

South Aegean



With its coast home to some of the country's largest and most popular resorts and its interior seemingly filled with the faded wonders of lost civilizations, the south Aegean would seem the perfect place to experience the best of both modern and ancient Turkey. True, the region has its critics – its swarming, package-orientated holiday towns are not to everyone's taste and there are too many examples of once-idyllic hillsides having been submerged beneath gluts of ugly, hastily erected hotels and holiday apartments – but the good points easily outweigh the bad.

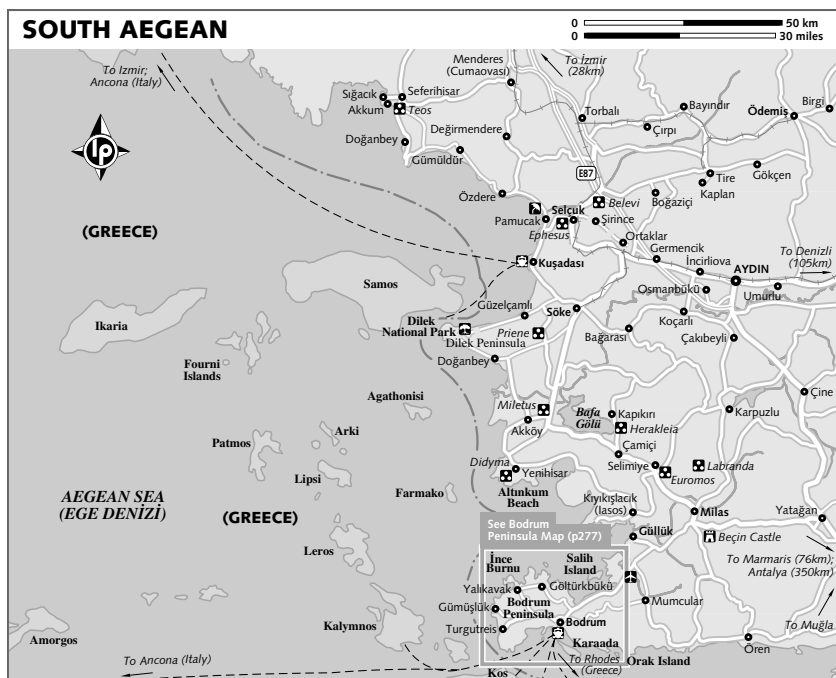
Development has extended its tentacles inland, but its embrace is by no means complete. Unspoilt, undeveloped pockets remain at places like Pamucak and the Dilek National Park, a glorious wilderness and wildlife haven. So rich is the area's history that it sometimes seems that for every modern high-rise there are another three ancient ruins. These include the grand-daddy of them all, Ephesus, one of the Mediterranean's best-preserved classical cities, even if it is today as big a tourist trap as any of the coastal towns, and often just as crowded. Priene, Labranda and Iasos receive far fewer visitors, and as such perhaps offer more pointed evocations of the faded past, their ancient stones now overgrown with weeds and home to scuttling lizards.

But you can only deny the area's true nature for so long. For all its aesthetic and historic wonders, there's no denying that the south Aegean is primarily visited for its party towns: Kuşadası, bloated, ugly and almost entirely artificial, but possessing a fine and surprisingly varied nightlife; and classier Bodrum, with its winning summer combination of cool cafés and a thumping, pumping, laser-strobing club scene.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Come see how the Romans lived, worked and played at **Ephesus** (p246), the best-preserved classical city in the eastern Mediterranean
- Explore the fragrant world of fruit wine at the charming hillside village of **Şirince** (p251), set amid blooming orchards
- Dive intensely, dine stylishly and dance wildly in **Bodrum** (p267), the region's premiere party town
- Try tracking down the rare Anatolian panther, then cool off with a swim in a secluded cove in the wonderful wilderness of **Dilek National Park** (p259)
- Be overwhelmed by natural splendour at **Bafa Gölü** (p263), a glorious lake fringed by olive-clad hills
- Roam the remarkable but less-visited ruins of **Priene** (p261), **Miletus** (p262) and **Didyma** (p262)





History

The Mycenaean and Hittite civilisations were the earliest recorded along the south Aegean. From 1200 BC, Ionians fleeing Greece established themselves in the area along the coast and founded important cities at Ephesus, Priene and Miletus. South of Ionia was mountainous Caria where the great King Mausolus' tomb, the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, became one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Caria was also home to Herodotus, the 'Father of History'. Roman Ephesus prospered with rich trade and commerce, becoming the capital of Asia Minor. The city also attracted a sizeable Christian population. St John settled here with the Virgin Mary, where he is said to have written his gospel. In the 15th century the Knights of St John briefly captured the area now called Bodrum before the Ottoman forces took over.

SELÇUK

☎ 0232 / pop 27,280

For such a major tourist destination, visitors might expect Selçuk to be a bit more than it is. After all, it's the site of one of the Seven

Wonders of the Ancient World and boasts an excellent museum, a fine old basilica and mosque, a stork nest-studded aqueduct and, of course, the ruins of Ephesus right on its doorstep. However, compared to the vast tourism factory of nearby Kusadası, Selçuk's tourism industry is more of a small scale, workshop-sized affair. It's not exactly a provincial backwater, but it's not too far removed either, with a collection of pleasant, low-key pensions that cater mainly to independent travellers on budgets.

Orientation

Selçuk otogar (bus station) lies just east of the İzmir–Aydın road (Atatürk Caddesi), with the town centre and some pensions immediately north of it. Three pedestrianised shopping streets – Namık Kemal, Cengiz Topel and Sieburg Caddesi – run east from a round fountain on the main road, north of the otogar, through to the train station.

On the western side of the main road a park spreads out in front of one wing of the famous Ephesus Museum. Many more small pensions can be found in the quiet, hilly streets between