



Home » Destinations » Europe » A long weekend in... Santorini, Greece

EUROPE

A LONG WEEKEND IN... SANTORINI, GREECE

CNT's travel guide to the ultimate long weekend in Santorini (including where to catch the sunset without the crowds)...



Andreas M/ Unsplash, Santorini

With whitewashed buildings cascading down the dramatic cliffs at the edge of the caldera, Santorini is one of the most romantic destinations in the world. This Cyclades island's popularity – thanks largely to its jaw-dropping volcano vistas, boutique resorts dotted with cerulean pools and photogenic architecture – mean you'll typically be jostling for a spot to witness the isle's signature sorbet-hued sunsets, especially in the picturesque village of Oia.

With travel reopening gradually and a number of restrictions still in place, Santorini is in the midst of a quieter season. What this means for you this summer: You'll experience Santorini's crown jewels without the usual overcrowding. And with direct [seasonal flights to Santorini](#) with Wizz Air Abu Dhabi, Etihad and Flydubai operating for the first time, this is the perfect summer to tick Santorini off your travel bucket list.

Where to stay in Santorini

Check in: [Katikies Santorini, Oia](#)



A grand dame on Oia's craggy caldera rim, [Katikies Santorini](#) is made up of a cluster of impossibly white buildings, navigated via a warren of steps gently descending toward the bottom of the cliff. All 30 rooms are tucked away in traditional whitewashed [Cyclades style](#) abodes, and top-tier suites have spacious alfresco decks, aquamarine jaccuzzis and those signature sought-after views of the volcano. Split-level Katikies Suites offer more space and privacy, although honeymoon suites still tick all of the boxes for those seeking the ultimate Santorini experience. Tear yourself away from the romantic privacy of your suite to explore the ever-alluring Oia, mere steps away, or while away afternoons at the hotel's

jaw-dropping infinity pool, where plush loungers come with gorgeous caldera views. Dining is an epicurean experience: the five-table Mikrasia restaurant showcases nine- and 11-course tasting menus that are odes to the fusion of cultures that influenced the culinary heritage of Asia Minor: you'll think the turbot with shrimp saganaki sauce is the standout – until the aromatic Greek lamb with capers and Greek yoghurt arrives, the scents of herbs wafting through the restaurant as it arrives. The chic Seltz Champagne bar, with its Mediterranean menu, decadent raw bar and impressive grape list is arguably one of the best spots in the hotel for lazily people watching and enjoying scenic Santorini views. Split across two spaces that flank the edge of the infinity pool, grab a seat at the sea-facing wooden counter and order the fish taco tartare – made fresh with the daily local catch – and pair it with a crisp glass of rose grape that comes straight from the Cyclades.

Doubles from AED 3,336; 0030 228 607 1401, katikies.com

Check in: Andronis Concept Wellness Resort, Imerovigli



First impressions can be deceiving: Andronis Concept is set on the outskirts of the romantic village of Imerovigli, and the drive up to this property gives no indication of what lies within. In densely packed Santorini, this kind of space is hard to come by – with just 28 guest suites spread across the property, at times it feels like you've got the place entirely to yourself. Alongside indulgent breakfast classics like waffles and black truffle eggs, colourful smoothies and health-focused alternatives dominate the menu, with eggs served more than a dozen ways; three swimming pools – including a cave pool and 56-metre infinity pool – are designed for leisurely lounging in a serene setting; and the calming Kallos spa offers a myriad of treatments that range from massages and facials tailored to full wellness programmes. Start the day with yoga on the dedicated pavilion, book in for an afternoon boxing session, then end the day with a sunset cooking class to prepare a delectable Greek meal in the resort garden, using produce picked fresh from the garden that afternoon. But for those seeking a slice of the action, it's easily accessible: a short stroll along the hiking path leads you straight into Imerovigli and its maze of whitewashed restaurants, bars and hotels.

Doubles from AED 4,120; 0030 2286 036738, andronis.com



Where to eat in Santorini

New hotspot: Kaliya, Fira



Kaliya's trifecta of experimental cuisine, incredible sunset views and friendly Greek hospitality make it a sought-after spot for sunset dining. An elevated alternative to the traditional fare found in the capital, dishes are fused with international influences, reimagining Greek cuisine in an idyllic bougainvillea-laden terrace facing the caldera. Dishes – especially starters – are best enjoyed sharing style, and the culinary team's extensive raw selection makes for a flavour-filled flight through the best locally sourced fish, meat and fresh vegetables. Kick off with the restaurant's signature beef tartare, or delight in the punchy flavours of a colourful and fresh tuna ceviche with avocado, a citrusy ponzu and tomato salsa. The rest of the menu is just as impressive, with perfectly plated dishes from the grill, seasonally changing catches of the day and a dedicated steak menu with cuts from Greece to Australia, as well as Japanese Wagyu.

Reservations are a must – after all, this is a prime spot to watch the fiery sun dipping behind the islands on the infinitely stretching horizon.

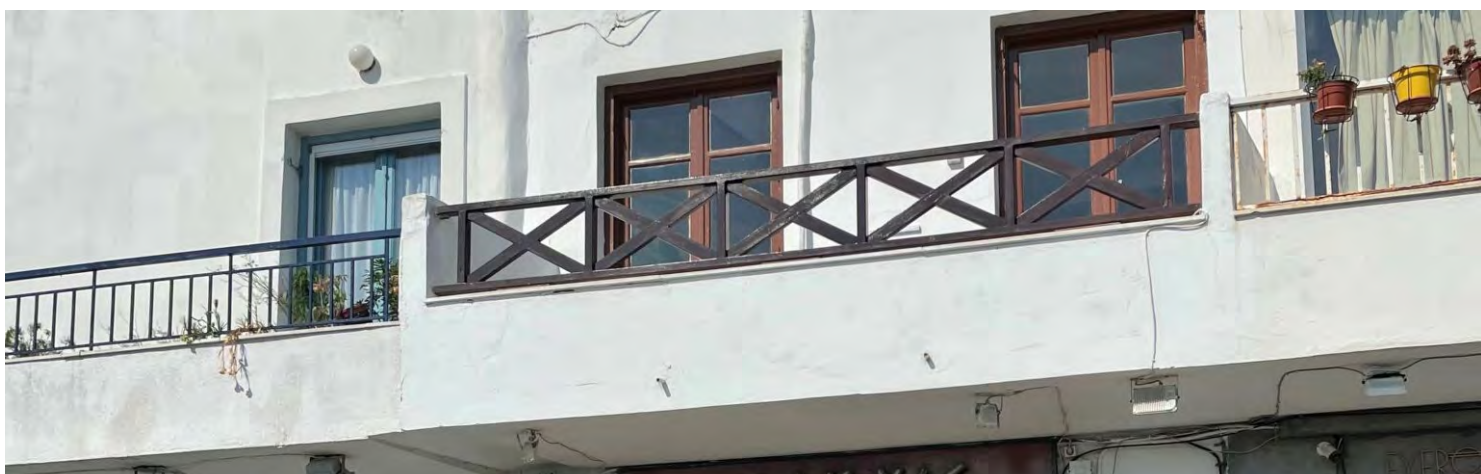
kaliya-restaurant.com

Destination dining: Sunset Taverna, Ammoudi Bay



There are two ways to reach Sunset Taverna, nestled on the picturesque waterfront of Ammoudi Bay. The easy route is by car, but the adventurer's approach is to get out in Oia, stroll along the main street and then take some 200 steps down the burnt orange cliff to a sleepy inlet. Well regarded by tourists and locals alike, it's instantly recognizable by the starfish strung by the waterfront, and the space is split across two levels with a restaurant perched above the water and sea-facing terrace one floor above. Both are brilliant for gazing at Santorini's legendary sunsets, although a sought-after table by the waters edge is arguably the best spot for watching the legion of boats and catamarans sail into port as the sun dips below the Aegean. Plentiful portions of fresh seafood are the order of the day, inspired by the picture-perfect setting and the fresh catch from the local fishermen that day. sunset-ammoudi.gr

Cheap eats: Lucky's Souvlakis, Fira





Blink and you'll miss it – so best not to blink. Behind an unsuspecting wooden façade on the main street that runs through Fira, Lucky's Souvlakis is a top spot for cheap eats on Fira's central stretch, a no-frills restaurant serving up some of the best gyros and souvlaki on the island. Visit during peak lunchtime in the afternoon and prepare to wait – but the delicious, fresh and budget friendly Greek signatures – most of which are less than EUR 5 – are well worth your time.

After hours: Buddha Bar Beach Santorini



Globally renowned Buddha Bar's breezy style finds a natural home in the laid-back village of Imerovigli. Attached to La Maltese Estate Hotel, Buddha Bar's East-meets-West fusion collides in a relaxed terrace

with wooden bar tables and low-lying loungers upholstered in colourful prints. The best seat in the house is found on a raised platform adjacent to a turquoise plunge pool, with panoramic vistas of Skaros rock and the surrounding Aegean. Mixed drinks are tropical and inventive, served up alongside a concise menu of gastronomic pan-Asian fare, soulful beats from a live DJ, and some of Santorini's finest sunset shades. It's also a popular spot for shisha – but check ahead, as shisha service may not be available during the 2021 summer season.

[buddhabarbeachsantorini.com](https://www.buddhabarbeachsantorini.com)



Vantage point: Santorini Sky



Santorini Sky debuted its collection of six ultra-secluded villas on Santorini's highest hilltop last year. While each villa comes with indoor and outdoor showers and a private terrace with jacuzzi plunge pool, the Master Villa is the envy of the isle, boasting the highest infinity pool on Santorini. There's a fruit and vegetable garden that supplies seasonal breakfasts for the guests, but you don't have to stay at Santorini Sky to enjoy its fresh bounty and unrivalled views: book ahead for a one-of-a-kind dining experience 2,000 feet above sea level. Head down a jagged path through Santorini Sky's gardens as the glorious sun

dips below the shimmering sea, and sip sundowners and graze on local seafood, ceviches and pasta in the privacy of a shimmering sky dome.

santorinisky.com

The best things to do in Santorini

See the sights



In Oia, the best way to see the sights is simply by stumbling upon them: getting lost in the labyrinthine streets; dipping in and out of boutiques filled with cyan-tinted souvenirs, rainbow silks and straw hats; and strolling along the cobblestoned paths to the many blue-domed churches. A word of warning for those seeking the coveted caldera shot: many of the snaps you scroll past on Instagram have been taken from private properties, and there are plenty of warning signs urging visitors to stay off the terraces and roofs along the route (not that many seem to take notice). A platform for capturing the caldera at its best – one that’s actually open to tourists – is just past Melenio Cafe, off of Oia’s main street.



Another must-visit: Santorini's unique black-sand beaches, Perissa and **Perivolos**, located side by side on Santorini's southeast coast. Hire a quad bike or take a transfer down to this corner of the island for a much more laid-back, crowd-free vibe, with boho beach bars spilling onto the smoky-coloured sand and straw parasols shading loungers where sunseekers park for the day.

Book this trip: Santorini Yacht Club



The most memorable ways to see Santorini is by venturing offshore. Book a day or sunset cruise aboard one of Santorini Yacht Club's luxury catamarans (bring your friends – semiprivate tours accommodate groups of up to 16 people) to sail the azure waters of the Aegean. The morning trip sets off from picturesque Ammoudi Bay in the north, sailing south down the island's beguiling west coast with stops en route: take dips in hot springs in the shadow of the towering volcano, snap postcard-perfect pictures of the quaint Venetian lighthouse and marvel at the ash white and volcanic red beach. You'll have ample time to swim and sightsee from the water, and enjoy a barbecue lunch of local flavours onboard, before docking at the southernmost tip of Vlychada five hours later. The afternoon excursion operates in reverse, transporting guests from Vlychada to arrive at picture-perfect Ammoudia Bay just as the sun sets.

Tickets from approx AED 565, santoriniyachtingclub.com

Adrenaline hit: Oia to Fira hike



Much of the action on Santorini happens on the west coast, from the ultra-romantic Oia in the north and down through Imerovigli and the more rugged capital of Fira. The best way to see all three is on a scenic 10-kilometre hike that can take anywhere between three to five hours, depending on your pace and amount of photo stops – of which there are plenty along the way. Lace up: The terrain transitions from

smooth pavements between the restaurants and resorts to more rough cobblestones and dirt trails. And plan your timings carefully – while there’s some shade along the route, you’ll spend a lot of time in direct sunlight, which means it’s best to steer clear of the midday sun during peak summer months.

Local flavours: Santo Winery



While the dramatic whitewashed villages are the standout attraction in the north and the island’s unique black beaches dominate the best things to do in the south, vast swaths of mainland Santorini are covered in vineyards. If you’ve got an afternoon or full day to spare, book a wine tour including tastings and transport between several of the island’s most popular wineries. If you’d rather go it alone, Santo Winery welcomes guests for tastings of local Greek grape, tours and dining at its signature restaurant with caldera views.

[santowines.gr](https://www.santowines.gr)

Insider tip



Most visitors flock to the edge of the caldera to capture Santorini's iconic sunset. Bypass them and head just past the sleepy inland village of Pyrgos. Crowning Mount Profitis Ilias is a monastery of the same, offering commanding views and 360-degree panoramas without the crowds.

The details

- Currency: *Euro*
- Time zone: *GST -1*
- Airport: *Santorini (Thira) International Airport (JTR)*
- Getting there: *Wizz Air Abu Dhabi flies from Abu Dhabi to Santorini twice per week on Mondays and Fridays until September 27, with return fares from AED 309. Etihad Airways flies from Abu Dhabi to Santorini twice per week on Fridays and Sundays until September 12, with return fares from AED 2,150. Flydubai flies from Dubai to Santorini via Mykonos three times per week on Sunday, Wednesday and Friday until September 29, with return fares from AED 3,150*
- Getting around: *Hiring a car or ATV to get around the island is easy and relatively inexpensive to do. If you prefer not to drive, you can easily walk between places in each of the villages, or ask your hotel to arrange transfers ahead of time to ensure you're not left waiting – this also ensures you'll pay a pre-set fee. Taxis are somewhat harder to come by: There are only around 25 serving*

the whole island, and you'll need to agree to a fee with the driver before you go to prevent being overcharged.

- Best time of year to visit: *July and August is peak season, with temperatures in the mid-thirties, although this is also the busiest time to visit. The shoulder seasons – May to June and September to October – still promise pleasant weather but fewer crowds.*
- Tipping guidelines: *Across Greece it's customary to round up to the nearest convenient amount, typically to the closest ten euros.*

Sign up for the latest travel news, reviews, inspiration and so much more from the Middle East and beyond straight to your inbox.

Previous

7 reasons to take a daycation to Khor Fakkan

Next

Abu Dhabi updates entry requirements and reintroduces nightly curfew
