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## The Secret Of Santorini

Sophie Fox, Wednesday 15 September 2010

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**Having heard about the beauty of Santorini for many years, I thought it was time I paid a visit to this volcanic island to see if it lived up to its incredible reputation of romance and bewilderment.**

On arrival I was welcomed by the customary heat that can be expected in August in Greece, and by the time I arrived at my hotel I was positively over-heating and ashamedly missing the cooler temperatures of London. Aiming to appear completely unaffected by the impact of the shift in body temperature, I walked up the steps to the hotel and prepared myself for the expected arduous check in procedure.

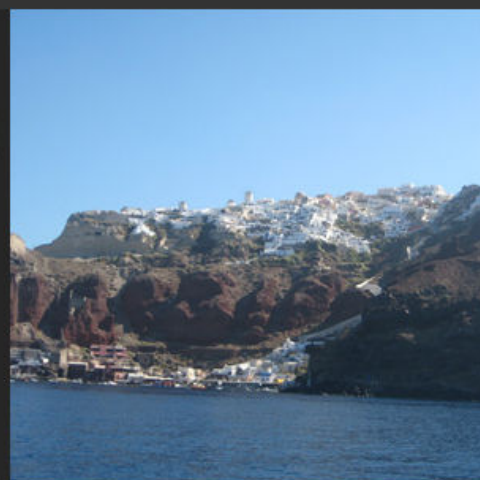
From the moment I walked in to Avant Garde Suites I fell in love with it. I was instantly offered a refreshing fruit cocktail and was taken directly to my room where I was told I could relax and unwind, and finish checking in once I was settled. I would have thanked the host more articulately if I hadn't been so stunned by the beauty of my surroundings. I knew I had found the real secret of Santorini.

Avant Garde Suites boasts of being the 'one and only design hotel in Santorini' and although this may detract the older generations, certainly lives up to its billings. Although it is part of a larger hotel group that has seven different hotels of varying style and standard across the island, the new Avant Garde Suites is definitely the most ambitious and unique. Personally, I love celebrating difference and whilst the public areas of the hotel do indeed boast incredibly modern and contemporary furnishings and fittings, the rooms themselves are spacious, comfortable and not trying to be so fashionable that they are un-homely. With several of the rooms, or suites to be exact, offering a huge private terrace with hot tub and double sun bed overlooking the ocean below, there is not much to quibble about.

The hotel is located on a more remote part of the island and although the full view of the famous sunset is partially blocked by the hotel itself, it stands alone and proud on the tip of the island over looked by no one, where you can literally hear a pin drop (or should I say jaw drop) as the view on to the Caldera is a once in a lifetime must see sight.

The island is an inverted 'C' curled around the waters of the caldera, the vast crater left by the Thera volcanic eruption of roughly 1500 BCE. Its popularity is well deserved and it offers visitors one of the most distinctive images of Greece: that of the white washed buildings and their blue domed roofs built thickly in to the rocks to defend against earthquakes.

I came across all types of people from families, young couples, newlyweds and small groups of young tourists. The younger, more daring travellers seemed to be having great fun discovering the island by go kart - a great way to view the beautiful beaches including Perissa, Kamari, Perivolos, Vlihada and Red beach. For those who want to get a close up view of the volcano there are daily cruises, where tourists are



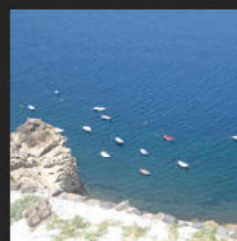
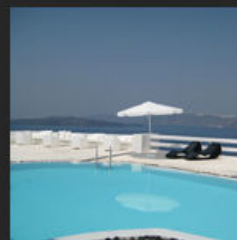
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allowed to climb the black walls of the volcano. The island has two other volcanoes, Nea Kameni and Palea Kameni. Palea Kameni is the oldest volcano on the island and is known for its stunning hot springs. These springs are perfect for relaxing in and the water is said to have healing properties.

For those who enjoy the nightlife, Fira is the best place to go for things to do, where nightmarkets line the streets and restaurants offer some of the best food in Greece. One of the highlights of the night is bound to be enjoying souvlaki in a traditional taverna, where Greek waiters show off their dance moves and refill your glasses with grappa.

The island is known for its spectacular sunsets, which feature on many tourist postcards of the island and are without doubt amongst the island's most spectacular charms. I visited some of the hotels in the areas that offered the best views of the sunset (areas include at Fira, Oia, Imerovigli) and although I was blown away by the view, it was clear that hotel designers had flocked to these areas as hotels were located almost on top of one another. Not only did the view include the sunset but at least 30 other 'private' terraces filled with other couples also taking in their surroundings. I retreated back to the Avante Garde Suites even more thankful to be away from the 'more popular' part of the island where I could relax on my truly private terrace overlooked only by the night's stars. Avante Garde Suites in Akritori is the ideal place to stay to take in the beauty and energy of the island especially when looking for a slightly less discovered, more unique experience.

*Suites at Avante Garde Suites start at €140 per night -*  
[www.avantgardesuites.com](http://www.avantgardesuites.com)



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