

Despite economic and migrant crises dominating the news, Greek business travel and tourism is flourishing. The Bank of Greece has revealed that UK arrivals to the sun-kissed capital of Athens increased by almost 15 per cent last year, to about 2.4 million visitors, compared with 2014. Meanwhile, the Greek National Tourism Organisation reported in excess of 26 million international tourists visiting the country, up from 22 million the year before.

The meetings and events industry is a mainstay of Greece's national tourism policy. The government, with strong support from local authorities, has been offering lucrative cash grants, tax allowances and subsidies to create new event facilities and expand existing ones. With minimal VAT increases, it's easy to find value-for-money venues and accommodation. One major event taking place in 2016 was the European Luxury Hospitality Summit at the Athens Ledra hotel last month.

Figures from the World Travel and Tourism Council show that business travel spending is expected to rise 6.7 per cent a year to €2.6 billion in 2025 (up from €1.3 billion in 2015). Athens is well set up to cater to demand. Global brands include Intercontinental, Hilton Hotels and Resorts, Radisson

Blu, Crowne Plaza and two properties from Starwood's Luxury Collection – the King George and Grande Bretagne. Many of these also have extensive meeting space for hire.

New 2015 openings included the 14-room art nouveau Emporikon in trendy Agias Irinis, the chic mid-century modern Athens Was, with 21 rooms, and 39-room design hotel Coco-Mat in the Kolonaki district. This year welcomes 109-room four-star Electra, and the Zillers, a boutique hotel with a rooftop bar, both on Mitropoleos Street; Met34, with seven rooms, on Petraki Street; and the four-

star Athens Tiffany, with 120 rooms, on Pireos Street. Next year, Coco-Mat Hotels and Resorts will open a property near the Acropolis Museum, while in Piraeus, 12km from the city centre, local developer Mektima is converting a Metaxa spirits distillery into a 100-room hotel.

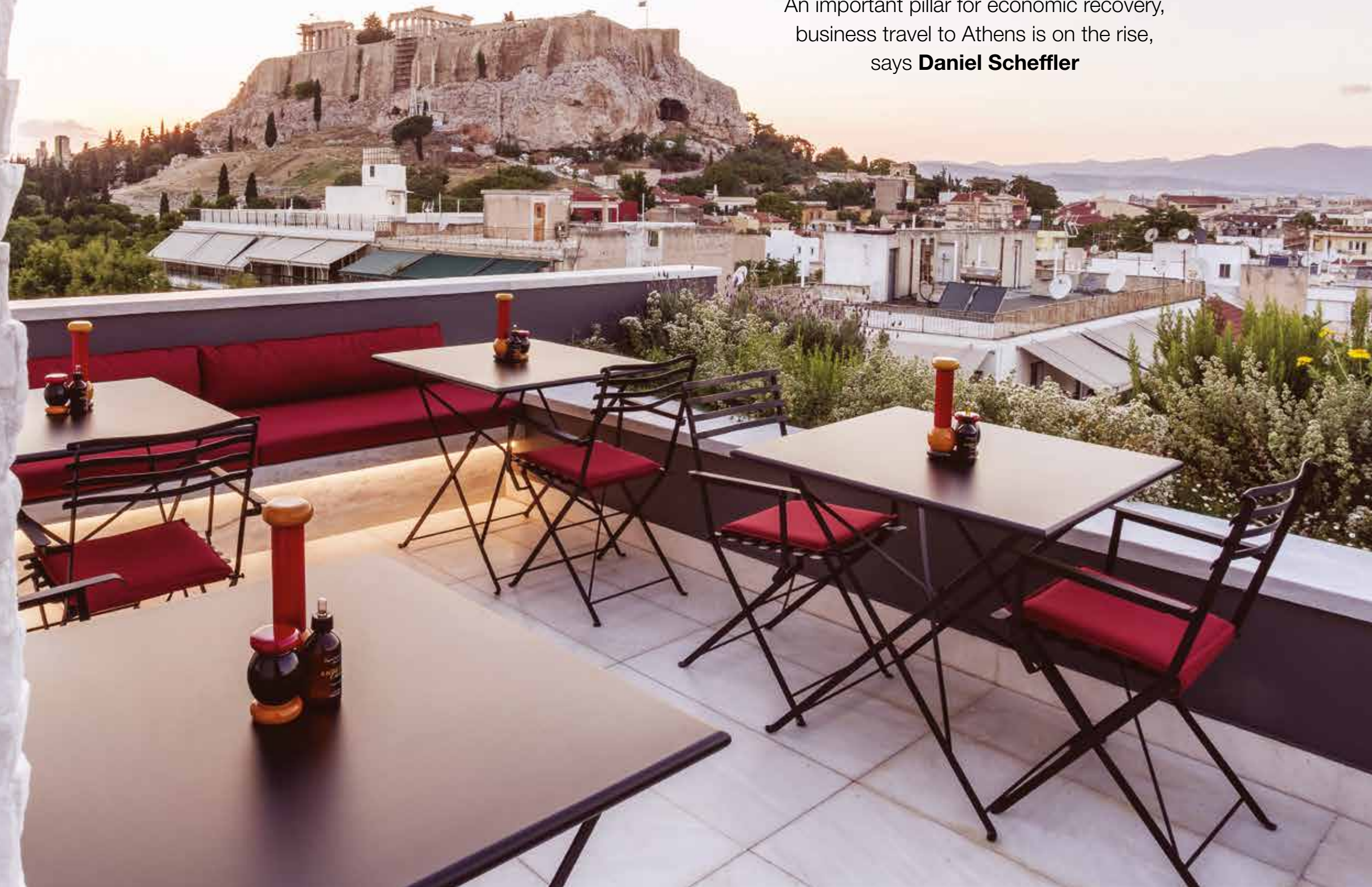
With direct access to the Mediterranean, the port of Piraeus sees almost 20 million people a year pass through. Here, yachts, ferries and hydrofoils await for post-meeting escapes to the nearby islands of Poros, Kea, Hydra, Aegina, Agistri, Spetses and Salamina. Once work is done, it's essential to relax somewhere beautiful with a glass of ouzo...

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Above: Coco-Mat hotel Right: Roof terrace at Athens Was hotel

# GREEK REVIVAL

An important pillar for economic recovery, business travel to Athens is on the rise, says **Daniel Scheffler**





## SIX STANDOUT EVENT VENUES

### HOTEL GRAND BRETAGNE

Dating back to 1930, this grande dame on Syntagma Square has 320 rooms and suites, and is at the top end of what Athens can provide business travellers. Views stretch to the Acropolis and meeting facilities are vast, with over 1,100 sqm of function space accommodating up to 800 people. Venues include the light-filled Grand ballroom, and seven smaller meeting rooms, such as Churchill's, with dramatic drapes and original mouldings, for an intimate, elegant affair.

**1 Vasileos Georgiou A Street;**  
**tel +30 21 0333 0000; grandebretagne.gr**

### MEGARON ATHENS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CENTRE

Pearly white, this well-known contemporary venue in the city centre is on the same site as the Athens Concert Hall. Opened in the early 1990s, it has 143,000 sqm of exhibition space, with two halls and 12 meeting rooms. The auditoria (of which there are four, seating 400 to 1,960 people) have top-class acoustics and can be used for live-streaming video links. Its gardens can be hired for up to 5,000 people after sundown, and there is also an outdoor courtyard atrium measuring 1,520 sqm.

**1 Leoforos Vasilissis Sofias and Kokkali;**  
**tel +30 21 0728 2156; maicc.gr**

### ONASSIS CULTURAL CENTRE

Launched in 2010 by the Onassis Foundation, this is a contemporary centre for design and innovation. An architectural splendour in glass and steel, it has 16 floors (nine are underground) and covers 18,000 sqm. The two most impressive facilities, both named after members of the family of shipping magnates, are the 880-seat Aristotle Onassis Centre Stage and the 220-seat Christina Onassis Hall. There is also an open-air theatre with 200 seats, available most of the year.

**107-109 Syngrou Avenue;**  
**tel +30 21 3017 8000; onassis.org**

**From top:** Hotel Grand Bretagne; Athens Congress Hall; Onassis Cultural Centre; Hilton Athens; Acropolis



### HILTON ATHENS

This block-shaped property was the first international hotel chain to open here in 1963, and is still a solid choice. Across the street from the National Gallery of Athens, the venue is well located and looks on to the Acropolis. With more than 6,000 sqm of event space, it is ideal for gala dinners and congresses. The Terpsichore ballroom is big enough for 1,300 guests and connects to convenient pre- and post-function areas. With ten meeting rooms to choose from, Hesperides has garden views and can take up to 300 guests, while Thalia faces the outdoor pool.

**46 Vasilissis Sofias Avenue;**  
**tel +30 21 0728 1000; hiltonathens.gr**

### IONIC CENTRE

This neoclassical pink-and-white building sits at the foot of the Acropolis, in the picturesque Plaka neighbourhood. Established in 1980, the Ionic Centre is suited to presentations and talks, with four spaces accommodating between 50 and 200 delegates in each. The roof terrace (for up to 200 people for a cocktail reception) is its most impressive location and has a view of the ancient temple of Erechtheion.

**11 Lisiou; tel +30 21 0324 6614; ionic.gr**

### NASIOUTZIK MUSEUM

Roughly 30 minutes' drive from the centre, this private museum, surrounded by 4,000 sqm of lawns and gardens, can be taken over for private functions. The owner, George Nasioutzik, took over the Byzantine Estate and Meteora Mansion in 1970, filling it with his own personal collection of art, antiques and ecclesiastical silverware. There are ten rooms measuring 2,500 sqm in total – the Meghisti Hall can host banquets for up to 1,000 guests, while for fireside dinners or high-profile functions there are the Marmaras or Mystras halls. There is also a helipad for those who want to fly here direct from the airport.

**Spata Attikis; tel +30 21 0663 2000;**  
**ktimanasioutzik.gr**

### GETTING THERE

Aegean Airlines and British Airways offer daily flights from London Heathrow, while Easyjet flies from Gatwick and Ryanair from Stansted. **cheapflights.co.uk**