

# MYKONOS

Roger Wheeler visits the Island of the Lotus Eaters



In ancient Greek mythology there was a race of people living on an island somewhere in the Aegean Sea who ate nothing but lotus flowers and lived a wonderful, sybaritic and relaxed life. This is a myth, or is it? I had never been to any of the (nearly) 3,000 islands of which 170 are inhabited, but I think that Mykonos comes pretty close to that ideal lifestyle. Mykonos became popular with the gay community about 40-years ago as there were very few holiday destinations where we could go and really relax. It fell out of fashion when places like Ibiza and Fort Lauderdale became popular; but today it is back where it belongs, right at the top of the gay holiday hot spots. Just under four hours from Gatwick it's a really beautiful place with a laid-back lifestyle, and although the Greeks officially have no money they seem to be doing pretty well.

Mykonos town is a fascinating maze of tiny streets and alleys. They suggest that you wander around and get lost, we did, but it isn't really that big. The economy depends to a large extent on tourism which is about 60/40 gay/straight. Every day a large cruise liner docks in the bay (spoiling the view) and offloads up to 3,000 tourists who flood the town and spend money at the hundreds of little shops selling all the usual souvenirs. There are plenty of highly priced designer shops including a brand new Louis Vuitton store who are there to help if you feel the need for a new handbag at 1am.



MYKONOS TOWN

There are half a dozen or so gay bars, some very noisy – **Jackie 'O** is one, to the quieter **Lola's** and the **Piano Bar** which attracts a mixed fashionable crowd and offers a great range of cocktails. The rumour that this island is expensive is another myth; it's no dearer than anywhere else. A beer costs 4.50€, about £3.60, and a cocktail 8€, no dearer than at home, but meals in most restaurants are really reasonable, around 20€-25€ for a decent meal with wine. Be warned, if, like me you have an aversion to cigarette smoke you'll find that the EU regulations are ignored and smoking is allowed in many of the bars and restaurants, which was the only problem

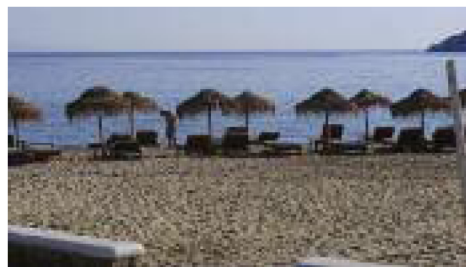


LETO HOTEL

we found on this lovely island. By the way they don't pay taxes either, but that's another story. On the plus side there is hardly any crime or drugs. There is a huge range of accommodation from self-catering apartments to upmarket hotels. We stayed initially at the **Town Suites**, a very quiet building with four very lovely fully equipped apartments, right in the heart of the town. We had our own private balcony, large sun terrace, TV and an excellent kitchen. The flat was provided by the Mykonos Accommodation Centre which is owned and run by Belgian ex-pat John van Lerberghe. John has been on the island for 30 years, living the dream and he knows just about all there is to know about gay Mykonos. There are no major international hotel chains on most of the Greek islands; the hotels are invariably family run and all the better for that. Our next stay was at the **Leto Hotel** on the sea front, which was the first large hotel on Mykonos, built in 1955 and whilst in need a slight re-vamp was absolutely great. It has

all the facilities you would expect from a four star hotel, with a dining area and bar by the palm fringed pool. The rooms were large and airy with balconies, and the staff were very friendly with everyone speaking good English. The food all over the island was excellent with fish dominating, but we had some terrific pork and veal. Dinner at the Leto came close to being marvellous.

The famous **Paradise** and **Super Paradise** beaches whilst still very popular are now quite commercialised with buses running frequently from the town to both. Super Paradise is in a truly stunning setting and they have just built a new club/bar with pool overlooking the beach, which is very popular with the boys.



ELIA BEACH

The newest 'in' place is **Elia Beach**, which is a large sandy bay with sun beds, umbrellas and bars with the gay nudist section at the far end just around the low headland. There are a couple of hotels on the beach. One of the loveliest I have ever seen was the **Arte & Mare Elia Suites**, a knockout small boutique hotel in a fantastic setting. Sadly we weren't staying, but the low season price of 90€ per night was almost a giveaway, and they offer free transport into town (20 minute drive) so you don't have to miss any of the atmosphere. This hotel is running a series of six gay beach parties throughout August and September.

The gay hotel on Mykonos is, without doubt, the **Elysium**, which is a very modern five star gay resort hotel perched high above the town with great views. It's run by **Vassilis**, who, when it comes to gay Mykonos, is your man.

Mykonos was and is once more a real party island. With the six beach parties on Elia Beach, the Elysium Hotel hosts the **S-Clash Pool Party** on 1st September which runs all night. By far the biggest gay event is the **Xlsior Festival** with an impressive programme running from 22-26 August. Now in its fourth year it goes from strength to strength and last year attracted thousands of gay visitors over the five days.

Mykonos is now one of the most affordable holiday destinations in Europe and it's a fantastic time to visit the Greek islands. It's getting cheaper day-by-day to visit Greece as travel firms scramble to fill hotels and planes, so there are some amazing bargains around. Go Greece, Go Gay, Go Mykonos!

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