

Mykonos

Mykonos is one of the smallest but also one of the most cosmopolitan islands in Greece. It officially belongs to the state of Greece called Cyclades, which is a group of islands in the Aegean Sea forming a circle around the sacred island of ancient Greece; Delos (1).

Mykonos covers an area of about 85 sq. Klm. And it is surrounded by a coastal line of about 81 klm.

Although the island is very small, it is nowadays very popular and has a great reputation of being the ultimate fun and trendy place of the Aegean Sea. Before the 1950's this island was quite poor and had to depend very much on the sea (fishing/navigation), but during 50's many people started visiting Mykonos as a necessary stop for Delos and soon it became a trend attracting the jet set worldwide; something that changed dramatically the status of the island.

The capital of the island is Mykonos Town which is built on the western part of the island and has a population of about 6000 people, in the winter...but in the summer the population increases dramatically to at least 100 000 daily! For some Mykonos town remains the Saint Tropez of the Greek islands and it is considered the insomniacs paradise.

The setting is memorable since the entire town is completely whitewashed; the houses are all cubical, stereotype of the Cycladic architecture, usually two-storied, brightly whitewashed with lime and ornamented with colorful doors, windows and wooden balconies.

The churches, which in this island are more than 400, are beautifully whitewashed with lime and their domes are colored sky blue, giving the obvious reason why the national colors of Greece are blue and white; depicted on the Greek flag (2).

Everywhere you turn you will see beautiful pink and white oleanders, scarlet hibiscus and fuchsia bougainvilleas climbing up to the balconies and trailing green pepper trees forming a contrast amid the dazzling whiteness. The narrow streets which are paved with flat stones and are outlined with white paint are made even narrower by the many outdoor stone staircases. This creates a scene that will give a great pleasure to anyone who enjoys getting lost (and getting lost in Mykonos is half of the fun of being there). The reason for this deliberate confusing layout was to foil, once, attacking pirates, giving the villagers the chance to escape.

The architecture of their buildings also serves a purpose, first of all, the white color reflects the strong sun rays, especially in the summer months where the thermometer very often shows three digit figures in the Fahrenheit scale. Also this whole group of islands are very dry and have severe water shortage so the cubical shape of the houses are topped with flat terraces in a slight angle giving the chance to collect the rain water in cisterns places in the basements of the houses, to be used later on for purposes such as cleaning or irrigation.

Points of Interest

One of the most important monuments of the island is a church named Paraportiani Church, dedicated to Virgin Mary. Paraportiani Church which recognized as a natural cultural monument, is the most popular and photographed of the 400 churches of the whole island, if not, of the whole Cycladic state. The reason that makes this church so unique is its construction which is an asymmetrical conglomeration of five churches amalgamated into one, with four different styles of architecture, mixing Byzantine, vernacular, traditional and westerns styles.

Another point of interest is an area called **Alefkandra**, a trendy district with many art galleries, chic bars and discos as well as tavernas. This is the location in which the early ship captains built their distinguished houses; all strategically built with their back balconies facing the sea, so they could easily check out everything that was coming in or going out of the port into the sea. Because of the resemblance, today this area is called **Little Venice**. Little Venice is one of the most romantic places of the island for one to watch the sunset. For this reason it is full of coffee shops, stylish bars and restaurants - all very pricey- which during the sunset get as packed as possible.

Overlooking Little Venice one can see, the symbol of Mykonos, the famous windmills. They were once used for grinding purposes (wheat, barley), since at that point there is a very strong wind that blows on the island almost all year round. Presently with their sails removed, they just stand there reminding of the years that passed and also giving character to the location.

The mascot of the island is not to be missed by anyone and this is of course **Petros**; the pelican, left behind in the 50's by a group of migrating pelicans. One can find him either by his nest (few meters away from Paraportiani church) or by the open air fish market, late in the afternoon as the fishing boats return, checking out their catch of the day. Other times you might see him, opening! the back doors of taverns that lead into their kitchen demanding a little fish snack!

Beaches There are beaches for every taste in Mykonos, peaceful, public and isolated, with activities and water sports, with clubs, sandy, with pebbles or rocky. The most famous ones are **Psarou, Agios Stephanos, Platy Gialos and Kalafatis**. There are also beaches **Paranga, Elia and Paradise** in which if you are wearing the smallest bathing suit ever invented, you are considered ... overdressed...and... there is one called Super Paradise!!!

Currency / Shopping The currency is of course the euro; cash and the major credit cards are welcome. Mykonos has quite a lot of shopping souvenir and touristy, the only items that can remind you of this island are the Cycladic art small statues.

Food and Drink A small seafood snack with a shot of ouzo or a glass of wine, in any of the seafront little snack bars, will really make Mykonos memorable. Try *mostra, gavros marinatos, octopus* on the grill and *shrimp* or *mussels saganaki style*. Mykonos also produces local almond sweets, called *amygdalota* and a non alcohol containing drink called *soumada*, they are a bit rare to find nowadays, but worth a try if you like almonds.

(1) Delos

Delos is an island and a sanctuary. It was revered as the birthplace of Apollo and his twin sister Artemis and was the heart of one of the most important civilizations in the Mediterranean Sea; the Cycladic Civilization (3000-1000 BC). Its vast archaeological site has revealed grand temples and the most complete residential quarter surviving from ancient Greece. Situated in the center of the Cycladic group; Delos was not only the spiritual focus of the ancient Greek's ethnic identity, but also a highly prosperous grain port and slave market. For almost 1000 years Delos was the political center of the Aegean and would host every four years the Delian games; the regions greatest festival. To honor the birthplace of Apollo, pilgrims from the surrounding islands and the city-states of the mainland, built great monuments and brought over great gifts and treasures. The population of Delos actually reached 20 000 at the peak of its commercial period.

(2) Greek Flag

Blue and white are the colors of the Greek flag representing sea, sky and the white houses. A cross at the top left corner representing Christianity that has always been closely associated with the country and nine stripes, blue and white; each one representing one syllable of the motivational phrase that led into the revolution for freedom from the Ottoman Turks in 1821 «Ελευθερία ή Θάνατος», "Freedom or Death".