

Climate

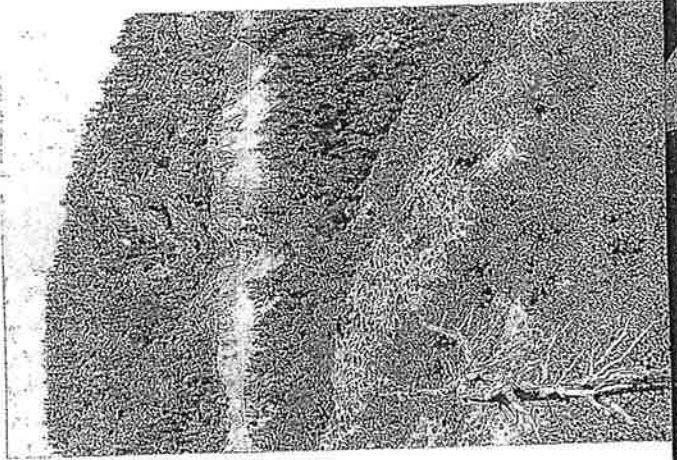
The summers in Greece are generally hot and dry, and the winters mild and wet. However, temperature and rainfall patterns vary considerably between island groups, and between coastal and mountainous regions. In winter, the average January temperature in Thessaloniki is around 6 °C, although it can drop as low as -4 °C. In Athens it averages 10 °C.

Summer temperatures tend to vary less, averaging 28 °C in July but often reaching highs of 40 °C. In northern and mountainous regions the winter often brings heavy snowfalls, and on a winter's day Crete's high peaks may have snow on them although the sea below is warm enough for swimming.

Forest fires

Greece's hot, dry summer months bring the threat of forest fires. Following devastating fires in 1998, the number of firemen, fire stations and amount of fire-fighting equipment available in high-risk areas was vastly increased. The authorities run seminars for people living near forests explaining how to combat the danger of fire. Every summer, posters, billboards and announcements on television warn against the risk of fires. As a result, since the late 1990s, the loss of forest land and vegetation to fire has dropped dramatically.

► A mountain pass winds through conifer woods in central Greece.



Earthquakes

Greece lies on more than one fault line in the earth's crust and mild tremors are not uncommon. One fault line runs from north to south along the west coast of Greece and down to the Peloponnese. In 1986 Kalamata and some surrounding villages were devastated by an earthquake that left over 12,000 people homeless. Many buildings, poorly constructed in the 1960s, were destroyed. In 1999 Athens was hit by an earthquake that made thousands homeless but fortunately caused few deaths. The Greek army is well trained to act swiftly in providing emergency shelter, water and relief supplies.

► Looking at this peaceful scene it is hard to imagine that parts of Greece lie on fault lines and have experienced damaging earthquakes.



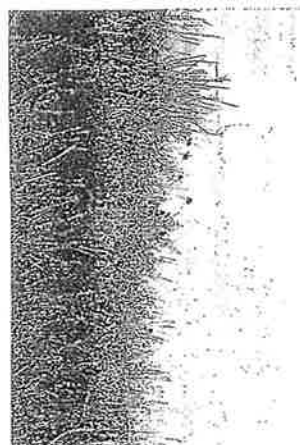
IN THEIR OWN WORDS



'I'm Grigoris Mihos. I'm 13 years old and I live in a village near the town of Préveza, on the west coast of Greece. There are very high mountains all around us. Look, even now in May, you can see snow on them. Our water comes from the mountains. It rains a lot here so we rarely have problems with water shortages, but I know it's a problem for many villages, especially if there are factories or industries in the area that use a lot of water. We're lucky. In summer it gets very hot here, and the mosquitoes are a great nuisance, especially around the marshy lands a little further south.'

Landscape and Climate

Greece is Europe's southernmost country. Situated at the end of the Balkan landmass, mainland Greece forms a peninsula jutting out into the Mediterranean Sea. Greece is also an archipelago of some 2,000 islands, although only 170 of them are inhabited. It is a country of very varied landscape and climate. Tourist postcards usually depict its sandy beaches, blue seas and hot sunshine, but in fact three-quarters of Greece is mountainous country, and its winters can be very cold and wet.

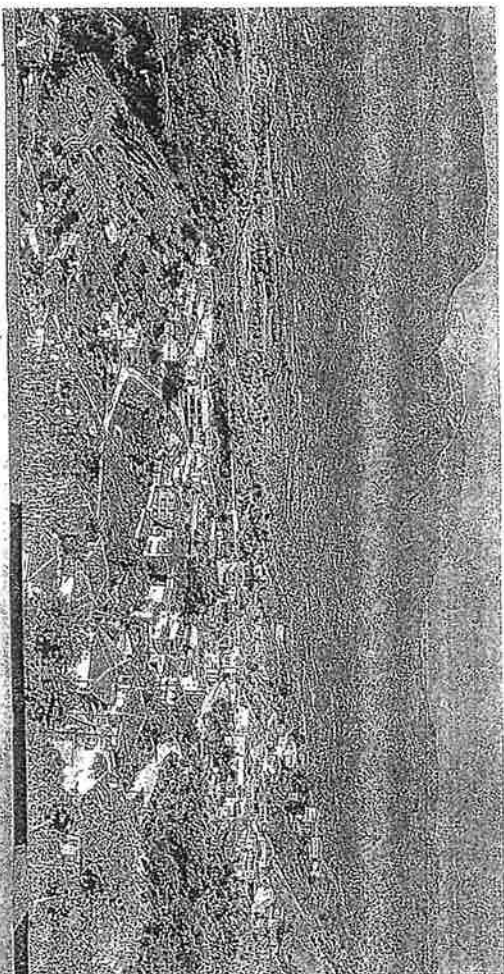


▲ Land rising up steeply from the sea is typical of much of the Greek coastline.

Mountains
The Pindus Mountains, running north to south, form the backbone of mainland Greece. In the north-east, creating the border with Bulgaria, are the wooded Rhodope Mountains. Other mountains include the Taygetus in the Peloponnese, and the White Mountains of Crete.

Greece's mountains form many steep cliffs and deep, narrow gorges with rivers below. Their slopes may be forested with beech, oak, chestnut and pine, or covered with dense, thorny scrub. Elsewhere, as in the Mani region of the Peloponnese, the limestone slopes are dry, rocky and barren, resembling stony deserts.

▼ A hillside village in the Epirus. In early May the lower slopes provide rich pasture land while the peaks above often still have snow.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS



'My name is Grigoris Kitsoullis. I'm 82 years old. I have lived all my life in this village, Polystiayillo, in the Epirus. When I was young, I used to go hunting in the woods for rabbits and birds. These were luxury foods for our family. Many people around here used to hunt. They hunted wild boar, wolves, foxes and rabbits. There aren't many animals in the woods today. In 20 years' time, this will be an abandoned place. The houses will only be used as holiday homes. Nobody will take care of the landscape and the wilderness will return.'

'The climate is changing, too. We used to have much more snow in the past. It doesn't seem to snow so often here, and it rains a lot less, too. It often used to rain for 10 to 20 days at a time. That's rare today.'

Lowlands

Most of Greece's lowlands stretch along its coastal areas. The main inland lowlands are the plains of Thessaly in central Greece, Macedonia in the north and Thrace in the north-east. Fertile lowlands are also found in the Peloponnese.

Islands

The landscape of the Greek islands is very varied. The Ionian Islands off the west coast of Greece, which include Corfu and Cephalonia, are green and comparatively lush due to heavy winter rainfall. In contrast, the Cyclades islands in the Aegean Sea are rocky, dry and wind-swept. Crete combines high and peaks with lower green slopes and fertile plains.

▼ A view across the Gulf of Corinth to mainland Greece. In the foreground are olive trees and tall, dark cypresses, which are typical of the Greek landscape.

