

Follow in Rick Stein's 'Food-Steps' in Greece

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Rick Stein's new BBC2 series 'From Venice to Istanbul,' takes a road trip through the countries of the former Byzantine Empire and includes a large helping of Greece.

From 21 August, the show follows the TV chef's travels across the Greek mainland taking in the lakeside city of Ioannina, the harbour town of Preveza, moving south to the wetland location of Messolonghi before crossing to the Peloponnese to visit the rugged Mani peninsula, Monemvasia and Pylos.

Rick prepares all the food – including sweet fish, lean lamb, wild oregano, and juicy tomatoes - for the series on the pretty Greek island of Symi. Follow his progress and find a side of Greece you didn't know existed!

Ioannina

Rick Stein and the crew visit the city of Ioannina, in the north west of mainland Greece, which spreads around the shores of Lake Pamvotis which boasts a beautiful backdrop of mountains. It is a hip, bustling little town with excellent cultural credentials, a great nightlife and food scene to boot, but the present niceties belie its bloody past under the 18th century Ottoman ruler Ali Pasha, who's head was eventually sent to decorate the gates of Constantinople. Rick Stein travels into the nearby Pindus mountains, famous for the Zagoria stone built villages, where he learns how to make a sublime Greek chicken pie.

Sherpa Expeditions Walking holidays are offering an 8-day self-guided walking holiday through the Pindus Mountains, descending into the Vikos Gorge with visits and stays in the 18th century stone-built villages for £740 per person on 30 August. To book see sherpaexpeditions.com or call 0800 008 7741.

Preveza

Located at the mouth of the Ambracian Gulf, Preveza has a yacht-lined harbour with beautiful, traditional buildings with pedestrian walkways and cobblestone streets. Its historical sites, including the remains of the castle of Bouka and the ancient ruined city of Nikopolis 7km north of the modern city, are a must-see. The local region is also famed for its great coastline and sandy beaches, while the nearby rugged cliffs at Zalogo, north west of the city saw the women of Souli avoid capture by Ali Pasha by throwing themselves and their children into the sea and rocks below.

Thomas Cook is offering 7 nights in Parga staying at the rural and coastal 3 star Zozefina Apartments & Studios on a self-catering basis, for £369 per person including transfers from London Gatwick from 15 May 2016. www.thomascook.com/holidays/greece/lefkas/. To book see www.thomascook.com, call 0844 412 5970 or visit the nearest Thomas Cook or Co-operative Travel.

Messolonghi

This town of southern mainland Greece skirts the largest natural wetland in Greece – or Klisova Lagoon. It's a favourite winter stopover for thousands of migrating birds and so attracts attending birdwatchers and photographers due to the stilt huts in the water. Another buzzing city, it has a rich cultural and historical past and is also well-known for being where Lord Byron took his last breath while trying to organise troops to support the Greek war of independence. His efforts were rewarded posthumously as international troops were spurred to action by his death.

The Peloponnese

Pylos

On the south west of the Peloponnese, the pretty town of Pylos boasts the castle of Palaiokastro and a huge natural harbour. The bay is best known for the sea battle of Navarino, which ended the Ottoman and Egyptian occupation and led to the Peloponnese becoming the first part of new independent Greece. Rick samples a simple fish stew of John Dory and rascasse made with onions, garlic, white wine, potatoes and lots of olive oil.

Monemvasia

The dramatic rock of Monemvasia - often referred to as The Gibraltar of the East - is a plateau on an islet

linked to the mainland by a short causeway. Its narrow cobbled streets, Byzantine churches and the ruins of a medieval fortress make it a favourite for Athenians looking for a break from the capital.

The Mani

The Mani is the central peninsula of the Peloponnese and its mountainous interior forms a continuation of the Taygetos mountain range, while its rugged coast is scattered with small coves and beaches. Until recent years many Mani villages could only be reached only by sea. The Mani's footpaths and landscape attracts active holidaymakers from around the world and its footpaths lead to fishing tavernas, and tower houses such as those at Vathia where medieval families fought to live in the highest vantage points by building taller and taller townhouses. Walking through its cobbled streets the architecture changes from war towers to fortified dwellings. In Mani, Rick visits the house of the late travel writer Patrick Leigh Fermor and makes moussaka, a dish the ex-patriate claimed not to like!

For Peloponnese holidays:

Book Sunvil Holidays, who are offering 7 nights' self-catering at [Elies](#), a collection of 18 immaculate stone-built cottages in Kardamili, from £802 per person including return flights from London Gatwick and transfers. Elies also has its own excellent restaurant. To book call 020 8758 4758 or see www.sunvil.co.uk/greece.

Book Design Holidays, who are offering a 7 night holiday at The Westin Resort, Costa Navarino in a deluxe garden view room on a B&B basis including flights from London Gatwick to Kalamata and return private transfers from £899 per person. Based on September departures. To book see: www.designholidays.co.uk or call: 01444 87 22 00. For more information on Costa Navarino visit www.costanavarino.com.

Book Thomas Cook, who are offering a 7 night holiday at the secluded 3 star Georges, on the bay of Stoupa, on a self-catering basis for £389 per person, including flights from Manchester to Kalamata on 15 May 2016 including transfers. To book see www.thomascook.com 0844 412 5970 or visit the nearest Thomas Cook or Co-operative Travel.

Symi

Best known for being an idyllic day trip from its big sister island – Rhodes – the island of Symi looks spectacular from the water, with its picture perfect port, steep cliffs and traditional architecture. During the Byzantine Empire, Symi was known for its sponge diving and ship building, fishing and viniculture. Developing the latter, the Symians built 120 wine presses all over the island, 11 of which have been reconstructed and are possible to visit by walking through the refreshing cypress forest of the area of Kourkounion.

Book Olympic Holidays who are offering a 7 night holiday from 9 September 2015 at the Irini Studios for £330 per person on a self-catering basis. These charming properties are traditionally styled Symian houses situated on a peaceful hillside area overlooking the picturesque harbour of Yialos. To book contact 020 8492 or see olympicholidays.com

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Rick Stein 'Venice to Istanbul' series of six episodes is aired on Fridays from 7 August on BBC 2 at 9.30 pm.

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