



# Astraeus

Discover the Real Greek Cyclades

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*Newsletter 29 January 2026*

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*Figure 1 Christmas tree Ermopolis 2026*

Χρόνια πολλά, I hope you have had a restful Christmas and Happy New Year, coming up some thoughts on Athens, some of the track islands, and general waffle.



## Our News



If

your New Years resolution is to get a holiday booked January is a good time to do it, Many airlines have sales on at the moment, some of which are about to finish, if you are slightly flexible this reduction in prices can make a big difference to the cost of your holiday, there is no doubt airfares are higher for 2026, so when thinking of a holiday you need to factor that in. The islands still have good availability even the smaller ones but if you leave it to late as I have mentioned many times previously you will find the best accommodation has sold out.

We are seeing a marked increase in demand for islands that have not featured so heavily in the last few years, Astypalaia being one very much in demand, we have also tailored holidays for islands that we would not have covered in previous years, including Skiathos, Alonnisos, Skopelos, Halki, Symi and Kastellorizo, As you well know we set up the business focusing on the islands of the Cyclades however, things move on and we are open as ever to new destinations.

In 2026 we will be working in collaboration with Syros cats to organise holidays for people who have expressed an interest in spending time at the cat sanctuary, and who don't have the time to commit to a month of volunteering, these holidays will obviously be focused on Syros and Kini in particular but as always, they can and will be tailored to suit the individual traveller. Please contact me for more information and see note from Jacky below.



## Musings from a small island – Jacky

(first published in 2023)

### Esperanza's Till

Greek tax laws are very strict. There's a robust on-line system to collect what is owed and many strange taxes are applied. Greece was occupied by Turkey for four hundred years, so it's easy to imagine that the locals were not keen to pay money to their masters. So in more recent years, the European Union have been trying to break the 'cash' habit. Businesses can be fined or closed for several days if the correct invoices or receipts have not been issued and everyone is wary when word goes around that the tax inspectors have landed on the island.

It wasn't always like this...

In 1995, you might not have noticed the tiny Kini shop, shrouded by vines and tucked back from the pathway, except that around ten every morning there was a hullabaloo when the women of the village arrived to fight for their daily bread – newly delivered from a bakery in the main town. Esperanza is usually a cheerful soul, greeting you with a large smile and welcoming you to her shop. The tiny emporium is a goldmine full of everything that you might need to buy. The trick is to find it. Many essentials are sold loose. She will willingly refill plastic water bottles with village brewed wine, benzini, the fuel for motor bikes and locally produced olive oil. You have to take care what you get – as they all look similar!

One morning, she had a problem. Gone were the smile and friendly words. Esperanza was struggling with a new till. The woman in front of me had bought four items and instead of the usual totting up on scraps of paper, Some official had warned her that she must use a till and issue a receipt. She entered one figure slowly, made a mistake on the next, cleared the entry and started again from the beginning. The till being quite clever, remembered the first figure and added that in as well. The transaction had taken so long that the customer had plenty of time to add the purchases for herself and of course, the two figures were different. Esperanza could not believe her eyes – she called her son, they all checked the figures manually, they sympathised with each other, while the line of customers started screaming for attention, waving loaves of bread, milk and lemons. Esperanza shrugged her shoulders, took the lower amount and moved on to the next customer.

Her worst suspicions were confirmed – the new-fangled technology didn't work. She was never seen using the till again.



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Electronic tills are the norm in Greece today, but I'm sure many of us who struggle with rapidly advancing technology, might have sympathy for Esperanza. Of course, she is long dead, but her children and grandchildren still live in the village – some things don't change.

Jacky Story – Kini 2023



## Note from Jacky and all at Syros Cats

We understand that spending a month volunteering with Syros Cats might not be for everyone, so we're delighted to announce a collaboration with Astraeus Holidays, who can make travel, transfer and accommodation arrangements for you, if you'd like to visit us, learn more about us, and our animals . Rachel and Brian, who run this select agency have also been rescuing dogs and cats in Syros, since they moved here, several years ago, so they are the perfect partners.

You will be spending as little or as long time as you wish. On your first day, you can join the team here for an informal late breakfast, find out about what we do and meet our resident cats. After breakfast, we'll show you around and you can decide how you'd like to help. You may prefer light duties, spending an hour or two each



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day brushing and petting cats or socialising kittens, or you might want to get stuck in and help one of our volunteers while they clean cages where our special needs cats reside overnight. If you're an early riser, you might like to help feed around 100 cats each morning at our local feeding stations, or if you're into gardening, you could help with weeding, maintenance or watering. There are also craft type opportunities if you are artistic, or good with a sewing machine. Whatever skills you would like to contribute, we will make a plan on day one, so as well as offering valuable help, you will also have time to enjoy the island, meet the people and share in the rich cultural identity of Syros.

NOTE HOLIDAYS AVAILABLE FROM THE END OF APRIL UNTIL THE END OF OCTOBER

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

<https://syroscats.com/>





## Musings – Rachel



Greek New Year tradition we have adopted is smashing a pomegranate the front door on New Year's Day.

This tradition goes back to ancient times (originating around the Peloponnese) and is carried out by the man of the house. According to Greek tradition, the more seeds that spread all over the floor, the better fortune will be brought to the house (and more clearing up will need to be carried out probably by the woman of the house!)

Well we have the rest of January to look forward to now, usually a busy month for us, Even though January is cooler days are generally sunny, and spring is already in the air, almond trees are in bloom and spring flowers are everywhere, and what makes it extra special are the orange and lemon trees bursting with fruit, these perfect jewel-like spheres remind you that soon you will forget the cold of winter and

Yuk its cold, and yes, I know cold is relative I was in the UK in December!

Christmas, Twixmas, New Year and Epiphany have been and gone which at least meant the end of the Christmas period which seems to have been going on forever.

New Year's Eve is very much a family celebration here, the one year we did venture out in to Ermopolis well before midnight we really did feel odd, the bars and streets were deserted, as everyone spends the evening with their families venturing out well after midnight by which time we were back in the house, the one



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will be moaning about the heat of the summer. We have a tree full of lemons and towards the end of this newsletter you will find a staple and simple recipe we use in this house to try to use some of them up, although they are great frozen for vodka and tonics in the summer!





## The woman who was told she could not run – but did anyway!

(first published 2021)



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*“a female Olympian would be impractical, uninteresting, inaesthetic and incorrect. The Olympic Games should be reserved for men. A woman’s role should above all be to crown the champions”. Baron Pierre de Coubertin*

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Born in Syros in 1866 Stamata Revithi became the first woman to “unofficially” run an Olympic marathon.

Records show that by 1896 when the first Olympic Games of the modern era were being staged in Athens, a 30-year-old Stamata probably widowed was living in poverty in Piraeus with a 17-month-old child. It is reported that whilst on her way to Athens to look for work she got talking to various people who suggested that if she ran the Olympic marathon, she could find fame and fortune. The Marathon was a race that had never been held before, it was the suggestion of Michel Bréal a French man who had been inspired by the legend of the messenger Pheidippides who had run from Marathon to Athens to



announce the victory of the Athenians in the Battle of Marathon, (although he did drop dead after he had made the announcement,) She decided that as she had been a good long-distance runner as a child the 40km race held no fears for her.

She arrived in Marathon before the race was due to start and was met by considerable press interest, who were present to witness the start of the race, the media described her as tall and skinny with long blonde hair, large eyes and a prematurely wrinkled face (plus ça change!).

Without appearing to be too rude it does appear that she was quite “gobby” although some may use the term audacious! She reputedly told the press; “I can finish the marathon in 3 hours I have dreamt of wearing a golden robe, my hands filled to the brim with golden almonds. I will not eat the day before the race. Countless are the times I have been forced to survive on an empty stomach, my child in my arms. I am tough”.

She believed she would have no problem beating the men in the event - a key point here is that only men were officially allowed to run under the rules of Baron de Coubertin who had little regard for female athletes.

On the morning of the race Stamata was effectively ruled out when she was refused an official number and the priest refused to bless her. so, around twenty male athletes went on their way without her. The race was won by Spyridon Louís who completed it in 2.58.50 minutes entering the Panathenaic Stadium in triumph with Princes George and Constantine joining him for the final lap.

Not to be deterred the following morning Stamata after getting witnesses to certify her starting time of 8.30 set off to run the marathon on her own, she arrived in Athens at 1.30 and was stopped in Parapigmata by Greek military officers who would not let her carry on to the Panathenaic Stadium. She asked the soldiers to sign her handwritten certificate and told reporters that she was going to meet with the General Secretary of the Olympic committee Timoleon Phillimori in order to present her documents in the hope they would recognise her achievement. With regard to how long it took her to run the distance (5 hours) she allegedly said “I could have done it even quicker but I did a bit of shopping on the way”. (no comment!)

The press who had been so interested in her story never followed up on what happened to her and she seems to have disappeared into the sands of time. When I told Brian how oddly her story ended with her fading into obscurity he said “she probably moved to Azoliminiós (his Syros joke!)



## Off the beaten track (the pros and the cons!)



Figure 2 Scoinousa

In a world cluttered with Instagram, want to be “influencers” and celebrity culture certain islands have become let’s face it overcrowded, the request I get the most is for quieter lesser-known islands. And barring August where no island however small is quiet, (it is the Greeks own main holiday time and they head back to their family islands for summer, which actually leaves Athens quiet).

Islands like Schoinousa, Donoussa, Iraklia, Sikinos, Anafi and Kimolos are examples of islands where you really are getting away from it and all are unique and beautiful if whilst Kea, Kythnos, Andros, Folegandros, Astypalia and Tinos are more well-known but still retain that authenticity many are looking for. “What are the downsides” you may ask, as I did call this pros and cons! Well, this is more to do with, especially whilst there is uncertainty around the barren ferry lines, logistics, getting there can be trickier (which can be a pro as it keeps mass tourism away!). Also, public transport on some of islands themselves can be barely existent, but for people willing to hire a car or who love walking all this is no problem whatsoever. Also, for families with small children who want those uncrowded sandy beaches, these islands can create beautiful memories. We once spent some time in Schoinousa in September and the peace was incredible, all and for us when we really need to clear our heads Serifos at the end of the season is a tonic. The islands



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mentioned above really do need booking early for higher season holidays (I know this sounds like a travel agent cliché!)

If you however, do not want to forego a few days in Paros or Naxos or miss out on the dramatic beauty of Milos or Ios worry not..... we know the best areas, and they in the main have the advantage of being well linked by public transport

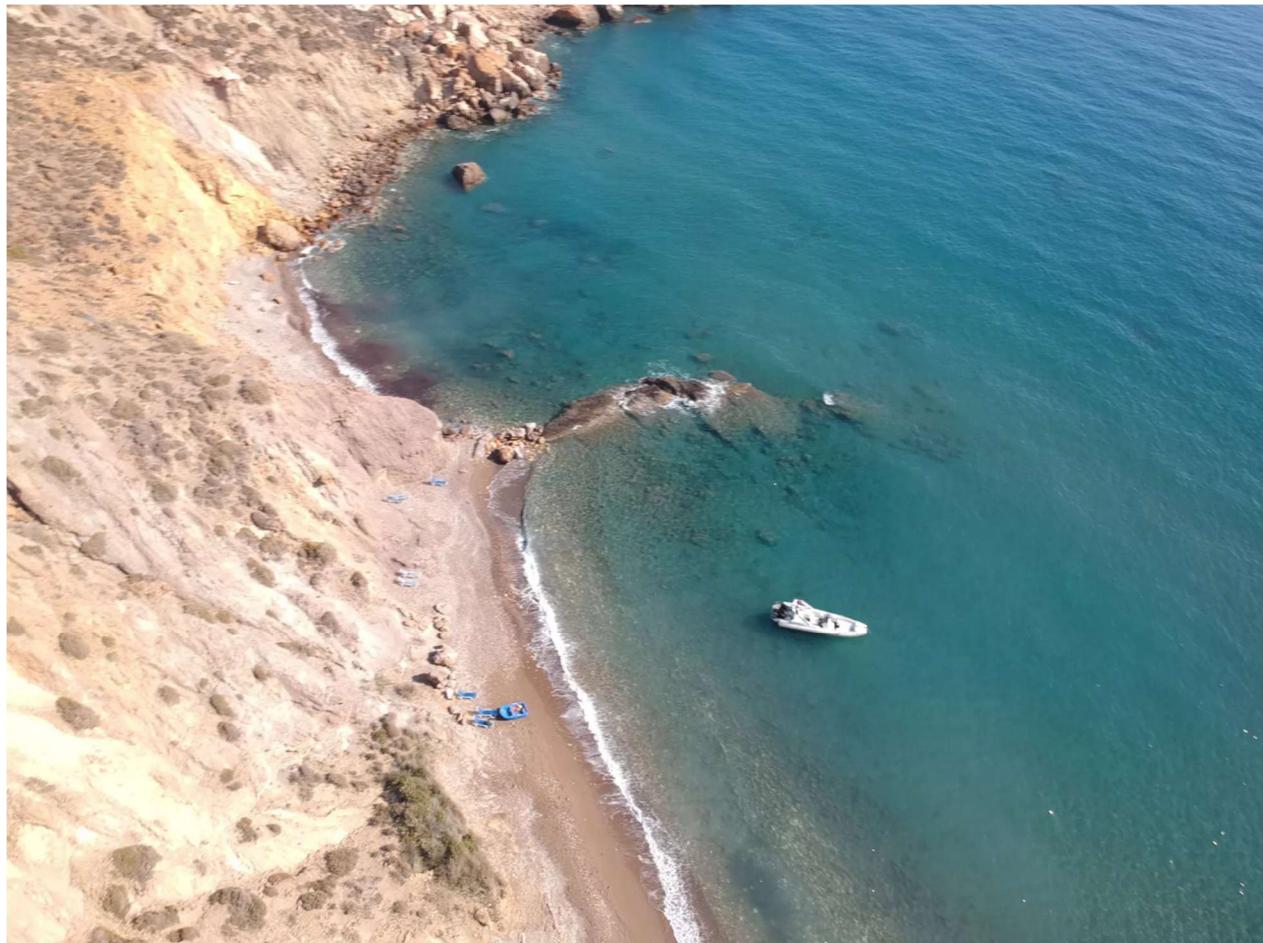


Figure 3 Anafi



## Overnight stops Athens and the islands

Our holidays are not fly and flop ones generally (unless you are staying on an island with an international airport obviously and we can provide those if you do not feel like a ferry.) So, using the Cyclades as example the main international airports we use are Athens, Mykonos and Santorini (depending on the logistics) you may fly in to one and out of another, I have recently published articles about why I don't think Mykonos is so bad (despite its negative press) for an overnight or two-night stay, and why sometimes it is just logistically impossible to get to your chosen island on the day you arrive. This could possibly be exacerbated this year with the introduction of new entry requirements for non-EU passengers, you will now be fingerprinted on arrival etc. This may mean you spend longer in the airport, so cutting it tight even on an early morning flight is not to be recommended, you do not want to start or end your much looked forward to holiday in a state of stress

Whether you are overnight in Mykonos, Santorini or Athens you can make the most of it, especially Athens which is one of the best value capital cities in Europe, it is also incredibly compact and nothing is too far to walk to. Our top tip for those with a short stop in Athens is to take a hop on, hop off bus tour these are easy to find and you can choose (as the name suggests) where you want to get off, although the first time we did



it we just stayed on for the whole route and it is great for orientating you for further exploration

Top tips to do with you time in Athens are below, also if you do book a holiday with us before the end of February that includes 2 or more consecutive nights in Athens we will include an Athens orientation tour in your booking (subject to availability ask for more information)

**The Acropolis** – Athens most historic/iconic landmark. It is a bit of a hike up in summer and can be busy and very hot, so it is best to visit first thing in the morning or in the evening. If you don't feel like walking up it, you can admire it especially in the evening when it is all lit up from a rooftop bar sipping a cocktail.

**Monastiraki Square** – a microcosm of Athens, a mix of ancient and modern. On one corner of the square is the Orthodox Church of the Virgin Mary Pantanassa believed to have constructed in the 10th century and on the other the Ottoman-era Mosque of Tzisarakis, through the arches of which you can see the remains of Hadrian's library built in the 2nd cent AD. An example of neo-classical architecture is the metro-station built in 1895. The square has recently been renovated and is always a lively place to visit.

**The National Gardens** – a public park of 15.5 hectares behind the Greek parliament building, the gardens were originally commissioned by Queen Amalia and completed in 1840. The gardens have recently become home to flocks of ring-necked parakeets! At the front of the gardens is the Zappeion which was built in 1874/78 its original purpose was a national exhibition centre. Next to the Zappeion is a restaurant/coffee shop, great for people watching

## **The Ancient Agora –**

The Agora of Athens was the commercial, social, and political hub of the entire city. The Agora would also have been surrounded by various temples making it a vital religious centre. Most of the buildings in the Agora did not stand the test of time but the most prominent buildings, including the Stoa of Attalos which currently houses the Ancient Agora Museum, have been reconstructed.

The Agora is also home to the Temple of Hephaestus, God of craftsmen. This building, one of the best-preserved temples of ancient Greece, was constructed between 449 and 415 BC.

**Museums** – Benaki, The New Acropolis Museum and The Museum of Cycladic Art are all well worth visiting and within easy walking distance of Plaka and Syntagma Square. On the top floor of the New Acropolis Museum the remaining Parthenon/Elgin Marbles line the wall (the missing ones are fairly clear!)



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Or just wonder the ancient streets of Plaka you will always find something interesting!

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*There were nights for instance, especially in August, where the view of the full moon from the top of the Acropolis hill or from a high terrace could steal your breath away. The moon would slide over the clouds like a seducing princess dressed in her finest silvery silk. And the sky would be full of stars that trembled feebly, like servants that bowed before her. During those nights under the light of the August full moon, the city of Athens would become an enchanted kingdom that slept lazily under the sweet light of its ethereal mistress."*

— Effrosyni Moschoudi, *The Necklace of Goddess Athena*

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## Κοτόπουλο λεμονάτο (kotopoulo lemonato)



So, something simple that utilises some of the glut of lemons, that I do manage to cook with good results is Lemon Chicken this is another dish that everyone makes slightly differently but it is easy, quick and does not make too much washing up

### Ingredients

- 1 chicken around 1.5kg cut in to 8 pieces or pieces of bone in chicken
- 2 cloves of garlic one chopped
- Red onion sliced or diced
- Juice of 3 medium lemons (I chuck in the zest as well) You can also use an extra lemon and put the slices on top
- 4–5 tbsps extra virgin olive oil
- Freshly ground salt and pepper
- 1 tsp dried oregano (I use lovely dried oregano which we buy in Volos on Tinos but any is good I also occasionally use fresh oregano as it grows like a weed in our garden!)
- 100ml dry white wine or dry Vermouth (optional) (I have used Tio Pepe in the past when we have had no spare wine!)
- Chicken Stock or water
- 100g feta cheese, cut into small cubes (optional)
- 1kg potatoes, cut into wedges



## Method

- Divide the chicken into 8 portions peel the garlic and rub on the chicken. Place on a large baking tray and season well with salt and pepper. Or alternatively put chopped garlic, lemon juice, olive oil, seasoning and oregano in a bowl mix together and marinade the chicken in the fridge for no less than 30 minutes before placing in baking tray
- Cut the potatoes into wedges and place them between the chicken, if using marinading method toss the potatoes in the reserved marinade before putting in baking tray, and tip the rest of the marinade in to the baking tray.
- Pour in some water or chicken stock and wine enough to cover half the chicken and if not using marinading method add the lemon juice, the olive oil, the chopped garlic and salt and pepper. and the oregano.
- Cover with tin foil and bake in a preheated oven at around 180C for 60-75 minutes in total.

50 minutes into the bake remove the tin foil and top the chicken with some feta cheese. then bake for another 15-20 minutes (the remaining time), check during cooking it has not dried out, you can also cook it much slower in a cooler oven – just as long as you check the chicken is cooked and do not poison your entire family!

Note, I do not use feta but if we have those small bacon cubes (cant think of a better way of describing them) in the freezer I chuck some of those in



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## 2 SPECIAL FAMILY SUMMER HOLIDAYS JULY/AUGUST 2026 ANY DATES



### 10-night break Athens and Serifos

First 2 nights Athens Apartment, close to all major sites, followed by 7 nights in traditional Serifos House five minutes' walk from the beach, final night in Athens hotel

Self-catering apart from the last evening, which is on a bed and breakfast basis

Two adults and two children under 11

Family Price £3550.00

### 10-night break Athens and Syros

First 2 nights Athens Apartment, close to all major sites, followed by 7 nights in Syros 2 bedroom apartment on small complex with pool, five minutes' walk from the beach, final night in Athens hotel

Self-catering apart from the last evening, which is on a bed and breakfast basis

Two adults and children any age or 4 adults

Family Price £31900.00

#### PLEASE NOTE

- Flights not included



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- Suitable for London, Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol, Edinburgh and Dublin airports
- Subject to availability (these properties sell out quickly)
- Prices include ferry tickets and transfers
- All holidays can be adapted further





And finally!



Figure 4 Agios Iannis (Shirly's Beach) Oct 2025

Winter is always a good time to cuddle up and watch films or read yet another book, we re-watched Shirly Valentine again recently, yes, it's hardly current but Pauline Collins was just so good in it and it's so sad she is no longer with us. Plus, it harks back to a much quieter Mykonos!

I find podcasts a good way to help me to sleep, and very rarely hear the end, having to play it back the next day, one of the most interesting ones (to me) I have listened to recently is from History Hit, the Ancients – titled Athens: Birthplace of Democracy.

Rachel and Brian 2025



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