





# SALUTE TO THE SUN

Michael and Pervin have found the perfect compromise, running yoga holidays from their Turkish hilltop base for half the year, then returning to London when the heat is on. Words **Carolyn Locher**

From the day they met at Goldsmiths College of Art, Michael Cullingworth knew his now-wife Pervin would one day want to return to her native Turkey. And on the day they married, Pervin knew Michael would never spend more than part of the year in a country where summer temperatures can reach 45°C.

So they have spent the last 18 years dividing their time between a flat in London (where Michael runs a successful shiatsu practice) and a house in the hills overlooking the fishing village of Gököy, where Pervin (an artist and former schoolteacher) runs their business, which offers a variety of yoga courses to guests staying at village hotels.

Their dual lifestyle began with a snippet of overheard conversation. "In 1983, we were staying in the village of Türkbükü on the Bodrum peninsula," says Michael. "We heard of a Frenchman who had bought five cottages for peanuts. Pervin thought, 'I can do that'.

"After seeing many crumbled cottages, we found a plot of land and put down a deposit. We found out later the landowner had decided to sell to someone else."

Undeterred, Pervin set out for Turkey again in the winter of 1986. She put in a successful bid for 1.5 acres of olive grove with phenomenal views.







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"With no road access, no electricity and no running water, the process of buying the land was very simple," says Michael. "The owner had a piece of paper with the design of the plot on it, and their name. We had the cash. Together we went to see the 'noter'. He scratched out the name of the owner and wrote in ours. He gave the owner our money and that was that."

**"We invited six Okido yoga practitioner friends to stay. We put them up on mattresses around the house and everyone mucked in. It was incredibly basic"**

Construction on their three-bedroom/three-bathroom hillside-house started that winter. "We employed a local builder called Speedy Muzaffer, named after his reputation for quick construction. My brother-in-law travelled 13 hours by bus from Istanbul to make sure enough cement was added to the concrete mix and that they used reinforcing bars in the ceilings. With a fault line running down the whole of western Turkey, you can never be too careful."

Despite a forest fire (which thankfully blew the opposite way) and various mishaps with tradesmen, they finally moved into their house in the summer of 1989.

Back in London, Michael's love of sport and his work as a shiatsu practitioner led him to the Japanese Okido form of yoga.

"In the spring of 1993, we met a trainer from Holland who was looking for his next challenge.







During a break, Pervin asked him if he would like to lead a group in Turkey. It was at that point that our experiment began to take shape."

During the summer of 1993, they constructed a purpose-built yoga terrace at the house. In October, they ran their first ever 'course'. Michael says:

"We invited six Okido yoga practitioner friends to stay. We put them up on mattresses around the house and everyone mucked in. It was incredibly basic."

But he adds: "We knew the experiment had been a success because we all enjoyed it. So we scheduled the same thing for two weeks in 1994 and opened the course to the public, this time with the option of staying in a local hotel."

Having added a variety of courses (including, Iyengar, Ashtanga and Hatha) to Pervin's summer schedule, the daily routine offered to their original guests has remained the same. They walk up the hill to take a morning class. After a light lunch of meze (occasionally using olive oil from their own grove) prepared by a local cook, they walk back down the hill. Unless a therapy treatment has been booked (perhaps a shiatsu session or a Thai yoga massage), guests go to the beach or the Turkish baths. Some venture further afield to Bodrum or to the ancient archaeological site of Ephesus. Others lie beside the pool at the Ece hotel (where the owner, a Turkish Briton, is happy to chat to guests) until it is time to return up the hill for the afternoon session.

By 2001 their business had turned in its first profit and Pervin, by now a trainee yoga teacher herself, was able to register their terrace as the Gököy Yoga Studio.

As the business goes from strength to strength, the couple are also witnessing the village develop. The countryside around their property, once full of burgeoning mandarin groves, is now a tasteful estate. What was a small, underused path at the bottom of their garden is now a rutted road. Thanks

**Guests walk up the hill to take a morning class, followed by a light lunch of meze**

to the new estate, their electricity supply is mains-attached and their original terrace, ripped up and relocated after the road was built, is more spacious.

Pervin loves her "April to November" time in Turkey. But she also looks forward to winter in London, with the comfort of central heating.

Michael stays for just three summer months, returning to the UK to give treatments and teach shiatsu. When he is not there, he misses the village, – and the sea. But most of all, he misses sitting with Pervin, breathing the pine-scented air while they gaze towards the mountain opposite their home.

Health & Yoga Holidays, tel: 020 8699 1900 (London); 00 90 252 357 7207 (Gököy)



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