Tour Code
IG10

ADVENTURESABROAD

AN IONIAN ODYSSEY

Corfu, Paxos, Lefkada, Ithaki & Kefalonia

13 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Corfu

Homer knew this island. He called it a distant paradise, a place where the soil was rich and the people gentle, and where a shipwrecked stranger might wash ashore and be received with kindness. For the Greeks who came after him, Corfu occupied a specific position in the imagination: the westernmost edge of their world, the last landfall before open sea.

We begin here too — on the emerald island that guards the entrance to the Adriatic, where the air carries traces of olive blossom and the harbour bells still ring on the hour. Unlike the rest of Greece, Corfu passed through four centuries of Venetian rule, then briefly French, then British, before returning to Greek hands in 1864. That layered history is written into the fabric of the capital — in its arcaded promenades and its Catholic campaniles and its cricket pitch on the Esplanade, that small implausible inheritance from the British period.

Tonight we gather for our welcome dinner and raise a glass to the journey ahead. We are, in a sense, following a very old itinerary. The islands we will visit over the next two weeks were known to Homer, sailed by Odysseus, contested by Venetians, and shaped by every civilization that has ever looked westward from the Greek mainland..

Overnight in Corfu.

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 2 Corfu Town & Fortress

The Old Town of Corfu is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the designation is warranted — this is the most complete surviving example of Venetian urban planning in the eastern Mediterranean. But the label can mislead. This isn't a preserved quarter behind a fence. People live here, hang their washing between the kantounia, argue in the kafeneions, and treat the Venetian architecture as simply the walls of their neighbourhood.

We spend the morning on foot, threading those narrow alleyways between ochre-plastered mansions and Byzantine chapels. The Old Fortress occupies a promontory at the eastern edge of town — originally Byzantine, substantially rebuilt by the Venetians, who carved a moat through solid rock to make it an island within an island. From the ramparts, the logic of Corfu's history becomes clear: whoever held this position controlled the shipping lanes between the Adriatic and the Ionian.

The Campiello district is the medieval heart of the old town, and the right way to see it is slowly. Garden squares appear without warning. A chapel opens into unexpected darkness. The Liston arcade — modelled on the Rue de Rivoli in Paris, built during the French interregnum — runs along the edge of the Esplanade and remains the social centre of town.

The afternoon is unstructured. The kumquat liqueur, if you're curious, is worth trying once.

Overnight on Corfu.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Corfu Island Discovery

The view from Kanoni Peninsula is one of those images that has been photographed so many times it risks arriving pre-consumed. We go anyway, because the reality earns it — the tiny islet of Pontikonisi sitting in its green lagoon, the monastery on its rock, the low light of a Mediterranean morning doing what Mediterranean light does. Homer's Odyssey identifies this as Odysseus's ship, turned to stone by Poseidon in punishment for its crew's safe delivery of the hero. Make of that what you will.

The Archaeological Museum holds the Gorgon Pediment from the Temple of Artemis — a piece of Archaic Greek sculpture that stops you in a room. It dates to around 580 BC and depicts Medusa in the moment before Perseus takes her head. For an object nearly 2,600 years old, it has not lost its force.

We continue to Paleokastritsa, where the cliffs are limestone and the water is the colour water sometimes achieves in the Ionian. The 13th-century monastery above the bay has been watching these coves since the Byzantines built it. Local tradition holds this as the bay where Odysseus met Nausicaa — the young princess who found the shipwrecked king and, without making it obvious, fell in love with him. Homer handled the scene with characteristic tact.

Our final stop is Lakones village, 180 metres above the sea, where the view west over the bay is worth the drive.

Overnight in Corfu.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Corfu - Ferry to Paxi

The ferry south takes roughly an hour and a half, and the effect on arrival is immediate. Paxi is eight miles long and has no airport, no large hotels, and no fast-food establishments. The Venetians planted the olive groves — an estimated 300,000 trees — and the stone walls that divide them are still standing. This is what the Ionian looked like before tourism discovered it.

Greek myth offers one explanation for the island's existence: Poseidon struck his trident against the southern tip of Corfu and broke off this piece of chalky rock to make a private retreat for himself and his consort Amphitrite. A more resonant tradition places Ogygia — the island of the nymph Calypso, where Odysseus was held for seven years — somewhere in these western waters. Paxi, small and seductive and slightly removed from the world, wears that identification well. We're not making a scholarly claim. We're noting that this is exactly the kind of island where a man might lose track of time.

We arrive in Gaios, the main harbour town, in time to settle in and find our bearings. This afternoon and tomorrow morning offer the chance for an optional walk: the Loggos to Monodendri Beach trail, a gentle 3 km point-to-point route with vehicle support, ascending about 120 metres through olive groves before descending to a beach of exceptional clarity. Vehicle support is provided throughout.

Tonight's dinner draws on what the island does best: vegetables from the kitchen gardens, oil from the ancient trees, seafood from the day's catch.

Overnight on Paxi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Paxi Boat Trip & Leisure Time

This morning we take to the water on a private boat, which is the correct way to understand Paxi's coastline. From the sea, the island presents its western face: white cliffs dropping straight into the Ionian, punctuated by sea caves and arches carved by centuries of winter storms. Some of the caves are navigable by small boat, and we go in.

Anti-Paxi lies a short distance south — a satellite island with two beaches of particular quality and a small vineyard that produces a red wine consumed almost entirely on the spot. We anchor, swim, and take stock of our position. The water temperature in late May is around 22°C. The clarity is considerable.

Back on the main island, lunch at a waterfront taverna, then the afternoon at Paxi pace. There is genuinely nothing scheduled. The olive groves are available for wandering. The harbour caffès are open. If you have identified a cove from this morning's boat trip that you'd like to return to independently, the afternoon is for that.

Odysseus spent seven years on Calypso's island, we are told, weeping for home while also, it must be said, not leaving. We have one day. We hope it's sufficient.

Overnight: Paxi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Paxi - Ferry to Lefkada

The crossing south to Lefkada takes approximately three hours and crosses open Ionian water — the geography of our route becomes legible from the deck. We have been moving south, island to island, and the chain of the Ionian Islands runs with us, parallel to the Greek mainland, each one separated by channels that were, for millennia, among the busiest sea lanes in the Mediterranean.

Lefkada is anomalous in this company. Every other Ionian island is genuinely insular — surrounded by water, shaped by isolation, oriented toward the sea. Lefkada is connected to the mainland by a causeway. It can be reached by road. This has given it a different character: more accessible, more cosmopolitan, less defined by the inwardness that shapes island culture elsewhere. Where Paxi developed in deliberate remove from the world, Lefkada stayed in conversation with it.

We base ourselves near Vasiliki in the island's south, well positioned for tomorrow's touring and close to the ferry connection that carries us onward. The harbour at Vasiliki is known internationally as a windsurfing destination — the afternoon thermal conditions here are among the most consistent in Europe, which explains the rigs.

Overnight in Lefkada.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Lefkada Island Touring

We begin in Lefkada Town, where the Castle of Agia Mavra guards the narrow channel at the causeway's edge. The Franks built the original fortification in 1294; the Venetians improved it; the Ottomans held it briefly; the British administered it. The walls have the particular quality of structures that have passed through many hands.

The town's Archaeological Museum is compact — four rooms — but well curated, tracing occupation of this site from Paleolithic settlements through to Roman-period villas. The evidence for continuous habitation across that span is the kind of thing that recalibrates your sense of time.

We then head inland, following mountain roads through the island's interior to Nydri Falls, where streams from the upper slopes drop through forested gorges into clear pools. The trail is short and the shade welcome. From here we continue climbing to Exanthia village, perched above the western coastline, where a small winery produces wines from grapes grown at altitude — the elevation brings both cool nights and intense sun, a combination the vines appear to appreciate.

Our final stop is Englouvi, at 700 metres the highest inhabited village on Lefkada, which has been growing lentils since at least the Byzantine period. They are held, by those with opinions about lentils, to be among the finest in Greece. August brings a festival; we are here in late May, which is quieter.

Overnight Lefkada.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Lefkada - Ferry to Ithaki

The ferry to Ithaki is short — perhaps an hour — and the approach to Vathi harbour is one of the more satisfying arrivals in the Ionian. The harbour is almost completely enclosed, a near-circular bay surrounded by hills, the town arranged along the waterfront in the manner of a natural amphitheatre. Ships have been putting in here for a very long time.

Ithaki is where this journey has been pointed. The whole arc of the island-hopping route — the first landfall at Corfu, the pause at Paxi, the mainland-connected interlude at Lefkada — has been building toward this. In Homer's telling, Ithaki is the destination that gives the entire Odyssey its meaning: not just a place but a principle, the thing that makes ten years of wandering worth enduring.

The modern island is small — about 96 square kilometres — and carries its mythology lightly. There are no large tourist facilities and no cruise ship berths. What it has is rugged interior landscape, a network of old paths, and the particular atmosphere of a place that knows it is significant without needing to announce it.

This afternoon we ascend to Moni Katharon, the Monastery of Panagia Kathariotissa, built in the late 1600s at 600 metres on the peak Homer called Mount Nirito. The views extend across the southern reaches of the island and over the straits to Kefalonia. It is a good place from which to take stock of where we are.

Overnight: Ithaki.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Ithaki; Following Odysseus

The Ancient Acropolis of Aetos occupies a clifftop peninsula in Ithaki's narrow central isthmus — a dramatically sited Bronze Age settlement that tradition has long identified as the location of Odysseus's palace. Recent excavations have turned up foundations and artifacts consistent with the period Homer describes. The identification remains debated, as these things tend to be. What is not debatable is the view: across the channel to Kefalonia in one direction, down into the enclosed harbours of Ithaki in the other. A king who built here knew what he was doing.

The island's path network is one of its underappreciated assets — old routes through working olive groves and along dry-stone walls that have not been adjusted for tourism. We walk some of this in the morning, threading through a landscape that has changed in its particulars but not in its essential character since the Bronze Age.

This afternoon, those who wish to continue on foot have the option of a gentle walk to the Cave of the Nymphs — the Marmarospilia, a natural grotto above Vathi that Homer identifies as the place where Odysseus concealed his treasure on his return home. The route from town takes about forty minutes each way, ascending through olive groves on a well-marked path before arriving at the cave entrance, where fig trees have taken root in the collapsed roof. It is not a strenuous walk. It is, however, a satisfying one — the kind where the destination earns its arrival.

Those preferring a quieter afternoon might explore Vathi's Archaeological and Ethnographic Museum, housed in traditional buildings around the port, or simply take the harbour at face value: the light on the water, the boats, the specific stillness that Ithaki offers and that Odysseus, apparently, found so difficult to leave.

Overnight on Ithaki

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Ithaki - Ferry to Kefalonia

The crossing takes about two and a half hours, and the shift in scale is apparent before we dock. Kefalonia is the largest of the Ionian Islands — nearly ten times the size of Paxi, substantially larger than Ithaki — and it presents itself accordingly. The mountains are higher, the coastline more varied, the towns more substantial. After the intimacy of Ithaki, the effect is almost cinematic.

This is the epilogue. In narrative terms, Kefalonia is what comes after homecoming — the largest and most complex chapter, where the story opens beyond the scope of any single myth. The island's history is too dense for one thread to contain: Mycenaean settlements, Roman occupation, Byzantine churches, Venetian fortifications, Ottoman raids, French administration, British rule, and then the 1953 earthquake that levelled most of it and required the island to rebuild almost from nothing.

We begin at the Robola Winery Cooperative in the island's interior. Robola grapes grow only on Kefalonia's limestone slopes — the grape is technically permitted in one or two other small areas of Greece but the variety has found its home here. The Venetians prized the wine enough to export it; the cooperative, established in 1983, continues a production tradition that predates them. We taste, we consider, we proceed.

The afternoon settles us into Argostoli, the rebuilt capital on the island's western bay — a working port town with ferries to Athens and Italy, good tavernas, and the particular energy of a place that had to start again within living memory and chose to do so with some confidence.

Overnight Kefalonia

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Kefalonia's Geological Wonders

Kefalonia sits on a limestone shelf of considerable age and complexity, and the underground landscape is as dramatic as anything on the surface. We begin at Drogarati Cave, a chamber system that has been developing for roughly 150 million years. The formations — stalactites, stalagmites, curtains of calcite — are the product of patient geology, and the space is large enough that Maria Callas performed a concert here in 1963. The acoustics, it is reported, were exceptional.

Melisani Lake is a different kind of wonder. The lake is underground — covered, until part of the roof collapsed in antiquity, creating an opening through which midday sunlight now falls directly onto the water. We cross it in small flat-bottomed boats, entering the unroofed chamber where the colour of the water shifts as the angle of light changes. The lake connects, via underground channels, to seawater absorption sinkholes on the island's western coast — a hydrological system whose workings were not understood until the 1960s, when a researcher added dye to the western sinkholes and watched it emerge here, 14 km away, two weeks later. Artifacts recovered from the lake floor suggest it was a cult site dedicated to Pan in the 4th and 3rd centuries BC.

The afternoon brings us to Assos, a village on the island's northwest coast that occupies a narrow isthmus connecting a headland to the main island. The Venetian castle above it is one of the largest fortifications in the Ionian — built to answer the Ottoman naval threat and still, four centuries later, defining the headland's silhouette.

Overnight Kefalonia.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Kefalonian Flavours & Farewell

This morning we go to market. Not as observers — as participants, moving through the stalls with a local cook who knows which vendor has the best cheese and which fisherman came in early. What we select determines what we eat, which is the correct order of operations.

From the market we travel to our host's home, where the kitchen and garden become the classroom for the rest of the day. Kefalonian cooking is not a minor subject. The island sits at a particular crossroads — Venetian trade routes brought techniques and ingredients from the Italian mainland; the mountains and limestone plateau support flavours that the coast alone cannot produce; and the 1953 earthquake, which levelled most of the island's buildings, paradoxically preserved food traditions that might otherwise have been modernised away. The recipes that survived in family kitchens are the ones we encounter today.

We eat what we've made, in a garden that looks the way Kefalonian gardens look in early June. The afternoon that follows is genuinely unstructured — De Bosset Bridge is a twenty-minute walk from Argostoli's centre if you want to cover ground, or the Archaeological Museum if the Mycenaean material from Day 10 left questions unanswered. Or the harbour, and the particular quality of doing nothing on an island that has earned your attention across three full days.

Tonight we gather for our farewell dinner — the last evening of a journey that began on Corfu with Homer and has arrived here, as good journeys do, somewhere richer and more complicated than where it started. Given the size and possible later timing of our lunch, our dinner arrangements may be on the lighter side this evening.

Overnight Kefalonia.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 13 Departure from Kefalonia

We transfer to Kefalonia Airport for onward connections — to Athens for international departures, or direct international flights depending on season and routing.

The view from the aircraft, if the weather obliges, returns us briefly to the geography we have been travelling through: the islands scattered across the blue, closer together than they sometimes felt from the water, the channels between them catching the light. Each one distinct. Each one, we now know, a different kind of story.

KALO TAXIDI! (Good Journey!)

Included Meal(s): Breakfast