



# THE ROUGH GUIDE TO GREECE



# 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 Greece, with regional 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 **GREECE**

This fifteenth edition updated by

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## Introduction to Greece

Despite the media battering its economic reputation has endured, Greece remains a premier-league travel destination. Its incredible historic sites span four millennia, encompassing both the legendary and the obscure. Its convoluted coastline is punctuated by superb beaches, while its mountainous interior urges you to dust off your hiking boots and explore. Yet perhaps its greatest riches are the islands, ranging from backwaters where the boat calls twice a week to resorts as cosmopolitan as any in the Mediterranean.

For anyone with a cultural bone in their body, Greece cannot fail to inspire. Minoans, Romans, Arabs, Latin Crusaders, Venetians, Slavs, Albanians and Turks have all left their mark, and almost every town or village has a link to the **past**, whether it's a delicately crumbling temple to Aphrodite, a forbidding Venetian fort or a dusty Byzantine monastery decorated with exquisite frescoes. And you'll be spoilt for choice when it comes to museums stuffed to bursting with classical sculpture and archeological treasures.

But the call to cultural duty will never be too overwhelming on a Greek holiday. The **hedonistic pleasures** of languor and warmth – swimming in balmy seas at dusk, talking and drinking under the stars – are just as appealing. Greek **cuisine** and wine production are going through a renaissance, with many young chefs and wine growers returning from abroad laden with ideas, while the genuine **welcome** you'll receive at the simplest taverna is often enough to get you booking next year's break as soon as you return home.

Whatever you come here for, it's clear that Greece needs its tourists like never before: although the country's titanic **debt crisis** (see p.788) seems to have abated, at least in the short term, tourism has been the main engine of the Greek economy since 2013 during its struggle through a long, painful recession. Since the first edition of this guide was published in 1982, one thing has undoubtedly remained unchanged – Greece can offer surprises and a true sense of discovery to even the most demanding traveller.

## Where to go

Sprawling, globalized **Athens** is an obligatory, almost unavoidable introduction to Greece: home to over a third of the population, it is on first acquaintance a nightmare for many, but should not be dismissed so quickly. The city is currently enjoying a resurgence as a short-break destination, and, aside from the show-stopping Acropolis, it offers a truly metropolitan range of cultural diversions, from museums to concerts, well-stocked shops, gourmet restaurants and stimulating clubs, plus an excellent transport infrastructure – a visible legacy of the 2004 Olympics. **Thessaloníki**, the metropolis of the north, has emerged in its own right as a lively, sophisticated place, with restaurants and nightlife to match that of Athens, Byzantine monuments compensating for a lack of “ancient” ones, and a tremendous capacity among the city’s inhabitants for enjoying life.

Apart from these cities, the **mainland** shows its best side in the well-preserved **classical ruins** of Mycenae, Olympia and Delphi, the frescoed Byzantine churches and monasteries at Mount Áthos, Metéora, Ósios Loukás, Kastoriá, Árta and Mystra, the massive **fortified towns** of Monemvasiá, Náfplio, Koróni and Methóni, the distinctive architecture of Zagóri and the Máni, and the long, **sandy beaches** of the **Peloponnese** and the Pelion peninsula. Perhaps more surprisingly, the mainland mountains offer some of the best and least-exploited **hiking**, rafting, canyoning and **skiing** in Europe.

Out in the Aegean or Ionian seas, you’re more spoilt for choice. The best strategy for first-time visitors can be to sample assorted islands from nearby archipelagos – the Dodecanese, the Cyclades, the Sporades, and the Argo-Saronic are all reasonably well









**GREECE**

**BULGARIA**

**TURKEY**

SEA OF MARMARA

Istanbul

Bursa

Balikesir

**TURKEY**

Manisa

Izmir

Kuşadası

Bodrum

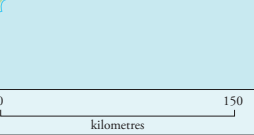
Marmaris

Rhodes Town

Lindhos

Rhodes

Kassidhra



**THRACE**

The North Aegean

The East Aegean

The Cyclades

The Dodecanese

SEA OF CRETE

Crete

AEGEAN SEA

The Sporades

Évvia

ATLANTICA

ATHENS

The Argo-Saronic

SEA OF CRETE

Crete

Dhráma  
Yánthi  
Komotini  
Kipi  
Alexandroupoli  
Liménas  
Thásos  
Samothraki  
Myrina

Kyrá Panayía  
Alónissos  
Peristéra  
Skápelos

Kymi  
Halkidha  
Ráfiina  
Pireas  
Lávrio

Andros  
Tinos  
Mykonos  
Kéa  
Sýros  
Delos  
Kýthnos  
Sérifos  
Páros  
Náxos  
Sifnos  
Andiparos  
Sikinos  
Folégandhros  
Milos  
Dhonoússa  
Amorgós  
Anáfi  
Santorini

Haniá  
Kastéllí  
Palaehóra  
Réthymno  
Psilorthís  
Iraklio  
Knossos  
Ayios Nikolaos  
Sítia  
Ierápetra

Ierissós  
Ouranoupoli  
Mt Áthos  
Sithonia  
Kassandhra

Kyrá Panayía  
Alónissos  
Peristéra  
Skápelos

Kymi  
Halkidha  
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Sítia  
Ierápetra

**FACT FILE**

- Out of a total Greek **population** of 11.3 million, nearly one-tenth is immigrants, half of whom are from Albania. There are also large Greek communities in the US, Australia (Melbourne is the third-largest “Greek” city) and the UK.
- 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, with twenty-nine million visitors from overseas in 2016; export of **agricultural products** – especially olive oil and olives, citrus, wine and raisins – is another key industry.
- With over 370 brands, 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 uyeiá sou!* (Cheers!)
- **Easter** is the biggest date on the Greek calendar. Instead of chocolate eggs, locals exchange hard-boiled ones painted red.

connected with each other, while the northeast Aegean and Ionian groups are best visited in single trips. If time and money are short, the best place to head for is well-preserved **Ydhra** in the **Argo-Saronic Gulf**, just a short ride from **Pireás** (the main port of Athens), but an utterly different place once the day-cruises have gone. Similarly, **Kéa**, one hour away from **Lávrio**, easily reached from the Athens International airport, has a Neoclassical charm, more akin to nineteenth-century Greece than the whitewashed tourist resorts of the Aegean. Among the rest, cataclysmically volcanic **Santoríni** (Thíra) and **Mýkonos**, with its perfectly preserved harbour town, rank as must-see spectacles, but fertile, mountainous **Náxos**, dramatic cliff-sided **Folégandhros** or gently rolling **Sífnos** have more life independent of cruise-ship tourism and seem more amenable to long stays. **Crete** could (and does) fill an entire Rough Guide to itself: the highlights here are Knossós and the nearby archeological museum in Iráklío, the other Minoan palaces at Phaestos and Ayía Triádha, and the west in general – the proud city of Haniá, with its hinterland extending to the relatively unspoilt southwest coast, reached via the fabled Samarian gorge. **Rhodes**, with its UNESCO World Heritage old town, is capital of the **Dodecanese**, but picturesque, Neoclassical **Sými** opposite, and austere, volcanic **Pátmos**, the island of Revelation, are far more manageable. Though somewhat marred by recent waves of migration, **Híos** with its striking medieval architecture, and balmy, traditional, olive-cloaked **Lesvos** are still worth visiting and offer great value. The **Ionian islands** are often dismissed as package-holiday territory,

but their Venetian-style architecture, especially evident in Corfu and neighbouring **Paxí**, make them well worth seeking out.

## When to go

If anything is god-given to the Greeks, it is their **climate** (see p.52). Most places are far more agreeable outside the mid-July to end of August peak season, when soaring temperatures, plus crowds of foreigners and locals alike, can be overpowering. You won’t miss out on **warm weather** if you come in **June or September**, excellent times almost everywhere but particularly on the islands. An exception to this, however, is the north mainland coast – notably the Halkidhíkí peninsula – and the islands of **Samothráki** and





## DIVINE INSPIRATION

A high proportion of the ancient sites still seen in Greece today were built as shrines and temples to the **gods**, primarily the twelve who lived on Mount Olympus. **Zeus**, the lord of the heavens and supreme power; **Hera**, his wife and sister, goddess of fertility; **Athena**, the goddess of wisdom, patron of crafts and fearless warrior; **Apollo**, the god of music, of prophecy and the arts; his sister **Artemis**, the virgin huntress and goddess of childbirth; **Poseidon**, the god of the sea; beautiful **Aphrodite**, goddess of love and desire; **Hermes**, the messenger who leads the souls of the dead to the underworld; **Hephaestus**, the god of craftsmen; **Ares**, the god of war; **Demeter**, the goddess of crops and female fertility; and **Dionysus**, god of wine and intoxication. Worshipped, feared and admired, they formed the basis for the ancient Greek religion until paganism was banned by the Romans in AD 391.

Thássos, which only really bloom during **July and August**. In **October** you will almost certainly hit a stormy spell, especially in western Greece or in the mountains, but for most of that month the “little summer of *Ágios Dhimítrios*” (the Greek equivalent of **Indian summer**) prevails, and the southerly Dodecanese and Crete are extremely pleasant. Autumn in general is beautiful; the light is softer than in summer, the sea often balmier than the air and the colours subtler.

**December to March** are the coldest and least reliably sunny months, though even then there are many crystal-clear, fine days. The more northerly latitudes and high altitudes endure far colder and wetter conditions, with the mountains themselves under snow from November to May. The **mildest winter** climate is found on Rhodes, or in the southeastern parts of Crete. As spring slowly warms up, **April** is still uncertain, though superb for wild flowers, green landscapes and photography; by **May** the weather is more settled and predictable, and Crete, the Peloponnese, the Ionian islands and the Cyclades are perhaps at their best, even if the sea is still cold for swimming.

Other factors that affect timing for Greek travels have to do with the level of tourism and the amenities provided. Service standards occasionally slip under peak season pressure, and room prices on the islands can rocket. If you can only visit during midsummer, it is wise to reserve a package well in advance, buy any ferry tickets beforehand or plan your itinerary off the beaten track. You might choose, for instance, to explore the less obvious parts of Thessaly, Epirus and the northern mainland, or island-hop with an eye for the remoter places.

**Out of season on the islands** you will have to contend with much reduced ferry and plane services plus fairly skeletal facilities when you arrive. You will, however, find reasonable service on main routes and at least one hotel and taverna open in the port or main town of all but the tiniest isles. On the mainland, winter travel poses no special difficulties except, of course, in mountain villages either cut off by snow in mid-winter or (at weekends especially) monopolized by avid Greek skiers, especially in the central Peloponnese.

# Author picks

Our authors travelled the length and breadth of Greece, teasing out the best beaches, sampling the tastiest meze and exploring countless ancient ruins. Here are their highlights:

**Unique Ólymbos** Traditions are fading fast in the mountain village of Ólymbos (p.544) on Kárpáthos but you may still spot some women wearing distinctive, brightly coloured costumes.

**Down the hatch** Once confined to parts of northern Greece, the fiery spirit *tsipouro* (p.41) has become the tippie of choice for many all over the country.

**Multicultural Greece** Thrace is one of the most culturally diverse regions, with Xánthi (p.317), Komotini (p.320) and surroundings full of Muslim, Pomak and Roma folk.

**Ahead of its time** The Antikythira Mechanism (p.85) in the Athens Archeological Museum is one of the world's most intriguing exhibits.

**Best sunset** Most tourists to Santorini make for Ía, but the sunset views from Akrotíri (p.443) at the croissant-shaped island's southwestern tip are better and far less crowded.

**City break** Haniá (p.494), Crete's second city, has daily flights from northern Europe, tremendous boutique hotels, and great food and atmosphere: what more could you ask for?

**Byzantine wonders** Set among almond trees and rolling hills, the Ósios Loukás monastery (p.213), close to Delphi, is home to some of the country's finest Byzantine mosaics.

**Fabulous fast food** A proper Greek *yíros* pítta, stuffed with lamb, tomatoes, onion, salad and a few fries, is the greatest fast food yet invented.

**Most underrated resort** With five excellent sandy beaches, a fishing village vibe and prices well below Greek-island averages, Finikoúnda in the southern Peloponnese is the ultimate family destination (p.181).

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** WOMEN IN TRADITIONAL DRESS, ÓLYMBOΣ, KÁRPÁTHOS; YÍROS; ÓSIOS LOUKÁS MONASTERY



# 25

## things not to miss

It's not possible to see everything that Greece has 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 treks and fascinating ancient sites. All highlights have a page reference to take you straight into the Guide, where you can find out more. Coloured numbers refer to chapters in the Guide section.

1



2

**1 ÍA, SANTORÍNI**

Page 441

If there are 1000 things to do before you die, having a sundowner overlooking Santorini's crater would near the top of the list.

**2 SHIPWRECK BAY, ZÁKYNTHOS**

Page 761

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

**3 THE METÉORA MONASTERIES**

Page 240

Rising like ecclesiastical eagles' nests, these monasteries are among the most awe-inspiring religious sites on earth.





#### 4 YÐHRA

Page 344

The bare granite cliffs of Ydhra (aka Hydra) soon part to reveal the fabulous horseshoe of its harbour, perhaps the most scenic in Greece.

#### 5 WINE TASTING

Pages 443 & 462

There's much more to Greek wine than dodgy retsina and you should visit at least one vineyard while you're here.

#### 6 KNOSSÓS PALACE, CRETE

Page 459

Restored, vividly coloured and ultimately the most exciting of Crete's Minoan palaces – simply the best.

#### 7 THE PELION PENINSULA

Page 225

Billed as the Greek Tuscany, this region has it all: lush countryside, excellent beaches, character-packed villages and superb treks.

#### 8 NIKOS TAVERNA, MÝKONOS

Page 393

Experience the most frenetic nightlife east of Ibiza at the party capital of the Greek summer.











12

**9 MYSTRA**

Page 160

A ghost town that provides a time capsule for the modern tourist to step through to the Byzantine age.

**10 SAMARIÁ GORGE, CRETE**

Page 501

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

**11 MEZÉDHES**

Page 41

For a true taste of Greece, tuck into a mezédhes (meze) platter of starters and dips accompanied by a glass of ouzo or *tsípoura*.



13

**12 THE PRÉSPA LAKES**

Page 292

Once a contentious border area, these lakes have been left alone for decades resulting in an almost pristine haven for birdlife.

**13 LION GATE AT MYCENAE**

Page 136

The imposing relief of lions guarding the main entrance to the Citadel of Mycenae is, incredibly, thirty-odd centuries old.

**14 THE ACROPOLIS, ATHENS**

Page 65

This small rock with its spectacular ruins is a cultural icon and a symbol of the birth of Western civilization.



14



## 15 DELPHI

Page 206

Located in an unbeatable natural setting, this ancient site has retained its inscrutable mystique through the centuries.

## 16 KEFALONIÁ

Page 740

Famous as the setting for *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, Kefaloniá remains a firm favourite.

## 17 EASTER

Page 45

The biggest festival in Greece, Easter combines devout Orthodox belief with joyful spring celebrations.

## 18 WINDSURFING

Page 47

There are very few places on the islands where you can't turn a windy day to your advantage, especially off Lefkádha in the Ionians or Náxos, Páros and Ándhros in the Cyclades.

## 19 RHODES

Page 514

Once home to the ancient Colossus and the medieval Knights of St John, this is one of the most captivating islands in Greece.

16









## 20 KALÁVRYTA RAILWAY, THE PELOPONNESSE

Page 197

This rack-and-pinion rail line on the Peloponnese is a contender for the world's quirkiest railway.

## 21 PÁTMOΣ

Page 586

One of the most beautiful islands in Greece, Pátmos is also home to the haunting Monastery of St John the Divine.

## 22 SKÓPELOS

Page 679

Mamma Mia! what an island – you can see why Hollywood's location scouts chose this as the ultimate sun-drenched Greek escape.

## 23 ATHENS AND EPIDAUROS FESTIVAL

Page 112

The ancient open-air theatres of Athens and Epidaurus make unforgettable venues for this festival of live music and Greek drama.

## 24 CLIMBING MOUNT OLYMPUS

Page 284

A trek to the home of the Greek gods is supremely atmospheric and a worthwhile challenge for hikers.

## 25 CORFU TOWN

Page 711

With its elegant Venetian architecture, fine museums and, uniquely, a cricket pitch, Corfu's capital is the heart of the Ionians.



23

24

25



# Itineraries

Although there are as many itineraries as there are Greek islands, we've put together four inspiring routes. These include a shortlist of the Classical sites, island-hopping in the Cyclades (the ultimate summer experience), a Cretan odyssey and, for Greece aficionados, the road less travelled.

## CLASSICAL GREECE

Take your own Grand Tour of Greece's Classical wonders and you'll be a budding archeologist in no time. Each stop tells you something new about one of the world's greatest and most influential civilizations. With your own vehicle, two weeks should be enough to see all these sites.

- 1 **Athens** The birthplace of many of the most famous examples of Classical Greek architecture and home to incredible museums. **See p.56**
- 2 **Souñion** Watch the sunset from the Temple of Poseidon at the tip of the Attican peninsula and you'll see a view unchanged in centuries. **See p.119**
- 3 **Kórinthos** Visit Ancient Corinth and the fortifications of Acrocorinth, a huge, barren rock crowned by a great fortress. **See p.132**
- 4 **Mycenae** The city that gave its name to a civilization whose Homeric heroes have become household names. **See p.135**
- 5 **Olympia** Sportsground of the ancients whose competitive motto "Faster, higher, longer" is as relevant today as it was then. **See p.187**
- 6 **Delphi** The site of the famous oracle has lost none of its mystique, seamlessly blending into the landscape. **See p.206**

## ISLAND-HOPPING

Thanks to quick and frequent ferry links, the Cyclades are the best island group to hop

between. While you could do this trip in a couple of weeks, three would allow a more leisurely pace.

- 1 **Ándhros** Green, fertile, culturally exciting and with a fantastic selection of beaches, this is a great introduction to the Cyclades. **See p.381**
- 2 **Mýkonos** Party island for as many sensuous, fun-filled days as your body can take and your wallet can stand. **See p.390**
- 3 **Páros** Choose between island experiences: peaceful hilltop retreats or nonstop happy hours and hangovers. **See p.403**
- 4 **Náxos** The activity centre of the Cyclades, this is the place to go trekking, diving or kitesurfing. **See p.412**
- 5 **Santoríni** It's camera-out time for the unforgettable spectacles around the crater, especially impressive at sunset. **See p.434**
- 6 **Mílos** The place to join a boat ride around the island and swim in some of its inaccessible, kaleidoscopic beaches. **See p.373**
- 7 **Sérifos** Quiet and good value with excellent beaches and a wonderful inland capital, this is a great place to chill out. **See p.364**

## 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.494**

② **Loutró** Accessible only on foot or by boat, Loutró is the perfect escape after you've hiked the Samariá Gorge. **See p.503**

③ **Réthymno** A university city with an enchanting old town and a big, sandy beach right in the centre. **See p.483**

④ **Iraklio** Crete's capital boasts a world-class archeological museum and is the easiest base from which to explore the ruins at Knossós. **See p.451**

⑤ **Áyios Nikólaos** Home to the finest of Crete's luxury resort hotels, plus great food and nightlife. **See p.470**

⑥ **Káto Zákros** A tiny, isolated seaside hamlet, with a lovely pebble beach and one of the four great Minoan palaces. **See p.480**

## THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

Central and northern Greece barely feature on travel agent radars, but you'll find perhaps the most "Greek" places here. To really do these quirkier sights justice, you'll need at least two weeks with your own vehicle, longer if you're relying on public transport.

① **The Pelion** Wind your way down the hairpin roads of this spectacular peninsula, discovering lovely villages, quiet beaches and enjoying a beautifully cool climate. **See p.222**

② **Píndhos Mountains** The Píndhos mountain range offers rafting, skiing and one of the country's best treks along the 20km Vikos Gorge. **See p.243**

③ **Préspa Lakes** One of Greece's prime locations for diverse birdlife, these peaceful lakes are bordered by several quaint villages where you can sample local lake fish. **See p.292**

④ **Xánthi** This delightful town has one of Greece's most established Turkish minorities, as well as a colourful street market. **See p.317**





SPINÁLONGA, CRETE

## Basics

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# Getting there

**By far the easiest way to get to Greece is to fly, and there are direct flights to a variety of Greek destinations from all major UK airports. Even if your starting point is North America, Australia, New Zealand or South Africa, the most cost-effective route to Greece 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 in winter, bargains are rare at any time.

**Overland** alternatives from the UK or Northern Europe involve at least three 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.

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.

## Flights from the UK and Ireland

Unless you book far in advance, there are few bargain fares to Greece. If you're heading for **Athens**, easyJet (✉easyjet.com) can fly you direct from **Gatwick**, **Manchester** or **Edinburgh**, Ryanair (✉ryanair.com) from **Stansted**, and Norwegian (✉norwegian.com) from Gatwick for less than £50 each way, but you'll have to book early to find fares this cheap. Realistically their prices are little different from those of the traditional operators – British Airways (✉britishairways.com) have frequent flights to Athens from **Heathrow**, Aegean (✉aegeanair.com) from

**Heathrow**, **Birmingham**, **Manchester** and **Edinburgh** – and you can expect to pay £75–250 each way at most times of the year. From **Dublin**, Aer Lingus (✉aerlingus.com) and Ryanair each have three direct flights a week in mid-summer, fewer in spring and autumn, with fares starting at around €70 each way, though you can easily pay three or four times that. Aer Lingus also flies direct to Corfu, and Ryanair to Haniá (Chania) in Crete.

## Regional flights

If your destination is not Athens, or you are flying from a **regional airport**, there's a bewildering variety of options, though most of them operate only in the summer months (May–Sept). Many involve **charter flights**, most of which, in practice, work in much the same way as budget airlines. In addition to the airlines mentioned on p.33 (all of which also have regional flights), the main operators with whom you can book direct are Jet2 (✉jet2.com), Thomas Cook (✉thomascokairlines.com) and Thomson (✉thomson.co.uk); others may be available indirectly, through travel agencies or third-party websites.

There are flights to many of the **Greek regional airports** (see map, pp.30–31) from Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted, Luton and London City, as well as Birmingham, Bristol, East Midlands, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds Bradford, Liverpool, Manchester and Newcastle. In addition to the obvious island airports, other handy destinations include mainland airports at Kalamáta (for the Peloponnese), Kavála (for Thássos), Vólos (for Mount Pílio and the Sporades) and Préveza (for Lefkádha). Thessaloníki (see p.268), Greece's second city, also has onward domestic connections throughout Greece.

## Indirect flights and ferries

If you're heading for the islands, it may cost less to fly from London to Athens (or Thessaloníki) and get a **connecting domestic flight or ferry** (see Getting Around, p.25). Out of season, you may have no choice but to take an **indirect flight** in any case. From regional airports in the UK or from Ireland,

### 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.

this usually means flying via London, while a multitude of Greek domestic destinations are accessible on connecting flights or ferries from Athens or Thessaloniki; Greek regional airports and major ferry routes are shown on our map (see p.30).

## Flights from the US and Canada

Delta (🌐delta.com) operates **direct nonstop flights** from New York JFK to Athens, daily for most of the year, while American (🌐aa.com) flies 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 in New York or a European hub such as London or Frankfurt.

**Fares** vary greatly, so it's worth doing some research 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 and travelling on from there.

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, while 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 fly you directly to Athens from their Gulf hubs, though 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 via their respective 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 T1877 967 5302, Australia 📞 133 133, New Zealand 📞 0800 243 544, South Africa 📞 0877 405 000; 🌐 flightcentre.com. Low-cost airfares worldwide from 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 interna-

tional 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**, Brindisi, Ancona or Venice to the Ionian islands and Pátra (Patras), from where there are connecting buses to Athens (see box, below). If you're determined to go **all the way by train**, there are a number of 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. The quickest route (though still slower and more expensive than using the ferry from Italy) is via Paris, Munich and Zagreb to Belgrade.

Either way, the journey to Athens from the UK takes **two days** at least 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](http://interrail.eu)) or **Eurail** (for all others; [eurail.com](http://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 for around £180 each way, to and from London, 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](http://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 western and southern Greece, the Ionian islands, and to Athens and most of the islands except those in the northeast Aegean. The far longer alternative through Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and the FYROM only makes sense if you're heading to the north, 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 alternatives, 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](http://greciantours.com.au).

A variety of accommodation and sightseeing tours, plus flights.

**Greek Sun Holidays UK** ☎ 01732 740317, [greesun.co.uk](http://greesun.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](http://hidden-greece.co.uk).

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

## 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, Igoumenítsa (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 Igoumenítsa/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 Pireás.

The following companies operate ferries: schedule and booking details for all of them are also available at [openseas.gr](http://openseas.gr).

**ANEK/Superfast** [www.anek.gr](http://www.anek.gr), [superfast.com](http://superfast.com). Ancona, Bari and Venice to Corfu, Igoumenítsa and Pátra.

**Grimaldi Lines** [www.grimaldi-lines.com](http://www.grimaldi-lines.com). Ancona, Brindisi and Venice to Igoumenítsa and Pátra.

**Minoan Lines** [minoan.gr](http://minoan.gr). Ancona and Venice to Igoumenítsa

and Pátra.

**Red Star** [albaniaferries.it](http://albaniaferries.it). Brindisi to Corfu, Paxi, Kefaloniá and Zákynthos, some via Albania.

**Ventouris Ferries** [ventourisferries.it](http://ventourisferries.it). Bari to Corfu, Igoumenítsa, Kefaloniá and Zákynthos.

**Homeric Tours US** ☎ 800 223 5570, 🌐 [homerictours.com](http://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](http://olympicholidays.com). Huge package-holiday company specializing in Greece; 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](http://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](http://sunvil.co.uk). High-quality outfit with a wide range of holidays to all parts of the mainland and islands.

**True Greece US** ☎ 1 800 817 7098, 🌐 [truegreece.com](http://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](http://cachet-travel.co.uk). Attractive range of villas and apartments in the more unspoilt parts of Crete, plus Hios, Sámos, Ikaría and Foini.

**CV Villas UK** ☎ 020 7563 7999, 🌐 [cvvillas.com](http://cvvillas.com). High-quality villas across Greece, though principally in the Ionian islands and Crete.

**Greek Islands Club UK** ☎ 020 8232 9780, 🌐 [www.gicthevillacollection.com](http://www.gicthevillacollection.com). Specialist in upmarket villas with private pools, especially in the Ionian islands and Sporades.

**Ionian Island Holidays UK** ☎ 020 8459 0777, 🌐 [ionianislandholidays.com](http://ionianislandholidays.com). Villas and small hotels, not just in the Ionians but also in the Sporades and mainland.

**Oliver's Travels UK** ☎ 0800 133 7999, 🌐 [oliverstravels.com](http://oliverstravels.com). Stunning upmarket villas on Mykonos and Santorini as well as Crete, the Ionians and mainland.

**Pure Crete UK** ☎ 01444 880 404, 🌐 [purecrete.com](http://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](http://simpsontravel.com). Classy villas, upmarket hotels and village hideaways in selected areas of the mainland and on Crete, the Ionians and Skópelos.

## SMALL GROUP TOURS, YOGA AND ART HOLIDAYS

**Hellenic Adventures US** ☎ 1 800 851 6349, 🌐 [hellenicadventures.com](http://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](http://paintingalonissos.com). Painting holidays and art courses on the island of Alonissos.

**Skyros Holidays UK** ☎ 01983 865566, 🌐 [skyros.com](http://skyros.com). Holistic yoga, dance, art, music, "personal growth" and more on the island of Skyros, as well as well-regarded writers' workshops.

**Yoga Escapes UK** ☎ 0207 584 9432, 🌐 [yoga-escapes.com](http://yoga-escapes.com). Yoga retreats with 5-star accommodation in Mykonos and Crete.

**Yoga Rocks UK** ☎ 020 3286 2586, 🌐 [yogaholidaysgreece.com](http://yogaholidaysgreece.com). Yoga courses in a beautifully isolated spot in southern Crete.

## WALKING AND CYCLING

**Classic Adventures US** ☎ 800 777 8090, 🌐 [classicadventures.com](http://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](http://cyclegreece.gr). Wide variety of bike tours on the mainland and islands, 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](http://exploreworldwide.com). A wide variety of tours, many combining hiking with sailing between the islands.

**Freewheeling Adventures Canada & US** ☎ 800 672 0775, 🌐 [freewheeling.ca](http://freewheeling.ca). Eight-day cycling tours of Crete.

**Hooked on Cycling UK** ☎ 01506 635 399, 🌐 [hookedoncycling.co.uk](http://hookedoncycling.co.uk). Guided and self-guided cycle tours, including island-hopping on a private boat.

**Inntravel UK** ☎ 01653 617001, 🌐 [inntravel.co.uk](http://inntravel.co.uk). Walking holidays to the mainland, Crete, Ionians and Cyclades.

**Jonathan's Tours** 🌐 [guidedwalks.net](http://guidedwalks.net). Family-run walking holidays on Crete, Corfu, Cyclades and Dodecanese.

**Macs Adventure UK** ☎ 0141530 5837, US ☎ 1 844 829 3969, 🌐 [macsadventure.com](http://macsadventure.com). Self-guided walking tours in the Cyclades, Crete and mainland, plus cycling on Rhodes.

**No Footprint Greece** ☎ 0030 6976 761 492, 🌐 [nofootprint.gr](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://natural-greece.gr). Birdwatching, bear-spotting, botanical and marine-eco (some including scuba) trips across the country.

**Naturetrek UK** ☎ 01962 733051, 🌐 [naturetrek.co.uk](http://naturetrek.co.uk). Fairly pricey but expertly led one- or two-week birdwatching and botanical tours in Crete, the Peloponnese. Lesvos and more.

**The Travelling Naturalist UK** ☎ 01305 267994, 🌐 [naturalist.co.uk](http://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](http://thebigblueswim.com). Open-water swimming around Crete, Lefkáda and Santorini.

**Northwest Passage US** ☎ 1 800 732 7328, 🌐 [nwpassage.com](http://nwpassage.com). Excellent sea-kayaking tours in Crete and the islands; also yoga, climbing and hiking.

**Nautilus Yachting UK** ☎ 01732 867445, 🌐 [nautilusyachting.com](http://nautilusyachting.com). Bareboat yacht charter, flotillas and sailing courses from a wide variety of marinas.

**Neilson UK** 📞 0333 014 3351, 🌐 [neilson.co.uk](http://neilson.co.uk). Half a dozen excellent beach activity clubs, plus flotillas and bareboat charter.

**Planet Windsurf UK** 📞 01273 921 001,

🌐 [planetwindsurfholidays.com](http://planetwindsurfholidays.com). Wind- and kitesurfing trips and instruction on Crete, Kárpáthos, Kos, Rhodes, Sámos and Zákynthos, plus mountain-biking.

**Seafarer UK** 📞 020 8324 3117, 🌐 [seafarertravels.com](http://seafarertravels.com). Small-boat island cruises, including tall-ship and mega-yacht vessels.

**Sportif UK** 📞 01273 844919, 🌐 [sportif.travel](http://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](http://swimtrek.com). Week-long open-water swimming tours in the Cyclades, Crete and Sporades, including the original island-hopping Cyclades trip.

**Valef Yachts US** 📞 1 267 404 2415, 🌐 [valefyachts.com](http://valefyachts.com). Small-boat cruises around the islands and luxury crewed yacht or motorboat charter.

## Getting around

**The standard overland public transport in Greece is the bus. Train networks are limited, even more so with recent cutbacks. Buses cover most primary routes on the mainland and provide basic connections on the islands. The best way to supplement buses is to rent a scooter, motorbike or car, especially on the islands where – in any substantial town or resort – you will find at least one rental outlet. Inter-island travel involves taking ferries, catamarans or the few remaining hydrofoils, which will eventually get you to any of the sixty-plus inhabited isles. Internal flights are mostly relatively expensive, but can save literally days of travel: Athens–Rhodes is just 2 hours return, versus 28 hours by boat.**

### By bus

Bus services on **major routes** are efficient and frequent, departing promptly at scheduled departure times. On **secondary roads** they're less regular, with long gaps, but even the remotest villages will be connected once or twice weekly to the provincial capital. On 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 in each county, known as the **KTEL** (*Kraticó Tamío Ellinikón Leoforión*; 📞 14505 premium call charge and no national online timetable). In

medium-sized or large towns there may be several scattered terminals for services in different directions, so make sure you have the right station for your departure.

From major departure points, **ticketing** is computerized, with assigned seating, and on inter-city lines such as Athens–Pátra buses often get fully booked at the *ekdhotíría* (ticket-issuing office); some regional KTEL companies have online booking, though it's no cheaper than buying from the ticket office on the day. On secondary rural/island routes, 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: Athens–Pátra costs €20.70 one-way, €30 return, though note that return tickets are not always cheaper than two one-way fares.

### By train

The Greek mainland's railway network is run by **OSE** (*Organismós Sidherodhrómion Elládhos*; 📞 14511, 🌐 [trainose.gr](http://trainose.gr)); with a few exceptions, trains are slower than equivalent buses. However, they can be much cheaper – fifty percent less on non-express services (but much the same on express), even more if you buy a return ticket – and some lines are intrinsically enjoyable, such as the rack-and-pinion service between Dhiakoftó and Kalávrýta in the Peloponnese (see p.197).

**Timetables** are available online or at station schedule boards or information counters. If you're starting a journey at a station with computerized facilities you can (at no extra cost) **reserve a seat**; a carriage and seat number will be printed on your ticket.

There are two basic **classes**: first and second, the latter about 25 percent cheaper, while first class includes a meal on certain routes. Express trains, called **Intercity** (IC on timetables), run between Alexandroupóli, Thessaloníki, Vólos, Kalambáka and Athens, though part of the section between Alexandroupóli and Thessaloníki is currently closed and served by replacement buses; also, if the line upgrade is ever completed, Pátra and Kalamáta, although currently all trains on this route terminate at Kiáto, with bus transfers completing the journey.

A second-class ticket on the IC service between Athens and Thessaloníki costs €45.40 in person, €34.70 online, with occasional much cheaper deals. The slower overnight train costs €25.10 (€19.20 online) for a seat, €47 (€41 online) for a sleeper.



## GREECE FERRIES, RAIL ROUTES AND AIRPORTS





Kalamotro Domestic Airport

Tickets issued on board carry a fifty-percent penalty charge; by contrast, under-26s and over-60s get 25 percent **discounts** at off-peak seasons for non-express trains. **InterRail** and **Eurail pass holders** must secure reservations, and pay express supplements, like everyone else.

## By sea

There are several varieties of sea-going vessels: **ordinary ferries**, which never exceed 17 knots; **“high-speed”** boats (*tahyplóō*) and catamarans, which usually carry cars, and are capable of reaching 27 knots; **hydrofoils**, similarly quick but which carry only passengers; **roll-on-roll-off** short-haul barges, nicknamed *pandóflēs* (“slippers”); and local **kaikia**, small boats which do short hops and excursions in season.

**Ferry connections** are indicated both on the route **map** (see pp.30–31) and in the “Arrival and Departure” sections throughout this book, though the ongoing economic crisis means some minor routes are sometimes discontinued without warning. Schedules are also notoriously erratic 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), Rafina (☎ 22940 28888) and Lárvio (☎ 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 ☎ openseas.gr.

## Ferries

Except for some subsidized peripheral routes where older rust-buckets are still used, the Greek **ferry fleet** is fairly modern. **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. Most newer boats seem 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–Thásos is €3.50 per person/€18 per car, while Sámos–Ikaría costs €10/€35 and Sámos–Pireás 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, although their network 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. 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 *dhiakiriméni thési* (upper class) merely gets you a better view. Car fares are the same as on the ferries, though passenger **tickets** are at least double a comparable ferry journey, ie similar to hydrofoil rates. Most hydrofoils and catamarans don’t run October–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](http://olympicair.com)) and Aegean Airlines (☎801 112 0000, [aegeanair.com](http://aegeanair.com)), as well as minor operators Sky Express (☎2810 223 800, [skyexpress.gr](http://skyexpress.gr)), Ellinair (☎2311 224 700; [ellinair.com](http://ellinair.com)), Astra Airlines (☎2310 489 390, [astra-airlines.gr](http://astra-airlines.gr)) and Ryanair ([ryanair.com](http://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 four airlines are geared to web and call-centre **e-ticket sales**, as there are few walk-in town offices. Tickets bought through travel agencies attract a minimum €10 commission charge.

**Fares** to/between the islands usually cost at least double the price 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.

Island flights are often full in peak season, so 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 car, motorcycle and taxi

Greece is blessed with dramatic mountain and coastal scenery, which is undoubtedly a joy to drive

through. You should, however, bear in mind that it 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. There is a limited but growing number of **motorways** on which tolls (€2–3) are levied, adding over €30, for example, on the drive from Athens to Thessaloniki. **Fuel**, whether regular unleaded (*amólyvdhi*), 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 almost every mainland town, plus the biggest island centres, is uniformly a nightmare. **Pay-and-display** systems, plus residents-only schemes, are common, and it's often unclear where to obtain tickets.

## Rules of the road

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

## FIVE SCENIC DRIVES

**Kefalonía's west coast** The route north from Argostóli allows vistas of the Lixouri Peninsula, Mýrtos beach and picturesque Ássos; see p.747.

**Sithonía circuit** Making the clockwise circuit of Sithonía keeps imposing Mount Áthos in view for half the way; see p.301.

**Arcadian mountains** The Peloponnese is at its most bucolic on the drive through the Arcadian mountains west of Trípoli; see p.174.

**Píndhos mountains** The mountains and villages north of Ioánnina offer scenic splendour; see p.243.

**Mount Psilorítis, Crete** Drive via Anóyia and Margarites for sweeping views of the fertile valleys around Mount Psilorítis; see p.469.

of a police control-point ahead. Bizarrely, there is no national law about who has the right of way at **roundabouts** – more often than not it is the vehicle entering the round-about, but proceed with care.

**Seat-belt** use (and wearing a helmet 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 pay €25–30 a 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 excess insurance** through Insurance 4 Car Hire (☎insurance4carhire.com).

Most major agencies require a **credit card** to swipe as a deposit, though smaller companies on the islands may ask for cash payment upfront; 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 required.

Advance, Antena, Auto Union, Payless, Kosmos, National/Alamo, Reliable, Tomaso and Eurodollar are dependable Greek, or smaller international, chains with branches in many towns; 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 drive in Greece for six months, or until their home-based road tax or insurance expires, whichever is 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 *mihanákia* or *papákia* (little ducks), are good transport for all but the steepest terrain. They're available for rent on many islands and in a few of the popular mainland resorts 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 transport 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 for failure to do so; on some smaller islands the rule is laxly enforced, on others random police roadblocks do a brisk business 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.

### 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 levied. 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 (€3.16 in Athens and Thessaloniki). Baggage in the boot is charged at €0.40 per piece. Additionally, there are surcharges of €2.60–3.84 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 *filothórima* (gratuity) of about ten percent is levied.

### By bike

**Cycling** in Greece 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 by **train** or **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, in the guard's van on most trains (for a small fee), and in the luggage bays of buses. Bring any small spare parts, since specialist shops are rare.

## Accommodation

**There are vast numbers of beds available for tourists in Greece, and most of the year you can rely on simply turning up pretty much anywhere and finding something. At Easter and in July and**

**August, however, you can run into problems unless you've 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.**

In cities and mainland towns you'll probably stay in **hotels**, but in the resorts and islands the big hotels and self-catering complexes are mostly pre-booked by package-holiday companies for the whole season. Non-package visitors are 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), 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 Náfplio, the Pelion or the Argo-Saronic islands, frequently charge significantly more at weekends.

Many of the smaller places offering rooms **close from October to April**, so in winter 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 open year-round.

### 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 straitjacket on the grounds of location or historical significance.

## 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 the 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, all accommodation 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 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 marked by a "Rooms for Rent" or "Zimmer Frei" sign) were 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 (though many still family-run), 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, though you may find 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 high season.

Rooms 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

## AIR CONDITIONING, WI-FI AND HOT WATER

When checking out a room, always ask about the status of **air conditioning** and **hot water**. Almost all modern rooms and apartments have air conditioning (indicated by a/c in our listings), but it's sometimes an optional extra, in which case you'll be charged an additional €5 or so a night to use it. Hot water is always theoretically available, though there may not always be enough: rooftop solar heaters are popular and effective, but shared solar-powered tanks tend to run out in the post-beach shower crunch 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.

operators (see p.27) represent some superb places, from simple to luxurious, and costs can be very reasonable, especially if shared between a few people.

However, if you do arrive and decide you want to drop roots for a while, you can still strike lucky if you don't mind avoiding the obvious coastal tourist spots, and are happy with relatively modest accommodation. Choose an untouristed village, get yourself known 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 Greece have closed down; competition from inexpensive rooms meant that they were simply not as cost-effective as elsewhere in Europe. However, those that survive are generally very good, and there's a new generation of youth-oriented **backpackers**, in the cities and 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 will have a curfew or any restrictive regulations. Prices for a dorm bed vary from €12 in a simple, traditional hostel to as much as €30 in high season in the fancier Athenian or island backpackers.

If you're planning to spend a few nights in hostels, **IYHF membership** is probably worthwhile. 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.hihostels.com](http://www.hihostels.com) (and book official hostels) or apply via your local youth hostel association. To book hostels online try [www.hostelworld.com](http://www.hostelworld.com), though note that many of the places on there are simply rooms, and not formal hostels.

## Monasteries

Greek **monasteries** and **convents** have a tradition of putting up travellers (of the appropriate sex). On the mainland, this – steadily decreasing – practice is used mostly by villagers on pilgrimage; on the islands, monastic hospitality is less common, so check locally before heading out to a monastery for the night. Also, **dress modestly** – no shorts or short skirts – and try to **arrive early** in the evening, not later than 8pm or sunset (whichever is earlier). For men, the most exciting monastic experience is a visit to the “Monks' Republic” of Mount Athos (see p.306), on the Halkidhiki peninsula, near Thessaloniki. This is, however, a far from casual travel option, involving a significant amount of advance planning and the securing of a permit.

## 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 on the islands 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](http://www.greececamping.gr)) lists all authorized campsites, with booking for many of them.

**SIX SPECIAL PLACES TO STAY**

**Kinsterna, Áyios Stéfanos, Monemvasiá** An Ottoman judge's farmhouse around an old cistern, converted into a spa eco-retreat. See p.151

**Kyrimai, Yeroliménas, Peloponnese** An 1860s trading post and manor house turned into a unique luxury hotel. See p.170

**Papaevangelou Hotel, Megálo Pápingo, Zagóri** Traditional comfort brought up to date in a beautiful high mountain village. See p.254

**Mount Áthos monasteries** Though just for male visitors, staying with the monks here is an unforgettable experience. See p.309

**Imaret, Kavála** Beautifully converted medrese with pool, massage spa and original Ottoman features. See p.316

**Kokkini Porta Rossa, Rhodes** Six exquisite luxury suites in a tastefully renovated Turkish mansion; wonderful breakfast using local produce too. See p.522

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 rural 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 mezedhes, 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 *marmelátha*), 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 *olikis* (wholemeal), *sikalísio* (rye bread) or *oktásporo* (multi-grain) 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 (*próvio*) is richer and sweeter than the more common cow's-milk. **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 mangoes. **Fruit** is relatively expensive and mainly available seasonally. 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 (mainly Aug–Sept). 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 plenty of 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**. The main distinction is that the former is more commonly found in large towns and emphasizes 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 towns, 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

### FAST FOOD GREEK STYLE

Traditional hot **snacks** are still easy to come by, although they are being elbowed aside by Western fast food at both international and nationwide 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 (*souvladzidhika*) churn out *souvláki*, 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.

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

The most common **mezédhes** are tzatzíki (yoghurt, garlic and cucumber dip), *melitzanosaláta* (aubergine/eggplant dip), *tyrokafteri/khtypiti/kopanisti* (spicy cheese dips), fried courgette/zucchini or aubergine/eggplant slices, *yígandes* (white haricot beans in hot tomato sauce), *tyropitákia* or *spanakopitákia* (small cheese or spinach pies), *revythokeftédhes* (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* (pork belly). The best *souvláki*, not always available, is lamb; more commonly encountered are rib chops (*paidhákia*); lamb roasted in tin foil (*exohiká*) is another favourite. *Keftédhes* (breadcrumbs 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

## TAVERNA TIPS

Since the idea of **courses** is foreign to Greek cuisine, starters, main dishes and salads often arrive together unless you request otherwise. The best strategy is to order a selection of *mezédhes* and salads to share, in local fashion. Waiters encourage you to take *horiatiki 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 a decent gesture if you’ve had good service.

dishes worth trying are stewed goat (*yidha vrasti*) or baked goat (*katsiki 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 Greece, though there are some tips to bear in mind. When ordering, 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 *ladholé-mono* (oil and lemon) sauce. An inexpensive May–

June treat is fresh, grilled or fried *bakaliáros* (hake). *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 (Thessaly, 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 nationwide, 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 **wine routes** on the mainland and

## VEGETARIANS

Vegetarians will find scarcely any dedicated **meat-free restaurants** 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.

individual wineries dotted around the wine-producing islands such as Límnos, Lésvos, Santoríni, Kefaloníá, Náxos, Ikaría, Rhodes and Crete (see [www.newwinesofgreece.com](http://www.newwinesofgreece.com)). Curiously, island **red wines** are almost uniformly mediocre, so you are better off ordering mainland varieties from Carras on Halkidhíkí, and various spots in the Peloponnese and Thessaly. Particularly notable vintages are mentioned throughout this Guide.

Other **premium microwineries** on the mainland whose products have long been fashionable, in both red and white, include the overrated Hatzimihali (central Greece), the outstanding Dhiamandakou (near Náoussa, red and white), Athanasiadhí (central Greece), Skouras (Argolíd) and the two rival Lazarídhí vintners (Dhráma, east Macedonia), especially their superb Merlots. For any of these you can expect to pay €10–18 per bottle in a shop, double that at a taverna. The best available current **guide** to the emerging Greek domains 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 by any means, but at about €7 per bottle, the quality is not bad.

## Cafés and bars

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

### Kafenía, cafeterias and coffee

The **kafenío** (plural *kafenía*) is the traditional Greek coffee house. Although its main business is "Greek" (Middle Eastern) **coffee** – prepared unsweetened (*skétos* or *pikrós*), medium (*metrios*) or sweet (*glykós*) – it also serves instant coffee, ouzo, brandy, beer, sage-based tea known as *tsáí vounouí*, 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 pre-prandial 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. *Freddoccino* 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"), *loukoumádhés* (deep-fried batter puffs dusted with cinnamon and dipped in syrup), *galaktobouérekó* (custard pie) and so on. For more dairy-based products, seek out a **galaktopolío**, where you'll often find *rizógaló* (rice pudding), *kréma* (custard) and locally made *yiaourti* (yoghurt). Both *zaharoplastía* and *galaktopolía* are more family-oriented places than a *kafenío*. **Traditional specialities** include "spoon sweets" or *glyká koutaliouí* (syrupy preserves of quince, grape, fig, citrus fruit or cherry).

**Ice cream**, sold principally at the parlours which have swept across Greece (Dhodhoni 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.

### Ouzerís, mezédhopolía and spirits

**Ouzerís** (often called **tsipourádhika** in Vólos, Thessaloníki and increasingly elsewhere), found mainly in select neighbourhoods of larger islands and towns, specialize in ouzo or *tsípouro* and *mezédhes*. In some places you also find **mezédhopolía**, a bigger, more elaborate kind of ouzerí. These places are well worth trying for the marvelous variety of *mezédhes* they serve. In effect, several plates of *mezédhes* plus drinks will substitute for a more conventional 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 **pikilía** (assortment) available in several sizes, the most expensive one usually featuring 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 *tsípouro*. Once, every ouzo was automatically accompanied by a small plate of **mezédhes** on the house: cheese, cucumber, tomato, a few olives, sometimes octopus

## THE STRONG STUFF

**Ouzo**, *tsípouro* (north mainland and increasingly nationwide) and **rakí** or *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 are mostly unadulterated but may have a touch of anise, cinnamon, pear essence or fennel. There are nearly thirty brands of ouzo or *tsípouro*; the best are reckoned to be from Lésvos and Sámos islands, or Zítsa and Týrnavos on the mainland. 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 (like driving) the next day.

or a couple of small fish. Nowadays, "**ouzomezés**" 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 basic snacks.

## Bars, beer and mineral water

**Bars** (*barákia*) are ubiquitous across Greece, 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 inter-national 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, up to €12 for imports in trendier parts of Athens. **Beers** are mostly foreign lagers made locally under licence at a handful of breweries on the 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 Santorini. Genuinely **imported** German beers, such as Bitburger, Fisher and Warsteiner (plus a few British and Irish ones), are found in Athens, Thessaloniki 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's 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** (*aerióuho*) water, in small bottles. Note that despite variable quality

in taste **tap water** is essentially safe all over Greece, though persuading a restaurant to provide it can be difficult in some places, especially 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 opposite). The US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have no formal healthcare 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 also **hospitals** in all the big cities; 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** (*farmakio*). 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. Also, 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 *periptero* (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 opposite). **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** (*tsoúkhtres*), 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. **Adders** (*ohiés*) and **scorpions** (*scorpií*) are found throughout Greece. Both 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, in addition to munching its way through a fair amount of Greece's surviving pine forests, the pine processionary **caterpillar** – which takes its name from the long, nose-to-tail convoys – sports highly irritating hairs, with 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

## THE EUROPEAN HEALTH INSURANCE CARD

At the time of writing, British citizens are still covered by the **EHIC** scheme ([ehic.org.uk](http://ehic.org.uk), [ehic.ie](http://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 show your EHIC; for free treatment from a regular doctor or dentist, call the IKA (the Social Insurance Institute, who administer the scheme) on their national appointments hotline, ☎ 184. 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.

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 newspapers 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, lag behind the private channels – notably Mega, Star, Alpha, Alter and Skai – in the ratings, though not necessarily in the 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 and series from about 9pm onwards, although the closer you get to the end of the movie, the more adverts you'll encounter. Hotels and rooms places usually have TVs in the room, but reception can be poor: 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 book ahead: for Easter dates, see below.

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 the darkness until the priest lights the candles of the 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 "*Khrístós 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** (lannis/lanna on Jan 7 or Yioryios 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 [namedays.gr](#).

## Festival calendar

### JANUARY

**January 1: New Year's Day (Protokhroniá)** In Greece this is the feast day of Ágios Vassílios (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 Piréas), 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. Pátra Carnival, with a chariot parade and costume parties, is one of the largest and most outrageous in the Mediterranean. Interesting, too, are the *boules* (masked revels) which take place around Macedonia (particularly at Náoussa), Thrace (Xánthi), and the outrageous Goat Dance on Skyros in the Sporades. The Ionian islands, especially Kefalónia, are also good for Carnival, as is Ayiássos on Lésvos, while Athenians celebrate by hitting each other on the head with plastic hammers.

**Clean Monday (Kathari Dhefétra)** 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 military parades and dancing to celebrate the beginning of the revolt against Ottoman rule in 1821, plus 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 (Páskha: April 28 2019; April 19 2020; May 2 2021)** The most important festival of the Greek year (see above). 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, Ólymbos on Kárhothos 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 of shepherds, is honoured with a big rural celebration, with much feasting and dancing at associated shrines and towns. If it falls during Lent, festivities are postponed until the Monday after Easter.

**MAY/JUNE**

**May 1: May Day (Protomaiá)** 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 Helen (Áyios Konstantinos & Ayia Eléni)** Constantine, as emperor, championed Christianity in the Byzantine Empire; St Helen was his mother. There are firewalking ceremonies in certain Macedonian villages; elsewhere celebrated rather more conventionally as the name day for two of the more popular Christian names in Greece.

**Whit Monday (Áyio Pnévma)** Fifty days after Easter, sees services to commemorate the descent of the Holy Spirit to the assembled disciples. 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 (Ayia Marina)** A big event in rural areas, as she's an important protector of crops.

**July 20: Feast of the Prophet Elijah (Profitis Ilías)** Widely celebrated at the countless hilltop shrines of Profitis Ilías. The most famous is on Mount Táietyos, near Spárti, with an overnight vigil.

**July 26: St Paraskevi (Ayia Paraskevi)** Celebrated in parishes or villages bearing that name, especially in Epirus.

**AUGUST**

**August 6: Transfiguration of the Saviour (Metamórfosis tou Sotiros)** 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 tis Panayias)** 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. Even some Greeks resort to sleeping in the streets at the great pilgrimage to Tinos; also major festivities at Páros, at Ayiássos on Lésvos, and at Ólymbos on Kárpáthos.

**August 29: Beheading of John the Baptist (Apoekálisis tou Prodrómou)** Popular pilgrimages and celebrations at Vrykoúnda on Kárpáthos.

**SEPTEMBER**

**September 8: Birth of the Virgin Mary (Yénnisis tis Panayias)** Special services in churches are 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 (Ípsosis 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, particularly celebrated in Thessaloníki, of which he is the patron saint. 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!").

**CULTURAL FESTIVALS**

Throughout the summer you'll find **festivals** of music, dance and theatre at venues across Greece, with many of the events taking place at atmospheric outdoor venues. Some, in the resorts and islands, are unashamedly aimed at tourists, others more seriously artistic. The granddaddy of them all is the **Athens and Epidaurus Festival** (📍greekfestival.gr; see p.112), which has been running every summer for over sixty years, incorporating everything from open-air performances of Classical drama in ancient theatres to jazz and contemporary art. Others include:

**Dhimitría Cultural Festival, Thessaloníki** Oct 📍 dimitria.thessaloniki.gr  
**Domus Festival, Nákxos** July–early Sept 📍 naxosfestival.com  
**Festival of the Aegean, Sýros** July 📍 festivaloftheaegean.com  
**Ioánnina Folk Festival** July  
**Ippokrateia Festival, Kos** July  
**Iráklío Festival, Crete** July–Aug  
**Kalamáta Dance Festival** July 📍 kalamatadancefestival.gr  
**Kassándhra Festival, Halkidhíki** (held jointly in Síviri and Áfytos) July–Aug 📍 kassandrafestival.gr  
**Lefkádha Arts and Folklore festivals** last week of Aug 📍 liff.gr

**Olympus Festival, Dhíon, Mt Olympus** July–Aug 📍 festivalolympou.gr  
**Pátra International Festival** May–July 📍 festivalpatras.gr  
**Pátra Film Festival** Oct  
**Philippi Festival, Thássos** July–Aug 📍 philippifestival.gr  
**Réthymno Cretan Diet Festival** July 📍 www.cretandietfestival.gr  
**Sáni Jazz Festival, Halkidhíki** July–Aug 📍 sanifestival.gr  
**Santoríni Music Festival** Sept  
**Thessaloníki International Film Festival** Oct–Nov 📍 www.filmfestival.gr



**NOVEMBER**

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

**DECEMBER**

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

**December 25 & 26: Christmas** (Khristouýenna) If less all-encompassing than Greek Easter, Christmas is still an important religious feast, one that increasingly comes with the usual commercial trappings: decorations, gifts and alarming outbreaks of plastic Santas on rooftops.

**December 31: New Year's Eve** (Paramóni Prothronía) As on the other twelve days of Christmas, a few children still go door-to-door singing traditional carols for money. 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, through what is one of Europe's more impressive mountain terrains. Winter also sees possibilities for skiing at a number of underrated centres. As for spectator sports, the twin Greek obsessions are football (soccer) and basketball, with volleyball a close third.**

### Watersports

**Windsurfing** and **kitesurfing** are very popular around Greece: the country's bays and coves are ideal for beginners, with a few spectacularly windy spots for experts (see box below). 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 at all the big resorts. **Jet skis** can be rented in many resorts, too, for a fifteen-minute burst of fuel-guzzling thrills.

A combination of steady winds, appealing seascapes and numerous natural harbours has long

### SIX OF THE BEST WINDSURFING SPOTS

**Kórthi**, Ándros. See p.385

**Kalafáti**, Mýkonos. See p.395

**Koureménos**, eastern Crete. See p.479

**Prassoníssi**, Rhodes. See p.529

**Kokkári**, Sámos. See p.612

**Vassilikí**, Lefkádha. See p.736

made Greece a tremendous place for **sailing**. All sorts of bareboat and flotilla yacht trips are on offer (see p.28), while dinghies, small cats and motor-boats 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 and north Peloponnese coast; 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 still restricted, though relaxation of the controls has led to a proliferation of dive centres across the mainland, 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.

In the Peloponnese, central mainland and Epirus, there's much potential for **rafting** and **kayaking**, while **sea kayaks** can be rented on many islands. Specialist companies offer both sea kayaking and **wild swimming** holidays (see p.238)

### Skiing

**Skiing**, which began on Mount Parnassós in the 1950s, is a comparative newcomer to Greece. With global warming, snow conditions are unpredictable at the southernmost resorts, and runs remain generally short. However, there are over **twenty ski centres** scattered about the mountains, and what they may lack in professionalism is often made up for by an easy-going, unpretentious après-ski scene. The season generally lasts from the beginning of January to the beginning of April, with a few extra weeks possible at either end, depending on snow conditions. No foreign package operators currently

feature Greece among their offerings – it's very much a local, weekend scene.

The most developed of the resorts is Kelária-Fterólakkas on **Parnassós**, the legendary mountain near Delphi, though high winds often close the lifts. Other major ski centres include **Vórras** (Mount Káimaktosalán), near Édhessa; **Veloúhi** (Mount Tymfrístós), near Karpeníssi in central Greece; **Helmós**, near Kalávrýta on the Peloponnese; and **Vérmion**, near Náoussa in Macedonia.

## Walking and cycling

If you have the time and stamina, **walking** is probably the single best way to see the remote back-country, with plenty of options from gentle strolls to long-distance mountain paths. This Guide includes some of the more accessible mountain hikes, as well as suggestions for more casual walks; 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.53) may be better bought in advance.

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

## Football and basketball

**Football** (soccer) is far and away the most popular sport in Greece – both in terms of participating and watching, its status strengthened still further by Greece's unexpected (and still unforgotten) emergence as Euro 2004 champions. The big teams are Panathanaikós (Ⓜpao.gr); AEK of Athens (Ⓜaekfc.gr), now challenging at the top again after bankruptcy-enforced relegation to the third, amateur tier; Athens' Atrómítos (Ⓜatromitosfc.gr), now regular European qualifiers; Olympiakós of Pireás (Ⓜolympiacos.org); and PAOK of Thessaloniki (Ⓜpaokfc.gr). Matches – usually Wednesday nights and Sunday afternoons – take place between September and May, and tickets are generally not too hard to come by at prices far lower than in the UK.

The national **basketball** team is one of Europe's strongest, while at club level, many of the football teams maintain basketball squads – Panathanaikós are the most consistently successful.

# 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 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

**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.

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 beginning 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 people puffing away.

**Bargaining and tipping**

Most shops have fixed prices, so **bargaining** isn't a regular feature of tourist life. It is worth negotiating over rooms off-season, or for vehicle rental, especially for longer periods, but don't 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 in Greece without harassment or intimidation. With the westernization of relationships between unmarried Greek men and women, almost all the traditional Mediterranean macho impetus for trying one's luck with foreign girls has faded. Foreign women are more at risk of **sexual assault** in 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 unaccom-

panied, 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 mainland towns and island ports, in particular near Síndagma in Athens; 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 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 and public transport falling somewhere in between that of cheaper Spain or France and pricier Italy.

**Prices** depend on where and when you go. Pockets of the larger cities, the trendier tourist resorts and small islands (such as Síymi, Ýdhra, Mýkonos, Paxí and Santoríni) are more expensive

**DISCOUNTS**

Full-time students are eligible for the **International Student ID Card** (ISIC; [isiccard.com](http://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.

and costs everywhere increase sharply during July and August, Christmas, New Year and Easter.

On most islands a daily per-person **budget** of €50/£40/\$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/\$128 a day you could be living quite well, plus sharing the cost of renting a large motor-bike or small car. Note that **accommodation** costs (see box, p.36) 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.40). 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. Nonetheless, theft and muggings are becoming increasingly common, especially in Athens, a trend only likely to be increased by 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 required to carry suitable ID on you at all times – either a passport or a driving licence – though it's understood you probably won't have it 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; they 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.55).

**Drug offences** are treated as major crimes, particularly since there's a mushrooming local addiction problem. 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 bought beforehand in the UK, as they can be difficult to find locally; standard 5-, 6- or 7.5-amp models permit operation of a hairdryer 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 €2–20, 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

EU citizens (and most of those from European countries not in the EU) need only a valid **passport** or identity card to enter Greece and can stay indefinitely (see p.52), though the rules post-Brexit may change for UK nationals from 2019. US, Australian, New Zealand, Canadian and most non-EU Europeans 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.

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 – i.e. 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](http://mfa.gr/canberra).

**Canada** 80 Maclaren St, Ottawa, ON K2P 0K6 📞 613 238 6271, 🌐 [mfa.gr/canada/en/the-embassy](http://mfa.gr/canada/en/the-embassy).

**Ireland** 1 Upper Pembroke St, Dublin 2 📞 01 676 7254, 🌐 [mfa.gr/dublin](http://mfa.gr/dublin).

**South Africa** 323 North Village Lane, Hillside Lynwood 0081 📞 012 348 2352, 🌐 [mfa.gr/pretoria](http://mfa.gr/pretoria).

**UK** 1A Holland Park, London W11 3TP 📞 020 7229 3850, 🌐 [mfa.gr/london](http://mfa.gr/london).

**USA** 2217 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington, DC 20008 📞 202 939 1300, 🌐 [mfa.gr/washington](http://mfa.gr/washington).

### Gay and lesbian 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 in the provinces with some bemusement but accorded the same standard courtesy as straight foreigners – as long as they refrain from public displays of affection, taboo in rural areas. There is a sizeable **gay community** in Athens, Thessaloniki and Pátra, plus a fairly obvious scene at resorts like Ydhra, Rhodes and Mykonos. Skála Eressou on Lésvos, the birthplace of Sappho, is unsurprisingly 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 nondescript premises.

### Insurance

Despite the EU healthcare privileges that currently apply in Greece (see box, p.43), 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

Other than in major cities and some towns, **internet cafés** have all but disappeared, due to the proliferation of **wi-fi**. Nearly all accommodation, most cafés (but not old-style *kafenía*) and an increasing number of tavernas offer free wi-fi to patrons, and an increasing number of municipalities are introducing free wi-fi hotspots.

### Laundry

**Laundries**, or *plindiria*, 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.

### 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](http://roughguides.com/travel-insurance).

**AVERAGE MONTHLY TEMPERATURES AND RAINFALL**

	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
<b>ATHENS</b>												
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
<b>THESSALONÍKI</b>												
Maximum (°C/°F)	9/48	12/54	14/57	20/68	25/77	29/84	32/90	32/90	28/82	22/72	16/61	11/52
Minimum (°C/°F)	2/36	3/37	5/41	10/50	14/57	18/64	21/70	21/70	17/63	13/55	9/48	4/39
Rainfall (mm)	44	34	38	41	40	40	22	14	29	57	55	56
<b>CRETE (IRÁKLIO)</b>												
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
<b>DODECANESE (RHODES)</b>												
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
<b>IONIANS (CORFU)</b>												
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

## 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 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 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.

Many people find **tourism-related work**, especially on the islands most dominated by foreign visitors; April and May are the best time to look around. Opportunities include being 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 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** (*katepigonda*). **Registered delivery** (*systeméno*) 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 main provincial or county 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 countrywide. 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. Road Editions, in addition to their touring maps, produce 1:50,000 topographical maps for mainland mountain ranges, including Áthos, Pílio, Parnassós, Ólymbos, Taiyetos, Ágrafa and Íti, usually with rudimentary route directions in English. Anavasi publishes a series covering the mountains of central Greece (including Ólymbos) and Epirus, some on the Peloponnese, the White Mountains and Psilorítis on Crete and Mt Dhýrfris on Évvia.

## Money

Greece's currency is the **euro** (€). Up-to-date **exchange rates** can be found on 📍xe.com. Euro notes come 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. 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 are 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** are 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 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 through-out the day. If you need to tackle **Greek bureaucracy**, don't count on getting anything essential done except from Monday to Friday, between 9.30am and 1pm.

**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.45 for dates).**May 1** May Day.**May/June** Whit Monday, 7 weeks after Easter.**August 15** Assumption of the Virgin Mary.**October 28** Ohi Day (see p.46).**December 25/26** Christmas Day/Boxing Day.

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 ([odysseus.culture.gr](http://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, Cosmote and Q-Telecom/WIND. **Coverage** countrywide is good, though there are a few "dead" zones in the mountains, or on 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 at all *periptera* (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, use a **calling card**, which involves calling a free access number from 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.

**PHONE CODES AND NUMBERS**

All Greek phone numbers require you to dial 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 – there's even signal 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**Canada** 001**Ireland** 00353**New Zealand** 0064**UK** 0044**USA** 001**South Africa** 0027**GREEK PHONE PREFIXES****Local call rate** 0801**Toll-free/Freefone** 0800**USEFUL GREEK TELEPHONE NUMBERS****Ambulance** 166**Police/Emergency** 100**Fire brigade, urban** 199**Speaking clock** 141**Forest fire reporting** 191**Tourist police** 171 (Athens);**Operator** 132 (Domestic);

0210 171 (elsewhere)

0139 (International)



## Photography

You can feel free to snap away at most places 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, [visitgreece.gr](http://visitgreece.gr)) maintains offices in several European capitals and major cities around the world. It publishes an array of free, glossy 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 **municipal tourist offices**, including advice on local attractions and public transport, 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, 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](mailto:info@gnto.co.uk).

**USA** 800 3rd Ave, New York, NY 10022 ☎ 212 421 5777, [info@greektourism.com](mailto:info@greektourism.com).

## Travellers with disabilities

In general, **disabled** people are not especially well catered for in Greece, though, as 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 are 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 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 talk) like adults. Other than 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 in Greece, 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 percent to completely free depending on their age; hotels and rooms won't charge extra for infants, and levy a modest supplement for an extra bed.



# Athens and around

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# 1 Athens and around

In Athens the past looms large – literally, in the shape of the mighty Acropolis that dominates almost every view, as well as on every visitor's itinerary. For all too many visitors, this is a city that happened two-and-a-half thousand years ago. Yet modern Athens has been transformed in the twenty-first century; home to over four million people, it's the vibrant capital of the nation and a place full of interest.

It's true that on first acquaintance, Athens is not a beautiful place – the scramble for growth in the decades after World War II, when the population grew from around 700,000 to close to its present level, was an architectural disaster. But, helped by huge **investment** of European funds and for the 2004 Olympics, the city has started to make the most of what it has, with new roads, rail and Metro, along with extensive **pedestrianization** in the centre. The views for which Athens was once famous have reappeared and, despite inevitable globalization and the appearance of all the usual high-street and fast-food chains, the city retains its character to a remarkable degree. Hectic modernity is always tempered with an air of intimacy and homeliness; as any Greek will tell you, Athens is merely the largest village in the country.

However often you've visited, 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 refurbished **National Archeological Museum**, the finest collection of Greek antiquities anywhere in the world, they should certainly be a priority. The majority of the several million visitors who pass through each year do little more; they never manage to escape the crowds and so see little of the Athens Athenians know. Take the time to explore some of the city's **neighbourhoods**, and you'll get far more out of it.

Above all, there's the sheer effervescence of the city. **Cafés** are packed day and night and the streets stay lively until 3 or 4am, with some of the best **bars and clubs** in the country. **Eating out** is great, and establishments range 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 crammed with the latest designer goods. And with good-value, extensive public transportation allied to inexpensive taxis, you'll have no difficulty getting around.

Outside Athens are more Classical sites – the **Temple of Poseidon at Souñio**, sanctuaries at **Ramnous** and **Eleusis** (Elefsína), the burial mound from the great victory at **Marathon** – and there are also easily accessible **beaches** all around the coast.

**The Athenian Golden Age** p.63

**The Olympic legacy** p.64

**A brief history of the Acropolis** p.65

**Forty years of scaffolding** p.69

**The Elgin Marbles** p.70

**A slice of old Athens: Anafiótika** p.75

**Roman Athens** p.76

**The Ottoman Legacy** p.77

**November 17: the student uprising** p.84

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p.112

**Bazaars and markets** p.114

**Pay beaches** p.118

**The Mysteries of Eleusis** p.121



TOWER OF THE WINDS

## Highlights

- 1 The Acropolis** Rising above the city, the great rock of the Acropolis symbolizes not just Athens, but the birth of European civilization. See p.65
- 2 Pláka** Wander the narrow alleys and steep steps of this architecturally fascinating and vibrant quarter. See p.74
- 3 Tower of the Winds** Intriguing and elegant, this ancient clocktower is well worth seeking out. See p.76
- 4 The bazaar** Athens' raucous and colourful market area spills out into the streets all around the nineteenth-century covered food hall. See p.83
- 5 National Archeological Museum** The world's finest collection of ancient Greek art and sculpture. See p.85
- 6 Café life** Much of Athens' life is lived outdoors; check out the buzzing cafés of Thissío as the setting sun illuminates the Parthenon. See p.106
- 7 Gázi** The heart of Athens' nightlife, packed with bars, cafés and restaurants that are buzzing till late at night. See p.109
- 8 Temple of Poseidon, Cape Souínio** Dramatic and evocative, this sanctuary to the sea god has been a shipping landmark for centuries. See p.119

HIGHLIGHTS ARE MARKED ON THE MAP ON P.60 & P.117

ACCOMMODATION		
Acropolis Museum Hotel	10	Marble House
Art Hotel	2	Museum
Athens Quinta Hostel	5	Orion and Dryades
CocoMat Athens	8	Pagination Athens
Delphi Art Hotel	5	Youth Hostel
Exarchion	4	PI Athens Suites
		St George Lycabettus

DRINKING, NIGHTLIFE AND ENTERTAINMENT		
45°	12	
After Dark	6	
An Live Club	2	
Bios	11	
Boemissa	3	
Dora Stratou Ethnic Dance Company	14	
The Drugstore	5	
Gagarin 205	1	
Greek National Opera	17	
Half-Note	15	
In Vivo	4	
Kookoo Live Music Bar	13	
Kouklas Club	16	
Mégaro Mousikis	7	
Micra Asia	8	
Noiz	9	
Sodade	8	
Stavros tou Notou	18	

HIGHLIGHTS	
1	The Acropolis
2	Plāka
3	Tower of the Winds
4	The bazaar
5	National Archeological Museum
6	Café Life
7	Gázi

SHOPPING	
The Bioshop	1
Compendium	2
Crop Circle	6
Music Machine Records	7
Oino Typo	5
Psit Jewellery	10
Rachel's Bookshop	8
Solaris	3
To Thymari tou Strefi	4
Tzatzos	9

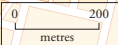


SEE 'CENTRAL ATHENS' MAP FOR DETAIL

Stavros Niarchos Cultural Centre, Pireas, 10 & 17

Syngrou-Fix & National Museum of Contemporary Art

# ATHENS



EATING	
Ambrosia	22
Andreas	8
Balsamakis (To Kotopoulo)	16
Butcher Shop	15
Chez Lucien	19
Da Capo	14
Dinner In The Sky	12
Filippou	10
Floral Books and Café	3
Gazohori	11
Iliko	13
Karavitis	18
Katsourbos	17
Lefka	2
Mama Tierra	7
Mystic Pizza	5
Oikonomou	20
Pinaleon	1
Rozalia	4
Spondi	21
Yiandes	6
Zahari ke Alati	9

Further afield, **Delphi** (see p.206) and the **islands** of the Saronic gulf (Chapter 5) are also within easy day-trip distance. Moving on is quick and easy, as scores of **ferries** and hydrofoils leave daily from the port at **Pireás** (Piraeus) and, somewhat less frequently, from the two other Attic ferry terminals at **Raffína** and **Lávrio**.

### Brief history

Athens has been continuously inhabited for over seven thousand years. Its acropolis, commanding views of all seaward approaches and encircled by protective mountains, was a natural choice for prehistoric settlement and for the **Mycenaeans**, who established a palace-fortress on the rock. Gradually, Athens emerged as a city-state that dominated the region, ruled by kings who stood at the head of a land-owning aristocracy known as the *Eupatridae* (the “well-born”), who governed through a Council which met on the Areopagus – the Hill of Ares (see p.72).

### The birth of democracy

As Athens grew wealthier, dissatisfaction with the rule of the *Eupatridae* grew, above all among a new middle class excluded from political life but forced to pay rent or taxes to the nobility. Among the reforms aimed at addressing this were new, fairer laws drawn up by **Draco** (whose “draconian” lawcode was published in 621 BC), and the appointment of **Solon** as ruler (594 BC), with a mandate to introduce sweeping economic and political reform. Although Solon’s reforms laid the foundations of what eventually became Athenian democracy, they failed to stop internal unrest, and eventually **Peisistratos**, his cousin, seized power in the middle of the sixth century BC. Peisistratos is usually called a tyrant, but this simply means he seized power by force: thanks to his populist policies, he was in fact a well-liked and successful ruler who greatly expanded Athens’ power, wealth and influence.

His sons **Hippias** and **Hipparchus** were less successful: Hipparchus was assassinated in 514 BC and Hippias overthrown in 510 BC. A new leader, **Kleisthenes**, took the opportunity for more radical change: he introduced ten classes or tribes based on place of residence, each of which elected fifty members to the *Boule* or Council of State, who decided on issues to be discussed by the full Assembly. The Assembly was open to all citizens and was both a legislature and a supreme court. This system was the basis of **Athenian democracy** and remained in place, little changed, right through to Roman times.

In around 500 BC, Athens sent troops to aid the Ionian Greeks of Asia Minor, who were rebelling against the Persian Empire; this in turn provoked a Persian invasion of Greece. In 490 BC, the Athenians and their allies defeated a far larger Persian force at the **Battle of Marathon** (see p.770). The Persians returned ten years later, when they captured and sacked Athens; much of the city was burned to the ground. That same year, however, a naval triumph at **Salamis** (see p.770) sealed victory over the Persians, and also secured Athens’ position as Greece’s leading city-state.

### The rise and fall of Classical Athens

Perhaps the most startling aspect of Classical Athens is how suddenly it emerged to the glory for which we remember it – and how short its heyday proved to be. In the middle of the **fifth century BC**, Athens was little more than a country town in its street layout and buildings – a scattered jumble of single-storey houses or wattle huts, intersected by narrow lanes. On the Acropolis, a site reserved for the city’s most sacred monuments, stood only the blackened ruins of temples and sanctuaries.

There was little to suggest that the city was entering a unique phase of its history in terms of power, prestige and creativity. But following the victory over the Persians at Salamis, Athens stood unchallenged for a generation. It grew rich on the export of olive oil and of silver from the mines of Attica, but above all it benefited from its control of the **Delian League**, an alliance of Greek city-states formed as insurance against Persian



## THE ATHENIAN GOLDEN AGE

Under the democratic reforms of Pericles, a new and exalted notion of the **Athenian citizen** emerged. This was a man who could shoulder political responsibility while also playing a part in the **cultural and religious events** of the time. The latter assumed ever-increasing importance. The city's Panathenaic festival, which honoured the goddess Athena, was upgraded along the lines of the Olympic Games to include drama, music and athletic contests. The next five decades became the **Golden Age** of cultural development, during which the great dramatic works of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides and the comedies of Aristophanes were written. Foreigners such as Herodotus, considered the inventor of history, and Anaxagoras, the philosopher, were drawn to live in the city. Thucydides wrote *The Peloponnesian War*, a pioneering work of documentation and analysis, while Socrates posed the problems of philosophy that were to exercise his follower Plato and to shape the discipline to the present day.

But it was the great civic **building programme** that became the most visible and powerful symbol of the age. Under the patronage of Pericles, the architects Iktinos, Mnesikles and Kallikrates, along with the sculptor Fidiyas, transformed the city. Their buildings included the Parthenon and Erechtheion on the Acropolis; the Hephaisteion and several *stoas* (arcades) around the Agora; a new *odeion* (theatre) on the South Slope of the Acropolis hill; and, outside the city, the temples at Souinio and Ramnous.

resurgence. The Athenians relocated the League's treasury from the island of Delos to their own acropolis, ostensibly on the grounds of safety, and with its revenues their leader **Pericles** (see p.772) was able to create the so-called **Golden Age** of the city. Great endowments were made for monumental construction, arts in all spheres were promoted, and – most significantly – it was all achieved under stable, **democratic rule**. The Delian League's wealth enabled office-holders to be properly paid, thereby making it possible for the poor to play a part in government.

The fatal mistake of the Athenian democracy, however, was allowing itself to be drawn into the **Peloponnesian War** (see p.772). Defeated, a demoralized Athens succumbed to a brief period of oligarchy, though it later recovered sufficiently to enter a new phase of democracy: the **age of Plato**. However, in 338 BC, Athens was again called to defend the Greek city-states, this time against the incursions of **Philip of Macedon**. Demosthenes, said to be as powerful an orator as Pericles, spurred the Athenians to fight, in alliance with the Thebans, at Chaeronea. There they were routed, in large part by the cavalry commanded by Philip's son, Alexander (later to become known as Alexander the Great), and Athens fell under the control of the **Macedonian Empire**.

The city continued to be favoured, particularly by **Alexander the Great**, a former pupil of Aristotle, who respected both Athenian culture and its democratic institutions. Following his death, however, came a more uncertain era, which saw both periods of independence and Macedonian rule, until 146 BC when the **Romans** (see box, p.76) swept through southern Greece and it was incorporated into the Roman province of Macedonia.

### Christians and Turks

The emergence of **Christianity** was perhaps the most significant step in Athens' long decline from the glories of its Classical heyday. Having survived with little change through years of Roman rule, the city lost its pivotal role in the Roman–Greek world after the division of the Roman Empire into Eastern and Western halves, and the establishment of Byzantium (Constantinople, now Istanbul) as capital of the Eastern – **Byzantine** – empire. In 529 AD the city's temples, including the Parthenon, were reconsecrated as churches.

Athens rarely featured in the chronicles of the Middle Ages, as it passed through the hands of various foreign powers before the arrival in 1456 of **Sultan Mehmet II**, the Turkish conqueror of Constantinople. **Turkish Athens** was never much more than a

garrison town, occasionally (and much to the detriment of its Classical buildings) on the front line of battles with the Venetians and other Western powers. Although the Acropolis became the home of the Turkish governor and the Parthenon was used as a mosque, life in the village-like quarters around the Acropolis drifted back to a semi-rural existence.

Four centuries of Ottoman occupation followed until, in 1821, the Greeks of Athens rose and joined the **rebellion sweeping the country**. They occupied the Turkish quarters of the lower town – the current Pláka – and laid siege to the Acropolis. The Turks withdrew, but five years later were back to reoccupy the Acropolis fortifications, while the Greeks evacuated to the countryside. When the Ottoman garrison finally left in 1834, and the **Bavarian** architects of the new German-born monarch moved in, Athens, with a population of only five thousand, was at its nadir.

### Modern Athens

Athens was not the first-choice **capital** of modern Greece: that honour went instead to Náplio in the Peloponnese. In 1834, however, the new king Otto transferred the capital and court to Athens. The reasoning was almost purely symbolic: Athens was not only insignificant in terms of population and physical extent but was then at the edge of the territories of the new Greek state. Soon, while the archeologists stripped away all the Turkish and Frankish embellishments from the Acropolis, a city began to take shape: the grand Neoclassical plan was for processional avenues radiating out from great squares, a plan that can still be made out on maps but has long ago been subverted by the realities of daily life. **Pireás**, meanwhile, grew into a significant port again.

The first mass expansion of both municipalities came suddenly, in 1923, as the result of the tragic Greek–Turkish war in **Asia Minor** (see p.781). A million and a half “Greek” Christians arrived in Greece as refugees, and over half of them settled in Athens and Pireás; with a single stroke, this changed the whole make-up of the capital. The integration and survival of these new inhabitants is one of the great events of the city’s history.

Athens was hit hard by German occupation in **World War II**: during the winter of 1941–42, there were an estimated two thousand deaths from starvation each day. In late 1944, when the Germans finally left, the capital saw the first skirmishes of **civil war**, and from 1946 to 1949 Athens was a virtual island, with road approaches to the Peloponnese and the north only tenuously kept open.

During the 1950s, the city again started to expand rapidly thanks to the growth of industry and massive **immigration** from the war-torn, impoverished countryside. By the late 1960s, Greater Athens covered a continuous area from the slopes of mounts Pendéli and Párnitha down to Pireás. Much of this development is unremittingly ugly, since old buildings were demolished wholesale in the name of a quick buck, particularly during the colonels’ junta of 1967–74 (see p.784). Financial incentives encouraged homeowners to demolish their houses and replace them with **apartment blocks** up to six storeys high; almost everyone took advantage, and as a result most central streets seem like narrow canyons between these ugly, concrete blocks.

### THE OLYMPIC LEGACY

The **2004 Olympics** can take much of the credit for getting Athens back on the map and regenerating the city’s infrastructure. Successful as they were in many ways, however, the legacy of the Games is a bitter one. In the rush to be ready on time, many of the works went disastrously **over budget**, while inadequate planning means that few of the costly stadia have found any purpose in life since the Games finished. These decaying white elephants are a potent symbol of Greece’s economic crisis and of the crazed rush to spend money that, ultimately, Greece never had.

Unrestrained **industrial development** on the outskirts was equally rampant.

Growth in recent decades has been much slower, but it's only in the last twenty years that much effort has gone in to improving the city's **environment**. Although Athens still lags far behind Paris or London in terms of open space, the evidence of recent efforts is apparent. What's left of the city's architectural heritage has been extensively restored; there's clean public transportation; new building is controlled and there's some interesting, radical modern architecture. Meanwhile, the economic crisis has a legacy of its own, in an extra-ordinary blossoming of graffiti art, especially on abandoned and boarded-up buildings.

## Acropolis

The rock of the **Acropolis**, crowned by the dramatic ruins of the **Parthenon**, is one of the archetypal images of Western culture. The first time you see it, rising above the traffic or from a distant hill, is extraordinary: foreign, and yet utterly familiar. As in other Greek cities, the Acropolis itself is simply the highest point of the city, and this steep-sided, flat-topped crag of limestone, rising abruptly 100m from its surroundings, has made it the focus of Athens during every phase of its development. 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.

You can walk an entire circuit of the Acropolis and ancient Agora on **pedestrianized streets** which allow the monuments to be appreciated from almost every angle: in particular, the pedestrianization has provided spectacular terraces for

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ACROPOLIS

The Acropolis was home to one of the earliest known settlements in Greece, as early as 5000 BC. In **Mycenaean** times – around 1500 BC – it was fortified with Cyclopean walls (parts of which can still be seen), which enclosed a royal palace, and temples to the cult of Athena. By the ninth century BC, the Acropolis had become the heart of Athens, sheltering its principal public buildings which remained there until 510 BC, when the Oracle at Delphi ordered that the Acropolis should remain the **province of the gods**, unoccupied by humans.

Following the Persian sacking of Athens in 480 BC, a grand rebuilding project under the direction of the architect and sculptor **Fidias** created almost everything you see today in an incredibly short time: the Parthenon itself took only ten years to finish. The monuments survived unaltered for close to a thousand years, until in the reign of Emperor Justinian the temples were converted to **Christian** worship. Over the following centuries the uses became secular as well as religious, and embellishments increased, gradually obscuring the Classical designs. Fifteenth-century Italian princes held court in the Propylaea, and the same quarters were later used by the **Turks** as their commander's headquarters and as a gunpowder magazine.

The **Parthenon** underwent similar changes: from Greek to Roman temple and Byzantine church to Frankish cathedral before several centuries of use as a Turkish mosque. The **Erechtheion**, with its graceful female figures, saw service as a harem. A Venetian diplomat described the Acropolis in 1563 as "looming beneath a swarm of glittering golden crescents", with a minaret rising from the Parthenon. For all their changes in use, however, the buildings would still have resembled – very much more than today's bare ruins – the bustling and ornate ancient Acropolis, covered in sculpture and painted in bright colours.

Sadly, such images remain only in the prints and sketches of that period: the Acropolis buildings finally fell victim to the ravages of war, blown up during successive attempts by the Venetians to oust the Turks. In 1687, laying siege to the garrison, the Venetians ignited a Turkish gunpowder magazine in the Parthenon, and in the process blasted off its roof and set a **fire** that raged for two days and nights. The process of stripping down to the bare ruins seen today was completed by souvenir hunters and the efforts of the first archeologists (see box, p.70).





cafés to the west, in Thissío. On the other side, in Pláka, you may get a little lost among the jumble of alleys, but the rock itself is always there to guide you.

## ESSENTIALS

**Tickets** Entrance to the Acropolis archaeological site, which includes the Parthenon, plus the South and North Slopes, costs €20 for a single visit. Alternatively, you can buy a joint ticket for €30, which is valid for up to seven visits over five days: it includes entrance to the Acropolis archaeological site, the South and North Slopes, the Ancient Agora, the Ancient Agora Museum, the Roman Forum, Hadrian's Library, the Temple of Olympian Zeus, the Kerameikos archaeological site and Aristotles Lyceum. Many sites also sell individual tickets (see accounts for prices), but if you want to visit several of the main sites, buying the joint ticket will work out cheaper.

**Getting there** To avoid the worst of the crowds, come very early in the day or late. The peak rush comes in late morning, when coach tours congregate before moving on to lunch elsewhere. The summit 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 almost to

## ACROPOLIS

the entrance. On foot, the obvious approach is from Akrópoli Metro station to the south, along pedestrianized Dhionysiou Areopayítou past the Acropolis Museum, Theatre of Dionysos and Herodes Atticus Theatre (or through the South Slope site). Disabled access to the Acropolis is available via a lift on the north side (by arrangement only ☎210 321 4172).

**Cafés, shops and cloakrooms** You can buy water and sandwiches, as well as guidebooks, postcards and so on, from a couple of stands near the main ticket office. There's a handy branch of *Everest* right opposite Akrópoli Metro station (at the corner of Makriyiánni and Dhiakóú) and plenty of similar places around Monastiráki Metro station, plus cafés and tavernas nearby in almost every direction: Pláka (see p.103), Monastiráki (see p.104), Makriyiánni (see p.106) and Thissío (see p.106). Backpacks and large bags are not allowed in to the site – there's a cloakroom near the main ticket office.

## The summit of the Acropolis

Daily 8am–8pm • €20, including entry to South and North slopes, or included in €30 joint ticket (see p.68)

As well as the iconic Parthenon, the **summit of the Acropolis** is home to the Erechtheion, the Temple of Athena Nike and the Propylaia, as well as lesser remains of many other ancient structures.

### Propylaia

Today, as throughout history, the **Propylaia** are the gateway to the Acropolis. In Classical times, the Sacred Way extended along a steep ramp to this massive monumental double gatehouse; the modern path makes a more gradual, zigzagging ascent, passing first through an arched Roman entrance, the **Beule Gate**, added in the third century AD.

The Propylaia were constructed by Mnesikles from 437–432 BC, their axis and proportions aligned to balance the recently completed Parthenon. They – the name is the plural of *propylon*, or gateway, referring to the fact that there are two wings – were built from the same Pentelic marble (from Mount Pendéli, northeast of the city) as the temple, and in grandeur and architectural achievement are almost as impressive. In order to offset the difficulties of a sloping site, Mnesikles combined, for the first time, standard Doric columns with the taller and more delicate Ionic order. The ancient Athenians, awed by the fact that such wealth and craftsmanship should be used for a purely secular building, ranked this as their most prestigious monument.

### The Panathenaic Way

The **Panathenaic Way** was the route of the great annual procession for ancient Athens' Panathenaic Festival, in honour of the city's patron goddess Athena. The procession – depicted on the Parthenon frieze – wound right through the Classical city from the gates now in the Kerameikos site (see p.89) via the North Slope and the Propylaia to the Parthenon and, finally, the Erechtheion. You can see traces of the ancient route just inside the Propylaia, where there are grooves cut for footholds in the rock and, to either side, niches for innumerable statues and offerings. In Classical times, it ran past a

10m-high bronze statue of Athena Promachos (Athena the Champion), whose base can just about be made out. Athena's spear and helmet were said to be visible to sailors approaching from as far away as Sounio.

Close to the Propylaea too are the scant remains of a **Sanctuary of Artemis**. Although its function remains obscure, it is known that the precinct once housed a colossal bronze representation of the Wooden Horse of Troy. More noticeable is a nearby stretch of **Mycenaean wall** (running parallel to the Propylaea) that was incorporated into the Classical design.

### Temple of Athena Nike

Simple and elegant, the **Temple of Athena Nike** stands on a precipitous platform overlooking Piraeus and the Saronic Gulf. It has only recently reappeared, having been dismantled, cleaned and reconstructed. Not for the first time either: demolished by the Turks in the seventeenth century, the temple was reconstructed from its original blocks two hundred years later.

In myth, it was from the platform beside the temple that King Aegeus maintained a vigil for the safe return of his son Theseus from his mission to slay the Minotaur on Crete. Theseus, flushed with success, forgot his promise to swap the boat's black sails for white on his return. Seeing the black sails, Aegeus assumed his son had perished and, racked with grief, threw himself to his death.

### Parthenon

The **Parthenon** temple was always intended to be a spectacular landmark and a symbol of the city's imperial confidence, and it was famous throughout the ancient world. Yet even in their wildest dreams, its creators could hardly have imagined that the ruins would come to symbolize the emergence of Western civilization – nor that, two-and-a-half millennia on, it would attract some two million tourists a year.

The first great building in Pericles' scheme, it was intended as a sanctuary for Athena and a home for her cult image – a colossal wooden statue by Fidiias overlaid with ivory and gold plating, with precious gems as eyes and sporting an ivory gorgon's head on her breast. Originally the columns were brightly painted and surrounded by the finest sculpture of the Classical age, foremost among them the beautiful **Parthenon frieze** and pediments. Also brightly coloured, these are generally held to have depicted the Panathenaic procession, the birth of Athena and the struggles of Greeks to overcome giants, Amazons and centaurs. The greater part of the frieze, along with the central columns, were destroyed by the Venetian bombardment in 1687. The best surviving examples are in the British Museum in London (see box, p.70); the Acropolis Museum also has a few original pieces, as well as reconstructions of the whole thing.

To achieve the Parthenon's extraordinary and unequalled harmony of design, its architect, **Iktinos**, used every trick known to the Doric order of architecture. The building's proportions maintain a universal 9:4 ratio while all seemingly straight lines are in fact slightly **curved**, an optical illusion known as *entasis* (intensification). The columns (their profile bowed slightly to avoid seeming concave) are slanted inwards by 6cm, while each of the steps along the sides of the temple was made to incline just 12cm over a length of 70m.

#### FORTY YEARS OF SCAFFOLDING

If you see a photo of a pristine **Parthenon** standing against a clear sky, it is almost certainly an old one. For most of the twenty-first century the Acropolis buildings have been swathed in **scaffolding** and surrounded by **cranes** – at times some structures have even been removed altogether, to be cleaned and later replaced. Though originally intended to be complete in time for the 2004 Olympics, the work is now set to continue for the foreseeable future – some claim that it will be forty years before the job is complete.

## THE ELGIN MARBLES

The controversy over the so-called Elgin Marbles has its origin in the activities of Western looters at the start of the nineteenth century: above all, the French ambassador **Fauvel**, who gathered antiquities for the Louvre, and **Lord Elgin**, who levered away sculptures from the Parthenon. As British Ambassador, Elgin obtained permission from the Turks to erect scaffolding, excavate and remove stones with inscriptions. He interpreted this concession as a licence to make off with almost all of the bas-reliefs from the Parthenon's frieze, most of its pedimental structures and a caryatid from the Erechtheion – all of which he later sold to the **British Museum**. While there were perhaps justifications for Elgin's action at the time – not least the Turks' tendency to use Parthenon stones in their lime kilns – his pilfering was controversial even then. Byron, for one, roundly disparaged his actions.

The Greeks hoped that the long-awaited completion of the new Acropolis Museum would create the perfect opportunity for the British Museum to bow to pressure and return the **Parthenon Marbles** (as they are always known here). But despite a campaign begun by the late Greek actress and culture minister Melina Mercouri in the 1980s, there is so far little sign of that happening; central to the British Museum's argument is that to return them would be to set a precedent that would empty virtually every museum in the world.

## Erechtheion

To the north of the Parthenon stands the **Erechtheion**, the last of the great works of Pericles to be completed. Both Athena and the city's old patron of Poseidon-Erechtheus were worshipped here, in the most revered of the ancient temples. The site, according to myth, was that on which Athena and Poseidon held a contest, judged by their fellow Olympian gods; at the touch of Athena's spear, the first ever olive tree sprang from the ground, while Poseidon summoned forth a fountain of sea water. Athena won, and became patron of the city.

Today, the sacred objects within are long gone, but the elegant Ionic porticoes survive. By far the most striking feature, however, is the **Porch of the Caryatids**, whose columns form the tunics of six tall maidens. The ones *in situ* are replacements: five of the originals are in the Acropolis Museum, while a sixth was looted by Elgin – they are substituted here by casts in a different colour.

## The South and North slopes

Daily 8am–8pm • Included in €20 Acropolis ticket, or €30 joint ticket (see p.68) • 📍 Akrópoli

Entrance to the **South Slope** site is either by a path leading around the side of the Acropolis near the main ticket office, or from below, off pedestrianized Leofóros Dhionysíou Areopáytou close to 📍 Akrópoli. A great deal of restoration and excavation work is ongoing here, including the opening up of a new area, the **North Slope**, on the eastern and northern edges of the rock, above Pláka.

## Theatre of Dionysos

The **Theatre of Dionysos** is one of the most evocative locations in the city. Here the masterpieces of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes were first performed; it was also the venue in Classical times for the annual festival of tragic drama, where each Greek citizen would take his turn as member of the chorus. Founded in the sixth century BC and rebuilt in the fourth, the theatre could hold some 17,000 spectators – considerably more than Herodes Atticus' 5000–6000 seats. Twenty of the original 64 tiers survive. Most notable are the great marble thrones in the front row, each inscribed with the name of an official of the festival or of an important priest; in the middle sat the priest of Dionysos and on his right the representative of the Delphic Oracle. At the centre of the roped-off stage is a diamond **mosaic** of multicoloured marble, best seen from above, while to the rear are reliefs of episodes in the life of Dionysos flanked by two squatting Sileni, devotees of the satyrs.



## Herodes Atticus Theatre

The dominant structure on the south side of the Acropolis – much more immediately obvious even than the Theatre of Dionysos – is the second-century Roman **Herodes Atticus Theatre** (Odeion of Herodes Atticus). This has been extensively restored for performances of music and Classical drama during the summer festival (see p.112) but is open only for shows; at other times, you'll have to be content with spying over the wall.

## Stoa of Eumenes

Between the two theatres lie the foundations of the **Stoa of Eumenes**, originally a massive colonnade of stalls erected in the second century BC. Above the *stoa*, high up under the walls of the Acropolis, extend the ruins of the **Asklepion**, a sanctuary devoted to the healing god Asklepios and built around a sacred spring; restoration is ongoing.

## Monument of Thrasyllos

Above the Theatre of Dionysos, you can see the entry to a huge cave, originally sacred to Artemis. It later housed choregic awards (to celebrate victory in drama contests; see p.75) won by the family of **Thrasyllos**, hence the name. The entrance was closed off around 320 BC with a marble facade, which is currently being restored. The cave was later converted to Christian use and became the chapel of Virgin Mary of the Rocks, but an ancient statue of Dionysos remained inside until it was removed by Lord Elgin (and is now in the British Museum), while the Classical structure survived almost unchanged until 1827, when it was blown up in a Turkish siege.

## Peripatos

The **Peripatos** was the ancient street that ran around the north side of the Acropolis. Access to this side has only recently been opened up so that you can now walk right around the rock within the fenced site, starting above the Theatre of Dionysos and emerging by the entry to the main Acropolis site; there's also a new entrance from Pláka, by the Kannellopoulou museum.

There are no major monuments en route, but the numerous caves and springs help explain the strategic importance of the Acropolis. In one impressive cleft in the rock was a secret stairway leading up to the temples: this provided access to spring water in times of war, and was also used in rituals, when blindfolded initiates would be led this way. Nearby are numerous other caves and rock arches that had cult status in ancient times.

## Acropolis Museum

Dhionysiou Areopayiftou 15 • April–Oct Mon 8am–4pm, Tues–Thurs, Sat & Sun 8am–8pm, Fri 8am–10pm; Nov–March Mon–Thurs 9am–5pm, Fri 9am–10pm, Sat & Sun 9am–8pm; last admission 30min before closing • €5 • [theacropolismuseum.gr](http://theacropolismuseum.gr) •  Akrópoli

The **Acropolis Museum**, opened in 2009, is a magnificent building, filled with beautiful objects, with a wonderful sense of space and light and a glass top storey with a direct view up to the Parthenon itself.

The remains of ancient Athens, uncovered during the building work, can be seen even before you enter, protected under glass flooring that continues through the ground floor. The displays proper start with a ramp described as the **Slopes of the Acropolis**, as that is where most of the pottery and other objects displayed here were found. At the top of the ramp are sculptures from the pediment of an early temple that stood on the site of the Parthenon, the Hekatompedon. Their surviving paintwork gives a good indication of the vivid colours originally used in temple decoration.

Statues dominate the **first floor**: the *Moschophoros*, a painted marble statue of a young man carrying a sacrificial calf, dated 570 BC, is one of the earliest examples of Greek art in marble. There's also an extensive collection of *Korai*, or statues of maidens. The

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progression in style, from the simply contoured Doric clothing to the more elegant and voluminous Ionic designs, is fascinating; the figures' smiles also change subtly, becoming increasingly loose and natural.

On the **top floor**, a fifteen-minute video (alternately in English and Greek) offers a superb introduction to the Parthenon sculptures. The metopes and the frieze are set out around the outside of the hall, arranged as they would have been on the Parthenon itself; the pediments are displayed separately at each end of the gallery. Only a relatively small number are original (see box, p.70); the rest are represented by plaster copies which seem deliberately crude, to make a point (there are better copies in Akropoli Metro station, for example).

On the way back down through the museum are **statues** from the Temple of Athena Nike and the Erechtheion, including the original Caryatids. The sculptures from the parapet of the former, all depicting Athena Nike in various guises, include a particularly graceful and fluid sculpture known as *Iy Sandalizoméni*, which depicts her adjusting her sandal. Don't forget to check out the restaurant, too (see p.108).

## Areopagus

Immediately below the entrance to the Acropolis • Free access

Metal steps as well as ancient, slippery, rock-hewn stairs ascend the low hill of the **Areopagus**, or "Hill of Ares". This was the site of the Council of Nobles and the Judicial Court under the aristocratic rule of ancient Athens; during the Classical period, the court lost its powers of government to the Assembly (held on the Pnyx) but it remained the court of criminal justice, dealing primarily with cases of homicide. In **myth**, it was also the site where Ares, God of War, was tried for the murder of one of Poseidon's sons; Aeschylus used the setting in *The Eumenides* for the trial of Orestes, who stood accused of murdering his mother, Clytemnestra. The Persians camped here during their siege of the Acropolis in 480 BC, and in the Roman era Saint Paul preached the "Sermon on an Unknown God" on the hill and won, among his converts, Dionysios "the Areopagite", who became the city's patron saint.

Today, there's little evidence of ancient grandeur beyond various steps and niches cut into the perilously slippery rock, and the hill is littered with cigarette butts and empty beer cans left by the crowds who come to rest after their exertions on the Acropolis and to enjoy the **views**. These, at least, are good – down over the Agora and towards the ancient cemetery of Kerameikos.

## Ancient Agora

Daily 8am–3pm; last admission 15min before closing • €8, or included in €30 joint ticket (see p.68) • © Monastiráki

The **ancient Agora**, or market, was the heart of Athenian city life from as early as 3000 BC. Approached either from the Acropolis, down the path skirting the Areopagus, or through the northern entrance on Adhrianoú, it is an extensive and confusing jumble of ruins, dating from various stages of building between the sixth century BC and the fifth century AD. As well as the **marketplace**, this was the chief **meeting place** of the city, where orators held forth, business was discussed and gossip exchanged – St Paul, for example, took the opportunity to meet and talk to Athenians here. It was also the first home of the democratic assembly before that moved to the Pnyx, and continued to be its meeting place when cases of ostracism (see p.74) were discussed for most of the Classical period.

## Hephaisteion

The best overview of the Agora is from the exceptionally well-preserved **Hephaisteion**, or Temple of Hephaistos, where there's a terrace overlooking the rest of the site from



the west. Here a plan shows the buildings as they were in 150 AD, and the various remains laid out in front of you make a great deal more sense with this to help (there are similar plans at the entrances). The temple itself was originally thought to be dedicated to Theseus, because his exploits are depicted on the frieze (hence Thission, which has given its name to the area); more recently it has been accepted that it actually honoured Hephaistos, patron of blacksmiths and metalworkers. It was one of the earliest buildings of Pericles' programme, but is now one of the least known – perhaps because it lacks the curvature and “lightness” of the Parthenon's design; the barrel-vaulted roof dates from a Byzantine conversion into the **church** of Saint George.

### Áyii Apóstoli

The church of **Áyii Apóstoli** (the Holy Apostles), by the south entrance, is worth a look as you wander among the extensive foundations of the other Agora buildings. Inside are fragments of fresco, exposed during restoration of the eleventh-century shrine.

### Stoa of Attalos

Same hours as Agora but opens at 11am Mon • €4 extra, or included in €30 joint ticket (see p.68)

For some background to the Agora, head for the **Stoa of Attalos**. Originally constructed around 158 BC, the Stoa was completely rebuilt between 1953 and 1956 and is, in every respect except colour, an entirely faithful reconstruction; with or without its original bright red and blue paint, it is undeniably spectacular.

A small **museum** occupies 10 of the 21 shops that formed the lower level of the building. It displays items found at the Agora site from the earliest Neolithic occupation to Roman and Byzantine times. Many of the early items come from burials, but as ever the highlights are from the Classical era, including some good red-figure pottery and a bronze Spartan shield. Look out for the *ostraka*, or pottery shards, with names written on them. At annual assemblies of the citizens, these would be handed in, and the individual with most votes banished, or “**ostracized**”, from the city for ten years.

## Pláka

The largely pedestrianized area of **Pláka**, with its narrow lanes and stepped alleys climbing towards the Acropolis, is arguably the most attractive part of Athens and certainly the most popular with visitors; it's a welcome escape from the concrete blocks that dominate the rest of the metropolis. With scores of **cafés, restaurants and shops** to fill the time between museums and important sites such as the **Roman Forum**, it's an enjoyable place to wander.

An appealing approach to Pláka is to follow **Odhós Kydathinéon**, a pedestrian walkway that starts near the **Anglican and Russian churches** on Odhós Filéllínon. It leads gently downhill, past the Museum of Greek Folk Art, through café-crowded Platía Filomoussou Eterías, to Hadrian's street, **Odhós Adhrianoú**, which runs nearly the whole length of Pláka and on into Monastiráki and Thissío. These two are the main commercial and tourist streets of the district, with Adhrianoú increasingly tacky and downmarket as it approaches Platía Monastirakiou and the Flea Market.

### Jewish Museum of Greece

Nikis 39 • Mon–Fri 9am–2.30pm, Sun 10am–2pm • €6 • 🌐 jewishmuseum.gr • 📍 Síndagma

The **Jewish Museum of Greece** tells the story of Jews in Greece, elegantly presented in a series of dimly lit rooms, with plenty of explanation in English. Downstairs are art and religious paraphernalia, many of which are centuries old. The centrepiece is the reconstructed **synagogue of Pátra**, which dates from the 1920s, whose furnishings have been moved here en masse and remounted. Upstairs, more recent history includes

## A SLICE OF OLD ATHENS: ANAFIÓTIKA

The main arteries of Pláka, above all Adhrianoú, home of the Manchester United beach towel and “Sex in Ancient Greece” playing cards, can become depressingly **touristy**. For a break, climb up into the jumble of streets and alleys that cling to the lower slopes of the northeast side of the Acropolis. Here, the whitewashed houses and ancient churches of the **Anafiótika** quarter proclaim a cheerfully architect-free zone. There’s still the odd shop, and taverna tables are set out wherever a bit of flat ground can be found, but there are also plenty of hidden corners redolent of a quieter era. A particularly good view of this area can be had by following the paths that track around the base of the Acropolis, above the buildings.

World War II and the German occupation, when Greece’s Jewish population was reduced from almost eighty thousand to less than ten thousand. There are features, too, on the part played by Jews in the Greek resistance and many stories of survival.

## Frissiras Museum

Monís Asteriou 3 and 7 • Wed–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat & Sun 11am–5pm • €6 • 📍 frissirasmuseum.com • 📍 Síndagma or Akrópoli

The **Frissiras Museum**, housed in two beautifully renovated, Neoclassical buildings, is home to a significant **permanent modern art collection**. The museum has over three thousand works – mostly figurative painting plus a few sculptures, as well as a regular programme of exhibitions. The space at no. 7 houses the permanent exhibition, which includes plenty of names familiar to English-speakers – David Hockney, Peter Blake and Paula Rego among them – as well as many Greek and European artists. Temporary exhibitions, along with a fine shop and an elegant café, are a block away at no. 3.

## Monument of Lysikratos

In the southeastern corner of Pláka, the **Monument of Lysikratos**, a stone-and-marble structure dating from 335 BC, rises from a small, triangular open area overlooked by a quiet café/taverna. It’s near the end of Odhós Tripódhōn, a relic of the ancient **Street of the Tripods**, where winners of drama competitions erected monuments to dedicate their trophies (in the form of tripod cauldrons) to Dionysos. The last survivor of these monuments, this example sports six Corinthian columns rising up to a marble dome on which, in a flourish of acanthus-leaf carvings, the winning tripod was placed.

In the seventeenth century, the monument became part of a Capuchin convent, which provided regular lodgings for European travellers – **Byron** is said to have written part of *Childe Harold* here, and the street beyond, *Výronos*, is named after him.

## Ayía Ekateríni

Platía Ayía Ekateríni • Mon–Fri 7.30am–12.30pm & 5–6.30pm, Sat & Sun 5–10pm • Free • 📍 210 322 8974 • 📍 Akrópoli

The church of **Ayía Ekateríni** – St Catherine’s – is one of the few in Pláka that’s routinely open. At its heart is an eleventh-century Byzantine original, although this has been pretty well hidden by later additions. You can see it most clearly from the back of the church, while in the courtyard in front are foundations of a Roman building. Inside, the over-restored frescoes look brand new, and there are plenty of glittering icons.

## Athens University History Museum

Thóλου 5 • Mon–Fri 9.30am–2.30pm; June–Sept also Mon & Wed 6–9pm • Free • 📍 210 368 9500 • 📍 Monastiráki

High up under the Acropolis, the **Athens University History Museum**, site of Athens’ first university, occupies a grand old mansion, one of the oldest in the city. The building itself is a large part of the attraction – in particular the scintillating views from

the top-floor terrace – but there's also a great collection of old scientific and medical instruments, sadly, labelled unfortunately in Greek only.

## Kanellopoulou Museum

Theorias 12 • Tues–Sun 8am–3pm • Free • 📍 Monastiráki • 📞 210 321 2313

Head for the highest street beneath the looming Acropolis walls, and you'll eventually emerge by the eclectic **Kanellopoulou Museum**, directly opposite the North Slope Acropolis entrance. This private collection includes a bit of everything – gilded icons, ancient jewellery, Classical-era pottery – and almost every object is a superb example of its kind.

## Roman Forum

Entrance on Dhioskouíron • Daily: April–Oct 8am–8pm; Nov–March 8am–5pm • €2, or included in €30 joint ticket (see p.68) •

📍 Monastiráki

The **Roman Forum** was built during the reign of Julius Caesar and his successor Augustus as an extension of the older Agora. As today, its main entrance was on the west side, through the **Gate of Athena Archegetis**. This gate marked the end of a street leading up from the Greek Agora, and its four surviving columns give a vivid impression of the grandeur of the original portal. On the side facing the Acropolis, you can still make out an engraved edict announcing the rules and taxes on the sale of oil. At the opposite end of the Roman Forum, a second gateway is also easily made out, and between the two was the marketplace itself, surrounded by colonnades and shops, some of which have been excavated. Inside the fenced site, but just outside the market area to the east, are the foundations of public latrines dating from the first century AD.

## Tower of the Winds

The best preserved and easily the most intriguing of the ruins inside the Forum site is the graceful octagonal structure known as the **Tower of the Winds**. This predates the Forum and stands just outside the main market area. Designed in the first century BC by Andronikos of Kyrrhos, a Syrian astronomer, it served as a compass, sundial, weather vane and water clock – the last of these powered by a stream from one of the Acropolis springs. Each face of the tower is adorned with a relief of a figure floating through the air, personifying the eight winds. Beneath each of these, it is still possible to make out the markings of eight sundials. On top of the building was a bronze weather vane in the form of the sea god Triton. In Ottoman times, dervishes used the tower as a *tekke* or ceremonial hall, terrifying their superstitious Orthodox neighbours with their chanting, music and whirling meditation.

### ROMAN ATHENS

In 146 BC, the **Romans** ousted Athens' Macedonian rulers and incorporated the city into their vast new province of Achaia, whose capital was at Corinth. The city's status as a renowned seat of learning (Cicero and Horace were educated here) and great artistic centre ensured that it was treated with respect, and Athenian artists and architects were much in demand in Rome. Athens, though, was a backwater – there were few major construction projects, and what building there was tended to follow Classical Greek patterns.

The one Roman emperor who did spend a significant amount of time in Athens, and left his mark here, was **Hadrian** (reigned 117–138 AD). Among his grandiose monuments are Hadrian's Arch (see p.82), a magnificent and immense library (see p.79), and (though it had been begun centuries before) the Temple of Olympian Zeus (see p.82). A generation later, **Herodes Atticus**, a Roman senator who owned extensive lands in Marathon, became the city's last major benefactor of ancient times.

## THE OTTOMAN LEGACY

Although they occupied the city for more than four hundred years, there are remarkably few **Ottoman relics in Athens**. Near the Roman Forum is a small cluster including the Fethiye Tzami (see p.77) and Medresse (see p.77), both of which can be viewed only from the outside, and the Bath-House of the Winds (see p.77); also worth checking out are the nearby ceramic collection of the Museum of Greek Folk Art (see p.79) and the Benáki Museum of Islamic Art (see p.89).

### Fethiye Tzami (Mosque)

The oldest **mosque** in Athens, the **Fethiye Tzami**, built in 1458, occupies a corner of the Forum site. It was dedicated by Sultan Mehmet II, who conquered Constantinople in 1453 (*fethiye* means “conquest” in Turkish). There’s a fine, porticoed entrance but, unfortunately, you can’t see inside the restored building, as it’s used as an archeological warehouse.

### Medresse

Eólou, at Pelopída

Outside the Forum site, more or less opposite the Tower of the Winds, the gateway and single dome of a **medresse**, an Islamic school, survive. During the last years of Ottoman rule and the early years of Greek independence, this building was used as a prison and was notorious for its harsh conditions; a plane tree in the courtyard was used for hangings. The prison was closed in the 1900s and the bulk of it torn down.

### Museum of Greek Popular Musical Instruments

Dhioyéous 1–3 • Tues–Sun 8am–3pm • Free • ☎ 210 325 0198 • 📍 Monastiráki

The **Museum of Greek Popular Musical Instruments** traces the history of virtually every type of musical instrument that has ever been played in Greece. It’s all attractively displayed in a fine mansion, with drums and wind instruments of all sorts (from crude bagpipes to clarinets) on the ground floor, lyras, fiddles, lutes and a profusion of stringed instruments upstairs. In the basement, there are more percussion and toy instruments. Reproductions of frescoes show the Byzantine antecedents of many instruments, and headphones are provided for sampling the music made by the various exhibits.

### Bath-House of the Winds

Kirístou 8 • Wed–Mon 8am–3pm • €2; audio tour €1, plus deposit • 🌐 melt.gr • 📍 Monastiráki

Close to the Fethiye Mosque is another Ottoman survival, the site of the **Bath-House of the Winds**. Constructed in the 1450s, the baths were in use, with many later additions, right up to 1965. The restored bath-house offers an insight into a part of Athens’ past that is rarely glimpsed and well worth a look. Traditionally, the baths would have been used in shifts by men and women, although expansion in the nineteenth century provided the separate facilities you see today. The *tepidarium* and *caldarium*, fitted out in marble with domed roofs and skylights, are particularly beautiful. The underfloor and wall heating systems have been exposed in places, while upstairs there are photos and pictures of old Athens. Labelling throughout is in Greek only, but an **audio tour** is available. You can visit a working hammam in Thissío (see p.87).

### The Museum of Greek Folk Art

Kirístou 8 • 8am–3pm; closed Tues • €2 • 🌐 melt.gr • 📍 Síndagma or Akrópoli

The **Folk Art Museum** is one of the most enjoyable in the city, even though it’s let down somewhat by poor lighting and labelling. Its five floors are devoted to displays of

weaving, pottery, regional costumes, jewellery and embroidery along with other traditional Greek arts and crafts. The highlight, though, is on the first floor: a reconstructed room from a house on the island of Lesvos with a series of murals by the primitive artist **Theofilos** (1868–1934). These naive scenes from Greek folklore and history, especially the independence struggle, are wonderful, and typical of the artist, who was barely recognized in his lifetime and spent most of his career painting tavernas and cafés in exchange for food and board.

There are three other branches of the museum across the city: a tiny but fascinating section devoted to the world of work, entitled “**Man and Tools**” at Panós 22 (Tues–Sat 8am–3pm; €2), the **Bath-House of the Winds** (see p.77) and a **ceramics collection** housed inside a mosque (see opposite).

## Monastiráki and Psyrrí

**Monastiráki**, to the north of Pláka, is substantially less touristy than its neighbour, though there are still plenty of sights and extensive opportunities for eating, drinking and shopping. The area gets its name from the little monastery church (*monastiráki*) on central **Platía Monastirakiou**. The square, with its handy Metro station, marks a return to the traffic and bustle of commercial Athens – it’s full of fruit stalls, street performers, lottery vendors and kiosks. This neighbourhood has been a **marketplace** since Ottoman times, and it still preserves, in places, a bazaar atmosphere. The main market (see p.84) lies straight up Athinás from here, towards Omónia, but nearer at hand you’ll see signs in either direction that proclaim you’re entering the famous **Athens Flea Market**.

**Psyrrí**, northwest of Platía Monastirakiou, is a former working-class district that is now home to some of Athens’ busiest nightlife as well as quirky shops and galleries. Around Odhós Sarrí, especially, **graffitti art** has been positively encouraged and there are some magical works on the crumbling buildings and metal-shuttered shop fronts around here. This is also a great place to **eat and drink**: between them, Monastiráki and Psyrrí probably have more places to eat per square metre than anywhere else in Athens.

## Athens Flea Market

Most shops open daily all day, till late, though more traditional ones close for a siesta; genuine flea market on Sun mornings  
These days the description of the streets around Platía Monastirakiou as **Athens Flea Market** is a bit of a misnomer – there’s plenty of shopping, but mostly of a very conventional nature. **Odhós Pandhróssou**, to the east, is almost entirely geared to tourists, an extension (though not quite literally) of Adhrianoú. West of the square the flea market has more of its old character, and among the tourist tat you’ll find shops full of handmade musical instruments, or stalls selling nothing but chess and *tavlí* (Greek backgammon) boards. Around Normánou and **Platía Avyssiinías** shops specialize in furniture and junky antiques, while from here to Adhrianoú, the relics of a real flea market survive in hopeless jumble-sale rejects, touted by a cast of eccentrics (especially on Sun). **Odhós Adhrianoú** is at its most appealing at this end, with a couple of interesting antique shops and some shady cafés overlooking the Metro Lines, the Agora and the Acropolis.

The stretch of **Odhós Ermoú** on the edge of the flea market as it heads west from Platía Monastirakiou is the southern fringe of fashionable Psyrrí, and among the workaday old-fashioned furniture stores here are some interesting new designer and retro shops. In the other direction, as it heads up towards Síndagma, the street is much more staid; in the pedestrianized upper section are familiar high-street chains and department stores.



## Iridhanós River

Platía Monastirakiou • 📍 Monastiráki

The **Iridhanós River** (or Eridanos) runs across Athens from its source on Lykavitós hill, via Síndagma and Monastiráki to Keramikós. Celebrated in Classical times, it had effectively been lost until the work on the Metro expansion uncovered its underground course early this century. Part of the ancient Greek and Roman system that turned it into an **underground drain** can be seen at Monastiráki Metro station, and through railings and glass paving from the platía above. The brick vaulting of these **ancient waterworks** constitutes some impressive engineering work and, in winter and spring, substantial amounts of water still course through.

## Hadrian's Library

Entry on Áreos • Daily 8am–3pm • €2, or included in €30 joint ticket (see p.68) • 📍 210 324 9350 • 📍 Monastiráki

Bordering the north end of the Forum site and stretching right through from Eóλου to Áreos, **Hadrian's Library** was an enormous building that once enclosed a cloistered courtyard of a hundred columns. Despite the name, this was much more than just a library – it was a **cultural centre** that included art galleries, lecture halls and a great public space at its centre. The site is still being **excavated**; much of it has been built over many times, and a lot of what you can see today consists of the foundations and mosaic floors of later Byzantine churches. However, the entrance has been partly reconstructed, some of the original columns survive, and above all you get an excellent sense of the sheer scale of the original building, once enclosed by walls and covering an area even larger than the current site. The **Tetraconch Church**, for example, whose remains lie at the centre of the site, was built entirely within the library's internal courtyard.

## Museum of Greek Folk Art: Ceramics Collection

Áreos 1 • 8am–3pm; closed Tues • €2 • 📍 melt.gr • 📍 Monastiráki

Squeezed between the walls of Hadrian's library and the shacks of Pandhróssou, the **Ceramics Collection** is housed in the former Mosque of Tzisdarákis. Built in 1759, the building has had a chequered life; it was converted to a barracks and then a jail after Greek independence, before it became the original home of the **Museum of Greek Folk Art** in 1918. Today, as a branch of that museum, it houses the **Kyriazópoulos collection** of ceramics – the legacy of a Thessaloníki professor. Good as it is, the collection is likely to excite you only if you have a particular interest in pottery; most will probably find the **mosque** itself, the only one in Athens open to the public, at least as big an attraction.

Though missing its minaret, and with a balcony added inside for the museum, plenty of **original features** remain. In the airy, domed space, look out for the striped *mihrab* (the niche indicating the direction of Mecca), a calligraphic inscription above the entrance that records the mosque's founder and date, and a series of niches used as extra *mihrabs* for occasions when worshippers could not fit into the main hall.

## Kapnikaréa

Ermouí, at Kapnikaréas • Free access • 📍 210 322 4462 • 📍 Monastiráki

The pretty Byzantine church of **Kapnikaréa** marks more or less the beginning of the upmarket shopping on Ermouí; it looks tiny, almost shrunken, in these high-rise, urban surroundings. Originally eleventh century, but with later additions, it has a lovely little dome and a gloomy interior in which you can just about make out the modern frescoes. The church is allegedly named after its founder, a tax collector: *kapnós* means smoke, and in the Byzantine era there was a tax on houses, known as the smoke tax.

## 1 Platía Mitropóleos and around

A welcome spot of calm among the busy shopping streets that surround it, **Platía Mitropóleos** – Cathedral Square – is home to not just one, but two cathedrals. The modern **Mitrópolis** is a large, clumsy nineteenth-century edifice; **Ágios Eleftheríos** alongside it is dwarfed by comparison but infinitely more attractive. There are also several other small churches nearby: look out especially for the dusty, tiny chapel of **Ayía Dhnámis** (though you're best off admiring it from the outside, as the building above looks like its about to collapse), crouching surreally beneath the concrete piers of the now abandoned Ministry of Education and Religion building on Odhós Mitropóleos, a short way up towards Síndagma.

### Ágios Eleftheríos

Platía Mitropóleos

There is said to have been a church where **Ágios Eleftheríos** now stands since the very earliest days of Christianity in Athens; what you see today dates from the twelfth century. Also known as **Mikrí Mitropolí** (“little cathedral”), it's a beautiful little structure, cobbled together with plain and carved blocks from earlier incarnations, some of which are almost certainly from that original church.

## Σύνδαγμα

All roads lead to **Σύνδαγμα** – **Platía Syndágmatos**, or Constitution Square, to give it its full name: you'll almost inevitably find yourself here sooner or later for the Metro and bus connections. Roughly midway between the Acropolis and Lykavitós hill, with the Greek Parliament building (the **Voulí**) on its uphill side, and banks, offices and embassies clustered around, it's the **political and geographic heart** of Athens and still the principal venue for mass demonstrations and political rallies. The square's name derives from the fact that King Otto was forced by popular pressure to declare a formal constitution for the new Greek state from a palace balcony here in 1844.

## Greek Parliament and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

Platía Syndágmatos • Not open to the public • 📍 Σύνδαγμα

The **Voulí**, the **Greek Parliament**, presides over Platía Syndágmatos from its uphill (east) side. A vast, ochre-and-white Neoclassical structure, it was built as the royal palace for Greece's first monarch, the Bavarian King Otto, who moved in in 1842. In front of it, goose-stepping **evzones** in tasselled caps, kilt and woolly leggings – a prettified version of traditional mountain costume – change their guard at regular intervals before the **Tomb of the Unknown Soldier**. On Sundays, just before 11am, a full band and the entire corps parade from the tomb to their barracks at the back of the National Gardens to the rhythm of innumerable camera shutters.

## Hotel Grande Bretagne

Vasiléos Yeoryíou 1 • 📍 grandebretagne.gr • 📍 Σύνδαγμα

Along with the **Voulí**, the vast **Hotel Grande Bretagne** – Athens' grandest – is just about the only building on Platía Syndágmatos to have survived postwar development. Past the impressive facade and uniformed doormen, the interior is magnificently opulent, as befits a grand hotel established in the late nineteenth century. It's worth taking a look inside or having a drink at one of the **bars**; recent renovations include a new rooftop pool, bar and restaurant with great views across the city.

The hotel has long been at the centre of Greek **political intrigue**. In one notorious episode, Winston Churchill narrowly avoided being blown up here on Christmas Day, 1944, when saboteurs from the Communist-led ELAS movement placed an enormous explosive charge in the drains. According to whom you believe, the bomb was either discovered in time by a kitchen employee, or removed by ELAS themselves when they realized that Churchill was one of their potential targets.

## National Gardens

Entrances on Amalías, Vasilíssis Sofías and Iródhou Attikouí • Sunrise–sunset • Free • 🗺️ Σύνδαγμα

The **National Gardens**, which spread out to the south and east of the Voulí, are the most refreshing acres in the city – not so much a flower garden as a luxuriant tangle of trees, whose shade and duck ponds provide palpable relief from the heat of summer. They were originally the private palace gardens, a pet project of Queen Amalia in the 1840s; supposedly the main duty of the minuscule Greek navy in its early days was the fetching of rare plants, often the gifts of other royal houses, from remote corners of the globe. Despite a major pre-Olympic clear-out, there's still something of an air of benign neglect here, with rampant undergrowth and signs that seem to take you round in circles. It's a great place for a picnic, though, or just a shady respite from the city streets. There's a children's **playground** (on the Záppio side) and a tiny **zoo** (signed *Irattikou*) with ostriches and some exotic fowl, though most of the cages these days are occupied by chickens, rabbits and domestic cats. The pretty building of the **Botanical Museum** occupies an elegant little pavilion nearby, though it was closed for refurbishment at the time of writing.

## Presidential Palace

Iródhou Attikouí, at Vasiléos Yeoryiou B • Not open to the public • 🗺️ Σύνδαγμα

Across the road from the east side of the National Gardens is the **Presidential Palace**, the royal residence until King Constantine's exile in 1967, where *evzónes* stand on sentry duty. Next door, the slightly more modest **Mégaro Maxímou** is the official residence of the prime minister.

## Záppio

**Grounds** 24hr • Free • **Building** Only open to the public during exhibitions • 🗺️ zappeion.gr • 🗺️ Σύνδαγμα

On the southern side of the National Gardens are the graceful crescent-shaped grounds of the **Záppio**. More formally laid out than the Gardens, the grounds are popular with evening and weekend strollers. The imposing Neoclassical building, originally built as an exhibition hall, has taken on prestigious roles such as headquarters of the Greek presidency of the European Union and of the 2004 Olympic; today, it hosts occasional exhibitions (see website for details).

## Roman baths

Leóforos Amalías • 🗺️ Akrópoli or Σύνδαγμα

Roman Athens expanded beyond the Classical Greek city to cover much of the area around the National Gardens. The most tangible evidence of this lies in a large **Roman baths** complex that was discovered during excavations for the Metro. It originally dates from the late third century AD, though it was substantially expanded over succeeding centuries. The baths, in which complete rooms have been well preserved, are now visible under a metal-and-perspex cover alongside the busy avenue of Leóforos Amalías, 100m or so north of Hadrian's Arch.

## Hadrian's Arch

Leóforos Amalías • Free, unfenced • 📍 Akrópoli

**Hadrian's Arch** stands in splendid isolation across from one of the busiest road junctions in Athens, the meeting of Amalías and Syngroú. With the traffic roaring by, this is not somewhere you'll be tempted to linger, but it's definitely worth a look on your way to the Temple of Olympian Zeus. The arch, 18m high, was erected by the emperor to mark the edge of the Classical city and the beginning of his own. On the west side, its frieze – damaged and hard to make out – is inscribed, “This is Athens, the ancient city of Theseus”, and on the other, “This is the City of Hadrian and not of Theseus”. With so little that's ancient remaining around it, this doesn't make immediate sense, but you can look up, westwards, to the Acropolis and in the other direction see the columns of the great temple completed by Hadrian.

## Temple of Olympian Zeus

Entrance on Vasilíssis Ólgas • Daily 8am–7pm • €2, or included in €30 joint ticket (see p.68) • 📍 Akrópoli

Directly behind Hadrian's Arch, the colossal pillars of the **Temple of Olympian Zeus** – also known as the **Olympieion** – stand in the middle of a huge, dusty clearing with excellent views of the Acropolis and constant traffic noise. One of the largest temples in the ancient world, and according to Livy, “the only temple on earth to do justice to the god”, it was dedicated by Hadrian in 131 AD, almost seven hundred years after Peisistratos had begun work on it. Hadrian marked the occasion by contributing a statue of Zeus and a suitably monumental one of himself, although both have since been lost.

Today, just fifteen of the temple's original 104 **marble pillars** remain erect. To the north of the temple enclosure, by the site entrance, are various excavated remains including another impressive **Roman bath complex**. The south side of the enclosure overlooks a further area of excavation (not open to the public) where both Roman and much earlier buildings have been revealed.

## The Grand Avenues

Northwest from Σύνδαγμα, the broad and busy **grand avenues** of **Stadhíou**, **Panepistimiou** (officially called Venizélou) and **Akadhimías** head towards Platía Omonías. Initially lined with grandiose mansions, some converted to museums, squares with open vistas and opulent arcades with chichi shopping, they move steadily downmarket as you approach Omónia.

### Museums

There are three museums around the grand avenues of rather specialist interest: the **National Historical Museum** (Stadhíou 13, Platía Kolokotróni; Tues–Sun 9am–2pm; €3, free on Sun; 📍nhmuseum.gr), which focuses on Greek history from the fall of Constantinople to the reign of King Otto; the **City of Athens Museum** (Paparigopóulou 7, on Platía Klafthmónos; Mon & Wed–Fri 9am–4pm, Sat & Sun 10am–3pm; €5; 📍athenscitymuseum.gr), set in King Otto's 1830s residence; and the **Numismatic Museum** (Panepistimiou 12; Tues–Sun 8.30am–4pm; €3; 📍enma.gr), which houses a collection of over 600,000 coins and related artefacts.

### Platía Klafthmónos

**Platía Klafthmónos** offers a wonderful view towards three grand Neoclassical buildings on Panepistimiou. Here the planners' conceptualization of the capital of newly independent Greece can for once be seen more or less as they envisaged it – the nation's Classical heritage blends with modern, Western values. As you look up you'll see, from the left, the sober grey marble of the **National Library**, the rather racier

**Akadhimía** (University), enlivened by frescoes depicting King Otto surrounded by ancient Greek gods and heroes, and the over-the-top **Academy of Science** with its pediment friezes and giant statues of Athena and Apollo. The garish decoration gives an alarming impression of what the Classical monuments might have looked like when their paintwork was intact. Behind these buildings, on Akadhimías, is a major terminus for **city buses**, from where you can get a connection to almost anywhere in the city or its suburbs.

## Platía Omónias and the bazaar

While Pláka and Síndagma are resolutely geared to tourists and the Athenian well-heeled, **Platía Omónias** (Omónia Square) and its surroundings represent a much more gritty city. Here the grand avenues imagined by the nineteenth-century planners have been subverted by time and the realities of Athens' status as a commercial capital. If you head up from Monastiráki, you'll come to the **bazaar** area around Odhós Athinás, home to a bustling series of markets and small shops spilling out onto the street. Platía Omónias itself – brutal and shadeless – has little to offer in terms of aesthetics but it is the heart of Athens for a good portion of the population: a continuous turmoil of people and cars. Avoid walking around this area alone at night, and be sure to hide your valuables.

### Bazaar

The city's **bazaar** area, concentrated on **Athinás** and **Eóλου streets**, has a cosmopolitan ethnic mix as well as some of urban Athens' most compelling sights. It's also a neighbourhood that's been increasingly recolonized by the drug addicts and prostitutes who were cleared out for the 2004 Olympics – a process accelerated by the economic crisis.

Here the unsophisticated stores still reflect their origins in the Oriental **souk system** with each street selling certain goods. Hence the Monastiráki end of Athinás is dedicated to tools; food stores are gathered around the central market in the middle, especially along Evripídhou; there's glass to the west; paint and brasswork to the east; and clothes in Eóλου and Ayíou Márkou. Always raucous and teeming with shoppers, *kouloúri* (bread-ring) sellers, gypsies and other vendors, the whole area is great free entertainment.

### Meat and seafood market

Athinás • Mon–Sat 8am–3pm (liveliest in the morning)

The lively heart of the neighbourhood is the central **meat and seafood market**, which occupies almost an entire block bordered by Athinás, Evripídhou, Eóλου and Sofokléous. The building itself is a grand nineteenth-century relic. Its fretted iron awnings shelter forests of carcasses and mounds of hearts, livers and ears – no place for the squeamish. In the middle section of the hall is the fish market, with all manner of bounty from the sea, squirming and glistening on the marble slabs.

### Fruit and vegetable bazaar

Athinás • Mon–Sat 8am–3pm (liveliest in the morning)

Across Athinás is the colourful **fruit and vegetable bazaar**, surrounded by streets where grocers pile their stalls high with sacks of pulses, salt cod, barrels of olives and wheels of cheese. A clear sign of Athens' increasingly **multi-ethnic** character can be seen in the streets around Evripídhou just west of here, where a growing community from South Asia, predominantly Bengalis, gather around spice-rich minimarkets.