

The Gulet gauntlet

The challenge: a family yacht charter in the Med, somewhere uncrowded and hassle-free, at the busiest time of the year... **Jeremy Evans** tried cruising in Turkey with The Moorings.



Above The scenery and historical ruins are spectacular, but dodging the fleets of gulets can be quite a challenge.

We wanted secluded anchorages, no hassles mooring in harbours or marinas, plus authentic local charm with an unspoilt coastline. That's a tall order when so much of the Med has been over-run by tourist development, and when you're travelling during school holidays in the middle of August. However, Jeremy Tutt from the Moorings assured us he knew just the right place. 'Go to Gocek, it's lovely and quiet, even in August!' he said.

I'd been there before; a long time ago when Gocek was a wee fishing village and the whole area was barely touched by visiting yachts, let alone beach clubs and hotels. Last time I flew into Dalaman it was a Turkish military fighter base which allowed occasional civilian aircraft to use its facilities. All that has changed, and Dalaman has since become a large and very modern airport.

Of course, I didn't recognise Gocek at all. The old fishing harbour has been replaced by two marinas and most of the old buildings have gone. But unlike nearby Marmaris, the level of development appears low-scale and restrained. In fact, it's a delightful place to collect a yacht.

The Port Gocek marina, slightly out of town and notably upmarket, gets my accolade as one of the most relaxed and pleasant marinas in which I've stayed. It's very quiet, facilities are excellent and the town is a 10-minute stroll away.

Your boat is ready, sir...

We chartered a Moorings 39.3, the latest 39ft design from Beneteau with all the luxury of three large self-contained cabins, two en-suite heads, excellent galley including a particularly impressive fridge-freezer (vital in the Med) and a huge amount of storage space (vital for a family). We also liked the huge cockpit with large table and split wheel steering for easy access to the transom and bathing platform, completely covered by a bimini, which provided invaluable protection from the Turkish summer sun.

Minimal hassle is a prime ingredient for enjoying a successful yacht holiday. On this occasion, it proved super-simple to shop at a well-stocked local food store and have the whole lot delivered direct to the boat. The Moorings shore team, managed by Constanza Meier, got a top rating for super efficiency at both ends of our holiday. In particular, they provided the best ever 'yacht briefing' which removed the chore of hunting down all the yacht's equipment yourself.

The Moorings suggest one or two-week itineraries going west or east along the Turkish coast, which is helpful for working out a plan of where to go. No tide makes navigation straightforward, particularly when there are plenty of high hills and headlands to confirm your position, backed-up by a GPS plotter in the cockpit. An ample supply of paper charts was complemented by Rod Heikel's pilot book, which provides useful information, spiced up by his own

strong opinions about the area. We chose the eastern route, spending a week covering 100 or so miles to the inland sea known as Kekova Roads, then cruising back to Gocek along the same stretch of coast with a big enough selection of harbours and bays to stay somewhere different most nights.

Unusually for the Med, we had enough good wind to spend most of our time going places under sail rather than motor, which was fortunate with the daytime temperature always above 40C. The Moorings 39.3 coped well when the wind picked up to Force 5-6 on a few afternoons, with slab reefing and roller headsail making it worry-free for an averagely capable sailing family.

Parking the yacht along this stretch of coast was also generally stress-free. Because the water is so deep close to the shoreline, normal practice is to drop the anchor, reverse to within a few metres of the shore and secure a stern line which can be swum or rowed to a suitable rock or tree. With excellent holding, a secure parking lot was invariably guaranteed.

A gauntlet of gulets

Most nights we sought and found a secluded bay. The principal challenge was to run the gauntlet of gulets. These handsome, traditional Turkish craft have become very popular for group holidays and there were a lot of them about – particularly between Marmaris and Gocek. Most caused no trouble, but a few were determined to



Above Sailing conditions were ideal with little need for motoring – although the relentless sunshine in August makes a biminy essential.

shatter the peace with their frolics. Our solution was to up-anchor and move on, which is pretty easy when the next decent anchorage is only half an hour away.

We were surprised to find it was easy to buy food or fill the yacht with fresh water every few days, despite only mooring in one town during a two-week stay. Kalkan was a very simple fishing village until a canny Istanbul developer bought the whole place. It still has some charm, if you can stand the sight of too much (principally English) flesh being paraded around the streets. One night at Kalkan was amusing, but we kept well away from any more tourist hotspots.



“ **Normal practice is to drop anchor, reverse, and secure a stern line to a suitable tree** ”

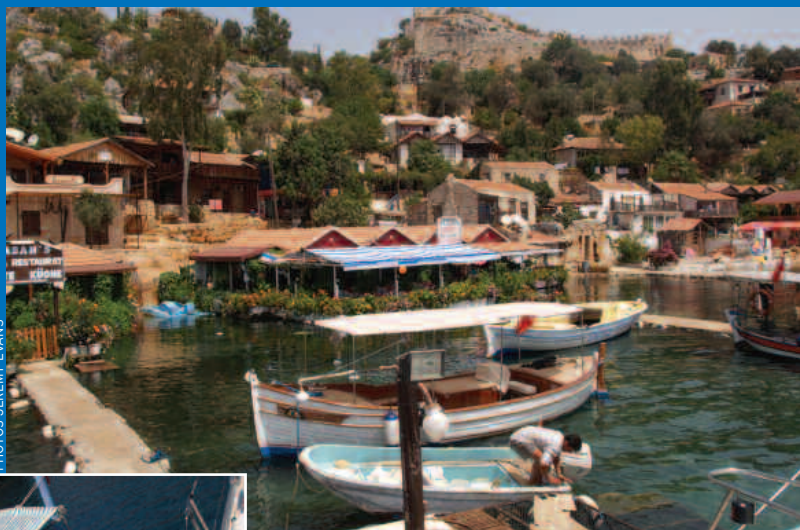


PHOTOS: JEREMY EVANS



Above The Kekova Roads area provided plenty of historical interest.

Left Because the water is so deep close to the shoreline, it's usual practice to tie a sternline to a nearby tree or rock.



Kekova Roads

By contrast, the rambling old hamlet of Kale and its magnificent ruined castle was a wonderful place to stay at the eastern limit of our cruise. This is in a sailing area known as the Kekova Roads which consists of two massive, landlocked bays where flat, sheltered water is pretty much guaranteed. They provided great cruising and exploring for four tranquil days. The wild landscape, littered with ancient sarcophagi, is linked by a long footpath which passes by the ruins of Simena, an ancient city now partly covered by the clear blue sea. If archaeology, ancient history and hiking appeal, this is a great area to spend time.

Despite dire warnings of 'poor holding' at Kale, it proved simple to moor alongside rickety pontoons sticking out from a handful of waterside restaurants. We paid two visits to Hasan Baskan's Roma restaurant and can thoroughly recommend it for a peaceful mooring in a superb location with the castle towering overhead – what's more, Hasan looks after his visiting yachts extremely well, providing good food, fresh water and great value.

We did not always get on so well with local entrepreneurs. It was fine having small boats come alongside most mornings to sell freshly baked bread and groceries, though you need to watch their prices. It was not fine to be pestered by touts in the anchorages close to Gemiler Island, which in other respects is a wonderful place with a maze of extraordinary Byzantine ruins. These guys insist on taking control when you park the yacht and saying 'No thanks' starts to get very tiresome.

Culture culture

For a change of culture, we dropped in on the Greek island of Kastellorizon (also known as Meyisti) which is 500kms from mainland Greece but only 5kms from Turkey. This island is a curious hybrid, variously occupied by France, Italy and Turkey until Greece took over in 1921. Having been a major port on the 19th Century trade route, Kastellorizon's population plummeted from 20,000 to 200 and its town was heavily bombed during the Second World War. Burnt-out houses are now being stylishly renovated, as the island takes on a new lease as

a hideaway for discerning tourists who are mainly Italian – it's also a lovely place for a short visit by yacht.

Closer to Gocek, the deeply indented bay known as Skopea Limani has an almost unlimited choice of good anchorages in a 12-mile cruising area that is extremely well protected from prevailing wind and swell. This is an ideal sailing area for people who don't want to risk any long passages or rough sea, with more than enough variety to provide a pleasant, hassle-free cruising area for a week. The downside is that it's very popular with gulets and other tripper boats in high season, but there's still space enough to find some peace.

The verdict

So did a yacht cruise out of Gocek measure up to our challenge for an uncrowded, hassle free holiday? The sailing was good, the boat was great, the Moorings service was superb. Gocek is a very pleasant place to start and end a charter, with a big choice of easy anchorages within easy reach. During August there were lots of other boats around but nothing like as crowded as the south of France or Solent (although those darn gulets are tricky to avoid). Our solution was to cruise west, which involved quite a long there-and-back passage with rolling waves, in order to enjoy the delightful cruising ground of Kekova Roads.

If you visit this area in August, expect a blazing hot sun which becomes oppressive if there's no breeze – we were under the bimini by 1000hrs! For those who can avoid the tyranny of school holidays, earlier or later in the season should be cooler, quieter and altogether a better bet. ■



Top The hamlet of Kale, with its ruined castle, is home to sheltered bays and friendly restaurants.

Above (inset) Local boats will come alongside to sell bread and groceries, which could be convenient but also overpriced and occasionally a nuisance.

Right Despite it being high season, by heading west it proved possible to find uncrowded anchorages.

Further information:

A Moorings charter out of Gocek starts from £205 per person for a week in a 363 Club Line yacht. Price is per person based on six people sharing and includes transit log, security insurance, fuel fill-up on return, propane and cleaning at end of charter. For more information Tel: 01227 776677 or visit www.moorings.co.uk