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THE GOLD STANDARD IN GREECE

Fine Living Travel Services was quick to see the need for gilt-edge, tailor-made tourist services and more prominent gourmet products in Greece. Now, five years later, the brand has set the benchmark for luxury offerings in the region. *FOUR* speaks with the company's founder, Giannis Stasinopoulos, to find out more...

After studying finance in London and subsequent employment in banking, real estate and consulting, Giannis Stasinopoulos answered his kindled desire for entrepreneurship. He has always enjoyed being treated to the highest level of service in the best hotels and eating top-quality food — whether in first-class restaurants or at home using the finest ingredients, since he's a talented cook, too. This led him to open Greece's first-ever luxury concierge company in the Starwood Hotels and Resorts' Astir Palace Hotel — now the Four Seasons Athens — with his good friend and executive associate, Mrs Eva Lympelopoulou. Although this was when the country was still knee-deep in financial turmoil, they served over 2,500 customers during their three-year tenure without even one complaint. Armed with this experience, Mr Stasinopoulos and his team saw an opportunity in high-end tourism services and decided to take action.

A business area with huge yet untapped potential, hospitality services in Greece aren't as customer-focused as in other parts of the world, and this is where their company, Fine Living Travel Services, comes into play, explains Mr Stasinopoulos: "Usually other companies in Greece offer hospitality services without having a keen ear on the client's wants and needs. On the other hand, we at Fine Living Travel Services follow the opposite route; first, we hear what the client wants and then we plan on fulfilling their desire."

Thus, 2017 saw the establishment of Fine Living Travel Services, located in the centre of Athens. Its motto is: "All client requests are acceptable — no request is impossible!" Backed by many customer pools like the American Express Centurion, Panas Group and other institutions, the company offers exclusive services and experiences to the most discerning individuals and VIPs.

When contacting Fine Living Travel Services' Home Office, anyone can request a simple or more complex service. The company's associates quickly get in touch and start working towards fulfilling that request. Some of these services include private dining, special experiences for marriage proposals and other events, shopping, gastronomic tourism, and, of course, accommodation and entertainment options. Fine Living Travel Services also holds a selection of the finest private, off-market villas in mainly Mykonos and various other locations in Greece, plus signature estates and further properties in Costa

OPPOSITE Giannis Stasinopoulos, owner of Fine Living Travel Services in Greece.

Esmeralda, Saint Tropez, Ibiza, Saint Barthélemy and many other high-profile destinations.

"High-net-worth individuals that want privacy and exclusivity and need custom-made services" is how Mr Stasinopoulos describes his clientele. "They expect facilitation and turn-key solutions from attentive personnel. These are people that don't have the word 'impossible' in their vocabulary, and neither do I," notes Mr Stasinopoulos with his gentle but no-nonsense tone. "The majority of our clients are American, followed by Arabs, Turks and Eastern Europeans. We also serve Greek VIP clients, especially those travelling abroad, as we are the only company in Greece that holds ties with the finest hotel groups, such as the Oetker Collection, Cheval Blanc, Mandarin Oriental and others. Furthermore, we are very popular for helicopter and private jet flights, and we are happy to be ambassadors for VistaJet, one of the best private aviation companies in the world."

However, Stasinopoulos also works with corporate luxury clientele. Major luxury-market firms, such as jewellery, haute couture fashion, and high-end automobile brands, approach his company for new product launches and events in Greece. Working with such high-profile contacts enabled Fine Living Travel Services to gradually expand abroad and do business in key destinations of the rich and famous crowd: Côte d'Azur, Italy, Spain, Dubai, New York, Miami and Saint Barthélemy, among others. The "nothing is impossible" mindset and firm trust bond with his clients pushed Mr Stasinopoulos to seek and find the best partners in each destination, often with surprising results. He states: "Funny as it may seem, we have clients that turned into partners abroad because they wish to help us and share their knowledge and contacts on their own local luxury services."

But what about competition? Giannis Stasinopoulos promptly replies: "What we are doing is unique. We listen, propose and plan alongside the client. We are not fond of and do not accept cookie-cutter solutions. Every request is a custom request, from a private tour of the Acropolis museum to setting up a romantic seaside dinner. Sure, there are travel agencies and companies that have developed transport services and tour guides, but we view them as potential partners, not competitors. We work with them and help each other out. Our company profile allows us to offer white-label luxury services to event planners or travel agencies with competitive pricing." »



LIFESTYLE



LEFT Fine Foods Collection, the sister business to Fine Living Travel Services, is the first Greek company to produce its own private label caviar in Germany in seven different varieties.

BELOW Fine Food Collection's caviar is on the menus of the best restaurants and hotels in Mykonos and Santorini.

« Touristic real estate is also part of the company's operations. Giannis Stasinopoulos is confident that Greece, especially the islands and the Athenian Riviera, are not only tourist attractions but prime destinations for semi-permanent or permanent residence. "The Riviera is particularly advantageous in this regard; it has an amazing climate for eight months a year, it's a twenty-minute distance from the airport and fifteen minutes from the centre of Athens, it has excellent Greek and foreign language schools and friendly neighbourhoods. All and all, an ideal place to raise a family!"

Stasinopoulos also warmly states, "The hottest Greek product for the upcoming years is... Greece itself! Think of wealthy families enjoying Greek beaches, their children attending school here, and all their spending being made here in our country. It is essentially an influx of foreign income, instead of domestic income recycling."

Soon, the company will launch their new endeavour: "Real Estate by Fine Living", an A-to-Z real estate service in exclusive cooperation with Savills. They will undertake airport transfers; property display; handling of contractual, visa or passport requirements and property management for interested clients.

Nevertheless, the crowning jewel of Fine Living Travel Services is Fine Foods Collection, the four-year-old sister company that deals in luxury, gourmet and premium food products from Greece and all over the world. Among the famous companies they represent are Petrossian Paris, Joselito, Barons de Rothschild Champagne and Edmond de Rothschild Heritage wines, Peck Milan, Plantin truffles and many others.

But what is a luxury product? According to Mr Stasinopoulos, a luxury product is one that requires a significant amount of man-hours to be produced. For example, caviar is the first one that comes to mind, but wild baby artichoke hearts from Crete are equally valuable: the adventuresome gathering from steep mountain dales and meticulous cleaning of their thorny exterior takes a lot of time and patience and often results in limited quantities.

In line with its dedication to luxury gastronomic products, Fine Foods Collection is the first Greek company to produce its own private label caviar (FFC Caviar) in Germany in seven different varieties, from Siberian black caviar to the rarest caviar in the world, Almas Gold from Iran. When Fine Foods Collection first opened, Greece's yearly caviar consumption was thirteen kilograms. Nowadays,

it has reached two tonnes, with eighty percent of it being imported by Stasinopoulos' company.

"Our caviar is on the menus of the best restaurants and hotels in Mykonos and Santorini, like Scorpios, Nōema, Principote Panormos, Billionaire, Bagatelle, Meraki, Hotel Grande Bretagne, the Four Seasons Hotel in the Athens Riviera, and many others," Stasinopoulos proudly remarks. "But we view local Greek products in the same high regard. Our brand contains carefully selected, rare and unique Greek products, such as sundried tomatoes from Santorini, fir honey from Mainalon, green olives from the Holy Mount of Athos, and strawberry sweets made from whole Pavliani strawberries. Mainalon fir honey is of the same calibre as the New Zealand manuka honey; however, it has never been advertised as special, unique and eclectic. Mount Olympus and Florina have the best truffles in the world, but thanks to well-implemented Italian marketing, most people believe that the top-of-the-line truffles come from Italy. It is our responsibility to let the world know who we are and the treasures we can offer. With the right branding and marketing, Greece can reach its rightful place as a destination of taste and beauty. Greece is always a good idea."

The company also provides a fleet of rental chauffeur-driven cars and a wide range of unique executive villas. However, according to Mr Stasinopoulos, their competitive advantage is the arrangement of exclusive services and one-of-a-kind experiences. "Booking the entire Acropolis museum for a dedicated dinner for two or a private theatrical performance is certainly a complicated feat and one that sets us apart in the field. But if I would single out our basic advantage, I'd say it's servicing. We are on duty 24/7, our dedicated advisors are quick to respond to queries and requests, and our drivers will make at-home delivery of any product at the client's desired time and place. We don't operate with a fixed timetable, which is something unusual and thus, remarkable in our line of work."

Fine Living Travel Services has its headquarters, including a flagship delicatessen store, in Kolonaki in the centre of Athens. The company also has representative offices in Mykonos, London and Monaco, and a new store and concierge office will soon be opening in Saint Barthélemy next winter. Plans to expand to a central Athenian marina and two regional airports are also underway.

"Our upcoming major step is to organise an international luxury services conference next October in Athens. It will include tourism, gastronomy and real estate and hopefully further promote Greece as a global point of interest." ■

