

baltic outlook

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Henrik Vibskov
The new cult icon
of Danish design

The Greek island of Mykonos:
an escapist's storybook

Finland's
northernmost
crossroads

Budapest

celebrating life



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The Greek island of
Mykonos:
an escapist's storybook
waiting for its pages
to be turned

baltic_{outlook}

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Baltic Outlook is published
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Printed at UAB Lietuvos Rytas, Lithuania,
phone +371 29 42 69 61

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TEXT AND PHOTOS BY MARIE BARBIERI

Greece's white bride

Basking in the Mediterranean, 94 nautical miles southeast of Athens, Greece's island of Mykonos is an escapist's storybook whose pages are just waiting to be turned.





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It's bright, white and a most resplendent sight. Magical Mykonos instils awe into all who set foot upon its shores. This glittering isle is known as the *Bride of the Aegean*; it must have been a very white wedding. Posing confidently, shoulder-to-shoulder, cocktail bars, cafés, designer boutiques, galleries, chapels, museums, lace shops, artists, bakers and shoemakers are located in what seems like an inside space, where the sapphire sky is the ceiling to their integrated home. "If architecture has anything to say," observed French architect Le Corbusier of Mykonos, "it has been said here."

1. Dormition of the Virgin Mary

This gem of a chapel is a stunning and heavenly sight. Built by the skilled hands of its owner, Sikiniotis Timos, the Dormition of the Virgin Mary sits within the terraced gardens of Soula Rooms at Psarou Beach. Beneath its porticoed dome, steps on its roof sink into slopes of thickly-covered 'icing' that frame triangular and rounded windows. Like a fairy's castle, its porches and porticos leave you breathless. In typically Greek style, this chapel is garlanded with miniature palm trees, themselves in carved white-painted flower pots; a true oasis of dreams. Over 800 churches and votive chapels pepper Mykonos' terrain like wildflowers, one for almost every family, on an island of just under 30 square miles.

2. Charming Chora

Chora, Mykonos' sugar-cubed town, oozes a sophisticated Cycladic splendour. It is an ensemble of whitewashed walls and multi-coloured balconies that drape crimson bougainvillea and daily wash loads above snaking alleyways. The serpentine streets within this architectural mayhem are as carefully painted as their protective walls. They were designed to disorient pirates, but today, tourists revel in getting refreshingly lost in these streets' frenzied beauty.

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3. Gone fishing

The clank of crockery echoes through the harbour as locals and stray cats awake. Fishermen dock and deliver their catch before the first ferry carrying the culture-hungry arrives. Mykonos once thrived on fishing. Today, it's tourism that keeps the island afloat, but seafood still dominates the menu, particularly octopus. Enjoy an early morning stroll and you might catch fisherman beating their 'oktapodi' off rocks to tenderise the flesh. You'll then see them being hung to dry on the boats for the rest of the day. These are centuries-old fishing techniques, and

are the reason why your olfactory system is seized whenever octopus sizzles on a hotplate. It's popularly served grilled, fried, stewed or in a salad, but excellent tavernas will barbecue it perfectly.

4. Panagia Paraportiani

Approaching Mykonos by ferry, one of Greece's most recognisable landmarks juts up like an iceberg. Dazzling and confident, it dominates the Kastro area, and is a magnet for even the most amateur photographers. Panagia Paraportiani took its name from 'porta', the tiny gated entrance of the stone wall that encircled the (now destroyed) medieval castle. Mykonos' oldest church is a snow-white architectural contradiction: actually the result of five asymmetrical chapels merged into one, built between the 15th and 17th centuries. All facing different directions, though seamlessly interconnected, they rest beneath the protection of their iconic dome. Inside this sacred monument are intricately ornate and perfectly preserved ecclesiastical heirlooms and a treasured 500-year-old silver iconostasis. The place is impressive during the daytime, and its splendid afterglow at sunset silences all.



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5. Caique boats

Watching Mykonian fishermen unload their catch and disentangle their nets is a classic Greek island experience. At the harbour, you'll regularly spot the traditional wooden caique boats docking with their day's catch. This island holds particular spiritual connections to fishing. In days gone by, when Mykonian seamen embarked on risky voyages in order to provide for their families, they first sought a blessing through the miraculous icon inside Panagia Tourlani, the monastery that sits high in the heart of the island. You may not find yourself fishing from a caique, but you can experience one when beach-hopping by water. These pristinely-painted boats ferry along between the southeast of the island's golden necklace of beaches. If you are lucky, you'll have a skipper serenade you with songs of yesteryear while en route. And he'll more than likely be one of Mykonos' elderly seamen.

6. Little Venice

Little Venice is a classy, Cycladic icon. This row of Italianate buildings is where you head for that sunset-soaked table for two. This postcard centrepiece is home to romantic balconies and slowly-sipped cocktails, with the waves of the Aegean lapping below. Step in and become part of the postcard at *Montparnasse*, the oldest cocktail bar in Mykonos. Also known as the *Piano Bar*, it provides private views of the sunset and Mykonos' famous row of windmills from its tiny protruding balcony. Once the sun has set, visiting pianists and cabaret singers continue performing well through the night. Cheers!

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