



TURKISH DELIGHT

NOTED FOR ITS FINE BEACHES AND STUNNING MOUNTAIN SCENERY, TURKEY'S SOUTHWESTERN SHORE HAS BEEN DUBBED THE TURQUOISE COAST. BUT IT'S MORE THAN THE HUE OF THE WATER THAT LURES VISITORS HERE. GISELLE WHITEAKER CHECKS IN TO HILLSIDE BEACH CLUB.



The delights of the all-inclusive Beach Bar.

Walking from the bright, white, spacious bedroom, into the open air lounge that doubles as a terrace, the sunlight is dazzling. My friend Caroline and I stop in our tracks, mouths slightly agape. We arrived at Hillside Beach Club, on the outskirts of Fethiye on Turkey's southwestern coast, after dark last night, so this is our first glimpse of the view. And what a view it is.

The sky is a brilliant blue, propelling a light breeze that whispers through the air. Over a line of palm trees, the water in the bay ranges from emerald green to vibrant aqua. Not a ripple mars its surface. Greenery covers the hills, tumbling towards the water, and in the far distance, beyond the mouth of the bay, a rocky island is framed by a mountain range. "I've never stayed at a place like this," says Caroline through a broad smile.

Hillside Beach Club is an all-inclusive resort, and we intend to spend our first morning exploring our new home. We race down the stairs between the layers of rooms, which are gently stacked on each other, subtly wending their way uphill. Walking to the far end of the beach, we find Sanda Nature Spa, a serene oasis hidden in the forest, where waterfalls tinkle gently into rock pools. Treatments booked, we walk along the side of Silent Beach, a cosy kink in the bay reserved for adults.

Following the path towards the main beach, we pass two floating platforms, where a smattering of people are already soaking up the sun, bobbing on the mild swell. We pass the Beach Bar and Restaurant, which dishes up a fabulous set menu of fine Italian fare in the evenings, and follow a snaking path between the pebbled main beach and the pool. Guests are drifting in and out of the Main Restaurant, where an extensive breakfast is laid out, catering for all tastes.



The path to Silent Beach.



Floating pontoons.

A row of shops is underneath, next to Sanda Day Spa, which houses the resort's *hammam*, where guests can steam on a heated marble disc and have their worries scrubbed away. We find several bars; a volleyball court; rows of sun loungers; the watersports centre, where catamarans, paddleboards, windsurfing boards and sit-on-top kayaks wait for punters; a craft centre; and more, all manner of activities on tap. At the far end of the beach, sits a gleaming white edifice: Pasha on the Bay. This Mediterranean restaurant dishes up late breakfast and snacks throughout the day, before offering set menu dinner in the evenings.

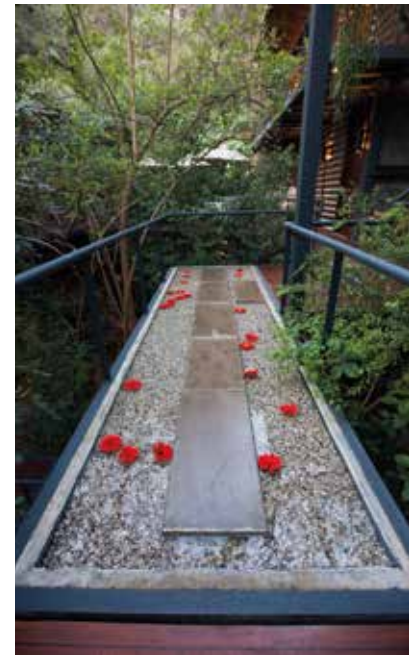
A few metres along a trail lined with lush evergreen trees climbing gently above the beach, we pass the motorised water sports centre, and in a second bay we find Serenity Beach, from which we catch a short boat transfer back to the main beach. I'd envisaged simply lying in the sun for a few days, occasionally venturing into the water to cool off. Instead, I download the Hillside app, scrolling through an incredible range of activities, from yoga to archery and Afro dance to Turkish lessons, choosing my own adventure.

All this exploration has made us hungry, so we drift into the Main Restaurant, to be faced with an appetite overload. Fresh salads, dips, grilled meats, seafood, Asian-inspired dishes, pasta, roasted meats – there is so much to choose from – not to mention the dessert buffet.

Returning to the table with melt-in-your-mouth braised lamb, a trio of dips, grilled beef patties, and a selection of salads, I pass the bread station, looking for pita bread. There's brown, wholemeal, sourdough, crusty baguettes, dinner rolls... but no pita. "Excuse me, where can I find bread?" I ask the man ladling a vegetable mix onto dough, which he slides into a pizza oven



Sanda Nature Spa.



The spa is nestled in a small forest.

Walking to the far end of the beach, we find Sanda Nature Spa, a serene oasis hidden in the forest, where waterfalls tinkle gently into rock pools.



The views at Hillside Beach Club are spectacular.



One of the light, airy rooms.



The Main Restaurant.



Pasha on the Bay.



on a long wooden paddle. He points to the bread section. "Flat bread?" I ask, trying to cross the language barrier. He indicates for me to wait and I watch him stretch another ball of dough, pounding it and slinging it through the air, before paddling it into the oven. Within minutes, the thin dough has turned golden and the chef slides it onto the counter, deftly slicing it and loading my plate. Bread doesn't get any fresher than that.

By the time the afternoon sun wanes, we've lazed on the beach, swam, and played bocchia – a boules game that has its own playing area by the beach. "Spa," Caroline says, a gleam in her eye, and we amble back to Sanda Nature Spa, submitting to our therapists' tender ministrations until we are purring with pleasure.

The sun is sending pink beams of light across the dusky sky as we enter Pasha on the Bay for dinner. It's the fitting end to our first day, feasting al fresco on an array of *meze*, from poached salmon with dill and a light lemon dressing, to *labneh*, a thick yoghurt dip topped with fierce diced chillies, and eggplant with tomato puree and yoghurt. "Now for the main," says our young waitress, delivering dishes of calamari, chargrilled octopus, and grilled prawns. To round it off, a chocolate parfait, the centre deliciously gooey, yet not overly rich.

Over the next few days, we immerse ourselves in the resort experience. We go wakeboarding, the mountains our backdrop as the boat skims across the clear salt water. Later, we soothe our tired muscles in the *hammam*. We play beach volleyball, paddleboard, and lie in sun. One morning, I try flyboarding, a thrill rushing through me when I finally manage to balance on the board and its twin jets push me up into the air. We're fast discovering the joy of being here is that you can do as much, or as little, as you like.

Throughout our stay, we meet people who come back here year after year. It's easy to understand why. Sometimes a hotel does well because of its location, sometimes due to its facilities and decor, and sometimes because of its friendly and professional staff. In Hillside Beach Club's case, it's all three. ■



Top: The azure waters are very inviting. Above: Main Beach. Below centre: Wakeboarding.

We go wakeboarding, the mountains our backdrop as the boat skims across the clear salt water.

INFO

Situated on the Aegean coast and overlooking the crystal-clear Mediterranean, Hillside Beach Club is a sun-drenched resort set within its own private bay near Fethiye in southwest Turkey. See www.hillsidebeachclub.com for more information.