

# DIVER



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**U.S. Navy**  
 Rewriting the Book



# THREE ISLANDS

THE COAST OF TURKEY STRETCHES MORE THAN 8,000 KILOMETERS ALONG THE MEDITERRANEAN, THE AEGEAN AND THE BLACK SEAS WHERE TIME TRAVEL IS PART OF THE DIVE EXPERIENCE.

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Located at the point where Asia, Africa and Europe are closest, and with seas on three sides, Turkey has found favour throughout history. As a crossroads, the country has been a prominent centre of commerce over the centuries and also the birthplace of many great civilizations.

The country's coastline is 5,177 miles (8,332km) long with the Black, Aegean and Mediterranean seas to the north, west and south, respectively. Ships have been traveling these waters for centuries and, as you might imagine, many failed to reach their intended destinations. That countless vessels have been wrecked off the Turkish coast is a reality not lost on European divers who have explored these waters for years. Surprisingly, North American scuba enthusiasts have not followed suit. This intriguing dive destination remains for them to discover.

Turkey's Mediterranean coast is washed in exquisitely blue, warm water that's a pleasure to dive. The Three Islands region, about half an hour by boat from the town of Camyuva, on the Antalya Gulf, along the country's southwestern coast, offers many interesting underwater sites. It was with the Suelo Dive Center that I explored these waters from their dive boat Deniz Akman. This enterprise is owned by Suelo Akman and together with his dive master Katja Hilde Brandt and crew they have been showing off the underwater treasures of the area for years.

Keeping the Three Islands company are a scattering of tiny islets and rock piles that break the surface. Below the surface they reveal a truly exciting seascape of walls, caves, swim thoughts and lots of big boulders to explore. The Mediterranean has a reputation for being fished out and while there may be some truth to this, perhaps more in a commercial fishery sense, you certainly wouldn't know it diving here, where I encountered schools of small barracuda and, in some areas, there were even significant populations of smaller, tropical variety fish. And if you keep a sharp eye out for small critters you'll be rewarded with sightings of different nudibranchs, including the elegant Dorid, and numerous other bottom dwellers such as spiny sea stars, fire worms, tube anemones and sea cumpers that,

until recently, had been observed only in the Red Sea. Large squids and moray eels are not uncommon either.

Countless ships have sailed these waters through the centuries and the Three Islands have claimed their share of these ancient wooden hulled vessels, now long since consumed by worms and whatever else the sea has thrown at them over the centuries. But their cargoes of amphorae remain and are spread on the sea bottom – if you know where to look. Of course, most are broken and many are covered with so much marine growth that it takes a trained eye to distinguish them from rock. Local divers have designated areas where they place some of these clay vessels that were shipping

containers for such ancient world treasures as wine, oils and other consumables. One such place is aptly named Amphora Place. Another large pile is located on Suelo Reef, named after my dive buddy and photo model on the trip.

Seeing all these amphorae lying about on the ocean floor really sets the mind to wondering about those early civilizations – the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans – and just how vital the Mediterranean was then, and continues to be, to the commerce that was more regional millennia ago and now global, especially with the Suez Canal in operation since 1869.

Looking at these age-old relics you can imagine a ship sinking in



The shallow water caves are breathtakingly beautiful. INSET: Divers can surface inside one cave to view the formations.

Suelo Akman examines amphorae on Suelo Reef.





■ Top of the triple expansion engine at deck level.



■ Kemer Harbour on Turkey's southwestern Mediterranean coast.



■ Suleo checks out ordnance on the deck of the Paris.

the grip of a storm, its cargo spilling out or, who knows, maybe a sailor tossing an empty amphora overboard to 'lose' the evidence of his thirsty theft. It boggles the mind to think that these jars were in use at a time when the known world's two most powerful people – Roman Emperor Gaius Julius Caesar and Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, were meeting in Alanya, a Turkish coastal town not 50 miles (80km) away from our dive site.

But amphorae aren't the only artifacts to capture the imagination. Others from more recent times are also to be found hereabouts. On Seagull Island reef there's a large anchor you can admire that I'd say is likely 17th Century vintage.

And, arguably, Three Islands is even more appealing for its natural attractions. There are some caves here that make for truly memorable diving. Swimming down one rock face you come upon a number of openings that lead to these small but beautiful caves. In one you can surface in an air pocket and see stalactites covered in algae, and while there, I'm told, you might get to share your impressions of the dive with a rather large Mediterranean Seal that likes to take a little air in this secluded spot. This possibility held much appeal for us and every day we checked the cave but she was a no show during my stay in the area. Other nearby caves aren't quite so dramatically decorated by Mother Nature as the one I've just described, but they make fabulous swim throughs at certain times of the day for the effect of sunlight that dances across the rocky walls and stony seafloor. It's simply breathtaking.

Closer to home than Three Islands is the wreck of the *Paris*, just outside the harbour of Kemer, a town not far from our dive boat's anchorage at Camyuva. A freighter of French registry built in 1913, the *Paris* had a short life, having been sunk by Turkish shore batteries in December of 1917, during First World War hostilities in the region.

At 230 feet (70m) in length, she's an impressive wreck, sitting upright in about 100 feet (30m) of water, her name quite visible

■ A recreated historic village in walking distance from Kemer Harbour.



■ Elegant Dorid nudibranch and other invertebrate life inhabit the rocky reefs of the Mediterranean.



■ Up close to the rocks and underwater caves.



■ Suelo enters one of several caves in the Three Islands area.

on her bows. The top of her triple expansion engine is can be seen on deck. Some armaments, installed for self-defense during the 1914-18 war years, are very evident. At her stern a gun mount is conspicuous for the absence of the gun itself. Ordnance is scattered around the cargo holds and someone – maybe a crewmember or maybe a diver – has piled some of these projectiles on deck.

Because the wreck lies near the mouth of the harbour at Kemer, visibility tends to be less than you'd experience further offshore at Three Islands. But visibility is a relative thing and for some, a bad vis day here is excellent compared with conditions you might experience at home. Exploring the *Paris* is well worth the effort and tends to round out the scope of dive offerings here – from ancient times to the modern day.

Of course, there's plenty to do and see during 'surface intervals' in Turkey. The countryside offers plenty of archeological and historic sites to tour. The resorts offer spas, lovely beaches and wherever you go there's plenty of good food and drink.

This region of Turkey is very reasonably priced and yet is one of the most expensive areas in the country. The Pegasus Beach Hotel in Kemer is a case in point: comfortable with moderate rates that include all meals and drinks. Hotel staff is friendly, helpful and enjoys practicing English because most guests tend to be Russian. This hotel is just 20 minutes from the dive boat I used in nearby Camyuva. Boat crew will pick you up at your hotel. Contact [www.pegasoshotels.com.tr](http://www.pegasoshotels.com.tr) In the Kalkan area a good choice is the Mosaicci Art Hotel, which offers three-hour courses in a variety of activities that include mosaics, glass beads, stained glass, glass fusion and photography. They can organize your scuba trips, among other activities in the Kalkan and Kas regions. Contact: [www.mosaicciarthotel.com/eng/otel.asp](http://www.mosaicciarthotel.com/eng/otel.asp). There are also Bed and Breakfast accommodations in the area. 🍁

■ The *Paris* lies in about 100 feet (30m) off Kemer Harbour.





■ Gun mount on stern of the *Paris*.

## IF YOU GO

- The best time to dive Turkey's Mediterranean coast is **April through September**, the dry season, when visibility is best. Water temps range from 75°F (24°C) to 85°F (29.5°C) and air temps are 85°F (29.5°C) to 95°F (35°C).
- On arrival in Turkey you can fly to **Antalya** or Dalaman in **Mugla** in order to get to the **Kemer, Kalkan and Kas** diving areas.
- Most hotels provide transportation to and from the airport or you can rent a car.
- The official language is Turkish but almost everyone speaks some English
- **Currency** is the New Turkish Lira.
- USD\$1 = YTL1.3. US dollars are accepted everywhere.
- The electrical system is 220.

## DIVE OPERATORS

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■ A typical Turkish ship in the Three Islands area. The law requires charter boats to have two engines or one engine and sail.



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