

Santorini - the best view in the world...

This is one of the most spectacular Greek islands - part of the Cyclades group, so called because they form a circle around the ancient island of Delos.



Nothing can prepare you for the first magical view of the towering multi-coloured lava layered cliffs rising out of an azure blue sea, topped with clusters of whitewashed villages and stunning cobalt blue-domed Byzantine churches.

It is picture postcard stunning, with no need of any artistic touching up - blue, blue sea, snow-white buildings and wonderful blue domes abound everywhere, particularly in the capital **Fira** and the ancient town of **Oia**. Away from the caldera, this loveliest of Greek islands has many quiet corners where the pace of life slows right down and you can experience the timeless peace of rural Greece. The historic villages of **Pirgos** and **Megalochori** are particularly worth a visit.

What to see and do on Santorini

Check out our instant tourist guide for the best and most popular things to do and see!

1. The Caldera - visit the volcanic island of Nea Kameni and swim in the hot sulphur springs of Palia Kameni
2. Sunset at Oia (known locally as Ia), enjoy a meal or drink at this beautiful village overlooking the scenic Caldera
3. Wine-tasting and see the extensive vine growing areas of the island by following the wineroads - Santo Wines in Megalochori
4. Visit the stunning Beaches - try a different one every day - relax or swim in crystal clear water
5. Souvenir shopping at Fira and Oia - designer fashion and fabulous jewellery and gold shops
6. Climb up the steps - 587 from the Old Port to Fira or 250 steps from Ammoudi to Oia.
7. Monastery view of island Drive up to the highest part of the island and see for miles across the sparkling waters of the Aegean Sea



8. Visit the ancient city ruins at Akrotiri and Ancient Thira, and see fascinating Cycladic, Hellenistic and Roman sculptures at the Archaeological Museum and the Museum of Prehistoric Thera.
9. Visit the traditional Greek villages : Imerovigli, Pyrgos, Megalohori and Emporio, and experience the timeless tranquility of rural Greece
10. Island hop to nearby Thirasia or further afield to Ios and Sikinos
11. Visit the historic Akrotiri Lighthouse in the far south of the island for a fabulous view
12. Enjoy the open-air cinema at Kamari - open from June onwards.

A brief history of the island

Santorini owes its unusual shape to a massive volcanic eruption around 3,500 years ago - the magnificent submerged caldera (crater) is the epicentre.

As well as wiping out the thriving Minoan civilization with huge tidal waves (tsunami), the explosion led to the centre of the island collapsing to form the caldera or crater. The caldera has very steep sides (essentially the cliffs you see above sea level continue down for a further 400 metres or so below the surface of the water).

This allows even the largest cruise ships to enter the sheltered waters of the Caldera and anchor safely. As a result, the island has become one of the most popular destinations on the Mediterranean cruise circuit with two or three liners arriving and departing every day.

Remains of the historical Minoan civilization, which was highly advanced, can be seen at the spectacular mountaintop village of old **Thira**. At the recently re-opened **Akrotiri** archaeological site excavations have revealed some fascinating aspects of how life was lived on these sunny islands, thousands of years before Christianity.

One of the most stunning aspects of Santorini is the amazing Caldera (crater)

Take in the Panoramic view of the Caldera with the whitewashed houses of Fira clinging to the top of the cliffs. The towns clustered on top of the towering cliffs on the west side of the island command a marvellous view over the Caldera.

Santorini History

The island of Santorini was once circular and was called Strongili

(the Round One). However, around 1650 BC a massive volcanic eruption sunk the centre of the island, leaving the Caldera surrounded by huge, towering cliffs. The eruption and tsunamis that followed are believed to have been responsible for the demise of the Minoan people in Crete.

Further volcanic eruptions shaped the island as it is today and created black sandy beaches, lava striped cliffs and fertile vine-growing soil. Later eruptions caused Thirasia to be split from the main island, and two islets to appear in the caldera : Palia Kameni and Nea Kameni.

The volcano is still active - steam can be seen venting on the islet of Nea Kameni and occasionally small tremors can be felt on the island.

Santorini's volcano

Trips to the volcano

It is also possible to visit the largest and youngest islet (50 years old), in the Caldera - Nea Kameni (meaning 'new burnt'), via a boat trip. Guided boat trips leave the Old Port at Fira daily and also from Ammoudi Port at Oia.

The volcano tour lasts around 2 hours, incorporating a swim in the hot thermal springs of Palia Kameni (meaning 'old burnt') or you can take a Caldera full day tour, which also takes you to the nearby island of Thirasia. Here you can lunch at a harbour taverna, and take a donkey up 250 steps to the village of Horio or Manolas. There are also extended boat trips which will include a sunset cruise.

It is around 150 metres from landing to the rim of the crater on Nea Kameni, where you can see the fascinating lava formations and gaze up at Santorini's cliff top villages, like Oia and Fira. The striped cliffs are reddish brown, grey and black pumice. You should be able to spot steam and sulphur escaping from vent holes. There is a hiking trail to follow.

Tip: Take an early trip as it can get very hot on the volcano in the afternoons. Wear flat, comfy shoes as it is quite a hike on rough ground, and a hat, sunscreen and take water



Swimming in the hot, thermal springs of the Caldera

The thermal springs at Palia Kameni are in shallow water, so the boats tend to moor about 50 meters(depending on their size) off the coast, at the bay of Aghios Nikolaos.

Look out for the ancient church set in the cliff's edge. In order to reach the hot springs you will need to jump off the boat and be able to swim at least a couple of pool lengths in order to reach them.

Once you reach the springs you will find the water is waist deep, so you can easily walk around. You will feel the soft volcanic mud beneath your feet, and as it is good for the skin many people rub the reddish brown mud on their arms and face as a treatment. Think of it as an outdoor spa!

The warm waters are caused by underwater venting from the live volcano, and they are full of minerals and salts so you will find you can float in the water easily.

Tip: If you're swimming in the hot springs don't wear your best swimwear, as the sulphury waters can stain them yellow.

The fantastic panorama from the clifftop villages of Fira and Oia over the Caldera in the sunshine seems even further enhanced as the sun sets. There are many sunset bars, restaurants and boat trips where you can watch the sun sink into the deep blue Aegean sea, falling behind the islets in the Caldera.

If you take a sunset cruise you can experience the sun setting magnificently behind the islets, Palia Kameni and Nea Kameni in the Caldera. You can gaze up at the clusters of whitewashed buildings on the edge of the towering colourful, lava-layered cliffs and enjoy the sun sinking behind the volcano.

As you return in the boat you will see all the twinkling lights of the island high up on the cliff tops. It is a magical view of a beautiful island.

Panoramic view of Santorini's west coast from the road near Akrotiri (seen on the left). Click on the picture for a high resolution version and you'll be able to see the picturesque white painted towns of Fira and Oia on the cliff tops across the the Caldera. The enormous cliffs dwarf the cruise liners which visit the island almost every day during the summer. A couple of donkeys graze in the field near one of the many bars which are popular places to sit over a glass of wine or two and watch the sun go down. On the right, you can see the mountain of Profiti Illia, the highest point on the island and a great place to go for some more spectacular views.

Santorini day trip - what to do in Santorini in one day

The general opinion is that you need at least 5 days to really take in all the sights. However, if you are on a cruise and find you only have a day to explore this beautiful Greek island, there are some amazing things to do and see in Santorini. It will be a busy day-trip but seeing the best places will be well worth it!

1. Enjoy the magnificent view of Santorini as you approach the island. It's likely you'll be sailing between the [caldera](#) (crater) and volcano, and combined with the white buildings and blue-domed churches perched on the top of the sheer cliffs, it is a stunning view from the water.

2. If you dock at the **Old Port (Skala Firas)** you would be advised to catch the [cable-car](#) up to **Fira**, as walking up the 587 steps or riding a mule, will take too much of your precious day on the island. There can be a short wait if a cruise ship has just docked, but the queues go down quickly as the cable-cars leave every 5 mins and only take around 3 mins to get to the top.



3. Explore the bustling capital town of **Fira** - there are lots of cafes and restaurants overlooking the caldera, so try and enjoy a drink whilst you gaze out at the fabulous view.

There are plenty of shops offering souvenirs, jewellery, designer clothes and accessories. The galleries and art stores are filled with original paintings depicting Greece's beautiful scenery and breathtaking views.

4. If you are not part of an organised tour, then you will need to hire some transport if you want to see all the sights. There are lots of dealers offering competitive rental rates for scooters, quad bikes and cars so don't forget your driving licence and credit cards.

Remember to ask the rental company for a [map of the island](#) and directions if you need them.

5. Either visit the different coloured beaches - red (the **Red Beach**), white (the **White Beach**) and black (**Kamari** or **Perissa**) - they are worth looking at even if you don't have time to stay and enjoy the sunbathing or swimming.

6. Or visit the ancient city of **Akrotiri** - the most important archaeological find in the Eastern Mediterranean. The ancient city was preserved by the lava from the volcanic eruption.

7. Top of the must do things is to visit **Oia**, which is a charming village built into the cliff with narrow paths, cobbled streets and an amazing view over the caldera. If you have time this is the place to enjoy a stunning and memorable sunset - the crowds gather in the evening at the castle walls and it's a wonderful atmosphere as the sun descends into the blue Aegean sea - expect much whooping, cheering and applause from enthusiastic tourists!



8. Time to rejoin your cruise or catch a ferry to your next destination.

You've seen many of the top attractions during one day, but there are so many more things to see and do:

the winefields, the picturesque traditional villages like Pyrgos and Megalohori, the wineries, the museums teeming with prehistoric discoveries, the wonderful local cuisine, a trip to the caldera's volcanic islets and the nearby lovely island of Thirasia, a swim in the hot springs and much more ...

Try and come back some day to experience all this beautiful Greek island has to offer.

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The unique deep red colour of the cliffs at the Red beach is due to the iron-rich sedimentary rocks and the colourful black, grey and red volcanic pebbles make this the most famous beach on the island

At the southern tip of the island, 12 km south west of **Fira**, is the **Red Beach**, close to the Minoan archaeological site of **Akrotiri**. This amazing red beach is definitely worth a visit any time of the year, just for a look, even if you are not planning on enjoying the swimming and sunbathing.



Unlike the more tourist focused beaches of **Kamari** and **Perissa**, this stunning red beach is unspoilt with no buildings on the shore. Consequently, there are no facilities on the beach, although during the summer there is a little kiosk selling drinks and snacks on the way to the beach.

If you are planning on spending the day there it's advisable to take food and drink with you. There are sunloungers and umbrellas

for hire during the high season. The beach can get crowded by noon, so try getting there in the morning if possible.

The water at the red beach is crystal clear and so is a popular choice for snorkelling. This is quite a rocky beach, so it is worth wearing sneakers, or tough sandals for the 10 minute hike across the cliffs and for walking across the hot pebbles once you get there. As you enter the water the pebbles get bigger and smoother and it's a bit easier underfoot.

You can take the bus from **Fira**, drive, catch a water taxi or caique (small fishing boat). Unless arriving by boat, access to the beach is via a rough, steep trail along the cliffs leading from the parking area. There are often jewellery stalls on the way up to the beach if you are looking for a bargain souvenir.

Santorini island beaches

Most of the beaches are black sand, due to the volcanic activity. Check out our guide to find the best beach on Santorini.



South

Best beaches in the South part of the island: **Perissa**, **Perivolos**, **Vlihada**, **Agios Georgios**, **Red beach** (see above) and the **White beach**

Perissa - 10 km south east of Fira

Near Ancient **Thera**, there are plenty of amenities on this popular tourist beach, with a wide choice of beach and chillout bars. The beach stretches for more than 7 km.

Perivolos - 10 km south of Fira

With lighter coloured black sand than **Perissa**, and the longest stretch of sand on the island, this is a great beach when there is a North wind. There are plenty of beach bars, restaurants and watersports including diving, windsurfing and jet skiing.

Vlihada - 10 km south of Fira

This quiet beach has a small port where fishing boats and yachts moor in summer. A big plus is the profusion of nearby seafood restaurants serving just-caught fish dishes!

Agios Georgios - 12 km south east of Fira

This delightful beach is situated at the southern tip of the Santorini and offers plenty of hotel accomodation, cafes, bars, beach bars and watersports. This beach is only 3 km from **Perissa**. This

is a great place for a swim if you want to avoid the crowds. You can reach this beach from **Perissa** by car or walking.

The White beach/ Aspri Ammos - 13 km south west of **Fira**

The White beach is less crowded than its famous neighbour the **Red beach**. To get there you need to take a boat from **Red Beach** or **Akrotiri**, or you can walk. Be warned you will need to walk through water when you get off the boat as there is no pier.

The **White beach** is very similar to the red beach but much smaller with black pebbles, surrounded by tall white sheer cliffs. During the summer there are a few umbrellas and sunbeds and a small canteen.

East

Best beaches in the East part of Santorini: **Kamari, Monolithos, Pori, Vourvoulos**



Kamari - 10 km south east of **Fira**

This is the main beach in the East part of Santorini. The just over 5 km long beach is made up of black sand and pebbles and has plenty of restaurants, bars, etc. There is a scuba diving centre. The beach is situated next to **Perissa**, with the rock called Mesa Vouno separating them.

Monolithos - 7 km east of **Fira**

This is a beach with shallow waters which makes it more suitable for families with children. There are also restaurants, sunbeds, umbrellas and a childrens' play park.

Pori - 10 km from **Fira**.

The rocks on this lovely unspoilt beach are a stunning red colour, but you do need to walk a while to get to this quiet spot. There are no facilities here so bring your own food and drink.

Vourvoulos - 4 km north east of **Fira**

Renowned for its crystal clear waters.

North

Best beaches in the North part of the island: **Baxedes, Koloumopos**

Baxedes - 2-3 km from **Oia**

This is a quiet beach with black sand and plenty of shade, but to be avoided when the north wind is blowing. Accessible by car or bike.

Coulumbo/ Cape Columbo/ Koloumopos - 12 km north east of **Fira** and 4 km from **Oia**

Beware of falling rocks on this beach. On a clear day you can see as far as **Ios**.

Kamari Resort and Beach

Kamari is one of the most popular beaches on Santorini with many bars and restaurants. **Ancient Thira** is on the top of the mountain in the distance, with the winding road up to it just visible behind the palm tree in the foreground.



Kamari

Santorini Sunset

Santorini is one of the most beautiful Greek islands where you can experience a truly stunning sunset

Due to the unique caldera (crater) it is wonderful to watch from high on the cliffs, as the evening sun sinks into the sea on the west side of the island. You will discover many sunset bars where you can sip your drink as the magnificent show from nature unfolds.

During peak holiday times the narrow streets of **Oia** can become crowded in the evenings, as visitors are coaxed in from all over the island for the dramatic sunsets. The cruise ships often moor below the village and large groups of tourists come up the steps from the port to experience the delights of **Oia**.

The most popular place to watch the sunset is from the ruined Kastro walls, but there are many bars with terraces where you can enjoy the view. It is worth braving the crowds as the views are truly stunning from the edge of **Oia**, and as the sun sets there is usually a loud cheer from everybody.

Another place on the island that has a magnificent view over the caldera is one of the most important wineries on the island - *Santo Wines*, near the village of **Pyrgos**.

This is the perfect place to try the delicious locally produced wines on the terrace while you enjoy the spectacular sunset. Have your camera ready to capture the glorious Santorini sunset.

Another way to enjoy the evening is to take a trip on one of the many sunset cruises available. There are many boat trips on offer ranging from wooden sailing boats, catamarans, motor boats or sailing yachts - most set sail from the old port of Fira.



Many sunset cruises visit the caldera for a volcano tour, stop off for a swim in the hot springs, then sail to the nearby island of Thirassia for a meal, finally heading to Oia to enjoy the amazing sunset.

If you rent a car or scooter try driving down to the port of Athinios in the evening and you will see the sun sinking into the sea and be able to watch the golden colours reflected on the layered reddish brown cliffs. It's yet

another good viewpoint to see the Santorini sunset.



Pyrgos, Megalochori, Imerovigli, Emporio - traditional villages of Santorini



Pyrgos



Pyrgos

8 km southeast of **Fira**

This is Santorini's old capital - a fortified Venetian town with mansions and narrow cobbled streets.

The village is perched on the top of a hill, giving it a breath-taking view of the island, and is said to be the highest village in Santorini. There is a good view of [Mt Profitis Ilias](#)

Pyrgos is one of the oldest settlements on Santorini. The traditional houses are clustered around the Venetian castle (Kastro) - which dates from the 13th century - with a network of small streets snaking up the hill.

Wander around the labyrinth of alleyways to discover Pyrgos's traditional houses, castle ruins and architecture - most of the village is a pedestrian zone.

The village has many beautiful churches including many blue-domes and a stunning belltower, containing six bells in a pyramid shape.

There are tavernas and tourist shops at the bottom of the hill. **Pyrgos** is a good place to escape the crowds as it is much quieter than Fira and Oia.

Tip: There is a car park off the road near the bottom of the hill, and once you climb up to the top of the village an excellent cafe where you can have a coffee, and enjoy the spectacular view.



Megalohori

9-10 km southwest of **Fira**. This is an enchanting traditional settlement with stone cobbled streets that dates back to the 17th century. There are historical mansions, traditional houses and wine canavas.

You'll notice that many of the houses have high walls, inner courtyards and heavy wooden doorways - this was to protect the residents of the village from pirates!

Megalohori is the heart of the wine production on the island and three [Santorini wineries](#) are located here: *Antoniou*, *Boutaris* and *Gavalas*. The winding cobbled streets all lead to the shady main square where there are tavernas and restaurants.

Tip: The roads in **Megalohori** are particularly narrow, but there are car parks at both ends of the village so it's best to park up and stroll through the quiet streets to the flower-bedecked main

square.

Imerovigli

3 km north of **Fira** - the next village after **Fira** and **Firostefani**

This picturesque traditional village has a beautiful view overlooking the nearby island of **Thirasia** across the Caldera and a panoramic view of the island.

Imerovigli is built on the highest point of the Caldera, at an altitude of 500 m and is a fantastic place to watch the sunset over the caldera. Check out the Panagia Malteza with the wooden temple and the post-byzantine Castle of Skaros which was once used as an observatory.

There are traditional hillside cave settlements, amazing architecture and a labyrinth of streets. The 1956 volcano eruption caused a lot of damage to the village so much has been restored and rebuilt.

Emporio

This picturesque traditional village is built on the plain in the South of Santorini. As you approach the village from the west you will notice a line of old windmills on the hillside. There are blue-domed churches and a ruined castle. The beautiful architecture is worth noting throughout **Emporio**.

The village overlooks **Perissa** beach. This was once the economic centre of Santorini with the windmills, Goulas castle - this is located North of the village and is where the villagers protected themselves from any marauding pirates, Kasteli with Old Panagia - has an ornate carved wooden dome on its bell-tower and is a fortress from the Byzantine period, and Agios Nikolaos Marmaritis - a former temple and ancient sacred site of the 3rd century B.C.

Santorini is one of Greece's most important producers of wine



The fertile loamy volcanic soil allows the island's farmers to grow luscious vines, mainly the *assyrtiko* grape, which produces a delicious fresh, dry white wine. The wines have been described by experts as citrusy, light, high in acidity and bright minerally rich white wines. This is a perfect accompaniment to seafood, poultry and white meat dishes and served at 50°C it is delicious.

Nykteri and **Assyrtiko** are both delicious wines which you'll find in all the island supermarkets. If you enjoy a dessert wine then try the velvety **Vinsánto**, a rich amber-coloured unfortified wine, which is a fine example. This wine is barrel-aged for a minimum of two years.



Island Wineries

The largest wineries are *Santo* and *Boutari*, which offer wine-tasting tours and presentations.

Santo Wines

Santo winery's position near Pyrgos, is wonderful and their wine-tastings on the terrace are very popular at sunset. They offer tours and wine tastings. Open from April to the end of November, 10 am to sunset.

SantoWines is the biggest wine producer of the island and receives more than 400,000 visitors yearly. They own around 4000 acres of vineyards on Santorini. The modern *Santo* Winery is built on five different levels, so energy is saved by using gravity. The position of the winerie terrace - on the edge of the caldera, makes it a perfect choice for weddings

Assyrtiko vines are 80% of the total cultivated varieties and produce wines of high acidity and full body, like *Nykteri* and *Assyrtiko*. When these delicious grapes are sun-dried they produce the dessert wine *Visánto*. It is a wonderful sight at the end of the harvest to see the grapes laid out on land overlooking the cliffs for ripening, these produce the delicious sweet wine, *Vinsanto*. The grapes spend 7-10 days drying in the sun, to further concentrate their juice. Santo wines also grow red grape varieties: *Mandilaria*, *Voudomato* and *Mavrotragano*, which produce red dry and sweet wines.

Boutari Wines

Boutari winery, in Megalohori, offers tours, tastings and they will also show you the vineyard where the luscious grapes that make the delicious Santorini wines grow. The vineyard is 300 years old and one of the oldest in Greece..



The stunning modern state-of-the-art hospitality centre has an interactive multi-media screening room. The winery also offers a shuttle service that includes a Winery Tour with free transportation between local hotels, so you can enjoy the wines without worrying about driving back after the tastings.

Try Boutari's *Kallisti*, a fine wine made from Assyrtiko vines and gently aged in French oak casks, and *Boutari Santorini*, made using 100% Assyrtiko grapes and vinified in stainless-steel vats.

[Boutari Wines](#)

There are smaller wineries around the island: *Antonίου Winery* in Megalohori, *Canava Roussos* near Kamari, *Gaia Winemakers* between Kamari and Monolithos, *Gavalas Vineyard* near Megalohori, *Hatzidakis* near Pyrgos, *Sigalas* near Oia and the fascinating *Volcan Wine Museum* on the way to Kamari (the admission fee includes tastings). Open noon to 7pm.

Wine making has been practised in Santorini for thousands of years - evidence of this has been found at the ancient site of **Akrotiri** with remains of burnt vines and grape decorations on the ceramics.



Wine roads

When you travel around the island you will spot signs to the wine roads, and if you follow these you can view the acres of vines that are grown to produce the island's wines.

The Santorini vines are cultivated close to the ground and grown in low hand-woven baskets (known locally as ampelies) to provide protection from the strong (known since ancient Greek times as 'the winds etesians') and the high temperatures. The baskets also trap moisture from the evening fog, providing micro-irrigation for the vines.

The strong island winds have the advantage of blowing away any pests and fungi. Santorini has phylloxera-free vineyards.

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