



## Explore Greece's beauty in these often-overlooked regions

ELIZABETH WARKENTIN  
SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE AND MAIL  
PUBLISHED JULY 7, 2016  
UPDATED JUNE 5, 2017

### HELLENIC HAPPINESS

*As anyone who has been to Santorini or Mykonos in the high season knows, strolling the overcrowded lanes can feel like negotiating a stampede at a soccer stadium. Those islands are indeed beautiful, but these lesser-known regions are just as alluring.*



### The Tragheia Valley of Naxos

The largest and greenest of the Cyclades, mountainous Naxos feels more authentically Greek than its glitzier siblings, Santorini and Mykonos.

Noteworthy for its stunning Byzantine churches, millennium-old olive groves, ancient *kouros* statues and an excellent network of walking trails, the Tragheia Valley is the ideal area for hiking enthusiasts.

And, if the Tragheia Valley is the crown of Naxos, then the bougainvillea-clad neoclassical village of Halki, sprinkled with arty boutiques, stylish cafés and an enchanting village square, is the cabochon stone in that crown.

### What to do

After a morning hike up to Mount Zas (Zeus), have lunch at one of the many tavernas in the lively and leafy main square in Filoti.

When the beach becomes firesome, head to interior Tragheia region of Naxos and explore the lively village of Halki. (Elizabeth Warkentin / Alexander Reichardt)

village, visit the Fish & Olive art gallery ([fish-olive-creations.com](http://fish-olive-creations.com)) and sample *kitron*, the local liqueur made of citron, which resembles a large, carbuncled lemon or grapefruit, at the Vallindras Distillery ([www.greeka.com](http://www.greeka.com)) right across from Fish & Olive.



The Church of Panagia Damiotissa in the Tragheia region of Naxos (Alexander Reichardt)

### **Where to stay**

Vasiliki Guest House. A lovely guest house in a restored traditional mansion just outside the village of Filoti ([enaxos.gr](http://enaxos.gr)).

### **Where to eat**

*Il Basilico, Halki*. Owned by an Italian couple from Milan, this popular Italian restaurant is set in a lovely garden. The cuisine is highly innovative and the chef creates a new dish made with fresh, local ingredients every day.

*Duetto, Filoti*. Authentic local cuisine is served in a welcoming atmosphere on the leafy main street of Filoti.

*Galani Kafenion, Halki*. With its original Grecian blue double doors and rickety marble-topped wooden tables, this friendly café is in a 1950s time warp. It is famous for its homemade *galaktoboureko*, a semolina-based custard in phyllo pastry.



The Fethiye Mosque, pictured, is the burial place of former Ottoman ruler Ali Pasha. (Elizabeth Warkentin)

### The Epirus region

From shimmering lakes and ice-cold rivers spanned by *Lord of the Rings*-style stone bridges to the world's deepest gorge; from the unspoiled Ionian coastline of long, sandy beaches to the Zagorohoria, 46 traditional mountain villages strung around the gorge like pearls on a necklace; and from Ioannina, a lively university town dripping with Ottoman riches, to clifftop Byzantine churches and monasteries – it's no wonder Lord Byron was awed by this forgotten corner of northwestern Greece.

### What to do

With its dreamy views of the supernaturally green Lake Pamvotis and the surrounding Pindus mountains, the Its Kale compound is Ioannina's Byzantine-era citadel, which serves today as the Byzantine Museum. The compound contains the palace of former Ottoman ruler Ali Pasha, who was buried here beside the Fethiye Mosque. Just a 10-minute ferry ride across the lake from Ioannina lies a small, forested island that is home to 300 inhabitants, as well as five secluded Byzantine monasteries notable for their fine frescoes and manuscript collections. For walking and hiking enthusiasts, the Vikos Gorge and the Ottoman-style villages of the Zagorohoria make for some of the best walking in Greece. The Instagram-worthy stone bridges that span the mountain rivers and waterfalls are a highlight for many travellers. Also worth visiting in the Zagori are the monasteries, some, such as the Monastery of Saint Paraskevi at the entrance to the gorge, clinging high up the sheer rock walls towering over the void below.



Parga, in the Epirus region of Greece. (Getty Images / Hemera)

### Where to stay

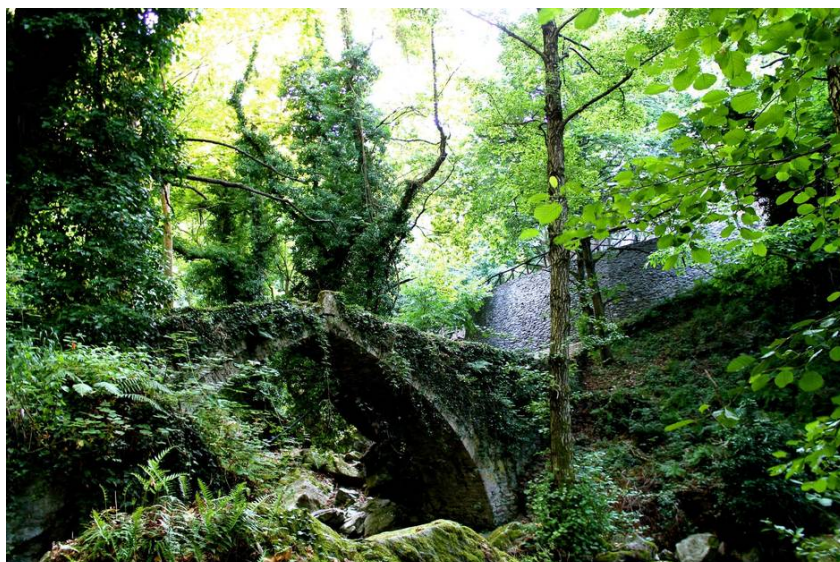
*Hotel Kastro* ([www.hotelkastro.gr](http://www.hotelkastro.gr)), Ioannina. This lovingly restored traditional mansion has seven elegantly decorated rooms and brand-new bathrooms. Owners Xenia and husband George provide superlative hospitality. Doubles start at \$80.

*Gaia Guest House* ([www.gaia-dilofo.gr](http://www.gaia-dilofo.gr)), Dilofo. A modern guest house built from the ruins of an 1862 stone mansion off the main square is managed with comfort in mind – there are board games, arty magazines, a mini-library, a cozy breakfast room and a fireplace in the living room. The owners also help to organize walking, rafting, kayaking and other activities. Doubles start at \$80.

### Where to eat

*Restaurant of Nikos and Ioulia Tsoumani* ([www.tsoumanisnikos.gr](http://www.tsoumanisnikos.gr)), Papigo. After a hike in the Vikos Gorge, gorge on *zimaropita* (Greek pie), salads and hearty local dishes and wash it down with *tsipouro* (pomace brandy) and local wine at this well-loved taverna.

*Mystagwgia* ([www.mystagwgia.gr](http://www.mystagwgia.gr)), Ioannina. Set in a traditional stone mansion, this stylish taverna and *tsipouradhiko* (ouzerie) is popular with locals for its *mezedhes* (small dishes) and grills.



### The Pelion Peninsula

The verdant interior of the Pelion peninsula is a mythical forest of chestnut, oak and eucalyptus. (Elizabeth Warkentin)

sea, with a number of secluded coves and beaches reachable only by boat or via steep staircases. Pelion's verdant interior is a mythical forest of horse chestnut, oak, eucalyptus and walnut trees interspersed with ice-cold streams and waterfalls. Nothing seems to have changed in the woods since the centaurs, winged horses and nymphs gamboled here.

Vertiginous mountain roads offering sweeping views of the sea are interrupted by villages typified by leafy, sun-dappled squares and half-timbered houses, many often adorned with overhanging balconies and the ubiquitous *vidrio*, or stained-glass, windows.



The Mylopotamos beach on the Pelion peninsula. (Elizabeth Warkentin)

### What to do

The peninsula is only 95 kilometres long, but driving its coiling roads can be torturous. It's often faster and safer to walk the *kalderimia*, the donkey tracks that connect many villages and beaches. Walking these cobbled paths, you're sure to come across a Byzantine-era church since these are often secluded in the woods. Some of the prettiest and best preserved mountain villages in Pelion include Tsagarada, Milies, Kissos, Lafkos and Portaria.

Coastal villages such as Agios Andreas and Kottes are a throwback to 1970s Greece, right down to the ramshackle taverna tables and chipped wooden fishing boats. Undoubtedly one of the most beautiful and dramatic beaches on the peninsula is Mylopotamos, which can be reached by boat or by a steep wooden staircase situated a few kilometres below the village of Tsagarada, but those with young children might prefer the beach at Kato Gatzia. For something touristy yet different, To Trenaki ([www.trainose.gr/](http://www.trainose.gr/)), the little train, is a popular four-carriage train that runs between Ano Lehonía and Milies.



A typical Pelion square in Portaria. (Elizabeth Warkentin)

### Where to stay

*Santikos Mansion* ([www.santikoshotels.com](http://www.santikoshotels.com)), *Vizitsa*. Santikos is an *arhontika*, a traditional mansion home converted into a hotel, with panoramic views from its stained-glass-windowed veranda. Richly decorated doubles with nice bathrooms start at \$130.

*Archontiko Stathopoulou* ([www.archontikostathopoulou.gr](http://www.archontikostathopoulou.gr)), *Aghios Georgios*. Housed in a grand neoclassical mansion with frescoed ceilings, the villa boasts a flagstone terrace from which you can appreciate the panoramic views of the coast and an ice-cold spring-water swimming pool. Its friendly managers, Dimitri and Thessalia, are always ready to help, and Thessalia bakes killer cakes and spinach pies. Doubles start at \$125.

### Where to eat

*Dipnosofistis* ([www.dipnosofistis.com](http://www.dipnosofistis.com)), *Tsagarada*. An elegant restaurant that also operates as a wine bar in the summer, it has a forested wooden deck that is a lovely spot to taste Greek vintages to the accompaniment of jazz music.

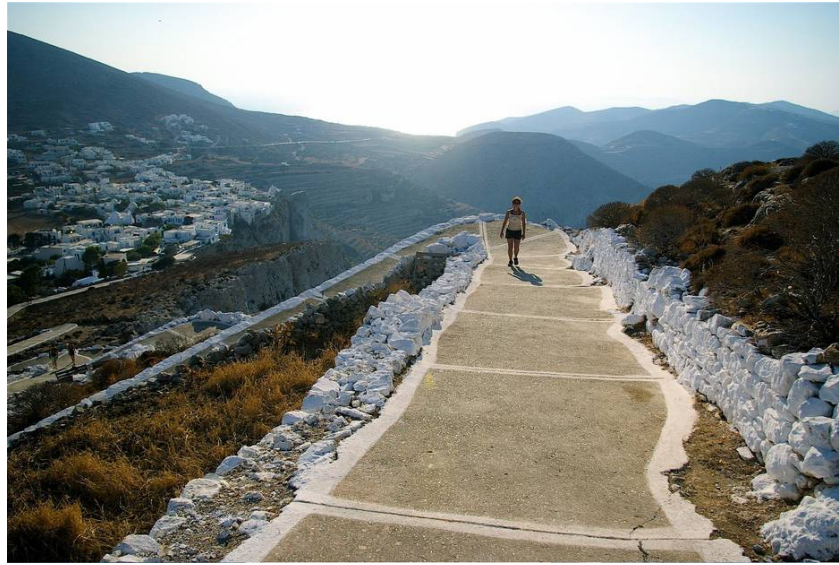
*Plymari at Analipsi beach*. The trip to this beachside taverna, where everything, from the garden-grown salad to the homemade spinach pie, is fresh, is worth it.



### Folegandros

There's little to do on this off-the-beaten-path little island of Folegandros, and that is the key to its charm. (Elizabeth Warkentin)

the unspoiled Cycladic paradise of the 1970s and 1980s. With its whitewashed capital that clings atop a steep rock cliff overlooking the Aegean and green and white flagstone lanes lined with whitewashed doll-size homes, Folegandros may look like Mykonos and Santorini, but the similarities end there.



A photo from September, 2008, shows the path to Panaghia church above Chora on Folegandros, a Greek island in the Aegean Sea. (Marc Levy / AP)

### **What to do**

Actually, there's little to do on this off-the-beaten-path little island and that is the key to its charm. Your days will probably be filled with treks to the Church of the Virgin up the steep switchback donkey path to watch the sun rise or set; a ride on one of the island's two buses to the village of Ano Meria at the other end of the island; lazy afternoons on secluded beaches, some accessible only by fishing boat; a relaxing boat trip around the island; or languorous lunches in one of the five interconnected squares, especially bewitching at night when the lights strung through the trees set the village aglow.

### **Where to stay**

*Anemomilos Apartments* ([anemomilosapartments.com](http://anemomilosapartments.com)). This is the classic Cycladic hotel: sugar-cube studios, enviable pool, seaside restaurant terrace, friendly owners and chic blue and white rooms with whitewashed balconies, some extending seamlessly out over the rocky abyss and the azure sea. Double studios start at \$220.

*Hotel Antheia* (<http://antheia-folegandros.com>). At the entrance to the village, this pretty little hotel has tasteful, comfortable and spotlessly clean rooms with outstanding service from the lovely Romanian couple who manage the place. Doubles start at \$60.



This September 2008 photo shows Livadaki beach, a splendid pebble and stone beach on Folegandros, a Greek island in the Aegean Sea. (Marc Levy / AP)

### Where to eat

*Mimi's, Ano Meria.* Owned by a charming family, Mimi's is famous for its *matsata* (a local homemade pasta) and cheese pies.

*Pounda, Chora.* From their walled garden, Takis and Elizabeth prepare simple and delicious dishes such as zucchini croquettes with *tzaziki*, artichoke stew and large, fresh salads served on Elizabeth's handmade pottery.



It's hard not to feel excited upon docking among the brightly coloured neoclassical buildings lining the horseshoe-shaped harbour of Kastellorizo. (Elizabeth Warkentin)

### Kastellorizo

One can't help but feel the excitement of a child on Christmas morning upon docking among the Skittles-coloured neoclassical buildings lining the horseshoe-shaped harbour of Kastellorizo. This tiny Dodecanese gem was once home to wealthy merchant sailors and their families, its harbour then considered the best between Beirut and Piraeus. After the First World War, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and an economic demise worsened by a tragic earthquake, the island's 10,000 or so inhabitants were forced to emigrate, mostly to Australia. Today, many of the Australian descendants of these emigrants – “Kazzies,” as they're affectionately known – are returning to reclaim their property and heritage and invest in the land of their ancestors. Only two kilometres from the town of Kas, on the Turkish mainland, the island is an intoxicating mix of Greek and Turkish influences.

### What to do

Lovers of grottoes will be awestruck by the Blue Cave, a surreal “underwater cathedral” that rivals Capri’s in height and width and wonder. Kastellorizo’s museum, housed in the old mosque in the harbour, is small but contains interesting displays and shows a moving documentary of the island’s tragic history. If you’re feeling more energetic, a walk up the 400 steps to the summit is tough on the knees, but the amphitheatrical view toward Kas in Turkey is definitely worth the effort, as are the encounters with goats in the fields and on the rocky plain on the way to the old monastery, which is being restored. Many locals and tourists take the boat to Kas on Fridays for the weekly market.

**Where to stay**

*Mediterraneo* ([www.mediterraneo-megisti.com](http://www.mediterraneo-megisti.com)). The boho-chic boutique hotel has Turkish accents and a marvellous waterfront location right at the entrance to the harbour. Gorgeous print bathrobes, which French owner Marie Rivalant also sells in her boutique, are provided for swimming, straight off the terrace. Doubles start at \$115.

**Where to eat**

*Olive Garden*. Australian Damien and his German wife Monika are affable owners serving a range of traditional Greek and international food in a cool and quiet setting away from the bustle of the harbour. They also run a guest house called Caretta and rent out apartments.

*Lazarakis*. This is a long-time favourite with locals and yacht owners who step straight off their boats into a taverna chair. Yorgos, the owner, who is the husband of Marie Rivalant, owner of Mediterraneo, offers home-cooked Greek dishes with a good wine selection.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW ADVERTISEMENT

FOLLOW US ON TWITTER @GLOBEANDMAIL

REPORT AN ERROR EDITORIAL CODE OF CONDUCT

As of December 20, 2017, we have temporarily removed commenting from our articles. We are behind schedule, but we are still working hard to bring you a new commenting system as soon as possible. If you are looking to give feedback on our new site, please send it along to [feedback@globeandmail.com](mailto:feedback@globeandmail.com). If you want to write a letter to the editor, please forward to [letters@globeandmail.com](mailto:letters@globeandmail.com).

RELATED TO THIS STORY

Some islands you need to explore slowly: Crete is one of them

Athens isn't pretty, but it's exciting: discover the city's cultural rebirth

Ancient Greece: See it in person, or get a taste in Montreal at a new exhibit

Daton Rouge officer fired, another suspended over shooting death of Aaron Sterling 0:54

Kyle Lowry calls Steve Nash 'one of the best playmakers' ever 1:29

Chinese space station will crash, but it probably won't hit you 1:33

Russian rocket takes military satellite into orbit 0:49

Russia shuts U.S. consulate as tension with West escalates 0:45

PRIVACY POLICY TERMS & CONDITIONS DISCLAIMER COMMUNITY GUIDELINES

SUBSCRIBE	BUSINESS SERVICES	CONTACT US	READER SERVICES	ABOUT US
<a href="#">Globeandmail.com</a>	<a href="#">Advertise with Us</a>	<a href="#">Address and Phone Number</a>	<a href="#">My Globeandmail.com Account</a>	<a href="#">Company Information</a>
<a href="#">The Globe and Mail Newspaper</a>	<a href="#">Corporate &amp; Group Subscriptions</a>	<a href="#">Public Editor</a>	<a href="#">Technical Support &amp; FAQs</a>	<a href="#">Work at The Globe</a>
<a href="#">Globe2Go</a>	<a href="#">Content Licensing</a>	<a href="#">Staff</a>	<a href="#">Manage my home delivery</a>	<a href="#">Accessibility Policy</a>
<a href="#">The New York Times</a>	<a href="#">DataStore</a>	<a href="#">Staff PGP Directory</a>	<a href="#">Manage my privacy preferences</a>	<a href="#">Editorial Code of Conduct</a>
<a href="#">Globe Email Newsletters</a>	<a href="#">Report On Business Top 1000</a>	<a href="#">SecureDrop</a>	<a href="#">Manage my advertising preferences</a>	<a href="#">Sustainability</a>
	<a href="#">Globe Event Centre</a>	<a href="#">Submit an article</a>		<a href="#">Licensing &amp; Permissions</a>

© Copyright 2018 The Globe and Mail Inc. All rights reserved.  
 351 King Street East, Suite 1600, Toronto, ON Canada, M5A 0N1  
 Phillip Crawley, Publisher

