

# Greece



The best time to go is May/June or September/October if you want summer weather. July and August get incredibly crowded and expensive. There are direct flights from Newark and Boston and I would recommend driving to either to meet your flight, relying on a connector from Hartford can result in serious delays if you miss your international flight.

## Athens

Athens is an amazing city that you need at least two full days to explore, three if you really like ancient artifacts and buildings.

Step 1 - Transportation from the airport takes about 40 minutes by car and is probably the best way to get there. You can arrange transportation through your hotel and there is a set rate of about 38€. To get back to the airport, you can arrange transportation through your hotel. There are trains and busses, but figuring that out on your own may be challenging and will still run you 20€.

### Accommodations

I think the best place to stay is just south of the Acropolis, there are several hotels with night time views of the Acropolis from their roofs. We stayed at the Niche hotel which was reasonably priced and steps away from the Acropolis as well as being near Markigianni Street in the Plaka district which is loaded with restaurants and stores. The other option is to stay further north, but I would try to stay centered between the Acropolis and the Hellenic Parliament. I would also recommend sticking with 4-star hotels, 3-star hotels are hit or miss and can be very basic.

### Must See things in Athens

1) **Acropolis** - buy your tickets online the day before you plan to visit, it allows you to skip the lines. This takes about 2 hours to tour and there is a lot of walking and climbing.

If you are not tired you can also climb **Areopagus Hill** which is close to the East gate and ticket office to get into the Acropolis



- 2) **The Acropolis Museum** - a stunning museum where many statues and reliefs from the top of the Acropolis are laid out to scale with the Acropolis, there are also stunning views of the Acropolis from inside the museum. Again, you can buy tickets online a day before or when you get there. Allow about 2 hours here as well. They are open late some nights as well.



3) **The Ancient Agora**

A large area of ruins which contains the **Temple of Hephaestus** (one of the best-preserved temples in Athens) as well as the Stoa of Attalos which is a reconstructed ancient market that you can walk through and see countless works of art.



4) **The Temple of Zeus** - This thing is massive, although most of it is in ruins, much of it is currently behind scaffolding. Worth a stop, the entrance is near Hadrian's Arch which is hard to miss.



5) **The Changing of the Guards** - I found this entertaining to watch the pomp and circumstance at this ceremony that starts at the top of the hour and lasts about 15 minutes. It takes place at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in front of the Greek Parliament.



6) **The Benaki Museum** - This is a bit different than looking at old carved rocks. Several priceless pieces of art as well as ancient jewelry and a great portrayal of how Christianity came to Athens. Truly a museum of Greek Culture.



## Santorini

We made the decision to take a boat to Santorini (from Paros) so we could see it from the sea. We also did not take the express boat (2 hours), we took the slower boat (3 hours) that allowed us to be out on the deck. Definitely the right choice, the ferry is easy to get on, just show up 30 minutes before your cruise and walk on. One important tip: make sure you know which deck you stow your luggage on, and take pictures in case you need help getting back to your luggage bin. The ship itself is as nice as any cruise ship I have been on, great seats, food, and a full bar. Again, have transportation arranged prior to getting in.

Santorini is a mystical place, it used to be a round island and then in 1600 BC, the volcano erupted and sunk most of the island. What is left is a caldera (top of the volcano) and the surrounding crescent land masses. Most of the hotels are built on the steep cliffs of the crescent. So when you get dropped off you will probably have to walk downstairs from the road to get to your hotel.



### Accommodations

We decided to stay in Fira (Thera) at the **Agali Houses** and it was a great hotel in the perfect spot. It was located right near Firostefani which is a 10-minute beautiful walk along the cliffs from the heart of Fira. The area is busy enough but quiet compared to Oia and the main part of Fira.



### Transportation

Again I rented a quad in Santorini, but instead of going to the rental place, I ordered it through the hotel. I ended up with a 330 which was much smaller than the one I had in Paros. If you end up with the smaller quad, it may make sense to rent one for each person. They only cost 30€ per day.



## Red Beach

This is a really cool red beach that requires a small hike to get to. There is plenty of free parking on the East side of the beach, although if you wait too late in the day you may be parking further away. The hike is what I would consider moderate and is well worth the views you get as you approach the beach. At the far West end of the beach is a small snack and drink building as well as rentable chairs but most people would rather sit on the beach itself. The blue water contrasting the red sand is spectacular. From Red Beach you can take a water ferry over to the white beach that sits on a 20-minute cycle, although we did not do this.



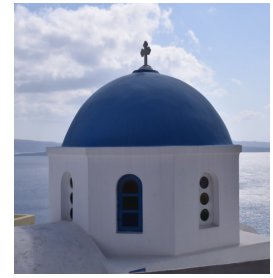
## Kamari Beach (Black Beach)

This is an expansive area with back-to-back beach clubs featuring restaurants, bars, and rentable chairs. When we were there, we found one that offered free chairs if you buy lunch. I found the food and drinks to be reasonably priced considering the atmosphere. The sand is truly black and coarse and can get hot, so the beach clubs have wooden slats that you can walk on to get out to your chairs. The blue clear water against the black sand is a sight you will not forget.



## Oia

You will read that the best sunset view in Santorini is from Oia, however, you will be standing there with hundreds of other people which kind of takes something away. Park at the end near the Oia bus stop. Oia is worth a visit for a couple of reasons; the paved walkways and churches are exactly what you would expect from Santorini and the **Castle of Oia** ruins where you can walk out to one of the remaining fortresses for amazing views. The walk to the castle also has some of the less commercialized stores and the views on different parts of the walk are breathtaking. Parking at Oia can be free if you find space and they also have pay lots, which we did not need.



## Thira (Fira in Greek)

This is the main area for tourism which is fascinating to explore but can get a bit busy if the cruise ships are in town. The good news is that most tourists leave near sunset. Near the center, you will see a cable car that goes down to the water. We chose to walk down the **Karavolades Stairs** to the water and take the cable car up. You can also take donkeys up or down the path. Thira has a lot of great souvenir shops for gifts, t-shirts, and sweatshirts. There is also an endless supply of restaurants.



## Firostefani

This area is just north of Thira and is a bit more quite, but has a lot of great restaurants and less expensive quality hotels. It is also 20 minutes walking distance along the cliff to Thira. This is where we stayed the last time we went to Santorini.



## Vineyards

Santorini is renowned for its wines that are grown in volcanic soil. The wine has a distinct taste and is very good. The vineyards are also very fancy and although we showed up in daywear, you will see a full range of styles from t-shirts to women in fancy dresses there for the perfect photoshoot. The one you can't miss is **Santo Wines** and many people go there to view the sunset. They do fill up during sunset, but we were able to get a table without reservation. It got a bit cool due to the wind and the vineyard supplied blankets. The one downside is that the vines are not on-site. We also went to **Argyros** which is in the middle of the island and is in the middle of the actual vineyard. Very scenic and very good wine. The area is really nice since you will be in the middle of several vineyards. We also stopped at Volcanic Slopes Vineyard and learned that they only offer tastings and tours by group reservation only. We then went to the **Art Space Art Galery - Winery - Museum**, where you can get a tour of some of the very old winemaking rooms and get a great story from one of the owner's family members. They also have an art gallery and a good wine-tasting experience.



## Things we did not have time for in Santorini

### Skaros Rock

Although we did not do this, it was on my list. You can walk out from the cliffs of Santorini to this ancient fortress.



### Akrotiri

This is the site of the ancient city of Akrotiri, there is a museum that you can go to to see the ruins of the old city. We had seen enough ancient artifacts in Athens and this did not make our list. This is very close to the Red Beach.

### Museum of Prehistoric Thira

A small museum in downtown Thira, that is worth a visit but check the open hours, missed out on it when they closed at 3PM.



we



### Ancient Thira

Drive up don't hike up. A very high point in Santorini with ancient ruins from the 11th century.

## Paros

Paros was the first Island we we went to. The quickest way to get there is to fly, and fares are real inexpensive from Athens. Again, arrange transportation through your hotel and if you stay in Naousa, it should run about 30€. This is a quiet island with two major towns for tourists Naousa and Parika. I would highly recommend staying near Naousa since it is really more the tourist town vs Parika, which is the main commerce town. We stayed at the **Anemomylos Residence** which was in a great spot with a 5 minute walk into Old Naousa Port, which is where all the restaurants and shops are. There is also a scooter/quad rental place across the street where I learned that you need a motorcycle license to rent a scooter, so we rented a quad for 3 days. Turned out to be the best experience ever, we had a large 650 quad that two people fit on easily and it had storage for our stuff. The Anemomylos Residence also had free parking behind the building. Although parking for a quad is free just about everywhere in Paros.



Things to Do besides sitting at the pool

- 1) **Old Naousa** - This is a small port with a lot of fishing boats and plenty to do for all tourists. Great seafood near the water and cobblestone streets with a lot of boutique stores and several bars where you can enjoy an Aperol Spritz or an Ouzo. There is also a pretty cool Venetian Castle ruin that you can walk out to if you can time the waves. We stayed at Anemomylos Residence which was great and right outside of old Naousa. Also, right across the street from the quad rental place.



- 2) **Visit a vineyard** - Since we stayed in Nauosa we were right near Moraitis Vineyard which was a great experience. Order a flight of wine and enjoy, it comes with a plate of snacks. The wine in the Greek islands is excellent. There is also a local brewery there called 56 Isles if you chase beer.





3) **Beaches** - This is where the quad comes in handy, so many great different beaches. Some have beach clubs meaning that for 20€ you can rent two chairs and a table for the day. They also provide food and drink service. But you do not have to sit in chairs, all beaches are public and you can sit in the sand or bring your own towel as well. There are a lot of great beaches on Paros and the ones below should not be missed.

**Kolymethres Beach** - crazy rock formations and a beach club.



**Monastiri Beach** - Blue Water and a church you can hike/drive to. Also an upscale beach club.



**Mikri Santa Maria (Little Santa Maria)** - small quiet beach with some rock hiking.



**Kalogeros Beach** - The therapeutic mud beach. Just look for wet rocks and you can use the mud to soften your skin. No club and you may run into some nudists at this beach.



4) **Lefkes** - this is a town in the mountains that was the original capital of Paros. On the way there you can try and find one of the ancient marble quarries as well. There is public parking when you get to the town, park there and walk. There is a group of authentic Greek restaurants where you can grab a bite and a drink. When we were there, we walked all the way down to the church in the old town which had an amazing cemetery behind it. Just mark your path, we had to use Google maps to get out of there.



5) **Byzantine Museum** - in Parika near the ferry. An old monastery that has a unique 1000 year old Byzantine church. This was free when I was there, and only took about 30 minutes



**Antiparos** - This is a small island accessible by a 5 min ferry ride from Paros. I was allowed to take on my quad according to my rental company so I did. The ferry does not require any reservation, just show up. You will pull into the only real town in Antiparos. There is a group of restaurants that serve you well as you wait for the return ferry.

**Castle of Aniparos** - definitely the smallest castle I have ever seen, but it is a nice 10 minute walk to get there from the port and you will be walking through town.



## Beaches

There are several beaches in Paros and if you have a quad, you can have some all to yourself.

### Paralia Sostis

Crystal clear waters and beautiful sand. Keep driving to the end of the trail and there is more beauty and a small greek church with some crazy landscape.



### Funari Beach

Another unique beach not far from town. Great beach club and restaurant. The beach also has trees.



**Caves of Antiparos** - I did not go, but they look cool if you are a spelunker head.

## Day Cruises

There are a few day cruises from Paros and Antiparos that circle the island. The one I saw in Antiparos was Captain Ben's <https://captainbenantiparos.com>

## Vravrona

We chose to stay here one night when we came back from the islands just to ensure we did not miss an international flight back to the US. Vravrona is also closer to Athens Airport than Athens (about 20 minutes vs 40). Stayed at a great hotel called **Dolce by Wyndham Attica Riviera**

<https://www.wyndhamhotels.com/dolce/vravrona-greece/dolce-athens-attica-riviera/overview> which was luxurious and included the best breakfast we had during the entire trip. To get off the resort, we walked to an amazing outdoor fish restaurant called **Taverna Artemis** which was an amazing experience. You get to pick your own fish from those caught that day.



## Other Greek Islands to Consider

**Mykonos** - Party Island, great if you want the hustle and bustle. Many options for tourists.

**Naxos** - Like Paros, but larger. Many nice beaches although those in Paros are a bit more renowned.

**Crete** - Very large Island with a lot of history, great food, and nice beaches.

**Rhodes** - Large Island close to Turkey, best weather and a lot of ruins.

**Lefkada** - beautiful beaches and white cliffs. (In the Ionian Sea)

**Corfu** - historical ruins (In the Ionian Sea)

## More Tips

We had no issues using credit cards just about everywhere, but I would get about \$300 worth of Euros to have (which you can get at AAA if you are a member). If you have Euros left over, you can spend them in duty-free at the airport before you head back.

Greece has very strict drunk driving laws, 0.5 is legally drunk, so be very careful. If you are going to visit more than one vineyard in a single afternoon, you should probably take a tour.

Make sure one of your phones has the International plan while you are there so you can navigate. AT&T and Verizon have reasonable plans.

For most arrivals and departures I arranged transportation through the hotels which worked great.

For tipping at restaurants or tavernas, leave 3-5 Euros if you had great service (cash is preferred). Greeks typically round up, so if dinner was 37 Euros, you would round up to 40.

You will be pleasantly surprised that most dinners come with a small complimentary dessert.

Definitely try Ouzo while you are there, it is very inexpensive at restaurants. It is a strong licorice liquor and it mysteriously gets cloudy with ice. Many times it is served by the ml (125 or 250).

Greeks love it if you try to use a little bit of their language, although most speak good English.

Our pictures are here: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/leopolean/collections/72157719915541638/>

## Greek Phrases

**Do you speak English** Me-las an-glee-ka

**Hello** Ya-sue oe Ya      *Formal* - Yas-oss

**Good Morning** - Ka-lee-ME-ra

**Good Afternoon/evening** Ka-lee-SPER-a

**Good Night** - Kali-nict-ya

**Please** - Par-aka-LOH

**Thank You** - Ef-caree-STO

**Yes** - Neh

**No** - OH-key

**Sorry** - Sig-no-me

**Excuse Me** - Me see-ho-rae-te      or      Me see-ho-race

