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Seez Travel arranged a private guided tour of the Acropolis for our group. I am a firm believer that having a private guide makes all the difference in your understanding and enjoyment of a new destination and the landmarks within it. Our guide provided insight into the past and present of the city, excellent commentary of the Acropolis visit and then proceeded to walk through the city to see and understand the areas for us to explore later on our own. Plaka is the oldest district in Athens, built at the foothill of the Acropolis with picturesque houses and mainly pedestrian streets that are perfect for strolling, shopping and enjoying great meals at tavernas/restaurants. This is where our "yamas" began.

Our WanderLuxe hotels in Athens are the sister properties **The Grand Bretagne** and **King George** that sit side by side and share some amenities in the best location of the city for visitors being next to parliament and a short walk to the Plaka. The Grand Bretagne has 300 rooms and is old world elegant. This was the first ever 5-star hotel in the city in 1874 and continues to be the grand dame of Athens with an expansive spa, multiple dining options, a rooftop pool, and award-winning butler service. Locals and tourists alike will enjoy coffee in the lobby restaurant, drinks at one of the most Instagrammable bars in the world, cigars in the new cigar lounge or a wine tasting with the sommelier. Our group enjoyed a Greek wine masterclass that is currently offered on Thursdays from 6-7pm for 45 euro per person in wine library. They also offer "Meet the Sommelier" Friday – Wednesday from 5-6pm for 5 euros per glass. These tastings can be arranged in advance through the concierge. With so much to do and not enough time in this visit, I have noted that when I return, I must do the water journey in the spa that is free of charge for all hotel guests.

With only 100 rooms, King George has more of a boutique feel and low-key vibe. Celebrities and high-profile guests enjoy the discrete nature of this property. The King George has the best penthouse in Athens with a huge rooftop that includes a private pool and stunning views of the Acropolis. The hotel's rooms are fresh, light and bright. Guests staying at the King George have access to all amenities at Grand Bretagne, except for the outdoor pool.

## **Mykonos**

From Athens we transferred back to the airport and boarded an Aegean Airlines 30-minute flight to island of Mykonos. The Mykonos airport is small and easy to get through.

The hotel we represent on the island is **Kensho Ornos**. This boutique hotel of just 35 individually styled rooms and suites (all with either a hot tub or plunge pool) have traditional architecture coupled with modern elements creating a special feeling of “barefoot, bohemian luxury”. Wellness travelers will enjoy this property that has 2 pools, a yoga area, gym, the only cave spa in Mykonos, and an exquisite dining experience.

If travelers are looking for a villa experience on the island, Seez Travel has a handful of handpicked villas that can be booked through them. Villas on the island during high season are typically available for Saturday to Saturday stays. We visited a stunning 8-bedroom villa, with amazing outdoor spaces and views.

While most visitors think of spending their days at beach clubs, a private boat charter is a great way to escape the Mykonos crowds. Depending on the size of your group and if you would like to do half day or full day excursion, there are a range of boats that can be reserved through Seez Travel. Your captain can take you to different coves for swimming and snorkeling and you can even be dropped off to a beach club for lunch if desired.

## **Paros**

From Mykonos we took the 1 hour and 15-minute ferry ride to Paros. Paros can also be reached by plane from either Athens or Thessaloniki. Paros is not as well known as Mykonos or Santorini, allowing it to maintain a certain off-the-beaten path charm. Parikia is the main town in Paros. I could have spent all day wandering through the alleys in Kastro, the old quarter of Parikia, with great boutiques and picturesque restaurants with outdoor seating overlooking the docks. This town felt less touristy and had better quality shops than Mykonos town.

While this island is great for couples, I think it is a better option than Mykonos or Santorini for families. The island is more green and less hilly than Mykonos or Santorini. With it being less crowded, it would be easier to rent a car and explore the different beaches and hiking trails. There are not as many hotels on the island, but Seez Travel will offer the right accommodations for your traveler's needs.

## **Santorini**

After our short stay in Paros, we took the 1-and-a-half-hour ferry to Santorini. First class seating, if available, is highly recommended for travelers. The seats are assigned with much more leg room and nice tables dividing the seating. On some boats you can purchase Wi-Fi to be connected during your journey. Another important thing we had on our ferry trips was luggage concierge. This service is a great add-on for your clients to

ensure easy travel from one island to the next. Instead of having to lug heavy suitcases on and off ferries and leaving them in an open area on the ferry, Seez can arrange for your luggage to be picked up at your hotel, taken in a private van onto a ferry and delivered to your next destination, with you just having to walk onboard with your carry-on and no other worries.

Santorini is a volcanic island where all of the accommodations are at the higher ground. Getting off the ferry can be a chaotic scene with buses, cars and hundreds of tourists all vying to get up and down the mountain on the sole two-lane windy road. After walking off the ferry, the luxury vehicles and Santorini Secrets drivers were easy to find and ready to whisk us up the mountain before traffic increased. It's a 35-minute drive from the ferry port (or 20 minutes from the airport) to the Secrets properties on Oia's caldera. The amazing crescent-shaped caldera formed by the volcanic eruption centuries ago, resulted in the most amazing sea views a human eye can ever see. Once summer homes of locals and sea captains, the whitewashed houses perched on the cliffs are some of the most sought-after accommodations in Greece. Most of, if not all of the hotels directly on the caldera are for guests ages 13 and older. This is due to the fact that the stairs are very steep without handrails or access to elevators and many infinity edges could be considered dangerous for young children. Just behind the caldera and in other villages on the island are accommodation options for those with mobility concerns and/or those with children. And while those on the caldera enjoy the sunrise, the hotels facing the other side of the island delight in the stunning sunsets.

To fit every traveler and their needs, our hotels on the island, **Secret Hotels** is collection owned by a family that has a rich history on Santorini. Secret Hotels create an experience that will go above and beyond guests' preferences in luxury hospitality, offering an unprecedented excellence in its standards and elegance while remaining authentic to local traditions. The collection's premiere property, **Santorini Secrets Suites & Spa**, used to be their family summer home built into the volcanic rock that has been converted into 17 tranquil suites divided into 6 room categories each with either a private pool or hot tub and one villa with private pool and hot tub. Guests have access to the award-winning restaurant, Black Rock, serving Greek post - modern cuisine with an international twist, the Harmonia Spa, and an infinity pool with unobstructed views of the Aegean Sea and the caldera.

Just above Santorini Secrets Suites & Spa on Oia's famous pedestrian walkway you will find **Santorini Secret Premium**. These are 5 suites divided into 3 room types with a private hot tub, swimming pool and panoramic views that is perfect for accommodating families wanting to have the caldera feel.

**Secret Legend Suites**, just a 3-minute walk down the pedestrian path is perched on the cliff overlooking the volcano. Here there are only 7 suites divided into 3 room types with private hot tubs and offers in-room breakfast served daily. With only having a few units, there is no pool or restaurant, but guests have access to Santorini Secrets Suites & Spa pool and restaurant.

**Tramonoto Secret Villas** was a captain's home turned into an exclusive villa complex, a short walk from Oia's pedestrian walkway. The villa has three levels, holding 4 suites with either a private hot tub or outdoor swimming pool and sunset/sea views that can be rented individually or as a buy-out.

The newest addition to the Secret group is **The View**, located in Foinikia. A 5-minute drive from the center of Oia. Opened in 2019, this property has stunning sunset views and a manageable layout with a large swimming pool that is a natural extension of the sea. The 39 suites are divided into 6 room types with its architectural design embracing minimalist lines and seamless connections with the natural surroundings.

While on Santorini, guests have a range of activities you can add to their itinerary through Seez including, winery visits, tours of different villages, boat trips, horseback riding, helicopter tours and more. Our group had a fantastic half-day boat trip, swimming in coves and taking in the views of the island from below. We also enjoyed an evening visit with a guide to an adorable village called Pyrgos with beautiful buildings and churches that was followed by a stop at a winery to see how unique the process is of growing grapes on a windy and volcanic island that concluded with a tasting in their beautiful courtyard.

## Crete

Our final stop on our FAM was the island of Crete. The ferry ride was just under 2 hours from Santorini (or can be a 35-minute flight from Athens). While Mykonos, Paros and Santorini are all Cycladic islands highlighted by their white and blue houses and churches, Crete is the largest and most populous of the Greek islands and has a topography more in-line with the mainland along with a more Mediterranean feel and stone buildings. You really need at least 5-7 days to have enough time to explore this island. It is a destination to keep in mind for families due to the ease of getting around and range of activities available. The island's luxury properties are in Elounda, a 1-hour drive from the ferry port and Herculean airport.

Our property, **Elounda Gulf Villas**, offers 33 suites & villas ranging from 1 to 4 bedrooms. We stayed in the Royal 4-bedroom villa and never wanted to leave. With a generous open living and dining room, sauna, fitness room, infinity pool with gorgeous sea views and an inviting outdoor patio, it was the perfect respite at the end of a busy trip. While offering the comforts of the private rooms, the property has the amenities of a hotel including a main pool, restaurant, spa, concierge office and daily housekeeping. The concierge can arrange your transfer to the private beach club that is just 10 minutes down the road through the main town where you can visit to shop, dine and explore.

After enjoying a leisurely breakfast served in our villa, we had a morning guided tour on the island of Spinalonga. A 15-minute boat ride takes visitors over to this archaeological site that was many things over time including a fort and even a leper colony. I personally found this site to be more interesting than visiting Pompeii. It is also a very picturesque

island, great for snapping Instagrammable photos. After spending some time on the island, your boat drops you off in the town of Plaka where you can enjoy a meal at a taverna and browse the shops with local wares that allowed us the opportunity to purchase some last-minute gifts at great prices.

After spending a total of 9 nights in 5 different regions of Greece, I truly believe the saying "it takes a lifetime for someone to discover Greece, but it only takes an instance to fall in love with her". Do your clients a huge favor and when planning their Greece itineraries, allow as much time as possible in each destination to be able to relax and take in the unique nature of each region/island. Seez Travel will guide you through the process and our hotel portfolio offers luxury accommodations and first-class service to ensure a memorable Greek vacation.