

# THE FEG MEETING IN CRETE, NOVEMBER 2018

## INTRODUCTION

Some of you will know that as a former FEG [European Federation of Tourist Guide Associations] delegate, this was not the first FEG meeting I attended so please forgive my positively biased point of view; I enjoy these events! Ever since I qualified as a BBTG I have been naturally curious as to the trials and tribulations of my European full time working colleagues. And few have had a more turbulent time recently than our colleagues in Greece after their severe financial crises. However, the one thing I took away from this successful and ambitious programme was how a forward looking fighting spirit and creative professionalism can lead to success and renewal. The organization of the event was in the hands of their own new company – Tourist Guides of Crete <http://tourguides.masterlogic.gr/>. If you look up their TripAdvisor listing, you will discover their excellent reviews so we were in very good hands! If you are planning a trip to Crete, you would be a fool not to use their services!

## CRETE

This was my third visit to Crete but the first in over thirty-five years. Things have changed and for the better! Membership of the EU has no doubt made a difference; an improved standard of living for most Cretans while the island's location at the Eastern extremity of Europe still assures its exotic heritage of influences from the Orient – those Ottomans got around and even the Egyptians made their presence felt. Crete is not just great beaches; its ancient archaeological sites continue to fascinate and evolve as new finds are excavated. Greek myth is everywhere. According to ancient legend, Agenor, a Phoenician king, had a daughter called Europa. Zeus became so enthralled by her beauty that disguised as a white bull he carried her all the way from Phoenicia to Crete where he eventually had his way. We even saw the tree under which it happened! Crete also played a major part in the Second World War and many groups come expressly to learn about the dramatic events during these turbulent times. Its Mediterranean climate makes Crete not just a superb producer of olive oil and wine; the essential oils of many indigenous plants are now sustainably explored and promoted commercially as we learnt from an interesting visit to Bioaroma <https://www.bioaroma.gr/gb/> [you can order online as well]!

## PROGRAMME & EXCURSIONS

Our Cretan colleagues had organised a meeting programme with excursions over five days. In addition you could join a two-day pre-tour to Chania, Western Crete, and a post tour to Athens and the Greek mainland. Many did all three and were culturally and happily exhausted, because it couldn't be the wine, could it? I had opted for the pre-tour and thoroughly enjoyed Chania, not least the excellent hotel Porto Veneziano which I warmly recommend, situated right in the historical harbour. One of the highlights for me was the visit with our excellent guide to the archaeological site of Aptera, seeing the ancient theatre and the huge Roman cisterns, still well preserved and once supplying water to all public and private baths located further west.

The main cultural programme was so full of highlights that I can only here mention a few. For those visiting for the first time the Minoan [Bronze Age] palace of Knossos excavated by Sir Arthur Evans, with its beautifully painted frescoes, is a revelation. Indeed, if fascinated by the 'bull leaping' pursuits of the Minoans, you may wish to revisit the British Museum and the 'Bronze group of an acrobat somersaulting over a bull's head' normally on view in room 12.

However, the biggest wow factor must be reserved for our visit to Eleutherna at the foot of the Psiloritis Mountain. Also called Apollonia, Eleutherna thrived until Byzantine times but in 365 AD, a powerful

earthquake buried it underground. Since 1984, a team of archaeologists led by Nicholas Stampolidis, Professor of Classical Archaeology, has excavated the site and hundreds of objects and remains of houses have been discovered, although the main focus is its burial grounds. We were extremely fortunate in having Professor Stampolidis himself – a great friend of qualified tourist guides - as our guide on site, giving us a passionate but clear explanation of its importance. The period 900 BC to around 500 BC was the city's most important period, directly associated with the dawn of Greek civilization and the author Homer. Indeed, finds from the Orthi Petra necropolis appear to illustrate the Homeric narrative, notably the ritual of funerary pyres, as described in the Iliad. The way Homer describes the construction of Patroclus' pyre, we found it exactly the same way at the Orthi Petra cemetery. There was also a cenotaph memorial dated to 670 BC described by Professor Stampolidis as the 'first tomb of the Unknown Soldier in European history'.

Our visit to the Arcadi Monastery, a national symbol of Crete's heroic struggle for independence, did not fail to move due to the tragic events there in 1866 during the Cretan rebellion against the Turks. Over 900 Greeks who had sought refuge at the monastery blew themselves up rather than surrender to the Ottomans, an event which would have serious repercussions internationally. We were reminded that Crete was in fact only unified with the rest of Greece in 1913. Oh and the monks also offered us a great lunch!

Another most interesting talk was given by a member of the Foundation for Research and Technology-Hellas (FORTH) - based in Crete - on the use of laser for art conservation. Such techniques are used for example on laser-cleaning projects on the Athens Acropolis sculptures (i.e. the Parthenon West Frieze and the Caryatids of the Erechtheion). The surface cleaning is achieved by means of an innovative laser system developed by IESL-FORTH in Heraklion. The laser is capable of operating at two wavelengths simultaneously and is able to remove thick pollution accumulations in a safe way: "The combination of the two wavelengths ensures that no discoloration or damaging phenomena occur on the original substrate, while revealing its unique surface".

## FOOD, DRINK & SOCIALISING

Of course, a FEG meeting is also about eating, drinking, socialising and dancing! You meet old friends from around Europe and you make new friends; when more than 160 guides and partners attend an event that is not too difficult. The net-working opportunities are endless and I have already been able to use contacts made to match clients with great colleagues in other European regions many times. Our Greek hosts made sure that we had plenty to eat and tasted all the local specialities; Cretan food is of course different from Greek food on the mainland and many participants had their suit cases over full with all sorts of goodies on the way home including very yummy baklava. In fact, on the pre-tour we were taken to a small workshop in Rhethymno to see how they still skilfully make traditional philo pastry by hand, a crucial ingredient in baklava. I shall not try this at home. From now on, eating a baklava will feel almost magical!

One of the gifts in our FEG welcome pack was a specially made so called Pythagorean Cup. This small terracotta drinking vessel, attributed to Pythagoras [580 – 496 BC], is designed so that when filled beyond a marked line, a siphoning effect drains the entire content. Apparently it was invented to inspire moderation in wine consumption. What a silly idea!

## FEG MEETING ISSUES & A NEW FEG EXCO

Let us not forget that the cultural and social programme, open to all qualified guides and their partners, is a consequence of the annual FEG AGM and delegates held their usual deliberations over two days. The minutes will be made available in due course. UK membership of FEG is shared between APTG, the Guild, STGA and WOTGA so internal UK cooperation is of essence. But even outside the meeting rooms certain things remain important in our continued work for wider professional recognition; high professional standards, promotion of tourist guide training by qualified and certified trainers, pan-European cooperation including adoption in all member countries of the standard BS EN 15565:2008 [Tourism services. Requirements for the provision of

professional tourist guide training and qualification programmes]. We must also continue to improve digital and online marketing opportunities for FEG members and qualified tourist guides.

## OUR GREEK COLLEAGUES

Finally, I would like to thank our Greek and Cretan colleagues for their extremely warm welcome and hard work to put on a lavish and comprehensive programme with fascinating excursions enjoyed by all. The attention to detail was impressive as was the involvement of so many sponsors, helping to promote our profession not just in Crete but beyond Greek borders. When we did not enjoy the expertise of museum experts [I was captivated by the curator who explained the role of Crete in the Second World War at the Historical Museum of Crete] we were expertly and patiently guided by our dedicated Greek colleagues. My heartfelt thanks goes to all of them and in particular to the wonderful Marinela Mamalaki Stavrakaki, head of the organising committee, whose professional dedication and engagement is a true inspiration to all. FEG now has a new Executive Committee made up of the tireless President Efi Kalamboukidou, the hard working Norma Clarkson from STGA [UK], the infinitely patient Paolo Cosme from SNATTI, Portugal, and the newly appointed and wise Themis Halvantzi from APTG [UK]. We now look forward to the next FEG meeting to be held in Faro, Portugal, 19<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> November 2019. See you there!

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