

INTRODUCING GREECE'S BEST SEASIDE TOWNS

A hedonistic paradise, Greece is famed the world over for its sweeping stretches of golden sand lapped by the azure waters of the Aegean. With over 13,000 km of coastline (the largest in the Mediterranean Basin) and more than 200 islands, this sun-drenched nation is the perfect beach holiday destination. Its charming coastal towns are sure to seduce you with their traditional character, ancient ruins, dramatic scenery, and rich culture and cuisine that differ from region to region. From quaint fishing villages to once-mighty ports and modern, developed tourist hotspots, there is much to uncover and explore across Greece's spectacular coast. Here we have compiled our pick of the best seaside towns, sure to cater to all, from nature enthusiasts, water sports fanatics, history buffs and laidback sunbathers.



Naoussa

Despite undergoing some serious tourism development in recent years, the picturesque fishing village of Naoussa has retained its traditional character and charm, with its beautiful whitewashed houses, churches and taverns standing firm amidst its labyrinth-like narrow, stone-paved streets. Located within an expansive bay in the northern part of Paros, Naoussa sits 10 kilometres east from the region's capital, Parikia, offering a tamer alternative to Parikia's highly populated streets. The gorgeous beach town further strikes the perfect balance of nightlife and beach bliss, with several animated bars and nightclubs open until dawn and numerous golden-sand beaches conveniently reached by footpaths or via a *caïque* (traditional fishing boat) from the port.

From tourist hotspots equipped with all necessary facilities to more secluded, tree-lined shores offering a wilder side (in the natural sense) to Naoussa, there is sure to be an ideal beach for everyone, covering all tastes and needs. Particular highlights include Kolymbithres, Paros' most visited beach marked by unique granite rock formations, and Santa Maria, offering plenty of water sports, beach bars and restaurants. If visiting at the end of August, travellers further have the chance to join in with local feasting and celebrations that re-enact the pirate raids which were once a common occurrence in the area. Firework displays light up the night sky and drinking, eating and dancing continue into the early hours of the morning.



Galaxidi

Once one of Greece's busiest and wealthiest ports and shipyards, Galaxidi entered a period of decline in the early 20th century after failing to take the technological leap from sails to steam. Yet, despite experiencing hard times, the quaint village, situated on the gorgeous northern shores of the Corinthian Gulf, has succeeded in preserving much of its previous glory, which visitors can discover in the

excellent Nautical Museum. Steeped in history and traditions, Galaxidi is now a protected heritage site and has more recently transformed into a prime yachting destination. The region features a vast waterfront, equipped with several small golfs offering pristine waters for swimming, as well as both fine pebble and sand beaches.

Beloved Kalafatis is perhaps the region's most visited beach. The Blue Flag awarded destination offers an incredible range of water activities, including paddle-boarding, snorkelling, canoeing and sailing, as well as an extensive pier, perfect for leisurely walks, and a sublime shoreline on which visitors can get horizontal and soak up the sun from rented lounge chairs. Other local favourites include Vistrithra Beach, Agioi Pantes and Voidaka. Galaxidi further attracts thousands of travellers every year for its highly-anticipated coloured flour fight, held at the end of carnival season (early March) on the town's harbour.



Symi

While this far-flung island town in the Dodecanese may not be an obvious first choice for travellers, its laidback atmosphere, luminous sea and almost tropical microclimate make it most definitely worth the visit. Renowned as the prettiest port in Greece, Symi is characterised by the 19th-century neoclassical pastel-coloured mansions that rise like a mirage from its surrounding turquoise waters, awarding the town its status as a national monument. A Venetian castle built by the Knights of the Agios Ioannis in 1407 and the stone church of Kyra Panagia are further important cultural landmarks. Symi itself is made up of two idyllic settlements, Gialos and Chorio, each with its own unique charm and attractions. The two

are connected via a 500-step marble staircase and are also enveloped by rugged hinterland, with more than 100 monasteries hidden among the surrounding pine and cypress forests.

Offering crystalline waters perfect for swimming and diving in, Emporios Beach is ideal for travellers looking for an almost entirely private shoreline. Emporios is also closely situated to the bays of Faneromeni, Marathounta and Agios Nikolaos, each easily reached by foot, car or even donkey. For a truly one-of-a-kind adventure, visitors can also join daily boat trips departing from Symi's largest port in Gialos in search of unspoilt coves and captivating marine life.



Naxos

Less touristy than its famous neighbours Mykonos and Santorini, the largest of the Cyclades, Naxos, has maintained an authentic feel. In the main town, Hora, the remnants of the fortified Venetian *kastro* (castle) loom over the charming seafood taverns, cafes and enticing bars that line the serene waterfront. This was once the seat of power for Marco Sanudo, the 13th-century Venetian who founded the town and made Naxos the heart of the Dutchy of Aegean. Its intriguing history can be explored throughout the two historic neighbourhoods that divide Hora: Burgos, where the Greeks lived, and the hilltop Kastro, where the Roman Catholics lived.

The west coast of Naxos comprises mile upon mile of powdery sands. Agios Prokopios and Agia Anna are perfect choices for families, offering crystal-clear shallow waters and plenty of thrilling water activities, while Plaka provides undisturbed endless sands, ideal for basking in the sun's rays and building epic sandcastles. The ultimate antidote to Naxos's somewhat crowded resorts, Alyko is just a short drive from the island's capital. Owing its name to the salt pans that surround it, Alyko is a truly mesmerising sight and contains several white sand beaches and coves such as Kedros, Mikro Alyko and Hawaii – famed for its towering dunes and surrounding cedar forest.



Parga

An undeniable beauty, Parga is a picture-perfect coastal town renowned for its Venetian castle and brightly coloured houses set amphitheatrically around its lively harbour. Although situated on the mainland in the northern region of Epirus, the small town retains an island ambience, drawing crowds of sun-seeking tourists and nationals alike during the

busy summer season (between May and September). Its serene stretch of coastline is dominated by a clear turquoise bay, pierced with islets, and its surrounding cobalt waters provide easy access to the stunning Ionian Islands via daily boat excursions. After the sun sets, the already buzzing beach town sees its many seafront tavernas and trendy bars welcome visitors for some all-night fun.

The majority of Parga's pristine beaches can either be accessed by foot from the main town or via a short car or boat ride from the town port. Without a doubt, the two most popular options are Valtos and Lichnos, both of which offer an incredible array of water sports (including jet skiing, canoeing, scuba diving, surfing and snorkelling) as well as ample space for sunbathing and plenty of dining options that offer authentic Greek cuisine. For those looking for a little more peace and quiet, Sarakiniko, located near the village of Agia, is the ideal option and is one of the only partially sandy beaches in the area.