

TAKE

Greece's lesser-known islands offer relaxation away from the crowds for second-time visitors, says **Alice Barnes-Brown**

Archaeology, beautiful beaches and upbeat urban areas: the Greek islands are destinations for travellers who want it all – to have their baklava and eat it, if you will.

Thirty-one million people visit Greece every year. And while the big islands with international airports – the likes of Crete, Corfu and Kos – are ideal for first-timers, those wishing to say *kalimera* ('good morning') to the Aegean archipelago for a second time may prefer somewhere to sunbathe and

sip sweet dessert wine away from the crowds. It's a good job Greece has enough to please everyone.

Across its 227 sun-drenched islands, Greece-bound holiday-makers will find hospitable islanders, olive oil-drizzled dishes and pine-scented coves – and these are just a handful of the country's USPs.

From quiet beach retreats to history-rich islands and getaway spots that look just like the set from *Mamma Mia!*, we've handpicked three lesser-known spots for a Greek island getaway.



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SANTORINI

The location of many guidebook front covers, Santorini's cliffside-clinging churches, volcanic sands and clear-as-day caldera waters are a huge draw for cruise ships, fly-and-flop families and adventurous solo travellers alike. Sunset views are worth their weight in gold: those on a budget can bag a spot at the west coast's viewpoints, but those with a little more cash to splash should check into a hotel with an infinity pool.

NAXOS

WHY GO? Santorini, lovely though it is, doesn't have the monopoly on whitewashed buildings and big sky views. Nifty Naxos, an island of seafood, sailing and scattered stone ruins, is just a two-hour ferry from Santorini and offers visitors a chance to experience the sleepier side of the Cyclades.

WHAT TO DO: Visitors can get their bearings by strolling along the Venetian harbourfront and among the bougainvilleas of capital Chora (pictured). For out-of-town options, hiking or biking Mount Zas, eating fried potatoes from nutrient-rich Naxian soil, or brushing up on history at the 530BC temple to Apollo are all delightful. Instagrammers will be especially pleased by the latter: the ruins boast the picturesque Portara gateway.

BOOK IT: Just 10 minutes from Naxos Town and its buzzy harbour sits the five-star Nissaki Beach Hotel, in a secluded spot on Saint George beach. The property features seaside dining and a chic swimming pool with a hydro massage area. Sunvil offers a seven-night stay for £1,156, including flights. sunvil.co.uk

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CORFU

This emerald Adriatic isle has long been coveted as a place to reinvigorate the soul among the cypress trees: over the years, it has been occupied by the Venetians, the French, and even the British (the Durrell family, of TV fame, have much to say about Corfu's charm). Regal villas, raucous resorts and historic hotels make it a retreat for all tastes, from fun-loving families and young travellers to cultured couples.

PAXOS

WHY GO? At just three miles wide and seven miles long – and only a 90-minute boat ride away – Paxos is Corfu's pretty (yet quiet) little sister. Paxos packs it in: there are 30 beaches, a sprinkling of red-roofed towns and some of the oldest olive groves in Greece.

WHAT TO DO: Paxos is slow travel at its best: streetwise cats lie in wait for fresh fish in the ports of Loggo and Lakka (pictured), while cafe-goers play backgammon to beat the heat. Clients who fancy themselves as captains can rent their own boat and sail over to Antipaxos for its sandy crescent shores and kaleidoscopic blue caves, but kicking back with a kumquat cocktail in a beach taverna is an equally good way to take in the sea air.

BOOK IT: Family and *filoxenia* (hospitality) are the guiding principles of Olympic Holidays' Club Paxos Resort, a four-star property set in the grounds of a gorgeous farmhouse. All five room types have private terraces. One week's B&B in a garden-facing double room, including flights, costs from £753 per person. booking.olympicholidays.com

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CRETE

As you might expect of Greece's largest island, Crete has appeal in abundance. Knossos Palace lorded over Europe's oldest civilisation, the Minoans, who existed from 2000BC, and the Cretan dialect and diet are notably distinct from the rest of Greece. Resorts on the north coast make for an easy-breezy holiday, while villas nestled among monastery-dotted mountains and guesthouses on the peaceful south coast draw discerning travellers.

KYTHIRA

WHY GO? Crete's northerly neighbour Kythira is home to snorkel-friendly seas, scenic waterfalls and medieval castles that aren't over-run by tourists. Intricate icons adorn rocky caves, mid-afternoon meals are taken under the shade of trees, and locals play music and stretch out on deserted beaches in the evening.

WHAT TO DO: Castles aren't uncommon in Kythira; the main settlement (also called Chora) is built around a 1503 fort with four churches inside its walls. History fans will love the plethora of museums, including an archaeological collection complete with an intact Roman lion statue, but active types should make a beeline for the canyon-like Kakia Langada gorge. Whatever activity is picked, a secluded beach is never too far away.

BOOK IT: For those inspired by the wooden-shuttered windows and pastel hues of *Mamma Mia!*, Sunvil features the El Sol Hotel, which boasts 24 bungalow rooms and is located just outside Chora. Seven nights' B&B costs from £478, including flights from Heathrow. sunvil.co.uk

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