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The opening of school gates marks the end of the peak summer holiday season, but even though beachgoers start thinning out and hoteliers pause to catch their breath for the remaining sunny weeks of the year, the Mediterranean's seaside resorts are not ready to be mothballed just yet. In Greece, this is the time when locals take long-awaited beach holidays, enjoying the comfortable temperatures that replace searing midsummer heat. The vibe everywhere becomes much more laid-back, prices roll down from their seasonal highs, and somehow the experience of a Greek holiday manages to feel just that bit more authentic.

What doesn't change are those things that draw us to Greece in the first place: crystal waters, gorgeous beaches and fabulous food. So if you're not tied to school holidays, why not follow the locals' example? I always plan my own big fat Greek holiday in these quieter months — September and October — and according to Eleni Skarveli, UK director for the Greece National Tourism Organisation, more of us are catching on.

Not to mention that most people head to Greece for its islands, but I've found the mainland offers a much more authentic experience. These are the underrated spots that are particularly lovely in autumn

1. Ionian Riviera, western Greece



Parga has charm-packed villages squeezed between forest and sea

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Corfu, Cephalonia and the other Ionian isles heave in summer; but the mainland adjacent to them to the east is far less hectic. Accessed via the airport at Preveza (served by direct UK flights), the stretch between Paleros and Parga is all charm-packed villages squeezed between forest and sea. When not gazing across at the islands, time here is spent exploring wineries or having a go at jeep safaris, hiking or white-water rafting.