




Izmir and the Northern Aegean Coast

By Dr Arjun Choong

The harbour at Sığirci, once the site of a Genoese castle,
and today a popular seaside resort



The Turkish city of Izmir, previously known as Smyrna, was one of the Seven Churches of Revelation mentioned in the Bible (“churches” refers to the communities of Christians living in each city, and not just the buildings they worshipped in), like the nearby towns of Ephesus and Pergamon.

Much of old Izmir was burnt down in the Great Fire of Smyrna in 1922, but the subsequent decades have seen massive migration from the heartland of Turkey and today, Izmir is the third most populous city in the country. Nevertheless, the city has its charms, and it provides a comfortable base from which to visit the ruins of Pergamon (now known as Bergama), and the small seaside towns on the Northern Aegean Coast, where the urbanites of Izmir escape to on weekends. **SMA**

Dr Choong wishes he knew how to stop travelling.

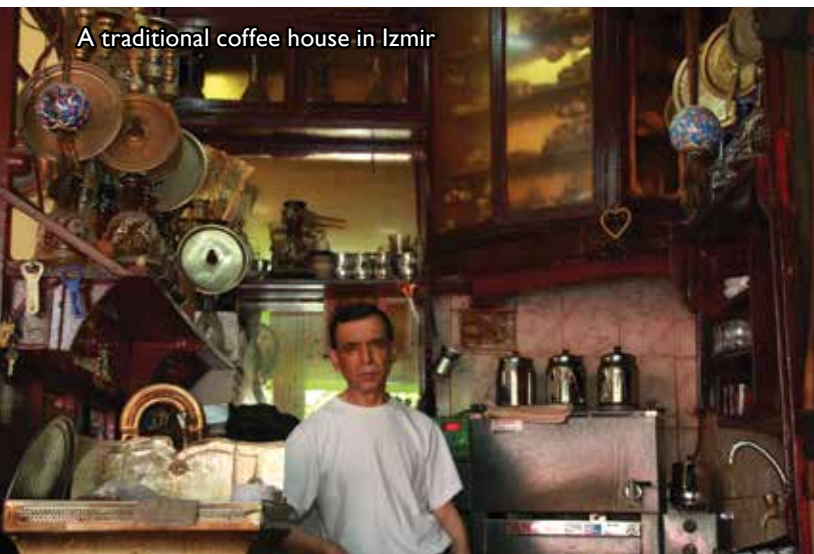
A busker plays a *baglama* by the Kordon, Izmir's pedestrianised waterfront



Greengrocers at the old bazaar of Izmir



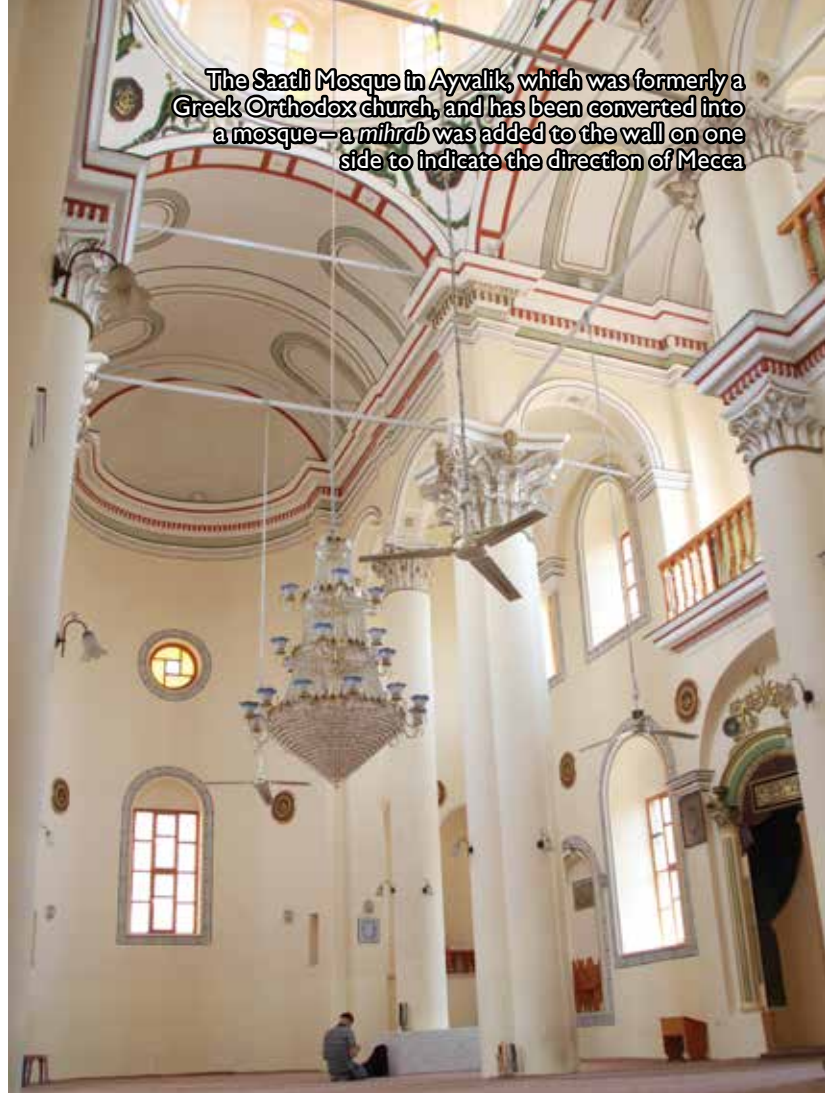
A traditional coffee house in Izmir



A fishing boat off the coast of Ayvalik – the seaside town once had a large Greek population, but following the Turkish War of Independence in 1923, there was a large-scale population exchange between Ayvalik and formerly Turkish islands that were ceded to Greece



The Saatli Mosque in Ayvalik, which was formerly a Greek Orthodox church, and has been converted into a mosque – a *mihrab* was added to the wall on one side to indicate the direction of Mecca



The beach at Yeni Foca, one of the many beaches and bays on the Aegean Sea



The Kordon or seaside promenade is the social heart of Izmit, and its parks and malls provide the space for anglers, families and couples to hang out and enjoy a picnic or a meal



A game of cards at a cafe in Sigacik



Pide, the Turkish version of pizza



A meal of grilled fish and vegetables, accompanied by the local beer



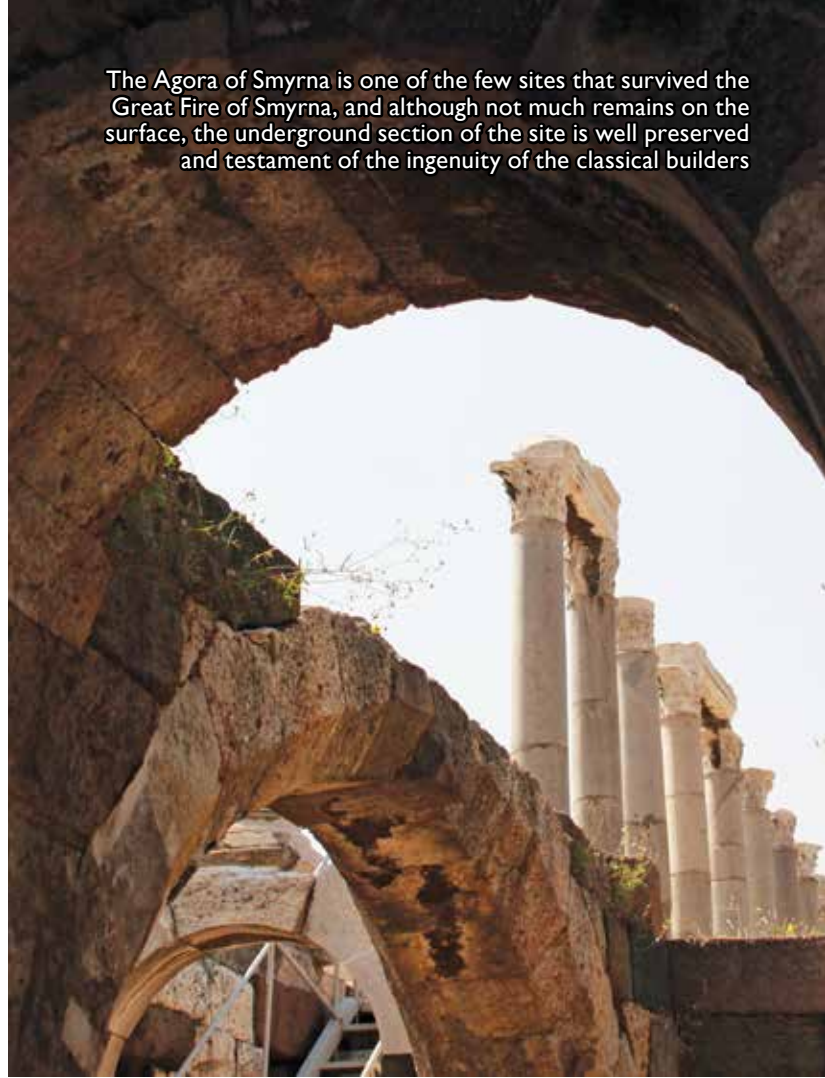
The stunning amphitheatre of Pergamon is perched on a steep hillside, and the surrounding countryside provides a backdrop to the stage



The ruins of Pergamon, once a powerful Hellenistic kingdom in Asia Minor – although many of the original monuments from the Acropolis of Pergamon is now in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin, but one can still imagine the splendour of the city at its peak from what remains



The Agora of Smyrna is one of the few sites that survived the Great Fire of Smyrna, and although not much remains on the surface, the underground section of the site is well preserved and testament of the ingenuity of the classical builders



The view to the Acropolis of Pergamon, from the colonnaded walkway to the Askleion, or the Temple of Asclepius, which was named for the Greek god of healing and was where Galen once practised



A meal of *koft*e (minced lamb meatballs; foreground) and salad, washed down with *raki*, an anise-flavoured liquor that is Turkey's national drink



Afternoon sweets in Ayvalik: the ubiquitous *baklava* (back of plate) and *lok*, a dessert similar to the Indian *gulab jamun*, all washed down with a cup of strong Turkish tea

