



Avoid the tourist traps and explore one of Greece's most beautiful spots like a local.

I stayed overnight at the Vouliagmeni Suites Boutique Hotel, the ideal sanctuary for a stay of any length on the Athenian Riviera (vouliagmenisuites.com). My comfortable room had a spacious balcony with a view over the Mediterranean and from the lobby it was an easy three-minute walk to the lake. A short bus ride takes you to the sandy beach at Varkiza, which retains a Greek island flavor. Speaking of flavor, a three-minute walk from the hotel in the direction takes you to a string of fantastic, tourist-free bars and restaurants, my favorite among which is Souvlike, where you will more than like, but love and swoon over, the best souvlaki you've ever had.

Of course, more great Greek food awaits in Athens and that's where you'll find one of the most original hotels in the Greek capital. Like Vouliagmeni Suites, the Pallas Athena (grecotelpallasathena.com) is part of the Grecotel group, which has some of the most unique hotel and resort properties — not just in the Athens area, but throughout Greece. In fact, many of the ingredients used in the hotel's restaurant are sourced from Grecotel's own farm in Crete. There's mm-good Cretan honey at the amazing daily breakfast (included in your room price!) and also a yummy "Cretan corner" with traditional products like dakos, apaki, mizithropitakia and other organic Hellenic delicacies to which addiction is wholeheartedly approved. The Pallas Athena is openly artsy, with an airy, modern art-filled lobby and guestrooms featuring quirky decorative touches (mine had a shiny ceramic yellow pig as well as a chandelier) and sometimes unique graffiti-style elements. The hotel is not in the touristy Plaka area (though it isn't too far) but closer to the Psirri and Monastiraki districts, which is where Athens' younger, more creative verve (and lots of interesting shopping) is headquartered. So, it makes an excellent base to explore ancient Athens and its more modern side, too.