

welcome to the Greek Islands



Escape

Before you even arrive, the Greek islands flirt with your imagination, promising the ultimate sun-soaked getaway. You'll soon discover that this archipelago of over 1400 islands and islets doesn't disappoint. The days melt from one to the next, filled with big blue skies and endless miles of aquamarine coastline blessed with some of Europe's cleanest beaches. Soak up the majestic beauty of Santorini or dive head-first into the pulsing nightlife of Mykonos. Take in the ancient sights like Knossos that you've read about all your life, or the exhilarating possibilities of the islands' mountainous interiors. Wander through lush wildflowers in spring or laze on isolat-

ed sandy coves in summer with the warm sea lapping at your feet. You'll quickly become acquainted to the melancholy throb of *rembetika* (blues songs) and the tang of home-made tzatziki. Many travellers simply settle down and never go home.

Tempt Your Appetite

Head to an island harbour to watch the fishermen's daily catch tumble from their nets; seafood takes pride of place in many Greek kitchens and nowhere is it fresher than on the islands. Greeks pride themselves on their cuisine and will go out of their way to ensure you are well fed. Basic ingredients like feta and olive oil are at home in kitchens across the country,



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Lapped by brilliant blue water and sprinkled with sun-bleached ruins, a visit to the Greek islands will fill your imagination with mythical tales, your belly with local flavours and your soul with true relaxation.

(left) Assos (p508), Kefallonia, Ionian Islands
(below) Mykonos (p171), Cyclades



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but it's the regional dishes and styles of cooking that make travelling around the country such a culinary joy. Turkish and Italian legacies are woven through many dishes and you'll discover islands or towns known for distinct ingredients. Cheeses, herbs and mountain greens you might never have heard of compliment local seafood, meat and veggie dishes. The secret of Greek cooking is often found in the back garden where many of the ingredients are freshly gathered and produced. These days, a renaissance in traditional cooking means that chefs are increasingly taking time-honoured dishes to new gourmet heights.

Stretch Yourself

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. The islands offer endless activities and are like floating magnets for anyone who enjoys the great outdoors. Wander along cobbled, Byzantine footpaths, hike into volcanoes, kayak with dolphins, watch for sea turtles and cycle through lush forests. Greece is also an excellent place to try new pursuits, with some of the world's top kitesurfing, diving and rock climbing locations. Be brave. Be passionate. Be Greek.