



# Put the wind in your sails

All aboard: **Matt Mostyn** joins a yoga-themed gay cruise around the Med

TAKE THE PLUNGE: Yoga cruises are barely like any other break



WELCOME MAT: Serge takes a class right on the water's edge

Rightly or wrongly, the traditional gay cruise holiday comes with a reputation for partying and excess that can make it seem the exact opposite of a relaxing getaway. But when the opportunity arose to join a different type of gay cruise — on a 30m-long sailing boat for a week-long, yoga-themed jaunt around Turkey and Greece — I decided to stow any preconceptions and take the plunge.

Our host for the trip is Serge Garnier, a French-born yoga teacher who now lives in Amsterdam and tailors retreats especially for the LGBTQ community.

"I don't believe that being gay should define one's travel choices," he explains. "These types of holidays are a great way to create space for

internal reflection, new habits, a renewed sense of meaning and purpose, and a feeling of belonging."

Small, intimate, personalised experiences with a strong wellness slant are Serge's forte, making these retreats a change from the more-hedonistic gay holiday. But, as I was about to discover, this was definitely no puritanical week of rules and restriction. Serge's classes are designed to be fun, playful and accessible to everyone, no matter what their level. "That helps students remove any self-judgment, weight or seriousness from their practice, and instead just laughing and having fun with it," he continues.

Along with a week of two yoga

**"The classes are fun, playful and accessible to everyone"**

classes each day, our itinerary promises plenty of time to laze on the deck, swim in the crystal clear waters, soak up the ever-changing views, commune with nature, make friends, enjoy a massage from our skilful on-board therapist and sample delicious Mediterranean food.

Arriving on day one, we make a bee-line for the port of Marmaris on Turkey's Turquoise Coast. This once-small fishing village, nestled in a valley between dramatic pine-forested mountains, has become a vibrant tourist town.

Its bustling harbour contains row upon row of glamorous super-yachts and wooden sailing boats, one of which is our home for the week.





**SAILS PITCH:** The cruise visits a number of secluded bays

These beautiful hand-crafted vessels, or gulets, were originally used for sponge diving and fishing, but over the years they've been re-imagined as floating hotels, staffed by small, diligent crews who take care of everything from the sailing to cooking and cleaning.

We've clearly struck gold with our gulet, the Captain Jack, whose team of five run the boat with a level of discretion, warmth and charm that put us instantly at ease.

Having captained many gulets over the past 10 years, our salty sea-dog of a skipper, Suleyman (aka Captain Jack) has all the smarts to be able to secure the most secluded bays and overnight mooring spots this stunning coastline — aptly dubbed the Turkish Riviera — has to offer.

The crew seem to effortlessly balance attentiveness with respect for our space, appearing almost magically when required before withdrawing to the lower or rear deck. The boat itself has seven guest cabins (all en-suite) and three different deck areas, making it small enough to feel cosy and intimate, yet spacious enough for anyone to find a quiet area and stretch out on a sun lounger or bean bag.

Hauling anchor, we set sail from Marmaris to the tranquility of a



**THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN:** Matt, in black top, joins the other yoga cruisers as they refuel



**PUSHING THE BOAT OUT:** Docked in Symi



**AT A STRETCH:** Not your average yoga studio



**THEY'VE GOT YOUR BACK:** The trip can help beat the blues



nearby quiet bay to moor up for the evening.

Here, the water is the clearest blue and soft as silk as we plunge from the ship's diving board into tranquil depths for a twilight baptism.

Feeling reborn, we clamber up the swim ladder to sprawl out on the front deck while our on-board chef sears freshly caught fish for dinner.

Our group of seven guys is a diverse, talkative, warm-hearted bunch representing all corners of Europe — from Poland and the Ukraine to The Netherlands, Italy, France and the UK.

As the sun slips below the horizon, we chat excitedly while a smorgasbord of fish and vegetable dishes slowly disappear into eager bellies, washed down with free-flowing local wine or beer.

Over the course of the next week, we meander our way around the southern Turkish coast into Greek waters, rising at dawn most mornings for an energising yoga

class on the deck while the sun climbs through the sky above us.

Devouring our breakfast buffet while gliding along to our next destination, we drop anchor in a new spot every afternoon and use the boat's stash of snorkel gear, fins and paddleboards to explore the blue waters of sheltered coves ringed by craggy, pine-scented cliffs.

Reaching the Greek island of Symi on day three, we sail into a dramatic harbour scene of colourful houses tumbling down the mountainside to the Aegean, giving the place a romantic vibe.

We spend the evening exploring the town's lively restaurants and bars, with the night's festivities leading to a more-bleary-eyed-than-usual yoga class for most of us the following morning.

Each new location seems more breathtaking than the one before.

Arriving at an idyllic cove called Emilianos Bay, we hop ashore in the

ship's dingy before making our way up a winding, goat-strewn path to a picturesque little church whose caretakers let us use their courtyard for a magical yoga session.

In another stunning cove, Serge sneaks ashore before us to prepare a special spot for our sunset class, marking a huge candle-trimmed heart in rocks on the beach for us to unroll our mats within.

Sailing is an activity of togetherness.

One goes to be with people. When it's so easy to sometimes feel tired, burnt out, disconnected or discontent on some level, there's something profound and life-affirming about sharing an experience of such sheer joy.

"Sad to leave, happy to go," we agree over our final night's banquet.

And as we sail into the sleepy harbour of Selimiye to make our way home, we are already clearing our calendars for the next time. 🙌

[sergeyogaclub.com](http://sergeyogaclub.com)  
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**"We sail into a harbour of houses tumbling down to the Aegean"**