

TRAVEL ↻

Greece's Most Touristy Islands Get a Fine Dining Reboot

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In perennial hotspots like Santorini and Mykonos, hotels like the Katikies luxury brand hope their fine dining options will help them stand out.

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Christos Drazos Photography

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At the very moment you're reading this, tens of thousands of people are crowding the beaches, bars, alleys, and clubs of Santorini and Mykonos, the two most famous of Greece's islands.

Thousands more are behind their screens, plotting their visit. It's a daunting reality, and one that risks unpleasantness. Earlier this summer, I was invited by one of the region's hotel groups—[Katikies](#)—to experience these spots as curated by them.

The last time I visited Greece was shortly after its borders reopened. This meant wherever you went felt exclusive. To say I was nervous about the experience in a year when American tourism has become turbocharged would be an understatement.

Upon landing after a flight from Naples, I headed to the first of their properties, [Katikies Garden](#). It's a luxury boutique hotel with only 40 suites housed in a former monastery in Santorini's central town of Fira. The staff is charming and quickly brought me to my rooms, which have been outfitted in a contemporary style rather than the bleached monastic aesthetic so common throughout the island. Many of the rooms come with jet pools, and some of those look out on the sea in classic Santorini fashion. The real luxury of the hotel, though, was its quietness. It's fitting, given its former life, that the hotel has numerous corners and courtyards to find some peace.



The restaurant at Katikies Garden Santorini. Christos Drazos

The central courtyard is where you'll have your breakfast, but it's also home to one of the island's most renowned restaurants, [Selene](#). Open for a whopping 37 years, it was given new life a couple years ago when it came under the auspices of Michelin-starred chef Ettore Botrini. I'll never get bored of the simple but delectable fare one can find at Greek island restaurants, but there's something to be said for having a place where one can go for something elaborate and special. Plus, Yiannis Karakasis, one of the world's "Masters of Wine" oversees the restaurant's cellar and offers a wine tasting that focuses on production from the island's own vineyards. A particular delight was the Anhydrous, a simple but tasty tart, which was made of thinly sliced tomatoes which form a beautiful rose shape.

Facing Santorini's collapsed caldera now brimming with the sparkling Mediterranean is the hotel's ample-sized infinity pool lined with beds. It's where I found myself decompressing on my first morning after a leisurely breakfast started with home made greek pastries and the classic Greek frappé coffee in the courtyard.

It was a busy day ahead—a lunch at a tavern on the Ammoudi port of fish freshly caught. Then we checked out two of the four additional [Katikies](#) properties on Santorini. The group, one of the region's most respected, has three properties in Oia alone, as well as the more relaxed Garden where I was staying.

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But today we headed to the one created for those who want to have a good time—[Chromata](#), found in neighboring Imerovigli. This is, for lack of better word, the “hip” option with a younger crowd and music playing by the pool all day. It has a restaurant, [Koukoumalvic](#), with an incredible view that overlooks the sea, that is a collaboration between Botrini and the longtime Santorini gastronomic icon Nikos Pouliasis. There, in a classic Cycladic atmosphere, I dined on a menu that ranged from a dressed-up silky smooth traditional Santorini fava to more experimental dishes like crayfish served with white chocolate and caviar.

The view of Santorini’s caldera may be spectacular from your hotel, then you haven’t seen its soaring cliffs from a boat while eating fresh seafood and some techno music wafting through the air in the background. [Katikies](#) also has boat charters ranging from a day to overnight stays to traveling between Santorini and Mykonos. It’s really one of the more pleasant ways to see the island, and one that certainly gets you away from crowds.



Christos Drazos Photography

If Santorini is iconic for what you can see, then the island famed for what you can do—namely, partying—is Mykonos. After a couple days in Santorini we went to explore Mykonos with the group’s newest property, [Katikies Mykonos Villas](#). Just under 20 minutes from the main town of Chora, the collection of villas here is a reminder that for many, Mykonos is actually a pleasant vacation.

Overlooking the Elia beach, the villas are in a tamer part of the island, which means that you can start and end your day removed from the crush of club-goers. The villas come with private pools and a fully equipped kitchen, but if you want to stay within the [Katikies](#) family for dining, their property in nearby Chora has one of the island’s handful of upscale restaurants named [Botrini’s Restaurant Mykonos](#). Our dinner that night started with a wild mushroom macaron with accents of hazelnut and five-spice, fresh scallops given some bite with bergamot and truffle. It was followed by a red mullet marinated in kritamo (sea fennel), ouzo, and elderflower.

When wandering the streets of Oia or trying to get in somewhere in Mykonos, the popularity of these islands can put a damper on your day. No matter where you stay, whether with one of the [Katikies](#) properties or elsewhere, it’s worth thinking about the place you stay providing you with a sanctuary of sorts.

And if you want that sanctuary to also include fine dining, well, you now know where to start.



Loïc Cardinal

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