Religion in Greece



Awe, devotion and spirituality

Religious faith is everywhere in Greece, both on the mainland and on the islands, from Mount Athos and the breathtaking Meteora to Patmos, the island of the Revelation and

Crete and from the Aegean to the Ionian Sea, where the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic doctrine exist side by side, in the Peloponnese and central Greece. The Christian faith has found many expressions throughout the centuries, building monasteries, churches and chapels of great architectural, artistic and spiritual value.

For the entire Orthodox Christian world, but also for Christendom over the world in general, the monasteries of Greece are great and important pilgrimage destinations. Since time immemorial, they stand there, unique and pure. Built in uniquely beautiful locations, often in the sites of ancient temples and shrines, they having been providing for the religious needs of Greeks for decades. They rise as symbols of man's effort to go beyond the earthly; some perched on cliffs above gorges, others with a fortress-like architecture that makes them look like castles, protecting their precious treasures from bandits and pirates.

Their major church buildings (Katholikon), their libraries and museums house frescoes, portable icons, manuscripts, books and relics with an incalculable financial, spiritual and artistic value. They include the Monastery of Agios Ioannis Theologos in Patmos, the Monastery of Osios Loukas in Viotia, the thousand-year-old monasteries of Meteora and Mount Athos.

Greece: the paths of faith

“Sta vimata tou Apostolou Pavlou” (Tracing the steps of the Apostle Paul) A journey in the footsteps of the “Apostle to the Nations”, who spread the Christian faith in Greece and, through this, across Europe. The journey of this leading Christian saint started from Samothrace and continued to Kavala, Philippi, Thessaloniki, Veria - where the so-called “Vima of the Apostle Paul” exists - to Athens and Corinth, where a church was built in his honour. In all these places, he preached to and organised communities of believers, while most of his Letters are addressed to his spiritual children that lived in these cities.

Mount Athos. The peninsula of Athos is home to 20 large and ancient monasteries, which function as religious brotherhoods. In cloisters, cells and sanctuaries, there are smaller brotherhoods, ascetics, eremites and intellectuals, many of them highly educated, who abandoned their worldly life when they heard the call of God. There are about 1,600 monks on Mount Athos today, mostly Greeks, but a large number comes from other Christian Orthodox nations, from Western Europe and the Middle East.

The evocative Meteora. In the region of the Meteora, known for its huge geological formations that seem to sprout from the ground, asceticism started in the 11th century AD. Six monasteries remain active or have been renovated today: The Great Meteoron (a.k.a. Monastery of the Transfiguration of Christ), the Varlaam monastery, the Roussanou monastery, the Anapafsa, the Agia Triada and the Agios Stefanos monasteries. Each of these hosts priceless spiritual treasures that have accumulated over the centuries, while the monasteries themselves are wondrously constructed on cliffs, with some using hoists for access!

Famous churches and monasteries in Greece

Magnificent monuments, eternal symbols of Christendom, of the Christian Orthodox faith, and of the human spirit itself. Majestic or humble, but always elaborate and unique, these faith-inspired buildings await the faithful or history lovers to discover them. The large pilgrimages of Greece host miraculous early Christian icons and relics of saints and martyrs of Christianity. Their anniversaries are always special occasions, during which the holy

relics are taken on a procession and are displayed for public veneration. Services and rituals, as well as folk festivals, with home-made wine or raki, traditional music and local dishes have been a continuous tradition over the last millennia. Embark on a memorable experience of devoutness, awe and spirituality. Discover the most important churches and monasteries of Greece.

- **Agios Ioannis Theologos, Patmos:** The island of Patmos, in the Dodecanese, known as the “Jerusalem of the Aegean”, is dominated by a majestic fort-like monastery, founded in 1088 by the Blessed Christodoulos Latrinos. This hosts treasures of inestimable value and is located on top of the sacred cave where John the Evangelist wrote the Apocalypse, the most important book of the New Testament after the Gospels.
- **Monastery of Osios Loukas Steiriotis, Viotia:** Perhaps the most important monument of the Middle Byzantine period in Greece, with excellent 11th-century frescoes and mosaics in its major church, thanks to which the church is also known as the “little Hagia Sophia”. It features fort-like architecture and has been an inspiration for poets and painters through the centuries, a testament to its beauty and importance.
- **Daphni Monastery:** Built on the site of an ancient temple dedicated to Apollo, it is one of the most important Byzantine monuments of the Mediterranean and its mosaics are amongst the most important and artistically finest ever made with a Christian theme. For all these reasons, it has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- **Mystras:** The castle-city of Mystras hosts seven important churches: the Pantanassa -which still operates as a monastery-, the Cathedral of Agios Dimitrios, the Evangelistria, the Peribleptou, the Agia Sophia, the Panagia Hodeghetria (or “Afentiko”) and that of Agioi Theodoroi. All used to be the major church buildings (Katholikon) of monasteries. Beyond its churches, Mystras is in itself a fine example of fort-like architecture, an impregnable castle that has hosted Byzantine princes and Frankish knights.
- **Nea Moni of Chios:** One of the most important monasteries of Greece, founded in 1024 by Emperor Constantine IX Monomachos, it has been standing proudly for 1000 years. The major church of Panagia (the Virgin) hosts some of the most beautiful Byzantine mosaics, made by Constantinopolitan artists, which stand on a par with those of famous Byzantine monuments.
- **Panagia Ekatontapiliani, Parikia of Paros:** The most popular sight of Paros for Orthodox Christians and one of the most important early Christian monuments in Greece, of great spiritual significance. It takes its name from a legend according to which it has 100 gates, of which only 99 are visible and one is invisible. It is a complex of early Christian churches, which includes the famous baptistery and many chapels, built more recently. It hosts a Byzantine Museum with extensive collections and celebrates on 15 August.
- **Panagia (the Virgin) of Tinos:** The thousands of faithful who have flocked to the miraculous icon of the Virgin Mary since 1880, when the monastery complex was built, has turned it into one of the most important pilgrimage destinations in Greece. The church celebrates on 15 August, when thousands of visitors from all parts of the world come to the island.
- **Panagia Hozoviotissa,Amorgos:** Built on vertical cliffs, it looks out to the endless blue of the Aegean Sea, as if suspended from the skies. It is 40 m high, with a width of just 5 m! Its foundation is connected with the miraculous image of the Virgin, which is housed there along with other relics of Christianity. It was founded by Alexios

Komninos. It celebrates on the anniversary of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, on 21 November.

- **Panagia Soumela:** The Soumela Monastery, the Orthodox Christian monastery in Trabzon of the Black Sea, was a symbol of orthodoxy for 16 centuries. After its destruction, the icon of the Virgin was taken to Nea Panagia Soumela, to the beech and oak-covered slopes of the Vermio Mountains and is a cultural and historical symbol of unity and remembrance of all Greeks of the Black Sea.
- **Churches of Thessaloniki:** Thessaloniki is an interfaith, multicultural city, famous for its Byzantine churches, particularly the church of its patron saint - the basilica of Saint Dimitrios, and the Hagia Sophia, the Church of the Acheiropoietos, Panagia Chalkeon and, in Ano Poli, the churches of Agios Nikolaos Orfanos and Osios David. A number of other Byzantine and Christian monuments lie scattered around the city.
- **Churches in Athens:** The capital of Greece may have been a minor city in Byzantine times, but has received many influences over the centuries and has added Byzantine undertones to its ancient glory, boasting important Byzantine and post-Byzantine churches. The Cathedral in the historic centre and the exquisite Panagia Gorgoepikoos next to it, Agios Nikolaos Rangavas and the Transfiguration of Christ in Plaka, Panagia Pantanassa in Monastiraki, Kapnikarea on Ermou Street, Agia Irini in the namesake square, the Agioi Assomati in Thissio, the Agia Fotini of Ilissos at the Columns of the Olympian Zeus, small or large churches of exceptional architecture, integrated in the urban landscape.
- **Agios Andreas of Patras:** The New Church of Agios Andreas (new as compared to the older one) is one of the most impressive churches in the world and is rightly positioned in an open area near the sea, showcasing the connection the city of Patras always had with water. An equally impressive church is that of the Platytera (named after the large icon of the Virgin above the sanctuary of the church), depicted hovering over the city with its characteristic neoclassical architecture, with her arms outstretched, embracing and simultaneously protecting the city. Andrew the Apostle (Agios Andreas o Protoklitos), brother of St. Peter, is the patron saint of the city, as he was sentenced to death by crucifixion on an X-shaped cross, approximately at the point where the church stands today. The Holy Head of Saint Andrew is kept inside the church, along with a piece of his peculiar cross. The church of Agios Andreas and the Vatican are the only two places in the world where the grave of one of Jesus' 12 apostles is located precisely at his point of martyrdom.





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