

**Greece is now more popular than ever, with breathtaking views, traditional cuisine and perhaps the best nightlife in the Mediterranean; it's no wonder the Grecian charm is beguiling us all. Yet Greece doesn't just consist of Athens and Mykonos—there are thousands of Greek Islands, and each has their own way of enchanting those who visit. Island-hopping is a way of exploring all Greek has to offer at your own leisure and truly allows you to have an authentic Greek experience. The below itinerary takes you from Athens to Santorini to discover Greece's lesser known yet equally beautiful islands...**

A flight into Athens is where we begin as it is the springboard for exploring the Greek Islands. However, it's necessary to take the time to absorb Athens' history, architecture and atmosphere. The Parthenon is a must-see and Syntagma Square is where to spend your time in the quaint cafés and restaurants, Paka, also known as the 'Neighbourhood of the Gods' is just that, walking through the beautiful narrow streets, it's easy to get lost in its history but also literally get lost, which is all part of the charm.

A 20-minute drive from Athens is Piraeus, the main port of Athens. The port is surrounded by a mix of cargo ships, cruise ships and yachts and shows the importance and connection that Greece has with the sea. On Piraeus' Coast there are restaurants, taverns and bars to immerse yourself in the city life before embarking on our journey to the Aegean Islands.

Just two and a half hours after departing Piraeus by ferry you can find yourself on one of the Cyclades' most famous islands: Serifos. This destination is laidback and incredibly low-key but at the same time is stylish and its dramatic landscape makes this island irresistible. With no airport you can near enough guarantee one of its 72 beaches with crystal clear water to yourself. Serifos is quaint, with nothing commercial, no boutiques or clubs or big restaurants, it's hard to escape the charm. Serifos has long been a secret to the Athenians, until now.

After convincing yourself to leave the secluded serenity of Serifos it will definitely be worth the

ATHENS



PIREAEUS



SERIFOS



# GREEK ISLAND



SANTORINI



SIFNOS



FOLEGANDROS

four-hour ferry to Sifnos. Known as the cradle of Greek cooking, immersing yourself in the cuisine is easy, with tavernas and quaint restaurants trying local specialities is a highlight in itself. Surrounded by sandy beaches and dotted with chic hotels and glorious swimming spots, Sifnos has it all. Hiring a boat to explore hidden beaches, rock pools and the bay of Fakidia is a must. Sifnos is home to the iconic church of the seven martyrs, it's blue and white architecture on secluded tip of the island is a staple of Greek lifestyle. It's capital Apollonia is no Mykonos but it is full of nightlife and ouzo but with a more laid back approach.

An hour and 15 minute ferry will take you to Folegandros. With just over 700 inhabitants, no airport and no cruise ships, this island is able to captivate you instantly with its simplicity and untouched surroundings. The luminous blue water of the Aegean Sea, pebbly beaches, sheer drop cliffs and tamarisk trees encapsulate the islands old world charm. A visit to Ano Meria town is as though you have stepped back in time, the ancient ruins on top of a hill allows you to take in the endless views. Authentic, fresh and local cuisine is the pinnacle of what Folegandros holds secret. It's distinctive and traditional family atmosphere and its back way of life is a lesson to take with you when you leave.

No Greek island hopping itinerary would be complete without a stop at the infamous Santorini. An hour and a half ferry from Folegandros, Santorini has glossed the classic Greek experience with a cosmopolitan twist. Devastated by a volcanic eruption in the 16th century BC, this crescent shaped island has come a long way. With social media being awash with views of its caldera, infinity pools and white and blue buildings it has reinvented itself as potentially the most romantic getaway in Greece. Yet stunning views and luxury cave hotels aren't all this island has to give. Black, red and white lava pebble beaches are a reminder the island is still an active volcano, with ruins on the south of the island, small peaceful villages, vast vineyards all add to its devastating beauty. Fira is busy with the hustle and bustle of those looking for a good time and those on cruise ships but the unique atmosphere and top cuisine is worth it. Oia is the place to be and stay to capture the moment of sunset from an infinity pool which feels as though it spills over into the abyss. ■

# HOPPING

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