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THE  TIMES**Follow the Carian Trail on Turkey's ultimate hike**

The trail runs through Selimiye in the Bozburun peninsula Altay Özcan

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## It's 820km long and winds through some of the country's loveliest scenery. Paul Bloomfield walks the new mega trail in Turkey

High in the pine-scented hills above Kayaliozu Bay, I stumbled across my first tortoise. Literally stumbled — an incautiously planted boot on a loose stone, a glance down to steady the feet, and there he was. Sensibly enough, given my obvious clumsiness and his resemblance to a rock, he adopted a wary pose, head and legs safely tucked away inside his shell.

I stepped back gingerly and, as a cicada shrilled nearby, we sized each other up. His expression was eloquent: you fool, it hissed. Why are you lumbering around with that lump on your back on this sweltering summer morning? Back at you, I bridled.

It's a fair question, however. Most visitors to this corner of Turkey — the Bozburun Peninsula, a gnarled finger south of Marmaris stretching out into the Med to tickle the Greek island of Symi — venture no farther from those balmy waters than the nearest sun-lounger or bar. Why trek out into the wilds, with pack on back and boots on pins?

A convincing answer has now been provided with the launch of the Carian Trail, Turkey's longest waymarked hiking path, which jinks and loops some 820km between Mediterranean coast and Aegean hinterland through ancient Caria — the modern regions of Mugla and Aydin.

Doubtless the acclaim lavished on its near neighbour to the east, the Lycian Way — a 509km coastal trail that is now well established among long-distance trekkers — prompted the idea. Like Lycia, Caria boasts dramatic shoreline scenery and a proud heritage stretching back at least four millennia, to a time before Persians, Alexander the Great, Romans, Seljuks and Ottomans swept through, leaving behind ample reminders of their visits.

However, while the Lycian Trail largely traces the coast, this route encompasses more diverse landscapes and cultures. Wild, rocky headlands and forests punctuate the Bozburun and Datça peninsulas, while in the Latmos Mountains and Milas plateau far to the north, centuries-old stone-laid roads link isolated villages nestling among umbrella pines.

Some sections far from transport, supplies or accommodation require trekkers to be self-sufficient, carrying food, water and tents for wild camping. Thanks to a new three-day package, however, first-timers like me can experience the selected stretches on the Bozburun from the comfort of a tastefully landscaped hotel in Kumlubuk Bay, with drop-off and pick-up at the beginning and end of each leg.

I set out on that first tortoise-blessed morning under cerulean skies (at this time of year, there's no other hue) accompanied by Murat Okur, a guide who'd helped to waymark the route. A man in the know, in other words — which proved rather handy. It was he who suggested reversing our first leg, swapping ascent for descent, from the craggy interior to Kumlubuk. With the mercury climbing relentlessly beyond 30C, it was a canny call.

We were dropped just outside the village of Bayir, the central crossroads of the peninsula, above Kayaliozu — a bay whose name translates roughly as “rocky origin”. It's aptly named. Indeed, the terrain across this region is decidedly muscular, with limestone outcrops, raw boulders and vertiginous cliffs dominating, softened in patches by pink oleander and rock roses.

Hills — mountains, really — reared behind us, but we headed coastward into the maquis, passing olive groves protected by dry-stone walls topped with thorny twigs to deter goats. As we gratefully reached shady pinewoods, I was hit by waves of herby scents — wild rosemary, thyme, sage and more, familiar yet subtly accented.

Soon we emerged to a clearing overlooking Sarimersin Bay, where we peered down at a couple of gulets, traditional wooden sailboats, bobbing in the turquoise. In these high woods, though, we were alone; but for the red-and-white waymarks daubed on rocks and tree trunks, there was little to suggest that anyone else had been past in decades. No wonder. While the Carian Trail links dozens of existing paths — some are very ancient indeed — few had been regularly used, and many had been strangled by undergrowth.

However, if people are conspicuous by their absence, the same isn't true of their ancestors. This trail boasts an impressive ruins-per-mile ratio, even if on the southerly stretches these relics are shrouded in mystery, since few have been seriously studied.

Take the crumbling arches known locally as Gerbe Kilise, which provided antiquated frames for our photos of the cove below. They are believed to be the remains of a church from the Byzantine era, built around AD400. But who knows? The same is true of Amos, our final destination that day. The focal point of this site is a 1,300-seat theatre — the Minack of antiquity, perched high above Kumlubuk, with sweeping sea views. Yet no meaningful excavations have taken place here.

Archaeology lessons aside, these walks offer scenic delights and cherished glimpses into traditional rural lifestyles. We'd wave at old women in housecoats and headscarves shoeing goats along dusty roads, and watch their husbands playing backgammon or dominoes on café terraces. Occasionally Murat would scramble on to a dry-stone wall to pluck a few velvety green pods from an adjacent branch, cracking them open with his teeth to reveal the creamy kernels inside. “Çağla — unripe almonds,” he told me. “They're a local treat, munched with raki.”

Our final day encapsulated all that was wondrous about the trail. It began, as the best days should, on a village square in the shade of a massive plane tree. As we sipped sugary çay (tea) from tulip-shaped glasses, I gazed around to admire the balkabagi dangling from rafters; peculiarly bulbous pumpkins painted as decorations or carved to make lanterns.

Reluctantly extracting ourselves, we followed the yellow “Karia Yolu” signpost to trace first a dry riverbed and then a forest track. The undulating trail combined the elements that, to my mind, constitute the perfect path: glimpses of lofty outcrops, whiffs of pine needles and wild herbs, intermittent shade, dragonflies and butterflies and the occasional Persian squirrel skittering across the track.

Three elderly locals passed us, driving a cow before them as they descended home after an early foray to gather armfuls of wild sage, thyme and oregano. Among the red pines were scattered wild carob trees. Villagers venture up into the hills to extract the seeds from the green pods, boiling them with sugar to make a sweet, chocolatey syrup. Pale blue beehives were planted under the trees, whose nectar lends carob honey its characteristic colour and flavour; I spotted the apiarist's tools — smoke funnel and bellows — sitting expectantly atop one.

A couple of hours' walk brought us to Selale, a series of waterfalls near Turgut. Niagara it ain't — the highest cascade is 3m — but there's a hobbit charm and we'd arrived early enough to beat the hordes. We dangled sweaty toes into the cool brook, with only the raucous chorus of frogs to disturb the babbling and gushing.

They say there's no such thing as bad publicity. Tell that to the unnamed soldier whose monumental tomb adorns a rocky prominence above Turgut, a couple of kilometres beyond the falls. For centuries, villagers climbed to this supposedly sacred spot, praying for help with marriage or children; soldiers heading to war would scoop a handful of dirt from the ground for luck. Then some pesky archaeologist recognised it as the tomb of a Greek gavar — infidel — and the homage stopped.

Thus we had the place to ourselves, bar a tiny bat roosting inside. It's a remarkable sepulchre, with a 6m-high pyramidal hat that is unique in the region — possibly anywhere — and still pristine after more than two millennia. Etched in the massive lintel are words meaning, Murat told me, “I'll be watching you”; creepy when Sting sings it, but powerful indeed when immortalising an ancient Hellenistic warrior.

Another calf-burning haul — the last of my odyssey — brought us to the ruined Hellenistic-Byzantine acropolis of Hydas. Inside 2m-thick walls lie untidy piles of stones more or less recognisable as cisterns, watchtowers and the rounded apse of a basilica: intriguing rather than gobsmacking. The views, though, are something else. Planted atop a prominence nudging into the bay between the Bozburun and Datça peninsulas, Hydas — like any bastion worth its salt — affords a jaw-dropping panorama, across jagged ridges and turquoise-azure seas.

Murat and I perched in the shade of a stunted holm oak, munching crisp pears in companionable silence. There were no questions to answer, since there were no answers to give: no one is certain what these ruins comprise.

I glanced around for a tortoise, but none was to be seen. Shame. I dearly wanted to hold one aloft to see the vista: there. That. That's why I'm here, with the daypack and sweaty boots and weary legs. The Carian Trail: promoting dialogue with reptiles since 2014.

### Need to know

Exclusive Escapes (020 8605 3500, [exclusiveescapes.co.uk](http://exclusiveescapes.co.uk)) has seven nights' B&B at The Dionysos Estate with three days' guided trekking the Carian Trail from £1,050pp based on two sharing, return flights from Heathrow, Manchester or the private terminal at Stansted to Dalaman, transfers, and a day's sea cruise.

### More information

Sturdy boots with ankle support are essential, walking poles helpful, and you'll need to carry at least 2–3 litres of water per day. An experienced guide is a must.

### Five great new walking holidays

**Dominica tip to toe:** To cram the 184km Waitukubuli National Trail ([waitukubulitrail.com](http://waitukubulitrail.com)) into an island only 47km long is quite a feat. But then Dominica is quite an island, a rough-cut emerald tempering Caribbean beaches with jagged pitons, thundering waterfalls and lush virgin forest. World Expeditions' itinerary combines the best of the 14 segments spanning the island from Scotts Head, in the far south, to Fort Shirley on the northwest coast.

**Details:** A 12-day holiday costs £1,995pp excluding flights but including airport transfers, most meals, guesthouse accommodation, guides and porters (020 8545 9030, [worldexpeditions.co.uk](http://worldexpeditions.co.uk))

**Around Wales:** The first trail to trace the coast of an entire country opened in 2012: the Wales Coast Path ([walescoastpath.gov.uk](http://walescoastpath.gov.uk)). It winds 1,400km from Chepstow to Queensferry via the Gower Peninsula, to Pembrokeshire's cliffs and coves, bustling seaside towns and castles. Contours Walking Holidays offers self-guided options for several sections; the 97km Ceredigion Coast Path, with its Dylan Thomas connections, seems apt in his 100th birthday year.

**Details:** Four nights' B&B costs from £320pp excluding transfers to and from the route but including luggage transfers, guidebook and map (01629 821900, [contours.co.uk](http://contours.co.uk))

**Portugal's wild west coast:** Europe's most southwesterly extremity is the Algarve, but not as you know it. The Rota Vicentina ([rotavicentina.com](http://rotavicentina.com)) traverses this wild corner, stretching north from Cape St Vincent to follow the Atlantic-battered coast into the tranquil Alentejo province. Inntravel's self-guided trip along the Costa Vicentina follows the "Fisherman's Trail" through Europe's largest coastal natural park, undulating from turtle-frequented beaches to cliff-top trails festooned with wildflowers, via white-washed fishing villages and charming guesthouses.

**Details:** Seven nights cost from £670pp excluding flights and transfers but including breakfasts, five dinners, five picnic lunches, luggage transport, route notes and maps (01653 617000, [inntravel.co.uk](http://inntravel.co.uk))

**Through Scotland's heart:** It's a century since the death of John Muir, the explorer, conservationist, writer and activist known as the "father of national parks". The 215km John Muir Way ([johnmuirway.org](http://johnmuirway.org)) was launched in April to celebrate his life, straddling Scotland from his birthplace in Dunbar to the shores of the Clyde at Helensburgh. In between it traces part of the West Highland Way, and visits Edinburgh, the Falkirk Wheel, castles and distilleries. Macs Adventure offers a self-guided supported package covering the lot.

**Details:** 11 nights' B&B costs from £795pp excluding travel to and from the route but including route notes and maps, luggage transfers and a pre-departure information pack (0141 530 3631, [macsadventure.com](http://macsadventure.com))

**Marseille's hinterland:** France's extraordinary grand randonnées — waymarked long-distance trails — include gems such as the GR20 across Corsica's mountains and the GR10 along the Pyrenees. The GR2013, inaugurated in 2013 for Marseille's Capital of Culture programme, offers a different take; it steers a course through typically lovely Provençal countryside, but also through the graffiti-tagged urban landscapes around Marseille. Buy the GR2013 Topoguide or visit [bouches-du-rhone.net/les-sentiers-les-topoguides/gr-2013/](http://bouches-du-rhone.net/les-sentiers-les-topoguides/gr-2013/) to plan a hike

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