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Turkey

Kalkan – it's busier but still charming

Annabelle Thorpe

has seen Kalkan change from a sleepy village, but it's still one of her favourite places



Night-time. Isn't that always when magic happens? I sit on my tiny wooden balcony, on a sleepy backstreet in Kalkan's pretty old town, and smell the jasmine and lavender wafting up from the garden below. Music drifts on the warm air; jazz seeping down from a rooftop restaurant, blurring with something pacier from the Moonlight bar, where I can picture the tables set neatly on the street, barmen whisking between them with dewy glasses of cold Efes and crisp, white Cankaya wine. There's something in the air in Kalkan, just like always; warmth, intensity, a thousand specks of light flickering beneath the vast inky sky.

Whatever the magic is, it's made this sleepy ex-Greek fishing village one of the biggest success stories in Turkish tourism. I first fell in love with Kalkan 20 years ago, on a week's spring jaunt with my sister that led to a whole summer living in a small, white-washed room not unlike the one I am staying in now. I sat on my tiny wooden balcony then and looked at the stars and marvelled at the beauty, the heat and the handsome, dark-eyed locals who flirted and grinned and had a sense of humour that seemed incredibly British. There was just the tangle of streets and a few villas, sprouting like unseeded shrubs on the hillsides. I thought it was the most amazing place I had ever visited.

It still takes people like that, even now that the hillsides are crowded with pastel-hued apartments and glass-fronted villas. Over the past two decades, thousands of British holidaymakers have fallen for Kalkan's charms; hundreds have bought

homes and moved in permanently. I've watched it change from a chic little village to an oddly English resort, a kind of Turkey-meets-the-home-counties mash-up, where the two communities co-exist in a generally fond, if wry, manner.

Like many love affairs, although we continued to see each other, Kalkan and I drifted apart; I grew to resent the constant development, the modern banks and shops that spread across the hillsides. Then last autumn I booked myself into the White House, a simple pension in the old town, and fell in love all over again. Tucked away in the eastern quarter of the village — once affectionately known as Beirut — because of the crumbling state of the houses — I felt as if I was back in the Kalkan I knew.

My window looked out onto a quiet lane, flanked by wooden balconies jutting out from the white-washed houses.

It's been gentrified of course, and many of the houses in the quarter are now holiday rentals, but at least there is a sense of history being maintained, or at least recaptured. When I went back last month I stayed in the White House's grown-up sister, the Courtyard, a beautifully restored clutch of houses. A flower-strewn garden links the two, where locals and ex-guests drop by for tea and gossip, and up on the roof terrace you can gaze out to sea without even glimpsing the wave of development that has taken place behind.

What makes Kalkan so popular is not just the beauty of the village itself, but the spectacular countryside that surrounds it. Two of the best beaches in Turkey — the vast, untouched reams of sand at Patara and the crystalline waters at Kaputas — are within 15 minutes' drive, the spectacu-

lar Lycian ruins at Xanthos and Letoon are not much further. And if you want authenticity, head inland — to the mountain village of Bezirgan, where the wealthy elders of Kalkan had their summer houses to escape the heat; or to neighbouring Islamlar, where the sparkling river is edged by restaurants that serve up fresh trout.

The days always were for exploring; boat taxis out to the beach platforms that dot the horseshoe-shaped bay, or full days out at sea on one of the elegant wooden gulets that line up along the harbour. Once evening falls, the town comes alive: sherbet-coloured Mulberry and Prada bags gleam in spotless shop windows, waiters stand outside their restaurants, menus to hand, and music floods the sweetly scented streets.

Perhaps the greatest magic, for me, is that as I sit on my balcony I can really believe that nothing has changed. Just a few seconds' walk away is the street I used to run down barefoot that first summer, all sparkly eyed and overexcited in the way you are when you know something extraordinary has happened, that your life will never be the same again. All of life was before that girl, everything yet to come. It's nice to be close to her again.

Need to know

Annabelle Thorpe was a guest of Monarch Airlines (0333 0030700, monarch.co.uk), which flies from Gatwick to Dalaman from £125.76 return. She stayed at the Courtyard Hotel (00 90 242 844 3738, courtyardkalkan.com), where double rooms start from £100 B&B. A week's car hire with Indigo Car Hire (0113 289 9281, indigocarhire.co.uk) costs from £110. More information on gototurkey.co.uk.



Best places to eat and drink

Estimates vary on the number of restaurants there are in Kalkan — some say 200, some say it's nearer 300. Eat on the harbour and you'll pay London prices, seek out a backstreet eatery and you'll get more authentic food at a much lower price. Here are my five current favourites.

Merkez, Hasan Altan Caddesi

The heart of the village for more than 20 years, the Merkez is the perfect place for breakfast. Locals read the papers over cay tea and pastries, waiters nip past on scooters to open up their restaurants. Order menemen (scrambled eggs with tomatoes and peppers), freshly squeezed juice and watch the world go by. Breakfast costs about £5, with pizzas £8 and main courses about £10.

Blue Marlin Fish and Meze, Pirat Otel Arcade

Most restaurants on the harbour serve overly fussy, overpriced dishes, so this restaurant, underneath the Pirat hotel — is a joy. The meze is made by the owner's mum, and it serves whatever fish is fresh that day. Meze costs £3-£4, fish about £10-£12 (00 90 535 302 6410).

Hunkar Ocakbasi, Sehittler Caddesi 38/E

If you want unfussy, traditional Turkish food then this is the go-to place in town: fantastic grilled meats and kebabs, served with salad and three small meze. At



busy times you'll have to queue, but it's worth the wait. Its food is an absolute bargain. Mains cost about £8 (00 90 242 844 2077).

Isos Kitchen, 17 Suleyman Yilmaz Caddesi

There's something of a backstreet revival going on in terms of restaurants, as people turn away from the overblown eateries on the front for something more authentic. Isos does wonderful meze and delicious guvec (casseroles) and fresh fish, with an easy, unpretentious feel. A three-course meal would cost about £20pp (00 90 242 844 2415).

Adam's Place, Kas Road

Perched on a headland five minutes out of town (but Adam will pick you up and drop you back), this restaurant has zingy meze and salads made by Adam's wife, succulent lamb shank and fresh fish. The views are spectacular. Main course costs about £10 (00 90 242 844 3232).