

Into THE BLUE

The Turkish seaside town of **Bodrum** is having a renaissance. Laura Millar falls for its charms...

I tried to count the number of masts bobbing up and down in the sparkling navy-blue water in Bodrum Town's main marina, but gave up after I got to a hundred.

This is a sailing town, where boats are a way of life – bringing in regular hauls of fresh fish and seafood – to be later devoured happily by eager visitors, of which there are many. They stroll slowly along the promenade that stretches sinuously around the harbour,

We sat on the pebbly beach as the water lapped at our feet, and watched the sun slowly sink

sit at waterfront bars and cafés enjoying Turkish coffee and colourful cocktails, or browse the bazaar that offers all the vivid carpets, lanterns and local souvenirs you could wish for.

It was heartening to see, because for a while Turkey's tourism numbers were down, due largely to a combination of political unrest and tragic terrorism attacks that occurred in the country's capital, Istanbul, in 2016 and 2017. But it's bouncing back, and more people than ever are being drawn to Bodrum, which has always had a reputation for being a slick, stylish seaside resort, particularly among chic, in-the-know Turks. It's even been called the St Tropez of Turkey. A raft of new hotel openings echoes the feeling that this is the place to be, with the likes of Mandarin Oriental, Six Senses and Four Seasons all staking a claim here in the past couple of years.

It's not hard to see why. The Bodrum Peninsula, in Turkey's southwest, which lies

next to the Aegean Sea, suffers from less humidity in the summer than resorts by the Mediterranean. And its beaches are more likely to be sheltered from the wind. I found my happy place on the quiet stretch of sand at my hotel, the silkily named, sleek and family-friendly Caresse Resort & Spa, which only opened three years ago.

Located just a 15-minute drive from the buzz of Bodrum Town, it's perched on the side of a hill and dramatically drops down towards the

The promenade has bars and cafés galore



The marina is packed with pretty sailboats



iridescent, turquoise sea. Its 67 rooms each have a view across the water, and you can flit between the serene infinity pool, surrounded by sun-loungers and four-poster cabanas, or the dazzlingly white sandy beach. The hotel décor is a mix of cool stone, grey and navy-blue tones, with polished marble floors to deflect the heat of the day – a relief when you're coming back in from the scorching sun.

After a delicious lunch at the resort's main restaurant, Glass, I took up position under a straw parasol, not far from the new Buddha-Bar Beach, which, come sundown, beats out hypnotic, Balearic tunes. Before that, all is peaceful and I spent the afternoon gazing idly out to sea, where it was a hive of activity. Speedboats pulled parasailers behind them, floating effortlessly up into the azure sky. There was the odd windsurfer, and even a kayaker or two. Excursions can be arranged on one of the hotel's four handsome boats. One is an elegant, traditional wooden gulet, while another, a staff member tells me proudly, featured in the 2006 James Bond film, *Casino Royale*. In the distance, the uninhabited island of Kara Ada shimmered through the haze.

Having seen out the hottest part of the day, my partner and I jumped into a taxi (ridiculously cheap – the exchange rate in Turkey is very much in Brits' favour) for the short trip into town. Even at around 5pm, the streets were busy, and after my attempt to assess how many boats were anchored here, we made our way along the waterfront to Bodrum Castle,

with its distinctive square turrets. The castle was built in the 15th century by the Knights of St John, and was converted into a mosque when the Ottoman Empire conquered Turkey in the early 1500s. Today it serves as the Museum of Underwater Archaeology. From here, we were swallowed up into the maze of narrow, paved streets which run parallel to the sea. Shoppers will be in heaven, with stores selling clothes and accessories, textiles, ceramics, and that most famous souvenir of all: powdery, chewy Turkish delight.

As dusk started to fall, we continued on along the next crescent-shaped stretch of waterfront with its bars and restaurants. We stopped at one place for a cocktail, sitting in chairs on the pebbly beach as the water lapped at our feet, and watched the sun slowly sink. Lanterns twinkled in the darkness as we dined in a nearby restaurant on a delicious dish of baked octopus in a lemon butter sauce.

Sun, sea, history and amazing food too: Bodrum had well and truly seduced me.



Turkish delight

WAY TO GO



Red Savannah offers a seven-night stay at Caresse Resort & Spa in a Deluxe room on a B&B basis from £1,540pp, including flights and transfers. To book, visit redsavannah.com or call 01242 787800.

BARGAIN BREAKS

Enjoy the sights and the seaside on these hot holidays

Thailand

WHY: Visit the west coast of Thailand to cruise around the Phi Phi Islands, explore jungles and sunbathe on beautiful white-sand beaches.

HOW: TopCashback (topcashback.co.uk) offers six nights at the three-star Aonang Eco Inn, Krabi, on a room-only basis from **£894.94 per person** through Ebookers, for two sharing, with flights from London Heathrow on July 22.



Dubrovnik

WHY: Baroque buildings, art and artefacts hide behind this city's ancient walls. Hop aboard the cable car for a vista, or visit the shore to hire a kayak or swim in the Adriatic.

HOW: easyJet Holidays (020 3499 5232, easyjet.com/holidays) has five nights at the four-star Valamar Argosy Hotel on a B&B basis from **£589 per person**, based on two sharing, with flights from Edinburgh departing on August 15.



Dubai

WHY: Luxury shopping, souks and sand dunes are out there in the UAE. Leave the seaside behind to climb the Burj Khalifa, sip a cocktail and enjoy a view from the clouds.

HOW: Thomas Cook (0844 871 6650, thomascook.com) offers five nights' B&B at the five-star Amwaj Rotana in a sea-view room from **£675 per person**, for two, including transfers, city tour and flights from London Stansted on September 4.

