

Travel/Aegean



Relax and enjoy the views while being served delicious food and cocktails on a cruise around Greece and Turkey, stopping off at historical places of interest along the way



Lie back and put your feet up while somebody else crews the yacht

BY BEVERLEY BYRNE

I love sailing but I'm not Ellen MacArthur. My idea of a perfect cruise entails lounging on deck, cocktail in hand, watching someone else shin up the rigging. All that hearty Jolly Jack Tar stuff just isn't my style which is why sailing with SCIC is this slothful sea dog's dream.

SCIC (Sailing Cruises in Comfort) has a fleet of five traditional Turkish timber built yachts which really do sail. Established in 1983 and based in Turkey, this is a small independent company with a family feel. The captains, chefs and crew are employed by SCIC all year round and during the winter they work in the company's shipyard, making sure the vessels are ship-shape and Bristol fashion for the next season. Each yacht has excellent rigging and all crew members are trained and qualified to sail.

At Bodrum harbour, I'm welcomed on board Nemesis by Captain Hakan Uguz and his well turned out crew. A gleaming, beautifully maintained Turkish ketch which comfortably sleeps up to 16 people, Nemesis attracts admiring glances from envious landlubbers wherever we moor up. A masterpiece of classic design constructed from gleaming golden timber, with her sails trimmed to perfection, she cuts through the waves like a knife through warm butter.

My en suite cabin is compact but comfortable and there is plenty of space on deck to lounge in comfort on one of the many sun beds. Initially, I suspect sharing Nemesis with a group of potential strangers might be difficult. Yet as Loes Doeze, director of SCIC explains, the company endeavours to match guests of like age group and interests. They also run themed cruises such as cookery, photography and yoga and there's no surcharge for singletons or the on-board water sports toys which includes water skiing. As my congenial fellow passengers share my interest in exploring historic sites rather than night clubs, accord is assured.

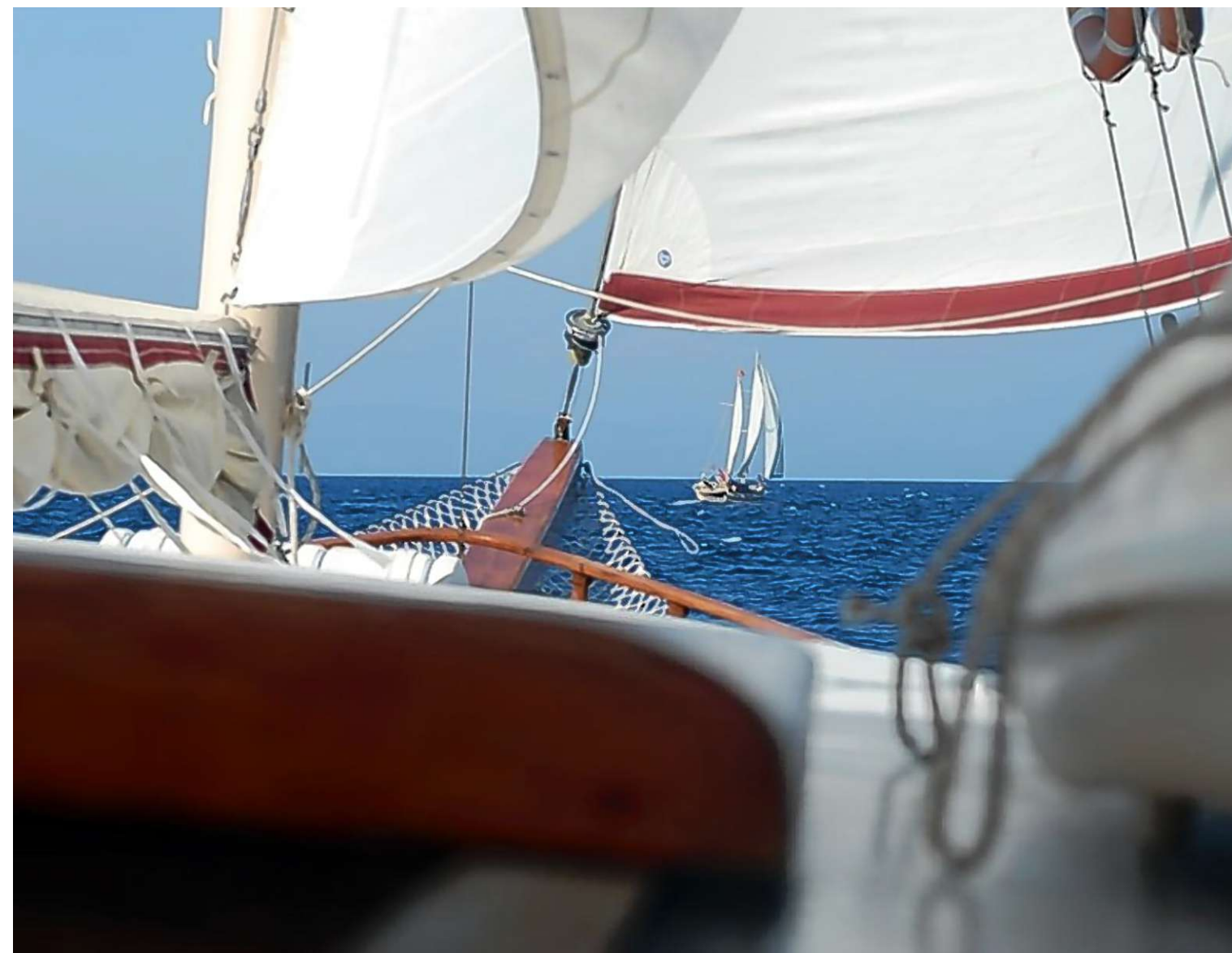
Although SCIC offers many alternative itineraries, they are not set in stone. Each day Captain Hakan lays out the chart and explains our options leaving his guests to make democratic decisions dependent, of course, on wind and weather conditions. We are following a Greek Island itinerary and our first port of call is Kos where the harbour is fringed with bustling tavernas and dominated by the Castle of the Knights. Built in the 14th century as a defence against the encroaching Ottomans, this imposing structure stands near the Agora, an archaeological site which used to be the town market and is now a jumble of ancient Roman remains. Nearby is a gnarled elephantine tree, said to be more than 700 years old, beneath which Hippocrates allegedly taught his students.

Our next landfall is Nisyros. This sleepy, sparsely populated, off the beaten track island is dominated by a brooding volcano whose hissing, broiling crater still breathes sulphurous fumes into the atmosphere. Overlooking this volcanic lunar landscape is the picture postcard village of Nikia. With its dazzling white-washed houses adorned with tumbling geraniums, this seemingly deserted village appears suspended in time.

Mandraki, the island's brightly painted port, features Roman mosaics, Hellenistic statuary and, clinging to a cliff, the monastery of the Madonna of the Caves built in 1600. Nisyros is a veritable repository of historical architecture and artefacts and as Nemesis glides from the harbour I reflect on the island's elaborate past and its uncertain future.

In contrast to Nisyros's enigmatic character, the island of Symi is a lively, lovely location. It's bustling harbour is embraced by mountains

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the colour of putty and dusted with greenery. Clinging to these escarpments are tall, elegant houses with classical roofs, their facades painted in fondant fancy shades of blue, yellow, toffee and violet. During Ottoman times, Symi prospered as a centre for sponge diving and ship building and up to the beginning of the 20th century, the island's industry and culture thrived. But occupation by the Italians and the introduction of the steam ship brought this prosperity to an end. However, the island is undergoing a reversal of fortune due to tourism and many of these glorious mansions have been restored.

On the other side of the island, the secluded Monastery of St Michael of Panormitis, patron saint of Symi and sailors, has gained a reputation for receiving messages in bottles sent by matelots from around the world.

However, in the safe hands of Captain Hakan and his crew, we have no need to litter the Aegean with messages of hope.

As well as exploring exceptional locations in Turkey and Greece, we anchor in idyllic, deserted bays and hidden creeks where we dive from the decks and take full advantage of the water sports. With chef Ali's exceptional cooking, it certainly pays to keep active. As all the delicious locally sourced meals and beverages, including alcohol, are included in the price, it's all too easy to indulge yourself. And this is exactly what the inhabitants of our next destination, the ancient city of Cnidos, seem to have done!

At the Captain's suggestion, we head back into Turkish waters to explore what remains of Cnidos. As we sail around the headline of this ravishing coastline, nothing can pre-

pare us for the sight of the extensive ruined city. Established in the fourth century BC, this strategically important cosmopolitan centre was a fabled prosperous city where the cult of Aphrodite flourished. A reputedly beautiful, huge, free standing marble statue of the goddess of love attracted thousands of ancient tourists to Cnidos. The notorious nude is thought to have stood on the site of a circular temple, the base of which is clearly visible. But the sacred prostitutes working within the temple precincts did not endear themselves to the Byzantine Christians who destroyed the statue. Although earthquakes completed the destruction of the city, it is still possible to imagine life as it was lived 2,000 years ago.

Although ancient stone terraces, cracked columns and ruined temples give an impression of the city's foundations, a well preserved amphi-

theatre remains to put flesh on the bones of this atmospheric landscape. I occupy a marble seat overlooking the auditorium, watch a lone tortoise clambering amidst wild herbs and imagine ghosts of the roaring crowd around me.

This is an eerily theatrical location and the best thing is, there's nobody here except me and my new friends from Nemesis. Too remote to be on the usual tourist track, Cnidos is just one of the idyllic sites we've visited which are best accessed by sea. Thanks to SCIC, I've discovered places I never knew existed and I didn't have to shiver my timbers or lash myself to the mast in the process. Now that's what I call sailing.

Visit the website: www.scicsailing.eu or call 0758 3001766. Prices start at 950 euros for a sailing cruise which includes meals, drinks and transfers from the airport but excludes flights.



Rural Getaways

This week's local holiday selection offers parents of babies and toddlers reassurance of a safe environment, a kind host and all the services and facilities needed for a relaxing and stress-free break. Choose from indoor pools, animal feeding, egg collecting, pony rides, babysitting services and secure play areas. So, if you have small children, visit www.cartwheelholidays.co.uk

Polcan
Charming, four-star cottages in 150 acres of farmland, two miles from the sea, near Looe, Cornwall. Great for young families – safe play area with ride-on tractors, games room, daily animal feeding and plenty of toddler equipment. Collect eggs or take a farm tour in the barrel train (pictured). Delicious local produce delivered to the door. Cottages sleep up to eight. Short breaks from £365.

Hilton Farm Holidays
Working farm set in 25 acres close to stunning beaches on the North Cornwall Coast. Safe and spacious children's play area, friendly animals to cuddle and feed, outdoor heated pool with sun terrace. Well equipped, 3 and 4-star cottages – cots and highchairs available. Baby sitting service. Pets welcome. Short breaks from £250.

Glynn Barton
Stunning, four-star, 18th century self catering cottages in 13 acres of safe secluded grounds overlooking the Glynn Valley in Cornwall. Daily animal feeding, egg collecting, heated indoor pool. Extensive range of toddler and baby equipment – delicious home made meals and local produce. Cottages sleep up to seven people. Price from £440pw.

Tree Farm Holidays
Comfortable, four-star cottages in stunning location, on the Lizard peninsula, Cornwall. Holidays designed for families with pre-school children with excellent range of nursery equipment and toys. Pony rides for little ones and hot tub for parents. Babysitting service. Cottages sleep up to six. Short breaks from £265.

Knowle Farm
Family friendly, four-star barns in 44 acres of beautiful countryside, near Totnes, Devon. Indoor heated pool, lessons available. Soft play area for under fives and outdoor playground. Help feed friendly chickens, ducks and donkeys. Sandy beaches close by. Barns sleep up to eight. Short breaks from £250.

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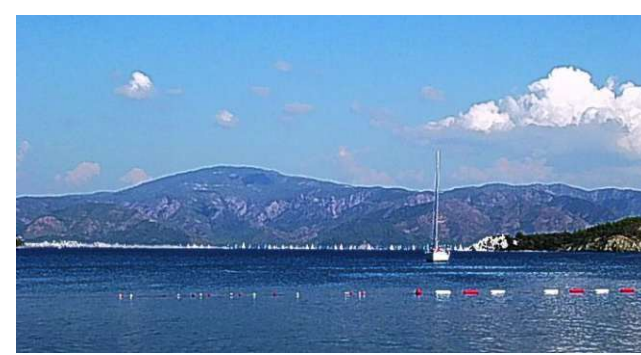
Boutique hotels in central locations

A special summer offer for early bookers at London's The Royal Park and The Cranley hotels means guests get the best deal by simply booking in advance directly with the hotels.

The offer is £149 per room, per night for a luxury boutique hotel in a central London location.

The Royal Park (www.theroyalpark.com, 0207 479 6601) is on the edge of Hyde Park and The Cranley (www.thecranley.com, 0207 373 0123), pictured, is in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

This luxurious stay includes continental breakfast served in the guest's room, a welcome drink and a glass of champagne each evening of their stay. Check websites for full details of the offer, which is subject to availability and valid for bookings from July 25 to September 4.



Regional departures head for Turkey

Exeter Airport has launched some exceptional deals to Turkey this summer.

Packages to the three-star Parador Apartments or the Green Park Apartments in Alanya start at £149 per person for seven nights' self-catering, both departing on June 10. Or stay at Lemas in the resort of Side for seven nights' bed and breakfast from £169. These are via Antalya airport.

If you head for Dalaman airport as your starting point for a Turkey holiday, seven nights' self-catering at the three-star Kocer Club Apartments in beautiful Marmaris (pictured) starts at £189 per person.

A week of B&B at the four-star Asena Village in Hisaronu starts at £230 each.

Call 0871 282 0881 or book online at www.exeter-airport.co.uk.

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