Secrets of Greece

KYTHERA

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untouched and unequalled

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Travel guides in a different way!
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The singer Katsaros already sang about this nice island: "Kythera, we will never find it!" But whoever found it cannot be happier. Kythera, with its inviting rolling countryside, overgrown with fragrant vegetation and adorned with numerous chapels and breath-taking sea views everywhere, a piece of paradise on earth!

Although Kythera is part of the Ionian Islands, it is architecturally and scenically very similar to the Cycladic Islands and belongs to the administration of the municipality of Piraeus, which is no less than 105 nautical miles away.

Kythera has less than 3,500 inhabitants, spread over 64 villages and hamlets. Chora, the island’s capital, is an interesting mix of typical Cycladic architecture with block-shaped white houses and Venetian influences, such as the Kastro, which towers over the town.

The island population mainly lives from agriculture and livestock. With the advent of tourism, more and more Kytherians see tourism as a new or additional source of income. The accommodations, from simple to comfortable, are spread all over the island. The island does not have a really busy nightlife, but there are many good restaurants and nice cafes.

The almost 80 km long coastline consists mainly of rocks, interspersed with beautiful beaches in large and smaller bays.

In mythology, Kythera is mentioned several times, and there are clear traces on the island of its eventful history, including finds from the Minoan era, Byzantine churches and monasteries, remains of Venetian fortresses, and various structures built by the English when they held sway on the island.

The picturesque villages, unspoilt nature, and interesting sights in combination with the wonderful, quiet beaches and the friendliness of the population, make the island an ideal place for holidaymakers.
Kythera town, also called Chora, is the island’s capital. The small town is located in the south of the island and has less than 400 permanent residents. During the Venetian occupation it was declared the capital of the island. For security reasons, the Venetians moved government from the 13th-century Byzantine settlement of Agios Dimitrios - present-day Paleochora - to Chora, where they took up residence in the fortified fortress.

Chora is best explored on foot. You can park in the parking lot, to the right of the road towards Kapsali. In the town there are a number of nice sights and you can enjoy shopping or have something to eat in one of the ‘kafeneia’. Cycladic, Venetian, and English architecture alternate in a particularly interesting mix: whitewashed houses with striking chimneys, picturesque alleys with arches that provide welcome shade here and there, numerous churches and chapels, Venetian and English mansions, and beautiful gardens and courtyards with colourful, fragrant flowers. On the central square you will find the town hall, a few banks, real estate agencies, and cafes. Below the Estavromenos Cathedral is the Estavromenos Square with the ‘agora’, the commerce building. In this square, the French proclaimed the French Revolution in 1799 and restored democracy by removing the feudal Venetian rule. In doing so, they burned the famous Libro d’Oro, the book of the Nobles. However, Chora is still dominated by a Venetian castle, or Kastro, which rises high above the town on a massive rock overlooking the sea.
In the village itself there are some very beautiful old houses. There is a bazaar every Friday from 18.00 o’clock.

The small village of Dokana is on the main road, just before the turnoff to Mylopotamos. The village owes its name to the fact that a toll station was located here during the British occupation. The local population did not like this, and they felt more or less trapped in their own village, because they did not want or could not pay the toll. So, they were trapped (‘dokana’).

In the vicinity of Dokana some special archaeological finds have been made, including some beautifully preserved vases, which have been transferred to the Archaeological Museum in Chora.

A winding road leads west towards Mylopotamos. Surrounded by lush nature, this medieval village has an impressive architecture. It is divided into three settlements: Mylopotamos, Kato Chora and Limnionas. In the centre is a pleasant square underneath giant plane trees. Of course, you will find a typical Greek kafeneio, where the older men are playing ‘tavli’ (a kind of backgammon). Furthermore, there is the old domestic school, the village church of Agios Sozontas and the Agios Charalampos Church with its striking bell tower.

A bit further down there are natural springs that supply the washing places with water. It is wonderful to enjoy the peace and quiet here and listen to the rippling water of the Neraida Stream. Ducks swim around in the stream.

On the border of the village is Kato Chora with the former English School and a Venetian fortress. Built on a protruding rocky outcrop, this abandoned Kastro served as a refuge for the inhabitants of the village during attacks. The entrance to the fortress is dominated by the well-preserved symbol of Venetian rule, the lion of St. Marcos. Within the ramparts, houses and exceptional Byzantine and post-Byzantine churches can be seen. The Agios Athanasios, Panagia Mesosportitissa, Profitis Ilias, Agios Kosmas and Agios Ioannis o Chrysostomos are very worthwhile, but unfortunately usually closed to the public. On the other side of the gorge, you will see the church of Agia Marina.

From Kato Chora a beautifully paved road leads to the imposing cliffs of Limnionas.
Cats on Kythera

When you think of Greece, you think of sun, sea, terraces, and fun. But when you are sitting on a terrace, you will also see the many cats scurrying around the tables. These stray cats have a hard life. Only few of them can survive on their own or have someone who feeds them in winter as well. Fortunately, since 2010, circumstances have improved for these animals on Kythera.

‘Adopt a cat’, the animal welfare organization on the island of Kythera was founded by Irene van Klinken after working with the local vet on a two-year sterilization program on the island. During those two years, more than 400 cats were sterilized on Kythera, and now the number has gone up to more than 1000!

During her work on the sterilization project, it became clear to Irene that much more needed to be done for the animals on the island and that she could never do that without financial help. For that reason, she founded Adopt a Cat in 2012. Adopt a Cat aims to raise support and money to help the stray cats of Kythera live a happier, healthier, and better life through vaccination, sterilization, food, and care.

Since many of the cats on Kythera are sick, they cannot fend for themselves and will therefore look for people to feed them. In the summer there are many tourists on the island who feed them and that is how most cats survive. Unfortunately, there are few people on the island in winter and many cats die eventually.

That is why Irene made and installed feed containers. There are now 30 feeding stations spread over the island. If the tourists feed the cats by means of the food containers, instead of on the terrace of their accommodation or at the restaurants, then the cats will also know where to find the food in winter and more will survive. Meanwhile, organizations on other Greek islands have adopted this great idea.

Sterilization is continuing, in collaboration with a veterinarian in Neapoli (Peloponnese). The cats are caught and after a short boat trip they are sterilized and vaccinated. The next day they come back fully recovered from the anaesthesia and are returned to where they came from. The cats are monitored and checked regularly. In case of an injury or illness, the cats receive the necessary treatment. And of course, food and water are provided.

To pay for all this, Irene has set up collection boxes in various places on the island, in addition to the ‘Adopt a cat’ program on the internet.

You too can support the cats on Kythera. There are various ways in which you can contribute, while on holiday and/or from abroad.

For example, visit the market in Potamos on Sundays and buy various products for the benefit of the cats on Kythera, for example a cool Adopt a Cat t-shirt, with which you can advertise Irene’s organization.

For more information, visit the website: https://adoptacat.jimdofree.com/.
For most tourists eating local food is an important part of the holiday. The Greek cuisine is sometimes called the healthiest cuisine in Europe and offers a wide variety of different dishes. Each region and each island have their own specialties, Kythera as well.

**Kytherian dishes**

Some Kytherian specialties are: ‘Kytherian fish soup’, ‘kolokithopita’ (zucchini pie), and ‘koulourakia tsipouras’ (biscuits with tsipouro). Of course, the more famous dishes such as ‘souvlaki’ and ‘mousaka’ are also available everywhere.

**Kytherian wine**

Wine has been made on the island since ancient times. Today, for example, by Nikos Stratigos in Markesakia near Kalokerines. To visit, please call in advance: (+30) 2736038250 / (+30) 2106125430. In the tavernas you can ask for the ‘krasi tou spitiou’, the house wine. This wine, somewhat turbid and slightly darker than a rose wine, has a slightly sweet flavour. In addition to this local wine, you will find the well-known retsina and other Greek wines on the wine list.

**Distilled**

Ouzo, the national drink of Greece is also served on Kythera. Zouma, tsipouro or raki is a drink, even stronger than ouzo, which is sometimes distilled locally, mostly from grapes, but sometimes also from figs. The taste may vary from mild to sharp. Just give it a try! Almost every restaurant has its home-made zouma in stock. Of course, the metaxa should not be missing on this list. This Greek brandy is available in different qualities, ranging from 3, 5 and 7 stars to the Private Reserve.

**Greek coffee**

Besides filter coffee, cappuccino, espresso and Nescafé, the Greeks mainly drink Greek coffee and ‘frappés’. Never ask for Turkish coffee! Greek coffee is strong powdered coffee cooked in a ‘priki’, a small pan and served in small cups. You have to let it settle for a while and when you have finished your cup, you can have your future predicted out of the remaining sludge... Yes, the Greeks read their coffee grounds instead of tea leaves. Frappés is ice coffee, or cold Nescafé, shaken in such a way that a foam head is created. Both types are available as ‘glyko’ (sweet), ‘metrio’ (semi-sweet), ‘me gala’ (with milk), ‘choris gala’ (without milk) and ‘sketto’ (black). Recently, the ‘freddo cappuccino’ and ‘freddo espresso’ have become immensely popular. Usually, a glass of water is served with coffee.
Secrets of Greece offers the most detailed travel guides to various Greek holiday destinations. These beautifully illustrated guides pay extensive attention to history, local traditions, and many points of interest, but also cover topics that usually receive little or no attention.

In addition to descriptions of sights, villages, local customs and traditions, history, mythology and legends, the guides contain many pictures, and small maps.

With the help of these travel guides you will get to places, which you would never find otherwise, and you will get to know the real Greece and its inhabitants.

The travel guides are written by Anneke Kamerling, who worked for many years as destination developer and knows the ins and outs of the various destinations like no one else.

Every year she returns to Greece and updates the information in the books immediately if anything has changed. The travel guides are therefore always up to date.

She will show you around your holiday destination in a personal way.

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