

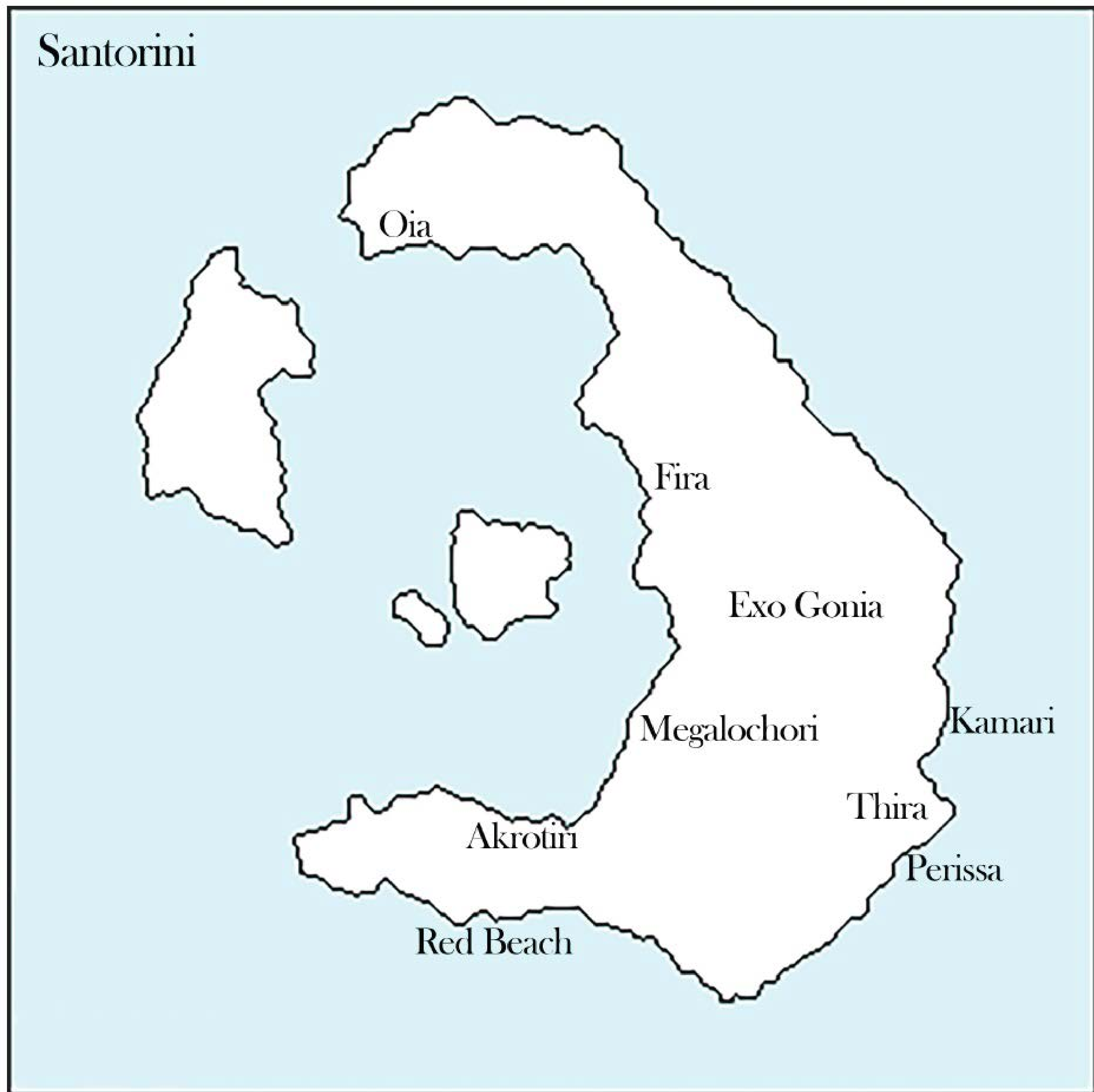
SANTORINI DESTINATION GUIDE



Introduction

Santorini used to be one round island, but a volcanic eruption around 1650 BC forced the center to implode. When the volcano erupted, the gases emerging from the volcano's interior created a vacuum underneath and the central portion collapsed, creating the enormous caldera (or crater) that delves up to 1300 feet below sea level.

Today, Santorini consists of two inhabited islands and several islets. The Santorini islands' volcano is still active and may be the only volcano in the world whose crater is underwater. The original island, called Strongyli, is considered by many to be the home of the lost city of Atlantis, which long ago disappeared into the ocean.



Oia

Oia is the spot to catch dazzling sunsets when the town glows as if on fire. In 1965, it was devastated by an earthquake and the residence chose to rebuild the city by carving the buildings into the cliffsides. The whitewashed walls bring to mind picturesque Greece and it is a popular destination for honeymooning couples.

There is a **hiking trail** linking Oia with Fira, the next village to the south. The trail traverses 6 miles of “paths” that are a mixture of paved pedestrian streets and dirt hiking trails. It’s a hilly walk with little shade, but affords wonderful views of the caldera and blue seas. I suggest walking from Fira to Oia, since it is mostly a downhill trek. Although, be warned, there is plenty of uphill walking regardless the

direction of travel. The walk will take about 3-4 hours.

The Beaches

The beaches are worth a visit on this unique island. Bathe in the deep blue waters or take a stroll on the white, red or black sand, or volcanic pebbles. Many of the beaches are also surrounded by impressive rock formations.

Amoudi Bay

For beautiful views of the caldera, you can descend the 300 steps from Oia to the Amoudi Bay. This little fishing area is surrounded by steep red cliffs and many of the tavernas serve the catch of the day. It can also be a nice spot for some swimming, but the beach is rocky.

Red Beach

On the island's southern coast, opposite Akrotiri, this beach is named for its reddish volcanic sand. It is often less crowded than the more famous Kamari Beach. It presents a picturesque view; the brick-red cliffs contrast nicely with the aquamarine water. It is a great swimming spot but it's a bit of a hike. This is also a good place for snorkeling.

Kamari Beach

On the island's east coast, this beach is a long stretch of sand turned black from the volcanic ash. The black sand can get hot with the sun beating down on it, so make sure you bring appropriate footwear and something to sit on. You can rent water sports equipment here, like

jet skis and kayaks. Because of its easy access and amenities, this is often a very crowded beach.

Perissa & Pervelos Beaches

Located on the quieter southeast side of the island, Perissa and Pervolos offer better sand, calmer sea, and plenty of sunbeds and restaurants. If you are looking for a relaxing and relatively crowd-free experience, this is the place to set up for a few days. The island's big tourists spots of Fira and Oia are easily accessible by public bus, taxi, or rental four-wheelers and scooters.

Archaeological Sites

Ancient Akrotiri

This well-preserved site at the southern end of the crescent was discovered in the late 1960s, but dates back to the 16th century BC. It was a Minoan outpost destroyed by a volcanic eruption. You can explore homes decorated with prehistoric frescoes and littered with pottery. The roads and drainage systems are still intact. To discover more about pre-historic civilizations, visit the Museum of Prehistoric in Thira (see below).

Ancient Thira

This site is located on the eastern side of the island, north of Perissa. Thira dates back to the Dorians in the 9th century BC and contains ruins from the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine

eras. You'll see Roman baths, Byzantine walls, marketplaces, cemeteries, temples, a theater and a gymnasium. There are wonderful views overlooking the site and the Aegean from the Terrace of the Festivals, where ceremonies were held in honor of Apollo.

Museums

In Oia, you can learn about Santorini's sea-faring past in the **Thira Maritime Museum**, which houses model ships, antique navigational equipment, cannons, anchors and other maritime memorabilia.

In Fira, the **Museum of Prehistoric Thira** houses frescoes and other archaeological treasures found during the excavation of ancient Akrotiri and other sites around the Aegean islands. The museum is small, but a good place to learn about early human life on the Greek islands.

Gastronomy

Some of the region's famous traditional products include cherry tomatoes, white eggplants, fava, capers and *hloro tyri* a special kind of fresh goat cheese. Sample wines produced from grapes grown in the volcanic soil of the island. Assyrtiko, Athyri, Aidani, Mantilaria and Mavrotragano are some of the varieties offered at the islands' wineries, some of which operate as museums as well.

SantoWines

In Fira (western side), you can find the island's

cooperative of grape growers. The complex overlooks the caldera, near the port, and has wonderful panoramic vistas across the caldera. There are many tasting options and a wine bar and restaurant that pairs local wines with food. The shop offers a range of local vintages and gourmet local products.

Boutari Winery

This famous winery in Megalochori (western side) has been producing Greece's most popular wine since 1989. You can tour the grounds and get an in-depth look at the winemaking process. The tour is free with the option to pay for a wine tasting at the end.

Art Space

This collection of modern art is located in Argyros Cavana, one of the oldest wineries on the island, in the town of Exo Gonia (center of the island). The old wine caverns are now decorated with artwork, but the small winery still produces wines and tasting is also available.

Caldera Cruises

Many travel agencies and tour operators sell daily cruises on the caldera. These vary in cost and duration. Here are a two of my favorite cruises on the caldera.



Full-Day Volcano Cruise

You'll join a boat load of 30 or so people on a sailing ship for a full day of cruising the caldera. You'll join a local guide to visit the volcanic islet of Nea Kameni and take a daring walk along its rim. There are incredible views from the summit. Later, dive into the sea for a swim in the sulfur-rich hot springs at the Palea Kameni, a lava islet. Finally, you'll have a 2-hour stop in Thirassia, across the caldera from Oia and Fira. This quaint little village provides a good opportunity to treat your tastebuds to authentic Santorinian cuisine. Priced from €36 per person.



Sunset Catamaran Cruise (5-6 hours)

Join 20 or fewer guests on an afternoon catamaran cruise in the caldera. You'll have several swim stops with great views of the red and black beaches. The captain and crew will spoil you with snacks and drinks all afternoon. Later, the crew will set up a BBQ on the back deck and prepare a wonderful dinner. Finally, enjoy the sunset from the bow of your catamaran on the caldera. prices begin at €90 per person for the group cruise. If you have 6 or more people, consider renting the entire boat for yourself.



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