



THE PELOPONNESE, GREECE

A go-slow corner of the Mediterranean

While the starriest [Greek islands](#) – such as Santorini and Mykonos – grapple with over tourism, forward thinking visitors are heading to the mainland and discovering the wide-open spaces of [Greece](#) off-season. The Peloponnese has been bubbling just below the radar since [Costa Navarino](#) opened in 2010. Soon afterwards, the local airport at Kalamata opened up to international flights, shaving off several hours' driving time from [Athens](#) and boosting arrivals to the region by 15 per cent last year.

In 2019, the rail service linking the port of Patras with the town of Pyrgos, in the south-western Peloponnese, will resume after a seven-year halt. A [train](#) ride is the perfect way to explore this laidback region which has been a destination for wellness and fitness since Hippocrates prescribed therapeutic olive oil massages and naked athletes limbered up in Olympia. Athletes (dressed in more than just a slick of olive oil) will be hitting Costa Navarino in April 2019 for Greece's first Iron Man race. After a 1.9km swim in the Ionian Sea, competitors will cycle through olive groves before embarking on a half marathon that runs alongside Voidokilia beach, a perfect semi-circle of burnished sand.

The west coast of the Peloponnese is rippled with mile upon mile of sand dunes. Kourouta may not be the quietest [beach](#), but it will soon become the hippest. In May, Dexamenes hotel opens in an abandoned wine factory on the waterfront. K-Studio (the architects behind all the coolest new hotels in Greece, from Branco on Mykonos to Perianth in Athens), have barely interfered with the industrial aesthetic: bedrooms are fashioned from old storage tanks, their gritty concrete walls punctuated by black steel piping, with polished terrazzo [bathrooms](#) screened by textured glass and sliding windows framing the sea views.

The adjacent buildings are being transformed into a taverna, a grocery selling local produce, and a history room that will connect guests to the local culture of wine-making. The Peloponnese has more wineries and grape varieties than any other region in Greece. It's a tradition you can taste at Eumelia, a farmstead set among 50 acres of organic olive groves and vineyards, which has quietly built a reputation for immersive foodie and creative retreats; and Zz Kyllini LA, a swish new estate in Kyllini that produces its own wine, grappa, honey, and Zea flour.

[Euphoria Retreat](#), Greece's first destination spa, is modelled on a Byzantine monastery, but it's not all about spiritual awakening and slowing down. Active retreats include the 'Spartan adventure in nature', which features rock climbing, rafting and paragliding. There's more off-grid action at Villa Vager Mani, from hiking and archery to kayaking and scuba diving. This family-run guesthouse has four suites in a fortified mansion built in 1858.

It's a 20-minute drive from the village of Kardamili, where the most desirable property in the Peloponnese will be available to rent for three months of the year from 2020: the peachy stone house poised above a private cove was built by travel writer Patrick Leigh Fermor in the 1960s – 'a world of utmost magical beauty' where he wrote, swam, and entertained poets and painters until his death aged 96. *By Rachel Howard*

To plan and book an under-the-radar Grecian getaway, email besttrips@condenast.co.uk