



# reading

G R E E C E

## BOOKS ABOUT GREECE / 1

When you're visiting Greece, don't forget sunscreen and a good book. If you're in the mood for fiction, our reading recommendations include a feminist take on ancient Greek myths, a modern romance that entranced readers around the world, and a page-turner featuring a bad-tempered Greek detective who is in love with language. There are also some outstanding nonfiction histories of ancient and modern Greece, powerful depictions of Greece's Jewish community, and a memoir that makes growing up on a Greek Island sound like something close to paradise.

### Fiction

Margaret Atwood. *The Penelopiad* (2005)

Atwood puts the women of ancient Greece into the foreground in this retelling of Homer's *Odyssey*, this time told through the perspective of Penelope, rather than that of her husband Odysseus. Noted classics scholar Mary Beard described the book as "brilliant."

Louis de Bernières. *Corelli's Mandolin* (1994)

Readers embraced this tale of ill-fated lovers set on a Greek island occupied by the Italian army during World War II. In 2004, British readers voted it one of their top 20 novels of all time. It was made into a somewhat less successful movie starring Nicholas Cage and Penélope Cruz.

Homer. *The Iliad and The Odyssey* (8th century)

Scholars still debate who Homer was and whether he really wrote these two epic poems. What is agreed is that these are central texts in the development of ancient Greek literature and indeed of literature as a whole. *The Iliad* tells of a single week during the Greeks' ten-year siege of Troy. Caroline Alexander's 2015 translation is highly recommended as is Emily Wilson's 2017 translation of *The Odyssey*, which recounts the story of Odysseus as he makes his way back from the Trojan War to his wife Penelope.

Nikos Kazantzakis. *Zorba the Greek* (1946)

The movie version helped make this the most well-known novel by Greece's most famous novelist. A Greek intellectual spends a year on the island of Crete with Zorba, a decidedly non-intellectual "lover, fighter, adventurer, musician, chef, miner, storyteller, and dancer." *Time* magazine called this novel about living life to the fullest "nearly plotless but never pointless."

Christos Ikononou. *Something Will Happen, You'll See* (2010)

These short stories look into the lives of Athens' working class in the wake of the economic crisis of 2008. They paint a bleak but powerful portrait of a Greece that is very different from the sun-filled paradise that visitors usually encounter.



# reading

## BOOKS ABOUT GREECE / 2

Artemis Leontis (ed). *Greece, A Traveler's Literary Companion* (1997)

*Kirkus Reviews* called this a "first-rate" introduction into modern Greek literature. Leontis has chosen 24 short stories, prose poems, and nonfiction snippets to showcase a variety of Greek writers, including Nobel Prize winners Odysseus Elytis and George Seferis.

Petros Markaris. *Che Committed Suicide* (2009)

*The Independent* said that the detective novels featuring the grumpy, dictionary-loving Inspector Costas Haritos "turn the hero's sleuthing into a spotlight on a fast-changing Greek society." In this story, set during the Athens Olympics of 2004, Haritos investigates whether the suicide of a shady entrepreneur is somehow linked to the Greek military dictatorship of 1967-1974.

Mary Renault. *The King Must Die* (1958)

Renault's historical novels based on Greek mythology were lauded by fans, critics, and President John F. Kennedy. The *New York Times* described *The King Must Die*, which reimagines the life and adventures of the hero Theseus, as "one of the truly fine historical novels of modern times."

Rick Riordan. *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* (2005)

Riordan's books about Greek gods in the modern world has made a generation of children and young adults into experts on Hercules, Zeus, and all manner of Greek mythology. There are many options if you or your children are looking for more traditional but still entertaining retellings of Greek legends including *Atticus the Storyteller* (2002) by Lucy Coats, and Stephen Fry's *Mythos* (2017) and *Heroes* (2018).

### Non-Fiction

Erika Kounio-Amariglio. *From Thessaloniki to Auschwitz and Back* (2000)

The author and her family were among the first Greek Jews to be deported to Auschwitz. She tells the story of her suffering and survival which included two and a half years in the camp, her escape to Yugoslavia, and eventual return to Greece. *The Holocaust in Salonika: Eyewitness Accounts* (2002), edited by Steven Bowman, features the three Jewish leaders from Salonika explaining in their own words their experiences during the Holocaust.

Roderick Beaton. *Greece: Biography of a Modern Nation* (2019)

*The Wall Street Journal* called this a "splendid ... focused, lively and clear" history of the Greek people in modern times. Beaton writes with compassion about the terrible human costs of Greece's War of Independence from the Ottoman Empire, the Nazi occupation, and the 1946-49 Civil War. But he also looks at the vibrancy of Greece's modern culture, the resilience of its people, and the strength of its democracy.



# reading

## BOOKS ABOUT GREECE / 3

Gerald Durrell. *My Family and Other Animals* (1956)

For decades, schoolchildren have laughed and been enthralled by the naturalist Durrell's memories of his wonderful childhood spent on the island of Corfu just before World War II. The Guardian called it a "literary masterpiece that remains the finest evocation of paradise ever written."

K.E. Fleming. *Greece: A Jewish History* (2008)

The first major English-language history of Greek Jews, this book follows their story from Greek independence in the early 19th century to the post-Holocaust era, when many of the remaining Greek Jews relocated to Israel and America. The UCLA Center for Jewish Studies called the book "an incredible – and moving – reading experience."

Nicholas Gage. *Eleni* (1993)

Gage, a renowned US journalist, was born in a small village in Greece. This award-winning memoir recounts the story of his family during World War II and the Civil War 1946-49, which included the execution of his mother by Communist fighters. Decades later, Gage returned to Greece to look for the people who murdered his mother. *The New York Review of Books* called *Eleni* "a devoted and brilliant achievement."

Thomas R. Martin. *Ancient Greece: From Prehistoric to Hellenistic Times* (1996)

A clearly written and comprehensive introduction to ancient Greece, from the Stone Age to the collapse of the empire built by Alexander the Great. Martin highlights the cultural achievements of Athens during its Golden Age and its demise as a great power as a result of its 27-year war against Sparta.

Mark Mazower. *Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims and Jews 1430-1950* (2004)

Today, when we visit Thessaloniki (Salonica), it can seem like an archetypical modern Greek city. Mazower shows that not long ago it was actually ruled by the Ottomans and was one of Europe's most diverse societies. He explores what became of the Muslim minarets that dominated the skyline and the dynamic, diverse Jewish population which once formed the majority of its population.

Mark Mazower. *Inside Hitler's Greece: The Experience of Occupation, 1914-44* (1994)

*Foreign Affairs* magazine described this as a "gripping, readable, and human account" of a terrible period in Greek history. Mazower looks at the brutality of the German occupation, the starvation that struck local people, the near-destruction of Greek Jewry, the ferocity of the Greek resistance movement, and finally, he examines the civil war that engulfed the nation after the Nazis fled.