



Greece

Ancient temples, whitewashed islands and a sea that is never far away, in the country that gave the world democracy and the Olympic Games.

AT A GLANCE

Facts to know

CAPITAL

Athens

POPULATION

About 10.4 million

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

Greek

CURRENCY

Euro

AREA

About 132,000 km²

GOVERNMENT

Parliamentary republic (current constitution from 1975)

HIGHEST MOUNTAIN

Mount Olympus (Mytikas peak), about 2,918 m

LONGEST RIVER

The Aliakmonas (Haliacmon), 297 km, the longest flowing entirely within Greece

NEIGHBOURS

Albania, North Macedonia, Bulgaria and Turkey by land. Across the sea it also faces Italy, Libya, Egypt and Cyprus

DRIVES ON THE

Right

CALLING CODE

+30

A 45-minute trip to Greece

Everything you need is in this pack. No preparation beyond printing. Adapt the timing to your group.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 0 to 5 min | Welcome. Show the map page and find Greece together. Ask: who has been there, or knows someone from there? |
| 5 to 15 min | Read the facts at a glance, then three moments from the story:
1900 BC: The first palace at Knossos; 1453: Constantinople falls to the Ottomans; 2004: Athens hosts the Olympics again. |
| 15 to 25 min | At the table: talk about Moussaka and Greek village salad. Idea: bring a small taste (bread, cheese, fruit, tea) if your kitchen can help. |
| 25 to 30 min | Say it like a local: practise "Kaliméra" (Good morning), "Kalispéra" (Good evening), "Kalinýchta" (Good night). Everyone says them together. |
| 30 to 40 min | Quiz: read the questions aloud, or play the big-screen version at https://worldstroll.com/countries/greece/group . No scores needed. |
| 40 to 45 min | Talk about it (questions page), then stamp or sign everyone's passport page. |

You will need

- This printed pack (one per table, or one each)
- Pens for the quiz
- Optional: a world map or globe, a small tasting, music from the country

Greece and its cities



- Athens (Attica): The Acropolis and the Parthenon, The National Archaeological Museum, The Panathenaic Stadium of the 1896 Olympics
- Thessaloniki (Central Macedonia): The White Tower, Byzantine churches, Bougatsa for breakfast
- Patras (Western Greece): One of Europe's largest carnivals, The Rio-Antirrio bridge, Saint Andrew, the city's patron saint
- Heraklion (Crete): Knossos, Venetian walls and harbour fortress, Its archaeological museum
- Chania (Crete): The Venetian harbour, The old town, The Samaria Gorge nearby
- Ioannina (Epirus): Lake Pamvotis, Its castle and Ali Pasha, The stone villages of Zagori nearby

- Nafplio (Peloponnese): The Palamidi fortress, Its neoclassical old town, Day trips to Epidaurus and Mycenae
- Kalambaka (Thessaly): The Meteora monasteries, Walks among the rocks, The village of Kastraki next door
- Delphi (Central Greece): The ancient oracle of Delphi, Mount Parnassus, The Delphi Archaeological Museum
- Rhodes (South Aegean (Dodecanese)): The medieval old town, The Palace of the Grand Master, The Colossus of Rhodes, a lost wonder of the ancient world
- Corfu (Ionian Islands): The Venetian fortresses, The Liston promenade, Its UNESCO-listed old town
- Fira (South Aegean (Cyclades)): Views over the caldera, The cable car and steps down to the old port, The Museum of Prehistoric Thera

A short history of Greece

Greece has one of the longest recorded histories in Europe, from Bronze Age palaces on Crete to classical Athens, yet the modern Greek state only became independent in 1830.

1900 BC The first palace at Knossos

Around 1900 BC the Minoans built the first palace at Knossos on Crete, the centre of Europe's first great Bronze Age civilisation.

776 BC The first Olympic Games

By tradition, the first Olympic Games were held at Olympia in 776 BC, in honour of Zeus. Greeks later counted time in four-year 'Olympiads'.

508 BC Democracy begins in Athens

The statesman Cleisthenes set up a system in which the citizens of Athens voted on their own laws, the first democracy known in history.

490 BC The Battle of Marathon

The Athenians defeated a much larger Persian army at Marathon. The legend of a runner carrying the news to Athens later inspired the marathon race.

480 BC Thermopylae and Salamis

King Leonidas of Sparta and his men died holding the pass of Thermopylae. Soon after, the Greek fleet crushed the Persian navy at Salamis.

447 BC Work begins on the Parthenon

In Athens' golden age under Pericles, work began on the Parthenon, the great marble temple of Athena on the Acropolis.

336 BC Alexander the Great becomes king

Alexander became king of Macedon at the age of 20. Before his death in 323 BC he had conquered the Persian Empire and reached India, spreading Greek language and culture.

146 BC Rome destroys Corinth

Roman troops defeated the Achaean League and destroyed the city of Corinth. Greece came under Roman rule, but Greek culture deeply

shaped Rome.

1453

Constantinople falls to the Ottomans

The Ottoman Turks captured Constantinople, capital of the Greek-speaking Byzantine Empire. Most Greek lands would stay under Ottoman rule for almost four centuries.

1821

The War of Independence begins

Greeks rose up against Ottoman rule. The revolution is remembered every 25 March, now Greece's Independence Day.

1830

Greece becomes independent

With the help of Britain, France and Russia, Greece was recognised as an independent state, at first much smaller than today.

1896

The first modern Olympics

Athens hosted the first modern Olympic Games in the marble Panathenaic Stadium. A Greek water carrier, Spyridon Louis, won the marathon.

1940

Greece says No to Mussolini

On 28 October 1940 Greece rejected an Italian ultimatum and then pushed the invading army back. 'Ochi Day' ('No' Day) is a national holiday.

1974

Democracy returns

The military dictatorship of the colonels, in power since 1967, collapsed. In a referendum that December, Greeks voted to abolish the monarchy.

1981

Greece joins the European Community

Greece became the tenth member of the European Community, today's European Union. The euro replaced the drachma in 2002.

2004

Athens hosts the Olympics again

The Summer Olympics returned to Athens in August 2004, more than a century after the first modern Games.

What people eat in Greece

Greek food rests on an ancient trio: wheat, olive oil and wine. Olive oil goes into almost everything, together with herbs like oregano, mint and dill, lemon, yogurt and cheese. Meals often begin with meze, small dishes put in the middle of the table and shared, followed by grilled meat or fish, a baked dish or a vegetable stew in olive oil.

Moussaka)

All of Greece (the modern Greek version dates from the 1920s)

Layers of fried or baked aubergine and a tomato and minced meat sauce, topped with a thick béchamel sauce and baked until golden.

Greek village salad)

All of Greece

Chunks of tomato, cucumber and onion with olives and a slab of feta, dressed with olive oil and dried oregano. A true Greek salad has no lettuce.

Tzatziki)

All of Greece

A cool dip of strained yogurt, grated cucumber, garlic, olive oil and a little vinegar or lemon, often with dill or mint. It is served as a meze and as a sauce for souvlaki and gyros.

Fasolada)

All of Greece

A thick soup of dried white beans simmered with tomato, carrot, celery, onion and plenty of olive oil. It is sometimes called the national food of the Greeks.

Dakos)

Crete

A hard barley rusk softened with water or olive oil and topped with grated tomato, crumbled feta or mizithra cheese, oregano and olive oil.

Spanakopita)

All of Greece

A pie of crisp filo pastry filled with spinach, usually with feta and egg. A version without cheese and eggs is eaten during religious fasts.

Souvlaki)

All of Greece

Small pieces of meat, usually pork in Greece, grilled on a skewer and eaten straight off the stick or wrapped in pita with tomato, onion and tzatziki.

Gyros)

All of Greece

Meat, traditionally pork in Greece, roasted on a turning vertical spit, sliced thin and wrapped in pita with tomato, onion, chips and tzatziki.

Pastitsio)

Ionian Islands

A baked dish of tubular pasta, a minced meat and tomato sauce spiced with cinnamon, and a thick layer of béchamel on top.

Kleftiko)

Mainland Greece and Cyprus

Lamb or goat marinated with garlic and lemon and slow-roasted in a parcel of paper with potatoes until it falls off the bone.

Bougatsa)

Northern Greece, especially Thessaloniki and Serres

Flaky filo pastry filled with semolina custard, dusted with icing sugar and cinnamon. In Thessaloniki it is a favourite breakfast. There are also savoury versions with cheese or meat.

Galaktoboureko)

All of Greece

Semolina custard baked between layers of filo pastry, then soaked in a sweet syrup, often flavoured with lemon or orange.

Loukoumades)

All of Greece

Small balls of yeast dough fried until golden, then drenched in honey or syrup and sprinkled with cinnamon.

Taramosalata)

All of Greece

A creamy dip of salted, cured fish roe mixed with olive oil, lemon juice and bread or potato. Good versions are beige, not bright pink.

Feta)

Mainland Greece and the island of Lesbos

A white, crumbly, salty cheese aged in brine, made from sheep's milk or sheep's milk with up to 30% goat's milk.

Ouzo)

All of Greece (Lesbos is famous for it)

A dry spirit flavoured with anise. Mixed with water it turns cloudy white, and it is usually sipped slowly with a plate of meze.

Frappé)

Thessaloniki

Instant coffee shaken with water, sugar and ice into a thick foam, with milk if you like. It is one of the most popular coffees in Greece in summer.

GOOD MANNERS

At the table

- Many dishes, especially meze, are put in the middle of the table and everyone shares.
- Before eating, people wish each other 'Kalí órexi' (good appetite), and they say 'Stin ygeiá mas' (to our health) when they raise their glasses.
- Ouzo is usually drunk slowly with water or ice and a little food, not on its own.
- Many Greeks follow Orthodox fasts, so tavernas often offer 'fasting' versions of dishes without meat, eggs or cheese, especially during Lent.
- On Clean Monday, the first day of Lent, families eat taramosalata, bread and other fasting foods, often outdoors.

Moussaka

Layers of fried or baked aubergine and a tomato and minced meat sauce, topped with a thick béchamel sauce and baked until golden.

Ingredients

- 3 large aubergines (about 1 kg), sliced 1 cm thick
- Olive oil for brushing and frying
- 500 g minced lamb or beef
- 1 onion, finely chopped, and 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 400 g chopped tomatoes and 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- Half a teaspoon of ground cinnamon
- For the béchamel: 60 g butter, 60 g flour, 600 ml milk, 2 egg yolks, 50 g grated hard cheese (kefalotyri or Parmesan), a pinch of nutmeg
- Salt and black pepper

Method

1. Brush the aubergine slices with olive oil, season with salt and bake at 200°C for about 25 minutes, turning once, until soft and golden.
2. Fry the onion in a little oil until soft, add the garlic and the meat and cook until browned all over.
3. Add the tomatoes, tomato paste, cinnamon, salt and pepper. Simmer for 20 to 25 minutes until thick.
4. For the béchamel, melt the butter, stir in the flour for a minute, then whisk in the milk a little at a time and cook until thick. Take it off the heat and beat in the egg yolks, half the cheese and the nutmeg.
5. In a baking dish, layer half the aubergine, all the meat sauce and the rest of the aubergine. Pour over the béchamel and sprinkle with the remaining cheese.
6. Bake at 180°C for about 45 minutes until golden, then leave to rest for 20 minutes before cutting.

Greek village salad

Chunks of tomato, cucumber and onion with olives and a slab of feta, dressed with olive oil and dried oregano. A true Greek salad has no lettuce.

Ingredients

- 4 ripe tomatoes
- 1 cucumber
- 1 red onion
- 1 green pepper
- A handful of Kalamata olives
- 200 g feta, in one piece
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- Salt, and capers if you like

Method

1. Cut the tomatoes into wedges and the cucumber into thick half-moons.
2. Slice the onion and the pepper into thin rings.
3. Put the vegetables and olives in a wide bowl and season with a little salt.
4. Lay the feta on top in one piece, sprinkle with oregano and pour over the olive oil. Serve with bread to soak up the juices.

Tzatziki

A cool dip of strained yogurt, grated cucumber, garlic, olive oil and a little vinegar or lemon, often with dill or mint. It is served as a meze and as a sauce for souvlaki and gyros.

Ingredients

- 500 g thick strained Greek yogurt
- 1 cucumber
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon chopped dill or mint
- Salt

Method

1. Grate the cucumber, sprinkle it with a pinch of salt and leave it for 10 minutes.
2. Squeeze the cucumber hard in your hands or in a clean cloth to remove as much water as possible.
3. Mix the yogurt with the cucumber, garlic, olive oil, vinegar and herbs. Season with salt.
4. Chill for at least an hour so the garlic flavour spreads, then drizzle with a little more olive oil to serve.

Fasolada

A thick soup of dried white beans simmered with tomato, carrot, celery, onion and plenty of olive oil. It is sometimes called the national food of the Greeks.

Ingredients

- 500 g dried white beans, soaked in cold water overnight
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 carrots, sliced
- 2 celery sticks, sliced
- 400 g chopped tomatoes
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 120 ml olive oil
- 1 bay leaf
- Salt and black pepper

Method

1. Drain the soaked beans, cover them with fresh water and boil hard for 10 minutes. Drain again.
2. Put the beans back in the pot with about 2 litres of fresh water and the bay leaf. Simmer for about an hour until almost tender.
3. Add the onion, carrots, celery, tomatoes, tomato paste and olive oil.
4. Simmer for another 45 to 60 minutes until the beans are soft and the soup is thick. Season with salt and pepper only at the end.
5. Serve with bread, olives and a little feta.

Dakos

A hard barley rusk softened with water or olive oil and topped with grated tomato, crumbled feta or mizithra cheese, oregano and olive oil.

Ingredients

- 4 round barley rusks (paximadia)
- 3 ripe tomatoes
- 150 g feta or mizithra cheese
- 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- Dried oregano
- A few olives and capers (optional)
- Salt

Method

1. Sprinkle the rusks with a little water and a spoonful of olive oil so they soften slightly.
2. Cut the tomatoes in half and grate them on a box grater, throwing away the skins. Season with salt.
3. Spoon the tomato over the rusks and crumble the cheese on top.
4. Finish with olive oil, oregano, and olives or capers. Leave for a few minutes before eating.

Useful phrases

Kaliméra

kah-lee-MEH-rah · Good morning

Kalispéra

kah-lee-SPEH-rah · Good evening

Kalinýchta

kah-lee-NEEKH-tah · Good night

Geia sas

YAH-sahs · Hello, or goodbye (polite)

Geia sou

YAH-soo · Hi, or bye (informal)

Chaíro polý

HEH-roh poh-LEE · Nice to meet you

Ti kánete?

tee KAH-neh-teh · How are you? (polite)

Kalá, efcharistó

kah-LAH ef-hah-ree-STOH · Fine, thank you

Me synchoreíte

meh seen-hoh-REE-teh · Excuse me

Miláte anglíká?

mee-LAH-teh ahn-gee-KAH · Do you speak English?

Den katalavaíno

dhen kah-tah-lah-VEH-noh · I don't understand

Póso káneí?

POH-soh KAH-nee · How much is it?

Poù eínai i toualéta?

POO EE-neh ee too-ah-LEH-tah · Where is the toilet?

Éna trapézi gia dýo

EH-nah trah-PEH-zee yah DHEE-oh · A table for two

Tha íthela énan kafé

thah EE-theh-lah EH-nahn kah-FEH · I would like a coffee

Ton logariasmó, parakaló

tohn loh-gahr-yahz-MOH pah-rah-kah-LOH · The bill, please

Kalí órexi

kah-LEE OH-rek-see · Enjoy your meal

Stin ygeiá mas!

steen ee-YAH mahs · Cheers! (literally 'to our health')

Voítheia!

voh-EE-thee-ah · Help!

Things you might not know

1. The nine blue and white stripes of the Greek flag have no official meaning, but they are popularly said to stand for the nine syllables of the motto 'Eleftheria i Thanatos', 'Freedom or Death'.
2. The poem behind the Greek national anthem, the 'Hymn to Liberty', has 158 stanzas. Only the first two became the anthem, and Cyprus uses the same anthem.
3. Greece has between 1,200 and 6,000 islands, depending on what you count as an island, but only about 170 to 230 of them are inhabited.
4. Thanks to its many islands and bays, Greece has the longest coastline on the Mediterranean, about 13,700 km.
5. About 80% of Greece is mountains or hills, making it one of the most mountainous countries in Europe.
6. Women are not allowed to enter the monastic community of Mount Athos, by Greek law and by religious tradition.
7. The Antikythera mechanism, found in a shipwreck in 1901, is an ancient Greek device of bronze gears from the 2nd century BC. It could predict eclipses and is the oldest known analogue computer.
8. In Greek writing, the question mark looks like an English semicolon (;).
9. Many Greeks celebrate their name day, the feast of the saint they are named after, much like a birthday.
10. The first modern Olympic marathon, in 1896, was won by Spyridon Louis, a Greek water carrier.
11. Feta has been protected in the European Union since 2002: cheese sold there under that name must come from Greece.
12. The frappé, the foamy iced coffee Greeks drink all summer, is usually said to have been invented at the Thessaloniki International Fair in 1957.
13. As of 2026, Greece has 21 UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The newest is the wider area of Mount Olympus, home of the gods in Greek myth, listed in July 2026.

Questions for the group

- Have you ever been to Greece, or has someone in your family? What do you remember?
- Have you ever tasted Moussaka or Greek village salad? What is a dish you remember from a trip?
- Democracy returns (1974). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- Greece joins the European Community (1981). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- Have you seen The Acropolis and the Parthenon, in person or in pictures? Which famous place would you most like to see?
- If you could spend one day in any city of Greece, which would it be and why?

QUIZ

How well do you know Greece?

Circle the right answer. The answers are on the last page.

1. What does 'Kaliméra' mean?

- A) Cheers
- B) Good morning
- C) Good night
- D) Excuse me

2. Greece has thousands of islands. About how many of them are inhabited?

- A) About 20
- B) About 1,200
- C) About 200
- D) About 6,000

3. Greece has the longest coastline of any country on the Mediterranean.

- A) True
- B) False

4. Which Spartan king led the Greeks at the pass of Thermopylae in 480 BC?

- A) Pericles
- B) Themistocles
- C) Alexander
- D) Leonidas

5. In Greece, causing a wildfire can be a criminal offence even if it was an accident.

- A) True
- B) False

6. What does 'efcharistó' mean?

- A) Please
- B) Good morning
- C) Goodbye
- D) Thank you

7. The slow-roasted lamb dish kleftiko is named after the klephts, outlaws of the Ottoman period.

- A) True
- B) False

8. The ancient theatre of Epidauros is famous for its acoustics and is still used for performances today.

- A) True
- B) False

9. Where were the first modern Olympic Games held, in 1896?

- A) London
- B) Athens
- C) Olympia
- D) Paris

10. Ioannina stands on the shore of Lake Pamvotis, in the mountains of Epirus.

- A) True
- B) False

11. In Greece, a small upward nod of the head with raised eyebrows usually means what?

- A) Come here
- B) Yes
- C) No
- D) Hello

12. In a referendum in December 1974, a majority of Greeks voted to keep the monarchy.

- A) True
- B) False

Quiz answers

1. B) Good morning

Kaliméra means good morning. Good night is 'Kalinýchta'.

2. C) About 200

About 200: published counts range from 166 to 227 inhabited islands, out of between 1,200 and 6,000 islands in total, depending on the definition.

3. True

True. With its many islands and bays, Greece has about 13,700 km of coastline.

4. D) Leonidas

King Leonidas of Sparta died holding the pass. Pericles and Themistocles were Athenian statesmen, and Alexander lived more than a century later.

5. True

True. Causing a wildfire is a criminal offence in Greece even if unintentional, so never light fires outdoors in summer.

6. D) Thank you

Efcharistó means thank you. You may know the root from the English word 'Eucharist'.

7. True

True. The klephts are said to have cooked meat in covered pits so the smoke would not give them away.

8. True

True. The theatre seats about 14,000 people, and plays are still staged there.

9. B) Athens

The 1896 Games took place in Athens, with the Panathenaic Stadium as the main venue. The ancient Games had been held at Olympia.

10. True

True. Ioannina lies at about 500 m above sea level on the western shore of Lake Pamvotis.

11. C) No

It means no, often with a 'tsk' click of the tongue. A nod downwards means yes.

12. False

False. About 69% voted to abolish the monarchy, and Greece became a republic.

Greece visa page

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Play the interactive version, collect a stamp in your passport:

<https://worldstroll.com/countries/greece>