

SailFuture Greek Islands Trip Day-By-Day

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Day 1: New City, Old Friends

My London -> Warsaw -> Athens flight touched the ground at 10pm, “just when things are getting started,” said my Athenian friend.

Leaving the airport on the metro, I chatted with a Greek who had just vacationed in Warsaw. She made me wish I somehow managed to escape the airport during my layover. She confirmed what I’d heard before: Great weekend trip! Warsaw is a cultural hub of Europe. Its architecture is incredible. The impression I got from the airport, however, was more eerie, like the sleepiness curse in *Sleeping Beauty* had descended on the airport. The security guard at my connections transfer and the gal at Duty Free were falling asleep right in front of me. The attendant at the gate desk could barely keep his eyes open. Ah well. I’d love to explore the country someday. Not that I have a bucket list, because I don’t believe in bucket lists per-se; I agree with Renee James’s op-ed there.

But back to Athens. This week the metro is free. Yippee! It’s something to do with the political situation, although as far as I can tell no one really understands why that makes the metro free. No one is complaining though.

At Doukisis Plakentias I met a friend from MIT. We hadn’t seen each other in over a year. How much has changed in that short time! Him and his girlfriend picked me up from the metro. We drank cognac on his balcony under a near-full moon. We chatted about the situation in Greece. It seems no one is certain of what will happen. The biggest pain of course is that the Greek banks are closed. Otherwise day-to-day life, at least for them, is more or less the same. The gal I met earlier on the metro reiterated the same things. One of the guests on our boat is an investigative journalist; he will do a real study on the sentiments and happenings here. Interested to learn what he surmises.



FIG. 1



FIG. 2

Day 2: Hi. So we're about to live on a boat together... !

All the crew met each other today. About half of “us” I know from the Marshall Scholarship program, the rest are friends of friends or friends-of-friends-of-friends. We grab lunch at the yacht club with last week’s crew.

I took the metro again this morning. Can’t argue with free! It ended up taking me two hours to get from North Athens to the marina. I took the tram half of the distance, which has large windows and passes through cute areas and gorgeous waterfront, but is slow and makes frequent stops. Maybe it was destiny though because I met a super muscular graphic designer from Sweden. He was interning in the city and meeting friends at the beach. He said the same thing my friends did about the “situation;” that the biggest issue/annoyance was that the closed banks. I hadn’t really pieced together that closed banks those companies and individuals with only Greek bank accounts not only can’t withdraw money, but can’t pay/receive their salaries. Yikes... Everyone is hoping this gets resolved soon.

I’m a bit late for lunch, which means I get to eat everyone’s leftovers. Classic poor- grad student move. Anyways, it’s a relief that everyone seems super awesome. I’ll leave my fellow sailors’ identities secret, mostly because it’d be creepy to talk about here all by name. But anyways they are all good at first impressions at lease. No one seems like a psychopath.

We’re eating a super posh meal at the closest yacht club to the Astir Palace Marina. I looked out over the cove and made a mental note of which boat I though was nicest. Later I found out that the one I choose was our boat. Isn’t that a special feeling.

The boat is stunning. It’s a 65’ MacGregor Pilot House. The sides are black, with light text in bold lettering on the sides. It reads “Defy the Odds #SailForJustice.” You see the boat and you want to ask questions. Then you wish you knew the owner.

First mate and one of our guests headed over first to get things set-up. We watch them from the beach.



FIG. 3: Capt. Mike Long.



FIG. 4

A group of kids paddleboard over to the boat, little cove pirates, and we see our crew welcome them aboard. This made me smile. What's that, then it looks like first mate is putting them to work, making an assembly line to move goods into the kitchen and then re-cover the cushions and beds.

We get the signal and take the tender over to the boat. Up close, you can see in blue cursive each of our names is inscribed on the hull (!) We drop off our things below deck, slip into swimsuits, and jump into the beautiful blue. I'm with some of my closest friends from Oxford in the Mediterranean. Someone is playing club music from the boat speakers. I'm probably dreaming. There's not a cloud in the sky. Yes I know I should reapply sunscreen. No one likes a lobster-red gal.

The group of "pirate" kids pulls up in a motorboat, towing a prime-to-ride surfboard. They invite the guys on the boat earlier to join them for a trip around the bay. Isn't this great. What does it take to retire on a sailboat? First I must work for clean and healthy oceans... Anyhow. I diverge.

We each get a tour of the boat. There aren't many rules, except don't ruin the boat, don't flush toilet paper, and don't be annoying. Captain is calm, cool and collected- but you can just tell he's a dude, ready to handle anything.

Captain cooked us dinner; oh man this is getting better. He's treated us this evening, but for the rest of the trip we'll alternate cooking responsibility. Dinner turns into a pre-game.

Now it gets better. An Athenian couple the other day told Captain about a "you can't leave without visiting," "most posh on the coast" club that happens to be right around the mountain from our boat. This couple phoned the owner, told him about the cause, and got us hooked up with a table. Around 11pm we pulled (our boat) the dock by the club (can't say I've done that before). As soon as my feet touch land I'm greeted by a waiter who serves us Procecco in long-stemmed glasses. Can't say that's ever happened before either. Procecco in hand, we climbed a set of precarious stairs up the Cliffside until we reached a beautiful soft-lit space, well-dressed people meandering about. We tried our best to not look like bunch of ragamuffin seagoers; that was a



FIG. 5: 1st mate Jeremy.



FIG. 6

bit of a struggle, but it didn't matter. The night got better. Inevitably shenanigans ensued.

People say you should set the bar low, so you then exceed it. If this night was setting some sort of bar for the trip, well then I'm not sure what to expect.

Day 3: Everyone here?! Off we go -> Agina

I woke up to learn that our first mate got part of his ear bit off in a fight last night. Yep, apparently that can happen. Watch your ears fellows. Our first mate got Mike Tysoned. Anyhow, Jeremy is ok now. The night crew at the hospital stitched his ear back together

Everyone else is in one piece thank goodness.

Well not quite. Our undercover reporter (political journalist James O'Keefe; he's kinda famous and so I'm not giving away a secret) went out that morning to try to vote. Then he got tear-gassed out of a protest. Well anyways he's fine now too. We pick him up at the dock, along with Jeremy and one other of our crew.

Everyone's back aboard.

None of us are really sure of our itinerary; we're ready and happy to play-by-ear. It turned out that we made our longest sail of the journey today, all the way to our southernmost destination, Agina.

The combination of the late night, boat rocking, and sunshine made us all want to nap. Captain and first mate take control of the sails, while the rest of us crew are strewn about the upper and lower deck, napping, reading, and chitchatting.

We dock in Agina by dinnertime. The first port on we pull into doesn't have the fresh water we need to refill the tanks, so we motor around the island to the next marina. This not only gave us access to fresh water, but also put us right in front of a line of restaurants. I think more than eating, our crew of city-going hussle-busslers is eager to connect to wifi. I can tell my crewmates need to learn to relax.

We eventually split into groups for dinner and spend the night wandering around the town. Beyond the waterfront the island feels somewhat deserted. But then again so is Oxford on a Sunday night.

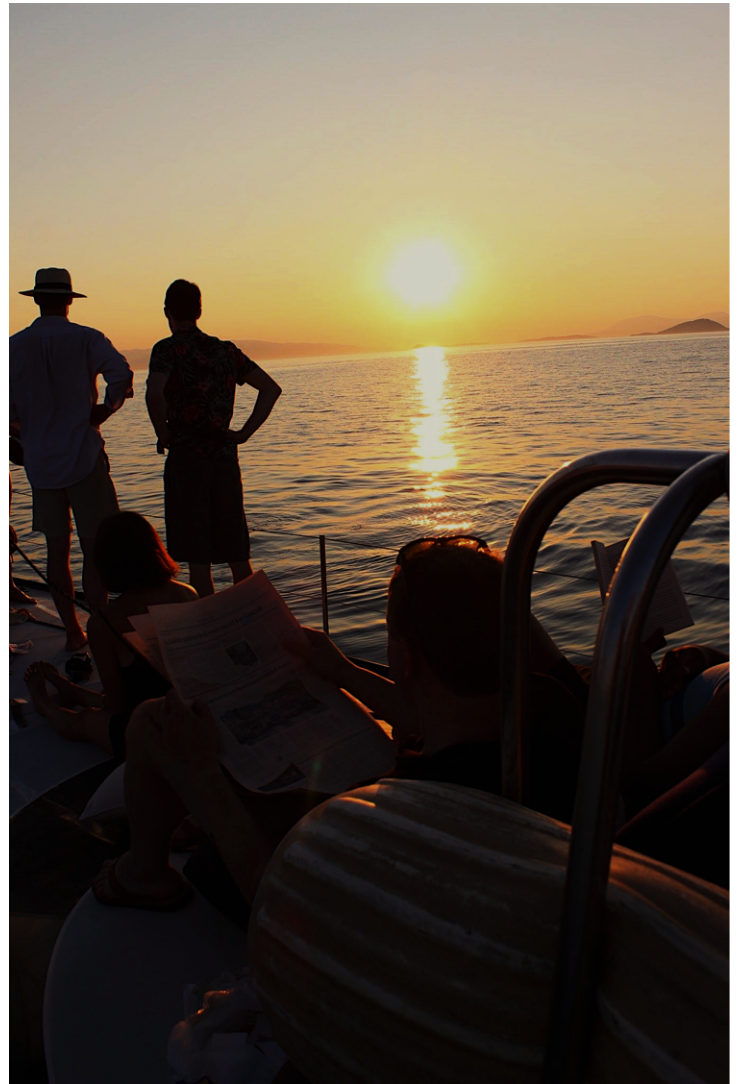


FIG. 7: Image credit Francisco Gonzalez.

Some folks watched news coverage of the elections on a projector by the dock. One home has a large “vote no” banner hanging from their balcony. I wonder what our investigative reporter is discovering.

Captain Mike brings us to the bow to “pause for the cause” – as one of our guests affectionately called it. He explained again the non-profit’s goals, to provide an alternative to incarceration that can help teens break the cycles of behavior that prevent them from being responsible and happy members of their communities. This was one instance, of many to come, when our easy-going, fun-loving Captain impressed me with his dedication and leadership. We each articulated our goals for the trip. This is about the kids SailFuture reaches out to, providing mentorship and a transformational experience that can get them out of the rigmarole of the criminal justice system. We’re all here to support the organization and it’s goals, plus take a vacation. Someone pops open a bottle of bubbly at port.

Day 4: A straggler joins.

We rented Vespas to scoot around the island. This was a great idea. Our first stop was a monastery. It was architecturally stunning. I wish I knew more about the history. I love visiting monasteries and nunneries. Imagine that space as your whole world. It reminds me that I’d like to read the book *If Nuns Ruled the World*. Our second stop was a ruined temple resting at the highest point on the island. You enter free if you are a student of the EU! The views were stunning.

I rode the Vespa with our mysterious reporter friend James O’Keefe. I learned he wrote a New York Times bestselling memoir and has his own media company outside NYC that does investigative journalism.

Our final guest, my friend from Oxford, joins us this evening. Once he’s onboard and settle we head off, once again surrounding ourselves by beautiful blue. We’re sailing at sunset; this must be the most beautiful scene in the world right now. We spend the night half-sailing half-motoring away from Agina.

Day 5: Agina -> Dhokos -> Hydra

I woke up to find that we’d anchored near Dhokos,



FIG. 8: Monastery.

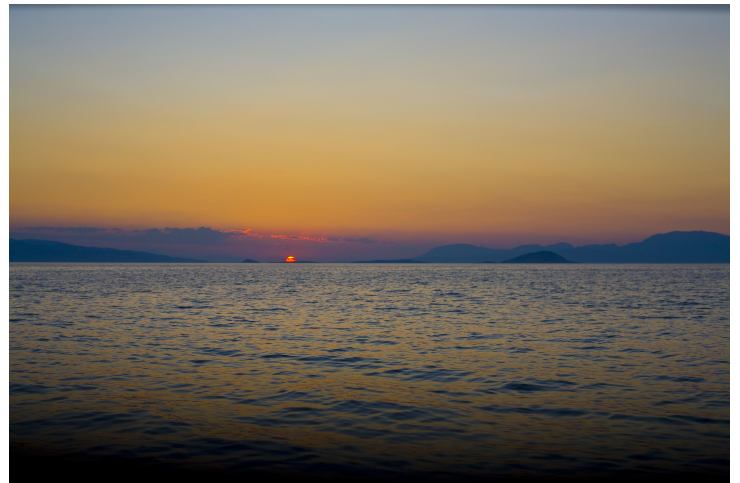


FIG. 9

a less frequented island. Part of our crew managed to swim to a nearby, rocky nearly deserted beach, but we didn't stay long. From Dhokos we sailed to Hydra. This was my favorite island. After lunch we climbed to the highest point on the island to get a great view over the harbor. We jumped off tall rocks from the coast until we worked up an appetite. We dined on the boat and then danced the night away in the bars on the island.

Day 6: Hydra -> Poros

We had a relaxed morning in Hydra. A boat mate and I explored more of the island. We heard an announcement over the loud speaker of a larger yacht-cruise to their guests, instructing them to wait in line for lunch, then giving them a run-down of the day. This was of course markedly different from our fly-by-night cruise. I'm thankful for the freedom and glad not to be getting babied around.

We reached today's destination, Poros, by dinner-time. Poros is a charming island, well aren't they all, although it felt more touristy than Hydra. Once again we had a pleasant pre-dinner exploration of the island, and then danced the night away. Some shenanigans ensued but no one lost an ear.

Day 7: Poros -> Methana

Time is flying by too fast. I'm relaxed, but also have that blissful feeling I get on the open ocean. This feeling isn't just my own. <link to that book Blue Mind>.

In the early afternoon we sail from Poros to a cove on Methana, where we anchored and set up a picnic-dinner and bonfire on the beach. There's a volcanic spring – a natural hot tub - on this island, where swimmers lounge. There's also "Methana Volcanic Spa." Our reporter friend finds a small town three or four miles away. We made fast friends with an Athenian vacationing on the beach and of course share our picnic dinner and fire. Many slept on the sand under the stars.

Day 8: Return to Athens. Where has time gone?!

We spend morning through lunchtime part-sailing, part-motoring upwind to Athens. The first few marinas we visited were full, so it took an hour or so to dock. The marina we ended up at docked



FIG. 10



FIG. 11

mostly mega yachts. Our neighbor was the most mega mega-yacht I've ever seen. It made our 65 footer look small – and I'm use to sailing dinghies.

The best thing about the marina was that it had clean, warm showers. Top ten showers of my life. A week on the water gets you pretty grimy. After that shower I noticed most of my clothes smelled pretty bad. It was more than worth it.

A family of Belgians we met in Poros joined us for post-dinner drinks in Athens. We were all a bit exhausted, and it's almost Monday. People are starting to think differently about those emails stagnated in their inboxes.

A small group of us stayed out late and walked back to the boat in the wee hours of the morning. The world's friendlies black lab puppy followed us to the boat. He wore a collar, but one that didn't have contact information for the owner. The puppy tried to jump the gap from the dock to our boat, but fell into the water! He was swimming around the boat, no easy way to get back to land. I yelped, which impressively woke up our Captain and first mate nearly instantaneously. The rescue mission commenced. One of the Marshall Scholars pulled our loyal fuzzball friend onboard. What would we do with this precious creature?! You said "sit" and the dog sat. This was someone's dog. We fed the dog water and cornflakes. A gay couple in a convertible and then the night patrol ended up helping us find the dog's owner. Phewf. I thought of my belief that humans are happier when they connect with animals. *Be kind to strangers, least they be angels in disguise.*

Day 9: Sad Face. Leaving.

Early in the morning I boarded my flights from Athens to London. I took time at the airport to edit this post. I stayed the night with my best friend in London.

The next morning I head to Oxford to repack pick up the gear we need for fieldwork in Utila, Honduras. I leave Monday morning and I won't arrive on our island until Wednesday; this is a long journey. I'm looking forward to the adventure. I'm also looking forward to testing technologies and collecting data for my PhD.



FIG. 12

On the plane I'm catching up on work and reading graphic novel *The Wake* by Scott Snyder and Sean Murphy. *The Wake* is all set on the ocean. Thank you friend for recommending this. It's kinda creepy the main character is a former-NOAA scientist who twists her blonde hair up in a bun. My fictional doppelganger?!!



FIG. 13

*All image credit Mike Norton
unless otherwise noted.*