

‘Kamakia – The perfect summer’ synopsis

Sam is an innocent young man. Someone who has led a very ordinary, albeit privileged, English life. Educated, moral and overly polite at times, he decides his horizons need broadening and travels to Greece in search of a job for the summer.

Initially heading to Santorini, our protagonist is sidetracked by an old man who convinces him that the island of Mykonos provides not only a more authentic view of 'the true Greece', but also life lessons that simply can't be learnt elsewhere.

The first of these lessons comes very quickly - never trust strange old men. Following the benevolent geriatrics' advice leads Sam to an empty campsite in the middle of nowhere.

On the plus side, he does manage to find a job - working on the island's port as a 'kamaki' - selling tourists accommodation in such a hustle bustle environment as to make Wall St. look tranquil by comparison. Or at least it would do, if any tourists had the same bright idea as he did and came to the island. Contrary to all expectations, the island remains desolate for the first few months of the season.

During this lonely initial period, Sam befriends the only other campground regular, a wild beatnik known only as 'The Chicken Twister'. Chicken Twister takes his name from his job - a mind numbing routine of watching chicken cook on a spit for ten hours a day. This would be enough to drive any ordinary mortal to insanity but Twister, made of sterner stuff, mitigates the stress by recounting old traveler tales to any passer who is willing to listen.

Bonded by boredom, the two sit and wait out the beginning of the season.

Even with slim pickings on the port, Sam's boss, the charming and completely immoral Capo, is not impressed. Sam does not appear to possess that certain indefinable star quality that makes a great kamaki and unbeknownst to Sam, Capo plans to dispose of his newfound employee the moment the campground's two seasoned kamakis - the Irish Herman and the Italian Guglielmo - arrive.

Herman and Guglielmo do arrive as planned but with much higher aspirations for the year. No longer will their days be filled with grinding monotony as they sit, waiting on the port for the next boatload of tourists to come in. This year will be different. Shorter hours, better food and a more relaxed schedule are the order of the day for these two veterans. In short, they refuse to be taken advantage of any longer.

Being taken advantage of is a concept Sam unwittingly becomes familiar with. Fearing for his job, he agrees to Capo's demands to work for commission only and do longer hours so that Herman and Guglielmo can enjoy a lifestyle they very quickly become accustomed to. Were Guglielmo and Herman grateful for the sacrifice, the blow would be softened. But as both of them are generally abusive of Sam and his 'good, clean, wholesome ways', it is a bitter pill to swallow. While the season continues and does eventually get busy, Sam remains as lonely as he was when the island was nothing but a handful of goat-herders and fishermen.

One of the bright points in all this though is Anatoli, the boss's daughter and someone who Sam befriends. 'The result of a lifetime of validation', she is, by all accounts (including the great philanderer Herman) 'too much, even for a kamaki'. Nevertheless, neither this, nor the discovery of Anatoli's boyfriend, dampen Sam's boyish fascination.

What does rub salt into the wound though, is that there aren't really any other girls to occupy Sam's mind. Herman, Guglielmo and Twister (whose other job - allegedly - is instructing Tantra) seem to busily Hoover up any available bachelor-ettes in the vicinity.

Needless to say, this causes some jealous tension between the group and Sam, most spectacularly when Guglielmo slings his roommate (Sam) out in the middle of the night so the Italian can have his wicked way with a tourist.

Just when the situation looks like it cannot deteriorate further, Sam, against the advice of The Chicken Twister accepts a dare from Herman and Guglielmo to jump from 'their jump' - a fifty foot drop from a cliff that overhangs the sea - to prove that he is 'just as fab and groovy' as they are.

Sam survives the childish stunt that could very easily have gone wrong only to discover that neither the Italian nor the Irishman had ever performed such a feat. Nonetheless, his action provides the seed from which a friendship can grow.

Over the rest of the season, Sam begins to learn the 'ways of the kamaki' from the others and so starts introducing the correct elements (namely dishonesty and misdirection) into his job on the port. His relationship with Anatoli also develops as he becomes a little more 'windswept and interesting'.

The season gradually snowballs in blur of wild nights, 'fifteen second friends', endless bickering on the port and alcohol poisoning. One day merges into another as time, routine and the outside world lose all significance.

And then, as suddenly as it began, the season ends. The island becomes a ghost town again, and the 'season-aies' are left to contemplate the events of the past few months, re-pack the small bag they came with and head home or onto whichever destination they have in mind.

The night before he leaves, Anatoli comes to Sam's bungalow and performs what, for her, will be the only act of infidelity in what is otherwise a chaste life.

Although Sam swears to secrecy, Herman becomes aware of the incident the next day as he watches the two of them try hard to casually say goodbye.

As The Twister, Herman, Guglielmo and Sam watch the island disappear over the horizon from the back of the boat, Herman quietly takes Sam to one side to inform him that 'it'll never last, not with the way things are with her boyfriend'. Sam, much as he would like that not to be the case, is forced to agree. Part of his appeal was, after all, the indiscretion he represented.

Epilogue

Many years later, Sam finds himself on the very same boat he took when he was younger. This time however, he has his girlfriend with him. Also, this time he is actually going to Santorini.

Sitting out on the deck, he befriends a disoriented looking backpacker. As the two of them make small talk, it emerges that the backpacker too has plans to visit Santorini. Not for a holiday, but to work the season. Sam casually suggests to the young man that 'it might be worth trying Mykonos instead'.