

# Corfu Charter Experience

**Willie Kearney (owner of Lasata Yacht in HYC), Brendan and Honor Mangan completed a charter of the Ionian Islands from Gouvia Marina in Corfu.**

**Charter from 13th to 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2017 - yacht hired for 10 days but 8 days sailing achieved.**

**See Map on Page 2.**

**Facts:** The cost of the 7 day charter from Yachtbookers.com of the yacht was € 680 plus a compulsory €70 cleaning fee. Something of a bargain we felt for our first charter despite the age - 1995 - of the yacht. We checked a week before arrival that the yacht had not been hired for the following week and made a cheeky offer to keep it for another three days; the Charter Company agreed immediately. A 7 day charter leaves only 5 days sailing as you need a day to arrive and a day to depart: not enough we felt for a rewarding voyage. We visited many islands en route at our leisure and were totally flexible in respect of our itinerary. Other accompanying 7 day yacht charterers had to reluctantly turn back earlier.

**Saturday:** We arrived in Corfu Airport on a late flight from Dublin and made our way to “Ariadne” a Moody 336 Yacht. This was obviously the first charter of 2017 as a number of faults was apparent: the toilet was not working, the boat was grubby, the anchor well was small and overflowing with chain and the GPS provided was basic giving longitude/latitude, only. Luckily we had downloaded local Navionics charts to an iPad and also had the relevant Imray paper charts together with a pilot book borrowed from Rod Cooper.

**Sunday Day 1:** In the morning I went through the charter formalities and signed my life and visa card away. The toilet took one hour to repair. We left finally at 11 am in beautiful sunny weather with a revised plan to sail 3 hours to Petriti, a small fishing village at the south end of Corfu. We had a relaxing sail culminating in our first stern-to mooring which went reasonably smoothly. However, as we began to relax a 50 foot yacht gave us a significant nudge while berthing beside us. It was all good humoured and we forgave the skipper as his wife as his all-female crew sashayed about in their white and orange bikinis.



**What a view to wake up to in Petriti!**



**Map Showing Route**

**Monday Day 2:** We had heard boat noises overnight and woke up to a quaint scene of a fleet of bright blue/white and red fishing boats bobbing on the adjacent wall. Canary yellow nets lay alongside being tended by swarthy fishermen. A fabulous sight while enjoying our breakfast of fresh fruit, bread, yogurt and honey. No wi-fi, facebook or twitter to bother us, just magnificent scenery. A truck selling delicious fresh cherries, melons and peaches arrived and were besieged by all.

We sailed 3 hours to the beautiful cliff surrounded town of Gaios on Paxos Island. We berthed the yacht in town centre facing the Town Church. Gaios was a magic town which can only be described as a cocktail of colour and chaos with visiting yachts competing for mooring positions. Our domestic

water pump had failed so we paid for water in order to check the tanks were full and to try to get rid of any airlocks. While filling the tank the water was overflowing and a rude Yachtsman pointed out we were polluting the environment. There was a queue of sailors waiting to use our water credit. The same Yachtsman who was standing beside me with his hose pipe then asked me to hurry up. I had to point out to him, I paid for the fob key and he could do the same if he so wanted to. Another Yachtsman then joined the queue. Finally, Ah here take it and they did. Later after I established the water pump was defective and needed replacement, I tried to fill a five gallon emergency water drum I found on the yacht. But my credit was up. I had now to find someone else's water credit. The consolation was the town was buzzing with activity and there was a lovely swimming location on the quay wall not far from our yacht. A large American yacht came in beside us and after seeing our flag invited us for after dinner drinks on board in order to discuss the affairs of the world.

**Tuesday Day 3:** Got up at 7 am to prepare for 33 mile sail south to the Lefkada Canal. Left Gaios at 9 am and after 2 hours the weather deteriorated to a force 5 with the wind on the nose. The worst part was the accompanying swell. Speed reduced to 4 knots with the wind and swell. We dropped all the sails and settled down for the hard graft. After 4 hours we reviewed whether to continue or not. We were unanimous in deciding to continue. The last hour of the voyage was encountered torrential rain which the bimini adequately shielded us from. The electronic Navionics charts were superb and saved us valuable time in locating the Canal entrance accurately in the storm. It took us a total of 9 hours from Petriti to finally enter the Lefkada Marina where a speedboat escorted us to our lazy line berth and set us up for electricity and key fobs for showers. The cost was € 48 plus €10 deposit for key fob. We were exhausted and were glad to pay. The Marina was located three hundred yards from the centre of the beautiful town of Lefkada. The town seemed to have more English Ex-Pats living there than local Greeks. A Greek Gibraltar.

We dined at the Nautilus Restaurant in the town centre. The excellent meal was complemented with good company and a free fresh fruit salad for all.



'Fish on the menu ?'



**Wednesday Day 4:** After provisioning the yacht we sailed down the Lefkada Canal. Then over to the Island of Scorpios and anchored off a beautiful beach with a blue and white arched beach hut. We anchored and jumped in for a swim in the well protected bay. A large day tripper boat from Nidri arrived and drove right up on the beach. It dropped a ladder from the bow for the tourists. It turned out this was Jacqueline Onassis' beach house and the beach on which she had been photographed topless by a paparazzi diver. The island is private and still owned by the Onassis family.



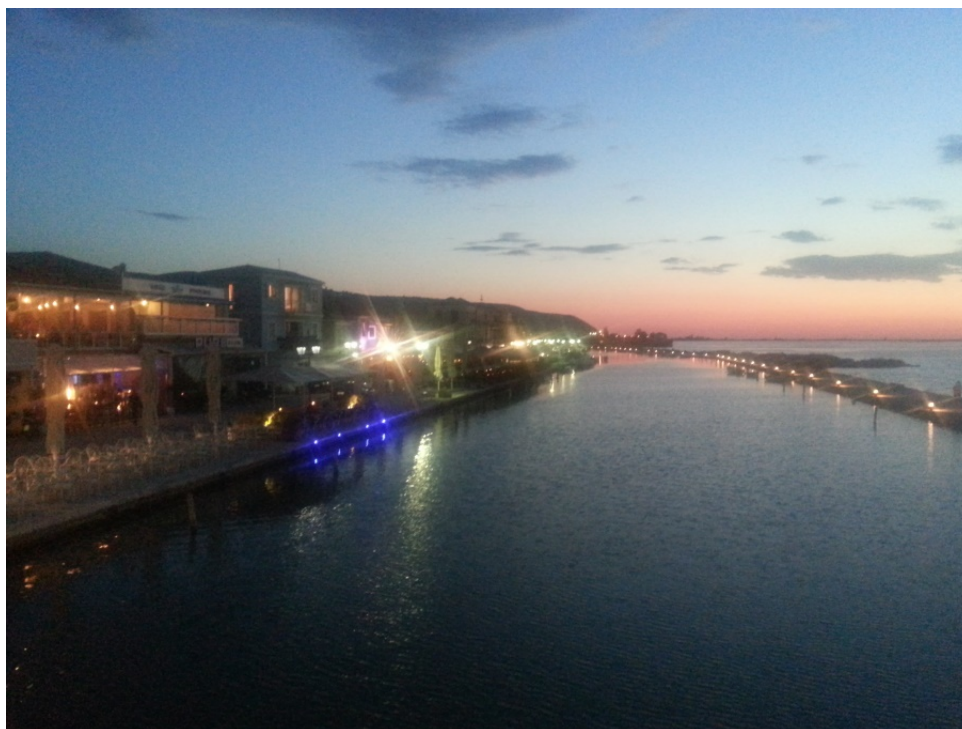
**Scorpios Island and Onassis Beach House**

We sailed on around the Scorpios and picked up a steady 15 knots of wind. What a sail. We passed the busy town of Nidri. No berths were available in Nidri, so we continued on into the famous and magnificent Tranquil Bay. Tranquil Bay does not live up to its name as it is famous for many yacht wrecks. Evidence of yacht accidents was strewn along its shores. The wind changed from calm one minute to gusting 25 knots from the sides of the surrounding hills. The wind seemed to accelerate through the hill gaps when the wind direction changed as it did frequently. We sailed right to the south end of the bay but failed to find a mooring - it was now 7 pm with the wind gusting at 25 knots and we were homeless and reluctant to anchor in the conditions. I had noticed a SailingHoliday.com pontoon on our way up the bay. The pontoon had easy lines and a sign stated that permission was needed to land. We approached the two blue T-shirted reps on the pontoon asking permission to land. They immediately said it was no problem and would assist with their rib. We needed the rib to turn the bow in successfully. We were tied up and very relieved. It turned out Sailingholiday.com owned the pontoon and the hotel and pool complex adjacent. There was no charge for the night stay or using the facilities. We were very grateful for their courtesy and dined using their facilities.

**Thursday Day 5:** We provisioned at a wonderful bakery and shop in Nidri and then set off for the town of Sivota to the south. We picked up again a 15 knot wind and with full sails entered the well-hidden gem of the town of Sivota in a magnificent bay. We berthed successfully first go against the tavern wall and then proceeded to the adjacent beach for a refreshing swim.

On reviewing our itinerary we concluded that Fiskardo on the island of Cephalonia was just too far south - given our time constraints - and opted to return towards Lefkada. An English couple beside us

advised that the small towns adjacent to Lefkada had no berths for yachts. Besides the Marina, the other option was to go through the Lefkada Canal Bridge and berth on the outer wall. We discussed this and decided on the comfort of the Marina and started northwards.



**Lefkada Town at Dusk.**

**Friday Day 6:** Up at 7 am for early breakfast and to queue at Marina Office to obtain the return of our yacht documentation and make the 9 am hourly opening of the Canal Bridge Ferry. (Interestingly, the islanders insist on calling the bridge a 'ferry' in order to retain their status as an island and associated grants). We exited the canal accompanied by a large catamaran and a 50 ft. motorboat. The motorboat nearly ran us down afterwards when we were raising our sails, as the Greek owner was on the phone in the pilot bridge and not paying attention. We proceeded to have a great sail with 16 knots of wind and finally set the battered old main sail in a good position using the traveller. We were sailing at a fantastic 7 knots. We were headed for the town of Lakka on the northern end of Paxos. Many yachtees had advised that it was a beautiful natural harbour and not to miss it. We were playing spot-the-entrance-buoy when we saw a fast motorboat ahead seemingly entering a cliff face. We sailed for this location and entered into the oasis of a beautiful circular bay with two beaches surrounding a central town. The setting was magical with Ospreys kia-ing in the skies above the encircling hilly forest cliffs. It was 3 pm and there were no yachts. We berthed up to the quay but found our rudder was almost touching bottom and had to move to a deeper point. Sweat dripping after all the anchor work, we sojourned to the adjacent tavern and had a glass of wine.





**Relaxing at Lakka. Note the Irish Flag .**

Then followed a swim, more wine and then dinner in a local recommended restaurant called Antonio's. What a meal. The Chef insisted on showing us the food he had prepared beforehand. It was the best meal we had on the trip. It was Nirvana. We decided to stay for an extra night and have a lazy day here.

**Saturday Day 6:** Slept late and got 11 am local bus to Longos and - again - Gaios town. We observed a 50 foot German yacht reversing into a berth and fouling his propeller on a Greek yacht's anchor chain. A crunch followed by alarms on the yacht. The yacht was subsequently immobilised in the navigation channel awaiting the assistance of a diver. It was very entertaining and we reluctantly left for our return bus not knowing what subsequently happened. We noticed a jeep being hurriedly loaded with diving equipment and wet suits in Logos on our way back in the bus and wondered. We then went for a long walk around Lakka and watched the harbour come to life for the evening festival. Greek dancing was scheduled in the surrounding tavern. In the hills above, the bells tingle as the exuberant goat herders call their flocks to order, leading them through the cherry trees for milking. Feta cheese I presume for our salads. The ever present sound of crickets preening their wings in the trees. One can appreciate how cattle cannot survive in the weather beaten and sun parched island. It would make one appreciate our Kerrygold and natural creams all the more with our abundant green grasses. We re-provisioned the yacht. The Weather forecast was a force 4 for the following day with a force 6 for Corfu in the afternoon.

**Sunday Day 7:** We decided to get up early and complete long sail (33 miles) to recommended Mandriki Marina located in the centre of Corfu town adjacent to the Venetian Fortress. We had decided to skip the obvious Petriti stop-over in favour of a new location and getting the long return sail over with. Great steady wind and a magnificent fast sail of 7 knots. When approaching the Corfu headland I reminded the crew of the procedure for dealing with heavy squalls of wind i.e. letting the

main and genoa sheets go and reefing the sails head to wind. 5 minutes later we were hit by a 25 knot squall and reacted very quickly to drop the main and roller reef 50% of the genoa. Jet fighter planes circled Corfu which was celebrating Island Independence day with marching bands and festivities. We proceeded at 7 knots (in 25 knot winds) for the remainder of the sail and arrived outside the Marina at 3 Pm. We radioed into Mandraki Marina to ask for a berth. They confirmed a berth complete with lazy lines. Hurray! cheered the crew. We had to berth the yacht bow-in, due to the depth. Special long planks were provided by the Marina for getting on/off the yacht.



**Berthed bow-to in Mandraki Marina.**

This was a great location with all the facilities of the Corfu sailing club including hot showers and Corfu fortress and Castle in the background. We enjoyed the festivities and the music bands on the streets and dined that night in a recommended restaurant. A visit to the Achillion Corfu Palace was available where you could walk with Hapsburg Empress Sissy in the grounds of her former summer Palace by the sea. Met a fellow RSGYC Dublin yacht in town Marina. The yacht was based in Ragusa Marina each winter in Sicily.



**Uneven walkway at Mandraki ensured our sobriety.**

**Monday Day 8:** We had time for a leisurely walk around Corfu town after breakfast before an even more leisurely sail to Gouvia Marina. Refuelled on the way in. Total fuel cost was €100 for entire 8 day voyage. Reversed confidently into Gouvia Marina with a 25 knot crosswind. Ariadne's owner was there to meet us and kept continually calling me Capitano and saying well done. Crew were getting fed up with me being called Capitano but I said to them I liked it and would insist on that appellation in future.

### **Conclusions**

Getting used to the lack of self-tailing winches was difficult. The main sail was, I would say, the original sail. It was baggy and shapeless. The reefing lines were set up wrongly and proved to be fitted too short to be useful. As a consequence I did not use the main sail reefing facility. When the wind exceeded 20 knots, I just dropped the mainsail in the zip up bag provided and used the furling jib. It was adequate and we had some fantastic day sails at up to 7 knots.

We would hire a larger, roomier and modern yacht next time. The more company aboard the better. However, we really enjoyed the freedom of the charter and the beautiful Ionian Sea islands. The ever present breezes to carry us away to beautiful anchorages surrounded by good company, laughter and the pleasant nature of the Greek people. It worked wonders on us. Would we go again, yes, yes, yes and hire the yacht for two weeks min.

Willie Kearney