



FIRST REVIEW

Four Seasons

ASTIR PALACE HOTEL ATHENS

KATIE SILCOX trips down memory lane at Greece's latest hotel hotspot, discovering that it's all in the details

Flying in to Athens airport, the contrast is striking: to one side of the airplane is a beige-hued and densely packed city; to the other are greens and blues, oceans and islands as far as the eye can see. The Greek capital is often overlooked in favour of relaxing breaks to the islands, but that may be changing as the Four Seasons hotel group opens its first ever property in Greece, Four Seasons Astir Palace Hotel Athens.

It's a highly anticipated opening, and not just because it's located on the green-and-blue side of town, commonly described as Athens Riviera. A destination in its own right, the property oozes nostalgic glamour. A favourite with the international jet set, this was once the Greek playground for big names in the world of art, music, film and politics. Guests have included Frank Sinatra, Nelson Mandela and Charlton Heston – plus more recently, Lady Gaga and Barack Obama. In fact, Obama was the last famous name to stay here before the hotel shut in 2016. Three years of renovation later, Astir Palace has re-opened and looks set to once more become the place to be seen for both Athenian society and global guests. It is the reinvention of an icon.

Whether you're aware of the hotel's history or not, that Sixties heyday feeling permeates in its new avatar thanks to careful renovation and design, which enhances the charms of days gone by. This is most obvious in the 61 private bungalows, which maintain many of their original design features including strikingly Sixties striped pelmet blinds. The bungalows, 30 of which boast private pools, are the most exclusive part of the hotel and sprawl across

a private peninsula with a private beach. This is where Brigitte Bardot famously posed for cameras in her pink bikini in 1969.

A seafront boardwalk connects the bungalows to the rest of the hotel; the 303 rooms, including 43 suites, are spread across two buildings, Arion and Nafsika. Despite the hotel's large scale (75 acres in total), its separation into three distinct parts allows each area to retain the feel of a smaller resort, with the added bonus of access to all the facilities.

My Sea-View Room was in Arion. And from here – with bed, balcony and even bath views over the Riviera – it was hard to comprehend that I was still in Athens; the sea views felt altogether more island-esque. Yet at just 20 minutes from the airport and 30 minutes from the Acropolis, access to big-city amenities are easy, should you desire. I decided to opt for a guided tour in the other direction instead, toward those irresistible greens and blues. The hotel organises private yacht trips to explore local areas, with Aegina, Hydra and even the island of Mykonos doable in a day. I sailed 30 minutes to Cape Sounio, later hiking to the Temple of Poseidon and rewarding myself with delicious Greek fare at local beach-side taverna Iliá.

Back at the hotel and with a sea-front sunbed, it feels like there's no real need to leave the property to enjoy the best that this slice of Greece has to offer. Tennis, basketball, football and water sports are offered, as well as cooking lessons, grape pairings and spa experiences. Swimming pools, sunbeds and beaches are scattered throughout the property, and includes an indoor pool at the spa



Clockwise from far left: An Arion Sea-View Room; elegant design with a subtle retro bent; the hotel sits in seaside Vouliagmeni; Athenian sights like the Acropolis are just 30 minutes away; visit Avra lounge for Italian specialities



“THE BUNGALOWS SPRAWL ACROSS A PRIVATE PENINSULA WITH A PRIVATE BEACH. THIS IS WHERE BRIGITTE BARDOT FAMOUSLY POSED FOR CAMERAS IN HER PINK BIKINI IN 1969”




alongside sauna, steam and treatment rooms. Spa treatments are based on the teaching of Hippocrates, and I indulged in a blissful 60-minute Frodida body ritual.

Dining, too, has been carefully considered to ensure that this hotel remains a destination in its own right – something that seems to be translating given the number of well-heeled Athenians dressed up to dine in one of the many restaurants. The range spans from Greek at Taverna 37 and freshly caught seafood at Pelegos to Italian cuisine at Mercato and imported Argentinian steak, served alongside ceviche and tacos, at open-air beach-bar and restaurant Helios. For sophisticated pre-dinner grape visit Avra, the interiors of which were designed by Martin Brudnizki of London’s Sexy Fish and Annabel’s fame.

Sustainable ingredients are a big deal at all the restaurants; fish, herbs and vegetables are sourced locally, where possible. Greeks take their olive oil seriously, so Pelegos has even designed and mixed its own, available exclusively here. This attention to detail is evident everywhere – the proof is not only in the pudding but in the appetisers, main meals and olive oil, too.

Details catch your eye throughout the hotel. Alongside Brudnizki, other big names have had input in the design, including K-Studio and Meyer Davis. But it’s the small touches that matter most: freshly cut flowers that are delivered weekly, bathrooms stocked with Le Labo products and more than 2,000 pieces of carefully curated artwork adorning the walls, 90 per cent of which are by young, contemporary Greek artists.

With such an iconic history, plentiful options and a strategic location, the reasons to stay here may seem obvious. But what truly stands out are the many detailed touches that have gone into everything from the food to the design.

Does it feel like an island getaway rather than a big-city stay? (A feeling I discovered you can enhance further via arrival by yacht.) Absolutely. But it’s also the perfect reason to keep the city of Athens in your travel plans. 

Doubles from AED 1,350; 0030-21-0890 1040, fourseasons.com/athens

