

European Adventure – Mediterranean Cruise aboard the yacht Wind Surf 2019

8 July 2019

Today we departed Canberra for the start of our holiday to London, Barcelona, Athens and a 20-day yacht cruise through the Mediterranean aboard Windstar's yacht, the Windsurf. We are overnighting at the Sydney International Airport Rydges to avoid any potential issues with flying out of Canberra early tomorrow morning. Also, this makes the start of the holiday more leisurely and relaxing.

However, not all went according to plan. Our jet service 5:15 pm flight from Canberra to Sydney was cancelled this afternoon. Qantas notified us about four hours before departure so enough time to make the change they recommended, which was to take the 5pm Dash 8 service. When we arrived at Canberra airport, we were early enough to be put on an earlier alternative flight at 4pm so that ended up being a real bonus.

When we arrived at the hotel, we found out that the main restaurant area is being renovated so they have created a temporary restaurant on the rooftop, but they only serve a buffet for the evening meal. We weren't hungry enough for a buffet and went down to the Touchdown bar and café where we decided to settle for a couple of burgers and a glass of wine each. Being a member of the Rydges group (free to join) really pays dividends as we get 20% off all food and drinks. Also being members, we received two free drink vouchers as we checked in. So, dinner was really cheap this evening. This was an excellent start to the budget.

We depart on our domestic flight with QF to Perth at 12:55 tomorrow and then connect with our direct service to London on QF9. We have a layover in Perth of about two hours so we will relax in the lounge as usual.

Well, that is all for today.

Steve and Maree

10 July 2019

Well, we arrived at LHR at 05:00 Wednesday morning. We had an enjoyable flight up from Perth on the new Qantas Dreamliner service. The direct flight is really good, although long at just over 16 hours, but doing the travel in business you don't really notice how long the flight is. Probably a very different matter if you are sitting down the back.

Our layover in LHR is 4 hours. I allowed extra time for the transit as I knew we had to collect our bags on arrival and then recheck them in for our BA flight to Barcelona. As it turns out we are now able to use the UK e-Gates for entry on Australian passports so this speeds up

the process immensely. After passing through the gates, it was just a short walk to the business check in desks. So, after landing at 05:00, collecting bags and checking the bags back in, we arrived at the BA lounge at 05:25. Not bad at all.

Now all we have to do is wait for the flight but plenty of time for Maree to go and have a shower which she is really looking forward to.

We arrived in Barcelona in very nice weather. Airport formalities were easy to go through and it was just a matter of waiting for our bags to arrive, which they did eventually. Our driver from Blacklane was there to collect us and whisk us away to the Hotel. His driving left a bit to be desired as he was talking to us all the way to the hotel and enjoyed using his hands as he spoke. Therefore, his hands were often off the steering wheel as he gestured with his hands above his head. But I guess that may be normal here. Any way by the time we reached our hotel, the Eurostar's Grand Marina, we were both very much awake.

We checked in, had a rest, and then went for a quick recce around the marina and did some essential shopping, bottled water, beer, and some wine. Tonight, we just stayed at the hotel for dinner, a very nice seafood paella accompanied by some nice Spanish wine, as we were too weary to venture out tonight. It has been a long 27-hour journey travelling to Barcelona from Sydney via Perth and London. So, tomorrow we will venture out starting along La Rambla.

Adiós por a hora

11 July 2019

This morning I awoke at around 04:00 after a great night's sleep. Maree is lying next to me still pushing up the zzz's. But she is sleeping well catching up on the sleep she didn't get on the flight across. I sleep well on the plane, but Maree doesn't. So, I just thought I would start today's blog.

As I mentioned yesterday, we are going to start with a walk along the famous La Rambla and take in the sights walking around the city. We intend to go back to the La Rambla for dinner tonight, probably for tapas.

Some background information on La Rambla.

La Rambla is a tree lined street in central Barcelona that stretches just over a kilometre connecting the Plaça de Catalunya in the centre with the Christopher Columbus Monument at Port Vell, located just around the corner from our hotel. La Rambla is often the first landmark that most tourists identify with the city. It is the central boulevard which cuts through the heart of the city centre and is a vibrant and lively promenade filled with Barcelona action at its best and apparently sometimes the worst. La Rambla can be roughly divided into seedy and non-seedy areas. This distinction between seedy and non-seedy becomes a lot clearer during the evening when the Southern end of the Rambla becomes something of a red-light district.

Historically, the course of La Rambla was originally a sewage-filled stream, usually dry but an important drain for the heavy rainwater flowing from the Collserola hills during spring and autumn. Rambla is Catalan for "wadi". Over the centuries, La Rambla became established as a centre of Barcelona city life, a long wide thoroughfare used for festivals, markets, and sports. Several large religious establishments were also built along the street during the period. These include the Jesuit Bethlehem monastery and college (1553), of which just the later church remains; the Carmelite St. Joseph's monastery, on the site of the current Boqueria market; and a Capuchin monastery at the lower end of the street.

Various conflicts over recent centuries took their toll on La Rambla's religious buildings, most notably the St. James's Night riots in 1835 when revolutionaries burned the monasteries and churches and killed a number of friars. The Spanish Civil War from 1936-39 put Barcelona under the control of anarchists who again targeted religious buildings and personnel, as well as being damaged by artillery and air attacks on the area from pro-Franco forces.

In recent times, on 17 August 2017, there was a terrorist attack where many people were struck by a van deliberately driven down the footpath on La Rambla, causing 15 deaths and at least 100 injuries.

Anyway, more later as we explore the area today and we will hopefully get some nice photos of the area that we can put up for you. Ah, the sun is starting to peak above the horizon. Time for breakfast.

Well, we started off from the hotel after having a leisurely breakfast. We were going to walk up to La Rambla but found some Pedi cabs waiting on a corner near the hotel. We asked about prices, and we were made an offer of an hour tour of the city for €40. That seemed an excellent price for a tour in this fashion. Turned out we were right. The guy took us all over the city, taking us to the tourist sights and even stopping and taking the photos for us that have us in the Pedi cab with the city behind us as you will see from the images below.

We started the tour at 09:30 and finished at 11:00. The peddler did ask us if we wanted longer for an extra €20 so we said yes, and it was well worth the extra money. We went to the following sights Columbus Monument, Port Vell, Santa Maria del Mar Cathedral, Parc de la Ciutadella, Arch de Triomf, and Sagrada Familia Cathedral, La Pedrera, Casa Batilo and then he dropped us off at the start of La Rambla.



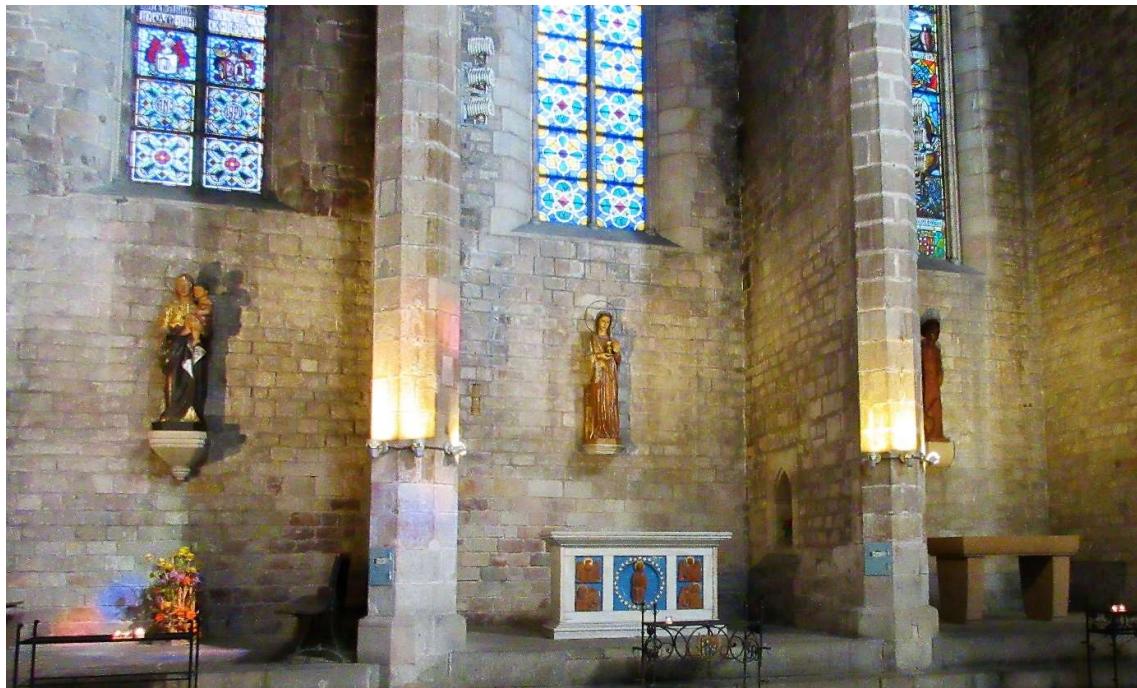
Maree and Steve on the Pedicab with Columbus Statue in background.



Statue of St Barbara Santa Maria del Mar Cathedral



Stain Glass Windows Santa Maria del Mar Cathedral



Stain Glass Windows Santa Maria del Mar Cathedral



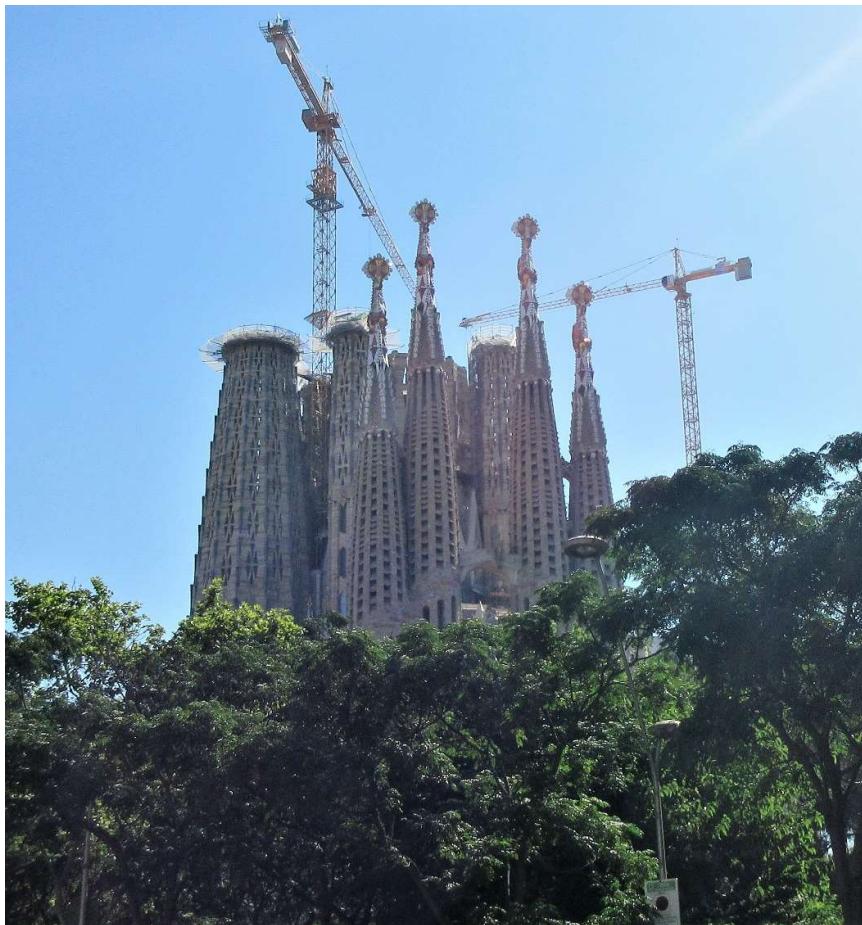
Maree and Steve in front of the Parc de la Ciutadella



Maree and Steve in front of the Parc de la Ciutadella



Arc de Triomf.



A distant shot of the Sagrada Familia Cathedral



A closer shot of the Sagrada Familia Cathedral



La Pedrera with Maree and Steve in the foreground



Casa Batilo



Steve and the Pedi Cab Peddler

We walked along La Rambla and stopped for a drink. As it was quite warm, we decided on a beer each, not realizing how large the glasses were going to be. Maree enjoyed hers as you can see but I did have to finish it for her; no surprises there – it was a very large glass.



Maree and that large glass of beer



La Rambla



La Rambla



La Rambla

After this we walked further along La Rambla and found a nice tapas café for lunch; the Tabarlot. The food was very enjoyable. We had three tapas dishes consisting of marinated salmon (very large thinly sliced piece of salmon gravlax style), calamari rings and bruschetta (or very similar). It doesn't sound a lot, but the three dishes were very filling and a great lunch.

It is early evening now and we are starting to lag again so we have decided tonight will be dinner at the hotel restaurant where we can just roll into bed afterwards. For the next couple of days, we will make lunch the main meal of the day. Ok, time to sign off for today, night everyone.

Hasta mañana.

12 July 2019

Today we decided to put exploring on hold, so we headed off to Maremagnum Shopping Centre in the vicinity of Port Vell, Barcelona. The distinctive Maremagnum building sits jutting out into the water at the end of a wooden jetty amongst the berthed yachts. The mirrored walls and arched roof reflect the water that surrounds it, giving it a glimmering blue glow. Around the edge of the building, you can see people relaxing on the wooden boardwalk, basking in the sunshine, and watching the boats come in and out of the port area. As well as shopping there are many restaurants around the outside perimeter of the building.



Maremagnum Shopping Centre



Panorama view of Port Vell Marina and Harbour with Maremagnum on the far right



Yacht Marina Port Vell

Access to the centre is via a long wooden bridge. Walking on the bridge emits sounds as though all the planks are loose and about to give way. The bridge was quite crowded today with tourists from recently arrived cruise ships.



Wooden Bridge leading to Maremagnum that opens in the middle to allow yachts to enter/leave the marina.



Port Vell Harbour



Port Vell Harbour Barcelona



Port Vell Harbour with Maremagnum Shopping Centre and wooden approach bridge in the background.

We are still debating where to go for dinner tonight, but it will most likely be back in La Rambla for some tapas.

13 July 2019

Well today we just lazed around the pool, went for a stroll and then back to the Tabarlot Restaurant, located off La Rambla in a side street, for dinner, once again enjoying some great tapas dishes. As usual we had started eating before I thought about taking some images but as we are heading back to this place for our last night in Barcelona, I will try to remember to take pics so you can see some of the great food we are enjoying (I remembered - see below). Tonight, we enjoyed the marinated salmon - gravlax style, calamari rings, thin bread with pesto, chicken strips, breaded brie slices, a very nice tuna

belly salad and a great bottle of Spanish dry wine - the best wine we have tried so far and highly recommended. We also had one croquet which was ordered as the waiter misunderstood our order for the bride. They thought it strange that we only ordered one. We didn't bother explaining what had happened and it was nice anyway as is all the food at this place. It may sound a lot of dishes, but they are just the perfect size to try various tapas.

Our Australian friends who live in the south of France and who we visited last year, told us that when you find an eatery that you really enjoy then stick with it. That is what we have done with the Tabarlot. That doesn't mean to say we haven't enjoyed food at other establishments, just that the food here is varied and consistently good and genuine Spanish cuisine.



Tabarlot Restaurant Exterior



Tabarlot Restaurant Interior

We had the following tapas dishes for dinner this evening. It was another fabulous night with great food and wine, and company of course. We also had the mushrooms with Iberian ham sauce but of course I forgot the picture.



Boqueria marinated salmon served with dill and bread



Pesto and Tomato Bread (partially eaten before I remembered to take a photo)



Octopus with smoked paprika and potato slices



Homemade croquettes of Goat's cheese and quince



Delicious, breaded brie slices with homemade jam and balsamic

14 July 2019

This morning we slept in to around 08:00, or should I say Maree did, and then we went down for breakfast. The selection for breakfast at this hotel is very good, but I consistently settle for the fresh fruit and yoghurt followed by smoked salmon on toasted pita bread with capers and brie. Yummy.



My Smoked Salmon on Pita with Capers and Brie

Today we took another leisurely walk around the city, wandering in and out of the different shops. On the way back I took an image of the sculpture we walk past every day as this steel sculpture is at the entrance to the Eurostar's Grand Marina Hotel. It overlooks the plaza and apparently welcomes and farewells those arriving and departing the Barcelona docks. The ferries to other countries and Spanish islands depart from these docks. The sculpture is named *Ones*, meaning waves, and was sculptured by Andreu Alfaro. The design is a tubular structure consisting of seven large steel arches, the largest being 42 metres tall and weighs 13 tonnes. They say that the design mimics the shapes and movement of waves; can't see it myself, but then again, I have never been the arty sort.



Sculpture is titled “Waves”.

15 July 2019

Today we joined the yacht Windsurf for the start of our 20-day sailing through the Mediterranean Sea. We will be visiting a total of 18 locations during the voyage. See the following map for details of the cruise. We board from 13:00 and set sail at 17:00 for the port of Palma on the Spanish Balearic Island of Majorca. We arrive the next day at 07:00.

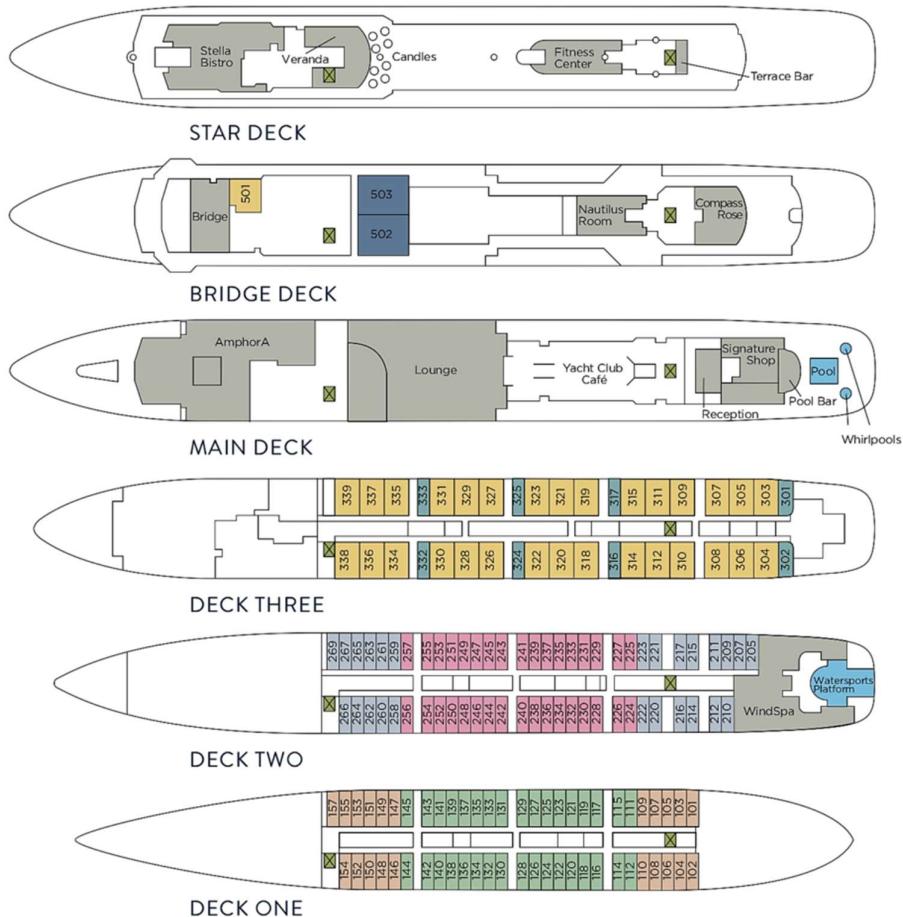


Map of our Mediterranean Yacht Cruise

Well, our yacht has arrived and is berthed, as expected, right next to the Hotel we are staying at. The following two images show a panoramic view of the vessel and the Windsurf deck plan. The view of the vessel was taken this morning as we were having breakfast.



Panoramic View of Windsurf docked at the World Trade Centre in Barcelona



Tonnage: 14,745

Length: 187 m

Beam: 20 m

Height: 80 m

Draught: 5.09 m

Decks: 8

Installed power: Four diesel-electric engines and computer-operated sails

Sail plan: Staysail schooner, 2,400 m² in seven triangular Dacron self-furled sails on five masts

Speed: 10–15 knots (19–28 km)

Capacity: 386 passengers

Crew: 214

We joined the vessel at 13:00. The formal processes were quite quick to complete when compared with the same with Windstar two years ago. The reason most likely is that this vessel, Windsurf, is a lot larger and has room for more staff to complete the onboard formalities.

After checking in it was upstairs to the open verandah for some lunch and then back to the room to unpack. The suite is very large, twice the size of the cabin we had on Windstar, where all the cabins were big but had the same layout. I have taken some images so you can see the suite. The suite has two bathrooms which I thought initially a bit odd for a couple, but it does mean we can both get ready at the same time and not wait for each other. It is also ideal for the twin share suites. The other cabins onboard, which are the same style as Windstar, have just the one bathroom.



Our suite aboard Wind Surf - Suite 322



Our suite aboard Wind Surf - Suite 322

We departed Barcelona on time at 17:00 to the Windstar Groups trademark Sail Away theme. They play a piece of classical music “Conquest of Paradise” by Vangelis at high volume as they unfurl the seven sails. A majestic sight and sound as you sit or stand at the

rear of the yacht to watch and listen to the sight that unfolds in front of you. All the Passengers on the other vessels in port just cram to the rails of their vessels to see the sight. It is incredible. Unfortunately, the volume was too low, so you didn't get the same moving feeling as we did on Windstar. I have asked the crew if they can turn the volume up for the outside speakers as this trademark Sail Away needs to be loud – I never thought I would ask for music to be turned up loud (and they did turn it up for the remainder the trip).

We headed for dinner around 19:00 in the AmthorA Restaurant. As usual with this Group the food was excellent, as were the wines. We sat at a table for four and were joined by a lady from Chicago. She was a very pleasant person and good company for the evening. She is travelling alone after recently losing her husband to cancer. She tried to get one of her friends to travel with her, but they couldn't get away for this 20-day cruise. We decided to go for a multiple table as it is a better option for meeting people on board. But we can also opt for a table for two if we choose to do so.

Well time to retire for the evening. Hasta mañana.

16 July 2019

Today we woke to the sounds of water splashing against the side of the yacht as we approached the island of Mallorca and the port of Palma.

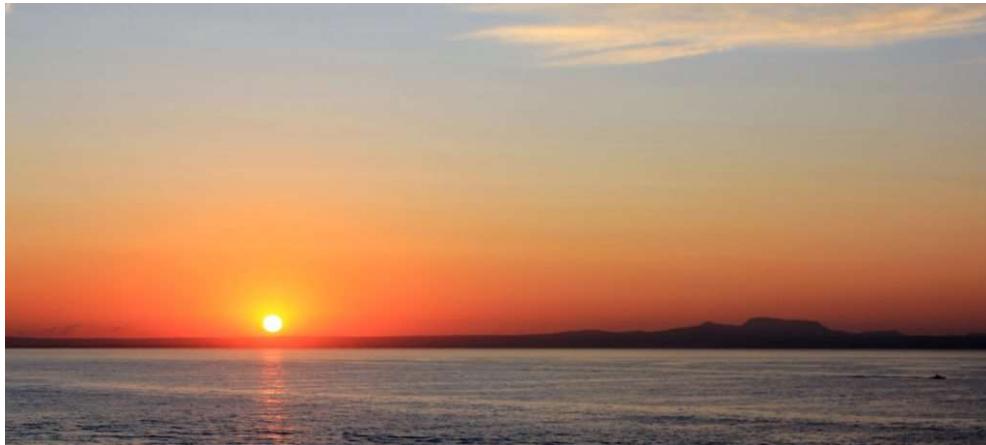
Palma takes its name from Palmeria, the town that was founded by the Roman General Quintus Caeillius Metellus Balearicus in 123 BC as part of the expansion across the Mediterranean. Situated on the sweep of a large bay, Palma had considerable advantages to exploit, and the Romans developed salt mining and olive cultivation as they exerted their influence on the island. With the fall of Rome, the city became Byzantine property in 534, was renamed Medina Mayurqa and was administered as part of Sardinia.

Almost two centuries passed before the city fell once again, this time to the Moors, and it became part of the powerful Caliphate of Cordoba. The Caliphate fragmented and an independent kingdom including parts of the mainland and the rest of the Balearic Islands took its place in 1015. The Denia Taifa had its capital between Cartagena and Valencia and was known for its promotion of piracy against the Christian coasts.

The Taifa lasted until 1229 when King James I re-conquered Mallorca and the other Balearic Islands which became subjects of the Crown of Aragon. Palma became somewhat of a backwater town at this point in its history with no major disasters or successes either. In 1891, disaster struck when a disease hit the vineyards of the island resulting in a substantial loss of population as people immigrated to the New World to look for a better life.

The city became a stronghold of the Nationalist forces during the Spanish Civil War. During the battle of Mallorca in 1936, Republican ground troops landed on Mallorca and its planes were successfully conducting bombing raids on Palma until the Nationalists were reinforced by the Italians who turned the tide in the air battle resulting in Franco's victory. During the battle, much of the city was destroyed but once in power, Franco remembered the loyalty shown by Palma and initiated a building boom in the 1950s and 1960s.

Palma has found its prosperity in tourism, and it is one of the most popular destinations in Spain. Its airport sees over 22 million people passing through each year. It has also become known as one of the country's most cosmopolitan cities.



Sunrise over Mallorca



Mallorca Square Panoramic View



Mallorca Cathedral Panoramic View

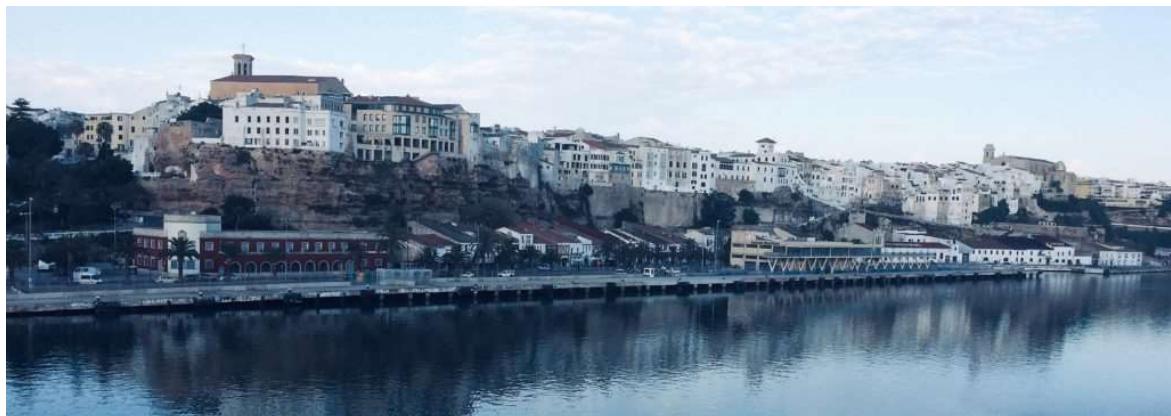
We sailed out of Palma de Mallorca at around 17:30. This yacht glides so smoothly through the waters that you don't even think you are actually moving. We once again enjoyed a lovely meal in the AmphorA Restaurant. Well, it is time to retire for the evening.

17 July 2019

We woke again to the gentle sounds of the waters breaking against the side of the yacht as we glided into the harbour of Mahon, Spain. The following images were taken as we arrived at port.



Mahon City Centre



Port of Mahon



Port of Mahon



Moon Setting as the Sun Rises

The following is some background to the city of Mahon and the island of Menorca.

Menorca is the second largest of the Balearic Islands and lies in the heart of the western Mediterranean. Its violent history includes occupations by Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Vandals, Moors, British and French who all left their mark behind.

Menorca's strategic position made it a pivotal point during the development of trade and growth in the Mediterranean ever since the Talaiotic culture from mainland Spain came here in the early Bronze Age. They built more than two thousand stone structures, temples, standing stones and elaborate burial chambers, which can still be seen throughout the island. As a result, it is one of the largest open-air museums in the world, with the highest concentration of megalithic monuments in the Mediterranean.

The first recorded visitors to the island were the Phoenicians followed by Greek traders trying to extend their range of trading posts to the west. A succession of occupiers followed from the first Roman colonization in 123 BC, to Byzantine rule in the early 6th century.

In 903, the island became part of the Caliphate of Cordoba and prospered under the Moorish rule as trade flourished, agricultural production grew, and extensive irrigation systems were built. In 1287, the Catalan army attacked and expelled the Moors from the island, but Menorca went into a decline period until the end of the Middle Ages.

The Turks attacked in the 16th century and the people of Ciutadella were either massacred or sent to the slave markets. This was followed by a prosperous time during the British rule from 1708 – 1756. With the invasion of 20,000 French troops, the British made a hasty retreat, and the ownership of the island was contested for the next 50 years, finally returning to Spain in 1802.

Menorca was in full support of the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War and Franco finally attacked in 1939 and the island paid a horrible price for not being on the Nationalists' side. Ironically, Franco's punishment of withholding funds helped preserve the island and was the basis for its tourism industry.



Our yacht, Windsurf, in port at Mahon



The city square in Mahon

The following is an image, the best I could do, of the Blood Moon we saw rising last night.



Blood Moon

18 July 2019



Our Yacht Wind Surf anchored in Alghero Bay in Sardinia. Image taken as we approached the vessel in the tender after returning from the old town of Alghero.

This morning we arrived in the port of Alghero. Alghero is one of Sardinia's most beautiful medieval cities. Yes, we have now moved on from the islands of Spain and are now travelling through the islands of Italy as well as the Amalfi coast in a few days' time.



Old Town of Alghero Sardinia

Alghero originally was named L'Alguerium and was so named after the abundance of seaweed along the coast and was originally established as a small fishing village in the 12th century by the Doria family. The town grew in importance quickly as a result of its strategic location and was carefully guarded by its Genoese founders. After a siege of 28 days in 1248, Pisa occupied Alghero but was only able to hold the city for four years. After the Genoese victory at the Battle of Meloria, it regained control and reestablished its dominance on the island.

The Aragonese first appeared on the scene in 1353 and took control of the city after a naval battle at Porto Conte. Catalan colonists arrived to settle the town and after an uprising in 1372, the remaining Sardinian residents were relocated to Villanova Monteleone, inland. From that point, the town became resolutely Catalan and changed its name to Alguer.

The town thrived during this period becoming the main Catalan port on the island and in 1501 gained its status as a city. Fortifications were built to defend against land and sea attacks. Further adding to its growing prestige was the arrival of the Holy Roman Emperor who was also the King of Spain, Charles V in 1541 to lead a campaign against the North African corsairs.



Old Town of Alghero Sardinia

In 1582 tragedy struck when the plague arrived. A local doctor recognized the symptoms from an epidemic he had experienced in Messina and was able to convince authorities to set up sanitary cordons around the city to prevent anyone from entering or leaving. Despite these efforts the plague had a devastating toll on the population and commerce. The city gradually recovered only to be hit again by the Black Death in 1652 killing 3,500 of its 5,000 residents.

After about 350 years of Spanish rule, the city passed to Austria with the treaty of Utrecht and then to the House of Savoy in 1720. The next couple of centuries resulted in hard times and the decline of Alghero, and by the 1920s its population had fallen to just over 10,000. Heavily bombed in 1943, Alghero remained in poor shape until tourism arrived in the late 1960s, paving the way for the development of the modern new town.

Following are some views of the yacht as we returned to the vessel after visiting the old town of Alghero in north Sardinia.



You can see the water sports deck open for use. You can undertake various water sport activities from this deck.



View of the yacht as we returned to the vessel after visiting the old town of Alghero, Sardinia.



View of the yacht as we returned to the vessel after visiting the old town of Alghero, Sardinia.



Nice view showing the tall masts of Wind Surf. It is great watching the sails unfurl as we set sail.

19 July 2019

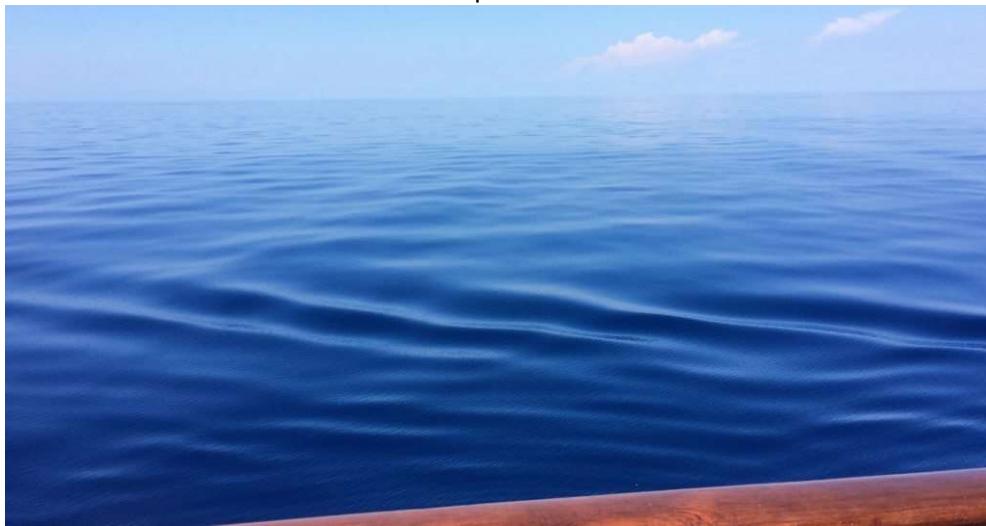
Today, we are at sea all day as we sail to Amalfi. So, nothing to add until we arrive in Amalfi. I'll add some images today that we take around the yacht.

We were also becalmed as there was no wind whatsoever and completely flat seas. Can just imagine the old days when the old wooden ships had to be towed by the sailors in an oared launch. We of course have diesel engines to propel us along at about 10kts when there is no wind.

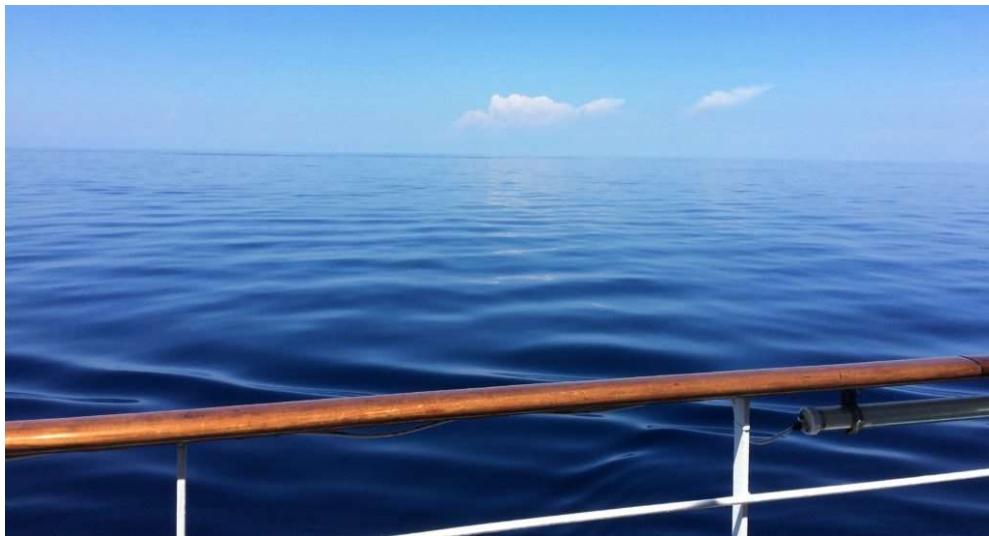
Some images of the Mediterranean at this time.



Not a Breath of Wind as we sail under power



Not a Breath of Wind as we sail under power.



Not a Breath of Wind as we sail under power.



Maree in the pool aboard Wind Surf



View outside Compass Rose Lounge and Bar at rear of yacht located on the top deck.



Inside View of Compass Rose Lounge and Bar



View - Pool Deck Rear of Yacht with spa in foreground and pool behind



View forward towards the Verandah Restaurant



Top Deck Rear View of Yacht



Reception and Lounge



Outside seating for the Verandah Restaurant where lunch is served. There is a large inside option as well.



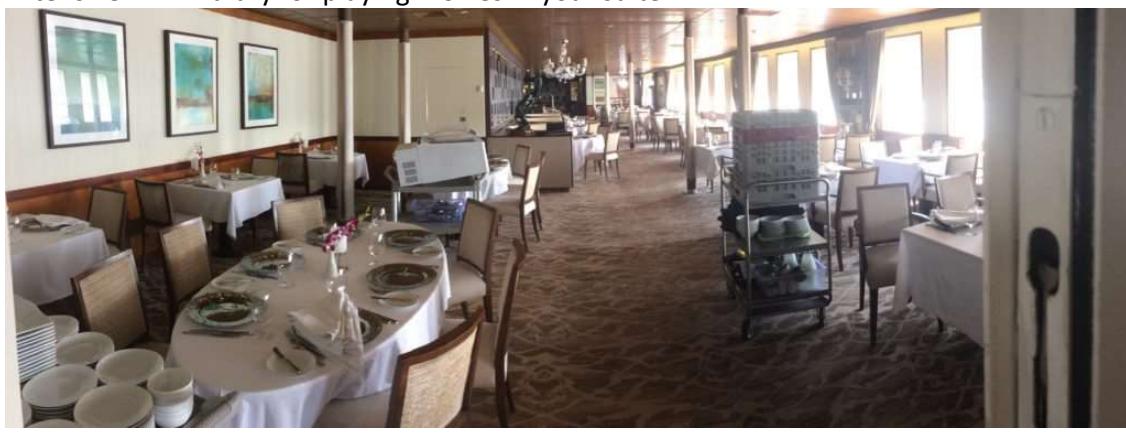
Lounge with Cafe



Lounge with band in evening and excursion discussions and bar



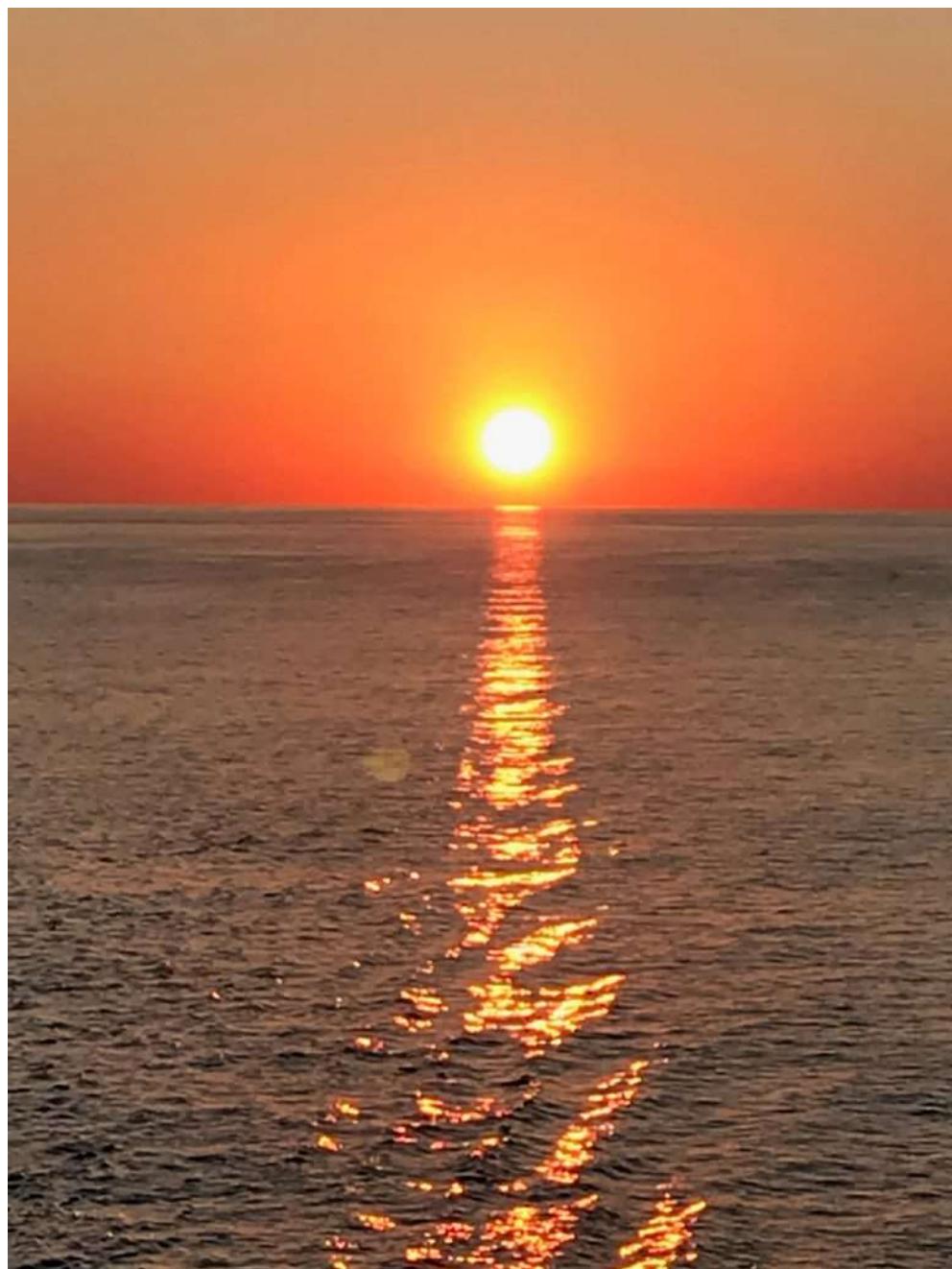
Extensive DVD Library for playing movies in your suite.



AmphorA Restaurant - Restaurant continues around the corner and can seat the 300 hundred guests in one sitting.

20 July 2019

We were able to get some pictures of the sunsets last night.



Sunset from Windsurf

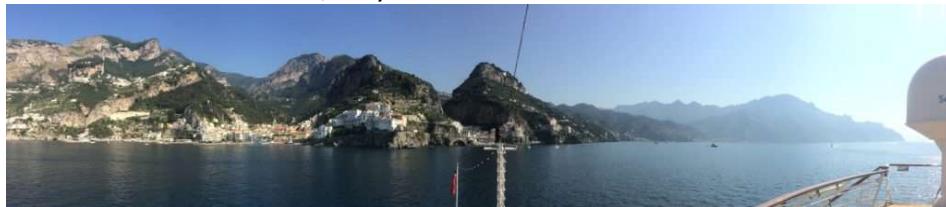


Sunset from Windsurf

Today we arrived in Amalfi and its picturesque coastline. Italy's Amalfi Coast has a classic Mediterranean landscape, a blend of both natural and cultural wonders. The terrain includes dramatic coastline topography scattered with terraced vineyards, orchards, and pastures—with magical views of the vibrant waters of the Mediterranean below.



Panoramic View of Amalfi, Italy



Panoramic View of Amalfi, Italy



Amalfi, Italy



Wind Surf with Sails unfurled in Amalfi.

The climate, abundant resources, and natural beauty have drawn people to this coast for many centuries. These people have also left their mark including the Greeks, Romans, Normans, Saracens, and Arab-Sicilians. Amalfi communities often cluster along cliffs, their terraces blending into the rock to add their own picturesque charm to the natural beauty of the coast. The towns of Amalfi and Ravello are home to many examples of artistic and architectural excellence. The city in the 11th and 12th centuries centered the Amalfi Maritime Republic and was a forceful naval power throughout the Mediterranean. Amalfi's ports also saw extensive trade with North Africa, and the city retains monasteries of Arab-Sicilian architecture.

We spent the day on a tour to the ruins of Pompeii, where Mount Vesuvius 'most famous eruption took place in the year 79 A.D. and buried the ancient Roman city of Pompeii under a thick carpet of volcanic ash. The dust "poured across the land" like a flood and shrouded the city in darkness. Two thousand people died, and the city was abandoned for many years. When a group of explorers rediscovered the site in 1748, they were surprised to find that—underneath a thick layer of dust and debris—Pompeii was mostly intact. The buildings, artifacts and skeletons left behind in the buried city have taught us a great deal about everyday life in the ancient world.

Life in Pompeii

Since the Greeks settled in the area in the 8th century B.C., the region around Mount Vesuvius and the Bay of Naples attracted wealthy vacationers who wanted to soak up the

sun and the scenery. By the turn of the first century A.D., the town of Pompeii, located about five miles from the mountain, was a flourishing resort for Rome's most distinguished citizens. Elegant houses and elaborate villas lined the paved streets. Tourists, townspeople, and slaves bustled in and out of small factories and artisans' shops, taverns and cafes, and brothels and bathhouses. People gathered in the 20,000-seat arena and lounged in the open-air squares and marketplaces. On the eve of that fateful eruption in 79 A.D., scholars estimate that there were about 20,000 people living in Pompeii and the surrounding region.

Mount Vesuvius

The Vesuvius volcano is said to be hundreds of thousands of years old and had been erupting for generations. In about 1780 B.C a violent eruption (known today as the "Avellino eruption") shot millions of tons of superheated lava, ash, and rocks about 22 miles into the sky. That eruption destroyed almost every village, house, and farm within 15 miles of the mountain. Even after a massive earthquake struck the Campania region in 63 A.D.—a quake that, scientists now understand, offered a warning rumble of the disaster to come—people still flocked to the shores of the Bay of Naples. Pompeii grew more crowded every year.

79 A.D.

Sixteen years after the August 79 A.D. earthquake, Mount Vesuvius erupted again. The blast sent a plume of ashes, pumice and other rocks, and scorching-hot volcanic gases so high into the sky that people could see it for hundreds of miles around. As the airborne debris cooled the debris drifted to earth: first the fine-grained ash, then the lightweight chunks of pumice and other rocks. Some people did not flee and for those who stayed behind the conditions soon grew worse. As more and more ash fell, it clogged the air, making it difficult to breathe. Buildings collapsed. Then a flowing mixture of superheated poison gas and rock travelling at high speed poured down the side of the mountain and engulfed everything and everyone in its path. By the time the Vesuvius eruption halted the next day, Pompeii was buried under millions of tons of volcanic ash. Approximately 2,000 people died. Pompeii, along with the smaller neighboring towns of Stabiae and Herculaneum, was abandoned for centuries.

Rediscovering Pompeii

Pompeii remained mostly untouched until 1748, when a group of explorers looking for ancient artifacts arrived in Campania. While digging they found that the ashes had acted as a preservative. Underneath all the dust, Pompeii was virtually exactly as it had been 2,000 years before. Its buildings were intact. Skeletons were frozen right where they'd fallen. Everyday objects and household goods littered the streets and archaeologists uncovered jars of preserved fruit and loaves of bread. Many scholars say that the excavation of Pompeii played a major role in the neo-Classical revival of the 18th century. Europe's wealthiest and most fashionable families displayed art and reproductions of objects from the ruins, and drawings of Pompeii's buildings helped shape the architectural trends of the era. Today, the excavation of Pompeii has been going on for almost three centuries, and scholars and tourists remain just as fascinated by the city's eerie ruins as they were in the 18th century.

21 July 2019

This morning we arrived into the port of Catania (Sicily), Italy.

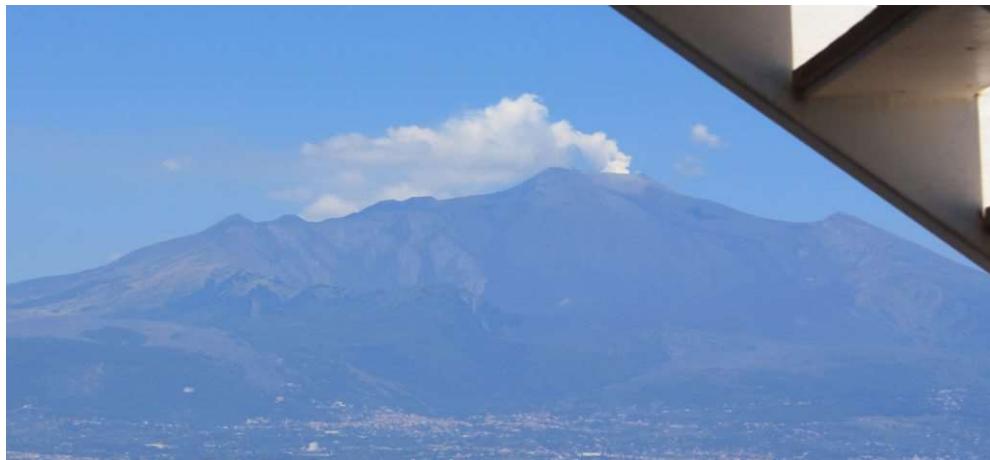
Katane (now Catania) was originally founded by the Chalcidians in 729 BC who had moved into the area from Naxos in the north. It grew to become a major regional power in the 4th and 5th centuries BC. As was the case with other Sicilian settlements, a succession of foreign rule took place over the centuries that followed. Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, and Normans all left their mark on the city, and it was sacked by Swabian emperors, Henry VI and Frederick II. Aragonese sovereigns of the Kingdom of Sicily often resided in the city and by the mid-1600s; Catania had gained prosperity as a commercial centre with an ideal location in the middle of Mediterranean trading routes.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, Catania endured pirate raids, epidemics, famines, and natural disasters. On March 8, 1669, Mount Etna started multiple eruptions covering several weeks. Lava flowed towards Catania that then had a population of 20,000 and a group of local men tried to divert the flow but were only partially successful. The residents stayed in the city thinking the walls would protect them, but Catania was engulfed and 17,000 people died.

Twenty-Four years later on January 11, 1693, a huge earthquake hit Sicily and Malta and was followed by a tsunami estimated to be 30 feet in height. The death toll was in excess of 60,000 in the region with about 12,000 citizens of Catania amongst the dead.

Out of the destruction arose the city that stands today. Under the supervision of architects Giovanni Vaccarini and Stefano Ittar, a new street grid was created incorporating spacious squares and streets of differing widths, all designed as part of an anti-seismic strategy. Much of the city was rebuilt using the very lava rock that had once destroyed it.

Unfortunately, more construction was required again after heavy bombing and fighting in 1943 during World War II. A restoration project was started in the early 2000s to bring the older buildings back to their former glory. Today, Catania is a major industrial and transportation hub with one of the busiest ports in Italy.



Mt Etna Erupting Steam following full Eruption 24 hours ago – 21 July 2019



Sicilian Coastline

Some pics from last night's BBQ party on board Wind Surf as we sailed from Catania to Valletta, Malta.



A selection for main course BBQ night Wind Surf



Fresh Lobster Tails on the BBQ



Paella at the BBQ on Wind Surf



Setting up BBQ Night on Wind Surf



Sunset Catania, Sicily, Italy with Mt Etna to the right of the image

22 July 2019

This morning we arrived into the port of Valletta, Malta.

You can see from the images that Malta is quite an impressive city.



View of Valletta from Wind Surf as we arrive in Malta.



View of Valletta from Wind Surf as we arrive in Malta.



View of Valletta from Wind Surf as we arrive in Malta.

Malta's history dates back to the very dawn of civilization. It was influenced by the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, and the Byzantines. St Paul brought Christianity to the islands on 60 AD, after being shipwrecked during a passage to Rome. In contrast to the island's long history, Valletta is relatively young. Most European settlements evolved over many centuries, but Valletta was one of the first to be built on a brand-new site using modern city planning starting in 1565.

From 1530 – 1798, the Knights of St John ruled Malta and ushered in a golden age that made it a key player on the economic and cultural stages of Europe. The Knights originally established their settlement in the Three Cities and fort St Angelo across the harbour from Valletta.

Prior to the Great Siege, the Maltese Islands were under constant threat from the Ottoman Turks who enslaved most of Gozo's population after a raid in 1551. Grand Master Jean Parisot de la Valette recognized the vulnerabilities of the harbour and Fort St Elmo was built. Valette did his best to fortify, with an imminent attack looming. Additional forces were requested from Emperor Charles V, the Pope, and the Viceroy of Sicily, but instead of reinforcements, in May 1565, the Ottoman fleet arrived with 40,000 men lead by Dragut Reis, Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent's most feared commander. The Great Siege was under way.

The Knights numbered only 700 with an additional 8,000 regular troops so residents fled inland to the fortified towns of Medina and Birgu. A small garrison of Knights held Fort Elmo for 36 days, resulting in the loss of 8,000 Turks including Dragut Reis. Mustafa Pasha took command and the Turks advanced on St Angelo resulting in the bloodiest fighting of the Holy War. The 71-year-old Grand Master took up arms and despite repeated attacks, Mustafa Pasha's forces held off. By the end of summer, the Ottoman morale was waning, and long-awaited reinforcements appeared for the Knights in Mellieha Bay. The Turks retreated but lost thousands of men in the process and the Great Siege ended on 8 September 1565.

The Ottoman power had been diminished and the magnificent Baroque city of Valletta was built and named after Grand Master Jean Parisot de la Valette.



View of Valletta from Wind Surf as we arrive at Malta.



Maree and Steve with city of Valletta in the background as we arrive in Malta.



Main Street Valletta, Malta



Main Street Valletta, Malta



Main Street Valletta, Malta



Cathedral Valletta, Malta



Cathedral Valletta, Malta



Cathedral Valletta, Malta



Cathedral Valletta, Malta



View of Valletta from the old fort, Malta



View of Valletta from the old fort, Malta



View of Valletta from the old fort, Malta



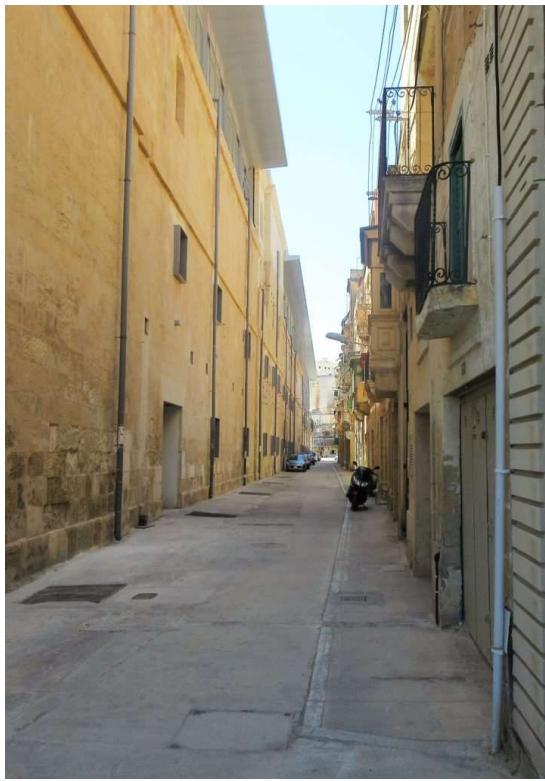
Main Street in Valletta, Malta



Pillars where they mount the Saints-on-Saints Day



Street in Valletta, Malta



Old Street Scene Valletta, Malta



Old Street Scene Valletta, Malta



Old Street Scene Valletta, Malta

23 July 2019

We are at sea all day as we sail to Gythion, Greece.

24 July 2019

We are anchored in the harbour of Gythion, Greece today.

The reputed founders of ancient Gythion were Heracles and Apollo who frequently appear on its coins or in other legends. In 455 BC, during the First Peloponnesian War, Gythion was burned by the Athenian admiral Tolmides who besieged the city with 50 ships and 4,000 hoplites. It was rebuilt and was the building ground for the Spartan fleet in the Peloponnesian War.

In 219 BC, Philip V of Macedon tried to capture the city but without success. Under Nabis, Gythion became a major naval arsenal and port. During the Roman Spartan War, Gythion was captured after a lengthy siege. After the war finished, Gythion was made part of the Union of Free Laconians under Achean protection. Nabis recaptured Gythion three years later and the Spartan fleet defeated the Achean fleet outside of Gythion. Gythion was liberated by a Roman fleet under the command of Aulus Atilius Serranus. Subsequently Gythion formed the most important of the Union of Free Laconians, a group of 24, later 18 communities leagued together to maintain their autonomy against Sparta and declared free by Caesar Augustus.

After the earthquake in 375 AD, Gythion was abandoned. Gythion remained a small village throughout the Byzantine and Ottoman eras. Its importance grew when Tzannetos Grigorakis built his tower at Cranae, and more people came to settle in Gythion.

Gythion is the largest and most important town in Mani. Most of the ruins of ancient Gythion are now submerged in the Laconian Gulf. Some of the walls remains can be seen on the sandy beach of Valtaki and in the shallow waters where the Dimitrios shipwreck lies stranded. It is also the capital of the municipality of Gythion.



Gythion Coastline taken from the top deck of Wind Surf. It was too hot today to walk around the town, so we just took in the views from the yacht.

25 July 2019

Today we arrived into the port of Piraeus in Athens. This is the end of the cruise from Barcelona but of course we stay onboard as we are continuing on the next cruise around the Greek Islands. So, it will be a leisurely day for us starting with breakfast with the friends we have made on board as we say goodbye.

Don't forget to check back to journey with us on the next part of our great yacht excursion through the Greek Isles.

Images of all of us at the farewell dinner last night where we said goodbye to the friends we made leaving the yacht to make their journey home.



Cindy and Al, Dallas Texas



Jean and Mike, Denver Colorado



Jo-anne and Jim, Toronto Canada



Maree and Steve, Canberra Australia

26 July 2019

Happy birthday Maree

Today we are in Nafplio, Greece.

Nafplio is less than two hours from Athens. In the 6th century BC, the city was captured by Damokratis, the King of Argos, as it allied with Sparta during the Second Messenian War. The next centuries were not active for the history of Nafplio as it was overshadowed by the neighbouring Argos.

In Medieval Times, Nafplio was occupied by the Venetians who made it an important naval spot in the Peloponnese. The Venetians constructed the impressive Palamidi Fortress above the town to protect it from enemies and also built a castle in Bourtzi, a small islet at the entrance to the port.

In the 16th century and after many sieges, the town was conquered by the Ottomans. Nafplio was among the first towns to be set free during the Greek War of 1821. It became the seat of the permanent Greek government until the end of the war and many war heroes and fighters moved to Nafplio. After the end of the war, it was in the port of Nafplio where the first governor of the Greek State arrived, Ioannis Kapodistrias, making the town the first capital of Greece. At the time of Kapodistrias, many public buildings were constructed, including the residence of the governor, also known as Palatka. It was also in the church of Agios Spyridon in the old town of Nafplio that Kapodistrias was assassinated by his political opponents on 27 September 1831.

King Otto chose to move the capital to Athens and that wasn't necessarily a bad thing as the romantic combination of the Venetian charm and Ottoman seductiveness remained unscathed. However, following the move, the city of Nafplio became less important. But Nafplio still continues to attract visitors to the city. The city of Nafplio is like a living museum as it is situated on the Argolic Gulf in the northeast Peloponnese. The streets showcase jasmine and bougainvillea creepers through the streets while the hub of the city is watched over by two imposing forts looking down protectively. Most of the old town is on a peninsula jutting out into the gulf; this peninsula forms a naturally protected bay. Originally almost isolated by marshes, deliberate landfill projects, primarily since the 1970s, have nearly doubled the land area of the city.

Enjoy the images of the town Nafplio, Greece.



Old Town Street, Nafplio



Old Town Street, Nafplio



Old Town Street, Nafplio



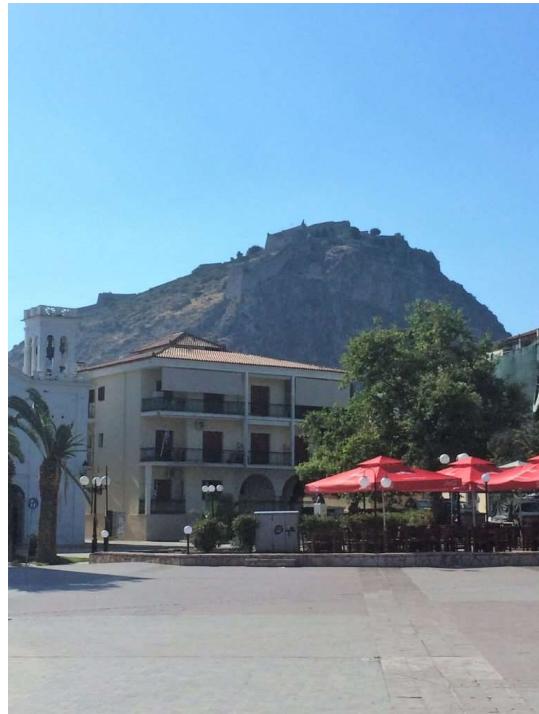
Old Town Street, Nafplio



Old Town Street, Nafplio



Nafplio Restaurants



Old Fort Nafplio



Steve in Nafplio Old Town



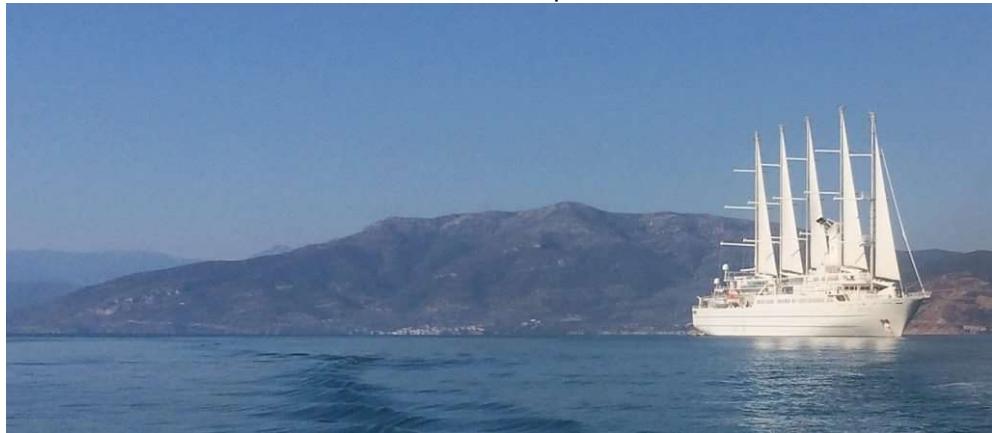
Wind Surf in Nafplio Bay taken while we were onshore.



Maree and Wind Surf View at Nafplio



Maree and Wind Surf Panoramic View at Nafplio



Wind Surf at Anchor in Nafplio



Two Yachts setting sail from Nafplio.



Old Fort in Nafplio Harbour

27 July 2019

Yesterday we had the Wind Surf sister yacht, Wind Star, in port with us in Nafplio. The captains decided to do a joint sail away from Nafplio. Wind Surf started to move out to sea as Wind Star joined us from behind. Both vessels were playing the sail away music by Vangelis – Conquest of Paradise. I have taken images of this sail away. Wind Star and Wind Surf unfurled their sails as the music played and at one stage were side by side. It was a great sight and a rarity for both vessels to be in port at the same time. Images are of the sail away yesterday afternoon.



Maree with Wind Star yacht in background during joint sail away



Maree and Steve with Wind Star yacht in background during joint sail away



Wind Star Sail Away with Wind Surf



Wind Star Sail Away with Wind Surf



Wind Star Sail Away with Wind Surf

I spoke with the captain this morning telling him we thought the double sail away with the sister yacht was a great sight. He told me that this had been put together by the company as a promotional exercise. There was a drone above us and behind taking video of the two yachts sailing together out of the harbour with Wind Star and her five sails and Wind Surf with her seven sails billowing in the wind. The footage will be used in their promotional videos and in the future catalogue. It was a great start to the evening.

As it was Maree's birthday yesterday, we decided to have dinner at the Candles Restaurant. This is a restaurant setup by the crew for the evening on the top deck. You get the nice warm sea breeze and excellent views while eating outside. We were joined by a couple from Denver, Colorado for the evening and we all had a good time. After we had finished main course, the crew brought a birthday cake to the table. This was a lovely gesture and a very nice cake which was a layered chocolate mousse.

After dinner we went to the Compass Rose lounge on the top deck where we had a few wines to top of the evening and joined in with the "Name that Tune" trivia game being played.

This morning we arrived at the harbour of Mykonos. After breakfast we joined the tender for a transfer to the island where we wandered around the town for a few hours. After a quick bite of lunch at a local restaurant we returned to the yacht. As the Wind Surf is staying anchored in port overnight, we will head back to shore for dinner in a local restaurant.

Following are some images of the town of Mykonos.



Mykonos Narrow streets and white buildings



Mykonos Greece View of Harbour from Café

28 July 2019

Last night we went into Mykonos for dinner. As we were going to be anchored all night it was the perfect opportunity to try some local Greek food. We had a great evening at a local restaurant tasting dishes of tzatziki and bread, Greek salad followed by mains of whole grilled squid and Maree had the steamed mussels. All dishes were excellent. As we went to pay the bill the waiter said “no, you must have a local dessert, on us”. He served a dish of thick yoghurt and cherries. He did give us the name of the dish but I cannot remember the name so I’ll have to try and Google it. It was delicious. After a leisurely two hour dinner and some very fine Greek wine (our choice to have the slow dinner) we headed back to the yacht. After a couple of glasses of wine aboard Wind Surf we retired for the evening.

This morning at about 06:30 Wind Surf up anchored and we sailed to the island of Syros where we arrived around 10:00. We will be in port all day and departing for Kusadasi, Turkey at 17:00 this evening.



Lunch on the Greek Island of Syros

Syros is the island where Greek tradition and western influence come to a harmonious marriage. The great number of beautiful beaches delights the sea and sand lovers. I hate the sand of course but the beaches are nice. The island of senses is well known for its usual gastronomy and unique local dishes. Syros also offers a vibrant culture and strong passion for the arts. We enjoyed a nice stroll around this town built on the banks of the Mediterranean Sea.

Enjoy the images of us having dinner last night in Mykonos and the town of Syros where we spent today.



Maree and Steve at Dinner Mykonos



Mykonos Harbour View with Maree in the foreground



Mykonos Harbour



Syros Cathedral on the Hill



Town of Syros



Town of Syros

29 July 2019

This morning we arrived into Kusadasi, Turkey. We decided to just go for a walk around the town as Wind Star is holding a special event in Ephesus tonight with a four course dinner held outside the historic library. The function starts at 19:00 and finishes at 22:30 where we then set sail for the island of Patmos at around 23:00.

Kusadasi translates to “Island of the Birds” and is a lovely small port along the shores of a small bay. It is a terraced village overlooking the beautiful bay of the Aegean and seems to have been created purely for the tourists. Historically the early settlers in Kusadasi were the Lelegians and Carians who moved from central Anatolia around 3000 BC. They were establishers of a colony on the outskirts of the Pilav Mountain in Kusadasi. They founded the cities of Ania and Melia. The mild climate allowed the inhabitants to grow essential products such as olives, grapes and figs for extracting oil and producing wine and sweets on the fertile lands around the city.

In the 10th century BC, 12 Ionian cities – Samos, Khios, Miletus, Priene, Ephesus, Teos, Erythrai, Klazonemi, Libidos, Phocaea, Colophon and Smyrna – were established and reputed to be the most developed cities of that age. In 200 BC, Kusadasi and its environs were dominated by the Roman Empire. With the division of the Roman Empire this then became a Byzantine state.

The climate changed causing serious earthquakes and changed the route of the Caystros River; Ephesus was mostly destroyed during this time and lost its prior importance and prosperity. The result then forced the Byzantines to search for a new port and a new road that would be suitable for trading.

Following World War I, Kusadasi was invaded by the Greeks; however, after a long struggle, in 1922 Kusadasi became part of the Turkish Republic with Izmar as the capital.

Following are some images of Kusadasi.



The town of Kusadasi, Turkey



The town of Kusadasi, Turkey



Harbour View and old Fort Kusadasi, Turkey



The Town of Kusadasi



The Town of Kusadasi from Wind Surf

30 July 2019

Today we arrived at the Greek Island of Patmos. We are anchored in the bay for the day with a tender service to the old town.

Patmos is famous as a religious destination. This is an extremely important destination for the Orthodox pilgrims as St John chose this island to write the Book of Revelation (Apocalypse). Little seems to have changed in Patmos during the 2,000 years since St John experienced his Revelation here. St John's hillside cave is now a monastery and an even larger monastery now stands out atop the island's tallest hill.

There are no sizable towns in Patmos, though; just the picturesque small harbour community of Skala and the labyrinthine whitewashed village of Hora. However, Patmos still thrives in barely disturbed bays lined with sand and pebble beaches, soothed by clear waters and overlooked by pine clad and heather coated hillsides.

Following are some images as we arrived into the bay. We were surprised to find the island completely hidden from view by fog. By 08:30 the fog started to clear so I was able to get some good images of the bay with the fog clearing.



On arrival into the Bay at Patmos Island we encountered fog. The images show the fog slowly lifting.



Fog slowly lifting



Fog slowly lifting



Fog slowly lifting



Fog finally lifted giving us a great view of the bay



Patmos, Greece



Patmos, Greece

We took the tender to shore where we wandered around the town before stopping at a local Taverna for a well earned refreshing beverage.



People watching as we enjoyed a nice refreshing beverage at a local Taverna in Patmos

31 July 2019

We travelled overnight arriving in Rhodes to another day of glorious sunshine. We will probably go for a walk later in the morning but it is expected to be very hot today and quite humid.



A picture of the Greek Island, Rhodes showing the Old Town Wall.

Maree took the following images as she wandered around the old town in Rhodes. I returned to the yacht as the weather was too hot.



Street of the Knights Rhodes, Greece



Old Town Palace of the Grand Master Rhodes, Greece



Old Town Palace of the Grand Master Rhodes, Greece



Old Town Palace of the Grand Master Rhodes, Greece



Old Town Palace of the Grand Master Rhodes, Greece



Old Town Approach to the Palace of the Grand Master Rhodes, Greece



Old Town Shopping Street Rhodes, Greece



Old Town Shopping Street Rhodes, Greece



Old Town Shopping Street Rhodes, Greece



Maree's Lunch Greek Salad, Old Town of Rhodes, Greece

Following is some history for the Greek Island of Rhodes.

According to mythology, Rhodes was the bride of the sun god Helios. Helios bestowed upon Rhodes light, warmth and vegetation. Their three grandsons Kamiros, Lalyssos and Lindos founded the cities which are named after them. When the three cities banded together in 408 BC to create a new capital, they did so to gain even greater access to the rich trading and shipping routes of the Mediterranean and Asia Minor, particularly Egypt. The city of Rhodes rapidly flourished under the Dorians having inherited lucrative commercial contacts and cultural traditions. Great temples were erected on the Acropolis and a wide straight road was built down to the harbour. The Colossus was built as a symbol of Rhodian strength and wealth. During the Persian wars Rhodes sided with Persia, and in a prolonged Peloponnesian conflict, Rhodes came to the aid of Sparta.

Rhodes' authority in the region declined as Rome, once an ally and trading partner, eventually overran and annexed the island. It was not until the early 14th century that Rhodes would emerge again as a major force. The Order of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem took refuge on Rhodes in 1306 and three years later took control of the island. For over two centuries Knights from Spain, France, Italy and England came to join the order, dedicated to returning Jerusalem to the Christian fold. The Knights renovated the huge fortifications over the ancient city and built the inns and castle, the hallmarks of Rhodes.

Many invaders assaulted the city throughout the residence of the Knights. The Sultan of Egypt tried and failed and then Mohammed II tried in 1480, with 1000 ships full of soldiers. The Knights sank all the ships with cannon fire. The Turks were enraged that a force of 650 Knights, 1,000 Greeks, 250 Genoese and a handful of venetians could stop a force almost 50 times larger. By 1522 the Knights' numbers had dwindled to a mere 180. Eventually, however, Rhodes fell to the large army of Suleiman the Magnificent in December 1522. The Sultan deployed 400 ships delivering 100,000 men to the island (200,000 in other sources). Against this force the Knights, under Grand Master Philippe Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, had about 7,000 men-at-arms and their fortifications. The siege lasted six months, at the end of which the surviving defeated Hospitallers (The Order of Knights of the Hospital of Saint John of Jerusalem) were allowed to withdraw to the Kingdom of Sicily. Despite the defeat, both Christians and Muslims seem to have regarded the conduct of Villiers de L'Isle-Adam as extremely valiant, and the Grand Master was proclaimed a Defender of the Faith by Pope Adrian VI (see Knights of Cyprus and Rhodes). The knights would later move their base of operations to Malta.

1 August 2019

This morning we arrived into the port of Ayios Nikolaos, Crete. As we arrived we passed a vessel that was the splitting image of our Wind Surf yacht. The vessel we passed was actually the Club Med 2 yacht. Our yacht, Wind Surf, was formally the yacht Club Med 1 and was purchased by the Windstar group in 1998. Our yacht was built in 1989 and Club Med 2 was built in 1990. Our yacht has been heavily refurbished and the interior is completely different to that of the original design. Our Captain states that the two yachts are identical but according to Wikipedia the Club Med 2 is about 7 metres longer than ours. The Captain begs to differ so we will accept the Captain's version. After all he should know...

Some history of the area follows.

Ayios Nikolaos was settled in the late Bronze Age by Dorian occupants of Lato at a time when the security of the Lato hill front became a lesser concern and easy access to the harbour at Ayios Nikolaos became more important.

Ayios Nikolaos was a thriving place in these ancient times. Ayios Nikolaos served as a port for the city state of Lato which was inland from this location. Ayios Nikolaos remained a port under the Venetians, who renamed it Ayios Nikolaos after a 10th and 11th century church of the same name. The venetians named the gulf Mirabella which translates as "Beautiful View" in Italian.

The town declined under the Turks who destroyed a Genoese fortress, but in the late 19th century the town began to thrive again as a popular destination for travellers. The town is still an important port and we saw many fisherman preparing their lines, nets and boats in the Marina as we walked through.

Ayios Nikolaos is the cosmopolitan capital of Lasithi with 20,000 permanent residents. The name Ayios Nikolaos translates to St Nicholas. Ayios Nikolaos is a common name in Greece as St Nicholas is the patron saint of sailors and of all Greece.

Enjoy the photographs and note that some images have the Club Med 2 in them and not Wind Surf. Club Med 2 is at anchor and Wind Surf is docked in the images.



Ayios Nikolaos, Crete, Greece Windsurf



Ayios Nikolaos, Crete, Greece Swimming Beach with clear Blue Aegean Waters



Ayios Nikolaos, Crete, Greece Swimming Beach with clear Blue Aegean Waters



Ayios Nikolaos, Crete, Greece Swimming Beach with clear Blue Aegean Waters



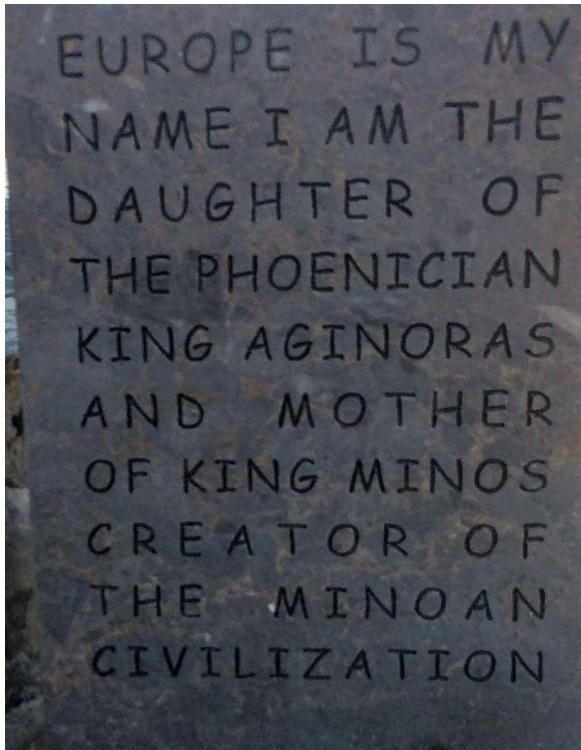
Ayios Nikolaos, Crete, Greece Marina



Ayios Nikolaos, Crete, Greece Marina and Ship Yards with Club Med 2 in the background, top left of image



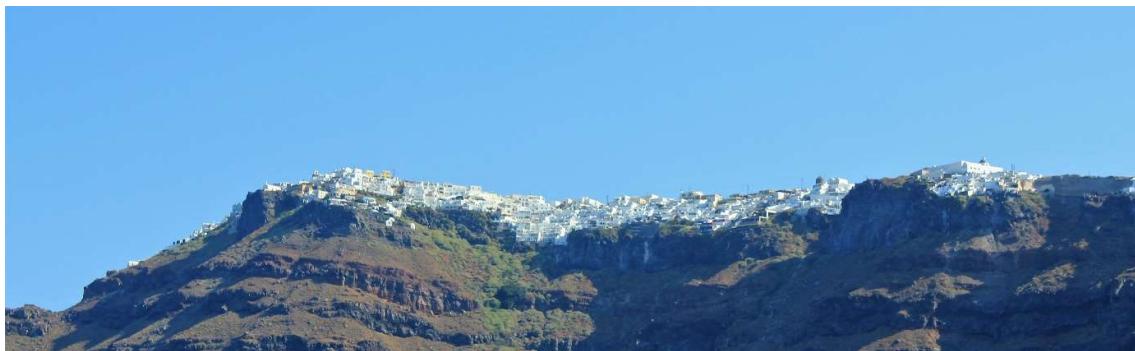
Ayios Nikolaos, Crete, Greece - Statue of Europe



Ayios Nikolaos, Crete, Greece Description of Statue

2 August 2019

Santorini lies within a sea drowned caldera with towering multi coloured cliffs rising above the blue Aegean waters, looking like a giant slab of layered cake. The island spoons the vast crater left by one of the biggest volcanic eruptions in history. Smaller islands curl around the fragmented western edge of the caldera, but it is the main island of Thira that takes your breath away with its snow drift of white Cycladic houses lining the cliff tops and, in places, spilling like icy cornices down the terraced rock. When the sun sets, the reflection on the buildings and the glow of the orange and red cliffs can be really spectacular.



Town of Santorini Greece on the cliff edge.

Maree is doing a tour of the island alone today and hopefully she will return with some great pictures as she travels around the island of Thira. The following images are ones I took this morning from Wind Surf and show the long climbing cable car that whisks you to the top of the mountain. You can also see the alternative route next to the cable car, the zig zag pathway, that you can walk up or down or use the donkey service to do the same. I am reliably informed that the donkey ride to the top is worrying enough but coming down apparently the donkey gets excited knowing food waits at the bottom and they tend to move down quicker than you would expect or want.

Accidents have been known to occur using this mode of transport. Most tourists take the cable car up and down the mountain. Maree's tour started with a tender ride to an area around the base of Thira where she met the coach that is being used for the tour. This option is designed to avoid the long line up in the morning to take the cable car to the top due to the number of tourist vessels in the harbour; however, Maree will have to take the cable car down the mountain on her return or use the donkey if she wants to. Can't see her doing that though – I certainly wouldn't and the cable car doesn't thrill me much either.



Chair Lift Santorini



Chair Lift Santorini



Oia Village view of the Aegean Sea



View from Santorini Oia Village



View from Santorini Oia Village



View from Santorini Oia Village



Santorini Oia Village



Santorini Oia Village



Santorini Oia Village

If you are not sick of the history lessons I have been providing then read on for some interesting facts about Santorini.

Millions of years ago there was a landmass where the Aegean Sea is today. Between 4.5 and 2.5 million years ago, the sea penetrated and flooded this area leaving only the mountain peaks that protrude today above the surface. These became the Aegean Islands.

In the location where Santorini is today, there were just rocky islets until the awakening of the volcano about 1.5 million years ago. The material that was produced by the eruptions united the islets and a new island of circular shape was created. According to Herodotus, the shape was called "Strongyli" which means "round".

The island has been inhabited from at least the mid-5th millennium BC. There were several settlements; however, the most important of all was Akrotiri, which became a major urban centre and developed an advanced civilization. The settlement was suddenly destroyed at its peak by a tremendous volcanic explosion which is considered to be one of the most powerful volcanic explosions in the history of this planet.

This catastrophe took place in the 17th century BC. Almost half of the island sank creating a rare phenomenon, the caldera, and the enormous tidal waves that were generated affected several parts of Greece. What was left from Santorini was buried under a thick layer of pumice and tephra.

It took two to three centuries before the island was re inhabited by the Phoenicians. They named the island "Calliste" meaning "The Most Beautiful". The name Thira was given by Spartans who arrived here in the 12th century BC. The name Santorini was given much later in the 13th century AD and it refers to St Irene (Santa Irini).

Maree also wanted to add this bit she wrote from her trip onshore in Santorini.

When we arrived at the village of Oia, the tour guide told us that while there is no crime in Santorini, with the influx of visitors in the summer, some undesirables come in, and they are pick pockets. I was walking with Jean and Mike, the couple we met from Denver, and going to see the "million dollar view" with the rest of the world, when I saw a man putting his hand into a ladies purse. I called "what are you doing, get out of her purse" and the lady grabbed at her bag. Thankfully he had not gotten her wallet or anything else. We walked a little further and the same man came up to me and said I needed to get my eyes checked as I had embarrassed him. I said I was sorry, but that was what I saw. When I returned to the bus Jean asked Mike if he heard me calling out, and he said no. He then asked if the guy was wearing a blue t-shirt and I said yes. The same guy tried to unzip Mike's pocket and he had brushed him away. Another person then asked if he had a hat, which he did, as he had also tried to pickpocket him also.

3 August 2019

Today, our last day, we are anchored in the harbour of Monemvasia. This town is surrounded by the blue waters of the Aegean Sea. There is a vast imposing iceberg like rock with sheer cliffs rising hundreds of metres from the sea. This monolith is linked to the mainland by a single highly defendable causeway. There is a comparison here of the rock in Monemvasia and the rock of Gibraltar. Maree and I took the tender across to the port

where we took a slow stroll around this small town. It is very hot today at 36 degrees and it is also quite humid. Following are some images of the area.



Monemvasia Monolith



Monemvasia Township

Once again I have a bit of history for you. Founded on a rock off the eastern Peloponnese in the late sixth century AD, Monemvasia was populated by the inhabitants of Sparta. Its strategic position on the main maritime routes along the Mediterranean converted it to an important maritime centre. This fortune came to an end for its inhabitants in 1893 with the opening of the Corinth channel. The citizens continued to develop its maritime activities and stretched their skills of survival to find other attractive economic draws. During the Middle Ages the city was renowned across Europe for its special sweet wine variety, known as "Malvasia".

During the 11th and 12th centuries the city continued to flourish under Byzantine rule. When the Turks seized control of Byzantium Monemvasia it was placed under Papal rule and not long afterwards moved under Venetian rule. In 1540 the Venetians gave the keys to the city back to the Turks but returned in 1690 and again controlled Monemvasia for 25 years. Monemvasia was finally liberated in 1821 during the War of Independence by the Greeks. Despite Monemvasia's immense popularity and the effects of mass tourism in summer, the town manages to absorb it all and still share her special energy with each who passes through.

The locals and others who purchased property here realised that they must preserve the nature of this place and development has been carefully measured. Hotels are in well restored buildings and the town has gained a reputation as an artist's colony.

4 August 2019

Well today we said goodbye to our friends on Wind Surf as we arrived in Athens and the end of our 20 day yacht cruise around the Mediterranean Sea. We had a relaxing day by the pool and then went down to the Plaka for dinner this evening and to wander through the shops. We had a great Greek meal consisting of Tzatziki, goats cheese, grilled octopus, lamb and moussaka. It really was very good and we had views of the Acropolis as well. It was just the most perfect evening.

Anyway that is all for today as it is 23:00 and time for bed.



Last night we had dinner at a nice Taverna in the Plaka, Athens

5 August 2019

Today we will start by going to Syntagma Square to the Hellenic Parliament to watch the changing of the guard.

Every Sunday morning at 11 am, people gather in Syntagma Square to watch the official changing of the guards, the military unit whose members stand proudly in perfect stillness in front of the Hellenic Parliament. They are of course changing every hour in the day, but on Sundays, it is the official ceremony with the official customs.

The Evzones is a special unit of the Hellenic Army, also known as Tsoliades, who guard the Monument of the Unknown Soldier in front of the Hellenic Parliament and the Presidential Mansion. Through the historical movement of Greece, the Evzones have become symbols of bravery and courage for the Greek people. The Presidential Guard, as the unit is now called, was constituted in 1868 and has taken many names through centuries (Guard of the Flag, Royal Guard, etc).

The duties of the soldiers are part of a ceremonial nature. Every soldier guards for about an hour, 3 times in total every 48 hours. Throughout these 60 minutes, they have to stand perfectly still until it is time to switch with another guard. During the changing, they work in pairs so they can perfectly coordinate their moves. The steps that the official ceremony requires at the time of changing are carried out in really slow motion to protect their blood circulation after 60 min of immobility.

The soldiers of the Presidential Guard are selected according to their height, excellent physical condition, and psychological state as well as character and morality, as they follow a hard training before they become part of this honorary unit. The training lasts for one month and includes exercises to keep the body and mind still. Apart from staying still, the soldiers must also not make any face or eye move and must not show any expression.

Their uniform of the Presidential Guard has a historical meaning. It refers to the uniform of the Kleftes and Armatoloi, two groups of Greek warriors during the War of Independence in (1821) against the Ottomans. In fact, the white skirt of the uniform has 400 folds to represent the 400 years of Ottoman occupation over the Greeks.



Changing of the Guards at the Tomb of the unknown soldier at the Hellenic Parliament in Syntagma Square



Changing of the Guards at the Tomb of the unknown soldier at the Hellenic Parliament in Syntagma Square



Changing of the Guards at the Tomb of the unknown soldier at the Hellenic Parliament in Syntagma Square



Changing of the Guards at the Tomb of the unknown soldier at the Hellenic Parliament in Syntagma Square



Changing of the Guards at the Tomb of the unknown soldier at the Hellenic Parliament in Syntagma Square



Changing of the Guards at the Tomb of the unknown soldier at the Hellenic Parliament in Syntagma Square



Changing of the Guards at the Tomb of the unknown soldier at the Hellenic Parliament in Syntagma Square



Changing of the Guards at the Tomb of the unknown soldier at the Hellenic Parliament in Syntagma Square



Changing of the Guards at the Tomb of the unknown soldier at the Hellenic Parliament in Syntagma Square



Changing of the Guards at the Tomb of the unknown soldier at the Hellenic Parliament in Syntagma Square



Changing of the Guards at the Tomb of the unknown soldier at the Hellenic Parliament in Syntagma Square



Changing of the Guards at the Tomb of the unknown soldier at the Hellenic Parliament in Syntagma Square



Changing of the Guards at the Tomb of the unknown soldier at the Hellenic Parliament in Syntagma Square



Changing of the Guards at the Tomb of the unknown soldier at the Hellenic Parliament in Syntagma Square



Changing of the Guards at the Tomb of the unknown soldier at the Hellenic Parliament in Syntagma Square



Changing of the Guards at the Tomb of the unknown soldier at the Hellenic Parliament in Syntagma Square



We stopped for Lunch at a nice Taverna, Athens



Lunch of Octopus, Potato, Carrot, Tomato



We stopped for Lunch at a nice Taverna, Athens



Mitropolis Athens Cathedral



Archbishop Damaskinos outside the Mitropolis Cathedral



The inscription on the statue of Archbishop Damaskinos outside the Mitropolis Cathedral

6 August 2019

Today is our last day in Athens before heading to London tomorrow where we will overnight before catching our direct Qantas flight to Perth. We plan a leisurely day and Maree will spend most of the day around the swimming pool. Tonight we will go back to the Plaka for a last visit and to have dinner.

Last night we had a great evening meal at the Karyatis Taverna located in the Plaka. We decided we would try more Greek dishes so we ordered entrees only. They consisted of Fried Cheese Saganaki, Stuffed Mushrooms, Dolmades (Stuffed Vine Leaves), Zucchini Balls and locally made Greek Sausage. This was all washed down with a nice bottle of Greek Chardonnay. An enjoyable evening as the sun set over the Acropolis.

Tonight we went back to the same restaurant and had some more great food. We remembered to take some pictures this time. We also had the zucchini balls but the image was blurred.



Tzatziki



Stuffed Mushroom with assorted Cheese



Hummus



Dolmades

7 August 2019

Today we started the trek home. First stop breakfast overlooking the Parthenon, amazing views, and then we were picked up by the Blacklane car service for the trip to the airport, everything going smoothly so far. After a short wait at the airport we were able to check in and then go to the business lounge.

The fun started when we boarded. British Airways was having computer problems and the weight and balance for the aircraft had to be calculated manually. The aircraft cannot depart until this calculation has been done and handed to the pilots for the data to be entered into the aircraft computers, a delay of around 25 minutes. After takeoff we were served a delicious meal. We settled in for the three and half hour flight and as we approached London the pilot told us we were in a holding pattern as there were delays on the ground due to the ongoing computer problems with BA and storms coming through.

LHR had been gridlocked for a while so flights were stacked up on the ground and take offs were given priority. About ten minutes later the captain said we had been given clearance to land which proceeded without any problems. We finally pulled up at our designated gate only to find the parking assist lights were not working, so a Heathrow airport employee was guiding us in with the paddles. So far so good.

The night before our flight we were listening to the news on BBC and they said that the proposed strike action had been cancelled, but what they did not say was they were going to have a go slow action. We sat on the plane for 30 minutes before the air bridge was connected so we could get off. All this time we had a driver waiting to take us to our hotel. Thankfully he was aware of the delays that were happening.

After clearing Immigration I left Steve to collect the bags and went to find the driver. We had thought that the bags would be taken off while we waited for the air bridge, but this did not happen, so Steve had a further 40 minute wait for the bags. The poor driver was losing jobs while he was waiting for us.

By the time we got out of the airport the home peak hour traffic had begun and even though we were only going approximately three kilometres it took about 20 minutes to get to the hotel.

Everything should be fine tomorrow as the issues are BA related and should not impact QF.

8 August 2019

We are in the LHR Qantas Lounge relaxing before our 16H45M flight direct to Perth. No issues this morning getting to the airport and our driver was happy to see us waiting for him this time. It was the same driver as yesterday.

Well that is all for today.

9 August 2019

Arrived into Perth on time. However, our flight from Perth to Sydney has been delayed until 15:50 getting us into Sydney late at 21:25. Changed our hotel in Sydney from the one in town to the Rydges at the international airport as it is a lot closer for tomorrow's early departure to Canberra. It will be good to get home tomorrow.

Maree and I hope you have enjoyed reading about our adventures on this trip.