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The Grand Tour

First trip to Greece? Here’s a mixed bag of the country’s top sights, most beautiful beaches, cultural highs, contemporary cities and laid-back island life.

Begin in Athens, visiting grand ancient sites and museums. Dive into the markets, contemporary-art scene and award-winning restaurants. Catch a ferry to chic Mykonos, with its fashionable bars and crowd-pleasing beaches. Day-trip to the sacred island of Delos for its fascinating ancient ruins. Hop a ferry to spectacular Santorini to watch the sun sink from the dramatic cliffs of its volcanic caldera.

Depending on your time, take a ferry or a flight to Iraklio, Crete’s vibrant capital. Explore the nearby magnificent Minoan ruins of Knossos. Catch the bus to Hania with its charming harbour and labyrinth of backstreets, then discover the island’s wild side on a trek through Samaria Gorge, which spills out on to a beach lapped by the Libyan Sea.

Return to Iraklio and hop a flight to cultured Thessaloniki to lose yourself in Ottoman-style architecture, Turkish sweets and a vibrant arts scene. Scale the slopes of Mt Olympus (2918m), Greece’s highest peak, then visit the monasteries of Meteora, perched high on narrow pinnacles of rock. Your last stop is Ancient Delphi, former home of the mysterious Delphic oracle.
If you’ve a hankering for island life along with beautiful medieval towns, ancient historic sights and dramatic scenery, a tour of the Ionian Islands and the neighbouring Peloponnesian peninsula will more than satisfy you. This is doubly true if you’re keen to toss some outdoor activities into your trip.

Begin on Corfu, spending a couple of days wandering through the amazing blend of Italian, French and British architecture in Corfu’s Old Town, indulging in gourmet cuisine, exploring picturesque coastal villages and lounging on sandy beaches. Corfu is also great for windsurfing, or biking in the mountainous interior. From Corfu, hop on a ferry to Kefallonia to visit the picturesque village of Fiskardo, kayak to isolated beaches and sample the island’s local wine.

From Kefallonia, it’s a short ferry ride to Kyllini on the Peloponnesian peninsula. Visit the sanctuary of Ancient Olympia and stand in the stadium that hosted the first Olympic Games. Stay overnight in the town and take in some of the excellent museums. Head south to the captivating World Heritage–listed ruins of Mystras. This massive ancient fortress town was the last stronghold of the Byzantine Empire.

Continue south to the rugged and remote Mani region, to encounter villages filled with fascinating architecture and the remnants of the unique Maniot culture. This region is a haven for hikers with the dramatic Tàygetos Mountains and tiny, isolated coves. It’s also home to one of mainland Europe’s most southerly points at Cape Tenaro, made famous in Homer’s ‘Iliad’. Follow the coast east to spectacular Monemvasia and spend at least a day exploring the medieval cobbled alleyways and a night staying in atmospheric lodgings within the walls of its medieval town.

Next head north to graceful Nafplio with its mansions, museums and lively port. From here, it’s easy to do day trips to the impressive acropolis at Tiryns and the citadel of Ancient Mycenae. East of here is the ancient theatre of Epidavros, where it’s well worth taking in some starlit classical performances. Then hop on a ferry from nearby Methana to end your journey in Athens.
Top: House of Dionysos, Ancient Delos (p.360)
Bottom: Palace of the Grand Master (p.500)
Rhodes Old Town
Eastern Crete offers a tranquil side of the island with relaxed resorts and impressive sights. From here it’s a short hop to the neighbouring Dodecanese, with their wealth of culture and speedy catamaran services that make island hopping a breeze.

Begin in Iraklio, taking in the excellent archaeological museum. Make a day trip to the captivating Minoan ruins of Knossos before sampling fine vintages in the Iraklio Wine Country, a mosaic of shapely hills, sun-baked slopes and lush valleys.

From Iraklio head east along the northern coast to the relaxed resort town of Agios Nikolaos, which radiates charm and chilled ambience. This makes a great base for exploring the surrounding region. Explore the massive Venetian fortress on Spinalonga Island, a leper colony until 1957 and just a short ferry ride across the Gulf of Mirabello. Visit the surrounding Minoan ruins, such as the Palace of Malia, still filled with mysteries, and rent a bike to explore the tranquil villages of the fertile Lasithi Plateau, lying snugly between mountain ranges and home to Zeus’ birthplace.

Continue on to Sitia, from where you can head for the clear water and white sand of Vai, Europe’s only natural palm-forest beach. You can also head south from here to Zakros to hike through the dramatic, cave-honeycombed Valley of the Dead to Kato Zakros and its Minoan palace.

From Sitia, get settled on a twice-weekly, 12-hour ferry ride to Rhodes. Spend a couple of days exploring the atmospheric, walled medieval Old Town and checking out its burgeoning nightlife. Visit some of the surrounding beaches and stunning Byzantine chapels. Catch a catamaran to lush Nisyros to explore atop the alarmingly thin crust of its 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. There are also some laid-back beaches here and excellent restaurants. 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.
Map Legend

Sights
- Beach
- Bird Sanctuary
- Buddhist
- Castle/Palace
- Christian
- Confucian
- Hindu
- Islamic
- Jain
- Jewish
- Monument
- Museum/Gallery/Historic Building
- Ruin
- Shinto
- Sikh
- Taoist
- Winery/Vineyard
- Zoo/Wildlife Sanctuary
- Other Sight

Activities, Courses & Tours
- Bodysurfing
- Diving
- Canoeing/Kayaking
- Course/Tour
- Sento Hot Baths/Onsen
- Skiing
- Snorkelling
- Surfing
- Swimming/Pool
- Walking
- Windsurfing
- Other Activity

Sleeping
- Sleeping
- Camping
- Hut/Shelter

Eating
- Eating

Drinking & Nightlife
- Drinking & Nightlife
- Cafe

Entertainment
- Entertainment

Shopping
- Shopping

Information
- Bank
- Embassy/Consulate
- Hospital/Medical
- Internet
- Police
- Post Office
- Telephone
- Toilet
- Tourist Information
- Other Information

Geographic
- Beach
- Gate
- Hut/Shelter
- Lighthouse
- Lookout
- Mountain/Volcano
- Oasis
- Park
- Pass
- Picnic Area
- Waterfall

Population
- Capital (National)
- Capital (State/Province)
- City/Large Town
- Town/Village

Transport
- Airport
- Border crossing
- Bus
- Cable car/Funicular
- Cycling
- Ferry
- Metro station
- Monorail
- Parking
- Petrol station
- S-Bahn/Subway station
- Taxi
- T-bane/Tunnelbana station
- Train station/Railway
- Tram
- Tube station
- U-Bahn/Underground station
- Other Transport

Routes
- Tollway
- Freeway
- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary
- Lane
- Unsealed road
- Road under construction
- Plaza/Mall
- Steps
- Tunnel
- Pedestrian overpass
- Walking Tour
- Walking Tour detour
- Path/Walking Trail

Boundaries
- International
- State/Province
- Disputed
- Regional/Suburb
- Marine Park
- Cliff
- Wall

Hydrography
- River, Creek
- Intermittent River
- Canal
- Water
- Dry/Salt/Intermittent Lake
- Reef

Areas
- Airport/Runway
- Beach/Desert
- Cemetery (Christian)
- Cemetery (Other)
- Glacier
- Mudflat
- Park/Sight
- Sportsground
- Swamp/Mangrove

Note: Not all symbols displayed above appear on the maps in this book
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Vesna has been a Lonely Planet author for more than a decade, covering places as far and wide as Bolivia, Algeria, Sicily, Cyprus, Barcelona, London and Croatia, among others. Her latest work has been updating the Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast chapters for the *West Africa* and *Africa* guides.

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OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that’s all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they’d sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Dublin, Beijing and Delhi, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony’s belief that ‘a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse’.

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Central Greece Michael’s Greek roots go back to the village of Karavostamo on the Aegean island of Ikaria, home to his maternal grandparents. He first travelled to Greece as a deckhand aboard a Greek freighter. For this journey, he drove over alpine passes, sea-kayaked in the Aegean, and walked the cobbled paths of Pelion villages, marvelling at the resiliency of Greeks in austere times. He has worked on Lonely Planet guides to Myanmar (Burma), New York, Hawaii and Japan.

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