

Destination Greece

In the early days of the summer of 2007 Greeks awoke to find their country alight: literally. Forest fires had broken out in the thickly carpeted hills around Athens. Within a week or two they had also erupted with unparalleled fury across wide areas of the Peloponnese, Evia and even as far north as Epiros. Satellite pictures showed a pall of billowing smoke drifting skyward, ash covered many neighbourhoods of Athens, thousands lost their homes and 66 hapless souls their lives. All the while, incessant talking heads on Greek TV loudly proclaimed this to be Greece's worst disaster of recent times; it was widely believed that the fires were deliberately lit, adding insult to injury. The 2007 firestorm not only had an ecological fallout, but also severely dented the reputation of the conservative government of the New Democracy party of Konstandinos Karamanlis. Such was the anger directed at the government – accused by many of idly standing by while their country burned – that in the September 2007 national elections Karamanlis was returned with a majority of only two in the 300-seat parliament. It was a wake-up call and he knew it.

All this came at a time when the three-and-a-half-year-old Karamanlis Government had considered itself to be sitting pretty. Greece had been revelling in the European spotlight for some time, enjoying a residual glow after the success of the 2004 Olympic Games, their unexpected triumph as UEFA football champions in the same year, and Patras being the European Capital of Culture in 2006. Yet for all their pride in and celebration of recent achievements, the Greek population proved themselves to be, ultimately, pragmatic and illustrated that politics is never far from the core of the Greek psyche. In the land where democracy was born, true democracy still prevails and the will of the people can be as strong as the winds that fanned those calamitous fires.

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 upper-end markets and sleeping rough is now oh-so out.

This has created mixed blessings for visitors: better facilities inevitably come at higher prices; faster and safer sea travel has replaced more romantic

FAST FACTS

Population:	10,706,290
Percentage of women:	50.5%
Tourists:	14.4 million annually
Cars:	4.1 million
GDP:	US\$256.3 billion
GDP growth:	4.2%
Per capita income:	US\$26,920
Inflation:	3.3%
Unemployment:	9.6%
External debt:	US\$67.23 billion

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, box-like rooms tended to with a smile have been usurped by airy, air-conned self-catering apartments with nary a Greek face in sight to say *kalimera* (good morning).

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.

And, of course, their homeland offers myriad experiences, landscapes and activities. Greece is the pulsing nightclubs of Mykonos and the solemnity of Meteora; the grandeur of Delphi and the earthiness of Metsovo; the rugged Cretan hillsides and the lush wildflowers of spring. It is the blinding light of the Aegean sun, the melancholy throb of *rembetika* (blues songs), the tang of home-made tzatziki, the gossip in the *kafeneia* (coffee shops). It is the Parthenon – solitary and pristine – lordling it over the hazy sprawl of Athens.

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

Getting Started

TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

Let's face it, Greece is a hugely popular destination. While this may be sustainable in the quieter time of the year, from June to September Greece receives an enormous influx of travellers and tourists. While this may be a bonanza for the country, this annual influx puts great strains on the infrastructure, the environment, the often fragile flora and fauna and even the Greek people themselves.

Mega-destinations like Santorini, Mykonos, Rhodes and Corfu often struggle to house and feed visitors and manage their detritus. The building of new developments often clashes with eco-minded organisations (see p554). In a similar vein, champions of fauna often fight losing battles with this relentless push for expansion (see p712).

As a potential visitor to Greece with an understanding of what issues prevail upon the country, you may be able to alleviate some of the negative side effects of mass tourism and travel.

July and August is the time of the fabled European Summer mass vacation. Outside this high season Greece is cheaper and accommodation is easier to find also the weather at these times is much more bearable.

Travelling to and around Greece will usually involve polluting, mechanised transport. Seriously consider cycling – it can be serious fun. You'll need good gears and a stout constitution at times – those mountains can be challenging – but the land is eminently suitable for cyclists.

Local transport is nonetheless well-developed and reasonably priced. You don't really need your own motorised transport: you just need a bit more time. There are lots of trekking options (for example in the Zagorohoria, see p335), or you may care to charter a yacht (see p718) with a few friends and use wind power to propel you from island to island in much the same way that Odysseus (Ulysses) did.

A growing number of hotels choose green options. Solar heating, the recycling of waste products, the use of energy efficient light bulbs and low impact architecture using local materials are all ways in which eco-savvy hotel and pension owners do their bit to keep green. Seek out such sleeping options and give them your mark of approval. An entire community in Crete has done away with electricity all together (see p485).

'Organic' is a buzzword in Greece too. Greece has one of the healthiest dietary regimes around; couple that with local organic products and you are onto a culinary winner. Consider choosing your restaurants on the basis of their locally grown food products – and *tell* the owners – they will all get the message in good time. When you're thirsty, don't cart one of those dastardly plastic water bottles with you. Who will ultimately dispose of it? Drink from a water fountain or from a tap. (Note, although the water in Greece is generally fine, many islands have questionable, limited or no water supply, so it's best to check with the locals there.) For more details on environmental issues, see p82. Shop sensibly too: look at labels and buy only locally made products. Don't just make a beeline for the most obviously popular spots: everyone else will be doing the same thing. Select your destination with some inventiveness. You'll probably have a better time.

Above all, exercise common sense. Set the precedent yourself and travel responsibly, yet comfortably. It's not hard. Greece and its people will be all the better off for it and so will you.

'Greece receives an enormous influx of travellers and tourists'

WHEN TO GO

Spring and autumn are the best times to visit Greece; specifically May, June, September and October. Most of the country's tourist infrastructure goes into hibernation during winter, particularly on the islands. Some of the smaller islands close completely and some islanders head off to alternative homes on the mainland for a few months. Many hotels, seasonal cafés and restaurants close their doors from the end of November until the beginning of April; bus and ferry services are either drastically reduced or cancelled.

The cobwebs are dusted off in time for Orthodox Easter (usually around April; see p724), when the first tourists start to arrive. Conditions are perfect between Easter and mid-June, when the weather is pleasantly warm in most places; beaches and ancient sites are relatively uncrowded; public transport operates at close to full schedules; and there's a bigger variety of accommodation options to choose from.

Mid-June to the end of August is high season. It's party time on the islands and everything is in full swing. It's also very hot – in July and August the mercury can soar to 40°C (over 100°F) in the shade just about anywhere in the country; the beaches are crowded; the ancient sites are swarming with tour groups; and in many places accommodation is booked solid.

The high season starts to wind down in September and conditions are ideal once more until the end of October.

By November the endless blue skies of summer have disappeared. November to February are the wettest months and it can get surprisingly cold. Snow is common on the mainland and in the mountains of Evia and Crete; it occasionally snows in Athens. But there are also plenty of sunny days and some visitors prefer the tranquillity that reigns at this time of year.

COSTS & MONEY

Greece is no longer a cheap country. Prices have rocketed since the adoption of the euro in 2002. It's hard to believe that inflation is less than 4%, as claimed by the government, when prices have risen by a perceptibly higher margin since that time. Some dramatic price rises, particularly for accommodation and restaurant meals, have been evident in recent years.

A rock-bottom daily budget for a solo traveller would be €45. This would mean hitching, staying in youth hostels or camping, and only occasionally eating in restaurants or taking ferries. Allow at least €90 per day if you want your own room and plan to eat out, travel about and see the sights. If you want comfortable rooms and restaurants all the way, you will need close to €130 per day. These budgets are for individuals travelling in high season (July/August). Couples sharing a room can get by on less.

Your money will go much further if you travel during the quieter months of May to June and September to October. Accommodation on the islands particularly is a lot cheaper outside high season. You will also be able to negotiate better deals if you stay a few days. Families can achieve considerable savings by looking for self-catering apartments, shopping for food and drink at supermarkets and local produce markets and cooking for themselves.

Prices quoted throughout this book are for the high season of mid-July to late August.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

Travel writers can be a great source of inspiration for those planning to follow in their footsteps.

Attic in Greece (Austen Kark) This tale revolves around the author's experiences of buying a house in the old town of Nafplio with his wife Nina. It's full of interesting insights gleaned through the author's time in Greece working for the BBC.

See Climate Charts (p720) for more information.

HOW MUCH?

Local telephone call €0.30 per min

Minimum taxi fare €4

Litre of milk €1.60

International Herald

Tribune €2.50

Coffee €3.50-5

Soft drink (can) €1.50

Cinema ticket €8

TOP 10

Green Destinations

So you want a green, sustainable vacation; you want to commune with the land, the people, the sea and the mountains. Here are our suggestions for some places you can visit that are off the beaten track.

- 1 The Zagorohoria (northwestern Greece; p332) – mountains and trekking
- 2 Remote islands such as Gavdos (Crete; p499), Agios Efstratios (northeastern Aegean islands; p634) or Psara (northeastern Aegean islands; p617) – minimal visitors, uncluttered space
- 3 Milia (Crete; p485) – no electricity, organic products
- 4 Tilos Park (Tilos, Dodecanese; p554)
- 5 Hydra (Saronic Gulf Islands; p355) – no cars
- 6 The Pomakohoria (eastern Macedonia; p314) – no tourists, thermal baths
- 7 Dadia Forest Reserve (Thrace; p320) – raptors, lots of them
- 8 Mt Athos (Halkidiki; p291) – for spirituality; no women allowed
- 9 Triá Potamia (central Greece; p264) – kayaking and skiing
- 10 Taÿgetos Mountains (Peloponnese; p193) – walking and wandering

Top Reads

One of the best ways to learn about Greek culture is to immerse yourself in a good book or some poetry. The following top 10 have earned critical acclaim in Greece and abroad. For more information on Greek literature, see p60.

- 1 *The Odyssey* by Homer
- 2 *Alexis Zorbas* by Nikos Kazantzakis
- 3 *A Century of Greek Poetry* by Bien, Constantine, Keely, van Dyck
- 4 *Christ Recrucified* by Nikos Kazantzakis
- 5 *Complete Poems of Cavafy* by Constantine Cavafy
- 6 *Dinner with Persephone* by Patricia Storace
- 7 *Life in the Tomb* by Stratos Myrivilis
- 8 *A House in Corfu* by Emma Tennant
- 9 *The Dark Labyrinth* by Lawrence Durrell
- 10 *The Olive Grove* by Katherine Kizilos

Our Favourite Festivals & Events

Greeks love to celebrate, and there's almost always something, somewhere that's worth celebrating. The following list is our top 10, but for a comprehensive list of all the main festivals and events throughout the year, see p723.

- 1 Easter (Corfu; p678) April to May
- 2 Summer theatre on Lykavittos Hill (Athens; p130) June to August
- 3 Patra Carnival (Peloponnese; p163) January to March
- 4 Hellenic Festival (Theatre of Epidavros, Peloponnese; p187) July to August
- 5 Skyros Carnival (Sporades; p672) February to March
- 6 Classical Music Festival (Nafplio; p183) May to July
- 7 Miaoulia Festival (Hydra; p358) June
- 8 Athens Festival (Theatre of Herodes Atticus, Athens; p130) June to September
- 9 Folegandros Festival (Cyclades; p437) July
- 10 Panagia tou Harou (Lipsi Village; Dodecanese p584) August

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

Most travellers carry far too much gear, filling bags and backpacks with things that will never see the light of day. It's best to bring only the essentials; you can buy anything else you might need in Greece. The essentials:

- A digital camera – Greece is enviably over-photogenic, so send photos home via the internet
- A few paperback novels to while away the hours spent riding ferries
- A shady hat, sunglasses and sun block – indispensable in Greece's hot climate
- An inflatable neck pillow and eye shades – for those long bus and train journeys
- Lonely Planet's *Greek Phrasebook* – talk like the locals
- Sturdy shoes – ancient sites and historic towns and villages have rocky paths
- Your international driving licence – you can't drive without it
- Your iPod – carry your photos of home and favourite music and video clips
- Your mobile phone – buy a local SIM card and keep in touch with family and friends

Mermaid Singing/Peel me a Lotus (Charmian Clift) A duet of titles from Clift's Greece period in the late 50s. They reflect her time as mother, spouse and blossoming author on the island of Hydra where she lived among the (at times) smothering embrace of her fellow Greek mothers and spouses.

Stars Over Paxos (John Gill) Travel writer Gill recounts his early experience on Paxi in the Ionian islands. Ostensibly helping out with the olive harvest Gill becomes enmeshed in the day to day life of the Paxiots who both befriend him and ultimately become alienated by him. A fascinating read about the mindset of a small island community.

The Colossus of Marousi (Henry Miller) Few writers have matched the enthusiasm expressed in this classic tale. Miller's fervour never flags as he leaps from one adventure to the next. Some travellers get upset about being ripped off by a taxi driver on arrival; to Miller, it's another experience to be savoured.

The Greek Islands (Lawrence Durrell) More than just a travel guide, Durrell's photojournalistic essay of Greece in the '70s stands the test of time with his quiet introspective observations of Greek history and culture that are still relevant today.

The Hill of Kronos (Peter Levi) A more serious and cerebral look at Greece from a long-time philhellene who has known Greece for many years. Levi's insight touches upon the history, politics and darker days of Greece during occupation and dictatorship. His long-time love and patience wins out with a picture of Greece that is both objective and subjective.

The Mani (Patrick Leigh Fermor) Another ardent philhellene, Patrick Leigh Fermor is well known for his exploits in rallying the Cretan resistance in WWII. He now lives in Kardamyli in the Peloponnese.

The Summer of My Greek Taverna (Tom Stone) A humorous yet bittersweet tale of love, dreams and anticipation. Stone does what we would all like to do – run a restaurant on a Greek island – in this instance Patmos. It's not all plain sailing as Stone learns the hard lesson of dealing with Greeks on their turf. It's a great read for the beach.

INTERNET RESOURCES

There is a huge number of websites providing information about Greece.

Culture Guide (www.cultureguide.gr) Lots of information about contemporary culture and the arts.

Greek Ferries (www.greekferries.gr) One-stop site with access to all the latest international and domestic ferry information.

Greek National Tourist Organisation (www.gnto.gr) For concise tourist information.

Greek Search Engine (www.in.gr) The best starting point for web browsers.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Has postcards from other travellers and the Thorn Tree bulletin board, where you can ask questions before you go or dispense advice when you get back.

Ministry of Culture (www.culture.gr) Information about ancient sites, art galleries and museums.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

A CYCLADES CIRCLE

Two Weeks / Athens to Athens

The Cyclades are by far the most popular and best known of the Greek islands. Start with a couple of days sightseeing in **Athens** (p95), before catching a ferry from **Rafina** (p145). The first port of call is class **Andros** (p368) with its fine beaches and art galleries. Move along to **Tinos** (p372), a pilgrimage island for many Orthodox Christians. Next in line is chic **Mykonos** (p381), famous for its bars and beaches, and stepping-off point for the sacred island of **Delos** (p390). **Naxos** (p401), the greenest and most fertile of the Cyclades is a great place for walkers. The sheer cliffs of the volcanic caldera at **Santorini** (Thira; p422, created by one of the largest eruptions ever recorded, are a sight not to be missed. Start your return leg with a couple of days partying on youthful **Ios** (p418) then recover on nearby **Paros** (p392) with its plethora of fine beaches and more mellow nightlife. Swing west on a weekly ferry to demure **Sifnos** (p442) with its olive grove, oleanders, almonds and junipers. Finally, do see discrete **Kythnos** (p456) and mingle with the Athenian yacht crowd.



Bearing southeast from Athens, this circular route covers several hundred kilometres, taking you through the perimeter of the Cyclades and back to Athens via the jewels of this island group.

THE GRAND TOUR**One Month / Athens to Ancient Delphi**

A month is long enough to have a really good look at the country and to experience the huge variety of attractions (both ancient and modern) that it has to offer.

From bustling **Athens** (p95), head to the pretty Venetian city of **Nafplio** (p180) in the Peloponnese. Nafplio, first capital of independent Greece, is the perfect base for day trips to **Ancient Mycenae** (p177) and the celebrated **Theatre of Epidavros** (p187). Head south from here to the attractive fishing town of **Gythio** (p202) to catch a ferry across to **Kissamos** (p499) on Crete, possibly stopping at the delightfully unspoiled island of **Kythira** (p224) on the way. It's certainly worth calling in at either the charming **Hania** (p485) or **Rethymno** (p476) on the journey along Crete's northern coast to the capital **Iraklio** (p464) and the ruins of **Knossos** (p472). From Iraklio, jump across to not-to-be-missed **Santorini** (Thira; p422) and start island-hopping north. Consider unwinding for a few days at some of the smaller islands like **Anafi** (p432) and **Koufonisia** (p412), both perfect for beach lovers, before hitting the bars and clubs of hedonistic **Mykonos** (p381). Mykonos also has weekly connections to cosmopolitan **Thessaloniki** (p272) in northern Greece. Thessaloniki is a pleasant surprise to many travellers; a sophisticated city with some fine Roman and Byzantine architecture and a lively nightlife. Walkers will certainly want to call at **Mt Olympus** (p298) on the way to the amazing rock monasteries of **Meteora** (p264), home of hermit monks. The last stop is at unforgettable **Ancient Delphi** (p233), former home of the mysterious Delphic oracle and steeped in ancient Greek history; just the place to ask what to do next.

A month should be ample time to complete this epic trip, taking you through the Peloponnese, Crete, the Cyclades and back to the mainland through northern and central Greece.

**MAINLY MAINLAND****Two Weeks / Igoumenitsa to Athens**

If entering Greece from Italy with your own transport, Igoumenitsa is a good place to start. Once the Via Egnatia highway is completed access across the north will be easier but not half as interesting as it is now.

Do not linger in **Igoumenitsa** (p343), the busy entry port in Greece's far northwest; head across the mountains to **Ioannina** (p326) with its arresting lakeside location, Ottoman monuments and social life. Head northwards to the **Zagorohoria** (p332), unlike anything else you will see in Greece. Cross the Pindos Mountains via the less-travelled northern route to **Kastoria** (p307), a pretty lakeside town. Now make a beeline for the **Prespa Lakes** (p305), where tranquillity reigns over landscapes of water and mountains. Visit the artists' town of **Florina** (p303) and cruise through western Macedonia with an overnight stop in **Edessa** (p302) – famous for its tumbling waterfalls. Spend some time in bustling **Thessaloniki** (p272) before heading to the home of the ancient gods at **Mt Olympus** (p298), a mere 90-minute drive south. Passing through the **Vale of Tembi** (p250) you enter the sprawling plains of Thessaly where monks built monasteries atop pinnacles of rock at stunning **Meteora** (p264). Heading south the route takes you across agricultural plains and mountains to the sea once more near **Lamia** (p245), not far from where ancient hero Leonidas stood his ground against invading Persians at **Thermopylae** (p246). A fast highway now leads on to Athens, a detour from which leads you to **Thiva** (Thebes; p230). From here choose the less-travelled mountain route via Erythres to approach **Athens** (p95).



This circuitous 1000km-long route takes in the more spectacular scenery of the north plus the centre's most visited attraction, Meteora, and finally leads you to Athens along routes that are not used by many travellers.

ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

EASTERN ISLAND RUN

Three Weeks / Rhodes to Alexandroupoli

This route takes travellers island-hopping north from Rhodes through the islands of the Dodecanese and the Northeastern Aegean, finishing in Alexandroupoli.

You'll need to spend a few days on **Rhodes** (p516), exploring the atmospheric old city and visiting the spectacular **Acropolis of Lindos** (p528) before setting sail for **Tilos** (p550). This laid-back island is a great place for walkers and those seeking uncrowded beaches and, unlike its neighbours, it is one of the few islands in the Dodecanese to have escaped the ravages of development. The next stop is **Nisyros** (p554), where the eruptions of Mt Polyvotis have created a bizarre volcanic landscape that will take your breath away. You'll need to call briefly at **Kos** (p557) to pick up a ferry onward to **Patmos** (p577), an island that St John the Divine found sufficiently inspiring to pen his *Book of Revelations*. Patmos has good connections to ultra-laid-back **Icaria** (p589), where you can laze at some of the Aegean's best beaches before continuing to **Chios** (p607) and its fabulous mastic villages of the south. The next stop is **Lesvos** (Mytilini; p618), birthplace of the poet Sappho and producer of Greece's finest olive oil and ouzo. **Limnos** (p630) is little more than a transit point on the journey north to **Samothraki** (p634) and the Sanctuary of the Great Gods. The final leg is to the Thracian port of **Alexandroupoli** (p316), where travellers will find good transport connections to Thessaloniki and Athens.

Furthest from the Greek mainland, this leisurely trip through the Dodecanese to the islands of the Northeastern Aegean covers about 800km.



A CENTRAL CIRCUIT

Two Weeks / Thessaloniki to Igoumenitsa

This journey starts in the bustling, stylish capital of Thessaloniki in Macedonia, and heads south and west through some spectacular mountain scenery to finish at the Adriatic port of Igoumenitsa.

Thessaloniki (p272) is an exciting lively city worth a few days of fun. Head south to **Litohoro** (p299), the trailhead for the ascent of **Mt Olympus** (p298). Allow two full days to ascend to the home of the gods. When done, head south into Thessaly through the **Vale of Tembi** (p250) and make for the pin-nacled rocks and hanging monasteries of **Meteora** (p264) – climb them if you're not vertiginously challenged. Cut due south across rolling farmland to unassuming **Lamia** (p245) before heading west to alpine **Karpenisi** (p243) at the heart of Greece's 'Little Switzerland'. Lay up for a day or two in this relaxing mountain resort then spiral on west and downwards to the languid lagoon of **Messolongi** (p241). Now go where few travellers venture: follow the often lonely road of the west coast through little visited resorts, such as **Astakos** (p243) and **Mytikas** (p243) – maybe add rarely visited **Kalamos** (p243) to your island collection. Barrel north to the fishing port cum resort of **Preveza** (p339) for the best sardines in Greece, then make a beeline for **Parga** (p341) on the Epiros 'Riviera' where you can swim in crystal blue coves. Your road will lead you to **Igoumenitsa** (p343), an important port linking Greece with Italy and the rest of Europe, and the start of the Via Egnatia highway that leads all the way to distant Istanbul.



This unusual route is best suited if you have your own transport, though it can be done by bus. The route combines ancient sites, mountains and sea in a package that few travellers have thought of.

BEST OF THE DODECANESE**Four Weeks / Kasos to Patmos**

The journey starts on the tiny and almost forgotten island of Kasos and winds its way along the borders of the Turkish coast to the holy island of Patmos.

Take a slow boat from Piraeus to **Kasos** (p540) and really step back in time for a day or two visiting monasteries and caves before moving on to the elongated island of **Karpathos** (p534) with its vibrant, ancient culture and music. After a few days step onto a ferry to tiny **Halki** (p531) for some fine food and relaxed swimming. Take a caique to the largest island of the Dodecanese, **Rhodes** (p516) and take in the stunning medieval old town. If time and budget allow, fly to **Kastellorizo** (p543), Greece's easternmost outpost and home to a busy expat Greek-Australian community. Cruise across to rocky **Symi** (p546) with its oh-so-pretty harbour, then chill out in laid-back **Tilos** (p550) with its fine walking trails and down-to-earth lifestyle. Hop across and northwards to visit a living volcano on craggy **Nisyros** (p554) then party on at holiday island **Kos** (p557) where there is ample room for everyone. Fly to startlingly bare yet unmistakably Cycladic **Astypalea** (p564; the flight path goes via Leros) for a different taste of the Dodecanese, then fly back and on to **Leros** (p574), an island that has not lost touch with its roots. Take a fast catamaran to **Lipsi** (p582), almost out of sight of the mainstream, but much loved by aficionados of small and cosy islands for its good food and beaches. Finally make a pilgrimage to spiritual **Patmos** (p577) for some excellent food and even more enticing beaches and getaway corners. When finished take a fast and luxurious ferry back to Piraeus or head on northwards to the islands of the Northeastern Aegean.

This island-hopping odyssey takes in 13 of the 17 official Dodecanese islands. With a little more time you can easily fit in the whole set.

**TAILORED TRIPS****ON THE GO**

If you really fancy a vacation that combines a number of activities beyond beaching it and dining then listen up. Start by some relaxing fly fishing on the Aoös River near **Konitsa** (p337) in Epiros. After a lunch of freshly caught trout, try walking the **Vikos Gorge** (p335) and maybe follow that with a mountain hike to **Drakolimni** (p336). Now take your gear south and check out some fast wind-surfing at **Vasiliki** (p698) on the island of Lefkada. When surfed out and you've caught your breath, trek on southwards across the Gulf of Corinth to the deep southwest of the Peloponnese at **Karitena** (p190) where you can white-water raft or hot dog a fast-flowing river and or simply hike. Now hop on a slow ferry to **Crete** (p460) from the southern Peloponnese and really do some walking. Hike the Trans-European E4 walking trail and take in the spectacular **Samaria Gorge** (p493) while you are at it. Allow a good week for this very challenging slog. Now cruise to **Rhodes** (p516) and take in some super scuba diving and when done with exploring the depths see the water from above in a bout of kite surfing at **Mikri Vigla** (p407) on Naxos. Exhausted?

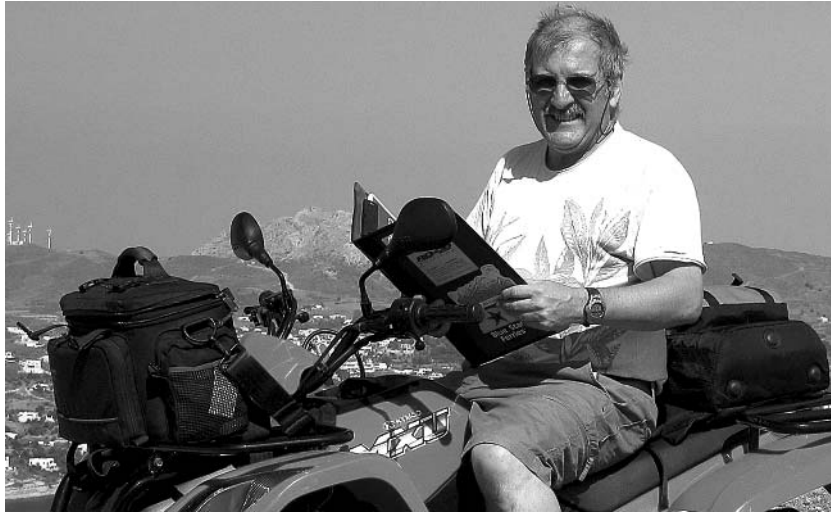
**NORTHERN ANTIQUITIES**

Make Thessaloniki your base and seek out some of the lesser-known but no less spectacular sites of the sprawling regions of Epiros, Macedonia and Thrace. This itinerary is best accomplished with your own transport.

Revel for a day or two in the vibrant nightlife of **Thessaloniki** (p272) and visit its numerous museums, then head west to the ancient Macedonian capital of **Pella** (p298), where you can admire the ruins of Alexander the Great's home base. See the stunning tomb of Alexander's father Phillip of Macedon at nearby **Vergina** (p301), the north's singularly most impressive archaeological site. Cross the looming Pindos Mountains to **Ioannina** (p326) from where you can easily visit the splendid amphitheatre and oracle of **Dodoni** (p332), the eerie underground site of ancient Hades at the **Nekromanteio of Afyra** (p343), close to the Epirote coast, and the Roman-era settlement of **Nikopolis** (p340). Cross back to Macedonia and take another breather in Thessaloniki before heading east. The first stop will be **Philippi** (p296), a Roman site where Christianity was first accepted in Europe and close to the busy port of **Kavala** (p295) with its archaeological museum. Do not miss out on the spectacular **Sanctuary of the Great Gods** (p637) on the island of Samothraki where the Winged Victory of Samothrace was found (now on display in the Louvre in Paris).



On the Road



PAUL HELLANDER

When I got to **Leros** (p574) and saw this wild-looking *gourouna* (sow) I just had to have it. It's a 50cc fun bike with fat tyres and lots of attitude. It was perfect to get around the lanes of Leros with all my gear. I have never had so much fun collecting data.



KATE ARMSTRONG

There are many close shaves while on the road, not least this one. I was interviewing the barber **Mr Yiangos Hytiris** (see A Cut Above the Rest, p689) from Kouramades on Corfu. Clearly bemused by my dishevelled appearance, he whipped out a pink smock, pushed me onto the chair and...

CHRIS DELISO

The master sea-urchin hunter in **Mesta** (p614) was handier with the hoe than I, but nonetheless I enjoyed a successful dive along the rocks in search of breakfast in beautiful southwestern Chios.



DES HANNIGAN

Glass of wine, hard copy, palmtop, foldaway keyboard and sun hat (though not necessarily in that order); I get my priorities right while catching up with the gruelling work of keying in the beta on rooftop **Mykonos** (p381). It rarely gets tougher than this...

MICHAEL CLARK

While following my climbing guide and new best friend, Kostas, 300m up the side of a sandstone tower at **Meteora** (p264), the thought crossed my mind, 'What, exactly, am I doing here?' The answer came quickly: 'Looking forward to one more meal on earth, and an extra shot of ouzo.'



VICTORIA KYRIAKOPOULOS

Around **Monastiraki** (p97), in downtown Athens, there is a delightful convergence of past and present, tourists and Athenians weaving their way around the ancient city and the grunge of the flea market. The bustling cafés are a favourite place to stop and enjoy the pulse of the city.

See full author bios page 761

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'