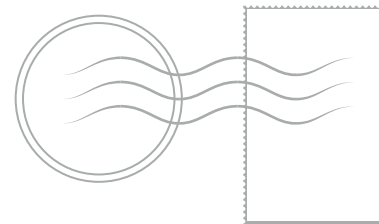


DESTINATIONS

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POSTCARD

Santorini



Can there be any such thing as a secret hideaway in tourist-saturated Santorini? **Russell Higham** finds out

There are 6,000 islands and islets in Greece, but I've come to the one that's top of more travel 'wish lists' than any other. Santorini, the quintessential Cyclades isle, is famed for its idyllic whitewashed villages, blue-domed churches and golden sunsets that are the stuff of legend.

I've escaped its busy streets to enjoy the view from afar, with a five-hour sailing in a luxury catamaran along the epic coastline of the caldera (a Unesco World Geological Heritage Site), passing by volcanic islets with iron-rich red or black-sand beaches, swimming in natural hot springs and, of course, basking in that famous Santorini sunset over the Aegean Sea.

Departing from the small port of Ammoudi, there are just two other couples cruising with us this afternoon, meaning everyone finds their own spot to soak up the views as well as the rays. While the crew of the *Vasiliki* ply us with delicious Greek food and drink, we luxuriate in the feeling of space that is more than welcome when, back on land, Santorini's population of 15,000 becomes dwarfed by the three million who visit each year.

Most make either for Fira, the capital and largest town on Santorini, or Oia, a breathtakingly beautiful village on the island's northwestern tip. Even if you choose not to wait in line just for a turn to grab that must-have selfie from a cliffside terrace, it can still feel overwhelmingly busy in the peak summer months.

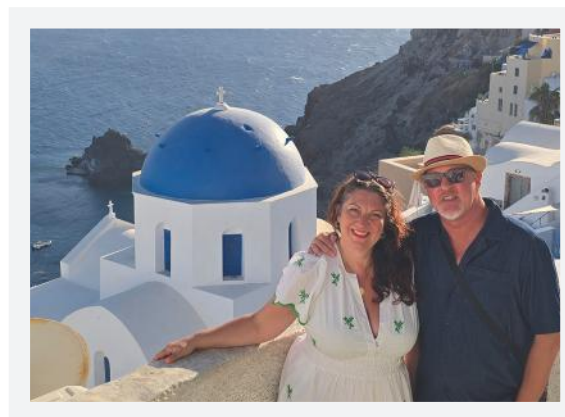
It's why I've chosen to stay, instead, in the southern beachside resort of Perissa. Here, the five-star, adult-only Tui Blue Meltemi hotel is an oasis of calm and tranquillity. Named for the meltemi breeze that blows refreshingly across the island, it's a haven of low-slung, earth-toned architecture and discreetly stylish furnishings. Three swimming pools, two restaurants (one buffet, one fine-dining), two bars, a health club with exercise classes and its very own private beach (with waiter service via an app) mean you can leave the madding crowds far behind. Against a backdrop of rugged mountains – one crowned by the Prophet Elias Monastery that stands 565 metres above sea level – a laid-back, boho-chic vibe pervades the neighbouring beachfront village. It all feels effortlessly relaxed and uncrowded.

Sipping a cocktail in the privacy of a whirlpool on my room's balcony, I toast my good fortune at having found what seems to be, for now at least, the best-kept secret in Santorini. **TW**



BOOK IT

Tui offers seven nights at Tui Blue Meltemi in Perissa, Santorini, from £1,491 per person, based on two adults sharing on a half-board basis, flying from Gatwick on July 2, with transfers and 23kg hold luggage. The half-day Luxury Sunset Cruise in Santorini costs £131 per adult. tui.co.uk



TOP: The pool at Tui Blue Meltemi
ABOVE: Writer Russell Higham and partner Emma in Oia

PICTURE: Shutterstock/Mikhail Grachikov