



Sailing made simple



Robin and Julie Oakley offer an intriguing
insite into a Sailing Holidays' holiday

Chartered Holidays



Above: The boys with a fantastic fishing village in the backdrop.



I WAS ASTONISHED when my wife suggested sailing in the Ionian for the family summer holiday. We first met on the **Round the Island** race back in '87, now in our forties we're more demanding of personal comfort. Not only that but our fourth delightfully unexpected child was due in January.

We were a bit worried that flotilla sailing might be a bit too like an organised package but Sailing Holidays were really helpful on the phone. We had a non-standard party of two adults, kids of 9, 11 and 13 plus the baby. Booking conventional holidays is difficult with 3 kids, but the office gave great service and allayed any worries.

That summer, after an easy flight and exciting coach ride along the mountainous coast, we found

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ourselves on the quay in Plataria. Our Sailing Holidays skipper, engineer and hostess, (supported by a big port crew) introduced us to our Jaguar 27'. We were the largest family in the flotilla, and it looked like a tight fit but it all worked out really well.

On the first night the Sailing Holidays crew organised it so the entire flotilla joined up, at a lovely taverna overlooking the bay. There was a party atmosphere that prevailed for the holiday's duration. We often all dined together.

The next morning we had a 9am briefing. Armed with the supplied charts, pilot books and excellent Sailing Holidays chart and pilot/guide/log book, we were given the day's sailing plan. This included: forecast; recommended course to steer; docking instructions; destination facilities and tourist tips. All in a relaxed laid back manner.

After victualling, we set off. I was nervous but confident my sailing skills would come back to me. At least one person on each boat had sailed before but one or two boats had a Sailing Holidays crew member on board on the first day to show them the ropes.

There were few problems with seamanship after that. The lead boat was never far away with help and advice available over the vhf.

Outside the harbour, we stopped

the motor and gingerly unfurled the sails in the gentle breeze. Both were roller reefing but performed faultlessly throughout. We had a fantastic beat up the bay making 3/4kts. Baby and crew were getting a fine introduction. Poor mummy, though, had to manage scrabbling across the cockpit while breast-feeding



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when we tacked. By nightfall we all knew we'd made a perfect holiday choice.

The yachts were sturdy, so barring hitting the rocks you could come to no harm. We did get some good blows - there was a memorable tack into Gaios where we had too much sail up and the lee rail was submerging to the varied shrieks of delight and despair from the wife and kids. The

strongest wind was 5/6 but reefed down it was exhilarating sailing with the boat not stretched in any way. The engine was a reliable 14hp Volvo diesel, capable of a respectable 6kts.

A typical day would start with a delicious breakfast of Greek yoghurt, honey and walnuts. Then our briefing and stocking up with water and supplies. We'd sail off and dependent on the length of trip and weather, anchor up a few times at promising

spots, for exploring, swimming and lunch. Mostly, we had wonderful weather and the kids enjoyed helming and helping with the sails. To keep them alert I'd occasionally cast a buoy adrift as man overboard drill. In light airs we trailed the kids on a line behind the boat, all great fun.

You were free to make your own choices en route, as some days the destination was very close but there were always great anchorages or



Chartered Holidays



LEFT: The beautiful coastline of the Greek islands is a mecca for yachting enthusiasts.

detours you could take, depending on your fancy. We anchored loads of times often just for an hour, and circumnavigated both Paxos and Anti Paxos.

Docking was a doddle, despite mostly being bow or stern to mooring. We'd radio the Sailing Holidays crew from offshore. They'd call us in to an allocated spot, and expertly tell us when to drop the kedge (if needed), apply reverse and take our lines and secure us.

Then we'd usually do a quick reconnaissance of the location and depending on time, plan our evening. This was typically swimming, sight seeing and a taverna supper.

Wife swapping didn't happen but there were kid swaps. The children made new friends and invited friends onboard for the days' sailing.

For the minimal cost of our holiday, we were frequently anchored next to



million dollar super yachts, in secluded coves. The scenery was fantastic, the cliffs, caves and coves on the west of Paxos were of especial note.

Swimming or rowing into the caves was brilliant, plus they often went underwater which was thrilling too. We even sailed through the 50-foot gap between a sheer cliff and giant "needle" rising high up out of the sea - magical! The bat cave was memorable with thousands of bats roosting and flying in and out of a little hole atop the huge cave.

We berthed in a big marina once; otherwise it was small town quays or remote fishing villages. There was always a taverna or two nearby with great Greek food, where you could

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feast on local delicacies or the days catch at very reasonable prices. The whole flotilla anchored up as a giant raft for one night, in the idyllic Two Rocks Bay and had a fun rowing race, beach picnic and fancy dress party. The Sailing Holidays crew really worked hard to ensure that not only our sailing was good but also that we got the most from our shore time. One night we anchored alone to share a family night of tranquillity and star gazing.

In two weeks we sailed up to the northern tip of Corfu, down south looping Paxos and Anti Paxos as well as a rich selection of mainland locations. Yes, we will be going again, and Flo has joined the sea cadets!

For further information, please contact Sailing Holidays on 020 8459 8787, or visit stand number N1749.

BELOW: Kids come together and have a great holiday, with Sailing Holidays.



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ALL IMAGES: OAKLEY DESIGN