



Aegean Interlude

Mykonos' marvels go far beyond its nightlife.

BY CASANDRA KARPIAK

Our high-speed ferry from Athens skimmed across the Aegean in just more than two hours. My sons pressed to the windows as Mykonos came into view, and the infamous Meltemi winds whipped the deck. The Old Town appeared as we prepared to dock. Arriving with my husband and two pre-teen boys in tow, I sought a mix of adventure and relaxation. Our private hotel shuttle delivered us to a boutique retreat perched on a hill in Aleomandra, overlooking the sacred isle of Delos.

Walking into Kalesma's open-air courtyard confirmed what the hilltop view promised. The main pool wrapped around the restaurant,

encouraging people to lounge late morning before setting off on the day's adventures. The hotel's co-owner, Aby Saltiel, greeted guests with an affection that felt worlds away from impersonal check-ins. "In Greek culture, hospitality is deeply personal and rooted in human connection," Saltiel told me later. "It's the small gestures, attention to detail and genuine warmth that can't be conveyed through a digital check-in. It's about making each guest feel truly seen and part of our extended home."

Traveling with energetic boys, I worried about keeping them engaged without exhausting myself. Sensing this, Saltiel suggested local activities. With young kids of his own, he proposed an outing to the go-kart track, then opened a map and jotted down family-friendly beaches and restaurants to try, including a quick ferry ride to Delos.

He arranged for a rental car to be delivered right to the hotel the following morning. We piled in and headed to Raceland Mykonos, an 800-meter track near Ano Mera. Kids over 7 years old can race alongside adults, and my kids whooped as they zoomed around bends

Relics of the Past:
Mykonos
windmills

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Together Time:

Mother and son enjoying the private pool at Kalesma Mykonos (top), and the boys racing go-karts at Raceland Mykonos (bottom)

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INFO TO GO

High-speed ferries connect Athens (Piraeus or Rafina ports) to Mykonos in roughly two to three hours. Direct flights operate seasonally and year-round from Athens International Airport and major European hubs to Mykonos Airport, with Aegean Airlines, Sky Express, easyJet and Ryanair the main air carriers. The New Port of Mykonos at Tourlos handles large ferry arrivals; taxis and private transfers reach most hotels in 10–20 minutes, depending on traffic.

LODGING

CALI MYKONOS

Located on the island’s quieter eastern coast near Kalafati, Cali Mykonos boasts one of the longest infinity pools in the Cyclades. An on-site spa, private beach club and dedicated athletic club make a compelling choice for travelers who prioritize both wellness and waterfront access.

Kalafati, Mykonos
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KALESMA MYKONOS

Each suite comes with a private heated pool or plunge pool and a generously sized terrace overlooking Ornos Bay. The minimalist design, whitewashed walls and natural tones encourage guests to unwind in their private retreat. Amenities include an on-site spa, an infinity pool and hot tub, Pere Ubu and Kuveda restaurants, and a domed-roof chapel.

Aleomandra, Mykonos
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SEMELI HOTEL MYKONOS

Tucked into the pedestrian lanes of Mykonos Town, guests step directly into Chora’s boutiques, galleries and waterfront cafés, then retreat to a quieter pocket just beyond the main flow. An on-site spa and Thioni restaurant add convenience without requiring a taxi.

Panachrantou 1, Mykonos Town
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DINING

BABOULAS OUZERI

Baboulas sits steps from the water in Mykonos Town, directly across from the harbor’s oversized red fishing boat that rarely escapes a photograph. Order grilled whole sea bream, fried zucchini, saganaki or a spread of classic meze alongside chilled ouzo as ferries ease in and out of port. Ideal for a late lunch before wandering Chora’s narrow alleys.

Old Port, Mykonos Town
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FOKOS TAVERNA

Set directly on Fokos Beach, this rustic seaside taverna serves charcoal-grilled fish, lamb and simple salads just steps from the sand. No-frills service and limited cell reception preserve its low-key appeal.

Fokos Beach, Ano Mera, Mykonos
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PERE UBU

Kalesma’s signature restaurant focuses on seasonal ingredients and traditional recipes. Expect grilled octopus, fresh seafood and regional wines served on the terrace. Sunset reservations are particularly coveted.

Aleomandra, Mykonos
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Quiet Moments:
Church of Panagia Paraportiani

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lined with rubber tires, the wind adding an extra thrill.

Post-race hunger led us to Saltiel's recommendation of souvlaki at a nearby taverna on the way to the beach. We settled on a casual spot for juicy skewers wrapped in warm pita, which everyone unanimously pronounced unbeatable. On Paradise Beach we stretched out on coarse, golden sand, my sons building castles while I bobbed in the water, letting the waves wash away jet lag.

Back at Kalesma, we retreated to our generously sized suite fitted with a private pool facing Ornos Bay. Saltiel often sees a shift in guests as the week progresses. "At Kalesma, time feels different," he said. "You're invited to reset and really slow down. Mykonos itself has a natural rhythm that encourages stillness: the light, the Aegean, the quiet corners of the island all make you pause."

One of the most serene spots was the hotel's own chapel dedicated to Agios Dimitrios. It's a functioning Greek Orthodox chapel, not just a decorative space. It hosts celebrations honoring the island's customs of happiness, love and piety. More than 400 chapels dot the island, many owned by individual families and open only on feast days. We passed several tucked between homes, modest facades concealing deeply personal histories.

No Mykonos escape is complete without Chora, the Old Town. We drove in early to avoid the midafternoon crush and easily found parking, even in high season. The boys darted ahead as we entered labyrinth-like alleys, passed white houses blooming with bougainvillea and spotted iconic windmills crowning the hill.

These 16th-century relics, once grinding grain, now loom over the harbor.

Pirate raids once plagued the Cyclades, and Chora still carries that imprint. Streets narrow without warning, twist sharply, then funnel toward the harbor for defensive visibility. Corners curve rather than meet at right angles, reducing wind resistance from the unrelenting Meltemi. Little Venice's colorful balconies dangle over the sea, where we sipped cocktails at a waterfront café, watching fishing boats bob. We all marveled at Panagia Paraportiani, a cluster of chapels fused into one asymmetrical wonder.

Curious how a Mykonian spends time here, I asked Saltiel to describe his perfect day on the island. He prefers to rise early for a quiet *kalimera*, the Greek "Good morning," then a swim at secluded Kapari Beach with its crystal-clear waters, or venturing "north to Fokos, which still feels wild and untouched, stopping for a simple lunch at Fokos Taverna just steps from the sand." Afternoons back at the hotel, watching the light shift over Delos from the terrace — a ritual we adopted, too. Evenings of long conversation over dinner at Pere Ubu, the hotel's restaurant, then slowly settling into the island's softer tempo after sunset.

As we left by ferry for Santorini, a brisk two hours away, Saltiel's words endured: "We hope guests leave feeling connected to the island and our traditions, but also to themselves. It's about slowing down, celebrating what matters and discovering Mykonos in a way that makes you want to return."