

# TRAVEL

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IN THE quiet, I can only hear the clapping of horses trotting on the cobblestone paths and see the occasional eagle circling the sky. Along the shoreline, rugged cliffs drop into the depths of turquoise clear waters while pine trees crowd densely further inland.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" my carriage driver calls out as I look upon the Sea of Marmara. It's hard to imagine the blurry patch beyond it is the bustling metropolis of Istanbul, packed with chaotic traffic, blinding lights and an intimidating population of 12 million. The city itself straddles Europe and Asia, divided by the Bosphorus Strait that links the Sea of Marmara to the Black Sea.

Sailing out from Istanbul's European side, I left the pandemonium behind in search of the islands I had heard so much about. The Adalar, loosely known as the Princes' Islands, are a patchwork of nine isles — only four of which are inhabited — just an hour by ferry from the coast of Istanbul.

The voyage itself is an experience: One can savour warm Turkish tea and sesame buns as the ferry cruises past Istanbul's cityscape into its Asian enclave and watch nature take over as it glides into the open sea. The boat stops at each of the four islands,



## To the exile isles

Enter a world of calm seas and secret coves in Turkey where princes once found refuge



Ferry setting sail from Istanbul (above); spotted: farmers taking five on the horse-drawn cart (right)

Photos: Nellie Huang

making it an ideal day trip from Istanbul.

In contrast to mainland Istanbul, life on the Princes' Islands is languid and relaxing. Along the traffic-free streets, locals wave and stop for a chit-chat before inviting you in for a meal or guiding you to secret sandy coves along the shoreline.

Come summer, holidaymakers from the city revel in the fresh clear waters and the serenity. Modern high-end apartments owned by urban Turks stand alongside Victorian-looking wooden mansions on the islands' undulating slopes. The architecture dates back to the Byzantine era when princes were exiled here, giving the islands much historical value.

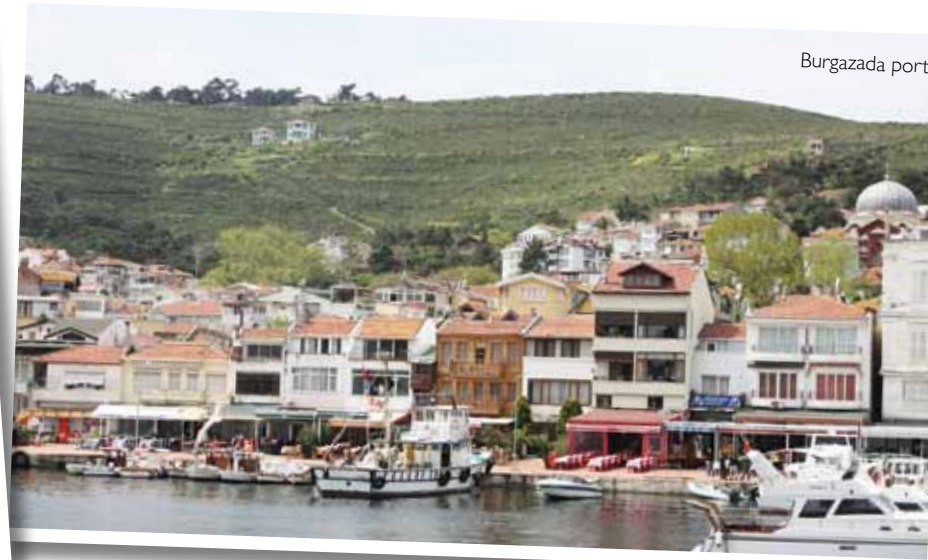
### Kinaliada

Kinaliada, just 12km from the Asian side of Istanbul, is my first stop. Its name means "Henna Island", a reflection of the reddish earth from the copper that used to be mined here. From the sea, you can see the rose-red cliffs rising over the grey pebble shoreline where a couple of outdoor bistros are opened for business.

This is one of the Adalar's quietest islands, perfect for those escaping the summer crowd. For the active traveller, there are some excellent hiking trails that lead to the inland cliffs and an awe-inspiring panorama from the highest peak. Several downhill paths allow access to quiet sandy bays that are ideal for a refreshing dip and a cosy picnic.



The town centre in Buyukada.



Burgazada port

### Burgazada

Burgazada — the second island along the ferry route — stands out for its historical significance.

At the port, visitors can see an eclectic mix of architecture, with the most prominent being a domed Byzantine basilica and Ottoman mosque.

The Aya Yani Church is testimony to the island's past, having withstood various empires in Turkish history. Below the church is a dungeon that's open to visitors. For literature buffs, Burgazada is also home to famous Turkish writer Sait Faik Abasiyanik. His residence has been converted into a museum.

### Heybeliada

The port of Heybeliada comes to life with a phalanx of multi-hued cottages and fishing boats. Perched on the seafront are a handful of upscale summer apartments and luxury yachts that exude extravagance. The island's biggest draw is the Hagia Triada Monastery. Poised at the peak of Umit Mountain, the Greek Orthodox monastery can be seen from all corners of the isle. Drawing Orthodox pilgrims from the region, the 11th century church has miraculously retained its grandeur from yesteryear.



### Buyukada

If you don't have time, make this island your essential stop. Buyukada, the biggest and most visited isle, is packed with unique architectural styles, hilly terrain and thick woods.

Wander around its town centre where a clock tower, souvenir shops and elegant seafood restaurants meld together. You will find yourself amid wooden mansions reminiscent of those in cowboy movies.

Since motorised vehicles are forbid-

den, a novel way to explore Buyukada is on a fayton, or a traditional horse carriage.

Enjoy a ride around the island — uphill to the Aya Yorgi Church and then around the island where you can see slopes of houses and an emerald sea.

Prices are fixed at about \$50 for an hour ride on a carriage that fits four people. Alternatively, explore the island on a bicycle at a cost of \$3 per hour.

The sea view is gorgeous. As is the soothing tranquillity of the Adalar island stretch.

### Trip notes

**Go:** Several airlines fly from Singapore to Istanbul with one stopover in Doha or Dubai. Turkish Airlines flies direct. Fares are about \$1,100. As to the Princes' Islands, fast ferries depart regularly from Istanbul's European side, Kabatas, and Asian side, Kadikoy. Ferry tickets cost \$3 each way.

Check the official website [www.ido.com.tr](http://www.ido.com.tr) for full schedules. The journey takes 1.5 hours from the European side and 45 minutes from the Asian side.

**Buyukada eat and stay:** Among a row of restaurants, Miltos Fish Restaurant (Gulistan Caddesi 16; [www.miltorest.com](http://www.miltorest.com)) dishes out a scrumptious dish of grilled trout (\$10) and some authentic Turkish delights as apres-lunch desserts. If you're looking to stay on the island for the night, brand new Gala Boutique Hotel (Cankaya Caddesi 3; [www.galaboutique-hotel.com](http://www.galaboutique-hotel.com), from \$60) offers plush furnishing in a mansion setting.



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