PACK LIGHTLY

SIX THOUSAND ISLANDS, ONE REAL QUESTION

Greece

Which islands actually fit your time, what the ferries really cost, and where Santorini's price tag hits hardest.



p. 19 Which islands for which traveler: a real decision guide

p. 28 The ferry network mapped, with real crossing times

p. 32 What a day really costs, printed as a till receipt

47 PAGES EUR PRICES SCHENGEN AREA EDITION 2026.08

photo: Wikimedia Commons

Start here

the shape of a Greece trip, what it costs, what to sort first



Greece is not one trip, it is a choice of island groups joined by ferries that run on their own logic. This guide is built around that choice: which islands actually fit the days you have, what a realistic ferry-hop route costs and takes, and the handful of things worth booking ahead before the meltemi wind or the August crowds decide for you. All of it offline in your pocket.

The shape of a trip

Most first trips base in Athens for 2 to 3 nights, then island-hop the Cyclades (Mykonos, Santorini, Naxos) for a week to ten days. Ferries, not flights, set the pace.

What a day costs

Budget travel runs about 50 EUR a day, mid-range around 100, higher on Santorini and Mykonos specifically. The full breakdown is on page 33.

Sort before you fly

EU passport holders need nothing; most others get 90 visa-free days in the Schengen area. Book ferries and July-August hotels early. Page 35 covers what to lock in.





HOW THE LINKS WORK

Some booking links earn Pack Lightly a commission, at no extra cost to you. Full disclosure is on the last page.

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tap a line to jump straight there

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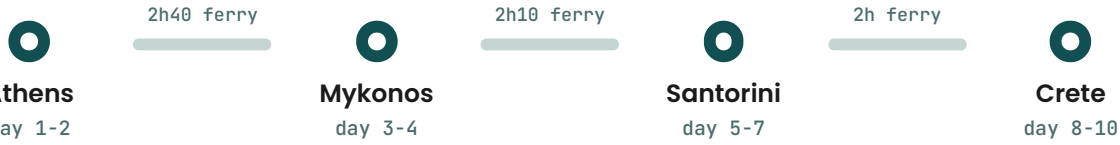
Your trip on one page

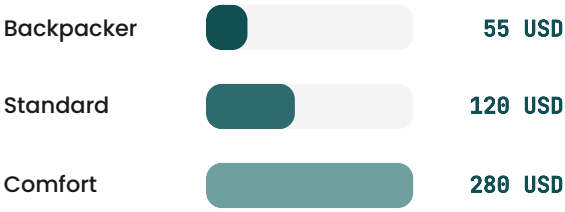
10 days · 55 to 120 USD/day · best May, Jun, Sep, Oct

If you read nothing else, this page is the trip. The classic first-timer route runs Athens to the Cyclades: Mykonos, Santorini, and one quieter island, over 8 to 10 days. Budget from the bars below, not from Santorini caldera-view rack rates. Book the ferries and the first Athens nights before you fly; the rest sorts out on the ground.

THE ROUTE



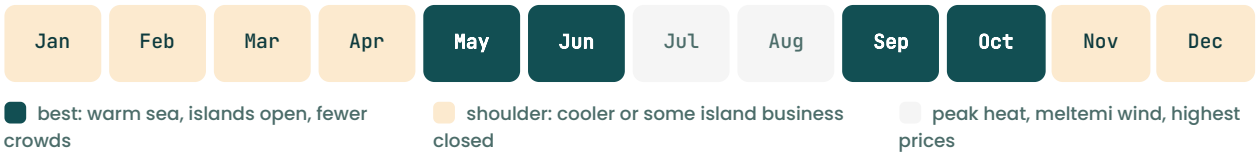
BUDGET PER DAY



BOOK FIRST

01	International flights, 6 to 8 weeks out	Skyscanner
02	Inter-island ferries, especially July-August	Omio
03	eSIM, install before departure	Saily

BEST MONTHS



Greece at a glance

scores 0-100 · pack-lightly country-comparison data

SCORECARD

Tourist infrastructure	80
Safety	85
Budget friendly	65
Nature	85
Food and drinks	90
Culture	95

Budget travel	55 USD/day
Mid-range	120 USD/day
Luxury	280 USD/day

BEACH · CULTURE · ISLAND-HOPPING · FOOD

source: country-comparison tool, 2026-08

SIX FRAMES OF THE TRIP













01

The country

What Greece is, what it is not, who goes, and the island groups worth knowing before you pick a route.

IN THIS CHAPTER

One country, four island groups, four readers 07

What Greece is

10.4M people · 6,000 islands, 227 inhabited · the EU's island nation

A parliamentary republic of 10.4 million people at the southeastern edge of Europe, with roughly 6,000 islands, only 227 of them inhabited. Athens is the capital and the entry point for most trips: 3.1 million people, the main international airport, and the mainland's monuments in walking distance of each other. Greece runs on a mainland-and-islands split that shapes every itinerary. The mainland gives you Athens and the ancient sites; the islands give you the beaches, the whitewashed towns, and the ferry logic this guide spends a full chapter unpacking. Prices on the famous islands, Santorini and Mykonos specifically, have climbed hard since 2022; this guide shows the version that still works without paying the premium everywhere.

CAPITAL
Athens
~3.1M people

POPULATION
10.4M
Greek Orthodox majority

CURRENCY
EUR
eurozone

BEST MONTHS
May, Jun, Sep, Oct
warm sea, fewer crowds

FOUR ISLAND GROUPS, FOUR CHARACTERS



The Cyclades: Mykonos, Santorini, Naxos

the postcard islands · ferry hub · peak Jul-Aug

The islands most first trips are built around. Whitewashed towns, the best ferry connectivity, and the highest prices in the country.



Crete

largest island · own microclimate · year-round appeal

Big enough to be its own trip: mountains, gorges, Minoan ruins, and a food culture distinct from the mainland.



The Dodecanese: Rhodes

closer to Turkey · medieval old town · longer ferry from Athens

A genuine detour from the Cyclades loop, best reached by a short flight rather than a long ferry crossing.



The mainland: Athens

entry point · ancient sites · year-round

Every island trip starts or ends here. Two to three nights covers the Acropolis, Plaka, and the National Archaeological Museum.

WHO THIS GUIDE IS WRITTEN FOR

First-time island-hopper
8 to 10 days, mid-range, the Athens to Mykonos to Santorini loop.

Budget backpacker
55 USD a day, ferries over flights, one quieter island to offset Santorini.

Couple on a splurge
A caldera-view suite in Oia, Santorini's sunset crowd, no regrets about the price.

Hiker or history reader
Crete's Samaria Gorge, Athens's ruins, skipping the party islands entirely.

02

Where to go

Six stops, very different islands. Pick your combination before your dates: Santorini in July and Santorini in October are two different trips.

IN THIS CHAPTER

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Athens

entry point · 2-3 nights minimum · year-round



Athens is where nearly every Greece trip starts and ends, and it rewards more time than the one-night layover most itineraries give it. The Acropolis at opening beats the midday heat and the tour-bus crush; the Plaka neighborhood below it is walkable, if touristy, and the National Archaeological Museum holds artifacts that make the ruins make sense.

Two nights covers the highlights; three lets you add the changing of the guard at Syntagma Square and a proper wander through Monastiraki's flea market. Athens runs hot July through August, comfortably warm the rest of the season.

Buy the Acropolis ticket online and pick an early slot. Same-day lines in peak season run past an hour in the sun.

A restaurant tout physically steering you toward a table in Plaka is a signal to walk two streets further in.

The Acropolis

Go at opening, 8am; the marble reflects brutal glare by midday in summer.

Plaka

The old neighborhood below the Acropolis; walkable, touristy, still worth an evening.

National Archaeological Museum

The single best museum in the country; two hours minimum, air-conditioned relief in summer.

Piraeus port

Where every Cyclades ferry departs; allow an hour from central Athens by metro.

GO DEEPER

The full Greece best-places ranking covers the rest of Athens and every island in this chapter in more depth than fits here.

Mykonos

nightlife island · 2-3 nights · peak Jun-Aug



Mykonos runs on a reputation for beach clubs and nightlife, and the reputation is accurate for the areas built around it: Psarou and Paradise beach charge resort prices for a sunbed and a DJ set. What the reputation undersells is Mykonos Town itself, a genuine Cycladic maze of whitewashed alleys, the five surviving windmills, and a harbor worth an evening walk regardless of budget.

Two nights covers the town and one beach day; three lets you add a boat trip to Delos, the archaeological island a short ferry away. Prices here rival Santorini's; a beach club sunbed alone can run 100 USD or more on peak weekends.

The meltemi wind picks up hard in July and August, some afternoons strong enough to ground the fast ferries. Build a buffer day if your onward ferry matters.

"Little Venice" balconies over the water photograph best about an hour before sunset, before the crowd peaks.

Mykonos Town (Chora)

The whitewashed maze; get lost on purpose, every alley loops back to the harbor.

The windmills

Five remain on the ridge above town; free to view, best at golden hour.

Delos day trip

UNESCO archaeological island, 30 minutes by ferry; book the boat, not a guide, if budget matters.

Ornos or Platis Gialos

Calmer, cheaper beaches than Psarou or Paradise, still a short bus from town.

READ ON Sand-level picks across every island sit in the beaches ranking, and island logistics continue in the islands rundown.

Santorini

the postcard island · 2-3 nights · highest prices in Greece



Santorini is the island every Greece search result leads to, and the caldera view genuinely earns the reputation: the town of Oia sits on the rim of a collapsed volcano, whitewashed houses stacked against blue-domed churches over a 300-metre drop to the sea. The sunset crowd in Oia is real, arrive an hour early to claim a spot along the walking path rather than fighting for one at 7pm.

Fira, the capital, is louder and cheaper than Oia and makes a reasonable base if a caldera-view room is out of budget. A red-sand or black-sand beach day on the island's south side balances the town-hopping; the beaches are volcanic and stony, not the soft-sand postcard image.

A caldera-view room in Oia in August can run 400 USD a night and up. Fira or Imerovigli give a similar view for a fraction of the price.

The island's beaches are volcanic sand and pebble, genuinely hot underfoot at midday. Water shoes are not optional in July and August.

Oia at sunset

The famous shot; arrive by 6pm in peak season to find a spot on the path, not the castle ruins.

Fira to Oia coastal walk

10km along the caldera rim; start early, carry water, the exposed sections have no shade.

Red Beach

Volcanic cliffs over red sand; arrive early, the small cove fills fast and has minimal shade.

Wine tasting, Santo Wines

Volcanic-soil vineyards with a caldera view; book ahead for the sunset tasting slot.

MORE ON THE SITE

Every named beach on the island, ranked, sits in the beaches guide.

Naxos

the quieter Cyclades · 2-3 nights · the budget-relief island



Naxos connects to both Mykonos and Santorini by short ferry, making it an easy mid-loop insert rather than a detour.

Naxos is the largest of the Cyclades and the island most itineraries skip in favor of Mykonos and Santorini, which is precisely why it is worth adding. Prices run noticeably lower, the beaches are longer and sandier, and Naxos Town's Portara, a freestanding marble temple gate from an unfinished 6th-century BC temple, gives the same golden-hour photograph without the Oia crowd.

Two nights covers the town and a beach day at Plaka or Agios Prokopios; three lets you add a half-day into the mountain villages, where the island's citron liqueur and olive presses give a genuine break from the coastal crowd.

The Portara

Free, unguarded, best at sunset; a five-minute walk from the port.

Agios Prokopios beach

Long, soft sand, a short bus from town; genuinely cheaper sunbeds than the Cyclades norm.

Mountain villages (Apiranthos, Halki)

Marble-paved lanes and citron distilleries; a rental car or organized tour covers both in a day.

READ ON More low-crowd islands like Naxos sit in the off-the-beaten-path guide.

Crete and Heraklion

largest island · 3-4 nights · year-round appeal



The Samaria Gorge is a 16km one-way hike, typically 5 to 7 hours; the last bus back from Agia Roumeli leaves by mid-afternoon, plan the start time accordingly.

Crete is large enough to function as a standalone trip: the Minoan ruins at Knossos outside Heraklion, the Samaria Gorge hike on the west coast, and a food culture built on Cretan olive oil and mountain herbs that runs distinct from the rest of Greece. Heraklion itself is a working city rather than a postcard town, worth a night for the archaeological museum and the tannery-district old streets.

Three to four nights covers Heraklion, Knossos, and one west-coast base (Chania is the common pick) for the gorge hike. Crete's own microclimate keeps it warm into late October, a genuine advantage for a shoulder-season trip.

Knossos

The Minoan palace complex; go with the archaeological museum in Heraklion the same day.

Samaria Gorge

One of Europe's longest gorges; open roughly May through October, weather permitting.

Chania Old Town

Venetian harbor, a genuinely walkable old quarter, the common west-coast base.

Elafonisi Beach

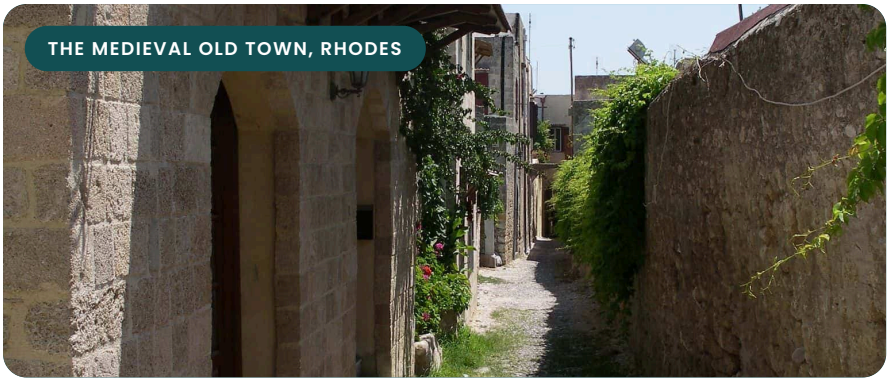
Pink-tinted sand and shallow lagoon water; a long drive from Chania, worth a full day.

GO DEEPER

The full Greece national parks guide covers Samaria and other protected gorges in detail.

Rhodes

the Dodecanese · 2-3 nights · best reached by flight



Cruise ships dock most mornings; the old town is calmest before 10am and again after 4pm once the ship crowds return to port.

Rhodes sits closer to Turkey than to Athens, which makes it a genuine detour from the Cyclades loop rather than an easy add-on: the ferry from Athens runs a long overnight crossing, so a short domestic flight is the realistic way in. The payoff is the medieval old town, a UNESCO World Heritage site with intact fortifications, a different visual register entirely from the whitewashed Cyclades towns.

Two nights covers the old town properly; three lets you add a day trip into the island's hiking trails around Mount Akramitis or the seven-springs walk near Archangelos, both genuine escapes from the cruise-ship crowds that dock in the old harbor.

The medieval old town

UNESCO-listed fortifications; the Street of the Knights is the postcard shot.

Palace of the Grand Master

A restored 14th-century fortress-palace within the old town walls.

Mount Akramitis hike

A genuine trail day away from the coast; guided small-group hikes run from the old town.

KEEP READING The full religious landmarks guide covers Rhodes's monasteries and the rest of the country's access rules.

Ancient sites and monasteries, mapped

21 landmarks · from the Acropolis to Meteora



Meteora monasteries require covered shoulders and knees; some still ask women to wear a wrap-around skirt over trousers, provided at the entrance.

Greece's ancient sites and Byzantine monasteries fall into two access categories that matter for planning: ticketed archaeological sites (the Acropolis, Knossos, Delos) with fixed opening hours and dress codes that rarely apply, and active monasteries (Meteora's clifftop complexes, Mount Athos) where modest dress is enforced and some sites close entirely to visitors of one gender.

Meteora, the six monasteries perched on sandstone pillars in central Greece, sits outside the standard island loop and needs its own day trip or overnight, typically from Athens by train to Kalambaka. Four of the six remain active and open to visitors on a rotating schedule.

The Acropolis

Athens; the essential ticketed site, book online, go at opening.

Delphi

Mainland, day trip from Athens; the Oracle's sanctuary on a dramatic mountainside.

Meteora

Central Greece; six clifftop monasteries, four active and open on a rotating schedule.

Knossos

Crete, near Heraklion; the Minoan palace complex, pair with the archaeological museum.

GO DEEPER All 21 sites, with exact access rules and dress codes, are ranked in the religious landmarks guide.

Beaches, matched to what you want

seven islands · sand type, crowd level, and cost compared

Greek beaches vary more than the postcard shots suggest: soft golden sand on Naxos, volcanic pebble on Santorini, pink-tinted sand on Crete. The matrix below replaces a page of prose: pick the column you care about, read down.

BEACH	ISLAND	SAND	QUIET	BUDGET
Agios Prokopios	Naxos	●●●	●●○	●●●
Red Beach	Santorini	●○○	○○○	○○○
Elafonisi	Crete	●●●	●○○	●○○
Ornos	Mykonos	●●○	●○○	●●○
Psarou	Mykonos	●●○	○○○	○○○
Tsampika	Rhodes	●●●	●○○	●●○
Plaka	Naxos	●●●	●●○	●●●

● filled dots = stronger fit (3 = built for it)

assessment: pack-lightly beaches cluster, 2026-08

Want soft sand and a lower bill: Naxos wins outright. Want the famous view and will pay for it: Santorini or Mykonos, no way around the cost.

Sunbed rental at the famous beach clubs is not optional in practice; bring your own towel and go rogue on the less-developed stretches instead.

ON THE WEBSITE Every named beach with access notes in the beaches ranking; full island profiles in the islands rundown.

Quieter islands worth the detour

for a second Greece trip, or a first one that skips the crowds entirely

The Cyclades headline every search result, but the wider Dodecanese and eastern Aegean hold islands that see a fraction of Santorini's traffic. Karpathos, south of Rhodes, keeps traditional dress and dance alive in its mountain villages and pairs some of the country's best windsurfing with near-empty beaches. Symi, a short boat from Rhodes, packs pastel Italianate architecture into a single harbor town with almost none of Mykonos's nightlife economy.

Karpathos

Between Crete and Rhodes; traditional villages, strong windsurf conditions, low tourist density.

Symi

A short boat from Rhodes; pastel neoclassical harbor, a genuine day-trip or overnight escape.

GO DEEPER

The full off-the-beaten-path guide maps routes to the far Dodecanese in detail.

03

Which islands for which traveler

Every Greece guide lists islands. Almost none tells you which combination actually fits your days, your budget, and what you came for. This chapter does.

IN THIS CHAPTER

The island-fit matrix 19

Santorini or Mykonos, not both 20

How many islands actually fits 21

The island-fit matrix

six islands, five questions, one honest answer per row

Every one of these islands photographs well. What differs is what a day there actually feels like, and that is the part travel content usually skips. Match your priority to the column, not the hashtag.

ISLAND	NIGHTLIFE	BUDGET FIT	FAMILY FIT	QUIET
Mykonos	●●●	○○○	○○○	○○○
Santorini	●○○	○○○	●○○	●○○
Naxos	●○○	●●●	●●●	●●○
Crete	●○○	●●○	●●●	●●○
Rhodes	●●○	●●○	●●○	●○○
Karpathos / Symi	○○○	●●○	●●○	●●●

● filled dots = stronger fit (3 = built for it)

assessment: pack-lightly Greece cluster, 2026-08

GO DEEPER

The comparison continues on the next page: why Santorini and Mykonos rarely both belong in the same short trip.

Santorini or Mykonos, not both

the pairing every algorithm recommends and almost no itinerary needs

Santorini and Mykonos sit two hours apart by ferry and show up together in nearly every "best of Greece" list, which is precisely why first-time visitors often book both on a short trip and regret the pace. The two islands solve different problems, and picking one properly beats splitting three nights across both.

CHOOSE SANTORINI IF

You want the view above the scene
The caldera and the sunset are the point. Nightlife exists but is not the draw.

You are traveling as a couple
Santorini's hotel stock skews toward romantic, quiet, caldera-view rooms.

CHOOSE MYKONOS IF

You want beach clubs and nightlife
The scene, not the view, is the point. Book a beach club sunbed ahead in peak season.

You are traveling in a group
Mykonos's social scene and villa stock suit a group trip better than Santorini's.

If the trip is 10 days or longer, both islands fit without feeling rushed. Under a week, pick one and add Naxos for the budget relief instead.

MORE ON THE SITE

Full island-by-island comparisons sit in the islands rundown.

How many islands actually fit

the math tourists get wrong every summer

Ferry schedules, not ambition, set the real limit on how many islands fit into a trip. Every island added costs a travel day, and a fast ferry can be cancelled by the meltemi wind with a few hours' notice in July and August. The rule that holds up: budget one full travel day per island change, and never schedule a flight home the same day as a ferry arrival.

TRIP LENGTH	REALISTIC ISLANDS	WHAT TO SKIP
5 to 6 days	1, plus Athens	Island-hopping entirely; base and day-trip instead
7 to 9 days	2	A third island; it becomes a transit day, not a visit
10 to 14 days	3	Rhodes or Crete unless you drop a Cyclades island
15+ days	4 or more	Nothing, but keep a buffer day for meltemi delays

assessment: pack-lightly Greece cluster, ferry schedule analysis, 2026-08

03

READ ON The ferry network itself, with real crossing times, is mapped starting on page 29.

04

Stay and go deeper

Where to sleep on each island, and the tours worth paying for instead of arranging piecemeal on the ground.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Athens and Santorini 23

Mykonos and Naxos 24

Crete and Rhodes 25

Where to stay: Athens and Santorini

prices per night, double room · book Santorini early, decide Athens on the ground

Athens rooms stay available close to the date outside major holidays; book only your first night if flying in. Santorini is the exception: July and August rooms, especially caldera-view, sell out weeks ahead and prices can double inside a season.

Athens

hostel **25 USD** mid **90 USD** comfort **180 USD**

Plaka or Monastiraki for walking distance to the Acropolis and easy metro to Piraeus. Check what a room costs near Plaka before you commit; dorm beds run through Hostelworld.

Santorini (Fira)

hostel **35 USD** mid **180 USD** comfort **450 USD**

Fira or Imerovigli give a caldera view for less than Oia's premium. Compare caldera-view rooms tonight before defaulting to the first search result.

Hotels and rooms across both stops, filtered to what is actually bookable tonight. **Find Stays**

TOURS WORTH PAYING FOR

Acropolis of Athens historical tour

from 35 USD
5.0 (73 reviews)
3 hours

Classic Athens food tour with market visit

from 70 USD
5.0 (65 reviews)
4 hours

Santorini airport or port private transfer

from 29 USD
5.0 (84 reviews)
30 min

Live Viator tours, prices captured August 2026, ratings from verified bookings. Tap a card to book.

Where to stay: Mykonos and Naxos

prices per night, double room

Mykonos Town

hostel 40 USD mid 170 USD comfort 400 USD

Stay in town for walkability; Ornos or Platis Gialos for a calmer, cheaper beach base. Check tonight's rates in Mykonos Town, or dorm beds via Hostelworld.

Naxos Town

hostel 22 USD mid 75 USD comfort 160 USD

Naxos delivers the same Cyclades look for noticeably less than its famous neighbors. Compare rooms near the Portara before booking the first option.

TOURS WORTH PAYING FOR

Mykonos boat tour with unlimited drinks

from 88 USD
5.0 (33 reviews)
2.5 hours

Naxos shared boat trip to Rina Cave

from 33 USD
5.0 (75 reviews)
2 hours

Naxos villages small-group minibus tour

from 100 USD
5.0 (39 reviews)
6 hours

Live Viator tours, prices captured August 2026, ratings from verified bookings. Tap a card to book.

Where to stay: Crete and Rhodes

prices per night, double room

Heraklion (Crete)

hostel **25 USD** mid **85 USD** comfort **170 USD**

Heraklion for the ruins and museum, Chania for a prettier old-town base near Samaria. Check rates near Heraklion's old harbor before booking.

Rhodes Town

hostel **28 USD** mid **95 USD** comfort **200 USD**

Stay inside or just outside the medieval walls for the shortest walk to the old town. See what a room near the old town costs tonight.

TOURS WORTH PAYING FOR

Cretan wine tasting experience

from 41 USD
5.0 (16 reviews)
1 hour

Heraklion street food and wine walking tour

from 68 USD
5.0 (21 reviews)
4 hours

Rhodes 2-hour sea cruise mini adventure

from 35 USD
5.0 (25 reviews)
2 hours

Live Viator tours, prices captured August 2026, ratings from verified bookings. Tap a card to book.

05

Routes and the ferry network

Eight paths by persona and budget, the ferry network mapped with real crossing times, and a 10-day route worked out day by day.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Pick your trip 27

The ferry network, mapped 29

The 10-day route, day by day 30

Pick your trip

three dimensions, eight paths · find yours, jump to the matching itinerary

Who you travel with, how long you have, and what you spend per night decide the route before any list of islands does. Find your row below; the 10-day route on the next spread covers path two in full.

SOLO · 7D · BACKPACKER

Athens, Naxos, Santorini

USD 550 · hostels and ferries

- Athens 2n: Acropolis, Plaka
- Naxos 3n: budget-relief island
- Santorini 2n: Fira, not Oia

SOLO · 10D · BACKPACKER

Athens, Mykonos, Santorini, Crete

USD 800 · hostels and ferries

- Athens 2 · Mykonos 2
- Santorini 3
- Crete 3: Heraklion + Chania

COUPLE · 10D · MID

Athens, Mykonos, Santorini

USD 2,400 for 2 · mid-range hotels

- Athens 2: boutique central
- Mykonos 3: town base
- Santorini 5: Fira caldera view

COUPLE · 7D · COMFORT

Santorini only, splurge

USD 4,200 for 2 · caldera suite

- Athens 1: layover night
- Santorini 6: Oia caldera suite

FAMILY · 10D · MID

Athens, Naxos, Crete

USD 4,600 · family of 4

- Athens 3: museum + ruins
- Naxos 4: soft-sand beach days
- Crete 3: Knossos + Elafonisi

FAMILY · 5D · COMFORT

Athens and Naxos, no ferry stress

USD 2,800 · family of 4

- Athens 2: central hotel
- Naxos 3: family-friendly beach

HIKER · 12D · MID

Athens, Crete, Samaria Gorge

USD 1,700 · hostels and gear

- Athens 2 · Delphi day trip
- Chania 4 · Samaria Gorge hike
- Heraklion 3: Knossos

RETIREE · 14D · COMFORT

Athens, Santorini, Rhodes, flights not ferries

USD 6,200 per couple

- Athens 4: 5-star central
- Santorini 5: caldera suite
- Rhodes 5: old-town hotel, flight in

WORTH A READ

Full day-by-day versions online: the 7-day route, the 14-day route, and the 28-day route.

The ferry network, mapped

Athens out to the Cyclades, down to Crete, across to Rhodes

Ferries, not flights, are the backbone of an island-hopping trip. Fast ferries (catamarans) cut crossing times roughly in half over the older conventional boats, at a higher price; both run from Piraeus, Athens's port, reached by metro in about an hour from the center.



The 10-day route, day by day

Athens, Mykonos, Santorini, Crete · the fullest first-timer loop

1-2AthensLand, the Acropolis at opening, Plaka in the evening, the archaeological museum on day two.
3-4MykonosFerry from Piraeus, town wander, windmills at golden hour, a Delos day trip if the wind allows.
5-7SantoriniFerry onward, Oia sunset on arrival evening, the caldera walk, a Red Beach afternoon.
8-10Crete (Heraklion)Ferry to Heraklion, Knossos and the archaeological museum, fly home from Heraklion or back via Athens.

READ ON

The full 14-day route adds Naxos and more time on each island for travelers with extra days.

06

When to go, what it costs

Weather, crowds and prices by month, then a day's spending itemized at three travel styles.

IN THIS CHAPTER

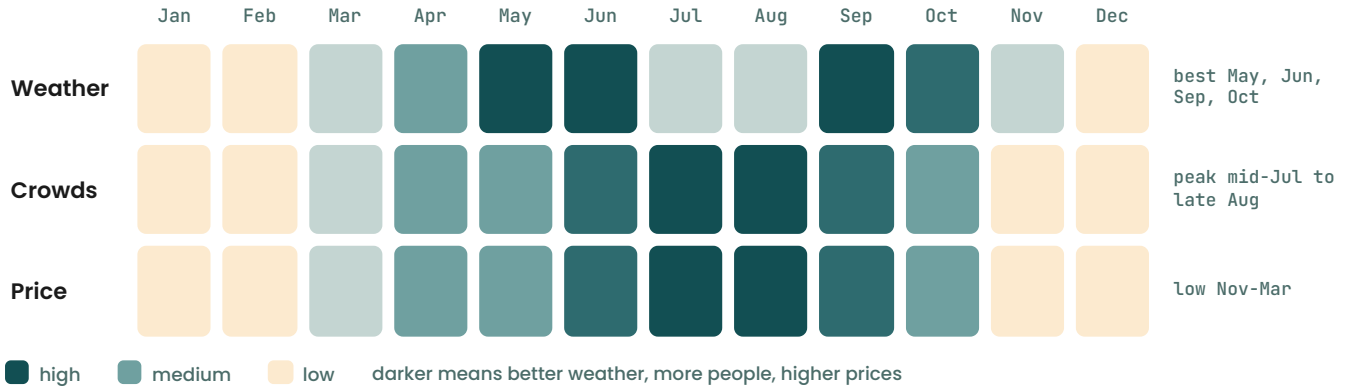
Weather, crowds, price 31

What a day really costs 32

Weather, crowds, price

12-month calendar · Cyclades-weighted

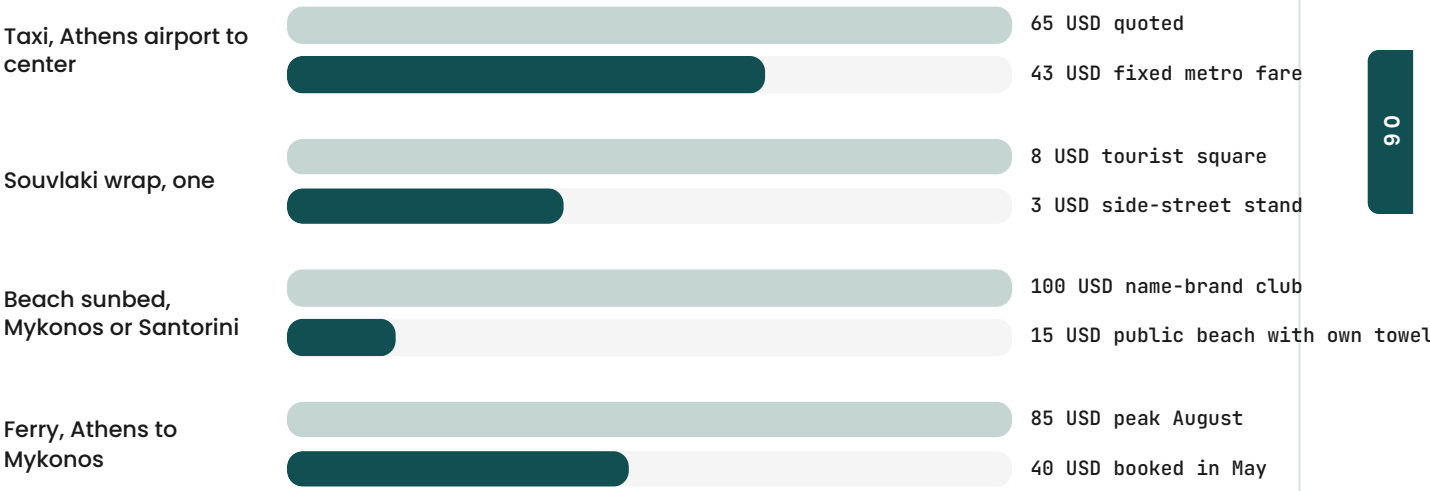
Greece's year splits around the sea temperature and the meltemi wind rather than rain: swimmable and mild from May through October, with a punishing midsummer stretch in July and August when the meltemi hammers the Cyclades and cruise crowds peak in the same weeks. Crowds and prices track the warm months closely, with the hardest peak from mid-July to late August.



source: best-travel-time dataset · captured 2026-08-15

WHAT THINGS COST: QUOTED VS PAID

SAMPLE DATA



06

What a day costs

three travel styles · printed the way the day spends it

Daily budgets hide in averages, so here is the day itemized instead: a bed, three meals, getting around, one thing worth doing, and the evening drink. Three real versions of the same Tuesday, split between an island day and an Athens day.

A DAY IN GREECE

* backpacker *

hostel dorm bed	25.00
Greek coffee + bougatsa	4.00
souvlaki wrap lunch	3.50
taverna dinner, side street	12.00
local bus + walking	2.00
Acropolis entry	5.00
ouzo, one round	3.00
water + snacks	2.50
TOTAL / DAY	**~50 USD**

budget-calculator data · 2026-08-15

A DAY IN GREECE

* standard *

3-star hotel double, half	60.00
cafe breakfast	10.00
taverna lunch	15.00
dinner with wine	28.00
local ferry or taxi	10.00
guided tour, split	18.00
sunset drinks	10.00
TOTAL / DAY	**~120 USD**

budget-calculator data · 2026-08-15

A DAY IN GREECE

* comfort *

caldera-view suite, half	180.00
hotel breakfast	incl.
restaurant lunch	32.00
dinner, good table	55.00
private driver, half day	40.00
wine tasting tour	incl. above
sunset cocktails x2	28.00
TOTAL / DAY	**~280 USD**

budget-calculator data · 2026-08-15

Run the same numbers for your own dates, group size and currency in the free budget calculator on pack-lightly.com.

Open the Budget Calculator

Santorini and Mykonos run 30 to 60 percent above the country average on rooms and sunbeds. Naxos and Crete hold closer to the numbers above.

Greece is eurozone; no exchange needed with EUR cash or cards. Card works nearly everywhere, even small tavernas.

07

Practical

Visa, money, ferries, eSIM, health, packing. The boring parts you only read once. Done right, you never think about them again.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Book in this order 34

Money and ferries 35

Bed, bag, signal 36

Health basics 37

Book in this order

four things before you fly · everything else on the ground

Greece rewards booking ferries and July-August rooms ahead and leaving the rest loose. EU passport holders need nothing for entry; most other nationalities get 90 visa-free days in the Schengen area, a five-minute check rather than an application. Four things genuinely reward locking in early, in this order.

8 wk before

International flights

Fares to Athens bottom out six to eight weeks ahead for the May-June and September-October windows. Direct flights from most of Europe run under 4 hours.

Compare fares on Skyscanner

4 wk before

Insurance + visa check

Buy travel insurance before booking ferries; some policies exclude watercraft cancellation cover. Confirm your entry rule: EU/EEA passports need nothing, most others get 90 visa-free days in Schengen.

Check entry rules per passport

2 wk before

Ferries + first Athens nights

Book every inter-island ferry leg now, especially July-August; fast ferries sell out and the meltemi wind cancels sailings with short notice. First two Athens nights too.

Book ferries on Omio

1 wk before

eSIM

Install before departure, activate on the plane. Coverage is strong across the mainland and major islands; smaller islands can thin out.

Set up a Saily eSIM

EU passport holders need only a valid ID or passport, no expiry buffer beyond normal validity. Non-EU passports should check the standard 6-months-beyond-travel rule.

Build a buffer day between your last ferry and any flight home. The meltemi wind grounds fast ferries with only a few hours' notice in July and August.

Money and ferries

eurozone, card-friendly · fast ferries for time, conventional for budget

Card works nearly everywhere in Greece, even small tavernas and beach kiosks; carrying cash is a convenience, not a necessity, though small islands and rural tavernas sometimes prefer it. Greece is eurozone, so no currency exchange is needed coming from most of Europe.

ITEM	BACKPACKER	MID	COMFORT
Hostel dorm / hotel double	USD 25	USD 90	USD 180
Street meal / taverna	USD 3.50	USD 15	USD 32
House wine, glass	USD 4	USD 7	USD 14
Ferry, short inter-island leg	USD 20	USD 40	USD 85
Beach sunbed	USD 10	USD 30	USD 100

verified 2026-08-15 · per-category numbers in the budget guide

FERRIES: FAST VS CONVENTIONAL

Fast ferries (catamarans, operated mainly by SeaJets and Hellenic Seaways) cut crossing times roughly in half over conventional boats (Blue Star Ferries), at 40 to 60 percent more cost. For a short trip, the fast ferry is usually worth it; for a longer, slower trip, conventional ferries save real money and add a slice of actual Greek ferry-deck life. Book through Omio, which aggregates both operators. Athens's airport connects to Piraeus port by metro (about an hour) or a taxi (30 to 40 minutes outside rush hour).

Dynamic currency conversion at card terminals adds 4 to 7 percent. Always choose to pay in EUR, never "your home currency", when the terminal asks.

Domestic airlines (Aegean, Olympic Air) are named without links where no partner relation exists; book them direct for island-to-island flights.

THE FULL PICTURE

The complete cost model sits in the budget breakdown, and diving logistics between islands in the diving guide.

Bed, bag, signal

hotels · packing for islands and Athens heat · eSIM, the three solved problems

BED

For mid-range and above, Stay22 wins on free-cancellation policy and inventory depth across the islands. For dorms and social hostels, Hostelworld has the deeper review pool. For small family-run rooms on Naxos or Crete, message the owner directly; a genuine saving over the booking-platform rate is common.

BAG: THE 10-DAY ISLAND-HOP LIST

- [ ] Light layers for Athens heat, one warm layer for ferry decks and evening wind
- [ ] Sandals plus one closed shoe for cobblestones and gorge trails
- [ ] Water shoes (Santorini and other volcanic-sand beaches are genuinely hot and sharp underfoot)
- [ ] Starter med-kit: motion-sickness tablets for ferry crossings, paracetamol, electrolytes
- [ ] SPF 50, the sun is stronger than it feels with the sea breeze
- [ ] Type C/F plug adapter (EU standard)
- [ ] 20,000 mAh power bank
- [ ] Two payment cards in separate pockets
- [ ] Dry bag for ferry-deck spray and beach days
- [ ] A scarf or wrap for the rare monastery dress code

Signal. Buy the eSIM the day before you fly and activate it on the plane. A 5 GB plan covers a week; 10 GB covers ten days of maps, ferry-schedule checks and uploads.

Set up a Saily eSIM

07

GO DEEPER The full seasonal packing list, including gorge-hike and ferry-specific notes, sits in the packing list.

Health basics

no required vaccines for most travelers · heat and ferry motion are the real risks

Greece requires no mandatory vaccinations for travelers arriving from the EU, UK, or North America; routine vaccines are the standard travel-clinic recommendation, not a legal entry requirement. The two genuine, unglamorous risks are heat exhaustion on midsummer island days and ferry-crossing motion sickness on the longer conventional-boat routes, both manageable with basic precautions.

PRACTICAL BASICS

- [ ] Tap water is safe to drink on the mainland and most islands; some smaller islands rely on bottled water, check locally
- [ ] Heat: carry water constantly in July and August, the midday sun on white stone streets is more intense than it looks
- [ ] Ferry motion: take medication before boarding, not after symptoms start, especially on longer conventional-ferry legs
- [ ] EU citizens: bring an EHIC or GHIC card for reciprocal public healthcare access
- [ ] Pharmacies (marked with a green cross) are widely available and staff commonly speak English

MORE ON THE SITE

The national parks guide covers gorge-hike specific health notes, including the Samaria Gorge's limited mid-route water access.

08

Safe and smart

The scams that target island tourists specifically, the etiquette that matters, and the language minimum that changes how locals respond.

IN THIS CHAPTER

The scams that still work 39

Etiquette: do and do not 40

Emergency numbers + phrases 41

The scams that still work

constant in island tourist zones, rare on the mainland outside them

Greece is genuinely safe by most measures; violent crime against tourists is rare. What is constant is a small set of overcharges and pressure tactics that run specifically on island visitors and Athens's tourist zones. Knowing three of them protects most of the money tourists actually lose.

SCAM 01

The Athens taxi meter workaround

A driver claims the meter is broken or quotes a flat fare well above the metered rate, common at the airport and Piraeus port.

The fix: insist on the meter, or use a ride app; Athens has fixed airport-to-center fares posted at the taxi rank.

SCAM 02

The unmarked beach-club sunbed bill

A "free" sunbed at a beach bar comes with an unstated minimum spend that appears only on the final bill.

The fix: ask the minimum spend before sitting down. Public beaches with your own towel exist on every island.

SCAM 03

The rental ATV or scooter damage claim

On return, the rental shop "finds" pre-existing damage and demands cash, holding a passport or large deposit as leverage.

The fix: video every panel at pickup with the shop staff in frame. Use a shop with visible reviews, not the cheapest roadside stand.

BONUS

The restaurant "recommended" upsell

A waiter brings unordered "recommended" dishes or a bottle of water and charges for them without asking.

The fix: confirm anything placed on the table that you did not order before touching it.

MORE ON THE SITE

The broader safety picture for the whole country is in the Greece hub.

Etiquette: the short list

first four are load-bearing · last four save you money and awkwardness

Eight things that matter. The first four cause real offense if ignored; the last four mostly smooth the day. Everything else is atmosphere.

DO

Dress modestly at churches and monasteries

Covered shoulders and knees are enforced at Meteora and most active monasteries, not optional courtesy.

DO NOT

Photograph military or naval sites

Greece takes this seriously near border areas and installations; signage is usually clear, respect it.

DO

Greet with a handshake, keep some distance

A firm handshake and direct eye contact is standard; closer contact follows once a relationship forms.

DO NOT

Make the "moutza" hand gesture

An open palm pushed toward someone's face is a serious insult in Greece, unlike its neutral meaning elsewhere.

DO

Tip 5 to 10 percent at restaurants

Rounding up or a small note is standard; service is not usually included in the bill.

DO NOT

Wear swimwear away from the beach

Cover up walking through town; it is a common and easily avoided tourist misstep.

DO

Confirm the sunbed minimum spend upfront

Ask before sitting down at a beach club; it avoids the most common island billing surprise.

DO NOT

Rush a taverna meal

Greek dining runs slow by design; asking for the bill quickly reads as odd, not efficient.

Greeks are direct and warm at once; a loud conversation is not an argument, and hospitality (an offered coffee, a extra plate) is genuine, not a sales tactic.

A "cover charge" (bread, olives, water) appearing automatically on a taverna bill is standard practice, not a scam, usually 1 to 3 EUR per person.

KEEP READING Dress codes and access rules for monasteries sit on page 15 in the religious landmarks guide.

Emergency numbers and eight phrases

save the numbers now · the phrases change how locals respond

EUROPEAN EMERGENCY
112
English spoken, 24/7

TOURIST POLICE
1571
English, nationwide

AMBULANCE
166
nationwide

COAST GUARD
108
ferry and boat emergencies

US EMBASSY ATHENS
+30 21 0721 2951
citizen services

HYGEIA HOSPITAL ATHENS
+30 21 0686 7000
private, English-speaking staff

EIGHT PHRASES THAT CHANGE HOW LOCALS RESPOND

ENGLISH	GREEK (PHONETIC)	NOTES
Hello	yassas (formal) / yassou	yassou is casual, use with peers
Thank you	efharisto	stress the third syllable
Yes / No	ne / ohi	"ne" sounds like "no" in English, a common mix-up
How much?	poso kani?	useful at markets and small tavernas
The bill, please	to logariasmo, parakalo	tavernas rarely bring it unprompted
Where is the ferry port?	pou ine to limani?	"limani" is port, useful island-hopping
Sorry / excuse me	signomi	universal apology and attention-getter
Help!	voithia!	emergencies only

Save 112 and your hotel's address in your phone before the first ferry departure; signal can drop mid-crossing.

These same phrases print as a wallet card on the next chapter's print-cards page; cut it out and keep it with your room key.

09

Tools and reference

The live tools this guide was built from, the cut-out cards for your wallet, and the sources behind every number.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Take the live tools with you 43

Print cards: cut, fold, take 44

Sources and methodology 45

A note on the links 47

Take the live tools with you

scan to open · data updates after this PDF was printed

This guide is a snapshot; the tools behind it keep updating. Scan a code or type the short URL. Each one is preloaded with the same Greece data this guide was built from.

Trip Budget Calculator

Greece: 55 USD/day backpacker, 280 USD/day comfort.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/budget-calculator/

Country Map

Every stop in this guide mapped, from Athens to Rhodes.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/country-map/

Best Time to Travel

Best: May, Jun, Sep, Oct. Month-by-month weather for 140+ countries.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/best-travel-time-worldmap/

Visa Checker

EU/EEA: nothing needed. Most others: 90 visa-free days.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/visa-checker/

Print cards: cut, fold, take

print at 100% scale · credit-card size, 85 x 54 mm

Print this page on A4 or US Letter at 100 percent (no fit-to-page), cut along the dashed lines, and the two cards live in your wallet for the trip. The form fields are interactive in Acrobat and iOS Preview if you would rather type than write.

GREEK · ESSENTIALS

Hello	yassas / yassou
Thank you	efharisto
Yes / No	ne / ohi
How much?	poso kani?
The bill, please	to logariasmo, parakalo
Where is the port?	pou ine to limani?
Help!	voithia!
Sorry	signomi

pack-lightly.com

EMERGENCY · GREECE

European emergency	112
Tourist Police	1571
Coast Guard	108
US Embassy Athens	+30 21 0721 2951

My hotel: _____

Address: _____

Insurance #: _____

Left card front, right card back: print double-sided on the short edge and they fold into one.

Lost the guide, kept the card? The QR opens the live Greece hub with every page this guide links to, plus updates published after this edition went to print.

pack-lightly.com/greece/

Photograph both cards before you cut. A phone copy of the emergency card still works when the wallet is back at the hotel.

Ask reception to write your hotel name and address for taxi and ferry-port staff; useful on islands where English signage thins out.

Sources and methodology

every number traces to a dated source



WRITTEN BY

Wouter van Kemenade

Founder of Pack Lightly. Performance-marketing background, data-led travel writing. Every number in this guide is verified against a source listed below; if a price moves more than 15 percent, the next edition flags it.

SOURCES USED IN THIS EDITION

1. Hotel and hostel pricing: Stay22 and Hostelworld snapshot 2026-08-15, Athens, Cyclades and Crete listings.
2. Ferry schedules and pricing: Omio aggregated data, captured 2026-08-15.
3. Visa policy: Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Schengen visa portal, retrieved 2026-08-15.
4. Travel advisories: FCDO and US State Department, last update 2026-07.
5. Climate: best-travel-time dataset, 10-year averages, captured 2026-08-15.
6. Tour data and prices: Viator Partner API, captured 2026-08-15.
7. Pack Lightly Greece cluster pages, retrieved 2026-08-15: hub · islands · beaches · religious landmarks

Methodology. Pack Lightly's country scores aggregate eleven dimensions into the 0-100 scorecard on page 5, re-scored every six months. Budget figures come from the live budget-calculator dataset, climate verdicts from the best-travel-time dataset, both stamped with their capture date where they appear.

What changed in edition 2026.08: first release on the v2 design standard. Next planned update: February 2027. Not covered here: cruise stopovers, sailing charters, medical tourism.

Photo credits. Every photograph is sourced from Wikimedia Commons under a Creative Commons or public-domain license. The full per-image list, with each photographer and license, is on the next page. The cover shows the Santorini caldera at sunset.

Image credits

every photo, its author and license

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1. **Medieval street, Rhodes old town**. Shadowgate, CC BY 2.0.
2. **Samaria Gorge, Crete**. Sebastian Mierzwa, CC BY-SA 4.0.
3. **Santorini caldera**. Sidvics, CC BY-SA 4.0.
4. **The Acropolis and Parthenon, Athens**. Giles Laurent, CC BY-SA 4.0.
5. **The Portara temple gate, Naxos**. Jean Housen, CC BY-SA 4.0.
6. **Whitewashed buildings above the Santorini caldera**. TomasEE, CC BY 3.0.
7. **Windmills above Mykonos Town**. Joe deSousa, CC0.

Tour data and prices: Viator Partner API, captured August 2026. Author portrait and brand marks: Pack Lightly.

A note on the links in this guide

disclosure · why this guide is free

This guide is free because some of the booking links inside it are affiliate links. When a reader books a stay, a flight, a ferry, a tour, or an eSIM through one of those links, the merchant pays Pack Lightly. The reader pays the same price either way.

The pick comes before the partner. An island or a ferry route is chosen for the trip it makes, and where a partner link exists for it that link is used; where none does, the plain link still points there. A scam pattern is still called out plainly, and a cheaper island that beats the famous one keeps the slot. The commission funds the guide, it does not choose for it.

Questions, corrections, or an island you tested that belongs in the next edition: write to hello@pack-lightly.com.

Partners linked in this edition: Skyscanner · Stay22 · Hostelworld · Omio · Saily · Viator · Sherpa

Links can outlive a print run. If one stops working, the live version of every page in this guide sits under pack-lightly.com/greece.

This file is versioned; the edition is on the cover. The next planned update lands February 2027 and replaces this file at the same download.

09