

Island adventures

With Greek island-hopping trips having a moment, Lina Molloholli explores three islands in the Dodecanese with Olympic Holidays



Visiting one island, it seems, is no longer enough – with many Brits opting to book more-adventurous Greek island-hopping trips. Rather than clients wanting to stay in one resort, Greek specialist Olympic Holidays has seen bookings increase by 50% since launching its island-hopping itineraries in 2019, with its Island Hops (taking in three islands) and Island Swaps (focused on two islands) proving hugely popular.

The Dodecanese are among the most popular islands. Of the 12 large islands and more than 100 smaller ones only 25 are inhabited. While no two are

alike, most have kept their long-established traditions intact. We took an island-hopping trip with Olympic Holidays to discover three Dodecanese favourites, each with their own identity, culture and uniqueness that can captivate even the most well-travelled visitors.

RHODES

At a glance: Rhodes is the largest and most-populated island in the Dodecanese – and fourth in the Greek peninsula. It's been nicknamed the island of the Knights, thanks to its remarkable ancient fortress and magnificent medieval castles. It's ideal for those seeking to combine ➤

DESTINATIONS

GREECE & CYPRUS | ISLAND-HOPPING



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Grecotel Lux Me Dama Dama; Monastery of Archangel Michael; narrow alleyway, Symi; the village of Lindos and its acropolis

PICTURES: Shutterstock.com/Kasper Ketelsen, ecstk22

rich history and architecture with pristine beaches, quiet coves and a bustling, cosmopolitan capital.

Do not miss: I loved getting lost in the narrow, cobbled streets of Rhodes Old Town – with Byzantine and Gothic churches, mosques and ancient baths – all leading to the stunning Palace of the Grand Master of the Knights. And only a short 15-minute drive away are the thermal Kallithea Springs, along with hidden bays, caves and teal waters for a refreshing stop after a day's exploring. Or for an adventurous day trip, the small east-coast town of Lindos is filled with whitewashed buildings and local boutiques, cascading down from the impressive Acropolis and its picture-perfect views of the Aegean Sea.

Where to stay: **Grecotel Lux Me Dama Dama** Located near Rhodes Town, the all-inclusive seafront resort exudes luxury with a striking combination of contemporary design and old-world lavish decor. Facilities include two outdoor pools, slides and a spa. **Lindos Blu Luxury Hotel & Suites** Nestled in a tranquil hillside with stunning views of the Mediterranean Sea, this adult-only hotel is ideal for couples who seek romance and tranquillity combined with the highest standards of hospitality. damadama.grecotel.com lindosblu.gr

SYMI

At a glance: Symi, an hour's ferry ride from Rhodes, was love at first sight for me. Entering the port, you see vibrant red, yellow, orange and blue neo-classical

“Be sure to finish with a sweet Greek baked delicacy from the on-site bakery or succulent Symi shrimp and fresh grilled octopus

mansions lining the mountainside, as traditional fishing boats and yachts bob around you in the azure sea. Known for its ship-building and sea sponge industries, the spirit of the island remains intact, with hidden beaches and welcoming locals giving it true authenticity. **Do not miss:** 'Kali Strata' (good path): a 500-stair climb to Chorio village. Although the hike may put some visitors off, the picturesque views of the bay, charming churches and the lively chatter from locals in cafes and tavernas echoing through the quaint narrow alleyways is the reward.

A 45-minute drive or a 20-minute ferry south from the harbour is The Monastery of Archangel Michael in Panormitis, still home to several monks. Visitors can light a candle in the church, gaze at the majestic bell tower and explore museums covering folklore and religion. Afterwards, be sure to finish with a sweet Greek baked delicacy from the on-site bakery or succulent Symi shrimp and fresh grilled octopus from the local taverna, Panormio Cafe-Restaurant. ➤

ASK THE expert



“Olympic Holidays' island-hopping experiences are created to suit the needs and requirements of the customer, whether that's destination, duration or budget, so there's great flexibility. On the budget front, people are often surprised at how reasonable island-hopping trips can be.

We have options starting from £650. Island-hopping is also great for families, and we've seen an increase in bookings from this market.

Island-hopping is also proving popular with the wedding market – couples are choosing to marry on one island with friends and family, then set sail and leave for their honeymoon. Clients tend to stay in local accommodation to start with before ending their stay at a luxury hotel or resort.”

Emma Hilton, business development manager (north) for Olympic Holidays:



Little Venice, Mykonos Town

PICTURE: Shutterstock.com/Imagin.gr Photography



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Village in Halki; port of Emporio, Halki; Aretanassa Hotel, Halki PICTURES: Shutterstock.com/Milan Gonda, Lubos K, George Sarmousakis

Where to stay: Iapetos Village

A stone's throw from Symi town's tavernas, these four-star neoclassical houses encapsulate the traditional spirit of beautiful Symi – and feature a stunning indoor pool, sauna and a sun terrace.

Pedi Beach Hotel

This relaxed three-star hotel on the beach boasts 56 blue-and-white rooms with a balcony or terrace to take in the unspoilt mountain or sea sunset views.

iapetos-village.gr bluesearesorts.gr

HALKI

At a glance: Home to about 300 people and a handful of cars, Halki is one of Greece's smallest inhabited islands. Largely untouched by tourism, it's ideal for visitors seeking to escape the crowds – and modern life. A place 'where time stands still', as the locals say, Halki is all about age-old Greek island living, with a picturesque harbour, colourful 18th and 19th-century mansions and pristine beaches.

Do not miss: Hiking along the rocky shoreline and the dramatic scenery was my highlight. Popular walks include Chorio, Kastro and the long walk to the Monastery of St John, built to protect the island and its residents from enemies and pirates. Clients can take a dip after a hike from the sandy beach at Pondamos –

“The air of Nimporio's little alleyways is filled with the scent of bougainvillea and baking from outdoor bread ovens

or at Ftenagia beach, a hidden pebbly paradise with cyan waters, sheltered from the wind.

Nimporio's little alleyways are also a must and are lined with pastel-coloured houses with red-tiled roofs – the air filled with the scent of bougainvillea and baking from outdoor bread ovens, which are shared daily by locals. Towards the harbour, travellers will find local fishermen preparing their catch of the day.

Where to stay: Aretanassa Hotel

Housed in an imposing historical building on the seafront, once used to store natural sponges, the hotel is locally known as the Queen of Halki, boasting 19 sunny sea-facing rooms with powder blue walls.

Fourlanou House

Fusing contemporary and traditional decor, the apartments are perfectly situated within walking distance to the harbour and Pondamos beach.

aretanassa-hotel.gr bit.ly/3jUYzFK

BOOK IT

Olympic Holidays' 10-night Rhodes-Symi-Rhodes-Halki island-hopping holiday costs from £1,885 based on two people travelling on June 3, including flights from Gatwick and transfers.

A nine-night **Romantic Greece** package in Santorini, Mykonos and Naxos costs from £1,050 this summer, including flights and transfers.

A 10-night **Emerald Gems** package, visiting Skiathos, Skopelos and Alonissos costs from £984 this summer, including flights and transfers.

A seven-night **Kefalonia & Zante** package starts from £669 in the summer, including flights and transfers. olympicholidays.com