

SLICE OF GREEK HEAVEN

We want to dive, enjoy tranquil evenings in good company, experience unspoilt nature, outstanding views and be surrounded by the unmistakable atmosphere the Mediterranean has to offer. The holiday roulette ball starts to roll – our choice is a small Ionian Isle.

Text by ROSE KEFRIG, photographs by UDO KEFRIG/TEAM OCEANPICS.DE

"Nero Sport offers all levels of diving and having your head stuck in the sand to glimpse the tiniest of slugs is just as popular as heading into a cave and grotto system, which is a speciality the dive centre offers"





The Nero Sport boat anchored in crystal-clear water



Vibrant colours adorn the rocks

At first glance the sleepy fishing village of Limni Keri seems deserted. The smell of fresh bread wafting from the bakeries mingles with the intensely zesty smell of lush lemon and orange groves nearby. By the roadside, merchants sell a colourful mix of pots, pans, herbs, tomatoes, grapes, garlic braids and huge melons. An old man greets over the garden fence with a friendly, 'Yassas', slowly spit roasting a whole lamb to juicy perfection over a brick-built fireplace. Small tavernas, cafés, grocery stores and souvenir shops are scattered along the bay from which you can enjoy an amazing view toward the turtle-shaped island of Marathonisi, a nesting ground to the loggerhead turtle and protected by the National Marine Park of Zakynthos. A few stalls along the small picturesque port offer organised trips to the famous Blue Caves and the old shipwreck Panagiotis. The stricken vessel sank in heavy storms in 1980 and her broken body is buried deep in the white sand of Navagio Bay, now a tourist attraction.

For those who enjoy the freedom of riding a motorbike, quad or scooter, there are not many better places than Zakynthos for a fun day out on a bike. Stunning views over the sparkling, clear Mediterranean Sea are matched by a dramatic backdrop of majestic cypress, pine and olive trees. Sadly, you see the dramatic effect of the ever-occurring bushfires



Freediver and turtle

but, on Zakynthos, the island with a mild winter climate, our Mother Earth quickly reclaims what man tries to destroy. Even on the tiniest bald patch, little pine trees sprout and reach toward the blue sky. The Mediterranean flora and fauna will always find a new niche. And so did a man called Peter Mohr. He wanted to fulfil his dream of making a name for himself in diving and find 'The Place'.

A VISION TURNS INTO REALITY

We go back to the year 1985. Born in North Rhine-Westphalia, Peter Mohr has found what he was looking for. Turning a dream and vision into a reality requires a lot of belief and faith. This is his story. Over an iced café frappe, he enthuses: „And, as I took the last bend behind the old olive mill on my motorbike, the whole panoramic view of the Bay Limni Keri opened before my eyes, I immediately knew. Here and nowhere else do I want to open a dive centre for all nationalities and families! And I went on to create Nero Sport Diving Centre on the island of Zakynthos". Since then, 29 years have passed and the next generation of the Mohr family is also at the helm.

It is like it always is at this internationally spoken dive centre, a warm pleasant evening with guests enjoying the warm summer night. Peter's son Dennis lectures in the education room, which is equipped with video and TV, and Valentin is in the compressor room checking that all is in order for the next day's dive. Besides a compressor room next to the workshop, there are five-, ten-, 12- and 15-litre steel and another 50 aluminium tanks. The centre is spacious and airy. There is a drying room and enough space for all your equipment. Meanwhile, daughter-in-law Britta rounds up her guests for a spot of Latin dancing, pilates, aquaerobics or other energetic sporting activities the centre offers alongside diving. Even the youngest member of the family, Mila, rounds up the other children and they all play quietly in the family corner. Lotte and Peter



Preparing to descend

fire up the BBQ and the soft sound of guitar music echoes from the centre. It is Jonas Wagner, a guest who returns time after time. When he plays his songs, you just want to keep quiet, listen and enjoy the moment. It's a home from home!

LET THE KIDS ARRIVE!

Dennis specialises in instructing children and teaches our 'dive offspring' in a playful, safe and interesting manner. Child-friendly equipment in all sizes helps the kids to enjoy the wet environment. Snorkelling courses are offered from six years of age and diving is taught from eight years. Thirteen-year-old Victor Massouri has recently qualified and is excited about the calm waters around Zakynthos. „It was well cool", he told us after this last dive, a location known as Slanted Willi on the northeast side of the isle. He thumbs through a fish guide, points to pictures and chats enthusiastically. „Look, the walls are covered with striking red, yellow, pink and violet coloured sponges and corals. I saw langoustines hide in little crevices and big, menacing-looking moray eels were glaring at me,





WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW...



ZAKYNTHOS

HOW TO GET THERE

There are numerous charter flights flying from the UK into Zakynthos, and you can pick up some keenly priced package deals.

WHEN TO VISIT

All year round, except for the period from 15 November - 15 December.

"In addition to normal diving, special family day trips are organised, taking you to pristine dive sites to the northwest of the island and the national marine park"

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

A valid passport with six months left to expiry.

CURRENCY

Euro (£1 = Euro 1.21).

WHERE TO EAT AND MEET

There are a multitude of cafes, restaurants and tavernas where you can enjoy tasty local food and drink.

"With visibility up to 30 metres, the 20-plus dive sites visited by Nero Sport offer up an array of marine life and stunning topography"

VERDICT

Zakynthos is an idyllic Greek island offering glorious sunshine, beautiful beaches and fabulous diving that is suitable for all levels of diver.

Entering one of the island's many caverns



Navagio Bay



Picture-postcard streets



"You might even be lucky and see a loggerhead turtle on her way to her nesting site, or even watch a monk seal"

opening and closing their big jaws. I just didn't know where to look first. I felt like an astronaut in outer space and I am sure the little nudibranch *Flabellina* is an extraterrestrial life form!"

BLUE WONDER OF THE MEDITERRANIAN

Nero Sport (www.nero-sport.de) has the same ritual every morning, day in and day out. The crew and guests stow away their dive equipment on a strange vehicle called Töff Töff. Peter's wife Lotte packs away enough food and drink to feed a whole army in cool boxes. It is only a short walk to the small harbour where Peter and the catamaran Neraki wait for the divers to arrive. The specially designed catamaran was constructed by Peter and is suitable for disabled divers, offering easy access via large ladders. It's swim up and step up - can't get any easier! Meanwhile, Captain Jonjo awaits other guests with the dayboat Avra.

With visibility up to 30 metres, the 20-plus dive sites visited by Nero Sport offer up an array of marine life and stunning topography. Expect shoals of sea bream and sardines, walls and boulders covered in sponges and feathery sea stars, brittle stars smothering the seabed, and parrotfish swimming nimbly about on their quest for food. Barracuda often cruise by, and tube and peacock worms offer bursts of colour among the green/brown algae. You might even be lucky and see a loggerhead turtle on her way to her nesting site, or even watch a monk seal.

In addition to normal diving, special family day trips are organised, taking you to pristine dive sites to the northwest of the island.

It's not all reef diving. Nero Sport offers all levels of diving and having your head stuck in the sand to glimpse the tiniest of slugs is just as popular as heading into a cave and grotto system, which is a speciality the dive centre offers. There are many caves, each with a different level of complexity, so perfect for everyone from novice to expert.

A STROLL THROUGH ZAKYNTHOS TOWN

Our last day is spent exploring the island itself and the capital. Zakynthos Town is a lively place, full of pulsating metropolitan influence. The Strata Marina boasts a long wide quayside next to the harbour. Here, yachts, pleasure boats and cruise ships arrive at this popular destination. Fishermen sell their daily catch to locals and visitors. For those divers adventurous enough to drive from the UK, Zakynthos can also be reached via a ferry-link. On the other side of the promenade is an abundance of banks, clothes stores, jewellers and souvenir shops.

If you intend to plan a dive vacation on this Ionian Island, you will be pleasantly surprised by the warm Mediterranean climate - with 12 hours of sunshine and mild water temperatures, there is no better place than Fior di Levante (Flower of the East), as the island is known. Our choice in this holiday roulette game was perfect. The ball stopped on Zakynthos - we had hit the jackpot. ■