

Greece Travel & Accommodation Guide

Almost too much of a good thing.

Islands... like fertile pebbles deposited in the surrounding seas by the country's many gods.

Innumerable gods, spectacular ruins, fascinating history, picturesque islands and coastlines... Greece has enough to satisfy the avid explorer for months, if not years.

Admire the grandeur of the Acropolis while downing coffee frappes al fresco on Athenian streets. Wander the narrow laneways of whitewashed cliff-top dwelling Santorini. Stroll through hillside olive groves and admire milky turquoise waters on one of its 6000 islands. Greece has beauty, sophistication, history and charm in spades.

The biggest problem is how to take it all in.

Despite common expectations, Athens, an absolute requisite, is a pulsing modern city, with the ruins of the hilltop Acropolis at its centre juxtaposed with an ugly urban sprawl of poorly planned cement monstrosities. The city's museums and ruins more than compensate with paintings, pottery, jewellery, architecture, frescos and sculpture artfully depicting the many mythologies and beliefs that shaped the numerous civilisations that have ruled this country: from the Minoans, whose deity inspired strange sexual proclivities precipitated the minotaur, to the Islamic Ottoman Empire that ruled for many centuries. The city is also littered with chic modern bars and funky cafes to satisfy travellers in search of local interpretations of globally inspired cool.

This template is repeated to varying degrees in cities throughout the country, but it is the preserved remnants of past civilisations that attract most visitors. From the picturesque site of Delphi: the old city of Rhodes; the temple of Apollo at Bassae, Olympia, the birthplace of the Olympics games; to the charming historic city of Corfu, once a satellite of the Venetian Empire... travelling through Greece is a journey through a myriad of fascinating times.

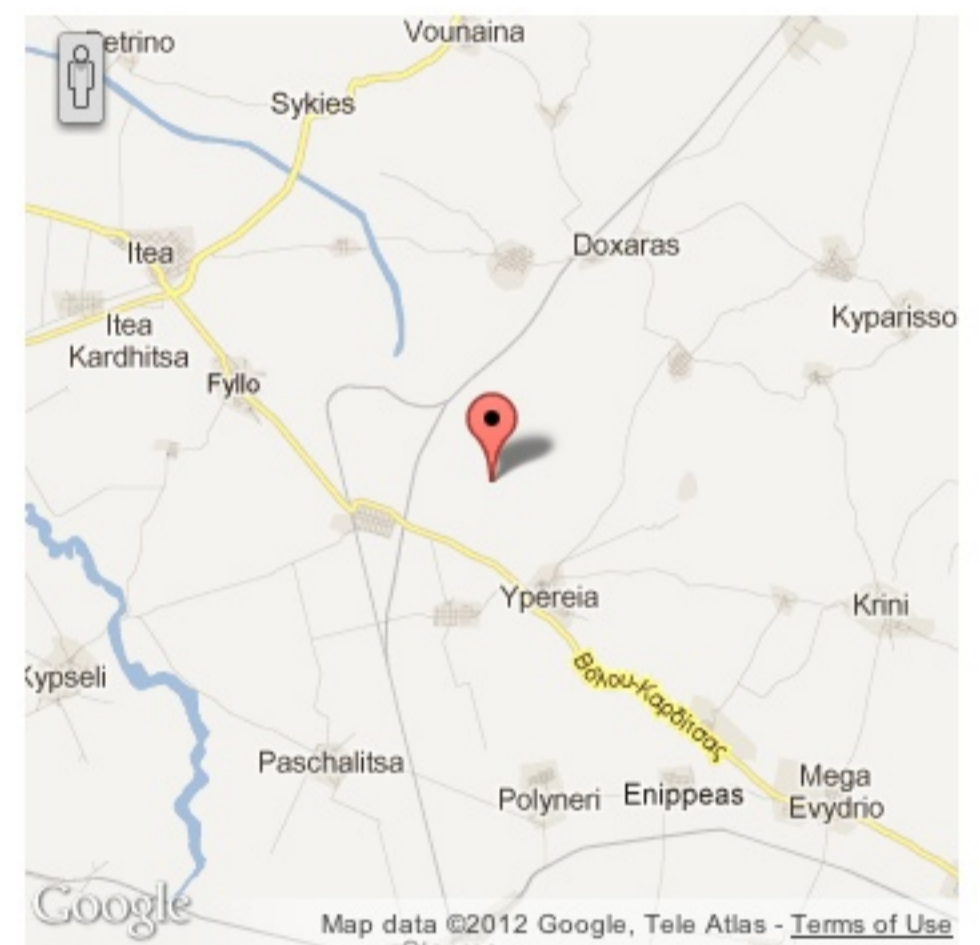
The thousands of islands are another significant lure. Like fertile pebbles deposited in the surrounding Aegean, Ionian, and Mediterranean seas by the country's many gods, Greek islands are some of the most beautiful in the world. Their dramatic rocky coast lines, charming sea-side villages, hillsides populated by gnarled olive trees or vibrant wildflowers and fine white sand beaches with pristine blue waters have been a magnet to travellers for decades.

Crete is very popular, as is the aforementioned volcanic island of Santorini. Lesbos, Corfu, Paro, Lefkada and Kos also rate highly with travellers. But there are little known gems, like Paxos, near Corfu, where days are spent among locals and peace and beauty abound.

Greeks have a great zest for life, and this can be best appreciated at one of the countries many festivals. The pre-Lenten carnival in particular, held in cities throughout the country, is an explosion of costumes, floats, parades and various regional traditions.

And one cannot spend time in Greece without appreciating its food. Indigenous traditions blending with the cooking styles, tastes and dishes of its neighbours, Italy and Turkey, Greek food, from divine seafood, like grilled octopus to the very popular souvlaki is a delight.

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Ben has travelled extensively through the Americas, Europe, Asia and Australia. His features and reviews have appeared in publications and websites in the UK and Australia, including Rough Guides (Penguin Group, London, UK), The List (Edinburgh, Scotland), Tiger Beer's UK website, Australian Traveller, OUTthere and Cruise Passenger.

