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TO BHMA International edition

Santorini's Greatest Story Is the One It Never Tells

By Maria Paravantes

Every year, the tiny Greek island of Santorini welcomes millions of visitors from around the world seeking a slice of paradise: a glimpse of a mesmerizing sunset, a sip of intoxicating wine, and a deep breath of air overlooking the spectacular caldera. Few realize that they are gazing into the heart of one of the planet's most studied and still-active volcanic systems. And even fewer leave knowing even a little about the restless volcano that created it all.

There are no more than 15 dedicated volcano museums in the world. Greece is home to one, but it's not where you think. Although most of us would expect a museum dedicated to volcanoes to be on Santorini, famous worldwide for its volcanic history, it is instead on Nisyros, a far quieter neighbor that receives a fraction of Santorini's annual visitors. One might well find it ironic that Santorini, shaped entirely by volcanic activity and part of a living geological system, remains without a single institution devoted to explaining the phenomenon that created it.

So the logical question is: why doesn't Santorini have a volcano museum, especially considering its international reputation, its history and the millions of tourists it attracts year round?

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KONSTANTINOS ANAGNOSTOU/EUROKINISSI

Collision between a Coast Guard patrol boat and a boat carrying refugees and migrants from the coast of Turkey to Chios, February 4, 2026. The result was that 15 people were thrown into the sea and lost their lives.

TO BHMA International edition

What Happens When the Cameras Are Off?

By Myrto Polymili

Fifteen people lost their lives on the night of February 3, when the small vessel they were traveling in collided with a Hellenic Coast Guard patrol boat off the coast of Chios. For an island that has stood on the front lines of Europe's migration routes for more than a decade, the aftermath felt painfully familiar.

The inflatable boat, approximately eight meters long, was carrying roughly forty migrants and refugees. Of them, only twenty-four were rescued. According to the official Coast Guard account, one of its vessels was "conducting a scheduled patrol" when it detected a speedboat "operating without navigation lights and heading toward the eastern coast of Chios." The authorities allege that the operator ignored light and sound signals, attempted to flee and rammed the patrol vessel, causing the migrant boat to capsize. Doctors at Chios General Hospital later described the injuries they encountered as resembling those seen in "a fatal multi-vehicle car accident."

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CALEB ALVARADO FOR WSJ

Six Americans Rate the Trump Economy

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

By Jeanne Whalen

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

The Trump economy in 2025 was a roller coaster, soaring and falling through tariff shocks, a cooling job market, robust AI investments and a near-record close to the U.S. stock market.

One thing remained constant, though: Americans are as laser-focused on prices as they were before President Trump took office. The high cost of living was the No. 1 economic complaint Americans cited in interviews with The Wall Street Journal.

Inflation has cooled significantly from its 2022 highs. But low- and middle-income workers said 2025 offered little relief.

Those with higher incomes have continued to spend, buoyed by soaring financial markets that have boosted their sense of security, a reflection of the nation's two-speed economy.

A Wall Street Journal poll found that half of voters say the economy has gotten worse in the past year, while 35% say it has improved.

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Six Americans Rate the Trump Economy

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Some are living close to the economic edge; others are spending freely and seeing their wealth rise. But Americans of all stripes can't stop talking about prices.

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The president has touted the nation's economic growth and in recent weeks rolled out plans to address complaints over affordability.

The Journal spoke to Americans from across the economic spectrum to hear about their experiences:

The Business Owner—Chesaree Rollins
Chicago, Ill.
Age: 43

Chesaree Rollins struggled to make ends meet at work and at home in 2025. Foot traffic was down at Chesa's Bistro & Bar, her Cajun-themed restaurant in the trendy Avondale neighborhood. Corporate bookings for her food trucks fell sharply as employers cut perks for their workers, the 43-year-old entrepreneur said.

"People aren't dining out as much as they once were, a year ago. So we've seen a decrease in cash flow," she said.

Rollins also grappled with rising costs for some of her food ingredients, forcing her to remove items from her menu. Beef short ribs nearly doubled to $8.99 a pound, squeezing margins on one of her most popular entrees. And her labor costs grew amid an immigration crackdown that left some of her immigrant workers here legally scared to leave their homes, she said. That forced her to find new people who asked for higher wages—$22 to $25 an hour versus $18 to $20 an hour before.

CALEB ALVARADO FOR WSJ

Derek Orth and his wife, Charisse, aren't sure they can afford to fix a tractor. They get some of their food from their farm.

Those troubles prompted Rollins and her 11-year-old daughter to move twice in 2025 to save on rent. "I was like, 'OK, I need to downsize. I need to downgrade my living situation,'" she said. She also tried expanding her catering business to pick up extra income. Amid the stress, she was diagnosed with epilepsy, which added some big healthcare bills to her woes.

Rollins invested small sums in individual stocks during the pandemic—"$25 bucks here, $30 bucks there"—but otherwise has gained little from the market's big run-up.

The Upper-Tier Family—Steve Newell
Chesterfield, Mo.
Age: 60

Steve Newell, a 60-year-old management consultant, is grateful to be on an upper tier of the economy.

With household income over $200,000 a year, he and his wife, Judy, who works as a teacher's aide, live a comfortable life in the suburbs of St. Louis. They're planning a road trip this summer in their new BMW convertible and are helping pay for weddings for two of their adult children this year. Last year, the couple visited Argentina to see Buenos Aires and the majestic Iguazu Falls.

The Newells will have paid off their home in a few years. They have adjusted their grocery shopping at times to avoid price spikes for beef and other items, but more out of prudence than a need to budget, he said. And they've continued to spend on charitable donations and cultural outings.

Newell said the U.S. stock market's near record-high ending in 2025 benefited his retirement investments, helping prompt him to consider retiring early.

Still, the market gyrations after Trump threatened new tariffs on Europe last month—and then dropped the threat—as part of his bid to acquire Greenland caused Newell to second guess that plan. "When you have policy by emotions, businesses can't plan and neither can individuals," he said.

The Young Renters—Ashley Imeh and Adam Little
Chicago, Ill.
Age: 31

After months of unemployment in 2024, Ashley Imeh caught a break in 2025 when she landed a job making $22 an hour as a loan-processing specialist in Chicago.

But her live-in partner, Adam Little, has been struggling to find work as a factory machine operator since 2023. The U.S. lost manufacturing jobs every month between Trump announcing his Liberation Day tariffs in April and the end of the year, extending a slow but

Ukraine Seeks a War Plan Beyond Killing as Many Russian Soldiers as Possible

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

As conflict approaches four-year mark, Russia's grinding, slow-motion advance is weakening Kyiv's hand at the negotiating table

By Anastasiia Malenko and Marcus Walker
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

NOVOMYKOLAIVKA, Ukraine—In this corner of southeast Ukraine, Russian forces are pummeling rear areas with drone attacks, seeking to sap the strength of Ukrainian defenders by cutting their supply lines. Snow-covered roads are littered with burned-out pickup trucks.

As the conflict nears the four-year mark, Russia's increasingly effective use of drones is helping its forces maintain a grinding, slow-motion advance. It is weakening Ukraine's hand at the negotiating table, where it is under pressure to cede strategically vital territory.

Russia's battlefield drone strategy is focused on a medium range of about 12 to 50 miles. Priority targets include Ukrainian drone operators as well as logistics.

In contrast, Ukraine's approach is still largely about inflicting maximum casualties on Russian infantry when they enter a kill zone beginning about 12 miles from the front line. Ukraine is betting on doing more of the same this year. The goal is to kill 50,000 Russian soldiers a month, up from 35,000 in December, new defense minister Mykhailo Fedorov said recently.

Many Ukrainian soldiers and officers say that a shift is needed and that Ukraine needs to match Russia's strategy of systematically targeting the rear.

Ukrainian forces could better resist the relentless Russian pressure if they focused more on targeting Russian drone operators and company and battalion command posts many miles behind the line of contact, said Major Oleh Shyriayev, commander of the 225th Assault Regiment, which is fighting off constant Russian assaults in the southern Zaporizhzhia region.

"Everything rests on their shoulders at the tactical level," he said.

Russian soldiers killed and wounded have reached nearly 1.2 million, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. But even that toll hasn't led the Kremlin to relent. Ukraine's military has likely suffered between 500,000 and 600,000 total casualties, CSIS estimates.

"Russia has adopted a much more systematic approach of hunting for Ukrainian drone teams, to disrupt and destroy Ukrainian drone logistics, because that's the center of gravity of the Ukrainian defensive system," said Franz-Stefan Gady, a Vienna-based military analyst. Ukraine has better individual drone pilots, but their strikes against targets in the rear are more piecemeal, he said.

Ukraine is short of drones and other weapons that can hit midrange targets at 20 to 120 miles behind the front line, Gady noted. More help from Western partners would be needed to improve its arsenal.

CALEB ALVARADO FOR WSJ

Here in the Zaporizhzhia region, it is easy to see why Russia's army still can't achieve a decisive breakthrough, despite having more men and munitions.

steady decline since 2023.

Imeh said she felt mixed about 2025. She gained a job but continued to struggle with rising prices. Neither of the Chicagoans felt Trump had done anything to help them financially.

Imeh and Little, both 31 years old, have at times resorted to paying the rent late on their one-bedroom apartment, which now costs $1,375 a month, up from $1,250 two years ago. Rent eats up more than half of Imeh's take-home pay, which was slimmed after a credit-card company started garnishing part of her wages to pay off her card debts, she said. Groceries, Imeh's cellphone bill and food for their cat take up most of the rest.

The couple mostly eats at home, often stretching rice, beans and other pantry staples into a meal. "We live off her pay schedule," Little said. "If she hasn't gotten paid we have to go with what we have around the house."

Little said he would like to get his car fixed and buy new tires, to make it easier to look for work. But "a new set of tires now is $500 or $600," he said. "Who the hell has $500 to $600?"

LUCY HEWETT FOR WSJ

Chesaree Rollins has adjusted her restaurant's menu because of rising costs. She and her 11-year-old daughter moved twice in 2025 to save on rent.

The Dairy Farmer—Derek Orth

Lancaster, Wis.
Age: 39

Derek Orth, a dairy farmer in southwestern Wisconsin, says he hasn't had a good financial year in a decade. But higher costs are making things even more challenging these days.

"I don't think 2025 was worse but it certainly wasn't a good year," he said.

Prices for labor and machinery parts and maintenance have grown significantly. "We have a $100,000 tractor that hasn't moved in three or four months because we don't know if we can afford to fix it," Orth said.

He's also felt the pain of insurance-price hikes that have rankled many Americans. Annual increases in his farm-insurance bill slowed in 2025, to 2%. But the accumulation of big increases that snowballed from 2022 to 2024 nearly quadrupled his bill over 15 years, to about $41,000.

The Orths, who have four children, live rent-free in the farm house, which is owned by Orth's parents. Orth's wife, Charisse, works as a county coordinator for 4-H. "A lot of the income I make goes back into the farm, and what my wife makes is what we use for family living," Orth said.

They get some of their food from the farm and have eliminated as much junk food as possible to reduce their grocery bill.

They haven't contributed to their retirement accounts in a few years because they have been paying off credit-card debt. They had whittled it down significantly from $18,000, "but then Christmas happened," Orth said.

He said he hopes the Trump administration's recent efforts to promote dairy products could boost his business, and he appreciates that gas prices are "fairly reasonable."

The Saver—Paul Spriggs

Decatur, Ga.
Age: 52

Paul Spriggs, a 52-year-old professional in the Atlanta suburbs, is thriving in the current economy.

The product manager for an investment firm feels thankful to have secured a 3% mortgage before the pandemic, when he bought a home that has since soared in value. He and his wife, Laura, a part-time volleyball coach, have household income of about $200,000, allowing them to splurge on travel and sports leagues for their teenagers.

Last year, the whole family flew to San Francisco to visit relatives, and tacked on a trip to Lake Tahoe. Spriggs and his wife returned to San Francisco a few months later to see "Dead & Company," a band of former Grateful Dead members. A spontaneous jaunt like that is probably something he wouldn't have done years ago, but "after a lifetime of being a conscientious spender and saver, it felt deserved," he said.

His investments have put him in "a great position" for retirement, and he began saving for his children's college education when they were little. Overall, he feels lucky to be 52 in this economy instead of 32 or 22, he said. "That's definitely where I see people struggling," particularly to afford a house, he said. "I can't imagine trying to get into the market now, trying to live where you want to live."

The Middle-Class Striver—Elena Haskins

Tulsa, Okla.
Age: 29

The past year has been one of the toughest, financially, for Elena Haskins. The 29-year-old Tulsa entrepreneur, who runs her own software-design business, Anele, faced growing competition from AI tools and low-cost overseas programmers, which dented her income. Her partner, Michael Knight, and his two young children also moved in with her, making her more aware of the high cost of groceries, she said.

Haskins is still comfortable but has "felt the weight of the growing prices impacting my decision-making more than usual," she said. As a single person, she used to eat steak several times a week, but if she shopped that way now it would cost $40 for four people. "Now we get more chicken breasts," she said. "Now I look at unit prices. Does it really matter if it's Heinz ketchup or store brand?"

Paying her $2,200 monthly mortgage has gotten easier now that her partner, who runs a machine shop, is sharing the burden. They have a combined income of roughly $135,000 a year. But she has cut back on theater trips and other outings. "With the kids, I'd really like to take them to Frozen, but then it's $400," she said of the local stage production.

Haskins is also cutting back on travel. "My family lives in New York, and I'd love to visit with the kids, but airfare is so expensive," she said.

EMANUELE SATOLLI FOR WSJ

A Ukrainian surveillance-drone pilot known by the call sign Kuts inside a drone workshop in the Zaporizhzhia region. Interceptor drones are used to shoot down Russia Shahed-type drones.

The snowy plains stretch for miles, occasionally interrupted by bare trees. The sky buzzes with deadly Ukrainian drones when Russian infantry try to cross the fields. Long ditches lined with coils of razor wire and concrete pyramids known as dragon's teeth await Russia's increasingly rare armored attacks.

The bare terrain doesn't defend itself, however. Shyriayev's troops are working like firefighters, rushing to respond when Russian soldiers find gaps in the thinly held front line. They are doing their best to make the strategy work, said Shyriayev.

Ukraine has more troops holding the line in the eastern Donetsk region, the war's single biggest battlefield. That has left it short of troops to cover the southern front.

Russian forces are now barely 14 miles from the outskirts of Zaporizhzhia city, putting it within range of some of their drones. Fears are growing in the city, whose prewar population was 700,000, that Russia could seek to make daily life impossible with constant drone attacks on civilians, like it has done in the city of Kherson.

In the countryside some 15 miles behind the southern front, Ukrainian troops' challenges are apparent. Antidrone nets cover long sections of road. In some sections, workers struggle to repair sections of netting torn by sleet and ice.

The Russians pick a road and try to destroy everything on or near it, said a deputy brigade commander on the southern front. Their goal is to break Ukrainian soldiers mentally by making all movement to and from the line of contact terrifying, he said.

His brigade is building up its midrange drone capabilities to hit Russian forces at up to 15 miles behind the front line, before they can launch infiltration attempts, he said. But more progress is needed.

The Russians rarely assault Ukrainian positions directly these days. Instead, small numbers of soldiers try to bypass them and get as far into the rear as possible to sow chaos. The Russians pay a high price, but they keep coming.

Near the town of Hulyaipole, which the Russians have partly taken, a Ukrainian surveillance-drone pilot known by his call sign Kuts was flying his drone back to base to recharge its battery recently. On the drone's video feed, he spotted three Russian soldiers only a kilometer away. "No one can understand how they got there," he said. He directed attack drones to the spot, which killed the Russians.

For Ukrainian infantrymen, Russia's midrange drones make moving to and from the front line the most perilous part of their work.

"During rotations, unfortunately, there are a lot of losses, the most losses," said a 52-year-old rifleman known by his call sign Psycho. His face bore the extreme exhaustion typical of men who have spent too long in front-line dugouts. After a few days' rest at his brigade's psychological support center, he returned to the front.

Kuts, the drone pilot, said he was paying only limited attention to the peace negotiations with Russia, the U.S. and Ukraine. With no deal in sight, it is more useful to watch the icy fields of Zaporizhzhia on his video feed, he said.

"They say one thing publicly," he said. But on the battlefield, "I see intensified assault operations."

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Who Exactly Is Superman? The Quest to Give the Man of Steel an Edge

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Movies and TV have long tried to make the character more than a Boy Scout. But he has always been difficult to figure out.

By Esther Zuckerman

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

In a 1957 episode of "I Love Lucy," Superman cracked a joke.

The hero has just rescued the mischievous Lucy (Lucille Ball) from the ledge of her apartment building where she had ended up after dressing up as Superman to entertain the birthday party for her son, Little Ricky. Lucy's husband, Ricky (Desi Arnaz), starts yelling in heavily accented English before Superman, played by George Reeves, stops him.

"You mean to say that you've been married to her for 15 years?" he says, before hitting the punchline: "And they call me Superman!"

That gag is evidence that for as long as Superman has been represented in film and television, writers have been trying to find a way to give him a little edge. In his initial screen representations, Superman was an earnest representation of Americana—despite being from the fictional planet Krypton—and tantamount goodness. But as time has passed, his appearances has been marked by artists and actors wrestling with his godlike nobility and wanting to question his straight-laced nature.

The more you look at the arc of Superman's appearances on screen, in fact, the more the question becomes: Whom do we want this character to be? Should he be relatable to viewers or exist on a higher plane to represent the best of us all? Should his huge amount of power be comforting or feared? And, perhaps most of all, should he be perceived as cool? Or is he inherently sort of dorky?

Whereas Batman had his tragic back story, making him moody and tortured, and Spider-Man had the youthful verve of a kid from Queens, Superman was always kind of a square. In his simplest form, as in Reeves's series "Adventures of Superman," which began airing in 1952, he was a noble crime solver. The opening credits find him standing, hands on his hips, as the announcer declares that he fights for "truth, justice, and the American way."

Over time, Superman has been transformed into a moody teen and a Christ-figure, a violent threat and a cuddly protector. The most recent high-profile incarnation of the character, played by David Corenswet in James Gunn's 2025 blockbuster "Superman," aims for a happy medium, reframing Kal-El's desire to do good as "punk." After all, if the world is full of bad guys, maybe being intensely optimistic is the most radical move of all.

Broad shoulders, strong jaw

Superman, the creation of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, was born in 1938's "Action Comics #1," and it didn't take long for Hollywood to get hold of him. He was first rendered with clean lines and broad shoulders in the series of Fleischer Studios cartoons that began with a 1941 short where Superman goes head-to-head with a mad scientist who has imprisoned Lois Lane, performing incredible feats of strength along the way.

The Fleischer films, like the Reeves series that would follow about a decade later, defined the traditional mode of Superman on screen. He was strong-jawed and eminently heroic. You don't get much of a sense of his inner life. After he saves the day, and his Daily Planet colleagues remark on Superman's skills, his alter ego Clark Kent gives a sly glance to the camera, letting the audience in on the, quite obvious, ruse.

By the time Superman was headed to the silver screen in the 1970s, audiences were a little more discerning; they wanted some sense that Superman wasn't a cardboard cutout but a human being—or as human as an alien could be. As such, when Christopher Reeve took on the mantle for the 1978 Richard Donner film, he realized how he could not only put an original spin on Supes, but make him more relatable to audiences.

"Superman," arriving three years after "Jaws," was a product of Hollywood's move toward blockbusters and a sign that the business was aiming for fluff that would make millions of dollars. But Reeve, who went to Juilliard, was trained to think about every role as if he were playing Hamlet. He argued the "Man of Steel" persona as "totally exaggerated," he told the New York Times. To challenge that, he made Clark Kent a nerd, hunching his shoulders, making him sputter with nervousness.

"There's some of him in all of us," Reeve said. "I have a great deal of affection for him—it's not just that he can't get the girl, he can't get the taxi."

The 1970s were a humanistic era of filmmaking, defined by filmmakers ranging from Martin Scorsese to Hal Ashby, and Reeve chose to locate the human in Superman not through his nervous Clark, but through the genuine tension in his romance with Lois Lane, then played by Margot Kidder.

Goodbye innocence

After Reeve hung up the cape, other versions would follow, using Superman's love life to find his pathos—among them the television shows "Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman" and "Smallville," the latter of which focused on Clark's hormonal teen years. It was as much in the spirit of "Dawson's Creek" as it was in the tradition of George Reeves.

Still, as the years progressed, cynicism seemed to cast a pall over Superman. The national innocence had curdled since his introduction, and so the hero himself couldn't be such an innocent figure. In recent years, before the 2025 movie, Superman has either had two modes: Nearly terrifying in his all-consuming power or laughable. The latter has been handled by cartoons like the 2019 series "Harley Quinn," which turns Superman into an overly confident dope. The former most embodied by Henry Cavill's take in the Zack Snyder movies like 2013's "Man of Steel."

Superman in those movies is a figure whose unlimited power can be violent. In "Justice League," first released in 2017 and then in expanded form in 2021, he briefly turns

A Stanford Experiment to Pair 5,000 Singles Has Taken Over Campus

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

A student built a matchmaking algorithm that has consumed the school—and highlighted the challenges of finding love for high achievers.

By Jasmine Li

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

When Ben Rosenfeld started working as a residential assistant at a Stanford University dorm, he encountered 77 freshmen possessed by an "all-consuming" force.

His new gig coincided with the release of Date Drop, a matchmaking platform that launched in September and immediately took over conversation in the dorm.

"They're always talking about who they want to be matched with, who they're matched with, who their friends are matched with," said Rosenfeld, a Stanford senior majoring in data science.

Created by graduate student Henry Weng, Date Drop has students answer 66 questions about their values, lifestyles and political views. These responses are fed into an algorithm to pair compatible students. Matches "drop" every Tuesday night at 9 p.m.

Students huddle in dorm rooms and libraries to find out who the algorithm chose for them. Some take to Fizz, a discussion forum, to complain. "My date drop was chopped," one student wrote, using a slang term for unattractiveness. Those who like what they see often wind up at On Call Café, a popular date spot that offers students a free beverage if they show up with their first match of the quarter.

More than 5,000 Stanford students have used Date Drop at a school with about 7,500 undergraduates. It has spread to 10 other colleges including Columbia, Princeton and MIT, and Date Drop just raised $2.1 million in venture-capital funding.

The growth, fans say, reflects a reality about many college kids: They're intimidated by real-life courtship and overwhelmed by the endless scroll of dating apps. Entrepreneurial students have found huge demand for alternate matchmaking tools.

"It helps people take a chance on connection," said Weng, a computer-science student who coded Date Drop in about three weeks. "You get a reason to meet up with a specific person, take some of that pressure off."

Some say Date Drop is a very Stanford solution to a very Stanford problem.

"A lot of people at Stanford place so much emphasis on success in other areas aside from social interaction, so it just naturally falls to the wayside," said sophomore Alena Zhang. "People just struggle with striking conversations in general—let alone romantic interactions."

Freshman Wilson Adkins began chatting with a girl from his dorm just as Date Drop was getting buzz. His friends took notice.

evil. The way this Superman battled preconceived notions of who Superman should be was to remove any warm and cuddly aspects of the figure.

In some ways, it was a Superman for an America that didn't feel like it needed a Superman, and a movie industry that valued destruction and spectacle over storytelling. The narrative of Snyderverse, as it was known, was as much about trying to battle DC Extended Universe's corporate enemy, the Marvel Cinematic Universe, as it was about Superman's emotional journey. The way to make Superman cool again was to highlight his brawn.

Optimism to a fault

The Gunn movie takes a different tack, essentially arguing that what makes Superman lame is what actually makes him valuable. Corenswet's Superman isn't just dorky when he's hiding as Clark Kent; being corny is his entire personality as evident in a scene in which Lois Lane (Rachel Brosnahan) teases him over his taste in music. He's feared, yes, but only by those who believe propaganda that the villains spew. And while he's physically strong, he's able to win the day because of his genuine love for others. He even has a cute dog sidekick.

This new "Superman" falls into a genre of science fiction and fantasy known online as "hopepunk," which gained popularity among some fans under the first Trump administration and was defined by optimism in the face of oppression. The label is fitting in part on a literal level because Gunn ends his movie on Superman's smiling face with the song "Punkrocker," which features Iggy Pop crooning, "I'm a punkrocker, yes I am." It's an argument that Superman's golly gee spirit is his greatest asset, no subversion necessary.

ROBERT NEUBECKER FOR WSJ

Where Did All the Cheap Restaurants Go?

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

As the price difference between low-end and midtier establishments vanishes, I've decided it's time to change my dining habits

By Chris Kornelis

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

I've had it with trying to find cheap places to eat. There used to be places where burgers, salads and draft beers, the midbrow fare that's in my sweet spot, could seem like a pretty good deal. Now, no matter where I'm eating, I'm paying pretty much the same price. When I get barbecue at a food truck—eaten outside, off a falling-over picnic table—it's the same price I pay sitting at the marble bar at a downtown restaurant that also provides water refills, clean bathrooms, table service and silverware.

I do understand why this is happening, and it's hard to blame the restaurants. Everything is expensive thanks to factors like increased labor costs and inflation that includes persistently high prices for some staples. The price of beef, for instance, was up more than 16% in December from a year earlier, according to the Labor Department.

Establishments that sell only a few items—say, food trucks and burger joints—have little room to absorb those higher prices, so they're more likely to have to pass them on to the consumer. But a steakhouse can try to make up for rising costs by jacking up the price on their porterhouse, while keeping some more accessibly priced items, like burgers (the food I generally eat), on their bar menus.

While I'm sure that I'm not alone in feeling this way, I know that my family and friends are sick of hearing me whine about it. So, I've decided to stop complaining (this piece is my swan song). But I've also decided to stop spending my money on what used to be the bargain joints, and start spending at establishments where I feel like I get more for those pricey burgers, salads and beers.

Where's the service?

I've been feeling this shrinking price gap for a few years—whether my family is getting a casual teriyaki for dinner, I'm out for a nice breakfast with my dad or I'm getting burgers and beer at a bar with friends. But it all came to a head for me over the summer, when I found myself eating out a lot while my wife and kids were out of town.

One day I went with a friend to a tap room not far from Bremerton, the blue-collar town across the water from Seattle where I live. Lunch was served out of a food truck. We were given pagers. When they buzzed, we walked back to the truck to pick up our food. My bill: $15 for a fish burger and small fries. When we were done, we bussed our own tables and sorted our garbage from our recycling. My friend got a beer and it was $8. I asked for water and the bartender pointed me toward a drinking fountain and some plastic cups.

Tips were expected. For what, I'm not sure. I'm happy to tip for service, but pointing toward a water fountain, handing someone a fish sandwich on a paper boat and asking customers to do their own dishes feels less like service and more like the least you can do.

The next day, I went to Five Guys and tried to order a bacon burger and regular fries. But after standing at the counter and getting no service or nods of recognition for what felt like an awfully long time—long enough for me to take note—I left. Just as well. I couldn't believe the burger and fries would have set me back $21.

I have no problem with no-frills service or self-service when I am getting a deal in return. In fact, such places often are my go-to's. The service might be minimal sometimes, but, hey, the food is good and cheap. But now it feels like that trade-off has become one-sided.

A burger with a view

The day after that failed Five Guys run, I decided to treat myself with a more-upscale outing. I drove through the woods and along a fjord until I reached the Alderbrook Resort & Spa, in a town called Union. Bill Gates has a place nearby and there was a McLaren parked out front. The last time I ate at their restaurant was for my wife's birthday.

On the menu at the bar: a Kobe beef burger (with fries) topped with bacon and avocado for $25. It turns out that this fancy burger cost just a few dollars more than the one at Five Guys. I ended up ordering a Caesar salad for $14. And that option was a little cheaper than the sandwich I purchased from the food truck earlier in the week.

But the game-changer for me was what I got beyond the food. My meal came with metal utensils and a cloth napkin. My seat at the bar had a view of the water, the Olympic Mountains and the Mariners baseball game. The bartender even poured me a glass of ice water to go with my $8 beer.

If I can get an arguably better burger and all those extras for just a few dollars more, not to mention a beer for the same price, isn't it worth it?

Of course, raising prices is a restaurant owner's prerogative; many have no choice if they want to stay in business these days. But I also am making a choice. I am choosing to spend my money differently. I don't have to pay resort prices at a food truck.

When I or my family go out to eat, I'm not going to complain about the prices. I'm going to gladly pay $25 for a burger and $8 for a beer. And I'm going to tip. I'm just going to choose to do it in a place with clean toilets, table service and a billion-dollar view.

A feature allows users to "couple" two people to boost their odds of matching. Students get an email alert if their friends propose a match for them. Adkins got three at once. "I knew they were conspiring," he said.

Sure enough, Adkins and his classmate were paired with a 99.7% compatibility score. "So now it looks like I had been kind of scheming and forcing this to happen," Adkins said.

He avoided her for weeks. They've since studied together a few times.

Stanford is also the birthplace of The Marriage Pact, a matchmaking project created in 2017 and adopted at more than 100 universities. Creator Liam McGregor said it's produced over 350,000 matches and dozens of marriages.

The questionnaire written by a team of relationship scientists invites students to rate a series of statements from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Among them: "I would rather fail than cheat in an exam" and "I believe I can truly change the world."

The Marriage Pact team apparently found Date Drop's questions and marketing a little too familiar. It sent a cease-and-desist letter in November. Weng said his team stands by their product and will continue operations.

Many colleges have their own matchmaking traditions. In 1994, Harvard's Computer Society introduced Datamatch, a multiple-choice questionnaire, to pair students. At Cornell, the Perfect Match project makes matches ahead of Valentine's Day. Dartmouth's Last Chances invites seniors to submit the names of their crushes to find out if they're mutual.

Students say they could use the help.

Princeton freshman Pierre Du Plessis said Date Drop has been useful on a campus where asking someone out is unusual.

"If it goes wrong, everyone will know," he said. "You don't want to be the guy that's known for embarrassing himself."

While Date Drop has helped, it won't necessarily solve the complex problem that is dating at a place like Stanford.

Sophomore Gabriel Berger went out with his first match over matcha lattes in Palo Alto.

"We had a great time. We talked for a couple of hours," he said. "And then our schedules were just completely conflicting."

His date was juggling dance practice with a full class schedule, while Berger was conducting research, taking four challenging courses and serving as vice president of his fraternity. He said the date ended with a shared realization: "We're not interfacing well."

Madhav Abraham-Prakash, a junior who oversees social life for Stanford's student union and helped bring Date Drop to campus, views the platform as a tool to maximize the "best dating pool that I will ever be a part of."

Although Date Drop hasn't resulted in a romantic connection for Abraham-Prakash, it's helped him make a few LinkedIn connections.

"I would be sad if my soulmate was here and I didn't find them," he said. "Or if my cofounder was here and I didn't find them, or if my business partner was here or the chairman of my board was here, and I didn't find them."

TO BHMA International edition

What Happens When the Cameras Are Off?

The Collision in the Aegean and the Questions that Followed

REUTERS/NICOLAS ECONOMOU

A group of newly-arrived migrants board a ferry bound for Piraeus, mainland Greece, in Souda, on the island of Crete, July 11, 2025.

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The government expressed condolences for the dead while praising the Coast Guard's actions. Ministers and ruling-party MPs attributed responsibility solely to the "murderous traffickers" who exploit desperate people and overcrowd unseaworthy boats. The opposition, almost unanimously, called for a full and transparent investigation.

Immigration Minister Thanos Plevris accused critics of siding with smugglers. "I believe the Coast Guard report," he said. "You can believe the smugglers," he told opposition MPs pointedly. In a recent interview, he went even further. "The Left went to the scene (of the shipwreck) not because they cared what happened to the victims, but rather with the sole aim of slandering the men and women of the Coast Guard in order to score political points."

Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis struck a more measured tone. In an interview with Foreign Policy, he called the incident a tragedy and stressed the need for an investigation. His "preliminary" information, he said, suggested that the Coast Guard vessel had been rammed by a smaller boat. Such situations "happen quite frequently in the Aegean," he added, noting, "my Coast Guard, we're not a welcoming committee."

Yet key elements of the official account remain unverified. Opposition MPs who met survivors have questioned the Coast Guard's version. The patrol vessel's onboard camera was not activated. In his testimony, the captain said since visibility was adequate that night, there was no need to turn on the thermal camera. He added: "There is a recording function, but I was not issued a recording card for this vessel by my service. It is not a recording device like a mobile phone camera. It can record, but only if It has been provided with a recording card."

Authorities have arrested the sole Moroccan survivor as a suspected smuggler, based on testimony from one passenger. His lawyers say there are "no substantial indications of guilt" and that other pretrial statements do not identify him as the operator. They allege that witnesses reported "no signal, no warning, no flashing light… only a collision with the Coast Guard vessel."

The absence of video documentation, and the rapid attribution of criminal responsibility to survivors, closely echo the Pylos shipwreck of June 2023, which the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights described as "one of the deadliest boat disasters in the Mediterranean Sea to date."

Pylos: a precedent that still looms

After the shipwreck of the *Adriana* off Pylos, in which over 500 people reportedly perished (though the Greek authorities dispute the number), the Greek Ombudsman opened its own inquiry when the Coast Guard declined to initiate disciplinary proceedings. In a report issued in February 2025, the Ombudsman identified "serious and blameworthy omissions" by senior officers and cited indications of potential criminal liability. Key evidence was unavailable, including communications with the Search and Rescue Coordination Center, which authorities said "were not digitally recorded," despite there being a legal requirement to do so. Footage from the patrol vessel's onboard cameras was also missing, with the Coast Guard claiming the system had been "out of operation due to malfunction," a decisive absence which made it impossible to properly assess responsibility.

A legal framework Greece is bound by

The legal framework governing maritime operations is clear: international human rights law and the law of the sea require states to prioritize the protection of life. In addition, the principle of non-refoulement, a cornerstone of refugee protection, prohibits the removal of persons to a country where their life or liberty would be at risk.

Minos Mouzourakis, Legal and Advocacy Officer at Refugee Support Aegean, told *TO BHMA International Edition:*

"The paramount need to safeguard lives at sea must be the primary consideration of Coast Guard operations according to international and EU rules on human rights and the law of the sea (namely, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, European Convention on Human Rights, SOLAS Convention, Regulation (EU) 656/2014). These also impose a prohibition on collective expulsions and on removing individuals to a place where their life or liberty would be at risk (refoulement)."

Those obligations apply regardless of a person's migration status. Border enforcement does not displace the duty to rescue or to assess protection claims.

Two forms of pushback

The evidence points to two distinct but related practices.

The first involves maritime pushbacks: boats intercepted at sea and allegedly forced back toward Turkish waters, sometimes through aggressive maneuvers, ramming, deliberate engine damage or abandonment on life rafts.

The second involves informal forced returns after migrants have already reached Greek territory. The Greek National Commission for Human Rights defines these as "summary removals of third-country nationals from the territory of a state without proper legal procedures, often involving the use of violence and in violation of international and European human rights law." They are described as "covert operations by design and intent," yet "frequently conducted openly," involving denial of access to asylum procedures, informal detention and removal "without registration, documentation or identification."

Both practices are illegal under Greek, EU and international law. That either is employed in Greece has been repeatedly and strenuously denied by Greek authorities.

ECHR

In January 2025, the European Court of Human Rights delivered a ruling in *A.R.E. v. Greece* that marked a highly consequential and significant judicial acknowledgment of evidence pointing to pushbacks by Greek authorities.

The Court found that there were "strong indications" that, at the time of the events examined, a systematic practice of pushbacks of third-country nationals by Greek authorities had existed in the Evros region. The Court also held that the applicant had been returned to Turkey without an individual assessment of the risks she faced, amounting to an unlawful removal without due process.

There has been a series of rulings over the past three years—*Safi v. Greece, Alkhatib v. Greece, Almukhlas v. Greece and F.M. v. Greece*—where the ECHR has condemned Greece for failures in rescue operations, fatal use of force by Coast Guard officers, and ineffective criminal investigations into maritime incidents.

Documenting a pattern in the Aegean

Allegations of pushbacks have been documented by major news organizations, including the BBC, *The New York Times*, The Guardian and *Der Spiegel*, as well as national and international human rights bodies.

In Greece, the Greek National Commission for Human Rights operates the Recording Mechanism of Informal Forced Returns in cooperation with civil society organizations and with technical

European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) Rulings on Greece

7 Jul 2022 — Safi v. Greece
Failure to conduct an adequate rescue in the 2014 Farmakonisi shipwreck; ineffective criminal investigation.

16 Jan 2024 — Alkhatib v. Greece
Fatal gunfire by Coast Guard officers near Pserimos (2014); ineffective criminal investigation.

3 Dec 2024 — G.R.J. v. Greece
Finding of "strong indications" of a "systematic practice" of pushbacks in the Aegean.

7 Jan 2025 — A.R.E. v. Greece
Condemnation for pushback and ineffective criminal investigation; finding of a "systematic practice" of pushbacks in the Evros region.

25 Mar 2025 — Almukhlas v. Greece
Fatal gunfire by Coast Guard officers near Symi (2015); ineffective criminal investigation.

16 Oct 2025 — F.M. v. Greece
Failure to conduct an adequate rescue in the 2018 Agathonisi shipwreck; shortcomings in the criminal investigation.

support from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. In its 2024 cycle, the Mechanism recorded 52 alleged incidents involving at least 1,517 individuals, including 300 women and 225 children. Of the 45 alleged victims whose testimonies were documented, 40 said they had never been registered or identified by Greek authorities, despite being found within Greek territory or under Greek jurisdiction. Of the 45, three were recognized refugees and one a registered asylum seeker.

Even those figures are likely to be incomplete. After visiting Greece in February 2025, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights reported persisting allegations of summary returns at both land and maritime borders. Citing information from UNHCR, he said the agency had received 248 allegations of summary returns in the first half of 2024 alone, 166 of which it assessed as substantiated; the substantiated cases affected at least 4,229 people. The Commissioner noted that the available data almost certainly underestimates the scale of the practice.

Other institutions have reached similar conclusions. The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture said it had received "many consistent and credible allegations" of violent pushbacks across the Evros River and at sea toward Turkey. In its 2024 review of Greece, the United Nations Human Rights Committee expressed grave concern about "multiple reports of pushbacks" at land and sea borders, citing allegations of excessive force, ill-treatment and inadequate procedural safeguards, as well as a lack of systematic investigations.

Greek authorities have consistently rejected the characterization of pushbacks as systemic, maintaining that violent summary returns "do not occur" or represent isolated incidents under previous governments. Some reports have been described by officials as "unjust."

At the same time, Greece's own oversight bodies have pointed to weaknesses in internal investigations. In its 2024 annual report, the National Mechanism for the Investigation of Arbitrary Incidents, operating under the Greek Ombudsman, said complaints of alleged pushbacks had continued throughout the year and, for a second consecutive year, maritime allegations had exceeded those at land borders. The Mechanism received seven new cases in 2024—one transmitted by the police and six by the Coast Guard—and noted that maritime inquiries are often opened only following the filing of a Serious Incident Report by Frontex, rather than on the authorities' own initiative. It identified recurring shortcomings in disciplinary investigations, including delays and deficiencies in evidence gathering.

Mouzourakis said the official statistics reflect those concerns. "Out of over 100 cases treated by the Naval Court Prosecutor concerning push back incidents, none have led to the prosecution of Coast Guard officials. As for disciplinary proceedings conducted by the Coast Guard itself, none of the 42 internal sworn inquiries (EDE) carried out into allegations of human rights violations have led to disciplinary action," he told *TO BHMA International Edition*.

In rare instances, visual evidence has surfaced. A video posted publicly in 2024 by an Austrian activist appeared to show a Coast Guard vessel aggressively intercepting a migrant boat, with women and children heard screaming. According to reporting by Balkan Insight, when Frontex Executive Director Hans Leijtens was shown the footage, he acknowledged that the agency's handling of its cooperation with Greece may have contributed to a "sense of impunity."

Frontex: warnings ignored, cameras switched off

Internal Frontex documents reveal persistent concern within the agency that has been tasked with supporting EU member states in the management of the bloc's external borders and "has hundreds of border officers in Greece, as well as boats, cars, mobile surveillance systems, thermal cameras and drones."

Following the Pylos shipwreck, Frontex's Fundamental Rights Officer formally advised Executive Director Hans Leijtens to suspend or terminate operations in Greece, citing frequent and serious violations.

Instead, Leijtens pursued what he described as "enhanced cooperation." In an April 2025 interview with Balkan Insight, he acknowledged that he had recently "grown impatient" with the situation in Greece, criticizing the implementation of agreed measures "in a formalistic manner." He singled out the use of onboard cameras on Coast Guard vessels as a key example.

As reported at the time, "cameras, for example, were installed on Coast Guard vessels to record potential abuses, but they weren't turned on."

"I already told the Greeks: those remaining points are not rocket science. I want them fulfilled before we talk about the next cooperation," Leijtens said. "If it's not done, I will not cofinance Greek vessels."

The same month Frontex announced that it was "reviewing 12 cases of potential human rights violations by Greece."

REUTERS/KONSTANTINOS ANAGNOSTOU

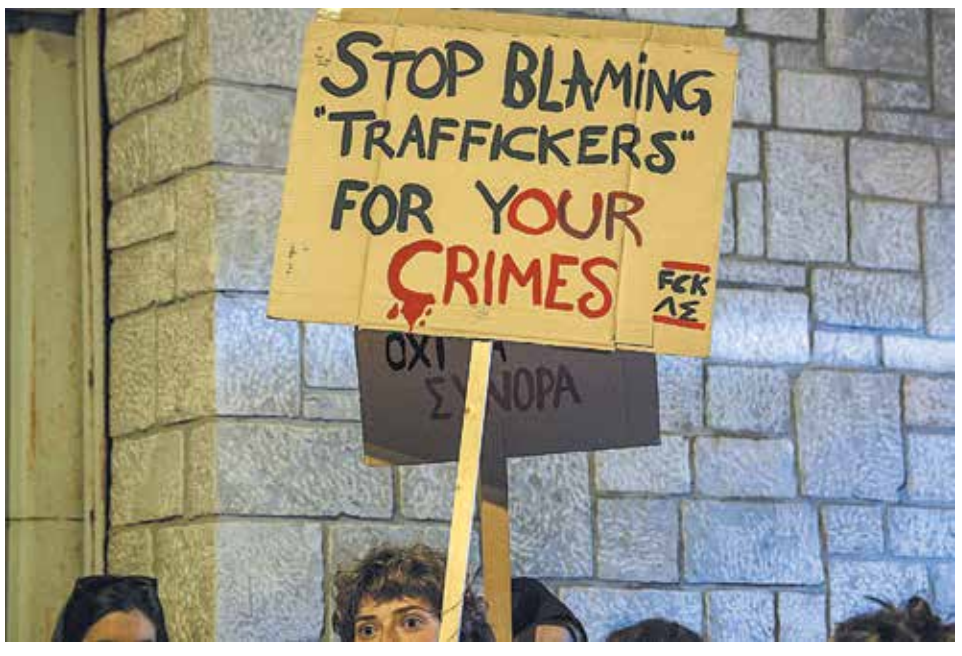
The Hellenic coast guard performs an SAR operation, following a migrant's boat collision with a coast guard vessel off the Aegean island of Chios, Greece, February 4, 2026.

AP PHOTO/PETROS GIANNAKOURIS

Graves at a cemetery for refugees and migrants who lost their lives while crossing the Aegean Sea from Turkey to Greece.

REUTERS/NICOLAS ECONOMOU

A child looks on as newly-arrived migrants are sheltered in a municipal hall in the town of Agyia, on the island of Crete, Greece, July 11, 2025.



REUTERS/KONSTANTINOS ANAGNOSTOU

A protester holds a placard during a protest following a migrant boat collision with the coast guard, which left more than a dozen dead, in Chios, Greece, February 4, 2026.

Migration Flows to Greece

	Arrivals by land and sea	Dead and missing
2026:	2.279	
2025:	48.711	107
2024:	62.119	125
2023:	48.721	799
2022:	18.780	343
2021:	9.157	115
2020:	15.696	105
2019:	74.613	71
2018:	50.508	187
2017:	36.310	56
2016:	177.234	441
2015:	861.630	799

(Data from UNHCR Operational Data Portal)

Santorini's Greatest Story Is the One It Never Tells

TO BHMA International Edition speaks with volcanologist George Vougioukalakis about why visitors remember Santorini's sunsets, wine, and views but little about the volcano that created it all

Continued from Page One

TO BHMA International Edition spoke with volcanologist George Vougioukalakis, former head of the Hellenic Survey of Geology and Mineral Exploration (HSGME) and former president of the Institute for the Study and Monitoring of the Santorini Volcano (ISMOSAV), about why one of the world's most famous volcanic landscapes continues to tell only half its story.

No volcano museum on Santorini

The short answer? Priorities and local choices, Vougioukalakis tells *TO BHMA International Edition*.

"Local authorities failed to recognize the importance of such a museum," he explains. "And as a result, it was never treated as a priority."

The idea itself is not new. Speaking at an event at the Acropolis Museum last year, Vougioukalakis confirmed that over the years, multiple proposals have been submitted, approved, and in some cases partially implemented. At one point, a historic mansion in Exo Gonia, owned by the Municipality of Thira, was designated to house the museum.

"But there was no continuity," Vougioukalakis explains. "No persistence in seeing the project through."

Santorini's early and explosive success as a tourist destination, he argues, played a decisive role. Once mass tourism took hold, long-term scientific and educational projects became harder to justify against short-term economic pressures.

"The focus shifted almost exclusively to maximizing tourism revenue," he says. "Effectively managing visitor numbers also became a major challenge. In that environment, a volcanology museum was never seen as essential."

On top of that, the focus on the island's archaeology overshadowed its geology. When archaeology and science compete in Greece, the former usually wins.

But for Vougioukalakis, not having a volcano museum on Santorini is a missed opportunity.

One of most studied volcanoes on Earth

The absence of a museum is all the more puzzling given Santorini's scientific importance.

"Santorini is one of the most extensively studied volcanoes on the planet," Vougioukalakis tells *TO BHMA International Edition*. "There is an extraordinary volume of data, research and documentation ready to be used in a museum."

The caldera is among the most thoroughly researched and closely observed volcanic systems on Earth. Its activity has been monitored continuously for decades. Only a year ago, increased activity caused renewed concern among residents and authorities. But also intrigued scientists worldwide.

He acknowledges, however, that turning complex scientific material into an engaging and accessible visitor experience is no simple matter, and would require careful museological design and interpretative work. The foundation already exists, he notes.

Nea Kameni, Santorini Island, Greece

Volcanic crater Stefanos in the Lakki valley of the island Nisyros Greece.

What would a volcano museum offer?

This would not be a museum for specialists, Vougioukalakis stresses, but rather for the millions who stand on the caldera's edge without understanding what formed it.

Looking at the Nisyros Museum and similar examples elsewhere, such as Vulcania theme park in France or Iceland's Lava Center, it's clear that Santorini has much to gain from a museum that tells the story of the volcanoes that gave birth to one of the most photographed and visited places on Earth.

The first and immediate benefit would be that accurate information and responsible risk communication would be assured, he says.

"A museum would offer clear, scientifically documented information on volcanic hazards stemming from the reactivation of Santorini's active volcanoes," Vougioukalakis tells *TO BHMA International Edition*. "Residents and visitors would have access to this information, thus preventing misinformation and irresponsible rumors."

He goes on to add: "everything that makes Santorini unique is the result of its volcanoes. The dramatic landscape and the caldera itself, its unique wine, fava beans, tomatoes and other produce, the lunar terrain of Nea Kameni, the unique island architecture; even the fact that the prehistoric settlement at Akrotiri has survived so well preserved."

Beyond education, the museum could enrich cruise and culture tourism, encourage year-round visits, ease seasonal overcrowding, and promote a more sustainable development model, particularly at a time when climate risk and geological awareness matter more than ever.

What's more, Vougioukalakis adds, there is little doubt about its appeal. It would be one of the most visited volcano museums in the world.

Why it matters now

For Vougioukalakis, the timing is critical.

"It's now widely accepted that Santorini's development model must change," he says. "The island cannot go on as it has done till now. Volcanic activity in 2011-2012, and again more recently in 2024-2025, have reinforced the need for balance and long-term planning."

A museum, he argues, would not simply inform; it would become a center of education and documentation, of collective memory; a space that explains both the greatness and the dangers of the volcano.

The example of Nisyros

On nearby Nisyros, a volcanological museum opened in 2008 in a renovated school building in the village of Nikia, perched right on the caldera rim. From there, visitors can hike down paths into the volcanic crater itself. Nearby, you'll also find the Volcanic Observatory, which tracks seismic and volcanic data around the clock.

The Nisyros Museum was created between 2005-2008, says Vougioukalakis, following recommendations from colleagues at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and the Institute of Greek and Mediterranean Studies, and thanks to persistent efforts on the part of the Municipality of Nisyros, which secured the relevant funding from the South Aegean Region.

A long-awaited vision

So what's needed at this stage for the Santorini volcano museum to move forward?

The project has already secured 1.33 million euros in funding from the South Aegean Region and is included in the 2021-2027 regional development program under a social infrastructure pillar, says Vougioukalakis.

"The next step is preparing the documents for the international tender and doing so quickly, so it can be executed within the required deadlines," he adds.

Looking ahead, Vougioukalakis is confident but cautious. "At this stage," he says, "the ball appears to be rolling, hopefully towards a successful conclusion. I am confident that, with the requisite scientific support from the Institute for the Study and Monitoring of Santorini Volcano, the Municipality of Thera and the South Aegean Region will move ahead with the creation of the long-planned Santorini volcano museum. It's what we've been dreaming of and striving to create for the last 30 years."