

There's This Place:

Milos, Greece

By Zuzana Prochazka

If you've ever Med moored in 35 knots, you know what a treat a Meltemi can be. As if it's not hard enough to wiggle your stern into a gap you'd swear is half the needed space, this wicked Greek northerly wind added to the fun of our arrival at Mykonos. Three days later, we were still there, partially due to a snarl on the marina bottom, somewhere under which, our anchor was firmly stuck on a cable. Ugh. Oh well, it wasn't the worst place to sit out the nasty wind as we continued our tour of the Cyclades Islands that are strewn about the southern Aegean Sea. We arrived in time to get a space on the quay, the sun was shining, the wine was flowing and seemingly, the gods were with us.

Mykonos, where beautiful people come to eat,

drink and generally misbehave, was fantastic but soon it was time for a more relaxed vibe and natural beauty, which we got in abundance on our next stop at Milos Island.

We had a phenomenal sail south with the weakening Meltemi at our backs and arrived at Milos and its small harbor of Adamas by late afternoon. This island is where the famous Venus de Milo(s) was unearthed by a farmer in 1820, back when she may have had arms. There's much debate as to how she lost them – probably in a scuffle regarding ownership between the French and the Turks. Possession being 9/10s of the law, today she's housed at the Louvre in Paris. (Who knows how much of that is accurate. We found history to be fluid and depending on what we read or whom we asked, "facts" changed as did timeframes and the spelling of names of towns and islands. That made navigation interesting.)

We tied up in Milos with time to take a stroll before dinner. Every evening, the

circular town quay is lined with vendors, some looking like Zorba the Greek, hawking excursions and promising unforgettable tours of the southern and western sides of the island, which are chock full of caves, rock formations and sheer cliffs. We walked from one handsome sunburned salesman to the next, eyeing their vessels, and learning about the must-see sites, while each assured us that his tour was better than his neighbor's.

The Greeks have a bit of a flirtation with vessel capacity limits and owners of 45-foot sailboats were promising full-day tours "with plenty of room for at least 18 people." We were seven in 56 feet and that was plenty. The highlight of every vendor's Oscar-worthy presentation was a photo of the amazing lunch that would be served along the way.

The more I listened, the more I realized that we could and should do this on our own. Sure, we didn't know whether we would be able to anchor at each site or if there were private vessel restrictions (which sounds silly now that I look back on it since Greeks are pretty mellow about most things) but we would give it a try. I collected brochures with maps on the back and over dinner, we decided how to organize our own tour – a stroke of genius, as it turned out.



Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3

The next morning, we waited for two hours after all the boats departed and then followed in their general direction, west and then south. With the delay, we arrived at each site just as the commercial boats were leaving for the next place so we had each cave, anchorage and lagoon to ourselves.

The first stop was Sikia, a cave rendered topless when its circular roof caved in a few centuries ago. The crystal clear pool within, lit by rays of sunlight streaming in through the hole above, beckoned. Moments prior, the place had been packed with raucous tourists, so our lone dinghy ride inside was positively sublime. It was peaceful, with nobody but our own echo for company. And lunch? Well, we put together our own, and it was more than amazing. We even took a brochure-worthy photo.

Anchor raised and following the bread crumbs of our guides, we continued south to Kleftiko, a movie set of an anchorage replete with arches, rock formations and caves you can swim through. The best part of the afternoon was spent dinghying inside the nooks and crannies, shooting video and taking hundreds of pictures. There wasn't a bad place to point the camera.

We completely lost track of time but a solution was at hand. Kleftiko can only be visited by boat, so when all the tourist vessels headed back to town, we let out some more chain and made ourselves comfortable for a quiet night at anchor. Protected from the northerly wind by the steep white cliffs, the night was calm and quiet, with no one near and nothing around but the stars above.

The wind was in the process of shifting directions from a northerly to a southerly. That left the next day with little breeze, so we motored east and then north, ducking into lagoons to check out beaches and the remnants of old mines.

On the northern side, we headed offshore a bit to check out Glaronissia, a geological phenomenon where three islets were formed under such great pressure that they are entirely made up of hexagonal rock tubes. The islands seem to have texture with the vertical brown tubes jutting down into the surrounding blue water.

Next up was a true highlight, the beach of Sarakiniko, one of the most photographed spots in Greece. Sheer white cliffs fall into blue-green water, dotted by pink caves that beckon to passing boats. We had a unique vantage point as we were the only boat anchored off. That made us much-envied and often-photographed by the rest of the visitors who had arrived by tourist bus from Adamas.

Made up of white and grey sand, tall cliffs and hundreds of caves, the moonscape of Sarakiniko is a spectacle in itself. Add the rusting hulk of a sunken ship in the clear water and it's a snorkeler's paradise. Young guys and gals were daring each other to jump of the 60-foot cliffs above but I opted for a long swim instead, wondering if Odysseus himself, might have been lured here by sirens.

That afternoon, we completed our circumnavigation and found one last space on the quay for another Med moor, this one executed in windless bliss. With hours of daylight left, we rented a car and visited the interior of Milos.

The Plaka is the old town, perched up on the western slope and full of narrow streets where tavernas are shoehorned into every whitewashed corner. Tucked way down below at sea level, is the fishing village of Klima that is the definition of a Greek seaside settlement. Painted every color of the rainbow, the buildings are lapped by waves as the fishing skiffs ride out the breeze on their moorings.

Half way between Plaka and Klima are ancient catacombs and an amphi-



photo 4



photo 5

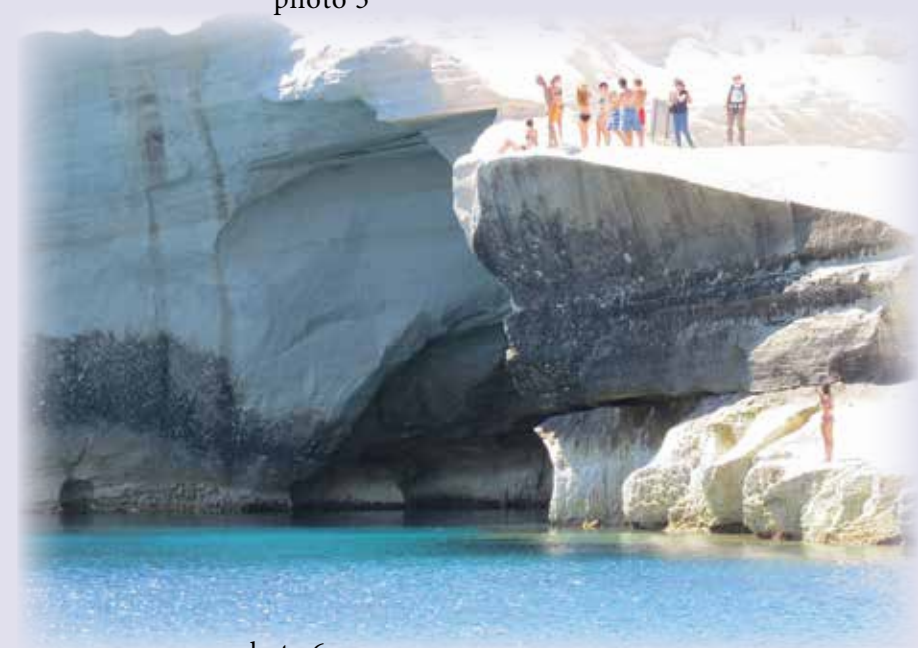


photo 6



Photo 8

theater with amazing bas-reliefs (presumably from Roman times). Once again, despite it already being June, there was hardly a soul around.

Trekking across the island, we found the tiny village of Pollonia from which you can almost see Glaronissia. It seems wherever there's a square meter of space, Greeks put down a table and chairs, thereby creating impromptu tavernas, each more colorful than the last. There were at least four crammed onto Pollonia's little waterfront.

A short distance away, we stumbled across the Kostantakis winery and were invited inside for a wine tasting. Milos is an arid island but somehow manages to have impressive vineyards. The scenery is less like that of the lush Napa Valley and more akin to the drier rolling hills of central California. Sipping a white wine on a bench, we had views that could have been stolen from the oenophile movie, *Sideways*.

We rolled back to town in time for preparations to be made for departure the next morning. We were headed back north toward Athens and the wind switched to the south – a minor miracle in view of the screaming Meltemi just a few days before. Sometimes, the gods are with you. 🚩



Photo 9



photo 10



Photo 11