



Buying in Greece



Your guide to buying a home in Greece, safely

- Your timetable to buying in Greece
- Focus on where and what to buy
- Set your budget
- Understand the legal processes
- Buy safely in Greece

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Speak to the experts

Buying a property in Greece is a simple matter of putting one foot in front of the other. But you do need to ensure that you are on a firm footing by having a team of professionals behind you. Contact us for further information.

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Buying safely in Greece

– about this guide

Generally speaking, the international property business has been cleaned up over the past few years. Still, many of us are understandably nervous. We want to spend our holidays, long weekends or even our retirement enjoying the Greek lifestyle, but we're nervous about sending so much money to another country with an unfamiliar legal system, language and currency. We've read stories about people who have run into difficulties when buying property abroad. We're worried about getting a properly-built home, about signing contracts we don't understand, about healthcare, pensions, currency and now Brexit!

The Greece Buying Guide's aim is simple – to help you to buy safely in Greece.

Not everyone delays buying because they're worried. Some just don't know where to start! We can help you too, with a roadmap and clear explanation of the buying process, the costs and timescales.

Along with a trustworthy estate agent and a good, specialist lawyer, the third way to eliminate risk is to stop exchange rate movements wrecking your budget. You wouldn't agree to buy a home in your own country where the price could move by 10 or even 20% before you have to pay for it, yet that is the risk you take if you don't lock in your exchange rate. We will explain how you can prevent that.

The Greece Buying Guide will help you achieve your dream of home-ownership in one of the world's favourite places. The process can be easy, enjoyable even, if you follow us on this journey.



Is this the year?



You can own a home in Greece!

You can swap the 1,500 hours of sunshine that the UK averages each year for the 2,700+ hours that Greece basks in. You can enjoy the island lifestyle, the beautiful landscapes, the history, architecture, nightlife and people of Greece, not just for a quick week here and there, but always. Here is why you should make this the year.

1. Complete and utter beauty!

It's difficult to explain why you would want to move to Greece to someone who hasn't been there. Mainly it's the coastline, of which Greece has more than any other Mediterranean country, with over 225 inhabited islands. While swimming in other oceans can feel a little scary, the sea around Greece is calm, warm and crystal clear. The homes are generally old, beautiful, spacious and well built. The countryside is green, and the Greeks are great gardeners. You'll see bougainvillea spilling out over honey-coloured, Italianate balconies, with a view of the sea that will have you marvelling at the beauty of the world, and of your life there. That's why you would want to own a home in Greece!

2. Low property prices

Not only are Greek homes exceptional value, but each island has its own appeal and personality. There is something for everyone, usually at a reasonable price. Prices fell by as much as 50% during the financial crisis, and have taken a long time to start to rise. Affordable prices with prospects for long-term capital growth? We suggest buying now! In Crete, one of the most popular islands with UK buyers, you can find an apartment on a good development, close to the beach, for between €50,000 and €100,000. For a Mediterranean villa in or

near a traditional, picture-perfect village, Greece is generally cheaper than most southern European countries.

3. Cost of Living

You may imagine that the UK is expensive (and some things are) but its cost of living is comparable to the USA, France and others. Not Greece though. Comparison site Numbeo.com shows just how much less you will be spending on your new life in Greece: 64% less on rent, 25% less on eating out and 15% less on general consumer goods compared to the UK. Your pension will go much further in Greece.

4. Tourist income

Tourism has been one of the few bright spots in Greece's economy in recent years and the government is keen to expand it further. The season now lasts from Easter until mid-October, which is great news if you want to rent out your property. Holiday rents are good compared to rival Mediterranean countries such as Turkey, and Greece is considered a safe destination.

5. Long-term appeal

Greece is one of those countries that British people (and Americans, Irish, Australians etc.) love coming back to. It's been a backpacker favourite since the 1960s, but British people have been moving here to live long before that – including the Durrell family, famously, in the 1930s. You can trace the Greco-British friendship back even earlier though, to romantic heroes like Lord Byron, who died fighting for Greece. We are old friends. You might never learn Greek because everyone will insist on speaking to you in English! And that friendship has been cemented by the Greek crisis, during which tens of thousands of young Greek people have moved to the UK.

“Bougainvillea spilling over honey-coloured, Italianate balconies; a view of the sea that will have you marvelling at the beauty of your life here. That's why you might want to own a home in Greece!”



Deciding What to Buy



Step One: Essential Decisions

Your dreams and intentions may change throughout the process, but organising your initial plans is the place to start. You should ask yourself these five basic questions.

Why are you buying?

So you know you want to buy a property in Greece, but why, exactly? Analysing and articulating your thoughts can help motivate and direct you, so write down your ideas. Here are some examples:

- “We want to enjoy more space, sun and warmer weather.”
- “Our pension will go further in Greece.”
- “I want a place to enjoy memorable holidays with family and friends.”
- “Now the kids have left home, we need a new adventure.”
- “Property investments in Greece could have real potential”
- “I don’t want ever to look back on my life with regret, never having made the move.”

How will you use it?

This is crucial to ensuring that you really enjoy your property. What will you do with it? Long weekends, three weeks over the summer, for investment, for relocation, for holidays and then eventually retirement? Be honest with yourself. If you really don’t think you’ll be nipping down for weekends, you can save money by being further from the airport. If you don’t want other people using it and don’t need the money, why worry about rental or investment potential?

How much can you afford?

There may be ways to raise more money, or even share the costs, but get an idea of your realistic budget from the off. (See our finance guide on page 15). You should budget for at least 10% extra for buying costs. Don’t forget also that you won’t quite get the “interbank” rate for your currency that’s shown on the news and the FX sites, but a percentage point or two below that.

(See our currency guide on page 16). On the other hand, you might be able to knock a little bit off the price of the property too.

What MUST your Greek home have?

What are your deal-breakers, the must haves? How many bedrooms or bathrooms do you need? Is a pool an absolute requirement or would a local beach be better? Outdoor space? Is it essential that you can walk to a local cafe or bar? And what would you like your Greek home to have? What would make it perfect for you? Do you want a terrace, garden and/or a swimming pool? (See our checklist on the next page).

What are your turn-offs?

It’s nice to be positive, but focusing on what we can’t stand can be quite liberating too! Would you hate having to book a ferry every time you go to Greece? Do you find a sandy beach less appealing than your own pool? Are you worried that you’ll be saddled with all the pool cleaning, or cooking? Would you find the presence of holidaymakers on your doorstep all summer a little irksome? Now is the time to say it loud and clear.

You want to love this home, so spell out what will stop that happening, then see if your partner or spouse feel the same!

Checklist to a perfect property

The location:

Essential

Preferable

Island or mainland?

Which island?

Expat area or more Greek?

City, town, village, country?

Maximum distance to shops?

Max distance to airport?

Max distance to hospital?

Max distance to beach?

Need public transport?

Other location requirements?

The property:

Budget (in pounds)?

Old or modern?

House, flat?

Detached, semi or neither?

Bedrooms?

Bedrooms with ensuite?

Bathrooms?

Living area – open plan?

Separate dining room?

Wheelchair accessible?

Rough square metres?

View?

State of repair?

Outside space:

Garden?

Terrace?

Pool, private or communal?

Garage?

Step Two: Countdown to Buying

Working out a timetable is a powerful tool in turning dreams to reality. Many people wait until the spring or autumn to start looking – but why wait until everyone is buying? High demand can mean higher prices. You can start looking at property at any time, and quiet times can be good for picking up bargains too. Estate agents will be keener and sellers more motivated, fearful of being without a buyer for another season.

A tactic that we find works well is to set an end date and fix in your mind being in the property by then. Then work your way back from that. Tick these off as you achieve them.

Six months from being a Greek home owner:

- Narrow down your choices using our checklist and propertyguides.com/Greece articles. Prepare a list of must-haves and nice-to-haves.
- Speak to Smart Currency Exchange. Until you have consulted our currency partner it will be impossible to set your budget. Remember, you will not be able to access the “interbank” rate that you see on the news and on the property websites, so it is essential to get an idea of your real buying budget and lock that in.
- Speak to a mortgage advisor, if required.
- Set your budget.

Five months from owning:

- Begin your detailed property search.
- Speak to a lawyer about how best to structure the deal.

Four months from owning:

- Speak to estate agents.
- Begin process of opening a Greek bank account.
- Narrow down properties for realistically achievable viewing trips.
- Book a viewing trip(s).
- Detailed discussions with lawyer and Smart Currency Exchange.

Three months from owning:

- Attend property exhibitions.
- Viewing trips.
- Get your AFM number and bank account.
- Make an offer.
- Protect your budget with a currency specialist. Consider a forward contract.
- Book a survey, if required.

Two months from owning:

- Sign reservation contract, if required, to start buying process.
- Sign deposit contract and pay deposit.
- Contract notary.
- Plan removals and decoration!
- Ensure utilities will be connected.
- Make final payment. Sign sale contract.
- Receive keys and move in.

Step three: Where to Buy

Greece continues to be one of the most popular locations with international property buyers. In part, this is due to the wide range of geographies, climates and lifestyles on offer depending on where you choose to look. In addition to the mainland of the country, there are over 200 inhabited islands, each with its own character and appeal. Three-quarters of Greece is uninhabited, and even the popular areas remain unspoilt. You can easily find an unspoilt island paradise.

Athens and Attica

Athens is one of the oldest western capital cities, and had a serious spruce up at the beginning of the noughties. However, the city is yet to recover from being hit by the financial crisis, and there are some signs of disrepair. Despite this, the city offers year-round life and entertainment, even in the winter months. It is served by flights from the UK throughout the year, so you can pop down for a winter weekend.

Athens' popularity continues in part due to the renowned friendliness of Athenians – and many British buyers can't help but be swayed by the number of people who speak English. There is a good expat network across the city, which is easy to find online before you get there, so you can seek advice about the best areas to look (and where not to buy).

The most plentiful option for property in Athens will be six-storey apartment blocks in the city centre. There are the leafy expensive neighbourhoods as well, where you can find larger properties, such as Kolonaki and Plaka; and you can always find more expensive apartments in the trendier city centre locations.

Just outside Athens, the region of Attica is also fairly popular. Here you can find beautiful coastal properties – although they do come at a premium. Particularly attractive are those found on the Apollo Coast, known as the Athenian Riviera. The resorts along this 50 kilometre strip are busy throughout the year.

Central mainland Greece

If you are looking for a more rustic and less touristy part of Greece, the central mainland is perfect. Here life seems to have continued in the same rural way for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. For miles around you can see wheat fields, cattle farms, orchards, mountains, forests and much more of the rural life. Properties here are very affordable, usually constructed from timber and the local red stone. The lifestyle here can feel more Eastern Europe than Mediterranean, and the weather is certainly cooler. Winters can be cold, wet and snowy.

Peloponnese

Ten per cent of Greece's population live in this peninsula in the south of the country. It is one of Greece's most historic areas, home to Ancient Olympia. The climate and geography changes from coast to coast, including snowcapped mountains, lush valleys, fertile plains and a beautiful coastline. For foodies, the local produce is known to be exceptional, especially the locally grown Kalamata olives.

Like the centre of Greece, the Peloponnese has undeveloped areas that rarely see tourists or international homebuyers. On the other hand, there are also über-upmarket resorts like Costa Navarino and Amazanoë. The Beckham family has been known to vacation here.

Crete

The largest island in Greece is one of the most popular with expats from across the rest of Europe. Chania in the north, Rethymno in the centre and Lasithi in the east are all particularly popular with foreign buyers. So are the inland villages, slightly inland from the coast, or in the foothills of the White Mountains.

Its popularity with expats and tourists has sheltered Crete from the economic issues that affected the rest of the country. Even so, bargain properties are still available, especially those that need a significant amount of work. Crete is easily accessible, thanks to the international airports at

A guide to Greece and its islands

See the map for the coasts, then search for them at propertyguides.com/Greece/buying/where-to-buy for more idea of what they are like.



Heraklion and Chania, although you may have to change in Athens in winter. Aside from that, it really has everything you could possibly ask for.

In terms of budget, you can easily find change from €100,000 when purchasing a fixer-upper in a traditional village, while a house with a pool may cost as little as €150,000.

The Cyclades

In the centre Aegean sea, you find the 30 Cyclades islands, including Mykonos and Santorini. These are the islands where every tourist brochure features the traditional cuboid, whitewashed Greek homes and buildings with brightly coloured domes and terraces.

In Mykonos, the west coast is where all the action happens. Here you'll find the most desirable areas to own a home, including Mykonos Town, also known as Chora, with its ancient harbour and picturesque 'Little Venice' quarter. Other hot spots on this coastline include Agios Lazaros, Agia Sofia, Tourlos and Houlakia. Set back a bit from the jetsetters, gay-friendly Elia has the island's longest beach. Platis Gialos is one of the oldest resorts on the island and is a more laid-back option. Mykonos is not cheap. For a small detached villa outside of the more fashionable areas and with no pool, don't expect a lot of choice for under €500,000. Your options (for a villa) increase significantly with a budget of €1million-plus.

Mykonos achieves one of the highest yields from holiday lets of all the Cyclades islands, according to local agents. The most desirable multi-million-euro villas can be let for as much as €10,000 or €20,000 in high season. On many islands, you could buy a whole home for that! Paros and Santorini are the next best earners.

Mykonos and Ios offer the hedonistic lifestyle, while Santorini is known for its beauty. Syros is popular with those looking for a more quiet life. Despite being one of the smallest islands of the Cyclades, it is the legal and administrative centre of the archipelago. It's also a transport hub for the northern islands, from the ferry

port in Ermoupoli. This gem of a Cycladic town owes its name to Hermes, the god of trade. Its illustrious past – it was Greece's main port once upon a time – is perfectly demonstrated by its historic mansions, marble paved streets and squares, imposing churches, monuments, statues and well preserved neoclassical buildings.

One problem with Greek islands in general – although you may see it as a plus – is that while busy in the summertime, they are generally very quiet in winter. In Santorini and Mykonos, however, the tourist authorities are beginning to open more hotels and attractions in winter too, and working to improve year-round access.

Property prices on these islands are some of the most expensive, but this does mean that they have high holiday rental returns

North East Aegean

The closest Greek islands to Turkey, including Lesbos, Chios and Samos, were in the news a couple of years ago thanks to the migrant crisis. This has largely, although not entirely, been solved, and the islands are returning to being most popular with tourists and expats. These are not the easiest in terms of access from the mainland, but there are direct flights throughout the summer. The property markets, especially in Lesbos and Chios, are well developed, making it easy for expats to find affordable properties.

Ionian islands

Home to Corfu and Kefalonia, the Ionian islands have been popular with British expats for decades. The success of Gerald Durrell's books, and the TV hit *The Durrells*, will have helped. The north-west corner of Corfu has long been nicknamed "Kensington-on-Sea", giving a slight insight into those who live there and the prices they pay. The island also has a UNESCO heritage old town, and is also popular for its olive and pine groves and secluded sandy bays. Properties on the north-east coast of the island have been sold for as high as €5 million in the last few years, but near Kassiopi you can easily find a three-bedroom cottage or a renovated townhouse for around €200,000.

Kefalonia, famous for the story of *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, is made for tourists who decide to stay, with purpose built modern holiday villas and apartments. You can find apartments here for less than €100,000. The island of Zakynthos is another favourite with expats and tourists, thanks to its easy summertime access and the possibility of holiday rental income.

The Ionian islands are the closest to the UK, making them the easiest to access, either by air into Corfu, Preveza, Kefalonia or Zakynthos, or overland via France and Italy and then ferry.

The Sporades

The Sporades islands have become well known in recent years, thanks to the hit Abba musical *Mamma Mia!* Skiathos is popular with tourists and foreign residents, and is regularly listed as one of Greece's most beautiful islands, while Skopelos (where the movie was filmed) is more traditional and relatively unspoiled. Here you can find gorgeous traditional stone farmhouses called *kalyvia*.

The largest of the Sporades islands is Evia, which can be reached by car from Athens in under two hours. The north of the island is popular with both international buyers and weekend Athenians, especially the quiet seaside resorts of Limni and Loutra Aidipsou.

Argo-Saronic islands

These are the islands closest to Athens, meaning they are fairly busy all year around, and property is relatively pricey. Their proximity to Athens is convenient to both the wealthier Athenians looking for getaway property and the expats who would like to travel around Europe and to and from the UK all year round. The closest of these islands is Aegina, which is only an hour by sea. This is popular thanks to its mountains and green landscape, and beautiful beaches – although property is expensive. Also important to note are Hydra and Spetses, which are beautiful, cosmopolitan, expensive, and car free!

Dodecanese

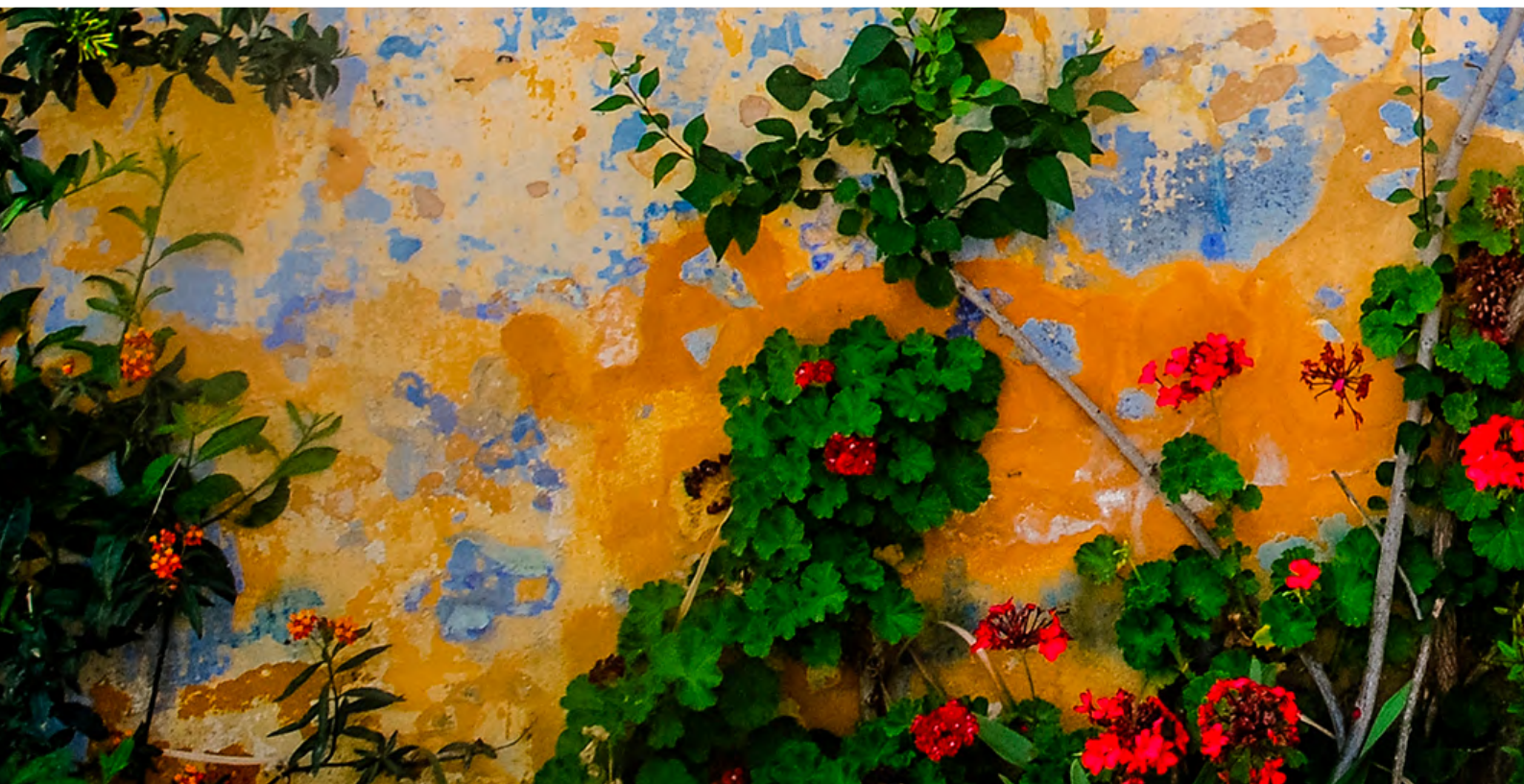
The most southern and sunniest islands of Greece include Rhodes, another popular island with international property buyers, including some famous names. Here you can find the typical tourist style apartments as well as traditional Greek village properties.

Prices here are often on the higher end of the market. However, a modest townhouse can be found for €200,000, or a detached villa could cost around €400,000. The Dodecanese are also home to Kos, Kalymnos and Karpathos, all increasingly popular with buyers thanks to the year round sunshine.





How to buy



How to pay for your house in Greece

You need to know exactly how much money you can spend, and what your financial sources are: savings, the sale or re-mortgage of your UK property, etc. It's also important to think about the costs involved in buying a property.

The key financial points to consider are:

Funds available:

Work out the total amount of money you have available to purchase a property. It could include cash, savings, items you can sell, pension drawdown, investments you can cash in. Consider buying with friends or family **read our guide, Buying Abroad With Family.**

Additional finance:

Can you buy with a mortgage? Speak to an estate agent, independent financial advisor, bank or other lender to assess your options. If so, how much deposit will you need, and how will you service the monthly repayments? What would you do in an emergency, such as unemployment or illness?

Do you have a property from which you can release funds, either by remortgaging or by equity release?

Ongoing finance:

There are costs that will come after you have bought the property, including local property taxes, maintenance and traveling expenses to get there. How will you cover these? Don't forget too, that exchange rates can change, and a pension or investments paid in pounds will not guarantee an income in euros. (Although, see Managing Your Currency Risk on the next page, for Regular Payment Plans where you can lock in a rate).

Investments:

If you're moving to Greece for good, you could benefit from moving your pension overseas into another scheme, such as a

self-invested personal pension (SIPP) or a Qualifying Recognised Overseas Pension Scheme (QROPS). Conditions do apply, but typically you could gain greater control over your pension and reduce your tax bill. Please note: the UK authorities will only allow you to transfer your pension into one of these schemes if you meet certain criteria: you need to be living, or going to live, abroad and you must remain living abroad. It's important to remember that it takes ten years of being a non-resident and moving the pension for a QROPS to show real benefits, making it really important to consider your options now rather than later.



Getting a mortgage

With interest rates so low, it's no wonder that many buyers are choosing to borrow to invest in Greece's affordable but rising market. To apply, have the following documentation ready:

- Income tax declaration for the past two years
- Bank statements from the past year
- Payroll or other proof of income for the past six months
- A list of mortgage loans already held
- A statement of your assets and liabilities, confirmed by an accountant.
- A copy of your passport.

Just like in the UK with pensions, Greece has had its scandals concerning the mis-selling of mortgages. Your lawyer should ensure that your mortgage takes into account consumer protection legislation. The contract of sale and signing of the mortgage will normally happen altogether, with a staff member from the bank present at the signing of the deeds in the notary's office, forwarding the money to the seller.

Managing your Currency Risk

Exchange rates are the great unknowns when buying property abroad. The risk of currencies moving is often overlooked in the excitement of buying, despite the fact that the price of your property will be changing by the minute. As a 'live' market, the cost of buying euros in the morning will be different to that in the afternoon. Over the course of days, weeks and months that fluctuation can be dramatic.

During 2017 your British pound would have got you anywhere from €1.20 to €1.08. If you had agreed to buy a €200,000 property in June, when the pound was at €1.15 it would have cost you just under £174,000 (at the "interbank" rate). But if you were completing on it just two months later when the pound had fallen after the General Election, that same property would cost over £185,000 and you would have to find another £11,000. If you couldn't find it, you might have lost the property and your deposit.

Such variations (known as "volatility") over the course of the buying process are perfectly normal; indeed they can be much worse. So while it is perfectly natural to want to buy in Greece when the pound is looking strong, unless you lock in your currency with a Forward Contract you are taking a huge gamble.

What many people don't realise is that you can lock in an exchange rate today for a purchase later – securing the price of the property in pounds having already agreed the price in euros.

We recommend getting in contact with our trusted partners, Smart Currency Exchange, as early as possible in your process.

Smart Currency Exchange has been one of the UK's most highly regarded currency exchange experts, dedicated to the overseas property market, since 2004. Smart has an "Excellent" rating from the thousands of its clients on the independent ratings service Trustpilot, and is the trusted currency partner of Rightmove.

Don't leave yourself exposed to currency risk



Buying Costs

In addition to the actual cost of the property, there are a number of additional costs to factor in. These will depend, for example, on whether the property is new-build or resale property, and how you are paying for the property – cash or mortgage. Budget around 10–15% of the purchase price to ensure all taxes and fees are covered. All professional fees incur VAT of 23%.

Most of the fees payable will be based on the 'assessed tax value' of the property, which will usually be lower than the actual price you are paying. This has been previously calculated by local tax authorities using government criteria and you will usually find this is fixed. These fees will usually include:

Purchase tax: This is around 7% of the first €15,000 of the assessed tax value of the property, and 9% on the remainder. For example if you are buying a property valued at €120,000, you will need to pay €10,095 in purchase tax. This must be paid before the final purchase contract is signed.

Value added tax (new build only): New build properties are subject to VAT at a rate of 18%.

Land registry fees: These will be from 0.3–0.5% of the assessed tax value of the property.

Notary fees: The fees charged by the notary for drawing up the final purchase contract will usually cost up to 2% of the property's assessed tax value.

Legal fees: The conveyancing of the property will usually cost up to 1% of the assessed tax value, but this will need to be agreed in writing beforehand. It is a legal requirement to have a lawyer for your Greek property purchase.

Community fee: Paid at the same time as purchase tax, you will need to pay a community tax of 3% for general public services such as road maintenance.

Agent's fees: These are split between the buyer and the seller and will usually be 2–5% of the purchase price. The seller's part may well be included in the purchase price of the property, meaning that in effect the buyer pays all fees.

The Estate Agent

A good estate agent will be the most important ingredient to successfully finding a property in Greece. You need one that is legal, reliable and, most importantly, understands, the type of property you want.

A problem that frequently occurs with international buyers is in opening a Greek bank account. Raise this subject with your agent before you start looking seriously for property, or you could end up disappointed.

A good agent:

Operates legally and ethically

Greek estate agents are regulated by law and should be professionally qualified and licensed. The main professional association for agents is the Hellenic Association of Realtors (www.sek.gr). Check that the agent is still a member by looking at the organisation's website. There is also a branch of FIABCI, the International Real Estate Federation.

Is proactive and offers a good service

If you ask a question, you want an agent who calls you back. If you have a problem, you want someone who takes action to get it resolved. Determining up

front if an agent is helpful will give you a better chance of getting things done properly. Send them a brief or an email before you go to Greece, asking them a question and see how long they take to get back to you – and how enthusiastic they are about helping you. You could fill in our checklist on page 14, photograph or scan it and send it to a few agents to see who seems most proactive.

Has experience working with international clients

You may want an agent who speaks your language, knows the popular areas for International buyers, understands the market and knows the politics and planning involved to make things happen. The particular geography of Greece, however, means that if you are buying on a tiny island you may just have to take what you can get! Unlike in the hotspots of Spain and France, it is relatively rare to find an agent who specialises entirely on the UK buyer market. In that case, finding a good English-speaking lawyer will be even more vital.

Stays with you until the end

Prior to the purchase, your agent should help you get your AFM number and open a bank account as earning their commission depends on it. They may also help you find a surveyor, builder, notary and anyone else to smooth the sales process.

A really good agent will help you further than just the final contract. They may suggest a good local doctor, school and whatever else you need. You can find out if your prospective agent does this by asking for past-buyer feedback. An estate agent working in an internationally popular destination such as Mykonos will often stay in contact with happy buyers and will be only too pleased to introduce you to someone who made this exciting move before you.

The Viewing Trip

Five tips for a successful viewing trip:

1. Avoid peak time. Even apart from the obvious downsides of expensive flights, hotels and tourist crowds, many of the best rental properties will have guests inside them. If looking off-season, do some research into how different the resort is in the height of the season.

2. Use technology. There's nothing more frustrating than driving miles to a property which you hate as soon as you lay eyes on it! Use Google Streetview to weed out those properties that lack kerb appeal before you even get to Greece. Once you're back home, you won't be able to pop back for another look, as you would if you were buying somewhere in the UK, so use your smart phones to take photos and video clips of properties.

3. Don't be too polite. Avoid any estate agent that tries to control or take over your time or schedule while there. A good agent might offer to find you a hotel, drive you around, even take you to dinner, but equally they will be happy to leave you to your own devices.

4. Engage the imagination. Sure, it looks a bit rough around the edges now, but picture it with a John Lewis kitchen and coat of Farrow & Ball...! Even the most sparkling pool can look like a little swampy after a month or two of neglect. Do consider that ugly duckling property – it might be tens of thousands of euros cheaper but cost just hundreds to turn into a gleaming white beauty of a home for generations to come.

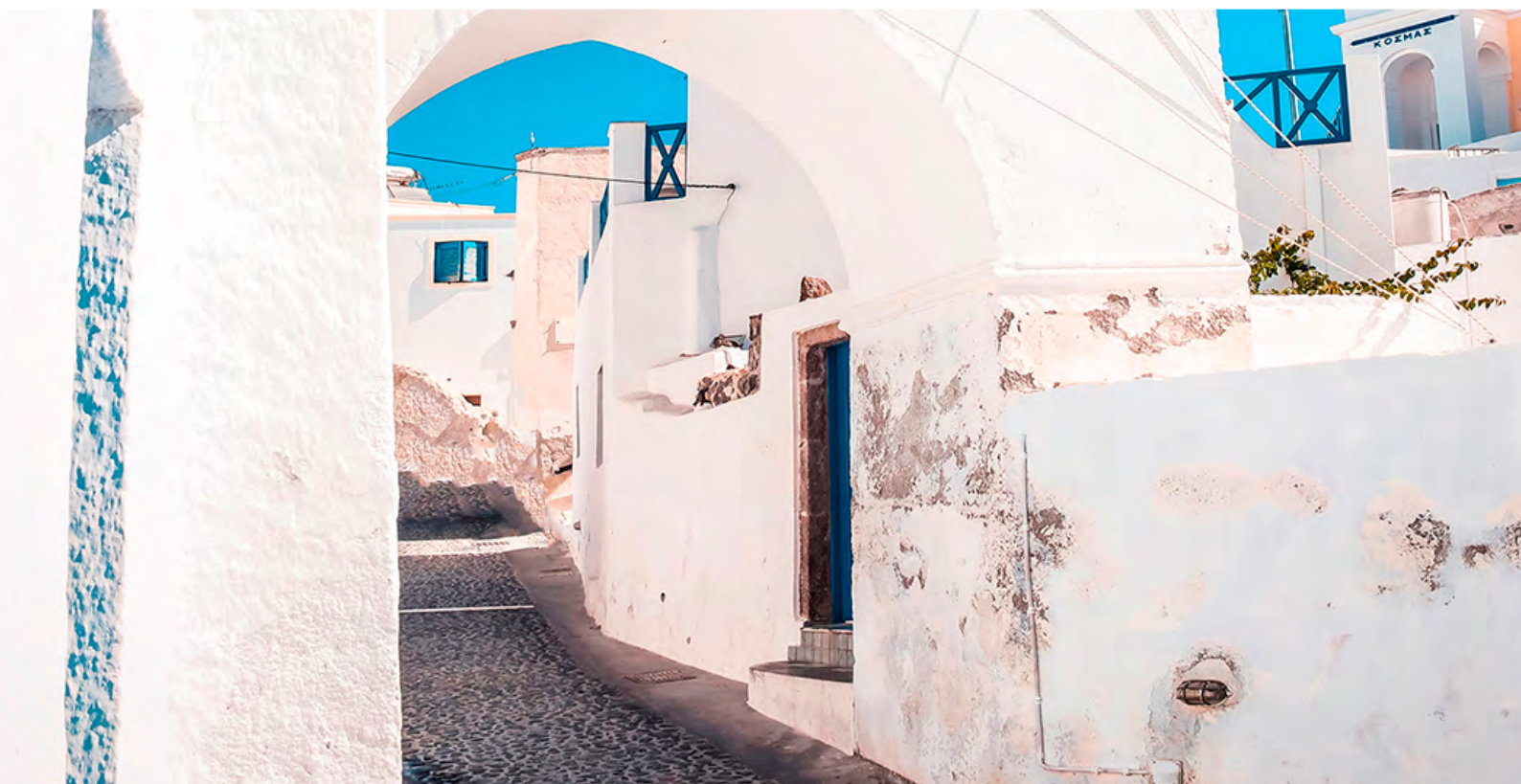
5. Be ready with a deposit. Be prepared to come up with a few thousand to secure a property via a reservation deposit. You should have registered with Smart Currency Exchange already when planning your budget, but you certainly should by the time you leave for your viewing trip.

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Making An Offer



How to bargain

Once you've had a viewing trip or two, narrowed down your property search to a handful of options, and know how you are going to pay for it, it's time to start making offers. Your agent should be able to let you know what an acceptable offer is, and make recommendations.

Remember, though, that the agent is working for the seller, and paid a higher commission the higher the price. It can be hard to gauge what is a fair price when you're buying abroad, in a country you're new to, so here are seven simple tips to staying in control during the negotiation process:

1. Know what you are talking about

By conducting the market research and reviewing recent local sales you will be confident in asking for a fair price. Being well-informed and asking educated questions will show you mean business.

2. Get your game face on

Don't come across too keen, nor too blasé. Be polite yet serious, let the selling team know you've viewed a lot of houses and know your stuff. Just like a poker player, read your seller's emotions: with some sellers you might want to show how much you love the property, with others you want to play it cool.

3. Charm

You are buying something that someone loves. Being too aggressive in your attitude or pricing will kill off all your good work. You should normally negotiate via the agent but writing a letter to the seller introducing yourself and explaining why you're interested in their property can help you stand out from competition.

4. Take control of the negotiations

You are the one making the offer. The seller wants to make a sale and understanding their vulnerability puts

you at an advantage. You can walk away at any minute and buy something else; the seller needs to sell that property.

5. Counter offer quickly

Any delay in responding leaves room for a seller to consider other offers. Make sure you are prepared for what you are willing to pay before entering negotiations and respond quickly and confidently to any counter-offers.

6. Don't stress if it falls through

Stay rational and if a deal falls through, don't worry. In many cases buyers look back on deals that didn't happen with relief, finding the ideal property later down the road.

7. Contact Smart Currency Exchange

Do this before you make an offer on a property in Greece. Otherwise you could make an offer and then find that the exchange rate has moved against you before the other side has even responded.



The Legal Process



Greece's buying system

The British have the same right to buy in Greece as the Greeks do, but the legal processes will not be like those you are used to in the UK.

It is a legal requirement to have a lawyer. It is wise to invest in the services of an independent, English-speaking Greek solicitor, who specialises in property law. They will not only oversee and organise the whole purchase process, but will often advise you on tax and inheritance issues too. This is even more important if you aren't a fluent Greek speaker, as they will be able to guide you through the details of the transaction, so that you fully understand the contract and supporting documentation. It is important to establish in whose names the property will be put and who will inherit it (especially for unmarried couples with children from previous relationships), among many other vital issues.

To be introduced to a recommended and trusted Anglo-Greek law firm, email info@grenty.com or call our Resources Centre on +30 210 2209415.

1. Getting your AFM number

You will need to secure a Tax Registry Number (AFM) from the Internal Revenue Service. It's important to note that anyone involved in making the purchase must obtain one of these (for example, if you are purchasing jointly as a married couple). You also need a Greek bank account and this can take a while to organise.

2. Offer and reservation

When you have found the property you wish to buy and have agreed a price, the agent will usually ask you to sign a reservation agreement to take the property off the market at the agreed price for, usually, 15–30 days. You will normally pay at least €3,000 but it could be as high as €10,000 or more, depending on the price of the property. Sometimes the deposit will be returnable if you change your mind at this early stage, but sometimes it won't; it depends on the terms. By making the agreement subject to preliminary legal checks, mortgage loan availability on the property and a building

survey, the deposit should be returned if there are problems.

3. Preliminary contract

This legal process will usually start with a preliminary contract – a private contract of sale between the buyer and seller agreeing the price, the payment method and any other conditions. When this contract is signed, it is binding and a deposit of around 10% of the agreed purchase price must be paid by the buyer. This kind of contract can take various forms, so it's important to go through all details with your lawyer to be sure you understand all your obligations and responsibilities.

Greece has strict planning laws, thankfully, which have protected it from over-development. But your lawyer will need to ensure that your property complies.



What will your lawyer check?

Before you pay any money other than a reservation deposit, your lawyer will get the following information from the Land Registry.

- Who owns the property and has the right to sell it.
- If there are debts against it. For example, a mortgage or court judgement. Also, if the seller is up-to-date with the community fees and property taxes.
- If there are sitting tenants in the property.
- If it is subject to any special rules such as subsidised housing.
- For new homes, if insurance is in place to cover structural defects.

For example, that the swimming pool and any extensions – including covered balconies – are legal. Closing of the sale from the preliminary contract to the sales contract will usually take around four to six weeks.

4. Survey?

Greece is an earthquake zone, so your lawyer should check that the property complies with Greece's Seismic Code, as laid down by the Earthquake Planning and Protection Organisation (EPPO). All the same, for this and other matters it can make sense to get a survey done. UK-based organisation RICS (the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors) has members in Greece, so search under RICS Hellas for a member.

5. Sales contract

A Greek notary (*simvoleographo*) must also be a party to the sale contract. As buyer, you will be responsible for hiring the notary, who will prepare the sales contract and ensure all details are correct. The sale contract legally transfers ownership between the seller and buyer. You sign it before the notary, who ensures this process is legal. Your lawyer must also be present as they will need to sign the document when the contract is signed. The notary's main function is to certify Greek documents and agreements to ensure that they meet all legal criteria. They work on behalf of the government and cannot advise or protect the interests of either the buyer or the seller. They also collect the taxes;

At this signing, the notary will read out all contents of the sale contract, and will sign and complete this providing they are satisfied that both parties understand this. The seller will need to pay the Property transfer tax before the contract is signed, but once these documents have been completed the balance of the purchase price will be paid and the notary must register the transfer of the property with the Greek Land Registry (*National Cadastre*).

Welcome to Greece!



Power of attorney

You may be able to organise Power of Attorney if you are unable to be present.

Your Power of Attorney can sign on your behalf and will be arranged by your lawyer. It is important to assign Power of Attorney only for the property transactions, and not to all of your legal affairs in Greece.

Whether you use Power of Attorney or are able to be present yourself, you will need to present a valid passport and your Tax Registry Number.