

# Greece



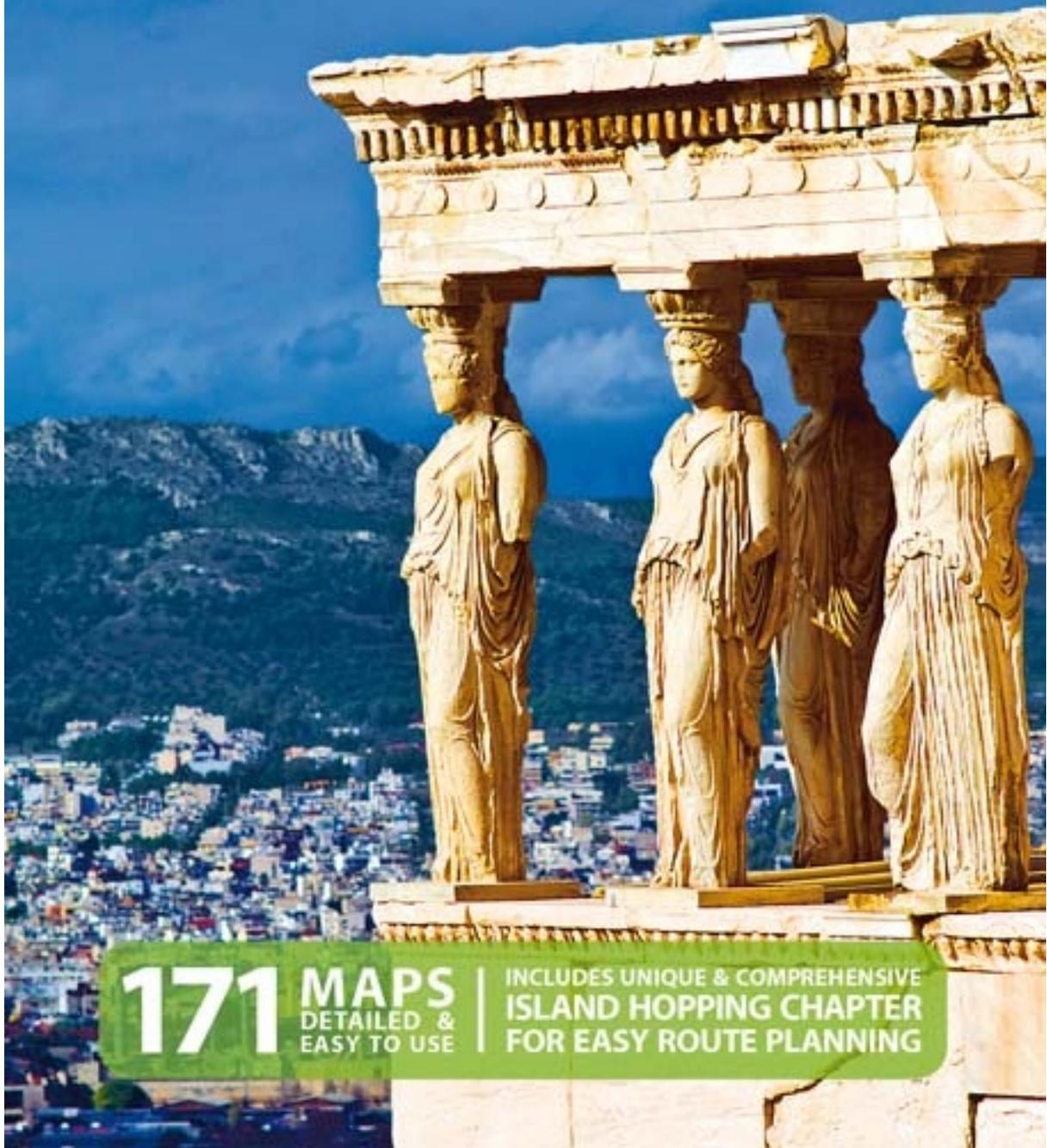
**171** MAPS  
DETAILED &  
EASY TO USE

INCLUDES UNIQUE & COMPREHENSIVE  
ISLAND HOPPING CHAPTER  
FOR EASY ROUTE PLANNING

The Lonely Planet logo, featuring the brand name in a white sans-serif font with a white circle around the word "planet", set against a dark blue rectangular background.

lonely planet

# Greece



**171** MAPS  
DETAILED &  
EASY TO USE

INCLUDES UNIQUE & COMPREHENSIVE  
ISLAND HOPPING CHAPTER  
FOR EASY ROUTE PLANNING

# Contents

[Destination Greece](#)

[Getting Started](#)

[Events Calendar](#)

[Itineraries](#)

[History](#)

[A Who's Who of the Ancient Greek Pantheon](#)

[The Culture](#)

[Food & Drink](#)

[Environment](#)

[Athens & Attica](#)

[Peloponnese](#)

[Central Greece](#)

[Northern Greece](#)

[Saronic Gulf Islands](#)

[Cyclades](#)

[Crete](#)

[Dodecanese](#)

[Northeastern Aegean Islands](#)

[Evia & the Sporades](#)

[Ionian Islands](#)

[Directory](#)

[Transport](#)

[Island Hopping](#)

[Health](#)

[Language](#)

[Glossary](#)

[The Authors](#)

[Behind the Scenes](#)

[Map legend](#)

[Return to beginning of chapter](#)

## Destination Greece

What is it that calls so many of us to Greece? Perhaps it's the endless miles of aquamarine coastline with some of Europe's cleanest beaches. Or the ancient sights that you've read about all your life and want to see with your own eyes. Maybe it's the slow-paced island life where days melt from one to the next, or the adrenalin-rushing possibilities of the mountainous terrain. It's 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. Greece is also the birthplace of drama and democracy, of western science and medicine. It's been said that, in many ways, we are all the sons and daughters of Ancient Greece. Perhaps we're simply being called home.

Once you arrive, it's not too difficult to find the Greece you were hoping for, whether it's 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'll quickly become acquainted with the melancholy throb of *rembetika* (blues songs), the tang of homemade tzatziki, and the ability of the ancient sights to unleash an imagination you might not have realised you had.

Nevertheless, while ancient sights might take the limelight in many tourist itineraries, the Greeks certainly aren't stuck in the past. Sure, it's easy to find remote, traditional villages with brilliant white buildings and roaming donkeys and goats, but the shepherd will likely be talking on their mobile phone and making a date for the local, trendy cafe. Athens has a firm grip on style and sophistication to rival any European capital. The Greek modern art scene is fresh and vibrant, and the political scene is passionate. It's a nation that welcomes and even insists upon change – from the unstoppable urban renewal taking place in Athens to the internet cafes found on the smallest islands and modern, impressive museums popping up around the nation.

There are few cultures that embrace the past so fondly while simultaneously welcoming the future with open arms.

Like everywhere, it's not always smooth sailing in Greece. When problems do arise, they're debated and handled with a strong will, as is evident in the heated conversations outside the local *kafeneio* (coffee house). The past three decades of increased wealth and improved living standards have gone hand in hand with rising unemployment, growing public debt and a credit crunch that's left many Greeks disillusioned and angry. The government's proposals of reforms in pensions and labour, plans for privatisation, and alleged corruption, incited many Greeks to take to the street in massive strikes and protests.

---

### **FAST FACTS**

Population: 11.26 million

Percentage of women: 50%

Life expectancy: 80 years

Inhabitants per square kilometre: 87

Tourists: 18.8 million annually

GDP: US\$345 billion

Per capita income: US\$32,005

Inflation: 1.57%

Unemployment: 9.3%

External debt: US\$92.19 billion

---

Since the early '70s, battles between youth and the police have been a mainstay of Greek society. Increases in youth unemployment and downward mobility have added fuel to the youth movement and protests in December 2008 resulted in the death of a 15-year-old, shot by the Athenian police in the student neighbourhood of Exarhia. News of the shooting quickly spread (largely via texting, Facebook and Twitter) and hundreds of youth took to the streets in a social uprising that lasted for days and threatened to topple the government.

The colossal fires of 2007 also sparked distrust in the government for the way in which they were (or weren't) dealt with. Today you'll find student groups, environmental charities and locals teamed up with expats working to reforest the country. Greeks are, in general, becoming increasingly aware of environmental degradation, with calls for bans on sprawling development and more opportunities to recycle. Climate change, diminished water supplies and the rising of sea levels are very real concerns for Greeks. But the debate is often tangled in the mixed interests of locals versus developers or backdoor deals with local government.

On the global front, Greece has become a truly multicultural nation in recent years and the pros and cons of this are another hot topic of conversation. Once an emigrant country, with thousands of Greeks moving to North America and Australia, and later a popular refuge for expats, Greece now sees a huge influx of illegal migrants from Afghanistan, Iraq and Africa who cross the border from Turkey. As islands such as Samos struggle to house boatloads of migrants, there is mounting criticism from the international community on the poor conditions and treatment of refugees and immigrants in Greece. With the lowest acceptance rate in Europe for asylum requests (only 379 out of 20,000 were accepted in 2008), many illegal immigrants and refugees simply disappear into Greece's informal economy or attempt to cross into other European countries. Others linger in shanty towns and deportation centres.

All of this would have once been discussed in a haze of smoke at the local *kafeneio* but in July 2009, Greece brought in antismoking laws similar to those across Europe, meaning all public places should be smoke free. Greeks are some of the heaviest smokers in Europe and it will be interesting to see how well this law is enforced, particularly in the small villages, remote islands and party hubs. It seems likely that the majority will continue to rule.

Despite these passionate debates and controversy, Greece is essentially a laid-back place. Lounge at the cafe over an endless coffee, stroll along the seafront, park yourself on the beach and take your time over meals and you'll fit right in. Greeks know how to enjoy life and are renowned as some of the most hospitable people on the globe. Their generosity and warmth is as genuine as the soft sand between your toes and the warmth of the Aegean sun.

[Return to beginning of chapter](#)

# Getting Started

---

---

[WHEN TO GO](#)

[COSTS & MONEY](#)

[TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY](#)

[TRAVEL LITERATURE](#)

[INTERNET RESOURCES](#)

---

---

## 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 (and in some places you'll be hard-pressed to find a hotel or restaurant open). Some of the smaller islands close completely as islanders head off to alternative homes on the mainland for a few months. Many hotels, seasonal cafes and restaurants close their doors from the end of October until mid-April; bus and ferry services are either drastically reduced or cancelled.

The cobwebs are dusted off in time for Orthodox Easter (usually in April; [Click here](#)), 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, when everything is in full swing and the majority of festivals take place. 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; most beaches are crowded; many ancient sites are swarming with tour groups; and in some 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.

---

---

See Climate [Click here](#) for more information.

---

---

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 even 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.

[Return to beginning of chapter](#)

## **COSTS & MONEY**

---

---

### **DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...**

Bags feel twice as heavy in the heat. Clothes also dry super fast under the Greek sun, so don't take more than you really need.

- A few novels or a deck of cards to while away the hours spent riding ferries.
  - A shady hat, sunglasses and sunblock – 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.
  - CDs – life-saving if you rent a car in a remote area.
  - A bathing suit in your daypack – for those unexpected coves and beaches.
  - Sturdy, nonslip shoes – many sights, historic towns and villages have slippery, rocky paths.
  - A penchant for octopus – it's on nearly every island menu.
  - Insect repellent – to ward off mosquitoes and sand fleas.
- 
-

Prices have rocketed since the adoption of the euro in 2002 and, although they appear to be levelling off, Greece is no longer the cheap country it once was. While tiny hole-in-the-wall restaurants continue to deliver hearty meals for low prices, eating out anywhere more upmarket has become a pricey venture. Accommodation has also skyrocketed, making many of the budget options not really worth the price and many of the midrange options appearing much more worthwhile.

A rock-bottom daily budget for a solo traveller is about €50. This would mean buses, staying in youth hostels or camping, and only occasionally eating in restaurants or taking ferries. Allow €100 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 closer to €150 per day. These budgets are for individuals travelling in high season (mid-June to late 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 mid-June and September to October. Particularly on the islands, accommodation 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 and shopping for food and drink at supermarkets and local produce markets. Travelling by boat can also save money as children under five board for free and you can save a night's accommodation.

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

---

---

## **HOW MUCH?**

Local telephone call per minute €0.30

Minimum taxi fare €4

Single Greek coffee €2

City bus ticket €1

Greek salad €6

---

[Return to beginning of chapter](#)

## TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

As with many popular European destinations, Greece's environment is pushed to the limit each year by the massive influx of tourists. While the bigger picture can seem rather overwhelming to an individual tourist [Click here](#), there are a number of things you can do that can help lessen the impact without compromising your holiday.

The first thing to consider is how you will travel to Greece. While short vacations don't always offer the luxury of avoiding the carbon footprints involved in flying ([Click here](#)), reaching Greece from the rest of Europe by train and/or boat is a viable option for those with a little more time. [Click here](#) for options. The experience of long-distance train travel can also be a highlight of your trip.

Next consider when you're going to travel. Visiting Greece on the shoulder seasons – early spring or autumn – means the weather is more bearable and puts less pressure on precious resources such as food and water. This is particularly true on the islands.

Once you're there, how you get around can make a difference to the environment. Not everyone (in fact, very few of us!) have the gumption and stamina to tackle the hilly, hot terrain on bicycle, but you can opt for local buses and trains rather than planes or rented cars, or for fast, fuel-economic ferries rather than slow gas-guzzlers. We've got all of the information you need to tackle the local transport; [Click here](#) and [Click here](#) for more details.

Water scarcity is a serious problem throughout much of Greece; a number of islands are without their own source. It's impractical to avoid buying bottled water entirely. On some of the remote and smaller islands, tap water

is not safe to drink (unless you boil or purify it); always ask locally. When buying bottled water, choose Greek brands (which are everywhere) rather than European brands that have travelled further and therefore come with a larger carbon footprint. You can also cut down on water use by not requesting hotels to wash your towels daily and by taking quick showers.

‘Organic’ and ‘green’ are increasingly popular buzzwords in Greece. The rise in agrotourism means more options for staying in local, environmentally friendly places. You’ll also find increasing options for recycling and for buying organic food, and for guided activities such as hiking and cycling. As much of Greek cuisine is based on local produce, restaurant proprietors are catching on to the movement and advertising their dishes as locally sourced and, in many cases, organically grown. Shops are also selling local, organic herbs, honey, soap and other wares as souvenirs, making it possible to support the local economy and the environment in one go. You’ll find many of these greener options listed in our GreenDex.

---

## TOP 10



### GREEN CHOICES

Green doesn’t have to mean composting toilets and a holiday without showers. Here are excellent ways to enjoy your vacation and do your bit for the earth at the same time.

1. [Milia](#) – mountaintop ecolodges
2. National Marine Park of [Alonnisos](#) – preserve of the Mediterranean monk seal
3. [Serpentine Organic Garden](#) – volunteering on these lush sustainable grounds
4. [Tilos](#) – for rare birds
5. [Octopus Sea Trips](#) – ecofriendly family activities

6. [Hydra](#) – car- and scooter-free
7. [Thrassa Eco-Tourism Guesthouse](#) – organic food and outdoor activities
8. [Masticulture Ecotourism Activities](#) – traditional cultivation of mastic trees, olive trees and grapevines
9. feel ingreece [Click here](#) – catch a glimpse of wild ponies
10. 2407 [Mountain Activities](#) – hop on a bike to explore in and around the Taygetos Mountains

### SET IN GREECE

Get inspired with some Greek scenery in these critically acclaimed films.

1. *Mediterraneo* (1991) – an award-winning comedy about Italian soldiers stranded on tiny Kastellorizo during WWII
2. *For Your Eyes Only* (1981) – Roger Moore travels around Greece secret-agent style
3. *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* (2001) – not as good as the book, but great scenes of Kefallonia
4. *The Guns of Navarone* (1961) – iconic war film, starring Anthony Quinn and Gregory Peck, on Rhodes
5. *Mamma Mia* (2008) – taking the world by storm, this ABBA-based musical is filmed on Skopelos, the Pelion Peninsula and Skiathos
6. *Zorba the Greek* (1964) – Anthony Quinn's steamy performance as an uptight English writer who finds love on Crete; the famous beach dance scene was at Stavros, near Hania
7. *Never on a Sunday* (1960) – Greece's big star Melina Mercouri received an Oscar nomination for her role as a prostitute in Piraeus
8. *Lara Croft Tomb Raider* (2001–02) – Lara Croft went diving off Santorini
9. *Shirley Valentine* (1989) – this classic foreign romance fantasy

takes place in Mykonos

10. *My Life in Ruins* (2009) – Nia Vardalos led her tour bus around Athens and the Peloponnese

## ADRENALIN KICKS

Greece isn't all about lazing on the beaches.

1. Hiking through mountain villages in the [Lousios Gorge](#)
2. Rock climbing seaside cliffs [Click here](#)
3. Diving in clear waters [Click here](#)
4. Kitesurfing with the world's best [Click here](#)
5. Scaling steep rock pinnacles [Click here](#)
6. Walking scenic cobblestoned mule pathways [Click here](#)
7. Hiking into the depths of a volcanic crater [Click here](#)
8. Walking in wildflower meadows [Click here](#)
9. Hiking the pristine Pindos Mountains through the stone-and-slate villages of the magical Zagorohoria region [Click here](#)
10. Swimming at the semitropical pink-sand beach of [Elafonisi](#)

---

[Return to beginning of chapter](#)

## TRAVEL LITERATURE

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

**92 Acharnon Street** (John Lucas; 2007) A view into contemporary Greece from the perspective of a visiting English professor at the University of Athens. It reflects the changes that took place during the '80s and covers politics to poetry.

**Eurydice Street: A Place In Athens** (Sofka Zinovieff; 2004) An engaging tale of an expat in Athens. The book takes in customs, etiquette, culture and modern history. Recommended by Greeks for its accuracy of modern Greek culture.

**Falling for Icarus: A Journey Among the Cretans** (Rory MacLean; 2004) The author journeys to Crete to live out his dream of constructing and flying his own plane and entwines his tale with history, myths and portrayals of village life.

**It's All Greek to Me!** (John Mole; 2004) The humorous and much-acclaimed account of an English family converting a stone ruin into a home on Evia, including their outlandish attempts to 'fit in'.

**My Family and Other Animals** (Gerald Durrell; 1977) The classic, witty story of a childhood spent on Corfu, told by a now-famous naturalist and conservationist. Not surprisingly, flora and fauna find their way into the pages.

**The Colossus of Marousi** (Henry Miller; 1975) 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.

[Return to beginning of chapter](#)

## INTERNET RESOURCES

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

**EOT** (Greek National Tourist Organisation; [www.gnto.gr](http://www.gnto.gr)) For concise tourist information.

**Greece Online** ([www.greece-on-line.gr](http://www.greece-on-line.gr)) An interactive map that lets you pinpoint things like beaches, museums, ski resorts or airports.

**Greek Travel Pages** ([www.gtp.gr](http://www.gtp.gr)) One-stop site with access to ferry schedules, accommodation listings and destination details.

**Lonely Planet** ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)) Get the latest updates and ask questions before you go or dispense advice when you get back.

**Ministry of Culture** ([www.culture.gr](http://www.culture.gr)) Details of events, sights, galleries, monuments and museums.

**Travel Guide to Greece** ([www.greektravel.com](http://www.greektravel.com)) Matt Barrett's comprehensive site to travelling in Greece.

[Return to beginning of chapter](#)

# Events Calendar

---

JANUARY

FEBRUARY

MARCH

APRIL

MAY

JUNE

JULY

AUGUST

SEPTEMBER

OCTOBER–NOVEMBER

DECEMBER

---

Attending a Greek festival or event can easily be a highlight of your trip. Atmospheric and jubilant, they're often seen as an excuse for a good party. Below are some of the main events; there are also countless religious festivals that towns and entire islands celebrate with great gusto. Ask locally, and see also the destination chapters.

[Return to beginning of chapter](#)

## JANUARY

### **FEAST OF AGIOS VASILIOS (ST BASIL)** 1 Jan

A church ceremony followed by the exchanging of gifts, singing, dancing and feasting; the *vasilopita* (golden glazed cake for New Year's Eve) is cut and the person who gets the slice containing a coin will supposedly have a lucky year.

## EPIPHANY (BLESSING OF THE WATERS)

6 Jan

The day of Christ's baptism by St John is celebrated throughout Greece. Seas, lakes and rivers are blessed; with the largest ceremony held at [Piraeus](#).

## GYNAIKOKRATIA

8 Jan

The villages of the prefectures of Rodopi, Kilkis and Seres in northern Greece hold a day of role reversal. Women spend the day in *kafeneia* (coffee houses) while the men stay at home to do the housework.

## PATRAS CARNIVAL

mid-Jan–early Mar

This Peloponnesian festival in [Patra](#) features a host of minor events leading up to a wild weekend of costume parades, colourful floats and celebrations in late February or early March. For more details check [www.carnivalpatras.gr](http://www.carnivalpatras.gr).

[Return to beginning of chapter](#)

## FEBRUARY

### CARNIVAL SEASON

3 weeks before Lent

Prior to the fasting of Lent, carnival season has many regional variations, but fancy dress, feasting, traditional dancing and general merrymaking prevail. The Patra carnival (above) is the largest, while the most bizarre is on [Skyros](#).

### CLEAN MONDAY (SHROVE MONDAY)

Mon before Ash

Wed

On the first day of Lent (a day which is referred to as Kathara Deftera), people take to the hills throughout Greece to enjoy picnics together and fly kites.

[Return to beginning of chapter](#)

## MARCH

## **INDEPENDENCE DAY**      25 Mar

The anniversary of the hoisting of the Greek flag by independence supporters at Moni Agias Lavras is celebrated with parades and dancing. This act of revolt marked the start of the War of Independence.

[Return to beginning of chapter](#)

## **APRIL**

### **ORTHODOX EASTER**      40 days after the start of Lent

The Lenten fast ends on Easter Sunday with the cracking of red-dyed Easter eggs, feasting and dancing. This is the most important festival in the Greek Orthodox religion. The Monastery of St John the Theologian on [Patmos](#), in the Dodecanese, is a great place to witness it.

### **FEAST OF AGIOS GEORGIOS (ST GEORGE)**      23 Apr or 1st Tue following Easter

The feast day of St George, the country's patron saint and the patron saint of shepherds, is celebrated at several places, but with particular exuberance in [Arahova](#), near Delphi, in central Greece. Expect dancing, feasting and much merriment.

[Return to beginning of chapter](#)

## **MAY**

### **MAY DAY**      1 May

This occasion is marked by a mass exodus from towns to the country. During picnics, wildflowers are gathered and made into wreaths to decorate houses.

### **ANASTENARIA**      21 May

This fire-walking ritual takes place in the village of Langadas, near