

TAKE YOUR PICK

Whether you're after a hearty dose of history, an adrenalin rush or a taste of Mediterranean gastronomy, you'll find it somewhere in Greece, says John Malathronas

HISTORY

With 17 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, including **Ancient Olympia** — site of the original Games, Greece's fascinating past is visible across the country. Athens is known for its wealth of historical sites, but even small regional capitals, such as **Nafplion**, have a story to tell: Byzantines, Venetians and Ottomans all left their mark here. At nearby **Epidaurus**, visitors are still stunned by the acoustics of the ancient theatre, where a match lit on stage can be clearly heard on the upper circles, while at **Delphi** — home of the ancient oracle — you'll find one of the country's most impressive archaeological sites. In the north, Vergina's underground graves of Macedonian kings amaze with their colours and frescoes, while the monasteries on the spectacular rocks of **Meteora** offer an insight into the Greek Orthodox church.

Cosmos Tours & Cruises offers a 10-day Wonders of Ancient Greece tour, starting and ending in Athens, with visits to sites including Delphi and Epidaurus. Prices start at £985 in April 2014, including accommodation, flights from Heathrow, airport transfers and some meals. www.cosmostoursandcruises.co.uk

This page: Ancient Olympia. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Drying octopus; Fava beans; Greek women cooking; Olive harvesting



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FOOD & WINE

The olive groves of the Messenian Olive Tree Route, part of the landscape since antiquity, are world-famous and centred around **Kalamata**. The renowned feta cheese and cheesecloth-strained Greek yoghurt are the legacies of the mountain shepherds, while moussaka and spicy kebabs are evidence of a Middle Eastern influence. **Crete** is home to boutique wineries, local honey and dishes such as *dakos* — a rusk topped with oil, feta, tomatoes and herbs — and cheese-filled pastries such as *sarikopitakia* and *kalitsoumia kritis*. In **Macedonia**, regional delicacies include filo pies, *tirokafteri* (spicy feta cheese dip), wild boar and *trahanas* — a mixture of cracked wheat and fermented milk. Mountainous **Epirus**, with its quaint villages, is one of the best places to find a truly traditional taverna. It's also where many

of Greece's most famous dairy brands are based, so feta and other cheeses are prolific here. The **Ionian** islands, especially **Kefalonia**, are lauded for their desserts, including *mantoles* (almond and sugar sweets) and *amigdalopita* (almond cake), but you'll also find distinctive savoury dishes here, such as octopus with *aliada* (garlic and mashed potato dip). **Santorini** has named 2013 its Year of Gastronomy, celebrating local products such as *tomataki* (small tomatoes), fava beans and wine. Elsewhere in the Aegean, **Ikaria** offers the ultimate clean-living culinary experience. The island has one of the world's largest populations of centenarians — a fact put down to the local diet. Meals here include all the classic ingredients of Greek cuisine: olive oil, pulses, honey, fresh fruit and veg, and locally sourced meat, all washed down with tea made from herbs grown on the island. ➤



ADVENTURE

Whether it's by bike, water or on foot, Greece has plenty to entertain adventurous travellers. The country's best-kept secret — the stunning 10-mile **Samaria Gorge** trek in Crete — has attracted walkers since the 1960s, and is now a must-do for any serious hiker. Only the mountaineering in-crowd flock to the steep, craggy shoreline of **Kalymnos**, but if you have the skills and confidence to give it a try, you'll be rewarded with views over the sea and the sight of quaint, secluded chapels tucked into the hillside. Nearby **Leros**, a battleground in the Dodecanese campaign of World War II, is being 'discovered' by savvy scuba divers, who explore the many war wrecks and shot-down aircraft. **STA Travel** offers an eight-day Crete Hike & Kayak small group tour from £699 per person. Includes accommodation on a B&B basis, but not flights. www.statravel.co.uk



Clockwise from left: Samaria Gorge; Loggerhead turtle, Zakynthos; Sailing, Milos

SAILING

Greece's past is the story of its sailors — they colonised the Mediterranean and Black Sea from Marseille to Trebizond, and transported goods in the Roman and Ottoman empires. Today, Greek shipping magnates control the world's biggest merchant fleet, and in the Olympic Games sailing medals are practically guaranteed. With a range of routes, and winds funnelling through the **Aegean** and **Ionian** seas, amateurs and

experienced seamen alike take to Greek waters. Even a day's sailing around a single island can lead visitors to discover otherwise inaccessible coves and untouched beaches.

Sunsail offers a 14-night flotilla sailing trip from Paxos in the Ionian Sea from £2,279 for two people in April 2014. It includes a two-cabin yacht and flights from Gatwick. A professional skipper can be hired for £130 a day. www.sunsail.co.uk ■



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