

Travel/Turkey



Arriving in Bodrum by sea, you are greeted by the Castle of St Peter, above and right



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Chris Robinson gets away from it all on a stress-free holiday at sea, sailing around the historic sights of Turkey

Picture if you will a sea that's more of a true navy blue rather than a British battleship grey, and a sky that's as clear as a million Manchester City shirts without a cloud on the horizon. Then imagine the warmth of the sun on your skin, with the sound of water gently lapping around you and the rush of the wind filling three great, cream, canvas sails, steering you towards some distant green-capped island.

Now close your eyes... and then open them again. If the vision is still there you could well be on a Turkish ketch or gullet flitting effortlessly from one sparsely-populated Greek or Turkish island to another, and not sat at home or in the workplace, in some overcast part of the south west of England.

I didn't know quite what to expect from a week's sailing holiday in Turkey, in fact I didn't know quite what to expect of Turkey itself, but both were a revelation: the former for its unhurried, uncomplicated beauty, the latter for its rustic charm and historic ruins.

"Turkey", our guide informed us on one of our rare excursions on dry land, "is the 17th largest, and one of the fastest growing, economies in the world."

Doubtless it could be much higher still if they sold all their produce at the asking price and not somewhere around half of that after haggling. But, believe me, you must haggle, it's expected, especially where almost everything from designer bags, and

sunglasses to woolly boots and watches, are fake: relatively convincing fakes, but fakes nonetheless – and they don't dispute it.

Having said that, so much about the country is real, very real, and miles away, eons away even, from the brash bustle of the tourist.

Vast parts of Turkey speak of life as it used to be. Notably the ancient city of Herakleia on the edge of Lake Bafa – it was originally a major port on the estuary of the River Maiandros (Meander) that weaved its way around the tinder dry terrain to meet the great Aegean Sea – that was until the silt deposits it brought from the mountains created a vast plain that now separates the two.

Here villagers eke out an agricultural existence in unfinished houses that sit on and incorporate the ruins of antediluvian walls, towers and temples. An old man leads a heavily laden donkey along a dusty and uneven path that is lined with a motley collection of bee hives. A cockerel crows and a dog looks on disinterestedly.

Out of nowhere a small tribe of sun-dried old women in heavily patterned skirts and shawls proffer beads, scarves and hamam towels. They scurry among us pale-skinned visitors, relentless in their quest, the prices slowly dropping as we near our return to our transport.

In the meantime we have enjoyed sharing the history of this cultural backwater, looking out across the distant flat fields that were once the scene of a great sea battle.

Earlier we had been shown one of the most complete temple remains in Turkey, the temple of at Zeus at Eur-



'Vast parts of Turkey speak of life as it used to be'

omos dating from the 2nd century AD. It has no roof but its Corinthian columns have withstood the ravages of time and the occasional earthquake. Among the fallen stones a tortoise labours on an uphill course – how many visitors has he seen?

Turkey, standing at the crossroads of so many ancient cultures, is full of stories like this, full of Hittites and Ionians, Karians and Persians, Romans and Byzantines.

Bodrum itself is awash with such tales. As you sail into it today it's hard but by no means impossible to imagine that, almost 2,500 years ago, this was Halikarnassos, housing at its peak a population of some 70,000 with an amphitheatre capable of seating 5,000 and the burial chamber of King Mausollos – the original Mausoleum – a vast structure comparable to a building today of some 15-20 storeys high and understandably one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

The castle at the entrance to the modern port is a mere 600 years old and was built by the Knights of St John and incorporates much of the stonework from the Mausoleum which was destroyed by an earthquake in 1304. Curiously enough many of the original friezes from the structure are today in the British Museum, but that's another story.

Moreover concerns about the history of this old world hub are in large part incidental to the holiday experience. It's there in abundance if you want it, but if you're just looking to escape the modern world, get away from the computer screen, the e-mail, text and telephone, then a week on board a graceful timber-frame tardis could be just for you.



An all-inclusive deal means your glass is always half full, be it of water, wine, beer, tea or Turkish coffee. There is always a place in the sun to lay your hamam – your thin Turkish over towel – and spread out and read, sleep or pass the time of day with a like-minded fellow traveller.

Typically there are up to a dozen passengers per boat, and four crew: the captain, the chef, the ever attentive steward and the boy. Passengers may travel alone, or in small groups – larger groups can hire the whole vessel. However, in the experience of Loes Douze, who has been running these trips for many years, there is a slight consensus in favour of the spirit of adventure and travelling alone or as a couple. With repeat booking accounting for some 70 per cent of her clientele that's as good as an endorsement of the success of these trips as you could wish for.

The cabins are compact, clean and all en suite, there are communal spaces inside and out, and most meals are taken at a large table on deck... and there are wi-fi connections for those who can't live without them – but it pays to try!

Swimming, snorkelling and kayaking are all available from the boat and for a little extra you can try your hand at windsurfing or waterskiing – or both. A couple of excursions are also included, but there is no hard and fast

itinerary, just an outline plan, and passengers are free to put their proposals to the captain, who will take a view according to the weather.

SCIC Sailing offer over a dozen different core itineraries, but all are flexible and each has its own highlight.

So, if you're looking for a completely stress-free holiday at sea, in the sun, where you are one of the pampered few, rather than few hundred, then check out their website.

As Cevat Sakir – the so-called Fisherman of Halikarnassos, who first put these "blue voyage" holidays on the map, over 50 years ago, once wrote: "Do not ever think that you will return as you came. The ones before you were much the same; They all left with their minds in Bodrum." And so, too, did we.

THE FACTS

SCIC Sailing is a Dutch/English operation and was established in 1983. Their sailing season is from the end of March through to early November. Prices start at 1,034 euros (currently around £825) per person per week and includes all accommodation, drinks and meals, on board, but excludes flights and two evening meals taken on shore. For further information, images or a brochure, please contact Loes Douze on: +44 (0) 7583 001 766 or e-mail info@scicsailing.eu or visit their website: www.scicsailing.eu.



The temple of at Zeus at Euromos (above) dates from the 2nd century AD. Its Corinthian columns have withstood time and occasional earthquake. Top right, meals are taken at a large table on deck