



Sunsets and Other Seductions in Santorini

by Brian Luke Seaward

Long ago, an island nation in the western hemisphere perished under the wrath of an active volcano. The majority of the island's inhabitants perished as well, but a handful of lucky ones escaped and traveled to distant shores. Stories of this natural disaster found the ear of Plato, who in turn wrote them down for future generations to know and remember. No one knows for sure, but Santorini (named by Venetian sailors) holds the distinction among all Greek islands as that most likely to be known as Atlantis.

My love affair with the Greek Isles, specks of land that punctuate the Aegean Sea, began with a childhood Hollywood crush on Hayley Mills. That's right, the movie *The Moon Spinners* was my introduction to a world of windmills and fishing boats docked in sapphire waters that play host to hundreds of Greek isles. Perhaps most notable of these islands is Santorini, or Thira, as it is known to the locals who cater to the daily influx of summer tourists.

My dream to travel to Santorini began when I was young, but it would be several decades before I set foot anywhere near this terrain, so rich in history, mythology, and legend. I had great hopes to visit Santorini on my 50th birthday, but the month of August on Thira is known the world over as "high season." So, on the advice of my travel agent, I opted to postpone my birthday celebration and head to the land of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* the first week of October instead. It was a wise decision. Patience and a few more months offered me the top choices of the best hotels and remarkable views of some of the most photogenic sunsets found anywhere in the world. I arrived after sunset but with enough light to know many digital "Kodak moments" awaited me.

Call me spoiled, but as a frequent business traveler, I like to arrive at a vacation airport destination seeing some person holding a sign with my name on it. When

I landed in Santorini's airport, that's exactly what I looked for as I exited customs: a man holding a sign with my name printed in black letters. Marco, my official contact, shook my hand, grabbed my bags and drove me to the idyllic resort called Homeric Poems.

"Is this your first time to Santorini?" he asked, with an accent that sounded like no other I've heard. I nodded yes, and he smiled, adding, "Everyone falls in love with my island." Perched on the side of a cliff overlooking the caldera of a quiet, but not extinct, volcano, Homeric Poems Resort was the backdrop for not one but several magnificent sunsets; Santorini, I would soon learn, is known the world over for its remarkable sunsets. No sooner had the sun disappeared in the Aegean Sea than lightning lit up the night sky over the western rim of the island for hours.

My room, one of 20 traditional cave homes, was replete with beautiful white adobe walls and windowed wooden doors painted the most delicious color of aqua-blue. The tiny windows were adorned with white lace curtains. (Don't spend too much time inside, because the reason you are there is the view of the caldera outside.)

Eating dinner at the Blue Note Cafe my first evening, I learned that the remnants of earth on which the towns and villages of Santorini reside are anything but stable. Situated on a fault line under the sea, the northern town of Oia (pronounced Eeh-ah) was



Thira exemplify the epitome of hospitality.) While these are important to me, I love to get a feel of the culture through its music, and you can hear plenty of authentic songs (yes, including a rendition of Zorba the Greek) in the pubs once the sun disappears into the night sky. On one occasion, I even heard a Yanni song, to the chagrin of a young honeymooning couple from La Jolla, California.

devastated by an earthquake in 1956 (with some crumbled buildings as a reminder). But on this night, I slept comfortably, knowing that all was calm. Upon waking the next morning, the first thing I noticed when I looked out over the caldera at sunrise were the colors of the water: sapphire, azure, cerulean, and in some parts, a hint of turquoise. While it's true that a volcanic eruption turned an amazing island into a remnant of its former self, the allure of mystery remains in the rebuilt structures of each town perched on the precipice of the caldera.

My arrival on Santorini was different than for most visitors. Few people, I discovered, ever see the airport. On average, three cruise ships anchor in the port of Fira, Santorini's main village, every day resulting in a tsunami of tourists, sometimes numbering in the thousands. Authentic tourists beware! Getting caught in this surge on my second day taught me the best time to see the island is before the boats arrive or after the last one has left. Perhaps by no coincidence, given the day's light, this is considered the best time to photograph as well.

Some people judge a foreign country by its food. (Santorini is renowned for its abundant choices of seafood dishes.) Others judge a place by the friendliness of its natives. (Residents of

the seductive magic of oia

Fira may be the heart of Santorini, but Oia holds a seductive magic all its own and it's here I recommend you spend most of your time on the island. Home to several Greek Orthodox churches, most likely the iconic blue domed structures that adorn the guidebooks and postcards to represent the Greek isles are those photographed in Oia. They certainly captured my attention.

While there are many places to stay in Oia, I dropped anchor at Perovolis, which came highly recommended by Patricia Schultz in her book, *1,000 Places to See Before You Die*. Built into the easterly cliffs of Oia, each of the 20 suites is a traditional cave home. And if the infinity pool doesn't lure you to a state of



tranquility, then the haute cuisine entrees at the pool-side restaurant surely will. Dinos, my waiter, seemed to relish the opportunity to share some cultural insights.

“Originally I am from Athens, but I adore Thira, it is my second home,” he said in flawless English. “Most people don’t know this, but we have great wines produced right here in Thira. Not to be outdone by the wine is the music. Have you heard of Glykeria?” he said. I shook my head no, and he disappeared only to reappear moments later with her latest CD and a complimentary glass of wine.

Sharing my interest in photography, he sketched out a map of the side streets of Oia with asterisks highlighting the best vantage points and vistas, including my long-sought-after windmill shot.

As a photographer, I gravitate not only toward beautiful scenery, but the complimentary colors found in all settings. Residents of Oia are masters of displaying complimentary colors. I began each day in search of the blue dome churches but was quickly seduced by the multitude of doors and window frames adorned in colors that mesmerize both the mind and soul.



What memories do I take back from one of Greece’s most popular destination Isles? It might be the breathtaking sunsets, or the brilliant colored doors and windows, or perhaps the white adobe traditional cave homes, all of which can only be found on the remnants of this volcanic island. It may have been the windmills and blue domed churches that first lured me to Santorini, but it is the heart and soul of its natives that call me to visit again. [AL](#)

Hotels:

www.homericpoems.gr
www.perivolos.gr

Restaurants:

There are so many restaurants in Fira and Oia it would be an injustice not to list them all here. Wander the streets; ask the natives where they like to go. Explore with your nose. All menus are printed in Greek and English. Sitting at any restaurant at sunset overlooking the caldera is a favorite pastime of tourists and residents alike.

Getting There:

Lufthansa Airlines flies to Athens. From Athens, you can fly Aegean Air into Fira, Santorini. Some people prefer to take a two-day ferry from Athens to Santorini.

Music: For a great taste of Greek music, I highly recommend Putumayo’s collection titled, *Greece: A Musical Odyssey*. For instrumental flare, consider Sirtaki and Hasapiko. Chris Spheeris’s *Culture* is also a worthy choice.

Brian Luke Seaward is an award-winning photographer and author who loves traveling the world in search of the dynamic landscape. He is the author of several books including the popular best sellers, *Stand Like Mountain*, *Flow Like Water*, *The Art of Calm* and *Stressed Is Desserts Spelled Backward*. When not traveling, he resides in Boulder, Colorado. Visit www.brianlukeseaward.net