Greece, officially known as the Hellenic Republic, lies at the south-eastern edge of Europe. It is a land of mountains and of sea, where it is difficult to be far out of range of either - a factor of major influence on the country’s economic and historical development. It has an area of 131,957 square kilometres, of which approximately one-fifth consists of islands (9,835 islands, islets and rock-islands, of which around 220 are inhabited), explaining in turn the country’s strong nautical tradition throughout its history. The meeting of land and sea creates an intricate complex pattern of islands, inlets, gulls, and bays, while the recurring contrasts between the deep blue of sea and sky, the white of limestone crags and whitewashed buildings, and the burnt-orange of tiled roofs, contribute dramatically to a quality of light that is unique.
The Greek mainland is bordered by the **Ionian Sea** to the west, by the **Aegean Sea** to the east and by the **Mediterranean Sea** to the south. To the north and northeast of the country lay its land borders, which run from west to east with Albania (247 kilometres), the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM - 256 kilometres), Bulgaria (475 kilometres), and Turkey (203 kilometres), totalling altogether (1,181 kilometres).

Greece is divided into several regions, very much along the same lines since antiquity. The provinces **of Macedonia and Thrace** lie along the northern coast of the Aegean Sea; to the west lies **Epirus**, which forms the northern boundary with Albania; east of Epirus and south of Macedonia is **Thessaly**; the southern half of Greece consists of the provinces of **Central Greece** and **Euboea** and the **Peloponnese**. The islands of Greece are divided into the **Aegean Islands**, including the **Sporades**, the **Cyclades**, and the **Dodecanese**; the island of **Crete**; and the **Ionian Islands** off the west coast.

The Greek landscape is conspicuous not only for its beauty but also for its complexity and variety, where three elements dominate. The first is the sea: arms and inlets of the sea penetrate deeply, and the rocky headlands and peninsulas extend out to sea as island arcs and archipelagos. The southernmost part of mainland Greece, the Peloponnesian Peninsula, is joined to the mainland only by the narrow Isthmuses at the head of the **Gulf of Corinth**. The country’s second landscape element is its mountainousness: roughly three quarters of Greece is mountain terrain, much of it deeply dissected. A series of mountain chains on the Greek mainland, aligned northwest-southeast, enclose narrow parallel valleys and numerous small basins that once held lakes. River and coastal plains, interior valleys and basins, account for the third dominant feature of the Greek landscape, the lowland.

The country’s highest mountain, at 2,917 metres, is **Mount Olympus** in Thessaly. There are several ranges, with the most important being the **Pindus Mountains**, which form the backbone of the Greek mainland, dividing Epirus from Thessaly. These mountains reappear in the south on the large peninsula of the Peloponnese, where they divide into several smaller ranges. One of these ranges vanishes under the sea but appears again in the east as the mountains of the islands of **Crete**, **Karpathos**, and **Rhodes**.

Between the main ranges there are valleys and depressions, some quite large. The largest plains are found in Macedonia and Thrace, while the Plains of Thessaly form the second largest lowland area.

The islands form complex patterns that generally follow the trends of the mainland mountain ranges. The Ionian Islands lie along the west coast. To the east in the Aegean Sea, the largest island is Euboea, with the Sporades, a group of smaller islands, located to its north. To the east are the islands of **Lemnos**, **Lesbos**, and **Chios**, which lie close to the coast of Turkey. The large group of islands to the southeast, known as the Cyclades, is of volcanic origin,
and farther east lie the islands of the Dodecanese group. The country’s largest island, Crete, is its southernmost area.

The rivers of Greece have a complex pattern. The northern rivers - the *Axios*, *Strymon*, *Nestos*, and *Evros* - rise in the mountains of Bulgaria and FYROM and flow onto Greek territory until they reach the Aegean Sea. The longest river in Greece is the *Alakmon*, which begins in the Pindus Mountains and flows eastward for 298 kilometres into the Aegean Sea, as do the two major rivers of Central Greece and Thessaly - the *Peneos* and the *Sperchios*. Several smaller rivers flow westward from the Pindus Mountains to the Ionian Sea. The rivers of the Peloponnese flow outward to the coast from the central mountains.

**Climate**

The climate of Greece is typically Mediterranean, i.e. mostly dry and temperate, with hot, dry summers and mild, rainy winters, although there is snowfall in the north and north-western mountainous areas. Northern Greece has a more continental climate than the south, with lower winter temperatures and some rain in summer. In the coastal regions, including Attica, and on the islands, summer temperatures average around 27°C, and winter temperatures rarely drop below 10°C.

In the mainland interior, including central Peloponnese, winters are colder and snow can lie on the mountains for several months. In the northern area of *Nevrokopi*, near the city of *Drama*, temperatures could drop as low as -20°C in February, while on the southern island of *Gavdos*, southwest of Crete, temperatures rarely fall below +10°C.

**Flora and Fauna**

Greece, with some 5,500 species of identified flora, is endowed with a variety univalved in Europe. Wild flowers, including *poppies, anemones, gladioli, cyclamens, irises, tulips, lilies, camomiles* and many others, create spectacular colour palettes, especially in springtime, when flowers carpet hillsides and fields, spring underneath rocks and perfume the air with breathtaking aromas.

The largest forests are found in Northern Greece, in the mountains of Thrace, Macedonia and Epirus. Furthermore, the islands in the Northern and Eastern Aegean Sea, as those of the Ionian Sea, are, to a large extent, covered with *pines, aspen*, as well as other forest trees. In total, the county has over 200 species of tree and large shrub and its forests consist, primarily, of *conifers*, with deciduous trees, such as *beeches* and *chestnuts*, coming second.

Numerous protected areas exist in Greece, via commitments at international conventions. *National Parks* include *Olympus* (on the borders of Thessaly and Macedonia), *Pamassus* and *Idi* (central Greece), *Prespes* and *Vikos-Aoos* (Epirus), *Parnitha* (Attica) and *Samarria* (Crete). There are also 11 wetlands, 51 preserved natural monuments, 113 important bird sanctuaries and 300 biotopes.

Moreover, 900 species of fauna live in Greece. The country is a refuge for
many endangered species that are protected through specific action programmes, aiming at the management and protection of biodiversity. Rare marine species such as the Mediterranean Sea Turtle (Caretta caretta) and the Monk Seal (Monachus monachus) living mainly in the seas surrounding the islands of Zakynthos, Kefalonia, Crete and the Peloponnese, are protected. The dense forests and rocky outcrops of the Dadia Forest River (upstream on the Evros River) in Thrace, as well as the wetlands at the Evros delta, are shelter to the largest range of birds of prey in Europe. Lake Mikri Prespa, in Macedonia, has the richest colony of fish-eating birds in Europe, including cormorants, ibises, egrets and herons. Moreover, the brown bear - Europe’s largest land mammal - survives in the Pindus massif and on the mountains along the borders with Albania, FYROM and Bulgaria. Finally, the northern forests are home to wildcat, marten, roe deer, occasionally wolf and lynx, whereas jackals, wild goats and hedgehogs live in the south.

Coastline
Although a relatively small country, Greece boasts an astonishing variety of alternating landscapes, ranging from legendary mountains such as Olympus, Pindus and Parnassus, to rugged hills and fertile valleys, stretching onto miles of pristine coastline, engulfing numerous clusters of sun-soaked islands. It is due to its large number of islands that Greece boasts the most extensive (18,400 km) coastline of all Mediterranean countries and its coastal waters penetrate far inland. Greece also has good natural harbours and the Saronic Gulf boasts great anchorages, notably in the natural harbour of Piraeus, which is the port of the Greek capital, Athens. In total, there are 1,354 gulfs, bays, coves and inlets, 161 straits and channels, and 520 harbours.

NORTHERN GREECE
Thrace
This region, known as Western Thrace, with an area of 8,200 km² and a population of approximately
GREECE

The country

370,000, constitutes the northeastern part of continental Greece, located between the Rivers Nestos and Evros. East of the Evros lies the Eastern part of Thrace, which is the European part of Turkey, while the area to the north in Bulgaria is referred to as Northern Thrace.

The Nestos River flows into the Aegean Sea, near the island of Thasos, spreading over the coastal plain of Chrysoupolis and expanding as a system of freshwater lakes and ponds forming the Nestos Delta, where swamplands, wetlands and a lagoon once existed and many rare species find refuge. The total length of the river is 230 km, of which 126 km is within Bulgaria.

The Evros, with a length of 480 km, is the longest river running solely within the Balkans. It has its origin in Western Bulgaria, flowing south-east towards the sea. The lower course of the river forms part of the Greek-Bulgarian border and its marshy valley most of the Greek-Turkish border.

Western Thrace - and in particular the Rodopi Mountains, which form the natural border with Bulgaria and are covered by dense forest - is home to one of the two surviving brown bear (Ursus arctos) populations in Greece (the other is in the Pindus mountains, in central Greece).

Macedonia

Macedonia, with an area of some 34,231 km² and a population of approximately three million, is the largest and second most populous region of Greece, and together with Thrace and Epirus, it is often, unofficially, referred to as Northern Greece. Its territory covers most of the region of ancient Macedonia; its name was later imparted to a wider Balkan region that became known in modern times as Macedonia, of which it forms 52.4% of the land and 52.9% of the population.

Its capital, Thessaloniki, with a population of around one million, is Greece’s second largest city and a major economic, industrial, commercial and cultural centre. A thriving, vibrant city, with a strategically located commercial port, Thessaloniki is a gateway and a transportation hub in southeastern Europe. The city also hosts a large student population and it is widely renowned for its large number of Byzantine monuments.

The region is bordered to the south by the Aegean Sea and Thessaly, to the east by Western Trace, west by Epirus and north by FYROM. It is traversed by the valleys of the Aliakmon, Axios, Nestos, and Strymon rivers, all of which drain into the Aegean and also account for the odd three-pronged shape of the Chalcidice Peninsula, on whose easternmost prong, Mount Athos, the famous site of Greek Orthodox monastic communities, is located. The lakes of Koronia and Volvi separate Chalcidice from the rest of the coastal region. Farther west, the large plain drains by the Axios and lower Aliakmon rivers is being continually extended, as the river deltas push out into the Gulf of Thermaikos, while from the lower Strimoni River extends a succession of plains. The forested Vermion Mountains and the barren inland basins around Lakes Vegeritis and...
**Kastoria** mark the boundary with the Pindus Mountains.

**Thessaly**
Situated in the middle-upper part of the mainland, Thessaly borders Macedonia on the north, Epirus on the west, Central Greece on the south and the Aegean Sea on the east. Its geography consists of a ring of mountains surrounding a central fertile plain, colloquially known as the *breadbasket of Greece*. The *Chasia* and *Cambunian Mountains* lie to the north, Mount Olympus to the northeast, the Pindus Range to the west, and the coastal mountain ranges of *Ossa* and *Pelion* to the southeast.

Lying on the border between Macedonia and Thessaly, and approximately 80 km from Thessaloniki, is *Mount Olympus*, whose cloud-topped and snow-capped summit rises to 2,917 metres, making it the highest point in Greece and one of the highest in Europe. In ancient Greece, it was regarded as the abode of the gods and the site of the throne of Zeus. Mount Olympus is also noted for its sumptuous flora with several endemic species.

The **Vale of Tempe** is a narrow, 10-km long valley running between Mount Olympus and *Mount Ossa*, in northeastern Thessaly, with the *Peneos River* flowing through it, before emptying into the Aegean Sea. The glen, believed to have been formed 1.6 million years ago, is lined by cliffs that rise to 500 m on the south, and in places it is only 25 to 50 m wide. It was dedicated by the ancient Greeks to the cult of Apollo. Known to the Byzantines as *Lykostomo* (“Wolf’s Mouth”) because it provides access from the mainland coast to the *Thessalian Plain*, it has been a traditional invasion route, and ruins of castles and fortifications, from the Roman period to the Middle Ages, mark its strong points.

Several tributaries of the Peneos River flow through the region, creating a large delta, well-known for its many animal species, pro-
Protected by international environmental treaties. Its total length is 216 km and it begins in the north at the Pindus ranges, east of Metsovo; the Meteora region and the cities of Trikala and Larissa lie along the Pineios.

Known for its dramatic landscape, lush vegetation, striking beaches with crystal clear waters, the Mount Pelion peninsula also boasts some of the best hiking trails and skiing in the country, as well as some of the most picturesque, beautifully preserved traditional villages in all of Greece, with many clinging onto wooded slopes, perching on steep bluffs, or hiding away in verdant ravines.

**WESTERN & CENTRAL GREECE**

**Epirus**

Situated in northwestern Greece, it has an area of about 9,200 km² and a population of about 350,000. It borders West Macedonia and Thessaly to the east, Central Greece to the south, the Ionian Sea and Islands to the west, and Albania to the north. The landscape is rugged and mountainous, and most of Epirus lies on the windward side of the Pindus range, with the winds from the Ionian Sea offering the region more rainfall than any other part of Greece. The climate of Epirus is mainly alpine, and the area is rich with forests and animal life.

The Vikos-Aoos National Park in northeastern Epirus, covering an area of 126 km², is an area of dazzling beauty, as well as home to a wide range of flora and fauna. Numerous species of mammals, including bears, wolves, foxes, lynxes and deer, fish and birds could be found in this park, which encompasses the Vikos and the Aoos Gorge, Mount Timfi (with Gamila as its highest peak, at 2,497 m) and several of the renowned Zagoria villages. The 12 km Vikos Gorge, with walls of up to 1,040 metres deep, is listed by the Guinness Book of Records as the deepest (in proportion to its width) canyon in the world. Its ecosystem is varied.
and it is a refuge for many endangered animal species, while great varieties of wildflowers, including huge expanses of purple crocus flowerbeds on the Timfi, cover this spectacular landscape.

The **Aoos River** has a total length of about 272 km, of which 80 km are in Greece. Its source is in the Pindus Mountains and it forms impressive canyons as it flows through the National park.

**Central Greece** is one of the most mountainous areas in the country, with a temperate climate along its coastlines and dry one in its interior. It is the central region of Greece, lying to the north of Attica and Peloponnese, to the east of Western Greece and to the south of Thessaly and Epirus. The area includes **Euboea**, the second largest island of Greece in area and population (after Crete).

The continental heartland of the country contains a number of lakes and wetlands and it is dominated by the **Pindus Mountains Range**; roughly 160 km long, with **Mount Smolikas** as its maximum elevation at 2,637 metres, it is the second highest mountain in Greece, after Mount Olympus. This rugged range forms the core of mainland Greece, and following the general northwest-southeast trend of the Balkan Peninsula Mountains, it sweeps down from the country’s north-western frontiers.

Because it runs along the border of Thessaly and Epirus, Pindus is often called the “spine of Greece”: stretching from near the Albanian border in northern Greece to the north of the Peloponnese, it continues through the western Peloponnese, crosses the islands of **Kythera** and **Antikythera** and find its way into the southwestern Aegean Sea, in the island of Crete, where it eventually ends; the islands of the Aegean are in effect peaks of underwater mountains that once constituted an extension of the mainland. Pindus is characterized by its high, steep peaks, of-
The country

Ten dissected by numerous canyons and a variety of other karstic landscapes.

On the east coast of central Greece (136 km northwest of Athens, near the Gulf of Malakos), lies the narrow pass of Thermopylae, scene of the famous battle of antiquity. The pass, whose name means “hot gates” (derived from its hot sulphur springs) is some 6 km long; its cliffs in antiquity were by the sea, but silting has widened the distance to more than a mile.

To the southeast, Mount Parnassus, a limestone spur of the Pindus Mountains, rises to 2,457 metres. Extending to Cape Opus on the Gulf of Corinth, and towering above the legendary archaeological site Delphi, it is the mythical home of the Muses.

The range continues as the backbone of the peninsula lying between the Gulf of Euboea and the Gulf of Corinth, and it reaches as far as Mount Parnitha, just to the north of Athens.

The island of Euboea is separated from the mainland by the Euripus Strait, a narrow channel of water subject to strong tidal currents changing direction several times a day, and, on the other, connected to the mainland by two road bridges across the strait: a cable-stay suspension bridge (opened in 1993) with a span of 215m, running over a 160m wide opening; and a “sliding bridge”, which can be opened to allow boat traffic through the strait, running over its narrowest point (38m wide). The Strait had been bridged as early as 411 BC with a wooden bridge.

Attica Region

This region includes the metropolitan area of Athens – capital city of Greece since 1834, the country’s largest city and its main administrative centre; the seat of government, higher courts, head offices of financial institutions, shipping and industry headquarters, major cultural and educational institutions, etc are concentrated in the capital area. With a population of around 4 million, Attica is the most populous region of Greece; moreover, Athens attracts daily a significant population of commuters who work in the capital, as well as an abundance of tourists who visit the Acropolis, the country’s foremost cultural symbol. The region enjoys a mild climate, with sunshine averaging 260 days a year.

With important historical and archaeological sites, unique Byzantine monuments, mountains, fertile plains and clean beaches, Attica has been, since antiquity, the most important cultural centre of Greece. Mount Parnitha (1,400m), a National Park, is located 30km northwest of Athens; it has an area of over 300 square km, with a variety of more than 800 herbs and plants. Mount Penteli is a densely vegetated mountain with springs, while Mount Hymettos is linked to the city’s history, as marble from its mines was used for the construction of monuments in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Cape Sounion is the most important sanctuary in Attica, where the Temple of Poseidon is located. Lavrion, located approximately 9km northeast of Sounio, is a small picturesque town, famous in antiquity for its mines.
The Peloponnese
The Peloponnese is a large peninsula in southern Greece, covering an area of some 21,549 km²; it constitutes the southernmost part of mainland Greece. The peninsula has mountainous interior and deeply indented coasts, with Mount Taygetus as its highest point. Two groups of islands lie off the Peloponnesian coast: the Argo – Saronic Islands to the east, and the Ionian Islands to the west. Although technically an island, since the construction of the Corinth Canal in 1893, the peninsula is linked to the mainland via a narrow stretch of land, the Isthmus of Corinth, as well the Rio-Antirio Bridge, which was completed in 2004.

The Corinth Canal, a waterway underlying the Isthmus, joins the Gulf of Corinth in the northwest with the Saronic Gulf in the southeast. Constructed in order to shorten the Italy to Athens sea route, the Canal is 6.3 km long, 8m deep and 25m wide.

The Rio-Antirio Bridge is a cable-stayed bridge crossing the Gulf of Corinth near Patras, linking the town of Rio on the peninsula to Antirio on mainland Greece. Widely considered to be an engineering masterpiece and with a total length of 2,880m and four towers, this is the bridge with the longest cable-stayed suspended deck in the world. Its width is 28m and includes two lanes each direction, an emergency lane and a pedestrian walkway. Its construction was completed in 2004.

The Aegean Islands

The Aegean Islands are situated in distinct clusters in the Aegean Sea, with mainland Greece to the west and north and Turkey to the east, while the island of Crete delimits the sea to the south. The islands are divided into numerous groups (from north to south), i.e. the Northeastern Aegean Islands, Sporades, Euboea, Saronic Gulf Islands, Cyclades, Dodecanese and Crete.
In the north-Aegean, off Thrace, lie Thasos and Samothrace, while Lemnos is situated midway between Asia Minor and the Mount Athos peninsula.

To the southeast, the rocky but sheltered islands of Lesbos, Chios, and Samos also lie close to the Turkish coast. Across the central Aegean, near northern Euboea, lie the Sporades ("Scattered Islands"), whose crystalline rocks are similar to those of the Greek mainland. Further south, in the heart of the Aegean, are the Cyclades ("Islands in a Circle"), these roughly centre on Delos and represent the tips of drowned mountain ridges, continuing the structural trends of Euboea and the region around Athens.

Between the Cyclades and the Turkish coast, the Dodecanese group ("twelve islands", with Rhodes as the largest of the dozen), has a varied geologic structure ranging from the grey limestones of Kalimnos, Simi and Chalki to the complete ancient volcanic cone that forms Nisos.

Crete
Finally, the long narrow shape of Crete stands at the southernmost entrance of the Aegean. It is the fifth largest island in the Mediterranean and the largest of all Greek islands, home to 650,000 people and several million olive trees. Crete claims to have the oldest living olive tree, though two trees - both over 2,000 years old - on either side of the island vie for the title. Branches from both trees were collected to make the wreaths awarded to winning athletes in the Athens 2004 Olympics. Its major cities are Chania, Rethymno, Heraklio and Aghios Nikolaos.

Its climate is primarily temperate, with fairly mild winters and hot summers, although its southern shore is the warmest area in Greece. With its fertile coastal plains and rugged barren mountains, Crete is geologically linked to the south and west of mainland Greece. Its steep and asymmetrical limestone massif, falling steeply to the south, is divided by the Lefka Ori ("White Mountains"), Psiloritis
**Mountains, Dikti Mountains, Thrifti Mountains and the Asterousia Range.**

The most prominent gorge in the White Mountains is the Samaria Gorge, located 43 km from Chania, in the South West of Crete. It was created by a small river running between the Lefka Ori and Mount Volakias; at 18 km long, it is the second longest in Europe. The most famous part of the gorge is the narrow entrance known as the “Iron Gates”, where the sides close to about 4 metres in and reach up to 500 metres high. The northern entrance to the gorge is 1,250 m above sea level. The gorge became a national park in 1962, particularly as a refuge for the rare Kri-krí (Cretan goat), which is largely restricted to the park and a small island just off the shore of Aghia Marina.

**The Ionian Islands**

The group of islands off the western coast of Greece in the Ionian Sea, collectively referred to as the Ionian Islands, are traditionally known as the Seven Islands (Eptanisa); the group, however, includes many smaller islands, as well as the principal seven, with the best known ones being Kerkyra (also known as Corfu), Lefkada, Ithaca, Zakynthos (sometimes known as Zante), and Kythera. The Ionian Sea is an arm of the Mediterranean Sea, lying south of the Adriatic, and it is bound by southern Italy to the west and by southwestern Albania.

The Ionian Islands structurally resemble the folded mountains of Epirus, in the same way that the Aegean Islands exhibit the characteristic landforms of the mainland. The islands’ climate is mild and relatively humid, with considerably high rainfall and abundant vegetation, with tropical flora and dense forests as a result. This region forms the smallest geographical area of Greece.

**World Heritage Sites**

Archaeological, Byzantine, Old Christian and numerous other his-
Historic and prehistoric sites litter the Greek landscape from North to South and East to West, many of which are renowned UNESCO World Heritage Sites:

**Mount Athos**, (the Autonomous Monastic State of the Holy Mountain, or Aghion Oros, as it is known in Greece), is home to 20 Eastern Orthodox monasteries and forms a semi-autonomous monastic state. Spiritually, Athos comes under the direct jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. Both mountain and peninsula, it covers an area of about 390 km, with the actual Mount Athos and its steep, densely forested slopes reaching up to 2,033 metres.

**Vergina**, where the burial site of the kings of Macedonia was unearthed in 1977, including the tomb of Philip II, father of Alexander the Great, is situated in Central Macedonia of Northern Greece, about 80km south-west of Thessaloniki.

The impressive **Meteora** (meaning “suspended in the air”) formation is situated at the northwestern edge of the Plain of Thessaly, near the Penos River and the Pindus Mountains, in central Greece. It consists of high, steep boulders, which appear to be hanging in mid-air; built on these spectacular natural sandstone rock pillars is one of the largest and most important monastery complexes in Greece, second only to Mount Athos, which served as ideal refuge for hermit monks over centuries of Ottoman rule.

The **Acropolis** of Athens was formally proclaimed on March 26th, 2007, as the pre-eminent monument on the European Cultural Heritage list of monuments. Its chief temple, the white marble **Parthenon**, is the world’s foremost architectural and sculptural symbol of classical harmony and clarity.

Site of the ancient temple and oracle of Apollo, **Delphi** was the centre of the world in ancient Greek religion. Located on the slopes of Mount Parnassus, the oracle was consulted not only on private matters but also on affairs of state, such as the founding of new colonies, military campaigns, policies etc.

Situated in the Peloponnese are several renowned UNESCO World Heritage Sites, such as the byzantine site of Mystras, ancient Epidaurus, the archaeological sites of Mycenae and Tiryns, as well as the ancient sanctuary of **Olympia**, home of the Olympic Games in classical times.

**Olympia** was centre of Greek religious worship, home to the Games held in honour of Zeus every four years, as well as to the statue of Zeus by Phidias, one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Excavations have uncovered many ruins, including temples and the stadium. Olympia is located near the north-western coast of the Peloponnese peninsula, 10 miles inland from the Ionian Sea, close to where the **Alpheus** and
Cladeus Rivers meet. Epidaurus, in the Northeastern Peloponnese, was an important commercial centre in ancient Greece, famed for its 4th-century-BC temple of Asclepius, the god of healing. Excavations of the sacred precinct revealed that it contained temples to Asclepius and Artemis, a theatre, stadium, gymnasia, baths, a tholos and a hospital. The theatre is still used for performances.

Mycenae, also in the Northeastern Peloponnese, is the site of the ancient city and legendary capital of Agamemnon. A natural rock citadel, it flourished during the Bronze Age, building the distinctive Mycenaean civilization. Ruins unearthed on site include the Lion Gate, acropolis, granary, and several royal tombs.

Tiryns is the site of a prehistoric city in the eastern Peloponnese, noted for its architectural remains of the Homeric period. Excavations show the area to have been inhabited from the Neolithic Age.

Mystras, a fortified town, on Mt. Taygetos, near ancient Sparta, was the last centre of Byzantine scholarship and became in the 13th century the second most important city in the empire after Constantinople.

One of the smallest of the Cyclades islands, Delos was an ancient centre of religious, political, and commercial life in the Aegean, and legendary birthplace of Apollo and Artemis. Its impressive ruins have been extensively excavated.

Of immense historic as well as religious significance is the Historic centre (Chora) of the island of Patmos, with the Monastery of St. John and the Cave of the Apocalypse, wherein St. John is said to have written the Book of Revelation.

The Medieval City of the island of Rhodes (Old Town) sits close to other wonders on the island, including the Acropolis of Lindos and the Acropolis of Rhodes, while its most famous monument was the Colossus of Rhodes, a large bronze statue standing in the harbour - depicted as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World - that was toppled by an earthquake c. 224 B.C.

The Old Christian and Byzantine monuments of Thessaloniki, the Monasteries of Daphni, Hossios Loukas and Nea Moni on Chios, all monuments of Byzantine Art, are also amongst the most noted UNESCO preserved sites in Greece.

Transportation
Greece has extensive road networks crossing the country and covering an area of over 116,470 km, of which many are national motorways connecting the country's main cities as well as small and remote towns and villages.

The main national routes are those of Athens - Thessaloniki (E 75), Athens - Corinth (E 94), Corinth - Patra (E 65), Patra - Olympia (E 55), Thessaloniki - Alexandroupolis (E 90), Igoumenitsa - Alexandroupolis (Egnatia Odos), Chania - Aghios Niko-
In most Greek towns and cities, ring roads provide motorists with efficient traffic-avoiding links between towns and suburbs.

Public transport is extensive, with buses, trains and airplanes connecting the mainland to the islands and the world. The Athens Metro, which opened early 2000, along with the tram and suburban rail, which began service in time for the Athens Olympics, have extended the capital’s public transport system.

The largest international airport in Greece is the Eleftherios Venizelos Airport at Spata, near Athens, which began operating in 2001, followed by the Macedonia Airport at Thessaloniki.

The state-run railroad system, albeit small, connects major cities on the mainland, with lines totaling 2,449 km.

Greece, with 8.5% of the world’s ships and 16.5% of global capacity, has the largest merchant marine in the world and numerous port-cities: leading seaports include Piraeus (near Athens), Thessaloniki, Patra, Lavrion, Volos, Confu, Alexandroupoli, Elefsina, Igoumenitsa, Kavala and Heraklion. A ship canal cuts through the Isthmus of Corinth, which connects the Peloponese to mainland Greece. A network of ferries links Piraeus and other mainland ports with the country’s numerous islands.

Numerous ferry lines, offering combinations of conventional ships and “flying dolphins” (fast sea vessels), connect the mainland to the islands.

**Useful Links**

- Hellenic National Meteorological Service
  www.hnms.gr
- Greek Coasts On-line
  www.thalassa.gr
- Hellenic Centre for Marine Research
  www.hcms.gr
- Biodiversity of Greece
  www.cc.uoa.gr/biology/zoology/biodiv.htm
- Hellenic Ornithological Society
  www.ornithologiki.gr
- Arcturos - A non-profit civil company, focusing on the Brown Bear
  www.arcturos.gr
- Greek Biotope/Wetland Centre
  www.ekby.gr
- UNESCO World Heritage Centre - Greece
  http://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/gr

Average distance between major Greek cities is as follows:

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<th>Distance (km)</th>
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