

Bloomberg

Where to Stay in Greece, From Private Villas to Five-Star Hotels

It's your first chance to get back to Europe. Don't mess it up.

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Greece Opens Doors to Tourists

Even before Greece announced on April 19 that it would be the first European country to welcome Americans—including unvaccinated ones—demand for summer trips to the Aegean was soaring.

It started in March. That month, Emirates announced that it would introduce new routes between Newark, N.J., and Athens; soon after, a handful of cruise lines said they'd start sailing the Greek Isles in June. It was a harbinger of good news to come—inspiring enough confidence to send airfare and hotel searches from the U.S. to Greece through the roof. As a result, airfare booking site Hopper tracked a 75% spike in round-trip searches, and luxury agency Virtuoso tallied a 225% jump in new hotel reservations across the mainland and Greek isles.

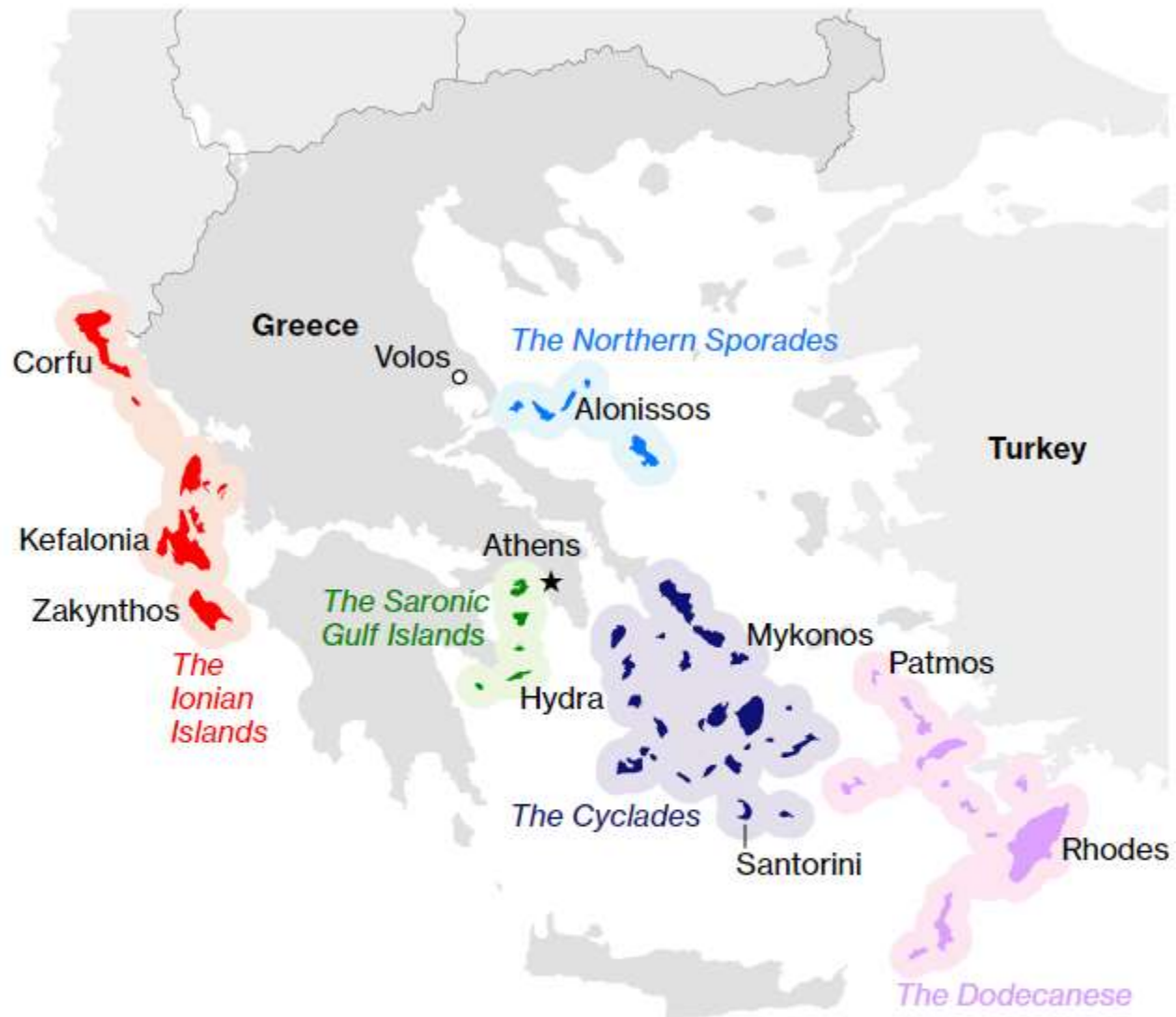


Construction on a grand Temple of Poseidon began around 500 BC but was never completed. *Photographer: Photograph by Paul Atkinson/Moment RF*

That momentum has only grown. “Greece is everyone’s Plan A,” says Paul Tumpowsky of the tech-driven agency Skylark. “There’s no doubt that by being open first, they’re going to capture the business on the front end of summer, because flights are unreliable everywhere else,” he explains. “If you’re hoping to put together a trip to France in August, you can expect schedule changes and disruptions until the opening policies are much clearer. Meanwhile, every major carrier is flying into Athens now—and you can bet that more airlines are going to be rerouting their wide-body jets there as soon as they can.”

Not only is airfare plentiful, it's also more affordable than usual, with Hopper reporting an average of 25% savings on round-trip fares from the U.S., compared with 2019 prices. Expect to pay around \$800 if you book soon, the company says, rather than the typical \$1,080 price tags that might have been common before the pandemic.

Aegean Destinations



Data: Yacht Charter Fleet

There's also optimism around Greece's vaccination campaign. The government has so far prioritized anyone working in the tourism sector and expects that all adults will be vaccinated by the end of June, even though just 15% of adults were accounted for by early May.

None of this means it's easy to plan a trip. Travelers frequently get boxed into the same well-known destinations, regardless of whether they're looking to party or relax as a family. "You always feel like you haven't scratched the surface," says David Prior, whose high-end travel club Prior has just opened an office in Greece to help travelers unlock some of the country's lesser-visited gems—such as laid-back, car-free Spetses for families or the a spiritual reset amid the precipitous churches of Meteora. "The wheels are starting to move," Prior says. "I think it's going to be a great summer this summer."

Here's a primer to what's new and notable in Greece this summer. And if you want to explore by sea, be sure to check out our guide on sailing the region—as well as our dream itinerary through the Saronic Gulf islands.

The Hotels to Book

Glamorous new hotels can ordinarily be expected in Mykonos and Santorini, markets that command high prices and equally high demand. This year, that's still true, but there are notable openings in surprising places, from boutique hotel-deficient Athens to lesser-visited islands such as Antiparos.



The Brown Hotel in Athens has one of the city's largest rooftop sun decks. *Source: Brown Hotel*

Brown Hotel Acropol, Athens: As part of a push to open 24 hotels around Greece, Israel-based design hotel brand Brown has planted its first flag in Athens, where it has one of the city's largest rooftop sun decks. Its 165 mod rooms near Omonia Square and the Acropolis feature locally quarried marble finishes, trolley bar carts, and vinyl record players.

Kalesma Mykonos: On five acres in prime Mykonos, Kalesma has built a thoroughly modern version of the traditional sugar cube village. Its 25 suites have private, heated plunge pools with sea views and terraces large enough for private meals or spa treatments.

Calilo Hotel, Ios: The local owners of this quirky new hotel scooped up 1,000 acres of land on this beloved, party-forward island with the intention of preserving almost all of it. They planted nearly 70,000 trees, started an organic garden, and foraged for some of the materials to build the 15 eco-friendly suites and villas, some set right into rock formations with natural tide pools and their own swim-up bars.