

# Art of relaxation

Book eco-conscious clients looking for wellness and creativity into Bayou Villas at Antalya's Lara Barut Collection, says **Clare Voight**

Candle-making isn't your typical beach resort activity. But that's exactly what I'm doing under the pergola-shaded Yasemin bar at Lara Barut Collection in Antalya, pouring hot wax scented with essential oils (orange, rosemary and bay) into a glass jar. To one side are tall palms and the beach beyond, and to the other the resort's aquapark, with its spiralling waterslides. But with the shrieks and splashes just out of earshot, the aural backdrop for us, as we wait for our candles to set, is just the gentle wind in the trees.

Having pinpointed a rise in demand for art tourism, as well as wellness and health travel, the hotel is increasingly aiming to tempt clients looking for breaks that are both restorative and creative. It's home to a 150-strong collection of artworks encompassing everything from restful pastel scenes to a mind-bending neon yellow and black spiral that appears to move as you travel up in the lifts. Guests can take part in on-demand workshops that can be booked for groups

of 10 or more. The range is impressive, encompassing everything from candle-making and ceramics to tufting (carpet-making) and audio therapy.

#### PRIVATE ACCOMMODATION

When it comes to wellness, perhaps the most impressive development from the hotel is the Bayou Villas, a collection of 24 private one to four-bedroom villas, which opened last October. Each has a freshwater pool and heated seawater pool outside, while all villas with two bedrooms and more also have a private spa space. My three-bedroom villa has a spa room with a whirlpool bath and two treatment beds, where I spend a blissful hour being massaged before stepping into my own personal Turkish hammam, which has obvious appeal after the pandemic. There's also a sauna, and a workout space with an exercise bike, treadmill and weights, but I opt instead to take one of the yoga mats outside for a poolside stretch every morning. ➤



Bayou four-bedroom villa, with freshwater and seawater pools

PICTURE: sinanacikalin

# DESTINATIONS

TURKEY | ANTALYA



## top tip

Suggest an excursion to Kaleiçi Old Town to see the ruins of Hadrian's Gate and walk narrow passages lined with traditional Ottoman homes



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: View across the grounds of Lara Barut Collection; Clare tries out tufting; artworks feature heavily at the resort; three-bed Bayou villa and pool

PICTURES: sinacackalin



## SERVICE, PLEASE

Poolside isn't the only chill-out area in a villa where space is not in short supply. And with the wealth of activities across the wider resort, it's an ideal place to bring the extended family – away from the buzz of the main resort, but close enough to have access to the kids' and teens' clubs, cinema and communal pools. Service is attentive, with 1,000 staff for the 1,200 guests, and WhatsApp keeps things speedy and efficient; a message from housekeeping asks when I'd liked my room to be cleaned, and the number can be used to book spa treatments and restaurants, and to order room service.

During my stay, the resort is at full occupancy – though with plenty of spare loungers and space in the restaurants, it never feels like it. Although tourism in the country took a hit following February's earthquake, group marketing and corporate communications manager Birgül Akgül tells me that numbers are returning to normal in time for the start of high season. "At the moment we have very good occupancy," adds deputy general manager Onur Cankaya. "And we're expecting a strong season. We have a 40% repeat guest [rate], which is very important for us."

## FOOD, GLORIOUS FOOD

The numbers reflect the fact that it's very much business as usual for tourism in Antalya, with Lara Barut Collection continuing to work to stand out from the crowd. As well as its arts and wellness offering, it's elevating its

food options, with 10 all-inclusive restaurants from sushi to Italian, including a buffet that serves just about everything imaginable (the highlight being an extensive *baklava* bar). "Gastronomy has a huge impact on travellers' choices, so we're paying a lot of attention to this, as well as art and sustainability," says Cankaya.

The latter plays a huge part in the food at Tirmis, where all ingredients (including the wine) are sourced from no more than 62 miles away, and dishes inspired by Antalya recipes include marvellous mezzes, from *mücver* (courgette and squid fritters) to *hibes* (a tahini and red pepper dip), and spiced, rice-stuffed courgette flowers.

Mezzes also feature heavily at the new Weik restaurant, which focuses on Turkish and international dishes made with local ingredients, and which villa guests have exclusive access to. The Weik Turkish breakfast is quite the experience: mine is delivered to my room on the final morning of my stay, a selection of 10 plates and bowls that make up an epic feast. Enjoying this on the sunny patio after a morning dip in the pool, I wonder if they'd mind if I decided to stay here forever... **TW**

## BOOK IT

Jet2holidays has seven nights' all-inclusive at Bayou Villas from £4,749 per person, based on two adults sharing. The price includes private transfers and return flights, with 25kg baggage allowance, from Manchester on October 29. [jet2holidays.com](https://www.jet2holidays.com)

## SUSTAINABILITY CREDENTIALS

🌱 Lara Barut Collection is fully powered by green energy, including solar power, and was the first hotel in the Mediterranean to receive an International Renewable Energy Certificate (I-REC).

🌱 The resort is working to reduce plastic consumption, with the toiletries in Bayou Villas (including bamboo toothbrushes) wrapped in recycled plastic and glass water bottles in the fridges and minibars.

🌱 95% of suppliers and raw materials come from the local area.

🌱 100,000 litres of grey water from showers and hand basins are purified each day and re-used in the gardens.

🌱 The hotel has a Sustainable Tourism Certificate recognised by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council.