



Fishing tourism: new opportunities for women and for sustainability

Antonia Vassileiou



Antonia Vassiliou comes from Kefalonia, one of the Ionian Islands of Greece. She has just been unanimously voted President of the Panhellenic Association of Fishing Tourism for Professional Fishermen for the second time—a great step forward for women in the sector. “I am so happy and honoured for this as fishing is usually about men, so a woman leading for 3 more years is great”. As a woman in a male-dominated industry, she acknowledges the challenges women face in being accepted as leaders in the fishing world. “Fishing has always been seen as a man’s job, with women always in the background,” she explains. However, her experience in fishing tourism has helped change this perception. “Women bring a lot to the table—organization, diplomacy, and a more collaborative approach, especially when dealing with the government,” she adds. She emphasizes that fishing tourism has created new opportunities for women, giving them a visible role on the boats, where they provide a sense of safety and care for the guests.

“Women’s presence on the boats changes the dynamics; it shows people that we are looking after the environment and ensuring their safety,” she says.

Together with her husband, Antonia was among the first people in Greece to obtain a license for tourist fishing, paving the way for a new form of sustainable tourism in the country. “Our day starts very early,” she says. “We welcome guests onto our boats: my husband has his own boat, and I have mine. We depart around 8 in the morning to retrieve the nets, mainly to catch lobsters. My husband has been a fisherman for 43 years, but I was not born into this profession. I studied agriculture for organic products, but ten years ago, we seized an opportunity and started this path together. Four years ago, I got my own boat and now I lead the tours myself.”

After retrieving the nets and checking the catch, the day continues in a secluded cove. There, they prepare lunch, cooking the freshly caught fish along with local traditional dishes and appetizers. “But first, we put the nets back in the sea,” she explains. “Our work is a constant balance between respecting nature and welcoming guests.”

Sustainability is at the heart of the project. By using smaller nets and limiting their fishing efforts, she has been able to continue the business without depleting marine resources. Practices such as rotating fishing spots allow lobsters and other marine life to regenerate. These efforts have resulted in noticeable increases in lobster populations year after year. “Fishing tourism is part of the blue economy, promoting both environmental and social sustainability,” she says, noting that her business continues to thrive without the need for larger catches.

Her personal journey into fishing tourism began unexpectedly. Originally from Athens and with Austrian roots, she moved to Kefalonia as a student and met her husband, a lifelong fisherman. “If you had told me 20 years ago that I’d be doing this, I would have thought you were crazy,” she admits. Now, as a successful entrepreneur, she runs a family business that not only promotes sustainable fishing but also provides jobs to local youth, including her 19-year-old daughter, who has recently become a fisher and who is eager to take over the business.

Fishing tourism, she says, is more than just about making money—it’s about creating an experience that reflects the true essence of Greece. “It’s about love and connection with people, it’s about what we give back to those who experience this with us,” she reflects. Although the sector is still in its early stages, with only 150 boats out of 350 licensed for fishing tourism, the future looks bright. As the Association continues to grow and attract more participants, they are determined to lead the way in ensuring that both the sea and the people who depend on it thrive sustainably for generations to come.