



Words: Helen Clemson. Pictures: SoicSailing.eu.

Turkish delight

Like an Hermès Birkin bag or a front-row seat at Paris Fashion Week, a holiday aboard a yacht is a bit of a dream come true - and it's so much more than just a sun-drenched vay-cay. Writer Helen Clemson took a week off to sail round the South West coast of Turkey



Coast around Turkish waters in a wooden sailboat called a gulet

THE SOUTHWEST COAST of Turkey is surely the most beautiful coastline in the Aegean. In this section of the Mediterranean, between Greece and Turkey, the ocean and skies are dazzling, the islands dotting the ocean are enchanting, and the whole region is rich in history and ancient ruins and is bursting with colourful culture.

The extra good news is that for South African travellers wanting to escape a freezing Jozi or rain-drenched Mother City winter, Turkey offers blissfully warm weather during our winter. And with an SA passport, there's no visa required. Also, despite the recent political upheaval in Turkey, this idyllic part of the coast has been all but untouched.

We were sailing with SCIC Sailing (which stands for Sailing Cruises in Comfort), which offers luxe yet relaxed cruising holidays. When you think cruise, don't think enormous cruise-boat-style sailing. This is the very opposite of that. We were on a Turkish gulet,

a wooden sailboat, with a select group of fellow travellers – the smallest yacht in the fleet sleeps eight and the largest 16. (There's also the option of chartering a gulet for a special celebration holiday if you want to book out the whole thing.)

SCIC Sailing is based in Bodrum, one of Turkey's best known holiday cities renowned as much for its glorious beaches as for its glamour and elegance – a suitable launching pad for what follows.

Each yacht sails according to its own itinerary, so where you go is up to you, the captain and, of course, the weather. The company is proud to be one of the few that favour sails rather than engines, so for the most part, the trip is engine-noise free.

While there's every reason just to lie back and feast your eyes on the endless blue water, there's loads to see and plenty of charming village markets to explore when you stop off. I spent the good part of the sailing trip on a sun lounger, Kindle in hand, but my History Channel-loving husband went mad for the excursions.

We visited Knidos, a settlement that was once part of ancient Greece. An hour's guided tour took us through a wealth of

exquisite ruins and provided a fascinating lesson on Turkey's early history.

Delicious meals play a major role on the trip, and your yacht's chef will prepare light yet more-ish traditional Turkish food for breakfast, lunch and dinner. From the fruit, yoghurts and breads served at breakfast to the lunches and dinners infused with Mediterranean flavours, each meal is a delight. And, while Turkey is a Muslim country, drinking alcohol isn't frowned upon, and we indulged in rather too much rosé while on the boat!

In May, when we went, temperatures were in the mid-20s, and the sea was refreshing to swim in. But even for us sun-loving South Africans, the months of July and August are very hot. If you can wait out our winter, sailing in September or October is advised – and think of the head start you'll make on your tan!

I leave you with this thought: next time you're feeling near to tears with deadline stress, simply think this: "I could be sunning myself on a yacht in Turkey." Ahhh... ■



Sunbathing is the order of the day on yacht cruises along the Turkish coast

HOW DO I GET 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 Turkishairlines.com for flights from Cape Town and Joburg.

WHAT DOES IT COST?

The price for one week per person ranges from R11 500 up to R13 000, 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 aren't included in the fee. For a quote on chartering a gulet, email info@scicsailing.eu.

IS THERE A CREW ON BOARD?

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.

HOW CAN I BOOK?

Visit Scicsailing.eu for more information or call +44 (0)75 830 01766.