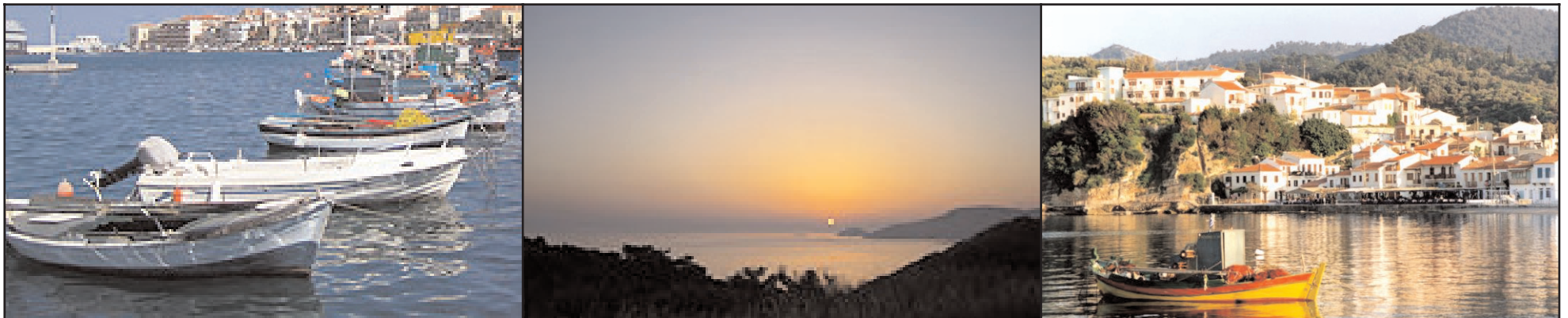


# SAMOS

## Enjoy This Greek Resort Island's Peaceful Beauty



*Situated in the eastern Aegean Sea near Turkey, the beautiful Greek resort island of Samos has been known for its rich collection of beaches, picturesque towns, stellar scenery and wonderfully warm weather.*

My wife May and I had planned to come to this island three years ago, but ran out of time during our first visit to Greece. We visited Athens, Santorini and Crete.

Samos is a bit out of the way. We had to fly first to Athens before taking a 50-minute flight on Aegean Airlines to the island. A ferry from Athens would have taken eight hours.

During our weeklong vacation, we stayed on the north shore of the island near Kokkari, a seaside resort town with an array of shops, eateries and hotels. It's an excellent base because it's close to many of the beaches, hiking routes and mountain villages we wanted to explore.

We stayed about 10 minutes from town at the Armonia Bay, a modern, spacious resort facility with 22 rooms, a large pool that overlooks a bay, a bar and a large lounge area. A dirt trail conveniently leads from the back of the hotel to Tsamadou Beach, one of the more well-known beaches on the north shore.

Armonia Bay is at the high end of accommodations in Kokkari, with rooms renting at about €100 (\$155) a night. There are other good hotels at lower prices in Kokkari, such as the Athena Hotel, Kalidon Palace and Virginia's Apartments.

Renting a car is a must, because bus service is infrequent. We picked up our rented car at the airport and drove to Kokkari, a half-hour trip along a two-lane road.

Along the way, we passed Pythagorion, a town named after one of Samos' most famous residents -- Pythagoras, the legendary Greek mathematician -- and Vathy (or Samos, as it is commonly called by residents), the

island's capital and a port city.

### On Samos

Samos has had a long, illustrious history. The island flourished in the seventh century B.C. when it became a maritime power and a center for culture and the arts. It later came under Roman, Byzantine and Turkish rule before it finally became a part of Greece in 1912.

Remnants of Samos' distant past can be found among the ruins of the temple for the Greek goddess of Hera near the airport and the Eupalinos underground aqueduct that was built in the sixth century B.C. and provided water for the island for 1,000 years.

Today, the lure of the island is its great outdoors. The island has a plethora of beaches, most of them with pebbled surfaces except for two sandy beaches. Our favorite was the sandy beach at Kilma Bay, with its inviting cool turquoise waters and scenic vistas.

Some of the best hiking on Samos can be found on the north shore, which gets more rain than the southern and western portions of the island. Here, travelers can retreat into a shaded forested area that is verdant, with terraced vineyards, wild flowers in bloom and the sounds of birds chirping.

The mountain village of Manolates is quiet and empty, except for a handful of shops. The road goes past the village cemetery, and several spots along the route offer commanding views of the coast.

Kokkari is well-known for its seafood. Two restaurants that stood out were the Poseidon, where we enjoyed excellent grilled fish and octopus as well as swordfish souvlaki. The quality of seafood dishes was just as high at Meltemi, which was always crowded with local residents and tourists.

Another delightful restaurant was the "Beer" located opposite St. Nicholas Church. Artemis Mylonas, the third-generation owner of the family-run eatery, said the restaurant got its name because it was the first snack bar in town to offer beer to diners in the mid-1920s.

It's best to get to the restaurant before 7:30 p.m. because lines quickly start to form outside. The restaurant is known for its home-made cooking, affordable prices and friendly service. On our visit, we had lamb roasted in vine leaves on a bed of rice and salad along with briam (a vegetable stew) and a cucumber salad.

When you tire of Greek food, you

can dine at Girasole, an Italian restaurant run by three entrepreneurs from that country.

The trio -- Luci Raineri, Francesca Ravelli and Michela Ranza -- said they have gone to great lengths to separate themselves from the competition by taking extra steps to make their dishes authentically Italian. Luci makes the pasta daily for the lasagna, gnocchi and ravioli dishes. And the three bring back olive oil, salami and cheese when they travel home to Italy in the off season.

We went to Girasole twice, once for tasty dishes of spaghetti with sardines and tagliatelle with porcini and a second time for thin-crust pizza.

Samos is also a good jumping-off point for short trips to other islands and Turkey, which is only two miles away. We took a day trip to Turkey to visit Ephesus, a huge archeological site of Greek and Roman ruins.

We went to a travel agent to book our tickets, which covered the round-trip ferry ride to the Turkish port of Kusadasi, the bus ride to Ephesus, the cost of the visa and an English-guided tour of the ancient city.

Ephesus was much larger than I expected. I didn't realize the ancient city at one time had a population of several hundred thousand. I also was taken back by how well preserved the city was and the size of the ruins. The Library, the 25,000-seat amphitheater, which is still used for concerts today, and the Temple of Artemis were particularly impressive sights.

The tour came with a heavy dose of patriotism and commercialism. Our Turkish guide went to great lengths to extol his country and Turkish-Greek ties. He later dropped us off at the end of the tour at a site where we were "invited" to listen to a hard sell from carpet salesmen.

Like our previous trip to Greece, the most enjoyable parts of vacationing on Samos turned out to be the intangibles: the leisurely pace of life on the island and the friendly people we met along the way.

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