



# Ionian Islands

Whether it's unspoiled Greece or an established resort you're after, these four islands – Ithaca, Kefalonia, Lefkas and Zakynthos – have something to suit everyone

**Ithaca, Kefalonia, Lefkas and Zakynthos – the islands grouped at the southern tail of the Ionian chain – all have more than their fair share of rugged beauty and excellent beaches. All four fit the bill perfectly for lazy beach holidays, but they have distinctly different characters, so be sure you're heading for the one most suited to your needs.**

**You'll find sublime mountain landscapes with pine and cypress, some of Greece's finest sandy beaches and a spectrum of nightlife that swings from laid-back harbour-front tavernas to the worst excesses of booze and video bars.**

## GETTING THERE

The only direct flights from the UK to these islands are operated by charter airlines – check routes and timings with Thomson, Thomas Cook, MyTravel and Monarch. Charter flights do not operate year-round, the season usually runs from April to October.

Scheduled flights from the UK fly to Athens from where Olympic Airlines connects to Kefalonia, Zakynthos and Preveza, the airport serving Lefkas, which lies about 16 miles away on the mainland. Ithaca has no airport – connect by ferry from Kefalonia or Lefkas.

## TOUR OPERATORS

- CV Travel [www.cvtravel.net](http://www.cvtravel.net)
- Direct Holidays [www.directholidays.co.uk](http://www.directholidays.co.uk)
- Greek Islands Club  
[www.greekislandsclub.com](http://www.greekislandsclub.com)
- Greek Options [www.greekoptions.co.uk](http://www.greekoptions.co.uk)
- Ionian Island Holidays  
[www.ionianislandholidays.com](http://www.ionianislandholidays.com)
- Kosmar [www.kosmar.co.uk](http://www.kosmar.co.uk)

- Manos [www.manos.co.uk](http://www.manos.co.uk)
- Meon Villas [www.meonvillas.co.uk](http://www.meonvillas.co.uk)
- MyTravel [www.mytravel.com](http://www.mytravel.com)
- Simply Travel [www.simplytravel.co.uk](http://www.simplytravel.co.uk)
- Simpson Travel [www.simpsontravel.com](http://www.simpsontravel.com)
- Spirit of Greece [www.spiritofgreece.co.uk](http://www.spiritofgreece.co.uk)
- Sunisle Holidays [www.sunisle.co.uk](http://www.sunisle.co.uk)
- Sunvil [www.sunvil.co.uk](http://www.sunvil.co.uk)
- Travelux [www.travelux.co.uk](http://www.travelux.co.uk)
- Thomas Cook [www.thomascook.com](http://www.thomascook.com)
- Thomson [www.thomson.co.uk](http://www.thomson.co.uk)

## GETTING AROUND

### By plane

Olympic Airlines operates flights between Kefalonia and Preveza (Lefkas), between Kefalonia and Zakynthos, and between Zakynthos and Preveza, but if you're not in a hurry it's far more enjoyable to travel by ferry.

### By ferry

Ferry links aren't always in the most user-friendly places, so if you don't have your own hire car you might have to shell out for a taxi to take you across an island from where you land to where you actually want to stay. On the plus side, the islands are clustered closely together so ferry crossings are short – ie no longer than a couple of hours.

Greek ferry schedules change from one year to the next and can be erratic, but the 2008 version of the *Greek Island Hopping Guide* ([www.greekislandhopping.com](http://www.greekislandhopping.com)), published by Thomas Cook, should help.

### By car

Getting around each island is best done by hire car as public transport is fairly rudimentary. Ithaca island is so tiny that a scooter should suffice.

## GOOD PLACES TO STAY

Prices are for the cheapest double room in Sept 2008, including breakfast and taxes.

### ITHACA

Tiny Ithaca is a simple, unspoilt island that has become a trendy, upmarket spot.

#### Frikes

Hotel Nostos

Tel 26740 31644

[www.hotelnostos-ithaki.gr](http://www.hotelnostos-ithaki.gr)

A peaceful friendly base for a laid-back holiday on sleepy Ithaca – and the only hotel in the village, so it's not hard to find. You wake and go to sleep with the scent of the jasmine that drapes around the hotel. **£71**

#### Vathy

Omirikon Hotel

Tel 26740 33596

[www.omirikonhotel.com](http://www.omirikonhotel.com)

Smart modern hotel on Vathy's harbourfront road, just a short walk from all the tavernas. Loutsas beach is also an easy stroll. Impressive rooms come with a separate kitchenette/lounge area. **£79**

### KEFALONIA

A smart upmarket destination with a strong yachtie contingent centred in Fiskardo.

#### Assos

Cosi's Inn

Tel 26740 51420

[www.cosisinn.gr](http://www.cosisinn.gr)

Cosi's is a small block of stylish modern apartments with lovely views over Assos village, where the tavernas are a five-minute stroll away. **£51 (minimum three-night stay)**

**For the full magazine report on the Ionian Islands, see p30 of the Sept 2008 issue of Which? Holiday**

## Argostoli

Ionian Plaza Hotel

Tel 26710 25581

[www.ionianplaza.gr](http://www.ionianplaza.gr)

Great value at this upmarket hotel on Argostoli's main square. Rooms are simple but spotless – get one with a balcony over the main square. The only downside is that the nearest beach is in Lassi. £86

## Fiskardo

Faros Suites Hotel

Tel 26740 41355

[www.myrtoscorp.com](http://www.myrtoscorp.com)

Classy colonial chic in a smart hotel just a short stroll from Fiskardo harbourfront. This is a stylish place, kitted out with teak fittings and cool marble floors. Sea view rooms look across the harbour to Ithaca. £91

## Sami

Sami Beach Hotel

Tel 26740 22802

[www.samibeachhotel.gr](http://www.samibeachhotel.gr)

Exceptionally friendly family run hotel with a loyal following of Brits. The centre of Sami is a walkable distance. The beach nearby is no great shakes, but the pleasant pool area is the focus of activity. Rooms here face either the sea or the forested hills inland. £71

## LEFKAS

Rugged Lefkas was our favourite of the southern Ionian islands. It has plenty going for it: a dramatic coastline, lovely beaches, an unspoilt mountainous interior and the characterful old town of Lefkada.

## Agios Nikitas

Odyssey Hotel

Tel 26450 97351

[www.odyssey-hotel.gr](http://www.odyssey-hotel.gr)

Simple rooms overlooking the pretty blue and white village of Agios Nikitas. Breakfast with a view is served on the hotel's highest terrace above the pool. £55

## Meganisi

Hotel Meganisi

Tel 26450 51240

The perfect bolthole for pure escapism on one of Lefkas' satellite islands. Curtains of bougainvillea drape the walls around a tranquil pool area and bedrooms are fresh and simple. Not a lot to do but read books and wander down to Vathy's harbourside tavernas. Bliss. £55

## ZAKYNTHOS

Zakynthos (also known as Zante) is a busy island with a major tour operator presence. The Vassilikos peninsula is the best base – accommodation options are classier than the rest of the island.

## Gerakas

Belvedere Hotel

Tel 26950 36061

[www.belvederezante.com](http://www.belvederezante.com)

Classy small hotel with light and uncluttered Scandinavian decor close to Gerakas beach. The whole place oozes an easy-going summery cheer. Delightful bedrooms have spacious balconies from where you can watch the sun set over Gerakas. £79

## Vassilikos

Golden Bay Hotel

[www.thebay.gr](http://www.thebay.gr)

Trendy minimalist design makes this hotel stand out from the bland package hordes. Several tour operators use the hotel, so check with them to see if you can get a deal that beats rack rates. £79

## GOOD PLACES TO EAT AND DRINK

### ITHACA

#### Frikes

Rementzo

Tel 26740 31719

[www.rementzo.sphosting.com](http://www.rementzo.sphosting.com)

You'd be pushed to find anywhere quieter than Frikes in the evening. Rementzo is a really friendly place that offers a few modern twists among the usual staples. Try the homemade cod and mint pies, *spetsofai* (village sausages), *soutsoukakia* (meatballs with cumin and herbs), or seafood with chilli, ouzo and basil. Mains £7-£15.

### KEFALONIA

#### Argostoli

Captain's Table

Tel 26710 27179

One of the smartest tables in Argostoli just a hop from the main square. Live music most evenings and a good choice of fresh fish and seafood dishes. Main courses £8-£20.

#### Assos

Nefeli

Tel 26740 51251

You couldn't wish for a better spot, smack on the quayside. Lunchtimes are a touch busy, but things quieten down in the evening. Daily fish specials, perhaps grilled sardines, tuna or swordfish. Mains £10-£15.

#### Platanos

Tel 26740 51143

Platanos is set back from the more touristy places on the waterside, beneath a vast plane tree. Delicious oven-cooked dishes are the speciality here – mouthwatering lamb chops with honey and mustard, *kleftiko* (lamb baked in foil with garlic and herbs), sea bass with olive oil and lemon. This is traditional Greek done really well. Mains £7-£13.

## Kato Katelios

Blue Sea

One of the handful of seafood specialist tavernas lining the beach on Kefalonia's southernmost tip. A lovely place to dine out on simple food done just right – opt for the squid with tomato and garlic. Mains £8-£18, unless you splash out on pricy lobster.

## Fiskardo

Tassia

[www.tassia-fiscardo.gr](http://www.tassia-fiscardo.gr)

Tassia is the perfect spot for people-watching on Fiskardo's yacht-lined harbour. The lavender and terracotta colour scheme is inviting, and the kitchen turns out a good line in fresh fishy produce, as well as the usual grilled meats and oven-baked dishes, such as lamb with wine and mustard. Mains £8-£18.

## LEFKAS

### Sivota Bay

Stavros

Tel 26450 31181

Perfect setting on the harbourside beneath curtains of climbing plants. Fresh fish is sold by weight or you could go for more substantial oven dishes such as *kleftiko*, *stifado* (stew) or roast pork. Mains £7-£11.

## ZAKYNTHOS

### Gerakas

Gerakas Taverna

(next to the turtle info centre)

Quiet tables beneath the trees, mellow jazzy music, hammocks slung from the bar roof – this is a great chill-out spot for tucking into the usual Greek favourites, such as rooster in wine sauce or rabbit *stifado*. Mains £7-£12.

### Zakynthos Town

Psaropoula

K Lomvardou 98 (next to the police station)

Tel 26950 44706

This friendly fish restaurant spreads its tables on a terrace beneath the arcades along the busy harbourfront strip. Mixed fish grill £11.50, rabbit *stifado* £7.50 and a blackboard menu of fresh fish that reads like the roll call at an aquarium. Mains £5-£12.

## USEFUL INFORMATION

**Time difference** GMT+2hrs

**International dialling code for**

**Greece** 0030

**Exchange rate** £1 = €1.27

**When to go** Avoid the busy and scorching hot peak summer months of July and August. June and September are much more relaxed and cooler.

## GUIDEBOOK

■ *Rough Guide to The Ionian Islands*, £10.99 (ISBN 978-1843536178)