

## Geography of Greece

Greece is a country of South Eastern Europe located in the Balkan peninsula with a surface area of 309,050 km<sup>2</sup> (including islets, rocks outcrops, rivers, lakes and the Aegean basin) and a population of 11,041,100 (2004). It's limited to the west by the Ionian sea; to the South by the Mediterranean; to the North by Albania, FYROM (Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia) and Bulgaria and to the East by Turkey.

The country ranges approximately in latitude from 35° N to 42° N and in longitude from 19° E to 29° 38' E.

Greece consists of three main geographical areas or features defined as the mainland, the around of 3,000 islands (6,000 including islets and rocks outcrops) and the Aegean basin.

About 80% of Greece is mountainous making it one of the most mountainous countries of Europe. Also it has a total coastline of around 16,000 kilometers (ranked 10<sup>th</sup> in the world). Due to its complex geography valleys, rivers, lakes, gulfs, bays and other geographical accidents abound in this country. All the above give some special attraction to Greece which made of this place all throughout history a popular spot for visitors, invaders and the most important for the surge of a great civilization that continues up to these days, the Greek.

**Area:** 309,050 km<sup>2</sup> (including islets, rocks outcrops, rivers, lakes and the Aegean basin), slightly bigger than Italy or Arizona. In area ranks 70<sup>th</sup> in the world and is the largest country of the Balkans.

**Population:** 11,041,100 (according to Eurostat 2004 analysis. Also this figure does not include foreign non-citizen immigrants). In population ranks 74<sup>th</sup> in the world and second in the Balkans only after Romania.

**Border countries:** Albania 282 km, Bulgaria 494 km, Turkey 931 km (206 km in the Evros river at NE Greece and 725 km in the Aegean from Thrace to Rhodes), the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia 228 km.

**Coastline:** 15,021 kms, but if we include the islets and rocks outcrops of the Aegean it is around 16,000 kms. Ranks 10<sup>th</sup> in the world, just behind the United States and 2<sup>nd</sup> in Europe behind Norway. When studied coastline length sometimes not all islets and rocks outcrops are measured due to its number and because of their changing nature and measuring difficulty.

**Maximum straight line distances (as the crow flies):** 800 kms in a South-North straight line 992 kms in a South East-North West straight line (that's much more than the distance from Vienna to Amsterdam crossing all over Germany or the same as from NYC to Charleston, SC).

**Climate:** Three well defined climatological areas; Mediterranean, Alpine, and Mid-European Temperate.

**Natural resources:** bauxite, coal in lignite form, magnesite, petroleum, marble, zinc, nickel, lead, hydropower, wheat, fruit and vegetables, tobacco, olives, salt, sugar beets, grapes, cotton, livestock.

**Natural hazards:** severe earthquakes.

**Environment - current issues:** air pollution; water pollution

**Environment - international agreements:**

*party to:* Air Pollution, Air Pollution-Nitrogen Oxides, Air Pollution-Sulphur 94, Antarctic-Environmental Protocol, Antarctic Treaty, Biodiversity, Climate Change, Desertification, Endangered Species, Environmental Modification, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, Marine Dumping, Nuclear Test Ban, Ozone Layer Protection, Ship Pollution, Tropical Timber 83, Tropical Timber 94, Wetlands

*signed, but not ratified:* Air Pollution-Persistent Organic Pollutants, Air Pollution-Volatile Organic Compounds, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol.



**COMPREHENSIVE GEOGRAPHY STUDY OF GREECE:**

As mentioned in the first part of this study we can divide the country in three main geographic areas or features; namely the mainland, the islands and the Aegean basin. But making a more detailed geographical subdivision of the country into:

- Northern Greece
- North Western Greece and Pindus range
- Central Greece

- The Peloponnese
- The Aegean Basin which in turn subdivides into
  - The North Eastern Islands
  - The Sporades
  - The Cyclades
  - The Saronic islands
  - The Dodecanesse
- Crete
- The Ionian Islands

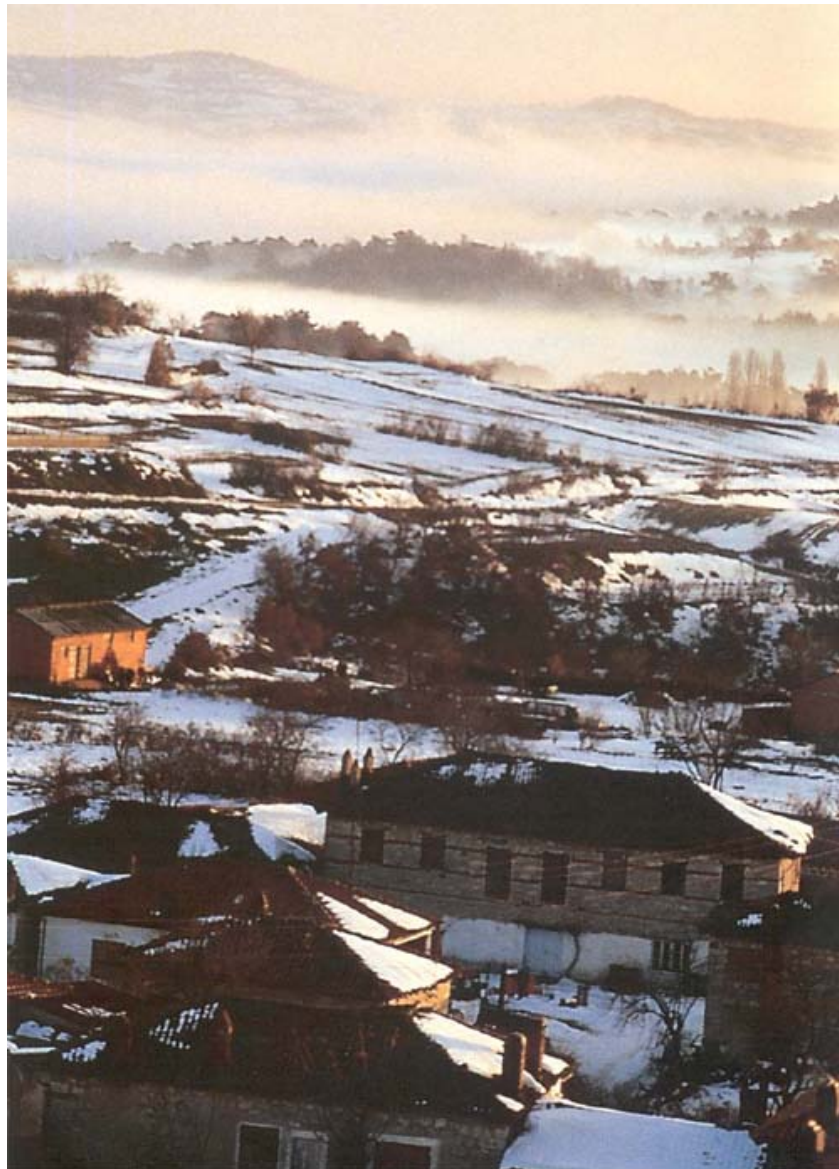
Also it must be mentioned the political subdivision of Greece in 10 peripheries namely:

- The Aegean Islands
- Macedonia
- Central Greece
- Peloponnese
- Thrace
- Thessaly
- Crete
- Epirus
- Ionian Islands
- Attika (sometimes it's considered part of Central Greece periphery)

These peripheries or departments are subdivided into Nomarchies, thus we have a political provincials organization similar to that of Spain or France with regions organized into provinces or roughly equivalent to UK and Australia shires.

GEOGRAPHIC AREAS:

**Northern Greece:**



A large geographic area which comprises three peripheries Macedonia, Thrace and Epirus, nonetheless for better comprehension and detail sometimes it's also studied in two parts, being thus Northern Greece and North Western and this is the approach we are going to take.

This area is rich in geographical and climatic features as well as in natural resources. Large in area and population this region is one of the most attractive in different aspects spanning from tourism to natural resources exploitations, industry and commerce.

This region presents a variated climatic and geographic spectrum, including high ranges and mountains, rich lowlands and valleys, lakes, rivers, centenary dense forests, long coastlines among other.

From the mountain ranges we have to mention three very important ones the *Rhodope*, the *Olympus range* and the *Mount Athos*.

*Olympus range:*

Besides being the country's highpoint, Olympus has always held an important role in the mythology and history of the place. It is known worldwide as the "Mountain of the Gods", as the 12 Gods of the ancient Greek religion, made it their home and fortress when fighting against the Titans (based on Mount Orthri) for control of the universe.

Although ancient Greeks used to climb up to Profitis Ilias to sacrifice to the Gods, they didn't dare get close to the highest peaks. Some unsuccessful attempts to the summit were recorded in the 17th and 19th centuries. Finally, in August 2 1913 Swiss climbers Fred Boissonas and Daniel Baud Bovy and the local guide Christos Kakkalos made it to the summit. They named it Venizelos, after the prime minister who has led the country to victory in the Balkan wars, and the one to the north "Zeus' throne". Those peaks are today named Mytikas and Stefani.

#### *Highest peaks:*

- Mytikas (2919m according to the latest measurements).
- Stefani (2912m according to the latest measurements), also known as "Zeus' throne"
- Skolio (2911m)
- Skala (2866m)
- Agios Antonis (2815m)
- Profitis Ilias (2803m)
- Toumba (2785)

There are 46 peaks above 2000m and 47 more above 1000m!

It's worth mentioning that the 2,919 meters to Mitikas are of real altitude from base to summit, that means that if you are to climb to its summit you have to climb each one of those meters; this happens since the base of this range is located at 0 meters above sea level, just next to the Aegean. This makes Mount Olympus the most massive one of all eastern Europe (including the ones located in Austria where the bases are located at an average of 1,000 meters above sea level).

Mount Olympus is noted for its very rich vegetation and several endemic species.



*Rhodope range:*

Located in northern Thrace and Eastern Macedonia this mountain range rich in flora and fauna presents centenary forests like Dadia.

The location of the Rhodopes extent the climate here. It is influenced both by the colder air coming from the North and by the warmer breeze from the south.

Temperatures of  $-15^{\circ}\text{C}$  are common in the winter, and due to this, the Rhodopes are the southernmost place in the Balkans where trees such as Norway Spruce and Silver Birch can be seen.

The climate is continental mid European temperate.

The range has a length of 220 kms.





#### *Mount Athos:*

Also known as the Holy Mount (Aghion Oros) it's located in the eastern peninsula of Halkidiki, it has 60 kms of length. It is the centre of Eastern Orthodox Monasticism. Set in an area of outstanding natural beauty, it is a treasury which houses and guards many artefacts and monuments of religious, national and artistic value. It is also a "workshop" where religious arts and crafts are still practised to this day, and where deep and genuine spirituality is allowed to flourish and bear fruit. As an institution Mount Athos is, and has been, the chief standard bearer of Orthodox Christianity.

It has a total height of 2,033 meters and as in the case of Mount Olympus its base is located at sea level.

Among the worth mention valleys are:

The Axios; the river valley has given its name to the *vardh  ris* or *vardarac*, a northerly prevailing ravine wind which blows down the length of the valley to bring cold conditions to the Thessaloniki area of Greece. It occurs when atmospheric pressure over eastern Europe is higher than over the Aegean sea, as is often the case in winter. It is somewhat similar to the mistral wind of France. The valley comprises fertile lands in the Kilkis and Thessaloniki prefectures. The river is surrounded by mountains elsewhere. The superhighway Interstate 1 runs within the valley along the river's entire length.

Nestos; it flows in the Aegean basin near the island of Thassos and the city of Kavala, The banks of the river are covered mainly by deciduous trees, the river later forms into a delta which represent a rich fauna refuge for birds of all the species.

Evros; one of the richest areas of northern Greece for agriculture in its lowlands much of the country's cotton productions are harvested (Greece is the 6<sup>th</sup> producer of cotton), it's also rich in wheat and other agricultural products. It's worth of mention the delta of this river (Delta Evrou) where more species of birds are to be found than any other place in Europe making of this place the richest aviary refuge in the continent and a natural protected monument.

In this region there's the second largest in surface area periphery of Greece after the Aegean Islands periphery, Macedonia with a surface of around 50,000 square kilometers (including lakes, rivers and its part of the Aegean basin), slightly larger than Slovakia

High ground makes up much of the region with mountains reaching up to 2,000 m (6,500 ft); extensive fertile plains lie along the Aegean Sea coast. Macedonia is traversed by the valleys of the Aliakmon, Axios/Vardaris, Nestos, and Strymon rivers, all of which drain into the Aegean. It borders the countries of Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria, and the Greek provinces of Epirus, Thessaly, Thrace and the Aegean Islands.

The region has a population of approximately 2,450,000, and its capital and largest city is Thessaloniki, with a population of around 1,350,000. Other major Macedonian towns and cities include Drama, Edessa, Florina, Grevena, Kastoria, Katerini, Kavala, Kilkis, Kozani, Polygyros, Serai/Serres, and Veria.

### **Northwestern Greece and Pindus range:**

This area of the country is dominated by the Pindus and politically coincided with the peripheries of Epirus and the western districts or nomarchies (Nomoi) of Central Greece and Thessaly.

Privileged naturally all this region of is known as the Switzerland of Greece due to the plenty of its Alpine landscape and climate full of high impressive mountains, lakes, coniferous vegetation, its fauna.





The Pindus range can be considered as its backbone and is part of the Dinaric Alps. The Pindus ecoregion covers a wide range of elevations and habitats, from deep canyons to steep mountains. The wide range in altitude results in two major forest zones. A conifer zone, with trees such as a subspecies of Austrian Pine and the endemic Greek fir, characterizes the highest elevations, with juniper woodlands dominating near the timberline. In the valleys and canyons of the middle and lower elevations, mixed broadleaf forests dominate, including many species of oak. There are many villages in the Pindus, including Samarina, boasting the highest elevation in Greece.

Large breeding colonies of herons, spoonbills, egrets, and pelicans fish the cool waters of the mountain lakes of the Pindus Mountain Conifer and Broadleaf Mixed Forests ecoregion. This is one of the few areas in Europe where the rare Dalmatian pelican can be found. Wolves, jackals, and bears are found in the forests.

This range has a maximum elevation of 2,637 meters in Smolikas at Epirus periphery and is among the ten highest peaks in Greece.

The Pindus range is part of the large Alpine arc spanning southeastwards from the Western, Central and Eastern Alps, via the Dinaric Alps, and includes the, Parnassos, Chelmos and the rest of central Peloponessus, having its southern extreme in Mount Taigetos. The cordillera system then continues by way of the southern Aegean islands of Kythera, Antikythera, Crete, Karpachos and Rhodes, as well as many islets around the larger islands, the later ones being the natural southern boundary of the Aegean basin.

The predominant climate of the region is Alpine.



Other natural landmarks of the area are the Meteora monument park and the Vikos Gorge.

Meteora:

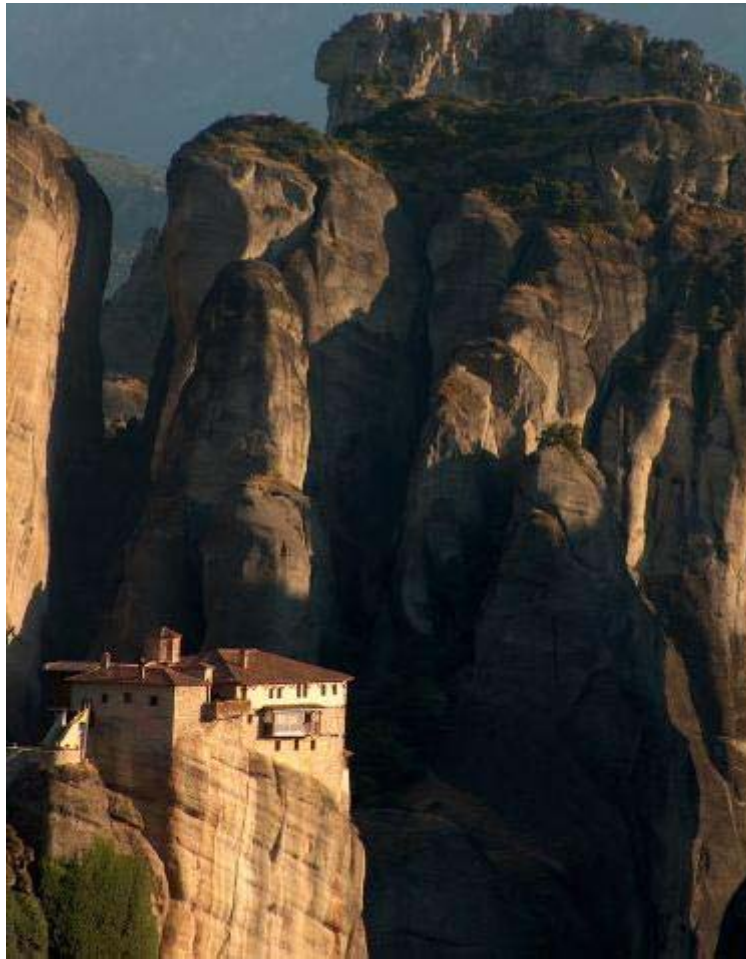
Rock pinnacles of deltaic origin, called 'Meteora', rising up to a maximum of 1,000 meters. Chemical analysis and work by the German geologist Philipson, supported by the Greek geologist Papadakis, suggests that the pinnacles were created some 60 million years ago in the Tertiary period, emerging from the cone of a river and further transformed by earthquakes. The pillars are of brown sandstone.



The area of Meteora includes forested hills and river valley with riverine forests of *Platanus orientalis* and species such as the endemic *Centaurea lactifolia* (found near Koniskos village) and *Centaurea kalambakensis*. The nearest protected area is Trikala Aesthetic Forest (28ha), created in 1979, which has been planted with *Pinus halepensis* and *Cupressus sempervivens*. The potential vegetation cover is described as supra-mediterranean, with climax cover of *Quercus* spp. and *Ostrya* spp. and beech *Fagus sylvatica* forest above 700m.



**CULTURAL HERITAGE:** The Meteora Group of Monasteries comprises the following monasteries: Ascension of Jesus Christ; Transfiguration of the Saviour; Varlaam, Saint Nikolas Anapafsas; Roussanou; Holy Trinity; and Saint Stephan. These are built directly on the rock's surface without foundations as such. Religious life, starting in the form of hermits dwellings, can be traced to around 1,000 AD. The first monastic community emerged in the 14th century, and was most successful during the 15th and 16th centuries. By the 17th century, the monastic population had dwindled to one-third of its original size. The site was bombed during World War II and many art treasures stolen. Details of the history of individual monasteries are available in the World Heritage nomination. The monasteries represent a unique example of monastic life since the 14th century.



The Vikos-Aoos National Park:

(Greek: *Ethnikós Drymós Víkou-Aóou*) is a national park in northeastern Epirus that encompasses the Vikos gorge, the Aoos gorge, Timfi range (with its highest peak [Gamila](#), 2497 m) and several Zagoria villages. The park has mammals including bears, foxes and deers. Birds are also included in this park. The forests are composed of diverse species. Trout are also found in its rivers. It is located N of Ioannina, SSW of Kastoria and WSW of Kozani.

The Vikos Gorge is listed as the second deepest gorge in the world by the Guinness Book of Records after the Grand Canyon. This appears to be following a somewhat arbitrary definition that excludes deeper features such as Colca Canyon in Peru as gorges because of their greater width:depth ratio. Nevertheless with walls up to 1 km in height, the 12 km gorge on the Voidomatis River is spectacular.





Another worth of mention natural landmark of NW Greece is the Ambrakikos Kolpos (Ambracian Gulf).

It is virtually a closed basin, whose only link to the open Ionian Sea is a narrow and shallow channel 600 m wide and 5 meters deep. The Gulf waters are renewed very



slowly, through a process that takes nearly one year to complete and thus they have just a partial salinity, also it could be considered as a lake as much as the Lake Erie for instance; in that case it could be also considered as the largest lake of the Balkans. It has an area of 405 km<sup>2</sup> a maximum depth of 60 m and stretches over 60 kms. It is located between Southern Epirus and Northern Aitolokarnania. The prefectures which surround it are: the prefecture of Preveza on the west, the prefecture of Arta on the north and the prefecture of Aitolokarnania on the east and south. embraced by green hills, fertile plains, lagoons and swamps. Thus, Amvrakikos was deservedly designated wetland of International importance and a surface of almost 250. 000 stremmata is protected by the Ramsar Convention. On the north, the gulf's wetland is situated between the estuaries of two large rivers, Louros and Arachtos, which, with their alluvial deposits combined with the presence of man, have moulded a unique mosaic of shallow lagoons with brackish waters, salt marshes and swamps. On the south, the gulf's banks are rocky and the water is deeper. On the South-East, the gulf forms the bay of Amfilochia, which unfortunately is polluted by the wastes of the urban zone. The presence of phytoplankton and zooplankton prove that the basin is quantitatively richer, but qualitatively poorer compared to other similar areas in Greece.

These lagoons with the constantly interchanging formations of land and sea, provide a refuge for a large number of rare birds. For example, the lagoon of Rodia, which contains Greece's most extended reed beds, a changing grid of hedgerows, small woods and canals, is one of the most important wetlands for water-fowl wintering, as it offers refuge to many species of ducks. Some very rare species nest or stop here during migration, such as the Dalmatian pelican, the slender-billed curlew and the ferruginous duck, all globally threatened with extinction and most of them protected by European legislation.

The gulf's side with the most interesting morphological and ecological aspects is the northern, because it forms numerous lagoons such as: Tsoukalio, Rodia, Logarou, Argilos, Koftra, Paliobouka in Arta, Tsopeli, Mazoma, Pogonitsa, Vathi in Preveza, Katafourko and Vonitsa lagoon in Aitolokarnania and the lakes of Saltini and Voulkaria in Aitolokarnania, too.

### **Central Greece:**



This region comprises the peripheries of Thessaly and Central Greece including the Attika district (metro Athens) and Eubea island.

This large area is a highly montaineous region with many peaks above the 2,500 meters but it also features the large plain of Thessaly.

The mountains of this area belong to the prolongation of the Dinaric Alps and Pindus range among its mountains we can find Idi, Gionas and Parnassos as well as in the Attika region other ones like Parnitha, Penteli, Imittos.



At the east the area presents the a range which rises from the Thessalian plain by means of Mount Pilion and continues in the island of Eubea stretching all along this island (the second largest of the Aegean) and finally reappears in the form of the Cycladic Islands but that-s in other geographic area belonging to the Aegean Basin.

The climate of the area is mainly Alpine in the interiors and mediterranean to the south and the east. It's very interesting to note that the city of Athens is located right at the transition zone between the Mediterranean climate and the Alpine, thus we have that in the southern suburbs predominates the former while at the northern ones the later as in the central areas the transition is given. So we can considere the climate of this city as the one of Barcelona for the southern suburbs and the one of Geneva in the northern ones, all in one city!

### **The Peloponnese:**





The peninsula has a densely mountainous interior and deeply indented coasts, with Mount Taygetos its highest point at 2,404 meters. It possesses four south-pointing

peninsulas, Messenia, the Mani Peninsula, Cape Malea (also known as Epidaurus Limera), and the Argolid in the far northeast of the Peloponnese.

Two groups of islands lie off the Peloponnesian coast: the Argo-Saronic Islands to the east, and the Ionian Islands to the west. The island of Kythira, off the Epidaurus Limera peninsula to the south of the Peloponnese, is considered to be part of the Ionian Islands.

Its mountains are a prolongation of the Dinaric Alps-Pindus system and the central Greece ranges and prolongate the alpine system by means of the hundreds of southern islands and islets of the Aegean basin (Kythera, Antikythera, Crete, Karpathos, Rhodes, etc).

The peninsula has been inhabited since prehistoric times. Its modern name derives from ancient Greek mythology, specifically the legend of the hero Pelops who was said to have conquered the entire region. The name *Peloponnesos* means "Island of Pelops". During the Middle Ages, the peninsula was known as the *Morea*. According to folk etymology, this is because the Crusaders found it densely planted with mulberry trees (Greek: *moreai*) used by the flourishing silk industry.

Its climate is mainly mediterranean and Alpine in the interior of the Achaia, Arkadia and Lakonia prefectures.







**The Aegean basin:**



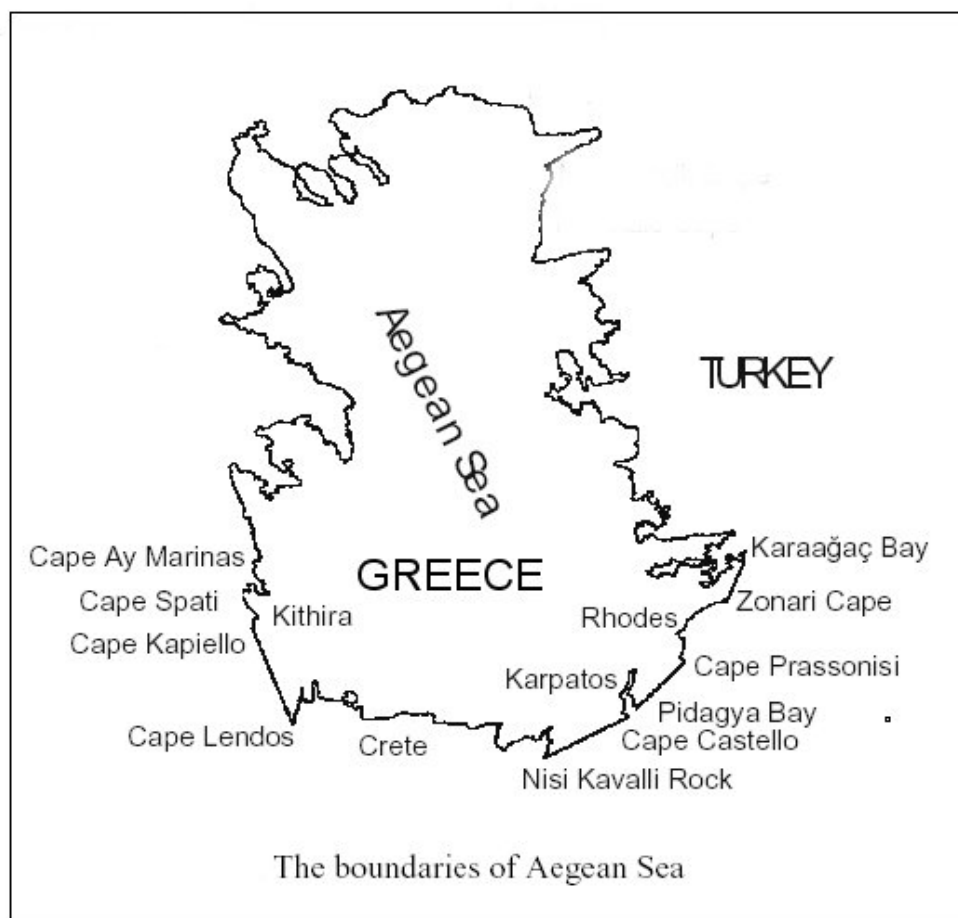
This region of Greece is the largest in area of the country (actually this region is slightly larger than Oklahoma) and by far the one for which Greece is maybe most famous as it-s here where thousands of islands, islets and rocks outcrops are located in like the worlwide famous Mykonos or Santorini.

The Aegean basin covers an area of 193,950 km<sup>2</sup> of which 174,350 km<sup>2</sup> belong to Greece and 19,600 km<sup>2</sup> to Turkey. Almost all of its islands belong to Greece with the exception of two Imvros and Tenedos in the North East.

For this study some of the definitions from encyclopedic sources are interpreted (Ana Britannica, 1994, p.101), International Hydrographic Bureau (SP23, 1953), and national atlases (Atlas, 1993, p.59).

Using all these sources, a boundary, especially in the southern region of Aegean Sea, may be suggested which can be commonly accepted. The deep trough situated to the south of Crete, Karpathos and Rhodes islands, is the surface indication of a major feature, which cuts across the whole lithosphere. This through is a principal element of a plate boundary. It could be either a trench (Le Pichon and Angelier, 1981; Spakman et al., 1988; Makris 1978, Makris and Stobbe, 1984) or a fore-arc (Hellenic) basin (Le Pichon et al., 1982) in "plate tectonics terminology".

A boundary for the Aegean Sea is defined under these decisions with geographic locations shown in the figure below (Goksel et al. 1999, Goksel et al. 2001).



The Aegean basin is subdivided in well defined groups of islands.

*The North Eastern islands*, mostly of big land area to mention a few of them we can name Lesbos, Lemnos, Samothrace, Samos, Ikaria, Chios, etc.

Lesbos the largest one of this area is a mountainous one (as all the islands of the basin actually) The island's volcanic origin is manifested in several hot springs. Two almost land-locked gulfs penetrate the interior so that no part of it is farther than a few miles from the sea. The island is verdant, aptly named the Emerald Island, with a variety of flora that belies its size. Olive trees, eleven million of them, cover 40% of the island together with other fruit trees. Forests of pine and some oak occupy 20%, and the remainder is scrub, grassland and urban. In the western part of the island is the world's second largest petrified forest of Sequoia trees.

Its economy is essentially agricultural.

The climate is mild Mediterranean, the mean annual temperature is 18 °C (64°F), and the mean annual rainfall is 750 mm (29 in). Its exceptional sunshine make it one of the sunniest islands in the Aegean. Snow is extremely rare as are temperatures below freezing.

Lemnos: A great part is mountainous, but some very fertile valleys exist. The hillsides afford pasture for sheep. A few mulberry and fruit trees grow, but no olives. The chief towns are Myrina on the western coast, and Mudros on the southern coast. Myrina (aka Kastro) possesses an excellent harbour, and is the seat of all the trade carried on with the island. Its climate is mainly Mediterranean and Winters are generally mild. Strong winds are a feature of the area during the Autumn.

Chios: The island is famous for its scenery and good climate. Its chief export is mastic but it also produces olives, figs, and wine.

Samos, is occupied throughout the greater part of its extent by the Kerketeus range of mountains, of which the highest summit is peak Vigla at 1,434 metres above sea level. The island is remarkably fertile, and a great portion of it is covered with vineyards, the wine from the Vathy grapes enjoying a, specially high reputation. Its climate is typically Mediterranean. Products include tobacco, Samian wine, honey, olive oil, citrus fruit, dried figs and almonds. The Muscat grape is the main crop used for wine production. Its principal traditional article of export is Samian wine, which was celebrated in ancient times, and still enjoys a high reputation in the Levant. It exports also silk, oil, raisins and other dried fruits.





*The Cyclades*, from the Greek Κυκλάδες, ("circular," modern Greek *Kykládes*; see also List of traditional Greek place names) form an island group south-east of the mainland of Greece. They are a part of the vast number of islands which constitute the Greek archipelago in the Aegean Sea. The name was originally used to indicate those islands that formed a rough circle around the sacred island of Delos..



The climate is generally dry and mild. islands are peaks of a submerged mountainous terrain, with the exception of two volcanic islands, Melos and Santorini (Thera). agricultural produce includes wine, fruit, wheat, olive oil, and tobacco. Cooler temperatures are in higher elevations and mainly do not receive wintry weather.

Among its hundreds of islands )a number increased to more than 1,000 if considered the islets and rocks outcrops) are the famous Santorini, Mykonos and Delos islands. Nonetheless it's recommended further exploration since the variety of islands of this region is great as well as their beauty.

The Cyclades is the only prefecture in Greece that is not linked with a state-maintained highway or a highway number. All of its roads in the island complex are secondary or provincial.





*The Sporades*, are located in central north Aegean and represent a group of green rich in flora and fauna islands. Among the most famous ones are Skyathos, Skopelos, Skyros and Alonissos.

**Skopelos:** The geography of Skopelos includes a mountaintop to the northwest and bushy and rocky hills around Skopelos. Most of the villages are to the west. Agriculture is also common, mainly mixed farming and vineyards, the main products are wine and plums. Fishing is also common on the island. Tourism is, however, the main industry.

**Skyathos:** Much of the island are forested. The area around the villages and Skiathos are deforested and has farms. The forests include pine trees. It is located in the southeastern part of the island.

**Skyros:** The north of the island is covered by forest, and includes the island's highest point, Mount Olympos (903 metres), while the south, dominated by the mountain of Kochila, is bare and rocky. The island's capital is also called Skyros (or, locally, *Chora*). The main port, on the west coast, is Linaria. The island has a castle (the *kastro*) that dates from the Venetian occupation (13th to 15th centuries), a Byzantine monastery (Saint George of Skyros), the grave of English poet Rupert Brooke at Tris Boukes harbour, and the Bronze Age archaeological site of Palamari. There are many beaches on the coast. The island has its own Skyrian breed of ponies.

**National Park of Alonissos:** The area comprises Alonissos and the southeastern part of Skopelos, which are its only inhabited territories, as well as a number of smaller islands and islets on which human presence is limited to a few guards and occasional

shepherds. The largest part of the area (94%) is covered by water. Geologically, the majority of islands consist mostly of limestone rock, with the exception of Psathoura featuring a geology of purely volcanic origin. In proximity to Psathoura lies a dormant volcano. On the island of Skopelos valleys with steep slopes and streams are formed. The local vegetation is chiefly made up of forests of pines, holly oak maquis (*Quercus coccifera*), a small forest of holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*), Oleo-Ceratonion maquis, fruit trees and olive groves. The plant life of Alonissos mainly consists of dense maquis with *Quercus coccifera*, *Q. ilex*, *Arbutus unedo*, *Juniperus phoenicea*, forests of Aleppo pines (*Pinus halepensis*) and brushwood (*Sarcopoterium spinosum*). The pine forests on Skopelos and Alonissos have replaced oak species that predominated in the past; this is due to a preference for pine trees, since their timber is widely used for ship construction.

The National Marine Park is a unique group of Mediterranean biotopes, both on land and in the sea. It encompasses many types of vegetation and highly representable marine natural habitats. The park is also home to many plant and animal species, including endemic, rare or protected species, as well as taxa at the southernmost or northernmost end of their spread. Piperi island is an area protected under the Barcelona Convention. Apart from its scientific and educational interest, the area also is of great archaeological interest, considering the number of remnants and monuments dating from the prehistoric, classical and Byzantine eras (speleological findings, shipwrecks, old monasteries and churches). The numerous caves and beaches formed between the rocky coasts constitute an ideal habitat for the monk seal, whose population in the area is estimated to be the largest in the Mediterranean. Piperi, the most important breeding site for the monk seal, is the core of the Northern Sporades Marine Park. An isolated population of wild goats (*Capra aegagrus* ssp. *Dorcas*) occurs exclusively on the island of Gioura. Equally important is the local reptilian fauna comprising rare and protected species. Birdlife in the area is abundant, with a large number of migratory birds and many species breeding in the area. The invertebrate fauna is also significant, as it consists of endemic species of isopods, especially in the Cave of Cyclops on Gioura. Marine biotopes are renowned for sustaining a great many well-populated species. This wide marine biodiversity is partly attributed to the diversity of marine natural habitats (such as underwater sea-grass beds of *Posidonia*, reefs, etc) and absence of pollution. This fact renders the recommended site especially important from a systematical and zoogeographical point of view. Furthermore, 170 species of fish, 70 species of amphipods and 40 species of sponges have been recorded in the area. The lush chasmophyte vegetation comprising many endemic species presents great phytogeographical and ecological interest.

Some species are spread over the Southern Aegean, and Gioura constitutes the northernmost end of their spread.

The total area of the national Park of Alonissos is of 251,440 hectares of 2,514 square kilometers.

*The Saronic Islands* are located in the homonymous gulf and are the closest to Athens for example Aegina is located just 50 kms from Athens Downtown so it represents a good start to your journey around the thousands remaining islands the country has to offer, also it's a great escape for Athenians who are seeking for a weekend close to their huge metropolis but still get that charm the greek islands can only provide and just 50 kms away.

There are other islands like the famous Salamina, Poros, Hydra or Spetses among others.

Hydra is a beautiful island located 120 kms from Athens so it could be considered also as a close one but it perfectly retains the charm of older days. Besides garbage trucks, motor vehicles are not permitted on the island; which leaves the bulk of public transportation up to donkeys and water taxis. The inhabited area, however, is so compact that most people walk everywhere.

There is one main town, known simply as "Hydra port." It consists of a crescent-shaped harbor, around which is centered a strand of commercial establishments (restaurants, shops, markets, and galleries), all of which cater to tourists and locals (Hydriots). Steep stone streets lead up and outwards from the harbor area. Most of the local residences, as well as the hostelrys on the island are located on these streets.

Although the island takes its name from ancient springs, it is now dry. While Hydra previously had wells, these were closed by seismic activity around the mid-20th century. Today, the island's water is imported by boat from the Greek mainland. The dominant geographic feature of Hydra is its rocky hillsides, which are empty save for the occasional farmhouse and one or two very isolated Orthodox monasteries.

*The Dodecanesse* consists of 163 islands of which 26 are inhabited, plus hundreds more of islets. Twelve of these are major, giving the chain its name. The most historically important and well-known is Rhodes (*Rodos*), which for millennia has been the island from which the region is controlled. Of the others, Kos is the historically most important; the remaining ten are Astipalea, Kalimnos, Karpathos, Kassos, Kastellorizo, Leros, Nisyros, Patmos, Simi, and Tilos.

Other notable islands in the chain include Agathonisi, Chalki, Lipsi, Pserimos, and Telendos.





Rhodes is the largest of the Dodecanese islands, and easternmost of the major islands of Greece in the Aegean Sea. The interior is mountainous and sparsely inhabited, covered with forests and abundant fauna including the Rhodian deer. Features include the so-called Petaludes or Petaloudes Valley, or Valley of the Butterflies, where tiger moths gather in summer; Mount Attavyros, at 1,215 m the island's highest point of elevation; and the appropriately named Seven Springs area. While the shores are rocky, arable sandy strips exist where citrus fruits, wie grapes, vegetables, and other crops flourish in the Mediterranean climate.

Outside of the city of Rhodes, the Faliraki resort, Lindos, Archangelos, Afandou, Koskinou, Embona, and Trianta (Ialysos) are significant. The economy of the whole island is geared toward tourism, the island's primary source of income.

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It must be pointed also that the island of Stroggyli is the easternmost point in Greece some 120 kms east of Rhodes and next to the more famous Kastellorizo.

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One of the interesting known features of the Aegean are its thousands of islets and rock outcrops which change in surface, appearance, and even there're always emergences of new terrain as well as sometimes their sinking, that's why measuring Greece's number of islands and specially the length of its coastline is so difficult and sometimes geographic studies for difficulty reasons try to be as precise as possible but they yet pass over many details and results are close to reality but not perfect; as you can see studying greek geography is not an easy and straightforward process; but hey beautiful and variated places must always present these difficulties in their study it's the price to pay.

The main climate of The Aegean basin region is the Mediterranean.









Crete:



It is the biggest island in Greece and the second biggest (after Cyprus) of the Greek world. The island is extremely mountainous and is defined by a high mountain range crossing it from West to East, formed by three different groups of mountain ranges. These are:

The White mountains or Lefka Ori (up to 2,452 m), The Idi range (up to 2,456) and the Dikti mountains (up to 2,148 m) Crete has an abundance of peaks above the 2,000 meters. These mountains gifted Crete with fertile plateaus like Lasithi, Omalos and Nidha, caves like Diktaion and Idaion cave, and gorges like the famous Gorge of Samaria (the longest in Europe).

Crete climate is the Mediterranean. As such, the climate in Crete is primarily temperate. The atmosphere can be quite humid, depending on the proximity to the sea. The winter is fairly mild. Snow fall is practically unknown to the plains, but quite frequent in the mountains. During summer, average temperatures are in the high 20's-low 30's (Celsius). The exception can be the south coast, including the Messara plain and Asterousia mountains, where you can find significantly more sunny days and high temperatures during the summer. Probably the best time to visit Crete is spring and autumn.

The economy of Crete, which was mainly based on farming, started changing visibly during the 1970s. While there is still an emphasis on farming and stock breeding, due to the climate and the terrain of the island, there is a drop in manufacturing and a big increase on the services industry (mainly tourism related). All three sectors of the Cretan economy (agriculture, processing-packaging, services), are directly connected and interdependent. Crete has an average per capita income which is close to 100% of the Greek average. Unemployment is at approximately 4%.









**Ionian Islands:**



They are traditionally called the Seven Islands (in Modern Greek Eptanisa, Επτάνησα), but the group includes many smaller islands as well as the seven principal ones. The seven are, from north to south:

Kerkyra, Paxoi (actually a group), Lefkada, Ithaka, Kephallonia, Zakynthos, Kythera. Also in this group of islands is the famous Skorpios owned by Athina Onassis the rich granddaughter of the greek tycoon Aristotelis Onassis. Also here you can find the westernmost point of Greece in the island Othoni just a few kilometers off the Italian coast.





Kerkyra:

The name Corfu is an Italian corruption of the Greek Koryphi), meaning "Crests." In shape it is not unlike the sickle (drepanē), to which it was compared by the ancients, the hollow side, with the town and harbour of Corfu in the centre, being turned towards the coast of North Epirus in Albania.

Two high and well-defined ranges divide the island into three districts, of which the northern is mountainous, the central undulating and the southern low-lying. The most important of the two ranges is that of San Salvador, probably the ancient Istone, which stretches east and west from Cape St. Angelo to Cape St. Stefano, and attains its greatest elevation of (1000 m) in the summit from which it takes its name. The second culminates in the mountain of Santi Jeca, or Santa Decca, as it is called by misinterpretation of the Greek designation οἱ Ἅγιοι Δέκα (hoi Hagioi Deka), or the Ten Saints. The whole island, composed as it is of various limestone formations, presents great diversity of surface, and the prospects from the more elevated spots are magnificent. Beautiful and sparkling beaches with yellow sands are founded in Agii Gordi, the Korissi lagoon, Agios Georgios, Marathia, Kassiopi, Sidari, Roda, Palaiokastritsa and many others.

It is worthy of remark that Homer names, as adorning the garden of Alcinous, seven plants only – wild olive, oil olive, pear, pomegranate, apple, fig and vine. Of these the apple and the pear are now very inferior in Corfu; the others thrive well and are accompanied by all the fruit trees known in southern Europe, with addition of the kumquat, loquat and prickly pear and, in some spots, the banana. When undisturbed by cultivation, the myrtle, arbutus, bay and ilex form a rich brushwood and the minor flora of the island is extensive.



#### Zakynthos national park:

The area encompasses the Laganas Bay and the islets of Marathonissi and Pelouzo before the southern coast of Zakynthos. The substratum is sandy and the waters are shallow (10 m deep at maximum), thus favouring the wide spread of *Posidonia* seagrass. The coastal zone of Laganas is of high biological importance, due to the existence of significant natural habitats, such as sandy beaches with sand plant (psammophyte) communities, rocky coasts and coastal lakes. Low sand dunes occur on the beach of Marathonissi, some of them extending up to 50 m. inland. The beach is backed by dense Mediterranean maquis. The area of Laganas is renowned for its small sandy beaches which are considered to be the most important nesting sites for the Mediterranean green loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*) both in Greece and, perhaps, the entire Mediterranean region. The two islets (Marathonissi and Pelouzo) lying in the Bay of Laganas support well-developed types of Mediterranean vegetation.

The beach of Laganas is one of the major nesting sites in the Mediterranean for the green loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*). The area also has great ecological importance due to the presence of the marine plant *Posidonietum oceanicae*, which forms a highly sensitive type of habitat occurring in the Mediterranean.



## **CLIMATE OF GREECE**

Greece has three well defined climatic zones the Mediterranean, the Alpine-temperate and the Mid European Temperate.



*The Mediterranean* is found all throughout the south of the country (Crete, Cyclades, Dodecanese, Peloponessus) as well as in coastal parts of central Greece, the Sporades and the North Eastern Aegean Islands region. Also predominates in the Ionian islands area but in more moderate level.

During summer, regions of Mediterranean climate are dominated by subtropical high pressure cells, while during winter the polar front brings weather conditions similar to those of an oceanic climate, with frequent precipitation. As a result, areas with this climate receive almost all of their yearly rainfall during the winter season, while during the summer without having significant precipitations.

All regions with Mediterranean climates have relatively mild winters, but summer temperatures are variable depending on the region. For instance, Athens experiences rather high temperatures in the summer, while San Francisco, California has cool, mild summers due to its proximity to the open Pacific Ocean as well as winters in the former are heavier than in the later.

The temperature is moderated by nearby large bodies of water making for comfortable conditions throughout most of the year. Temperatures around the Mediterranean coast are higher than the dry summer subtropical climates bordered by colder ocean water.

During the summer, the subtropical high has expanded to its largest extent and most poleward position, exerting its influence on subtropical west coasts between 30° and 45° N and S latitude.

The most distinguishing characteristic of the dry summer subtropical climate is its seasonal precipitation regime. As discussed above, the dry summer is due to the presence of the subtropical high. The subsidence of the subtropical high suppresses cloud development and precipitation.

The cloudless skies during summer, however, increase the absorption of insolation by the polluted atmosphere of many large urban centers like Athens causing problems of photochemical smog.

During the winter, the subtropical high shrinks and moves away from the climate and the subpolar low with its associated cyclone belts moves in. Uplift provided by cyclonic circulation brings much needed rain to this region. However, intense down pours can cause rapid runoff, and initiate landslides on unstable slopes.

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*Alpine-temperate* is mainly found in almost all of the Central Greece (aka. Sterea Ellada) periphery, Thessaly, Epirus, Western Macedonia as well as in central parts of the Peloponessus (like districts of Achaea, Arkadia and Lakonia).

The climate is, or average weather conditions over a long time, of the central Alpine region of Europe. As we rise from sea level into the upper regions of the atmosphere the temperature decreases. The effect of mountain chains on prevailing winds is to carry warm air belonging to the lower region into an upper zone, where it expands in volume at the cost of a proportionate loss of heat, often accompanied by the precipitation of moisture in the form of snow or rain. The Subalpine is the region which mainly determines the manner of life of the population of the region. On a rough estimate we may reckon that, of the space lying between the summits of the Alps and the low country on either side, one-quarter is available for cultivation, of which about one-half may be vineyards and grain fields, while the remainder produces forage and grass. About another quarter is utterly barren, consisting of snow fields, temporal or small glaciers, bare rock, lakes and the beds of streams. There remains about one-half, which is divided between forest and pasture. For a quarter of the year the flocks and herds are fed on the upper pastures; but the true limit of the wealth of a district is the number of animals that can be supported during the long winter, and while one part of the population is engaged in tending the beasts and in making cheese, the remainder is busy cutting hay and storing up winter food for the cattle

The most characteristic feature of this region is the prevalence of coniferous trees, which form vast forests that cover a large part of the surface. They protect the valleys from destructive avalanches, and, retaining the superficial soil by their roots, they mitigate the destructive effects of heavy rains. In valleys where they have been rashly cut away, and the waters pour down the slopes unchecked, every tiny rivulet becomes a raging torrent, that carries off the grassy slopes and devastates the floor of the valley, covering the soil with gravel and debris.

The larger villages are mostly in the valleys region, but in many parts of the Alps the villages stand in the subalpine region at heights varying from 1000 m to 1700 m above the sea like in the case of Evritania, Zagorochoria in Epirus and others).

The alpine region refers to the region of the mountains between the uppermost limit of trees (the tree-line) up to the permanent snow. This alpine region contains the full beauty and variety of characteristic vegetation of the Alps.

The summers are milder than in other areas of the country.

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*Mid European temperate* is found in northern parts of Central Macedonia as well as in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace.

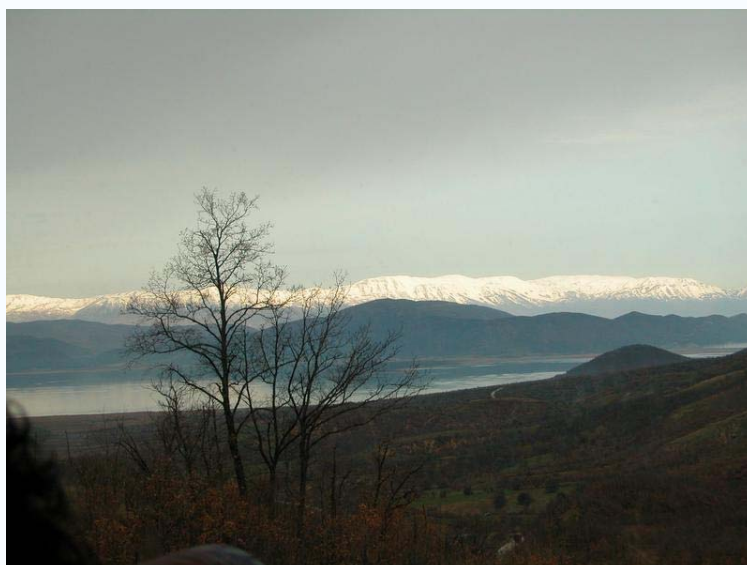
A long and at times severe winter (December-March), a hot summer (April-July), and a prolonged autumn (August-November) are the principal seasons, with a rapid transition from spring to summer.

Rainfall, although adequate throughout the country, decreases from west to east and from mountains to plains.

In places like Florina or Nevrokopi temperatures of as low as -30C have been registered during winter.

The summers are more moderate than in other parts of the country.

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The variety of the greek climate is given by two factors. One is the size of the country of 309,050 square kilometers with long distances (a maximum of 992 kms from SE to NW, that's more than the distance you can find from Vienna to Amsterdam so in a straight line you can cross all over Germany, the Netherlands and big part of Austria and would still be in the same country) and a long latitudinal range from the 35° N to the 42°N. This last is most important since other countries of Europe like Germany have similar ranges (47° 16' N-54° 51'N), Poland (49°N-54° 50'N) or Spain (36°N-43° 46'N, Canary Islands not included) and in the case of the two first ones the variety of climate is not as rich as in the case of Spain, another country located in the so called "blessed" zone of the 35N-47N degrees range, like Greece.

It must be noted that Greece is also influenced by the streams coming from the west, as well as North Eastern Europe or Syberia (boriades) the later one of the main causes of wintern heavy storms.

Other factor but not less important is the geomorphology of the country as well as its many geographycal accidents which somewhat contribute in this climatic variety.

The temperature extremes in the country can be as high as 40° C in southern parts in summer or as low as -30° C in northern areas like Florina or Nevrokopi in winter.

Also temperature differences in winter sometimes have reached the 35° C at the same time as in the January of 2006 winter storm with temperatures of -25C in Florina and 10°C-12°C in Rhodes.

## **NATURAL RESOURCES:**

Greece is a country rich in natural resources specially minerals. It counts with the largest bauxite reserves of Europe (aluminium), coal in form of lignite, as well as possible reserves of 3 billion barrels of oil underwater in the Aegean basin and the coasts of the Ionian (the third in reserves of Europe after UK and Denmark). Nevertheless because of current policies only a small amount of of it is extracted from the Prinios area in northern Aegean, though there are comments of possible investments from multinational companies on these reserves for their exploitation). Keeping on mind that Greece current consumption of oil has a daily basis of 434,000 barrels this means it has "potential" reserves for 19 years of domestic consumption.

Greece is also rich in many other minerals like nickle, marble, zinc and many more due to its complex geology. Though many of these resources are located in areas that should be (and most of them are) protected for its wildlife either flora and fauna. Greece is a country rich in mineral resources but it's richer in natural beauties which should be taken care of. An example is the case of the dispute between an energy company which was interested in the coal reserves of an area of Messinia in southern Peloponnesse and the local population which is trying to preserve the natural beauties of the area and avoid the hazards that such an activiy could produce to the region.

## **THE GREEK COAST:**





The Greek coast has a total length of approximately 16,000 km. Half of these are on the 6,000 of Greek islands, islets and rock outcrops while the rest extends along the mainland. What characterises the famous Greek coasts is their unique diversity (beaches stretching over many kilometres, small bays and coves, sandy beaches with dunes, pebbly shores, coastal caves surrounded by steep rocks and with the characteristic dark sand of volcanic soils, coastal wetlands), their clean and transparent waters which have made them renowned all over the world and, for this reason, extremely popular.

In 2005, Greece had 383 beaches and 5 marinas that were awarded the “Blue Flag” (See below), a fact that puts the country in a top-ranking position among the European countries.

Most of the thousands of Greek coasts are freely accessible and you have the opportunity to discover and enjoy them without the presence of a large number of swimmers. There are, however, also many organised beaches in the country with the necessary infrastructure providing high-quality services (umbrellas, reclining chairs, changing booths, cafes, bar-restaurants etc), where, apart from swimming, you can enjoy water sports (water ski, windsurfing, diving etc) as well as other means of having fun in the water, such as the parachute for one or two persons, “tyres” and the “banana”, pedalo, jet ski etc. All organised beaches also have lifeguard towers ensuring safe swimming in the area.

### **“Blue Flags of Europe”**

Each year this programme presents an award to the coasts and marinas which meet strict criteria as regards the cleanness of the sea and the coast, good organisation and safety as well as the protection of the coastal environment in general. More specifically, the criteria for the award of the “Blue Flag” are the following:

1. Cleanness of the sea and the coast
  - Quality of swimming water verified by measurement of water samples;

- Absence of industrial sewage discharge on the coast;
- Treatment of urban sewage as required by the relevant EU directive;
- Adequate number of litter bins which must be emptied at regular intervals;
- Periodical cleaning of the beach from litter, cigarette stubs etc.

## 2. Organisation of the coast and safety of the visitors

- Continuous information of the public regarding the quality of swimming water;
- Immediate information if the water has become unsafe for swimmers;
- Plans to deal with a pollution accident and to immediately inform the public;
- Adequate number of sanitary facilities with controlled sewerage;
- Trained lifeguards or direct access to telephone, lifesaving equipment and First Aid;
- Safe passage to the coast and special care for people with disabilities;
- No driving (vehicles and motorcycles) is allowed on the beach;
- Free camping is forbidden; and
- Pets have to be supervised on the beach.

## 3. Protection of nature and environmental education

- Printed information and publicly displayed instructions regarding behaviour on the coast;
- Activities actively promoting the protection of the natural coastal environment.

## THE MOUNTAINS OF GREECE



Greece is above all a mountainous country with thousands of mountains all around its territory, The majority of islands throughout the Aegean are in fact the mountain peaks of the now-submerged landmass of Aegeis.

The Greek mountains are renowned for their diversity, landscapes of singular beauty and unique forests, many of which rank among the oldest natural wooded lands in Europe. Due to the astoundingly rich flora and fauna they support, many of these environments have been designated as National Parks and are protected as such,

while as a result of infrastructure developed over the last decades, they constitute today ideal destinations for winter and alpine tourism. Today there are 19 ski centers all throughout the country. A small amount considering the high number of mountains the country has.

### *Hiking – Mountaineering – Climbing*

Simple hiking is distinguished from mountain walking. The former involves walking a minimum distance of 5 km, covered in 1-2 hours on slightly sloped terrain (with almost no differences in elevation) and entails only light gear. The latter involves distances of 15-20 km covered in 5-8 hours, and special equipment, particularly during the winter season, is imperative. Mountain hiking can be practised on any mountain. Its main characteristic is the difference in elevation one may encounter along the route, which may reach as much as 500-600 m.

Greece lagged behind in the creation of an integrated motorway network, other than the basic road arteries running across the country. Before the development of such infrastructure, transportation took place via paths to which the elderly inhabitants of mountainous settlements still refer today as *dimosia* (in Greek “a public, main road”), which at the time constituted the chief access road. Despite the fact that some of the old paths and artfully built cobbled lanes were turned into asphalt roads, a great many of them still survive today running through mountains, dales and gorges. In recent years, financing from various bodies (municipal authorities, mountaineering associations, private individuals, etc) has allowed for the maintenance and revival of these paths throughout the country, the majority of which are waymarked, thus creating a 3,500 km-long network. For the larger part this comprises long-distance European Paths E 4 and E 6, and Class O (3,000 km), while a number of new shorter paths of similar interest running over a length of 500 km have also been developed.

\*European Path E 4 (- GR ): Starting in the Pyrenees range, it stretches into Greece passing through FYROM. The Greek E4 path traverses the northern and central part of the country, the Peloponnese , ultimately reaching Gythion and ending in Crete . It thus affords hikers the opportunity to become familiar with the diversity and natural wealth of the Greek landscape.

The highest elevation on the entire route is the Skolios peak (2,911 m) the third highest of Greece. The E4 is ideal for hiking from May 15 until early October. Often, the opening of new forest roads may confuse hikers. Some of the villages encountered en route are uninhabited during the winter, thus limiting the possibility for an overnight stay. The areas have a typical Mediterranean climate, with warm dry summers and considerable differences in day and night temperatures. Snowfall starts in November and snow is likely to linger into June. The route in the southern part of the path ( Peloponnese and Crete ) is less rough than the northern one and is walkable throughout the year due to the milder climate.

\*European Path E 6: The Greek section of the European long-distance path E4 has two parts: the first has its starting point in the Prespes area and reaches the town of Igoumenitsa via Kastoria-Ioannina-Dodoni; the second part begins in Florina, crosses the mountainous regions of western, central and eastern Macedonia (along Greece's borders with FYROM and Bulgaria) and reaches the city of Alexandroupoli in Thrace.

**Mountain climbing** is the hardest form of hiking. Usually, the climber's goal is to conquer a peak. In mountaineering, distance is of little significance. The most important element is that per hour approx. 300 m in rise of elevation are covered, which means



that a 1000-m ascent requires about 4 hours including stops made during the climb. A usual mountain ascent lasts 7-10 hours, descent included.

Finally rock climbing (the term defines an ascent under summer conditions while in winter the activity is referred to as alpinism) is practised on any mountain peak, on very steep slopes (cliffs) rendering imperative the use of climbing techniques (of great or small degree of difficulty) and auxiliary equipment. In Greece, many spots lend themselves to free rock climbing, while schools offering the possibility of artificial climbing also operate.

## **ECOTURISM:**

Greece is endowed with a particularly rich and diversified natural environment as a result of a rare geomorphology, with many striking natural contrasts and areas of great ecological value. The country's abundant natural gifts –thousands of indented coasts, imposing rocky massifs, caves, gorges, lakes, rivers, biotopes of spectacular beauty and unique natural habitats– coupled with the mild climate, place it among the ideal destinations for ecotourism and alternative forms of tourism.

When travelling in Greece, nature-loving tourists are offered the opportunity to:

- to wander in aesthetic forests or explore national parks not merely in the mountainous regions of the mainland, but also on certain islands or in the proximity of rivers and lakes
- to enjoy the wonderful natural monuments, gorges, caves and waterfalls.
- to watch and admire rare bird species nesting or seeking refuge in coastal ecosystems and wetlands (rocky coasts, sandy beaches, sand dunes, river deltas, lakes, marshes, coastal plains, etc)
- to study the highly diverse floral life of the Greek countryside
- to visit the unique marine parks supported near the islands of Alonissos and Zakynthos, which provide shelter to two protected species, the Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus-Monachus*) and the Mediterranean green loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*) respectively.
- to engage in extreme sports (canoe-kayak, rafting, monorail, hydrospeed, canyoning, mountain biking, etc), activities which have seen a spectacular rise in popularity in recent years
- to stay in agrotourist units which are being developed all over the country and afford visitors the opportunity to become familiar with vernacular architecture, cultural and gastronomic tradition, local products, farming activities and the daily life of local inhabitants.

Visitors of ecologically sensitive areas must observe all rules for the protection of the environment against pollution, the non-disturbance of natural habitats and the preservation of the various ecosystems' equilibrium. Information on visiting protected areas and participating in special programs can be obtained from local information centres, local authorities, and specialised agencies.

## **LAKES:**

Lakes (natural or artificial) and lagoons abound in Greece. Most of them are freshwater lakes and have been formed far away from the coast as a result of tectonic or volcanic forces or the action of glaciers. Lagoons, which are shallow coastal water reservoirs connected to the open sea via a wider or narrower opening, may turn into freshwater lakes when the inflow of saline water from the sea is for some reason interrupted, and a satisfactory influx of freshwater occurs from flowing water sources. A number of lakes, whose substratum contains many soluble salts or which receive saline-water influxes, have saline or brackish water. Artificial lakes, which resulted from the

construction of dams in brooks, streams or rivers in order to ensure storage of water for various purposes (irrigation, farming, drinkwater supply, etc), constitute the most important category of man-made wetlands in Greece. They cover a considerable area and have enriched the Greek wetland environment with important ecosystems.

## CAVES:

As a result of the country's rich geological structure and history, thousands of gorgeous subterranean and underwater caves were formed both on the mainland and on the islands. Systematic studies conducted by geologists and speleologists have brought to light more than 8,500 caves of all categories, many of which remain unexplored. On Greek territory, caves were gradually formed during the Tertiary and Quaternary Periods, while their large number is due to the huge quantities of limestone covering about 65% of the country's surface. Many of these caves have yielded vessels, bones, rock paintings, jewelry and traces of fire, as well as a host of other findings attesting to a very early human presence. Furthermore, many of these caves were used in antiquity as sites of worship, while in later times they housed churches and monasteries; many caverns situated on steep slopes were used by monks as hermitages. Moreover, numerous caves have played an important role in the Greek people's struggles for independence (since they served as shelters, hideaways, hospitals, workshops, etc.).

Some of the most famous ones include:

In the Aegean NE islands:

Lesvos	
<b>Mytilene</b>	THE AGIOS VARTHOLOMEOS CAVE, featuring stalactites, is separated by a 10-min bus ride from the public road that leads to Taxiarches. At present, it remains unexploited.
<b>Plomari</b>	CAVES are found at the sites of "Kokkala", "Agios Isidoros" and "Mavri Petra". Access to the caves is difficult.
Samos	
<b>Marathokambos</b>	<p>The CAVE OF PYTHAGORAS. A country road that ascends to Mount Kerki runs near the cave wherein Pythagoras, the great mathematician who had opposed the Samian tyrant Polycrates, hid before fleeing to Southern Italy (Magna Graecia) as a political refugee.</p> <p>THE CAVE WITH THE CHURCH OF SARANTASKALIOTISSA lies on a precipitous rock of Mount Kerki in proximity to the cave of Pythagoras. It boasts fine cave paintings.</p>

<b>Pyrgos</b>	The CAVE OF TRIPIOVRACHOS features formations of stalactites and stalagmites.
<b>Limnos</b>	
<b>Kontopouli</b>	The CAVE OF PHILOCTETES is situated at the edge of the precipice. Below the ruins runs a trail. Tradition holds that the cave wherein the Homeric hero dwelled is connected to the adytum of the Sanctuary of Kaviri.

Cyclades:

<b>Andros</b>	
<b>Messaria</b>	CAVE CHAOS, situated in Aladino.
<b>Antiparos</b>	
<b>Antiparos or Kastro</b>	<p>The renowned cave of Andiparos is sited on the hill of Agios Ioannis at an elevation of 350 m, 8 km away from Kastro. Fascinating stalactites and stalagmites adorn its chambers. One of the cave's most outstanding features is an 8-m. high stalagmite named "Agia Trapeza" (Greek term for high altar) after a Christmas mass that was celebrated in the cavern in 1673 by the priest who was escorting French Ambassador Marquis De Nointel to Constantinople. This impressive stalagmite bears a carved Latin inscription that reads: "Here, Christ himself celebrated his birth in the middle of the night of 1673". Several other inscriptions have been chiseled in various parts of the cave, many of which, however, are barely discernible today. A case in point is the inscription that provides the names of those who, according to tradition, had conspired against Alexander the Great and later sought refuge in the cave. Elsewhere one can see an inscription bearing the name of the lyric poet Archilochus who lived in the 7th century BC. At the mouth of the cave stands the chapel of</p>



	Agios Ioannis Spiliotis, dating from the 18th century.
<b>Kimolos</b>	
<b>Kimolos or Chora</b>	A CAVE is situated in the area of Vromolimni ("Dirty Lake") on the north coast of the island. The chapel of Agios Minas is marked as the halfway point on the route that leads to the Cave of Vromolimni. The latter is the largest in a series of rock-cut caves; it consists of an external cave and an internal one, which, however, is difficult to access for it is usually inundated. This is reason why the cave remains unexplored.
<b>Kythnos</b>	
<b>Dryopida</b>	CAVE KATAFIKI, found in proximity to the village of Dryopida, occupies the site of Fires. At present, it remains unexploited and ranks among the largest caves in Greece that are rich in stalactites. In the course of World War II, the cave served as shelter for local inhabitants. It is furthermore a gathering place for the celebration of the Resurrection of Christ on the night of Holy Saturday (Easter Vigil).
<b>Irakleia</b>	
<b>Mersini</b>	THE CAVE OF AGIOS IOANNIS, which is not touristically exploited, contains beautiful stalactitic formations. A Vespers service is customarily performed in the cave on the eve of the feast of Agios Ioannis (August 28).
<b>Naxos</b>	
<b>Filoti</b>	THE CAVE OF ZA, situated SE (at an elevation of 600 m), was dedicated to Zeus Milosios and boasts rare stalagmitic formations. A chamber found to the left of the entrance harbours the small chapel of Zoodochos Pigi. The cave has yielded important prehistoric findings (e.g. tools made of obsidian, etc).
<b>Serifos</b>	
<b>Koutalas</b>	THE CAVE OF KOUTALAS

	<p>OR CYCLOP, is located west of Koutalas. Its walls had collapsed down and it was accidentally discovered when its entrance became connected to the galleries for purposes of mineral extraction. It features oddly-shaped stalactites and stalagmites, while various findings that have been unearthed from the cave suggest that the latter was used as a place of worship in antiquity.</p>
<b>Syros</b>	
<b>Ano Syros</b>	<p>THE CAVES of Ano Syros - once the dwelling of philosopher Pherecydes - occupy the location known as "Alithinis" that lies 5 km N from Plati Vouni.</p>
<b>Tinos</b>	
<b>Kionia</b>	<p>THE CAVE found at the coastal location known as "Gastria" remains to this day unexplored. It has been associated with local traditions, since, as local inhabitants maintain, its length runs all the way up to the great rock of Exomburgo.</p>
<b>Pyrgos - Panormos</b>	<p>TWO CAVES are found NW of the Gulf of Panormos.</p>
<b>Milos</b>	
<b>Apollonia or Pollonia</b>	<p>THE CAVE OF PAPAFRAGAS lies 2 km W, adjacent to an archeological site. It consists of three successive caves of unique natural beauty and great originality that can be visited by boat. In the past, they were used as shelters and pirate hide-outs. The enchanting image they present is enhanced by the spectacular rock masses of Glaronissia towering just opposite the caves.</p>
<b>Donousa or Stavros</b>	
<b>Chivadolimni</b>	<p>THE CAVE OF TICHOS, featuring stalactites, is located N of the island between Aspros Kavos and Xylobatis.</p>
<b>Koufonisia</b>	
<b>Pano Koufonissi</b>	<p>SEA CAVES are located on the northern promontory of the island.</p>

Sikinos	
<b>Chora or Kastro</b>	The Mavri Spilia Cave, situated N, is the largest cave encountered on the island.
Folegandros	
<b>Folegandros or Chora</b>	CHRYSSOSPILIA CAVE. Recent findings indicate that the cave once constituted a place of worship. It features beautiful stalactites and has not yet been explored. So far, its use has not been established with certainty. Potsherds and human bones have been discovered in its interior. The walls display ancient names that have been written with clay material. The cave is protected by the Archaeological Service.
<b>Karavostatis</b>	GEORGITIS CAVE. Located at the southern tip of the island, it can be reached by boat.

## Dodecanese

Astypalea	
<b>Analipsi or Maltezana</b>	PANAGIA POULARIANI CAVE.
<b>Vathy</b>	DRAKOS CAVE (the cave of the dragon) with impressive arrays of stalactites and stalagmites. It can be reached by boat.
<b>Livadi</b>	NEGROS CAVE (the cave of the black man). Local tradition has linked this cave with marauding pirates and their treasures. Access to it is possible by boat from Chora. Excursions to the cave are also organised from the surrounding islets.
Kalymnos	
<b>Kalymnos or Pothia</b>	KEFALA CAVE, located NW, is of considerable archaeological and speleological interest. The passageway, overhung with massive stalactites, measures 103 m in length. The cave was explored for the first time in 1961 by oceanographer Anastasios Christomanos, bringing to light evidence



	of worship of the Olympian Zeus. Visitors can access the cave by boat from Pothia or Myrties.
<b>Vathy</b>	<p>ROCK-CUT CAVES, which have yielded evidence of human habitation in primitive times, are found on the slopes of the Kastani and Tsingoura hills. Traces of smoke can be detected on the ceiling. The caves become more numerous in the direction of the small chapel of Agios Yannis. Access to them is difficult.</p> <p>DASKALIO CAVE has yielded prehistoric findings - Neolithic tools, spindles and ceramic items dating from the Middle and Late Minoan Period (2000-1400 BC). The cave, located at the entrance to the port, was used by the inhabitants of the island for defense purposes.</p>
<b>Masouri</b>	AGIOS IOANNIS CAVE, situated to the N.
<b>Emporios</b>	THE CAVES that are found in this location can be admired from below.
<b>Karpathos</b>	
<b>Karpathos or Pigadia</b>	<p>POSEIDON CAVE. The cave that occupies the site known as "Myli" constitutes a monumental rock-cut tomb or sanctuary. This particular type was very common in the Eastern Aegean Sea. Certain traces hint at the existence of a wooden cover at the mouth of the cave. The latter was probably a sanctuary dedicated to Aphrodite, a very popular goddess with the lower social class. Statuettes of the goddess have been found in Pigadia. In all probability, the open-air sanctuary of the goddess stood in Parthenos Cave, 2 km away, in the area of Vathypotamos. Owing to its continuous and extensive use by shepherds, the cave has been eroded over time.</p>
<b>Kasos</b>	
<b>Agia Marina</b>	ELLINOKAMARA CAVE. The cave provided shelter to local inhabitants during times of regular pirate

	<p>raids. Its entrance, measuring 30 m wide and 10 m high, has been closed since antiquity with a wall built of equal-sized stones ending at two openings. Further exploration has yielded ceramic items dating from various epochs, including the Mycenaean era. It appears that the cave was a place of worship over a period extending from the Mycenaean era until Hellenistic times. Located west of Agia Marina, it overlooks the small valley of Paradisi dotted with olive-trees and fields that reach down to the seashore. Opposite the cave lies the tiny offshore islet of Armathia, flanked by several other islets.</p> <p>SELAI CAVE, overhung with impressive stalactites, is located 2 km W from the village. It measures 30 m in depth and 8 m in width.</p>
<b>Kos</b>	
<b>Kefalos</b>	<p>ASPRI PETRA CAVE (White Rock) is situated after the site known as "Ta Palatia" towards Zini. Its exploration brought to light findings from the Neolithic Era and subsequent times.</p>
<b>Megisti (Kastelorizo)</b>	
<b>Megisti (Kastelorizo)</b>	<p>THE GALAZIO SPILIO (blue cave) or FOKIALI CAVE. This is probably one of the most beautiful caves encountered in the Mediterranean region. It boasts an unworldly, dreamy atmosphere dominated by all shades of dark and light blue, and splendid arrays of stalagmites and stalactites. A boat can enter the cave, however passengers need to lower their heads. It is preferable to visit the cave in the morning when there is ample sunlight. In the eastern part of the island lie many smaller caves. The most outstanding one is Kolones Cave.</p>
<b>Patmos</b>	
<b>Chora</b>	<p>THE HOLY CAVE OF THE APOCALYPSE (Tel. 312</p>

	<p>34) is located midway between Chora and Skala. Tradition holds that in this cave St John - exiled to the island of Patmos by the Roman emperor Domitian in AD 95 - dictated the Apocalypse (Revelation) to his disciple. In front of the cave's mouth, and climbing down a few stairs, the visitor can see the church of Agia Anna. The latter, which underwent renovation in the 17th century, is presently surrounded by a monastic complex (Monastery of Apocalypse), with flower-filled gardens, cells and chapels. Rock-cut steps lead to the entrance.</p>
<b>Rhodes</b>	
<b>Rhodes</b>	THE PERIERGES SPILIES, located to the NE, resemble an aqueduct and are considered to be a sanctuary of the Nymphs.
<b>Kalithies or Faliraki</b>	KALAMONIAS CAVE, which is hard to access, is of great archaeological importance as the dwelling of the island's earliest inhabitants (this is also the case with Koumelos Archangelos Cave).
<b>Salakos</b>	MAKAROUNA CAVE, which has been made suitable for tourist visits, lies at the edge of the village. Next to it flows the Spring of Nymphs, wherefrom water is tapped for distribution over the island and bottled for commercial purposes.
<b>Archangelos</b>	KOUMELOU CAVE. Located 3 km away on the peak of the hill that bears the same name, this cave is of considerable archaeological and speleological interest. Recent excavations have brought to light vases and other artifacts dating from the Neolithic and Mycenaean periods, thus attesting to the very ancient origins of human habitation in the area.
<b>Tilos</b>	
<b>Megalo Chorio</b>	CHARKADIO CAVE. Excavations conducted by paleontologists Nikolaos Simeonidis and Georgios



	Theodoros brought to light in 1971 neolithic tools and bones of dwarf elephants and of a deer, datable to 8000-7000 BC. The area is covered with volcanic lava. The unearthed findings are displayed at the Paleontological Museum (Athens University Campus).
Khalki	
<b>Khalki or Nimborio</b>	<p>THE CAVE IN THE AREA OF KELIA (access to it takes a 20-min-boat-ride), which has housed anchorites in the past, features religious paintings on its rocks.</p> <p>THE CAVE OF KAMENOS SPILIOS (the burned cave) is situated in Amiglay, on a steep rock, 8 km from Nimborio. In 1658, the Venetian Fleet Admiral Francesco Morosini eliminated the inhabitants who had hidden inside, when he blocked the mouth of the cave with wood from the nearby almond trees and set it afire. In this manner, Morosini wreaked vengeance on the people of Khalki who had foiled his plan to take over the island of Rhodes by sending word to the Rhodians.</p>

## Crete

Chania	
<b>Agia Marina</b>	NEROSPILIAS CAVE located 1.5 km away from Chania features stalactites and stalagmites. The cave constituted a place of worship during the Middle Minoan period.
<b>Akrotiri</b>	ARKOUDIOTISSA OR ARKOUDIA CAVE is set in the same area with the Monastery. The exploration of the cave by archaeologist K. Davaras revealed that the cult of the goddess Artemis was practised here in antiquity.
<b>Georgioupoli</b>	KOURNAS CAVE occupies the site known as Keratides, south of Lake Kournas. Discovered in 1961, the cave is crammed with fine rock

	formations (stalactites, stalagmites, many columns).
<b>Theriso</b>	SARAKINA CAVE, located 2 km to the N, has yielded ancient vases.
<b>Malaxa</b>	ACHLODOLAKKI and GRAI SPILI CAVES are found in proximity to the village of Malaxa.
<b>Paleochora</b>	ZOURES CAVES and CHARAKAS CAVE are situated adjacent to the village of Azogyres. They were home to 99 holy fathers who came from Egypt, Cyprus and Attalia via the island Gavdos in 1300, in order to lead an ascetic life. Here visitors can see the "Museum of Nature" dominated by a unique evergreen plane-tree.
<b>Fournes</b>	CHIROSPILIOS CAVE, 2 km to the N.
<b>Chora Sfakion - Fragokastelo</b>	DASKALOGIANNI CAVE, situated on the coast, is accessible only by boat. Here operated the mint during the Revolution of 1770.
<b>Rethymno</b>	
<b>Rethymno</b>	THE CAVE in Gerani, 6 km N of Rethymno, was discovered in 1969 during construction of the national road. It commands speleological and palaeontological interest and has yielded findings such as stone and bone tools, as well as bones of deer, elephants and other animals.
<b>Zoniana</b>	SFENDONI CAVE, (and not "SENDONI" as it is persistently called by local inhabitants) is one of the most spectacularly beautiful caves, lying near the village of Zoniana at an imposing location, with a modern tourist kiosk. Information: 61 209
<b>Perama</b>	MELIDONI CAVE (alternatively referred to as Gerospelios or Gerondospelios), is situated 4 km to the NW. Aside from the speleological interest it presents (it contains stalagmites, stalactites and columns), the cave was reportedly a place of worship of the mythical bronze figure of Talos

	<p>(crafted by Hephaestus), who was revered as the indefatigable warden of laws in Minoan times. Later, in the Roman era, the cave was given over to the worship of god Hermes. In recent times, its name became associated with one of the most horrific events recorded in the history of Crete. In 1824, hundreds of Cretans from the surrounding villages died tragically inside Gerondospelios where they had sought shelter since 1822 in an attempt to escape the troops of Hassan Pasha. The latter's successor, Hussein Pasha, discovered their hide-out and tried to talk them into surrendering in peace, but to no avail. Following their refusal, the mouth of the cave was blocked and a fire was lit, thus causing the suffocation of 340 women and children and of 30 armed men.</p>
<b>Heraklion</b>	
<b>Arkalochori</b>	<p>THE MINOAN SANCTUARY-CAVE, wherefrom ample ceramic findings were unearthed, is located in the area. Particularly impressive are the votive offerings - probably to some war deity - including swords, knives and a series of gold, silver and bronze double-bit axes, some of which bear engraved decoration. Also, there are signs hinting at the cave's violent destruction at the onset of the Late Minoan Period.</p>
<b>Ano Archanes</b>	<p>HOSTO NERO CAVE is situated in the same area.</p>
<b>Kato and Pano Asites</b>	<p>SARCHOU CAVE, alternatively referred to as CHONOS CAVE or NYCHTERIDOSPELIO, lies in Sarchos, 4.5 km to the N. Measuring about 300 m in length, it is overhung with stalactites and filled with water.</p>
<b>Ano Viannos</b>	<p>VIGLAS CAVE features stalactite and stalagmite formations. It served as shelter during the Turkish occupation (13 km, passable road).</p>
<b>Zaros - Kamares</b>	<p>KAMARES CAVE, NE of the Kamares village, is</p>



	<p>situated on the southern slope of Mount Ida (or Psiloritis) at an elevation of 1520 m (the ascent to it takes 1 h). The cave was discovered in 1890 by a villager, while excavations conducted later (1913) by British archaeologists yielded important Minoan findings; among the latter the most outstanding ones were abundant quantities of the famous Kamares ware, multicoloured pottery of the Middle Minoan period. Exquisite examples of this style of pottery were also found at the great palaces of Knossos and Phaestus. They are presently on display in the Archaeological Museum of Heraklion. The cave, which served as a dwelling to Neolithic people, was dedicated to the worship of the great Minoan deity. A visit to the cave entails a long ascending walk.</p>
<b>Karteros - Amnisos</b>	<p>ELITHYIA CAVE (1 km S of Amnisos). The cave, mention of which is made in Homer, constituted one of the major places of worship of Elithyia, the Cretan goddess of childbirth. It was discovered in the late 19th century, it is oblong (60 m long and 9 to 12 m wide), and is known to local inhabitants as "Neraidospelios" (i.e. the cave of the fairy). Excavations conducted by archaeologists Hatzidakis and Marinatos revealed that it was a cult site from the Neolithic period until the 5th century BC (ceramic findings are representative of all periods). Almost in the centre of the cave, there is a rectangular altar or nave, around two cylindrical stalagmites that are evocative of human figures.</p>
<b>Matala</b>	<p>THE CAVES. They were apparently used as dwelling places by prehistoric people. Many of them contained rock-hewn tombs dating to the Graeco-Roman times and the Early Christian period.</p>
<b>Lasithi</b>	
<b>Milatos</b>	<p>MILATOS CAVE lies in a</p>

	steep gorge, NA of the village that bears the same name. It has been connected with the historical events of 1823. Here 3,700 women and children sought refuge after escaping the fierce troops of Hassan Pasha. After a long siege and a forced surrender, they were massacred by the Turks. Stalactites and stalagmites abound in the cave. A chamber in its southern part harbours a chapel wherein a mass is celebrated once a year, on the feast day of Agios Thomas in commemoration of the massacred Cretans.
<b>Lasithi Plateau (Tzermiado)</b>	TRAPEZA OR KRONION CAVE features stalactites and stalagmites, as well as remains dating to the Neolithic period.

The Peloponnese:

<b>Argolida</b>	
<b>Didyma</b>	Two caves (of doline karst) are found just outside the entrance to the village (1 km to the W). The largest cave has a diameter of 150 m and reaches a depth of 80 m. Both caves are truly impressive in terms of size and shape.
<b>Kilada</b>	FRANCHTI CAVE. It has yielded important palaeontological findings.
<b>Arcadia</b>	
<b>Leonidio</b>	DIONYSUS (SINTZAS) CAVE, with stalactites and stalagmites. Vases and bones dating from various periods were unearthed in the cave.
<b>Paralia Tyrou - Sapounakaiikon</b>	THE CAVE OF THE LOVERS, located on the beach of Tigani. It can be reached by boat.
<b>Achaia</b>	
<b>Kalavryta</b>	THE CAVE OF THE LAKES (Tel: 31558, 31633, 31001) is situated 1500 m N of the village of Kastria. It contains 13 lakes and is endowed with a geomorphologic character that is unique throughout the world. The quiet waters of the lakes, which are situated on three levels and are arranged in an echelon pattern, reflect magnificent multicolored stalactites that have formed on the cave's walls and ceilings. Although the existence of the cave has been known since ancient times, its second level was not discovered until 1964, when certain inhabitants of Kastria reached it by means of wooden ladders. The

	<p>exploration of the cave was undertaken by the Greek Mountaineering Association (EOS) and was headed by Professor Ioannis Melentis and speleologist Anna Petrochilou. In 1981, the cave opened to the public and has since been exploited by the Greek National Tourist Organisation. The cave is fed by waters tumbling from the Apanokambos Plateau (the latter rises some 4 km above the cave) which are canalised through swallow-holes and underground natural channels to the sources of Aroanios River. In total, the cave covers an area of 20,000 square meters, of which only 1,980 have been explored and 350 have been arranged for tourist visits, while further works are currently under way. The lower level (inaccessible) yielded human and animal fossils of paramount palaeontological importance, as well as potshards dating to the Neolithic period and the early Helladic times. The cave facilities, open to the public all year round, comprise a waiting room and a tourist kiosk.</p>
<b>Klitoria</b>	THE CAVE OF THE LAKES, situated in Kastria, 9 km to the N.
<b>Kato Achaia</b>	NERAIDOTRYPA CAVE is situated adjacent to the village of Portes, 5 km N from Santomeri.
<b>Lakonia</b>	
<b>Neapoli</b>	THE CAVE, with rich stalactitic decoration, lies 17 km to the NE.
<b>Pyrgos Dirou</b>	<p>THE PYRGOS DIROU CAVE SYSTEM, located 5 km to the NW, incorporates the famous caverns ALEPOTRYPA and VLYCHADA, both explored by speleologists Ioannis &amp; Anna Petrochilos. The Alepotrypa cavern was discovered in 1958.</p> <p>Archaeological research begun in 1970 under the direction of archaeologist Georgios Papathanassopoulos. In the course of the late Neolithic period (4000 - 3000 BC), the cave was extensively used as shelter, dwelling, workshop, storage place for goods, cemetery and a place of worship. The richness and quality of the unearthed findings bear witness to the existence of a populous society in Alepotrypa, which developed over time into an important centre that engaged largely in trade, maritime travel, farming and stockbreeding. Strangely enough, human skeletons were found on the surface, meaning that entombment had not taken place. This led archaeologist G. Papathanassopoulos to the conclusion that these Neolithic people died suddenly during a strong earthquake, which in turn generated huge rockslides from the ceiling, thus blocking the cave's entrance. The passageways of Alepotrypa, decorated with stalagmites and stalactites, measure 500 m in length. The cave</p>



	<p>covers an area of 6,500 m<sup>2</sup>. The central cave ends into a very beautiful lake attaining a maximum depth of 6 m. The cave is not open to the public, yet.</p> <p>THE CAVERN OF VLYCHADA covers an area of 16,700 m<sup>2</sup>. Since 1949, about 2,800 water passages have been explored. A 2.5-km-long winding passageway is the main route for sightseeing. During a 40-min boat ride, the visitor comes across an intricate network of passages and galleries, decorated with gleaming stalagmites and stalactites, whose reflection in the water accentuates their natural beauty. The guided tour into the cavern of Vlychada takes place by boat and on foot - part of it is laid out on land. Information: Tel. 52222, 52223.</p>
<b>Messinia</b>	
<b>Agios Nikolaos</b>	KATAFYGIO CAVE, overhung with stalactites, is located 3.5 km to the SE.

#### Ionian Islands:

<b>Ithaca</b>	
<b>Vathy</b>	THE FAMOUS CAVE OF THE NYMPHS is located 2 km to the N. According to the myth, it was here that Ulysses hid the presents he received from the Phaeacians (i.e. the inhabitants of ancient Corfu, referred to as the island of Scheria in the Homeric epic) on his return from Troy, after years of trying adventures.
<b>Stavros</b>	THE LOIZOUS CAVE lies in the northern part of the gulf. Traces of a 9th-century-BC sanctuary were found in the cave along with tripods of the Geometric period, and pottery dating from the time span extending from Mycenaean to Roman times. The cave served as a place of worship over a span of 2,000 years.
<b>Paxoi</b>	
<b>Lakka</b>	THE SEA CAVE OF YPAPANTI. Legend holds that it leads to the church and the stately house of Grammatikos - the latter is a listed building.
<b>Lefkada</b>	

<b>Syvota</b>	<p>THE DEMONAS CAVE is found near Spartochori.</p> <p>THE CAVE OF PAPANIKOLIS. It is believed to have been the hideaway of the "Papanikolis" submarine. It contains many caverns.</p>
<b>Cephalonia</b>	
<b>Fiskardo</b>	<p>THE CAVES situated on the hill of Spiliovouno are sites of archaeological interest. In close proximity are found remains of Cyclopean walls.</p>
<b>Lixouri</b>	<p>DRACOSPELIA CAVE (the cave of the dragon), located to the S.</p>
<b>Argostoli</b>	<p>AGIOS GERASIMOS CAVE, situated 3 km from the town. This is where Agios Gerasimos, the island's patron saint, led an ascetic life before settling in the Valley of Omalon.</p>
<b>Sami</b>	<p>THE ZERVATI CAVE, located in the area of Karavomylos, is 18 m deep and 75 m long. It features two small lakes whose banks support aquatic plants that are rarely encountered in Greece. It is not open to the public.</p> <p>THE DROGARATIS CAVE, located 5 km from the town, is truly a manifestation of the grandeur of nature which has crafted this "sculptural" masterpiece. Once inside the cave, the visitor is instantly captivated by this remarkable workshop of the earth, where stalactites and stalagmites have been formed for thousands of years. The reflection of sunlight on the stalactites creates an unworldly, dream-like atmosphere. The cave contains a 44-m-long descending passageway that leads to a chamber of 30 x 40 m. The latter, decorated with multi-hued stalactites and stalagmites, is renowned for its excellent acoustics and is arranged for concerts (a special platform has been erected along the back wall of the</p>

	<p>cavern). Its domed roof is intact and is of a unique, magical formation. The Drogarati Cave is a rare geological phenomenon and attracts thousands of visitors.</p> <p>THE AGGALAKI CAVE, found in the area of Poulata, is surrounded by fourteen other caves. It has a 50-m-deep cauldron-like opening, and comprises a lake with a surface area of 3,000 m<sup>2</sup> approximately, and a subterranean karst branch that extends over some 8,000 m<sup>2</sup>. The cave is not open to the public.</p>
<b>Skala</b>	<p>THE SAKKOS CAVE is a site of archaeological interest, found at the location that bears the same name, between Skala and the Temple of Apollo. It consists of two cavities linked by a small tunnel. It has yielded findings attesting to its use by prehistoric peoples.</p>
<b>Zakynthos</b>	
<b>Volimes</b>	<p>THE FAMOUS BLUE CAVES, located on the NE coast of Cape Schinari, rank among the most beautiful caves in Greece. They consist of a series of chambers, the Megali and Mikri Spelia (Large and Small Cave). The reflection and diffusion of sunlight in the waters trigger a riot of color. Visitors can go up to Agios Nikolaos by car (asphalted road) and then continue by boat. Alternatively, they can start out from the town of Zakynthos by boat or caique.</p>
<b>Corfu</b>	
<b>Agios Mattheos</b>	<p>THE CAVE OF "TRYPA TOU PELAOU" (in Greek Hole of the sea). The cave, located on Mount Mattheos, 500 m away from the Monastery, dates from the Paleolithic Period. According to legend, it leads to the sea.</p>
<b>Kythira</b>	
<b>Mylopotamos</b>	<p>AGIA SOFIA CAVE. It features displays of stalactites and stalagmites.</p>



Cental Greece:

Northern Attica	
Penteli	THE CAVE OF LISTARCHOS DAVELIS. Access to it entails 1-hour walk from Agia Triada.
Eastern Attica	
Paeania or Liopesi	KOUTOUKIS CAVE. A captivating site, hidden on a slope of Mount Ymittos (asphalted road, parking area).
Salamina	
Moulki or Aeantio	THE CAVE OF EURIPIDES, located in Peristeria. This historic cave, explored since 1994 by archaeologist Giannos Lolos, consists of 10 chambers in total. Its use covers a time span of eight different periods, extending from the Neolithic Period to modern times. Its exploration brought to light many findings such as stone tools, a Mycenaean sword, coins, jewels, vases dating from the Classical period, the Hellenistic and Roman times, as well as from the Frankish rule. The coastal location of the cave and its morphology, as well as the latest discovery of a skyphos (type of cup) bearing the name of Euripides, ascertain the fact that the great tragedian used to retire here to write his works.
Spetses	
Spetses	BEKIRIS CAVE. Located in Agii Anargyri, at the back of the island, this cave was used as a hide-out by the fighters of the Greek War of Independence (1821).
Aetoloacarnania	
Astakos	KYKLOPAS (CYCLOPS) CAVE, found at a distance of 1 km.
Eurytania	
Proussos	SPELIA CAVE (variously referred to as Apoklistras Cave). It features two entrances; one lies within the village and the other is farther away from it.

Euboea	
<b>Karystos</b>	AGIA TRIADA CAVE. Evidence of prehistoric settlement was unearthed here.
<b>Aedipsos - Loutra Aedipsou</b>	THE CAVE OF SYLLA is situated adjacent to the spring of Agii Anargyri, where Sylla resorted to seek cure from gout.
<b>Lihada - Agios Georgios</b>	THE CAVE, which is still unexplored, occupies the site known as "Pasogourni", on the hillock of Profitis Ilias.

Sporades:

Skyros	
<b>Linaria</b>	The area numbers five or six caves, lying some 18 nautical miles SE from the port (2 hour-trip). The biggest cave, Pentekali, is accessible by boat. The beauty of the stalactite decoration and the green bottom of the sea are truly awe-inspiring. The cave of Diatrypti, which has two openings, can be crossed by low-freeboard boat. The landscape and the entire route are captivating.
Skopelos	
<b>Skopelos</b>	TRYPITI CAVE lies in proximity to Glysteri and can be reached by motor-boat from Skopelos town.

Thessaly:

Magnesia	
<b>Agios Lavrentios</b>	THE CAVE OF THE MYTHICAL CENTAUR is located on the top of the mountain, commanding a panoramic view of the Pagasitikos Gulf and the Aegean Sea.
<b>Platania - Katigiorgis</b>	THE LOUMBARDA. Towering rocks, which emerge from the sea, front the Martia coast. Here the visitor can swim into a small cave featuring stalactites and stalagmites.
<b>Chorefto</b>	HUGE SEA CAVES lie in the harbourless area of Palea Mintzela (the latter

	is uninhabited today; its inhabitants founded Amaliapoli). It can be accessed by boat (1-hour ride to the NW). According to myth, Thetis, the prettiest of the fifty Nereids, fell in love with Peleus in this area.
<b>Vyzitsa</b>	THE CAVE OF CENTAUR CHIRON can be accessed by foot (1-km walk). A cobbled pathway leads to the cave, while the route threads a lushly vegetated landscape.
<b>Karditsa</b>	
<b>Kanalia</b>	THE TSANAKA CAVE is located below the square of the village. At present, it remains unexplored.
<b>Mavrommati</b>	THE CAVE. Legend holds that Georgios Karaiskakis - one of the fighters in the Greek War of Independence of 1821 - was born in this cave in 1872. It is located 2.5 km south of the Monastery of Agios Georgios, where the mother of the fighter was living. Visitors can walk to the cave.
<b>Larissa</b>	
<b>Elassona</b>	THE CAVE in the area of Kefalovryssos is a captivating, unexplored site, boasting stalagmites and stalactites rich in colour and shape. The cave was known to local inhabitants as "Apati trypa" (bottomless hole) or "Trypa tou Boursi" (the hole of Boursi). Information - Tel: 952 67.

## Epirus:

<b>Ioannina</b>	
<b>Ioannina</b>	THE PERAMA CAVE is located 4 km north of the town of Ioannina, on the way to Metsovo. Teeth of cave bears were found in its interior. The cave features displays of stalactites and stalagmites and was dedicated to Pluto and Persephone.
<b>Pramanta</b>	PRAMANTA CAVE. A site of rare beauty, containing stalagmites and stalactites.

Preveza	
<b>Parga</b>	THE CAVES, in the bay of Lychnos. The largest cave, Aphrodite, is entered by boat.

Macedonia:

Grevena	
<b>Deskati</b>	THE CAVE found at the location of Agia Paraskevi.
<b>Zakas</b>	THE CAVES situated on Mount Orliakas.
Kastoria	
<b>Dispili</b>	THE CAVE, lying 500 m away from the village.
Kozani	
<b>Akrini</b>	SKOTINO CAVE is found at an elevation of 1000 m in proximity to the village. It is decorated with stalactites and stalagmites.
Imathia	
<b>Kato Vermio</b>	THE CAVES occupying the sites known as "Siambalis" and "Prionia".
<b>Naoussa</b>	THE "SARANDA OUTADES" CAVE, features stalactites and stalagmites.
<b>Rodochori</b>	A NEOLITHIC CAVE, discovered in 1963, is situated near the village.
Kilkis	
<b>Kilkis</b>	THE TWO-STORIED CAVE ON THE HILL OF AI-GIORGIS was discovered accidentally by a lumberman. It covers an area of more than 1000 m <sup>2</sup> and boasts an impressive decoration of stalactites and stalagmites.
Chalkidiki	
<b>Petralona</b>	PETRALONA CAVE. It is situated in the foothills of Mount Katsika, where a human skull dating from 600,000 BC was unearthed. The skull, which belonged to a woman aged approximately 25, provided evidence of an earlier species of man, the Archanthrope, which constituted the transition



	from Homo erectus to Homo sapiens. The cave also yielded animal bones (belonging to cave bears, hyenas, lions, rhinoceroses, deer, etc.) The stalactites and stalagmites contained in the cave are also of considerable interest.
<b>Thasos</b>	
<b>Panagia</b>	DRACOTRYPA CAVE (the hole of the dragon). It was named after a stalactite that had the shape of a dragon.
<b>Drama</b>	
<b>Prosotsani</b>	THE MARAS CAVE, situated in the area of Kokkinogia, was discovered in September 1978 by a team of Greek and French speleologists. The latter, basing their assumption on some natural phenomena, maintained that the waters of the sources of the Angitis River were flowing through a cave. In order to uphold their theory, they conducted underwater exploration of the sources with the help of diving equipment. At a depth of 7 m, they discovered a passage leading to the cave. A huge gallery measuring some 500 m in length was also found. Its ceiling is dripping with stalactites, some of which attain a diameter of 2 m and reach the surface of the water. Their amazing colours are attributed to the existence of ores (manganese, iron, copper, etc).
<b>Serres</b>	
<b>Serres</b>	A CAVE is found in the area of Efta Myloi (Seven Mills).
<b><u>Alistrati</u></b>	A CAVE lies in the area of Petrotos. It ranks among the largest and most beautiful caves encountered in the country. For the time being, it is not open to the public due to work conducted by the Archaeological Service of Greece.

Thrace:

Evros	
<b>Makri</b>	THE CAVE, lying by the sea, is believed to have been the residence of Cyclops Polyphemus. The first level comprises two chambers, while the second one features one spacious chamber decorated with stalactites and stalagmites. Potsherds discovered in its interior attest to its use in ancient times.
<b>Didymoticho</b>	TWO CAVES are located adjacent to the cathedral. Tradition holds that Charles XII of Sweden was imprisoned here, after falling into the hands of the Ottomans in 1713.
Rodopi	
<b>Maronia</b>	THE CAVE OF KYKLOPAS (i.e. CYCLOPS) is situated between the villages of Maronia and Proskinites, where ceramic items dating from the Neolithic period and the Byzantine era were unearthed. The cave served as a dwelling to prehistoric peoples, which was also the case with other caverns found in the area.

## GORGES:

Gorges are typical formations of limestone rock. They result from the action of rainfall and melting ice. On their inaccessible walls grow rare wild flowers and many birds find safe nesting spots. Canyoning (known in the U.S. as canyoneering) is an outdoor sport activity combining hiking, climbing, scrambling, rock descent, li-losing (travelling down streams using an inflatable air mattress) and swimming. This sport also involves jumping from a high point into the water when waterfalls are encountered along the route. In Greece canyoning is a relatively new activity, developing at a fast pace and steadily rising in popularity; it has a big potential as an attraction pole for worldwide visitors related to these kind of sports due to the complex geography of the country.

Greece's most important gorges per geographical department are the following:

NE Islands of the Aegean:

Ikaria	
<b>Armenistis</b>	HALARI GORGE, is found near the small port of Nas in a magnificent natural environment punctuated by flowing springs, plane-trees and a natural lake.

Crete:

Chania	
<b>Samaria Gorge</b>	<p>The Samaria Gorge is the longest ravine in Europe (with a total length of 18 km) and offers one of the most spectacular hiking routes in Europe. Its width ranges from 150 m (widest part) to 3 m (narrowest part). The walk takes 6 to 8 hours. The Samaria Gorge has been designated as a national park in order to protect its flora and fauna. The walk starts at Xiloskala, a solid, wooden staircase down into the gorge that facilitates hikers' fast descent. The trail follows a riverbed through a magnificent wooded area with tall trees and a spectacular view. Midway lies the abandoned hamlet of Samaria, with a tiny 14th-century Byzantine church dedicated to Ossia Maria the Egyptian, who gave her name to the area ("Samaria" results from the synaeresis of "Ossia Maria"). The church contains interesting frescoes. It stands on the south side of the hamlet and it can be reached via a path starting from the site of the heliport. One of the most impressive parts of the trail is Sideroportes (Iron Gates) where the rock walls, only 3 m apart, soar straight up to about 600m. The walk down the gorge ends at Agia Roumeli, a seaside village where visitors can stay overnight or alternatively board the boat that will take them to Loutro, Chora Sfakion, Sougia or Paleochora.</p>
<b>Anopolis</b>	<p>The gorge between Anopolis and Arádena ends at the Dialiskari beach (total length 7 km). Information: Mountaineering Association of Chania, Tel: 28210-44647.</p>
<b>Georgioúpolis</b>	<p>The IMBROS GORGE. It has a length of 6-7 km and is one of the narrowest and deepest gorges of the country. In places, its width is only 2 m and its depth 300 m, while elsewhere the walls converge even more, blocking the sky from</p>

	view. Cypressess, holm-oaks and other trees abound in the area. The motor road leading to Chora Sfakion threads the gorge.
<b>Epanohori</b>	The lushly vegetated AGIA IRINI GORGE ends at the beach of Sougia (a 4-hour walk). From Agia Irini, the road leads in 12 km to Omalos.
<b>Theriso</b>	The imposing ELEFThERIOS VENIZELOS GORGE links the village to Chania. The road runs through this gorge that once served as the "headquarters" of Cretan revolutionaries.
<b>Malaxa</b>	A SMALL GORGE, 400 m deep, lies in proximity to the village.
<b>Paleochora</b>	The small GORGE OF ANIDRI-GIANISKARI (30-min. walk).
<b>Topolia</b>	TOPOLIANO GORGE. Measuring 1.500 m in length, this gorge is characterised by vertical, precipitous slopes riddled with cavernous openings, one of which is the explored cave of Agia Sofia rising at 80 m to the right of the road that threads the gorge. The cave features rich displays of stalagmites and stalactites in spectacular formations. The Agia Sofia Cave presents archaeological interest as well, since it has yielded potsherds dating from the Neolithic period.
<b>Rethymno</b>	
<b>Koxaré</b>	KOURTALIOTIKO GORGE. This imposing, narrow gorge of rugged beauty is dotted with springs and caves. When the wind blows, one can hear hand-clapping sounds (in the local dialect the latter are referred to as kourtala, hence the name of the gorge). The Kourtaliotis River flows through the gorge and debouches into a location adjacent to the Monastery of Preveli. The chapel of Agios Nikolaos nestles in the gorge. Tradition holds that when the saint's fingers touched the rock water came gushing forth, hence the five springs of Kourtaliotis,



	close to the chapel. It is worth climbing down the stone steps that lead to the river to visit them. Closeby, the small church of Agios Georgios contains a unique rendering of the Holy Trinity in a mural that depicts the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove flying out of the mouth of God.
<b>Herakleion</b>	
<b>Ano Viannos</b>	THE VIANNOS-AMIRA GORGE.
<b>Zaros-Kamares</b>	THE GORGE. For safety reasons, visitors are advised to ask local inhabitants for information before setting off.
<b>Lassithi</b>	
<b>Lassithi Plateau (Tzermiado)</b>	THE HAVGAS GORGE is situated 40 km from Agios Nikolaos, at the eastern tip of the plateau, commanding a spectacular view over the entire area. The gorge reaches a depth of 300 m. Two slit rocks form the entrance to an array of caves that were extensively used by Cretan revolutionaries and the Allied forces during the German Occupation. Access is possible via Tzermiado.

The Peloponnese:

<b>Argolida</b>	
<b>New Epidaurus</b>	THE VOTHYLAS GORGE lies at the end of the village near the site where the monument that commemorates the National Assembly stands.
<b>Ermioni</b>	KATAFYKI GORGE, extending along 4.5 km to the N.
<b>Arcadia</b>	
<b>Stemnitsa (Ipsous)</b>	LOUSIOS GORGE, located 10 km to the W.
<b>Achaia</b>	
<b>Kalavryta</b>	2 km from Diakofto starts the GORGE OF THE VOURAIKOS RIVER which extends for 20 km up to Kalavryta. Along this route runs the Kalavryta-Diakofto rack railway. The narrowest point of this

	<p>route bears the name "Portes" (Gates), and is situated a few km before one reaches the site of Zachlorou. The railway tunnels, in conjunction with the idyllic scenery of the Vouraikos Gorge dotted with waterfalls and caves, render this journey a unique experience. Visitors who reach Kalavryta by car are strongly recommended to continue by railway all the way to Diakofto and return. Information: OSE of Kalavryta.</p>
<b>Kalentzi</b>	THE SMALL GORGE OF POROS.
<b>Messinia</b>	
<b>Kardamyli</b>	<p>THE VYROS GORGE. The entrance to the gorge is found outside Kardamyli. Vyros stretches for about 20 km and its rugged beauty is reminiscent of the Samaria Gorge. Visitors can walk up to the springs of the Vyros River (2 h 30-min walk). After that point, the terrain becomes rough, and the route almost inaccessible. Adjacent to the Vyros springs several old flour mills survive.</p>

#### Ionian Islands:

<b>Kythira</b>	
<b>Agia Pelagia</b>	THE LAGADAS GORGE, situated to the S. It once formed a lake.
<b>Mitata</b>	THE TSAKONAS GORGE, containing several rock-hewn churches.

#### Central Greece:

<b>Aetoloacarnania</b>	
<b>Agrinio</b>	<p>THE LARGE GORGE OF KLEISOURA lies 20 km to the S. Its southern entrance is occupied by the rock-hewn Monastery of Agia Eleousa. It was in this area that Yiannis Gounaris, the hero who saved Mesolongi during the first siege, led a monastic life and died (hence the nickname by which he was known, "the Monk of Kleisoura").</p>

	Above the monastery, on the surface of a rock the visitor can discern two figures, "the head of the Virgin Mary" and a "lamb", sculpted by the action of tumbling water.
<b>Euboea</b>	
<b>Nea Styra</b>	THE HARAKAS GORGE, ideal for walking (2-hour walk).

Epirus:

<b>Ioannina</b>	
<b>Monodendri</b>	THE VIKOS GORGE. 600 m from the village of Monodendri, starts the beautiful Vikos Gorge which has a total length of more than 30 km (Tsepelovo-Kleidonia). Its depth varies: from approx. 600 m in the area of Monodendri, where its narrowest part occurs, up to approx. 1,200 m near the village of Vikos (more than 1,300 m at the eastern wall and approx. 1,100 m at the western wall). The deepest part of the gorge also has the greatest width, approx. 2,200 m. It's the second deepest in the world just after the Grand Canyon in the US.

Macedonia:

<b>Imathia</b>	
<b>Kato Veria</b>	THE SELIOS GORGE stretches for 5 km. At its entrance one can find the Hole of Michalis.
<b>Pieria</b>	
<b>Agios Dimitrios</b>	THE BREATH-TAKING OLYMPOS GORGE dominates the area. The route towards the STENA (STRAITS) OF PETRA is worth following.

## POPULATION:

According to Eurostat the population of Greece was of 11,041,100 in 2004 a small number if we consider the area of the country, it's also among the less inhabited countries of Europe in comparison to its area. Nevertheless if we consider the number of non citizen immigrants we have to add another 500,000 and this figure doesn't

include the illegal migration. Some studies even have showed a total migration of 1 million thus putting the population up to the 12 thousands. Anyway we are to stick with the official numbers so the total population including the non citizen foreign migrants is considered to be around the 11.5 millions.

Of these 5 millions live in Athens and its metro area (Attika) according to latest appreciations around 4.5 millions live in Athens area (the city itself has an area of around 500 sq kms and saw a big sprawling process in the last ten years ) plus 500,000 in the Attika metro area (with an area of 4,000 sq kms). It must be noted that this ciphers doesn't coincide with the numbers given by the 2001 census, due to the registration issue of much of the population of Athens, many of who are originals of other peripheries (mainly Cyclades, Epirus and Peloponnesse) and moved out to the capital in the last decades, however there is a trend of keeping the original registration addresses, resulting in the registration of their census data in their original towns. That's why while the 2001 census gave a result of 3.8 millions for Athens later studies projected a figure approaching the 5 millions.

Second in importance is Thessaloniki with a population of around 1.3 millions (including metro area) located in Macedonia some 500 kms north from Athens.

Third in importance and population is the capital of the Peloponessus Patra with 300,000 inhabitants (including metro area) and located 210 kms W of Athens.

Other cities in importance include Herakleion, Larissa, Volos, Kavala, Kalamata, Ioannina among others.

About 60-65% of Greek immigrants have come from Albania (following the fall of communism) although some 200.000 are ethnic Greeks from Northern Epirus. The other principal nationalities are, according to residence permit data, Bulgarians (67.000), Romanians (29.000), Ukrainians (23.000), Pakistanis (17.000) and Georgians (15.000); as well as Indians, Chinese and other in less numbers.

## **ECONOMY:**

Greece has a mixed capitalist economy with the public sector accounting for about half of GDP. Tourism has great importance, providing a large portion of GDP and foreign exchange earnings. Greece also counts as a world leader in shipping (first in terms of ownership of vessels and third by flag registration). Greece figures prominently as a major beneficiary of EU aid, equal to about 2.4% of its GNP. The export of manufactured goods, including telecommunications hardware and software, foodstuffs, and fuels accounts for a large part of the rest of Greek income.



 Greek euro coins



The country has a high standard of living, ranking 24th on the 2005 Human Development Index and 22nd on The Economist's 2005 world-wide quality-of-life index. The economy has improved steadily over the last few years, as the government tightened fiscal policy in the run-up to Greece's entry into the Eurozone on January 1, 2001 (Greek euro coins). Average per capita income in 2005 was estimated at \$22,800. Greece has an expanding services sector and telecommunications industry and has become one of the largest investors in the immediate region. Moreover, Greece now operates as a net importer of labour and foreign workers (mainly from Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Pakistan, and Africa).

The main challenge facing the Greek economy is proving impossible to remedy; the public sector employs almost half the population. The vast majority of state employees are untrained and/or lack relevant skills (including teachers), thereby they slow down the economy and absorb collectively a vast proportion of Greek finances with no visible input. They owe their position to political favouritism, they enjoy unlimited job protection and early pension rights.

Other challenges faced by the country include the reduction of unemployment, social security reforms, overhauling the tax system, and minimising bureaucratic inefficiencies. Forecasts predicted economic growth of 4 - 4.5 % in 2004. Reducing the government deficit also remains a major issue, as it is currently running at nearly twice the Eurozone target of 3% of GDP. The new conservative government revealed to Eurostat that the previous figures supplied, which were the basis of Greek entry into the Eurozone, were incorrect. Under a negotiated agreement, the EU gave Greece two years (budgets of 2005 and 2006) to bring the economy in line with the criteria of the European stability pact.

The Bank of Greece, now a subsidiary of the European Central Bank, functions as the nation's central bank. This bank is not the same as the "National Bank of Greece", a commercial bank.

## **TOURISM**

Greece has traditionally been one of the most popular tourist destinations on a global basis and each year, particularly in the summer months, the nation's numerous cosmopolitan islands get literally packed with millions of international visitors. Unparalleled natural beauties, golden beaches, idyllic sunsets, a legendary nightlife and the world famous Greek cuisine combined with a unique hospitality and an impressively developing tourist infrastructure make Greece an irresistible hotspot for many. The spectacular success of the 2004 Olympic Games boosted the country's international prestige even further and reaffirmed its status as one of the safest places to be. In 2004, Greece ranked 12th in terms of international tourist arrivals when more than 14.2 million visitors came to the country, many of which combining both vacations and attendance of Olympic athletic events. In 2005, however, those numbers increased by 14%, surpassing 16.1 million arrivals, marking Greece as the top tourist destination amongst Americans. In 2006, those figures are only expected to grow bigger.

The New Democracy government, that took power in March 2004, established a brand new Ministry of Tourism headed by Mr. Dimitris Avramopoulos. Mr Avramopoulos proved to be a particularly competent man, determined to massively promote the nation to new, emerging markets in addition to the traditional ones, through various means of communication. For instance and among other initiatives, Helena Paparizou, the winner of the 2005 Eurovision Song Contest was recently designated as the official ambassador of the Hellenic Tourism Organization. An interesting fact that is attributed

in all those efforts is that according to a survey conducted in China in 2005, Greece was voted as Chinese' people number one choice. Overall, this year the Greek Ministry of Tourism plans to invest more than 30 billion euros in the tourism industry, one of the most essential sectors of the Greek economy. That is 4 times more than the amount spent in 2002 by the previous government. What is more, the government intends to promote winter tourism in Greece, something that could potentially double international arrivals.

Apart from Athens, other top ranking tourist destinations include the islands of Mykonos, Santorini, Rhodes, Crete, Corfu, Paros, Ios, Kos, Kefallonia and Hydra as well as the northern Halkidiki peninsula.

## THE CITY OF ATHENS



Athens is located at 38°00'N 23°43'E. The metropolitan area of Athens is home to some 5 million people. Athens has a population of about 5 million representing approximately 40% of the total population of Greece and is one of the largest metropolitan areas of Europe.

The city grew rapidly in the years following World War II until ca. 1980 and suffered from overcrowding and traffic congestion. Greek entry into the European Union in 1981 brought new, unprecedented investments into the city along with problems of increasingly worsening industrial congestion and air pollution. Throughout the 1990s the city's authorities undertook a series of decisive measures in order to combat the smog which used to form over the city, particularly during the hottest days of the year.

se measures proved to be succesful and nowadays smog or *nefos* in Greek is less of an issue for Athens.

As far as the situation with the traffic congestion is concerned, the latter has been considerably improved, even though it is not resolved as yet. Part of this improvement is attributed to the transformation of the once highly problematic Kifissos Avenue into a modern, 8 lane Expressway that stretches for more than 11 km along the Kifissos River, linking many of Athens' western suburbs, from Peristeri to the port of Piraeus. Today Athens is a vibrant metropolis with improving infrastructure, world-class ancient monuments and museums, a legendary nightlife and increasing shopping malls.

Athens sprawls across the central plain of Attica, which is bound by Mount Aegaleo in the west, Mount Parnitha in the north, Mount Penteli in the northeast, Mount Hymettus in the east, and the Saronic Gulf in the southwest. Athens has expanded to cover the entire plain making it difficult to significantly grow further in size in the future due to the forementioned existing natural boundaries. The geomorphology of the city frequently causes the so called temperature inversion phenomenon that was partly responsible for the air pollution problems Athens faced in the recent past. The city has an area of 500 square kilometers and with the metro area (Attiki) it has some 4,000 sq. kms.

Athens has been a popular tourist destination even since antiquity. Visitors from all over the globe have always been eager to visit its famous ancient monuments. Over the past decade, the infrastructure and social amenities of Athens have been radically improved as a result of the city's successful bid to stage the 2004 Olympic Games. The Greek state, aided by the E.U., has poured money into infrastructure projects such as the new, state of the art "Eleftherios Venizelos" International Airport, the massive expansion of the Metro system, and the new Attiki Odos ring-road. As a result, the numbers of international visitors are only expected to rise even further in the coming years. Currently, Athens is the 6th most visited capital in Europe.

Athens is home to a vast number of 5 and 4 star hotels, some of which were refurbished ahead of the 2004 Olympics. Entire parts of the downtown area have also been remodelled. Notably, the famous Dionysiou Aeropagitou street has been pedestrianized thus forming a fascinating scenic route. The route starts from the Temple of Olympia Zeus in Vasilissis Olgas Avenue, continues under the southern slopes of the Acropolis near Plaka and finishes just outside the Temple of Hephaestus in Theseum. This remarkable route provides the visitors breathtaking views of the Parthenon and the Agora (the meeting point of ancient Athenians), away from the bustle and hustle of the city centre. Near Syntagma Square (described above) stands the 22 centuries old highly impressive Kallimarmaro Stadium, the place where the first modern Olympic Games took place in 1896. It is a restoration of the ancient Athens Stadium. It holds a special interest, not only for romantic reasons but also because it is the only major stadium (60,000 spectators) made entirely of white marble from Penteli, the same as the one used for the construction of the Parthenon.

The city's classic museums like the National Archaeological Museum in Patission Street (which holds the world's greatest collection of Greek art), the Benaki Museum in Piraeus Street, the Byzantine Museum, or the Museum of Cycladic Art in the Kolonaki district (strongly recommended for its collection of elegant white metamodern figures, more than 3,000 years old), were all renovated ahead of the 2004 Olympics. A new Acropolis Museum is being built in the central Makryanni district according to a design by acclaimed architect Bernard Tschumi. Not to be missed is also the very impressive Athens Planetarium, considered to be among the world's best.

The old campus of the University of Athens, located in the middle section of Panepistimiou Avenue, is one of the finest buildings in the city. This combined with the adjacent National Library and the Athens Academy form the imposing "Athens Trilogy", built in the late 19th century. However, most of the university's functions have been moved to a much larger, modern campus located in the eastern suburb of Zografou. The second most significant academic institution of the city is the Athens Polytechnic School (*Ethniko Metsovio Politechnio*), located in Patission Street. More than 20 students were killed inside the School in November 17, 1973 during the Athens Polytechnic Uprising against the military junta that ruled the nation from April 21, 1967 till July 23, 1974.

As far as entertainment and night life are concerned, Athens offers an endless amount of possibilities, reflecting all tastes and all cultures. To begin with, it has a great number of multiplex as well as romantic open air garden cinemas, more theatres than any other European city (including ancient marble ones that are home to the Athens Festival from June to July) and many music venues including a state of the art music hall known as the "Megaron Moussikis" that attracts world-famous artists all year round. The Athens coastline, extending from the major commercial port of Piraeus to the southernmost suburb of Vouliagmeni for more than 25 km, is also connected to the city centre with a gleaming tram and it boasts a series of high class restaurants, cafes, exciting music venues and sports facilities. It is justifiably named as the "Attican Riviera" by many. In addition, Athens is packed with trendy and fashionable bars and nightclubs that are literally crowded by the city's youth on a daily basis. Especially during the summer time, the southern elegant suburbs of Glyfada, Voula and Vouliagmeni become home to countless such places, situated all along Poseidonos and Alkyonidon Avenues. Turning now to the city centre, the Psiri neighborhood - aka Athens' 'meat packing district'- has acquired many new mainstream bars, thus becoming a hotspot for many youngsters. It also features a number of live music restaurants called "rebetadika", after rebetiko, a unique kind of music that blossomed in Athens from the 1920's till the 1950's. Rebetiko is still admired by many, therefore virtually every night rebetadika get crammed by people of all ages that will sing, dance and drink wine until the dawn of the following morning. Plaka remains the traditional top tourist destination, with many tavernas featuring 'traditional' music, but the food, though very good, is often more expensive compared to other parts of the city. Plaka, lying just beneath the Acropolis, is famous for its numerous neoclassic buildings, making it one of the most scenic districts in central Athens. Monastiraki, on the other hand, is famous for its loads of small tourist shops as well as its crowded flea market and the legendary tavernas that specialize in what many consider to be the best souvlaki in town. Yet another district notably famous for its student-crammed, stylish cafes is Thessalon, lying just west of Monastiraki. Thessalon, or Thission is home to the remarkable ancient Temple of Hephaestus, standing on top of a small hill. The Gazi area, one of the latest in full redevelopment, is located around a historic gas factory in downtown Athens, that has been converted into the *Technopolis* (Athens's new cultural multiplex) and has a number of small clubs, bars and restaurants as well as Athens' nascent gay village.





The chic Kolonaki area, near Syntagma Square, is full of boutiques catering to well-heeled customers by day and bars and restaurants by night. Ermou Street, an approximately 1 km pedestrian road connecting Syntagma Square to Monastiraki, has traditionally been considered a consumer paradise for both the Athenians and foreign tourists. Full of fashion shops and shopping centers featuring most international brands, it has become one of the most expensive roads in Europe. Huge malls such as the "Attica" mall in Panepistimiou Avenue and "The Mall Athens" located in the classy northern suburb of Maroussi also offer an enormous variety of international selections that can totally satisfy even the most demanding customer. Some central areas (mostly just south of Omonoia Square) are mainly peopled by immigrants and are therefore full of colorful ethnic restaurants and shops.

A panoramic view of Athens from the Lykavittos Hill.

Casinos operate on both Mount Parnitha, some 30 km from downtown Athens (accessible by car or cable car) and the nearby town of Loutraki (accessible by car via the Athens - Corinth National Highway or the suburban railway). An entirely new attraction is the massively upgraded Olympic Stadium Complex (known by its Greek initials OAKA). The whole area has been remodelled by the Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava with monuments, gardens, futuristic passages and a characteristic new blue glass roof which was added to the main Stadium. A second olympic area, next to the sea at the beach of Kallithea (Faliron), also boasts futuristic stadiums, shops and an elevated esplanade.

Many of Athens' southern suburbs (such as Alimos, Palaio Faliro, Elliniko, Voula, Vouliagmeni and Vari) host a number of beautiful, sandy beaches, most of which are

organized by the Hellenic Tourism Organization. This means that one has to pay a fee in order to get in. None the less, this fee is not expensive in most cases and it includes a number of related, convenient services like parking facilities, cocktail drinks and umbrellas. These beaches are extremely popular in the summer by both Athenians and foreign tourists. The city is also surrounded by four easily accessible mountains (Parnitha and Penteli to the north, Hemmettus to the southeast and Egaleo to the west). Mount Parnitha, in particular, is the tallest of all (1,453 m) and it has been declared a protected National Park. It has tens of well-marked paths, gorges, springs, torrents and caves and you may even meet deer or bears while exploring its dense forests. Hiking and mountain biking in all four mountains have been and still remain popular outdoor activities for many Athenians. What is more, Lykavittos a hill of 300 meters in the middle of the city center that, according to an ancient legend, was actually a boulder thrown down by Goddess Athena. Located in the city center, near Alexandras' and Vassilisis Sofia's Avenues, it offers magnificent, literally breathtaking views of sprawling Athens that lies underneath. On top of it, stands the picturesque St. George's church which is definitely a must-see. The nearby islands of Salamina, Aigina (50 kms), Poros (90 kms), Hydra (120 kms) and Spetses (180 kms) are also sites of spectacular natural beauty and historical architecture. Work is underway to transform the grounds of the old Athens Airport - named Hellinikon - in the southern suburbs into a massive landscaped park (considered to be the largest in Europe when ready). The Athens municipality maintains a site of tourist interest: <http://www.cityofathens.gr/>



The public transport system in Athens consists of bus, metro, tram and suburban railway services.

The Athens Metro is one of the most modern systems in the world. It has four lines.

It is managed by three different companies (ISAP line 1), Attiko Metro (lines 2 & 3), Proastiakos (line 4).

The whole Metro system of Athens has currently 91 km. Considering this issue shows how the mass transport system in Athens has improved in the last years, since until 1999 the length of the system was of just 25 km and comprised by one line. It's expected that for the 2008 it will reach 110 km, after the extensions of the first phase of expansion get concluded.



The bus service consists of a network of lines on which normal buses, electric buses, and natural gas buses run (the largest fleet of natural gas run buses in Europe). There are plenty of bus lines serving Athens and the suburbs, and they link the centre of the city with most of the suburbs and neighborhoods.

The tram runs from Syntagma Square to Palaio Faliro and there the line splits in two branches, going to Glyfada and Neo Faliro. Both Syntagma - Palaio Faliro - Neo Faliro and the Glyfada branch opened on 19 July 2004. Further extensions are considered.

There are many taxis in Athens, which can be recognised by the yellow color of the vehicles. They are quite cheap and during rush hours it is considered normal to halt a taxi even when it is in service (although, strictly speaking, this is forbidden); in that case, if the one halting it happens to go to the same direction as the customer and the customer does not mind (although this is never brought up or an issue), he is also allowed in, and each one pays normally as if they were the only customer.

Athens is served by the Eleftherios Venizelos International Airport at Spata, east of the city (having served 14,281,027 passengers in 2005), about a 45-minute taxi ride from the city centre. There're also two metro lines serving the airport and linking it to the city center and other neighborhoods. Line 3 to Monastiraki and Line 4 (Proastiakos) to the Central train station (from where you can take trains to other parts of the country as well as to Central European countries).





## OLYMPICS 2004

Athens was awarded the 2004 Summer Olympics on September 5, 1997 in Lausanne, Switzerland, after surprisingly having lost the bid to organize the 1996 Summer Olympics, the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the modern Olympic Games. It was to be the second time Athens had hosted the Olympic Games, the first being in 1896.

In 1997, Athens made a bid based largely on an appeal to Olympic history. In the last round of voting, Athens defeated Rome, 66 votes to 41. Before this, Buenos Aires, Stockholm, and Cape Town, had already been eliminated from consideration after receiving few votes.



After that, the International Olympic Committee expressed its concern over the status of the progress of construction work of the new Olympic venues. A new Organizing Committee was formed under President Gianna Angelopoulos-Daskalaki and preparations began at an accelerated pace. Although the heavy cost was criticized, as is not unusual with Olympic preparations, Athens was transformed into a city that uses state-of-the-art technology in transportation and urban development. Some of the most modern sporting venues in the world were created, almost all of which were fully ready on schedule. The 2004 Games were adjudged a huge success, as both security and organization were exceptionally good and only a few visitors reported minor problems, mainly concerning transportation or accommodation issues. Essentially, the only notable problem was a somewhat sparse attendance of some preliminary events, during the first days of competition. Eventually, however, a total of more than 3.2 million tickets were sold, which was higher than any other Olympics with the exception of Sydney (more than 5 million tickets were sold there in 2000).



## **GEOGRAPHY GUIDE OF GREECE COMPILED BY GRIGORIOS SOKRATIS FOR THE FORUMERS OF SKYSCRAPERCITY.COM**

All the information has been collected from different websites, encyclopedias, geographic books, geological studies, eurostat data, official government organizations, etc.

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