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Finding My Favorite Beach by [Roger Starkey](#)

Standing in front of the Hotel Artemis on the Greek island of Mykonos, we breathed a large sigh of relief. We had just stepped out of a van that had shuttled us from the harbor to the hotel ('Shuttled' being a word, in this case, used to define driving as quickly as possible in hopes of dislodging the tourist's bags that had previously been thrown on top of the van without so much as a hairnet to keep them in place). Facing the whitewashed hotel, the crystal blue waters of Agios Stefanos beach, already my favorite beach, were a scant 100 meters behind us. The setting was a perfect change of pace from the previous days spent in Athens where the only thing more overwhelming than the sense of history was the smog.

Although Agios Stefanos had already been designated as my favorite beach, we decided that there was no need to visit it first. This beach, our beach, was going to greet us every morning for breakfast and tuck us in each night. We put the luggage in the room, rented motor scooters and began our exploration of this Cycladic Island.

Renting the motor scooters, we soon discovered, was the best decision that we made during our five-day stay on the island. Travel on Mykonos is best done by motor scooter. Buses run to and from most major beaches and convertible cars can be rented all over the island for a reasonable price. However, the freedom to go anywhere your heart desires, the low cost (between \$12 and \$20 per day) and the ability to park in very small places are incomparable advantages to the favor of the motor scooter. Practicality aside, there is no feeling to rival that inspired by reaching the top of a cliff face to be greeted by an unimpeded ocean view as you zip along on your motor scooter with the wind blowing in your face.

The four-kilometer trip to Mykonos town from the Hotel Artemis, along the coast road, provided impressive views-across the bay-to the many nearby islands. Arriving outside the town, we parked the scooters in any convenient crevice and walked into the town that is officially shut off to traffic. Official vehicles, however, are granted an exception to the no traffic law and provide a great deal of charm. Watching the tiny three-wheeled vans attempt to maneuver through the tiny streets as they make their deliveries to the businesses can provide a full lunchtime's worth of entertainment for those who aren't lucky enough to find a table near the water.

Wandering the streets of Mykonos town on a shopping expedition will please even the most ardent aficionados of the pastime. The streets themselves were designed like a labyrinth in order to make it difficult for the eighteenth and early nineteenth century pirates, who paid too many unwelcome visits, to get their loot out of the town. They serve the opposite purpose in modern times. Today the streets are not only lined with the sugar cube buildings that typify the Cyclade Islands but also with hundreds of shops sure to please every type of shopper and the labyrinth helps ensure that plenty of loot finds its way out of the town. Even for those not interested in shopping, the simplistic beauty of the town's architecture makes getting lost for a couple of hours in the streets an enjoyable diversion from the beaches. But one doesn't go to an island paradise and stay away from the beaches for too long, so we were soon on our way to nearby Ornos Beach.

Emerging from the tiny hamlet of Ornos onto the sandy beach, I had the same 'awestruck with natural beauty' feeling that I had when I saw Agios Stefanos beach and that I would have at every beach on Mykonos. With each successive beach, I began to wonder if I had chosen my favorite beach wisely and exactly how someone could choose a favorite. The answer, I eventually discovered, was simple. On an island where every beach is like paradise, a person's favorite is based on the intangibles. Proximity to your hotel, clientele, party atmosphere, tranquility, a nice restaurant or an on-the-beach masseuse are some of the intangibles that can elevate one piece of paradise to a higher level than the other pieces.

The majority of the island's 800,000 annual visitors are only there to party. For that reason, Paradise and Super Paradise are the island's two most popular beaches. Paradise lives up to its name only if a beach where every square centimeter of sand is covered by people in their early twenties alternating between reminiscing about last night's party and planning that night's festivities is your style of beach. For a break from the party chatter, retire to one of the bars just off the beach where the music pumps out so loud that overhearing a conversation near you is impossible.

Super Paradise, whose name seems as though it may have been the result of a childhood argument ("Oh yea, well if your beach is 'Paradise' than mine is 'Super Paradise'") is simply a more remote version of Paradise beach. The steep winding road down to the beach had me wondering if my scooter would be able to make it back to the top. The beach atmosphere had me wondering why I took the risk.

The remaining beaches are rather similar; pristine blue waters, nearby restaurants with nice food, impeccable sand, not overly crowded and a nice mix of young people and families. Some differentiate themselves by offering water sports and scuba diving. Most of the beaches may seem indistinguishable at first glance but each is someone's favorite for their own special reasons.

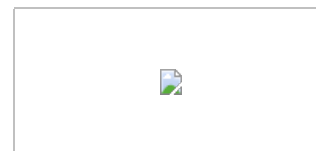
The day before we were to leave Mykonos was the 'change of pace' day. Rather than spending the entire day on a beach, or in transit to the next, we took a small excursion to the neighboring island of Delos and later had dinner in the tiny inland village of Ano Mero.

Delos, the mythical birthplace of Apollo, is now inhabited by fewer than twenty people but was once the commercial and religious center of the Amphictionic League. Delos reached the peak of its glory during the third and second centuries BC when it was home to more than twenty thousand inhabitants of varying races and religions. The ancient inhabitants were renowned for their religious tolerance and were, apparently, sexually liberated long before it was the fashion. Many of the relics that remain on the island are devoted to the act of lovemaking or genitalia. A few artifacts in the museum will bring a blush to the face of even the most open-minded visitor.

The island of Delos is now filled with whatever ruins were not plundered after its decline as well as the remains of one of the ancient neighborhoods. The ruins of these houses, surrounding the incredibly intact amphitheatre, provide a small glimpse into what life was like on this once great island. Lording over the ancient neighborhood is Mount Kinthos. From the base of Mount Kinthos, it is an easy walk to the summit for a fantastic view of the Cyclades (the name means "those [islands] around [Delos]).

'Change of pace day' culminated with dinner in Ano Mero which is the only other town on Mykonos with a significant number of inhabitants. The town offers a pleasant little square and a quaint monastery but not much else. The square is lined with restaurants serving typical Greek cuisine;

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the same typical Greek cuisine that we had found in every restaurant on the island and the previous three days in Athens. A pass around the square, examining each of the menus-all displayed with considerable pride-revealed to us that our culinary experience that evening would not differ greatly from the previous seven days. We decided to choose a dining establishment based on less conventional criteria and took another lap around the square, this time carefully inspecting the outdoor furniture of each restaurant. The furniture in each eatery was rather standard with one glaring exception; one of them had very thick cushions on their seats. The bistro with the cushioned seats appeared to offer the most comfortable dining experience and was, therefore, the recipient of our patronage.

The flight from Mykonos on our final day was a late evening flight so we were left with enough time to explore the only corner of the 75 square kilometer island we had yet to see. The guidebook promised a rocky beach and oil stained waters but we were determined to see every beach on the island regardless of its condition. Besides, after seeing one glorious beach after another, a bit of imperfection on Mykonos would be a welcome change.

We weaved our way through a few tiny hamlets, several unmarked streets, more than one unpaved road, got lost a few times and were chased from a dead end by a dog larger than our scooters before finally arriving on the long, winding, unpaved path that we thought may lead to the beach. The road, at times, seemed to be leading only into the hills and, at other times, it appeared to only follow the gently flowing river, which suddenly appeared around one bend, into nowhere. This was our last hope of finding our last beach so we continued despite the gloomy outlook.

Fifteen minutes after finding the isolated road, we found our isolated beach. The scooters had to be parked several hundred meters away and the walk to the beach seemed to confirm the guidebook's comments about its rocky nature. Arriving, we found it to be surrounded by the promised bed of rocks. However, the bed of rocks gave way to the beautiful sand blanketing the most stereotypically beautiful blue lagoon beach one could imagine. The sand was every bit as wonderful as the island's other beaches and the water equally as sparkling blue. The steep, jagged cliffs that enclosed the lagoon were splendid and the few sunbathers present seemed to be basking in the glory of the tranquil surroundings as much as they were basking in the sun.

Several minutes passed as I surveyed the idyllic surroundings. When the shock over what we had discovered subsided, I began to wonder why the author of the guidebook would lie about such a spectacular beach. Then I began to think that it wouldn't be so spectacular if it were overrun by thousands of people and ear-popping music. I finally concluded that it must have been the author's favorite beach and she wrote bad things about it because she didn't want it spoiled for her next visit. While I can't be sure that it was her favorite, it certainly overtook Agios Stefanos as mine; and, for that reason, I won't tell you where exactly it is located. I don't want it spoiled for my next visit.

[See all travel writing by Roger Starkey.](#)