

May 2012

SSCA Commodores' Bulletin

Wintering Aboard in Marmaris, Turkey

Dear SSCA,

Much has been written about Turkey in general and Marmaris in particular, but information gets old quickly, so here's an update.

The day after *Halekai* was loaded on a ship in Phuket, Thailand, in June 2011, we flew to Istanbul, with plans to travel around Turkey till the ship arrived in Marmaris. After enjoying the sights of Istanbul for a few days, a travel agent arranged a bus tour that took us to Safranbolu, Cappadocia, Konya and Pamukkale, ending in Marmaris. We had a great time but paid high season rates. In hindsight we could have spent the time in SE Asia instead, and postponed our Turkey travel till this past winter while living aboard. Had we known about Gwen Bylund, we surely would have done so.

Gwen is an American expat who has been living aboard her boat, Kornwerd ("KW"), in Marmaris for many years. She organizes not only most liveaboard activities at the local marinas, but also arranges small group trips all over Turkey, in comfortable vans that pick you up and deliver you back to the marina. How convenient is that?! Tas, Gwen's tour guide, speaks excellent English and is personable, entertaining and professional. The camel wrestling/Ephesus trip in January is not to be missed! Gwen is now an SSCA Cruising Station Host for Marmaris, and anyone planning on cruising in Turkey would be well advised to get on her email list in advance of arriving there. Ask her for a copy of her calendar of events and her Marmaris FAQ's.

Once *Halekai* arrived in Marmaris, we berthed for a month at Yacht Marine, enjoying the amenities of the marina--the swimming pool, fitness center and sauna, good restaurant, etc.--and took the bus or ferry into town for shopping and errands. We decided to live aboard in Turkey this past winter, since we had some major refit projects that could be done there. We chose Marmaris because it has a wealth of marine vendors and chandleries, including West Marine, as well as an industrial area with good availability of spare parts and repair services. It's a pleasant town with lots of shops, restaurants and nearby hiking trails. The town hosts downmarket tourism in the summer, but residents enjoy their hometown the rest of the year. There's a lively liveaboard community with plenty of activities and opportunities to socialize. The winter climate is relatively mild, with typical daytime temps in the 50's and nights in the 40's. Dalaman Airport is an hour away by low-cost shuttle bus, and good connections to Istanbul and other cities. The airports in Izmir and Rhodes are other options. The ferry to Rhodes, Greece, leaves from the dock adjacent to Netsel, making visa runs easy. In Rhodes, take a taxi to Lidl, a supermarket that stocks things unavailable in Turkey.

After studying the pros and cons, we chose Netsel Marina over Yacht Marine, due in part to Netsel's convenient location right in town. We also found it better protected from

storms, sheltered behind the breakwater. This was important to us since we left *Halekai* in a wet berth from August through December while we were away. The cost to dry store a yacht is more expensive than in the water at both marinas, and at most others in the Med as well. Netsel's berthing fees are higher than Yacht Marine's, but utilities are included, which is a significant cost during heating or cooling season. The bus fare to town from Yacht Marine, twice a week on average for two people, adds another \$50/month to the equation. Unfortunately Netsel, which is part of the Setur chain of Turkish marinas, does not grant SSCA members a discount, as Yacht Marine does, for longterm contracts (see SSCA online list of Special Offers).

We found the quality of Marmaris marine services high and the cost reasonable, though it's important to get multiple quotes as prices range dramatically. UK Sailmaker made our new mainsail, employing the latest expertise. Their new loft is located above the Thursday market hall. Their prices were comparable with those of SE Asia, and we are very satisfied with our new sail. Torque Yachting, located at Netsel, completely rebuilt our diesel engine, and were very competent at finding the needed spare parts. Marln, with offices at both marinas, repaired our generator. Jes Holman, a Brit, repairs fiberglass and does yacht surveys, both of which we needed. His partner, Emma Thomas, is the author of *Turkey Cruising Companion*, a popular cruising guide.

A good dentist who speaks English has an office near Netsel: Dis Hekimi. His fee for a thorough cleaning and check-up was US \$40. Annette, a Swedish expat, charges \$10 for a haircut. Her salon offers mani/pedicures, massages and facials as well. There's no DIY laundromats in Marmaris. We paid \$15 for two loads washed, dried and folded each week at Orion Laundry at Netsel, a luxury we came to enjoy. They pick up and deliver.

There's no reason for boredom in the winter in Marmaris. For those who enjoy group activities, there were dominoes, knitting, quiz night, singalongs, hiking outings, and flea markets ("jumbles" per the Brits). There's a happy hour and discounted dinner once a week at restaurants in each marina. Fridays there was a ladies afternoon tea followed by a skippers' meeting just prior to Happy Hour at Yacht Marine. The skippers' meeting was open to all, and information was shared about subjects of interest. The holidays were celebrated in style. In addition to Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's, there were parties for Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, Leap Year, and Easter. All activities and events are open to everyone from both marinas, and everything is announced on the morning VHF net, 9 am on channel 69. Both marinas have sizable, well-sorted book swap libraries. Yours truly was the librarian at Netsel's Sailor's Point Clubhouse, a job I enjoyed as I got first dibs at returned books and DVD's. Both marinas have low-cost hot lunches at the workers' canteens. There's a large sport center right near Netsel with bowling, tennis, a large fitness center and fitness classes; there's an indoor swimming pool and Turkish baths in town.

Our favorite restaurants were Pineapple's, Rota, Neighbors, and Oh Yes! There are several cafes that have delicious, fancy layer cakes that compare well with German *Konditorei* creations. Strangely, they also make very dry, tasteless pastries as well as honey-soaked baklava.

Cruising Permit and Visa Issues

Turkey has been a popular liveaboard winter option for years, one of the few non-EU countries thus unaffected by the Schengen treaty. Upon arrival yachts get a one-year cruising permit (transit log) and are issued 90-day tourist visas for a small fee. One could get a 90-day visa renewal simply by taking a ferry day trip to a nearby Greek island, such as Rhodes. A new law was threatening to close this door this year, conforming Turkey to EU laws that allow only 90 days out of 180. All winter long, much time was spent in yachtie meetings with local Customs and marina officials, discussing the evolving issues and their repercussions for different nationalities, and whether short-term cruisers or expat residents. The marina managers combined forces to try to convince the powers that be that the new rule changes would have a negative impact on the marine and tourist industry. Compounding the situation is the fact that the Customs officials in each town choose to interpret the rules differently, and/or to just ignore new rulings made in Ankara. At the time of this writing, visa renewals are still relatively easy and inexpensive. Contact Gwen who keeps abreast of the evolving visa situation.

Internet and Cell Phone Access

Another issue cruisers face is cell phone and internet communication. You can register an existing phone and/or 3G dongle in Turkey. The assigned phone number can not be changed for two years. If you go abroad and return and your chip has expired you have to have the new chip programmed to your assigned number. So make a note of it and keep it safe. Dongles can be a big hassle here, especially with Vodaphone. Like most everyone else we talked to, we gave up and bought a cheap cell phone and new dongle with chips from Turkcell. There is free, passcoded wifi at Yacht Marine and Netsel, though the signal can vary depending on your location, and it's slower than 3G. The Netsel wifi system has many popular websites blocked, such as FaceBook and the iTunes Store.

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