

# Understand Greek Islands

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As the islands weather the nation's economic crisis, the spirited and passionate Greeks remain anxious but – by and large – get on with life.

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

# Greek Islands Today

Life on the Greek islands seems to carry on relatively unfettered, despite the gloom of the nation's debt crisis. That said, few have been unaffected by savage wage and pension cuts, new taxes, record joblessness and the closure of thousands of shops and businesses, and tourism hasn't been the hoped-for miracle balm. Many islanders are disillusioned and apprehensive of a future that no longer necessarily includes them in the Eurozone, and a government that threatens to capsize due to its drastic attempts to keep the country afloat.

## Best on Film

**Shirley Valentine** (1989) Classic Greek-island romance on Mykonos.  
**300** (2007) Testosterone-fuelled retelling of the Spartans' epic stand against the Persian army in the 480 BC Battle of Thermopylae.  
**Mamma Mia** (2008) The island of Skopelos shines to the soundtrack of ABBA.  
**Guns of Navarone** (1961) Compelling boys-own thriller, in which Allied soldiers enter Nazi-occupied Greece.  
**Captain Corelli's Mandolin** (2001) Lavish retelling of Louis de Bernières' WWII novel, awash with romance on occupied Kefallonia.

## Best in Print

**The Magus** (John Fowles; 1966) Creepy mind games set on fictional island Phraxos.  
**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.  
**Falling For Icarus: A Journey among the Cretans** (Rory MacLean; 2004) A travel writer fulfils his ambition to build his own plane in the land of Icarus.  
**Colossus of Maroussi** (Henry Miller; 1941) A travelogue of pre-war Greece and heralded as Miller's best work.

## Austerity Measures

The multi-billion-euro bailouts loaned to Greece by its EU and IMF creditors have come with strong strings attached, with the Greek government forced to implement austerity measures that have seen severe wage cuts while living costs soar at an unpalatable rate. At the same time, the rising unemployment rate has reached around 26%. The start of 2015 saw approximately 59 businesses 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 on many of the outlying islands. Homelessness and suicides are on the rise, while growing anger and social unrest sparked mass demonstrations in Athens that have spread to the larger islands. Disillusioned young Greeks are bearing the brunt of years of economic mismanagement – the country's most educated generation (30% of 20- and early 30-somethings are university graduates) faces bleak prospects as youth unemployment tips 60%. There is a feeling of despair that is decidedly un-Greek.

Dissent within the ruling Syriza and ANEL coalition, brought on by hardliners opposed to the bailout, led Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras to resign in August 2015 and return to the polls in October in hopes of gaining a majority government. Just eight months into Syriza's four-year term, this was Greece's fourth election in just over three years. While Syriza won an increased majority, it fell short of outright rule and the crisis seems more diverted than eradicated. Greece's economy does not show signs of recovering in time to keep up with the loan repayments, and the possibility of leaving the Eurozone has not vanished. For many Greeks, choosing