

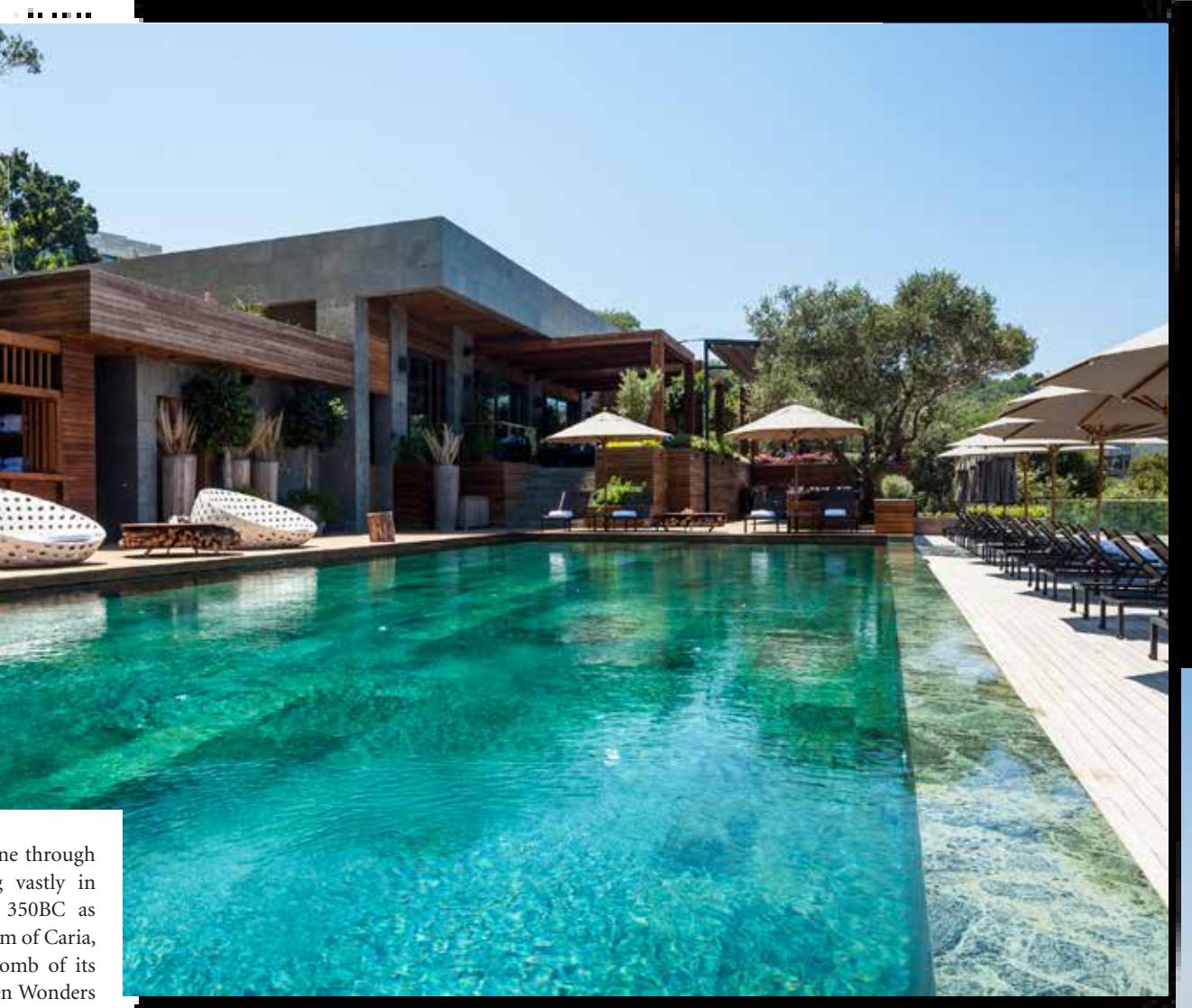
Bodrum BECKONS

The new Mandarin Oriental, Bodrum invites guests to sample all of the Turkish peninsula's local flavours – from its coastal towns to its azure bays and exotic cuisine – enjoying not only the resort, but also the destination, says Sevil Delin

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MING TANG-EVANS



This photo: the lobby of Mandarin Oriental, Bodrum. Opposite: the spectacular view of the Aegean Sea upon entering the hotel



THE AEGEAN TOWN OF BODRUM has gone through many phases in its long history, varying vastly in prominence and might. At its zenith in 350BC as Halicarnassus, the capital of the small kingdom of Caria, it was powerful enough for the towering tomb of its leader, Mausolus, to become one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Never truly recovering from the siege of Alexander the Great in 334BC, the peninsula, nevertheless, became home to a majestic crusader castle that still stands over the main city. It seems only appropriate that Herodotus, known as the Father of History, called this his home. But in the 20th century, Bodrum experienced an era of decline, until it shrank to a small seaside town known mainly for its sponge diving. Today, Bodrum is back on form, attracting visitors with its world-class marinas, dining and nightlife – not to mention its natural beauty.

New to the peninsula is **Mandarin Oriental, Bodrum**, located on the most sought-after point, the aptly named Cennet Koyu, or Paradise Bay. This unspoilt swathe of land has been lovingly tended and nurtured, with the maintaining of its original olive grove, the planting of a luxurious garden of one million plants, and the widening of its long beach with Black Sea sand that stays cool to the touch, even on the most blistering days. The hotel blurs the lines of the indoor and outdoor, beginning when you arrive at the Welcome Lounge, sited on a lofty wooden terrace with a panoramic view of the bay, an outdoor fireplace and gnarled, tropical trees. The theme continues in the guest rooms, where the bathtub overlooks the sea and a skylight pours in sunlight (or starlight), and reaches its peak at the idyllic 2,700-square-metre **Spa**, which is perched on a hillside ridge with a panorama of pine forests and the sea from its outdoor sauna, treatment cabanas and vitality pool. The dominant colours of the peninsula – tangerine and turquoise – set the tone inside, from the room keys to the handmade bathroom sinks.

Just as the hotel design merges the external and internal, the guest experience is about blending and variety. Those who seek a quiet retreat will gravitate to the VIP Spa Suite, with its private Turkish hammam bath and bay views, to dinner at a small table in the leafy Olive Garden, serving local delicacies such as succulent octopus, or to one of the isolated loungers on the 2.5-kilometre **Blue Beach**. Equally, the more energetic will favour the water sports, yachts, swimming platform and music at **JuJu Beach**, run by Babylon – one of Istanbul's foremost music and entertainment brands – followed by cocktails and dancing at a DJ

party until the small hours at the beachside **JuJu Bar @M2**. There are also tennis courts and a basketball court on-site, and guests can go hiking or horse riding in the hills. Younger guests can play in the cool indoors of the Panda Kids' Club, or at one of the two children's pools and playgrounds. When it comes to dining, there is a choice of nine restaurants and bars, offering Turkish, Italian and Japanese cuisine.

The hotel's elegant Turkish general manager, Nejat Sarp, returned to the country after some 30 years, in order to be part of this project, having been at the helm of Mandarin Oriental, Singapore. He not only wanted to bring the Mandarin Oriental experience to Turkey, but to also add an authentic Turkish touch to the property. 'This is not just a resort, it is a community,' he says. 'As Turks, our culture is hospitality. We want to bring that to the surface, and for the experience to be like coming to our home.'

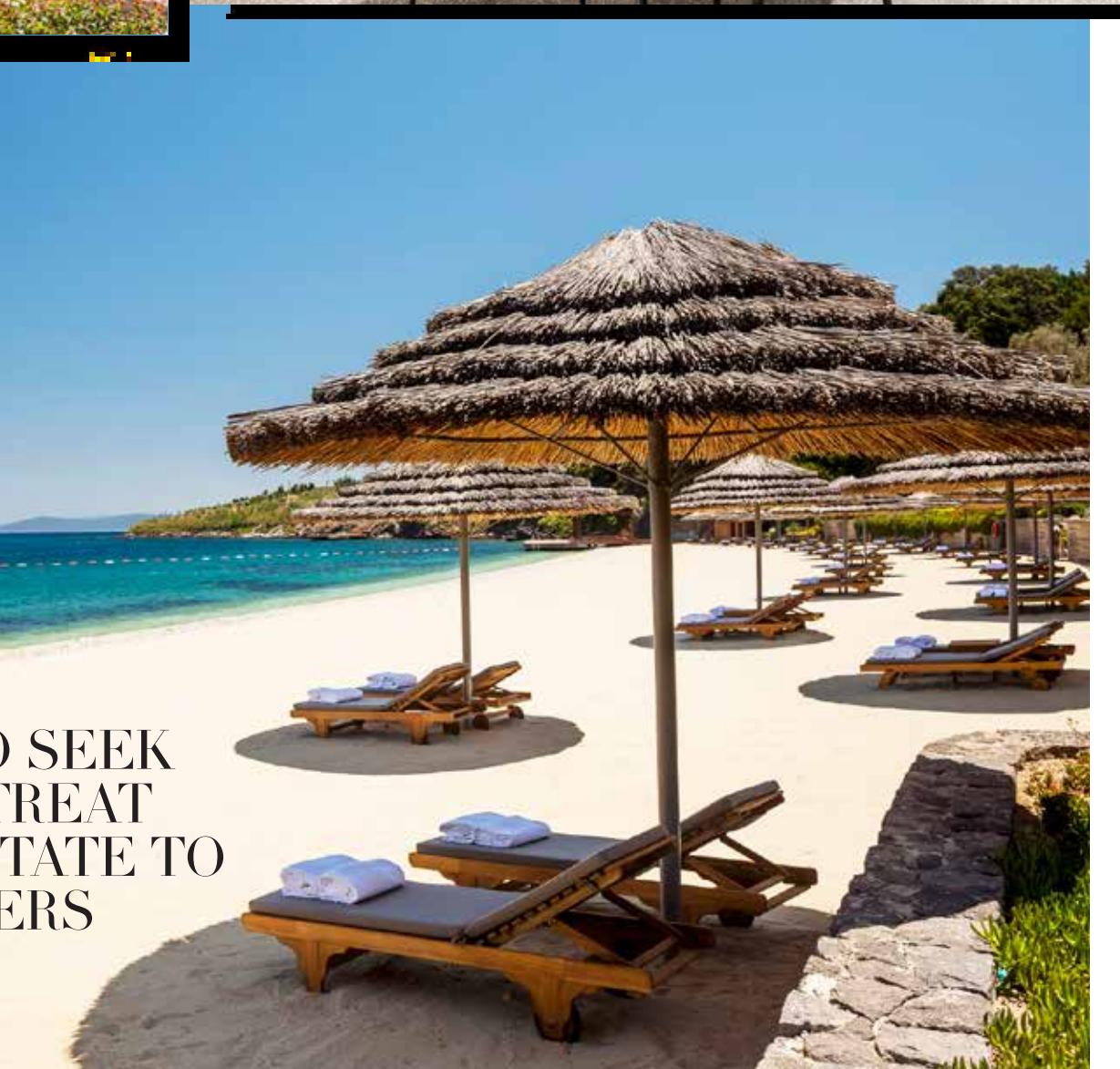
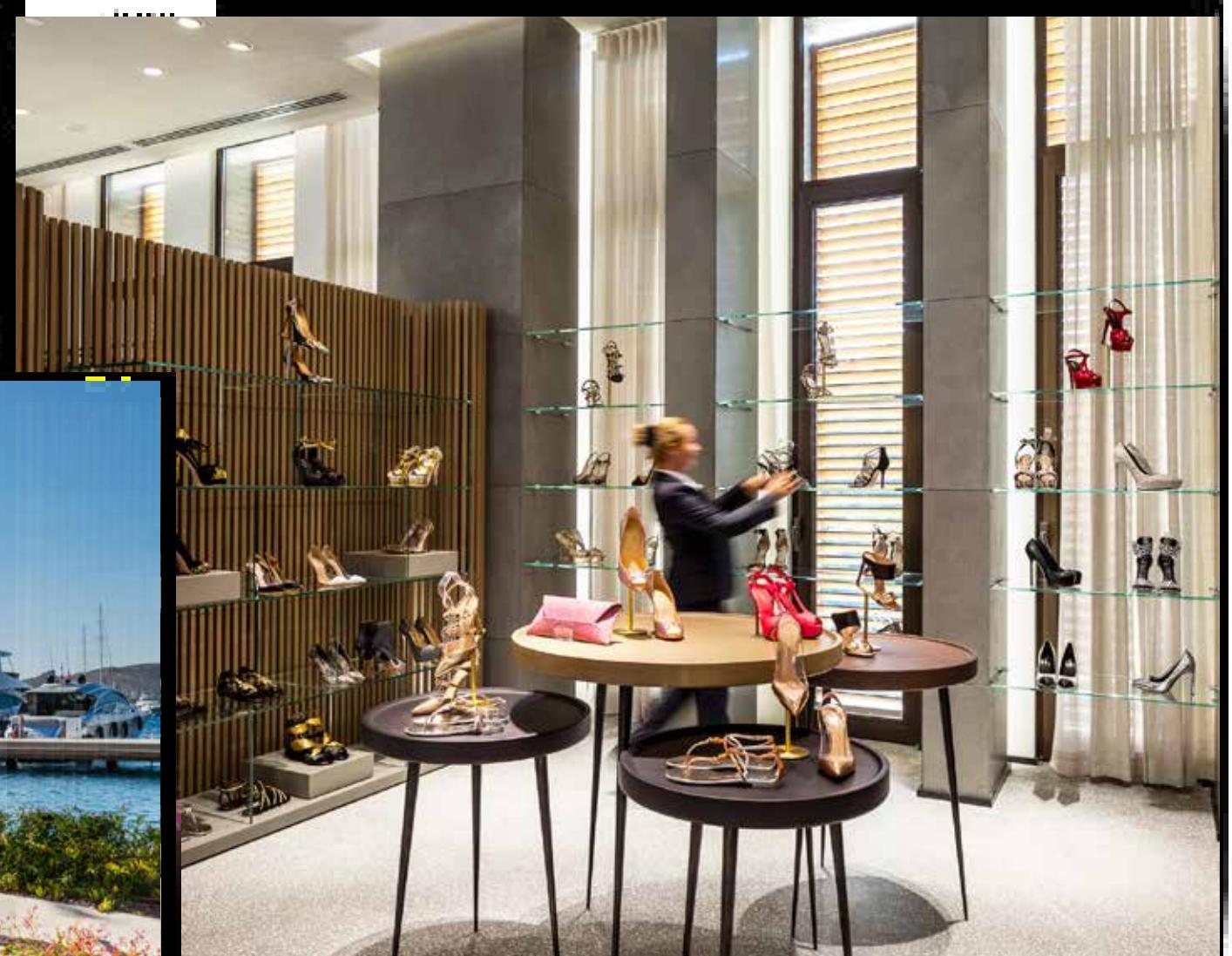
Aegean Turks are renowned for their welcoming, relaxed charm. And at Mandarin Oriental, Bodrum, everyone from the avuncular head concierge, Mehmet Sahinoğlu, to the housekeepers (mainly local housewives, who live by the mantra that cleanliness is next to godliness) is quick to smile and happy to help. The beaches and pools are within walking distance from the main rooms, but private buggies can spirit you to your next location – with the driver pointing out the acacias and laurels along the way.

The resort's luxury shops are a perfect blend of the Turkish and the international, too, with **Beymen Resort Store** carrying global brands

THE LOCATION ON A SECLUDED BAY FEELS REMOTE, BUT BODRUM IS AT YOUR FEET

This photo: the coastal setting of The Spa at Mandarin Oriental, Bodrum.
From far left: exotic bougainvillea found around the resort; the pool by the hotel's Italian restaurant, Assaggio; members of the concierge team

This page, clockwise from right: the Beymen Resort Store is one of the hotel's luxury retail outlets; the Blue Beach, with the hotel's loungers and a club and bar; the world-class yacht marina, Palmarina, at nearby Yalikavak. Opposite: the English Tower at the Castle of St Peter in Bodrum



**THOSE WHO SEEK
A QUIET RETREAT
WILL GRAVITATE TO
THE LOUNGERS**



such as Missoni Mare, Stella McCartney, Etro and Givenchy, while the jewellery and watch collections at Luxury Point include Sevan Biçakçı's Ottoman-inspired statement pieces. And among the decorative items at Home are Hiref's turquoise collection and plates by Burhan Doğançay, the celebrated Turkish artist who made Bodrum his home in his final years.

The hotel's location on a secluded bay, set back at the end of a long drive flanked by purple bougainvillea, feels remote and reclusive, but Bodrum – indeed, all of Turkey – is at your feet. In fact, its unique geographic location means that guests have a plethora of ways to explore both near and far by land, sea or air.

For those hiring a car or limousine to explore the entire peninsula, the first stop is Bodrum town, 25 to 30 minutes away. The historic centre features many important sites, such as the imposing **Castle of St Peter**. It was built in the 15th century by the crusading Knights of Rhodes using stones pillaged from the ruins of the 43-metre-high **Tomb of Mausolus**, which, although destroyed by an earthquake, lives on as the origin of the word 'mausoleum'. While the mausoleum can be visited, it takes some imagination to conjure up an image from its ransacked remains. The castle, however, is a must-see, as it is now restored and home to the **Museum of Underwater Archaeology**, which displays the treasures found in the peninsula's waters, as well as the tomb of Queen Ada, the wife (and sister) of Mausolus, complete with her jewellery and crown of gold leaves.

The **Bodrum Maritime Museum** in the centre of town offers a comprehensive history of seafaring in the area, and showcases an extensive collection of seashells on the second floor. And perched on a hill above Bodrum, there is a small but well-preserved classical theatre, dating from the time of Mausolus, that hosts concerts in the summer. It is worth wandering up to the top of the hill to see the somewhat dilapidated windmills, as they afford the best view of Bodrum Bay, including its dramatic breakwater, which is home to a working cannon. During the Islamic month of Ramadan, the canon is fired every night at sunset to signal the end of the fast, its sound echoing around the bay and the grey smoke rising near the castle. If you seek some respite from the sun, sea and sand, it is also possible to head inland to Etrim, 24 kilometres from Bodrum. This typical Aegean village located in the cool of the mountains invites you to mix with the easy-going locals, learn about carpet weaving and take a carpet home.

Bodrum owes a lot to the Oxford-educated Turkish writer and intellectual Cevat Sakir Kabağaçlı, who was exiled here in 1925 when it was a sleepy backwater; exile failed to have the desired effect, as he grew enamoured by the town and proudly bore the nickname 'Halikarnas Balıkçı', the Fisherman of Halicarnassus. Sakir did much to raise the profile of the region, both in Turkey and abroad, through his writing and connections with the Istanbul intelligentsia. He is said to have created the concept of the Blue Cruise – a voyage along the shores of the Aegean – when he took his friends on boat tours during their visits.

Mandarin Oriental has a traditional Bodrum 'gulet' – a handmade, wooden double-masted ship with a wide, rounded stern – available for its guests, either for a day trip around the peninsula's coves or for a **Blue Cruise**. Indeed, the sea remains the best pathway to explore the environs of the hotel, and is a destination in itself. The Marine Concierge can arrange yacht rentals and create tailor-made itineraries, from day tours of the local bays to excursions to nearby Greek islands, such as **Kos**, with its evocative Asklepion, a proto-hospital dating from 400BC. Water taxis and Zodiacs are also available to guests who wish to explore the nearest town, **Türkbükü**, only a five-minute boat ride away. The bay of Türkbükü is divided into two, with a small bridge connecting both sides. The two areas are quite different in atmosphere: the right-hand side of the bridge provides a more traditional, family feel, punctuated by bijou boutiques, such as **Kismet by Milka** (quirky jewellery and accessories by a young Turkish designer), while the left stretch attracts the glitterati from

Istanbul, with its fine dining restaurants situated on piers that jut into the bay. Night owls can zip over from the platform at M2 to carry on their revels at Türkbükü's upscale bars, including **Ship Ahoy**, a Bodrum institution, or the **Marina Yacht Club Jazz Bar**, which features live performances.

Yachting enthusiasts can dock their yachts at the hotel at the platform next to Juju Beach, but there is also a world-class yacht marina, **Palmarina**, a short distance away at **Yalikavak**. This new marina boasts high-end shopping and outdoor dining and nightlife options, including a branch of **Nobu** that recently opened beside a stunning infinity pool, a very popular **Cipriani** serving classic Italian fare, and a **Billionaire Club**, with outdoor chandeliers, throne-like seating and champagne parties. For a memento of your trip, **Mysabella** makes a modern, elegant version of the strappy summer sandals that are synonymous with Bodrum.

Perhaps the most memorable way to explore the region is by helicopter. Just over an hour's flight away is the town of Selçuk and the majestic ruins of **Ephesus**, the most spectacular ancient site in Turkey. This almost perfectly preserved city is on a par with Pompeii in terms of its ability to immerse the visitor in ancient history. The site is best known for its monumental Library of Celsus, but a number of luxurious private homes with intricate mosaics have been unearthed recently and can be visited. Nearby, the **House of the Virgin Mary**, where she is said to have spent her final years, is an important point of pilgrimage for believers from many faiths. Selçuk is also home to the unexpectedly lovely **Camlik Museum of Steam Locomotives**. Among the large collection of engines in a former train station are the private apartment wagons used by Atatürk, the first Turkish President, in his travels around the country. A tour of Ephesus and the House of the Virgin Mary can be completed in a couple of hours, followed by a catered lunch or candlelit dinner arranged by the hotel, before returning to the helipad at Mandarin Oriental, Bodrum. Another aerial option is to board a seaplane for a trip to nearby Izmir, or as far afield as Istanbul.

Depending on the time of year, there are several high-profile events on the local calendar. In the summer, there is the **Gümüşlük International Classical Music festival**, a fixture that began in 2004, its concerts held in the ancient stone quarry that provided the stones to build the Mausoleum. Marking the end of the season is the annual yacht regatta, the **Bodrum Cup**, which has been held in the third week of October since 1989.

The Bodrum Peninsula is a uniquely varied destination that offers visitors an unforgettable experience. And while its stunning geography is its driving charm, it has also become a culinary, artistic and cultural destination in its own right. But at the core of the peninsula is the hospitality and openhearted welcome of the Turkish people – as experienced at Mandarin Oriental, Bodrum – who take pride in sharing the ancient and modern wonders of their world with their guests.

