

The Palace Of The Grand Master, seen from Mandraki harbour



RHODES LESS TRAVELLED

Leave the crowds to the beaches, says Faye Bonny. This island has a horde of treasures to explore

Set in the clear waters where the Mediterranean meets the Aegean, the Greek island of Rhodes sits at a crossroads between Europe, the Middle East and Africa. This has given the city and the island many different identities, cultures, and languages during its long history.

The island has been inhabited since about 4,000BC, the Neolithic Period. However, it wasn't until the 11th Century BC that the island started to flourish with the arrival of the Dorians, one of three tribes that divided the ancient Greeks. It was the Dorians who later built the three important cities of Lindos, Ialysos and Kamiros.

A visit to Kamiros revealed what would once have been a bustling community. Built around 600BC, this city was divided into public and private buildings arranged within the natural slopes of the hills in a kind of chessboard fashion. The city was destroyed in 226BC by an earthquake

but the ruins remain. It is strange to walk through them and enter what would have been real streets and homes more than 2,000 years ago.

Lindos, however, is still a small yet busy



DEFENSIVE WALLS ENCLOSE NOT ONLY THE 14TH CENTURY PALACE OF THE GRAND MASTER, BUT A LABYRINTH OF COBBLED STREETS WITH TAVERNAS AND SMALL SHOPS AT EVERY TURN

medieval village, set in a beautiful valley and was once the capital of the island. Today it is more of a holiday resort topped with the ruins of a fortified ancient acropolis.

No traffic is allowed in the village so you can only reach the acropolis on foot or by donkey through the winding streets passing many shops enticing you with their local crafts and gifts.

The city of Rhodes itself is also steeped in ancient history. If legend is to be believed, the Colossus of Rhodes, a huge bronze statue of the sun god Helios and one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, was an imposing sight in 292BC when entering what is now Mandraki Harbour. This, however, was destroyed some 56 years after it was erected when an earthquake struck.

Now, the harbour is full of boats waiting to take day-trippers on tours and is just a stone's throw from the delights within the medieval fortress that is Rhodes Old Town, a



The acropolis of Lindos, which was fortified by the Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Knights of St John and the Ottomans

UNESCO World Heritage Site and the oldest inhabited medieval town in Europe.

The 4km of walls enclose not only the Palace of the Grand Master, built in the 14th Century, and various museums but also a labyrinth of cobbled streets and alleyways with tavernas and small shops at every turn.

For one of the best views of the Old Town and Mandraki harbour, climb to the top of the clock tower. Outside the walls lies the New Town of Rhodes, providing a taste of modern Greece with fashionable shops and trendy cafés and restaurants.

Many treasures are a little off the beaten track, so what better way to see them than on foot? To avoid the blisteringly hot, midday sun we began our walks late afternoon with an experienced guide from Walking Rhodes. First we visited a beautiful hidden gorge, you could never know existed, yet a half-hour hike into the countryside and you are rewarded with amazing scenery.

Then we pressed on to the ancient ruins of the castle of Feraklos. It is a good climb and fairly rough underfoot. And like so many of the ruins here, the only significant remains are the walls, but you can see where rooms used to be, and the breathtaking views are worth the trek.

Our three-hour tour ended with a cold drink with our guide in Haraki, a village packed with friendly tavernas.

It is almost impossible to resist the warm blue seas surrounding the island so we booked a day scuba diving with the award-winning Waterhoppers Diving School.

WAY TO GO

Amathus Beach Hotel Rhodes (www.amathus-hotels.com +30 22410 89900) offers nightly rates in an Elite Suite from 220 euros per night, based on two sharing on a b&b basis. easyJet flights from London Gatwick start from £39.99 one way or £76.58 return (www.easyjet.com). For information on Rhodes visit www.rodosisland.gr or read DK Eyewitness Travel guide to the Greek Islands.

We took off by boat to the beautiful Kalithea Bay, where we were kitted out. Being a novice is no problem as all levels are catered for, and within a few minutes of entering the water we were swimming among brightly coloured fish. It took a while to get used to the breathing but it soon became second nature, and we could appreciate fully the beauty of an underwater world. Expert instructors were on hand all the way, making an already exciting day even better.

For a more laid-back day we headed to Petaloudes, Valley of the Butterflies, where the fluttering yellow and black-winged Jersey Tiger Moths are drawn to the liquid amber trees in this beauty spot. With walkways, flowing streams tumbling into waterfalls, rustic bridges and resting places, cafes and charming gift shops, it's a little haven on a hot day

Staying at the luxurious five-star Elite

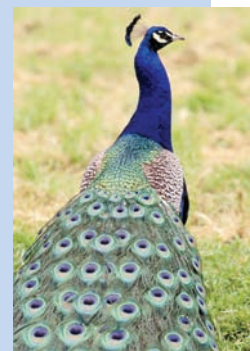
Suites at the Amathus Hotel in Ixia, with its great facilities was a treat. With your own decking area you can sip on champagne, nibble strawberries and take a splash in your own private plunge pool while topping up your tan... the perfect base for a fabulous holiday.



Ten things you must do in Rhodes

1 The best way to explore the island is by hiring a car but keep an eye out for mopeds in the cities and goats in the countryside. www.galaxy-rentacar.com, prices start from 182 euros for a week.

2 Visit Rodini Park which lies in the bed of a stream shaded by pines and maples to see peacocks, Rhodian deer and also turtles.



3 Take a tour with Walking Rhodes who offer a wide variety of hikes, from a couple of hours to complete walking holiday packages. www.walking-rhodes.com

4 Unwind with a Metaxa, a distilled spirit that was invented by Spyros Metaxas in 1888.



5 Visit the Archaeological Museum of Rhodes, to see collections of Classical, Hellenistic and Roman sculpture as well as vases and figurines from ancient lalysos.

6 Try windsurfing at Prasonisi, the southernmost tip of the island famed for watersports.

7 Walk along the famous medieval Street of Knights created by the Knights of St John.

8 Scuba dive with Waterhoppers, who also offer snorkelling lessons. www.waterhoppers.com

9 Admire all manner of sea life in the aquarium and marine research centre near Mandraki harbour.

10 Sample cheap, home-cooked and delicious traditional Greek food by avoiding the tourist restaurants.