



# A refugee's "dreamland"



# 2

## A refugee's "dreamland"

1. Watch a National Geographic video titled "Syrian Refugees: A Human Crisis Revealed in a Powerful Short Film" on YouTube or look at the pictures below, and describe the scenes you see.



[http://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=1&v=hiujzFNgHcE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=hiujzFNgHcE)



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hiujzFNgHcE>

2. Watch the video “The Greek island where Syrian refugees are welcome - BBC News” on YouTube, and discuss your first impressions of it.



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pwa9KPxbZWQ>



3. Form groups, read the text below and answer the questions that follow. Then report to the class.

### **Island of goats and dreams - tiny Tilos, in the Aegean, welcomes refugees with open arms**

Tucked away in a quiet corner of the Aegean, Tilos is an island of crimson bougainvillea cascading over whitewashed houses, ancient stone terraces and goats – lots of goats.

For years its main claim to fame was a cave in which the remains of pygmy elephants – the last to roam Europe, until around 4,000 years ago – were discovered by paleontologists.

But Tilos has now earned a new distinction, as a place that has actively welcomed refugees fleeing the war in Syria.

Islanders say their decision to embrace a dozen refugee families – around 70 people in total – offers an example to the rest of Greece, where



Syrian children in the refugee camp established on Tilos. They learn Greek and English and will start attending school in September. Credit: Nick Squires



The main port in Tilos. The island is part of the Dodecanese and lies close to the coast of Turkey. Credit: Nick Squires



The refugee camp in Livadia, the island's port. Credit: Nick Squires



Syrian children in an English lesson in the camp on Tilos. Credit: Nick Squires

more than 60,000 refugees from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and other countries languish in limbo in camps, waiting to be granted asylum and allowed to settle in other EU countries.

"We think that the arrangement we have here could be a model that could be exported to the rest of Greece and the whole of Europe," Maria Kamma, the mayor, said in her office in Megalo Horio, the tiny 'capital' of Tilos, a village that clings to the slopes of a craggy mountain beneath a ruined castle.

"If a little island like ours can support 12 families, then others can do the same, in proportion to their population. Bigger communities can take larger numbers. We can solve the refugee problem," the mayor told The Telegraph.

Maria Kamma, the mayor of Tilos, has welcomed the refugee families. The number of refugees settled in Tilos may seem small, but in proportion to the island's resident population, which is barely 500, it is significant.

Unlike the miserable camps in other parts of Greece where refugees have nothing to do, those on Tilos are becoming integrated into the fabric of daily life.

Almost all the adults – aside from mothers looking after small children – have found work, in hotels and restaurants, shops, the island's bakery or as day labourers.

They live in a purpose-built camp in the middle of Livadia, the island's port, where tourists eat grilled fish and tsatsiki in seafront tavernas. It is hardly luxurious – families live in Portakabins grouped around a communal cooking area and a shower block.

But trees provide splashes of shade, a fresh layer of gravel keeps down the dust and there is plenty of room for the children to run around.

Conditions are immeasurably better than in other, much larger camps on Aegean islands

such as Lesbos and Chios, where refugees have been stuck since crossing in boats from nearby Turkey.

Those asylum seekers, many of them women and small children, are suffering ever greater levels of “psychological stress” and despair, according to the UN.

On Tilos, in contrast, the children go to Greek and English lessons and will start attending schools on the island in September.

“I like the lessons, and playing outside, and having my friends around,” said Nour, an outgoing eight-year-old Syrian girl, speaking in confident Greek rather than her native Arabic.

Leading a toddler by the hand in the shade of a eucalyptus tree, Mohsen Barak, 42, from the city of Al-Hasakah in north-eastern Syria, has been on Tilos for seven months. “It is so much better than where we were before. We were on Rhodes, in a refugee camp inside an old slaughter yard. It was bad, really bad. We spent nearly a year there,” he said.

Eleni Kymina, 35, teaches the children Greek several times a week. “The kids really want to learn, they want to play music – all the things they didn’t have a chance to do in the past,” the teacher said.

The camp was established about a year ago by Solidarity Now, a Greek NGO, with help from UNHCR, the UN’s refugee agency.

“The refugees are much happier than they were at first, especially now they have found jobs. It’s not good to sit around all day with nothing to do, you become depressed,” said Spiros Aliferis, a team leader from the NGO. “They’re part of our community. The kids go to the playground in the village, they swim in the sea. And they pick up Greek quickly.”

Like many Greek islands, Tilos has suffered from chronic depopulation in the past. Up in the hills,



Dawn on Tilos. The island lies just a few nautical miles from Turkey.



The village of Mikro Chorio. Around 15,000 goats roam the mountains and valleys of Tilos.



away from the beaches and bays, lies the abandoned village of Mikro Chorio.

The village of Mikro Chorio was abandoned in the decades after the Second





An abandoned house in the deserted village of Mikro Chorio.

World War. Goats wander through deserted houses, while others are boarded up with bits of rusting corrugated iron.

The village's inhabitants drained away after the Second World War, seeking new lives in Athens, the United States and Australia.

The presence of the refugees has injected money into the island. They receive a modest allowance from the UNHCR and spend the money in local shops.

Now there are plans to build a cheese factory on Tilos, to take advantage of the milk produced by the 15,000 goats that wander its herb-scented mountains and valleys.

"Some shepherds use the milk and one or two make their own cheese but it's for their own consumption. There's a big potential," said Stathis Kontos, special adviser to the mayor. It is hoped that the cheese factory will provide jobs for both Syrians and locals. "The locals will provide

the expertise and the refugees will provide the manpower," said Mr Kontos.

The enterprise will help diversify Tilos' dependence on tourism as the mainstay of its economy. A two-hour boat ride from Rhodes, the island is popular with a small but loyal crowd of British, Italians and Scandinavians, many of whom come year after year.

Tilos has a permanent population of just 500, but thousands of tourists arrive in the summer months.

Some fall in love with the place so much that they buy houses and live there all year round. Ian Beesley, 70, originally from Oldham, moved here nearly 20 years ago and lives in a villa overlooking the sea.

"This island could be an example of how to deal with the refugee problem and integrate them into communities. There is a genuine feeling of compassion here," he said. "I think they also want to build up the population. At one point the ratio of kids to teachers was three to one. I have only encountered one guy with anything negative to say about the refugees," he said.

Some of the refugees hope to be reunited with relatives already settled in Germany or other EU countries, but the mayor hopes the rest will remain and rebuild their shattered lives on Tilos. "I'd like them to stay. They're human beings. It's their right to live in humane conditions. Tilos is a place where we can support their dreams of a peaceful life," she said.



<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/09/06/island-goats-dreams-tiny-tilos-aegean-welcomes-refugees-open/>



1. Tilos welcomed a proportion of refugees of over 10% of its population.

**TRUE** →

**FALSE** →



2. Write two advantages of Tilos' refugee camp in comparison with camps on other islands.

✓ .....

.....

✓ .....

.....

3. According to the refugees, all Greek people welcome them.

**TRUE** →

**FALSE** →

4. What are the main reasons that refugees are welcome on the island of Tilos according to Ian Beesley?

.....

.....

.....

.....



5. The refugees think that:

- a. doing nothing all day makes you happy
- b. doing nothing all day causes depression
- c. life is better on bigger islands because there are more jobs
- d. locals should give them money

6. Tilos' economy mainly depends on:

- a. goats
- b. dairy industry
- c. tourism
- d. fishing

7. Young children from refugee families don't go to school because they must learn Greek first.

**TRUE** →

**FALSE** →

8. Explain in which ways local economy can benefit from refugees.

.....

.....

.....

.....



## ACTION PLAN



A. Create an action plan using the "Read Think Write" application. Show how you can help a group of refugees be integrated in your town or village. Refer to the number of people that can be successfully integrated, the kind of entrepreneurship that can be developed, the ways your school can help, the potential benefits for local community etc.



<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/student-interactives/timeline-30007.html>

Present your action plans to the class.



- B.** Imagine you and your family are fleeing Syria for Europe. In groups, use the BBC interactive application and choose your escape route.



<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32057601>

- C.** Use the interactive application “Tour Builder” to talk about your journey to freedom. Use pictures and detailed descriptions for every part of your journey.



<http://tourbuilder.withgoogle.com/>

# 2 A refugee's "dreamland"

