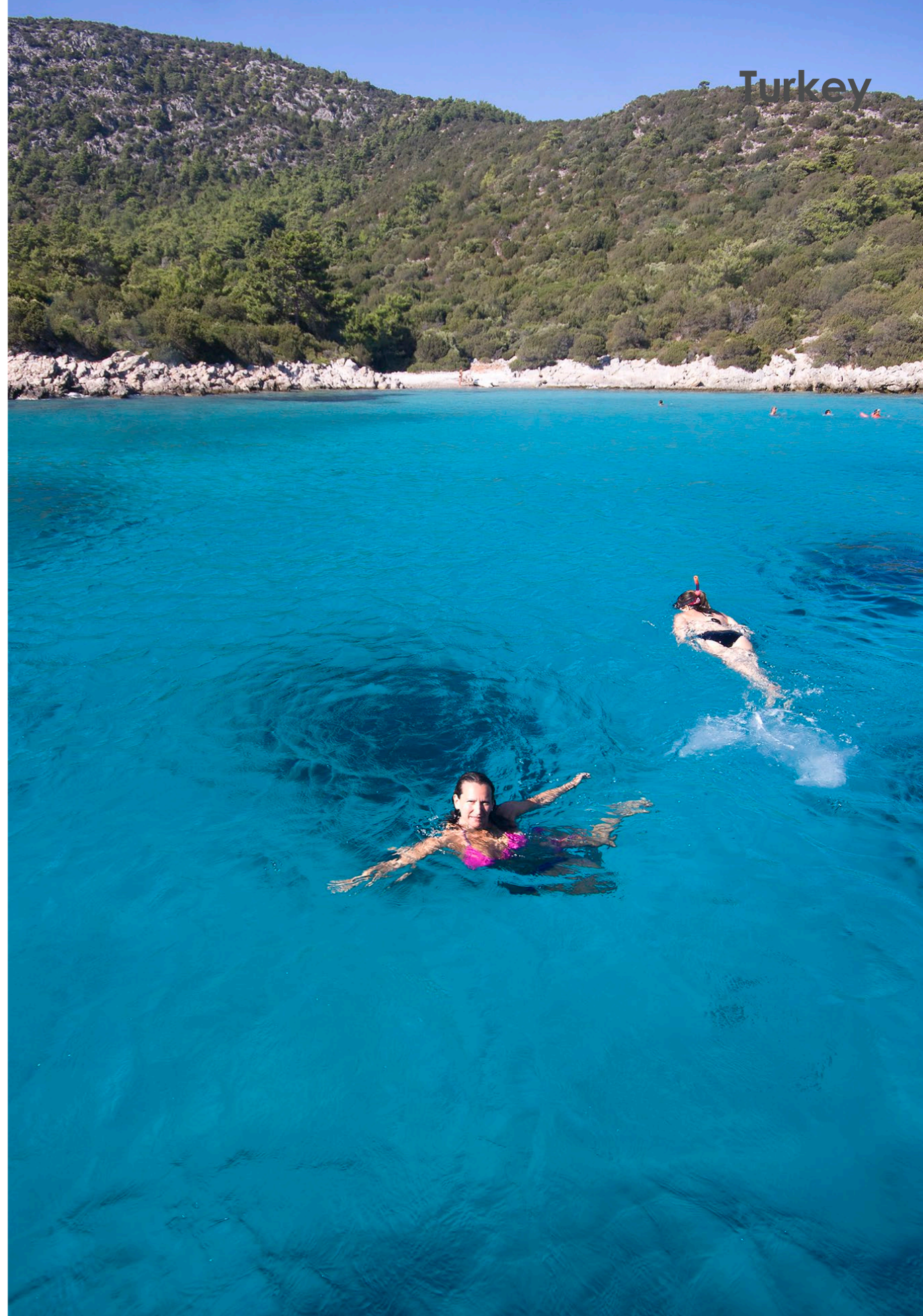


Turkey

Mediterranean & Aegean Hotspots

Text and photos by Rico Besserlich





Like diving in warm, turquoise waters with great visibility? Enjoy a laid-back atmosphere, without the stress of mass tourism, but still proper structures and professional services for scuba diving on site? Want guaranteed sunshine and excellent food from one of the world's greatest cuisines? Or perhaps you have a passion for history and culture as well, but not if it requires endless flights and travel? Then, Turkey is for you.

The most outstanding feature of the seas around Turkey is the remains of past civilizations. Turkey is where the East meets the West. The ancient Romans named this region "Asia Minor". But long before they came, the country saw the influx of the Hittites, the

Assyrians, the Phrygians, the Byzantine Empire, Alexander the Great, the Persian Empire and the Ottoman Empire.

This "breath of history" can be seen and felt everywhere in Turkey, even underwater. There is almost no dive where you won't spot ancient amphorae, some of them dating back to 500 BC. Lots of shipwrecks, ancient and modern, are awaiting discovery—which is often a relaxed endeavor, as water visibility is usually 40m or more. The water itself comes with colour tones that cannot be found elsewhere.

Marine life

The Mediterranean Sea is not famous for its rich marine life and often it simply needs luck to spot something special. However, groupers, barracudas, sting-rays and jack fishes are around—squids and sea turtles, too. As far as invertebrates and small fishes like wrasses, gobies and sea breams are concerned, they can be seen on every dive.



There are no fancy corals around here, but there are quite impressive underwater landscapes, with stunning rock formations, underwater canyons, caverns and hints of history, everywhere. While swimming in these waters and experiencing the great visibility, you might re-discover that wondrous

Snorkelers enjoy the clear, turquoise waters of Bodrum on the Aegean coast of Turkey; Motorized traditional Turkish wooden schooners, or *gület*, in Bodrum (top left); Curious shrimp on night dive (left)





The Canyon is one of Kas' top dive sites; View of marina from Bodrum Museum of Underwater Archaeology (top right); With a sharp eye and patience, you can find seahorses (right)



feeling, the gleeful “freedom of diving”, once again.

Dive sites in Turkey are found in the Aegean Sea, on the west coast, and in the Mediterranean Sea on the south coast of the country—also known as the

“Turkish Riviera.” It is on this south coast where you will find Turkey’s most popular dive sites.

About Turkey

Turkey is a country which belongs to Europe and Asia at the same time. Whilst the today’s Republic of Turkey is still a young one (founded in 1923), the Anatolian Peninsula is one of the oldest permanently settled areas in the world. There is evidence that even 40,000 years ago, people inhabited the area.

The world’s oldest known shipwreck—the “Uluburun,” dated 3,300 BC—was found in Turkish waters (see my article on Uluburun in issue 55 of X-RAY MAG at: <http://www.xray-mag.com/content/uluburun-oldest-wreck-world>)

The oldest man-made religious temple—Göbekli Tepe, dated to 10,000 BC—is located in Turkey and so are the ruins of Troy, dating from 3,000 BC to 500 AD. Some might recall from history class that the ancient city of Byzantine, later named, Constantinople, was one of the most significant cities in world history.

Well, the city is still here, but today its name is Istanbul.

The Temple of Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world—yes, that one—is in Turkey, too. It is in Turkey you will find the House of the Virgin Mary on Mt. Koressos; the Hagia Sophia—Constantinople’s Orthodox cathedral, turned imperial mosque, in Istanbul; the Library of Celsus in the ancient Roman capital of Ephesus; the Siren Rocks at Foca, fabled to be the site where Odysseus shipwrecked, in Homer’s Odyssey; and plenty more really old stuff.

It is actually nearly impossible to take a step without sniffing the smell of archeology. And still there are new finds almost every day, which makes modern construction a tricky thing sometimes; by law, if ancient artifacts are found during construction, it has to stop until archeologists can process the site.

Turkish cuisine

While in Turkey, we sniff and smell the thousands-of-years-old culture, our noses might sniff something else, too: the



Ancient amphorae are very common in Turkish waters; Flatworm and friend (left); Loggerhead sea turtle (right)



zen pizza and stuff it in the microwave. Never, ever.

The cuisine varies depending on the area. In the Aegean and Mediterranean regions, olive oil, vegetables, herbs and fish dominate the kitchens, whilst plenty of different kebabs (meat dishes) are typical for the Anatolian region.

food—oh, the food! Turkish cuisine is considered by many to be the third greatest cuisine in the world, not far behind French and Chinese. If you are a real foodie, one lifetime is not long enough to taste everything Turkish cuisine has to offer.

Turks love food—quality food, with the finest ingredients, and of course, everything must be fresh and homemade. No food-loving Turk would ever buy a deep-fro-

The right kebab is a science in itself. And nope, I am not talking about that unidentifiable meat served in a pita wrap, which you find on many a street corner of a cosmopolitan city. That ain't a proper kebab, and you will not find such things offered here in Turkey itself.

In Turkey, besides the traditional restaurants, which always offer "some of everything," there are plenty of small, local kitchens in the streets. If you see a place

with just three small tables in front of it, be brave and check it out. These local kitchens often specialize in only one special dish. Maybe you will find yourself sit on simple wooden or plastic chairs, and maybe everything around you looks incredibly simple, but at these small kitchens, you can eat like a gourmet, albeit at reasonable prices made for common folk—just US\$2.00 to \$5.00 for a rich, delicious meal.

But beware of those small green pepperonis that often come as a free side dish: They are hot as hell. Do not trust those old Turkish gentlemen sitting next to you who are eating these fiery things like French fries!

Raki

Turks are very social people and they like to socialize in the evenings over dinner. A Turkish "raki sofrasi" (or Raki dinner) is a cul-

tural experience and a must to try. Plenty of different starters (or mezze) are served, and the main dish might be fish or beef, just as you like it. At a raki sofrasi, the table is full of food—lots of different foods, each extremely tasty and freshly made, of course.

The namesake of this type of meal is Raki—or "Lions Milk" as it is called by some. It is an anise-flavored drink, and is the proper thing to drink at a raki sofrasi. But no worries—there are several very drinkable Turkish wines, and Turkey's Efes beer is good too.

If you are going to try raki, have a "tek" (a single) or a "duble" (a double), add some water and ice and enjoy. The founder of modern Turkey, Kemal Mustafa Atatürk, was a big fan of the raki sofrasi—he actually invented it.

Music

Another advantage of raki is that,



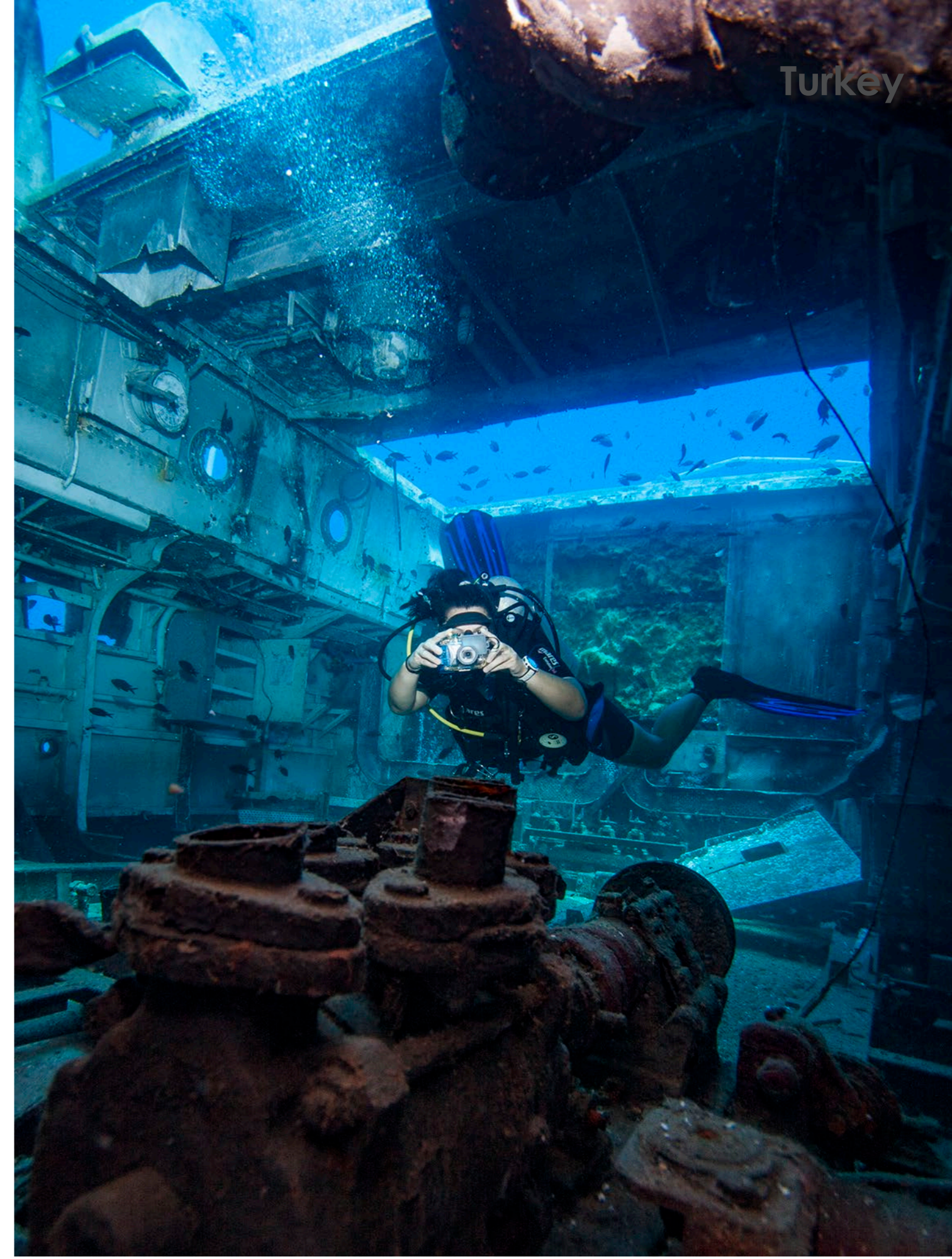
after the second one, you start to enjoy the music. It's all a matter of taste, of course.

Music is an important part of Turkish culture. Whilst the melodramatic "arabesque" style might be tricky for non-Turkish ears to appreciate, the Turkish gypsies come up with some pretty cool grooves. Sometimes in a public

square, you might see a six-year-old, young gypsy boy playing the "darbuka" (a type of drum) as a teenage gypsy girl dances to it, accompanied by her great-grandmother, who might be around 90 years old! Have a third raki, and you will be ready to join them!

The Dolapdere Big Gang is





a Turkish musical group that plays covers of international hits, albeit “gypsy style.” Check out their version of “Don’t let me be misunderstood” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=McDoisLBXel>) and feel the “Turkish groove.”

Turkish brunch

The day after a raki sofrasi, you might want to have a good breakfast. Oh, the Turkish breakfast! It isn’t a proper Turkish breakfast if it hasn’t got more than ten different dishes on the table, let me tell you! You don’t want to miss trying some “simit” (sesame bread). Then there are the homemade jams, a selection of fine cheeses, fresh tomatoes, cucumbers, the world’s finest olives, not to mention the “sucuk”—a Turkish sausage, sliced and baked together with eggs in a traditional copper pan.

A Turkish Sunday brunch can easily last three to four hours. You might like to round up the meal with a traditional Turkish mokka, and if you have a “wise woman” sitting at your table, she will tell you your future from the coffee grounds remaining in your cup. Surprisingly and certainly not proven by science, these wise

women are often right, and they might make you think about powers beyond human imagination, rational thought and science. Welcome to the mysterious Orient!

Street vendors

In Turkey, the “micro business” is a very common thing to see. Whilst laying in your hotel room, you might hear people shouting on the road. The “eskici” collects old stuff no one can or wants to use anymore; the “simitci” sells the super-tasty simits; others might praise their tomatoes to be the best in the world or just offer to clean your carpet.

The unique Turkish humor reaches every corner, even micro businesses. You might hear a vendor yell: “Don’t make the children cry—buy a simit!” The twilight zone of Turkish micro business is hard to explain in words alone. Check out the short video “Ben Geldim, Gidiyorum” (or “I’ve come and I’m gone”) here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8qzMHfis2vQ>. And you’ll understand what I am talking about.

Tea time

Drinking tea is something impor-



tant, too. Turkish people invite each other for a tea, almost continuously. Turks are the no. 1 tea drinkers in the world. No matter if it is a classy restaurant or a small local kitchen: if no tea is served, no Turk will ever sit there.

The Turkish “Cay” tea is served in very small glasses, and in Turkey the rule is: Whatever trouble you have, or whatever hassle you are in, there is always time for a glass of tea. As

Diver inside the SG-114 shipwreck; View of Kas, the top dive location in Turkey (top left); Squid (left)





Remains of an Italian bomber plane (left) at 58-71m at Flying Fish dive site in Kas; Juvenile baracudas cruising around in the shallows (right); Wreck of a Douglas "Dakota" C-47 aircraft in Kas (below)



("tesekür ederim"), but the French word "merci" works, too. And if you can't recall anything, just smile. That works as well.

Turkish people are all natural born "McGyvers", meaning that they always find a way. And even though there might be a slight language problem, just give them a minute and they will find a neighbor, friend, cousin or someone who knows some English and will happily give a hand. Give them two minutes and they will find a cousin who has a cousin that lives just one block away from your home in your home country! Yes, they can do such things.

Open every day

In Turkey, only Sunday is considered a day off, sort of, as it is

said, they take their tea very seriously. Sitting in one of the small cafes, having a cay and just watching what is happening on the streets, is almost a sort of core element of the Turkish culture itself.

You might then want to talk to people and then find that the Turkish language is beyond your capabilities of pronunciation. Doubt it? Try to pronounce "Üzgünüm" correctly. If you can do that, then you know how to say, "I am sorry", in Turkish. No worries, in tourist areas (which includes dive locations as well) most people know some English.

But with just a few Turkish

words, suddenly you are not a tourist anymore. They will make you family. The basic dialogue is always the same and works in 99.5 percent of all cases. We are of course talking about small-talk here. For example:

"Merhaba" means "Hello."
 "Nasilsiniz" means "How are you?"
 "İyi'm. Siz nasilsiniz?" means "I am fine. How are you?"
 And "Bende iyi'm" means "I am fine, too."

Learn this mini dialogue and see the real Turkey open its heart to you. The Turkish phrase for saying "thank you" might sound difficult



mainly only true for banks and offices. Shops of all kinds are open every day, usually from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. The same is true for hairdressers.

Oh, the hairdressers. They never sleep. A proper haircut or shave (or both) in Turkey is a lifetime experience. A good one, of course. And it's not done with a quick snip. No, no, you are the king of the scene. Tea will be served (I

told ya!) and every single hair of your head will be treated like a piece of gold.

You will get a relaxing neck massage and don't be surprised if the hairdresser will even trim your eyebrows. That's all part of the service, usually somewhere between US\$5 and \$10—perhaps three bucks more for a proper shave, and no, it's not a shave you could do at home.

As the coastal areas of Turkey provide 300 sunny days per year, most of life happens outside. Street life. Drinking tea (yes, again) or whatever you like, exploring history, recovering from the raki sofrasi and making new friends. That's easy in Turkey.

Religion and tolerance

Turkey's major religion is Islam. But when on holiday in Turkey, you will not find any "limitations". Turks are very warm-hearted people, and

Turkish hospitality is legendary. Going out on the town at night, you will be surprised how youthfully Turkish women are dressed. Things might look different in the deep east Anatolia, but on the Turkish coastal areas, everything is easy-going. To go "topless" sunbathing might be, here and there, a bit too provocative, but no woman has to cover her hair, except when visiting a mosque. Female divers can travel alone, without being bothered.

Turkish people still feel honored if anyone from abroad visits their country. It is the warmth, not only in the climate, but in the heart of the people, that makes a visit to Turkey a special event. And let's not forget: Turkey has some pretty cool spots to dive, too.

Kas

Kas is the number one dive desti-



Turkey

Airplane wreck (above) and typical underwater scene (right) at Bodrum; Diver at wreck of Greek cotton freighter (far right)

nation in Turkey. It is a nice, small town 140km from Dalaman and 200km from Antalya. With around 20 worthwhile dive sites, it is a lovely place to stay for divers and non-divers alike. Recommended dive centers include SunDiving, Kas Archipel Diving Center, SubAqua Dive Center. Here are some of the top dive sites.

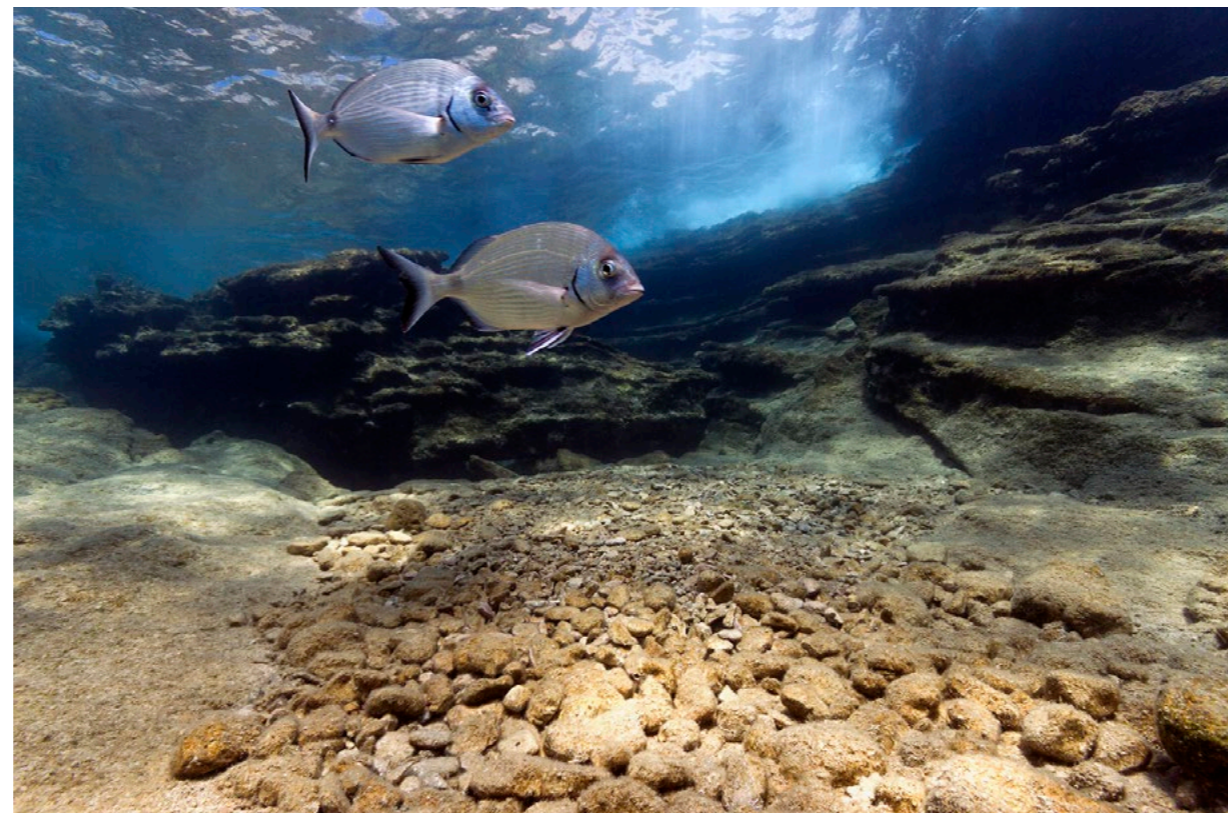
C-47/Dakota. Here, an intact C-47 aircraft rests in 18-26m of depth. You cannot find a complete wreck like this anywhere else in the world.

Flying Fish Reef. For years, this has been Turkey's No 1 spot and placed on the international list of "100 best dive sites worldwide." It is a huge underwater island where there are good chances to spot jack fishes and huge groupers. Some rare nudibranchs can be found here too. There is also an Italian bomber aircraft from

WWII at 58-70m.

Canyon.Tunnel. One of Turkey's largest caverns.

Topside excursions. Explore the old town, sit in a bar, have a drink and just "let God be a good man." There are lots of nice shops that sell Turkish handcrafts and other artworks. You can also visit Kekova, a sunken city, half underwater and half above it. Daily boat trips are available. Or take a boat trip to the lovely Greek island of Castellorizo, just 3 sea miles from Kas. Other outdoor activities in Kas include sea kayaking, mountain biking, hiking, paragliding, exploring half-forgot-



ten mountain villages, jeep safaris to Sakklikent Canyon and Butterfly Valley, and trips to Kaputas or Patara Beach (where sea turtles breed at Patara). Various local agencies offer lots of trips to explore all the "surface beauty"

of the region. No advance reservation in necessary.

Kalkan

This small romantic village, just 20km away from Kas (just take a bus or rent a car to reach it)

is quite popular with the British. There are around 10 worthwhile dive sites, including Dutchess of York, a huge freighter shipwreck; Heybeli Reef, a Mediterranean macro stuff paradise; and Ince Burun, with its beautiful underwater landscape. I recommended the dive center Dolphin Scuba Team. Other activities and things to see or to do include walking around, enjoying the local flavor

and don't miss having a dinner at the Aubergine Restaurant!

Kiris/Kemer

Very close to Antalya, this place provides good quality hotel resorts, designed for divers with families who like to relax and do a dive from time to time. The top dive spots include Paris Wreck, a French freighter from WWI that sank in the bay of Kemer.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Blenny; There are many “good days” with visibility of +40m—not every day, but nearly; Cuttlefish on night dive; Flatfish

Ranging from 16 to 31m, it is one of Turkey's best wrecks. Other top spots include, Three Islands Cave and Three Islands Aquarium. I recommend using the dive center Kemer Diving. Things to enjoy while topside include exploring the old harbour of Antalya, relaxing and enjoying your drink at the hotel pool bar.

sites include TC SG 115, with a wreck of a military patrol boat; Pirate's Bay, where one can find hundreds of nudibranchs and sometimes thousands of wrasses; C47, the second dive site with a

Bodrum

A city with a long history, Bodrum has a very beautiful marina and an old part of town, in the city centre. Located on Turkey's Aegean coast, water temperatures here are three degrees lower than at the other mentioned places. But in return, you will find the best water quality experienced in Turkey—very much a “turquoise dream.” The top ten worthwhile dive



finally, there is Big Reef, which is very rich with marine life and lots of fish. I recommend the dive center Happy Bubbles Dive Center.

oldest shipwreck ever found in the world, dating to 1,400 BC) and many, many more awesome things... One needs a full day to discover all. You can also explore the marina and enjoy Turkey's “jet set” holiday destination. If you still have energy at night, Bodrum is notorious for its nightlife.

What to do when topside includes visiting the world's only museum of underwater

Dakota airplane wreck. This C47 is broken, but still beautiful. It has the best underwater visibility in all of Turkey—close to 50m! And

archaeology, which is located in the old crusader's stronghold near the marina. It hosts the treasures of the “Uluburun” (the

Dive logistics

Turkish dive centers are used to foreign guests and do everything they can to make their divers happy. Diving is usually done in two separate dives by boat per day. Nitrox is not very common



adapters are provided.

Seasons and conditions

The diving season in Turkey goes from end of April until the end of October. The peak season is July through August. The water is 18-19°C in May, 21-23°C in June, 24-28°C in July, August and September and 24°C in October. July, August and September are

summers. There are 300 sunny days per year are the average. The hottest months are July and August, with temperatures rising up to 34-39°C.

Rates

Compared to other dive destinations in the Mediterranean Sea, Turkey still offers recreational diving opportunities for reasonable rates. An average quote for a 10-dive package (including tanks, weights, boat trips and dive guide) is between 190-220 EUR, depending on the area and on the dive center. The more dives you do, the lower the price gets. If booking a 15- to 20-dive package and bringing your own scuba gear, you will get the single dive for 14-16 EUR. Dive centers that are located in big hotel resorts (4 to 5 stars) do charge 30-35 EUR for a single dive, regardless

of how many you do. A beginner diving course, such as the PADI OWD, is 290-340 EUR, and includes all materials (books) and certification fees. ■

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Swimmer enjoys the clear waters of Bodrum; Diver at the SG-114 shipwreck (left); Rocky reefs and superb visibility are common in the Turkish Mediterranean Sea (top)

in Turkey, but some of the larger dive centers do offer nitrox for an extra fee. Other gas mixes such as heliox are nearly impossible to find, the same is true for rebreather scrubber. Only a handful of

dive centers in the entire country are qualified and certified to provide technical diving services. Dive tanks are usually 12-liter steel tanks with a single DIN valve. For divers with INT valve regulators,

the best months for underwater visibility, which is (depending on the dive site) between 35m and 45m. The coasts of Turkey have the classic Mediterranean weather, with mild winters and hot, dry



fact file



Turkey



SOURCES: US CIA WORLD FACTBOOK, US STATE DEPT, US CDC, XE.COM, LONDONDIVECHAMBER

History After the Ottoman Empire was defeated, modern Turkey was founded in 1923 by national hero, Mustafa Kemal, later dubbed, "Father of the Turks." Radical political, social and legal reforms ensued, eventually leading to multi-party politics, and then in 1950, victory and a peaceful transfer of power to the Democrat Party. In 1945, Turkey joined the United Nations, and NATO in 1952. The country became an associate member of the European Community in 1963.

There have been periods of instability and military coups in Turkey, occurring in 1960, 1971, 1980 and 1997. After each coup, formal political power was returned to civilians. In 1984, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) started a separatist insurgency that has killed more than 40,000 people. The PKK agreed to a cease-fire with the Turkish Government in 2013, but fighting broke out again in 2015.

There have been several incidents of terrorism in Ankara and Istanbul in 2015 and 2016. Another military coup was attempted in July 2016, resulting in around 300 people killed and 2,000 injured, spurring mass demonstrations in the streets by Turkish citizens, against coup forces. Mass arrests of military personnel by the Turkish Government ensued. The country has seen a quickly growing

economy in the past ten years due to economic reforms. Government: parliamentary republic. Capital: Ankara.

Geography

Turkey is located in Southeastern Europe and Southwestern Asia—the area of west of the Bosphorus is considered part of Europe geographically). Turkey borders the Black Sea, between Georgia and Bulgaria, as well as the Aegean Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, between Syria and Greece. Coastline: 7,200km. Terrain consists of high central plateau in Anatolia) and narrow coastal plain, with a few mountain ranges. Lowest point: Mediterranean Sea 0m. Highest point: Mount Ararat 5,166m.

Climate Turkey's climate is temperate, with mild, wet winters and hot, dry summers. Natural hazards include: severe earthquakes, especially in Turkey's northern areas; and rare volcanic activity from its three active volcanoes Tendurek, Ararat, Nemrut Dagi, which have not erupted since the 1800s.



Location of Turkey on global map (right); Location of Kas on map of Turkey (below)



Language Turkish is the official language, but Kurdish and other minority languages are spoken.

Health There is a risk of hepatitis A and typhoid through contaminated food or water, especially in rural areas. Rabies is found in bats, dogs and other mammals. There is a small risk of malaria. Check with your health department for recommended vaccinations.

Decompression chamber

There is a hyperbaric chamber in Istanbul.

Travel/Visa Citizens of the European Union get their visa automatically at passport control when entering the country, without any extra fee. The tourist visa is valid for 90 days. Citizens of many other countries outside the EU will need to apply for a visa prior to their flight. Such a visa can be acquired online (www.evisa.gov.tr/en/) and the fee is EUR20. Passports must be valid for at least 60 days beyond the expiry date of the traveller's visa or the end of the traveller's visa exemption period.

Security US and European authorities have issued travel warnings of terrorism in areas of Turkey, with extremists targeting foreign and American tourists. It is recommended that visitors avoid the southeast region, and take caution in large urban centers. Please consult your state department before traveling to Turkey.

Web sites

Tourism Turkey
Tourismturkey.org

Environmental issues

Challenges include urban air pollution; pollution of water with chemicals and detergents; deforestation; oil spills are a concern with increasing ship traffic in the Bosphorus.

Economy With a largely free-market economy, Turkey's industry and service sectors are surpassing the traditional agriculture sector, which still provides a quarter of jobs. Privatization has reduced state management in banking, basic industry, communication and transport. Spurring the economy are more and more middle-class entrepreneurs who are expanding production beyond traditional textiles and clothing sectors, which have also been surpassed as exports by the

electronics, automotive and petrochemical industries. Since 2006, up to one million barrels per day have been brought by pipeline to market from the Caspian region. Measures are in motion to bring natural gas from the same region through Turkey to Europe, thus addressing the country's dependence on imported gas, which supplies 98 percent of its energy requirements. Financial and fiscal reforms strengthened the economy after a severe financial crisis in 2001, fostering strong annual growth until 2008, when the global economic downturn caused a contraction in the country's GDP in 2009. However, the well-regulated banking system and financial markets aided the country's economic rebound in 2010-11, leading to the upgrading of Turkey's

investment grade in 2012 and 2013. But growth slowed significantly in 2014 due to lagging domestic and European consumer demand, and high interest rates, which were increased by the government to reduce inflation and boost the country's currency. Interest rates were cut in 2015 to energize economic growth. Current challenges include a relatively high account deficit, unsure commitment to structural reform, and destabilizing shifts in the economy due to instability in neighboring countries.

Currency Turkish liras (TRY). It is recommended to have some local money in your pocket. Exchange rates: 1 USD = 2.99 TRY 1 EUR = 3.36 TRY 1 GBP = 3.89 TRY 1 AUD = 2.29 TRY 1 SGD = 2.19 TRY

Population 80,274,604 (July 2016 est.) Ethnic groups: Turkish 70-75%, Kurdish 18%, other minorities 7-12% (2008 est.) Religions: Muslim 99.8% (primarily Sunni), other religions 0.2% (mainly Jews and Christians) Internet users: 42.7 million, or 53.7% of the population (July 2015 est.)