

Agia Paraskevi - The House on the Hill. (Part 1)

And so at last we left for Leros, with Dad and dog. Car, roofbox and trailer – stuffed to the last inch, barely able to move inside. A week's drive via Munich (gasthaus & wienerschnitzel), Lake Garda, a wonderful, sunny day in Venice, a hilltop stay in a medieval monastery, and overnight ferries from Ancona to Patras (GR) and Piraeus to Leros. And the little house we had purchased spontaneously in December.

Leros remains one of the most authentic islands of the Dodecanese, a stone's throw from Turkey, 52 sq. km, pop. 8500, untouched by mass tourism, yet everything you need is here. Many arrive and never leave. It is cheerful, down-to-earth and lived in. It grows on you. Topped by an impressive medieval castle, it is an island of stunning views and turquoise bays. It has also seen hard times- last occupied by the Italians during WW II, two destroyers sunk with all hands in the bay of Lakki- Mussolini's fleet base for the eastern Med. 157 soldiers lie at rest in the peaceful, waterside British War Cemetery. Today, however, it is a happy and prosperous island. A large hospital provides employment for 1500. The current economic troubles of Greece seem somehow far away in Athens.



Dad stayed with us for 5 weeks and did a lot of his own exploring on foot – occasionally more than intended but was met with great kindness by the locals who drove him back...(they don't use street addresses here so even the locals get lost!) not bad for 90 years old! He liked the house and pronounced it "different"!

Agia Paraskevi (Saint Friday), the old town, stands high on the hill under the fort with the most stunning views of all. It is between Agia Marina, the picturesque and colourful harbourside and Platanos, the tiny capital with its tree-shaded square of cafes. The house can be reached by 2 paths. From above, along a flower-filled path hugging the cliff with stunning views, past the barking dog, past the chicken house and past the chapel, or from below up the white-washed, graduated steps, past the blue shrine and the neighbours' grape vine. As we opened the sun-bleached door into the yard, we wondered if it would really live up to the image we'd carried in our heads all winter. But as our first visitors said, the pics are great but they can't prepare you for the reality of the views.

