Standing at the front of the ship, arms spread-eagled, head tipped back and mouth gaping to drink in the air, I felt a joyous sense of disorientation. Then as the pirate-like wooden vessel lapped over the water, I faced the harbour and remembered that I was, after all, in Marmaris.

Yes, the Turkish town Marmaris, best known for sun loungers, beaches and not much else. Although there’s no denying the presence of McDonald’s, baseball caps and bargain beers, scratch the surface a little and there is evidence that the town, where the Mediterranean Sea meets the Aegean, has not lost all its tradition and culture. Rural Marmaris might well be one of Turkey’s best-kept secrets.

An hour and a half’s drive from Dalaman, its gateway airport, Marmaris’s reliably good weather and cheap hotel beds – there are more than 60,000 of them – have long been a pull for British tourists who, until recently, have largely been herded in and left to their own devices.

But hoteliers are upping their game and beginning to develop higher-end, boutique options that leave the tacky three-star stereotype in the dust.

There’s more to Marmaris than meets the eye – so don’t let your clients miss the boat.

**ISN’T MARMARIS JUST SUN, SAND AND SEA?**

Once visitors go off-piste in Marmaris, there is a whole host of sights and activities available that will leave them with a real taste of the region, and some...
fantastic photos to boot. Half an hour’s walk from the hotels that stretch along a segment of the coast is the Marina. The seventh-largest in the world, the Marina is flanked by bars, cafes and the odd kebab joint – though the doners here are a million miles away from your average British takeaway.

Guests are perfect for a bit of nautical escapism. Available for day trips and longer expeditions, these large traditional wooden sailing boats are typically equipped with a bar and sunloungers. The ship on which I found myself having a Titanic-style Jack and Rose moment passed hidden caves and billionaires’ super yachts. We even stopped to have a dip by Roman Abramovitch’s liner. Turkish Yacht has a fleet of varying sizes available for private charter.

But the real treat is when you get out of the town. Hire a car to wind up through mountain roads, where every corner reveals a new vista of the coastline – and these will be even more accessible with new bike routes being added in April. If clients prefer not to drive, Attraction World offers a day-long Ec devastate off-road safari from £89 per adult and £14 per child. The further from town, the more rustic the scenery. You might see tethered goats, horse-drawn buggies or blue beehives stacked on the roadside. Beekeeping is a key part of Marmaris culture, and the honey museum in the village of Osmangazi is well worth a visit. Entry to the honeycomb-shaped building is free, but don’t miss the yoghurt and honey served at the museum’s cafe: so good it’s sure to take the edge off any sting.

The Dionysos Estate is, if you walk up through mountain roads, you’re more likely to find yourself chatting with fellow guests and hotel staff at the poolside bar. Children under 14 were not allowed until recently, but the peace is upheld by the resident sheep and a Mediterranean diet is impressively empty.

A week’s BB&B at the Dionysos Estate costs from £650 with Exclusive Escapes, including return flights from the private terminal at Stansted, with BA from Heathrow, or with Monarch from Manchester, plus transfers and a day use cruise exclusiveescapes.co.uk 020 8605 3500

**ANATOLIAN SKY HOTEL**

Anatolian Sky Holidays has introduced three destinations this year: the seaside town of Kas, where it offers four properties; yachting hotspot Göcek, home to the high-end D-Resort; and Izmır, where it features an Ottoman-influenced boutique hotel. It has also added properties in Oludeniz, Dalaman and İstanbul, plus walking tours in Cappadocia.

**ISN’T IT JUST A SUMMER HOTSPOT?**

Summer might be when it’s most sizzling, but for active and more mature travellers, spring and autumn work equally well. Even in late October, temperatures hover around the low to mid 20Cs and, crucially, the hordes have gone. This is ideal for activities such as hiking and cycling, which are far more pleasant in the shoulder seasons, but it works for sightseeing too.

A river boat trip from Dalaman passing by the Royal Tombs – elaborate temples built improbably into the hillside – is much more enjoyable in the cooler weather. And to cap it off, the boats call into the hillside – is much more enjoyable in the cooler weather. And to cap it off, the boats call

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