

TRAVEL

Picturesque Greek Islands are fun to visit

(Last of a two-part series)
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Approaching the tiny island of Patmos, we are sure that it has been whitewashed. Its gleaming white houses built along stadium-style streets are a picturesque introduction to the first of the Greek islands we will visit on our cruise of the Aegean Sea. Patmos is where St. John the Evangelist was supposedly exiled for preaching Christianity at Ephesus. The cave, where he lived and wrote the Book of Revelations during the 1st Century AD, and the namesake Monastery from the 13th century that is still functioning, are well worth a visit. The small museum adjacent to the monastery turns out to be a jewel.

We only spend a morning on Patmos, and then it's on to Samos. It boasts the town of Pythagoreon, yet after the theorem inventor. On approach, it is a panorama of pastel-colored houses and brown-red-tiled roofs.

After our stops at the Turkish ports where we experienced Pergamum and Ephesus, its fragmented ruins aren't a big draw - though it has a rather famous aqueduct that is in its final stages of restoration. We

decide to walk into its countryside, where at one point we had to make way for a shepherd-less herd of goats, and try the local wine that is sweet and good and served over ice.

If you're not going to ascend the Acropolis of Lindos on the island of Rhodes, it's probably not worth driving the 40 minutes to the town itself. It's a moderately strenuous climb to the top, but worth it both for the views and the ruins that include the 4th century BC Doric temple of Athena.

Favorite stop

Better to spend the whole day in Rhodes City, enclosed by walls built in the 14th century. Although no longer provided over by the Colossus of Rhodes, standing 100 feet high and built in 280 BC, it was my favorite of the Greek islands we visited.

The highlight is the Palace of the Grand Masters that has ancient mosaic tile floors imported from the island of Kos, dozens of rooms and an interior courtyard of gigantic proportions. Built by the Knights of St. John, who occupied the island from the 12th to the 16th century, it survived until an explosion of ammunition stored nearby devastated it. It has been magnificently reconstructed.

A tiny Jewish synagogue built in the 1700s, when Rhodes had a significant Jewish population, has been restored and includes a small museum. Almost all died in Nazi concentration camps. Rhodes now has just seven Jewish families.

A good gift from Rhodes is one of the colorful umbrellas made on the island.

It's no wonder the symbol of Mykenos is the windmill. Be prepared to be belted about as you wend your way through its deliberately created maze of streets. It has a sweet harbor where sardine fishermen sell their wares and the island's pelican mascot gets the trimmings, then adds a drink of water from a nearby fountain.

If you go to Mykenos in mid-

October, as we did, a sojourn to the island's famous beaches - nude and otherwise - may find them empty and their exteriors closed. But you have to experience at least one. Then, enjoy meandering in and out of the hundreds of tiny Greek Orthodox chapels that occur almost as frequently as the shops and restaurants. Gold jewelry fashioned after ancient Greek designs and sweaters more varied than just the Greek fisherman style are fun to buy.

Cruising into Santorini, you are at first not quite sure whether the white cliff tops are natural or man-made. The white-washed buildings are so aptly constructed that they fit into the island as if they were puzzle pieces, so perfectly are they interlocked with the land.

At one end of the island is Oia, all white with blue trim. It's outer rim of homes is composed of caves built into the rock. In Santorini itself, which is accessible on foot, by donkey, and more recently by cable car, the individual sights are secondary to the shopping.

Outside the two cities, the land is volcanic ash, its terraced gardens barren and brown in fall although apparently covered by vineyards and wild flowers in spring and summer following the winter rains.

A number of cruise ships have canceled or reduced their routes in this area for 2002, according to area travel agents. All I can say is that those of us who cruised the Aegean a month



Perfect fit: The architecture of Santorini fits into the land seamlessly.



Sightseeing: Walking about the walled city of Rhodes was one of the best Greek Island experiences. This is my husband Ed.

after 9/11 and in the early days of the bombing of Afghanistan were overjoyed that we had come.

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