



THE TOP FIVE SUMMER SAILING DESTINATIONS

Here are some sailing destination ideas, to glide through the deep blue sea this summer... by **Dini Martinez** >>



Top left: Port Cogolin, France **Above:** Zakynthos, Greece **Left:** The Valley of the Temples, Agrigento **Centre:** Marmaris Harbour, Turkey

Istanbul and gathers speed until well past Crete. In its strongest months of July and August it can regularly reach 40 knots and more. If this doesn't scare you, then one of the world's most stunning island paradises is all yours to discover. Across hundreds of diverse islands you can find anything from glamorous Santorini and party-land Mykonos, secluded Astipalia and volcanically peculiar Simi to history-ridden Rhodes, almost inaccessible Karpathos and more.

Even with a whole season at hand, it is impossible to see it all, so reading up beforehand about the different areas will make sure you chose the one that most suits your dreams and capabilities. In a nutshell, the eastern side of the Peloponnese Peninsula and the Saronic Gulf offer many charming local town quays, numerous well-equipped marinas and boatyards and several picturesque bays and anchorages, including ones suitable for hiding away from the Meltemi.

The Cyclades are full of contrasting islands and – weather permitting – can offer a diverse and unforgettable sailing holiday. The 24 main islands forming the Sporades Archipelago lie further north, slightly off the beaten track, and will enthuse nature lovers with their dense forest walks, expansive olive groves and monk seals (one of the Mediterranean's largest seal species). The Dodacanese hug the Turkish Coast and even some of the smaller, uninhabited islands boast a rich history, including Byzantine churches and mediaeval castles. To the very south, more remote Crete seals off the Aegean Sea and, culturally and geographically, almost feels like a country on its own to which only a few experienced sailors seem to venture.

1. Cote d'Azur (France)

If budget is an issue, this destination is not for you. If it's not, then France's south-eastern Mediterranean coast offers the most glamorous harbours and towns you've ever seen. Because it is busy with the rich and famous throughout the summer, all the way from Nice through Monaco to Saint-Tropez and beyond, booking marinas in advance is a must. And so is mariners' etiquette and a certain dress-code – influenced, if not dictated, by the innumerable fashion shops lining the French Riviera alongside uncountable seafood restaurants, stylish cafés and glittery night-clubs.

There are few anchorages and even fewer less glitzy, more down-to-earth marinas, such as Port Cogolin or Port de Menton, in the event that Monte Carlo, Cannes and the like won't let you in if your last name is not Cruise, Branson or something similar. As a contrast to the exhilaration and fervour of the many charming mainland cities, visit attractive islands such as Porquerolles, Port-Cors or St Honorat, all of which offer a wealth of beautiful beaches, fascinating history, natural parks and more relaxed, quirky towns.

2. Sicily (Italy)

Sicily is arguably southern Italy at its best – if this can be said of a country full of highlights and an island which considers itself Sicilian long before Italian. It is wise to carry the Sicilian courtesy flag when sailing to Malta's closest neighbour. The people are friendly, the food delicious, the history breath-taking, the culture unparalleled and the geographic highlights plentiful, including active Mount Etna to the east, the pristine Aeolian Islands to the north and the Valley of the Temples near Agrigento in the south. Less plentiful are weather-safe anchorages which is why hopping from marina to marina in the summer months can crank up your summer sailing budget considerably.

Sicily is often merely passed in transit from the eastern to the western Mediterranean or vice versa, but it definitely offers enough to fill an incredible sailing holiday on its own. If you plan to circumnavigate, take at least four weeks and be aware of the Traffic Separation Scheme, cross-strait ferry traffic, tidal currents and the whirlpools off Scylla and Charibdis in the Messina Strait. In the must-visit, incredibly unique, volcanic Aeolian Islands you should be prepared to move if winds shift swiftly, unless you've laid a running mooring or forked out an eye-watering amount to tie up to one of the few town-quays.



3. The Ionian Islands (Greece)

One of the Mediterranean's most popular flotilla destinations, it isn't for those who love peace and quiet. But if herds of young and inexperienced party-sailors, together with tween Italians set free on fast inflatables and jet-skis can't shock you, you'll be rewarded with one of the most accessible island paradises in the Mediterranean Sea.

Each island has its own trademark: Zakynthos to the south with its famous turtle colonies, Meganisi between Lefkas and the Gulf of Corinth with its innumerable most picturesque fjords and renowned Corfu further to the north with its Tuscan-style wavy, lush hills and olive groves. What they all have in common makes all sailors happy: bountiful anchorages, accessible marinas and often free town quays. Add to that the rustic taverns, ever-flowing Greek wine, immaculate swimming and snorkelling spots and low-key tracks leading to picture-perfect sunset locations and you'll understand why thousands of Brits, Germans, Dutch, Italians and more chose this region as their yearly summer destination.

A little insider tip to make your cruising more enjoyable: no matter which bay, quay or marina, it is always wise to arrive not much later than lunch-time to ensure you get a spot before the flotillas and charter armies arrive. Moreover, for the safety of your boat you might want to stay on board between 4 and 6pm when these usually get in and, not uncommonly, rip your anchor out or bump into your sides.

4. The Aegean (Greece)

The Aegean in summer is not for sailing novices, due to the Meltemi, a strong wind which picks up near

5. The Turquoise Coast (Turkey)

If the Greek Islands made you think you'd found paradise, then wait until you've spent some time sailing along Turkey's Riviera. Basically, it has equally stunning and diverse inlets, jetties and harbour towns – but often at half the price and double the hospitality. The area around Marmaris rivals the Ionian Islands in business, but the further east you head, the quieter it gets. Also, possibly due to the stricter environmental regulations (watch out for the Blue Card and pump-out requirements for your holding tanks!) the waters and beaches are less polluted.

In general, the Turks are incredibly friendly and forthcoming and will go out of their way to offer you the requested services. The presence of Islam is mainly apparent through the calls to prayer five times a day, which gives an exotic feel to your cruise. Add to that unique cultural experiences such as visiting a town's local Hamman, driving out to one of the many totally amazing archaeological sites, or letting your sense of smell and taste go crazy at one of the many spice and fresh produce markets and you'll feel like you've properly landed in a fairy land far, far away.

In summary, the Mediterranean Sea will spoil you with its terrific sailing destinations, and the Top Five above are only the tip of the iceberg. Choosing your favourite spot according to budget, sailing competency and time constraints will ensure that you have an unforgettable season on the water, no matter where – even if it means this year staying in local waters and exploring Malta and Gozo's beautiful sailing grounds on your own or on a friend's or a charter boat. 📍