



Peloponnese

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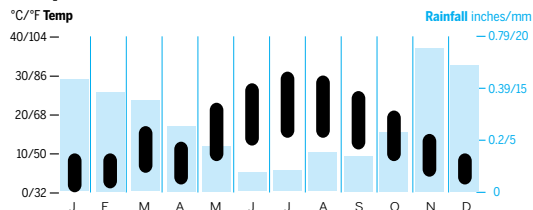
Why Go?

The Peloponnese (pe-lo-po-nih-sos; Πελοπόννησος) is the stuff of legends. Literally. It is here that Hercules fought the Nemean lion and gods walked the earth, meddling in mortal affairs; it's from here that Paris of Troy eloped with Helen and the Argonauts set sail in search of the Golden Fleece. Celestial and mythological charms aside, this region bears tangible traces of the many civilisations that once called it home, witnessed in its classical temples, Mycenaean palaces, Byzantine cities, and Ottoman, Frankish and Venetian fortresses.

The very topography that kept invaders at bay for centuries – lofty, snowcapped mountains, vast gorges, sandy beaches and azure waters – now draws visitors of a very different kind. *Filoxenia* (hospitality) is as strong here as anywhere in the country; the food is among Greece's best; and the region's vineyards are contributing to Greece's wine renaissance. Locals claim to have the best of everything to give. And that's no myth.

When to Go

Nafplio



Apr–Jun Perfect hiking and beach weather, without the summer crowds.

Sep Take part in the gruelling Spartathlon...if you think you're tough enough.

Easter The pomp and ceremony of religious festivities during Orthodox Easter week are unforgettable.

History

Since ancient times the Peloponnese (named after the mythical Pelops) has played a major role in Greek history. When the Minoan civilisation declined after 1450 BC, the focus of power in the ancient Aegean world moved from Crete to the hill-fortress palaces of Mycenae and Tiryns in the Peloponnese. As elsewhere in Greece, the 400 years following the Dorian conquests in the 12th century BC are known as the Dark Ages. When the region emerged from darkness in the 7th century BC, Athens' arch rival, Sparta, had surpassed Mycenae as the most powerful city in the Peloponnese, sparking the Peloponnesian Wars (431–04 BC).

A period of peace and prosperity ensued under Roman rule (146 BC to around AD 250) but was shattered by a series of invasions by Goths, Avars and Slavs.

The Byzantines were slow to make inroads into the Peloponnese, only becoming firmly established during the 9th century AD. In 1204, after the fall of Constantinople to the Crusaders, the Frankish Crusader chiefs William de Champlitte and Geoffrey de Villehardouin divided the region into 12 fiefs, which they parcelled out to various barons of France, Flanders and Burgundy. These fiefs were overseen by de Villehardouin, the self-appointed prince of the Morea, as the region was called in medieval times.

The Byzantines gradually won back the Morea and although the empire as a whole was now in decline, a glorious renaissance took place in the area, centred on Mystras, the region's seat of government.

The Morea fell to the Turks in 1460, and hundreds of years of power struggles between the Turks and Venetians followed. The Venetians had long coveted the Morea and succeeded in establishing profitable trading ports at Methoni, Pylos, Koroni and Monemvasia.

The Greek War of Independence supposedly began in the Peloponnese, when Bishop Germanos of Patra raised the flag of revolt near Kalavryta on 25 March 1821. The Egyptian army, under the leadership of Ibrahim Pasha, brutally restored Turkish rule in 1825.

In 1827 the Triple Alliance of Great Britain, France and Russia – moved by Greek suffering and by the activities of philhellenes (the death of Lord Byron in 1824 was particularly influential) – came to the rescue of the Greeks by destroying the Turkish–Egyptian fleet at the Battle of Navarino, ending Turkish domination of the area.

The Peloponnese became part of the independent state of Greece, and Nafplio became the first national capital. Ioannis Kapodistrias, Greece's first president, was assassinated on the steps of Nafplio's Church of St Spyridon in October 1831, and the new king, Otto, moved the capital to Athens in 1834.

Like the rest of Greece, the Peloponnese suffered badly during WWII and the civil war (1944–49) that followed. During the 1950s many villagers migrated to Athens, and further abroad to Australia, Canada, South Africa and the USA.

i Information

Due to the Greek financial crisis, the hours of museums and sites in the Peloponnese are particularly vulnerable to change. Check in advance.

i Getting There & Around

BUSES

Be aware of the difference between Corinth Isthmus (the canal) and Corinth (the city). Located on a main road on the Peloponnese side of the Corinth Canal, the **Corinth Isthmus (Peloponnese) KTEL bus station** (☎27410 75410, in Athens 210 512 4919) is the spot to change for buses south to the rest of the Peloponnese. No formal timetables are available; most buses from Athens heading to the Peloponnese stop here.

The **KTEL Korinthos bus station** (☎27410 75425; www.ktel-korinthias.gr; Dimocratias 4) in Corinth (city) is the departure point for buses to Ancient Corinth (€1.60, 20 minutes, seven daily Monday to Saturday), Nemea (€4.50, one hour, four to five daily, one Sunday) and Loutraki (for Corinth Isthmus; €1.70, 10 minutes, half-hourly).

Weekend bus services range from infrequent to nonexistent.

CAR

If driving the winding, scenic minor roads across the peninsula, always allow yourself plenty of time. When going around sharp bends, watch out for oncoming drivers who can tend to cut across your lane without sounding their horn.

At research time, the E65, the coastal motorway that connects Athens to Patra, was in the process of being turned into a four-lane highway; however, work has been suspended in the past due to lack of funding. The barrier in the middle of the road means travelling in heavy traffic at the speed of the slowest vehicle, with few opportunities for overtaking.

TRAINS

At research time the OSE train services in the Peloponnese were suspended. Only one line – Athens to Patra – was operating, with a replacement bus service between Kiato and Patra.