

Introducing Greece: Land and Climate

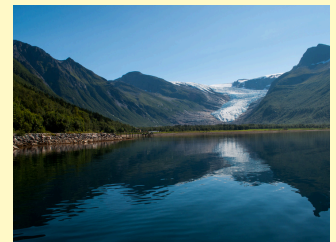
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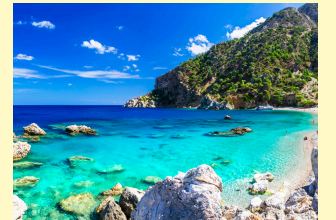
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Nestled in the Navel of the Earth

“If I lived here, I’d never leave.” Those were the words uttered by someone in our group as we entered the site at Delphi in Greece. Referred to as the “navel of the earth,” Delphi sits snugly in the center of a beautiful stretch of mountains in the south-central part of Greece. Delphi is a world-famous site, known for its oracles and the sacred town that ancient pilgrims from around the globe flocked to in search of advice, prophecy, and direction. Delphi awes travelers with its rugged mountains, stunning views, and refreshing climate.



Greece, the Beautiful

According to legend, Helen of ancient Greece was the most beautiful woman in the world. And there is no doubt that the country of Greece, which has a similar name as “Helen” in Greek, is an incredibly beautiful country. In short, Greece offers travelers a piece of paradise: delectable beaches, spectacular mountains, breathtaking vistas, sun-drenched islands, sprawling cities, quaint villages, walkable volcanoes, and internationally acclaimed historical sites.



Geography

Situated in the southeastern part of Europe, Greece lies at the bottom range of the Balkan Mountains. But unlike its immediate neighbors to the north, Greece is a peninsula, meaning that a good portion of the country juts down deep into the sea. For instance, Greece shares the Ionian Sea with Italy to the west, the Aegean Sea with Turkey in the east, and the celebrated Mediterranean Sea with several countries in the south.

Given its strategic location, it is not surprising that Greece has played such an important role in world history. It commands a coveted position with close access to Europe, Asia, and North Africa. The ancient Greeks took advantage of this setting, and, over time, they spread their culture, language, and ideas to the whole world.



When you have a moment, look at a map of Greece and take notice of its location in relation to other countries. It is Greece’s location, along with Italy, that accounted for its lopsided importance in world history. In a word, it has the best real estate in the ancient world, and Greece used that real estate to reproduce itself across multiple continents.

Landscape

Greece is dominated by two major landscapes: mountain and sea.

Mountains

You may be surprised to learn that nearly 80% of Greece is mountainous. That is a staggering statistic, and it also explains a lot about ancient Greek civilization.

To begin with, virtually all ancient Greeks lived on land that was subject to devastating earthquakes. But more importantly, the extensive mountain ranges meant that ancient Greeks never united and, instead, communities formed in the plains and valleys between these mountains. These communities led to what is called a "city-state," or *polis* in Greek.

Over time, each *polis* developed its own dialect, political and economic structure, and culture. And, unfortunately, it created a rugged independence that was suspicious of outsiders, meaning that much of ancient Greek history is filled with battles between neighboring city-states.

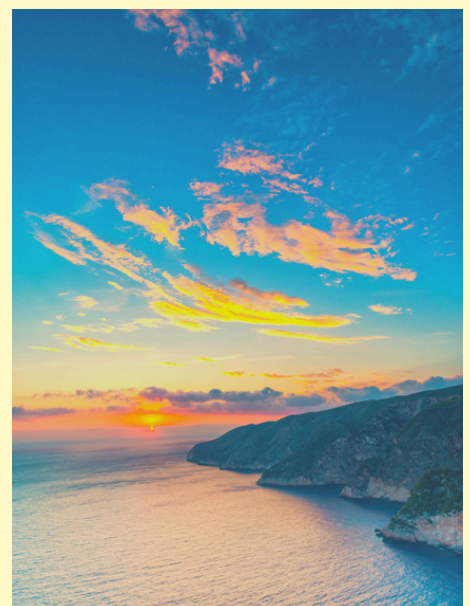
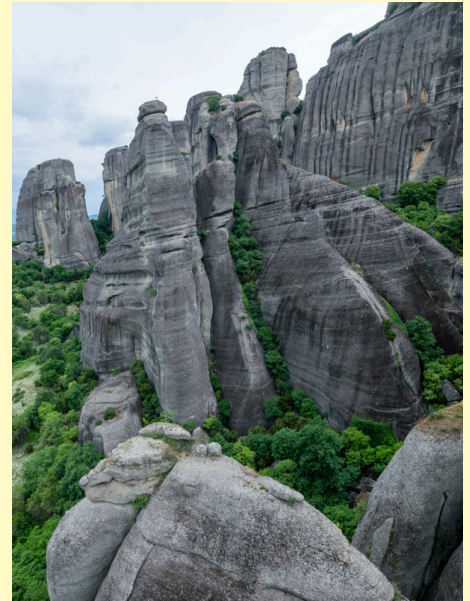
With 80% of the land being mountain, that meant precious little was available for farming. Farmers could only grow certain things, and so the farming industry centered on barley, grapes, and olives, meaning that the staple of the ancient Greek diet was bread, wine, olives, and olive oil.

Sea

As we might suspect, the ancient Greeks relied heavily on the sea. Most communities lived within a day or two's walk to the sea, with many communities living even closer. Their proximity to the sea greatly enhanced their diet, allowing them to add fish and seafood to bread and wine.

In fact, because Greece contains hundreds and hundreds of islands, the sea became a way of life for much of ancient Greek culture. For instance, important communities formed on islands such as Crete, Rhodes, Lesbos, and others. And Patmos became the setting of the last book of the Bible.

After all, the ancient Greek's strategic location along the sea enabled them to come into contact with cultures of all kinds through trade, discovery, and war. This contact and constant communication with other cultures was a door that swung both ways: It both facilitated the Greek's ability to spread their own culture to foreigners and to be influenced by those same foreigners in terms of religion, industry, language, and ideas.





Weather

Greece boasts one of the best climates in the world. Although the weather patterns vary depending on the exact location, Greece enjoys a Mediterranean climate that produces consistently warm and dry summers and cool and wet winters. But, best of all, regardless of the time of year, the Sun is almost always shining. When you travel there, there is a good chance you will experience heavy doses of sunshine.

In the northern part of Greece, the weather tends to be a bit milder, and you will see snowfall in the mountains during the winter. In the southern part, however, the weather is much warmer.

In fact, if you look at a map of Athens, the capital of Greece, you will see that it

is essentially the southernmost capital city in continental Europe. That helps explain why Athens is actually the warmest capital city in Europe. This means that, regardless of time of year, there is a good chance that Athens will be pleasant and not too cold. And in the spring, summer, and fall, it can get very hot.

The Best Time of Year to Visit Greece

People ask me all the time when the best time to visit Greece is. My response is always the same: “The best time to visit Greece is whenever you are able to go!”

In all seriousness, there is no “wrong” time to visit Greece. Of course, every country has extremes and unexpected storms, but the weather patterns in

Greece are fairly consistent. To get an idea of what the weather will likely be, you can check average temperatures for each month based on the exact location you are visiting: whether Athens, Thessaloniki, or one of the islands. Simply do a search online and you will get an idea of what to expect.

My Preferred Time to Visit: Spring, Early Summer, and Early Fall

Personally, I enjoy taking groups to Greece anytime between March through June or September through October. August can be a challenging time because that is when most Greeks take their vacations, so prices tend to be highest in July and August. And it is also when the temperatures are hottest and driest.

At the same, I hasten to add that I have traveled to



Greece during every season, and I have never been disappointed. When traveling to a country, there are a lot of factors to consider regarding exactly when you visit. For instance, if swimming at a beach is really important to you, then I would avoid the winter months. But if you do not care about swimming and instead simply want to ensure that you see the cultural sites, then you have much greater flexibility. And as hinted at above, the price of your trip will be most expensive in the summer, so if pricing is the most important factor for you, then I suggest avoiding travel there between May and August.



Conclusion

In conclusion, Greece is one of the most incredible countries you will ever visit. Its landscape is stunning, its climate is delightful, and its islands are first-class. It is not surprising, therefore, that Greece is one of the top destinations on the globe that receives tourists year-round from around the world.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. When it comes to mountains and sea, which is your favorite to visit, and why?
2. What is your priority when visiting Greece? Based on that, is there a better time of year to visit?
3. What kind of clothing should you wear based on the geography of Greece and locations you want to visit?
4. Do you think you would want to hike any mountains or swim in the ocean while in Greece?
5. What are you most looking forward to when visiting Greece?



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