

Your Greek Restroom Experience - A "Hole" New Adventure

Let me preface this article by saying that, if you already have a trip booked with us or are considering booking a trip with us, don't let the following frighten you. On the contrary, the things I'm going to describe are exactly why you would want to take a private tour, rather than venture out on your own. We can help you avoid some of these things or, at least, remove the fear of the unknown.

I always find it interesting and exciting when I travel to see the local culture. How they dress, what they eat and drink, how they dance and sing...and what the restroom accommodations are like.

Firstly, in Europe, the electric service is 220 volts. So, this is the only reason I can figure as to why all of the light switches for the restrooms are on the outside. I assume it's so you don't electrocute yourself trying to turn on the light with wet hands. Anyway, this is a good thing to keep in mind when you go into one with no windows. As soon as you close the door, it can be really dark, unless you remember to turn the light on as you enter. If you have any urgency to your visit, this switch thing can be more than a nuisance. I usually forget.

The next thing is - unisex or separate? By unisex, I don't mean one restroom that can be used by either sex, one at a time. I'm talking about one room with a common sink and counter and a few stalls next to each other. The first stalls are usually for the men and the ones farther down are for the women. This means that you could be in there doing a "big job", smelling up the place, and sitting in the stall right next to you is a Greek chick doing her business. Awkward. It's even more awkward if you both finish at the same time and have to wash your hands in the same sink, giving her a chance to meet the person who made her nose burn and eyes water, face-to-face. Or, it could be the other way around, and you're the one with the burning nose and watery eyes...it's still just as embarrassing. Granted, I did encounter this situation only once, but still...

How do I flush this thing? Here in the States, things are pretty standard as far as toilet functionality goes. There is a little handle on the side; you push it down, flush! Simple. Even inside of the tank - no rocket science in there, either...just a rod with a chain on the end that pulls up a rubber valve. Again, simple. I think my dog, Buster, could figure it out. Not so in Greece. Do I push down on this button or pull up on it? Is it this chain? This button on the floor? And, heaven help you if, after you find the device and push/pull/twist/kick it, nothing happens and you have to go into the tank. Holy crap! (Pardon the pun.) Just try and figure that one out! Some of them are actually pneumatic. When you push the button on top, it pushes air through a tube, down into the water, and does... something. I don't know exactly what. I mean, I know it has to open some type of valve in the tank to flush. I just don't know specifically how it works. Fortunately, I haven't had to go in that far (yet).

Have a seat. No, it's more like, "have a seat???" It almost seemed that, more often than not, there wasn't a seat on the toilet. Sometimes it would be leaning against the wall. Sometimes, it just wasn't there at all. (Hey, that rhymed). One day, Helen asked one of the taverna workers about this situation. The reply she received was "sometimes they break off...we haven't gotten around to fixing it yet". The

funny thing, though, when it would be a separate facility and Helen and I would use them, she would report of no seat in hers but there would usually be one in the men's. Also, since there are no seats half of the time, why have seat covers??? Actually, they probably don't have seat covers because of the next point I'll touch on...no paper in the toilet!!!

In every Greek restroom, there do seem to be two standard items...a toilet bowl brush and a little bucket next to the toilet to put used toilet paper. No matter what it was used for...in the bucket it must go. Thankfully, most have a lid with a foot pedal to open. There is a reason for not flushing paper (and it better be a pretty darn good one, you say). And it is. It's kind of like why the streets are so freaking narrow. Greece is a very old civilization and, so is most of its infrastructure, like the sewer pipes. They're just too narrow and old to handle the extra amount of stuff. If they flushed the paper, the sewer would back-up. I wonder how long it took to figure that out (peeeuuuu).

Is this a Turkish toilet or just a hole in the ground? Actually, they're the same thing. Helen and I were in the Petrified Forest in Sigri and I needed to use the facilities. The Petrified Forest is a national park, so they have cinder-block type restrooms outdoors, similar to ours in the States...with an exception - no actual toilet - just a hole in the ground. Being that this was an outdoor restroom in a national park, though, I didn't really think too much of it, other than the fact that I was a glad I'm a guy and could do this particular business standing up. It wasn't until a later trip, when we were in a taverna downtown and I needed to use the facilities, when I really noticed this. I went into the fairly modern looking restroom and, surprise, no toilet. Although, I must say, this hole was way fancier than the one in Sigri. This one had a porcelain area around it with a place on either side to put your feet. How nice.

I haven't documented this with any photos...yet. I'm thinking when I go back next year this would be a good project. This way, I could have a photo record of the different types of facilities at each place I visit. So, I guess if you're in Greece next year and walk into a restroom and there's a goofy guy in there taking pictures of the toilet, it may be me!

Cheers and Yia sas!