

› Understand Greek Islands

GREEK ISLANDS TODAY 526

As the islands weather the nation's economic crisis, the spirited and passionate Greeks remain anxious.

HISTORY 528

Greece's cultural influence and turbulent past have left deep historical footprints. Follow them through the ages.

THE ISLANDERS 539

The Greek islands balance tourism, agriculture and tradition. Get an insight into seasonal life, island customs and characters.

ART & LITERATURE 543

A snapshot of Greek art and literature from ancient times to the contemporary scene.

ISLAND ARCHITECTURE. 547

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

MUSIC & DANCE. 550

The lowdown on Greek music from folk and pop to rock and rap – Greek style.

GREEK CUISINE 553

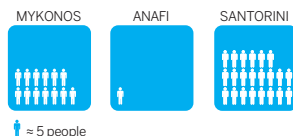
From traditional home cooking to contemporary cuisine, Greek food offers plenty of tasty treats.

NATURE & WILDLIFE 558

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



population per sq km



Greek Islands Today

Tourism Rebounds

The Greek islands have been a good place to escape the doom and gloom that beset Greece as the nation struggled with its growing sovereign debt crisis.

While the islanders have been feeling the economic pinch, tourism is being touted as one of the saviours in Greece's economic recovery. Despite the bad press from clashes, strikes and demonstrations in Athens, international visitor numbers to the islands were hitting record numbers in 2011. The biggest increases were in Rhodes, Kos and Corfu, boosted partly by a rise in low-budget and charter flights, emerging new markets in Russia and Israel and increased cruise-ship arrivals. Domestic tourism to the islands, however, was down, with shrunken budgets forcing Greeks to cut back on travel and holiday spending.

- ▶ Population: 10.7 million
- ▶ Percentage of women: 50%
- ▶ Life expectancy: 80 years
- ▶ Inhabitants per square kilometre: 87
- ▶ Tourists: 15 million

National Crisis

While the languid islands may feel like a long way from Athens, the islanders closely watch developments on the mainland and are not immune to national controversies and events.

In the three decades since Greece joined the European Union, increased wealth and improved living standards have gone hand in hand with rising unemployment, growing public debt, corruption allegations and a credit crunch that's left many Greeks disillusioned and angry.

Since the early '70s, clashes (occasionally violent) between youth and the police in central Athens have been a mainstay of Greek society. Rising youth unemployment and downward mobility have added fuel to the fire, while plans for far-reaching privatisation, tax reforms and public-sector cuts have incited many people to take to the street in massive strikes and demonstrations, occasionally spreading to the larger islands such as Crete.

Interesting Trivia

- » Greeks actually work longer hours than their European counterparts.
- » Greek wages are among the lowest in Europe and the cost of living among the highest.
- » Greeks are the EU's biggest smokers: 42% of people over 15 are heavy smokers; women smoke as much as men.
- » The healthy Mediterranean diet has fallen victim to changing lifestyles; Greeks have the highest obesity rates in the EU.

Top Films

- Mamma Mia!** (2008) Skopelos to the soundtrack of Abba.
- Shirley Valentine** (1989) Classic Greek-island romance.
- Mediterraneo** (1991) Italians occupy Kastellorizo.
- Zorba the Greek** (1964) All-time classic.