



Opposite: Set into the island's craggy coastal cliffs, Hozoviotissa Monastery overlooks the Aegean Sea

Top to bottom: Chora's traditional centre; the crystal-clear views from one of Amorgos' piers; the island's popular sandy Maltezi Beach



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ON THE EDGE OF HEAVEN

A steep, 300-step cliffside climb on the picturesque Greek island of Amorgos reveals a gravity-defying historic monastery with soul-stirring sea views

WORDS REBECCA HALL

It's not every day you find yourself climbing 300 steep stone steps carved into rock, each bringing you closer to a vision that seems to defy the laws of gravity. Yet here I was, ascending towards the thousand-year-old Hozoviotissa Monastery on the Greek isle of Amorgos, its chalk-white facade improbably wedged into the rock face, with the azure Aegean Sea sparkling 900 feet below.

Built in 1017 and later renovated by Byzantine emperor Alexius Comnenus I, the monastery is dedicated to Panagia, the Virgin Mary – Amorgos' patron saint. The climb is demanding (good shoes are essential, and don't forget a sun hat and plenty of water), but the reward is nothing short of extraordinary. Pausing to catch our breath, the surrounding sea unfurled beneath us, a dazzling endless blue that made every step worthwhile.

Stepping inside the cool, cave-like chambers scented with incense, I found it hard to fathom how this place was built so high, so long ago. The monastery's

simplicity only amplifies its powerful presence, a silent tribute to faith and resilience, with views that stir the soul.

After our descent, a short drive brought us to Chora, Amorgos' fairytale capital. Atop the island and crowned by a 13th century Venetian castle, it's a place where time slows. We wandered through narrow alleyways, past whitewashed houses and under bursts of bougainvillea, guided by the gentle rhythm of village life. Long abandoned windmills stood sentinel on the slopes, and tiny churches whispered stories of centuries past.

At a sun-drenched square, I sipped strong Greek coffee at a traditional kafenio, soaking in the sense of stillness. Amorgos had quietly worked its magic – one steep climb and timeless stroll at a time. ▶

Variety Cruises visits Amorgos on its seven-night Unexplored Greece voyage, with several departure dates from May–September yearly. A four-and-a-half-hour Endless Blue Aegean, Hozoviotissa Monastery and Chora Capital excursion is priced from €88 (£74) including bus, guide and entrance fee. varietycruises.com