

Hellenic hot list

Greece and Cyprus have plenty of new hotels, attractions and tours coming to their shores this year, finds Alice Barnes-Brown

Appetite for the beautiful landscapes of Greece and stellar beaches of Cyprus is stronger than ever – at World Travel Market in November, Greece's tourism minister announced that international tourist arrivals had increased by 18% last summer compared with the same period in 2022, while Cyprus reported a year-on-year rise of 23%.

This looks set to be another busy year for new openings too, from luxury hotels to exciting infrastructure projects that promise to revolutionise Greece's largest cities. Get ahead of the game and discover some of the hottest openings in the Hellenes.

HIGH-END HOTELS

A wealth of international hotels open their doors on the windswept whitewashed Cyclades at the start of the summer season.

For starters, there's the highly anticipated One&Only Kéa Island – one of the closest isles to Athens and its glitzy Riviera – in May. The all-villa accommodation is set around a secluded inlet, featuring 63 immaculate villas and a Guerlain spa where guests can get back to the rustic simplicity of Cycladic life.

Also in May, the Domes Oramma will open in Santorini, while its northerly neighbour, Folegandros, is getting its ➤

New five-star property
Gündari, Folegandros

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The all-villa One&Only Kéa Island, which will feature a Guerlain spa, opens in May PICTURE: Rupert Pearce

first five-star hotel: the design-led Gundari will comprise 27 villas and suites built from local materials, a restaurant with a Michelin-starred chef and a wellness programme that takes its inspiration from ancient Greek medicinal rituals.

While the arid, hilly landscapes of southern Greece are appealing, luxury lovers should not neglect the country's verdant north. This spring, Hyatt's Inclusive Collection brand Zoëtry will open its second European outpost, in western Halkidiki, within a stone's throw of Mount Olympus and a short glass-sided lift ride from the blue-hued beach.

Louis Hotels, meanwhile, is expanding in the cypress-covered hills of Zante. The adult-only King Jason Zante, opening on June 1, is a grown-up water park, with overwater bungalows atop a stunning infinity pool, six swim-up pools, 12 private pool suites and even a hydrotherapy pool in the hammam-style spa.

The group is also welcoming a new hotel in Paphos, Cyprus. Cali

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Resort will open at the start of the summer season, just 300 metres from Coral Bay, the island's most famous stretch of sand.

Independent hotels and new holiday homes are also in abundance this year, particularly in lesser-known areas that can offer clients a true taste of Greek *filoxenia* (hospitality).

CV Villas has added the family-oriented Villa Amalia on little Paxos to its sizeable Greek roster, while close to the Byzantine walled town of Monemvasia in the Peloponnese, independent boho-chic Quattro Suites is set to open in March.

TRENDING TOURS

Walking on ancient paths through olive groves or sailing into the sunset on board a small ship – an escorted tour makes this kind of Hellenic magic a little more accessible.

Intrepid Travel's eight-day Greece Sailing Adventure, breezing through the Ionian Sea from Corfu to Kefalonia, lets guests explore the region on an eight-person yacht. Setting out from the 15th-century Venetian harbour at Corfu Town, clients can learn how to sail with a team of local sailors as they journey south. This new itinerary also offers the chance to explore private Ionian islands that other cruise operators pass by, such as glamorous Skorpios and goat-filled Atokos.

On Greece's southernmost island, Jules Verne's new Walking in Crete tour launches in April – then resumes operations in October, to beat the summer heat. From a base in the historic city of Chania, this seven-night romp reveals the mountainous interior of Greece's largest island, pays a visit to a ➤

ASK THE expert



Noel Josephides, chairman, Sunvil

“As Greece and Cyprus grow in popularity, Sunvil remains true to its ‘Find the Real Country’ ethos, with a focus on lesser-known islands and areas. New for 2024 is the island of Kéa, just one hour by ferry from Athens, and increased choice of flexible island-hopping itineraries taking in the more remote islands of the Dodecanese and Cyclades. We find more clients are looking for an escape from the stresses of modern life – a ‘back to basics’ holiday of simple pleasures, great food and warm hospitality, all of which Greece and Cyprus deliver with aplomb.”

top tip

Greece is introducing a daily climate tax that guests pay at their accommodation. Rates are based on a property's star rating and the time of year: from €0.5 to €4 per night from November to February and €1.50 to €10 from March to October.

DESTINATIONS

GREECE & CYPRUS | WHAT'S NEW



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: King Jason Zante; Zoëtry Halkidiki Resort & Spa; Hard Rock Hotel and Casino; Cali Resort



BOOK IT

Inspiring Travel offers a two-centre holiday that combines four nights at the One&Only Kéa Island and three nights at One&Only Aesthesis on the Athenian Riviera, which opened in November. B&B prices start at £7,599 and include a free night at the Aesthesis, flights and private transfers, for departures from May 3-31. inspiringtravel.co.uk

Seven nights at the Cali Resort & Spa on a Premium All-Inclusive Basis starts at £1,290 with **easyJet holidays**. The price includes transfers and flights with 23kg luggage, departing September 6. easyjet.com/holidays

fast fact

Thessaloniki's first metro system, which will run from the main train station to the southern suburbs, is set to open this year.

Cretan family who have been producing olive oil for generations, before heading down to the coast to take the plunge into pristine waters.

Trips on two feet also open up slow and sustainable tourism opportunities. Ramble Worldwide's new Lesvos and Chios trip – suitable for semi-regular walkers – takes two full weeks to explore two Greek islands that have thus far swerved the country's tourism boom. The astonishing hill town of Molyvos (officially Mithymna) on Lesvos is topped by an impressive 14th-century castle, which clients can access via cobbled Ottoman backstreets. On Chios, geometric-patterned villages are ripe for exploration, as are the aromatic mastic plantations – this island is the only place in the world that cultivates the shrub used in food and drink.

SHIPPING FORECAST

Several new cruises are calling at the port of Piraeus this year. From April, Riviera Travel will team up with Celestyal to offer an 11-night Athens and Greek Islands sailing on board the newly renovated *Celestyal Journey*. The itinerary visits not only the capital and some famous islands, but also the buzzing second city of Thessaloniki and the Turkish resort of Kusadasi. A pre-cruise stay in central Athens and a post-cruise extension on the city's luxe Riviera will offer clients plenty of downtime in the sunshine.

Oceania Cruises is using Athens as a launch pad for four new itineraries, where stops will include favourites such as Mykonos, Santorini and

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Corfu as well as Limassol in Cyprus, plus sleepier spots such as Gytheio in the Peloponnese.

NEW ATTRACTIONS

In a country filled with ancient landmarks, there are still new surprises to be found. Aigai, an ancient palace in northern Greece once occupied by Alexander the Great and his father, Philip of Macedon, reopened to the public this month following 16 long years of restoration.

By the Athenian Riviera, the Piraeus Tower – a 22-storey office block that sticks out among the low-lying landscape, left largely abandoned since its construction in the 1970s – is reopening in March with a gleaming new facade and sustainable shopping and restaurants, making it perfect for cruise passengers with a few hours to spare.

Southern Athens is soon to be home to the world's largest coastal park, the Ellinikon, a green space that incorporates hotels and shops, on the site of the former international airport. The first phase of its construction is due to be completed by 2025. By 2027, it will be home to a Rosewood and Hard Rock Hotel and Casino – the latter of which broke ground two weeks ago. **TW**