

A KYTHERIAN EASTER



Everyone has a bucket list; a list of things that one has not done but wants to do before dying. On the top of mine was spending Easter in Kythera

This year, I realised my dream. My son and I flew to Kythera on the day before Palm Sunday and prepared to embark on the spiritual journey to Christ's crucifixion and resurrection.

The island in spring is stunning. The winter's rain gives the island an England like appearance.

Everything is so lush and green and the countryside is sprinkled with flowers.

Even my home town of Livadi and its valley, mirrors a scene from Tuscany.

The drive from the airport was an easy one, due to the lack of traffic on the main road, which crosses Kythera from the north to the south. What a difference to the mayhem in summer, when the increase in population on the island makes driving a health hazard.

We stopped along the way to greet friends and relatives who had the time and "ορεξη" to speak to us. This was so refreshingly different to summer, when



the locals are inundated with their "δουλειες".

Spring is their time to take a breath before the annual invasion of tourists begins.

The Holy Week afforded us the opportunity to attend church services in various churches that hold considerable significance for my family.

Our local church of Ayia Eirini, where my father was christened, is just a short walk up the road from our house in Katouni. A service was held there every day.

Myrtydia is without doubt my favourite church and it is there that we attended "Τα Δωδεκα Ευαγγελια", the service on the Thursday night. After the reading



of the fifth "ευαγγελιο", the lights were switched off as the priest carried the Cross around the inside of the Monastery. The bells were rung and their melodic sound echoed throughout the quiet countryside surrounding us.

Coincidentally, a group of well known actors visited the island during Easter and I was star struck to find *Yiannis Bezos* standing beside me during the church service.

On Good Friday, at the Church of Estavromenos in Hora, we began the Epitaphio procession which took us through the back streets of Hora almost up to the Kastro. Every house along the way had its front door opened to reveal a table with an icon and burning incense.

Ayios Haralambos in Milopotamo conveyed images of my mother and her siblings as young children, walking to church every Sunday from Kato Hora.

We attended the "Anastasi" there on Saturday night.

One of the aspects of life in Kythera that I love is its unpredictably. When I asked my relatives what time the service was due to begin, they initially replied 9,

10 or 11pm. The reason for this was that the priest had to be at Ayios Theodoros before 12. So, in keeping with the locals, we arrived at the church for our midnight service which was held at 11pm.

Fireworks are still used in various parts of Greece for celebrations and this was certainly the case in Milopotamo. While the service was being conducted, a war was being waged outside with fire crackers exploding continuously, often drowning out the priest's voice. Leaving the church with no injuries and full hearing was a major achievement.

One of our most memorable services was held in Ayios Yiorgios Sto Vouno. We were celebrating St George and the Esperino was held in this beautiful small church. The mosaics on the stone floor date back to the 7th Century and pay a silent homage to the many parishioners who have worshipped there over countless centuries.

The highlight of our trip, however, was without doubt, following the "Ikona Tis Myrtidiotissas" as it was carried from village to village around the island. This is a long standing tradition that begins fifty days

before Easter, when the icon is taken from Myrtidia to Hora. It resides there until after Easter Sunday and then begins a two week journey back to the Monastery.

Upon reflection, this trip was truly one of enlightenment. We were able to celebrate Easter in a beautiful and unique way while taking the opportunity to strip away the tourists' image of a sun-soaked Greek island and appreciate the true Kythera and its wonderful people.

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