

ESCAPE TO 'AGIOS', DESTINATION BEACH AND WATERSIDE CHIC

By Caroline Preston



2021, and despite some return to normality our travel industry is still in disarray. Likened to a flight in turbulence, weary, we desperately need a return to smoother skies. As the clouds begin to clear, our restrictive belts ease, and mobility is again restored and as autumn rapidly approaches, like a migratory bird, I seek sun and warmer climes.

Travel is still slightly more complicated, and research is needed, but being double-jabbed means access is easier, Greece easier still.

With entry requiring just one form, another on return and a day 2 test, it's not rocket science.

One thing Greece doesn't struggle for is sunshine and wanting plenty of it I head to the most southerly of its islands, large and luscious Crete. Located in the Mediterranean Sea, south of the Aegean Sea, Crete has no shortage of stunning views. My destination is Agios Nikolaos known as 'Agios' to locals or 'Ag Nik' to visitors. This large town and capital of the region Lasithi (East Crete) is the perfect place for a beach-loving, culture craving foodie like me.

Our hotel is the Miramare Resort and Spa in Gargadoros, a mere 1.5km from Agios town (miramarecrete.gr). This hotel has one major advantage, the view, more akin to a cruise ship balcony it overlooks the stunning Mirabello Bay, a bay so beautiful I'd often find myself in a trance-like state gazing at the vivid and varying shades of the blue sea available at every turn.

On this trip there would be plenty of time to chill, soak up some culture and eat like kings, so after settling in and spending a day topping up with

some much-needed vitamin D, we head out for a beach day. There are several beaches within a short distance here including pebbly Gargadoros just opposite, great for swimming in turquoise blue bliss. We decide to head to top recommendation, Voulisma Beach. Around 15km's away it's a 20 Euro taxi ride but so worth it, gorgeous white sand, beach bar, and lively surf we spend our day being floored by big rollers and recovering with sunbed service cocktails. We round off our day at nearby Taverna Panorama devouring delicious Greek salad, sweet baklava pastries and ice-cold Mythos beer, perfection.

Evenings here were spent either hotel-based or taking the short hop to Agios town, lived-in year-round by locals it has a cosmopolitan vibe like a small Greek city, and unlike the more touristy resorts, there's no rowdiness here. What you'll find instead is a smart busy town with a weekly market and quality shops, boutiques, and some of the better tourist offerings.

Agios is a popular day trip from Crete's other resorts and people flock here for the marina, the harbour, and the ancient lake. Lake Voulismeni is in the centre of Agios and according to local legend, the goddess Athena regularly bathed here, it's not

hard to see why, who wouldn't want to bathe in such grand surroundings? You can't bathe here now but you can enjoy the stunning view from a wide choice of eateries.

In the days that followed we explored the Lasithi region further, a boat trip to the island of the former leper colony Spinalonga (tours widely available). From 1913 this former Venetian medieval stronghold was used to house ousted and disowned leprosy sufferers who endured extreme poverty and hardship for decades, the story and history of Spinalonga makes for a fascinating day.

A trip to gorgeous rural Kritsa was another treat. Showcasing picture-perfect Greece this tiny hillside hamlet offers a museum of flora and fauna, a selection of little boutiques, cafes and a taverna where you can refresh and soak up the surroundings. I recommend wandering around Kritsa's quaint ancient streets that showcase its colourful doorways adorned with flowering plants, so beautiful.

It's our last day and time to fit in just one more visit, jumping in our hire car we take the easy drive from Agios along the stunning coast to Elounda, with its pretty harbour and seaside tavernas it's a perfect stop for a seafood lunch.

As the trip time comes to an end, our final evening is spent enjoying drinks on hotel's glass-encased terrace, within view is Agios, its lights twinkling like a jewel-encrusted brooch, the perfect accessory for chic sun filled autumn break.

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