

The view from Alefkandra Restaurant



At Alefkandra Restaurant



MYKONOS

A celebrated and world-famous gay destination, Mykonos is one of the most popular and stylish islands of Greece. Offering sophistication, charm, and beauty – both scenic and corporeal – it's no wonder that so much of Mykonos flies the rainbow flag.

Michael Darton

mykonos is part of a small cluster of Greek islands offering 85 square kilometers of charm, beauty, and beaches. Its epicenter is the town which is directly beside the island's two ports. The town is known as Chora, and has managed to keep its traditional look and feel. Small cobbled streets with churches and shops line the bright and winding alleys. Some shops are so small you can only fit a few people in at a time. The longest street in the town is Matoyianni; here you can buy clothes, jewelry, and all the rest offered by celebrated local designers.

The streets in this town are laden with restaurants and coffeeshops as well as more traditional-style Greek gyro joints and salad bars. You can lose yourself in this colorful maze and discover new alleys and hidden sidestreets. If you're not careful, you can take a turn into the backyard of a local house and walk into someone's living room.

Just north of the port is the area of Little Venice, adjacent to the island's famous windmills, Kato Myli, which used to be a strong force of the local economy grinding

wheat to produce flour. Some are now converted into houses. Other buildings which can offer insight into the history of the island can be found in the easy-to-get-to monastery of Tourliani, about five miles north of the town. Ancient artifacts and impressive architecture await. Check out the amazing range of ecclesiastical wood-carvings, and be sure to see the amazing marble bell tower here, too.

Getting there

Getting to the beautiful Greek isle of Mykonos is easy: there are many direct flights to Mykonos Airport, which is just a five minute, nine euro taxi drive from Mykonos town. Or you can choose to fly to Athens as an alternative. Athens is served by a good transportation system, and it's a simple direct journey from Athens airport to Piraeus, the Port of Athens. The journey takes about one hour and costs around nine euros from airport to port. From Piraeus there are four or five boat services to take you direct to Mykonos. The slower boat takes about five hours and cost around 28 euros. A faster boat service can get you direct to the island in about three hours. I preferred the slower

boat, which offers more deck areas and restaurants. The crossing offers idyllic views passing other islands, and if you're traveling later in the day the sun setting over the sea is a sight to remember.

Bars and clubs

After the sunsets on Mykonos, the evening sweeps in with its pulsing nightlife. The restaurants tend to get busier from 8 p.m., and the bars begin to get busy from 10 p.m.

A visit to Mykonos goes hand in hand with a nightly visit to **Montparnasse Piano Bar** (24 Agion Anargyron Street, Venetias (Little Venice); +30-22890-23719; Thepianobar.com). Opened in 1983, Piano Bar serves exquisite drinks, cocktails, and champagnes, as well as other wines and a range of beers. Each night there is live entertainment featuring the finest of singers and cabaret artists. The front of the bar is for those who want to chat and meet locals and international travelers. You can gaze out at the ocean here and watch the legendary sunsets, or browse through the endless photos of international celebrities who have stopped in to visit. Proudly gay owned and operated, the

Piano Bar's owners, the delightful and charismatic Nikos and Jody, will instantly make you feel like you've known them for years. They are charming with tremendous warmth and wit.

The **Ramrod Club** (Taxi Square; +30-22890-24301; Ramrodbar-karnagio.com) sits right by the port on Taxi Square. It's a mixed club and hosts drag shows; the music here ranges from house to electro pop. You can lose yourself in the busy atmosphere or sit on one of the two verandahs with stunning views of the bay. Ramrod gets going late, so it's best to arrive here after midnight; the shows start around 2 a.m.

Pierro's Cafe (Mantoyianni Street, Kyr-iaki Square; +30-22890-23529), associated with Pierro's Bar, is a busy dance venue with a mainly gay clientele. Pierro's gets busy later, and the hedonism goes on until the early hours. Watch out for their legendary drag shows, especially on the weekends.

Cavo Pardiso (opposite Paradise Beach; +30-22890-27205; Cavoparadiso.gr) offers a mixed crowd of happy clubbers getting down to house and dance music.

Here it gets very, very busy in high season. It's a place to dance your night away and drink cocktails until sunrise.

Coco Club (beside Super Paradise beach), perched looking over the beach, serves food and drinks at fairly high prices as it's adjacent to the island's most exclusive and well-known beach. Coco is a popular gay hangout for those wanting to sit and enjoy the views

Where to eat

One of the features of Greek cuisine is the *mezze*, meaning "middle," possibly referring to the fact that it's a filler and not a full meal. Traditional *mezze* may contain marinated olives in oil, fresh bread, soft feta cheese in oil, dolmades (vine leaves stuffed with rice, pine nuts, and currants), sundried tomatoes, sardines, and other seafood. The portions can be so generous that your *mezze* turns into a full meal itself!

Salads, fish, and meat are local and fresh; you won't find a fast-foot outlet anywhere. Selections of wine, spirits, and local ouzo – the national anise-flavored liqueur – are always on the menu, together with cognacs and fine coffees.

The stunning **Blu-Blue Lounge**, overlooking the old port of Mykonos and sitting beside the Harmony Hotel, has a fantastic view of the Aegean Sea and its sunsets. They have an extensive range of organic fruit juices and alcoholic cocktails. The menu offers a wide range of local and international foods; try their amazing Greek salad, which comes with lavish amounts of feta cheese spread with olive oil and oregano. Their range of pasta dishes is impressive; they serve a tasty carbonara with huge chunks of ham and cheese, along with fresh parmesan.

For the real friendly Greek service and cuisine try **Alefkandra Restaurant** (+30-02890-22450), offering the ultimate experience in dining and style. The restaurant sits just south of the famous windmills and overlooks the ocean. On the other side of the restaurant is the Metropolis church, adding to the ambiance. They have a wide range of fresh fish and meats to choose from, expertly accented with garlic and wine sauces. The meat and fish are grilled on open barbecues, so the aromas are hard to beat. The waiters are friendly and cheeky, sure to make you feel welcome.

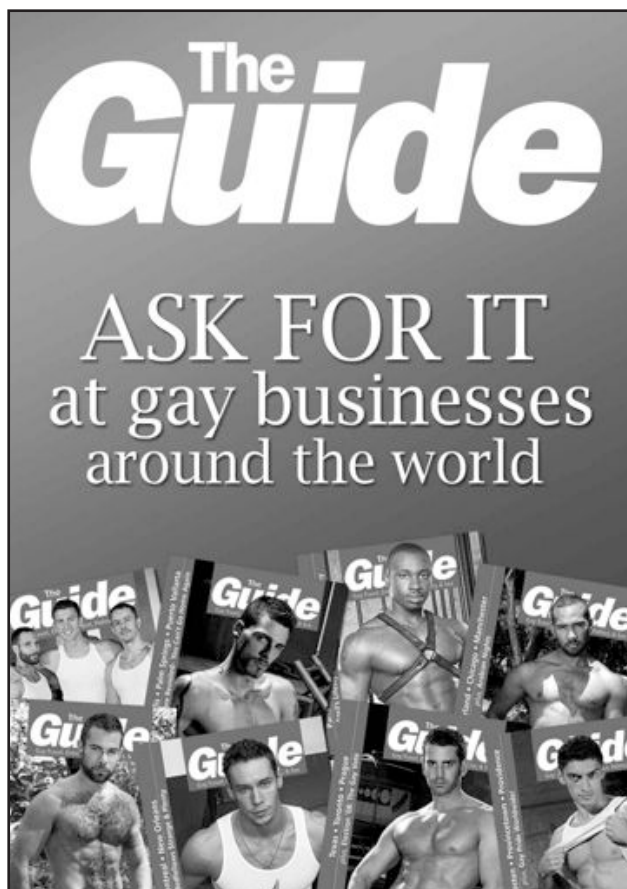
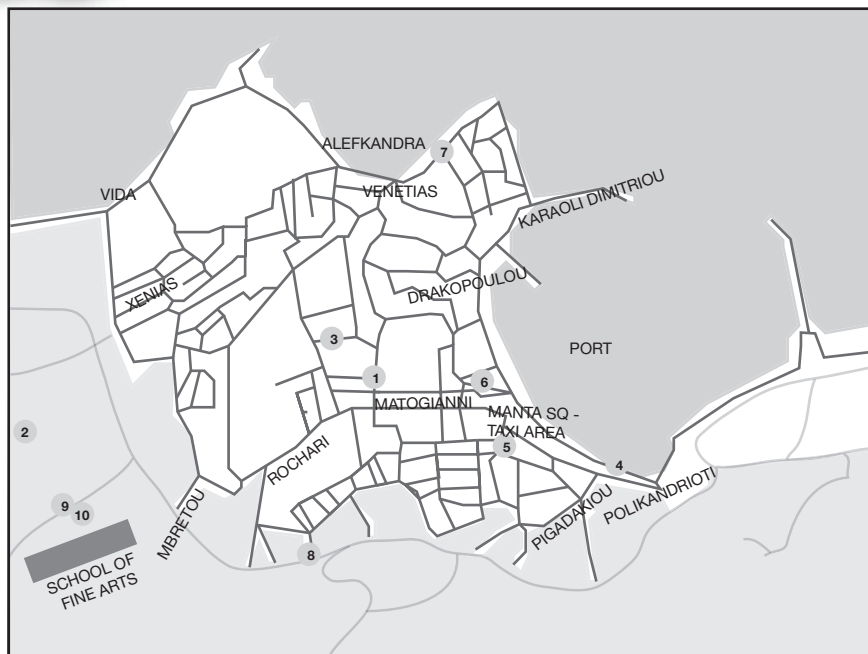
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- 2) **Geranium Moonlight Hotel**
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For authentic Thai cuisine, try **Blue Ginger Restaurant** (Argyraina; +30-22890-27602) on the ring round that surrounds the main town. Run by Carol and Yiannis, Thai and Chinese chefs serve up Asian cuisine in idyllic surroundings. The restaurant boasts a large outside area with amazing views. Try their Thai chicken satay with chopped peanut sauce and aromatic jasmine rice. They also serve a range of Chinese food here, too.

Restaurant Kostos (5 Metropoleos Street) has been in operation since 1963

and sits right in the center of town. The wood chairs and tables complement the white surroundings and traditional decoration. They offer a full range of Greek and international food.

Accommodations

From boutique hotels offering cozy rooms tucked within traditional Greek structures in the town center, to more lavish and spacious modern neo-classical hotels located all over, Mykonos boasts an impressively wide range of accommoda-

tions. By mentioning *The Guide* you may be offered special discounted rates, so please quote us when booking for offers on rooms and suites.

Nearly all hotels in Mykonos have adapted to the island's nocturnal nature and breakfast is served until around noon. It's a joy after a late night to know you don't have to struggle to wake up too early for the treats!

Apartments Rania (2 Leondiou Boni, Petassos; +30-22890-28272; Rania-apartments-mykonos.com) are spread around a luxurious garden which sits just at the top of Mykonos Town overlooking the ports and beaches. All apartments are spacious and equipped with a full kitchen, telephone, mini-bar, and television. Most have small balconies, some which overlook the Aegean Sea. Their rates are competitive; like with all accommodations in Mykonos, their high season (June through August) rates do rise, while earlier in the year and in September prices drop.

Elysium Hotel (Mykonos; +30-22890-23952; Elysiumhotel.com) is a "gay and proud" hotel run by the charming Vassilis. Situated around the School of Arts area, just a three minute walk into the center of town, this hotel has a host of exquisite rooms to offer within its spacious grounds. The stunning pool overlooks the town and the sea, and there's a friendly poolside bar. There is adequate space here to find a secluded spot to read, or busier areas where you will find others to talk and enjoy fun with. Cute locals who are friends of the manager drop by and strip down to their Speedos to bathe and enjoy the experience of the Elysium. There is always a lot to be seen around the pool, day and night. Also on the premises is a well-equipped gym room with free weights and machines. Adjacent is a holistic room with sauna, jacuzzi, and massage facilities.

Zannis Hotel (Mykonos; +30-22890-22486; Zannis.gr) is directly opposite the Elysium and offers a sun terrace and pool with a jacuzzi. The breakfast area offers wonderful sea views. The rooms are well-furnished, and services and breakfast are first class. This is a gay-friendly hotel run by a wonderfully warm and friendly Greek family. I sat chatting with them over the best coffee and cake I tasted in Mykonos.



Follow us to the bright side of the moon



Geranium Residence - Moonlight Hotel
School of Fine Arts area. P.O. Box 58, 84600 Mykonos, Cyclades, Greece

Tel. 22890 22867, 24620, fax 22890 24624 info@geraniumhotel.com, www.geraniumhotel.com

For an authentic Mykonian experience the **Zorzis Hotel** (30 Nik Kalogera Street; +30-22890-22167; Zorzishotel.com) sits on the familiar narrow streets in the heart of Mykonos town, Chora. The well-equipped rooms are all *en suite*. All rooms have television and air-conditioning as well as a large ceiling fan. The Zorzis boasts a tranquil garden at the rear of the hotel where breakfast is served. And on the front of the hotel there is a small verandah and balcony for relaxed people-watching. All the rooms are impeccably clean, and the service is friendly and relaxed. The Zorzis is open year round and is an excellent choice for quality and value.

The **Geranium Moonlight** (New Ring Road; +30-22890-22867/24620; Geraniumhotel.com) is stylish and decadent. Overlooking the whole bay of Mykonos town, the view here at sunset is unsurpassable. The charming and charismatic owner, Alexandar Georgiev, makes all guests feel special. A sunset cocktail offered upon checking in makes a perfect time to collect info and advice about your itinerary. There is a selection of 16 rooms and suites; the ultimate in style and glamour is the semi-detached Villa Kiveli, boasting a large, private verandah. A sumptuous homemade breakfast served daily by the pool includes freshly baked treats and squeezed orange juice. The pool offers shaded areas and comfortable lounges. Regular events and live music take place here. If you book early for 2008 you will receive great discounts; contact Alexander at the Geranium Moonlight soon!

Harmony Boutique Hotel (Mykonos; +30-22890-28980; Harmonyhotel.gr), one of the few hotels open year round, sits overlooking the port and the town. Most of the rooms have balconies that boast stunning views. The rooms are equipped with satellite television, mini-bar, safe, hairdryers, and modem port. The decor is light with warm colors and wood finishes, producing a fresh feel. The suites have jacuzzis and offer designer spa products for the ultimate in relaxation. Within the hotel is the Apolafsi Restaurant, overlooking the sea and offering a diverse range of local dishes, pasta, and international cuisine. You can relax with a cocktail or two in the pool bar and watch the large cruise liners arrive and depart from the island.

Information and tours

The **Mykonos Accommodation Center** (Enpolon Dymameon 10; +30-22890-23160; Mykonos-accommodation.com) is placed neatly in the heart of Mykonos town. At the top of a stairway you will find a helpful oasis of information and services. The center is run by the delightful and attentive John Van Lerberghe. In Mykonos for 24 years, John has a wealth of experience and expertise on trips, hotels, flights, and boat excursions, as well as what to do locally. One of the trips on offer is to the sacred island of Delos, birthplace of Apollo, god of music, truth, and light; booked through the Accommodation Center, this excursion costs 35 euros, which includes ferry tickets, your guide, and entrance to the museum. Boats leave

every day except Monday at 10 a.m. and return at 1 p.m.

The gay-run **Matt Holidays** (Sotiraki, PO Box 166, Mykonos 84600; +30-22890-28020; Matt-santorini.com) offers ultimate professionalism with all your travel requirements. They can arrange for inbound and outbound flights to Mykonos or Athens and other local places of interest, as well as local trips and tours. Being a gay-run business they understand your needs and tailor your trip accordingly. Run by the friendly Anna Manolakou (who knows Mykonos and the other Greek islands better than anyone I know), Matt Holidays is able to offer great deals on some of the lavish hotels and spas on Mykonos. Car rentals and local trips can also be booked via their website, or feel free to pop into their spacious office, which sits neatly north of the town, right above the bus station.

Beaches and outdoors

The island of Mykonos offers a wide choice of beaches and bays. Some are unspoiled with few or no amenities, while a host of famous beaches serve up everything you might want within walking distance; these beaches are packed during high season in July and August, but come September are a lot quieter.

Getting to the beaches can be exhilarating as some of the roads are narrow and rocky; you're probably best off hiring a car or quad bike. I was brave and hired a small moped. It was fun but challenging; the drivers are frantic in Greece, and the roads

Friendly faces at the Elysium Bar



The family Zannis by the pool



Stripping off at the pool of the Elysium Hotel



seem to have bumps and holes everywhere.

For those who want to be driven, taxis are reasonable, or the regular bus services from the town center can take you to the most popular beaches: Paradise, Super Paradise, Paranga, and Elia Beach. All buses run from early in the morning until 9 or 10 p.m. The single bus journey cost 1.20 euros, or you can buy a book of bus tickets for a discounted price from local shops and outlets.

Another popular and pleasant way to see the beaches is to take the boat and beach-hop. These boats sail back and forth all day.

Karanga Beach, small and gorgeous, soon became my favorite, with its mixed clientele and nearby rocky cruising area. The beach is small but well-equipped with sun-beds and two restaurants. There is even a masseur that will soothe you into your holiday right on your sun-bed.

Just towards the end of the beach is a raised rocky area, with lots of naked men engaged in what I dubbed "cock-climbing." At the top of this small outcrop you can see fantastic views of the beaches and surrounding environs. The cruising here in the day is quite busy, with treats to be found around the hidden areas. Naked bodies and skinny dipping are all the rage at this rocky retreat. Note well though: good shoes are a must if you plan on climbing the rocks.

Paradise Beach sits neatly beside Karanga Beach and is well-equipped with shops, self-service restaurants, dive centers, and bars. It's about five kilometers from the town and is served by a regular bus service. Paradise Beach starts to pound with music by late afternoon, and the lively crowd start to drink and dance as the sun sets.

Super Paradise Beach has gained an international reputation for the place to be in Mykonos, but I found it less super than Paradise Beach and somewhat more difficult to access. Its waters and sands are super, but it's less organized and has less to offer than Paradise Beach and is a longer journey, about seven kilometers out of Mykonos town. But the beach does boast an array of cute men in Speedos and sunglasses. There is a bar and restaurant – with a pool, too – over-



Greek Guards in Athens



Your auteur at Geranium Hotel

Hotel Zannis

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looking the sea. Prices are high here, so if you don't fancy spending on local delicacies, pack a snack and plenty of water. As you arrive at Super Paradise, remember it's gays to the right and straights to the left.

Elia Beach is a little further on and takes a little longer to reach, but here it's a more relaxed and natural ambiance on the long, wide, mixed-clientele sands. Of course, there's lots of nude sun-bathing at this beach popular with gay travelers.

Working out

To work off all those generous Greek portions – and I mean food! – take a trip to the friendly and busy **Bodywork Gym** (Vrisi, on the road to Plati Yialos Beach). This well-equipped establishment offers a range of machines, free-weights, and regular classes. I enjoyed the yoga class, which is led by one of the owners, Anke; it's great for stretching and rejuvenation. They also house the innovative “power plate” machines here, too, which can be booked for use. The gym is open every day and stays open until 10 p.m. most nights. ▼



Owners Nikos and Jody with the lovely Pamela



Geranium Hotel guests enjoy crazy fun on quad bikes



Happy clappers at Paradise Beach

 A black and white advertisement for Montparnasse the Piano Bar. The title is in a large, elegant font. Below it, the text reads "Eclectic entertainment nightly with distinctive cocktails". The image shows silhouettes of people sitting at a piano bar, with a piano and a bar area visible.

24, Ag. Anargyron Str., Little Venice, Mykonos 84600
tel (+30) 228 902 3719; www.thepianobar.com

 A photograph of a man, John, sitting at a desk in an office. He is wearing a light blue shirt and is smiling. Behind him are shelves filled with books and papers, and a wall with various notices and advertisements.

John of the Accommodation Center

 A black and white advertisement for Apartments Rania. The title is in a large, bold font. Below it, the text reads "LUXURY APARTMENT RENTALS" and "ULTIMATE STYLE & PLEASURE, MINUTES FROM BEACHES & MYKONOS TOWN". The image shows a view of a building with a balcony overlooking the sea.

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