

## Sailing the Carian Coast of the Aegean Sea

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The geography of the Aegean Sea creates ideal conditions for yachting. The coastline is rugged and deeply indented with numerous bays and coves. The sea is dotted with islands of all sizes which are only one or two hours' sailing time apart and are also blessed with sheltered anchorages. Thus there are many different places for visiting yachtsmen to drop anchor and go ashore.

There is also time enough most days to explore the interior a little and to sail off to another bay for the night.

The enclosed nature of the Aegean means that there is little oceanic swell, but there are good winds. The prevailing wind, the Meltemi, blows from the North West. It is strongest in high summer, but is also steady in spring and autumn which (we were told) are the best times to visit, since summer is excessively hot.

These conditions have given rise to a long tradition of seamanship which is evidenced today. The Castle at Bodrum houses an impressive underwater archaeology museum including the world's oldest shipwreck. The town, Turgutreis, from which we chartered our boat, is named after a famous seaman, and restaurants and hotels are named "Artemisia" in honour of a Carian princess who bravely led her fleet against the Greeks at the battle of Salamis in 480BC.

It is not surprising, therefore, that a tourist industry focused around yachting has developed. It is, however, highly seasonal.

We chartered our 12.6 metre, 8 berth Beneteau from a small family-run Turkish company. The rates, at &euro; 2600 for two weeks, were much lower than those available in neighbouring Greece. Since we had three qualified yachtsmen in our crew, we did not need a pilot. Instead we were shown the charts, GPS navigation system and two invaluable books: "Turkish Waters Pilot" and "Greek Waters Pilot". These described in great detail navigational areas, interesting places and the hazards of anchorages.

The main obstacle to our explorations was the presence of Greece. The border between Turkey and Greece lies very close to the Turkish mainland and all the large islands are Greek (which must be something of an irritation to the Turks!) We could arrange permission for only one formal entry into Greece, and on the face of it our plans to hop between the two countries were out of the question.

However, it soon became clear that no-one cared about informal landings. If you stayed away from big towns, customs and border police, there was no problem anchoring near small settlements and taking the tender ashore to enjoy a Greek salad and Baklava pastry.

Coastal towns and villages on both sides of the border are geared to accommodate touring yachts. Even in isolated coves you can find a jetty and a restaurant. There may be water and electricity, but not much else. The cove at Bozuk Buku, formerly the location of the ancient town of Loryma, still boasts the remains of a 300 BC citadel, and this is a big draw for visiting yachts. It is only accessible from the sea and the isolated restaurant relies entirely on provisions and diesel for the electricity generator brought by sea. (Incidentally, the restaurant's fresh bread, baked in a clay oven, is delicious.)

The trade of such places is dependent on yachts and the visits of magnificent two-masted boats called gulets. The gulets, traditional ships of the region, are built locally using teak and mahogany. They can sleep six to eight passengers plus a small crew. Sadly, Gulets are rarely seen under sail, since it is cheaper to pay for diesel than hire a full crew. Gulets also ferry larger numbers of people on short day-trips.

The strong seasonality of this tourist industry is striking. We were there in mid-October and businesses, including hotels, were already getting ready to close down. For example, the small Greek island of Pserimos is barren except for a beautiful bay and 12 beach-side restaurants. In the height of summer 13 gulets arrive each day and disgorge their 100 to 200 passengers, who stay for an hour so, take a drink and snack, and then leave. In one day the island may receive 2000 visitors. But the boats stop coming towards the end of October. The restaurants close and the owners and staff leave the island until the following April. In the winter Pserimos has only 40 inhabitants and reverts to being the territory of sheep, goats and olive trees, much as it may have been almost 2000 years ago when Denia was called Dianium.

by Chris Betterton-Jones

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