

Its roots stretch back millennia, but the modern country is focused on the future

Greece has been a well-established vacation destination for sun-seekers for decades and is breaking records as it diversifies its incredible tourism offering

The importance of tourism and its myriad of activities on the health, well-being and overall performance of the Greek economy cannot be overstated, with the huge, year-round industry generating around a quarter of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employing over one million workers during the peak summer season.

Tens of millions of visitors vacation in the Mediterranean hotspot each year, enjoying its breathtaking tapestry of historical treasures — particularly the stunning Acropolis and Pantheon in Athens — and gorgeous scenery, complemented by a favourable climate and amazing cuisine and hospitality. As a pillar of the Greek economy, the lucrative tourism sector is at the heart of government policy and official data shows the industry has rebounded rapidly and sustainably from the disruption triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic.

As Minister of Tourism, Vassilis Kikilias, has his finger on the pulse of all the latest industry developments and is exceptionally upbeat about the sector's prospects given its outstanding performance in 2022 and strong start to 2023. "First of all, this is a major industry in Greece," he states. "Tourism is 25 per cent of our GDP, that's one out of every four euros of the Greek economy. It also supports the primary sector of agriculture; mainly fruit, vegetables and what we produce from our land that is exported, or sold to local hotels and restaurants.

"The commercial world is closely tied to tourism and, of course, construction, since eight out of 10 new investments in Greece are touristic investments, such as condos and hotels. After that, there are the infrastructures to enable people to get there. We've got 224 inhabited islands and the beautiful mainland with its unbeatable scenery, it's a unique experience to visit Greece. Since we are a safe destination, it's a multiple gain for us post-pandemic, the ministry and the touristic sector, because travellers and tourists from all over the world are opting for Greece."

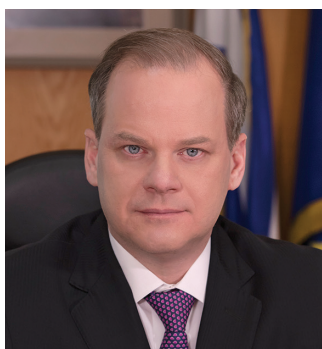
To support the ongoing diver-



Dominating the capital's skyline, the Parthenon and the Acropolis represent thousands of years of civilisation



Vassilis Kikilias
Minister of Tourism



Kostas Achillea Karamanlis
Minister of Infrastructure and Transport



Adonis Georgiadis
Minister of Development and Investments

sification of the excellent product and promotion of regional-based destinations rather than just Athens and traditionally popular islands, the forward-thinking government has prioritised relevant major infrastructural developments, including the upscaling of Greece's largest marina, the Alimos Marina, as well as Crete's Kastelli Airport.

According to Kikilias, part of the equation is better ports, marinas, and airports, with investment in aviation gateways across the republic playing a key role in the sector's expansion. "We also

have new flights from the UAE, Kuwait and Qatar, flights going to Mykonos, Santorini and Eleftherios Venizelos airports. Upgrading our infrastructures is a key part of being sustainable for years to come," he explains. "The biggest part of the peripheral economy is supported by tourism so large condominiums and big hotels are built and that means the administration has to upgrade the infrastructures. This is how we introduce our programme, our strategy, step by step. We are transforming the periphery of Greece, so it can welcome large

numbers of travellers, but we don't want to lose our culture or the uniqueness of our product.

"Our strategy is to link the Gulf and countries in the Middle East and Asia with the other side of the Atlantic, and for the centre of the equation to be Greece, especially Athens and Thessaloniki."

The government's ambitious economic growth and investment targets are being supported by tangible infrastructure projects, including many related to transport. Indeed, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport has devised a €13 billion comprehen-



sive infrastructure plan, much of which is funded by the EU.

Key infrastructure projects
According to Kostas Achillea Karamanlis, Minister of Infrastructure and Transport, the plan comprises the largest public works and infrastructure plan since the 2004 Olympic Games.

"We have a two-fold target: on one hand to promote 'green transport' and 'green infrastructure' projects, and on the other hand to elevate Greece's position as an infrastructure, transport and logistics hub of the greater South-Eastern Region," he says.

Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) inked in economic fields in a clear sign of a thriving strategic partnership. The duo also signed a deal involving \$4 billion of Emirati investment in the Greek economy, with the aforementioned MoUs including pacts featuring powerful entities like Mubadala Investment Company and Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC).

"We aspire to witness tangible progress in health care, infrastructure, renewable energy and other sectors," Karamanlis adds. "We have projects focused on expanding motorways and air-

"Tourism is 25 per cent of GDP, or one out of every four euros of the Greek economy. We've got 224 inhabited islands."

VASSILIS KIKILIAS, MINISTER OF TOURISM

"Our top priority is to provide infrastructure projects that serve a specific strategy. We want Greece to become an infrastructure hub and a competitive intermodal corridor for the wider South-Eastern European region.

"With the expansion of the Suez Canal, Piraeus has become an important hub, a port of entry for products from Asia. Our infrastructure projects aim to connect ports to industrial centres by rail, with €4.5 billion put towards upgrading our rail system. We have also commenced the third line of the Athens metro."

Bilateral relations between the UAE and Greece are moving forward in all fields of mutual interest, with Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis visiting Abu Dhabi several times and many

ports, both of which form a very important strategic option for investors in the UAE."

Cabinet colleague Adonis Georgiadis, Minister of Development and Investments, is excited about the opportunities created by the close ties to 'strategic partners and friends' — the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the UAE. "We set a common view about the future of our region. We admire their progress in producing renewable energy in new technologies and innovation. We admire the special leadership for their countries, and we want to expand our ties with them," he states.

"This is a very clear message of friendship and respect to the people of the Middle East. We want to unite our future and go forward together."

Investment in infrastructures grows as nation ramps up development drive

Billions of euros of funding is flowing into various parts of the economy, including the vibrant tourism sector

An impressive year-round climate means that even in the latter part of the European autumn and into early winter, Greece's weather is so mild that people can swim in its warm waters, even though there is snow up in the mountains.

Given the extra returns and business openings generated by this enviable natural environment, there has been a huge hike in major foreign direct investment (FDI) in tourism, particularly in the development of new transport and accommodation. The tourism sector enjoyed an outstanding 2022 as more than 31 million visitors arrived by air alone, according to airport data. More than 5,000 cruise liners called at ports, with berthing numbers up by an average of 200 per cent year-on-year.

Kikilias attributes some of this fantastic success to the Greeks' willingness to embrace the arrival of foreigners, known as 'Xenia'. "They give them beverages, water, food and welcome them into their homes and show them a great time," he says. "This is what we've been doing since ancient times and it's part of the key to our success — we are very happy to have travellers, tourists and foreigners in Greece and we show them a great time, and they feel like they're at home.



Stavros Mitsis
MD, MITSIS HOTELS

"This is why we bounced back really quickly after the pandemic. We aim to grow this trend and rebrand the country as a viable, sustainable destination, with low-carbon emissions, an environmentally friendly, green and blue economy, in order to become pioneers in what will be the key factor for the years to come for the world; trying to support the planet and pass on our prosperity to future generations."

Mitsis sets hotel benchmark
Blending first-class service with great locations, impeccable facilities, sophisticated dining and a broad spectrum of options given its 19 upscale hotels and resorts in Athens, Crete, Kamena Vourla, Kos and Rhodes, Mitsis Hotels is a popular choice with interna-

tional visitors and local families and business clients.

The award-winning group's rich hospitality portfolio consists of premium collection, all-inclusive, family, city, meetings, social events, spa resorts and wedding hotels. With a passion for rich culinary experiences inspired by Greek and international cuisine, its all-inclusive and à la carte restaurants also serve a range of exquisite refreshments and beverages. "With over 5,000 years of history, Athens is the cradle of the Western world, Greece's cultural, political and economic hub and has the most important monument of all history; the Parthenon and the Acropolis," says Mitsis Hotels MD, Stavros Mitsis.

The senior executive notes how in recent years, Athens has become quite famous for tourism investment opportunities. "We have at least 100 new hotels in the city centre that create a buzz in the market and attract new clientele while offering a high-quality product that was not there before.

"Athens has a lot to offer to the modern traveller and it's a nation that is easy to reach, particularly due to the big airport in Athens which is quite modern. There is a good transportation network from the airport. These are a few of the reasons why Athens has been successful in recent years."

Greece's tourism industry in numbers:

Around **400** Dubai and Athens direct flights per week

Nearly **550** five-star hotels throughout the country

Almost **two dozen** modern marinas for yachts

A record **31 million** visitors arrived at its airports in 2022

Over **6,000** islands, of which less than 5% (224) are inhabited

More than **€18** billion in tourism receipts in 2022

ATHENS | CRETE | KAMENA VOURLA | KOS | RHODES
www.mitsishotels.com

Aviation sector takes off on tourism diversification and new routes to the Middle East

With flights from around the world arriving at its airports on a daily basis, Greece's aviation industry is flying high, as is the country's flag carrier, Aegean Airlines

Branded a 'safe destination' in the post-pandemic era of travel thanks to its stringent health measures and sanitary controls, tens of millions of tourists and over €18 billion in revenue was generated by the sector in a record-breaking 2022.

Greece has made huge strides in diversifying its tourism industry, cultivating old destinations and building up new ones, with a goal to defeat seasonality outside of Athens. Well-received advertising and marketing campaigns placed in international media and based on campaigns such as 'Greeken' and 'Greece does have a winter' have moved the spotlight to areas of the mainland, as well as other lesser-known corners of the country.

"The campaigns have been a great success," states a delighted Kikilias. "A key factor in upgrading our product was investments from abroad, including from Saudi Arabia, the UAE and the US. All the big brands are now here, but this is not random, if all the major tourism multi-nationals want to invest in Greece and have opened numerous high-class hotels and condos — six stars, even seven stars — then this is proof of the uniqueness of this country."

"Plus of course, these big multinational companies bring with them their tour operators, the airline companies, digital booking, and their own brand in the touristic world, which means more travellers, tourists and high-end visitors as well, so this has a multiplying effect in the country, not only in the field of tourism; Saudi Arabia and the UAE want to invest in the fields of energy and real estate."

Kikilias is quick to praise the hard work of colleagues in the administration, but especially Prime Minister Mitsotakis, who has travelled many times to the Middle East to foster relationships and encourage investments in various fields.



Dimitris Gerogiannis
CEO, Aegean Airlines

This progress can be seen in the increase in number and frequency of new and existing airline routes to and from Greece, with daily direct flights to the capital from major American cities and a growing number of carriers from the Middle East offering routes for leisure and business travellers.

"Emirates is a success story for Greece and for the company, since for the last few years, Emirates has been flying Newark-Athens-Dubai, in what may have been the company's most success-

ful route, and a great success for us," he notes. "This has created a pull factor among American airline carriers to serve Greece."

"Americans are high spenders, and with the favourable value of the euro against the dollar, they can spend more, and this has boosted the capital and the Attica region and our top-branded islands, but also alternative destinations. So, our strategy is to link the Gulf and the countries of the Middle East and Asia with the other side of the Atlantic, and for the centre of the equation to be Athens, Thessaloniki and Greece."

"The real asset in an airline is not the aircraft, but its people. This is what makes the difference. For the past 24 years, we have been continuously investing in the development and upskilling of our employees. Our people are our main focus and will remain so because this is what will deliver the competitive advantage."

"Our investment in new technology to improve service and efficiency of the organisation will continue, as will fresh investment in hiring new staff and upskilling our existing workers for that technology."

"To achieve our two main goals — quality of service differentiation and very high efficiency — we invest in our key assets."

DIMITRIS GEROGIANNIS, CEO, AEGEAN AIRLINES

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Thousands of international travellers arrive at Greece's airports daily via a broad range of leading airlines



The famous and historic Hotel Grande Bretagne blends elegance and style with incredible levels of hospitality

Hotel Grande Bretagne showcases the best of Athens in grand style

With beautiful views of the Acropolis, Syntagma Square and the Parliament, Lycabettus Hill or the original Olympic Stadium, the five-star Hotel Grande Bretagne offers an unrivaled perspective of the capital's mythical history

With an unrivaled history and heritage in Greece — if not all of Europe, — the landmark Hotel Grande Bretagne in the heart of the bustling and breathtaking city has served royalty, powerful political figures, foreign missions, diplomats, statesmen and sporting and entertainment stars for almost 150 years.

This roll call of famous guests includes household names like leading ladies Elizabeth Taylor, Sophia Loren, Maria Callas, and Brigitte Bardot. Hollywood icons Greta Garbo, Sean Connery, and Francis Ford Coppola have visited repeatedly, while music stars Sting, Bruce Springsteen, David Bowie, Jay-Z, and Jose Carreras have resided there while on tour.

Returned to its former glory two decades ago via a huge €82 million restoration project, the Hotel Grande Bretagne underwent a massive restoration courtesy of parent Marriott and emerged as a state-of-the-art, five-star reincarnation of its former glory that continues to delight its guests with legendary hospitality and iconic style.

The hotel's most famous accommodation offering is the sprawling one-bedroom, two-bathroom Royal Suite that encompasses over 400 magnificent square meters, elegantly appointed and entirely individual, the 320 guest rooms and suites provide refined living in the heart of Athens.

"Sumptuous fabrics, original artworks, museum-quality antiques and classic architectural features combine with modern technology to present accommodation that embraces the historic legacy of this dynamic city," says Hotel Grande Bretagne General Manager, Hom Parviz. "Each of our guest rooms and suites is furnished with 'The Luxury Collection Bed' allowing for restorative sleep to enrich the soul."

"Floor-to-ceiling windows offer an abundance of natural light and captivating views across Acropolis Hill and Syntagma Square, while opulent en-suite bathrooms provide prime opportunity for pampering. All rooms and suites come with a well-stocked refreshment center, restorative bottles of water and nightly turndown, as well as flat screen televisions and access to high-speed wi-fi. Personalised 24-hour butler service and expedited check-in is offered to all 56 suites, alongside guest rooms located on the sixth and seventh floors."

Of course, it is not just well-heeled tourists who stay at the Hotel Grande Bretagne, with the

hotel also the ideal choice for sophisticated business meetings and lavish social events and weddings. More than 1,100 square metres of refined meeting rooms and event venues feature rich silk drapes, stately chandeliers, 19th century furnishings and authentic works of art add a host of exquisite touches to conferences.

Remote workers eye stays

Back upstairs, among the steady flow of guests enjoying all the delights and comforts that the Hotel Grande Bretagne has to offer are potential digital nomads who may be seeking a temporary base before buying or renting an apartment or house as part of the new global drive to remote working.

This pattern has been welcomed by Greece's government, who are keen to attract the brightest and best workers to its shores, with this positive trend given fresh impetus by the global corporate and commercial world's post-pandemic realisation that a happy workforce is also a very productive one.

"Floor-to-ceiling windows offer plenty of natural light and captivating view across Acropolis Hill and Syntagma Square."

HOM PARVIZ, GENERAL MANAGER, HOTEL GRANDE BRETAGNE

"We've seen through the crisis that there was a vast amount of the population that had to work from home through Zoom and Skype," says Kikilias. "That was a necessity because of the pandemic, but the big companies discovered that many of their employees were happier and healthier if they worked from home or, even better, from another location on the planet which is beautiful."

"The question is, would someone want to work where there is mist, fog, cold winters and snow, or in a place like Greece with mild weather, sunshine, beautiful conditions that would make them happy and maybe even more productive for the company?"

"The idea is to bring professionals who want to work from here, and offer them digital tools, better and faster internet, better prices for hotels, or B&Bs or condos, open restaurants and all in a unique setting in order for them to stay here for one, two, three or four months, work here and then go back home."

The experienced politician notes there has been an uptick in foreign workers moving to areas such as Crete, Ermoupoli and Kalamata in a repeat of the success-

ful Golden Visa system "I see important companies and big CFOs and CEOs thinking about remote working for part of their company's workforce," he continues. "This is a way of attracting people off-season and having them in Greece and, of course, they are our best advertisement because if someone comes to Greece, they don't want to leave and always want to come back."

Boasting the third largest coastline in Europe, the government is increasingly placing sustainability and green initiatives front and centre of its policies and regulations in the push to net-zero. Several green projects, like an €8 billion investment in the country's state-of-the-art Smart City, Ellinikon Park, will benefit Athenians as well as international visitors and eco-tourists.

"Once again, there is an ecological awareness in Greece, and the Prime Minister has stepped up and we're pushing forward into renewable energy for the country and we already started that on several small Greek islands,"

Kikilias explains. "Chalki and Astypalea are already eco-islands that are totally dependent on renewable energy and solar cars and bikes. We aim to have a sustainable touristic programme, environmentally friendly with low carbon emissions."

"It's incredible to see how large, multi-national companies came here and have been working with the administration to invest. Rhodes, which is one of our biggest touristic islands is working on a five-year programme, together with the municipality of the south-eastern Aegean and the administration with the aim of transforming the island into a sustainable destination."

The government is trying to build awareness among hoteliers and professionals, with programmes and assistance available for those businesses and entrepreneurs who wish to upgrade their hotels. One such example is firms being encouraged to replace old windows with newer models that are more energy sustainable. "We're optimistic and owe it to ourselves and to our children and the next generation, to secure the planet and to offer them the life they deserve," he adds.

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