

The Ties That Bind

A trip through Greece gives three generations an opportunity to more deeply connect. **By Eleni N. Gage**

MY SON STOOD eye to eye with a pelican on Mykonos. My daughter spotted a sea turtle off Finikounda Beach, in the Peloponnese. My husband and I hiked along the edge of a palm forest, overlooking the Libyan Sea, on the southern shore of Crete. But my favorite moment on our three-generation sail took place on the island of Kíthira.

As the daughter of a Greek father, I've been visiting the country every summer since I was 14. And while I mostly grew up in the U.S., I've long wanted to give my two children the same opportunities I've had to explore Greece—and to

understand the memories it holds for generations of our family.

So, when my mother, my husband, and our kids were wandering the winding main street of Chora, the principal town on Kíthira, we had to stop when my mother pointed out a restaurant called Zorba's. "When I was here a long time ago, your mom and I ate on that rooftop," she told my 12-year-old daughter, Amalia. I recalled the meal, too. It was back in 1993, when the restaurant was one of just two that were open. They had run out of clean dishes and, as we waited for the plates they did have to be washed, I wrote *πεινάω* ("I'm hungry") on a paper napkin and stuck it to my forehead. My mom was amused—and the couple at the next table offered me one of their meatballs.

I was 18 on that visit, and my mother was just a few years older than I am now. At the time, I never would have imagined that we'd be back at Zorba's with a daughter of my own, as well as my husband and son. But as our three generations revisited the memory,



▼ *Variety Voyager docked in Kíthira, Greece.*

▲ *The ship's restaurant.*

I wondered if Amalia would herself return, perhaps some time around 2054.

Full-circle moments like this were exactly what I had hoped for when I booked a weeklong trip with **Variety Cruises**. I wanted a multigenerational adventure we would all remember fondly. I also hoped for enough excitement to engage my husband and kids, balanced with enough ease for my mother, who is spry for 83, but still happiest when sitting by the water with a glass of wine.



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ONE TO BOOK EARLY Known for river itineraries, Emerald Cruises will launch a third ocean vessel, the 64-suite *Emerald Kaia*, in early 2026, with trips to small harbors in the Mediterranean and Seychelles.



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We would stop at many places our Greek-American children had yet to see, including islands in the Aegean Sea and Saronic Gulf, as well as coastal cities in the Peloponnese. We'd avoid the hassles of packing (and repacking) several suitcases. And I wouldn't have to worry about driving or getting everyone checked in and out of hotels.

I had thought most of the action would be onshore, but being on the ship became a core part of our experience. Some of the most memorable sights were the ones we sailed past, like the Temple of Poseidon at Sounion, silhouetted by an orange sky as we departed Athens on the first evening. (My mom took a selfie with the landmark in the background, a photo she quickly dubbed "two ancient monuments.")

Then there were the moments with the crew. One day, while swimming in Fokianos Bay in the Peloponnese, our captain picked up a fried-egg jellyfish to prove they don't sting, and my kids stared in awe. They also marveled at the service. My eight-year-old son, Nico, was so impressed by the cool towlettes the crew would offer us when we'd return to the ship that he started carrying a washcloth purloined from the cabin, so he could hand it to us at opportune moments.

The relatively small size of the 36-cabin *Variety Voyager* meant that we would often dock right in the harbor of whichever town we'd come to see. It was also easy for us to split up for activities while still coming together for meals. On Crete, for example, we went our separate ways after we docked in the medieval port of Réthymno. My husband, Emilio, and I decided to rent a car and drive the kids across the island from the Aegean to the Libyan Sea. There we swam in the clear, greenish water off Preveli Beach, where

a palm-lined river meets the coast. My mother, meanwhile, opted to stay in town for a seaside lunch, which turned out to be a wise choice: it was a hot, hard hike down to the beach—and back up again—from where we parked. And yet, later that night, we all had a chance to reconnect on the ship, as we watched a troupe of Greek dancers who had come aboard.

One morning, on Amalia's 12th birthday, we decided to let her choose our activities. She opted to skip Delos, now an uninhabited archaeological site just southwest of Mykonos, and simply admire its ruins from the ship. Instead, she wanted to swim off the islet of Rhenia, where inhabitants of Delos were sent to give birth and die so as not to sully the island sacred to Apollo and Artemis with the messy business of being human. I couldn't imagine a more fitting, or more beautiful, place to mark a birthday.

By the afternoon, we had reached Mykonos, where we got caught in a scrum of passengers disembarking from a cruise ship several orders of magnitude larger than ours. Once we had escaped the herd, we made it to Little Venice, the island's seaside quarter, where we had a golden-hour birthday toast on the balcony of my favorite bar, with a view of the island's signature windmills.

Everything was perfect until we docked in Nauplia. There, as we stepped off the ship and started walking to town, my mother tripped and fell. A huge goose

▲ The author's mother, Joan, and daughter, Amalia, on the *Voyager*.

▶ The author in Monemvasia, in the southern Peloponnese.

egg appeared on her forehead, and she and I spent most of the night in the ER. It was terrifying, but thankfully she was fine. And it was so comforting to come back "home," at three in the morning, to *Voyager*, where several members of the crew were waiting up for us.

The next day, we docked in the stunning harbor of Hydra. While my mother recovered in her cabin, the rest of us jumped in Hydronetta and Spilia, two of the island's rocky swimming holes; ate ice cream; and visited Rafalias, the well-known pharmacy that dates back to 1890, right next to the old hotel where my mom swears she once saw a ghost.

This is why I brought my mom *and* my kids along. Even though there will always be a risk of tripping on a cobblestone or sighing about too much archaeology, the experiences we shared will stay with us. And these places will be waiting for us to return, offering us both safe harbors and new adventures.

*Eight-day Greece trips with **Variety Cruises** from \$2,745 per person.*

ELENI GAGE. ILLUSTRATION BY BASHIEL LUBARSKY



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