How to switch off



Unlike enforced detoxes and wellness resorts, the remote village of Simena doesn't promise transformation. It simply offers space to breathe, away from pollution, notifications and noise – which may be the greatest luxury of all

Words by Suzy Pope

PHOTOS: ADOBE STOCK





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Be honest, how many times have you decided on a holiday destination with a little help from social media scrolling?

The influence of Instagram and TikTok on our holiday habits continues to grow, and while it's helpful to crowdsource information online, there's a marked downside. Travel to holiday hotspots – even so-called 'hidden gems' – can feel more about queueing for selfie spots and staging videos than doing what we really crave: enjoying the moment, in a beautiful place.

But alongside polished influencer videos, TikTok creators are now tackling 'brain rot' – how excessive time online causes a slow, foggy feeling in the brain – by promoting long walks, time outdoors and writing by hand. These analogue activities are more about delayed gratification than instant dopamine hits, and they're finding their way back into the way we travel.

While resort hotels boast about high-speed Wi-Fi in every room, more and more travellers are actively seeking to unplug. A 2023 digital wellbeing report found that over 55% of Gen Z respondents need a break from social media and digital life, while online searches for digital detox retreats tripled between 2024 and 2025. Screen fatigue and nostalgia for simpler times has us abandoning our phones and embracing quiet, screen-free travel.

Unlike at the better-known resort towns along Türkiye's Turquoise Coast, you won't find modern hotel chains and mod cons in the remote, car-free village of Simena, which tumbles from a Byzantine castle down to the shore of the Med.

Instead, there's just a handful of family-run guesthouses and ramshackle tavernas, clustered around the seashore where you might spot sea turtles drifting by. With no traffic and very little phone signal, it feels like Simena hasn't changed much since it was founded in the 4th century BC.

Here's how Simena ticks all our boxes for a digital detox holiday – without even having to try.

1. You can't get any phone signal

The only way to reach Simena is by boat from Üçağız and Kaş, or on foot. The ancient village sits on the Lycian Way, a long-distance hiking route from Antalya to Fethiye. From the nearest town Kapaklı, it's an 8.5km walk along a trail that hugs the coastline along Gökkaya Bay, where forested islets float in shimmering teal water and the occasional day boat is the only sign of civilisation. Simena's geographic isolation, tucked between towering, forested hills, means weak phone signal is inevitable – naturally pulling you into an offline world, with no rules or lockboxes required, and where you feel like you've gone back in time.

"In other towns, the ruins are fenced off. In Simena, the ancient Lycian sarcophagi are part of the village furniture," says Paul Forrester, founder of Amber Travel, which offers multi-day or single-day hikes. During the Middle Ages, the village was plagued by pirates, so the Byzantines built a dramatic fortress on the hilltop, and little has changed since then. "It's an analogue dream, forcing you to slow down to the speed of a rowboat," Paul says.

Opposite page Exploring the ruins of Simena Castle
Here Car-free Simena can only be reached by boat or on foot



"Simena forces you to slow down to the speed of a rowboat"

2. It's a ready-made 'quietcation' destination

As one of the last car-free villages on Türkiye's Turquoise Coast, Simena is blissfully free of the sounds of car horns and distant traffic hum. A 2024 study published in The BMJ confirmed what many of us already instinctively feel: that traffic noise can raise blood pressure, increase stress hormones and worsen cardiac function. Across Europe, it's rare to find a true escape from the persistent, low-level rush of vehicles, but it's something we all badly need. Enter the 'quietcation', a major trend for Gen Z travellers in 2026.

"Simena lacks the noise of modern life. Instead of engines, you hear goat bells and the rhythmic lapping of the Mediterranean," Paul says. As there's little by way of nightlife, you won't hear the thud of bass-heavy club music or the cackle of late-night revellers. It's a quietcation destination without even trying.

The idea of a quietcation is often misunderstood as a holiday where you do nothing. But it's not about boredom – it's about relief, softening the nervous system naturally with a lack of modern noise and abundance of sea air, natural landscapes and stars at night. Paul recommends stargazing in Simena. "With almost no light pollution, the Milky Way is spectacular here," he says.

"Instead of horns, you hear goat bells and the Mediterranean"





From top to bottom With no real nightlife, expect quiet, tranquil evenings in Simena; Simena Castle was built to protect the town from pirates

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3. Wi-Fi barely exists

Wi-Fi has crept into some of the cafés and guesthouses, but it's not guaranteed or expected. "There are no grand hotels in Simena, only family-run guesthouses where the 'lobby' is a wooden jetty and room service is a bowl of fruit from the garden, by your bed," Paul says.

Mehtap Pension is a perfect example, where bougainvillaea-dappled terraces overlook the water. Dinner is fish caught fresh, local cheese and sweet peppers. The hillside rooms feel like cottages, each with a sea view. The family owners will take you to and from Üçağız by private boat and offer trips around the rocky islands to see the ruins of ancient Lycia.

Wi-Fi exists, but barely. Without the temptation to scroll late into the night, evenings slow down naturally. A warm breeze drifts through open windows, crickets provide gentle white noise and deep, uninterrupted and restorative sleep comes easily.

Down on the waterfront, Sahil Pension offers more basic accommodation. Wi-Fi is nonexistent here. Instead, the focus is lounging on the private dock between plunges into the crystal-clear water and on the hammock-strewn terrace. The rooms won't win any awards for luxury, but have all you need for deep sleep: comfortable beds and windows that open to the sound of waves.

Above from left to right The view from Mehtap Pension; the best way to see the Sunken City of Kekova is from a kayak

PHOTOS: @MEHTAPKALEKOY, ADOBE STOCK



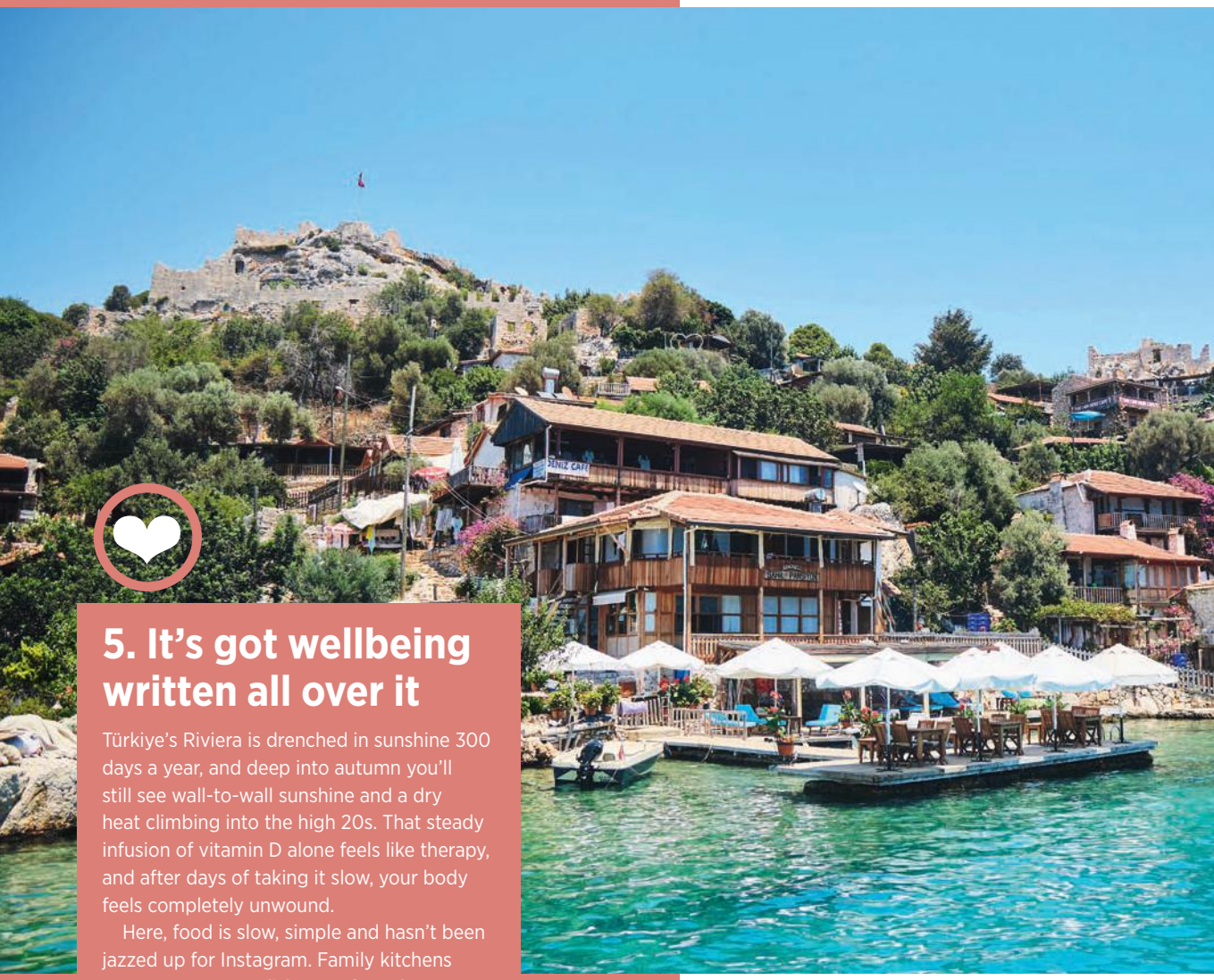
“Kayaking offers an intimacy a standard boat tour can’t”

4. There are no influencers in sight

Social media hasn’t found Simena yet. The village’s isolation means far fewer visitors than the rest of Türkiye’s Riviera, and “this physical barrier has kept the mass out of mass tourism,” says Paul. Without intimidating must-see lists online, there’s zero pressure to sightsee, and any tourist activities you do have a refreshing sense of the unknown about them.

You might follow the Lycian Way to Smugglers Cove – a tumbledown, pirate-themed bar hidden in a forested bay where a small jetty juts into emerald water, for paddleboarding and wild swims. Or you could climb past shops selling burnt-milk or cactus fruit ice cream, to the ruins of Simena Castle. Within the walls, an ancient amphitheatre sees 300 seats carved into the rock – the smallest theatre in Lycia – and wooden walkways weave between the crumbling, crenulated walls.

“Kayaking the Sunken City of Kekova is a highlight,” Paul says. “It offers an intimacy that a standard boat tour can’t.” Amber Travel offers guided kayaking experiences in Simena, and Mehtap Pension has kayak rental included with each stay. “While large gulets must keep their distance from the protected archaeological site, kayaking lets you float inches away from 2,000-year-old Lycian staircases leading into the turquoise depths,” Paul explains. “There’s something hauntingly beautiful about the clack of your paddle being the only sound as you hover over submerged walls and terracotta amphorae shards.”



5. It's got wellbeing written all over it

Türkiye's Riviera is drenched in sunshine 300 days a year, and deep into autumn you'll still see wall-to-wall sunshine and a dry heat climbing into the high 20s. That steady infusion of vitamin D alone feels like therapy, and after days of taking it slow, your body feels completely unwound.

Here, food is slow, simple and hasn't been jazzed up for Instagram. Family kitchens turn out 'peasant' dishes perfected over generations: stuffed sweet peppers, grilled aubergine drenched in local olive oil and glistening pomegranate seeds adding a sharp punch to salads. Food is fuel for fishing or tending the land, and perfect for days spent hiking, kayaking and swimming. While health resorts started to construct menus around the Mediterranean diet in the 1990s, Simena's restaurants have always used the bounty of the land without thinking about it.

Simena is a place to get outside and touch grass. It's made for reading long-ignored books, keeping handwritten journals and doing analogue activities. For watching the light fade from the water's edge, and sitting in silence without feeling the temptation to scroll on your phone. Detoxing never felt so natural.

Wizz Air flies to Antalya

Above The marina near the town of Kekova is the ideal launch pad to hike to Simena Castle

After days of taking it slow, your body feels completely unwound

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