

A white motorboat is positioned in the center of a calm, blue lake. The background features a steep, densely forested hillside with various shades of green and brown. On the left side, a large, vibrant green pine branch hangs down into the frame. The water's surface is still, reflecting the surrounding landscape. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic, typical of a Mediterranean coastal area.

# Mediterranean Summers

How a man, a woman, and a dog  
spent eight summers  
exploring the ancient sea  
in a small boat

Karen Heath Clark



*Travel through the Mediterranean on a small boat with an adventurous couple and their dog, experiencing the charms of Greek island ports, quiet nights at anchor in picturesque coves and the raucous energy of metropolitan marinas. Included is a primer on planning your own trip, with detailed information on buying a boat in Europe, leaving home for months, the best and worst Mediterranean ports to visit by boat, and how to take your pet along.*

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Front cover: *Avanti* at anchor near Croatian island of Rab

Rear cover: Roka is ready to start our journey in Palma, Mallorca;  
Colorful harbor in Mali Lošinj, Croatia

## PREFACE

### HOW AND WHY DID THIS HAPPEN?

Our easyJet plane, full of noisy, cheering British tourists, touched down in Palma on the Spanish island of Mallorca. My husband, Bruce, gathered our luggage while I let our small black dog out of her under-seat travel bag. We hailed a taxi. “Marina Real Club Nautico,” Bruce said proudly, feeling superior to those mere tourists surrounding us. We belonged here. We owned a boat in the marina. Several minutes later, the taxi pulled up to the marina and the guards waved us through. The taxi rolled slowly down the long dock past hundreds of expensive yachts waiting in the water for their owners to reappear.

“Stop here. That’s it,” Bruce commanded. A bit stunned, we unloaded the taxi and stood in front of a decidedly unimpressive “yacht” bearing the name *Avanti*. I looked down at our piles of luggage, then over at the waiting boat, and finally started to laugh. Bruce glanced at me, confused, then finally smiled. “This is ridiculous,” I sputtered, “This can’t really be happening”

We boarded *Avanti*, opening her door with the key we had never used before. After dumping our belongings in a pile in the “main saloon,” we headed straight for the marina bar to attempt to gather our wits. We sipped gin and tonics and reminisced about the past five years, pondering what had brought us to this surprising place and time.

Bruce and I are both Type A workaholics with a thirst for oddball travel. Tours horrify us, and even extensive planning is anathema. We study possible destinations, buy airplane tickets, then improvise. Our now-grown children, Adam and Andrea, hated our travels when they were young. Like most children, they wanted routine, certainty and comfortable hotels with swimming pools. We rarely had reservations and often didn’t find a place to stay until late in the day.

Sometimes it was well after dark – often after hours of driving, looking and squabbling – and there was rarely a swimming pool.

The dawn of the plan that resulted in our standing here on the dock in Palma had occurred in Turkey five years earlier. We had spent three weeks driving through the country on one of our typical vacations, just offbeat enough to raise eyebrows among our friends about our safety. After spending a few days browsing Istanbul in miserable cold and rain, we rented a car and headed for Ankara. We quickly realized that we actually should worry about our safety: the Turkish highways are absurdly dangerous. Picture three giant buses racing to pass each other on a two-lane road, all speeding directly toward your underpowered subcompact car.

In Cappadocia, we stayed in a hotel carved into the cliffs a thousand years ago, and then visited the ascetic, fundamentalist home of the whirling dervishes in Konya, where alcohol was not available anywhere, even in our Western-style hotel. From there we headed on a small winding road over the snow-covered Taurus Mountains to the sublime southern Turkish coast on the Mediterranean Sea. At Antalya we turned west and followed the coast past ruins from at least a half-dozen ancient civilizations. At Marmaris in the southwest corner of Turkey, we turned north, leaving the Mediterranean for the Aegean Sea. Our next stop was the popular tourist town of Bodrum.

From first appearances, Bodrum was not going to be a highlight of the trip. A series of monstrous white condo developments greeted us as we drove into town. Although the town boasts a stunning crusader castle, it was otherwise uninspiring. Cruise ships stop here, resulting in an abundance of tacky tourist shops. The available hotels were unattractive.

We stopped for a late morning coffee at the harbor's edge contemplating driving on to the next town. As we discussed our options, we noticed the rounded sterns of dozens of Turkish gulets lining the town's main wharf. Turkish gulets are gorgeous boats –

MEDITERRANEAN SUMMERS

quaint, beamy, wooden, with small sails, looking like misplaced Chinese junks. Their sails are rarely used; gulets usually run under power.

Several of the larger gulets posted signs advertising their availability for charter for the day, the week, or the month. It was only May, too early for the swarms of tourists that appear in July and August. The boats were still being varnished and polished for the season. Here and there a shill stood on the wharf beside a gulet, hoping to scout up tourists to take out to sea, but without much luck so early in the season. The weather was chilly and the water too cold for swimming.

Eying the charter signs, I suggested idly that perhaps we should try to spend the night on one of these boats. Bruce unexpectedly agreed with me. He's not one who normally takes well to something new. We started looking more carefully at the gulets. Could we charter one of these gulets for just one night and avoid the dreary hotels?

We paced the harbor's edge, inspecting the boats. Some were way too big – they could hold at least a dozen people. Some of the smaller ones looked shabby, even unseaworthy. Then we saw her – the *Adorga* – her perfectly-sized, varnished hull glowing in the late morning sun. There was no sign advertising that she was available, only two young people sitting on board watching us.

What should we do? "Okay," I whispered to Bruce, "Let's go for it. What do we have to lose? You ask." Bruce is used to being asked to do awkward or embarrassing tasks and usually complies. He paused, then called out, "We like your boat – is it available for charter?"

Three hours later we were aboard while the young couple, Adil and Lynn, maneuvered *Adorga* out of the Bodrum harbor. Our lives would never be the same.

That morning in Bodrum was the beginning of our new journey. Had it been earlier in the day, had the town been more appealing, had

Bruce not worked up the nerve to ask, what would we be doing in retirement? Traveling in a Winnebago? Bored at home snapping at each other? Driving a golf cart in Leisure World? We'll never know.

Adil was a Turk, but spoke good English as do most coastal Turks. He was the owner and skipper of the *Adorga* and appeared to be serious and hard-working. His girlfriend, Lynn, was the cook, and Adil's total opposite. Lynn was British, demanding, critical, funny, chatty and irreverent. Adil claimed to be a devout Muslim; however, it was obvious even to us that his religious views were unorthodox.

Adil and Lynn took our pre-paid trip money to town to shop for dinner and breakfast for the four of us, telling us to return in two hours. And then we were off, *Adorga's* tiny two-cylinder motor churning up a miniature wake behind us. As *Adorga* sputtered slowly out of the harbor, Adil brought out a round of beers.

An hour or so of cruising brought us to an isolated bay. Adil dropped the anchor and turned off the engine. *Adorga* was enveloped in total silence except for Lynn's outbursts from the galley where she was cooking dinner. She complained loudly in her cockney accent, mostly about Adil and other Turkish men. "Those Turks!" she declared. "They are so pig-headed and opinionated!"

Eventually Lynn brought out a glorious fish dinner and the four of us ate together. We watched the sun set and talked, and then the fiery, licorice-flavored Turkish liqueur, raki, appeared on the table. Adil and Lynn told us about their lives – how she had met him in Turkey many years ago, then bounced back and forth to and from England until four years earlier when she returned to Turkey and Adil for good. Her family was not pleased. She and Adil had a stormy relationship. At first they tried to conceal their fighting from us, limiting their battles to surly bickering and sniping. By morning, they had stopped trying to hide the fighting and openly screamed at each other. We decided fighting was part of how they kept their relationship exciting.



MEDITERRANEAN SUMMERS

Adil had recently found God and had become a committed, though eclectic, Muslim. Muslims are not permitted alcohol, but Adil seemed to have no issues with downing both beer and raki. Lynn was not impressed by his new-found faith.

“Would you like to hear some Sufi music?” Adil asked us.

Lynn roared at him in exasperation, “They don’t want to hear it! Stop bothering them! They’re not interested.”

But Lynn was wrong. “Actually, we’re fascinated by your religion” I told Adil. “We’d love to listen to some Sufi music.” We talked for hours with Adil, about his beliefs and the Koran and about his theories of how the world will end.

We were deeper into the heart of Turkey than at any other time on our trip. We spent the evening with the atonal chants of the Sufis, drinking raki, watching the stars, rocking gently with the boat, and listening to Adil talk about the glories of Islam while Lynn angrily banged pots in the galley.

When the sun came up the next morning, Lynn appeared with a breakfast of cheese and salami to go with the pot of strong Turkish coffee. We explored some of the nearby islands and I swam in the icy water. Early in the afternoon, chugging back into Bodrum, we sighed with regret, wishing we didn’t have to leave *Adorga*.

Bruce had talked vaguely about going somewhere on a sailboat when we retired. I wasn’t convinced. Our only multi-day sailing adventure had been a disaster, resulting in a tangled genoa, a fire on board and a close encounter with a giant cargo ship. I had vowed that I would never spend more than half a day on any boat. Overnight trips were banned.

But *Adorga* was different. She was comfortable. A thick Turkish carpet covered the floor of our cozy bedroom. The galley was not

large, but workable. We could stretch out in the sun on the large aft deck. The small bay where we rocked through the night was isolated and serene.

Bruce has always hated searching for hotels in our travels, along with the requisite unpacking and packing of suitcases. The idea of taking our home with us from port to port sounded unusually civilized to him. We both hated searching for meals. With our own boat, we could cook on board as much or as little as we wanted.

Driving out of Bodrum that day, our enthusiasm was hard to contain. The more we talked, the more excited we became. Perhaps leasing a boat would work, or maybe even buying one and spending a year, maybe two years, cruising in the Mediterranean.

We were nearing retirement after many years of two heavy-duty, long-hour careers. I was a partner in a large international law firm, putting in 10-hour days. Bruce was a geologist, formerly a university professor, now running a large geotechnical consulting company. Both of us were burning out on work. Our children were on their own. It was time for something new. We loved travel. Our travel history was checkered with strange adventures and the occasional mishap. We had hitchhiked with backpacks in our childless years through Greece and Yugoslavia. Later we spent a year in Australia with one-year-old Adam, meandering home through Africa and South America. When Adam and his younger sister, Andrea, were a bit older, we took them on trips through Europe and Australia, driving them crazy with our lack of planning. Then it was on to family camping in Wyoming, Idaho, Washington and Oregon. After our children left for college, we ventured through Chile, visited the Galapagos, biked with another couple through the Czech Republic, and trekked in Nepal. And then there was the visit to Turkey.

Thoughts of retirement had started to edge into our brains, but we had no idea how retirement could possibly work for us. Suddenly, there in Bodrum, everything changed. We now had a plan.

## *MEDITERRANEAN SUMMERS*

The idea snowballed. We started telling friends that we would retire to cruise the Mediterranean even though we barely believed it ourselves. When we heard that sailboats could be a problem in the Mediterranean since the winds were not reliable and that a powerboat might be better (the kind we'd always called "stinkpots"), we decided to try one out. We chartered diesel trawlers for a few days in San Diego, then the San Juan Islands, and even Alaska. It was fun, never a disaster. The closer we came to retirement, the more committed we became to our crazy idea.

We started researching, expecting to be hammered with the many reasons why our harebrained scheme could never work. We took tiny steps forward, always ready to jettison the whole idea if we hit a brick wall. The wall never appeared.

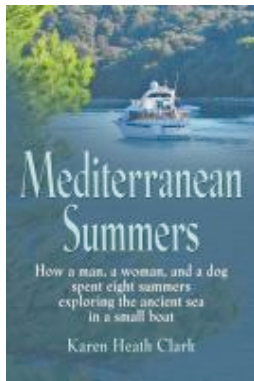
We searched for resources to help us – the library, the Internet, Amazon, bookstores – but there was nothing. Most travel guides were not helpful. Land-based travel books miss what a boating visitor needs and wants to know. Traveling by boat is a vastly different experience from traveling by car or train. Many villages and towns on the water, where boaters spend most of their time, don't rate even a mention in most travel books. And some towns that are tourist favorites provide a terrible boating experience – often they have miserable or no marinas and do not cater to boaters. The best sources for the Mediterranean are a group of boating handbooks written by Rod Heikell and a number of his friends, and published in the UK. They provide all the little details necessary to find a good marina or town wharf and settle in, including the amenities available. They also provide information on the history and ambience of the harbors and port towns themselves. His descriptions are often the only information easily available in English about these places. But even Heikell couldn't answer the big questions we would face. Instead, we learned by picking up snippets of information available locally and from other cruisers, and from a long list of hit-or-miss experiences along the way. It wasn't pretty, but it did produce its own type of excitement. We hope this book will make it easier for

*Karen Heath Clark*

others who are game to try an adventure like ours by providing the type of information that was not available to us.

We started and ended on the island of Mallorca in the Balearics. We traveled along most of the east coast of Spain, the entire Mediterranean coast of France, the west coast and islands of Italy plus the sole of the Italian boot and its spur (the Gargano peninsula) and Venice, the entire sea coasts of Croatia and Slovenia, approximately 40 Greek Islands plus parts of the Greek mainland, both the Aegean and Mediterranean coasts of Turkey and, finally, Northern Cyprus. Although we originally expected to travel the Mediterranean for only a year or two, we ended up spending eight years cruising there, between three and five months each year.

This book is divided into two parts. Part I is a description of our actual travels, with a full chapter devoted to each country. Included are descriptions of our favorite ports, bays, and cities, and some of the unique boating joys and troubles we found along the way. Part II discusses the nuts and bolts of traveling by boat in the Mediterranean. This section includes how to decide which boat to buy, where to buy it and how to handle the purchase, things to consider when leaving home for a long period, how to manage and maneuver in the marinas, harbors, and bays in the Mediterranean, how to estimate the costs of the whole adventure and, finally, for animal lovers, what you need to know if you want to take your dog or cat along for companionship.



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