

AN ISLAND-HOPPING GREEK CRUISE

Greece offers a variety of ancient buildings, azure seas and salads

Story and Photos by Marybeth Bond

“We always dreamed of island hopping for our honeymoon,” Dave and Jenny, newlyweds from Michigan, told me. While not on our honeymoon, my husband, Gary, and I had the same idea about island hopping.

Athens

Before our cruise could set sail into the Mediterranean, our adventure began in Athens. On our first evening, we discovered an outdoor rooftop bar with an unparalleled vista of the Acropolis. The ancient citadel stood as a timeless beacon of Greece’s storied past.

As the sun dipped below the horizon, casting a golden hue over the hills encircling Athens, we took a taxi to Plaka, the vibrant neighborhood of restaurants, cafes, bars, and shops. Plaka is nestled at the foot of the Acropolis.

In the maze of narrow streets, we embarked on a culinary journey through the heart of Greek cuisine. The aroma of grilled octopus and lamb filled the air outside a busy restaurant. We settled at a table with blue-checkered table cloths and ordered crispy fried calamari, savory lamb kebabs and moussaka. Each dish was a symphony of flavors, perfectly complemented by the refreshing notes of Greek wine.

Of course, no Greek meal would be complete without the quintessential Greek salad. A medley of ripe tomatoes, crisp cucumbers, tangy onions, briny capers, and creamy feta cheese, drizzled with the finest olive oil fit the bill.

One of the top places to see is undoubtedly the Acropolis. We bought “skip-the-line” tickets for entry to the Parthenon that allowed us to enter by a side gate, with fewer tourists. A visit to The Acropolis Museum gave us further insight into the history and significance of these archaeological treasures.

Our adventure was far from over when we bid farewell to Athens. It marked merely the beginning of our journey.

As we embarked on an eight-day Holland America cruise through the Greek islands, we quickly realized that life takes on a different rhythm here. The livin’ is easy, as the saying goes, and nowhere is this more evident than aboard a cruise ship. Each day we ordered room service for breakfast and leisurely ate it on our balcony. The Holland America ship *Osterdam*, featured two pools, inviting hot tubs, indulgent spa facilities, classes, lectures, specialty restaurants, and nightly entertainment. Boredom was simply not an option. Moreover, the ship’s exceptional array of shore excursions enabled us to maximize our experiences in each port of call.

Rhodes

From Athens we glided through the azure waters of the Aegean Sea for the island of Rhodes, where history and beauty converge. Approaching the island’s shores, the formidable medieval walls of Rhodes Town emerged dramatically from the sea, foreshadowing the treasures concealed within its ancient embrace.

We walked through the towering gates of the stone fortifications, where cobblestone streets, and fragments of ancient ruins greeted us at every corner.

The imposing Palace of the Grand Master stood as a testament to Rhodes’ rich history. The Palace, formerly a castle, was once a citadel of the Knights Hospitaller. It is believed that the Colossus of Rhodes (a statue of the Greek Sun God, Helios), stood where the palace is today. The standing Colossus was one





of the Seven Wonders of the World. The height of the Statue of Liberty, the Colossus was the tallest statue in the ancient world. Unfortunately, it collapsed during an earthquake in 226 BC.

We wanted to see more of Rhodes, so we traveled to the east coast to the village of Lindos. Lindos is a tiny, picture-perfect Greek town, nestled between rugged cliffs overlooking the Aegean Sea. As we descended the steep street leading to the old town, we were rewarded with sweeping panoramas of the sapphire sea and the whitewashed houses clustered below.

We meandered through the labyrinthine streets of Lindos passing quaint tavernas boasting mouthwatering local delicacies, homemade ice cream stands, and clothing boutiques. Our explorations led us to a rooftop restaurant, where we savored cold beer, pizza and panoramic views of the town's picturesque harbor below. After lunch, we enjoyed a revitalizing swim in the crystal-clear sea.

Cyprus

Next on our itinerary was the island of Cyprus. We traveled into the mountains and along the coast to the Paphos Archaeological Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This shore excursion was the cultural highlight of our Greek cruise because of the intricate and well-preserved mosaics in the excavated Roman villas. The mosaics served as both decorative elements and symbols of wealth and status. They are extremely rare and rank among the best examples in the world.

Excavations have unearthed spectacular 3rd- to- 5th century mosaics of the House of Dionysus. Although they were buried for 16 centuries, they are amazingly intact and colorful. Named after the god of wine, the grand villa boasts mosaics depicting scenes from Greek mythology, including the triumph of Dionysus, the god of wine, and various episodes from the tales of Greek heroes and gods.





Santorini

The Santorini caldera is a large and mostly submerged volcanic crater, notable for being the only inhabited volcanic caldera on the planet. Santorini is celebrated for its breathtaking cliffs and charming villages. Some visitors hike up the steep cliff between the port and the main town of Fira. Others brave a donkey ride. We opted to ascend and descend the cliff in a cable car.

The breathtaking six-mile hike along the caldera's edge from Fira to Oia is a highlight for many hikers. This scenic route takes you through the charming and iconic villages of Firostefani and Imerovigli. Along the way, you'll capture stunning photos of blue-domed churches, luxurious resorts with infinity pools, and quaint cafes perched on the cliffs below.

For many travelers, a visit to Santorini wouldn't be complete without experiencing the island's unique beaches, Perissa and Kamari, and their volcanic sands and crystalline waters.

Mykonos

Mykonos, with its iconic windmills and bustling waterfront dotted with colorful fishing boats, is a magnet for tourists. In the old town we found a gem-like Orthodox church dedicated to St. George. We stepped inside for a moment of silence, admiring the icons, ornate religious art, hanging lamps, and chandelier.

As the Holland America ship docked for the final time in Athens, we felt gratitude for the unforgettable memories and a longing for more. The Greek Islands had not only given us a glimpse into their timeless beauty and history but had also left an indelible mark on our hearts.

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