

On the Road

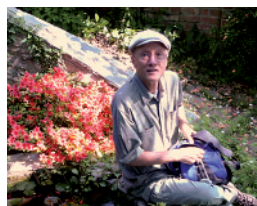


KORINA MILLER *Coordinating Author*

It's very quiet. All I can hear is the hissing and popping of the crater as I stand deep within it. It's early morning and we're alone. Around me is the moonscape of the volcano of Nisyros (p551), the caldera rising up to the lush landscape that spills down to the shore. Beautiful, other-worldly and – it can't be denied – rather pongy.



KATE ARMSTRONG Who says we authors don't go to the ends of the earth for our readers? Here I am at Cape Tenaro (p213), Greece's southernmost point. Cape Tenaro lighthouse sits in a historical treasure trove in the magnificent Mani. The walk there – via a rocky path – with views of Roman ruins, inlets and the ocean, makes you feel like you're on the edge of the world.



MICHAEL STAMATIOS CLARK

When I reached the Serpentine Organic Garden oasis (p267) in Tsangarada on the Pelion Peninsula, via a rocky forest path, I found a hidden hillside of greenery and colour, even a family of ducks annoyed by my presence. We worked it out, though, and I was able to grab a bit of shade on a hot summer's day.



VICTORIA KYRIAKOPOULOS Where did you say that bar was? Getting the low-down on new bars, restaurants and the latest hotspots in Athens (p147) is serious business involving serious research and leg work. Walking around exploring Athens is always full of surprises and rewards, with new places to discover all the time.



CHRIS DELISO They seldom come more iconic than Georgios the elder. With a long beard and an unbreakable olive-wood cane, this black-clad elder descended on me in Rethymno's bus station, bearing 700 years of Cretan history and an ever so slight whiff of Crete's famous firewater, *raki*. Fifteen minutes later the history lesson was over and the other waiting tourists, like all of Crete's would-be past invaders, had left the scene.



DES HANNIGAN Always find time for an acropolis; but not just your common or garden Athenian pile of old rocks. This is the Mycenaean acropolis of Koukounaries (p402) near Naousa, on Paros. Unbeatable viewpoint, enough old stones to stir the imagination and rarely anyone else there. Don't all rush.

For full author biographies see p777

Destination Greece

What is it that calls so many of us to Greece? Perhaps it's the endless miles of aquamarine coastline with some of Europe's cleanest beaches. Or the ancient sights that you've read about all your life and want to see with your own eyes. Maybe it's the slow-paced island life where days melt from one to the next, or the adrenalin-rushing possibilities of the mountainous terrain. It's easy to understand how so many myths of gods and giants originated in this vast and varied landscape, with wide open skies and a sea speckled with islands. Greece is also the birthplace of drama and democracy, of western science and medicine. It's been said that, in many ways, we are all the sons and daughters of Ancient Greece. Perhaps we're simply being called home.

Once you arrive, it's not too difficult to find the Greece you were hoping for, whether it's the pulsing nightclubs of Mykonos or the solemnity of Meteora; the grandeur of Delphi or the earthiness of Metsovo; the rugged Cretan hillsides and the lush wildflowers of spring. You'll quickly become acquainted with the melancholy throb of *rembetika* (blues songs), the tang of homemade tzatziki, and the ability of the ancient sights to unleash an imagination you might not have realised you had.

Nevertheless, while ancient sights might take the limelight in many tourist itineraries, the Greeks certainly aren't stuck in the past. Sure, it's easy to find remote, traditional villages with brilliant white buildings and roaming donkeys and goats, but the shepherd will likely be talking on their mobile phone and making a date for the local, trendy cafe. Athens has a firm grip on style and sophistication to rival any European capital. The Greek modern art scene is fresh and vibrant, and the political scene is passionate. It's a nation that welcomes and even insists upon change – from the unstoppable urban renewal taking place in Athens to the internet cafes found on the smallest islands and modern, impressive museums popping up around the nation. There are few cultures that embrace the past so fondly while simultaneously welcoming the future with open arms.

Like everywhere, it's not always smooth sailing in Greece. When problems do arise, they're debated and handled with a strong will, as is evident in the heated conversations outside the local *kafeneio* (coffee house). The past three decades of increased wealth and improved living standards have gone hand in hand with rising unemployment, growing public debt and a credit crunch that's left many Greeks disillusioned and angry. The government's proposals of reforms in pensions and labour, plans for privatisation, and alleged corruption, incited many Greeks to take to the street in massive strikes and protests.

Since the early '70s, battles between youth and the police have been a mainstay of Greek society. Increases in youth unemployment and downward mobility have added fuel to the youth movement and protests in December 2008 resulted in the death of a 15-year-old, shot by the Athenian police in the student neighbourhood of Exarhia. News of the shooting quickly spread (largely via texting, Facebook and Twitter) and hundreds of youth took to the streets in a social uprising that lasted for days and threatened to topple the government.

The colossal fires of 2007 also sparked distrust in the government for the way in which they were (or weren't) dealt with. Today you'll find student groups, environmental charities and locals teamed up with expats working to reforest the country. Greeks are, in general, becoming increasingly aware of environmental degradation, with calls for bans on sprawling development

FAST FACTS

Population:	11.26 million
Percentage of women:	50%
Life expectancy:	80 years
Inhabitants per square kilometre:	87
Tourists:	18.8 million annually
GDP:	US\$345 billion
Per capita income:	US\$32,005
Inflation:	1.57%
Unemployment:	9.3%
External debt:	US\$92.19 billion

and more opportunities to recycle. Climate change, diminished water supplies and the rising of sea levels are very real concerns for Greeks. But the debate is often tangled in the mixed interests of locals versus developers or backdoor deals with local government.

On the global front, Greece has become a truly multicultural nation in recent years and the pros and cons of this are another hot topic of conversation. Once an emigrant country, with thousands of Greeks moving to North America and Australia, and later a popular refuge for expats, Greece now sees a huge influx of illegal migrants from Afghanistan, Iraq and Africa who cross the border from Turkey. As islands such as Samos struggle to house boatloads of migrants, there is mounting criticism from the international community on the poor conditions and treatment of refugees and immigrants in Greece. With the lowest acceptance rate in Europe for asylum requests (only 379 out of 20,000 were accepted in 2008), many illegal immigrants and refugees simply disappear into Greece's informal economy or attempt to cross into other European countries. Others linger in shanty towns and deportation centres.

All of this would have once been discussed in a haze of smoke at the local *kafeneio* but in July 2009, Greece brought in antismoking laws similar to those across Europe, meaning all public places should be smoke free. Greeks are some of the heaviest smokers in Europe and it will be interesting to see how well this law is enforced, particularly in the small villages, remote islands and party hubs. It seems likely that the majority will continue to rule.

Despite these passionate debates and controversy, Greece is essentially a laid-back place. Lounge at the cafe over an endless coffee, stroll along the seafront, park yourself on the beach and take your time over meals and you'll fit right in. Greeks know how to enjoy life and are renowned as some of the most hospitable people on the globe. Their generosity and warmth is as genuine as the soft sand between your toes and the warmth of the Aegean sun.

Getting Started

WHEN TO GO

Spring and autumn are the best times to visit Greece; specifically May, June, September and October. Most of the country's tourist infrastructure goes into hibernation during winter, particularly on the islands (and in some places you'll be hard-pressed to find a hotel or restaurant open). Some of the smaller islands close completely as islanders head off to alternative homes on the mainland for a few months. Many hotels, seasonal cafes and restaurants close their doors from the end of October until mid-April; bus and ferry services are either drastically reduced or cancelled.

The cobwebs are dusted off in time for Orthodox Easter (usually in April; see p23), when the first tourists start to arrive. Conditions are perfect between Easter and mid-June, when the weather is pleasantly warm in most places; beaches and ancient sites are relatively uncrowded; public transport operates at close to full schedules; and there's a bigger variety of accommodation options to choose from.

Mid-June to the end of August is high season, when everything is in full swing and the majority of festivals take place. It's also very hot – in July and August the mercury can soar to 40°C (over 100°F) in the shade just about anywhere in the country; most beaches are crowded; many ancient sites are swarming with tour groups; and in some places, accommodation is booked solid. The high season starts to wind down in September and conditions are ideal once more until the end of October.

By November the endless blue skies of summer have disappeared. November to February are the wettest months and it can get surprisingly cold. Snow is common on the mainland and in the mountains of Evia and Crete; it even occasionally snows in Athens. But there are also plenty of sunny days and some visitors prefer the tranquillity that reigns at this time of year.

See Climate (p714) for more information.

COSTS & MONEY

Prices have rocketed since the adoption of the euro in 2002 and, although they appear to be levelling off, Greece is no longer the cheap country it once was. While tiny hole-in-the-wall restaurants continue to deliver hearty meals for low prices, eating out anywhere more upmarket has become a pricey venture.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

Bags feel twice as heavy in the heat. Clothes also dry super fast under the Greek sun, so don't take more than you really need.

- A few novels or a deck of cards to while away the hours spent riding ferries.
- A shady hat, sunglasses and sunblock – indispensable in Greece's hot climate.
- An inflatable neck pillow and eye shades – for those long bus and train journeys.
- Lonely Planet's *Greek phrasebook* – talk like the locals.
- CDs – life-saving if you rent a car in a remote area.
- A bathing suit in your daypack – for those unexpected coves and beaches.
- Sturdy, nonslip shoes – many sights, historic towns and villages have slippery, rocky paths.
- A penchant for octopus – it's on nearly every island menu.
- Insect repellent – to ward off mosquitoes and sand fleas.

Accommodation has also skyrocketed, making many of the budget options not really worth the price and many of the midrange options appearing much more worthwhile.

A rock-bottom daily budget for a solo traveller is about €50. This would mean buses, staying in youth hostels or camping, and only occasionally eating in restaurants or taking ferries. Allow €100 per day if you want your own room and plan to eat out, travel about and see the sights. If you want comfortable rooms and restaurants all the way, you will need closer to €150 per day. These budgets are for individuals travelling in high season (mid-June to late August). Couples sharing a room can get by on less.

Your money will go much further if you travel during the quieter months of May to mid-June and September to October. Particularly on the islands, accommodation is a lot cheaper outside high season. You will also be able to negotiate better deals if you stay a few days. Families can achieve considerable savings by looking for self-catering apartments and shopping for food and drink at supermarkets and local produce markets. Travelling by boat can also save money as children under five board for free and you can save a night's accommodation.

Prices quoted throughout this book are for the high season of mid-June to late August.

HOW MUCH?

Local telephone call per minute €0.30

Minimum taxi fare €4

Single Greek coffee €2

City bus ticket €1

Greek salad €6

TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

As with many popular European destinations, Greece's environment is pushed to the limit each year by the massive influx of tourists. While the bigger picture can seem rather overwhelming to an individual tourist (p90), there are a number of things you can do that can help lessen the impact without compromising your holiday.

The first thing to consider is how you will travel to Greece. While short vacations don't always offer the luxury of avoiding the carbon footprints involved in flying (see p762), reaching Greece from the rest of Europe by train and/or boat is a viable option for those with a little more time. See p728 for options. The experience of long-distance train travel can also be a highlight of your trip.

Next consider when you're going to travel. Visiting Greece on the shoulder seasons – early spring or autumn – means the weather is more bearable and puts less pressure on precious resources such as food and water. This is particularly true on the islands.

Once you're there, how you get around can make a difference to the environment. Not everyone (in fact, very few of us!) have the gumption and stamina to tackle the hilly, hot terrain on bicycle, but you can opt for local buses and trains rather than planes or rented cars, or for fast, fuel-economic ferries rather than slow gas-guzzlers. We've got all of the information you need to tackle the local transport; see p731 and p738 for more details.

Water scarcity is a serious problem throughout much of Greece; a number of islands are without their own source. It's impractical to avoid buying bottled water entirely. On some of the remote and smaller islands, tap water is not safe to drink (unless you boil or purify it); always ask locally. When buying bottled water, choose Greek brands (which are everywhere) rather than European brands that have travelled further and therefore come with a larger carbon footprint. You can also cut down on water use by not requesting hotels to wash your towels daily and by taking quick showers.

'Organic' and 'green' are increasingly popular buzzwords in Greece. The rise in agrotourism means more options for staying in local, environmentally friendly places. You'll also find increasing options for recycling and for buying organic food, and for guided activities such as

TOP 10



GREEN CHOICES

Green doesn't have to mean composting toilets and a holiday without showers. Here are excellent ways to enjoy your vacation and do your bit for the earth at the same time.

- 1 Milia (p498) – mountaintop ecolodges
- 2 National Marine Park of Alonnisos (p661) – preserve of the Mediterranean monk seal
- 3 Serpentine Organic Garden (p267) – volunteering on these lush sustainable grounds
- 4 Tilos (p547) – for rare birds
- 5 Octopus Sea Trips (p404) – ecofriendly family activities
- 6 Hydra (p364) – car- and scooter-free
- 7 Thrassa Eco-Tourism Guesthouse (p331) – organic food and outdoor activities
- 8 Masticulture Ecotourism Activities (p611) – traditional cultivation of mastic trees, olive trees and grapevines
- 9 feel ingreece (p667) – catch a glimpse of wild ponies
- 10 2407 Mountain Activities (p215) – hop on a bike to explore in and around the Taygetos Mountains

SET IN GREECE

Get inspired with some Greek scenery in these critically acclaimed films.

- 1 *Mediterraneo* (1991) – an award-winning comedy about Italian soldiers stranded on tiny Kastellorizo during WWII
- 2 *For Your Eyes Only* (1981) – Roger Moore travels around Greece secret-agent style
- 3 *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* (2001) – not as good as the book, but great scenes of Kefallonia
- 4 *The Guns of Navarone* (1961) – iconic war film, starring Anthony Quinn and Gregory Peck, on Rhodes
- 5 *Mamma Mia* (2008) – taking the world by storm, this ABBA-based musical is filmed on Skopelos, the Pelion Peninsula and Skiathos
- 6 *Zorba the Greek* (1964) – Anthony Quinn's steamy performance as an uptight English writer who finds love on Crete; the famous beach dance scene was at Stavros, near Hania
- 7 *Never on a Sunday* (1960) – Greece's big star Melina Mercouri received an Oscar nomination for her role as a prostitute in Piraeus
- 8 *Lara Croft Tomb Raider* (2001–02) – Lara Croft went diving off Santorini
- 9 *Shirley Valentine* (1989) – this classic foreign romance fantasy takes place in Mykonos
- 10 *My Life in Ruins* (2009) – Nia Vardalos led her tour bus around Athens and the Peloponnese

ADRENALIN KICKS

Greece isn't all about lazing on the beaches.

- 1 Hiking through mountain villages in the Lousios Gorge (p197)
- 2 Rock climbing seaside cliffs (p569)
- 3 Diving in clear waters (p654)
- 4 Kitesurfing with the world's best (p536)
- 5 Scaling steep rock pinnacles (p275)
- 6 Walking scenic cobblestoned mule pathways (p262)
- 7 Hiking into the depths of a volcanic crater (p554)
- 8 Walking in wildflower meadows (p659)
- 9 Hiking the pristine Pindos Mountains through the stone-and-slate villages of the magical Zagorohoria region (p342)
- 10 Swimming at the semitropical pink-sand beach of Elafonisi (p498)

hiking and cycling. As much of Greek cuisine is based on local produce, restaurant proprietors are catching on to the movement and advertising their dishes as locally sourced and, in many cases, organically grown. Shops are also selling local, organic herbs, honey, soap and other wares as souvenirs, making it possible to support the local economy and the environment in one go. You'll find many of these greener options listed in our GreenDex (p803).

TRAVEL LITERATURE

Travel writers can be a great source of inspiration for those planning to follow in their footsteps.

92 Acharnon Street (John Lucas; 2007) A view into contemporary Greece from the perspective of a visiting English professor at the University of Athens. It reflects the changes that took place during the '80s and covers politics to poetry.

Eurydice Street: A Place In Athens (Sofka Zinovieff; 2004) An engaging tale of an expat in Athens. The book takes in customs, etiquette, culture and modern history. Recommended by Greeks for its accuracy of modern Greek culture.

Falling for Icarus: A Journey Among the Cretans (Rory MacLean; 2004) The author journeys to Crete to live out his dream of constructing and flying his own plane and entwines his tale with history, myths and portrayals of village life.

It's All Greek to Me! (John Mole; 2004) The humorous and much-acclaimed account of an English family converting a stone ruin into a home on Evia, including their outlandish attempts to 'fit in'.

My Family and Other Animals (Gerald Durrell; 1977) The classic, witty story of a childhood spent on Corfu, told by a now-famous naturalist and conservationist. Not surprisingly, flora and fauna find their way into the pages.

The Colossus of Marousi (Henry Miller; 1975) Few writers have matched the enthusiasm expressed in this classic tale. Miller's fervour never flags as he leaps from one adventure to the next.

INTERNET RESOURCES

There is a huge number of websites providing information about Greece.

EOT (Greek National Tourist Organisation; www.gnto.gr) For concise tourist information.

Greece Online (www.greece-on-line.gr) An interactive map that lets you pinpoint things like beaches, museums, ski resorts or airports.

Greek Travel Pages (www.gtp.gr) One-stop site with access to ferry schedules, accommodation listings and destination details.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Get the latest updates and ask questions before you go or dispense advice when you get back.

Ministry of Culture (www.culture.gr) Details of events, sights, galleries, monuments and museums.

Travel Guide to Greece (www.greektravel.com) Matt Barrett's comprehensive site to travelling in Greece.

Events Calendar

Attending a Greek festival or event can easily be a highlight of your trip. Atmospheric and jubilant, they're often seen as an excuse for a good party. Below are some of the main events; there are also countless religious festivals that towns and entire islands celebrate with great gusto. Ask locally, and see also the destination chapters.

JANUARY

FEAST OF AGIOS VASILIOS (ST BASIL) 1 Jan

A church ceremony followed by the exchanging of gifts, singing, dancing and feasting; the *vasilopita* (golden glazed cake for New Year's Eve) is cut and the person who gets the slice containing a coin will supposedly have a lucky year.

EPIPHANY (BLESSING OF THE WATERS) 6 Jan

The day of Christ's baptism by St John is celebrated throughout Greece. Seas, lakes and rivers are blessed; with the largest ceremony held at Piraeus (p158).

GYNAIKOKRATIA 8 Jan

The villages of the prefectures of Rodopi, Kilkis and Seres in northern Greece hold a day of role reversal. Women spend the day in *kafeneia* (coffee houses) while the men stay at home to do the housework.

PATRAS CARNIVAL mid-Jan–early Mar

This Peloponnesian festival in Patra (p171) features a host of minor events leading up to a wild weekend of costume parades, colourful floats and celebrations in late February or early March. For more details check www.carnivalpatras.gr.

FEBRUARY

CARNIVAL SEASON 3 weeks before Lent

Prior to the fasting of Lent, carnival season has many regional variations, but fancy dress, feasting, traditional dancing and general merrymaking prevail. The Patra carnival (above) is the largest, while the most bizarre is on Skyros (p667).

CLEAN MONDAY (SHROVE MONDAY) Mon before Ash Wed

On the first day of Lent (a day which is referred to as *Kathara Deftera*), people take to the hills throughout Greece to enjoy picnics together and fly kites.

MARCH

INDEPENDENCE DAY 25 Mar

The anniversary of the hoisting of the Greek flag by independence supporters at Moni Agias Lavras is celebrated with parades and dancing. This act of revolt marked the start of the War of Independence.

APRIL

ORTHODOX EASTER 40 days after the start of Lent

The Lenten fast ends on Easter Sunday with the cracking of red-dyed Easter eggs, feasting and dancing. This is the most important festival in the Greek Orthodox religion. The Monastery of St John the Theologian on Patmos (p575), in the Dodecanese, is a great place to witness it.

FEAST OF AGIOS GEORGIOS (ST GEORGE) 23 Apr or 1st Tue following Easter

The feast day of St George, the country's patron saint and the patron saint of shepherds, is celebrated at several places, but with particular exuberance in Arahova (p247), near Delphi, in central Greece. Expect dancing, feasting and much merriment.

MAY

MAY DAY 1 May

This occasion is marked by a mass exodus from towns to the country. During picnics, wildflowers are gathered and made into wreaths to decorate houses.

ANASTENARIA 21 May

This fire-walking ritual takes place in the village of Langadas, near Thessaloniki. Villagers clutching icons dance barefoot on burning charcoal.

JUNE

NAVY WEEK

early Jun

Celebrating their long relationship with the sea, fishing villages and ports throughout the country host historical re-enactments and parties.

NAFLION FESTIVAL

mid-Jun

Featuring Greek and international performers, this classical music festival in the Peloponnese uses the Palamidi fortress (p187) as one of its concert venues. Check out www.nafplionfestival.gr for details.

FEAST OF
ST JOHN THE BAPTIST

24 Jun

This widely celebrated holiday sees Greeks make bonfires of the wreaths made on May Day.

ROCKWAVE FESTIVAL

end of Jun

With major international artists (such as Moby, The Killers and Mötley Crüe) and massive crowds, this festival (p138) is held on a huge parkland at the edge of Athens. See www.rockwavefestival.gr for more.

HELLENIC FESTIVAL

Jun-Aug

The most prominent Greek summer festival features local and international music, dance and drama staged at the Odeon of Herodes Atticus (p122) in Athens and the world famous Theatre of Epidavros (p193), near Nafplio in the Peloponnese.

JULY

WINE & CULTURE
FESTIVAL

early Jul-end Aug

Held at Evia's coastal town of Karystos, this festival (p649) includes theatre, traditional dancing, music and visual-art exhibits. It ends with a sampling of every local wine imaginable.

FOLEGANDROS FESTIVAL

late Jul

This week-long festival (p442) features music and feasting at a range of locations around the island's beautiful old *hora* (main town).

SPEED WORLD CUP

Jul or Aug

Kitesurfers from around the world hit Karpathos (p536) for its excellent surfing conditions and big prize money. Event dates change annually; check www.speedworldcup.com for more details.

AUGUST

AUGUST MOON FESTIVAL

full moon

The full moon is celebrated with musical performances at historical venues such as the Acropolis (p118) in Athens and other sites around the country. Check local papers for details.

FEAST OF THE ASSUMPTION

15 Aug

Assumption Day is celebrated with family reunions; the whole population is seemingly on the move on either side of the big day. Thousands make a pilgrimage to Tinos to its miracle-working icon of Panagia Evangelistria (p379).

CRACKIN' HOLIDAY

Forget Christmas or birthdays. In Greece, the biggest day of the year is Easter when communities joyously celebrate Jesus' Resurrection. The festival begins on the evening of Good Friday with the *perifora epitafiou*, when a shrouded bier (representing Christ's funeral bier) is carried through the streets in a moving candle-lit procession. One of the most impressive of these processions climbs Lykavittos Hill (p131) in Athens to the Chapel of Agios Georgios. If you visit churches early in the morning on Good Friday, you'll often see the bier being decorated with countless flowers.

Resurrection Mass starts at 11pm on Saturday night. At midnight, packed churches are plunged into darkness to symbolise Christ's passing through the underworld. The ceremony of the lighting of candles that follows is the most significant moment in the Orthodox year, for it symbolises the Resurrection. Its poignancy and beauty is spellbinding. The ceremony ends with candle-lit processions through the streets and fireworks representing the sound of the boulder rolling away from in front of Jesus' tomb.

The Lenten fast ends on Easter Sunday with the cracking of red-dyed Easter eggs, symbolising the blood of Christ and new life – taken together this represents the new life given through Christ's resurrection on the cross. An outdoor feast of roast lamb takes place in the afternoon, followed by Greek dancing. The day's greeting is '*Hristos anesti*' (Christ is risen), to which the reply is '*Alithos anesti*' (truly He is risen).

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Religious festivals flood the Greek calendar. In fact, according to tradition, every day of the year is dedicated to a saint or a martyr. Christian Greeks are more likely to celebrate the day for the saint they are named after than their birthday. On a person's name day, greet them with *hronia polla* (good wishes and prosperity) and, if you go to visit or meet them out, take them a small gift. Islands and towns also celebrate the day of their patron saint with church services in historic chapels, feasting and often some dancing.

SEPTEMBER**GENNISIS TIS PANAGIAS** 8 Sep

The birthday of the Virgin Mary is celebrated throughout Greece with religious services and feasting.

EXALTATION OF THE CROSS 14 Sep

Celebrated throughout Greece with processions and hymns.

OCTOBER–NOVEMBER**FEAST OF AGIOS DIMITRIOS** 26 Oct

This feast day, commemorating St Dimitrios, is celebrated in Thessaloniki (p291) with wine drinking and revelry.

OHI (NO) DAY 28 Oct

Metaxas' refusal to allow Mussolini's troops passage through Greece in WWII is commemorated with remembrance services, parades, feasting and dance.

THESSALONIKI INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL mid-Nov

Around 150 films are crammed into 10 days of screenings around the city. For details, check out www.filmfestival.gr.

DECEMBER**CHRISTMAS DAY** 25 Dec

Christmas is celebrated with religious services and feasting plus added 'Western' features, such as Christmas trees, decorations and presents.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

A CYCLADES CIRCLE

Two Weeks / Athens to Athens

The Cyclades are by far the most popular and best known of the Greek islands. Start with a couple of days sightseeing in **Athens** (p102), before catching a ferry from **Rafina** (p164). The first port of call is classy **Andros** (p374), with its fine beaches and art galleries. Move along to **Tinos** (p378), a pilgrimage island for many Orthodox Christians. Next in line is chic **Mykonos** (p386), famous for its bars and beaches, and stepping-off point for the sacred island of **Delos** (p395). **Naxos** (p406), the greenest and most fertile of the Cyclades, is a great place for walkers. The sheer cliffs of the volcanic caldera at **Santorini** (Thira; p427), created by one of the largest eruptions ever recorded, are a sight not to be missed. Start your return leg with a couple of days partying on youthful **Ios** (p423), then recover on nearby **Paros** (p397) with its plethora of fine beaches and more mellow nightlife. Swing west on a weekly ferry to demure **Sifnos** (p447) with its olive grove, oleanders, almonds and junipers. Finally, visit discrete **Kythnos** (p453) and mingle with the Athenian yacht crowd.

Heading southeast from Athens, this circular route covers several hundred kilometres, taking you to the jewels of the Cyclades and back to Athens.



THE GRAND TOUR

One Month / Athens to Ancient Delphi

A month is long enough to experience the huge variety of attractions (both ancient and modern) that Greece has to offer.

From bustling **Athens** (p102), head to the pretty Venetian city of **Nafplio** (p186) in the Peloponnese. Nafplio, first capital of independent Greece, is the perfect base for day trips to **Ancient Mycenae** (p184) and the celebrated **Theatre of Epidavros** (p193). Head south from here to the attractive fishing town of **Gythio** (p208) to catch a ferry across to **Kissamos** (p500) on Crete, possibly stopping at the delightfully unspoiled island of **Kythira** (p231) on the way. It's certainly worth calling in at either the charming **Hania** (p483) or **Rethymno** (p473) on the journey along Crete's northern coast to the capital **Iraklio** (p460) and the ruins of **Knossos** (p469). From Iraklio, jump across to not-to-be-missed **Santorini** (Thira; p427) and start island hopping north. Consider unwinding for a few days at some of the smaller islands such as **Anafi** (p438) and **Koufonisia** (p417), both perfect for beach lovers, before hitting the bars and clubs of hedonistic **Mykonos** (p386). Mykonos also has weekly flights to cosmopolitan **Thessaloniki** (p282) in northern Greece. Thessaloniki is a pleasant surprise to many travellers; a sophisticated city with some fine Roman and Byzantine architecture and a lively nightlife. Walkers will certainly want to call at **Mt Olympus** (p311) on the way to the amazing rock monasteries of **Meteora** (p272), home of hermit monks. The last stop is at unforgettable **Ancient Delphi** (p241), former home of the mysterious Delphic oracle and steeped in Ancient Greek history; just the place to ask what to do next.



A month-long epic trip, taking you through the Peloponnese, Crete, the Cyclades and back to the mainland through northern and central Greece.

MAINLY MAINLAND

Two Weeks / Igoumenitsa to Athens

If entering Greece from Italy with your own transport, Igoumenitsa is a good place to start exploring the natural and historic wonders of the mainland.

Do not linger in **Igoumenitsa** (p352), the busy entry port in Greece's far northwest; head across the mountains to **Ioannina** (p337) with its arresting lakeside location, Ottoman monuments and social life. Head northwards to the **Zagorohoria** (p342), unlike anything else you will see in Greece. Cross the Pindos Mountains via the less-travelled northern route to **Kastoria** (p319), a pretty lakeside town. Now make a beeline for the **Prespa Lakes** (p317), where tranquillity reigns over landscapes of water and mountains. Visit the artists' town of **Florina** (p315) and cruise through western Macedonia with an overnight stop in **Edessa** (p314) – famous for its tumbling waterfalls. Spend some time in bustling **Thessaloniki** (p282) before heading to the home of the ancient gods at **Mt Olympus** (p311), a mere 90-minute drive south. Passing through the **Vale of Tembi** (p258) you enter the sprawling plains of Thessaly where monks built monasteries atop pinnacles of rock at stunning **Meteora** (p272). Heading south, the route takes you across agricultural plains and mountains to the sea once more near **Lamia** (p254), not far from where ancient hero Leonidas stood his ground against invading Persians at **Thermopylae** (p254). A fast highway now leads on to Athens, a detour from which leads you to **Thiva** (Thebes; p238). From here choose the less-travelled mountain route via Erythres to approach **Athens** (p102).

This circuitous 1000km-long route takes in the more spectacular scenery of the north plus the centre's most visited attraction, Meteora, and finally leads you to Athens along less-travelled routes.



ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

EASTERN ISLAND RUN

Three Weeks / Rhodes to Alexandroupoli

This route takes travellers island hopping north from Rhodes through the islands of the Dodecanese and the Northeastern Aegean, finishing in Alexandroupoli.

Spend a few days on **Rhodes** (p512), exploring the atmospheric old city and visiting the spectacular **Acropolis of Lindos** (p526) before setting sail for **Tilos** (p547). This laid-back island has escaped the ravages of development and is a great place for walkers. The next stop is **Nisyros** (p551), with its breathtaking volcano and lush flora. Call briefly at **Kos** (p555) to lounge on long, sandy beaches and then hop on a ferry to **Patmos** (p575), an island that St John the Divine found sufficiently inspiring to pen his *Book of Revelations*. Patmos has good connections to ultra-laid-back **Ikaria** (p587), where you can laze at some of the Aegean's best beaches before continuing to **Chios** (p604) and its fabulous mastic villages of the south. The next stop is **Lesvos** (Mytilini; p616), birthplace of the poet Sappho, and producer of Greece's finest ouzo and arguably some of the country's finest olive oil. **Limnos** (p627) is little more than a transit point on the journey north to **Samothraki** (p632) and the Sanctuary of the Great Gods. The final leg is to the Thracian port of **Alexandroupoli** (p327), where travellers will find good transport connections to Thessaloniki and Athens.



Starting in the far south of Greece, this leisurely 800km-long trip hops through the Dodecanese to the north-eastern Aegean islands with lots of beaches and stunning scenery en route.

EXPLORING THE PELOPONNESE**Two Weeks / Athens to Athens**

This route mixes island life with the ancient sights and villages of the Peloponnese peninsula. It's only a short hop from Athens but it feels worlds away.

Jump on a ferry from **Athens** (p101) to Methana from where you can visit the ancient theatre of **Epidavros** (p192) and take in some star-lit classical performances. Next head to graceful **Nafplio** (p186) with its mansions, museums and lively port. From here, it's easy to do day trips to the impressive acropolis at **Tiryns** (p192) and the citadel of **Mycenae** (p184). Head west from Nafplio to the medieval village of **Dimitsana** (p197), perched high on a hill and a magnet for hikers. A detour north will take you to the sanctuary of **Ancient Olympia** (p227) where you can stand in the stadium that first hosted the Games. South of Dimitsana is the World Heritage-listed **Mystras** (p202), the massive ruins of an ancient fortress town that was the last stronghold of the Byzantine Empire. If you enjoy stretching your legs, head south to the rugged and remote **Mani** (p209). Explore the Taygetos Mountains and tiny, isolated coves. Walk out to one of mainland Europe's most southerly points at **Cape Tenaro** (p213), mentioned in Homer's 'Iliad'. Follow the coast east to spectacular **Monemvasia** (p205), Greece's answer to France's Mont St-Michel, and spend at least a day exploring the medieval cobbled alleyways and staying in atmospheric lodgings within the walls. A short journey south brings you to Neapoli where you can hop on a ferry to the unspoilt island of **Kythira** (p231) with its fine beaches and tiny villages. From here, another ferry will return you to Athens.

This 900km-long route through the Peloponnese peninsula takes in some of Greece's most beautiful medieval towns and historic sights, and dramatic scenery that's ideal for hikers.



TAILORED TRIPS

ON THE GO

If you really fancy a vacation that combines a number of activities beyond beaching it and dining then listen up. Start with some relaxing fly fishing on the Aoös River near **Konitsa** (p346) in Epiros. After a lunch of freshly caught trout, try walking the **Vikos Gorge** (p344) and maybe follow that with a mountain hike to **Drakolimni** (Dragon Lake; p343). Now take your gear south and check out some fast windsurfing at **Vasiliki** (p691) on the island of Lefkada. When surfed out and you've caught your breath, trek on southwards across the Gulf of Corinth to the deep southwest of the Peloponnese at **Karitena** (p196) where you can white-water raft or hot dog a fast-flowing river and or simply hike. Now hop on a slow ferry to **Crete** (p457) from the southern Peloponnese and really do some walking. Hike the Trans-European E4 walking trail (p486) and take in the spectacular **Samaria Gorge** (p491) while you are at it. Allow a good week for this very challenging slog. Now cruise to **Rhodes** (p512) and take in some super scuba-diving and when done with exploring the depths, zip across the water to kitesurf at **Mikri Vigla** (p411) on Naxos. Exhausted?



NORTHERN ANTIQUITIES

Make Thessaloniki your base and seek out some of the lesser-known but no less spectacular sites of the sprawling regions of Epiros, Macedonia and Thrace. This itinerary is best accomplished with your own transport.

Revel for a day or two in the vibrant nightlife of **Thessaloniki** (p282) and visit its numerous museums, then head west to the ancient Macedonian capital of **Pella** (p310), where you can admire the ruins of Alexander the Great's home base. See the stunning tomb of Alexander's father Phillip of Macedon at nearby **Vergina** (p313), the north's singularly most impressive archaeological site. Cross the looming Pindos Mountains to **Ioannina** (p337) from where you can easily visit the splendid amphitheatre and oracle of **Dodoni** (p341), the eerie underground site of ancient Hades at the **Nekromanteio of Afyra** (p352), close to the Epirot coast, and the Roman-era settlement of **Nikopolis** (p350). Cross back to Macedonia and take another breather in Thessaloniki before heading east. The first stop will be **Philippi** (p306), a Roman site where Christianity was first accepted in Europe and close to the busy port of **Kavala** (p306) with its archaeological museum. Do not miss out on the spectacular **Sanctuary of the Great Gods** (p634) on the island of Samothraki where the Winged Victory of Samothrace was found (now on display in the Louvre in Paris).



The Authors



KORINA MILLER Coordinating Author, *Dodecanese, Island Hopping*

Korina first ventured to Greece as a backpacking teenager, sleeping on ferry decks and hiking in the mountains. She has since found herself drawn back to soak up the dazzling Greek sunshine, lounge on the beaches and consume vast quantities of Greek salad and strong coffee. Korina grew up on Vancouver Island and has been exploring the globe since she was 16, working, studying and travelling in 36 countries en route. She now resides in England's Sussex countryside while she plots her next adventure. Korina has been writing travel guides for Lonely Planet for the past decade with 15 titles under her belt. Korina also wrote the Destination Greece, Getting Started, Events Calendar, itineraries, Environment, Directory, Transport, Health and Glossary chapters.



KATE ARMSTRONG Peloponnese

Having studied history and fine arts, Kate headed to Greece aeons ago to view her first (noncelluloid) *kouros* (male statue of the Archaic period), and fell in love with the country. On several subsequent visits she's rubbed shoulders with many ghosts of mythical beings in the Peloponnese, her all-time favourite region. She devoured kilos of feta and olives (to the delight of locals), several pigs (to the dismay of her vegetarian partner) and was treated to more hospitality than Aphrodite herself. When not wandering in mountainous terrains, Kate sets her itchy feet in Australia. A freelance travel writer, she contributes to Lonely Planet's African, South American and Portuguese titles as well as Australian newspapers, and is the author of educational children's books.



MICHAEL STAMATIOU CLARK Central Greece, Evia & the Sporades

Michael's Greek roots go back to the village of Karavostamo on the Aegean island of Ikaria, home of his maternal grandparents. He was born into a Greek-American community in Cambridge, Ohio, and recently became a Greek citizen. His first trip to Greece was as a deckhand aboard a Greek freighter, trading English lessons for Greek over wine and backgammon. When not travelling to Greece, Michael teaches English to international students in Berkeley, California, listens to Greek *rembetika* (blues) after midnight and searches for new ways to convert friends to the subtle pleasures of retsina.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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CHRIS DELISO Northern Greece, Northeastern Aegean Islands, Crete

Chris Deliso was drawing maps of the Aegean by the age of five, and 20 years later he ended up in Greece while labouring away on an MPhil in Byzantine Studies at Oxford. Ever since studying Modern Greek in Thessaloniki in 1998, he has travelled frequently in Greece, including a year in Crete and a long sojourn on Mt Athos. Chris especially enjoyed stumbling upon the unexpected on remote isles like Psara, imbibing heartily in the wineries of Macedonia, gawking at the vultures ripping apart carrion in Thrace, and feasting himself on those incomparable Cretan sweet cheese pies – the *myzithropitakia*.


DES HANNIGAN Saronic Gulf Islands, Cyclades, Ionian Islands

Des first surfaced (literally) in Greece many years ago in an Aegina harbour, having jumped off a boat into several feet of unexpected water. Ever since, he's been drifting around the country whenever he can, although home is on the edge of the cold Atlantic in beautiful Cornwall, England. In a previous life Des worked at sea, valuable experience for coping with the Greek ferry system. One day he'd really like to hop round the islands in a very fast yacht with all sails set, although he would happily settle for an old caique with just one sail. Des worked on the previous editions of Lonely Planet's *Greece* and *Greek Islands* and has written guidebooks to Corfu and Rhodes for other publishers.


VICTORIA KYRIAKOPOULOS The Culture, Food & Drink, Athens

Victoria Kyriakopoulos is a Melbourne-based journalist who morphs effortlessly into an Athenian whenever she hits the motherland. She just clocked up her 269,010th kilometre getting to Greece, has travelled widely around the country and moved there for a while (2000–04), hoping to get it out of her system. Victoria wrote Lonely Planet's first pocket *Athens* guide in 2001, did a stint as editor of *Odyssey* magazine, covered the 2004 Olympics for international media and worked on several television shows about Greece. She returns regularly for research (and pleasure), including for Lonely Planet's latest *Athens Encounter* and *Crete*. An occasional food critic back home, when not writing or making documentaries, she is working through her extensive Greek cookbook collection.

CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

Gina Tsarouhas Born in Melbourne with Greek blood flowing through her veins, Gina packed her little suitcase at the tender age of four and took off for Greece. Gina flitted across various continents over the years until she discovered she could travel vicariously as an editor of travel guides, as well. When not editing she's co-authoring and contributing to all things Greek at Lonely Planet, including *Greece* and the *Greek Islands*; or tending to her beloved fig and olive trees in the backyard. Gina worked on the previous edition of *Greece*, and wrote the Architecture and History chapters for this guidebook.

Richard Waters Richard's first of taste of travel was as a 21-year-old driving around Central America in an old jalopy; it took him through Guatemala's civil war and gave him his first taste of wanderlust. He's been travelling ever since: across Southeast Asia, Europe, the US and Africa. His first visit to Laos in '99 brought the Hmong guerrillas to his attention and in 2002 he was among the first to creep into the Special Zone in search of their story. He's since contributed to three books on Laos for Lonely Planet. He lives with his partner, son and daughter in Brighton and works as a freelance writer and photographer for British newspapers and magazines. You can see his work at: www.richardwaters.co.uk. Richard wrote A Who's Who of the Ancient Greek Pantheon for this book.

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