

Bodrum: Turkey's St-Tropez

by Joan Scobey

BODRUM, Turkey - What would Herodotus, the world's first travel writer, make of his hometown today?

He wouldn't even recognize its current name, Bodrum.

Just about the only familiar word might be Halikarnas, the city's best-known disco. It was named for Halicarnassus, which is what Bodrum was called when the great Greek historian was born there in 484 B.C.

Come to think of it, Herodotus, who captured the essence of much of the ancient world in "The Histories," might well see the gigantic throbbing disco as an apt symbol of contemporary Bodrum. It's not called Turkey's St-Tropez for nothing.

CENTER OF ATTENTION - The Castle of St. Peter, the centerpiece of Bodrum's waterfront, divides Bodrum's harbor into two pretty bays. The castle was built as a Crusader stronghold. CNS Photo by Joan Scobey. **DINING BY THE DOCKS** - Lunching at Aquarium by Myndos Bay is always a treat. CNS Photo by Joan Scobey. **ANCIENT AMPITHEATER** - The fourth century B.C. Greek-style theatre was completed by the Romans. Mausolus, a Persian ruler (377-353 B.C.), started to build it. CNS Photo by Joan Scobey. **READY TO SET SAIL** - Turkish sailing ships, called gulets, line the quai opposite a mosque. CNS Photo by Joan Scobey. Barely 30 years ago, this playground of the Euroscanti was a sleepy fishing village on the southwest coast of Turkey where the Aegean meets the Mediterranean. No surprise that its pleasant weather, sunny days, blue skies and inviting sailing bays enticed vacationers to the city of Bodrum and the surrounding peninsula, also called Bodrum.

Private villas and small pensions now share the pine and oleander hills with five-star resorts. One of the most attractive is the Marmara Bodrum, on a hilltop overlooking white stucco buildings that seem to tumble down to the pretty harbor and its centerpiece, the Castle of St. Peter.

The harbor is the heart of Bodrum, divided into twin bays by the Castle peninsula. To the east is a warren of small streets and the cafes, restaurants and clubs on the seafront sweep of Cumhuriyet Caddesi, popularly called Bar Street for obvious reasons. To the west is the marina with its thicket of masts and a curving, palm-lined promenade. Docked along the quai are traditional Turkish sailing boats, called gulets, flying the red national flag with white crescent and star.

At this site, ancient Halicarnassus, founded in the 11th century B.C. by Greeks for its superb harbor, had its glory days under Persian rule, which began shortly after Herodotus was born when the Persian king, Xerxes, took the city. Herodotus was later involved in an unsuccessful coup against the state and left to live on the Greek island of Samos, never to return.

Its golden age as a great maritime power came over a century later under Mausolus, who ruled for the Persians from 377-353 B.C. He made Halicarnassus the capital of the province, dredged a deep harbor, erected statues, marble buildings and a fortress-palace, and started an amphitheater. After his death, his wife had a great tomb built for him, with 36 columns, elaborate bas reliefs and equestrian statues that adorned a 135-foot tall, temple-like monument of marble that came to be known as the Mausoleum. It is one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

Only a few years later, Alexander the Great set fire to the city, destroying virtually everything but the Mausoleum, which stood for some 1,600 years before it was devastated by a series of earthquakes. By the time Halicarnassus joined the Roman province of Asia Minor, it was just a small town with no strategic role.

Fast forward to the 15th century, when the Knights of St. John, needing a Crusader stronghold, built the Castle of St. Peter over an old fortress, cannibalizing the stones from the ruins of the Mausoleum. In honor of St. Peter, they also renamed the city Petronium, from which Bodrum is derived.

What you can see of Halicarnassus' early days are the foundations and some rubble from the Mausoleum; a small museum on the site with a model of the original tomb; Mausolus' amphitheater, completed by the Romans, and now occasionally used for performances; and remains of the Myndos Gate that was part of the four-mile-long town walls. And, of course, the Castle of St. Peter, now housing a fascinating Museum of Underwater Archaeology that displays amphora, glass, mill stones, olive presses, ancient vessels and their cargos salvaged from wrecked ships. From its five towers, many gardens and turret walks there are fabulous

views of the bay, the town and the surrounding hills.

For visitors, days in Bodrum tend to have a common rhythm, with slight variations.

At the Marmara Bodrum, for instance, they start on a sea-view terrace while tiny birds flit over the tables. Breakfast on nuts, raisins, olives, cheeses, tomatoes, fresh and dried fruits, yogurts, a variety of breads, on honey from a big standing honeycomb, and on such sweet delicacies as mushroom-shaped brioches with narrow stems and chocolate-filled caps.

Living is slow and easy in Bodrum. The major decisions are what to do, where to eat.

This morning shall we visit the castle and the archaeology museum? The mausoleum and the amphitheater?

Nah. Maybe a bit of tennis, then lounge by the pool.

Lunch is by the water, somewhere. Perhaps at the harborside Kocadon in Bodrum, or at Aquarium by the tiny bay in Myndos. Wherever it is, expect mezes, perhaps eggplant with yogurt, zucchini flower stuffed with rice and mint, octopus salad and other assorted appetizers, grilled sea bass or mullet, and sweet watermelon, with puffy white clouds, blue sea and views of gulets.

Perhaps explore the less-touristed, sun-blessed pleasures of the Bodrum peninsula, at seaside fishing villages such as Myndos and Turkbuku, where chic new hotels, among them Ada and Ev, cosset guests in intimate tranquility. Then meander back to the hotel to luxuriate in the spa, or nap.

At dusk, over a glass of milky raki, the Turks' favorite anise-flavored aperitif, more choices loom. Italian or Asian food at the sprawling new Kempinski Barbaros Bay? Octopus salad and grilled fish at a Turkbuku beach club? Kick back at Tuti, the Marmara Bodrum's Turkish kitchen, and take your Turkish coffee out to the terrace for cooling breezes from Homer's wine-dark sea? Then party down by the harbor; it doesn't get going much before midnight.

No need to hassle the choices. There's always tomorrow.

IF YOU GO

WHERE TO STAY

The Marmara Bodrum, 800-525-4800, www.slh.com/marmara, member of Small Luxury Hotels. Architecturally inspired by Bodrum Castle, the 100-room stone and stucco, multilevel hotel has spectacular views of the city, the sea and the castle, stunning decor, playful art works, and a spa; doubles from \$360.

Kempinski Hotel Barbaros Bay, Bodrum, 800-426-3135, www.kempinski.com. Recently opened, a huge sprawling hotel near Bodrum, with 173 large stylish rooms, decks, several restaurants, variety of water sports and an elaborate spa; doubles from about \$390.

Ada Hotel, Bagarasi Mahallesi, Tepecik Caddesi 128, Turkbuku; 800-735-2478; www.adahotel.com. An intimate, 14-room Ottoman palace with Turkish antiques, a beautiful hammam and library, and a private beach (it's not on the water); doubles from \$355.

Ev Turkbuku, Turkbuku Caddesi Ballidere Mevkii; 800-337-4685; www.designhotels.com. Dazzling white and cutting-edge modern, the hilltop Ev overlooking Turkbuku Bay has 48 one- and two-bedroom suites in eight buildings, plus eight pools. Rates from about \$310.

WHERE TO EAT

Kocadon, Saray Sokak 1, Bodrum, 90 252-316-3705.

Tuti, Marmara Bodrum, Bodrum, 90 252-313-8130.

Aquarium, Myndos, 90 252-394-3682.

Olives, Kempinski Hotel Barbaros Bay, Bodrum, 90 252-311-0303.

WHERE TO PARTY

Cumhuriyet Caddesi, the town's main waterfront drag, is widely known as Bar Street, where you'll find bars and clubs of every kind.

Catamaran Club, Dr. Alim Bey Caddesi 1025, Sokak 44; 90 252-313-3600; a party boat with a glass dance floor cruises the Aegean every night 1-5 a.m.

Hadigari, Dr. Alim Bey Caddesi Kaledibi, 90 252-313-9087; overlooking the Castle, sometimes live music; 7 p.m.-5 a.m.

Halikarnas, 178 Cumhuriyet Caddesi; 90 252-316-8000; big and popular, an open-air club with everything from techno and tribal to hip-hop and blues, 10 p.m.-4 a.m.

Kuba, Neyzen Tefvik Caddesi 62, 90 252-313-4450; popular club with a new, cool modern look, 12:30-4 a.m.

GETTING THERE

Turkish Airlines, 800-874-8875; www.turkishairlines.com, flies from New York to Bodrum via Istanbul.

For more information, contact the Turkish Culture and Tourism Offices, 877-FOR-TURKEY, or visit www.tourismturkey.org.

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