



## Stuttford Van Lines Country Guide for

# Greece



Country Guides: Courtesy of Overseas Moving Network International ( OMNI )

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## 1 CONTACT ADDRESSES

**Location:** Southeast Europe.

**Time:** GMT + 2 (GMT + 3 from last Sunday in March to last Sunday in October).

Embassy of Greece (Hellas) in the UK

**1A Holland Park, London W11 3TP, UK Tel:** (020) 7229 3850 or 7221 6467 (visa section) or 7313 5600 (visa helpline) or (09065) 540 744 (visa appointment booking line). Website: [www.greekembassy.org.uk](http://www.greekembassy.org.uk) Opening hours: Mon-Fri 0930-1300.

Greek/Hellenic National Tourism Organisation (GNTO) in the UK

**4 Conduit Street, London W1S 2DJ, UK Tel:** (020) 7495 9300. Website: [www.gnto.co.uk](http://www.gnto.co.uk) Also deals with enquiries regarding conferences and conventions.

Embassy of Greece (Hellas) in the USA

**2221 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20008, USA Tel:** (202) 939 1300 or 1318 (consular section). Website: [www.greekembassy.org](http://www.greekembassy.org)

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

**Olympic Tower, 645 Fifth Avenue, 9th Floor, Suite 903, New York, NY 10022, USA Tel:** (212) 421 5777. Website: [www.greektourism.com](http://www.greektourism.com) or [www.gnto.gr](http://www.gnto.gr)

## 2 OVERVIEW

'From Eurydice to the Euro'

Greece may be the home of Zeus and his fellow Olympians, but at first glance its bustling, traffic-ridden capital, Athens, is anything but divine. Yet here, as all over Greece, are reminders of the country's glory from Athens' Parthenon and Delphi's Temple of Apollo, to the ruins on Crete of the Minóan city of Knossós, a civilisation reaching even further back into history. Scattered throughout the calm blue waters of the Aegean are the islands, each with its own special story. Visit Zakynthos in the spring to see why it is 'the island of flowers', or the volcanic Santorini, where the blackness of the sand accentuates the brilliant whiteness of the villages. The serenity of islands like Skópelos contrasts with the hedonistic party islands such as Myknos and Páros where the worship of Dionysus the god of revelry continues to the beat of garage and house music. It is easy to forget that from this fertile land of mythology, olive groves and retsina, sprang political, philosophical and artistic ideas that shaped the whole course of western civilisation. Greece today offers the traveller the comforts of modern Europe in close proximity to the stark beauty of the ancient world.

Juliet Ferguson



### 3 GENERAL INFORMATION

**Area:** 131,957 sq km (50,949 sq miles).

**Population:** 11 million (UN estimate 2005).

**Population Density:** 83.4 per sq km.

**Capital:** Athens. Population: 750,000 (2004 estimate); Greater Athens 3.3 million (2004 estimate).

**GEOGRAPHY:** Greece is situated in southeast Europe on the Mediterranean. The mainland consists of the following regions: Central Greece, Peloponnese, Thessaly (east/central), Epirus (west), Macedonia (north/northwest) and Thrace (northwest). Euboea, the second-largest of the Greek islands, lying to the east of the central region, is also considered to be part of the mainland region. The Peloponnese peninsula is separated from the northern mainland by the Isthmus of Corinth. The northern mainland is dissected by high mountains (such as the Pindus) that extend southwards towards a landscape of fertile plains, pine-forested uplands and craggy, scrub-covered foothills. The islands account for one-fifth of the land area of the country. 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. The Aegean archipelago includes the Dodecanese, lying off the Turkish coast, of which Rhodes is the best known; the Northeast Aegean group, including Chios, Icaria, 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, is not included in any formal grouping. For fuller descriptions of these regions and islands, see Top Things To See/Do.

**Government:** Republic. Head of State: President Karolos Papoulias since May 2005. Head of Government: Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis since March 2004. Recent history: The Greek conservative New Democracy Party led by Costas Karamanlis took over the reins of government from the Pan Hellenic Socialist Movement (Pasok) in elections in early March 2004. Pasok had been in Government for over 10 years. Since he came to power, Mr Karamanlis has faced industrial action due to high unemployment and rising inflation as well as government plans for pension and labour reforms. He is also under pressure from the European authorities to cut the budget deficit which is in excess of the level permitted under the euro zone stability pact. 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 the continuing division of Cyprus (see Cyprus section) and control of territorial waters in the Aegean Sea.

**Language:** Greek (Ellenika). Most people connected with tourism and those of a younger generation will speak some English, French, German or Italian.

**Religion:** 98 per cent Greek Orthodox, with Muslim, Roman Catholic and Jewish minorities.

**Electricity:** 220 volts AC, 50Hz. Round two-pin plugs are used.

**Social Conventions:** Visitors to Greece will find the Greeks to be well aware of a 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.

Passport/Visa

	<i>Passport Required?</i>	<i>Visa Required?</i>	<i>Return Ticket Required?</i>
<b>British</b>	1	No	No
<b>Australian</b>	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Canadian</b>	Yes	No	Yes
<b>USA</b>	Yes	No	Yes
<b>OtherEU</b>	1	No	No
<b>Japanese</b>	Yes	No	Yes

**Note:** Greece is a signatory to the 1995 Schengen Agreement. For further details about passport/visa regulations within the Schengen area, see the introductory section, How to Use this Guide.

**Entry restrictions:** (a) Greece refuses admission and transit to holders of travel documents issued by Macedonia (Former Yugoslav Republic), unless accompanied by a special visa form; holders of Somalian passports issued or extended after 31 January 1991; Norwegian Fremmedpass or Reisbevis; Ethiopian emergency passports; holders of travel documents issued by the area of Cyprus not controlled by the Government of Cyprus; holders of UN laissez-passers; and holders of Turkish travel documents with visas or stamps indicating previous or planned visits to Cyprus. (b) Some nationals may have to register with the Aliens Department of the nearest police station within 48 hours of arrival. It is advised to contact the nearest Embassy/Consulate to determine whether this is necessary prior to travel.

**PASSPORTS:** Passport valid for at least three months beyond length of stay required by all except: (a) 1. EU/EEA nationals (EU + Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway) and Swiss nationals holding a valid national ID card. Note: EU and EEA nationals are only required to produce evidence of their EU/EEA nationality and identity in order to be admitted to any EU/EEA Member State. This evidence can take the form of a valid national passport or national identity card. Either is acceptable. Possession of a return ticket, any length of validity on their document, sufficient funds for the length of their proposed visit should not be imposed. (b) nationals of Monaco, holding a valid national ID card.

**VISAS:** Required by all except the following: (a) nationals of the countries referred to in the chart above for stays of up to 90 days; (b) nationals of Andorra, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Brunei, Bulgaria, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, El Salvador, Honduras, Hong Kong (SAR) (blue and red passport holders), Iceland, Israel, Korea (Rep), Liechtenstein, Macau (SAR), Malaysia, Mexico, Monaco, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Romania, San Marino, Singapore, Switzerland, Uruguay, Vatican City and Venezuela for stays of up to 90 days; (c) those continuing their journey to a third country within 48 hours, provided holding tickets with reserved seats and other documents for their onward journey, except: nationals of Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Congo (Dem Rep), Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey who always need a visa, even if transiting by the same aircraft.



**Types of visa and cost:** A uniform type of visa, the Schengen visa, is issued for tourist, business and private visits. There are three types of Schengen visa. Short-stay, Transit and Airport Transit: £25.50. Prices depend on exchange rates. Contact the Consulate/Consular section at Embassy for further details.

**Note:** Spouses and children of EU nationals (providing spouse's passport and the original marriage certificate, or child's original birth certificate (with certified translation into English, if applicable), are produced), and nationals of some other countries, receive their visas free of charge (enquire at Embassy for details). Minors under 18 years should be accompanied by both parents. Otherwise, a letter from both parents or legal guardians is needed, authorising the minor to travel and stay in Greece, appointing a person responsible for the minor during stay (authenticated by man of law or consular officer of applicant's nationality), parents' passports, birth certificate of the minor and proof of legal guardianship enclosed.

**Validity:** Depends on nationality.

**Application to:** Consulate (or Consular section at Embassy); see Passport/Visa Information. Travellers visiting just one Schengen country should apply to the Consulate of that country; travellers visiting more than one Schengen country should apply to the Consulate of the country chosen as the main destination or the country they will enter first (if they have no main destination).

**Application requirements:** (a) Passport or travel document valid for at least three months after expiry date of visa, with blank pages to affix visa, showing valid Residence Permit. (b) Completed application form (signed by legal guardian in case of minors). (c) Two recent passport-size photos. (d) Fee (payable in cash or postal order only). (e) Return or onward ticket (necessary for transit and airport transit visas, which also require a visa for onward country to be submitted, if applicable) or proof of booking/itinerary from travel agent. If visiting friends or relatives, a letter duly certified by a police station in Greece must be submitted. (f) Proof of sufficient funds to cover stay (bank statement or travellers cheques). (g) Proof of reason for visit; a letter of reference from employer detailing wages, and letter of invitation from Greek company for business trips; a letter from school for school trip. If self-employed, a letter from a solicitor or an accountant. (h) Original and photocopy of proof of travel insurance to cover intended stay in Greece. (i) Transport documentation, eg air ticket, confirmed ferry booking or, if driving, registration document, proof of legal ownership of vehicle and insurance certificate. (j) Those who claim visas in the UK and live more than 200 miles from London do not have to collect their visas in person at the London Embassy but may supply a Special Delivery self-addressed envelope instead.

**Note:** Applications can be made in person only. Appointments must be made through the automated booking service for those residing in the UK and in the vicinity of London (tel: (09065) 540 744). A limited number of visas are issued each day on a first-come, first-served basis. All documents must be submitted both in their original form and with photocopy.

**Working days required:** At least two weeks.

**Note:** Nationals from the following countries should allow several weeks from the date of appointment for the processing of their application: Afghanistan, Algeria, Armenia, Bahrain, Belarus, Burundi, China (PR), Colombia, Egypt, Georgia, Guinea, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Korea (Dem Rep), Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Oman, Palestinian Authority passport holders, Pakistan, The Philippines, Qatar, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia,



Somalia, Sudan, Surinam, Syrian Arab Republic, Taiwan (China), Ukraine, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

**Temporary residence:** Apply to the Aliens Department in Athens.

**Important note:** Persons arriving in and departing from Greece on a charter flight risk having the return portion of their ticket invalidated by the authorities if, at any time during their stay, they leave Greece and remain overnight or longer in another country.

**Passport/Visa Information:** Embassy of Greece (Hellas) in the UK1A Holland Park, London W11 3TP, UK Tel: (020) 7229 3850 or 7221 6467 (visa section) or 7313 5600 (visa helpline) or (09065) 540 744 (visa appointment booking line). Website: [www.greekembassy.org.uk](http://www.greekembassy.org.uk) Opening hours: Mon-Fri 0930-1300. Embassy of Greece (Hellas) in the USA 2221 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20008, USA Tel: (202) 939 1300 or 1318 (consular section). Website: [www.greekembassy.org](http://www.greekembassy.org)

## 4 MONEY

**Single European currency (Euro):** The Euro is now the official currency of 12 EU member states (including Greece). The first Euro coins and notes were introduced in January 2002; the Greek Drachma was in circulation until February 28 2002, when it was completely replaced by the Euro. Euro (€) = 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.

**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. Many UK banks offer differing exchange rates depending on the denominations of currency being bought or sold. Check with banks for details and current rates.

**Credit & debit cards:** American Express, Diners Club, MasterCard, Visa and other major credit cards are widely accepted (although less so in petrol stations), as well as Eurocheque cards. Check with your credit or debit card company for details of merchant acceptability and other services which may be available.

**Traveller's cheques:** All major currencies are widely accepted and can be exchanged easily at banks. Generally, banks in Greece charge a commission of 2 per cent with a minimum of €0.15 and a maximum of €13.21 on the encashment of traveller's cheques. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take traveller's cheques in Euros, Pounds Sterling or US Dollars.

**Currency restrictions:** There are no restrictions on the import or export of either local or foreign currency.

Exchange rate indicators

Date At time of publishing £1.00 = €1.46 \$1.00 = €0.82

**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. The GNT0 bureau in Athens can give full details.



## 5 DUTY FREE

**The following goods may be imported into Greece by visitors without incurring customs duty by:** (a) Passengers arriving from within the EU: 800 cigarettes or 200 cigars or 400 cigarillos or 1kg of tobacco; 10l of alcoholic beverage or 90l of wine and 110l of beer; there is no limit for perfume. (b) Passengers arriving from non-EU countries within Europe: 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 100 cigarillos or 250g of tobacco; 1l of alcoholic beverage over 22 per cent or 2l of alcohol beverages of 22 per cent or less and 2l of wine and liqueurs; 50g of perfume and 250ml of eau de cologne; gifts up to a value of €175 per person and €90 if under 15. (c) Passengers arriving from outside Europe: 400 cigarettes or 100 cigars or 200 cigarillos or 500g of tobacco; 1l of alcoholic beverage over 22 per cent or 2l of alcohol beverages of 22 per cent or less and 2l of wine and 2l of still table wine; 50g of perfume and 250ml of eau de cologne.

**Note:** The tobacco and alcohol allowances listed above are not available to passengers under the age of 18.

**Restricted items:** It is forbidden to bring in plants with soil. One windsurfboard per person may be imported/exported duty free, if registered in the passport on arrival. The export of antiquities is prohibited without the express permission of the Archaeological Service in Athens; those who ignore this will be prosecuted.

**Abolition of duty free goods within the EU:** On 30 June 1999, the sale of duty-free alcohol and tobacco at airports and at sea was abolished in all of the original 15 EU member states. Of the 10 new member states that joined the EU on 1 May 2004, these rules already apply to Cyprus and Malta. There are transitional rules in place for visitors returning to one of the original 15 EU countries from one of the other new EU countries. But for the original 15, plus Cyprus and Malta, there are now no limits imposed on importing tobacco and alcohol products from one EU country to another (with the exceptions of Denmark, Finland and Sweden, where limits are imposed). Travellers should note that they may be required to prove at customs that the goods purchased are for personal use only.

## 6 PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Below are listed Public Holidays for the January 2006-June 2007 period. Jan 1 2006 New Year's Day. Jan 6 Epiphany. Mar 6 Orthodox Shrove Monday. Mar 25 Independence Day. Apr 21 Orthodox Good Friday. Apr 24 Orthodox Easter Monday. May 1 Labour Day. Jun 12 Day of the Holy Spirit. Aug 15 Assumption. Oct 28 Ochi Day. Dec 25 Christmas Day. Dec 26 Boxing Day. Jan 1 2007 New Year's Day. Jan 6 Epiphany. Feb 19 Orthodox Shrove Monday. Mar 25 Independence Day. Apr 6 Orthodox Good Friday. Apr 9 Orthodox Easter Monday. May 1 Labour Day. May 28 Day of the Holy Spirit.

## 7 HEALTH

	Special Precautions	Certificate Required



<b>Yellow Fever</b>	No	1
<b>Cholera</b>	No	No
<b>Typhoid and Polio</b>	No	N/A
<b>Malaria</b>	No	N/A

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

**Food & drink:** Water quality varies from area to area, depending on the source, but in most regions is excellent. Bottled water is available and is advised for the first few weeks of the stay. 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 vaccination for tick-borne encephalitis.

**Health care:** European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland: If you or any of your dependants are suddenly taken ill or have an accident during a visit to an EEA country or Switzerland, free or reduced-cost necessary treatment is available in most cases on production of a valid European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). Each country has different rules about state medical provision. In some, treatment is free. In many countries you will have to pay part or all of the cost, and then claim a full or partial refund. The EHIC gives access to state-provided medical treatment only and the scheme gives no entitlement to medical repatriation costs, nor does it cover ongoing illnesses of a non-urgent nature, so comprehensive travel insurance is advised. Note that the EHIC replaces the Form E111, which will no longer be valid after 31 December 2005. Some restrictions apply, depending on your nationality. Local chemists can diagnose and supply a wide selection of drugs. There are often long waits for treatment at public hospitals. Hospital facilities on outlying islands are sometimes sparse, although many ambulances without adequate facilities have air-ambulance backup. For emergencies, ring 166 (public ambulance). Consultations and treatment with dentists and doctors are free. However, you will have to pay part of the cost of secondary examinations, such as X-rays. You will also have to pay for supplementary treatment, such as physiotherapy, and for dentures. For prescribed medicines, hand the prescription to any chemist in the IKA scheme - IKA offices will provide a list. You will have to pay a small standard charge, plus 25 per cent of the actual cost of the medicine, which is non-refundable. If you are charged in full, obtain a receipt and ask for the prescription back. Keep the self-adhesive labels from the medicines. If you obtain medicines or any kind of treatment privately, you must pay the full cost. Take the original receipts and your European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) to the IKA within one month, and they will reimburse you up to the limit allowed for similar treatment by the IKA. If you are staying in a remote part of the country or on a small island, there may be no IKA office or facilities within easy reach. In this case you must pay the full cost of private treatment and apply for a refund on return to the UK. If you are charged in full, you will need the original prescription and receipt. The self-adhesive labels from the medicines should be stuck on to the prescription - you will not get a refund without them. Hospital treatment: following an IKA doctor's diagnosis you must ask for a 'ticket', which is your approval of admittance to a hospital within the IKA scheme. If you go into the hospital before obtaining the 'ticket', show the administration your EHIC and ask them to contact the IKA. More information can be obtained from IKA (Social Insurance Institute), 8 Aghiou Constantinou Street, Athens.

Travel - International



**AIR:** The national airline is Olympic Airlines (OA) (website: [www.olympic-airways.com](http://www.olympic-airways.com)). British Airways makes scheduled flights to Greece. Delta Airlines operates flights four times a week from New York to Athens.

**Approximate flight times:** From Athens to London is five hours; from Rhodes is five hours 15 minutes; from Corfu is four hours; from Heraklion is eight hours; and from Skiathos is six hours (all flight times include a stopover). From Athens to Los Angeles is 15 hours; to New York is 13 hours; to Singapore is 13 hours; to Sydney is 24 hours 30 minutes.

**Main airports:** Athens (ATH) (Eleftherios Venizelos) (website: [www.aia.gr](http://www.aia.gr)) is located 33km (23 miles) northeast of the city. To/from the airport: There is a six-lane motorway linking the city and the airport, and regular airport buses running 24 hours from the centre and the port of Piraeus. Facilities: Duty free shops, car hire, banks, cash machines, bureaux de change, bar and restaurant facilities, post office, business centre and hotel. Thessaloniki (SKG) (Macedonia) is 16km (10 miles) from the city. To/from the airport: Regular coach and taxi services are available. Facilities: Duty free shops, restaurants, bars, banks/bureaux de change, car hire and a post office. Corfu (CFU) (Kerkira) is 3km (2 miles) from the city. To/from the airport: Regular coach, taxi and local bus services are available. Facilities: Duty free shop, cafe, bar and car hire. Rhodes (RHO) (Paradisi) is 16km (10 miles) from the city. To/from the airport: Coach, taxi and local bus services are available. Facilities: Duty free shop, car hire, bank, bureau de change, cafe and bar. There are also international airports at Chania (CHQ), Heraklion (Crete) (HER), Kalamata (KLX), Karpathos (AOK), Kavala (KVA), Kefalonia (EFL), Kos (KGS), Lesbos (Mytilini) (MJT), Mykonos (JMK), Preveza (Lefkos) (PVK), Samos (SMI), Skiathos (JSI), Thessaloniki (SKG), Thira (Santorini) (JTR) and Zakynthos (ZTH), most of which serve predominantly summer traffic.

**Departure tax:** €12 (when arriving at Athens airport an additional €11.20 is payable).

**SEA:** Main ports: Corfu, Heraklion, Igoumenitsa, Patras, Piraeus (Athens), Rhodes, Thessaloniki and Volos. Shipping and ferryboat lines link these ports with Italy, Croatia, Cyprus, Russia and Turkey. Greek ports are used by a number of cruise lines including Celebrity Cruises, Costa Cruises, Crystal Cruises, Festival Cruises, Holland America Line, Princess Cruises, Silversea and Swan Hellenic. The Greek/Hellenic National Tourism Organisation can give full details (see Top Things To Do). A car ferry links the Italian ports of Brindisi, Venice, Trieste and Ancona with Igoumenitsa and Piraeus. There are also services from Corfu to Ancora, Bari, Brindisi and Trieste; and from Rhodes to Marmaris (Turkey). During the summer months there are services from Ithaca and from Cephalonia to Brindisi.

**RAIL:** The national railway company is Hellenic Railways Organisation Ltd (OSE) (website: [www.osenet.gr](http://www.osenet.gr)). 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. Eurostar is a service provided by the railways of Belgium, the UK and France, operating direct high-speed trains from London (Waterloo International) to Paris (Gare du Nord) and to Brussels (Midi/Zuid). It takes two hours 40 minutes from London to Paris (via Lille) and two hours 20 minutes to Brussels. For further information and reservations, contact Eurostar (tel: (0870) 600 0792 (travel agents) or (08705) 186 186 (public; within the UK) or +44 (1233) 617 575 (public; outside the UK); a £5 booking fee applies to all telephone bookings; website: [www.eurostar.com](http://www.eurostar.com)); or Rail Europe (tel: (08705) 848 848; website: [www.raileurope.co.uk](http://www.raileurope.co.uk)). Rail passes: The Inter-Rail pass offers unlimited second-class train travel in up to 29 countries (includes Morocco and Turkey) split into eight zones (A-H). Three different tickets are available: a ticket covering one zone (two to six countries, 16 days' validity), a ticket covering two zones (six to ten countries, 22 days' validity) and an All Zone Pass (29 countries, one month's validity).



Ferry services between Italy and Greece are included. Passengers must be resident in Europe for at least six months before the pass is used. Travel is not allowed in the passenger's country of residence. Travellers under 26 years receive a reduction of about 30 per cent. Children's tickets are reduced by about 50 per cent. Supplements are required for some high speed services, seat reservations and couchettes. Discounts are offered on Eurostar and some ferry routes. Available from Inter Rail (website: [www.interrailnet.com](http://www.interrailnet.com)). The Eurailpass offers unlimited first-class train travel in 17 European countries. Tickets are valid for 15 days, 21 days, one month, two months or three months. The Eurailpass Saver ticket offers discounts for two or more people travelling together. The Eurailpass Youth ticket is available to those aged under 26 and offers unlimited second-class train travel. The Eurailpass Flexi allows either 10 or 15 travel days within a two month period. The Eurail Selectpass is valid in three, four or five bordering countries and allows five, six, eight or 10 travel days (or 15 for five countries) in a two-month period. The Eurail Regional Pass allows four to 10 travel days in a two-month period in one of nine regions (usually two or more countries). Children receive a 50 per cent reduction. The passes cannot be sold to residents of Europe, Turkey, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, or the Russian Federation. Available from The Eurail Group (website: [www.eurail.com](http://www.eurail.com)).

**ROAD:** It is possible to ferry cars and caravans across to one of the major ports of entry or to enter overland. Points of overland entry are from the Macedonia (Former Yugoslav Republic of) via Evzoni, and Niki; from Bulgaria via Promahonas or Kastanies and Kipi. From Serbia and Montenegro, the route is via Italy (Trieste), Austria (Graz) and Belgrade. The journey from northern France to Athens is over 3200km (2000 miles). For car ferry information, see details under Sea above. Bus: There are routes from Athens via Thessaloniki to Dortmund, Istanbul, Paris and Sofia. Information and bookings are available from terminals in Athens at 6 Sina Street (tel: (210) 362 4402; 1 Karoulou Street (tel: (210) 529 7777) and 17 Filellinon Street (tel: (210) 323 6747); also at Thessaloniki rail station.

#### Travel - Internal

**AIR:** Olympic Airlines flies from Athens to Alexandroupolis, Astypalaia, Chania (Crete), Chios, Heraklion, Icaria, Ioannina, Karpathos, Kassos, Kastellorizo, Kastoria, Kavala, Kefaloniá, Kerkira (Corfu), Kithira, Kos, Kozani, Lemnos, Leros, Milos, Mykonos, Mytilini, Paros, Preveza, Rhodes, Samos, Sitia, Skiathos, Skiros, Thessaloniki, Thira (Santorini) and Zakinthos. There are also routes from Rhodes. Aegean Airlines (website: [www.aegeanair.com](http://www.aegeanair.com)) flies from Athens to Alexandroupolis, Chios, Heraklion, Ioannina, Kavala, Kerkira (Corfu), Kos, Mykonos, Mytilini, Rhodes, Santorini (Thira) and Thessaloniki. Private charter flights are also available.

**Departure tax:** &#8364;12.

**SEA:** It is both cheap and easy to travel around the islands. There are ferry services on many routes, with sailings most frequent during the summer. The main ports are Attica, Piraeus and Rafina, although there are regular sailings 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. In major ports the larger lines have offices in the city centre. There are two classes of ticket (First Class and Economy Class) which offer varying degrees of comfort; couchette 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: There are regular sailings to the following ports: Dodecanese: Astypalaia, Chalki, Kalymnos, Karpathos, Kassos, Kastellorizo, Kos, Leros, Lipsi, Nissiros, Patmos, Rhodes, Symi and Tilos. Cyclades: Aegiali and Katapola (both on Amorgos), Anafi, Donoussa, Folegandros, Heraklia, Ios, Kimolos, Koufonissia, Kythnos, Milos, Mykonos, Naxos, Paros, Santorini, Schinoussa, Serifos,



Sifnos, Sikinos, Siros and Tinos. Peloponnese: Gytheion, Hermioni, Kithira, Methana, Monemvassia and Porto Heli. Saronic Gulf Islands: Aegina, Hydra, Poros and Spetses. Crete: Agios Nikolaos, Chania, Heraklion, Kastelli, Rethymnon and Sitia. Samos: Karlovassi and Vathi. North Eastern Aegean Islands: Agios Kirykos (Ikaria), Chios, Evdilos (Ikaria), Limnos, Mitilini (Lesvos) and Psara. Northern Greece: Kavala and Thessaloniki. Check sailing times either with individual lines, the Greek/Hellenic National Tourist Organisation, or in Piraeus upon arrival in Greece. Routes from Rafina: There are local services from Rafina (near Athens) to: Agios Efstratios, Amorgos, Andros, Chalkida (summer only), Chios, Donoussa, Heraklia, Karistos (Evia), Kavala, Koufonissi, Kythnos, Limnos, Marmari (Evia), Milos, Mykonos, Naxos, Schinoussa, Serifos, Sifnos, Syros, Thessaloniki and Tinos. Other routes: These include Agia MarinaNea Styra; PeramaSalamis; RioAntirio; AedipsosArkitsa; Eretria Oropos; GlifaAgiokambos; PatrasIthaca; PatrasKefalonia (Sami); PatrasCorfu; PatrasPaxi; PrevezaAktion; IgoumenitsaCorfu; CorfuPaxi; KylliniZante; Kyllini Cephalonia (Poros); KavalaThassos (Limenas); Kavala Thassos (Prinos); KeramotiThassos; Alexandroupolis Samothrace and Limnos. Hydrofoil: A hydrofoil service (also called the Flying Dolphins) 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. There are also fast hydrofoil services from Agios, Gytheion, Kimi (Evia), Konstandinos, Lavrion, Thessaloniki, Volos and Zea Marina (Piraeus). For further information on various ferry and hydrofoil timetables, visit [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/Hellenic National Tourism Organisation (see Top Things To Do) has a full list of companies running this type of holiday.

**RAIL:** The two main railway stations in Athens are Larissa (with trains to northern Greece, Evia and Europe) and Peloponnissos (with trains to the Peloponnese). Train information and tickets are available from the Hellenic Railways Organisation (OSE) in Athens (tel: (210) 529 7633 or 1110 or 1440 (customer services and recorded train departure timetable, in Greece only) or in Thessaloniki (tel: (310) 599 143; website: [www.ose.gr](http://www.ose.gr)). Travelling north, there are regular daily trains from Athens to Thessaloniki, Livadia, Paleofarsala, Larissa, Plati, Edessa, Florina, Seres, Drama, Komotini and Alexandroupolis (connections from Thessaloniki and Larissa). Travelling south, there are regular daily trains from Athens to Kiato, Xylokastra, Diakofto, Patras, Olympia, Argos, Tripoli, Megalopolis and Kalamata.

**Rail passes:** The EuroDomino pass enables holders anything from three to eight days' extensive travel within a one-month period on the entire rail network of their chosen country. It is valid in 28 European countries and North Africa, including the ferry service from Brindisi (Italy) to Igoumenitsa (Greece). To purchase a EuroDomino pass you must have been a resident in Europe for at least six months and a passport number is required at time of booking. It is not permitted to purchase a pass for travel within your own country of residence. To qualify for the youth rates, you must be under 26 years on the first date of validity of the pass. Children aged four-eleven years inclusive pay half the adult fares rounded up to the nearest pound. Children under four years travel for free. Seat reservations, couchette and sleeper charges are not included in the cost of the pass and are payable at the normal rate. Passholder fares are payable on some services. Reservation/supplement charges are payable on all trains within Spain. Available from Rail Europe (website: [www.raileurope.co.uk/railpasses/eurodomino.htm](http://www.raileurope.co.uk/railpasses/eurodomino.htm)). Vergina Flexipass offers unlimited rail travel in Greece for three, five or 10 days within one or two months in either first or second class, depending on the choice of ticket. Greek Flexipass offers unlimited rail travel in Greece for three or five days within one month in first class. Students may be entitled to a 25 per cent reduction in the price of domestic rail fares. For further information on the above schemes, contact the Hellenic Railways Organisation (OSE).



**ROAD:** Greece has a good road network on the whole, totalling approximately 117,000km (73,000 miles), mostly paved. Traffic drives on the right. Examples of some distances from Athens: to Thessaloniki, 512km (319 miles); to Corinth, 80km (50 miles); to Igoumenitsa, 560km (350 miles); and to Delphi, 165km (103 miles). Bus: Buses link Athens and all main towns in Attica, northern Greece and the Peloponnese. Service on the islands depends on demand, and timetables should be checked carefully. Some islands do not allow any kind of motorised transport, in which case islanders use boats, or donkeys and carts to travel around. Fares are low. The Greek/Hellenic Railways Organisation Ltd (OSE) runs bus services to northern Greece from the Karolou Street terminus and to the Peloponnese from the Sina Street station. Bus information: There are two long-distance bus terminals in Athens: Terminal A and Terminal B. For information on long-distance buses, run by KTEL, from Athens to the provinces, enquire at Terminal A, 100 Kifissou Street, Athens (tel: (210) 512 4910) or Terminal B, 260 Liossion Street, Athens. Further information can be obtained from KTEL offices (website: [www.ktel.org](http://www.ktel.org)). Taxi: Rates are per km and are very reasonable, with extra charge for fares to/from stations, ports and airports. Taxis run on two tariffs: tariff 1 is the day rate from 0500 to 2400; tariff 2 is the night rate from 2400 to 0500. Car hire: Most car hire firms operate throughout Greece. For details, contact the Greek/Hellenic National Tourism Organisation (see Top Things To Do). Reservations can be made by writing or telephoning the car hire agency direct. 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 (60mph) outside built-up areas and 50kph (30mph) in built-up areas. There are slightly different speed limits for motorbikes. It is illegal to carry spare petrol in the vehicle. EU nationals may import a foreign-registered car, caravan, motorcycle, boat or trailer for a maximum of six months. This period may be extended to 15 months for a fee and further paperwork. Documentation: A national driving licence is acceptable for EU nationals. EU nationals taking their own cars to Greece are advised to obtain a Green Card, to top up the insurance cover to that provided by the car owner's domestic policy. It is no longer a legal requirement for visits of less than three months, but without it insurance cover is limited to the minimum legal cover in Greece. The car registration documents have to be carried at all times. Nationals of non-EU countries may need an International Driving Permit and should contact ELPA (Automobile and Touring Club of Greece). Road assistance: A breakdown service is available on main roads, conditions of which have vastly improved. For details, contact ELPA, Athens Tower, Messogion 2-4, 115 27 Athens (tel: (210) 779 1615; website: [www.elpa.gr](http://www.elpa.gr)). Emergency breakdown services can be contacted toll-free by dialing 104. There are good repair shops in big towns and petrol is easily obtainable.

**URBAN:** Buses: There are several services around Athens and Attica. The terminal at Mauromateon Street, Areos Park, Athens has regular services to Amfiaraio, Marathonas, Nea Makri, Porto Rafti, Ramnous and Sounio. Trolley buses (ILPAP) and regular buses (ETHEL) have frequent links to tourist attractions and places of interest. Tickets for buses and trolley buses can be purchased from the Athens Urban Transport Organisation (OASA) at various booths and kiosks situated around the city. For further information contact OASA at 15 Metsovou Street, 106 82 Athens (tel: (210) 883 6076; website: [www.oasa.gr](http://www.oasa.gr)). Metro: Athens has a reliable underground system (ISAP) that consists of three major lines. The old line runs northsouth between Athens (suburb of Kifissia) and Piraeus daily 0500-0015. There are two other lines: Line 2 runs between Aghios Antonios and Aghios Dimitrios and line 3 runs between Monastiraki and the airport. Tickets can be purchased at every Metro and ISAP station. Information on timetables and schedules can be found from Athens Metro (website: [www.ametro.gr](http://www.ametro.gr)) or OASA (see address details above). Tram: 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 all the way to the most southern point of Glyfada. Tickets can be booked at all stations and trams connect with the Metro at Neos Kosmos and Neo Faliro (website: [www.tramsa.gr](http://www.tramsa.gr)).



**TRAVEL TIMES:** The following chart gives approximate travel times (in hours and minutes) from Athens to other major cities/islands in Greece. AirRoadSeaCorfu0.5011.00\*-Crete0.50-6-12.00Rhodes0.55-14.00Thessaloniki0.508.0014.00Note: \*The travel time by road to Corfu includes a sea crossing from Patras.

## 8 ACCOMMODATION

**HOTELS:** The range of hotels can vary greatly both among the islands and on the mainland, from high class on larger islands and the mainland to small seasonal chalets. Booking for the high season is essential. Xenia hotels are owned and often run by the Greek/Hellenic National Tourism Organisation. Small family hotels are a friendly alternative to the hotel chains. Hotel reservations can be made by writing directly to the hotels, through a travel agent, or by contacting the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels (at least one month beforehand). 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.

**SELF-CATERING:** Furnished rooms in private houses, service flats, apartments and villas are available. On most of the Greek islands, rooms in private homes are an extremely popular form of accommodation and can usually be arranged on the spot. All types of accommodation can be arranged through tour operators in this country. The Greek/Hellenic National Tourism Organisation can provide further information on request.

**TRADITIONAL SETTLEMENTS:** Known also as paradosiakoi oikismoι in Greek, these traditional hostels can be found throughout the country, notably in Areopolis (Mani), Gythion (Peloponnese), Ia (Santorini), Koriskades (Central Greece), Makrinitza (Pelion), Mesta (Chios), Milies (Pelion), Monemvasia (Peloponnese), Papingo (Epirus), Psara Island, Vathia (Mani), and Vizitsa (Pelion). This type of accommodation normally offers single, double or triple bedrooms with shower, or a four-bed house.

**CAMPING/CARAVANNING:** There is a wide network of official campsites (website: [www.panhellenic-camping-union.gr](http://www.panhellenic-camping-union.gr)). For details, contact the Greek/Hellenic National Tourism Organisation (see Top Things To Do). Note: It is not permitted to camp anywhere except registered sites.

**YOUTH HOSTELS:** Greece has only six youth hostels recognised by the International Youth Hostel Federation: four in Athens, one in Corfu and one in Santorini. The original Athens hostel is on 16 Victor Hugo Street, 104 38 Athens (tel (210) 523 2540; website: [www.interland.gr/athenshostel](http://www.interland.gr/athenshostel)). 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.

**ACCOMMODATION INFORMATION:** Greek Youth Hostel Association 75 Damareos Street, Athens, Greece Tel: (210) 751 9530.E-Mail: [y-hostels@otenet.gr](mailto:y-hostels@otenet.gr) or [skokin@hol.gr](mailto:skokin@hol.gr) Hellenic Chamber of Hotels24 Stadiou Street, 105 64 Athens, Greece Tel: (210) 331 0022.Website: [www.grhotels.gr](http://www.grhotels.gr)

Introduction



For the purposes of clarity, information on Resorts & Excursions within Greece has been divided into mainland Greece, in the first part of the section (with five regional sections plus Athens), and the Greek islands, in the latter part of the section (with six island groups plus Crete). These do **not necessarily reflect administrative boundaries.** **Note:** (a) Following an initiative by the Greek government, opening hours and fees for major museums and archaeological sites are now uniform throughout the country. Archaeological sites with adjoining museums charge a single admission fee, allowing entry to both at no extra cost. Visitors have access to these attractions Tues-Sun 0830-1500. (b) Tourist police in the main tourist destinations are trained to assist visitors with accommodation, maps, timetables, details of places to visit and special events. All wear flag badges denoting which language(s) they speak. English and German are fairly common. Do not hesitate to ask them for help.

## Athens

Capital of Greece and the country's largest city, Athens is dominated by the flat-topped hill of the Acropolis, site of the 2400-year-old Parthenon, one of the most famous classical monuments in the world. Close by lie the Theatre of Dionysus and the restored Odeon of Herodes Atticus, a superb theatre in which open-air performances of the International Athens Festival are held from June to September. The ruins of the civic, political and commercial centre of the Ancient Agora can be visited, as can the reconstructed Hellenistic Stoa of Attalos, which houses the Agora Museum. Most artefacts are displayed in the National Archaeological Museum on Patission Street. The old quarter of the town, Plaka, which spreads around the Acropolis, is picturesque with its famed flea market, small tavernas, craft shops and narrow winding alleys. The excavations of the Library of Hadrian can be observed from Pandrossou Street. The centre of modern Athens, most notably the chic area of Kolonaki, has many designer boutiques, smart restaurants and international-class hotels. The city has a thriving nightlife, with most bars and clubs staying open until at least 0300.

**PIRAEUS:** Lying at the innermost point of the Saronic Gulf just outside Athens, and connected to the centre by metro, Piraeus is the city's main port. From here, ferries leave regularly for the Islands (see the information on the Greek Islands).

## Central Greece with Euboea

The area surrounding Athens, known as Attica, is characterised by calm beaches, and the pinewoods and thyme-covered slopes of Mount Parnes, Hymettus and Pentelico. As one travels northwest, towards the interior, the landscape combines fertile plains planted with tobacco and cotton, and rugged mountains with unspoilt villages and winter ski resorts.

**CAPE SOUNIO:** 69km (43 miles) east of Athens, crowning Cape Sounio is a towering promontory which dominates the landscape for miles around. Here stand the superb ruins of the Temple of Poseidon, built in the fourth century BC, commanding spectacular views over the sea and islands. The Apollo Coast, a highly developed tourist area stretching from Piraeus to Cape Sounio, is dotted with exclusive resorts such as Glifada (17km/11 miles from Athens) and Vouliagmeni (24km/15 miles from Athens), offering marinas, well-kept beaches, modern hotel complexes, seafood tavernas and luxury-class restaurants and nightclubs. North of Cape Sounio lies Rafina, Athens' second port, with ferry connections to Euboea and some of the Greek Islands.

**OSSIOS LOUKAS:** Northwest of Athens, close to the town of Livadia, stands the magnificent monastery of Ossios Loukas. Within the monastery complex one can visit the 11th-century Church of St Luke, noted for its marvellous Byzantine mosaics, and the 13th-century Church of the Virgin, built by Cistercian monks who occupied the monastery during the Middle Ages.



Livadia, built into the foothills of Mount Helikon, was famous in ancient times for the Oracle of Trophonios Zeus, the Springs of Forgetfulness (Lethe) and Memory (Mnemosyne) to the north of the town.

**DELPHI:** Lying 176km (109 miles) northwest of Athens, Delphi can be reached by road via Livadia and Arahova. This is the site of the famous Oracle, where rulers of ancient Greece came for many centuries for political and moral guidance. The complex of treasury buildings, plinths and the foundations for the fourth-century BC Temple of Apollo are set on the steep rocky hillside, overlooking olive groves and the Sanctuary of Athena, known as the Marmaria (marbles). A steep uphill climb from the Temple brings one to the theatre, offering stunning views over the entire site, and further uphill still lies the ancient stadium. The Delphi Museum contains a superb collection of finds from the site. Many visitors to Delphi stay overnight in nearby Arahova, a pretty hillside town renowned for its cheese, formaela. Alternatively, a short distance southwest of Delphi, on the northern coast of the Gulf of Corinthia, lie the seaside towns of Itea and Galaxidi, offering hotels, restaurants and beaches. A regular bus connects Athens and Itea, passing through Arahova and Delphi enroute.

**MOUNT PARNASSUS:** Close to Arahova, on the main road from Athens to Delphi, lie the southern slopes of Mount Parnassus, which towers 2457m (8061ft) over the Gulf of Corinth. Through winter (December to April) the mountain hosts a number of well-equipped ski resorts, and the area is popular with hikers during spring and autumn.

**EUBOEIA:** The island of Euboea is the second-largest in Greece after Crete. A major bridge (road and rail) spans the narrow Evripos Strait that separates the island from the mainland, to arrive in the main town, Halkida, a well-developed tourist resort. Euboea is an island of great natural beauty and scenic variety, with sandy beaches and secluded coves, wooded mountainsides ideal for climbing, and many peaceful and unspoilt villages. Regular train and bus services run between Halkida and Athens, and there is a ferry from Rafina.

### The Peloponnese

Lying to the south of the country, the Peloponnese, rich in history and diverse landscapes, is joined to Central Greece by a massive road and rail bridge spanning the Canal of Corinth.

**NAFPLIO:** An ideal base for exploring the ancient sites of the northeast Peloponnese, from 1824 to 1834, Nafplio was the capital of the newly formed state of Greece, before this role was passed to Athens. Considered by many as one of the country's loveliest towns, the historic centre is made up of narrow winding streets with Neo-classical and Ottoman-style buildings. Seafood restaurants line the seafront, looking out to the tiny fortified island of Bourdzi. High above the town stands Palamidi, a Venetian fortress. Close by lies the beautiful Karathona Bay, with a wide sand beach, backed by eucalyptus trees. Just north of Nafplio stands Tiryns (Tirinta), the ruins of an ancient fortress made up of massive limestone blocks, dating back to the 13th century BC.

**MYCENAE:** North of Nafplio lies the ancient fortified city of Mycenae. The fortress is entered through the Lion Gate, named after the two magnificent lions (now unfortunately headless) carved into the rock above the doorway. Within the walls, excavations have uncovered the palace complex, while close by on the hill of Panagitsa, the Treasury of Atreus (an underground tomb, 36m (118ft) long and 6m (20ft) wide) is considered the most impressive example of Mycenaean architecture.

**CORINTH:** North of Mycenae lies Corinth. The modern city, despite its beautiful location, is unremarkable, having been destroyed by an earthquake in 1858, rebuilt but destroyed again in



1928. However, 8km (5 miles) away, on the northern slopes of Akrokorinthos Hill, are the ruins of Ancient Corinth (Arhea Korinthos), where the remains of the Temple of Apollo are still to be seen. On the hilltop stands Acrocorinth (Akrokorinthos), with a medieval fortress built upon an ancient site. From the highest point, once the Temple of Afrodite, one can enjoy a magnificent panorama.

**EPIDAUROS:** East of Nafplio stands the impressive open-air Epidaurus Theatre, dating back to the fourth century BC. The acoustics are perfect, and there is seating for 14,000. From July to August, each weekend, the Epidaurus Festival offers performances of ancient Greek dramas in this magical setting. East of Epidaurus, jutting out from the Peloponnese peninsula, lies Methana, an important spa town since ancient times, with sulphuric waters and modernised hydrotherapy installations.

**PATRAS:** Patras is a thriving commercial and industrial port, and the third most important town in Greece. From here, daily ferry services connect the country to Italy and the Ionian islands. Southwest of Patras, at Kyllini there are mineral springs, hydrotherapeutic installations, new hotels and a public beach. The stretch of coast south of Kyllini as far as Kiparissia offers plenty of good beaches and seaside resorts. East of Patras, one can travel through the deep Vouraikos Gorge, taking a spectacular train journey from Diakofto to Kalavrita.

**OLYMPIA:** Olympia, the original site of the Olympic Games, which began in 776 BC, and the site where the Olympic Flame is still lit today, can be reached by train or by the mountain road from Kalavrita, or along the coast, via Patras and Pyrgos. The site is a mass of marble inscriptions, restored temples and civic buildings, including the Temple of Zeus, which once housed the colossal gold and ivory statue of Zeus, one of the 'Seven Wonders of the Ancient World' (later taken to Constantinople and destroyed in a fire). There is also a good Archaeological Museum on the site, and a Museum of the Olympic Games located in the modern town of Olympia. Southeast of Olympia at Bassae (Vasses) is the well-preserved monumental Temple of Apollo Epicurius, dating back to the fourth century BC.

**PILOS:** Northeast of Pilos, at Mystra, lie the ruins of a fortified Byzantine city, once inhabited by 42,000 citizens but now home to just a small number of nuns. In the lower town, which was the religious centre, stand the 13th-century frescoed Cathedral and several interesting churches and monasteries. In the Upper Town, where the aristocrats lived, stand numerous palazzi (palaces), notably the Palace of the Despot, built between the 13th and 15th centuries. The site is crowned by the ruins of a hilltop Kastro (Castle). East of Mystras lies Sparta. Now a provincial town with parks, broad avenues and a pleasant atmosphere, it was once a powerful city-state, notorious in ancient history for the austerity of its regime.

**MYSTRAS:** Lefkas, joined by a narrow strip of land to the Greek mainland, is a green and fertile island which is surrounded by many islets. Excursions, involving some mountain climbing, can be made in the centre of Lefkas, near the Stavrota Mountain. There is good swimming and fishing in the villages of Agios Nikitas on the northwestern coast, Ligia on the southeastern coast or Vassiliki (which is also popular with windsurfers) on the southwestern coast.

**MANI:** Located on the southernmost point of mainland Greece, the Mani peninsular is known for its rocky mountains and barren landscapes, and medieval villages made up of towers and churches. Githio, a peaceful holiday resort with good facilities, makes a good base for exploring the area. Of particular note are the semi-abandoned village of Vathia with its numerous stone towers, and the amazing Caves of Dirou, a vast network with underground channels and huge caverns, which can be visited by boat.



**MONEMVASSIA:** Built into a rocky promontory overlooking the sea, almost on the southeastern tip of the Peloponnese, stands the spectacular medieval fortified town of Monemvassia. Made up of cobbled alleys and old stone houses, the town is crowned by a hilltop Citadel and the Byzantine church of St Sophia, both of which offer splendid views of the town and gulf below.

#### Thessaly

**The fertile plain of Thessaly in Central Greece is surrounded by high mountains:** the Pindus Range to the west, Olympus (Olimbos) to the north, Ossa, Pelion (Pilio) and Othris to the east, and Trimfrestos to the south. The River Pinios, flowing down from the western slopes of the Pindus, cuts Thessaly in two and passes through the Valley of Tempi to meet the sea. The region's capital, Larissa, is an important industrial centre and traffic node (road and rail), with good shopping and nightlife and plentiful cafes. The main port, Volos, situated on Pagasitikos Bay, is largely modern, due to repeated destruction by earthquakes. However, there is a pleasant seafront with cafes and restaurants, and frequent ferry services for the Sporades (see the information on the Greek islands). Close by, on the slopes of Mount Pelion, stand the pretty villages of Makrinitza and Vizitsa, noted for their traditional architecture, and the winter sports centre of Hania. Mount Olympus, home of Zeus and the immortal gods and land of the Centaurs, is Greece's highest mountain, standing 2917m (9570ft). Walking tours depart from the village of Litochoro, where one finds hostels, hotels and tavernas. To the west, above the Pinios Valley and the town of Kalambaka, just as the Pindus Range begins to form, stand the incredible cliff-top monasteries of the Meteora. Perched upon bizarre vertical rock formations of up to 300m (984ft) high, a total of 24 monasteries, some with beautiful Byzantine frescoes, were founded here during the 15th-century. Several are open to the public (accessed by a series of steep steps carved into the rocks), notably Megalo Meteoro and Varlaam Monastery.

#### Epirus

Lying between the Ionic Sea and Thessaly, in the northwest corner of the Greek peninsula, Epirus is the most mountainous region in Greece. Due to its isolation, locals here have retained many of **their traditions:** costumes, dances and handicrafts. The chief settlement, Ioannina, overlooking Ioannina Lake, reached its peak during the 18th century under the Ottomans when it was an important administrative centre and home to the notorious Ali Pasha, Istanbul's local representative at that time. The town has conserved a marked eastern atmosphere, thanks to a bazaar and several mosques, notably Aslan Pasha Mosque, which now houses the Museum of Popular Art. North of town lies the spectacular Perama Cave, filled with stalactites, stalagmites and running waters. Further north still, one enters the mountainous area of Zagoria, noted for its dense pine forests, wildlife (wolves and bears) and picturesque stone villages. Here, contained within the Vikos-Aoos National Park lies the dramatic Vikos Gorge, a canyon formed by the River Aoos, popular with hikers. South of Ioannina lie the archaeological remains of Dodoni, notably the well-conserved theatre dating back to the third century BC, where open-air performances are held during summer. On the coast, built around a bay, the pretty town of Parga is backed by pine woods, olive groves and orchards. Here one finds a 16th-century Venetian fortress, whitewashed houses, hotels and an excellent sandy beach.

#### Macedonia

Bordering onto Albania, Macedonia (Former Yugoslav Republic of) and Bulgaria, Macedonia stands slightly apart from the rest of the country; its scenery and climate have more in common with the adjoining Balkans, the mountains being bitterly cold in winter. Though little known by foreign tourists, this is still a particularly beautiful part of Greece, rich in historical monuments and archaeological sites. The region's capital, Thessaloniki, is the second-largest city in Greece. A



modern industrial port, partly protected by impressive city walls, it is home to the superb Archaeological Museum, housing the 'Treasures of Ancient Macedonia'. On the seafront, the imposing 16th-century White Tower, built by the Ottomans as part of the city's defence system, houses an excellent Byzantine Art Collection. Churches of note include the fourth-century Rotonda (also known as St George's), Agios Dimitrios with its seventh-century mosaics, and the eighth-century Agia Sofia, converted into a mosque during Ottoman rule. The main ancient sites are the Arch of Galerius built in AD 297, and the ruins of **the Roman Agora. Southeast of Thessaloniki are the three mountainous peninsulas of Halkidiki:** Cassandra, Sithonia and Agio Oros (Mount Athos). Cassandra and Sithonia shelter Northern Greece's best beaches and are both popular holiday resorts. However, Mount Athos, with its renowned monasteries, is undoubtedly the region's highlight. The first religious community, Megistis Lavras, was founded here in AD 963. Between the 13th and 16th centuries, the number of monasteries multiplied, until there were about 30,000 monks living in the area. Today, about 1500 monks remain (predominantly Greeks, but also some Russians, Bulgarians and Serbs), housed in 20 monasteries. Women (and female animals) are refused entry, but men can gain a special permit by proving religious or scholarly interests. For further information, contact: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorate of Churches, Zalogosta 2, Athens (tel: (210) 368 1000/2000/2311/3000/4000; website: [www.mfa.gr](http://www.mfa.gr)), or the Ministry of Macedonia and Thrace, Directorate of Political Affairs, Plateia Diikitiriou, 541 23 Thessaloniki (tel: (2023) 103 7900; website: [www.mathra.gr](http://www.mathra.gr)). East along the coast, Kavala is a modern, commercial seaside port with hotels, beaches, museums, restaurants and tavernas. The old town retains many traditional features, notably the aqueduct and Byzantine fortress. There are some good sand beaches, and facilities for fishing, water-skiing and sailing. From here one can reach the island of Thassos, another popular summer retreat with fine beaches, hotels, and some interesting ancient ruins. North of Kavala, Filippii is one of Macedonia's most extensive archaeological sites. Named after the father of Alexander the Great, it is where Caesar's murderers, Brutus and Cassius, were defeated by Octavius in 42 BC, and is believed to be the site of St Paul's first recorded preaching in Greece. West of Thessaloniki, at Vergina (Aigai), findings from the monumental fourth-century BC 'royal tombs' are displayed in an excellent museum, housed underground, within one of the former burial mounds. Further west still, overlooking Kastoria Lake, lies the beautiful town of Kastoria, home to some exquisite frescoed Byzantine churches and an important fur coat industry. From Kastoria, driving north to the border with Albania and Macedonia (Former Yugoslav Republic of), are the Prespa Lakes (Limnes Prespes) contained within the Prespa Lakes National Park.

**THRACE:** Going east from Macedonia, the towns and villages become more oriental in style. Xanthi is an attractive small town clinging to the hilly sides of the Remma Valley. Southwest of Xanthi is Avdira. Nearby Lagos, built on the narrow strip of land in the lagoon, is rich in wildfowl. One of the best northern beaches is 8km (5 miles) east of Fanari. The main road dips down to the coast before going inland again to Komotini, further east, then follows the coast via Nea Hili to Alexandroupolis, which has an archaeological museum of local finds. North from here is Soufli, famous for its silks. East from here lies the River Evros, marking the natural boundary with Turkey.

#### Saronic Islands

Lying south of Athens and to the east of the Peloponnese, these islands are within easy reach of the capital, with regular ferry and hydrofoil services running from the port of Piraeus. Aegina, Hydra, Poros, Salamis and Spetses are the most popular islands, with Hydra as the indisputable highlight.



**SALAMIS:** (Perama, 1 nautical mile.) Closest to the mainland, Salamis (Salamina) can be reached from both Piraeus and Perama. There are reasonable sandy beaches at Iliakti, Kanakia, Moulki and Peristeria, though the island's natural beauty is somewhat spoilt by the proximity of heavy industry. The island has good roads and a network of bus and taxi services.

**AEGINA:** (Piraeus, 17.5 nautical miles.) Famed for pistachios and ceramics, Aegina (Egina) makes a perfect daytrip from Athens, thanks to its excellent beaches, clear seas and proximity to Piraeus. Boats arrive at the main port, Aegina Town. East from here, on top of a wooded hill offering panoramic views, stands the Temple of Aphaia made up of 22 Doric columns erected in the fifth century BC. On the coast, below the temple, Agia Marina is the island's most popular resort, thanks to its long sandy beach. South of Aegina Town lies Perdika, a pretty fishing village with a good sandy beach and boat trips running to the small wooded islands of Angistri and Moni. Aegina is relatively flat. Bicycles are available for hire, and it is possible to take a ride in a horsedrawn carriage. The island is also served by buses and taxis.

**POROS:** (Piraeus, 35 nautical miles.) Poros is a thickly wooded island separated from the Peloponnese by a very narrow channel. Regular boats cross the channel from Galatas, on the Peloponnese mainland. There is also a service from Piraeus. The island was formed through the union of two smaller islands, Kalavria and Sphaeria. The chief settlement, Poros Town, is known for its white buildings with blue woodwork, typical of Greek island architecture. Close by lie the remains of the Sanctuary of Poseidon, built in the sixth century BC. The best sand beaches lie at Askeli and Neorio.

**HYDRA:** (Piraeus, 42 nautical miles.) A barren, rocky, car-free island, Hydra (Idra) is popular with artists and jet-setters, primarily for the beauty of its chief settlement and port, Hydra Town. Built into the hill overlooking the harbour, Hydra Town is a labyrinth of steep cobbled streets, filled with chic bars, restaurants and art galleries. 500m (1640ft) above town stands a monastery, offering fantastic views out over the sea. There are a number of small hotels and private rooms to rent, though visitors should make reservations well in advance as Hydra is extremely busy through high season. Being so rocky, there are few good beaches, but it is possible to swim south of town at Kaminia, Molos and Vlichos, and north of town at Mandraki.

**SPETSES:** (Piraeus, 35 nautical miles.) Located at the southern extremity of the Saronic Gulf, Spetses has long been a popular holiday retreat for wealthy Athenians, who are attracted here by good beaches, beautiful pine woods and fresh air. Cars are forbidden, except to residents. Bicycles are available for rent, and the island is served by buses and taxis. There are plenty of good hotels and entertainment facilities in the chief settlement, Spetses Town. The best beaches lie at Agia Anangiri and Agia Pasaakevi.

## Ionian Islands

Located off the west coast of mainland Greece, the seven Ionian Islands (Cephalonia, Corfu, Ithaki, Kythira, Lefkada, Paxi and Zakinthos) are comparatively isolated from one another. Consequently, through the centuries each one has developed its own identity. The most popular islands are Cephalonia, Corfu and Kythira. Ferry connections to each destination are given within their relative section.

**CORFU:** (Igoumenitsa, 18 nautical miles.) The northernmost island of western Greece, Corfu is the best-known, busiest and most cosmopolitan of the Ionian islands. Although its natural beauty has led to rampant commercialisation along parts of the coast, visitors who arrive during spring or autumn will still find idyllic beaches, romantic landscapes studded with cypresses and olive groves, and unspoilt inland villages. The capital, Corfu Town, is presided over by two imposing



Venetian fortresses and gives onto a series of pretty harbours and bays. With Italian, French and English influences evident in its architecture, it is made up of wide avenues and large squares, among them the graceful Spianada or esplanade, cobbled alleyways, arches and colonnades. Worth visiting are the Archaeological Museum, which houses finds from local excavations; the Byzantine Museum, with a fine collection of icons; and the Museum of Asiatic Art. The Town Hall, a splendid example of 17th-century Venetian architecture, and the 12th-century Byzantine Church of St Jason and Sospater and the Church of St Spyridon are also of interest. At Kanoni, on the tip of a small peninsular south of the town centre, a narrow causeway leads to the much photographed Monastery of Vlacherna. From here, it is possible to take a boat to the tiny island of Pondikonissi, crowned by a 13th-century church. South of Corfu Town, at Gastouri, stands the 19th-century Achillion, the summer palace of Empress Elizabeth of Austria, surrounded by beautiful Italian-style gardens. West of town, built into a rocky hill, lies the village of Pelekas, reputedly the best place to watch the sunset. Close by, the Ropa Valley (Livaditou Ropa) is home to the excellent Corfu Golf Club. North of town lie the popular seaside resorts of Ipsos, Kassiopi and Sidari, the latter known for its unique rock formations and beaches, which have unfortunately been somewhat spoilt by commercial development. Northwest of Corfu Town, the fortunately unspoilt resort of Paleokastritsa offers crystal clear seawater and two delightful sandy coves for bathing. Close by stands Angelokastro, a 13th-century Byzantine fortress. Corfu can be reached by ferry from either Patras (see Peloponnese section) or Igoumenitsa (on the northwest coast of mainland Greece, just south of Albania), and there are direct ferries from Italy in summer. The island's airport offers direct flights to Athens and several other European cities.

**CEPHALONIA:** (Patras, 53 nautical miles.) Best known as the setting of Louis de Bernières Captain Corelli's Mandolin, Cephalonia is the biggest Ionian island. The mountainous scenery, culminating with the 1600m (5250ft) Mount Enos, is dramatic and the island has a good network of roads. The chief settlement, Argostoli, was largely destroyed in the disastrous 1953 earthquake. However, the Archaeological Museum and Folk Art Museum are both worth visiting, and the nearby beaches of Makris and Platis Gialos are perfect for bathing. Inland, close to Perata, stands the 16th-century St George's Castle (Agios Georgios), built by the Venetians. Cephalonia's second town, Lixouri, is peaceful and old-fashioned, and a little south from here lie some of the island's best beaches. On the northwest coast, the village of Assos is known for its picturesque castle. Fiskardo, the northernmost harbour, is unspoilt and has some good beaches. On the east coast, the Cave of Melissani, noted for its extraordinary colours caused by the reflection of the sun's rays through the sea, can be visited by boat. Cephalonia can be reached by ferry from Patras. The island's airport offers direct flights to Athens.

**KYTHERA:** (Piraeus, 28 nautical miles.) Lying at the southeastern tip of the Peloponnese, Kythera is the southernmost Ionian island. Much loved by artists such as Watteau, it was often portrayed as a 'Garden of Paradise' and has some beautiful sand beaches. The capital, Kythera Town, is a neat settlement overlooking the sea, close to the main port of Kapsali. The second port, Agia Pelagia, is the main tourist centre. At Milopotamos stand the ruins of a Byzantine town and the Cave of St Sophia, formerly used as a chapel and adorned with frescoes, stalagmites and stalactites. Kythera can be reached by ferry from Piraeus and Monemvassia. During summer there are also direct flights from Athens.

## The Cyclades

Lying east of the Peloponnese and southeast of the coast of Attica in the Aegean, a total of 30 islands make up the Cyclades, the best-known being Mykonos and Santorini. Other popular islands are Andros, Delos, Naxos, Paros and Tinos, while the small islands of the eastern Cyclades are less visited and offer only basic amenities. All can be reached by ferry from Piraeus, and several have small airports with daily flights to Athens through summer.



**ANDROS:** (Piraeus, 89 nautical miles.) Most northerly of the Cyclades, Andros is a green mountainous island planted with olive groves, vineyards and pine trees. Its capital, Andros Town, is made up of typical white cottages, plus a number of neoclassical-style town houses and the remains of a 13th-century Venetian castle. Worth visiting are the Archaeological Museum, displaying a rich collection of finds from the excavations on the island; the Museum of Modern Art, staging exhibitions of contemporary Greek artists; and the Maritime Museum. There are many fine beaches, the largest being at Batsi, which also has several small hotels. Other places of interest are Paleopolis, the island's ancient port, much of which now lies below the sea, though some ruins can still be seen; Panachrantou Monastery at Falika; and the Byzantine Church of Taxiarchon in Messaria. Apikia is known for its mineral springs. The principal port is Gavrio, west of Andros Town.

**TINOS:** (Piraeus, 86 nautical miles.) The island's largest settlement, Tinos Town, is best known as a pilgrimage site. Each year on 25 March and 15 August, thousands of believers gather here to pay their respect to an icon of Our Lady (said to perform miracles) kept in the Church of the Annunciate Virgin (Evangelistria). The town's second attraction is the Archaeological Museum, exhibiting finds from the ancient Temple of Poseidon. Remains of the temple itself can be seen at Kionia, northeast of town, where there is also a good beach. Buses connect Tinos Town to the island's numerous villages, the most interesting being Pirgos, noted for its sculpture school and marble workshops, plus another pleasant beach.

**MYKONOS:** (Piraeus, 95 nautical miles.) The most visited and most expensive of all the Greek islands, Mykonos is known for its lively nightlife and some of Greece's best discos. It is now especially popular among the international gay community. Mykonos Town (also known as Hora) comprises a modern harbour, whitewashed houses and churches, shops selling local arts and crafts, small tavernas and cafes, and is backed by a hill with five thatched windmills. The Paraportiani Church, a complex of four chapels, is considered to be an architectural masterpiece. The Archaeological Museum exhibits finds excavated from the necropolis on the nearby islet of Rhenia. There is also a Folklore Museum. Interesting excursions can be made to the monasteries of Agios Panteleimon, close to Mykonos Town, and the Tourliani Monastery, close to the old fishing village of Ano Mera. Beaches range from cosmopolitan to secluded, the most popular being Agios Stefanos and Platis Gialos. On the south side of the island lie several unspoilt nudist beaches, the best known being Paradise and Super Paradise, which can be reached by boat from Plati Gialos. It is also possible to visit the uninhabited island of Delos (see Delos section) by boat from Mykonos Town. Through summer, there are daily flights from Mykonos to Athens.

**DELOS:** (Mykonos, 6 nautical miles.) The religious and political centre of the Aegean in ancient times, the tiny island of Delos is said to have been the birthplace of Apollo and Artemis. Today uninhabited, it is possible to visit this superb archaeological site, arriving by boat from Mykonos. Star attractions include the Avenue of the Lions, featuring five crouching stone lions, guardians of the Sacred Lake, and the Sanctuary of Apollo, made up of three temples. The Archaeological Museum exhibits archaic, Classical, Hellenistic and Roman sculptures, including the Archaic Sphinx of the Naxians and Acroteria (Victories) from the Temple of the Athenians, found in excavations on the site.

**PAROS:** (Piraeus, 95 nautical miles.) The island's hinterland has undulating hills that contain the famous Parian marble. It is becoming an increasingly popular tourist destination, thanks to its sand beaches, unspoilt fishing villages, reasonably priced hotels and lively nightlife. Parikia, the island's picturesque capital and main port, is built on the site of the ancient city. There is a ruined Venetian castle and close to the port stands the impressive sixth-century Byzantine church of Ekatondapiliani (Church of a Hundred Doors). A number of good beaches lie near Naousia, the



island's second port, notably Kolimbithres, where the rugged coast forms inlets with golden sands. Of the island's monasteries, Zoodohos Pigi Longovarda and Christou Tou Dassous are the most significant. Antiparos is separated from Paros by a narrow channel. The main attraction on this small island is its famous cave with stalactites. There are also several hotels and a number of good sand beaches. Through summer, there are daily flights from Paros to Athens.

**NAXOS:** (Piraeus, 103 nautical miles.) The largest and most fertile island in the Cyclades islands, Naxos lies almost in the centre of the Aegean. The capital and main port, Naxos Town (also known as Hora) is crowned by the ruins of a Venetian castle. A little way out of town, the Pirgos Bellonia (Bellonian Tower) was built under Venetian rule (note the Lion of St Mark emblem) as a refuge from pirates. The island is particularly noted for its numerous sand beaches, and just south of Naxos Town lie the bathing areas of Agia Anna, Agios Georgios and Agios Prokopios. The island's second town and port, Apolonas, also has an excellent beach. The inland village of Halki has a medieval fortress and several Byzantine churches. Through summer, there are daily flights from Naxos to Athens.

**SANTORINI:** (Piraeus, 127 nautical miles.) Considered by many as the most dramatically beautiful of all the Greek islands, Santorini (also known as Thira) was formed by the eruption of a now dormant volcano around 1600 BC. Arrival by ferry brings one to the west side of the island, with the whitewashed cliff top villages of Fira (the capital) and Ia (the Aegean's most photographed town) overlooking the circular caldera (a huge depression created by a volcanic explosion). A steep winding path leads up from the harbour of Skala to Fira, where one finds many excellent hotels, chic restaurants and bars, and a vibrant nightlife. The Archaeology Museum, displaying finds from the excavations at Akrotiri, is worth a visit. From Fira, a mountain path leads along the cliff edge to Ia, noted for its beautiful white buildings with blue domes. On the east side of the island lie the archaeological remains of Ancient Thira, a Dorian city dating back to the ninth century BC. Akrotiri is also of great interest for the relics of the Minoan civilisation which were buried under lava following the eruption of 1600 BC: about 40 buildings have been uncovered to date. The 18th-century Monastery of Profitas Ilias on the island's summit and the swimming beaches of Perissa and Kamari are other attractions. Through summer, there are daily flights from Santorini to Athens.

**KEA:** (Piraeus, 42 nautical miles.) Kea is dotted with small cultivated valleys, sandy beaches, fruit orchards, clusters of whitewashed houses, several windmills and a large number of churches. A short distance inland from the port of Korissia lies the chief settlement Hora (also known as Kea Town). The Convent of Panagia Kastriani, overlooking Otzia Bay, is worth visiting. At Koundouro and Pisses, there are good swimming beaches.

**KITHNOS:** (Piraeus, 54 nautical miles.) A small island, the harsh landscape of Kithnos is softened by vineyards and fig trees. Most hotels are found in the small port towns of Loutra (noted for its warm medical springs) and Merihas. The main town, Hora (also known as Messaria), is built into a barren hillside. White Cycladic cottages, churches with frescoes and icons and the islanders' hospitality combine to make Kithnos increasingly popular with visitors in search of beauty and quiet.

**SERIFOS:** (Piraeus, 70 nautical miles.) Ships calling at the island anchor at Livadi, which is surrounded by gardens and orchards. From here the road climbs up to Hora (the chief settlement), where narrow paved alleys are lined by typical Cycladic houses and churches. Higher still stands the old Venetian fortress. Attractive beaches are to be found at Mega Livadi and Koutalas.



**SIROS:** (Piraeus, 80 nautical miles.) Siros lies at the heart of the Cycladic complex. Its capital and main port, Ermoupolis, has many notable neoclassical buildings, such as the Town Hall and the Apollo Municipal Theatre (which is a miniature copy of La Scala in Milan), plus spacious public squares and impressive churches. Upper Siros retains a strong medieval flavour with city walls, narrow cobbled streets and arcades.

**SIFNOS:** (Piraeus, 78 nautical miles.) Sifnos is the most popular of the western Cyclades. An attractive drive inland from the port of Kamares leads to the main settlement, Apollonia, made up of distinctive Cycladic houses, a number of notable churches, and the Museum of Folklore. Other places to see are the atmospheric medieval town of Kastro, and the village of Artemonas, built on gently undulating hills surrounded by picturesque windmills. There are good beaches at Faros and Vathy.

**MILOS:** (Piraeus, 82 nautical miles.) This beautiful island has been inseparably associated with Venus since a statue of the goddess of love, which is now in the Louvre in Paris, was found here during the 19th century. A copy of the statue can be seen in the Archaeological Museum in the chief settlement, Plaka. Also of interest in Plaka are the remains of a hilltop Frankish castle and the 13th-century Byzantine Church of Thalassitras. Close to Plaka, at Tripiti, there are extensive early-Christian catacombs. The best beaches and accommodation are found at Apollonia and Adamas (the island's port), and a number of sea caves, notably Sikia (also known as the Blue Cave) and Kleftiko, can be visited by boat.

**IOS:** (Piraeus, 114 nautical miles.) The chief settlement of this extremely popular island, Hora (also known as Ios Town), stands above the small harbour of Ormos and the attractive swimming beaches of Milopotas and Yalos. Hora boasts whitewashed cottages, a number of interesting churches and the ruins of a 15th-century hilltop fortress. Each year, thanks to a steady influx of visitors, numerous summer discos open up in Hora.

#### Northeast Aegean Islands

The four most popular islands of this group are Chios, Lemnos, Lesbos and Samos, all of which lie fairly far apart in the waters of the northeast Aegean, close to Turkey. It is possible to reach each of these islands by ferry from Piraeus.

**CHIOS:** (Piraeus, 153 nautical miles.) Lying just 8km from Turkey, this surprisingly unexploited island offers excellent beaches, unspoilt medieval towns and stunning landscapes. The north side of the island is dominated by Pelinio, a 1297m- (4255ft-) high mountain of volcanic origin. The capital and main port, Chios Town, lies on the eastern shore. Several of the town's churches, which date back to Byzantine times, were converted into mosques by the Turks, but have since resumed their Christian function. The Byzantine Museum is housed in a former 19th-century mosque. In the hills east of town lies the splendid 12th-century monastery of Nea Moni, one of the country's finest Byzantine monuments, with a beautiful octagonal church adorned with golden mosaics. The inland villages on the south side of the island have conserved a medieval appearance, the best examples being Pirci and Mesta. Pirci is unique in that all the building facades are decorated with grey and white geometric designs, known as xista. The settlement of Mesta is made up of narrow winding streets and traditional cottages, many of which offer tourist accommodation, plus a fine Byzantine church. There is an airport, providing daily flights to and from Athens.

**SAMOS:** (Piraeus, 174 nautical miles.) Separated from Turkey by a narrow strait, Samos is an island of forested hills, olive groves, vineyards and meadows. Samos Town, the island's capital, is divided into two parts: the new quarter, which developed during the 19th century; and the old



quarter, Ano Vathi, on a hill above the port. The Archaeological Museum displays finds from Heraion, an ancient sanctuary located on the southeast coast. Pythagorio, a lively fishing port and tourist resort, was known as Tigani until 1955, when it was renamed in honour of its best known citizen, the philosopher and mathematician, Pythagoras. From Samos Town a good asphalt road runs the length of the northern coast to Potami, passing through the picturesque villages of Kokari, Tsamadou and Avlaxia, each of which have good beaches close by, and Karlovassi, renowned for its excellent sweet wine. There is an airport, providing daily flights to and from Athens.

**LESBOS:** (Piraeus, 118 nautical miles.) Lesbos, home of the ancient poet Sappho, is the largest island in this group, with vast olive groves, shady pinewoods, good beaches and picturesque monasteries. The capital, Mitilini, is dominated by a 14th-century castle, and has a nearby beach with good facilities. There are more good beaches at Agios Issidoros, Petra, Skala Eftalou and Vateron and along the Gulf of Kaloni on the south coast of the island. At Loutropoli Thermis, there are therapeutic springs which have been known since antiquity. Mithimna (Molivos), on the north of the island, is popular with artists and has a fine pebble beach. There is an airport, providing daily flights to and from Athens.

**LEMNOS:** (Piraeus, 188 nautical miles.) Lemnos is still relatively unknown to mainstream tourism. Mirina, its capital, is built on the site of an ancient city of the same name and has an Archaeological Museum housing exhibits from around the island. The hilltop castle, extended successively by the Venetians, Genovese and Turks, offers wonderful views. North of the town, close to the village of Kaspakas, lies Kaspakas Bay with several excellent sand beaches. Likewise, south of town, close to the village of Plati, lies the Bay of Plati and another large sand beach. To the east of the island, ancient ruins are found at Poliohni and Ifestia. There is an airport, providing daily flights to and from Athens.

### Sporades Islands

East of the Thessaly region on mainland Greece lie the four islands of the Sporades Alonissos, Skiathos, Skiros and Skopelos. They are becoming very popular and it is advisable to book early, especially in the high season. It is possible to reach these islands by either ferry or hydrofoil from Volos on the mainland, and from Kimi on Euboea. Skiathos and Skiros can also be reached by plane from Athens.

**SKIATHOS:** (Volos, 41 nautical miles.) Planted with pine trees and olive groves, Skiathos is a popular tourist destination, thanks to its indented coast with numerous sandy coves. The capital, Skiathos Town, was built in 1830 on two low hills. The seafront is lined with cafes and seafood restaurants, and there is a good marina. Numerous hotels, villas and private rooms provide seasonal accommodation, and the town's bars and discos ensure a vibrant nightlife through summer. Boat trips take tourists around the island to visit the Blue Cave, the ruins of the medieval walled town of Kastro on the south coast, and the pebble beach of Lalaria. From Skiathos Town, a good road follows the southern coast with its many bays, to arrive at the renowned pine grove beach of Koukounaries. There is an airport, providing daily flights to and from Athens the year round.

**SKOPELOS:** (Volos, 58 nautical miles.) This island has small bays, golden sands and slopes covered with pine forests, olive groves and plum trees (prunes are a local speciality). Less busy than Skiathos, it is known for its traditional architecture and tiny white chapels. The main settlement, Skopelos Town, is made up of narrow cobbled streets, whitewashed houses and the Venetian Kastro (fortress). The island has numerous beaches, both of sand and pebble, and



shallow waters safe for children. There is an airport, providing daily flights to and from Athens during summer.

**ALONISSOS:** (Volos, 62 nautical miles.) The most distant and least populated island of the Sporades, the hills of Alonissos are covered with unspoilt woods. There are limited tourist facilities a number of small hotels and private rooms to let. With only 10km (6 miles) of roads, the best way of getting about is by motorboat, sharing the fare. There are a number of good beaches, but as the coast has been declared a Marine Conservation Park, building development is forbidden.

**SKIROS:** (Kimi, 25 nautical miles; Piraeus ,118 nautical miles.) The largest of the Sporades, Skiros lies far out from Volos and is most easily accessed from Kimi on Euboea. Tourist facilities are not particularly developed, though there are some beautiful sand beaches, good tavernas serving authentic seafood and local cheeses, and interesting craft shops. The main settlement, Skiros Town (also known as Horio), is made up of whitewashed cottages and narrow winding alleys, crowned by the hilltop Venetian Kastro (fortress). The Folklore Museum gives an excellent presentation of local handicrafts, and includes a reconstruction of a traditional house. Close to town lies the large sand beach of Magazia.

#### Dodecanese Islands

This cluster of 12 (dodeca) islands lies east of Peloponnese, closer to Turkey than to mainland Greece. All the islands can be reached by ferry from Piraeus, and distances between them are fairly small, so visitors can easily hop from one to another, swapping the relative sophistication of Rhodes and Kos for the calmer and simpler life on Tilos or Astipalaea.

**RHODES:** (Piraeus, 267 nautical miles.) One of the most popular and best-developed islands in the Mediterranean, Rhodes offers international-class hotels, varied nightlife and good sports facilities. It has 370km (230 miles) of coastline and a good, well-surfaced road network, with bus services linking most of the towns and villages. Travel agents organise daily sightseeing trips to the archaeological sites and beauty spots. The capital, Rhodes Town, lies almost at the northern tip of the island. It is made up of two distinct parts an old town and a new town. The old town, contained within the walls of a medieval fortress, centres of the Avenue of the Knights, lined with magnificent medieval buildings, including the monumental 14th-century Palace of the Grand Masters. The 15th-century Knight's Hospital now houses the Archaeological Museum. 2km (1.2 miles) west of the town walls lies the Acropolis of Ancient Rhodes. Many impressive ruins can still be seen, including the Temple of Apollo, and a theatre and stadium dating back to the second century BC. Just out of town lie the main tourist complexes of Faliraki on the east coast, and Ixia and Ialissos (also known as Trianda) on the west coast, all with numerous hotels and good beaches. At Filerimos, 15km (9 miles) from Rhodes Town, lie the ruins of ancient Ialisos, and 25km (16 miles) southwest from here stand the remains of ancient Kameiros. 56km (35 miles) southeast of the capital stands the delightful town of Lindos, made up of winding streets and whitewashed buildings, crowned by a 15th-century hilltop fortress standing aside an imposing ancient Acropolis. Rhodes can be reached by ferry from Piraeus. There are regular flights to Athens and several other Greek islands, plus a number of European cities.

**KOS:** (Piraeus, 201 nautical miles.) This fertile island boasts sandy beaches (some of black volcanic sand) and ample hotel accommodation. Most places of historical and sightseeing interest lie in or close to the main settlement, Kos Town, and can be visited on foot or bicycle (available for hire). Activity centres on Platia tou Platanou, a piazza named after the Plane Tree of Hippocrates, a massive tree (12m (39ft) in circumference), beneath which the philosopher Hippocrates is said to have taught his students. Close by, the 15th-century Castle of the Knights



of St John is accessed across a drawbridge. There are also some interesting ancient Greek and Roman archaeological sites. From Kos Town, a road traverses the length of the island all the way to Kefalos, a town on the southwest coast with an old Fortress and a splendid beach. Also of note is Kardamena, a pretty fishing village and well-developed resort with many hotels and beautiful sand beaches. Kos can be reached by ferry from Piraeus and Rhodes. There are regular flights to Athens and Rhodes.

**SIMI:** (Piraeus, 235 nautical miles.) A lovely mountainous island with several good beaches, Simi offers limited hotels and tourist facilities. The chief settlement, Simi Town, is divided between Ano Simi (upper town) and Kato Poli (lower town). The lower town, also known as Yialos, is made up of charming pastel-coloured, neoclassical mansions built close to the port, while the upper town is capped by the ruins of a castle, built by the Knights of St John. On the southwest coast stands the 18th-century Monastery of St Michel of Panormitis. Simi can be reached by ferry from both Piraeus and Rhodes.

**KARPATOS:** (Piraeus, 227 nautical miles.) Karpathos, a mountainous island with fertile valleys and several good beaches, lies between Rhodes and Crete. The main settlement and port, Karpathos Town (also known as Pigadia), sits in a bay on the southeast coast. It was built primarily from funds sent home by immigrants to the USA and does not reflect the traditional style found in the older villages, but has good tourist facilities and numerous hotels. From the island's second port, Diafani, on the northern coast, a road leads to Olimbos, an isolated but well-preserved medieval village where local customs are very much alive. Karpathos can be reached by ferry from both Piraeus and Rhodes. There are regular flights to Athens and Rhodes.

**KASSOS:** (Piraeus, 255 nautical miles.) Kassos, the most southern of the Dodecanese lies just 3 nautical miles from Karpathos. Emborios, the port, and Fri, the principal town, are picturesque settlements, both with good beaches. Selai, a cave to the west of the village of Agia Marina, is filled with impressive stalactites. Kassos can be reached by ferry from Piraeus.

**PATMOS:** (Piraeus, 140 nautical miles.) St John is said to have been exiled to Patmos and was inspired to write his Revelations here. During the 11th century, the massive fortified Monastery of St John the Divine was built above the capital, Patmos Town (also known as Hora), to honour the saint. The monastery is worth visiting for its church and chapels, displaying Byzantine icons, and also for the panoramic view it affords out to sea. The island's main tourist resorts are Skala and Grikos. Skala, made up of whitewashed houses, bars and tavernas, is also the principal port, and lies 2km (1.2 miles) from Hora Town. Grikos is built overlooking Grikos Bay and has a fine beach nearby. Patmos can be reached by ferry from Piraeus.

**KALIMNOS:** (Piraeus, 180 nautical miles.) Kalimnos is famous for its sponge fishing a tradition which is expressed in many folk songs and local dances. Along the northwest coast of the island there are several resorts with lovely beaches, notably Mirties and Massouri. Good hotels can also be found in the chief settlement, Pothia, a cheerful port town with brightly coloured houses, founded in 1850. Close to Pothia lies Therma, a well-equipped spa with therapeutic bathing installations and overnight accommodation. The old capital, Horio, stands below the remains of a medieval castle. Kalimnos can be reached by ferry from Piraeus.

**LEROS:** (Piraeus, 169 nautical miles.) Leros is an island of fertile valleys, green hills and unspoilt beaches. The chief settlement, Agia Marina is made up of steep winding alleyways, whitewashed houses, and several neoclassical buildings, and crowned by a 14th-century Byzantine fortress. Most hotels are found in Laki (one of the Mediterranean's largest natural harbours) and Alinda, both of which have fine beaches. Leros can be reached by ferry from Piraeus and by plane from Athens.



**TILOS:** (Piraeus, 290 nautical miles.) Little known by tourists, Tilos is a hilly island with many isolated and unspoilt beaches. The main settlements are the inland town of Megalo Horio, crowned by a medieval castle, and Livadia, the island's port. Close to Megalo Horio it is possible to visit the monastery of Agios Antonios. Tilos can be reached by ferry from Piraeus.

**NISSIROS:** (Piraeus, 200 nautical miles.) This small volcanic island lies between Kos and Tilos. The capital and port, Mandraki, is built below a medieval castle. Close by at Loutra lie the renowned hot springs, while in the centre of the island one can visit the vast smouldering crater, formed in 1522 by a massive volcanic explosion. Nissiros can be reached by ferry from Kos, Piraeus and Rhodes.

**HALKI:** (Piraeus, 302 nautical miles.) Halki is a small hilly island, little known by tourists. From the main settlement and port, Nimborio (also known as Halki), Potamo is the only beach accessible on foot, though many other beautiful unspoilt beaches can be reached by boat. The island's second town and former capital, Horio, was built inland to avoid pirate attacks. Halki can be reached by ferry from Piraeus.

**ASTIPALAIA:** (Piraeus, 165 nautical miles.) The westernmost of the Dodecanese, Astipalaia is mountainous but fertile, and little discovered by tourists. The capital, also called Astipalaia, is built on a steep hill and dominated by an austere Venetian castle. The most beautiful part of the island is around Livadia, where there is a fine sandy beach. Astipalaia can be reached by ferry from Piraeus and by plane from Athens.

## Crete

(Piraeus, 174 nautical miles.) Crete is the largest and most southerly Greek island. Despite a busy tourist industry concentrated along the north coast, Crete has preserved its unspoilt nature, local traditions and ancient monuments. The Minoan culture, Europe's first advanced civilisation, developed here between 2800 and 1000 BC. When Constantinople fell to the Ottomans in 1453, many artists took refuge on the island, founding the renowned 'Cretan School' of painters. The capital and main port, Heraklion (Iraklio), offers a variety of cafes, restaurants, nightlife and sightseeing opportunities. The old town lies within the 16th-century Venetian city walls, while the harbour is protected by Koules, an imposing Venetian Fortress. The National Archaeological Museum is one of the country's top museums, displaying finds from the Minoan era, and the History Museum tells the island's story from Byzantine times up to the present day. Close to town stand three wonderful Minoan sites - Knossos, Malia and Phaestos. The palace at Knossos, founded in 2000 BC, was a vast city of 50,000 inhabitants, destroyed around 1600 BC by earth movements provoked by the volcanic eruption on Santorini. The highlights here are the frescoed sanctuary and the royal apartments. Another palace, built on an identical plan around a central courtyard, can be seen at Phaestos, though the frescoes here are not so well preserved. The remains of yet a third palace can be seen at Malia. East of Heraklion, Agios Nikolaos, one of the island's best-known holiday resorts, overlooks the Gulf of Mirambello and several fine beaches. East from here stands Sitia, another popular resort with bars, restaurants, hotels and a Venetian fortress. West of Heraklion, the well-preserved port town of Rethimno is made up of narrow winding alleys conserving a number of 16th-century Venetian stone buildings and 19th-century Turkish houses with traditional wooden balconies. At the western end of the island, Hania has a mixture of modern, neoclassical and Venetian architecture, plus a Naval Museum and good beaches. South of Hania, the beautiful Samaria Gorge, declared a National Park, is the longest gorge in Europe. Keen hikers will be able to walk the 18km (11.2 miles) length in a day, while the less sporting can join an organised tour, departing from Hania. The only major resort on the south side of the island is the small port of Matala, offering good sandy beaches and excellent



fish restaurants. Crete can be reached by ferry from Piraeus. There are airports at Hania, Iraklio and Sitia, with regular flights to Athens and several other Greek islands, plus a number of European cities.

## 9 SPORT & ACTIVITIES

**Watersports:** There are excellent facilities along all coastlines of the mainland and particularly in the islands. Most major hotels can help with arrangements. Water-skiing is especially popular and there are over 30 water-ski schools in Greece with restaurants and child-care facilities. Speed boats are also available for hire. Independent scuba-diving is strictly forbidden, in order to guard against the pilfering of underwater antiquities. Divers may only venture out under the auspices of a recognised diving school. Snorkelling is permitted, however, and is possible practically anywhere. For further information, contact the Hellenic Federation of Underwater Activities, West Terminal Post Office, Agios Cosmos, 166 04 Hellenikon, Athens (tel: (210) 981 9961; fax: (210) 981 7558; website: [www.sportsnet.gr](http://www.sportsnet.gr) or [www.finswimming.org.gr](http://www.finswimming.org.gr)).

**Fishing:** Greek waters offer good fishing, particularly during the summer and autumn. Boats and equipment can be found in most villages.

**Mountaineering:** This is becoming increasingly popular and there is scope for hill walking and climbing. There are well-maintained trails in the most popular areas, supplemented by donkey and goat tracks connecting villages and leading over mountains. The best areas for walking include the Peloponnese, the Pindos Mountains and the south and west of Crete.

**Other:** Sites of archaeological interest abound, and the visitor can often come across ancient ruins and traces of lost civilisations. It is often advisable to use a guide when visiting the more remote regions. There are over 7000 karstic cave formations in the country, the majority in Crete. Further information on these caves is available from the Hellenic Speleological Society, 32 Sina Street, 106 72 Athens (tel: (210) 361 7824; fax: (210) 364 3476; e-mail: [ellspe@otenet.gr](mailto:ellspe@otenet.gr); website: <http://web.otenet.gr/ellspe>). There are some horse riding clubs in Greece (in Attica, Crete, Corfu and Thessaloniki).

### Entertainment

**Food & Drink:** Restaurant and taverna food tends to be very simple, rarely involving sauces but with full use of local olive oil and charcoal grills. All restaurants have a standard menu which includes the availability and price of each dish. A good proportion of the restaurants will serve international dishes. Hours are normally 1200-1500 for lunch and 2000-2400 for dinner. Opening hours vary according to the region and local laws. Waiter service is usual. National specialities: Dolmades (stuffed vine leaves). Moussaka (aubergine casserole with minced lamb, cinnamon, red wine and olive oil). Kebabs and avgolemono (chicken broth with rice, eggs, salt and lemon juice). Taramasalata (a dip made from fish roe, bread, onion, olive oil and lemon juice). Squid (kalamari) or octopus. Keftedes (hot spicy meatballs). Tzatziki (a dip made from yoghurt, olive oil, garlic, shredded cucumber and dill). Salads (feta cheese, tomato, cucumber and fresh olive oil). Gigantes (large white beans). Kolokithakia (small boiled courgette with oil and lemon). Baklavas (filo pastry filled with almonds and topped with honey, vanilla and sugar). Loukoumades (honey-drenched pastry puffs). National drinks: Retsina wine (made with pine-needle resin). Ouzo (an aniseed-based clear spirit to which water is added).

Local brandy (sharp and fiery). Greek coffee (thick and strong, and sugared **according to taste**). **Greek beer is a light Pilsner type. Tipping:** 12 to 15 per cent is usual.



**Nightlife:** This is centred in main towns and resorts with concerts and discos. Athens offers many local tavernas, particularly in the Plaka area, and ouzeris (typical Greek bars). Regular concerts and evening shows are also held at the Odeion of Herodes in Attica. Nightclubs featuring Greek bouzouki music are extremely popular. There are some casinos in Greece, such as the Mount Parnes Casino in Athens, the Corfu Casino in Corfu and the Casino at the Grand Hotel Astir in Rhodes.

**Shopping:** Special purchases include lace, jewellery, metalwork, pottery, garments and knitwear, furs, rugs, leather goods, local wines and spirits. Athens is the centre for luxury goods and local handicrafts. The flea markets in Monastiraki and Plaka, below the Acropolis, are all crowded in high season. Regional specialities include silver from Ioannina, ceramics from Sifnos and Skopelos, embroidery and lace from Crete, the Ionian Islands, Rhodes and Skiros, fur from Kastoria, alabaster from Crete and flokati rugs from the Epirus region. Note: (a) Visitors should be aware that many 'antiques' sold to tourists are fake; it is illegal to export any item of real antiquity without a special permit from the Export Department of the Ministry of Culture. (b) Non-EU citizens can get a refund on Greek VAT (4 per cent on books and 18 per cent on nearly everything else); the process is fairly complex, but well worth it. Non-EU visitors may buy goods from certain shops bearing the sign 'Member of the Tax-Free Club' and have the VAT refunded, in cash, at special refund points at the airport. Ask store owners and tourist information offices for details.

**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. Note: Most holiday resort shops stay open late in the evening.

#### Business

**GDP:** US\$226.4 billion (2004). Main exports: Food, beverages, manufactured goods, petroleum, chemicals and textiles. Main imports: Machinery, transport equipment, fuels and chemicals. Main trade partners: Germany, Italy, UK, Japan, Russia and France.

**Economy:** Traditionally agricultural, accession to the EU gave a new impetus to the Greek economy, particularly the industrial sectors of textiles, clothing and shoes, cement, mining and metals, chemicals, steel and processed agricultural products. Nonetheless, 20 per cent of the working population still work the land a very high proportion by EU standards. Tourism, the most important service industry, has boomed since the 1980s, with upwards of 10 million tourists now visiting the country annually. Shipping is also an important source of income: Greece has one of the largest merchant fleets in the world. Greek enterprises have consistently encountered difficulty penetrating European markets, however, because of the comparatively small size of the majority of businesses and high transport costs (owing to its geographical position). Nonetheless, the country exports large quantities of wheat, barley, maize, tobacco and fruit to the rest of the EU and elsewhere. The Greeks have benefited substantially from transfers of funds within the EU and support for its large public-sector debt. Growth is around 3.5 per cent, with inflation nearly 3 per cent, and unemployment hovering around 10 per cent in 2005. Greece's huge public-sector deficit prevented it from meeting the convergence criteria for the European single currency and the country entered the Euro zone in January 2001. The EU accounts for about 65 per cent of Greek trade.

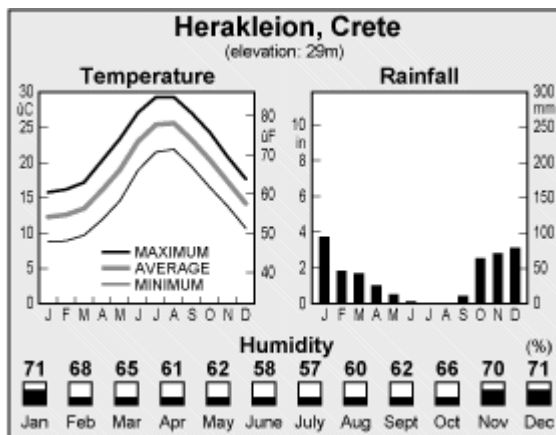
**Business Etiquette:** Formal suits are expected. French, German and English are often spoken as well as Greek.



**Conferences/Conventions:** Greece has many convention centres and hotels with conference facilities, in locations ideal for post-conference tours, eg Athens, Corfu, Crete, Halkidiki, Metsovo (Epirus) and Rhodes. It also has ships equipped for 'floating conferences', sailing between the islands. For further enquiries, contact the Greek/Hellenic National Tourism Organisation (see Top Things To Do).

**Commercial Information:** Athens Chamber of Commerce & Industry (ACCI) 7 Akademias Street, 106 71 Athens, Greece Tel: (210) 362 5342. Website: [www.acci.gr](http://www.acci.gr)

## 10 CLIMATE



Greece has a warm Mediterranean climate. In summer, dry hot days are often relieved by stiff breezes, especially in the north and coastal areas. Athens can be stiflingly hot, so visitors should allow time to acclimatise. The evenings are cool. Winters are mild in the south but much colder in the north. November to March is the rainy season.

**Required clothing:** Lightweight clothes during summer months, including protection from the midday sun. Light sweaters are needed for evenings. Rainproofs are advised for autumn. Winter months can be quite cold, especially in the northern mainland, so normal winter wear will be required.

## 11 HISTORY AND GOVERNMENT

**History:** Greece was 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. 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 through 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 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. Many attempts were made to shake off the yoke of the Ottomans, such as the rising of 1770, which was supported by Catherine the Great. After a bitter War of Independence from 1821, a free state was declared in 1829. The effective consolidation was a gradual process, the last territory to be handed back being the Dodecanese Islands in 1945. Until 1967, Greece was a monarchy but the country then endured the rule of the Colonels. After their fall in 1974, elections gave the New Democracy Party (ND) a majority. A subsequent referendum rejected the idea of a return to monarchical rule. However, since 1981, with the exception of a single spell from 1990 to 1993 when ND regained power, Greece has been governed by the centre-left Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK). From 1981 until his death in 1996, the dominant figure both in PASOK and in Greek politics was Andreas Papandreu, a charismatic and highly effective politician who maintained, for the most part, a firm grip over his party. In his later years, both he and the party were tainted by repeated allegations of corruption. Nonetheless, since his death, the new PASOK leader, Costas Simitis, has managed to keep PASOK in office through two general elections: firstly, soon after Papandreu's death and, most recently, by virtue of a wafer-thin majority at the April 2000 poll. The main objective of the second Simitis administration was to steer Greece into the euro-zone. This was done successfully but at the cost of domestic unpopularity due to the necessary economic measures. 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 the continuing division of Cyprus (see Cyprus section) and control of territorial waters in the Aegean Sea. But the accession of Greek-controlled Cyprus to the EU in 2004 may act as a catalyst to a final resolution of that problem: indeed, Greece has now explicitly backed Turkey's own EU application. 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 (see Macedonia section). 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. 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.

**Government:** Greece is a unicameral parliamentary democracy. The 300-member parliament is elected for a maximum four-year term by adult suffrage. The Prime Minister is the leader of the largest party. The President is Head of State and is elected for a five-year term but has no executive powers.



## Travel Advice

Most visits to Greece are trouble-free but you should be aware of the global risk of indiscriminate international terrorist attacks, which could be against civilian targets, including places frequented by foreigners. This advice is based on information provided by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the UK. It is correct at time of publishing. As the situation can change rapidly, visitors **are advised to contact the following organisations for the latest travel advice:** British Foreign and Commonwealth Office Tel: (0845) 850 2829. Website: [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk) US Department of State Website: <http://travel.state.gov/travel>

## Top Things To See

In Athens, the capital and the country's largest city, it is impossible to miss the flat-topped hill of the Acropolis, site of the 2400-year-old Parthenon, one of the most famous classical monuments in the world. The ruins of the civic, political and commercial centre of the Ancient Agora can be visited, as can the reconstructed Hellenistic Stoa of Attalos, which houses the Agora Museum. Most artefacts are displayed in the National Archaeological Museum on Patission Street. Then head for the Athens' Parliament Building on Syntagma Square. Built in 1840 and originally a royal palace, this enormous building was badly damaged by fire in the early 20th century and was rebuilt for the National Assembly. One of the main highlights at the Parliament Building in Athens is the hourly changing of the guard at the front of the building. Visit the Panathenaic Stadium in Athens, which hosted the first modern day Olympic games of 1896 and the current stadium was constructed on the site of the original stadium, which was built almost 2,300 years ago. Drive or take a train to Olympia, the original site of the Olympic Games in the Peloponnese, which began in 776 BC, and the site where the Olympic Flame is still lit today. The site is a mass of marble inscriptions, restored temples and civic buildings, including the Temple of Zeus, which once housed the colossal gold and ivory statue of Zeus, one of the 'Seven Wonders of the Ancient World' (later taken to Constantinople and destroyed in a fire). There is also a good Archaeological Museum on the site, and a Museum of the Olympic Games located in the modern town of Olympia. Southeast of Olympia at Bassae (Vasses) is the well-preserved monumental Temple of Apollo Epicurius, dating back to the fourth century BC. Bordering onto Albania, Macedonia (Former Yugoslav Republic of) and Bulgaria, Macedonia's scenery and climate have more in common with the adjoining Balkans. The region's capital, Thessaloniki, is the second-largest city in Greece. A modern industrial port, partly protected by impressive city walls, it is home to the superb Archaeological Museum, housing the 'Treasures of Ancient Macedonia'. On the seafront, the imposing 16th-century White Tower, built by the Ottomans as part of the city's defence system, houses an excellent Byzantine Art Collection. The main ancient sites are the Arch of Galerius and the ruins of the Roman Agora. Southeast of **Thessaloniki are the three mountainous peninsulas of Halkidiki:** Cassandra, Sithonia and Agio Oros (Mount Athos). Mount Athos, with its renowned monasteries, is undoubtedly the region's highlight. Crete (Piraeus, 174 nautical miles) is the largest and most southerly Greek island. Despite a busy tourist industry concentrated along the north coast, Crete has preserved its unspoilt nature, local traditions and ancient monuments. In the capital and main port, Heraklion (Iraklio), the old town lies within the 16th-century Venetian city walls, while the harbour is protected by Koules, an imposing Venetian Fortress. The National Archaeological Museum is one of the country's top museums, displaying finds from the Minoan era, and the History Museum tells the island's story from Byzantine times up to the present day. Close to town stand three wonderful Minoan sites Knossos, Malia and Phaestos. Lying south of Athens and to the east of the Peloponnese, the Saronic islands are within easy reach of the capital, with regular ferry and hydrofoil services running from the port of Piraeus. Aegina, Hydra, Poros, Salamis and Spetses are the most popular islands. A barren, rocky, car-free island, Hydra (Idra) (Piraeus, 42 nautical miles) is popular with artists and jet-setters, primarily for the beauty of its chief settlement and port,



Hydra Town. Built into the hill overlooking the harbour, Hydra Town is a labyrinth of steep cobbled streets, filled with chic bars, restaurants and art galleries. 500m (1640ft) above town stands a monastery, offering fantastic views out over the sea. Located off the west coast of mainland Greece, the seven Ionian Islands (Cephalonia, Corfu, Ithaki, Kythira, Lefkada, Paxi and Zakynthos) are comparatively isolated from one another. Consequently, through the centuries each one has developed its own identity. The northernmost island of western Greece, Corfu is the best-known, busiest and most cosmopolitan of the Ionian islands. The capital, Corfu Town, is presided over by two imposing Venetian fortresses and gives onto a series of pretty harbours and bays. Worth visiting are the Archaeological Museum, which houses finds from local excavations; the Byzantine Museum, with a fine collection of icons; and the Museum of Asiatic Art. The Town Hall, a splendid example of 17th-century Venetian architecture, and the 12th-century Byzantine Church of St Jason and Sosipater and the Church of St Spyridon are also of interest. At Kanoni, on the tip of a small peninsular south of the town centre, a narrow causeway leads to the much photographed Monastery of Vlacherna. South of Corfu Town, at Gastouri, romantics will be delighted by the sight of the 19th-century Achillion, the summer palace of Empress Elizabeth of Austria, surrounded by beautiful Italian-style gardens. Best known as the setting of Louis de Bernières' Captain Corelli's Mandolin, Cephalonia (Patras, 53 nautical miles) is the biggest Ionian island. The mountainous scenery, culminating with the 1600m (5250ft) Mount Enos, is dramatic. The chief settlement, Argostoli, was largely destroyed in the disastrous 1953 earthquake. However, the Archaeological Museum and Folk Art Museum are both worth visiting. Lying east of the Peloponnese and southeast of the coast of Attica in the Aegean, a total of 30 islands make up the Cyclades, the best-known being Mykonos and Santorini. Other popular islands are Andros, Delos, Naxos, Paros and Tinos. Take a ferry to the most visited and most expensive of all the Greek islands, Mykonos, known for its lively nightlife and some of Greece's best discos. Mykonos Town (also known as Hora) comprises a modern harbour, whitewashed houses and churches, shops selling local arts and crafts, small tavernas and cafes, and is backed by a hill with five thatched windmills. The Paraportiani Church, a complex of four chapels, is considered to be an architectural masterpiece. The Archaeological Museum exhibits finds excavated from the necropolis on the nearby islet of Rhenia. Go on an excursion to the monasteries of Agios Panteleimon, close to Mykonos Town, and the Tourliani Monastery, close to the old fishing village of Ano Mera. From Mykonos, take a boat to the tiny and today uninhabited island of Delos, the religious and political centre of the Aegean in ancient times, also said to have been the birthplace of Apollo and Artemis. Star attractions include the Avenue of the Lions, featuring five crouching stone lions, guardians of the Sacred Lake, and the Sanctuary of Apollo, made up of three temples. The Archaeological Museum exhibits archaic, Classical, Hellenistic and Roman sculptures, including the Archaic Sphinx of the Naxians and Acroteria (Victories) from the Temple of the Athenians, found in excavations on the site. Considered by many as the most dramatically beautiful of all the Greek islands, Santorini (also known as Thira) was formed by the eruption of a now dormant volcano around 1600 BC. Arrival by ferry brings one to the west side of the island, with the whitewashed cliff top villages of Fira (the capital) and Ia (the Aegean's most photographed town) overlooking the circular caldera (a huge depression created by a volcanic explosion). A steep winding path leads up from the harbour of Skala to Fira, where one finds many excellent hotels, chic restaurants and bars, and a vibrant nightlife. The Archaeology Museum, displaying finds from the excavations at Akrotiri, is worth a visit. On the east side of the island lie the archaeological remains of Ancient Thira, a Dorian city dating back to the ninth century BC. The four most popular islands of the Northeast Aegean Islands are Chios, Lemnos, Lesbos and Samos, all of which lie fairly far apart in the waters of the northeast Aegean, close to Turkey. Lesbos, home of the ancient poet Sappho, is the largest island in this group, with vast olive groves, shady pinewoods, and picturesque monasteries. The capital, Mitilini, is dominated by a 14th-century castle. East of the Thessaly region on mainland Greece lie the four islands of the Sporades Alonissos, Skiathos, Skiros and Skopelos. Planted with pine trees and olive groves, Skiathos is a popular tourist destination, thanks to its indented coast with numerous sandy coves.



The capital, Skiathos Town, was built in 1830 on two low hills. The seafront is lined with cafes and seafood restaurants, and there is a good marina. Boat trips take tourists around the island to visit the Blue Cave, the ruins of the medieval walled town of Kastro on the south coast, and the pebble beach of Lalaria. The largest of the Sporades, Skiros lies far out from Volos and is most easily accessed from Kimi on Euboea. The main settlement, Skiros Town (also known as Horio), is made up of whitewashed cottages and narrow winding alleys, crowned by the hilltop Venetian Kastro (fortress). Visit the Folklore Museum which gives an excellent presentation of local handicrafts, and includes a reconstruction of a traditional house. The Dodecanese Islands is a cluster of 12 (dodeca) islands lying east of Peloponnese, closer to Turkey than to mainland Greece. All the islands can be reached by ferry from Piraeus, and distances between them are fairly small, so visitors can easily hop from one to another, swapping the relative sophistication of Rhodes and Kos for the calmer and simpler life on Tilos or Astipalaia. Rhodes is one of the most popular and best-developed islands in the Mediterranean. The capital, Rhodes Town, is made up of two distinct parts an old town and a new town. The old town, contained within the walls of a medieval fortress, centres of the Avenue of the Knights, lined with magnificent medieval buildings, including the monumental 14th-century Palace of the Grand Masters. The 15th-century Knight's Hospital now houses the Archaeological Museum. 2km (1.2 miles) west of the town walls lies the Acropolis of Ancient Rhodes. Many impressive ruins can still be seen, including the Temple of Apollo, and a theatre and stadium dating back to the second century BC.

**Tourist Information:** Greek/Hellenic National Tourism Organisation in the UK4 Conduit Street, London W1S 2DJ, UK Tel: (020) 7495 9300. Website: [www.gnto.co.uk](http://www.gnto.co.uk) Also deals with enquiries regarding conferences and conventions. Greek/Hellenic National Tourism Organisation in the USA Olympic Tower, 645 Fifth Avenue, 9th Floor, Suite 903, New York, NY 10022, USA Tel: (212) 421 5777. Website: [www.greektourism.com](http://www.greektourism.com) or [www.gnto.gr](http://www.gnto.gr)

#### Top Things To Do

Attend an open-air performance of the International Athens Festival at the Odeon of Herodes Atticus (from June to September). Alternatively, opt for the Epidaurus Festival which offers performances of ancient Greek dramas in the magical setting of the open-air Epidaurus Theatre, East of Nafplio (every weekend from late June to August). Open-air performances are also held during the summer at Dodoni's well-conserved theatre, dating back to the third century BC. Wander around the old quarter of Athens, Plaka, which spreads around the Acropolis. The area is picturesque with its famed flea market, small tavernas, craft shops and narrow winding alleys. Close to Arahova, on the main road from Athens to Delphi, lie the southern slopes of Mount Parnassus, which towers 2457m (8061ft) over the Gulf of Corinth. Through winter (December to April) the mountain hosts a number of well-equipped ski resorts, and the area is popular with hikers during spring and autumn. Mount Olympus, home of Zeus and the immortal gods and land of the Centaurs, is Greece's highest mountain, standing 2917m (9570ft). Walking tours depart from the village of Litochoro, where one finds hostels, hotels and tavernas. Climbing is also popular on the island of Euboea. Access the incredible cliff-top monasteries of the Meteora by a series of steep steps carved into the rocks. Perched upon bizarre vertical rock formations of up to 300m (984ft) high, a total of 24 monasteries, some with beautiful Byzantine frescoes, can be found to the west, above the Pinios Valley and the town of Kalambaka. Several are open to the public, notably Megalo Meteoro and Varlaam Monastery. Treat yourself in Methana, an important spa town since ancient times, located east of Epidaurus, with sulphuric waters and modernised hydrotherapy installations. East of Patras, travel through the deep Vouraikos Gorge, taking a spectacular train journey from Diakofto to Kalavrita. South of Hania (Crete), the beautiful Samaria Gorge, declared a National Park, is the longest gorge in Europe. Keen hikers will be able to walk the 18km (11.2 miles) length in a day, while the less sporting can join an organised tour, departing from Hania. On Tinos, the island's largest settlement, Tinos Town, is best known as a



pilgrimage site. Each year on 25 March and 15 August, join thousands of believers who gather here to pay their respect to an icon of Our Lady (said to perform miracles) kept in the Church of the Annunciate Virgin (Evangelistria). There are over 7000 karstic cave formations in the country, the majority in Crete. In the Mani peninsula, go to the semi-abandoned village of Vathia where the Caves of Dirou are located. The caves consist of a vast network with underground channels and huge caverns, which can be visited by boat. On the east coast of Cephalonia, the Cave of Melissani, noted for its extraordinary colours caused by the reflection of the sun's rays through the sea, can also be visited by boat. The Cave of St Sophia in Milopotamos on Ythera island, has frescoes, stalactites and stalagmites. On Milos island, take a boat to Sikia (also known as the Blue Cave) and Kleftiko. Further information on these caves is available from the Hellenic Speleological Society, 32 Sina Street, 106 72 Athens (tel: (210) 361 7824; website: [www.speleologicalsociety.gr](http://www.speleologicalsociety.gr)). There are excellent facilities along all coastlines of the mainland and particularly in the islands for watersports. The Apollo Coast, a highly developed tourist area stretching from Piraeus to Cape Sounio, is dotted with exclusive resorts such as Glifada (17km/11 miles from Athens) and Vouliagmeni (24km/15 miles from Athens), offering marinas, well-kept beaches, modern hotel complexes, seafood tavernas and luxury-class restaurants and nightclubs. Near Delphi lie the seaside towns of Itea and Galaxidi. Euboea is an island of great natural beauty and scenic variety, with sandy beaches and secluded coves. There are also plenty of good beaches and seaside resorts on the stretch of coast south of Kyllini as far as Kiparissia. On Mystras island, Vassiliki is also popular with surfers. Cassandra and Sithonia shelter Northern Greece's best beaches. North of Corfu town lie the popular resorts of Ipsos, Kassiopi and Sidari. In Cephalonia, the best beaches can be found a little south from Lixouri. Kythera has often been portrayed as a 'Garden of Paradise' and has some beautiful beaches. On Mykonos island, beaches range from cosmopolitan to secluded, the most popular being Agios Stefanos and Platis Gialos. On the south side of the island lie several unspoilt nudist beaches, the best known being Paradise and Super Paradise, which can be reached by boat from Plati Gialos. Naxos, the largest in the Cyclades islands, is particularly noted for its numerous sand beaches. For unspoilt beaches, go to Chios, Tilos or Halki. In Rhodes, just outside Rhodes Town lie the main tourist complexes of Falikari, Ixia and Ialissos (also known as Trianda), all with numerous hotels and good beaches. To see sandy beaches, some of black volcanic sand, go to Kos. East of Heraklion (Crete), Agios Nikolaos, one of the island's best-known holiday resorts, overlooks the Gulf of Mirambello and several fine beaches. East from here stands Sitia, another popular resort with bars, restaurants, hotels and a Venetian fortress. Note: Independent scuba-diving is strictly forbidden, in order to guard against the pilfering of underwater antiquities. Divers may only venture out under the auspices of a recognised diving school. For further information, contact the Hellenic Federation of Underwater Activities, West Terminal Post Office, Agios Cosmos, 166 04 Hellenikon, Athens, Greece (tel: (210) 981 9961; website: [www.sportsnet.gr](http://www.sportsnet.gr)).

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## Overview II

Greece was 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. Greece today offers the traveller the comforts of modern Europe in close



proximity to the stark beauty of the ancient world. There is no denying the historical and cultural heritage of Greece continues to resonate throughout the modern Western world - in its literature, art, philosophy and politics. All over Greece, are reminders of the country's glory from Athens' Parthenon and Delphi's Temple of Apollo, to the ruins on Crete of the Minóan city of Knossós, a civilisation reaching even further back into history. Scattered throughout the calm blue waters of the Aegean are Greece's 1400 islands, the largest of which is Crete, each with its own special story. The serenity of islands like Skópelos contrasts with the hedonistic party islands such as Myknos and Páros where the worship of Dionysus the god of revelry continues to the beat of garage and house music. Athens's previous glory in sports was restored when the Olympic Games returned home in 2004. Since Greece won her independence in 1830 from the Turkish Ottoman Empire, there have been problems in the relationship between the two neighbours. Achieving a political settlement in Cyprus remains a key concern of Greece's foreign policy. The situation seems to have improved following the accession of Greek-controlled Cyprus to the EU in 2004 which may act as a catalyst to a final resolution of that problem. Greece has now explicitly backed Turkey's own EU application.

#### Communications

**Telephone:** Country code: 30, followed by (2100) for Athens, (2310) for Thessaloniki and (2810) for Heraklion (all area codes are prefixed with 2 and end with 0). IDD is available throughout the mainland and islands.

**Mobile telephone:** Roaming agreements exist with most international mobile phone companies. Coverage is excellent.

**Internet:** Internet cafes are available in the main cities, including Athens, Thessaloniki and the islands Crete, Kos, Mykonos and Rhodes.

**Post:** All letters, postcards, newspapers and periodicals will automatically be sent by airmail. Airmail to Europe takes five days; six to North America; seven to Australia. Post office hours: Mon-Fri 0730-1400, Sat 0800-1400.

**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 1700 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 better regulate the FM dial in Athens resulted in a political row. Press: There are numerous daily newspapers in Athens including Eleftherotypia, Kathimerini (in English) and Ta Nea. Athens News is published weekly in English. TV: Publicly-owned ERT operates ET1, NET and ET3. Commercial channels include Alpha TV, Antenna TV and Mega TV. Radio: Publicly-owned ERA operates ERA1, ERA2 (entertainment), ERA3 (culture) and ERA4 (sport and music). Commercial stations include Antenna FM, Skai 100.3 and Sfera 102.2. Municipal Athens station Athena 98.4 was one of the first non-state radio stations.