



A GLAMOROUS REJUVENATION RETREAT ALONG TURKEY'S LYCIAN COAST

Text by Jessica Lee | Photos by Serena Bolton

The deck of the Ecce Navigo is an ideal place to observe the world around you. Peering over the rail, I caught sight of a sleek silvery fish hanging suspended just below the surface. Dark shadows danced and flitted in formation beneath. The sun was only just beginning to clamber above the tree line and intricate beads of dew glistened on every surface of the deck.

Opening double page spread: The crew, hoisting the main sail on the Ecce Navigo.

We were moored at the tiny, horseshoe-shaped Osman Bay on Turkey's Lycian coast, where gnarled pine trees stood bent and twisted over the shoreline as if preparing to dive into the water. Our yoga instructor, Deborah, was already limbering up on the bow. By the time the sun risen, we had all joined her, rolling out our mats along the deck. To the sound of gently lapping water we slowly began that morning's wake-up yoga session.

The Lycian Coast stretches roughly from Fethiye to Antalya, and is a popular summer sailing destination. Gülets (traditional wooden Turkish sailboats) ply the dinky harbour towns of the region throughout the long summer months. Aboard the Ecce Navigo, guests holiday with a holistic purpose on yoga and massage retreats. It was the first time I'd heard of a sailing holiday here that was more than just swimming and sun-soaked lounging. Before I'd arrived I had wondered how the delicate balancing positions of yoga would marry with the continuous rocking of a boat. After all, a yacht is not the obvious choice for a yoga holiday. In practice though, there didn't seem to be an issue.

As Deborah led us through the poses, I was pleasantly surprised to find that my body naturally adjusted to the subtle rhythms of the yacht. Stretched out in front of us was the shimmering Mediterranean, and far beyond, behind the rolling coastline, the dramatic pinnacles of the Taurus Mountains showed off their snow-capped peaks. It was a much more inspiring view than the usual blank walls of a yoga studio.

This page: Lycian tomb inscription; Captain Bilal Davutog lu loves sailing in this region because of its wealth of history, culture and quiet atmosphere; Sailing along the Lycian Coast often means rarely seeing another yacht in sight. **Opposite page (from top):** The crew of the Ecce Navigo preparing to sail; The Lycian Coast's hundreds of tiny coves and hidden bays provide a multitude of serene spots to anchor in.





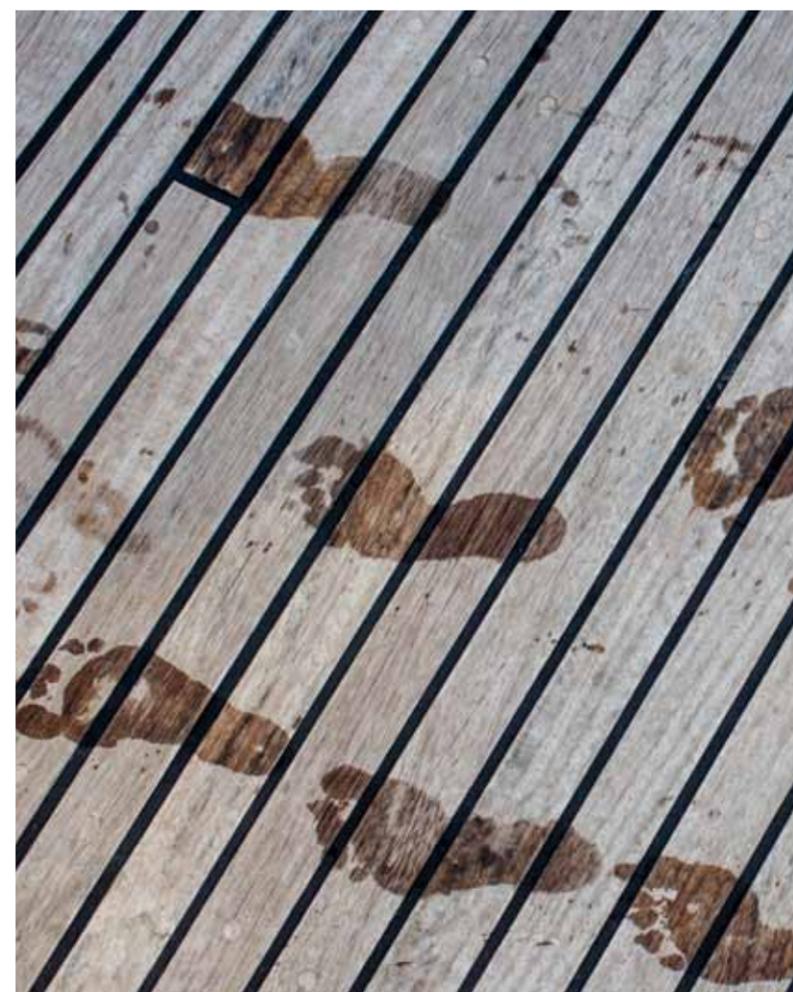
Incorporating holistic elements into a sailing holiday may be new but, wrapped up in local folklore and myth, this stretch of Turkey's coastline is no stranger to the idea of rejuvenation. The lushly forested Lycian coastline has been an area of sanctuary since the days of ancient Greece. It was to here, Greek mythology tells, that pregnant Leto, lover of the great god Zeus, fled to escape the wrath of Zeus' wife Hera on Mount Olympus. Far from home, sheltered within the dense forest of this region, the goddess Leto gave birth to the twins Apollo and Artemis and was kept safe from harm by the local wolves that roamed the hills. One story holds that Lycia (from the Greek 'Lykos' for wolf) got its name after Leto bequeathed it with this title in honour of her animal guardians.

Today the wolves and Greek god love triangles are long gone but aboard the Ecce Navigo this place remains a refuge from the world. Olivia Rajah, who operates these retreats, was on the yoga mat next to mine. "Being out here is so different to just being in a yoga studio." She told me. "Out here, among the mountains, the wind, the sea; doing yoga in this environment is so inspirational." As we sunk into the savasana pose to end the session, laying flat on our backs, the sun warming our skin, I couldn't have agreed more. This style of barefoot glamour blending luxury with natural therapies has become more popular in recent years. After all, you shouldn't have to sacrifice comfort for health. "After yoga has finished," Olivia said, "you can literally just dive into the sea and the whole day then becomes about wellbeing."

Salt spray tingled on my lips as, with the main sail hoisted high, we cruised towards the harbour town of Fethiye. I squinted as I looked up to the sky where the billowing cumulus clouds of earlier had been brushed away by the breeze, leaving candyfloss wisps of cirrus in their place. Fethiye appeared between the cleft of two hills. Its buildings still looked like a toy town from this distance. As we neared the harbour I spotted the outlines of Lycian tombs high above the houses, carved into the hill.



This page (from top): Full of the fresh flavours of Turkish cuisine, the food upon the Ecce Navigo is one of this sailing holiday's highlights. Lunch comes with a view; Chef Mehmet Yavuz creates menus infused with Mediterranean flair. **Opposite page (from top):** sunrise breaks over the waters of Osman Bay; wet footprints tattoo the deck after a quick swim.



Ancient Lycia is little known outside of Turkey but this federation of independent cities once controlled the nation's southern Mediterranean coastline from the late Bronze Age. Despite the imperial might of the Persians and the Greeks, who both fought to gain control over this slice of land, the Lycians managed to hold onto their independence and were given the right of home rule up until the arrival of the ancient Romans. It was only in 43 BC that the league of Lycian cities was finally dissolved by the Emperor Claudius and Lycia was properly absorbed into the Roman Empire.

The Lycians adopted the worship of the goddess Leto with gusto, replacing the ancient Anatolian mother goddess with this new Greek import. Today, remnants of Leto's veneration still lie scattered across the region, such as at the 6th century BC religious centre of Letoön, 60 kilometres from Fethiye, where temples were raised in her honour and also to her children Apollo and Artemis.

In Fethiye, we disembarked from the yacht and stretched our legs, strolling through the harbour-side bazaar. Huge barrels of spice sat below colourful tinsels of dried peppers and aubergines at stalls as the vendors sat on plastic stools playing backgammon and drinking strong Turkish tea from tiny tulip-shaped glasses. Wafts of cardamom and cinnamon hung in the air. We walked past a store offering tiny samples of coconut-covered lokum squares (Turkey's famous sweet known worldwide as Turkish delight). I popped one in my mouth and felt the explosion of crunchy pistachio against the intense sugar-hit of chewy rosewater flavoured gel.

My stomach gumbled from all the confectionery tasting. So many people think holistic and wellness holidays are about strict diet regimens and self-denial but on the Ecce Navigo they take a different approach. By the time we got back on board the boat was infused with the smell of chocolate. We set sail for Panço Bay and I followed my nose down to the kitchen where Mehmet the chef was watching over



the slow bubbling of a pot on the stove. The scent down there was almost heaven. “I’m making a chocolate terrine with white chocolate, bitter chocolate and milk chocolate, for dessert tonight” he grinned. So much for the diet, I thought to myself.

At Panço Bay we anchored and the table was laid for lunch. Turkish food is one of the world’s great cuisines, rich in the seasonal fresh flavours of the land. Mehmet’s love of this cooking tradition shows. “The Mediterranean style of cooking is one of the healthiest in the world,” he told me. “Turkish cuisine is ancient, and it’s interesting because of the many different types of produce available and the huge variety of techniques used to cook it.” Salads arrived at the table, bursting with crunchy fresh flavours and topped with a scattering of nuts. There were smoky grilled aubergine slices doused in a rich tomato sauce and topped with tangy yogurt. Perfectly wrapped yaprak sarma (vine leaves stuffed with rice), and tender lamb cutlets sprinkled with sumac and other spices. All the dishes were healthy and fresh but without a whiff of sanctimonious diet advice.

The surrounding clear blue water provided too much temptation and after lunch some of the girls dived in. Others took the kayaks out to explore while the crew got the motor launch ready for the guests who wanted to water-ski. “Every single retreat is completely tailor-made,” Olivia said. “If a group wants to really extend their yoga practice and make that the focus of the trip we can do that. Or if they prefer the yoga to be just one facet of the trip, that’s fine too. Our usual structure is sunrise and sunset yoga sessions and every guest gets three massages while onboard as well.”

The canopy awning had been strung above the bow’s deck for the massage table. Ecce Navigo’s masseuse Karen Street works with both Swedish and deep tissue massage, as well as reflexology and shiatsu. “The environment here is so pristine,” she said to me as I lay down on the table. “So subconsciously you’re already thinking about being healthy. When you’re in the city there’s so much sensory stuff going on, but here you’re free from all of that. The massage is that extra touch that goes with the clean environment, the yoga, and the great food.” Karen’s hands firmly pressed, pulled and pushed my body in gentle folds. The slow contortions smoothly adjusted my body into alignment. Somewhere above in the blue cloudless sky, a seagull



Double page spread: Scattered ruins lay across the hilltop in Binlik Bay. **This page:** Street scene in St Tropez.

This page: A lone donkey guards the glorious views over Binlik Bay.



called out, mixing with the sound of water sloshing against the side of the boat.

While the normal beach holiday or yachting trip is soul food for the stressed out, adding a wellbeing element takes things that couple of steps further. “The environment here instantaneously relaxes you,” Olivia said. “The scenery right away makes you calmer.” I looked out from the deck, toward the rippling hills of the shore and realised there was not another boat in sight. Thousands of sun-seekers flock to Turkish resort towns such as Marmaris and Kusadasi every summer but the Lycian coast has something a little extra. At the helm, Captain Bilal told me what he thought it was. “This part of the coast is my favourite because it’s more tranquil and a holiday here can incorporate all kinds of activities like hiking, ruins, and culture. This area is simply brimming with history,” he said.

The next day we anchored at Binlik Bay and boarded the dinghy to take us to a narrow strip of shore. A dilapidated goatherd shack marked the start of a stony track which twisted steeply uphill. We hiked upwards onto the crest of the hill where the dazzling view down to the cove was laid out before us. A lone donkey stood tethered to a pole, busily munching grass. I could hear the tinny jingle of cowbells from somewhere unseen nearby. We walked into a forest of tangled, ancient pine trees, their branches weighed down with cones. Above us on a ridge sat a couple of crumbled Lycian tombs; their roofs long ago caved in. You could see why the Lycians had fought so hard to stay independent from the Persian and Greek Empires who had tried to claim their land. Who would want to share this peaceful piece of the world with anyone else?

As sun set that evening Deborah gathered us all on the bow again and we began our yoga practice. “Every time you practice yoga you

should make it new,” Deborah said. “You should keep a childlike enquiry to your practice to hold onto that sense of newness.” It’s not hard to melt into the mindset of a yogi here. We pulled ourselves up into virabhadra pose (yoga’s warrior position). As I held that position steadily for a few minutes, feeling my thigh muscles tremble and stretching my arms out towards the fading daylight, I thought about how the Lycian coast has always been a place of renewal. While the goddess Leto may have used this region to shelter from the fury of a jealous wife, today the waters offshore provide an idyllic escape from the pressures and stress of day-to-day life. ☺



This page (from top): An early morning yoga session begins the day; bright blue evil eye amulets for sale amid Fethiye’s bazaar.

FACTS

ON BOARD THE ECCE NAVIGO

The Ecce Navigo sails from Göcek (30 kilometres from Fethiye) or Bodrum through May to October. Tailored yoga and massage retreats (including masseuse and yoga instructor), family retreats (including masseuse and child-minder) and private charters can be booked through their website www.eccenavigo.com

THE LYCIAN COAST AWAY FROM THE YACHT

FETHIYE

This harbour-side market town and yachting hub sits on the site of ancient Telmessos and is presided over by huge Lycian tombs cut into the hillside and the tumbled remains of the Knights of St John Crusader Fortress.

- Do: In town Fethiye Museum does a good job of explaining ancient Lycia with a hoard of finds from excavations across the region. The Tomb of Amyntas just above town is the most interesting tomb facade to visit. Fethiye is a good base to visit surrounding sights. The world-famous paragliding destination of Ölüdeniz beach is 15 kilometres south; there’s rafting and canyoning on offer at Saklıkent Gorge, 48 kilometres east and the Lycian ruins of both Tlos and Letoön are all within day-trip distance.
- Stay: Yacht Classic Hotel
1 Fevzi Çakmak Caddesi
www.yachtclassichotel.com
- Villa Daffodil
115 Fevzi Çakmak Caddesi
www.villadaffodil.com

KAYAKÖY

Snuggled in a valley, surrounded by dense forests and overlooked by the crumbling ruins of the abandoned Greek town of Levissi, sleepy, tiny Kayaköy is a favourite for travellers seeking peace and quiet. The village is famous for being the inspiration behind Louis de Bernières’ best-selling novel *Birds Without Wings*.

- Do: The hillside ruins of Levissi (abandoned during the 1923 Greek-Turkish population exchange) are an evocative reminder of the Ottoman Empire’s lost communities. From Kayaköy there is an excellent day-hike (part of the Lycian Way walking trail) to Ölüdeniz beach with vistas over the Mediterranean.

- Stay: Günay’s Garden
Gümürük Sokak
www.gunaysgarden.com

PATARA

With 18 kilometres of sand, Patara is Turkey’s longest beach and with so much space available it means there’s always a quiet spot to throw down a beach towel. If sunbathing isn’t enough for you, there are plenty of Lycian ruins to explore and the village of Gelemis (which has all the accommodation) is a charming, relaxed place to idle away a few days.

- Do: The ruins of Ancient Patara are right on the beach and trace its long and illustrious history first as a Lycian port up to an important Byzantine town. A short drive out of town is the ruins of Xanthos, Lycia’s capital city.
- Stay: Patara View Point Hotel
Gelemis
www.pataraviewpoint.com

KAS

With its harbour-side cobblestone streets crammed with dinky boutiques and cute restaurants, Kas is a favourite port for local yachters. Although the town itself doesn’t have mammoth ruins or great beaches to offer, it’s an excellent base for exploring the surrounding area.

- Do: In town itself are the ruins of Antiphellos with a theatre and rock tombs. Just offshore from Kas, the Greek island of Meis with its fishing village and hill walks is easily visited on a day-trip. The sunken ruins of Kekova (the remnants of ancient Simena, destroyed by an earthquake in the 2nd century AD) are south of Kas and are best visited by a sea-kayaking tour. Inland, 71 kilometres northeast, the well preserved Lycian archaeological site of Arykanda is well worth a trip away from the coast.
- Stay: Olea Nova Boutique Hotel
43 Demokrasi Caddesi
www.oleanova.com.tr
- White House Pension
10 Yeni Cami Caddesi
www.orcholiday.com

ÇIRALI

While the neighbouring village of Olympus is a famed backpacker hangout with its ‘tree house’ accommodation and hippy-trail history, Çıralı has always been happy to play second fiddle. This laidback hamlet though is home to one of the region’s best beaches and while Olympus may be famous for its

partying, Çıralı is for those who’d rather swing in a hammock and relax.

- Do: The Chimaera (eternal flame) is what most people come here to see. It’s a 30 minute walk uphill from Çıralı to view the spectacle (caused by gas seeping from the ground).
- Stay: Olympus Lodge
Çıralı
www.olymposlodge.com.tr

ANTALYA

One of the Lycian coast’s favourite destinations, the city of Antalya has a splendidly preserved old town that is a delight to stroll through, plenty of accommodation and restaurant choices, fabulous shopping, and an excellent museum.

- Do: The Antalya Museum (1 Konyaaltı Caddesi) is renowned for its large, well-displayed collection which traces the full breadth of this region’s history. 47 kilometres out of town, the massive 15,000 seat Roman theatre of Aspendos is one of the region’s most famous sights.
- Stay: Tuvana Hotel
18 Karanlık Sokak
www.tuvanahotel.com
- Villa Perla
26 Hesapçı Sokak
www.villaperla.com

GETTING THERE AND AWAY

- Nearly all nationalities can get a 90-day tourist visa (costing between US\$20-60) upon arrival. Check Turkey’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs website (www.mfa.gov.tr) for up-to-date details.
- Turkish Airlines (www.turkishairlines.com), Malaysia Airlines (www.malaysiaairlines.com), Emirates (www.emirates.com), Qatar Airways (www.qatarairways.com), Etihad Airways (www.etihad.com) and Singapore Airlines (www.singaporeair.com) all fly frequently from Asian cities to Istanbul.
- There are several flights daily with Turkish Airlines (www.turkishairlines.com) and Pegasus Airlines (www.flypgs.com) from Istanbul to Dalaman Airport (40 kilometres from Fethiye).

BEST TIME TO GO

Turkey’s sailing season runs from May to October. July and August are the busiest months. In spring and autumn months be sure to bring a sweater as evenings can still be chilly, and prepare for the odd rain shower.