

An Independent Foreign Female Entrepreneur – Still a Rarity in Turkey

Sanna Alatalo, an entrepreneur in Alanya, Turkey, isn't afraid of challenges. Despite worrying news about the country, she foresees a bright future.

Near the popular Kleopatra Beach in the center of Alanya, Sanna Alatalo, 37, is at her Kleopatra Homes company's office – and her phone keeps ringing. She smoothly switches between Finnish, Turkish and English while agreeing a curtain deal and an appointment with a construction contractor. The daily life of a real estate agent-entrepreneur is filled with a wide variety of tasks, especially as Alatalo does not abandon her customers after they buy apartments.

"I help them to buy furniture and curtains, and often serve as an interpreter for them," Alatalo says.

In Alanya, a city of about 300,000 that lives off tourism, there is no sign of the recent negative news about Turkey besides a decline in the number of visitors.

"Day-to-day life in Alanya is the same as ever. There have been bombings reported in the news in Finland, but the nearest ones have been hundreds of kilometers from here.

You have to remember that Turkey is a really big country more than twice as big in area as Finland," Alatalo points out.

Alanya remains a popular vacation destination for Finns, and about 3,000 Finns own apartments here. Several hundred of them live here permanently or for part of each year.

Alanya - Immediately Charming

Alatalo has lived in Alanya since 2009.

"Well, it's the usual story – I was here on vacation and met a local guy, and then our friendship turned into a relationship," says Alatalo, recalling the summer of 2004, when she went on holiday with a friend to the randomly-chosen destination of Alanya.

After visiting Alanya, Alatalo was no longer interested in other beach destinations, but instead always wanted to return to Alanya.

"People's friendliness made a big impression on me and seemed really genuine. And Alanya was and still is an inexpensive place," Alatalo says.

After studying to be a cosmetologist, Alatalo worked as a sales manager at a

cosmetics import firm in Helsinki. While working, she studied the Turkish language at a community college. After many vacations and a longer period off work, Alatalo quit her job and moved to Alanya.

"I wanted to find a job, because I've always been work-oriented. At first I worked at a hospital as an interpreter for Finns, but I wanted to do sales work, which I was used to."

Alatalo also worked as a hostess at a Finnish dance restaurant before she began working as a real estate agent in mid-2010. Her relationship ended, but Alatalo had settled into Alanya so well that she decided to stay.

Natural Step toward Entrepreneurship

Alatalo enjoyed working as a real estate agent and earned a Turkish degree in the field.

"I got to work on my own and help develop the company's operations, so it was a natural step when I bought Kleopatra Homes myself in 2014," Alatalo explains.

The recent negative news about Turkey have worried all the Finns living in the country.

"Of course the situation is worrying, but as an entrepreneur I have to believe in a positive future, and so do many others here. New buildings are going up and flats are being sold. Alanya has developed a lot in recent years, and there are many development projects going on in the city," she notes.

As an independent foreign female entrepreneur, Alatalo is a rarity in Turkey, even in Alanya.

– Most of the Turks with whom I work are men. I do, however, know many Turkish women in management positions, for instance in the insurance and banking sectors, Sanna Alatalo says.

