

Introducing Greece

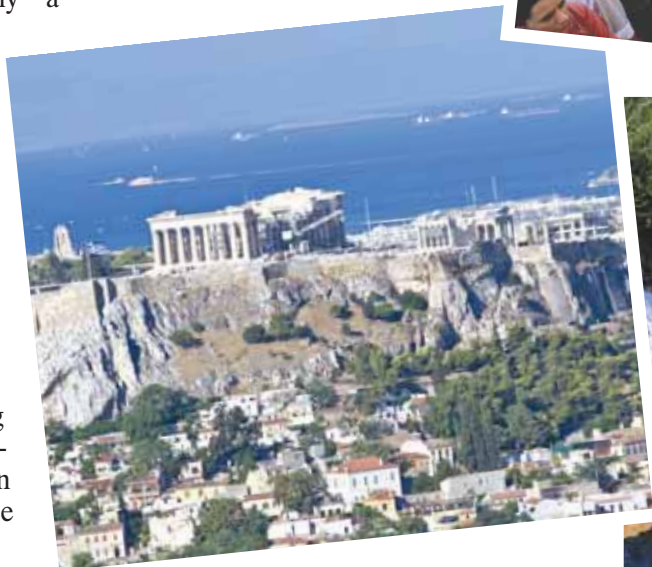
Greece offers a myriad of experiences, landscapes and activities. It is the pulsing nightclubs of Mykonos and the ancient beauty of Delos; the grandeur of Delphi and the earthiness of Ioannina; the rugged hillsides of Crete and the lush wildflowers of spring. It is the blinding light of the Mykonos sun, the melancholy throb of Thessaloniki's rembetika (blues songs), the tang of home-made tzatziki, the gossip in the kafeneia (coffee shops). It is the Parthenon - solitary and pristine - lording it over the hazy sprawl of Athens.

Greece is a country with a hallowed past and an at-times turbulent present. Appreciation of the achievements of its classical past has tended to overshadow its development as a free nation since the War of Independence from the Ottomans in 1821. Many foreign Hellenists imbued with a romantic ideal of the Greece of Pericles and the Parthenon are blithely ignorant that Greece today is a vibrant modern European country. It is equally a land where the languages of recent migrant communities from the Balkans, Africa and Asia - not to mention the English and German of EU migrants and retirees - contribute to Greece's status as one of Europe's more recent multicultural societies.

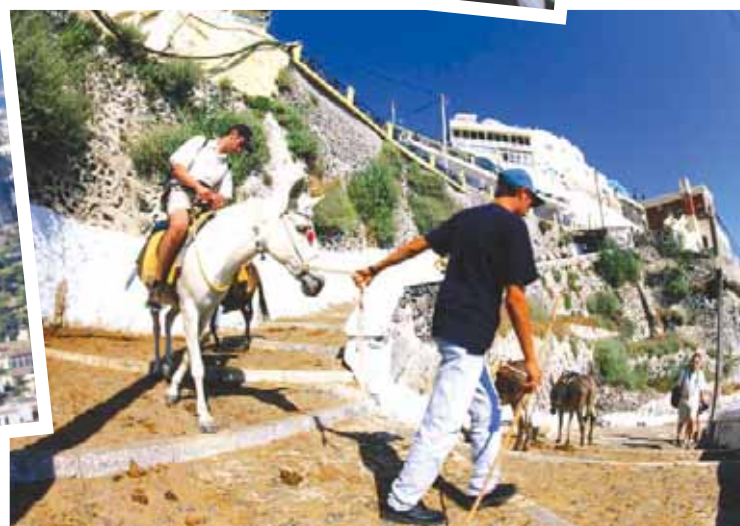
As recently as 1983, when it acceded to the EU, Greece was essentially a conservative, agrarian society famous for olive oil, coups, beaches and islands. Its transformation since its induction - alone, at the time, among the southeastern European nations - to the Brussels-led club of prosperous nations has been no less than dramatic. It could once take up to two years to obtain a landline for a home - now Greeks boast



more mobile phones than fixed-line phones. Internet hotspots pop up like mushrooms, while car ownership, once the privilege of the affluent few, is now a consumer commodity enjoyed by the majority.



While sleeping on beaches was once de rigueur for travellers in the carefree '70s, tourism is now most definitely pitched to the middle to up-



per-end markets and sleeping rough is now oh-so out. This has created mixed b-



lessings for visitors: better facilities inevitably come at higher prices; faster and safer sea travel has replaced more romantic slow boat voyages to rocky isles; wholesome, home-cooked food may be hard to find amid the surfeit of tacos,

sushi or stir-fried lamb; homey, boxlike rooms tended to with a smile have been usurped by airy, air-conned self-catering apartments with nary a

Yet the fact that Greece continues to enjoy a steady influx of foreign visitors is easy to explain. The Greek people still have the welcome mat out. It is they who, after all, make Greece. Without the indomitable bonhomie of the Greeks themselves, Greece would be a different place altogether. Their zest for life, their curiosity and their unquestioning hospitality to the visitors in their midst is what makes a visitor's experience in the country inevitably unforgettable. The Greeks may curse their luck at times, distrust their politicians and believe 'oiling' the wheels of bureaucracy a fact of life, but they maintain their joie de vivre, their spontaneity, their optimism.

So, the job at hand is simple: decide which particular Greece you want to experience. Then come and find it.

Make it happen

Ready to go? These recommended tours make it easy:

- Sail the azure waters of the Aegean and cycle to ancient ruins and unspoilt beaches
- Explore the Peloponnese region of Greece where the ancient world meets the modern
- Skip the lines and see all our Athens tours

Article from Lonely Planet magazine
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Lonely Planet Photographer



Greek face in sight to say kalimera (good morning).