**Greece**

**Overview**

A flavourful melting pot of sparkling nightspots, fresh seafood, sizzling Mediterranean passion and mythical legend, Greece is a fascinating and enchanting destination.

The country has long held appeal for travellers, who decamp to its shores to lounge on beaches, explore ancient relics and take advantage of the legendary Grecian hospitality.

Yet despite its popularity, there is still an undiscovered feel to parts of Greece with Mount Olympus, the Peloponnese coast and some of the more remote islands slipping, for now at least, under the radar of mass tourism.

The first port of call for most visitors is Athens, the country’s stunning capital, which combines a modern centre with the stark ancient beauty of the Parthenon and a position overlooking a cerulean stretch of the Saronic Gulf.

Like the rest of the country, Athens was built on a classical civilisation that produced some of the world’s greatest thinkers, philosophers and poets. The ancient Greeks also brought the world democracy, which locals cheerfully remind visitors about, and a pantheon of deities, who are celebrated through statues and local folklore.

Everywhere has its own legend; from the tiny island of Ithaca, home to the wanderer Odysseus, to the rugged stretch of the Peloponnese, the onetime playground of divine beings.

While modern Greeks might not be hitting the intellectual heights of Pericles, the country remains one of Europe’s leading holiday destinations, thanks largely to its gorgeous collection of islands, which are scattered like confetti across the Mediterranean Sea.

Greece boasts 1,400 islands in all, amongst them Rhodes, which was home to the ancient Minoan culture and, legend has it, the terrifying Minotaur. Today it is better known for its stunning beaches, charming seaside towns and lively nightlife.

The islands of Corfu, Crete and Santorini are also established hangouts for sun-seekers and merrymakers, while Kos has begun to attract deities of a very modern kind – the world’s rich and famous. Ultimately, though, in democratic Greece, everyone is welcome.

**Getting There**

**Air**

Olympic Air (OA) ([www.olympicair.com](http://www.olympicair.com)) and Aegean Airlines (A3) ([www.aegeanair.com](http://www.aegeanair.com)) run direct flights from London Heathrow. The cost of flights to Greece peaks in July and August when most Europeans take their holidays. Throughout the rest of the year prices vary according to demand.

**Air Notes**

As of spring 2010, when Greece’s economic crisis became serious, flights have often been disrupted by strikes – especially on Tue, Wed and Thurs. Greek workers are less likely to take industrial action Fri-Mon.

**Flight Times**

From London to Athens is 4 hours; and from New York is 10 hours.

**Air Passes**

Olympic Air have a Travelair Club which offers frequent fliers the chance to earn air miles, while Aegean Airlines run a similar Miles&Bonus scheme. Aegean Airlines is a member of the Star Alliance, which is made up of 27 international airlines.

**Departure Tax**

€12.

**Road**

It is possible to ferry cars and caravans across to one of the major ports of entry. Points of overland entry are from the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia via Evzoni (550km from Athens), and Niki (630km from Athens); from Bulgaria via Promahonas (610km from Athens); from Turkey via Kastanies (920km from Athens) or Kipoi (840km from Athens). For car ferry information, see Getting There.

**Road Note**

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**Rail**

The national railway company is Hellenic Railways Organisation Ltd (OSE) ([www.trainose.gr](http://www.trainose.gr); tel: 1110). A good way to travel from the UK is to take the Eurostar through the channel tunnel, from London to either Brussels or Paris, both of which have onward connections to Greece (via Italy, then an overnight ferry). Journey time takes an average of around 48 hours. For further information and reservations, contact Eurostar (tel: 08432 186 186 within the UK, [www.eurostar.com](http://www.eurostar.com)) or Rail Europe (tel: 08448 484 064, within the UK; [www.raileurope.co.uk](http://www.raileurope.co.uk)).

**Rail Passes**

**InterRail:** Offers unlimited first- or second-class travel in up to 30 European countries for European residents of over six months with two pass options. The Global Pass is available in durations of one month, 22 or 15 days for those looking to travel continuously; otherwise there are passes that allow for 5 days of travel to be used over a ten-day period or a ten-day pass to be used over a period of 22 days. Each pass is valid across all countries. Available from InterRail ([www.interrailnet.com](http://www.interrailnet.com)).

**The One-Country Pass:** Offers travel for three, four, six or eight days to be taken in one month in any of the countries except Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg are classified together as the Benelux countries). Travel is not allowed in the passenger's country of residence. Travellers under 26 years receive a reduction. Children's tickets are reduced by about 50%. Supplements are required for some high-speed services, seat reservations and couchettes. Discounts are offered on Eurostar and some ferry routes. Available from Rail Europe (tel: 08448 484 064; [www.raileurope.co.uk/inter-rail](http://www.raileurope.co.uk/inter-rail)).

**Eurailpass:** The global Eurail pass offers unlimited train travel in 22 European countries. Select, regional (Greece is grouped with Italy) and one-country Eurail passes are also available. Tickets are valid for two months or three months and permit between three and ten days’ travel in those periods. The passes cannot be sold to residents of Europe. Available from The Eurail Group ([www.eurail.com](http://www.eurail.com)).

**Rail Note**

Due to Greece’s ailing economy, as of early 2011, the Hellenic Railways Organisation (OSE) suspended the circulation of all international trains “until further notice”. This means there are no longer direct trains from Greece to Sofia in Bulgaria, Skopje in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Belgrade in Serbia, or Istanbul in Turkey.

**Water**

Greece’s main port for international ferry arrivals is Patras ([www.patrasport.gr](http://www.patrasport.gr)) with daily overnight services from Venice, Ancona, Brindisi and Bari in Italy. The main port for internal passenger arrivals is Athens’ port, Piraeus ([www.olp.gr](http://www.olp.gr)) with dozens of daily ferry and catamaran departures for the Greek islands.

**Water Note**

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**Cruise Ships**

Greek ports (notably Piraeus, Corfu, Santorini, Mykonos, Rhodes and Heraklion) are used by a number of cruise lines. Athens’ port Piraeus is a home port (meaning that cruises begin and end here) for ships sailing the East Mediterranean, while the others are ports of call (where ships stop for a day or less).

**Ferry Operators**

International car ferry lines link Patras and Igoumentisa with Ancona, Bari, Brindisi and Venice in Italy year round, and there are also summer services from Corfu to these ports. There is also a service between Rhodes and Marmaris in Turkey.

Major ferry operators covering the international routes are Superfast (tel: 210 891 9000; www.superfast.com), Minoan (tel: +30 210 414 5700;[www.minoan.gr](http://www.minoan.gr)) and ANEK (tel: 210 419 7900;[www.anek.gr](http://www.anek.gr)). Note that Superfast and ANEK also operate as an alliance ([www.anek-superfast.gr](http://www.anek-superfast.gr)).

**River Routes**

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**Getting Around**

**Air**

Olympic Airlines ([www.olympicair.com](http://www.olympicair.com)) and Aegean Airlines ([www.aegeanair.com](http://www.aegeanair.com)) operate flights on over 30 domestic routes. Major routes include Athens-Thessaloniki and Athens-Heraklion (on Crete). For many people, travelling from Athens to the islands by ferry is far more enjoyable than flying, though if time is an issue, flights are quicker for more distant islands such as Corfu, Crete and Rhodes. Through summer, advance bookings are recommended. Private charter flights are also available.

**Air Notes**

As of spring 2010, when Greece’s economic crisis became serious, flights have often been disrupted by strikes – especially on Tue, Wed and Thurs. Greek workers are less likely to take industrial action Fri-Mon.

**Air Passes**

Olympic Air have a Travelair Club which offers frequent fliers the chance to earn air miles, while Aegean Airlines run a similar Miles&Bonus scheme.

**Departure Tax**

€12.

**Road**

The motorway network is gradually being upgraded to link Athens to all the other major cities on the mainland – due to Greece’s mountainous terrain, this requires the building of several new tunnels. Motorways and some bridges incur a toll. In rural areas, and especially on the islands, many roads are narrow, twisty and poorly surfaced. Beware that roads up steep mountains may involve hairpin bends and plummeting cliffs with no guardrails. To reach some of the more isolated beaches you may have to negotiate unsurfaced tracks – in which case it is often better to walk.

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**Road Quality**

Greece has a good road network.

**Road Classification**

Greece’s major motorways are the A1 linking Athens and Thessaloniki; the A2 linking Igoumenitsa (on the west coast) to Evros (on the border with Turkey) passing through Thessaloniki en-route; and the A8 linking Athens and Patras. Some stretches of these motorways are still being upgraded. Secondary roads are known as ‘national roads’ and numbered from 1 to 99.

**Car Hire**

Most major international car hire firms operate throughout Greece, with offices at airports, ferry ports and in all major cities. The legal age for hiring a car is 21.

**Taxi**

In Athens, taxis are safe, plentiful and cheap. It is common practise to share the ride (but not the cost) with other passengers going in a similar direction. The same applies for other major cities. On the more commercial islands, such as Santorini, taxis can be expensive and also difficult to find during peak season. On the less touristy islands, taxis are cheaper but often scarce.

**Bike**

Greeks can be erratic drivers and big cities are risky for cyclists. That said, the Greek countryside offers superb terrain for mountain bikers. Various companies hire out bikes, and organise guided and self-guided tours of anything from a half-day to one week. The most popular regions for cycling are the island of Crete and the Peloponnese, both of which offer cycling paths, rural back roads and stunning mountain scenery.

**Coach**

All Greece’s main cities and many small destinations too are connected by an extensive network of long-distance buses, which almost always prove more efficient than the train. Major routes include Athens-Thessaloniki and Athens-Patras. The private companies involved operate under the umbrella of KTEL (tel: 14505, within Greece only; [www.ktel.org](http://www.ktel.org)).

**Regulations**

The minimum age for driving is 18. Children under 10 must sit in the back seat. Seat belts must be worn. There are fines for breaking traffic regulations. The maximum speed limit is 120kph (75mph) on motorways, 110kph (68mph) outside built-up areas and 50kph (30mph) in built-up areas. It is illegal to carry spare petrol in the vehicle, and to use a mobile phone (without hands-free) while driving. It is also illegal to use the horn in built up areas except in cases where there is immediate danger.

**Breakdown Service**

ELPA (Automobile and Touring Club of Greece; tel: 210 606 8800; [www.elpa.gr](http://www.elpa.gr)). Emergency breakdown services can be contacted toll-free by dialling 10400.

**Documentation**

A national driving licence is acceptable for EU nationals. The car registration documents must be carried at all times. Nationals of non-EU countries may need an International Driving Permit and should contact ELPA.

**Road Note**

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**Towns And Cities**

**Athens:** Athens city centre is well served by frequent buses and trolleybuses. Tickets can be purchased from the Athens Urban Transport Organisation ([www.oasa.gr](http://www.oasa.gr)) at various booths and kiosks situated around the city.

Athens has a reliable underground system that consists of three major lines. Line 1 ([www.amel.gr](http://www.amel.gr)) or the green line, runs north-south between Athens (suburb of Kifissia) and Piraeus daily; Line 2 or the blue line, runs between Aghios Antonios and Aghios Dimitrios and line 3 or the blue line, runs between Egaleo and the airport, passing through Monastiraki en route. Tickets can be purchased in the stations.

The tram system in Athens cuts through the city from Syntagma Square right through to the coast and runs a pleasant route from Peace and Friendship Stadium (in Neo Faliro) all the way to the most southern point of Glyfada. Tickets can be booked at all stations and trams connect with the Metro at Syntagma, Neos Kosmos and Neo Faliro.

Athens' large fleet of yellow taxis are extremely cheap by European standards. If you hail a taxi down in the street, it is not unusual to share the ride with other passengers going in a similar direction. Drivers are obliged to run a meter. Prices go up between midnight and 0500.

**Thessaloniki:** The city centre is well served by frequent buses. Tickets can be purchased from *periptera* (kiosks). Construction of the long-awaited metro in Thessaloniki finally began in 2006. If building work goes to plan, the single line running east-west will have 13 stations and should be ready for late 2014. Taxis in Thessaloniki are dark blue and white. As in Athens, they are cheap and plentiful.

**Rail**

Athens now has only one main train station, Larissa. Train information and tickets are available from the Hellenic Railways Organisation (OSE) (tel: 1110, within Greece only; [www.trainose.gr](http://www.trainose.gr)). Due to Greece’s current economic problems, some domestic services were cut during 2011, so now only a limited number of destinations are served every day going north and west from Athens. The most efficient service runs north-south, from Athens to Thessaloniki.

**Rail Passes**

**InterRail One-Country Pass:** various tickets allow for travel for three, four, six or eight days to be taken during the period of a month and within Greece. The passenger must be an EU resident. Travel is not allowed in the passenger's country of residence. Travellers under 26 years receive a reduction. Children's tickets are reduced by about 50%. Supplements are required for some high-speed services, seat reservations and couchettes. Discounts are offered on Eurostar and some ferry routes. The InterRail Greece Plus Pass also allows free deck tickets from Italy to Greece aboard Superfast ferries. Available from Rail Europe (tel: 08448 484 064;[www.raileurope.co.uk/inter-rail](http://www.raileurope.co.uk/inter-rail)).

**Balkan Flexipass:** offers five, 10 or 15 days' unlimited rail travel within one month in Greece, Bulgaria, Turkey, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia (Former Yugoslav Republic of) and Romania. However, note that all international trains into and out of Greece were suspended in early 2011 until further notice. Available at the international ticket sales points in any of the participating countries.

**Rail Note**

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**Water**

It is both cheap and easy to travel around the islands. There are ferry services ([www.greekferries.gr](http://www.greekferries.gr)) on many routes, with services most frequent during the summer. The main ports in Attica are Piraeus and Rafina, although there are regular services to the islands from the smaller ports of Alexandroupolis, Igoumenitsa, Kavala, Kyllini, Patras, Thessaloniki and Volos.

Tickets can be bought from the shipping lines' offices located around the quaysides or online. In major ports the larger companies have offices in the city centre. There are two classes of ticket (First Class and Economy Class) which offer varying degrees of comfort; cabins can be booked for the longer voyages or those wishing to avoid the sun. Most ships have restaurant facilities. During high season it is wise to buy tickets in advance, as inter-island travel is very popular.

**Routes from Piraeus:** Piraeus offers frequent services to most islands in the following groups: Argo-Saronic, Cyclades, Dodecanese and the northeast Aegean, plus Crete and several mainland ports.

Check sailing times either with individual lines, the Greek National Tourism Organisation, or in Piraeus.   
  
**Routes from Rafina:** There are ferries to nearby Evia from Rafina, plus to some islands in the Cyclades, the Dodecanese, and the northeast Aegean.

**Other routes:** Several other routes between the mainland ports and the islands are also covered.

**Hydrofoil:** A hydrofoil service, also called the Flying Dolphins, ([www.hellenicseaways.gr](http://www.hellenicseaways.gr)) offers a fast and efficient service from Piraeus, travelling to many of the nearby islands. Although this is somewhat more expensive than travelling by ferry, journey times are cut drastically. They also serve some other routes. For further information on various ferry and hydrofoil timetables, see the Greek Travel Pages ([www.gtp.gr](http://www.gtp.gr)).

**Yachts:** Numerous types of yachts and sailing vessels can be chartered or hired with or without crews. 'Flotilla holidays' are popular, and the Greek National Tourism Organisation has a full list of companies running this type of holiday.

**Water Note**

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**Business**

**Business Etiquette**

Most Greek companies close completely through August for their annual summer holidays. Punctuality is expected for meetings, although a Greek host may keep a business visitor waiting for a short time. French, German and English are often spoken as well as Greek. It is usual to shake hands to greet a business contact but embracing and kissing colleagues is not uncommon, although not upon first acquaintance. Business cards are exchanged after introductions have been made. Business attire is relatively formal; men and women are expected to wear suits and men should also wear ties. More casual wear is sometimes acceptable during the summer but local businesspeople tend to dress conservatively.

Hospitality is an important part of Greek culture and visiting businesspeople may well be taken to lunch. Greeks do not drink excessively but they will appreciate it if foreigners show enthusiasm to sample Greek wines and spirits. Almost everyone smokes, so visitors should not be surprised by endless offers of cigarettes. Gifts from abroad are well received but not expected, unless a visitor is invited to a colleague's home, in which case a gift of wine, sweets or flowers is usual.

In Athens, the working day is fairly flexible. In general, offices are open Monday to Friday 0830-1630, although shops and banks may have different hours (smaller organisations still close for a siesta in the afternoon during summer).

**Office Hours**

Mon-Fri 0830-1700.

**Economy**

While agricultural accession to the EU brought new focus to the Greek economy, particularly industrial sectors, in 2009 the Greek economy went into recession, contracting by 2%. Although Greece's financial struggles can be explained in part by the conditions that have affected the rest of the world, there are other factors that have contributed which are particular to the country.

The failure to address a growing budget deficit, falling state revenues and increased government expenditure have meant that Greece required the biggest bailout in recent history from the EU and IMF. The financial assistance has come with conditions and the new austerity measures, including dramatic cuts in public spending and increased taxes which have seen protests in the streets of Athens and anger amongst the country’s unions. The ratings agency S&A has already downgraded Greek debt, meaning Greece is now a viewed as highly risky place to invest. Unemployment in stood at 17% in May 2011 and was expected to increase. Inflation stood at 2.4% in July 2011. Further austerity measures imposed in 2011 included a massive privatisation scheme and the talk of possible default should Greece fail to appease its creditors.

Regardless of Greece's current financial situation, since the 1980s tourism has played an increasingly important part in the economy and it now accounts for 16% the country's GDP.

Greece has many convention centres and hotels with conference facilities. It also has ships equipped for 'floating conferences', sailing between the islands. For further enquiries, contact the Greek National Tourism Organisation (see Important Addresses).

**GDP**

US$312 billion (2011).

**Main Exports**

Food and beverages, manufactured goods, petroleum, chemicals and textiles.

**Main Imports**

Machinery, transport equipment, fuels and chemicals.

**Main Trading Partners**

Germany, Italy, Cyprus, Bulgaria, UK, Russia, China and France.

**Sightseeing**

**Rhodes’ Old Town**

Rhodes’ medieval old town is a UNESCO world heritage site - explore the car-free cobbled back alleys after dark for a truly unforgettable medieval experience. The Order of St John of Jerusalem occupied the city from 1309 to 1522, and bequeathed it with the 4km-long city walls, the Palace of the Grand Masters and the Street of the Knights. It subsequently fell to the Ottoman Turks – their traces include Islamic architecture such as the Mosque of Soliman and the Great Hamam.

**Corfu’s Old Town**

Fortified by the Venetians, this charming medieval sea port is protected by two castles – the hilltop Old Citadel and the seaward New Fortress. The UNESCO-listed old town is packed with 19th-century neo-classical mansions, many housing quaint tavernas and souvenir shops at ground level. The Spianada, a vast green space designed by the French, with a music pavilion and a cricket field, is overlooked by the arcaded Liston, home to several elegant cafes.

**Meteora**

On the edge of a flat plain in Thessaly, Central Greece, the Meteora is Greece’s second most important group of monasteries after Mount Athos. From the 11th century onwards, when the first hermits settled here, 24 Orthodox monasteries were built atop bizarre rocky pinnacles overlooking the plain. Today, six monasteries, several decorated with late-Byzantine frescoes, are open to the public.

**Lake Plastira**

See the work of man of nature combined at Lake Plastira in Kardista. Surrounded by hills covered in oak and chestnut trees, a wander round the glistening waters and awe inspiring views are sure to leave your senses soothed.

**Monemvasia**

Slow down in the old fortified Byzantine town of Monemvasia. The town can only be reached by a single causeway after an earthquake in 375 AD caused it to split from the mainland. Cars are not allowed in the old town, but romantic boutique hotels, starry nights and fine food most certainly are.

**Mount Athos**

Stand tall on Mount Athos, also known as 'Holy Mountain', in the east of the Chalcidice peninsula. Home to 20 Orthodox monasteries, some 1000 monks and an invaluable collection of frescoes and religious art, it dates from 1045 and is now a UNESCO world heritage site. Although it is part of Greece, it has a special self-governing status. Women and children are banned, and men who wish to visit it need to make a complicated application for permission.

**Olympia**

Dedicated to the father of the gods, Olympian Zeus, Olympia is the birthplace of the Olympic Games, which were first held here in 776 BC. Situated on the Peloponnese, the site boasts many ancient buildings, including the Heraeum, the Stadium and the Hippodrome where ancient horse races were held. There was also a Palaestra, or wrestling school, and a Gymnasium where competitors were obliged to train for at least a month. Today, visitors to Olympia come to see the Temple of Zeus, which once contained a gold and ivory statue of Zeus, and the nearby Archaeological Museum, which contains many artefacts from Olympia, including a collection of marble statues and bronzes. It is a UNESCO world heritage site.

**Birdwatching**

There are 11 wetlands of international importance in Greece, and over 190 'important bird areas'. The most impressive include the Nestos Delta in Thrace and the Prespa Lakes in Macedonia. Expect to see herons, storks, pelicans and eagles.

**Karst caves**

Greece is home to some 6,000 karst caves, the majority in Crete. Over 20 show caves are open for guided tours, the largest and most impressive being Perama, which is filled with stalagmites and stalactites. Some were used in antiquity as sites of worship, then later housed churches and monasteries, or even became used as hideaways during Greece’s struggles for independence.

**Discover the Cyclades**

Visit Santorini's whitewashed towns of Ia and Thira, built on a cliff overlooking the caldera, a circular depression in the sea created when a volcanic eruption blew the centre out of the island around 1600 BC. Expect stunning sunsets, black sand beaches, boutique hotels and gourmet cuisine. Mykonos, known for its glamorous, hedonistic nightlife, attracts celebrities and fashionistas in equal measure as well as a notable gay community.

**Hellenic Festival**

Do not miss the Hellenic Festival ([www.greekfestival.gr](http://www.greekfestival.gr)), Jun-Sep, which sees music, dance and theatre performances held in the second-century AD Odeion of Herodes in Athens, as well as classical Greek dramas in the fourth-century BC amphitheatre in Epidaurus.

**Hit the beach**

The Greek Islands are home to countless stunning beaches. These range from the glamorous party beaches of Paradise and Psarou on Mykonos, to the more sedate family-orientated pine-scented golden sands of Koukounaries on Skiathos. Other joys include the white pebbles and turquoise waters of Myrtos, backed by plummeting cliffs on Kefalonia’s dramatic west coast, and the isolated beach of Vai, sheltered by Europe’s largest palm grove, on Crete.

**Sailing**

With its endless blue seas and countless islands, Greece is a sailor’s paradise. The majority of charter companies are based in Athens – from here a one-week sailing trip might take you to the islands of Aegina and car-free Hydra, while a two-week tour could include Mykonos and the southernmost of the Cyclades, Santorini. Alternatively, set sail from bases on Corfu or Lefkada to explore the turquoise waters of the Ionian.

**Watersports**

The shallow, fast-flowing rivers of mainland Greece offer excellent facilities for water-based adventure sports such as rafting, kayaking and canoeing. Sea-kayaking and scuba diving are also becoming popular on the islands. Greece has numerous thermal springs, spas and hydrotherapy centres to help sooth any aches and pains.

**Athens**

Begin with the UNESCO-listed Acropolis rock, home to the magnificent fifth-century BC Parthenon, then stroll down to the Ancient Agora, once Athens' civic, political and commercial centre. Be sure to check out the ultra-modern New Acropolis Museum, displaying ancient finds from the Acropolis site, and opened in summer 2010. Don't miss the world-class National Archaeological Museum, packed with ancient marble statues, jewellery and ceramics.

**Delphi**

Discover Delphi, believed by the ancients to be the centre of the world. This fascinating pagan religious complex, set on a stunning hillside site, comprises classical temples, a theatre and a stadium. Numerous finds are displayed in the excellent Delphi Archaeological Museum.

**Attractions**

**Epidaurus**

The fourth-century BC Sanctuary of Asclepius at Epidaurus was once an important healing centre as well as a religious centre and spa – today it is a UNESCO world heritage site. It boasts a well-preserved 1400-seat theatre, which comes alive every summer with theatrical performances. There is also a small excavation museum near Epidaurus, which was built between 1902 and 1909, and contains many remains from the sanctuary.

**Thoroughfare**

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**Neighborhood**

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**Locality**

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**Sub Admin Area**

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**Admin Area**

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**Postcode**

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**Country**

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**Telephone**

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**Website**

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**Opening Times**

XXX

**Admission Fees**

XXX

**Disabled Access**

No

**UNESCO**

Yes

**Mycenae**

Visit the treasure trove that is Mycenae on the Peloponnese. This hilltop citadel of private dwellings and shrines, surrounded by Cyclopean Walls, was the powerful Mycenaeans' capital from about 1600 BC to about 1100 BC. Golden treasure, including the 'Mask of Agamemnon' and ‘Nestor’s Cup’, was found here. Today the highlight at Mycenae, which is one of the most popular attractions in Greece and a UNESCO world heritage site, is the much-photographed Lion Gate.

**Thoroughfare**

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**Neighborhood**

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**Locality**

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**Sub Admin Area**

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**Admin Area**

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**Postcode**

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**Country**

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**Telephone**

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**Website**

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**Opening Times**

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**Admission Fees**

XXX

**Disabled Access**

No

**UNESCO**

Yes

**Knossos**

Explore the extensive ruins of Knossos, a 3,000-year-old frescoed Minoan Palace, home to Europe's earliest civilisation. Discovered by British archaeologist Arthur Evans in 1900, it was subsequently excavated and partially reconstructed. Finds from the site are displayed in the Archaeological Museum in the nearby Venetian-style port town of Iraklio, on Crete.

**Thoroughfare**

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**Neighborhood**

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**Locality**

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**Sub Admin Area**

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**Admin Area**

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**Postcode**

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**Country**

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**Telephone**

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**Website**

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**Opening Times**

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**Admission Fees**

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**Disabled Access**

No

**UNESCO**

No

**Samaria Gorge**

From May through September, keen hikers tackle Crete’s gruelling Samaria Gorge. This dramatic, high-sided, rocky canyon, runs 18km from Xiloskalo, at an altitude of 1200m, down to the tiny village of Agia Roumeli, on the coast, making it the longest gorge in Europe. Thanks to its outstanding natural beauty, it is on the UNESCO world heritage ‘tentative’ list.

**Thoroughfare**

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**Neighborhood**

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**Locality**

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**Sub Admin Area**

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**Admin Area**

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**Postcode**

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**Country**

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**Telephone**

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**Website**

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**Opening Times**

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**Admission Fees**

XXX

**Disabled Access**

No

**UNESCO**

No

**Shopping**

Special purchases include lace, jewellery, metalwork, pottery, knitwear, rugs, leather goods, local wines and spirits, olive oil and objects made from olive tree wood. Athens is the centre for luxury goods, and local handicrafts and international brand names and high street stores. The Sunday morning flea market in Monastiraki, below the Acropolis, is crowded in high season. Athens’ Central Market, a series of halls lined with colourful stalls plying fresh seafood, meat, fruit and vegetables, is also well worth a look in. Regional specialities include silver from Ioannina; ceramics from Sifnos and Skopelos; embroidery and lace from Crete, the Ionian Islands, Rhodes and Skiros; alabaster from Crete; furs from Kastoria; and flokati rugs from the Epirus region. Other popular buys include olive oil based eco-friendly toiletries (soaps, shampoos, face creams etc), and mastiha products (cosmetics made from mastic resin, produced on the island of Chios).

**Shopping Hours**

These vary according to the season, location and type of shop, but a rough guide follows: Mon, Wed, and Sat 0900-1430; Tues, Thurs and Fri 0900-1430 and 1730-2030. Most holiday resort shops stay open until late in the evening. In Athens, several big new shopping malls in the suburbs are open Mon-Fri 1000-2100, Sat 0900-2000.

**Note**

(a) Visitors should be aware that many 'antiques' sold to tourists are fake; information on exporting antiques can be found at [www.law-archaeology.gr](http://www.law-archaeology.gr) (b) Non-EU citizens can get a refund on Greek VAT (which stands at 23%) on purchases worth more than €120; the process is fairly complex, but well worth it. Ask store owners and tourist information offices for details.

**Nightlife**

Greece's nightlife is centred in main towns and resorts with late-night bars, dance clubs and live concerts. Athens' nightlife is among the best in Europe, with many local tavernas, particularly in the Plaka area, and *ouzeris* (typical Greek bars), plus a plethora of trendy bars and small clubs in the fashionable night-time districts of Psirri and Gazi playing international music.

In summer, many of Athens’ big clubs move out of the centre to the beaches at Voula, Vouliagmeni and Varkiza, for big open-air cocktail bars, DJ-music and endless sea views. Nightclubs featuring live Greek *bouzouki* music are also extremely popular in both Athens and Thessaloniki – think glitzy clientele throwing carnations and dancing on the tables.

Through summer, the Cycladic islands of Mykonos and Santorini are also noted for their exceptionally glamorous and up-market nightlife, while Corfu, Zakynthos (Zante), Rhodes and Ios attract youngsters in search of cheap alcohol and all-night discos. Couples in search of a romantic escape would do better to head for lesser known islands such as Milos, Folegandros, Patmos or Ithaca.

Greece has some casinos, such as the Mount Parnes Casino in Athens, the Casino Achilleon in Corfu and the Casino Rodos at the Grande Albergo delle Rose in Rhodes. For more highbrow entertainment, regular classical music concerts and international theatrical performances are held at the stunning open air second-century AD Odeon of Herodes Atticus in Athens during the Hellenic Festival (Jun-Sep).

**Events**

**Anastenaria Firewalking Festival**

The idea of walking on embers began in these parts in 1250, supposedly when holy images were miraculously rescued by local people from a burning church. Another theory attributes the practice to a pre-Christian, Dionysian cult. Certainly from early times, a tradition of firewalking developed here. The modern version has become something of a media and tourist circus in several villages, though probably seen to best advantage in Langadhas. The day begins with holy images being displayed, and selecting a sheep to be sacrificed. Firewalkers limber up with rhythmic dancing to acquire a trance-like state, before dashing over the glowing embers. Many of them clasp icons of Saint Constantine and Saint Helen whilst performing the ritual. Afterwards, feasting continues until the early hours.

**Theme**

Religion

**Start Date**

21 May 2016

**End Date**

23 May 2016

**TBC**

Yes

**Date Description**

XXX

**Venue Name**

Various villages

**Thoroughfare**

XXX

**Neighborhood**

XXX

**Locality**

XXX

**Sub Admin Area**

XXX

**Admin Area**

XXX

**Postcode**

XXX

**Country**

XXX

**Website**

XXX

**Frequency Period**

yearly

**Frequency Number**

1

**Cost**

Most events are free.

**Importance**

Medium

**Easter**

Easter is the most important religious festival of the year for the Orthodox Church. Good Friday sees candle-lit holy processions departing from churches in most towns and villages. On the Saturday evening, a solemn church service is held, concluding with the midnight resurrection - church bells ring, candles are lit and a big feast of dyed red Easter eggs and *magaritsa* soup ensues. Easter Sunday is given over to a massive family lunch of whole spit-roast lamb and lots of wine.

**Theme**

XXX

**Start Date**

01 Apr 2016

**End Date**

30 Apr 2016

**TBC**

Yes

**Date Description**

April.

**Venue Name**

Throughout Greece

**Thoroughfare**

XXX

**Neighborhood**

XXX

**Locality**

Athens

**Sub Admin Area**

Athens

**Admin Area**

Attica

**Postcode**

XXX

**Country**

Greece

**Website**

XXX

**Frequency Period**

yearly

**Frequency Number**

1

**Cost**

Free.

**Importance**

Medium

**Apokries**

Each year, in the 3-week run up to Lent, Greeks celebrate *Apokries* (carnival). The biggest festivities, including parades with floats and masquerade (fancy dress) are in Patras and Xanthi. Although apokries is connected to the Orthodox Church calendar, it also has links to the Ancient Greek god of wine and ritual intoxication, Dionysus. Celebrations culminate on the weekend before *Kathari Devtera* (Ash Monday), which is a public holiday, after which a 40-day period of fasting runs until Easter.

**Theme**

XXX

**Start Date**

01 Feb 2012

**End Date**

31 Mar 2012

**TBC**

Yes

**Date Description**

Feb-Mar (depending when Easter falls)

**Venue Name**

Throughout Greece

**Thoroughfare**

XXX

**Neighborhood**

XXX

**Locality**

Athens

**Sub Admin Area**

Athens

**Admin Area**

Attica

**Postcode**

XXX

**Country**

Greece

**Website**

XXX

**Frequency Period**

XXX

**Frequency Number**

XXX

**Cost**

Free.

**Importance**

Medium

**Epidaurus Festival**

On Friday and Saturday evenings throughout the summer, classical Greek drama is played out at an equally classical Greek site - the Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus. Close to an extensive archaeological site, the well-preserved theatre was built in two stages in the fourth and second centuries BC. The plays are performed in Modern Greek.

**Theme**

XXX

**Start Date**

01 Jun 2012

**End Date**

31 Aug 2012

**TBC**

Yes

**Date Description**

Various evenings from June until August.

**Venue Name**

Epidaurus Ancient Theatre.

**Thoroughfare**

An extensive, major ancient Greek site; theatre at southern end of site

**Neighborhood**

XXX

**Locality**

Epidaurus near Nafplion

**Sub Admin Area**

XXX

**Admin Area**

XXX

**Postcode**

XXX

**Country**

Greece

**Website**

http://www.greekfestival.gr/en/

**Frequency Period**

XXX

**Frequency Number**

XXX

**Cost**

XXX

**Importance**

Low

**Acropolis Rally**

Staged annually since 1953, this is one of the most gruelling races on the World Rally Championship schedule. The course alters slightly each year, following the rough, twisty, rocky mountain roads outside Athens. It takes place over three days and attracts competitors from all over the world.

**Theme**

Sport

**Start Date**

01 Jun 2015

**End Date**

30 Jun 2015

**TBC**

Yes

**Date Description**

Mid-June

**Venue Name**

Athens and surrounding area

**Thoroughfare**

XXX

**Neighborhood**

XXX

**Locality**

Athens

**Sub Admin Area**

Athens

**Admin Area**

Attica

**Postcode**

XXX

**Country**

Greece

**Website**

http://www.acropolisrally.gr

**Frequency Period**

yearly

**Frequency Number**

1

**Cost**

Variable.

**Importance**

Medium

**Hellenic Festival**

Open-air theatre, opera, classical music and dance are staged at various sites in Athens, with the top venue being the 2nd-century BC Odeon of Herodes Atticus, carved into the rocks of the southern slope of the Acropolis. Line-ups have included the Sadler’s Wells dance company from London and the Bolshoi Opera from Moscow. In addition, ancient Greek dramas are staged at Epidaurus Ancient Theatre, a two-hour drive southwest of Athens.

**Theme**

Art & Literature

**Start Date**

01 Jun 2015

**End Date**

30 Sep 2015

**TBC**

Yes

**Date Description**

Jun-Sep.

**Venue Name**

Athens and Epidaurus

**Thoroughfare**

XXX

**Neighborhood**

XXX

**Locality**

Epidaurus

**Sub Admin Area**

Argolis

**Admin Area**

Peloponnesia

**Postcode**

XXX

**Country**

Greece

**Website**

www.greekfestival.gr

**Frequency Period**

yearly

**Frequency Number**

1

**Cost**

Variable.

**Importance**

Medium

**European Music Day**

Founded to celebrate the summer solstice (Jun 21), European Music Day sees free concerts at open-air venues in various cities throughout Europe. In Greece it has been extended to last five days. The main events take place in Athens, where past performers include the Scissor Sisters and Transglobal Underground. but there are also concerts in 33 other Greek towns, including Thessaloniki, Rhodes Town (Rhodes), and Hania and Heraklion (Crete).

**Theme**

Music

**Start Date**

01 Jun 2015

**End Date**

30 Jun 2015

**TBC**

Yes

**Date Description**

Mid-June.

**Venue Name**

Various towns throughout Greece.

**Thoroughfare**

XXX

**Neighborhood**

XXX

**Locality**

Athens

**Sub Admin Area**

Athens

**Admin Area**

Attica

**Postcode**

XXX

**Country**

Greece

**Website**

www.europeanmusicday.gr

**Frequency Period**

yearly

**Frequency Number**

1

**Cost**

Free.

**Importance**

Medium

**Rockwave Festival**

This annual three-day rock festival is staged over a long weekend at the Terra Vibe stadium near Malakassa (37 km north of Athens city centre). There are two main stages - line ups have included international names such The Stranglers, Gogol Bordello and The Prodigy.

**Theme**

Music

**Start Date**

01 Jan 2015

**End Date**

10 Jul 2015

**TBC**

Yes

**Date Description**

Early July.

**Venue Name**

Athens

**Thoroughfare**

XXX

**Neighborhood**

XXX

**Locality**

Athens

**Sub Admin Area**

Athens

**Admin Area**

Attica

**Postcode**

XXX

**Country**

Greece

**Website**

www.rockwavefestival.gr

**Frequency Period**

yearly

**Frequency Number**

1

**Cost**

Variable.

**Importance**

High

**Assumption Day**

Celebrating the Virgin Mary, this is the second biggest religious holiday after Easter throughout Greece. On the island of Tinos, thousands of pilgrims flock to Church of the Megalohari, home to an icon said to perform miracles. It is also the ‘name day’ for anyone called Maria, Panagiotis, Panagiota or Despina.

**Theme**

Religion

**Start Date**

15 Aug 2015

**End Date**

15 Aug 2015

**TBC**

Yes

**Date Description**

XXX

**Venue Name**

Throughout Greece.

**Thoroughfare**

XXX

**Neighborhood**

XXX

**Locality**

Athens

**Sub Admin Area**

Athens

**Admin Area**

Attica

**Postcode**

XXX

**Country**

Greece

**Website**

XXX

**Frequency Period**

yearly

**Frequency Number**

1

**Cost**

Free.

**Importance**

Medium

**August Full Moon**

In August, the night of the full moon sees various archaeological sites throughout the country staying open until 1:30am with free admission. Regular participants include the Acropolis in Athens, as well as places such as Ancient Olympia and Ancient Corinth on the Peloponnese, Delos archaeological site (on the tiny uninhabited island close to Mykonos), and Edessa archaeological site in the Greek region of Macedonia. Concerts are also scheduled at some venues.

**Theme**

XXX

**Start Date**

01 Aug 2015

**End Date**

31 Aug 2015

**TBC**

Yes

**Date Description**

Annual.

**Venue Name**

Throughout Greece.

**Thoroughfare**

XXX

**Neighborhood**

XXX

**Locality**

Athens

**Sub Admin Area**

Athens

**Admin Area**

Attica

**Postcode**

XXX

**Country**

Greece

**Website**

XXX

**Frequency Period**

yearly

**Frequency Number**

1

**Cost**

Free.

**Importance**

Low

**Thessaloniki International Film Festival**

Southeast Europe’s major film festival attracts new and emerging film makers from all over the Balkans and beyond. This 10-day event also features retrospectives and special screenings. Illustrious figures such as Francis Ford Coppola and Faye Dunaway have sat on the festival’s jury.

**Theme**

XXX

**Start Date**

04 Nov 2015

**End Date**

13 Nov 2015

**TBC**

Yes

**Date Description**

Mid-November.

**Venue Name**

Olympion Theatre, Thessalonika

**Thoroughfare**

XXX

**Neighborhood**

XXX

**Locality**

Thessalonika

**Sub Admin Area**

Thessalonika

**Admin Area**

Central Macedonia

**Postcode**

XXX

**Country**

Greece

**Website**

www.filmfestival.gr

**Frequency Period**

yearly

**Frequency Number**

1

**Cost**

Variable.

**Importance**

XXX

**Thessaloniki International Film Festival**

Southeast Europe’s major film festival attracts new and emerging film makers from all over the Balkans and beyond. This 10-day event also features retrospectives and special screenings. Illustrious figures such as Francis Ford Coppola and Faye Dunaway have sat on the festival’s jury.

**Theme**

Theatre & Film

**Start Date**

01 Nov 2015

**End Date**

30 Nov 2015

**TBC**

Yes

**Date Description**

Mid-November.

**Venue Name**

Olympion Theatre, Thessalonika

**Thoroughfare**

XXX

**Neighborhood**

XXX

**Locality**

Thessalonika

**Sub Admin Area**

Thessalonika

**Admin Area**

Central Macedonia

**Postcode**

XXX

**Country**

Greece

**Website**

http://www.filmfestival.gr

**Frequency Period**

yearly

**Frequency Number**

1

**Cost**

Variable.

**Importance**

High

**Food and Drink**

**Introduction**

Eating out is national pastime in Greece. For an informal snack, try an ouzeri, where you can join locals for small platters of savoury appetisers and a glass or two of aniseed-flavoured ouzo. Visit a *mezedopolio* to feast on a selection of tasty mezes (similar to Spanish tapas) which you might accompany with a flask of *rakija* (a potent spirit made from distilled grapes) or a carafe of *hima* (barrel wine).

For a more hearty meal, try a *taverna*, serving generous portions of traditional Greek favourites, often in a rustic (or pseudo-rustic) setting – the best ones have open log fires and stage occasionally live music. A *psarotaverna* is a taverna that specialises in fish and seafood. Last but not least, an *estiatorio* is a full blown restaurant, where service will be a little more formal and the menu will probably include a choice of both Greek and international cuisine, as well as quality bottled wines.

Greek food tends to be very simple, rarely involving sauces but with full use of local seasonal produce, olive oil and charcoal grills – just as people have been eating in outlying villages for many centuries. However, Athens and some of the more fashionable islands such as Santorini and Mykonos have seen the arrival of fusion cuisine and so-called modern taverna fare (involving lighter dishes with more subtle flavours and artistic presentation).

Restaurant hours are normally 1200-1500 for lunch and 2000-2400 for dinner. Opening hours vary according to the region and local laws – many establishments in popular holiday destinations stay open all day through the summer. Waiter service is usual.

Those with a sweet tooth should head for a *zaharoplasteio* (cake shop), where a vast array of syrup-drenched Turkish-inspired goodies such as baklava and slices of chocolate-coated cakes like Black Forest gateaux are displayed behind glass counters. You can choose pieces individually and then have them put in a box to take away – if it’s a gift they’ll tie it with a brightly coloured silk ribbon.

**Specialities**

• Dolmades (stuffed vine leaves).  
• *Gemista* (tomatoes, peppers and courgettes, stuffed with rice and oven-baked).  
• *Gigantes* (big butter beans baked in a rich tomato sauce with olive oil).  
• Moussaka (aubergine casserole with minced lamb, cinnamon, red wine and olive oil).   
• Calamari (deep-fried rings of squid) or htapodia (octopus).   
• Souvlaki (spit-roasted meat, generally pork or chicken).   
• Stifado (a rich beef stew with caramelised onions, cinnamon and cloves).  
• *Kokkinisto* (a rich stew of either beef, pork or chicken cooked with red wine and tomatoes).  
• *Horiatiki* (Greek salad: feta cheese, tomato, cucumber, green peppers, black Kalamata olives and fresh olive oil).

**Things To Know**

XXX

**Tipping**

12 to 15% is usual.

**Regional Drinks**

• *Krasi* (wine - *lefko* is white, *kokkino* is red).  
• Retsina (wine made with pine-needle resin).  
• Ouzo (an aniseed-based clear spirit to which water is added).  
• Raki (a sharp and fiery spirit made from distilled grapes).  
• *Metaxa* (a Greek spirit, similar to brandy).  
• Greek coffee (thick and strong, and sugared according to taste).  
• Frappe (frothy iced coffee made from Nescafe and drunk through a straw).

**Drinking Age**

16.

**History**

Greece is often referred to as the birthplace of European civilisation. The period from 700BC saw the rise of the great city states of Athens, Corinth and Sparta, frequently engaged in long struggles for supremacy, and uniting only when faced with the common threat of invasion by the Persian Empire. The zenith was reached in the fifth century BC when Athens became the cultural and artistic centre of the Mediterranean, producing magnificent works of architecture, sculpture, drama and literature – 2500 years later, you can still see the splendid Parthenon crowning the Acropolis rock in the city centre, the classical marble sculptures on display in the National Archaeological Museum, and even the ancient tragedies written by Euridipes and performed in the Odeon of Herodes Atticus during the Athens Summer Festival.

Athens lost her empire through a mutually destructive struggle with her arch rival Sparta. The nation was then forcibly united under Alexander the Great. After defeating the sagging military might of Persia in a number of major battles, the expansion of the empire spread Greek influence through the East as far as India and Egypt. The empire fragmented after Alexander's death in 323 BC, and the fall of Greek hegemony was completed when the country came under the sway of Rome. Under the Roman emperor Constantine, the empire gained a new capital in Constantinople, and Greece came under the control of the Eastern Empire when the empire divided. The Byzantines (who bequeathed Greece with its countless quaint little brick churches and religious icons featuring weary-eyed saints against golden backgrounds) were, however, unable effectively to defend the whole of their empire from invaders, and only occasionally did Greece enjoy the security of effective imperial rule. The major beneficiaries of this were the Venetians, who increased their influence in Greece and other parts of the empire.

Byzantium finally fell to the Turks in 1453, although the process of conquest was already well underway by the end of the 14th century. For the next 350 years, Greece was part of the Ottoman Empire. Although this is a period of their history that many Greeks despise, countless traces of Turkish influence can be seen in modern day Greek culture, such as the language, cuisine, music and dancing. Many attempts were made to shake off the yoke of the Ottomans, with the Orthodox Church playing a leading role in organised uprisings, as well as safe-guarding the Greek national identity, which to this day is closely related to religion.

After a bitter War of Independence from 1821, a free state was declared in 1829. In 1833, the so-called Great Powers (Britain, France and Russia) installed the unpopular King Otto (originally from Bavaria), and Greece became a monarchy, ruled by an imported (predominantly Danish) royal family, until 1973. The effective consolidation was a gradual process, the last territory to be handed back being the Dodecanese Islands in 1945.

After liberation from the Germans at end of WW2, Greece descended into civil war, with pro-Communists fighting the right-wing monarchists, until in 1949, Communism was outlawed and sympathisers either fled the country voluntarily, were sent into ‘exile’ on remote islands such as Ikaria, or were forced to renounce their beliefs. From 1967 to 1974, Greece endured the rule of the oppressive right-wing Colonels, also known as the junta. Since their fall Greek politics has been dominated by two main parties, the right-wing New Democracy Party (ND).

The EU has also been at the heart of Greek foreign policy and although Greece has occasionally found itself at odds with its partners on a number of important issues, it has derived important dividends from this approach. One of these has been a slow but steady improvement in relations with Turkey, which itself aspires to EU membership; despite common membership of NATO, bilateral relations between Turkey and Greece have historically been among the worst between any two European countries. The principal causes are historical, coupled with the continuing division of Cyprus and control of territorial waters in the Aegean Sea. But Greece has now explicitly backed Turkey's own EU application and the then Socialist prime minister, Georgos Papandreou, made further moves to improve relations.

Greece also keeps a wary eye on the Balkan states to its north. Independence for the Former Yugoslav Republic Of Macedonia (FYROM) was initially blocked by Greece before a complete settlement between the two countries was agreed in 1995. During the conflict in the former Yugoslavia (now Serbia and Montenegro), Greece was actively involved in finding a peaceful political settlement although it objected strongly to the 1999 NATO intervention in Kosovo against the Serbs. Instability in Albania is another irritant and Greece has come close to closing its border on several occasions to prevent mass illegal immigration.

Another constant irritant in relations with the UK and the US has been the 25-year assassination campaign by the far-left November-17 guerrilla organisation, which targeted prominent Greeks and foreign nationals. Many left-wing Greeks blame the US for the Greek Civil War that followed WW2, and for the period spent under the military junta, which was in part instigated by the Americans. By the end of 2002, cooperation between Greek and foreign agencies - which had previously been lacking - finally brought about the demise of November-17. For the Greek authorities, the elimination of the domestic terrorist threat was an essential precursor to the success of the 2004 Olympic Games.

Although Greece managed to pull off a tremendously successful 2004 Olympics, the country has since descended into recession. The gravity of the nation’s debt became apparent in early 2010, so that by spring Athens was reduced to requesting a massive bailout from the EU and the IMF. Since then the economic crisis has deepened, and after a crisis in confidence in Georgos Papandreou, Lukas Papademos became prime minister in 2011. It remains to be seen whether the country will remain in the Eurozone, or default and return to the drachma.

**Data**

**Calling Code**

+30

**Area**

131957

**Population**

10775557

**Population Density**

82

**Population Year**

2014

**General**

**Area**

131,957 sq km (50,949 sq miles).

**Population**

10.8 million (2014).

**Population Density**

81.7 per sq km.

**Capital**

Athens.

**Geography**

Greece is situated in southeast Europe, bordering Albania, Macedonia and Bulgaria to the north, Turkey to the east and the Mediterranean Sea to the south and west.

The mainland consists of the following regions: Central Greece, Peloponnese, Thessaly, Epirus, Macedonia (which, incidentally, borders the country of Macedonia) and Thrace. High mountains, fertile plains, pine forest and scrub-covered foothills are all found on the Greek mainland.

The largest mountain range is the Pindus, which runs north-south through central mainland Greece, and separates the regions of Thessaly and Epirus. The highest mountain is Olympus, which soars 2,917m (9,570ft) - according to Ancient Greek mythology, this is where the 12 Olympian Gods resided.

The islands account for one-fifth of the country's land area. The majority are thickly clustered in the Aegean between the Greek and Turkish coasts. The Ionian Islands are the exception; they are scattered along the west coast in the Ionian Sea, looking (both geographically and culturally) towards Italy.

The Aegean archipelago includes the Dodecanese, lying off the Turkish coast, of which Rhodes is the best known; the northeast Aegean group, including Chios, Ikaria, Lemnos, Lesvos and Samos; the Sporades, off the central mainland; and the Cyclades, comprising 39 islands (of which only 24 are inhabited). Crete, the largest island (with an astounding 1,000km/621miles of coastline and a population of some 650,000), is not included in any formal grouping.

**Government**

Republic.

**Head Of State**

President Prokopis Pavlopoulos since 2015.

**Head Of Government**

Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras since 2015.

**Electricity**

230 volts AC, 50Hz. European plugs with two round pins are used.

**Note**

XXX

**Travel Advice**

Last updated: 10 June 2015

The travel advice summary below is provided by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the UK. 'We' refers to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. For their full travel advice, visit [*www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice*](http://www.worldtravelguide.net/e/www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice).Major pre-planned strikes and demonstrations

Demonstrations take place regularly around major squares in central Athens, in particular Syntagma Square. The police have used tear gas to disperse demonstrators. You should follow local media and avoid large crowds and demonstrations. Road closures are common in Athens and are not always announced in advance. Demonstrations can be called at short notice, but there are certain dates on which demonstrations traditionally occur: 1 May, 17 November, and 6 December.Crime

Most visits to Greece are trouble-free, but theft of wallets and handbags are common on the metro and in crowded tourist places. Leave valuables in a safe place at your hotel or apartment. You should maintain at least the same level of personal security awareness as in the UK. There have been some racially motivated attacks, mostly in inner-city areas.

Personal attacks, including sexual assault and rape, are generally rare in Greece, although there have been incidents involving British nationals in some holiday resorts frequented by large numbers of youth tourists. In some cases the alleged attackers were also British nationals. In many cases excessive drinking by either the victim or the offender preceded the incident.

Alcohol and drugs can lead to you being less alert, less in control and less aware of your environment. Drinks served in bars overseas are often stronger than those in the UK.Local travel

Certain border areas are militarily sensitive. Although you can visit these areas, you should avoid taking photographs or video footage. You should also avoid approaching or taking photographs or video footage of military installations.Road travel

Take particular care when travelling by road. In 2012 there were 1,027 road deaths in Greece ([source: Department for Transport](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/359311/rrcgb-2013.pdf)). This equates to 9.1 road deaths per 100,000 of population, compared to the UK average of 2.8 road deaths per 100,000 of population in 2012.

Make sure any vehicle you hire is in good condition and check that you’re insured. Hire companies sometimes ask for your passport as a form of security. Don’t hand over your passport under any circumstances. Check the terms and conditions regarding any damage to the vehicle.

If you intend to hire a moped you will need a valid driving licence with at least category A1 - ‘light motorcycle’. Category P, which is valid in the UK for driving mopeds up to 50cc, is not valid in Greece.

By law you must wear a crash helmet on a scooter, moped or motorcycle. Quad bike riders must wear a full-face helmet (or non-full-face helmet plus goggles). Failure to wear a helmet might invalidate your travel insurance if you are involved in an accident.

See the [European Commission](http://ec.europa.eu/transport/road_safety/going_abroad/index_en.htm), [AA](http://www.theaa.com/motoring_advice/overseas/countrybycountry.html) and [RAC](http://www.rac.co.uk/travel/driving-abroad/countries/greece/) guides on driving in Greece.Swimming

Follow local advice if jellyfish are present.Political situation

Greece is a stable democracy and a member of the European Union. At present, the country is going through a severe economic crisis. The Greek government, with the support of the International Monetary Fund, the European Commission and the European Central Bank, is implementing an economic adjustment programme with a view to ensuring fiscal stability, economic recovery and Greece’s continued membership of the Eurozone.

**Passport Visa**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Passport Required** | **Return Ticket Required** | **Visa Required** |
| Other EU | 1 | No | No |
| USA | Yes | Yes | No |
| Canadian | Yes | Yes | No |
| Australian | Yes | Yes | No |
| British | Yes | No | No |

**Table Note**

XXX

**Passports**

A passport valid for three months beyond the length of stay and issued within the past 10 years is required by all nationals listed in the chart above except (**1**) EU nationals holding a passport or national ID card which is valid for the duration of stay.

If travelling from one border-free Schengen country to another however, EU nationals are not required to show a passport or national ID card. It is still recommended that you travel with your passport or ID card to prove your identity if necessary though. Note that Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Ireland, Romania and the UK are not part of the Schengen area, so a passport or ID card is required if travelling to/from these countries.

EU nationals are not required to possess a return ticket or show sufficient funds.

**Passport Note**

XXX

**Visas**

A visa is not required by all nationals referred to in the chart above for the following durations:

• Nationals of most EU countries for stays of up to 90 days (EU/EEA citizens may stay a further three months if seeking work).

• Nationals of Australia, Canada and the USA for stays of up to 90 days.

Nationals not referred to in the chart above are advised to contact the embassy to check visa requirements.

**Visa Note**

Greece refuses admission and transit to holders of travel documents issued by the area of Cyprus not controlled by the Government of Cyprus, and holders of UN laissez-passers.

**Types And Cost**

Transit/short-stay Schengen visa: €60 (£43.80).

**Validity**

Schengen visa: 90 days within a six-month period.

**Transit**

Australian, Canadian, US and EU passport holders do not require transit visas. Other nationals should check with the consulate.

**Application To**

In person at the consular section of their nearest Greek Embassy. In the UK, nationals requiring a visa can apply via the Greece Visa Application Centre ([www.vfsglobal.com/greece/unitedkingdom](http://www.vfsglobal.com/greece/unitedkingdom)); an additional service charge of £17.20 applies.

**Schengen Visas**

Greece is a signatory to the 1995 Schengen Agreement.

**Temporary Residence**

If you're an EU national and are staying more than 90 days, you have to apply in person to the Aliens Department office (in Athens) or at your nearest police station (in districts outside Athens) for a Registration Certificate (*Veveoisi Engrafis*), which is valid indefinitely. To obtain this, you need to show the passport you used when entering the country and provide a statement from your employer (if you're here for work), or a marriage or birth certificate (if you're here because of family ties).

If you're from the USA, you can apply for a temporary residence permit, valid from three to six months. These are issued by your local Aliens police office, but only if you can show evidence that you have a compelling reason to prolong your stay in Greece.

**Working Days**

Visa processing time is usually three to 14 days.

**Sufficient Funds**

Australian, Canadian, US and EU passport holders do not need to prove access to funds when entering Greece for tourism.

Schengen visa applicants do need to prove sufficient funds.

**Entry Documents**

XXX

**Extension Of Stay**

Schengen visa holders can only extend their visas in exceptional circumstances, such as *force majeure* or for humanitarian reasons.

**Entry With Children**

XXX

**Entry Restrictions**

Non-EU passport holders can stay within the Schengen zone for up to 90 days within a 180-day period. After their 90-day stay, they cannot return to these countries for at least another 90 days.

**Entry With Pets**

Pets travelling to Greece from other EU countries need a microchip for identification, an EU pet passport, and stamp to prove they have been vaccinated against rabies (within between four weeks and one year of date of entry into Greece). Pets arriving from outside the EU need a health certificate completed by a vet in either Greek or English.

**Healthcare**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **Special Precautions** |
| Yellow Fever | No\* |
| Typhoid | No |
| Tetanus | Yes |
| Rabies | No |
| Malaria | No |
| Hepatitis A | Sometimes |
| Diphtheria | No |

**Table Note**

\* A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required from all travellers over one year of age coming from infected areas.

**Healthcare**

Members of the European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland are entitled to free emergency medical treatment providing they have a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC).

Visitors from outside the EU are strongly advised to take out travel medical insurance before visiting Greece. Respective consulates and Athens-based embassies can help visitors find hospitals and doctors in Greece, should the need arise. Note that most Greek doctors speak basic English. If you plan to do any ‘extreme’ sports, such as scuba diving whilst on holiday, you should also look into extra insurance cover.

For minor problems, it may be sufficient to visit a pharmacy – pharmacists in Greece are highly qualified and can offer advice and medication for mild conditions.

Emergency care, in the case of accidents, is provided free of charge to all nationalities at public hospitals. However, be aware that there is a certain degree of corruption within the Greek healthcare system. Even in public hospitals, doctors often expect under-the-table payments from patients in return for priority treatment, and sometimes receive kickbacks for referring patients to private institutions. Public hospitals are frequently understaffed, so it is not unusual for family members to bring patients meals from home and sometimes even stay overnight to help with basic nursing care. Private hospitals usually require the proof of adequate insurance or cash before admitting foreign patients.

Note that the Greek health care system is heavily concentrated in Athens (and to a lesser extent Thessaloniki), so that people from the islands and rural areas usually have to visit to the capital to see consultants and receive treatment for more serious ailments.

For emergencies, ring 166 (public ambulance).

**Food And Drink**

Tap water is drinkable in Athens and other cities – in fact, in areas where the local water is good, bars and restaurants are obliged by law to provide customers with glasses or jugs of tap water free of charge upon request. So don’t be ashamed to ask. However, visitors should be wary of drinking tap water in remote areas, and on many islands – even if the locals do it. Bottled water is widely available and prices are strictly controlled on the mainland and islands. Milk is pasteurised and dairy products are safe for consumption. Local meat, poultry, seafood, fruit and vegetables are considered safe to eat.

**Other Risks**

Visitors to forested areas should consider getting the vaccination for tick-borne encephalitis three months before their date of travel. In summer 2011, there were reports of several cases of malaria in Greece, attributed to local transmission. However, the situation has not been deemed serious enough to warrant foreign visitors taking anti-malarials prior to their visit, as Greece is still considered extremely low-risk.

**Money**

**Currency Info**

Euro (EUR; symbol €) = 100 cents. Notes are in denominations of €500, 200, 100, 50, 20, 10 and 5. Coins are in denominations of €2, 1 and 50, 20, 10, 5, 2 and 1 cents.

**Credit Cards**

American Express, Diners Club, MasterCard, Visa and other major credit cards are widely accepted (although less so in petrol stations).

**ATM**

ATM’s are widely available in all cities and towns, on the mainland and the islands. They are generally reliable.

**Travellers Cheques**

All major currencies are widely accepted and can be exchanged easily at banks. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take traveller's cheques in Euros, Pounds Sterling or US Dollars.

**Banking Hours**

Mon-Thurs 0800-1430, Fri 0800-1400. Banks on the larger islands tend to stay open in the afternoon and some during the evening to offer currency exchange facilities during the tourist season.

**Currency Restrictions**

There are no restrictions on the import or export of local or foreign currency. However, amounts exceeding €10,000 or equivalent must be declared if travelling from or to a country outside the European Union.

**Currency Exchange**

Foreign currency can be exchanged at all banks, savings banks and bureaux de change. Exchange rates can fluctuate from one bank to another.

**Language**

**Language**

Greek (*Ellenika*) is the official language. Most people connected with tourism, and younger generations generally speak some English, French, German or Italian.

**Phrases**

Beer = Bira

Cheers! = Giamas

Closed = Klistó

Do you speak English? = Miláte anglika?

Doctor = Iatrós

Eight = Okhtó

Eighty = Ogdhónda

Entrance = Issodos

Exit = Exodos

Fifty = Penínda

Five = Pénde

Forty = Saránda

Four = Téseres /tésera

Friday = Paraskebí

Goodbye = Andío sas

Hello = Giásou

Hotel = Ksenodhohío

How are you? = Ti kánis / ti kánete?

How much does it cost? = Póso káni?

I'm very well = Kalá ímeh

I don't understand = Dhen katalavéno

I feel ill = Ímeh arostos

Menu = Kataloghos

Monday = Deftéra

My name is  = Meh léne

Nine = Enyá

Ninety = Enenínda

No = Óhi

One = Éna

One Hundred = Ekató

One Thousand = Hílies

Open = Aniktó

Please = Parakaló

Restaurant = Estiatorio/ taverna

Saturday = Sábato

Seven = Eftá

Seventy = Evdhomínda

Six = Éksi

Sixty = Eksínda

Sunday = Kiriakí

Ten = Dhéka

Thank you = Efharistó

Thirty = Triánda

Three = Trís/tria

Thursday = Pémpti

Today = Símera

Toilets = Toualétes

Tomorrow = Ávrio

Tuesday = Tríti

Twenty = Íkosi

Two = Dhío

Wednesday = Tetárti

Where is ? = Pou ine ?

Wine = Krasi

Yes = Néh

**Duty Free**

**Overview**

If you are travelling from within the EU, there is no limit on the amount or value of goods you may import, providing your goods are for personal consumption. Goods imported for commercial purposes are subject to duty and the following guideline amounts are in place to determine whether this is the case:

• 800 cigarettes or 200 cigars or 400 cigarillos or 1kg of tobacco.  
• 10L of spirits (over 22%), 20L of spirits (under 22%), 90L of wine and 110L of beer.

If you're arriving from a non-EU country, the following goods may be imported into Greece by travellers over 17 years of age:

• 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 100 cigarillos or 250g of tobacco (if arriving by air).  
• 40 cigarettes or 20 cigarillos or 10 cigars or 50g of tobacco (if arriving by other means).  
• 1L of spirits over 22% volume or 2L of spirits up to 22% volume.  
• 4L of wine.  
• 16 L of beer.  
• 50ml of perfume and 250ml of eau de cologne.  
• Gifts up to a value of €430 if arriving by sea or air or €300 if arriving by other means (reduced to €150 for children under 15).

**Banned Imports**

The import of soil (as well as plants) and certain animals is restricted. The import of meat, meat products, milk and milk products from outside the EU is also restricted. Firearms, explosive and drugs are very tightly controlled.

**Banned Exports**

The export of antiquities is prohibited without the express permission of the Archaeological Service in Athens; those who ignore this will be prosecuted.

**Important Addresses**

**Embassy of Greece in the UK**

**Thoroughfare**

1A Holland Park

**Neighborhood**

XXX

**Locality**

London

**Sub Admin Area**

XXX

**Admin Area**

XXX

**Postcode**

W11 3TP

**Country**

United Kingdom

**Telephone**

(020) 7229 3850 (visa section) or 09065 540 744 (24-hour visa information line)

**Website**

http://www.greekembassy.org.uk

**Opening Times**

Mon-Fri 0930-1300.

**Embassy of Greece in the USA**

**Thoroughfare**

2217 Massachusetts Avenue

**Neighborhood**

NW

**Locality**

Washington

**Sub Admin Area**

XXX

**Admin Area**

DC

**Postcode**

20008

**Country**

United States of America

**Telephone**

(202) 939 1300/6 (consular section).

**Website**

http://www.mfa.gr/washington

**Opening Times**

Opening hours: Mon and Thurs 0930-1300, 1400-1600; Tues, Wed and Fri 0930-1300.

**British Embassy in Greece**

**Thoroughfare**

1 Ploutarchou Street

**Neighborhood**

XXX

**Locality**

106 75 Athens

**Sub Admin Area**

XXX

**Admin Area**

XXX

**Postcode**

XXX

**Country**

Greece

**Telephone**

(210) 7272 600.

**Website**

http://www.ukingreece.fco.gov.uk

**Opening Times**

Mon-Fri, 0830-1300.

**Tourist Offices**

**Greek National Tourism Organisation (GNTO) in the UK**

**Thoroughfare**

4 Conduit Street

**Neighborhood**

XXX

**Locality**

London

**Sub Admin Area**

XXX

**Admin Area**

XXX

**Postcode**

W1S 2DJ

**Country**

United Kingdom

**Telephone**

(020) 7495 9300.

**Website**

http://www.visitgreece.gr

**Opening Times**

XXX

**Greek/Hellenic National Tourism Organisation (GNTO) in the USA**

**Thoroughfare**

305 East 47th Street

**Neighborhood**

XXX

**Locality**

New York

**Sub Admin Area**

XXX

**Admin Area**

NY

**Postcode**

10017

**Country**

United States of America

**Telephone**

(212) 421 5777.

**Website**

www.visitgreece.gr

**Opening Times**

Mon-Fri 1000-1600.

**Communications**

**Telephone**

The best way to call home is from a call centre or internet café – public telephones are scarce and those that exist tend be on noisy street corners.

**Mobile Phone**

Roaming agreements exist with most international mobile phone companies. Coverage is excellent on the mainland and islands, but occasionally disappears in more rural locations.

**Internet**

Wi-Fi is widely available in Greece and in most establishments it is free to customers. Internet cafes in the cities and on the main islands of Crete, Kos, Mykonos and Rhodes, also offer Internet access.

**Post**

All letters, postcards, newspapers and periodicals will automatically be sent by airmail. Airmail to the rest of Europe takes five days; six to North America; seven to Australia.

**Post Office Hours**

In Athens, the main post office on Syntagma Square is open Mon-Fri 0730-2000, Sat 0730-1400 and Sun 0900-1330. Most smaller offices work Mon-Fri 0730-1400 only.

**Media**

A free press operates in Greece, although material deemed offensive to the president or religious beliefs can lead to the prosecution of editors and publishers. It was only in the late 1980s that the virtual monopoly of state-run broadcasters came to an end, with the introduction of new commercial TV services. Peak-time TV schedules are dominated by news, domestically made variety programmes, comedies and game shows.   
  
The country hosts about 1,700 private radio and TV stations, many of which are unlicensed, since broadcasting in Greece is relatively unregulated by European standards. An attempt made in 2001 to regulate the FM dial in Athens resulted in a political row. There are numerous daily newspapers in Athens including *Eleftherotypia*, *Kathimerini* and *Ta Nea*; *Athens News* is published weekly in English. Foreign-language newspapers are available in all the main tourist destinations, though on the more remote islands they may be a day out of date.

**Press**

XXX

**Television**

XXX

**Radio**

XXX

**Where to stay**

**Hotels**

Hotels in Greece can vary greatly both among the islands and on the mainland, from luxury and chain hotels, to chic boutique hotels with personalised service, and those aimed at the package market complete with outdoor pools and meals all-inclusive. Booking for the high season (Jul-Aug) is essential. The highest concentrations of 4-star and 5-star hotels are to be found in Athens and on the islands of Santorini, Mykonos, Rhodes and Crete. Hotels are graded using the international star system, though visitors should note that standards are not always the same from one country to the next. Beware also that hotel rooms (and bathrooms) in Europe tend to be smaller than those in the US.   
  
**Grading:** Hotels are all officially classified as Luxury or rated on a scale from 1 to 5 star ratings. The category denotes what facilities must be offered and the price range that the hotelier is allowed to charge.

**Bed And Breakfast**

The equivalent of a B&B, a Greek pension offers basic accommodation with breakfast but no restaurant as such. They are usually family-run and purpose-built, and found mainly on the coast and islands, offering a cheaper alternative to a *xenodoheio* (hotel).

Likewise, a *xenona* is a guesthouse, set in an old traditional mansion or villa furnished with antiques and rugs. They are more atmospheric and found mainly in the mountains, and may have extras such as log fires in the bedrooms, and occasionally their own restaurants. They tend to be popular with wealthy Athenians during the winter weekends and over the Christmas and New Year holiday period.

**Camping**

There is a wide network of official campsites ([www.panhellenic-camping-union.gr](http://www.panhellenic-camping-union.gr)). Most offer facilities such as showers, toilets and a cafe, and some also have a small shop, a restaurant and sports facilities. Many of the best ones are on the islands, close to the sea. For details, contact the Greek National Tourism Organisation (see Important Addresses).

**Note:** Visitors are not permitted to camp anywhere other than on registered sites.

**Other**

**Rural farmstay accommodation:** Also known as agrotourism, this is an expanding market and has terrific potential in a country with a warm Mediterranean climate, dramatic landscapes and unspoilt nature. The region with the most developed agrotourism in Greece is the island of Crete. Guests stay in rooms or apartments on the farm – usually purpose-built from local materials such as stone and wood, and furnished in traditional style. It’s ideal for families with kids as there’s lots of fresh air and plenty to do. Most farms also offer fantastic food – local specialities prepared from their own seasonal produce, plus homemade wine.

**Self-catering:** Throughout Greece, but especially on the islands, families have invested in building new apartments, or restoring old villas or cottages, to rent to holiday makers. Standards vary but some properties are truly stunning and very luxurious – set in gardens with pools - whilst others are basic. The great advantage of having self-catering facilities is that you can cook and eat what and when you want – it also means that you’ll need to shop at nearby stores and markets, putting you more in tune with the local way of life.

**Youth Hostels:** Greece has only nine youth hostels recognised by the International Youth Hostel Federation ([www.hihostels.com](http://www.hihostels.com)): five in Athens, one in Kryoneri (close to Corinth on the Peloponnese), one in Corfu, one on Ios and two on Santorini. A number of youth hostels belong to the Greek Youth Hostels Association. Other youth hostels exist in Crete, the Cyclades and the Peloponnese. For further details, contact the Greek Youth Hostel Association.

**Culture**

**Religion**

98% Greek Orthodox, with Muslim, Roman Catholic and Jewish minorities.

**Social Conventions**

Greeks are very aware of their strong historical and cultural heritage. Traditions and customs differ throughout Greece, but overall a strong sense of unity prevails. The Greek Orthodox Church has a strong traditional influence on the Greek way of life, especially in more rural areas. The throwing back of the head is a negative gesture. Dress is generally casual. Smoking is prohibited on public transport and in public buildings.

**Weather**

**Best Time To Visit**

Greece has a warm Mediterranean climate. In summer, dry hot days are often relieved by stiff evening breezes, especially in the north, on the islands and in coastal areas. Athens can be stiflingly hot, with temperatures occasionally exceeding 40°C (104°F) in July. Winters are mild in the south but much colder in the mountainous north, where it is not uncommon to see snow and temperatures plummeting to well below zero. November to March is the rainy season, most notably on the Ionian islands.

If you are planning a beach holiday, the sea is warm enough to swim from June through September, and hardier types will also manage in May and October. Seaside hotels are generally open from Easter through to late-October, as are water sports facilities.

Spring and autumn are the ideal seasons for hiking and mountain biking, when the days are sunny but not unreasonably hot. Spring sees the Greek countryside dappled with wild flowers, while in autumn the trees take on russet hues.

Although few people think of Greece as a winter destination, it is in fact possible to ski and snowboard here. Two of the most popular mountain ski resorts are Arahova (near Delphi) and Kalavrita (on the Peloponnese), both much loved by wealthy Athenians, and therefore also well provided with cosy hotels and authentic rustic eateries with blazing log fires.

**Required Clothing**

Lightweight clothes (cotton is best) during summer months, including protection from the midday sun and sunglasses. Light sweaters are needed for evenings, especially on the islands. Waterproofs are advised for spring and autumn. Winter months can be quite cold, especially in the northern mainland, so normal winter wear will be required.