

Introduction

Greece

It is no coincidence that the Ionian islands and the Saronic Gulf south of Athens is one of the most popular charter areas in the world. The climate is good, the winters are mild and the summers are hot. Winds are also cool and predictable in the summer. The scenery is beautiful and is much greener than other Greek islands. The culture of the area has been influenced by Greek, Italian, British and Turkish cultures and the sailing area is sheltered. Distances between harbours are also short and price levels are good.

Chartering in Greece

Flotillas are a very popular way for families and beginners to experience sailing. There are usually 10-12 sailing boats in each flotilla, led by a lead boat with an experienced crew. The flotilla leaders help you with getting in and out of harbours and with any problems you may have with your boat. They also often arrange meals and festivities in the harbours the flotilla visits. Boats can gradually sail alone between harbours, meeting up again in the evenings at agreed locations and times.

Bareboat

Bareboat charters are for those who have enough experience to navigate the area by sail or engine. This type of boat charter lets you decide where you want to go. The range of boats available for bareboat charter is large and boats can be returned to the starting base or chartered one-way and delivered to another base. Good one-way charters in the Ionian Sea include Gouvia on Corfu to Lefkas/Paleiros to the south. There is usually an extra charge for a one-way-charter. Charter companies can also stock the boat with provisions before you arrive. A fee is charged for this.

Skipper

You can also charter a boat with skipper. A skippered boat lets you go wherever you want and at the same time frees you from being responsible for the boat. You should, however, be aware of the additional costs. A skippered boat is more expensive than a bareboat. Also note that the sailing skills of skippers do vary. You will also have to charter a bigger boat as you will need space for the skipper.

Trip suggestions

Those sailing for 1 week will want to see as much as possible without trying to see too much. Make sure you leave enough time to enjoy swimming, sunbathing and life at the tavernas in the evening. Those starting in Corfu can sail southwards to Paxos and Antipaxos and maybe to Párga, Moúrto or Plataría on the mainland on the way back. Those starting in Lefkas will almost certainly visit Nidri, Sívota and Meganísi and may even get as far as Fiskárdho on Kefallínia, on the way back calling at Vathí or Kíóni on Itháka. Those starting from Palairos or Vounaki will almost certainly call at the islands of Kálamos and Kastós and at the islands of Itháka, Lefkas and Meganísi on the way back.

Those chartering for 14 days from Corfu have time to explore Lefkas and the Inland Ionian Sea between Lefkas, Kefallínia and the mainland. Make sure you leave plenty of time for the trip back from Lefkas to Corfu. It is a long way and you can often meet headwinds. Those starting in Lefkas or Palairos/Vounaki can sail all the way down to Kefallínia and Zákynthos or explore more unknown parts of the mainland and the islands south of Astakós. You can also sail north to Párga, Paxos and Corfu. Birdwatchers may perhaps want to include the exciting wetlands of Órmos Valtóu east of Corfu or Nisis Petalas south of Astakós.

Another exciting area to explore is the Gulf of Pátras and Gulf of Corinth. You can also take a trip inland to Delphi, which may be the highlight of your holiday. Those starting in Athens (Pireus) can explore the Saronic Gulf and the islands of Salamis, Aígina, Póros, Hydra and Spetses. The ultimate challenge in this area is, however, sailing around The Peloponnese. This is a cruise of 600 nm and therefore too long for most.

Where you go will depend on what type of holiday you want to have. If you want to visit towns and cities and to shop, then you should visit Corfu town in the Ionian, Pátras and Corinth in the Gulf of Corinth and Athens in the Saronic Gulf. If you want to visit places that are busy and lively in the summer, then you should try Gouvia, Fiskárdho and Piraéus. Anchoring around the smaller islands is, however, perfect for those looking for peace and quiet. However, don't expect to be on your own, particularly in July, August and September. It quickly becomes full in the main summer months, particularly if you arrive at the same time as a flotilla. May, June and October are therefore much better months and temperatures are also much more comfortable.

A new travel destination for both cruising and land-based holidays is Albania, which is now really opening up to tourism. Albania has, however, few sailing facilities including just one marina, Marina Orikuim south of Vlorë. You can travel from the marina inland where the scenery is beautiful and the culture is exciting. Albania is definitely worth a visit when on your way between Croatia/Montenegro and Greece.

Tying up «Mediterranean style»

Boats in this area usually tie up bow or stern to quay and not alongside. Larger marinas lay out moorings with a line to quay or floating pontoons. You otherwise will need to tie up using your anchor. How you should tie up is specified on charts and pictures (see list of symbols p. 21).

Tie up as follows. Set out fenders and prepare lines before approaching the quay. Lay out plenty of anchor chain (minimum two-three boat lengths). Approach the quay at as close to 90 degrees as possible. This is not easy if there are crosswinds, as you will need enough speed to maintain steering. Let the chain run out freely until you are a half boat length from the quay. Then secure the chain and check that your anchor is dug in. Most boats tie up stern to quay. You may have to go in bow first if there is ballast along the quay. Prepare a stern anchor before

going in. Don't be afraid of a less than perfect arrival the first few times you try this. Everyone knows it requires a little practice.

Anchor tangling

Anchor chain tangling is normal in any busy harbour. You must therefore expect tangling sooner or later, despite everyone trying to avoid this. Talk to the skippers of the boats around you and decide how to unravel the mess. If you are the cause of the tangle, then your chain is on top and is usually easily solved by you leaving first on the following day. If your chain is under the chain of another boat and you want to leave first, then the boat with the chain above yours must pay out their chain as you raise your anchor. Pass a line under the other boat's chain and hold until your anchor is freed. The other boat's chain can then be released and re-tensioned. This is not a problem in calm weather. It is, however, much more challenging in winds. The boat which is going to remain must run their engine to keep the boat clear of the quay. Keep calm and agree with the other boats how to solve the problem. If flotilla boats are involved, then the flotilla skipper will normally help unravel the tangle in a dinghy.

How to get to the sailing area

You can fly to the airports on Corfu and at Préveza (between Párga and Lefkas), Kefallínia, Zákynthos and Kalamáta in The Peloponnese. Low price airlines and charter companies fly to these airports from May to October. Fly to Corfu and Athens and to Tirana in Albania outside of the summer season. You can take an express bus from Athens to Pátras (3 h) and to Igoumenítsa (5-6 h). Ferries run from Igoumenítsa to Kefallonia/Zákynthos and Corfu/Paxos. Express ferries also run from Corfu, Igoumenítsa and Pátras to Bari and Brindisi in Italy.

Life onboard

Water

Water is in short supply in the Mediterranean and particularly on the Greek islands. Some islands experience water shortages in the summer. The Ionian islands are, however, not as dry as the islands further east. Make sure you respect this and avoid wasting water. Washing down cockpits and decks with a couple of buckets of salt water is often as good as fresh water. Take a cloth, wring out in fresh water and dry off any remaining salt water.

Smaller harbours often have a water agent who handles water supply and payments. Water is normally included in the marina fees of larger marinas. Payment machines for water are also installed in some harbours. You should be very aware that not all water is fit for drinking. Stocking up with plenty of bottled water is therefore a wise move. This would be fine if you could be sure that the plastic disposable bottles were handled correctly after disposal. This is unfortunately not always the case. A better solution can therefore be investing in a couple of solid water cans which you can fill where there is a supply of good drinking water.

Fuel

It is normally not difficult to get hold of fuel in Greek harbours. Very few harbours have fuel pumps. You can however usually arrange fuel delivery to your boat by tanker truck. These trucks usually only carry diesel. Petrol must therefore be bought from nearby fuel stations. Keep, therefore, a couple of smaller fuel cans onboard.

Electricity

Electricity is usually available in all marinas and all but the smallest harbours. Supply is often included in marina fees. You pay for electricity in some harbours via payment machines. A separate payment is made in smaller harbours for electricity, where available. Connection is normally via a standard 220V 50 Hz 16 A connector. Other types of connectors are used at some places. Keep, therefore, a range of adapters onboard.

Electricity is only available in harbours. This can be a challenge when anchoring for modern boats with so much electric equipment. The sun shines almost all the time in Greece. Solar panels are therefore very useful in the summer. A 80-100 W panel usually provides enough electricity for a coolbox and for charging PC, tablets and mobile telephones. If you need to power more equipment or plan to remain at anchor for longer periods of time, then you should add one more panel, a windmill or generator.

Gas

Blue or green Camping Gas cylinders are available everywhere, except perhaps the very smallest villages. You exchange your empty cylinder with a full one. Switching to the larger (and cheaper) Greek cylinders can be more economical if you plan to stay in Greece for a longer period of time and have enough space to store them.

Spare parts, repairs and antifouling

Spare parts are easy to get hold of in the larger marinas. They can be ordered from Athens if not held in stock. Repairs are generally carried out quickly and professionally and at a price that is not higher than elsewhere in Europe. Access to these services is particularly good in Gouvia, Préveza, Lefkas, Aígina and the area around Athens. You can also have your boat lifted ashore to antifoul and carry out other work below the waterline. The marine growth period is long in the Mediterranean, even though salinity reduces the rate of growth. Get advice on what type of antifouling you should use. Type of antifouling will depend on whether your boat is laid up ashore for parts of the year. Local antifouling can be fine for boats in the water for 6-8 months of the year. It is far cheaper than the more well-known brands. Check with your boatyard which is best.

Charts and guides

The Harbour Guide series has been prepared to give you the best possible overview of the harbours in the area. Each harbour is described on a separate page, which should make finding your way around the book easier and leaves space for aerial photographs, chart extracts, descriptions of berthing, the harbour and area around.

Many islands are close together. You will therefore usually be able to navigate by sight. Visibility is, however, often reduced by heat haze to two to three nautical miles in the hot summer months.

Imray has a good paper chart series which covers the whole area. G1 is a planning chart for the Ionian Sea, The Peloponnese and the Saronic Gulf. G11 is a more detailed chart for the area from Corfu to Lefkas, G12 covers the area from Lefkas to Zakynthos and G13 covers the Gulfs of Patras and Corinth. G14 covers the Saronic Gulf and G16 and G15 the east and south coasts of The Peloponnese. Imray's G121 chart is a more detailed chart of the Ionian Inland Sea. The numbers of British Admiralty and Greek charts are given for each harbour.

For Albania, Standard Admiralty chart No 1590 (Ports in Albania) covers Dürres and Vlorë. There also are Italian charts of Albania. More information on this is given for each harbour.

Most boats today have a chartplotter. Skippers therefore navigate today using electronic charts and GPS. We should however add the following warning. Electronic charts from suppliers such as C-map and Navionics are getting better and better. DGPS also now has an accuracy of +/- 5 metres. These charts cannot, however, be trusted blindly. Your eyes and good paper charts are still the best aids for safe navigation. You should also make sure you have a backup-plan if your electronics fail.

Telephone and PC

Harbour Wi-Fi networks are, in general, only found in larger marinas. Many bars, cafes and tavernas, however, have Wi-Fi. A good investment is a repeater or wireless extender which amplifies Wi-Fi signals. If you want to connect to the Internet when anchored, then buy a SIM card and subscription from a local operator (Vodafone, Wind or Cosmote). Greek Cosmote has good coverage on the smaller islands.

Mooring lines

Keeping a couple of additional long and strong lines ready for tying up is a good measure. A lot of swell is not unusual in harbours due to winds or boat traffic, particularly harbours called at by ferries. A couple of strong steel springs are also a good investment for boats left in harbours during the winter where there is a lot of swell. You can alternatively buy other types of snubbers to protect lines when it blows hard. Tie your boat up well away from the quay or floating pontoon when leaving it for longer periods of time.

Rats and rubbish

Some harbours have had a problem with rats due to poor garbage collection and handling. This problem has now generally been solved. Some boats do, however, leave rubbish on quays to avoid the problem of smell onboard. This, of course, is not acceptable unless closed rubbish containers are available.

Popular harbours that have a rat problem include Mongonissi on Paxos, Abelike on the north side of Meganísi and Pera Pigadi

on Itháka. You should fit rat guards to your lines here. Rats are difficult to get rid of if they get onboard. They also soil and can create real problems with onboard electric equipment.

Formalities

All boats that arrive in Greece should fly the Greek courtesy flag on the starboard spreader and call at a Port of Entry as soon as possible. Ports of Entry in the Ionian are Kérkira town (Corfu), Préveza, Argostoli (on Kefallínia) or Zákynthos town. If you are arriving from outside of the EU, then go first to the immigration authority office for passport control, then the customs authority office and then Port Police. Passport control is not necessary if arriving from another EU country. EU citizens and Schengen area passport holders can remain in Greece as long as they want. These citizens are considered to be citizens of the country they are in after being there for more than 183 days. This means that they must pay tax to that country.

18 month rule

Boats which are registered in a non-EU country can remain in an EU country for 18 months. The boat must then leave the EU (in this area to Albania, Montenegro or Turkey) or the boat will be considered to have been imported to the EU and VAT will be due. A new 18 month period starts after a boat returns from outside of the EU. Make sure all formalities are correctly carried out when entering or leaving Greece and retain all documentation so that you are able to present proof that your boat has been outside the EU. It is also important to be able to present proof that VAT has been paid in your country of origin.

Boat documents required in Greece

All boats more than 10 metres long, which are based in an EU country, are to obtain a DEPKA from Port Police. Boats that are not registered in EU countries are to obtain a Transit Log from the custom authorities. These are now valid for 18 months and can be extended for a further 6 months.

Transit Log and DEPKA were previously checked by Port Police (the Greek Coastguard) on arrival at a harbour, when your boat was laid up onshore or when crew onboard is changed. This is, however, no longer necessary. Port Police now only check the documents of boats that arrive in Greece from a country outside the Schengen area (such as Albania) or once a year when your DEPKA or Transit Log is stamped and you pay Cruising Tax (see below).

Standard boat documents and certificates of competence

All boats are to be registered in their country of origin. Proof of this is to at all times be able to be presented. A radio licence for VHF/SSB and insurance papers (blue card) are to also always be able to be presented. Some form of documentation of crew competence is normally also required, ideally two of the crew. This can be a Certificate of Competence or other form of skipper/crew certification. This is not always checked. You should, however, have this. If you are chartering a boat, then contact your charter company.

All boat papers, including DEPKA and Transit Log, should be inserted in plastic sleeves and kept in a folder so that they easily can be presented to marinas and the authorities.

A new Cruising Tax was introduced in Greece on 1 January 2014. The new tax applies to all vessels irrespective of whether they are registered in the EU or not. Boats that have paid cruising tax are permitted to sail in Greek waters for one calendar year. Fees for a 7-8 m boat in 2014 were 200 Euro, 8-10 m 300 Euro and 10-12 m 400 Euro. The fee for boats of more than 12 m is 100 Euro per m and can be paid in instalments of 10 Euro/m per month. A discount of 30% per year is given to boats permanently based in Greece. It is still has not decided who should collect the tax and when it is to be collected.

The aim of this new tax is to simplify the system described above (DEPKA, Transit Log) and harmonize the fee system with countries north of Greece such as Montenegro, Croatia and Slovenia.

Climate, weather and winds

The Ionian Sea is known for hot summers and mild winds. You also do not need to fear the Meltemi in this area as it does not occur here (but does in the Cyclades and islands further E). The normal summer wind pattern is calm in the morning, NW winds (maistro) building up from two or three in the afternoon to force 3-4 in spring and autumn and force 5 in the summer and then dying out in the evening. Boats sailing northwards should therefore start early and motor until the wind starts. Those sailing southwards should wait until a little later in the day to benefit from the following wind. This pattern means nights at anchor are usually calm where sheltered from night winds.

There are, however, many exceptions to this pattern. A light SW or S wind sometimes blows in the morning. The NW wind sometimes doesn't start until late in the afternoon or early evening and sometimes blows all night even though calm weather is forecast. The very many islands and straits and the great height differences create major deviations from this pattern. A strong offshore night breeze can suddenly start and blow hard for 2-3 hours. A low pressure system moving in from W can lead to strong winds from SW to SE, although this only occurs occasionally in the period June - September. Wind conditions in the winter are far more unpredictable. You should therefore plan the day's sailing in winter based on the latest weather forecast.

The dominant summer wind direction in the Gulfs of Pátras and Corinth is from W. Winds start here in the middle of the day, reaching force 5-6 in July and August. Winds from NE can also blow around Corinth, veering to E as you move westwards in the Gulf. Winds in spring and autumn are often between E and W. Thunderstorms also sometimes occur, particularly in the Gulf of Pátras. Waterspouts also occur but are fortunately rare and easy to spot and avoid in daytime.

You are likely to come across the feared Meltemi in the Saronic Gulf and on the east coast of The Peloponnese. It is not as strong in these areas as in the Cyclades and blows from NE reaching force 4-5 and occasionally force 6. It usually starts occurring in July and stops occurring in October. The Meltemi can bring strong offshore gusts at Cape Soúion and in the approach to the Corinth canal. Reef early if you are in these waters. Winds, when the Meltemi is not blowing, are generally from S-SW, starting around midday, reaching force 2-4 during the afternoon and dying out in the evening.

The most common wind in the Hydra and Argolikos Gulfs is the Bouka Doura and blows from SE. It normally reaches force 3-5 and dies out in the evening. Sudden downbursts can occur around Astrous and reach force 6-7. Take the necessary precautions when tying up here for the night.

The S Peloponnese is between the large wind systems of the Ionian and Aegean seas. The dominant wind west of the Mani peninsula is from NW. You can, however, come across the Meltemi further to the east and particularly around Cape Maleas. The high mountains can create strong downbursts on their lee sides and particularly around Capes Tainaron and Maleas. Keep well off the shore here when the wind is from N. The weather can suddenly deteriorate when a low pressure moves into the strait between the Peloponnese and Crete. This occurs less often in the summer than in the autumn and spring. Keep a close eye on the weather forecast when sailing here early or late in the year. It is not uncommon for boats to have to turn around after rounding Cape Maleas because of strong headwinds.

Table of dominant wind directions and calm on Corfu and in Athens:

Corfu

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Okt	Nov	Dec
08.00 Hours	E-SE 30 %	E-SE 26 %	E-SE 19 %	SE 12 %	SE 10 %	NW 12 %	NW 14 %	NW 12 %	SE 13 %	SE 18 %	SE 25 %	SE 25 %
14.00 Hours	E-SE 28 %	E-SE 38 %	E-SE 40 %	E-SE 37 %	E-SE 29 %	NW 29 %	NW 32 %	NW 36 %	SE 25 %	SE 26 %	SE 32 %	SE 33 %
Calms	27 %	21 %	15 %	17 %	17 %	15 %	10 %	14 %	15 %	26 %	26 %	23 %

Athens

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Okt	Nov	Dec
08.00 Hours	NE 29 %	NE 24 %	NE 20 %	N-NE 18 %	S-SW 27 %	N-NE 29 %	N-NE 33 %	N-NE 35 %	N-NE 36 %	N-NE 28 %	N-NE 39 %	N-NE 34 %
14.00 Hours	N-NE 37 %	N-NE 37 %	S-SW 43 %	S 35 %	S-SW 58 %	S-SW 51 %	N-NE 43 %	N-NE 36 %	N-NE 42 %	S-SW 51 %	N-NE 34 %	S-SW 37 %
Calms	9 %	8 %	5 %	5 %	5 %	2 %	1 %	3 %	5 %	3 %	20 %	11 %

Watch out for downbursts (catabic winds) on the lee side of islands when wind pressure on the wind side of islands is strong enough. These winds can also occur in the evening when air at high altitudes cools and runs down towards the sea. It is stated for each harbour whether there is a risk of these winds. Tie up or anchor securely and draw your boat a little further from the quay or pontoon than normal where these winds can occur.

Fog and visibility

Fog is rare in these waters. It can occur in the waters around Corfu early in the morning, but usually disappears by the late morning. Heat haze can, however, reduce visibility to 2-3 nautical miles in July and August.

Currents and tides

A weak current runs northwards along the Ionian coast. It rarely exceeds 0.5 kn. The current can, however, run at up to 2 kn in the strait between Ríon and Andírrion and at 1-3 kn in the Corinth canal. Current direction usually follows wind direction.

The tidal range in this part of the Mediterranean is 0.2-0.3 m. Tidal range can, however, be affected by air pressure and wind. Tide levels are higher in low pressure and onshore winds (up to a 0.8 m range) and lower in high pressure and offshore winds.

Temperature

Table of average air and water temperatures on Corfu and in Athens:

Corfu

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Okt	Nov	Dec
Air temperature	10	11	14	17	22	26	28	29	24	20	16	13
Water temperature	15	15	15	16	18	21	23	25	24	22	18	16

Athens

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Okt	Nov	Dec
Air temperature	10	10	11	15	20	25	27	27	25	19	15	12
Water temperature	14	14	14	15	18	22	24	24	23	21	19	16

Note that the table gives average temperatures. It can therefore be much colder in the winter, temperatures below freezing not being uncommon in Athens and much hotter in the summer, temperatures in the 40s not being uncommon in August. Avoid coming here in August if you are troubled by the heat.

Weather forecasts

Weather forecasts are now available on the Internet. Many are, however, computer generated and not evaluated by a meteorologist. We have good experience with services such as windfinder.com which also forecast wave height and direction. The Greek sites poseidon.hcmr.gr and hnms.gr provide good graphical forecasts. Weatheronline.co.uk, weather.gr and passageweather.com are also used by many.

Weather forecasts are broadcast in Greek and English on VHF at 0600, 1000, 1600 and 2000 UTC (add two hours in winter and three in the summer). Forecast areas are North Ionio (Corfu to Kefallonia), South Ionio (Zákinthos to Kalamáta), Kithira Sea (Kalamáta to Kíthera), Patraikos (Gulf of Pátras), Korinthiakos (Gulf of Corinth), Saronikos and SW Aegan (for the area S of Athens). VHF channels are 02 (Kerkira), 27 (Kefallínia), 83 (Kalamáta), 85 (Kíthera), 85 (Pátras), 25 and 27 (Corinth), 25 (Parnis) and 04 (Siros) for the Saronic Gulf.

Gale warnings are also broadcast on channel 16. You can also receive the Italian weather forecast in the Ionian Sea on VHF, which is broadcast continuously in Italian and English on channel 68. Navtex users can use Kerkyra (K) on 518 KHz at 0540, 0940, 1740 and 2140 UTC.

Weather forecasts can also be heard on Radio Kerkyra (SVK) on 2830 KHz at 0633, 0903, 1533 and 2133 UTC. You can also watch weather forecasts on Greek TV after the news at 6 pm and 9 pm local time, often shown in local cafes and tavernas.

We, in the descriptions of shelter in each harbour, use the words weak or light wind for force 1-3, moderate wind for force 4-6 and strong wind for force 7 and higher. A harbour which provides shelter in moderate wind should not be used in strong winds.

Rescue services

All rescue services are coordinated by Piraéus Coastguard, which continuously monitors VHF channel 16 and MF 2182 kHz and can be reached by telephone on 210 411 2500. There is also a regional station in Pátras (tel. 2610 327136).

Language and abbreviations

Chart series are abbreviated as follows. Imray-Tetra: Imray, Greek charts: GR, British Admiralty chart: BA and The Italian Navy's hydrographical institute: IMM.

Nautical miles: nm, kilometre: km and metre: m.

We have in general used the local spellings and names of places. We have, in most cases, also included the names of Greek harbours in Cyrillic script. Abbreviations are also used in names. The most common are:

N: Nísis = island, Ák: Ákra = cape, Ó: Órmos = bay, K: Kólpos = gulf, Ag: Agios = saint. The accent shows where stress should be placed. Stress in Ákra is on the first syllable and on the last in Kastós.

Albania

Language, commercial life, history and culture

Albania, on the east side of the Adriatic, is bordered to the north by Montenegro to the south by Greece. Albania is called Shqipëria by Albanians, 'the land of the eagles'. The population was 3.3 million in 2011 and Albania covers an area of 28,750 square kilometres, which makes it a little smaller than Belgium. The country has a typical Mediterranean climate of mild winters and hot summers. Temperatures inland in July - August can be more than 40 degrees, while along the coast they are around 30 degrees. There can be snow in the mountains between November and March.

Albania is first and foremost an agricultural country. The most important products are grain, potatoes, sugar beet and tobacco. There is also some industrial activity in and around the largest towns (cement, chemical, natural gas and oil). Food is very similar to the food of Italy, with some local exceptions.

Most of the country's residents are ethnic Albanians. There is, however, a Greek minority in the south of the country. Albanian is one of the Indo-European languages and is related to Serbo-Croat and Romanian. 95 % of the population has Albanian as their mother tongue, 0.5 % have Greek as their native language.

This area was called Illyria in ancient times and extended from today's Greece all the way up to Slovenia. Albanians have managed to hold on to their language and culture despite Greek col-

onization and invasion by the Romans, Goths, Serbians, Slavic tribes, the Franks, Venetians and Ottoman Turks. Albanians are considered to be the oldest ethnic group in SE Europe.

Albania became a part of the Eastern Roman Empire (later Byzantine) after the Roman Empire split in two. The population then became Christian. The first attempts of independence came in 1388 when attacks by the Ottoman Empire were repulsed under the leadership of their national hero Skanderbeg. The Turks however managed to gain full control of the country in 1506, Albania remaining a part of the Ottoman Empire until independence in 1912. The majority of the population converted to Islam in this period, primarily for financial reasons. Around 70 % of the population is today Muslim, 20 % are orthodox and 10 % are Catholics.

Albania attempted until 1939 to develop into a modern European state, first as a republic and then as a monarchy. World War 2 however stopped this progress. The country became a war zone and was under Italian, Greek, Italian and finally German occupation. This is brilliantly described in the novel 'Chronicle in Stone' by the Albanian author Ismail Kadare. The communists took power after the war and under the leadership of Enver Hoxha became more and more isolated. All tourism stopped and so did the economic development of the country. Mines were laid along the coast and all leisure boats were prohibited.

Hoxha's death in 1985 and the collapse of the communist party in 1990-91 led to democratic elections. This unfortunately did not lead to stability and prosperity. A new crisis occurred in 1997-98 when a governmental Ponzi scheme resulted in many Albanians losing everything they owned. Instability and unrest broke out across the country again and many fled to Italy and Greece. The situation stabilized in 2005, thanks to the assistance of other countries. Albania today promotes tourism, particularly in the south of the country.

Life onboard, currency and communication

Albania heavily promotes tourism, but not boat tourism. The country therefore has just one marina, Marina Orikum, south of Vlorë. Harbours are otherwise not adapted to leisure boat needs. Many boats therefore still sail past Albania on their way south or north between Greece and Montenegro/Croatia. Rumours of a complicated bureaucracy, old mine fields and widespread crime still hold sway. There are however no grounds for this. All passing boats should take the opportunity to visit this beautiful country and experience the country's old culture and hospitable people. The capital Tirana and the resort town of Sarandë now have pavement cafes where young people meet, just like any other European city. There are, however, still isolated villages where time seems to have stood still. The coast is totally unspoilt and totally free of all litter and other pollution. There are long sandy beaches at the north end of the coast and steep mountains and cliffs which plunge down into the crystal clear water at the south end.

There are, along the Albanian coast, also commercial harbours where you can tie up and idyllic bays where you can anchor (where you often will be alone). Be aware that filling water or diesel in harbours may not be straightforward. Check with your agent whether they can help you.

The currency in the country is the Lek. The exchange rate in March 2017 was 135 Lek for 1 Euro, 127 Lek for 1 US dollar and 158 Lek for 1 British pound. There are cash dispensers in most larger towns. Exchange money at official currency exchange offices (Kambim Valuator). Banks opening times are 8.30 am – 2.30 pm (Mon-Fri). Post offices are open 8 am – 4 pm (Mon-Sat).

There are three mobile telephone networks in the country, AMC, Vodafone and Eagle. There is almost always an Internet cafe with Wi-Fi in all but the very smallest places. If you are calling locally, dial the international dialling code for Albania of 00 355 followed by the local telephone number dropping the first 0. The number for the Police is 129 and ambulance 127. If you need an ambulance, then it is often better to call a taxi and say 'tek urgjenca' to the taxi driver, who will drive you to the nearest doctor, emergency clinic or hospital.

Formalities

All EU citizens and EFTA citizens (EEA) and citizens of the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand can visit Albania without a visa. Stays in the country are limited to 90 days. If you want to stay longer, then you must apply for a residence permit at the local police station. Passports should be valid for 6 months when entering the country.

When arriving by boat, call up the first harbour you intend to proceed to after entering Albanian territorial waters, which is 12 nm from the coast. Call up on VHF channel 16 or the working channel for the harbour. Port of Calls are, from north to south, Sjingjin (VHF 16, 71), Durrës (VHF 16, 10 or 15), Vlorë (VHF 16 and 12 – but you can now proceed directly to Marina Orikum VHF 15 and 12) and Sarandë (VHF 16 and 11). Enter the harbour flying the yellow Q flag and the Albanian courtesy flag on the starboard spreader. Your agent, if contacted in advance, will often meet your boat as it arrives in the harbour. Tie up to the designated berth. Remember also to notify the harbour authorities when leaving the harbour. It's easy to forget. Notify well before you plan to leave, so that the harbour authorities are ready to clear you.

Leisure boats in Albania often use an agent for all contact with the authorities, in the same way as used by commercial shipping. This system seems to work well and makes things easier for visitor boats. There is, of course, a charge for this which is usually 30-50 Euro. The telephone numbers and email addresses of agents we have been recommended or used ourselves are given for each harbour. Agents will be waiting for you when you arrive and will lead you to a free space. You can, if are not happy with your berth, ask to be moved. This may not, however, be granted.

Fees vary from harbour to harbour but are generally reasonable. Remember to get a receipt so that you can show you have paid all fees, or you may incur problems at the next harbour.

Harbour conditions also change all the time. The visitor harbour symbols used in charts and pictures from Albania must therefore be seen as being only an indication.

The boat documents you will need to present are: the boat's registration papers, insurance papers (blue card), VHF licence, documentation of the skipper's competence, crew lists (first name, last name, nationality, passport number and position onboard – captain or crew) and passport or ID card.

Climate, weather and wind

The north Albanian coast from the border with Montenegro to Cape Gjuhëzës is shallow with a low plain behind. The coast is steep and inaccessible south of Cape Gjuhëzës to the border with Greece, mountains rising here to almost 1000 m straight up from the shore. The 362 km long coast can be seen as been unsafe and exposed to NW-SW winds. There is no archipelago or islands which provide natural shelter from winds. Sailing along this the coast therefore requires good planning.

Cape Rodine can provide reasonable shelter from winds from N or S. Durrës is a safe harbour, but is not adapted to the needs of leisure boats. Gjiri in Vlorës is a deep bay which faces NW. At the innermost end of the bay is Albania's only marina, Marina di Orikum, a joint Albanian-Italian project. The marina, Palermo bay further south and to a certain extent Gjiri in Sarandës just NE of Corfu are the only really safe harbours in Albania. Prepare, therefore, for long passages of up to 60-70 nm if you want to sail in the daytime along the Albanian coast and tie up in a safe harbour at night.

The winds that blow along this coast are the same as those in the Adriatic. They have the following Italian names. S and SE winds: Scirocco, SW winds: Garbi or Libeccio, W winds: Punente and NW winds: Maestro. The wind from SW (Garbi/Libeccio) is the most feared along the Albanian coast. This

is because there is only one place you can find shelter from it and that is Gjiri in Vlorës. This wind is, however, quite rare in the summer. The warning signs are the same as for the Bora, cloud formation above mountains combined with falling barometer pressures.

The north part of the country is exposed to the feared Bora, which blows down from the mountains to NE. The Bora can be very strong in the Gulf of Drin and a steep and uncomfortable sea can occur close to land despite the Bora being an offshore wind. Warning signs are the accumulation of clouds just above the mountain tops or right below. The Bora starts in clear weather, lasts usually 2-3 days, but sometimes not as long. If it starts in cloudy weather, then it can last even longer.

Albania has no dedicated weather forecasting service for leisure boats. Try therefore to get hold of the latest weather forecast in the harbour you leave or use one of the many Internet based services. You may be able to pick up the Italian weather service which broadcasts continuously on VHF channel 68 (Metemora). You can, at the north end of the country, pick up the weather forecast from Bar Radio (Montenegro) on VHF 24 (16.20 or 22.50) or Dubrovnik Radio (Croatia) on VHF 04 and 07 (08.25, 15.20 and 23.20). At the south end of the country you can try Kerkyra Radio (Corfu) on VHF 0 (06.00, 10.00, 16.00 and 22.00). You can also use the Internet weather forecast services stated for Greece in the text above.

The coastal current normally runs N at just 0.1-0.2 kn. Current speed can be affected by winds that are constant over a period of time. The N running current is intensified by a Scirocco or Libeccio and can reach 1-2 kn. Current is however reduced or even turned by a Bora or Maestro. The tidal range is small, normally 0.2-0.3 m.

Albania has the following coastal radio stations. They are, from north to south: Shengjin (VHF 16, 71), Durrës (VHF 16, 22), Vlorë (VHF 16, 11) and Sarandë (VHF 16, 06). These operate 24/7. Albania uses the IALA system A of buoyage, as used by most other European countries. However, you should be aware that not all buoys are always in place or in the correct position.



Per Hotvedt