

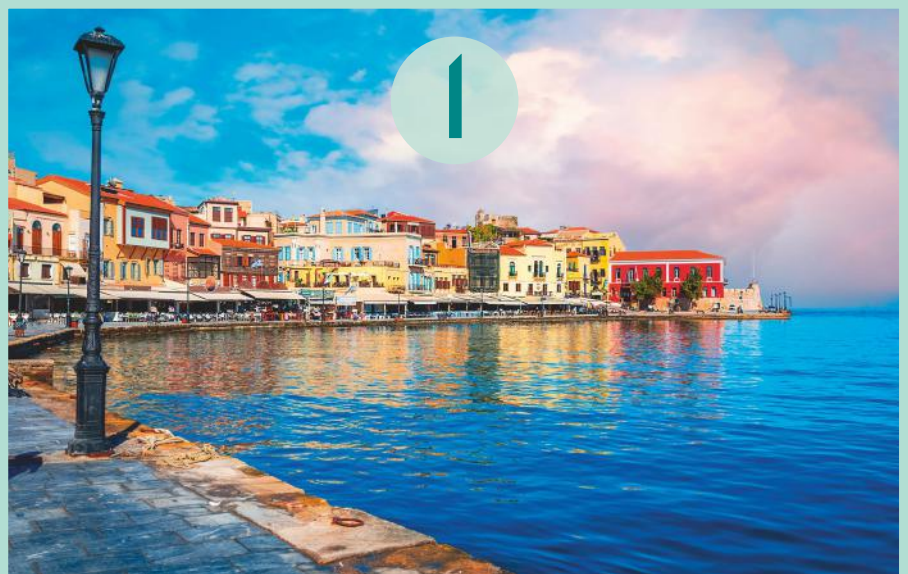


## ISLAND CAPITALS

A Greek island holiday isn't just about the beach – these towns offer the best of both worlds, writes **Alice Barnes-Brown**

If you've ever island-hopped in Greece, you'll have noticed each island has its own capital – the *chora*. Though they are sometimes overlooked in favour of beachfront resorts, these towns and cities are as diverse as they are plentiful. In Ionian isles such as Corfu and Zante, clients will find a distinctly genteel vibe, but if they head south to the Cyclades, rugged and historic settlements seem to cling to cliff edges.

For a Greek island getaway with a cultural twist, they're the ideal base. Spend mornings in archaeology museums, stop for an iced coffee in a bustling square, then hop on a local bus to go hiking in the hills or spread out on the sand – these cities put clients at the heart of it all.



### CRETE

Visitors to Chania, the cultural heart of Crete and its capital until 1971, won't fail to miss its huge medieval harbour. A 16th-century lighthouse watches over a port that once hosted up to 40 galleys – today's travellers, however, are far more likely to board a would-be 'pirate ship' or glass-bottomed boat tour. The waterfront is lined by a rainbow of old warehouses, transformed into restaurants and shops. A pink-domed Ottoman-era mosque now houses a peaceful art space, but if clients are looking for something livelier, they can head into Chania's maze of alleys to hear street musicians and sip local wine.

**Book it:** Inspiring Travel sells a seven-night stay at Domes Zeen Chania from £2,329 per person, based on two sharing a Tropical Bungalow. Includes breakfast, transfers and flights departing August 15.

[inspiringtravel.co.uk](http://inspiringtravel.co.uk)



### SPETSES

Stepping off the ferry in Spetses' pretty port, clients will see palatial buildings, peppered with the eccentric mansions of wealthy merchants who made their fortunes on other shores but left a legacy here. Perhaps most interesting is the 17th-century Laskarina Bouboulina house, designed by a Mauritanian architect and now a museum dedicated to its formidable eponymous former owner, believed to be the first woman to become an admiral in the navy. Staying in a villa means travellers can indulge in a little old-world glamour themselves: Villa Spetses is a 10-minute walk from the Bouboulina mansion and just 20 minutes from a pebbly swimming cove.

**Book it:** Oliver's Travels sells a seven-night stay at Villa Spetses for £9,160 per villa (£763 per person based on 12 sharing). Includes transfers from Athens and flights departing October 4.

[oliverstravels.com](http://oliverstravels.com)

PICTURES: Shutterstock/David Ionut, Georgios Tschilis

### KOS

The main town in Kos is rich in ancient history: the Ancient Agora is where islanders gathered to buy goods and talk politics in the 4th century BC, while a brilliantly reconstructed Roman villa displays fabulous mosaics akin to those in Pompeii. Plus, those with a passion for the past can sit under the Tree of Hippocrates – a shady plane tree where, local legend has it, Hippocrates taught medicine. Even if the ancient world isn't your clients' forte, a network of flat, off-road cycling paths means they can pedal through Kos with ease. The new Kos Ethereal Suites and Spa, opened last month, sits next to a seafront cycle track, so clients can bike to Psalidi beach – replete with blue Aegean waters and buzzing beach bars.

**Book it:** Jet2holidays sells a seven-night stay at Kos Ethereal Suites and Spa from £979 per person, based on two sharing. Includes breakfast, 22kg of luggage, transfers and flights from Leeds Bradford on September 1.

[jet2holidays.com](http://jet2holidays.com)



### CORFU

Strolling around Corfu town, it would be easy to mistake it for the Italian coast: think wide esplanades, marble piazzas and restaurants that spill out onto the cobblestones. A half-hour walk past windmills and terrace restaurants leads to Mon Repos, a former residence of the Greek royal family. The palace museum is fascinating, but the surrounding 258-acre park is the star: look for paths lined with exotic plants and breathtaking sea views.

**Book it:** Classic Collection sells a seven-night stay at the Mon Repos Palace Art Hotel from £1,029 per person, based on two sharing. Includes breakfast, 23kg luggage, shuttle transfers and flights from Gatwick departing August 31. [classic-collection.co.uk](http://classic-collection.co.uk)



### SKOPELOS

The island immortalised in the *Mamma Mia* films is known for coves, pine forests and chapels atop cliffs, but its capital makes a worthy base. It's sheltered in a bay and home to a 13th-century castle, and has an outstanding food scene. Skopelos Village Hotel is a 12-minute walk from the harbour. Activities can be arranged by the hotel, from bike and kayak trips to pottery and diving courses.

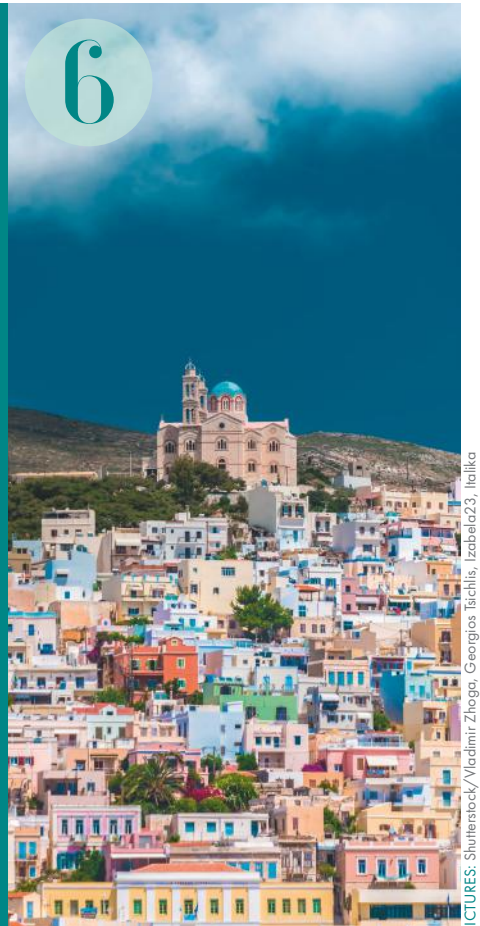
**Book it:** EasyJet holidays sells seven nights at the Skopelos Village from £1,306 per person, based on two sharing. Includes breakfast, luggage, transfers and flights from Gatwick departing July 20.

[easyjet.com/holidays](http://easyjet.com/holidays)

### SYROS

Not just the capital of Syros, but also of the entire Cyclades region, Ermoupoli is a Greek rising star – it was voted one of the world's most welcoming cities in a Booking.com traveller survey conducted last year. Alan Garner, product development and sales manager for Islands of Greece, says: "Ermoupoli was a major 19th-century trading port, but today it's a cultured town that blends neoclassical grandeur with the charm that is typical of the Cyclades. Pastel-coloured mansions line the marbled streets, and the Apollon Theatre is a miniature La Scala. Beaches here may not be as wild or dramatically photogenic as those on Santorini, but they offer safe swimming and a more relaxed vibe."

**Book it:** Islands of Greece offers a seven-night holiday at the Syrou Melathron from £1,449 per person, based on two sharing. Includes breakfast, transfers from Mykonos and flights departing August 31. [islandsofgreece.co.uk](http://islandsofgreece.co.uk)



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