For our 17th Hot, Hot, Hot we decided to return to the predictable enjoyment of the Greek Islands, our 5th visit to that country. In 2005 we sailed from Kos and visited the northern Dodecanese Islands so a visit to the southern ones was long overdue. Also, on two of our trips to Turkey we have sailed around but having to avoid these islands, which are very close by, as you are not welcome to simply flit between the 2 countries. The problems with the immigrants understandably trying to cross this short stretch of water also seem to have stopped.

30 people arrived in Mandraki Marina, Rhodes at varying hours on Saturday 16th September. We used 5 different flights and boarded 5 boats chartered from 3 different companies. However, despite the last arriving well after midnight and some dining on nothing more than cold water, somehow we all made it safely and enjoyed a night of water slopping through the marina.

Sunday morning saw boat briefings and last minute repairs carried out, and victualling taking place from one of the 2 well stocked (if expensive - and that was with 15% discount!) Mini Markets in the marina. The marina is right in the middle of the town and features a small fort and lighthouse on the northern end as well as 3 lovely windmills on the breakwater and so we were constantly being viewed by those tourists strolling to take a look. Despite dealing with 3 charter companies all the guys were helpful and the boats were generally in good condition.

Our destination that night was Simi town on the island of the same name, about 23 miles away. Dependent on what time boats got away dictated the amount of time they were able to enjoy sailing V. resorting to the iron topsail. Simi is a port of entry and so we had to demonstrate that we were only coming from Greece before proceeding to the town quay for the first bit of stern to mooring. With the exception of Rhodes, there were no lazy lines in the area which means you use your bow anchor for forward stability and need to be careful not to cross it with that of another boat.

Simi is a beautiful spot featuring large neo-classical mansions in various hues of ochre, powder blue, cream and rose which climb up the steep slopes surrounding the harbour. Its wealth was originally founded on sponge fishing but nowadays it is tourism which brings in the money with day-trippers descending in droves. Luckily for us, these pests had mainly left and so we were able to enjoy strolling around the pretty harbour and dinner at one of the many water–side restaurants.

Monday dawned blue and sunny with very little wind for what would be our longest leg (about 35 miles) to Nissoros, the furthest north we would go. Nevertheless a beautiful trip along the Turkish coast although at least one member got caught by their mobile provider for roaming outside Europe. Our destination was Palon, Paloi or Palli (all the same place) a pretty little harbour on the north end of the island. Having missed out on a swim stop many of us headed for the little beach on the west side of the harbour and thence for drinks at the bar and drinks on other boats on the way home. It was in Palon that we were joined by new members Mark and Cathy Stansfield on their boat, Ubulukutu, which they keep out in this part of the world. Their local knowledge lead most of us to Aphrodite’s Restaurant that evening where we enjoyed another lovely dinner before a bit of a party on Nostalgia.

Livadhi on Tilos was our next destination, again not a great deal of wind but a shorter distance meant that both sailing and lunch stops could be enjoyed. A very small harbour meant that we expected that some of us might have to anchor but, amazingly we all squeezed in. It seems that Livadhi is often sailed by in favour of some of the better known places but we enjoyed this sleepy little town.

The next island on the itinerary was Khalki, back off the west coast of Rhodes and situated within an area strewn with islets, rocks and reefs. However it was not as hard as it looked in settled conditions and soon there were 4 boats at anchor in beautiful Ormos Potamos to the south of the main town where much between boat swimming and visiting went on. We all met up for drinks at the bar (which they opened for us) before walking over the top to Khalki town where the advance party had booked us a table for dinner. Khalki town is described as a miniature Simi and is lovely.

Unfortunately at this point we received the news that Joy from Melodia had slipped and dislocated her shoulder and, despite a visit from the doctor, was in much pain. She had to take the 0600 ferry the next morning back to Rhodes town. Billy and Colin kindly helped her off the boat and to the ferry and Janet and Brendan heroically accompanied her and took her to a hospital where the offending limb was relocated. Meanwhile Don and crew sailed back to Rhodes short-handed where they were immensely pleased to be greeted by a much happier Joy.

On the Thursday the wind had freshened considerably and we enjoyed an exhilarating sail back to the south side of the island of Simi to Panormitis, home to the Monastery of St Michael, and destination for many a disruptive ferry and tripper boat which didn’t help our anchoring attempts in quite a choppy bay (despite Rod Heikell promising good all round shelter!). Eventually settled, a certain amount of boat hopping by dinghy took place (it wasn’t swimming weather) and most of us were able to make the short distance ashore by dinghy. Weird place and sadly the celebrated and ornate bell tower was shrouded in scaffolding. There was just one restaurant (but that’s enough) which resembled a wind tunnel where we dined. Yet again, no problem with the food which has certainly improved since earlier trips.

And so sadly, our last day and back across to Rhodes in, again, quite fresh conditions, there was even a, tiny, rain shower en route. The “slap” in the marina was even more pronounced and the boats were certainly bobbing up and down. Advance party Mary had dined in the nearby Old Town before joining the trip and she lead us to Romios’ Restaurant which was situated in a lovely garden setting with beautifully presented food. A fitting end to a lovely week.

For most of us on the Saturday flights were late in the evening and so we were able to see a bit more of Rhodes town or, in some cases, the island itself, before making our way back to the airport, flights home and a very cold arrival.

Best bits: Good boats, blue sea and sky throughout, unspoilt area (No flotillas), consistently better food than previously in Greece and the rose was extremely quaffable!

Downsides: Joy’s accident! Late flights ….