

December on Kastellorizo

by Chrissie Verevis, Sydney



As the softer, shorter, cooler days signal the end of the tourist season on Kastellorizo, so too do they signal its metamorphosis from international holiday destination to lonely Greek island. Once again, Greek becomes the dominant language spoken on the waterfront; some of the restaurants and cafes close; kalamari make their appearance in bigger numbers in the cooler sea and the general subsiding of the hustle and bustle of the busy months ushers in the return of local people enjoying each other's company and with that the comforting signs of social cohesion which are blanketed during the season.

The sun, reduced in intensity, now becomes sought after rather than something from which people seek protection. Young and old bask in the soft sunlight and local laughter returns to the isle. Those of us who are fortunate enough to stay beyond tourist season enthusiastically welcome this time on Kastellorizo.

Through to the year's end, the weather is mostly mild, punctuated here and there by stormy days and nights. At times the sea rolls over the front and sometimes into the few restaurants and cafes which have remained open. Many a night during this period is spent indoors at one of these establishments, laughing and protesting in equal measure, as we lift our feet to avoid the sea which washes in. On a given night, if we are lucky, we are treated to an 'I must dance' moment when one of the gathered decides to take the floor. Lest I make it sound too idyllic, I should add the annoyance of being inside a small space with smoke wafting from the cigarettes of those who indulge below the 'no smoking signs'!

With the first rains locals head to the mountains looking for snails to cook and our long walks are rewarded with the volumes of purple

mountain crocuses and white crinums. The herbs are more fragrant and fresh than during summer with the dust washed off by the rain.

A key feature of the lead in to Christmas is the celebration of a series of saints' days. The event which most signals the beginning of the end of year festivities is the evening of 24 November which sees many in the community gather for the Esperinos of Aghia Aikaterini. This church is one of the newer and certainly one of the smaller churches in the town. Built some seven years ago by the builder Dimitris Gatis, the church sits in the tiny square created by a few homes a couple of streets back from the Limani. Only a small portion of those who gather fit into the church; most stand outside listening to the melodious and distinctive tones of Papa Yiorgi. At the conclusion of the service, in the garden outside the church, mounds of food prepared by the women of the town, and chiefly by the women whose homes surround the little church, appear on the waiting table. The winter drink of choice is either ouzo or raki and it flows plentifully as those gathered fall into animated discussion. It is a joy to witness the coming together of local people who clearly enjoy the setting.

Early December brings significant days – The fourth is Aghias Varvaras, the fifth Aghios Savvas and the sixth of course is the very important day of Aghios Nikolaos. Services are held for each with, in my view, none more beautiful than the Esperino for Aghios Nikolaos. The twin church of Aghios Dimitris and Aghios Nikolaos sits high on the Kavos hill, not far below the Kastro of Kastellorizo. This beautiful stone church is not connected to electricity and so the magical Esperino takes place exclusively by candlelight. The service commences in the late afternoon with the enchanting atmosphere augmented by the setting sun. By the time we walk back to the Limani we need candles to light

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up our steps. Some use their Smart Phone torch, but somehow even that does not spoil the moment. The day of Aghios Nikolaos also sees visitors from Rhodes, often including dignitaries, religious and otherwise. Some years, these visitors and locals make the pilgrimage across to Myra (now known as Demre) where many Kastellorizians once lived, to the famous church of Aghios Nikolaos.

Early December also sees the appearance of Christmas and festive decorations around the Limani and on some homes. These mainly come in the form of lights with lamp posts adorned with stars and the appearance of an impressive sailing ship of lights on the main wharf. Papa Yiorgi assembles a large nativity scene in the Horafia and decorates an old wooden boat with colourful lights.

Meanwhile, school is back in earnest and the children are hard at work with their studies, but also with preparing the school Christmas play. This is an absolute highlight of the season, as much for the performances of the children as for the sight of beaming proud parents, relatives and friends in the audience. Performances are usually in three sections commencing with the little ones, then the middle school children and concluding with a performance by the older students. The theme is generally Christmas, however, during these difficult times, there was one year in which the theme was 'austerity'. The evening is held in the main hall in the Horafia district

and it is standing room only! Predictably the evening concludes with snacks and drinks amidst much laughter and congratulations ... oh yes, and a visit by Santa!

Before Christmas the women on the island make melomakarona (finikakia), the beautiful honey dipped biscuits which, as they contain no butter and no eggs, can be eaten during the fasting period leading to Christmas Day. They also prepare kourambiedes, delicious shortbread dusted with icing sugar which can be eaten in celebration from Christmas Day forward.

On Christmas Eve, young children go door to door, some with melodic triangles, all singing to welcome in Christmas Day. They repeat this performance on 31 December, singing the Kalanda to welcome in the New Year.

On Christmas Day, following attendance of the service at Aghios Konstandinos and Eleni, family and friends gather in homes to feast for hours on end. No one is left out of the festivities; one does not need to belong to a local family in order to be included in the celebration of this special day.

This is the Kastellorizo many don't see; it is Kastellorizo as a jewel ... the glorious feeling of living in a small and remote community.

Commemorating 70 years of the Empire Patrol Tragedy



The following information sourced from Dr Paul Boyatzis' website (The Empire Patrol Disaster <http://www.empirepatrol.com/index.htm>) provides the context to help us understand the circumstances that led to the tragedy of the sinking of the Empire Patrol.

"The sinking of the Empire Patrol on 29 September 1945 forms a significant part of the history of Kastellorizo and relates to many thousands of Kastellorizian descendants residing in other parts of Greece, Australia and many other countries.

On 3 September 1943, special British detachments were sent to Kastellorizo for the liberation of the island from the Italians with further Royal Air Force troops landing on the 11th of the month. Two days later, 13 September 1943, Kastellorizo was formally liberated by the Allies with the arrival of 350 men on the Greek destroyer Koundouriotis and the two French ships.

During the subsequent weeks, Kastellorizo's garrison for strategic purposes was hurriedly increased to 1300 British troops, providing a significant target for the German Air Force. As anticipated, on 17 October, 1943 Kastellorizo was bombed for the first time by six Stukas which were supported by two escort planes. The island was again heavily bombed on 18 October, 1943 at 10.00am by 12 Junkers 88s. Serious damage was caused to a number of residences with loss of life and injuries to soldiers and inhabitants.

Between 23rd and 26th October 1943, approximately 1000 members of the civilian population were evacuated to Cyprus for a short stay and then transferred to Nuseirat in Gaza, Palestine. Another smaller group was taken to the nearby Turkish coast, Antifillo.

After the second World War, the ill-fated British ship transporting refugees from Palestine to Kastellorizo, caught fire and sank in the Mediterranean with the loss of 33 lives, mainly women and children, and huge devastation to some 500 passengers who were subsequently forced to leave their home of birth and migrate to other lands."

The 70th anniversary of this tragic event was commemorated on Kastellorizo at St George of the Well Square at the site of the Memorial Sculpture and Plaque where many attended the service by Father George Maltezos, including our two students who were on exchange to Kastellorizo. Friends of Kastellorizo worked with the Municipality of Kastellorizo to have Alexandros Zygouris create a sculpture that symbolises this tragedy. It now provides a focal point that serves as a memorial to commemorate those who died.

As well as acknowledging the 70th anniversary on Kastellorizo, a Memorial Service was organised in Perth by Dr Paul Boyatzis, Nick Lucas, Katina Asvestis and Katina Verevis.

Photo of survivors above: L-R Betty Papadopoulis, Evangelia Mallis, Mary Koufos, Irini Tsolakis, Evangelia Tsangari, Despina Tringas, Katina Asvestis, Katina Verevis, Arthur Athans, Nick Lucas, Lefteris Boyatzis, Paul Boyatzis

The excerpts from Katina Verevis' address to an audience who attended a Memorial Service at Evangelismos Church in Perth on October 4th, 2015 demonstrates how this moment in time still haunts many people who survived this disaster.

We left Kastellorizo because of the bombings and fear and fled to Cyprus for three months. Then we were taken to Gaza in Palestine for two years, experiencing more fear and anxiety about our future. This reads like a myth, however, for those of us who lived it, it left a deep mark on our soul and spirit. Particularly, those of us who lost family on this boat journey. When the war ended, we returned to the derelict Kastellorizo. We were the third group to be returned on the Empire Patrol boat. We were the lucky ones!

We left from Port Said on 29th September 1945 and were on the boat for five hours, when it caught fire. People were screaming and crying as golden flames surrounded them. It was a nightmare. A young man, Aristidis Gikas, sent an SOS to Port Said. Luck was with us, as a boat that carried seaplanes received the message and came to our rescue. The Captain and crew guided us hurriedly to the lifeboats and boarded the rescue boat for 24 hours, collecting those people who were still alive and those who died at sea.

All of this happened seventy years ago. On 29th September 1945, 33 people lost their lives. That's why today we commemorate the lives that were lost and this Memorial Service is to honour their memory. Let us all stand for one minute silence.

Editor's note

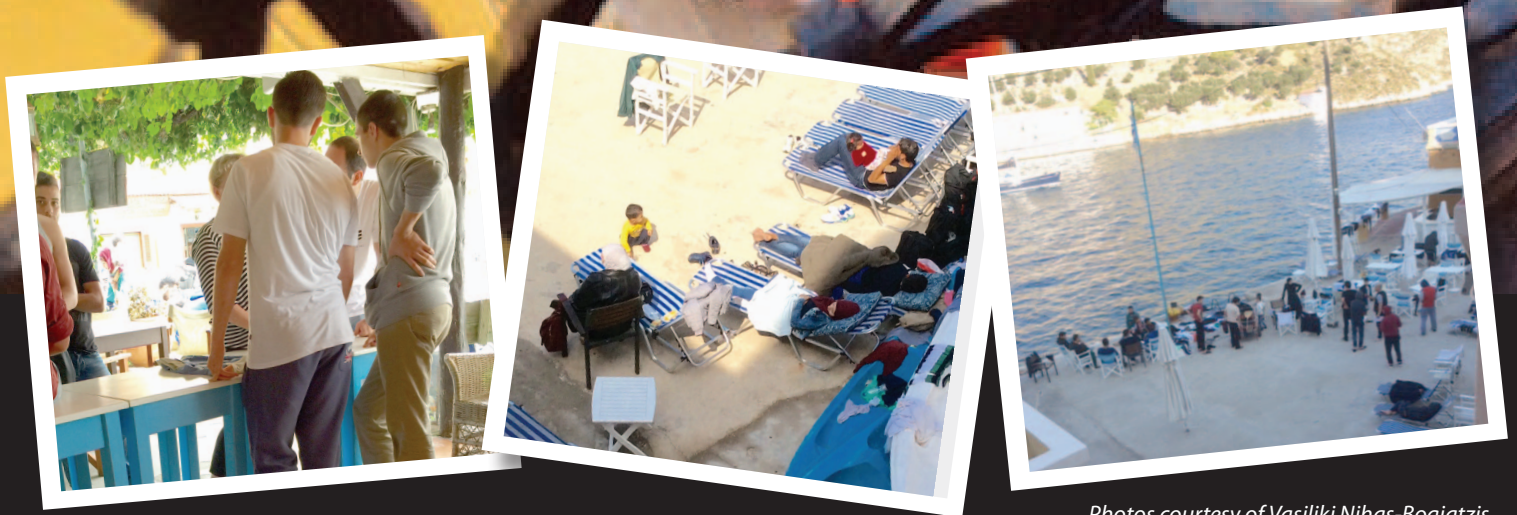
I was part of the audience and was affected by Katina's trembling voice that showed how deeply traumatising this event was for her and all of the survivors. They truly were the lucky ones to survive after 70 years.

That silence resonated with me as I tried to recall the horror of this moment knowing that my grandmother, and her daughter, and two granddaughters had survived this traumatic event along with others from Australia and other parts of the world.

The context may have changed, however, it seems all the more relevant 70 years later as the Syrian refugee crisis, makes you realise the fragility of life and how our security can easily be threatened. Chrissie Verevis' article on the Syrian refugees on Kastellorizo poignantly tells the human tragedy that is occurring today.

The Community Responds

by Chrissie Verevis, Sydney



Photos courtesy of Vasiliki Nihis-Bogiatzis

As recently as August this year, *The West Australian* newspaper published an article about the beauty of Kastellorizo which, as we know, is one of the more remote and magical of Greece's islands, an island which is often characterised as a geopolitical oddity as it sits some 72 nautical miles from the nearest Greek territory and less than 2 miles from the Turkish coast. The island is the ancestral home of many of us who belong to Friends of Kastellorizo, and beloved location of many others. Bombed, set fire to and looted during World War 2, in recent years the island has seen a resurgence of fortune such that in summer scores of proud Greek Australians, stylish Italians and assorted others walk the promenade, swim in the emerald sea, sip coffee and ouzo at the waterfront restaurants and generally marvel at the sheer beauty of the place and its way of life.



This year there has been an additional feature, the influx of hundreds of asylum seekers, of people seeking refuge from the horrors of war in their homeland. They come across from Turkey, often if they can afford it, with the perverse 'assistance' of people smugglers who reprehensibly charge unthinkable prices of these vulnerable and desperate people. If they can't afford it they swim across – a testing night time venture not without dangers. As a phenomenon this is not news, particularly to Australians and Italians. What is different, and poignantly so, for those of us who come from far away Australia, is that these people are with us, here amongst us, not in some distant 'Nauru' or 'Manus Island' not in a detention centre in western Sydney or remote South or Western Australia, but with us on this tiny idyllic isle which is about the size of Sydney's Centennial Park.

Some weeks ago, two young Syrian brothers arrived. Utterly exhausted, looking almost as if they may not recover, the 21 and 18 year old had swum across the previous night. For four hours they made their way, one in a floatation circle, holding the one small backpack which contained all their possessions, while the other held the floatation circle with one hand and swam, using one arm, all the way. There are no facilities here for such people. Whilst their papers were being processed and they waited for the next ferry out, we took them in and they stayed with us for 6 days. With food and rest, with the basics we take for granted – the use of a toilet and shower, a washing machine for their sea-salt ridden clothes – and, importantly, receiving a little of the milk of human kindness, they recovered sufficiently for a smile to return to their young handsome faces. They have hope and they are optimistic. We are apprehensive for them, for the treacherous journey which lies ahead as they attempt to make it to Germany where they hope to be able to work and study and where they aim to achieve all the things young people around the world aspire to achieve.

These brothers left Syria with the reluctant and heart-wrenchingly given blessing of their parents. They left, they said, not because they wanted to leave their country, their home or their family, their friends, their possessions, but because the Universities have closed and young men their age are being forcibly enlisted into the army. They don't want to fight, they don't want to kill, they do not want to be anyone's enemy. They want a peaceful, safe, fun, productive and contented life. These two young men, and thousands of people like them, want to be able to live peacefully in their homeland that is their preference. They are on the move seeking a new home and refuge. It is not because they want to put themselves through this ordeal and have to deal with the rejection and scorn of governments; some of which seek to characterise them as dangerous and undesirable; it is because their only other choice is to stay, to be forced into the army, to fight and to become our enemy. They are so fearful of Islamic State. Not surprisingly, more than anything else their dream is to return to a peaceful homeland. The 21 year old was pretty stoic, but the 18 year old cried for his mother; he misses her very much. It broke my heart.

The boys left Kastellorizo bound for Germany and the more recent reports of Germany's decision to accept Syrians in big numbers is welcome, but inexplicably arrivals are still expected to make the dangerous and difficult journey; they can't just walk into a processing centre in a city like Athens. This is incomprehensible to me when one considers that within 24 or 48 hours of a natural disaster like a tsunami or an earthquake, major relief agencies are able to set up administration centres, provide clean water, food, medical aid, blankets. It is regrettable then, that so far, Europe and the UN have been unable to construct a practical response to address this situation of young and old having to travel, often on foot, through inhospitable countries to get to places like Germany.

Thankfully there is a significant compensatory aspect to my story. Our assistance to the boys is by no means an exception, indeed I have not written about it in order to distinguish our efforts from those of others, rather it is one of many examples of community stepping in where authorities leave a gap. Over the past several weeks we have witnessed the kindness of countless people here – locals and visitors alike, whose generosity has touched the asylum seekers, has gladdened their hearts. In the case of the two brothers, some of our Greek Australian compatriots gave a little money to help ease the burden of the journey ahead; some bought them clothes and one particularly generous Aussie ensured that they had a brand new backpack each to replace the damaged one with which they traversed the sea. Many in the local population provide ongoing support to the stream of people who arrive. There are so many who help that it is simply not possible to list them all. Having said that it would be remiss not to write of the work done by locals Monika and Damien who have virtually set up an NGO style help centre, coordinating the provision of food, assisting arrivals to find a room for the days they are on Kastellorizo, ensuring that all have appropriate shoes and clothes for the onward journey and generally ensuring that they feel safe in this part of their ordeal. In part, they are helped by the generous assistance of donors who, having witnessed the lack of official facilities on the island and the efforts of Monika and Damien, have provided through them some resources for the ongoing needs of the people who arrive.

A word needs to be added about the kindness and goodwill, the professional and caring behaviour of the Hellenic Coast Guard and the Greek Police staff on the island. They are a credit to their professions as they work to rescue, make comfortable, and process large numbers of people in tiring conditions and without additional staff.

The hard work, the kindness, the generous giving of assistance of all kinds, the tireless effort and good will which we have witnessed must not be exclusively depended upon. It is time for the authorities to go beyond rhetoric and policy, to move speedily to action. Despite the best efforts of many, the assistance and kindness afforded to people now is random and irregular; some miss out. The authorities must step in, and step up.

Postscript

Since I wrote this piece in the first week of September a lot has happened. Refugees have arrived every day, often in numbers exceeding 80 and sometimes up to 125 per day. With the time it takes for their papers to be processed and the reality of a ferry only twice a week, Kastellorizo often has in excess of 300 refugees at any given time, and this in the context of dwindling numbers of local people during the winter months. Little has been done by the authorities; many of the very generous private donors have had to cease funding as the funds required have far exceeded what anyone anticipated. The mild weather here means that arrivals are continuing and in increasing numbers. The Hellenic Coast Guard, Greek Police and Medical Centre staff are severely stretched. Whilst I continue to observe great kindness and generosity at an individual level from local people, there is an increased expression of grave concern with what is to come as numbers increase and winter approaches. Local people are worried about illness particularly in the context of some refugees having no alternative but to sleep in the streets and without basic hygiene. Further, local people are worried about safety particularly for their children who until now have been able to play and walk back and forth to school without a care. The failure of the EU to assist is taking its toll. The situation is becoming serious.

In the early hours of the morning after this article was written, local people woke to the news of four deaths crossing from Kas to Kastellorizo – a six month old child, a 15 year old boy, a pregnant woman and one other person.

STUDENT EXCHANGE

Long Way Home

by Maraya Takoniatis

If we start at the very beginning of this story when I was filling out my application form for the student exchange, crossing my fingers wishing for a place, then I will never get to the end of my story in 1000 words. The journey that I have just been through has changed me in so many ways and my experiences have been so full, that to tell you about everything would take up way too much of your time.

So I guess I will start from the third level of the Blue Star ferry where I stood watching as the island of Kastellorizo slowly grew before my eyes. There I was next to my cousin, watching as all my expectations were broken and I was presented with something more magnificent than any amount of imagining could conjure up. The buildings were all posed on the mountain sides like toy houses, and the number of boats tied to the port was almost comical. There was something just so fantastical about the beauty of the island, that even when I think back to those moments, butterflies still start dancing in my stomach.

The feeling of seeing Kastellorizo for the first time after many years was so surreal. I can still feel that sense of wonder and nervousness that gripped me as I stood there watching. I still remember the hustle to get off the boat, and that walk dragging my ridiculously large suitcase behind me over all those uneven stone paths. The thrill of excitement, and at the same time the feeling you're about to burst into tears from the sheer overwhelming factor of having finally arrived.

It's hard to take you back to a place like Kastellorizo in a series of words, but if I had to try I would paint this picture in your mind. Imagine a balcony, no more than one meter wide and two meters long. You are sitting on an old wooden chair with a seat made of thick straw wound in a square pattern. Imagine the wood has been painted the most classic Greek blue and there is a small table next to you painted in the same hue. You don't feel extremely comfortable, but relaxed enough to stay a little longer and look out at the view.

Below you and stretched out far are old stone houses and winding paths. To your right you can see the top of the masts on the boats, swaying from side to side to the rhythm of the sea. If you look directly ahead, you can see the beautiful sloping mountains, and right next to the mountain almost sitting on its side is the moon in a grey morning sky. As you listen, you can hear people yelling in friendly voices, and the conversations that are going on. Sometimes you can even hear the occasional caterwaul as the cats fight, and the buzzing from the ridiculously oversized bugs.

For me, this island, even at its most ordinary moments, managed to capture the different aspects of normality and transform them into the most beautiful and cherished memories I have, changing the way I look out at the world.

But it wasn't just the beautiful landscapes and historical architecture that made you fall in love with Kastellorizo. The interesting and diverse range of characters you meet play a large role in the character of the island. I have so many fond memories of the people I met there, not just the people that I talked to, but even the people that I just recognised time and time again. I have even made potential lifelong friends and relationships with not only kids my age, but adults of my parents' and grandparents' generations.

The atmosphere of the island is so different from the feel of Australia. You can't help but relinquish the sense of escape and the peacefulness that comes with it. The whole mindset of the island is so different, making questions of whether you look good in that bikini irrelevant. Kastellorizo gives the undeniable

feeling of retreat and freedom, especially from the constricted society within Australia.

Here it no longer matters what you look like or how you act, because no one is judging. I remember Margarita telling me how people didn't care about body image and that everyone was admired for being comfortable in their own skin. This shocked me so much into realising I'd been looking at things from the wrong perspective, simply because of the different attitudes in Australia. This new mindset allowed me to be who I wanted to be, and I have never been happier in my whole life, learning so much about the person I am and what I could become.

The next place in my story is the top of the mountain, where after the long tiring walk, you find yourself in a completely different world from the harbour. Walking along the goat path, trying not to notice the bugs crawling out from the dark crevices in the stones beneath your feet, you feel this amazing sense of wonder and release. It's like your heart can grow wings and fly away as a butterfly.

The quiet peacefulness surrounds you and travels into your mind pulling away all thoughts leaving you calm like the gentle motions of the water in the harbour. The wind blows, comforting you, as you see the sweeping valleys and hills rising to your left and falling to your right, accompanied by the unmistakable bleating of a goat and the ringing of a bell from around its neck in the distance.

It's like you're on a set from a Greek movie where all you need now is an old man playing the bouzouki, a chair and small table, and an ice cold frappe in your hand.

I want to take you back to a balcony that is no more than one meter wide and two meters long. If you look down you can see the edge of the island where the land meets the sea, and where people sit at tables with their voices echoing off the boats that rock back and forth to the rhythm of the sea. If you look directly ahead you can see the Turkish mountains and the calm waves of the Mediterranean occasionally carrying a boat full of tourists or locals.

Imagine standing there, a delicate breeze wafting from your left to your right, secure in the knowledge that you have reached the place you belong. The place where many years ago your ancestors lived and breathed, and from the place that you stand now, your great-great-uncle dived every day off this small balcony into the water.

Stories are just stories, until you have witnessed them in some way yourself. The story of my great-great-uncle didn't feel like a fairy tale anymore, because now I had stood where he stood, and I had felt that same love for the island that he undoubtedly once felt. In that moment, the island had turned into something more than just a holiday destination. It had always been my family's history, but now it had finally become my history.

I sincerely thank Marilyn, Margarita, City of Perth, Friends of Kastellorizo and the organisers who put together this trip, and who gave me the opportunity to discover this part of myself and where I come from. Australia will always be my birth place, but Kastellorizo will always be my home.





Land of my Ancestors by Demi Sipsas

Kastellorizo or Megisti by its ancient name is 20 hours away from all my friends and family and half way across the world from all that is familiar to me, but a journey worth more than words can express. It is 11.98 km² of uniqueness and 6km in length of rare beauty. A place where my ancestors were born, raised, lived, loved and had to say good-bye to. Kastellorizo is a beautiful island only 2 1/2 km off the coast of Turkey, across from the city of Kas. Kastellorizo holds steadfastly onto its traditions and culture and they are passed on to its descendants with much vigour.

When you set foot onto this amazing island something changes. From hearing about this distant and dream-like, magical island to physically venturing there is an amazing experience. You feel instantly connected and at peace and in touch with your spirituality. Kastellorizo transfixes you with its breathtaking beauty. It feels safe and very much like home. It holds a certain allure that draws you into its uniqueness and possesses a certain vulnerability. The atmosphere of this little island in the Aegean is something words can't quite describe. You feel free to be yourself, without the constraints of society, free to explore what it means to be alive and to be living. In Kastellorizo you feel happy and at ease with yourself and at liberty to do whatever you may, whether that's climbing mountains, shopping, eating, exploring, swimming...

Kastellorizo is an island with pretty, colourful houses standing side by side, with its sparkling, iridescent harbour, its shore-line cafes, its mountains reaching skywards and its smiling, friendly people. Climbing the mountain and witnessing the beautiful vantage point from the highest point of Kastellorizo and overlooking the entire island is something I will never forget. Standing on top of the mountain in complete silence, with my cousin Maraya right beside me, was a very surreal experience. An emotional, peaceful moment where I found myself wishing time would freeze to allow this moment to last forever. The locals in Kastellorizo define what it means to be a Kastellorizian. They are so friendly, laid-back, relaxed, hospitable and kind each with a different history and story to share. A very special individual we met was Thespina, who graciously allowed my cousin and me into her home so she could demonstrate how to make the Greek sweet katoumari, which was delicious. Thanks also to Margarita who allowed us to share her home with her while we stayed on the island.

Sitting at one of the restaurants, listening to Greek music and dancing with the locals whom you don't yet know, you feel such a connection to the island and these people. Swimming at St. George in the sparkling, blue water with the sun warming your face. Discovering the ancient castles and churches with so much

history embedded in their walls. Going to a church service and listening to the beautiful music of the chanters. Venturing to school and seeing the bright futures of the children etched in their small, smiling faces. Walking between the narrow arches, wondering about the ancient buildings and how they shaped this small island. Swimming in the stunningly beautiful blue cave with its crystal clear depthless waters. Blue and white flags billowing effortlessly in the wind. Little row boats filled with character and charm, all so different. Rooftops, multi-coloured, full of charisma and individuality. Small, ageing, white churches on hilltops in the far distance and slow sunsets over sapphire horizons. I find myself constantly wondering what the sea would look like today. Would it sparkle? What colour would the sky be? Is it filled with the beautiful orange sunset? What time will the church bells ring? Will the lights from Turkey be twinkling in the night sky? Would I hear the wind, the waves gently crashing or the children at play?

Kastellorizo is a culturally rich place filled with history. Kastellorizo has been occupied by many foreign entities- the Ottomans, the Italians, the French, the English. It has been bombed, burnt and abandoned. It has endured wars and natural disasters, but despite all it has endured, Kastellorizo and its inhabitants have remained strong and wise. Despite all the troubles ancient Megisti went through to make it the Kastellorizo we know today we have all realised just how precious Kastellorizo is and how important it is to protect and safeguard it from all that threatens it. I hope to visit again as I now know to treasure and savour it. I hope to leave a mark, a footstep, a legacy on the island. Once you've been to Kastellorizo, it's hard to say good-bye, like I had to do. Whether you're a Kastellorizian living on the island or half-way across the world like me in Australia, you are forever connected and anchored to this place.

The exchange trip to Kastellorizo has been truly inspiring and made me truly proud of my heritage. It has taught me a lot about both myself and the world. I've learnt how to be independent, to be confident in myself and with others. I have learnt how to communicate with people who live on the other side of the world from me. I have learnt about the cultural, social and religious aspects of people living on Kastellorizo and Greece and how they are both similar and different to the lifestyle we have in Australia. I am in awe of Kastellorizo's sheer beauty and I remind myself constantly of how lucky I am to come from this magical island - the island of my ancestors - and I feel so grateful to have been given the opportunity to go to Kastellorizo on the exchange program. Many thanks to Marilyn Tsolakis, the co-ordinator from Friends of Kastellorizo for all her hard work and The City of Perth for kindly sponsoring the program.

*Season's Greetings
from Friends
of Kastellorizo*



Friends of Kastellorizo would like to thank Peter's of Kensington in Sydney for sponsoring this edition of Filia.

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Friends of Kastellorizo would like to thank the City of Perth for their sponsorship of the Intercultural Exchange Program this year. Maraya Takoniatis and Demi Sipsas were received by the Lord Mayor, Lisa Scaffidi and the former Deputy Lord Mayor, Rob Butler to hear their positive feedback about their experiences on Kastellorizo. The Lord Mayor was most impressed with the mature comments they made about how it changed the way they thought about themselves.

Friends of Kastellorizo would also like to thank the following people for providing support to make this program achievable:

Margarita Kannis for hosting the students and Veronica Stathis for assisting Margarita in some of the activities that were organised such as a history walk through the main town, Horafia, the Ossuary, Saints Constantine & Helene Church and returning through the Ottoman part of town.

Loeke Houlis who took the girls on a walk to Paleokastro.

Betty Mouzak, the Principal of Santrapeia School for allowing the students to participate in the school environment. Maraya conducted Art classes with local students.

Despina Misomike (nee Matsos) for showing the girls how to make katoumari.

Nick and Elspeth Geronimos for providing accommodation at their Athens Studio Apartments.

The generosity and time given by people who support this program is most appreciated and is a fine example of giving back to the island of our forebears. Next year we are bringing students from Kastellorizo to Australia.

To become a member, to advertise or for general information contact Marilyn Tsolakis,
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