

Santorini –Volcanic island with world-renowned sunsets and possible location of the lost civilisation of Atlantis



Santorini, part of the Cyclades islands network, is a volcanic island of immense natural beauty. World-renowned for its spectacular sunsets, many hypothesis support that the Lost City of Atlantis was on Santorini before being completely destroyed by a large volcanic eruption.

Santorini is a popular tourist destination, attracting thousands of both foreign and national tourists annually and thus it is very well connected to mainland Greece via Athens International Airport and Pireaus Port.

With a Mediterranean climate, Santorini Island has very favourable weather conditions, with sun-drenched days and a cooling breeze blowing frequently during the evening.

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General



Santorini is unique both in its shape and its landscape. The whole island is a volcano (still active today) and its actual shape is the result of volcanic eruptions over the years. The most important of these eruptions took place in 1500 B.C., when, all the western part of the island disappeared under the water. This formed the walls of the "caldera", the remains of the volcano's old crater, a steep, 300m high, rock of volcanic material.

On the opposite side of the "caldera", to the west, two smaller islands, Thirassia and Aspronissi, form a circle with the main island, giving an impression of the island's

shape before the eruption. Virtually, one can reconstruct a rather round island, as its ancient Greek name - Strongyli (meaning "round") - suggests. In the middle of this circle, two small islands made of volcanic material, appeared in more recent periods - Palaia Kammeni ("kammeni" meaning burnt in Greek) and Nea Kammeni. When reaching Santorini by boat the view of the "caldera" is truly breathtaking.

A steep cliff, composed of various colours, ranging from purple to vivid red and from various tones of grey to pale yellow, without any vegetation, stands out, threatening and discouraging anyone wishing to explore the island. The rest of the island, hidden behind this cliff, is totally invisible. However, when you reach the cliff-foot you start seeing small white houses, churches with blue domes, narrow paths and steps leading to the top.



Volcano

The present-day crescent shape of the island is a consequence of volcanic activity that took place in prehistoric times. The island itself owes its very existence to the volcano.



The volcano's last huge eruption dates back 3,600 years, to the late Bronze Age. Thirty million cubic meters of magma in the form of pumice and ash were blown to a height of up to 36 kilometers above the island. Pumice deposits, dozens of meters thick, buried one of the most prosperous prehistoric settlements of that period, feeding the myth of the lost Atlantis.



Mild volcanic activity, after this major eruption, continues into the present (the most recent eruption occurred in 1950) building up two small islands within the caldera, Palea and Nea Kammeni. These islands represent the volcano's most recent activity.

The marvelous dry climate and continuous sunshine create conditions which are perfect for observation and photography under an extraordinary variety of natural lights and colours. Visitors to the island often take the opportunity to experience a boat-journey to the volcano's interior.



History

Ancient Thera

Ancient Thera, is located on Mesa Vouno, 396 m. above sea level. It was founded in the 9th century B.C. by Dorian colonists whose leader was Theras, and continued to be inhabited until the early Byzantine period. The preserved ruins belong to the Hellenistic and Roman phases of the city.

There are many important monuments in Ancient Thera, such as the **Sanctuary of Artemidoros** (with



its many engravings), the **Temple of Dionysus**, the **Cemeteries of Ancient Thera** and the **Agora**.

More about Ancient Thera



The Sanctuary of Artemidoros, entirely hewn into the rock-face, was founded by Artemidoros of Perge. Engraved on the rock-face are epigrams and inscriptions, as well as symbols of the gods worshipped there: an eagle for Zeus, a lion for Apollo, a dolphin for Poseidon. Also engraved is the portrait of a wreathed Artemidoros, the sanctuary's founder. The whole structure is dated to the end of the 4th or the beginning of the 3rd century B.C.

The Agora lies almost in the city's centre. Its southern part was actually the commercial centre and the middle part was the administrative centre. The northern part was added in the Roman period and included a portico, monuments and temple-like buildings, erected in honour of distinguished persons.



The Royal Stoa (46 x 10 m.) was built in the time of Augustus (1st century A.D.), in the Southwestern part of the Agora. The main entrance is on the East side, towards the Agora and the roof was supported by an interior Doric colonnade along the axis of the building. Statues of members of Caesar's family were erected in the northern part. Two inscribed slabs built in the west wall, record that the portico was repaired in A.D. 149 by Kleitosthenes, a rich Theran.

Temple of Dionysus. This is a small, Doric temple with a small cella and pronaos, built on an artificial terrace to the north of the Agora. The facade and roof were made of marble while the rest of the building was of local stone. Dated to the 3rd century B.C. (Hellenistic period).



Sanctuaries on the city's South-Eastern side. This area is occupied exclusively by sanctuaries, open-air or roofed (such as the sanctuary of Apollo Karneios, of Hermes and Heracles, of Ptolemy III etc.) and the square, where the Gymnopaediae (dances of nude boys) were held in honor of Apollo Karneios. Engraved in the rocks are numerous inscriptions dating from the Archaic to the Roman period, referring to deities and youths.

The Sanctuary of Apollo Karneios, dated to the 6th century B.C., is partially hewn into the rock and partially built on an artificial terrace. It includes a temple with pronaos and cella, a square courtyard with an underground cistern, the roof of which was supported by six large monolithic pillars and a small building, probably a repository.



Gymnasium of the Youths. It lies city's Southern edge and dates back to the 2nd century A.D. A small cave, partially hewn from rock, was dedicated to Hermes and Heracles.

Cemeteries of Ancient Thera. These are located



on the slopes of the Sellada, on either side of the roads that led to the north and south harbours of the ancient city, the modern villages of Kamari and Perissa, respectively. The graves uncovered, span the long period between the Geometric and Roman times.

The Theatre lies Southeast of the Agora. It was constructed in the Ptolemaic period (3rd century B.C.) and in its original form had a circular orchestra. During alterations in the 1st century A.D., the stage was extended and took over part of the original orchestra.

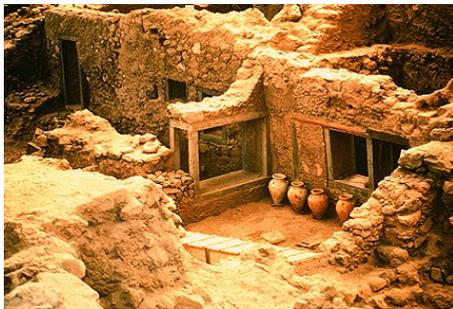
Thera Akrotiri

One of the most important prehistoric settlements of the Aegean, Akrotiri was a large settlement with an elaborate drainage system, sophisticated multi-storeyed buildings with magnificent wall-paintings, furniture and vessels, all indicating its great development and prosperity. *Please note that the Akrotiri museum is presently closed due to renovation.*



More about Thera Akrotiri

Akrotiri at Thera is one of the most important prehistoric settlements of the Aegean. First signs of habitation on the site dates from the Late Neolithic times. During the Early Bronze Age, a sizeable settlement was founded and in the Middle and early Late Bronze Age (ca. 20th-17th centuries B.C.) it was extended and gradually developed into one of the main urban centres of the Aegean. The settlement's size (ca. 20 hectares), elaborate drainage system, sophisticated multi-storeyed buildings with magnificent wall-paintings, furniture and vessels, all indicate its great development and prosperity.



Various imported objects found in Akrotiri buildings indicate a wide network of external relations. Akrotiri was in contact with Crete but also communicated with the Greek Mainland, the Dodecanese, Cyprus, Syria and Egypt. The town's life came to an abrupt end in the last quarter of the 17th century B.C. when the inhabitants were obliged to abandon it as a result of severe earthquakes. A severe volcanic eruption followed.

Volcanic material covered the entire island and the town itself. This volcanic material, however, protected the buildings and their contents, up to now, just like in Pompei.

Evidence of habitation at Akrotiri first came to light in the second half of the 19th century. Systematic excavation begun much later, in 1967, by Professor Spyridon Marinatos under the auspices of the Archaeological Society at Athens. He decided to excavate at Akrotiri in the hope of verifying an old theory of his, published in the 1930's, that the eruption of the Thera volcano was responsible for the collapse of the Minoan civilization. Since his death in 1974, the excavations have been continued under the direction of Professor Christos Doumas.

The most important buildings of the site are:



Xeste 3: A large edifice, at least two-storeys high, with fourteen rooms on each floor. Some of rooms were connected by multiple doors and decorated with magnificent wall-paintings. In one of them there was a "Lustral basin", which was considered a sacred area. The most interesting of the frescoes are the ones of the Altar and of the Saffron Gatherers. The former depicts three women in a field with bloomed crocuses and an altar, and the latter, female figures engaged in collecting crocuses which they offer to a seated goddess, flanked by a blue monkey and a griffin. Judging from the architectural peculiarities of the building and the themes of the frescoes, one may conclude that Xeste 3 was used for ritual performances.

Sector B possibly comprises two separate buildings, the one attached to the other. The famous wall paintings of Antelopes and the Boxing Children are from the western building. The eastern building yielded the "fresco of the Monkeys", a composition of monkeys climbing on rocks at the side of a river.



The West House is a relatively small, but well-organized building. On the ground floor there are storerooms, workshops, a kitchen and a mill-installation. The first floor is occupied by a spacious chamber used for weaving activities, a room for the storage of clay vessels, a lavatory and two rooms, the one next to the other, embellished with magnificent murals. The first room was decorated with two frescoes of the Fishermen, a fresco of the Young Priestess and the famous Flotilla miniature frieze. The latter, ran around all four walls and depicted a major overseas voyage, in the course of which, the fleet visited several harbours and towns. The rocky landscape, the configuration of the harbour and the multi-storeyed buildings identify the port, as the prehistoric settlement at Akrotiri. The walls of the second room were decorated with a single motif which was repeated eight times. This motif is identified as the cabin at the stern of the ships depicted in the miniature frieze.

Complex Delta includes four houses. A room in the eastern building is decorated with the Spring fresco: the artist represented a rocky landscape, planted with blossoming lilies, between which swallows are depicted in a variety of flying positions. Linear A script tablets have recently been found in the same building. All four buildings yielded interesting finds such as abundant imported pottery and precious stone and bronze objects.



House of the Ladies. The large, two-storey building was named after the fresco with the Ladies and the Papyrus, which decorated the interior. The most interesting architectural feature of the building is a light-well constructed at its centre.

Xeste 4. This is a magnificent three-storey building, the largest excavated up to now. The fragments of frescoes that have so far come to light belong to a composition which adorned the walls on either side

of the staircase at the entrance of the building, depicting life-size male figures ascending the steps in procession. It was in all probability a public building, judging from its unusually large dimensions, the impressive exterior and the walls' decoration.

The Lost Civilisation of Atlantis

The story of Atlantis, a fabled utopia destroyed overnight, in ancient times, has captured the imagination of scholars ever since it was first described in 355 B.C. by the philosopher Plato more than 2,000 years ago.

Plato's depiction of a land of fabulous wealth, advanced civilisation and natural beauty has spurred many adventurers to seek out its location. Debate rages over where it may lie, however various studies place it to be submerged, near Santorini island.



More about the Lost Civilisation of Atlantis

According to Plato, Atlantis was a great island (larger than Libya and Asia combined) in the Atlantic Ocean, but its control extended beyond the 'Pillars of Heracles' into the Mediterranean as far as Egypt and Tyrrhenia (Italy). Its powerful and remarkable dynasty of kings arose directly from Poseidon, god of sea and of earthquakes, though this divine and heroic lineage gradually became diluted by mixing with mortal stock.

The resulting degeneration of this noble civilisation led it into a war with its former ally, Athens, and culminated in its cataclysmic destruction.

Plato wrote that the sea god Poseidon (Neptune) was given Atlantis and then built a large home for his mortal wife on a hill in the middle of the island. This palace was surrounded by five rings of water and land connected only by tunnels large enough for ships to pass through.

A dual pipe system suggesting hot and cold running water, the advanced architecture, and the apparent layout of the Akrotiri find, resembles Plato's description of the legendary lost city of Atlantis, further indicating the Minoans as the culture which primarily inspired the Atlantis legend.

The most believable theory about Atlantis came from the Greek archaeologist Angelos Galanopoulos in the late '60s. He theorized that around 1500 BC, a massive eruption from a volcano ripped apart the island of Santorini in the Mediterranean and probably wiped out most civilization on the Greek islands and regions of Greece. Galanopoulos suggested this disaster is the one that sank Atlantis.

Other theories include placing Atlantis as part of the Egyptian civilization, as being located somewhere in the Azores and as being destroyed by a comet.

Museums in Santorini

In Santorini there are a variety of museums showing the island's history from prehistoric times, up until today. Ancient engravings, Cycladic style dresses and shoes, books about Santorini and information about wine-making techniques can all be found in one of the various museums in Santorini.



[The Archaeological museum](#)
[Museum of Prehistoric Thera](#)
[The Naval museum](#)
[The Megaron Gyzi](#)
[The Folklore museum](#)
[The Bellonio Cultural Centre and Library](#)
[Santorini Wine Museum](#)



The Archaeological museum

The museum is located in Thera, the island's capital, opposite the cable car station. You will be able to admire some finds testifying the island's long history. You can also see a collection of Hellenistic and Roman sculpture from the Archaic to the Roman period, as well as vases and clay figurines from the Geometric to the Hellenistic periods.

Museum of Prehistoric Thera

Located in Thera, the island's capital, this museum houses masterpieces of art from the prehistoric Cyclades.

The Naval museum

Located in Oia, a picturesque town in the north of Santorini, this museum houses all kinds of marine objects tracing the maritime history of the island. The museum also features a small library and the vestiges of a Venetian fortress.

The Megaron Gyzi

Museum Gyzi is located in Thira, behind the Catholic cathedral. It exhibits engravings from the 16th to the 19th century with dresses, views and maps of the Cycladic islands as well as fascinating photographs of Thera before and after the earthquake of 1956.

The Folklore museum

The Folklore Museum is located in Kontohori, in Thera. It was built in a cave-house in 1861. You will find a variety of exhibits in this museum: barrel and shoe makers, an old traditional winery and also the work of local artists.

The Bellonio Cultural Centre and Library

Situated next to the post office, the Cultural Centre has a good collection of books about Santorini.

Santorini Wine Museum

The museum is located in the village of Messaria and offers information about the wine traditions of Santorini.

Villages



Santorini's villages have kept their traditional character with white-washed buildings, narrow, winding, cobbled streets and exquisite blue-roofed churches. Some of the villages are perched on the top of 300 m high cliffs and offer gorgeous views. Some of the most beautiful villages include: Thera, Oia, Imerovigli, Firostefani, Megalochori, Akrotiri, Pyrgos, Messaria, Exo Gonia, Finikia, Emporio, Katarados. [Click here](#) for short descriptions of each unique village.

Thera Village

Clinging to the rim of a steep cliff, Thera is actually in the middle of the volcano's crater. It is the island's capital, although the town is not typically Cycladic. The long period of Venetian domination left its influence on the town's architecture while Cycladic and Venetian architectural features are found side by side making for a quite interesting blend.

Firostefani

Built the cliff edge facing the caldera, some 1 to 1,5 km from Thera, in the North, Firostefani offers the visitor a magnificent view, romantic walks and a sunset of unique beauty, less crowded than that of Oia.

Imerovigli

Situated 3 km of Thera at the Northwest, Imerovigli is a typically Cycladic settlement, with traditional low, white washed houses with terraces, narrow pebble paved streets and numerous tiny churches found in every quarter. Built on the rim of the volcanic crater, 300 m. high, it has an extraordinary view of the caldera.

Vourvoulos

2,5 km from Thera in the North and just in the centre of the island's northern part is Vourvoulos. Although a bit remote from the sea, the village has exceptional views of the Aegean, traditional architecture and is a tranquil setting

Finikia

10 km from Thera, in the North West on the public road to Oia is Finikia, a small inland traditional village with 50 permanent residents. The entrance is quite impressive, as the visitor is faced with a high wall made of dark volcanic stone. Two churches, that of Aghia Matrona and of Epta Paides, cut out of rock, are worth seeing.

Oia

Situated 11 km from Thera, on the northwest edge of the island, Oia shares the same landscape as Thera. Built on the rim of a steep cliff, it has views of the "caldera", the nearby island of Thirasia, and almost the whole island.

Karterados

Small inland village just 2 km from Thera, in the South, Karterados is situated on the public road leading to Messaria. The village has interesting architecture and is surrounded by vineyards.

Messaria

Situated almost in the centre of the island, this inland village is only 4 km from Thera, in the Southeast. Messaria has 1.075 permanent residents and is the heart of Santorini wine-making. Surrounded by gardens and vineyards, with white-washed houses and narrow paths, it is possibly the island's most beautiful village.

Vothonas

6 km from Thera in the Southeast, is Vothonas, a small scenic village built in a valley, with small, cute houses and few residents. It is worth seeing the two churches built within caves; the "Panaghia tis Sergeinas" and the "Panaghia tis Tripas" (meaning "of the hole")

Monolithos

Small village on the coast, 9 km far from Thera and very close to the airport, Monolithos has 405 residents. It is a typical Cycladic village with narrow streets and white washed houses, less crowded than Kamari or Perissa. Due to the shallow sandy beach it is suitable for families with children.

Pyrgos

An inland village built on the slope of the mountain Profitis Ilias, Pyrgos is situated 7,5 km from Thera, in the southeast and has 730 permanent residents. The houses are arranged amphitheatrically surrounding the remains of a Venetian castle (today known as "kasteli") offering magnificent views.

Messa Gonia

Village in the island's interior, 8km far from Thera , on the way to Kamari. The village suffered from the earthquakes of 1956 and was partly abandoned by its residents who resettled in Kamari. It is a traditional village, surrounded by vineyards, one of the island's major wine producing centres.

Exo Gonia

Small traditional village, 12 km far from Thera, with very few permanent residents. The village is quiet with narrow streets, beautiful houses, a flat landscape and marvellous views.

Kamari

One of the best organised places in Santorini, Kamari is situated 10 km from Thera, to the South east. It is a new village, reconstructed after the earthquake of 1956 and fully developed into a tourist resort, with 1350 permanent residents. Apart from the beach, it is worth seeing the ruins of ancient buildings by the sea.

Megalochori

Megalochori is at a distance of 10 km from Thera at the Southwest. Its name in Greek means "big village", but in fact with 460 permanent residents, the name is not fully justified! However, Megalochori is one of the most representative villages of Santorini, having kept its features almost intact. Traditional Cycladic houses, neoclassic buildings and small houses dug in the volcanic rock blend together with harmony.

Emporio

Built in the middle of a big plain in the southern part of Santorini, Emporio is 12 km from Thera and has 1770 permanent residents. Due to tourist development the village has expanded and it tends to join the nearby resort of Perissa to the east.

Perissa

Due to its impressive long, black, sandy beach, Perissa is Santorini's best known summer resort. Situated on the island's southeastern edge, it is 15 km from Thera and has 470 permanent residents. It is worth seeing the Byzantine church of Aghia Irini (St. Irene) there.

Athinio Port

This is the new port of Santorini, 12 km from Thera, almost in the middle of the caldera coasts. Some cafes and one or two mini markets are available to serve the passengers arriving by ferry, but it is not a settlement.

Akrotiri

Situated 15 km from Thera, in the south-western part of the island, this village is famous due to the very important Minoan settlement brought to light by excavations conducted at the site since 1967.

Thirassia

A small island opposite Oia. Thirassia is a part of what was once the round island of Santorini before the 1500 B.C. explosion. Along with Oia, it forms the caldera's northern entrance. The main settlement is Chora (or Manolas), not far from the sea and Korfos on the beach in the Eastern part; Riva, just opposite to Oia in the North and Potamos in the west are the other settlements.

Beaches



The island is full of original and scenic beaches that have unusually colored sand due to past volcanic activity. Deep, clear-blue water is found in the western part of the island, where the caldera is, whereas beaches with black or red sand, polished black stones and pumice stones are found in the eastern part. Most beaches have full tourist facilities, offering a wide range of amenities. Two of the better known beaches worth visiting are the Red Beach and the White Beach.

Red Beach (Kokkini Ammos)

Not far from the archaeological site of Akrotiri is Kokkini Ammos. Here, one does not only find black sand and blue water, but also red sand. The beach took its name ("red beach") from the impressive red lava cliffs dropping to the sea and surrounding the beach. This impressive beach seems to have been painted on one of the frescoes found in the Minoan settlement.

White Beach (Aspri Ammos)

At a walking distance from Kokkini Ammos, in the West, you will find Aspri Ammos "white beach". Another scenic environment, where the cliffs surrounding the beach are whitish. Access is possible by boat or on foot.

Tastes of Santorini



Santorini owes its worldwide uniqueness to the peculiar ecosystem that was created due to successive volcanic explosions and lava that burnt rocks and formed a porous terrain of porcelain slabs. The composition of this terrain combined with drought and the island's microclimate, which is a result of territorial humidity and the morning coolness, caused by sea vaporization at the point where the caldera is located, give the produce of this land an extra special taste.

You may try these locally produced delicacies in one of the many restaurants in Santorini. Definitely do not miss trying "Tomatokeftedes", which resemble meatballs with tomatoes instead of meat and are the most traditional Santorini delicacy.

Santorini Cherry Tomato

Fava - Split peas

Capers

White Aubergines

Wine

The Santorini Cherry Tomato

It is unique of its kind. It came from Suez and adapted easily to the volcanic terrain of the island. In 1875, I. Kiriakos, a folklorist from Thera, described the Santorini cherry tomato as a golden apple. It is shrubby and produces fruit the size of a cherry. Its skin is hard and therefore has a unique taste. Tomato paste is also produced from this variety of tomato. The dry terrain results in an increased amount of sugar and therefore increased tastiness. Prior to the 1956 earthquake there were 13 factories in operation on the island producing "Thera style paste". After this, due to the low yield per, cultivation of tomatoes was considered unfavorable. Nowadays, there is only one tomato factory in operation in the island.

Fava - Split Peas

Santorini split peas are considered unique as they originate from the variety *Lathyrus clymenous*, although this presents a paradox as it is the only type that is not registered in the official Greek catalogue. Traces of this exact type of split peas were found during excavations at Akrotiri which means that they were cultivated since then on the island. Based on this, the co-operative is taking steps towards making them a PDI product (Protected Designation of Origin). They are roughly the size of a large grain of sand and differ from other split peas as they become mushy on their own and have a purer aroma. They are sown in mid-November and harvested in May. They are then dried in the sun, cleaned, skinned and split by the producers.

Split peas can be found in many recipes from Santorini, with onions, pork pieces and also in soup or with aubergines and tomatoes.

Capers

This shrub grows on the steep slopes of the caldera above the island's traditional terraces. The blossom and leaves are collected from wild capers and because they are wild they have a more intense aroma and a more spicy taste. They are used in salads or spicy salads, both fresh and dried.

White Aubergine

A traditional produce of Santorini. Its seed originates from Egypt (from the time when pumice stone was exported to Suez). Due to the terrain it does not have the same bitterness as purple aubergines. On the contrary it is sweet and juicy and has few seeds.

Wines

Santorini is home to a small but flourishing wine industry, based on the indigenous grape variety, Assyrtiko. Assyrtiko vines are an extremely old variety and are resistant to phylloxera, attributed by local winemakers to the well drained volcanic soil and its chemistry. Consequently they did not need to be replaced during the great phylloxera epidemic of the early 20th century. Assyrtiko vines are well adapted to the Santorini habitat and are planted far apart, as their principal source of moisture is dew.

They are pruned in the shape of low spiraling baskets, with the grapes hanging inside to protect them from the wind. Also unique is the red, sweet and extremely strong Vinsanto. Vinsanto is distinguished by its superb velvety palate with aromas of creme brulee, chocolate and dried apricots.

White wines from the island are extremely dry with a strong, citrus scent; the ashy volcanic soil gives the white wines a slightly sulphurous flavor.

You can visit some of the wineries for a wine-tasting session and to view their winery. It is best to contact the winery concerned before your planned visit.

Santorini Wineries

(please use the prefix 22860 if calling from a Greek telephone or +30 22860 if calling from an international telephone)

ARGIRIS SIGALAS WINE HOUSES - Thera →tel: 22802 →fax: 25400
ANTONIOU WINES - Megalochori →tel: 23557
BOUTARI WINES - Megalochori →tel: 81607 / 81011 →fax: 81606
CANAVA ROUSSOS - Exo Gonia →tel: 31349
HATZIDAKIS WINERY - Pyrgos →tel: 32552
KASTELLI WINES KARAMOLEKOS I.S. - Vothonas →tel/ fax : 32047
KOYTSOYIANNOPOYLOS →tel: 22266
SANTO WINES - Pyrgos →tel: 32128 / 22596

Night Life



Santorini Island is famous for its lively nightlife. There are many lively bars and clubs in the main tourist areas of Thera, Oia, Perisa and Kamari.

Thera is the most popular place in Santorini and many cafe bars or clubs are situated along the caldera (the cliff-top).

Caldera (Thera) bars and cafes are usually built into decorated caves and renovated old houses. For this area there are very strict laws about music and closing time. These bars will generally close earlier.

Clubs and large bars operate during summer months and stay open to the early hours. There is usually a fee at the door which includes the first drink.

Enigma, Koo and Dom are the best known clubs, where the partying continues till dawn.

If you are in search of quieter nightlife experiences in Santorini, Oia is the place to be.