

Our holiday to Crete 2003

This time we would not fly directly to Crete, but first to Athens. There would we then travel on to Crete by ferry. This time we left from Düsseldorf. Our daughter and son drove us there and at 08:45 we went with our backpacks on our back, the small backpack with hand luggage in hand, the hats on and the katsouna in hand on our way to the check-in counter.

Slight panic

It was not very busy in the hall, but it had a high immigrant content, especially many Turks. There was also a lot of police, security and cleaning staff that armed with a spray bottle, cloth and gloves on even cleaned the bottom of the tables.

We installed us at a coffee corner for a nice cup of coffee. When I looked for the purse in the backpack, I saw the outer zippers of the small backpack were open. According to Arno, it contained his wallet, passport and driver's license. Arno then quickly wanted to call our daughter to ask if she would have a look into the trunk of the car and see if it might have fallen out. While Arno was at the phone cell (we didn't have a mobile phone) checking the number, I searched further for his stuff and I saw Arno's belongings behind another (closed) zipper. Pfffff.... We were so lucky.

Check in

We were able to check in at the Olympic Airways desk by 10 am and we walked with our hand luggage and Arno's "katsoena" (walking stick) to customs and the gates for the control of hand luggage. The alarm sounded very often. When I passed by the alarm sounded, but it was nothing special. Arno passed the gate without alarm bells ringing, this never happened before.

But he had to go to the "Sonderngepäck", with his walking stick because this item was not allowed on the plane as hand luggage. This were the rules. One staff member admitted it was a matter of doubt. Arno made the comment "when I'm old and a Turk, the stick is allowed". He shouldn't have said this because they looked pretty pissed off. Arno did apologize then.

Sonderngepäck

We went looking for the section "Sonderngepäck", but here it was said that we first had to go to the check-in counter to "label" the walking stick. So we get back to the check-in desk. The ground stewardess was surprised that the stick was not allowed. She put a label on the stick and we could go back to "Sonderngepäck". Here they started laughing at the walking stick, but put it neatly on the conveyor belt.

For the second time we went through the gates and Arno again apologized for his saying. According to the employee it was OK, they just followed the rules and they were followed strictly since September 11 last year.

We continued to Gate 73 B, where the plane was scheduled to take off at 11:45 AM. And he did. We got a good look at Germany and Austria, but after this it became very cloudy. Shortly before we would land at Athens, it was very clear and we could see Athens, but we didn't see an airport anywhere. We had the idea that we were just landing somewhere in a field. But it turned out there really was an airport.

Athens

We walked to the baggage claim and 15 minutes later we saw our backpacks already arrive. When Arno's katsouna appeared, this was again reason for a lot of laughter. Outside the arrivals hall we could immediately queue for the bus to the port of Piraeus.

In the meantime it had become cloudy and it looked threatening, many dark rain clouds. I had just enough time to buy the bus tickets. The bus was already packed when we got in, especially tourists

and luggage, a lot of luggage. We found a place in the back of the bus where we could just stand (stuck).

Piraeus

The bus ride took over an hour, many traffic lights and many more stops. When we arrived at the harbour we bought a boat ticket at the ticket office and then we went to the other side of the harbour in search of the boat Aptera, which would sail to Crete.

We could go straight on the boat and put our backpacks on 2 chairs in a TV room and we went back on deck with our hand luggage containing our valuables.

Here the sun was shining and we could sit here and watch the world go by. The harbour was busy. The impression we got of Athens (on the bus and in the port) was dirty, noisy and above all a lot of stress.

At sea

At 20.15 pm the boat left with a loud honking. We stayed on deck for a while and enjoyed the view of the port of Athens. The weather got worse quickly, it got cloudy and lightning flashed in the distance. When it was almost dark we went to the buffet and had a delicious meal: fries, lasagne, fish and Greek salad. We had ticket without a cabin (was much cheaper) and at 22:15 pm we went to our touring car seats and tried to get some sleep.

Sleeping in such a chair is not easy and Arno decided to lay down on the ground. People were everywhere spread on the floor in a sleeping bag, on a jacket or on a towel. It was a bit like a camping site with a cinema (zip open, zip closed, rustle, crack, rustle) and I'm not even talking about the snoring. I slept a little and at 3.15 am we went to the lounge for a cup of hot coffee.

Submarine

In the lounge there was a thriller on TV (with Greek subtitles), good for practicing your Greek. At 4.30 we went outside, it was almost light. In the distance we saw some lightning flashes. Just when Arno went to the toilet I saw one in the water in front of us a green light and thought it was a buoy, until it continued to surface: it was a submarine. Arno returned and took a picture of it while the periscope (with light) turned around. A moment later he disappeared under water again. I thought it was strange that he was so close at the ferry.



the submarine

Rethymnon

In the distance we could already see the lights of Rethymnon (yes, there were still ferries to Rethymnon). It was already light when we entered the harbour. After all passengers were offered a glass of orange juice, we disembarked at 6.15 am. We walked towards the centre, where it was still

completely silent now. A Papous (grandfather) asked if I wanted to sleep (he rented out rooms). We bought a ticket at the bus station for Georgioupolis and at 7:30 am we arrived at our first address of this holiday.

Joanna Apartments

We put on our backpacks and walked to Joanna Apartments, across the street from the highway. We saw no one, and softly I shouted, "Niky, kalimera" and then Niky looked through the window. After a warm welcome we were able to use a room until the small studio would become available for us. This was ok with us, if only we could exchange our long pants for shorts. We freshened up, changed clothes and walked to the village for breakfast at the square in the sun.



a lonely donkey in the field

ATM

When our studio was ready we slept until 3 p.m. Hereafter we went again to the village for shopping. There was now an ATM in the village (at Ethon rent a car) and at the bank, the ATM had been extended with the maestro vignette. Last year we had to go to the bank in Vrisses, where there was an ATM for Maestro cards.

At Café Samaria, owned by Stelios, Nicky's brother-in-law, we enjoyed a café frappé and a yogurt. After this walked to Anna's Supermarket to do some shopping and Anna was there herself and just as talkative as last year.

When Giannis, Nicky's husband, came home late in the evening, he got a bottle Dutch Genever from us and he loved this very much. When we were in bed we occasionally heard some noise on the roof. Arno had already seen something walking on a cable in the evening... a mouse?

Exopolis

The next morning at 11 a.m. we headed for Exopolis for a walk from our walking guide "West Crete". The first part was on asphalt and after that we walked via a narrow path uphill with many thorny plants along the side. We soon looked like we'd been abused, scraped and bloody smudged.

In the village of Likotinara there were 2 grandmothers who asked us if we wanted to go to Georgioupolis. We just have to follow the asphalt road. One of the grandmothers did walk with us to show us the way, but we saw close by, to the left of the road, a sandy path and a blue dot: there we wanted to go. According to our book, this would also be the right way. According to the grandmother we couldn't go that road. I asked why not, but we just couldn't go there. I tried to explain to her that we were going to have a look there. She didn't get it or did not want to understand.



view on Georgioupolis from the Agios Nikolaos church

We walked up the path and soon came to a new house and there the real path should be starting. We saw a metal gate and could easily push it aside and walk along. On the path we encountered several gates that we had to open to be able to continue walking (there was always a sign with the request closing the gates again).

The beginning of the path was very overgrown, but soon it got a little better. At one point the path ran parallel to the asphalt road and close to it. We then decided to continue walking on the asphalt road, the road that the grandmas were showing us.

Plakias

A few days later we took the 9:00 a.m. bus to Rethymnon and then travelled further to Plakias, In Rethymnon we changed buses and left promptly at 10.00 a.m. We felt very safe on the bus, because the “Papas” (priest) was also on the bus. And he was busy hitting crosses when we passed by churches and chapels. It was a nice journey, in the backyard of Rethymnon to the south and riding through the Kotsifou Gorge.



Rethymnon busstation

At 11 a.m. we arrived in Plakias and we went looking for apartment Anna, that we had seen on the internet. However, I had left the address at home so it would not be easy to find it.

After an hour's search we finally ended up at the Olive Grove. An apartment complex in an olive grove, a bit outside the centre of Plakias.

Here we found a room with a shower, toilet and kitchenette and, to Arno's delight, a microwave with oven/grill. In the evening in the village we bought an interesting book about the komboloi.



the steep rocks near Plakias



the beach at Plakias

severe weather

The next morning it was cloudy, but we didn't mind, we could have a nice walk today. On the way to the village we felt a few raindrops and before that we realized it was suddenly stormy with torrential rain, thunderstorm and lightning! The sea in the bay soon turned brown from all the rainwater and mud that poured into the sea.

When the rain stopped we walked to Mirthios, uphill, and we saw a special source with a lot of water basins. As real Dutch water workers, we have cleaned a bit and improved it so the water could flow better from high to low.



the church of Mirthios

in the gorge

Along narrow paths, sometimes washed away and collapsed, we arrived at a picnic area, with a nice view of the mountain on the other side of the Kotsifou gorge.

On our way back into the gorge we saw a ruin of a mill near the river and there we sheltered from a short rain shower. On the other side of the river was an old church, that you could reach through stepping stones in the river.

moving

After a day at the beach we came back to the apartment and there we heard that we had to move because the new Czech guests all wanted to stay together. We were given half an hour to shower and grab our things.

Maria, the daughter of the owner Angelica, took us in the pick-up truck to an apartment complex located on the hill. Here we had a huge roof terrace to our disposal with a nice view.



In the evening we were in the centre of Plakias and there we met taxi driver Georgios and he would bring us to Chora Sfakion the next day. We love to travel by public transport, but with the bus we would have to return to Rethymnon and Vrisses and this would last half a day.

Chora Sfakion

The taxi driver Georgios spoke some English and Arno and Georgios had an interesting conversation about the komboloi hanging from the mirror in the taxi. Georgos had 5 or 6 kombolois at home. He had the prettiest one in his pocket and Arno was allowed to hold it. When we got out in Chora Sfakion Arno received the komboloi from his mirror as a gift.

The ride to Chora Sfakion was very beautiful, we passed by small villages on the winding road. It was very hilly and we enjoyed the sea views.

At the kiosk in Chora Sfakion I bought the boat tickets to Loutro and in the small shop of Andrea, a friend of Georgios, I bought a book about Crete.



sometimes the ferry is near the beach to bring heavy things

Loutro

On the boat it was busy with people who want to walk the Samaria Gorge “easy-way”. Just after 15 minutes of sailing we reached and we left the boat we only heard: “Do you want a room?” We found a room at “Kri-Kri”, a tavern at the back of the village, against the mountains, nice and quiet, near the gate where you could walk up the E4 path to Sweetwater Beach.



playing Tavli (backgammon)

We had dinner at “Kri-Kri”, but Kostas was not working here anymore. He now worked at Limani, two taverns further on, towards the beach.

Later in the evening we had a drink at Limani with Kostas and he told us had seen us, but that he was no longer allowed to come on the terrace of Kri-Kri due to an argument

Livaniana

At 10.30 in the morning we walked towards Livaniana and from here we wanted to walk into the Aradena gorge.

At Phoenix we saw that the E4 path has changed from last year. They built a dirt road from Phoenix to Livaniana, so that cars could now also reach Phoenix. In Livaniana, at the tavern of Nikos, we drank a frappé and 3 glasses with sheep's milk with some paximadi bread.

We heard a man screaming in the distance, but Nikos said this was nothing special, just a crazy man. As long as this man talked a lot we had nothing to be afraid of.

Aradena gorge

Behind Livaniana we walked downhill in the direction of the gorge and there we saw the first birds of prey, the large griffon vultures. They had their nests at the other side of the gorge. In the gorge we walked in the direction of Aradena, with some climbing now and then. Arno lost his walking stick and had to go back, because without his katsouna he is not making one step.



a vulture



Aradena gorge

In the gorge there were still the old iron ladders along which you could climb up. But on the left side of the gorge they had built a new path, with a kind of staircase, with armrests, uphill and later



huge rocks



the old iron ladders

downhill again, so you didn't have to go up the ladders, if you didn't want to.

Bridge

When we walked underneath the bridge we saw an old Kalderimi path on the left and right of us along which you could walk uphill out of the gorge. We took the left path up so that we could also visit the abandoned village of Aradena.

We would have to walk over the bridge to cross the gorge to get back to Loutro, but I thought I could do this now. Near the bridge was a kiosk where I bought a bottle with "Exota" to get some courage.



the bridge over the Aradena gorge

Looking straight ahead, I crossed the bridge, hoping that no car would come because it makes such a noise and then the wooden beams you walk on rattle so loud. It went well. Until my walking stick got caught in a hole in the beams. I didn't dare to look at my stick, because then I would also see through the hole in the beams how high we walked (approx. 138 meters) So I pulled on my stick to get it out of the hole. Luckily he let go quickly and I was able to walk (almost ran) to the end of the bridge. I did it !!!



the Kalderimi left and right from the gorge

Anopoli

Via a kalderimi, an old cobbled road, we walked towards Anopoli. On the village square the old people sat in front of the kafenion. We walked towards the iron towers and noticed that we missed the church of Agia Ekaterina. We will visit this church another time. We only wanted to go back to Loutro.



Loutro, still 700 meter to go

With a view on Loutro, about 700 meters below us , we descended the mountain, with some muscle pain and difficulties, because of the many small stones. It was a bit slippery on steep places. It was not until 7 p.m. that we were safely back in Loutro. But this was our own fault: we left far too late. And this happened many times, so sometimes we are walking on the wrong moment (at noon) at the wrong place (on a road without shade).

Sweetwater Beach

The walk to Sweetwater Beach was beautiful, but the beach was very busy with tourists and tents. So we went back to Loutro.



Sweet Water Beach

In the evening we went to “Kri-Kri” to help Nikos with translating the menu and mediating between Kostas and Nikos to catch up with their quarrel. After a busy but productive evening, we didn't get to bed until 4am. We should leave the next day but we postponed this for a day. We have holidays.

Lykos Bay

After breakfast we walked towards Lykos Bay, where you see the cliffs. We thought it was wise not to walk any further, because it was quite hot and we only had 1 bottle of water with us. We would do this hike another time. We would certainly come back here.

Our last evening was very enjoyable and the Raki never ran out!

Bus ride

We said goodbye to all our friends and took the boat to Chora Sfakion. We should go back to Georgioupolis. The bus to Vrisses would leave at 11 am, so we still had enough time to buy a ticket and have a drink. Arno did not feel really good (lots of Raki or sfakian pie for dessert, or both).

After a coffee and a yogurt on the terrace at Stavris, we stepped into the bus.

Arno was still not feeling well and before we reached the top of the first mountain he had to throw up. Oh, what to do now. In my backpack I had a plastic bag with cookies and I quickly threw the cookies out so Arno could use the plastic bag for throwing up. Fortunately, we were in an old bus, with windows that could open and I could just throw the bag away into the Imbros gorge. Arno felt a lot better after this.



Askifou Plain

Georgioupolis

At Joanna Apartments we chose studio 8, but the room had to be cleaned, but we did not mind, we unpacked our things, put them in the cupboard and went to the beach.

Komboloi

In Rethymnon we were looking for a komboloi for Arno. In the centre, in a small shop, with a young man who spoke very good English (and German) we saw beautiful kombolois. The seller also knew a lot about it and he had a nice conversation with Arno about the use and the meaning of the komboloi. Arno chose a beautiful red faturain komboloi.

Vrissinas

The next day we wanted to try to visit again (attempt 2) the monastery on the Vrissinas. We rented a moped, but it was also along this road, from Armeni, impossible to drive uphill.. Then we went to the Mili gorge. At Theodosius (Josef) in the tavern we had a delicious lunch and then we walked into the gorge in the direction of the source. It is so wonderful green in the gorge.



The church Agia Pnevma on the Vrissinas



The Mili gorge

Kournas Lake

At 9.30 am we left by foot to the Lake of Kournas to see if we could follow the hiking route uphill, in the direction of Alikambos-Vrisses. We walked along the right side of the lake, crossed the dam and then under the bushes we finally came across the gravel path along the lake. Then we went uphill through a river bed looking for cairns and blue dots.

It was a beautiful gorge, with many “goats' rugs” and lots of spices. On the right slope we saw blue dots, but a part of the mountain was crashed down and the trail was nowhere to be seen.



sailing back to Georgioupolis

On the other side of the slope we looked for blue dots, but the bushes (especially Jerusalem sage) stood shoulder high and stung a lot. So we returned the same way again. Arno had problems with his knee and my thigh muscles were hurting.

On the way back we filled our bottle of water at a leaking water hose in the olive grove (there was only a lump of ice in our bottle) and cooled our heads for a moment.

Gouves

We said goodbye to our friends in Georgioupolis and got on the bus to Heraklion.

Here we got on the bus to Gouves. We wanted to visit Giannis and his mother in his tavern “Megas Alexandros”.

When we discovered the apartment complex “John and Mary”, we went looking for the tavern of Giannis, but it was no longer there. There was now a rent-a-car company on that spot. The owner of “John and Mary”, Michalis, told us Giannis now worked in a tavern in Analipsi. In the bar we met a number of acquaintances, Dutch tourists who come here for many years.

In the new apartment complex we rented a room for 1 night and later we walked to Analips, trying to find tavern Hercules where Giannis would work. And we found him there. In the evening we had a delicious diner here.

Chersonissos

After breakfast we walked along the beach to Chersonissos, about 10 kilometres beyond. We wanted to have a look there. And we did have a look. We saw only taverns, hotels, screaming tourists and tourist shops... We took the first bus back to Gouves.

In the afternoon we had to pack our things and go home, our holiday was over. We took the bus to Heraklion. Changed the bus to the airport and waited for our plane to bring us back to the Netherlands.

Like our other holidays on Crete we enjoyed every minute of it and could hardly wait to come back to this special island.

