

Cover story

Continued from Page 5



SANTORINI
Adrian Mourby

I've been visiting Santorini for over 20 years and its caldera-view still takes my breath away: a 1,000ft plunge to the dark waters of the Aegean with seagulls circling silently below you. Santorini is all about views and wine. The piercing white light of sunrise over the caldera, seen from your terrace, is matched by the incandescent evening view of sunset from Oia Castle.

Between those two big events, there's upmarket shopping in Fira, and sunbathing next to your plunge pool – but one of the greatest pleasures is visiting the island's wineries. The owners are always pleased to show off their flinty Assyrtiko wine, because they know Santorini whites are some of the best, not just in Greece, but in the world.

I wouldn't take my children to Santorini – there are much better beaches all over Greece – this is very much an island for adults. This year is going to be a perfect year to visit because the cruise ships, whose passengers used to overwhelm Santorini's narrow streets, are heavily restricted from docking.

George Filippidis, general manager of Andronis hotels, believes the lack of these huge ships will make a big difference: "The number of cruise ship passengers will be way less than in 2019 – an 80 per cent reduction – so this is a great opportunity for people to enjoy the island as it used to be before it became too popular."

GETTING THE GREEN LIGHT?
Hopefully by later in the summer.



VIS
Emma Cooke

I remember my first trip to Vis, shortly after the *Mamma Mia* sequel came out: the film, despite being set in Greece, had in actuality been shot largely on this tiny Croatian island. Intrigued by a setting that could out-idyll the Greek islands – surely the very definition of Mediterranean beauty – I charted a course from the city of Split to the far-flung patch of land.

Until the 1990s, the island was occupied by 10,000 Yugoslavian troops: something that adds a little cultural spice, with visitors able to take tours in a 1976 Steyr-Puch army truck and wander through Cold War army tunnels. Combine this relatively recent occupa-

➤ You can spot endangered turtles on a boat trip off the coast of Zante



tion with Vis' status as the most distant of all the major islands off the Dalmatian coast, however, and you're left with most tourists opting to hop off the ferry in Hvar or Brač. Instead, I stayed on board until the end of the line, arriving at dusk to the sight of Vis Town's bars and restaurants twinkling in the half-light. The next morning I awoke in the sleepy fishing village of Komiza, throwing open my windows to see the just-risen sun above the terracotta rooftops.

What followed was a slow-burning week of boat trips out to empty pebble beaches, sinking into emerald waters and "pomalo", the Croatian word for taking it easy. On Vis, it's used in place of everything from "see you later" to "you're welcome" and encompasses the mood – walking should never be more than an amble, and lunches should always stretch across the afternoon.

GETTING THE GREEN LIGHT?
Croatia's infection rates have been rising since February, although they have started to plateau. Vaccinations are progressing slowly. A green rating is unlikely until the second part of summer.



MYKONOS
Laura Millar

It's not that hard to explain why I have been coming to Mykonos almost annually for over 25 years. Initially, I was attracted to the glamour and hedonism. It lured the likes of Grace Kelly and Jackie Onassis in the 1950s, and, with its subsequent reputation as a magnet for the gay scene and a hands-in-the-air party island, nowadays the superyachts anchored off Paradise beach are likely to belong to Beyoncé, Mariah Carey or Leonardo Di Caprio, eager

▲ Santorini's Oia village at sunset



says. "There are exciting new developments coming: the Pacha Group is opening a hotel, restaurant and venue, for example.

"We may not get back to 2019 levels but I predict it will be better than 2020."

Aby Saltiel, co-owner of new luxury property Kalesma (kalsemamykonos.com), located on the wide sweep of Ornos beach, the perfect sunset-viewing spot, says: "There is so much for people coming to Mykonos this year to get excited about, not least our hotel, which offers something uniquely Greek: the age-old concept of philoxenia, or hospitality, from the heart." Yamas to that.

GETTING THE GREEN LIGHT?
The Greek Government's assessment for Mykonos has been eased recently, and green status from the ECDO could follow later in the summer.



CORFU
Anastasia Miari

Growing up between the Venetian old town of Corfu, with its winding alleys and sunset colour palette, and a rural white-washed village in the south of the island, I have always had the best of both worlds.

The largest of the Ionian islands, Corfu manages to incorporate the wild and rugged charm of Greece – with its laid-back seafood tavernas like Spiros Karidis in Boukari Bay, and villages that seem frozen in time (be sure to visit Old Perithia in the north) – with a more cosmopolitan feel, thanks to its bustling old town, with a healthy and thriving nightlife owing in part to the Ionian University.

Cult favourite Sirens Beach Bistro has undergone a refurbishment this year, with new apartments adjoining the banana tree-lined paradise on sandy Marathias beach.

Unlike other Greek islands that come to life only for the summer season, Corfu buzzes with life year-round and can offer more than just a beach holiday (though it's good for that too). When I'm craving the country life, I take to the Corfu trail to hike through rushes, olive groves and across craggy cliffs overlooking neighbouring Paxos in the south of the island.

Here, mountain villages like Argyrades are still untouched by the tourism on the coast and I can escape into a Greece of old – complete with donkeys, wise old women dressed in black and limited Wi-Fi.

Then as the day moves on, I can get dressed up, head to the Venetian Well for Mediterranean flavour with a fine-dining twist and people-watch as golden hour descends on the terracotta-topped old town.

GETTING THE GREEN LIGHT?
Hopefully by later in the summer.

➤ Zlatni Rat, Brač's famous beach, changes shape with the winds and tides



HVAR
Jane Foster

Approached by boat, Hvar Town looks superb – Venetian-era stone houses cling to three hillsides, and centre on a grand piazza with a Baroque Cathedral, surveyed by a hilltop castle. It has become madly trendy – celebrities, honeymooners, yachties and backpackers, all disembark on Hvar Town's palm-lined seafront promenade, in search of her magic. For me, that lies in the labyrinthine stone alleys – wafts of espresso coffee, pots of pink geraniums, a passing nun, and a cat basking in the sun. For others, it could lie in the swanky hotels or leisure facilities. "New this summer, Beach Club Hvar will be offering the chance to buy tailor-made beachwear," says Marzia Marti of Sunčani Hvar.

But there's still more beyond the fortified capital. Take the old road, through purple lavender fields, to Stari Grad, founded by ancient Greek seafarers in 384BC. It sits in a long, deep sheltered bay, where sailing crews moor up to feast at authentic konobe (taverns). It also hosts the new Maslina Resort. "For 2021, we're opening our garden-to-skin Pharamatiq Spa, offering unique treatments inspired by the island," says Daniela Rogulj of Maslina.

You might go wine tasting in Jelsa, then head for Hvar's glorious south-coast, where rugged slopes tumble down to pebble coves that time forgot, giving onto sparkling sea and a dazzling sunny horizon.

GETTING THE GREEN LIGHT?
As for Vis – note that Croatian islands are highly unlikely to be given a different rating from the mainland.



BRAC
Isabel Putinja

Not one for beaches, expectations were low when I first set out on the pine-scented promenade from Bol to Zlatni Rat, Brač's famous beach. But I was enchanted at first sight by its elongated V-shape outlined by a lick of brilliant turquoise. Equally startling was the softness of its fine white pebbles that didn't poke my feet or stick to my skin. Wading into the see-straight-to-the-bottom waters was like stepping into a celestial bath. This beach draws me back every summer.

But Brač has other charms that keep luring me back. I've had a bird's eye view of Zlatni Rat from the top of 778-metre-high Vidova Gora, the Adriatic's highest peak. And rambled along a stony path to the 16th-century hermitage of Blaca clinging to the slope of a ravine. In Pucisca, a quiet seaside inlet and Roman-era quarry, the sound of chiselling led me to the stonemason school, where students sculpt Brač's celebrated limestone. And I sampled its excellent olive oil in Skrip, the island's oldest settlement and home to an olive museum set in an old mill.

Marino Fratinovic, Bol hotelier, spent coronavirus downtime sprucing up his 15-room Villa Giardino. With its stylish upgrade complete, this heritage hotel tucked in a leafy garden soon attracted celebrities flying into Brač airport. "I had zero expectations for 2020, but all our rooms were booked in peak season," he says. "And I'm optimistic this summer will be the same judging by the number of inquiries flowing in." The villa also now boasts the island's fastest internet thanks to a fibre-optic connection, a sure draw for remote workers lured in by Croatia's new digital nomad scheme.

GETTING THE GREEN LIGHT?
Hopefully by summer, following the same progress as Hvar and Vis.



ZANTE
Kerry Christiani-Walker

Zante fired my imagination long before I ever set foot there. It was a photo of Navagio that did it: a deep, white thumbprint of a bay, with limestone cliffs soaring above a shockingly aquamarine sea.

The cove fulfils every shipwreck fantasy in reality, but only if you dodge the day-trippers – try a private, early-morning speedboat tour with eco-aware Nefis Travel.

But this Ionian island is more than a one-beach wonder. I never tire of Xechoriati, where the first sun touches the olive groves like a caress. Here, multigenerational Greek families chat and splash in the translucent sea, emerging to share picnics of spanakopita (filo pastry spinach-and-feta pie) and ripe figs. Xigia, just north, keeps me returning, too, with icy sulphuric waters bubbling from the rocks offering a natural spa treatment, and a pine-shaded taverna serving boat-fresh seafood.

I might scoot north on a moped to the wild Blue Caves, or south to the Bay of Laganas marine park, where endangered loggerhead turtles can be sighted on a sustainable boat trip around Turtle Island and the Keri Caves.

In the wake of Covid, the island is calmer than ever, particularly if you eschew the resorts in favour of more secluded, family-friendly holiday lets such as Xigia Beach Residence, or luxury back-to-nature, all-suite hotels like Olea and Zante Maris. According to Haris Stavridis, managing director of PR agency Globe & Trotter, Zante Maris is one to watch food-wise, with new restaurant Cava offering a small-but-refined menu championing small Greek producers and a great wine list.

"Travellers lucky enough to arrive earlier this season will enjoy fewer crowds on stunning beaches like south-coast Mizithres, which the earthquake expanded in 2018, and hidden Porto Limniona, with turquoise waters," he says.

GETTING THE GREEN LIGHT?
The party island caused an infection spike last summer and remains in the Greek Government's highest risk category. A close watch will be kept before a green rating is given – but hopefully this will arrive by late summer.