



Astraeus

Discover the Real Greek Cyclades

Newsletter 30: March 2026



Happy Spring, from a distinctively wintery Syros as I sit typing this I am longing for a bit of sun and a day without needing to huddle in front of an electric heater, still it won't be long I am ever the optimist! I am struck also by the fact that this is newsletter number 30, how much waffle can one woman produce! So for those of you who have been receiving these for as long as I have written them well done!

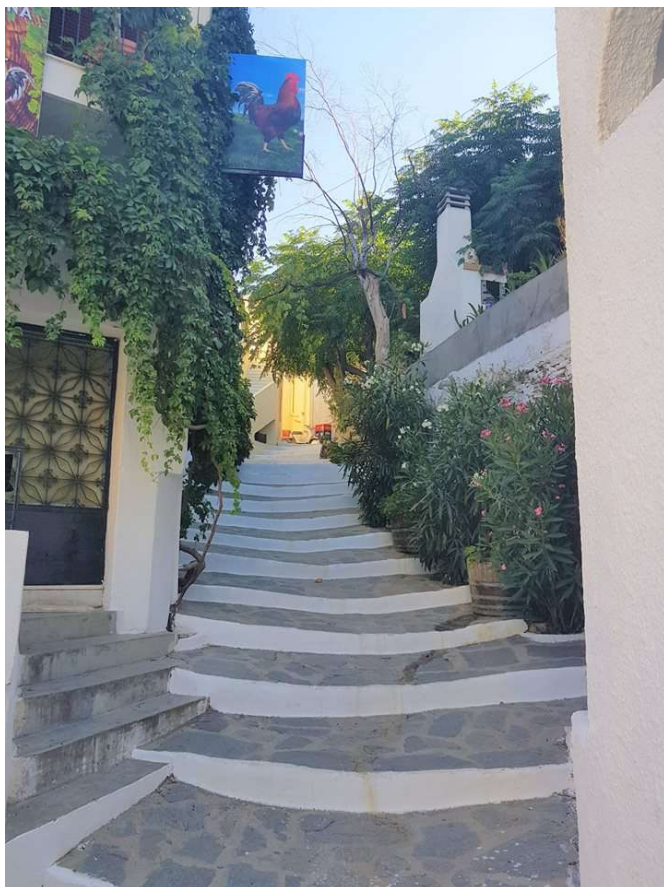
Coming up: A bit of travel news, Paros and Milos, our autumn tour and a cake recipe!



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Travel News



- Please if you are thinking about booking a holiday which includes Sifnos and Serifos especially in the busier months, contact us as soon as you can, these islands are really popular this year and have fewer hotels and villas than a lot of the other islands meaning availability is becoming tight.

- There is no getting around the problems the war in Iran is causing, regarding fuel costs as I am sure you are aware. If you have already booked your holiday, please do not worry about ferry tickets increasing, or rise in anything basically, we have you covered! But if you have been holding on, these increases will start to filter

through, so please consider not holding on for too long. The Greek government is in discussions with the ferry companies regarding ticket pricing and Aegean have started to make noises about increasing flight tickets. From my point of view, from the holidays we have booked in the last few days, flights from the UK are still reasonable but April normally sees a rise anyway, due to the algorithms the airlines use.

- The disruption to travel has not according to the Greek Travel pages not had an impact on 2026 reservations, as many people who may have been considering long-haul holidays have decided to stick to Europe instead.
- Finally, we have got our Group Holiday itinerary for September sorted out, more to follow.
- Don't forget if you recommend us to a friend who goes on to book a holiday we will send you a gift voucher as a thank you!



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Musings from a small island – Jacky

Jacky looks back on Greek island life in 1996



Figure 1 Syros Port in the 90s

Living as we do on a small island, arrivals and departures are a prominent feature of our lives. Most members of our local and international community and many of the islanders too, have family, friends, businesses and commitments on other islands, the mainland or other parts of the world. If you add to this, the regular comings and goings of visitors, the boats and planes that link us to the rest of Europe, take on an unusual importance.

Since the opening of a small airport here, travelling has become easier and more reliable. However, the tiny plane that serves the island has only nineteen seats and is popular with locals and foreigners. In rough weather, for many, twenty minutes on a plane, even if bumpy, is preferable to four hours on an old, rolling ferry in turbulent seas.

On our sleepy island, where, 'avrio', tomorrow is the first response, the husband and wife team who run the Olympic office here, seem to have the most stressful job on the island. Two or three times a day, there are people clamouring for the last few seats on the plane - each believing that their reason for travel should take priority. Of course, the problem is compounded when stormy seas prevent ferries from sailing. And this can happen, even in high summer for two or three days at a time.

It's easy to lose all sense of time here, especially when on holiday. Relaxing beach days roll into each other and taverna suppers are extended with a glass of Metaxa - the local brandy. It slips down pleasantly enough but can cause confusion the next day. So, it's not unusual for visitors to find themselves at an empty airport and be told their plane left yesterday, or confronting an angry sea and cancelled ferries in the port on the other side of the island, when in Kini it seemed like a pleasant summer day. Such mistakes can be inconvenient and expensive - but such are the realities of island living.



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Figure 2 Naxos Port in the 90s

In Greece, there is a word 'philoxenia', which roughly translated means befriending strangers. Greek people, especially in rural areas take this responsibility very seriously. Sometimes at supper, mysterious

carafes of krasi, the local plonk will arrive, or if later in the meal, a glass of tsipouro, a distilled spirit, or occasionally a glass of the illegal hooch, raki. This is fire-water indeed. Inevitably the generosity results in a pushing together of tables and an extended drinking session, where locals, curious to find out about visitors can ask questions and vice versa. But it's sometimes a bit disconcerting to be asked, 'How much do you earn?' 'How old are you?' 'What religion are you?' All quite normal within Greek culture. If there's music, it's never long before dancing follows. All Greek children learn their folk dances in school and as adults are happy to give lessons to foreigners who are inebriated enough to join in. These impromptu and very enjoyable sessions can often have implications, even for meticulous travel plans.

One friend of mine was dozing on the harbourside of a neighbouring island, after a session with locals on the previous evening. He was watching the once weekly ferry arriving over the horizon. It was only a short doze, but long enough that at the next glimpse it had already departed. An expensive forty winks, as the only way back in time for work, was by air.

The Mykonos, our trusty supply boat, often gets delayed by bad weather. It's surprising the things that are missed. Essential gas canisters are suddenly not available. Without good electricity supplies, there's a big reliance on bottled gas for heating and cooking. Bananas are absent too, being usually supplied from Crete. Among the things I never miss until I can't have them!



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As ferries are manoeuvring impressively into the port, they announce, 'We shall shortly be landing to the port of Syros, departing passengers should make their way to the garage now, as the boat will stay only a few minutes.' The speed with which some of these boats arrive and depart is incredible. I've had several friends, who, distracted by the view or missing the announcement, have embarked on an unwanted cruise around the Greek Islands.

Local residents, of course, are well used to ferry transport. They arrive with large parcels, sick relatives and goods to sell. Syros is the home of loukoumi, a sweet, set jelly confection, flavoured with rose, pistachio or nuts. Even if the ferry only stays a few minutes, men with traditional baskets, white painted and full of sweets, push their way on board to sell their famous wares. Most of the ferries take vehicles too and I once saw a horse being rolled aboard inside the cart he had been pulling. As a driver, it's quite a challenge to negotiate the gangplank and shouted requirements of the ferry staff who are trying to get everyone parked in record time.

Extract from 'Sea Change' – an anthology of Syros life by a local writing group, shortly to be published as an e-book on Amazon Kindle

Postscript

Happily, some things have now moved on – today, we have an efficient modern airport, although still a limited service operated currently by Sky Express not Olympic and a refurbished port area, with good parking, shade and a comfortable inside waiting area. Large modern stabilised ferries ply from the mainland and to other islands. An efficient ticket system limits the number of passengers allowed on board and there are usually elevators, escalators and reclining aircraft type seats available for those who prefer more comfort. In summer, a fleet of high-speed boats also move rapidly around the islands, offering greater flexibility for island-hopping visitors. Calor gas, although not used so much in these days of a more efficient electricity supply is bottled on the island and we rarely run out of bananas! You'll probably still get quizzed by curious locals, who will be happy to share their wine with you. Greece produces some quite good wines now and even the local 'krasi' slips down easily. Loukoumi sellers still push their white baskets through queues waiting to board ferries. But it's always a magical experience cruising around misty Greek islands, through glistening blue Aegean waters and arriving at new bustling ports. And with today's greater level of comfort and organisation, it's not anymore only a possibility for the young – us oldies can enjoy the adventure too...

Jacky Storey, Kini, Syros July 2022

Please note, we have had lots and lots of enquiries to us regarding volunteering for a month with Syros Cats we cannot help with that you need to email volunteeratsyroscats@gmail.com.

The work of charities like Syros Cats is invaluable, should you wish to donate please see their website <https://syroscats.com/>



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Musings from a small island – Rachel



Well, we are in March, carnival has been and gone and the Lanten Fast is underway in the run up to Greek Easter, which is the weekend on the 10th to 12th of April this year so a week later than the UK. I have often discussed how unique Easter is here in Syros with both Churches celebrating simultaneously, Easter here is also as big as Christmas and the shops are already bursting at seems with all kinds of lovely food, no doubt challenging the most determined faster!

We were in Athens again recently (it seems we are never not there from this newsletter!) but stuck in more than often and with mainly Greek TV it reminded me how slowly my Greek is coming on, I often wonder if it is an age thing and if I had been 20 years younger whether my brain would have absorbed this very difficult language differently, there are times when I can manage to make myself understood, adding in a few hand gestures to help things move a long a little bit, I suppose it is a matter of “sigar – sigar and as my English friend who has lived here over 30 years attests it is still not easy for here to remember everything, she often recounts the story of her walking in to the vets and announcing that her cat “has ear rings” apparently the word for worms is very close to earrings!



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Paros and Milos – Growing Popularity is it off-putting?



As most of my previous clients are aware, Milos was my first Cycladean island, many years ago now. At the end of the ferry line (about 7 hours away from Piraeus) or with only one government subsidised flight a day from Athens, it was a little bit of heaven away from the mainstream islands, there are very few islands that can match Milos for its dramatic beaches and landscapes. I was a later traveller to Paros, which has actually been a tourist destination since the 70s, due to its beauty and many of you reading this I know visited it decades ago, As a travel agency and lovers of the Cyclades as a whole we are not here to deter our clients from visiting these islands, however it is important to be honest, as sometimes when we send a quote for these islands it can be a bit of a shock!

Forbes Magazine has a lot to answer for! Since around 2017 when it highlighted Milos as a “lesser known” island, it has become anything but! It has also really pushed Paros which has taken advantage of this surge in popularity to build more and more luxury properties, and in the summer to fill up with tourists to the point where areas such as Naoussa have become frankly overcrowded.

For both islands this surge in popularity has pushed prices up, caused arguments with locals and environmentalists, as more hotels are promised in areas of natural beauty, for example Sarakiniko Beach, in Milos famed for its white rocks and almost lunar landscape, now a massive favourite for (mainly younger) tourists to buzz in and out of on ATVs, just to picture themselves on Instagram! In Paros beaches became covered with beds and umbrellas to rent, so expensive and so prolific that it led to the "beach towel movement" (or “Kinisi tis Petsetas”) started in Paros in May 2023, as a grassroots campaign by locals to reclaim public beaches from illegal, overpriced, and overcrowded commercial sunbeds, this movement has, helped reduce 100% covered beaches and got some illegal beach bars shut down, but they have to be ever vigilant, as bars aware they were going to get visits,



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hastily removed illegal structures and sunbeds, only to set up again as soon as said inspectors had moved on!

Other islands are making moves to avoid these conditions, new hotels and villas for example in Sifnos may find they do not have permission to add a pool and in Serifos permission for building in protected areas is not being granted, but what to do if you have your heart set on Paros and Milos?

For Paros, not every area is overcrowded or over-priced and its good public bus service means you can still travel around the island from these areas without needing a car, just talk to us! Or may be at the moment, you maybe look at another island such as Ios, and I know many people (including me) have thought of Ios as being a young person's island, or party island, well that is changing and with some of the most beautiful beaches in the Cyclades why ignore it! It has some lovely mid-range and luxury hotels at affordable prices. Maybe it is the time to reconsider Mykonos in some cases it has become less expensive than Paros and Milos, and nowhere quite does luxury like it!

When it comes to Milos it would be disingenuous to say there is an island to match it for the dramatic scenery, beaches with multi-coloured rock formations and hot springs among other things – again there are areas that are less well known, but its transport system does tend to mean in those areas you may need a car, or to rely on foot, so if your heart is set on it, maybe think about travelling to Milos in May or later in September or early October, it is an island you will not regret visiting!





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2026 Cycladean Highlights Tour

26th September – 5th October 2026

2 nights Mykonos, 4 nights Naxos, 4 Nights Syros, 2 nights Athens



It has been our intention for many years to organise a small group tour taking in some of these beautiful islands, and including Athens, there are plenty of island-hopping experiences aimed at the younger market to islands including Paros Ios and Santorini, but nothing much aimed at the older market who don't want copious amounts of alcohol and dormitory accommodation!

Some of us want to do things at a slower pace and mix culture and history with relaxation in a structured way in hand picked hotels, and to enjoy the company of other travellers so hopefully we have achieved a nice balance of all of these things and more with our itinerary, which will be published on our website in the coming days. This tour will be limited to 12 people it will be ideal for couples and friends and we will have at least one place at a reduced rate for a solo traveller.

If you are interested and want more information or to put your name down, please do not hesitate to contact me.



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Greek Yoghurt Cake with Lemon

Yiaourtopita



There are some food items that are essential to have in your house at all times, when I was younger and had my first house taking advice from my mother I was instructed always to have a bag of pasta, a tin of tomatoes, an onion and a carrot, some cooking oil and optional garlic, cheese and a potato, this way apparently I could cope with sudden onset nuclear war or poverty (be fair it was the early 90s) I took the advice regarding the tinned tomatoes rather too seriously and at one point had 13 tins but that is straying off the subject, nowadays what I find vital is a bit broader, but since living here it has included Greek Yoghurt, I use it for everything, even as a substitute for Crème Fraiche (which according to a friend they had in one local supermarket once for about 2 weeks) and double cream (we don't have that either) it works in sweet and savoury and is good among other things in a cheesecake. I always have a brand with a fat content – sorry whatever you do to the fat free version it just is not right! For this recipe you need the highest fat version (so here that is 10%). You can cook this in a normal tin, a loaf tin or if you want to go fancy get the Bundt tins out just make sure you oil it and flour it properly! In theory this is a simple and really nice recipe but as I seem to defy all known laws of chemistry when I bake I get mixed results!



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Ingredients

- 200 grams of 10% Greek Yoghurt
- 200 grams of Sugar – in the UK caster is the better option, as we do not get it here I tend to just put granulated in the hand blender for a few minutes to make the sugar finer
- 200 grams of self-raising flour sifted (or 200 grams plain flour and just under 2 tsp baking powder)
- 100 ml of extra virgin olive oil, or vegetable or sunflower oil or
- 3 Large eggs
- Finely grated zest of 2 lemons or oranges for a different taste
- 1 tsp vanilla bean paste
- Juice of half a lemon or orange

Glaze with some icing sugar mixed with lemon juice or use a lemon/Orange Syrup

Method

- If using a round tin or loaf tin line with baking paper and oil well, if you are using that Bundt tin good luck!
- Pre-heat the oven to 180 degrees
- Whisk the yoghurt, eggs oil, sugar, lemon zest, lemon juice, and vanilla until smooth but do not over whisk
- Fold in the flour gently until incorporated
- Pour in to the tin and cook for around 30-35 mins (until skewer comes out clean it may take slightly longer in the Bundt but try not to over bake!)
- Then leave in the tin for no less or no more than 10 minutes before turning out!

And Enjoy!

“Baking is a dark art, the kind of sorceress-given gift I do not possess a single ounce of.”

— Elliott Rose, Taming the Heart



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And finally!



In July Christopher Nolan's latest film *The Odyssey* will be released starring Matt Damon as the hero of the book Odysseus, who is making his way back from Troy, a recent article in the Times made me smile, regarding some historians claiming the choice of clothing for these ancient Greek warriors, was inaccurate, this was followed up by a comment by Tom Holland basically saying as the whole thing is imaginary why on earth do the clothes matter! Anyway, there is a very good *In Our Time* available on BBC sounds, where Melvyn Bragg and guests discuss the book, Or catch up on the story before the film by reading my go to author for all things Greek Myth, Stephen Fry in his entertaining book *Odyssey*

Rachel and Brian 2026



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