



## Paddling and sailing in the Cyclades Islands - experiencing the Greece of years gone by

Alex Panagakos has run Sea Kayak Paros for five years. As a trial for the first time, he put together a week-long trip sailing and paddling through the Cyclades. We were onboard *Fine*, a 43-foot Sun Odyssey, owned and skippered by Alex's father, George, who has a lifetime of Aegean sailing in his veins.

This was a paddling journey with a difference; we used *Fine* to work our way around the weather whilst picking off the best paddling and scenery over a number of the Cyclades Islands and extend the summer beyond the usual British boundaries.

After a short flight from Athens, we arrived on Paros in warm sunshine and a force 6 northerly wind. However, that soon became force 4, then force 2 and finally, the wind disappeared, leaving flat water and perfect paddling conditions in its wake.

Each day the volcanic scenery delivered another palette of colours and shapes. This area of the Cyclades is a geological wonderland with blueschist and volcanic rocks present throughout. In its geological past, the area used to be a mountainous land that has slowly been submerged, allowing for what once were peaks to become islands. Termed the Cyclades during ancient times after the word 'kyklos' meaning 'circle', the islands, populated since the bronze age, have flourished as a centre of commerce and development ▶



bridging Greece, Asia, and Africa.

Setting off from the small harbour of Piso Livadi on Paros we visited eight islands, paddling every day. In order: the east of Despotiko and the south of Antiparos, the south of Folegandros, the south of uninhabited Polyegos, the south, southwest and then the north of Milos and the north of Polyegos.

Paddling from the yacht gave us precision accuracy. We would put on the water, paddle a linear route with a lot of time for exploring caves, arches and the coastline to be picked up at the end by the yacht. Giving plenty of time for swimming and snorkelling.

Alex and George were fantastic hosts. Alex, the leader and paddling coach and George, the yacht skipper. We anchored overnight in remote bays and small harbours with few, if any, other tourists. They cooked, buying fresh fish just landed from local fishermen and introduced us with devastating effect to souma - the local grappa of Paros.

It is invidious to single out paddling highlights as each day truly seemed to get better and better. However, the south side of the uninhabited island of Polyegos was world-class, with countless caves, inspiring sea stacks, and huge cliffs. The spectacular cave on the north side of Polyegos deserves its own mention - what looked like a narrow fissure was a 30 metre entrance into a blow-hole with spectacular colours in the Mediterranean light. There was a child-like delight in exploring all its facets.

We visited the archaeological excavation and restoration of the temple of Apollo, fittingly the Greek god of the sun, on uninhabited Despotiko; paddled under flocks of Elanora's falcons on Folegandros; came across a kingfisher in a cave and ate at an excellent taverna full of local character and seemingly little changed since opening in 1920 on Kimolos.

Above all else, we were enveloped in the warm charm of Alex and George.

For us, Alex's trial was a resounding success. A great trip, a real privilege.

Caroline Armstrong  
Jeremy Cole  
Keith Gaines  
Helen Marsden

Guests of Sea Kayak Paros 12-19 October 2019.  
[www.seakayakparos.com](http://www.seakayakparos.com).