

Greece to UK Travel - October/November 2020

Tuesday 27th October 2020:

Having hauled my yacht "*Tradewinds of Emsworth*" ashore into a shipyard at Kilada on the coast of Greece's Argolic Gulf I started my long journey by road in my trusty Audi A3 back to Spain mid morning. Later that morning I arrived in the historic city of Nafplio, just 2 hours drive away from Kilada. On arrival in city I took the opportunity to fly my drone, something I'd been hoping to do for some time, despite having visited the city by sea on numerous occasions over the years.

After lunch I booked into the Hotel Vasilis and later in the afternoon drove to Athens Airport to meet my friend Terri, who joined me from the UK to share my travels from Greece to Italy and France.



My yacht "*Tradewinds of Emsworth*" with my Audi A3

Wednesday 28th October 2020:

This morning Terri and I spent most of the morning sightseeing around Nafplio, which historically was the capital of the First Hellenic Republic and of the Kingdom of Greece from the start of the Greek Revolution in 1821 until 1834. Walking the marble streets between the Venetian influenced traditional-style colourful buildings, shops, restaurants and houses was a delight, so much to see around each corner including one of the most beautiful churches I have seen in Greece. But high above the town was the Palamidi Fortress, which I had visited on many occasions, but had no time for today. Come back another time Terri and we'll see a lot more of Nafplio.



Nafplio

In the afternoon we drove to visit the small tourist coastal town of Paralio Astros, which again was a place I've visited many times before, but could only spend an hour or so sightseeing today. But we did walk the mainstreet and waterfront, but also to the 12th century medieval fortress that overlooks the town. We had a little rain, but it didn't affect our sightseeing.

After Astros we took the road south to Monemvasia, crossing very high ground as we travelled. By late afternoon we were booked into the Aktaion Hotel in Monemvasia on the southeastern coast of the Peloponnese mainland of Greece. It had been a wet day and into the evening the rain was of monsoon proportions so didn't venture out to one of the many restaurants along the waterfront for dinner.

Thursday 29th October 2020:

This morning Terri and I went sightseeing in the medieval walled town of Monemvasia, which was entirely carved on the backside of a sea rock and was therefore not visible from the mainland. The only way to reach Monemvasia when it was built was by boat, while in more recent times a causeway was constructed to connect the castle entrance to the mainland. This is how the name came about, meaning a single passage. Our walk around the lower Castle Town was to travel into the past, ancient buildings, historic mansions, quaint restaurants, many churches and narrow cobbled streets, whilst the sea view from the upper town at the top of many steps was breathtaking. We enjoyed breakfast on the patio of a restaurant overlooking the sea, an omelette, freshly baked bread, marmalade, jam, water to drink and excellent service in a very memorable place.

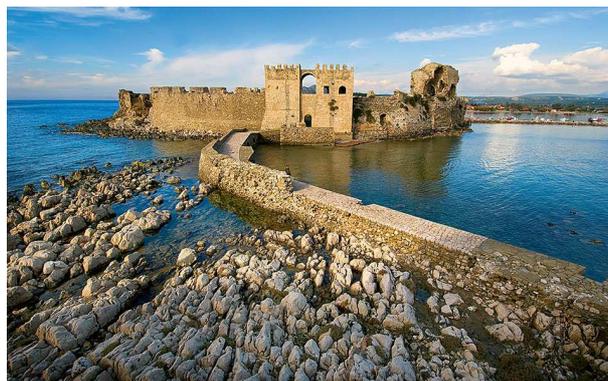


Monemvasia

Last night the governments of France and Germany announced lockdowns in their countries, restricting travel from 2nd November. As part of the new regulations Germany is closing all hotels for tourists, although travelling across the country will still be permitted. In France travelling will not be permitted except for special reasons. With a ferry booked to Italy from Greece tomorrow evening, these are the challenges that are facing us. As of this morning there had been no lockdown announcement in Italy, but it was considered likely.

I woke very early this morning and spent almost 2 hours online researching how it will be possible to travel across Europe back to the UK, or possibly just back to Torremolinos in Spain where I have a rental apartment available to me from 9th November. But I didn't want to be locked down in Spain for an unknown period, so decided not to return there at this time. To add to the complication Terri needs to return to the UK earlier and is hoping to get a flight from Rome on 2nd November, although as of today she's not been able to make a booking. Later after more research online we concluded that it would be best if she flew from Venice rather than Rome. More flights were available from there, and the location worked well as part of my itinerary through Europe back to the English Channel ports.

This evening we spent the night in the small Peloponnese coastal resort of Foinikouta six miles from Methoni, having previously spent more than an hour sightseeing the historic Castle at Methoni. The castle of Methoni (actually a fortified city) is one of the most important and significant historic castles in Greece. It was originally built from 1209 at a strategic location on a rock penetrating the sea, separated from the land by an artificial moat, but it was the Venetians that built the castle that we saw today. Although of course the castle was now all in ruins, the various buildings within the extensive perimeter wall were remarkably well preserved, including the church and the small fortified islet of Bourtzi, which was apparently used at times as a prison and was where many soldiers and inhabitants of Methoni were slaughtered during the years that the Turks occupied the fort from 1500.



Methoni

After our day of sightseeing-overload and checking into the Hotel Korakakis at Foinikouta we spent time preparing all the documents necessary for arrival in Italy. Our ferry was booked for tomorrow at 1800.

Friday 30th October 2020:

We had a good start at our small hotel at Foinikounta with an excellent breakfast provided as part of the room rate. We had a 145 mile drive to the Port of Patras, which was easily done on reasonable roads. We stopped at a small town off the main road for frappe and tea late morning and by the ocean for our spinach pie lunches just south of Patras (bought at the supermarket before leaving Foinikounta). Having obtained our ferry tickets from the ANEK office at the port we boarded ANEK-Superfast One almost two hours before our departure at 1800. For entertainment we stood on deck and watched the cat and mouse competition between potential illegal immigrants and the Port Police as they tried to stowaway aboard trucks. There must have been about 10-15 of them with both uniformed and plain clothed police trying to stop them.

Our ferry, ANEK-Superlines 1, was far from fully loaded (the capacity was 938 passengers and 783 vehicles), there were only a handful of private cars and the lorry deck was only about 25% full. We slipped from Patras on time at 1800 for the overnight trip to Bari in Italy but stopped at

the Greek port of Igoumenitsa late in the evening where further trucks were embarked, filling the vehicle deck and squeezing our car into a corner surrounded by huge 40ft container trucks!

Whilst on board I was still getting a good phone signal so was able to use data. First I checked the distance from Bari to Venice and the time it would take. It was necessary to email the Venice Hotel to advise of our very late arrival. Next I booked a fully flexible ticket with P&O Ferries from Calais to Dover at 1240 on Wednesday 4th November. The time and date was a guess, but necessary to prove to Immigration authorities across Europe that my journey was being made to return home to the UK.

Saturday 31st October 2020:

I didn't get a great deal of sleep on the ferry, not because we were just trying to sleep on an aircraft style seat, or the weather or ship's movements, but because my mind was too active thinking about the challenges ahead over the next few days. I was up and down during the night and restless - not a good night with such a long drive ahead after disembarking in Bari.



ANEK-Superfast 1

We arrived in Bari, Italy just after 0930 but it wasn't until 1030 that we disembarked from the ferry because of the huge number of trucks that were blocking us in. The first of our challenges then went smoothly - we sailed through immigration into Italy without any checks of our passports or the Covid-19 documents we had spent so long preparing. We weren't stopped at any barrier as we departed from the port and were soon on the autostrada heading north along the eastern shores of the country

Our 500 mile journey was uneventful until we arrived at the city of Bologna, where we missed a turning and found ourselves floundering around in heavy traffic trying to follow the route that the GPS recalculated. We wasted about 15 minutes before getting back on the correct route, but soon encountered our second challenge of the day, thick fog. The fog remained with us for the remainder of our journey to the Novatel Hotel in Venice Mestre, although we saw nothing of the town. We were soon checked in after our 9 hour drive, had dinner and quickly asleep! Thank you Terri for treating us to dinner on your final night of our short time together and for your company and help with the navigation. It was a memorable Halloween evening to remember x.



With Terri at Paralio Astros

Sunday 1st November 2020:

After some good quality and restful sleep we were back on the road at 0800 this morning, in thick fog! It was a short drive to the airport for me to drop Terri off for her flight back to the UK although a very long drive for me after saying our farewells. I was sorry to see Terri leave because we had enjoyed a great few days together, but they were too few! I hope that we can repeat our travels again sometime again in the future.

After 90 minutes I emerged from the fog and was able to enjoy driving through Northern Italy and into Austria by late morning. The autostrada took me to an altitude of over 4000ft with breathtaking scenery in all directions, including snow capped mountains and beautiful fall colours. When descending onto the flatter terrain of Germany in the early afternoon the rain started and remained with me until well into the early evening. I stopped at a cafe in a autobahn service centre to use WiFi and booked an Ibis Budget

Hotel just off the autobahn at Frankfurt. It was easily found and I was soon checked in (as a business traveller, because tourists were banned!) and asleep after another 9 hours of driving and over 500 miles behind me.

Monday 2nd November 2020:

It was still raining when I peered out from the hotel room this morning but it didn't last long. I only had just over 5 hours to drive before arriving at the hotel I had booked just outside the historic Belgium city of Bruges. It was an uneventful drive except for a strong headwind and the occasional heavy downpour of rain. I was checked into the hotel by 1500 and ready for a long rest, although I still had time to spend amending my ferry ticket from Wednesday back to Tuesday. With only a 90 minute drive to the Port of Calais tomorrow morning the day's challenge will be to convince the French border police to allow me to travel on to catch my ferry.

Tuesday 3rd November 2020:

I enjoyed a long rest in my Ibis Budget Hotel at Bruges, particularly because it was a new construction and probably the best of the kind I'd ever stayed in! A far cry from some of the other Ibis Budgets I've spent the night in and actually better than the more expensive Novotel used a couple of nights ago!

I departed the hotel at just after 0800 for the short drive to Calais, leaving early because I assumed that it would take some time to cross the border into France. But I was wrong again because I continued at 120 km/hr and hardly even noticed where the border was! As a result I arrived at Calais much earlier than necessary and spent almost three hours waiting to embark aboard my P&O ferry across the English Channel to Dover on the south coast of England.

Crossing the channel was interesting because of the very high winds and heavy seas. I chose a seat in a lounge just above the foredeck of the vessel and enjoyed watching as we ploughed through a fairly rough sea with a swell of 2-3m. The sky was mostly blue and the combination of sun and wind created extremely good visibility - the white cliffs of Dover could be seen even before leaving the French Harbour. On reaching the coast of England we appeared to be in a race against two other ferries as we approached Dover, but the captain seemed to time his arrival to be able to enter the port without any delay. We had departed Calais 30 minutes late and unsurprisingly for such a short voyage arrived in Dover 30 minutes later than scheduled. It had been an easy crossing despite the weather. The ferry was a Ro-Ro and probably less than half full, so within 15 minutes of berthing I was driving ashore. Yet again I entered a country without showing my passport or any Covid-19 documents (a total of 7 since leaving Greece - Italy, Austria, Germany, The Netherlands, Belgium, France and now the UK).

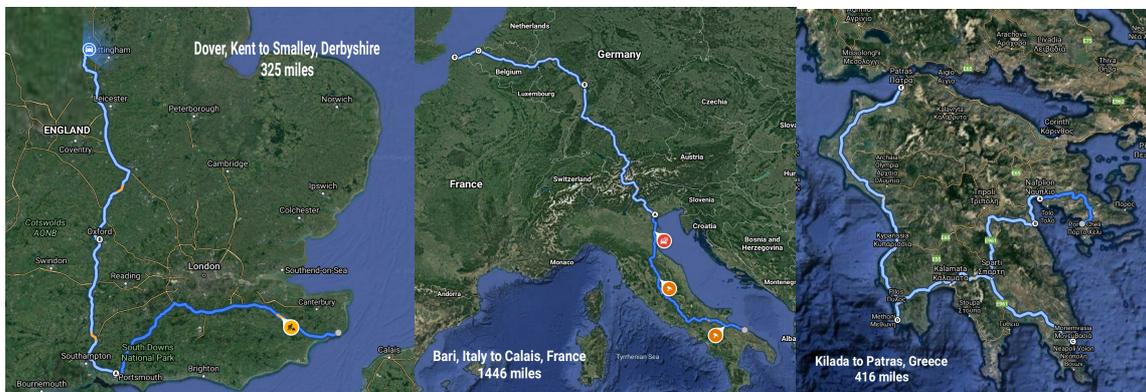


P&O Ferries - Pride of Calais

On departing Dover I drove the M20, M26, M25 and A3 route to Portsmouth to visit my storage unit, to exchange clothing, unload stuff from the boat and load up what I needed for the coming weeks of self-isolation and national lockdown. I then drove to my granddaughter's home in Derbyshire to start my house arrest! It had been another long and tiring day with over 400 miles driven. Sleep came quickly and easily. It was wonderful to reach my destination and to see my family, for the first time in 11 months.

Finally I have to record my thanks to Terri for participating in this journey and being such pleasant company, and also to my family in Derbyshire for stepping in to help me when I had nowhere in the UK to stay.

Routes and distances (Total: 2,187 miles):



Thank you for your interest in our travels

The End