



SATURDAY

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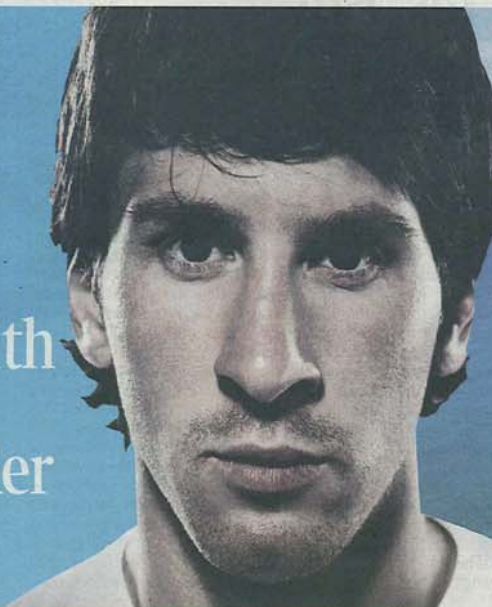
FMM

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Lionel Messi

Exclusive interview with the world's best footballer

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Travel

The island the Greeks keep secret

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Festival fans defy elements to revel in Isle of Mud



PETER BYRNE / PA

Flooding at the Isle of Wight Festival created a mudbath. Car-loads of music fans were pulled to safety by tractors and others gridlocked for up to ten hours. Page 11

IN THE NEWS

Assad general banned from London Olympics

The head of Syria's national Olympic committee has been banned from attending the London Games next month, ministerial sources told *The Times* yesterday. Mofwak Joumaa, a general said to be a friend of President Assad, will not be allowed to head the 31-strong Syrian delegation due to his close links to the regime. Page 7

Japan nuclear uproar

Japanese politicians provoked fury by passing a law that may allow the country to develop nuclear weapons. A clause in a revised law on atomic power states that it should "contribute to national security". Page 62

Hillary's hilarity

Hillary Clinton, the US Secretary of State, has been letting her hair down as she prepares to get off the high wire of politics. She has transformed her competent, slightly dull, image to that of a fun-loving national treasure. Page 63

The 38-year tax backlog

Revenue struggles to cope with more than 20,000 outstanding cases

Secrets of the tax avoiders

Alex Spence, Alice Thomson
Rachel Sylvester

Billions of pounds of potential revenue is tied up in more than 20,000 tax tribu-

nal cases because the Government lacks the resources to deal with them promptly, tax experts have told *The Times*.

An internal estimate by Revenue and Customs claims that the backlog would take 38 years to clear at the present rate. Interviews with current and former Revenue staff, and lawyers and accountants who advise wealthy taxpayers, have portrayed a department that is struggling to cope with mounting pressure to stop big companies and the rich from avoid-

ing their tax bills. The claims come after it was revealed this week that a host of wealthy people, including footballers, financiers and celebrities, continue to use avoidance schemes to reduce their income tax, despite HMRC increasingly challenging such arrangements.

One of Britain's most successful businessmen is increasing pressure today on the Government to produce a tax law that is fair for all. In an interview with *The Times*, the former chief execu-

tive of Tesco Sir Terry Leahy says that if there is unhappiness with the law "then the answer is to change the law". He attacks the status of non-domiciles, who avoid paying full tax by being registered abroad. "There's an insulated international group of people," he says. "I'm slightly puzzled by the UK's generous treatment of foreign residents. I'm for lower tax but I'd start with British citizens. Why should Continued on page 8, col 1

Inside today

Springsteen: hard rock in hard times

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Buying *The Times* overseas: Belgium €4.25; Bulgaria Lev 6.50; Canada \$4.25; Cyprus €4.25; northern Cyprus YTL 9.50; France €4.25; Germany €4.25; Gibraltar £2.30; Greece €4.25; Italy €4.25; Luxembourg €4.25; Malta €4.00; Morocco Dirh 55; Netherlands €4.25; Oman OMR 1.50; Portugal €4.25 (CONT.); Singapore S\$10; Spain €4.25; Switzerland SFR 7.80; Turkey YTL 8.00; UAE AED 10

Weekend

travel Mediterranean

The island the Greeks keep secret

Only private boats and a few foreign tourists make it to Andros. **Kate Quill** visits a place they call 'the dream'

Don't plan to do much while you're at Onar. It's not that kind of place. Time is so slow here you lose interest in checking it. There is no wi-fi, no shops, no night-clubs and very few people.

The only distractions at this isolated seaside spot on one of Greece's most under-appreciated islands is the occasional bleat from goats in the valley and a visit from the resident cat. There isn't even a proper road, which means jumping in the car to explore seems, after a couple of days of staring at the horizon, like too much hard work.

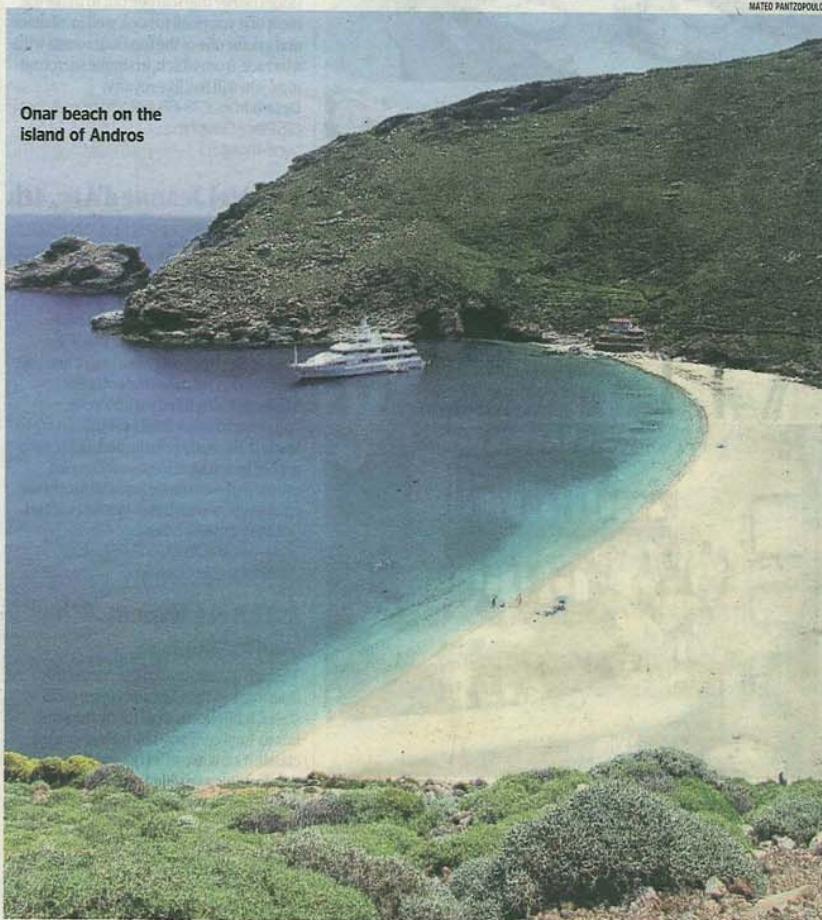
Onar is a small, eco-minded development of attractive stone cottages sitting at the bottom of a green, fertile valley on the northeastern corner of Andros, an island in the northern Cyclades. The journey here from the port, Gavrio, is a bone-rattling hour's drive. The road peters out about halfway, and turns into a rocky, earthen path that loops through a deserted, mountainous landscape. Very few foreign tourists come to Andros — it's a secret the Greek shipowners who have holiday homes here have kept to themselves. Even fewer make it to isolated spots like Onar.

Onar means "dream" in ancient Greek, and it's one come true for the owner, Mateo Pantzopoulos. He's been coming to this flower-filled valley since he was a child. His father used to sail the family boat into the sheltered cove near by; Mateo would swim ashore to go running through the fields and dodge wild bulls. "Even as a child, I realised this place was special," he says. "The beach, the trees, the waterfall, the silence. You can't find these places so easily in Greece anymore."

Mateo, an exuberant, sun-bronzed man with a big laugh, traded a city suit for shorts and flip-flops a few years ago following a successful career in shipping and a glamorous lifestyle that took him between Athens, London and New York. He grew tired of the rat race and the parties and longed to set up a small resort that was rural, private and respectful of the environment. One weekend he noticed a small advertisement in an Athens newspaper for the sale of the valley where he had spent so many happy days as a child. "The Greek fates stepped in," he says. "I cried when I signed the contract, I was so happy."

Mateo bulldozed a rough dirt road through the valley and had nine cottages built from local stone. Gardens and terraces overlook a romantic, unmanicured landscape full of trees, oleander, lavender and waist-high fields of grass and wild flowers. The air is heavily perfumed and throbs with the sound of bees and insects.

The cottages are served by a restaurant



Onar beach on the island of Andros

MATEO PANTZOPOULOS

with a pretty communal outdoor dining area shaded by plane trees. But the star attraction here is Achla beach, a couple of minutes walk beside a trickling stream. This sweeping arc of golden sand is lapped by the palest blue water, and is usually empty. There's no tourist paraphernalia either: no beach umbrellas, loungers, stalls or inflatables. There's one shack that serves as a very basic beach bar, but even that was closed most of the time I was there. Achla's beach is unspoilt and tranquil because, unless you are staying at Onar, it's impossible to access it by road. Visitors arrive by private boat at the weekends, but even then it never fills up too much, and they're gone by early evening.

Staying in private, comfortable accom-

“The beach, the trees, the waterfall, the silence. You can't find these places easily in Greece”

modation near a clean, empty beach was an experience I didn't think you could still have in the Mediterranean without paying a high price for the privilege. But at Onar it's affordable, with the cottages starting at €170 a night in summer. Mateo, who loves to socialise with his guests in the evenings, is a hippie at heart. "I wanted the chance to live in a beautiful, balanced environment and to make enough money to be self-sufficient. Nothing more."

That approach sums up the experience. The cottages are comfortable and stylishly decorated, but not luxurious. Onar's not the place to come if you require 24-hour room service and beauty treatments. The kitchen is open three times a day and serves a limited menu of fresh dishes:

salads (using vegetables grown in the garden), spicy sausages, pasta, roast meats, fish and local wine. If you're lucky, Mateo will get out a bottle of his best ouzo and pass it around. Otherwise you're advised to order self-catering supplies in advance as it will take a day for them to be delivered.

But the luxuries of Onar are those things that you don't get at many resorts that cost five times as much: silence and seclusion. Don't underestimate how precious these are. If you want to spring-clean your head, forget the expensive spa and Gestalt therapy sessions and book a week's holiday here. It's cheaper, lovelier and a bona fide natural cure.

I spent my time reading, taking sunset dips in a warm sea by a deserted beach, walking through woods to a cool, shady waterfall that is deep enough to bathe in, dozing on my terrace and stroking the cat. I didn't feel remotely guilty, because there isn't anything else to do. I cherished the silence. By day three, I had switched my phone off and put it in a drawer.

You can go exploring, of course — Mateo can arrange boat or car hire — and on Andros you never need to worry about hitting the hordes. There aren't any. It's a wild, wind-beaten, beautiful island. The charming, small capital town, Hora, is about 40 minutes away.

But you won't want to stray too far for too long. As Mateo declared one starry evening, raising a glass of wine to toast his valley: "God was in a good mood when he created this."

He's right. Onar is a dream of a place.

Need to know

Stay

A one-bedroom villa at Onar, Andros (onar-andros.gr), starts at €170 (£140) a night, including breakfast. Lunch or dinner at the restaurant is about €20pp (£16). Groceries can be ordered at cost, at a day's notice (00302106251052, info@onar-andros.gr).

Getting there

BA (0844 4930787, ba.com) flies from London Heathrow to Athens, from £159 return; easyJet (easyjet.com) flies Gatwick to Athens, from £73 return. Andros is two hours by ferry from Rafina (€15 at the port, or book from togiastavel.com). In Athens stay at the Divani Caravel (00302107207000, divanis.com/caravel), a modern hotel with a rooftop pool and views of the Acropolis. Doubles from €100 (£80), excluding breakfast.

Getting around

A 4x4 hire car from Gavrio, the main port on Andros, costs about €50 a day from Anna Vrettou at Euro Car Andros (00302282072440, info@rentacareuro.com). Transfers to Onar are about €50, one way.

Stop-offs

For a burst of nightlife, Mykonos is two-and-a-half hours by ferry. The Grace is a boutique hotel opposite a sandy beach. Doubles from €250 (i-escape.com)

Should you go to Greece this summer?

It's getting cheaper by the day to visit Greece as travel firms scramble to fill hotels and planes, but is it worth the risk of having your holiday ruined by possible strikes? While the economic turmoil still exists, the formation this week of a pro-euro government, along with the start of the annual July/August holiday exodus for locals, is positive, says Noel Josephides, the managing

director of the specialist tour company Sunvil Holidays. "I don't believe we are going to have any strikes of any note until the autumn." Even if there are, they are unlikely to affect tourists once in a resort, or on remote islands. Meanwhile, there are plenty of bargains. Sunvil has up to 25 per cent off late bookings, with a typical holiday next month for £349pp a week. Thomson and Olympic

Holidays have even cheaper packages, with the best deals to main tourist destinations such as Corfu, Rhodes, and Crete. Olympic, for instance, has a week's self-catering in Corfu, departing on July 14, for £176pp, or a week in Rhodes this month for £158pp. There are, though, several precautions worth taking: ● Take more cash than normal in case the banks

and ATMs close.

● Take euro notes in small denominations; if there is a change of currency followed by a devaluation, you won't be left with too much of the new currency. ● Watch the Foreign Office recommendations (fco.gov.uk). ● If you are worried, book a package holiday as your tour operator will be responsible if you are delayed by airport strikes. **Jane Knight**