



LUCKY DIP
A hotel pool overlooking the coastline

From my balcony, downy olive groves splashed with canary-yellow wildflowers stretch out to the deep blue Aegean, the sea that Cevat Sakir Kabaagaci, one of Turkey's most poetic wordsmiths and free spirits, described as 'cracked upon the horizon like a vast blue thundering infinity'. Exiled here from Istanbul in 1925 for seditious writing, he wrote prolifically under the nom de plume 'the Fisherman of Halicarnassus', bringing the epic peasant romance of this peninsula to the attentions of the pleasure-seeking Turkish elite. That elite has been arriving ever since, and these days the entire establishment descends when school's out to indulge in Bacchanalian delights and network over mezze. The Bodrum Peninsula, with its suave restaurants and hoteliers, its bronze-limbed Aphrodites and abundance of yachts, has long been to Istanbul what Saint-Tropez is to Paris. But now this Turkish Riviera is newly chic with the gilded international set, too.

In Kabaagaci's era, the peninsula was unconnected by road to the rest of Turkey, reachable solely on foot or with a mule, and Bodrum was a tiny sponge-diving village full of Turkish Cretan refugees. Historically, though, this finger of land has been crowded since the ancients. Greeks, Persians, Romans and Crusaders have all left their mark, and what might seem an untouched rural utopia of scrubland, immense limestone crags and jade-hued valleys is rich in the remains of their fallen civilisations – temples, theatres and marble-paved cities.

My precious view is from the Aman resort, which steals an unspoiled coastal position near the unassuming village of Torba. This 60-acre dominion of red dirt tracks and olive-trees is profuse with fig and carob, scented beds of thyme and fragrant pines. The late Turgut Cansever, a famed Turkish architect who won the Aga Khan Award for Architecture for his stone-built villas in the valley, owned the spot. He sent a string of luxury-hotel brands packing, but succumbed to the Aman Group, those ever-pernickety

hotel supremacists. His daughter presided over the building of this Ottoman-style village, Amanruya, in warm terracotta and stone, favouring everything artisanal and Turkish, from the hammam-style marble bathrooms, the charcoal fireplaces, the 50-metre infinity of green Antalya marble and the hand-laid pebblework that lines the pathways. As ever, the monastic quiet of the Aman is an antidote to the clamour of the summer crowds.

Bodrum, to its habitués, is not precisely the town itself – the name refers to the peninsula at large. And on this coastal finger, you need to know where to go – and, crucially, where not to (do eschew, for example, the over-developed south-west coast, where modern whitewashed villa rentals preside over the hillsides like so many anthills). The town is where you dock your *gulet* if you are going on a 'mavi yolculuk' or 'blue voyage' – a phrase coined by the Fisherman, which refers to the practice of exploring the Riviera in hand-built timbered Turkish yachts, still so popular. (Roman Abramovich, Lakshmi Mittal, the Ferragamos et al might have to divert to Palmarina Yalikavak, a marina that can squeeze in yachts of up to 100 metres and has a heliport).

It is also where one goes to let off steam at night, where nightclub singers croon, where the sound of corks popping reverberates across the shiny marina superyachts, where summering show-offs swarm the boulevards and perfect their see-and-be-seen struts. Head to Orfoz (www.orfoz.com) for a rustic-gourmet seafood degustation menu to contrast with the fine dining (meze and fish) in the cobbled courtyard of Kocadon (www.kocadon.com), set in an Ottoman house. If you're seeking a scene, try Barbeast (www.barbeast.com), an alfresco bar-with-DJ-cum-restaurant that is favoured by the young and the beautiful. Those who must will later make the obligatory bad-taste visit to Halikarnas, the legendary alfresco club built for thousands, where near-naked

beauties writhe ironically on platforms at 1am.

By day, those in the know are nowhere to be seen in these overpopulated winding streets: they are reclining on giant pillows at the Macakizi, the sine qua non of Bodrum boutique hotels in the chic enclave of Turkbuku on the north coast, where a coterie of



DEEP CALM
A Turkish yacht in a Bodrum bay

The Bodrum Peninsula, with its suave restaurants and hoteliers, its bronze-limbed Aphrodites and abundance of yachts, has long been to Istanbul what Saint-Tropez is to Paris

immaculate beauties provides eye candy for the watchful hedonists jostling for a position at the bar. Owned by the exuberant Sahir Erozan, to be found hobnobbing among the politicians of Washington DC when not amusing his guests in the summer months, this is the ultimate pontoon beach-club concept. You never really have your feet in the sand (perfect in a region where it has a disappointingly grey quality), instead lounging on platforms jutting out into the cerulean waters or on terraces carved into the steep hillsides (the rustic rooms are a world away from the madness on the water below). Across the bay lurk the gin palaces that brought in the latest arrivistes, before they were whisked into the Macakizi on speedboats.

Once you tire of the goldfish bowl, it's de rigueur to escape to the quieter villages hugging the northern shoreline. Yalikavak, an unassuming town lined with fish restaurants, is gaining ascendance. The sweetest place to stay is 4 Reasons, which mirrors the village's spirit. Its all-white, simple suites overlook a pool and unspoilt vista of olive groves and searing blue. The Mediterranean food is simple and sating; the charming owners encourage you to unwind, put your feet up and play dominos. Chic dropouts head to Gumusluk in the west, a tiny curl of white fishing cottages on the remains of the ancient city of Myndos, catnip for writers, artists and bohemians uninterested in the paparazzi-captured partying in Turkbuku. Under the water, the ancient city is visible, a treat for snorkellers swimming towards Rabbit Island, where the remains of antiquity are scattered around. The best time

to visit is during the Gumusluk International Classical Music Festival (www.gumuslukfestival.org), run by Guildhall pianist Eren Levendoglu, a Turkish-British woman who has restored a Byzantine church to hold cello and violin masterclasses from July to September and who brings the Hellenic theatre in Bodrum alive with her concerts. In these months, the exquisite sound of virtuoso musicians practising emerges from cottages all over the hillside. On a summer's night, Mimoza, with its hanging lanterns and alfresco tables, is the prettiest restaurant on the beach. Up in the hills, Limon Cafe (www.limongumusluk.com) enchantingly recalls the old hippie spirit of Gumusluk.

Seekers of resplendent peace and luxury head to the Aman

resort, or east to Barbaros Bay, where the hills spiral breathlessly up from the beach, affording mesmerising sunsets. Here you'll find the Kempinski, with its sleek rows of sunbeds, vast infinity pool and the only truly top-notch spa in town: Six Senses, which has unveiled a detox range for summer hedonists. Soon it is to be joined by the Four Seasons, which has brokered a deal to open nearby.

If you are seeking the folkloric charm of the Fisherman of Halicarnassus' time, though, you must venture out of these luxury forts and go inland. Discover the disappearing art of natural-dyed carpet and kilim weaving in the nomadic village of Etrim (www.etrinvillage.com), eat its incredible honeys, yogurts, breads and lentil soups, and drink its dry village wines.

The British Museum long ago carried off the reliefs and statues of the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, built for King Mausollos of Caria. So to reconnect with the ancients, go instead to Bodrum Castle, built by Crusaders from 1402 from the ruins of the Mausoleum. It was reborn in 1962 as the magical Museum of Underwater Archeology, and has an impressive collection of eastern Mediterranean ancient ceramic vases, as well as exquisite relics from shipwrecks around the Turkish Aegean: Egyptian jewellery; fifth-century-BC glassware; ancient olive presses and ostrich eggs. Its shade-dappled courtyards, filled with cacti, oleander, bergamot and mulberry, are

littered with epitaphs, anchors and Bronze Age grinding stones. This is a place to seek respite from the burning sun, contemplate the hills of modern-day Bodrum, and feel the breeze on your skin – air that, as the Fisherman wrote, is 'dry and bright as if lit by an inner light'. □

Seven nights at 4 Reasons in Yalikavak, from £875 a person B&B, including flights and transfers, with Anatolian Sky (0844 273 1152; www.anatoliansky.co.uk). Amanruya, from about £640 a room a night, including transfers from Bodrum International airport (www.amanresorts.com). Kempinski Hotel Barbaros Bay (+90 252 311 0303; www.kempinski.com/bodrum), from about £125 a room a night B&B. Pegasus (www.flypgs.com) flies direct from London Stansted to Bodrum.



LIGHT FANTASTIC
The peninsula at dusk

Once you tire of the goldfish bowl, escape to the quieter villages hugging the northern shoreline like Gumusluk, a tiny curl of white fishing cottages and catnip for writers, artists and bohemians