

## ON THE WATER

# Getting personal in Greece

**Sarah Pain** samples an easy-going Mediterranean cabin charter on a 53ft cat with a company that believes in the old maxim that the customer is king.

It was a cool May Friday morning when I set off for a six-day, Saturday to Friday cabin charter around the Greek Islands with Archipel Club, which has two Pahi 53ft catamarans, *Astarte* and *Hecate*, based in Paros. With four double cabins on the boat there were potentially six other guests, plus our skipper George, so, naturally, I spent considerable time wondering who my fellow crew members would be.

Getting to Paros itself was fairly simple – I followed the advice of George and Vanessa, the owners of Archipel Club, and flew from Gatwick to Athens with Olympic airlines (3½ hour flight). The ferries to Paros leave from Piraeus on the mainland, so having landed in Athens I jumped on a shuttle bus that went direct to the port and took about an hour. Taxis were also available at the airport, but the bus was quick, comfortable and on time. I didn't arrive in Piraeus until about 2200, so I stayed the night there

(flights), such as ferry times and recommending hotels both in Piraeus and Paros – a great help if you're looking to extend your holiday with a few days in a hotel.

## MEETING UP

When I finally arrived in Parikia, Paros, about midday on the Saturday (the agreed time to meet the boat), everyone was already on board *Astarte* and starting to unpack and generally get their bearings. Introductions were made and it was soon clear what an international group we were. Two guests had travelled from the Netherlands, a father and daughter were joining us from the US and George is a local man. He later explained that this was nothing new – with their cabin charters they often have an international mix on board – so his fluency in Greek, English, French, German and some Spanish often came in handy.

This time was also used to explain and sort out the kitty. Archipel Club has two options

receipts etc. It certainly seemed to work well and, in the case of our holiday, everyone seemed more than happy with it. The only 'extra' money spent was really only on souvenirs and any drinks etc when people were sightseeing away from the group.

Shortly after arriving on board *Astarte*, we motored out of Parikia harbour and I finally had the chance to take a proper look at my home for the week. My immediate thought was just how much space was available,



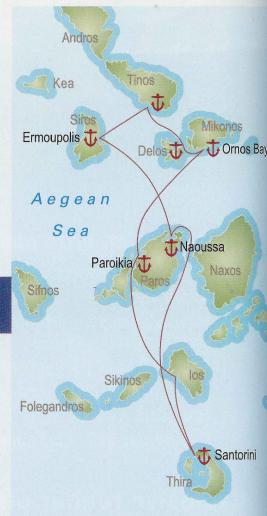
We followed a route from Paros to Ios, Santorini, Paros (Naoussa), Syros, Tinos, Delos, Mykonos, Paros, taking us around the Cyclades in a clockwise direction.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Sarah Pain has been sailing yachts and dinghies in the UK and beyond for over 20 years. From early beginnings sailing in Fareham Creek, she's since completed two transAtlantic passages and has over 10,000 sea miles under her belt. After a time in the Royal Navy, Sarah has worked in the advertising department of *Sailing Today* for the past six years.

before getting my Blue Star ferry to Paros the following morning. The ferry journey is about 4½ hours long, but if you sit outside you can watch all the islands go past. There are refreshments available on the ferry and all the usual mod cons. It's also worth noting that Piraeus is a fairly big port – much bigger than I expected. There are lots of ferries leaving to go to all the different islands, so leave plenty of time to find your ferry and, more importantly, find somewhere to sit once you're on board! Vanessa is happy to help you with your travel arrangements (although you will have to book your own

for its charters: an 'active' or 'cosy' formula. The active charter (which is what we were on) has a skipper on board and guests are expected to participate in helping sail the boat etc – as much or as little as they want. In contrast, the cosy formula has a skipper and steward on board, taking care of absolutely everything.

The company also suggests that cabin charters run a common kitty. Payable upon boarding, it covers all shared expenses such as breakfasts and lunches on board, dinners ashore, water, port dues, fuel, end cleaning and the skipper's meals. The skipper acts as the bookkeeper, keeping all



both on deck and below. Each of the four double cabins is separately accessed via a large hatch, the ladder leading into a small seating and storage area (with a hanging locker). To one side is a large double berth, with plenty of stowage space in deep shelves each side, and to the other the huge 4ft x 6ft en-suite heads.

## GREEK CHARTER



**Top:** Little Venice in Mykonosa, a very popular hang out. The Tinos mountains tower above in the background.

**Left:** Our Pahi 53 on a reach, surging along at 12kn. Note the excellent aerodynamics of the soft wing sail.

**Above:** Satisfied customers.

**Above right:** One of the four independently accessed double cabins with en suite bathroom.

**Right:** Georges Gritsis, Archipel Club's head skipper and co-manager.



“ *Hoisting the mainsail on the Wharram looked relatively easy but, in fact, was a two person job because of the gaff rig.* ”

Again, there's lots of stowage space in the heads and a very good shower.

### MODIFIED WHARRAMS

The boats themselves were designed by James Wharram and built in 2005 and 2006. The design was modified to suit the

charter market and specifically the conditions in the Greek Islands and come extremely well equipped with radar, autopilot, chart plotter, DSC VHF, GPS, compass, depth sounder, binoculars, spinnaker, lifejackets and harnesses, liferaft, powered (15hp) dinghy, electric winches,

watermaker and 220v AC inverter. They also carry a laptop with GPRS internet connection, which guests are able to use for a minimal cost. Bed linen, extra blankets and towels are also provided.

Our first sail was a relatively short hop to the island of Ios, south of Paros. *Astarte* has twin 30hp diesel engines, so we motored comfortably at 8kn while George explained how to hoist the ketch's gaff sails. Shortly afterwards we were sailing along nicely making 5-6kn in 14kn apparent wind. Hoisting the mainsail was easy, but a two-person job, because of the

gaff rig. The jib is on a simple roller furling system. Everyone was able to get involved in the sailing, regardless of any previous experience and each step was clearly explained.

The skippers are clearly able to handle the boats themselves with great expertise, so if you do wish to take a more active part in the sailing then it would probably be best to make this clear to the skipper at the start. The whole holiday was very much geared towards individuals and what they wanted to get out of it, whether it be actively getting involved in the sailing or lounging on the vast deck area, enjoying the »

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experience with a cool drink and a good book. The amount of available and usable deck space was really clear under sail – with the obvious advantage of not heeling like a monohull – and there was plenty of room to relax and enjoy the



sailing. Be warned,

though, you're likely to get splashed sitting on the netting trampoline.

### STRONGER WINDS

The Cyclades usually have light northerly winds in May and June, but a low pressure system was producing southwesterly or even southerly winds this particular week, causing our itineraries to be amended. The itinerary specified on the website (which states that it is subject to change) is Paros – Sykinos – Santorini – Folegandros – Polyaigos – Despotiko – Paros, but the shift in wind direction made this impractical.

All the guests were asked if there were any islands they especially wanted to visit and the itinerary was then amended around their preferences – along with the predicted wind direction.

In fact, we ended up following a route of Paros – Ios – Santorini – Paros (Naoussa) – Syros – Tinos – Delos – Mykonos – Paros, taking us around the Cyclades in a clockwise direction. This also meant that we got the maximum

amount of good sailing, which was generally in the morning

**Above:** After a super day's sailing, we relax, unwind and tuck in!

**Right:** In Delos, you can wander around the ruins of what was once the centre of the ancient world.

before lunch.

Each day of the charter seemed to fall into a routine of breakfast around 0800, leaving by 0900 and sailing (or motoring if no wind) all morning before stopping for lunch – maybe also a swim. We would then get in to our destination in the afternoon, in time to have a look around before dinner later in the evening. George was always on hand to recommend places to see or things to do, although if you just wanted to relax on board that was also fine. You really could do as much or as little as you liked.

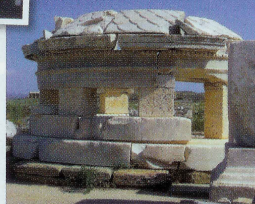
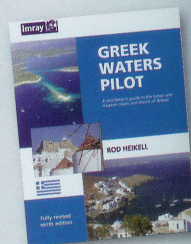
On the first evening in Ios (on Saturday night), having berthed stern-to in the harbour and explored the old town at Georges recommendation, we all met in the evening to go to a local

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### GREEK WATERS PILOT

by Rod Heikell

This 10th edition, published by Imray, is an indispensable guide for anyone sailing around Greece. Between 2005 and 2007 Rod and his wife Lu revisited much of the Ionian, Saronic and Dodecanese in their present yacht, *Skyfax*, picking up new information, additional photographs and updated plans. To obtain your discount, simply telephone Imray on 01480 462114 or log on to [www.imray.com](http://www.imray.com). Don't forget to mention *Sailing Today* when ordering.



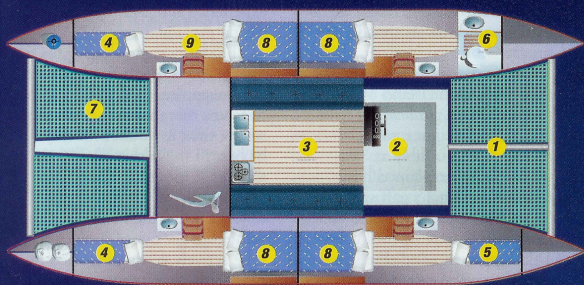
taaverna. We all realised pretty quickly quite what a gastronomic tour we were all in for – George is a local man and clearly knows a lot about the locally produced foods and wines. The dishes were really good and not necessarily things that I would have tried had they not been recommended.

What struck me was that you didn't really notice the speed at all – the boat felt incredibly stable and balanced.

### STRIKING SCENERY

Unfortunately with the increased wind strength also came the rain, which by the afternoon was quite heavy. However, the main saloon can be completely sealed off, providing a dry and sheltered seating area and because the boat is so stable it was very comfortable to sit and read without the awkward motion of a monohull. Fortunately, by the time

## LOOKING INTO THE PAHI 53



1. Swimming platform Dinghy launching ramp
2. Partially enclosed (sprayhoods & Bimini) Cockpit, steering & nav station
3. Partially enclosed (sprayhoods & Bimini) Settee & galley
4. Extra single berth or light gear Storage
5. Skipper's cabin
6. Crew's locker & toilet
7. Rampoline
8. Double bunk
9. Shower & head





Main: Mykonos old harbour on a beautiful calm day. Right: Our Pahi 53 alongside the Ermoupolis neoclassical customs house at Syros. Far right: Discussing the finer points of sail trim.

we were walking back to the boat after dinner that evening the rain had finally stopped and the skies were clear again.

We set sail for Syros the next day, stopping in a beautiful bay for a lunchtime swim and cool off. Both boats carry a good range of snorkelling gear – I had actually taken my own, but to be honest the kit on board was more than adequate and I needn't have done. The boat also sports a very useful and immensely practical system that lowers the 15ft wide net swimming platform at the stern into the water. With good wide steps up the middle, it means you can very easily climb in and out of the water (or relax on the netting); it also enables the dinghy, which usually sits on it, to be lowered very simply.

### SEEING THE SIGHTS

By the afternoon we were berthed in the town of Ermoupolis, and George suggested that we take the opportunity to go for a wander to see the town itself. The harbour area is lovely with lots of cafes and bars overlooking the water, but a few minutes walk inland and you're surrounded by stunning neo-classical mansions built years ago by wealthy merchants. It's a beautiful town, so it's really worth taking the time to explore a little. It's definitely one of the places that I would happily go back to,

to spend longer there soaking up the atmosphere.

The opportunity to explore some of the islands with your skipper as a local guide was definitely one of the advantages of this holiday and something that I've never done before on a sailing charter. The two elements combined really well and, although it may not suit someone who wants a 100 per cent sailing holiday, setting the sails at 0900 and taking them down at 1700, it made for an incredibly relaxing break. For example, in Tinos, on the Wednesday, we hired a couple of cars in the afternoon to explore some of the villages inland.

We visited Pyrgos and Volax, to name just a couple, and generally explored the island. It was a really great way to see everything and the cost of the hire cars was covered by the kitty.

Delos was also a welcome addition to the itinerary. As well as being a beautiful island and a lovely sailing passage from Tinos, the ancient Greeks considered it to be the centre of the Cyclades and a sacred island where, according to mythology, Apollo and Artemis were born. There is a very large and well preserved ancient town and there are various walks around the ruins that allow you to take in as much or as little as you like. We arrived there early for two reasons; firstly

to avoid the crowds and more and more tour boats arrived and secondly to avoid the scorching heat later in the day. *Astarte* was anchored off the island and by the time we got back on board it was a relief to get underway and cool off.

### BACK TO PAROS

The charter ended on the Friday, when we headed back from Mykonos to Paros and back into Parikia Harbour. By lunchtime we were tied up alongside and some of the guests who were staying an extra night or two ashore said their goodbyes and checked into their hotels. The boat cleaning is taken care of after the guests leave, so apart from packing there's nothing to worry about or to delay you.

Looking back at the charter, my overwhelming memory is of a completely relaxing, very personal holiday that was tailored to suit the guests on board. *Astarte* exceeded my expectations – she was extremely comfortable, very spacious, sailed well and was perfect for chartering.

However, it was the local knowledge of George, our skipper, that made the whole experience so special.

I wouldn't hesitate to recommend Archipel Club to anyone who wants that little bit more from their holiday.

### ARCHIPEL CLUB

Archipel is a family-run, crewed yacht charter business established in Greece in 1962 and operating its own custom-built fleet of luxury Pahi 53 catamarans.

Prices: Cabin only from €930/week (approx £600/week). A common kitty of €200/week is payable upon boarding, which covers shared expenses. Whole boat for charter from €5,600/week (approx £4,000/week).

Contact +30 22840 22874  
info@archipelclub.com  
www.archipelclub.com

### FOOD AND DRINK

Excellent and inexpensive to the point where you probably won't want to bother to mess up your own galley. Plenty of small local dishes, delicious grilled vegetables and the ubiquitous Greek salad. As with anywhere in the Med, the fish is delicious, but a little pricey.

### CHARTER AREA

The Cyclades are islands scattered around the middle of the Aegean, an area where the sailing can be quite hard when a strong wind like the Meltemi decides to pay a visit. Between mid-June and September this local wind can blow ferociously from the north down through the islands at anything up to a F8. The best way to avoid it is to plan your visit for the beginning or end of the season (April to mid-June, September to October).