

# THE LAND OF ETERNAL BLUE

Where the turquoise Aegean meets the inky Mediterranean, Bodrum's storied landscape is attracting an influx of luxury lifestyle hotels

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From left: The whitewashed town of Bodrum; cobble lanes leading to Yula Bar

SOMETHING SPECIAL HAPPENS OVER BODRUM when there's a full moon: the entire bay becomes silver. This iridescent glow stretches across the peninsula, to its crystal bays with gentle waters lapping the bows of sailing boats. This is the Turkish Riviera, or Turquoise Coast as it's known, a storied land sitting where the Aegean meets the Mediterranean, just a few miles from the Greek Islands. Come summer, and travellers descend for sun-warmed wooden decks, with ladders leading into the inky blue below, and to mingle with the even warmer hearted locals.

Since antiquity, this peninsula has commanded great attention. Its former guise, Halicarnassus, was home to a wonder of the ancient world and part of mighty Ancient Greece, described by Homer as the "land of eternal blue." Centuries later, and the stones of the wondrous Mausoleum formed the foundations of Bodrum Castle, built by the Knights of St John – still stoically standing watch.

Today, the sun-bleached ruins lie amongst olive and mandarin groves and typical whitewashed, blue-trim houses, influenced by Cretans who settled in the area in the 1920s. To the west, ritzy Yalıkavak Marina, filled with superyacht dwellers dining at Zuma and Nusr-Et. To the south, the hairpin cobbles of the old town, and bays where oily limbed beings jump from masted gulets. Many are sailing the Blue Voyage – a route from Bodrum to Kas coined by the famous writer Cevat Sakir Kabağaçlı, exiled to Bodrum in the mid-20th century. He loved it so much, he stayed for three decades.

explains general manager Iker Yörükçü. "Social living is the DNA of Mett – our menus are made for sharing, our outlets made for socialising. Restrictions didn't allow us to showcase this, and we needed it to be just right."

Just as well, then, that time has come. Guests enter a soaring sky-lounge-like lobby sitting high atop the property, evoking feelings of an elegant art gallery. This sensibility continues in the lobby's actual art gallery, showcasing works by artist Laura Margarita, and at the Assouline shop, which stocks the luxury publisher's inspiring coffee table read, *The Turquoise Coast*.

It's a theme that continues to the rooms, with 72 housed in the main building and 32 villas and lofts jumbled across the cove – many with private pools and gardens. Rooms are awash in neutral, earthy hues, floors clad in jute rugs and dotted with Grecian pots, walls a soothing white. Local touches are abundant, and waxy olive oil soaps and sunflower and echinacea shampoos fill rooms with a sweet fragrance.

Summers are long and languid in Bodrum, the heat creating a gentle haze over the inky blue. Mett certainly caters for this, and guests can sunbathe on the soft grass fringing the swimming pool or the pale grey sands of various wooden decks hovering above the Aegean – all on royal blue beds shaded by white fringed umbrellas. But the chicest place to bask is a private cabana, a handful of which are perched above the sea. All come with sound systems and private plunge pools, and DJs and spa therapists can even stop by – a nod to the glamour of Sunset's hometown. From across the bay comes the

## IN THE 1970S, BODRUM WAS THE JET-SET CENTRE OF TURKEY, UNTIL TUMULTUOUS TIMES LED NUMBERS TO DWINDLE. BUT IN RECENT YEARS, BODRUM HAS BEEN SPARKLING WITH NEWFOUND GLOSSINESS

In the 1970s, Bodrum was the jet-set centre of Turkey, until tumultuous times led numbers to dwindle. But in recent years, the likes of Aman, Edition and Mandarin Oriental have been snapping up land, leaving Bodrum sparkling with newfound glossiness. Last summer saw the opening of Susona Bodrum, the first Turkish outpost of Hilton's LXR brand, while this summer welcomed Mett Social Living, the debut hotel by Dubai-based Sunset Hospitality Group. With the season stretching into October and a new direct flight path from Dubai, Bodrum is fast becoming one of the most glamorous and accessible destinations in the Mediterranean.

### SOCIAL LIVING

West of Bodrum, in the hidden bend of Haremtan Cove, the hubbub of the city ebbs away to leave nothing but endless blue. Ruined windmills sit high atop the hill, overlooking gulets bobbing in the bay – on the horizon, the twinkle of the Greek island of Kos. Despite its prime position, just a 10-minute drive from the cobbled marina, the cove had remained relatively untouched. Enter Sunset Hospitality Group, the masterminds behind Bodrum's chicest new hotel opening, Mett Bodrum (*doubles from AED 1,340; mettsocialliving.com*). The property marks the debut hotel for the group, the first of 12 Mett Social Living properties scheduled to pop up in destinations like Sardinia, Marbella and Mykonos.

While the hotel opened in May, Mett Bodrum has been a long time coming, stalled by the pandemic and a desire to open only when the time was right. "We could open, but we didn't want to,"

gentle hum of DJ beats and superyacht tenders zooming by.

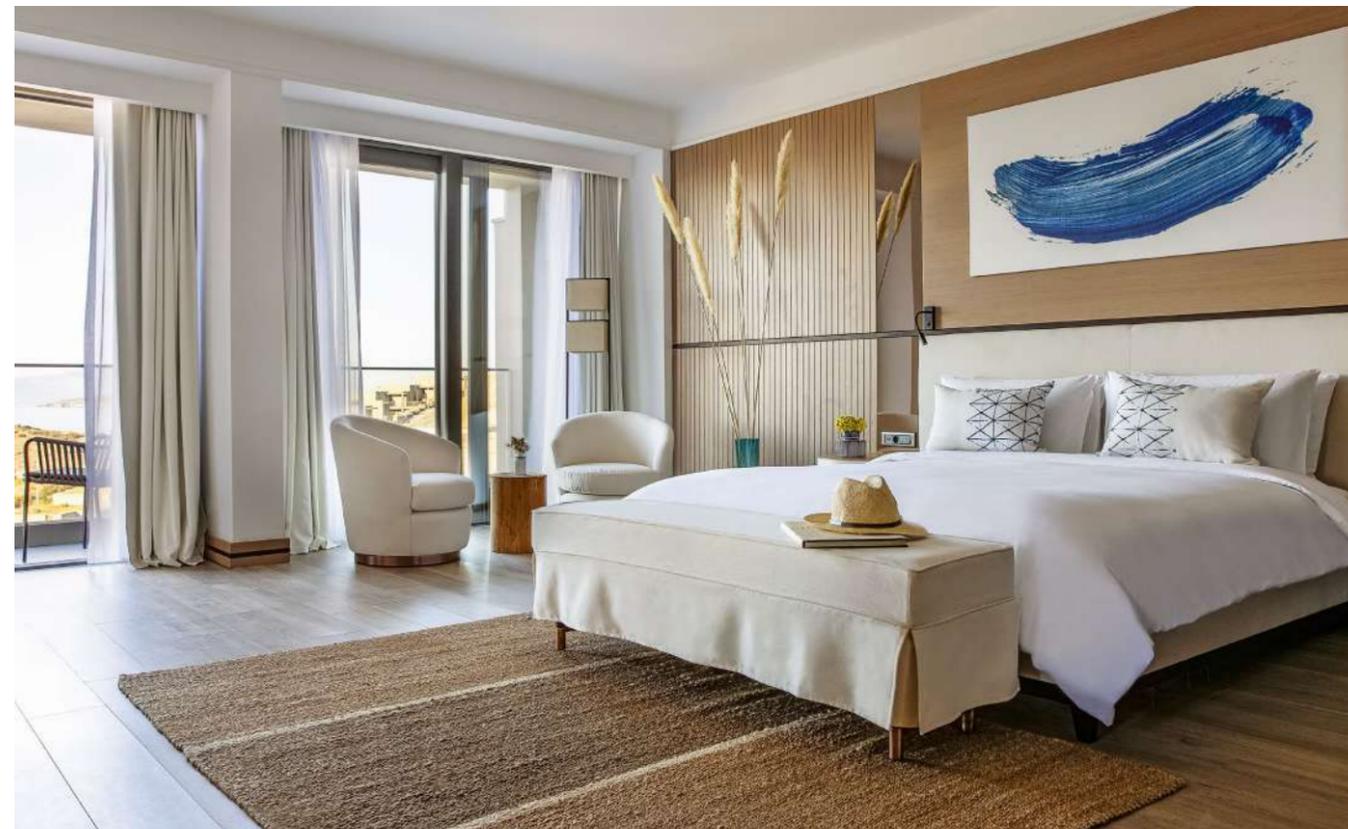
The tenders are heading to Folie, the hotel's flashy beach club and restaurant occupying a delicate wooden structure hovering above the sea. Canary yellow sunbeds pepper the waterside deck, and pretty young things sip on French drinks and loll on sunken hammocks. A saxophonist makes his rounds, entertaining diners who slurp on fresh seafood pasta and crack open lobster.

Guests can frolic at Folie until sunset, when Mood Lounge opens. A sultry sundowner spot by way of Dubai, the lounge's Bodrum venue is carved into the rocks, serving Pan-Asian cuisine and drinks. Elsewhere, roaming poolside eatery Gulet serves zingy fresh tacos, while Otto champions modern Turkish cuisine in a Mediterranean setting – also the backdrop for wholesome Turkish breakfasts. Another Dubai standout joining the fray is Italian Isola, the younger sister of Isola Ristorante in Jumeirah Islands Clubhouse.

### LOCAL CONNECTIONS

The Bodrum peninsula spans 215 kilometres, with grove-covered mountains and clusters of chalky white villages. Tucked away on the northern coastline near Torba Bay, but just six kilometres from Bodrum town, lies Susona Bodrum (*doubles from AED 1,320; lxrhotels3.hilton.com*). The property, reborn last year under Hilton's LXR brand, juts out into the ocean on a garden-covered pontoon, a maze of brilliant white, Guggenheim-esque structures.

Susona takes its name from a mythological aquatic creature, →



PHOTOGRAPHS: UNSPLASH/ MERT KARHVECI, GOKHAN POLAT, ENGIN YAPICI

Clockwise from top: Guest rooms at Mett Bodrum; balconies offer picturesque Aegean views; Mett's slick of private beach

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and everything here is a nod to the ocean, from the rippled buildings to the panoramas from its sunlight-bathed lodgings. Susona has just 72 in total, a collection of ultra-modern sugar-cube structures with private pools, gardens and sweeping terraces. Looking out from a terrace across the bay shows the lay of the land, the tiny port of Torba with its decades-old cafés and sun-pummelled hills, their thick pine tree forests concealing ultra-luxury hotels.

Mandarins grow freely here, and their sweet smell permeates the salty sea air. Blooming fruit trees line Susona's grounds, an expanse fringed by soft ochre sands and stretches of wooden decking with ladders plunging into the sea. Occasionally, a secluded jetty juts out with a lonesome pair of sun loungers; elsewhere lies a protected family bay, while the main pontoon is dotted with billowing white cabanas and loungers.

"Susona, and LXR as a brand, is all about making local connections," says general manager Funda Eratici, who is transforming the hotel into one that champions the locale. Its deep-rooted connection to the land is palpable: bathrooms are stocked with mandarin-scented Atelier Rebul products and Spa Soul has a Turkish hammam menu. There's plenty of input from area artisans, too, in the form of sea-blue crockery sourced from the nearby villages.

Nothing, however, compares to the hotel's extensive and wildly underrated food and beverage programme – spearheaded by Kaya Demirer, founder of famed Frankie Istanbul – which is aiding an entire ecosystem. Menus at festive Frankie Beach Club, laid-back Ezi and fine-dining Malva are sourced from the peninsula and Aegean area, at local markets and from trusted suppliers. Mandarin jams and baklava, pink tomato salads and the freshest catch feature, but none are as intriguing as lionfish ceviche. A prickly and dangerous creature from the Red Sea, it found its way to the Mediterranean after the creation of the Suez Canal, causing havoc in the ecosystem due to over-population. Inside, the flesh is juicy and white; noticing this, Susona added lionfish ceviche to the menu, creating demand for skilled lionfish fishermen.

Guests can see this thoughtful process firsthand, on a trip to a local market with executive chef Gökhan Sinmaz. A kaleidoscope of the ripest tomatoes, creamiest cheeses and most fragrant herbs are snapped up, then transformed into a unique meal on return. Guests dine in bohemian Malva overlooking the coastline, dishes washed down by the finest Turkish grape paired by the impassioned resident sommelier, or Aegean-inspired drinks from the award-winning Malva bar. Other jollies beyond the property include a trip to local vineyards, a sandal-making workshop and a visit to Etrim Village, where luxury Turkish carpets are sold. But the swishest is jumping on Susona's sleek jet black houseboat to whiz across the peninsula to the iconic hotel Maçakızı, a stalwart since the 1970s, or pulsating Göltürkbükü – its wooden decks shining with sun-kissed limbs.

Tranquillity has long been sought in Bodrum's pale turquoise waters, and with openings like Four Seasons and Bulgari, it's set to draw an ever-more polished crowd. But one can still enjoy a simple life here, under the shifting sun as the sea changes from golden to silver and ultimately, eternal blue. ☺



## WHERE TO DRINK

Head to Bodrum town's winding cobbled waterfront for trendy Yula Bar, a thatch beach bar spilling out into the sea. Staff in colourful Hawaiian shirts dole out ice-cold local hops and fruity beverages to well-heeled locals as easy-breezy music fills the air. Many chairs are actually in the ocean, and no one bats an eyelid if you go for a dip mid-sip.

## WHERE TO EAT

Bodrum's culinary scene takes inspiration from the Mediterranean and the Middle East, and a visit to Bodrum isn't complete without sampling pide, a baked flatbread stuffed with toppings like cheese, sausages and spiced meat. Some of the best are at Hotel Torbahan's tiny marina-front café, a Torba favourite for 35 years. For more upscale international fare, there's Yalikavak Marina, where Zuma, Hakkasan and Nusr-Et all have outposts.

## GETTING THERE

Flydubai flies direct from Dubai International (DXB) to Milas-Bodrum Airport (BJV) twice a week, on Tuesdays and Fridays until September 28. Return business class fares from Dubai to Bodrum start from AED 6,000 and economy class fares start from AED 1,600. Flydubai packages, including flights and a stay at Mett, are also available from AED 4,730 per person. [flydubai.com](https://flydubai.com)

## ADDITIONAL INFO

The best time to visit Bodrum is from June to October, with peak season being July and August. The shoulder months bring fewer crowds and milder climes, with the sea at its warmest in September. Double-vaccinated passengers do not need a PCR test to enter Bodrum.

**Clockwise from top left:** Poolside breakfast at Susona; sea views from Malva Bar; Susona's modern and minimalist guest rooms; Frankie Beach Club. **Opposite:** A traditional Turkish gulet