

A new touch of class on Mykonos

By Heather Timmons

MYKONOS, Greece

It is well after midnight on a weekend night in late June, and the narrow, high sidewalk that hugs Mykonos's harbor is crammed with tourists clutching pricey drinks capped by giant fruit kabobs. Fueled by alcohol or perhaps just inspired by the warm moonlit night, one young couple leaps from the crowded walkway into the water below, whooping. They spend several minutes struggling to gain their footing and drag themselves out of the ocean, the woman's white skirt now transparent. Most of the crowd above pays no attention.

Mykonos, a rocky, scrub-strewn outcropping in the middle of the Aegean Sea, enjoys a bit of a tangled reputation. It's one of the most popular, and most expensive, of the Greek islands, even though it can be baked by the sun or raked by wind in the summer. But that popularity — augmented by the steady stream of backpackers, chubbies, gay men, college kids and nudists who have come ashore in the past few decades — has tended to put off travelers who feel they have put their spring break years behind them and are not interested in a shopping in a village where stores specializing in condoms or offering tattoos postle up against the Patisserie boutiques.

In recent years, though, the island has undergone a bit of a makeover. Many of the older hotels have been recently revamped to reflect a clean-lined, cool aesthetic, and many have white drapes that flow seductively in the breeze. New boutique hotels and restaurants concentrate on simplicity, and unusual, arty details, and many have DJs whose mandate is to create a background vibe rather than keep time for gyrating hips.

If this island has one place that represents the "new" Mykonos (while not entirely discarding all remnants of the "old") it is the Belvedere Hotel, an imposing well-gated complex perched halfway up a hill overlooking the town of Mykonos (also known as Chora) — a flower-covered jumble of white, cubed buildings and meandering, cobble streets that practically sweats with crowds in July and August.

The Belvedere's key attraction is its outdoor restaurant, Matsuhisa, one more international outpost of the restaurateur Nobuyuki Matsuhisa. Sushi in Mykonos? As is the case with nearly anything else here, the right answer is "They, why not?" Nearly all of the fish is flown in, not from local waters.

The Belvedere's multi-platformed poolside bar area is thick with bougainvillea and greenery, with panoramic views of the harbor, windbreakers, draped couches and giant beds for lounging. During a recent visit, three men in khaki shorts smoked cigars on three side-by-side beds, while nearby a group of fresh-faced women in strappy dresses sipped expensive fresh fruit daiquiris.

The beautiful people also can be found at the Sea Satin restaurant. (In fact, on a recent night, a table of what could easily have been 10 members of Gisele Bündchen's extended family dined in one corner.)

On the far side of the harbor, under Mykonos's trademark windmills, and with candle-lit tables set just near the water's edge, the restaurant is a level-elike setting for dinner, although the crowd can sometimes be jarring. On one evening, a couple in their 30s split a huge, expensive lobster — the man carrying on a cellphone conversation for most of the time. Later, a group of Greek men and women in their 20s — the women wrapped in catwalk-worthy flyover summer gear — swayed drunkenly in their seats over a table strewn with empty wine bottles.

Mykonos has a clock all its own that



Photographs by Stefan Welter/Pictaris for The New York Times



Mykonos, a rocky, scrub-strewn outcropping in the middle of the Aegean Sea, has undergone a bit of a makeover in recent years. New boutique hotels and restaurants concentrate on simplicity and unusual, arty details. At left, houses along the Aioi kamari Bay. Above, the Sea Satin restaurant, with candle-lit tables set just near the water's edge, can be either a subdued or a very lively setting.



The Belvedere Hotel, above — with its multi-platformed poolside bar, giant beds for lounging and panoramic views of the harbor — represents the "new" Mykonos. The newly restored Ostraco Suites, right, has gorgeous duplex suites and a melon-poolside bar.

most visitors quickly respect. If you're sitting down to an evening meal at 10 or later and topping that with several hours of dancing or just a walk through the streets of Chora, you're unlikely to spring out of bed early in the morning. Thus, crowds don't start showing up at Mykonos's main beaches until the late morning, or even the early afternoon.

On their own, Mykonos's beaches don't do much to explain the island's popularity. The water surrounding Mykonos is a crystal-clear aquamarine, and while the beaches themselves are starkly beautiful, they are also narrow or crowded, occasionally rocky and generally reached only by catered, dusty, twisting roads or by boat.

Paradise Beach is famous outside Mykonos for being one of the island's wilder spots (which is saying a lot) but seems more a study in well-ordered, well-marketed hedonism. A simple half-circle carpeted with lines of beach chairs and umbrellas, it draws hardbodies — male and female and gay and straight — with deep tans. It also has its share of topless women, shaggy beach-bum guys and the occasional family, all sunning

themselves to dance hits pumped out by the restaurants that ring the beach.

If you tire of the crowds or the hedonism on tap at Paradise Beach, or its neighbor, the enthusiastically named, and very gay, Super Paradise Beach, there are plenty of smaller ones to escape to, though they'll often require a car or scooter. It's worth noting that Mykonos's roads run the gamut from well-paved highways to narrow goat trails.

One of the most underused beaches on the island is Agios Sostis, just a few miles northeast of Chora. The wide beach is of pale sand, sometimes windy in the summer (and with a relentless sun, but without any of the music or beach chairs or preening sun worshippers of the Paradise beaches. The strange mooncave hills of Mykonos rise above it, sprinkled with white cubed houses. A small cove on the north end provides all the shelter you need from the wind and sun and feels a continent away from the tanned, self-conscious masses.

GETTING THERE From Athens, Aegean Air and Olympic Air each have at least

one flight a day to Mykonos in the high season (July and August). Ferries, hydrofoils and catamarans run from Athens to Mykonos and the two to six hours. See Blue Star Ferries, www.bluestarferries.com.

WHERE TO STAY The Belvedere Hotel, (30-2289) 025 122, www.belvederehotel.com, has rooms located in white with marble baths. Standard sea-view rooms are €370 a night, or \$460, through mid-September.

On the waterfront is the Mykonos Theoxenia, (30-2289) 022 230, www.mykonostheoxenia.com, which recently reopened after renovation with a '60s lounge feel. Doubles with a sea view start at €345 a night through early September.

Less expensive and more attractive is the Ostraco Suites, (30-2289) 023 396, www.ostraco.com, a 10-minute walk from town. The newly restored hotel has gorgeous duplex suites, a melon poolside bar and friendly staff. Suites start at €330 in the high season.

The Harmony, (30-2289) 028 980, www.harmonyhotel.com, a spotlessly renovated hotel on the edge of Chora, is



also stylish and quiet. There is a small pool, and most rooms have a view of the harbor. Double suites start at €285 until the end of August.

Most hotel prices drop sharply in September and stay low until June.

WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK Travelers tired of expensive drinks or "style bars" could do no better on Mykonos than Kiki's Place, a small outdoor restaurant at the top of a hill on the edge of Agios Sostis, shaded by a grove of branches from the three trees growing through the floor. Patience helps here, as there is typically a long line of patrons waiting for a table at lunchtime. There is no

telephone; go to Agios Sostis beach and ask. Lunch for two is about €49.

Marmacas, (30-2289) 026 120, a new restaurant in Chora, mixes style and simplicity without an exorbitant price tag. Diners eat classic Greek food in a tree-covered yard. Dinner for two with a bottle of wine was about €109.

Kastrin, (30-2289) 022 169, said to be a favorite of Aristotle Onassis, seems to emphasize cost over quality. Frozen Bellinis garnished with rose petals and built made for a promising start, but the calamari was insipid and the bill for dinner for two with a moderately priced bottle of wine was more than €200.

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Traveler's forecast

High-low temperatures, in degrees Celsius and expected conditions

	C	F	W
C	Cloudy	Sh	Showers
H	Hazy	S	Sun
R	Rain	Sh	Sh
S	Partly cloudy	SS	Snow showers
PC	Partly cloudy	R	Thunderstorms
V	Var	W	Windy

	Monday	Tuesday
Athens	43/26	40/21
Athens	26/18	24/18
Beijing	30/25	26/21
Beijing	30/25	26/21
Beijing	30/25	26/21
Beijing	30/25	26/21
Beijing	30/25	26/21
Beijing	30/25	26/21



INTERNATIONAL TRAVELER UPDATE

EDINBURGH Thousands open Fringe

Thousands of actors, comedians, musicians and mime descended on the Scottish capital Sunday for the opening of the Edinburgh Fringe — the world's largest arts festival and, arguably, the most democratic.

At the Fringe, anyone can register and put on a show, resulting in a diverse program whose 1,800 shows

Hotel Elnau, near the mountain resort of Garmisch-Partenkirchen, broke out early Sunday. Hundreds of firefighters responded, some from Austria.

The evacuated guests were given shelter in a nearby military barracks, the police said. (AP)

CORFU, Greece

Greecians are making a comeback in

newspapers Eleftherotypia and Eleftheros Typos. According to a law passed in 2001 after the sinking in 2000 of a 34-year-old ship, which caused 80 deaths, a ferryboat must be put out of service after 30 years, meaning about half of the ferries in Greece, or 38 boats, must be replaced by 2008.

MADRID: An Air Madrid airliner

bound for Lima left Madrid after a 20-

(AFP)