

Le retour d'une stagiaire...

***Anna est australienne, mariée à un Italien,
et vit en Bulgarie ! une citoyenne du monde !
Voici ce qu'elle nous a écrit, à son retour du
stage de randonnée à Tinos :***



Tinos is a very special and precious island in the Cyclades, home to the church of Panagia Megalochari (the Blessed Virgin Mary), plus many other Greek Orthodox and Catholic churches; dovecotes (pigeon houses); windmills; watermills; quaint villages, both Orthodox and Catholic; sculptors (marble) and other artisans; original architecture and appealing beaches.

The very beautiful Panagia Megalochari, located in the picturesque Tinos town, is famous for attracting pilgrims who go there to pray for a healing.

An 8 days cultural trekking/dancing seminar arranged by the ingenious and imaginative Philippos Dellatolas was a perfect way to discover the island. Each year Philippos organises trekking, dancing and/or cooking programs and no two are ever the same. They are a world apart from the usual stereotyped arrangements and one becomes embedded in many elements of the Greek way of life.

The first pleasant surprise was the charming hotel in which we were accommodated. Being more than 100 years old, it was simple and elegant and even in its renovated state, retained the style of the

grand old days with its high ceilings, chandeliers and antique furniture. It is run by the kind, hospitable and helpful grandson of the man who originally built it.

During the seven days our entertaining guide led us along many stonepaved alleyways and small, stonewalled tracks and paths, uphill and downhill, and we visited many villages and points of interest. Our initiation involved walking seventeen kilometers the first day, thereafter the distance varied depending on the degree of difficulty. A lot of territory was covered and often, from far away in the countryside, we had stupendous views of the sea. Being the month of May, pretty wildflowers were everywhere and much of the island looked green and fresh. The scent of herbs was everywhere - sage, origano, thyme, rosemary and so on. A specific characteristic of Tinos are the pigeon houses, the dovecotes, hundreds of which are dotted all over the island. Most of these ornately decorated stone buildings influenced by the Venetians and with interesting "crewelwork," were constructed during the 18th and 19th centuries. The Italians who settled for some time on the island loved the meat of pigeons.



Walking through the unspoilt villages, one couldn't help but notice details of the carved lintels, bronze door-knobs and lace curtains on the windows, marble fountains and decorated archways. Another noticeable feature was the wreaths of flowers which were hung on the doors of houses on May 1st to celebrate Spring. These, along with the bouganvillea and many varieties of flowers in

full bloom, complemented by the blue of the sky, added a marvellous brightness.

Each village is like a postcard - amongst those on our routes: Triandaros, with its lovely renovated houses and finally on the same day, to Agios Sostis Beach for a swim; the beautiful little village of Kardiani, from here we continued on to Ormos Giannaki where we swam and lunched; Isteria where we climbed Agia Marina, walked through the village and down to the sea for lunch. Steni; Mesi and another day we went to Koumaros. From here we climbed up the old path of Exomburgo mountain which, at 640 meters, is the site of a ruined Venetian fortress and the original town of Tinos. We then ventured down to a patisserie located on the highway and collected our picnic lunches which we ate sitting on steps in the little village of Tripotamos. Being the place of our guide's relatives, we were kindly offered homemade raki and chocolates. A visit to the local museum complemented this diversion.



Another day saw us in Karia and Arnados, it was here that we visited a small biscuit factory. The tasty products were made with herbs. After this calling into a distillery to taste the homemade raki seemed a fitting way to prepare us for the long trek back to the hotel.

Perhaps it is timely to mention the meals. The island is very fertile, therefore there is much agriculture and all of the food was local and mouth watering. Sumptuous breakfasts at the hotel; and gourmet dishes for lunch and dinner were prepared in different tavernas. Sometimes we danced at lunchtime

and it was always a merry group trekking its way back to the hotel after lunch.

We dined magnificently on meze, salads, seafood such as sardines and oysters, lamb, pork, chicken, moussaka, omelette etc., all prepared in the Greek way giving it that extra taste. Local wine of the district was passed around in jugs. Desserts were homemade cake, my favourite being the lemon and the speciality of Tinos, Tiropika which is made from sugar, cheese and oranges. Fruit was always on the table.



One extra memorable lunch was when we called into the home of Nikoletta Delatola-Foskolou. Nikoletta is a famous chef in Greece, she has researched Cycladic dishes, teaches cooking, her books have been published and she has appeared on TV. We were welcomed with raki and fresh figs and she spoke a little about food. It was obvious that the warm hearted Nikoletta had gone to a lot of work, our eyes widened as we saw the table laden with all manner of delicacies. Rice with artichokes; fresh cheese balls with thyme; tzatziki; ham, similar to prosciutto, made by her family; tiny slices of bread covered in cucumber paste; beans; green salad with tomatoes and cucumbers, and more. The house was in the countryside with fantastic views of the sea.

Tinos is rich in culture and apart from visiting many churches and monasteries, some ornate, others simple but all delightful, and coming across ancient relics etc., certain visits had been arranged. During one walk we stopped off to see an exhibition of a woman's

litographs and paintings, inspired by visits to Greece.

The museum of marble crafts in Pyrgos was exceptionally interesting, so too the icon painting school in Tinos.

The ancient sanctuary of Poseidon at Kionia took us well back in history and an exhibition of contemporary tapestries by the French artist Artemis, in Tinos town, was lovely.



I've left the dancing until last only because I wanted to familiarize you with the island, hoping that by now you might feel as if you've been there! If so, perhaps you can stretch the imagination to thinking you were in the dance classes with us! Music and dance is an integral part of Tinos and our lessons each evening with the modest, talented, emotional Stathis were amazing. A man born to dance, he put his skills and soul "on the table," so to speak. We were drawn to him and the lessons, whilst being casual and fun, involved a lot of technicality as well.

Stathis has a group "Terpsichori" which performs in different festivals including at Varna, in Bulgaria. He dances with finesse and passion and one of his many attributes is that he goes in between all the dancers in the circle to make sure they have mastered the steps more or less correctly. Our one hour dance course always lasted much longer and also, many times Stathis joined us for or after dinner and we danced the nights away.

Dances learnt were: Syrtos (Cyclades); Ballos (Cyclades); Ikariotiko (Ikaria); Kabodoritiko (Eubia); Issos (Dodecanese); Sousta (Dodecanese); Pirogousikos (Chios); Plataniotiko Nero (Samos); Aptaliko (Lesbos);

Patima (Limnos); Zonaraviko (Makedonia); Hasapiko (Popular); Zeibekiko (Popular); Siganos (Crete); Maleviziotis (Crete); Endeka (Makedonia); Haniotiko (Crete); Hassapia (Thrace); etc.



We stayed after our lessons to watch rehearsals of "Terpsichori" with live music as they were preparing to perform on mainland Greece.

Stathis is also a cantor (chanter) in Panagia Megalochari Church and one evening we were invited to go and hear his astonishing voice.

We also came across Greek parties where people were dancing, stopped to watch and were invited to join in these atmospheric gatherings and dancing.

The French people with whom I spent these wonderful days were very "sympatico", fun loving and energetic and whilst some were serious trekkers and less interested in dancing, there were some others who wanted to learn and also, there were several experienced dancers amongst the group. This meant that Stathis was able to teach not only easy but more complicated dances as well.

The week was fabulous the one drawback being that it passed too quickly! There is a certain allure about Tinos, I was captured and enraptured, not just by the island itself but by its generous and friendly people. We can only hope that in this fast developing world it continues to preserve its unique identity.

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