

Chapter 6 – Santorini (Thera) ("Lost Island of Atlantis")



Daily program announcement: Ancient Greek Symposium. We are proud to invite you on a magnificent journey in time. Come experience an ancient Greek symposium presentation on board Celestyal Olympia with authentic food and music. This is an experience that you do not want to miss!

The sweet treats were hard to resist. The statue of Pegasus, the flying horse, and Medusa, the hideous Gorgon, were among the decorations on the table.



Michael Stefos and Olga Stefou perform.



Lambrini Agianitou recites poetry from Sappho.

<http://wigowsky.com/travels/GreeceRome/audios/santorini1.wma> (audio file)



The Poems of Sappho –
Performed by Lambrini Agianitou

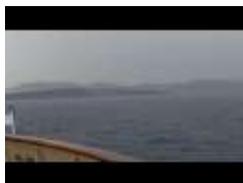
Of all the stars,
the most beautiful,
Evening Star*,
you bring back everything
scattered by the dawn,
you bring the sheep,
you bring the goat,
you bring the little child
to the mother's embrace.
(*Evening Star=Aphrodite/Venus)

Ancient Greek Music by LyrAvlos
(Michael Stefos, Olga Stefou)
https://youtu.be/yuVjf_XvBSY

<http://www.lyravlos.gr/multimedia-en-video.asp> LyrAvlos Video Gallery

Later, I sat in the Argos Bar and watched and listened to a classical melody played by the pianist Yuri. It was the Blue Danube Waltz by Johann Strauss II. I always associated that classic melody with the movie 2001: A Space Odyssey that I saw in the 1960's. That epic adventure on the "Ocean of Space" to Jupiter (Zeus) was parallel in my mind to the adventure on the Mediterranean Sea that I was presently on.

<http://wigowsky.com/travels/GreeceRome/audios/santorini2.wma> (audio file)



Celestyal Cruise lines on its way to the Island of Santorini

<https://youtu.be/Y8uWUijNybK>



Celestyal Olympia cruise ship enters Santorini waters

<https://youtu.be/AZ45THbpwOk> (1:28)



The Island of Santorini - also known as Thira (Lost Atlantis?)

<https://youtu.be/-6Y-wwnUA1c> (4:29)



Taking the tender boat to the port of Santorini.



<https://youtu.be/Rjel0JY1-AM> (4:34)

[Arrival at the port of Santorini; board a bus. Our tour guide is Vicky]

Tour guide Vicky explains our tour of Santorini island as we drive to the volcanic rim.

<http://wigowsky.com/travels/GreeceRome/audios/santorini3.wma> (audio file)

Welcome to Santorini. My name is Vicky, and I will be your guide for the tour of this island. We are now leaving the port of Athinios, which is the main port of the island. We are going to drive – at least Marcos, our driver, will – all the way up to the top, to the main road. And from there we'll head to Oia, which is located on the northernmost part of the island. You can see it here on the map. <http://www.greece-holiday.co.uk/images/santorini-map.jpg>

You can see it from here, looking at the left. You can see the houses on the very edge of the island. This is the village of Oia, this is where we are going. It's spelled Oia on the map, spelled O-i-a, but in Greek we don't pronounce the first O, so it's pronounced 'e – a'. Oia is the best place on the island to see the local construction and the type of traditional houses that belong to farmers, and the big mansions that belong to captains (of ships). The most unusual types of houses on this island are the cave houses. Have you heard of the cave houses? No? Ok, I'm not going to tell you more about them now. I'll keep you in suspense until we get to Oia.

Going up this steep road (with sharp switchbacks), I would like to explain to you how this wonderful island was created. If you look at the cliffs, you can see that they are made of layers. So that shows you that Santorini is mainly a volcanic island. All those layers were produced by eruptions. The volcanic activity started here two million years ago. Before the lava activity, the original Santorini – you see all those islands – there used to be big limestone rocks spread all over this island. Then the volcanic activity started. There were several volcanoes. The volcanic

material spread out in layers, as you can see by looking at the cliffs. All the small limestone islands were united into one, one round-shaped island. Actually, looking at the map, if you connect the lines between the islands you see on the map, you can see the contour of what used to be a round-shaped island. Can you see that? OK. It used to be a round-shaped island. What happened to that round-shaped island?

Part of this island was destroyed because of a huge eruption in the 15th century BC (some say 16th century BC). That was the worst eruption for the whole planet in the last 10,000 years. It lasted days and days. Because of this eruption, what used to be the center of the round-shaped island was destroyed, and this was how the caldera was created. Now looking at the map, you see big basin of the inner sea – this is the caldera. Caldera is a Spanish word (meaning cauldron), and it's used on the international level to describe this kind of volcano. There are calderas all over the world, and we are very proud of our caldera, and we all agree that it has natural beauty. Right? After the eruption there was nothing in the caldera but sea water. Now you can see two black islands in that sea. They were formed after the creation of the caldera. The bigger island (Nea Kamini) closer to us was created is a recent creation of the volcano; that island was created only 440 years ago, while the one behind this – the smaller one (Palea Kamini) – was created 2,000 years ago. Both of those islands we call Kamini, which means 'burnt' (island) because they are made of petrified lava. They're both uninhabited islands. The big island, which is closer to us, at the very top there is a crater. I think there's more than one, but the only active one is located on that big, black island. So a lot of people call it 'the volcano island' so they know where the crater is. The volcano is active. But I have good news. Don't worry, it's dormant, that means it's sleeping. And we hope it stays this way. For today, you have the guarantee of this tour – actually, it's a very interesting volcano. That's why volcanologists and geologists do annual meetings here. And at such a meeting two decades ago, they decided to place geological stations all over the island that record the slightest change of the ground, and this way they hope – and I hope, as well – that they would predict the next eruption. So good news, no eruptions today. You're safe.

Around the caldera there are three remnants of what used to be the round-shaped island of Santorini: the main part is the crescent shape of Santorini where we are at this point, the Kimini crater in the middle, and a large section named Thirasia at the northwestern part. So now that you know the story, you can put those pieces together and imagine that it used to be a round-shaped island. Going up the cliffs you can see different layers, so I think it's now easier to imagine it took two million years and hundreds of eruptions to create the beautiful island. The walls or cliffs are an interesting archive for the geologists, because by studying the rocks they can recreate the geological history of this island. You have probably noticed that the last layer or layers are a clear color. You can see that we are getting closer to the main road. Those last layers are made of pumice stone. Looking up you can see that already. So that was the material that was last created by the eruption of 16th century BC, the one that destroyed the rock island and created the caldera.

And not from this point, looking straight ahead, you can see the north part of the island. Closer to us you can see the capital city Fira, and further to the left you can see in the distance the village of Oia. This is where we are going now, to the edge of the island to the village of Oia. Actually, Fira will be the final destination of the tour. After the visit of Oia, we have to drive to Fira, where you're going to spend some free time on your own before catching the cable car down to the tender boat at the old port. So we're not coming back to the port you just arrived at. You only go up this beautiful cliff road once.

So you can now see the thick layer of pumice stone to the side of the road. And to the right you can see a beautiful view of the caldera. And finally the main road. So this is the main road of the island, the road that connects the south part to the north part. The south part of the island is where the most beautiful beaches are located. We're turning to the left going northward because we want to see the most beautiful village Oia. But next time you come on the island and

want to go to the beaches, you would turn right here. The beaches have beautiful black sand; that's what you find on this volcanic island, black sand.

Now as we're driving north on the main road you can see to the right a hill made of limestone. You see no layers there, so that means this hill belongs to the pre-eruption era. Remember I said there used to be rocks in this region, so you have to imagine that this hill once was a small island surrounded by sea water. The land that we are on now was added because of the eruptions of the volcano. Complicated? Ok, forget it. That hill – the highest hill of the whole island – is 567 meters, about 1,060 feet high. That's the highest point of the whole island. At the very top there's a monastery dedicated to the prophet Elijah (Ilias), a very small building. We call it the mountain of the Profitis Ilias.

Looking around you, what you see are all those bushes of grapes. This is the main cultivation of the island. They have a circular shape and stay low to the ground. This is the only place in Greece, and in Europe, that we grow vines this way.

Looking straight ahead, right side, you can see the monastery on the hill again. And on the left side, closer to us, is a small village with a castle on top of the hill. Look at the very top; you can see the black color of the fancy walls. That was a castle constructed by the Venetians. The Venetians left Venice, Italy, and they came here participating in the fourth crusade, which started in 1204 AD. They occupied Santorini, among other islands. At that time there were pirates in the Aegean Sea. So when the Venetians came here, they built castles like the one you see on top of the hill. They built five of them; one of them is located at the north edge of the island near Oia. So when you have free time at Oia, you can walk to the edge of the island and see the ruins of a small castle built by the Venetians in the Middle Ages. The Venetians ruled the island for almost four centuries, about 400 years, from the beginning of the 13th to the end of the 16th century AD.

So looking straight ahead you can see the beautiful village of Pyrgos, which is one of the most beautiful villages because it's my village. There are fourteen main villages and towns, and this is one of them. Seven hundred people live there all year round. And guess what? We have more than 40 churches and chapels there. Today on the island of Santorini there are 15,000 people, and we have more than 500 churches and chapels. I will always remember a comment made by a visitor many years ago; he said, 'Oh, my God, either you are very religious people or you are great sinners here.' I'll explain to you later why we have all those churches and chapels. Lots of suspense today.

Looking straight ahead, you can see the capital city Fira. This is where we're going to end our tour. On the right side you can see the airport on the east coast of the island. Left side, the caldera and Aegean Sea, and no beaches on the west coast. Villages on the left side have hotels mainly, since they have the most expensive view of the island. This is the caldera view, which is the exclusive and the expensive view. The expensive hotels always have the caldera view. So all the villages you see have modern buildings that have been built recently during the last few decades. Nevertheless, they introduce the traditional architectural lines, and you probably have noticed by now that all the buildings are covered only with two different kinds of roofs: the flat roofs and the vaulted-shaped ones. The flat roof is to collect the rain water. We suffer from a shortage of water, so it is important for us to collect the rain water. And the flat roof makes it easier to do so. From the roof the water collects in a subterranean tank, an underground cistern. All the buildings, not only houses, but also shops, churches, and hotels – they all have an underground cistern. It is very important for the life of the island.

The vaulted-shaped roof was the type that was used in olden days, when the main construction material of the island used to be stone. So making a roof of stone using that shape like an arch made it more resistant in case of an earthquake; it did not collapse as easily as the flat one. It gave anti-seismic protection to the houses. Nowadays, modern buildings are mostly made of concrete, so you could give any shape to the house. But for esthetic reasons the designs

reproduced the same traditional lines. So old or new, the buildings are covered with only those two types of roofs.

Straight ahead you can see the capital city Fira, and on the left side you can see an angular hill. That was the very first hill chosen by the Venetians to build their first castle. This area was struck by earthquakes several times, so people moved to the other side, and this is how the capital city was created. Down below us, you can see quarries of pumice stone. You can see how thick the layer is here. Pumice stone has been used for several decades as insulation material for the construction of houses. For several decades the pumice was a source of income for the local people. Not anymore. Now the production of pumice is limited to local use so as not to ruin the landscape of Santorini, which is classified as landscape of exceptional natural beauty, and that's why it is protected.

So this is Fira, the Greek capital where we are now. The Greek name of the island is Thira (Thera). Have you heard the Greek name of the island? It starts with a 'th' like in 'theater.' The capital city's name sounds almost the same, but instead of 'th,' it starts with a 'f', in fire or fox. They say that the Venetians couldn't pronounce easily the 'th' sound – it doesn't exist in the Italian language – so the closest possible sound was 'f.' So instead of saying Thira, they would say Fira, and that's how the capital city got its name.

So this is the main settlement of the island, with 2,500 people living here all year round. This is where we're going to end our tour after the visit to Oia, so later on you're going to have plenty of free time to stroll around on the streets of Fira before you take the cable car down to the old port.

You may have noticed that there are not many trees on the island. Did you notice that? This is because of strong winds and lack of water. The main decoration tree they use here are the kind of trees you see here – eucalyptus, not indigenous, brought from Australia. These trees don't need large quantities of water; they utilize humidity. Summer time it doesn't rain at all here. That's why we don't water anything; we don't irrigate plants, and trees, and flowers. We have to choose very carefully what kind of plants we should grow here; they shouldn't need water. That goes for all cultivations, the grapes you saw, tomatoes, everything – we don't water them. Nevertheless, we have a very good quality of production.

On the right you can see a small hospital, and on the left side one of the four high schools on the island. We don't have any university, so the students have to study in mainland Greece or in Crete. Right side, central bus station. Straight ahead on the right corner is the prehistoric museum, one of the most important museums of Greece. I'm going to talk to you later about that. And be prepared to look at the left side at the big, white dome; this is the orthodox cathedral. Straight ahead you can see another white dome, with a clock tower; this is the Catholic cathedral. The majority of the people here were Christian Orthodox; that's why most of the 500 churches and chapels on this island are orthodox churches and chapels. But you see a Catholic one because we had a minority of Catholics who were mainly the descendents of the Venetians who ruled the island.

We're now at the main square of Fira, and you can see coffee shops and restaurants around. It's a typical Greek thing, since the weather very good nine months a year, and people stay out to enjoy the beautiful weather. But what about the winter time? I know it's hard to believe it, but every now and then we see snow here. Not very often. This year was a very mild winter, so no snow on the ground. But the year before, we had snow three times that lasted about one or two days. And on those days the children woke up very early in the morning in order to play with the snow before going to school because when they came back from school it was already gone.

<http://wigowsky.com/travels/GreeceRome/audios/santorini4.wma> (audio file)

The temperature is not as low in the winter time as in the northern parts of Greece. However, it's combined with strong winds and high humidity. So winters do get cold here.

Straight ahead on the left side you can see the courtyard of the elementary school. Nowadays most of the schools have an elementary school. And behind that school you can see the kindergarten. And this is the end of the city of Fira. The village you see in front is a small village named Firostefani. And straight ahead you can see a blue dome. This is typical of the Greek islands. Most of the churches are Orthodox churches, and in an Orthodox church the dome symbolizes heaven; heaven in the imagination of the people was up in the sky, and the skies here are usually blue. The heaven is imagined to be that color, and that is why most of the churches – when they have a dome, not all of them, but about 95% -- when they have a dome, the dome is painted blue.

You've probably noticed by now that most of the houses are painted in white, and if not white, then in clear colors. The houses were originally built with black lava rock, so that was the original color. So people lived in houses that were built with natural materials; also, the black lava blended with the landscape, and this way they couldn't be seen by pirates from the sea. This was a way to defend themselves. What about the white color? This is a recent story. It started in the late 1930's. The government obliged the people to disinfect the houses, and the area around the houses, using lime water. Lime water was used in Italy as disinfection material. Using that material, the houses were painted white. And people noticed that this way it was much cooler than before. It did not absorb the heat of the sun anymore. So now even though we're not obliged to use lime water anymore, we still keep on painting our houses in white, and if not in white, then in clear colors to remain cooler.

Now we are at the highest point of the caldera. The elevation here is 350 meters above sea level, so it's about 1200 feet high. The name of this place is Merovigli, which means observatory since the highest point of the caldera was used as an observatory by the Venetians. Being up here they could control the whole area of the island, and in case of a pirate raid they could warn the people to take refuge in one of the castles they built here. Merovigli is known nowadays for small luxury hotels, great views of the caldera, and being close to the capital city – actually, within walking distance.

Most of the 15,000 people of this island make a living off of tourism. To that number you can add 6,000 people that come at the start of the tourism season to find a suitable job that lasts six to seven months out of the year. This is a good case, because most of the other Greek islands have a tourism season that only lasts three months. The second important activity on this island is agricultural. You can still see all over the place the low grapes, bushes and vines. This means the main product of this island is wine, mainly white wine. We have more than forty varieties grapes, but mainly we produce white wines. The most famous white wine that we use is a dry white wine; we call it Nychteri. So if you want to enjoy a glass of white wine at the village of Oia, you can order Nychteri. If you don't like the dry wine, you can have a street wine, a dessert wine which is called Vin Santo. The color of the wine is dark, cause to produce this wine we expose the white grapes under the sun for two weeks until they become like raisins. And then we press them, and we get a good quality wine without adding any sweetness.

We have small cherry tomatoes. You won't find them this time of year; the season for tomatoes begins at the end of June. Our tomatoes are not the usual cherry tomatoes you find in other places; our tomatoes are thick-skinned because they are not watered. But they're full of taste. Talking about water, there are trucks that transport water to us. In other places, those same trucks would be transporting milk, but here it's always about water. That's the main issue of the island.

We also have excellent quality fava beans on the island. The local dish is fava beans puree. Our fava beans do not look like the usual fava beans; they look like small lentils. We boil them so as to make a puree, full of protein, and to this puree we add lemon juice, a slice of onions, and capers or caper leaves. Have you ever eaten caper leaves? We pick the round-shaped leaves and use them in fava beans puree. If you want to buy something original that you won't find elsewhere, buy caper leaves. So the last thing we add to the recipe is olive oil, the best

quality Greek olive oil. This place is not the best place to buy Greek olive oil because, as you might have noticed, we don't have olive trees here. We have those products brought here from Crete and mainland Greece.

Down below you can see the east coast of the island and the open Aegean Sea. Soon we will pass to the narrowest point of the island, and there you will have a sense of the city from both sides of the road. The north point is 1,300 meters (about 4,000 feet) high. And soon you are going to have the caldera view.



Down below you can see the terraces, which were once cultivated, but are now abandoned. Santorini has never been a very productive island because of the shortage of water. In the olden days, in order to survive, the farmers created the terraces and watered by hand. Now the terraces are abandoned because it takes hard work to cultivate those terraces. Nowadays the main activity – the main industry – is tourism. So I want you to be prepared for the narrowest point.

We're not allowed to stop there long, so be prepared to look quickly at the left side, the caldera view, and the right side, the open Aegean Sea.

Here it is. Have a look. See how steep it is. Actually, that is the deepest point of the caldera. It is 389 meters (1200 feet) deep. It is very deep.

Looking at the left side now you can see some bushes with round-shaped leaves; those are capers with the white-pink flowers. They grow wildly all over the island, and the local people love them. They use them a lot.

On this road you can see the three layers that created the island of Santorini, different layers of different colors. We have already seen the clear-colored layer, and you can see that again here. That clear-colored layer covered the whole island. It's mainly made of pumice stone and volcanic ashes. Every now and then you can see pieces of molten rock, black lava. But what prevails is the clear-colored layer, the tephra. Right next to this is the black basalt, where people write messages with pumice pieces.

By the way, Santorini is a very romantic island, so many people come here for weddings or anniversaries. So they stop and write messages on the black basalt. But they (the messages) won't last long because of the light pumice markings. It's a romantic habit that still goes on.

And soon we will see the dark red layer that is on the island. Straight ahead you can see the material that is called scoria (porous cinder-like fragments of lava). So we have black for basalt, red for scoria, and white for pumice. All those layers make us realize that the creator of all this beauty has always been the volcano – the creator and destroyer of this beautiful island.

So be prepared – look straight ahead – to enjoy the beautiful view of Oia. This is the village of Oia at the very edge of the island. Here we're going to see the small traditional houses that once belonged to farmers. In the olden days, the main activity used to be agriculture. So most of the people used to spend their days out working the fields. They didn't need big houses, and to be honest, most of them were poor people. They couldn't afford bigger houses. And if they were rich enough to have enough money then, they would invest in land, not in bigger houses. Land brought in the money.

Now and then you will see big mansions. Those were the houses of the captains and fleet owners. In the 18th century, some clever wine traders of the island decided to export our famous wine abroad. To do so they had to build ships, and they became ship owners and captains, and they gained a lot of money. And at that time their well-being did not depend on land ownership,

so they could afford to build bigger houses. Now we know them as the captain houses. At the village of Oia, you're going to see several of those because in the olden days the port of the island used to be here. You're going to recognize them immediately because they are bigger than the others, and they have a big rectangular façade, asymmetrical. Usually, they have two floors; the lower floor was used for production and storage of wine, and the upper floor was used for the family.

To give you an idea – the average size of a traditional house would be not more than 80 square meters, that's about 700 square feet. The captain's houses were about 300 square meters, that's about 2,500 square feet. Much bigger.

I told you we were going to see the cave houses. What are those cave houses? They used to be the houses of the very poor people, the very poor people who couldn't afford to build anything bigger than a small stone house. So what they did dug into the pumice layer, which was easy to be dug. They dug out their houses, thus creating artificial caves. And the only part that was built in stone was the façade. So this way, those houses didn't cost much. Guess what? Nowadays those are the most expensive houses of all Greece – the poor people's houses. Most of the cave houses in Oia are used as small luxury hotels. The lowest price you can give for a cave house is 10,000 Euros per square meter, that's about \$1,100 per nine square feet. Poor people's houses – not bad, really.



Be prepared to look at the left side as soon as we pass the narrow point. Down below you can see the cave houses. Don't worry if you can't see them now. As soon as we get to Oia, I'm going to lead you to the central square and show you several more.

So this is the village of Oia where we are now. Soon we will be at the parking lot. We will go all together as a group to the main square of Oia.

On the way I will stop several times to give you some more information, and then you'll have some free time on your own.



Panagia Platsani ("All Holy Lady of the Sea") Mary, Mother of God & Divine Child (above door)

The Church of Panagia Platsani is dedicated to the Akathist Hymn of the Most Holy Theotokos.

Originally the Church of Panagia Platsani was built on the edge of the village inside the castle, where today all visitors of the island gather daily to enjoy the amazing sunsets of Oia. With the devastating earthquake however of

9 July 1956 the church was destroyed, and because the soil there is not stable, the church was rebuilt in the village center.

Tradition says that the icon of the Virgin found in the temple was found in the sea. A fisherman was fishing at the time and saw in the middle of the sea something like a light from a vigil lamp. Going near he saw the icon of the Virgin Mary, but as he approached it would distance itself. Then he called the priests and the villagers who, with prayers and supplications, with incense and candles, went to the shore and with great devotion brought the icon to the church. The next day when he went to light the candles, the priest did not find the newly-revealed icon. After several hours of searching he found the icon on the walls of the castle from where he moved it back to the church. But again the next day the inhabitants found the icon in the same spot of the castle. They brought the icon back to church, yet the same thing happened again and again, so often that the residents decided to all contribute to build the church in the same place where the Virgin Mary had chosen. Here she could watch the sea from where she came and bless the sailboats that embarked on long journeys. The name "Platsani" comes from the words "plats, plats" which in Greek is equivalent to "splash, splash", which was the sound the icon made in the water of the beach upon its discovery.

<http://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2011/04/synaxais-of-panagia-platsanis-in-oia-of.html>



<http://www.summitpost.org/santorini/188847> (Atlantis – Santorini & Crete) – Webcam

The origins of this myth we can find in Plato's dialogues Timaeus and Critias.

<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/timaeus.html>

<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/critias.html>



Walk through city of Oia on the Island of Santorini

<https://youtu.be/74TdlzQpSpE>



Pilgrim Tours guide Yanni leads the way.



White buildings of Oia provide a scenic view from every vantage point.



A gallery of paintings to please the visual senses. My favorite painting of Oia.



The mules have the right of way on the narrow street.



Fantastic views all around.



2007 Koinothta Oiae display with dolphins.



Enjoying the view of Oia and the caldera.



Copy of Fresco of Fisherman in Oia.

Fresco of The Fisherman, from the wall painting in the ladies house, Akrotiri.

The fresco shows a male figure holding a bunch of fish in each hand tied together with yellow string. The fish are an offering.

“The Bronze Age frescoes from Akrotiri on the Aegean island of Thera (modern-day Santorini) provide some of the most famous images from the ancient Greek world. Sometime between 1650 and 1550 BCE Thera suffered a devastating earthquake which destroyed the town, and this catastrophe was soon followed by a volcanic eruption which covered the settlement of Akrotiri in metres-thick layers of pumice and volcanic ash. As a result, the vibrant frescoes which were on the walls of almost all buildings in the town have been remarkably well preserved. When the first systematic excavations began in 1967 CE, the secrets and wonders of this lost ancient city were finally re-discovered and once again admired by the human eye.”

by Mark Cartwright

<http://www.ancient.eu/article/673/>

<http://wigowsky.com/travels/GreeceRome/audios/santorini3.wma> (audio file)

[On our way from Oia to Fira, taking the eastern road along the east coast – with guide Vicky]

Looking straight (northward) you see Greek islands, and the one that looks bigger than the others is Ios; it looks bigger since it's closer to us. To the right of Ios and way in the distance you can barely see another island with a hill – this is Naxos, the biggest among the Cyclades islands. In ancient times it was famous for its good quality of marble that was produced there; art from the 5th and 6th centuries BC were made of marble from Naxos. And beyond Naxos is Mykonos. So Mykonos, Ios, Naxos, Pharos, Santorini, and 30 other (major) islands belong to the same group of Greek islands – we call them Cyclades, which derives from the Greek word 'Cyclos' which means circle. This is because they cover a circular area, like inside a circle. Ancient Greeks used exactly that same name to describe the group of islands. In those days they believed the islands were placed around the sacred island of Delos, where Apollo and his sister Artemis (Diana) were born. Delos is close to Mykonos.

Santorini is actually located in the southernmost area of this group of islands. To the south of Santorini there is only one big island – Crete, which is the biggest island of Greece. To the left of Ios is a long island named Sykinos. You can see that we are not going back the same way we came to Oia; we are taking a secondary road in order to give you a chance to see the color of the sand. Remember what color the sand is here? Yes, dark black, because it is a volcanic island. What you won't see here is a clear blue water like usually advertised in Greece. That does not exist here, because the sea sand is black. So this is the north coast of Santorini.

The people around the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea were seafarers, and they faced dangers at sea. They faced dangerous situations due to the bad weather. So local people prayed to saints for help and for their salvation. After surviving a journey out at sea they would visit a local chapel or church that was dedicated to the saint who saved their life. Looking at the right side on top of the hill you can see a house on the lower level with a yellow façade that has a bell on the top, which tells you that it's a church or chapel. And there's another one at the higher level. All the other buildings in between are houses of people.

And now on the left side is the most beautiful beach of them all, made of black sand. The locals call it 'Paradise Beach.' Another part north of Santorini is known by a strange name, 'Kolumbo,' which is the name of a submarine (submerged) volcano, and it's hidden under the sea. Volcanologists say that probably the next eruption will be produced by this volcano. So it's more dangerous than the one in the caldera.

There was another big eruption here in the year 1650 AD (not BC, like the Minoan era). Before the eruption, there was a terrible period which lasted about four months, and earthquakes destroyed the houses, and poisonous gas from the sea killed many people and animals. People in those days couldn't possibly know of such phenomena being produced by volcanoes. They thought that if those things come from the sea and dominate the island, they needed to do something, so they decided to build a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary. You can see the church with a blue dome that was built after the eruption of 1650 AD. And every year on the 15th of August, people come there for a service, and after the service they have a festival drinking lots of beer and wine, and they play music for the people. The church is dedicated to the Dormition ("Sleep of Death") of the Virgin Mary, and it's a religious tradition that keeps on being celebrated on the island now for more than 300 years.

The chapels you see are mostly privately owned. That means that they are responsible for the maintenance if they want to keep them. There are about 500 of them, but they don't have services on a regular basis. They usually have a service once a year on the day of the saint to whom it is dedicated. Local people usually organize a nice feast after the service. Left side, another chapel, this one dedicated to Saint Nicholas. Down below there's a small harbor with boats. Saint Nicholas for us (Greek Orthodox) is a saint who protects all the people who travel by sea. In Greece, most churches by the coast, overlooking the coast, are built for protection for all people around. Saint Nicholas has nothing to do with Christmas; it's on the fourth of December,

and for us it's the saint who protects sailors, captains, and all people who love to travel by sea. So most of the churches on Santorini are dedicated to Saint Nicholas.

Look at the right side of the road, up above on the slope of the hill, where you can see some buildings. They look like windmills. They are modern buildings made of concrete. They only have a shape of a windmill. What happened here is, in olden days in order to grind cereals like barley and grain, we used windmills. They're not in use anymore. However, the present owners are not allowed to demolish them. Those windmill houses are now used as vacation houses. If they had been real windmills, they would have been made of black lava stone, which was the main construction material in olden days.

Straight ahead, left side of the road, you will see a house that was destroyed by the last big earthquake that struck the island in 1956. This is a good chance to see the material that was used for the construction of the building, the black lava stone. The 1956 earthquake was 7.86 on the Richter scale. 70% of the village was destroyed at that time. Santorini is a volcanic island that has a lot of earthquakes, but not as strong as that one.

Now I will give you a little history about Santorini. It seems that the first name used for this island was Strongyle. Strongyle in Greek means 'the round one.' That was when the island had a round shape. We're talking about prehistoric time. After the huge eruptions of the 17th century BC, the island was completely uninhabited. Looking around, you can see the thick layer of pumice that covered the entire island. So there was no soil to cultivate, and no human beings lived here for 500 years. The very first people who came after this long abandonment gave this island the name that I prefer, but which is not used anymore – the name Kallisti (kalliste), which means 'the fairest of all' in Greek. Or 'the most beautiful one.'

What about the name Thera (Thira)? That's a Greek name that is still in use. It's a name that was given by the Spartans in the 9th century BC. That's 2,900 years ago. When the Spartans left mainland Greece, they left one of the most important cities in Greece and came here to form a colony. Their leader was named Thiras. So the city that was founded after him was named Thira. And gradually the whole island was known under this name.

What about the name Santorini? That's a name given by the Venetians – the Crusaders. When they came on the island they saw a church named after Saint Irene. So for them that was a point of reference, so this became the island of Saint Irene. In their language it was called 'Santa Irini.' Santa Irini became Santorini, which means the island of Saint Irene. By the way, the name Irene – it's a Greek name (Irini) – means peace. So this is the island of Saint Peace.

Santorini or Thira nowadays is classified among the main tourist destinations worldwide, and that makes it one of the richest islands of Greece. But it wasn't always that way. At the beginning of the 20th century there was a change with the boats to steam-driven boats, and not all of the local fleet owners followed the progress. At the same time, it was decided that the main industries should be transferred to mainland Greece. That brought the rate of unemployment up to very high levels on the island. And to make matters worse, the island was struck by that huge earthquake of 1956. At that time, many people abandoned the island. Some people left behind houses that are now worth millions.

Things started getting better after the crucial year of 1967. In that year a professor of archaeology at the University of Athens came on the island and started the archaeological excavation of the south coast of the south cape, revealing there an amazing place of a prehistoric city (named Akrotiri) that was completely buried under the layer of pumice. It was a very similar case to the case in Pompeii. Pompeii goes back to the 1st century AD, while this prehistoric city goes back to the 17th century BC. This city was created 3,600 years ago. The buildings were constructed of four levels, and they had interior toilets and bathrooms in their houses, and sewers under the paved streets of their city. They decorated their houses with murals and wall paintings. The people enjoyed a high standard of living here 3,600 years ago.

That amazing discovery drew the attention of the whole world on this small island. Many people attached this discovery to the mythical land of Atlantis. Have you heard the myth of the

lost Atlantis? Yes. Plato is the only writer who mentions this story of the lost Atlantis (in Timeaus and Critias), and according to him the people of Atlantis were wealthy traders, enjoyed a high standard of living, and had advanced technology. The only thing those people did wrong was they grew arrogant and selfish, and they didn't make the sacrifices that they should to God. So that's the punishment – their land disappeared under the sea. Remember the round-shaped island – a big part of it ended up at the bottom of the sea.

So many people connected the case of Santorini to the mythical land of Atlantis, and some of them decided to come here to see what Atlantis looked like. That was the beginning of a tourism period, because by coming here they had a chance to see the beautiful landscape of Santorini. And that was the beginning of tourism on the island. Nowadays, Santorini is classified as one of the main tourist destinations worldwide. Next time you come to the island, don't miss the opportunity to visit the prehistoric city of Akrotiri. It's an amazing city with advanced infrastructure and technology; you won't believe it was a city built 3,600 years ago.

In front of us you can see the city of Fira, looking up the hill at the blue domes. There are many churches here. And now straight ahead, on the right side of the road, you see two older windmills made of black lava stone. And you can also see one that has been restored with concrete as a vacation house. So you have both cases (of windmills) here.

So now we're very close to Fira, the capital city. We'll stop at the parking lot, and then we'll walk all together. I will lead you to the city center – the main street of Fira – and I'll show you where the cable car is. From then on you're going to have free time on your own. You'll have to take the cable car back to the tender boat at the old port. The old port is very small, so you won't have any trouble finding the tender boat that will take you back to your cruise ship.

[We said our good-byes to Vicky, our tour guide, and headed out on our own, some to the city center, and some to the cable car.]



Teleferique, Cable Car entrance.



Teleferique, Cable Car.



https://youtu.be/_q1bsKHjt4U (2:18)

Riding the Teleferique (aerial tramway or cable car) at Santorini.



View of the capital city of Fira from the Teleferique (cable car).

The impressive city of 1,600 permanent inhabitants is on the western part of the island. It sits on the edge of an impressive cliff 260 meters (853 feet) above the sea, offering a great panoramic view over the submerged volcano (caldera).

Source: www.greeka.com



I saw a web site advertised on the side of the boat: www.santorini-boatmenunion.com (It was changed to the following link)

<http://www.boatmenunionsantorini.com/>

The web site advertised the arrival of Celestyal Olympia to start the 2016 season:

The season 2016 just started on Sunday March 13th when we welcomed the arrival of the Celestyal Cruise.

<http://www.boatmenunionsantorini.com/2016/03/the-season-2016-began/>



Tender boat named Orpheas takes us back to the Celestyal Olympia cruise ship. The ancient legend of Orpheus and Eurydice concerns the fateful love of Orpheus of Thrace, son of Apollo and the muse Calliope, for the beautiful Eurydice.

Orpheus was known for his ability to charm wild animals (and people) with his musical skills on the lyre of Apollo.

Also, the Orphic Mysteries were based on his sacred writings.

[The tender boat took us back to the Celestyal Olympia cruise ship, where we enjoyed a late dinner.]

Online Resources:

<http://www.greece-holiday.co.uk/images/santorini-map.jpg>

Celestyal Olympia Iconic Aegean Greek Cruise

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oIWwB4A-1Bs>



Barry Vaudrin

See the Celestyal difference and the most magical way to experience the Greek Islands. Celestyal Olympia, ex Song of America, is the perfect, comfortable and authentic way to see the Greek Islands. [Features a short interview with Emre Ates at Ephesus]

<http://www.summitpost.org/santorini/188847> (Atlantis – Santorini & Crete) – Webcam

The origins of this myth we can find in Plato's dialogues Timaeus and Critias. The state of Atlantis was a kingdom of two islands - Meison (Bigger One) and Elasson (Smaller One). This kingdom was formed by ten city-states. Plato describes in Critias two of this cities - Metropolis (probably the island of Strongyli, present Santorini) and Vasiliki Politeia (probably the island of Crete).

Research works of two archeologists Spyros Marinatos and Nikos Platon convinced the scientists, that mythical Atlantis was -according to Marinatos- the Santorini island and according to Platon the island of Crete.