



# PAROS

## Roger Wheeler visits the incomparable paradise of Paros

For many years the Greek Islands have been regarded as the expensive holiday choice, not any more. The Greeks with their well known financial problems have woken up to the fact that if they want tourists (and they certainly do) they had to adjust their prices and they have.

Not having any real idea of what the **Cyclades Islands** had on offer, we flew to **Mykonos** and then took the fast ferry to **Paros**. Mykonos is great with its many tourists, cruise ships, boutique hotels and wonderful beaches, but Paros is a completely different place. Only an hour or so by Sea Jet and you're in another world; a truly white shiny island full of ancient history, beaches to die for, fantastic food, really lovely welcoming people, plenty of very reasonably priced hotels and of course the weather. We landed



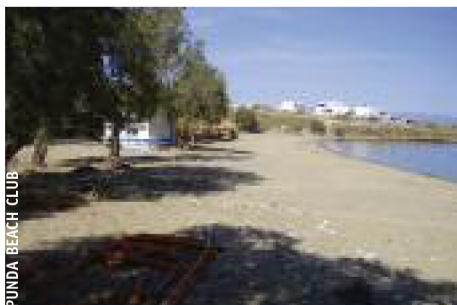
PANAYA TEMPLE, PAROS

at the 2,000-year-old capital, **Parikia**, situated on a bay on the north west side of the island. It's a small town that time doesn't seem to have touched. Every turn in the tiny winding alleys brings a new and, naturally, ancient building and fascinating little shops selling all kinds of locally made artefacts and interesting alcoholic beverages.

We were there at the beginning of the short summer season and saw hardly any other tourists; the cafés and restaurants were very quiet, nice for us but sad for local business. We took a trip around the island (it's just

21km by 16km) and saw some of the luxury resort hotels that were getting ready for the hoped for influx of tourists. We took a look at three in the 5 star luxury category: the **Saint Andrea Seaside Resort** and **The Archipelagos Resort** both were quite stunning, well up to international standards and with prices to match. The facilities at both were about the best we'd ever seen: infinity pools, bars, restaurants, vast bedrooms and bathrooms and private terraces. If you can afford £200 per room per night in high season, then there's no doubt these are the best. The **Yria Resort** is more secluded, with individual rooms based in the grounds rather than a large hotel, a really beautiful place. Out of the high season (July and August) there will be some great deals. We stayed at the much more modestly priced **Narges Hotel** in the lovely little village of **Aliki**. The Narges is a small, very quiet and tasteful hotel just around the corner from the beach. Aliki is beautiful, on a bay with a sandy beach, a few tavernas serving great food at very reasonable prices, we ate too much.

All the Cyclades Islands have different personalities; the beautiful Paros with green and pleasant with gentle rolling hills, lovely historic villages, sandy beaches and the famous 'wine dark' sea. There is the well known old hippy resort of **Punda Beach Club** that's been pulling in the cool crowd for decades. It's Paros' party central with almost continuous beach parties, non-stop DJs, pool parties and all that that entails.



PUNDA BEACH CLUB

Paros is not known as a particularly gay destination but it is a blissful island with beautiful beaches and the natives are very friendly. I'd go back without hesitation.

Our hosts suggested that we should hop on the next (slow) ferry and see **Ios** (pronounced Eos), the next island further south, so we did. Once again it has a completely different vibe from the other islands. Geographically smaller than most of the Cyclades, just 18km by 10km, its original claim to fame is the legend that Homer, author of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, was born here around the 12thC BC and was subsequently buried there. Whether that's true or not seems of little interest to today's hedonistic young, mainly Australian, tourists.



IOS

Ios is a fascinating place with just 1,200 permanent inhabitants. We were met by a lovely lady, Rita, who runs the **Avanti Hotel**, who drove us up the steep road to the main and only village, **Chora**. This is a very picture perfect Greek village, full of steps and narrow paths, completely inaccessible for cars. The main path through the village is completely taken over by tourism in terms of restaurants,



CHORA

boutiques, bars and discothèques. Apart from the port and the village of Chora, Ios has only a few small settlements, just a group of spread out houses. In short there's not a lot to Ios. It's very hilly and rather barren with hardly any roads, steep cliffs and a few lovely beaches. The main resort, **Mylopotas**, has a few reasonable hotels and a great beach that attracts a young mixed crowd who enjoy all kinds of water sports and night long parties. Not a destination for same-sex couples, so I suggest you keep going to **Santorini**.

### more info

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