

## DESTINATIONS

### ESCORTED TOURS | TURKEY

# Q&A

## ZEYNEP BAZLAR, TOUR GUIDE, EXPLORE

INTERVIEW BY Katie McGonagle



#### Q. How did you become a tour guide with Explore?

A. I grew up in Istanbul. I studied philosophy at university there and my family was expecting me to do a 'proper job', but I worked in bars and restaurants then went to the south coast for a holiday with my friends, to a remote place called the Kabak Valley. I started to volunteer there – cooking, gardening, cleaning – until I found a job as a tour guide for a little agency. I had never done sports or activities before but you get training, so I began canyoning, cycling and walking. Two years later, I started with Explore and have now been working with them for six years.

#### Q. What do you enjoy most about leading active tours around the Turkish coast?

A. I love introducing city people to nature and the outdoors with trekking, cycling, sea kayaking and canoeing. I was exactly like them – I didn't come from the countryside, I grew up in a big city – so I know how that feels. I once had a lady who was trekking up Bozkaya peak and decided she didn't want to walk any more, but we were already 2,000m in. The conditions were hard and she wasn't used to walking, but she carried on and at the end she was so thankful. She kept saying 'I never thought I could do this', so that was a nice experience. I love making people happy.

#### Q. What about family tours – are they even more of a challenge?

A. Those are my best tours! I love



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#### ZEYNEP'S TOP TIP

People worry about signing up to a multi-activity tour, but they shouldn't – kids are doing the same activities! From the first to the last moment at the airport, I'm with them, and everything is organised, so they don't have anything to be concerned about.

trekking but family groups are fun because the kids completely change the atmosphere. I like to play with the children because I am trying to help the parents have some free time too, especially because we get a lot of single parents. The kids' ages range from seven to 15, and the company tries to match the same age in the same group, so it's good for them and their parents to meet other people. The girls like having a female guide too; when they see my hairstyle and the way I dress, they feel very comfortable. Some of them might be only seven or eight years old but we do much shorter treks and they have a go, and it's nice to see the reaction when they try something new.

#### Q. Do you have a favourite spot?

A. Butterfly Valley – it's really pretty – but the whole south coast is my favourite place. Kaputas Beach, near Kas where I live now, has a view of the Turquoise Coast. It's beautiful.

#### Q. How do you get the right balance between guided activities and free time?

A. It's easier with family tours because we stay in the same place. We have activities in the morning and then free time in the afternoon, and then we meet again for dinner. I love to see children visiting the local village for lunch. They learn how to cook and they go very quiet, just watching



PICTURE: Explore

and listening. It's interesting for the parents as well, and I love to introduce that part of the country.

#### Q. How do you find inspiration for your own travels?

A. Listening to stories from others is very inspiring. I love to listen to 60 or 70-year-olds tell me about their travels. I generally work for six months and travel for six months, especially to Asia. My favourite place is India, but also Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia and Sri Lanka. I don't like staying in a hotel and doing the same thing every day. I go backpacking and search for a volunteering job. My favourite sentence – and this is the way I live my life – is 'the adventure starts when you leave your comfort zone'. **TW**