

## WHEN IN CHIOS DO WHAT THE CHIOTIS DO SIT BACK AND RELAX

Peter Adamis 13 Jul 2015



My wife and I arrived in Chios in June of this year with an American friend and remained on the island for approximately five days. It is an island so close to Turkey that it is used as a crossing point for Syrian and other refugees fleeing oppressive regimes.

We had a great time becoming entangled in the myriad of streets, alley ways, and main roads across the island. It was great fun and one can imagine the glee in finding that we had gone around in circles after making the same wrong turn every time.

I can truly say that my wife is a safe but drives a vehicle like the ancient Greeks conducted their chariot races. There is absolutely no fear demonstrated on my wife's face as she makes her way through the valleys and mountains of Chios; whilst on the other and her husband's face as the passenger clearly is not afraid to display his fear as they wiz past other cars at breakneck speed and through the small roads and street that throughout the villages that dot the island landscape. I must admit as her husband nothing normally fazes me until my lovely wife jumps into the car and off we go with me as her navigator clinging onto the edges of my seat with one hand and the map in the other. Heaven help me if I had taken the wrong turn.



Our accommodation was superb and the owners were even more hospitable towards us, especially after finding out that we had come from another Island on the far side of the earth.

The owners of the holiday inn named Ilioxenia were just a husband wife team, John and Triantafillia (Rose) and they made it their business to ensure that we enjoyed our stay. They were just brilliant hosts and one could not fault their manner and service towards us.

Our getaway holiday home was tucked away on the East coast of Chios some 8 kilometres from the seaside port of Chios at a beach resort called Agia Fotia near the Agia Fotini church and below the Monastery that currently housed thousands of skulls and bones which were the result of the Turkish massacre of some 150, 000 Chians some 150 years ago during the War of Independence. Visitors to the Monastery are welcome to visit it only two times during the day, once in the morning and once in the afternoon after the islanders have had the rest.

Whilst we were soaking in the sun's rays our thoughts would occasionally drift back to Melbourne to our home town. A city that was in the grip of an Antarctic blast and those wintery conditions had taken more than a toe hold on the environment. The miserable Melbourne was so far from our minds as we basked in the glorious Mediterranean sunshine and occasionally dipping in the cool waters of the sea to remind us that we were living on an island paradise.



At one beach I even climbed a rocky outcrop jutting out to the sea so that I could bring them down and present them to my lovely wife as romantic gesture that still remained within me that chivalry of a bygone period where knights saved the damsels so to speak.

Well I was brought back to reality when I presented them to my wife who said thankyou but what am I going to do with them. I was momentarily dismayed by her unromantic response and told her that I had climbed a "bloody mountain" in bare feet just to get these flowers for her. She looked at me as to say what century are you living in and I just sulked off with the flowers in my hand, feeling dejected and saying to myself, bloody hell, what does a bloke have to do to be romantic to his missus these days.



Anyway to cut a long story short, the flowers came back to the Hellenic mainland and along with a black rock and six stones that i had brought to Greece from our Australian front yard on a previous trip now proudly hang in the office at my parents home in Pellana, Laconia, Greece. This is a reminder of the day when I climbed a rocky outcrop on the island of Chios braving the sun, surf, overhead seagulls, winds, jagged rocks, half naked (swimming trunks) just to grab a handful of flowers. (Much emphasis on the melodramatics to make it plausible and to demonstrate what we blokes do to win the hearts of our women)



We travelled inland to the many villages that were built like forts to ward off the pirates and corsairs that roamed the Mediterranean seeking to kidnap men, women and children to be sold or bartered at the slave markets. Some of these towns like Mesta had joined their homes together, thus building a high wall between them and the outside with one entrance that was guarded day and night by the village watchmen and during the occupation period by soldiers. They were difficult years where watchmen like their ancient Mycenaean ancestor kept a lookout out for marauders.

At the first sign of trouble the church bell could be heard across the valleys and the villagers would come in with their livestock. The men would man the towers while the women and children were lowered from the top of to the bowels of the earth where tunnels were used to escape to the hinterland. Mesta and other similar villages are a must for tourist and for the curious wanting to obtain a glimpse of a bygone era.



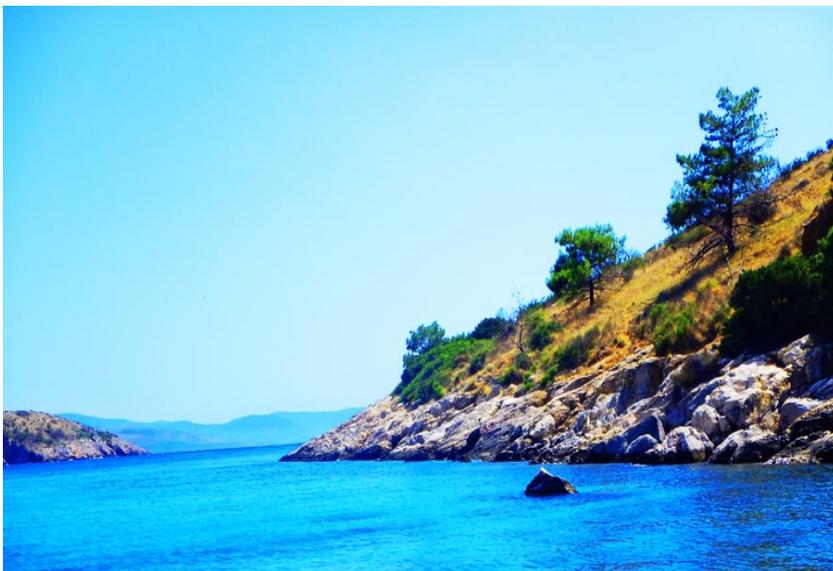
They certainly will not be disappointed by what they will find. After taking in the breathtaking views of the valley the twist and turns of the small alleys and of the many overhead arches that join the build villages to form a natural bastion, visitors can sit under an overhead vine sheltering them from the sun and drinking the cool wine made locally.

The food was extremely reasonable and on many if not all occasions, my wife and I felt that we had robbed or cheated the proprietors for the good food, service and hospitably were had received. It was just beyond belief and we were very sad to be leaving such an idyllic island spot that hugged the Turkish mainland coast. Mind you today the majority of tourists come from mainland turkey, all seeking a breather from their daily routine and lives to live for a short while amongst their Hellenic hosts.



In fact for tourist islands such as Chios, the Turkish tourist will assist in the revival of the local tourist industry already feeling the effects of a precipitous Hellenic fiscal tragedy of unknown proportions. The main city or capital of Chios being of the same name has deep sea port where regular tourist ships come and go daily.

It's not uncommon for all nationalities from around the globe to bump into each other at the many seaside taverns, bars and clubs that dot the quayside. Imagine driving towards the quayside and being confronted with a huge wall like structure that towers above all the other buildings and wonder how it suddenly appear when you had passed that same spot in the morning. The huge wall would be the sides of a ship that had berthed for the day bringing with it another ship full of eager tourists.



The island is well known for its mastic gum, a resin that is taken from the mastic trees that are found in numerous groves all around the island.

These mastic trees are harvested at one time during the year and the gum is collected in the same way as the resin is collected from the rubber trees in Malaya.

Jealously guarded it is believed that Chios is the only Island to possess the mastic trees. The clean beaches, sun and surf are the main attractions for the tourists and many off the track beaches can be reached by a normal vehicle but it is recommended that a four wheel drive is hired if it can be found. There are also caverns to be explored on the island, scuba diving, fishing, night clubs, taverns of all sorts and plenty of other forms of entertainment to whet the appetite of the tourist.



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