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T'S 7AM AND I'M FLOATING ON MY BACK in the clear waters of the Aegean sea at Elia beach on Mykonos – an island in the Cyclades group. The rocky escarpment that overlooks this pebble-stoned stretch is dotted with white, lime-washed buildings that make up a number of hotel and villa buildings within the Myconian Hotels & Resorts collection. The early morning sun is forming pockets of pale pink clouds in the sky above the cobalt blue sea; roosters have crowed their morning greeting; and a striped Greek flag flaps in the breeze above a dome-topped chapel. I am buoyed by the salty water, staring upwards as the morning sun rises over the cliff and winks down at me. I take in the solitude before being joined by a couple; and as the first jet-ski rider of the day fires up, I'm drying off and heading back up the hill to a decadent breakfast, served with champagne, on the terrace of the Myconian Villa Collection.

Mykonos is one of the fastest-growing islands in all of Europe. Long known for its vibrant party scene, the idyllic destination is one of contrasts with much to offer for travellers. Last year, Qatar Airways introduced five weekly seasonal flights direct to the island from its hub in Doha in the Middle East, allowing Australian passengers a simpler route than flying via the UK or Europe.

The island's landmark traditional windmills are perched on a hill in the main town of Chora, overlooking Little Venice beach which swells with people when the sun goes down. I am here to



#MYKONOS #GREEKISLANDS

## Cyclades calling

The Greek island of Mykonos in the Cyclades group of islands has layers that are unveiled beyond its stunning shores, in the heart of its winding laneways.

*By Katrina Holden*

© MYCONIAN VILLA COLLECTION



LEFT: Cabbanes restaurant at Myconian Villa Collection.  
 BOTTOM LEFT: Evening dining at Pavilion restaurant at Myconian Utopia.

Mykonos also cultivates a thriving arts scene with a number of contemporary galleries throughout the island, many built more than 350 years ago using ancient building materials. In 2018, the island introduced the annual Mykonos Arts Festival, to be held each summer. On a walking tour, our guide Amaryllis Grypari shows us through a discrete entrance to one of the island's best-kept secrets – 'Cine Mando'. This outdoor cinema, café and bar is where locals gather to watch the latest blockbusters underneath the skies on plastic white chairs, and dine in an enormous tree-shaded courtyard.

I'm staying at the über-chic, five-star Myconian Villa Collection, part of the family-owned Myconian Collection group of nine hotels and resorts which are located in different parts of the island. From the airport, I'm whisked away in a luxurious white Mercedes van and driven through the winding roads, steep barren hillsides and narrow streets before arriving at my hotel, where a vintage Bentley Corniche is permanently posing like a glamour puss in the driveway. It's hard to divert my eyes from the elevated views over Elia beach, but staff member Katerina approaches, appearing to almost float like a Grecian goddesses in her uniform – an elegant, floor-length black dress. It's apparent that this hotel, the only one in Greece to be awarded 'Legend Collection' status as a member of Preferred Hotels & Resorts, has art and design running through its white-hot core. A gallery by renowned Artion Galleries, based in Geneva and Athens, is positioned in the lobby with a range of eclectic artworks available for purchase. The reception desk is a large sculptured piece of timber while conical-shaped pendants hang low.

From my room's balcony, I can see more white-washed buildings and hotel rooms that form part of the Myconian Collection, nestled into the hillside. Out front, the waters of the Aegean are glistening, rippled by the motion of the occasional yacht or jet-ski breaking its stillness; directly below, I spot the edge of my hotel's infinity pool.

view one of the most romantic (and most photographed) sunsets in the world. The narrow and winding streets of Chora reveal the quintessential, postcard-worthy charm of the Greek islands – with white-washed pebble-stoned paved laneways; vivid blue and red doors and shutters; blazing pink bougainvillea; family chapels (there's more than 1000 on the island); and cats snoozing in doorways. The government very wisely enforced a law in the 1930s that all structures on the island must be built in the traditional shape and style. They had to be white-washed, and neon signs were

completely banned. This visionary law has preserved the authentic appeal of Mykonos and has retained its allure – not only in the old town but throughout the entire island. There are no high-rise, international-chain hotels anywhere to be seen. Amid the laneways of houses, rental apartments and accommodation is a mix of high-end, artisanal and souvenir shops. A Louis Vuitton store appears on the same street as a souvenir shop selling just about any object you can imagine decorated with the Greek 'evil-eye' symbol, said to ward off and protect against negative energy.



1. View over Platis Gialos beach from Myconian Ambassador; 2. Fresh seafood is the catch of the day; 3. Waterfront restaurants in Chora's narrow laneways; 4. The colours of old-town Chora; 5. Rooms at Myconian Villa Collection; 6. Reception area at Myconian Villa Collection; 7. A guest walks to a nearby beach; 8. Vintage Bentley Corniche in the driveway at Myconian Villa Collection; 9. Octopus at Efisia, a Relais & Chateaux restaurant.



ABOVE: Black velvet daybeds by the infinity pool at Myconian Villa Collection.

## The waters of the Aegean are glistening, rippled by the motion of the occasional yacht

Opening its doors to visitors for more than 40 years, the Myconian Collection was founded in 1979 by George Daktylides and his wife Eleftheria when they opened their first hotel closer to town, now named Kyma. Today the business is run by the pair's four sons – Panos, Markos, Vangelis and Marios Daktylides – although word has it that George still does weekly rounds on the island with his truck loaded with farm eggs, local lamb, goats meat and Eleftheria's home-made cheeses and cakes.

At Myconian Villa Collection, the infinity pool inevitably takes centre stage. Guests of all ages, including families with young children, are chilling on black and baby pink velvet day lounges, mesmerised by the views of mountain and sea, funky music, and food and drinks served from the Infinity Pool Bar & Restaurant.

Within the collection, some of the hotels are members of Small Luxury Hotels of the World, Design Hotels, Relais & Chateaux, Leading Hotels of the World and Preferred Hotels & Resorts. Each has its own distinct style, personality and decor but a thread of design, relaxed luxury and generous hospitality weaves throughout each one. Each location has its own advantages – at Mykonos town, Korali, Kyma and Naia are just a 10-minute walk from the heart of Chora town, and you can see the windmills in the distance; the Myconian Ambassador hotel is only a three-minute

flat stroll from the hip Platis Gialos beach with its waterfront bars and restaurants; while the Elia beach properties of Avaton, Imperial, Royal, Utopia and the Villa Collection are all tucked away with a true sense of being away from the bustle, but only a 20-minute bus ride from town.

I start each day at Nouveau restaurant, feasting on home-made Greek tarts, pastries and fresh yoghurt as I take in the impossibly pretty views over Elia. Guests at any of the group's hotels can dine seamlessly at the sister properties (charging back to your room) – and with three Relais & Chateaux restaurants in its portfolio, an exceptional meal is virtually guaranteed. At Elia, Pavilion restaurant at Myconian Utopia is an elegant yet relaxed affair. The space is decorated with natural materials – centrepiece vases are covered in driftwood; small white ceramic farm animals line the cornices; and wines are served in some of the funkiest glassware I've ever seen by Sempre. A live saxophonist plays among the diners as the sun is setting over the Aegean and the internal lights of Utopia's pool start to flicker. I try my first octopus since arriving on the island and as I savour the soft and fleshy tentacles with a delicate charred flavour, balanced by fresh bursts from tiny red peppers, I'm aware I may well be spoiled if I attempt another octopus dish elsewhere on the island. At Myconian Kyma hotel, Noa Greek restaurant serves a

crunchy fried calamari with white lemon sauce and capers that melts in the mouth, followed by traditional walnut cake. Poolside at Myconian Ambassador, bring your sunnies as you dine at another Relais & Chateaux restaurant, Efisia. Here, the lamb and pork has been reared by the group's founder himself, George Daktylides; and salt is sourced from nearby Delos island.

A trip to Mykonos is not complete without a visit to Delos, one of the largest archaeological sites in the world and UNESCO World Heritage-listed. Myconian Collection staff can organise your visit by private luxury yacht charter where you will be guided throughout the ruins and learn more about the mythological birth place of ancient Greek gods Apollo and Artemis. My guide invited our small group to sit in silence on the front row of 2,300-year-old theatre seats, soaking in the sacred atmosphere and imagining life here in ancient Greek times.

I return from Delos back to the modern world at Mykonos, arriving at Myconian Villa Collection in the early evening. The moon is full and heavy in the sky, casting a pathway of light stretching across the water like carpet. Stars are flickering and I can hear the laughter of guests at restaurants, and the chinking of glasses. There's a little bit of magic in Mykonos. 🌃

### 📍 TRAVEL FACTS

**GETTING THERE**  
Qatar Airways flies daily to Doha from Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth. From Doha, Qatar Airways operates seasonally only (from late-May to end of September) with five weekly flights to Mykonos Island National Airport, with an average flight time of 4 hours and 25 minutes.  
[qatarairways.com](http://qatarairways.com)

**STAYING THERE**  
**Myconian Villa Collection**  
The Myconian Collection Hotels & Resorts is a local family-owned group of nine luxury hotels on Mykonos, open for season bookings during May to October each year. Our writer stayed at Myconian Villa Collection at Elia beach. Rates start from €295 (about A\$474), per room per night.  
[myconiancollection.gr](http://myconiancollection.gr)



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