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# Idyllic By Design

Since it opened earlier this year, the **Anantara Santorini Abu Dhabi Retreat's** unique architecture, hyper-exclusive approach to luxury, and deep commitment to sustainability have been making waves across the UAE's – and the world's – hospitality scene

In 2023, Minor Hotels announced that it was going to open a property unlike any other: the Anantara Santorini Abu Dhabi Retreat. Located in Ghantoot – along the coastline, a 35-minute drive from Abu Dhabi's Zayed International Airport and 25 minutes from Dubai International Airport – it was unlike anything in the region (or elsewhere in the world, really): its low-lying white buildings resembled those of the Cycladic Greek island to a tee. The main idea, according to general manager Rachid Bakas, was “to offer a unique experience that you won't find anywhere else in the region” by bringing “the Greek island vibe right to the heart of the UAE.” After a three-month design phase and one-year construction period, the retreat officially opened its doors in February 2024, becoming an instant icon.



The reception was overwhelmingly positive, Bakas says. “Both local and international guests have praised the mix of Greek island charm and modern luxury we offer in the UAE.

The industry has also taken notice, with several awards highlighting our design and exceptional guest experience. We're thrilled to see such enthusiastic responses, and look forward to continuing to exceed expectations,” he says. Indeed, with its intimate feel and quiet luxury concept, it's a peaceful getaway from the hustle and bustle of city life that is very convenient to get to.

Once there, the property is all about privacy and personalised service. There are only 22 keys, all complemented by top-tier facilities and amenities designed with attention-to-detail in mind. “With a limited number of guests, the level of service is higher, and the atmosphere is more serene and intimate, making the luxury elements stand out even more,” Bakas says. Doing so allows them to create a more authentic and luxurious experience for guests, he explains: “This allows us to offer a higher level of personalised service and attention, ensuring that each guest feels special and well-cared-for. The exclusivity also allows us to maintain a restful, luxurious

atmosphere, essential for those looking for a relaxing getaway. Also, by making the resort adults-only, we provide a tranquil environment perfect for romantic escapes and quiet retreats.”

Building a place that so closely resembles Santorini wasn't easy. To make sure the structures, built to follow traditional Cycladic architecture, could withstand the local climate and environmental conditions of the UAE, Bakas says they “had to use special materials for heat resistance and better insulation, all while keeping the iconic, white-washed walls.” He adds: “We also incorporated modern construction techniques to ensure everything was durable and comfortable without losing that authentic Greek look.”

Sustainability is another major priority here. “Nature is an important part of what makes our location special, and without its beauty, we wouldn't attract guests,” Bakas says. He explains that sustainability initiatives not only help to preserve a destination's natural appeal, but also ensure that a business can thrive and remain profitable, and attract guests who value eco-friendly initiatives, “which ultimately benefits our bottom line.”

“We've put a lot of effort into sustainability and are always looking to expand, especially as a new destination,” Bakas says. “We've set up an on-site water bottling plant to cut down on plastic waste, and switched from single-use plastics to organic straws, bamboo cutlery, and biodegradable cups. Our eco-friendly touches also include refillable shampoo bottles and wooden key cards. We use solar energy for outdoor lighting to conserve energy, and offer EV charging stations for the guests. We're focused on effective waste management, turning food waste into compost and repurposing wood waste into shelves, office tables, and benches. We grow fresh produce on-site and use dates from our 450 palm trees in our kitchen, for guests to enjoy. This year, we're planning to establish a greenhouse project to create even more green spaces.”

## HOTEL VIEWS



attracts high-end buyouts and events, where its more unique amenities – such as designer dining experiences, and an indoor VIP cinema – can truly shine. “The private cinema is pretty special. It features smart comforts, luxury bed-style seating, and gourmet food service delivered right to you, which is something you don't usually find in a luxury resort. It can also be booked privately for special events,” Bakas says, explaining that the expansive private beach, enormous pool, relaxing spa – all of which, again, offer a sense of quiet and thoughtful exclusivity – are also major draws. “Our service is another highlight. We take a warm, genuine approach with our guests; nothing is scripted. Our butlers are hands-on and attentive to each guest's needs. My team adds those special touches that create amazing stories and experiences for our guests,” he adds.

“I want our guests to feel like they're transported to a place that offers the best of both worlds. I want them to truly relax and feel that they've escaped everyday worries and stepped into Greece without having to fly there. My goal is for them to see us as a unique getaway, offering a distinctive and memorable experience that draws them back whenever they need to switch off,” Bakas says. ■

The retreat's clientele consists of guests from the GCC and Middle East region, as well as travellers from the rest of the world including Russia, Germany, the UK, and more. It also