

## Entry-level Adventure: Ionian Flotilla

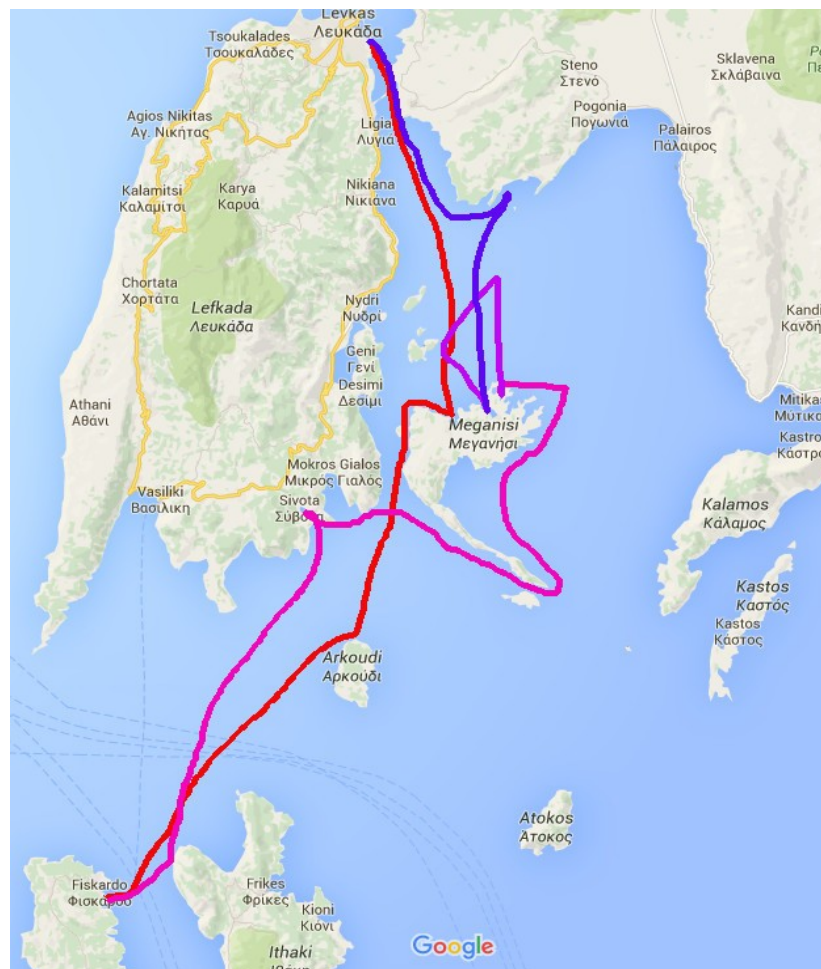
The boat “Lancelot” was a decently equipped Jeanneau Sunsail 33i, whose lines we defiled by our strapping two red plastic kayaks to it, because this was a holiday, and toys were mandatory.

Crew: Two RYA Dayskippers Cordula Hansen and James 'Shay' Gilna, Cordula's brother Florian (first-time sailor), and his fiancée Heloise Barbier, who had been on some sailing holidays before.

We managed to arrange some time together for early August, which meant that the weather was going to be very hot, around 38°C, with a water temperature of around 26°C. We were justifiably planning on taking it easy, doing a bit of sailing and lots of swimming and snorkelling.

Booked was a week-long flotilla, with the itinerary set by the lead crew, usually leaving port around 10 or 11am, reaching the next destination by 5pm at the latest. There is one “free-sailing” day, with no set destination or arrival time.

Mooring was mostly stern-to with anchor or lazy lines. Alternatively, rafting up if it's very busy. In bays, we used anchor and stern lines when the water was shallow enough. When we wanted to explore small beaches or caves along the coast, we had one person on board with the engine running, while the others made use of the kayaks or the dinghy. Some of these excursions were quite idyllic and punctuated the calmer passages nicely – paddling across Abelike Bay at night, or making landfall on the marble beaches of Ithaka, with Lancelot hovering watchfully. Well worth the sore shoulders, our paddling exploits earned us the label “Kayak Patrol”...



Not yet an Odyssey

## Day 1: Lefkada-Spartakhor

Spartakhor was extremely busy even though we arrived around 4pm that afternoon, so Tom the Lead Skipper offered valet parking to all boats, essentially squishing each one stern-to into a raft. Not something we would have attempted ourselves – no fenders were spared during the maneuver!



Spartakhor

## Day 2: Fiskhardo on Kefalonia

Famous for its beautiful setting, Fiskhardo proved a little more exciting than anticipated. This time we did our own stern-to squishing (official nautical term used during high season sailing) on the sheltered North shore of Fiskhardo Bay. Once the anchor was dropped and the stern lines secured to some sturdy rocky outcrops, we tested the snorkelling equipment and established contact with the local marine life – mostly sea urchins and colourful, territorial fish.

Having decided to walk around the bay to find dinner, our plans were thrown by Poseidon himself: As we turned the corner from the North shore, waiters gathered wine glasses and cloths from the tables, as fishermen nervously watched their boats. Not twenty minutes later, Fiskhardo Bay resembled a washing machine, with 45' sailboats being blown onto rafts of dinghies and fishing boats and Greek expletives flying. We decided that dinner would have to be on the boat, as our raft was drifting dangerously close to the rocks. Together with the adjacent boats, we managed to move forward just enough to avoid the shore, not wanting to join into the already busy radio chatter. As the hunting party returned with food, the whole drama was as good as over. However, that did not stop us from checking on the anchor and lines every couple of hours during the night...

We had been warned by the more seasoned sailors at Howth of the strong afternoon breezes in the Ionian Sea, but somehow we didn't think that's what they had meant!



Fiskhardo before the storm



Early morning in Fiskhardo

Day 3: Next was a short hop to Sívota back on the island of Lefkas via the marble beaches and turquoise seas of Ithaka.

Day 4: Abelike Bay via the wrong way around Meganisi

From Sívota we aimed for Abelike Bay, and decided to round Meganisi anticlockwise to make a day of it. Very calm winds meant motoring most of the way, but also that we could have two people “hover” the boat while two others could safely explore parts of the coast by kayak or go for a swim. We took some time to explore an interesting looking cave along the West coast of Meganisi - with just enough headroom to squeeze in by kayak, the warm humid air was pierced by high-frequency

chirps. We had just invaded a bat cave - paddling resumed depending on individual disposition...

As this was our “free-sailing” day, we were not as constricted by the Flotilla schedule – nightfall was our only deadline for arrival at our destination. We hove to for lunch once reaching the Southern tip of Meganisi. Halfway up the East coast, the afternoon breeze slowly began to ripple the water, and finally gave us a sporting beat almost all the way into Abelike Bay. Cozy and sheltered from the strong breezes, Abelike was idyllic, but also busy. A motor yacht dominated most of the view and illuminated the entire bay. Once again, our kayaks and the dinghy gave us a chance to get away from it all and enjoy the starry Ionian skies.



Meganisi – cave-in-waiting



Lunchtime view at Meganisi

## Day 5: Old Vathi

The Lead Crew had planned to throw us a beach party at Varkó Bay, but forecast Southerly winds meant that anchorages would have been exposed to the weather, so we were instructed to return to Meganisi – the next bay West from Abelike, Old Vathi. Another lovely spot, most notable for its night life, great food and the proliferation of rather, rather large yachts.

## Day 6: Varkó Bay for a swim, then Lefkas

We managed to get a brief look at Varkó Bay after all on our way back to Lefkada. Not known as The Windy Town for nothing, the afternoon winds everyone had been talking about finally arrived on the last day. Unfortunately the channel leading up to Lefkas is very narrow, so sailing it was out of the question.

On the way into the marina, we were instructed to stop for fuel and return to the pontoon afterwards. The last night was spent on the boat, just letting everything sink in. Figuratively speaking...

Overall, this was a suitable entry-level adventure. There is no long-distance sailing, no vast expanses of water, and during high season solitude and peace are in short supply. However, for a social, easygoing introduction to cruising and getting used to being in charge of a yacht, with no pressure and lots of support it was a valuable experience for all, and a proper excuse to go somewhere warm.

Distance travelled: 85nm, with a lot of motoring, but also some really fun sailing.

