
BlackBook

A GLOBAL GUIDE FOR THE DISCERNING TRAVELLER

The stone tower of the Tainaron Blue Retreat

THE SMART GUIDE

Grecian Splendour

From Athenian cafes to Mykonos nightclubs, Greece's appeal is a 24-hour proposition, says **ANTHONY GRANT**



Capital Delights

A curated directory of locales in and around Athens for tucking in and letting loose

PHOTO GEORGE MESSARITAKIS

Athens was for a glorious while the city at the centre of the world – and the ruins never let you forget it – but today the Greek capital wears its antiquity with a mix of intense pride and improbable ebullience. In this century, Athens is well on its way to becoming the capital of the Mediterranean, with all that implies – and doesn't. That's because this reliably

inscrutable tangle is hardwired for both cultural accomplishment and languor, a combination that even in a brief spell you will see, hear and taste. Nothing stands between the Parthenon and the stars, which is one of limitless small exultations a few days of kicking around the capital will afford you. Stare down at the Acropolis from the one city peak that's higher than the sacred rock itself: Mount Lycabettus, →



From above: a pool at the Four Seasons Astir Palace; the Art Lounge of New Hotel



Mr Pug Athens (+30 21 0331 1436) with its Greek-Thai fusion menu. Bordering downtown on the east is the scruffy-chic Psyri neighbourhood, repository of much of the street art popular with the Instagram set and also a new nightlife hub, with characterful spots such as the buzzy, neo-Panamanian **Juan Rodriguez Bar** (+30 21 0322 4496). The area is also an incubator for edgy boutique hotels like **The Foundry** (thefoundryhotelathens.com), a former font foundry reborn last year as a fusion of colourful industrial styles with 12 apartment-style rooms. Take a break from the asphalt by ducking into **Polis Hammam** (polis-hammam-gr), a sparkling Athenian spin on the rituals of the Turkish steam bath. Kolonaki, which borders Syntagma on the west, is a stalwart of Greek chic: elegant **Buñuel Uptempo Bistro** (+30 21 1113 2626), a recent addition →

which takes its name from the wolves that once prowled its slopes. You can take the funicular up to the top from Kolonaki; for a more indulgent twist repair to the rooftop of the **St George Lycabettus Hotel** (sglycabettus.gr) for cocktails and the whole sweep of Athens before you. Closer to the Acropolis (and for a ravishing view of it), follow the marble path from Dionysiou Areopagitou Street up to the top of Philopappou, also known as the Hill of the Muses, and drink in a classic view of the city that extends south to Piraeus and the Saronic Gulf. If you fancy a jog with a dash of drama and promise of a panoramic view, go to the Panathenaic Stadium, known locally as Kallimarmaro as its hewn entirely of marble. Just make sure you follow the Athenians to the Archimideous Street side, from where you can run along the top of the stadium or take the footpath to the top of adjacent Ardittou Hill for a breezy and rather confidential view of the capital. Athenians take any chance they can to nibble or imbibe alfresco, and the best place for the latter in the summer months is the gorgeous Bar 8 on the roof of the **Hotel Grande Bretagne** (gbroofgarden.gr). If it's weekend brunch you have a hankering for,

try one of the city's foremost purveyors (don't skip the croissants) on the roof of the confidently artsy **New Hotel** (yeshotels.gr), very near to Syntagma Square. Crave authentic Athenian gyros? The very best, in varieties both classic and inventive, is served in the industrial-chic **Hoocut** (hoocut.gr) by the church of Agia Irini in the commercial heart of downtown. This is also the precinct of the city's best bar, **The Clumsies** (theclumsies.gr), and a slew of eclectic tables like sleek



The Bar 8 at the Hotel Grande Bretagne

to the classic cocktail scene, already has its acolytes as does **Coviar** (coviar.gr), a new new third-wave coffee-and-cocktail bar. The much anticipated **Four Seasons Astir Palace** (fourseasons.com/Athens) is set to open on the Athens Riviera in spring, while a bit further out but still within the Athenian orbit, a sojourn at the esteemed **Cape Sounio Grecotel Exclusive Resort** (capesounio.com) is an entrance into a realm of easy indulgence, and like a trip to a dreamy Greek island without the fuss of navigation.

On the Water

Many historians cite the importance of the ancient Athenian navy in shoring up the city's fledgling democracy, and the legacy of maritime power lives on – even if it's most visible today in the form of hulking island ferries and yachts. **Flisvos Marina** (flisvosmarina.com), at the southern perimeter of the city, has large-scale mooring for megayachts as well as a variety of bars and restaurants at the water's edge. While it's technically a separate municipality, Piraeus is the multifaceted port city that despite its salty reputation has served Athens faithfully since the Battle of Salamis in 480BC. The yachts call in at the **Zea Marina** (www.d-marin.com) section of Piraeus, on the southern rim of Pasalimani harbour and where the Emir of Qatar's mammoth *Al Mirqab* is a common sight in the winter months. Zea too is home to a bubbly assortment of waterfront

bars and restaurants, like the oddly named yet acclaimed (for its seafood) **Hams & Clams** (hamsandclams.gr). The nearby Mikrolimano harbour, also part of Piraeus, is ringed by seafood tavernas and restaurants, most notable among which is **Varoulko Seaside** (varoulko.gr) that under the watchful eye of power chef Lefteris Lazarou turns out some of the best seafood dishes in Athens (his newer Bites & Wine shares the premises). If you want a short introduction to the nimble triremes that powered the Ancient Greek navy, make a detour to the excellent, if off-radar, **Archaeological Museum of** →



From left: the Zea Marina in Piraeus, Varoulko Seaside's chef Lefteris Lazarou

CULTURE CULTURES

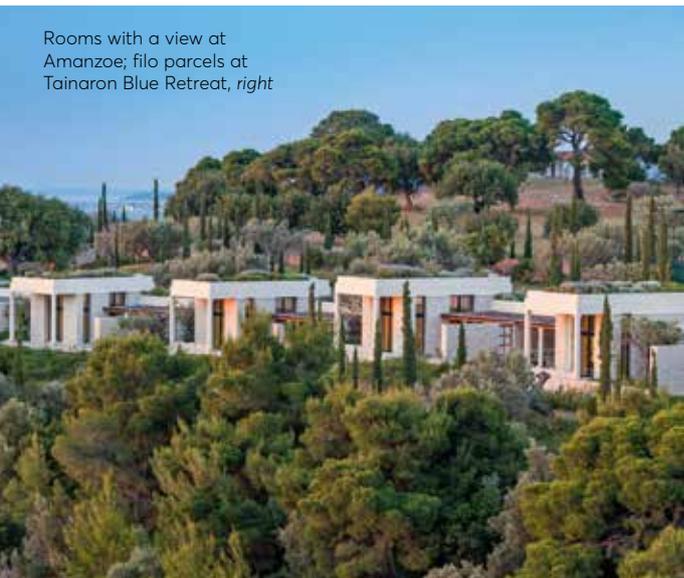
Partly housed in the gorgeous 19th-century Stathatos Mansion, the **Museum of Cycladic Art** (cycladic.gr) is a window on the ancient cultures of the Aegean islands and showcases ancient Greek artworks too. In Plaka, the **Canellopoulos Museum** (pacf.gr) houses a small but enchanting collection of both Grecian antiquities and early Christian and Byzantine art, while exhibits at the **Benaki Museum** (benaki.gr) highlight the panoply of Greek culture, from exquisite ancient artefacts to historical photographs. The new **Museum of Illusions** (museumofillusions.gr) is wonderful for a family outing and the changing ground-floor exhibitions at the **Acropolis Museum** (theacropolismuseum.gr) never fail to amaze.



The Museum of Illusions pushes the boundaries

PHOTOS CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: DUBY TAL / ALBATROSS / ALAMY, © VAROULKO SEASIDE, © MUSEUM OF ILLUSIONS

Rooms with a view at Amanzoe; filo parcels at Tainaron Blue Retreat, right



Piraeus (piraeus-greece.org) – just a short stroll from the wide circular seaside promenade of Pasalimani and a poignant trip through time.

Getting Away From it All

When well-heeled Athenians need a break from their 24-hour metropolis they have an array of easy getaways at their disposal. Only a couple of hours' ferry journey separates Piraeus port from scenic islands Hydra and Spetses, where the five-star **Poseidonion**

Grand Hotel (poseidonion.com) and its top-shelf alfresco restaurant beckon. Spetses chic finds its mainland counterpart in Porto Heli, just a ten-minute water taxi ride away on the vast and storied Peloponnese peninsula, where the **Nikki Beach Resort & Spa** (nikkibeach.com) and **Amanzoe** (amanzoe.com) each have their acolytes. Porto Heli is close to the archaeological site of Epidauros and its iconic amphitheatre, a centrepiece of the prestigious annual Athens & Epidauros Festival. Careful

though, the beauty of the Peloponnese may pull you in further; if it does, follow the Athenian cognoscenti farther south. A visit to the romantic castle island of Monemvasia may be de rigueur, and make sure to stay at **Kinsterna Hotel and Spa** (kinsternahotel.gr), a refurbished stone mansion and estate. If you venture into the slender Mani peninsula you can stay in a three-storey 19th-century defensive stone tower given a modern makeover at the **Tainaron Blue Retreat** (tainaron-blue.com). A region with a famously feisty history, the Mani is southern Greece at its most rustically intense. Travel will take on a gentler, more sophisticated tilt in Sifnos, the one Cycladic island that many Athenians would have no qualms considering another neighbourhood of the capital. The island is dotted with the ruins of dozens of ancient stone towers, and just as many good spots to eat, such as the excellent **Omega3** (+30 22 8407 2014), a fish and wine bar at the beach of Platis Gialos. It's hard not to feel a little heady dining under the firmament at **Rabagas** (kikladonxoros.gr/en) in the island's hilltop capital of Apollonia. On summer weekends, reserve a suite or executive pool villa at the **Elies Resort** (eliesresorts.com) in Vathi well in advance.

Crazy for Crete

Away from the tourists traps, some surprises await

The biggest of the Greek islands (some 258 kilometres end to end), Crete has seen its popularity soar in recent years – largely on the strength of its numerous photogenic beaches – but its ravishing landscapes are mercifully holding firm against the incursions. Yes, there are some sandy stretches like Balos, way up in the west and now best avoided in the peak summer season, when historic town centres too become uncomfortably choked with tourists (Chania in particular comes to mind). But Crete is not short on possibilities for exploration and there's no reason to follow the crowd. Case in point, the Cretan capital, Heraklion. It's the fourth-largest city in →



The pool of the Grand Beach residence at AmiranDES

PHOTOS CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: DANIEL HERENDI, GEORGE MESSARTAKIS, © AMIRANDES

Greece and one of its least loved, yet inside its Venetian ramparts this most essential of eastern Mediterranean ports retains more charms than you might think. From the unexpected grandeur of 25th of August Street and lovely Venetian Loggia which is today the City Hall, to the remodelled **Archaeological Museum** (*heraklion.gr*) with its sublime Minoan treasures, Heraklion is more than a box to tick. **The Historical Museum of Crete** (*historical-museum.gr/eng*) is a saga unto itself, and includes the faithfully reconstructed library of celebrated Cretan author Nikos Kazantzakis. Highly recommended is a meal at **Peskesi** (*peskesicrete.gr/en*), where the gamut of savoury Cretan gastronomy shines; another is **Kouzineri** (+30 281 034 6452), where the *hortopitakia*, filo turnovers with aromatic herbs and greens, win plaudits. If you have the time, make the 65km drive south to the wide white sandy beach at Kommos. The route passes by the Minoan palace ruins of Phaistos, more impressive than the better known ones at Knossos. Back on the north coast, where the

principal Cretan towns are located, the lushly landscaped **Amirandes Grecotel Exclusive Resort** (*amirandes.com*) is styled after those rambling ancient royal cities and has a variety of room styles, including luxe bungalows and private sea-facing villas. Amirandes is well-positioned for jaunts to the excellent 18-hole golf course at the **Crete Golf Club** (*cretegolfclub.com*) in Hersonissos as well as Heraklion Airport. Farther east, what the resort towns of Elounda and Agios Nikolaos may lack in cultural verve (the islet of Spinalonga, with its unique Venetian fortifications, being one compelling exception) they make up for with the discreet seaside indulgence that has attracted a VIP following for decades now. That appeal is still there. At **Elounda Mare** (*eloundamare.com/en*), for instance, you'll find a solid range of sea view restaurants and Six Senses Spa, and the newest addition is the Minoan Palace, a four-bedroom beachfront villa well suited for families. The Elounda Peninsula All Suite Hotel and Porto Elounda Golf & Spa Resort (*below*) are under the same umbrella.



Postcard from Mykonos



The Island of Winds continues to blow a gale of *joie de vivre*

Unlike some Greek islands, Mykonos is short on mythological associations, but oh how mythic it is! The chiselled contours of its beaches and coves may find their counterparts elsewhere, but the Mykonian reputation for exuberance is second to none. Even the normally staid governmental tourist literature of two decades ago teases the island's "complete lack of restraint and climate truly divorced from anything that resembles everyday routine". So if you're looking for hedonism you will find it here and in infinite variations.

The cosmopolitan energy of the place extends from the gleaming white lanes of Mykonos Town, easily the most iconic "chora" in the Cycladic archipelago, to the numerous on-trend bars and beach clubs. Of the latter, note **Nammos** (*nammos.gr*) at Psarou beach below Chora and the design-driven "nomadic enclave" of **Scorpios** (*scorpiosmykonos.com*), where at the tip of a rocky promontory you can fete the sunset to the tune of curated ethno-electronica. Lots of →

beachside spots are hybrid upscale beach club-restaurants; case in point the glamorous, freshly renovated **Principote** at Panormos (principote.com), near the northern beach of Agios Sostis. **Fokos Taverna** (fokosmykonos.com), on the fringe of another northern cove, is about rustic indulgence.

For in-town grazing and excellent seafood try the neo-tavernas such as **Bakaló** (☎ bakalo.gr) or **Salparo** (☎ +30 22 8907 8950), especially as nourishment

is advised before a night out at the myriad bars like **Bao's** (baosmykonos.com) or **Cavo Paradiso** (cavoparadiso.gr), the celebrated club at Paradise Beach. Not all luxe Mykonos lodgings hit the aesthetic target of that perfect Cycladic cubist minimalism with the same accuracy but one resort that does is **Katikies Mykonos** (☎ katikies.com) on the away-from-the-fray peninsula of Agios Ioannis. Its ethereal sea view suites and stylish A.Spa put it on the A-list.

Other top contenders in Agios Ioannis are the new **Bill & Co Coast Suites** (☎ bill-coo-hotel.com), a couples-oriented seaside sanctuary with just 15 suites, and beachfront **Anax Mykonos** (anaxmykonos.gr), another study in luminous white. The **Kenshō Boutique Hotel's** (kenshomykonos.com) new Psarou Private Villa is achingly indulgent, while to the east above Elia Bay, the **Myconian Villa Collection** (myconianvillas.gr) is another uber-chic invitation to the Mykonian dream.

Isles Apart

Separated by the mainland, the Ionian and Sporades islands each have their own distinctive charm



Porto Zante on Zakynthos; Elivi Skiathos, below

The Ionian Islands west of the Greek mainland, like the Sporades east of it, are the green counterpoints to the arid Cycladic Islands. These varied isles are not merely repositories of lush pine-clad landscapes, fragrant citrus groves and abundant white sandy beaches: among them are custodians of some serious cultural lore – case in point Corfu, or Kerkyra in Greek. This island of indisputable mystique, where Alexander the Great is said to have spent a good chunk of his youth and where Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh was born (at the historic Mon Repos villa) has always had a texture

more broadly European than classically Greek. Credit the centuries of Venetian rule for that too – the old town of Corfu and its iconic Spianada Square even today evoke a gracious vision not of Athens but Venice. Twelve kilometres from Corfu Town on the verdant Kommeno Peninsula, the **Grecohotel Corfu Imperial** (corfuimperial.com) has emerged after extensive renovations with renewed splendence; additions include a flagship two-story Elixir Spa, a new grand swimming pool set amidst the Italianate gardens, a new Mediterranean promenade, a refurbished main restaurant called Mon Repos, and an

impressive range of seafront bars and restaurants. The hotel's opulent beachfront villas and pastel-hued waterfront palazzos are the most prized perches on the island. South of the southern tip of Corfu, the tiny island of Paxi is worth an excursion

to delectate in its blue waters. Less imbued with continental pedigree than Corfu but no less alluring is that other Ionian beauty Zakynthos (or Zante). Its Navagio ("Shipwreck") Beach may have fallen prey to the solitude-shattering clutches of Instagram – there is no more photographed wedge of sand in Greece than this – but fear not because there is hardly a more sybaritic spot on the Ionian Sea shore than **Porto Zante** (☎ portozante.com), at Tragaki. The resort's beachfront villas (each with a private heated pool) promise pampered seclusion, while its restaurants offer not only Greek but also Asian fusion fare. A prized gem of the Sporades, meanwhile, is low-key Skiathos, which tempts with history and the ravishing Lalaria white sand beach. Best lodging choices on the island are the **Atrium Hotel** (atriumhotel.gr) and beachfront **Elivi Skiathos** (elivihotels.com).



The hideaway at Perivolos; whitewashed accommodation at Living Theros, on Tinos, right



spot to live out a Robinson Crusoe fantasy in dream-state style at the aptly named **Perivolos Hideaway** (hideaway.gr). Milos is a volcanic island on the rise; the alabaster lunar landscape at Sarakiniko is a sheer delight, as is a chic country island stay at **Skinopi Lodge** (skinopi.com). Beaches on Ios are among the best in the Cyclades; stay at **Agalia Luxury Suites** (luxorios.com/agalia-luxury-suites) but swim and watch the sun sink into the Aegean at **Erego** (erego.gr), a stunning and theatrically over-the-top beach club. Tinos has seen its star rise recently, largely as a bucolic antidote to the glamour and buzz of nearby Mykonos. You'll get the flavour of that at **Xinara House** (xinarahouse.com), a stylishly renovated Tinian farmhouse, but for a more classic stay with sea view included, **Living Theros Luxury Suites** (livingtheros.com) in Kardiani is a fine choice. For a happy medium between the torpor of Tinos and fast pace of Mykonos, and in proximity to each, investigate Syros. Its glittering and Italianate seaside capital, Ermoupolis, is a revelation. At **Asteria Beach Bar** (☎ +30 22 8107 6476) you can jump right into the aquamarine water (there's no sand to get in the way), or feast on Aegean flavours at **Avant Garden** (avantgarden.gr). The dizzying view over the Mediterranean from the boutique-chic guesthouse **Wind Tales** (windtales.gr), up in the heights of medieval Ano Syros, is exceptional.→

The Best of the Rest

Santorini, Syros, Tinos, Ios and more: the essential destinations across the remainder of the Greek Isles

The Greek islands continue to offer an inexhaustible supply of Aegean sea breezes, pristine beaches (outside the island towns) and an array of alluring lodgings too. Case in point is Santorini, where no amount of overtourism can spoil the heavenly views over the caldera. **Canaves Oia** (canaves.com) has a variety of cliffside suites and a private villa too. Midway between lofty Oia and the main island

town of Fira is the village of Imerovigli, the highest point on the island and home of **La Maltese** (lamaltese.com) with its private villa and sparkling Buddha Beach Bar. Also in Imerovigli, stupendous views and gorgeous food define the dining at **Throubi** (throubirestaurant.com), while in bustling Fira, **Argo** (☎ argo-restaurant-santorini.com) still reigns supreme. Across the caldera from Oia, the hidden island of Therasia is where you'll find a coveted

All at Sea

A trio of onboard experiences to savour



GALILEO G

A new addition to the market, this 55.7m superyacht (*pictured*) is available to charter in Greece this summer. With accommodation for 10 to 12 guests, an onboard gym is among the many amenities. burgessyachts.com

ELIANA K-IV

Savour the shimmering blues of Mirabello Bay by booking an outing on the signature sailing yacht of the Elounda resort. The two-masted San Germani schooner can cater for seven guests. elounda.com

THE BIRD

Launching soon at the Danai Beach Resort & Villas, Halkidiki, this 25m motor yacht promises trips around the sacred Mount Athos peninsula, with butler service helping you to enjoy your voyage. danairesort.com

A Slice of Paradise

Greece's property market is enticing investors from locations near and far. Herewith are some of the leading purchase opportunities



1 Villas in Porto Heli Its prime Peloponnese location gives Porto Heli added appeal for those seeking both opulence and proximity to the capital. Amanzoe's modern hilltop Greek Residences (*top left*) all have stunning sea views. aman.com/resorts/amanzoe/villas-to-own



2 Costa Navarino Residences Villas at Costa Navarino (*bottom left*) integrate seamlessly with the lush western Peloponnese landscapes. Plus, two new golf courses designed by José María Olazábal will open for play by 2021. costanavarino.com/real-estate

3 Revithis & Partners

Acquiring property in Greece is rarely an uncomplicated affair. In addition to its excellent listings in Santorini, Mykonos, Patmos and elsewhere this well-established group leverages family know-how to smooth the process. revithis.com

4 One and Only Mykonos

Many view Mykonos as the quintessential Greek holiday island – a fair assessment. The local team at One and Only Mykonos knows the Island of the Winds and relevant properties well. oneandonlymykonos.com

5 Leptos Estates One of the largest property developers in Cyprus has an excellent range of offerings in the Greek islands of Crete, Paros and Santorini, as well as a vast selection on its home isle. leptosestates.com ●

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