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Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Youth and Sports Minister Suat Kılıç attend the opening ceremony for the facilities of the 17th Mediterranean Games on June 9.



TURKEY TO HOST 17TH MEDITERRANEAN GAMES IN HOME OF CARETTA CARETTA SEA TURTLES

Turkey, which has hosted more than 700 international sporting events in the past decade, is now hosting the Mediterranean Games for the second time in the games' history. The 17th Mediterranean Games will take place this year from June 20-30, and will be attended by 6,000 athletes from 24 different countries, in 32 different branches of sports. The stage for the Mediterranean Games this year is to be Mersin, the homeland of the famous and nearly extinct *Caretta caretta* sea turtles, and the home of the famous historical site, Cleopatra's Gate. With the slogan "Three Continents, One Heart," these games, which will last for 10 days, will be an important test for Turkey on many fronts.

With İstanbul now a candidate to host the 2020 Summer Olympics and the Paralympic Games, the Mersin 17th Mediterranean Games are like Turkey's trial run for the Olympics.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports was able to work and complete the needs for sports facilities in Mersin in just 18 months, with a full \$400 million set aside from the central Turkish budget for this city, which is in itself a center of economic stability in its region. Turkey readied 54 sports facilities for these games, 11 of them completely new. And so, the Turkish construction sector -- second in the world only to the Chinese construction sector -- passed an important test in Mersin and is feeling some well-deserved pride.

With the 17th Mediterranean Games coming to Mersin, this Mediterranean city has found itself transformed into an Olympic city.

7 years of work finished in just 18 months

In fact, the designation of Turkey as the next site for the Mediterranean Games took place in a very interesting fashion. Though the International Committee for the Mediterranean Games (ICMG) had voted on Oct. 28, 2007 that the next games were to be held in the Greek city of Volos, it was then announced, after four years of economic crisis in Greece, that Volos could not, in fact, hold the games.

On Feb. 23, 2011, a vote between the options of Spain, Libya, and Turkey gave Mersin the right to host the 17th Mediterranean Games. With the leadership change in Libya and the unfolding economic crisis in Spain, the ICMG was pleased to see the games go to Turkey.

In the meantime, the international arena, including the head of the ICMG, Amar Addadi, termed the rapid reading of Mersin for these games a "Turkish miracle."

Addadi also noted that with the experience Turkey has had in readying Mersin for the 17th Mediterranean Games, İstanbul is actually at more of an advantage than other candidate cities and Turkey more than deserves to win the privilege of hosting the 2020 Summer Olympics and Para-Olympics.

54 sports facilities opened for 17th Mediterranean Games

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan attended ceremonies marking the official opening of the 54 sports facilities constructed in Mersin



Youth and Sports Minister Suat Kılıç (C) cuts the cake during the foundation-laying ceremony for the facilities of the 17th Mediterranean Games in Mersin.

for the 17th Mediterranean Games.

Speaking to thousands of Mersin residents who crowded into the 7,500-capacity Servet Tazegül Sports Salon, Erdoğan noted that normally it would have taken around six years to ready the city, but Turkey managed to do this job in a much shorter time.

He said, "Though preparations began just 18 months ago, we are perfectly prepared for the Mediterranean Games, which start on June 20."

The opening ceremonies were also attended by Minister of Youth and Sports Suat Kılıç, Minister of Culture and Tourism Ömer Celik and Economy Minister Zafer Çağlayan. Erdoğan, who examined the completed facilities by helicopter, noted this about Turkey's capacity on these fronts:

"Some very great jobs were completed in Mersin in a very short period of time. And this all seems worthy of Mersin. ...In just 18 months, we set about constructing 11 completely new facilities and also completed them in this time period. From transportation to food and drink, from hotels to safety, from technology to health care, our preparations cover every possible area."

Erdoğan gave some clear figures related to the cost for Turkey for these facilities, and for the games in general:

"As far as the facilities we built which are completely new, and the repair work we did on others, we made an investment of around TL 500 million. We also set aside around TL 300 million for other costs related to the games. Our total costs were around TL 800 million. I hope, when the opening ceremonies for the June 20 games take place, our entire Mediterranean coastline, from Adana to Silifke, will be turned into an area of celebration. What we are hosting is literally like a mini-Olympics."

Minister Kılıç: A global record

Kılıç, underscored that the fact that the entire preparation for the Mediterranean Games took

port provided has been voluntary, with more than 2,000 Turkish youth involved in overseeing preparation to make sure that visiting athletes and viewers receive the very best Turkish hospitality in the region.

Racing against time

With just 18 months to prepare Mersin for hosting the 17th Mediterranean Games, the Ministry of Youth and Sports moved swiftly to construct new facilities to be built in the city. On Feb. 20, 2012, foundations for the first five facilities to be newly built for the games were put down in Mersin.

At the ground-breaking ceremony for the Mersin Edip Buran Sports Salon, Kılıç and Çağlayan were present. The Mediterranean Games Committee head Amar Addadi was invited to this ceremony.

Many questioned at the time whether the city could actually be ready for the games in time. Kılıç asserted at the ceremony, "We will do in one year what Greece could not do in four." He continued: "We have before us a great test. Though we have only a short time, we will do it. We will complete these facilities in just one year. Now is the time to act. ... What we are able to complete here in such a short time will be proof of our capacity for success and our level of activity where our other candidacy for another international sports organizations is concerned."

Mersin, home to *Caretta caretta* sea turtles

It is thought that the *Caretta caretta* sea turtle has lived on earth for about 106 million years. These sea turtles, which are widely found along the Mediterranean coastline, are one of the world's oldest living species, and Mersin, where the Mediterranean Games are to be hosted, is one homeland of these special sea turtles.

The *Caretta caretta* is under protection as a result of its endangered status. There is, interestingly, even a hospital for these sea turtles in Mersin.

Caretta chosen over orange as mascot for games

With Mersin a nesting grounds for the *Caretta caretta* sea turtle, this very special and endangered species was chosen as the mascot for the 17th Mediterranean Games. In fact, it was votes cast over the Internet that wound up deciding on the *Caretta caretta* as the official main mascot, surpassing both the symbols of the orange and the lemon as other possible choices. *İstanbul Today's Zaman*

place in just 18 months -- as opposed to 6 years -- is a global record. As for the changes that have come to Mersin as a result of the new facilities, Minister Kılıç said: "With these Mediterranean Games, we aim to see one of Turkey's largest cities turn into a true city of sports and tourism, highlighting its role not only in Turkey's heritage, but the world's. In the past year, Mersin's silhouette has gone through some very modern changes. Completely new structures, projects and buildings have been added to Mersin, and in this way this city has become a new center not only within Turkey, but in the Mediterranean basin in general."

Olympic flame stretches to Mediterranean

The role of the former head of the Egyptian Olympics Committee, Muhammed Tahir Pasha, was a large one in seeing the Mediterranean Games come to Mersin. Ethnically Turkish, Muhammed Tahir Pasha believed that sports were a vehicle for peace and brotherhood, and this belief found life three years after his death in the 1st Mediterranean Games, which took place in 1951 in Egypt, with 10 countries participating.

Since that date, the countries in the Mediterranean basin have come together every four years to compete in unifying sports competitions governed by the same rules that govern the Olympics.

Turkey's first hosted the Mediterranean Games -- the 6th edition -- in İzmir in 1971.

Support from youth volunteers

Coordinated efforts between the Sports Ministry, the delegation from the Mediterranean Games itself and various civil society organizations have helped see the details of this wide-reaching sports competition be completed. Much of the sup-



Caretta caretta and orange come in peace

The official logo of the XVII Mediterranean Games in Mersin is made up of symbols tied to Mersin. The *Caretta caretta* emerging from the sea symbolizes the Mediterranean and friendship, while the citrus fruit as the sun symbolize the warm climate of Mersin and the Mediterranean.

'Three Continents, One Heart'

The official slogan for the 17th Mediterranean Games is "Three Continents, One Heart." Cooperation between 24 countries located on the continents of Asia, Europe and Africa bring a very unique character to these games.



WHICH FACILITIES WILL HOST WHICH GAMES?



Mersin Tennis Complex



There is no question that Mersin, with its blue seas, hot climate, rich cultural legacy and warm hospitality is the perfect city to host the Mediterranean Games. Notably, investments totaling \$400 million were made here to prepare the city to host these games.

The economic stability and developed construction technology available in Turkey means that giant facilities for hosting the games were built in a record amount of time. And while great care was given to make sure that these new facilities would be strong and durable, there was also focus placed on making sure the architectural style used was one that would suit Mersin's own unique feel. In the end, not only newly built but also renovated facilities are all ready for the games.

Mersin Stadium

The stadium to be used for the opening and closing ceremonies in Mersin can hold 25,000 viewers. As a result of work done on this giant facility by a team of thousands, this stadium was completed in just 300 days.

The Turkish government, deciding that the city's Tevfik Gür Stadium -- built in the 1970s -- did not suit the image of a modern Turkey, resolved to build a brand new stadium in Mersin that would fit UEFA standards.

While this new stadium is set to host just the opening and closing ceremonies for the games, it will then go on to host football matches played by the Mersin İdman Yurdu Sports Club in the coming season. The stadium's design was influenced by the symbol of the Caretta caretta sea turtle, which is also of course one of the official symbols of the 17th Mediterranean Games.

The construction of the new Mersin Stadium is truly a success story for the Turkish construction sector. To complete the project in just 18 months, the stadium had teams of thousands at one time working to see seating finished and sections completed. The roof was first put together outside the stadium and then set into place on top of the stadium.

Mediterranean Village 1

The Mediterranean Village has a total of 3,500 beds. The village boasts a two-story restaurant, a canteen, a cafeteria, game and Internet rooms, a semi-Olympic-sized swimming pool, gymnastic and sports salons, three multi-purpose rooms and a 515-person conference hall. There is also a small cinema in the village. After the 17th Mediterranean Games are over, this spot will be used by students from Mersin University as a dormitory. In the meantime, the Ministry of Youth and Sports has plans to build an even larger version of the Mediterranean Village in Istanbul next year. The Istanbul Olympic Village -- with a 10,000-bed capacity and at the level of a five-star hotel -- has already been planned. This facility, which would host athletes arriving in the city for the 2020 Summer Olympics and Paralympics, would then go on to serve students from the nearly 30 universities in and around Istanbul.

Mersin Tennis Complex

One of the most important facili-

ties in Mersin for the Mediterranean Games is the 3,000-viewer-capacity Mersin Tennis Complex. Composed of two separate blocks and built according to international standards, this facility has a total of 11 courts: a central court, two closed courts and eight open courts. A very modern-looking facility, the Mersin Tennis Complex is one of the largest of its kind to be built in Turkey recently.

At the same time, the Ministry of Youth and Sports is also building an even larger and better developed tennis facility in Istanbul. If the 2020 Summer Olympics are in fact awarded to Istanbul, the Istanbul Tennis Complex -- being built to Wimbledon standards -- will host some of the greatest tennis players in the world.

Servet Tazegül Sports Salon

Mersin's 7,500-viewer-capacity Servet Tazegül Sports Salon is set to host basketball and handball matches during the 17th Mediterranean Games. With its incredible acoustics, this salon will open its doors to sports lovers for the first time during these games. The salon was named after Turkish Olympic gold medal winner Servet Tazegül, who won the gold for Turkey in taekwondo in the 2012 London Summer Olympics. In London, Tazegül was selected by the International Taekwondo Federation as being the most technically talented Taekwondo competitor in the world and is definitely considered an athlete to watch.

Turkish construction workers built the Servet Tazegül Sports Salon in just 463 days. With an 805-square-meter training salon inside, this sports salon will be used by Turkish basketball and handball teams after the Mediterranean Games are over. The finals for both basketball and handball will also take place in this salon during the Mediterranean Games.

Mersin Olympic Swimming Pool

With its own unique architectural style and space for 1,000 viewers, the Mersin Olympic Swimming Pool actually has three different pools. The facility has 15 protocol seats, 10 press seats, nine handicapped seats and 966 other viewing seats. The 1,250-square-meter Olympic-sized pool also boasts a 400-square-meter warm-up pool and one kicking pool. This facility was completed in just 397 days and is opening its doors for the first time to the champions of the future at these 17th Mediterranean Games.

Nevin Yanıt Track and Field Complex

The Nevin Yanıt Track and Field Complex, which is set to host competitions in track and field as well as track and field for the physically disabled, has a total viewer capacity of 4,500, including temporary stands. This particular facility was built with the hope of supporting and perpetuating the success Turkey has enjoyed in recent years in track and field. It was completed in just 300 days and was named after track and field athlete Nevin Yanıt, who won the European Championships twice for Turkey in 100-meter races.

Mersin Volleyball Salon

The Mersin Volleyball Salon was completed in just 248 days and is now ready to host the 17th Mediterranean Games. With a 30-person protocol viewing stand, a 60-person press stand and a 910-person viewing stand, this older facility was renovated as a part of a large-scale project.

500-viewer-capacity Sports Salon

Mersin's 500-viewer-capacity Sports Salon boasts a match arena, viewing stands, a press stand, a special VIP stand and technical centers and is ready to host the upcoming Mediterranean Games. Completed in just 257 days, this facility will serve athletes from many types of sports and will be used as a training facility during the games.

Mersin Gymnastics Salon

With its colorful architecture, the Mersin Gymnastics Salon can hold 1,288 viewers. It has one main salon and two smaller training salons. This facility will be the stage for the artistic gymnastics and rhythmic gymnastics competitions of the Mediterranean Games. After the games are over, it will serve Turkish gymnasts. The facility was completed in just 307 days.

Mersin Bocce Salon

An increasingly popular sport, bocce will be included for the first time in the Mediterranean Games this year. For bocce matches, a 1,000-viewer-capacity facility was completed in just 46 days and will serve the Turkish National Bocce Ball Team after the games are over.

Erdemli Shooting Range

Mersin's Erdemli Shooting Range has 10, 25 and 50-meter shooting ranges and is Turkey's best shooting range as well as one of the top three of its kind in all of Europe. Built in the foothills of the Toros (Taurus) mountain range, this shooting range boasts a cooler climate than the hot temperatures usually found in and around Mersin.

The facility also has lesson rooms, an ammunition depot, an inspection room, a doping control room, first aid room, meeting rooms, a VIP room and a pressroom.

There is also an 80-bed, five-star hotel right next to this facility. After the 17th Mediterranean Games are over, the Turkish Sharpshooting National Team will use the while attending its training camp.

Seyhan Water Sports Facility

Many of the water sports that are a part of the Mediterranean Games will take place at the Seyhan Dam Lake, which is just 30 minutes away from Mersin. Rowing and canoe competitions will be hosted at this site, which will then later be used by the Turkish Kayak and Canoe National Teams.

Modernized facilities

In addition to the brand new facilities built for the 17th Mediterranean Games, all facilities set to host competitions in both Mersin and Adana have been repaired, renovated and otherwise improved in advance of these important games.

MODERNIZED FACILITIES

Sport	Name Of Facility	
Track and field/track and field for physically disabled	Mediterranean Games Bicycle Course	
Badminton	Mersin University No. 1 Salon	Yenişehir
Badminton	Seyfi Alanya Sports Salon	Yenişehir
Riding	Mediterranean Games Equestrian Facility	Adana
Bicycling	Mediterranean Games Velodrome	Yenişehir
Boxing (men)	Tarsus Sports Salon	Toroslar
Boxing (men)	Yenişehir Sports Salon	Yenişehir
Football	Tevfik Sırrı Gür Stadium	Yenişehir
Football	Tarsus City Stadium	Tarsus
Football	Burhanettin Kocamaz Stadium	Tarsus
Football	Koray Aydın Stadium	Toroslar
Football	Akdeniz Municipality Seyfi Ali Türkoğlu Field	Akdeniz
Football	Toroslar Anafartalar Field	Toroslar
Football	Macit Özcan Sports Complex	Yenişehir
Football	Tarsus Kırklarsırtı Stadium	Tarsus
Football	Toroslar 3 Ocak Field	Toroslar
Wrestling, Greco-Roman	CNR Yenişehir Trade Fair	Yenişehir
Free Wrestling	CNR Yenişehir Trade Fair	Yenişehir
Weight-Lifting	Erdemli Sports Salon	Erdemli
Handball	Yüreğir Serinevler Sports Salon	Adana
Handball	Sakıp Sabancı Sports Salon	Adana
Handball	Lütfullah Aksungur Sports Salon	Adana
Judo	Mersin University No. 1 Salon	Yenişehir
Judo	Mezitli Sports Salon	Mezitli
Canoeing/Rowing	Çukurova University Canoeing-Rowing Facility	Adana
Karate/Taekwondo	Edip Buran Sports Salon	Yenişehir
Karate/Taekwondo	7th Regional Sports Salon	Erdemli
Archery	Mersin University Field	Yenişehir
Beach Volleyball	Med. Games Kızkalesi Beach Volleyball F.	Kızkalesi
Waterskiing	Med. Games Atatürk Park Waterskiing F.	Yenişehir
Volleyball	Mersin University No. 2 Salon	Yenişehir
Volleyball	Gelişim College	Yenişehir
Sailing	Mersin Marina Sailing Facility	Yenişehir



Mersin Stadium



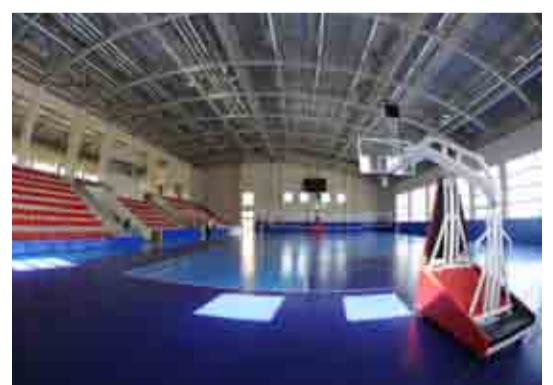
Servet Tazegül Sports Salon



Olympic Swimming Pool



Mersin Volleyball Salon



Mersin Olympic Swimming Pool



Nevin Yanıt Track and Field Complex



Mersin Gymnastics Salon



One of the main port cities on Turkey's Mediterranean coast, Mersin has been turned into an Olympic city with the construction of 54 sports facilities for the 17th Mediterranean Games. A total of \$400 million was set aside from the central Turkish budget for this project.

Under-20 World Cup groupings

A Group	B Group	C Group
France	Cuba	Turkey
Ghana	South Korea	El Salvador
US	Nigeria	Colombia
Spain	Portugal	Australia
D Group	E Group	F Group
Mexico	Chile	New Zealand
Greece	Egypt	Uzbekistan
Paraguay	England	Uruguay
Mali	Iraq	Croatia



F1 Grand Prix in İstanbul, 2011



23rd World University Summer Games in İzmir, 2005



UEFA Cup Final in İstanbul, 2009

MERSIN TO BE AN OLYMPIC CITY

After a rapid 11-month long preparation period to get Mersin ready to host the 17th Mediterranean Games, the Turkish government will declare the city a center for the training of future Olympic athletes once the Mediterranean Games are over. In the wake of these important regional games, Mersin will have facilities that can be used for training by the Turkish track and field national teams, swimming teams, and Bocce national teams.

Recently, a number of different cities across Turkey, all of which have hosted large sporting events, have been turned into training centers for Olympic athletes. Included in this list are İstanbul, Ankara, Adana, Erzurum, Trabzon, Samsun, Bursa, Kayseri, Konya, İzmir and Aksaray. Facilities built in Aksaray will serve as a camp and training center for athletes in the Para-Olympics.

Turkey has hosted 700 international sporting events

With the 17th Mediterranean Games, Turkey will be the largest sporting event

the country has hosted in the past decade. Since 2003, nearly 700 international sports events have been hosted in Turkey, with each event only serving to increase Turkey's experience on this front. Which is why Turkey is also now an official candidate for the 2020 Summer Olympics and Para-Olympics.

Turkey awaiting word on Olympics

İstanbul, which is competing against Madrid and Tokyo for the honor of hosting the 2020 Olympics, will hear the final results on Sept. 7 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, when a vote is cast to see which of these cities it will be.

From Mersin to İstanbul

The Turkish slogan for the 2020 Summer Olympics is also closely linked to the slogan for the upcoming Mediterranean Games in Mersin. The slogan for the Mersin Games is "Three Continents, One Heart," while İstanbul has launched its Olympic bid under the "Bridge Together" slogan, offering the

Olympic world to be able to hold the Olympics on two continents (Asia and Europe) at the same time. In both cases the idea is the same, throwing aside differences to gather as one. As a transition point for cultures, religions and civilizations, İstanbul offers the entire world the chance to build bridges alongside it.

With the 17th Mediterranean Games starting up on June 20, Turkey is also hosting a sports event that will attract the attention of football fans worldwide the same month: the 2013 FIFA U-20 World Cup to be played in 7 different cities through Turkey. Between the dates of June 21-July 13, young football players from all over the world will descend on Turkey to play matches in 7 important Turkish cities.

The groups and teams set to play in the Under-20 World Cup are as follows.

Host Turkey, which is in C Group, will go up against El Salvador, Colombia and Australia.

The FIFA U-20 World Cup matches will all be played at 6 p.m. and 9 p.m. Turkish time. A and B Group matches will be played on June 21, 23 and 27 in İstanbul and Kayseri; C and D group matches will be played on June 22, 25, and 28 in Trabzon, Rize and Gaziantep; and E and F group matches will be played on June 23 and 26 in Antalya and Bursa.

The second four matches will be played on July 2 in İstanbul and Gaziantep, and on July 3 in Kayseri, Trabzon, Antalya and Bursa. The quarter finals will be on July 6 in Rize and Bursa, and on July 7 in İstanbul and Kayseri; the semi-finals will be on July 10 in Trabzon and Bursa, and the final will be on July 13 in İstanbul.

Mersin, host to the 17th Mediterranean Games, is not an old city

While research and archaeological digs have shown that the region Mersin is located in was resided in by people during the Neolithic age and the Copper age, the actual founding of this city itself is not very old. The development of the cotton trade in Çukurova during the years of the American civil war (when there was a large mass shortage of cotton meant that the region was connected to railways in 1866, and this helped change Mersin's fate. During this time, Mersin quickly became a port and trade center for agricultural goods produced in Çukurova.

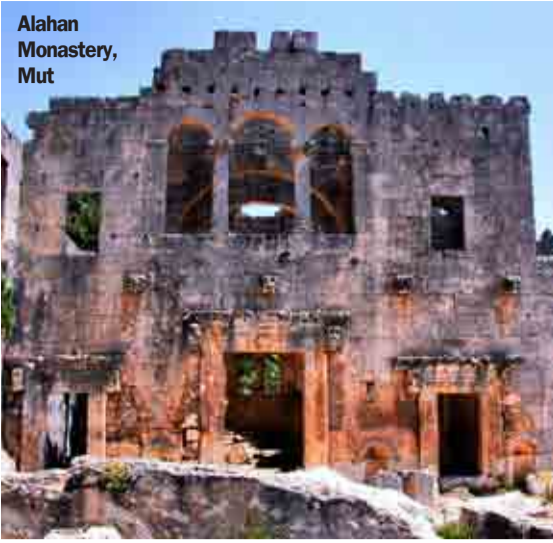
There are many different legends that surround how the area got the name Mersin. The oldest name for the region is "Kizuvatna," which became "Que" during the Hittite age, and Kilikya during the Classic period. According to the great Turkish travel writer Evliya Çelebi, the city of Mersin actually took its name from the Mersinogulları tribe. Some say that Mersin takes its name from the "murta" berry grown locally, which is called "Yaban Mersini" in Turkey.

The traces of many civilizations can be found throughout Mersin. The Hittites, the Phrygians, the Asurs, the Persians, the Macedonians, the Romans, and the Byzantines were all here at one point or another, followed upon by the Selçuks in the 11th century, the Karamanogulları in the 14th century, then the Ramazanogulları and in the 15th century, the Ottomans.

What has Turkey done in the last 10 years?

Experience gained through hosting large international sporting events over the past decade has played an important role in Turkey's desire to host the 2020 Summer Olympics. So which events has Turkey hosted in the past 10 years? Here are just some:

- 2005 UEFA Champions League final
- 2006 WTA Tennis Cup
- 2009 UEFA Cup Final
- 2010 World Basketball Championship - İstanbul - Ankara - Kayseri - İzmir
- 2010 Heavyweight World Weightlifting Championship - Antalya
- 2010 Europe Road Bicycle Championship - Ankara
- 46th Presidential International Bicycle Tour - İstanbul - Alanya
- 2010 World Coastal Rowing Championships - İstanbul
- 2010 World 3-Cushion Billiards Championships - Antalya
- 2010 Archery Trap Skeet World Cup Final - İzmir
- 2010 Season World Rally Championship - İstanbul
- 2010 Modern Pentathlon Star A World Championship - İstanbul
- 2011 the European Youth Olympic Festival (EYOF) - Trabzon
- 2011 European Judo Championships - İstanbul
- 2011 European Team Championships in İzmir
- 2011 Europe Mountain Running Championships - Bursa
- 2012 11th FINA World Swimming Championships (25 m)
- 2012 World Amateur Golf Championship and Turkish Airlines World Golf Final Tournament
- Turkish Airlines Euroleague Final (Basketball)
- 2012 2012 World Indoor Athletics Championships <http://www.athleticsdb.com/2012-world-indoor-athletics-championships.php>
- 2012 TEB BNP Paribas WTA Championships - İstanbul
- 2012 World Chess Olympics - İstanbul
- 2012 EuroLeague Women Final Eight



Mamure Castle, Anamur



Host to kingdoms: Tarsus

Though the actual history of Mersin as a city may not be that old, the region of Tarsus, which is linked to Mersin, is definitely of interest to visitors.

Archaeological digs conducted in 1934 at the Gözlu Kule burial grounds make it clear that the first settlements in and around Tarsus began during the Neolithic era and continued consistently through the mid Bronze Age. In historic documents, Tarsus is noted as the spot where Ashurbanipal first settled his kingdom.

Tarsus is first mentioned in Hittite documents as "Tarša." According to the Asurs, Tarsus was the capital of the Que Kingdom. During the eighth and seventh centuries B.C., the Asurs called Tarsus "Tarzi." During the sixth and fifth centuries B.C., at the times of the Asur and Sennesis kingdoms, the name didn't change. On coins made by the Persians in Tarsus, the name "Tarsus" can be seen. According to an Arab history called "Miratülber," Tarsus was actually founded by a descendant of the prophet Noah, called Tarasis. Tarsus' name was first the Greek Tarsos, and then in Latin Tarsus.

As the city where St. Paul was born, Tarsus is also very important for Christianity. The famous geographer Strabon wrote in the first century B.C. that Tarsus was a place where important linguists, philosophers and writers lived. In the year 639, after Muslims took over the city, Tarsus became an important center for intellectual thinkers in the Abbasid and Emevi eras.

There are all sorts of legends that surround the actual founding of Tarsus.

According to mythology, the Tarsus River was named the Cydnos by the local peoples of Kilikya. Cydnos was the mythological name of a river god. It is said that Cleopatra and the Roman commander Mark Antony, also known as Marcus Antonius, came to Tarsus down this river.

It is also said that because the mythological Pegasus injured his leg in the same spot as Tarsus, that the city received the name "Tarsus," which means the sole of the foot in Latin.

Yet another legend says that the city's original founder was the former Cilicia god Sandon, who is identified with the legendary Hercules. In fact, images of Hercules can be seen on coins from the fourth century B.C.

Cicero's home: Kizkalesi

A beach with fine sand and a beautiful blue sea is 70 kilometers to the west of Mersin. On it stands a castle that attracts many visitors, built on rocks that jut out from the waters. With eight towers, this castle also has many stories that surround how it came to stand here.

Some sources say that this castle was actually a military structure. After all, piracy in these waters was a factor that was bothersome enough to even drive people to live in other places, and as in so many other places, it threatened the livelihood of Korykos (Kizkalesi).

When the famous intellectual Cicero arrived in the region in 51 B.C., he struggled against these pirates and made important strides in the military arena. In fact, Cicero used two castles on the sea and on the land, to set up a system to fight the pirates. When attacks took place, he would order chains that were tied to the land and sea castles to be pulled, thereby blocking enemy ships and boats from entering the port guarded over by these castles.

Legendary castle

The "Kizkalesi" also has its own legend that surrounds it. It is said that a local king had

PLACES NOT TO BE MISSED IN MERSİN

a daughter whose beauty and kindness won the hearts of everyone who saw her. One day, a fortuneteller who was telling the king's fortune insisted on telling the fortune of his daughter. The moment the fortuneteller took the girl's hands in her own she began to tremble. The king asked what the fortuneteller had seen, and the fortuneteller told him that a snake would bite his beautiful daughter one day, and that because of this, his daughter would die at a very young age.

Thus, the king decided to build a castle in the middle of the sea, a place where no snake would be able to reach his daughter. His daughter moved to the castle to live, but one day, a basket containing some grapes was brought to her, and among the grapes a snake was hidden; it bit and killed her. After this incident, the king and his people realized that no one could ultimately escape the fate meant for them.

Pirates' city: Soli

The historic and ancient city of Soli Pompeiopolis is 11 kilometers to the southwest of Mersin. This is also a spot that should not be missed by visitors. This ancient city hosted not only pirate colonies, but also Alexander the Great, the Seleucid Empire and the Ottomans. With the permission of Roman Emperor Julius Caesar, Commander Pompey carried out a great military campaign against the pirates. Pompey was able to eliminate all of the pirate shelters along the Mersin coastline, but he also declared Soli the "city of pirates who have been forgiven," this after treating pirates who asked for amnesty with kindness. At the time, this city was known then as Pompeiopolis. Of the 200 giant columns that were thought to be here in that era, only 40 have are to be found in modern times.

Soli (also known as Soloi, Solipolis, and Pompeiopolis through the ages) was an important and functioning port town during the Byzantine Empire. But much of the city was destroyed in the famous Great Antakya Earthquake of 528 A.D.

St. Paul's Well

Another important tourist spot near Mersin is in Tarsus, which is significant as far as the spread of Christianity is concerned. St. Paul was born here, coming into the world in a Jewish family, given the name Otto Menardius. He left for Jerusalem at an early age to get an education, and though he joined in the attacks against the rapidly spreading Christianity at first, it was during a journey to Damascus that Paul encountered Jesus and converted to Christianity.

After this, St. Paul devoted his life to the spread of Christianity. He made a series of long and very effective journeys to this end during the first century A.D. These journeys are described in the Bible. In the courtyard of the home accepted as having been St. Paul's, in the center of Tarsus, there is a well that has been considered sacred for a long time. Christians who make the pilgrimage to this site never neglect to drink the water from this well.

Ashab-ı Khef

Ashab-ı Khef, which is mentioned in the Khef Sure in the Quran, is also known locally as the "Cave of the Seven Sleepers." There are many different legends that surround Ashab-ı Khef, but the shared opinion of Islamic intellectuals is that this cave is in Tarsus. Sacred to both Muslims and Christians, one descends down some 15-20 steps to this cave.

Some say that the "Seven Sleepers" were in fact seven youths that were trying to escape from the tyranny of Emperor Decius, who was persecuting early Christians for their faith.

Their names were Yemliha, Mekseline, Misliha, Mernuş, Sazenus, Tebermuş and Kefesteyayus, and they had one dog (Kitmir) with them. They took shelter in this cave and fell promptly into a deep sleep. Local people became aware of their presence not long after and covered the entrance to the cave, leaving these youths there to die.

One day, the Seven Sleepers awoke to light, and each one of them thought they had fallen asleep just one day before, though actually, much time had passed. They were hungry, though, and they sent group member Yemliha to go get some bread for them from the nearby city of Tarsus. When Yemliha made his way into town, he noticed that the roads and the style of clothing had changed. He went into a bakery to get some bread, and the baker said the money he had with him was no longer used.

Yemliha returned to the cave in a bewildered state and told his friends what he had encountered. And so it turned out that the sleep they had thought was just one night was actually 309 years. The Seven Sleepers were so confused about what had happened that they fell into another deep sleep, this time never to awaken again.

In the Muslim version of this story, Yemliha returns to the cave with many people from the city. These people see the six people in the cave praying; Yemliha leaves those he came with behind, enters the cave to join the other six in prayers, and then all seven of them become invisible.

Catholics celebrate these events on July 7. According to Orthodox Christians, the Seven Sleepers entered the cave on Aug. 4 and woke up centuries later on Oct. 22. For Muslims, there is no particular date connected to this story, and the cave can thus be visited in every season of the year.

Paradise and Hell caves

The Paradise and Hell Caves are two natural wonders that are made up of large, deep pits in the ground. Getting into the Paradise Cave is not easy; one has to descend a staircase of 450 stone steps. Inside the cave, there is the Virgin Mary Church, which is reached by another 300 steps.

These two caves are located right next to one another, although descent into the Hell Cave is nearly impossible, it is so deep.

According to mythology, a war broke out between the Olympic gods and the titans. The titans

were defeated, and Mother Earth, Gaia, came up with a mode of revenge for her grandchildren, the titans, by giving birth to a dragon. This dragon, fierce under its tough outer shell and with fire pouring from its mouth, was named Typhon, and it fought Zeus. Before locking Typhon away forever under Mount Etna, Zeus locked him in the very deep Hell Cave for a while.

Adam Kayalar -- (Cliff of Men)

Another spot that attracts much attention in Mersin is the Cliff of Men. Located in a very steep canyon, this place has rocks that are at an angle of nearly 90 degrees. The reliefs of human figures on these jutting rocks are thus very effective and stunning.

The reliefs, which date to the second century A.D. and the era of the Roman Empire, can be found in nine niches on the steep face of the rocks and show 11 men, four women, two children and one mountain goat. One of the frontal niches also shows a relief of a Roman eagle.

Cleopatra Gate

The Cleopatra gate is located at the entrance to Tarsus. As one wide arch supported by two legs, a port gate named "Gözlu Kule" is also the gate through which the famous queen of Egypt, Cleopatra, arrived in Tarsus to meet her lover, Roman General Mark Antony. It has been called Cleopatra's Gate since the start of the 20th century.

Kravga Bridge

The Gökcay and Gökdere rivers, which spring from the Geyik Mountains in the mid-Toros (Taurus) range, come together near Mut to become the Göksu River. The river is almost 260 kilometers in length and has an ancient bridge spanning it that has witnessed much history. The bridge is 84 meters long, and its architectural style reflects both early Roman style and the 14th century Karamanoğlu style. Many still say that camel caravans belonging to the Yörüks, loaded down with pomegranates, mostly used the bridge. Due to the high acidic factor in sour pomegranate, this syrup worked its way into the stones of the bridge over time. Because of the repairs to it, the ancient Kravga Bridge was closed to traffic permanently in 1990.

Gözlu Kule burial grounds

This is another settlement area that sheds some important light on early Anatolian culture. Archeological digs done between 1934 and 1938 and then in 1947 unearthed all sorts of structures; some were from the Neolithic period, and others all the way up to the Islamic period. Pieces unearthed from here are currently on display at the Adana Museum.

Donuktaş

Donuktaş, located in the Tekke district, is known to be one of the oldest structures in the area. It is widely believed that this was a Roman temple. According to legend, Donuktaş was the castle of a ruler who lived here with his daughter. It is said that a prophet who lived during this time

was cross with the ruler and kicked the castle, so that it rolled over and fell into the spot on which it now sits.

Bac Bridge

Located to the east of the modern city of Tarsus, the Justinianus Bridge is called the Bac Bridge, as crossing bridges used to cost money, and "Bac" meant taxation. This bridge spans the Berdan River and was commissioned in the sixth century by the Byzantine Emperor Justinianos. It was restored most recently in 1978.

Roman Road

Around 15 kilometers outside of Tarsus, an ancient road runs through the mountainous parts of the village of Sağlıklı. The road, which is cobbled, is from the Roman era. The road is around 3 kilometers long and around 3 meters wide. There are many engraved panels and old gravestones in this area as well. It is thought that the arch that crosses this ancient Roman road is either a border marker or a victory arch.

Makam-ı Şerif Mosque and Prophet Daniel's tomb

The Makam-ı Şerif Mosque was built in 1857. On its eastern side is the tomb of the prophet Daniel, who lived during the lifetime of the second King of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar (605-562B.C.).

Ulu Mosque

This mosque is also called the Camii Nur and is one of the most prominent examples of Turkish-Islamic art in the center of Tarsus. The son of Piri Pasha, Ibrahim Bey, built it in 1579. In the eastern section of the mosque are the gravesites of the holy men Seth and Lokman.

Old mosque -- (St. Paul's Church)

This was built in the 11th century A.D. in the name of St. Paul. It was put under official protection in 1993, when it went through a variety of restorations. It receives many Christian visitors throughout the year and is notable not only for its bell towers, but also its frescoes.

Kırk Kaşık Covered Bazaar

This covered bazaar is located next to the Ulu Mosque. It is an important historic structure due to its functioning as a madrasa and an almshouse.

Tarsus Waterfall

The water from this five-meter-high waterfall comes from the Berdan River. The ancient Romans once used this region as a grave area, but when the waterfall emerged, it began to attract different interests and purposes.

Kubut Paşa Madrasa (Tarsus Museum)

Kubat Pasha constructed this madrasa with its open courtyard in 1557; it boasts important aspects of Ottoman architecture. The structure was restored in 1966 and now serves as the Tarsus Museum. The museum contains more than 5,000 archaeological artifacts, around 2,000 ethnographic pieces and tens of thousands of ancient coins.

Orthodox Greek Church

This is located in the Tarsus' Cumhuriyet neighborhood. The local Greek community built it in 1850. The apse on its eastern side and the side two section roofs have been partially destroyed. There are some frescoes on the roof of the apse that depict angels. The fresco towards the middle of the roof that shows disciples is partially ruined.

Roman Temple

This temple was built during the second century A.D., though later changes were made to it to convert it into a church.

The historian Zosimus writes about the function of this temple, saying, "This temple was clearly built as a sign of gratitude to Apollo for the birds he sent to wipe out a plague of locusts that were attacking crops in the plains."