

# IRAKLIA – ORIGINAL HOMELAND OF WATER

Iraklia, a small Cyclades island, is a place of peace and energy for Austrian Johanna Klinar. The Underwater Photographer pictures the world below sea level with great passion. She visits the island since 1990 and initiated the social project „Elpida for Iraklia“ supporting the community members during tense times.



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Even with my eyes shut I'd probably recognize its smell, a while before the ferryboat is tied up: this familiar mixture of a bitter, salty, slight breeze from the sea, blended with those indefinable fishy odours that rise on very hot afternoons from the nets that are being prepared for the night catch. Along with a gentle touch of diesel from a small boat tuckering by. Today the wind sleeps. It's one of those summer days that holds this obvious conspiracy of melting heat and complete dryness. You can smell the dust in the motionless air and above all the gorgeous scent of wild thyme...

I'm back and feel like a dry sponge filling up with impressions. Well known faces, hugs, laughter, tears of joy. About a dozen others arrive, a couple on a motorbike, one family with a car. Besides that there's a big hustle unloading boxes of beer and wine, a barrel of *raki*, water in those inevitable plastic bottles, huge sacks with shining eggplant, giant potatoes and onions, boxes with bright green peppers and thick red tomatoes. Everyone gives a hand, shouting, running, laughing, sweating. The air fills with a long hoot, the ropes are loosened and pulled back up. Then the Scopelitis – the swimming bus connecting the Small Cyclades Islands – leaves the tiny harbour.

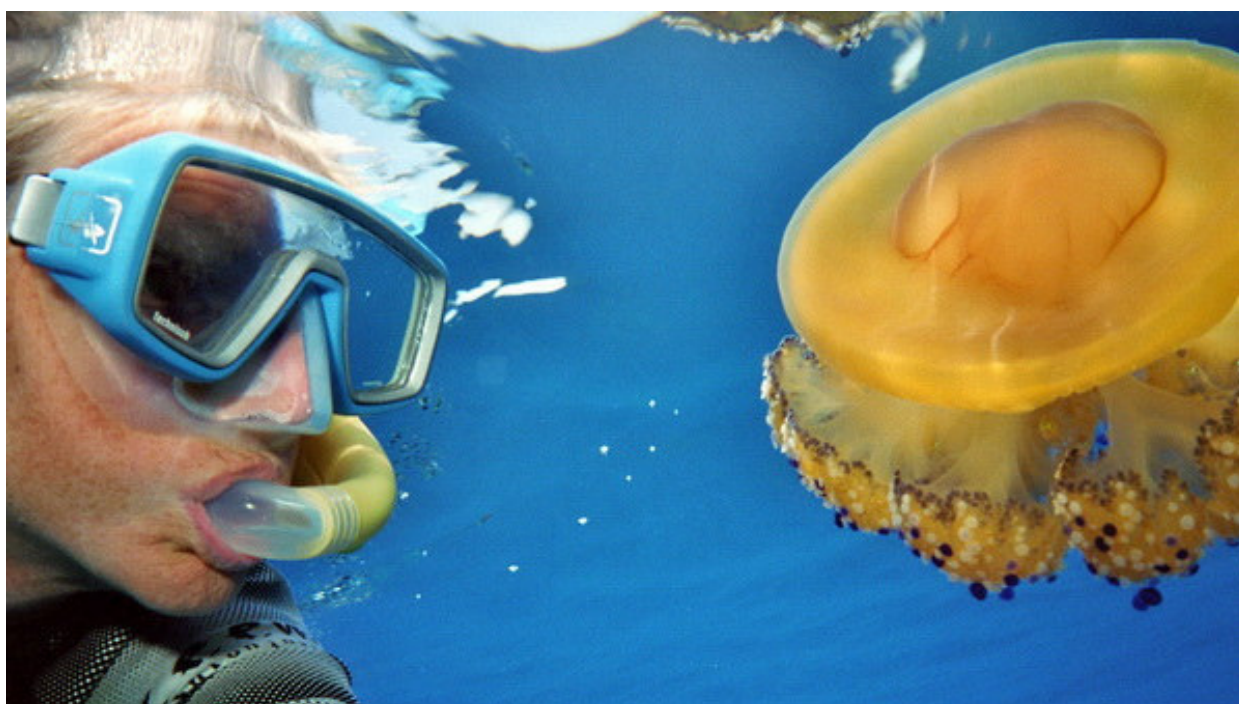




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Like everywhere else there's the familiar „Rooms, rooms!“ But it sounds different here, more quiet and relaxed, friendly, inviting. Even time is different here: Sun time and moon time, day and night, and the blue hours in between.

The arrival at my favourite taverna starts with a frenetic hug from Stella and Jorgos, the hosts and one of the best cooking couples of the Cyclades islands. They welcome me with a blooming twig of basil with its intoxicating smell. More warm hugs from other people who've become good friends over the years. On the terrace overlooking the glittering waves we sit down for a cool café frappé and a small snack: a slice of bread, a few olives, a bright red tomato fresh from the small new garden, salt from the sea and a little olive oil – that's paradise!



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Before I unpack completely, I take flippers, mask and snorkel and walk back down to the beach. The first meeting after a year is always like the passionate embrace of lovers after a long time of separation. On the surface I taste the salt and let my eyes drown in the vast panorama. It's incredibly clear today and I spot some perfectly camouflaged sole. Nothing else, only the gleaming net of silver rings moving smoothly over the ground in perpetual motion. Floodlight. An endless luminous pattern in slow fluctuation. Continually changing, continually dissolving and recreating its shapes.



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Further out in the deep are huge rocks scattered between sea weed. Nothing could keep me at the surface now, so I take a deep breath and follow my inner call down. With a few kicks I'm there, gliding weightlessly over the soft sand, touching the ripples with my belly, slowly moving through endless blue. I feel like being caressed by a thousand velvet fingers, covered and secure, carried by the warm element we all come from. My perception is switched from mind to body. Slow movements, everything light and familiar. It must have been like this in my mother's womb. I'm one with my surroundings, my origin. After a blissful while out of time and space I drift back up to the surface. Breathe in. I'm back at home.





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It was in 1990 when I first smelled Iraklia's magic scent. Since then I keep spending my summer holidays there, and the island became my precious retreat spot and beloved mentor. First we lived on the beach – sometimes gently woken by curious goats... Tourism was in its infancy. Many things have changed during these 25 years, but the light atmosphere is still the same: open, affectionate and very very hospitable. You find all kinds of accommodation – from the lovely simple guest house to the small and beautiful little hotel – hosting visitors from all over Europe. In the evenings you enjoy the deliciously rich island tastes with your friends in one of the beautifully situated tavernas.



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About 150 people make their living on 18 square kilometres – on fishing and on tourism, on farming, gardening and goat breeding. Iraklia is the first of the Small Cyclades islands southwest of Naxos. A road connects the harbour village *Agios Giórgos* with the mountain village *Panaghía* via *Livádi bay* with its old castle from the 4th century BC, another one leads from *Panaghía* down to *Tourkopígado bay*. There's a mini bus a few times a day in summer.



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Life is simple and close to nature: The shallow sandy beaches of *Agios Giórgos* and *Livádi* are family-friendly, tamarisks provide a little shade. *Mítsos Kovéos* offers boat trips on his *Anemós* to the southwestward bays. The impressive rock formations near the cliffs of *Merichás* alone would make the trip worthwhile! *Karvounólakos* captivates you with the most beautiful pebbles, *Alimiá* attracts with the wreck of an Arado 196 from World War Two in the sea weed down at ten metres.





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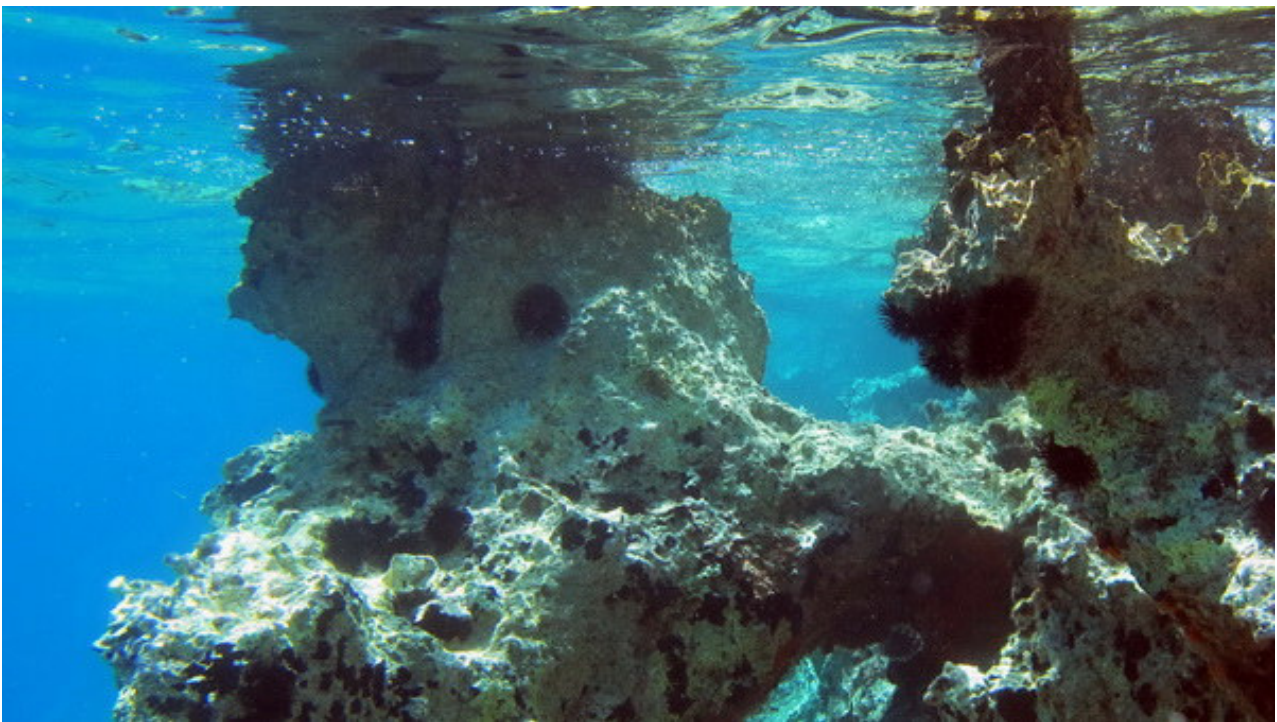
You find hiking paths between the villages and other beautiful spots, up to *Mount Páppas* with its 420 metres above sea level and to the vast stalactite cave of *Aghios Gioánnis*. It feels perfectly right to bow to the womb of Mother Earth to manage the short entrance on hands and knees that are protected by an aged carpet. The cave is widely branched and in its natural state, a visit without a local guide is only advisable with sufficient lights and “Ariadne’s thread”.

Every year on August 28th a festival service is celebrated at the small altar in the first spacious room in honor of the island’s patron *Aghios Gioánnis Prodromos* - St. John the Baptist. In the morning children have decorated the stalagtites with hundreds of thin wax candles. You are in a magically illuminated chthonian dome, and many people from near and far attend this ceremonial festivity.



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Rather soon I succumbed to the charms of the sea and became a passionate snorkeller and free diver. My passion for wild life photography took new flights in Poseidon's kingdom. With my pictures I have a fantastic potential to give something back and support these wonderful people during their hard times of the economic crisis. In 2012 I started my feature-length picture shows "BEAUTIES OF IRAKLIA" (PowerPoint presentation with music) emphasizing nature's beauties on land and especially in the sea. You get a very personal and "female" look into my way of spending my holidays – aesthetic, emotional, sensual. All the profit goes to my project "Elpida-for-Iraklia" supporting the small school and other social needs.



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Contents "BEAUTIES OF IRAKLIA": Crystal clear waters that feel like velvet. Small beaches that invite with smooth sands or polished pebbles. Rough rocky cliffs that hide their feet somewhere deep down in the „Big Blue“. They all serve with perfect conditions for outdoor freaks as well as for a huge variety of amazing creatures: curious fish, colorful nudibranch, shy crab, delicate jellyfish, perfectly camouflaged and playful octopus, elegant anemones and many kinds of starfish make you sense the width of biodiversity. This part of the Mediterranean is not really famous with big fish. It rather fascinates with small beauties that show themselves to everyone who can slow down to quiet movement and peaceful observation.





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Often it's love at second sight. No way to resist the temptation of exploring overhanging rocks, dark caves, shadowy crevices and dim grottoes. These spots provide shelter for slow-growing sponges and other invertebrates. With torch or flash they explode to an incredible firework of breathtaking colours and amazing shapes. Furthermore they provide a refuge for nocturnal species...

The island fascinates on land as well: Iraklia belongs to the Natura 2000 network and is an important bird sanctuary. Apart from that it offers a wide spectrum of animals and plants...





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#### Helpful links:

- [www.johanna-klinar.at](http://www.johanna-klinar.at) - Detailed information about my social project „ELPIDA-FOR-IRAKLIA“ and stationery with my best wildlife motifs
- [www.iraklia.gr](http://www.iraklia.gr) – website of the island in Greek and English; a brief and useful summary for tourists
- Iraklia – wikipedia: general information
- [facebook](#): Public groups HRAKLEIA and ΕΞΠΡΕΣ ΣΚΟΠΕΛΙΤΙΣ (Express Skopelitis)
- [www.greek-islands-ferries.gr](http://www.greek-islands-ferries.gr) - You reach the island by boat only. The *Express Skopelitis* runs almost daily between *Amorgós* and *Naxos* and stops at *Donoúsa*, *Koufonísi*,

*Schínoussa* and *Iraklia*. Connections to Athens several times a week by *Blue Star Ferries* and others.

- Nearest airports: *Náxos*, *Mýkonos* and *Santoríni*/Thira.
- Accomodation: It is advisable to book your rooms in advance for July and August! Almost everyone speaks sufficient English, in *Villa Glafkos* German as well.
- [www.nissomanie.de](http://www.nissomanie.de): A voluminous blog in German(!) about “Island Fever” by Katharina Roller, who travels with open eyes and loving observation.
- [www.griechenlandabc.de/iraklia/](http://www.griechenlandabc.de/iraklia/) - German(!) travel guide, reports and useful descriptions
- [www.wildgreeceeditions.com.gr](http://www.wildgreeceeditions.com.gr) – Natural scientific literature by *Giannis Gavalas* from Iraklia: ΟΙ ΠΕΤΑΛΟΥΔΕΣ ΤΗΣ ΗΡΑΚΛΕΙΑΣ 2013 (Iraklia’s butterflies – in Greek), FLYING OVER THE AEGEAN 2014 – a guide to the birds of Iraklia and the nearby islets (english; in cooperation with Lefteris Stavrakas, Michalis Kotsakis a.o.) More booklets are on the way
- Webcams of Naxos and Iraklia: <http://www.naxosisland.eu/portara.html> and <http://www.naxos.gov.gr/webcam/iraklia/current.jpg>

In Naxos you´ll find a link to all boat positions (live ship data)