

Karpathos

Solace and serenity never far away on this Greek island

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Anyone who has been to the Greek islands will waste no time in telling you about his or her favorite corner of paradise. Whether it was a week on Santorini, a few days on Ios or weeks of island hopping via ferry and smaller boats through the Aegean Sea, one can't help but come across incredibly beautiful vistas, experience striking brushes with antiquity and encounter memorable people and places.

While Greece has seen ever larger incursions of tourists in the past couple of decades bringing all of the related trappings — larger hotels catering to packaged tours, more and more airports on the islands — it is still not that difficult to find secluded beaches, authentic music and cuisine, and places where one truly feels as if escape from the everyday world is possible.

If you've never been to Greece, you may want to get a sampling of several islands and visit the mother of all Greek cities by beginning your journey in Athens and hopping a ferry at the nearby port of Piraeus. Boats leave regularly for destinations near and far. One need merely visit one of the ferry offices in the harbor, examine the departure times and select an island to visit. Pick up a couple sandwiches and relax over a Greek coffee at one of the harbor cafes before sailing off into the Aegean.

After spending a few days looking for octopi off the sandy beaches of Naxos or exploring the windmills of Mykonos, hop the next ferry leaving for one of the other nearby

islands. Rooms in private homes and camping accommodations are relatively easy to find on most of the islands.

While children too can enjoy spreading out the old trusty sleeping bag and sprawling under the stars on the deck of an island-hopping ferry, people with families may prefer to arrange a flight to one of the islands including hotel accommodations. Larger islands such as Crete or Rhodes offer a wide range of choices for places to stay, historical sights to explore and contrasting landscapes. Even though there are large unsightly stretches of beach lined by hotels near the Cretan capital and fifth largest Greek city of Herakleon, the sheer size of Crete ensures that one can eventually find solace in remote villages overlooked by imposing monasteries and Greek Orthodox chapels.

Many of the German travel outfits such as TUI and Neckermann feature trips to the Greek islands, but none offer quite as wide a selection as Attika Reisen which specializes in Greek travel.

Off the beaten track

While the island of Karpathos, east of Crete about halfway to Rhodes, may not appear on most tour companies' radar screens, it is definitely worth getting to know. Still relatively off the beaten tourist track, Karpathos, situated in the Dodecanese island chain, is a long, thin stretch of rocky terrain that sweeps down to the sea and includes a spine of high peaks separating the north from the south.

The remote northern part of the island features the port village of Diafani and the



The sleepy fishing village of Finiki boasts several excellent tavernas featuring fresh fish and Greek specialties. Secluded beaches and miles of wild coastline are within walking distance of the town.

mountain village of Olympos. Because it was isolated from the rest of the island for so many years, Olympos has retained its own unique flavor including traditional dress, broken down windmills and native crafts. To get to Olympos visitors must either rent a four-wheel drive vehicle or travel by boat from the island's capital of Pigadia. In the north one can also visit the island of Saria, once home to pirates.

Despite its storied history dating back to the Minoan era and ever changing ownership from the Romans to the Turks and constant raids by pirates, Karpathos is not the island to visit for an in-depth exploration of classical civilization. Few striking landmarks remain from previous eras. One can visit a small early Christian temple in Pigadia, a few remainders of cultures past such as the Mycenaean acropolis near Arkassa and view an untold number of picturesque Orthodox chapels. Still the primary allures of Karpathos are its many stunning beaches, mountain villages perched precariously on hillsides and dramatic scenery where one can wander undisturbed among the fig and olive groves under a blazing sky with the sea never far away.

Tiny fishing villages such as Lefkos and Finiki may appeal to travelers who are most



Greek Orthodox churches and chapels are in great abundance all over the island of Karpathos.

interested in whiling away their hours on a sandy beach, snorkeling for conch shells in the coves, hiking on rocky trails and dining in beach-front tavernas offering grilled fish and vegetables washed down with glasses of the local grape.

Motorbikes and cars are available for rent by the day everywhere so one is never far from the other towns and villages on the roughly 300-square-mile island, half of which is practically inaccessible except by boat or jeep. Motor bike rides are particularly thrilling as one crosses from one side of the

island to the other, climbing up hundreds of meters and racing down through breathtaking villages such as Piles or Menetes which appear to defy the laws of nature by jutting out over the mountainside. One road near the town of Spoa leads one around Kalilimni, the highest peak in the Dodecanese island chain.

Well traveled folk

But even though one may feel engulfed in Greek island culture — Orthodox priests sipping a coffee at the local taverna, fishermen bragging about the day's catch in the marina — one will quickly discover that many of the just over 6,000 inhabitants on Karpathos have a connection to the United States. As youngsters get a Greek tongue-lashing for playing in the street outside a village store watched over by their mother, don't be surprised if she turns to you and says in a New Jersey accent, "Kids, what can you do with them?" As you get to know more of the islanders you'll soon discover that many have worked in American cities ranging from Baltimore to Allentown. You can even go in search of the hometown (Aperi) of famed television detective Telly Savalas, alias "Kojak," whose family once called New Jersey home, according to the



Swimmers still enjoy body surfing in the warm waters of the Aegean Sea in the month of October near the town of Arkassa. The island of Kassos looms in the background.

guidebooks. Karpathos isn't the most exciting nor intriguing island in Greece. But that doesn't mean it is anyway less vital than some of the better known islands. One should visit without expecting to find more than simply the perfect getaway — a place in which to dream,

indulge in the simple pleasures such as well prepared food, catch up on one's reading and make like the local lizards basking in the afternoon sun. Booking early in the year is recommended as flights and hotels quickly disappear for the summer and fall school vacation periods.



While handmade Greek treasures may not be in abundance on Karpathos, breathtaking vistas are commonplace.



A lonely donkey keeps watch over a field of wild flowers on one of the many hills of Karpathos. The island's highest peak is the tallest point in the Dodecanese.



Visitors enjoy plates of fresh fish, local vegetables, Greek salads and tzaziki washed down with local wine at one of many tiny tavernas overlooking the sea.



Cats bask in the sun and look for handouts in the town of Arkassa. The remains of an ancient Mycenaean acropolis are located on a hill overlooking the town.