



Astraeus

Discover the Real Greek Cyclades

Newsletter 27: October 2025



Figure 1 Kionia Beach - Kythnos

Well, the end of another hectic season, much needed rain has lashed Syros for the last 24 hours, although it is needed it certainly is not liked by the locals or for that matter the cats who are all hiding. Given how fast the year goes, we will soon be back to dark nights, weather below 20 degrees (in other words freezing) Ochi Day and Christmas which starts early and seems to go on forever, if you think you have enough seasonal music in the UK it is nothing compared to here!

*"What good is the warmth of summer, without the cold of winter to give it
sweetness."*

— John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley: In Search of America*

Coming up

The cost of living (again!), family holidays, another beef recipe, the best destinations for spring and other waffle.



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Our News



Figure 2 Spring flower bed Milos

Bookings for next year are as usual taking up a lot of our time and we now have rates for all of our hotels even on the more obscure islands for 2026. I try never to worry anybody about the need to book too early except in the below cases where booking early can be a benefit, however, if there is a particular property or island you wish to return to it can also be beneficial

- Family or group holidays in July and August (although as many of you know I have done many last-minute ones!)
- Families with small children who want family suites where the children are in the same room but separated by a door
- Villa Holidays
-
- Smaller islands.

Time pressures have meant I have not got round to adding various new islands to the website but as ever if you have an island in mind but can not see it on our website just ask. Remember we specialise in complex island hopping so in some cases can mix island groups.

As I have said many times previously Easter in Syros is a particular special festival with both churches celebrating together, if you are interested in an Easter break (around 9th – 13th April 2026) let me know.

As usual there were some disruptions to ferry services throughout the year, especially at the end of September but we are used to it now, so hopefully it did not disrupt any of your holidays too much.



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Musings from a small island – Jacky

Recently they have placed two original electric cars produced on Syros outside the new Alpha Beta Supermarket (previously Neorian Sipermarket) in Ermoloplis, there is little in way of explanation as to why they are there (it was originally the factory where they were produced) and it brought to mind this article Jacky wrote some time ago!

Serendipity - ‘The occurrence and development of events by chance in a happy or beneficial way.’



Figure 3 Image of Greek build Enfield 8000 in Syros (Source Wikipedia) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Skartsis>

Some days just don't begin well... The three current volunteers are trying to push my elderly car backwards up onto the road so I can bump start it. The battery is just too weak to do the job and is protesting with whines and groans. Forty plus hungry street cats are waiting for their breakfast. In spite of their best efforts, the helpers just can't shift it enough to get a clear run down the hill.



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An elderly battered red truck trundles round the corner and grinds to a halt. The driver doesn't have much choice since we're blocking most of the road, but like a knight in shining armour he pulls in and emerges from the cab clutching a set of jump leads. He's done this before and in a couple of minutes we're all on our way.

With my car engine, still running, street cats fed and bread purchased, I decide to forego my breakfast and head straight to the garage to buy a new battery. The current one is old and in my experience, once they fail, they keep giving trouble current cool, damp, melancholy, autumnal mornings don't help either.

The mechanics faff around. 'Maybe it's not the battery.' 'The coolant is low.' Maybe the fluid is leaking into the engine.' 'It should be a sealed system, why is the engine running at a high temperature?' In a mixture of Greek and English, with a little help from friends and other customers, they describe the major work that might be necessary to fix the problem. Eventually they fall back on technology and chattering together, go off to find a battery meter.

I'm left to my own devices and spot a tiny, shiny, red UK registered car. It's like a very old Austin Mini and takes me back to my youth in London in the 1960s. These trendy cars were designed by Alexander Issigonis, an engineer of Greek origin, born in Smyrna from a father who had become a naturalised British citizen while studying in London. Fortunately for the family this made them eligible for evacuation by the British navy before the town was destroyed. Alex, already with a maternal connection to motor manufacture, studied engineering in London and was later awarded a knighthood for his innovative and successful car designs.

But this car is different. It's not a mini. On the rear is a small plate with the name 'Enfield'. Immediately I'm excited and forget my own car problems. This is one of the early pioneering electric cars manufactured in the Goulandris factory in Syros in the 1970s. The only other one I've ever seen is in the industrial museum in Hermoupolis. I ask a few questions...

A man who lives here imported it,' they illustrate their answer with photos of a crate being unpacked.

'Does it work?' 'We had to charge the battery for a week!' Then they show me a short video of it moving around the garage.

We must wait for the Greek number plates, then she can leave.'

I'm intrigued about the identity of someone who has gone to a lot of trouble and expense to bring the car back to its origins in Syros but the garage are reluctant to give me a name. On the number plate is a clue – a car restoration company from the UK.

Impatient to continue the research, I reluctantly accept the mechanic's diagnosis that there's nothing wrong with the battery on my car and it's a fault with the cooling system. The car starts without trouble but now it's bright and warm, and the earlier air humidity has long been dissipated by the heat of the sun. I'll park it on a hill for the next few days, just to be sure.

The next time I'm in town, I spot the car on the road. We take photos of it in front of the factory where it was made. Many of you will know it as the site of the now closed, Neorian Supermarket, but it was once the Goulandris engineering factory. A plaque on the side of the building – 1973, identifies it as the first electric car factory in Syros.

Giannis Goulandris, a Greek millionaire also had a factory in the Isle of Wight, an island off the south coast of England called Enfield Automotive. Its technical director, Greek engineer Constantine Adraktas had won a competition to design and manufacture cars for the British electricity council. They were the first electric cars ever built and were way ahead of their time. But this was an era of serious industrial unrest in the UK, leading to the confrontations between management and unions that were a feature of the Margaret Thatcher government. So Goulandris moved production to his factory in Syros. Some say this was to avoid disruption to the manufacturing process caused by industrial strife. But cynics suggest that he was 'paid off' by the oil industry and note that in a time of depression, with many tankers anchored idly in seas around the UK, his fleet were working profitably!

One hundred and twenty cars were built, sixty-five were used by electricity boards in England. The car has a top speed of seventy-seven kilometres per hour and a range of sixty-four kilometres with good acceleration. Body parts and design were adapted from the famous Mini. In spite of being manufactured in Greece, it was never permitted on the roads here, because tax laws of the time made it impossible to register such an innovative vehicle.

A few of the Enfield 8000 cars remain in museums around the world, including the one in Syros. One or two are still in private ownership, the rest are rust buckets beyond repair. So, it's exciting to see one of the originals being restored and brought back to its home in Syros – at huge effort and considerable expense. It was a great thing to do...

And my car – it didn't start again this morning, but was facing downhill. I took another trip to the garage and they replaced the battery.

Jacky Story – Kini 2021

The work of charities like Syros Cats is invaluable, should you wish to donate please see their website

<https://syroscats.com/>

Musings – Rachel

The end of another season and so much moving about means I am glad to have some time at home, although that never lasts too long. We took our last visit of the year to Mykonos last week, along with Santorini, Milos and Paros, Mykonos tends to be the last to close, so we got a lovely day on a half empty Platis Gialos beach it is so nice to see it without all the beds. There is a lightness to the hotel and waiting staff, finally they are going home or getting to rest for the winter. Of course we will be heading off to Athens in December how could I survive without my Ermou Street fix, so expect pictures of the tree in Syntagma, The countdown is on for which family will be the first to put their Christmas lights on their balcony in our village, and Lidl are already selling their Christmas food. After a quick trip back to the UK in December we will be off to the Athens apartment with the added bonus of going to see Rod Stewart at the Olympic Stadium (one for the teenagers!)

We are naturally curious about this relatively new place we live in and find somethings we did not necessarily expect one of those is the competition and differences between islands and islanders. It came as a surprise when we first lived here when we found out the islanders very rarely visit the other islands even those close to them, unless they have to, a hotelier in Sifnos asked us what Serifos was like as he had never been there, I suppose our natural wanderlust (and job) meant we found that very odd as it is 30 minutes away. A lot of islanders will have visited Syros for their health as we have the main hospital and at one point not so long ago we knew someone from Naxos who had to come here regularly for dialysis (not a cheap undertaking even with some ferry subsidies) and before everything went on line (again not so long ago) the main tax office was here, anything bureaucratic sill can involve an overnight in Syros, incidentally that is also true of all us Brits who after Brexit need to see the immigration officer, the only one for the Cyclades is on Syros. Many Greeks visit Tinos for religious reasons and that includes the islanders, and some may go to other islands for family or work purposes, Locals are far more likely to go to Athens, not just for shopping, but again for health reasons.

You may think it does not matter which is the third biggest island in the Archipelago but to Paros and Tinos it does! Inter-island sporting events are very competitive to say the least and one of our friends recounts going to Naxos to watch the Syros team, and it in her words “it all got a bit wild”

And everyone it seems has an opinion on the other islands/islanders of course they wince at Santorini and Mykonos, even when you tell them Mykonian people are lovely they look at you as if you are completely bonkers, A different hotelier in Sifnos told us everyone in Serifos is a “snob” and when I told her our friend in Serifos is



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lovely, like her, she looked mortally offended, a great friend on Serifos who is usually really empathetic totally surprised me when she brushed off the problems that residents of Kythnos are facing due to the lack of a ferry connection (disappeared after thirty years flipping ferry companies again!) “oh well they can get to Lavrio they are not so inconvenienced” the fact that they are not was apparently not an issue. Oh well we still have lots to learn.



Figure 4 Platis Gialos Beach Mykonos October 14th 2025



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Our harmonious Islands!

I originally wrote these pieces in the dark days of Covid but they still hopefully raise a smile. Also, to this day I have still never seen a pelican in either Mykonos or Tinos (thanks for all the selfies with them though!)

Theft of donkey leads to siege on the island of Syros!!!!!!

(Otherwise known as The War of the Ass 1296)



Figure 5 Note this is not the actual donkey!

Picture the scene, it is the 13th century the Aegean Sea is awash with pirates, and the Cyclades Islands are ruled by various Venetian overlords. Tinos is in the hands of the Ghisi family and Syros is controlled by the equally powerful Sanudu family. A pirate raid on Tinos results in the theft of a donkey, the donkey a possession of the Ghisi family (and clearly marked as such) was then sold to the Sanudus by the pirates. This action prompted the Ghisi's to lay siege to the Sandu's castle on Syros. The Sandu's however had powerful friends as an Angevin fleet was at port in Milos. The Angevin's forced the Ghisi's to raise the siege and the issue of who owned the donkey was referred to the Venetian Balio at Negroponte, (the representative of the Republic of Venice stationed at Chalcis on the island of Euboea) who brokered peace between the families. However, as William Miller observed peace was achieved "only after 'more than 30,000 heavy soldi' had been expended for the sake of the animal, which had probably died in the interval".



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Diplomatic crisis between Mykonos and Tinos after “theft” of Petros!!!



Figure 6Figure 3 Jackie Kennedy with Petros from Time Magazine 1961

For many years the mascot of Mykonos has been a pelican. This started in 1958 when a fisherman found an injured pelican and nursed him back to health, the fisherman named the pelican Petros and he soon became a familiar site wondering round the harbour and Mykonos town. Whilst he was still a young bird Petros decided it was time to fly and promptly took himself off to Tinos. The Tinos islanders apparently told their Mykonian counterparts that Petros had come to Tinos because he was bored of Mykonos and they considered the visit as voluntary migration and would keep him. The matter was taken to court, this apparently was the first (and last) court case in

Greece where the custody of a bird was fought over, but to the Mykonians the matter was so serious it ranked with the abduction of Helen of Troy! The court decided in favour of Mykonos and Petros was returned. His return from exile was marked with a welcome party with music and a feast. Even the Orthodox and Catholic churches rang their bells. Petros is long dead and there have been various new Pelicans since (one donated by Jackie Onassis as she became) Despite numerous visits to Mykonos I have never spotted a pelican – nor may I add have I see the one that now allegedly lives on Tinos (I told you I would not be a very good tabloid hack I have the observational skills of a wombat!)



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The Cost-of-Living issue again!



Figure 7 Sunset over Plaka Naxos

“Good grief have you see the electricity bill?” is a familiar refrain in this house, especially this summer when prices have almost doubled and obviously aircon is a necessity, (there is actually a long list of familiar complaints ranging from shopping to me apparently leaving things on), so even though we are not in the UK we are still very familiar with rising costs of living affecting everyone, just about everywhere, holidays it seems are often considered a luxury we just can not afford. I first put this together a couple of years ago but if anything, it feels like things are just not improving.

So, do you need to give up on getting away next year or are there solutions? I often find for most problems there is a solution, and we will always help, just give us a call and don't worry “been there done that” we are very understanding. In the

meantime some thoughts below on how we can help you still get a break, but not break the bank! (sorry, that is such a cliché).

- Firstly, and most obviously, if you do not have school aged children, it is better to travel outside school holidays, unfortunately the airlines as we all know are very aware of the dates! If you do have children, the best thing is flexibility around days and dates in the main summer holidays.
- One of the drivers of inflation in the UK is an increase in flight prices, be realistic, don't expect the very cheap prices you used to get also do you need two cases for two people?!
- For families, booking early means you secure the best value and often best accommodation.
- When booking a holiday with us, you can pay in three or even four instalments, do not hesitate to ask.
- Many people think travelling out of season is a no go but in fact you are probably missing the best times to be here, fewer tourists (even on Mykonos and Santorini) make everything far more relaxed, and we have great offers for April, May and after the 25th September into late October, which is one of the nicest months to be here, still warm enough on the whole to swim, and with pleasantly warm days ideal for the odd hike for the adventurous and just a stroll for some of us.
- Athens is one of the best value cities in Europe, eating out will generally not empty your pocket, museum entrance is not overly expensive, and there are plenty of things to do for free in the shadow of the Acropolis.
- Self-catering is not always the least expensive option, so keep an open mind, if it is just two of you stocking up on food to eat in can be more expensive than you think or speak to us if you are coming to Syros we will always help, even getting you food delivered,
- Car hire is expensive in high season, especially if you leave it to the last minute to book (we had the last car on Tinos one summer and as it was a huge jeep it cost us a small fortune.) We have ways of keeping the price down and will point you in the direction or get prices for you, but always think how many days you will use a car for, check with the supplier as they often give a better rate for 3 days than 2, and think about taking excess waver cover in the UK before you arrive, I am not an expert in these things, so check with a broker if you have one.



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- Sometimes biting the bullet and taking a late evening flight to here or home can save you a small fortune, we do everything we can to alleviate the downsides. The same with ferries, you are on holiday, a jet may get you somewhere quicker but relaxing on the deck of a ferry as it slowly cruises to your destination can be such a relaxing experience.
- Unless more than a night or two on Santorini or Mykonos are on your bucket list it is best to try to keep time on those islands as short as possible. Remember sunsets are just as beautiful all over the islands.

These are just suggestions, contact me anytime, if possible, with a budget and we will do everything we can to ensure you have a lovely holiday. Do not forget when you book through us, everything is covered including ferry tickets and transfers, and we protect you against any nasty shocks like cancelled ferries. Booking through an agent is not always more expensive and in the long run can save you money (I would say that wouldn't I!)

“Rest is not a luxury; it is a necessity. Take the time off to replenish your energy and recharge your soul.

In the midst of life's chaos, find solace in the stillness of rest that is where true rejuvenation resides.”

— Dr. Lucas D. Shallua

Family Holidays

We all want our holidays to be as stress free as is possible, the wish to keep every member of the family happy is overwhelming, parents naturally worry about where is suitable for their little children, their teens and in many cases their parents too. Worry about getting luggage, and small children on to ferries is not unusual, especially in the height of summer, when ferries are packed and everything feels a bit chaotic, or that teenagers as can often be the way, just find everything boring! Even when there are just two of you one may find a day on the beach the perfect way of spending a holiday, but the other really does not (yes, this my life!) So juggling groups of all ages and keeping them and so yourself happy can feel a bit overwhelming, it is no wonder that many people would just prefer to fly in to an island and stop.

However, what you gain from family island holidays more than makes up for some of the minor inconveniences you may experience, these are great islands for all ages, children of all ages eat well in to the evening with their parents (and on their own here for that matter), teens hang round coffee bars making one coffee and a flask of water last for ages, there are an abundance of water sports, tracks for gentle and not so gentle hikes, these islands are full of history, beautiful beaches and the most welcoming people, I could go on but won't!

Some of our tips are;

- Where possible with children under school age and if work allows it travel earlier or later in the season June and September are ideal as the heat is not so fierce and there are less people travelling at the same time.
- With younger children it is better to choose islands close to each other (although I have had families with younger children who were perfectly happy on longer ferry journeys just give them a game of some kind!)
- If you have to travel in the August school holidays and are worried about too much ferry travel, it is good to focus on one main island with just overnight stops either way, you can always visit other islands from the main one
- If you have a large group or just do not want to be driving when you are on holiday pick an island with a good public transport system.
- Children (and adults) of all ages love Athens, and there is plenty to see and do even in a short time so consider adding it on for a couple of days at the beginning or the end of the holiday.
- If you have special dietary requirements or fussy eaters, consider villa holidays (although Greek food has something to suit most diets).
- All of us are different and that goes for our teenagers and older children as well, some islands have more activities on offer than others



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Spring Destinations



Figure 8 Serifos

When Santorini started its rumblings last winter, we were surprised just how many tourists were actually there, to be perfectly honest I don't find many of the islands particularly appealing in February and March, I would rather be in Athens or another city. The weather generally though picks up throughout April, with days mostly sunny and warm, although until the start of June it can be unpredictable, but slightly cooler weather on some days can suit anyone who enjoys a bit of hiking or sightseeing, or just people watching from a warm café. Considering cost of living again, May can be an ideal time to be here rates are lower, of course there are less ferry connections but it just takes a little longer to get anywhere but that is Greece! You also get to see the islands at their greenest, spring flowers are everywhere. Where islands have natural coves, swimming is cool and refreshing but not freezing. The light is also good for keen

photographers

Our ideal islands in May are (along with Athens and the Athenian Riviera)

- Mykonos
- Paros
- Milos
- Naxos
- Syros (goes without saying)
- Sifnos with Serifos for a chilled out holiday
- Rhodes
- Patmos
- Tinos and Andros if you like to hike it is the perfect time



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Beef Stifado



Ok so another recipe including beef after last months Beef in Red Sauce, but we were in Serifos at the end of September and one evening was particularly chilly and windy, we had managed to find a traditional taverna run by a lovely family, who as usual had chatted to us the previous evening and seeing us outside, quickly took us to the same table (your table as she called it) out of the wind and cool evening.. Given the weather the Stifado stood out as the best dish to order, and it was perfect. So I decided to cook it when we got back, as it is not just a great dish in the autumn winter it is also perfect for the slow cooker. Just relooking at the recipe, I glanced at (I tend to go a bit off piest) I now know that I added quite a lot more than the recommended amount of red wine vinegar, however, everyone enjoyed it so if you do the same don't worry!

Ingredients

- Olive Oli (around 3 tablespoon)
- Beef in very large chunks (shin and chunk are recommended however we just asked the butcher for beef for stifado and he worked it out per person (approx. 375grm)
- Around 600 grams of whole shallots/button onions (compromise certain people do not want to eat whole onions so I finely chopped half
- Pinch of sugar
- 3 garlic cloves



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- 4 bay/laurel leaves
- Cinnamon Stick
- Half teaspoon ground allspice
- Pinch of dried cloves (optional I did not have any!)
- 1 teaspoon dried Oregano (forgot it!)
- 1 Teaspoon Tomato Puree (you may need a bit more)
- 1 Tablespoon only Red Wine Vinegar (ok I went mad!)
- 150 ml red wine (here it would be the semi-sweet but any red)
- Tin of chopped tomatoes (you could go with 2 depending on how many you are cooking for)
- Flour
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Carrots if you want to add more veg

Vague method!

Heat the oil in a large pan and batch cook the beef chunks (I improvised a bit here before cooking the beef I tossed it in a bag with flour and salt and pepper to try and add a bit more thickness to the sauce)

When the beef chunks are brown all over remove from pan and add whole shallots, add some sugar to caramelise them a little. Turn heat down and add chopped onions (if using) and garlic and fry to soften (add more oil if you need it)

Add the, bay, cinnamon stick, allspice, cloves and oregano, and cook for 1 min more. Stir in the tomato purée and cook for another minute, then tip in the beef along with any resting juices. Stir to coat in the spiced onion mixture.

Add the red wine vinegar and chopped tomatoes. Rinse the cans out with the wine and pour it in, then add a third of a can of water. Season with salt and stir well.

Transfer the whole lot to your slow cooker, and cook on auto until the beef is tender enough to break with a fork, I did leave it on a bit to long and most of the whole shallots did not come out whole but the ones that did were lovely!

Every restaurant has its own version of this so I think you can be a bit *laisse fair* and go with your own preferences even add more vinegar if you want!

This is perfect with pureed potatoes



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And finally!



“We have got too many cats”! I hear that on a regular basis we had six at that point one full time indoor and five mainly living in the garden or on the balcony (and to be fair one of those came with the house). Anyway, six here is hardly a massive amount! However, despite being told “we are not under any circumstances having another cat” I seem to have acquired one! So meet Mati, he has to, because of his health condition always sleep inside the house and has got his paws well and truly under the table much to the distain of our other indoor cat, so an inordinate amount of time is spent trying to keep them separate

If you have got to the end of this well done and thank you for reading

Its winter and with dark nights we don't tend to go out so much, so going to take some time to re-read *My Family and Other Animals*, *Birds, Beasts and Relatives* and *The Garden Of the Gods* – The three books in the Corfu Trilogy by Gerald Durrel, it's like comfort eating but not as fattening!

Rachel and Brian 2025



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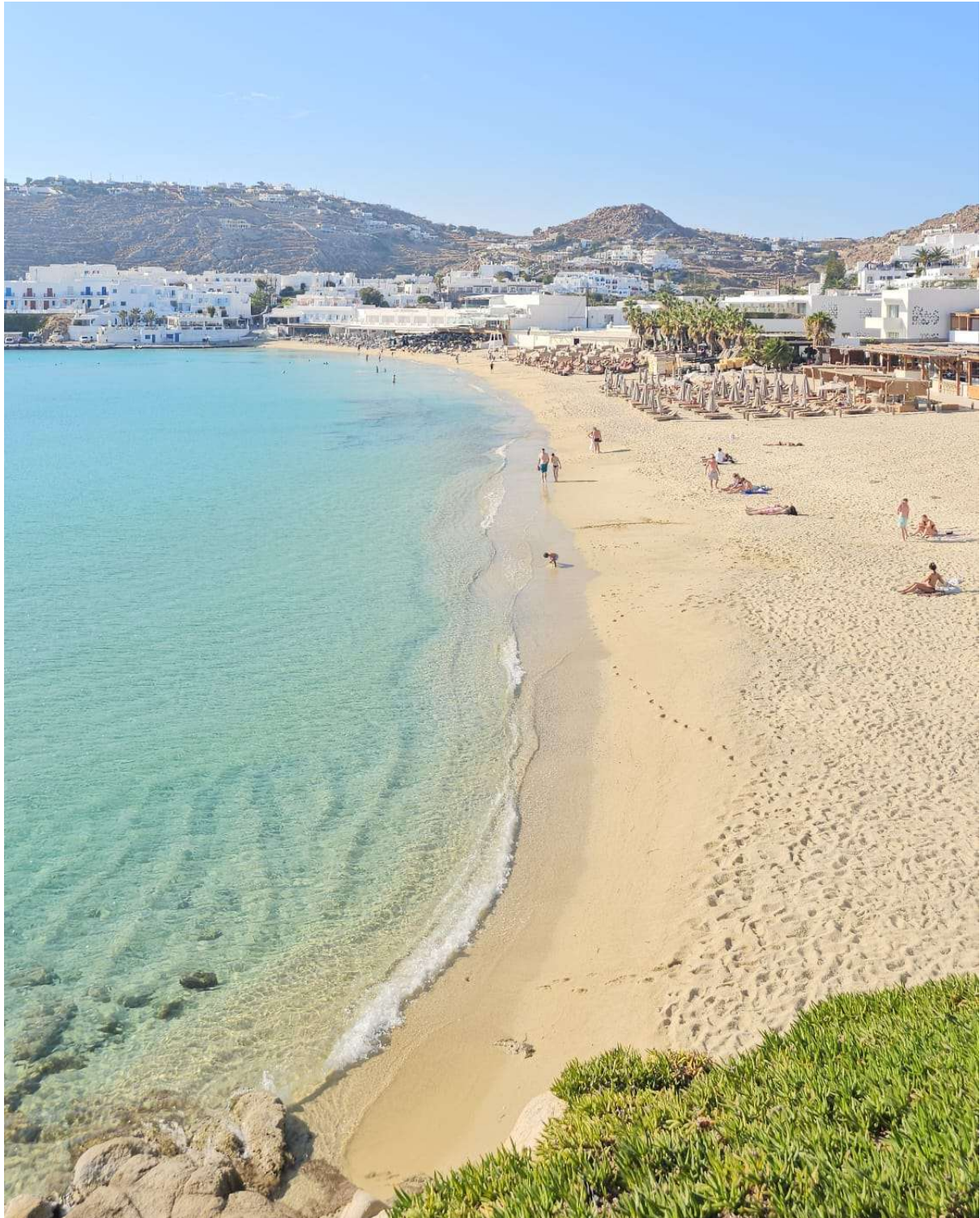


Figure 9 Platis Gialos (again) October 2025