ANCIENT GREECE

The cradle of western civilization

THEMATIC ITINERARIES - ANCIENT GREECE

THEMATIC ITINERARIES EXPLORED IN GREECE

N°1 Mystras – The Wonder of Morea
N°2 At the Steps of Jesse and Céline
N°3 Hydra – Poros – Epidaurus
N°4 Best of Athens
N°5 Endless blue – The greek Islands
Located in the south-eastern Europe, with thousands of islands throughout the Aegean and Ionian seas, Greece, is a European country often called the cradle of Western civilization because many of the ideas that flourished in the western world were “born” in ancient Greece.

Athens, is the historical capital of Greece, with a long history, dating from the first settlement in the Neolithic age. In the 5th Century BC (the “Golden Age of Pericles”) – the culmination of Athens’ long, fascinating history – the city’s values and civilization acquired a universal significance. Over the years, a multitude of conquerors occupied Athens, and erected unique, splendid monuments - a rare historical palimpsest. In 1834, it became the capital of the Modern Greek state and in two centuries since it has become an attractive modern metropolis with unrivalled charm.

Greece is also known for its islands, Cyclades, Dodecanese, Ionian islands, Crete and the islands of the Saronic Gulf. Cosmopolitan or secluded, with idyllic beaches, elegant architecture and pure nature and lush mountains. A romantic sunset in Santorini’s Oia, painting the horizon every shade of pink...dawn on Mykonos, in Little Venice, drinking, dancing and flirting as the sun comes up... the epitome of luxury with a view of the sea from your opulent suite in Elounda, on Crete... travelling back in time, as you walk through Rhodes’ Old Town and aristocratic Corfu... a stately excursion to Athens’ smaller, nearby islands in the Argosaronic Gulf (Hydra, Spetses, Aegina, Poros)... an expedition off the beaten track where you’ll discover hidden ‘diamonds’, islands like Anafi, Kimolos and Kastelorizo, Symi, Alonissos, Samothrace and Paxi.

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Thematic itineraries explored in Greece

N°1  Mystras – The Wonder of Morea
N°2  At the Steps of Jesse and Celine
N°3  Hydra – Poros – Epidaurus
N°4  Endless blue – The greek Islands
Locations from the following films are included in this itinerary:
- Before Midnight (2013)

**Entering the Byzantine Empire**

In *Before Midnight*, Céline and Jesse spend their holidays in around the ancient city of Mystras, where we stand right now. The couple travels to the Peloponnese with their two young daughters to visit a friend, after leaving Hank (son of Jesse) with his former wife. On the trip, Jesse and Célie talk about Hank and Céline’s professional future. The chat continues at his friend Patrick’s house. At dinner, they enjoy talking about love, relationships and life.

The following days they walk, they share watered meals, they redo the world – and we do so with them. The day before the return to Paris, their friends offer the couple a night in a charming hotel, without children. The conditions are idyllic, but the old resentment comes back to the surface and the evening in love turns quickly to the settlement of accounts.

After accepting an invitation of their friends, the couple spends the night alone in a nearby hotel. The way to the hotel serves to remind them how they met and how time has changed them, and their lives. During the night, they have an argument that will eventually end in reconciliation in a scene either outside the hotel, near the beach. While Céline seems unable to understand that relationships change, Jesse has a more down-to-earth approach: “If you want true love, then this is it”, he says to Céline. “This is real life. It’s not perfect, but it’s real”. Lesson of the movie is clear: love is about romance, but also about understanding and caring every single day (even...
when there is no Vienna and no Paris!). The warm and sunny territory of Greece that they travel to is full of remains of ancient civilizations that, despite the time, resist in their entire splendor. The director, Richard Linklater, skillfully manages the metaphorical transcendence of the surroundings of the UNESCO site of Mystras in the film. The fact that the same characters enroll themselves in an itinerary across the region makes *Before Midnight* the best guide to know this Greek region, rich in stories, heritage and art.

One of the most striking features of the area of Mystras, in the Peloponese, is its imposing Byzantine heritage, as the visitor can already sense in this enclave. Mystras was a fortified city, right in the middle of the Taygetus Mountain. At the beginning, Mystras was nothing more and less than a fortified amphitheater. Later on, between the 14th and the 15th centuries, the Byzantines established there and made it the capital of their empire. The ruins that we can see nowadays have remained untouched since the 19th century, when the city was abandoned. This legacy was recognized by UNESCO in 1989, year in which it was declared World Heritage Site.

Once in Mystras – it’s a must to visit some very important places:

**The Palace of Despots in Mystras**, also known as the Palalaki mansion, which means the small palace, can be found on the top of the hill, above the church of Agios Nikolas. This is a great complex of buildings belonging to different times of construction. These palaces constitute a great example of Byzantine architecture. The whole building complex is L-shaped and has been well-preserved until our days.

**House of Frangopoulos and the House of Lascaris**: the Laskaris House, a mansion thought to have belonged to relatives of the emperors. Like the House of Frangopoulos, it is balconied; its ground floor was probably used as stables.

**Mystras churches**: Agia Sophia, the Cathedral of Agios Demetrios, Agioi Theodoroi, the church of Panagia Odigitria. The Monastery of Panagia Perivleptos, one of the churches that charm every visitor at first sight for its idyllic location and its unique architecture and the women's monastery of Panagia Pantanassa, founded in the 15th century.

Continue your trip, in 10 minutes' drive you will reach Sparta.

**Sparta**, the Legendary City of Ancient Greece, a city state founded by the Dorian's in the 11C BC, well known for its citizen soldiers, strict military training and powerful army with excellent skills.

In Sparta don't miss the following:

**Thermopylae**: the place where one of the most famous battles in the Greek history took place and made Leonidas and his 300 Spartans immortal for all times.

**Bronze statue of Leonidas**: the statue of the King of Sparta Leonidion (the tomb of Leonidas): The Spartan general and
travel writer Pausanias claims that the bones of the legendary king Leonidas were transported and buried in Sparta from Thermopylae after the battle against the Persians.

The Museum of the Olive and Greek Olive Oil: here you will get informed about the history of the olive cultivation and the production of olive oil since ancient times.

The Koumantareios Art Gallery: a small gem housed in a neoclassical mansion of the 20th century. The gallery hosts temporary exhibitions with works from the rich collections of the National Gallery of Greece, as well as thematic exhibitions that present particular interest for the history of Sparta and Laconia.

N°2. At the Steps of Jesse and Céline

Locations from the following films are included in this itinerary:

- Before Midnight (2013)

Exploring the past of Platsa village

On one of their first trips to explore the region, the couple travel to the village of Platsa. Jesse and Céline are shown there walking in the small square where in everyday life locals rest in the heat of the day, sitting in the shade of Byzantine churches. The sleepy afternoon gives way to the golden light of the early evening where children play in the streets. As we follow the steps of the couple into this town full of Byzantine churches and frescoes. They are truly an outdoors exhibition of the past of the Byzantines and the buildings surrounding Mystras, influenced by the so-called Helladic School of architecture. The paintings inside the churches reflect also reflect influences of the art of the time in Constantinople.

Domes, passages, fountains... As one can see in Platsa, Mystras and its surroundings portrays an imaginary that doesn't match with what some people picture as the historical past of the Peloponnese. The peninsula was once the home of the Spartans, but centuries later it became the city where the Byzantines saw its full glory. This glory still shines today in its alleys, citadels, and palaces. By late medieval times, it was already the neuralgic point that attracted both institutions and colons. It was a center of power and culture.

An example of this is the fact that the bishopric was transferred there from Sparta. The Metropolis or church of Agios Demetrios, built after 1264, became the basis of the
The UNESCO site of Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus stands out as a unique architectural and artistic achievement through its admirable integration into the landscape and above all the perfection of its proportions and outstanding acoustics. Like Messini’s, it is also in the Peloponnese (in this case, in the eastern area of the peninsula). Its stellar appearance on the big screen came from the hand of Sofia Loren in the movie *Boy on a Dolphin*. For those interested in exploring Greek theatres, others worth visiting in Greece are those of Thoricos, Corinth, Delphi, Milos and Dodona.

**The Fountain of Arsinoe** is second building that the visitor will come across in Ancient Messini.

A *Doric temple dedicated to Messene*, the patron of the city, and Sanctuary of Asclepius are also interesting sites to spot. In the sanctuary, there is also a well preserved *ekklesiasterion*. This structure served as a meeting point in ancient Greece for their democratic assemblies. The fact that Messini has a separate *ekklesiasterion* somewhat demonstrates its importance, as in many Greek polis the assemblies gathered in the theatre, not in a separate structure.
Before leaving this wonderful archeological site, make sure you have visited Andromonastiro, a beautiful little church that has an amazing history behind. Known as “The Monastery of the Transfiguration”, it is located southeast of the village of Petralona, near ancient Messene.

You’ll be surprised by the peaceful environment where it is located: you will not hear a single sound that comes from a source different from nature. The Byzantine Emperor Andronicus II Paleologos built the monastery in the 13th century. His will was to commemorate the Patriarch of Constantinople Athanasios I who came from Androussa.

For many years, this highly fortified jewel was left abandoned. It was not until the contemporary times that public authorities realized of its value and decided to invest in its improvement. In May 2011, the first restoration program of Andromonastiro was launched, with an investment of 800,000 euros. Since 1962, Andromonastiro has not had any monks. Nowadays, the monastery still preserves that timeless charm of the Byzantine buildings, perhaps accentuated by the fact that it is located in a wild environment. The vegetation has climbed and dominated the old infrastructures of the area, such as a small bridge of in the surroundings of the monastery.

**Myths and stories of Kardamyli**

The enchanting warm Greek evening and the simplicity of the café setting, with the sea gently lapping against the pier makes the scene of the visit of Céline and Jesse to Kardamyli Pier so special. Located between mountains, following Kardamyli one can get to the peak of Mount Taygetus. Anyone who comes to this small viewpoint will realize why it is chosen by the director of Before Midnight to shoot such an intimate and warm scene among the couple.

Kardamyli owes its ancient name to the many Cardamoms (Cardamon— the queen of spices) grown in the area. It was mentioned in the Iliad, the epic poem by ancient Greek writer Homer. Ancient Kardamyli was the main port of the powerful ancient city-state of Sparta, linked through the “Royal Roads”, that we can still see along the natural path of the gorge of Viros.

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Vyros Gorge. Beyond its obvious natural beauty, this gorge stands out because of its historical importance. Reportedly, the Royal Route went through this gorge, connecting ancient Sparta with the port of Kardamyli. This route was widely used when the Spartans, during the Messinian Wars, lost the sovereignty of all their ports, except for that of Kardamyli.

This old quarter of the village exhibits antique houses and churches, the old Tower of Mourtzinos and a soap factory. Around the small port there are taverns and cafes. The same families that run the business have lived in the area for generations. In fact, it is said that the majority of the inhabitants of Kardamyli descend from the rulers of the Byzantine Empire. Whether it is true or not it is something that only they know. But what it is certainly true is the surname of many of them is Dimitreas, a name that derives from Dimitri Palaiologos, son of Emperor Constantine.

This has a strong connection with a cultural reference in Before Midnight. The village of Kalamitsi, just outside Kardamili, was the principal home of Patrick Leigh Fermor, the celebrated English travel writer. During his life, Leigh Fermor developed a strong connection with Greece. He even joined the Greek Resistance during the World War II, something that
led him to Crete as an anti-nazi secret agent. There he wrote about traditions and ways of living that the Nazis were trying to erase, in their attempt to exterminate everything departing from the so-called Arian race. His experiences in Crete were covered by the film *I'll Met by Moonlight*. A friend of Fermor, Bruce Chatwin, also a cult travel writer and author of books like *In Patagonia* or *The Songlines*, developed a similar strong bond with the region. His ashes were scattered near the Byzantine chapel of Agios Nikolaos in 1989, above Kardamyli, in the tiny village of Exochori.

Bearing in mind that Jesse himself is a writer, this connection acquires a much more heartfelt meaning. It is time now to step into the world of Leigh Fermor, following the path of Céline and Jesse do so in *Before Midnight*.

**From writer to writer: Leigh Fermor’s house**

*Locations: Leigh Fermor’s house / Benaki Museum*

Leigh Fermor’s house makes its splendid appearance when Céline and her daughters are in a garden at the Kardamyli house. The scriptwriters’ wink at the figure of the English writer is evident: the host of the family that welcomes them to Greece is casually called Patrick.

Patrick Fermor designed and built the house himself with local help in a perfect spot in Kardamyli. In 1996, he and his wife Joan donated the house to the Benaki Museum and stated that they want it to be a home open to writers and to the general public. In a close future, the Benaki Museum plans to habilitate it as a residence for researchers where residencies can be allowed in partnerships with universities.

Born an explorer, Leigh Fermor wrote about his journeys around the 30s Europe in *A Time of Gifts—On Foot to Constantinople: From the Hook of Holland to the Middle Danube and The Broken Road*. The mention of Constantinople as the destiny of this route already tells how close he was to the past of Mystras and the Byzantium Empire. In a letter to his wife, he wrote about the region we are now visiting: “We saw a peninsula ending in crescent-shaped beaches … We walked down into a gently sloping world of the utmost magical beauty … thick with magnificent olive trees and lots of other trees … Behind, the peninsula melted into a great conch of grey and orange rock”. His style gained him the description of “a cross between Indiana Jones, James Bond and Graham Greene”.

The center of the house’s terrace marks out a compass showing Patrick’s love of maps. The view is breathtaking and the sea is crystal clear and blue. There’s a point off the terrace where you can jump safely into the sea, which was apparently christened ‘Geronimo’.

Christina Guan www.happytowander.com
Pylos: every story shall come to an end

Locations: Pylos and Nestor’s Castle

Following the seaside, we arrive at Pylos, the capital of the prefecture of Messinia. This picturesque town enchants with its beauty locals and visitors. The village is popularly known for the famous Naval Battle of Navarino (1827), in which the victory of the allied forces brought closer the liberation of Greece from the Turkish rule. Today it is a finish village surrounded by large ruins emerging from vegetation.

Pylos is historically known as Navarino and was once a significant kingdom in Mycenaean Greece, with remains of the so-called “Palace of Nestor” excavated nearby. The castle is named after Nestor, the king of Pylos in Homer’s Iliad. In fact, the strategic Bay of Pylos is guarded by two castles; the New Navarino castle known as Neokastro which is located in the southern entrance of the bay, and the 13th-century Old Navarino castle known as Palaiokastro located at the northern entrance of the bay.

The ruins had been dated to the end of the Mycenaean period, in the 13th century B.C. Although nothing proved any link with Homer’s character, some still believe that the palace belonged to king Nestor, who in the Odyssey was an Argonaut and, in the Iliad, advised Achilles and Agamemnon to reconcile.

One of its most astonishing elements is the bridge ston of 14 arches, which connects the castle to the shore. At the south edge of the castle, a fortified islet known as Bourzti is floating. Bourzti served as a prison and place of executions during the Turkish Occupation, was built in 1500 and is connected to the Sea Gate of the castle with a paved tiny road.

Due to its mythical importance, the castle of Nestor is the ideal place for us to finish this route. Greece is a land where myths have reached the state of the universal. We sense it in its mythology, a faithful reflection of human desires, and in the remains of what was the cradle of contemporary civilization. Many of them are obviously in ruins. By definition, the ruins are vestiges of a past that for the monuments in question was better than the present. But, also, in that present, they are valuable to contemplate, as they have not lost their shine. Just as Jesse tells Céline in their conservation about love, they are not perfect, but they are real. We must not forget that the ones who seek in his past find lessons worth learning (and living) in the present. Whether they search in a cute bookshop in Paris (like Céline and Jesse), in a small village past Byzantine (like Leigh Fermor) or on a winding road that follows the edges of the Peloponnese (like us!).

Nestor’s Palace

The strategic Bay of Pylos is guarded by two castles; the New Navarino castle known as Neokastro which is located in the southern entrance of the bay, and the 13th-century Old Navarino castle known as Palaiokastro located at the northern entrance of the bay.
**N°3. Athens - Hydra - Poros Epidaurus**

Locations from the following films are included in this itinerary:
- Boy on a Dolphin (1957)

In Boy on a Dolphin (1957) Phaedra, Sophia Loren, is a poor sponge diver on the lovely Greek island of Hydra. While diving, she discovers an ancient brass and gold statue of a boy riding a dolphin, which is said to have the magical power to grant wishes. Her shiftless boyfriend wants to sell it to an unscrupulous art collector.

At first the sponge diver goes along with her lover’s schemes, but after a few key events, she realizes that she has fallen in love with the archaeologist and also realizes that he is right; the treasure belongs to Greece.

Most of the exterior shots for the movie where filmed on Little Hydra in the Saronic Gulf, but also featured other Greek sites in Athens, Rhodes, and the island of Delos. One scene uses the Eastern Orthodox monastery complex at Metéora, which was later used as a location in the James Bond film For Your Eyes Only.

**Hydra Island**

Located in the heart of the Argo Saronic Gulf, pretty close to Athens, Hydra is, hands down, one of the most famous Greek islands. The charming atmosphere of the island has seduced many international jet setters and has been a retreat for famous personalities!

**Sophia Loren mill at Hydra**

In honour of the 1956 film, Boy on a Dolphin, filmed on Hydra, in which Sophia Loren starred, the habitants of Hydra renovated the old mill, situated just above the canons and the “Periptero,” or Pavilion, on the western tip of Hydra Harbor, and named it after the actress. Just behind the mill, visitors can visit the statue of the Boy on a Dolphin, commemorating the movie.

**Poros Island**

A little jewel in the Saronic Gulf, the island of Poros, a place beloved by Seferis, the Greek Nobel laureate, and Henry Miller, the American writer. Small boats bearing visitors come and go and when they land, visitors encounter old-world tavernas,

**Transportation to/within Hydra**

Take a taxi or drive to piraeus with your rental car, as cars are allowed on most ferries running from athens to Hydra:
https://www.greeka.com/saronic/hydra/transportations/

**Accommodation**

https://services.grhotels.gr/en/SearchAccomodation/
http://www.hydra.gr/front_en/

**Restaurants in Hydra**

http://www.hydra.gr/front_en/

**Calendar of Events**

http://www.hydra.gr/EventCalendar_en/
yacht marinas, neoclassical buildings, a clock tower, pine forests reaching the sea, serenity and relaxation.

**Hepidauros**

The archaeological site of Asklepieion, is considered one of the most important in Greece and was declared by UNESCO as a World Heritage Centre.

**Theatre of Hepidauros**

The finest and best-preserved example of a classical Greek theatre. Even by today’s standards, The Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus stands as a unique architectural and artistic achievement through its admirable integration into the landscape and above all the perfection of its proportions and outstanding acoustics. The theatre was originally designed for the amusement of patients, but also a method of treatment as it gave beneficial results to the physical and mental health of patients. Musical, singing and dramatically events would take place, while drama shows were also included.

**Transportation within Poros**

Two buses depart from the port of Poros: one goes to Askeli and Monastiri and the other goes to Neorio, Love Bay and Russian Bay. Along the port, there are also many car and bike rentals. Particularly a bike is a very popular way to get around the island as distances are very small.

**Accommodation in Poros**

https://services.grhotels.gr/en/SearchAccomodation/  
http://poros.com.gr/eo/in/?category=1&lang=en

**Restaurants in Poros**


**Calendar of Events**

http://greekfestivals.org/world_index.php?type=Cultural%20Event&city=Poros&state=Attica&country=greece

**Accommodation in Epidaurus**

https://services.grhotels.gr/en/SearchAccomodation/  

**Restaurants in Epidaurus**


**Calendar of Events**

During the summer period, the festival of Epidaurus is held with famous performances of ancient drama and comedy.  
https://www.greeka.com/peloponnese/epidaurus/festivals/  
https://whyathens.com/events/epidaurus-tickets/
N°4. The best of Athens

Locations from the following films are included in this itinerary:

- **Boy on a Dolphin (1957)**

**Athens Parthenons**

The magnificent temple that dominates the hill on the Acropolis of Athens, known as the Parthenon, was built in the mid-5th century BCE during the golden age of Pericles and was dedicated to the city's patron goddess Athena. The temple remained in use for more than a thousand years, and despite the ravages of time, explosions, burgling, and pollution damage, it still dominates the modern city of Athens, a magnificent testimony to the glory and fame the city enjoyed throughout antiquity.

In the film Sophia Loren goes to Athens to meet an archaeologist professor who is also responsible for the protection of antiquities for the Greek government to tell him about her underwater discovery. She waits for long hours at the Parthenon which in 1957 was also the place of the Acropolis Museum. Then she enters into the museum where she meets an art dealer who will undertake everything to recover the sculpture 'the boy on the dolphin'.

**Dionysus theatre**

The Theatre of Dionysus, a prototype of Greek theatres was dedicated to Dionysus, the god of the grape-harvest, winemaking and wine, of fertility, ritual madness, religious ecstasy, and theatre in ancient Greek religion and myth. Situated on the south-eastern slopes of the Acropolis, in Athens, was the big Theatre of Dionysus, where theatrical performances took place (tragedies and comedies, which were sung and danced) in Athens during the celebrations in honour of the god.

**Plaka**

In the shadow of the Acropolis, Plaka is the oldest section of Athens and undeniably the nicest neighbourhood in central Athens. Anafiotica, a cluster with small houses built on the slopes of Acropolis above Plaka gives you the feeling of a small village on an island. Plaka was a very popular filming location for many Greek films of the early 50's and 60's.

**The ancient Agora of Athens**

The best surviving example of agora of the Greek ancient cities. Agora was the meeting place where people would meet, talk, and trade.

The Ancient Agora of Athens is the largely green area in between Monastiraki and the Acropolis and one of the few archaeological sites in the world that has a train running through it.

Today, the Ancient Agora is open for the public and contains many surviving examples of stone carvings, columns, and statues. There is also the reconstructed Stoa of Attalos which houses the Museum of the Ancient Agora.
N°5. The endless Blue: the Greek Islands (Rhodes-Delos-Mykonos)

Locations From The Following Films Are Included In This Itinerary:

- *Boy on a Dolphin* (1957)

Rhodes Island

Widely known as the island of the Knights, Rhodes (or Rodos) is the largest of the Dodecanese Island complex in the Aegean Sea. An island of contrasts, combining the past with modern elements. An island with rich history, and a landscape with eye-catching, generous natural beauty. The mediaeval old city of Rhodes is listed as an UNESCO World Heritage site since 1988.

The port of Mandraki, the Acropolis of Lindos, the ancient cities of Kamiros and Ialysos, the Valley of the Butterflies, the vast sandy beaches with emerald waters, castles and ancient civilisations, gourmet restaurants and traditional tavernas and endless attractions make Rhodes an ideal destination. The entrance to the port of the medieval old city of Rhodes (UNESCO-listed site).

Transportation to/within Athens

Options to Athens
https://www.athens-airport.info/transportation.html

From/to the airport
1. For individual travellers who arrive at Eleftherios Venizelos Airport we suggest the following means of transport:
   - Get a Taxi from the airport
   https://www.athens-airport.info/taxi.html
   - Athens Airport Bus
   https://www.athens-airport.info/bus.html
   - Athens Airport Train
   https://www.athens-airport.info/train.html
2. For travellers who have booked organized excursions they will have their transfer from the airport to their chosen hotel and their excursions will be carried out by a coach with an experienced guide.

Within the city
1. by tram https://www.introducingathens.com/tram
2. by taxi – Taxi are everywhere in Greece, but you can always go to a square or central area where a lot of taxis always gather. They’re usually parked in a line and you can enter the one that’s on the very front.

Accommodation
Check the following link:
https://services.grhotels.gr/en/SearchAccomodation/

Restaurants
Check the following link:
https://www.athensguide.com/restaurants.html

Calendar of Events
Check the following link:
http://www.cityofathens.gr/en/what-s-city-0
Delos Island
The birthplace of the immortals, the head priest of the Cyclades, the glory of the Greek civilization, It's Delos. According to the myth, Delos island is the birthplace of god Apollo, god of light, and Artemis, goddess of hunting. A sacred island, once the center of the Cyclades and the ancient world. Nowhere else in the Globe is there a natural insular archaeological site of this size and importance.
No other island on Earth hosts so many monumental antiquities from the Archaic, the Classical, and the Hellenistic periods. Delos is not a museum; Delos is not there to tell a story. Delos is history itself.

Mykonos Island
A whitewashed paradise in the heart of the Cyclades. According to mythology, Mykonos was formed from the petrified bodies of giants killed by Hercules.
Here in Mykonos, glamour meets simplicity. Celebrities, college students and families fuse together to celebrate the Greek summer.
Stroll around its narrow marble streets and admire whitewashed houses with colorful doors and window frames, bougainvillea trees in purple bloom and hidden churches.

Panagia Paraportiani
Mykonos' most famous church is the Panagia Paraportiani, whose name translates to “Our Lady of the Side Gate". It's actually not a single church, but a group of five smaller churches that were amalgamated into one.