Greek Islands

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If you’re short on time, this itinerary packs a punch in just 10 days. Take in the must-see attractions in Athens, visit a few popular, bustling islands, and chill out in quieter havens where you can soak up that slow-paced island life. Transport between these islands and the mainland is plentiful.

Spend a couple of days in Athens, visiting the Acropolis, catching a play at the ancient Odeon of Herodes Atticus and wandering through the Acropolis Museum. Take in Athens’ lively markets, contemporary art scene and brilliant nightlife.

Catch a ferry from Rafina to spend a day or two on chic Mykonos and enjoy the colourful harbour, hopping bars and beaches full of sun worshippers. Take a day trip to sacred Delos and explore ancient ruins. Hop on a ferry to Naxos, the greenest of the Cyclades with its hilltop, Venetian-walled old town, quaint villages and sugar-soft beaches. Move on to Paros whose cobbled capital is filled with trendy boutiques and excellent dining. Head to the seaside village of Naousa for excellent seafood.

Lastly, visit spectacular Santorini (Thira) for stunning sunset views. Explore excellent wineries and volcanic beaches, along with the truly impressive Minoan site of Akrotiri. From here, catch a flight back to Athens.
PLAN YOUR TRIP ITINERARIES

Top: Mirabello Bay, near Agios Nikolaos (p296), Crete
Bottom: Skala Eresou (p425), Lesvos
With divine beaches, atmospheric towns and jaw-dropping sights, Crete is a full destination in itself. From the eastern side you can reach the neighbouring Dodecanese by ferry or on a short flight from Iraklio. The Dodecanese offer a wealth of diversity, and a speedy catamaran service that makes island hopping a joy.

Begin in Iraklio, visiting the excellent Archaeological Museum and taking a day trip to the impressive Minoan ruins of Knossos. En route see the surrounding Peza wine region, which is nestled in a landscape of shapely hills, sunbaked slopes and lush valleys. From Iraklio, head east along the northern coast to the relaxed resort town of Agios Nikolaos, which dishes out charm and a hip ambience in equal portions. Agios Nikolaos is a great base for exploring the surrounding region. Head to Golden Beach (Voulisma Beach) and Istron Bay for long stretches of sand. Take a short ferry ride across the Gulf of Mirabello to see the massive fortress on fascinating Spinalonga Island. Explore nearby Minoan ruins including Malia, a palace still filled with mysteries, and hire a bike to explore the tranquil villages of the fertile Lasithi Plateau, lying snugly between mountain ranges and home to Zeus’ birthplace.

From Agios Nikolaos, continue east via Sitia to the white sand of Vaï, Europe's only natural palm-forest beach. You can also travel south from here to Kato Zakros to hike through the dramatic Valley of the Dead.

From Sitia, get settled on a 10-hour ferry ride to Rhodes. Spend a couple of days exploring Rhodes Town’s walled medieval Old Town and some of the surrounding beaches, fascinating Byzantine chapels and the white-sugar-cube village of Lindos. Catch one of the daily catamarans to lush Nisyros to explore deep within its bubbling caldera and then carry on to Patmos to experience its artistic and religious vibe and to visit the cave where St John wrote the Book of Revelations. Backtrack to Kos to spend a final couple of days on gorgeous, sandy Kefalos Bay and to sip coffee and cocktails in Kos Town’s lively squares. From Kos Town you can catch onward flights to Athens.
For intrepid travellers without a tight time schedule, Greece’s eastern periphery offers languid coasts, lush scenery, amazing sights and divine beaches. Scheduled ferries are regular but not always very frequent; thankfully you won’t be in any hurry to leave and many island hoppers would happily extend their exploration from three weeks to three months.

Begin your journey with a few days on Rhodes, wandering through the walled medieval Old Town and soaking up the contemporary, atmospheric nightlife. Visit the Acropolis of Lindos and the crumbling fairy-tale castles on the north coast with their phenomenal views. If you have time, take a day trip to Symi to enjoy its picturesque harbour and the ornate Moni Taxiarhou Mihail Panormiti.

From Rhodes, set sail for the remote-feeling Tilos, a great place for bird lovers and walkers, with ancient cobbled pathways and tiny coves only accessible on foot. Head north to Leros with its Italian-inspired architecture, ultra-relaxed vibe and fascinating bunker museum that reveals the island’s starring role in WWII. Continue north to Samos, where you can hike through lush forests to secluded waterfalls and laze on idyllic beaches. From Samos, make for Chios where you can get lost in the labyrinth of stone alleyways in the southern village of Mesta and then head into the interior to hike through citrus groves under the shade of towering mountain peaks.

The next stop is Lesvos (Mytilini), birthplace of the poet Sappho and producer of some of Greece’s finest olive oil and ouzo. Not surprisingly, it’s also home to a hopping nightlife. Visit the island’s fantastic modern art gallery and the hilltop Byzantine monastery of Moni Ypsilou, with its glittering ancient manuscripts. Its landscape, with salt marshes, gushing hot springs, dense forests and soft beaches, is as diverse as its cultural offerings. From here hop to Limnos to dine on the day’s catch at Myrina’s waterside seafood restaurants. Carry on to secluded Agios Efstratios to stretch out on volcanic sand beaches before jumping on an overnight boat to Athens.
Plan your trip itineraries.

Top: Loggos (p486), Paxi, Ionian Islands
Bottom: Agios Georgios (p483), Corfu
If you have a hankering for island life along with beautiful architecture, scrumptious food, flour-soft beaches and dramatic scenery, a tour of the Ionian islands will more than satisfy you. This is doubly true if you’re keen to toss some outdoor activities into your trip. Both the start and end of this itinerary are reachable by short, scenic flights from Athens.

Begin your tour in Corfu, where you can easily spend a couple of days wandering through the amazing blend of Italian, French and British architecture in Corfu Old Town, indulging in gourmet cuisine. Take in the island’s world-class museums and fortresses. Explore picturesque coastal villages and lounge on fantastic sandy beaches. If you want to expend a bit more energy, Corfu is also a great place for windsurfing, or try biking in the island’s mountainous interior.

From Corfu, hop on a ferry to tiny Paxi, where ancient olive groves and windmills dot the interior while tranquil coves beckon from the coastline. Its colourful, Venetian-style harbour towns will beg you to stay. Drag yourself away to the west-coast beaches of Lefkada, where you can bliss out on endless stretches of sand and turquoise water. Head to the southern tip to windsurf before carrying on to Ithaki where you can walk the paths of Homer and feel inspired by ancient churches and monasteries.

Hop over to neighbouring Kefallonia; overnight in the picturesque village of Fiskardo, with its top restaurants. Kayak to isolated golden beaches and sample the island’s well-reputed local wine. Catch a boat south to Zakynthos to take in the fabulous Byzantine Museum before heading for the verdant southern cape. This island is the nesting grounds of the endangered loggerhead turtle.

Jump on a flight south to Kythira, which rests between the Aegean and Ionian Seas and is peppered with tiny, white, sugar-cube villages. Explore the island’s pastoral interior, waterfall and remote coves before heading back to the real world.
Greg Ward  
**Dodecanese**  Having first visited Greece as an InterRailing teenager, Greg Ward (www.gregward.info) has been returning ever since, and honeymooned on Symi. He has written books and articles about the Greek islands for many publishers and newspapers.

Richard Waters  
**Ionian Islands**  Richard is an award-winning journalist and writes about Greece for the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Independent* and *Sunday Times Travel Magazine*. He lives with his family in the Cotswolds but his spiritual home is in the islands of Greece where he first went as a boy in 1974. Since then he has been more than 20 times, and is most at home sat in a *kafenio* talking about myths, digging into freshly caught calamari and island hopping. As ever his admiration goes out to the people of Greece who, despite unimaginably difficult times, remain among the friendliest on the planet.
Melbourne, Oakali, Bcilig and Delhi, wiih .ore than 600 staft and writers. We share Volmy’s belief that ‘a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.