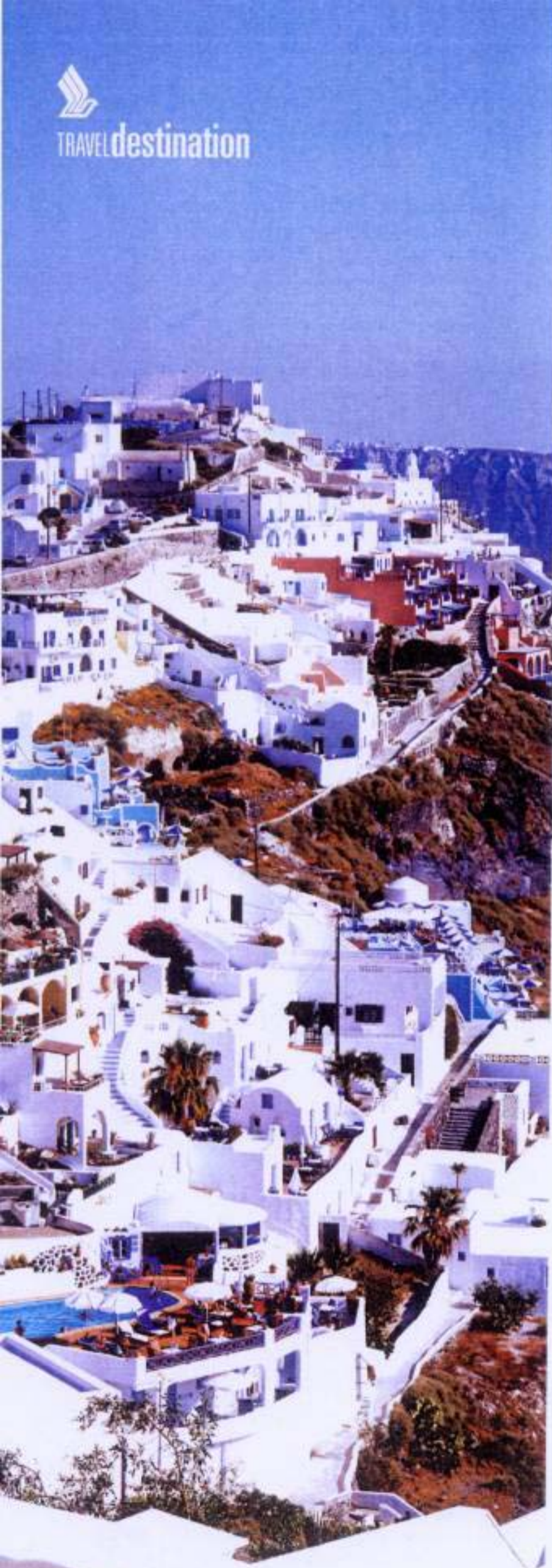


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GREEK ISLANDS
A WINDOW TO PARADISE


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special holidays, and the steamed Cretan pilaf, grilled cuttlefish or spiny sea urchin that the locals just can't do without.

In the marketplace of the town of Hania, the greengrocers lay out piles of produce: prickly pears, avocados, tomatoes and oranges from the hothouses of its valleys – a radiant display that only adds to the vibrancy of this small Cretan town.

Food is just one of the major draws for visitors to Mykonos in the Northern Cyclades. For years, jet setters and wealthy Greeks flooded in to spend the summers on this wild and rocky island just 85 sq km in size where the unparalleled shopping was almost as good as the partying.

Hugging the main town's winding alleys are the closely packed, whitewashed homes, sitting like stacks of sugar cubes. Unlike most Greek harbour towns, the island capital, Hora, was not built in an amphitheatre style but rambles, higgledy-piggledy down the hills in blocks.

Hora's pretty waterfront district of Little Venice is packed with restaurants and tiny cafés perched right on the edge of the lapping ocean, typically serving pink octopus or the local grilled swordfish, whose soft flesh and salty taste come from the strong currents and salty waters it swims in.

Mykonos is also unique in that it has some of the best international eateries in Greece, such as the well-loved Mansion Stoupa, built in 1850. The location is shared with the glamorous boutique Belvedere hotel, to which the restaurant now belongs.

In summer, well-heeled diners flock to the mansion's fabled Matsuhita Mykonos restaurant which, unusually, serves Japanese-influenced cuisine courtesy of wunderchef Mark Edwards, of London's famous Nobu.

This exemplifies Mykonos' appeal to global visitors from all corners, who converge on the island for long summer nights spent partying on the beach or dancing until dawn in the its cosmopolitan clubs.

Those keen on tranquility can sneak off to visit the ruins on the sacred island of Delos, a few kilometres away across the strait.

The uninhabited isle is famous for its monuments: A row of wonderful stone lions, pristine mosaics, and many temples dedicated to Apollo, the God of the Sun, who is supposed to have been born here.

Left: White houses, like stacks of sugar cubes, cling to the cliffs of Santorini. Facing page from top: waves lap at the shore of a fishing village in Mykonos; the sacred island of Delos is famous for its pristine mosaics.