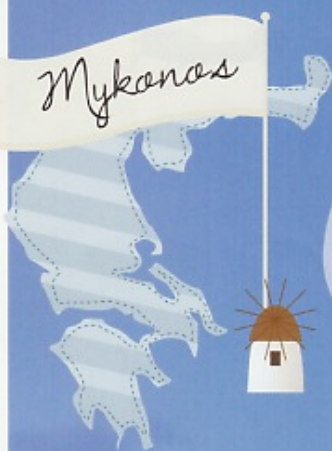




Mykonos



# Island of the *Winds*

Mykonos may only take up 33 square miles of the Aegean Sea but it's certainly made its mark; *ANNABEL HARRISON* retreats to luxury resort Santa Marina to soak up the sunshine and get into the fun-loving spirit of this little Greek gem





THE SUN SHINES for up to 300 days a year in Mykonos. This is reason enough to visit for me but when one adds in the fact that residents are required by local law to paint every building white, I'm sold. I can't imagine anything prettier than a sun-drenched island, fringed with the vivid turquoise of the Aegean and cocooned by cerulean sky, speckled with icing sugar white dwellings. In fact, I've never wished for a longer transfer before but when we've driven the ten short minutes it takes to reach Santa Marina from the airport, I can't take it all in quickly enough; it's white, white, bright blue and white, as far as the eye can see, and crosses big and small stand proudly above the buildings, scattered over the slopes in little clusters.

The wind-whipped island may be famed for its (heaven sent) breezy and blustery climate but Santa Marina, which takes its name from a nearby chapel, is nestled safely within the sheltered Ornos Bay, home to a handful of small

local restaurants and taverns. On an island where stylish masses flock to the most popular beaches for cocktail dancing and people-watching, and which is known for being an unbeatable place to stay up dancing and go to sleep as the sun rises, Santa Marina is somewhat of a haven. That's not to say it doesn't know how to party like the best of them, as I'm sure summer scenes will testify, but it offers the luxuries of privacy and space, which are not as freely found elsewhere on Mykonos.

Let's start with the beach; this is very important. Santa Marina is one of the only hotels in Europe to have a private beach (150 metres of it), right in front of the hotel. Guests can splash straight from their sun loungers into the sea and luxury







► yacht owners can moor in the bay all

day without being disturbed (which I'm told they do, very happily). Speed boats and tenders are on hand if you feel like a day trip to another beach. The entrance and expansive grounds – all 20 acres of them – are private too, and from almost every spot, one is dazzled by a 180 degree, picture-perfect view of the sun-dappled sea, the bay of Ornos and shadowy shapes in the distance (the islands of Naxos and Paros). In fact, it's what the panoramic setting on your camera was designed for.

The beach is buzzy and busy during the day, with great music and atmosphere (more than half of guests are repeat visitors, which adds a really friendly vibe), but if you yearn for a little more sunbathing space, head upwards. The resort, established in 1982, is made up of five separate accommodation areas built into the land that slopes down to the sea and over the years these have been connected

and homogenised. The lovely island-white theme continues, complemented by stone walls and tunnels. There are two pools flanked by individual sunbeds and heavenly double wicker loungers, a tiny church named after St George, floodlit tennis courts, the Lotus Spa and a kids' playground (its popularity proved by the constant stream of kids rushing in and out of it). A kiosk next to the spa sells useful things such as chilled drinks, lilos and sunscreen, while a little boutique sells luxury brands synonymous with a stylish summer, including Chloé, Melissa Odabash and Vilebrequin.

## Supper at Bayview restaurant blows me away and that's before I've even tried the food

What's most exciting this year is that, following an extensive renovation, most of the rooms (89 of them) and communal areas have been revamped and are oh-so-chic in a typically Mykonian way. The Superior rooms, Deluxe rooms and Seaview Suites boast a white or black scheme, comprising expanses of wicker, sea-themed iconography (silver fish and framed white coral), smart suitcase-inspired bedside tables and bathrooms in cool cream with silver accents and housing statement sinks made from petrified wood. The air conditioning and heavy cream curtains mean that it's tempting to lie in until lunchtime but I'd urge you to get up for the buffet breakfast, 8-11am, at the Colonial Restaurant (which does lunch too). The fresh fruit is particularly delicious.







However, it's supper at Bayview Beach Restaurant & Bar which blows me away and that's before I've even tried the food. It winds its way along the length of half the beach, backed by stone walls, canopied by a white and wooden-beamed ceiling and separated (just) from the beach and its beautiful view by unobtrusive glass panels. Beautiful Indonesian-style lanterns hang above the bar and orchids (white, of course) in silver champagne buckets sit on the counter, as well as on each table. Huge vases of palm leaves sway in the breeze and stresses melt away as, glass in hand, I contemplate the menu. It's seafood-tastic and Bayview even has its own sushi station. You must try the shrimp tempura with wasabi, and both the sea urchin and bass are fresh and mouth-watering. The pasta is also excellent (be prepared for a big, hearty portion), as is the pavlova and berry pudding.

We are eating next to a family and it exemplifies how easily couples or friends can coexist here with lively kids; we are enchanted by one of the little girls happily whirling on the spot to the DJ's music and we have noticed charming owner Christiana's well-behaved children flitting around the resort. Kids and adults alike will enjoy going into Mykonos town for a sunset drink and supper too; it's a microcosm of the island's most lovely aspects, with little streets winding through white-washed buildings via tiny restaurants and boutiques selling everything from high-end swimsuits to fringed and frilly children's dresses. However, we end up on our last night

back in Bayview because we like it so much.

When foodie and sunshine indulgence becomes too much, head to the Lotus Spa for one of its Timeless Treatments; I opt for a 60-minute Sports Massage (€95). The best way of describing therapist Tina's technique is that it feels as though she can see beneath my skin, so spot on is she in targeting knots and kneading my sore spots. Heavenly. Face, Body and Signature Rituals treatments (such as Bio Rhythms Jet Lag Balance) come courtesy of organic brand ILA and Le Spa Phytomer, from France, has a line of treatments with natural products that combine the spirit and values of the sea, including Golden Veil Lifting and the Monoi Tahitian Ritual. Also on offer are manicures and waxing for those keen on presenting in perfection before a Mykonian night out.

During peak season BA has two flights a week to Mykonos, each taking less than three and a half hours. I don't know about you but I think that this provides yet another very good reason to return for a mini-break. Friends, if our British summer is as dismal as it sometimes is, you'll know where to find me. ■

*Santa Marina Resort & Villas, Mykonos is open until 6 October 2014. Stay 7 nights from £1,315pp in a Superior Room including breakfast, return flights from London Heathrow with British Airways and private transfers; 0161 492 1357 / carrier.co.uk [santa-marina.gr](http://santa-marina.gr)*

