

A YACHTING WORLD PUBLICATION

# CHARTER WORLD

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*European Edition*

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WIN A HOLIDAY IN MALTA



**Above, locally caught fish is usually excellent, but is best avoided in Thessaloniki where the water is heavily polluted. Below right, the crew play backgammon in a rare moment of sunshine**

## Nor any drop to drink

Water, water everywhere, but unfortunately not on board! And that was just one of James Boyd's problems when he headed for the northern Sporades for an early season holiday

**I**t had been a long, dismal, London winter and I must say I was quite keen on the idea of a *Yachting World* charter in Greece, even though May was the very beginning of the season. All I wanted was a week of fair winds, brilliant sun and, above all, no problems.

By booking through a German company, I hoped that efficiency and smooth running would be assured. Cosmos Yachting, based in Munich, but with an office in London, are agents for yacht charter companies in Turkey, the Balearics, South of France and the Caribbean among others. In Greece, they use Kiriacoulis Mediterranean, which, with nine bases, plus two new ones opening at Samos and Lefkas this year, is one of the biggest charter companies in the country.

To avoid the time-consuming business of returning the yacht to her base, we chose to do a one-way charter starting from Thessaloniki in north-east Greece and finishing in the popular resort island of Skiathos. Unlike some other charter companies, Cosmos Yachting make no extra charge for one-way charters between their bases.

**T**hessaloniki is Greece's second largest city, sitting plumb in the middle of Macedonia. Once our Olympic Airways flight had touched down, we were met and taken by taxi to the large, modern Aretsou Marina, which lies to the south of the city. On arrival we were greeted by Paris Karabatsos, the amiable manager of Kiriacoulis's base at Volos: the local manager was apparently away delivering a boat.

"Can you give me your licence?" Paris asked, after he had shown us round the smart Gib'Sea 442 which was to be our home for the next week.

I looked at him blankly. Usually this hurdle is crossed with the aid of an RYA qualification or certificate of competence when you book a charter, so that the appropriate paperwork can be handled by the charter company beforehand. We admitted that we had arrived sans certificate; Paris had to make an attestation of our sailing ability himself to the rigorously bureaucratic local authorities.

With the combination of the marina's location (outside the city) and the weather (driving rain), we did not feel inclined to take a look round Thessaloniki before we left. What we did see suggested a rather large, modern and heavily industrialised city. However, there are reputedly excellent museums showing relics from ancient Macedonia and sites such as the Arch and Palace of Galerius.

As we'd planned a longish passage and wanted to reach our destination before dark, we headed off early the next

morning. It was overcast and raining intermittently. I wished I had brought my oilskins.

Although our ultimate destination was Skiathos and the other Sporades, en route we wanted to explore Khalkidhiki, three fingers of land pointing southward from mainland Macedonia. We had been told that Khalkidhiki possessed some of the best beaches in Greece, but had yet to feel the effects of tourism fully. It seemed an ideal area to explore by yacht.

Motor-sailing south in drizzle off Kassandra, the westernmost peninsula, we spotted several holiday complexes and numerous holiday homes along the rugged, conifer-clad coast. A notable resort for yachts is Porto Carras on Sithonia, Khalkidhiki's central finger, which is a modern hotel/marina/leisure complex similar to those found on the Languedoc-Roussillon coast of France. However, our landfall a few kilometres south was rather different.

Porto Koufo's narrow entrance between two cliffs proved difficult to spot, but once we negotiated our Gib'Sea 442 through it, we found a picturesque lagoon, protected to the west by a high mountain. Someone mentioned that it reminded them of Scotland, but that may just have been the weather...

As with other ports we were to visit, we moored stern to the quay among a host of fishing boats. Apart from a few tavernas, there was little else to see, although a quayside supermarket was in the final throes of construction. When we ventured into a taverna for a spread of taramasalata, choriatiiki, tzatziki, fresh squid and fries, washed down with a bottle of red Domestica, we got the impression we were the first tourists of the season. With the May weather as it was, we could see why.

I had hoped to have a sail around the easternmost ▷



All photos: Oli Tennent

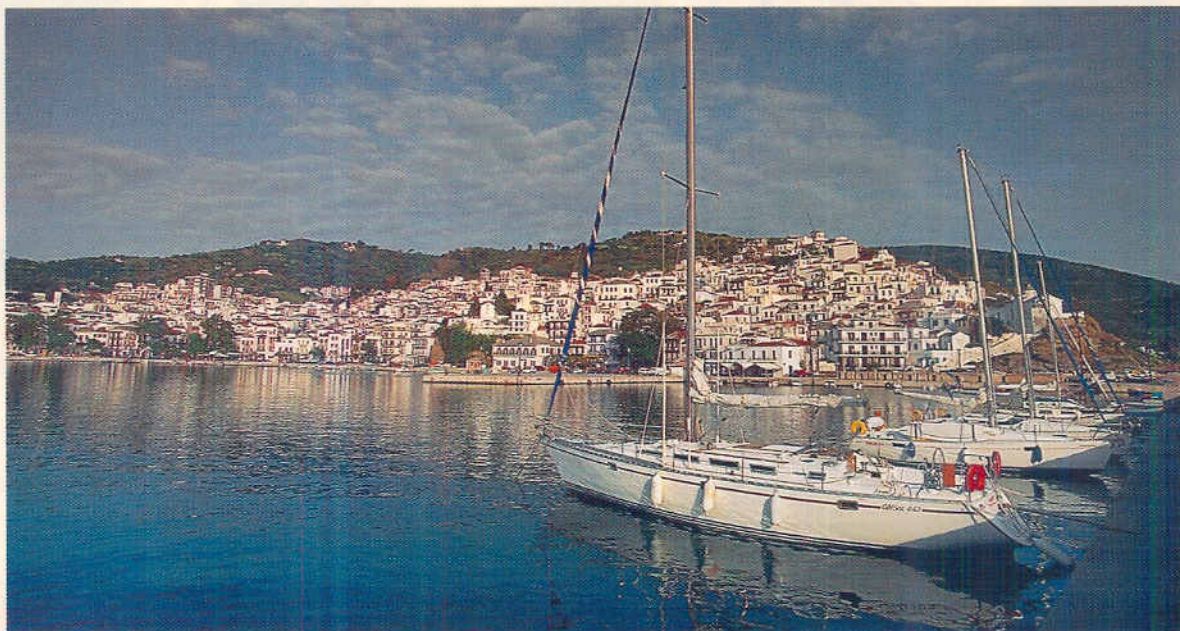


**Above, Panormos Bay proved a spectacular last night anchorage. Far left, we were surprised that many of the anchorages were so remote. Planitis on the island of Pelagos, for instance, was completely deserted. Left, running with the Meltemi under grey skies**

# Greece



Above and right, Port Skopelos was a picturesque stopover, but even the mayor was unable to find water for our tanks. Far right, the deserted hilltop village on Alonissos is well worth a visit



peninsula, Akti, but this was pointless in the conditions. For over a thousand years Athos, on Akti, has been an isolated monastic state. Populated by monks and hermits, this mountainous peninsula has its own theocratic government and no roads, communications or electricity. Time in Athos still operates on the Julian calendar and on the Byzantine clock, where midnight falls at dusk each day.

A strict rule of Athos is that no women are allowed there, although laws have been relaxed slightly since ancient times when even female animals were banned. In amazement, we read Rod Heikell's pilot which told us that yachts with females on board were not allowed to approach closer than 500m.

Pelagos, a wild, dramatic island of rolling green, is the easternmost and remotest of the northern Sporades. Skiathos, the westernmost, has its own international airport and is the most crowded. Pelagos is uninhabited save for a single hermit who is believed to live there.

## THE BOAT

Kiriacoulis are Greek agents for Gib'Sea and any boat in Gib'Sea's range, from a 31-footer to the mighty Master 52, is available to charterers, depending upon availability. Apart from the problems we encountered with the water system and the lack of jerrycans, we found our Gib'Sea 442 to be in first class condition.

Although she was three years old she seemed very well maintained, possibly because she belongs to the Volos base manager. In common with most modern French cruising yachts, her sail controls were easy to use and she handled well under both sail and power.

The cabin configuration with two double-berthed cabins and two with



single bunks was less than ideal for our party of three couples.

She featured none of the quirky electrics, engine or refrigeration systems which we have encountered on some other charter boats. All were fairly 'standard' and easy to use. The yacht was adequately equipped with lifejackets. A depth sounder display in the cockpit would have been useful.

On the west side of the island there is a good lunchtime anchorage beneath a deserted monastery. It is possible to visit the monastery and see how the monks lived their self-sufficient existence. There is still a winepress and ovens for baking bread.

We anchored on the opposite side of the island in a beautiful lagoon called Planitis which we shared with three fishing boats. It is well protected – which was fortunate, as a severe gale passed through in the night.

The gale blew away the overcast sky and, for the first time since our arrival, we were in danger of acquiring a suntan. Even better, the Meltemi was now doing its job and there was a stiff northerly. The swell left over from the gale was still running so, with one reef in, our reach to Alonissos was a thrilling roller-coaster ride.

**M**id-afternoon we moored at Patitiri, the main harbour on Alonissos. Many shops were closed and, we were told, wouldn't open until June. However, that evening we chose the taverna with the most locals in it and this proved to be a successful technique.

The night was sleepless as a massive ferry, lit up like a Christmas tree and looking far too big for the harbour, arrived late in the evening, followed in the early hours of the morning by a coaster which wanted our berth.

En route to Skopelos, the next island to the west, we stopped off at Murtia, a small anchorage at the western extremity of Alonissos. We took the dinghy ashore to a small deserted beach and were able to climb the steep donkey track up to the island's hilltop former capital. The half-hour hike was rewarded by a stroll round an almost deserted picture postcard town, offering a view across the island.

In the early evening, we moored stern to the smart quayside in Port Skopelos. The port had fine houses and better facilities. But not for yachts, as we found.

For two days we had been without water on board. We had filled up before leaving Thessaloniki and I could not believe we had run out in just three days of fairly sparing use. However, cries of dismay had issued from the forward



head while the photographer's wife was mid-shower. Changing tanks proved ineffective; the pump was still operating, but clearly had nothing to pump.

We tried in vain to get water in Patitiri. Although the tap marked in the pilot book existed, no water came out of it and we learned that there was a shortage on the island. Our yacht had a hose, but there were no taps ashore to which it could be connected. There were no jerrycans on board and we were unable to beg, borrow or buy one.

In Port Skopelos, the situation proved little better. The tap marked in the pilot book was not evident and, despite being referred from the main council office to the police to the port office and back, and eventually storming the mayor's office to confront the boss himself, we still could not get water. Eventually we managed to buy a jerrycan and were allowed three refills by the owner of a taverna.

Having temporarily solved our water crisis, we ventured out into the wilds of the Sporades and spent the night in Panormos Bay, surrounded by dense coniferous woodland and a deeply shelving rocky bottom.

We anchored and took a line ashore, trying to ignore a flotilla moored nearby in this otherwise perfect location. Although there were a couple of restaurants ashore, we chose to polish off the remainder of our provisions on board. But when we came to wash up, we found – no water!

**T**he rain returned for our short, final hop across to Skiathos the next morning. Although the island has its own airport, the harbour was the most awkward we encountered. Highly exposed, the quay is used by several charter boat operators and is thick with yachts. We managed to crawl into the last berth stern to the quay.

I had imagined Skiathos to be full of nightclubs and white-socked western Europeans. It is, we were told, exactly like that in summer, but when, between downpours, we were able to look round the main town, we found it to have great character. There are plenty of restaurants and bars in the delightful, winding streets, along with the usual plethora of tourist souvenir shops.

At the time of planning our trip, the one-way charter seemed a good idea. In retrospect a round trip, taking in Khalkidhiki and the Sporades, but not Thessaloniki, would have been better.

Although the almost continuous rain we experienced presented the landscape as lush and green, visiting in early May had little else going for it. In the height of the season, though, the more popular anchorages might become overcrowded. Greek authorities lay on few facilities for yachts, and we also felt the performance of Cosmos Yachting and Kiriacoulis to be lax in certain areas – such as the lack of information on certificates of competence and sorting our water situation mid-charter.

The problems we faced with our water supply did not represent a life or death situation. However, they did seriously impair our enjoyment of the holiday. Kiriacoulis's representative in Skiathos took our water system apart and discovered that the feeder pipe to the pump was clogged with small pebbles from artesian wells.

On the plus side, the short distances between most ports and anchorages will appeal to many. The area is relatively undiscovered by Greek standards and does have an excellent blend of picturesque towns and anchorages, good food and good sailing to make for a superb yachting holiday. But not in May... □



## CHARTER FACTS



### Travel

Charter flights, available two or three times a week, cost approximately £160-210. Scheduled flights costing approximately £200-270 go daily.

### Cost

£900 per person based on a party of six on a Gib'Sea 442 for two weeks, including a £200 flight, mid-season (30 April until 25 July or 27 August until 15 October). Prices for the yacht increase by 15 per cent during peak season (26 July until 26 August). Kiriacoulis ask for a £750 security deposit upon embarkation (credit cards accepted).

### Climate

June to mid-September is the best time to go – May was too early! In July and August the prevailing north-westerly

Meltemi usually blows at Force 4-5, and occasionally up to Force 7.

### Currency

350 drachmas: £1. The cost of living is much lower than western Europe. Eating out at tavernas and produce from shops is very good value. We found some fresh products such as milk difficult to get hold of, but the vegetables are excellent.

### Note

Men who wish to visit Mount Athos must apply to the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Athens or the Ministry of Northern Greece in Thessaloniki well before their departure.

### Contact

Cosmos Yachting Ltd, 77 London Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT2 6ND. Tel: 081-547 3577. Fax: 081-546 8887.