

My first sea turtle encounter

It is the summer of 2017, I just finished my bachelor's degree and was free of any school related work for the entire summer. Because of this, my parents planned a family trip to the island of Rhodes in Greece. When I first heard the news, I started packing right away. Not that I have that many clothes or anything, but just to make sure that I would not forget to bring any important attributes on this holiday. First thing that came to mind was not to forget my snorkelling and fishing gear, since we were staying close to the seaside. The day we actually had to leave on holiday, I could not wait to arrive at the pristine beaches and seagrass meadows that I was told about by some friends.

Being the curious person that I am, I had already done a background check of the entire area, so I knew that the sea was not too far away from the house where we were staying. Passing some locals in the street, I asked the directions and off I went. From that day, I knew I could not rely on google maps anymore, because what was meant to be a short hike through a nice Mediterranean landscape, quickly changed into a three hour walk in the burning sun. Several times I thought of going back to try it another day, but I kept going, until, scorched by the sun, I arrived at the bay.

First thing I did was get those goggles on and get in the water to cool down. As I swam in the shallow water, I saw some pretty coloured fish passing by, so I went on and on until I was about fifty meters away from the coast. I came up to get a breath of fresh air, since I forgot to put my snorkel tube on. When I went back under, I could not believe what I saw! A sea turtle was swimming just next to me. First, it was moving slowly but when I tried to follow it, it just went on into the blue. What an encounter that was! Up until today, that moment is one of the most memorable of my life.

The magical encounter of that day lead me to try and understand these wonderful animals better. This is why, in about a month from now, I will be flying to the Seychelles for the practical part of my master's thesis. There I will study the effects of different factors on the hatchling success of sea turtles. I bet, the moment I come across a turtle again, it will be as wonderful as it was the first time!