

Kalamaki  
beach, Corfu

Large and lively  
or small and  
sweet? Choose  
a Grecian island  
to suit you  
and head to  
guaranteed sun

# Great *Greek* getaways



If you're on a budget, try...

## SELF-CATERING ON CORFU

Carpeted in pine forests, olive groves and fruit trees, Corfu is Greece's emerald isle, with stunning beaches, traditional villages and rich, historical sights. The most northerly of the Ionian Islands, it has plenty of peaceful enclaves far from party town, Kavos in the south.

For traditional Greek hospitality, base yourself at the Sea Breeze Family Beach Hotel in the picturesque resort of Agios Gordios on the west coast. You'll be amazed as the dense forest lining the winding roads from the airport suddenly clears to reveal a stunning crescent-shaped bay.

The self-catering accommodation, run by friendly brothers Vasilis and Yannis, has an enviable position right on the golden sandy beach, and its restaurant serves delicious Greek dishes, stone-baked pizzas and fruity cocktails with dramatic views over the Ortholithos rock.

The village, with its small shops, bars and tavernas, is a five-minute walk away. From here, car rental is easy, and a bus runs to Corfu Town, from where services snake across the island. This bustling city, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, with its Old Fort and cobbled streets lined with cafés and boutiques, is well worth a visit.

Although Corfu is blessed with many lovely beaches, Paleokastritsa – a cluster of secluded bays and hidden coves – is its most treasured beauty spot. Snorkel in the crystal-clear waters or take a boat trip around the caves, before heading to the Bella Vista restaurant, for a breathtaking panorama of the coastline.

### THINGS TO DO

- ◆ Get back to Agios Gordios in time to catch the stunning sunset, then dine by candlelight at Steven's on the Hill or Sebastian's tavernas.
  - ◆ Head 20 miles south of Corfu Town to the Achillion Palace. This 18th-century residence, set in botanical gardens, was the backdrop to the James Bond film, *For Your Eyes Only*.
  - ◆ Corfu is blanketed with over three million olive trees, so buy locally produced olive soaps, creams and fruity olive oils as souvenirs.
- BOOK IT** Greek specialist Manos offers holidays to Corfu from airports across the UK. Seven nights self-catering at the three-star Sea Breeze Family Beach Hotel costs from £365 per person, including flights. Visit [thomascook.com](http://thomascook.com), call 0844 412 5970 or visit your nearest branch of Thomas Cook or Co-operative Travel.



The port of Gaios

For the real Greece, try...

## A peaceful Paxos hideaway

Tiny Paxos is only 19km square and feels far from the crowds, especially as the journey includes a 2.5-hour ferry ride from Corfu. The pace is slow and the relaxed mood of its tiny villages and charming tavernas is ideal for a leisurely break.

There are three main harbour towns, Gaios, Lakka and Loggos where you can rent a little motor boat (£10 an hour) to chug around the island exploring the hidden coves, stunning blue caves, or enjoy some easy off-boat snorkeling.

Villa Andromeda, set within a small hillside hamlet, makes a beautiful base, surrounded by olive groves. Its leafy garden is packed with fruit and olive trees, and shady terraces surround the spacious private swimming pool. Large, airy rooms are tiled in ceramic and marble, the living room leads on to a series of terraces bordered by olive groves and bedrooms have balconies overlooking the sea. It feels secluded but Loggos is only 1.5km away.

Paxos is unusually lush and densely planted, and its rocky coastline is lapped by the clearest, turquoise sea. The beaches are all smooth white pebbles, so a pair of jelly shoes and a rubber mat are useful buys for a day at the beach.

It's also a wonderful place for walking – the ideal way to build

up an appetite for fresh fish, salads, stuffed vine leaves and giant beans, with homemade cake to finish.

Eat, sleep and enjoy the laid-back pace on this tiny isle, where a week is heaven, but two weeks divine.

### THINGS TO DO

- ◆ One of the best places on Paxos for typical Greek food is Taverna Fontana in the charming, traditional village of Fontana, run by the delightful Nikos and his mum, who bakes a legendary walnut cake. Dinner costs around £15 per person with local wine.
- ◆ Take a day trip on the Poseidon Express from Gaios for the full island experience and a visit to the idyllic neighbouring island of Antipaxos, whose beaches rank in the Med's top ten. A day's boat trip costs £18 per person ([paxos-greece.com](http://paxos-greece.com)).
- ◆ Watch the glorious sunsets in style at the Sunset View Bar in Erimitis, over on the west coast of Paxos. It offers stunning views of its dramatic cliffs – and delicious cocktails.

**BOOK IT** Greece villa specialist GIC The Villa Collection ([gicthevillacollection.com](http://gicthevillacollection.com), 020 8232 9780) offers a seven-night stay at Villa Andromeda (sleeps eight) from £669 per person (based on four sharing). The price includes self-catering accommodation, return flights from Gatwick (regional departures also available) and car hire.

## To discover for yourself, try...

# EXPLORING SURPRISING SAMOS

Considering that Samos, in the Aegean, is the eighth largest of the Greek isles, it's surprisingly undiscovered. Visit once, however, and you'll want to rediscover its green, lush landscape, punctuated by bursts of colourful flowers, again and again.

With a backdrop of dramatic cliffs, the beaches are a mix of sand and smooth stones with wonderfully clear sea. There's

always at least one beachside taverna offering fresh fish and salad for lunch. For a wider choice of restaurants, visit the small town of Kokkari and meander through the old town to the harbour. Or if shopping is on your mind, you can't go wrong with local honey and a bottle of Samena, the world-famous wine.

Samos is popular with walkers, and groups travel here year round to stride up to the stunning hilltop villages and admire the breathtaking views. Particularly lovely is a drive to the village of Manolates through the Valley of the Nightingales, while craft lovers will enjoy Vourliotes, where jewellery makers and ceramicists open up their studios.

### THINGS TO DO

- ◆ Visit the hammam in Kokkari for a steam or massage. Two hours costs around £6. Open every day until 9pm
- ◆ Watch a movie at the open-air cinema Cine Rex in Mytilini, where entry (£5) includes free honey doughnuts.
- ◆ Visit the striking chapel of Agios Antonios, built in a natural cave.

**BOOK IT** Independent Greece specialist Sunvil Holidays has an excellent range of properties and looks after guests throughout their holiday. Visit [sunvil.co.uk](http://sunvil.co.uk) or call 020 8758 4758. Seven nights self-catering at Villa Penny on Samos costs from £681 per person (based on two sharing a one-bedroom apartment), including return flights (from Gatwick) and transfers.



Below: Kokkari town in the evening  
Left: The balcony at Villa Penny

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The beach at Gramvousa  
Below: Youphoria villas

## For a special family stay, try... Your own villa on Crete

For a peaceful, flexible family holiday, a comfortable villa is ideal. You'll feel at home yet spoilt in the privacy of your luxury hideaway, kids love the freedom of their own space and establishing a leisurely routine is a pleasure.

Set in the picturesque bay of Kissamos, in the rustic village of Kastelli, the Youphoria villas are stunning. Stylish and innovative in design, they have magnificent panoramic views of the Gramvousa peninsula from their hillside location. Each villa has two bedrooms, one reception room and bags of outdoor space, including a beautiful private pool the kids will love. There's a good choice of unspoilt sandy stretches a short drive away and its lovely to spend

time in the charming shops, local cafés and tavernas in the nearby town of Kissamos, before retreating to your own little villa-shaped world.

### THINGS TO DO

- ◆ From Kissamos, take a boat ride to the pirate island of Gramvousa and the world-famous Balos Lagoon.
- ◆ Head to ancient Falasarna with its golden sandy beach and fascinating Minoan history.
- ◆ If you're up for adventure, walk all or part of the famous Samaria Gorge for solitude and stunning views.

**BOOK IT** Fly to Chania with EasyJet from around £100 (easyjet.com). Hire a car through Holidayautos.co.uk for around £200 per week. Youphoria villas cost from £1,400 per week for a one-bedroom villa, to £2,080 for a two-bedroom villa. Shorter lets are available during quieter times.

**PRIMA OFFER** Prima readers booking Youphoria in 2013 will receive a 20% discount, subject to availability, excluding August. Visit [youphoriavillascrete.com](http://youphoriavillascrete.com) or call 0871 990 2070.



FEATURE: JANE LOVATT PHOTOS: 4CORNERS, GETTY IMAGES, PHOTOSHOT



Of the 6,000 islands and islets in the Aegean and Ionian seas, just 227 are inhabited. With 7,500km of coastline between them, they're the perfect destination for a beach holiday. Expect to find everything from sheltered bays and coves, dunes, pebbles, caves and dark volcanic sand.

◆ Take your Greek island holiday from April through to October. Temperatures reach around 30°C in July and August, but the best months to visit are May, June and September, when prices are lower and the climate is predictable and perfect.

- ◆ The islands of Mykonos, Santorini, Naxos, Paros, Crete, Rhodes, Lesvos, Corfu, Skiathos, Chios, Samos and Kos all have airports with good connections to the UK. From these bigger islands there is an extensive ferry network to the smaller islands (visit [aferry.com](http://aferry.com) or [ferries.gr](http://ferries.gr)). Alternatively, fly to Athens ([easyjet.com](http://easyjet.com)) and pick up internal flights ([aegeanair.com](http://aegeanair.com)) or ferries from there. For more information on Greece and the islands, see [visitgreece.gr](http://visitgreece.gr).
- ◆ The Argo-Saronic islands – Poros, Idhra and Spetses – have good ferry connections to Athens.
- ◆ The Cyclades lie in the Aegean Sea and include Mykonos, Naxos, Paros, Sifnos and Syros.
- ◆ The Dodecanese in the Aegean Sea include Symi, Tilos, Kos, Karpathos, Lipsi and Rhodes.
- ◆ The East and North Aegean islands include Samos, Ikaria and Limnos, Thasos, Ikaria, Lesbos, Chios and Psara.
- ◆ The Sporades lie off the eastern coast of Greece and include Skyros, Alonissos, Skiathos and Skopelos.
- ◆ The Ionian Islands are off the west coast in the Ionian Sea and include Corfu, Paxos, Kefallonis and Lefkada, Zakynthos and Ithaca.