

(RE)DISCOVERING

ETERNAL

GREECE

Alone in the anchorage; the incredibly-coloured water: this photo was not taken in Polynesia or the West Indies, but in Greece...

We left in the tracks of Ulysses and Hercules, looking for the secrets of Poseidon. A dream voyage in a catamaran on the Greek seas, looking for the pretty corners of the Mediterranean.

Greece is renowned for the beauty of its islands, the quality of its welcome and the exceptional diversity offered by the islands it is made up of. Our pro-

gramme was simple, we wanted to take advantage of all this, but much more, by coming to Greece at the very beginning of the season, to discover the spots which

would have been impossible in summer, due to overpopulation... The first advantage when you leave to go cruising in Greece is that if you are leaving from

Europe, the flight is very quick and you will not suffer from jet lag. In other words, less than five hours after leaving home, you will be discovering Athens and the





marina where your catamaran awaits you. Our charter company (Kiriacoulis) was very efficient, as the boat was ready, the provisions aboard, the skipper (who

« A moment of emotion gripped us as we passed Cape Sounion and the temple of Poseidon before heading, as night fell, for the Cyclades... »

spoke Greek, French, English and Spanish fluently) was ready to leave... In short, after completing the administration and drinking an iced coffee at the marina, we found ourselves aboard for a first big sail. It must be said that 'Harry', our skipper, took his role as a guide very seriously, and promised us an unforgettable trip, so we would be able to give Multihulls World readers the maximum amount of information about everything there is to do in Greece... In addition, we were lucky enough to have arrived for the orthodox Easter, certainly the biggest moment in the Greek calendar. In all the streets of Greece, procession follows procession from one church to another (and there are a lot of them!) in a mixture of religious and popular celebrations. The weekend promised to be lively. It was 4pm when we left our pontoon berth, to try and reach the island of Kea, 50 miles away, before midnight. Why before midnight? Because at midnight, the celebrations begin...

KEA, THE FIRST IS ALWAYS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL...

The light, variable breeze didn't propel our Lagoon 440 fast enough for us to enjoy the celebrations, so we headed due south assisted by the engines. A moment of emotion gripped us as we passed Cape Sounion and the temple of Poseidon before

heading, as night fell, for the Cyclades...

It was just 10 o'clock when we arrived in the little port of Kea, for our first Greek-style mooring (see box). A manoeuvre which finally



Harry, our skipper, won over both the adults and the children.

was easy and perfectly mastered by our experienced crew, motivated by the idea of going to celebrate. There were only about ten boats taking advantage of the place, which allowed us to be comfortable and separated from each other. Obviously, in the middle of the season, you have to arrive early enough to get a berth, or be satisfied with being at anchor, far from the tavernas and little shops. This was one of the lessons learnt on this cruise: there is no point in taking on excessive amounts of provisions in Athens: they are expensive,



Essential for the Easter weekend: lambs were cooking everywhere in the streets. What an atmosphere!

TYING UP IN GREEK HARBOURS

The first time, you will be disoriented. Arriving in a harbour, you will see all the boats moored stern-to, with the bows held by their anchor. The manoeuvre is simple. Going astern, as far from the quay as possible, drop the anchor, reverse to the quay, and tie off your mooring lines. Then all you need to do is take in on the windlass to stabilise everything.

The problem comes generally the next morning, when the first boat to arrive the previous evening weighs its anchor, and takes all the others with it. Chain spaghetti guaranteed. In this case, don't panic, take your time, haul up your anchor and with a rope, release the chains caught in your anchor. Work carefully, as there is a lot of tension...

CRUISING

and you will find everything you need on even the smallest of the islands you will visit. At midnight, everyone came out and we were treated to a (small) firework display on a yacht in the anchorage in front of us. Then the cars arrived from all sides, the masses were finished, as was Lent, and everyone came down to eat in the restaurants bordering the quay... As Harry said, the Greeks don't need a reason to party, so when there is a reason...

The next day, we left in a taxi for the small market town to which the port is attached, just 6km away, but at the top of the moun-

cious meal – whilst enjoying the local legends our guide-skipper (and now friend) took pleasure in relating to us.

45 KNOTS OF WIND FORECAST, IT WAS TIME TO LEAVE!

On the Monday morning, we woke after a night...which was not very warm! It was the beginning of April, and the weather conditions were not yet completely on our side. The proof, we had to leave the Cyclades to avoid a gale, forecast for the following evening!

Hardly awake, and before our



In the port of Kea, a little table was waiting for us in front of our catamaran: hurrah for the Greek-style welcome...

tain. When we arrived there, we wandered round the small pedestrian-only streets of this atypical village, wrapped around its churches, all of whose inhabitants seemed to be occupied roasting a lamb on a spit, a requirement for Easter! As for us, we took advantage of our visit to go and pay deserved homage to the famous stone lion, a huge stone sculpture dating from 600 years before our era. Impressive.

Back at the boat, we now headed for our second island in the Cyclades, Kythnos, just 25 miles away. This short sail allowed us time to eat and rest, and above all, to enjoy the visit from our friends the dolphins, (who came to play with the Lagoon's bows for over a quarter of an hour), before arriving in the afternoon at the port, where we were...the only cruising boat amongst the fishing boats. Although this island is not very touristy, it remains just as attractive, if nothing else because of the inhabitants' welcome. In the evening, we ate on the beach - a gargantuan and deli-

crossing to the Saronic Gulf, we went to an extraordinary anchorage, a cove split by a strip of land, where we were obviously

On arrival at Poros, we discovered a pleasant port under a superb sunset. We started the starboard engine, and easily

only separated from the mainland by an arm of the sea less than 200 metres wide. The incessant stream of ferries and



OCTOPUS, ACCORDING TO HARRY'S MOTHER'S RECIPE

Take a freshly-caught octopus. Hit it 40 times against a rock to tenderise it, until there is no more white foam. Even simpler, take a frozen octopus... Throw it in a pan with a small glass of fresh water and a little olive oil. Cover and leave it to cook for 30 minutes on a low heat. When the octopus can be cut easily, it is cooked. Reduce the sauce, add salt, pepper and a few spices to taste and...enjoy!

The famous Kea lion. From the heights of this archaeological enigma, 2,500 years dominate you...

alone. In the season, Harry maintained that there are no more than twenty or so boats spread out either side of this strip of sand, which leaves a lot of space for each of them... But time was marching on, and we had to leave our peaceful haven, to head towards Poros, 50 miles away. As was often the case, the wind was absent and we tackled our fifty-mile trip under engine. The wind gradually got up, to reach about fifteen knots. Fortunately, because right in the middle of our crossing, the port engine stopped. Dirt in the tank. Just in case, we stopped the starboard engine, and continued under sail, enjoying the passing time and the beauty of this peaceful cruise...

found a place. Hurrah for the catamaran and its two engines. The charter company arranged things well, as we had hardly tied up, when a mechanic climbed aboard to fix everything. Perfect



Only just dried, and the octopus is being prepared to join our meal...

service! The following morning, we took advantage of the stopover to discover Poros, which is

« The gale was pursuing us, and we were looking for the most protected place to await the wrath of the gods »

At Kythnos, we were alone in the harbour. Hurrah for Greece off-season!

other water-taxis plying to and fro between the two coasts never really stopped...

The gale was pursuing us, and we were looking for the most protected place to await the wrath of the gods. After a detailed study of the chart and the weather forecast, we set a course for Ermioni, on the mainland, and less than three hours' sail from Poros. Here we would be sheltered, and even if it was not the prettiest place in Greece, we would at least be able to take advantage of it for some nice walks...and perhaps even to fill

up with water. Because aboard our cat we had a novice catamaran cruiser who would have liked to wash her hair, which the captain obstinately refused, so as not to have to fill up with water. In Greece, the harbours are public, with areas reserved for fishermen and others for cruisers. They are free (or almost, we were asked for 2.04 euros for the night at Egine), but with minimum service. It is nevertheless possible to fill up with water, under the supervision of a harbour employee, at a very reasonable price (15 euros for 600

« We quickly finished tying up the boat, and hurried to lose ourselves in the little streets of this superb village, a landmark for bohemian artists since the 60s »



ALONE IN THE WORLD

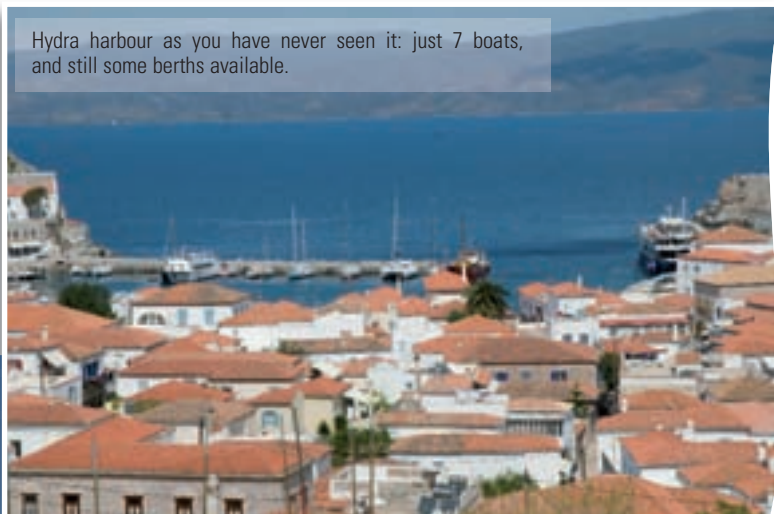
We woke up after an excellent night: hearing the wind blowing the halyards when you are tied up safely is always very restful. This morning, we were going to buy some food, as we were sleeping outside in the evening, or more precisely at anchor, off an uninhabited island. Because even when you are the only boat in the harbour, it is nothing like a wild anchorage. And to double the pleasure, Harry offered to prepare an octopus for us as only his mother knew how. Our mouths were watering!!!

Our desert island was called Dhokos. Here we found almost wild goats, whose goatherd only came from time to time to check that all was well. In the evening and the morning, we

litres at Hydra, an island with no springs, whose water arrives in a tanker). Finally, at Ermioni we found a sympathetic hairdresser who agreed to wash our crew member's hair. A big thank-you to him, as the atmosphere was starting to become tense aboard...

In the evening, the wind started to freshen, and we were particularly happy to have found such good shelter.

Hydra harbour as you have never seen it: just 7 boats, and still some berths available.



A cove split by a strip of sand. Another absolutely magic anchorage!





More than just useful, the donkey is still used as a means of transport, especially on the island of Hydra, where there are no cars.

saw the goats coming down to the beach to drink a little sea water... But the best thing on this island of Dhokos was the little chapel we found on the beach. Tiny, white and blue, it nevertheless seemed a bit wretched. But on opening the door, we found an interior worthy...of a cathedral. This is also the magic of Greece! In the anchorage, we were quite obviously the only boat. In summer there can be up to twenty or so boats, but to really enjoy the place, as is

Hydra, we found it hard to believe that this island was once one of the most powerful in Greece, thanks to its shi-

only two motor vehicles: the fire engine and the dustcart. Everything else is carried on the backs of donkeys. They are everywhere; certain of them even have a registration plate. The atmosphere on Hydra is unique. A really charming moment, which we took full advantage of, by going to eat at Lulu's, the oldest tavern on the island (1865). Go there on our behalf, the welcome is warm, but to find it, you will first have to accept losing yourself in the little streets, and not going by the simplest route...

The island takes its name from the numerous fresh water springs which used to flow here...until an earthquake dried them up, several hun-



your freeboards will be at the same level, but the next morning, the tanker will be 4

A fruit and vegetable seller in front of the boat. Our kind of supermarket!



One of thousands of tavernas... And always, everywhere, a brilliant welcome...

often the case in the Mediterranean, you simply have to alter the moment you arrive, to be peaceful. The charter boats leave from Athens on the Saturday, so will be around Dhokos on the Monday or Tuesday evening. A word to the wise... Hydra, sublime beauty... Arriving in the small port of

powners and numerous boats. In fact, Hydra port holds around twenty cruising boats at the best. There is no need to say that in the season, you must arrive (very) early to be able to moor your catamaran. In April, on the other hand, we were spoilt for choice. If the harbour is full, all that remains is to go and anchor in the little cove close by and wait for a water taxi to come and collect you to take you to the island. This costs less than 10 euros; it would therefore be a shame to deprive yourselves... We quickly finished tying up the boat, and hurried to lose ourselves in the little streets of this superb village, a landmark for bohemian artists since the 60s. On this island, there are

dred years ago. Since then, as on many of the Greek islands, the water arrives by tanker. If you are on the pontoon next to such a boat, be on your guard: in the evening, when it arrives,

metres higher than you. Impressive. We also needed to fill up with water at Hydra. It appeared that certain of us had finally used and abused the hot



A lost church on a desert island. But the interior is worthy of a cathedral.



water to wash their hair in secret... Filling up on Hydra will allow you to meet the harbourmaster, a meeting you will never forget. A beard that Father Christmas would be proud of, the look of a Vietnam veteran, a really unique technique for rowing from one end of the harbour to the other: in short, you just have to meet him. What is more, he is quite simply charming. The young lady aboard is still talking about him!

Our cruise was coming to an end. It was time to sail back up to Athens. We took advantage of this to stop over at Khersonisos Methanon, a vol-

canic peninsula, famous for its springs, whose water is mixed with methane from the volcano. The characteristic odour of methane is quite disconcerting, but here again, we were alone in the harbour.

Finally, the stopover on the island of Nisis Moni, opposite Egine, is also not to be missed. Here you will find a large number of peacocks, but also, and harder to see and approach, some fallow deer. We were driven away by the northerly wind which made our anchorage uncomfortable, and we found refuge in the port of Egine, the pistachio island, where the Athenians come to spend the weekend.



The start of the cruise: we rounded Cape Sounion, heading for the Cyclades...

The atmosphere here is one of holidays and relaxation, and, as throughout our trip, we were welcomed warmly and enjoyed the tavernas for the

last time before setting off again for Athens in the early morning. One thing is certain, we will return to Greece.

PRACTICAL GREECE

Getting there: Nothing easier, regular airlines, charter and low-cost flights serve Greece and its various airports.

When: Spring, summer or autumn: each season has its fans. The weather is very mild in Greece, and the sea temperature varies between a minimum of 11°C in winter to more than 25°C in summer. The summer can be very hot, and temperatures of over 30°C are not rare...

Sailing conditions: Conditions can vary considerably depending on the location. The Saronic Gulf is more protected; the Cyclades are more exposed to the winds, which can be violent. Beware of the famous meltem, which starts to blow from the end of June onwards. This steady breeze, which generally blows at around 15 knots, can without warning, become very violent and reach 35 to 40 knots.

Practical tips: The official currency is the euro. The language is Greek, but in practice, everyone speaks at least English.

Skipper To discover an area, nothing is better than a skipper, who will take you to the right places at the right moments. Harry was a valuable guide, always calm and professional, even faced with the most contradictory requests. A big thank-you.

Some local charter companies: We did this trip aboard a Lagoon 440 from Kiriacoulis. Service and boat in perfect condition. Otherwise, you will certainly find the cat of your dreams at: Archipel Club - Dream Yacht Charter - Endless Blue - Fancy Sailing - Istion Yacht Charter - Moorings - Multihull Yachting - Oceans Evasion - Sunsail - Vent Portant - VPM Bestsail...