

# Go car-free and carefree on Hydra



**Rick Steves**

The island of Hydra — less than two hours south of Athens by ferry — offers the ideal Greek island experience. But those who come here with an agenda should be warned ... this is the kind of place that makes you want to buy a bottle of ouzo and toss your itinerary into the sea.

Hydra has one real town, no real roads, no cars and not even any bikes. Water taxis whisk travelers from the quaint little harbor to isolated beaches and tavernas. Donkeys are the main way to transport things here. These sure-footed beasts of burden, laden with everything from bathtubs to bottled water, climb stepped lanes. Behind each mule-train toils a human pooper-scooper; I imagine picking up after your beast is required. On Hydra, a traffic jam is three donkeys and a fisherman.

Hydra is hardly undiscovered. In 1956, Sophia Loren came here to play a Hydriot sponge diver in the film “Boy on a Dolphin,” propelling the little island onto the international stage. (A statue honoring the film sits just outside of town along the coastal path.)

By the 1960s, Hydra had become a favorite retreat for celebrities, well-heeled tourists, and artists and writers who drew inspiration from the idyllic surroundings.

The late Canadian songwriter Leonard Cohen lived on Hydra for a time — and was inspired to compose his beloved song “Bird on the Wire” after observing just that here. To honor the expat poet, the town has named the street in front of his house after



Hydra has no real roads, no cars and no bicycles — so most things on this Greek island are transported by donkeys. **ADDIE MANNAN**

him. Not that street names mean much — locals ignore addresses, and few lanes are labeled. Expect to get lost in Hydra ... and enjoy it when you do.

Today, visitors only have to count the yachts to figure out that Hydra's economy is still based on the sea. Tourists wash ashore with the many private and public boats that come and go, but few venture beyond the harborfront. Locals, proud of the extravagant yachts moored for the night, like to tell of movie stars who make regular visits.

Little Hydra — which has produced military heroes, influential aristocrats and political leaders — is packed with history. Rusted old cannons are scattered about town, and black, pitted anchors

decorate squares. Hydra also has a few small museums, including a historical museum and a wealthy shipping magnate's mansion.

But while its history is somewhat interesting, the beauty of Hydra is in relaxing at a cafe and aimlessly wandering its back lanes. Once, I decided to head uphill from my hotel, and my small detour became a delightful little odyssey. While I had no intention of anything more than a lazy stroll, one inviting lane after another drew me up, up, up to the top of the town. Here, shabby homes enjoyed grand views, tired burros ambled along untethered, and island life trudged on, oblivious to tourism.

Although Hydra's beaches are nothing to get

excited about, there's no shortage of places to swim.

The one swimming spot right in Hydra town has steps that lead down to a series of small concrete platforms with ladders into the sea. There are also a few decent beaches within a pleasant, easy walk of town: Mandraki Bay, Kaminia and Vlychos. Distant beaches on the southwestern tip of the island (Bisti and Agios Nikolaos) really get you away from it all, but are best reached by boat.

As sunset nears, I head for the rustic and picturesque village of Kaminia, which hides behind the headland from Hydra, about a 15-minute walk along the coastal path. Kaminia's pocket-sized harbor shelters the community's fishing boats,

and its taverna, perched on a bluff above, boasts my favorite, irresistible dinner views on Hydra. Sitting on the porch with a glass of ouzo and some munchies, I watch the sun dip gently into the Saronic Gulf.

At twilight, I walk back to town along the lamplit coastal lane, under a ridge lined with derelict windmills.

Back in town, I settle on a ferry cleat the size of a stool, scanning the scene. Big flat-screen TVs flicker from every other yacht — the high rollers are back on their boats. I observe the pleasant evening routine of strolling and socializing. Dice clatter on backgammon boards, entrepreneurial cats seem busy, children chase soccer balls, and a tethered goat chews on something inedible in its

low-profile corner. From the other end of town comes the happy music of a christening party. Dancing women fill the building, while their children mimic them in the street. Farther down, two elderly, black-clad women sit like tired dogs on the curb.

Succumbing to the lure of a pastry shop, I order some honey-soaked baklava. I tell the baker I'm American. “Oh,” he says, shaking his head with sadness and pity. “You work too hard.”

I answer, “Right. But not today.”

*Rick Steves (www.ricksteves.com) writes European travel guidebooks and hosts travel shows on public television and public radio. Email him at rick@ricksteves.com and follow his blog on Facebook.*

## CELEBRITY TRAVEL

### Actor sets low bar for trip's first day

By **Jae-Ha Kim**  
Tribune Content Agency

Marissa Chanel Hampton said that filming on location can help actors get more in depth with the roles they're playing.

“It's always fun to have the opportunity to get to experience somewhere new while working, especially if the location is a central part of the story,” said Hampton, who splits her time between homes in Atlanta and Southern California.

“On ‘It's Not Like That,’ we filmed it in Atlanta, my second (real-life) home. Working on location is great.”

This interview with Hampton has been edited for clarity and length.

**Q: What can you share about your latest role?**

**A:** Most recently, I had the pleasure of playing Gail on the upcoming show “It's Not Like That” (on Prime Video). I love fun, feisty characters who speak their mind. In this heartfelt family drama and romance, Gail is exactly that.

**Q: If you could pick a location to film a project, where would it be?**

**A:** Florence. I have been several times, and it would be a dream to film something there that would hopefully center the city as a main character. It's beautiful. Also, the Uffizi Museum is a favorite of mine due to their extensive Botticelli collection.

**Q: As someone who travels extensively, what can you suggest to make trips less chaotic?**

**A:** Whenever I take a big



Actor Marissa Chanel Hampton says New Zealand offers an adventurous vacation. **STORM SANTOS**

trip, I always say that day one is always the worst. Not because it's terrible, but because I let the bar be low for that first day. So often, we are rushing to jam it all in, desperately trying to hit the ground running. It sets you up for an emotional roller coaster when things don't go exactly as planned. I always assume on day one, you are just getting your feet underneath you ... so go with the flow. Something's bound to go wonky. But if you expect that, you can sort it out while you roll with the punches.

**Q: What untapped destination should people know about?**

**A:** I don't know that I would call it untapped, but one location that I've recently added to my travel bucket list because I hadn't considered it yet is Oman. The gorgeous mountains, historic Nizwa Souq and Wadi Shab are all on my dream itinerary when I visit there.

**Q: What trip you took as a child that stands out?**

**A:** We went to China when I was a young adult. It was such a great adventure. I'd been very lucky to have gone to Europe quite a bit by then, but hadn't gone to China yet. We visited Shanghai, then made our way to Hong Kong, Lantau Island and Macau.

**Q: What is your favorite vacation destination?**

**A:** New Zealand. I recently

went for a friend's wedding, and it was one of the best trips I've ever had. Stunning views and relaxation on Waiheke Island in addition to some wonderful vineyards and an excellent gin and vodka distillery with great desserts. I never had a bad cup of coffee my entire trip. If you're an outdoors person like I am, Queenstown is absolutely worth exploring. Fly fishing, jet boating, rafting ... it's an adventurer's paradise. Take a helicopter tour and make your way to Milford Sound, get a massage and soak in a hot tub overlooking the Shotover River. ... I could go on and on. New Zealand is high on my list for a repeat visit!

**Q: Where would you like to go that you have never been to before?**

**A:** Portugal, Scotland, Zanzibar and Japan. The list is neverending. I'm always adding a new place to the dream travel list.

**Q: If you could only pick one place to eat, would you prefer a food truck or fine dining?**

**A:** Food truck! Don't get me wrong, I love fine dining, but I also love the adventure of food trucks. You never know if you're going to find a hidden gem. I have had some incredible once-in-a-lifetime dining experiences at food trucks in the most random places.

For more from the reporter, visit [www.jaehakim.com](http://www.jaehakim.com).

## TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

### Expedia stonewalls after flight canceled by airline

By **Christopher Elliott** | King Features Syndicate

My daughters and I were set to fly to Cambodia from Eugene, Oregon, via Seattle. The first leg was on Alaska Airlines with a connection to EVA Air in Seattle. The Alaska flight was the first leg of our trip to Cambodia. Hours before our departure, Alaska canceled our flight because of a crew shortage. No rebooking options existed, so we drove 5 hours to Seattle, missing a day of our vacation.

I booked through Expedia, so I contacted the online travel agency first. What followed was months of maddening runarounds. Expedia's chatbots bounced me to agents who claimed that Alaska marked us as no-shows. (Absurd, since Alaska's own email confirmed the cancellation!)

Agents insisted that Expedia couldn't refund us and told me to pester Alaska or EVA Air. EVA replied, “Contact Expedia,” and Alaska said, “Expedia holds your funds.” I escalated my case to Expedia's Premium Traveler Care department, only to hear: “We no longer have access to your tickets.”

I've saved every email and chat log, which proves Expedia's indifference. Why did Expedia, the middleman whom I paid, refuse to process a refund even after Alaska admitted fault? How many hoops must a customer jump through? Can you help me get my money back?

— *Laura Hughart, Cottage Grove, Oregon*

**A:** Expedia should have refunded you immediately. You paid Expedia — not Alaska or EVA. Expedia's terms of service are noncommittal when it comes to airline refunds. It says that any refunds will be transferred back to you by the party who took your original payment — in other words, your airline. It adds, “We do not have visibility of a travel provider's refund process.”

But the Department of Transportation is clear about who's responsible. Its regulations mandate automatic refunds for cancellations regardless of cause; there are no loopholes for “staffing issues.” I think the DOT might hold Expedia responsible, especially if it charged your credit card.

Expedia played a shell game with your money,

wasted your time with useless chatbots, and ignored paper trails. You wisely documented every interaction, saved Alaska's cancellation confirmation, and persistently escalated your request.

Still, I have three tips for next time: First, demand refunds in writing within 30 days. Companies stonewall, hoping that you'll quit. Second, when front-line reps shrug, skip the chat roulette and email Expedia's executives. I publish their contacts on my consumer advocacy site, [elliott.org](http://elliott.org), for this exact purpose. Finally, you can contact the DOT when an airline or online agency won't refund you. Typically, this will get a quick response.

By the way, I wanted to commend you on your choice of a vacation desti-

nation. Cambodia is rich in culture and history and is one of my favorite places. I hope it was worth the 5-hour drive to Seattle to make your flight.

I contacted Expedia on your behalf and separately, and you also reached out to EVA's executives, who controlled your ticket. Finally, almost a year after your flight cancellation, you received your \$500 refund from EVA. While I'm glad that EVA finally did the right thing, it shouldn't have taken a year or an advocacy team to fix this mess.

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