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12 DAYS IN TURKEY

Such a large country, so much to see; so, how best to plan your time and get the most out of your trip?

By Monica Kapila



That would depend on your interests and age of travellers, but here's what a family with two teens from Dubai with a decent budget decided to do...read more

Itinerary:

Dubai to Istanbul on Emirates – 4 hours.
Istanbul to Bodrum on Atlas Jet – 50 minutes .
Bodrum to Alacati (near Izmir) Self drive about 3 hours.
Izmir to Istanbul on Atlas Jet – 50 minutes.
Istanbul back to Dubai on Emirates – 3.5 hours.

We spent four nights at the magical Macakisi Hotel in a village called Golturbuku in Bodrum, the idea being to relax and de-stress immediately after a tense session of exams and waiting for results.

We have image-conscious and panicky members in our family so there is always some scepticism about what mum has decided to book, but all doubts disappeared on arrival at the Macakisi. It passed all tests and really is a stylish place to unwind, relax, eat and sleep.

The accommodation

We booked a two-bedroom, two-bathroom villa room facing the sea, the interiors are all blonde wood and marble dotted with beautiful bits of original artwork and stunning views from the terrace. Sleep quality is excellent, black out blinds, no noise, delicious linen and showers in bathrooms that matched Dubai's largest!

The food

It's such a pain having to look for places to eat at the end of a tiring day so thankfully the Macakisi offers half board which we gratefully accepted thinking how bad can hotel buffet type dinners be? How wrong were we! These all in dinners are pure a la carté at a renowned restaurant that is the highlight of some people's stay.

Tables are located impeccably overlooking the sea, food is very high quality although there could have been a few more vegetarian main

options. But these fabulous inclusive dinners were matched with beautiful breakfasts in a perfectly designed global dining room that I really loved.

Fresh juices, all types of coffees, Turkish traditional or Western standard breakfasts, it's all there and worth lingering over despite some guests doing their derivative trading in a quiet corner facing the sea. Life really could be a bowl of cherries.

The facilities

There is a small gym with the usual equipment and a trainer on hand to help, but the view of all the tropical foliage makes you forget you might be bored!

It's a bit hot as there is no air conditioning but this didn't bother me; the fans were effective. The deck is a large well planned area adjacent to the sea with stations for drinks, towels and service, gorgeous, chilled and fabulous to do some people watching from. And when you get too hot, dive



in! There is a small pool at the level of the dining room but we didn't use it much. There is a very modern hammam that incurs an extra charge and the spa uses luxury Nuxe products from France.

The people

It's such a cliché but the people really do make the place and everyone scored very highly on all aspects in my book, free and helpful valet for the hire car, a very friendly and helpful induction to the hotel and grounds, (not standard by any means but we came to expect it) and well trained waiters and deck attendants. I just loved the infectious upbeat and positive attitude (not in a yoga type way) more a hep and stylish need to live life kind of way that everyone has at the

Macakisi and this just rubs off on you.

The location

The resort nestles in the hillside of a village called Golturbuku, or Turbuku, same thing, not easy to find your first time round so do get dropped off here but we hired a car on our second day and found it fine to get back to. There are a couple of places worth seeing nearby and the hotel guest relations staff are happy to advise you.

The downside ?

Well not much really, but this resort doesn't have a great deal to offer very young children although there were families with younger children staying at the hotel so they are very welcome.

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Maybe don't pack the high heels? There are a good few steps to negotiate from your room down to breakfast, the bar and dinner areas so perhaps stick to fancy flats for footwear.

If you have younger children then perhaps consider the Casa Del Arte in nearby Torba, they are completely equipped to deal with young families, have a large swimming pool, a gentle but small beach area, a gorgeous art set up for kids and young adults as well as a clay workshop area complete with an American potter! Owned by a Turkish family from Istanbul, this group of properties has an exquisite collection of art in one of its hotels that's a real treat to be around. It is a venue for openings and events on a regular basis.

But if money is no object and you really are more comfortable with big names, then look no further than the fabulous and newly opened Mandarin Oriental Bodrum, again located in Golturbuku, a few minutes drive from the Macakisi in a lush, green hillside with hidden beach areas reminiscent of Langkawi.

In fact there are two private beaches at the Mandarin Oriental, both of which looked very peaceful and have had soft sand transported from Northern Turkey. The lobby of the hotel is strewn with freshly potted orchids and exudes an air of luxury and tranquillity.

The rest of the hotel follows suit from its state-of-the-art gym with pilates rooms and oversized indoor swimming pool, the many outdoor swimming areas and the gorgeous bar where we had drinks in the evening overlooking the Aegean watching speedboats make deliveries to larger yachts in the area.

The rooms are everything you'd expect from a hotel like this and a big plus for me was every room had its own yoga mat! Service was efficient and friendly and despite the hotel only being open 3 days, it was already 40 percent full and I think it will get busy very quickly. This hotel has something for everyone, young and old, those who want to party and those who want some peace, the setting is unbeatable and the facilities very extensive so really you would have no reason to leave this place if you come on a short break or were part of a mixed age group that likes doing their own thing and getting together for meals.

We then chose to stay at the Alavya hotel in Alacati, the windsurfing capital of Turkey. This boutique hotel has 20 rooms or so and is quite a contrast in size and style to the Macakisi and Mandarin Oriental.

It has been designed by renowned Turkish architect Hakan Ezer who also designed the Nars hotels. Everywhere you look is perfect from a simple window ledge to garden bench, there is no detail that's been overlooked here so you really feel you are in an interiors magazine. The hotel's restaurant Mitu opens out onto the main street of Alacati's old town so you literally are on the doorstep of lots of cafes, bars, restaurants and shops.

This is fabulous to have so close to home but it did get quite noisy late into the night as it was high season so perhaps come out of season to really enjoy this area. Moreover, reputed restaurants were booked out for dinner for two weeks solid! But we ate once at the hotel restaurant and loved the bar Foryu which felt a bit like a tropical Zuma.

Don't leave Alacati without trying to windsurf as the fabulously flat sea in a sheltered bay with just the right amount of wind make ideal conditions for this sport even if you are a complete beginner. The hotel is connected to the Bubi Surf school and the instructors are highly trained and friendly. Do note that Classic rooms at the Alavya can be a bit on the small side as the hotel is group of converted Greek s that have

been extended so you may feel more comfortable in the more expensive superior rooms.

Three Nights in Istanbul could make a story all on their own but we decided to do a little bit of sight seeing, explore some different neighbourhoods and do some shopping along with good eating and drinking. We stayed in the Nisantasi area of Istanbul similar to Knightsbridge in London and were located very well for shops, cafes and restaurants as well as European style buildings and architecture. We took the metro from Osmanbey to Sishane and explored artisanal Galata a couple of times. I highly recommend having lunch or even staying at the very French-influenced Georges Hotel near Galata Tower. This boutique hotel has a large and relaxing roof top terrace restaurant Le Fumoir that serves excellent, high quality French food in a peaceful setting with a breathtaking view. We had a very late and leisurely lunch and noticed people just came in to have drinks or coffee and relax on the terrace later in the day. The sea view rooms with parquet floors are very atmospheric in this hotel.

Museums

There is no shortage of monuments and

museums in Istanbul but do remember mosques, even the Blue mosque while free to enter have specific opening and closing times during the day. Some of the well known museums are around 30 euros to enter and do have long queues in high season. I loved shopping in Istanbul from Turkish designers to the Grand Bazaar where bargaining is de rigeur. Do pack your most stylish walking shoes as everyone walks here.

Turkey is a great choice for a perfect short break from the region, only four hours away, very reasonable to fly to unlike The Seychelles or Phuket, extremely interesting, with very high standards of accommodation, shopping, food and sight seeing. But Istanbul is expensive so be prepared and while English is spoken in the swankier parts of the city, it really helps if you learn some Turkish phrases before you go. But don't let that put you off!

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It's always helpful to have some genuine, recent inside knowledge before you plan a trip.

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