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TOP TEN TURKISH BEACHES

Antalya and its surrounding riviera is Turkey's most popular destination, with 10 million tourists visiting each year. What's the story, you might ask? Well, it's all about the beaches. Turkey possesses a phenomenal 10 per cent of the world's Blue Flag beaches, and over half of them are dotted along Antalya's riviera. So whether you're looking for your own isolated cove, some 2,000-year-old ruins or a solid day of fun in the sun, you'll find it here.

Words **KATHRYN TOMASETTI**

1

KAPUTAS, KAS

A silver sliver 20km north of the seaside village of Kas, Kaputas is one of Turkey's most beautiful (and most secluded) beaches. To access it you need to teeter down hundreds of steep stone stairs. Unspoilt and largely untouched by tourism, Kaputas has no beach clubs, no facilities and almost no shade. It's a real treat for sun seekers, but families should get there early to snag one of the few parasols available for rent (high season only, £3 each)

– and be sure to pack beach toys and buckets to keep the kids busy. Couples will be in their element, though, particularly when the beach clears late in the day and a crimson sun slips beneath the horizon. Lovers should steer clear of the beach's yellow flowers, which bloom exclusively in and around Kaputas during high summer. They may be a tempting way to display your affection, but they're also a critically endangered species. >





2

OLYMPUS & CIRALI

Three kilometres of pretty pebbly seafront links Olympus' ancient culture with Cirali's boho charm. Here you can discover your own lost world: head just inland from the beach to clamber around Olympus' 2,000-year-old, Indiana Jones-style temples and tombs (the entrance fee is around £1.50). Then stroll northwards along the water to Cirali's beachfront cafes, sun-dappled under shady mulberry trees. From here, if you're feeling energetic, you can hire sea kayaks, but other than that there isn't a tourist shop, sightseeing boat or carpet salesman in view. Endangered loggerhead sea turtles swim ashore to lay their eggs here in June and July. In August, lucky visitors may catch a peek of the eggs hatching and baby turtles scurrying back into the sea at dawn.

A beach with serious history: make sure you don't miss ancient Olympus

3

PHASELIS

If stretching out on a remote beach without a care in the world gives you itchy feet, how about an expanse of sand that sits alongside ancient chunks of marble and crumbling sarcophagi? Phaselis is not just a national park composed entirely of a designated archaeological site (the entrance fee is around £3), it's also a picturesque peninsula trimmed by three gorgeous bays. Our hot tip? Head southward through the ruins to the most southerly of the three, which boasts soft, fine sands. Naturally, you're not the only one who'd like to possess this little corner of paradise. Legend has it that Alexander the Great captured Phaselis during the 4th-century BC, claiming this beautiful sun-blessed spot as his own. Who can blame him? >

PHOTO SUPERSTOCK

4

LARA BEACH, ANTALYA

Ten kilometres southeast of Antalya's town centre, the honey-hued shores of Lara beach are home to a medley of private waterfront clubs and wide-open spaces. However, it's the annual Sandland Festival (larasandland.com) that draws crowds of locals and visitors to Lara beach each year. Between May and November, international sculptors congregate on these shores, transforming 10,000 tonnes of sand into monumental creations. In 2014, the festival's "Empires" theme saw the beach dotted with Egyptian pharaohs and windblown vikings, ancient Chinese emperors and elephant-riding maharajahs. The high-end hotels that lie along the beach have been known to lure A-listers, too, including Monica Bellucci and Tom Jones.

5

KONYAATI, ANTALYA

For visitors who like their beach holidays paired with a bit of urban buzz, Konyaati is Antalya's most popular public beach, spectacularly backed by the towering Beydaglari mountains. From the Antalya Museum (antalyamuzesi.gov.tr), it spreads 6km westwards, passing the city's Aquarium (antalyaaquarium.net) and the waterslides at Antalya Aquapark (antalya-aquapark.com). Konyaati itself is a vibrant blend of beachfront cafes – try a shisha pipe at Iba Café (ibacafe.com) – beanbag-covered terraces and, come nightfall, lively bars and restaurants. Stroll along the winding promenade, stop for a delicious Turkish *dondurma* ice cream and work out where to spread your beach towel. >

Beauty, brains and buzz, could Konyaati beach have it all?





6

BUYUK CAKIL, KAS

Buyuk Cakil Plaji (“Big Pebble Beach”) is a bit hit with diving enthusiasts. The beach’s shingle shores paired with its cool freshwater creeks create exceptional visibility, and surface colonies of octopus and bonito make for superb snorkelling and scuba diving. A network of nearby caves and swim-throughs – holes in the submerged rocks, big enough to paddle through – adds to the allure. For organised scuba trips, try Mavi Diving (mavidiving.com) in Kas. Back on land, seafront restaurants serve simple Turkish dishes, such as *kofte* meatballs and grilled aubergine with bottles of ice-cold Efes beer. The beach is just over 1km south of Kas, and easily accessible from the town via a winding waterfront trail.

7

CAVUS BAY, ADRASAN

Cavus bay’s biggest attraction is that it sits squarely on the Lycian Way, the region’s 500km coastal trek. Not much more than a sleepy cove, this deep sandy beach is backed by pine forests and citrus groves. During summertime, oversized umbrellas dot their shade on to sunloungers, and Turkish tourists enjoy long, lazy lunches at the few village-style restaurants that face the sea. Between November and March – before the weather really heats up – the beach is scattered with long-distance hikers stopping en route for a quick dip. Feeling lazy? Leave the walking boots at home and hail a taxi from the main Antalya to Kas road, where you’ll find the beach. >

These boots were made for walking – but pass us the flip-flops...



PHOTO GETTY

8

WEST AND EAST BEACHES, SIDE

Side (pronounced “see-day”) is covered with ancient Roman ruins, from the impressive amphitheatre crumbling into the sand, to the 2nd-century Temple of Apollo. So it’s a very popular destination come the summer months. However, it’s easy to ditch the crowds if you know where to head to. Flanking Side’s Old Town peninsula, the beach bends from a flat, sandy expanse in the west to the dune-backed east, making up Turkey’s second-longest stretch of sand. There’s something for everyone. Adrenaline junkies might want to spend an afternoon parasailing courtesy of watersports outfit Beach Boys (Buyuk Plaj, East Beach); those after something more relaxing can enjoy a stroll along the seafront at sunset.

9

MERMERLI, ANTALYA

Situated just below the Mermerli Restaurant (mermerlirestaurant.com) in Antalya’s Old Town, this private beach – almost entirely hidden from sight from anywhere around town – is as stylish as it is secluded. Shell out approximately £4 and, courtesy of dozens of wooden stairs, step into your own private paradise: an expansive golden crescent of sand, complete with sun loungers, large parasols and warm turquoise seas. Splash around on one of the stone piers jutting out into the sea before feasting on crispy calamari and grilled meats from the restaurant upstairs. Then, after all that hard work, you can kick back and watch the elegant wooden *gulets*, traditional Turkish sailboats, floating by. Bliss.

10

KLEOPATRA BEACH, ALANYA

Legend has it that, while sailing these shores, legendary Egyptian queen Cleopatra couldn’t resist stopping for a quick dip in sheltered Alanya bay. And so the locals named this gorgeous beach after her. Two thousand years later, the waters haven’t lost an iota of their appeal, and are still exceptionally clear. Watersports enthusiasts can try windsurfing, wakeboarding, jet-skiing or riding the waves aboard a banana boat. At the eastern edge of the beach, the scene is quieter and the sea is calmer: snorkellers paddle along the cliff-like coastline, spying bream and bass under the translucent waves. ✓



Holiday in Antalya with Jet2.com and Jet2holidays

This temple to sun god Apollo worked: Antalya gets 300 days of sun a year!



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