

*Gem of the Gulf of Saros* □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ *Population:*



With 40 kilometers of golden sand, Enez at the far western end of Trakya (Thrace) ought to be at least as well known as [Patara](#) . That it isn't is in part due to the fact that until 2004 it was off-limits to foreigners because of its proximity to the Greek border. But it's also partly because there are really two Enezes, and therein lies a story.

## **Enez (Ainos)**

Old Enez is the sleepy small settlement that stands on the site of ancient **Ainos**. Arriving there feels a little like arriving at the end of the world, although in no more time that it requires to take a turn round the castle you'll realize that this was not always the case. For in its prime Ainos must have been an impressive place, endowed with some extraordinary monuments that are still coming to light as excavations about town continue.

This being Turkey, Ainos passed through the hands of a staggering array of different occupiers before it became Enez. Settlement in the area appears to have started around 4,000 BC when the vestigial town sat right on the Saros Körfezi (Gulf of Saros) at the point where the Meriç river emptied into the sea.

Later, Aeolian settlers from the Greek islands moved in to found trading colonies here, only to be pushed out in the 6th century BC by Persian invaders. The locals fought back by joining the Delian League of Greek city states, which didn't stop them from falling under first the Ptolemaic and then the Roman sway.

In Byzantine times, Ainos operated as a virtually independent principedom. Then in the Late Middle Ages the Genoese moved in to add it to their trading empire. Finally, in 1456 Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror's general Has Yunus Bey rode into town and claimed it for the Ottomans. By then the delta of the Meriç had silted up, leaving the town stranded four kilometers inland, an economic disaster from which it never really recovered.

### Around Old Enez

**Enez castle** is by far the most significant monument in town. Inside it stands a wonderful building that deserves to be far better known, a **vast Byzantine basilica** dedicated to Haghia Sophia (Divine Wisdom) and dating back to the 6th century. In its heyday it must have made a stupendous sight with its soaring dome and tall apse; the dome has long since caved in, but the apse survives, albeit propped up with scaffolding lest it succumb to a similar fate.

After the Ottoman takeover the church was converted into a mosque; the mihrab inserted into the south aisle still survives intact, along with much of the painted decoration that was added to the walls. A delightful narthex with seven arches looks straight out from the church to the sea.

Anywhere else this would be a major historic monument, but in Turkey, which is almost too richly endowed with monuments, it goes virtually uncommented.

On its own the basilica would be enough to justify a visit to the castle but elsewhere in the grounds excavations have also uncovered the remains of a small **chapel** dedicated to St Gregory of Neocaesarea (Niksar) that dates back to the 6th century and boasts especially beautiful mosaic flooring.

Nearby ongoing excavations have revealed how later buildings inside the castle were erected

right over rock-cut storage depots.

Much of the outside wall of the castle survives intact and from the ramparts you can gaze out over a line of outer fortifications to the sea. It's well worth strolling around the walls to examine the beautiful brickwork (thankfully so far only "restored" near the main gate). Eventually you will come to a large detached **tower** which served for a while as the local mint (darphane). Another tower, called the **Çan Kulesi (Bell Tower)**, has been pleasingly restored to serve as someone's home.

The other specific sight in this part of town is what is described as the **Has Yunus Bey Türbesi** but which started life as a tiny

**14th-century chapel**

. Cross-shaped, with a central dome and a shallow apse, it looks exactly like the chapels to be seen all over Greece, and is a poignant reminder of the harsh way in which land borders slice across the more gentle natural meeting and merging of different cultures.

When Has Yunus Bey, the Ottoman leader who had captured Ainos, died in 1456 it was adapted to serve as his burial place. There's a cluster of impressive Ottoman tombs adorned with stone turbans right by the door as if anybody who was anybody locally was jostling for the chance to be interred as close to him as possible.

Other slight traces of the past lie scattered about, including an ancient **necropolis** opposite the bus terminal, and a

### water tower

of the same kind as can be seen at Kilyos and at the start of Divan Yolu in İstanbul on the road back towards Keşan.

### Around new Enez

Another sight requires you to journey across a small lagoon to new Enez, a very different world known to many holiday-loving Turks who migrate here en masse to stay in the summer houses that line the beach.



What to say of this second Enez that will not sound completely offputting? Let's just say that the **Sahil Kervansarayı (Coastal Caravansaray)** sounds a lot more romantic than it really is. A long, thin Ottoman barracks now standing in ruins behind a rusting iron fence, it was re-used by the British as recently as the First World War at which time it would have been standing in splendid isolation. Now, however, it's hemmed in by ugly modern housing developments divided by dirt roads. Most visitors will want to take the briefest of looks before moving speedily on.

It's a great shame because this must once have been an area of great natural beauty. Even today it has a certain pastoral charm, especially in early evening when villagers can be seen leading flocks of cows and sheep back to their sheds while their neighbors pass by in box carts pulled by donkeys that seem to belong to a completely different world to that of the serried *sites* (housing developments) spreading out around them.

If you do that it will also give you the chance to make a second foray out to Uzunköprü (Longbridge), a small town whose main feature is, not surprisingly, a long bridge over the Ergene river that dates back to 1443 and still boasts an incredible 174 arches. The journey back and forth will also give you plenty of opportunity to appreciate the never-ending fields of sunflowers (perversely called moonflowers in Turkish), past their prime at this time of year and with their heads bowed penitentially beneath the sun, but astonishingly beautiful nonetheless.

### Best hotels

New Enez has three hotels scattered about amid the concrete, but these are hardly inviting, and/or grossly overpriced. Old Enez has only one extremely basic hotel that would not appeal to everyone. The solution perhaps is to stay in Keşan, an hour away by minibus, and make a day trip of a visit.

Alternatively you could consider staying at **Sığınak (The Retreat)** at Mecidiye near İbrice which offers everything from hotel rooms to treehouses. Tel: 0284-783 4310.

### Transport info

There are regular buses from [İstanbul](#) (Esenler) to Keşan otogar where you must take a servis bus into the town center to catch one of the half-hourly minibuses to Enez. From Enez town center half-hourly minibuses run to the neighboring beach resort.

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*This article first appeared in Time Out Istanbul in English*

### THE TWO FACES OF ENEZ

Row upon row of featureless summer houses with piles of builders' rubble abandoned in between them. A giant branch of the cut-price supermarket Bim. Litter gently billowing in the wind. Doesn't sound too appealing, does it, but this is the seaside resort of Enez on the Gulf of Saros, about as far west in Turkey as you can get without crossing the border into Greece.

Cut. Rewind a bit. Because of course if that was all there was to it then Enez couldn't be the popular summer escape for Turkish families that it quite clearly is. The explanation lies in the never-ending stretch of beach that puts out tentacles in both directions. Forty kilometers of sand, and you can't say fairer than that, can you?

Still, few foreigners are going to be lured away from the bright lights and familiar comforts of the Aegean and Mediterranean without more of a carrot than that. For them the good news is that there are actually two Enezes coexisting side by side like an ill-matched couple whose relationship has gone sour, and it's the other Enez, the quieter Enez that struggles to rustle up a single hotel, that is likely to be of most interest to visitors.

### **For Enez read Ainos**

The second Enez (really the first one since the beach resort is less than a decade old) stands on the site of an ancient settlement called Ainos that seems to have been established around 4,000 BC. This was later occupied by Greek colonists, then by the Persians and Romans, but its glory days came under the Byzantines when a massive basilica dedicated to Divine Wisdom (Haghia Sophia) was erected here. Later Enez was seized by the Ottomans whereupon the church became a mosque, with a mihrab slotted into its south aisle and its walls deftly repainted.

Ainos' primary attraction had been its location at the point where the Meriç river emptied into the sea. This made it perfect for traders, including the Genoese who established a colony here, but as at Ephesus the harbor gradually silted up, leaving the town stranded some four kilometers inland. The result was inevitable. By the time the Ottomans rode in in 1456 the town had already lost its *raison d'être*. The resort may be hellish tacky to look at, but at least it's brought renewed life to the area, at least until the summer draws to an end.

### **The sight circuit**

The great thing about a visit to Enez is that it's small and compact, with the things to see handily grouped together. The most unmissable sight is the medieval castle with the great

ruined basilica tucked up inside it. On-going excavations have uncovered extraordinary rock-cut depots beneath the later buildings as well as what must have been a delightful sixth-century chapel with a wonderful marble floor. Surprisingly, given how little is said about Enez, most of the castle's walls are still standing as are a series of peripheral towers, the largest of which once housed the local mint.

Also worth a look is a doll's house of a church which was pressganged into service as a burial place for Has Yunus Bey, the Ottoman commander who captured Ainos, then died shortly afterwards. The church looks as if it's drifted across the border from Greece, although Ottoman tombs of the beturbanned sort that can be seen along İstanbul's Divan Yolu are jostling each other for position by the entrance.

To tick off Enez's third main attraction you need to venture into the wasteland of summer houses which lies across a small lagoon to the east. There the Sahil Kervansarayı, a long, thin barracks erected in Ottoman times, continued in business right into the First World War. It would be a fine sight were it not surrounded by ugly modern development.

### **Sunflowers with everything**

If you've ever wondered where all the sunflower seeds that rural Turks like to crunch with their tea come from, then look no further than western Thrace where field after endless field is planted with *ayçiçekler* (moonflowers). In fact this is a surprisingly bucolic corner of the country, with traffic frequently forced to give way to slow-moving herds of cows, and flocks of sheep and goats. Unlikely as it might seem, this is also a part of the world where the donkey cart is up there with the Volvo as the favored mode of transport with the locals.

### **Hotel desert**

The biggest snag with a trip to Enez is that if you don't own a summer house there you'll be struggling to find somewhere to stay. The Hotel Ege in Enez Mark One features a fine line in mothball-scented bathrooms, while the Golden Beach Hotel in Enez Mark Two asks 100TL for a room overlooking a half-built housing development. That leaves Keşan, an hour's drive inland, which offers some typical city-center business hotels. But then you could just travel out there for the day and be back in İstanbul in time for tea...

## **The great summer migration**

Enez is a prime example of a Turkish phenomenon that will strike some visitors as extremely odd. Every year the schools have barely closed their doors for the three-month vacation before half the country ups sticks and migrates en masse to summer houses (*yazlıks*) by the sea. It's a migration with a long history, and one that proved lucrative for the Princes' Islands even in the 19th century. But once upon a time only the well-heeled could afford to indulge in such journeying. Now the middle classes can also manage second homes by the sea, with the result that whole swathes of coastline have disappeared beneath concrete not to provide hotels for foreign tourists but to provide *yazlıks* for locals.

Maybe it's something to do with the ancestral nomadism that supposedly lingers in the Turkish soul, a yearning to recreate the old annual movement up to the yaylas (plateaus) in search of better pastures. Who knows. The one thing that's certain is that a move to the yazlık holds out no prospect of a holiday for the women of the household who must continue their round of domestic drudgery, just in a different setting.