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Aegean

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inside: CONTINUING MEDICAL EDUCATION CALENDAR

where will you meet? OSLO / SAN JUAN / NONTABURI / HAMILTON / TULSA >>

On the Aegean

On this storied sea you may snorkel above a thousand-year-old shipwreck and glimpse shards of ancient amphoras, walk amidst temple ruins and fallen columns, hear tales of goddesses and long-gone heroes, sip raki and savour just-caught seafood, and then swim amidst phosphorescence under a star-swamped sky... all in one day on the Aegean.

story + photography
by Barb Sligl

Guide Sidar
Duman and first
mate Erdal Altin
leap from the
prow of the Zeus
into the Aegean





Zeus in full sail



Knidos ruins



Raki, known as "lion's milk"



Monastery of Panormitis on Symi



First mate with his catch



Captain Cura at Knidos lighthouse



Full moon over Knidos

The Aegean is a fairytale. From holding on to the handle of an ancient amphora from a thousand-year-old shipwreck to walking across the remains of mosaic floors and marble stairs of a long-gone temple to Aphrodite, I'm submerged in so much historic essence it's surreal.

How many souls have trod this way, swam in these waters? Or hiked up the same scrub-dotted hillside to look over this amphitheatre and shimmering expanse of sea?

I trudge up to Knidos lighthouse like the goats that now outnumber people. At the top I sip a glass of wine (from a box of wine hauled in a backpack) and watch the

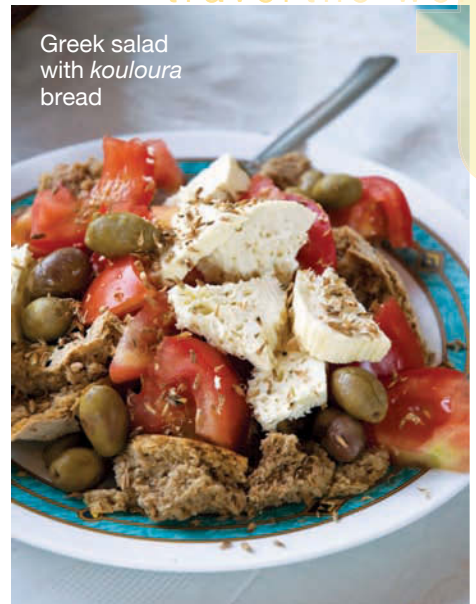
reveal themselves because there's now a lunar eclipse under way. Seriously.

The only thing to do is to get in the warm Aegean water amidst the luminosity for a late-night swim. It's as if some sort of spell has been cast. I've become part of Homer's parable. I'm a goddess.

Well, that's how the Aegean makes you feel...and the splendid ship Zeus (the name couldn't be more apropos) and its crew. The wide-bottomed, smooth-sailing gulet is mahogany with a teak deck and two masts—the same ship that's been used by sailors and fishermen for centuries to ply these waters.

This particular beauty was custom-

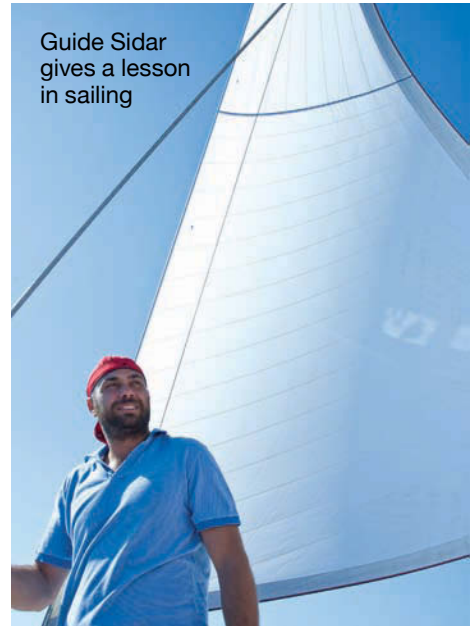
Greek salad with *kouloura* bread



Seaside town of Mandraki on Nisyros



Guide Sidar gives a lesson in sailing



sun set. I can almost make out a streak in the sea marking where the Aegean and the Mediterranean meet. And I imagine Odysseus sailing past, as besotted by the beauty (sirens or not) as I am.

Back below and at the water's edge, Hellenistic columns standing in sight, I order *raki* (the Turkish anise tippie) and fresh-caught fish with *mezes*.

Just offshore, Zeus, a traditional Turkish gulet (Odysseus didn't have it as good as this ship) is anchored, its towering masts in line with the full moon rising over the now-inky water.

On the zodiac ride back to Zeus I dip my hand into the indigo water and tiny gems of light do a jig where the water breaks. The beads of radiance—phosphorescence or *yakamoz* in Turkish—

built in 2008 in the shipyards of Bodrum. Its owner, Selahattin Cura, also known as Captain Yorgo, is a charming Odysseus himself who can sail the Aegean without a compass, GPS or any charts. This is his playground (and he's the one with the forethought to bring that box of wine to Knidos lighthouse).

The Captain and his crew are based out of Bodrum, which is Turkey's answer to the French Riviera (and home of the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, as well as Halikarnas, a nightclub wonder since 1979).

With the Dodecanese group of Greek islands just off Turkey's southwest shores, Bodrum is *the* port from which to embark on a Blue Voyage or *Mavi Yolculuk*. Within

Mandraki, tiny tasty fried fish in Pandeli on Leros



an hour of sailing out of this happening town on Turkey's Turquoise Coast, I'm in my bikini and jumping off starboard into that unbelievable blue and swimming to a deserted beach.

This particular Blue Voyage took me into secluded coves (where I spied WWII bombs below the surface of the water, so incongruent with the clear cobalt blue) and fishing villages where time seems to have stood still.

There's the once-supreme sponge capital of Pothia on Kalymnos, where the men who risked their lives by pipe diving up to 90 feet for table-sized sponges now reminisce and socialize over a coffee *metrio* (Greek style: short, black, one sugar or medium sweetness).

On the other side of the island in a tiny community that only received electricity last year, another ex-sponge diver, Nikolas Makarounas, now runs a taverna aptly named Palionisos (Paradise) where rock climbers (here for the challenging limestone cliffs) mingle with yachters.

He says people should come here to experience "a silent place." That and his food, from ubiquitous grilled octopus to

a Greek salad with chunks of *kouloura*, a traditional Kalymnos bread.

Arki, an island of about 40 permanent residents, has a few tavernas (sit back with a Mythos beer) and goats—lots of goats. Sleeping on deck under the stars, the tinkling of goats' bells as the creatures traverse the tiny island is a lullaby (now recorded on my phone).

Other islands on this Blue Voyage are better known, like Patmos, where St. John wrote the Book of Revelations in the Cave of the Apocalypse.

I visit the cave and see the hollow in the rock where the apostle once laid his head, and then climb farther to the monastery where orthodox monks mingle with tourists.

On the island of Leros, another hike up a sun-drenched hillside takes me to the medieval castle of the Knights of Saint John. Afterwards, I cool off at a seaside table on the pebbly beach, my feet nearly in the water, with a tall glass of ouzo and crunchy *maridaki* (the tastiest miniature fried fish; you can't have just one).

Symi, another idyll with a sponge-diving history, is the most touristy (British

accents are heard everywhere)—with reason. Arriving late afternoon into Yialos harbour, the bright neo-classical buildings lining the hillside, tier after tier, are aglow. It seems that the Captain knows exactly when and where to arrive, every time.

His favourite island—and the entire crew's—is Nisyros. The volcanic island (with a semi-active caldera and sulfurous fumaroles) has storybook whitewash buildings both in seaside and hilltop villages—and a delicious almond-based drink, *soumada*.

All these islands feel like hidden secrets, revealed by the Captain and crew in enticing bits and pieces, each place almost better than the last.

It's like I'm part of some tale of destiny (I can't get away from the Odyssey connection) that comes to its culmination in Knidos, back on the Turkish coast.

Here, all the various elements—scenery, history, adventure, cuisine, even the cosmos and pixie dust of phosphorescence—come together for a day unlike any other. It's *tatlı rüyalar* or sweet dreams. ●

IF YOU GO

GULET TOUR This Blue Voyage was about far more than the storied Aegean. The splendid gulet and the Zeus crew—gregarious guide, legendary captain (known for his skillful assistance-free manoeuvres), envy-inducing chef and stellar first mate and apprentice—are what made this cruise memorable. Sidar Duman of **Avanti Tourism** offers a number of Turkish tours, but get on his sailing trips with the Zeus and Captain Yorgo to tour the Dodecanese and beyond. The next tour following a similar itinerary is set for May 13 – 23, 2012, and with only 12 spots, book early. **avantitourism.com** You can also charter the Zeus and Captain Yorgo and crew and plan your own itinerary—he'll take you wherever you want to go, whether it's dips in deserted coves or the nightlife of Kos (home of Hippocrates). There's probably no better way to do a group trip. **zeusyacht.com** **GET THERE** Getting to Turkey is easy with Turkish Airlines, which operates direct flights between Toronto and Istanbul. Spend a few days in this vibrant cosmopolitan city, then fly south to the Turkish Riviera and Bodrum. Indulge in business class; service inflight is splendid (and you can order raki!). **turkishairlines.com** **MORE** For more on the chic playground of Bodrum go to **bodrum-guide.org** or **boytav.org** and for more on Turkey go to **goturkey.com**.

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