

Greece Ελλάδα

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Acropolis** Savour your first glimpse of one of the most important monuments of the ancient world in Athens (p526)
- **Santorini** Experience the dramatic volcanic caldera of Santorini, arguably the most stunning Greek dot on the map (p544)
- **Rhodes** Meander through the atmospheric streets of the largest inhabited medieval town in Europe (p550)
- **Olympia** Dash off a quick 100m at the evocative birthplace of the games (p535)
- **Samaria Gorge** Trek through the most famous of Crete's spectacular gorges, then swim in the Libyan Sea (p549)
- **Mykonos** Party hard and lose yourself in the maze of white-walled streets originally designed to confuse pirates (p540)

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 131,944 sq km
- **Budget** €50 to €60 per day
- **Capital** Athens
- **Country code** ☎ 30
- **Famous for** ancient ruins, beautiful beaches
- **Language** Greek
- **Money** euro (€); A\$1 = €0.55; C\$1 = €0.60; ¥100 = €0.78; NZ\$1 = €0.43; UK£1 = €1.12; US\$1 = €0.74
- **Phrases** *yasas* (hello), *andio* (goodbye), *parakalo* (please), *efharisto* (thank you), *ne* (yes), *ohi* (no)



- **Population** 11.1 million
- **Visas** most travellers don't need one (p559)

TRAVEL HINTS

Remember sunglasses and sunscreen. *Gyro pita* (Greek version of doner kebab) are the best in cheap eats. Retsina may be an acquired taste, but it will suit your budget.

ROAMING GREECE

Explore Athens' museums and ancient sites before heading to the Peloponnese, visiting Nafplio, Mycenae and Olympia; ferry to the Cyclades and enjoy Mykonos and spectacular Santorini. Head further south to Crete, then on to Rhodes and its atmospheric Old Town.

There is something mystical and magical about Greece that makes it one of the most popular destinations on the planet. The alluring combination of history and hedonism attracts all sorts. Within easy reach of magnificent archaeological sites are breathtaking beaches lapped by amazingly clear waters. Throw in welcoming locals with an enticing culture, captivating music, tasty local cuisine and beverages, and it's easy to see why most visitors head home vowing to come back.

Adrenalin-focused travellers can mountain climb, hike, windsurf, dive and even hit the ski slopes. Party types can enjoy pulsating nightlife in Greece's vibrant modern cities and on islands such as Mykonos and Ios. And if all you're after is a peaceful holiday on a perfect beach, there are countless spots to enjoy your Greek dream.

Among the myriad attractions, travellers to Greece inevitably end up with a favourite site they long to return to – get out there and find yours.

HISTORY

With its strategic position at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Greece has endured a long and turbulent history. During the Bronze Age (3000–1200 BC in Greece), the advanced Cycladic, Minoan and Mycenaean civilisations flourished. The Mycenaeans were swept aside in the 12th century BC by the warrior-like Dorians, who introduced Greece to the Iron Age.

By 800 BC, when Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad* were first written, Greece was undergoing a cultural and military revival, with the evolution of the city-states, the most powerful of which were Athens and Sparta. Greater Greece was created, with southern Italy as an important component. The unified Greeks repelled the Persians at Marathon (490 BC) and Salamis (480 BC). A period of unparalleled growth and prosperity known as the classical (or golden) age followed – Pericles commissioned the Parthenon, Sophocles wrote *Oedipus the King* and Socrates taught young Athenians to think. Preoccupied with fighting the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC), the Greeks failed to notice the expansion of Macedonia under King Philip II, who easily conquered the war-weary city-states.

By 146 BC Greece and Macedonia had become Roman provinces. After the subdivision of the Roman Empire into Eastern and Western Empires in AD 395, Greece became part of the Eastern (Byzantine) Empire, based at Constantinople. In the centuries that followed, Venetians, Franks, Normans, Slavs, Persians, Arabs and, finally, Turks took turns chipping away at the Byzantine Empire. In 1453, when Constantinople fell to the Turks, most of Greece became part of the Ottoman Empire. By the 19th century the Ottoman Empire was in decline, and the Greeks fought the War of Independence (1821–32). In January 1833 Otho of Bavaria was installed as king, until 1862 when he was peacefully ousted and George I, a Danish prince, was chosen as king.

Greece fell to Germany in 1941 and resistance movements, polarised into royalist and

communist factions, staged a bloody civil war lasting until 1949. This was a trigger for a mass exodus that saw almost one million Greeks head off to places such as Australia, Canada and the USA.

An army coup d'état in 1967 led to a period of brutality, repression and political incompetence. The 1974 Turkish occupation of North Cyprus became (and remains) one of the most contentious issues in Greek politics. The junta had little choice but to hand back power to the people.

In 1981 Greece entered the European Community (now the EU) and in 2002 it adopted the euro; prices have been on the rise ever since. Greece hosted a successful 2004 Olympics, but is still counting the cost.

During the long hot summer of 2007, the world watched as forest fires threatened Athens and caused untold damage in the western Peloponnese, Epiros and Evia.

Greece's foreign policy is dominated by a perceptibly warming, yet still sensitive relationship with Turkey – with Greece continuing to support Turkey's bid to join the EU.

THE CULTURE

Greece's population has exceeded 11.1 million, with around one-third of the people living in the Greater Athens area and more than two-thirds living in cities. Less than 15% live on the islands. Greece has an ageing population and declining birth rate, with big families a thing of the past. Population growth over the last couple of decades is due to a flood of migrants, both legal and illegal. Previously, Greece had been a nation of emigrants and

TIME YOUR VISIT

Spring and autumn are the best times to visit Greece – the weather is fine, temperatures are pleasant, beaches are uncrowded and off-season prices are in effect. Turn up in midsummer and you'll be battling the heat, crowds, accommodation that's booked solid and high-season prices.