

Hype vs hideaway

From party islands to peaceful escapes, there's a Greek island for every client, says Lina Molloholli

In the fast-changing world of travel one thing's for sure: Greek island getaways are strong sell. But demand for more unique, authentic holiday destinations at affordable price points and with fewer crowds is bringing some of Greece's lesser-known islands into the limelight.

According to Google data, Milos is the most-searched-for Greek island in 2024 – a spot held by Mykonos last year. Harry Kyrillou, the aviation and commercial director for Hellenic specialist Planet Holidays, says: "there has been an increase in holidays to lesser-known islands post-Covid, with folks seeking out smaller hotels and villas."

From the cosmopolitan streets of Corfu to the coves of Rhodes, discover five perennially popular Greek islands to visit – and their lesser-spotted alternatives.

HYPE: SANTORINI
Why go? The volcanic island is the supermodel of the Greek islands. Think blue-domed churches and stout whitewashed homes cascading down volcanic cliffs, against the backdrop of the azure Aegean Sea.
Must do: Watch the sun set in Oia. Widely known as the top spot for sunset viewing, the coastal town offers unobstructed views of the caldera, with the ruins of Oia Castle providing the ideal vantage point for catching the sun's fiery descent.

HIDEAWAY: ASTYPALAIIA
What's the vibe? Astypalaia, one of the Dodecanese archipelago's best-kept secrets, is known as 'butterfly island' because it comprises two wing-shaped islands, linked by a beachy strip of land. With about 1,300 inhabitants, this remote island boasts traditional whitewashed villages and spectacular sunsets minus the crowds.
Secret tip: For clients after true seclusion, recommend hiring a boat to explore Astypalaia's semi-secret beaches. The many shores that promise

privacy include Vatses, Psili Ammos and Vathi beaches.

HYPE: RHODES

Why go? Rhodes is the largest and most-populated island in the Dodecanese archipelago. It's been nicknamed the 'island of the knights', as it was occupied by the Knights of St John from 1309 to 1523. It's ideal for those seeking to combine rich history and architecture – such as Byzantine churches and art deco apartments – with crystal-clear coves for swimming and water sports.

Must do: A short drive from Rhodes Old Town is Kallithea Springs, which offers a hidden swimming bay, a seafront cafeteria-cum-cocktail bar and gorgeous pavilions and fountains that serve as photoshoot locations.

HIDEAWAY: SYMI

What's the vibe? Known for its ancient shipbuilding and sea-

sponge industries, Symi is only a 45-minute boat hop from Rhodes, and has recently been added to Jet2's summer programme. Vibrant red, yellow, orange and blue neoclassical mansions fringe the quayside, while traditional fishing boats bob around in the water. The spirit of the island remains intact, with hidden beaches and welcoming hospitality awaiting visitors.

Secret tip: Take the 500 painted steps of 'Kali Strata' (literally 'good street') up to Chorio hilltop. The colourful old doorways and scent of bougainvillea delight the senses on the way to the summit, but these simple pleasures pale in comparison with the views over the bay below.

HYPE: MYKONOS

Why go? Renowned for its vibrant nightlife and luxurious hotels, the Cycladic 'island of the winds' is a magnet for honeymooners and Instagrammers. With bustling streets

lined with chic crochet boutiques and gourmet restaurants, Mykonos is the perfect high-end holiday.

Must do: Go 'out out'. From legendary beach clubs such as Scorpios and Super Paradise to the thumping bars and clubs of Mykonos Town, there's a venue for every different kind of night.

HIDEAWAY: MILOS

What's the vibe? This year's rising star, the Cycladic island offers an unusual selection of sights. There are lunar-like beaches, (such as Sarakiniko and Firiplaka), eerie early Christian catacombs, plus the petite fishing village of Klima and its *syrmata* (fishermen's boathouses built into rocks).

Secret tip: Visit Papafragas Cave. The roof of the cave has long collapsed, so it's more like a natural swimming pool. And it's less crowded than the fabled Sikia sea cave. Papafragas is easily

ASK THE expert



ELENI SKARVELI
director, GNTO

"There is growing interest in lesser-known gems. Travellers are craving authentic experiences away from the crowds – and Greece's diverse islands offer precisely that. We recommend flying to a large island and then exploring nearby islands. Easy ferry and speedboat connections make travelling from hubs such as Mykonos to other destinations a delightful and enriching journey. Avoiding a day excursion offers a more immersive experience."



DOMES

A Lifestyle Hospitality Brand

"Domes Resorts Engagement Portal
www.domesresortsexpert.com"



ATHENS | CRETE | IONIAN | CYCLADES | HALKIDIKI | ALGARVE





CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Symi; Sarakiniko beach, Milos; Paxos; and Chora, Astypalaia

PICTURES: Shutterstock/Heraclis Kritikos, ian woolcock, Josef Skacel, leoks

accessible by car, or as a part of an organised boat excursion.

HYPE: CORFU

Why go? The main town on this Ionian island is a labyrinth of Venetian streets that meet at the Spianada – a grand esplanade where porticoed buildings surround a cricket pitch. History lovers will enjoy the Palace of St Michael and St George, while away from town, there are a host of beaches to swim at and kumquat groves to wander around.

Must do: The highest peak on Corfu’s coastline is topped by Angelokastro, an impressive Byzantine fortress, sitting over a 300m drop above the sea. Hike up to the castle for the island’s best Ionian vistas and fascinating murals in the crypt, before making downward tracks to the heart-shaped bay of Palaiokastritsa for a cooling dip.

HIDEAWAY: PAXOS

What’s the vibe? A short ferry ride off the southern coast of Corfu,

Paxos is something of a best kept secret. Visitors can explore the harbour of Gaios, where pastel-hued houses frame the calm waterfront, or venture to the pebbly beaches of Orkos and Kipiadi for a day by the big blue.

Secret tip: Sample the wine of Antipaxos. It’s sweet, rich and made from locally grown *pheidias* and *petrokodrynthos* grapes. The wine is made on a minute scale, so clients won’t be able to find it anywhere else in Greece.

HYPE: KOS

Why go? The birthplace of physician Hippocrates, Kos is steeped in myth and history. Enthusiasts can flock to the Asklepion – an ancient healing centre that is home to temples, hot springs and a school – or to Antimacheia Castle, a fortress built during the late Middle Ages.

For a taste of local life, the streets of Kos Town frame Byzantine churches, which typically have lively tavernas and bustling markets in their squares.

Must do: Visit the mineral water springs. There are many on Kos, with three different types – hot, warm and cool. Some of the best can be found at Agios Fokas, Piso Thermes, Kokkinonero and Volkanous. Perfect for soothing the soul.

HIDEAWAY: ITHACA

What’s the vibe? Ithaca is the home of Odysseus, the hero from Homer’s eponymous poem. Odysseus’s decade-long voyage towards the island after the Trojan war gives Ithaca a mythical aura, with fishing villages sheltered by tall cypress trees and ancient ruins hidden in deep forests. The island is quiet, but easily accessed from nearby Kefalonia and Lefkada.

Secret tip: Visit the medieval village of Anogi. The keys to the old church can be found at the village coffee shop (in Greece, church keys are often entrusted to local businesses). For a tasty meal, the owner Sofia cooks whatever is available from her garden or neighbour’s fields. **TW**

BOOK IT

Milos: Olympic Holidays has recently added the Golden Milos Beach Hotel to its collection. Seven nights’ bed and breakfast in a Superior Room Side Sea View starts at £1,409 per person, based on two sharing. The price includes flights from Gatwick to Santorini on June 12 and transfers. olympicholidays.com/agents

Ithaca: A seven-night holiday at Perantzada Art Hotel starts at £1,497 per person with **Planet Holidays**. The price is based on two sharing and includes breakfast, flights from Gatwick to Kefalonia, ferry tickets and taxi transfers. planet-holidays.co.uk

Symi: Jet2Holidays offers seven nights’ bed and breakfast at Opera House Apartments from £981 per person, based on two sharing. The price includes luggage, ferry transfers and flights from Stansted to Rhodes on June 28. jet2holidays.com