

A Greek experience with Rod and Kendal

Friday 13 June 2014 - not a good date I thought but in my usual fashion – got on my bike, having been ably assisted by Philippa the night before to get me to Kettering station to catch the train to Luton Airport in readiness for an early departure to Skiathos, Greece – a land of myths, magic and possible mayhem!!! A first for me and I love islands. I shared the journey with a lovely couple and arrived safely. I had an alarming jolt as I needed the rest of my tickets; this was booked the week before with a reputable English company who were quite concerned that I was willing to travel to Thessaloniki, then take an overland coach to Volos (where I was hoping to meet an old school friend), then a 2.5 hour ferry journey to Skopelos so when she told me what deal they could offer I plumped for “the package”! However, even though I am used to thinking on my feet, I was not used to the “package”. On arrival in Skiathos, the instructions were to stay at a Greek café with my suitcase until the “rep” arrived with the next part of the ticket to take a catamaran to Skopelos – land of Mama Mia. But I am somewhat independent so after drinking a sweetened ice tea and still no “rep” I marched off to the Greek ferry company’s main office where – no wonder – they call the men “Greek Gods” - there was a handsome young man who could not help me as I was with the “package”. Alarm bells ringing I took a walk round the block and ended up in the same office again where standing in the middle of the room the “rep” hailed me with open arms as the man in the Greek restaurant thought I had gone to visit the ferry office and pointed in that direction. Lucky me! She then presented me with a one way ticket for the catamaran for Skopelos. Hurray. Sun shining, blue sky, blue sea and friendly people eventually. On arrival Rod and Kendal kindly welcomed me to the island which was beautiful; plantations green everywhere, white houses with terracotta roofs; and a harbour with not a steep incline so at that point no sheer drops. I was despatched via taxi up to my hotel which was perfect; a room with a sea view a swimming pool and hardly many guests!! I then walked down to meet Rod and Kendal who introduced me to some of the singing group who were made up of English people like me and English expats who live on the island.

Saturday and Sunday were taken up with two workshops per day singing a selection of songs from contemporary to classical from which Rod was to choose for the concerts on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. At these workshops, I met the whole choir which was made up from Greek people in Skopelos, Italian, Australian, English expats living on the island and English people like me. Rod works you very quickly so the ability to read music or know the tune helps.

What was good from my point of view was that I had something to take part in, good company and a lovely meal every evening, the sun shone every day with blue sky and sea, something to work towards i.e. the concerts and places to explore. A chance to relax and unwind or plenty of things to see and do if you wanted to do so.

The first concert was Tuesday night at an outside bar at Bardos with great acoustics. This was made up of contemporary music including The Hired Man and solos from Robin Maughan (currently touring the UK with a Tribute to the Jersey Boys) and Linden (Rod and Kendal’s son) and the second concert was on Thursday night at a Monastery with a wonderful roof top view of the bay

with a solo from Kendal. Selections from both these concerts can be seen on You Tube if you look up Greek music festivals Skopelos 2014.

Skopelos is a musical island with plenty of Greek gentlemen playing bouzouki instruments. One night we went to one of the outside Greek restaurants by the bay where one of the last remaining icons of Rembetik, the Skopeliti Giorgios Xintaris can usually be seen performing in his open air restaurant *Anatoli* at the top of the Kastro in Skopelos Chora or in Rembetika clubs with his son, or other musician friends. Tavernas that do not offer live performances, play Giorgios Xintaris records, along with other Rembetika music, in the late evening. The cadence of this beautiful music sounding in the taverns at night usually communicates 'vibes' that makes a very special atmosphere. When challenged about the possibility of purchasing a CD of this beautiful sound, Giorgios said that he was "merely a waiter"!!! The island holds various music and other festivals during the course of the year.

Wednesday I went exploring on my own as we had some free time so took the bus through olive groves, forests, steep drops with no road barriers (not quite my cup of tea), and wonderful music playing as you bobbed along (though not in all buses). Kastani beach was my destination and my what a place. A lovely bar with food and several gorgeous men all singing; a board walk; lounging chairs at your disposal; with the beach just ahead of you!! Beautiful. This is part of the Mamma Mia film but strangely enough the Greek people of the island do not like to promote this. When you wander through their towns and tiny streets it is a whole different community. You should respect their culture. The food is wonderful and very reasonably priced considering the state of the economy in the country.

The end of the week was looming and time to travel back home. We had a celebratory dinner on Thursday night with Italian, French, Australian, and some of the English party. Rod and Kendal kindly saw us all on to the catamaran at 07.00 am on Friday morning back to Skiathos. This again I had a further experience with the "package" in that I was not included on the vehicle list back to the airport!!! A taxi was offered at 11.00 am with another couple which did not happen so I decided to walk to the airport with my suitcase. The positive side of this was that I was able to experience closely the amazing take-off and landing of planes at Skiathos airport!! I had wondered why lots of people were at the end/beginning of the runway as you land on a slip of runway which is between the hills and is like a motorway with houses very near! As each 'plane arrives, you sometimes experience a blast from the engines which nearly blows you backwards, sideways, hair streaming and everyone laughing! Amazing.

The couple I sat next to on the 'plane had attended the Bardon contemporary concert and had loved it and we all had a very musical chat on the way back. They lived in Sussex where Keith Richard of the Rolling Stones can be seen supporting their village community activities. Again I was met by kind Philippa and took me safely from Kettering railway station back to Cottingham. Home again after another adventure. Why not join in 2015 when Rod and Kendal go next year?

Pauline L M Youngs - June 2014