

A guide about sea kayaking in Greece

Why go kayaking in Greece? Greece has more than 2,000 islands, of which about 170 are inhabited; some of the easternmost Aegean islands lie just a few miles off the Turkish coast. Greece is bordered to the east by the Aegean Sea, to the south by the Mediterranean Sea, and to the west by the Ionian Sea. Only to the north and northeast does it have land borders. The amount of islands itself is a good reason to go sea kayaking in Greece. Let's have a detailed look about the whole islands in Greece to get an idea how they are more or less structured.

The islands of Greece

The Ionian Islands off the western coast of Greece structurally resemble the folded mountains of Ipeiros. Of the six main islands, Corfu (Modern Greek: Kerkyra), opposite the Albanian frontier, is the northernmost; it is fertile and amply endowed with well-watered lowland. The other islands, Paxoí (Paxos), Lefkada (Leucas), Itháki (Ithaca), Kefalonía (Cephalonia), and Zákynthos (Zacynthus), lie farther south; lack of rainfall accentuates their gaunt, broken limestone relief, although Lefkáda and Zákynthos have sheltered eastern plains. A seventh island, Kýthira (Cythera), is grouped with the Ionian Islands for administrative purposes but is geographically discrete.

The Aegean islands, also exhibiting the characteristic land forms of the mainland, are situated in distinct clusters in the Aegean Sea, east of the Greek mainland. Greek islands in the Aegean Sea are particularly the Cyclades, Sporades, and Dodecanese groups. The Cyclades consist of about 30 islands. The Dodecanese, or Southern Sporades, include Kálimnos, Kárpáthos, Cos, Léros, Pátmos, Rhodes, and Sími. The [Sporades](#), or Northern Sporades, include Skyros, Skópelos, and Skíathos.

In the north, off Thráki (Thrace), lie Thásos, an oval block of ancient mineral rocks similar in composition to neighbouring blocks on the mainland, and harbourless Samothráki (Samothrace), an island of volcanic origin. Límnos (Lemnos), situated midway between Asia Minor and the Mount Athós peninsula, is almost cut in two by the northern Pourniás Bay and the deep southern harbour afforded by the Bay of Móudros (Móúdhrou).



To the southeast the rocky but sheltered islands of Lésbos (Lésvos), Chíos (Khíos), and Sámos lie close to the Turkish coast and are extensions of peninsulas on the coast of Asia Minor. Across the central Aegean, near northern Évvoia, lie the Northern Sporades (“Scattered Islands”); their crystalline rocks are similar to those of the Greek mainland. Farther south, in the heart of the Aegean, lie the Kykládes (Cyclades; “Islands in a Circle”). These roughly centre on Dílos (Delos) and represent the tips of drowned mountain ridges continuing the structural trends of Évvoia and the region around Athens.

Between the Kykládes and the Turkish coast, Dodekánisa (the Dodecanese group), of which Ródos (Rhodes) is the largest of a dozen major islands, has a varied geologic structure ranging from the gray limestones of Kálymnos (Kálimnos), Sými (Sími), and Chálki to the complete ancient volcanic cone that forms Nísuros (Nísiros).

Finally, the long narrow shape of Crete stands to the south at the entrance of the Aegean and is the most popular destination for experienced paddlers that want to enjoy sea kayaking expeditions in Greece. With an area of 3,190 square miles (8,262 square km), it is by far the largest of the Aegean islands and the fifth largest island in the Mediterranean. Crete is geologically linked to the south and west of mainland Greece. Its rugged, deeply ravined, asymmetrical limestone massif, falling steeply to the south, from a distance resembles four separate islands: the westernmost Lefká (Levká) Mountains; the central Psíloreítis (Ídi) Mountains, with Crete’s highest point, the summit of Mount Psíloreítis, called Timios Stavrós, 8,058 feet (2,456 metres) high; the east-central Díkti Mountains; and the far eastern Tryptí (Thriptís) Mountains. Another range, the Asteroúsia (Kófinas) Mountains, runs along the south-central coast between the Mesarás Plain and the Libyan Sea. Of Crete’s 650 miles (1,050 km) of rocky coastline, it is the more gradual slope on the northern side of the island that provides several natural harbours and coastal plains. Crete is the best island for sea kayaking in Greece as it is the only one where you can do long expeditions (1024 km of coastline) guided or self guided with wild camping all year long, either in the west, south, north or eastern Crete. Bare in mind that from the whole islands in Greece, Karpathos, Kasos, Kythira, Antikithira and Crete are the

roughest and you need to be at 4* level or higher to enjoy the coast.

What to expect from the weather while sea kayaking in Greece?

The Mediterranean climate of Greece is subject to a number of regional and local variations based on the country's physical diversity. In winter the belt of low-pressure disturbances moving in from the North Atlantic Ocean shifts southward, bringing with it warm, moist, westerly winds.



As the low-pressure areas enter the Aegean region, they may draw in cold air from those eastern regions of the Balkans that, sheltered by the Dinaric mountain system from western influences, are open to climatic extremes emanating from the heart of Eurasia. This icy wind is known as the boreas. Partly as a result, Thessaloníki (Salonika; Thessalonica) has an average January temperature in the low 40s F (about 6 °C), while in Athens it is in the low 50s F (about 10 °C), and in Iráklieo (Candia) on Crete it is in the low to mid-50s F (about 12 °C). Occasionally the warmer sirocco (shilok) winds are drawn in from the south.



The western climatic influences bring plenty of precipitation to the Ionian coast and the mountains behind it; winter rain starts early, and snow lingers into spring. On Corfu, January temperatures average in the low 50s F (10 °C), and the island's average annual precipitation is about 52 inches (1,320 mm), compared with that on Crete of about 25 inches (640 mm) and that at Athens of about 16 inches (400 mm). Few populated areas have lasting snowfalls, but snow is commonly found on the highest peaks.

In summer kayaking in Greece is at its best, when the low-pressure belt swings away again, the climate is hot and dry almost everywhere. The average July sea-level temperature approaches 80 °F (27 °C), although heat waves can push the temperature well above 100 °F (38 °C) for a day or so.

Topography is again a modifying factor: the interior northern mountains continue to experience some precipitation, while along the winding coast the afternoon heat is eased slightly by sea breezes. In other regions, such as Crete, the hot, dry summers are accentuated by the parching [meltemi](#), or etesian winds, which become drier as they are drawn southward.

Last but not least there is a forum for kayaking in Greece at www.sea-kayak.gr where you can post your questions if any. Many paddlers from all over the country are there and you will get most of the times the answer that you might looking for. It is mainly in Greek but there is an English speaking forum as well.