



CHECKING IN KALESMA, MYKONOS

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IMAGES KALESMA MYKONOS

Set on Greece's most party-forward island, this stylish hotel provides a restful base from which to dip in and out of the action, with an intriguing design inspired by classical legend

There aren't many places from which you can watch a glorious sunrise just as easily as an incredible sunset, but Kalesma, a smart boutique property perched on a small hilltop overlooking two different stretches of sand, is one of them. At dawn, you turn to face Ornos Bay, while at dusk, just angle yourself towards Agios Ioannis. The distance you need to cover to do so is minimal: just a few metres – a lucky, and sublime, quirk of geography. Set at a high elevation on the small peninsula which sticks out from the southwestern coast of Mykonos, Kalesma's rarefied location is also garlanded with myths and legends; the exact area on which it sits is called Aleomandra, said to be where the god Apollo stabled his horses. Here, you're close enough to these busy beach resorts to view them from one of the hotel's many terraces, yet far enough away to offer respite from what can often feel like Mykonos' relentless party atmosphere. Peace and quiet, then, are in

ample supply, but the main town, with its many clubs and bars, is just a 15-minute drive away.

Kalesma is the passion project of local businessman, Makis Kousathanas, whose family once owned a house on this plot of land, in partnership with his friend Aby Saltiel, a restaurateur and hotelier. Their dream was to revive the concept of traditional, authentic Mykonian hospitality; simple yet sumptuous, effortless yet considered. Together they have created something incredibly special, blending elements that feel rooted in the past with unmistakably 21st-century features. I've been visiting the Cyclades for more than 30 years, and have always found their plain, whitewashed, cube-shaped buildings with rounded edges unutterably charming. Kalesma follows the same pattern; its 25 suites and two villas take the form of the small houses of a typical Cycladic village, with wooden-beamed ceilings overlaid with wicker, the way they have been for centuries. They stretch down the sunrise side of the hill in six serried rows, forming a village of their own, with the *plateia* – the social hub of any Greek hamlet, and home to the property's main restaurant, Pere Ubu – back at the top.

My first impressions are of a calm, serene haven; when I arrive at almost midday, few other guests are in evidence. This, explains manager Konstantinos Chalkias, is because they're enjoying the private pools in their suites – perfectly arranged such that you can't observe your neighbours. Before I see mine, however, Chalkias urges me to have breakfast. Really? At 12pm? "We serve breakfast until 1pm," he laughs. "We know what Mykonos nightlife can be like." Regretfully passing on what sounds like Elvis Presley's final meal – the croissant waffle with caramelised banana, peanut butter, maple syrup and rum and raisin cream – I go for *kayanas*, a Greek dish of scrambled eggs with fresh tomatoes, garlic and olive oil. It arrives creamy and flavourful, and I virtuously add a green juice made with apple, kale, cucumber and ginger.

Afterwards, I'm shown to my suite, which is on the highest row, where I have a full view of the Aegean from my vast, flagstoned terrace. Each suite is standalone, entered via small courtyard. Inside, an open-plan bathroom features a sunken bath, separate walk-in rainfall shower, twin sinks, and divinely-scented Eau de Magnolia products by Frederic Malle. A short hallway leads to the main sleeping area, with two wardrobes which contain – optimistically, in my case – a set of weights and a yoga mat, as well as robes and slippers. There's a huge bed in the middle of the room, a wide shelf/desk running along one wall, and a small area with a coffee table and more wicker, this time in the shape of sink-into-me chairs. Back out on the terrace is the showstopper: a sparkling (heated) pool long enough to swim proper laps in. There's also a chunky stone table with built-in bench



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seating and two sun loungers. The only sound I can hear is the water lapping at the side of the pool, ruffled by the cool breeze which drifts across the hill. The minimal colour scheme throughout is largely black, white and brown, while the main materials used are wood, stone and marble, and the expansive grounds are planted with olive trees, elephant grass and small shrubs. In short, Kalesma feels homely, but elegant; simple, yet stunning.

The devil, as always, is in the detail. Chalkias explains that the timeless-feeling architecture was by modish, Athens-based K-Studio – who revamped Mykonos airport in a similar style in 2019, a year before they started work on Kalesma – while the pristine interiors were courtesy of Vangelis Bonios at Studio Bonarchi. K-Studio's exteriors take design elements from traditional Greek *peristeriones*, or dovescotes, which feature geometric, triangular patterns. Within the property, however, Bonios has sought inspiration from the myth of Apollo: in the lobby, there are lamps by Apparatus made with natural horse hair to resemble their tails, while a long, leather bench by designer Rick Owens represents a drinking trough, and in the suites, lights by the bed – designed bespoke by Bonios – are woven with leather in the form of bridles. Even the hangers have metallic, equine-shaped hooks.

In 2024, the hotel opened a small, luxurious, subterranean spa in collaboration with skincare expert du jour, Dr Barbara Sturm, next to a compact but well-equipped 24-hour gym; you can also arrange personal training, yoga or Pilates sessions. The laid-back but highly efficient staff are on hand for any guest requests, from helicopter transfers to restaurant reservations. Though why you'd want to eat anywhere else but Pere Ubu (the name was inspired by a French play, *Ubu Roi*) is unclear. Masterminded by chef Costas Tsingas, who has a standalone restaurant of the same name in the upmarket Athenian neighbourhood of Glyfada, the menu marries locally-sourced ingredients with authentic Mykonian recipes and adds the occasional contemporary twist.

After an unmissable sunset, viewed from the al-fresco lounge bar, Aloni (order the Mykonian Mary, a savoury blend of *tsipouru* spirit, olive oil, citrus and Bloody Mary foam), I head for supper. I start with spicy smoked feta and miso dip with honey, burned green onion, chilli and housemade Mykonian sausage, which is a riot of fabulous flavours, followed by grilled-just-so octopus with wasabi taramasalata and giant beans. Around me are several tables of couples – I get chatting to one pair, in their 50s, from Texas – and a stylish, 30-something group of garrulous Greek friends. The atmosphere is lively, but not raucous, and I linger into the small hours, already anticipating missing tomorrow's sunrise. The word, '*kalesma*', means to invite, to welcome, to make you feel at home. On the basis of my stay, I'd say they've nailed it.

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