



# DESTINATIONS

## GREECE & CYPRUS

ALSO IN  
DESTINATIONS  
***DYNAMIC  
PACKAGING  
& ADD-ONS***

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Meera Dattani  
goes in search  
of an authentic  
Hellenic holiday



PICTURE: BLUE PALACE RESORT & SPA

## » FIND THE REAL GREECE

**C**rack open the ouzo. Greece is predicted to receive 17 million tourists in 2013, an all-time high for this popular destination. While its weather, sights and beaches remain key, there is an increase in holidays offering more local, authentic and crowd-free experiences.

Olympic Holidays has added Alternative Greece to its Summer Sun 2013 brochure. "There are many options, such as Symi, Halki and Thassos, for those who want to get away from it all and experience the quieter side of Greece," says commercial director Photis Lambrianides. "Symi is my favourite. It is small and beautiful, with very little traffic."

With so much variety, it is the perfect time to sell Greece in a different way.

### ● ISLAND ALTERNATIVE

Other quieter islands include Ios, known as Homer's burial place and relatively unknown to UK travellers despite being a ferry ride from Santorini. Hydrofoils from Skiathos also link up Alonissos and Skopelos while Kalymnos in the eastern Mediterranean, known as the island of the 'sponge fishers', is excellent for diving and climbing. Sunvil also features Ikaria, one of the world's five 'blue zones' – designated places on Earth where residents lead extraordinarily long lives.

Suggest Intrepid Travel's 10-day Sail Greece: Cyclades Islands, which ▶

[travelweekly.co.uk/destinations](http://travelweekly.co.uk/destinations)

visits lesser-known islands such as Amorgos, Sifnos, Folegandros and Syros. Sunvil Holidays has introduced the Dodecanese islands of Kalymnos and Telendos to its portfolio, with accommodation in tiny Emborios village, home to just one sand-shingle beach, five restaurants, a church and a shop.

Close to Athens is the island of Spetses, where private cars are banned and horse buggies, wooden fishing boats and water taxis are the chosen modes of transport. Classic Collection Holidays and Planet Holidays are among the companies featuring this serene hideaway.

#### NEW FLIGHTS, NEW IDEAS

With new direct easyJet flights to Kalamata opening up the lesser-visited Peloponnese region in the south, the 2013 Mythical Peloponnese campaign has been highlighting outdoor adventures. Bungee jumping in the Corinth Canal, the vast Glyfada sea cave



Get a taste of the real Greece with lessons in local cooking



New easyJet flights to Kalamata have opened up the Peloponnese region



Clients can learn to paint on a break with GoLearnTo.com



Clients can take part in the olive harvest when staying at Costa Navarino

## NEWS FROM GREECE

**EasyJet** started direct flights from London to Kalamata in the Peloponnese this month, flying twice a week on Tuesdays and Saturdays. [easyjet.com](http://easyjet.com)

**Sani Resort** has launched its own smartphone app to help guests pre-plan their break. There is information on events such as farm visits and garden theatre productions, day trips and activities, restaurant information and details of the spa and treatments. [saniresort.gr](http://saniresort.gr)

The five-star **Marbella Beach Hotel** on Corfu launched excursions by private speedboat this summer. Itineraries can be tailor-made to include the island's sights and attractions, deserted beaches and some of its best cuisine. Trips for two cost around €400, plus fuel. [marbella.gr](http://marbella.gr)

**Kirini Suites & Spa**, the only Relais & Chateaux accredited hotel in Oia, Santorini, has added four new suites this season. Three have Jacuzzi baths, while the fourth, the Kirini Suite, has its own pool. [kirini.com](http://kirini.com)

**Daios Cove**, Crete, has a seven-night yoga and Ayurveda break from September 29, with cooking lessons, yoga and spa treatments included in the £399 package, but not accommodation. There is also a new kids' menu with child-sized portions of risotto, ravioli and gnocchi. [daioscove.com](http://daioscove.com)

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in Diros Bay, Lakonia, the Langada Climbing Range and hiking along the 20km Neda Gorge are among the highlights. Cyclists can also bike the Peloponnese Wine Routes, set up by the Wine Producers Association of the Peloponnese – the region has one third of Greece's grape wines and produces more than 1,200 labels.

High-end properties are also increasing. The Villa Collection's new Trochalo Villas, seven stone-built villas with private pools, are a mile from the harbour village of Stoupa. In addition Planet Holidays offers packages to Kinsteria Hotel & Spa, a restored Byzantine mansion on the Monemvasia peninsula.

Monarch's flights to Volos in the Pelion peninsula in central Greece have also opened up this relatively unknown region, home to more than 70 villages and numerous walking trails.

#### LOCAL LIVING, LOCAL EATING

Engaging with local people is key to this trend. Think Experiences has added Think Experiences to its villa stays on the lesser-known islands of Lefkada and Meganissi. Guests

#### Sani Resort has its own marina



can book in-villa Greek dancing lessons or have a local chef prepare traditional cuisine.

Learning holiday specialist GoLearnTo.com offers an Island Hoppers Cooking Break to Poros island, with a local chef. In Crete, food company Gaea Products has teamed up with Daios Cove Hotel to create a yoga package featuring Ayurvedic Greek cuisine, while five-star hotel Aldemar Royal Mare on Crete's northern coast offers free Saturday cooking lessons.

Crete's Blue Palace Resort & Spa in Elounda also hosts a different cultural initiative each year. This year is ancient Minoan cooking, with guests learning to cook traditional dishes on an open fire using clay replica cooking pots.

Staying in small villages also enhances local engagement. The village of Kastelli is the base for six new You-Phoria Villas with private pools (15% trade commission). The village is in Crete's Kissamos bay near Chania airport (served by easyJet, Monarch and Ryanair). Sister property Mistral Resort is aimed at independent travellers, and offers interesting excursions such as gorge hiking and joining a local family for lunch.

#### A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE

Hiking holidays are becoming popular too. World Expeditions' eight-day tour scales the heights of Meteora and Mount Olympus while learning about Greek myths, and G Adventures' Crete Hike and Kayak includes hiking the Samaria Gorge and kayaking to remote beaches. Headwater's Coastal Crete Walk also takes in coastal paths, deserted beaches and birdwatching spots.

Explore's hiking and biking trips include following ancient mule tracks on the Aegean Islands Hike or taking on higher altitudes on its more challenging Corfu Trail Explorer itinerary. Inntravel also offers self-guided walking breaks off the beaten track across Greece.

#### LIVE AND LEARN

There is a huge choice of learning holidays. GoLearnTo.com's Painting and Drawing Holiday takes place in the Ionian fishing village of Paleros, staying in a family-run apartment with tuition from a resident artist. Sunvil also offers painting holidays in Samos and Alonissos, sold as holiday add-ons for £199. ▶



Serene Spetses is where the Greeks go on holiday

## SAMPLE PRODUCT

**Planet Holidays** offers a four-night stay at the five-star Kinsterna Hotel & Spa on the Monemvasia peninsula from £865 on a B&B basis in a Byzantine Suite, including return Gatwick to Athens flights in late September.  
**planet-holidays.co.uk**  
**0871 871 2234**

**Sunvil Holidays** offers seven nights' self-catering on Kalymnos from £668 including flights from Gatwick and transfers, staying at Harry's Paradise Garden in Emborios.  
**sunvil.co.uk**  
**020 8758 4758**

**G Adventures'** Crete Hike and Kayak costs from £699 for an eight-day tour including sea kayaking and gorge hiking. All activities, guides, accommodation, seven breakfasts and one dinner are included. Flights to Chania cost from £260 with Ryanair/easyJet.  
**gadventures.co.uk**  
**0844 272 2040**

**ITC Classics'** seven-night half-board Sani Beach Club holiday starts at £835 in a double bungalow with garden view, with BA flights from Gatwick and private transfers based on an October 11 departure.  
**itcclassics.co.uk**  
**01244 355 527**

### RESORTS WITH A DIFFERENCE

Larger luxury resorts are also tapping into this trend. Costa Navarino in Messinia in the southwest Peloponnese has introduced experiences such as cookery lessons in local homes, taking part in the olive harvest and philosophy walks as well as local dance events, poetry readings and traditional Greek shadow theatre.

On the Cassandra peninsula in Halkidiki, family-owned Sani Resort, on a 1,000-acre ecological reserve, has wetland tours with local bird experts, local organic farm visits and eco-learning games for kids. **TW**



Enthusiasts can snap away on New Hotel's Athens tour

Peter Sommer Travels' archaeology, nature and food tour in Crete, led by expert guide Heinrich Hall, is perfect for history buffs, while specialist archaeological travel company Andante Travels is launching expert-led 'Meet the Past' tours from 2014, including The Ancient Greeks.

Skyros Holidays offers everything from yoga, textile art and photography to comedy improvisation, seductive speaking and mindful living at its Atsitsa Bay accommodation on Skyros.

### TRIPS WITH A TWIST

The cities are also ripe for authentic experiences.

In Athens, visitors can book Cyplon Holidays' one-day Saronic Island cruise to Hydra, Aegina and

Poros islands for £89.

New Hotel's Holiday Memories Photography Experience takes budding photographers around Athens' lesser-visited spots, while its Cultural Experiences package is tailored around the latest exhibitions.

Intrepid Travel's Urban Adventure tours also focus on local areas. Tastes of Thessaloniki (four hours, €40) is a walking tour around markets, ouzeris and old stores, while Hidden Markets of Thessaloniki (three hours, €27) takes visitors to see artisan products at lesser-visited markets.

The Tastes of Athens walking tour (three hours, €46) includes sampling traditional food at Central Market as well as visiting cafes and delis frequented by locals.