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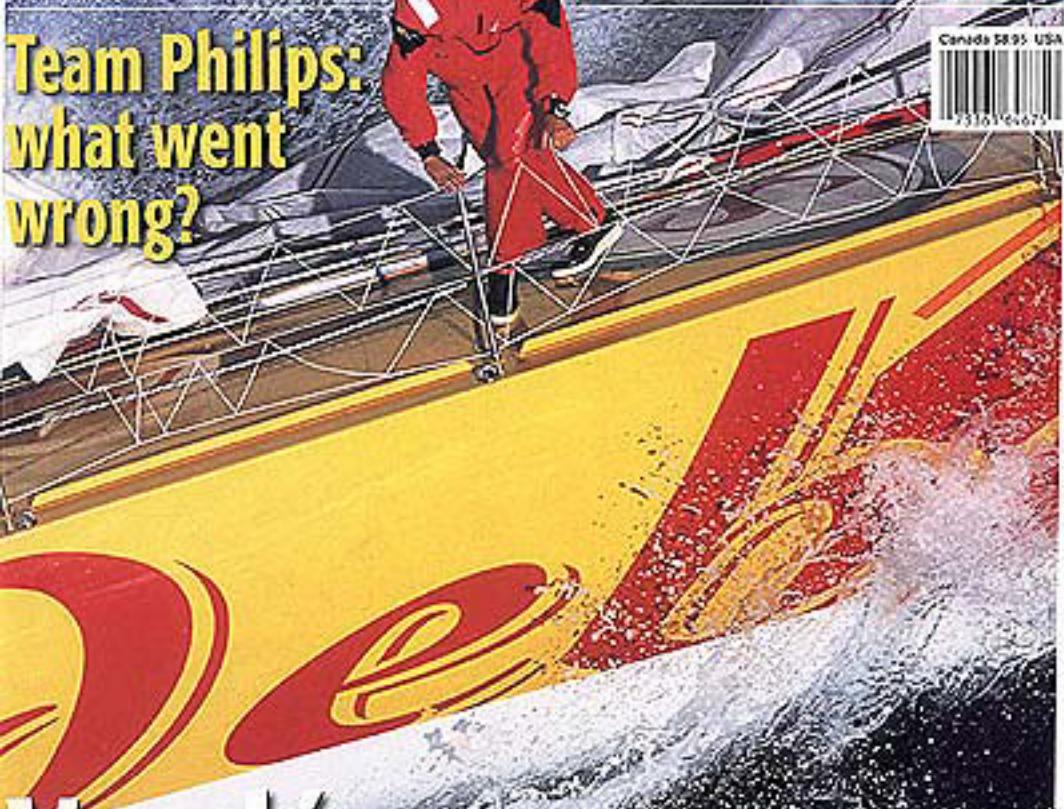
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Vendée Screaming through the Southern Ocean

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Turkey, the traditional way

Chartering a gulet is not only a great way to explore Turkey's remote Lycian and Carian coasts, it provides children with a non-stop round of watersports and parents with a relaxing break

Inset picture:
the anchorage at Kalkan
where we picked up a
river boat to explore
the Keyregla River
and the mud baths
along Coynes





Above: Pavuryo moored in a typical deserted anchorage on the Dorian peninsula. This gulet was well equipped with snorkelling equipment and plenty of toys such as sailboard, dinghy, two canoes and fishing gear, making it a natural choice for families. Left: another gourmet breakfast.



From almost any vantage point in Bodrum, Marmaris or Fethiye, the view to seaward is dominated by one of Turkey's most distinctive maritime features – the gulet. These beauty-wooden workhorses, packed stern-to along harbour walls like fat kebabs, have played a key role in the development of the country's flourishing tourist industry over the last 20 years.

The Lycian and Carian coastline of southwest Turkey is still largely inaccessible by land so the sea kindly, load-carrying gulet (pronounced 'go-let', from the French *goulet*, meaning schooner) is in demand by those seeking to explore an area which offers a tantalising blend of seduction, beauty and archaeological remains.

The gulet experience

Gulets are big business. An estimated 1,000 charter boats ply this coast, many adorned with the names of household tour operators like Thomson, First Choice and Virgin. They're laden with holidaymakers who treat them as floating hotels. Others are more discreet, their owners preferring to operate them like private yachts. Service can approach five-star standard, with accommodation, cuisine, watersports and a crew to match.

But whichever approach you choose, the debate over whether a gulet is a satisfactory substitute for a week aboard a conventional sailing boat is likely to be short; they are very different boats, each with their own appeal.

The gulet experience certainly removes the hardship and everyday chores of life afloat – shopping, cooking, even tidying your bunk are all

taken care of, which is a big selling point for those who want a real rest. The responsibility of decision-making is also removed since passage planning is somebody else's problem. Purists may sneer at this but as an alternative to usual charters I found the experience something of a tonic.

From the children's point of view, gulets score well. They're spacious, the inevitable junk can be contained in individual cabins and it doesn't take much imagination to turn a gulet into a pirate ship. There are also canoes, sailboards, dinghies, snorkelling and fishing gear on board and a crew who will keep an eye on children during the day and baby-sit in the evenings. Gulets which accept children (some don't) rate highly for child entertainment. And for those who immediately think of safety, deep bulwarks, high guardrails and a commonsense use of lifejackets will put parents' minds at rest. Sun protection and keeping children hydrated is just as important.

Another bonus of the crewed gulet charter is that your skipper will choose some of the best and least-known anchorages. We visited places neither named on the chart nor mentioned by Rod Heskell in his excellent Turkish Yacht Pilot.

We chose Top Yacht Charters for our gulet charter. The company specialise in Turkey, have an excellent reputation and have been working with Deniz Serbestcigil's Bodrum-based Flama Tours for 18 years; that many of Top Yacht's gulet customers are repeat business speaks volumes.

At the outset it is vitally important to decide whether you are willing to share a gulet with a party of strangers. Both Top Yacht and Flama

will help you – in effect they match-make – but it's an obvious risk. We decided to ask friends to join us and with that family of five we accommodated the whole yacht. We were offered the good ship *Pavuryo*, a five-cabin 18.1m vessel which in the high season (ie August) will charter at £350 a day, which includes everything (fuel, harbour dues, use of equipment, incl. kayak) from food and drink, which worked out at £10 a head per day.

After a four-hour flight from the UK, we were relieved to step into the air-conditioned luxury of Flama Tours' 12-seater Mercedes-Benz minibus equipped with cool box and chilled drinks. A big bonus of flying to Dalaman is that the transfer from airport to boat takes only 20-30 minutes, but for the first week we decided to acclimatise in a small hotel near Fethiye, a good move considering the temperature was in the mid-30s.

A week later the same minibus collected us and we were soon on the aft deck of *Pavuryo* staring somewhat gobble-eyed at the beautifully laid lunch table, chilled bottle of champagne and vast basket of fresh fruit being offered in welcome. The initial impressions far exceeded our expectations, which is not a bad way to start any holiday.

Housekeeping rules (mainly about the loo) were explained, the crew introduced, the food bill for half the week settled and off we went.

Pavuryo is a voluminous 13-year-old gulet of immense character. Captain Sener had been aboard for 11 years and had virtually turned her into his home; with her vast amount of sparkling varnished wood, Turkish carpets, trinkets and pictures we instantly felt at ease. One thing she didn't

have was air conditioning, which was fine in the day but almost unbearable at night; sleeping on deck was a popular and perfectly comfortable option thanks to the acres of sunbeds at our disposal.

We were encouraged to eat on board and advised that if we ate ashore we should choose busy restaurants where food was unlikely to have stood for the benefit of flies. Although water is now considered drinkable in Turkey, Flama Tours' Gocek base manager Gulden Ersak advised us to drink only bottled water. As a result no one suffered serious stomach upsets and I can honestly say the cooking of our young chef Kamil was such that we weren't tempted ashore once.

Life in the slow lane

And so began a week-long series of lunch stops and evening anchorages with sea time amounting to no more than three or four hours a day. The universal method of mooring in Turkey is to drop anchor on the slow approach to a selected mooring space, turn the rudder on the anchor, send the dinghy ashore with a stern line and then take up the slack on the anchor windlass. Captain Sener, Ibo the deckhand (king of the dinghy) and Kamil had this manœuvre off to a tee and before we knew it the canoes had been launched, the dinghy was made available, the children were in the water and drinks were being served. It took some time to get used to not helping but, of course, if we really wanted to pull ropes, steer for a bit or raise another G&T we only had to ask.

Our first lunch stop and overnight stay was in Skepe Limanı, the ten-mile-long bay running

south-west from Göcek. There are literally dozens of anchorages to choose from, we landed in Deep Bay and overnighed in Kinkuyruk, both of which were idyllic. Sandy beaches are non-existent in this area. Small areas of gravel foreshore quickly lead into pine and scrub and it's hard work scrambling over awkward, sharp rock – never go ashore without shoes.

Because there is no tidal rise and fall, there is none of the interesting seafarle that exists between high and low water marks on the Atlantic coasts of Europe. There are fish to see, but stocks have been badly depleted in recent years by over-fishing and the failure to enforce regulations. As a result the once prolific dolphin is rarely seen playing in your bow wave. We saw starfish, sponge, sea urchins and several species of fish, but the snorkelling was generally disappointing.

But there's much on offer in Turkey. Displaying an alarming degree of daring, mums in the party had already tried their hand at parasailing off Calis Beach near Fethiye and for £7 had braved the Turkish baths in the same town. 'Massage, steam bath and an all-over body scrub – it won't hurt!' read the sign on the door and a few hours later they emerged positively glowing.

Charlotte Glenn in her element at the mudbaths near Cesme





Above: not exactly strenuous! If you're looking for real relaxation and a great watersports holiday for the children, the gulet experience is worth considering. The gulet's acres of deck space and ample sunbeds make sleeping under the stars a popular option when it gets too hot below decks

The antithesis of the Turkish bath was the Turkish mudbath. One of the most popular is up the Köyceğiz river beyond the ancient ruined city of Caunos. This is a must-do that combines the mudbath with an unusual river trip, the remarkable Lycaean rock tomb at Caunos and an estuarial beach where loggerhead turtles lay their eggs.

No sooner had we moored stern-to in one of the Likian anchorages a couple of miles to the north-west of the river mouth than a small river boat approached and arranged to take us upriver in the cool of late afternoon. The five-hour round trip cost £40 for ten people.

A friend who had been on the trip once described the scene to me as "almost biblical" and with the reed-flanked passages through the marshy plain and remarkable tombs set into the cliffs, on the summit of which are Roman remains, one could see his point.

So it was a shame the mudbaths didn't live up to the journey - they were rather unimpressive, horribly crowded and exceptionally smelly. One wallows and smears with hundreds of tourists who spookily lose their distinguishing features as they become masked in the filthy slime. If you believe the blurb, you'll be cured instantly of any arthritic ailments and for males (but irritatingly not for females) sexual potency will soar!

Like many Turkish towns, Dalyan had been devastated by earthquakes in the late Fifties and architecturally was nothing to write home about.

The same can be said of Marmaris. Once an appealing little port, it now has a three-mile long strip of hotels, a waterfront of over-enthusiastic carpet salesmen (known as *avci*, or hunters), an

over-commercialised bazaar and a big marina which provides a staging post for large yachts. If you do visit, walk into the back streets near the old harbour where a little of the original town remains. Marmaris is a useful place to restock but we managed to hang on until Bodrum, which for me was one of the gems of our cruise.

The simple village, sheltered by a handful of small islands at the mouth of the bay, used to be the centre of the Turkish sponge fishing industry, which is now carefully controlled; a large sponge costs £80 in the shops. Bodrum now derives income from tourism, visiting yachts and gulets. Ice, water and excellent fresh vegetables and meat can be bought here and there are less aggressively staffed souvenir shops. There's also a good fishmonger but it's expensive - £14 for fish for four.

Bodrum's sheltered location can make it a bit of a dust bowl, so after a drink in Demir's Place bar, it's best to head out for the night to one of the beautiful anchorages in the shelter of Kuml Adasi. There seemed to be more sealife here than anywhere else on our trip and we spent a wonderful evening swimming, snorkelling, canoeing and cooling out before another of Kamil's banquets.

Idle days and hedonism

Mid-week found us sailing between the Greek island of Simi and the Dorian promontory, where we selected a perfectly secluded fissure in the rocky coast for a day of blatant hedonism - a large lunch, canoeing, swimming, snorkelling, reading and sunbathing. It all seemed to tickle that day, but just as we were about to sit down to yet another table groaning with goodies a strong, hot

wind sprung up and Semer and his men had to work quickly to evict the bay, in the process leaving our long-stem mooring warp on the beach until the following morning.

Our last major stop before reaching Bodrum was the fluctuating settlement at Knidos. There is no modern dwelling here, just a basic restaurant, but in Dorian and Roman times this was one of the biggest cities in the vicinity, one of the Dorian hexapolis, the six cities of the Dorian Confederacy. A fantastic Roman amphitheatre has been excavated and other remarkable remains prove the past significance of Knidos. It's also famous for a Praxiteles sculpture of Aphrodite, notable because it was thought to be the first example of a sculpture of a naked woman and now the subject of much entertainment if apocryphal mythology.

We encountered the only rough weather off Cape Krio as we started crossing the Gulf of Gokova but we soon slipped into a sheltered bay a morning's steam from our final port of Bodrum.

It could be argued that the direction of our cruise should have been undertaken in reverse because the prevailing wind in August is from the west and north-west, making a west-going cruise almost all upside down. When selecting departure point and holiday dates, it's also worth remembering the Meltem, which though unlikely to be encountered in August can reach gale force in the same direction for prolonged periods. Another quibble is that with no real sailing on offer I started to get a bit twitchy after a week. But for a holiday which gives everyone the chance for a real rest and plenty of watersport fun, the gulet experience proved a big hit with both families.