

# History

## STONE AGE

The discovery of a Neanderthal skull in a cave on the Halkidiki peninsula of Macedonia in 1960 confirmed the presence of humans in Greece 700,000 years ago. Bones and tools from as far back as Palaeolithic times (around 6500 BC) have been found in the Pindos Mountains.

The move to a pastoral existence came during Neolithic times (7000–3000 BC). The fertile region that is now Thessaly was the first area to be settled. The people grew barley and wheat, and bred sheep and goats. They used clay to produce pots, vases and simple statuettes of the Great Mother (the earth goddess), whom they worshipped.

By 3000 BC people were living in settlements complete with streets, squares and mud-brick houses. The villages were centred on a large palace-like structure that belonged to the tribal leader. The most complete Neolithic settlements in Greece are Dimini (inhabited from 4000 to 1200 BC, see p254) and Sesklo (p254), near Volos.

## BRONZE AGE

Around 3000 BC, Indo-European migrants introduced the processing of bronze (an alloy of copper and tin) into Greece and so began three remarkable civilisations: the Cycladic, Minoan and Mycenaean.

### Cycladic Civilisation

The Cycladic civilisation, centred on the islands of the Cyclades, is divided into three periods: Early (3000–2000 BC), Middle (2000–1500 BC) and Late (1500–1100 BC). The most impressive legacy of this civilisation is the statuettes carved from Parian marble – the famous Cycladic figurines. Like statuettes from Neolithic times, the Cycladic figurines depicted images of the Great Mother. Other remains include bronze and obsidian tools and weapons, gold jewellery, and stone and clay vases and pots.

The peoples of the Cycladic civilisation were accomplished sailors who developed prosperous maritime trade links. They exported their wares to Asia Minor (the west of present-day Turkey), Europe and North Africa, as well as to Crete and continental Greece. The Cyclades islands were influenced by both the Minoan and Mycenaean civilisations.

### Minoan Civilisation

Crete's Minoan civilisation was the first advanced civilisation to emerge in Europe, drawing its inspiration from two great Middle Eastern civilisations, the Mesopotamian and the Egyptian. Archaeologists divide the Minoan civi-

lisation, like the Cycladic, into three phases: Early (3000–2100 BC), Middle (2100–1500 BC) and Late (1500–1100 BC).

Many aspects of Neolithic life endured during the Early period, but by 2500 BC most people on the island had been assimilated into a new culture that we now call the Minoan – after King Minos, the mythical ruler of Crete. The Minoan civilisation reached its peak during the Middle period, producing pottery and metalwork of great beauty that required much imagination and skill to make.

The Late period saw the civilisation decline both commercially and militarily against Mycenaean competition from the mainland, until its abrupt end, attributed to the eruption of the volcano on Thira (Santorini) in around 1100 BC.

### Mycenaean Civilisation

The decline of the Minoan civilisation coincided with the rise of the first great civilisation on the Greek mainland, the Mycenaean (1900–1100 BC), which reached its peak between 1500 and 1200 BC. Named after the ancient city of Mycenae, where the German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann made his celebrated finds in 1876, it is also known as the Achaean civilisation, after the Indo-European branch of migrants who had settled on mainland Greece and absorbed many aspects of Minoan culture.

Unlike Minoan society, where the lack of city walls seems to indicate relative peace under some form of central authority, Mycenaean civilisation was characterised by independent city-states such as Corinth, Pylos, Tiryns and, most powerful of them all, Mycenae. These were ruled by kings who inhabited palaces enclosed within massive walls on easily defensible hilltops.

The Mycenaeans' most impressive legacy is their magnificent gold jewellery and ornaments, the best of which can be seen in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens. The Mycenaeans wrote in what is called Linear B (an early form of Greek), and worshipped gods who were precursors of the later Greek deities.

The Mycenaean civilisation came to an end in the 12th century BC, when it was overrun by the Dorians.

## GEOMETRIC AGE

The origins of the Dorians remain uncertain. They are generally thought to have come from Epiros or northern Macedonia, but some historians argue that they only arrived from that direction because they had been driven out of Doris, in central Greece, by the Mycenaeans.

The warrior-like Dorians settled first in the Peloponnese, but soon fanned out over much of the mainland, razing the city-states and enslaving the inhabitants. The Dorians brought a traumatic break with the past, and the next 400 years are often referred to as Greece's 'dark age'. But it is unfair to

*Greece Before History*, by Priscilla Murray and Curtis Neil Runnels, is a good introduction to Greece's earliest days.

[www.ancientgreece.com](http://www.ancientgreece.com) is a great web portal for all things ancient and Greek.

For more on Linear B script, try [www.ancientscripts.com/linearb.html](http://www.ancientscripts.com/linearb.html).

## TIMELINE

### 7000–3000 BC

For 4000 years the early inhabitants of the Greek peninsula live a simple agrarian life growing crops and herding animals. Communities with housing and planned streets begin to appear by around 3000 BC.

### 3000 BC

The discovery of how to blend copper and tin into a strong alloy gives rise to the Bronze Age. Trade flourishes and increased prosperity sees the birth of the Cycladic, Minoan and Mycenaean civilisations.

### 3000–1100 BC

For around 900 years two parallel civilisations, the Cycladic and the Minoan, prospered, developing sophisticated forms of manufacturing, governance and trade links.

### 1700–1550 BC

During this period the island of Santorini erupts with a cataclysmic explosion, one of the largest volcanic events in recorded history, causing a Mediterranean-wide tsunami that probably contributed to the destruction of Minoan civilisation.

### 1500–1200 BC

Mycenaean culture from the Peloponnese mainland usurps much of the Cretan and Cycladic cultures. Goldsmithing is a predominant feature of Mycenaean life, as is rigid authority.

### 1200–800 BC

Arriving from the North, the mysterious Dorians herald a 400-year period of obscurity in Greek cultural and trading life as existing infrastructures are obliterated.

dismiss the Dorians completely; they brought iron with them and developed a new style of pottery, decorated with striking geometric designs – although art historians are still divided on whether they merely copied designs perfected by Ionians in Attica. The Dorians worshipped male gods instead of fertility goddesses and adopted the Mycenaean gods Poseidon, Zeus and Apollo, paving the way for the later Greek religious pantheon.

**‘The people of the various city-states were unified by the development of a Greek alphabet’**

### ARCHAIC AGE

By about 800 BC Greece had begun to settle down again. The Dorians had developed into a class of land-holding aristocrats and Greece had been divided into a series of independent city-states. The most important of these were Argos, Athens, Corinth, Elis, Sparta and Thebes (Thiva).

The city-states were autonomous, free to pursue their own interests as they saw fit. Most abolished monarchic rule in favour of an aristocratic form of government, usually headed by an *arhon* (chief magistrate). Aristocrats were often disliked by the population because of their inherited privileges, and some city-states fell to the rule of tyrants after Kypselos, the first tyrant of Corinth, started the practice in Corinth around 650 BC. Tyrants seized their position rather than inheriting it. While today the word ‘tyrant’ may have darker overtones, in ancient times they were often seen as being on the side of ordinary citizens.

The people of the various city-states were unified by the development of a Greek alphabet (of Phoenician origin, though the Greeks introduced the practice of indicating vowels within the script), the verses of Homer (which created a sense of a shared Mycenaean past), the establishment of the Olympic Games (which brought all the city-states together) and the setting up of central sanctuaries such as Delphi (a neutral meeting ground for lively negotiations); all common bonds giving Greeks, for the first time, a sense of national identity. This period is known as the Archaic, or Middle, Age.

### Athens & Solon

The seafaring city-state of Athens, meanwhile, was still in the hands of aristocrats when Solon was appointed *arhon* in 594 BC with a mandate to defuse the mounting tensions between the haves and the have-nots. He cancelled all debts and freed those who had become enslaved because of them. Declaring all free Athenians equal by law, Solon abolished inherited privileges and restructured political power establishing four classes based on wealth. Although only the first two classes were eligible for office, all four were allowed to elect magistrates and vote on legislation. His reforms have led him to be regarded as a harbinger of democracy.

### Sparta

In the Peloponnese, Sparta was a very different kind of city-state. The Spartans were descended from Dorian invaders and used the Helots, the original inhabitants of Laconia, as their slaves. They ran their society along strict military lines.

Newborn babies were inspected and, if found wanting, were left to die on a mountaintop. At the age of seven boys were taken from their homes to start rigorous training that would turn them into elite soldiers. Girls were spared military training, but were forced to keep very fit in order to produce healthy sons. Spartan indoctrination was so effective that dissent was unknown and a degree of stability was achieved that other city-states could only dream of.

While Athens became powerful through trade, Sparta became the ultimate military machine and it towered above the other city-states.

### The Persian Wars

The Persian drive to destroy Athens was sparked by the city’s support for a rebellion in the Persian colonies of Asia Minor. Emperor Darius spent five years suppressing the revolt and emerged hellbent on revenge.

A 25,000-strong Persian army reached Attica in 490 BC, but suffered a humiliating defeat when outmanoeuvred by an Athenian force of 10,000 at the Battle of Marathon.

Darius died in 485 BC, so it was left to his son Xerxes to fulfil his father’s ambition of conquering Greece. In 480 BC Xerxes gathered men from every far-flung nation of his empire and launched a coordinated invasion by land and sea, the size of which the world had never seen.

Some 30 city-states met in Corinth to devise a common defence (others, including Delphi, sided with the Persians). They agreed on a combined army and navy under Spartan command, with the strategy provided by the Athenian leader Themistocles. The Spartan King Leonidas led the army to the pass at Thermopylae, near present-day Lamia, the main passage into central Greece from the north. This bottleneck was easy to defend, and although the Greeks were greatly outnumbered they held the pass until a traitor showed the Persians a way over the mountains. The Greeks were forced to retreat, but Leonidas, along with 300 of his elite Spartan troops, fought to the death.

The Spartans and their Peloponnesian allies fell back on their second line of defence, an earthen wall across the Isthmus of Corinth, while the Persians advanced upon Athens. Themistocles ordered his people to flee the city, the women and children to Salamis (today’s Salamina) and the men to sea with the Athenian fleet. The Persians razed Attica and burned Athens to the ground.

Things did not go so well for the Persian navy. By skilful manoeuvring, the Greek navy trapped the larger Persian ships in the narrow waters off

**‘Sparta became the ultimate military machine’**

#### 800–700 BC

Homer composes the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* some time during this century. The two epic poems are Greece’s earliest pieces of literary art and are still praised for their poetic genius.

#### 800–650 BC

Independent city-states begin to emerge in the so-called Archaic Age as the Dorians mature and develop. Aristocrats rule these mini-states while tyrants occasionally take power by force. The Greek alphabet emerges from the Phoenician script.

#### 700–500 BC

Having originated around 1000 BC in the Peloponnese, the Spartans come to play a decisive role in Greek history. Politically and militarily, the Spartan star shines in ascendancy for around 200 years.

#### 594 BC

Solon, a ruling aristocrat in Athens, introduces rules of fair play to his citizenry. His radical rule-changing – in effect creating human and political rights – is believed to have been the first step to real democracy.

#### 490 BC

Athens invokes the ire of the distant Persians by supporting insurgencies within Persian territorial domains. Seeking revenge, the Persian king Darius sends an army to teach Greece a lesson but is defeated at Marathon.

#### 480 BC

Darius’ son and heir Xerxes seeks to extract revenge for the defeat of Marathon. The enormous army sent to crush Greece defeats Leonidas at Thermopylae, sacks Athens but is routed at sea off Salamis.

Salamis, where they became easy pickings for the more mobile Greek vessels. Xerxes returned to Persia in disgust, leaving his general Mardonius to subdue Greece. The result was quite the reverse; a year later the Greeks, under the Spartan general Pausanias, obliterated the Persian army at the Battle of Plataea.

### CLASSICAL AGE

After defeating the Persians the disciplined Spartans retreated to the Peloponnese, while Athens basked in its role as liberator. In 477 BC it founded the Delian League – so called because its treasury was on the sacred island of Delos. The league consisted of almost every state with a navy, no matter how small, including many of the Aegean islands and some of the Ionian city-states in Asia Minor.

Ostensibly its purpose was twofold: to create a naval force to liberate the city-states that were still occupied by Persia, and to protect against another Persian attack. The swearing of allegiance to Athens and an annual contribution of ships (later just money) were mandatory. The league, in effect, became an Athenian empire.

Indeed, when Pericles became leader of Athens in 461 BC, he moved the treasury from Delos to the Acropolis and focused on using the treasury's contents to begin a building programme in which no expense was spared. Pericles' first objectives were to rebuild the temple complex of the Acropolis, which had been destroyed by the Persians, and to link Athens to its lifeline, the port of Piraeus, with fortified walls designed to withstand any future onslaught.

With the Aegean Sea safely under its wing, Athens began to look westwards for further expansion, bringing it into conflict with the Sparta-dominated Peloponnesian League. A series of skirmishes and provocations subsequently led to the Peloponnesian Wars.

### First Peloponnesian War

One of the major triggers of the first Peloponnesian War (431–421 BC) was the Corcyra incident, in which Athens supported Corcyra (present-day Corfu) in a row with Corinth, its mother city. Corinth called on Sparta to help and the Spartans, whose power depended to a large extent on Corinth's wealth, duly rallied to the cause.

Athens knew it couldn't defeat the Spartans on land, so it abandoned Attica and withdrew behind its mighty walls, opting to rely on its navy to put pressure on Sparta by blockading the Peloponnese. Athens suffered badly during the siege; plague broke out in the overcrowded city, killing a third of the population – including Pericles – but the defences held firm. The blockade of the Peloponnese eventually began to hurt and the two cities reached an uneasy truce.

'when Pericles became leader of Athens in 461 BC, he moved the treasury from Delos to the Acropolis'

### Second Peloponnesian War

The truce lasted until 413 BC, when the Spartans went to the aid of the Sicilian city of Syracuse, which the Athenians had been besieging for three years. The Spartans ended the siege, and destroyed the Athenian fleet and army in the process.

Despite this, Athens fought on for a further nine years before it finally surrendered to Sparta in 404 BC. Corinth urged the total destruction of Athens, but the Spartans felt honour-bound to spare the city that had saved Greece from the Persians. Instead they crippled it by confiscating its fleet, abolishing the Delian League and tearing down the walls between the city and Piraeus.

### Spartan Rule

During the wars Sparta had promised to restore liberty to the city-states that had turned against Athens, but now it changed its mind and installed oligarchies (governments run by the super-rich) supervised by Spartan garrisons. Soon there was widespread dissatisfaction.

Sparta found it had bitten off more than it could chew when it began a campaign to reclaim the cities of Asia Minor from Persian rule. This brought the Persians back into Greek affairs, where they found willing allies in Athens and an increasingly powerful Thebes. The rivalry between Sparta and Thebes culminated in the decisive Battle of Leuctra in 371 BC, where Thebes, led by Epaminondas, inflicted Sparta's first defeat in a pitched battle. Spartan influence collapsed and Thebes filled the vacuum.

In a surprise about-turn, Athens now allied itself with Sparta, and their combined forces met the Theban army at Mantinea in the Peloponnese in 362 BC. The battle was won by Thebes, but Epaminondas was killed. Without him, Theban power soon crumbled.

Athens was unable to take advantage of the situation; like the other city-states it was a spent force, and a new power was rising in the north: Macedon.

### THE RISE OF MACEDON

While the Greeks engineered their own decline through the Peloponnesian Wars, Macedon (geographically the modern *nomós*, or prefecture, of Macedonia) was gathering strength in the north. Macedon had long been regarded as a bit of a backwater, a loose assembly of primitive hill tribes nominally ruled by a king. They probably spoke a variant of Greek, which to Athenian ears would have sounded rural or countrified, thus giving the Macedonians a reputation for being rough country cousins.

The man who turned them into a force to be reckoned with was Philip II, who came to the throne in 359 BC.

In 338 BC, he marched into Greece and defeated a combined army of Athenians and Thebans at the Battle of Chaironeia. The following year

'In a surprise about-turn, Athens now allied itself with Sparta'

479 BC

The Greeks pay back their defeat at the hands of Xerxes by smashing the Persian army of Mardonius at the decisive Battle of Plataea under the Spartan leader Pausanias. The Persian Wars are finally over.

477 BC

Seeking security while building a de facto empire, the Athenians establish a political and military alliance called the Delian League. Many city-states and islands join the new club.

461 BC

New Athenian leader Pericles shifts power from Delos to Athens and sets about building a city with magnificent monuments, using the treasury wealth of the Delian League to fund his massive works.

432 BC

The magnificent Parthenon is substantially completed and becomes an enduring legacy of Pericles and the Delian League.

431–421 BC

The military might of Sparta runs afoul of the commercial and artistic clout of Athens over an alliance with Corcyra. The spat becomes a full-blown war of attrition, with Athens barricaded and the Peloponnese embargoed.

429 BC

Pericles – general, statesman and arguably the architect of the Athenian empire – falls victim to the plague sweeping Athens and dies.

Philip called together all the city-states (except Sparta) at Corinth and persuaded them to swear allegiance to Macedonia by promising to campaign against Persia.

Philip's ambition to tackle Persia never materialised, for in 336 BC he was assassinated by a Macedonian noble. His son, 20-year-old Alexander, became king.

### ALEXANDER THE GREAT

Philip II's death had been the signal for rebellions throughout the budding empire, but Alexander wasted no time in crushing them, making an example of Thebes by razing it to the ground. After restoring order, he turned his attention to the Persian Empire and marched his army of 40,000 men into Asia Minor in 334 BC.

After a few bloody battles with the Persians, most notably at Issus (333 BC), Alexander succeeded in conquering Syria, Palestine and Egypt – where he was proclaimed pharaoh and founded the city of Alexandria. He then began hunting down the Persian king, Darius III, defeating his army in 331 BC. Alexander continued east into what is now known as Uzbekistan, Baluchistan in Afghanistan and northern India. His ambition was now to conquer the world, which he believed ended at the sea beyond India, but his soldiers grew weary and in 324 BC forced him to return to Mesopotamia, where he settled in Babylon. The following year he fell ill suddenly and died, heirless, at the age of 33. His generals swooped like vultures on the empire.

When the dust settled, Alexander's empire had fallen apart into three large kingdoms and several smaller states. The three generals with the richest pickings were Ptolemy, founder of the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt (capital: Alexandria), which died out when the last of the dynasty, Cleopatra, committed suicide in 30 BC; Seleucus, founder of the Seleucid dynasty, which ruled over Persia and Syria (capital: Antiochia); and Antigonus, who ruled over Asia Minor and whose Antigonid successors would win control over Macedonia proper.

Macedonia lost control of the Greek city-states to the south, which banded together into the Aetolian League, centred on Delphi, and the Achaean League, based in the Peloponnese. Athens and Sparta joined neither.

### ROMAN RULE

While Alexander the Great was forging his vast empire in the east, the Romans had been expanding theirs to the west, and now they were keen to start making inroads into Greece. After several inconclusive clashes, they defeated Macedon in 168 BC at the Battle of Pydna.

The Achaean League was defeated in 146 BC; the Roman consul Mummius made an example of the rebellious Corinthians by destroying their city. In 86 BC Athens joined an ill-fated rebellion against the Romans in Asia Minor

staged by the king of the Black Sea region, Mithridates VI. In retribution, the Roman statesman Sulla invaded Athens, destroyed its walls and took off with its most valuable sculptures.

For the next 300 years Greece, as the Roman province of Achaia, experienced an unprecedented period of peace, known as the 'Pax Romana'. The Romans had always venerated Greek art, literature and philosophy, and aristocratic Romans sent their offspring to the many schools in Athens. Indeed, the Romans adopted most aspects of Hellenistic culture, spreading its unifying traditions throughout their empire.

The Romans were also the first to refer to the Hellenes as Greeks, which is derived from the word *graikos* – the name of a prehistoric tribe.

### CHRISTIANITY & THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE

The Pax Romana began to crumble in AD 250 when the Goths invaded Greece, the first of a succession of invaders spurred on by the 'great migrations' of the Goths from the middle Balkans.

Christianity, in the meantime, had emerged as the country's new religion. St Paul had visited Greece several times in the 1st century AD and made converts in many places. The definitive boost to the spread of Christianity in this part of the world came with the conversion of the Roman emperors and the rise of the Byzantine Empire, which blended Hellenistic culture with Christianity.

In AD 324 Emperor Constantine I, a Christian convert, transferred the capital of the empire from Rome to Byzantium, a city on the western shore of the Bosphorus, which was renamed Constantinople (present-day Istanbul). While Rome went into terminal decline, the eastern capital began to grow in wealth and strength. Emperor Theodosius I made Christianity the official religion of Greece in 394 and outlawed the worship of all Greek and Roman gods, now branded as pagan. Athens remained an important cultural centre until 529, when Emperor Justinian forbade the teaching of classical philosophy in favour of Christian theology, then seen as the supreme form of all intellectual endeavour.

In 747 the population of the Peloponnese was decimated by an outbreak of bubonic plague that spread from the port of Monemvasia. The Byzantines encouraged an influx of Slavic peoples to repopulate the area, and to this day many villages in the Peloponnese carry names of Slavic origin.

### THE CRUSADES

It is ironic that the demise of the Byzantine Empire was accelerated not by invasions of infidels from the east, nor barbarians from the north, but by fellow Christians from the west – the Frankish crusaders.

The stated mission of the crusades was to liberate the Holy Land from the Muslims, but in reality they were driven as much by greed as by religious

'Alexander's ambition was now to conquer the world'

'The Romans had always venerated Greek art, literature and philosophy'

#### 413–404 BC

A second war breaks out over the distant colony of Sicily, ending an eight-year truce. The Spartans side with the Sicilians, breaking the Athenian siege and routing the Athenians. Sparta assumes total dominance.

#### 371 BC

Thebes (Thiva), a small city-state, is now on the ascendancy and under its general Epaminondas takes on the might of Sparta at Leuctra, where the hitherto indomitable Spartans suffer their first land defeat.

#### 362 BC

Nine years of Theban dominance comes to an end at the hands of a Spartan–Athenian alliance, which witnesses the death of the Theban leader despite a Theban victory in the Battle at Mantinaea.

#### 359 BC

In the north, the Macedonians are on the rise as King Philip seizes the initiative in the power vacuum. He seeks alliances with Sparta and Athens on a promise to wage war again on Persia.

#### 336 BC

Philip's son Alexander assumes leadership of Macedonia following the untimely murder of his father. Within a few years the new king takes up the challenge against Persia laid down by the slain Philip.

#### 334–323 BC

Alexander sets out to conquer the known world. Thebes was the first victim, followed by the Persians, the Egyptians and finally the peoples of today's central Asia. He dies in 323 BC.

fervour. The first three crusades passed by without affecting the area, but the leaders of the fourth crusade decided that Constantinople presented richer pickings than Jerusalem and struck a deal with Venice.

Constantinople was sacked in 1204 and much of the Byzantine Empire was partitioned into feudal states ruled by self-styled 'Latin' (mostly Frankish or western-Germanic) princes. The Venetians, meanwhile, had also secured a foothold in Greece. Over the next few centuries they acquired all the key Greek ports, including the island of Crete, and became the wealthiest and most powerful traders in the Mediterranean.

Despite this sorry state of affairs, Byzantium was not yet dead. In 1259 the Byzantine emperor Michael VIII Palaeologos recaptured the Peloponnese and made the city of Mystras his headquarters. Many eminent Byzantine artists, architects, intellectuals and philosophers converged on the city for a final burst of Byzantine creativity. Michael VIII managed to reclaim Constantinople in 1261, but by this time Byzantium was a shadow of its former self.

## THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Constantinople was soon facing a much greater threat from the east. The Seljuk Turks, a tribe from central Asia, had first appeared on the eastern fringes of the empire in the middle of the 11th century. They established themselves on the Anatolian plain by defeating a Byzantine army at Manzikert in 1071. The threat looked to have been contained, especially when the Seljuks were themselves overrun by the Mongols. By the time Mongol power began to wane, the Seljuks had been supplanted as the dominant Turkish tribe by the Ottomans – the followers of Osman, who ruled from 1289 to 1326. The Muslim Ottomans began to rapidly expand the areas under their control and by the mid-15th century were harassing the Byzantine Empire on all sides. In 1453 Constantinople fell to the Turks and once more Greece became a battleground, this time fought over by the Turks and Venetians. Eventually, with the exception of the Ionian Islands, Greece became part of the Ottoman Empire.

Ottoman power reached its zenith under Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent, who ruled between 1520 and 1566, during which time he expanded his empire through the Balkans and Hungary to the very gates of Vienna. His successor, Selim the Sot, added Cyprus to their dominions in 1570, but his death in 1574 marked the end of serious territorial expansion.

Although they captured Crete in 1669 after a 25-year campaign, and briefly threatened Vienna once more in 1683, the ineffectual sultans that followed in the late 16th and 17th centuries saw the empire go into steady decline. Venice expelled the Turks from the Peloponnese in a three-year campaign (1684–87) that saw Venetian troops advance as far as Athens. The Parthenon was badly damaged when a Venetian cannonball struck

### GREECE'S TURKISH DELIGHTS *Will Gourlay*

Mentioning the architectural legacy of Greece will evoke images of the Parthenon, the Minoan palaces and the monasteries of Athos, but it is a little-known fact that Greece is home to the oldest mosque in Europe. The mosque at Didymotiho (p321) was built by Ottoman Sultan Bayazit I in the late 14th century and is an example of the important Turkish buildings found in Greece. The Turkish occupation was not a happy chapter of Greek history, but the Ottomans left a lasting footprint in the form of *bezisten* (bazaars), mosques and palaces from Epiros to Crete, from Thrace to the Dodecanese.

During the 20th century Greece put all of its energies into preserving and highlighting the Hellenistic aspects of its history, while the Turkish influence was ignored and Ottoman buildings were left to the ravages of time and inclement weather, or in some cases destroyed. In recent years, however, there have been increasing efforts to preserve Ottoman-era architecture: the Greek Ministry of Culture has invested time and money in restoring Ottoman buildings across Macedonia and Thrace. Meanwhile, the imaret of Mohamed Ali Pasha has been artfully restored by a private owner and now functions as a high-end hotel (see Imaret, p297).

It is tempting to suggest that such moves are indicative of an increasing self-confidence within Greece and a willingness to accept that the fabric of modern Greece contains strands that are not specifically Hellenic. However, it would seem that grants from the EU and Unesco are a useful lubricant in greasing the wheels of such restoration projects.

It has been specialist architects and archaeologists in Greece, rather than the average Greek on the street, who have taken an interest in restoring such places, but the fact remains that these Ottoman-era buildings are another fascinating aspect of the intricate fabric of Greek history and culture.

Of course, the intertwined history of the Greek and Turkish people is not just told in bricks and mortar, but also manifests itself in cultural curios, such as the *mati* (evil eye), *karaghiozi* (shadow puppets) and tasty traditional dishes too many to mention. But that is, of course, another story...

Turkish gunpowder stored inside. Turkish rule was restored in 1715, but it never regained its former authority.

## RUSSIAN INVOLVEMENT

Russia's link with Greece goes back to Byzantine times, when the Russians had been converted to Christianity by Byzantine missionaries. When Constantinople fell to the Turks, the metropolitan (head) of the Russian Church declared Moscow the 'third Rome', the true heir of Christianity, and campaigned for the liberation of its fellow Christians in the south.

By the time Catherine the Great became Empress of Russia in 1762, both Venice and the Ottoman Empire were weak. She sent Russian agents to foment rebellion, first in the Peloponnese in 1770 and then in Epiros in 1786. Both insurrections were crushed ruthlessly – the latter by Ali Pasha,

'Ottoman power reached its zenith under Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent'

86 BC–AD 224

Roman expansion inevitably includes Greek territory. First defeating Macedonia at Pydna in 168 BC, the Romans ultimately overtake the mainland and establish the Pax Romana. It lasts 300 years.

324

The AD 250 invasion of Greece by the Goths signals the decline of Pax Romana and in 324 the capital of the empire is moved to Constantinople. Christianity is the dominant religion.

394

Christianity is declared the official religion. All pagan worship of Greek and Roman gods is outlawed. Christian theology supplants classical philosophy.

529

Athens' cultural influence is dealt a fatal blow when Emperor Justinian outlaws the teaching of classical philosophy in favour of Christian theology, by now regarded as the ultimate form of intellectual endeavour.

1204

Constantinople is sacked by marauding Frankish crusaders in a campaign gone awry. Trading religious fervour for self interest, the Crusaders strike a blow that sets Constantinople on the road to a slow demise.

1453

Greece becomes a dominion of the Ottoman Turks after they seize control of Constantinople, sounding the death knell for the Byzantine Empire.

the governor of Ioannina, who proceeded to set up his own power base in defiance of the sultan.

### Independence Parties

In the 1770s and 1780s Catherine forcibly dislodged the Turks from the Black Sea coast and created a number of towns in the region, which she gave Ancient Greek or Byzantine names. She offered Greeks financial incentives and free land to settle the region, and many took up her offer.

One of the new towns was called Odessa, and it was there in 1814 that businessmen Athanasios Tsakalof, Emmanuel Xanthos and Nikolaos Skoufas founded the first Greek independence party, the Filiki Eteria (Friendly Society). The message of the society spread quickly and branches opened throughout Greece. The leaders in Odessa believed that armed force was the only effective means of liberation, and made generous financial contributions to the freedom fighters.

## THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

Ali Pasha's private rebellion against the sultan in 1820 gave the Greeks the opportunity they had been waiting for. On 25 March 1821, Bishop Germanos of Patra signalled the beginning of the War of Independence when he hoisted the Greek flag at the monastery of Agia Lavra in the Peloponnese. Uprisings broke out almost simultaneously across most of Greece and the occupied islands, with the Greeks making big early gains. The fighting was savage and atrocities were committed on both sides; in the Peloponnese 12,000 Turkish inhabitants were butchered after the capture of the city of Tripolitsa (present-day Tripoli), while the Turks retaliated with massacres in Asia Minor, most notoriously on the island of Chios.

The fighting escalated, and within a year the Greeks had captured the fortresses of Monemvasia, Navarino (modern Pylos) and Nafplio in the Peloponnese, and Messolongi, Athens and Thebes. Greek independence was proclaimed at Epidavros on 13 January 1822.

The struggle, however, was far from over. Leaders who had been united against the Turks now turned against each other and disagreements twice escalated into civil war (1824 and 1825), as a result of regional differences over national governance. The sultan took advantage of this and called in Egyptian reinforcements. By 1827 the Turks had recaptured most of the Peloponnese as well as Messolongi and Athens. The Western powers then intervened and a combined Russian, French and British fleet destroyed the Turkish-Egyptian fleet in the Bay of Navarino in October 1827. Sultan Mahmud II defied the odds and proclaimed a holy war, prompting Russia to send troops into the Balkans to engage the Ottoman army. Fighting continued until 1829 when, with Russian troops at the gates of Constantinople, the sultan accepted Greek independence with the Treaty of Adrianople.

## BIRTH OF THE GREEK NATION

The Greeks, meanwhile, had been busy organising the independent state they had proclaimed several years earlier. In April 1827 they elected Ioannis Kapodistrias, a Corfiot who had been the foreign minister of Russian Tsar Alexander I, as their first president. Nafplio, in the Peloponnese, was chosen as the capital.

While he was good at enlisting foreign support, his autocratic manner at home was unacceptable to many of the leaders of the War of Independence, particularly the Maniot chieftains who had always been a law unto themselves, and Kapodistrias was assassinated in 1831.

Amid the ensuing anarchy, Britain, France and Russia again intervened and declared that Greece should become a monarchy. They decided that the throne should be given to a non-Greek so as not to favour one Greek faction, and selected 17-year-old Prince Otto of Bavaria, who arrived in Nafplio in January 1833. The new kingdom (established by the London Convention of 1832) consisted of the Peloponnese, Sterea Ellada, the Cyclades and the Sporades.

King Otto (as his name became) got up the noses of the Greek people from the moment he set foot on their land. He arrived with a bunch of upper-class Bavarian cronies, to whom he gave the most prestigious official posts, and he was just as autocratic as Kapodistrias. Otto moved the capital to Athens in 1834.

Patience with his rule ran out in 1843, when the War of Independence leaders led demonstrations in the capital, calling for a constitution. Otto mustered up a National Assembly, which drafted a constitution calling for parliamentary government, consisting of a lower house and a senate. Otto's cronies were whisked out of power and replaced by War of Independence freedom fighters.

## THE GREAT IDEA

By the end of the 1850s, most of the stalwarts from the War of Independence had been replaced by a new breed of university graduates (Athens University had been founded in 1837). In 1862 they staged a bloodless revolution and deposed Otto. They weren't quite able to set their own agenda, however, because in the same year Britain returned the Ionian Islands (a British protectorate since 1815) to Greece, and amid the general euphoria the British were able to ease young Prince William of Denmark onto the throne. He became King George I and the Greek monarchy has retained its Danish links ever since.

His 50-year reign brought stability to the troubled country, beginning with a new constitution in 1864 that established the power of democratically elected representatives. An uprising in Crete against Turkish rule was suppressed by the sultan in 1866–68, but in 1881 Greece acquired Thessaly and part of Epiros as the result of another Russo-Turkish war. And for many, the staging of the first modern Olympic Games in Athens in 1896 marked a coming of age for the Greek nation.

'the first modern Olympic Games in Athens in 1896 marked a coming of age for the Greek nation'

1684–87

The Turks are expelled from the Peloponnese by the Venetians in a campaign that sees Venetian troops advance as far as Athens.

1687

A freak incident sees the Parthenon badly damaged when a Venetian cannonball strikes Turkish gunpowder stored inside.

1762–86

Seeking to recompense the Byzantine Greeks' loss of Constantinople, Catherine the Great of Russia encourages dissent in the Ottomans' colonies of the Peloponnese and Epiros.

1814

A chink in the Ottoman's armour is achieved with the establishment of a Hellenic Independence party known as the Filiki Eteria (Friendly Society). Its influence spreads throughout Greece.

1821

The chink becomes a vast chasm when the movement for independence is officially launched on 25 March 1821. This is Greece's national day and is celebrated each year with much fanfare.

1822–29

After less than a year's campaigning, independence is declared at Epidavros on 13 January 1822 but fighting continues for another seven years. The Ottomans capitulate and the Treaty of Adrianople is born.

'Uprisings broke out almost simultaneously across most of Greece'

In 1897 there was another uprising in Crete, and the hot-headed Prime Minister Theodoros Deligiannis responded by declaring war on Turkey. A Greek attempt to invade Turkey in the north proved disastrous – it was only through the intervention of the great powers that the Turkish army was prevented from taking Athens.

Crete was placed under international administration. The day-to-day government of the island was gradually handed over to Greeks, and in 1905 the president of the Cretan assembly, Eleftherios Venizelos, announced Crete's union (*enosis*) with Greece, although this was not recognised by international law until 1913. Venizelos went on to become prime minister of Greece in 1910 and was the country's leading politician until his republican sympathies brought about his downfall in 1935.

### THE BALKAN WARS

Although the Ottoman Empire was in its death throes at the beginning of the 20th century, it was still clinging onto Macedonia. This was a prize sought by the newly formed Balkan countries of Serbia and Bulgaria, as well as by Greece, and led to the outbreak of the Balkan Wars. The first, in 1912, pitted all three against the Turks; the second, in 1913, pitted Serbia and Greece against Bulgaria. The outcome was the Treaty of Bucharest (August 1913), which greatly expanded Greek territory by adding to it the southern part of Macedonia, part of Thrace, another chunk of Epiros, and the Northeastern Aegean Islands, as well as recognising the union with Crete.

In March 1913 King George was assassinated by a lunatic and his son Constantine became king.

### WWI & SMYRNA

King Constantine, who was married to the sister of the German emperor, insisted that Greece remain neutral when WWI broke out in August 1914. As the war dragged on, the Allies (Britain, France and Russia) put increasing pressure on Greece to join forces with them against Germany and Turkey, promising land in Asia Minor in return. Prime Minister Venizelos favoured the Allied cause, placing him at loggerheads with the king, who finally left Greece in June 1917 and was replaced by his second-born son, Alexander, who was more amenable to the Allies.

Greek troops served with distinction on the Allied side, but when the war ended in 1918 the promised land in Asia Minor was not forthcoming. Venizelos took matters into his own hands and, with Allied acquiescence, landed troops in Smyrna (present-day İzmir) in May 1919, under the guise of protecting the half a million Greeks living in the city. With a firm hold in Asia Minor, Venizelos ordered his troops onto the offensive again in October 1920.

By September 1921 the Greeks had advanced as far as Ankara, where they were halted by Turkish forces commanded by Mustafa Kemal (later

to become Atatürk). Kemal routed the Greeks with a massive offensive the following spring. Smyrna fell and many of the Greek inhabitants were massacred. Mustafa Kemal was now a Turkish national hero, the sultanate was abolished and Turkey became a republic under his rule.

The outcome of these hostilities was the Treaty of Lausanne in July 1923. This gave eastern Thrace and the islands of Imvros and Tenedos to Turkey, while the Italians kept the Dodecanese (which they had temporarily acquired in 1912 and would hold until 1947).

The treaty also called for a population exchange between Greece and Turkey to prevent any future disputes. Almost 1.5 million Greeks left Turkey and almost 400,000 Turks left Greece. The exchange put a tremendous strain on the Greek economy and caused great hardship for the individuals concerned. Many Greeks abandoned a privileged life in Asia Minor for one of extreme poverty in Greek shantytowns in Athens.

### THE REPUBLIC OF 1924–35

The arrival of the Greek refugees from Turkey coincided with, and compounded, a period of political instability unprecedented even by Greek standards. In October 1920 King Alexander died from a monkey bite and his father Constantine was restored to the throne. Constantine identified himself too closely with the war against Turkey and abdicated again after the fall of Smyrna. He was replaced by his first son, George II, who was no match for the group of army officers who seized power after the war. A republic was proclaimed in March 1924 amid a series of coups and counter-coups.

A measure of stability was attained with Venizelos' return to power in 1928. He pursued a policy of economic and educational reform, but progress was inhibited by the Great Depression. His antiroyalist Liberal Party began to face a growing challenge from the monarchist Popular Party, culminating in defeat at the polls in March 1933. The new government was preparing for the restoration of the monarchy when Venizelos and his supporters staged an unsuccessful coup in March 1935. Venizelos was exiled to Paris, where he died a year later. In November 1935 King George II was restored to the throne by a rigged plebiscite and he installed the right-wing General Ioannis Metaxas as prime minister. Nine months later, Metaxas assumed dictatorial powers with the king's consent, under the pretext of preventing a communist-inspired republican coup.

### WWII

Metaxas' grandiose vision was to create a Third Greek Civilisation, based on its glorious ancient and Byzantine past, but what he actually created was more like a Greek version of the Third Reich. He exiled or imprisoned opponents, banned trade unions and the KKE (Kommounistiko Komma Elladas, the Greek Communist Party), imposed press censorship, and created a secret po-

'Venizelos pursued a policy of economic and educational reform'

'Greek troops served with distinction on the Allied side'

1827–31

Ioannis Kapodistrias is appointed prime minister of a fledgling government with its capital in the Peloponnesian town of Nafplio. Discontent ensues and Kapodistrias is assassinated.

1833

The powers of the Entente (Britain, France and Russia) decree that Greece should be a monarchy and dispatch Prince Otto of Bavaria to Greece to be the first appointed monarch in modern Greece.

1843

Monarchy takes a nose dive when King Otto convenes a constitutionally elected parliament made up of War of Independence freedom fighters.

1862

King Otto is deposed in a bloodless coup, yet the British manage to engineer the ascension to the Greek throne of Danish Prince William.

1881

Greece expands northwards with the acquisition of Thessaly and Epiros among its territories. This is an indirect result of hostilities between Russia and Turkey.

1912–13

Greece and Serbia initially side with Bulgaria against Turkey over the Slav territory of Macedonia. Then Greece and Serbia fight for the same territory against Bulgaria. Greece's territory expands.

lice force and fascist-style youth movement. Metaxas is best known, however, for his reply of *ohi* (no) to Mussolini's request to allow Italians to traverse Greece at the beginning of WWII, thus maintaining Greece's policy of strict neutrality. The Italians invaded Greece, but were driven back into Albania.

A prerequisite of Hitler's plan to invade the Soviet Union was a secure southern flank in the Balkans. The British, realising this, asked Metaxas if they could land troops in Greece. He gave the same reply as he had given the Italians, but then died suddenly in January 1941. The king replaced him with the more timid Alexandros Koryzsis, who agreed to British forces landing in Greece. He committed suicide when German troops invaded Greece on 6 April 1941. The defending Greek, British, Australian and New Zealand troops were seriously outnumbered, and the whole country was under Nazi occupation within a month. The civilian population suffered appallingly during the occupation, many dying of starvation. The Nazis rounded up more than half the Jewish population and transported them to death camps.

Numerous resistance movements sprang up. The dominant three were ELAS (Ellinikos Laïkos Apeleftherotikos Stratos), EAM (Ethnikon Apeleftherotikon Metopon) and the EDES (Ethnikos Dimokratikos Ellinikos Syndesmos). Although ELAS was founded by communists, not all of its members were left wing, whereas EAM consisted of Stalinist KKE members who had lived in Moscow in the 1930s and harboured ambitions of establishing a postwar communist Greece. EDES consisted of right-wing and monarchist resistance fighters. These groups fought one another with as much venom as they fought the Germans.

The Germans were pushed out of Greece in October 1944, but the communist and monarchist resistance groups continued to fight one another.

## CIVIL WAR

On 3 December 1944 the police fired on a communist demonstration in Syntagma Square in Athens. The ensuing six weeks of fighting between the left and the right, known as the Dekemvriana (events of December), were the first round of the Greek Civil War, and only the intervention of British troops prevented an ELAS-EAM victory. An election held in March 1946, and boycotted by the communists, was won by the royalists, and a rigged plebiscite put George II back on the throne.

In October the left-wing Democratic Army of Greece (DSE) was formed to resume the fight against the monarchy and its British supporters. Under the leadership of Markos Vafiadis, the DSE swiftly occupied a large swathe of land along Greece's northern border with Albania and Yugoslavia.

By 1947 the US had replaced Britain as Greece's 'minder' and the civil war had developed into a setting for the new Cold War. Communism was declared illegal and the government introduced its notorious Certificate of Political Reliability, which remained valid until 1962 and without which Greeks couldn't vote and found it almost impossible to get work.

**'The civilian population suffered appallingly during the occupation'**

US aid did little to improve the situation on the ground. The DSE continued to be supplied from the north (by Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and indirectly by the Soviets through the Balkan states), and by the end of 1947 large chunks of the mainland were under its control, as well as parts of the islands of Crete, Chios and Lesbos. It was unable, though, to capture the major town it needed as a base for a rival government.

The tide began to turn the government's way early in 1949 when the DSE was forced out of the Peloponnese by the central government forces, but the fighting dragged on in the mountains of Epiros until October 1949, when Yugoslavia fell out with the Soviet Union and cut the DSE's supply lines.

The war left the country in an almighty mess, both politically and economically. More Greeks had been killed in three years of bitter civil war than in WWII, and a quarter of a million people were homeless.

The sense of despair became the trigger for a mass exodus. Almost a million Greeks headed off in search of a better life elsewhere, primarily to countries like Australia, Canada and the USA. Villages – whole islands even – were abandoned as people gambled on a new start in cities like Melbourne, New York and Chicago. While some have drifted back, most have stayed away.

**'The sense of despair became the trigger for a mass exodus'**

## RECONSTRUCTION & THE CYPRUS ISSUE

After a series of unworkable coalitions, the electoral system was changed to majority voting in 1952 – which excluded the communists from future governments. The next election was a victory for the right-wing Ellinikos Synagermos (Greek Rally) party, led by General Papagos, who had been a field marshal during the civil war. General Papagos remained in power until his death in 1955, when he was replaced by Konstandinos Karamanlis.

Greece joined NATO in 1952 and in 1953 the US was granted the right to operate sovereign bases. Intent on maintaining a right-wing government, the US gave generous aid and even more generous military support.

Cyprus took centre stage in Greece's foreign affairs from 1961 and has remained close to it to this day. Since the 1930s Greek Cypriots (four-fifths of the island's population) had demanded union with Greece, while Turkey had maintained its claim to the island ever since it became a British protectorate in 1878 (it became a British crown colony in 1925).

Greek public opinion was overwhelmingly in favour of union, a notion that was strongly opposed by Britain and the US on strategic grounds. In 1956 the right-wing Greek Cypriot EOKA (National Organisation of Cypriot Freedom Fighters) took up arms against the British. In 1959 after much hard bargaining, Britain, Greece and Turkey finally agreed on a compromise solution whereby Cyprus would become an independent republic the following August, with Greek Cypriot Archbishop Makarios as president and a Turk, Faisal Kükük, as vice president. The changes did little to appease either side. EOKA resolved to keep fighting, while Turkish Cypriots clamoured for partition of the island.

1914

1919–23

1924–34

1935

1940

1941–44

The outbreak of WWI sees Greece initially neutral but eventually siding with the Western allies against Germany and Turkey on the promise of land in Asia Minor.

With no redeemed land in sight Greece embarks on the 'Great Idea': a military campaign to liberate former Hellenic lands in Asia Minor. It ends in abject failure.

A return to stability is countered by the Great Depression. Monarchists and Parliamentarians under Prime Minister Venizelos tussle for control of the country.

The monarchy is restored under suspicious circumstances. Right-wing General Ioannis Metaxas assumes the role of prime minister while introducing dictatorial measures of governance.

Metaxas famously rebuffs the Italian request to traverse Greece at the beginning of WWII. The Italians engage Greek forces and are driven back into Albania.

Germany invades and occupies Greece. Monarchists, republicans and communists form resistance groups that, despite infighting, drive out the Germans after three years.



Back in Greece, Georgos Papandreou, a former Venizelos supporter, founded the broadly based EK (Centre Union) in 1958, but elections in 1961 returned the ERE (National Radical Union), Karamanlis' new name for Greek Rally, to power for the third time in succession. Papandreou accused the ERE of ballot rigging, and the political turmoil that followed culminated in the murder, in May 1963, of Grigorios Lambrakis, the deputy of the communist EDA (Union of the Democratic Left). All this proved too much for Karamanlis, who resigned and left the country.

The EK finally came to power in February 1964 and Papandreou wasted no time in implementing a series of radical changes. He freed political prisoners and allowed exiles to come back to Greece, reduced income tax and the defence budget, and increased spending on social services and education.

### THE COLONELS' COUP

The political right in Greece was rattled by Papandreou's tolerance of the left, and a group of army colonels led by Georgos Papadopoulos and Stylianos Pattakos staged a coup on 21 April 1967. King Constantine tried an unsuccessful counter-coup in December, after which he fled the country. A military junta was established with Papadopoulos as prime minister.

The colonels imposed martial law, abolished all political parties, banned trade unions, imposed censorship and imprisoned, tortured and exiled thousands of Greeks who opposed them. In June 1972 Papadopoulos declared Greece a republic and appointed himself president.

In November 1973 students began a sit-in at Athens Polytechnic in protest against the junta. On 17 November tanks stormed the building, injuring many and killing at least 20. On 25 November Papadopoulos was deposed by the toughish Brigadier Ioannidis, head of the military security police.

In July 1974, desperate for a foreign policy success to bolster the regime's standing, Ioannidis hatched a wild scheme to assassinate President Makarios and unite Cyprus with Greece. The scheme went disastrously wrong after Makarios got wind of the plan and escaped. The junta installed Nikos Sampson, a former EOKA leader, as president and Turkey reacted by invading the island.

The junta quickly removed Sampson and threw in the towel, but the Turks continued to advance until they occupied the northern third of the island, forcing almost 200,000 Greek Cypriots to flee their homes for the safety of the south.

### AFTER THE COLONELS

The army now called Karamanlis back from Paris and his New Democracy (ND) party scored a big win at elections held in November 1974. The ban on communist parties was then lifted, Andreas Papandreou (son of Georgos) formed PASOK (the Panhellenic Socialist Union) and a plebiscite voted 69% against the restoration of the monarchy.

New Democracy won again in 1977, but Karamanlis' personal popularity began to decline. One of his biggest achievements was to engineer Greece's entry into the European Community (now the European Union). On 1 January 1981 Greece became the 10th member of the EC.

### THE SOCIALIST 1980s

Andreas Papandreou's PASOK party won the election of October 1981 with 48% of the vote, giving Greece its first socialist government. PASOK came to power with an ambitious social programme and a promise to close US air bases and withdraw from NATO.

After seven years in government, these promises remained unfulfilled (although the US military presence was reduced); unemployment was high and reforms in education and welfare had been limited. Women's issues fared better, though: the dowry system was abolished, abortion legalised, and civil marriage and divorce were implemented. The crunch came in 1988 when Papandreou's love affair with air hostess Dimitra Liani (whom he subsequently married) hit the headlines, and PASOK became embroiled in a financial scandal involving the Bank of Crete.

In July 1989 an unlikely coalition of conservatives and communists took over to implement a *katharsis* (campaign of purification) to investigate the scandal. In September it ruled that Papandreou and four of his ministers be tried for embezzlement, telephone tapping and illegal grain sales. Papandreou's trial ended in January 1992 with his acquittal on all counts.

### THE 1990s

An election in 1990 brought the ND back to power with Konstandinos Mitsotakis as prime minister. Intent on redressing the country's economic problems – high inflation and high government spending – the government imposed austerity measures, including a wage freeze for civil servants and steep increases in public-utility costs and basic services.

By late 1992, corruption allegations were being made against the government and it was claimed that Cretan-born Mitsotakis had a secret collection of Minoan art. Allegations of government telephone tapping followed, and by mid-1993 Mitsotakis supporters began to cut their losses, abandoning the ND for the new Political Spring party. The ND lost its parliamentary majority and an early election was held in October, which returned Andreas Papandreou's PASOK party with a handsome majority.

Papandreou's final spell at the helm was dominated by speculation about his health. He was finally forced to step down in early 1996 and his death on 26 June marked the end of an era in Greek politics.

Papandreou's departure produced a dramatic change of direction for PASOK, with the party abandoning his left-leaning politics and electing experienced economist and lawyer Costas Simitis as the new prime minister.

'On 1 January 1981 Greece became the 10th member of the EC'

For an insight into the 1967 colonels' coup read Andreas Papandreou's gripping account in *Democracy at Gunpoint*.

## 1944–49

The end of WWII sees Greece descend into civil war, pitching Republicans against Communists. The monarchy is restored in 1946. Many Greeks migrate in search of a better life.

## 1959

Cyprus is declared an independent State amid pleas for union with Greece from Greeks and Greek Cypriots alike. Turkey maintains claims of sovereignty over the island.

## 1967–73

Right and left continue to bicker, provoking a right-wing military coup of army generals who impose martial law. Civil rights are abolished. Tanks storm the Athens Polytechnic in a bid to quash a student uprising.

## 1974

A botched plan to unite Cyprus with Greece results in the fall of the military junta and the invasion of Cyprus by Turkish troops, paradoxically a catalyst for the restoration of parliamentary democracy in Greece.

## 1981

Greece joins the European Union, effectively removing protective trade barriers and opening up the Greek economy to the wider world for the first time. Boosted by EU cohesion funds the economy grows smartly.

## 1981–90

Greece acquires its first elected socialist government under the leadership of Andreas Papandreou. The honeymoon lasts nine years. The Conservatives ultimately reassume power.

On the strength of his reputation as the Mr Clean of Greek politics, Simitis romped to a comfortable majority at a snap poll called in October 1996.

## THE NEW MILLENNIUM

With the turn of the millennium the Simitis government focused almost exclusively on the push for further integration with Europe. This meant, in general terms, more tax reform and austerity measures. His success in the face of constant protest nonetheless earned Simitis a mandate for another four years in April 2000. The goal of admission to the euro club was achieved at the beginning of 2001 and Greece adopted the euro as its currency in March 2002.

In April 2004 the Greek populace, perhaps tired of a long run of socialist policies, turned once more to the right and elected New Democracy leader Konstandinos Karamanlis as prime minister. This may have been a blessing in disguise for the socialists as they had been chiefly responsible for the preparation of the then-upcoming 2004 Olympic Games, which had for some time been dogged by delays and technical problems.

Before the staging of the Olympic Games, Greece's sporting prowess had an unexpected shot in the arm when, against all odds, it won the European Football Championship (Euro 2004) in Portugal, giving Greeks the world over an enormous boost of pride. As it happened the August Olympic Games were, by all accounts, a resounding success and the Greeks put on a well-organised – if poorly attended – summer spectacle. The cost of the 2004 Olympics will inevitably take many years to pay off, as the eventual cost of the games far exceeded the original budget. Further national kudos was gleaned when Greece – again against the odds – won the 2005 Eurovision Song Contest, with an English song sung by a Swedish-Greek diva called Elena Paparizou. Greeks the world over were again ecstatic.

Greece's relations with its neighbours – particularly Turkey – have become perceptibly warmer. Konstandinos Karamanlis made particular efforts to chip away at the occasional frost with Greece's eastern neighbour and the efforts seem to have paid off, with little to report on the brinkmanship front – a trend that all too often in the past had caused sabres to be rattled between the two military forces.

Greece by 2005 was a developed yet still-maturing EU nation with a rising standard of living that was counterbalanced to some degree by a rising cost of living. A consumer credit squeeze began to take its toll as more and more middle- to low-income earners succumbed to a ballooning credit debt. Car and even house repossessions became common, a stark contrast to previous years in which Greeks had traditionally shunned credit. Tourism grew unabated despite rising costs, and in the long hot summer of 2007, forest fires throughout the western Peloponnese, Epiros and Evia caused untold damage to the nation's flora and fauna.

'a rising standard of living was counterbalanced to some degree by a rising cost of living'

### 2004

Greece successfully hosts the 28th Summer Olympic Games amid much muffled rumour that the country cannot pull it off. Greece wins the European football championship.

### 2007

Vast forest fires devastate much of the western Peloponnese as well as parts of Evia and Epiros, causing Greece's worst ecological disaster in decades.

### 2007

General elections are held in September and the conservative government of Konstandinos Karamanlis is returned to power for a second consecutive term.

# A Who's Who of the Ancient Greek Pantheon

Richard Waters

Ancient Greece revolved around a careful worship of 12 central gods and goddesses. A visitor to Greece 2500 years later should not neglect a nod to them; picture Poseidon and his pet Kraken lurking in the navy deeps of the Aegean, sniff the pine-scented forests and listen for Pan's footfalls between the cicada song. So representative was the Olympian pantheon in its human aspect – the wanton lustfulness of Zeus, the boozy revelry of Dionysos – that the Greek gods were to survive even the invasion of the Romans who were happy to plunder and rename them for their own worship. Below is the pecking order of the deities (with equivalent Roman names).

## **ZEUS (JUPITER)**

Heavyweight champ of Mt Olympus, lord of the skies and master of disguise in pursuit of mortal maidens. Wardrobe includes shower of gold, bull, eagle and swan.

## **POSEIDON (NEPTUNE)**

God of the seas, master of the mists and younger brother of Zeus. He dwelt in a glittering underwater palace.

## **HERA (JUNO)**

Protector of women and family, the queen of heaven is also the embattled wife of Zeus. She was the prototype of the jealous, domineering wife.

## **HADES (PLUTO)**

God of death, he ruled the underworld, bringing in newly dead with the help of his skeletal ferryman, Charon. Serious offenders were sent for torture in Tartarus, while heroes enjoyed eternal R&R in the Elysian Fields.

## **ATHENA (MINERVA)**

Goddess of wisdom, war, science and Guardian of Athens. The antithesis of Ares (see p50), Athena was deliberate and where possible, diplomatic in the art of war. Heracles, Jason (see p250) and Perseus all benefited from her patronage.

## **APHRODITE (VENUS)**

Goddess of love and beauty. The curvy lady of the shell was said to have been born whole on the waves. When she wasn't cuckolding her unfortunate husband, Hephaestus, she and her cherubic son Eros (Cupid) were enflaming hearts and causing trouble (cue the Trojan War).

## **APOLLO (PHOEBUS)**

God of music, the arts and fortune-telling, Apollo was also the god of light and an expert shot with a bow and arrow. It was his steady hand which guided Paris' arrow towards Achilles' only weak spot – his heel – thus killing him.

'Ancient Greece revolved around a careful worship of 12 central gods and goddesses'

**ARTEMIS (DIANA)**

The goddess of the hunt and twin sister of Apollo was, ironically, patron saint of wild animals. By turns spiteful and magnanimous, she was closely associated with the sinister Hecate, patroness of witches.

**ARES (MARS)**

God of war. Zeus' least favourite of his progeny. Not surprisingly, Ares was worshipped by the bellicose Spartans and may today have felt at home among soccer hooligans.

**HERMES (MERCURY)**

Messenger of the gods, patron saint of travellers, the handsome one with a winged hat and sandals. He was always on hand to smooth over the affairs of Zeus, his father.

**HEPHAESTUS (VULCAN)**

God of craftsmanship, metallurgy and fire, this deformed and oft derided son of Zeus made the world's first woman of clay, Pandora, as a punishment for man. Inside that box of hers were the evils of mankind.

**HESTIA (VESTA)**

Goddess of the hearth, she protected state fires in city halls from where citizens of Greece could light their brands. She remained unmarried, inviolate.

**THE MYTHS, THE MYTHS!**

Some of the greatest stories are to be found in the Greek myths. Confound fellow travellers with your classical erudition using our whistle-stop tour!

**HERACLES (HERCULES)**

The most celebrated, endearing hero of ancient Greece. The bearded one was set 12 labours of penitence for mistakenly killing his family (Hera blinded him with madness). These included slaying the Nemean Lion and the Lernean Hydra (see opposite); capturing the Ceryneian Hind and the Erymanthian Boar; cleaning the Augean Stables in one day; slaying the Stymphalian Birds; capturing the Cretan Bull; stealing the man-eating Mares of Diomedes; obtaining the Girdle of Hippolyta and the oxen of Geryon; stealing the Apples of the Hesperides; and capturing Cerberus (see opposite).

**THESEUS**

The Athenian hero volunteered himself as a one of seven men and maidens in the annual sacrifice to the Minotaur, the crazed half-bull-half-man offspring of King Minos of Crete (see also opposite). Once inside its forbidding labyrinth (from which none had returned) Theseus, aided by Princess Ariadne (who had a crush on him courtesy of Aphrodite's dart) loosened a spool of thread to find his way out once he'd killed the monster.

**ICARUS**

Along with Daedalus (his father and a brilliant inventor), Icarus flew off the cliffs of Crete pursued by King Minos and his troops. Using wings made of feathers and wax, his father instructed him to fly away from the midday sun. Boys will be boys, Icarus thinks he's Jonathan Livingston Seagull...glue melts, feathers separate, bird-boy drowns. And the moral is: listen to your father.

**TOP FIVE MYTHICAL CREATURES**

- **Medusa:** She of the bad hair day, punished by the gods for her inflated vanity. Even dead, her blood is lethal.
- **Cyclops:** One-eyed giant. Odysseus and his crew were trapped in the cave of one such cyclops, Polyphemus.
- **Cerberus:** The three-headed dog of hell, he guards the entrance to the underworld – under his watch no-one gets in or out.
- **Minotaur:** This half-man-half-bull mutant leads a life of existential angst in the abysmal labyrinth, tempered only by the occasional morsel of human flesh.
- **Hydra:** Cut one of its nine heads off and another two will grow in its place. Heracles solved the problem by cauterizing each stump with his burning brand.

**PERSEUS**

Perseus' impossible task was to kill the gorgon, Medusa (see above). With a head of snakes she could turn a man to stone with a single glance. Armed with an invisibility cap and a pair of flying sandals from Hermes, Perseus used his reflective shield to avoid Medusa's stare. Having cut off her head and secreted it in a bag, it was shortly unsheathed to save Andromeda, a princess bound to a rock in her final moments before being sacrificed to a sea monster. Medusa turns it to stone, Perseus gets the girl.

**OEDIPUS**

You can run but you can't hide...having been abandoned at birth, Oedipus learned from the Delphic oracle that he would one day slay his father and marry his mother. On the journey back to his birthplace, Thiva (Thebes), he killed a rude stranger and then discovered the city was plagued by a murderous Sphinx (a winged lion with a woman's head). The creature gave unsuspecting travellers and citizens a riddle; if they couldn't answer it they were dashed on the rocks. Oedipus succeeded in solving the riddle, felled the Sphinx and so gained the queen of Thiva's hand in marriage. On discovering the stranger he'd killed was his father and that his new wife was in fact his mother, Oedipus ripped out his eyes and exiled himself.

'Some of the greatest stories are to be found in the Greek myths'

# The Culture

## THE GREEK PSYCHE

Greeks have long lived in the shadow of their ancient ancestors' illustrious cultural and artistic legacy. If history is a country's burden, then the baggage of centuries of foreign occupation and colonisation, war, political turmoil, isolation, poverty and mass emigration also weighs heavily on the Greek psyche. The exotic 1960s image of Greece as a nation of carefree pleasure-seeking Zorbas may have reflected their resilience and spirit, but not the complexity of the Greek character.

The Greeks are undeniably passionate, fiercely independent and proud of their heritage. While their ancestry can give them a smug sense of cultural superiority, they are well aware of their present-day underdog status in the new Europe and are more firmly focused on building a future.

Since they came hurtling into the EU in 1981 as the smallest and poorest nation on the block, Greeks have been struggling to catch up with the radical, fast-tracked social changes, modernisation and economic reforms that are sweeping the country.

The resounding success of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games was a major turning-point in changing the perception of Greece as a European backwater, while Greece's euphoric European Cup football triumph that same year also boosted morale and national pride. Greece's first Eurovision Song Contest win, in 2005, proved another confidence booster.

Real freedom and self-determination has only been a recent phenomenon but these days the resilience of Greek culture and traditions are being tested by globalisation and market forces. The current generation of Greeks is dealing with a massive generational and technological divide; multilingual children playing games on their mobile phones while their illiterate grandfathers still get around on a mule. In the major shift from a largely poor, agrarian existence to increasingly sophisticated urban dwellers, Greeks are also delicately balancing cultural and religious mores. The younger generation of Greeks is multilingual, educated, far less insular and increasingly more widely travelled.

As Greeks continue to reinvent themselves, the Greek psyche presents some intriguing paradoxes.

Greeks have an undeniable zest for life, but aren't into making plans, with spontaneity a refreshing aspect of social life. They like to flaunt their newfound wealth with top brand-name clothing and flashy cars, and they are prone to displays of excess, especially in spending on entertainment. In many ways the chain-smoking, mobile-phone addicted, consumerist Greeks are making up for lost time.

Greeks have long enjoyed a reputation as loyal friends and generous hosts. They pride themselves on their *filotimo* (dignity and sense of honour), and their *filoxenia* (hospitality, welcome, shelter), which you will find in even the poorest household.

Yet this hospitality and generosity seems to extinguish in the public sphere, where surly civil servants show a distinct lack of interest in customer service.

Given political stability is a relatively recent phenomenon (since 1975), there is a residual mistrust of authority and little respect for the state; personal freedom and democratic rights are almost sacrosanct and there is an aversion to the Big Brother approach of many over-regulated Western nations.

Greeks are the biggest smokers in the EU: 42% of Greeks over 14 are heavy smokers and women smoke as much as men. Smoking is banned in public areas and on public transport but in restaurants it's widespread.

Rules and regulations are routinely ignored or seen as a challenge. Greeks are masters of getting around the system, demonstrating an almost admirable ingenuity and impudence given they live in the most bureaucratic country of the old EU. Corruption is the more serious form of the getting-ahead mentality, with the *fakelaki* (little envelope of cash) remaining a common way to cut red tape, from jumping the queue for surgery to dealing with the tax office or building permits.

Many visitors are indeed surprised to learn there are road regulations at all. Creative and inconsiderate parking is the norm, dangerous overtaking is rife, while you'll see people riding bikes carrying their helmets as they chat on their mobile phones.

Patronage features prominently at all levels of society; nepotism is an accepted state of affairs, a by-product of having to rely on personal networks to survive. It's still almost impossible to make any headway with local bureaucracy (or in many cases get a job) without *meson*, the help of a friend or family member working within the system. Yet there is little sense of collective responsibility in relation to issues like the environment; and the pride Greeks have in their homes rarely extends to public spaces.

Greece is both Mediterranean and Balkan and has long straddled east and west, so it's not surprising that Greeks have a very different character to the rest of Europe.

Most Greeks are forthright and argumentative. They thrive on news, gossip and political debate and while they will malign their governments and society mercilessly, they are defensive about external criticism.

Greeks have a casual approach to timekeeping. They are notoriously late and masters of the last minute, as the Olympics proved. Turning up to an appointment on time is often referred to as 'being English'. It's almost as if they resent the sense of obligation; some speculate that this stems from centuries of answering to foreign masters.

Unlike many Western cultures where people avoid eye contact with strangers, Greeks are unashamed about staring and blatantly observing (and commenting on) the comings and goings of people around them. Few subjects are off limits, from your private life and why you don't have children, to how much money you earn or how much you paid for your house or shoes. But they are just as likely to tell you their woes and ailments rather than engage in polite small-talk.

Greeks remain very ethnocentric, and anti-Americanism is another interesting undercurrent of the Greek psyche. Apart from general resistance to American hegemony, it originates from what many regard as undue US interference in Greek affairs during the civil war (p44), suspected CIA involvement in the colonels' coup in 1967, US indifference over Cyprus, and its interventions in the Middle East and the Balkans.

Stereotypes about Greek men being mummy's boys are not totally unfounded, while AIDS and the sexual liberation of Greek women have virtually killed off the Greek lover and the *kamaki* (literally a fishing trident; the term refers to the once widespread practice of fishing for foreign women) that made the Greek islands a magnet for foreign women in the 1970s and '80s à la *Shirley Valentine*.

## THE GOOD LIFE

The lifestyle of the average Greek has changed beyond all recognition in the last 50 years. The generation gap between grandparents who recall the devastated country that emerged from the civil war in 1949 and their children or grandchildren reflects the drastic economic and social changes the country has undergone. Greeks are visibly wealthier, as the new generation

Greeks have their own distinctive body language – 'yes' is a swing of the head and 'no' is a curt raising of the head (or eyebrows), often accompanied by a 'ts' click-of-the-tongue sound.

### WISHING WELL

Greetings are one of the endearing features of daily life in Greece. Whether it stems from superstition or an excess of good will, Greeks seem to have a wish for every occasion. They won't just wish you *kali orexi* (bon appetit), but also *kali honepsi* (good digestion) and *kali xekourasi* (good rest) or *kali diaskedasi* (good entertainment). On the first day of the week it's *kali evdomada* (good week), each month *kalo mina* (a good month), while the start of summer brings *kalo kalokeri* (good summer) and the end of the holidays *kalo himona* (good winter). When you purchase something it's *kaloriziko* (good luck) and a new business is greeted with *kales doulies* (good work) or challenges with *kali dynami* (good strength) and every possible *kalo* permutation.

of Athenian yuppies in designer clothes, clutching the newest mobile phones and driving the latest-model cars or four-wheel drives will attest. Greek children are now the fattest in the EU and many teenagers are addicted to internet games. While there are still huge disparities in the overall standard of living and a stark rural-city divide, Greeks enjoy a good quality of life.

Greece is one of Europe's friendliest, safest and most relaxed countries.

Greeks have a work-to-live attitude to life and pride themselves on their capacity to enjoy life. They are social animals and enjoy a rich communal life, eating out regularly and filling the country's myriad cafés and bars. They travel and socialise in packs, with family or their *parea* (company of friends). In the evenings, especially in summer, you will see people of all ages out on their *volta* (evening walk), walking along seafront promenades or through town centres, dressed up and refreshed from their afternoon siesta. Theatres, cinemas, live-music venues and dance clubs seem to thrive and the lively street life in Athens and most major towns is something that strikes most visitors. Another is that children are out late at night.

Summer holidays are the highlight of the year, with most people taking off for the islands, beaches or their ancestral villages. The country virtually shuts down during mid-August, when one of the peculiarly Greek social talking points is how many swims you've had. Greeks are now travelling abroad, reflecting newfound wealth, interest beyond their shores and the high cost of domestic tourism.

High levels of home ownership, generational wealth and family support structures go some way to explaining a lifestyle that is out of sync with average incomes – Greek wages remain among the lowest in the EU. Another factor must be the huge small-business, black-market economy – estimated at up to 30 per cent of the country's GDP.

Households have been feeling the financial pinch since the arrival of the euro, however. The use of credit cards, loans and *dosis* (instalment schemes) has skyrocketed, as have housing prices, while the younger generation are highly dependent on family. Eating out and holidays have been curtailed, and they are always complaining about it, but Greeks still spend a higher percentage of their income on restaurants and holidays than their EU counterparts.

### PEOPLE & SOCIETY

Greece's population exceeded 11.1 million in 2007, with a third of the population (3.7 million) living in the Greater Athens area. Greece is now largely an urban society, with more than two-thirds of the population living in cities and less than 15% living on the islands.

However, regional development, decentralisation and the improved lot of many regional communities has stemmed the tide of people moving to Athens (other than new immigrant arrivals). Young people are less likely to

Andreas Staikos' novel *Les Liaisons Culinaires* is a mouthwatering erotic account of an Athens love triangle that culminates in saucy food-inspired seduction (complete with recipes).

leave major regional growth-centres such as Larisa, Iraklio or Ioannina, while people are also escaping overpopulated Athens for the regions. Greece has an ageing population and a declining birth rate, with large families a thing of the past. The main population growth has been the flood of migrants who have arrived since 1991 – about one million migrants are estimated to be living in Greece legally, illegally or with indeterminate status.

### Family Life

Greek society remains dominated by the family. It's uncommon for Greek children to move out of home before they are married, unless they are going to university or find work in another city. While this is slowly changing among professionals and people marrying later, low wages are also keeping Greek children at home.

Parents strive to provide homes for their children when they get married, with many families building apartments for each child above their own (thus the number of unfinished buildings you see).

Extended family plays an important role in daily life, with grandparents often looking after grandchildren while parents work or socialise. The trade-off is that children look after their elderly parents, rather than consign them to nursing homes.

Greeks attach great importance to education, with the previous generation determined to provide their children the opportunities they lacked. English and other languages are widely spoken by the younger generation. Greece has the highest number of students in the EU studying at universities abroad, though many end up overeducated and underemployed.

Greeks retain strong regional identities and affiliations, despite the majority having left their ancestral villages for the cities or abroad. Even the country's remotest villages are bustling during holidays, elections and other excuses for family reunions and homecomings. One of the first questions Greeks will ask a stranger is what part of Greece they come from.

### Multiculturalism

Greece has been a largely homogenous society and not so long ago the concept of multiculturalism was tantamount to regional differences. The disparate *xenoi* (foreigners) living in Greece were mostly the odd Hellenophile and foreign women married to locals, especially on the islands.

But with the influx of economic migrants in the past 15 years, Greece is becoming an inadvertently more multicultural society. Bulgarian women look after the elderly in remote villages, Polish kitchen-hands work on the islands, Albanians dominate the manual labour workforce and Chinese businesses are springing up, African hawkers sell fake-designer bags and CDs on the streets and Pakistanis gather for weekend cricket matches in Athens car parks.

Greece has compulsory 12-month military service for all males aged 19 to 50. Women are accepted into the Greek army, though they are not obliged to join.

### DON'T WORRY

You see men stroking, fiddling and masterfully playing with them everywhere – the de-stressing worry beads that are not just an enduring tradition but a fashion statement. There are many theories about the origins of the *komboloi* – one is that Greeks first improvised with Islamic rosary beads to mock their enemy's religious habits; another theory is that they derived from Orthodox monks' rosaries. *Komboloia* (plural) were traditionally made from amber, but coral, handmade beads, semiprecious stones and synthetic resin are also widely used. Most of the ones you see in souvenir shops are plastic but you can get *komboloia* worth more than €10,000 and rare old ones are collector's items.

Migration and multiculturalism are posing major challenges for both the community and the state, both of which were ill-prepared for dealing with this inward wave of people (see the boxed text, opposite). Economic migrants exist on the social fringe, but as they seek Greek citizenship and try to integrate into mainstream society, community tolerance and notions of Greek identity and nationality are also being tested.

Albanians make up roughly two-thirds of the migrant population and they have become an economic necessity in the agriculture and construction sectors, and in the menial labour and domestic work that Greeks no longer want to do. Many Albanians have settled with their families all over Greece but remain largely stigmatised, as most Greeks initially reacted with xenophobia and resented their presence, blaming them for every crime committed.

Among the new arrivals are more than 150,000 people of Greek descent who repatriated from the former Soviet Union and Balkan states after the fall of communism.

### IDENTITY CRISIS

Author Ioanna Karystiani is one of the polytechnic generation. In the early 1970s the high-profile student activist was jailed for rebelling against Greece's military dictatorship (see p46), which sent the tanks storming into the Athens Polytechnic to break up the famous student sit-in, killing at least 20. The watershed moment continues to influence the country's political consciousness. Karystiani became a political cartoonist until she turned to writing later in life, penning several award-winning novels and the screenplay of *Brides*. Born in Hania to Greek refugees from Asia Minor, she left Crete at 18 to study in Athens, where she lives with her husband, film director Pantelis Voulgaris, and their two children. But she maintains strong ties to Crete, where her family still lives.

Karystiani believes Greeks are still adjusting to the radical political, social and economic changes since the '70s, and are undergoing an underlying identity crisis. 'There has been a dramatic change in the every day life of the Greeks. The things that in other countries they had slowly gained, the house, the TV, the cars, the holidays...in Greece it all came together very suddenly. From having nothing they've gone to having mobile phones and new cars and home cinema. There is a strong tendency to flaunt their newfound wealth and easy money role models predominate.'

In the fierce rush to become modernised and 'European', Karystiani believes many regional and cultural characteristics have been extinguished. 'Everyone has a unique quality imposed by their land, local lore and tradition which feeds the next generation. But many young people did not have time to be baptised in their own land and have been attacked by a foreign way of life through television and the media.'

Karystiani believes Greece is undergoing a period of transition. She concedes Greeks are a complex people, who had yet to reconcile their relationships with the environment, the provinces, the political sphere or their history. 'We have a lot of history behind us that we don't know very well and we don't know what to do with, and we have a future that is not entirely clear that we are unable to trust. The modern Greek is confused. They feel guilty about keeping elements of eastern culture which, despite everything, seems sweeter and more communal and is in a hurry to adopt an identity from western culture, which seems cold and individualistic.'

Greece's immaturity as a nation is evident in the citizen's relationship to the state which, she says, is still 'a deep wound'.

'Greeks at many times have felt deceived by the state and view it with suspicion and mistrust,' she explains. 'That's why in their obligations to the state they are contradictory because they feel they have been cheated.'

'One of the biggest changes seen in Athens in the past 15 years,' she says, 'is that the city has become much more multicultural. Greece is no longer isolated and protected or living at the edge of international life.'

### THE GREEK DIASPORA

Greece was until recently a nation of emigrants, with more than five million people of Greek descent living in 140 countries. The biggest migration waves were in the 15 years before the Balkan Wars, after the 1922 Asia Minor purge and in the postwar aftermath in the 1950s and 1960s.

The largest Greek communities abroad include an estimated three million in the US and Canada. Melbourne, Australia, claims to have the third-largest population of Greek-speakers in the world (300,000), after Athens and Thessaloniki.

Nostalgia and ties with the home country remain strong, with a significant number of Greeks living abroad or of Greek descent returning for annual holidays or retiring in Greece. They own property and are involved in the country's political and cultural life, while a steady stream of young second- and third-generation Greeks are also repatriating.

The Greek state promotes Greek language, culture and religion abroad and funds a world body representing the Greek diaspora. There were also controversial moves to give Greeks living abroad the right to vote in elections.

While there is still a long way to go before migrants are accepted into the community, there is recognition that they keep the economy going.

Mixed marriages are becoming common, especially in rural areas where eastern-European brides fill the void left by Greek women moving to the cities.

Until recently Greece's only recognised ethnic minority were the 300,000 Muslims in western Thrace (mostly ethnic Turks exempt from the 1923 population exchange), who continue to have a difficult time, despite being Greek-born.

Very small numbers of Vlach and Sarakatsani shepherds live a semi-nomadic existence in Epiros, while you will come across Roma (Gypsies) everywhere in Greece, especially in Macedonia, Thrace and Thessaly.

### Religion & Identity

The Orthodox faith is the official and prevailing religion of Greece and a key element of Greek identity, ethnicity and culture. There is a prevailing view that to be Greek is to be Orthodox. While the younger generation aren't generally devout, nor attend church regularly, most observe the rituals and consider their faith part of their identity. Between 94% and 97% of the Greek population belong at least nominally to the Greek Orthodox Church.

During consecutive foreign occupations, Greeks maintained a sense of unity through the church, which was the principal upholder of Greek culture, language and traditions. Under Ottoman rule, religion was one of the most important criteria in defining a Greek. The church still exerts significant social, political and economic influence in Greece, which doesn't have the same church-state separation as other Western countries (priests are even paid by the state). Until recently Greece was one of the few European countries where religious affiliation appeared on national identity cards. Non-Orthodox Greeks can still have a hard time joining the civil service or military, civil marriages have only been recognised since the early 1980s and cremation was only recently legalised after much controversy.

The Greek year is centred on the saints' days and festivals of the church calendar. Namedays (celebrating your namesake saint) are celebrated more than birthdays and baptisms are an important rite. Most people are named after a saint, as are boats, suburbs and train stations.

You will notice taxi drivers, motorcyclists and people on public transport making the sign of the cross when they pass a church, and many Greeks will go to a church when they have a problem to light a candle to the relevant

**THE BIG SPLIT**

Greece was one of the first places in Europe where Christianity emerged, with St Paul reputedly first preaching the gospel in AD 49 in the Macedonian town of Philippi. He later preached in Athens, Thessaloniki and Corinth. After Constantine the Great officially recognised Christianity in 313 AD (converted by a vision of the Cross), he transferred the capital of the Roman Empire to Byzantium (today's Istanbul) in 330 AD.

By the 8th century differences of opinion and increasing rivalry emerged between the pope in Rome and the patriarch of the Hellenised eastern Roman Empire. One dispute was over the wording of the Creed, which stated that the Holy Spirit proceeds 'from the Father', but Rome added 'and the Son'. Other points of difference included Rome decreeing priests had to be celibate, while Orthodox priests could marry before becoming ordained; and the Orthodox Church forbade wine and oil during Lent.

Their differences became irreconcilable, and in the great schism of 1054 the pope and the patriarch went their separate ways as the Orthodox Church (Orthodoxy means 'right belief') and Roman Catholic Church.

The Greek Orthodox Church is closely related to the Russian Orthodox Church; together they form the third-largest branch of Christianity.

saint. There are hundreds of tiny churches dotted around the countryside, predominantly built by individual families dedicated to particular saints. The tiny roadside iconostases or chapels you see everywhere are either shrines to people who died in road accidents or similar dedications to saints. If you wish to look around a church or monastery, you should always dress appropriately. Women should wear skirts that reach below the knees, men should wear long trousers and arms should be covered.

While religious freedom is part of the constitution, the only other officially recognised religions in Greece are Judaism and Islam, despite the existence of anything from Greek Jehovah's Witnesses to Scientologists. While there is tolerance of non-Orthodox faiths, they do face legal and administrative impediments.

With the recent wave of migrants, an estimated 10,000 Muslims are now living in Athens. While many makeshift mosques operate in the city, construction of an official mosque, though approved at the official level (both government and church leadership publicly support it), remains mired in controversy and delays; it was finally expected to open downtown by 2010.

There are more than 50,000 Catholics, mostly of Genoese or Frankish origin and living in the Cyclades, especially on Syros, where they make up 40% of the population. Recent Polish and Filipino migrants make up the majority of Athens' Catholics.

Greek Jews number about 5000, with small Jewish communities in Ioannina, Larisa, Halkida and Rhodes (dating back to the Roman era) and Thessaloniki, Kavala and Didymoticho (mostly descendants of 15th-century exiles from Spain and Portugal). In 1941 the Nazis transported 46,000 (90%) of Thessaloniki's Jews to Auschwitz; most never returned.

**Women in Society**

Greek women have a curious place in Greek society and the male-female dynamic throws up some interesting paradoxes. Despite the machismo, it is very much a matriarchal society. Men love to give the impression that they rule the roost but, in reality, it's often the women who run the show both at home and in family businesses.

While sexual liberation, education and greater participation in the workforce have given women a different sort of power, 'mother' and 'sex object'

are still the dominant role-models and stereotypes, which Greek women play on with gusto. Chauvinism and sexism seem to be an entrenched and largely accepted part of the social dynamic.

Old attitudes towards the 'proper role' for women have changed dramatically since the 1980s, when dowry laws were abolished, legal equality of the sexes established and divorce made easier.

While there are many benefits for mothers in the public sector, Greek women generally do it tough in the male-dominated workplace. Women are significantly underrepresented in the workforce compared to their EU or international counterparts, often earning less than men and struggling up the corporate ladder.

There are capable women in prominent positions in business and government, though more often than not they also happen to be the wives or daughters of prominent or wealthy men. Only 14% of seats in parliament are held by women.

In provincial towns and villages, women still maintain traditional roles. In the cities and large towns things are much more liberal.

On the domestic front, Greek women (at least the older generation) are famously house-proud and take great pride in their culinary skills. It's still relatively rare for men to be involved in housework or cooking and boys are waited on hand and foot. Girls are involved in domestic chores from an early age, though the new generation of Athenian women are more likely to be found in a gym or beauty salon than in the kitchen.

**Politics & the Media Circus**

Greeks love their newspapers and politics. You will often see people standing outside *periptera* (street kiosks) reading the day's juicy headlines from the gallery of daily papers on display. Greece has a disproportionate number of newspapers and TV stations given its population – 30 national dailies (including 10 sports dailies) and seven national TV networks. Newspapers, like most Greeks, are openly partisan, with papers representing the gamut of political views from conservative to communist. The line between news and opinion is often blurred, with more reams dedicated to journalists' comments and diatribes than straight news coverage.

Newspaper readership has, however, dramatically declined since the advent of private TV and radio in 1989. Papers and magazines have fought back with gimmicks, competitions, magazine inserts and free DVDs and gifts.

With the exception of the more straight-shooting public broadcasters, TV news is highly sensationalist and parochial, dominated by domestic news

**REVIVING THE ANCIENT GODS**

Zeus and ancient gods of Mt Olympus (see p49) still have some loyal fans in Greece, with a resurgence of interest in the polytheistic religion of their ancestors. In 2007 a fringe revival-group flouted a ban and held a ceremony at the Temple of Olympian Zeus in Athens. Dressed in ancient costumes, they recited Morpheic hymns and performed ancient rituals in the presence of a high priestess.

The event followed a court victory in 2006 for the Ellinis group, which recognised them as a 'cultural association with a religious goal'. They are now fighting to have their offices recognised as a place of worship.

All forms of pagan worship were outlawed by the Roman state in the fourth century AD, and were later renounced by the Greek Orthodox Church. The polytheists, who hold pilgrimages to Mt Olympus, number about 2000 (albeit divided) followers, mostly academics, lawyers and other professionals.



and society scandals. Dramatic music, repetitive footage and lots of talking heads (usually shouting at the same time) are a key feature.

Given the partisan nature of newspapers and the sensationalist TV news coverage, the country's media-owners play an extremely influential role in shaping public opinion. Media ownership is spread among a handful of major players, while the contentious entangled relationship between media owners, journalists, big business and the government has been coined *diaplekomena* (intertwined).

## ARTS Theatre

Drama in Greece can be dated back to the contests staged at the Ancient Theatre of Dionysos in Athens during the 6th century BC for the annual Dionysia festival. During one of these competitions, Thespis left the ensemble and took centre stage for a solo performance. This is regarded as the first true dramatic performance – thus the term 'thespian'.

Aeschylus (c 525–456 BC) is the so-called 'father of tragedy'; his best-known work is the *Oresteia* trilogy. Sophocles (c 496–406 BC), regarded as the greatest tragedian, is thought to have written over 100 plays, of which only seven survive. These include *Antigone*, *Electra* and his most famous play, *Oedipus Rex*. Sophocles, whose plays dealt mainly with tales from mythology and had complex plots, won first prize 18 times at the Dionysia festival.

Euripides (c 485–406 BC) was more popular than either Aeschylus or Sophocles because his plots were considered more exciting. He wrote 80 plays, of which 19 are extant (although one, *Rhesus*, is disputed). His most famous works are *Medea*, *Andromache*, *Orestes* and *Bacchae*.

Aristophanes (c 427–387 BC) wrote comedies – often ribald – that dealt with topical issues. His play *The Wasps* ridicules Athenians who resorted to litigation over trivialities, *The Birds* pokes fun at Athenian gullibility and *Ploutos* deals with the unfair distribution of wealth.

You can see plays by the ancient Greek playwrights at the Athens and Epidavros festivals (p130), and at various festivals around the country.

Drama continues to feature prominently in domestic arts. Athens supports a lively winter theatre scene, with more than 200 theatres presenting anything from Sophocles to Beckett, as well as popular slapstick comedies and political satires.

The most distinguished modern Greek playwrights are the father of postwar drama Iakovos Kambanellis, Yiorgos Skourtis and Pavlos Matessis, whose plays have been translated and performed outside Greece.

## Literature

### FROM HOMER TO ZORBA

The first, and greatest, ancient Greek writer was Homer, author of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, telling the story of the Trojan War and the subsequent wanderings of Odysseus. Nothing is known of Homer's life; where or when he lived, or whether, as it's alleged, he was blind. The historian Herodotus thought Homer lived in the 9th century BC, and no scholar since has proved or disproved this.

Herodotus (5th century BC) was the author of the first historical work about Western civilisation. His highly subjective account of the Persian Wars, however, led some to regard him as the 'father of lies' as well as the 'father of history'. The historian Thucydides (5th century BC) was more objective in his approach, but took a high moral stance. He wrote an account of the Peloponnesian Wars and also the famous *Melian*

(Continued on page 69)

(Continued from page 60)

*Dialogue*, which chronicles talks between the Athenians and Melians prior to the Athenian siege of Melos.

Pindar (c 518–438 BC) is regarded as the pre-eminent lyric poet of ancient Greece. He was commissioned to recite his odes at the Olympic Games. The greatest writers of love poetry were Sappho (6th century BC) and Alcaeus (5th century BC), both of whom lived on Lesbos. Sappho's poetic descriptions of her affections for women gave rise to the term 'lesbian'.

Dionysios Solomos (1798–1857) and Andreas Kalvos (1796–1869), who were both born on Zakynthos, are regarded as the first modern Greek poets. Solomos' work was heavily nationalistic, and his *Hymn to Freedom* became the Greek national anthem. Other notable literary figures include Alexandros Papadimitriou (1851–1911) from Skyros, and poet Kostis Palamas (1859–1943).

The best-known 20th-century poets are George Seferis (1900–71), who won the 1963 Nobel Prize for literature, and Odysseus Elytis (1911–96), who won the same prize in 1979.

The most celebrated novelist of the early 20th century is Nikos Kazantzakis (1883–1957), whose unorthodox religious views created a stir. His novels, all of which have been translated into English, are full of drama and larger-than-life characters, such as the magnificent title character in *Alexis Zorbas* (Zorba the Greek) and the tortured Captain Michalis in *Freedom and Death*, two of his finest works.

Another of the great prose writers was Stratis Myrivilis (1892–1969), whose works includes *Life in the Tomb*, *Vasilis Arvanitis* and *The Mermaid Madonna*.

## CONTEMPORARY WRITERS

Greek fiction and nonfiction have boomed in recent years, thanks to a thriving publishing industry. About 7500 new titles are published annually, including 1700 local works of literature.

Leading contemporary Greek writers include Thanassis Valtinos, Rhea Galanaki, Ziranna Ziteli and Ersi Sotiropoulou, who wrote the acclaimed 1999 novel *Zigzagging Through the Bitter Orange Trees* as well as playwright Kostas Mourselas, whose novel *Red-Dyed Hair* was made into a popular TV series, and Ioanna Karystiani, who wrote the screenplay for *Brides*. Unfortunately very little contemporary work is translated in English. Writers making small inroads into foreign markets include Vangelis Hatziyiannidis, with his award-winning novel *Four Walls*, Alexis Stamatis with *Bar Flaubert* (2000), Apostolos Doxiadis (*Uncle Petros and Goldbach's Conjecture*; 2000), Petros Markaris, whose crime noir novels delve into the Athens underbelly, and criminologist-cum-children's author Eugene Trivizas.

## LIFE AMONG THE GREEKS

Greek characters are brought to life through foreign eyes in several recent books.

In *North of Ithaka*, Greek-American journalist Eleni Gage gives an insightful account of a year in her ancestral village, uncovering the ghosts of civil war and the realities of modern Greek village life while restoring the house of her grandmother, who is immortalised in her father Nicholas Gage's book *Eleni*.

Urban life in modern Athens is examined by Sofka Zinovieff in *Eurydice Street*, while long-time Greek resident British John Mole's *It's All Greek to Me* is a humorous memoir of his labour of love restoring an island home on Evia. Rory McLean lives among the Cretans in the amusing *Flying With Icarus*.

*Uncle Petros and Goldbach's Conjecture* by Apostolos Doxiadis is an unlikely blend of family drama and mathematical theory. It tells the story of a mathematical genius' attempt to solve a problem that has defied the world's greatest minds.

*Collected Poems* by George Seferis and *Selected Poems* by Odysseus Elytis are excellent English translations of these Greek poets.

For a comprehensive run-down of arts and cultural events and exhibitions around Greece check out [www.goculture.gr](http://www.goculture.gr).

The Greek Book Centre reviews the latest Greek books and has author profiles in the Ithaca Online ([www.ekabi.gr](http://www.ekabi.gr)) journal.

Kedros' modern literature translation series includes Dido Sotiriou's *Farewell Anatolia* and Maro Douka's *Fool's God* and *Innocent and Guilty*.

Panos Karnezis bypassed the translation issue by writing in English. *The Birthday Party* follows from his well-received novel *The Maze* and short stories, *Little Infamies*. Best-selling author, Soti Triandafyllou, also wrote her latest novel, *Poor Margo* in English.

## Fine Arts

### PAINTING

The lack of any comprehensive archaeological record of ancient Greek painting has left art historians to largely rely on the painted decoration of terracotta pots as evidence of the development of this art.

There are a few exceptions, such as the famous frescoes unearthed on Santorini and which are now housed in the National Archaeological Museum (p120) in Athens. These works were painted in fresco technique using yellow, blue, red and black pigments, with some details added after the plaster had dried. Stylistically, the frescoes are similar to the paintings of Minoan Crete.

Greek painting came into its own during the Byzantine period. Byzantine churches were usually decorated with frescoes on a dark blue background with a bust of Christ in the dome, the four Gospel writers in the pendentives supporting the dome and the Virgin and Child in the apse. They also featured scenes from the life of Christ (Annunciation, Nativity, Baptism, Entry into Jerusalem, Crucifixion and Transfiguration) and figures of the saints. In the later centuries the scenes in churches and icons involved more detailed narratives, including cycles of the life of the Virgin and the miracles of Christ. The 'Cretan school' of icon painting, influenced by the Italian Renaissance and artists fleeing to Crete after the fall of Constantinople, combined technical brilliance and dramatic richness.

Painting after the Byzantine period became more secular in nature, with 19th-century Greek painters specialising in portraits, nautical themes and representations of the War of Independence. Major 19th-century painters included Dionysios Tsokos, Andreas Kriezis, Theodoros Vryzakis, Nikiforos Lytras, Konstantinos Volanakis and Nicholas Gyzis. Gyzis' paintings created during the time of the fascination with the 'Great Idea' of a new Greek empire are particularly interesting.

From the first decades of the 20th century, artists such as Konstantinos Parthenis (one of the greatest modern Greek artists), Konstantinos Kaleas and later the expressionist George Bouzianis were able to use their heritage and at the same time assimilate various developments in modern art.

Significant artists of the '30s generation were cubist Nikos Hatzikyriakos-Ghikas, surrealist Nikos Engonopoulos, Yiannis Tsarouhis and Panayiotis Tetsis.

Other leading artists include Yannis Moralis, Giorgos Zongolopoulos (with his trademark umbrella sculptures), Dimitris Mytaras, Yannis Tsoklis, abstract artists Yannis Gaitis and Jannis Spyropoulos, Christos Caras and Alekos Fassianos.

Many internationally known artists live abroad, including Paris-based Pavlos, known for his distinctive use of paper, and kinetic artist Takis. New York-based artists include neon installation artist Stephen Antonakos and sculptor/painter Chryssa.

In the past 25 years modern Greek painting has become a serious collector's pursuit. Lytras' 19th-century painting *The Naughty Grandchild* set a record for a Greek artist when it was sold for more than €1 million at a London auction in 2006.

*Greek Art and Archaeology* by John Griffiths Pedley is a super introduction to the development of Greek art and civilisation.

Athens has a burgeoning contemporary arts scene, with regular shows by local and international artists at a host of galleries centred mostly on Psyrri and Kolonaki. The National Art Gallery (p122) in Athens and the Rhodes Art Gallery have the most extensive collections of 20th-century art. The annual Art Athina expo showcases contemporary Greek artists; a much-anticipated new Museum of Contemporary Art is being built at the former Fix brewery in Athens; and the capital hosted its inaugural biennial art show in 2007.

### SCULPTURE

The sculptures of ancient Greece are works of extraordinary visual power and beauty that hold pride of place in the collections of the great museums of the world.

The prehistoric art of Greece has been discovered only recently, most notably the remarkable figurines produced in the Cyclades from the high-quality marble of Paros and Naxos in the middle of the 3rd millennium BC. Their primitive and powerful forms have inspired many artists since.

Displaying an obvious debt to Egyptian sculpture, the marble sculptures of the Archaic period are true precursors of the famed Greek sculpture of the classical period. The artists of this period moved away from the examples of their Asian predecessors and began to represent figures that were true to nature, rather than flat and stylised. For the first time in history a sculpted shape was made to reproduce the complex mechanism of the human body. Seeking to master the depiction of both the naked body and of drapery, sculptors of the period focused on *kouroi* (figures of naked youths), with their set symmetrical stance and enigmatic smiles. Many great *kouros* sculptures and draped female *kore* can be admired at the National Archaeological Museum (p120) in Athens.

The sculptures of the classical period show an obsession with the human figure and with drapery. Unfortunately, little original work from this period survives. Most freestanding classical sculptures described by ancient writers were made of bronze and survive only as marble copies made by the Romans.

The quest to attain total naturalism continued in the Hellenistic period; works of this period were animated, almost theatrical, in contrast to their serene Archaic and classical predecessors. These were revered by later artists such as Michelangelo, who was at the forefront of the rediscovery and appreciation of Greek works in the Renaissance. The end of the Hellenistic age signalled the decline of Greek sculpture's pre-eminent position in the art form.

### EL GRECO

One of the geniuses of the Renaissance, El Greco ('The Greek' in Spanish), was in fact a Cretan named Dominikos Theotokopoulos. He got a grounding in the traditions of late-Byzantine fresco painting during a time of great artistic activity in Crete, following the arrival of painters fleeing Ottoman-held Constantinople.

El Greco went to Venice in his early 20s, but came into his own after he moved to Spain in 1577, where his highly emotional style struck a chord with the Spanish. He lived in Toledo until his death in 1614.

A handful of El Greco's works are in Greece. In Athens you can see *Concert of Angels*, *The Burial of Christ* and *St Peter* at the National Gallery, as well two signed works in the Benaki museum. El Greco's *View of Mt Sinai*, *The Monastery of St Catherine* and *Baptism of Christ* hang in Iraklio's Historical Museum of Crete (p467).

The artist will be making it onto the big screen with the forthcoming release of *El Greco*, an epic €7 million film.

*The World of the Ancient Greeks* (2002), by archaeologists John Camp and Elizabeth Fisher, is a broad and in-depth look at how the Greeks have left their imprint on politics, philosophy, theatre, art, medicine and architecture.

The torch was handed to the Romans, who proved worthy successors. Sculpture in Greece itself never again attained any degree of true innovation.

Two of the foremost modern sculptors from Tinos, where marble sculpture endures, were Dimitrios Filippotis and Yannoulis Halepas. Modern Greek and international sculpture can be seen at the National Glyptoteque (p122).

### POTTERY

The painted terracotta pots of ancient Greece, excavated after being buried throughout Greece over millennia, have enabled us to appreciate in small measure the tradition of ancient pictorial art.

Practised from the Stone Age on, pottery is one of the most ancient arts. At first vases were built with coils and wads of clay, but the art of throwing on the wheel was introduced in about 2000 BC and was then practised with great skill by Minoan and Mycenaean artists.

Minoan pottery is often characterised by a high centre of gravity and beaklike spouts, with flowing designs of spiral or marine and plant motifs. Painted decoration was applied as a white clay slip (a thin paste of clay and water) or one which fired to a greyish black or dull red. The Archaeological Museum in Iraklio (see p466) has a wealth of Minoan pots.

Mycenaean pottery shapes include a long-stemmed goblet and a globular vase with handles resembling a pair of stirrups. Decorative motifs are similar to those on Minoan pottery but are less fluid.

The 10th century BC saw the introduction of the Protogeometric style, with its substantial pots decorated with blackish-brown horizontal lines around the circumference, hatched triangles and compass-drawn concentric circles. This was followed by the new vase shape and more crowded decoration of the Geometric period, painted in a lustrous brown glaze on the light surface of the clay, with the same dark glaze used as a wash to cover the undecorated areas. Occasionally a touch of white was added. By the early 8th century figures were introduced, marking the introduction of the most fundamental element in the later tradition of classical art – the representation of gods, men and animals.

By the 7th century BC Corinth was producing pottery with added white and purple-red slip. These pots often featured friezes of lions, goats and swans and a background full of rosettes. In 6th-century Athens, artists used red clay with a high iron content. A thick colloidal slip made from this clay produced a glossy black surface that contrasted with the red and was enlivened with added white and purple-red. Attic pots, famed for their high quality, were exported throughout the Greek empire during this time and today grace the collections of international museums.

Reproductions of all these styles constitute a sizable proportion of Greece's pottery production, and they are available at souvenir shops throughout the country. Some contemporary ceramicists are making pots using ancient firing and painting techniques, while Minoan-style pottery is still made in Crete. The island of Sifnos continues its distinctive pottery tradition. You can also find traditional potters in the northern Athenian suburb of Marousi, once one of the big pottery centres of Greece.

### Music

Greece has a strong and enduring musical tradition, dating back to the Cycladic figurines found holding musical instruments resembling harps and flutes from 2000 BC. Ancient Greek musical instruments included the lyre, lute, *piktis* (pipes), *kroupeza* (a percussion instrument), *kithara* (a stringed instrument), *aulos* (a wind instrument), *barbitos* (similar to a cello) and the *magadio* (similar to a harp).

*Road to Rembetika: Music of a Greek Sub-Culture: Songs of Love, Sorrow and Hashish* by Gail Holst-Warhaft is a passionate account of this Greek music genre, while Ed Emery has translated Elias Petropoulos' excellent *Songs of the Underworld: The Rembetika Tradition*.

### RECOMMENDED LISTENING

**40 Hronia Tsitsanis** Original recordings of the classics of Vasilis Tsitsanis by some of the leading Greek singers.

**Anthologio** A musical journey with Greece's most formidable female singer Haris Alexiou, covering her most memorable hits from 1975 to 2003.

**Auti I Nyhta Menei** A double-CD of some of the most memorable songs from the voice of an era, Stelios Kazantzidis.

**Hatzidakis at the Roman Agora** (Manos Hatzidakis) Double-CD compilation spanning his works from 1947 to 1985, or his timeless classical recording *To Hamogelo tis Tzokantas*.

**Itane Mia Fora** (Nikos Xylouris) A two-CD collection covering a broad range of music from Crete's favourite son.

**Kakes Sinithies** (1998) A stand-out album by contemporary folk rock singer-songwriter Miltiadis Paschalidis.

**Me Ton Grigori** (Grigoris Bithikotsis) An anthology of one of the greatest Greek voices, with songs covering the gamut of Greek music.

**Mode Plagal III** (2001) The third self-titled album by this contemporary jazz-folk fusion band features some distinguished vocalists, including Savina Yannatou, Eleni Tsalgopoulou, Theodora Tsatsou and Yota Vei.

**Sta Hamila Kai Sta Psila** (2006) The latest CD from one of the more promising contemporary singer-songwriters, Dimitris Tzervoudakis.

**Ta Rembetika** An excellent 2-CD compilation of original recordings of *rembetika* from Greece's national broadcaster, featuring all the foremost exponents of the genre.

**The Very Best of Mikis Theodorakis** A special-edition three-CD set covering the acclaimed composer's music from 1960 to 2000.

**The Very Best of Stavros Xarhakos** A good compilation of the composer's work sung by great Greek voices such as Xylouris and Bithikotsis.

The ubiquitous six- or eight-stringed bouzouki, the long-necked lutelike instrument associated with contemporary Greek music, is a relative newcomer to the scene. The *baglamas* is a baby version of the bouzouki used in *rembetika* (blues songs) while the *tzouras* is halfway between the two.

The plucked strings of the bulbous *outi* (oud), the strident sound of the Cretan *lyra* (lyre), the staccato rap of the *toumberleki* (lap drum), the *mandolino* (mandolin) and the *gaida* (bagpipe) bear witness to a rich range of musical instruments that share many characteristics with instruments all over the Middle East, as do the flat multi-stringed *santouri* and *kanonaki*.

Every region in Greece has its own musical tradition. Regional folk music is divided into *nisiotika* (the lighter, more upbeat music of the islands), and the more grounded *dimotika* of the mainland – where the *klarino* (clarinet) is prominent and lyrics refer to hard times, war and aspects of rural life. The music of Crete, which has a presence in the world-music scene as a genre in its own right, remains the most dynamic traditional form, with a popular local following and regular performances and new recordings by folk artists.

Greece's music has always reflected the country's history and politics. Traditional folk music was shunned by the Greek bourgeoisie during the period after independence, when they looked to Europe – and classical music and opera – rather than their eastern or 'peasant' roots.

In the 1920s the rebel underground music known as *rembetika* (see the boxed text, p74) became popular, entering the mainstream after WWII.

In the '50s and '60s a popular musical offshoot of *rembetika* – known as *laika* (urban folk music) took over and the clubs in Athens became bigger, glitzier and more commercialised. The late Stelios Kazantzidis was the big voice of this era, along with Grigoris Bithikotsis.

During this period another style of music emerged led by two outstanding composers – the classically trained Mikis Theodorakis and Manos Hatzidakis. Known as *entehno* or 'artistic' music, they drew on *rembetika* and instruments such as the bouzouki but had more symphonic arrangements. They

## REMBETIKA

*Rembetika* is often referred to as the Greek 'blues', because of its urban folk-music roots and themes of heartache and longing, hardship, drugs, crime and the grittier elements of urban life. The etymology of the term *rembetika* is highly disputed, as is its transliteration. The rhythms and melodies are a hybrid of influences, with Byzantine and Ancient Greek roots.

Two styles make up what is broadly known as *rembetika*. The first emerged in the mid- to late 19th century in the thriving port cities of Smyrna and Constantinople, which had large Greek populations, as well as in Thessaloniki, Volos, Syros and Athens. Known as Smyrneika or Café Aman music, it had a rich vocal style with haunting *amanedes* (vocal improvisations), occasional Turkish lyrics and a more oriental sound. The predominant instruments were the violin, *outi* (oud), guitar, mandolin, *kanonaki* and *santouri* (flat and multi-stringed musical instruments).

In Piraeus, *rembetika* was the music of the underclass and the bouzouki and *baglamas* became the dominant instruments. When the bulk of refugees from Asia Minor ended up in Piraeus after the 1922 population exchange (many also went to America where *rembetika* was recorded in the 1920s), it became the music of the ghettos. The lyrics reflected the bleaker themes of their lives; the slums, hash dens and prisons. Markos Vamvakaris, acknowledged as the greatest *rembetis*, became popular with the first bouzouki group in the early 1930s, which recorded at the Columbia factory in Athens. He revolutionised the sound of popular Greek music.

The protagonists of *rembetika* songs were often the *manges*, the smartly dressed (often hashish-smoking and knife-carrying) street-wise macho characters who spent their evenings singing and dancing in the *tekedes* – the hash dens which inspired many of the lyrics.

Although hashish was illegal, the law was rarely enforced until Metaxas did his clean-up job in 1936, attempting to wipe out the subculture through censorship, police harassment, raids on *tekedes* and arresting people carrying a bouzouki. Many artists soon stopped performing and recording, though the music continued clandestinely.

After WWII a new wave of *rembetika* performers and composers emerged, including Vasilis Tsitsanis, Apostolos Kaldaras, Yiannis Papaioannou, Georgos Mitsakis and Apostolos Hatzihristou; one of the greatest female *rembetika* singers, Sotiria Bellou, also appeared at this time. Their music later morphed into lighter *laika* (urban folk music), with the lyrics reflecting more social and sentimental themes. It was played in bigger clubs with electrified orchestras, losing much of the essence of the original music.

*Rembetika's* anti-authoritarian themes made the genre popular among political exiles and left-wing activists during the junta years.

Interest in genuine *rembetika* was revived in the late 1970s to early '80s – particularly among students and intellectuals, and it continues to be popular today.

brought poetry to the masses by creating popular hits from the works of Seferis, Elytis, Ritsos and Kavadias.

Yiannis Markopoulos continued this new wave by introducing rural folk-music and traditional instruments such as the *lyra*, *santouri*, violin and *kanonaki* into the mainstream and bringing folk performers like Crete's legendary Nikos Xylouris to the fore.

During the junta years Theodorakis' and Markopoulos' music became a form of political expression and social commentary. Theodorakis' music was banned (and Theodorakis jailed). Theodorakis is one of Greece's most prolific composers, though somewhat to his dismay he is best known for the classic 'Zorba' tune.

All of the different Greek musical styles are still heard today, with most leading performers drawing on *rembetika*, *laika* and regional music at some stage. Comparatively few Greek performers have, however, made it big on the international scene – 1970s icons Nana Mouskouri and kaftan-wearing Demis Roussos remain the best known.

Greek music veteran George Dalaras has covered the gamut of Greek music and collaborated with Latin and Balkan artists, as well as Sting. Other distinguished artists include Haris Alexiou, Glykeria, Dimitra Galani, Eleftheria Arvanitaki, Alkistis Protopsalti, Dionysis Savopoulos and Alkinoös Ioannides. Talented singer-songwriters include Nikos Papazoglou, Socrates Malamas, Nikos Portokaloglou, Orfeas Peridis and Stamatis Kraounakis.

Contemporary Greek music also includes element of folk rock, heavy metal, rap and electronic dance music, as well as a host of music that fits no established category. The pop-rock band Raining Pleasure is breaking into Europe with English lyrics.

Stand-out contemporary singer-songwriters include Thanasis Papakonstantinou, Dimitris Zervoudakis and Miltiadis Pashalidis.

Acclaimed vocal artist Savina Yannatou, along with ethnic jazz fusion artists Kristi Stasinopoulou and Mode Plagal, are making a mark on the world music scene, while other notable musicians include Hainides and Ahilleas Persidis.

In classical music and opera, sopranos Elena Kelessidi and Irini Tsirikidou are following in the footsteps of the country's original diva Maria Callas. Greece's best-known conductor was Dimitris Mitropoulos, who led the New York Philharmonic in the 1950s, while Loukas Karytinis is Greece's leading conductor. Greece's most distinguished composers include Stavros Xarhakos and the late Yannis Xenakis. Mezzo-soprano Agnes Baltsa and acclaimed pianist Dimitris Sgouros are internationally known, while Greece's answer to Andrea Bocelli is tenor Mario Frangoulis.

Composer Vangelis Papatheanasiou is best known for film scores, including Oscar-winner *Chariots of Fire*, *Blade Runner* and more recently *Alexander*, while Stamatis Spanoudakis wrote the excellent soundtrack to *Brides*. Evanthia Remboutsika, who wrote the music for *A Touch of Spice*, is an emerging talent, winning the 2006 World Soundtrack awards for the Turkish film *My Father & My Son*.

Greece's big name pop and modern *laika* performers include Anna Vissi, Notis Sfakianakis, Despina Vandi, Yiannis Ploutarhos, Antonis Remos, Mihalis Hatziyiannis, heart-throb Sakis Rouvas and Greek-Swedish singer Elena Papparizou, who won Greece the 2005 Eurovision Song Contest.

During summer you can see Greece's leading acts in outdoor concerts around the country. In winter they perform in clubs in Athens and Thessaloniki. The hugely popular nightclubs known as *bouzoukia* are glitzy, expensive, cabaret-style venues where the bouzouki reigns supreme. Musical taste can sometimes takes a back seat in second-rate clubs referred to as *skyladika* or dog houses – apparently because the crooning singers resemble a whining dog.

## Dance

Dancing has been part of social life in Greece since the dawn of Hellenism. Some folk dances derive from the ritual dances performed in ancient Greek temples. The *syrtos* is depicted on ancient Greek vases and there are references to dances in Homer's works. Many Greek folk-dances are performed in a circular formation; in ancient times, dancers formed a circle in order to seal themselves off from evil influences or would dance around an altar, tree, figure or object. Dancing was part of military education.

Regional dance styles often reflect the climate or disposition of the participants. In Epiros, the stately *tsamikos* is slow and dignified, reflecting the often cold and insular nature of mountain life. The Pontian Greeks, on the

The comprehensive [www.rebetiko.gr](http://www.rebetiko.gr) has an extensive discography and database of more than 2500 songs, while Matt Barrett gives a history and guide to the main players in modern Greek music at [www.greektravel.com/music/index.html](http://www.greektravel.com/music/index.html).

The *syrtaki* dance immortalised by Anthony Quinn in the final scene in *Zorba the Greek* was in fact a dance he improvised, as he had injured his leg the day before the shoot and could not perform the traditional steps and leaps originally planned.

contrary, have vigorous and warlike dances such as the *kotsari*, reflecting years of altercations with their Turkish neighbours. In Crete you have the graceful and slow *syrtos*, the fast and triumphant *maleviziotikos* and the dynamic *pentozali*, which has a slow and fast version, in which the leader impresses with high kicks and leaps.

The islands, with their bright and cheery atmosphere, give rise to light, springy dances such as the *ballos* and the *syrtos*, while the graceful and most widely known *kalamatianos*, originally from Kalamata, reflects years of proud Peloponnese tradition. The so-called 'Zorba dance', or *syrtaki*, is a stylised dance for two or three men or women with linked arms on each other's shoulders, though the modern variation is danced in a long circle with an ever-quickening beat.

Women and men until recently danced separately (or often used handkerchiefs to avoid skin contact) and had their own dances, while courtship dances like the *sousta* were danced together.

The often spectacular solo male *zeimbekiko*, with its whirling improvisations, has its roots in *rembetika*, while women have their own sensuous *tsifteteli*, a svelte, sinewy show of femininity evolved from the Middle Eastern belly dance.

### Cinema & Television

Cinema in Greece took off after the end of the civil war and peaked in the 1950s and early '60s when domestic audiences flocked to a flurry of comedies, melodramas and musicals being produced by the big Greek studios. The 1950s also saw the arrival of significant directors such as Michael Cacoyiannis (*Zorba the Greek*) and Nikos Koundouros, while more social themes were tackled in the 1960s.

After those heydays, Greece's film industry was in the doldrums, largely due to the demise of the studios after the advent of TV, inadequate funding and state film policy. Film production decreased dramatically – from its peak in 1967–68 when 118 films were made in one year to the 15 to 20 films made annually since the late '80s.

The problem was compounded by filmmakers taking on writer, director and producer roles, as well as the type of films being produced. The 'new Greek cinema' of the '70s and '80s was largely slow-moving, cerebral epics loaded with symbolism and generally too avant-garde to have mass appeal.

The leader of this school is award-winning film director Theodoros Angelopoulos, winner of the Golden Palm award at the 1998 Cannes Film Festival for *Eternity and a Day*. Angelopoulos is considered one of the few

#### ON LOCATION

You've seen the movie but where in Greece was it shot?

**Big Blue** (1988) Memorable opening scenes in black-and-white of unspoilt Amorgos.

**Bourne Identity** (2002) The final scenes were shot in Mykonos.

**Captain Corelli's Mandolin** (2001) Shot largely in the port of Sami, Kefallonia.

**For Your Eyes Only** (1981) Stunning images of 007, played by Roger Moore, hang-gliding at Meteora.

**Lara Croft Tomb Raider: the Cradle of Life** (2003) Lara Croft went diving off Santorini.

**Mediterraneo** (1991) Italian soldiers are garrisoned on tiny, remote Kastellorizo in the Dodecanese.

**Never on a Sunday** (1960) Greece's big star Melina Mercouri received an Oscar nomination for her role as a prostitute in Piraeus.

**Pascal's Island** (1988) Ben Kingsley plays a Turkish spy on Symi during the dying days of Ottoman occupation.

**Shirley Valentine** (1989) The classic foreign woman's Greek-island romance-fantasy was in Mykonos.

**Summer Lovers** (1982) Darryl Hannah and Peter Gallagher got raunchy on Santorini, Mykonos and Crete.

**Zorba the Greek** (1964) Where else but Crete? The famous beach dance scene was at Stavros, near Hania.

Pantelis Voulgaris' acclaimed 2004 film *Brides* follows the fortunes of one of the 700 Greek mail-order brides who set off for America in the 1920s on the SS *Alexander*, bound for unknown husbands and lives.

### GREECE'S QUIRKIEST FESTIVALS

- **The Moors** – On Epiphany (January 6) sword-carrying masqueraders called *Arapides* go through the northern village of Monastiraki, near Drama, wearing black furry shepherd's coats, tall goatskin masks and sheep's bells around their waists tapping passers by with ash from the hearthfires of Christmas (for good luck).
- **Women's Rule Day** (Gynaikokratia) – On January 8 in the northern villages of Komotini, Xanthi and Serres, the sexes exchange roles for a day. Men have to stay home and do housework (unless they are serving or entertaining women) and women have their fun in the *kafeneia*.
- **The Goat Dancers of Skyros** – During carnival, men dress up in goatskins, masks and goat bells, weighing up to 40kg, and parade around skilfully shaking their booty to make music.
- **Tyrnavos Phallic Festival** – With its roots in Dionysian times, this bizarre Clean Monday event takes place in Tyrnavos where, during the cooking of the *bourani* (a traditional vegetable soup), revellers parade around with impressive phallic displays reciting lewd poems and performing comedies.
- **Sheep Blessing in Crete** – In the village of Asi Gonia, tens of thousands of sheep are paraded through the church on St George's Day (April 23), to be blessed and then milked, with milk offered to visitors during the subsequent feast.
- **Anastenarides Fire Walkers** – On St Constantine's and St Eleni's Day (May 21) in the northern villages of Langadas near Thessaloniki and Agia Eleni near Serres, people bearing icons and waving red kerchiefs dance around hot ashes and run barefoot across hot coals.

remaining 'auteur' filmmakers and his films have won international critical acclaim, including the epic *Alexander the Great* (1980), *Travelling Players* (1975), *Landscape in the Mist* (1988) and *Ulysses' Gaze* (1995), starring Harvey Keitel.

Another internationally known Greek director is Paris-based Costa-Gavras, who made his name with the 1969 Oscar-winning *Z*, a story based on the murder of communist deputy Grigoris Lambrakis in Thessaloniki by right-wing thugs. His recent films include *Amen* (2003) and *The Axe* (2005).

The 1990s saw a shift in cinematic style, with a new generation of directors achieving moderate commercial successes with lighter social satires and themes and a more contemporary style and pace. These included Sotiris Goritsas' *Balkanizater* (1997), Olga Malea's *Cow's Orgasm* (1996) and *The Mating Game* (1999), Nikos Perakis' *Female Company* (1999) and the hit comedy *Safe Sex* (2000), directed by Thanasis Reppas and Mihalís Papathanasiou.

But Greece has not had a major international hit since *Zorba*, and beyond the festival circuit few have made an impact outside Greece. Two major mainstream films that gained international cinematic releases outside Greece – the first in many years – were Tasos Boulmetis' *A Touch of Spice* (*Politiki Kouzina*; 2003) and Pantelis Voulgaris' 2004 hit *Brides* (*Nyfes*), which was executive produced by Martin Scorsese. Perakis' chauvinistic but fun 2005 comedy *Sirens in the Aegean* was a big local hit.

The latest wave of filmmakers is attracting international attention with films that present a grittier, up-close and candid look at contemporary Greek life, a shift from the idealised and romanticised views from the past. Directors to watch include Konstantinos Giannaris, whose provocative documentary-style films like *From the Edge of the City* and his most recent release *Hostage* seem to split audiences and critics alike. Yannis Economidis, whose punishing second film *Soul Kicking* (2006), was screened at Cannes, has been likened to a younger Mike Leigh on speed.

Tasos Boulmetis' 2003 film *Politiki Kouzina* (*A Touch of Spice*) is a beautifully shot and bittersweet story about Greek refugees from Istanbul moving to Athens in the 1960s, told through a boy's passion for food. Filmed in Greece and Turkey, it stars the dashing George Corraface.

**REALITY TV**

Greek TV offers a jumble of programmes from histrionic comedy series, talk shows and soap operas to Greek versions of reality TV, game shows and star-producing talent shows. Prime-time TV is dominated by locally produced shows, with significant investment in domestic programming. Popular American series seem to dominate foreign content.

Popular comedies are generally hammed up and loud, though there have also been some excellent dramas in recent years tackling social themes like immigration, single mothers and life in rural Greece.

TV reflects local preoccupations and attitudes to gender roles and sexual mores, one example being younger women often portrayed in relationships with much older men, while comedies such as *Seven Deadly Mother-In-Laws* play on well-known stereotypes.

**SPORT**

Two unexpected sporting triumphs – the resounding success of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games and the Greek football (soccer) team's astounding victory in the European Cup brought Greece into the international spotlight in 2004. The national basketball team kept up the momentum when they became European champions the following year, for a brief time making Greece the reigning European champions in both football and basketball. But since then little of note has happened in the international sporting arena.

Greek football has been riding high, however, after many years in the doldrums. Greece had never won a game in a major football championship before their extraordinary performance in the European finals. While the national team post-Euro performance was largely lacklustre, they did manage to qualify to defend their title for the Euro 2008 championship with a determined win against Turkey.

Football remains the most popular spectator sport in Greece and you will see large TV screens set up outside cafés and tavernas on big match nights. The first division is dominated by the big glamour-clubs of the league: Olympiakos of Piraeus and Panathinaikos of Athens. Their rivalry is occasionally interrupted by AEK Athens and PAOK from Thessaloniki. Greece normally fields two teams in the European Champions League.

Basketball is the other major sport. Basketball gained popularity after the Greek team first won the European championship in 1987, for a while overtaking football as business tycoons bought the big clubs and paid big money for broadcast rights. Panathinaikos, Olympiakos and AEK are also the big clubs of Greek basketball. Panathinaikos was European champion in 1996, 2000 and 2002, and Olympiakos followed suit in 1997, while AEK, Aris and PAOK have also won European titles (Greece's national team finished fourth in the European basketball championships in 2007).

Greece's interest in other sports was boosted during the Athens Olympics, where Greek athletes won a record 16 Olympic medals, split evenly between men's and women's sports.

Since 2004, some of Athens' world-class Olympic sports stadiums have attracted international sporting events and track meetings, but most are still awaiting their new fate and likely to be turned into entertainment complexes.

**'Football remains the most popular spectator sport in Greece'**

# Architecture

Column detail from the Parthenon (p113) of the Acropolis, Athens

**There's no denying it: Greece contains *the world's natural library of architectural reference*. Here you'll find classical temples that have inspired entire civilisations; indeed, Greek temple styles are renowned as international symbols of democracy and have spawned major architectural movements such as the Italian Renaissance and the British Greek Revival – but forget those humbug copycats, Greece has the real thing. It's also an exciting time for modern Greece; visitors can track the country's transition from fugly modern high-rise to exciting modern hi-tech, and heritage gurus are restoring neoclassical glamour with sassy retrofits. Much of Greece is moving forward, including its past.**

## MINOAN MAGNIFICENCE

Most of our knowledge of Greek architecture proper begins at around 2000 BC with the Minoans, who were based on Crete but whose influence spread throughout the Aegean to include the Cyclades. Minoan architects are famous for having constructed technologically advanced, labyrinthine palace complexes. The famous site at **Knossos** (see below) is one of the largest. Usually characterised as 'palaces', these sites were in fact multifunctional settlements that were the primary residences of royalty and priests, but housed some plebs, too. Minoan townships dotted the rural landscape, along with some grand residential villas that were microversions of the palaces up the road, complete with multilevel abodes, shrines, storage facilities and workshops. Large Minoan villages, such as those of **Gournia** (p506) and **Palekastro** (p509) in Crete, also included internal networks of paved roads that extended throughout the countryside to link the settlements with the palaces. More Minoan palace-

South Propylum, Palace of Knossos (p472), Crete

CHRIS CHRISTO



## GRANDEUR OF KNOSSOS

The elaborate palace complex at **Knossos** (above) was originally formed largely as an administrative settlement surrounding the main palace, which comprised the main buildings arranged around a large central courtyard (1250 sq metres). Over time, the entire settlement was rebuilt and extended. Long, raised causeways formed main corridors; narrow labyrinthine chambers flanked the palace walls. The multilevel palace comprised luxurious living spaces, banquet and reception halls, and shrines and ceremonial rooms for religious events. There were even designated areas for celebrating bull contests. (This meandering floor plan of enigmatic labyrinthine corridors, together with the graphic ritual importance of bulls, inspired the myth of the labyrinth and the Minotaur.) The compound featured strategically placed interior light wells, sophisticated ventilation systems, aqueducts, freshwater irrigation wells, and bathrooms with extensive plumbing and drainage systems. The ground levels consisted mostly of workshops, cylindrical grain silos, and storage magazines.

era sophistication exists at **Phaestos** (p475), **Malia** (p474) and **Ancient Zakros** (p510) on Crete, and at the Minoan outpost of **Ancient Akrotiri** (p431) in the south of Santorini.

However, several gigantic volcanic eruptions rocked the region in the mid-15th century BC, causing geological ripple-effects that at the very least caused big chunks of palace to fall to the ground. The Minoans resolutely rebuilt their crumbling palaces on an even grander scale, only to have more natural disasters wipe them out again. The latter effected an architectural chasm that was filled by the emerging Mycenaean rivals on mainland Greece.

## MYCENAEAN ENGINEERING

The Mycenaeans had a fierce reputation as spectacular structural engineers and expert builders of massive masonry. These rich war-mongering people roamed most of southern mainland Greece, picking off the choice vantage points for their large and austere palaces, which were fenced within formidable citadels. Usually built to a compact and orderly plan, the citadels' enclosing fortified Cyclopean-stone walls were on average an unbreachable 3m (10ft) to 7m (25ft) thick – it was believed for a time, of course, that only the legendary race of giants could have lifted such monumental blocks of stone. The famous Lion Gate at the citadel of **Ancient Mycenae** (p177) is the oldest monumental gate in Europe, and is dominated by the triangular-shaped sculpture above that's designed to protect the lintel from the weight of the wall. The immense royal beehive tomb of the **Treasury of Atreus** (aka Tomb of Agamemnon) at Mycenae was constructed using tapered limestone blocks weighing up to 120 tonnes. The palace at **Tiryns** (p185) has stupendous corbel-vaulted galleries and is riddled with secret passageways; and the incredibly well-preserved **Nestor's Palace** (p217), near modern Pylos, also illustrates the Mycenaeans' structural expertise. At their zenith, the Mycenaeans had constructed over 300 of these supersized citadels throughout mainland Greece and the Aegean, and ultimately overran the remaining Minoan palaces on Crete.



Citadel marvel, Lion Gate (p178), Mycenae

JOHN ELK III

## ARCHAIC ANARCHY

When the notorious, war-mongering Dorian tribes bounded across the Greek plains in about 1000 BC, they carried with them a penchant for iron weaponry. Fortunately, however, their great light-bulb moment came during the Archaic period (from about the 8th century BC), when they put their strong iron metallurgy skills to good use and developed a Hellenic architectural vision for temples. Doric masons now used iron rods cased in lead to support monumental limestone drums for columns (instead of the traditional use of timber). Architects designed temples that were now not only reinforced masonry, but also featured terracotta roof tiles and stone guttering. This guttering had a clever outer decorative band (*sima*) that was covered in elaborately sculptured reliefs forming spouts that allowed rainwater to drain away. Almost three millennia later, only very goat-grazed



ruins remain of these once-grand Archaic temples; hardcore architecture buffs can muse over the **Sanctuary of Poseidon** (p174) in Ancient Isthmia or the first **Temple of Apollo** (p173) in Ancient Corinth.

## CLASSIC COMPOSITIONS

The classical age (5th to 4th centuries BC) is when most Greek architectural clichés converge. This is when temples became characterised by the famous orders of columns, particularly the Doric, Ionic and Corinthian. Doric columns feature austere cushion capitals, fluted shafts and no bases. The classical temple style is also underpinned by the architects' refined knack for mathematics and aesthetics. The monument with the biggest reputation for this noble geometric intellect is the mother of all Doric structures, the 5th-century-BC **Parthenon** (p113), whose blueprints are attributed to master architects Iktinos and Kallikrates. The Parthenon emerged as the ultimate in architectural bling: a gleaming, solid marble crown. To this day, it's probably *the* most obsessively photographed jewel in all of Greece.

In the meantime, the Greek colonies of the Asia Minor coast were creating their own Ionic order, designing a column base in several tiers and adding more flutes. This more graceful order's capital received an ornamented necking, and Iktinos fused elements of its design in the Parthenon. This order is used on the Acropolis' **Temple of Athena Nike** (p113) and the **Erechtheion** (p114), where the famous Caryatids regally stand.

Towards the tail end of the classical period, the Corinthian column was in limited vogue. Featuring a single or double row of ornate leafy scrolls (usually the very sculptural acanthus), the order was subsequently adopted by the Romans and used only on Corinthian temples in Athens. The **Temple of Olympian Zeus** (p118), completed during Emperor Hadrian's reign, is a grand, imposing structure. Another temple design, the graceful, circular temple *tholos* (dome) style, was used for the great **Sanctuary of Athena** (p234) at Delphi.

The Greek theatre design is also a hallmark of the classical period. The original classical theatre design had a round stage to accommodate the traditional circular dance. The small structure called a *skene* (scene building) in the background was used as dressing-hut and stage backdrop. The semicircle of steeply banked stone benches seated many thousands,

The striking maiden columns of the Erechtheion known as the Caryatids (p114), Athens



Stone and marble Theatre of Dionysos (p114), Athens

## MUST-SEE THEATRES

- Epidavros (p187)
- Delphi (p233)
- Odeon of Herodes Atticus (p115)
- Theatre of Dionysos (p114)
- Theatre of Dodoni (p332)
- Argos (p176)

but the perfect acoustics meant every spectator could monitor every syllable uttered on the stage below. It's thought this auditory marvel may have been produced by setting empty jars underneath the seats; the seats were usually hollowed out so that spectators could draw back their feet to allow others to pass. While Hadrian was still kicking, parts of some theatres were renovated and roofed to create an odeum (music hall), which sometimes shortened the stage into a semicircle. Most ancient Greek theatres are still used for summer festivals, music concerts and plays. See the boxed text (above) for a list of must-see theatres.

## HELLENISTIC CITIZENS

In the twilight years of the classical age (from about the late 4th century BC), cosmopolitan folks started to take a very individualistic approach to life, becoming rather weary of focusing so much on temples. They cast their gaze towards a more decadent urban style for their civic and domestic sites. The Hellenistic architect reflected this new wave by responding to calls for new designs for palaces and private homes. Wealthy citizens, dignitaries and political heavyweights of antiquity (think Cleopatra) lavishly remodelled their abodes; many homes featured painted stonework and were redesigned with peristyled (column-surrounded) courtyards in marble, and striking mosaics were displayed as status symbols (read *more* bling). The best Hellenistic ancient home displays are the grand houses at **Delos** (p392).

## BYZANTINE ZEAL

Church-building was particularly expressive during Byzantium in Greece (from around AD 700). The Byzantine church design has the perfect symbiotic relationship between structural form and function. The original Greek Byzantine model features a distinctive cross-shape; essentially a central dome supported by four arches on piers and flanked by vaults, with smaller domes at the four corners and three apses to the east. Theologian



Byzantine chapel, Mystras (p197)

GLENN BEANLAND

architects opted for spectacular devotional mosaics and frescoes instead of carvings for the stylistic religious interiors, which are vivid microcosmic portrayals. Symbolically, working down from the dome (which is always representative of Christ in heaven), images of the Virgin are shown in the apse (symbolising the point between heaven and earth), with the walls decorated in images of saints or apostles, representing the descent to earth (the nave). In Athens, the very appealing 12th-century **Church of Agios Eleftherios** (p119) incorporates fragments of a classical frieze in Pentelic marble;

the charming 11th-century **Church of Kapnikarea** (p119) sits stranded, smack bang in the middle of downtown Athens – its interior flooring is of coloured marble and the external brickwork, which alternates with stone, is set in patterns. Thessaloniki's 8th-century **Church of Agia Sofia** (p278), with her 30m-high dome, is a humble version of her sister namesake in Istanbul. There are numerous Byzantine chapels in **Kastoria** (p309), many of which were originally private chapels attached to enchanting 17th- and 18th-century *arhontika* (mansions once owned by *arhons*, wealthy bourgeoisie merchants).

Several Byzantine monastic sites have made it to the Unesco World Heritage register, including the *katholikon* (main churches) of **Agios Loukas** (p239), significant for their late-Byzantine multidomed style, and the 11th-century **Moni Dafniou** (p156), which stands on the site of an ancient Sanctuary of Apollo.

## FRANKISH KEEPS & VENETIAN STRONGHOLDS

After the sack of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204, much of Greece became the fiefdoms of Western aristocrats. The Villehardouin family punctuated the Peloponnesian landscape with Frankish castles, eg at **Kalamata** (p210) and at **Mystras** (p197), where they also built a palace that ended up a court of the Byzantine imperial family for two centuries. When the Venetians dropped by to seize a few coastal enclaves, they built the impenetrable 16th-century **Koules Venetian fortress** (p467) in Iraklio; the very sturdy fortress at **Methoni** (p215); and the imposing 18th-century **Palamidi fortress** (p181) at Nafplio. The rambling defence at **Acrocorinth** (p173) is studded with imposing gateways, and the rock-nest protecting the enchanting Byzantine village at **Monemvasia** (p200) commands spectacular ocean views.

## OTTOMAN OFFERINGS

Interestingly, remarkably few monuments are left to catalogue after four centuries of Ottoman Turkish rule (16th to 19th centuries). Though many mosques and their minarets have sadly crumbled or are in serious disrepair, lucky for us some terrific Ottoman-Turkish examples survive. These include the prominent pink-domed **Mosque of Süleyman** (p523) in Rhodes' Old Town, which still bears many legacies of its Ottoman past, as does the walled quarter of Ioannina and its restored **Fetiye Cami** (Victory Mosque; p327). The **Fethiye Mosque** (p128) and **Turkish**

## TOP FIVE PROVINCIAL ORIGINALS

- See the medieval, labyrinthine vaulted island village of **Pyrgi** (p613) in Chios, for its unique Genoese designs of intricate, geometric grey-and-white façades
- Gaze at the slate mansions of the **Zagorohoria** (p332) – schist-slab roofs, stone-slab walls and fortified courtyards
- Watch out for the lovely but paranoid semiruined hamlet of **Vathia** (p207) in Mani, for its startling meercat-esque stone tower houses with round turrets as sentry posts
- Squint at the volcanic-rock hewn cliff-top village of **Oia** (p429) in Santorini – dazzlingly whitewashed (and we mean *really* white) island streetscapes and homes
- Discover the strangely attractive wooden-framed houses of **Lefkada Town** (p696); lower floors panelled in wood; the upper floors lined in painted sheet metal or corrugated iron



Streetscape nestled in niches hewn into the volcanic rock at Oia (p429), Santorini.

CHRISTOPHER GROENHOUT

**Baths** (p123) are two of Athens' few surviving Ottoman reminders, and the architect for the 16th-century **Koursoun Tzami** (p262) in Trikala also designed the Blue Mosque in Istanbul.

The charming old Turkish quarter of **Varousi** (p262) in Trikala, and the atmospheric streets of **Thessaloniki** (p272), and **Didymoticho** (p319), near the Turkish border, showcase superb Turkish-designed homes with stained-glass windows, wooden overhangs on buttresses, decorated plasterwork and painted woodwork.

Greeks are becoming acutely aware that their 400-year-long Ottoman dossier is worth preserving. One good restoration job is the 18-domed **Imaret** (p297) in Kavala, which incorporates a mosque, college and *hammam* (Turkish bath). For more on Greece's efforts to preserve its Ottoman past, see p39).

## NEOCLASSICAL SPLENDOUR

Regarded by experts as the most beautiful neoclassical building worldwide, the 1885 **Athens Academy** (p120) reflects Greece's post-Independence yearnings for grand and

The grand Athens Academy (p120), Athens

GEORGE TSAFOS

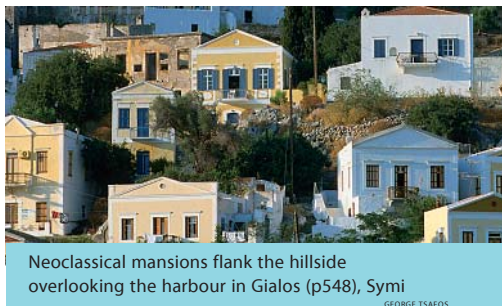


geometric forms, and Hellenistic detail. Renowned Danish architect Theophile Hansen drew inspiration from the Erechtheion to design the Academy's Ionic-style column entrance (guarded over by Apollo and Athena); the great interior oblong hall is lined with marble seating, and Austrian painter Christian Griepenkerl was commissioned to decorate its elaborate ceiling and wall paintings. In a similar vein, the Doric columns of the

Temple of Hephaestus influenced Theophile's solid marble **National Library** (p120), while Christian Hansen (Theophile's brother) was responsible for the handsome but more sedate **Athens University** (p120), with its clean lines.

Meticulously restored neoclassical mansions house notable museums, such as the acclaimed **Benaki Museum** (p121) and the Ernst Ziller-built **Numismatic Museum** (p122), which contains beautiful frescoes and mosaic floors.

Many provincial towns also display beautiful domestic adaptations of neoclassicism. In Symi, the harbour at **Gialos** (p548) is flanked by colourful neoclassical façades (still striking even if a little derelict) and **Nafplio** (p180) is also embellished with neoclassical buildings.



## MODERN IDEAS

Athens today is embracing a sophisticated look-both-ways architectural aesthetic by showcasing its vast collection of antiquities and archaeological heritage in evolutionary buildings (see the boxed text, below), and by beautifying landscapes for pedestrian zones to improve the urban environment. Examples include the well-designed facelift of the historic centre, including its spectacular floodlighting (designed by the renowned Pierre Bideau) of the **ancient promenade** (p115), and the cutting-edge spaces emerging from once-drab and derelict industrial zones, such as the **Gazi** (Technopolis; p99) gasworks arts complex.

## BEST FUTURISTIC ATHENS

- **New Acropolis Museum** (p115) A sharp new space to house Greece's antiquities, featuring an internal glass cella (inner room) mirroring the Parthenon with the same number of columns (clad in steel).
- **House of Letters & Arts** (Leoforos Syngrou 109) An imposing glass-and-steel atrium that will exhibit contemporary Greek culture, stage theatre productions and house an electronic library. Opens late 2008.
- **Museum of the Hellenic World in Asia Minor** (Hellenic Cosmos; p125) Anamorphosis Architects are creating a futuristic exhibition core space and virtual-reality dome comprising continuous, curved lines of glass, steel and marble. Opens 2008.
- **Planetarium** (p126) Providing a state-of-the-art hemispherical dome for virtual 3D galaxy rides.
- **Athens Olympic Stadium** (OAKA; p125) Notable for Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava's striking ultramodern glass-and-steel roof, which is suspended by cables from large arches.

# Environment

## THE LAND

Greece is essentially a mountainous country with a disproportionate number of islands – many of which are equally mountainous. Rock and water dominate the landscape and are the two key elements that typify this ancient land. Plains interrupt the mountains in relatively few places, with the exceptions of Thessaly and Thrace, and water – the Aegean and Ionian Seas – threads together the far flung pieces of real estate that make up the Greece of today.

During the Triassic, Jurassic, Cretaceous and even later geological periods, Greece was a shallow oxygen-rich sea. The continuous submerging of land created large tracts of limestone through the whole submarine land mass. Later, as the land emerged from the sea to form the backbone of the current topography, a distinctly eroded landscape with crystalline rocks and other valuable minerals began to appear, marking the spine that links the north and south today. Limestone caves are a major feature of this karst landscape, which is shaped by the dissolution of a soluble layer of bedrock.

While volcanic activity was once prevalent in Greece – perhaps the world's largest volcanic explosion was on Santorini – there is today little volcanic activity, unlike in neighbouring Italy. Earthquakes continue to shake the country with almost predictable frequency.

Greece consists of a peninsula and about 1400 islands, of which 169 are inhabited. The land mass is 131,944 sq km and Greek territorial waters occupy about 400,000 sq km. The islands are divided into six groups: the Cyclades, the Dodecanese, the islands of the Northeastern Aegean, the Sporades, the Ionian and the Saronic Gulf Islands. The two largest islands, Crete and Evia, do not belong to any group. The much indented coastline has a total length of 15,020km. In Greece nowhere is much more than 100km from the sea.

Greece does not have many rivers, and none that are navigable. The largest are the Aheloös, Aliakmonas, Aoös and Arahthos, all of which have their source in the Pindos Mountains range in Epiros. The long plains of the river valleys, and those between the mountains and the coast, are the only lowlands. The mountainous terrain, dry climate and poor soil restrict agriculture to less than a quarter of the land. Greece is, however, rich in minerals, with reserves of oil, manganese, bauxite and lignite.

## WILDLIFE

### Animals

Greece's relationship with its fauna has not been a happy one. Hunting of wild animals is a popular activity with Greeks as a means of providing food. This is particularly true in mountainous regions where the partisanship of hunters is legendary. Wild boars have been around since antiquity and are commonly the main game. One could argue that the culling of these destructive and cunning animals is a blessing in disguise. Despite signs forbidding hunting, Greek hunters often shoot freely at any potential game. In reality, you are unlikely to spot any wild animals in areas widely inhabited by humans other than as road kill, or the odd fox, weasel, hare or rabbit scurrying out of your way.

The mountains of Northern Greece nonetheless do support a wide range of wildlife. The brown bear, the golden jackal and the grey wolf still survive in the more remote regions of Epiros and Macedonia; and sheep farmers still occasionally point the finger of blame at the much-maligned wolf for occasional marauding and mauling of their flocks. Wild dogs or more likely

**'Nowhere in Greece is much more than 100km from the sea'**

shepherds' dogs with bad attitudes often roam the higher pastures on grazing mountains and should be given a wide berth if encountered.

The country has an active snake population and in spring and summer you will inevitably spot these wriggling reptiles on roads and pathways all over the country. Fortunately the majority are harmless, though the viper and the coral snake can cause fatalities. Lizards are in abundance and there is hardly a dry-stone wall without one of these curious creatures clambering around.

Bird-watchers have a field day in Greece as the country is on many north-south migratory paths. Lesvos (p618) in particular draws a regular following of birders from all over Europe who come to spot some of the over 279 recorded species that transit the island annually.

Another more visible visitor is the stork. Storks arrive in early spring from Africa and return to the same nest year after year. The nests are built on electricity poles, chimney tops and church towers, and can weigh up to 50kg; keep an eye out for them in Northern Greece, especially in Thrace (p310).

Lake Mikri Prespa (p305) in Macedonia has the richest colony of fish-eating birds in Europe, including species such as egrets, herons, cormorants and ibises, as well as the rare Dalmatian pelican – Turkey and Greece are now the only countries in Europe where this large bird is found. The wetlands at the mouth of the Evros River (p319), close to the border with Turkey, are home to two easily identifiable wading birds – the avocet, which has a long curving beak, and the black-winged stilt, which has extremely long pink legs.

Upstream on the Evros River in Thrace, the dense forests and rocky outcrops of the 7200-hectare Dadia Forest Reserve (p320) play host to the largest range of birds of prey in Europe. Thirty-six of the 38 European species can be seen here, and it is a breeding ground for 23 of them. Permanent residents include the giant black vulture, whose wingspan reaches 3m, the griffon vulture and the golden eagle. Europe's last 15 pairs of royal eagle nest on the river delta.

About 350 pairs (60% of the world's population) of the rare Eleonora's falcon nest on the island of Piperi (p669) in the Sporades and on Tilos (p550), which is also home to the very rare Bonelli's eagle and the shy, cormorant-like Mediterranean shag.

## Endangered Species

One could argue that all the native animals of Greece are endangered, given the encroaching and invasive nature of human development over a generally small landmass. The brown bear, Europe's largest land mammal, still manages to survive, although in very small numbers, in the Pindos Mountains; the Peristeri Range that rises above the Prespa Lakes; and in the mountains that lie along the Bulgarian border. If you want to see a bear in Greece nowadays you are better off heading for the Arcturos Bear Sanctuary in the village of Nymfio in Macedonia as it's unlikely you will see one anywhere else.

The grey wolf, which is not protected in Greece as in other countries, is another endangered species. They survive in small numbers in the forests of the Pindos Mountains in Epiros, as well as in the Dadia Forest Reserve area. Wolves can be spotted reliably only at the Wolf Sanctuary near Aetos in Macedonia, as it's rare to see one in the wild.

The golden jackal is a strong candidate for Greece's most misunderstood mammal. Although its diet is 50% vegetarian (and the other 50% is made up of carrion, reptiles and small mammals), it has in the past shouldered much of the blame for attacks on stock carried out by wild dogs or allegedly wolves. It was hunted to the brink of extinction until declared a protected species in 1990, and survives only in the Fokida district of central Greece and on the island of Samos.

The Hellenic Ornithological Society, [www.ornithologiki.gr](http://www.ornithologiki.gr), has loads of information about what to see and where, as well as information about the society's activities.

One of Europe's last breeding grounds for raptors (birds of prey) is at Dadia in eastern Thrace; 36 of Europe's raptor species breed here.

*Birding in Lesvos* by Richard Brooks is an excellent handbook for bird enthusiasts visiting this large northeast Aegean island.

## Marine Life

Surprisingly perhaps for a country with such an expanse of sea territory, the state of Greece's marine life is precarious. To their credit the Greeks have taken great pains to clean up their act in and around the water. Water clarity in the Saronic Gulf – once notoriously polluted – is almost on a par with the further reaches of the Aegean archipelago. Biological treatment of waste is largely responsible and has been very successful. Legislation aimed at preventing water pollution has been noticeably effective at keeping the quality of Greece's seawater at respectable level of salinity. The problems here arise from foreign ships that illegally discharge their waste into the sea.

The more endemic problem, however, lies in overfishing – a problem that is admittedly Mediterranean-wide. While Greeks love their fresh-fish restaurants and will pay a premium to eat it, finding the fresh fish is getting ever harder. More often than not it will come from fish-farmers or from further afield. Greece now produces more than 60,000 tons per annum of farmed fish and around 60% of the EU's sea bass and sea bream.

Dolphins can be spotted during almost any ferry trip and they are in abundance particularly in the turbid waters of the Amvrakikos Gulf of Western Greece. The continent's rarest mammal – the monk seal (*Monachus monachus*) – ekes out an extremely precarious existence in Greece, which is host to about 50% of Europe's minuscule population of 400. It is estimated that about 40 live in the Ionian Sea and the remaining 160 are scattered in small pockets around the Aegean Sea. Previous pervasive habitat encroachment is the main culprit for the paucity in numbers of this species. Small colonies live on the islands of Alonnisos (p666) and there have been reported sightings on Tilos (p550).

The waters around Zakynthos are also home to the last large sea turtle colony in Europe, that of the loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*; see the boxed text p712). The loggerhead also nests in smaller numbers on the Peloponnese and on Crete.

## PLANTS

Greece is endowed with a variety of flora unrivalled elsewhere in Europe. The wildflowers are spectacular, with over 6000 species, some of which occur nowhere else, and more than 100 varieties of orchid. They continue to thrive because most of the land is too poor for intensive agriculture and has escaped the ravages of chemical fertilisers.

The regions with the most wildflowers are the Lefka Ori mountains of Crete (p493) and the Mani area (p204) of the Peloponnese. Trees begin to blossom as early as the end of February in warmer areas and the wildflowers start to appear in March. During spring the hillsides are carpeted with flowers, which seem to sprout even from the rocks. By summer the flowers have disappeared from everywhere but the northern mountainous regions. Autumn brings a new period of blossoming.

The forests that once covered ancient Greece have been decimated by thousands of years of clearing for agriculture, boat building and housing. Northern Greece is the only region that has retained significant areas of native forest and here you will find mountainsides covered with dense thickets of hop hornbeam (*Ostrya carpinifolia*), noted for its lavish display.

Another common species is the Cyprus plane (*Platanus orientalis insularis*), which thrives wherever there is ample water. It seems as if every village on the mainland has a plane tree shading its central square – and a Taverna Platanos (Plane Tree Taverna).

The Sea Turtle Protection Society of Greece, Archelon, runs monitoring programmes and is always looking for volunteers. For details, visit [www.archelon.gr](http://www.archelon.gr).

*Wildflowers of Greece* by George Sfikas is one of an excellent series of field guides by this well-known Greek mountaineer and naturalist.

*The Flowers of Greece & The Aegean* by William Taylor and Anthony Huxley is the most comprehensive guide for the serious botanist.

## NATIONAL PARKS

National Parks in Greece are not quite like those in modern Western societies. They tend to be protected reserves for the flora and fauna of the region first rather than Disneyfied recreational grounds for socially conscious visitors. Facilities can be basic to decent – forget motorised tours – yet there will be abundant walking trails, some quite rough and more often than not a clutch of basic refuges for sparse-minded guests. Still, they serve their purpose and for the appreciative and unfussy visitor they will be an excellent alternative to the Yellowstones and Grand Canyons of this world.

For visitors who crave a little interactivity with nature, the most visited parks are Mt Parnitha (p158), just north of Athens, and the very popular Samaria Gorge (p493) on Crete. The other national parks are Vikos-Aoös (p332) in Epiros with excellent trekking; Prespa (p305) in Macedonia; Mt Olympus (p298) on the border of Thessaly and Macedonia; and Parnassos (p237) and Iti (p247) in central Greece. Most consist of buffer zones protecting an inner wilderness area. Some activities (including hunting!) are permitted in the buffer areas, but no activities other than walking are allowed in the protected area.

## ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Greece is belatedly becoming environmentally conscious. Global awareness, a greater sensitivity on the part of younger technocrats, or sheer financial inducements from funding bodies are shifting Greece's devil-may-care attitude of yesteryear to a growing awareness that the environmental rape and pillage of a land cannot go on for ever.

Long-standing problems such as deforestation and soil erosion date back thousands of years. Surprisingly, live cultivation and goats have been the main culprits, but firewood gathering, shipbuilding, housing and industry have all taken their toll.

Forest fires are a major problem, with many thousands of hectares destroyed annually. Every year there are forest fires in some of the most picturesque areas of Greece. Such fires on Mt Parnitha and in the Peloponnese in the summer of 2007 destroyed large tracts of that area's vegetation and changed the face of the landscape for many years to come.

## RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

Visitors should travel responsibly at all times. Follow these common-sense rules:

- Dispose of litter thoughtfully
- Do not discard items that could start a fire (cigarette butts, glass bottles etc) – forest fires are an annual torment
- Stick to footpaths wherever possible
- Close gates behind you
- Do not pick flowers or wilfully damage tree bark or roots – some of the species you see are protected
- Do not climb on walls or buildings
- Respect landowners' property and do not trespass
- Take care when walking near cliffs – they can be dangerously slippery and quick to crumble
- Keep noise to a minimum and avoid disturbing wildlife
- Pay attention to signs and public warnings

## URBAN SPRAWL *Gina Tsarouhas*

The 20th-century scourge of *afthaireta* (illegal buildings) that sprouted all over the country due to lax planning controls and/or corruption is an ongoing issue. Paradoxically, while much of inner Athens is being beautified, many of its inner neighbourhood tenants have fled the once-declining and congested centre and have contributed to its growing urban sprawl. Many of these outlying satellite townships have received little sensible urban planning infrastructure and are now suffering additional environmental strain. Urban planners and councils all over Greece are looking at ways to retrofit laws to cater to the swelling of these communities. Many illegal buildings have been legalised, though a few spectacularly outrageous examples along coastal areas have been torn down in recent years. There's also mounting pressure by environmental groups, who are pushing for stronger law enforcement in national marine parks where encroaching coastal tourist development continues to affect the natural habitats of endangered species (see opposite).

The result is that the forests of ancient Greece have all but disappeared. Epiros and Macedonia in northern Greece are now the only places where extensive tracts remain. This loss of forest cover has been accompanied by serious soil erosion. The problem is finally being addressed with the start of a long-overdue reforestation programme.

While a marine park ostensibly exists for the protection of loggerhead turtles at Laganas Bay on Zakynthos, implementing its protective policies has been fraught with difficulties. Tourists cavorting on the beach and excessive neon lights have played with the breeding patterns of this endangered species to a point where the European Commission has reportedly taken up the case and is losing patience with authorities.

General environmental awareness remains at a low level, especially where litter is concerned. The problem is particularly bad in rural areas, where roadsides are strewn with soft-drink cans and plastic packaging hurled from passing cars. Environmental education has begun in schools, but it will be a long time before community attitudes change.

# Food & Drink

Steeped in ritual, Greece's culinary tradition incorporates mountain village food, island cuisine, exotic flavours introduced by Greeks from Asia Minor, and influences from various invaders and historical trading partners. Greek cuisine also reflects the bounty of the land and the resourcefulness that comes from subsistence living during hard times. Greeks are good at making a delicious meal out of the simplest ingredients, while olive oil is the key to making Greek food taste so good.

One of the delights of travelling around Greece is exploring regional variations and specialities. You will find there is more to Greek cuisine than charcoal-grilled meat and seafood, which admittedly Greeks do exceptionally well. The food in the average taverna unfortunately often bears little resemblance to that served at the kitchen table, though traditional home-style dishes are increasingly appearing on restaurant menus. Even in tourist areas, many tavernas have stopped pandering to foreign predilections and traded schnitzel for *stifadho* (a sweet stew with tomato and onions). A new generation of Greek chefs is also experimenting with variations of traditional dishes and flavours, as well as attempts at more inventive Greek *haute cuisine*. Overall, Greece's dining scene has become increasingly diverse and there is more international and ethnic cuisine in Athens and larger towns.

Greeks are fussy eaters and are sticklers for fresh produce, often travelling great distances to eat in village tavernas, where they know the meat is local and the produce from the owner's garden, or dine on the day's catch in remote fishing villages. Whether it's dining al fresco at a rickety table by the sea, quaffing wine straight from the barrel at a traditional basement *koutouki* (cosy meeting spot) in Athens or eating boiled goat in a mountain village, eating out in Greece is not just about what you eat, but the whole sensory experience.

## THE GREEK KITCHEN

The essence of Greek cuisine lies in its fresh, unadulterated seasonal produce and original flavours. The cuisine is generally unfussy and its simplicity brings out the rich flavours of the Mediterranean. The majority of Greek dishes are mainly seasoned with salt, pepper, lemon, olive oil and pungent Greek oregano, while parsley, garlic and dill are also widely used. Vegetables, pulses and legumes (key elements of the healthy Mediterranean diet) are made tastier by plentiful use of olive oil and herbs.

Meat has become more prominent in the modern diet; lamb and pork dominate, though kid goat is also common. Beef is mostly imported and chicken is also widely used, with special dishes being reserved for the *kokoras* (rooster). At home meat is commonly prepared with lemon and oregano and baked with potatoes, or used in tomato-based stews (*kokkinisto*). Rabbit is either fried or cooked in a *stifadho*. Almost every part of the animal is used – from the delicacy *ameletita* (literally 'unspeakables'), which are fried sheep's testicles to *kokoretsi* (spicy, spit-roasted offal wrapped in intestines) and the hangover-busting *patsas* (tripe soup).

In a land with countless miles of coastline, fish has long been a staple. Fish from the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas are tasty enough to be cooked with minimum fuss – usually grilled whole and drizzled with *ladholemono* (a lemon and oil dressing). Smaller fish like *barbounia* (red mullet) and *maridha* (whitebait) are lightly fried.

The ubiquitous Greek salad (*horiatiki*, translated as 'village salad') is the summer salad, with tomatoes, cucumber, onions, feta and olives. Other summer favourites include dishes like *yemista* (seasonal vegetables stuffed with rice and herbs). Salads are normally seasonal, with lettuce and cabbage served outside the summer. *Horta* (wild greens) make a great warm salad, drizzled with olive oil and lemon.

A staple with a myriad regional variations of pastry and fillings is the *pita* (pie), the most common being the *tyropita* (cheese pie) and *spanakopita* (spinach pie). Typical Greek pasta dishes include *pastitsio* (a thick spaghetti and meat bake) and the hearty oven-baked *youvetsi*, which is meat in a tomato sauce with *kritharaki* (rice-shaped pasta).

Bread is a mandatory feature of every meal. The most common is the white crusty *horiatiko* (village) loaf.

## DINING OUT

Eating out with family and friends is an integral part of social life, and Greeks eat out regularly regardless of socioeconomic status. Most prefer the relaxed taverna style of dining, normally sharing a range of dishes.

The key to picking a restaurant is to find where locals are eating, rather than 'tourist' tavernas (touts and big illuminated photos and signs are usually a giveaway). Hotel recommendations can be tricky as some have deals with particular restaurants or will suggest one run by a relative. Try to adapt to local eating times – a restaurant that was empty at 7pm might be heaving at 11pm (for more details see Habits & Customs, p89).

Solo diners remain a curiosity but are looked after. Most tavernas are open all day, but upmarket restaurants often open for dinner only.

## Mezedhes & Starters

Most places have a wide range of mezedhes (appetisers) that are shared, though it is quite acceptable to make a full meal of them. Common mezedhes include dips, such as *taramasalata* (fish roe), tzatziki (yogurt, cucumber and garlic) and *melitzanosalata* (aubergine), *keftedes* (meatballs), *loukaniko* (sausage) and *saganaki* (skillet-fried cheese).

Vegetarian mezedhes include rice-filled dolmadhes (see p90), deep-fried zucchini or aubergine slices, *gigantes* (lima beans in tomato and herb sauce) vegetable fritters, most commonly *kolokythokeftedes*

There are at least 100 edible *horta* (wild greens), though even the most knowledgeable person would not recognise more than a dozen.

For information about Greek products and cuisine, including a glossy magazine with recipes you can download, check out [www.kerasma.gr](http://www.kerasma.gr).

Greeks consume more oil per capita than any other people: 30L annually. Greece is the third-largest producer of olives and olive oil (more than 80% of which is extra-virgin, compared to 45% in Italy), but exports much of its finest oil to Italy, where it is mixed and sold as Italian.

## WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

**Bar restaurant** A more recent urban concept, they become incredibly loud after 11pm.

**Estiatorio** A restaurant, where you pay more for essentially the same dishes as in a taverna or *mayireio*, but with a nicer setting and formal service. These days it also refers to an upmarket restaurant serving international cuisine.

**Kafeneio** One of the oldest institutions, a *kafeneio* (coffee house) serves Greek coffee, spirits and little else, and remains largely the domain of men.

**Mayireio** Specialises in traditional home-style one-pot dishes and oven cooked meals (known as *mayirefta*).

**Mezedhopoleio** Offers lots of small plates of mezedhes (appetisers).

**Ouzerie** Traditionally serves tiny plates of mezedhes with each round of ouzo. The Cretan equivalent is a *rakadiko* (serving raki) while in the north you will find *tsipouradhika* (premises serving *tsipouro*, a variation on the local fire water; see also The Tsipouradhika, p253).

**Psarotaverna** Tavern or restaurant that specialises in fish and seafood.

**Psistaria** A taverna specialising in char-grilled or spit-roasted meat.

**Taverna** The most common, casual, family-run (and child-friendly) place, where the waiter arrives with bread and cutlery in a basket; usually has barrel wine, paper tablecloths and fairly standard menus.

**Zaharoplasteio** A cross between a patisserie and a café (though some only cater for takeaway and gifts).

## FISHY BUSINESS

Fresh fish in Greek restaurants (such as in a *psarotaverna*, see p85) is usually sold by weight and traditionally grilled and served whole, with a simple lemon and oil dressing. It is customary to go into the kitchen and choose the fish yourself. Make sure it's weighed (raw) so you don't get a shock when the bill arrives.

Don't kid yourself that there is enough local fish to cater for the millions of tourists who descend each summer. The fish on your plate could just as well be from Senegal and there is also an increase in inferior farmed fish. Unfortunately some places charge the same regardless.

Most places will state if the fish and seafood is frozen, though sometimes only on the Greek menu (indicated by the abbreviated 'kat' or an asterisk). Smaller fish are often a safer bet – the odder the sizes, the more chance that they are local.

See the glossary (p92) for common fish names.

(with zucchini), *revythokeftedhes* (with chick pea) or *domatokeftedhes* (with tomato).

Typical seafood mezedhes are pickled or grilled *ohtapodi* (octopus), *lakerda* (cured fish), mussel or prawn *saganaki* (usually fried with tomato sauce and cheese), crispy fried calamari and fried *maridha*.

Soup is not normally eaten as a starter, but can be an economical and hearty meal in itself. You'll occasionally come across home-style soups, such as *fakes* (lentils), *fasolada* (bean soup) or chicken soup with rice and *avgolemono* (egg and lemon), but you are more likely to find a *psarosoupa* (fish soup) with vegetables or *kakavia* (a bouillabaisse-style speciality laden with various fish and seafood; made to order).

## Mains

Most tavernas will have a combination of one-pot and oven-baked dishes (commonly referred to as *mayirefta*) and food cooked to order (*tis oras*), such as grilled meats. *Mayirefta* are usually prepared early and left to cool, which enhances the flavour (they are often better served lukewarm, though many places microwave them).

The most common *mayirefta* are *mousakas* (layers of eggplant or zucchini, minced meat and potatoes topped with cheese sauce and baked), *boureki* (a cheese, zucchini and potato bake), *pastitsio* and *yemista*. Other tasty dishes include rabbit or beef *stifadho* and *soutzoukakia* (spicy meatballs in tomato sauce).

Tasty charcoal-grilled meats – most commonly *paidakia* (lamb cutlets) and *brizoles* (pork chops) – are usually ordered by the kilo. Restaurants tend to serve *souvlaki* – cubes of grilled meat on a skewer, rather than *gyros* (meat slivers cooked on a vertical rotisserie; usually eaten with pitta bread).

Seafood mains include octopus in wine with macaroni, grilled *soupias* (cuttlefish), squid stuffed with cheese and herbs or rice, and fried salted cod served with *skordalia* (a lethal garlic and potato dip).

## Sweet Treats

After a meal Greeks traditionally serve fruit rather than sweets but that's not to say that there are not some delectable Greek sweets and cakes. Sweets are offered to guests with coffee or taken as gifts when visiting someone's home.

Traditional sweets include baklava, *loukoumadhes* (ball-shaped doughnuts served with honey and cinnamon), *kataifi* (chopped nuts inside shredded angel-hair pastry), *rizogalo* (rice pudding) and *galaktoboureko* (custard-filled

pastry). Dodoni is an excellent local brand of ice cream and it is worth looking out for places selling *politiko pagoto* (Constantinople-style ice cream). Traditional syrupy fruit preserves (spoon sweets) are served on tiny plates as a welcome offering (and occasionally after dinner), but are also delicious as a topping on yogurt or ice cream.

## REGIONAL SPECIALITIES

While you'll find the staple dishes throughout Greece, seek out the diverse regional variations and specialities. Some areas have dishes unheard of in other parts of Greece, such as *kavourma*, the smoked water buffalo made around Serres, or pies made with nettles in northern Greece.

The cuisine of northern Greece is influenced by the eastern flavours introduced by Asia Minor refugees, and uses less olive oil and more peppers and spices than the rest of the country. Northern coastal towns are known for their seafood delicacies like fried mussels or mussel pilaf.

The Peloponnese is known for simpler herb-rich one-pot dishes. As the biggest producers of olive oil, it is not surprising that the Peloponnese and Crete have the biggest variety of *ladhera* (vegetable dishes baked or stewed with plenty of olive oil).

The cuisine of the Ionian islands (which were never under Turkish rule) has an Italian influence, seen in dishes such as *sofrito*, a braised meat with garlic and wine sauce.

On Sifnos, *revithadha* (a local chick-pea stew) is made in a specially shaped clay pot and slow-cooked overnight.

You'll find excellent cured meats across Greece, from the vinegar cured *apaki* (Crete), olive-oil stored *pasto* (the Mani) and specialities, such as *louza* (Tinos) and *siglino* (Crete and Peloponnese).

In Crete other specialities include spiky wild artichokes, *soupias* (cuttlefish) with wild fennel or *horta*, *hohlii* (snails) and *dakos* (rusks moistened and topped with tomato, olive oil and cheese).

Santorini and the Cyclades are renowned for their *fava* (split pea purée served with lemon juice and finely cut red onions), sun-dried tomato fritters and wild capers.

## SAY CHEESE

Greeks are the world's biggest per capita consumers of cheese, eating around 25kg per capita annually. Widely used in cooking in both savoury and sweet dishes, cheese is also a virtually mandatory accompaniment to any meal.

Greece probably produces as many different types of cheese as there are villages, with infinite variations in taste. Most are made from goat's and sheep's milk. Several Greek cheeses have gained appellation of origin status.

Feta, the national cheese, has been produced for about 6000 years from sheep's and/or goat's milk. *Graviera*, a nutty, mild Gruyère-like sheep's milk cheese, is made around Greece, but is a speciality of Crete, where it is often aged in caves or stone huts (*mitata*).

Other excellent cheeses include *kaseri*, similar to provolone, the ricotta-like whey cheese *myzithra* and the creamy *manouri* from the north. *Myzithra* is also dried and hardened and grated in pastas. *Anthotyro*, a low-fat soft unsalted whey cheese similar to *myzithra*, and the hardened sour *xynomyzithra* are made in Crete.

Other distinctive regional cheeses include *galotiri*, a strong white spreadable cheese from Thessaly; *ladotyri*, a hard golden cheese from Mitylini preserved in olive oil; and the semi-soft smoked *metsovone* from Epiros and *mastelo* from Chios.

The popular skillet-fried cheese mezes, *saganaki*, is made from firm, sharp cheeses, such as *kefalotyri* or *kefalograviera*, while *formaella*, from Arahova, is ideal grilled.

*The Glorious Foods of Greece* by Diane Kochilas is a must have for any serious cook, with a regional exploration of Greek food. Kochilas' culinary tour provides insights into Greece's history and culture as well as glorious recipes.

Acclaimed London chef Theodore Kyriakou goes back to his roots in search of recipes for *The Real Greek at Home*, the follow-up to his first book *Real Greek Food*; both are co-written by Charles Campion.



*The Olive and the Caper* by foodie and anthropologist Susanna Hoffman provides a lively exploration of Greek food culture, with interesting culinary sidebars on history, mythology, customs and regional specialties, and 325 recipes.

Look out for regional sweet specialties, such as *amygdalota* (almond sweets) from Andros, and Thessaloniki's favourite *bougatsa* (creamy semolina/custard pudding wrapped in a pastry envelope, baked and sprinkled with icing sugar).

### Quick Eats

*Souvlaki* is still the favourite fast food, both the *gyros* and skewered versions wrapped in pitta bread, with tomato, onion and lashings of tzatziki. *Tyropites* (cheese pies) and *spanakopites* (spinach pies) can be found in every bakery and food store. Another favourite snack is the *koulouri* (round, sesame-covered fresh pretzel-like bread) sold by street vendors. There are plenty of *fastfoudadika* (burger and fast-food chains) in major cities.

### VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

A legacy of lean times and the Orthodox faith's fasting traditions mean vegetables feature prominently in the Greek kitchen, making it easier and tastier to go vegetarian in Greece.

*Ladhera* are the mainstay of religious fasts. Look for popular vegetarian dishes, such as *fasolakia yiahni* (green bean stew), *bamies* (stuffed okra) and *briam* (oven-baked vegetable casserole). Artichokes and aubergines are also widely used, while vine leaf or cabbage dolmadhes and stuffed zucchini flowers (*anthoi*) are a staple. Beans and pulses are the foundation of the winter diet, when you will usually find dishes such as *yigandes* (giant white beans cooked in a light tomato sauce with dill) on the menu. Of the wild greens, *vlita* (amaranth) are the sweetest, but other common varieties include wild radish, dandelion, stinging nettle and sorrel.

### FEASTS & CELEBRATIONS

Food plays an integral part in religious rituals and cultural celebrations, which inevitably involve a feast. Every morsel is laced with symbolism, from Christmas biscuits to the spit-roast lamb for Easter. Even the 40-day Lenten fast has its culinary attractions, with special dishes that have no meat or dairy products (or oil if you go strictly by the book).

#### MADE IN GREECE

Feta cheese was the first Greek product to gain the same protected status as Parma ham and champagne. Only feta made in Greece can be called feta, a ruling that will eventually apply outside the EU.

Several other local products are also being recognised as officially Greek, including ouzo, and *tsipouro* and *tsikoudia* (see p91) are likely to follow suit.

One of the more obscure Greek products is mastic, the aromatic resin from the mastic trees that grow almost exclusively on the island of Chios. Most people associate it with chewing gum, liqueur, or the sticky white fondant sweet served in a glass of water, but it is also used to flavour pastries and other foods, and its medicinal benefits are promoted through mastic-based natural skin products and pharmaceuticals.

Greece is also one of the biggest producers of organic red saffron, grown in villages around the northern town of Kozani – one of the few areas in the world suitable for cultivation of high quality saffron. Kozani saffron (*Krokos kozanis*) has protected 'Designation of Origin' status.

Greece produces an exceptional tangy, thick-strained yogurt, usually made from sheep's milk. It is rich and flavourful and ideal for breakfast with thick aromatic thyme honey, walnuts and fruit. Look out for locally made yogurt in villages and small towns.

Another local delicacy is *avgotaraho* (botargo), a distinctive fish roe (usually grey mullet) from Messolongi on the west coast, which is preserved in beeswax.

#### DOS & DON'TS

- Do ask what the local speciality is in each region.
- Do look in the pots in the kitchen to select your meal.
- Do select your own fish and get it weighed.
- Don't insist on paying if you are invited out – it insults your host.
- Don't refuse a coffee or drink – it's a gesture of hospitality and goodwill.

Red-dyed boiled eggs are an integral part of Easter festivities, both for cracking and decorating the *tsourekki*, a brioche-style bread flavoured with mastic and *mahlepi* (mahaleb cherry kernels). The Resurrection Mass on Saturday night is followed by a supper that includes a bowl of *mayiritsa* (offal soup), while on Easter Sunday you will see lambs being cooked on spits all over the countryside.

Christmas is a more low-key celebration, with pork the traditional dish for Christmas Day. A golden-glazed cake called *vasilopita* (baked with a lucky coin inside) is cut at midnight on New Year's Eve, giving good fortune to whoever gets the lucky piece.

Lenten sweets include halva, both the Macedonian-style version made from tahini (sold in blocks in delis) and the semolina dessert often served in tavernas after a meal.

In agricultural areas many festivals are dedicated to local produce, from the Aubergine Festival (see p192) in Leonidio in the Peloponnese (which has a distinctive long purple local variety) to the Sardine festival in Preveza, held in August.

### HABITS & CUSTOMS

Hospitality is a key element of Greek culture, from the glass of water served on arrival to the customary complimentary fruit at the end of the meal. Meals are commonly laid out in the middle of the table and shared, rather than served individually, making it a more social dining experience (it also means meals can be stretched to accommodate extra and unexpected guests, as is often the case). Greeks generally order way too much food and notoriously over-cater at home, preferring to give it away or even throw it out than not have enough.

Breakfast is commonly a cigarette and a cup of coffee, and maybe a *tyropita* eaten on the run, though you'll find omelettes and Western-style breakfasts in tourist areas.

Though changes in working hours are affecting traditional meal patterns, lunch is still usually the big meal of the day and does not start until after 2pm. Cafés do a roaring post-siesta afternoon trade. Most Greeks wouldn't think of eating dinner before sunset, which coincides with shop closing hours, so restaurants often don't fill up until after 10pm.

Dining is a drawn-out ritual, so if you are eating with locals you should probably go easy on the mezedhes, because there will usually be many more to come. The pace of service can accordingly be slow by Western standards, but it's also important to remember the staff is not in a rush to get you out of there either, generally leaving you alone until you ask for the bill.

It is polite not to start drinking until everyone else's glass is full and they've done the customary toast, '*Yia mas*'. Greeks generally don't drink coffee after a meal and many tavernas don't offer it.

Boasting the largest collection of Greek recipes on the web is [www.greek-recipe.com](http://www.greek-recipe.com), which also includes a Greek culinary dictionary and cookbook reviews.

## EATING WITH KIDS

Greeks love children and tavernas are child-friendly, where it seems no-one is too fussed if children play between the tables. You might find a children's menu in some tourist areas but kids mostly eat what their parents eat. For more information on travelling with children, see p719.

## COOKING COURSES

Several well-known cooking writers and chefs run cooking courses, mostly during spring and autumn.

Aglaia Kremezis and her friends open their kitchens and gardens on the island of Kea for five-day hands-on **cooking workshops** ([www.keartisanal.com](http://www.keartisanal.com)).

Award-winning Greek-American food writer Diane Kochilas runs her **Glorious Greek Kitchen** ([www.gloriousgreekkitchen.com](http://www.gloriousgreekkitchen.com)) course on her ancestral island Ikaria.

Crete's **Culinary Sanctuaries** ([www.cookingincrete.com](http://www.cookingincrete.com)), run by Greek American chef and food writer Nikki Rose, combines cooking classes, farm tours, hiking and cultural excursions.

## DRINKS

### Wine

*Krasi* (wine) predates the written record in Greece, with the wine god Dionysos tramping the vintage before the Bronze Age. By the time of Greek Independence in 1821, however, there wasn't much of a wine industry, with most wine made for personal consumption. It wasn't until the 1960s that Greeks began producing wine commercially – and the infamous retsina was introduced to the world.

Flavoured with the resin of pine trees, retsina became popular in the 1960s when, due to urbanisation in Athens and a boom in tourism, bottled retsina took over from the casks that tavernas used to ferment it in. It was mass produced and exported widely. Nowadays, retsina has taken on a folkloric significance with foreigners. It does go well with strongly flavoured food (especially seafood) and you can still find some excellent homemade retsina. Leading wineries are also producing a more lightly resinated and sophisticated new-age retsina.

### TRAVEL YOUR TASTE BUDS

You will discover a range of culinary treats on your travels around Greece. Look out for the following.

- ahinosalata** – sea urchin eggs with lemon juice, for a super-fish taste
- anthoi** – zucchini flowers stuffed with rice and herbs
- bekri mezes** – spicy meat pieces cooked in tomato and red wine
- bougatsa** – Thessaloniki's famous creamy semolina/custard pudding wrapped in pastry
- dolmadhes** – vine or cabbage leaves stuffed with rice and herbs
- domatokeftedhes** – tasty tomato fritters from the Cyclades
- fava** – yellow split-pea purée from Santorini
- gavros marinatos** – delicious marinated anchovies
- hohlii bourbouristoi** – Crete's famous snail dish
- horta** – wild greens; nutritious and delicious
- keftedes** – small meatballs made with minced lamb or pork
- melitzanosalata** – a tangy roast aubergine purée
- saganaki** – a sharp, hard cheese skillet-fried until crispy on the outside and soft in the centre
- taramasalata** – a thick pink or white purée of fish roe, potato, oil and lemon juice
- tyrokafteri** – a spicy feta cheese-based dip

*The Illustrated Greek Wine Book* by Nico Manassis is the definitive guide, tracing the history of Greek wine. It profiles leading Greek winemakers and wine regions, and has hundreds of reviews. Also check out [www.greekwine.gr](http://www.greekwine.gr).

## OUZO

Ouzo is Greece's most famous but misunderstood tipple. While it can be drunk as an apéritif, for most Greeks ouzo has come to embody a way of socialising – best enjoyed during a lazy, extended summer afternoon of mezedhes (appetisers) by the seaside. Ouzo is sipped slowly and ritually to cleanse the palate between tastes (it also cuts through the oiliness of some foods). Ouzo is served in small bottles or *karafakia* (carafes) with a glass of water and bowl of ice cubes, and should be drunk on the rocks diluted with water (it turns a cloudy white). Drinking it straight is not advisable. Mixing it with cola is a foreign abomination.

Made from distilled grapes in a similar way to *grappa* or *raki*, ouzo is also distilled with residuals from fruit, grains and potatoes and flavoured with spices, primarily aniseed, giving it that liquorice flavour. The best ouzo is produced in Lesvos (Mytilini), particularly the top brand Plomari, named after the region where it is widely made.

These days more ouzo is drunk in Germany than Greece, where Johnnie Walker dominates and the trendy young things are downing mojitos.

In the past 20 years, however, Greek wine has experienced a renaissance, led by a new generation of progressive, internationally-trained winemakers. Apart from wines made from foreign varieties, age-old indigenous Greek varieties are being increasingly used and recognised internationally for their unique flavours.

White varieties to look out for include *moschofilero*, *assyrtiko*, *athiri*, *roditis*, *robola* and *savatiano*. Greek reds include *xynomavro*, *agiorgitiko* and *kotsifali*. A rose *agiorgitiko* is the perfect summer wine. Greek wines are produced in relatively small quantities, however, making many essentially boutique wines (and priced accordingly).

Dessert wines include excellent muscats from Samos, Limnos and Rhodes, Santorini's Vinsanto, Mavrodafne wine (often used in cooking) and Monemvasia's Malmsey sweet wine.

## Spirits

Greece's main firewater is *tsipouro*, a highly potent spirit produced from fermented distilled grape skins. A similar but smoother variation called *raki* or *tsikoudia* is produced in Crete. You should also look out for sweet liquors like Kumquat from Corfu, Mastiha from Chios (best served chilled), citrus-flavoured Kitro from Naxos and the spicy Tentura drink from Patra. Greek brandies tend to be sweet and flowery in the nose, the dominant brandy being Metaxa.

## Beer

Greeks are not big beer drinkers, consuming about half the EU per capita average. The most common beer is locally brewed Amstel and Heineken, while major Greek brands include Mythos and Alfa.

A number of smaller boutique breweries have sprouted in recent years, producing some fine brews. Look out for Vergina, a lager produced by the Macedonian Thrace brewery, the organic Piraiki beer made in Piraeus, Hillas from Rodopi and Crete's Rethymniaki blonde and dark lagers. Another small local brewery, Craft, has beer in draught form at bars around the country. Corfu produces a unique non-alcoholic ginger beer called Tsitsibira.

## Hot Beverages

A legacy of Ottoman rule, Greek coffee has a rich aroma and distinctive taste (and is traditionally brewed on hot sand in a special coffee-maker called a *hovoli*). These days it's made in special *briki* (copper pots) and served in a

Greece shares the honours with South Korea for the world's highest per capita consumption of whisky – which sells twice as much as domestically produced ouzo.

small cup. It should be sipped slowly until you reach the mud-like grounds at the bottom (don't drink them) and it is best drunk *metrios* (medium, with one sugar).

Greek coffee is, however, struggling to maintain its place as the national drink against the ubiquitous frappé, the iced instant coffee concoction that you see everywhere drinking. Espresso also comes in a refreshing chilled form (*freddo*).

While *tsai* (tea) is usually a sorry story (hot water and a cheap-brand teabag), the chamomile and *tsai tou vounou* (mountain teas) that grow wild all over Greece are excellent. Crete's endemic Diktamo (dittany) is known for its medicinal qualities and the island's other reputedly medicinal warm tippie (found in many parts of Greece) is *rakomelo* – raki, honey and cloves.

## EAT YOUR WORDS

Get behind the cuisine scene by getting to know the language. For pronunciation guidelines see p752.

### Useful Phrases

#### I want to make a reservation for this evening.

Θέλω να κλείσω ένα τραπέζι για απόψε. *the-lo na kli-so e-na tra-pe-zi ya a-po-pse*

#### A table for... please.

Ένα τραπέζι για... παρακαλώ. *e-na tra-pe-zi ya... pa-ra-ka-lo*

#### I'd like the menu, please.

Το μενού, παρακαλώ. *to me-nu, pa-ra-ka-lo*

#### Do you have a menu in English?

Έχετε το μενού στα αγγλικά? *e-hye-te to me-nu sta ang-li-ka?*

#### I'd like...

Θα ήθελα... *tha i-the-la...*

#### Please bring the bill.

Το λογαριασμό, παρακαλώ. *to lo-ghar-ya-zmo, pa-ra-ka-lo*

#### I'm a vegetarian.

Είμαι χορτοφάγος. *i-me hor-to-fa-ghos*

#### I don't eat meat or dairy products.

Δε τρώω κρέας ή γαλακτοκομικά προϊόντα. *dhen tro-o kre-as i gha-la-kto-ko-mi-ka pro-i-on-da*

## Food Glossary

### STAPLES

ψωμί	<i>pso-mi</i>	bread
βούτυρο	<i>vu-ti-ro</i>	butter
τυρί	<i>ti-ri</i>	cheese
αυγά	<i>a-vgha</i>	eggs
μέλι	<i>me-li</i>	honey
γάλα	<i>gha-la</i>	milk
ελαιόλαδο	<i>e-le-o-la-dho</i>	olive oil
ελιές	<i>e-lyes</i>	olives
πιπέρι	<i>pi-pe-ri</i>	pepper
αλάτι	<i>a-la-ti</i>	salt
ζάχαρη	<i>za-ha-ri</i>	sugar
ζύδι	<i>ksi-dhi</i>	vinegar

### MEAT, FISH & SEAFOOD

βοδινό	<i>vo dhi no</i>	beef
ροφός	<i>ro-fos</i>	blackfish
κοτόπουλο	<i>ko-to-pu-lo</i>	chicken

σουπιά	<i>sou-pia</i>	cuttlefish
κέφαλος	<i>ke-fa-los</i>	grey mullet
σφυρίδα	<i>sfi-ri-da</i>	grouper
ζαμπόν	<i>zam-bon</i>	ham
λαγός	<i>la-ghos</i>	hare
κατσικάκι	<i>ka-tsi-ka-ki</i>	kid (goat)
αρνί	<i>ar-ni</i>	lamb
αστακός	<i>a-sta-kos</i>	lobster
κολιός	<i>ko-li-os</i>	mackerel
μύδια	<i>mi-di-a</i>	mussels
χταπόδι	<i>ohta-po-dhi</i>	octopus
χοιρινό	<i>hyi-ri-no</i>	pork
γαρίδες	<i>gha-ri-dhes</i>	prawns
κουνέλι	<i>kou-ne-li</i>	rabbit
μπαρμπούνια	<i>bar-bou-nya</i>	red mullet
σαρδέλες	<i>sar-dhe-les</i>	sardines
φαγάρι/λιθρίνι/ μελανούρι	<i>fa-ghri/li-thri-ni/ me-la-nu-ri</i>	sea bream
καλαμάρι	<i>ka-la-ma-ri</i>	squid
ξιφίας	<i>ksi-fi-as</i>	swordfish
μοσχάρι	<i>mos-ha-ri</i>	veal
μαρίδα	<i>ma-ri-dha</i>	whitebait

### FRUIT & VEGETABLES

μήλο	<i>mi-lo</i>	apple
αγγινάρα	<i>ang-gi-na-ra</i>	artichoke
σπαράγγι	<i>spa-rang-gi</i>	asparagus
μελιτζάνα	<i>me-li-dza-na</i>	aubergine
λάχανο	<i>la-ha-no</i>	cabbage
καρότο	<i>ka-ro-to</i>	carrot
κεράσι	<i>ke-ra-si</i>	cherry
σκόρδο	<i>skor-dho</i>	garlic
σταφύλια	<i>sta-fi-li-a</i>	grapes
(άγρια) χόρτα	<i>(a-ghri-a) hor-ta</i>	greens, seasonal wild
λεμόνι	<i>le-mo-ni</i>	lemon
κρεμμύδια	<i>kre-mi-dhi-a</i>	onions
πορτοκάλι	<i>por-to-ka-li</i>	orange
ροδάκινο	<i>ro-dha-ki-no</i>	peach
αρακάς	<i>a-ra-kas</i>	peas
πιπεριές	<i>pi-per-yes</i>	peppers
πατάτες	<i>pa-ta-tes</i>	potatoes
σπανάκι	<i>spa-na-ki</i>	spinach
φράουλα	<i>fra-u-la</i>	strawberry
ντομάτα	<i>do-ma-ta</i>	tomato

### DRINKS

μπύρα	<i>bi-ra</i>	beer
καφές	<i>ka-fes</i>	coffee
τσάι	<i>tsa-i</i>	tea
νερό	<i>ne-ro</i>	water
κρασί (κόκκινο/ άσπρο)	<i>kra-si (ko-ki-no/ a-spro)</i>	wine (red/ white)

*Culinaria Greece* is a superb weighty tome that explores Greek cuisine by region, recipes, history, guide to Greek products and wine. Edited by Maranthi Milona, it's a glossy and useful reference with plenty of photos.

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