

MEDITERRANEAN

SIGGY AND HEATHER | TRIP AROUND THE MEDITERRANEAN | SUNDAY, 28 APRIL 2013

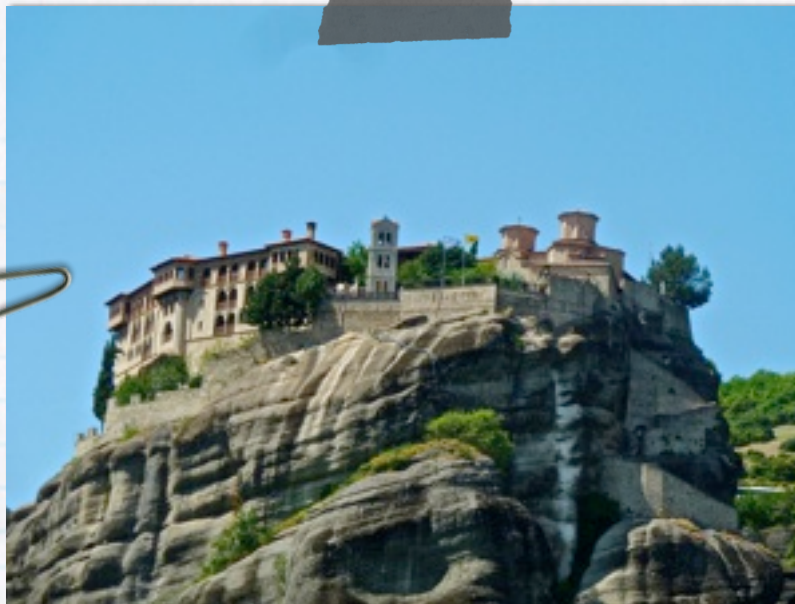
Meteora

The name Meteora derives from a Greek adjective which means “suspended in the air”. The area is World Heritage listed and consists of massive pinnacles of smooth rock topped by monasteries. Six monasteries are still active today and there are ruins of 18 more scattered over the area.

It could easily be the setting for a futuristic movie and one monastery did actually feature in a James Bond movie - ‘For Your Eyes Only’. Physically it reminded me of the Olgas without the bands of colour and with buildings on top!

To go back a little in time, apparently, from the 11th century, hermit monks lived in the scattered caverns that exist in the area. By the 14th century these monks started to feel the wrath of the Turks. So, what did they do - “lets build up high where they can’t get to us” - the ideal retreat so to speak.

Seriously, they are very inspiring. For us to get up to them with all the mod-cons of modern roads and steps carved in the walls of the pinnacles was very challenging. Imagine having to use huge ladders or be pulled up in a net. The net method was used to haul people and supplies right up to the 1930s. We climbed up to four of the monasteries and walked around the



Rocks to Climb

Meteora is renowned around the world for rock climbing. There is little wonder why. We can appreciate there are a huge number of rock faces to choose from but why people risk their lives to climb rocks is beyond us.

In the bus whilst on the way to the monasteries, we passed a group of people getting their climbing gear ready. I was surprised how much stuff they were lugging.

Near the end of the day, as we were walking down the road, we happened to see a large cave in one of the mountains. Heather took out her binoculars to see what was in the cave. That’s when we noticed the rock climbers. They were high up, hanging on to the side of the rock face. We watched in horror at how steep and insecure they seemed to be. No ropes either. Certainly not something we would try.



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MEN IN SHORTS NOT ALLOWED AND LADIES IN SLEEVELESS DRESSES, SLACKS OR PANTALOONS WILL NOT BE ADMITTED.

STRICT DISCIPLINE The entry fee is E3 and ladies who do not have a dress below knees can borrow a wrap-around skirt while in the monastery grounds. Not sure how a Scotsman would fare with a short kilt?



WHO GETS THE BLAME? No photos allowed but Heather snapped anyway with flash blazing. Head monk saw the flashes and me with camera so just assumed it was me. I was severely chastised in front of many people. “Are you Italian” he asked. “No Australian” I said meekly. “OK, no worries. No more.”



WASHING LINE? Hard to make out in a slit in the rocky face. Looked like a washing of national flags for rock climbers who made it up to this high place.

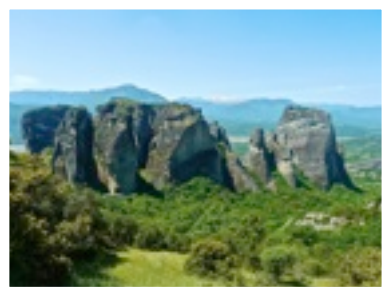
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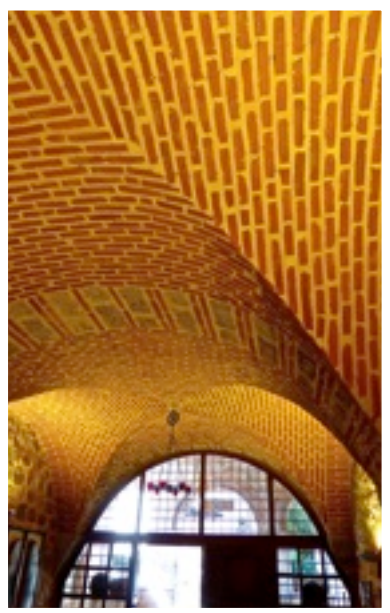
FLOWERS IN BLOOM



PERCHED UP HIGH



ROCKS AND MORE ROCKS



ARCHES OUT OF BRICK

Walking up and down stairs from 9am to 4pm slowly wears you out.

whole area. We had the company of a fellow Brisbanite - Lyn, a lady in her early 50s. It was great to have her company and to swap travel stories.

THERE ARE 15 KMS OF ROADS AROUND METEORA - WE TRAIPSED MOST OF THEM.

The Greeks don't seem to be much good at drawing maps. The map we were given at the caravan park was a schematic one showing how all the monasteries were connected by track or road. It looked like the map was drawn up by someone who thought "more or less" was OK (similar to the one we had in Zagahoria earlier). It lacked a scale and left a lot to the imagination.

This lack of a reliable map, meant that we did a lot of walking on the roads. Walking on the road (without a pedestrian footpath) required the three of us to constantly keep watch for vehicles coming in both directions. We only saw 3 other people walking (and they were young). We decided to walk/ bus, because we did not want to have to worry about the van and we thought it would give us a better view of the whole place.

The first monastery we visited - Meteora (after which the whole complex is named), had quite an extensive museum. We were particularly impressed with the library museum. It had very old hand written manuscripts. The ones we saw were as old as the 11th and 12th centuries. They state that they even have some of the works of Homer and Aristotle! Apparently the library is one of the most extensive in Europe.

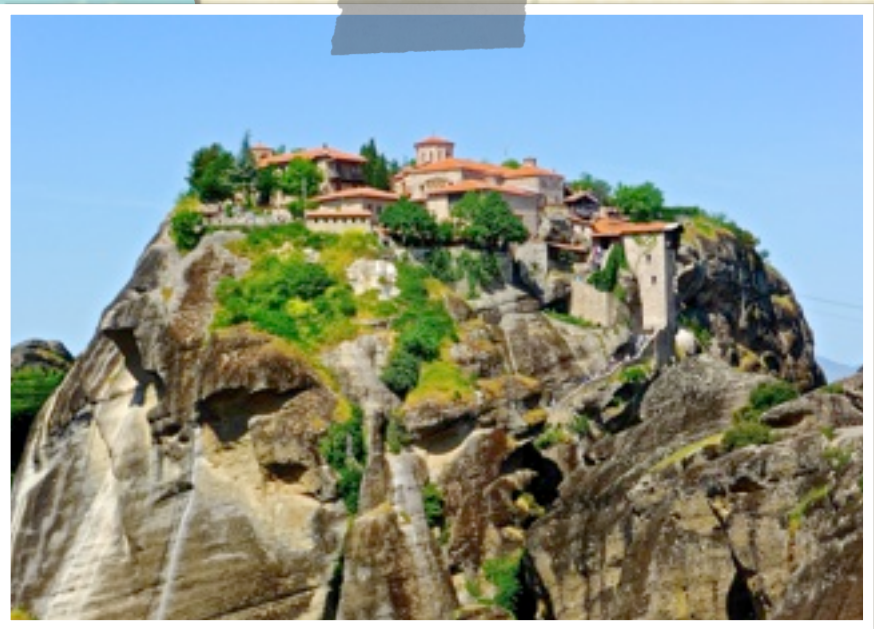
Lots of the other exhibits were to do with the many wars that the Greeks have been involved in. On display were an interesting collection of uniforms, weapons and paintings of prominent figures from those times. The hall of portraits, with their explanation of the roles that the people played, really made us reflect on the influences the people like the Greeks must absorb. Maybe it helps explain the passionate nationalism that we see in places like Greece.

By the end of the day we were exhausted. Luckily the walk back to the camp was downhill. We will sleep well tonight after a hearty greek meal. We are a little sunburnt too.





PHOTOS



IT IS DIFFICULT TO SHOW THE SCALE OF METEORA IN PHOTOGRAPHS. THE MOUNTAINS ARE GIGANTIC AND THE BUILDINGS PERCHED ON TOP ARE AWE INSPIRING. IT MAKES YOU WONDER HOW THEY GOT THERE IN THE FIRST PLACE AND WHAT CHARISMATIC FIGURE WAS ABLE TO COAX OTHERS INTO HELPING HIM HAUL EACH BRICK UP THE MOUNTAIN TO BUILD A MONASTERY.

