



20 YEARS ON THE RUNWAY

From Kittyhawks to cocktails, how the Carlton Hotel Dublin Airport is celebrating 20 years of airside hospitality

MARKING 20 years is no small feat in an ever-changing industry and the Carlton Hotel Group is going from strength to strength, while also embracing a more sustainable, greener approach.

Michael Kearney is the Irish businessman and chairman/chief executive of the Carlton Hotel Group, which is behind its success. At a recent 20-year celebration at the Carlton Hotel Dublin Airport, he shared stories of how it all began.

As an entrepreneur, he combined his business and property experience and focused on two hotels in Dublin – the Carlton Hotel Dublin Airport and the Carlton Hotel Blanchardstown, both four-star hotels.

The airport hotel opened in 2006 after years of planning. In such a prime location, it had very little there for the size of the community. It began as a cafe/restaurant called Kittyhawks, which was originally catering for the locals and travellers to Dublin Airport.

It took off – pardon the pun – with family celebrations offered to the community in the restaurant. It underwent a major transformation in the early 2000s and became the Carlton Hotel Dublin Airport.

Kittyhawks is a huge part of the identity of the hotel and is now a spacious ground-floor bar and restaurant catering to guests, airport workers and locals.

Roll on 20 years and the hotel is still evolving. It has introduced new cocktail and dining menus in the Runway 28 Rooftop Bar and Restaurant. The dining is exquisite and is led by head chef Cian O'Leary, incorporating locally-sourced ingredients.

BY **YVONNE REDDIN**

Sky's the limit: A view from the planes from a comfortable room and, inset below, some of the delicious food on offer

(fairies), Ealai (swans), Púca (ghost) and Capall (horse). Ingredients range from bourbon, Irish whiskey, Guinness syrup and Angostura bitters, to espresso, coconut syrup, Frangelico and lots more bespoke flavours.

The Runway 28 Rooftop has a great covered outdoor area and if you like watching planes take off, you can do so from here while sipping a cocktail.

Why not book an overnight stay to really treat yourself to the whole experience? The buffet breakfast has all the authentic offerings for every palate and I sampled the tasty Biscoff overnight oats as well as a traditional full Irish breakfast.

The rooms are very spacious, with emerald touches throughout from the furnishings and décor, to the swirl in the carpet design. And who doesn't like a silk bespoke eye mask to ensure you get that good night's sleep – which you will, as they have the best pillows.

Rooms suit families too, with plenty of space for a family of four or interconnecting rooms for five. It is definitely a nice treat

ahead of a holiday and will ensure the ease of a sometimes chaotic airport experience. You can park your car at the hotel and avail of the regular shuttle buses.

The hotel is currently launching a Platinum Chapter Stay, which includes a luxury rooftop suite with champagne and macarons on arrival, a celebratory dinner and cocktails at Runway 28, exclusive relaxation comforts and a full Irish breakfast. The experience also includes direct transfer to Dublin Airport and lounge access for a seamless, stress-free journey.

It seems rude not to avail of all or some of these stress-free amenities. From the origins of the infamous and popular Kittyhawks, the Carlton Hotel Dublin Airport offers guests a warm Irish welcome and a seamless guest experience.

TRAVEL FACTS

The Platinum Chapter Escape is priced from €565 for two people sharing. The Stay, Park & Fly offer features overnight stay, long-term parking and airport transfers from €225 per room. See carltondublinairport.com.



LOOKING back now, it seems crazy to me that one very hot day, a long time ago, a 16-year-old me decided to set off, the long way around, for the island of Crete.

Having disembarked my flight in a strange new country and then finding my way to Greece's biggest, bustling harbour at Piraeus in Athens, I endured the then 11-hour journey to its largest island cheek by jowl with other, mostly older, backpackers on an exposed and intensely humid ferry deck. The cheap seats, if you will.

Younger me would possibly find it even crazier that this time I'm making a very similar pilgrimage around the Cyclades islands in the lap of utter luxury.

But after all this time, there's one thing that hasn't changed – the deep, deep sapphire hue of the Aegean that I still remember being mesmerised by for hours on end as I killed time staring out to sea all those years ago. It's still as beautiful and vibrant as I remember.

I'm setting sail on a week-long voyage on Sea Cloud II, part of the Sea Cloud fleet that offers upscale and exclusive sailing experiences carrying a small number of guests to ensure intimate and unique journeys.

Dropping anchor at some lesser-known islands with the promise of a week full of rugged coastlines and dreamlike coves, I'm about to embark on a Greek odyssey that would make my younger self proud.

I have never set foot upon a cruise ship and, to be honest, I've never really wanted to. It's the type of trip I have always figured just wasn't for me. But arriving for embarkation at the port, it becomes immediately clear that a trip aboard this magnificent vessel isn't going to be your average cruise.

A lot smaller in size than the surrounding mega-cruisers, this three-masted Windjammer is nonetheless impressive – judging by the envious glances of admiring bystanders lining the dock snapping photos. Simply put, it wows.

After ascending the gang-plank and being welcomed onboard, I'm shown to my cabin. Once my luggage has been deposited and the door has closed, I can finally allow myself to be truly impressed. For this is no ordinary ship's

cabin. The bathroom comes complete with gold-plated taps and the bath itself is framed by marble pillars.

The cabin is spacious enough to accommodate a dressing area, large fireplace and a living room. I stare out of the windows overlooking the port and conclude that I might take to this cruising business after all.

I'm still not sure how the day-to-day business of sailing around the islands for seven days is going to pan out but it seems that Sea Cloud has thought of everything. There's a handy itinerary on my bed, and daily thereafter, with information from menus to excursions and onboard activities. No detail is left to chance, making every minute feel effortless.

The programme can also be downloaded digitally as sustainability is a priority onboard.

We depart Athens later that evening and wake to a day under sails. I'm not great at winding down but after a sumptuous breakfast on deck it suddenly comes as second nature.

My surroundings seem like something from the golden age of travel, with every whim catered for and it takes no time to lean into it. From the crew, every one is a highlight of the overall experience, to the food, this is a trip where you can leave everything behind.

The following day, we make our first stop at Patmos, the Jerusalem of the Aegean, where it is believed John the Evangelist was exiled and had visions chronicled in the book of Revelations. Home to the cave where he is believed to have written the text, you can also find the Monastery of Saint John the Theologian, both Unesco World Heritage Sites. Excursions to both can be booked onboard.

I'm in full relaxation mode already so I choose to spend the afternoon on the pebbled beach staring out to sea and at my home for the week gently swaying in the distance.

It seems that each island we visit on our trip is more beautiful than the last and as I take the tender ashore the following morning to Amorgos, I once again forsake any optional activities for some quiet time on this stunning island.

Amorgos really is the Greek dream, with white-washed tavernas draped in bougainvillea and hibiscus, and tables placed on the shoreline Shirley Valentine-



Hark back to the GOLDEN AGE OF TRAVEL

A Sea Cloud cruise is intimate and exclusive, taking this writer on an island-hopping trip that feels like a Greek odyssey

BY **KEVIN GLEESON**

High seas: Clockwise from main, Sea Cloud II; The library area; One of the lavish suites; The island of Amorgos; The Monastery of St John the Theologian in Patmos; and the pool deck on board



Cloud II is the vacation in itself. There are lectures on the history of the island group in the library, cocktail masterclasses in the lounge and so much incredible food to enjoy on the deck from freshly caught fish to al dente spaghetti swirled in a giant parmesan wheel, salads, fresh fruits and pastries.

Evenings are spent under the stars with entertainment on the piano from our maestro Tom or getting to know fellow guests over a glass of Champagne by candlelight on the stern.

By day, guests can also opt to climb the rigging or swim off the marina platform when anchored at sea.

After another exquisite meal on my final evening, I retreat to the bow and stare up at the Milky Way among a background of dense stars, with just the gentle flapping of the sails for company.

Considering I started the week as a cruise virgin, I am surprised by how easily I adapted to it.

My only worry now is that I have been spoiled and can only cruise in this fashion from now on. If so, be it.

One of the quotes on the trip is from Oscar Wilde, 'Thinking is wonderful, but the experience is even more wonderful'.

So if you're thinking of booking that once-in-a-lifetime cruise then look no further than Sea Cloud.

TRAVEL FACTS

Fly Dublin to Athens from €120 return, aerlingus.com. All-inclusive Aegean cruises departing Athens aboard Seacloud II start from €4,790pp excluding flights and excursions. For further information and itineraries see seacloud.com.



style, allowing you to enjoy a bite or a drink as the water laps at your feet.

The friendly cats and locals make for great company as I lunch on fresh hummus and grilled fish, all washed

down with an ice-cold beer. Later in the week we stop off at the largest island in the group, Naxos, before visiting Syros, today a rare example of Renaissance architecture found in

the Cyclades, and once the commercial and administrative centre of early modern Greece.

Both islands are rich in archaeological history, scenic bathing spots and great res-

taurants. But truth be told, for all of the olive oil, honey and dried herb shopping opportunities found on the islands, there is really no need to disembark should you not want to. The Sea

