



Sifnos

Low Season: September-June

Sifnos is the perfect Cycladic island for families that no one's talking about. This lesser-known island offers playgrounds, sandy beaches with shallow, crystal clear waters, cultural activities, great food and a laid-back vibe.

By Rania Margari

Part of the Cyclades islands found on the Aegean Sea, Sifnos is well known for its gastronomy and prominent ceramic culture. But last summer while visiting with my family I realised that it's also the ideal place for a beach family vacation. The island's relatively small size guarantees short car drives, yet there is enough variety to keep adults and kids happy for several days (if not weeks).

With a total size of 74 sq km and the highest point at 682m above sea level (Profitis Ilias), Sifnos offers an interesting landscape with inhabited traditional villages, cultivated lands with terraced slopes and olive trees and wild areas. While exploring the island you will often find yourself surrounded by the serenity of the ocean and the open, wild space around.

The island is only accessible by ferry and this is one of the reasons it has succeeded in keeping tourism development under control, thus offering a better experience overall to those who visit.

The food is delicious everywhere you go, and there are numerous family-run tavernas, many of them conveniently located just by the beach. The sandy beaches with the shallow, crystal clear waters are great for families with young kids who don't swim very well yet. Evenings are spent wandering around the clean and car-free villages, with ice cream in hand. We also found the locals to be genuinely friendly and welcoming.

Low season in Sifnos can be considered anytime between September and June. Though it is possible to visit the island year-round, visiting from April to late June or September – October might be the best option for many: this is a great season to explore the island's many hiking trails due to the mild weather and have more options when it comes to restaurants, accommodation and transportation.

Avoiding the peak seasons of July and August is a good idea for other reasons too: the locals have more time and energy to interact with visitors, you get the beach to yourself (though April to June expect to have cold water) and experience better service everywhere.

This is also the season when one can attend well-being retreats and sessions. One Sunday afternoon during our visit I had the pleasure of joining an outdoor sound healing session led by Elina Pavlides under the starry sky, a truly unique experience. Elina organises retreats on Sifnos usually in May, June and September. She also organises regular yoga and sound healing sessions. www.yennaei.com



Giannis Apostolidis of En Sifno Ceramics

The villages and churches

Apollonia is the capital of Sifnos and its small, colourful alleyways are filled with restaurants, galleries and shops. In this car-free village, you will also find Sifnos Cultivity offering creative workshops for kids. Its location, standing along the slopes of a hill offers panoramic views of the sea.

Artemonas is another lovely village worth exploring with elegant mansions, picturesque paths and lush gardens – that's where we spent many leisure afternoons, exploring the restaurants, shops and churches along the way. Kitrino Podilato is the place to go for coffee and pastries, Theodorou confectionery for traditional sweets while To Xruso, Mosaiko and Aggeles should be on your list for a meal out.

Kastro, the old capital of Sifnos, is also worth exploring. At its entrance, you will find the Seven Martyrs Church, a small chapel featuring in the photo memories of most visitors. Loggia Wine Bar offers spectacular views along with a good glass of wine and nearby you will also find Cantina restaurant, ideal for a romantic dinner.

Kamarees is the main port of Sifnos where you will find an organized, sandy beach, playground, restaurants, accommodation and a few ceramic workshops worth exploring. A few minutes away from Kamarees you could also visit Yannis Apostolidis' ceramic workshop, En Sifno, where the ceramist creates all his work. Yannis and his assistant welcomed us into the workshop and explained the different ceramic pots they use in Sifnos for everyday needs such as cooking. www.apostolidis-ceramics.gr

You will get the best view of Kamarees and the surrounding area from Agios Simeon monastery during the sunrise or sunset.

Vathi is a sleepy seaside village with the picturesque Taxiarchon church in its small harbour where we had one of our most memorable and relaxed meals, at the seaside tavern "To Tsikali" run by Nikolaos Frantzeskaros and his family since 1983.

On the way to the seaside village of Platis Gialos, you can visit the Holy Monastery of Chrissopigi which is the saint protector of Sifnos and one of its most impressive sights. Platis Gialos is probably the most popular beach with many facilities available. Other smaller seaside villages we enjoyed visiting are Faros and Heronissos on the north.

Gastronomy

Sifnos is renowned for its chickpeas. A must-try local recipe is revithada (chickpea stew) traditionally cooked in a skepastaria, a clay pot with a lid made specifically for this dish by local potters. Most of the locals eat revithada every Sunday.

The most famous Greek chef, Nikolaos Tselementes, originates from Sifnos and there is a three-day food festival named after him every year in September on the island. (14-16 September 2023).

TOP EXPERIENCES

Ceramic art/workshop: ceramic art is still prominent on the island of Sifnos and you can play with the clay yourself while attending a workshop led by an artist. Pilotechneio at Apollonia (www.pilotechnio.com) or Atsonios near the seaside village of Vathi (www.ceramicartatsonios.gr), are two of the several options available.

Hiking trails: Sifnos has an extended network of hiking trails offering visitors the opportunity to discover treasures accessible only on foot. You could hike all year round but spring and autumn are considered the best seasons due to the mild weather conditions and the vegetation. In summer, especially in July and August, the temperature is too high while during winter you should expect cold weather (rain and wind) and muddy trails. You can find more info about the various routes available here - www.sifnostrails.com.

You could walk the trails alone or follow a guide such as Anna Graikou from Sifnos Hiking to escort you and give you information about the landscape, vegetation and the island itself - www.sifnoshiking.com

Festivals (panigiri): if you ask a local what's an experience not to be missed while visiting Sifnos, they will most probably answer that you should attend at least one local feast (called panigiri in Greek). Most of them are taking place during summertime but there are also a few happening in May and September. Expect to experience praying, singing, dancing and also long, communal tables where participants eat together.

FOOD & DRINK

In Sifnos, food is excellent in most places. From the humble tavern to the award-winning restaurants, you will taste delicious local cuisine. Here are a few recommendations:

To Tsikali, Vathi: the quintessential Greek tavern by the sea serving Sifniot and Greek traditional cuisine since 1983. With your feet in the sand and the kids playing at the beach, enjoy your lunch or dinner in a relaxed atmosphere. No fish on the menu. (Open from Greek Orthodox Easter – middle of October) www.tsikali.com

Lebesis Tavern Chrisopigi: another tavern by the sea with great views of the impressive Chrisopigi monastery. Traditional recipes, quick and friendly service, possibility to swim while your meal is being prepared. (Open from April until the end of October)

Drakakis, Apollonia: in the alleys of Apollonia, the capital of Sifnos, grab a seat and a table at Drakakis, a traditional kafeneio serving delicious mezedes. Best for dinner. Open seasonally. (Open from 1st May – middle of October) www.facebook.com/kafeneioDrakakis



Path To Chrisopigi Monastery

Bostani Restaurant: only open for dinner, the restaurant of Verina Hotel opened in 2022 and serves fine dining with unhindered views of the Aegean. Pick a full moon night and you are in for an experience of a lifetime. (Open from June – the end of September) www.verinahotelsifnos.com/el/bostani-bar-restaurant

Cantina Zero Waste: Chef Giorgos Samoilis and his team have undertaken a huge project emphasizing local, seasonal products while also trying to reach a zero-waste practice. Best for romantic dinners among adults or with older kids. (Open from April – the end of September) www.cantinasifnos.gr

Special thanks to the Municipality of Sifnos for the support and hospitality and to the ferry company “Sea Jets” for the transportation.

(Municipality of Sifnos: www.sifnos.gr/en/sifnos, Sea Jets - www.seajets.com)

During our trip, we stayed at Arhontou rooms & apartments (two-bedroom apartment with sea view) offering great panoramic views and breakfast - www.arhontou-sifnos.gr