

The Sincerity of Friendship

Read a story written by SISWP member Glen Slee from Club SI Karratha and Districts about the wonderful Soroptimist International program [Open Heart, Open Door](#) which connects Soroptimists worldwide.



“The sincerity of Friendship” is unequivocally what Gary and I experienced during a short visit to Athens. The database maintained by Henny Knap: Open Heart, Open Door, included contacts for Athens, and at “the eleventh-hour” we were able to connect with Fortini Kelagero and arranged to meet her the day before we left for our Iranian tour.

To our great delight, Fortini (a founding member of Athens club) had arranged for the President, Anthoula Anakefalou, who spoke very little English, to join us, and the ladies shouted us to coffee and cake and gave us a book on The Acropolis Museum.

I asked if any member of the club was “in travel” as we had no specific plans for the week after our return from Iran. Out came the Union’s Directory (akin to Region database), a phone call was made, and soon all four of us were walking to Aktina Travel Group a few blocks away where we received a wonderful welcome and hospitality. It was a large office, and I suspect, in quick-time, many knew why and how we came to be there. The business owner is a Soroptimist, but she was away, and we were most capably looked after by Diana, who made our bookings while we were away. We were to visit Ikaria; and to join a cultural tour of Olympia, Delphi and Mateora.

Fortini and Anthoula then walked us through the streets of old Athens and brought us lunch at one of their favourite restaurants. Meeting these ladies had been the best part of our Athens experience... and it was to get even better.

Fortini had told us that for the last 15 years she and her husband took holidays on the island of Ikaria, which is part of “the blue zone”: about six global locations were residents age-well and have a high proportion of centenarians - hence we planned two nights on Ikaria. This came with a personal introduction by Fortini to Maria Alana, proprietor of the hotel where Fortini stays, and a recommendation that we use the thermal baths in the next village, about 2 km walk.

On our return to Athens, Fortini and Anthoula pulled-out all stops to ensure they caught up with us to say bye-bye. Fortini gave me a copy of her research and presentation on the thermal-springs, then, before I knew what was happening, Anthoula had me on the phone speaking with Maria Gratz, President of the Greek Union. There was a lot of noise in the restaurant, but I was able to glean that Maria had spent time in Perth six years ago and was excited that I was able to re-connect her with our own Margaret Lobo (Past International President).

As a footnote, in 2015, we received a very warm welcome and hospitality from our Friendship Link - Solent East (SI-GBI), and encourage all Soroptimists to experience for themselves, The Sincerity of Friendship.

Photo: Rear: L - Anthoula, R - Fortini - sharing traditional Greek fare with Gary and Glen Slee

Regards Glen Slee
Charter Member, SI Karratha and Districts Inc

For registration or information about [Open Heart – Open Door](#).
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