

Kefalonia, Greek Islands: the perfect break

With its unspoilt beaches drenched in autumn sun, Kefalonia is ready to celebrate its patron saint with an island-wide party, says Oliver Smith.

Why go?

The setting for Louis de Berneres' fabulous novel Captain Corelli's Mandolin, Kefalonia's myriad appeals include magnificent, rugged scenery, friendly locals, a certain rural charm, and some of the best beaches in the whole of Greece. And despite the success of the novel – and the subsequent film adaptation – it remains mercifully unspoilt by mass tourism.

The largest of the Ionian Islands, it never feels crowded, even in high season on the photogenic sands of Myrtos, or among the swanky, marina-side restaurants of Fiskardo.

During August, the heat can border on the unbearable, but visit the island in the coming weeks and you'll be rewarded with temperatures in the mid-20s, even quieter beaches and cheaper accommodation. Or you could wait a little longer and time your trip to coincide with the second feast of St Gerasimos – Kefalonia's hugely revered patron saint – on October 20, during which his incorruptible remains are paraded through the streets in a gilded sarcophagus, and the island descends into raucous celebration.

Spend the morning...

At Myrtos Beach. Backed by almost sheer cliffs and lapped by unfathomably turquoise waters, it is one of the world's most photographed stretches of sand. It fills up with boisterous Italians from around noon, so arrive early to claim a sun lounger.

Have lunch...

At the Castle Cafe, found beneath the ruins of the 16th-century hilltop Castle of St George, near the small town of Peratata. Offering sandwiches and traditional snacks, it is set within a gorgeous, shaded garden and commands stunning views across the south of the island. It is run by an amiable Greek gent – whose mother tends the flowers – and his English wife, who is rather secretive about her recipe for spicy baked feta. Burn off your meal by inspecting the aforementioned Venetian fortress.

Spend the afternoon...

At the monastery of Ayios Gerasimos (8am-1pm, 3pm-8pm; free). Nestled in a verdant valley a few kilometres to the north east of the castle, the monastery is modern, having been rebuilt in a Byzantine style following the devastating earthquake of 1953 that levelled the original 16th-century structure. The interior is adorned with colourful biblical scenes, and behind the building lies a small chapel, where svelte visitors can squeeze through a hole in the ground and inspect the caves where St Gerasimos is thought to have spent endless hours meditating. Two annual feasts celebrate the saint's life, on August 15 and October 20, during which the monastery is overrun with worshippers.

Have dinner at...

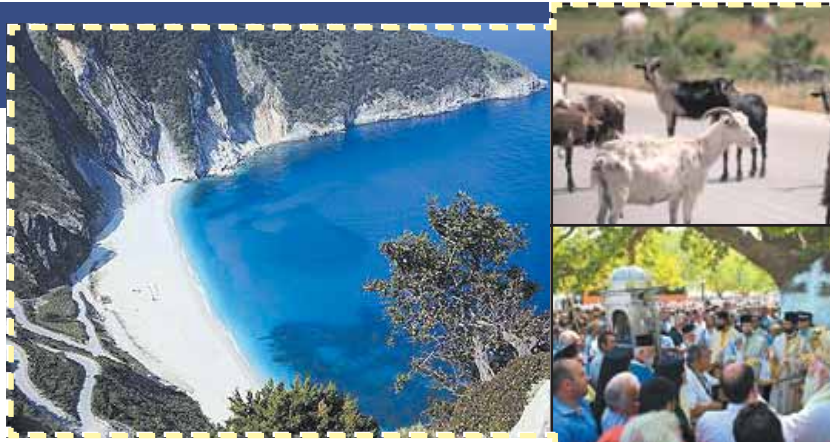
A taverna. With their plastic chairs, paper tablecloths, lukewarm dishes (Greeks believe hot food is bad for the stomach) and feline visitors, these traditional Greek restaurants can feel like much of a muchness, but a few stand out. The Waterway bar and grill, on the beach below Sparta, has a lively atmosphere and sea views, and Tassia, in Fiskardo, is good for lobster and Kefallonian meat pie.

Spend the next day...

Exploring the Lixouri peninsula. Kefalonia's second city, and the surrounding villages, bore the brunt of the 1953 earthquake, and it still bears the scars. Goats, chickens – and the odd eccentric-looking local – potter around the farming region, where ruined homes and sub-sided fields still dot the landscape.

Make for the rust-red sands of family-friendly Xi Beach, on the south coast, which offers watersports and a couple of smart tavernas, or wild Petani Beach, on the west coast, which rivals Myrtos for its spectacular location. Finish the day at the Monastery of Kipoureon, which occupies a dramatic cliff top location on the west coast of the peninsula, and where each evening a score of tourist join the Orthodox priests to watch the sun set.

By Oliver Smith - article from Telegraph.co.uk



THE GREEK ORTHODOX COMMUNITY OF NSW, THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY AND THE MODERN GREEK DEPARTMENT INVITE YOU TO CELEBRATE THE

2500TH ANNIVERSARY OF

THE BATTLE OF MARATHON

HISTORY & LEGEND

PRESENTED BY DR ALASTAIR BLANSHARD AND DR VRASIDAS KARALIS
INCLUDES A DVD SCREENING OF THE BATTLE OF MARATHON

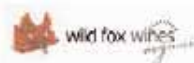


DATE: SUNDAY 12TH SEPTEMBER 2010

VENUE: EASTERN AVENUE AUDITORIUM, SYDNEY UNIVERSITY

TIME: 4PM

REFRESHMENTS SERVED



11965

LECTURE PRESENTED IN ENGLISH

*SAME CONTENT TO BE PRESENTED IN GREEK AT THE GREEK ORTHODOX COMMUNITY CLUB LAKEMBA ON 10TH OCTOBER 2010 AT 6PM