

TURKEY

Positive performance

Turkey is proving a tempting prospect for visitors from around the globe. The country is now set on attracting a superyacht clientele by creating exclusive marinas

TRISTAN RUTHERFORD REPORTS



The boat park in the Bosphorus enclave of İstinye, founded and managed by İspark

CONSIDER THESE TWO Turkish facts. First, the country is set to become the globe's second largest yacht producer, knocking the Netherlands into third place. Second, Turkey is also set to leapfrog Italy to become the fifth most visited nation on the planet.

What if the country could combine its seafaring industry and allure into an infrastructure package fit to welcome the world's largest superyachts? I jet into Istanbul's Atatürk Airport for a 48-hour research trip – only to discover it already has. The city's latest marina projects could turn Istanbul into an Auckland-style sea of sails.

My afternoon taxi boat up the 30km-long Bosphorus Straits reveals 136m *Savarona* moored against the genteel village of Bebek. Further along

are Venice-style Bosphorus villages including Arnavutkoy and Kuruçeşme. On these sunlit straits, modern superyachts used to be as rare as rainy days in Bodrum. Yet today I spot four 50m boats.

I jump ship at Istanbul's newest yacht project for my first interview. İspark's İstmarin is a 'boat park', a marina that floats on the Bosphorus in the ultrachic enclave of İstinye. Another near-identical port bobs just north in Tarabya.

New marina projects

İspark's general manager Nurettin Korkut tells *SB* that these Bosphorus boat parks can be built far faster than traditional marinas. "We have four new Bosphorus marina projects that will be put into service in 2017. In Bebek and

Kuruçeşme, plus the charming zones of Paşabahçe and Beykoz on the Asian shore."

Is the demand there? Korkut says, "Our company focuses primarily on meeting the city's own mooring demand." Four additional boat parks are slated for immediate construction should his clientele cry out for more. And yachts above 30m? As Korkut continues, "For İspark's later investments we will take into account the infrastructure needs of superyachts, which claim an ever-growing place in the sector."

I ponder Istanbul's attraction as a superyacht hub on the taxi ride south along the Bosphorus. The interest is apparent. First we pass the Çırağan Palace Kempinski. In 2013 this landmark hotel hosted the World Superyacht Awards

for the second time. It now welcomes wealthy guests who prefer to moor alongside.

Next up is the Four Seasons Bosphorus. Here guests may take a private speedboat shuttle to Atatürk Airport, a 20km sail away. I alight at the hipster Karaköy docklands area, home of Istanbul's art Biennial.

Will superyachts eventually moor up alongside here, just as Abramovich does with his yacht in Venice? For a reality check I call Fraser Yachts' country manager Haver Tanbay, a man who doesn't mince his words.

"As of today Istanbul is not yet a destination for superyachts," he says. "But the biggest attraction will be, we believe, the small exclusive marinas on the Bosphorus like İstinye and Tarabya. (İstmarine's projects) are located in



Ataköy Marina plans for a bespoke marina for completion in 2017



West Istanbul Marina has a large technical services facility

beautiful bays adjacent to high-end regions of Istanbul.”

Will charter brokers at Fraser Yachts be pushing destinations north of Istanbul in 2016? “We do not believe Sochi alone is enough of an attraction to bring superyachts all the way to the Black Sea.” If the recent Winter Olympics and the new Sochi Grand Prix can’t tempt Fraser Yachts clients and owners north, what can?

The answer may lie 35km west at the rapidly expanding West Istanbul Marina. My journey the next morning is one of the most boring I’ve ever made – but that’s the point. “We are not Palmarina (Bodrum’s exclusive superyacht harbour),” explains marina marketing manager Esra Daldal. “Sure we have a swimming pool and seafood restaurants. But West Istanbul Marina’s USP is as an inexpensive winter base for the

Aegean’s largest yachts.” Sure enough, 15 superyachts up to 60m are lined up on a bespoke pier. “In 2016 we are expanding the area to accommodate 25 superyachts,” continues Daldal as she guides me around. I’m shown the new sports complex, a new petrol station, “for tax-free fuel of course”, plus a Blue Flag beach beyond. The price? To safely winter a 50m yacht in West Istanbul Marina for six months costs just €22,500.

Excellent refit services

Daldal and I stroll 10 minutes to the other side of the 160,000m² marina complex. Here sits West Istanbul Marina’s secret weapon.

Daldal’s colleague, technical services manager Cem Elemen, welcomes me to his vast technical services wing. “Here we can refit almost any visiting superyacht,” he claims. “You explain your needs to my team

in English. Then we deal with 25 local Turkish companies from carpentry to electronics, many of whom have their workshops right here. Your contract is with West Istanbul Marina, so owners and yacht managers require no local knowledge to get the job done.”

Is it cheaper than refit yards in the Western Mediterranean? “Naturally, some superyacht items like rigging are imported from North Sails, so we price in euros,” says Daldal. “But labour is far cheaper. And local materials like steel and mechanics we can pass on at 50% of European prices.” A final reminder of West Istanbul Marina’s intentions is the 700-tonne boat lift – Turkey’s largest – under construction on the technical services area perimeter. “Our new baby will be born on May 1, 2016,” says Daldal. “Whether you sail the Bosphorus for pleasure, or sail here for refit, we can help.”

I follow the coastal road along the Sea of Marmara. This vast area is home to the Prince Islands, an archipelago that has been beloved of Istanbul’s elite for a millennium. Further east is Tuzla, the grimy yet vital shipyard quarter where 88m *Maltese Falcon* and 72.5m *Vicky* were built. Twenty minutes later my car skirts alongside Atatürk Airport. As a metaphor of Turkey’s strong economy, passenger numbers here jumped 11% last year. A few miles north, work continues the world’s largest airport, slated to open in 2018.

Ilyas Korkmas greets me at Ataköy Marina. This chic downtown harbour currently has space for 500 yachts. “But we are currently building a bespoke marina twice this

size for completion in 2017” he explains, “with space for just 200 superyachts”.

Korkmas runs through the presentation as we stroll past the marina’s pavement cafés. There’s a pontoon for 25m yachts, one for 30m, then another for 40m and 50m vessels. “Plus one mega pontoon for two 100m yachts, or one 200m yacht alongside.” Is the demand there? “We wouldn’t build it otherwise,” laughs Korkmas. “Our largest boats have already outgrown our main Ataköy marina.”

A bright future

On my last morning I catch Ali Tanir – who has represented Turkish yacht brands such as Tansu and Vicem, and now Numarine. Are his client’s latest 30XP and 40XP superyachts built for Bosphorus cruising? “Last month we just sold two 33m Numarine Hardtop 105 yachts, one for the South of France, the other for the Far East,” says Tanir. “A superyacht owner doesn’t necessarily need a boat to see Istanbul.” So the future of Turkish yachting isn’t all about Istanbul? “It’s starting,” admits straight-talking Tanir. “But major refits and occasional cruises aside, the future is in more harbours in southern Turkey of the standard of Gocek’s D-Marina and Kaş Marina.”

There’s a lot to ponder on the long taxi ride to Sabiha Gökçen, Istanbul’s second airport. My aircraft is parked next to Italy’s presidential Airbus A319 and countless other Gulfsteams and Dassault Falcons as world leaders congregate for Turkey’s recent G-20 summit. There’s money in Istanbul and more money is starting to sail in. **SB**

USEFUL LINKS

Istmarin: www.istmarin.com.tr
Fraser Yachts: www.fraseryachts.com
West Istanbul Marina: www.westistanbulmarina.com
Ataköy Marina: www.atakoymarina.com.tr
Numarine: www.numarine.com
New Istanbul Airport: www.igairport.com