

Understand Greece

GREECE TODAY..... 676

Greek society remains spirited in the face of an ailing economy, corruption and ever-increasing austerity measures.

HISTORY 678

Greece's cultural influence, physical prowess and athleticism of mind have left deep historical footprints.

ANCIENT GREEK CULTURE 694

Ancient Greece is the grandfather of philosophy, the keeper of classical sculpture and the wellspring of stories and myths.

THE GREEK WAY OF LIFE 698

Independent yet family oriented, overeducated yet under-employed – the Greek way of life is rife with paradoxes.

THE ARTS 701

Greece's contemporary page-turners, music styles and thought-provoking modern art scene.

ARCHITECTURE 706

Discover Greece's influence on architecture around the globe, along with where to see the best preserved temples and ruins.

NATURE & WILDLIFE 711

With mountainous interiors and unending ribbons of coastline, the great Greek outdoors offers everything from birds and turtles to orchids and oregano.

Greece Today

Greek resilience has been stretched thin, leaving many disillusioned and apprehensive of a future that no longer necessarily includes them in the eurozone. The continued deterioration of the Greek economy is taking its toll on virtually every aspect of society. Few have been unaffected by savage wage and pension cuts, new taxes, record joblessness and thousands of shops and businesses closing. Meanwhile, the government threatens to capsize due to its drastic attempts to keep the country afloat.

Best in Print

The Odyssey (Homer; 8th century BC) Plagued by Poseidon, Odysseus struggles to return home to Ithaca.

Zorba the Greek (Nikos Kazantzakis; 1946) A spiritual bible to many; one man's unquenchable lust for life.

The Magus (John Fowles; 1966) Creepy mind games set on fictional island Phraxos.

Falling For Icarus: A Journey among the Cretans (Rory MacLean; 2004) A writer fulfills his ambition to build his own plane in the land of Icarus.

Colossus of Maroussi (Henry Miller; 1941) A travelogue of prewar Greece and heralded as Miller's best work.

Best on Film

300 (2007) Testosterone-fueled retelling of the Spartans' epic stand against the might of the Persian army.

Mamma Mia (2008) Skopelos shines to the soundtrack of ABBA.

Guns of Navarone (1961) Allied soldiers enter Nazi-occupied Greece in this compelling boy's-own thriller.

Shirley Valentine (1989) Classic Greek island romance on Mykonos.

Captain Corelli's Mandolin (2001) Lavish retelling of Louis de Bernières' novel, set in occupied Greece.

Before Midnight (2013) The third in a trilogy following the relationship of a French-American couple, filmed in the Peloponnese.

Austerity Measures

The multi-billion-euro bailouts loaned to Greece by its European Union and International Monetary Fund creditors in 2009, and again in 2010, 2011 and 2015, have come with strong strings attached. To secure them, the Greek government was forced to implement austerity measures that saw severe wage cuts, while living costs soared at an unpalatable rate. At the same time, the rising unemployment rate has reached around 26%. The start of 2015 saw approximately 59 business close per day with the economic growth predicted for 2014 nowhere to be seen.

The austerity measures and declining living standards have also widened Greece's stark economic and social disparities – the hedonistic lifestyles of Athenians taking weekend jaunts to Mykonos bear no resemblance to struggling pensioners or workers in rural Greece. Homelessness, suicides and once-rare violent crime are on the rise. Growing anger and social unrest has sparked mass demonstrations and violent clashes with police. Disillusioned young Greeks are bearing the brunt of years of economic mismanagement – the country's most educated generation face bleak prospects as youth unemployment tips 60%. There is a feeling of despair that is decidedly un-Greek.

The Rise of Syriza & Grexit Crisis

In January 2015, Alexis Tsipras took the helm as prime minister, wooing voters with an anti-austerity platform. It was the first ever election win for radical left-wing Syriza, which ousted the ruling conservative New Democrats. To reach a majority, Syriza established a coalition with right-wing Independent Greeks (ANEL), unlikely bedfellows united by their mutual condemnation of the bailout program. Initially, Tsipras stuck to his guns and June 2015 saw Greece become the first first-world nation to go into arrears with the EU and IMF. Attempts to negotiate a new bailout and avoid default were unsuccessful.

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