



# OVERSEAS

## Haven Report



**Corfu, Greece**  
— An Idyll In The Ionian Sea



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# Corfu, Greece

## —An Idyll In The Ionian Sea

By Sophia Titley





The first time I went to Corfu was several months into the pandemic. Feeling stir crazy, I booked the cheapest ticket going anywhere when the list of “travel corridors” (places where you could travel safely and quarantine-free) was announced by my government.

My expectations for Corfu were low... Initial research told me it was a small, heavily touristed Greek isle. I had conjured up images of your typical over-developed resort towns like Cancún, Mexico, and Malaga, Spain... Places where tourists outnumber locals, vestiges of authentic culture are scarce, and visitors are there to over-indulge in fun in the sun.

I was itching to get out of London after months of being cooped up. Aside from keeping myself and others safe with regard to the virus, my main criteria for my trip were beaches and warm weather...



From before the moment I landed, I was pleasantly surprised by Corfu. Looking out the window of the

plane as it made its final descent, I could tell that the beaches were going to be phenomenal. My first few steps outside the air-conditioned airport told me I was going to get my wish about the weather, too. I was blasted by the full effect of the summer heat, when temperatures are about 85°F (30°C) during the day...

But, really, it was my first interaction with the Corfiot people that set the tone for my entire trip. I decided to rent a car to be able to explore the island as thoroughly as possible. You need an International Driving Permit to drive in Greece, so I purchased one online a few days before my trip... but even I have to admit, the digital copy of the license that I flashed the car rental agent looked dodgy.

Her response couldn't have been more easygoing. She handed me the keys and pointed out the car I'd be driving for the next few days. She even told me that it was no problem if my sister (who doesn't even have a license) wanted to drive, too. When I asked where to drop off the keys when it was time to return the car, she told me just to park it in the same spot and leave the keys in the cupholder.

I knew right away that crime and safety weren't going to be concerns during my stay, but I also loved how informal and laidback everything was... such a welcome change from the rigidity and rule-oriented culture of life in London. The Greeks have a reputation for being friendly, boisterous, un-shy people... I quickly learned that “Why not!?” is the common response to most questions you ask, whether it's “Can I have another glass of wine?” or “Can I really rent a motorboat without any training or a boat operator's license?” (It turns out, you can.)





Corfu is amazingly green, sheathed in the silvery-green leaves of olive trees as well as Mediterranean cypresses, pine trees, leafy shrubs, and flowering plants. With all the vegetation, the scenery looks more like Lake Tahoe than the dry and dusty scenery of your typical Greek island...



As I made my way northwest from the airport to Liapades, the village where I'd be staying, I got a sense of Corfu's dramatic landscape. It's flat and low-lying in the south, undulating in the center, and mountainous in the north. Despite its small size (only 40 miles long and 20 miles wide at its thickest part), Corfu is home to a huge number of jaw-dropping land formations. Because it's made up of sedimentary rock, it's constantly being shaped by the elements, creating wind-sculpted cliffs, stalactite-laden caves, craggy bluffs that drop down into the ocean...



Serving as backdrop for all this dramatic scenery is the dazzling aquamarine of the Ionian Sea, arguably some of the most beautiful water on this planet. The island has 135 miles (217 kms) of coastline and 57 beaches—some sandy, others pebbly; some developed, others completely isolated. Living here, you can take advantage of proximity to the sea regardless of where you settle on the island. Glorious ocean vistas are around every corner, and enjoying the sea every day, whether boating around the island or simply going for a dip, is the way of life.



With the longest coastline in the Mediterranean Basin and a unique geography full of islands and peninsulas, Greece's reputation as a bona fide beach destination is well-founded. But among the thousands of islands in Greece, Corfu stands out as the ideal overseas retirement locale... On top of the unique scenery and friendly locals, the cost of living is low, especially for Europe. About US\$1,500 is enough for a comfortable lifestyle in Corfu, though you can easily go below this number depending on your preferences.

Another reason that Corfu makes a lot of sense for overseas retirement is that Greece offers an easy, quick, and legal path to residency through its Golden Visa Program. For a 250,000-euro investment in real estate, non-EU citizens can get a residence permit that's good for five years and renewable. There's no minimum time you need to spend in the country to maintain it, and the 250,000-euro investment can be split over multiple properties.

This gets you a life in Europe and access to the 25 other countries that make up the Schengen Area... The advantage of Corfu offers over its European counterparts is that it's a very laid-back version of life on the Continent. One in which you can eat great food, live in a safe, welcoming environment, and enjoy a Mediterranean lifestyle at a low cost...

### **A Bit Of Background...**

Known as Kerkyra to locals, Corfu's history is ancient... So ancient, in fact, the origins of

civilization on the island can't be traced. Several historical accounts float about... some say the first reference to Corfu comes from the Mycenaean Greek word *korokurajjo* (meaning man from Kerkyra), from 1300 BC. Others insist that the island of Scheria in Homer's "Odyssey" is really Corfu.



Fertile lowlands and its strategic position between the Greek mainland and Magna Graecia (the areas of the Southern Italy coast that were heavily populated by Greek settlers) made Corfu an important island, causing growth and prosperity to flow here. This growth was interrupted a few times during its history, starting with conflict with the Corinthians in the early 7th century.

Corfu served as a naval base during the Peloponnesian War and the Sicilian campaigns of Athens. Control of Corfu passed from the Epirote League to the Illyrians to the Romans, and it remained a Roman naval station until around 189 BC.



A look at Corfu's Old Fortress...

Frequent raids led to Corfu's main settlement being relocated to where the Old Fortress is found today. Situated between peaks, Corfu got its modern Western name from the word *korphoi* meaning "peaks."

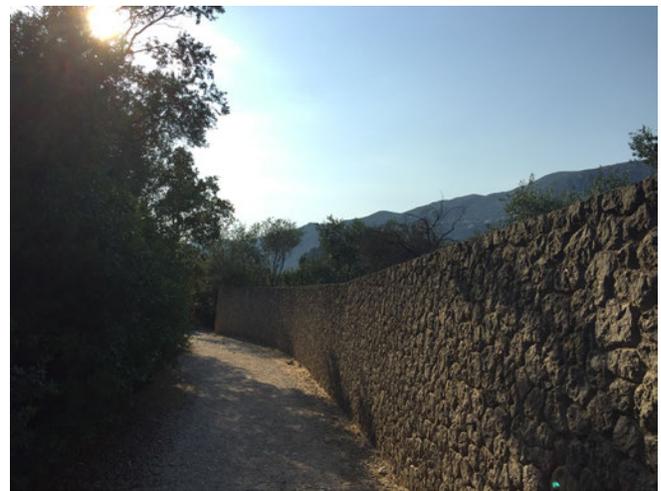
The island was in Venetian hands from 1401 to 1797, becoming one of the most heavily fortified places in Europe during this time. It was built up by the Venetians to act as the "Door of Venice" and block Ottoman intrusion into the Adriatic Sea. The fortresses on Corfu were so effective, it's one of the few areas of Greece that was never conquered by the Ottomans.



The legacy of Venetian rule on Corfu is still visible on the island today, especially in the architecture in the Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It

features multi-storied buildings on narrow lanes that stand out from the architecture of other Greek cities. Venetian rule in Corfu also brought about Greece's first opera house, Nobile Teatro di San Giacomo, in Corfu Town.

Corfu briefly fell under French control after the Treaty of Campo Formio in 1797... It eventually became a protectorate of the U.K. after Napoleon's defeat at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. With British rule came important infrastructural developments, like improvements to water supply, new roads, and the development of the first Greek university. Corfu and the other Ionian Islands were returned to Greece by Britain in 1864.



During World War II, the Italians occupied Corfu after Greece surrendered to Axis powers. They were succeeded by the Nazis after the fall of Italian fascism in 1943, and much of the island's structures were bombed by the Luftwaffe. Under Nazi rule, hundreds of Jewish Corfiots were rounded up by the Gestapo and sent to concentration camps. The island was liberated by the British Royal Marines on Oct. 14, 1944.

In the years that followed WWII and the Greek Civil War, Corfu was rebuilt, keeping elements of its classical architecture in tact... Its tourism industry kicked off as early as 1952 when a Club Med opened on the island. The first charters started arriving here in the 70s and hotels were established. Tourism came to replace agriculture as the main economic activity and remains the top industry today.

## What Makes It Tick?



Corfu has long held a reputation as an idyll, especially in regard to its beaches, which rank among the best in Greece... They vary in style, from empty to developed for tourism, but regardless, all are graced with the piercing blue waters of the Ionian Sea.



At its core, the island remains traditional. You get a sense of the authentically Corfiot way of life at

its many charming villages, particularly the inland mountain ones, where life is still carried out the same way it was a couple generations ago.

Children still play in the streets... Nuns don their black habits and make their way to church in the early hours of the morning... People gather in the town square after dark to chat with their neighbors... It's a very safe, simple way of life—the type of place where you can leave your front door unlocked and not worry about a thing.



Often cited as Greece's greenest island, Corfu is a place of bountiful produce, with various fruits and vegetables grown locally and vineyards turning out award-winning wines. The local grapes are unique to the Ionian Islands and pair perfectly with the cuisine, which is some of the healthiest, most delicious on the planet.

In short, what people love about Corfu is its stunning natural environment, friendly locals and wholesome way of life, delicious cuisine, interesting history and culture, and low cost of living.

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## How To Get Here

Corfu is a tiny, sickle-shaped island just off of Greece's northwest coast. It straddles the Greece and Albania border offshore and floats in the Ionian Sea. It's about 70 miles (110 kms) southwest of the heel tip of the Italian boot and as close as 2 miles (3 kms) to Albania from its northeast coast.

To get here from abroad, you can fly into Corfu International Airport. There are no direct flights to the States or Canada, but there are options to fly into big European hubs, like London-Gatwick (in the U.K.) and Schiphol Airport (in Holland). Otherwise, your best option is to fly into Athens and catch a low-cost domestic flight onwards to Corfu.



Greece has been a sea faring culture since ancient times, so, of course, you can also get to Corfu by way of the sea. Ferries connect Corfu to the Greek mainland at Igoumenitsa and Patras. You can also hop on a ferry to Venice, Ancona, Bari, and Brindisi, Italy, as well as Himara and Saranda, Albania.

## How To Get Around

Corfu Town is the major metropolitan area on Corfu... if you can call a city of roughly 40,000 metropolitan. Much of Corfu Town is walkable, particularly in the pedestrianized historic zone. So, too, are Corfu's 22 villages: you can easily walk to most places you'd want to go—the beach, the grocery store, the bar... But if you want to venture beyond your immediate village and have the most

flexibility possible, you'll want to have your own means of transport. Having a car is the best way to get around, although lots of people drive mopeds and quads, too.



The condition of the roads that crisscross the island varies... The roads that connect towns and villages are wide, well-paved, with frequent roundabouts to control traffic flow. Within villages, roads are narrow and routes are circuitous, often diverting around trees and other obstacles that have been around long before anyone thought to put in a road.



**This gives you an idea of what the roads in the north are like...**

The south end of the island is flat and mostly at sea level while the north is mountainous... Driving after dark in the north can be dangerous if you don't know the routes. The roads are etched into the sides of steep hills. They're two-way with dubious shoulders and little-to-no lighting after sundown...

Corfu has a few public transportation options available, if you're unwilling to get behind the wheel after that description. There are two bus lines: the blue buses serve Corfu Town and its surroundings; the green buses serve the rest of the islands. Tickets are single-journey (prices vary from 1.10 to 1.50 euros) and can be bought from machines or the driver. Corfu also has a few taxi companies, mainly operating around Corfu Town.

## The Expat Community



It doesn't matter which village you visit in Corfu—you're almost guaranteed to find a handful of expats living there. They came to the island as tourists, fell in love (either with the place or with a person), and extended their trip indefinitely. It's a common story, and it's not hard to understand why. The cost of living is low, the scenery is stunning, and the climate is great. Corfu offers the opportunity for an all-around easy lifestyle, and it attracts a lot of expats.

Of the island's 100,000 people, a few thousand are expats—mostly from the U.K., though you'll also find Canadians and Americans, too. The expat community

organizes itself through online resources like Corfu Forum (more information in this issue's [Rolodex](#)) where you can find out about local news, upcoming events, volunteer opportunities, and more.

Gatherings, activities, and other opportunities to socialize spring up organically as well. The locals are friendly and happy to chat with anyone. You get to know them simply by living here, interacting through daily life, and seeing the same faces again and again.

## The Cost Of Living In Corfu

Some Greek islands have a reputation for being expensive, even over-priced for what they offer... Corfu isn't one of those islands. Here you can enjoy a high standard of living for a low cost, especially considering it's in Europe and a major beach destination. Your lifestyle will determine exactly how much you pay, but about US\$1,500 a month should be enough for a couple to live comfortably...

Renting a two-bedroom apartment costs about US\$450 a month; for a house, you'll pay between US\$485 and US\$545 a month, though you'll have to negotiate for a long-term contract. Most rental agents prefer to keep their rentals unoccupied during summer months so that they can make more money off of short-term rentals during the tourist season.



**Gyros are a cheap and delicious meal...**

Enjoying yourself in Corfu doesn't cost much either. A pint of local beer costs about US\$2.50; a glass of local wine will set you back about US\$5. You can get a lunchtime special—chicken or pork gyro and

a pint—on the beach for US\$5, but going out for proper meals at nicer restaurants won't break the bank. Main courses are generously portioned and cost between US\$12 and US\$20 a plate. US\$50 is plenty to spend on a nice night out.



Meals at nice restaurants won't break in Corfu...

Groceries are inexpensive if you shop for local produce... As with any place, and especially an island, shopping for imported products will jack up costs considerably.

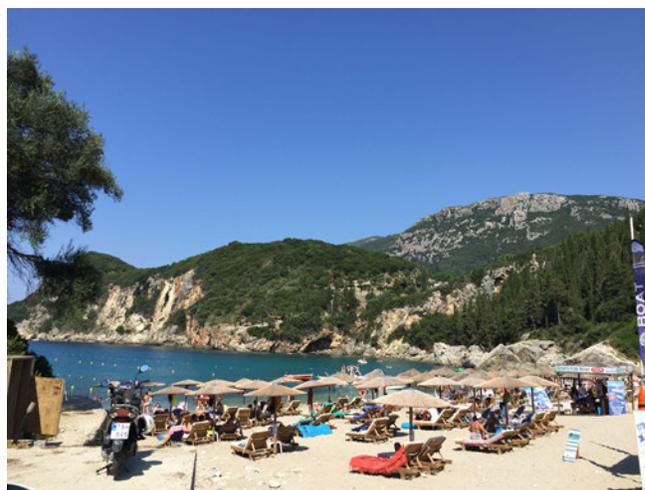
**FOR MY FULL BREAKDOWN ON THE COST OF LIVING IN CORFU, GO HERE.**

## What's There To Do In Corfu?

### Outdoor Recreation

Corfu is first and foremost an ocean-lover's paradise. The island is surrounded by the Ionian Sea, arguably the most beautiful waters in the world. With low-lying topography on the southern end of the island,

the beaches are sandy and at sea level. The northern half of the island is mountainous, with jagged cliffs dropping down into aquamarine waters and white-pebble beaches.



### LIOS in Corfu



Go here to view my Corfu video resource.

On summer afternoons, the only respite from the heat is going for a dip in the calm, cool ocean waters. Beaches range from totally isolated to resort-dominated, but there's no wrong place to go for a swim here. Even in the center of Corfu Town, the closest thing the island has to a city, you find people lounging in the water right next to the Old Harbour.

Watersports are popular on the island. Scuba divers, snorkelers, and anglers have been attracted to Corfu for decades because of the vibrant marine life. You can also rent jet skis, pedalboats, sea kayaks, and other equipment right on the beach... You can even rent a motorboat and take it out for a day's adventure—no need for a boat operator's license or any training. This is the best way to access the beaches of the north, which you otherwise wouldn't be able to get to because they are so isolated. With several deep-water marinas around the island, Corfu is also a yacht and super yacht destination.



Aside from the beach, there's plenty to do on land in Corfu, too. It's surprisingly verdant for a Greek island, with pine forest, cypresses, and thousands (maybe

millions) of olive trees growing around the island. With its varied terrain and lots of shade, it's a great place for walking, hiking, and horseback riding.



**Cape Drastis is just one example of Corfu's amazing landscape**

Because of its geology, Corfu is full of unique land formations that make for jaw-dropping vistas. Cape Drastis, for instance, is a cluster of limestone cliffs in northern Corfu, carved into peculiar shapes through wind erosion. Canal D'Amour is a narrow ocean channel flanked by sandstone cliffs... Local legend says that if two people swim the length of the channel together, they're destined to fall in love.

For the golf lovers, Corfu offers the Corfu Golf Club, an 18-hole, par-72 course with a high-quality club house. There's a waterpark called Aqualand for the kids, and organized sports for kids and adults alike. Corfu is also a great place to practice adventure sports, like mountain biking, quadding, and dirt biking.

### **Cultural Attractions**

Greece is a culturally fascinating place—the cradle of Western civilization with foundational concepts, like democracy, western philosophy, political science, and literature, originating here. Sites of cultural and historical importance, some dating back thousands of years, are found all over the country, including in Corfu.



For the highest concentration of things to see and do on the island, you need to go to Corfu Town, the capital and main city. This is where the airport, governmental buildings, and shopping centers are, as well as the Old Town. This is the historical center of Corfu, a UNESCO World Heritage Site with streets and buildings dating back hundreds of years. Here you find architectural remnants from the various cultures that influenced Corfu over history, from Byzantine to Venetian, Greek to Roman, French to British.



As you walk through the compact streets of the Old Town, you can't help but gaze upwards at the colorful multi-story buildings with their ornate balconies draped in flowering plants. It exudes a distinctly Old World charm... Though still residential, many of these old buildings have been converted into boutique hotels with rooftop bars and trendy cafés. Among the narrow backstreets that spill out into lively squares, you find bazaar-style shopping and places to eat, drink, and enjoy yourself after sundown.



Still confused about residency overseas? Or simply want to learn more about the benefits of having a second residency? You need our...

# PASSPORT TO FREEDOM: THE WORLD'S TOP HAVENS FOR RESIDENCY, CITIZENSHIP, AND A SECOND PASSPORT

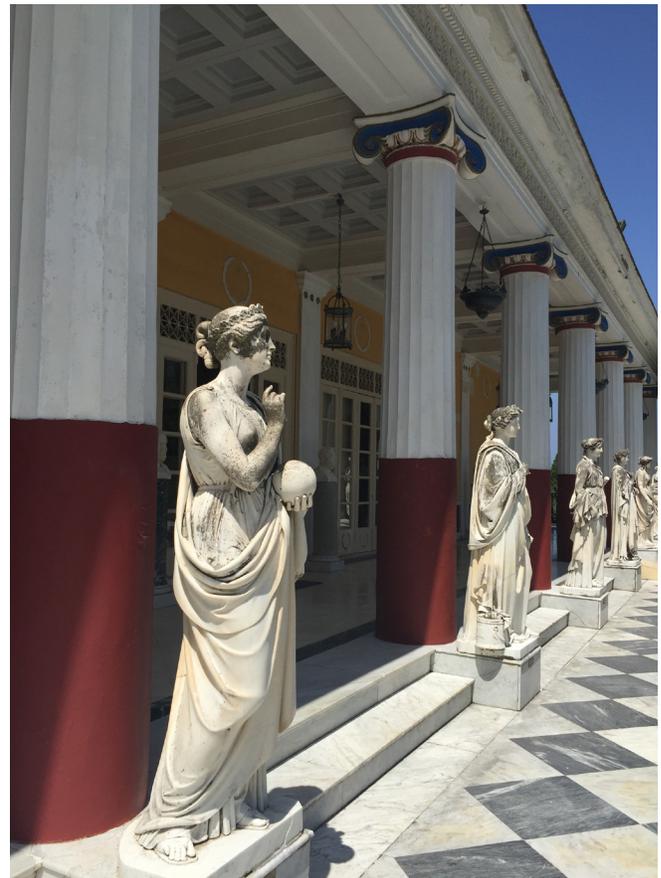
This series of reports and audio recordings is your road map to creating your new life in Paradise. Our Passport to Freedom contains five invaluable reports and five instructive audio recordings that will help you on your way to realize your dream life overseas, detailing everything you need to know about establishing residency overseas.



The Old Town is surrounded by water on three sides, situated at the end of a peninsula and sandwiched between the Old Fortress and the Old Harbour. The Old Fortress dates back to the early 16th century, built by the Venetians to fend off Ottoman sieges (which it did in 1537, 1571, and 1716). Directly in front of the fortress is the Esplanade, an open parade ground that was landscaped by the French, making it one of the most attractive town squares in Greece.

From the Esplanade, you can head out in any direction and be likely to bump into a site of historical significance. The Listón, for example, is an arcaded walkway also built by the French to look like Rue de Rivoli in Paris. Under the elaborate arches are cafés from which you can people watch and enjoy some of the most expensive coffee on the island.

On the north side of the Esplanade is the Palace of Saint Michael and George, built by the Maltese under orders from the British between 1819 and 1824. It used to be the official residence of the high commissioner but today houses the Museum of Asian Art—a collection of over 10,000 Asian artefacts collected by Greek diplomats.



**The Achilleion is the former palace of Empress Elisabeth of Austria**

Corfu is home to a dozen or so museums scattered around the island and dedicated to different subjects, though most have to do with archaeology and local folklore. Collections are housed in historical spaces, like the Achilleion, the former palace of Empress Elisabeth of Austria. It was built in the late 1800s as an homage to the Empress' love for Greek mythology... Inside are hand-painted frescoes and statues of Greek philosophers, heroes, and gods. Outside are elaborate gardens, larger-than-life statues of Achilles, and panoramic views of the island and sea.

To get a dose of Corfu's modern culture, visit one of its 22 villages. If you venture outside the tourist zones, you can get a taste for the authentic Corfiot way of life, where people still gather in village squares ringed with tavernas after dark, kids play freely in the streets, everyone is friendly and familiar, and life moves at a slower pace. It's true that much of the island has been developed for tourism, but there are certain villages that still retain their charm, like Liapades, one of the oldest villages in Corfu.



Corfu's cuisine is some of the world's best...

One of the best things about living in Greece full-time is the chance to enjoy Greek cuisine full-time. It has one of the most studied and celebrated culinary heritages on the planet and emphasizes things like fresh fish, vegetables, and grains. It's also one of the world's healthiest diets, which explains why Greek people have some of the longest life expectancies in Europe.



You can find all types of restaurants in Corfu, ranging from fine dining to roadside gyros wrapped in newspaper... Eating out can be a really inexpensive indulgence, even at the higher end places. Ambelonas Corfu is a farm-to-table restaurant situated within a gorgeous vineyard. Its menu shifts with the seasons, but a meal for two (including drinks, appetizers, mains, and dessert) still only costs around 50 euros.

Ambelonas offers cooking lessons if you want to pick up some of the tricks that make Corfiot food so delicious... Like many places, they also cultivate and sell their own olive oil and wine—a cultural tradition in Corfu. The island is said to have superior-quality wine to other parts of Greece not only because of the

climatic conditions but also because of the influence of the Venetians who passed on their viticulture know-how.



Wine tasting is a great way to connect to Corfu's culture and history. Theotoky Estate is one of the oldest wineries, operated by a family that was among the most powerful in Greece (two different Theotokys have served as prime ministers). You can visit the estate, take in vineyard views, and have a tour and wine tasting for 8 euros. They produce a red (made from Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon grapes) and a white (made from Robolla and Kakotrygis).

### Corfu Wine Has Bond's Backing

In "For Your Eyes Only," a James Bond flick from 1981 starring Roger Moore, Bond orders a glass of Theotoki Aspro (a white wine made by Theotoky Estate). Famous for being a man of refined tastes, Bond's endorsement of the local vintages is a major claim to fame for Corfu and Theotoky wines.

### Do People Speak English In Corfu?

From ordering in restaurants to asking for directions to having conversations with locals, you'll have no problems communicating in English in Corfu. It's a well-established tourism destination with historical ties to the U.K., so there is a strong basis for speaking English here.



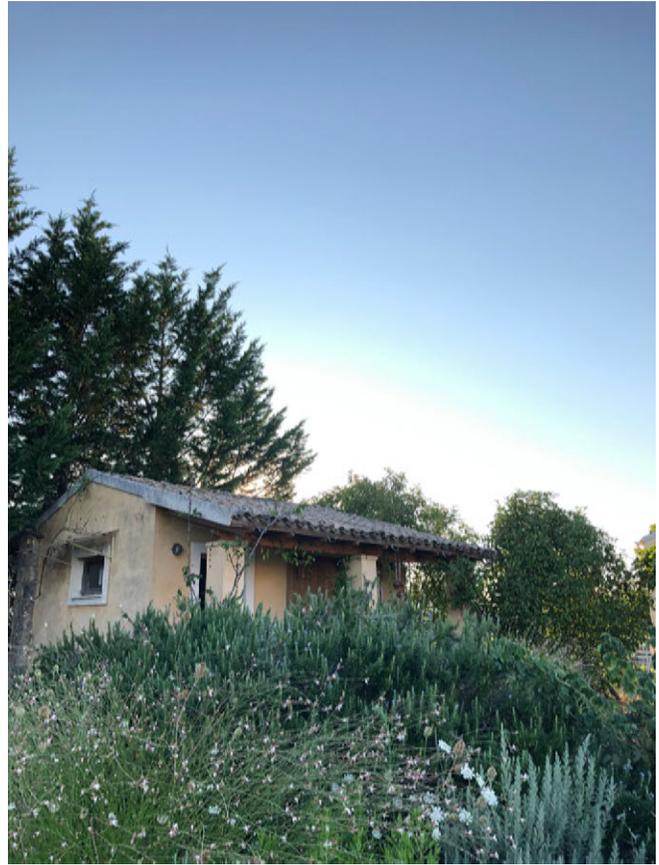
One group of the population you may not be able to talk to in English is the elderly... The 80-something-year-old lady you pass on your stroll through the village may not know many words of English, but that won't stop her from trying to have a chat with you... This is when it's great to know a few words of Greek, if only the basics.

### It's All Greek To Me

Hello.....	Yassou
Good morning.....	Kalimera
Good evening.....	Kalispera
Thank you.....	Efharisto
Please/You're welcome.....	Parakalo

## The Property Market

For such a small island, Corfu offers a wide range of property types, from apartments in historical buildings in Corfu Town to villas near the sea, quaint stone houses in mountain villages and properties situated in olive groves...



Price are generally low for what's on offer, especially compared to other European beach destinations. My local friend Dimitris tells me you can get an old house in a village for as little as 7,000 to 15,000 euros, though, of course, you'll want to invest a bit more to fix it up. The properties that most expats go for are in the 200,000- to 400,000-euro range.

Not everyone who moves overseas is looking to own property... but there's a major incentive for owning property in Greece. If you buy a place (or multiple places) worth at least 250,000 euros, you can qualify for residency through the Greece Golden Visa program. I get into the details of the program in this issue's Residency section...

Another great thing about buying on Corfu specifically is that the regulations for property ownership are the same for foreigners as they are for Greeks. This isn't true of all of the Greek islands. On Crete and Rhodes, for instance, non-EU nationals are subject to restrictions in certain areas.

To get the whole picture of Corfu's property and rental market, I talked with Corfu Home Finders, a local real estate agency. (Find their information in this issue's [Rolodex](#).)...

## Corfu Home Finders On The Local Property Market

### **OLL: Can you break down the property purchase process in Corfu?**

Corfu Home Finders: Yes, of course. We can help you find your property. We recommend that you speak to a lawyer and give them power of attorney to enable them to begin the searches. We request a “holding” deposit, in order for us to ask the vendor to remove the property from sale. The vendor signs a simple agreement to sell the property at the agreed price, and the buyer also signs an Acceptance Form to say that they intend to purchase. With the power of attorney your lawyer can obtain the required tax number and establish a Greek bank account. If necessary, they can also begin the application for a Golden Visa on purchases over 250,000 euros.

Your lawyer appoints an engineer to check the property from the planning permits/build point of view. If required we can also organize a structural survey (400 to 700 euros, depending on the required depth of the survey). Once the actual legal status of the property is confirmed, the seller’s lawyer has to provide all personal documents such as tax clearance certificate, certificate of no debts, etc., no outstanding property taxes, and final paid utility bills and energy certificate. Once everything has been obtained and checked, they will proceed to final contract.

### **OLL: Are there any financing options available for foreigners who want to buy property there?**

Corfu Home Finders: No, there are no loans available. There have not been for the last seven or eight years. Also, I do not know of any countries where loan providers will loan funds secured on a Greek property. Most people release equity on their existing home country properties and come as cash buyers.

### **OLL: Can you give an estimate of the value per square meter of Corfu’s real estate?**

Corfu Home Finders: No, unfortunately not. All properties are pretty much individual, with value based on location. For example, in Corfu Town properties range from about 1,500 euros per square meter to 5,000 euros per square meter. In the countryside prices are never based per-square-meter price. A new property might have a basic square-meter calculation but all properties are so different, it isn’t really a sound basis.

### **OLL: What’s the market like currently? Is now a good time to buy?**

Corfu Home Finders: We have been busier this year than ever before. Definitely more people are cost conscious but the general rule applies that properties on or near the sea are the most in demand, and tend to hold their prices. Many of them are holiday let investments for their owners and they are therefore not desperate to sell. Inland properties with no views tend to be in the lower price ranges, but again a beautiful property in an olive grove can also have a high value. The mid-range properties, between 200,000 to 400,000 euros, tend to be the most requested.

### **OLL: On average, how much would it cost per month to rent a two-bedroom apartment or small house?**

Corfu Home Finders: For a six-month winter let, a two-bedroom apartment would probably be about 350 euros per month; a house would be 400 to 450 euros a month; a villa would be 900 euros a month and up. However, many properties are also Airbnb lets in summer, so it is quite difficult to get a full 12-month-plus let. This year has of course been strange, but we are still finding there is a shortage of long-term rentals.

### **OLL: What are the usual rental terms?**

Corfu Home Finders: Rentals can be either furnished or unfurnished (if they are Airbnbs in the summer they will be furnished) and you would normally pay two month’s rent in advance plus the first month’s rent. Sometimes a good discount can be obtained by paying six months or a year in advance. Bills are normally additional unless the let is under six months. It is very rare to find a full summer six-month rental as owners tend to calculate these more on a per-night basis.

### **OLL: If someone is looking for a buy-to-let opportunity, are there property managers available?**

Corfu Home Finders: Yes, there are plenty of property managers who can provide any level of service from just being key holders to taking reservations, looking after guests, hiring and paying staff... literally any level.



# Top Health Insurance Options For The Retiree Abroad

If health care is one of your biggest concerns about moving overseas, you need to take your research seriously. Our Retire Overseas Index covers the basics, but only scratches the surface of all the ins and outs of health care overseas.

Our Complete Guide To **Health Care And Health Insurance Options Overseas** is your detailed, comprehensive, and current guide to your best choices right now for health insurance and health care as an expat or retiree abroad.

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## Health Care

Greece's health care system is a combination of the National Healthcare Service, compulsory social insurance, and a voluntary private health care system. With a residence permit, you'd get access to public health care, and according to the WHO last rankings, Greece's system is quite good, coming in at 14th place for overall performance. That said, many Greece expats prefer to maintain international private insurance to ensure access to care and shorter wait times for procedures.

Corfu General Hospital is the island's main hospital, providing pulmonary, intensive care, gynecology, pediatric, pathology, cardiology, surgery, orthopedics, and neurology clinics as well as external care medical units. The hospital has mixed reviews from expats. Those who review it negatively cite lack of funding and low-quality attention from nurses and doctors as the main problems.

There are a few private clinics on Corfu. The Therapia Clinic has pathology and surgery departments, radiodiagnostic and microbiology laboratories, and a private ambulance service. Alexandros Mastoras General Clinic offers doctors from a range of specialties and modern technology. Both have English-speaking employees and deal with international insurance.

## Getting Greek Residency

Americans and Canadians can come to Greece visa-free for stays of up to 90 days. To stay longer than this, you'll need a visa. The good news is that Greece is one of the most accessible countries in Europe when it comes to residency.



The standard way to stay long-term is the National "D" Type Visa, which generally lasts for one year. To qualify, you need to prove you have sufficient funds or about 2,000 euros a month (plus 20% for your spouse and 15% for each child). You can prove this through your pension, bank balance, or with other financial means. The fee for the visa is 180 euros.

Greece also offers the Greek Golden Visa—a residence-by-investment visa program that's giving Spain and Portugal a run for their money for the most popular in Europe. It allows non-EU citizens to make a significant contribution to the Greek economy to qualify for a residence permit.

There are a few different forms this financial contribution can take, like investment in specific activities determined by the Greek government or by making a capital contribution of a least 400,000 euros. The one most expat retirees go for is the property purchase route...

For a minimum purchase price of 250,000 euros, you acquire both a property and permanent residency. The permit lasts five years and is renewable so long as you hold onto your property. You can include family members in it, including your spouse and children up to 21 years old. A Greek residence permit gets you full access to the Schengen Zone, too.

After seven years of continuous residency, you can apply for Greek citizenship. The only stipulations are that you provide a medical certificate, police background check, and proof of health insurance. Also, you can't be employed in Greece under this visa, so it's a good option if you're solely looking to retire in Greece.

## Taxes

Anyone earning income in Greece is liable to pay taxes there. You're considered tax-resident if you spend more than 183 days a year in Greece and/or your "vital interests" are centered there—i.e., you and your family spend time in or reside in Greece, you have citizenship, you own assets in Greece, and/or are registered with social security.

As a permanent resident, you will pay taxes on your worldwide income, though Greece has tax treaties in place with the United States and Canada.

Employment income, pensions, and profits from business are taxed at the following rates:

Income Scale (euros)	Tax Rate (%)
0–10,000	9
10,001–20,000	22
20,001–30,000	28
30,001–40,000	36
40,001 and higher	44

To counter losses from the pandemic, Greece has introduced new tax laws aimed at expat retirees. If you transfer your tax residency to Greece, you'll be taxed at a flat rate of 7% on all your foreign-sourced income, regardless of the form it takes.

The scheme is only available to pensioners from countries that Greece has a double tax treaty with. It goes into effect from the following tax year of which the application for this new tax regime is filed.

Value-added tax (VAT) is 24% in Greece, though basic necessities are taxed at a reduced rate of 13%. Property tax consists of a principal tax on real estate property (based on its objective value) and a supplementary tax on individuals imposed at progressive rates ranging from 0.15% to 1.15%.

## Internet Access

Broadband internet is fast, reliable, and widely available across Corfu. Free Wi-Fi is available in Corfu Old Town, the airport, hotels, cafés, and most restaurants. I didn't have any interruptions when it came to checking emails, streaming shows, or doing video calls.

Internet costs about 48 euros a month for a plan that includes 24 Mbps download speed, a landline, and a cell phone plan (cheaper plans without the extra perks are also available). With the overall low cost of living in Corfu and solid internet service, this island is a good choice for digital nomads, though it's definitely not a digital nomad hub yet. There's only one coworking space on the island, called Cocohub.

## Corfu For Kids

Corfu is a great place for families. It's a safe, family-friendly environment—the type of place where kids

still play outside unaccompanied and parents don't need to arrange formal playdates for them to see their friends.



The downside of bringing up kids on Corfu is that there are no international schools on the island. You'd need to either homeschool your child or enter him or her into the Greek system... and local Greek schools require a certain level of Greek language ability before they'll accept a foreign student.

If you were to bring up a child here, you'd want them to have some intensive Greek lessons prior to arrival, and as a general rule, the younger they are when you make the transition, the better.

## Disabled Access: Is Corfu Wheelchair Friendly?

Access to Corfu for those with mobility issues is mixed: The north is hilly, with steep and often uneven roads in the villages. To reach most of the north's beaches, you have to hike down steep rocky dirt trails. They can be challenging to reach even for those without physical impairments. On the

whole, the north is not accessible to those who use wheelchairs or have special needs.

In the flatter southern half of the island, the situation is a bit more promising. Andreas Skoupouras, the Deputy Mayor for Welfare and Social Policy, has made accessibility for people with special needs a priority. As someone who uses a wheelchair himself, he has inspired changes across the community...



Corfu's Old Town is now 80% accessible, and an app is being developed with maps showing different routes for wheelchair users. On 20 of the island's beaches, you'll find floating wheelchairs. One even has a Seatrac system—a mechanism that lets people with mobility issues get in and out of the water independently.

## LGBT Living In Corfu

Sexual freedom dates back to ancient Greece, making this one of the most liberal countries in Southeast Europe. Greece has long been a gay travel destination, especially islands like Mykonos and Santorini. Corfu is gay friendly, too, particularly around the Benitses village and beach area. Silk is a LGBT-specific bar and nightclub.

Your sexuality shouldn't be a reason you run into trouble in Corfu... Same-sex sexual activity has been legal since 1951, and same-sex unions have been legal since 2015. That said, the country still has a way to come. Gay marriage is not yet legal in Greece, although legalization has been proposed.



## Bringing Your Four-Legged Friends To Corfu

Cats are everywhere in Corfu. Kind-hearted locals feed them and prop up the local populations. It's definitely a pet-friendly environment if you're looking to bring your pet along for the adventure...



All pets coming to Greece must have a rabies vaccine, a microchip, and a certificate of health endorsed by

a USDA state veterinarian. Greece doesn't allow you to bring in young dogs, cats, or ferrets... i.e., animals under 12 weeks old that haven't had a rabies vaccine or those between 12 and 16 weeks that aren't fully protected by the vaccine yet.

Your pet will need to pass through an authorized Border Inspection Post when it arrives in Greece. There are several around the country, but you'll probably use the one at Athens International Airport when you arrive. You'll also need to carry a valid EU Pet Passport for each pet when traveling with your animals between EU countries.

## Inconveniences & Annoyances

Just like any place in the world, Corfu isn't perfect. It has its share of downsides, which range from minor nuisances to more serious concerns...

On the lighter end of the spectrum of things that could annoy you about Corfu are the wasps... Regardless of whether you're sitting by the pool, on the beach, or on the patio of some restaurant, wasps appear out of nowhere to hover around your face and bother you. They don't tend to sting you, but their presence can be disconcerting if you're insect-averse like me.



**The white-pebble beaches of the north**

On some of the beaches in the north of Corfu, you don't have the fine, soft golden sand you might be expecting... Waters are so calm at these protected

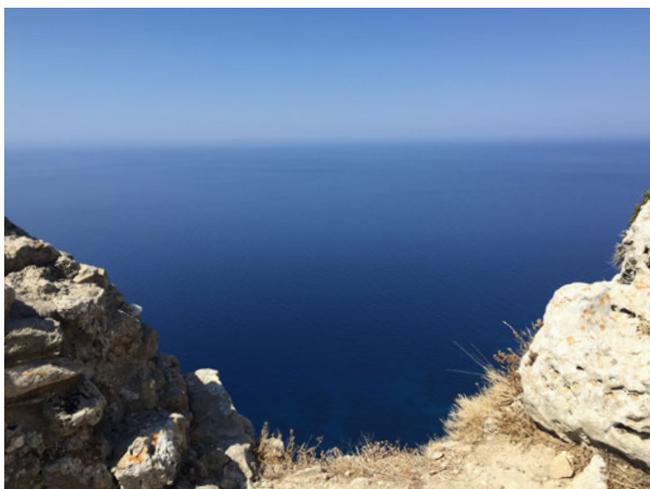
beaches, the rocks haven't been eroded down into sand. Instead, the beaches are made of smooth white pebbles, about the size of kiwis. They aren't the most comfortable to lie on, though you do get used to it quickly. Plus, a beach chair is an easy solution to this problem.

On the side of the more serious things to understand about Corfu is the fact that it's a tourist destination six months out of the year. Under normal, non-pandemic conditions, it can receive 250,000 to 300,000 tourists in a year—three times more than the island's total population. Tourists come from May to September, with Aug. 15 being the zenith of the tourist season. The rest of the year, the island is very quiet, and many businesses shut down for the slow months. You have to get used to these two flavors of Corfu—the busy tourist season and the quiet down months—and ideally find things you appreciate about both.

Another effect of tourism on Corfu is overdevelopment in certain areas and overcrowding at beaches... It has changed the ambiance in of some of Corfu's villages, as they adapt themselves to cater to their guests. In Sidari, a municipality in the north, you find cookie-cutter beach hotels lining the beach. They've been designed to be low-cost, not with any sort of eye to being cohesive the island's natural beauty. You also find rowdy pubs that serve the full-English breakfasts and blare whatever sports game is currently on on big-screen TVs. Of course, people from Corfu have every right to pursue tourism profits in whatever way they can, but this particular brand of tourism may not appeal to all.



## Could Corfu Be For You?



Corfu offers a lot but, but it's not for everyone. At the end of the day, it's a tiny island, and as it goes with all islands, certain types of people can get restless after spending some time here...

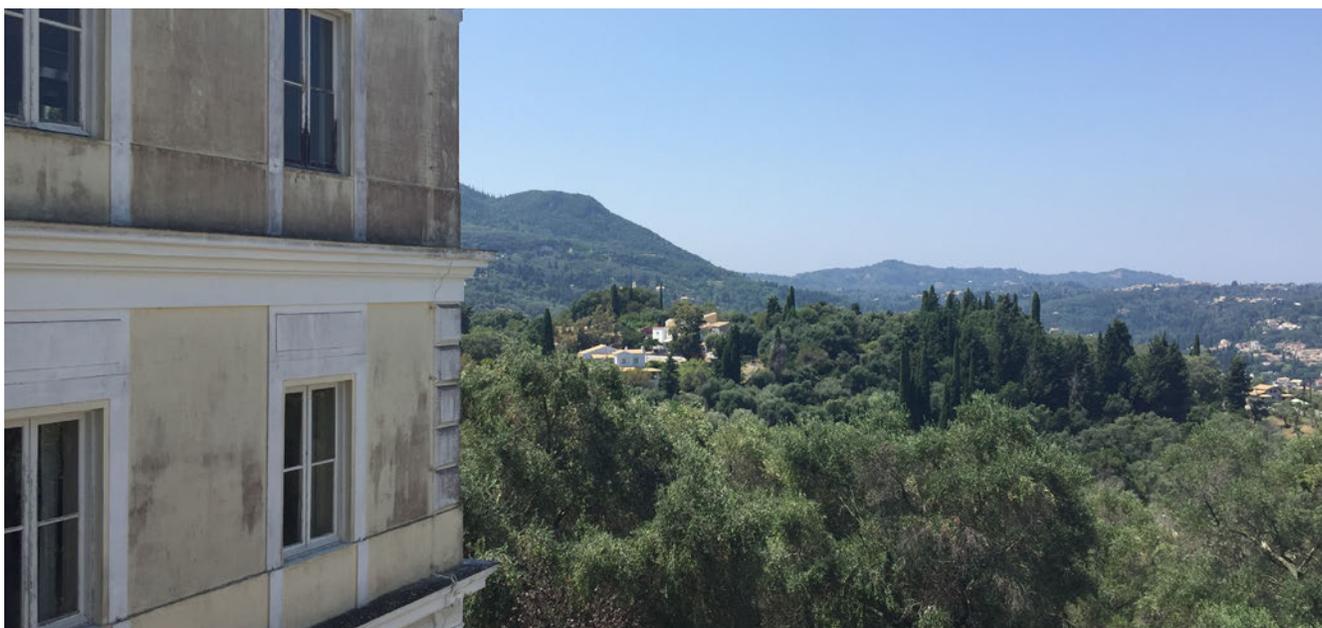
The lifestyle in Corfu is laid-back and simplistic, so if you're the type of person who needs to be constantly seeing new things, have convenience at your fingertips, and requires everything to work at maximum efficiency, this may not be the place for you. If you're moving here from New York City, Paris, or some other major metropolis, you might find the change in the pace of life jarring.

On the other hand, this slowed-down pace of life might be just what you're looking for. The two-season lifestyle could be perfect for the part-time overseas retiree specifically... Why snowbird to Florida or Arizona when you can go to Corfu? You can get permanent residency and a place to live relatively inexpensively, plus you're not beholden to a time-in-country requirement to maintain your residency status. With the low cost of living and good internet infrastructure, it could also be a great choice for digital nomads.

If you're a sucker for an ocean view, you should really be considering Corfu, as the beach scenery on this island is out of this world. It's a great place for those who are content to keep themselves entertained, going on walks or tending to a small garden or vineyard, enjoying the ocean every day, and living in a safe, welcoming environment with a low cost of living. 🏝️

### About The Author

For Sophia Titley, home is a subjective concept. She was born in Singapore but grew up in Indonesia and Saudi Arabia... and has since lived in Canada, Spain, Colombia, and, most recently, Panama. She studied political science and Spanish at the University of British Columbia, and in her free time enjoys trying new recipes, playing soccer, and salsa dancing.



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# Corfu Rolodex

By Sophia Titley

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**Tel:** (+30) 26610 58351

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**Email:** [info@theotoky.com](mailto:info@theotoky.com)

**Tel:** (+30) 69455 93016

### Ambelonas Corfu

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**Email:** [ambelonas.corfu@gmail.com](mailto:ambelonas.corfu@gmail.com)

**Tel:** (+30) 69321 58888

## The Property Market

### Corfu Home Finders

**Agent:** Diana Giannoulis

**Address:** Main Road, Dassia, 49083, 49100

**Email:** [info@corfuhomefinders.com](mailto:info@corfuhomefinders.com)

**Tel:** (+30) 69420 64002

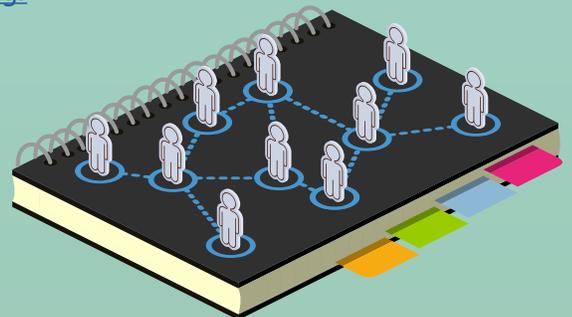
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### Royal Car Rentals

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