

# BEACHES ARE ON SALE ON THE TURKISH RIVIERA



The Turkish Riviera is a popular vacation destination. Now some bays and beaches have been privatized: What does this mean for vacationers?

The Turkish Riviera is considered by many people as a dream destination for vacations in the Mediterranean. White sandy beaches, steep coasts and luxurious resorts attract tourists every year who go there to soak up the sun. **The communities on the Turkish Riviera profit from tourism - and pay attention to environmental protection on the Mediterranean coast.** However, that could now change.

Private owners are to manage stretches of coastline on the Gulf of Fethiye, as far as the Turkish Ministry for the Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change is concerned. Four bays have already been sold. Nineteen more are to follow. According to experts, the contracts are to last ten years.

## **A Piece of the Riviera for about 800,000 Euros**

The reason for the sale of the previously public bays could be the desolate economic situation in Turkey. The inflation rate in March 2022 was 61.14 percent compared with the previous month.

The bays in the Gulf of Fethiye were purchased for 12.5 million Turkish liras (about 800,000 euros) by a mining entrepreneur from Ankara: Süleyman Bölünmez. The entrepreneur ran for the ruling of AKP party in 2007 and is said to be close to Turkish President Erdoğan. Bölünmez does not have a clean slate either: he was sentenced to four years in prison for fuel smuggling, and a house he built illegally was also demolished in December 2020.

## **Moorings for Yachts of the Super-rich Ready**

Now, the entrepreneur has to take care of the coasts. As his first official act, Bölünmez had heavy concrete slabs sunk into the Mediterranean, where the yachts of the super-rich can anchor. Until now, yachtsmen and women could anchor in the Gulf of Fethiye free of charge. In the future, anchoring will cost money. Expected, it could be as much as 150 euros. The journalist Fatih Portakal even accuses the government: "You are ending amateur sailing in Turkey". This is because common citizens who like sailing will probably no longer be able to afford anchoring here in the future.

However, not only sailors are criticizing the project. The communities on the Gulf of Fethiye also criticize the allocation of their bays. "There are many archaeological sites in the bays. No studies have been done at all. The bays are the heritage we will leave to future generations. For this reason, bays cannot be leased with a throwaway logic. Our bays should be evaluated with long-term, environmentally sound, public benefit projects. And this is only possible with the participation of local governments, NGOs and chambers," said Süleyman Girgin of the local government in Muğla.

## **Turkish Riviera Municipalities to Enforce Sustainable Tourism**

In recent years, the municipalities on the Gulf would have worked to ensure that yacht tourism, which is actually damaging to the environment, is handled in a reasonably sustainable manner. With the new owners, that could change. The president of the People's Chamber of Göcek, Yegim Mukan, criticizes the allocation of the bays. Because a feasibility study is actually required for this, and so far, this study is not available.

The president of the Fethiye Gulf Municipality Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Osman Çıralı, also calls for the cancellation of the allocation of the bay, saying, **"It is not private investors who should be responsible for the bays, but public institutions together with the local business community."**

If the Turkish government goes through with its sale plan, the Gulf of Fethiye and other stretches of land on the Turkish Riviera could soon be reserved only for the super-rich: Arab sheikhs, foreign oligarchs and other wealthy people. The citizens of the communities on the Gulf and tourists with normal wealth would then no longer be able to experience the beauty of the Gulf of Fethiye without restriction.

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