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WHICH GREEK ISLAND SUITS YOU?

The islands of the Aegean Sea might blur into one mirage of summer bliss, but who goes and what goes down can vary dramatically. *Sophia Wilson* gives the lowdown so you can find your perfect fit

PHOTOGRAPHY: ADOBE STOCK; ALAMY; GETTY IMAGES



Above: the traditional fishing village of Firopotamos



Right: an Ancient Roman theatre built around the third century BCE; Right, middle: the white cliffs on Sarakiniko Beach. Below: octopuses hung out to dry in the village of Mandrakia



Milos

THE VIBE: This volcanic island may lack the razzmatazz of some of its better-known Cycladic neighbours, but with fewer crowds and more beaches than any other island in the group, it shouldn't be ignored. It's not the place if you want to party next to Paris Hilton but its spectacular rock formations, hot springs and stunning cliffs make it a geography buff's nirvana.

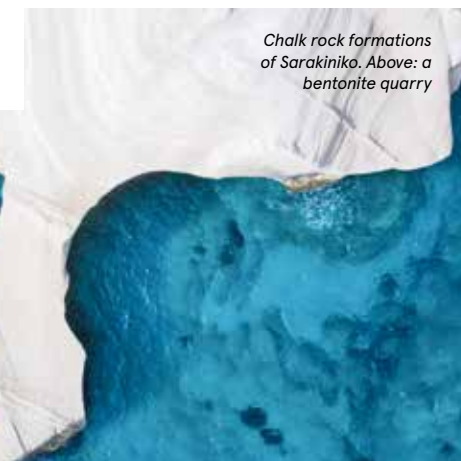
WHO GOES? Celebrity visitors are few and far between (thankfully this also means no hordes of Instagram influencer wannabes) but superyacht royalty, including the late Steve Jobs' *Venus*, are regularly spotted off its shores.

LOCAL LOWDOWN: Milos's mineral extraction industry dates from the Neolithic period and today it is still the biggest supplier of bentonite and perlite in the European Union. Its traditional mining industry is why the island has been slower to develop its tourism trade, but its mineral-rich grounds are also what make it so spectacular. "Milos is famous for its white chalk landscapes," says superyacht owner Harry Vafias. "It makes you think you are on another planet." To make the most of the island's natural beauty, Vafias suggests swimming off the beaches of Kleftiko and Sarakiniko, with their limestone caves and turquoise waters.

CULTURE CULTURES: Milos's most famous export, the statue of Venus de Milo, is sadly more than 2,000 kilometres away in The Louvre in Paris. However, the catacombs of Milos, which were thought to have been built towards the end of the first century and used as Christian cemeteries during Roman times, are a must-visit while on the island.

SECRET ESCAPE: Further afield, Vafias recommends cruising across to the uninhabited island of Polyaigos. "The sea is so clean that you can see the sandy bottom at 50 metres' depth," he enthuses.

BEST BY BOAT: Yachts can either use the sheltered anchorage off the beach at Kleftiko or head for the main port.



Chalk rock formations of Sarakiniko. Above: a bentonite quarry





Below: Kamini Beach. Right: the Pirate Bar



Mykonos

THE VIBE: The St Barths of the Med, Mykonos is the place to see and be seen. Combining stretches of cream sand, enough high-end boutiques to keep even the most ardent shopaholic entertained and some of the best beach clubs in the world (Nammos and Scorpios), it’s the ultimate hedonist’s playground. Tourist numbers may have increased over the past decade, but the island’s elite clientele remains just as loyal and Harry Vafias believes it is still the undisputed “King of the Aegean”.

WHO GOES? Mykonos gained a reputation as a celebrity magnet in the 1960s, when Aristotle Onassis, Brigitte Bardot and Grace Kelly all sunned themselves on its shores, and it hasn’t slowed down since: Leonardo DiCaprio, Mariah Carey and Richard Branson are all regulars.

TOP TABLE: With seaside tavernas and global franchises (including Nobu and soon-to-open Coya) there are plenty of excuses to dine ashore. “Nusr-Et has the best steak if you have a large wallet,” recommends Vafias. For those looking for something a little more secluded, Mykonos regular and founder of Bright Blue Villas, Natasha Martsekis, suggests Spilia Seaside Restaurant (if you can get a table). “It’s nestled in between the rocks and they serve great seafood next to the water. Lots of famous yachts dock there and drop guests off for meals,” she says.

Home to chef Nobu’s Matsuhisa, the Belvedere Hotel has been a favoured hangout for Mykonos’ original cool crowd for nearly 30 years. Its pool, framed with palm trees and pink bougainvillea, is the perfect spot to recover from a little overindulgence – or duck into its Six Senses spa. **CULTURE VULTURES:** While long afternoons slurping rosé are the order of the day, it’s not just party culture that Mykonos offers. Less than three nautical miles from the island, the UNESCO World Heritage site of Delos is the mythical birthplace of twins Apollo and Artemis and one of the most important archaeological sites in Greece.

SECRET ESCAPE: The nearby island of Rineia also offers a break from Mykonos’s relentless pace. “If you are fed up with the noise, parties and crowds, it’s just 15 minutes away and you can go swimming in its exotic waters and sunbathe on white-sand beaches,” says Vafias.

BEST BY BOAT: “Yachts wanting protection from the wind can anchor at Ornos, Psarou or in the main port if you can find a berth,” Vafias advises.



Above: the port officer introduces Jackie Kennedy to Mykonos’s pelican mascot in 1961. Below: the Belvedere Hotel pool and (bottom) its cocktail bar



From top: the Belvedere Hotel, home to Matsuhisa Mykonos; the ancient ruins of Delos, the mythical birthplace of Apollo and Artemis; Scorpios, one of the island’s coolest beach clubs



PHOTOGRAPHY: ADOBE STOCK GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY OF DESIGN HOTELS; AVL IMAGES; GABRIELE CROPP/ACORNERS



Hydra’s whitewashed walls, cobble alleys and old tavernas (right) hold a timeless appeal



Above: a labyrinth of charming cobble backstreets are home to al fresco dining opportunities



Hydra

THE VIBE: With new architecture banned and donkeys or mules providing transport in place of wheeled vehicles, this Saronic island remains in a blissful time-warp. At the heart of the Greek Riviera, the daily arrival of cruise ships can spoil the illusion but for those in the know its labyrinth of twisting backstreets and private bays still hold a timeless appeal.

WHO GOES? Liz Taylor and Leonard Cohen both bought homes on its cliffs in the 1960s. Nowadays, its high-profile visitors, who have recently included *Game of Thrones* stars Kit Harington and Rose Leslie, stroll its marble-cobbled lanes undisturbed.

LOCAL LOWDOWN: “Hydra is a great destination for superyachts because it’s close to Athens, has amazing food and great shopping,” says Captain Dimitri Pavlidis, of 40-metre sailing yacht *Aristarchos* (available for charter with IYC). The main shopping buzz is centred around the whitewashed streets of Hydra Town, where boutiques (rather than international brands) housed within traditional buildings offer souvenirs, filigree jewellery and local embroidery.

TOP TIPPLE: Once guests have shopped until they drop, Captain Pavlidis suggests casual drinks at The Pirate Bar. As the sun sets, Athenian day-trippers, locals and sun-scorched tourists rub shoulders while sipping cold beers with a view over the bobbing boats below.

SECRET ESCAPE: Away from the main town it is still possible to enjoy a taste of the “real” Greece. “One of my favourite things to do with guests is to take them swimming at beaches only accessible by boat, like St Nicholas,” says Captain Pavlidis. Captain Nasos Grammatikos, of 35.5-metre *Celia* (available for charter with Atalanta Golden Yachts), recommends Agios Georgios, on the island’s northern tip, as a protected anchorage that is great for making the most of your yacht’s toy box.

BEST BY BOAT: Captain Pavlidis warns that it can be challenging to dock outside the port. His top tip? Keep on the good side of the legendary bearded port master Pantelis.





Top, middle:
Otzias Bay.
Top, right: a
theatre in the
ancient city
of Karthea.
From above:
the new
One&Only
luxury resort;
old stone steps
in the capital
city of Ioulis; an
ancient carved
stone lion



The One&Only development
will occupy a 65-hectare
beach-front site and
offer rooms, suites, villas
and private homes



Kea

THE VIBE: Less than 12 nautical miles from mainland Greece, Kea’s pristine turquoise waters and verdant shores peppered with olive groves haven’t escaped the notice of the wealthy Athens set, meaning it is one of the few Greek islands where nationals outnumber foreign tourists. From Easter onwards, Athenians weekend at this cosmopolitan haven, and with €600 million (£524m) being invested to create a One&Only resort and residential development, its luxe credentials are on the up. **WHO GOES?** You aren’t likely to bump into the latest Hollywood starlet strolling along the shoreline, but the village of Koundouros is a Mecca for Greek shipping magnates and their families. Expect flowing designer kaftans and oversized sunglasses.

LOCAL LOWDOWN: Sixty-five hectares of beach-front on the western side of the island have been chosen by Dolphin Capital Partners as the site for the One&Only project but the developers are determined not to spoil the island’s charm. “The strong appeal of Kea is the anonymity of the place – it’s a Greek island waiting to be discovered, as opposed to being overpopulated,” says Miltos Kambourides, founder and managing partner of Dolphin Capital. “We will make Kea an upmarket, chic and elegant Mediterranean destination.”

CULTURE CULTURES: Mass tourism might not have hit Kea but superyacht captains are fans. “Kea offers the combination of idyllic landscape and archaeological interest at the same time,” says Captain Zacharias Karalogos of 42.5-metre *Libra Y* (available for charter with IYC). “The bay of Poles with the ancient Karthea [the remains of an ancient Greek city] in sight is the best example of this.” There is further historical interest under the surface as Kea is home to four shipwrecks – *Titanic*’s sistership HMS *Britannic*, French ocean liner SS *Burdigala* and paddle steamer *Patris*, plus a WW2 Luftwaffe plane.

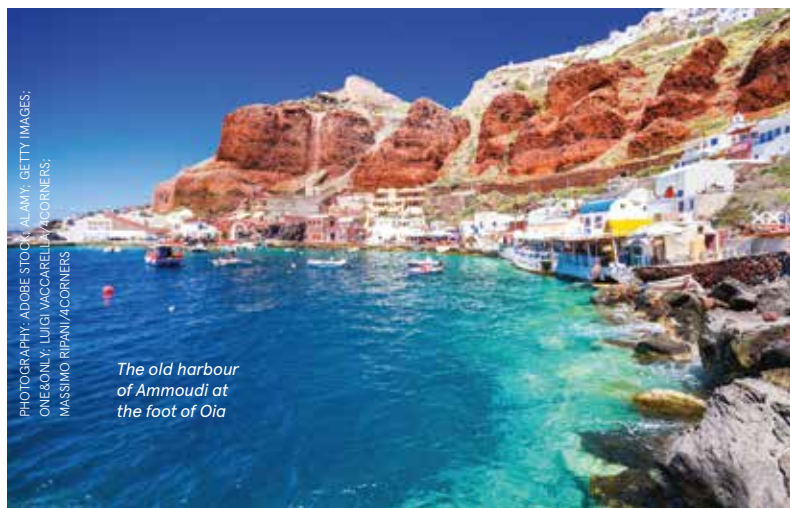
BEST BY BOAT: Drop anchor in the port of Vourkari, a convenient first stop if you are meeting your yacht in Athens.



Above: Santorini aubergines.
Right: Opson Restaurant at the
Andronis Arcadia hotel. Far right:
a typical church in Oia village



PHOTOGRAPHY: ADOBE STOCK, ALAMY, GETTY IMAGES;
ONE&ONLY, LUIGI VACCARELLA, ACORNERS;
MASSIMO RIPANI/ACORNERS



The old harbour
of Ammoudi at
the foot of Oia

VOYAGE

Santorini

THE VIBE: If Mykonos is the King of the Greek islands then Santorini is most definitely the Queen. With its spellbinding caldera, multi-coloured sunsets and sheer cliffs topped by sugar-cube houses, the island’s natural beauty is enough to make even the saltiest sea dog go weak at the knees. And while her looks may steal the headlines, the island is also at the forefront of Greece’s gastronomic movement.

WHO GOES? It’s a who’s-who of Hollywood, with visitors including Jennifer Aniston, Mariah Carey and Queen B herself, Beyoncé.

LOCAL LOWDOWN: “There is no way you can cruise the Cyclades without visiting Santorini,” says Captain Zacharias Karalogos. “It’s the most common destination on people’s bucket lists.” Unfortunately, this isn’t just the case for yacht owners, as the island welcomes two million tourists a year. “The best thing is to explore in the shoulder season and not be there in July and August,” says Bright Blue Villas’ Natasha Martsekis. “It’s a great destination in the spring or for an autumn break.” According to Martsekis there are two main factors behind Santorini’s foodie success. “The volcanic landscape and soil mean that produce, especially vegetables such as tomatoes, have a very distinctive taste. Also, a lot of the top chefs from Athens move to Santorini to work in the hotels during the summer,” she explains.

TOP TABLE: Martsekis’s top tip for local cuisine is Selene, which opened more than 30 years ago but is due to move to a new home in the Katikies Garden hotel this season. Showcasing local produce, dishes include a simple tomato salad, hake fried with garlic-walnut sauce and squid sautéed with white beans. Step back in time at the rooftop Opson Restaurant, housed within the recently opened Andronis Arcadia, which serves up a menu inspired by ancient Greece with dishes including red mullet flavoured with Greek saffron and lamb with artichoke and ancient grains. There is plenty to wash down all these delicious delicacies as the island (which spans less than 80 square kilometres) is home to 18 wineries. “It’s known worldwide for its Vinsanto dessert wine, which has a deep colour and crisp, metallic flavour,” says Martsekis. **CULTURE CULTURES:** “The top gourmet restaurants can be combined with archaeological sites such as the Bronze Age settlement of Akrotiri,” adds Captain Karalogos. “It was one of the most important Minoan urban centres and ports in the Aegean Sea when it was covered by volcanic ash in the 17th century BCE.”

BEST BY BOAT: Large buoys in Athinios Port or the Skala Port provide the best superyacht anchorages as the collapsed volcanic crater is more than 400 metres deep. ■

