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## The Best of Greece

Greece is, of course, the land of ancient sites and architectural treasures—the Acropolis in Athens, the amphitheater of Epidaurus, and the reconstructed palace at Knossos among the best known. But Greece is much more: It offers age-old spectacular natural sights, for instance—from Santorini’s caldera to the gray pinnacles of rock of the Meteora—and modern diversions ranging from elegant museums to luxury resorts. It can be bewildering to plan your trip with so many options vying for your attention. Take us along and we’ll do the work for you. We’ve traveled the country extensively and chosen the very best that Greece has to offer. We’ve explored the archaeological sites, visited the museums, inspected the hotels, reviewed the tavernas and ouzerics, and scouted out the beaches. Here’s what we consider the best of the best.

### 1 The Best Travel Experiences

- **Making Haste Slowly:** Give yourself time to sit in a seaside taverna and watch the fishing boats come and go. If you visit Greece in the spring, take the time to smell the flowers; the fields are covered with poppies, daisies, and other blooms. Even in Athens, you’ll see hardy species growing through the cracks in concrete sidewalks—or better yet, visit Athens’s Ancient Agora, which will be carpeted with a dazzling variety of wildflowers. See chapter 6, “Exploring Athens.”
- **Island-Hopping in the Cyclades:** Though the Cyclades are bound by unmistakable family resemblance, each island has a unique personality. Distances between islands are small, making travel by ferry pleasant and logistically straightforward (at least in principle). If you are traveling in the off season, when you do not need hotel reservations, don’t plan too much in advance and allow yourself to “go with the flow”—a tactful way of preparing you for the unexpected in island boat schedules! See chapter 10, “The Cyclades.”
- **Leaving the Beaten Path:** Persist against your body’s and mind’s signals that “this may be pushing too far,” leave the main routes and major attractions behind, and make your own discoveries of landscape, villages, or activities. For instance, seek out a church or monastery such as Moni Ayios Nikolaos outside Metsovo—you may be rewarded by a moving encounter with the church and its caretaker. When you visit the Cycladic Islands, consider a base on Tinos, which is very popular with Greeks but attracts hardly any foreigners. See “Metsovo” on p. 528.
- **Exploring the Naturalists’ Greece:** There is a Greece beyond the columns and cafes—a land of rugged terrain and wildflowers and birds and other natural phenomena. Sign up for a special tour (see chapter 2, “Planning Your Trip to Greece”), or

go it alone with one of the several beautifully illustrated handbooks available, such as Oleg Polunin's *Flowers of Greece and the Balkans* (Oxford Univ. Press); or *Birds of Europe* (McGraw-Hill), by Bertel Bruun and Arthur Singer. And don't forget your binoculars!

- **Sunrise, Sunset:** Get up a little earlier than usual to see the sun rise (preferably from the Aegean, illuminating the islands). Then watch it sink over the mountains (anywhere in Greece, but try not to miss the sunsets that change the Ionian Sea from the deepest blue to a fiery red).

## 2 The Best of Ancient Greece

- **The Acropolis** (Athens): No matter how many photographs you've seen, nothing can prepare you for watching the light change the marble of the buildings, still standing after thousands of years, from honey to rose to deep red to stark white. If the crowds get you down, remember how crowded the Acropolis was during religious festivals in antiquity. See p. 181.
- **Nemea** (Peloponnese): This gem of a site has it all: a beautifully restored stadium, a handsome museum, even picnic tables with a view of the romantic Doric temple. Look for the three long-standing columns—and several newly restored and reerected ones. If you're lucky, you may see Nemea's archaeologists at work lovingly reconstructing and reerecting more columns from the temple's north facade in their ambitious restoration project. See p. 268.
- **Olympia** (Peloponnese) & **Delphi** (Central Greece): Try to visit both Olympia, where the Olympic Games began, and Delphi, home of the Delphic Oracle. That's the only way you'll be able to decide whether Olympia, with its massive temples and shady groves of trees, or Delphi, perched on mountain slopes overlooking olive trees and the sea, is the most beautiful ancient site in Greece. See chapters 8 and 12.
- **Palace of Knossos** (Crete): A seemingly unending maze of rooms and

levels and stairways and corridors and frescoed walls—this is the Minoan Palace of Knossos. It can be packed at peak hours, but it still exerts its power if you enter in the spirit of the labyrinth. King Minos ruled over the richest and most powerful of Minoan cities and, according to legend, his daughter Ariadne helped Theseus kill the Minotaur in the labyrinth and escape. See p. 307.

- **Delos** (Cyclades): This tiny isle, just 3.2km (2 miles) offshore of Mykonos, was considered by the ancient Greeks to be both the geographical and spiritual center of the Cyclades; many considered this the holiest sanctuary in all of Greece. The extensive remains here testify to the island's former splendor. From Mount Kinthos (really just a hill, but the island's highest point), you can see many of the Cyclades most days; on a very clear day, you can see the entire archipelago. The 3 hours allotted by excursion boats from Mykonos or Tinos are hardly sufficient to explore this vast archaeological treasure. See chapter 10.
- **Vergina** (Northern Greece): In the brilliantly designed museum here, you can peek into what may have been the tomb of Alexander the Great's father, Philip of Macedon. Nearby, more than 300 burial mounds stretch for miles across the Macedonian plain. See p. 593.

# Greece





### 3 The Best of Byzantine & Medieval Greece

- **Mistra** (Peloponnese): This Byzantine ghost town has streets lined with the remains of homes both humble and palatial, as well as some of the most beautiful churches in all of Greece. If you have the energy, climb to the top of the defense walls for the superb view over the plain of Sparta. Try to visit in spring, when Mistra is carpeted with wildflowers. See p. 277.
- **Church of Panagia Kera** (Kritsa, Crete): If Byzantine art seems a bit stilted and remote, this striking chapel in the foothills of eastern Crete will reward you with its unexpected intimacy. The 14th- and 15th-century frescoes are not only stunning but depict all the familiar biblical stories. See p. 338.
- **The Churches of Thessaloniki** (Northern Greece): Thessaloniki's Byzantine churches are the finest not just in Greece but in the entire world. From tiny Osios David to towering Ayios Dimitrios, these churches boast mosaics and frescoes that give you astonishing glimpses of the artistic grandeur of the mighty Byzantine empire. See p. 570.
- **Nea Moni** (Hios, Northeastern Aegean): Once home to 1,000 monks, this 12th-century monastery high in the interior mountains of Hios is now quietly inhabited by one elderly but sprightly nun and two friendly monks. Try to catch one of the excellent tours sometimes offered by the monks. The mosaics in the cathedral dome are works of extraordinary power and beauty; even in the half-obscurity of the nave, they radiate a brilliant gold. Check out the small museum, and take some time to explore the extensive monastery grounds. See p. 615.
- **Monemvassia** (Peloponnese): Long called "The Gibraltar of Greece," this rocky promontory crowned by a medieval citadel and church has only one real street (just wide enough for two donkeys to pass each other), no cars, cobbled lanes, beautifully restored stone houses (some of which are now hotels), and views that stretch forever over the sea. See p. 280.
- **A Clutch of Castles: Acrocorinth, Argos, Mistra & Nafplion** (Peloponnese): Some of these castles have ancient foundations; all were added onto by the Franks, Venetians, Byzantines, and Turks. Several were used as fortresses as recently as World War II. See chapter 8.
- **A Profusion of Byzantine Churches in the Cyclades:** The fertile countryside of the island of Naxos is dotted by well-preserved Byzantine chapels. Parikia, the capital of Paros, has the Byzantine-era cathedral of Panagia Ekatondapiliani. Santorini boasts the 11th- to 12th-century church of the Panagia in the hamlet of Gonia. See chapter 10.

### 4 The Best Beaches

- **Arvanitia** (Nafplion, Peloponnese): After a vigorous and tiring day of sightseeing, this small municipal beach can seem like the best in Greece. Handy changing rooms and showers make this a great place for a quick break between exploring the ruins at Mycenae and taking in a play at Epidaurus. See p. 256.
- **Plaka** (Naxos, Cyclades): Naxos has the longest stretches of sea sand in the Cyclades, and Plaka is the most

beautiful and pristine beach on the island. On its 4.8km (3-mile) stretch of mostly undeveloped shoreline, you can easily imagine yourself as Robinson Crusoe alone on his island (bending the plot to include a few sunbathing Fridays). If you need abundant amenities and a more active social scene, you can always head north to Ayia Anna or Ayios Prokopios. See p. 389.

- **Paradise** (Mykonos, Cyclades): Paradise is the quintessential party beach, known for wild revelry that continues through the night. An extensive complex built on the beach includes a bar, taverna, changing rooms, and souvenir shops. This is a place to see and be seen, a place to show off muscles laboriously acquired during the long winter months. See p. 397.
- **Lalaria Beach** (Skiathos, Sporades): This gleaming, white-pebble beach boasts vivid aquamarine water and white limestone cliffs with natural arches cut into them by the elements. Lalaria is not nearly as popular nor as

accessible as Skiathos's famous Koukounaries, which is one of the reasons it's still gorgeous and pristine. See p. 497.

- **Megalo Seitani** (Samos, Northeastern Aegean): Megalo Seitani and its neighbor, Micro Seitani, are situated on the mountainous and remote northwest coast of Samos. There aren't any roads to this part of the island, so the only ways to reach the beaches are by a short boat ride or a rather long (and beautiful) hike. You won't regret taking the trouble, since both beaches are superb: Micro Seitani's crescent of pebbles in a rocky cove, and Megalo Seitani's expanse of pristine sand. See p. 607.
- **Vroulidia** (Hios, Northeastern Aegean): White sand, a cliff-rimmed cove, and a remote location at the southern tip of the island of Hios combine to make this one of the most exquisite small beaches in the northeastern Aegean. The rocky coast conceals many cove beaches similar to this one, and they rarely become crowded. See p. 617.

## 5 The Best Scenic Villages & Towns

- **Monemvassia & Nafplion** (Peloponnese): Everyone says it, and for once, everyone is right: Nafplion is the loveliest town in the Peloponnese, and Monemvassia is the region's most spectacular village. Thanks to the speedy hydrofoils (Flying Dolphins), you can visit both spots and decide for yourself which has the best cafes, castles, and sunsets. See chapter 8.
- **Chania** (Crete): Radiating from its handsome harbor and backdropped by the White Mountains, Chania has managed to hold on to much of its Venetian Renaissance and later Turkish heritage. Wander the old town's narrow lanes, filled with a heady mix

of colorful local culture, and enjoy its charming hotels, excellent restaurants, interesting shops, and swinging nightspots. See p. 315.

- **Hora** (Folegandros, Cyclades): In this town huddled at the edge of a cliff, one square spills into the next, its green and blue paving slates outlined in brilliant white. On a steep hill overlooking the town is the ornate church of Kimisis Theotokou, often illuminated at night. The church's icon of the Virgin is paraded through the streets of Hora with great ceremony and revelry every Easter Sunday. Mercifully free of vehicular traffic, Hora is one of the most beautiful and least

spoiled villages in the Cyclades. See p. 362.

- **Yialos** (Simi, Dodecanese): The entirety of Yialos, the main port of the tiny, rugged island of Simi, has been declared a protected architectural treasure, and for good reason. This pristine port with its extraordinary array of neoclassical mansions is a large part of why Simi is known as “the jewel of the Dodecanese.” See p. 446.
- **Ermoupolis** (Siros, Cyclades): In the 19th century, this was the busiest port in the Cyclades. Today, it is still a hub for island travel and retains an astonishing number of handsome neoclassical governmental buildings, ship sheds and factories, and elegant town houses. Walk uphill from the harbor to Ano Siros (upper Siros) and you’ll find an old *kastro* (fortress) and a miniature whitewashed Cycladic village. See p. 419.
- **Skopelos Town** (Skopelos, Sporades): The amazingly well-preserved Skopelos, a traditional whitewashed island port town, is adorned everywhere with pots of flowering plants. It offers some fairly sophisticated diversions, several excellent restaurants, a couple good hotels, and lots of shopping. See p. 502.
- **Metsovo** (Western Greece): Steep slopes, ever-green conifers, stone houses with slate and slanted roofs, stolid villagers in traditional clothing

speaking a Latin-based language—if this is Thursday, you must be in Switzerland. But no, it’s Metsovo, in Epirus. Occasionally jammed with excursionists, this mountain town still comes through as an authentic locale, refreshing in the summer and invigorating in the winter ski season. See p. 528.

- **Corfu Town** (Corfu, Ionian Islands): With its Esplanade framed by a 19th-century palace and the arcaded Liston, its old town a Venice-like warren of structures practically untouched for several centuries, its massive Venetian fortresses, and all this enclosing a lively population and constant visitors, here is urban Greece at its most appealing. See p. 534.
- **Piriyi & Mesta** (Hios, Northeastern Aegean): These two small towns, in the pastoral southern hills of Hios, are marvelous creations of the medieval imagination. Connected by their physical proximity and a shared history, each is quirkily unique and a delight to explore. In Piriyi, every available surface is covered with elaborate geometric black-and-white decorations known as *Ksisti*, a technique that reaches extraordinary levels of virtuosity in the town square. Mesta has preserved its medieval urban fabric and conceals two fine churches within its maze of narrow streets. See p. 616.

## 6 The Best Islands

- **Hydra** (Saronic Gulf Islands): Old-timers keep waiting for Hydra, with its handsome stone mansions overlooking a picture-postcard harbor, to be spoiled. After all, even before Mykonos and Santorini, Hydra was one of the first Greek islands to be “discovered.” So far, so good: Donkeys still outnumber motorcycles,

and the day-trippers who blitz through the appealing harborside shops leave at twilight. That means you can almost always find the table you want at one of Hydra’s pleasant small restaurants. See p. 235.

- **Crete**: Whether for its rugged mountains or its countless beaches, its ancient remains or its ultramodern

hotels, its layered history or its intense people, Crete cannot be denied. It is not just a distinctive Greek island—it is a world unto itself. See chapter 9.

- **Santorini** (Cyclades): This is undoubtedly one of the most spectacular islands in the world. The streets of Fira and Ia are carved into the face of a high cliff, overlooking the circular caldera left by an ancient volcanic eruption and now filled with the deep-blue waters of the Aegean. The site of Akrotiri offers a unique glimpse into life in a Minoan city, frozen in time by the eruption 3,600 years ago. Be sure to find out if this spectacular site, which was closed to the public at press time, has reopened when you visit. Add to this the Fira nightlife scene, and you'll see why this is one of the most popular (and overcrowded) summer vacation spots in the Aegean. See p. 342.
- **Siros** (Cyclades): This tiny island has it all: a vivacious, cosmopolitan capital town; thriving beach resorts; and a starkly beautiful region of farming communities, archaeological remains, and remote beaches to the north. Siros is also one of the centers of *rembetika*, a form of Greek traditional music with roots in Asia Minor. The *Fragosiriani*, a classic known throughout Greece, was composed by the Siriot Markos Vamvakaris, and you're sure to hear its simple and infectious rhythms many times during your stay here. See p. 417.
- **Tinos** (Cyclades): The island often called the "Lourdes of Greece," because of the church, Panagia Evangelistria (Our Lady of Good Tidings) with its healing icon, also has Venetian dovescotes; farm fields set off with handsome stone boundary walls; and Pirgos, the village of marble. See chapter 10.
- **Rhodes** (Dodecanese): The island of Rhodes has everything a visitor could want—dazzling ancient and medieval ruins, great food, spectacular beaches, and the hottest nightlife outside of Athens—the one drawback being that everyone knows it. See chapter 11.
- **Skyros** (Sporades): Winding roads and remote beaches, one main town and a few minor villages, some ancient legends and 20th-century tales: Skyros's charms remain perhaps the most elusive of the four Northern Sporades. But though the island remains a bit difficult to access and not overstocked with touristy amenities, Skyros also offers both a living local culture and some natural wilderness. See chapter 13.
- **Corfu** (Ionian Islands): With lush vegetation, some still undeveloped interior and unspoiled coast, ancient sites and a 19th-century presence, a dash of Italy and a dose of the cosmopolitan, Corfu is a Greek island like no other. Tourism may be rampant, but Corfu's attractions have survived worse. See chapter 15.
- **Hios** (Northeastern Aegean): You'd think that an island with such gorgeous beaches, exquisite medieval towns, and remarkable scenery wouldn't remain a secret for long. Despite the qualities that attract a small group of devotees year after year, Hios remains surprisingly quiet. If you like the idea of getting away from the tour buses, being alone on a beach to rival any in the Cyclades, and exploring towns that preserve the contours of medieval life, Hios is for you. Another benefit: The local hospitality hasn't worn thin here, as it has on many of the more heavily toured islands. See chapter 17.
- **Sifnos** (Cyclades): Sifnos is a green island of ravines, mountaintops, and pristine beaches. Despite its small size



(a hardy walker can explore the entire island on foot), Sifnos has numerous attractive small towns which can be used as bases for your explorations. Apollonia, in the central hills, offers elegant small-town civility, with the added benefit of being the hub of an

excellent public transportation system. The *kastro* (castle), on its seaside rock, is the medieval locus of the island, while Platis Yialos is a quiet beach resort. Don't visit in August, when the island is mobbed with vacationing Athenians. See chapter 10.

## 7 The Best Places to Get Away from It All

- **National Garden** (Athens): It's all too easy to overlook this oasis of calm and cool in the heart of Athens. You'll discover shady benches, a small cafe, a superb restaurant, and lots of opportunities to enjoy watching Greek families out for a stroll. Keep an eye out for the balloon sellers on weekends. See p. 200.
- **Mount Likavitos (Lycabettus)** (Athens): Walk up Likavitos at dawn and enjoy the sunrise over the hills that surround Athens. Come back for sunset, and you may encounter others strolling here, but the sounds (and smells!) of Athens's ferocious traffic will be pleasantly distant. See p. 200.
- **Folegandros** (Cyclades): Most visitors to Greece once sailed past the formidable Folegandros cliffs en route from the mainland to Santorini and other islands; they'd catch a glimpse of the whitewashed *kastro* walls perched 300m (984 ft.) above the sea. The beauty of Hora, the fine beaches, and the great walking trails are no longer secrets, but if you arrive during the off season, Folegandros still offers a restful retreat. Largely free of the commercialism that has engulfed so many Aegean

isles, Folegandros is now appearing on insider lists as "the" new place to visit. See p. 360.

- **Zagori & Vikos Gorge** (Western Greece): If the 40-some tiny villages linked by roads lined with spectacular terrain are not enough, you can venture into at least a section of one of the most spectacular gorges in Europe. Greeks and some Europeans have long appreciated this undeveloped corner of northwestern Greece known as the Zagoria. See p. 530.
- **The Road Not Taken** (Greece): Don't fret if you take a wrong turn in Greece, whether it is on a street in Athens or a road somewhere in the country. Go with it! This may be the highlight of your trip—the Athenian shop-owner who shows you pictures of his aunt's family in Chicago when you stop to ask for directions; the *yiayia* (granny) next to you on that boat that you caught after the boat you wanted to catch had left; the school child who quizzes you about why you came to Greece when you bump into him at an ancient site; the little village you chance upon because you stumbled onto the road you did not mean to take.

## 8 The Best Museums

- **National Archaeological Museum** (Athens): This stunning collection, which reopened after a major renovation in 2004, has it all: superb red-and black-figured vases, bronze stat-

ues, Mycenaean gold, marble reliefs of gods and goddesses, and the hauntingly beautiful frescoes from Akrotiri, the Minoan site on the island of Santorini. Unfortunately, at

press time only the ground floor was open, but authorities promise that the entire museum will be open "soon." See p. 192.

- **Museum of Greek Popular Musical Instruments** (Athens): Life-size photos of musicians beside their actual instruments and recordings of traditional Greek music make this one of the country's most charming museums. On our last visit, an elderly Greek gentleman listened to some music, transcribed it, stepped into the courtyard, and played it on his own violin! See p. 192.
- **Archaeological Museum of Iraklion** (Crete): Few museums in the world can boast of holding virtually all the important remains of a major culture. This museum can do just that with its Minoan collection, including superb frescoes from Knossos, elegant bronze and stone figurines, and

exquisite gold jewelry. The museum also contains Neolithic, Archaic Greek, and Roman finds from throughout Crete. See p. 307.

- **Archaeological Museum of Chania** (Crete): Let's hear it for a truly engaging provincial museum, not one full of masterworks but rather of representative works from thousands of years, a collection that lets us see how many people experienced their different worlds. All this, in a former Italian Renaissance church that feels like a special place. See p. 318.
- **Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki & Museum of Byzantine Culture** (Northern Greece): These side-by-side museums have fascinating exhibits on the art and architecture of Thessaloniki and Northern Greece from the earliest days through the Byzantine era. See p. 566 and p. 568.

## 9 The Best of Greece's Religious Treasures

- **Panagia Evangelistria** (Tinos, Cyclades): The most revered religious shrine in Greece. See p. 411.
- **Patmos** (Dodecanese): For 2 millennia, this small island of more than 300 churches has been hallowed ground, a place of pilgrimage. The Monastery of St. John the Divine and the Cave of the Apocalypse, where St. John is said to have dictated the Book of Revelation, are among the most revered and wondrous Byzantine treasures in the world. See p. 461.
- **The Monasteries of the Meteora** (Central Greece): Even from a distance, the monasteries perched atop the weird rock formations and mini-mountains of the Meteora are one of the most awesome sights in Greece. Inside, the monasteries are equally impressive, with fine collections of manuscripts, frescoed chapels, shy monks, and chatty nuns. See p. 487.

- **Aslan Pasha Mosque & Cami at Ioannina** (Western Greece): Little of Greece's Turkish-Muslim phase has survived beyond the odd minaret, but here on the promontory of the walled quarter of Ioannina are the still-solid, fine old mosque (now a museum), minaret, and school. Picturesque from afar, they speak up close of Ioannina's—and Greece's—diverse past. See p. 522.
- **Mount Athos** (Northern Greece): Only men can visit the Holy Mountain, where monks still live in isolation in some of the most isolated—and beautiful—monasteries in all Greece. If you can't go to Athos itself, take heart: The boats from Ouranopolis that cruise around the peninsula offer excellent views of the rugged, pine-clad promontory and some of the monasteries. See p. 598.

## 10 The Best Resorts & Hotels

- **Andromeda Hotel** (Athens; ☎ 210/643-7302): The city's first serious "boutique" hotel, located on a wonderfully quiet side street, the classy Andromeda offers charm, comfort, and a reassuringly helpful staff. See p. 166.
  - **Grande Bretagne** (Athens; ☎ 210/333-0000): Back for a return engagement and better than ever, Athens's premiere hotel still overlooks the best view in town if you have the right room: Syntagma Square, the Houses of Parliament and, in case you wondered, the Acropolis. See p. 164.
  - **Malvasia** (Monemvasia, Peloponnese; ☎ 27320/61-323): The Malvasia brought the concept of the boutique hotel to the Peloponnese. Each room in the Malvasia is different, with some of the nicest overlooking the sea; all are tastefully furnished with hand-loomed rugs and antiques. A visit here gives you the illusion of staying in the home of wealthy Greek friends who have enormously good taste—and who just happen to be away and have left the staff behind to tend to your needs. See p. 282.
  - **Atlantis Hotel** (Iraklion, Crete; ☎ 2810/229-103): There are many more luxurious hotels in Greece, but few can beat the Atlantis's urban attractions: a central location, modern facilities, and views over a busy harbor. You can swim in the pool, work out in the fitness center, send e-mail via your laptop, and then within minutes enjoy a fine meal or visit a museum. See p. 310.
  - **Doma** (Chania, Crete; ☎ 28210/51-772): A former neoclassical mansion east of downtown, the Doma has been converted into a comfortable and charming hotel, furnished with the proprietor's family heirlooms.
- Although it's not for those seeking the most luxurious amenities, its atmosphere appeals to many. See p. 320.
- **Astra Apartments** (Santorini, Cyclades; ☎ 22860/23-641): This small hotel with handsomely appointed apartments looks like a miniature whitewashed village—and has spectacular views over Santorini's famous caldera. The sunsets here are not to be believed, the staff is incredibly helpful, and the village of Imerovigli itself offers an escape from the touristic madness that overwhelms the island each summer. This is a spot to get married in—or celebrate any special occasion here. See p. 354.
  - **Anemomilos Apartments** (Folegandros, Cyclades; ☎ 22860/41-309) and **Castro Hotel** (Folegandros, Cyclades; ☎ 22860/41-230): The small island of Folegandros has two of the nicest hotels in the Cyclades, both with terrific cliff-top locations. The Anemomilos has all the creature comforts, traditional decor, and a good location (it's just out of town), with a delicious pool and sea views that stretch forever. The Castro, built into the walls of the 12th-century Venetian castle that encircles the village, has lots of character and the necessary modern comforts. See p. 363.
  - **Rodos Palace** (Rhodes, Dodecanese; ☎ 22410/25-222): The largest five-star hotel in Greece and possibly in the entire Mediterranean, this "palace" was decorated by the famed designer of the movies *Ben-Hur* and *Quo Vadis*. Located in Iksia, just outside Rhodes city, it offers all the amenities imaginable, including a family center—a resort within a resort designed to provide the ultimate holiday for travelers with children. See p. 436.

- **Hotel Nireus** (Simi, Dodecanese; ☎ 22410/72-400): Perfect island, perfect location, unpretentious, and tasteful. The views from the sea-facing rooms, framed by the fluid swirls of the wrought-iron balcony, define the spell of this little gem of an island. You'll never regret one more night on Simi, and here's the place to spend it. See p. 450.
- **White Rocks Hotel & Bungalows** (Kefalonia, Ionian Islands; ☎ 26710/28-332): For those who appreciate understated elegance, a shady retreat from all that sunshine, a private beach, and quiet but attentive service,

this hotel, located a couple of miles outside Argostoli, can be paradise. See p. 551.

- **Mediterranean Palace Hotel** (Thessaloniki; ☎ 2310/552-554). This hotel has it all: location (overlooking the harbor, in the trendy Ladadika district) and luxury. The lobby is, as you might expect, seriously glitzy—but the really pleasant surprise is the comfort and elegance of the guest rooms. The service is usually excellent. The two restaurants are good enough to tempt you to dine here at least one night rather than explore the hot spots of Ladadika. See p. 580.

## 11 The Best Restaurants

- **Daphne's** (Athens; ☎ 210/322-7971): As well as Pompeiiian-style wall frescoes and one of the nicest gardens in Athens, Daphne's offers consistently delicious food. It makes you wonder why other Greek restaurants can't make supposedly simple dishes like eggplant salad or yogurt with quince taste this distinctive. Added to all this are strolling musicians—and the owners and staff are so delightful that you hate to leave, even when you can't eat another prawn with toasted almonds. See p. 172.
- **Vlassis** (Athens; ☎ 210/646-3060): This small restaurant with a very loyal following (ranging from prominent ambassadors to struggling artists) serves traditional (*paradisiko*) Greek cooking at its very best. A tempting choice if you have only one night in Athens—but be sure to make a reservation. See p. 179.
- **Varoulko** (Athens; ☎ 210/522-8400; www.varoulko.gr): In its new Athens location, with a menu that adds tasty meat dishes to its signature seafood, Varoulko continues to win plaudits. Everything here is so good that many

Athenians believe chef/owner Lefteris Lazarou serves not only the finest seafood in Athens, but some of the best food in all of Greece. See p. 179.

- **Nykterida** (Chania, Crete; ☎ 28210/64-215): We're not saying that the location may influence your taste buds here, but the spectacular views from this restaurant high above Chania and Soudha Bay can definitely make you feel as if you're eating a meal like few others in Greece. See p. 322.
- **Selene** (Santorini, Cyclades; ☎ 22860/22-249): The best restaurant on an island with lots of good places to eat, Selene is one of the finest restaurants in all Greece. The reason: Owners George and Evelyn Hatzyiannakis constantly experiment with local produce to turn out their own innovative versions of traditional dishes. Inside, the dining room is elegant, while the terrace has a wonderful view over the caldera. See p. 358.
- **Petrino** (Kos, Dodecanese; ☎ 22420/27-251): When royalty come to Kos, this is where they dine. Housed in an exquisitely restored, two-story,

century-old stone (*petrino*) private residence, this is hands-down the most elegant taverna in Kos, with cuisine to match. This is what Greek home cooking would be if your mother were part divine. See p. 459.

- **Venetian Well** (Corfu, Ionian Islands; ☉ 26610/44-761): A bit

severe in its setting at the edge of a small enclosed square in Corfu town, with no attempt at the picturesque, this restaurant gets by on its more esoteric, international, and delicate menu. It's for those seeking a break from the standard Greek scene. See p. 543.

## 12 The Best Nightlife

- **Theater Under the Stars** (Athens and Epidaurus, Peloponnese): If you can, take in a performance of whatever is on at Odeion of Herodes Atticus theater in Athens or the theater at Epidaurus. You'll be sitting where people have sat for thousands of years to enjoy a play beneath Greece's magical night sky. See chapters 6 and 8.
- **Mykonos** (Cyclades): Mykonos isn't the only island town in Greece with nightlife that continues through the morning, but it was the first and still offers the most abundant, varied scene in the Aegean. Year-round, the town's narrow, labyrinthine streets play host to a remarkably diverse crowd—Mykonos's unlimited ability to reinvent itself has assured it of continued popularity. Spring and fall tend to be more sober and sophisticated, while the 3 months of summer are reserved for unrestrained revelry. See chapter 10.
- **Rhodes** (Dodecanese): From cafes to casinos, Rhodes has not only the

reputation but also the stuff to back it up. A good nightlife scene is ultimately a matter of who shows up—and this, too, is where Rhodes stands out. It's the place to be seen, and if nobody seems to be looking, you can always watch. See chapter 11.

- **Skiathos** (Sporades): With as many as 50,000 foreigners packing this tiny island during the high season, the many nightspots in Skiathos town are often jammed with the mostly younger set. If you don't like the music at one club, cross the street. See chapter 13.
- **Corfu** (Ionian Islands): If raucous nightspots are what you look for on a holiday, Corfu offers probably the largest concentration in Greece. Most of these are beach resorts frequented by young foreigners. More sedate locales can be found in Corfu town. Put simply, Corfu hosts a variety of music, dancing, and "socializing" opportunities. See chapter 15.

## 13 The Best Natural Wonders

- **The Caves of Dirou** (Peloponnese): No one knows how far these caves run into the seaside cliffs of Dirou on the Peloponnese's Mani peninsula. You can get some idea of their vastness by taking a tour on one of the boats that explore this underground labyrinth. See p. 283.
- **Samaria Gorge** (Crete): At 18km (11 miles) long, the Samaria is the longest gorge in Europe. But although its walls reach up to 500m (1,640 ft.) and at one point are only 2m (6½ ft.) apart, it's not the physical dimensions that attract thousands each year. You can credit the wildflowers, the cold

stream, and the whole experience of making your way from the heart of Crete to its coast. See p. 324.

- **Santorini Caldera** (Cyclades): As you approach Santorini by ferry, the whitewashed cliff-top villages of Ia and Fira resemble at first a new dusting of mountain snow. Then the ferry enters the caldera, the cliff walls rise steeply on either side, and you're suddenly enclosed in a fantastic bowl whose sides are formed of red, yellow, and ochre rock and whose surface is the shimmering blue Aegean. Some 3,600 years ago, the center of the island was blown away in a colossal volcanic eruption, leaving behind a

roughly circular depression in the sea floor and the crescent-shaped sliver of rock known as Santorini. The best places to view the caldera are the walking path between Fira and Ia, and the cliff-top streets in either of the two towns. See p. 347.

- **Vikos Gorge** (Western Greece): With its wooded slopes, often taxing terrain, and rugged riverbed, Vikos Gorge in Epirus is in many ways at least as impressive as the far better-known Samaria Gorge of Crete. Its remoteness means that it is also far less frequented—and that much more a wilderness challenge. See p. 530.

## 14 The Best Shopping

- **Traditional Arts & Crafts:** So many places in Greece pride themselves on their needlework that it is hard to single out even a few, but among those few would be Crete, Rhodes, and Skyros. Two places in Athens deserve mention: The Center of Hellenic Tradition (59 Mitropoleos and 36 Pandrossou) and the National Welfare Organization (6 Ipatias and Apolonos). The Center offers ceramics, woodcarvings, prints—and one of the finest views of the Acropolis in Athens. The National Welfare Organization contains hand-loomed rugs and silk embroidery done by village women, as well as excellent copperwork and ceramics.
- **Leatherwork:** Both Rhodes and Crete feature local leatherwork, from sandals to handbags, from belts to jackets. Pay attention to quality.
- **Furs:** Kastoria, in northwestern Greece, is the center of the fur trade, and fur products are everywhere. Athens, of course, sells expensive fur coats. Rhodes also features fur coats. Wherever furs are sold, be sure you know what you are buying.
- **Jewelry:** It now seems that half of Greece's retail stores sell jewelry, so shop around. Much of it is really no different than what can be found in cities all over the world, but Athens does have major, internationally known jewelers such as LALAOUNIS and Zolotas. Try Chania, Crete, for sophisticated local artisans' work. Islands such as Santorini, Skiathos, and Rhodes have scores of stores appealing to the tourist trade.
- **Ceramics:** As with needlework, pots and ceramics of all kinds are to be found throughout Greece. Some of the more traditional may be found on Chios, Crete, Mitilini, Sifnos, and Skopelos.
- **Rugs/Weavings:** Crete probably offers the largest variety of rugs and weavings. Metsovo has some distinctive textiles. If you like rag rugs, keep an eye out for *kouroulouides* on sale at small shops as you travel the Peloponnese.
- **Wood:** Corfu seems to be the center of olive wood products—carving boards, bowls, utensils. Rethymnon, Crete, also has a selection. In the

Peloponnese, woodcarvings and utensils are often found in the villages of Arcadia. Chios and Mitilini also boast wood-carving traditions.

- **Icons and Ecclesiastical Books & Items:** On the streets around the Greek Orthodox Cathedral (Metropolitan) in Athens, you'll find many shops selling votive offerings, candles, and reproductions of icons. In Thessaloniki, **Apostolic Diakonta Bookstore** (☎ 2310/275-126) has a wide selection of religious items. Many of the most important religious shrines, such as Panagia Evangelistria on Tinos, and many convents and monasteries, including most of the Meteora monasteries, sell reproductions of icons and other religious items. On Crete, the Petrakis couple in Elounda paint internationally sought traditional icons.
- **Museum Reproductions:** Officially approved, fine replicas of many famous museum pieces may be purchased at the Archaeological, Byzantine, Benaki, Goulandris, and LALAOUNIS museums in Athens; at the Archaeological and Byzantine museums in Thessaloniki; and at official archaeological service stores in Rhodes Old Town and in Rethymnon, Crete.
- **Books:** Whether you're looking for books about Greece or books for vacation reading, in Athens the places to go are **Eleftheroudakis**, **Compendium**, **Reymondos**, and **Folia tou Bibliou**. In Thessaloniki, seek out **Ianos**.
- **Natural Products:** In the last few years, Greece has begun to produce superb organic and natural products, including olive oil, honey, jams, and cosmetics. Keep an eye out for food products with the Peloponnese, Gaea, Milelia, Nefeli, Yiam, and Stater labels in groceries and delis. Good places to look in Athens include most specialty food shops in Kolonaki, and the Mesogaia delicatessen in the Plaka section of Athens. **Green Farm** in Kolonaki sells only organic produce. **Korres Natural Products** ([www.korres.com](http://www.korres.com)), including a wide range of herbal shampoos and lotions, and **Apivita's Aromatherapy Essential Oils** ([www.apivita.gr](http://www.apivita.gr)), are now carried in many pharmacies and cosmetics stores (such as the widespread Hondos Centers) throughout Greece.