

Jason and the Ugurnauts
Sail Turkey's Turquoise Coast
September 7-21, 2013



I chartered this gorgeous 35 meter Turkish *gulet* for \$36,000. It's named the *Ugur* which means luck. And it also means that The Dragon Lady and 12 friends sharing in the cost and adventure were my Ugurnauts.



With a captain, two deckhands, and an incredible cook we plotted to sail and cruise 280 miles from Bodrum eastward to Kemer. It was along the historically richest section, with Greek and Byzantium ruins everywhere, and along ancient mariner shipping routes. But before we explore the coast, let's explore the yacht.



The dream to sail this magnificent coast was born in December 1973. It was after being stuck in a 24-hour curfew during the Athens coup, tanks everywhere, when my then girl friend (Wende, the uptight one that became a dog doctor) and I flew into Cairo, then Beirut. This was just three weeks after the Yom Kuppur War, the region was still uber tense, and the planes empty. We planned to head across Asia to India but in Damascus we ate bad chicken and she got so sick, spewing out of every orifice, and wasted away so fast I feared she was going to croak. I phoned the British Embassy doc who was kind enough to do a hovel call and pump her full of antibiotics.



I have a Kevlar stomach and quickly (and mostly) recovered but she was very weak so we limped up through northern Syrian to Turkey, heading to Rhodes and familiar food and surroundings to recover (which we did for three weeks in December and over New Years of 1974). It was while busing along the southern Turquoise Coast that I first laid eyes on the graceful *gulets* and a yearning was born to sail this coast. Especially when the bus kept passing ancient, over grown ruins every 15 miles! Just lying there! Unexcavated!



Well, it took five trips to Turkey - one of my very favorite countries, right up there with Thailand and Nepal - but that dream finally came true 40 years later. And I ain't a backpacker traveling on a shoestring no more. We did it with

class.







The master cabin. Because my name is Jason we got it, naturally. The others weren't so bad either, but I enjoyed bragging about how ours was so far down the hall that I had to take a taxi, and then a camel caravan across the enormous expanse of the bed itself. And how for my birthday on Sept. 14 I booked the Eagles to perform in it (but communications got mixed up and they ended up playing Toontown on that date).





We met at the fabulous Su Otel in Bodrum the day before boarding. This, and all the fish eye shots, are from the camera of *Angry Planet* producer Peter Rowe, aka Don Pedro. He arrived the day after wrapping principal photography on *Shipwrecked on a Great Lake* about a true life adventure during the War of 1812.



There's no other museum in the world like the one filling the Crusader castle in Bodrum. I've been reading George Bass' stunning articles in *National Geographic* since the '60s. He's one of the living giants of adventure and exploration - the Father of Underwater Archaeology - and since the late 1950s he's discovered and excavated over 200 Bronze Age shipwrecks along the coast, most from the section we were sailing.



Indeed, George is such a Bronze Age man that he's even been cast in it. He's retired back to the States but since he contributed to *Adventurous Dreams*, *Adventurous Lives*, and wrote one of the best endorsements (challenging readers to try to put down the book after reading my introduction), I emailed him that several of us planned to visit his museum.



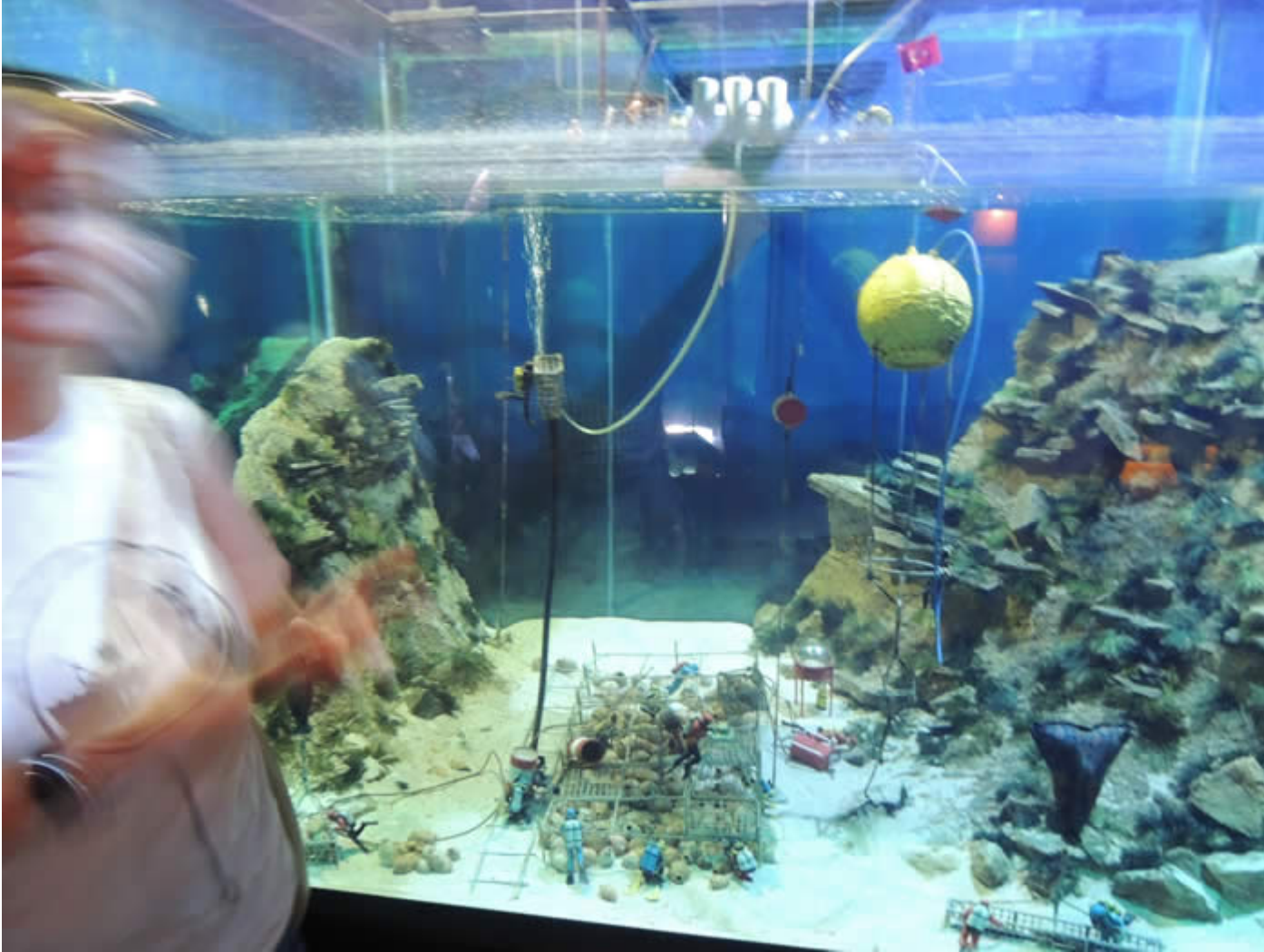
George kindly set us up with Tuba Ekmekci, the local Director of the Institute of Nautical Archaeology which operates the museum as well as continuing exploration along and under the coast. George founded the Institute which does underwater research all over the world, including in the Yukon with John Pollack, head of the Canadian Chapter of The Explorers Club and a good friend of mine. George was an Honorary Director of the Club. He's a man who has lived his dreams of adventure big time.



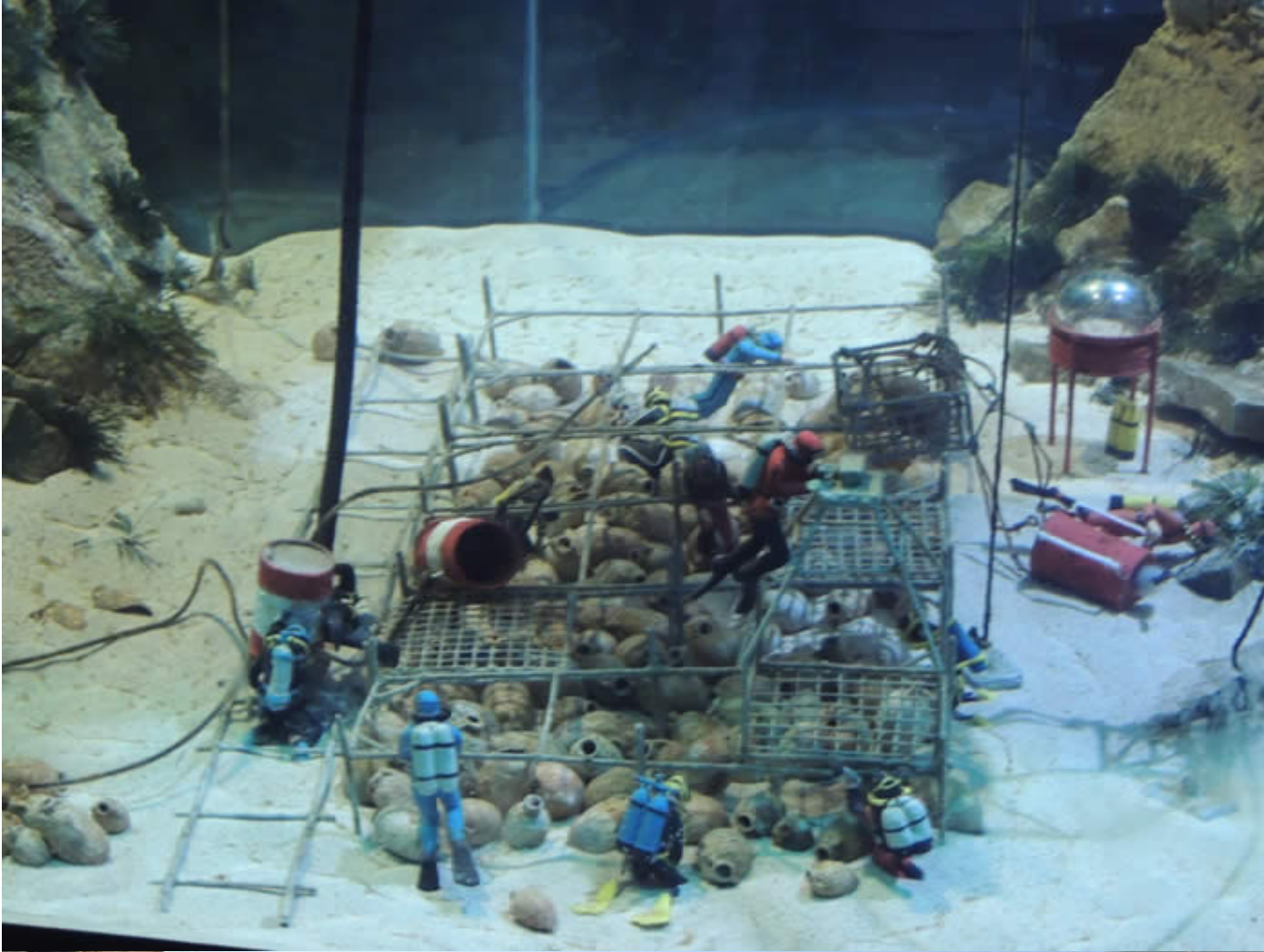
The museum is stupendous - and made more so for the eight of us by the intelligent, knowledgeable, personable and dedicated Tuba who generously took the afternoon off from moving house (into George's old digs) to take us behind the scenes and deep into George's World. Her passion poured through as she led us through the entire, huge museum, and it was late afternoon before we wrapped. To say it was an enriching experience is to speak in understatement. Thank you again Tuba.



Then we boarded and began exploring the coast George - and the ancient mariners - knew so well. When I asked him if there was a place where he found most of the wrecks, he replied, "Points. When we dived on a point, we always found wrecks."



We couldn't sail past a point without me thinking of George being here. I was NAUI certified in 1967 and have dived all over the world, and love it. And I love archaeology, and the thrill of discovery that goes with it, of course. If there's one life I'd trade in *Adventurous Dreams*, it would be with George's.



The coast above the water line is loaded with old Greek, Byzantine-Roman and Ottoman sites as well.



This is an ancient, crumbling Hellenistic ruin. No, wait, sorry. This is Jyll Batten-Not-So-Young. She's an ancient, crumbling Hellish ruin. The following are ancient, crumbling Hellenistic and Lycian ruins:

















Cusco? Machu Picchu? No, Arykanda, an ancient Lycian (a confederation of Greek cities) city near Finike. This was probably done about the 2nd century AD.



Carolyn Rowe, Hooker (cousin Leanna's last two men were Johns) and heroic Jason of the Ugurnauts.



"Stand in the door and I'll take your picture."

"...Uh, no, you stand in the door."

"I said it first."

"Well, I said it second...."



When we weren't exploring ruins we were cruising - or sailing. Exploring those ancient Greek and Roman mariners' trading routes in their manner. The Mediterranean climate is incredible, perfect.



Several swims a day in the lapis lazuli blue water was a given. This is lovely Maya Batten-Young, who I've known since she was dumping her diapers and who won the Best Actress Award at the Whistler Film Festival for her co-starring role in 2007's feature *River*. Atom Egoyan praised her to the rafters.



This beauty is a Don Pedro shot. He should dump whatever it is he does for a living and take up photography. The tootsies belong to Lady Danger - *Treasure Trader's* Jessica Lindsay Phillips.



The Out Of Tune Singers entertained. (Well, Laurie left, can carry a tune well. The rest are Flasher, Hooker and Don Pedro.)



Some read dirty books. This bunch were as politically incorrect as Lee Rivers, the protagonist in this grand adventure sweeping across Southeast Asia, from the mountains of Nepal to those of Manhattan. My kinda people. And you can guess whose life Lee Rivers is modelled on.



Others relaxed. I've said I'm never happier than when I'm in my hammock in northern Saskatchewan canoeing. Well, hammocking while sailing the Turkish Riviere is just as good.



Though admittedly Lady Danger looks better in it than I do.



It's hilarious walking down a street with her, especially when she's dressed to the 10s and in 4" lifts making her 8' tall. Heads everywhere swivel so fast they almost spin off. She also shot an episode of Ihor Macjiwsky's *Mantracker*. Both are fellow members of The Explorers Club. You'll be seeing a lot more of her. This fun, high energy broad's on her way to stardom.



Don Pedro's a member too. So over it all we flew The Explorers Club pennant in addition to our national colours.



I mentioned I had a birthday, rolling over 67 on the odometer. The Urganauts threw me the best party of my life. With Don Pedro doing a remarkable Ed Sullivan as MC, he brought on the rap quartet of Carolyn, Kristi, Hooker and Lady Danger who did a hilarious and energetic rap thing that was brilliantly funny, followed by Laurie who did an excellent and breathy Marilyn Monroe Happy Birthday imitation a la John Kennedy at Madison Square Gardens.



Then we partied and danced until the wee hours...or at least 11pm for me, which is incredibly wee. I don't have good pictures. Ah, hell, you hadda be there....



Jason at 67, but still 10 inside. The big difference is that now when I go out to play, it's out to play all over the world.









The old Romantic Mediterranean still exists here in pockets, but it's Westernizing fast.



Thirty years ago the standard uniform of the women was that of this buba. Now the young generation is all about halter tops, shorts and cell phones.



The Turkey I first fell in love with was this traditional old Ottoman one. It's largely given way, at least along the coast, to modern buildings with a fraction of the character. The standard issue to men then was a mustache, a brown "sports" jacket and pants, the backs of shoes stepped forward on creating goofly looking slippers, worry beads in one hand and a cigarette in the other.



The cigarettes are still there but now they're all blue jeans and Western European. Cross cultural miscues - the most humorous being "Beauty Saloons" replete with Wild West swinging doors - are all MIA.



The Turkish Riviera boasts arguably the largest yachting community on the planet, and that's sailed in a lot of

change



There's a hell of a nightlife. Several times Lady Danger (she backhanded one rude guy off a bench, giving me grist for jokes forever), Maya and Kristi - our younger contingent - disappeared into it until 6am. Well, girls just wanna have fun. And geezers like me just wanna have sleep. I'm still partied out from Bangkok's Patpong Road in the '80s.



But the essential Ottoman character is often kept. I'm sure back in the interior of Anatolia there's still the old Ottoman Turkey to be found.







And when we weren't exploring we were EATING.



Husiyen Karatas is one of the BEST cooks we've experienced. I live in Thailand part time and love their world-famous cuisine - but Turkish food is its equivalent. Stir in Husiyen, and it's even better! Madame Su and I agree: we have never spent two weeks eating better and with a greater variety. And he did it all on a grill like this - or a hot, galley kitchen 10 feet long. He became a close friend to many on this voyage, including us. We hope he'll guest at our place so I can cook him Canuck food.



I pigged out. This is a picture of me boarding a bus after the trip. No, wait. That's Bigelow.



As it turned out poseidon, the nautical weather website, threatened a storm and we had to end our trip a day and 55 miles short of Kemer, at Finike. But that was fine with the majority. There were lots of sights and sites to see and it actually worked out better.



The cruise was a dream fulfilled (and I'm all about living dreams). My noble and high spirited Ugronauts, L-R lower: Peter "Don Pedro" Rowe, "Admiral" Don Bigelow, my Uncle Don Symons. 2nd row: The Dragon Lady, cousin Leanna "Hooker" Keyes, Jessica "Lady Danger" Phillips, Shirley Bigelow, Kristi Pavelich, Laurie Symons. Top: Bev "Flasher" Pavelich, Maya Batten-Young, Jyll Batten-Not-So-Young, Carolyn Rowe. Thanks much to Jyll for the appro t-shirts.



We regrouped in the fabulous Old Town in Antalya, with most of us staying at the Tuvana, a great old refurbished Ottoman place, and we had our Last Suppers. The first overlooking the dramatic Roman harbour presenting one of the greatest dinner views on Earth. Across the bay mountains surge toward the sky. I don't want to show it. My travel

writing has done enough damage over the years.



The second was the next evening at an old Ottoman place with the stragglers. I got a kick out of teasing Uncle Don about his pronunciation of Istanbul as Instanbul. "Bigger stones

than that have bounced off me," he joshed in his inimitable manner.





Partings after such a dream trip were emotional. Indeed, the tender hearted Maya was in tears. I tried my best to console her by soothing, "Hey, if Jyll was my mother, I'd cry too. All day. Every day." It didn't work. She just wailed

louder.



Good-night Turkey's Riviera. It's on to the next adventure, but we'll be back sooner than later. Fortunately, we still have another 10 days exploring this fascinating country with its wonderful people, places, history, food and national hospitality. And that'll form the next Blah Blah.