

# Greece



**COVID-19 information:** Greece has lifted all COVID-19 specific entry requirements and also use of vaccination certificates. The only requirement remaining is that of mask wearing in hospitals and on public transport (excluding planes and other means of transport with numbered seating).

More details (<https://www.discovergreece.com/covid19-advice-for-travellers-greece>)

*(Information last updated 22 Jul 2022)*

**Greece** (<https://www.visitgreece.gr/>) (Greek: Ελλάς, *Hellas* or Ελλάδα, *Ellada*) is a country rich in history, culture and natural beauty. Ancient Greece was one of Europe's first urban civilisations, and the origin of much of the arts, language, philosophy, politics, and sports of western society. The cultural heritage and spectacular mountains and beaches draw tourists from far away.

Much of the country consists of peninsulas and islands in the Aegean, Ionian, and Mediterranean Seas.

## Regions

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Greece is both a mountainous and coastal country, with countless islands spread over the Ionian and Aegean seas.

**The Peloponnese** (Achaea, Arcadia, Argolis, Corinthia, Elis, Laconia, Messenia)

**Central Greece** (Evia, Attica, Boeotia, Phthiotis, Phocis, Evrytania, Aetolia-Acarnania)  
Home to Athens, the Greek capital

**Thessaly** (Magnesia, Larissa, Trikala, Karditsa)

**Northern Greece** (Ioannina, Kastoria, Florina, Kozani, Pella, Imathia, Pieria, Thessaloniki, Chalkidiki, Serres, Drama, Kavala, Xanthi, Komotini, Alexandroupolis)

**Epirus** (Arta, Ioannina, Preveza, Thesprotia)

**Greek Islands** (Saronic Gulf Islands, Cyclades, Dodecanese, Rhodes,

Sporades Islands, East Aegean Islands, North Aegean Islands, Ionian Islands)

**Crete** (Crete, Gavdos, Chrysi)

## Cities

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Major cities include:

- **1 Athens** (Αθήνα, *Athína*) — the capital, known for the Parthenon
- **2 Chania** (Χανιά) — surrounded by beaches and the Samaria National Park
- **3 Chersonissos** (Χερσόνησος) — party capital of Crete in the summer
- **4 Heraklion** (Ηράκλειο, *Irákleio*) — Crete's largest city and main hub with the archaeological site of Knossos
- **5 Kavala** (Καβάλα) — romantic port city in East Macedonia with many sights and ferry port to the North Aegean Islands.
- **6 Patra** (Πάτρα) — Third largest city in Greece, known for its wine production
- **7 Rhodes** (Ρόδος, *Ródos*) — impressive medieval structures, nightlife and beaches
- **8 Thessaloniki** (Θεσσαλονίκη) — the main city in the central Macedonia region
- **9 Volos** (Βόλος) — coastal port with nice museums and architecture



Greece regions - Color-coded map

## Other destinations

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- **1 Crete** (Κρήτη) No. 1 tourist destination of Greece
- **2 Corfu** (Κέρκυρα, *Kérkyra*) — large island with many attractions
- **3 Delphi** (Δελφοί) — site of the famous oracle of Apollo, major archaeological site
- **4 Meteora** (Μετέωρα) — hilltop monasteries
- **5 Mount Athos** (Άθως, *Áthos*) — semi-independent republic, home to many Orthodox monasteries (access restricted)
- **6 Mykonos** (Μύκονος) — world famous, sophisticated holidays
- **7 Olympia** (Όλυμπία) — sanctuary dedicated to Zeus, site of the ancient Olympics
- **8 Rhodes** (Ρόδος, *Ródos*) — island with ancient monuments, as well as beaches



Panoramic view of Oia, Santorini Island

- **9 Santorini** (Σαντορίνη or Θήρα, *Thira*) — a volcanic island known for its beautiful views, towns and sunsets

See also the [UNESCO World Heritage sites in Greece](#)

## Understand



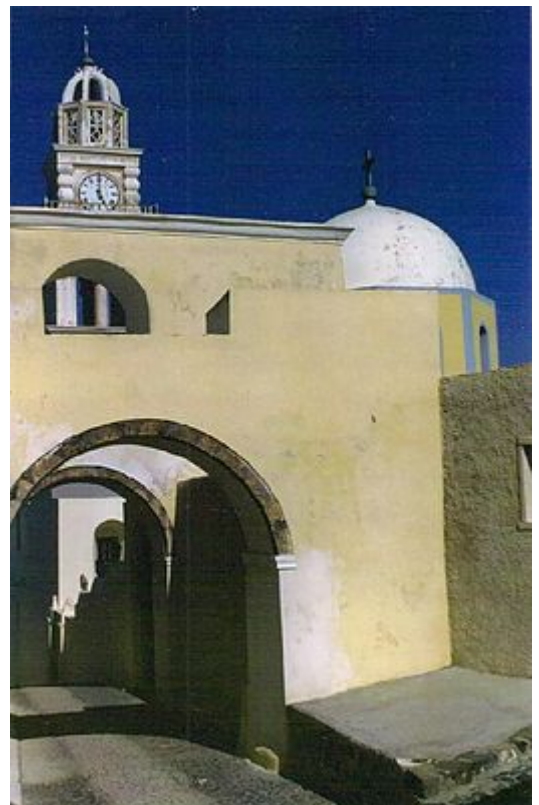
<b>Capital</b>	Athens
<b>Currency</b>	euro (EUR)
<b>Population</b>	10.4 million (2021)
<b>Electricity</b>	230 volt / 50 hertz (Europlug, Schuko)
<b>Country code</b>	+30
<b>Time zone</b>	UTC+02:00
<b>Emergencies</b>	112 (emergency), 100 (police), 166 (emergency medical services), 199 (fire department)
<b>Driving side</b>	right

[edit on Wikidata](#)

Visitors are drawn to the country's beaches and reliable sunny summer weather, its nightlife, historical sites and natural beauty. In 2018, Greece received 33 million visitors, more than three visitors for each of the country's residents.

The majority of visitors come to Greece from other European countries, although tourists from other world regions have been increasing in number. The vast majority of visitors visit from April through to October. Peak season is between May and September when approximately 75% of all tourists arrive. Most of the tourists and tourism industry are concentrated in [Crete](#), the [Dodecanese](#), [Cyclades](#), and [Western Greek Islands](#), and to a lesser extent the [Peloponnese](#) and the [Halkidiki](#) peninsula in [Macedonia](#). There are still many rewarding areas in the country free of large-scale tourism.

Many first-time visitors arrive in Greece with specific images in mind and are surprised to discover a country with such regional and architectural diversity. The famous whitewashed homes and charming blue-domed churches only characterise a specific region of the country (the [Cyclades](#) Islands). Architecture varies greatly from one region to the next depending on the local history. Visitors will find Neoclassical architecture in the cities of [Ermoupolis](#) and [Nafplion](#), Ottoman-influenced buildings in [Grevená](#) and [Kozáni](#), whitewashed Cycladic homes on the island of [Paros](#), and pastel-coloured baroque homes and churches on [Corfu](#). The



Backstreets of charming Firá, Santoríni

nation's terrain is just as varied as its architectural heritage: idyllic beaches, towering mountain ranges, wine-producing valleys, vast stretches of olive orchards in the south, and lush forests in the north. Greece's historical sights are just as varied; the country is littered with just as many medieval churches and castles as classical ruins and temples.

It borders Albania, North Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Turkey.

## History

*See also: Ancient Greece*

Greece boasts a very long history, with the Greek language being spoken in the country and throughout the Mediterranean region for nearly 4000 years.

### First civilisations

The country's first inhabitants are now referred to as the Pelasgians. Little is known about them, but it is believed that they were a primitive people. The first advanced civilisations in Greece are known as the **Cycladic** in the Cyclades Islands, and the **Minoan** in Crete and Santorini. The Minoans had a written language which remains undecipherable to archaeologists, which is one of the most interesting and profound historical mysteries.

### Dark Ages

**Greek-speaking Indo-European peoples** arrived in the country from somewhere to the north, around 1700 BC, and slowly invaded the entire country from the north all the way to Crete, as well as the west coast of Asia Minor (now Turkey), absorbing the native peoples. Their arrival may have been responsible for ending the Cycladic and Minoan civilisations and brought the country into what is now referred to as the Dark Age of ancient Greece; although it is now understood among historians that civilisation in Greece remained sophisticated and advanced during this time. The first Greek-speaking civilisation, Mycenaean, was centred in the Peloponnese region. As they do today, many ancient Greeks made a living from the sea. They were accomplished fishers, sailors and traders and the sea has profoundly shaped Greek culture.

### Classical Greece

*See also: Trojan War*

The rise of the Greek city-states occurred in the period 1200 to 800 BC and heralded the **Golden Age of Greece**, which lasted many centuries and spurred several scientific, architectural, political, economic, artistic, and literary achievements. Athens, Sparta, Corinth, and Thebes were the most prominent of the city-states (with Athens being the most prestigious), but there were several other advanced city-states and colonies that had developed across the Aegean



Olympia, site of the Olympic Games in ancient times

basin. Greek settlements were also established in southern Italy and other coastal areas of the Mediterranean colonised by Greeks. The legacy of Greek Civilisation from this time period made a major impact on the world and continues to influence us to this day with the development of democracy, philosophy and theatre.

## **Hellenistic and Roman eras**

The epicentre of Greek Civilisation shifted, during the 4th century BC, from southern Greece to northern Greece. The northern Macedonian kingdom, under **Alexander the Great**, conquered all of Greece, and proceeded eastward, conquering all the way to South Asia with the intent of expanding the Greek empire. The empire broke up after Alexander's death, and Greece was eventually annexed by the growing Roman Empire. Although weakened politically, Greek culture continued to flourish under Roman rule and indeed heavily influenced Roman culture.

## **Arrival of Christianity and rise of Byzantine Empire**

Christianity arrived in Greece with the preachings of St. Paul during the 1st century AD, and eventually spread throughout Greece and the Roman Empire. In the 4th century, Roman Emperor Constantine the Great legalised Christian worship and declared it the state religion of the empire. He moved the capital of the empire from Rome to Byzantium (present-day Istanbul), which he renamed Constantinople. Internal divisions eventually divided the Roman Empire into a western half (the West Roman Empire) and an eastern half (East Roman Empire.) The West was eventually invaded and sacked by invaders from northern Europe, while the East survived for another millennium as the Byzantine Empire with Constantinople as its capital.

## **Medieval Greece**

Greece's medieval history is dominated by the **Byzantine Empire** which revolved around Christianity, Greek Language and Roman law. It was a powerful force in the Mediterranean basin for centuries, engaging in trade, politics, and the spread of Christianity. The empire collaborated with Rome during the Crusades against the Muslims. However, during the 13th century, the Crusaders turned on the Byzantine Empire itself and sacked Constantinople. With a weakened Byzantine Empire, Frankish and Latin invaders arrived and occupied various parts of Greece. Over the following centuries, the Byzantine Empire began to regain strength and reconquer lost territory, but received a final blow in the 15th century when a growing Ottoman Turkish Empire to the east captured Constantinople.

## **Ottoman rule**

With the capture of Constantinople, Greece fell under **Ottoman Turkish rule**, but vigorously retained its Greek-speaking Christian culture. However, many Greeks fled the country, establishing Greek communities elsewhere in Europe; these communities would later influence the Greek Revolution.

## **Enlightenment and revolution**

The **Italian city-states** of Genoa and Venice competed with the Ottoman Turks for control of various areas of Greece and managed to conquer various islands and coastal areas, bringing pan-European movements such as the Renaissance (and later the Enlightenment) to places in Greece such as Crete, Corfu, and parts of the Peloponnese region. In the 18th century, the Enlightenment, both in Venetian/Genoese-occupied areas of Greece and from Greek communities abroad, led to an awakening among prominent Greeks and gave birth to the goal of an independent, unified, and sovereign Greek state. The Greek Revolution finally broke



out on the 25th of March, 1821, and led to a long war against the Ottomans for independence. The Greek Revolution gained attention across Europe, with Russia, Britain, and France sending military aid to assist Greece.

### 19th to mid-20th century

The nation finally achieved its **independence** from the Ottoman Empire in 1829. The newly-independent Greek State was briefly a republic, before becoming a monarchy at the will of major European powers. During the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, Greece gradually annexed neighbouring islands and territories with Greek-speaking populations. The country sided with the allies during World War I. Despite declaring neutrality during World War II, the country was invaded by Mussolini's



Athens' Pláka district, with its 19th century character

forces on 28 October 1940. Greek forces victoriously pushed the Italians out of Greece, but the Germans then came to their aid, occupying the country until its liberation toward the end of the war. Civil war broke out in 1946 between communist rebels and royalists, the former supported by Yugoslavia (until the Tito-Stalin rift of 1948) and the latter by the West. The communist rebels were defeated by the royalists in 1949. The second world war and the civil war that followed had left the country war-torn, forcing many people to flee the country in search of a better life abroad.

Greece joined NATO in 1952; rapid economic growth and social change followed. A right-wing military dictatorship staged a coup in 1967, disbanding all political parties, suspending political liberties and forcing many prominent Greeks into exile, including Communists, who played an active part in the Greek Parliament before and after the junta. King Constantine II and his family also fled the country. Democracy returned in 1974, and a national referendum abolished the monarchy, creating a parliamentary republic.

### Modern Greece

Greece joined the **European Community** or EC in 1981, which later became the European Union (EU) in 1992. The country's tourism industry – which had begun to take off during the 1960s – began to flourish, bringing 5 million annual visitors to the country in 1980 (a figure that eventually grew to over 17 million by 2007). The country suffered serious economic stagnation in the 1980s, but began to experience remarkable economic growth in the 1990s, fuelled by heavy investment, entrepreneurship, trade, and EU aid.

By the early 21st century, Greece had seemingly achieved stability and prosperity, with a high standard of living. An influx of immigrants began in the late 1980s, transforming Greece, once an immigrant-sender, into an immigrant-receiving country. Foreign-born residents, most of them undocumented and coming from various parts of the world (Eastern and Central Europe, Middle East, South and Southeast Asia, and Africa) are estimated to number at least 1 million, or equivalent to 10% of the population. In 2004, the nation stepped into the global spotlight as it successfully hosted the Summer Olympic Games in Athens, to the defiance of critics. Greece however, has borne the brunt of the late-2000s recession and related 2010 European sovereign debt crisis.

The main issues facing Greek society are a high and growing level of bureaucratic corruption, high unemployment, sluggish economic growth and widespread poverty. As a by-product of the ongoing economic depression, there has also been a rise in extremism. Particularly worrying is the rise in support for Golden Dawn, a violently xenophobic opposition party that has often been described as neo-Nazi, some of whose members of Parliament have been arrested for beating foreigners in the street, and which has reportedly gained a considerable degree of control over some Greek police forces. This is unlikely to affect most travellers, but if you could be mistaken for a refugee or illegal migrant to Greece, think twice about whether now is the right time to visit (also refer to [§ Stay safe](#)). As of 2020, this party has been declared a criminal organization, and has ceased to exist, with most of its important members found guilty in court and sentenced to prison.

## Climate

Despite its small size, Greece has a **varied climate**.

Most of the country, including all coastal areas, enjoys a so-called **Mediterranean climate**, almost identical to much of California. Summers are hot and dry with a 7-month period of near-constant sunshine generally from April until November. The remainder of the year is characterised by a relatively cold, rainy period which generally starts sometime in November and lasts until late March or early April. Sporadic rains do occur during the dry season, but they tend to be rare, quick showers. The country's Ionian Coast and Ionian Islands tend to receive more annual precipitation than the rest of the country. The islands in the southern Aegean and parts of the southeastern mainland are the driest areas of the country.

The **most pleasant weather** occurs in May–June and September–October. The warmest time of the year starts in mid-July and generally lasts until mid-August, when the annual *meltémi* winds from the north cool the country. Mid-July to mid-August is the height of summer, and the midday sun tends to get very strong; during this time, most Greeks avoid heavy physical activity outdoors between 13:00 and 17:00. It is best advised to get in tune with the local way of life by waking up early, doing all sightseeing and errands in the cool morning hours, and then spending the afternoon in the relaxing shade or at the beach. In fact, the bulk of tourists arrive in Greece during the height of summer, to do just that! For visitors from more northerly climates, the off season from November through February can be a rewarding time to see Greece. It will not be beach weather, but temperatures are mild. The much added bonus is that there will be very few other tourists and reduced prices.

**Summer evenings** tend to be *very* rewarding. As strong as the sun may get on a summer afternoon, the low levels of atmospheric humidity in most areas of the country prevent the air from trapping much heat, and temperatures tend to dip to very pleasant levels in the evenings. But even during midday, high temperatures actually tend to be quite comfortable as long as the time is not spent doing a lot of walking or other physical activity. (Athens, however, can still be uncomfortably warm during summer afternoons due to the predominance of concrete in the city, an effect similar to New York City.) Coastal areas near open waters (away from tightly-closed bays and gulfs), especially on many of the islands, tend to be quite breezy, and can be quite cold at night.

While the Mediterranean climate characterises most of the country, **two other climate systems** are present. One is the cool Alpine climate which is found on mountainous areas of the country's interior, including many high-altitude valleys. Another system is the Continental climate found on the interiors of north-central and northeastern Greece, which gives those areas very cold winters and warm, relatively humid summers.

Greek weather forecast given [here](http://www.hnms.gr/) (<http://www.hnms.gr/>)

## Holidays and festivals

The following are national public holidays:

- **New Year's Day** - 1 Jan
- **Epiphany** - 6 Jan
- **Clean Monday** (First day of Lent) - movable
- **Independence Day and The Annunciation** - 25 Mar
- **Holy Friday** - movable
- **Pascha Sunday** - movable
- **Pascha Monday** - movable
- **May Day / Labour Day** - 1 May
- **Pentecost Sunday** - movable
- **Pentecost Monday** - movable
- **Dormition of the Theotokos** - 15 Aug
- **WWII Day / "OHI(no) Day"** - 28 Oct
- **Christmas** - 25 Dec
- **Boxing Day** - 26 Dec



Easter Mass in [Santorini](#)

The nation's three most important holidays are Christmas, Pascha, and the Dormition. Christmas tends to be a private, family holiday, but lights and decorations adorn city squares across the country. Dormition is a major summer festival for many towns and islands. Pascha weekend is perhaps the most flamboyant of all holidays; religious processions on Holy Friday and the following Saturday evening culminate in exuberant fireworks at midnight, Easter morning.

Contrary to most national holidays in other countries, **Independence Day** in Greece is a very sober holiday. There is a school flag parade in every town and village and a big armed forces parade in Athens.

Although not an official holiday, pre-Lenten **carnival** - or *apókries* - is a major celebration in cities throughout the country, with [Patras](#) and [Xanthi](#) hosting the country's largest and most famous events. Carnival season comes to an extravagant ending the weekend before Lent begins, with costumes, float parades, and various regional traditions.

In addition to nation-wide holidays and celebrations, many towns and regions have their own *regional* festivals commemorating various historical events, local patron saints, or wine harvests.

The Greek Orthodox Church uses a different method to determine the date of Easter from the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant churches. Therefore, Greek Orthodox Pascha and - derived from that - Holy Week and Pentecost usually fall one or two weeks later than their Roman Catholic and Protestant counterparts, but they do sometimes coincide (as in 2010, 2011, 2014, 2017 and 2025).

## Talk

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See also: [Greek phrasebook](#)



**Greek** is the official national language and is the native tongue of the vast majority of the population, although the English speaking visitor will encounter no significant language problem. English is the most widely studied and understood foreign language in Greece, followed by French, Italian, and German. Basic knowledge of English can be expected from almost all in the tourism industry and public transport services. Learning a few Greek terms, such as "hello" and "thank you" will be warmly received.

The Latin and Cyrillic alphabets were derived from the Greek alphabet and about half of Greek letters look like their Latin counterparts, and most Greek letters resemble their Cyrillic counterparts. With a bit of study it's not *too* hard to decipher written names. You'll find that place names on road signs throughout the country are often transliterated into Latin letters (some signs, especially on the newer roads, are even outright translated into English).

As true throughout Greece, you will find multiple spellings for the same place because of the transliteration from the Greek to Roman alphabet and because Greek grammar rules change the word's spelling depending on whether it is the subject or object of a verb, or to indicate possession (each of these also change the pronunciation), and because of the language reform in 1976. You will see road sign and place names on maps that spell the same place different ways. Sometimes a place will be spelled how it is pronounced, sometimes it will be spelled using Roman letter substitutions. So you will see Heraklion, Iraklion, Heraklio and Iraklio for Ηράκλειο and Rethymnon, Rethymno, Rethimnon and Rethimno for Ρέθυμνο.

## Get in

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### ***Entry requirements***

Greece is a member of the Schengen Agreement.

- There are normally no border controls between countries that have signed and implemented the treaty. This includes most of the European Union and a few other countries.
- There are usually identity checks before boarding international flights or boats. Sometimes there are temporary border controls at land borders.
- A **visa** granted for any Schengen member is valid in all other countries that have signed *and* implemented the treaty.
- Please see Travelling around the Schengen Area for more information on how the scheme works, which countries are members and **what the requirements are for your nationality**.

Citizens of Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Mauritius, Saint Kitts and Nevis and Seychelles are permitted to work in Greece without the need to obtain a visa or any further authorisation for the period of their 90 day visa-free stay. However, this ability to work visa-free does not necessarily extend to other Schengen countries.

For detailed regulations applied to your country, refer to the Greek Ministry for Foreign Affairs (<https://www.mfa.gr/en/visas/visas-for-foreigners-traveling-to-greece/>).

### **By plane**

Athens' **Elefthérios Venizélos International Airport (<http://www.aia.gr>)**, near the Athens suburb of Spáta, is the country's largest, busiest airport and main hub, handling over 15 million passengers annually as of 2006. Other major international airports in terms of passenger traffic are, in order of passengers served

per year, Heraklion (Nikos Kazantzákis Int'l), Thessaloniki (Makedonia Int'l), Rhodes (Diagóras), and Corfu (Ioánnis Kapodístrias).

Athens and Thessaloníki handle the bulk of scheduled international flights. However, during tourism season, several charter and low-budget flights arrive daily from many European cities to many of the islands and smaller cities on the mainland.

**Olympic Air** (<http://www.olympicair.com/>) (previously Olympic Airlines) offers services to Greece from several cities in Europe and the Middle East. **Aegean Airlines** (<http://www.aegeanair.com/>), which owns half the domestic market also operates international routes to Greece from a growing number of European cities. **Sky Express** (<http://www.skyexpress.gr/en-us/home.aspx>) is the second biggest airline in Greece and operates domestic routes and also international routes by request.

Athens is also well-served by airlines from all over Europe, the Middle East, North America, and Southeast Asia, with flights from their respective hubs.

The presence of low-cost carriers in Greece's international market has increased tenfold within the past decade, offering service to Athens and Thessaloníki from several other European locations, such as Easyjet (from London Gatwick, London Luton, Manchester, Milan, Paris and Berlin), Transavia (Amsterdam), Sterling (Copenhagen, Stockholm, Gothenburg and Oslo), Norwegian Air (Warsaw, Katowice and Kraków), Wizzair (Katowice and Prague), FlyGlobeSpan (Glasgow) and Vueling (Barcelona). Ryanair in addition to regular services to central airports also offers service to smaller airports in Greece, for example from Bergamo, Rome, Frankfurt-Hahn, Charleroi and Pisa to Volos, Rhodes, Kalamata, Preveza and Kos.

## By train

As of 2022, there are no long-distance international passenger services to Greece. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, there used to be overnight trains from Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia to Thessaloniki. International trains might be resumed but there is no confirmation on when. An exception to this is that from November 2022 a regional service between Florina and Bitola in North Macedonia will commence.

Travelers with an **Interrail pass** (<https://www.interrail.eu/en>) may obtain a discount on certain ferry crossings from Italy.

## By car

Greece can be entered by car from any of its land neighbours. From Italy, ferries will transport cars and passengers to Greece (see by boat section). From western Europe, the most popular route to Greece was through Yugoslavia. Following the troubles in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s, most motorists from western Europe came overland by Italy, and then took a trans-Adriatic ferry from there. Although the countries of the former Yugoslavia have since stabilized, and Hungary-Romania-Bulgaria form another, albeit a much longer, alternative, the overland route through Italy now remains the most popular option.

## By bus



Aircraft at Athens airport

There is some, albeit limited, **international bus service** to neighbouring Albania, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, and Turkey, as well as Serbia and Georgia.

## By boat

*See also: [Ferries in the Mediterranean](#)*

From Italy, main sea routes of the Adriatic connect the ports of Venice, Ancona, Bari and Brindisi of Italy to Patras and Igoumenitsa in mainland Greece. Several ferries also connect Italy to the Ionian Islands, though mostly during summer months. Trip duration varies from a minimum of about 8 hours Brindisi to Igoumenitsa, to a maximum 26 hours from Venice to Patras. Multiple ferries depart for Greece daily.

From Turkey there are ferries from Marmaris to Rhodes, from Çeşme (near Izmir) to Chios, from Bodrum to Kos, from Kusadasi to Samos. From July 2019 a ferry sails overnight between Lavrio near Athens and Çeşme in Turkey, operated by Aegean Seaways (<https://aegeanseaways.com>).

There are also ferries connecting Piraeus (Athens) and Rhodes to Alexandria (Egypt), Larnaca and Limassol (Cyprus), and Haifa (Israel).

## Get around

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A frequently asked question of travellers in Greece is whether they should **rent a car**. The primary advantage of having a car is that you can cover a lot more ground per day if you're travelling in rural areas or on the larger islands: you can get almost anywhere in Greece by bus, but some isolated villages may only have one or two buses per day, and having your own car means you don't have to wait in the summer heat for the bus to come. Almost all archaeological sites are accessible by bus, but at some of the more remote, less famous, sites, the bus may drop you off up to a mile away from the site, while with a car you can almost always get right to the site via at least a rough road.

On the other hand, **going car-free** in Greece is not only possible, but offers significant advantages, while driving involves a number of disadvantages. Though many people find driving in Greece easy and even pleasant, others are concerned by the high accident rate (one of the highest in Europe), the national reputation for risky driving, and the presence of many twisty mountainous roads, sometimes hugging the side of a cliff. Gas is as expensive as anywhere. (For more on driving conditions in Greece see below.) Driving in Athens and other big cities can be a frustrating, and sometimes hair-raising, experience, and finding parking can be very difficult. And having a car greatly restricts your flexibility when island-hopping, since only the larger, and usually slower, ferries offer car transport, which must be paid for in addition to your passenger ticket. Travelling by bus is not only cheaper but offers a greater chance of striking up conversations with both locals and other travellers than going by car. Language is not usually a problem for English speakers in using public transit: wherever there is significant tourism in Greece bus schedules are posted in English, and bus drivers and conductors, as well as taxi drivers, will understand at least enough English to answer your questions



With 3,000 islands, many of which are popular destinations, getting around Greece often entails boat or plane travel

Public transport can be supplemented by **taxis** (see below), which in many places, especially the islands, offer fixed rates to various beaches, which can be affordable especially if the price is shared among several people. And on many islands it's possible to get places by **walking**, which can be a pleasant experience in itself.

## By bus

Intercity buses are a very popular option for domestic travel. **KTEL** is the national government-subsidized network of independent businesses which cooperate together to form a dense route system serving almost the entire country. The system is efficient, reliable, and relatively inexpensive. It serves both long and short distances, including routes from major cities to islands near the mainland, such as Corfu and Cephalonia (in such cases, the ferry crossing is included in the price of the bus ticket).

As KTEL companies operate independently, the quality of information available online greatly varies between each one. Most companies now support online booking, at least for routes between major cities.

## By train

Trains used to run around large parts of Greece. In the last few years, however, development and funding have been focused exclusively on the Athens-Thessaloniki line, which links the country's two biggest cities. Trains operating on this line are modern, clean and mostly punctual. Delays and bus replacements are frequent for routes operating outside this line. Multiple projects are planned to improve railway infrastructure all over Greece.

Train stations in Greece are often very primitive, having no departure and arrival boards. In order to find out the platform of your train, ask an employee at the ticket counter or keep an eye out for a paper notice.

Hellenic Train (<https://www.hellenictrain.gr/>) is the sole passenger train operator across Greece. Information about destinations and timetables is available on its website.

## By car

Exploring the country by car can be an extremely rewarding experience, allowing you to explore the incredibly scenic and varied terrain of the country's coastlines, interior, and islands, at your convenience. Roads are usually well-marked and well-maintained, and billions of euros are being poured into expanding the nation's network of multi-lane freeways. Because of the rapid expansion and improvement of the nation's road system, it is advised to have the most updated road map(s) possible. Many of the newer motorways are toll roads, and fees can be expensive. Road signs in Greek are usually repeated with a transliterated version in the Latin alphabet.

Drivers who do not hold an EU driving licence must carry an international driver's permit obtained in their home country. This may not be required when renting a car, but will certainly be required if the driver is involved in an accident or pulled over by the police for a traffic citation. Insurance policies may be void if the driver is a non-EU driver without an international permit.

Petrol prices are steep, but relatively inexpensive in comparison with many other EU countries.

For those used to driving in North America, driving in Greece can be a challenge. To them Greek (and other European) drivers might appear aggressive. Also the nation's topographic reality poses challenges by forcing many narrow roads in mountainous regions to take several twists and turns. Roads in towns and

villages can be surprisingly narrow as well. If cars meet on a narrow stretch of road it is customary for one driver to find a spot to pull over and let the other driver pass. At times, one driver will need to back up for the other. Adherence to this practice is expected and failure to do so will bring the ire of your fellow drivers. Drive slowly through villages and small towns, because there are often pedestrians in the roadway. Another major difference between driving in North America and Greece is the range of speeds at which vehicles travel, particularly on the highways. While speed limits are as high as 120 km/h (75 mph), some vehicles will be travelling as slowly as 60 km/h (40 mph). Other vehicles will travel at speeds well in excess of the posted limits and can come up from behind very quickly.

## By rental car

Car rental offices are present throughout Greece, especially in major cities and in highly touristed areas. About 90% of rental cars are manual, for automatics it is advised to reserve one in advance. Some companies use vehicle classification scale from A to Z instead of the four-letter SIPP/ACRIS (https://www.acriss.org/car-codes/) codes. Often rental terms restrict taking the vehicle on ferries.

Larger car rental companies in addition to well known names like Avis/Budget, Europcar, Hertz/Firefly, Enterprise and SixT include Abbycar (https://www.abbycarhire.com), AutoUnion (https://www.autounion.gr), Kosmo Car Rental (https://www.kosmos-carrental.com/en) and Caldera (https://caldera.com.gr).

Cheaper companies such as Greenmotion achieve lower cost by not having a real rental desk at airport, lesser trained and knowledgeable staff, instead having sign-and-greet, then a shuttle bus to bring customers to their "airport office" which is some distance away, so their lower prices are not without drawbacks. And online reviews have noted some companies' propensity to deceive customers thru bait and switch, hidden and/or inflated charges.

Shoulder season starts from June 1, peaking at July. The rental companies' ratings on broker sites such as Rentalcars.com, Autoeurope.com are not necessarily indicative of their quality of service.

So beware of unreasonable rental conditions and unscrupulous agencies trying to attribute existing damages to new renters and inflating repair costs, make sure to do your due diligence, read terms and conditions and inspect the cars very carefully and note down the smallest irregularities before signing, as it is in their interest to not fully inform you of hidden damages.

## By boat

The frequency, reliability and availability of Greek ferries are largely dependent upon the time of year. For instance, during the winter off-season (January to March), the weather on the Aegean can be extremely rough and boats are often kept in port for days at a time. This type of delay is extremely unpredictable (it is not a decision of the ferry companies, but rather, that of the port authority) and determining when a boat in harbour will actually set sail is near impossible. Therefore, travellers in off-season should build some flexibility into their schedule and not plan on departing an island in the morning and catching a flight home in the afternoon. On the opposite end of the spectrum, ferries in August fill up due to the National Holiday (15 Aug), so travellers should plan ahead. If you would like to track your ferry and get information such as live estimated times of arrival you can download the **NISEA app** (https://nisea.co/download/SgVd) which provides all that information for free.



An inter-island ferry and smaller boats just outside Poros



As for **routes**, during high-season there are extensive connections from Athens and quite a few in-between islands for "hopping." Again, in the winter, some of these ferries run once, maybe twice a week.

Visitors to Greece planning to travel by ferry should be aware of some **potential complications**. First, it can't be assumed that you can get from any given island to any other island every day of the week. The Greek ferry system is basically a hub-and-spoke system, with the spokes radiating from Piraeus out to the various island groups. As a result, boats within the groups are fairly frequent, but less so between the groups. Sometime islands which are geographically close together are in different groups: for instance, the Western Cyclades (Serifos, Sifnos, Milos) look very close on a map to the Central Cyclades (Naxos, Paros, Mykonos,) but these groups are on different spokes, meaning you can usually in summer get from one island to another in the same group on any day, but boats between the groups, e.g. Naxos to Sifnos, may be significantly less frequent. Second, trying to find advance information on ferry schedules can be frustrating: unfortunately there exists no single official comprehensive source for Greek ferry schedules either in print or on line, though there are a number private sites run by travel agents or other businesses which claim to give comprehensive schedules, and many of the individual ferry companies have web sites giving their schedules, in some cases offering the ability to book and pay for tickets on line. Ferry schedules are also always posted at the boat ticket offices in departure ports. Next, though getting a ticket usually isn't a problem, some boats to the most popular destinations, especially those leaving at the most convenient times, do sell out in high season or on holiday weekends. Finally, though ferries nowadays usually run on schedule, weather, strikes, and mechanical breakdowns still can occasionally delay them. None of these problems are insuperable, but they do mean you shouldn't try to micromanage your ferry itinerary too strictly in advance: be flexible, and always have a backup plan. And it's always a good idea not to count on taking a ferry from the islands to get back to Athens the same day your plane leaves, even if boat schedules theoretically should enable you to do this: this will *probably* work, but there's enough of a chance it won't to make it prudent to plan on getting back to Athens at least one day before your flight.

There are three ports in Athens: the main port Piraeus and outlying Rafina and Lavrio port. These serve all islands, but central Cyclades islands such as Tinos and Mykonos, it is often better to leave from Rafina.

Ferries are about the one thing in Greece that leave on time so **be prompt**. New "fast ferries" are cutting distance times in half but prices are slightly more expensive. Sometimes, it is more practical to fly, especially to Crete or Rhodes. However, flights are usually more expensive. Santorini is 8 hour slow boat from Athens but the entrance view from the boat is spectacular.

The major ferry companies operating in Greece include:

- **Aegean Speed Lines (<https://aegeanspeedlines.gr/>)** (Cyclades)
- **ANEK Lines (<https://www.anek.gr/>)** (Crete and international)
- **Blue Star Ferries (<https://www.bluestarferries.com/>)** (Italy-Greece and Aegean Islands and Crete)
- **Hellenic Seaways (<https://hellenicseaways.gr/>)** (Cyclades, Argosaronic, North Aegean, Sporades)
- **ANES Ferries (<https://www.anes.gr/>)** (Saronic, Sporades, Rodos Symi Line)
- **Saronic Ferries (<https://www.saronicferries.gr/>)** (Saronic Gulf)
- **Seajets (<http://www.seajets.gr/>)** (Aegean Islands)
- **Minoan Lines (<http://www.minoan.gr/>)** (Italy-Greece and Crete)
- **SAOS Ferries (<http://www.saos.gr/>)** (Aegean Islands and northern mainland)
- **Superfast Ferries (<https://www.superfast.com/>)** (Italy-Greece)
- **Ventouris Ferries (<http://www.ventouris.gr/>)** (Italy-Greece)
- **Zante Ferries (<http://zanteferries.gr/>)** (Cyclades)
- **Golden star Ferries (<https://goldenstarferries.gr/>)** (Cyclades, Sporades)

- **Levante Ferries (<https://www.levanteferries.com/>)** (Ionian Islands)
- **Kefalonian Lines (<https://kefalonianlines.com/>)** (Ionian Islands)

Schedules and web sites for some very local ferry services may be found on the destination pages for the relevant islands or ports, or you can also decide to rent a sailing boat, motor boat, catamaran or a gulet and explore Greece from a deep blue sea.

## By plane

The nation's domestic air travel industry is dominated by **Olympic Air (<https://www.olympicair.com/>)**, **Sky Express (<https://www.skyexpress.gr/en/>)** and **Aegean Airlines (<http://www.aegeanair.com>)**. These airlines offer an extensive route network within the country, including services connecting several islands to the mainland. Aegean Airlines and Olympic Air offer e-tickets which you can display on the Aegean smartphone app. Sky Express offer e-tickets, which only exist as an e-mail or web page with booking confirmation. Boarding passes can be printed using the automatic self check-in machines at the airport.

## By taxi

There are many taxis in Greece. Over ten years ago, getting one could be quite a challenge, but not any more. You hail taxis on the street like in any other large city.

Transport from the airport to the center of Athens is fixed cost from the taxi line that is outside exit 3 in the arrivals level. Day time fare from 05:00–00:00 cost €38 Night time fare from 00:00–05:00 cost €54

If you need a taxi from the ferry at night from Piraeus, it might not be easy. The drivers who wait outside sometimes are looking to take at least three different individuals going in the same direction so they can charge three fares! If you are two or three people, only one person should hail the cab and then if the driver agrees to take you, have the other(s) jump in. In Greece you don't pay "per capita", unless of course the other passengers are strangers to you and you just happened to stop the same taxi. In this case you pay separately -for example you, your wife and you pay one fare, and the others pay also one fare (one fare for each "group", no matter how many there are in the same company). If you are 4 friends, you pay one fare.

The taxi situation has improved since the debt crisis in Greece, but being a tourist might make you vulnerable to "extra" charges (see also the section about the cost of living).

## By boat

Many major cruise ships visit the islands and there is also the option of hiring your own boat from any main harbour such as Athens, Kos and Lefkas.

For those sailors with experience, the Greek Islands provide an idyllic sailing experience with moderate winds and calm waters. An exceptional sailing opportunity with a chance to visit many places in one go.

There are several yacht charter companies where one can rent a boat skippered or not.

## See

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Few countries can pride themselves on a heritage as important to Western civilization as Greece. A range of first class historic landmarks remind one of the days when the great Greek emperors and writers made their mark on the development of science, literature and democracy. No less than 17 of those monuments are listed as **World Heritage Sites**. However, the many charming little islands, sandy beaches and picturesque whitewashed coastal towns are at least as much a reason to come for the millions of tourists that this Mediterranean country receives each year.

Apart from that Greece offers a distinct and wonderful flora and fauna, with the odd tortoise appearing on the side of the road more often than you would expect.

## Cultural heritage

*So the famous Greek playwright takes his  
toga for repair, and the tailor recognises  
him - "Euripides?"  
"Yes" he says, "Eumenides?"*

World famous are the iconic **Parthenon** in the bustling capital **Athens** and the splendid site of **Delphi**, where the mighty emperors sought the prophecies of the most prominent oracle in the ancient Greek world. There's the temple of Apollo at **Bassae** and the gorgeous old city of **Rhodes**, once overlooked by the Colossus of Rhodes. The archaeological site of **Olympia** is the birthplace of our modern Olympic Games and the place from where the Olympic flame is sent around the world. The many Eastern Orthodox monasteries of **Meteora** are just stunning to look at, built high on natural sandstone rock pillars. At the small town of **Vergina** the ancient site of **Agai** was found, and many valuable artifacts were discovered in several untouched tombs, one of them being the tomb of Philip II of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great. Proudly situated on Mt. Taygetos is the ancient town of **Mystras**, close to (and often mistaken for) ancient **Sparta**. Another great site is the island of **Delos**, not far from the popular holiday destination **Mykonos**. According to myths, this is where Apollo and Artemis were born. The island used to be the main Panhellenic sanctuary and is now dotted with archaeological remains.



A mosaic in the Palace of the Grand Master of the Knights of **Rhodes**

Some major sights are nicely located on one of the beautiful Greek islands, allowing for a delightful combination of sightseeing and relaxing on one of the many fine beaches. **Patmos** is a lovely example, boasting the historic centre **Chora**, the **Monastery of Saint John the Theologian** and the **Cave of the Apocalypse**, but also some pleasant sea side restaurants with pretty views. **Corfu** has the same characteristics, being a popular holiday destination with good beaches and an impressive historic town centre. The beach towns of **Samos**, just a stone's throw away from the **Turkish** mainland, are a good place to try the islands local wines (famous in the ancient world!). On the island are also the World Heritage **Temple of Hera**, the remains of the fortified **port of Pythagoreion** and the famous **Tunnel of Eupalinos**, a 1 km long subterranean aqueduct built in the 6th century BC. Although not an island, the ancient **Mount Athos** is in the north of Greece, on the peninsula of **Chalkidiki**. It's one of the country's most popular tourist regions with excellent beaches, numerous other ancient sites and many charming villages.

If you still want more of the historic stuff, admire the massive Sanctuary of Asklepios at **Epidaurus** or the Archaeological Sites of **Mycenae and Tiryns**. The Monasteries of Daphni (Athens), **Hosios Loukas** (Beotia) and **Nea Moni** (on the island of Chios) complete the World Heritage listings for Greece.

## Islands

*Main article: Greek Islands*

When it comes to Greece's famously gorgeous islands, it's hard to take your pick out of the 6000 options you have, 227 of them being inhabited. Their rocky coast lines, sandy beaches, charming villages, sheltered bays and many yacht harbours make them extremely popular among all kinds of travellers. The large island of **Crete** is a highly popular tourist destination, with landscapes varying from great sandy palm beaches to snow-covered high peaks and stunning river gorges and a good deal of night life in its main tourist towns. If you're looking to party at night, lovely **Mykonos** or **Ios** are good options too. The volcanic island of **Santorini** is one of the most romantic picks and offers some spectacular views. Its whitewashed capital of **Fira** is dramatically situated on the edge of a 400m high cliff, overlooking a beautiful blue lagoon. Other popular ones are **Lesbos**, **Paros**, **Lefkada** and **Kos**. The **National Marine Park** on **Zakynthos** is the primary nesting ground for loggerhead sea turtles in the Mediterranean. The rugged, green hills and valleys of **Kefalonia** boast a number of vineyards, and the island's cliffs and beautiful beaches make it a tourist hotspot. For a slightly more authentic and less touristy experience, try **Syros**, **Amorgos** or any of the other small and less developed islands. But if you want to live the way of life in Cyclades, **Andros** is one of the most original places to visit.



The beach of Elafonisi, Crete

## Do

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There are a variety of activities that someone can follow in Greece. One of the most unique that also started to become more and more well known is, during the trip from Athens to Thessaloniki, a stop for few days at **Mount Olympus**, the mythic palace of the 12 Gods of the Greek Mythology.

## Buy

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### Money

Greece uses the **euro**, like several other European countries. One euro is divided into 100 cents. The official symbol for the euro is €, and its ISO code is EUR. There is no official symbol for the cent.

All banknotes and coins of this common currency are legal tender within all the countries, except that low-denomination coins (one and two cent) are phased out in some of them. The banknotes look the same across countries, while coins have a

#### Exchange rates for euros

As of January 2023:

- US\$1 ≈ €0.9
- UK£1 ≈ €1.1
- AU\$1 ≈ €0.6
- CA\$1 ≈ €0.7
- Japanese ¥100 ≈ €0.7

standard common design on the reverse, expressing the value, and a national country-specific design on the obverse. The obverse is also used for different designs of commemorative coins. The design of the obverse does not affect the coin's acceptability .

Exchange rates fluctuate. Current rates for these and other currencies are available from XE.com (<https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/>)

The euro replaced the *drachma* in January 2002.

## ATMs

ATMs are present almost everywhere, with MasterCard/Cirrus and Visa/Plus being the most widely accepted cards. Many ATM machines may not accept 5-digit pin numbers; ATM card-users with 5-digit pins are advised to change their pin to 4 digits before leaving home.

ATMs usually charge €2.50–3 in addition to what your bank demands. This is added to the withdrawn amount and invoiced to your bank, but not dispensed. Thus, the larger the amount withdrawn, the less the fee percentage-wise.

## Cards

You may get better exchange rates by using credit or debit cards directly, instead of exchanging cash. MasterCard, Visa, Maestro and Eurocard are widely accepted across the country in retail stores, hotels, and travel/transportation agencies (including ferry, airline, and car rental agencies), but are not accepted at some restaurants. Local souvenir shops usually require a minimum purchase before allowing you to use your card and may not accept it for special sales or deeply discounted items.

## Money exchange

Common particularly in larger cities and in any touristed area. In addition to hard currency, they also accept traveller's cheques. There are also automated currency exchange machines in some areas of the country, particularly at Athens airport. Most banks will also exchange euros for some currencies—such as the US dollar and pound sterling—often at better rates than currency exchanges. Banks' commission fees for these exchanges are usually structured so that it's more economical to change larger sums than smaller. Usually, only the larger, international-standard hotels will exchange money for their guests.

Branches of the Greek bank **Alphabank** will exchange Euro American Express Travellers Cheques and US\$ American Express Travellers Cheques into euros at their usual bank rates without fee or commission.

When changing money in large amounts at a bank or currency exchange, it's a good idea to ask for mostly smaller notes, and nothing larger than a €50. Many businesses are reluctant to accept notes of larger than €50, partly because of a scarcity of change, partly because larger notes have a history of being counterfeited.

## Shopping

### Arts and crafts



Artisan craftsmanship has a millennia-old tradition, but it is advisable to leave the beaten track and drive especially in the islands a few kilometres into the interior to get good goods at good prices.

## Bargaining

One can bargain on many things, especially on clothing, souvenirs etc. You can also try different spots for what you are interested in buying and see the different prices that the specific item is sold, and pick the cheapest.

## Business hours

Greece is in the Eurozone. Outside the tourist resorts and apart from the large supermarkets, a long lunch break is usually from about 14:00 to 17:00. Then the shops open again until 20:00 and sometimes even longer.

## Costs

Prices are horrendous relative to wages. **Petrol** cost €2.1-2.4/litre as of July 2022. A packet of **cigarettes** about €4-5. A loaf of **bread** cost about €1. A **coffee** in a bar €3-5, a bottle of **beer** in a small bar about €4-5, a shot of **spirits** about €4-8. You can buy much cheaper water, cheese, milk, ham, fruits, soaps, health care products, et al. in a supermarket such as Lidl, but bread is cheaper in bakeries.

Public transport ticket is 1.20€ for a ticket that's valid for 90 minutes irrespective of number of transfers in the metro area and €5 or more for destinations out of Athens (for distances greater than 20-30 km). The buses and trains in the cities stop at night; then you need a taxi, ride hailing apps are **Beat** and **TAXI 18300**. The minimum charge was €3 and €0.80/km, double at night and also double when your destination is outside the city limits. Since June 2022 **Beat** also adds an additional €1.2 charge for calling a taxi through the app. There is an extra charge of €3 if you get a taxi from the airport -ask to see the official card with the specific costs for baggages etc. that all the taxis must have. You can eat cheap if you eat "souvlaki" (pork or chicken pieces) for €2 each stick but usually one person needs two of them. **Tavernas** are much cheaper than restaurants to get lunch or dinner -you can eat in a taverna spending €12-20 per person. The main dish usually costs €7-12, the salad €7, the coke €2, the "cover charge" depending on the area. If you need **clothing**, bath suit or shoes, bags, tea shirts etc., the cheapest shops (but by no means the best) are the Chinese which you can find almost in every block in the cities. A ticket to a **cinema** costs around €8 per person, with €5-8 for a drink or snack in the intermission. **Seashores** are usually free but around Athens many of them charge €4-5 per person. Sometimes in free beaches you pay extra (if you want) in order to use the umbrella or other facilities. Tipping is usually an extra 10%, but if you get a €3 coffee in a bar, you shouldn't leave 0.20 because it will be considered an insult. Greeks in this case leave either nothing or at least 0.40-0.50 for a €2 charge. If you like Greece and decide to **rent** an apartment, don't say you are a tourist, because they will ask you for more -they'll think you don't know the prices. Find a Greek to trust and let them negotiate on your behalf. Greeks pay for two rooms €250-400 in middle class areas, up to €700 for expensive areas (rarely) or down to €180 (also rarely) in areas you don't really want to live in. Electricity costs about €60-100 a month. For a single person who doesn't work and keep the air conditioning or the heat on all day long, and uses washing machine once a week, cooks every day and needs hot water on daily base, he gets to pay €80-100 a month. Tap water is about €7-10 a month. Internet and phone at home costs about €25-40 a month. An acceptable pair of shoes, about €40 (although there are shoes that cost €15 or €300), trousers €20-80. **Hairdressers** cost €8-40, usually around €20 if you want to leave satisfied. If you cook at home, **potatoes** cost €1-2/kg, **olive oil** €4.5-6/litre, cooking oil for frying

€4/litre, **tomatoes** €1-3 (depending on the season), **meat** €5-12/kg, **fresh fishes** €10-20/kg in the fish market (the frozen meats and fishes are much cheaper), and the **fruits** (also depending on the season) €1-5. (All prices in this section as of Feb 2019)

## Kiosks

There are newsstands (períptero) in every corner of the city, where newspapers, magazines, chilled drinks, confectionery, snacks, tobacco and ice cream can all be bought.

## Markets

Greece farmers markets (Laikí Agorá) take place at least once a week in every town. Here agricultural products of the region but also the things of daily life are offered. They have a very special flair that you should not miss. Standowners in the big markets are vociferously promoting their products, while the small rural markets are comparatively quiet. One is rarely addressed by the sellers. But there are many other things to discover in the markets. For example olives. Stalls offer the wide selection of pickled olives. It's allowed to taste before you buy what you like most. Also very nice are the stalls that offer nuts. A very wide selection of nibbles, you can buy here. Again, tasting is allowed. Of course, there is also a part that offers clothes, shoes, fabrics and jewellery. Here you get the known plagiarism, but also products from Greece.

Supermarket chains are *Skvalenitis*, *Masoutis*, *AB Vasilopoulos*, *Market In* and *Economy Market*, smaller mini marts include *OK Market*.

## Tipping

Traditionally tipping in restaurants is not customary in Greece. Rounding of the bill used to work both ways, up or down to the nearest note amount. A tip was considered insulting, and the best way to show appreciation was to come back. In touristy areas this has almost completely vanished, but off the beaten track it is still alive.

Tipping is certainly not based on a predetermined percentage. Customers usually leave a tip on the table, varying from a few coins to large amounts of money, according to how satisfied they are by the service, but usually something like €1-2. Tipping taxi drivers is uncommon.

Many restaurants bring you a bottle of water and charge you without your having ordered it. Thus, if you do not like this approach, kindly refuse the bottle of water if it is a fresh and newly opened one. Tap water is generally free.

## VAT

Value Added Tax is charged on most items, usually included in the item's price but some shops offer "Tax Free" shopping to non-EU residents. This means that non-EU residents can ask for a VAT refund at their port of exit in the EU. Ask for your voucher before leaving the shop and show that along with your items to the customs officer upon departure from the EU.

## In general

Things you might buy at home but are (usually) fresh in Greece include olive oil, fruits (watermelon, cantaloupe, peaches, grapes, strawberries, etc.), feta cheese, and some breads and sweets that are local (see the "Eat" section). As for drinks, "Retsina" and "Tsipouro" are also local, but the first has a peculiar taste and the second is really strong, like "ouzo" and "raki". Don't mix those four with other drinks if you buy some for back home. It's nice to buy small statues and miniatures of ancient Greek art, but search for the cheap ones in various shops - you can almost always find them in half the price. Shops that cater to tourists are always more expensive - a local you can trust could be of great use. Buy definitely a hat for the sun if it's summer and sunblock (see the "Natural dangers" section).

## Eat

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See also: [Greek cuisine](#)

Greek cuisine is a blend of indigenous traditions and foreign influences. Neighbouring Italy and Turkey have left a major impact on Greek cuisine, and there are shared dishes with both of these nations. The traditional Greek diet is very Mediterranean, espousing vegetables, herbs, and grains native to the Mediterranean biome. Being a highly maritime nation, the Greeks incorporate plenty of seafood into their diet. Greece is also a major producer and consumer of lamb; beef, pork, and especially chicken are also popular. Olive oil is a staple in Greek cooking, and lemon and tomatoes are common ingredients. Bread and wine are always served at the dinner table.



Greek (*horiatiki (village) salata*) salad

The cuisine in Greece can be radically different from what is offered in Greek restaurants around the world. Greek restaurants abroad tend to cater more to *customer expectations* rather than offer a truly authentic Greek dining experience. One example is the famous *gyros* (yee-ros), a common item on Greek menus outside Greece. While it is a popular fast-food item in Greece today, it is a foreign import adapted from the Turkish *döner kebab* after World War II. It is considered by Greeks as junk food. It is never served in the home and is generally not found on the menus of non-fast-food restaurants.

Greeks live to eat, and eating out is Greece's national pastime and a rewarding experience for visitors; however, not knowing where to go or what to do can dampen the experience. In the past, restaurants that catered mostly to tourists were *generally* disappointing. Thankfully, the nation's restaurant industry has grown in sophistication over the past decade, and it is now possible to find excellent restaurants in highly-touristed areas, particularly areas that are popular with *Greek* tourists as well. Thus, it remains a good idea to dine where *Greeks* dine (Go search them at the times Greeks dine: 21:00-23:00). The best restaurants will offer not only authentic traditional Greek cuisine (along with regional specialities) but Greece's latest culinary trends as well.

A good sign of authenticity is when you get a small free dessert when you ask for the bill. Bad signs are when desserts are listed on the menu, large posters depicting food are seen outside or when a waiter is standing outside yelling for clients to come in or taking your plates away while you are still sitting at the table (traditionally everything is left on the table until the customer is gone, even if there is hardly any space left).

Restaurants serving international cuisine have also made a presence in the country, offering various options such as Chinese, French, Italian, and international contemporary.

## Vegan and vegetarian

Restaurants catering strictly to vegans and vegetarians are practically non-existent outside of Athens. However, there are many vegan and vegetarian dishes in Greek cuisine. As a vegan, you'll probably end up ordering **fava** every time you go to a taverna but do ask the waiter if there are other vegan dishes on the menu or if the chef could make a vegan-friendly version of a particular dish. In cases when someone is not familiar with the concept of veganism, you may ask if the food you're ordering is νηστίσιμο (nistisimo), i.e. appropriate for people who fast for religious reasons. Such food may still contain honey or even seafood, so make sure to ask.

A number of vegan restaurants have opened in and around Athens. Falafel places are also becoming quite popular. There are also many shops with healthy food and a [vegan shop \(https://www.bamboovegan.com/\)](https://www.bamboovegan.com/), all in addition to ubiquitous fruit and veg shops.

But also do not miss the numerous stalls on the side of the road selling delicious local fruits, vegetables and produces.

## Popular local dishes

The traditional fast foods are **gyros** (γύρος, "GHEER-ohs", *not* "GY-rohs" as in "gyroscope"), roast pork or chicken (and rarely beef) and fixings wrapped in a fried pita; **souvlaki** (σουβλάκι, "soov-LAH-kee"), grilled meat on a skewer; Greek dips such as **tzatziki** (τζατζίκι), made of strained yoghurt, olive oil, garlic and finely chopped cucumbers and dill or mint; and **skordhalia** (σκορδαλιά), a garlic mashed potato dip which is usually served with deep fried salted cod.



Moussaka

With its extensive coastline and islands, Greece has excellent seafood. Try the **grilled octopus** and the **achinosalata** (sea-urchin eggs in lemon and olive oil). By law, frozen seafood must be marked as such on the menu. Fresh fish, sold by the kilogram, can be very expensive; if you're watching your budget, be sure to ask how much your particular portion will cost before ordering it.

**Greek salad** (called "country salad" locally, "horiatiki"), a mix of tomatoes, cucumber, feta cheese and onion – all sliced – plus some olives, and occasionally green bell pepper or other vegetables, usually garnished with oregano. Traditionally it is dressed only with olive oil; vinaigrette or lettuce are added only in the most tourist-oriented restaurants. It is the typical summer salad.

Also consider:

- **moussaka**, a rich oven-baked dish of eggplant, minced meat, tomato and white sauce
- **pastitsio**, a variety of lasagna
- **stifado**, pieces of meat and onion in a wine and cinnamon stew
- **spetsofai**, braised sausage with pepper and tomatoes, a hearty dish from the Mt. Pelion region
- **sahanaki**, fried semi-hard cheese

- **paidakia**, grilled lamb chops, are also popular. (They tend to have a gamier taste and chewier texture than North American lamb chops, which you may or may not like.)
- **creamy peppered cheese, eggplant salad or fried zucchini**
- **fasolada**, dry beans stew, sometimes considered Greece's national dish. A variety with a larger bean cultivar is known as "Gigantes".



Fasolada

**Fried potatoes** (often listed on menus as **chips**) are a naturalized Greek dish, found almost everywhere. They can be very good when freshly made and served still hot. **Tzatziki** is usually a good dip for them, though they are still good on their own.

For dessert, ask for **baklava**, tissue-thin layers of pastry with honey and chopped nuts; or **galaktoboureko**, a custard pie similar to mille feuille. Other pastries are also worth tasting. Another must-try is yoghurt with honey: yoghurts in Greece are really different from what you used to see at Danone stores: to start with, genuine yoghurt in Greece has 10% of fat. Fruit such as watermelon is also a common summertime treat.

For **breakfast**, head to local bakeries (**fourno**) and try fresh **tiropita**, cheese pie; **spanakopita**, spinach pie; or **bougatsa**, custard filled pie, or even a "'horiatiko psomi", a traditional, crusty village type bread that is a household staple, and very tasty on its own too. All are delicious and popular among Greeks for quick breakfast eats. Each bakery does own rendition and you are never disappointed. Go to the next Kafeneion with them and have it there with a Greek coffee to be local.

A popular drink is a frappe made with instant Nescafé, water, sugar, and sometimes milk. It is frothed and served over ice.

## Cover fee

It's common to charge a cover fee in restaurants officially (i.e. stating it in a receipt), such as €0.30 to €2 per person, but if it's tending towards €2 you should really consider eating somewhere else.

## Fast food

McDonald's and Domino's pizza have made a significant presence in Greece over the past 15 years. However, they face strong competition from the popular local chains and they are not really popular with natives, especially outside Athens.

*Goody's* (<http://www.goodys.com/>) is the most popular fast-food chain in the country, offering a large variety of fast food meals, with numerous outlets throughout the country. A hamburger with Coke costs €3-5. *Everest* (<http://www.everest.gr/>) is a chain which specialises in hand-held snacks. Also in *Thessaloniki* you can find *Subito*. *Flocafé* (<http://www.flocafe.gr/>) is gaining popularity through its coffee and dessert items. There are also many independently-owned fast food businesses that offer typical fast food items, such as gyros. Many of these small businesses tend to be open late at night, and are popular with younger crowds on their way home from a night out.

## Drink

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Those wishing to booze in Greece would be well advised to stick to the traditional domestic Greek products discussed below, which are freely available, mostly cheap by European standards, and usually of good quality. Any imported, non-Greek alcoholic beverages are likely to be very expensive if genuine and, if cheap, may well be "bomba," a locally distilled alcohol with flavourings which sometimes, especially in island bars catering to young people, masquerade as whisky, gin, etc. If you drink it, you'll be very sorry. Drink in respectable places where you can see the bartender mix your drink.

## Water

A glass of water is traditionally served with any drink you order; one glass for each drink, especially with any form of coffee. Sometimes you even get a glass of water first and then you are asked what you want to drink. Sometimes you might as well get a bottle instead of just a glass. In touristy areas you might have to ask for a glass of water if you want one. If you don't get water with a coffee you just stepped into a tourist-trap. Also, if you did not explicitly ask for a bottle instead of a glass, and they try to charge you for it you should refuse.

Tap water in most places a tourist would visit is drinkable; if in doubt, ask your hotel. But often though drinkable it doesn't taste very good, especially on some small islands (as it is imported in and heavily chlorinated), and many visitors, like many Greeks, prefer bottled water. By law, water prices in shops must remain within acceptable limits, making it much cheaper than in Anglosphere nations. A half litre of bottled water costs (July 2022) €0.50 if you buy it on the street, and €0.15 if you buy it from the supermarket.

## Wines

To be able to purchase or drink alcohol in Greece, by law, you must be 17 and photographic ID will be asked for infrequently, especially in venues that sell food (many independent fast food outlets will serve alcohol).

Greece, an ancient wine producing country, offers a wide variety of local wines, from indigenous and imported grape varieties, including fortified and even sparkling wines. Greek wines are generally not available on the international market, as production is relatively small, costs are quite high and little remains for export. However, in the past decade Greek wines have won many international prizes, with the rise of a new generation of wineries. Exports are rising as well.

Wine (*Krasi*: κρασί / *oenos*: οίνος) is most Greeks' drink of choice.

Almost every taverna has "barrel wine," usually local, which is usually of good quality and a bargain (€6-8/litre, but check this before ordering when you are in a touristy area.).

If they have it, try also the **Imiglyko** (Half-Sweet) red, even if sweet wine is usually not your preference, it is different from anything you know.

**Retsina** is a "resinated wine" with a strong, distinctive taste that can take some getting used to; the flavour comes from pine resin, which was once employed as a sealant for wine flasks and bottles. The most well-known and cheap-n-dirty is "Kourtaki Retsina".

Bottled wines have gotten increasingly more expensive; some that the beginner may find worth trying are whites from Santorini and reds from Naoussa and Drama. All wines and alcoholic beverages are cheaper in the super markets, but then you can't consume them in a bar, unless you keep them hidden in small bottles and use them very discretely.

## Beer

Even if beer (*bira*: μύρα) is consumed all around the country, don't come to Greece for the beer. The only local varieties widely available are Mythos and Alpha, but Greeks drink mostly Northern European beers produced under license in Greece like Heineken and Amstel. Heineken is affectionately known as "green"; order it by saying "Mia Prasini."

On the quality front, there is also a microbrewery/restaurant called Craft (2 litre jug also available in large supermarkets), and new organic beer producers like Piraiki Zythopoiia.

## Liquor

The most famous indigenous Greek liquor is **ouzo** (ούζο), an anise-flavored strong spirit (37.5%), which is transparent by itself but turns milky white when mixed with water. Mainlanders do not drink ouzo with ice, but tourists and Greek islanders generally do. A 200 ml bottle can be under €2 in supermarkets and rarely goes above €8 even in expensive restaurants. Mytilene (Lesbos) is particularly famous for its ouzo. A few to try are "Mini" and "Number 12," two of the most popular made in a middle-of-the-road style, "Sans Rival," one of the most strongly anise-flavored ones, "Arvanitis," much lighter, and the potent "Barba Yianni" and "Aphrodite," more expensive and much appreciated by connoisseurs.

**Raki** or **tsikoudia** is the Greek equivalent of the Italian *grappa*, produced by boiling the remains of the grapes after the wine has been squeezed off. It is quite strong (35-40% of alcohol) and in the summer months it is served cold. It costs very little when one buys it in supermarkets or village stores. The raki producing process has become a male event, as usually men are gathering to produce the raki and get drunk by constantly trying the raki as it comes out warm from the distillery. One raki distillery in working order is exhibited in Ippikos Omilos Irakleiou in Heraklion, but they can be found in most large villages. In northern Greece it is also called *tsipouro* (τσιπουρο). In Crete, raki is traditionally considered an after-dinner drink and is often served with fruit as dessert.

## Coffee

Coffee (kafes: καφές) is an important part of Greek culture.

The country is littered with *kafetéries* (*kafetéria* singular) which are cafes that serve as popular hangouts for Greeks, especially among the under-35s. They tend to be pretty trendy -yet relaxed- and serve a variety of beverages from coffee, to wine, beer, spirits, as well as snacks, desserts, and ice cream. In the pleasant



A bottle of ouzo

months of spring, summer, and fall, all *kafetéries* provide outdoor tables/seating and they are busiest with customers in the late afternoon and evening hours. Several *kafetéries* also double as bars.

*Kafeneia* (coffee houses) are ubiquitous, found even in the smallest village, where they traditionally served a function similar to that of the village pub in Ireland. Their clientele tends to be overwhelmingly men over 50, however *everyone* is welcome, male or female, young or old, Greek or foreigner; and you will be treated extremely courteously. However, if you're not interested in cultural immersion to *this* extent, you may find the *kafeneia* pretty boring.

Traditionally, coffee is prepared with the grounds left in. It is actually a somewhat lighter version of *Turkish coffee* but in Greece it's only known as *Greek coffee* - "*ellinikós kafés*" or simply "*ellinikós*." Despite being slightly lighter than the original Turkish coffee, it remains a thick, strong black coffee, served in a small cup either sweetened or unsweetened. If you don't specify, the coffee is usually served moderately sweet. Greek coffee traditionally was made by boiling the grounds and water on a stove in a special small pot called a "briki." More and more now days it's made by simply shooting steam from an espresso machine into the water/coffee mixture in the briki, resulting in an inferior drink. If you find a place that still actually uses a stove burner to make their coffee, you can be sure it's a traditional cafe.

During the hot summer months, one of the most popular coffees at the *kafetéries* is *frappé* (φραπέ): shaken iced instant coffee. This is actually an original Greek coffee and can be really refreshing, ordered with or without milk, sweetened or unsweetened.

Coffee can also be made espresso-style, French press (mainly at hotels), and with modern filter technology. The latter is sometimes known as *Γαλλικός: gallikos* ("French") which can lead to some confusion with the press method. It is best to ask for *φίλτρον: filtrou*, which refers unambiguously to filter coffee. It is best not to ask for *black coffee*, as it is unlikely that anyone will understand what you are asking for.

*Espresso freddo* or *cappuccino freddo* have gained much popularity the last decade, and these are the most popular coffees throughout Greece. *Espresso freddo* is simply espresso + ice; *cappuccino freddo* refers to espresso + ice + chill milk foam. They may be served from mousse containers, not prepared to order; be careful to check.

## Iced tea

In mass-sector taverns and cafe, iced tea typically means instant; ask twice if you prefer brewed ice tea.

## Sleep

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If you enjoy the local traditions and charm, unhurried rhythm of living, small, family-run **pensions** are the best way to enrich your experience. Owners and personnel there are friendly and open-minded, compared to the impersonal service you normally encounter in large hotels.

If you have a bigger budget, renting a **villa** is a luxurious and splendid idea. They are normally near or on the beach and provide more space and a great view.

In Greece hotels, especially in the islands but also even in Athens and other big cities, tend to be **simple establishments**. Rooms are typically small, and bathrooms smaller, with the shower often a hand-held sprayer; if there is a bath-tub, it's often a sit-bath. Sometimes in the most basic places shower curtains are lacking. Closets are often inadequate, and sometimes there is only a wardrobe. On the plus side, such hotels typically have a balcony (though sometimes tiny) or veranda, either private or a large one shared by all the rooms (but these are usually spacious enough not to feel cramped.) Standards of cleanliness are usually

good, even in the simpler places. Those who want more luxurious accommodation can usually find it in cities and on the more popular islands but should check the hotel's quality in reliable sources to be sure of what they're getting.

Most Greek hotels now, even the smaller ones, have **websites** and will take bookings by email, though sometimes fax is a more reliable way to communicate. There are also numerous Greek and international hotel booking services which will make bookings, and sometimes these are cheaper, or have rooms available when the hotel itself says it's sold out. If you're not really particular about choosing a hotel, you can usually find a place on a walk-in basis without too much trouble on all but the most crowded islands, where rooms can be difficult to find at the peak of the season, and even in the shoulder season on weekends and major holidays. If you do get stuck for a room, try a local travel agency (preferably one endorsed by a reputable guidebook) or alternatively, ask at a cafe whether the owner knows of any rooms for rent; often they do.

On some islands, though this varies from place to place, the owners of accommodations will **meet arriving ferries** to offer rooms. Often they'll have a van there to transport you from the port, and will have brochures to show you. These places are perfectly legitimate, they're sometimes among the best value places. You can negotiate prices, especially when there are a lot of them trying to fill their rooms, and prices in the range of 20-25 EUR for a room or even a studio is not uncommon in mid-season. But they could be anywhere from a few steps away from the port to a mile out of town, so before accepting such an offer it's best to be sure you get a good idea of its location.

Places listed in the guide books tend to be booked up in advance and usually get more expensive as soon as they know they are in there!

Greek rooms typically have **air conditioning** nowadays. If this is important to you, ask before booking. Some rooms in old traditional buildings with thick stone walls may not need it. **Televisions** are also common, though the picture may be too fuzzy to be much use, and if you get the set to work you may find it receives programs only in Greek. Room phones are rare in the less expensive places.

The main problem you're likely to encounter with a Greek hotel room is **noise**. Anything on a road is likely to suffer from traffic noise, and even at hotels not on a major road you may find that that "footpath" outside is used as a superhighway by Greece's notoriously loud motorbikes. And tavernas and clubs nearby can be loud. If you're concerned about noise, it makes sense to choose your hotel's location carefully. The quietest ones are likely to be in an old part of the town or village accessible only by stairs which counter the prevailing "if I can drive it there I will drive it there" car and motorbike philosophy.

In addition to hotels, almost every popular Greek destination offers **self-catering accommodations** called *studios* or sometimes *apartments*—the terms are pretty much interchangeable. Often these are run by hotels: a hotel may include some self-catering units, or the managers of a hotel may also run a separate building of self-catering apartments. Though not listed very often in travel guides, these studios are most certainly a viable option for many travellers. Typically, a studio consists of one large room, usually larger than a hotel room (though sometimes there are multiple rooms,) with a sink, small refrigerator, and two-burner hot-plate. They usually have a private balcony or veranda, a television, and air conditioning, though rarely a room phone and almost never internet access. In contrast to a hotel, they lack a front desk, there is no breakfast or other food service, and there may be maid service only once every two



The White Tower of Thessaloniki

or three days. Studios are often in quieter and more scenic locations than hotels. For those who don't require the full services of a hotel, studios can be an attractive alternative offering better accommodation for the money, and the chance to economize on food by preparing some meals yourself.

## Learn

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Being the cradle of Western civilisation, Greeks take education very seriously. Many of the world's greatest minds (e.g. Aristotle, Pythagoras, Plato, Democritus) were from Greece, many Greeks have university degrees, and the country sends many students to universities all over the world.

Although this all sounds impressive, Greece isn't a popular destination for foreign students yet. The Greek government is trying to change that, however. Greek universities charge low tuition fees for all students, including international students.

The Greek educational system is known for being notoriously difficult, competitive, and painstaking; Greek parents often complain that children get too much homework, and the national Panhellenic exams (known as *Apolytirion* and are akin to *A-Levels* in the United Kingdom) are widely criticised for being extremely difficult and gruelling.

If there's one thing that attracts students to Greece, it's the affordable cost of living. Costs in Greece are much lower compared to other European countries. Athens is remarkably cheaper to live in than say, Oslo in Norway.

The most prestigious universities in the country are as follows: The [Aristotle University of Thessaloniki](https://www.auth.gr/en/) (<https://www.auth.gr/en/>), [National Technical University of Athens](https://www.ntua.gr/en/) (<https://www.ntua.gr/en/>), and the [National and Kapodistrian University of Athens](https://en.uoa.gr/) (<https://en.uoa.gr/>).

**Students** from EU countries may enter many sites for free. Students from other countries have their entrance fees reduced. So take your International Student Identity Card with you.

## Modern Greek courses

For those interested in **learning modern Greek**, there are several schools offering courses in language instruction for foreigners. Most of these are designed for English speakers, but some schools have courses for people with other first languages. Some schools are in Athens, some in Thessaloniki (among them the very good school of Modern Greek language in the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki) while others have centers in the islands offering a residential program that combines language study with a vacation. Some offer individual tutoring in addition to classes. Some well established programs are [The Hellenic Culture Centre](https://www.ikariancentre.com/greek-online/) (<https://www.ikariancentre.com/greek-online/>) (an associate of The Ikarian Centre,) and [The Athens Centre](https://athenscentre.gr/) (<https://athenscentre.gr/>).

## Work

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If you are a citizen of a country that is a part of the European Union or the EFTA, you may work in Greece without any restrictions whatsoever. Everyone else including citizens of the United Kingdom requires a work permit to work in Greece.

Greece's biggest export happens to be people leaving the country in search of better opportunities. The country has a high rate of unemployment (12% as of 2022), which means there's not enough work for everyone and that the Greek job market is **weak**. During the Greek debt crisis, the unemployment rate once rose to 28%. In addition, rates of pay are quite low compared to other European countries.

## Stay safe

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### Crime and theft

Violent crime and theft rates are low; public disorder is rare, and public drunkenness is generally frowned upon. Visitors should rest assured that this is a safe and friendly destination, but it is always advisable for foreign tourists to exercise basic precautionary measures just as they would at home. There has been a spike in theft (or at least a perceived one), which some locals will not hesitate to blame on the influx of immigrants.

The places where the visitor is most likely to encounter crime and theft are overcrowded and popular with tourists. This includes the metro in Athens and tourist resorts thronged with younger foreigners. The more notorious of such places include Faliraki in Rhodes (calmed down since a new tough mayor was elected), Kavos in Corfu, Malia on Crete, and Ios (though this last is said to have quieted down a bit.) Most visitors to these places return home safely, but there have been increasing reports from them of theft, public indecency, sexual assault, and alcohol-fueled violence; both the perpetrators and victims are usually young foreigners, though sometimes locals are involved. Authorities have stepped up the police presence in such areas to crack down on these activities. Still, visitors to these places would do well to avoid anything that looks like trouble, especially late at night, and to remember that their own overindulgence in alcohol increases their chance of attracting trouble themselves.

### Scams

The most commonly reported major scam against travellers is the Greek version of the old clip joint routine. This is reported primarily from central Athens, but also occasionally from other cities and even the larger island towns. A single male traveller will be approached, usually at night in a neighborhood where there are a lot of bars, by a friendly Greek who will strike up a conversation leading to an invitation to go to "this really cool bar I know" for a drink. Once at the bar, they are joined by a couple of winsome ladies who immediately begin ordering drinks, often champagne, until, at the end of the evening, the mark is presented with an astronomical bill, payment of which is enforced by the sudden appearance of a pair of glowering thugs. The reason this scam works is because most Greeks have a tradition of being friendly to visitors, and almost all Greeks who strike up a conversation with you will have no ulterior motives. But if you're a single male traveller approached by a Greek in the circumstances described above, it's safest to politely but firmly decline any invitations.

Also don't accept to change your money on the street and if someone asks you if you could change a €20 or €50 note, refuse (you might get a counterfeit note).

### Photography restrictions

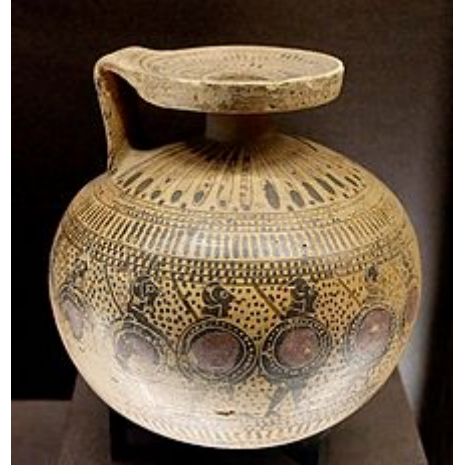
It is strictly forbidden to take photos of military installations or other strategic locations. Authorities will take violations quite seriously. Obey signs prohibiting photography. In fact, it would be best not to take photographs of anything of military significance, including Greek navy ships, or of airports or any aircraft, even civilian ones: Greek authorities can be very sensitive about such things. Many museums prohibit



photography without a permit; some prohibit only flash or tripod photography, and many ask visitors not to take photos of objects (statues, etc.) which include people standing by them, as this is considered disrespectful. Officials at museums will rush over to yell at you if they see a camera or even a cell phone in your hand.

## Antiquities

Greece also has very strict laws concerning the export of antiquities, which can include not only ancient objects but also coins, icons, folk art, and random pieces of stone from archeological sites. Before buying anything which could conceivably be considered an antiquity, you should become familiar with the current laws regarding what can be taken out of the country. Briefly, all objects made before 1830 are considered antiquities and are protected by the Ministry. Do not ever think to export or buy any piece of archeological value because it will be either be a fake or you will be arrested promptly at the airport for trafficking of goods of archeological value.



Greek Aryballos (a kind of vase)  
from the 6th century BC

## Drugs

Greece has some of the strictest, and most strictly enforced, drug laws in Europe, and tourists are not exempt. No matter what anyone tells you, it is most definitely not cool to do drugs in Greece, including marijuana. Furthermore, such a behaviour is strongly rejected by most locals and will almost certainly cause someone to call the Police and have you arrested. Even a very small quantity is enough to get you in serious trouble. Don't even think of offering even the smallest amount of drug to someone else. You risk being prosecuted with charges of drug dealing, leading to several years of imprisonment!

## Traffic

The greatest danger to travellers in Greece is probably in the simple process of crossing the street: traffic can be bad even in smaller towns and horrendous in Athens and other Greek cities, and accident rates are high. Caution should be exercised by pedestrians, even when crossing with a walk light. Traffic fatalities were cut by 60% in the ten years leading up to 2018, but in that year 709 people were killed on Greek roads — 64 per million people, which is higher than the average of 49 in the rest of the European Union. Drivers often weave between lanes while speeding. Stay safe.

## COVID-19 measures

The only measure that will be active for the summer of 2022 is the mandatory use of face mask in public transport and in all indoor places except indoor places of restaurants, cafes, bars and clubs. The Greek government has not ruled out the application of restrictive measures for the unvaccinated people after September 1, 2022.

## Cope

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Toilets in public spaces such as restaurants and bars sometimes lack seats over the porcelain, so to avoid direct contact with the toilet's porcelain, you may want to bring disposable toilet seat covers.

## Stay healthy

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**Note:** Mosquitoes transmitting **West Nile virus** appear routinely, even in urban areas like Attica. Wear long sleeves and/or use repellents in the infested areas. Most infected people don't get any symptoms. In the worst case the infection develops into West Nile fever which can lead to meningitis, encephalitis, damage to the nervous system and death. As of 2019, Greek authorities have declared this a public health issue with 300 infections and 50 deaths from the illness in 2018.

## Health care

The government's austerity program in the 2010s led to a "meltdown" of Greece's previously admired health care system, as the budgets of state-run hospitals have been cut by up to 50%. Many citizens prefer private health care for longer-term hospital stays. Hospitals face shortages of doctors, nurses and basic supplies. However, public health care is free and universal for all citizens, and for all EU nationals upon presentation of an EHIC card (formerly the E111 form). For non-EU nationals, only emergency care is provided for free.

A network of **helicopter ambulances** serves the islands, transporting patients who need immediate attention to the nearest island or city with a major hospital.

The country's **pharmacies** and **medications** are of top quality, and pharmacists are highly trained experts in their field. Many medications that need a prescription in the UK and US can be purchased without a prescription in Greece. When sick with a simple, common illness, a visit to the pharmacist will provide you with the medication you need. If you are looking for a specific medication, be sure to know its generic name, as brand names might be different. Most pharmacies close on Sundays, but a sign will be posted on the door indicating the nearest pharmacies that are open.

Healthcare provision is different to Anglosphere nations in that many specialists are in the community. GPs are replaced by community pathologists. Hotels and tourist agencies can provide advice on where to go if you are ill.

## Sexually transmitted infections

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) exist in Greece as elsewhere, and travellers who may engage in sexual activity while visiting Greece should remember that even if one is on vacation and one's sexual partner is also a traveller, perhaps from one's own country, neither of these facts suspend the laws of biology. According to reports in the Greek and British media, unprotected sex among visitors to Greece, with a consequent rise in STIs and unplanned pregnancies, is especially common at the party resorts favoured by younger people, such as Ios, Malia, Kavos, and Faliraki. Condoms are available at any pharmacy and at many kiosks.

## Natural dangers

**Sun and heat** pose risks that summer visitors should take precautions for. Take a good, light sun hat and sun glasses, and drink plenty of water.

In late spring and summer, the government runs public service announcements on television reminding Greeks to wear their **sunblock** at the beach. The Mediterranean sun tends to get quite strong, and can burn skin that has not been exposed to the sun for a long time. Any *excessive* daily sun exposure can also cause long-term damage to skin. Sunblock and sunscreen are widely available throughout Greece at supermarkets, grocery stores, pharmacies, and special stores selling beach-related items, though they tend to be expensive, and the higher SPF factor blocks can be hard to find.



Beaches and history are two of Greece's biggest draws

During the hottest months, while visiting archaeological sites, wear tank tops, carry umbrellas, and carry water. Daily high temperatures stay at about 95-100°F (35-38°C). The sun is merciless. Athens has been subject to periodic summer heat waves where the temperature can reach above 100°F (38°C), posing a risk of respiratory problems and heat stroke for some people. Many islands, especially in the Cyclades, have very little shade to ameliorate the summer heat; if hiking around such islands, including going by foot to distant beaches, it's especially important in hot weather to wear a hat and sunscreen, to take water, and to avoid being caught walking during the hottest part of the day.

**Jellyfish** periodically infest some beaches and their stings can be severe. The red ones are particularly dangerous. **Sea urchins** are common along the Greek coast, usually clinging to underwater flat surfaces such as smooth rocks and sea walls. They usually inhabit shallow water so they're easy to see. Care should be taken not to step on them, since their spines can be painful.

Don't **hike cross country** in Greece alone: even in popular places, the countryside can be surprisingly deserted, and if you get in trouble while you're out of sight of any houses or roads, it could be a long time before anyone notices you.

**Lifeguards** are rare at Greek beaches, though most of them where people congregate to swim are locally considered safe. Some beaches have shallow water a long way from the shore; others suddenly shelf steeply. If in doubt about safe swimming conditions, ask locally.

There are no **required inoculations** for Greece and the **water** is almost everywhere safe (see above under Drink.) Look for 'Blue Flags' at beaches for the highest quality water (which tend to also have good sand and facilities)

## Respect

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Greeks rate politeness with a person's **behaviour** and not their words. Furthermore, there is an air of informality; everybody is treated like a cousin. They use their hands to gesture a lot. Have fun with this. Sometimes over-emphasizing politeness in spoken language will only make the person dealing with you think you are pretentious. It's nice to learn basic words like "thank you" (Ευχαριστώ: ef-khah-rees-TOH) or "please" (Παρακαλώ: pah-rah-kah-LOH).

Greeks generally consider it proper etiquette to **let the stranger make the first move**. You may find that on entering a cafe or passing a group on the street you feel that you're being ignored, but if you take the initiative by saying hello first, you're likely to find that people suddenly turn friendly. In the countryside it is

not uncommon that total strangers will greet you, greet them back in kind. Greeks like to smalltalk, and when they get carried away smalltalking, they might even forget what they were doing to begin with, ending up drinking raki with you.

Greeks are often portrayed and stereotyped as "lazy". Perpetuating this stereotype is rude. In actuality, Greeks take **leisure** very seriously. Don't take perceived laziness or rudeness harshly. They do it to everyone, locals and tourists alike.

**Dress codes** for churches sometimes include covered shoulders for women and knees covered for both sexes, but generally they don't mind about your clothes as long as they are not very provocative. This tends to be lightly enforced during the height of the summer tourist season, simply due to sheer volume! In any case, appropriate clothing is usually available at the entrance of churches and monasteries, especially the ones receiving most tourist traffic. Just pick it up going in and drop it off on the way out.

**Nudism:** Regular tourists are annoying the locals, because too much skin is shown at the beaches. Nudity is not so common in the Greek public. Also topless is not accepted outside the tourist areas. Nevertheless there are on all shores of the mainland and on most of the islands *nudist beaches* (<http://www.capnbarefoot.info/start/>) where nudism is tolerated and even *nudist hotels* in Crete, Rhodes, Kefalonia, and Zakynthos.

## Social etiquette and breaches

**Respect for elders** is very important in Greece. Greeks place a high emphasis on family values and it is common for Greek parents to be intimately involved in the lives of their children. Try to act in a mature, sensible fashion around someone older than you and try not do anything that would make an older person/authority figure feel challenged.

Greeks value **transparency and loyalty**. Don't say something if you don't mean it. Don't say "next time" if there isn't going to be a "next time".

It's common for Greeks to ask you **personal questions**. It's completely normal for them to ask about your family life, about your vocation, and the like. It may, however, be crass to discuss someone's religious convictions and/or their salary, matters which are normally considered private in many parts of the world.

## Sensitive issues

Avoid saying that Greece is part of **Eastern Europe**. Greece is generally considered part of **Southern Europe**.

Avoid saying that Greece is a **Balkan country**; Greeks in general dislike this label.

Avoid making negative comments about **Ancient Greece** and the **Byzantine Empire**; Greeks take pride in their country's history and are proud of what their country has given to the world.

Although Greece is, by law, a secular state, the vast majority of Greeks are **Greek Orthodox Christians**. The Greek Orthodox Church, a branch of the Eastern Orthodox Church, is highly influential in Greece. Christianity plays an important role in the lives of many Greeks and many Greeks believe that it is a key part of "being Greek". Try to refrain from making negative comments about the Greek Orthodox Church, and when visiting a Greek Orthodox Church, behave well.

The **Macedonian issue** is considered a very sensitive topic: Greeks consider that the name "Macedonia" is stolen from them and used by Tito's partisans in southern Yugoslavia to address the country created after World War II as a new constituent republic within Yugoslavia by Tito. The Greeks refer to it as "FYRoM"

or the "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" when dealing with foreigners and as Skopje (The Greek name of the Macedonian capital Skopje) among themselves. In February 2019, the country was officially renamed the Republic of North Macedonia in order to settle the dispute. The **military junta** of the late 1960s-mid 1970s is a sensitive topic, when many Communists and other left-wing groups—have suffered severe repression and view its leaders with utter resentment.

The **Greek debt crisis** of the 2010s is a very sensitive topic of discussion. Many Greeks lost a great deal of purchasing power, lost their jobs, and the crisis forced many Greeks to move abroad. The crisis also caused many Greeks to distrust their government. Offer sympathy as and when required, and avoid saying or implying that the Greeks "deserved" their economic demise.

After centuries of Ottoman occupation and domination, there's some resentment towards Turkey. If you happen to be the most ardent Turkophile in the world, **avoid being overly enthusiastic about Turkey** in front of Greeks as it can easily arouse strong emotions. Subjects such as Turkey's occupation of Northern Cyprus, Greece being under Ottoman rule, the Greek genocide (the Ottomans massacred almost a million Greeks during World War I), and the like can very easily incite fierce, passionate, emotional debates. Bear in mind that most Greeks have nothing against people from Turkey; rather, a lot of them disagree with the views and beliefs of the Turkish government.

Greece is also home to a sizeable Albanian population which immigrated after the fall of communism in Albania. At least in Greek cities, refrain from negative comments about the Albanian people and Albania in general, in order not to trigger anyone.

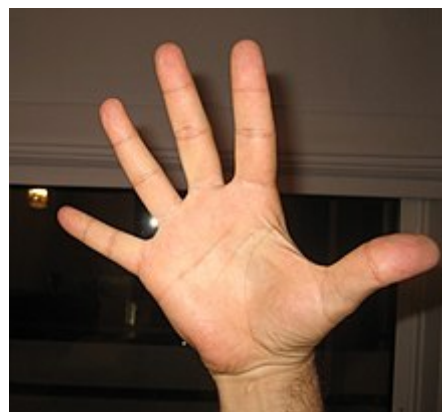
## Obscene gestures

Although it is associated with greeting people, saying goodbye to people, or refusing something in many parts of the world, holding up your palm with your fingers extended outwards is considered **rude** in Greece, and is akin to giving someone the middle finger. This gesture, known as *Mountza*, is thought to originate from the days of the Byzantine Empire.

The universally understood **okay gesture** is also considered rude in Greece.

## Smoking

Greeks smoke tremendously, and they see cigarettes as a birthright. Smoking is prohibited by law in all public places like restaurants and cafeterias. A hotline (1142) can be used to report people and establishments breaking the smoking ban, and Greeks have not been shy about using it. You will rarely, if ever, see people smoking in such places and it is best to step outside when you want to smoke.



Avoid doing this in Greece!

Greece is subject to frequent **forest fires** during the dry summer season, so definitely avoid smoking in forested areas!

## Connect

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### Phone

#### Mobile internet

There are at least three mobile carriers, Cosmote, Wind and Vodafone all of which require by law presenting some form of identification in order to activate your prepaid plan. Choose whichever has better reception in your area; GSM 900, GSM 1800 and UMTS 2100 bands are supported. Data usage is cheap. Ask the mobile carrier for more information. Mobile phone carriers support data roaming with 2G, 3G, 4G and LTE technologies.

#### Calling

The cheapest way to call someone abroad – and this is really cheap – is to use a pre-paid calling card and call from a land line anywhere (also from your hotel room). Pre-paid calling cards are sold in many shops and kiosks. The calling card is not much more than a phone number and a pin code, which you dial prior to dialling the usual phone number. If you want to call internationally, ask for an *international* calling card. For €1 you can call for about 45 minutes, so buy a card in the cheapest value (which is about €3). Calling someone for half an hour is cheaper than sending one email from an internet café. Cards expire usually 90 days after first use. You can also use this pre-paid calling card at public phone boxes, which are widely available.

Mobile phones are prevalent in Greek's communication, and if you need to talk with your fellow travellers it is advised that you buy a local prepaid plan instead of using roaming, as it is far cheaper.

### Internet

Internet access is widely available throughout the country. Almost all hotels provide internet access, either free or paid. Local coffee shops usually offer free Wi-Fi access, as many other public places do. Feel free to ask for the password, if the network is locked.

### News

You can have an update from various news agencies that provide Greek news in English like the official Athenian-Macedonian news agency (<https://www.amna.gr/en>) and Reuters (<http://www.reuters.com/places/greece>), EPT Greek Edition (the public broadcaster) (<https://int.ert.gr/>), IN (the oldest news active Greek news site) (<http://www.in.gr/english-edition/>) or Kathimerini English Edition (a daily newspaper published in Athens and distributed exclusively with the International New York Times in Greece and Cyprus) (<http://www.ekathimerini.com/>) but it's always safer to keep in touch with locals (for example in the case of a fire in a nearby location that you planned to visit).

## Go next

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The land border can be crossed to Turkey, Bulgaria, North Macedonia and Albania.

Greece has ultra-low-cost flights to many European countries, Jordan, Israel, Georgia and to the United Arab Emirates.

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