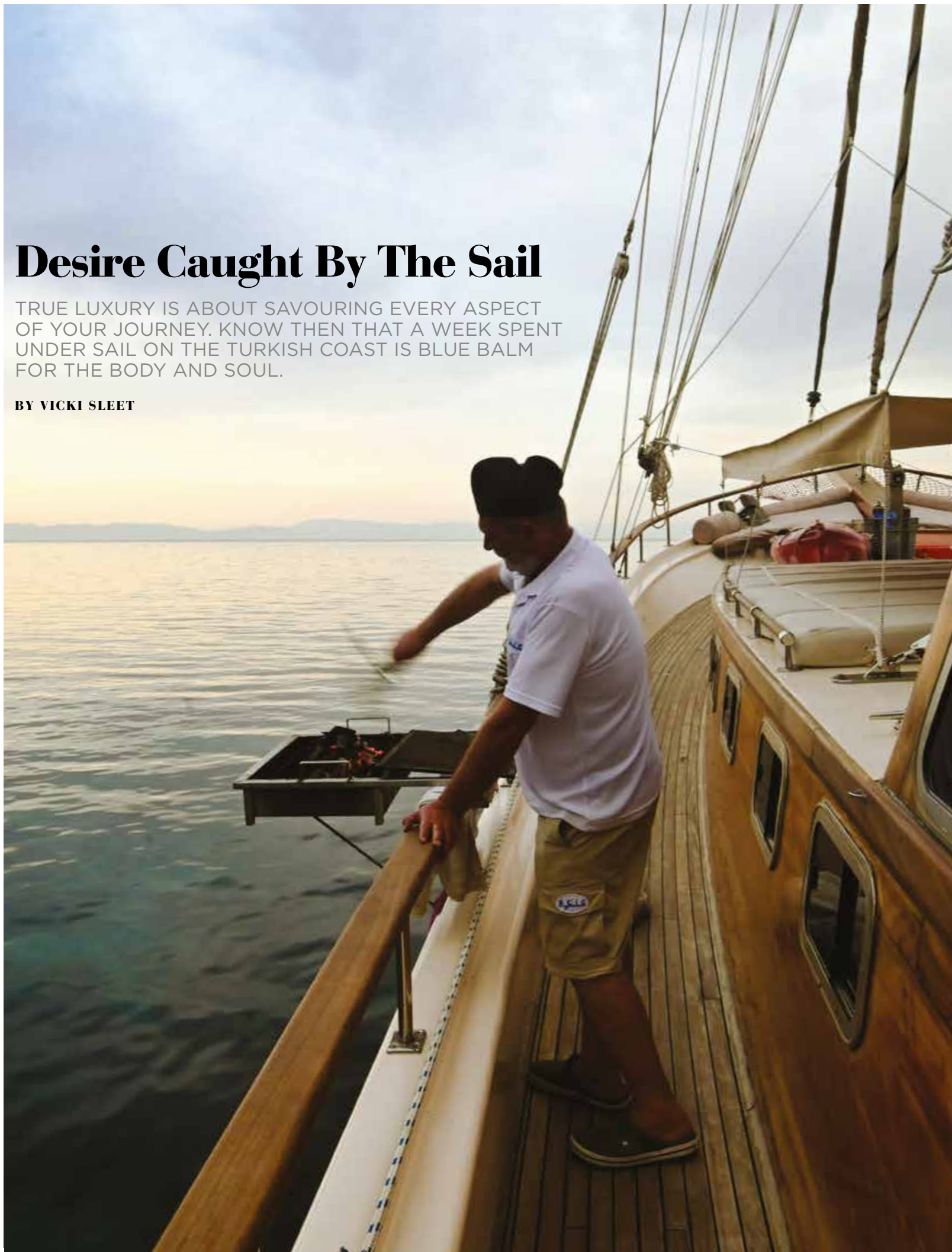


Desire Caught By The Sail

TRUE LUXURY IS ABOUT SAVOURING EVERY ASPECT OF YOUR JOURNEY. KNOW THEN THAT A WEEK SPENT UNDER SAIL ON THE TURKISH COAST IS BLUE BALM FOR THE BODY AND SOUL.

BY VICKI SLEET



AS I WRITE THIS, I'm sitting in front of a fire, enveloped in both a beanie and oversized scarf. It's the coldest Cape winter I can remember in a long time and my recent week in Turkey aboard the *Nemesis*, a jewel in the ScicSailing crown, feels like a lifetime ago. Scrolling through our images of rosé-at-noon, sundowners and snacks on the beach and swimming sorties in the crystalline waters of the Aegean is bittersweet. I can feel the saltiness on my skin, I can hear the *whoosh* as the 85-foot wooden ketch carves her way through the water, sails up in the lightest of breezes and, yes, I can feel the warmth of the Turkish sun on my skin.

Our holidays tend to be on the water. It's difficult to convince my husband, a keen sailor, of the virtues of a land getaway. Taking our accommodation with us as we explore and not having to worry about packing and unpacking bags, arguing with Google Maps or fretting about transfers to new destinations works for us.

We regularly take a boat out into Cape waters for a day or for overnight jaunts but my husband is a proper seadog; in recent years, we have sailed for two weeks on a monohull in Croatia, we've island-hopped in the Seychelles on a catamaran and enjoyed a power yacht holiday in Greece. He's done transatlantic crossings and even sailed to St Helena Island and popped his boat back on the mail ship. But according to him (and certainly to me), nothing beats an all-frills, luxury sailing cruise. Despite being a fleet captain, we agree there's joy in cruising some of the most gorgeous coastlines imaginable under someone else's watch. Add in the rich flavours of Turkish food, drinks on tap, excursions onto the history and culture of the land, plus the silkiness of a warm-water swim – and actual sailing – and it's a recipe for a hedonistic adventure.

It's the opportunity to immerse yourself in an experience without having to lift a finger. In the mornings, your breakfast call is a civilised clang of gleaming brass and there – spread out with none of your planning, buying and galley sweat – is a table laden with Turkish breakfast delicacies: olives, boiled eggs, suitably salty feta, fresh cucumber, tomatoes and juicy seasonal fruits, the softest white bread to be slathered in honeys and local fruit-studded jams. It's a feast, like all meals on board. You'll be seated at a table with a view because your captain will have chosen an out-of-the-way anchorage in a secluded bay the night before.

And so, the day begins. A morning swim absolves the guilt of breakfast and is followed by a briefing from the captain. Perhaps you'll journey to ancient ruins, visit a village market where you can rub shoulders with local Turks selling their garden-grown produce and handwoven traditional cotton towels or simply spend the morning lolling about while the sails do the work, wind-powering you to your next spot of unspoilt coastline, chalk-white beach and inky waters. And you can't resist a swim or, if you're feeling adventurous, try anything from stand-up paddleboarding to windsurfing, canoeing and even (regrettably, in my opinion) the thrill of jet skiing.

By wind or by wish, Scicsailing has flexibility built into their itineraries, as much to cater for the desires of their passengers as to account for nature's whims, making for the ultimate personalised boutique sailing experience.



journey



TOP AND ABOVE LEFT The Nemesis is a traditional Turkish gulet, a type of wooden sailing boat that offers all the contemporary luxury of a modern-day yacht combined with the simple pleasure of being able to hoist the sails to let Mother Nature do the work – the engine is only used when necessary. BELOW LEFT The ruins of the Ancient Greek city of Knidos near the modern Turkish district of Datça – a picturesque and historical backdrop for a day's sailing.

The boat itself is expansive and you never feel confined. There are seating and tanning areas all over the deck, the indoor salon and bar is spacious and the main cushioned chill zones at the back of the boat are perfect for lazing about while the boat is on the move. These are stable boats, so there is no need to worry about seasickness either.

The days on board Nemesis merge into one, and by the third, you'll feel that life back home – where emails and Zoom meetings clutter your day – is light-years away. That's precisely the point. This is the ultimate reset. For me, it's a chance to beat my husband at yet another round of rummy, to take a day to finish a Scrabble game, to read and to daydream.

A sailing cruise of this calibre is all about details and, in this case, the skilled behind-the-scenes graft by owner Loes Douze. Dining and drinking preferences are noted weeks before your arrival on board, freshly baked birthday cakes appear for celebrants, cabins are turned down and tidied while you are at breakfast and

if a secluded bay with a visit to an authentic taverna and a beach is on your wish list, then wishes are fulfilled. Each captain has an itinerary, of course, but it's loose. Stops for lunch depend on guests – and the crew are experts at revealing little surprises. You may sense the start-up of the engines at 6:30am, only to be lulled back to sleep and awaken moored in a sapphire mirrored inlet, complete with underwater Roman ruins. Loes is a savvy matchmaker. Singletons and couples on romantic breaks won't find themselves on the same trip as a young family. She curates her guest lists as meticulously as her itineraries. Loes is a maven and a fixer. She has cherry-picked some of her favourite activities, hosted by experts with whom she has established relationships over the last three decades.

In the past 10 years, we have discovered so much about Turkey by sailing but it's a seduction that has us ravenous for more. We have dined in the fish market in Fethiye, where scores of vendors beckon you over

to choose your fish for them to cook for you. We have shopped in bougie boutiques in the Göcek marina and visited Kayaköy, an abandoned hillside village close to Fethiye and immortalised in author Louis de Bernières' *Birds Without Wings*. We have walked part of the Lycian Way and watched the sun set over bays that were anchorages for Ancient Greeks. We've explored Ancient Roman ruins with a professor of archaeology, visited an extinct volcano with a jolly local islander in Greece, had a gloriously authentic lunch with Turkish locals in their home and visited a family-run rug studio where the octogenarian matriarch cooks breakfast before getting back to work on her loom.

This is a deep dive into Turkish culture and it's intoxicating. But mostly, it gifts us the luxury of time – to connect, to lean in and be present in the glory of cold sweet melon while still wet from an invigorating dip in the sea, and remembering just how privileged we are to be players on this cerulean stage. ▽

PHOTOGRAPHS: SUPPLIED

SAILING AT A GLANCE

There are four boats in the ScicSailing fleet – two comfort cruisers, including the *Nemesis*, and two luxury yachts. The boats sleep up to 16 guests in eight twin or double cabins.

ADVENTURE INVESTMENT

A week's charter of the *Nemesis* for up to 16 passengers costs between €6 721 and €10 728, depending on the season, excluding meals and drinks.

For individual bookings, a week's cruise costs between €1 107 and €1 390 per person, including meals and drinks and based on two sharing a cabin.

For solo travellers, there's a cabin single use surcharge of €250.

GETTING THERE

Turkish Airlines currently flies five times a week from South Africa direct to Istanbul. ScicSailing boats depart either from Bodrum or Marmaris, depending on itinerary, with flights from Istanbul to Milas-Bodrum Airport and/or Dalaman Airport both an easy 75 minutes.

WHEN TO GO

High season is late June to the end of August – reflected in flight prices, restaurant queues and people on even the most sparsely inhabited Turkish beaches or Greek islands. Mid-May to mid-June and the first two weeks of September are excellent – the weather is milder and the islands less busy.

VISA

South Africans can apply for a free visa online at least 72 hours prior to departure. evisa.gov.tr/en/

CURRENCY

At the time of going to print, the Turkish lira stands at around L1,42 to R1,00.

PACK LIGHT

Less is more but bring your board games, playing cards and books. No shoes are allowed on board but you will need sneakers for island exploration. Sun protection and a large hat are essential. The crew supplies hammam towels to use as wraps and towels.