

pearls of the
mediterranean



From high speed to slow down

RUTGER GEERLING

Kas, Turkey

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Photos by Harald Apelt
and Rutger Geerling

Upon leaving the modern Antalya airport in Turkey, my Turkish adventure began immediately. I was awaited by a taxi driver—let's call him Mehmet—who was hired for my transfer from the big metropolis of Antalya to my final destination, Kas. I met this guy, Mehmet, who bravely held the sign board for identification into the air, "Mr. Apelt for Kas Diving", and our welcome was spartan and friendly. But there was one problem: Mehmet didn't speak a word of English, or any other language, but Turkish. This is why I didn't get his name. So, I call him "Mehmet", a very respectable Turkish name.

During the 210-kilometer taxi transfer from the airport to Kas, there was no conversation with Mehmet—not a word—but I learned a lot about life here on the goose chase through Antalya's metropolis of around 700,000 inhabitants.

What traffic! I've been a pretty keen driver for more than 30 years, and I am used to driving in big cities such as Barcelona, Milano, London and Paris, but the traffic in Turkey is something different. Mehmet just about flew me through the city. Only if absolutely necessary, did he drive less than 100km per hour, and red traffic lights seemed to be only a recommendation—a useless illumination for him.

To cut a long story short, the transfer was an adrenalin rush into a new and interesting and different world that exists so close to Europe. McDonalds, shopping malls, big city architecture are nearly the same here as in any other European city. On the other hand, the culture and atmosphere here makes the place seem so far away from European



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Spectacular caverns, interesting wrecks and colourful marine life can be discovered on the diving trips with the comfortable diving ship *Abyss* (above right whilst leaving Kas harbour)

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Kas



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Colourful night life in the small alleys of Kas: Modern lifestyle in shops and restaurants right next to the mosque

life. To be honest, the mixture of East and West in Turkey is like an amazing spice on a good meal.

Outside Antalya, we drove endless kilometers along the coastal line. My nerves calmed down. The road slid along the hills of the Taurus Mountains. Little villages and picturesque port towns bordered vast forests. The fantastic view over the Lycia coast, the smooth light of the nearby sunset and the amazing colours of the sea, which I would soon be exploring, inspired a wonderful holiday feeling.

It was shortly after sunset when Mehmet suddenly left the road and drove onto a small path into the forest. "What's going on now?" I wondered and started getting a bit irritated when we suddenly stopped in front of a small restaurant.

Bringing three fingers into his mouth, Mehmet made me understand that this would be our dinner pause.

We entered the restaurant where

Mehmet was well known. We were welcomed and served at once, and I ate one of the best trout dinners I have ever had in my life, plus an amazing fresh salad and a Turkish "meze" antipasti plate. The compulsory deep black Turkish coffee completed the perfect transfer break.

Astonishingly, for this opulent meal, I paid an amount that one would pay, in Germany, for a little more than a few French fries and a beer.

We finally reached Kas close to midnight, and the beauty of this small historic port town was already blanketed by the night.

The resort

The next day, bright sunshine awoke me with deep blue skies and temperatures of more than 25°C, which is not high for Turkey, but hot for this time of



little bit Hamburg was a warmer than 4°C when I left in the beginning of March. The climate in south of Turkey was pleasant compared to the rainy and cold season some 2500 kilometres north.

It is like early summertime in central Europe, and that's why Turkey is a very popular travel destination in the early part of the season during March and April.

I stepped into Kas Diving,

which is close to the hotels and only a few steps away from the sea. I was welcomed by Arzu Övünc. She had such a nice German Berlin accent, that I immediately felt at home. She is Turkish but has lived in Germany for many years, has perfect in English as well and knows all about everything. She manages Kas Diving, the client relations, bookings and accommodations, and she is



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Kas



a very professional guide for guests who wish to discover the endless historical and tourist highlights on the Lycia coastline, and she is, of course, a keen diver, too. Sometimes she is bothered a little by her position and not having enough time to accompany Levent, the owner of Kas Diving, and his two instructors, Murat and Jeff, on their daily trips along the Kas coastline.

After one week of diving, I understood Arzu's feelings, because my prejudices against eastern Mediterranean diving were blown away. There are about 30 dive spots that are used for diving here. All the trips start from the little harbour of Kas. Kas Diving has an own space at harbour with an exclusive place for the dive boat. Right next to the peer, there is a compressor station, which Levent installed.

Clients of Kas Diving enjoy the

comfortable way of diving. Nobody has to take care of equipment. That job is done by the crew during your entire stay on board the dive boat. Nobody has to carry tanks or weight belts—everything is perfectly organised by Levent and his crew.

Kas diving

So again, the question is, "What makes a 'pearl', a 'pearl', as we define it"? Well, Kas is a good example of how a holiday destination can be perfect in so many different ways.

It was not much more than 30 years ago, that Kas could only be reached by a narrow, impassable goat path. That's why nowadays Kas is far from the disastrous tourist development of many other Mediterranean destinations. There are no hotel bunkers, no classical signs of mass tourism to be found



No mass tourism will be found here: The picturesque harbour of Kas (left). Divers having lunch on the Abyss while anchored in a small bay outside Kas (above)

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here. And Kas is still an attractive port town with many historic buildings and traces of more than 20 centuries all around. This nice little port town has exciting aspects as well, which each tourist might hardly be looking for such as small, narrow alleys with a lot of little shops, bars and restaurants, a port region where fishing boats land their fresh catch and palm garden cafés where one can drink a refreshing tea (or even a more refreshing Efes-Pilsen) and watch the life around the central port square with its impressive monument showing Kemal Atatür—the beloved and adored founder of the Turkish nation. Guests will meet some of the 8000 inhabitants of Kas who are absolutely relaxed, attentive and have such an amazing kindness that questions about the speed of life in modern civi-

lization crawl into one's head without fail. Being relaxed seems to be one of the most positive characteristics the owner of a diving center could have. And Levent has it. Although he grew up in a busy atmosphere in southwest Germany, he celebrates his days in an absolutely unusual manner in diving business. Maybe it is the mixture of German correctness and reliability and the easy going relaxed Turkish way that makes the special atmosphere in diving with Kas Diving. As everyone knows, dive boats can be a story in themselves. I cannot remember many boats that have been so well organised, offered so much space, were so clean and showed so many nice details of perfect planning and good craftsmanship like the *Abyss!* A visit to the boat's restrooms, for instance,

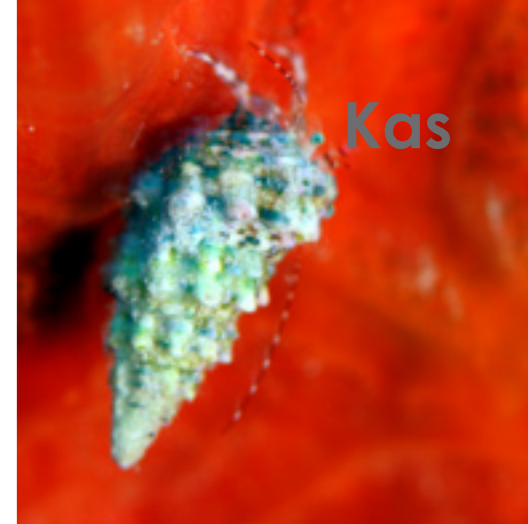
Diving at its best: Highlights are the wrecks outside Kas, the historical sites with amphora's, and the rare meetings with Hawksbill sea turtles

Kas



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Kas

Historical artefacts are protected by law: Just look, don't touch! Octopus, nudibranch, hermit crab and scorpion fish can be found easily

will surprise anyone with their inspiring, artful flagging work.

The Kas flagship dive boat, *Abyss*, is 19 meters long and six meters wide. The second ship, *Barakuda*, is 16 by 5 meters. The daily dive trips are made with the *Abyss*, which can transport up to 35 equipped divers. During the main season, Kas Diving offers two excursions per day and day trips, with two dives and a common meal at lunch time, three or four times per week.

Compared to other Mediterranean regions, diving at Kas has perfect visibility. The water is mostly crystal clear and bearable in temperature. In March, the water is already 17°C, which quick-



ly rises up to 24°C in June, and in August and September reaches a peak of 29°C.

by Kas Diving, and there are two you should absolutely see at "Olu Burun", which means "holy nose" and describes the small peninsula west of Kas. Here you can dive the replica of a historic shipwreck, which was discovered by some fishermen in the early '80s.

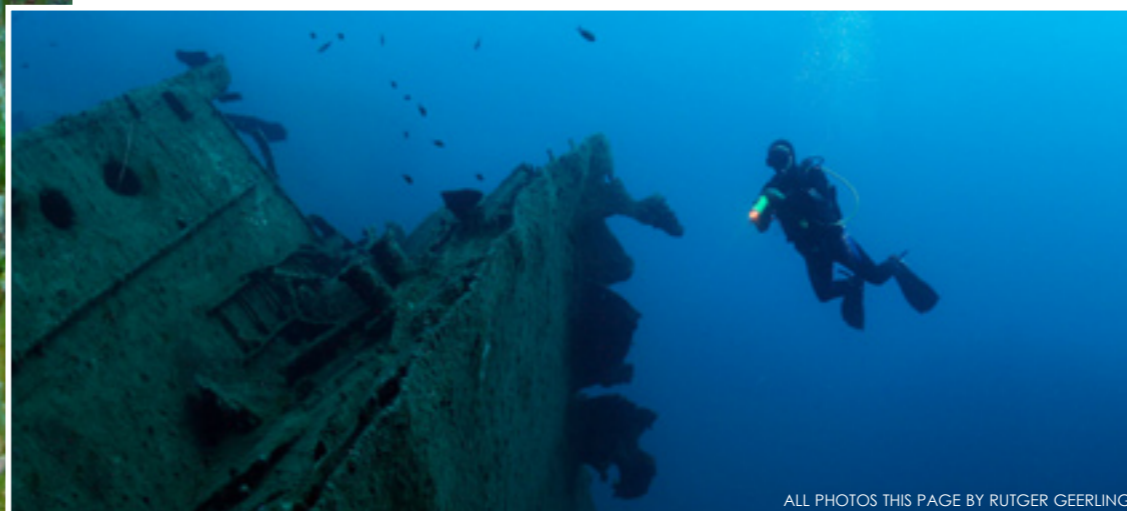
The original wreck was 15 metres long and transported amphoras and bronze. It was in a good state and declared to be older than 3300 years. It was discovered in a depth of 60 meters. It took ten years and more than 22,000 dives to register all the ship's details, section by section, and recover the numerous artifacts. The ship found its final home in the Museum of Bodrum.

In 2007, the local underwater archaeology club decided to build and countersink a replica of this famous wreck at Olu Burun and reconstruct the recovered amphora field with replicas for divers to enjoy.

Within two months, the replica wreck was built and plunged to a depth that was good for sport diving activities. Later, heavy storms moved the wreck from 15 meters down to 30 meters. Now, it is tied with a sturdy rope to a rock, and the rope leads divers down from the coastline from six meters direct-

Diving

There are about 30 dive spots used



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Common life at Kas: The Turkish people are very friendly and hospitable to foreigners. The pide baker made a perfect 'Lahmacun' and 'Pide'.

ly down to the wreck and the amphora field.

The second spot you should dive is the wreck of the Greek freight ship, *Dimitrij*. It sank in the early '60s carrying cotton. It was hardly damaged by numerous heavy winterstorms.

The dive of the wreck starts unexpectacularly at six meters and leads one over a flat region where divers come up against the first metal leftovers of the *Dimitrij*. But suddenly, it gets more exciting because a deep canyon at 25 to 40 meter appears next to the hull of the *Dimitrij*.

And finally, when you get back to the dive boat, the relaxing atmosphere topside goes on as usual. The



team gives you a hand wherever you need it. There is no hurry and a good pot of tea is ready for you after the good dive you had.

Topside excursions

If the historic "Olu Burun" wreck has inspired you to see more historic places and explore the beautiful landscape around Kas, you should tour the region by car. There is a nice day trip recommended by Arzu, which will show visitors a lot of what makes the Kas region a real pearl of the Mediterranean.

About 40 kilometers west of Kas, one should see the ruins of Patara, the birth place of the god, Apollo. During the reign of the Roman Empire, Patara was the capital of Lycia. Many ruins of this important city can be seen here. The amphitheatre is especially worth a visit. (See more

information at: www.allaboutturkey.com/patara.htm

Only a few minutes away towards the seaside, travelers will reach the Patara beach. It is one of the most famous and longest beaches of Turkey. It's more than 18 kilometers long and is still the home of one of the last Mediterranean populations of hawksbill turtles, which come here to lay their eggs.

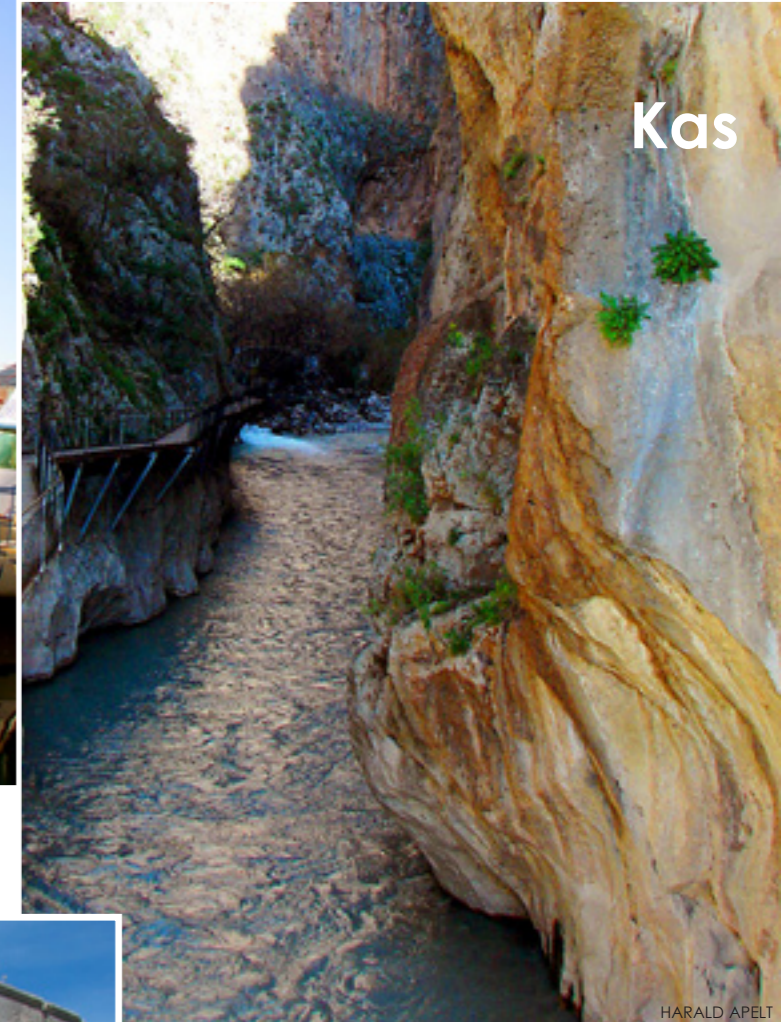
Leaving the seaside heading north on the road to Fethiye, one will reach Xanthos. It was



The Kas team: Captain Sadik, Arzu Övünc, Jeff Dobson, Murat Ayildiz and owner Levent Aydogmus

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What you should see when visiting Kas: The market place at Kas, the quiet atmosphere at the harbour, the canyon of Saklikent, the historical ruins at Patara and Xanthos, and the nice hilly alleys at Kas

only to be smashed again. Grave sites, sarcophagus, monuments, ruins of ancient palaces and the former amphitheatre are witnesses to the long history of this place.

Leaving the main road northeast into the hills, you'll reach the canyon of Saklikent. The river Akdagi makes its way through this canyon, which is 18 kilometers long. From the visitors point, you can explore 16 grottos and the deep canyon that is bordered on both sides by the 600-meter high Akdag Mountains.

And if you want another great day trip, just visit Greece. Not much more than two kilometers outside Kas is the most eastern Greek island of Kastelorizo, which is called "Meis" in Greek. It's a small island, which occasionally has flights to its small regional airport. But the picturesque little port town of Kastelorizo is absolutely beautiful and worth visiting.

It's just a 20-minute ferry ride from Kas, but it's not like crossing the river Thames. Although it's only a day trip of a few hours, you will need an official visa for your re-entry into EC from Turkish Kas. The visa must be applied for at least one day before the trip. This can be taken care of by Arzu from Kas Diving.

The whole immigration system is performed very seriously and even customs control looks like it would appear if you were visiting the Soviet Union in former years. Having an his-

toric enemy, Greece, right in front of the Turkish door seems to make everybody a little bit nervous. That's why it is not surprising, that the Turkish Navy has a station in the harbor of Kas. That of course, has been matched by the presence of a Greek frigate in the port of Kastelorizo.

As you can see, there are quite a lot of exciting activities to be done during a holiday in Kas besides diving. And the very last adventure of the holiday was—yep, that's right—the taxi transfer back to Antalya airport. Another driver,



another car and a new fastest lap of 2:40 hours.

When I got to the airplane, I was vividly day dreaming of my own car and being my own driver in my own slow-paced city. But overall, the journey to Turkey was a really great adventure, and the mad taxi rides were just minor irritations to endure on the trip. ■



the capital of ancient Lycia, and the first federal republic in the world. During its long history and many occupations, Xanthos experienced several wars and catastrophes. Wars destroyed and burnt down the city, which ten was reconstructed and grew up to a metropolis again

fact file



Turkey



SOURCE: HARALD APELT, CIA WORLD FACT BOOK AND SCUBA-DOC.COM

History Under the authoritarian leadership of national hero Mustafa Kemal, "Father of the Turks", modern Turkey was founded in 1923 from the surviving Anatolian vestiges of the defeated Ottoman Empire. Under Kemal's rule, the country adopted wide-ranging political, social, and legal reforms. An experiment with multi-party politics followed a period of one-party rule. In 1950, the Democratic Party won a victory and a peaceful transfer of power. Political parties in Turkey have multiplied since then, but periods of instability and occasional military coups in 1960, 1971 and

1980, have fractured democracy in the country. After each coup, power was eventually returned to civilians. The military assisted in a coup which ousted the then Islamic-oriented government in 1997. In 1974, Turkey's military intervened on Cyprus to prevent the takeover of the island by Greece. Turkey acts as the patron state to the island which is now dubbed the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, recognized only by Turkey. In 1984, a separatist insurgency began by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) known today as the People's Congress of Kurdistan or Kongra-Gel (KGK). The conflict has taken all the Turkish military's attention and led to the deaths of more than 30,000 people. In 1999, the group's leader was captured which led to the retreat of the insurgents to northern Iraq. The year 2004 saw an end to the KGK's ceasefire and an increase in attacks attributed to the KGK. In 1945, Turkey joined the UN and became a member of NATO in 1952. Turkey became an associate member of the European Community in 1964. Within the last ten years, the country has undertaken several reforms to strength-



tion and strong economic gains from 2002-07, high external debt and current account deficit still thwarts the economy.

In 2006, oil began to flow through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, leading to 1 million barrels per day from the Caspian entering the market.

Decompression chambers

Dept of Underwater and Hyperbaric Medicine, Istanbul Medical Faculty, Istanbul University, 34390 Çapa, Istanbul. Tel. +90 1 212 531 3544

Dept of Underwater and Hyperbaric Medicine, GMMA Haydarpasa Teaching Hospital, Uskudar 81010 Kadimathköy, Istanbul Tel.: +90 216 345 02 95

GATA Haydarpasa Military Hospital, 81327 Kadikoy, Istanbul Tel.: +90 216 3462453

Websites

Turkey Tourism www.turkeytourism.com
Ankara University Medical Faculty Underwater Research and Diving Club, Ankara. English webpage: www.geocities.com/Colosseum/Loge/5795/englishversion.html ■

en its economy and democracy in order to qualify to begin accession membership talks with the European Union. Government: republican parliamentary democracy. Capital: Ankara

Geography Turkey is located in Southeastern Europe and Southwestern Asia (the Turkish region west of the Bosphorus is geographically part of Europe). The country borders the Black Sea between Bulgaria and Georgia. It borders the Aegean Sea and the Mediterranean Sea between Greece and Syria. Coastline: 7,200 km. Terrain: high central plateau in Anatolia; several mountain ranges and narrow coastal plain. Lowest point: Mediterranean Sea 0 m. Highest point: Mount Ararat 5,166 m. Natural hazards: in northern Turkey along an arc extending from the Sea of Marmara to Lake Van, there are severe earthquakes. Note: Turkey holds a strategic location controlling the Turkish Straits (Bosphorus, Sea of Marmara, Dardanelles) which links the Black and Aegean Seas. The legen-

dary landing place of Noah's ark, Mount Ararat, is located in the far eastern region of the country.

Climate temperate with hot, dry summers and mild, wet winters; harsher climate is found in the interior

Environmental issues The dumping of chemicals and detergents has led to water pollution. Urban areas experience air pollution. Deforestation and oil spills from increasing Bosphorus ship traffic challenge the country. Turkey is party to agreements: Air Pollution, Antarctic Treaty, Biodiversity, Climate Change, Desertification, Endangered Species, Hazardous Wastes, Ozone Layer Protection, Ship Pollution, Wetlands. Turkey has signed, but not ratified Environmental Modification.

Population 71,892,807 (July 2008 est.) Ethnic groups: Turkish 80%, Kurdish 20% (estimated). Religions: Muslim 99.8% (mostly Sunni), other religions 0.2% (mostly Christians and Jews). Internet users:

12.284 million (2006)

Language Turkish (official), Kurdish, Dimli (or Zaza), Azeri, Kabardian. There is also a large Gagauz population in the European part of Turkey.

Economy Modern industry and commerce coincides with a traditional agriculture sector that provides more than 35 percent of employment. Strong and rapidly growing private sector, is tempered by the state still playing a large role in basic industry, banking, transport, and communication. Textile and clothing production accounts for 33 percent of industrial employment and faces stiff competition in international markets. Automotive and electronics industries are rising. Real GNP growth has exceeded 6 percent in recent years, undermined by sharp declines in output in 1994, 1999, and 2001. Implementation of economic reforms has turned the economy around leading to a peak GDP growth rate of 9 percent in 2004. Despite falling infla-



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