

CERULEAN: MY FIRST CRUISE THROUGH THE CA

TRAVEL AND ADVENTURE WITH THE CREWING SERVICE



ARTICLE BY
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TRAVELLING FROM DUBROVNIK THROUGH TO GREECE



After sailing in Fethiye in October 2019, I was joined by my brother-in-law for a Day Skipper theory & practical course in Gibraltar for 10 days, with confidence of passing after the thorough training.

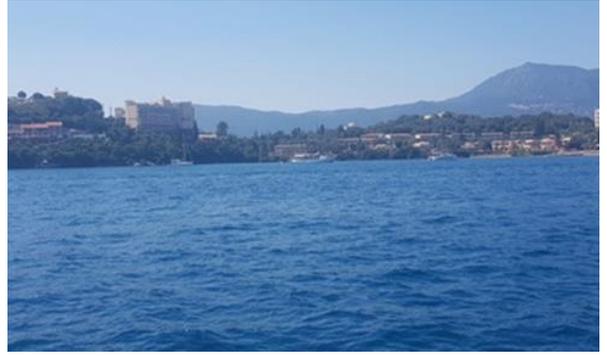
I was keen to maximise my sailing opportunities, so I joined the CA after reading articles in Yachting Monthly. With my profile added, I viewed the skippers' requests for Mediterranean cruises. After a telephone interview, Neil Lerner offered me a working passage on his Grand Soleil 43, sailing from Dubrovnik in June through to Greece. Lockdown delayed our departure till July 25th, when Neil was confident we could sail into Greek waters from Italy.

Through WhatsApp the cruise details were shared with the crew of 3, with meet-up scheduled for Heathrow Terminal 5. Taxis took us to Cerulean at the ACI marina, where we split duties to get the boat

victualled and prepared for departure after her delivery from Split earlier in the week. Departing for Cavtat at 16:00hrs, crew duties were duly assigned, including responsibility for stowing and deploying fenders and the forward and stern warps. After fuelling we had an easy first leg to familiarise ourselves with each other and the skipper's style, with a nice 18 mile sail to the lively port. Dinner next to the Adriatic in the open air was a real treat, Neil choosing the restaurant well for our delightful first meal together. Sunday morning saw my first opportunity for a swim in 2020, the Adriatic being a really refreshing start to the day.

CROATIA AND ON TO ITALY

Breakfast was on board before a planned departure at 9:00hrs to be processed by the port authorities to leave Croatia for Italy. Upon pooling all the passports there was a stressful point for one of the crew, who could not find theirs and couldn't remember when they last had it. Was it still at the airport or in the taxi? Bags being packed, they decided to stay and backtrack their movements. A last search averted their early departure from Cerulean, with the missing passport being under a pile of documents. No challenging explaining was now needed for customs; that could have been fun for Neil!



We departed on an overnight passage to Brindisi, with a good opportunity to team-build on our assigned watches throughout the night.

Departing Cavtat with harnesses and lifejackets adjusted ready for passage, with a 12-14 knot westerly we made good progress throughout the day, starting with 3 hour watches until 20:00 hrs, reducing to 2 hours each until 08:00hrs. Dinner was taken on passage, with spaghetti bolognese being ideal. Fed & watered we had a beautifully clear night, enabling us to helm by the stars – much more comfortable on the mind at 03:00 hrs than the compass – with the wind holding for the whole passage to Brindisi.

We made the marina after a passage of 21 hours for the 117 miles, with just the paperwork to do before we were allowed to berth: photographing the signed documents for submission by the marina staff, for onward submission to the port authorities. After a good shower we were off to explore Brindisi and an excellent seafood lunch. There were no crowds, just very welcoming Italians keen for the custom of the few tourists about.

NEW TO ME, THE BOAT USED THE APP *SPLITWISE* TO RECORD ALL OUR INDIVIDUAL CRUISE EXPENDITURE, THE BOOKS BEING BALANCED AT THE CRUISE FINISH. NO NOTE BOOKS & CALCULATORS, IF YOU'RE IN THE KNOW THERE'S AN APP FOR EVERYTHING!

The 28th saw us off for an early departure down the coast to Otranto, then on to Santa Maria du Leuca; again the winds were with us so we sailed most of both days. The whole of the way down the Italian coast we saw no more than 5 vessels; completely different to my last year's cruises in Gocek bay in Turkey with charter & private yachts aplenty.

Using the mariners to assist with berthing, we were made to feel most welcome in Santa Maria du Leuca. Covid-19 appeared to have made little change, other than wearing masks in shops and on entering restaurants, so we enjoyed a delightful dinner overlooking the harbour.

An early clearance with port authorities saw us depart Italy for Greece to Othonoi north of Corfu, anchoring on the south of the island in the sheltered bay off Ammos. Swimming off Othonoi was a unique experience, with the cold currents from the 951 m deep trench less than half a mile offshore delivering at least a 5 degree intermittent temperature change as you swam. Through good planning we had a balance of dining out and cooking on board in the evenings with buffet lunches on the move, all the crew taking their turns to deliver their signature dishes, so catering was healthy and to a very high standard.



LAKKA BAY ON THE NORTH OF PAXOS

Rising early to a most welcoming swim before breakfast, with a schedule to maintain the 31st saw us weighing anchor for Gouvia on the east side of Corfu. With lighter winds of less than 5 knots, which were challenging as I wasn't used to the helm on this boat. We had to motor sail for some parts, which was welcomed by the skipper to put some charge into the batteries.

Again the coast was devoid of large numbers of fellow sailing or motor vessels. Very unexpected for the high season in August, the large marina at Gouvia was quite busy by comparison. Cruising down Corfu's coast saw no change in the number of boats at sea, anchoring overnight off Pretritic before heading down around the bottom of Corfu to Paxos.

LAKKA TOWN HIGH SEASON POST



Arriving at Lakka bay on the north of Paxos, we found where most of the yachts were. It was challenging to see where to anchor safely, with so many boats in such a small bay, keeping us the deck crew busy, before we managed to get the anchor to bite properly. In the evening the restaurants were a short dinghy ride ashore, but we saw barely 40% of covers occupied, which did surprise me. The food was excellent, with staff being really glad of our custom. But in the morning the town was virtually deserted, with all the vessels still at anchor. Did people only anchor up and not come ashore?

We then weighed anchor for the Greek mainland, planning a leisurely passage to anchor off Leiga, north of Preveza.

Being the only boat anchored just 200 metres off the shore in 20 metres of water, we had a very peaceful evening meal cooked on board, making kebabs with a masala marinade I bought from home in a sachet. Dinner and wine made for a relaxing evening with an early night, in preparation for a very busy final day before departure.

After our final swim in the sea before breakfast, we had a leisurely passage of 13 miles down to the newly finished Preveza Town Marina in a light westerly wind. This is a very impressive marina finished to the highest standards, with everything driven through the Cloud, so a tablet is essential at the very least.

As we were leaving Cerulean in Preveza for Neil's next cruise in September, a check sheet was revealed with all the cleaning tasks needing to be undertaken by us all before we could stop for a well-earned beer. With a now-honed team we thoroughly worked through all the cleaning & washing down on deck, before setting out for our well-earned last team dinner, next to the Ionian Sea.

Preveza was the busiest harbour front we experienced on the cruise, but other than face masks in shops, life appeared similar to how it was the previous year.

With taxi loaded we headed to the airport 15 minutes away, check-in being very disciplined. For my BA flight to Heathrow, there were fewer than 30 passengers. I ate my own rolls bought in the airport early; they were light on coffee though.

After the false starts through Covid-19, I considered myself very lucky to have experienced such a good first cruise through the CA, being very thankful for the opportunity provided by Neil with the balanced crew that he had selected. Having no fallouts or stressful times made for a great first experience which I certainly hope to build on next year, further developing my sailing skills.

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