

Off-peak odyssey



From city streets to mountain peaks, Greece and Cyprus have plenty to draw clients outside the peak summer period, writes **Lina Molloholli**

Summer is the sweet spot for Greek and Cypriot holidays, but ever more travellers are opting to visit during the cooler months. Last winter saw a 16% jump in Greece-bound airline seats – around half of which came from the UK.

Airlines including British Airways, Jet2.com, easyJet, Aegean Airlines, Sky Express and Wizz Air continue to operate strong schedules, with flights to Athens, Thessaloniki, Paphos and Larnaca year-round, plus services to some of the most popular Greek isles – even in winter. Many hotels and resorts are also staying open longer, with bike tours or wine tastings to make the most of the cooler weather.

From sunny coastlines to snowy mountain villages and lively cultural festivals, these spots offer clients an authentic but crowd-free taste of Greece and Cyprus.

BEST FOR...CITY BREAKS

Cooler temperatures make winter the perfect time to see Athens. Clients can climb the Acropolis, wander through the temples of the ancient Agora or take the funicular to the top of Mount Lycabettus. Plenty of cosy coffee shops await in the neoclassical neighbourhood of Plaka – you can simply swap an iced frappé for a piping-hot Greek coffee. In the city's modern side, explore the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural

Arachova
PICTURE: Shutterstock/
Ivo Antonie de Rool



Selling TIPS

Check flight schedules: Many airlines now extend their seasons into early spring and late autumn, but direct routes to the smaller islands take a break between November and March. Advise clients to connect via Athens, Thessaloniki, Larnaca or Paphos.

Look at ferry timetables: Ferries between the Greek islands run less frequently in winter, and some services can be suspended at short notice due to weather. Book in advance and focus on the mainland or larger islands, where the transport links are more reliable.

Eat in local restaurants: Many tourist-oriented venues shut after October, particularly in the smaller coastal towns. But local neighbourhood tavernas stay open year-round, even if they don't appear online.

Go early to attractions: Major historical sites remain operational throughout the year, but opening hours are often shorter in winter, so suggest morning visits to avoid disappointment.

Pack for all weathers: Greek winters are mild but unpredictable. Advise clients to pack layers and waterproofs for cooler evenings or rainy spells.

Centre (home to the National Library and Opera House), browse indie boutiques in Koukaki and tuck into a warming dinner in the creative neighbourhoods of Psiri and Metaxourgeio.

Or try: Greece's northern powerhouse, Thessaloniki, is an extroverted student city. Clients can stroll the waterfront promenade, climb the Ottoman-era White Tower for sweeping sea views and sample local *koulouri* (sesame bread rings) in the lively Ladadika district. Winter also brings a packed cultural calendar, including the renowned Thessaloniki Film Festival in November and the city's Documentary Festival in March.

Book it: EasyJet holidays offers a seven-night stay at Grand Hotel Palace in Thessaloniki from £750 per person, based on two sharing. Includes breakfast, luggage and flights from Gatwick departing February 13, 2026.

easyjet.com

BEST FOR... WINTER SUN

For clients craving sunshine without the long-haul flight, temperatures on southerly Rhodes hover around 17C in winter, ideal for walking in its wooded hills or exploring the atmospheric old town. The cobbled Street of the Knights and Palace of the Grand Master of the Knights of Rhodes – both built by Crusaders – can be enjoyed without the usual cruise crowds. An hour's drive south leads to Lindos, where the ancient Acropolis towers over blue bays and empty beaches. Direct flights operate from London between April and October, with connections via Athens the rest of the year.

Or try: The ancient Greek and Roman Paphos Archaeological Park and rock-hewn Tombs of the Kings in Cyprus are far easier to pore over when temperatures average 16C-19C than during the sweltering summer, while the Akamas Peninsula National Park is a dream for hikers and photographers.



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BEST OF THE REST



LESVOS

For bird lovers, late winter and early spring are ideal for spotting more than 300 species in Lesvos, especially around Vatera and Skala Kalloni, as birds – including the hoopoe and European bee-eater – migrate from Africa. The island is reached via connecting flights from Athens.



ANDROS

Andros in the Cyclades is green year-round and remains largely undiscovered by foreign visitors. Clients can explore Chora's neoclassical mansions or hike the 62-mile Andros Route through olive groves and waterfalls. The island has no airport, but year-round ferries run from Athens' Rafina port.



LATCHI

On Cyprus's northwest coast, Latchi offers a relaxed seaside base for walking, sailing and exploring the Akamas Peninsula. Clients can visit the Blue Lagoon or hike the Aphrodite Nature Trail before sampling wine and meze in Droushia or Kathikas. Paphos airport lies just 22 miles away.



KALAVRITA

In the northern Peloponnese, Kalavrita has ski slopes, mountain railways and timeless charm. Clients can ride the rack railway through the Vouraikos Gorge, explore the Cave of the Lakes or ski at Mount Helmos. It's an easy winter add-on from Athens, just two hours away by road.

PICTURES: Shutterstock / Simon_kranz, Sven Harsche, Daliu, samaboni

Agents can also highlight that vineyards and olive mills stay open for tastings year-round.

Book it: Tui offers seven nights at Helea Lifestyle Beach Resort in Rhodes from £1,530 per person, based on two sharing a double room on an all-inclusive basis. Includes luggage, transfers and flights from Gatwick departing October 24, 2026. tui.co.uk

BEST FOR...FESTIVALS

In Crete, the island's three major towns of Heraklion, Chania and Rethymno are hotspots for local nightlife and art exhibitions. February's Rethymno Carnival is a month-long affair that transforms the pretty fortress town into a riot of colour, music, costume parades and even one of the world's largest treasure hunts.

Outside the festival seasons of Christmas and carnival, clients can explore Crete's archaeological wonders at Knossos and Phaistos. Alternatively, snowy mountain villages such as Archanes and Anogeia offer hearty, veg-packed Cretan cuisine and traditional guesthouses, while Chania's Venetian harbour boasts photogenic orange-tinged sunsets in winter. ➤



IMPERIAL ISLAND

by LOUIS HOTELS

A New Sanctuary by the Sea

FIVE STAR IMPERIAL ISLAND RESORT TO OPEN IN PAPHOS, CYPRUS IN MAY 2026

Louis Hotels is excited to announce the opening of the five-star Imperial Island Resort, nestled along the scenic shores of Paphos. Launching in May 2026, this family friendly hotel emerges following an extensive metamorphosis of the popular four-star plus Louis Imperial Beach Hotel, to become a Premium All Inclusive, Family Resort.

Stylish Spaces

Following a comprehensive transformation, enjoy 239 newly renovated elegant rooms and suites, thoughtfully designed with muted colours to balance comfort and sophistication.

Elevated dining experiences

Enjoy four dining experiences and two bars. Relax in your stylish room or suite. The main restaurant provides an extensive buffet experience with live cooking stations and themed evenings seven times a week, featuring local and international favourites. Book a table at Fiki Japanese Fusion restaurant for bold Eastern flavours or savour gourmet burgers at Pygmalion Handmade Burger Restaurant. The new Snackeria offers freshly made treats and light bites throughout the day.

Inspired facilities for families

Relax, renew and rejuvenate at the spa – unwind in the sauna, enjoy the bubbling Jacuzzi, or indulge in revitalizing massages and treatments. Young ones can enjoy the brand-new Kids & Teens Club.

The property will be fully renovated in two phases with the first phase opening in May 2026 with. The second phase will be completed in April 2027 and will comprise: An extensive waterpark with waterslides, two new family pools, new kids' pool.

The new Imperial Island Resort is part of the Elegant Collection by Louis Hotels, which has a focus on couples and families who seek comfort and exclusive touches that are tailored to their personal preferences.

W.imperialislandpaphos.com | FB.facebook.com/imperialislandpaphos | IG.instagram.com/imperialislandpaphos

DESTINATIONS

GREECE & CYPRUS | LOW SEASON

ASK THE EXPERT



Leanne
Edwards,
head of sales,
Olympic
Holidays

"An increasing

number of travellers are discovering the beauty and value of visiting outside the traditional peak months. A handful of Greek islands are gradually extending their seasons for travel into April, May and October, with islands such as Crete, Rhodes, Corfu and Evia enjoying mild temperatures, fewer crowds and a more authentic local feel at this time of year. Beyond the islands, Athens and Thessaloniki are excellent city-break options, both offering a vibrant arts and dining scene, world-class museums, and easy access to nearby archaeological and natural attractions. Meanwhile, Cyprus remains a year-round destination and we have seen a notable increase in bookings for January and February departures. Enjoy Limassol's coastal promenade, Paphos' heritage sites and Larnaca's relaxed seafront atmosphere, which is increasingly popular with winter holidaymakers."



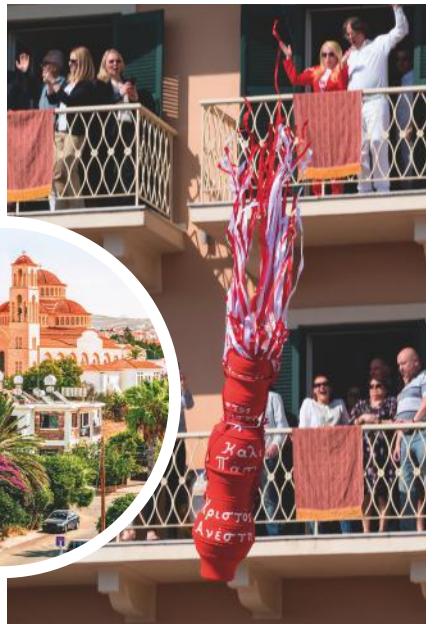
Thessaloniki's
Waterfront



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Rethymno

Carnival, Crete; pot smashing, Corfu; Paphos, Cyprus; Parnassos Ski Centre

PICTURES: Shutterstock/Paul Cowan, D. Zheleva, Oleksandr Savchuk, Heracles Kritikos; GNTO/H Kakarouhas



Or try: In Corfu, Easter steals the show. Celebrations blend Greek Orthodox rituals with Venetian flair, including candlelit processions, brass bands and a true spectacle in Corfu Town, where ceramics are thrown from balconies to symbolise regeneration. Outside Easter, clients can explore pastel-hued towns, the elegant Achilleion Palace and forested trails.

Book it: CV Villas offers a seven-night stay at Villa Oriana in Corfu from £2,441 per person, based on four sharing. Includes luggage, car hire and flights departing Gatwick on April 11, 2026. cvvillas.com

BEST FOR...WINTER SPORTS

Few people associate snow with Greece, but just two hours from Athens lies picturesque Arachova, set on the slopes of Mount Parnassos. Its traditional stone houses, luxurious chalets, ice rinks and lively tavernas make it the country's best-known winter resort, with lower prices than in major Alpine ski resorts. The Parnassos Ski Centre in Kelaria and Fterolakkas has 23 runs for both beginners and pros. For après-ski, dance to DJs in local bars, browse chic boutiques in town or sip honeyed *rakomelo* liqueur by the fireside.

Or try: The Troodos Mountains reveal an unexpected side of Cyprus, far from the sun-kissed coastal resorts. Snow dusts Mount Olympus from December to February and the small Troodos ski centre has a handful of runs for beginners, but the real draw is the landscape, with its pine forests, painted Byzantine churches and scenic paths that wind past waterfalls,

best explored by foot or 4x4. The nearest airport is Larnaca, served year-round by direct flights from London.

Book it: Sunvil offers a seven-night stay at Troodos Hotel in Cyprus from £1,005 per person, based on two sharing. Includes breakfast, transfers, luggage and flights from Heathrow on February 3, 2026. sunvil.co.uk

BEST FOR...OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

In the Ionian island of Kefalonia, clients can drive through Mount Ainos National Park, explore the Drogarati Cave and Melissani Lake, relax in Assos with its Venetian castle, or wander Fiskardo harbour with its pastel-coloured houses. Jet2.com has recently added flights from Manchester and eight other UK bases to Kefalonia until October 2026, with connections via Athens throughout the rest of the year.

Or try: Evia, Greece's second-largest island, is a vast, underexplored land of pine forests, mineral springs and mountain villages. In seaside Aidipsos, more than 80 thermal baths of different temperatures are said to offer healing powers – ideal for wellness-inclined clients – while hikers can tackle trails both easy and challenging around Mount Dirfi or the Drimonas waterfalls. The capital Chalkida remains open for waterfront dining year-round – suggest the mezze bars, fish tavernas and cocktail spots under the shadow of 17th-century Karababa Castle.

Book it: Jet2holidays offers a seven-night stay at Aelia Suites in Kefalonia from £809 per person, based on two sharing. Includes breakfast, transfers, luggage and flights from Stansted departing on October 3, 2026. jet2holidays.com **TW**