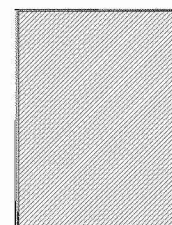
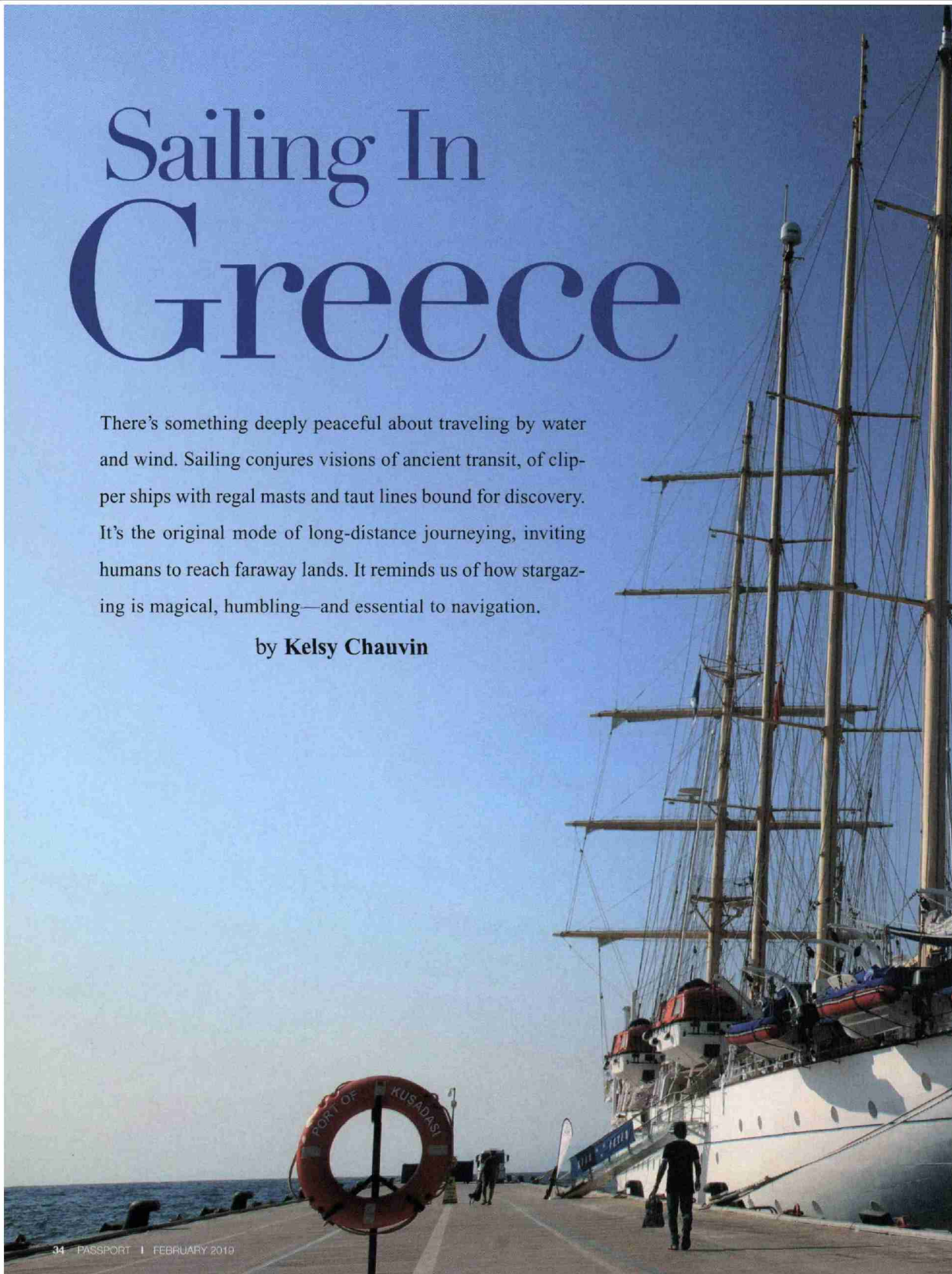
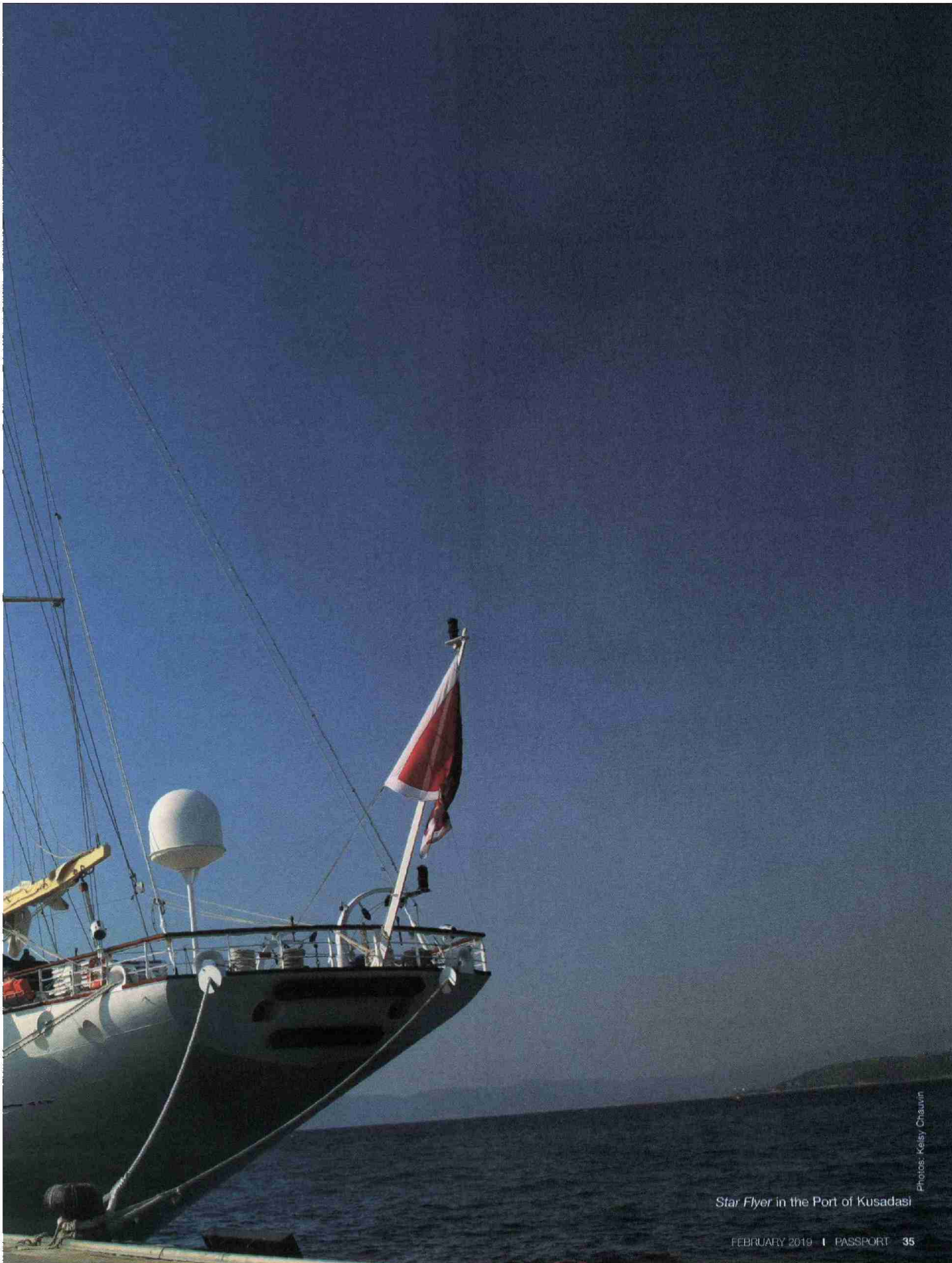


Sailing In Greece

There's something deeply peaceful about traveling by water and wind. Sailing conjures visions of ancient transit, of clipper ships with regal masts and taut lines bound for discovery. It's the original mode of long-distance journeying, inviting humans to reach faraway lands. It reminds us of how stargazing is magical, humbling—and essential to navigation.

by **Kelsy Chauvin**





sailing in greece

I often thought about the timelessness of sailing while aboard the *Star Flyer*, a 360-foot-long, four-mast clipper ship. It was a natural connection, because we were cruising aboard a modern vessel through the Aegean, the world's great, famous sea of myths and legends. There I stood on the bow of a gleaming tall ship, traversing the same stretch of water as Odysseus at war with the Trojans. But unlike the tribulations in Homer's *Odyssey*, I was relaxing with an Aperol spritz under blue skies.

This was my first sailing cruise—a weeklong voyage with **Star Clippers** (www.starclippers.com) through the Northern Cyclades Islands. The trip would take us round trip from Athens on an unforgettable journey to Patmos, Amorgos, Mykonos, Monemvasia, and to Kusadasi, Turkey.

Sailing is distinct from other cruises. Motor-powered cruising across an ocean or river have their own appeal, but the opportunity to sail was an intriguing alternative. As I plotted the trip along with my spouse and co-adventurer Denise, we wondered how the boat would feel on the sea, how much we'd rely on wind versus engine power, how easily would the crew manage the enormous sails?

That curiosity led us aboard the *Star Flyer* with open minds. At the cruise port of Pireaus in Athens, we climbed the gangplank on a hot Mediterranean afternoon, joining our fellow passengers in the ship's open-air Tropical Bar where we awaited embarkation.

We soon found ourselves a flight up on the top deck, watching a dozen masterful sailors hoist sails over 200 feet high. It was like a ballet of movement by men (yes, no women) who spoke to each other in nautical terms as they performed age-old maneuvers on a modern-day craft. Then, at last, the engines powered down, and the wind filled each sail and jib, and we set out across the Aegean under a gibbous moon.

LIFE ON BOARD

I love water and boats. Chalk it up to my seafaring ancestors or the magnetism of rolling waves, but for me, cruising equals serenity. Thankfully I don't suffer from seasickness, and I actually enjoy the overpowering sensation of a ship's lists and heaves. For Denise, sea travel is more of a guessing game. So for this cruise, she came prepared with ginger chews, medication, and those chic little anti-motion-sickness bracelets.

Cut to our first night on board, the start of the longest spell of open waters as we crossed well over 200 miles to Kusadasi. I woke a few times to the loud swish of water across our room's porthole. I felt the ship's sway and imagined being an infant rocked to sleep. Soothing for me, not so much for Denise. By morning, the motion remained, but she was in a new headspace, slightly concerned by the level of intensity. She steadied herself, donned her wristbands, and prepared for a full day at sea like a true traveler eager to explore new places. Before long she'd adapted to the motion, and the vessel returned to smoother waters that, thankfully, remained for the trip's duration.

As our home for the next seven days, the *Star Flyer* felt luxurious, with four levels and 170-passenger capacity. Cabins and the sloop shop occupied the two lower guest decks (crew members live below), as did the dining room, where we were treated to continental and French-inspired dinners and breakfasts, and lunches with more ethnic flair. The middle "main" deck was our functional space with the indoor Piano Bar, library, and Tropical Bar that doubled as an all-passenger gathering space for games and nightly entertainment.

For me, life on the *Star Flyer* was all about the top "sun" deck, prime for lounging with a good read, and for soaking up the sun, breeze, and Mediterranean views. Both the bow and stern had sepa-

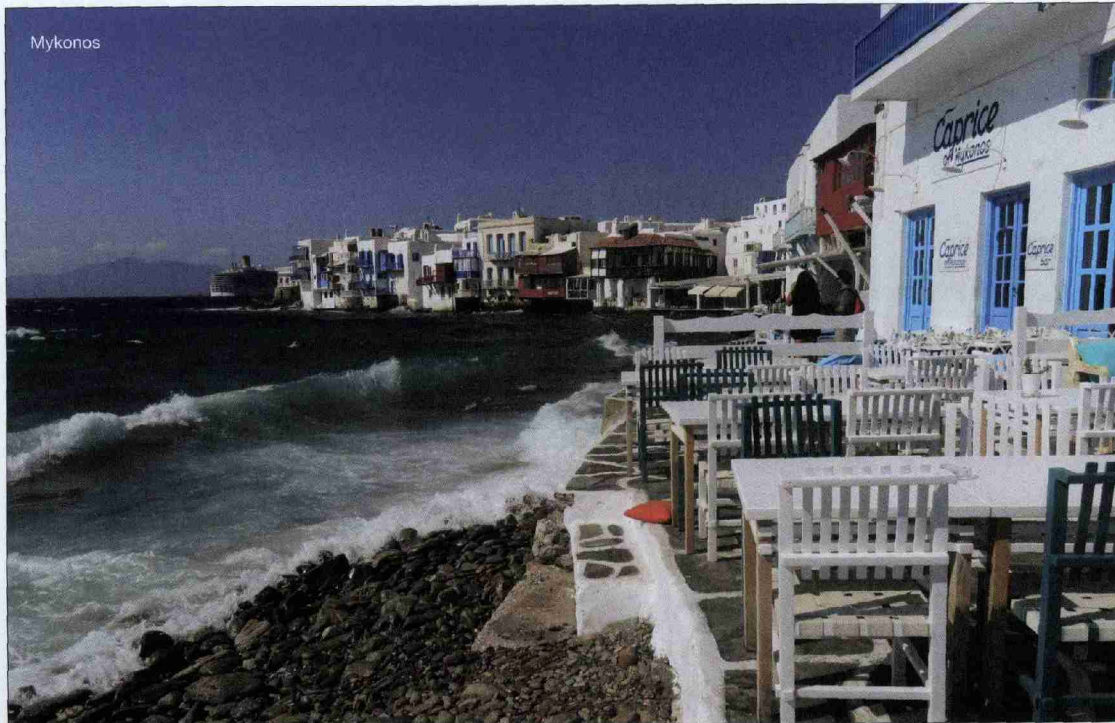


Photo: Kelsey Chauvin

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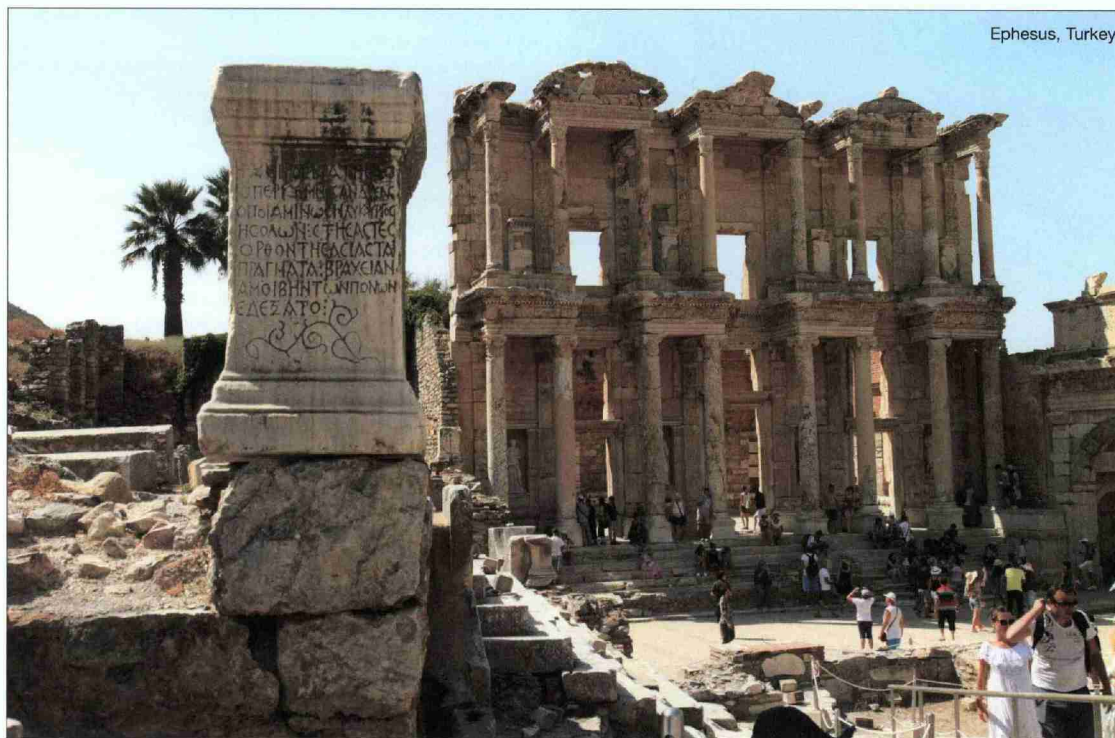


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rate lounging areas with small pools, and Denise and I often perched in the shade of a full sail. I fell almost as hard for the ship's classic nautical style (the elegant captain's wheel, flying jib sails, polished wood pulleys and booms, perfectly coiled ropes) as I did for the outward views of the Aegean.

My fellow passengers seemed as enthusiastic about sailing as me. They spanned all ages, and despite some language barriers, were fun, friendly shipmates. On most days and while anchored, the crew indulged our sense of daring. We were invited to climb onto the bowsprit nets, the long trapeze-type nets stretched across the ship's front spar, to recline over the open waters.

The other onboard adventure was to climb 100 feet high on a wire-and-rope ladder up to the crow's nest (really a crescent-shaped platform) and behold an entirely unique perspective. The panorama from that high mast was for me a pinnacle moment on the trip, revealing all at once a bird's-eye view of our ship with the backdrop of perfect blue sea and sky.

EXPLORING THE PORTS

Though our first stop wasn't part of the Cyclades Islands, Kusadasi was a fascinating addition to the itinerary. It gave me an introduction, albeit a limited one, to Turkey. We browsed bazaars and enjoyed tzatziki, fish, and the

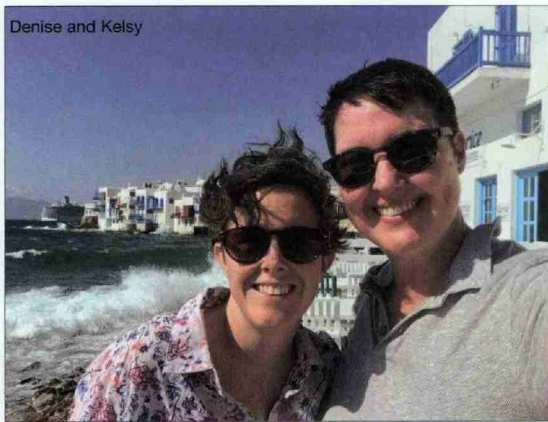
best calamari of my life at **Ali Baba Restaurant** (4 Ataturk Bulvari Belediye. Tel: 90-256-614-1551) along the seafront promenade.

But the highlight was *Star Clippers*'s guided excursion to nearby Ephesus, the ancient Greco-Roman city dating back to the Bronze Age. Today, the 550-acre UNESCO World Heritage Site is protected, and some of its architecture is being pieced back together stone by stone, including the marvelous Library of Celsus. Another highlight was the famed Roman-era terrace houses, which were practically frozen in time after a seventh-century earthquake led to their abandonment. Presently, their mosaics, stuccos, and other rich domestic details are being gradually restored.

Greek mythology and architecture beguile me, so I adored wandering around the ancient temples, amphitheaters, waterways, and other structures at Ephesus and the Greek ports. But in many of the islands and mainlands, Biblical and other religious history is just as prominent. Outside Ephesus, Christian pilgrims flock to the House of the Virgin Mary, where she's thought to have spent her final years, and to the sixth-century archaeological site of St. John's Basilica, where the evangelist is supposedly interred.

Our ship's second port was Patmos, where it's believed that St. John wrote the Bible's final chapter, the Book of Revelation. The Cave of the Apocalypse, a UNESCO site with an undeniably intriguing name, is a

sailing in greece



Photos: Kelsy Chauvin

major tour stop along with other ancient religious sites. But Denise and I opted for an excursion to the hilltop of Patmos, called Chora or Hora, the name for most islands' main towns. There we learned about Greek Orthodox history, found some lovely shops and breezy cafés, and the island's restored 16th-century windmills now converted into turbines.

One of the advantages of traveling by a slim cruise vessel like the *Star Flyer* is getting to visit smaller ports like Amorgos. Anchored just offshore, we climbed into the ship's 20-passenger tender (a little bus-like boat that travels to and from shore) to sample small-town Cyclades life.

Though it had a mix of cute boutiques, waterfront restaurants, and historic sites, Amorgos felt undiscovered. We bought fresh fruit and a

slice of spanakopita, and settled onto a small beach where a handful of people swam and sunbathed.

Suddenly a new sensory wave drifted in. Denise and I floated in the Aegean and felt an emotional rebirth. The hot sun and the refreshing sea water seemed to wash away stress and worry in a whole new way, flooding us with a renewed optimism. Maybe "buoyancy" is a better term for it. We had at last arrived at the sweetest spot of any trip, when you feel like you've returned to your essence, and are gaily immersed in the journey at hand.

The next morning, we rose to the sight of Mykonos across the harbor, and via tender we soon stood among its über-hip islanders popping off selfies by the dozen. But here was something different: Gay men (and some lesbians) populated the scenery so ubiquitously it felt like we'd been teleported to an upscale fusion of Provincetown, the Fire Island Pines, and Palm Springs. We were giddy at the sudden queerness of it all, until we were struck by the sheer volume of people everywhere.

Desperate to restore our newfound Greek tranquility, we escaped from the main drag, heading up the hill along Mykonos's iconic white-painted walkways to wander and browse away from the throngs. We broke for afternoon cocktails at the edge of "Little Venice," a row of colorful houses built precariously over the sea, across from the island's iconic Windmills of Kato Mili. Along that bay, cute gay-centric restaurants offer views and bites, like **The Piano Bar** (24 Ag. Anargyron. Tel: 30-2289-02-3719. www.thepianobar.com), **Rhapsody** (22 Ag. Anargiron), and **Galleraki Bar** (Little Venice. Tel: 30-2289-02-7188. www.galleraki.com).

Mykonos has an undeniable party vibe, with cocktails generally going for luxury-club prices (north of 15 euros each). By contrast, shops around town sell reasonably priced, often handcrafted textiles, jewelry, housewares, and souvenirs. And it's surprisingly easy to eat affordably at counter-order cafés like delicious **Sakis Grill House** (7 Kalogera 7. Tel: 30-22-8902-4848. sakisgrillhouse.yolasite.com) and **Jimmy's Gyros** (Jakka Street. Tel: 30-22-8902-8745.).

It was fun to experience the more cosmopolitan vibe of Mykonos, and while **Paradise Beach** nightclub (Paradise Beach. Tel: 30-69-4946-8227. www.paradisecubmykonos.com) and other destination/resort clubs there promised memorable party time, we opted for a more low-key experience. We settled in for super-fresh seafood at family-owned, LGBTQ-friendly **Katarina's** (8 Mikonou, Agii Anargiri. Tel: 30-2289-02-3084. www.katerinaslittlevenicemykonos.com), accompanied by a romantic sunset over the sea.

Our sailing cruise was winding down, so there was a tinge of sadness as we last docked at the port of Monemvasia. The tiny town marks the far southeastern point of Peloponnese, Greece's southern peninsula. Along with a historic fortress and chapels, and a handful of small touristic businesses, Monemvasia is home to a long, curved beach lined with casual open-air restaurants.

Joined by some Star Flyer buddies, Denise and I floated in the crystal-clear water. We savored our final hours on our sailing adventure, wishing we could somehow capture the beauty. And in a way we did, because we'll always harbor memories of the wondrous Aegean Sea, our clipper gliding across it, and a newfound love for Greece. ■

If thoughts of the Greek Isles conjures fond visions of *Mamma Mia!*, you're in luck. *Star Clippers* is offering the "Mamma Mia Itinerary" on four Eastern Mediterranean sailings in 2019, with visits to some of the beaches, landmarks, and other island locations from both films. (www.starclippers.com/us-dom/destinations/eastern-mediterranean-sailings.htm)