



ISLANDS v MAINLAND

The Greek mainland offers coast and culture without the island crowds, writes **Lina Molloholl**

The gorgeous Greek islands grab most of the glory, but increased demand for more-affordable, authentic getaways is bringing some of Greece's lesser-known mainland spots into the limelight.

Even at the height of summer, the mainland is a holiday haven: clients can swap packed ferries and crowded lanes for sleepy winding roads, tucked-away beaches and family-run fish tavernas where locals outnumber tourists.

Sunvil director Dudley der Parthog says: "Those who know and love Greece often choose a mainland area as their favourite

spot. It has beaches to rival those on the islands, the lion's share of Greece's famous archaeological sites, the most spectacular scenery and is generally a lot less crowded. As well as resort stays, the mainland is also ideal for a touring fly-drive holiday, or a mix of the two."

Clients will soon have more ways to get there too. A new Jet2.com route from Luton to Preveza, launching next summer, will make reaching the verdant Ionian Sea coastline even easier. The airline is also extending the 2026 season on Kalamata flights from Manchester and Stansted, so clients can enjoy a Peloponnese package from as early as April 5.



LIKE THIS?

RHODES

The biggest and busiest island in the Dodecanese, Rhodes has it all. It was ruled by the Knights of St John from 1309 to 1523 and clients can explore its vast Palace of the Grand Master of Knights, one of few examples of Gothic architecture in Greece. There's plenty more for non-historians: explore its art-deco buildings, hike in the hills or swim in its crystal-clear coves.

NAFPLIO

The vibe: Nafplio is a city steeped in myth, as it was said to be founded by Nafplios, the son of Poseidon. Its more modern history is illustrious; in the 1820s, it was made the first capital of the new Greek nation. Only a two-hour drive from Athens, Nafplio is a popular weekend escape for city dwellers, with a plethora of lively bars and restaurants serving fresh seafood.

The highlights: Nafplio is watched over by three fortresses. The most dramatic is Palamidi (*pictured*), a Venetian citadel perched 216 metres above sea level – clamber up the 857 steps to the castle for breathtaking views of the blue Argolic Gulf. On the shoreline, Akronafplia is the oldest of the trio, while Bourtzi, a tiny fortress on an islet, can be reached by boat. The scenic Arvanitia promenade offers a gentle seaside walk that leads to a small beach. A 30-minute drive away lies Epidaurus, a vast ancient amphitheatre where performances are held during summer.

Book it: Sunvil offers a seven-night stay at Ippoliti Hotel from £1,280 per person, based on two sharing. The price includes breakfast, luggage, transfers and flights from Gatwick departing in October. sunvil.co.uk

TRY THIS





LIKE THIS?

CRETE

Greece's largest island was once home to the Minoans, often regarded as Europe's first civilisation, whose legacy lives on at the mural-filled Palace of Knossos. Today, the island has a distinct dialect and diet, its north coast dotted with resorts for every budget, while the quieter south offers guesthouses and boutique hotels. The rugged mountains are scattered with monasteries and villas.

MANI

The vibe: Once known for its feuding clans and fortress-like tower houses, the Mani Peninsula shares many cultural similarities with its island cousin across the Aegean. Jutting out from the southern Peloponnese, this rugged region is all dramatic coastline, stone-built villages and deep-rooted traditions.

The highlights: Suggest clients visit the ghost-like village of Vathia, where windswept tower houses rise from the hillside. From here, they can take a short drive to the harbour of Geroliminas (pictured), perfect for sampling local *travixti pita* (hand-stretched pie made from pita dough) with cheese and honey. Inland, the bougainvillea-lined streets of Areopoli are packed with charming *kafenias* (traditional Greek cafes) as well as a tower house converted into a museum. To get their seaside fix, clients can take a boat through the Diros Caves or cool off at one of the region's peaceful beaches, which include Kotrona, Alypa and Chalikia Vatta.

Book it: Olympic Holidays offers a seven-night stay at Nefeli Apartments from £660 per person, based on two sharing a studio on a self-catering basis. Includes flights from Bristol departing in October. olympicholidays.com



TRY THIS



LIKE THIS?

PAXOS

Measuring about 10 square miles and with a population of only 2,500, Paxos is Corfu's little sister, located an hour's hydrofoil ride away from the larger island. Visitors can explore its tranquil harbour at Gaios (pictured) – where pastel-hued houses frame the waterfront – dip in the Ionian Sea at one of 30 secluded beaches or learn about island life in the rustic folklore museum.

PARGA

The vibe: Parga, which has a ferry connection from Paxos, has a distinctly Italian flair with Portofino-style townhouses dotting the hillside. Cobbled lanes lead down to a crescent-shaped beach and marina thronging with boutiques and Mediterranean restaurants. Overlooking it all is the 16th-century castle, a reminder of the town's Venetian past.

The highlights: With south and west-facing beaches, Parga offers unbeatable sunbathing and sunsets. Suggest Valtos beach, a sweep of sand stretching almost two miles westward from the harbour. Come evening, the Parga waterfront (pictured) is buzzing with bars and convivial tavernas serving local Epirus feta and *amigdalopita* (almond cake). For a history hit, recommend the ruins of the Roman-era provincial capital, Nikopolis. Alternatively, the spooky Necromanteion of Acheron was said to be the gateway to Hades' underworld – and is around half an hour's drive from Parga.

Book it: Cyplon Holidays offers seven nights' B&B at Parga Beach Resort from £799 per person, based on two sharing a Premium Garden View Room. Includes luggage, private transfers and flights from Gatwick departing on October 2. cyplon.co.uk



TRY THIS

PICTURES: Shutterstock/Dalio, Greens and Blues, arturasker, Georgios Tichlis, Mark Jell, PetraKub