

The ABCs of

GREECE

Antiquities, beaches and cuisine are just a few reasons to visit this historically important, naturally beautiful and culturally rich country.

BY STACEY ZABLE

PHOTO BY STACEY ZABLE



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Clockwise from left: Sunset over the infinity pool at Andronis Arcadia Hotel, Santorini; The Parthenon on the Acropolis, Athens; Acropolis Museum, Athens

The decision to take a trip to Greece is as simple as A-B-C, and the memories will be deep and long-lasting. Even after you return from the Hellenic Republic, you'll remain in awe of the ancient civilizations that stood on the same ground that you traveled. You'll cherish images of the beautiful sea and the sands that fringe the Greek Islands. You'll find yourself recalling cliffside views of blazing orange sunsets glistening off whitewashed buildings. And you'll long for a taste of the day's fresh catch and for some freshly baked bread dipped in tzatziki sauce.

Despite Greece's economic woes, tourism is strong, with 33 million visitors in 2018 and expectations that those numbers will increase in 2019, according to the Greek National Tourism Organization.

ANTIQUITIES

Most visitors to Greece begin their journey in Athens, the country's capital, where the Acropolis, an ancient citadel and UNESCO World Heritage site that dates to 5th century BC, sits high above the city. It's not an easy walk up the famed hill, but the reward is a 360-degree view of the city and the Aegean Sea beyond. You can also get an up-close look at such ancient treasures as the Parthenon, one of Greece's more than 100 archaeological sites. The imposing temple standing guard over the city has 17 columns on its longer sides and 8 columns on its shorter sides. Another of the Acropolis' temples is the Erechtheion. The impressive Caryatids, six detailed maiden statues, can be found on its south porch.

For more on the Acropolis but on lower land, the 10-year-old Acropolis Museum houses many sculptures from its namesake. Built above an archaeological excavation site, the museum has glass floors in some areas,



Clockwise from top left: Sarakiniko Beach, Milos; Oia, Santorini; Paleochori Beach, Milos



Clockwise from top left: Lining up for the sunset on Mykonos; The breakfast bread basket at Andronis Arcadia Hotel, Santorini; Greek salad at Ammoudi Fish Tavern, Santorini

to allow visitors to see an ancient neighborhood of houses and streets below.

Beyond Athens and near the city of Heraklion on the island of Crete is the archaeological site Knossos. Walk along what was once the most prominent center of Minoan Civilization and the site of the Minoan Palace of Knossos. Two of the highlights are partitioned off for protection, so visitors cannot enter; however, you can peek inside the Throne Room with its restored throne and the Queen's quarters with its reconstructed Dolphin Fresco to get a glimpse of palace life.

BEACHES

Some 6,000 Greek islands and islets dot the Aegean and Ionian Seas, many of them tourist destinations featuring whitewashed buildings, blue-domed roofs and some of the world's most spectacular sunsets. Greece's 10,000 miles of shoreline are home to stunning beaches, each with its own vibe. Many beaches are fronted by restaurants and hotels that rent lounge chairs and umbrellas for relaxing in the sands.

In Milos, check out Sarakiniko Beach's gray-white volcanic rock that creates a moon-like surface. You'll want sturdy shoes

to navigate your way down to the inviting water. The scene offers opportunities aplenty for selfies and scenic shots of the fascinating rock. While there are no permanent services on this beach, a food truck sells necessities such as bottled water and ice cream at the entrance.

Another Milos beach worthy of a stop is Paleochori. Here, dramatic red rocks tower just beyond umbrellas and lounge chairs. The crystalline water offers lulling waves that make it hard to leave their trance.

On Santorini, the island's past volcanic activity has produced unique beaches that include the black lava sands of Perissa. This beach boasts waters that are as calm and inviting as the umbrellas and lounge chairs that line it. Don't be surprised to find a few friendly neighborhood dogs following you into the water or taking advantage of the shade of your umbrella.

Sunset is an Instagrammable event in Greece. On certain islands, including Mykonos and Santorini, photographing the sunset is a daily ritual, with visitors lining up cliffside to capture the fiery sun. Avoid the crowds by finding a restaurant with a view; fortunately, there are plenty of choices.

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CUISINE

Greek cuisine typically features fresh local ingredients enhanced with olive oil. Most *tavernas* offer similar menus featuring meats and seafood, often grilled. Many of the islands' seaside restaurants proudly hang their calamari out to dry and invite you back to the kitchen to see the seafood selection for that night.

In terms of classic Greek dishes, the recipe for *moussaka*, traditionally made of eggplant, potatoes, tomato meat sauce, béchamel sauce and grated cheese, may be tweaked here and there. Greek salad is served in Greece without lettuce but with plenty of cucumbers, tomatoes, onions, peppers, a

VALUE TIP: Travel Off-Peak

Though a year-round destination, Greece's peak season is May 1 to October 1. If you can travel off-peak, you can generally get deals on hotels and airfare as well as escape the crowds and the hot summer temperatures.

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big chunk of fresh feta and olive oil. The *tzatziki*, usually made from cucumbers, garlic, lemon and Greek yogurt, is incredibly fresh. And, yes, Greek yogurt for breakfast with honey and an assortment of fruit and granola fixings is a must. Treat yourself to a glass of the local Greek wine as well. Greek wine dates back thousands of years, and wineries can be found in numerous areas around the country, including Santorini and Crete.

In Athens, explore the many restaurants that dot the neighborhoods of Plaka and Psiri. One good choice is Grill House Aischilou in Heroes Square, featuring a reasonably priced menu of traditional favorites such as *moussaka*, *tzatziki*, Greek salad and fried cheese, along with live music nightly.

Santorini's new Andronis Arcadia Hotel in Oia opened its doors in June with three upscale dining options that are available to the public by reservation. Along with a quiet and spectacular place to watch the sun setting into the Aegean Sea, Opson Restaurant offers tasting and à la carte menus designed with the help of a consultant who holds a doctorate in archaeology with a specialty in ancient Greek gastronomy. As a result, you can dine on foods similar to those the ancient Greeks once ate, all of which have been sourced from local produce suppliers,



Ammoudi Fish Tavern with a view of Oia above on Santorini
PHOTO BY TESS ROBIN

including the hotel's own gardens. Among the main course options are lamb with artichoke and ancient grains and sea bass with fennel. Also designed to face the setting sun, the al fresco Pacman near the hotel's infinity pool offers drinks and sushi. For another view of Santorini's sunset and the chance to look up at Oia terraced above, Ammoudi Fish Tavern in Ammoudi Bay is the spot. You'll sit alongside the Aegean Sea, where you can see the small fish swimming. Time it right for dinner for a front-row view of the boats making their way into the bay to see the sunset. Start your meal with toasted bread dipped into fresh tzatziki, and enjoy seafood dishes such as linguine and shrimp with fresh tomato sauce and a large selection of grilled fish, including grouper and bass.

Whether on the islands dining in a local *taverna*, exploring the beaches that hold such natural treasures as black sands and moonlike settings, or in such places as Athens or Crete walking amid ancient dwellings, it's as easy as A-B-C (antiquities, beaches and cuisine) to understand the magic that lures visitors to Greece's magnificent shores.

GREEK ISLAND RETREATS

Seeking a luxury resort off the beaten path? Look no further than these private hideaways.

Andronis Arcadia Hotel

Part of the Andronis Exclusive properties on Santorini, this new five-star hotel features 53 spacious suites, each with its own infinity pool and a deck ideal for watching the sun set over the Aegean Sea. A two-bedroom, two-bathroom two-level villa is perfect for families or two couples traveling together. A five-minute walk from the cliffside shops and restaurants of Oia, the property offers an expansive infinity pool facing the sea, two restaurants and a sushi bar, and a spa. Andronis Arcadia's service is also impressive, starting with personal check-in with staff outlining all there is to do on the island. During the included daily breakfast, the superior service continues with a concierge stopping by your table to offer assistance in planning the day's activities. andronisarcadia.com



Mykonos Theoxenia Hotel

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Mykonos Theoxenia Hotel

Steps from the white windmills and Little Venice, this 50-room historic Mykonos hotel overlooking the Aegean Sea provides a private haven away from the island's pulsating nightlife. Designed by famed architect Aris Constantinides, the hotel uses stone from the nearby island of Delos. Its décor is inspired by the clean look of the 1960s, with sleek wood furniture and patterned and solid fabrics on chairs and sofas. Perfectly situated with a view of the sun setting into the sea, patio dining at the hotel's Mediterranean restaurant, The Plate, is a relaxing experience enhanced on select nights by saxophone music. (*Moussaka* is a must-order from the menu.) The hotel's large outdoor pool and a beach located a few minutes' walk from the property provide delightful spots for cooling off. Spa services and a fitness center offer more spaces for relaxation. Breakfast is included in the rate, and a half-board option of breakfast and dinner is available. mykonostheoxenia.com

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