

ESSENTIALS THESSALONIKI

# BACK TO BUSINESS

For a city making a very cool comeback, check out Greece's colourful 'second city' of Thessaloniki

Words by **Hannah Summers**



DO

**Discover a city that's on the up...**

A trip to Greece doesn't have to mean a fortnight of island hopping (although we'd like to do that too, please). Look at it as your next city break instead – one that combines all the country's best bits (blinding history, heaps of food and really awesome people). No, it's not Athens, but instead it's the country's thriving second city and gastro capital, Thessaloniki. This is a place that was hit hard by Greece's economic recession, but its spirited, youthful population have pushed back to create a city that's brimming with new ideas, bars and restaurants. Stroll along ancient walls, sip beer by the water, and take it easy in the sunshine.

**Thessaloniki Walking Tour**

There's one for food, and one for history – and I strongly recommend you do both to get a good grip of the city in a short amount of time. The history tour will take you on an easy wander around the city's main ancient sites, from the Roman third-century Arch of Galerius to the magnificent St Paul's Orthodox Church. The food tour will lead you through mounds of olives at Kapani market, and also to the best local bakery in town, where you'll stuff your face with sweet, flaky, crunchy baklava that's the best we've ever tasted. Really.  
[thessalonikiwalkingtours.com](http://thessalonikiwalkingtours.com)

**White Tower and the Promenade**

It might make for a lovely picture, but Thessaloniki's most famous site has a harrowing and grisly past, and in the Ottoman period the White Tower operated as a prison and torture chamber. Come 1913 the building, which stands at 34m high, was whitewashed, and today houses a museum detailing the history of the city. The tower is also surrounded by pretty trees and families strolling happily along the promenade – which you must do for a look at Giorgos Zogolopoulos' famous sculpture, 'Umbrellas', and a faceful of sea air and sunshine.

Photograph by Alex Archontakis/Alamy

**GETTING THERE**

EasyJet offers return flights to Thessaloniki from £60. [easyjet.com](http://easyjet.com); For more information on Greece, its islands and cities, head to [discovergreece.com](http://discovergreece.com)

## EAT

**Derlicatessen Souvlaki**

For cheap souvlaki in the sunshine, head to Derlicatessen Souvlaki. It's narrow and hectic inside, but you should be able to suss out the on-the-wall Greek menu with the paintings of kebabs. Pay at the hole in the wall, and take your food out to one of the high tables outside, handily located to catch the late-afternoon rays. Chicken and/or pork is stuffed into lightly grilled pita wraps, and chips are coated in grated Parmesan-like cheese. Do what the locals do and wash one down with a pint of local lager.

Find Derlicatessen Souvlaki on Kouskoura Street

**Estrella Thessaloniki**

Imagine combining two of the greatest foodstuffs in the world: a croissant and a Greek custard pie. An instant online hit, right? Yes, right. The *bougatsan* is the brainchild of Kostas Kapetanakis, who in the wake of Greece's financial crisis (having been made redundant from his job) decided to open a café called Estrella. He created the *bougatsan*, uploaded it to Instagram and the pastry-custard dream (topped with chocolate!) went viral and sold out instantly. Swing by the café to try it for yourself.

[facebook.com/EstrellaThessaloniki](https://facebook.com/EstrellaThessaloniki)

**Tsinari**

For some old ouzerie vibes, head into the old city, and the oldest restaurant in town, and order the entire menu at Tsinari. Grab a spot at a blue wooden table outside, or underneath the black-and-white photograph-lined walls inside. Whatever you do, go big. Don't hold back. This restaurant is ridiculously cheap – a banquet of fried feta and honey, mussels and meatballs with several bottles of wine will cost you no more than €20. If there's time, grab a drink at the very local, smoke-filled bar opposite, too.

74 Papadopoulou Alexandras

Photograph by Hercules Milas/Alamy



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## DRINK

Photograph by Chris Mellor / Getty Images

**Sti Stoa Soul Bar**

Thessaloniki is a university city, so you'll find a bar scene that is suitably raucous and thriving. This small soul bar is one of the best you'll find in town, and you'll find it on Vilara (the surrounding streets are great for bar crawling). Expect reggae, reggaeton, a small and sweaty dancefloor, mega-strong cocktails and small areas for perching. When it all gets a bit crazy, head to the late-night pizza bar nearby, which serves big Italian pizzas that'll soak up all that ouzo in no time. Hopefully.

[facebook.com/sti.stoa.soulbar](https://facebook.com/sti.stoa.soulbar)

**Coq au Zen**

You could swing by Coq au Zen in the morning for a coffee and a pastry, but it's at night when this place comes alive. Hidden at the back of a shopping arcade in the trendy Valaoritou district (shopping arcades are becoming very cool in the city as peeling-paint walls are revived for new hipster bars) it's a narrow, packed and smoke-filled den with shabby furniture, zesty cocktails and handsome barmen. Forget securing a seat, just dip in for one before heading on to continue your Thessa bar hopping.

[facebook.com/pages/Coq-au-Zen](https://facebook.com/pages/Coq-au-Zen)

**Garçon Brasserie**

To get your caffeine fix with an added view try the Garçon Brasserie, a plush, local waterfront hangout that feels a little like dining on a swanky ship. The interiors are a little questionable – the red tablecloths would look more at home on a magician's table – but you can't fault looking out over the Med with a killer Greek coffee or late-night beer (it's open 24 hours!). Head to Leof Nikis (the main road which runs along the water) and look for the deep-red awnings and glowing giant letters spelling the restaurant's name, and you'll be on the right track.

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## STAY

**Makedonia Palace**

For a waterfront location and a buffet breakfast to spend hours at, try the Makedonia Palace. Many bedrooms (well, about half) have floor-to-ceiling windows leading to big balconies with lovely sea views. The location is spot on – perfect for a stroll along the waterfront, and there's a big pool if you just fancy doing nothing for an afternoon. It's a grand place – so grand, in fact, that Greece's handsome PAOK FC football team were hanging about in the lobby during our stay. From \$140 per night. [makedoniapalace.com](http://makedoniapalace.com)

**City Hotel**

For a pretty stay – and yes, pretty really is the word for this place – try the City Hotel. It turns out you don't need to compromise on looks if you're on a budget, either – bright and fresh rooms (with some forest-green touches) at reasonable prices per night make this eco-friendly hotel a win-win in the style-and-savings department. A location on the waterfront means it's walkable from most of the big sites, and taxis into town are temptingly cheap. From £70 per night. [cityhotel.gr](http://cityhotel.gr)

**Ekies All Senses Resort**

Strictly speaking, this hotel (pictured) isn't in Thessaloniki city, it's a little way along the coast (and around 70 miles from Thessaloniki airport). But it's a great place to twin your city break with some chilled-out lounging. Expect lab-white rooms splattered with turquoise paint and crazy-pattern tiles, a curvy swimming pool dotted with funky parasols, and a beach with water that's so clear and calm you'll spend your whole damn holiday Instagramming. From \$87.25 per night. [designhotels.com](http://designhotels.com); [ekies.gr](http://ekies.gr)