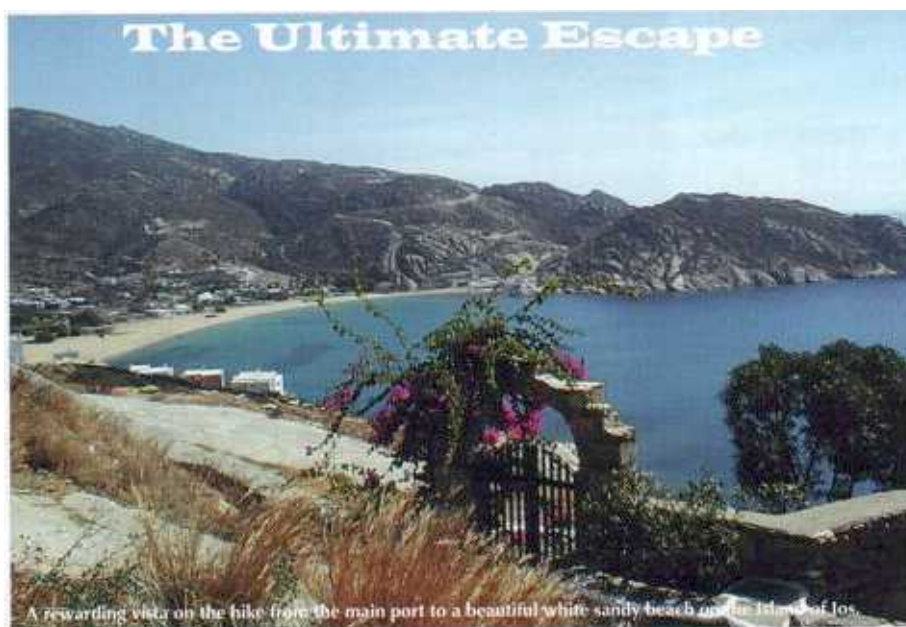




Sifnos' most famous church, Panaya Chrissopigi.

## Bareboating in the Greek Isles



A rewarding vista on the hike from the main port to a beautiful white sandy beach on the Island of Ios.

**E**ight close friends, a country steeped in history, warm breezes, and a 51-foot sailboat is my recipe for a wonderfully exotic and exciting vacation.

The planning and anticipation were half the fun — and the planning paid off! Before we even boarded our “floating hotel” for our bareboat sail one of the newest of our group stated, “You’ve already exceeded my expectations.” We had just spent our second glorious day on the beautiful island of Santorini, a brief stop before picking up our boat on the Island of Naxos. We took a scooter tour of the island which ended at the rustic, traditional Santos Winery on top of a cliff in the town of Akrotiri — where the sunset was spectacular and a wedding ceremony overlooking the valley was taking place.

In the Greek Islands, there is no shortage of beautiful places that are just perfect for the wedding of your dreams. Santorini would

definitely get my vote! When exploring the Greek Islands, Santorini is a must, but is tricky for boaters as the port is deep and anchoring is difficult. Taking a ferry to this island, as we did, is strongly recommended.

Sadly we left the breathtaking island of Santorini yet eager to trade our scooters for another mode of transportation — the sailboat that would be our home for the next week.

And a bareboating sailboat holiday is the ultimate escape. You charter a sailboat and crew it yourself. If there isn’t a skipper in your group of friends, one can be hired to take you through your journey of the Greek Islands. So our next stop on our tour was Naxos and there we boarded our 51-foot Jeanneau sailboat — aptly named *Carpe Diem* — and prepared to “seize the day” for our adventures.

The first order of the day was to shop for

provisions for the week at a local market just a few feet away from where our boat was docked. If you really want to be spoiled, you can hire a cook to travel with you. Most well-appointed charter sailboats have crew quarters on board for such a situation. However, the food in Greece is so good and so reasonable that you’ll probably find that hiring a cook isn’t necessary. Most restaurants are family owned and operated and the minute you walk in the door, you’re treated as a member of the family — and the best way to really enjoy the warm hospitality of the Greek people is to have a meal with them.

Our choice was to just stock up with traditional Greek delicacies — slabs of fresh feta cheese, vegetables grown in a garden we could see just outside the door, and garlic-laden tzatziki. After shopping we settled down to a “welcome to Naxos” Ouzo at Yanni’s where we were joined by a group

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A view from the castle ruins overlooking Faros Bay on the island of Sifnos.

of local sponge fishermen, and Yanni's entire family! Another Greek feast and an evening of live entertainment — complete with an impromptu demonstration of a traditional Greek dance — topped off our day.

The next day began another new chapter of our Greek Isles storybook holiday.

There are 3,000 Greek Islands (only 2,500 of which are inhabited) and one is more beautiful than the next. Having a loose itinerary is a good idea — or you could spend your whole vacation getting from one island to the next! Our plan was to stick to what's known as the Cyclades (pronounced kick-lad-ies) Islands in the Aegean Sea. This body of water separates Greece and Turkey and is just north of the Sea of Crete. When planning your own Greek Island tour, make sure the first item you pack is a guidebook which gives you some suggestions on itineraries and other helpful tips. Mine was "Greece: The Cyclades" by Dana Facaros. It is part of the "Cadogan Island Guides" series and was very helpful. Fodor's guides are also very

thorough and entertaining.

One of the most amazing things about Greece is its history, both real and mythological. In ancient times, the Greeks believed that all events that occurred were actions of the gods. When traveling the Greek Islands, there are stories of how each island was formed by one god or another, with mountains erupting as battles were waged. Keeping track of historical and mythological events relating to each island we visited was both educational and intriguing.

One such island was Sifnos. Snuggled between Serifos and Paros, Sifnos has a charm and history you can feel as you slowly motor into the peaceful cove of Faros. Mythology tells of the Sifniotes mining gold (which was plentiful on the island in 530 BC) and bringing it up to the mountains in an offering to the god Apollo. When looking up the cliff-side, the ruins of an ancient castle can be seen and above the castle, the island's most famous church — Panayia Chrissopigi.

Both are an easy hike from the anchor-



The shops of Santorini.

age up a narrow donkey-path that starts at the beach known as Fasolou. We decided to take advantage of the opportunity for some exercise, and once we arrived at top of the mountain were rewarded with a panoramic view that would make your heart sing.

But then breathtaking views are the norm on the Greek Islands. Greece has always been an artist's paradise. However, artists are not the only ones who have been attracted to these gems of the Aegean. Colorful characters entered our picture book at every turn. From the salty sponge divers on Nax-

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## GREEK ISLES VACATION

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os to the cosmopolitan couple (he from Athens and she from Holland) who welcomed us to their Taverna overlooking the bay in Faros.

The best part of a Greek Islands bareboating holiday is the variety of activities available. For the less adventurous looking for peaceful contemplation, the miles of white sandy beach on Ios are perfect to settle in with a good book — while the dare-devils head into the hills for a dirt-biking, adventurous thrill-ride! If shopping is your passion, most of the islands have a wonderful collection of boutiques and shops you can visit as you wind your way through narrow streets, surrounded by pristine whitewashed buildings adorned with blue shutters and doors.

**I**n our travels we found the best islands for shopping, nightlife, and action were Mykonos, Santorini, Naxos,

Paros, and Ios. The smaller, less developed islands were best for peaceful days of hiking and quiet soul-searching. Many travelers whose paths we crossed were exploring the islands by way of ferry. If you're not a sailor, this is an easy and enjoyable way to travel — and the ferries run frequently and generally on time.

We ended our wonderful vacation on the island of Paros where we packed our bags and handed Carpe Diem back to her owner. One final dinner in a cozy Taverna and one more stroll through the winding Grecian streets completed the last chapter of our incredible and exotic Greek Islands adventure.

♥  
*Author Anne O'Connell is the Director of Community Relations for Keiser College, an avid traveler, and an occasional travel writer. The stunning photos were taken by Douglas Erskine, Anne's husband, and the skipper of the Carpe Diem crew.*