

MEDITERRANEAN

SIGGY AND HEATHER | TRIP AROUND THE MEDITERRANEAN | THURSDAY, 16 MAY 2013

Monemvassia

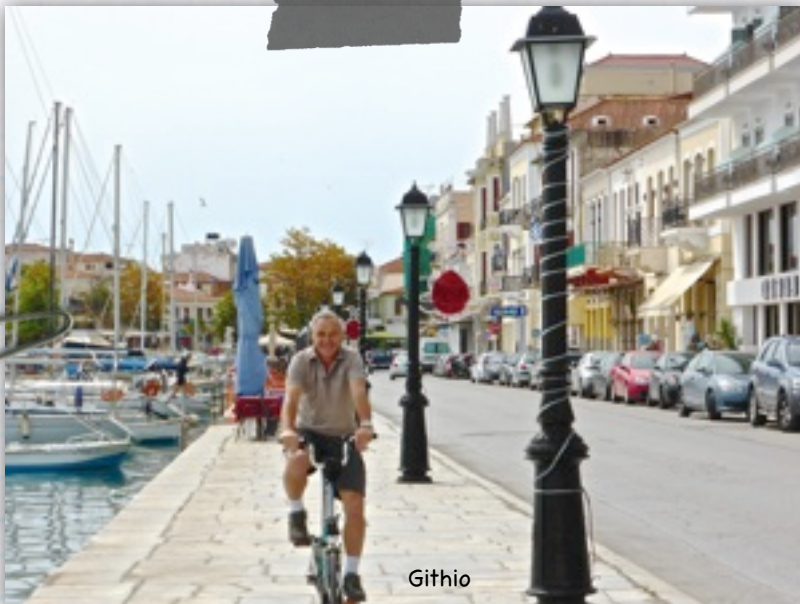
We are told that summer can be very oppressive in Greece with extreme temperatures, but conditions during the last few weeks of our trip here have been extremely pleasant. Today was no different - temperatures around 22 degrees (evenings being a cooler 12 degrees.) It makes driving and sightseeing so very enjoyable.

After initially getting lost in some backroads (we stupidly wanted to take a shortcut) we eventually found the right road and headed off to Monemvassia - a giant rocky outcrop with a medieval walled village. We were not sure what we would find on this, the final southern leg of our journey. Sometimes guide books don't get it right. Nevertheless we stuck to our plan.

Not long into our excursion we drove into Githio. What a surprise. It was a bustling place with the sea side footpath taken over by umbrellas and tables and chairs. There were few people actually eating or having coffee but all the tables were set for a meal and the restauranteurs were fussing around waiting expectantly for customers. This use of prime waterfront space was a surprise to me because it severely limited the amount of space for car parking.



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Githio



Monemvassia's Hagia Sophia



At one point I found a space free on the other side of the road and promptly dove in only to realize it was space reserved for police cars. I quickly moved on.

Once parked we jumped on our bikes for a quick cycle round. We had a lovely relaxing ride stopping often to enjoy the view. We even found an ATM and sampled the local bread.

It was then on to see the Greek version of Mont St Michael. We have seen the French version and the English one too, so were expecting something interesting. After an hour we rounded a bend and caught sight of Monemvassia. Wow. The rock was huge but we could not see any "medieval township clinging to the side". We parked on the man-made causeway that links the rock to the mainland and walked to the far side of

the rock. Apparently it was joined to the mainland until an earth quake separated it in 375 AD.

As we approached we started to see the ruins of a fortress on the top of the rock. The walls of the lower village also came into view. In the 6th century local residents were forced to retreat to this area to gain protection from invaders. We could certainly see why they chose this spot. The rock has a sheer cliff face on all sides - an excellent natural defense. Monemvassia in fact means "single entry".

Upon entering the area you come to the "lower" village with its narrow cobbled streets lined with souvenir shops and eateries, flanked by winding stairways that weave between a complex network of stone houses with walled gardens and courtyards.

We spent some time here enjoying the maze, and gazing at the buildings. Much rebuilding and reconstruction is going on. The streets are decorated tastefully with flowers and pots.

The upper part of town is a vast and fascinating jungle of ruins - except for the church of Hagia Sophia which is set on the edge of a sheer cliff (there seems to be lots of churches named Hagia Sophia). I know how sheer the drop down to the sea was because when I peered casually over the side it literally took my breath away - quite a drop I can tell you.

After two hours we had had enough but it was far too early to think about calling it a day. The only way back was the way we came so we set off and ended up near to where we had started today.

Another enjoyable day.



Stairway to Hagia Sophia



Monemvassia Rock and causeway but no town or ruined fort visible



Githio



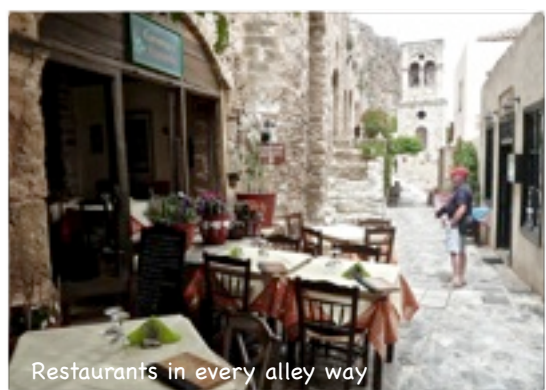
PHOTOS



Masses of flowering bouganvillia all over town



Gorgeous Githio



Restaurants in every alley way



Mini Hagia Sophia (big brother is in Istanbul)



Interesting tiled roofs



View down from upper ruins

