

Green and pleasant land

Paxos is a little island full of low-key charm, finds Mary Novakovich



Paxos is hardly undiscovered. Mention it to Grecophiles and they will sigh with pleasure at memories of holidays spent on this smallest of the Ionian islands.

Despite its popularity, it has managed to avoid mass tourism and remain surprisingly unspoilt. There are no high-rises and sprawling resorts – only olive trees, hidden coves and a sense of time standing still.

► SELL: GREEN PEACE

Lying seven miles off the southern coast of Corfu, Paxos

is a world away from its bigger neighbour. The lack of an airport has kept the island, which is just six miles by two-and-a-half, free of the overdevelopment seen in other parts of the Mediterranean.

There are only three villages – all tucked into picturesque harbours – plus a few hamlets scattered within the hilly, wooded interior. Thanks to the Venetians, the island is covered with olive groves bordered by tumbling dry-stone walls.

Gaios, the largest village, is a busy, cheerful place, with

colourful Venetian-style houses lining the harbour. The new port where the hydrofoils from Corfu dock is just under a mile from the village centre, leaving the harbour free for pleasure craft, fishing boats, water taxis and excursion boats. With its restaurant-filled squares, bars and shops, it's as bustling as Paxos gets – and once you adjust to the agreeably slow pace of island time, you wouldn't want it any livelier than this.

Tiny Loggos on the eastern coast is the prettiest harbour,

with tavernas hovering over the waterfront and cypress and olive groves curving round the village.

At the northern end of Paxos is Lakka, nearly as pretty as Loggos, with a deep horseshoe bay that makes it particularly alluring for flotilla holidaymakers. Lakka is a good bet for clients who want a decent range of restaurants, shops and beaches within easy reach, but prefer somewhere smaller than Gaios.

There is a bus service of sorts, but there are easier ways for clients to get around. For



Gaios, Paxos



LEFT:
Gaios



RIGHT:
Lakka
Bay

→ those staying in villas outside the villages, car hire is recommended. Holidaymakers staying in the villages will have restaurants, small supermarkets and bars on their doorstep, but might want to hire a small boat, a car or a scooter to make the most of the island's beaches.

All three villages – indeed, the whole island – boast the same informal, relaxed and friendly ambience. History buffs in search of ancient ruins might have to make do with exploring Paxos's 63 churches – but even that

might sound too strenuous after days spent doing very little apart from soaking up the sun and swimming in sparkling blue seas.

▶ SEE: BEACH BONANZA

The rugged coast of Paxos shelters more than 30 beaches; all are pebbly and almost all are exquisite, with towering olive trees providing welcome shade. The water is amazingly clear and perfect for snorkelling.

The western coast is quite wild, with pebbly coves best reached by boat, with the added bonus of



Spring attracts keen walkers, when wildflowers bring an explosion of colour to the woods and groves

taking in the breathtaking cave formations along the way.

Clients staying in Lakka can walk to delightful Harami beach on the western side of the horseshoe bay. After an initial strip of pebbles, the surface turns to soft sand. It's also possible to walk – but easier by car or scooter – to get to Plani beach on the western coast near Lakka's lighthouse, which is one of the best places to watch the sun set.

In the relatively short distance along the coast from Lakka to Loggos, there's a pleasingly wide variety of beaches. Orkos can be reached via a footpath through the woods, although many visitors find it easier to come by boat.

Monodendri is at the bottom of a winding lane and quickly becomes a favourite with clients: the long beach is home to two restaurants, one of which has a pool, and it's also conveniently placed on the bus route between Lakka and Loggos.

Levrechio is only a few minutes' walk from Loggos,

which means it gets very busy in high season. It also doesn't have the shade-giving olive trees of many of the other beaches, but holidaymakers who fancy a hike – or a boat ride – can swim in the pebbly coves of Marmari and Kipos about half a mile away.

Those who prefer sand to pebbles can take a boat to Antipaxos, about two miles south of Paxos, which has beaches that wouldn't look out of place in the Caribbean. The only proper sandy beach on Paxos itself is Moggonissi, south of Gaios, which is a man-made beach with full facilities and a popular restaurant.

Outside classic sunbathing season, spring and autumn attract holidaymakers with a keen interest in walking, especially early in the year when wildflowers bring an explosion of colour to the woods and groves.

▶ STAY: CHIC BOUTIQUES

There's only a handful of hotels on the island, as most of the accommodation on Paxos is in apartments and villas, ranging from simple harbour-side flats to luxurious rural houses with infinity pools.

Paxos Beach Hotel is the grande dame, its low-rise cluster of bleached Paxiot stone buildings hidden in olive and pine groves. It sits on its own private beach a mile south of Gaios, and rooms have balconies or spacious stone terraces from



LEFT:
Loggos
Harbour

which to enjoy the sea views.

With a restaurant and chilled-out poolside lounge bar – not to mention a tennis court – it's tempting to spend lazy days at the hotel without venturing too far. Sunvil offers a week's B&B at the Paxos Beach Hotel from £837, including flights and transfers.

Deep in Paxos's green interior just under a mile south of Gaios is the family-oriented Paxos Club Resort, which is surrounded by gardens and olive groves. All of the rooms have balconies or terraces with views either of the gardens or the large swimming pool. There's also a hot tub on a little island in the pool.

The garden has plenty of places in which to relax, including a large covered terrace and hammocks. Although the hotel is modern, the restaurant is in the owners' original family home, made of Paxiot stone and dating from 1896.

The hotel runs a shuttle service to Gaios and has a mini market selling basic provisions. Ionian & Aegean Island Holidays offers a week's B&B at the Paxos Club Resort from £778, including flights and transfers.

For a boutique hotel offering pure romance, recommend Torri e Merli, half a mile south of Lakka. Rooms in this 18th-century fortified manor house feature exposed stone walls and stylish pale-wood furnishings that mix modern and traditional.

There are just seven rooms, and all have a balcony or a terrace, some with distant views of the sea. Amid the olive trees in the gardens is a smallish infinity pool, and the spa area includes an unusual relaxation room that's carved out of a stone cellar. CV Villas offers a week's B&B at Torri e Merli from £979, including flights and transfers.

Just as intimate, and also



ABOVE: Torri e Merli hotel

with just seven rooms, is Purple Apricot Hotel, run exclusively by Simpson Travel for adults only. Its chic, individually designed suites have balconies or terraces as well as kitchenettes. Surrounded by

olive groves, it's a mile and a half inland from Gaios but you can still see the sea from some of the rooms and the pool. A week's B&B starts at £913, including flights and transfers. **TW**



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