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CANADIAN *Traveller*

GREECE

An island-hopping
ethereal escape

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WANDERLUST

GRECIAN PROMISES

For **KASIA DIETZ** and her husband,
Greece is more than just a place – it's a feeling.



Santorini island, Greece



Afternoon mikró ypno (“little sleep”) is sacrosanct and enforced by law; no noise is allowed between 3-5:30 p.m. and phone calls made during these hours are frowned upon.



THE DAY WE MET, he promised me Greece. I had recently returned from a solo journey around the world and had put off island-hopping the Hellenic Republic for a more amorous occasion. It’s fun to think that maybe he had read my mind but actually, the Greek islands were one of his most beloved

destinations and he wished to share them with me.

We arrived to Santorini, the gem of the Cyclades, and headed straight for the town of Oia on the northwestern tip of the island. A landscape of whitewashed stone houses carved into craggy cliff tops overlooking the caldera took my breath away. The seemingly infinite vistas leading to a crystal blue sea appeared out of a fairytale. Oia was undeniably one of the most picturesque hamlets on the island, making Santorini a prime destination for romantic interludes.

The season was early fall and while the island was buzzing with life, it was far calmer than the tourist-laden summer months. With a little luck and a lot of knocking on doors, we settled into a boutique hotel boasting a majestic terrace above the caldera. Here, we would sit perched for hours, watching as the sun set far off in the distance, illuminating the peninsula with its golden hues.

Explorations of the island found us mingling with local artisans in the cosmopolitan capital of Fira, as I carefully selected the newest addition to my globally curated art collection. Afternoons were spent amidst the soaring red cliffs and inviting blue waters of Kokkini Beach, better known as Red Beach. One evening, we snaked down the narrow steps to Ammoudi, a tiny fishing port just below Oia. Surrounded by more majestic red cliffs, it was here where freshly caught fish was grilled to perfection as another dazzling sunset ended a utopian day.

Santorini became our first stop while hopping around the neighbouring Cyclades. The blue-domed churches and white stone-paved paths so characteristic of these islands dotting the Aegean Sea set the scene for our holiday sanctuary.

It was this same mystical landscape of Santorini, from the vantage point of our plush cave-like dwelling that the man who once promised me Greece, promised me eternity. One year later, this became the setting for our honeymoon – a Greek odyssey beginning in Santorini and ending in remote, less inhabited islands, that would even more deeply devote us to this land. ►



Triopetra beach in Crete

Our longing for the feeling of Greece grew more profound with every moment that didn't result in dips into transparent waters and long walks along wild idyllic beaches. Ten years and five junkets since that first Greek sunset, I have encountered 15 islands, my husband even more. We craved the ethereal escape that these soulful islands could provide.

Having read much about the largest Greek island of Crete, we decided to trade island-hopping via ferryboat for a self-guided driving tour. It was late May when we arrived in the capital city Heraklion and joined the still scant amount of tourists for a history lesson at the ancient Minoan village of Knossos. The heat rising in the late afternoon, we set our sights on beaches along the less developed southern coast.

We arrived at Triopetra Beach, named for its trio of majestic rocks jutting out of the water, and knew this would become home, at least for a few days of this whirlwind trip. Settling into a family-run hotel which instantly welcomed us as though we were long lost relatives, we blissfully sank into the feeling of Greece. ►



Made up of 56 islands, 24 inhabited, the large number of islands in the Cyclades ensures diversity. That means that while there are islands, like Ios, where staying up all night at a club is de rigueur, others, like Sikinos, are quiet and traditional.

Crete has possibly the best hiking in the region, and attracts rugged hikers bent on trekking famous Samariá Gorge.



Chania, Crete

*The Cyclades are best for:
Venetian kástra and sunset views*

*Crete is best for: Beaches, traditional culture,
Venetian castles and urban architecture*



While Crete boasts its share of sandy secluded beaches, we were surprised to discover a palm tree forest hidden behind Preveli Beach. Located just below the monastery of Preveli at the mouth of the Kourtaliótiko gorge, this lush forest is filled with endemic Cretan palms rising into the sky. As though taken from a distant land, not at all reminiscent of Greece, the scene was further set with majestic mountains and a freshwater stream, ideal for cooling off. Before heading back to the beach, we stopped for a dip in the adjacent lagoon.

We became intrigued by this island that delighted with the unexpected, such a contrast to Santorini and the Cyclades. As difficult as it was to part from the panorama that became the setting of our Cretan adventure, more of the island beckoned with its idyllic beaches and inviting villages. The food, too, was much more diverse than on smaller islands and we soon discovered for ourselves that the Cretan kitchen is one of the best in Greece.

Our next stop was a two-hour drive along the Southern coast to the town of Chora Sfakion, the capital of the mountainous region of Sfakiá. Rather than hiking the 10-kilometre cliffsides path, we hopped aboard a boat that deposited us in Loutro. This small seaside village set upon a turquoise bay felt like stepping back into the Cyclades. Whitewashed houses trimmed in blue beneath mountains along a single pedestrian street set the scene in what felt like a remote island. Goats outnumbered humans come winter, while in-season the village came to life along its portside eateries. Within hours of arriving, we met the locals, each one offering a room to rent, and set our sights on the beach furthest from the port.

As happened often during our Greek adventures, we were reluctant to leave our newfound paradise, but one last stop remained. En route to the port town of Chania, we stopped for a last dip at a beach nestled in between a canyon. Seitan Limania Beach is only reachable by hiking down a narrow slip between two rugged cliffs. We couldn't resist a swim in these crystal clear waters whose sandy beach was no longer an unknown destination to tourists.

Blissfully bronzed and scented with sea salt, we arrived to what is often considered the soul of Crete. Admired for its 14th century Venetian harbour boasting an array of dining options and trendy watering holes, Chania proved an unexpected Shangri-la. Walking the tangle of back streets revealed the local side to this evocative town that we were in search of. Venetian, Egyptian and Ottoman influences were omnipresent, particularly at the 16th century lighthouse.

During our last Cretan meal, shaded by an olive tree in the old town as locals mastered games of backgammon in the distance, rather than reflecting on the many islands that remained to be explored, we plotted our return to Crete. **CT**



CRUISE YOUR WAY THROUGH GREECE

Inspired to plan your own experience in Greece?

Celebrity Cruises is among the many options you can find to get around, enjoying comforts and luxuries while travelling from one island to the next and creating unique adventures along the way. Here are some of the sights you can discover when travelling by sea:

SANTORINI

Less academic than Athens and quieter than Mykonos, Santorini is one of the most-visited destinations on any number of Celebrity Cruises' Mediterranean cruises, and for good reason. Santorini's cruise port was created when the island's volcano erupted in 1650 BC. When a Celebrity cruise docks in **Fira**, you'll take a small boat to the shoreline and then make your way to the top of the island by either cable car, donkey or on foot.

While you're in Santorini with Celebrity, you'll explore the village of **Oia**, see the sunset from **Amoudi Bay**, or take a half-day excursion to **Nea Kameni** and **Palia Kameni** for a dip in their ancient, therapeutic hot springs.

CRETE

Throughout human history, Crete has been conquered, lost and reconquered time and time again by Romans, Byzantines, Venetians and Turks. As a result, archeological ruins dating back to antiquity are found everywhere in Crete, creating a delightful mishmash of Ottoman architecture and historic Venetian mansions, many of which have been transformed into quaint shops, inviting cafés, and boutique hotels.

You'll experience Cretan hospitality and history on your Celebrity cruise to Chania with a tour to the traditional **Village of Vamos**, the **Karidi Monastery**, the **Braoudakis winery**, and the **Folklore Museum**. Plus, learn about the Cretan diet and prepare a traditional dish using local products and extra virgin olive oil.