

TIME TRAVEL

Heidi Fuller-Love heads for the Lycian coast in southern Turkey and enters a fascinating ancient world

Rock tombs, carved like miniature villas, high above the Çayı river at Dalyan



Demre – the home of Santa Claus?

Home of a sizeable ex-pat population, Fethiye also has hundreds of shops selling a colourful variety of spices, alabaster and brass-ware, 'evil-eye' beads and leather goods. You'll also find a wide range of restaurants to suit all tastes, ranging from cheap and homely Lokanta eateries to chic Balık Evi fish restaurants.

Kayakoy, the atmospheric ghost village that inspired Louis de Bernières' novel, *Birds Without Wings*, was our next stop. Located along a winding road surrounded by forests, this Greek village that once boasted a population of 2,000 was abandoned after Greece and Turkey's population exchange agreement in 1923 (the entire place is now a museum). We can thoroughly recommend the Köfte house here, where we washed down delicious spicy sausage-shaped meatballs with tumblers of the local raki.

It took several days to explore the sites of Patara and Letoon further along the coast. Famed for its oracle, Patara was Lycia's main seaport and a glimpse of its former magnificence can be seen in the wide, paved streets, beautifully-preserved amphitheatre and thermal bath ruins.

Next door, Letoon, with its stunning limestone temple dedicated to Leto, the Goddess of Motherhood, and sacred spring full of terrapins, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

So far we'd holidayed in hot sunshine, but after the pretty little resort of Kas the rain came pouring down. Seeking a place to stay for the night, we turned off along a winding track and parked outside a mosque in a tiny village called Beymelek. Woken by a knock on the door the next day, we staggered out expecting to be scolded for parking outside this holy edifice, only to find the Imam and his family serving us a full Turkish breakfast – complete with homemade honey and cheese – on a bench outside the mosque.

Just down the road, Beymelek lagoon is renowned for its freshwater crabs. After stopping off for a crabmeat snack in one of the rickety restaurants alongside this wide strip of water, we headed for Demre, to visit the rather touristy church of Nicholas of Myra, a 4th century BC saint who is said to be the model for Santa Claus.

At the tiny resort of Olympos, our last stop, we found a perfect pitch alongside the beach, and set out at dusk to visit the Chimaera. Named after the mythical fire-breathing monster that was killed by Belerophon, this site high in the Taurus mountain range was first mentioned by sailors 2,400 years ago.

As dusk fell we gaped in wonder at the hillside dancing with the lights of a dozen eternal flames – said to be caused by pockets of methane that have been burning here for millennia – and said silent thanks to the Lycians for providing us with such a magical winter trip. ■

DID YOU KNOW?
Herodotus lived in the 5th century BC and has been called the 'Father of History'

INFORMATION

SITES

- **Aktur Camping**, Datça, Marmaris. Call 0090 252 724 6167. This bite-sized site, surrounded by family-run tavernas and overlooking a pine-shaded cove, has a dozen plots with basic facilities, plus direct access to a clean, sandy beach.
- **Dalyan Camping**, Maras Cad. 72 Dalyan. Call 0090 252 284 4157. Open all year round, this pleasant campsite with lovely views over the river to Dalyan's rock tombs has 20 pitches with hook-ups and solar showers, plus a landing stage for boat trips to the surrounding area.
- **Camping Olympos Mocamp**, Kalkan-Yolu, Kas. Call 0090 242 836 2252 or see kasolympus.com. A large and well-run site with excellent facilities, close to a sandy beach near the shops, bars and restaurants of the pretty village of Kas.

TRAVEL/TOURISM

- **Ferry bookings via the Club** – for ferry details and to make bookings, call 01342 316101 or see caravanclub.co.uk
- **Turkish Tourist Office** – call 020 7839 7778 or see gototurkey.co.uk

STRETCHING FROM Mugla in the west to Antalya in the east, this region on Turkey's southern coast is littered with structures left by the Lycians who – according to ancient Greek historian Herodotus – came from Crete and were probably a branch of the Minoans.

Granted independence from Rhodes by the Roman Republic, the founding principles of the Lycian League, a democratic federation of 23 cities created in 168BC, were used as a model for the US constitution.

With a month to explore, we'd decided to wander down the coast visiting some of the sites while also lapping up some winter sun. Once the port authority had done its brief but thorough search of our motor caravan, we trundled out over the cobbles to explore Marmaris.

A laid back town fringed with thick pine forests and bordering a harbour bristling with yachts, Marmaris has plenty of cafés and tavernas along its waterfront. We'd arrived on Christmas Eve and, even though this is not a Muslim festival, there was a definite bustle in the streets. "Here in Turkey we like any excuse to party," restaurant owner Mehmet, who served us pide (the delicious Turkish version of pizza, only with a thicker crust), told us.

Turning left out of the harbour as night fell, we followed the light, sparkling coastline to our campsite just outside of town, overlooking an inlet and a sandy beach. Here, we met up with a Swiss couple from Zurich travelling in a Volkswagen camper, and spent the evening in a taverna next door supping

on balık güveç seafood stew and toasting the advent of Christmas with Melen Shiraz wine and punch-packing, aniseed-flavoured Yeni Raki.

Upon leaving our site, we chugged along admiring the views over to the islands that dot the Marmara sea, ignoring the constant hooting of car horns!

The sun shone bright and warm as we arrived in Köycegiz, a bustling lakeside town whose restaurants serve the bass, mullet and sea bream that swim from up river to spawn here, before making their way out again past the ruins of ancient Caunos into the Med.

To celebrate the festive season in style we followed the lake to Sultaniye Kaplıcaları where, for a small fee, we were allowed to pitch for several nights near the thermal springs and mud baths that have been in use since Lycian times.

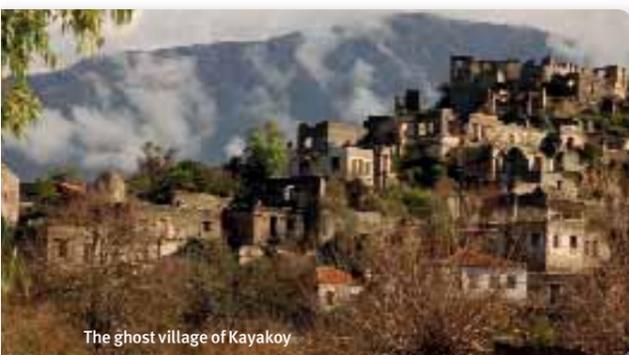
A Turkish family in the mud bath helped us slap on the pungent clay that's said to be good for everything from eczema to arthritis. Skin clean and glowing, we spent the rest of the afternoon plunging from the

hot water thermal baths into the ice-cold lake and back again.

A leisurely ride past cotton fields and fruit trees took us to the pretty resort of Dalyan and the breathtaking rock tombs, carved like miniature villas with fluted columns into rocks high above the Çayı river. Built in around 400BC, the tombs have stone ledges like shelves inside where the dead were laid to rest with coins in their mouths to pay the ferry that would take them over the Styx.

From here it was a short hop to Iztuzu, beach home of the endangered loggerhead sea turtle. Voted best beach in the world 15 years ago, this sandy swathe backed by pine forests and marshes is still stunningly unspoilt – we wandered for hours without seeing another living soul.

Further along the coast, Fethiye is the starting point of the 300-plus-mile long Lycian Way and the home of Telemessos, ancient Lycia's capital city. Littered with remnants, there are rock tombs – some the size of dog kennels, others as big as garden sheds – in the oddest places all over town.



The ghost village of Kayakoy