



THE ROUGH GUIDE TO

THE GREEK ISLANDS



INSIDE THIS BOOK

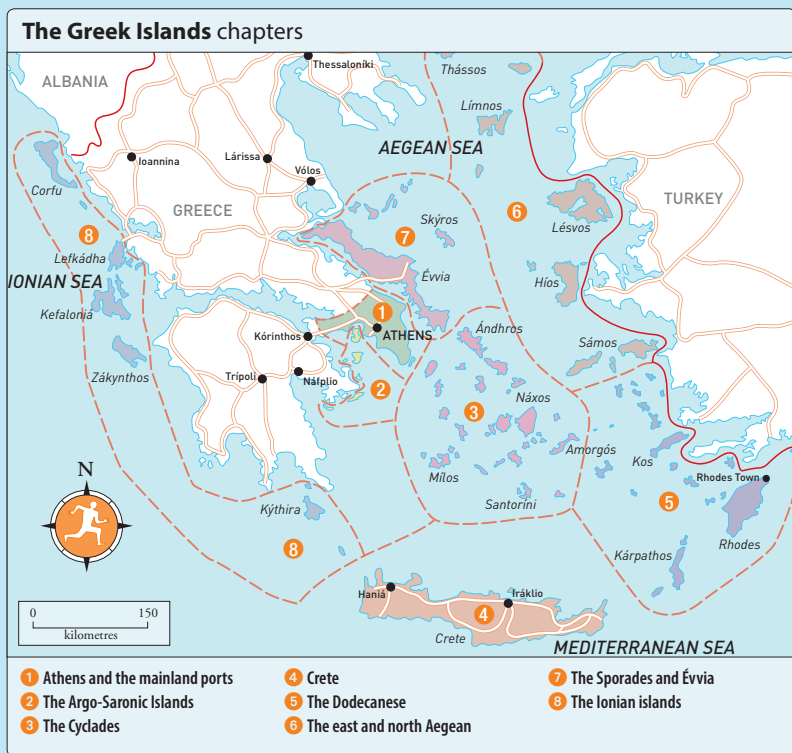
INTRODUCTION What to see, what not to miss, itineraries and more

BASICS Pre-departure tips and practical information

THE GUIDE Comprehensive, in-depth guide to the Greek Islands, with area highlights and full-colour maps throughout

CONTEXTS History, archeology, wildlife and music, plus recommended books and a useful language section

We've flagged up our favourite places – a perfectly sited hotel, an atmospheric café, a special restaurant – throughout the Guide with the ★ symbol



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THE ROUGH GUIDE TO

THE GREEK ISLANDS

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**ROUGH
GUIDES**



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Introduction to

The Greek Islands

It would take a lifetime of island-hopping to fully appreciate the 227 inhabited Greek islands scattered across the Aegean and Ionian seas. With sapphire water lapping at rocky coastlines sprinkled with secret coves and sandy beaches, they are the stuff of dreamy travel posters, the very definition of the eulogized Greek summer of sun, sea and sand. Easy as it is to wax lyrical in general terms, however, the islands are by no means a homogeneous holiday cluster – no Bahamas or Seychelles here. Each one has its distinctive personality, architecture and flora as well as its own loyal tourist base.

The sea, surprisingly **unpolluted** and beautifully clear, is undoubtedly the major selling point: as well as offering gorgeous swimming, there are **watersports** galore, from snorkelling and kayaking to banana boating and windsurfing – indeed, the Greek islands are home to some of the best windsurfing spots in the world. Yacht charter, whether bare-boat or skippered, is big business, particularly out of Rhodes, Kálymnos, Kos, Lefkáda, Páros and Pireás. When the sea is less welcoming during the spring and winter months and the crowds have abated a little, there's plenty of land-based activity including **walking** through lush, wild flower-strewn meadows, **hiking** and **rock climbing** to enjoy.

But the islands are far from simply good-looking outdoor playgrounds: like the rest of Greece, they exude a colossal sense of **history**, sheltering vestiges of occupying foreign forces. Romans, Arabs, Byzantines, Genoese, Venetians, French, British, Italians and Ottomans have all controlled different islands since the time of Alexander the Great, and countless monuments have been left behind by these waves of power: frescoed Byzantine churches, fortified Venetian towns, conventional castles built by the Genoese and Knights of St John, Ottoman mosques and the Art Deco edifices of the interwar Dodecanese Italian administration make up this historical patchwork. Couple these with the lovely cities and temples of ancient Greece itself and the fascinating jumble is complete.

The biggest surprise – for the first-time visitor at least – is the ecologically sensitive absorption of **mass tourism**, from the untainted beaches to the traditional, still inhabited, inland capitals. Of course, there are overblown resorts, tavernas aplenty, sophisticated bars and clubs, even the obligatory Irish pub. But, with a few loutish exceptions, the sense of history, accompanied by stringent planning regulations, has ensured that life on the islands more or less appears as it has for centuries. This still holds true in the second decade of the tumultuous debt-ridden twenty-first century, when Greece's economic crisis has been exacerbated by a cataclysmic influx of refugees for which the country was ill-prepared. The islands affected were few, however – mainly Lésvos, Híos, Sámos and Kos – and, by all accounts, the islanders have weathered these challenges with characteristic grace and humanity.

Where to go

After an almost mandatory stop in **Athens** – the big, sprawling capital of Greece – perhaps the best approach for first-time visitors is to sample islands from the Argo-Saronic archipelago. Crete, the Dodecanese, the Cyclades and the northeast Aegean are all reasonably well connected with each other in high season, though the Sporades and Ionian groups offer limited possibilities for island-hopping, and to get there usually involves a long mainland traipse.





THE GREEK ISLANDS

BULGARIA

TURKEY

Istanbul

SEA OF MARMARA

Bursa

Balıkesir

TURKEY

Manisa

Izmir

Kuşadası

Bodrum

Marmaris

Rhodes Town

Lindhos

Rhodes

Kárpáthos

Kássos

SEA OF CRETE

Haniá

Kastéllí

Paleohóra

Réthymno

Psilorítis

Íraklio

Knossós

Ayios Nikólaos

Sítia

Zákros

Ierápetra

Crete

AEGEAN SEA

The North Aegean

The Sporades

The East Aegean

The Cyclades

The Dodecanese

The Argo-Saronic

Kavála

Liménas

Thásos

Samothráki

Mt Áthos

Limnos

Mýrina

Ayios Efstrátios

Skiáthos

Alónissos

Skópelos

Skýros

Mólyvos

Ayvalik

Mytilini

Lésvos

Psarà

Inoússes

Hiós

Hiós

Çeşme

ATHENS

Ráfiνα

Pireás

Lávrio

Egina

Póros

Ythra

Kými

Halkidha

Évria

Ándhros

Tinos

Sýros

Delos

Mýkonos

Kýthnos

Sérfios

Sífnos

Milos

Andáparos

Sikinos

Folegandhros

Santorini

Dhonoússa

Náxos

Amorgós

Anáfi

Sámos

Íkaria

Foairi

Pátmos

Lipsi

Léros

Kálymnos

Kos

Nissyros

Astypálea

Tilos

Háiki

Sými

Rhodes

Rhodes



FACT FILE

- There are around 6000 **Greek islands**, of which 227 are inhabited. Around one million people live on the islands, nearly half of these in towns with over five thousand inhabitants.
- Greek structures such as doors, windowsills, furniture, and church domes are often painted a bright royal **blue**, especially in the Cyclades, following an ancient belief that this shade repels evil.
- No point in Greece is more than 137km from water. Greece has about 14,400km of **coastline**, the tenth longest in the world.
- **Tourism** is the country's main foreign-currency earner, hitting twenty-nine million overseas visitors in 2016, just under triple the population of the country. Export of agricultural products – especially olive oil, olives, citrus, wine and raisins – is another top industry.
- With over 370 brands and 190 distilleries scattered about the islands, anise-flavoured **ouzo** is Greece's most famous and popular beverage. Come the evening, the Greeks sip it with a little ice and water while tucking into *mezédhes*. *Stin uyeia sou!* (Cheers!)

If time and money are short, head for well-preserved, atmospheric **Ýdhra** in the Argo-Saronic Gulf, a short ferry ride from **Pireás** (the main port of Athens); alternatively, **Kéa**, one hour from the port of Lárvio close to Athens airport, has a Neoclassical charm and few foreign tourists. Of the Sporades, **Skýros** and **Skópelos** remain the most traditional and attractive, with forests, pale-sand beaches and well-preserved capitals. Among the Cyclades, cataclysmically volcanic **Santoríni** (Thíra) and **Mýkonos** with its perfectly preserved harbour-town rank as must-see spectacles, but mountainous **Náxos** and gently rolling **Sífnos** have a life independent of cruise-ship tourism and are better for longer stays. Cliff-bound **Amorgós** and **Folégandhros**, rocky **Sýros** with its Italianate main town, artistic **Tínos**, secluded **Sérifos** and lonely **Anáfi** with its balmy, south-facing beaches are less obvious but equally satisfying choices. **Crete** can fill an entire Rough Guide itself, but the highlights have to be Knossós and the nearby Iráklío Archeological Museum, the other Minoan palaces at Festós and Ayía Triádha, and the west in general – Réthymno and Haniá, whose hinterland extends to the relatively unspoilt southwest coast, reachable via the remarkable Samariá Gorge.

Rhodes, with its Unesco Heritage Old Town, is the capital of the Dodecanese, but scenic **Sými** and austere **Pátmos**, the island of St John's Revelation, have beaches just as lovely. **Kárpathos**, marooned between Rhodes and Crete, has arguably the best

coastline in the Dodecanese, while **Léros** and **Níssyros** will appeal to the adventurous. From there it's easy to continue north via **Sámos** – one of Greece's most attractive islands – or **Híos**, with its striking medieval architecture, to balmy, olive-cloaked **Lésvos**, perhaps the most traditional in its way of life. All three islands have seen a drop in tourist numbers due to the refugee crisis, making them even better value than ever.

The Ionian islands are primarily package-holiday territory but, especially if you're exiting Greece towards Italy, be sure to stop at **Corfu**, which along with neighbouring **Paxí** islet escaped damage from the 1953 earthquake which devastated the southern Ionians. Little **Itháki**, most easily reached from the mainland, is relatively untouristy, given its lack of beaches, though big brother **Kefaloniá** is truly in the spotlight due to spectacular scenery – and exposure in Louis de Bernière's *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*.





BEST ISLAND FOR ...

Watersports Kárhothos (see p.291). The *meltémi* winds are the best and strongest here, which makes for great windsurfing conditions.

Food and drink Lésvos (see p.387). As this island is the main producer of both olive oil and ouzo, you can expect top-quality ingredients served up in the tavernas and bars.

Parties Mýkonos (see p.142). From energetic superclubs to chilled, sophisticated beach bars, the nightlife here is seriously hot – be prepared to party hard and pay for it.

Classical sights Crete (see p.211, p.215 & p.232). Knossós, Festós, Zákros ... to mention just a few. Take your pick from a number of Cretan classics.

Seclusion Alónissos (see p.436). If you're keen for some peace and quiet, this traditional little island has it in spades.

Luxury Ýdhra (see p.96). With mule the only way of getting around, this cute and charming island hasn't escaped the attention of the rich and famous, so expect pricey boutique hotels and chic restaurants to indulge your sophisticated side.

Views Santoríni (see p.186). There are few views in the whole world that compare with the dizzying panoramas of this island's marine caldera, subject of a thousand blog posts and a million snaps.

When to go

Most islands and their inhabitants are far more agreeable outside the **busiest period** of early July to late August. The first Monday in August traditionally marks the arrival of the largest number of holiday-makers in Greece in one day; in 2014 this amounted to 760 flights bringing 148,000 passengers. In order to cope with such an influx, bus and ferry schedules change almost weekly, hours are extended, prices skyrocket and, occasionally, service standards slip.

The peak period also coincides with the arrival of the infamous **meltémi**, a cool, fair-weather wind which appears during daytime but disappears at night; those picturesque windmills on Mýkonos weren't built for show. The *meltémi* originates in high-pressure systems over the far north Aegean, gathering momentum as it travels southwards and ending up in gusts by the time it reaches Crete. It is responsible for the occasional cancellation of a catamaran service, although large ferries are unaffected. North-facing Cretan coasts, the Cyclades and western Dodecanese bear the full brunt; the wind is less pronounced in the north or northeast Aegean, where continental landmasses provide some shelter for the islands just offshore.

As for climate (see box, p.47), you won't miss out on **warm weather** if you come between late May and the end of June, or in September, though at these times you'll find little activity on the northernmost islands of Thássos, Límnos and Samothráki and in the Western Cyclades. During October you'll probably hit a week's stormy spell, but for much of that month the "little summer of Áyios Dhímítrios", the Greek equivalent of





GODS AND MONSTERS

A high proportion of the ancient sites still seen on the Greek islands today were built as **shrines and temples to the gods**. They include spectacular sites such as **Delos** (see p.148) or the **Temple of Aphaea** in Égina (see p.88), but also many other sanctuaries, great and small, throughout the islands – everywhere, in fact, because the gods themselves were everywhere.

There were many lesser and local gods like the Nymphs and Pan, but the great gods known to all were the **twelve** who lived on **Mount Olympus**, including **Zeus** and his wife and sister, **Hera**. They had human form, and were born and had sexual relations among themselves and humankind, but they never ate human food, nor did they age or die.

As well as fearsome gods, tales of **monsters** and demons proliferate from the Greek islands, of which the half-bull, half-man **Minotaur** (see p.211) is probably the best known. Dwelling within the Cretan labyrinth at Knossós, in the grounds of his father's palace, he was fed a diet of youths and maidens until Theseus turned up and destroyed him. The Minotaur's notoriety is equalled by the **Cyclops**, one-eyed giants who were said to live on the island of Sérifos (see p.116) and supplied Zeus with regular thunderbolts. The three horrifyingly ugly **Gorgon** sisters with snakes for hair and a gaze that could turn a mortal to stone, Euryale, Stheno and (the ill-fated) Medusa, were feared to such a degree that their figures were carved onto buildings throughout the Greek islands; check out the pediment on the Temple of Artemis in the Archeological Museum in Corfu (see p.467). Add to this motley crew the giant, winged **Sirens**, who lived on the rocks in the sea and reputedly lured sailors to their watery deaths, and one thing is for sure – the Greeks certainly had imagination.

Indian summer, prevails. While restaurants and nightlife can be limited in spring and autumn, the light is softer, and going out at midday becomes a pleasure rather than an ordeal. The most reliable venues for late autumn or early winter breaks are Rhodes and balmy southeastern Crete, where it's possible to swim in relative comfort as late as November.

December to March are the **coldest** and least reliably sunny months, particularly on the Ionian islands, typically the rainiest area from November onwards. The high peaks of northerly or lofty islands wear a brief mantle of snow around the turn of the year, with Crete's mountainous spine staying partly covered well into April. Between January and April the glorious lowland **wild flowers** start to bloom, beginning in the southeast Aegean. April weather is more reliable, the air is crystal-clear and the landscape green. May is more or less settled, though the sea is still cold.

Another factor that affects the timing of a Greek island visit is the level of tourism and the related amenities provided. If you can only visit during midsummer, it is wise to reserve a package well in advance, plan an itinerary off the beaten track and buy all your ferry tickets beforehand. Between November and Easter, you'll have to contend with pared-back ferry and plane schedules plus skeletal facilities when you arrive. However, you should be able to find adequate services to the more populated islands, and at least one hotel and taverna open in the port or main town of all but the tiniest isles.

Author picks

Our authors hopped from island to island, testing out the best beaches, sampling the tastiest tzatziki, taking to the water on boats, kayaks or windsurfers and exploring countless ancient ruins. Here are their highlights:

Marine sanctuary Take a boat trip to the Alónissos Marine Park (see p.442) for stunningly clear water, even by Greek standards. If you're lucky, you might catch sight of dolphins or an elusive monk seal.

Must-do museum The Archeological Museum in Iráklío is a real eye-opener; a fresh look at Europe's earliest civilization (see p.206).

Biggest time bubble To experience what Greek holidays were like thirty years ago, before the Age of Resorts, book a ferry to the tiny island of Áno Koufoníssi (see p.174).

The harbour at Ýdhra Sail into the perfect horseshoe of Ýdhra's harbour (see p.97) and you'll be convinced you've found the archetypal Greek island – an impression bolstered once ashore by the narrow, traffic-free alleys and fine sea-captains' mansions.

A climb to remember The twenty-minute strenuous vertical climb to Hotzoviótissas monastery in eastern Amorgós (see p.177) can just about convince anyone that its precarious structure was indeed built by angels.

Alternative islands Pockets of alternative culture exist, such as the lesbian and spiritual influence at Skála Eressou, on Lésvos (see p.400), and the hippy colony around Nas, on Ikaría (see p.373).

Moonwalking on Níssyros Not literally, but it certainly feels like it once you step foot on the plains of the extra-terrestrial landscape of the Stéfanos volcano crater floor (see p.307). Completely otherworldly.

Windsurfing on Lefkádha The sweeping bay at Vassilikí in the south of Lefkádha (see p.488) is one of Europe's top windsurfing destinations and a pretty relaxed resort to boot.

Our author recommendations don't end here. We've flagged up our favourite places – a perfectly sited hotel, an atmospheric café, a special restaurant – throughout the Guide, highlighted with the ★ symbol.

FROM TOP FRESCO, IRÁKLÍO ARCHEOLOGICAL MUSEUM, CRETE;
MONASTERY OF HOTZOVÍÓTISSAS, AMORGÓS



21

things not to miss

It's not possible to see everything that the Greek Islands have to offer in one trip – and we don't suggest you try. What follows, in no particular order, is a selective taste of the region's highlights, including beautiful beaches, outstanding Classical monuments, charming seaside towns and unforgettable wildlife and outdoor experiences. All highlights are colour-coded by chapter and have a page reference to take you straight into the Guide, where you can find out more.





1 MÝKONOS NIGHTLIFE

Page 147

Soak up the electrifying atmosphere of the Greek party capital – this is the most frenetic nightlife east of Ibiza.

2 KÝTHIRA

Page 515

An inspiration for artists, this is also the ultimate family destination, with plenty of hiking opportunities and golden sand beaches.

3 KNOSSÓS PALACE

Page 211

Visit the most spectacularly restored, vividly coloured and most exciting of Crete's Minoan palaces.

4 NÁXOS ACTIVITIES

Page 165

Whether you climb Mount Zas, or kitesurf on Orkós, this is the activity playground of the Cyclades.



5 DELOS

Page 148

Pay your respects to the most sacred site of the Eastern Mediterranean and the biggest port of the Cyclades in the ancient world.

6 THE CLIFFS OF KÁLYMNOS

Page 328

The island's limestone cliffs and dry weather attract climbers from all over the world.

7 CHURCH OF EKATONDAPYLIANI, PÁROS

Page 156

Built by St Helena in the fourth century AD over an old pagan temple, this may well be the most continuous place of worship in Europe.

8 SÝMI

Page 297

Take a leap into the past and stroll among the grand mansions of Sými's picturesque harbour, built with wealth from the sponge trade.

9 AUGUST 15

Page 44

The feast of the Assumption of the Virgin provides a spectacular explosion of Orthodox devotion in the Cyclades, especially on Tinos.

10 SARAKÍNIKO, MÍLOS

Page 129

If the moon had beaches, they'd look like Sarakíniko, where the rocks resemble solidified white meringue.



5



6







11



12



13

11 HANIÁ HARBOUR

Page 246

Crete's most charming city, Haniá displays the haunting vestiges of its Venetian and Ottoman past with pride.

12 SAMARIÁ GORGE

Page 253

The 16km descent of this leafy gorge enclosed by high rock faces is an unforgettable hike.

13 ISLAND WINES

Pages 38, 195 & 214

Have a go at wine tasting in the vineyards of Santoríni, Kefaloníá, Crete or Sámos, and sample the delights of local grape varieties.

14 KOURÉMENOS BEACH

Page 31

Kourémenos, on Crete's unspoilt east coast, is one of the finest windsurfing beaches in all of Greece.

15 ÓLYMBOS VILLAGE, KÁRPATHOS

Page 296

Ólymbos village, built spectacularly on a saddle between two mountain peaks, has goosepump-inducing views of Northern Kárpithos.



14





16



17



18

19

**16 CORFU HISTORIC CENTRE**

Page 463

With its elegant Venetian architecture and fine museums, Corfu's capital is a UNESCO World Heritage site and the beating heart of the Ionian islands.

17 THE OTHER ACROPOLIS

Page 278

From the Hellenistic Acropolis of Lindhos, high above the modern village, look north along the length of Rhodes island for one of the most stunning views of the Dodecanese.

18 PÁTAMOS, MONASTERY OF ST JOHN

Page 341

Built around the cave where St John wrote the Book of Revelation, this monastery is a warren of fresco-strewn courtyards, arcades and roof terraces.

19 MELISSÁNI CAVE, KEFALONÍA

Page 442

Visit the underwater Melissáni Cave to admire the rock formations and play of light on the cave walls.

20 MARINE PARK, ALÓNISOS

Page 499

The sea around the island is a haven for the endangered Mediterranean monk seal.

21 SHIPWRECK BAY, ZÁKYNTHOS

Page 514

Lie back and enjoy the unforgettable scenery of one of Greece's poster beaches.



20



21



Itineraries

Although there are as many itineraries as there are islands, the ultimate Greek summer experience is island-hopping, and in particular around the Cyclades. If you want to combine some history with blissful beach living, then head for the Dodecanese, while if you haven't got your sea legs and prefer driving to sailing, base yourself in Crete. The other islands, especially the Ionians, are best explored individually.

HOPPING AROUND THE CYCLADES

Ferry routes connect all of these islands; in the summer months be sure to book tickets in advance and check the most recent timetables. You'll need at least 2–3 weeks to cover this itinerary depending on ferry frequency.

- ① **Ándhros** Green and fertile, with some terrific walking trails and a fantastic selection of beaches, this is a great introduction to the Cyclades. **See p.133**
- ② **Mýkonos** The party island for as many sensuous, fun-filled days as your body can take and your wallet can stand. **See p.142**
- ③ **Páros** A little bit of everything – beautiful beaches, pretty fishing harbours, graceful monasteries and an energetic nightlife defined by its "happy hours". **See p.155**
- ④ **Náxos** The activity centre of the Cyclades, this is the place to go trekking, diving or kitesurfing. **See p.164**
- ⑤ **Santoríni** Don't forget your camera – the crater that makes up this island is particularly photogenic at sunset. **See p.186**
- ⑥ **Mílos** Join a boat ride around the island and swim in some of its kaleidoscopic coves. **See p.125**

⑦ **Sérifos** Glorious beaches and with a breathtaking inland capital, Sérifos is a perfect chill-out zone. **See p.116**

DISCOVERING THE DODECANESE

The starting point for this itinerary, Rhodes, is served by several flights daily, while all the other islands are connected by regular ferries. The whole itinerary should take a minimum of 2–3 weeks depending on how often ferries are running.

- ① **Rhodes** With its lovely medieval Old Town and numerous sandy beaches, this is rightfully one of the most visited of the Greek islands. **See p.266**
- ② **Sými** Italian architecture, cobbled streets in the Horíó and the everyday comings and goings of Greek life makes Sými a very attractive island getaway. **See p.297**
- ③ **Tílos** Quiet, volcanic and part-protected with a national park, this is one of the most relaxing of the Dodecanese chain. **See p.303**
- ④ **Nissyros** Home to a dormant volcano, there are some rather unearthly moonscape panoramas to enjoy here. **See p.307**
- ⑤ **Kálymnos** The sponge capital of the Mediterranean has reinvented itself as a rock-climbing, hiking and scuba-diving destination. **See p.328**
- ⑥ **Pátmos** Despite the awe-inspiring cave where St John the Divine wrote the Book of

Revelation, beaches are still the island's principal attraction. **See p.338**

THE GREAT ISLAND

Ancient Minoan palaces, beautiful port towns, high mountains and plentiful beaches all make Crete more than just the biggest of the Greek islands. To explore properly, hire a car and give yourself a couple of weeks.

- ① **Haniá** The island's sophisticated second city is the gateway to the mountains of the west, as well as a beautiful place to relax and people-watch. **See p.246**
- ② **Loutró** Accessible only on foot or by boat, Loutró is the perfect escape after you've hiked the Samariá Gorge. **See p.255**
- ③ **Réthymno** A university city with an enchanting old town and a big, sandy beach right in the centre. **See p.235**
- ④ **Írakklio** Crete's capital boasts a world-class archeological museum and is the easiest base for exploring the ruins at Knossós. **See p.203**
- ⑤ **Áyios Nikólaos** Home to the finest of the luxury hotels, plus great food and nightlife. **See p.222**

⑥ **Káto Zákros** A tiny, isolated seaside hamlet, with a lovely pebble beach and one of the four great Minoan palaces. **See p.232**

SARONIC SAILING

Ideal for exploring by yacht or on a flotilla holiday, the Saronic Gulf also lends itself to a short trip from Athens, with frequent, fast hydrofoils and catamarans. Allow a week.

- ① **Égina** An easy first day's sail, or less than two hours by ferry, Égina has a lively harbour and, inland, the beautiful Temple of Aphaea, one of the most visually compelling in Greece. **See p.83**
- ② **Póros** The narrow channel between Póros Town and the mainland is the highlight of many a sailing trip; great moorings, plenty of beaches and some lively bars. **See p.92**
- ③ **Ýdhra** The most dramatic of the Argo-Saronic islands, its town like an amphitheatre around a horseshoe harbour. Sailors can expect crowds and short tempers, but it's worth it. **See p.96**
- ④ **Spétses** A family holiday island with developed infrastructure, good beaches and excellent, upmarket tavernas; yachties in the know anchor off *Loula*, a taverna at the island's eastern tip. **See p.102**





TOUR BOATS, SPINÁLONGA, CRETE

Basics

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- 44 Sports and outdoor pursuits
- 45 Culture and etiquette
- 46 Travel essentials

Getting there

By far the easiest way to get to the Greek islands is to fly. An increasing number of islands have international airports that see charters and occasional scheduled flights from Britain, Ireland and the rest of northern Europe. Other islands can be reached on domestic flights, connecting with international scheduled arrivals in Athens and Thessaloníki. Even if your starting point is North America, Australia, New Zealand or South Africa, the most cost-effective way to the islands may well be to get to London, Amsterdam, Frankfurt or another Northern European hub, and pick up an onward flight from there.

Airfares are highest in July, August and during Easter week. But May, June and September are also popular, and since far fewer flights operate through the winter, bargains are rare at any time.

When **buying flights** it always pays to shop around and bear in mind that many websites don't include charter or budget airlines in their results. Be aware too that a **package deal**, with accommodation included, can sometimes be as cheap as, or even cheaper than, a flight alone: there's no rule that says you have to use your accommodation every night, or even at all.

Once in Greece, you'll find a vast **ferry** network which connects even the smallest of islands (see p.29). Details of the mainland ports are covered in the "Athens and the ports" chapter (see p.56).

Overland alternatives from the UK or Northern Europe involve at least two days of nonstop travel. If you want to take your time over the journey, **driving** or travelling **by train** can be enjoyable, although invariably more expensive than flying. We've included only brief details of these routes here.

Flights from the UK and Ireland

There's a bewildering variety of flights to the island airports shown on the map on pp.58–59, as well as

to handy mainland airports at Kavála (for Thássos), Vólos (for the Sporades) and Préveza (for Lefkádha). The vast majority of these are with budget or charter airlines, most of which offer flight-only seats in much the same way as budget operators, albeit with clunkier booking systems and often less convenient flight times. Most of them fly only in the summer months, from May to September, and almost all allow you to book one-way tickets at no extra cost, so you can fly into one airport with one and leave from another island (or Athens) with another.

From the UK, you'll find flights from Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted, Luton and London City, as well as Birmingham, Bristol, East Midlands, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds Bradford, Liverpool, Manchester and Newcastle. The main **airlines** include British Airways (✉ba.com), easyJet (✉easyjet.com), Ryanair (✉ryanair.com), Jet2 (✉jet2.com) and Norwegian (✉norwegian.com). The biggest **charter** operators with whom you can book direct are Thomas Cook (✉thomascokairlines.com) and Thomson (✉thomson.co.uk); others may be available indirectly, through travel agencies or third-party websites. **From Dublin**, Aer Lingus (✉aerlingus.com) flies direct to Corfu, and Ryanair to Chania (Haniá, Crete).

Don't expect any of the above to be cheap: unless you book far in advance, there are few bargain **fares** to Greece or its islands. Seats are theoretically available on the budget airlines for less than £50 each way (€70 from Ireland), but you'll have to move very fast indeed (or travel way out of season) to find fares this low. Realistically you can expect to pay £75–250 (€100–280) each way at most times of the year.

Indirect flights

If you can't get a direct flight, or the island you're heading for has no airport, you'll have to make at least one stop along the way and continue by **domestic flight** (see p.30) or by **ferry**. Most obviously this means via Athens, but there are also plenty of connecting flights to the islands from Thessaloníki (as well as ferries to the Sporades), or

A BETTER KIND OF TRAVEL

At Rough Guides we are passionately committed to travel. We believe it helps us understand the world we live in and the people we share it with – and of course tourism is vital to many developing economies. But the scale of modern tourism has also damaged some places irreparably, and climate change is accelerated by most forms of transport, especially flying. All Rough Guides' flights are carbon-offset, and every year we donate money to a variety of environmental charities.

ferry connections may be better from nearby islands: if you're travelling to Pátmos, for example, look at flights to Kos or Rhodes; for Skópelos consider Skiáthos or Vólos (on the mainland). Details of how to get to and through Athens and the other mainland ports can be found in Chapter 1 (see p.56), where there's also a map showing island airports and the major ferry routes (see pp.58–59).

Scheduled **flights to Athens** include Aegean (🌐aegeanair.com) from Heathrow, Birmingham, Manchester and Edinburgh, British Airways from Heathrow, easyJet from Gatwick, Manchester or Edinburgh, Ryanair from Stansted, and Norwegian from Gatwick. From Dublin, Aer Lingus and Ryanair each have three direct flights a week in mid-summer, fewer in spring and autumn.

Flights from the US and Canada

Delta (🌐delta.com) operate **direct nonstop flights** from New York JFK to Athens, daily for most of the year, while American (🌐aa.com) fly five times a week from Philadelphia to Athens between May and October. Code-sharing airlines can quote through fares with one of the above, or a European partner, from **virtually every major US city**, connecting either at New York or a European hub such as London or Frankfurt. From Athens, there are reasonably priced add-on flights to the islands (see p.30).

Fares vary greatly, so it's worth putting in a little time on the internet, or using a good travel agent; book as far ahead as possible to get the best price. Round-trip prices range from US\$700 out of season to \$1400 in high summer; from the west coast, expect to pay ten to twenty percent more. Remember too that you may be better off getting a domestic flight to New York or Philadelphia and heading directly to Athens from there, or flying to London (beware of changing airports) or another European city where you may be able to get a direct connection to the islands.

As with the US, airfares **from Canada** vary depending on where you start your journey and whether you take a direct service. Air Canada Rouge (🌐aircanada.com) flies daily to Athens out of Toronto and Montreal between May and October. Air Transat (🌐airtransat.com) also has summer-only flights two or three times a week from Toronto and Montreal to Athens. Otherwise, you'll have to choose among one- or two-stop itineraries on a variety of European carriers, or perhaps Delta via New York; costs run from Can\$800 round-trip in low

season from Toronto to more than double that from Vancouver in high season.

Flights from Australia and New Zealand

There are **no direct flights** from Australia or New Zealand to Greece; you'll have to change in Southeast Asia, the Gulf or Europe. Tickets purchased direct from the airlines tend to be expensive; travel agents or Australia-based websites generally offer much better deals on fares and have the latest information on limited specials and stopovers.

Fares **from Australia** start from around Aus\$1000, rising to around Aus\$2600 depending on season, routing, validity, number of stopovers, etc. The shortest flights and best fares are generally with airlines like Emirates (🌐emirates.com), in partnership with Qantas (🌐qantas.com), and Etihad (🌐etihadairways.com) who can fly you directly to Athens via their Gulf hubs: you'll also find offers on Swiss (🌐swiss.com), KLM (🌐klm.com) and other European carriers. **From New Zealand**, prices are slightly higher: from around NZ\$1200, rising to over NZ\$3000 in high season.

Flights from South Africa

There are currently no direct flights from **South Africa** to Athens. Alternative routes include Emirates (🌐emirates.com) or Etihad (🌐etihadairways.com) via the Gulf, EgyptAir (🌐egyptair.com) via Cairo, or just about any of the major European airlines through their domestic hubs. Prices start at around R8000 return for a good low-season deal, to double that in high season or if the cheaper seats have gone.

FLIGHT AGENTS

Charter Flight Centre UK 📞 020 8714 0010, 🌐 charterflights.co.uk. Booking for a huge range of charter flights from the UK and Ireland.

Flight Centre UK 📞 0870 499 0040, Ireland 📞 01 695 0365, US 📞 1877 922 4732, Canada 📞 1877 967 5302, Australia 📞 133 133, New Zealand 📞 0800 243 544, South Africa 📞 0877 405 000; 🌐 flightcentre.com. Low-cost airfares worldwide from their local agencies, plus rail passes and more.

North South Travel UK 📞 01245 608 291, 🌐 northsouthtravel.co.uk. Friendly, competitive flight agency, offering discounted fares worldwide. Profits are used to support projects in the developing world, especially the promotion of sustainable tourism.

Skyscanner 🌐 skyscanner.net. Comprehensive flight search site that includes charter and budget airlines.

STA Travel UK 📞 0333 321 0099, US 📞 1800 781 4040, Australia 📞 134 782, New Zealand 📞 0800 474 400, South Africa 📞 0861 781 781; 🌐 statravel.com. Worldwide specialists in independent travel; also student IDs, travel insurance, car rental, rail passes, and more. Good discounts for students and under-26s.

Trailfinders UK 📞 020 7368 1200, Ireland 📞 01 677 7888; 🌐 trailfinders.com. One of the best-informed and most efficient agents for independent travellers.

Travel CUTS Canada 📞 1800 667 2887, 🌐 travelcuts.com. Popular, long-established student-travel organization, with good worldwide offers; not only for students.

Trains

As a result of the economic crisis, **Greek rail routes** have been greatly reduced, and for a while all international services were suspended. Travelling to Greece by train is possible, however, and the most practical route **from Britain** doesn't actually involve any Greek trains; you cross France and Italy by rail before embarking on the **ferry from Bari** or Brindisi to Pátra (Patras), with connecting buses to Athens (see box, below). Many of the ferries from Italy call at **Corfu** on the way, and there are connections to other **Ionian islands**. If you're determined to go **all the way to Greece by train**, there are a number of alternate routes across Europe to either Belgrade or Sofia, each of which has connections to Thessaloniki, from where you can get an onward train to Athens, ferry to the Sporades or flights to a number of islands.

Either way, the journey to Athens from the UK takes at least **two days** and will almost always work out more expensive than flying. It also takes a fair bit of planning, since there's no through train and **tickets** have to be bought from several separate

operators. However, you do have the chance to stop over on the way, while with an **InterRail** (for European residents only; 🌐 interrail.eu) or **Eurail** (for all others; 🌐 eurail.com) pass, you can take in Greece as part of a wider rail trip around Europe. Booking well in advance (essential in summer) and going for the cheapest seats on each leg, you can theoretically buy individual tickets from London to Athens for around £180 each way (£150 as far as Corfu), not including the incidental expenses along the way. Using rail passes will cost you more, but give far more flexibility. For full details, check out the Man in Seat 61 website (🌐 seat61.com).

Car and ferry

Driving to Greece can be a pleasant proposition if you have plenty of time to dawdle along the way, though fuel, toll and ferry costs ensure it's not a cheap option. It's only worth considering if you want to explore en route, or are going to stay for an extended period. The most popular **route** from the UK is down through France and Italy to catch one of the Adriatic ferries (see box, below); this is much the best way to get to the Ionian Islands, and to Athens for ferries to most other islands. The far longer alternative through Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and the FYROM only makes sense if you are heading for the northeast Aegean islands or want to explore northern Greece on the way.

Tour operators

Every mainstream **tour operator** includes Greece in its portfolio. You'll find far more interesting alter-

ITALY-GREECE FERRIES

Sailing from **Italy to Greece**, you've a choice of four ports; ferries run year-round, but services are reduced December to April. The shortest routes and most frequent ferries link Bari and Brindisi with Corfu and other Ionian islands, Igoumenitsa (the port of the western Greek mainland) and Pátra (at the northwest tip of the Peloponnese). Ferries also sail from Venice and Ancona to Pátra via Igoumenitsa/Corfu. These longer routes are more expensive, but the extra cost closely matches what you'll pay in Italian motorway tolls and fuel to get further south. On most ferries, you can stop over in Corfu for no extra charge. For direct access to Athens and the Aegean islands head for Pátra, from where you can cut across country to Piréas.

The following companies operate ferries: schedules and booking details for all of them are also available at 🌐 openseas.gr.

ANEK/Superfast 🌐 www.aneq.gr, 🌐 superfast.com. Ancona, Bari and Venice to Corfu, Igoumenitsa and Pátra.

Grimaldi Lines 🌐 www.grimaldi-lines.com. Ancona, Brindisi and Venice to Igoumenitsa and Pátra.

Minoan Lines 🌐 minoan.gr. Ancona and Venice to Igoumenitsa and Pátra.

Red Star 🌐 albaniaferries.it. Brindisi to Corfu, Paxí, Kefaloniá and Zákynthos, some via Albania.

Ventouris Ferries 🌐 ventourisferries.it. Bari to Corfu, Igoumenitsa, Kefaloniá and Zákynthos.

natives, however, through the small **specialist agencies**. As well as traditional village-based accommodation and less-known islands, many also offer **walking** or **nature holidays** and other special interests such as **yoga**, **art** and above all **sailing**, with options ranging from shore-based clubs with dinghy tuition, through organized yacht flotillas to bareboat or skippered charters.

PACKAGE OPERATORS

Grecian Tours Australia 📞 03 9663 3711, 🌐 greciantours.com.au.

A variety of accommodation and sightseeing tours, plus flights.

Greek Sun Holidays UK 📞 01732 740317, 🌐 greekson.co.uk.

Good-value package holidays mainly in smaller islands of the Dodecanese, northeast Aegean and Cyclades; also tailor-made island-hopping itineraries.

Hidden Greece UK 📞 020 8758 4707, 🌐 hidden-greece.co.uk.

Specialist agent putting together tailor-made packages to smaller destinations at reasonable prices.

Homeric Tours US 📞 800 223 5570, 🌐 homerictours.com. Hotel packages, individual tours, escorted group tours and fly-drive deals. Good source of inexpensive flights.

Olympic Holidays UK 📞 020 8492 6868, 🌐 olympicholidays.com.

Huge package-holiday company serving a wide variety of islands; all standards from cheap and cheerful to five-star, and often a good source of last-minute bargains and cheap flights.

Sun Island Tours Australia 📞 1300 665 673, 🌐 sunislandtours.com.au.

Greece specialist offering an assortment of island-hopping, fly-drives, cruises and guided land-tour options, as well as tailor-made.

Sunvil Holidays UK 📞 020 8758 4758, 🌐 sunvil.co.uk.

High-quality outfit with a wide range of holidays to many islands.

True Greece US 📞 1 800 817 7098, 🌐 truegreece.com. Luxury hotels and villas, plus cruises, customized trips, weddings and more.

VILLA AND APARTMENT AGENTS

Cachet Travel UK 📞 020 8847 8700, 🌐 cachet-travel.co.uk.

Attractive range of villas and apartments in the more unspoilt south and west of Crete, plus Hios, Sámos, Ikaría and Fούμί.

CV Villas UK 📞 020 7563 7999, 🌐 cvillas.com. High-quality villas, principally in the Ionian islands and Crete.

Greek Islands Club UK 📞 020 8232 9780, 🌐 www.gicthevilla.com. Specialist in upmarket villas with private pools, especially in the Ionian islands and Sporades.

Ionian Island Holidays UK 📞 020 8459 0777,

🌐 ionianislandholidays.com. Villas and small hotels in the Sporades as well as the Ionians.

Oliver's Travels UK 📞 0800 133 7999, 🌐 oliverstravels.com.

Stunning upmarket villas on Mykonos and Santorini as well as Crete and the Ionians.

Pure Crete UK 📞 01444 880 404, 🌐 purecrete.com. Lovely, converted cottages and farmhouses in western Crete, plus walking, wildlife and other special-interest trips.

Simpson Travel UK 📞 020 8392 5742, 🌐 simpsontravel.com.

Classy villas, upmarket hotels and village hideaways in selected areas of Crete, the Ionians and Skópelos.

SMALL GROUP TOURS, YOGA AND ART HOLIDAYS

Hellenic Adventures US 📞 1 800 851 6349

🌐 hellenicadventures.com. Small-group escorted tours led by enthusiastic expert guides, as well as itineraries for independent travellers, cruises and other travel services.

Painting Alonissos UK 📞 07766 906 483, 🌐 paintingalonissos.com. Painting holidays and art courses on the island of Alónissos.

Skyros Holidays UK 📞 01983 865566, 🌐 skyros.com. Holistic yoga, dance, art, music, "personal growth" and more on the island of Skýros, as well as well-regarded writers' workshops.

Yoga Escapes UK 📞 0207 584 9432, 🌐 yoga-escapes.com. Yoga retreats with five-star accommodation in Mykonos and Crete.

Yoga Rocks UK 📞 020 3286 2586, 🌐 yogaholidaysgreece.com. Yoga courses in a beautifully isolated spot in southern Crete.

WALKING AND CYCLING

Classic Adventures US 📞 800 777 8090, 🌐 classicadventures.com.

Spring or autumn rural cycling tours crossing the north Peloponnese to Zákynthos and on Crete.

Cycle Greece US 📞 800 867 1753, 🌐 cyclegreece.gr. Wide variety of bike tours including cycle cruises, hopping between islands on a traditional sailing boat.

Explore Worldwide US 📞 1 800 715 1746, **Can** 📞 1 888 216 3401, **UK** 📞 01252 883 760, **Aus** 📞 1300 439 756, **NZ** 📞 0800 269 263; 🌐 exploreworldwide.com. A wide variety of tours, many combining hiking with sailing between the islands.

Freewheeling Adventures Canada & US 📞 800 672 0775, 🌐 freewheeling.ca. Eight-day cycling tours of Crete.

Hooked on Cycling UK 📞 01506 635 399, 🌐 hookedoncycling.co.uk. Guided and self-guided cycle tours, including island-hopping on a private boat.

Intravel UK 📞 01653 617001, 🌐 intravel.co.uk. Walking holidays in Crete, the Ionians and Cyclades.

Jonathan's Tours 🌐 guidedwalks.net. Family-run walking holidays on Crete, Corfu, Cyclades and Dodecanese.

Macs Adventure UK 📞 0141 530 5837, **US** 📞 1 844 829 3969, 🌐 macsadventure.com. Self-guided walking tours in the Cyclades and Crete, plus cycling on Rhodes.

No Footprint Greece 📞 0030 6976 761 492, 🌐 nofootprint.gr. Guided and self-guided walks in the Cyclades, Ionians and on Crete, with a focus on low impact tourism and the environment.

Ramblers Holidays UK 📞 01707 331133, 🌐 ramblersholidays.co.uk. A huge variety of walking trips including spring hiking in Crete, Dodecanese island-hopping and combined island and mainland treks.

Walking Plus Greece 📞 0030 22840 92117, **US** 📞 347 815 5621, 🌐 walkingplus.co.uk. Guided and self-guided walks in the smaller Cyclades, which can be tailor-made, plus Greek language and culture classes.

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

Natural Greece Greece 📞 0030 2130 46261, 🌐 natural-greece.gr.

Birdwatching, botanical and marine-eco (some including scuba) trips to the Cyclades, Dodecanese and Crete.

Naturetrek UK 📞 01962 733051, 🌐 naturetrek.co.uk. Fairly pricey but expertly led one- or two-week natural history tours; offerings include springtime birds and flora on Lésvos, and wildlife of Crete.

The Travelling Naturalist UK 📞 01305 267994, 🌐 naturalist.co.uk. Wildlife holiday company that runs excellent birding and wild-flower-spotting trips to Crete.

SAILING AND WATERSPORTS

Big Blue Swim UK 📞 0113 216 9434, 🌐 thebigblueswim.com. Open-water swimming around Crete, Lefkáda and Santoríni.

Northwest Passage US 📞 1 800 RECREATE, 🌐 nwpassage.com. Excellent sea-kayaking tours in Crete and other islands; also yoga, climbing, hiking and art in Crete and Santoríni.

Nautilus Yachting UK 📞 01732 867445, 🌐 nautilusyachting.com. Bareboat yacht charter, flotillas and sailing courses from a wide variety of marinas.

Neilson UK 📞 0333 014 3351, 🌐 neilson.co.uk. Half a dozen excellent beach activity clubs, plus flotillas and bareboat charter.

Planet Windsurf UK 📞 01273 921 001, 🌐 planetwindsurf.holidays.com. Wind- and kitesurfing trips and instruction on Crete, Kárpáthos, Kos, Rhodes, Sámos and Zákynthos, plus mountain-biking.

Seafarer UK 📞 020 8324 3117, 🌐 seafarer.cruises.com. Small-boat island cruises, including tall-ship and mega-yacht vessels.

Sportif UK 📞 01273 844919, 🌐 sportif.travel. Wind- and kitesurfing packages and instruction on Crete, Kos, Mykonos, Rhodes, Sámos, Lésvos, Límnos and Kárpáthos.

Swim Trek UK 📞 01273 739 713, 🌐 swimtrek.com. Week-long open-water swimming tours in the Cyclades, Crete and Sporades, plus the original island-hopping Cyclades trip.

Valef Yachts US 📞 1 267 404 2415, 🌐 valefyachts.com. Small-boat cruises around the islands and luxury crewed yacht or motorboat charter.

new generation of “**high-speed**” boats (*tahyplóó*) and catamarans, which usually carry cars, and are capable of attaining 27 knots; **roll-on-roll-off** short-haul barges, nicknamed *pandáflies* (“slippers”); **hydrofoils**, similarly quick but which carry only passengers; and local **kaikia**, small boats which do short hops and excursions in season.

Ferry connections are indicated both on the route **map** (see pp.58–59) and in the “Arrival and Departure” sections throughout the book. Schedules are notoriously erratic, however, and must be verified seasonally; details given are for departures between late June and early September. When sailing in season from **Pireás** to the Cyclades or Dodecanese, you should have a choice of at least two, sometimes three, daily departures. **Out-of-season** departure frequencies drop sharply, with less populated islands connected only two or three times weekly.

Reliable departure information is available from the local **port police** (*limenarhío*) at all island and mainland harbours of any size; around Athens there are offices at Pireás (📞 210 455 0000), Rafína (📞 22940 28888) and Lávrio (📞 22920 25249). Busier port police have automated phone-answering services with an English option for schedule information. Many companies produce annual **schedule** booklets, which may not be adhered to as the season wears on – check their **websites** (if any) for current information, or refer to 🌐 gtp.gr or, even better, 🌐 openseas.gr.

Ferries

Except for some subsidized peripheral routes where older rust-buckets are still used, the Greek **ferry fleet** is fairly contemporary. **Routes and speed** can vary enormously, however; a journey from Pireás to Santoríni, for instance, can take anything from five to ten hours.

Tickets are best bought a day before departure, unless you need to reserve a cabin berth or space for a car. During holiday periods – Christmas/New Year, the week before and after Easter, late July to early September – and around the dates of elections, ferries need to be booked at least ten days in advance. Ticketing for most major routes is computerized and you cannot **buy** your ticket on board, although booths on the quay sell last-minute tickets. Many companies allow you to reserve places and pay online but tickets must still be picked up at the port at least fifteen minutes before departure.

The cheapest **fare class**, which you'll automatically be sold unless you specify otherwise, is *ikonomikí thési*, which gives you the run of most boats except for the upper-class restaurant and bar.

Getting around

Inter-island travel mostly means taking ferries, catamarans or occasionally hydrofoils, which will eventually get you to any of the sixty-plus inhabited isles. Internal flights are relatively expensive, but can save literally days of travel: Athens–Rhodes is just 2 hours return, versus 28 hours by boat. The standard public transport on the Greek islands is the bus, although services vary from rudimentary to quite comprehensive. The best way to supplement buses is to rent a scooter, motorbike or car – in any substantial town or resort you will find at least one rental outlet.

By sea

There are several varieties of sea-going vessels: **ordinary ferries**, which never exceed 17 knots; the

Most newer boats seem expressly designed to frustrate summertime travellers attempting to sleep on deck. For long overnight journeys, it's worth considering the few extra euros for a **cabin bunk**; second-class cabins are typically quadruple, while **first-class** double cabins with en-suite bathrooms can cost as much as a flight.

Motorbikes and cars get issued separate tickets, which can cost as much as five times the passenger fare, depending on size and journey duration – the shortest crossings are most expensive in comparison to a passenger ticket. For example, Keramotí–Thássos is €3.50 per person/€18 per car, while Sámos–Ikaría costs €10/€35 and Sámos–Piréas is €38.50/€80. It's really only worth taking a car to the larger islands like Crete, Rhodes, Híos, Lésvos, Sámos, Corfu or Kefaloniá, and only if staying a week or more. Otherwise, it is cheaper to leave your car on the mainland and rent another on arrival.

Hydrofoils, catamarans and high-speed boats

Hydrofoils – commonly known as *dhelfinia* or “Flying Dolphins” – are at least twice as expensive as ordinary ferries. Their network neatly fills gaps in ferry scheduling, but the service has been drastically reduced in recent years. The other drawback is that they are the first vessels to get cancelled in bad weather and even in moderate seas are not for the seasick-prone. Many don't operate – or are heavily reduced in frequency – from October to June. Hydrofoils aren't allowed to carry scooters or bicycles.

Catamarans and high-speed boats (tahýplia) are ruthlessly air-conditioned, usually without deck seating and with Greek TV blaring at you from multiple screens – paying extra for *dhiakikriméni thési* (upper class) merely gets you a better view. Car fares are normal, though passenger **tickets** are at least double a comparable ferry journey, ie similar to hydrofoil rates. Similarly, many don't run between October and April.

Small boats

In season, small boats known as **kaikia** and **small ferries** sail between adjacent islands and to a few of the more obscure satellite islets. These are extremely useful and often very pleasant, but seldom cheaper than mainline services. The more consistent *kaiki* links are noted in the text, though the only firm information is to be had on the quayside. Swarms of **taxi-boats** are a feature of many islands; these shuttle clients on set routes to remote beaches or ports which can only be reached arduously, if at all, overland. Costs on these

can be pretty stiff, usually per person but occasionally per boat.

By plane

Scheduled Greek **domestic flights** are run by the merged partnership of Olympic Air (☎801 801 0101, olympicair.com) and Aegean Airlines (☎801 112 0000, aegeanair.com), as well as minor operators Sky Express (☎2810 223 800, skyexpress.gr) Ellinair (☎2311 224 700; ellinair.com), Astra Airlines (☎2310 489 390, astra-airlines.gr) and Ryanair (ryanair.com). Together they cover a broad network of island and mainland destinations, though most routes, especially on Aegean/Olympic, are to and from Athens or Thessaloniki. All these airlines are geared to web and call-centre **e-ticket sales**, with few walk-in town offices. Tickets bought through travel agencies attract a minimum €10 commission charge.

Fares to/between the islands cost at least double the cost of a deck-class ferry journey, but on inter-island routes poorly served by boat (Rhodes–Sámos, for example), consider this time well bought, and indeed some subsidized peripheral routes cost less than a hydrofoil/catamaran journey. The cheapest web fares on Aegean/Olympic are non-changeable and non-refundable, so it may be worth paying a little extra for a flexi-fare.

Island flights are often full in peak season; if they're an essential part of your plans, make **reservations** at least a month in advance. Waiting lists exist and are worth signing on to, as there are almost always cancellations. Small prop planes, which won't fly in strong winds or (in some cases) after dark, are used on many routes to less popular destinations. A 15kg baggage **weight limit** can be strictly enforced; if, however, you are connecting with an international flight or purchased your ticket outside Greece, you're allowed the standard 20–23kg limit.

By bus

Bus services on **major routes** in Greece are efficient and frequent, departing promptly at scheduled departure times. On the islands there are usually buses to connect the port and main town (if different) for ferry arrivals or departures. The national network is run by a syndicate of private operators based on each island, known as the **KTEL** (*Kratikó Tamío Ellinikón Leoforión*; ☎14505 premium call charge and no national online timetable).

In island capitals or large cities in Crete, the **ticketing** is often computerized, sometimes with

assigned seating, but otherwise it's first-come, first-served, with some standing allowed, and tickets dispensed on the spot by a conductor (*ispráktoras*). Prices are fixed according to distance and there are no cheap advance booking fares; Iráklio–Haniá costs €15.10, for example, but no other island except Évvia and Lésvos will have fares much in excess of €5.

By car, motorcycle and taxi

The Greek islands are blessed with dramatic coastal and mountain scenery, which is undoubtedly a joy to drive through. You should, however, bear in mind that Greece has one of the highest fatal **accident rates** in Europe. Local driving habits can be atrocious; overtaking on bends, barging out from side roads and failing to signal manoeuvres are common practices. **Drunk driving** is also a major issue, especially on Sunday afternoons, public holidays or late at night.

Road conditions can be very poor, from bad surfaces and inadequate signposting to unmarked railway crossings. The larger islands have some fast dual carriageways but, unlike the mainland, no toll motorways. **Fuel**, whether regular unleaded (*amólyvdi*), super or diesel, is currently over €1.50 per litre across the country, often €1.70-plus in remoter areas. Be aware that many petrol stations close after 8pm and on Sundays.

Parking in the biggest island towns is inevitably a nightmare owing to oversubscription. **Pay-and-display** systems, plus residents-only schemes, are common, and it's often unclear where to obtain tickets.

Rules of the road

As in all of continental Europe, you **drive on the right** in Greece. Uphill drivers demand their **right**

of way, as do the first to approach a one-lane bridge; **flashed headlights** usually mean the opposite of what they do in the UK or North America, here signifying that the other driver insists on coming through or overtaking. However, this gesture rapidly repeated from someone approaching means they're warning you of a police control-point ahead. One extraordinary fact is that there is no national law about who has the right of way at **roundabouts** – more often than not it is the vehicle entering the roundabout, but proceed with care.

Seat-belt use (and helmet wearing on scooters and motorcycles) is compulsory and children under the age of 10 are not allowed to sit in the front seats of cars; infractions of these rules are punishable by fines. It's illegal to drive away from any kind of **accident** – or to move the vehicles before the police appear – and where serious injury has resulted to the other party you can be held at a police station for up to 24 hours.

Car rental

Car rental in Greece starts at around €250 a week in peak season for the smallest vehicle from a one-off outlet or local chain, including unlimited mileage, tax and insurance. At other times, at smaller local outfits, you can get terms of €25–30 per day, all inclusive, with even better **rates** for three days or more – or prebooked on the internet. Rates for open **jeeps** vary from €60 to €90 per day.

Rental prices in Greece almost never include **collision damage waiver** (CDW) and personal insurance. The CDW typically has a deductible charge of €400–700, which may be levied for even the tiniest scratch or missing mudguard. To avoid this, it is strongly recommended that you pay the €6–9 extra per day for full coverage. Frequent EU-based travellers should consider **annual**

SIX MEMORABLE JOURNEYS

Kefaloniá's West Coast The road route north from Argostóli offers vistas of the Lixouri Peninsula, Mýrtos beach and picturesque Ássos. See p.500.

The approach to Samothráki The ferry from Alexandhróupoli allows Samothráki's profile, dominated by majestic Mount Fengari, to loom into focus. See p.410.

Mount Psilorítis, Crete Drive via Anóyia and Margarítes for sweeping views of the green valleys around Mount Psilorítis. See p.221.

Náxos to Amorgós Take the ferry from fertile Náxos via the delightful minor Cyclades to the imposing coast of Amorgós. See p.164.

Mastic villages, Híos Glimpse the alluring Mastic coast and marvel at the unique architecture of the villages on a drive through southern Híos. See p.381.

The Zákynthos circuit The anticlockwise boat tour of the island takes you to the famous Blue caves and Shipwreck Bay. See p.506.

excess insurance through Insurance 4 Car Hire (📞insurance4carhire.com).

Almost all agencies will require a blank **credit card** slip as a deposit (destroyed when you return the vehicle safely); minimum **age requirements** vary from 21 to 23. **Driving licences** issued by any European Economic Area state are honoured, but an **International Driving Permit** is required by all other drivers (despite claims by unscrupulous agencies). You can be arrested and charged if caught by the traffic police without an IDP if you require one.

Avance, Antena, Payless, Kosmos, National/Alamo, Reliable, Tomaso and Eurodollar are dependable Greek, or smaller international, chains with branches on many islands; all are cheaper than Hertz, Sixt or Avis. Specific local recommendations are given in the guide.

Bringing your own car

If you intend to **drive your own car to and within Greece**, remember that insurance contracted in any EU state is valid in any other, but in many cases this is only third-party cover. Competition in the industry is intense, however, so many UK insurers will throw in full, pan-European cover for free or for a nominal sum, for up to sixty days. Those with proof of AA/RAC/AAA membership are given free road assistance from ELPA, the Greek equivalent, which runs **breakdown services** on several of the larger islands; in an emergency ring 📞10400.

EU citizens bringing their own cars are free to circulate in the country for six months, or until their home-based road tax or insurance expires, whichever happens first; keeping a car in Greece for longer entails more paperwork. **Non-EU nationals** will get a car entered in their passport; the carnet normally allows you to keep a vehicle in Greece for up to six months, exempt from road tax.

Scooter and motorcycle rental

Small **motor scooters** with automatic transmission, known in Greek as *mihandkia* or *papakia* (little ducks), are good transport for all but the steepest terrain. They're available for rent on most islands for €12–18 per day. Prices can be bargained down out of peak season, or for a longer rental period. Only models of 80cc and above are powerful enough for two riders in mountainous areas, which includes most islands.

True **motorbikes** (*mihanés*) with manual transmissions and safer tyres are less common. With the proper licence, bikes of 125cc and up are available in many resorts for around €20 per day. **Quads** are

also increasingly offered – without doubt the most stupid-looking and impractical conveyance yet devised, and very unstable on turns – make sure helmets are supplied.

Reputable establishments demand a full **motorcycle driving licence** (Class B) for any engine over 80cc and sometimes even for 50cc models, which is the official legal requirement. You will sometimes have to leave your passport as a deposit. Failure to carry the correct licence on your person also attracts a stiff fine, though some agencies still demand this rather than a passport as security.

Many rental outfits will offer you (an often ill-fitting) **crash helmet** (*krános*), and some will make you sign a waiver of liability if you refuse it. Helmet-wearing is required by law, with a €185 fine levied for failure to do so; on some smaller islands the rule is laxly enforced, on others random police roadblocks do a brisk commerce in citations, to foreigners and locals alike.

Before riding off, always check the **brakes** and **electrics**; dealers often keep the front brakes far too loose, with the commendable intention of preventing you going over the handlebars. Make sure also that there's a kick-start as backup to the battery, since ignition switches commonly fail. If you **break down** on a scooter or motorcycle you're often responsible for returning the machine, although the better outlets offer a free retrieval service.

Taxis

Greek **taxis** are among the cheapest in the Mediterranean – so long as you get an honest driver who switches the meter on and doesn't use high-tech devices to doctor the reading. Use of the meter is mandatory within city or town limits, where Tariff 1 applies, while in rural areas or between midnight and 5am Tariff 2 is in effect. On certain islands, set rates apply on specific fixed routes – these might only depart when full. Otherwise, throughout Greece the meter starts at €1.20, though the minimum **fare** is €3.40; baggage in the boot is charged at €0.40 per piece. Additionally, there are surcharges of €2.60 for leaving or entering an airport, and €1.07 for leaving a harbour area. If you summon a taxi by phone on spec, there's a €1.92 charge; the meter starts running from the moment the driver begins heading towards you. All categories of supplemental charges must be set out on a card affixed to the dashboard. For a week or so before and after Orthodox Easter, and Christmas, a *filodhórima* (gratuity) of about ten percent is levied.

By bike

Cycling in the Greek islands is not such hard going as you might imagine (except in summer), especially on one of the mountain bikes that are now the rule at rental outfits; they rarely cost more than €8 a day. You do, however, need steady nerves, as roads are generally narrow with no verges or bike lanes and Greek drivers are notoriously inconsiderate to cyclists.

If you have your own bike, consider taking it along on the **plane** (it's free if within your 20–23kg international air allowance, but arrange it in writing with the airline beforehand to avoid huge charges at check-in). Once in Greece you can take a bike for free on most ferries and in the luggage bays of buses. Any small spare parts you might need are best brought along, since specialist shops are rare.

Accommodation

There are vast numbers of beds available for tourists throughout the Greek islands, and most of the year you can rely on simply turning up and finding something. At Easter and in July and August, however, you can run into problems if you haven't booked in advance. The economic crisis and subsequent loss of domestic tourism has tended to depress prices, and what you pay may depend on how far you are willing to bargain.

Many of the big hotels and self-catering complexes are pre-booked by **package-holiday companies** for the whole season. Although they may have vacancies if you just turn up, non-package visitors are far more likely to find themselves staying in smaller, simpler places which usually describe themselves simply as "**rooms**", or as apartments or studios. Standards here can vary from spartan (though invariably clean) to luxurious, but the vast majority are purpose-built blocks where every room is air-conditioned, and where the minimal furnishings are well adapted to the local climate – at least in summer.

Seasons

There are typically three **seasons** which affect prices: October to April (low), May, June and September (mid) and July and August (high) – though this can vary from place to place, while **Easter** and the first two weeks of August may be in a higher category still. Urban hotels with a predominantly business clientele tend to charge the same rates all year. Elsewhere, places that have significant domestic tourism, such as the Argosaronic islands, frequently charge significantly more at weekends.

Many of the smaller places offering rooms **close from October to April**. In winter, then, you may have to stay in hotels in the main towns or ports. On smaller islands, there may be just one hotel and a single taverna that stays open year-round.

ACCOMMODATION PRICES AND BOOKING

The price we quote is for the establishment's **cheapest double room in mid season** – there may well be other rooms that cost more. Depending on where you are, the price may rocket in the first two weeks of August, sometimes by as much as double: for much of the year, however, you can expect to pay a bit less. In rooms establishments and the cheaper hotels, the price of a basic double room starts at around €20–25 a night out of season, though the same room may be €50 or more in August. For a bit more luxury and in more touristy areas, you'll probably be paying €40–50 in mid-season, €70–90 if you add a pool and other facilities; 5-star hotels charge €200 and above. In practice, the price is highly flexible, especially if you call direct or just turn up: if there's a spare room, they'll try to fill it.

By law, **prices must be displayed** on the back of the door of your room, or over the reception desk. You should never pay more than this, and in practice it is rare to pay as much as the sign says. If you feel you're being overcharged, threaten to make a report to the tourist office or police, who will generally take your side in such cases. The price is for room only, except where otherwise indicated; fancier places often include breakfast in the price – we indicate this in the listing, but check when booking.

All the usual **online booking engines** operate in Greece, including Airbnb, and the majority of places have their own online booking. Even on Airbnb, most of the properties in tourist areas are regular commercial rooms or apartments: in theory, any accommodation offered has to be registered and pay tax. The vast majority of hoteliers prefer you to book direct, however, rather than pay commission to a third party and will often offer a better deal for direct bookings.

Hotels

The tourist police set official **star categories** for hotels, from five-star down; all except the top category have to keep within set price limits. You may still see the old letter system (L, luxury, is five-star, then A to E). Ratings correspond to the facilities available (lifts, dining room, pool etc), a box-ticking exercise which doesn't always reflect the actual quality of the hotel; there are plenty of 2-star hotels which are in practice smarter and more comfortable than 3-star outfits. A "boutique" category allows some hotels to escape the strait-jacket on the grounds of location or historical significance.

Hotels with 2-star and below have only to provide the most rudimentary of continental **breakfasts** – sometimes optional for an extra charge – while 3-star and above will usually offer buffets with cheese, cold meats, eggs and cereals.

Single rooms are rare, and generally poor value – you'll often have to pay the full double-room price or haggle for a small discount; on the other hand, larger groups and families can almost always find triple and quadruple rooms, and more upmarket hotels may have **family suites** (two rooms sharing one bathroom), all of which can be very good value.

Private rooms and apartments

Many places categorized as apartments or rooms are every bit as comfortable as hotels, and in the lower price ranges are usually more congenial and better value. Traditionally, **rooms** (dhomátia – but usually spotted by a "Rooms for Rent" or "Zimmer Frei" sign) were often literally a room in someone's house, a bare space with a bed and a hook on the back of the door, where the sparse facilities were offset by the disarming hospitality you'd be offered as part of the family. Such places are now rare, however, and these days almost all are purpose-built, with comfortable en-suites, air-conditioning

and balconies – at the fancier end of the scale you'll find studio and apartment complexes with marble floors, pools, bars and children's playgrounds. Many have a variety of rooms at different prices, so ask to see the room first. Places described as studios usually have a small kitchenette, while **apartments** generally have at least one bedroom and separate kitchen/living room.

If you haven't already booked a room, you may find owners descending on ferry or bus arrivals to fill any space they have, sometimes with photos of their premises. This can be great, but you can also be in for a nasty surprise – usually because the rooms are much further than you had been led to believe, or bear no relation to the pictures. In some places the practice has been outlawed. In the more developed island resorts, room owners may insist on a **minimum stay** of a few days, or even a week, especially in the high season.

Room proprietors sometimes ask to keep your **passport**: ostensibly "for the tourist police", but in reality to prevent you leaving with an unpaid bill. They'll almost always return the documents should you ask for them.

Villas and longer-term rentals

Although one of the great dreams of Greek travel is finding an idyllic coastal villa and renting it for virtually nothing for a whole month, there's no chance at all of your dream coming true in modern Greece. All the best **villas** are contracted out to **agents** and let through **foreign operators**. Even if you do find one empty for a week or two, renting it locally usually costs far more than it would have done to arrange from home. There, specialist operators (see p.28) represent some superb places, from simple to luxurious, and costs can be very reasonable, especially if shared between a few people. Several of the companies listed will arrange stays on two islands over two weeks.

That said, if you do arrive and decide to drop roots for a while, you can still strike lucky if you

AIR CONDITIONING, WI-FI AND HOT WATER

When checking out a room, always ask about the **air conditioning** and **hot water**. Almost all modern rooms and apartments have air conditioning (indicated by a/c in our listings), but you may be charged an extra €5 or so a night to use it. Hot water is always theoretically available, but there's not always enough: rooftop solar heaters are popular and effective, though the tanks tend to run out in the post-beach shower rush around 6–7pm, with no more available until the next day. A water heater, either as a backup or primary source, is more reliable. **Wi-fi** is ubiquitous, and almost always free – even the most basic places tend to have it, though the signal may not extend to every room, and it's often pretty slow.

SEVEN SPECIAL PLACES TO STAY

Hydra Hotel, Ýdhra Stunning boutique hotel in a converted mansion, with glorious views from its unique rooms. See p.99

Grotta, Naxos Town The best place to watch the sunset on Naxos comes with possibly the best breakfast in the Cyclades. See p.166

Polikandia, Folégandhros A well-priced, well-designed boutique hotel on one of Greece's less discovered islands. See p.185

Miliá Eco Village, Crete Abandoned mountain hamlet restored as lovely, candlelit accommodation. See p.257

Kokkini Porta Rossa, Rhodes Six exquisite luxury suites in a tastefully renovated Turkish mansion; wonderful breakfast using local produce too. See p.274

Archontiko Angelou, Leros Beautiful Italian mansion restored with original furnishings and individual style, plus a wonderful gluten-friendly breakfast. See p.338

Karimalis Winery, Ikaría A winery and organic farm running wine and cooking courses on little-visited Ikaría. See p.372

avoid the obvious coastal tourist spots, and are happy with relatively modest accommodation. Choose an untouristed village and ask about; you might still pick up a wonderful deal. **Out of season** your chances are much better – even in touristy areas, between October and March (sometimes as late as April and May) you can bargain a very good rate, especially for stays of a month or more. **Travel agents** are a good source of information on what's available locally, and many rooms places have an apartment on the side or know someone with one to rent.

Hostels and backpackers

Over the years most traditional youth **hostels** in the islands have closed down; competition from inexpensive rooms meant that they were simply not cost-effective. However, those that survive are generally very good, and there's a new generation of youth-oriented **backpackers** on the more popular islands, big on social life and a party atmosphere. Few of them are members of any official organization – though an IYHF card or student ID may save you a few euros – and virtually none have a curfew or any restrictive regulations. Prices for a dorm bed vary from as little as €12 in a simple, traditional hostel to as much as €30 in high season in the fancier backpackers.

If you're planning to spend a few nights in hostels, **IYHF membership** is probably a worthwhile investment. By no means all Greek hostels offer discounts, but there are other membership benefits – the card may be accepted as student ID, for example. You may be able to buy membership at official hostels; otherwise, you can join at www.hhostels.com (and book official hostels) or apply via your local youth

hostel association. To book hostels online try www.hostelworld.com, though note that many of the places on there are simply rooms places, and not hostels in any recognizable sense.

Camping

Partly thanks to the economic crisis, Greek **camping** has undergone something of a revival in recent years. **Officially recognized campsites** range from ramshackle compounds to highly organized and rather soulless complexes, often dominated by camper vans. Most places cost in the region of €5–7 a night per person, plus €4–6 per tent and the same again for a car, or €7–10 per camper van; at the fanciest sites rates for two people plus a tent can almost equal the price of a basic room. You will need at least a light sleeping bag, since even summer nights can get cool and damp. The website of the official Greek camping organization (www.greececamping.gr) lists all authorized campsites, with booking for many of them.

Camping **outside an official campsite** (with or without a tent) is against the law – enforced in most tourist areas and on beaches. If you do camp rough, exercise sensitivity and discretion. Police will crack down on people camping (and especially littering) if a large community of campers develops. Off the beaten track nobody is very bothered, though it is always best to ask permission in the local taverna or café, and to be aware of rising crime, even in remote areas. If you want to camp near a beach, the best strategy is to find a sympathetic taverna, which in exchange for regular patronage will probably be willing to guard small valuables and let you use their facilities.

Food and drink

Although many visitors get by on *moussaka* or *kalamári* almost every night, there is a huge range to Greek cuisine, not least its wonderful *mezédhes*, seafood and juicy, fat olives. Despite depressed wages, most Greeks still eat out with friends or family at least once a week. The atmosphere is always relaxed and informal, with pretensions rare. Drinking is traditionally meant to accompany food, though a range of bars and clubs exists.

Breakfast

Greeks don't generally eat **breakfast**, more often opting for a mid-morning snack (see below). This is reflected in the abysmal quality of most hotel "continental" offerings, where waxy orange squash, stewed coffee, processed cheese and meats, plus pre-packaged butter, honey and jam (confusingly called *marmeládha*), are the rule at all but the top establishments. There might be some fresh fruit, decent yoghurt and pure honey, if you are lucky. The only egg-and-bacon kinds of places are in resorts where foreigners congregate, or where there are returned North American- or Australian-Greeks. Such outlets can often be good value (€4–7 for the works, including coffee), especially if there's competition.

Picnics and snacks

Picnic ingredients are easily available at supermarkets, bakeries and greengrocers; sampling produce like cheese or olives is acceptable. Standard white **bread** is often of minimal nutritional value and inedible within a day of purchase, although rarer brown varieties such as *alikís* (wholemeal), *sikalísio* (rye bread) or *oktásporo* (multigrain) fare better. Olives are ubiquitous; the Kalamáta and Ámfissa varieties usually surpass most local picks in quality.

Honey is the ideal topping for the famous local **yoghurt**, which is widely available in bulk. Sheep-milk yoghurt (*próvia*) is richer and sweeter than the more common cow's-milk kind. **Feta cheese** is found everywhere, often with a dozen varieties to choose from, made from goat's, sheep's or cow's milk in varying proportions. Harder *graviéra* is the second most popular cheese.

Greece imports very little produce from abroad, aside from bananas, the odd pineapple and a few

FAST FOOD GREEK STYLE

Traditional hot **snacks** are easy to come by, although they are being elbowed aside by Western fast food at both international and Greek chains such as *Goody's* (burgers, pasta and salad bar), *Everest*, *Grigoris* and *Theios Vanias* (baked pastries and baguette sandwiches), and various pizzerias. Still, thousands of kebab shops (*souvladzídhika*) churn out *souvlákia*, either as small shish on wooden sticks or as *yíros* – doner kebab with garnish in pítta bread. Other snacks include cheese pies (*tyrópites*), spinach pies (*spanokópites*) and, less commonly, minced meat pies (*kreatópites*); these are found either at the baker's or some of the aforementioned chains.

mangoes. **Fruit** is relatively expensive and available mainly by season. Reliable picnic fruits include cherries (June–July); *krystália*, small, heavenly green pears (Sept–Nov); *vaniliés*, orange- or red-fleshed plums (July–Oct); and kiwi (Oct–May). Less portable, but succulent, are figs, whose main season is August and September. Salad **vegetables** are more reasonably priced; besides the famous, enormous tomatoes (June–Sept), there's a bewildering variety of cool-season greens, including rocket, dill, enormous spring onions and lettuces.

Restaurants

Greek cuisine and **restaurants** are usually straightforward and still largely affordable – typically €12–20 per person for a substantial meal with house wine. Even when preparation is basic, raw materials are usually wholesome and fresh. The best strategy is to **go where Greeks go**, often less obvious backstreet places that might not look much from outside but deliver the real deal. The two most common types of restaurant are the **estiatório** and the **taverna**. Distinctions are slight, though the former is more commonly found in the larger island towns and emphasize the more complicated, oven-baked casserole dishes termed *mayireftá* (literally, "cooked").

As one might expect, the identikit tavernas at resorts dominated by foreigners tend to make less effort, bashing out speedily grilled meat with pre-cut chips and rice containing the odd pea. You should beware of **overcharging** and bill-padding at such establishments too. In some island capitals

and chic resorts, growing numbers of pretentious restaurants boast fancy decor and Greek nouvelle (or fusion) cuisine with speciality wine lists, while producing little of substance.

Greeks generally eat very late in the evening, rarely venturing out until after 9pm and often arriving at midnight or later. Consequently, most restaurants operate flexible hours, varying according to the level of custom, and thus the **opening times** given throughout the listings should be viewed as approximate at best.

Estiatória

With their long hours and tiny profit margins, **estiatória** (sometimes known as *inomayíria*, "wine-and-cook-houses") are, alas, a vanishing breed. An *estiatório* will generally feature a variety of *mayireftá* such as moussaka, *pastítsio* (macaroni pie), meat or game stews, stuffed tomatoes or peppers, the oily vegetable casseroles called *ladherá*, plus oven-baked meat and fish. Usually you point at the steam trays to choose these dishes. Batches are cooked in the morning and then left to stand, which is why the food is often **lukewarm**; most such dishes are in fact enhanced by being allowed to steep in their own juice.

Tavernas and psistariés

Tavernas range from the glitzy and fashionable to rough-and-ready beachside ones with seating under a reed canopy. Really primitive ones have a very limited (often unwritten) menu, but the more elaborate will offer some of the main *mayireftá* dishes mentioned above, as well as standard taverna fare: **mezédhes** (hors d'oeuvres) or **orektiká** (appetizers) and **tís óras** (meat and fish, fried or grilled to order). **Psistariés** (grill houses) serve spit-roasted lamb, pork, goat, chicken or *kokorétsi* (grilled offal roulade), and often *yíros* by the portion. They will usually have a limited selection of *mezédhes* and salads (*salátes*), but no

VEGETARIANS

Vegetarians will find scarcely any dedicated **meat-free restaurants** at all in Greece. That is not to say that they cannot enjoy excellent food, however. The best solution in tavernas or ouzerís is to assemble a meal from vegetarian *mezédhes* and salads and, in *estiatória* especially, keep an eye open for the delicious *ladherá*, vegetables baked in various sauces.

mayireftá. In rural areas, roadside *psistariés* are often called *exohiká kéndra*.

The most common **mezédhes** are *tzatziki* (yoghurt, garlic and cucumber dip), *melitzanosaláta* (aubergine/eggplant dip), fried courgette/zucchini or aubergine/eggplant slices, *yígandes* (white haricot beans in hot tomato sauce), *tyropitákia* or *spanakopitákia* (small cheese or spinach pies), *revythókeftedes* (chickpea patties similar to falafel), octopus salad and *mavromátika* (black-eyed peas).

Among **meats**, *souvláki* and chops are reliable choices; pork is usually better and cheaper than veal, especially as *pantséta* (spare ribs). The best *souvláki*, not always available, is lamb; more commonly encountered are rib chops (*paidhákia*); lamb roasted in tin foil (*exohikó*) is another favourite. *Keftédhes* (breadcrumbed meatballs), *biftékia* (pure-meat patties) and the spicy, coarse-grain sausages called *loukánika* are cheap and good. Chicken is widely available but typically battery-farmed. Other dishes worth trying are stewed goat (*yítha vrasí*) or baked goat (*katsíki stó fóurno*) – goat in general is typically free-range and organic.

Fish and seafood

Seafood can be one of the highlights of a trip to the Greek islands, though there are some tips to bear in

TAVERNA TIPS

Since the idea of **courses** is foreign to Greek cuisine, starters, main dishes and salads often all arrive together. The best strategy is to order a selection of *mezédhes* and salads to share, in local fashion. Waiters encourage you to take *horiátiki saláta* – the so-called Greek **salad**, including feta cheese – because it is the most expensive. If you only want tomato and cucumber, ask for *angourodomáta*. Cabbage-carrot (*láhano-karóto*) and lettuce (*maroúli*) are the typical cool-season salads.

Bread is generally counted as part of the "cover" charge (€0.50–1 per person), so you have to pay for it even if you don't eat any. Though menu prices are supposedly inclusive of all taxes and service, an extra **tip** of around five percent or simple rounding up of the bill is appreciated.

mind when ordering fish at a taverna or *psarotavérna* (specialist seafood restaurant). The standard procedure is to go to the glass cooler and pick your specimen, then have it weighed (uncleaned) in your presence. Overcharging, especially where a printed menu is absent, is not uncommon; have weight and price confirmed clearly.

Taverna owners often comply only minimally with the requirement to indicate when seafood is **frozen** – look for the abbreviation “kat”, “k” or just an asterisk on the Greek-language side of the menu. If the price, almost invariably quoted by the kilo, seems too good to be true, it’s almost certainly farmed. The choicest varieties, such as red mullet, *tsipoúra* (gilt-head bream), sea bass or *fangrí* (common bream), will be expensive if wild – €45–70 per kilo. Less esteemed species tend to cost €20–35 per kilo but are usually quoted at €6–9 per portion.

Fish caught in the summer months tend to be smaller and drier, and so are served with *ladholémono* (oil and lemon) sauce. An inexpensive May–June treat is fresh, grilled or fried *bakaliáros* (hake), the classic UK fish-and-chip shop species. *Gávros* (anchovy), *atherína* (sand smelts) and *sardhélles* (sardines) are late-summer fixtures, at their best in the northeast Aegean. *Koliós* (mackerel) is excellent either grilled or baked in sauce. Especially in autumn you may find *psarósoupa* (fish soup) or *kakaviá* (bouillabaisse).

Cheaper **seafood** (*thalassiná*) such as fried baby squid (usually frozen); *thrápsalo* (large, grillable deep-water squid) and octopus are summer staples; often mussels, cockles and small prawns will also be offered at reasonable sums (€20–30 per kilo).

Wine

All tavernas will offer you a choice of bottled **wines**, and most have their own house variety: kept in barrels, sold in bulk (*varelísio* or *hýma*) by the quarter-, half- or full litre, and served in glass flagons or brightly coloured tin “monkey-cups”. Per-litre prices depend on locale and quality, ranging from €4–5 (Skýros) to €10–12 (Santoríni, Rhodes). Non-resinated wine is almost always more than decent; some people add a dash of soda water or lemonade. Barrelled **retsina** – pine-resinated wine, often an acquired taste – is far less common than it used to be, though you will find bottled brands everywhere: Yeoryiadihi from Thessaloníki, Liokri from Ahaia and Malamatina from central Greece are all quaffable.

Among **bottled wines** available throughout the islands, Cambas Attikos, Zítsa and Rhodian CAIR products are good, inexpensive whites, while Boutari Naoussa and Kourtakis Apelia are decent, mid-range reds. For a better but still moderately priced red, choose either Boutari or Tsantali Merlot, or Averof Katoí from Epirus.

An increasing number of Greek **wineries** open their doors to visitors for **tastings and tours**, which are usually free or make a nominal charge. There are a number of wineries dotted around the wine-producing islands of Límnos, Lésvos, Santoríni, Kefalonía, Nákos, Ikaría, Rhodes and Crete (see www.winesofgreece.com). Curiously, island **red wines** are almost uniformly mediocre, so you are better off ordering mainland varieties from Carras on Halkidhiki, and various spots in the Peloponnese and Thessaly. Particularly notable local vintages are mentioned throughout the guide. The best available current guide to the emerging Greek domaines and vintners is Konstantinos Lazarakis’ *The Wines of Greece*.

Finally, CAIR on Rhodes makes “**champagne**” (“naturally sparkling wine fermented en bouteille”, says the label), in both brut and demi-sec versions. It’s not Moët & Chandon quality by any means, but at about €7 per bottle, nobody’s complaining.

Cafés and bars

A venerable institution, under attack from the onslaught of mass global culture, is the **kafenio**, still found in every Greek town but dying out in many resorts. In greater abundance, you’ll encounter **pâtisseries** (*zaharoplastía*), swish modern **cafeterias** and **trendy bars**.

Kafenía, cafeterias and coffee

The **kafenio** (plural *kafenía*) is the traditional Greek coffee house. Although its main business is “Greek” (Middle Eastern) **coffee** – prepared unsweetened (*skétos* or *pikrós*), medium (*métrios*) or sweet (*glykós*) – it also serves instant coffee, ouzo, brandy, beer, sage-based tea known as *tsáí vounou*, soft drinks and juices. Some *kafenía* close at siesta time, but many remain open from early in the morning until late at night. The chief summer socializing time for a preprandial ouzo is 6–8pm, immediately after the afternoon nap.

Cafeterias are the province of fancier varieties of coffee and **kafés frappé**, iced instant coffee with sugar and (optionally) condensed milk – uniquely Greek despite its French name. Like Greek coffee, it is always accompanied by a glass of water. *Freddoc-*

cino is a cappuccino-based alternative to the traditional cold frappé. "Nes"(café) is the generic term for all instant **coffee**, regardless of brand. Thankfully, almost all cafeterias now offer a range of foreign-style coffees – filter, dubbed *filtros* or *gallikós* (French); cappuccino; and espresso – at overseas prices. Alcohol is also served and many establishments morph into lively bars late at night.

Sweets and desserts

The **zaharoplastío**, a cross between café and patisserie, serves coffee, a limited range of alcohol, yoghurt with honey and sticky cakes. The better establishments offer an amazing variety of pastries, cream-and-chocolate confections, honey-soaked Greco-Turkish sweets like *baklavás*, *kataifi* (honey-drenched "shredded wheat"), *loukoumádhēs* (deep-fried batter puffs dusted with cinnamon and dipped in syrup), *galaktoboureko* (custard pie) and so on. For more dairy-based products, seek out a **galaktopolío**, where you'll often find *ryzógalo* (rice pudding), *kréma* (custard) and locally made *yiaourti* (yoghurt). Both *zaharoplastía* and *galaktopolía* are more family-oriented places than a *kafénio*. **Traditional specialties** include "spoon sweets" or *glyká koutaliou* (syrupy preserves of quince, grape, fig, citrus fruit or cherry).

Ice cream, sold principally at the parlours which have swept across Greece (Dhodoní is the posh home-grown competition to Haägen-Dazs), can be very good and almost indistinguishable from Italian prototypes. A scoop (*baláki*) costs €1.50–2; you'll often be asked if you want it in a cup (*kypelláki*) or a cone (*konáki*), and whether you want toppings like *santiyi* (whipped cream) or nuts.

Ouzerís, mezedhopolía and spirits

Ouzerís (sometimes also known as **tsipourádhika**), found mainly in select neighbourhoods of larger island towns, specialize in ouzo and mezedhes. In some places you also find **mezedhopolía**, a bigger, more elaborate kind of ouzerí. These places are well worth trying for the marvellous variety of mezedhes they serve. In effect, several plates of mezedhes plus drinks will substitute for a more involved meal at a taverna, though it works out more expensive if you have a healthy appetite. Faced with an often bewilderingly varied menu, you might opt for a *pikilia* (assortment) available in several sizes, the most expensive one usually emphasizing seafood.

Ouzo is served by the glass, to which you can add water from the accompanying glass or ice to taste. The next measure up is a *karafáki* – a 200ml vial, the favourite means of delivery for *tsipouro*. Once, every

THE STRONG STUFF

Ouzo and the similar **tsipouro** (some north Aegean islands and increasingly elsewhere) and **tsikoudhiá** (Crete) are simple spirits of up to 48 percent alcohol, distilled from the grape-mash residue of winemaking. The former is always flavoured with anise, the latter two mostly unadulterated but may have a touch of anise, cinnamon, pear essence or fennel. There are nearly thirty brands of ouzo or *tsipouro*, with the best reckoned to be from Lésvos and Sámos. Note that ouzo has the peculiar ability to bring back its effect when you drink water the morning after, so make sure you don't plan to do anything important (not least driving) the next day.

ouzo was automatically accompanied by a small plate of **mezédhes** on the house: cheese, cucumber, tomato, a few olives, sometimes octopus or a couple of small fish. Nowadays "ouzoomezés" is a separate, pricier option. Often, however, this is "off-menu" but if you order a *karafáki* you will automatically be served a selection of albeit basic snacks.

Bars, beer and mineral water

Bars (*baráki*) are ubiquitous throughout the islands, ranging from clones of Spanish bodegas and British pubs to musical beachside bars more active by day than at night. At their most sophisticated, however, they are well-executed theme venues in ex-industrial premises or Neoclassical houses, with both Greek and international soundtracks. Many Greek bars have a half-life of about a year; the best way to find current hot spots, especially if they're more club than bar, is to look out for posters advertising bar-hosted events in the neighbourhood.

Shots and **cocktails** are invariably expensive at €5–8, except during well-advertised happy hours: beer in a bar will cost €4–6 in most establishments.

Beers are mostly foreign lagers made locally under licence at just a handful of breweries on the central mainland. **Local brands** include the palatable Fix from Athens, milder Mythos and Veryina from Komotini. There is, however, a growing number of quality **microbreweries**: the original is Craft in Athens, who produce lager in three grades (blonde, "smoked" and black), as well as a red ale, and now distribute quite widely. Other highly rated but strictly local microbreweries have sprung up on Crete

(Réthymno), Corfu, Híos and Santoríni. Genuinely **imported** German beers, such as Bitburger, Fisher and Warsteiner (plus a few British and Irish ones), are found in Athens and at busier resorts.

The ubiquitous Loutraki **mineral water** is not esteemed by the Greeks themselves, who prefer various brands from Crete and Epirus. In many tavernas there has been a backlash against plastic bottles, and you can now get mineral water in glass bottles. Souroti, Epsa and Sariza are the principal labels of naturally **sparkling** (*aeirióuho* in Greek) water, in small bottles; Tuborg club soda is also widespread. Note that despite variable quality in taste **tap water** is essentially safe all over Greece, though persuading restaurants to provide it can be difficult on many islands.

Health

There are no required inoculations for Greece, though it's wise to ensure you are up to date on tetanus and polio. The main health risks faced by visitors involve overexposure to the sun, overindulgence in food and drink, or bites and stings from insects and sea creatures.

EU nationals (including British citizens at the time of writing) are entitled to free medical care in Greece upon presentation of a European Health Insurance Card (see box below). The US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have no formal health-care agreements with Greece (other than allowing for free emergency trauma treatment), so insurance is highly recommended.

Doctors and hospitals

For serious medical attention you'll find English-speaking **doctors** (mainly private) in all the bigger

towns and resorts: if your hotel can't help, the tourist police or your consulate should be able to come up with some names. There are **hospitals** on all the bigger islands, and some kind of medical centre on virtually every one; medical standards are high but, in state hospitals at least, you'll only get the most basic level of nursing care – locals depend on family for support. For an ambulance, phone **166**.

Pharmacies, drugs and contraception

For minor complaints it's enough to go to the local **pharmacy** (*farmakía*). Greek pharmacists are highly trained and dispense a number of medicines which elsewhere could only be prescribed by a doctor. In the larger towns and resorts there'll usually be one who speaks good English. Pharmacies are usually closed evenings and Saturday mornings, but all should have a schedule on their door showing the night and weekend duty pharmacists in town.

If you regularly use any form of **prescription drug**, you should bring along a copy of the prescription, together with the generic name of the drug; this will help you replace it, and avoids problems with customs officials. In this regard, you should be aware that **codeine** is banned in Greece. If you import any you might find yourself in serious trouble, so check labels carefully; it's a major ingredient of Panadeine, Veganin, Solpadeine, Codis and Nurofen Plus, to name just a few.

Contraceptive pills are sold over the counter at larger pharmacies, though not necessarily the brands you may be used to; a good pharmacist should come up with a close match. **Condoms** are inexpensive and ubiquitous – just ask for *profylaktiká* (less formally, *plastiká* or *kapótes*) at any pharmacy, sundries store or corner *períptero*

THE EUROPEAN HEALTH INSURANCE CARD

At the time of writing, British citizens are still covered by the **EHIC** scheme (ehic.org.uk, ehic.ie), but with the UK's impending departure from the EU, you should check the latest situation online before travel. Holders of a valid EHIC are entitled to free consultation and treatment from doctors and dentists. At hospitals you should simply have to show your EHIC; for free treatment from a regular doctor or dentist, you should call the IKA (the Social Insurance Institute, who administer the scheme) on their national appointments hotline, T184. For prescriptions from pharmacies you pay a small fixed charge plus 25 percent of the cost of the medicine; if you are charged in full, get a receipt and keep the original prescription to claim it back. You can also claim back for private treatment; take the original receipts and your EHIC to the IKA within one month, and they will reimburse you up to the limit allowed for similar treatment by the IKA.

(kiosk). Sanitary towels and **tampons** are widely sold in supermarkets.

Common health problems

The main health problems experienced by visitors – including many blamed on the food – have to do with **overexposure to the sun**. To avoid these, cover up, wear a hat, and drink plenty of fluids to avoid any danger of **sunstroke**; remember that even hazy sun can burn. **Tap water** meets strict EU standards for safety, but high mineral content and less than perfect desalination on many islands can leave a brackish taste not suited to everyone. For that reason many people prefer to stick to bottled water (see p.39). Hayfever sufferers should be prepared for a pollen season earlier than in northern Europe, peaking in April and May.

Hazards of the sea

To avoid hazards in or by the sea, goggles or a dive mask for swimming and footwear for walking over wet or rough rocks are useful. You may have the bad luck to meet an armada of **jellyfish** (*tsoúkhtrés*), especially in late summer; they come in various colours and sizes ranging from purple “pizzas” to invisible, minute creatures. Various over-the-counter remedies are sold in resort pharmacies to combat the sting, and baking soda or diluted ammonia also help to lessen the effects. Less vicious but far more common are spiny **sea urchins**, which infest rocky shorelines year-round. If you step on or graze against one, an effective way to remove the spines is with a needle (you can crudely sterilize it with heat from a cigarette lighter) and olive oil. If you don't remove the spines, they'll fester.

Bites and stings

Most of Greece's insects and reptiles are pretty benign, but there are a few that can give a painful bite. Much the most common are **mosquitoes**: you can buy repellent devices and sprays at any minimarket. On beaches, **sandflies** can also give a nasty (and potentially infection-carrying) sting. **Ad ders** (*ohiés*) and **scorpions** (*scorpii*) are found throughout Greece. Both creatures are shy, but take care when climbing over drystone walls where snakes like to sun themselves, and – particularly when camping – don't put hands or feet in places, like shoes, where you haven't looked first.

Finally, watch out for the pine processionary **caterpillar**, which takes its name from the long,

nose-to-tail convoys it. In addition to munching its way through a fair amount of Greece's surviving pine forests, it sports highly irritating hairs, with a venom worse than a scorpion's. If you touch one, or even a tree trunk they've been on recently, you'll know all about it for a week, and the welts may require antihistamine to heal.

If you snap a **wild-fig shoot** while walking, avoid contact with the highly irritant **sap**. The immediate antidote to the active alkaloid is a mild acid – lemon juice or vinegar; left unneutralized, fig “milk” raises welts which take a month to heal.

The media

Greeks are great devourers of newsprint – although few would propose the Greek mass media as a paradigm of objective journalism. Papers are almost uniformly sensational, while state-run TV and radio are often biased in favour of whichever party happens to be in government. Foreign news is widely available, though, in the form of locally printed newspaper editions and TV news channels.

Newspapers and magazines

British newspapers are widely available in resorts and the larger towns at a cost of €2–4 for dailies, or €4–6 for Sunday editions. Many, including the *Times*, *Mail* and *Mirror*, have slimmed-down editions printed in Greece which are available the same day; others are likely to be a day old. In bigger newsagents you'll also be able to find *USA Today* and *Time* as well as the *International New York Times*, which has the bonus of including an abridged English edition of the same day's *Kathimerini*, a respected Greek daily, thus allowing you to keep up with Greek news too. From time to time you'll also find various English-language magazines aimed at visitors to Greece, though none seems to survive for long.

Radio

Greece's airwaves are cluttered with **local and regional stations**, many of which have plenty of music, often traditional. In popular areas many of them have regular news bulletins and tourist information in English. The mountainous nature of much of the country, though, means that any sort

of **radio reception** is tricky: if you're driving around you'll find that you constantly have to retune. The two state-run networks are ER1 (a mix of news, talk and pop music) and ER2 (pop music).

The BBC World Service no longer broadcasts to Europe on short wave, though Voice of America can be picked up in places. Both of these and dozens of others are of course available as internet broadcasts, however, or via satellite TV channels.

Television

Greece's state-funded **TV stations**, ET1, NET and ET3, nowadays lag behind private channels – notably Mega, Star, Alpha, Alter and Skai – in the ratings, though not necessarily in quality of offerings. Most foreign films and serials are broadcast in their original language, with Greek subtitles; there's almost always a choice of English-language movies from about 9pm onwards, although the closer you get to the end of the movie, the more adverts you'll encounter. Although hotels and rooms places frequently have TVs in the room, reception is often dire: even where they advertise satellite, the only English-language channels this usually includes are CNN and BBC World.

Films

Greek **cinemas** show all the regular major release movies, which in the case of English-language titles will almost always be in English with Greek subtitles. In summer, wonderful **open-air screens** operate in all the big towns and many resorts. You may not hear much, thanks to crackly speakers and locals chatting throughout, but watching a movie under the stars on a warm night is simply a great experience.

Festivals

Most of the big Greek popular festivals have a religious basis, so they're observed in accordance with the Orthodox calendar: this means that Easter, for example, can fall as much as three weeks to either side of the Western festival.

On top of the main religious festivals, there are scores of local festivities, or **paniyiria**, celebrating the patron saint of the village church. Some of the more important are listed below; the *paramoni*, or

eve of the festival, is often as significant as the day itself, and many of the events are actually celebrated on the night before. If you show up on the morning of the date given you may find that you have missed most of the music, dancing and drinking. With some 330-odd possible saints' days, though, you're unlikely to travel round for long without stumbling on something. Local tourist offices should be able to fill you in on events in their area.

Easter

Easter is by far the most important festival of the Greek year. It is an excellent time to be in Greece, both for the beautiful and moving religious ceremonies and for the days of feasting and celebration which follow. If you make for a smallish village, you may well find yourself an honorary member for the period of the festival. This is a busy time for Greek tourists as well as international ones, however, so check dates (see opposite) and book ahead.

The first great ceremony takes place on **Good Friday** evening, as the Descent from the Cross is lamented in church. At dusk, the *Epitáfios*, Christ's funeral bier, lavishly decorated by the women of the parish, leaves the sanctuary and is paraded solemnly through the streets. Late **Saturday** evening sees the climax in a majestic Mass to celebrate Christ's triumphant return. At the stroke of midnight, all the lights in each crowded church are extinguished and the congregation plunged into darkness until the priest lights the candles of the nearest worshippers, intoning "*Défte, lévete Fós*" ("Come, take the Light"). The burning candles are carried home through the streets; they are said to bring good fortune to the house if they arrive still burning.

The lighting of the flames is the signal for celebrations to start and the Lent fast to be broken. The traditional greeting, as fireworks and dynamite explode all around you in the street, is *Khristós Anésti* ("Christ is risen"), to which the response is *Alithós Anésti* ("Truly He is risen"). On **Easter Sunday** there's feasting on roast lamb.

The Greek equivalent of **Easter eggs** is hard-boiled eggs (painted red on Holy Thursday), which are baked into twisted, sweet bread-loaves (*tsourékia*) or distributed on Easter Sunday. People rap their eggs against their friends' eggs, and the owner of the last uncracked egg is considered lucky.

Name days

In Greece, everyone gets to celebrate their birthday twice. More important, in fact, than your actual birthday, is the “**Name Day**” of the saint who bears the same name. If your name isn’t covered, no problem – your party is on All Saints’ Day, eight weeks after Easter. If you learn that it’s an acquaintance’s name day, you wish them *Khrónia Pollá* (literally, “many years”).

The big name-day celebrations (Iannis/Ianna on Jan 7 or Yeoryios on April 23, for example) can involve thousands of people. Any church or chapel bearing the saint’s name will mark the event – some smaller chapels will open just for this one day of the year – while if an entire village is named after the saint, you can almost guarantee a festival. To check out when your name day falls, see www.namedays.gr.

Festival calendar

JANUARY

January 1: New Year’s Day (Protokhroniá) In Greece this is the feast day of *Ágios Vassilios* (St Basil). The traditional New Year greeting is “*Kali Khroniá!*”

January 6: Epiphany (Theofanía/Tón Fóton) Marks the baptism of Jesus as well as the end of the twelve days of Christmas. Baptismal fonts, lakes, rivers and seas are blessed, especially harbours (such as Pireás), where the priest traditionally casts a crucifix into the water, and local youths compete for the privilege of recovering it.

FEBRUARY/MARCH

Carnival (Apokriátika) Festivities span three weeks, climaxing during the seventh weekend before Easter. The Ionian islands, especially Kefaloniá, are good for Carnival, as is *Ayiássos* on Lésvos, while the outrageous Goat Dance (see p.444) takes place on *Skýros* in the Sporades.

Clean Monday (Kathari Dheftéra) The day after Carnival ends and the first day of Lent, 48 days before Easter, marks the start of fasting and is traditionally spent picnicking and flying kites.

March 25: Independence Day and the feast of the

Annunciation (Evangelismós) Both a religious and a national holiday, with, on the one hand, military parades and dancing to celebrate the beginning of the revolt against Ottoman rule in 1821, and, on the other, church services to honour the news given to Mary that she was to become the Mother of Christ. There are major festivities on Tinos, *Ydhra* and any locality with a monastery or church named *Evangelistria* or *Evangelismós*.

APRIL/MAY

Easter (Páscha: April 28, 2019; April 19, 2020; May 2, 2021) The most important festival of the Greek year (see opposite). The island of *Ydhra*, with its alleged 360 churches and monasteries, is the prime Easter resort; other famous Easter celebrations are held at Corfu, *Pyrgi* on Hios, *Olympos* on *Káirpathos* and St John’s monastery on *Pátmos*, where on Holy Thursday the abbot washes the feet of twelve monks in the village square, in imitation of Christ doing the same for his disciples. Good Friday and Easter Monday are also public holidays.

April 23: The feast of St George (Ágios Yeóryios) St George, the patron saint of shepherds, is honoured with big rural celebrations and much feasting and dancing at associated shrines and towns. At the mountain town of *Así Goniá* in Crete, this is a major event. If it falls during Lent, festivities are postponed until the Monday after Easter.

MAY/JUNE

May 1: May Day (Protomayiá) The great urban holiday when townspeople traditionally make for the countryside to picnic and fly kites, returning with bunches of wild flowers. Wreaths are hung on their doorways or balconies until they are burnt in bonfires on St John’s Eve (June 23). There are also large demonstrations by the Left for Labour Day.

May 21: Feast of St Constantine and St Helena (Ágios Konstandinos & Ayia Eléni) Constantine, as emperor, championed Christianity in the Byzantine Empire; St Helena was his mother. It’s a widely celebrated name day for two of the more popular Christian names in Greece.

May 20–27: Battle of Crete The anniversary of one of the major World War II battles is celebrated in the *Haniá* province of Crete with veterans’ ceremonies, sporting events and folk dancing.

Whit Monday (Áyio Pnévma) Fifty days after Easter, sees services to commemorate the descent of the Holy Spirit to the assembled disciples.

CULTURAL FESTIVALS

Festivals of music, dance and theatre take place in summer throughout the islands, many at atmospheric outdoor venues. Some are unashamedly aimed at drawing tourists, others more seriously artistic. Some of the more durable include:

Domus Festival, Náxos July–early Sept www.naxosfestival.com

Festival of the Aegean, Sýros July www.festivaloftheaegean.com

Ippokrateia Festival, Kos July

Iraklio Festival, Crete July–Aug

Lefkádha Arts and Folklore festivals last week of Aug www.liff.gr

Philippi Festival, Thássos July–Aug www.philippifestival.gr

Réthymno Cretan Diet Festival July, www.cretandietfestival.gr

Santoirni Music Festival Sept

Many young Greeks take advantage of the long weekend, marking the start of summer, to head for the islands.

June 29 & 30: SS Peter and Paul (Áyios Pétros & Áyios Pávlos)

The joint feast of two of the more widely celebrated name days is on June 29. Celebrations often run together with those for the Holy Apostles (Áyii Apóstoli), the following day.

JULY

July 17: Feast of St Margaret (Ayía Marína) A big event in rural areas, as she's an important protector of crops. Ayía Marína village on Kássos will be en fête, as will countless other similarly named towns and villages.

July 20: Feast of the Prophet Elijah (Profitis Ilías) Widely celebrated at the countless hilltop shrines of Profitis Ilías.

July 26: St Paraskeví (Ayía Paraskeví) Celebrated in parishes or villages bearing that name.

AUGUST

August 6: Transfiguration of the Saviour (Metamórfosis tou Sotíros) Another excuse for celebrations, particularly at Khristós Ráhon village on Ikaría, and at Plátanos on Léros. On Háiki the date is marked by messy food fights with flour, eggs and squid ink.

August 15: Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Apokimisis tís Panayías) This is the day when people traditionally return to their home village, and the heart of the holiday season, so in many places there will be no accommodation available on any terms. Even some Greeks will resort to sleeping in the streets at the great pilgrimage to Tínos; also major festivities at Páros, at Ayiássos on Lésvos, and at Ólymbos on Kárpáthos.

August 29: Beheading of John the Baptist (Apokefálistis tou Prodrómu) Popular pilgrimages and celebrations at Vrykoúnda on Kárpáthos. On Crete a massive name-day pilgrimage treks to the church of Áyios Ioánnis on the Rodhópu peninsula.

SEPTEMBER

September 8: Birth of the Virgin Mary (Yénnisis tís Panayías) Sees special services in churches dedicated to the event, and a double cause for rejoicing on Spétses where they also celebrate the anniversary of the battle of the straits of Spétses. Elsewhere, there's a pilgrimage of childless women to the monastery at Tsambíka, Rhodes.

September 14: Exaltation of the Cross (Ipsosis tou Stavrou) A last major summer festival, keenly observed on Háiki.

September 24: Feast of St John the Divine (Áyios Ioánnis Theológos) Observed on Níssyros and Pátmos, where at the saint's monastery there are solemn, beautiful liturgies the night before and early in the morning.

OCTOBER

October 26: Feast of St Demetrios (Áyios Dhimitrios) Another popular name day; in rural areas the new wine is traditionally broached on this day, a good excuse for general inebriation.

October 28: Óhi Day A national holiday with parades, folk dancing and speeches to commemorate prime minister Metaxas' one-word reply to Mussolini's 1940 ultimatum: "Óhi!" ("No!").

NOVEMBER

November 7–9: Arkádhí The anniversary of the 1866 explosion at Arkádhí monastery in Crete is marked by an enormous gathering at the island's most revered shrine.

November 8: Feast of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel (Miháil & Gavriíl, or tón Taxiárhon) Marked by rites at the numerous churches named after them, particularly at the rural monastery of Taxiárhis on Sými, and the big monastery of Mandamádhos, Lésvos.

DECEMBER

December 6: Feast of St Nicholas (Áyios Nikólaos) The patron saint of seafarers, who has many chapels dedicated to him.

December 25 & 26: Christmas (Khristoúyenna) If less all-encompassing than Greek Easter, Christmas is still an important religious feast, and one that increasingly comes with all the usual commercial trappings.

December 31: New Year's Eve (Paramoni Prothroniá) As on the other twelve days of Christmas, a few children still go door-to-door singing traditional carols, receiving money in return. Adults tend to sit around playing cards, often for money. A special baked loaf, the *vassilópitta*, in which a coin is concealed to bring its finder good luck throughout the year, is cut at midnight.

Sports and outdoor pursuits

The Greek seashore offers endless scope for watersports, from waterskiing and parasailing to yachting and windsurfing. On land, the greatest attraction lies in hiking; often the smaller, less developed islands are better for this than the larger ones crisscrossed by roads. As for spectator sports, the twin Greek obsessions are football (soccer) and basketball, with volleyball a close third. You'll see youths playing impromptu games everywhere, but as of the 2017–18 season only Corfu and Crete boasted top-flight teams on the islands.

Watersports

Windsurfing and kitesurfing are very popular around Greece: the islands' bays and coves are ideal for beginners, with a few spectacularly windy spots for experts (see box opposite). Board rental rates are reasonable and instruction is generally also available. **Waterski** boats spend most of their time towing people around on bananas or other inflatables, though usually you can waterski or wakeboard as well, while **parasailing** (*parapénti*) is also on offer

SIX OF THE BEST WINDSURFING SPOTS

Kórthi, Ándros. See p.137
Kalafáti, Mýkonos. See p.147
Kourémenos, eastern Crete. See p.231
Prassoníssi, Rhodes. See p.281
Kokkári, Sámos. See p.364
Vassilikí, Lefkáda. See p.488

at all the big resorts. **Jet skis** can be rented in many resorts for a fifteen-minute burst of fuel-guzzling thrills, while **sea kayaks** can also be rented on many islands, with specialist companies offering both sea kayaking and **wild swimming** holidays (see p.29)

A combination of steady winds, appealing seascapes and numerous natural harbours has long made the islands a tremendous place for **sailing**. All sorts of bareboat and flotilla yacht trips are on offer (see p.29), while dinghies, small cats and motorboats can be rented at many resorts. For yachting, spring and autumn are the most pleasant seasons; *meltémi* winds can make for nauseous sailing in July and August when you'll also find far higher prices and crowded moorings. The Cyclades suffer particularly badly from the *meltémi*, and are also relatively short on facilities: better choices are to explore the Sporades from Skiáthos; to set out from Athens for the Argo-Saronic islands; or to sail around Corfu and the Ionians, though here winds can be very light.

Because of the potential for pilfering submerged antiquities, **scuba diving** is restricted, though relaxation of the controls has led to a proliferation of dive centres across the Dodecanese, Ionians, Cyclades and Crete. There's not a huge amount of aquatic life surviving around Greece's over-fished shores, but you do get wonderfully clear water, while the rocky coast offers plenty of caves and hidden nooks to explore.

Walking and cycling

If you have the time and stamina, **walking** is probably the single best way to see the quieter islands. The bigger islands offer greater choice, especially the well-organized Corfu Trail (see p.479), mountainous Évia and above all Crete, with its famous gorge descents. This guide includes some of the more accessible hikes, from gentle strolls to long-distance mountain paths; there are also plenty of companies offering walking holidays (see p.28). Local **hiking guidebooks** are available in the more

popular spots, though detailed **maps** (see p.50) may be better bought in advance.

Cycling is less popular with Greeks, but in an increasing number of resorts you can hire **bikes**, and many of the rental places lead organized rides, which vary from easy explorations of the countryside to serious rides up proper mountains. Again, there are specialist companies offering cycling breaks (see p.28). Summer heat can be fierce, but spring and autumn offer great riding and walking conditions.

Culture and etiquette

In many ways, Greece is a thoroughly integrated European country, and behaviour and social mores differ little from what you may be used to at home. Dig a little deeper, however, or travel to more remote, less touristed areas, and you'll find that traditional Greek ways survive to a gratifying degree. It's easy to accidentally give offence – but equally easy to avoid doing so by following a few simple tips, and to upgrade your status from that of tourist to xénos, a word that means both stranger and guest.

In general, Greeks are exceptionally friendly and curious, to an extent that can seem intrusive, certainly to a reserved Brit. Don't be surprised at being asked personal questions, even on short acquaintance, or having your **personal space** invaded. On the other hand, you're also likely to be invited to people's houses, often to meet a large extended family. Should you get such an invitation, you are not expected to be punctual – thirty minutes late is normal – and you should bring a small **gift**, usually flowers, or cakes from the local cake shop. If you're invited out to dinner, you can offer to **pay**, but it's very unlikely you'll be allowed

SHHHH! SIESTA TIME

The hours **between 3 and 5pm**, the midday **siesta** (*mikró ýpno*), are sacrosanct – it's not acceptable to visit people, make phone calls to strangers or cause any sort of loud noise (especially with motorcycles) at this time. Quiet is also legally mandated **between midnight and 8am** in residential areas.

to do so, and too much insistence could be construed as rude.

Dress codes and cultural hints

Though **dress codes** on the beach are entirely informal, they're much less so away from the sea; most Greeks will dress up to go out, and not doing so is considered slovenly at the least. There are quite a number of **nudist** beaches in remote spots, with plenty of locals enjoying them, but on family beaches, or those close to town or near a church (of which there are many along the Greek coast), even toplessness is often frowned on. Most monasteries and to a lesser extent churches impose a fairly strict **dress code** for visitors: no shorts, with women expected to cover their arms and wear skirts (though most Greek women visitors will be in trousers); the necessary wraps are often provided on the spot.

Two pieces of **body language** that can cause unintentional offence are hand gestures; don't hold your hand up, palm out, to anybody, and don't make an OK sign by forming a circle with your thumb and forefinger – both are extremely rude. Nodding and shaking your head for yes and no are also unlikely to be understood; Greeks use a slight forward inclination of the head for yes, a more vigorous backward nod for no.

Although **no-smoking zones** in restaurants, bars or public offices are starting to be respected, Greeks are still among the heaviest smokers in Europe, and in outdoor spaces at least you're likely to be surrounded by smokers.

Bargaining and tipping

Most shops have fixed prices, so **bargaining** isn't a regular feature of tourist life. It is worth negotiating over rooms – especially off season – or for vehicle rental, especially for longer periods, but it's best not to be aggressive about it; ask if they have a cheaper room, for example, rather than demanding a lower price. **Tipping** is not essential anywhere, though taxi drivers generally expect it from tourists and most service staff are very poorly paid. Restaurant bills incorporate a service charge; if you want to tip, rounding up the bill is usually sufficient.

Women and lone travellers

Thousands of **women** travel independently around the islands without being harassed or feeling intimidated. With the westernization of relationships between unmarried Greek men and women,

almost all of the traditional Mediterranean macho impetus for trying one's luck with foreign girls has faded. Foreign women are more at risk of **sexual assault** at certain notorious resorts (including Kávos in Corfu, Laganás in Zákynthos and Faliráki in Rhodes) by northern European men than by ill-intentioned locals. It is sensible not to bar-crawl alone or to accept late-night rides from strangers (**hitching** at any time is not advisable for lone female travellers). In more remote areas intensely traditional villagers may wonder why women travelling alone are unaccompanied, and may not welcome their presence in exclusively male *kafenía*. Travelling with a man, you're more likely to be treated as a *xéni*.

Lone men need to be wary of being invited into bars in the largest island ports; these bars are invariably staffed with hostesses (who may also be prostitutes) persuading you to treat them to drinks. At the end of the night you'll be landed with an outrageous bill, some of which goes towards the hostess's commission; physical threats are brought to bear on reluctant payers.

Travel essentials

Costs

The **cost of living** in Greece has increased astronomically since it joined the EU, particularly after the adoption of the euro and further increases in the VAT rate in 2011. Prices in shops and cafés now

DISCOUNTS

Full-time students are eligible for the **International Student ID Card** (ISIC; www.isiccard.com), which entitles the bearer to cut-price transport and discounts at museums, theatres and other attractions, though often not accepted as valid proof of age. If you're not a student but aged under 26, you can qualify for the **International Youth Travel Card**, which provides similar benefits to the ISIC. Teachers qualify for the **International Teacher Identity Card** (ITIC), offering insurance benefits but limited travel discounts.

Seniors are entitled to a discount on bus passes in the major cities; Olympic Airways also offer discounts on full fares for domestic flights. Proof of age is necessary.

AVERAGE MONTHLY TEMPERATURES AND RAINFALL

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
ATHENS												
Maximum °C/F	13/55	14/57	16/61	20/68	25/77	30/86	33/91	33/91	29/84	24/75	19/66	15/59
Minimum °C/F	6/43	7/45	8/46	11/52	16/61	20/68	23/73	23/73	19/66	15/59	12/54	8/46
Rainfall mm	62	37	37	23	23	14	6	7	7	51	56	71
CYCLADES (NÁXOS)												
Maximum °C/F	15/59	15/59	16/62	20/68	23/73	26/79	27/81	28/82	26/79	24/75	20/68	17/63
Minimum °C/F	10/50	10/50	11/52	13/55	16/62	20/68	22/72	22/72	20/68	18/64	15/59	12/54
Rainfall mm	91	73	69	19	12	11	2	1	11	45	48	93
CRETE (IRÁKLIO)												
Maximum °C/F	16/62	16/62	17/63	20/68	23/73	27/81	29/84	29/84	27/81	24/75	21/70	18/64
Minimum °C/F	9/48	9/48	10/50	12/54	15/59	19/66	22/72	22/72	19/66	17/63	14/57	11/52
Rainfall mm	95	46	43	26	13	3	1	1	11	64	71	79
DODECANESE (RHODES)												
Maximum °C/F	15/59	16/62	17/63	21/70	25/77	30/86	32/90	33/91	29/84	25/77	21/70	17/63
Minimum °C/F	7/45	8/46	9/48	12/54	15/59	19/66	21/70	22/72	19/66	15/59	12/54	9/48
Rainfall mm	201	101	92	23	21	1	1	0	15	75	114	205
IONIANS (CORFU)												
Maximum °C/F	14/57	15/59	16/62	19/66	23/73	28/82	31/88	32/91	28/82	23/73	19/66	16/61
Minimum °C/F	6/43	6/43	8/46	10/50	13/55	17/63	19/66	19/66	17/63	14/57	11/52	8/46
Rainfall mm	196	132	100	70	41	14	4	20	95	184	237	259

match or exceed those of many other EU member countries (including the UK). However, outside the chintzier resorts, travel remains affordable, with the aggregate cost of restaurant meals, short-term accommodation (see p.33) and public transport falling somewhere in between that of cheaper Spain or France and pricier Italy.

Prices depend on where and when you go. Island capitals, as well as the trendier tourist resorts and small islands (such as Sými, Íydhra, Mýkonos, Paxi and Pátmos), are more expensive and costs everywhere increase sharply during July–August and during other holiday periods such as Easter.

On most islands a daily per-person **budget** of €50/£40/US\$64 will get you basic accommodation and meals, plus a short ferry or bus ride, as one of a couple. Camping would cut costs marginally. On €100/£80/US\$128 a day you could be living quite well, plus sharing the cost of renting a large motorbike or small car. Note that **accommodation** costs (see p.33) vary greatly over the seasons.

A basic taverna **meal** with bulk wine or a beer costs around €12–20 per person. Add a better bottle of wine, pricier fish or fancier decor and it could be up to €20–30 a head; you'll rarely pay more than that, unless you are tricked into buying overpriced fish (see p.37). Even in the most

developed resorts, with inflated “international” menus, there is often a basic but decent taverna where the locals eat.

Crime and personal safety

Greece is one of Europe's safest countries, with a **low crime rate** and a deserved reputation for honesty. Most of the time if you leave a bag or wallet at a café, you'll probably find it scrupulously looked after, pending your return. Although muggings and other violent crimes are still very rare outside Athens, petty theft has been on the rise with the economic crisis. With this in mind, it's best to lock rooms and cars securely, and to keep your valuables hidden. **Civil unrest**, in the form of strikes and demonstrations, is also on the increase, but while this might inconvenience you, you'd be very unlucky to get caught up in any trouble as a visitor.

Though the chances are you'll never meet a member of the national **police force**, the Elliniki Astynomia, Greek cops expect respect, and many have little regard for foreigners. If you do need to go to the police, always try to do so through the **Tourist Police** (☎171), who should speak English and are used to dealing with visitors. You are officially required to carry suitable ID on you at all

times, either a passport or a driving licence, though in reality nobody would expect you to have such valuable documents with you at the beach, for example.

The most common causes of a brush with the law are beach nudity, camping outside authorized sites, **public inebriation** or lewd behaviour. In 2009 a large British stag group dressed as nuns was arrested in Mália and held for several days, having managed to combine extreme drunkenness with a lack of respect for the church. Also avoid taking **photos in forbidden areas** such as airports (see p.52).

Drug offences are treated as major crimes – the maximum penalty for “causing the use of drugs by someone under 18”, for example, is life imprisonment and an astronomical fine. Foreigners caught in possession of even small amounts of marijuana get long jail sentences if there’s evidence that they’ve been supplying others.

Electricity

Voltage is 220 volts AC. Standard European two-pin plugs are used; **adaptors** should be purchased beforehand in the UK, as they can be difficult to find locally; standard 5-, 6- or 7.5-amp models permit operation of a hair dryer or travel iron. Unless they’re dual voltage, North American appliances will require both a step-down transformer and a plug adaptor (the latter easy to find in Greece).

Entrance fees

All the major **ancient sites**, like most **museums**, charge **entrance fees** ranging from €2 to €12, with an average fee of around €4. From November to March, entrance to all state-run sites and museums is **half price** (we have quoted the full summer price throughout the Guide) and **free** on Sundays and public holidays.

Entry requirements

UK and all other EU nationals need only a valid **passport**, which remains unstamped, to enter Greece and can stay as long as they like (see opposite), though the rules post-Brexit could change for Brits from 2019. US, Australian, New Zealand, Canadian and most non-EU Europeans receive mandatory entry and exit stamps in their passports and can stay, as tourists, for ninety days (cumulative) in any six-month period. Such nationals arriving by flight or boat from another EU

state party to the Schengen Agreement may not be stamped in routinely at minor Greek ports, so make sure this is done in order to avoid unpleasantness on exit. Your passport must be valid for three months after your arrival date.

Unless of Greek descent, visitors from **non-EU** countries are currently not, in practice, being given extensions to tourist visas. You must leave not just Greece but the entire Schengen Group and stay out until the maximum 90-days-in-180 rule, as set forth above, is satisfied. If you **overstay** your time and then leave under your own power – ie are not deported – you’ll be hit with a huge fine upon departure, and possibly be banned from re-entering for a lengthy period of time; no excuses will be entertained except (just maybe) a doctor’s certificate stating you were immobilized in hospital. It cannot be overemphasized just how exigent Greek immigration officials have become on this issue.

Greek embassies abroad

Australia & New Zealand 9 Turrana St, Yarralumla, Canberra, ACT 2600 ☎ 02 6271 0100, 🌐 mfa.gr/canberra.

Canada 80 Maclaren St, Ottawa, ON K2P 0K6 ☎ 613 238 6271, 🌐 mfa.gr/canada/en/the-embassy.

Ireland 1 Upper Pembroke St, Dublin 2 ☎ 01 676 7254, 🌐 mfa.gr/dublin.

South Africa 323 North Village Lane, Hilside Lynwood 0081 ☎ 012 348 2352, 🌐 mfa.gr/pretoria.

UK 1A Holland Park, London W11 3TP ☎ 020 7229 3850, 🌐 mfa.gr/london.

USA 2217 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington, DC 20008 ☎ 202 939 1300, 🌐 mfa.gr/washington.

LGBT+ travellers

Greece is deeply ambivalent about **homosexuality**: ghettoized as “to be expected” in the arts, theatre and music scenes but apt to be closeted elsewhere. “Out” gay Greeks are rare, and “out” local lesbians rarer still; foreign same-sex couples will be regarded on most islands with some bemusement but accorded the same standard courtesy as foreigners – as long as they refrain from public displays of affection, taboo in rural areas. There is a sizeable **gay community** in Athens, plus a fairly obvious scene at resorts like Ýdhra, Rhodes and Mýkonos. Skála Eressou on Lésvos, the birthplace of Sappho, is (appropriately) an international mecca for lesbians. Even in Athens, however, most gay nightlife is underground (often literally so in the siting of clubs), with no visible signage for nondiscript premises.

ROUGH GUIDES TRAVEL INSURANCE

Rough Guides has teamed up with WorldNomads.com to offer great **travel insurance** deals. Policies are available to residents of over 150 countries, with cover for a wide range of adventure sports, 24hr emergency assistance, high levels of medical and evacuation cover and a stream of travel safety information. Roughguides.com users can take advantage of their policies online 24/7, from anywhere in the world – even if you're already travelling. And since plans often change when you're on the road, you can extend your policy and even claim online. Roughguides.com users who buy travel insurance with WorldNomads.com can also leave a positive footprint and donate to a community development project. For more information go to [roughguides.com/travel-insurance](https://www.roughguides.com/travel-insurance).

Insurance

Despite the EU healthcare privileges that currently apply in Greece (see p.40), you should consider taking out an **insurance policy** before travelling, to cover against theft, loss, illness or injury. Before paying for a whole new policy, however, it's worth checking whether you are already covered: some home insurance policies may cover your possessions when overseas, and many private medical schemes (such as BUPA or WPA in the UK) offer coverage extensions for abroad. **Students** will often find that their student health coverage extends during the vacations.

Make any claim as soon as possible. If you have medical treatment, keep all receipts for medicines and treatment. If you have anything stolen or lost, you must obtain an **official statement** from the police or the airline which lost your bags – with numerous claims being fraudulent, most insurers won't even consider one unless you have a police report.

Internet

With the proliferation of portable wi-fi devices, **internet cafés** have all but disappeared except in the larger island capitals. Nearly all accommodations, most cafés (but not old-style *kafenía*) and an increasing number of tavernas offer free wi-fi access to patrons. An increasing number of municipalities are introducing free wi-fi hotspots.

Laundry

Laundries or *Plindíria*, as they're known in Greek, are available in the main resort towns; sometimes an attended service wash is available for little or no extra charge over the basic cost of €8–10 per wash and dry. Self-catering villas will usually be furnished with a drying line and a selection of plastic wash-tubs or a bucket. Most larger hotels have laundry services, but charges are steep.

Living in Greece

EU (and EEA) nationals are allowed to stay indefinitely in any EU state, but to avoid any problems – eg, in setting up a bank account – you should, after the third month of stay, get a **certificate of registration** (*vevéosi engrafís*). In 2019, UK nationals should check the official situation, which may change post-Brexit. Residence/work permits for **non-EU/non-EEA nationals** can only be obtained on application to a Greek embassy or consulate outside of Greece; you have a much better chance of securing one if you are married to a Greek, are of Greek background by birth or have permanent-resident status in another EU state.

As for **work**, non-EU nationals of Greek descent and EU/EEA native speakers of English (ie Brits and Irish) have a much better chance than anyone else. **Teaching English at a private language school** (*frontistírio*) is not as well paid as it used to be and is almost impossible to get into these days without a bona fide TEFL certificate. Again, it is uncertain how Brexit will affect the situation.

Many people find **tourism-related work**, especially on the islands most dominated by foreign visitors, April and May being the best time to look around. This is often as a rep for a package company, although they recruit the majority of staff from the home country; all you need is EU nationality and the appropriate language, though knowledge of Greek is a big plus. Jobs in bars or restaurants are a lot easier for women to come by than men. Another option if you have the requisite skills is to work for a **windsurfing school** or **scuba-diving** operation.

Mail

Post offices are open Monday to Friday from 7.30am to 2pm, though certain main branches are also open evenings and Saturday mornings. **Airmail letters** take 3–7 days to reach the rest of

Europe, 5–12 days to North America, a little longer for Australia and New Zealand. Postal rates for all postcards are 80c; letters up to 20g cost 85c within the EU and 90c to all other overseas destinations. For a modest fee (about €3) you can shave a day or two off delivery time to any destination by using the **express service** (*katepígonda*). **Registered** (*systiméno*) delivery is also available for a similar amount but is slow unless coupled with express service. Stamps (*grammatósima*) are widely available at newsagents and other tourist shops, often for a small surcharge.

Parcels should (and often can) only be handled in the island capitals. For non-EU/EEA destinations, always present your box open for inspection, and come prepared with tape and scissors.

Ordinary **post boxes** are bright yellow, express boxes dark red, but it's best to use those adjacent to an actual post office, since days may pass between collections at boxes elsewhere.

Maps

The most reliable **general touring maps** of Greece are those published by Athens-based Anavasi (📍anavasi.gr), Road Editions (📍travelbookstore.gr) and Orama (📍oramaeditions.gr). Anavasi and Road Editions products are widely available in Greece at selected bookshops, as well as at petrol stations and general tourist shops throughout the islands. In Britain they are found at Stanfords (📞020 7836 1321, 📍stanfords.co.uk) and the Hellenic Book Service (📞020 7267 9499, 📍hellenicbookservice.com); in the US, they're sold through Omni Resources (📞910 227 8300, 📍omnimap.com).

Hiking/topographical maps are gradually improving in quality and availability. Anavasi publishes a series covering the White Mountains and Psiloritis on Crete and Mt Dhýrifs on Évvia.

Money

Greece's currency is the **euro** (€). Up-to-date **exchange rates** can be found on 📍xe.com. Euro notes exist in denominations of 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200 and 500 euros, and coins in denominations of 1, 2, 5, 10, 20 and 50 cents and 1 and 2 euros. Avoid getting stuck with **counterfeit euro notes** (€100 and €200 ones abound). The best tests are done by the naked eye: genuine notes all have a hologram strip or (if over €50) patch at one end, there's a watermark at the other, plus a security thread embedded in the middle. If you end up with a fake note, you'll have no recourse to a refund. Note that shopkeepers do not

bother much with shortfalls of 10 cents or less, whether in their favour (especially) or yours.

Banks and exchange

Greek **banks** normally open Monday to Thursday 8.30am–2.30pm and Friday 8.30am–2pm. Always take your passport with you as proof of identity and expect long queues. Large hotels and some travel agencies also provide a **foreign cash exchange service**, though with hefty commissions, as do a number of authorized brokers in Athens and other major tourist centres. When changing small amounts, choose bureaux that charge a flat percentage commission (usually 1 percent) rather than a high minimum. There is a small number of 24-hour **automatic foreign-note-changing machines**, but a high minimum commission tends to be deducted. There is no need to **purchase euros** beforehand unless you're arriving at some ungodly hour to one of the remoter frontier posts.

ATMs and debit/credit cards

Debit cards have become the most common means of accessing funds while travelling, by withdrawing money from the vast network of Greek **ATMs**. Larger airports have at least one ATM in the arrivals hall and any town or island with a population larger than a few thousand (or substantial tourist traffic) also has them. Most accept Visa, MasterCard, Visa Electron, Plus and Cirrus cards; American Express holders are restricted to the ATMs of Alpha and National Bank. There is usually a charge of 2.25 percent on the sterling/dollar transaction value, plus a commission fee of a similar amount. Using **credit cards** at an ATM costs roughly the same; however, inflated interest accrues from the moment of use. When using a card, if you are given the option for the transaction to be calculated in euros or your home currency, always choose euros to avoid disadvantageous rates.

Major credit cards are not usually accepted by cheaper tavernas or hotels but they can be essential for renting cars. Major travel agents may also accept them, though a **three-percent surcharge** is often levied on the purchase of ferry tickets.

Opening hours and public holidays

It's difficult to generalize about Greek **opening hours**, which are notoriously erratic. Most shops open 8.30/9am and close for a long break at

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS**January 1** New Year's Day.**January 6** Epiphany.**February/March** Clean Monday (*Kathari Dheftéra*), 7 weeks before Easter.**March 25** Independence Day.**April/May** Good Friday and Easter Monday (see p.43).**May 1** May Day.**May/June** Whit Monday, 7 weeks after Easter.**August 15** Assumption of the Virgin Mary.**October 28** Óhi Day (see p.44).**December 25/26:** Christmas Day/Boxing Day.

2/2.30pm. Most places, except banks, reopen around 5.30/6pm for three hours or so, at least on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. Tourist areas tend to adopt a more northern European timetable, with supermarkets and travel agencies, as well as the most important archeological sites and museums, more likely to stay open throughout the day. If you find yourself needing to tackle Greek bureaucracy, you can't count on getting anything essential done except from Monday to Friday, between 9.30am and 1pm.

As far as possible, times are quoted in the text for tourist sites but these change with exasperating frequency, especially since the economic crisis. Both winter and summer hours are quoted throughout the guide, but to avoid disappointment, either phone ahead, check on the Greek Ministry of Culture website (www.odysseus.culture.gr), or time your visit during the core hours of 9am–2pm. **Monasteries** are generally open from approximately 9am to 1pm and 5 to 8pm (3.30–6.30pm in winter) for limited visits. Again, the opening times given for **restaurants, cafés** and **bars** can also be very flexible.

Phones

Three **mobile phone networks** operate in Greece: Vodafone-Panafon, Cosmote and Q-Telecom/WIND. **Coverage** is good, though there are a few "dead" zones on the most mountainous islands or really remote islets. There are no **roaming charges** within the EU, so EU nationals pay the same price for calls, texts and data to numbers in their home country as they would at home; UK nationals should check the situation post-Brexit in 2019. For calling Greek numbers, however, you can save money by buying a **pay-as-you-go** SIM card (€15–20) from any of the mobile phone outlets. Top-up cards – starting from €8–10 – are available

PHONE CODES AND NUMBERS

All Greek phone numbers require dialling of all ten digits, including the area code. Land lines begin with 2; mobiles begin with 6. All land-line exchanges are digital, and you should have few problems reaching any number from either overseas or within Greece. Mobile phone users are well looked after, with a signal even in the Athens metro.

PHONING GREECE FROM ABROAD

Dial 0030 + the full number

PHONING ABROAD FROM GREECE

Dial the country code (below) + area code (minus any initial 0) + number

Australia	0061	UK	0044
New Zealand	0064	Ireland	00353
Canada	001	USA	001
South Africa	0027		

GREEK PHONE PREFIXES

Local call rate	0801	Toll-free/Freefone	0800
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USEFUL GREEK TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Ambulance	166	Police/Emergency	100
Fire brigade, urban	199	Speaking clock	141
Forest fire reporting	191	Tourist police	171 (Athens); 210 171 (elsewhere)
Operator	132 (Domestic)		
Operator	139 (International)		

at all *períptera* (kiosks). North American users can only use tri-band phones in Greece.

Land lines and public phones are run by OTE who provide phonecards (*tilekártes*), available in denominations starting at €4, from kiosks and newsagents. If you plan on making lots of international calls, you'll want a **calling card**, all of which involve calling a free access number from either certain phone boxes or a fixed line (not a mobile) and then entering a twelve-digit code. OTE has its own scheme, but competitors generally prove cheaper. Avoid making calls direct **from hotel rooms**, as a large surcharge will be applied, though you will not be charged to access a free calling-card number.

Photography

You can feel free to snap away pretty much anywhere in Greece, although some churches display "No photography" signs, and museums and archeological sites may require permits at least for professional photographers. The main exception is around **airports** or **military installations** (usually clearly indicated with a "No pictures" sign). The ordeal of twelve British plane-spotters who processed slowly through Greek jails and courts in 2001–2 on espionage charges should be ample deterrent.

Time

Standard Greek time is two hours ahead of GMT. Along with the rest of Europe, the clocks move forward one hour onto **summer time** between the last Sunday in March and the last Sunday in October. For North America, the difference is usually seven hours for Eastern Standard Time, ten hours for Pacific Standard Time.

Toilets

Public toilets are usually in parks or squares, often subterranean; otherwise try a bus station. Except in tourist areas, public toilets tend to be filthy – it's best to use those in restaurants and bars. Remember that throughout Greece, you drop paper in the adjacent **wastebins**, not the toilet bowl.

Tourist information

The **National Tourist Organization of Greece** (Ellinikós Organismós Tourismou, or EOT; Visit

Greece abroad, visitgreece.gr) maintains offices in several European capitals and major cities around the world. It publishes an array of free, glossy, regional pamphlets, invariably several years out of date, fine for getting a picture of where you want to go, though low on useful facts.

Within Greece, a lack of funding has led to the closure of all public EOT offices outside Athens and Rhodes, although administrative branches still exist. You can, however, often get information from **municipally run tourist offices**, including advice on local attractions and public transportation, as well as informal advice. In the absence of any of these, you can visit the **Tourist Police**, essentially a division (often just a single room) of the local police. They can sometimes provide you with lists of rooms to let, which they regulate, but they're really the place to go if you have a **serious complaint** about a taxi, or an accommodation or eating establishment.

Greek national tourist offices abroad

UK & Ireland 4 Great Portland St, London W1W 8QJ ☎ 020 7495 9300, ✉ info@gnto.co.uk.

USA 800 3rd Ave, New York, NY 10022 ☎ 212 421 5777, ✉ info@greektourism.com.

Travellers with disabilities

In general **disabled** people are not well catered for in Greece though, as relevant EU-wide legislation is implemented, things are gradually improving. Wheelchair ramps and beeps for the sight-impaired are rare at pedestrian crossings, and outside Athens few buses have disabled access. Only Athens airport, its metro and airline staff in general are wheelchair-friendly. Ancient monuments, one of the country's main attractions, are usually inaccessible or hazardous for anyone with impaired mobility.

The National Tourist Organization of Greece (see above) can help; they also publish a useful questionnaire that you can send to hotels or self-catering accommodation. Before purchasing **travel insurance**, ensure that pre-existing medical conditions are not excluded. A **medical certificate** of your fitness to travel is also extremely useful; some airlines or insurance companies may insist on it.

Travelling with children

Children are worshipped and indulged in Greece, and present few problems when travelling. They are not segregated from adults at meal times, and early on in life are inducted into the typical late-night

routine – kids at tavernas are expected to eat (and up to their capabilities, talk) like adults. Outside of certain all-inclusive resorts with children's programmes, however, there are very few amusements specifically for them – certainly nothing like Disney World Paris. Water parks, tourist sites and other places of interest that are particularly child-friendly are noted throughout the guide.

Luxury hotels are more likely to offer some kind of **babysitting** or **crèche service**. All the same basic

baby products that you can find at home are available on the islands, though some may be more expensive, so it can pay to load up on nappies, powders and creams before leaving home.

Most domestic ferry-boat companies and airlines offer child **discounts**, ranging from fifty to one hundred percent depending on their age; hotels and rooms won't charge extra for infants, and levy a modest supplement for "third" beds which the child occupies by him/herself.



Athens and the mainland ports

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Athens and the mainland ports

Although a growing number of islands have their own airports served by direct international flights, the majority still have to be reached by ferry. In this chapter you'll find survival guides to all the significant ports on the Greek mainland; how to get there, where to find the ferries, and suggestions for places to stay and eat if you need to do so.

Most commonly, you'll find yourself travelling to or from the islands via **Athens**, and here you may well want to break your journey to take in the exceptional array of ancient sites and museums, while sampling some of the country's best food and nightlife. A two or three night stopover will allow you to take in the Acropolis and the other major sites and museums, and get a feel for a few of the city's neighbourhoods. Even in a single day, a morning arrival would give you time for a look at the Acropolis and Pláka before heading down to the port of **Pireás** (Piraeus) to catch an overnight ferry.

Note that **ferry timetables** are seasonal and complicated, with the same ferry taking different routes on different days and journey times that vary wildly, so take the schedules listed in this chapter (accurate at the time of research) as a rough guide.

Athens and Pireás

ATHENS is home to more than a third of Greece's population and, while history looms large, the twenty-first-century capital is also a vibrant, hectic place, buzzing with life into the early hours of its warm summer nights. While on first acquaintance it may not be a beautiful city, new roads, rail and Metro, along with extensive pedestrianization in the centre, have transformed Athens' aesthetics over recent years. The clamorous port at **Pireás** is quickly and easily reached from the centre or airport.

The vestiges of the ancient Classical Greek city, most famously represented by the **Parthenon** and other remains that top the **Acropolis**, are an inevitable focus, along with the magnificent **National Archeological Museum**. Even on a brief stopover, though, you should also take the time to explore some of the city's **neighbourhoods**. **Eating out** is great, with establishments ranging from traditional tavernas to gourmet restaurants. In summer, much of the action takes place outdoors, from dining on the street or clubbing on the beach, to **open-air cinema**, **concerts** and **classical drama**. There's a diverse **shopping** scene, too, ranging from colourful bazaars and lively street markets to chic suburban malls. And with good-value, extensive public transportation allied to inexpensive taxis, you'll have no difficulty getting around.

Acropolis

The rock of the **Acropolis** dominates almost every view of Athens. Easily defensible and with plentiful water, its initial attractions are obvious. Even now, with no function apart from tourism, it is the undeniable heart of the city, around which everything else clusters, glimpsed at almost every turn. Surrounded by pedestrianized streets, it can be appreciated from almost every angle.

ESSENTIALS

Getting there The summit of the Acropolis can be entered only from the west, where there's a big coach park at the bottom of the hill: bus #230 from Síndagma will take you

ACROPOLIS

almost to the entrance. On foot, the obvious approach is from 📍Akrópoli. Crowds at the Acropolis can be horrendous – to avoid the worst come very early in the day, or late.



THE PARTHENON, ATHENS

Highlights

- ① **Acropolis, Athens** Rising above the city, the great rock of the Acropolis topped by the Parthenon symbolizes not just Athens, but the birth of European civilization. See p.65
- ② **National Archeological Museum, Athens** Quite simply the world's finest collection of ancient Greek art and sculpture. See p.65
- ③ **Pireás** The port of Athens is constantly alive with the movement of ferries and cruise liners – if this is not enough, the small boat harbours boast some of the city's best fish restaurants. See p.65
- ④ **Gázi, Athens** The heart of Athens' nightlife, packed with bars, cafés and restaurants that are buzzing till late at night. See p.69
- ⑤ **Archeological Museum, Thessaloníki** Home to the Gold of Macedon exhibition, displaying finds from the royal tombs at Vergina. See p.75
- ⑥ **Áno Póli, Thessaloníki** In the city's Upper Town, restored Ottoman architecture vies for space with Roman and Byzantine remains, and it's also home to a burgeoning nightlife scene. See p.76



HIGHLIGHTS

- 3** Piraeás
- 5** Archeological Museum, Thessaloníki
- 6** Áno Póli, Thessaloníki

ATHENS AND THE PORTS