) is a 20-min walk from the beach, and a quiet retreat with the best moussaka on the island.

ATHENS Gritty and heaving with people, Greece’s capital isn’t for everyone. But it is a captivating mix of new meets very, very old. Visit the Acropolis (don’t miss the museum below) and the Temple of Zeus – then spend the night somewhere ultra modern like Pallas Athena (grecotelpallasathena.com), a gallery-like hotel packed with contemporary art.

TINY BAYS MEAN PEACEFUL – AND PRIVATE – ALFRESCO DINING





LEFT AND ABOVE: TURKISH VILLAGE MARKETS ARE THE REAL DEAL – WE RECOMMEND THE BAKLAVA AND TEAS **THIS PIC:** VILLAGES ARE RELAXED AND UNPRETENTIOUS



PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF SCIC SAILING. SOICSAILING.EU.

are the ruins at Knidos, once an ancient Greek settlement, as well as St. Nicolas Island, rich with the remains of churches built between the fourth and sixth centuries. For shoppers, an hour's stroll through one of the small village markets is just enough time to stockpile Turkish delight (in every flavour imaginable) and spices to lug home. Make sure you find the baklava seller with a tray of just-cooled pastries. This syrupy treat is best served fresh, so markets mean you get the good stuff.

Speaking of which, what's a holiday without heavenly food? Mealtimes on the gulets are a high-light, and although the fare is healthy and fresh, you'll have to bid banting goodbye for the duration. Traditional Turkish food cooked by your yacht's chef is a lovingly prepared feast. From the fruit, cheeses and breads served at breakfast to the lunches and dinners infused with Mediterranean flavours, each meal is a delight. There's lots of seafood – think

getting to Turkey

GETTING THERE

Depending on your itinerary, you'll need to fly into Bodrum or Dalaman, which means a brief stopover in Istanbul and then an hour's flight to your destination. Visit www.turkishairlines.com for flights from Cape Town and Johannesburg. For a visa (which is free of charge), visit www.evisa.gov.tr/info

THE COST

The price for one week per person ranges from €940 up to €1 059, depending on the season. The cost includes breakfast, lunch and five dinners on-board and all snacks and drinks (including alcohol). Excursions and some activities (like waterskiing) aren't included. For a quote on chartering a gulet, email info@scicsailing.eu

THE CREW

Each yacht has a captain, chef and one or two sailors. This is sufficient to sail the yacht without the passengers' assistance. There's always at least one crew member who speaks English.

TO BOOK

Visit www.scicsailing.eu or call +31(0)629063180

QUEEN OF THEMES...

Doing lots of nothing might be your holiday spec, but if you're up for a crash course in, say, Turkish cooking, yoga practice or sailing lessons, check out SCIC's themed cruise line-up. In September and October there's hiking, painting and kids' cruises as well as singles' weeks – there's even a clubbing trip in the offing. Rock on!

grilled fish, prawns and calamari – and tasty vegetable dishes like garlicky tomatoes, grilled aubergine and red peppers infused with the region's famous olive oil. Ask for plenty of sides of yoghurt laced with interesting mixes of carrot, beetroot and courgette (plus loads of garlic and herbs of course), and smear generously onto chunks of baguette. And, while sailing is a chance to detox from your iPad, we don't suggest total austerity. Turkey is a Muslim country but drinking alcohol isn't frowned upon, and delicious local wines (try the rosé by producer, Pamukkale Sefoni) are plentiful onboard. ❖



LOCALS ARE WELCOMING AND ENGAGING