Naxos—Life, the Greek way

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The old landlady is waving to visitors from afar. In Lionas Bay, however, no further invitation is needed to indulge in dolmades and satsuki, followed by a serving of grilled fish. During the off season, the remote beach string in the northern part of Naxos is only inhabited by a dozen people, all making their living at the local taverns. The few visitors, who stray from the main roads and wander down the narrow, dusty path, are treated to a delicious meal and home-made wine bottled in plastic water bottles—one of the many provisional arrangements you are certain to fall in love with.

Upon exploring the Hellenic civilization, the famous German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe remarked: “Of all peoples, the Greeks have dreamt the dream of life best.” On Naxos, this dream is still much alive. According to the myth, Dionysus and Ariadne were still much alive. According to the best; on Naxos, this dream came true.

Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches along massive Venetian castles and Hellenic cult sites tell of the island’s multicultural history; Greeks, Persians, Italians, and Turks long fought for dominance in the Aegean, and only since 1852 has the island been part of Greece.

Naxos lures locals, as well as tourists, with a more peaceful ambiance nowadays. Visitors are greeted by the iconic Portara, the entrance to an unfinished temple from the 5th century BC. Although Chóra—as the capital is called by locals—has an airport, most visitors come by ferry from Piraeus in Athens three times a day. On the airy decks, weekenders reunite with backpackers and Greek grandmothers, who occasionally feed tourists with cookies and fruit. Security instructions should always be followed, since the ferries here tend to be overcrowded. Only recently have ferry workers protested against their poor working conditions.

With an area of 500 square kilometres, Naxos is the largest island of the Cyclades, yet, it managed to resist the mass tourism that swept through Greece in the 1980s and 1990s. As a result, you will not be able to find resorts or big holiday complexes that are common on other islands, like Crete and Rhodes. Instead, the island offers a vast number of decently priced apartments that will make you forget the buffet when you can enjoy breakfast on your sea-view balcony. The tourism business has brought moderate wealth to Naxos, which was formerly known only for its marble mining industry and its excellent citrus olive.

There is plenty to explore on the island: the still intact, picturesque Castro in Naxos-City with the Venetian Museum; the Temple of Demeter in the Naxos-City center; the unfinished Kouros statue of Apollo; the Dimitra temple near Sangri, and the Dionysus temple at Glinado, to the centre and north of the island. Agia Anna and Plaka, just outside Naxos-City, are the most well-known beaches. But only a few kilometres south, each remote and beautiful beach is followed by another, connected by twisting dirt tracks that challenge even the most experienced drivers.

A dusty road meanders invitingly down to Lionas Bay, and the journey is absolutely worth it as the landlady is sure to be expecting you already. More information can be found at www.visitgreece.gr

CINEMA

FOOD, INC. is the latest documentary to hit the screens—and it is a powerful one. With the use of clever animations and compelling graphics, the filmmakers—Producer-Director Robert Kenner and investigative authors Eric Schlosser (Fast Food Nation) and Michael Pollan (The Omnivore’s Dilemma)—expose how highly mechanised today’s food industry is. They furthermore reveal how a handful of corporations control the food supply, while scientists manipulate the very DNA of the animals we eat so that they grow faster, feed more efficiently and even taste different.

The film was received with much controversy at the Berlin Film Festival in February. It will be shown at other festivals before it is released in cinemas worldwide.

TECHNOLOGY

The Geneva Sound Home Theater from Geneva Lab in the US is a hybrid of high-quality furniture and high-fidelity electronics. It’s also the latest in iPod/iPhone accessories and a posh TV stand. The stereo system features 2.1 surround sound with Embracing Sound DSP technology, an all-digital 700 W amplifier, seven speakers, as well as a rocking 12-inch subwoofer. An integrated dock lets you store your iPod or iPhone. There’s also extra interior space for components such as a cable box, DVD/Blu-ray player, game console or Apple TV.

The Geneva Sound Home Theater comes in black or white and can be yours for US$5,999.

DINING

The Italian restaurant Isola Bar and Grill at the waterfront of IFC Mall in Hong Kong offers spectacular views over the Victoria harbour. Opened in 2004, it was voted Hong Kong’s Best new restaurant by readers of HK magazine. Fortunately, the restaurant does not rely only on its scenic location but also offers simple and authentic cuisine. Chef Gianni Caprioli says he uses “common ingredients cooked uncommonly well” as evidenced in his baked breaded buffalo mozzarella or stone-baked whole sea bass with tomato, asparagus and black olives.

DESIGN

The Stop Playing with Yourself concept piece by designers schamburg + alvisse from Sydney in Australia is a new furniture concept based on a classic wooden puzzle. The foam elements can be arranged in a way that lets you decide whether you want them to be a sofa, chair, table, or even a bed in your living room or practice. The pieces are available in pink and grey. The retail price per piece is AU$8595 (US$8299).