

Greece revels this summer

To make this summer a memorable one, plan a trip to one of the world's cultural hotspots. With endless miles of aquamarine coastline, sun-bleached ancient ruins, strong feta and stronger ouzo, the Greek landscape thrills, and Greek people are passionate about politics, coffee, art.

Let the Greece you have been imagining fill your senses, whether it is through the pulsing nightclubs of Mykonos or the solemnity of Meteora; the grandeur of Delphi or the earthiness of Metsovo; the rugged Cretan hillsides and the lush wildflowers of spring. You will quickly become acquainted with the melancholic throb of rembetika (blues songs) and the ability of the ancient sights to unleash an imagination you might not have realised you had. You will also encounter thought-provoking modern art and a vivacious contemporary music scene, stumbling across galleries, live music and impressively modern museums in the most unexpected places. Greece balances its past, present and future in a way managed by few other countries. The result is a country with endless cultural pursuits.

Greeks pride themselves on their cuisine and as some of the most hospitable people on the globe, they will go out of their way to ensure you are well fed. The tang of home-made tzatziki and the aroma of grilled souvlaki are just the beginning. The Greek menu is filled with scrumptious cuisine that o'er an adventure at every mealtime. Basic ingredients like feta and olive oil are at home in kitchens across the country, but it is the regional dishes and styles of cooking that make travelling around the country such a culinary joy. Cheeses, herbs and mountain greens you might never have heard of compliment local seafood, meat and veggie dishes. The secret of Greek cooking is often found in the back garden where many of the ingredients are freshly gathered and produced.

It is easy to understand how so many myths of gods and giants originated in this vast and varied landscape, with wide open skies and a sea speckled with islands, where days melt from one to the next, while you relish the white-sand and palm-fringed beaches. But Greece offers endless activities and is a magnet for anyone who enjoys the great outdoors. Wander along cobbled, Byzantine footpaths, hike into volcanoes, watch for dolphins and sea turtles

and cycle through lush forests. Greece also offers some of the world's top kitesurfing, diving and rock-climbing locations.

As the birthplace of drama, democracy, Western science and medicine, Greece offers a welcome balance of traditional and contemporary life. Ancient sights often take the limelight and while it is easy to find traditional villages with brilliant white buildings and roaming donkeys, Athens' firm grip on style and sophistication rivals that of any European capital. The Greek modern art scene is fresh and vibrant, fashionable clubs and cafes buzz with life and society is increasingly multicultural. There are few cultures that embrace the past so passionately while simultaneously welcoming the future with open arms. Make sure you make a few pit-stops while you travel across the country.

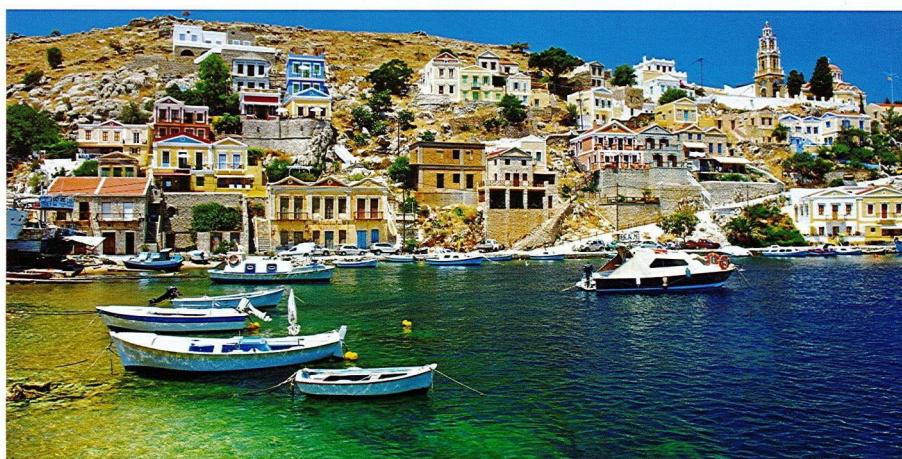
Soaring high at Meteora: You are not likely to forget the first moment the magnificent Meteora come into view – soaring pillars of rock that jut heavenward, and a handful of monasteries at the top. Once, these monasteries were used successfully as refuge by hermit monks seeking a retreat from expanding Turkish occupation. The rope ladders that once enabled the monks to reach the top have long been replaced by steps carved into the rock. Today, these spectacular stone towers beckon rock climbers from around the world.



Surreal Santorini: Even the most jaded traveller succumbs to the spectacle of this surreal landscape, a relic of what was probably the biggest eruption in recorded history. The caldera and its vast curtain of multicoloured cliffs is truly awesome. Santorini is famous for its spectacular sunsets, hugely popular from the village of Oia on the northern tip of the island because there is an uninterrupted view of the sun as it finally sinks below the horizon.

Rhodes' medieval old town: Getting lost in the Old Town is a must. Only then will you find yourself removed from the throngs of tourists and meandering down twisting, turning, cobbled alleyways with archways above and squares opening up ahead of you. The beauty of the Old Town lies in these hidden corners, where your imagination will take off with flights of medieval fancy.

Experiencing the Acropolis: The Acropolis is the most important ancient site in the Western world. Crowned by the



Parthenon, it stands sentinel over Athens, visible from almost everywhere within the city. Its monuments of Pentelic marble gleam white in the midday sun and gradually take on a honey hue as the sun sinks, while at night they stand brilliantly illuminated above the city. A glimpse of this magnificent sight cannot fail to lift your spirits.

Climbing to Angelokastro: The ruined fortress of Angelokastro, on Corfu's west coast, rises above everything, especially the crowds. It is one of those reassuring places where land and water meet sensationally; a great knuckle of rock soaring above the glittering Ionian Sea, a green belt of olive trees and cypresses at its back.

Its name derives from the 11th-century Byzantine rulers of Corfu. Its fortifications repulsed Ottoman attack three times. You climb steeply to the lonely ruins – ancient Kerkyra beneath your feet – to what must have been a refuge and lookout long before the Byzantines.