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RELUCTANT CRUISER GOES ON A GREEK ODYSSEY

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Travel Writer Mark Cummings takes on his greatest travel phobia...the cruise.

Henry and Julie from Telford live inside my head. They are the clichéd couple I dread getting stuck with on a humongous ship with no escape from never ending stories of their long and exotic cruise history, laborious details about Henry's new electric Vauxhall Corsa and Julie's ever-growing list of food intolerances.

Then my friend Powell from The Small Cruise Collection challenged me to try one, he had chosen Variety Cruises for me and a seven-day adventure called "Jewels of The Cyclades" with thirty-eight fellow passengers, eighteen crew and an exciting list of adventurous excursions to enjoy.



As we set sail for Poros we experienced that first awkward but exciting evening meal and the cruise ship ritual of sussing out the fellow passengers. Over melt in the mouth steak we proudly showed off our intimate knowledge of Barcelona (we have family there) to locals Pedro and Genia who instantly became our Catalan kindred spirits.



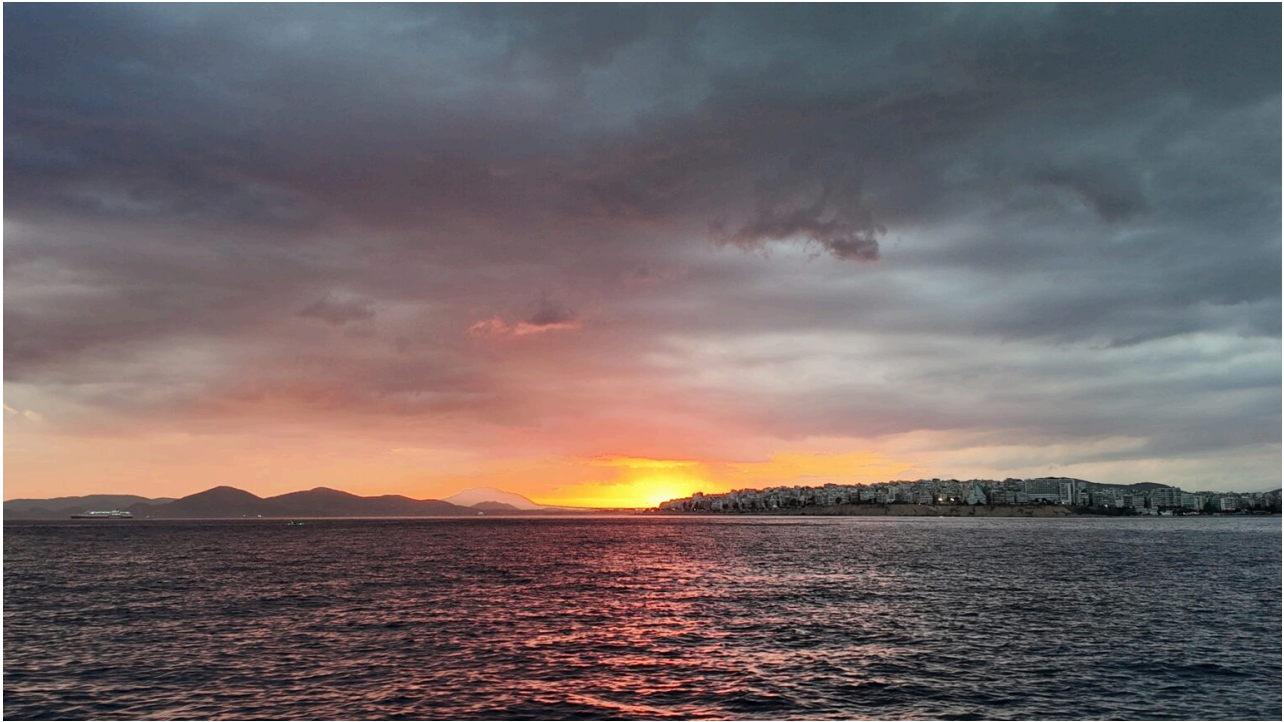
The next morning, I had a fascinating encounter with Andreas and Vladimira from Germany and some wild goats. We were sitting on a beach on the uninhabited island of Poliegos (meaning ‘many goats’) and I discovered that this was their sixtieth cruise. What struck me as odd was the fact that they seemed perfectly normal and at no point did they talk about their other cruises.

On Santorini we travelled back to 3000 BC visiting the archeological site of the prehistoric town of Akrotiri. By now I had

got to know Mina from Sweden who was a finance lawyer living in London, formed a bromance with Carlos a Brazilian restaurant owner from Sao Paulo and worryingly I couldn't get rid of this nagging compulsion to track down Andreas and ask him more details about some of the other cruises he'd been on. What was happening to me?



After a short sail we saw the sunset at Mykonos followed by the sunrise the next day approaching Syros. This is the capital of the Cyclades and that night whilst everyone partied on the boat I climbed high up into the hills above the main town of Ermoupoli because I just couldn't resist another hill top church.



We had engaged with most of the other passengers but there was one couple who we had never managed to chat to. I decided to put that right and ended up with Henri and Juliette who said they had moved to France from the UK emigrating from a town in eastern Shropshire. As Henri was giving me chapter and verse about the range of his new electric Corsa, Juliette began detailing what happens to her bowels when she has too much gluten, caffeine and dairy. Oh, my Lord! This was my worst nightmare come true. Then I woke up. After too many beers with Carlos, I'd fallen asleep on the sunbed. Phew!



We cruised back to Athens via Kythnos and a stunning view of the temple of Poseidon for a final night captain's dinner. On Powell's website it mentions "Travel to enjoy, but also to see and experience, learn as you travel in the company of like-minded travellers." That was it. I had swum, explored, made new friends and learned lots. This miserable mariner, dubious deckhand, sceptical seadog, vacillating voyager was no more. Got to go... Carlos wants a FaceTime.

The Small Cruise Ship Collection offer a wide range of cruises worldwide. Even Mark might be tempted by river cruises from the Congo to Columbia, joining a multinational Polar Expedition party, enjoying a Gullet adventure and the chance to hike, cycle or join a wildlife cruise.

This article was written by [Mark Cummings](#) and published on Saturday, December 20, 2025.

To follow in Mark's footsteps and book a trip on a cruise, meet Mark and our cruise experts at the [Cheltenham Travel Festival](#) taking place on Saturday 21st February 2026, from 10am-4pm. [Plan your visit](#), view our [travel talks](#), [exhibitors](#) and [book your tickets](#) to attend.



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