

Why a cruise is the best way to discover Greece's hidden islands

To visit some of the remote Aegean isles, our writer opted for a boutique cruise far from the madding crowds



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Kalymnos is one of the least-visited Greek islands

Rebecca Hall

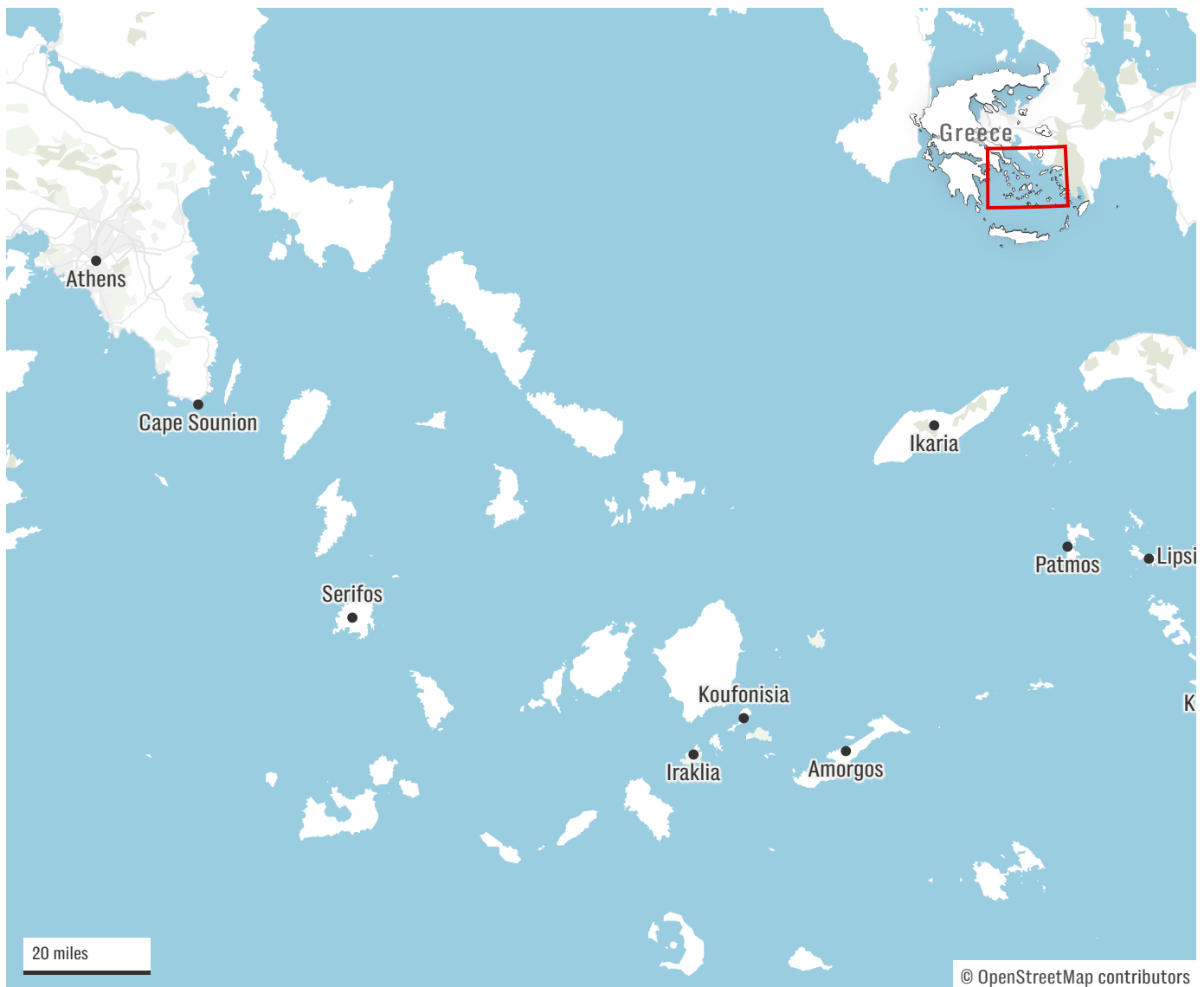
Travel Writer

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As someone who has spent roughly half of the last 15 years in [Greece](#), writing extensively about it in the process, I'm often asked if there's anywhere in the country that I've yet to explore. With nearly 8,500 miles of coastline and 227 inhabited islands, the answer is yes, absolutely.

Despite my deep connection with Greece, there are many [lesser-known islands](#) which I've yet to visit, thanks either to unpredictable Greek ferry timetables, or the fact that some of the smaller, more remote islets are simply inaccessible unless you have your own boat – or know someone who does.

Greek islands



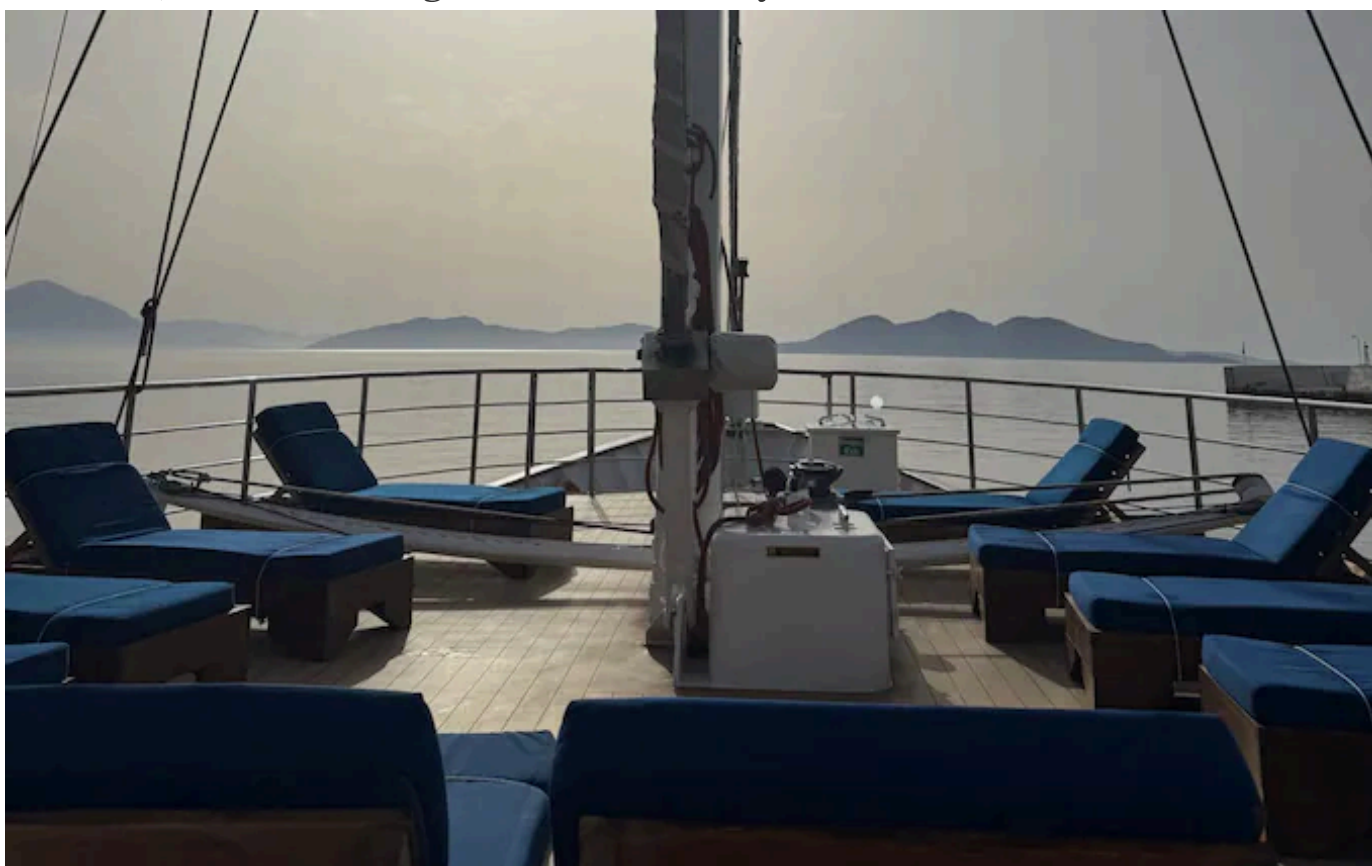
So when I was offered the chance to join Variety Cruises' Unexplored Greece voyage – set to call at several of the islands I'd long wanted to see – I was intrigued.

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Despite being a [cruise](#), this trip guaranteed to keep me far from the crowds of [Santorini](#) or [Mykonos](#) – as did the ship itself, Harmony G, a sleek 173ft yacht with 24 ocean-view cabins and a maximum of just 49 guests – so I agreed.

Our journey began with an overnight sail from [Athens](#) to Ikaria, the famed [Blue Zone Island](#) renowned for the longevity of its residents. An optional shore excursion offered a swim in the natural thermal springs where mineral-rich waters are said to work wonders for mind and body.

Later, a local came aboard to explain Ikaria's secret to long life: a relaxed pace, red wine, olive oil and tight-knit community.



"This isn't a cruise for those seeking glitz, yet it is boutique. It's for travellers who want something real" Credit: Rebecca Hall

Already I was seeing the appeal – not just of the islands, but the cruise format itself; everything taken care of, some meals onboard, excursions arranged and no logistics to worry about. Wake up in a new destination, repeat.

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There's something refreshing about boutique cruising. Fewer guests meant longer port stops, more personalised excursions and the opportunity to get to know fellow passengers if you wished, yet also space to find solitude with a book and sea view. The layout fostered camaraderie without obligation.

Our group was a global mix – couples and friends from the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand; solo travellers; retirees and professionals in their 30s and 40s. One American couple remarked they'd never been to Greece before and had chosen this cruise over more crowded spots. "We wanted the real Greece – small towns, traditional food, meeting the locals – not lines of souvenir shops and bus tours," they told me.



Kalymnos is otherwise known as 'the sponge island'

Some passengers were repeat customers who'd cruised other routes with Variety, drawn by the company's itineraries and excellent service. With a crew of 21, the attention to detail was impressive, even down to the towel animals made nightly in cabins.

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Our itinerary, subject to the Aegean's famous winds, was flexible. We were due a swim stop at Seychelles beach on Ikaria, but rough weather meant we missed it. Later, operational reasons brought us to Naxos, where we glimpsed its grand Portara and Venetian old town.

We lingered longer on Lipsi, a tiny island with only 800 residents, visited a local winery to learn about Fokiano grapes and sampled sweet red wines rarely exported

That evening, a Greek dancing performance onboard – fuelled by said wine – capped our day.

Next came Patmos, where we explored the Monastery of St John and the Cave of the Apocalypse, allowing a morning of spiritual and historical wonder accompanied by an atmospheric thunderstorm.



The monastery of Patmos, one Greece's Dodecanese islands

Then on to Amorgos, home to the cliff-carved Monastery of Hozoviotissa with its vertigo-inducing perch and panoramic sea views.

Due to adverse weather, we missed the sponge island of Kalymnos, finishing instead with stops at Iraklia – a tiny Cycladic speck – and Serifos, a rugged island with its churches tumbling down the cliffs, the quiet port and Cycladic architecture offering a perfect finale to a week of slow discovery.



Rebecca's cruise stopped at Serifos, a rugged island with churches and chapels scattered across the landscape

Unlike larger liners, Harmony G doesn't offer casinos or cabarets – and that's precisely its appeal. Entertainment came in the form of wine tastings, Greek cooking demonstrations and casual chats over shared meals.

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Dining was informal. Buffet breakfasts were followed by sit-down or buffet lunches or dinners with complimentary house wine. The dining area in the main deck seated small groups of four, making it easy to socialise – or not.

There was a library of board games, snorkelling gear for swim stops and stand-up paddleboards for more active guests. Weather permitting, we enjoyed

impromptu swims in hidden coves, and crew members arranged cocktail-making classes. Or you could simply order a drink and relax on deck.

This isn't a cruise for those seeking glitz, yet it is boutique. It's for travellers who want something real, who prefer stone alleys to beach clubs, and taverna tables over long buffet lines, for people who understand that Greece's greatest treasures are the quietest: a conversation with a winemaker, a stroll through a whitewashed village, or a solo moment watching the sun set into the Aegean.



Amorgos is great for hiking to panoramic sea views

As we docked back in Athens, I realised this voyage had shown me a Greece I hadn't met, yet one which is also hidden in plain sight – to islands few ferries reach, but which leave lasting memories.

Essentials

Rebecca Hall was a guest of [Variety Cruises](#) (0208 324 3114), which offers the seven-night Unexplored Greece cruise from £2,643 per person (plus £283 in port taxes), calling at Cape Sounion, Ikaria, Patmos, Lipsi, Kalymnos, Amorgos, Koufonisia, Iraklia and Serifos. International flights extra. Departs Athens on various dates throughout July, August and September 2025, and May-September 2026.

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[EasyJet](#) flies from London Gatwick to Athens from £88 return. [The Herodian Hotel](#) in Athens has doubles from £177 per night, including breakfast.

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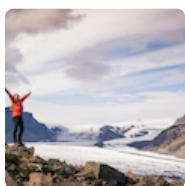
Ian Priestley 19 HRS AGO

Just because you're a guest, you don't have to mislead readers. We have visited most of these islands by ferry: Northern Aegean from Samos and Cyclades from Paros. There is a small daily ferry from Naxos to Amorgos, calling at Iraklia, Koufonisia and others on the way. Amorgos is also the terminus for large, modern Blue Star ferries plying the central Cyclades route. Timetables are fairly reliable if seas are calm. We have loved cruising, but it doesn't beat ferry-hopping. Live a little while you can.

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