



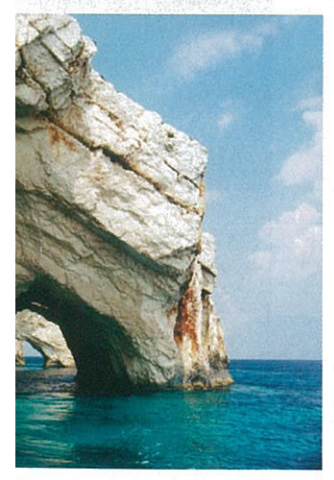
A night view of the Acropolis in Athens from the Hotel Grande Bretagne; Blue Caves on Zakynthos; the marble paved Arcadian Way at Ephesus leading to the 24,000-seat Grand Amhitheatre; the Blue Mosque, built in the early 1600s in present day Istanbul, Turkey

# HELLENIC FANTASY

**FROM THE ACROPOLIS TO THE COVES OF BODRUM PENINSULA, A TRIP TO GREECE AND TURKEY IS A JOURNEY BACK IN TIME.**

Despite continued unrest from the Greek debt crisis, and mass protests in front of the the Acropolis, the most important ancient site in the Western world, the Parthenon transcends politics, glowing honey gold at sunset, illuminated like a jewel. This magnificent view is ours on our first night in Athens, from the Hotel Grande Bretagne's Roof Garden. Looking out across the city to that ancient 3,000-year-old ruin, lit as if a desert mirage, is spine-tingling. Add to that a bottle of Pol Roger champagne (hard to find these days) and one of the best dinners we've ever eaten, and the memory becomes part of the romantic history of our marriage, like the ancient temple itself, whose main function was to shelter the monumental statue of Athena that was made by Pheidias out of gold and ivory.

BY DONNA BUNCE



Late on day three, we boarded the 148-guest *Wind Star*, one of Windstar's three-ship fleet of luxury sailing yachts, for a week's cruise through the Greek Isles into Turkey. It was exhilarating departing Athens harbor under sail, as Windstar's signature for its sailing yachts is the huge, self-furling, computer-operated sails.



A wooden boat or gullet in Bodrum harbor

We found our luxurious stateroom — each room has an ocean-view — filled with all the comforts of home. I especially appreciated the plush robes. We soon realized we could be as busy as we wanted. To view the dramatic coastlines, there was complimentary water-skiing, windsurfing, snorkeling, sailing, and kayaking from the ship's aft Marina Deck. A pool, Jacuzzi and fitness facilities were available, as well as a first-rate salon and spa — I had some great treatments during the week. It was nice to know there was a full-time physician on board, if needed, and my husband and I thought the informative lectures on the exotic places we visited enriched our interest and knowledge of the location.

Legendary Mykonos was our first stop. We wandered the quaint, narrow walkways early Sunday morning, just as the shops were opening, and residents were scurrying to their white-washed churches. Everything was white, even the walkways, with vivid splashes of color on doors, window frames, balconies, etc. We had lunch at a quaint café on the waterfront, with the waves crashing in, and the island's signature thatched windmills off in the distance.

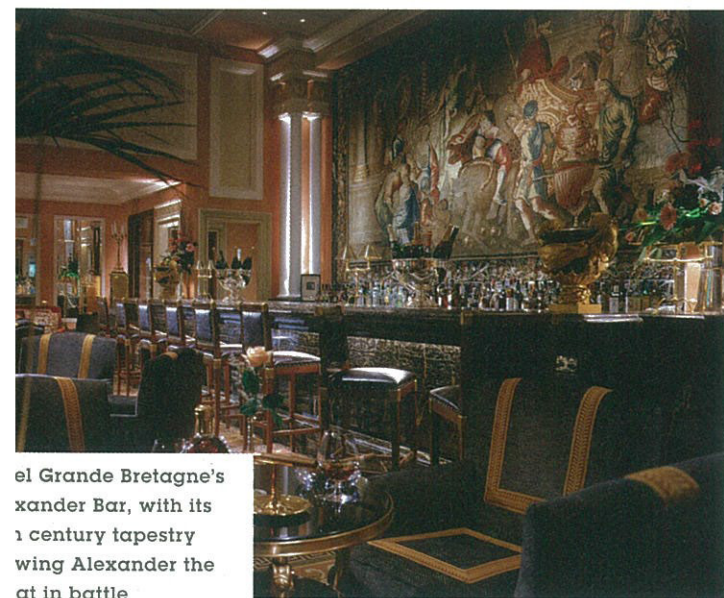
The next day, the beautiful isle of Santorini greeted us with its cliff-hanging towns filled with beautiful white-washed, colorfully-domed buildings offering magnificent views of the cobalt blue Aegean. The crescent shaped island is widely believed to be a candidate for the lost Kingdom of Atlantis from an eruption that left a huge crater in the middle — today's caldera. We ate lunch in Fira, Santorini's capital, 1,000 feet above where the *Wind Star* was moored, on a bright, sunny day in a restaurant hanging out over a cliff with a magnificent view of the caldera. We later took a ride out into the island's interior and found that wines are produced throughout the island and that viticulture, along with tourism, is the main source of income for the locals. Back in Fira, we had a choice of a donkey ride or a cable car down the cliffs to the ship. The cable car won out.

Our next stop was Rhodes. The island's principal city, Rhodes, has been famous since antiquity as the site of the Colossus of Rhodes, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The city boasts one of the best preserved medieval towns in Europe and was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1988. The Grand Masters Palace dominates the town, and, walking along the labyrinth of narrow streets, we came upon the Archeological Museum, housed in a 15th century building, where we spent a few hours finding out more about this ancient island. We had a delightful lunch in the heart of the city at a second-story restaurant overlooking the main square, where I ate my first Gyro.

Bodrum, Turkey, one of the most charming cities and sophisticated resorts on the Aegean coast, is a boat-building center from the days of Cleopatra. Lining the waterfront were wooden boats, or gullets, which have plied the waters for centuries. Known as Halicarnassus in ancient Greek times, the city reached its zenith under governor Mausolus, who ruled from 377 BCE to 353 BCE. His wife Artemisia, who succeeded him, ordered the construction of what turned out to be the biggest tomb ever built by the ancient Greeks, the great white marble Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, which

Staying at the five-star, 136-year-old Grande Bretagne, situated in the heart of the city in Constitution Square, gave my husband and I the opportunity to see the changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and to peruse the city's main shopping mecca, the Plaka, a short walk from the property. The newly-renovated nine-story hotel, once the most luxurious mansion in Athens, was elegance and style personified. The mammoth 18th-century tapestry of Alexander the Great in battle suspended in the hotel's Alexander Bar, which is rated Best Hotel Bar in the world by *Forbes* magazine, was stunning.

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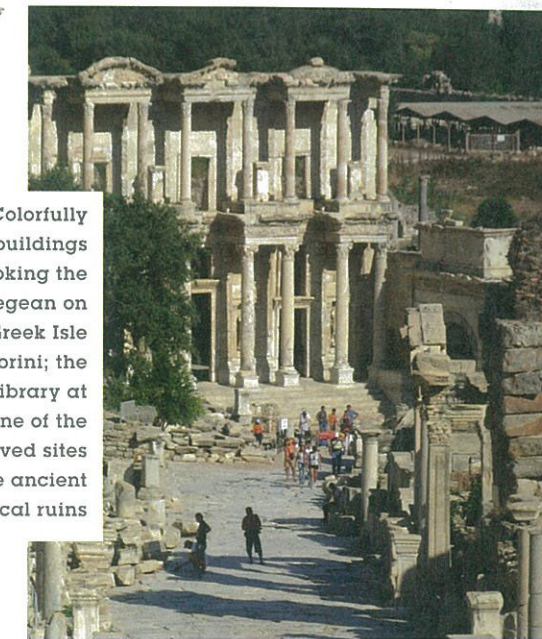
el Grande Bretagne's Alexander Bar, with its 18th-century tapestry of Alexander the Great in battle



made the Seven Wonders list and gave us the word "mausoleum." Today, only the massive foundation remains, due to an earthquake that destroyed it in the 14th century, and when we toured Bodrum's stunning Castle of St. Peter, which stands at the entrance of the harbor, we were told the Knights of St. John had used the stones from the tomb as building materials in their construction of the castle in 1522.

Next came the second highlight of the trip, right after the night view of the Acropolis — cruising the magnificent coves of the Bodrum peninsula on a wooden gullet with eight of our shipmates. The day was sunny and beautiful, and swimming to shore in the warm, sparkling blue Aegean, I grabbed some stones from the ocean bed, which lie today on a coffee table in our home, a reminder of that glorious day. A traditional Turkish lunch, cooked onboard, was a delight, and the Turkish coffee turned out to be quite the topic of conversation when our Turkish guide read our fortunes from the coffee dregs.

Docking the next day at Kusadasi, a small Turkish port along the shores of a beautiful bay, we took a 35-minute ride to Ephesus, one of the grandest and best preserved of all the ancient classical ruins. It was once a thriving port of trade connecting Europe, Asia and Africa, with its demise occurring with the silting of its harbor. Today, it sits six miles from the sea. In its heyday 2,000 years ago, Ephesus was the second largest city in the Roman Empire, after Rome itself, with nearly 250,000 inhabitants. It had street lighting and public toilets, and the multi-storied houses of the nobility with their fine mosaics and frescoes featured indoor plumbing with running water and indoor toilets, thanks to an ingenious sewer system. Walking into the city on the marble-paved Arcadian Way, which once extended to the ancient port and was lined with shops and covered archways, was awe-inspiring, especially knowing that Alexander the Great walked there, as well as Antony and Cleopatra on their honeymoon. It leads to the 24,000-seat Grand Theatre, known for its incredible acoustics. Used today for theater and dance performances, including a recent Elton John concert, the



Colorfully domed buildings overlooking the blue Aegean on the Greek Isle of Santorini; the Celsus Library at Ephesus, one of the best preserved sites of all the ancient classical ruins

The day was sunny and beautiful, and my swim in the warm, sparkling, cobalt blue Aegean was both invigorating and relaxing. Swimming to shore I grabbed some stones from the ocean bed, which lie today on a coffee table in our home, a reminder of that glorious day.



## GO THERE

■ **CRUISE IT** :: Carrying just 148 to 312 guests, the luxurious sailing yachts of Windstar cruise to nearly 50 nations, calling at 100 ports throughout Europe, the Caribbean and the Americas. Here's the breakdown: *Wind Star* (148 guests); *Wind Spirit* (148 guests); *Wind Surf* (312 guests).  
800.258.7245 :: [windstarcruises.com](http://windstarcruises.com)

■ **GET GOOSEBUMPS** :: Viewing the beautifully lit Acropolis at night from the five-star Hotel Grande Bretagne's Roof Garden is worth the trip to Athens. After dinner, visit the Alexander Bar on the hotel's ground floor.  
:: Hotel Grande Bretagne, Athens, Greece  
:: +30 210 3330000 :: [starwoodhotels.com](http://starwoodhotels.com)

■ **PAMPER YOURSELF** :: If you want to create an exclusive experience for yourself at such world-renowned sites as Istanbul's Topkapi Palace or the ancient ruins at Ephesus, 10-year Istanbul resident and Sea Song Tours President Karen Fedorko-Sefer can make the arrangements. Working with Turkey's Culture Ministry and with museum directors, she can arrange for you to enjoy private lunches, dinners and concerts at the prestigious sites.  
:: Sea Song Tours :: 90.212.292.8555  
:: [seasong.com](http://seasong.com)

■ **ENJOY THE VIEW** :: The contemporary Hilton Istanbul Hotel, overlooking the beautiful Bosphorus Strait in Istanbul, features a number of restaurants with water views – the hotel's Roof Bar and Restaurant, the Bosphorus Terrace, and The Lobby Veranda Bar and Grill. The Dragon Restaurant, while not offering a view, features Cantonese and Sichuan specialties with Chinese décor and wooden screens.  
800.992.4023 :: [hilton/istanbul.com](http://hilton/istanbul.com)

One of the many excavated homes of the nobility in Ephesus

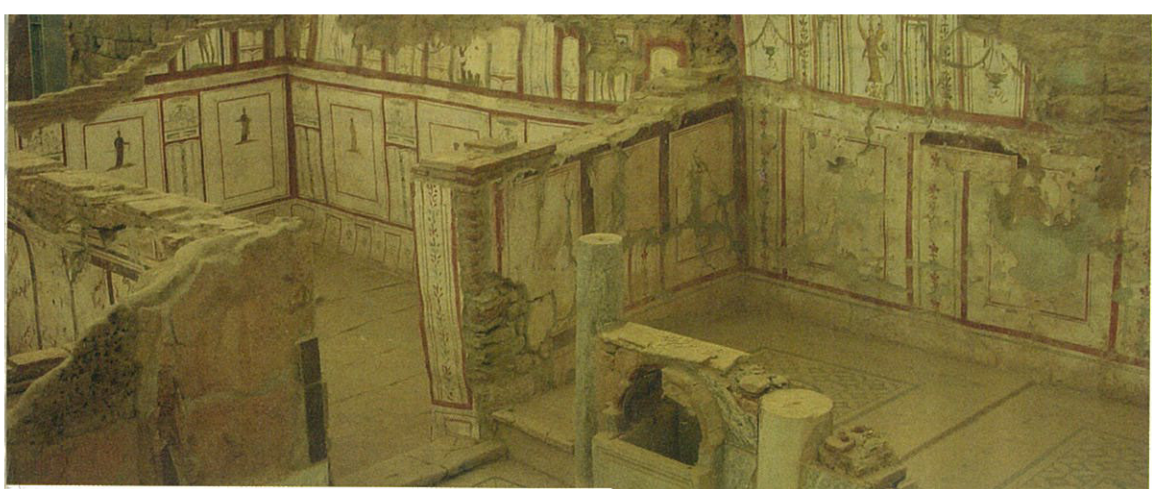


One of the many excavated homes of the nobility in Ephesus

Constantinople, and Istanbul over the centuries. We stayed in the Hilton Istanbul, lavishly decorated in white marble, with Turkish rugs and large brass urns. It is arguably one of the best-located Hiltons in the chain, perched high on a hill overlooking the Bosphorus Strait.

Istanbul embraces two continents, with one arm reaching out to Asia and the other to Europe. Our first stop was to visit the Byzantine Hippodrome, where chariot races in honor of the emperors once took place, and the famous Egyptian Obelisk still stands. Nearby, the magnificent Blue Mosque, built in the early 1600s and featuring six graceful minarets, was named for the blue Iznik tiles used for its interior decoration. Just as impressive, the monumental Hagia Sophia, built in 537 CE, was once the greatest church in Christendom until the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 by Sultan Mehmet II, who ordered the conversion of Hagia Sophia into an Ottoman mosque. The Topkapi Palace was our next stop. Now a museum, overlooking the Golden Horn and the Sea of Marmara, it was for four centuries the imperial residence of the Sultan and his court and the seat of government for the Ottoman Empire. Viewing the lavish costumes of the Turkish sultans and the over-the-top treasures of the Ottoman Empire was a treat.

In visiting the Underground Cistern, an underground cavern, we found that it was supported by 336 columns that were salvaged from pagan temples destroyed during the Roman Empire's conversion to Christianity. The Grand Bazaar, open since 1461, could easily be called the world's oldest shopping mall. Its 92 winding, arched passageways, crammed with 4,000 tiny shops, is a treasure trove of all things Turkish – carpets, brass, copper, jewelry, textiles, and leather goods. A stop at the nearby Egyptian Bazaar, or Spice Bazaar, built in the 17th century, featured stall of exotic spices, dried fruits, herbs, nuts, and Turkish sweets - flavors to add to the memories that will last a lifetime.



Istanbul's Egyptian Bazaar, or Spice Bazaar, built in the 17th century

amphitheater is where St. Paul preached to the Ephesians in ancient times. Marble Avenue leads from the amphitheater to the much-photographed, two-story Celsus Library. Other memorable stops here included the façade of the Temple of Hadrian, the Odeon, an intimate semicircle of seats where guests listened to poetry readings and music, the central square or town hall, and a columned area marking the northern edge of the agora, or market.

Spending the next day sailing to Istanbul, our journey took us through The Dardanelles, the straits running between the Aegean and Marmara seas, where decorated memorials and beautifully tended cemeteries reside on the Gallipoli Peninsula, north of the straits, marking the Gallipoli campaign of World War I, where so many soldiers are buried.

Once we docked in Istanbul, it was time to say farewell to the Wind Star staff, whom we enjoyed getting to know. We felt pampered, but not smothered, and definitely agreed we would travel again with Windstar. After disembarking, we joined our Sea Song Tour guide, Metin Gobekli, signaling the beginning of our Windstar Cruises three-day Istanbul tour. Gobekli was an excellent guide and introduced us to a city that has been the former capital of three successive empires – Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman, and has been known by the names Byzantium,

