



# XK Gazette

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# Arcadia discovery

**Alex Holis** celebrates the Greek autumn with a group drive into the spectacular and historic countryside

Summer in Greece has just ended, at least as far as the calendar is concerned, but not yet when it comes to temperatures. This is why it is so nice to visit the region of Arcadia in the Peloponnese during autumn. It includes two of the most characterful villages that Greeks adore and lately even foreigners have discovered: Dimitsana and Vytina. Just 200km from Athens, they both offer an oasis of peace and tranquillity where time seems to have stopped in the 1950s or '60s – just like our cars! To savour this feeling, our 14 crews had as their first stop the traditional tavern To Lathos in Dimitsana, where the grandmother's recipes are still cooked with natural products, as in the good old days.

When we finished our huge dinosaur-sized T-bone steaks, we continued our journey to the centre of the village. Dimitsana is perched at an elevation of 950m on the west slopes of Mt Mainalon. It overlooks the lush Lousios river gorge and the green valleys of pines, olive, chestnut and oak trees, under which flocks of goats and sheep graze undisturbed, playing their melancholy bells.

The historical roots of Dimitsana can be traced



- Top: overlooking the spectacular and historic hillside town of Dimitsana
- Above: the group visited an exhibition celebrating 200 years since the revolution against Ottoman rule



to the ancient town of Teftis. The great traveller and geographer Pausanias visited the town in 174 AC and included his impressions in his ‘Arcadian’ writings. A few metres away from the centre of the village, we let our Jaguars rest in front of the only hotel with safe, generous parking – the Nerida Boutique Hotel – and it was time for us to enjoy a coffee looking at the amazing view.

In the afternoon we walked in the centre of Dimitsana, characterised as a ‘traditional settlement’ protected by the Ministry of Culture. Perfectly restored stone houses testify to the importance of this cultural and artisan centre, which experienced rapid growth from the 16th century. From its faculties graduated innumerable scholars, priests and schoolteachers. At the same time crafts, manufacturing and trade were also on the rise.

Our stroll up and down the alleys of the village stirred our appetites and we all found ourselves together at the well-known Taverna Sto Kioupi. At the end of the meal we threw a surprise birthday party for our member Sofi. The local pastry shop Gliko Barouti (‘Sweet Dynamite’) kindly offered us a beautiful cake to express their appreciation in visiting Dimitsana with our gorgeous cars. The cake had an impressive image of a red XK 120 and the typical Greek birthday wish: ‘May you celebrate at least up to 100 years!’

The second day of our tour was ideal for visiting the Open-Air Museum of Hydrokinesis of the Cultural Foundation of the Piraeus Group. This unusual Open-Air Water Power Museum has restored traditional installations and water-powered mechanisms with wooden gears that



- Top: how’s that for a view? The Jaguars parked at the Nerida Boutique Hotel
- Above: Sofi’s XK 120-themed birthday cake

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reminded us of the archaic stage of the first car engines.

All the workshops are surrounded by dense vegetation and plenty of running water, and all their equipment has been restored to their original function – exactly what we do with our cars. One of the stone buildings housed the tannery showing the various stages of processing and dying of the leather. This was probably the most interesting place for us because leather is so important in renovating and restoring a classic car! Now that everyone is looking for more natural and less polluting ways to dye leathers, we are finally returning to the roots of the ancient techniques.

Two other buildings captured our attention for their historical importance: an exhibition for the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the Greek Revolution against Ottoman rule, and the gunpowder mill that supplied the insurgent heroes with the necessary ammunition material during the struggle.

One of the strange findings we saw was a letter written by the chief of the Greek troops, Kolokotronis. Due to lack of paper, he asked to collect the students' notebooks in Dimitsana in order to use them in the cartridge manufacture! At the end of our impressive visit, a pleasant coffee break offered by the museum was waiting for us in the garden.

Our journey continued to the most glamorous mountain village of Arcadia – Vytina, where we were welcomed in the main square by the Vice-President of the community, Fotis Katsoulis. To thank him for the warm hospitality and the gifts prepared for all the crews, we presented him with a commemorative plaque. The people we met were very interested in our historic cars. We answered many questions to convey to the younger ones the passion for these 'mobile museums' that we keep alive and functional with so much love – the same love we have for our dear Jaguar friends. 🐾



- Left: Alex (on left) presenting Fotis Katsoulis – the Vice-President of the community – with a commemorative plaque
- Below: the Jaguars lined up in the main square in Vytina

