

View across the  
caldera from  
Santorini Grace

# INTO THE BLUE

SOME DESTINATIONS GO IN AND OUT OF FASHION, BUT THE GREEK ISLANDS ARE ETERNAL. IT CAN BE HARD TO CHOOSE JUST ONE TO VISIT – SO WE'VE DONE THE HARD WORK FOR YOU, AND PICKED OUT SIX CLASSICS

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WHENEVER I'M ASKED which Greek island is my favourite, I change my mind. With around 6,000 to choose from, it depends what kind of mood I'm in. If I feel like a desert-island fantasy, I'll take the slow boat to Kastellorizo armed with little more than a sarong and sunscreen. If I fancy yacht spotting from a cliff-top terrace, I'll zip over to Santorini on a high-speed ferry. There's a Greek island for every mood and every budget. These are my current favourites.

## BEST FOR LOVERS

### KASTELLORIZO

With around 250 inhabitants squeezed into five square miles, this far-flung island within squinting distance of Turkey is tiny – just a handful of pastel-coloured houses clinging to a horseshoe harbour. The rugged land is criss-crossed by footpaths. Wander off and find your own rocky outcrop, where the only intrusion will be the odd monk seal. Apart from swimming through the Blue Cave and a shopping trip across to Kas to pick up a Turkish carpet, there's little else to do but gaze into your beloved's eyes.

**STAY AT** The ground-floor suite of Mediterraneo hotel ([www.mediterraneo-megisti.com](http://www.mediterraneo-megisti.com)), a waterfront mansion restored by French architect Marie Rivalant. Breakfast on croissants and Turkish tea on the terrace then descend the ladder straight into the sea.

**EAT** Chickpea pie and octopus fritters at Alexandra. Don't overdo the wine – tables are so close to the sea you might fall in.

## BEST FOR LUXURY

### SANTORINI

Cosmopolitan, classy, and world famous for its sunsets, Santorini is a honeymooners' heaven. Five-star hotels are lined up along the volcanic caldera, a sheer 300-metre drop to the sea. Spas in converted 'yposkafa' – cave dwellings carved out of the cliff face – make for memorable massages. Dubbed 'the black pearl of the Aegean' because of its black sand beaches, Santorini's volcanic soil also produces superb *asyrtiko* wines. You can taste some of the finest at the lovely Sigalas winery.

**STAY AT** Santorini Grace ([www.santorinigrace.com](http://www.santorinigrace.com)), where the service is as sleek as the all-white interiors.

**EAT** Dimitris Lazarou's squid, fennel and leek risotto and fava (yellow split pea purée) with green olives and hazelnuts at Saltsa ([www.saltsa.gr](http://www.saltsa.gr)). Flash-fried red mullet and minty tomato fritters at Katina, a homespun taverna on Ammoudi bay.

## BEST FOR ANTIQUITIES

### CRETE

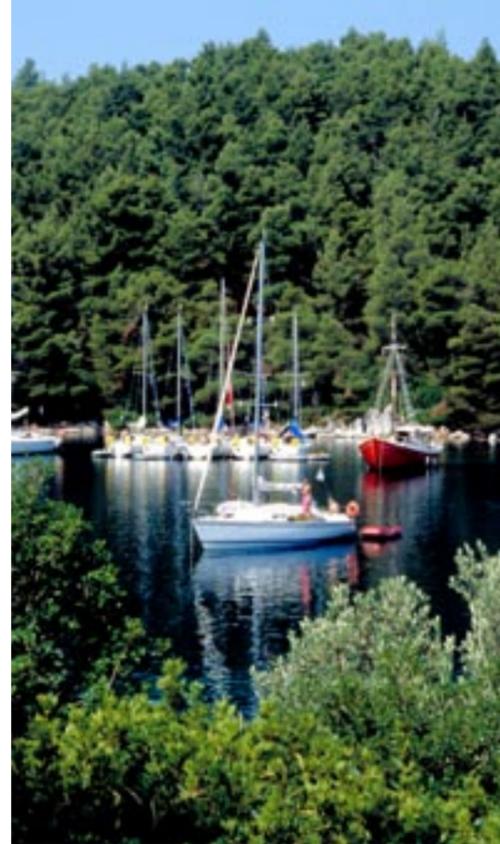
Crete is like another country – vast, mountainous, fiercely independent. The island's first inhabitants, the Minoans, were extraordinary architects. Their palaces at Knossos, Zakros, and Phaestos bristle with tour buses in high season, but if you

go at sunset they'll still take your breath away. With monasteries, gorges, and remote hamlets, Crete's hinterland is heaven for hikers as well as historians. The wild southern shores are a welcome antidote to the over-developed north and west coasts. **STAY AT** Rodialos House ([www.rodialos.com](http://www.rodialos.com)), a secluded villa inspired by Minoan architecture. Watch the sunset from the terrace or enrol in a cookery class run by owner Maria Frangaki. **EAT** Traditional *dakos* (rusks piled with tomato, goat's cheese and oregano), lamb chops, and snails with rosemary and vinegar at Kipos tis Arkoudainas. For a posh spin on Cretan cuisine, reserve a table at Avli, a romantic Venetian mansion in Rethymno, with a 500-year-old wine cellar.

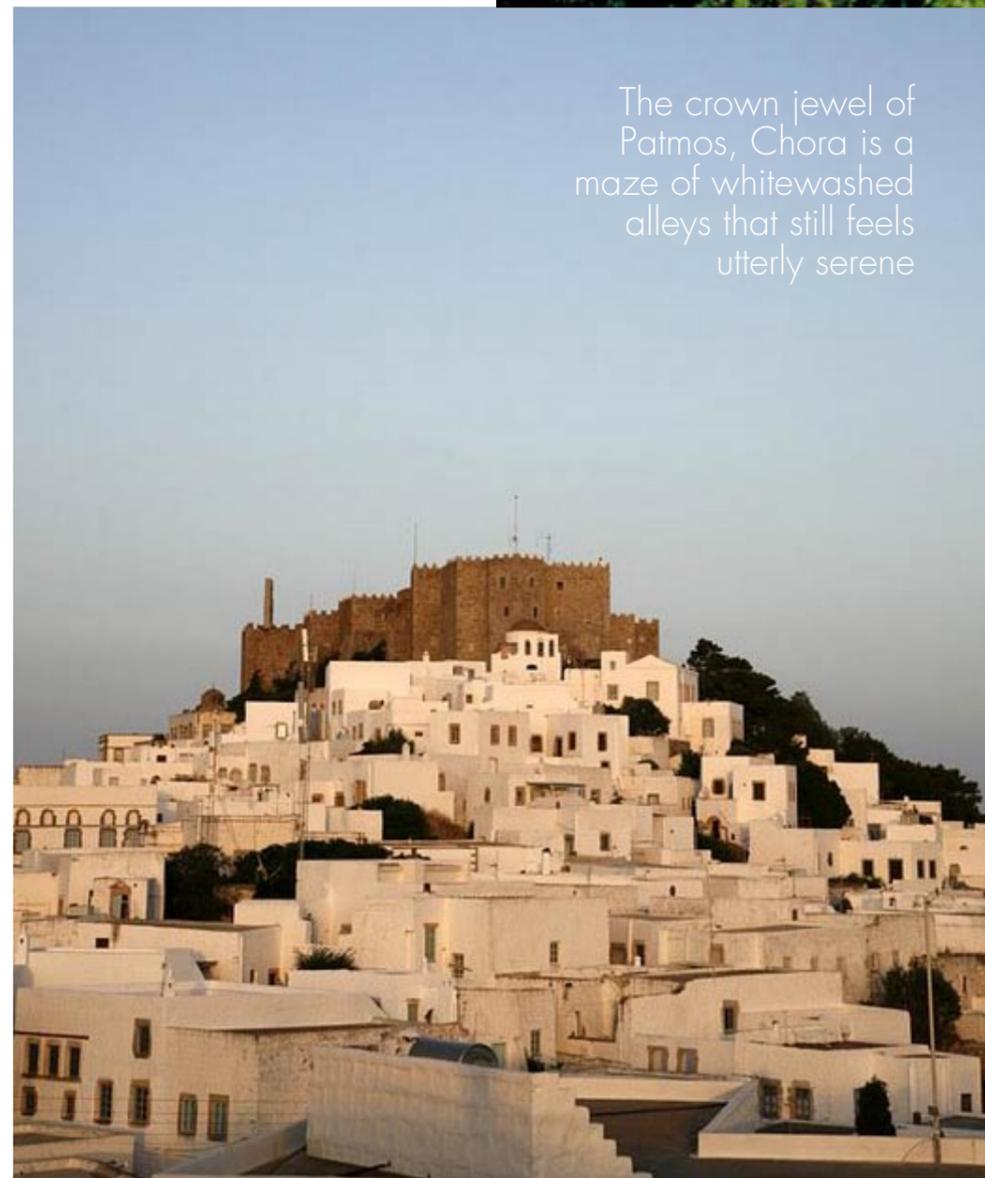
## BEST FOR ESCAPISTS

### PATMOS

Aside from the Orthodox pilgrims snaking their way up the hill to the eleventh-century Monastery of St John, Patmos is miraculously unscathed by mass tourism. The island's crown jewel, Chora, a UNESCO World Heritage site, has been discovered by the likes of David Bowie, but its



The crown jewel of Patmos, Chora is a maze of whitewashed alleys that still feels utterly serene



maze of whitewashed alleys still feels utterly serene. Follow dirt tracks over thyme-scented hills to deserted pebble coves, take a boat trip to Psili Ammos beach, or hike up to Profitis Ilias church on the island's highest peak. **STAY AT** Arhontariki ([www.archontariki-patmos.gr](http://www.archontariki-patmos.gr)) a seventeenth-century manor house in Chora, all stone archways, shady nooks and stunning views beyond the monastery to the sea. **EAT** Fish doesn't come fresher than at Tarsanas ([www.patmosmarine.gr](http://www.patmosmarine.gr)), a restaurant in a boatyard where the tables are on the owner's *caïque*.

## BEST FOR GOURMETS

### SIFNOS

Nikos Tselemendes, author of the first modern Greek cook book, was born on Sifnos, an island celebrated for its inventive cuisine. You'll find creamy goat's cheese and caper leaves in the Greek salad, *revithokeftedes* (addictive chickpea croquettes), and meat dishes stewed in earthenware pots, which make great souvenirs. Sifnos is the quintessential Cycladic island: chapels poking out of olive groves, sheltered coves with postcard-perfect tavernas and bleached villages perched on craggy hills. The finest village is Kastro – a must-see, if only for the spinach and feta pie from the hole-in-the-wall bakery.

**STAY AT** Elies Resort ([www.eliesresorts.com](http://www.eliesresorts.com)) overlooking the sandy bay of Vathy. The Olea spa offers treatments using olive oil and sea salt. **EAT** At To Tsikali, in Vathy, produce from the owners' farm is served at tables in the sand. Savour the caper salad and aubergine stuffed with lamb and cheese under the tamarind trees at Chryssopigi taverna. Feast on lobster and truffle oil risotto and crisp calamari rings at Ta Vatrahia below Kastro.

## BEST FOR BEACHES

### LEFKADA

The lush Ionian islands opposite Italy have some of the most spectacular beaches in Greece. The cliffs along Lefkada's west coast plunge down to white sand beaches with cobalt waters so clear you can see the sea bed from the twisting mountain roads. Glorious at sunset, Kathisma and Porto Katsiki are the most famous – and busiest. It's worth climbing the 360 steps carved into the rock-face to get to Egremni beach. If you're feeling lazy, hop on a water taxi from the pretty fishing port of Agios Nikitas to Milos beach, or sail out to one of the deserted islets scattered around Lefkada. Just don't disembark at Scorpios, Onassis' island – it's off limits to the hoi-polloi. **STAY AT** Pavezzo Country Retreat ([www.pavezzo.gr](http://www.pavezzo.gr)), a hilltop cluster of stone cottages, with a pool, top-notch restaurant and hamam. **EAT** Roast goat, home-made pies and yoghurt with thyme honey at Oasis taverna, hidden among the pine trees above Egremni beach. Fish straight from the sea and shrimps sautéed in ouzo at Stavros, best of Sivota's seaside tavernas.

photographs: xxxxxxxx; xxxxxxxx; xxxxxxxx

A typical dish at Santorini Grace. Below, clockwise from top: Pavezzo Country Retreat, Lefkada. Church on Santorini. Agiofilii beach, Lefkada. Opposite, from top: Porto Katsiki, Lefkada. Chora, Patmos



**Getting there** BA, Aegean and easyJet all fly to Greece. From Athens, there are domestic flights to Crete, Kastellorizo (via Rhodes), Santorini, and Preveza, near Lefkada. Ferries to most islands depart from Piraeus port; boats for Lefkada from Patras. For ferry schedules, go to [www.greekferries.gr](http://www.greekferries.gr)

**When to go** Avoid August, when Greek families descend *en masse*. June and September are perfect. May and early October are best for walking holidays or cultural breaks; you will have the islands to yourself and hotel rates drop. For more ideas on where to stay, visit [www.smallhotelsingreece.com](http://www.smallhotelsingreece.com)

