

Boutique Hotels WAYS

Boutique hotels offer a personal touch whatever the budget, finds Katie McGonagle

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Utter the words 'boutique hotel' and most luxury lovers' ears will perk up at the thought of quirky decor, one-off artworks and thoughtful design touches, and the character that comes with staying somewhere independent.

Those are certainly plus points

for eschewing big-brand chains, but why should high-spending guests get all the fun? While Greece and Cyprus have their share of design-led properties catering to the upper end of the market, there are also plenty of family-run guesthouses, converted farmhouses and



→ island villas offering every bit as much of a boutique feel without the price tag to match.

“Boutique hotels offer a more personal, bespoke stay, which in itself is a luxury,” says Photis Lambrianides, commercial director at Olympic Holidays. “While many properties are luxury in standard, that’s not the only criteria for a boutique stay – it’s really about staying somewhere that gets under the skin of a destination because of its size and unique design, or offers an innovative take on the guest experience.”

Whatever the budget, these islands offer plenty of properties with personality.

▶ **SAVE**

Greece: With just 30 rooms set in flower-filled gardens, Villa Afrodite on Greek island Lemnos is an attractive choice for tighter budgets. It’s in Plati, a mile from Myrina in the southwest of this Aegean island, where a Blue Flag beach and a couple of tavernas make up the majority of the tourist infrastructure, though there’s a pretty old village if visitors don’t mind a steep 15-minute walk uphill. The hotel boasts double or family rooms and suites that sleep four, plus an outdoor pool and restaurant. Prices start at £650 for a week’s B&B with Sunvil in October, including flights and transfers.

Also playing on its small-island appeal is Iapetos Village in Symi, a collection of neoclassical stone houses just added to Olympic Holidays’ portfolio to cater for repeat customers requesting lesser-known spots. The island has a picture-postcard facade – all elegant pastel-hued houses and wooden boats bobbing in the harbour – and these 25 traditional houses fit in nicely. Set in the heart of Symi Town, the mix of studios, double rooms and maisonettes can be a little dated, but a pretty courtyard and pool more than make up for it.

Cyprus: Pocket-friendly properties in Cyprus tend to be of the smaller, family-run variety, offering surprisingly good value, especially if clients are happy to self-cater or go B&B then make up the rest of their meals in local restaurants and tavernas. As travellers’ appetites expand to cover more than just beach resorts – with smaller villages or inland areas such as the Troodos Mountains gaining a higher profile – it’s a good opportunity to steer clients toward converted farmhouses or restored historic properties that combine keen pricing with genuine character.

Leonidas Village Houses in Goudi, near Paphos, is a group of five 19th-century houses set around a communal yard and pool, recently restored but maintaining the original wooden



LEFT: Elounda Peninsula All Suite Hotel

RIGHT: Londa Beach Hotel



Symi is all elegant pastel-hued houses and wooden boats bobbing in the harbour

beams, stone walls and sizeable fireplaces, which come complete with a wood store in winter. It’s gorgeous in summer too, with views across the colourful orange and lemon groves that mark the outer edges of the village.

▶ **SPEND**

Greece: Part with a little more cash, and the gorgeous beachfront boutiques of Greece are within reach. San Nicolas Resort in Lefkada is a prime example, with just 17 rooms and suites offering panoramic views across Mikros Gialos Bay. Lefkada, which connects to the mainland via a causeway, is known even among locals for its brilliant-blue waters and idyllic beaches, and this property’s light, contemporary decor makes it a good spot for quiet contemplation. Cyplon offers a week staying B&B in a deluxe room from £879 with Gatwick-

Preveza flights in September.

The views are no less idyllic from the 57 suites and villas of the Elounda Peninsula All Suite Hotel on Crete, which manages to make the Aegean Sea the focal point of every room thanks to its peninsular position. Simply Luxury by Travel 2 can offer a week in a Junior Sea View Suite from £1,279 in September, including private transfers and flights. It’s a great option for honeymooners looking for something special, and has a nine-hole golf course, dive school, Six Senses Spa and its own wine cellar, so guests won’t be short of activities to occupy their time.

Cyprus: Larnaca and its villages offer competitive prices compared with other parts of the island, in accommodation as well as bars and restaurants, so clients can afford to upgrade here. The Library Hotel and Wellness Resort is a 19th-century mansion house made up of 11 individually-styled suites, named after poets and playwrights from Oscar Wilde and Edgar Allan Poe to famous Greek authors. The high ceilings, parquet or mosaic floors, and marble bathrooms with Jacuzzi should help sell it, as will the nearby nature trails. A week with flights and car hire starts at £747 in October through Sunvil.

Also on a wellness theme, the 56-room Ayii Anargyri Natural Healing Spa Resort in the Paphos

region stands out from other boutiques: it was converted from a monastery by two brothers in the 17th century and has rooms set in the original monks’ quarters. Not only that, but its 21-room spa far outsizes the hotel, and boasts scenic views from its relaxation room.

▶ **SPLURGE**

Greece: Greece is well-positioned to look after the upper end of the market, with hilltop hideaways like the 18-room Aristi Mountain Resort in Zagori on the mainland, or beachfront boutiques such as Aqua Blu Boutique Hotel & Spa on Kos. Pricier islands such as Santorini offer cobbled streets and contemporary design at Aressana Spa Hotel & Suites in Fira, or famous caldera views at Canaves Oia Hotel.

Olympic Holidays is a fan of Santorini Secret Suites & Spa, where each of its 17 suites comes with a private pool or Jacuzzi and veranda overlooking the caldera. “Here, the location is the real star, and when you add a boutique hotel, it really creates a luxury and individual option,” says Lambrianides. “Built on the famous cliffside of Oia and incised into volcanic rock, this is a five-star stay 100 metres above sea level.” A week’s B&B in a Premium Sea View Suite starts at £2,325 with Gatwick flights in summer.

For a different take on a boutique stay, Classic Collection Holidays recommends the Poseidonion Grand Hotel on Spetses, which was fully restored to mark its 100th anniversary in 2014. This 52-room property is a real grand dame of the Greek hotel scene, once a summer retreat for wealthy Athenians that now embodies all the glamour of those high-society stays. Opt for a Tower Room for great harbour views – ideal in early September during the island’s re-enactment of the burning of the Turkish flotilla – or upgrade to the Pool Suite. A week including Gatwick flights, private transfers and hydrofoil from Athens starts at £2,037 for the former or £3,542 for the suite with Classic Collection.

Cyprus: Luxury boutiques aren’t as abundant on Cyprus, with pricier properties tending to be on the larger side compared with the smaller design-led hotels of Greece. One exception to the rule, however, popular with mainstream and luxury operators alike, is Londa Beach Hotel in Limassol. This member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World is a sophisticated choice, recently redeveloped with natural fabrics and lighter decor, all accented by little touches of Cypriot lace or local antiques. It’s close to the beach and home to one of the resort’s trendiest bars, Caprice. **TW**



LEFT: Iapetos Village

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