



THE MISSION:
A new cruise brand for Greece



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CLEAR WATER —Greece

Preface

In the third instalment of our series in which we garner the expertise of industry insiders, we've come up with a business plan for a Greek cruise line. Here's how our White Dot fleet would revitalise the industry and the country's finances.

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The hypothesis: *Greece's economy needs reinvigorating and there is a gap in the market for a cruise line using smaller boats that makes money for the nation and above all capitalises on its national heritage.*

Despite its economic woes, Greece is still one of the world's best-loved tourist destinations. More than 20 million visitors flocked to its coastal towns and cities last year to visit sun-bleached beaches, admire ancient temples and feast on a Mediterranean diet. But the biggest draws are the islands of the surrounding seas and the secluded bays peppering its coastline.

These treasures make Greece perfect for a cruise holiday. Yet this quintessentially maritime nation has done little to capitalise on the potential of the market (worth a

whopping €34bn globally). In the 1970s it was the Mediterranean hub for cruise lines, with many shipping families (*see page 75*) involved. But today, although about 25 cruise line companies sail in Greece only a couple are based here; the majority are headquartered in the US.

With its storied seafaring heritage, Greece should have a quality cruise-ship company with a distinctly Greek identity. While such a business might not single-handedly save the economy, it could be a brilliant model for how the country's tourism industry should rebrand. And with any luck it could become a soft-power icon, just as Stena is for Sweden.

So if we were to establish a cruise line, what would we need to consider? Where would we pitch our offering to differentiate ourselves from the competition? What would the on-board experience look and feel like? The first thing to consider is size – not of the company but of the vessels themselves. “Big cruise ships are a different product; people want to truly relax but it's like being on a floating resort. You really don't feel you're at sea,” says Filippou Venetopoulos of Variety Cruises, a family-owned cruise business targeting high-end holidaymakers. “Once you go small you won't go back – you simply open your window to feel, hear and smell the sea.”

Unlike big liners, smaller ships can anchor at secluded bays and the less well-known but still attractive Greek islands have marinas instead of ports, which means they're only accessible to smaller vessels. While we're keen to reach a larger customer base than Variety, we too want to choose more unusual routes so we'd also opt for smaller vessels.



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- 01 Cruise ships sailing past the Aegean island of Santorini
- 02 Port of Chania, Crete
- 03 Tourists gathering at Chania
- 04 Mandraki Harbour, Rhodes

Our boats would be built in the shipyard of Thodoris Tsikis, a third-generation boat-builder. We would have about 50 cabins on board to accommodate some 100 passengers and there would be a ratio of one member of crew to every three paying customers.

Keeping the craft relatively small allows us to control our routes. We want to include some famous landmarks without getting trapped in the usual mass-tour formula. However, according to Andreas Stylianopoulos, an industry expert from agency Navigator Travel and Tourist Services, “it’s crucial to have an airport near to your starting port”. In Greece this narrows down the options.

We would kick off from Corfu, which has an international airport. From there we would plan more unusual routes that include lesser-known towns and islands. One route could take us across the Ionian Sea to the islands of Paxos, Antipaxos and the mainland area of Sivota before steering south to Ithaca and Kefalonia.

“To extend seasonality you’d include places that have life beyond the end of September,” says Stylianopoulos. Outside the summer months, therefore, Igoumenitsa would be included on the Ioanian route to take in Ioannina, the village of Metsovo and the Zagori area. Another interesting sailing trip could be planned off the coast of the Peloponnese. Visitors would land at Kalamata Airport and explore Pylos, Koroni, Gytheiom, the castle of Monemvasia and the picturesque island of Kythira. A fleet of four ships would be enough (to start with) to cover more unusual routes. When things get chilly, ships would redeploy to bases in Thailand and Brazil.

While standards of service on board cruise ships have improved in recent years, more can be done. A simple brand designed by Athens-based studio Busybuilding (see panel, opposite) would distance us from the overly playful logos on the market. The agency believes White Dot would be a suitable name. “It refers to the brightness of the Greek sun, heightened when you’re sailing the Greek seas,” says managing partner Effie Komninou.

The brand discreetly alludes to a clear Greek identity without regurgitating any



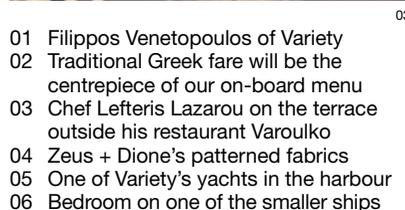
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Crew uniforms

Uniforms are an important aspect of service and of customers’ overall experience of the brand. Ours would need to be typically Greek but also modern so we would draft in the designers behind Athens-based label Zeus + Dione to create our staff threads. Its light, breezy creations, incorporating Greek fabrics and patterns, would be perfect.

“The most important element is to create an aesthetic experience when the guest comes aboard: a comfortable, clean and calm environment,” says Lydia Vouvouni, one of the label’s designers. Her sketches of easy-to-wear tunics and caftans for the female waiters, smarter silhouettes for the barmen and more athletic-looking *salvati*-style baggy shorts for the pool staff capture the tone of the type of service that our passengers can expect to receive.



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stereotypes. The logo is surrounded by white and shapes suggesting sunrays emanate out from the centre. This design language would translate across the branding, from passengers’ tickets to the various objects we would have on board, such as towels, toiletries and herb jars.

Next it’s time to start thinking about some of other “soft” elements, such as the on-board menu and crew uniforms (see panel, opposite). We would bring Lefteris Lazarou on as consultant chef for the fleet. His restaurant, Varoulko, is on the Mikrolimano Marina and has been awarded a Michelin star. Another amenity would be an on-board library stocking hardback books and a regularly replenished newsstand. The owners of the fantastic Atlantis Books on Santorini would curate our initial selection.

Just as Hurtigruten (see page 88) shows the world the best of Norway, gently introducing passengers to its service and food, so White Dot Cruises would use its Greek identity to win over a global audience. It would also be the best way to reboot Greece’s faltering economy. — (M)

The conclusion: *It would require some real investment but we believe a Greek cruise line balancing quality and scalability is possible. A truly Greek identity would have to be the brand’s point of difference.*

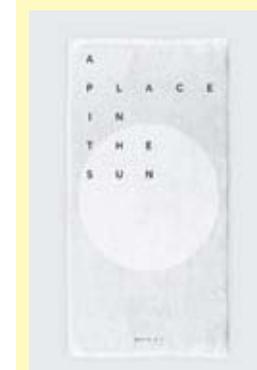
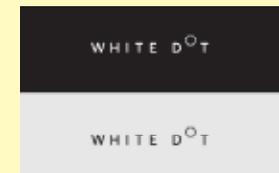
The branding

Who: Dimitris Gkazis founded multidisciplinary branding and design agency Busybuilding in 2007 with Effie Komninou. He explains their approach to the White Dot brand.

“We wanted to show a different view of Greece because the cruise line is going to show visitors a different side of the country. The black-and-white branding is unlike the colourful branding normally seen here. And the colours, shapes and typefaces we’ve used, they’re quiet like the atmosphere on the sea between islands.”



Athens-based branding and design agency Busybuilding creates a clean, sophisticated and simple identity for our quality Greek cruise line White Dot.



Clockwise from top: branded tote bag; brand treatment; herb jars; toiletries; poster; towel