



Voyage to the land of the *Iliad*

With a curious mixture of Mediterranean nonchalance, blatant tourism and epic history, Turkey has something to offer everyone, as David Pugh and the crew of *KitKat Too* discovered one hot August

Photos by Dean Trembl/ywpix



According to received wisdom, chartering in Turkey in August is unwise for pale-skinned western Europeans. ‘Temperatures can reach 40°C,’ I was told. ‘You’ll roast.’

Instead, spending a week cruising southwest Turkey in early August was one of the best holiday experiences my friends and I have ever had. Admittedly, it was warm, about 30°C, but unless you were climbing around one of the many historical sites on shore, this was not a problem. As an added bonus, the bad press that Turkish summer temperatures have received made this one of the quieter times of year.

We were chartering with Top Yacht, who managed all the arrangements for us efficiently, so we only had to turn up at Gatwick to catch the XL Airways flight to

Dalaman airport. From there, they took us by air-conditioned, beer-supplied minibus to our start base in Keçi Bükü, one of two bases run by Top Yacht in Turkey. We had five days to deliver the boat to their other base in Göçek, a distance of only 37 miles east as the crow flies, although the steeply indented coastline doubles this.

Getting started

Top Yacht work with private yacht owners to offset the cost of ownership, chartering the boat through the season and allowing the owner use of the yacht out of season and at pre-arranged times. Luckily for us, the owner of one of their previous charter yachts, *KitKat*, had decided to upgrade, giving us the opportunity to be the first to charter his new Dufour 425 Grand’ Large, *KitKat Too*. With



Nightlights over Datça. Above right: Camilla on the helm, with Mark and the author looking on



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six berths in three cabins, not counting the saloon, she was ideal for our group of five.

Keçi Bükü marina has adequate facilities, including showers, a small supermarket that will pre-deliver essentials to your yacht and a small selection of restaurants. More importantly, we discovered, it has a cocktail bar next to the swimming pool.

After an efficient briefing from the Top Yacht team we slipped our lines the next morning.

The Turkish coast has an abundance of ruins, some of which date back to several centuries BC, so with culture in mind we started to head west with the intention of reaching Knidos, a ruined city 35 miles away at the end of the Datça peninsula. However, with only 10 knots of breeze combined with a sagging headsail luff, going to windward was a laborious process at which we probably persisted too long, so we made for the harbour of Datça, about 20 miles from Keçi Bükü.

Datça is a vibrant town built around two bays, of which the southernmost has the deepest entrance and visitors' moorings for yachts. As we approached we were signalled into a dauntingly narrow berth between a German yacht and a large wooden yacht with an American charter group on board. As it was, despite the fact that none of us had attempted a stern-to mooring before, we slipped easily into the berth.

Datça is built on a steep hill, so the cafés and bars on the waterfront soon give way to a host of interesting shops, including the classic Turkish carpet vendors, where you can enter an Aladdin's cave of dust and muted colours and, after many cups of coffee, leave with the rug of your choice.

The following day, after hoisting one of the crew to the masthead to try to solve our problem

with the headsail halyard, we continued with our plan to reach Knidos. But even with an improvement in pointing and speed we were still making slow progress against the wind, so motorsailed the last seven miles and pulled into the bay below the ruins at around lunchtime.

Ancient Knidos

Knidos itself is an ancient city, built on a steep hill with two harbours at its foot – the yacht moorings lie in the eastern harbour, once a commercial port, while the western harbour was home to military vessels. Rising to prosperity in around 600BC, most of the architecture dates from around 400BC through to the Seventh Century AD, when Arab raids and earthquakes caused widespread destruction. There is still plenty to see, including two amphitheatres, a mark of the city's prosperity, and several temples.

Our destination for that evening, Palamut, was one of the finds of the holiday. Taking the last slot in the small, square harbour, we plugged into some spectacularly dodgy shore power facilities and gingerly turned the switch, but there were no problems and for only 30 lira (about £12) with power and water, mooring here is a bargain.

Palamut also had the best restaurant we found all week – Le Jardin de Semra. Perhaps the only solid building in Palamut, the restaurant was once the local Customs house until its closure in the 1960s. In 1997, the current owner Semra took over, returning to her home town after several years' study in Paris. Ten years later, we found that her food was excellent: one of her first tasks had been to plant a garden to supply all the salad and vegetables for the restaurant, so everything is guaranteed fresh. We even went back the

Knidos barman Hopba offers a choice: a bristly kiss to return Camilla's stolen sunglasses





Clockwise from left: rickety wooden jetty at Bozuk Bükü; *Kit Kat Too* shows her pedigree; ruins at Knidos; Mark and Lena contemplate kebabs; anchored for lunch at Knidos





We were able to admire the tortured geology, riven with caves and oddly angled strata of conglomerate rock

following morning for coffee and a chat in the pleasant courtyard where we had been served the previous evening.

Leaving Palamut, we headed offshore, south and east towards the southern tip of the Greek island of Simi. Most of the islands around here are Greek and we were warned to expect half a day's paperwork if we landed, so we contented ourselves with anchoring for lunch in a secluded bay. Swimming in this area is superb, with crystal clear water that allows you to see most of the hazards to navigation, although strangely in the area there seemed to be little flora and fauna – perhaps the jagged rock is not conducive to growth.

A eight-knot reach with 18 knots' true breeze brought us rapidly to our next port of call for the night – Bozuk Bükü, a tiny bay on the southern edge of the Bozburun peninsula.

Dining with Ali Baba

There is a host of mooring options at Bozuk Bükü. We chose the only dry-shod option available – a rustic, but apparently solid jetty. Mooring here obliges you to eat at Ali Baba's restaurant. At first glance you wonder whether a swing mooring and some home cooking might be a better option – unshaded fluorescent lights and equally fluorescent pink tablecloths give the impression of a second-rate chip shop, but shut your eyes and choose the fish. The self-styled Ali Baba has no refrigerator, which forces him to buy fish fresh each day from the local fishermen. If you're in a group, he'll cook an entire fish for you – the one we ate must have weighed five pounds.

Next morning dawned bright, breezy and unusually clear – when we visited, the area had

had no rain for five months and a haze of dust dulled what would often have been spectacular views of the arid, craggy landscape.

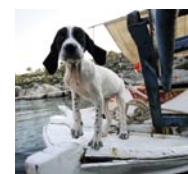
In the late morning the wind began to fail, so we gybed offshore in search of better breeze. The wind was better farther out and, as we approached our evening destination in Ekinçik Bay, it built to over 20 knots, bringing us towards our mooring at an impressive 8.92 knots. A quick motor around the bay and we rounded up in the lee of some cliffs to drop the anchor and swim a line ashore. That evening a boat came alongside to ask if we would like a private trip up the Dalyan river and, as this is one of the best-known archaeological areas in Turkey, we accepted swiftly, engaging his boat for the entire day for 300 lira.

The following morning our guide introduced himself as Captain Osama bin Laden, but rapidly backtracked to his real name – Hidayet. Creeping eastwards along the coast towards the entrance to the Dalyan delta, we were able to admire the tortured geology, riven with caves and oddly angled strata of conglomerate rock.

Dalyan was an important strategic waterway for the ancient Greeks, its winding, reed-lined channels giving plenty of opportunity to attack enemy ships before they reached the important citadel of Caunos. It eventually lost its importance as the river silted up and malaria became rife. Nowadays a sandspit bars most of the entrance, leaving a half-metre deep channel scoured by the propwash of the river boats while the spit plays host to a myriad Tahitian-style rush sunshades for the cruise parties that visit here.

Leaving that behind, you soon reach Caunos which, even in ruins, is still an impressive sight.

Tumbled ruins falling down to the anchorage at Bozuk Bükü. Above: Lycian tombs at Caunos



Sea dog



Mud larks. Treatment in the famous mud baths upriver from Caunos. Right: photographer Dean Tremi takes a dive

Like Knidos, there is a curious mix of temples and churches left over as religion changed through the ages. There's also a Roman bath and a huge, 33-tier amphitheatre in remarkably good repair. Above all stands the acropolis, built imposingly on the very top of the outcrop of rock which forms the foundations of Caunos.

Further up the river are the Lycian tombs, hewn from the solid rock of the cliff face, which formed the last resting places of the kings of Caunos. It's difficult to get close to the tombs, but if you're happy to admire from a distance there is a host of restaurants overlooking them, desperate to serve you lunch. For only 210 lira we were served a delicious mezze and mixed kebabs.

Glorious mud

Further up the river is a complete change to the ancient culture seen downstream – the mud baths. This area is famous for its thermal springs which, according to the tourist information, are supposed to make you look ten years younger.

I'm not sure about all that, but it certainly



makes you behave years younger. Wading into the syrupy grey mud in our swimming gear we soon discovered two things. First, it's incredibly buoyant – you can float at any angle, even lying on your side. Second, if you reach to the bottom of the pool, which is only about a metre deep, there's some wonderfully thick, glutinous mud which is perfect for throwing. Suffice to say the crowded pool soon began to clear . . .

A few silly photographs and it was off to the showers, followed by the sulphur baths – at 39°C they're warm, but quite pleasant. A swim in a nearby freshwater lake is apparently the end of the treatment.

As we motored back towards the mouth of the river, we came across a crab fisherman. Buying a baker's dozen of his catch, we spent the evening at the anchorage, cooking and eating fresh crab, washed down with some more of the local wine. Despite a few other boats in the bay, it felt as if we were in a world made especially for us and it was with a curiously smug, self-sufficient feeling that we went to bed before our final sail to Göçek.

It was a light wind journey to Göçek bay, which is littered with islands – Top Yacht told us that many of their charterers never leave the area – so we stopped in a promising cove for lunch. There were plenty of interesting caves to explore, but eventually we dried off and carried on to the top of the bay and the marina. Surprised to find that they didn't have a fuel berth, we had to make a brief journey to the barge moored in the north-western corner of the bay, but then returned to find the Top Yacht staff waiting to receive our lines.

Göçek is well worth visiting, but somehow, despite an excellent dinner at Café West and the ladies managing some good shopping the following morning, it all felt a bit of an anticlimax. After a week on board we were by no means ready to leave – but that has to be the mark of a great holiday.

Useful information

Top Yacht offer a range of Mediterranean charters as well as many further afield, but their biggest operation is in Turkey with two bases. They can offer bareboat, crewed or skippered charters, or you can take a berth on one of the local Turkish gulets.

Our experience with Top Yacht was faultless, with everything from the flights they arranged for us through to the condition of the yacht working perfectly.

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