

## NEXT STOP MYKONOS

## A Swinging Aegean Isle Now Attracts the Grown-Ups

By HEATHER TIMMONS

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 leap 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 wom-

*Boutique hotels and chic restaurants are helping to redefine Mykonos.*

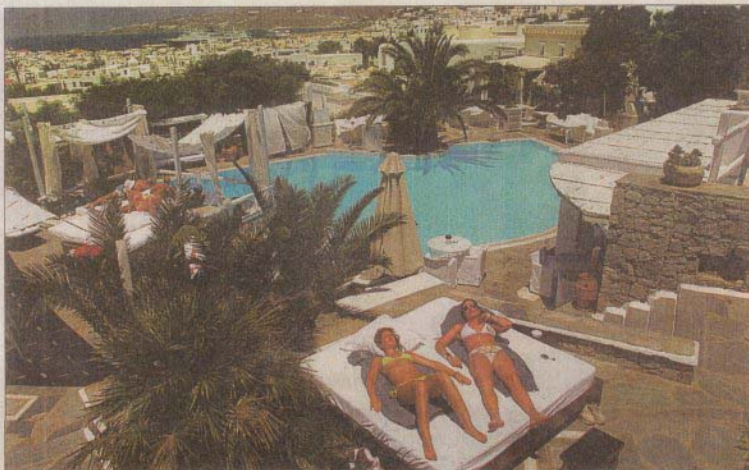
an's white skirt now translucent. Most of the crowd above pays no attention.

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 Isles, 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 hedonists, clubbers, 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 tattoo jostle up against the Patek Philippe boutique.

In recent years, though, the island has undergone bit of a makeover. Many of the older hotels have been recently revamped to reflect a clean-lined, cool aesthetic, strewn with white drapes that flow seductively in the breeze. New boutique hotels and restaurants concentrate on simplicity, and unusual, art details, and many have D.J.'s 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 imposingly 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 out-



Photographs by Stefan Wotter/Polaris for The New York Times

door 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 "Hey, why not?" Nearly all of the fish is flown in, not from local waters.

The Belvedere's multiplatformed pool-side bar area is thick with bougainvillea and greenery, with panoramic views of the harbor, windscreens, 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. An aside: When exactly did sitting beds become something glamorous to do in public?

The beautiful people can also 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-light tables set just near the water's edge, the restaurant is a jewel-like setting for dinner, although the crowd can sometimes be jarring. On one evening, a couple in their 30's split a huge lobster that must have cost at least \$110 — the man carrying on a cellphone conversation for most of the time. Later, a group of Greek men and women in their 20's — the women wrapped in catwalk-



worthy floppy summer gear — swayed drunkenly in their seats over a table strewn with empty wine bottles.

Mykonos has a clock all its own that most visitors quickly respect. If you're sitting down to an evening meal at 10 or later (and, really, no one eats earlier, you know), 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 cratered, 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 the type of tans last seen in America in those Bain de Soleil ads from the



ABOVE Dancing at Sea Satin. LEFT The Belvedere Hotel, known for its restaurant, also attracts sunbathers. BELOW LEFT An islander washes his boat.



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1980's. It also has its share of topless women, shaggy beach-bum guys and the occasional family, all sunning themselves to dances hits pumped out by the restaurants that ring the beach.

The mix can be jarring. One early afternoon, we watched, feigning nonchalance, as a middle-aged topless woman with obviously, and substantially, augmented breasts put down her cigarette to apply sunscreen to her chubbly 10-year-old son. Nearby, men in Dolce & Gabbana short shorts preened near tattoo-covered companions who were studiously applying sunscreen to their six-pack abs.

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 and, in some cases, steely nerves and an appreciation for getting lost. 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 Sotir, just a few miles north of Chora, still a pleasantly harrowing drive. 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 moonscape 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.

## FOOD, LODGING AND TRANSPORTATION IN THE GREEK ISLANDS

## 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, Hydroflote and catamarans run from Athens to Mykonos, and take two to six hours. See Blue Star Ferries, [www.bluestarferries.com](http://www.bluestarferries.com).

## WHERE TO STAY

The Belvedere Hotel, (30-2285) 025 122, [www.belvederehotel.com](http://www.belvederehotel.com), has rooms decorated in white with marble baths. Standard sea-view rooms are \$460 a night, at \$120 to the euro, through mid-September. On the waterfront is the Mykonos Thexenia, (30-2289) 022 236, [www.mykonosthexas.com](http://www.mykonosthexas.com), which recently reopened after renovations with a 60's lounge feel. Doubles with a sea view start at \$423 a night through early September. Less expensive and more attractive is

the Ostraco Suites, (30-2289) 023 396, [www.ostraco.gr](http://www.ostraco.gr), a 10-minute walk from town. The newly restored hotel has gorgeous duplex suites, a mellow poolside bar and friendly staff. Suites start at \$408 in the high season.

The Harmony, (30-2289) 028 980, [www.harmonyhotel.gr](http://www.harmonyhotel.gr), 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 rooms start at \$245 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 Sotir, shaded by a canopy of

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