

Ephesus
and TurkeyHistory and
sunny days
on a yacht

Paul Thomas finds moving moments in a fast-growing country which is booming with new business opportunities

MANY Suffolk people enjoy days by the seaside – or heading down the county's rivers or out to sea aboard a sailing or motor boat. Here on the east coast we have maritime interest and history – from the legendary Thames sailing barges at Pinn Mill to the village of Dunwich, lost beneath the sea off Southwold centuries ago.

But if you really fancy history and sunny days afloat, you could consider a very different place from our coast. We've just visited Turkey – and found fun afloat and great history ashore.

Economically Turkey is accelerating at 11 per cent - faster than China – and is a truly amazing, evolving place. Its population of 77 million includes a majority aged below 40 and its manufacturing capability is huge.

Turkey is the latest runner seeking to join the European Union. And Britain backs it – albeit, it seems, we ourselves are uncertain of the benefits to us let alone anyone else currently.

After a few days in the vast city of Istanbul on the Europe and Asia borders, we joined a sailing cruise – and while it's the 21st century, you go back in time to a simpler civilisation of social well-being, sun, peace and relaxation in deserted bays.

While the 90-foot teak and oak Turkish ketch *Navaga* was only born 17 years ago in Bodrum, she might well have been built 50 years or even a century ago. She is traditional, 80 tons in weight, makes ten knots under sail and 12 by a 360 hp diesel. Up to 16 passengers are cared for by her crew of four satisfying your every need.

She is not luxurious but comfortable and geared for the sun. All cabins are en suite, some

twin bunks, others a double, some a double and third. There is plenty of sun-lazing space.

Key to your peaceful nights and pleasant moorings in bays and occasionally a marina is the anchor and *Navaga* carries 160 metres of anchor chain weighing about three tons. Inevitably you moor by dropping the hook to hold her bows and taking one or two lines to the shore, round a rock or tree then tightened.

Her crew are superb, there is no other word for it. They have arrived at their standards by training to be “a sailor”; the captain; the cook doubling as “mate”; another crew member and the “boy” – an apprentice learning the trade. All targeting the day they will be in charge of a ship like *Navaga*.

Bodrum, one of Turkey's renowned coastal sailing highspots, is home to about 300 lesser and greater ships like her – many chartered to parties and individuals of many races – English, Dutch, French, Asians and Americans.

The charter business here is growing fast. Then there are private and bare sailing and motor boats. The typical format is leisurely. If you are keen you will rise at seven and have a quick swim – leaping from the side of the boat or more sedately down steps lowered from the side deck. There is a freshwater shower when you come out – then breakfast as some of your companions rise later.

The skipper, in our case Haken, rings the traditional bell and everyone – from six in our case to the largest charter parties of perhaps 16 – gather and feast for breakfast, lunch and dinner aboard with a wealth of fruits, vegetables, salads, meats and fish. Drinks are there from wine to beers and soft drinks – as you require. Also tea and coffee.

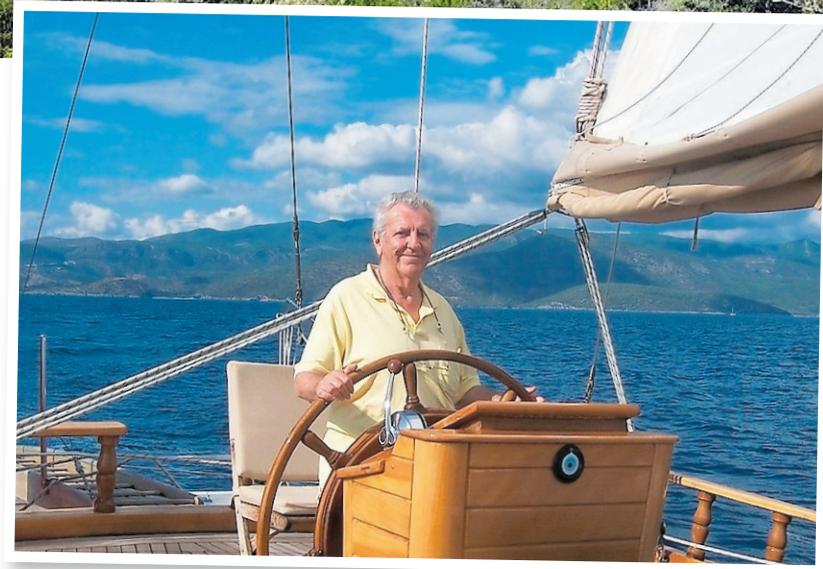
Occasionally you will get in the dinghy and go to shore and a bar or restaurant there. This holiday is peace. The sun, wind, lapping water, creaking timbers.

You will have the choice of cruising Turkish or Greek waters but all depends on the weather of course. Your captain will have the final word but they consult, listen and want to please you – with alternatives to match everyone's hopes.

Your crew inevitably will be local sailors – and far from typical east-coast of Englanders. Yet there are similarities – in the North Sea you are thankfully away from the hub-bub of London and pressures – and in Turkish waters you escape the stress of Turkey's growing economy, and its greatest city, Istanbul which you can also visit.

It may be the 21st century, yet you easily slip back centuries, particularly when you know the history of this region – Ephesus, in particular.

A visit there raises your eternal longing for a time machine, but we are lucky to have our guide Bora to explain the history for us.



TIMELESS TURKEY: Above, the beautiful sailing ketch *Navaga*, left, Paul Thomas at the wheel as *Navaga* cruises the Turkish coast

PHOTOS: GUUS VAN LINGEN AND PAUL THOMAS

Ephesus was on the old Anatolian peninsula (now comprising most of modern Turkey) and highly productive in the then Roman empire for three reasons – its harbour trading position on the coast; its riches raised from taxes and local wealth and the work of its highly competent population – 25,000 recognised male inhabitants plus a further 225,000 unregistered young people, women and slaves.

We take a day off from our cruise to go by car, two hours, plus a short stop at a lovely bar and café by what was once the Sea of Ephesus. Now it is called Lake Bafa, so-called after Ephesus harbour silted up over centuries bringing to an end one of those reasons for the city's success.

Today Ephesus has restored and classical sites – but with 300-400 years of continuing excavation and restoration work to be completed.

But you view sights which albeit only partial, illustrate how this amazing city must have been 2,000 years ago. From the galleries of the politicians and bureaucrats who ran this part of the Roman empire, neighboured with Persia and Greece – to a street of homes for the wealthy and the vast amphitheatre. Here notables would address an audience of 25,000, be they only the city's registered males if it was a policy address, or possibly a mixture of residents, men and women, if it was entertainment – ranging from Greek tragedy to humour.

Repairs and restoration continue – and Bora explains the vital part of Christianity and its threat to the Roman empire, not the least the presence of the disciple Paul who, with the preachings of Christianity with other disciples, was threatening the security of the Roman Empire.

But perhaps the most telling and for me, emotional moment of this entire trip, came from a visit – and setting I had never contemplated, or expected.

It arises from the question: What happened to Mary, the mother of Christ, after his crucifixion? It is recorded Jesus, hanging from the cross, asked the disciple John to care of his mother – and indeed he did, taking her to Ephesus. But it took 18 centuries for the truth, if it is indeed so, to emerge.

A German nun, an invalid, had a dream envisaging data identifying where Mary had gone to live and spend her last years. The data was so specific that a French nun, Sister Marie was inspired to find the home of Mary – and did so, the result being supernaturally similar to the German's dreamed insight.

The Church allowed Marie to buy the site and excavations revealed a building Mary had occupied in the years shortly after Christ's crucifixion.

To visit this tiny building is an inspiration – an awakening to a question I had never asked? If Christians, and others, question Christ's existence and death – what indeed happened to his mother after he was crucified?

And this incredible place provides answers – for centuries pilgrims have made a pilgrimage to the site on August 15, the date on which most of the Christian world celebrated Mary's life and last days.

Turkey was a country of which I knew only a little. And, as well as its wonderful history, we found peace and sunshine aboard our yacht – and returned home, astonished at one of the most cultured, rich and poor, friendly but provocative settings I have encountered.

travel facts

- We flew with Pegasus Airlines, www.flypgs.com
- Sailing Cruises in Comfort (SCIC) operate from Bodrum. Prices from 1034 euros per person a week for a hosted/crewed cruise including cabin, breakfast, lunch, five dinners, alcoholic and soft drinks on board and transfers, but excludes flights. Or you can charter an eight-berth crewed yacht from 5993 euros. Visit www.scicsailing.eu
- Our guide to Ephesus was: Boras2007@gmail.com
- More Turkey information: www.gototurkey.com