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The Greek holiday complex that will change the way you think about resorts

Costa Navarino is challenging preconceptions of holiday resorts in an overlooked region of Greece



By [Ella Alexander](#) Sep 5, 2018



Courtesy

It's a telling fact that the Greek gods were big fans of the overlooked region of Peloponnese. This small peninsula, carpeted in olive groves, is where Paris chose to stay for his first night with beautiful Helen of Troy after having run away together. It's where Hercules proved his worth when he fought the Nemenean lion. It's where Nestor, who was known for his wisdom and kindness, built his majestic palace, as described by Homer.

COSTA NAVARINO

And yet, it rarely makes the must-see lists of most tourists, who gravitate towards the country's numerous islands. The Peloponnese is a peninsula in southern Greece, roughly the size of Wales, connected to the mainland by the Corinth Canal and the Rio-Antirrio bridge. Despite its unspoilt beaches, azure waters, ancient sights, olive groves and idyllic villages, it has never been as popular as Greek hotspots such as Athens, Crete or Mykonos. From the 18th century through to the 21st century, the region fell into poverty - a situation that was worsened by World War II.



The Castle of Methoni in Messina

Courtesy

Captain Vassilis Constantakopoulos, a local boy done good who made his money in shipping, decided to make his goal to revitalise the area he was born and grew up in. Through international luxury tourism, he wanted to boost the economy of his homeland while preserving and honouring its natural beauty. What he and his family achieved was nothing short of impressive - a sprawling, sustainable luxury resort called Costa Navarino, formed of two hotels - the Westin and the Romanos - with another two on their way. He upturned and replanted 6,500 olive trees and 2,000 fruit trees, along with another 400,000 shrubs.



The olive groves surrounding Costa Navarino

Courtesy

He diverted rivers and roads while leaving its coastline intact. He created two reservoirs so that his newly built golf courses wouldn't consume too much natural water. Only local materials were used to create the properties which were built in keeping with their surroundings. He made sure the hot water was solar powered. He established the Navarino Environmental Observatory whose mission is the study of climate change, and opened the Navarino Natura Hall, a modern interactive exhibition centre for guests and locals to learn about the area's unique biodiversity. Guests are asked to leave its beach after six so that the region's loggerhead turtles can continue to dig nests and lay their eggs, which they do by night. Low-intensity lights were planted around the resort to make sure the beach was left dark in the evening, so that disorienting light doesn't stop the hatchlings finding their way to the sea. Costa Navarino can legitimately claim to be as close to sustainable as a resort can get.

Accommodation



A room at the Romanos

Courtesy

The resort's two five-star hotels appeal to slightly different markets, with the Westin catering more to families. We stayed at the Romanos, which is set among the olive groves. The reception area offers such beautiful sunsets that they almost look superimposed. Each room boasts varying idyllic views - of private pools that look out over olive groves or sweeping views of the vivacious Ionian Sea. The beds are so comfortable you won't want to get up. The resort itself is large, but a call to reception will ensure the arrival of a chauffeured golf buggy to take you to wherever you want to go. The service here is top level - staff are friendly and warm with plenty of personality and knowledgeable about the area and its traditions.

The food

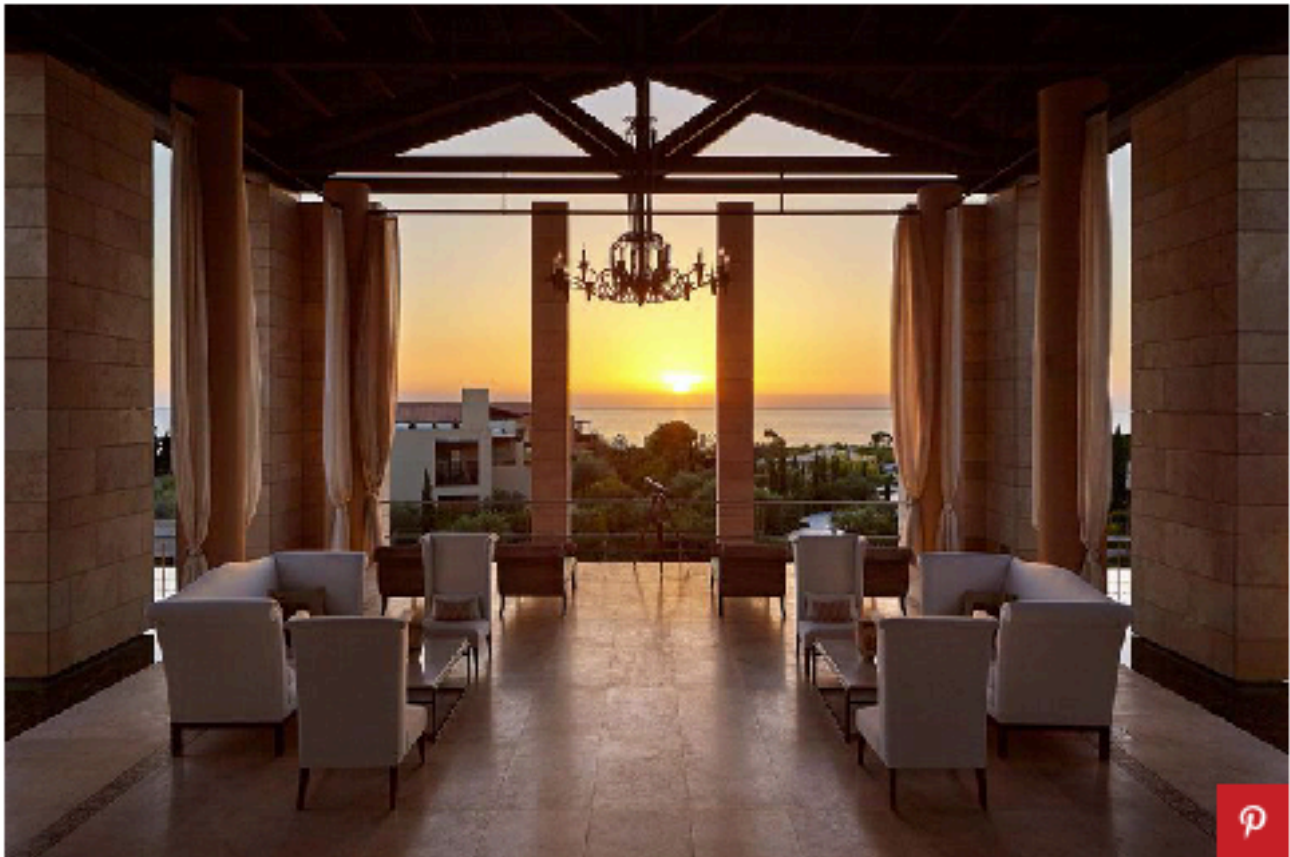


The Barbouni restaurant at Costa Navarino

Studio F

All amenities at the Westin and Romanos can be shared between guests, so there are 13 eating destinations and four bars. Don't miss breakfast at Pero, which offers an incredible selection of local Greek dishes such as cream pies, sausages, cheese pies, tomato and rusk salads, and freshly baked bread. Have lunch at Barbourni, a stylish restaurant that sits on the beach, serving delicious seafood; the prawns with melted feta cheese were particularly good, as were the calamari and seafood salad. The halloumi puts everything you've tried in the UK to shame. If you're after a dazzling sunset and jaw-dropping vistas, head to Flame which specialises in locally-sourced meats. Classic cuts of lamb, beef and pork are served on wooden platters complemented by delicious salads. The best way to try it all is to order the Flame Surf n Turf, a platter offering rib-eye steak, lobster, asparagus, mac 'n' cheese and courgettes. The Flame Salad is well worth making room for, a mouthwatering mix of glazed pecans, grilled peaches and kopanisti - a salty, spiced cheese.

Activities



The Romanos reception

Courtesy

Most resorts operate on a fly-and-flop basis, but Costa Navarino encourages its guests to try one of its culturally-focused experiences as much as possible - although if you want to lie flat among the sand dunes, there's no judgement here. There's astronomy courses where you can spend a night star-gazing. There's the 'Farm To Table' cooking sessions where guests learn about local dishes, collect produce from the vegetable garden and enjoy dinner al-fresco. There's 'Songs Round The Table', in which guests help prepare traditional delicacies with a group of local women while they sing regional folk songs a capella, a historic Messinian practice. There's olive oil and wine-tasting sessions and philosophy walks round the local area. Even the resort's fitness activity nods to local culture; learn how to master traditional Greek dancing or do yoga on the beach at sunset. For those in need of serenity, the award-winning Anazoe spa offers indoor and outdoor treatments, as well as multiple baths and salt water pools ideal for weary muscles.

How to get there

COSTA NAVARINO

Costa Navarino is a three-hour journey from Athens along picturesque, winding roads that cross olive groves, vineyards and valleys. Break up the journey by staying at the Hilton Athens Hotel, which boasts a rooftop bar offering one of the city's best views of the Acropolis. Otherwise, the resort is a 45-minute drive from Kalamata airport. Staff will happily arrange transfers from either airport.

One night at Costa Navarino will make you feel as content and rested as if you've been away for many more. The honourable, ambitious intentions of its founder - to be a sustainable paradise that benefits the area and its locals as much as its guests - have truly been realised.

Stay at Costa Navarino's The Romanos, a luxury collection resort, from €279 / £250 per night, including breakfast.