

# *Tinos and Mykonos*

## *Meteora to Tinos*

From gorgeous Meteora in the Peloponnese we make our way back to Athens - about a seven hour drive, punctuated by comfort and lunch stops. Our destination is Rafina Port - the main port for the mammoth inter-coastal ferries that ply the waters of the Aegean.



Photo by Linda

L. Long rides are no problem when you have a comfortable bus (with a whole row for each person!) like our Mercedes. R. View from our lunch stop.



These ferries are the life's blood of island-to-island transportation, moving people, cars, buses, trucks and whatever else can be hauled aboard from one place to another.

As I looked out the window as we approached Tinos, I thought how gracious of nature to have bestowed so many riches upon Greece.

I know the country is not without its problems, but for a visitor it has everything: lovely people, beautiful culture, five millennia of history and sites, fabulous and nutritious healthy food (a Mediterranean diet) and even good shopping. I did have to hold back on this.

If you only have time for a short trip in Greece, then you must concentrate on the mainland and Peloponnese and visit the Big Five: The Acropolis, Delphi, Olympia, Meteora and Mycene -- the itineraries that 8 to 10 day tours of made of.

But with more time available I can say, without hesitation, that the crown jewels of this country are its islands. I've had the pleasure of visiting the larger, more populated islands of Crete, Corfu, Rhodes and Kos on previous trips. This Eldertreks itinerary includes the small and holy island of Tinos counterbalanced with the glitz and glamour of Mykonos. Both of these islands are part of the Cycladic group. (I'm back.....!!!!)

As an aside -- I wonder if those Cubist painters traveled to the Cyclades group of islands, and maybe having a bit of myopia, translated what they saw to their paintings.



On this ferry, passenger seating is like airline seating - with about 20 seats across bisected by several aisles. They even have a business class and those seats are doubles by the window. There are snack shops spread around, and nice clean bathrooms. I explore around and thanks to a friend's warning, am careful to watch my footing crossing over the tall lips in-between any watertight doors. (Thanks Diana!).

After a short 2 1/2 hour ride we offload on Tinos, along with many Greek Orthodox pilgrims visiting this holy island. It is well-touristed by the pious who come to venerate a miraculous icon at the Evangelistria Church aka Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

We are to spend a luxurious three and a half days on this island, also known for its marble quarries, sculpting workshops, local crafts and hiking.

## *On Tinos*

The time spent in Tinos is just about perfect. Foreigners are mainly interested in hiking the ancient footpaths that connect villages full of picturesque white-washed cube houses and where “island-time” is the norm.

This is the perfect place to rub shoulders with Greek culture and those who want to shop at flashy boutiques, visit glitzy bars or dance all night are in the wrong place.



L. A copy of the miraculous icon revered by religious greeks. R. Along on Leoforos Megalocharis Street there is even a carpeted lane protected by traffic cones running from the harbor to the Church so pilgrims who want to do penance by approaching the shrine on their hands and knees can do so without fear of being run over. The carpeted track is almost a mile in length -- and there are several streets to cross.

Christos is a hiking guide and this trip is graded a Level 3 -- “For hiking enthusiasts”. When I signed up two years ago, I could do it. But not now.

So one morning while the others trekked steep hills to the ruins of a medieval fortress, I urban trekked in town.... or some might think of it as a shopping kora. No matter what I call it, I love it.

When it is just about time to meet the group in the courtyard in front of the church I start to make my way up Leoforos Megalocharis Street and thence comes my most heartwarming and sweetest memory of this island.

It concerns a pilgrim moving toward the church along the carpeted lane on her hands and knees. She is not a young woman. There is one very wide street nearest the church with traffic coming from four directions with no traffic lights and I didn't notice any stop signs. When she paused at the corner to survey the crossing I sensed her fear as she looked at the cars whizzing by. So I slowly walked over to her and when she started to cross, I walked along side so any approaching car could see me and hopefully the pilgrim, and slow down or stop. We both make it across -- alive. She smiles, raises her hand in thanks, then continues thru the church's plaza and up the stairs to the sanctuary.

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Tinos is a great place to walk around. Tinou Kallonis, a long street parallel to the harbor has lots of restaurants and religious souvenir shops. Leoforos Megalocharis Street is straight up a hill and lined with more shops and from there are little lanes radiating out in both directions. It is easy to spend a few hours exploring here and there and I'm glad I did as later I serve as "guide" to others who want to do some shopping and I know the stores to take them to.

Another day I explore further, walking along any old path that catches my fancy with the goal of getting lost in the labyrinthian backstreets. I could sense walking up, up, up and moving further away from the harbor area.



Amazingly I run into some "handyman specials" - once beautiful buildings now unoccupied and left to ruin. Probably a family estate dispute here. Also large lots with nothing on them, or evidence of their being used for anything more than a pasture. Surprising in this very up-and-coming island. Just wait until those who can afford it discover Tinos!

When I get turned around and stuck at the end of a pedestrian lane with no outlet, a lovely woman asks "are you lost?" And when I answer in the affirmative, I find myself with a volunteer guide who makes sure I find my way back to the recognizable streets by my hotel.



Our last day is devoted to group sightseeing around the island. Think of all the Greek statues and temples you have seen — what are they made of — marble! And where does a lot of the marble come from??? Tinos!!!



This is a quiz: What do you think this elegant marble building is? A Church? A community center? An entrance to a library?

Answer: Its the most gorgeous bus stop in the entire world!



Marble is everywhere here. The streets, buildings, sculptures, churches, homes, archways, cemeteries and more. In the village of Pyrgos, we visit a marble museum as well as the School of Fine Arts where its director Leonidas Halepas (at left) goes over the curriculum then takes us through the classrooms/workshops.



Graduates of this school have jobs for life with all the restoration going on at archaeological sites.

The town's cemetery absolutely gleams as the sun hits the stark-white headstones and memorials. We spend time looking at the graves -- very different from what we are used to.



These distinctive dovecotes are a legacy from the Venetians who ruled here from the 13th to 18th century. They bred pigeons for their meat and droppings, which was used as fertilizer. Today about 600 are left, scattered around the island.

About the hotel. The Onar Hotel in Tinos is one of the quirkiest hotels I've ever stayed at. The architect was clearly channeling Antoni Gaudí but apparently wasn't a very good student. For such a lovely hill-side property, his failing was to disregard Tinos' gorgeous views. Rooms face blank walls, or windows in some rooms are placed so high, there is little natural light and no view- of anything. Some balconies are not attached to rooms, but hang on walls just for show. In its defense, the breakfast is wonderful: home-made spinach and cheese pies, salads, cakes, pastries, cookies and the usual yogurt, fruit, cereal, hard-boiled eggs, and coffee/tea.... Yum!

## *Tinos to Mykonos*

I soon learn that there are "fast" and "slow" ferries. We had taken the "fast ferry" from Athens to Tinos, and now we are on the "slow" ferry from Tinos to Mykonos. But what a ferry it is!!!

The Andros has escalators, its seating resembles a 5-star hotel lobby with comfortable sofas and easy chairs set around coffee tables. Its snack shop looks like a Starbucks.

Alas, it is only a half-hour ride!

# *Mykonos*

From the quiet elegance of Tinos we are thrust into busy, glitzy, over-crowded, yet still beautiful, charming and appealing Mykonos. This is my 4th trip to this island -- first time with Hanna, Bette, and Carol in 1990; second in 2017 on a Venice-to-Venice cruise taken when I had an extra week in-between trips in Italy and used the ship as a hotel; and just a few weeks earlier on the (beautiful) Galileo. Each time has been a different experience.

And now we have two and a half days here with enough free time to explore, explore, explore!

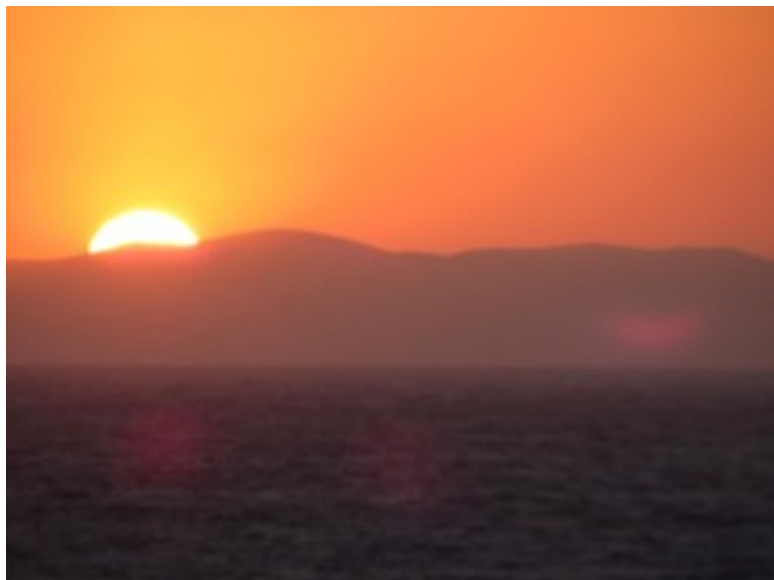
Christos does a brilliant thing on our orientation tour - he designates a “meeting point” for us should we ever need it. I didn’t appreciate the significance of this right away but did again and again later on.

Our Cycladic-style hotel, the Harmony Boutique Hotel is a (brisk) 10 minute walk to the center of the Old Town. If walking leisurely, enjoying the architecture, the sea views or the sunset, it can stretch to 20 minutes.

When we are to return to town for meals, I enjoy a head start to the meeting point - walking at my own pace, taking in the sights and sounds around me. No need to rush to keep up with others. No need to concentrate where my feet fall. There are even benches along the way to just sit and enjoy being part of the scene.

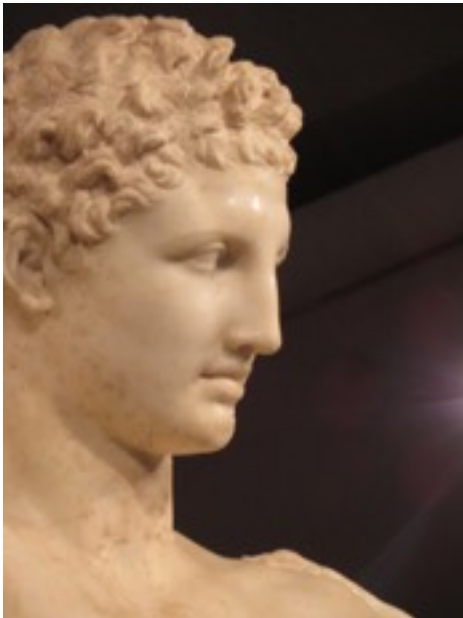
And I did. Often.

Sunsets on Mykonos are gorgeous. I liked sitting on a bench by our meeting point watching the sky morph from light blue to orange to red and finally to gold.



## Delos

Our Mykonos visit isn't to shop or to be toe-to-toe with cruise ship passengers. Our big event is visiting the Sacred Island of Delos, a small, rocky island off the coast of Mykonos and the birthplace of Apollo (the god of light, harmony and balance) and his twin sister Artemis (the moon-goddess).



Good thing I brought along the *Gods of Greece* genealogical chart Sophia (guide for my Northern Greece trip) gave us. It is so difficult to remember who's who, who married who, or who is who's sibling, son or daughter. Her handout helps a lot!

Oh, just so you know, Apollo and Artemis are children of Zeus.

All the way back since 1500 BC, Delos has been a place of worship for the Mycenaeans followed by the Ionians who built elaborate temples on the island. By 425 BC, the Athenians wanted to purify the island and moved everyone off it, including the cemetery. Since then no one has been allowed to be born or die in Apollo's sanctuary.

Our days of private guiding are over. After a short boat ride, we join a group of about 40 people all jostling to get a good view of the guide and hear her presentation. Very difficult for short people! I stay with the group for most of the tour, but when we come in sight of the museum, I break away.



I soon hear "Esther! Esther!" Wonderful Christos has stationed himself by the museum to "catch" us to offer directions, suggestions, and a reminder to be back at the dock in time for the ride back to Mykonos. He is always there when we need him!



I love museums as they exhibit the best of the best. After taking way too many pictures, I make my way to the pier with enough time to stop at the Delos Gift Shop. On the 45 minute ride back to Mykonos I sit next to a woman who mentions she didn't have time to visit the museum.

No problem! I hand her my camera and let her go thru all the photos while I relate any details I remember. (good memory test for me!) She returns the favor by recommending I visit the Mykonos Archaeological Museum to see their jewelry collection, a special exhibit. One good turn carried forward -- what goes around comes around every time!

When we returned to Mykonos, I thought I would give the Illias Lalaounis Jewelry store another chance. I had stopped by the Mykonos store about 2 weeks earlier while on



the Galileo and since there were so many cruise passengers about, the attendant didn't give me the time of day. But this morning another did. I tried on several bracelets and was VERY tempted. My better judgement took over especially since I knew I could duplicate the simple bead design with one visit to Hobby Lobby or JoAnn's Crafts - and I did.

## *Time to Say Goodbye*

On my last day in Athens and thanks to a friendly, chatty taxi-driver, I could finally put a word to a feeling of something I kept experiencing throughout this past month -- it is **Filoxenia** which is pronounced fē-lo-kse-nē'-ä

It literally translates as "a friend to strangers" but it means so much more. There must be something embedded in Greek DNA as they have such a generosity of spirit, an interest in others, manifested by doing a kindness to someone for no reason and thinking nothing of doing a good deed which will never be repaid. They are especially welcoming to those interested in seeing and learning about their part of their world.

And I was the recipient of this remarkable quality many times over.



Photo by Christos

What frangipani is to Southeast Asia, bougainvillea is to Greece. It is everywhere in the Cyclades group of islands and so strikingly bright against the white-washed architecture.