

## TURKEY

## Gulets take travelers way back in time

By Mark Stratton

“WITH SAILS open you hear the sounds ancient mariners would’ve heard 2,000 years ago,” says Peter Sommer. His Monmouth, Wales-based company is among a growing number of tour operators offering Turkish sailing holidays in time-honored wooden vessels known as gulets. These trips have triggered a boom in traditional boat-building and marina construction around southwest Turkey.

While fiber-glass-hulled yachting holidays are well catered for — beginners can learn from scratch at specialist sailing schools or join flotilla holidays suitable for all abilities — what really sets Turkish sailing holidays apart is gulets. Formerly used as cargo vessels, they originate from the Bodrum region, which has some 2,500 years of experience constructing boats. They have twin masts and may have rounded broad sterns, which offer modern-day mariners ample deck space. They range in length from 16 meters to 39 meters and cabins rather than cargo now fill the space below decks. With between two and seven crew (depending on the size of the craft), gulets offer passengers comfort and luxury and are fully catered. Based on the size of the craft, passenger numbers can range from two to 24.

The appeal of Turkey’s 8,000-kilometer coastline, which encompasses the Black, Aegean and Mediterranean Seas, is diversity. Nicknamed “Blue Cruises,” because of the seas’ color, sailing holidays focus on the pristine Carian and Lycian coasts between the Mediterranean ports of Bodrum, Fethiye and Antalya, where Julius Caesar, Cleopatra and Achilles once sailed.

“It’s a paradise for sailors with lots of tiny bays and coves and islands backed by 3,000-meter mountains,” says Mr. Sommer.

On one- or two-week holidays, an onboard chef prepares fine Turkish fare. Typically, an average day will include three hours of sailing; stops for swimming; and as the after-

noon heat wanes, visits inland to archaeological sites.

Cruises are especially popular in mid-May and June, when the shoreline blooms with wild flowers, and in September when summer’s peak heat subsides and the coastal waters are ambient for swimming. Mr. Sommer’s clientele is typically aged 35 to 70, and 40% originate from the U.K. and 40% from the U.S. Prices suit all budgets.

“You can find basic boats for backpackers for a week costing just a few hundred euros, or pay small fortunes on boats with marbled bathrooms and jacuzzis,” he says. A top-end gulet can cost around €35,000 to charter for a week. Mr. Sommer’s gulet cruises cost around €2,500 per person for two weeks.

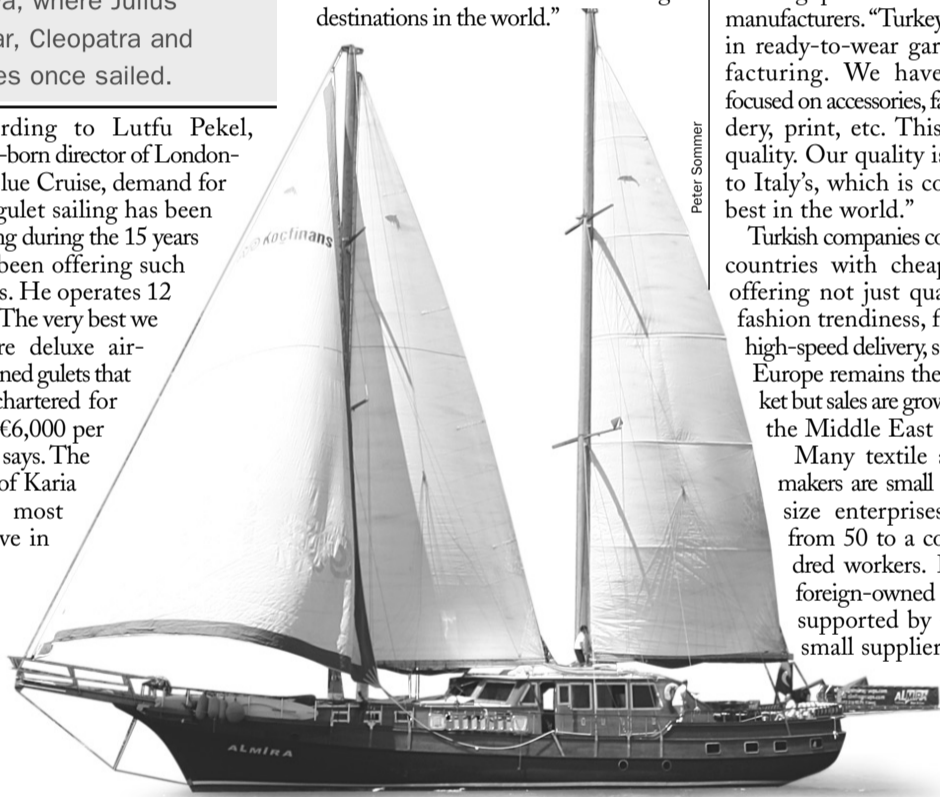
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According to Lutfu Pekel, Istanbul-born director of London-based Blue Cruise, demand for luxury gulet sailing has been increasing during the 15 years he has been offering such holidays. He operates 12 gulets. “The very best we offer are deluxe air-conditioned gulets that can be chartered for around €6,000 per day,” he says. The Queen of Karia II, the most expensive in

his fleet, is a 39-meter ketch with just five spacious cabins: three with king-size double beds, a jacuzzi, hydro-massage showers, air-conditioning and satellite television.

The rising popularity of gulet cruises has boosted ship-building around Bodrum, Marmaris and Fethiye. Another spinoff has been a mini-boom in new marinas offering world-class facilities to meet passenger growth. The Antalya region has projects in the pipeline such as the Gazipasa Yacht Port and Kas-Bucak Marina, both due to open next year. Istanbul-based Setur Marinas currently runs seven marinas around southwest Turkey, and according to Vedat Midilli, its general manager, it is planning to increase them to 12 in the next five years.

“As sailing tourism grows in Turkey, we are seeing the marina sector expanding seriously,” says Mr. Midilli. “We always believed [that] with Turkey’s unpolluted waters and environment, historical and cultural heritage, beautiful bays, and affordable high-quality marinas that Turkey would be one of the favorite sailing destinations in the world.”



Peter Sommer

## A strategic location for outsourcing production

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ket with good logistics costs and delivery time,” says Wolfgang Colberg, chief financial officer at BSH in Munich. Compared with Poland, which is similarly close to the European market, it’s about equal for costs, depending on the value of the Turkish lira, Dr. Colberg says. But Turkey has the added advantages of a larger local market and easier access to the Mediterranean and Central Asia, he adds.

While Turkey has attracted investment from big Western companies such as BSH and auto makers Ford, Toyota, Renault and Fiat, other foreign companies increasingly prefer to contract with local Turkish firms for production. That’s especially the case in the textile and ready-made garment industries.

Turkey has long experience in the textile trade, says Murat Kavak, founder and owner, with Gulistan Eker, of Turkishtextile.com, an online meeting place for exporters and manufacturers. “Turkey is specialized in ready-to-wear garment manufacturing. We have companies focused on accessories, fabrics, embroidery, print, etc. This focus raises quality. Our quality is comparable to Italy’s, which is considered the best in the world.”

Turkish companies compete against countries with cheaper labor by offering not just quality but also fashion trendiness, flexibility and high-speed delivery, says Mrs. Eker. Europe remains the biggest market but sales are growing to Russia, the Middle East and Africa.

Many textile and garment makers are small and medium-size enterprises, employing from 50 to a couple of hundred workers. Even the big foreign-owned factories are supported by a network of small suppliers.



BSH has invested about €300 million during the past 10 years in four factories in Turkey.

“European companies first looked to Eastern European countries, but over time they saw efficiency and productivity in Turkey,” says Mr. Meral of Tuskon. “Suppliers are quite skilled and adapted to the requirements of a free economy. The quality concept of Turkish workers and original-equipment makers are quite high. It makes them ideal business partners for Europeans.”

And growing labor skills, coupled with political and economic stability, have been bringing in foreign direct investments, hindered until a few years ago by bureaucratic requirements and economic instability. The government instituted many reforms following the country’s 2000-2001 financial crisis. Turkey has registered cumulative gross domestic product growth of 122% over the past four years and FDI more than doubled to \$20.12 billion in 2006 from \$9.8 billion in 2005, according to the 2007 World Investment Report of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Last year, FDI totaled about \$22 billion.

The 2008 “Doing Business” report by the World Bank, which measures constraints on business activity in 178 countries, lauds Turkey for introducing electronic customs procedures that cut waiting times for exports. Turkey ranks No. 57 in the World Bank report, up from No. 117 a year earlier.

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