

# Wanderlust



## Costa Navarino, Greece

In a little-visited corner of the south-western Peloponnese lies a multifaceted luxury tourism project that places environmental regeneration, local community and sustainable development at the forefront of its endeavours

Facing the twinkling Ionian Sea, the 1,000-hectare development of Costa Navarino spans five sites on the coast of Greece's Peloponnese region, a vast peninsula west of Athens. It first opened its doors in 2010; now it includes flagship stay The Romanos, A Luxury Collection Resort; the family-friendly Westin; a unique W Resort with unusually strong local character; and a just-opened, ultra-luxury Mandarin Oriental resort. Guests have access to restaurants, shops and wellness and sports facilities, and cycling and walking paths scatter the area. You could easily treat it as a self-contained world, but there is far more to this project.

The Romanos is the pre-eminent resort within Costa Navarino, featuring a little over 300 rooms, with almost half of them equipped with their own infinity pools (using water from sustainable irrigation systems). Its Blue Flag sand-dune beach hosts a monitoring and protection programme for the loggerhead sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*), and patches are frequently cordoned off as nesting areas. The resort also offers surprisingly good value for money in its plethora of dining options, including the excellent beachfront Barbouni, which has a heavy focus on local Greek cuisine and sustainably sourced seafood.

Many of Costa Navarino's buildings have been inspired by local architecture and the nearby Mycenaean ruins. Indeed, the site of the storied Palace of King Nestor – which was described in Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad* – and its exquisite frescoes are but a ten-minute drive away. The wider area of the largely still-off-the-beaten-path western Peloponnese is also rich in history and archaeology, and the

UNESCO-listed Ancient Olympia site, birthplace of the Olympic Games, is just 90 minutes' drive from the hotel.

Along similar lines, Costa Navarino's 'Messinian Authenticity' experiences focus on getting people out of the resort area through immersive activities, such as regional cookery classes held in a local village, olive harvesting (Kalamata, of olive fame, is the nearest big town and international airport) and olive oil- and wine-tasting sessions, all managed and run by local community agrobusinesses.

Before its redevelopment as a resort, the area was mostly made up of disused farmland with limited vegetation; following its reinvention it has seen the biggest olive tree transplanting programme in Europe take place, in addition to the planting of 9,900 new indigenous trees. Costa Navarino has been credited with bringing about a significant economic revival in the south-western Peloponnese, employing and training thousands of locals and attracting international visitors to a lesser-known corner of the Greek mainland.

While notable oversights are still present – including the Canadian-made toiletries in the bathrooms of the Romanos – the resorts here stand out in terms of tourism sustainability and community engagement credentials in Greece. In a country where visitors often focus on the beauty of its islands, Costa Navarino offers a world-class mainland alternative with bountiful nature, crowd-free beaches and historic sites from Greece's Heroic Age. **GK**

Rooms from around £280pn at The Romanos in spring/autumn; [costanavarino.com](http://costanavarino.com)