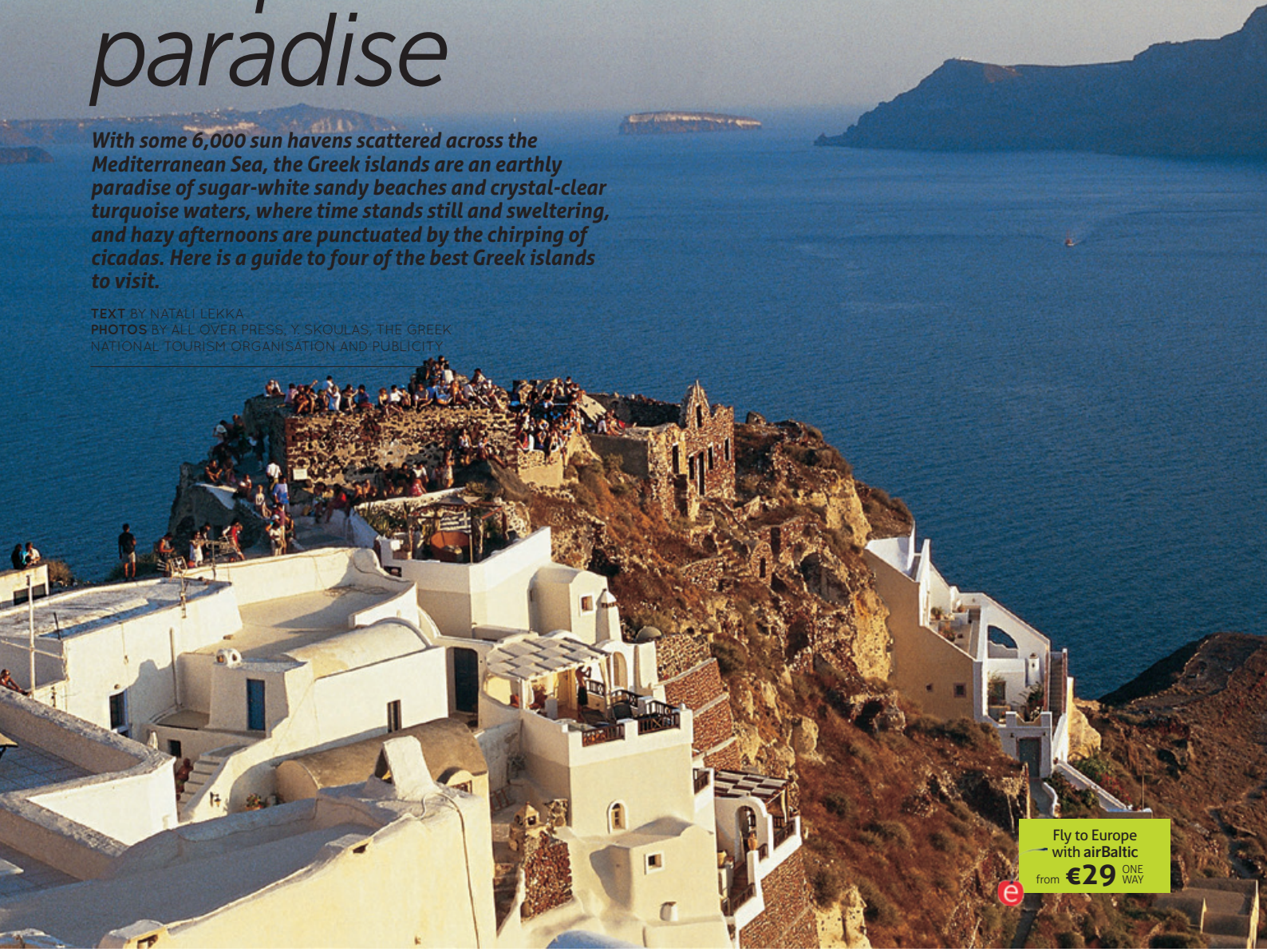


# A trip to paradise

**With some 6,000 sun havens scattered across the Mediterranean Sea, the Greek islands are an earthly paradise of sugar-white sandy beaches and crystal-clear turquoise waters, where time stands still and sweltering, and hazy afternoons are punctuated by the chirping of cicadas. Here is a guide to four of the best Greek islands to visit.**

TEXT BY NATALI LEKKA  
PHOTOS BY ALL OVER PRESS, Y. SKOULAS, THE GREEK NATIONAL TOURISM ORGANISATION AND PUBLICITY



Fly to Europe  
with airBaltic  
from €29 ONE WAY



## *Santorini, the black diamond of the Aegean*

A volcanic island in the southern Cyclades, Santorini – so named by the Venetians in honour of Saint Irene – is always present on lists of the world’s most beautiful islands. And this should come as no surprise. The island will captivate you with its stunning sunsets and picturesque towns perched on the edge of volcanic cliffs. The capital, Fira, and the village of Oia offer captivating views of the island’s caldera, while their narrow stepped streets, whitewashed houses and blue-domed churches are among the most photographed in the entire country.

It was some 4,000 years ago when the volcano of Santorini exploded, devastating much of the Eastern Mediterranean region, including the flourishing Minoan civilisation of Crete. Today, the crescent-shaped island of Santorini is what remains after this violent eruption. Archaeological excavations in 1967 unearthed the site of Akrotiri, an entire town that had been hidden under the volcanic ash for over 4,000 years. Smaller eruptions have followed, the most recent in 1950.

Today, the volcano of Santorini, with its 390-metre-deep caldera, is considered to be still active. However, it is highly unlikely to erupt while you are there. Santorini would not have been what it is today had it not been for its breathtaking volcanic formations. Where else do you get to bathe in warm volcanic springs or swim off some of the most spectacular beaches in the entire country? The Red Beach is the most impressive of them all. Only a few metres away from the



archaeological site of Akrotiri, this volcanic stretch of sand really is red, with spectacular red rock formations in the background. Kamari, one of the busiest beaches on the island, has a 4.5-km-long section of black volcanic sand.

For fantastic views of the caldera and the Aegean Sea, treat yourself to a romantic candlelit dinner at the *White Cave Dinner Restaurant* in the *Kirini Suites & Spa*. Located in the iconic town of Oia and famed for offering the best views in Santorini, this gourmet restaurant will spoil you with its ceremonial wine-tasting and wide selection of eclectic dishes. A great wine-making place with 3,500 years of tradition, Santorini is particularly famous for its *Vinsanto* wine, made from sun-drenched grapes.

Among the traditional dishes that you can savour on the island are the local *fava* (yellow split peas), moussaka made from local

white aubergines, and *tomatokeftedes* (tomato balls) with mint sauce made from local cherry tomatoes. Once you are in Oia, walk down the 235 steps from Oia Castle or ride a donkey to reach Ammoudi Beach and the Agios Nikolaos chapel. For an intimate experience in a secluded location overlooking the entire Aegean Sea, book a suite at the luxurious *Perivolos* cave hotel within walking distance from Oia. A unique *al fresco*, or open-air, dining experience awaits you.

You can reach Santorini either by plane from Athens or by boat from the port of Piraeus. As with most of the Cycladic islands, it is better to rent your own car if you want to move around freely. Alternatively, you can make use of the island's not-always-so-reliable public transport (KTEL buses) and for short distances, ride a donkey or jump on a *caiique*.



## Mykonos, the island of the winds

Although renowned as an international party island, Mykonos offers a lot more than meets the eye. A beach paradise by day and a cosmopolitan party place by night, this island will win your heart and mind with its whitewashed houses, blue doors and windows smothered in blooming bougainvilleas, hand-painted streets, picture-perfect labyrinths of roads, charming windmills and 365 chapels – one for every day of the year.

The nickname “island of the winds” comes from the constant *meltemi* wind that blows from mid-May to mid-September, offering welcome relief in the sweltering days of July and August. Mykonos first made headlines as a glamorous destination for the international jet set back in the 1960s, when it attracted the likes of Aristotle and Jackie Onassis, but perhaps its most lovable resident and oldest celebrity is Petros the Pelican. Petros, often to be found at the town’s waterfront, has been the island’s mascot for over 60 years.

Legend has it that in 1954, a fisherman found a wounded pelican at sea, brought him to shore and nursed him back to health. The pelican took residence at the island and lived there for 30 long years, before it was accidentally run over by a car in the 1980s. Such was the love of the locals for their pelican that the entire island went into mourning. Rumour also has it that Jackie Onassis donated a new pelican to Mykonos. Nowadays there are three



## A BEACH PARADISE BY DAY AND A COSMOPOLITAN PARTY PLACE BY NIGHT, THIS ISLAND WILL WIN YOUR HEART

pelicans prancing about and one of them has been honorifically named Petros.

Today, Mykonos continues to be the island where one goes “to see and be seen”, especially for a large number of the Athenian elite who have bought their summer houses there. The island is peppered with designer boutiques, luxury hotels and gourmet restaurants. Prices are, not surprisingly, notoriously high. The island also prides itself for being a gay holiday destination with a vibrant nightlife that caters to all tastes.

While in town, don’t forget to visit Little Venice, an impressive part of the island’s capital featuring rows of fishing houses right at the waterfront, with their balconies hanging over the sea. Many of these houses, which once belonged to rich merchants and sea captains of the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, have now been converted into

bars, cafés and galleries. Little Venice is considered to be the most romantic spot on the island and is very popular among tourists and artists, who flock there every day at sunset to admire the purple-clad coastline. Escape the crowds by staying at *Bill & Co Suites and Lounge*, a mere 10-minute walk from the centre of town.

Of course, the activities in Mykonos do not revolve solely around Chora, the capital. Life is a beach on this island and, with 25 of them to visit, you will definitely be spoilt for choice. Paradise Beach and Super Paradise Beach, which lie next to each other, are the island’s most famous and busiest beaches, with Super Paradise Beach being especially popular among the hip, trendy, gay and celebrity crowds for its round-the-clock party atmosphere.

Platis Gialos, Elia and Psarou (with its popular beach bar-restaurant *Nammos*),



# CONTEMPORARY LATVIAN JEWELLERY



are also busy, cosmopolitan beaches. For a quieter alternative, beaches on the northern coast of the island have fewer amenities and are ideal for calmer moments.

Those seeking a slightly different experience can visit the exquisite *Interni* restaurant and bar, which is favoured by locals and Greek celebrities alike. It is located in Matogiannia, in the heart of the island. Among Mykonos' local delicacies are its great variety of cheeses and especially the peppery *kopanisti*, along with local sausages and *louza* (a dish made from local pork). A mere 40-minute hop by plane from Athens' airport, the best ways to move around the island are by car, scooter, local buses and boats, or on foot.



Guntis Lauders, Latvia

**Putti**  
ART GALLERY

Mārstaļu iela 16, Old Riga  
Phone: (+371) 6 7214229  
gallery@putti.lv | www.putti.lv



## Gastronome seafood restaurant and bar - a place for true seafood lovers

Brivibas Street 31, Riga, Latvia

Phone: + 371 67152080

Opening hours:

Monday - Saturday: 12.00 to 23.00;

Sunday 12.00 to 22.00

[www.gastronome.lv](http://www.gastronome.lv)

[www.facebook.com/gastronomeRiga](https://www.facebook.com/gastronomeRiga)



### Crete, *the mother of all islands*

Crete, the largest island in Greece and southernmost in Europe, has it all: pristine blue seas and gorgeous sandy beaches, cities brimming with culture, the healthiest diet in Europe and an ancient history that goes back to the illustrious Minoan civilisation.

Crete has given birth to a number of distinguished personalities over the years. Domenikos Theotokopoulos, the 16<sup>th</sup> century painter, sculptor and architect of the Spanish Renaissance or *El Greco*, as he is better known, was born there. Nikos Kazantzakis, one of the greatest Greek writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and famous for his novel *Zorba the Greek*, was from Crete, as are international singer Nana Mouskouri and Nobel Prize poet Odysseas Elytis.

Heraklion, the island's capital, is the first port of call for anyone flying by plane or arriving by boat from Athens or other islands. Renting a vehicle is perhaps the best way to move around in this place where driving from one part of the island all the way to the other takes no less than four full hours.

Before heading west to the picturesque Venetian towns of Chania and Rethymnon, satisfy the archaeologist within you by visiting the famous archaeological site of Knossos, with its imposing Minoan palace situated 5 km east of Heraklion. Discovered only in 1900, these ruins are of the largest and most impressive palace of the Minoan civilisation and date back to 1700 BC. They inspired one of the most fascinating myths of the Greek mythology, that of Theseus and the Minotaur. For purists, there is also the nearby Palace of Phaistos.

Chania, a city with its own airport, is a fascinating blend of Byzantine, Venetian and Ottoman architecture. Much of the city's daily life takes place around the old port or Venetian harbour, with its shopping alleyways and waterfront restaurants, buildings of Venetian and Ottoman style, museums, churches and local craft shops. Stay at the wonderfully refurbished 17<sup>th</sup>-century Venetian mansion of *Casa Delfino*, a mere 20 steps away from the Venetian harbour.

Eat at the award-winning *Chrisostomos* taverna at the marina end of the harbour for a truly authentic culinary adventure. If you are feeling particularly bold, then go



**OVER** 1700 DIFFERENT SPECIES OF PLANTS GROW IN CRETE, OF WHICH AROUND 150 ARE PURELY ENDEMIC

hiking at Samaria Gorge, a major tourist attraction and biosphere reserve 43 km south of Chania. You may even catch a glimpse of the rare horned kri-kri (Cretan wild goat) there.

To add an exotic, almost Caribbean touch to your holiday, visit the blue flag beach in Vai, at the far east of the island. Surrounded by the largest palm forest in Europe, you will be excused for thinking that you have landed on a Caribbean island with fine, sugary sand and crystal-clear turquoise waters. It is no wonder that the location was also used for a *Bounty* chocolate bar advert.

Cretans are particularly proud of their fertile land, temperate climate, high-quality local produce and award-winning olive oil. Over 1700 different species of plants grow in Crete, of which around 150 are purely endemic. The Cretan diet, which has been found to be the healthiest in Europe, is said to date back to the Minoan Age. Don't leave the island without trying some of the local delicacies: fried snails or *hohli boubouristi*, cheese and honey pies from the region of Sfakia, steamed *stamnagathi* salad or the famous *dakos* salad made from grated tomato, aromatic spices, traditional Cretan cheeses and olive oil on a large barley rusk. For the strong at heart, a glass of the fragrant *tsikoudia* spirit is a must.



**RUMENE MANOR**  
the country side residence of the  
**HOTEL BERGS**  
this season offers to experience:

Gourmet Dinner  
with a special guest  
on November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014

The Masquerade Ball  
on February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2015



EXPERIENCE ANOTHER WORLD



HOTEL BERGS • Riga, tel.: +371 67770900, e-mail: [hotelbergs@hotelbergs.lv](mailto:hotelbergs@hotelbergs.lv) [www.hotelbergs.lv](http://www.hotelbergs.lv)  
RUMENE MANOR • Rumene, tel.: +371 67770960, e-mail: [rumene@hotelbergs.lv](mailto:rumene@hotelbergs.lv) [www.rumene.lv](http://www.rumene.lv)



## *Ikaria, the island of Icarus*

The island of Ikaria is named after Icarus, the young man from Greek mythology who flew too close to the sun and plunged to his death in the sea near the island when his wings made out of wax and feathers melted in the heat. Ikaria made headlines a few years ago when doctors in Athens claimed to have discovered the secret to longevity after studying the diet and lifestyle of the locals. This soon attracted interest from abroad and the island, located in the far east of the Aegean Sea, received visits from scientists, journalists and Dan Buettner, who wrote a book called *Blue Zones* about five small areas in the world where the population outlives Americans and Europeans by a decade. Ikaria is one of those five areas. So what is the secret to the Ikarians' longevity?

Nearly everything that the population eats is grown locally. In a geographically isolated location like Ikaria, this ensures healthy, organic production with no trace of chemicals or pesticides. The



© SAKIS PAPADOPOULOS, ROBERT HARDING WORLD IMAGERY, CORBIS

island's rich and fertile soil, as well as the high concentration of radium in the water, are also thought to be factors in the inhabitants' long and healthy lives.

Locals swear by their afternoon naps and never worry about time. If they catch you wearing a watch, then this will be pointed out and in extreme cases they will even ask you to take it off. They are warm-hearted, hospitable individuals who will open their house to you and make you feel like one of the family. Good, strong red wine, known by Homer as *Pramneios*, is never missing from the table. And how could it? Ikaria, after all, is proud to be the birthplace of Dionysus, the Ancient Greek god of wine.

With its rocky cliffs and beautiful coves, prehistoric forests and healing hot springs, Ikaria may look at first like any other island, yet visitors choose it for its alternative laid-back lifestyle and wild beauty – a far cry from the organised paradises of Mykonos and Santorini. Here, time comes to a standstill, less is more, and life is better spent lounging insouciantly at the beach.

As a visitor, you are likely to visit cosmopolitan Armenistis on the north-west of the island, with its few good hotels and restaurants, as well as the long, sandy beach of Messakti, voted as one of the most beautiful beaches in Greece and home to the famous *Messakti* beach bar and surf school.

For peace and tranquillity, visit Akamatra, one of Ikaria's most picturesque villages, right in the middle of the island, with quaint little square and shops. Enjoy traditional, home-style gourmet food at the village's *Sta Perix* restaurant.

The best way to get to Ikaria is by plane from Athens, as the boat trip from the port of Piraeus usually takes between seven and nine hours and schedules are unreliable. It is also possible to fly there from Mykonos. Ikaria's airport is about 1 ½ hours by car from the village of Armenistis. Rent your own vehicle while you are there, as public transport is less than trustworthy.

## Steak and fish restaurant



**BLUE COW**  
Meistaru iela 21,  
Līvu laukums, Rīga  
(+371) 67223307



[www.zila-govs.lv](http://www.zila-govs.lv)



## Latvian fish restaurant

**FISHERMAN'S SON**

Kaļķu iela 2, Rīga  
(entrance from Kungu iela)  
(+371) 67227505

[www.zvejniekadels.lv](http://www.zvejniekadels.lv)



## OUTLOOK / TRAVEL

### Traveller's little black book

#### Vital things and addresses for summer holidays in Greece



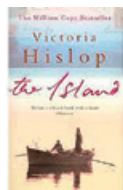
#### Bookshop

Voted as one of the most beautiful bookshops in the world, *Atlantis Books* is a charming, whitewashed little bookstore in the heart of Oia, Santorini. Founded in 2004 by a group of friends from Cyprus, England and the USA, you will find a great selection of books in seven different languages. [www.atlantisbooks.org](http://www.atlantisbooks.org)



#### Market

A landmark in the town of Chania, Crete, the cross-shaped 4,000-m<sup>2</sup> market building dates back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and is a must-visit for foodies wishing to buy traditional Cretan products, including cheese, honey, herbs, fresh fish, meat and souvenirs. There is also an open-air market in Chania every Saturday. [www.chaniamarket.com](http://www.chaniamarket.com)



#### Book

Victoria Hislop's first novel, *The Island*, is an acclaimed best-seller about the deserted island of Spinaloga, a former leper colony with a tragic history, off the coast of Lasithi, in Crete. [www.victoriahislop.com](http://www.victoriahislop.com)

#### Ice cream

Visit the *Gelarte* ice-cream café in Chora, Mykonos, for great *gelato* in a variety of flavours. Everything, including the waffles, crêpes and *loukoumades* (Greek honeyed donuts), is made with the finest ingredients. The café is right next to the town hall, in a perfect location for admiring the beautiful harbour by night.

#### Museum

Delos, an open-air museum with 5,000 years of history, is a short 20-minute journey by *caïque* from Mykonos. The island, which boasts impressive

monuments and mosaics, is one of the most important mythological, archaeological and historical sites in Greece. An uninhabited island, it was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1990.

#### Beauty and olive oil

*Olive'secret* makes a wide variety of organic beauty products for the face, body and hair, based on the beneficial cosmetic properties of olive oil. These can be found at supermarkets and tourist shops all across Crete. The company was founded in Heraklion in 2005. [www.olivesecret.gr](http://www.olivesecret.gr)



#### Honey

Honey is Ikaria's most precious product. *Anama* is an organic honey of high viscosity, produced with nectar from a bush called *reyki*. It is high in nutritional value and allegedly has anti-cancer and anti-inflammatory properties. [www.ikariahoney.com](http://www.ikariahoney.com)