



**10 OF THE Best BEACHES**  
 From sandcastles to sailing, Laura French lines up the best beaches in Greece and Cyprus  
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PICTURE: NEWSFOCUS1; THOMAS COOK; KARTOUCHKIN/ISTOCK

**Picture paradise and thoughts of exotic far-flung islands might be the first thing that comes to mind.**

But clients don't have to take a 14-hour plane journey to see some of the most spectacular stretches of sea and sand on the planet - there are plenty to be found in Greece and Cyprus.

From the scorching red volcanic rocks of Santorini to the golden sands of Nissi, they offer just about everything a beach-loving dreamer could want, alongside a rich history and colourful culture to boot.

The appeal is nigh on universal: couple tying the knot? Check. Group of twentysomethings looking to party? Check. Family wanting an action-packed adventure? Check. So they should be a doddle to sell.

But with several thousand islands in Greece alone, the tricky part is knowing which one to choose. To help you, we've selected some of the best.

**1 ELAFONISSI BEACH, CRETE, GREECE**

With a coastline that stretches 650 miles, Crete is home to more beaches than you could shake a souvlaki stick at - from the party-pumping hub that is Malia to the crystal-clear waters around Chania.

But the most impressive has to be Elafonissi, located in the southwest and listed among the world's best beaches by TripAdvisor. Set on its own island,

though reachable from the mainland, it's a powerful cocktail of tropical waters, pink-hued sand and sweeping mountains sitting in the distance.

Along the coast there are plenty of small secluded coves, alongside ample flora and fauna, much of which remains blissfully untouched thanks to the island's status as a protected area.

**2 KOUKOUNARIES BEACH, SKIATHOS, GREECE**

Take Curaçao-coloured waters, endless white-sand beaches and lush forest and you have Skiathos, the sort of place that would make the Caribbean do a double take.

Among its standout spots is Koukounaries, 10 miles southwest of the main town. A regular on lists of the Med's best beaches, it offers temptingly blue shallow waters, spectacular scenery and a large natural lagoon.

For active clients there are jetskis, waterskis and speedboats to whizz along on, while those looking to relax can kick back beneath the shade cast by the picturesque pine forest that borders the water. Younger clients can, meanwhile, wander over to Big Banana Beach in high season for pumping music from the Bananarama Beach Bar, the island's party centre.

Recommend the Mandraki Village Hotel for luxury beachfront accommodation close to the action. Islands of Greece

offers seven nights' bed and breakfast from £799 per person, including flights.

For a cheaper alternative, there's Myrtia Summer Village, a family-friendly resort made up of apartments and maisonettes bookable through Thomas Cook.

**3 MAKRONISSOS BEACH, CYPRUS**

Over in Cyprus, there's a horde of postcard-worthy beaches to look out for, thanks to the sparkling blue pearl that is the Med.

Thomas Cook recommends the east coast around Ayia Napa for some of the best spots. "It's home to two of my favourite beaches - Limanaki and Makronissos," says Vanessa Freeman, regional product manager for Greece and Cyprus.

Makronissos draws in a party crowd, with a summer festival taking place for two separate weeks in June and July - Craig David's TS5 and Rudimental made appearances last summer.

But its appeal isn't limited to these; there are several family-orientated resorts in the area, including Dome Beach Hotel and the Tsokkos Paradise Village, set right by the white-sand Nissi Beach, which is a hub for watersports and bars.

Thomas Cook offers seven nights' all-inclusive at Dome Beach Hotel from £529 per person, based on two adults sharing.

**4 LIVADIA BEACH, SERIFOS, GREECE**

If it's authentic local character and culture that clients are after, suggest Serifos, says Dudley der Parthog, programme director for Sunvil Greece & Cyprus.

Set amid the Cyclades in the heart of the Aegean, it's graced with untouched beaches, as well as historic sites, and tourists are few and far between. It also happens to be surprisingly accessible, reached via a two-hour high-speed ferry from Athens.

Beaches span rocks and pebbles to pure golden sand; for the latter, recommend Livadia, a small port and the main tourist area thanks to a handful of traditional tavernas, shops and bars that border a long, curved beach. Tamarisk trees provide natural shade along the sand and the water is a deep cerulean.

It's also close to the historic capital of Chora - where whitewashed houses rub shoulders with ancient chapels - so it's a good midway point for holidaymakers who are not set on a pure beach holiday.

There are a handful of resorts scattered around the area, including Alexandros-Vassilia, a cluster of apartments that caters to various budgets and is set right by the ocean.

Prices start at £756 per person room-only for seven nights based on two sharing in May, with Sunvil.



ABOVE: Santorini

### → 5 KASSANDRA PENINSULA, HALKIDIKI, GREECE

If you're looking for a super-luxury option that caters to families as well as couples, look to Halkidiki - more specifically, the Kassandra Peninsula. "It features extensive, fine, white sandy beaches with crystal-clear waters," says Gary Boyer, head of purchasing for Classic Collection Holidays.

The four-mile-long Bousoulas Beach nearby is a renowned hangout for partygoers with weekly 'white night' parties held at the Bousoulas Beach Bar. Water is shallow enough for kids to swim in - and clear enough to snorkel in - and the sunsets aren't bad either; think glorious swathes of pink and orange fusing over the ripples below.

Sani Resort, with its four properties, is a popular choice in the area, offering several private beaches and a range of watersports and activities. It's also a good choice for families, with kids' clubs and a 'Babewatch' service, which gives parents a free 30-minute break away from their little ones.

A week's half-board starts at £855 in April and £2,091 in August, including flights, through Classic Collection.

### “ 6 Santorini's iconic red beach has earned itself a well-deserved place on island-hopping bucket lists the world over

### 6 ANALIPSI BEACH, PELOPONNESE, GREECE

For watersports enthusiasts nothing quite beats Greece, and the Peloponnese peninsula, connected to the southern mainland via bridges, is especially well primed, thanks to gentle wind conditions.

Recommend Neilson's four-star Messini Beachclub for clients wanting to get the most out of it. The resort is set in an idyllic bay around Analipsi beach, with activities including sailing, windsurfing, waterskiing, wakeboarding and kayaking. A week's holiday starts at £869 per person, including flights, most activities and meals on a club-board basis.

### 7 RED BEACH, SANTORINI, GREECE

Plunging red-and-black cliffs and rock the colour of fire; Santorini might not be the one for golden-sand seekers, but the iconic red beach has earned itself a well-deserved place on island-hopping bucket lists the world over. That means it can get a little crowded, so those wanting to escape the crowd might prefer to admire it from the headland above.

Clients who do venture down below (it's easily accessible) will be greeted with unique views and inviting waters, where snorkellers and divers will find other-worldly rocks and colourful marine life.

Other beaches on the island worth a visit include Vlychada - an uncrowded, moon-like expanse of volcanic white rock - and the black-sand beaches of Perivolos and Exo Gialos. Most are on the east and southeast coasts but they're easily accessible from the main town Fira, so it makes a good base.

Fun-seeking younger travellers might also want to experience some of the other Cyclades, so suggest a multi-stop tour such as Contiki's 13-day Greek →

BELOW:  
Agios Ioannis

→ Island Hopping trip, which passes through Mykonos, Santorini and Ios, with prices from £1,310.

## 8 CAMEO ISLAND, ZANTE, GREECE

When it comes to romantic spots Greece and Cyprus aren't lacking, but for a unique and secluded area, Ionian Weddings suggests the private Cameo Island, set just off the shores of Laganas in Zante. It offers a peaceful cove with spectacular views over the Ionian Sea and across to Marathonisi Island, making it a popular choice for couples tying the knot, especially because it's available for private hire.

It's not exclusive to couples though, and when it's not hired out, it's open to general visitors for a small entrance fee. The white-pebble beach is ideal for snorkelling, with water so clear you can see to the bottom, while at night things liven up with music blasting out from the island's two bars.

Cameo Island is easily accessible via

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According to rumours, Papanikolis cave, on Meganisi, was a hideout for submarines during the second world war

a footbridge from Laganas Beach: the latter might have a party reputation, but the long stretch of sand – which spans from Kalamaki to Agios Sostis – is surprisingly tranquil, with loggerhead turtles nesting on the shores.

## 9 AGIOS IOANNIS, MEGANISI, GREECE

Couples or families wanting a quiet getaway and vast swathes of empty beach should look to Meganisi. Set between Lefkada and the west mainland, it's a pristine island

characterised by peaceful villages and traditional fishing ports.

Helen Denman, product and commercial executive at Monarch, says: "Meganisi is one of the more traditional Ionian Islands, pretty much still untouched by mass tourism with quaint stone houses, traditional cobbled streets and a very warm welcome from the locals."

For the best beach on the island, she recommends Agios Ioannis, a long stretch of unspoilt shoreline on the west coast, which takes its name from the nearby chapel.

It's set right by a historic village, and for nature lovers there are several limestone caves along the coast to explore. The most famous is Papanikolis, the second biggest of its kind in Greece and, according to rumours, a hideout for submarines during the Second World War.

For a comfortable three-star accommodation option near Agios Ioannis, suggest the Gavrilis Apartments, which are right by →



DESTINATIONS BEACHES GREECE & CYPRUS

→ the sea and surrounded by mountain views. Prices start at £329 per person with Monarch, including flights, based on two sharing.

**10 LATCHI, CYPRUS**  
For a crowd-free, mile-long beach complete with dramatic mountain scenery, there's no better option than Latchi, a laid-back village in the northwest of Cyprus, where Aphrodite is said to have fallen in love with Adonis.

It's a mixture of sand and pebble, with sunbeds and umbrellas available for hire. And if your customers get itchy feet, Akamas National Park is nearby, where there are olive trees, juniper forests and other natural landscapes to greet budding hikers.

For a pure-sand beach, Polis is only a few miles away, with nesting sea turtles occasionally spotted at Khrysokou Bay, while for city life, Paphos is 45 minutes to the south.

On the hotels front, the five-star Anassa, set between Latchi harbour



and Polis, has garnered rave reviews and is worth recommending to those at the higher end of the budget. Seven nights' bed and breakfast starts at £1,758 per person in May with Classic Collection.

**ABOVE:**  
Anassa hotel

Set on a scenic hillside, the hotel is close to the beach and offers a comprehensive wellness programme for those in need of some good old R&R - not that you'll need it with views like this. **TW**

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