

Greece is the word

With a bumper crop of milestone events, Greece is a fantastic place to send LGBTQ+ clients this year, finds **Alice Barnes-Brown**

Rainbow flags are flying with pride in Greece. In February, the government voted to legalise same-sex civil marriage and adoption – the first Orthodox Christian country to do so. And in June, second city Thessaloniki will host the EuroPride 2024 festival, with 40,000 visitors expected for the event.

The Greek tourism ministry is actively trying to attract LGBTQ+ travellers in its marketing, and is working with tourism promoter Queer Destinations to collect data on this market. This will help agents to better understand the needs of LGBTQ+ clients – though with so much to look forward to, a Greek getaway practically sells itself.

Queer Destinations chief executive Edgar Weggelaar says: “Working with the travel sector comprehensively and authentically will allow the country to attract this important demographic. Having a plan to draw in LGBTQ+ travellers is as important as having supportive legislation – the legalisation of same-sex marriage provides a socio-cultural context in which LGBTQ+ people will feel more welcome.”

Contiki’s annual Pride-themed group tour takes to Cycladic shores in June, with an 11-day Greek Island Hopping itinerary – though an eight-day version is also available. Clients will combine the best of the Aegean (from the church-dotted cliffs of Santorini to a speedboat safari in Ios) with the legendary gay culture of Mykonos, a party island filled with beach clubs and cosy bars.

WEDDING CEREMONIES

Following the government’s landmark ruling, many Greek hotels (particularly larger resorts) can now offer same-sex wedding ceremonies – though couples still have to file paperwork with the local authority. The adult-only Domes Noruz Mykonos, for example, has introduced a selection of bespoke wedding packages that include takeovers of the hotel, private receptions and island experiences – and the concierge can arrange appointments and transfers to nearby Mykonos ➤

FIGURE: Giorgos Alexakis



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ABOVE: Thessaloniki Pride OPPOSITE: Contiki offers a Pride-themed tour

PICTURES: Flip Mattia; Contiki

Town Hall for the formalities to make the marriage legally binding.

LOVE ISLANDS

Mykonos has been Greece's gay capital since the 1970s – when its bars first hosted drag shows – but it's far from the only option. Other islands that cater to LGBTQ+ travellers include Crete, Skiathos and Milos; agents can build an island-hopping trip using ferry services. Alternatively, group sailing holidays offer an interactive and fun way for LGBTQ+ clients to meet each other – and can provide lucrative commissions.

For female-identifying LGBTQ+ travellers specifically, the hilly island of Lesbos is a popular option. Besides being the birthplace of poet Sappho – and the very word 'lesbian' – the north Aegean island has hosted the two-week International Eressos Women's Festival since 2000, which brings a dedicated following and late-summer boom to the isle. Some nearby resorts – including the Aeolian Village by Mark Warner in Skala Eressos, which opened in 2023 – put on inclusive activities for LGBTQ+ couples and groups.

This year, Jet2.com has expanded its flight capacity to Lesbos from Stansted and added a route from Birmingham, making the island easier to reach.

CITY LIFE

In Athens, the neighbourhood of Gazi is a hub of gay clubs and bars. Plus, the Athens City Festival (held every May) features a programme of LGBTQ+ events, including 'Queer Movie Nights' at the historic Trianon cinema.

Meanwhile, in Thessaloniki, EuroPride starts with a bang on June 21 with an opening ceremony and concert. For the following nine days, revellers can expect a non-stop roster of plays, film screenings and LGBTQ+ walking tours of the city. The event culminates on June 29 with the mother of all parades along the seafront boulevard leading to the city's most iconic attraction, the White Tower.

Although there's always more that can be done to improve inclusivity, Greece is proving itself to be a safe, welcoming and exciting place for all travellers – and agents can steer them towards the very best experiences. **TW**



BOOK IT: EUROPRIDE 2024, THESSALONIKI

Hotel Onoma

Thessaloniki’s most extrovert hotel has a rainbow-painted basketball court, dance music in the lobby, and neon signs reading “Hi!” and “Whaaat?” in the suites.

Book it: Olympic Holidays offers seven nights’ B&B from £1,028 per person, based on two sharing a double room. The price includes private transfers and flights from Gatwick on June 22.

olympicholidays.com

Met Hotel

Combining contemporary art with a smart city vibe, the Met Hotel is close to the restaurants and bars of Ladadika district. There’s a free shuttle to Aristotelous Square – which the EuroPride parade passes – plus a 22m-long rooftop pool.

Book it: Classic Collection sells five nights’ B&B from £899, based on two adults sharing a Superior Plus double room. The price includes luggage, transfers and flights from Gatwick on June 27.

classic-collection.co.uk

The Modernist

This charmingly utilitarian hotel in the heart of the city is an easy walk to EuroPride events. The Modernist’s minimalist design belies how comfortable it is.

Book it: Jet2CityBreaks offers five nights’ B&B for £749 per person, based on two adults sharing, including luggage and flights from Manchester on June 27.

jet2holidays.com

Makedonia Palace

The highlight of this 284-room urban resort is its hammam, which allows guests to immerse themselves in Thessaloniki’s rich Ottoman traditions in a modern way.

Book it: EasyJet holidays offers eight nights’ B&B for £1,968 per person, including transfers, luggage and flights from Gatwick on June 21.

easyjet.com



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Schedule shown applies to Summer 2024. Correct at time of print.