



From top: Kaputas beach; the six-bedroom Villa Nobles Rox in the hills above Kalkan; the ancient city of Xanthos

The ultra-modern villa in the middle of Turkey's ancient past

Shayma Bakht pulls herself away from the infinity pool to explore amphitheatres and butterfly-filled valleys on the Lycian Coast

Standing on the edge of an infinity pool in the foothills of Turkey's Taurus Mountains, Ramazan Atilia uses the dizzying view of the Lycian Coast as a map, tracing an invisible line through wriggly streamlets, sparkling towns and clusters of ancient ruins we will visit this week. That's if he can drag us from our villa, of course.

Because Villa Nobles Rox is the kind of house any tour guide might struggle to tempt his clients away from. Opened in 2024 the ultra-modern villa is perched on the hills above Kalkan and has two pools, three floating double daybeds, a cinema, sauna, gym, indoor children's playground — and those spectacular views of the sea and hills stretching as far as Antalya. A five-minute taxi ride from the centre of Kalkan, it is close enough for us to pop into town for dinner, but far enough to make us feel free of the crowds in our own palace.

Let by the Turquoise Collection, a the Brit-owned Kalkan specialist, Villa Nobles Rox has six spacious bedrooms, all en suite. The master bedroom, located on the top floor, has its own hot tub and opens onto a roof terrace with an outdoor kitchen and sofas. It is truly a tough place to leave, but leave Atilia insists we must — and thank goodness he does.

Because this section of the Turkish Riviera is a never-ending catalogue of beaches, coves and bays to reward the curious, and just ten minutes' drive south of Kalkan, Atilia shows us one of the best. Hidden below a steep stone staircase that seems to descend to nowhere, Kaputas beach is a magical stretch of golden sand, lapped by a mosaic of emerald, azure and indigo shallows.

"Wait till you get to Butterfly Valley," says Atilia, now driving us back west to Oludeniz, where we take a £5 boat ride across the bay to a white-sand amphitheatre of cliffs and waterfalls, with butterflies flitting



overhead as though someone had thrown fistfuls of pastel confetti into the air. Located in the Fethiye district, this is a national reserve sheltering more than 100 species of butterfly and Atilia is right: it is stunning.

Next morning we take a winding drive from our villa to Saklikent Gorge, 20 minutes from Kalkan. At 18km long and 300m deep, it is one of the deepest canyons in the world. You can go white-water rafting, ziplining and canyoning here, but we go decidedly more chill, floating downriver on giant inflated inner tubes, surrendered to the gentle mercy of mint green rapids. If there's a better way to take in the dizzying cliffs, they haven't invented it yet.

We also do the gorge's famous hike, clinging to ropes and trying not to faceplant into icy waist-deep streams while elderly Turkish *nenes* overtake us deep in happy chatter. It is ridiculous, hilarious, freezing — and

completely worth the struggle for the waterfall selfie at the end. Looking at that selfie that night, I appear to be half-smiling, half-hypothermic — but 100 per cent alive.

On our last day we take in the one non-negotiable in this part of Turkey: the history. A key point along ancient Mediterranean

trading routes, the Lycian Coast is littered with Greek, Roman and Persian ruins.

Kalkan, once the only safe harbour between Kas and Fethiye, is a veritable El Dorado of ancient treasures.

Twenty minutes west of Kalkan, the ancient city of Xanthos is probably the best known.

Once the Lycian capital, it is now a jumble of broken sarcophagi and eerie tombs, the sort of place that makes you sit in the amphitheatre and whisper without meaning to. What sticks with me isn't the view or the 2nd century BC theatre, still with its original pillars — it's the moment Atilia invites us to run our fingers along the carved stones lining the path out of the site. "Touch history," he says. "It's allowed here."

Back at the villa, on the edge of the infinity pool with apple teas in hand, we attempt to pinpoint everywhere we've been that week. We can't, of course — the distances are too great, the details too small. But we trace the air anyway, drawing invisible lines through butterfly-filled valleys, ice-cold gorges, ancient amphitheatres and sunburnt memories. Again, Atilia is right. It is a map. A wiggly, wonderful map — and it has left its contours imprinted in our hearts.



Need to know

Shayma Bakht was a guest of Turquoise Collection (theturquoisecollection.com), which has seven nights' self-catering for 12 at Villa Nobles Rox from £2,350. Day trips cost £90 for a group of six, including vehicle and driver/guide (volumetravelturkey.com). Fly to Dalaman from Edinburgh or Glasgow from about £210 return with easyJet, SunExpress, TUI and Jet2.