

My First Greek Ferry Experience

By Ethan K. Owen

I am not sure what I expected to find when I got on my first ferry but what I found was not what I had imaged. Having traveled a good bit of the globe I have had the opportunity to travel by ferry in a few places. I even have a few horror stories about ferry rides that almost ended in disaster. At times I was sure that I would end up being mentioned on page 24 of the New York Times: Ferry sinks off the coast of Indonesia, 150 people presumed dead including one American. For the most part, the ferries that I have been on have been small and unsafe.

I am by no means a ferry aficionado and honestly know very little about them. So when I arrived at Piraeus' Great Harbor I was shocked to see a fleet of enormous, modern ferries big enough to hold dozens and dozens of cars and trucks and hundreds of people each. The gleaming white ferries looked as though they were carbon copies of the Love Boat. As I stared up at the ferries from the dock I would not have been surprised to find them equipped with swimming pools and full bars with bartenders named Isaac. If they made the ferries any bigger you could probably land airplanes on them and America would be leasing them to use in their war against terror.

Unlike the Love Boat, I did not have to wait in a structured single file line to get on board. With my ticket in hand I walked down the vast pier pushing through the throngs of people, frantically searching for my ferry as my departure time loomed closer. Painted in huge letters on the backs of the ferries are their names (each ship has its own name) and the islands that they service. Spotting my towering white ferry from afar, I handed my ticket to a chain-smoking sailor who, without even looking at my ticket, ripped it in half and waved me on board.

Taking the escalator up (yes, that's right, the escalator), I entered into a huge room that looked like a strange crossbreed of a McDonald's, a Starbucks, an airplane, and an ashtray. The room, which stretched the length of the ship, had rows and rows of airplane seats, several large screen TV's, a small coffee shop, a bar, a kiosk, and about a hundred people endlessly chain smoking. Needless to say, I decided to check out the outside deck.

Covering most of the upper deck was a blue tarp ceiling providing shade for the fixed plastic seats. The air was thick with the smell of

diesel fumes. The huge red and black smoke stacks were placed directly in front of the deck and as the ship moved forward the wind blew the fumes over the deck. I made a mental note for when I design my next ferry: put the smoke stacks behind the deck so as not to asphyxiate the passengers who go outside seeking fresh air.

Still in search of fresh air, I discovered that on each side of the boat, up a flight of stairs from the deck, were some benches located in front of the smoke stacks and their billowing black fumes. Sitting in the fresh air, enjoying the breeze, I gazed out across the blue sea at the islands in the distance. After a long search I had finally found the choice spot on the ferry, breathed a sigh of relief, and enjoyed the rest of the ride.