

The Greek Islands

Jim and Emmy's Travel Journal

The Greek Islands

1989

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We left Pireás, the harbor of Athen, spent several days on the SS City of Rhodes, visiting the Greek Islands of Mykonos, Patmos, Crete, and Santorini, in addition to Kusadasi and Ephesus, Turkey.

Left the campsite at 8:15 and caught a cruising taxi immediately. The ride to the harbor, to get our tickets, cost 800 dr, and after getting the tickets, we needed another taxi for 250 dr to get nearer the ship.

It was still a long walk from customs to our ship, and we could not get on until 10:00. Want to bet we were early! Our cabin was nice size, but the fan made so much noise we asked if we could be changed to a better room. Since no cabin with a porthole was available, we decided to stay where we were. Later in the afternoon the steward came to take us to a room with a porthole.

Well, maybe we should have left well enough alone! This room had a small closet, upper and lower bunk beds, a porthole, and about three feet of floor space, the length of the beds. The tiny bath had another porthole, sink, shower, and toilet. It reminded us of our cabin on the first cruise we ever took (the first year the Princess Cruise was in business), on a ship called the "Carla-C." (We saw "her" docked in some European harbor, one time during our travels.)

The buffet lunch on City of Rhodes was mediocre, nothing very tasty, but the dinner buffet was not bad. We arrived on the island of Míkonos late afternoon, and spent a pleasant few hours touring the town. Countryside is barren, but all the white buildings with flowers and little walking streets, the island really was all it is supposed to be.

On the mainland of Greece, almost every building has balconies, but in Míkonos the architecture is completely different, and genuinely appealing. Emmy saw a dress she liked, but decided to wait until we return here next week, on the next cruise-ship. Míkonos is the only island we will visit on both cruises, and it's worth a second visit, and a third, a fourth, and whatever!

About the most famous resident on Míkonos is Peter the pelican. By far the largest pelican we have seen, he just makes himself at home, goes into stores (they chase him out), and in general sort of runs the place. The City of Rhodes had anchored off shore at Míkonos, and we rode a small boat to and from the

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shore. As we returned to the ship at sunset, the ship in silhouette in the sunset, and the town with its lights just taking effect, both made beautiful pictures.

SS City of Rhodes, May 16, Tue Between Míkonos and Pátmos.

Slept well, but awoke at 6:00 AM, and arrived at the harbor of the Isle of Pátmos, at about 6:20. Breakfast on the SS City of Rhodes was not up to the standard of the RV! Emmy's bacon was greasy, the scrambled eggs almost uneatable, and the orange juice, watery. Otherwise, the fried eggs were OK, and the tea was fine.

At each stop, conducted tours are available at an additional cost. The people on the ship try very hard to sell a tour to everybody, but we didn't need any. They cost from \$25 to \$50 or even \$100 each. We are perhaps more experienced travelers than a lot of the people, and have found in the past that we know how to get around on our own. Even if we miss some things the other people see, we usually see much more than they do on a tour, and we don't have to spend our time waiting for the tour bus. On many tours, the bus just "happens" to stop at a tourist store that will give a kick-back to the tour guide and driver!

We walked around the town next to the harbor for awhile, then took a taxi (1500 dr) to near the St. John Monastery, at the top of the island. Emmy bought a hand-made belt from a nice lady. Emmy also petted the garbage pick-up "vehicles" on the Isle of Pátmos, four donkeys, with an oversupply of bags of garbage tied here and there. The donkeys were friendly, and were happy to be petted by Emmy, but then, so is Jim, and he's a Republican!

We walked the rest of the way up the hill to St. John Monastery. The buildings are quite colorful, with arches and rooms and stairways, and this and that. The library at the St. John Monastery contains 15,000 books, over 1,000 manuscripts, fragments of the famous Codex Purpureus (can't find that in the Encyclopedia) on purple vellum from the 500's, and other old, old, documents.

The mountain side is very barren. We met friends from the ship, a German Army Colonel and his wife (who had walked up the hill), so they shared our taxi down the hill to the Cave of the Apocalypse. According to the Michelin Guide, on the Isle of Patmos "... within a small monastery is the spot where St. John received his divine revelation through terrifying dreams which his disciple Procoros wrote down from his dictation." What an inspiring place. We remembered the "Apocalypse Tapestry," we saw in Angers, France last year. (Originally a set of six continuous pieces of cloth, each 78 feet long, and 20 feet high.)

Arrived at Kusadasi, Turkey, visited Ephesus (Efes), then back to the SS City of Rhodes, and on to other Greek Islands

SS City of Rhodes, May 17, Wed Between Ephesus and Rhodes.

We arrived in the city of Rhodes on the SS City of Rhodes, and believe us, while the SS City of Rhodes is not too great, the real city of Rhodes is outstanding!

The medieval city of Rhodes was restored by Italian architects early in this century, and is as nice a walled city as any we have seen. Centuries ago this was the place from which pilgrims visited the Holy Land. As with most places in this part of the world, everybody and his brother occupied it at one time or another.

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(We have since heard that the Greek Government, along with the United Nations, are spending another ton of money to restore more of this city. Must visit again in the near future.)

The Colossus of Rhodes was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Ninety-eight feet high, it stood with one foot on each side of the harbor, until leveled by an earthquake in 226 BC. Two columns, one with a statue of a roe, the other a buck, have been erected on the spots where the feet of the Colossus of Rhodes once stood.

The new town was pleasant, so rather than take the bus to visit the countryside and other towns nearby, we just walked here and there, very nice. There was a Moslem cemetery at one place, and plenty of nice buildings. On the beach near some expensive hotels in the city of Rhodes there were dozens of bathing-beauties. They were so poor they could only afford half of a bathing suit, so were barefoot from the waist up.

In the harbor were several tourist ships, and several expensive looking yachts. As our ship left and headed along the northwest shoreline, we could see dozens, at least, of new-looking hotels, extending for mile after mile. We sure wouldn't want to vacation there, but Scandinavians and Germans must love it, anything for some sunshine. Dinner tonight was very good, with well-done beef for Jim, and who knows what else for the others.

SS City of Rhodes, May 18, Thu Between Rhodes and Crete.

Arrived at Herakleion, Crete at 7:30 in the morning. This city is located at about the middle of the north side of the island.

What we could see from the harbor was not very impressive, and as we saw more of the town, thought that was not too striking either. We have talked to people who have visited the island of Crete, many who traveled in a camper and spent several days here, and they all say how nice the island of Crete is. Since we have just seen this one rather old, rather crowded, rather dirty city, we can't judge the whole island. We didn't walk far enough to see the wall and much that was ancient. Understand, it was interesting and we wouldn't have missed it for the world, but compared to and ...!

So many times (for example, Spain, Greece, and Italy) the condition of the buildings is in reverse to the age of the building. The really old ones are ruins, but the area around the ruins is usually cleaner than other parts of the country. Buildings 2,000 years old are so loved by the people, they are kept very nice. Those from 500 to 1,000 years old are in good shape when used as a tourist attraction. Newer buildings, especially ones still in use and lived in, just aren't maintained much at all.

Of course, just as each old city is unique, the amount and method of maintenance is unique to that country, and often to a particular location in that country. We haven't seen one place yet where we wouldn't be very happy to return for a visit, immediately!

Again we negotiated for a taxi, and while we got one for far less (3,000 dr) than the first people wanted (5,000 dr), we felt the price was still higher than it should have been.

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Jim asked why so many of the taxis were Mercedes, and the driver said many of the winter tourists on Crete are German, and they insist on riding in a German made taxi. This Mercedes (1976) has been driven over 2,000,000 km (1,250,000 miles), and is on its third engine, he said. It's a taxi 24 hours a day, one driver after another. (Did a little arithmetic the car had to go 250 mile a day, each and every day for all those years, doesn't seem logical, but it's possible.)

We had him take us to visit King Minos' Palace of Knossós, one of the major sights on Crete. A palace was built here about 2000 BC, was destroyed in 1700 BC, replaced by Palace of Knossós, then destroyed in 1500 BC by an earthquake and tidal wave from the volcano on Santoríni (where we will visit later today). It appears the palace had about 1300 rooms, some places there are four floors, and there was piped fresh water under pressure. It's intriguing, but so much of what can be seen has been reconstructed to some extent.

Some people told us it's the most exotic palace ruin anywhere. Exotic? Well maybe. Palace of Knossós is not at the top of our list. It's almost unbelievable to think something like this existed a few thousand years ago. A 1300 room palace, a pressure water system, 4,000 years ago! Well, it should be a little higher on our list.

We anchored near the island of Santoríni at 4:00 PM, and stayed until 7:00. The Greek island of Santoríni resulted from a volcano explosion in about 1500 BC. The island is shaped like the edge of your right hand, with the thumb and finger curved. The water is so deep, over 1300 feet, they can't drop anchor. The ship is tied, one line to shore, and another to a buoy offshore, so we rode small boats to and from the ship. The very white town of Thíva is perched about a thousand feet up, on top of a mostly black cliff, but with many layers of volcanic colors.

The tour group paid \$12 to ride a boat to Athiniós, then a bus ride to Thíva. (It would have cost at least \$225 for us to take all the tours offered on these 4 days, and we think we saw more than the tour groups, and our cost was much, much less, and we were our own boss.)

There are three ways to scale the 1,000 foot cliff from the dock to Thíva, Santoríni. Walk up the 587 steps zigzagging up the side of the cliff, ride one of the donkeys or horses which carry passengers up those same steps, or ride the cable car. Easy decision, and the cable car took us right into town.

Thíva is a picturesque town with narrow streets, white buildings, beautiful churches, and tourist stores by the hundreds. We walked here and there, and could see farm fields in the distance. There are ruins of ancient civilizations on other parts of the island, but no time to visit. Some date from, and appear similar to, the style and time of Knossós, on the island of Crete.

Several additional volcano explosions, and earthquakes, have continued to shape the Santoríni. Exceedingly interesting. (Sure would be interesting to find a more interesting word than interesting, but can't think of one, especially when interesting is exactly what it is. We could use stimulating, provocative, titillating, appealing, or intriguing, and at times we have!)

When it was time to leave, there were still the same three choices for the return from Santoríni to sea level, and someone decided to take the stairs, not on

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a donkey, but on foot. After walking down about 200 steps, stepping in millions of donkey donuts along the way, the same someone decided this was not the way to do it. Emmy wouldn't give up and ride a donkey the rest of the way, but her knees were shaking from the strain and she was ready to collapse before the next 387 steps were concluded. Emmy wouldn't sit in all the donkey donuts on the steps to rest, so Jim will bet our next trip down the cliff in Santoríni will be different. And we both sure hope there will be a next time. We must find a way to spend some more time here.

On this trip, and especially on this boat we have given copies of "Invitation to France" to people who expressed interest in it, with the stated promise on their part to write to us, and give their opinion. Months later, only two people have written, none from this ship. Person after person expressed great interest, and the next day or so told us how much they enjoyed the book, but that seems to be the end of it. Don't misunderstand, we don't really care, but it's funny so many people can be so certain they will write, and then almost no one does.

People appear to enjoy hearing about our mode of travel, and are excited to get a copy of the book. Different people we met on the ship would say someone else had already told them about our book and our way of travel. They all were very happy to receive the book, and goodness knows we have plenty of them to give. (If we give away enough of the books, there will be room in the garage for the car! We have written 3,000 of the 4,000 books in our library!)

SS City of Rhodes, May 19, Fri Between Santoríni and Athens.

The security on this ship was superb. Each time we returned to SS City of Rhodes, each and every purse and package was searched by a very large Israeli who looked like he knew what he was doing. He sure impressed the passengers, and he was much bigger than anyone who might not have been impressed.

We docked in Pireás early in the morning, and right after breakfast we left the ship. Customs clearance was no problem. Jim now went to the bank in Athens to get cash from Visa to pay for the seven day trip next week. We got an additional 3% deduction for cash. Saved about \$1,500 on the two cruises, the cost was about \$2,700 for two trips, eleven days, two people.

We took a taxi to Camping Athens, went to the nearby grocery store, then rested the rest of the day. The camper was just fine, but we had left the refrigerator turned so low there were no ice cubes, but there was no food to spoil.

We returned to mainland Greece for a few days, then we left Pireás/Athens on the SS Odysseus, and spent a day on the Greek Island of Míkonos.

SS Odysseus, May 25, Thu Between Athens and Míkonos.

It was very windy this morning, so we had to dock at a spot several miles from the town of Míkonos, and ride a bus into town.

Jim had a haircut for 800 dr, \$12. On the wall of the barber shop in Míkonos are pictures of both John and Bobby Kennedy. We walked here and there for awhile, really enjoying the white buildings and the red flowers. Emmy looked at, and rejected the dress she thought she wanted, and we soon went back to the ship.

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We were scheduled to leave Mikonos at noon. At 2:00 PM there was a meeting to tell about tours available for the rest of the trip. Instead, they said there's a problem with the motor used to raise the anchor, and we will be here until they think of something. About 10:00 PM we were told we would leave at midnight, but now the arrival and departure times at the other stops will be a problem.

The people at our table are enjoyable. Lukas and Beryl live on the island of Cyprus. Lukas is Dutch, and was a very successful architect in England. Beryl is English. They love Cyprus, but since a recent war left it divided between Greece and Turkey, war could break out again at any time, they don't keep anything expensive in Cyprus, and feel they could just leave everything and go, if there is a problem. Lukas is an artist, as was his father. Lukas painted a picture of the harbor at the island of Rhodes, and gave the painting to us. (It was later stolen from us, and he sent us another.)

Lukas lived in Spain with his parents, before the Spanish Civil War in the 1930's, and had to leave their apartment quickly, to get out of the country when the war started. Years later they returned and found everything was just as they had left it, no one had bothered a thing. Lukas also was in Austria when Hitler entered Vienna, and he says the Austrians were happy to join Hitler. He agrees with Jim that Austria was Hitler's first ally, not his first victim.

Beryl was in the British Army and was on the staff of Lord Mountbatten, during WW II. She and about 20 other women soldiers/sailors were being transported by ship, and somewhere in the Indian Ocean the ship was sunk. She was the only lady survivor.

The other couple at our table are Greeks from Australia. His parents are Greek, and he was born in Egypt. He visited Greece for the very first time in 1974, and they tried to draft him into the Greek Army, even though he had never been in the country before! He somehow managed to escape before they caught him.

Emmy is having a problem with a tooth, so went to see the ship's doctor. He gave her antibiotics, enough for 3 days.

After getting the anchor fixed, we left late for Istanbul, and on to Odessa and Yalta in the Black Sea. We returned through the Bosphorus, past Istanbul, to
Athens