

Greece

Welcome to Mykonos, the in-crowd's new hangout

Move over St Tropez and Ibiza — A-listers are now heading to this tiny island with its hip hotels and all-day parties, says **Amanda Dardanis**

It's a late Friday morning at Hippie Fish, site of the homely family-run taverna immortalised in *Shirley Valentine*. Above the bar is a photograph of the owner, George Xidakis, flanked by the film's stars Pauline Collins and Tom Conti.

Twenty-six years on, the swathe of blue-green sea fanning out from pretty Agios Ioannis beach remains as comely; and George, the waiter in the film, is still here (although sons Nikos and George Jr mostly run the show now). It's about all that is the same.

These days, the taverna employs security to stop the paparazzi bothering its more high-profile guests — an international potpourri that often includes pop stars, sporting greats and actors. What would Shirley Valentine's egg-and-chips-loving Brits make of a menu that now features fish tartar with marinated seaweed and olive leaf pasta; or the new Peruvian-Japanese restaurant Mistura that the Xidakis family has just installed next door, with a lobster pond and statement chairs from Bali.

As with so much of Mykonos, the taverna's customers are a worldly, wealthy breed, who think of this small, arid island in the Cyclades as a more upmarket Ibiza. If you want to shop for a Rolex or get your hair done in the middle of the night, you'll find someone to oblige.

"Mykonos is not Greece," says George Sr's daughter-in-law, Georgia Gianakopoulou, owner of the on-site Hippie Chic boutique where one can buy high-end crocheted clutches from Sardinia or a tribal necklace from Papua. "It's in its own orbit now. It's become part of a holy triangle, along with St Tropez and Ibiza."

Known as the Island of the Winds, Mykonos was once a destination for

Sixties jet-setters, such as Grace Kelly, Bridget Bardot and Jackie Kennedy. Now it is attracting Richard Gere, Johnny Depp, Naomi Campbell and the like, as well as Georgio Armani and Lady Gaga.

International money is pouring into the property market on this rocky island, just one fifth the size of Ibiza. Adding to this momentum is a wave of recent openings, with upscale brands such as Hakkasan, Buddha-Bar, as well as the nightclub franchises Bonbonniere and Toy Room. This summer's big splash is the sophisticated Scorpis, where you can party from noon on a private peninsula.

Popping up alongside old-school luxury hotels, such as Belvedere and Santa Marina, is a clutch of new, hip, boutique hotels and stylish villas complete with private chefs and drivers. New VIP villa purveyors will also "hook you up" socially. It's become an essential ingredient on Mykonos, where demand is now so great that regulars from London and New York book their sunbeds and restaurants before they even get on the plane.

"No other island comes close to Mykonos now," says Fotini Efthymiou-Ioannidis, a London-educated Greek who has summered here for two decades. "Can you think of one other Greek island where you can choose from five different French roses on the beach? The service is phenomenal, the food is phenomenal. The worst meal I had this year in Mykonos was in Nobu. That's how high the standard is."

Nowhere embodies the seismic shift of this once-poor isle of shepherds and sailors than Nammos, the world-famous beach club. Go back 15 years and the beach was a humble bucket-and-spade affair that you would probably avoid. Now, its burnt-orange umbrellas and turquoise loungers are as instantly recognisable on the "haute hedonist" circuit as Le Club 55 in St Tropez or Blue Marlin in Ibiza.

When we visit on a Saturday at about 6pm, the party is approaching full tilt. Because it's crazy-stupid season, I've enlisted the help of **Odysseus Demetriades, known as "The Villa Man", who runs Elite Estates, a VIP villa company. After a discreet conversation with the maitre d', the Villa Man magics us mai tais and a couple of director's chairs in prime position.** I count 16 luxury vessels berthed out front.

Today, handsome young waiters spirit platters of sushi to €60 (£44) sunbeds, where photogenic twentysomethings Instagram themselves. In the restaurant, a well-known Australian fashion designer



Need to know

Where to stay
Amanda Dardanis was a guest at De.Light Boutique Hotel (delightmykonos.com) in Agios Ioannis Bay, where a one-night stay in a double room starts at about €250. She also stayed at Bill & Co Suites and Lounge (bill-coo-hotel.com) in Megali Ammos Bay, which costs from €400 a night. **Elite Estates** (00 30 6945383900, elite-estates.co) offers a range of fully managed villas in Mykonos, starting from about €1,400 a night for a private property with pool, sleeping 12.

How to get there
Aegean Airlines (aegean-air.com) flies direct from London to Athens three times a day year-round, with regular connecting flights to Mykonos until the end of October.



holds court as friends in fedoras work their way through iced magnums of Miraval Rosé from Brangelina's French estate. This time last week, Lionel Richie was grooving on a table to his own tunes. It's a heady Bacchanalian mess that shouldn't work. But somehow it does — in small doses.

Even so, I'm happy to retreat an hour later to catch the sunset at Bill & Co Suites and Lounge, the hip celebrity bolt hole where I'm staying, on a quiet hill overlooking Megali Ammos, close to Mykonos town. It's all teak and stone and sleek, well-cut minimalism, with a sultry scenic pool bar.

Beyond the non-stop party on Mykonos, there is another world of wonderful, relaxing spots. On my final day I head to Ftelia — an unpretentious, more affordable northern beach, popular with windsurfers and an arty crowd.

Lounging on camouflage beanbags sipping €6 house white while watching windsurfers riffing off the strong *meltemi* breeze is great fun. But the undoubted highlight is the much-loved café run by Nektarios, a gentle, long-haired man-mountain who fled the buzzy beach scene of Kalo Livadi several years ago to sculpt his own chilled-out Nirvana here. "Every-

Where to see and be seen on Mykonos



Scorpis, above, and one of the dishes they serve, below; Ftelia beach, bottom

Scorpis, Paraga Beach
This classy newcomer has a cactus-clad compound set on its own peninsula in southern Mykonos, with a collection of "emotionally themed" spaces such as the Sunshine Beach, Nomad's Terrace and a nook selling pricey, natural-fibre garments from Tulum. Go at 6.30pm for the Sunset Ritual party where you're as likely to be dancing next to a shamanic healer as Lindsay Lohan. **Details** (00 30 2289 029250, scorpismykonos.com)



Alemagou, Tarsanas Beach, Ftelia
Billed as the "future of Mykonos", stylish Alemagou at wind-swept Ftelia draws a crowd that has grown weary of the Nammos fishbowl — in fact, the owner Andreas used to run Nammos. At this boho-haven, children explore craggy rocks while mellowed-out beach bums arrive in black Jeeps to enjoy clams, calamari and sweet cherry tomatoes with spearmint and feta mousse. New this year are sunbeds you can rent from €10. **Details** (00 30 22890 71339, alemagou.gr)

Solyimar, Kalo Livadi
Tom Hanks is a big fan of this relaxed and unpretentious mid-range resort at Kalo Livadi beach. Shallow turquoise waters and a flat sandy shore make it a popular choice for families. Its outstanding modern Mediterranean fare includes tuna tatakis with jalapenos and grilled scallops with pea purée. Book a sunbed for noon, then migrate at 3pm for a long leisurely lunch, Mykonian-style, in Solyimar's beach hut restaurant. **Details** (00 30 22890 71745, solymarmykonos.com)



Panormos, Panormos Bay
Another of the new-breed beach hangouts, Panormos lets you experience barefoot-on-the-sand restaurant dining. Or you can sprawl on giant outdoor pillows around low picnic tables. Gaze out over the lagoon-like bay to Ftelia or migrate along the shoreline, where you can always find your own private space. **Details** (00 30 22890 77184, panormosmykonos.gr)

Jackie O' Beach, Super Paradise Beach
Truffle and mozzarella sarnies at the beach? Ecological body oil for managing the perfect tan? Neither is a problem at this popular two-year-old retreat which caters to a mostly gay clientele (and is sister to the Jackie O' club in town). It's fun and universally welcoming, with an infectious vibe that's Vegas lounge via Club Tropicana. Party central is a 25m round bar with lounging cushions overlooking a sculpted infinity pool. **Details** (00 30 22890 77298, jackieobeach.com)

Remezzo, Polikandrioti, Old Port
This magnificently located 1960s icon was the meeting point for some of the original jet-setters. Elevated above the old port, stars such as Paul Newman and Brigitte Bardot would party until dawn. Remezso was re-launched last year with a greater emphasis on romantic fine-dining — but the non-stop party (and knock-out views) live on. **Details** (00 30 22890 25700, remezzomykonos.com)



Mykonos town, top; Johnny Depp, above; Naomi Campbell, right



“Some visitors book a sunbed before they get on the plane

one was laughing at me when I first opened because I was all alone here on Ftelia," Nektarios says.

There's no insistent music, it doesn't matter what you're wearing and there's a complete absence of attitude. That applies whether you're a beach bum, the Emir of Qatar, or the César-winning French actor Gérard Lanvin, who's here, sharing a white pizza and leafy salad with friends.

I adore Ftelia, but the standout place is Spilia, a chic and atmospheric restaurant in a natural cave, which is reached by walking across giant boulders. The owner, Manos, is barefoot when we arrive, crouched over a large rock pool. He fishes out bristly sea urchins, deftly bisects and then cleans them. Five minutes later, they're on our cliff-side table.

The succulent, creamy urchins are followed by a perfectly grilled *sinagrida* (snapper) that three of us just about manage to finish. While we dine, elegant castaways drift in to occupy other tables. There's a heartfelt authenticity to Spilia, and it flows all the way down from Manos and his barefoot waiters, to the captivatingly simple food itself.

"This is my favourite place on the planet," he says passionately, looking out to where the sea smashes into the rocks. "I thank the gods every day that I am here." I'm with Manos.