

While Greece is synonymous with dazzling beaches and stunning sunsets it is possible to have a great time in the Greece off-season as well.

As the weather cools down in November each year tourist crowds dwindle, and souvenir shops and summer activities shut their doors. Visiting Greece in winter offers a chance to get to know the country beyond its familiar facade of sun-kissed beaches, bustling seaside villages and busy tourist attractions and ancient sites. And though it may be colder than usual, it's still warmer than many European destinations.

Coupled with the very real opportunity to hit the slopes at a number of ski resorts, and Greece reveals itself as a very comprehensive winter destination for everyone!

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Greece weather in winter

Generally, the winter weather in Greece tends to be quite cold in most places. From around November, the temperature begins to drop leaving behind the balmy days of summer and heading towards the winter months.

With the peak season running from June through September many places begin to close after that as the Greece off-season begins.

From November, daytime temperatures in much of the country average around 15°C and don't get much warmer than that until March, when temperatures begin to climb to around 17°C (in Athens, at least).

Generally, places like Crete see higher daytime temperatures before March; in February, for example, the average daytime high is 16°C.

December can be gloomy; think overcast skies and rain and it can also get windy in coastal areas although Christmas in Greece is, of course, a very festive time. That said there is also a phenomenon called Halycon Days that are clear and sunny and can be very nice.

January is the coldest month of the year; it can drop below zero in some places (notably the north), but temperatures are still warmer than many other Northern European countries. That means hiking and exploring the Greek countryside, or its islands may be a nice idea.

Things start to look up in March. You'll still be in for showers and overcast skies, but it's not freezing. The days start to get longer and warmer. Temperatures hover around 10°C for much of the country, except for the islands further south.

Winter in Athens

Though sultry and hot in the summer months in winter [Athens](#) can be quite wonderful. It's a cooler, quieter and perhaps more magical affair, with fewer tourists and less baking sun to hinder long days of discovering what the city has to offer.

[Visiting the Acropolis](#) (which dates back to the 5th century BC) during the cooler months is

different from seeing it in summer when there can be big crowds of people to contend with.

You'll be able to take your time and get to learn the history in a calmer atmosphere.

The Ancient Agora is also open and much more pleasant to explore without the searing sunshine glaring down. You can take in this storied marketplace with its statues and monuments at a very comfortable pace.

Generally, everything from museum tickets to hotels and eateries will have cheaper rates than in the peak months, meaning your budget will stretch even further.

One thing to note, however, is that sites will have shorter opening times, closing around 5 p.m. rather than 7 p.m., for example. A lot of people like to buy a [Multi-pass](#) that allows them to visit 6 of the top archaeological sites with self-guided audio tours.

Tip: It's a good idea to pack a few layers and bring an umbrella (or waterproof jacket) in case of a downpour.

There's no reason Athens can't be a winter destination — millions live, work, and play in the city all year round. Chances are you'll be able to get under the skin of the city a little more than in peak season.

Further reading: [Where to stay in Athens](#)



The Greek Islands in Winter

People may think that Greece's storied and sun-drenched islands shut up shop in winter, but that is not the case for some of them.

Life continues for most islanders, and though some islands' big resorts and hotels — even some restaurants and bars — close for the season, most islands will still be ticking along with local life. Greeks like to eat out, too!

You'll get to discover a different side of the Greek islands in winter, minus the party-goers and package tourists.

Crete in winter

Located furthest south [Crete](#) has mild and sunny weather throughout winter; in fact, it has some of the warmest winter weather in Europe.

This makes it easy to get out and see everything this ancient site has to offer. Museums remain open in Crete (maybe with shorter opening hours), and popular sites such as Knossos - usually crowded with tourists in-season - may feel like exclusive viewings.

The Cyclades Islands in winter

[Santorini](#) in winter is a lot quieter than other times a year but it's still good as a year-round destination. Views of the caldera remain stunning, the sunsets here stay beautiful, no matter what the temperature is — and all of that with fewer party-going crowds.

A lot of shops and tavernas will be closed but there are enough open to satisfy most visitors. There are usually some limited Caldera cruises operating, albeit without swim stops, and the incredible [Ancient Akrotiri Site](#) is open year round, as are several other great Museums like the [Museum of Prehistoric Thera](#).

Syros, the [Cyclades'](#) capital and most populated island, also remains open for business, if somewhat quieter than usual; think cool breezes and bright winter skies. As the Capital it has a very impressive Town Hall, in fact the largest in Greece, and there are some magnificent Cathedrals and even a beautiful Theatre to visit.

Other popular Cycladic islands such as [Paros](#) and [Naxos](#) are home to large permanent populations and life goes on for them those who live there year round. Beach clubs, boat trips and other beach focused activities will not be available and many shops will be shut other than supermarkets, pharmacies and other places than service the locals.

It is still possible to find a few hotels open and the taverna's that remain open will be the ones that the locals all frequent so it makes for a very authentic experience, albeit a very different one for tourist season.

Also don't expect the pink bougainvillea that you see in the photos. That's also a flower that loves summer much more than winter.

The Dodecanese Islands

Across the Aegean Sea, Lesbos — the “Island of Ouzo” — is also very much visitable during winter. This island is a go-to destination for bird-watchers and nature lovers; wildflowers and marshlands make this a beautiful place to base yourself.

Rhodes also experiences mild winters (highs average around 15°C), which makes seeing its UNESCO-recognised Old Town - complete with Byzantine and Venetian architecture - very doable.

Hiking is great on [Rhodes](#), and pleasant when the temperatures aren't so hot, particularly around the pretty town of [Lindos](#).

The Sporades Islands

The island of [Skiathos](#) calms down in winter after the nightlife of summer. It also offers you the chance to get in touch with local life. With tourist restaurants and souvenir shops shut, local *tavernas* will welcome you in, and you'll be able to get chatting to locals.

The Saronic Islands in Winter

Just off the coast of Athens, the [Saronic Islands](#) make for excellent day trips from the capital, even during the winter months, with sandy beaches, pine trees, history, and rustic, lively tavernas.

They may be cooler than in summer, but they remain lovely. [Hydra](#), for example, is home to around 3000 permanent residents and is still very much alive in winter. The cliff top bars may be a magnet for summer time visitors but sitting under a warm heater at a harbourside taverna and watching the machinations of the island can also be very enjoyable.

Even easier is [Aegina](#), only 1 hour from Athens by ferry and very much a year round destination, in fact it is practically a suburb of Athens. There are some significant archaeological sites on Aegina, particularly the Temple of Aphaia and the Churches such as Nectarios are open year round and are very worthwhile.

Further reading :

[Which are the warmest Greek islands in May?](#)

[Which are the best Greek islands in October?](#)

[Which are the best Greek islands?](#)



The Temple of Aphaia, Aegina Island



Santorini

Thessaloniki in Winter

Thessaloniki has average winter temperatures of around 10°C and lows of 1°C, with January being the coldest month. Since it's a northern city, Thessaloniki can also get an occasional dusting of snow. However, this just adds to its charm.

That charm is further enhanced by the fact that there are practically no tourists here during winter.

The waterfront area of [Thessaloniki](#) becomes a wintery walkway, where you can duck into cafes to warm up with a hot chocolate, complete with views out across the sea. The city takes on a completely different character.

The popular "Umbrellas" sculpture is crowded with Instagrammers and selfie-takers during the height of the season in summer, but in winter, it's deserted.

That means it'll be your own spot for photoshoots and sunset seclusion; the abstract sculpture looks starkly stunning silhouetted on the red sky.

Elsewhere in Thessaloniki in winter, the city's more historical sights are also quiet.

The iconic White Tower, with its Byzantine history, remains open, as does its museum. Again, the lack of crowds makes visiting a much less stressful experience. The charming Ano Poli — Thessaloniki's old city — is still bustling with residents.

Yet the cobbled streets are quieter, meaning you'll be able to feel the historical atmosphere and character of the place more readily. The smell of wood fires burning in houses as you meander just adds to the allure.

If you've had enough of wandering around in the cold and exploring outdoors, you (and your extremities!) will be pleased to note that Thessaloniki has a wealth of cafes offering warmth and good food.

Spend time people-watching, enjoying the environment, and maybe even chatting to a local. Sampling delicious Greek food is a given, with hearty delights such as *moussaka* providing a warming treat.

The weather is generally cold, and it can get icy underfoot, so make sure you've got a sturdy pair of shoes for walking around the city streets. A warm scarf, gloves and a hat wouldn't go amiss in Thessaloniki's winters. A down jacket may be in order, too!

Further reading : [Visit the city of ghosts : What to see in Thessaloniki](#)



Thessaly and Meteora in winter

The region of Thessaly has the Aegean Sea — and the Sporades Islands — to the east, Macedonia to the north, Epirus to the west, and Central Greece to its south.

It's a land of myths: the Plain of Thessaly is where the epic battle for supremacy between the Titans and the Olympians took place.

Thousands of years later, the region is yours to explore. Yes, even in the winter months.

Dubbed the "Breadbasket of Greece", the seasons in this region are very distinct here, but mainly split into just two: summer and winter. Summer is hot; winter is cold.

The temperatures average between 10°C and zero, with chilly nights and snowfall a distinct possibility, especially in highland areas.

In Thessaly, you'll find one of Greece's most celebrated attractions outside of its ancient wonders - [Meteora](#).

This incredible set of monasteries is set on a castle-like outcrop of rock, with a setting and history that resulted in them being made a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Though the date of its origin is unknown, there was a monastic state existing there in the 11th century.

By the 14th century, hermit monks escaping the Turks had founded 20 monasteries in the area. Only six remain today - and thankfully, you can visit them.

Meteora in winter means snow-dusted mountains, making for an even more mystical and surreal world.

It's a quiet place, much more subdued than summer with its tour groups and daytrippers; you can more easily feel the holiness of the region. Note, however, that opening times of the monasteries change in the winter months, so it's important to check ahead.

Plan for cold weather when you're visiting Meteora in winter; make sure to bring layers and a good pair of walking shoes if you don't want to do a tour. It actually may be more pleasant in winter than in summer, as the trails can get sweaty in the summer heat.

Oh, and it's beautiful in winter, especially after a snowfall. Thessaly's capital, Larissa, is an excellent place to base yourself. It can be a cosy winter getaway. Being the fourth biggest city in Greece, there's a choice of accommodation, and it makes for a good jumping-off point for skiing in Greece too.

Further reading : [How to visit Meteora](#)

[Book our overnight Meteora tour now!](#)



Central and Northern Greece in Winter

If you're interested in skiing or just want to see some beautifully snowy landscapes, you'll be pleased to know (and probably surprised to hear) that the central and northern parts of the country are a veritable winter wonderland.

It's beaches and nightlife that often spring to mind when people think of Greece; many may not even realise there *are* ski resorts in Greece. In fact skiing in Greece is great value and there are over [24 ski resorts](#) to choose from!

Parnassos, for example, around two hours north of Athens, hosts a very popular ski resort — so popular, in fact, that you should book ahead, especially for weekends. The resort itself opens between December and May and boasts 13 ski lifts and 19 runs, making for a comprehensive place to hit the slopes. It's probably the best-organised ski resort in the country, hence its popularity.

The main town of [Arachova](#) is very charming and one of the best places to visit in Greece during the off season, as right next door is the incredible archaeological site, [Delphi](#), one of the most important in the country.

Elsewhere, there's the Kalavrita Ski Centre. Set on Mount Helmos, this ski resort is the second-biggest that Greece has to offer, with 12 slopes and seven ski lifts.

Most people base themselves in Kalavrita itself - a pretty town with cafes, eateries, and accommodation on a mountain backdrop. Perhaps most beautiful, however, is Agriolefkes on

Mount Pelion.

Featuring five ski slopes and four lifts, there are chalets and eateries scattered around the area; there's even a ski and snowboard school and hiking paths.

Mount Olympus may be the designated [home of the gods](#), but it's also home to prime skiing! Towering at 2,917 metres, it's the tallest peak in Greece.

On its northern slopes, you'll find Elatochori Ski Centre. Comprising six slopes and two ski lifts, there are also two ski schools and a selection of hotels, guesthouses, eateries and shops scattering the local area. It's a four-hour drive from Athens.

For a long ski season, head to Mount Falakro near the Bulgarian border. Falakro Ski Centre boasts a whopping 21 slopes and is open Thursday-Sunday, December to late May. The snowiest month here is actually March!

Skiing in Greece isn't just doable, it's one of the most popular winter pastimes of the country, with resorts getting busy at the weekends.



The Peloponnese in Winter

Barely connected to the mainland by the isthmus of Corinth, the southern Greek peninsular region of the [Peloponnese](#) is primed for exploration during the winter months. Days here can be sunny and bright, with temperatures between 2 and 10°C.

It's not warm, however, *it is* beautiful. There are wildflowers to marvel at, walking trails to enjoy, ancient ruins to soak up, vistas of snow-capped mountains to gaze upon, and local life to embrace.

On sunnier days, despite low temperatures, you may find yourself in a T-shirt — especially towards the tail end of February.

Corinth itself is an ancient city, once its own city-state alongside the likes of Athens and Sparta. Ruins and museums are the order of the day in the historic Corinth, including the Temple of Apollo (built in 550 BC) and its very own answer to the Athens Acropolis, Acrocorinth.

Glimpsing these relics of the past and coastline views with no crowds makes it easy to let

your imagination run riot; it's mostly free of big tour groups in winter.

Mycenae, in the northeastern Peloponnese, is another ancient site. It was home to a Bronze Age civilisation. In fact, it was the Mycenaean culture that left its tales in Homer's *Illiad*, which makes visiting this site of myth and legend even more of a wonder. You can also see the tomb of [Agamemnon, the king of Mycenae](#) who led the attack on ancient Troy.

Close to Mycenae is the coastal town of [Nafplio](#). Usually a bustling destination in summer, in winter, the beachside draw of this town remains. This was the first Capital of modern Greece and is considered one of the prettiest towns in the country.

The medieval Venetian-built Fortress of Palamidi above the town is ideal for hiking (it's about 1,000 steps), but if you don't fancy that sort of work-out, its old, winding streets are welcoming enough for exploration.

Other amazing sites to visit on the Peloponnese include the Byzantine city of [Mystras](#) and [Ancient Olympia](#), both perfect in winter and they are mostly outdoors and can be hard going in the summer sun.

Further reading: [Peloponnese holidays : A complete guide](#)



Mystras



Visiting Greece off-season may not be the vacation you had in mind when you saw all the stunning photos of azure beaches and blue church domes in sugar cube villages but it does offer a real alternative to many of the more popular European winter destinations.

No crowds and low prices are two great incentives to explore Greece in winter and shoulder seasons and you will likely uncover a more authentic local experience than you would in Summer.

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