

Greece is the word

A golden goose of history, mythology, archaeology, sights, beaches, cuisine, nature and activities, Greece has it all for families, as **SARAH KNIGHT** discovers.

Our Grecian adventure begins well in advance of take-off with some at-home DIY language lessons. With a couple of YouTube tutorials under our belt, we've sorted our "kalimera" (good morning) from our "kalispera" (good afternoon) and mastered "efharistoh" (thank you). While we may not fool anyone with articulation, at least we're polite.

Our first outing when we arrive in Athens is equal measures practising our newly acquired Greek sayings, staring in astonishment at glimpses of the ancient Acropolis, and selecting the perfect stracciatella (vanilla gelato with crunchy chocolate pieces – you can thank me later).

We base ourselves in Plaka, a family-friendly, historical town resting in the northeastern shadows of the **Acropolis** where we enjoyed a three-day sojourn touring the city, the Acropolis itself and nearby Monastiraki area, known for iconic landmarks including the ruins of **Hadrian's Library**, the **Ancient Agora** and the rebuilt

Stoa of Attalos as well as the incredible **Monastiraki Flea Market**.

Hydra delights

After our Athenian introduction, it is time to bask in the Greek summer on the islands. Postcard worthy from every angle, Hydra is a 1.5-hour ferry ride from Athens and makes a perfect day trip. Vehicle and scooter-free, the island is a welcome change from the hustle and bustle of Athens. Water taxis can transport you to beautiful beaches around the island or you can people-watch in and around the port. If you're feeling a little more adventurous, discover Hydra on horseback with **Harriet's Hydra Horses**. There's a choice of short rides or full-day island discoveries and even an incredible Seahorse option enjoying Hydra's blue waters on horseback.

Pretty Paros

An unsung hero, **Paros Island** is the lesser known cousin of Mykonos and Santorini, and



the lack of hype only adds to its substantial charm. Easily accessible from Athens via a three-hour ferry or a 30-minute flight, once you spot the iconic windmill at Parikia Port, you'll be forever hooked. There is plentiful accommodation in Parikia or the smaller, quieter fishing village Naousa. We opt for an Airbnb stay in the latter, which provides the perfect base to explore the island.

The island's white cubic houses, cobblestone streets and character-filled laneways have us captivated. Naousa is filled with boutique shopping, traditional Greek restaurants (dinner at SOSO is a must) and modest cafes. Our children love watching the ducks and geese in port, as well as local fishermen unloading fresh hauls of octopus each day. We're spoilt for choice when it comes to beaches, with kid-friendly Little Santa Maria, Kolymbithres, Monastiri and Ampelas beaches and a day trip to pretty **Antiparos** top of our list.

Show-stopping Santorini

Our ferry hopping takes us to **Santorini** where we oooh and ahhh for days on end at

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the breathtaking views of the large, mostly submerged caldera and cascading cliffs. While the town is certainly not known for its toddler/stroller friendliness, we arrive well equipped with a travel stroller which folds at lightning speed for trekking up the steep stairs.

We set up post at the base of **Oia** in Amoudi Bay, once a simple fishing village, but now filled with restaurants, hotels, a small bay and views of Oia's famous sunsets. A sailing adventure proves an unforgettable way for us to explore the caldera, floating through its azure waters and visiting the nearby islands.

Public transportation is a cinch and an easy bus ride transfers us to nearby beaches. **Perissa**, known as the black-sand beach, becomes a favourite. With its kilometres of sand dotted with beach bars, sun beds, cafes and playgrounds on the sand for the kids, it is the perfect spot to swim, splash and play.

Captivating Crete

Our last stop on our island hop is **Crete**. While we evaded car hire elsewhere, in Crete, Greece's largest island, it's the ideal way to explore. Crete is renowned for its beautiful

beaches, but be prepared for the logistics of getting to them. **Balos Beach** is a non-negotiable. Access it via boat, or take the 15-minute downhill trek from the car park. Yes, your children will probably complain hiking back up. And yes, the awe-inspiring sight of the turquoise paradise is worth it.

We reward them for their efforts the next day with a visit to Elafonisi Beach in **Chania**. The powdery fine pink sand, created by crushed shell powder, and endless shallow, clear waters make a perfect family day out.

After two weeks of unadulterated family fun, spine-tingling sights, superb weather and delicious food, we're heading off to our next destination, but I can't shake the feeling that we've hardly scratched the surface of this one. ●

Stay tuned for part 2 of Sarah's European adventure in our next issue.

Greece Report Card



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