

Mykonos - Part 1 now a jet set destination

At 21 years old, on my first trip to Greece, I visited Mykonos. It is now renowned as a jet-set destination, with high-end boutiques, hotels, and all-night parties. Then Mykonos was really only known to artists and a few savvy travelers. Mykonos is in the Cycladic Islands group, which gets its name from the relatively circular arrangement of what is a large number of Aegean Islands. Sailing from Piraeus we passed fairly close to the Temple of Poseidon at Sounion. We could see the gleaming pillars from the sea.

The story of where the name “Aegean” came from is interesting. On a regular basis, Athens was forced to send seven young maidens and seven young men to Crete to the Palace of King Minos as a feast for the Minotaur, because Athenians had killed Minos’ son. Below the King’s Palace was a labyrinth, and in the centre of the labyrinth dwelt the feared Minotaur. Normally the young tributes would end up in the winding, dark and confusing passageways of this labyrinth and then be devoured by the beast. King Aegeus of Athens sent his son, Theseus, who vowed to kill the Minotaur. King Minos’ daughter, Ariadne, fell in love with Theseus, and handed him a ball of string to unravel as he advanced into the labyrinth. The story continues that Theseus killed the Minotaur and found his way out un-harmed. He fled with Ariadne, eventually abandoning her on the island of Naxos.

When the ship containing the young people left Piraeus, they unfurled black sails as a testament to the journey’s sad aspect. Aegeus instructed them to lower the black sails and hoist white ones if the tributes were returning alive. Otherwise, they were to sail back with the black sails. King Aegeus anxiously awaited their return at Sounion, and to his despair saw the ship returning with the black sails unfurled. Certain his son had died, he dove off the cliff into the sea, literally drowning in his sorrow. Theseus and the others had, however, in the excitement of their safe return forgotten to change the sails. Thus, Aegeus gave his name to the Aegean Sea which begins after this headland.

Back in the 1970s the harbour at Mykonos was too shallow for the arriving ferryboats to be able to dock. Once they had come in as far as they safely could to the white-washed, still quaint little Mykonos town, they were met by “caiques” that transported the passengers to the shore. This was a romantic aspect of travelling there. Mykonos town is

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The View from Here



built in the Cycladic style. The buildings are low, whitewashed, with bright colours (blue, red, turquoise, green) added for contrast around the window-sills and doors. There

are many curved structural elements to protect from earthquakes and the streets, paved in grey stone with whitewashed borders, run in confusing patterns, often ending in cul-de-sacs. The streets were constructed this way because of pirate raids throughout the Middle Ages. People could run away and the pirates would be unable to figure out the route they had taken. Mykonos town was one of the most traditionally pristine towns in the Cyclades, even as late as the 1970s. There is no doubt as to why it attracted artists from many countries who came here to paint.



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