

Sailing in Greece's Ionian Sea - Alumni

Ionian Sea, Greece

May 11 - 23, 2026



Features

- Self-sufficient sailing expedition
- 10 days, 10 nights aboard a 42' sailboat
- Three nights lodging in Vliho Bay, pre- and post trip
- Hands-on sailing skills and sea-personship development
- Exploring islands, anchorages, quaint villages, Greek history, and culture
- Passage planning, weather assessment, sailing and navigation skill development

Cost: \$6,355—includes pre and post-trip lodging in Vliho Bay, Lefkada

Max group size: 6 Participants
2 NOLS Instructors

Minimum Age: 18

Historic Age Range: 31-74

Trip Description

Join NOLS in exploring our newest sailing destination in Greece! We are excited to offer this trip to a small group of Alumni who are interested in honing their sailing skills with a small student/instructor ratio.

The trip builds upon previous sailing experience you may have (novices are certainly welcome!) while exploring the geography and cultural history of the area. There will be opportunities for both long and short passages, coastal exploration, swimming, and relaxing in stunning anchorages!

Participants tell us that a fantastic part of alumni trips is the group itself. NOLS alumni and their guests are an interesting crew, with diverse professional and personal backgrounds. Expect plenty of camaraderie, laughter, learning, and shared responsibility on this trip.

Environment

The Ionian Sea is an elongated bay of the Mediterranean Sea, south of the Adriatic Sea. It is bounded by Southern Italy including Calabria, Sicily, and the Salento peninsula to the west, southern Albania to the north, and the west coast of Greece. All major islands in the sea belong to Greece. These islands are rich in history, culturally diverse, and offer tremendous geologic formations and stunning coastlines to explore. During this trip, you can enjoy Greek island culture, Mediterranean cuisine, ancient history and ruins, incredible coastal landscapes, and modern sailboat cruising aboard a 42' sailing yacht.

Trip Progression

This trip begins on the island of Lefkas (Lefkada) in Greece. We will gather together in Vliho Bay at the Geni Garden Apartments where we will settle into Greek life as we prepare to go out to sea. After an evening of getting to know each other and a day of preparations and relaxation ashore, we will board the boat in Vliho Bay, weigh anchor, and set sail for the myriad remote anchorages and island

villages to explore. There are opportunities for short and long distance passages, sailing skill development, coastal exploration, swimming, snorkeling, and relaxing in beautiful anchorages! With ample time underway, we will aim to head north into the Northern Ionian with our sights set on reaching Corfu. The northern region lends itself to some longer passages and good navigational challenges. Then we will plan on heading south into the Southern Ionian where we will find a mix of quaint seaside villages and stunning remote anchorages. We will likely find some time to explore ashore, taking swim and lunch breaks at mid-day anchorage stops, exploring caves, and making shorter passages while exploring in the south. The following are potential amazing places to be explored on this sailing expedition. Our exact route will be determined based on our group and the environmental conditions at the time.

Lefkas (Lefkada)

Lefkas is a Greek island in the Ionian Sea, connected to the mainland by a causeway. West coast beaches like Porto Katsiki and Egremni feature sheer cliffs and turquoise waters. The east coast is known for its traditional villages, including the seaside resort of Nidri, Nikiana, and Lefkada Town. Depending on the weather, we may be able to sail along the west coast beaches and take in the views off of Cape Lefkada.

Paxos and Antipaxos

These offshore islands to the north offer beautiful anchorages and quaint island villages. Depending on the winds and sea state, sailing along the west coast of these islands is remarkably beautiful. Huge cliffs and amazing caves make an incredible backdrop to sail by!

Corfu and Gouvia

The Old Town of Corfu makes for a wonderful port of call! It will be the busiest port we may choose to explore. Although it is a major tourist attraction, it is one worth visiting. The Old Fortress of Corfu is amazing. We may seek a berth at the Mandraki Marina below the fortress or in the Gouvia marina nearby. Both marinas offer great amenities and a wonderful experience around Corfu!

Meganisi

Meganisi island lies to the east of Lefkas. The northern portion of the island has small municipalities and villages, while the southeastern peninsula is rugged and mostly uninhabited. Papageorges Cove on the south end is a beautiful protected anchorage surrounded by cliffs and clear water to enjoy!

Formikula and Atoko

These remote islands could make great intermediary stops between Lefkas and heading further south toward Kefalonia and Ithaca. Formikula is a very small group of remote, uninhabited islands located south of Kalamos. The water is known for its marine life making this bay one of the best for snorkeling. Cliff Bay on Atoko is surrounded by jagged cliffs and caves. The island is uninhabited, with the exception of some roaming goats, and offers beautiful, although tricky anchoring. This overnight anchorage is known for blue waters and a stunning backdrop!

Kefalonia (Cephalonia)

The island of Kefalonia offers a wide array of opportunities. A visit to the quaint village of Fiskardo on the northeast corner of the island offers typical island cafe culture along the town quay catering to yacht visitors. This could be a nice place to enjoy some of the creature comforts of the cruising lifestyle before sailing onward.

A Day in the Life

Casual mornings will follow a typical routine, starting off with breakfast and possibly a swim before getting on with the day's activities. Most days we will sail to a new port or anchorage, taking turns with the different roles onboard. Island exploration, technical sailing classes, and passage planning could all be involved outside of sailing time. Evenings will involve group planning of the next day's passage and perhaps tall tales of the seas provided by our instructor/captains.

Meals on board are a group affair. We will cook and eat together before getting underway in the morning and after anchoring for the evening. Lunch will often be prepared and eaten while underway or perhaps during daytime exploration. We'll also have opportunities to enjoy the occasional happy hour once we anchor or dock for the night.

Of note, fresh-water is a limited resource onboard a boat so showers and laundry are uncommon to happen while at sea. It is possible that there will be limited opportunities for these luxuries depending on our port schedule for the trip.

Difficulty Scale

This trip is rated 3 out of 5 on our difficulty scale.



We use a difficulty scale to help participants evaluate if a trip is right for them. It considers probable weather conditions, physicality of activities, and food and accommodations. You don't need to be a honed athlete, but pre-trip work to improve your strength, flexibility and endurance, is highly encouraged to improve your enjoyment of the place. If you have specific questions regarding physical preparation and your readiness please reach out to the Alumni Trips Department.

Food on the trip

There will be plenty of food provided on the trip for everyone. We are happy to ensure that folks who have reasonable dietary needs and/or preferences are well taken care of throughout the entire trip. Listing those needs on your registration paperwork is critical for our success here.

If you would like to bring your own snacks along, that is highly encouraged. We all have treats that we enjoy and bringing something special is a great way to keep motivation high and not have to rely on the group's schedule for your munchies. We will cook and eat most of our meals onboard the boat and we will also enjoy a few meals out in various ports along the way.

Curriculum

Alumni trips are more relaxed than a typical NOLS course, therefore there is no standard NOLS curriculum. However, we will cover sailing and seapersonship skills, Leave No Trace skills and ethics relevant to the local environment, and engage with the human and natural history of the area. The expedition sailing format emphasizes hands-on learning and application of new skills in a variety of situations. Our goal is to teach to participant interest and to encourage participants to take the helm and manage the sheets as much as possible!

Expectations of Participants

The alumni trip atmosphere is more relaxed than a typical NOLS expedition. However, it's not a full-service vacation or guided experience. You'll have to participate, carry your load, and help out as

needed. These expeditions are fun, but they still require self-reliance, self awareness, risk management and sound decision making as we hike and sail through remote areas where evacuation to modern medical facilities could take several hours to days. Like all NOLS courses, these expeditions emphasize hands-on learning and the application of new skills in a variety of situations.

All participants need to complete and submit application materials, including a medical history form. These forms highlight the intersection of your trip's anticipated physical rigor and your current health and fitness status. Your forthright and timely completion and submission of the forms sets you and your trip up for success in the outdoors.

Alumni trips allow electronics and alcohol (for those of legal age in the country of the trip). Many participants find that these luxuries can add to the trip experience and local flavor. Excessive alcohol consumption is not a part of the culture of Alumni trips.

Trip Itinerary

May 9-10	Depending on connections, many participants will depart the U.S. one of these days. Please consider flying to Preveza a day early. This allows for jet lag recovery, travel delays, and to deal with any luggage troubles that may arise.
May 11	Arrive in Preveza, Greece (airport code PVK) on or before this day. We will meet at Geni Garden Apartments in Vliho Bay. Lodging on May 19th and May 20th is included. Feel free to arrive anytime after 2 pm and get settled into your room. We'll send out room assignments a week or two before the trip. We will gather together at 5:00 pm for a trip orientation meeting as we get to know each other while sampling some local wines, cheeses, and 'tapas' to kick off our adventure together! After orientation, dinner will be on your own. There are a few restaurant tavernas just down the road to choose from.
May 12	In the morning, we will meet up after breakfast and go over the plan in more detail, review the necessary gear and packing system for our time onboard the boat, and we will discuss a few introductory sailing topics to set us up for getting underway. After lunch, the afternoon will be free time to get your gear organized, run any last minute errands, and to have some hang out time by the pool to relax and settle into 'Greek time' before heading out to sea. During the afternoon, the instructors will be taking care of boat logistics with the charter company and getting it ready to welcome you aboard!
May 13	In the morning we will board the boat, do a safety briefing, get familiar with boat systems, and then we will weigh anchor and get underway!
May 14-22	Navigate and explore the Northern and Southern Ionian Sea, making passages while exploring the rugged coastlines, remote anchorages, and quaint island villages.
May 23	Return to our starting port and disembark from the boat. We will transfer back to Geni Garden Apartments where we will stay for our last night of the trip. After getting cleaned up, we'll enjoy a final dinner out to celebrate our time together!
May 24	Return home or travel onward!

Trip Logistics

Travel

Air travel

Getting to Preveza and accommodations before and after your trip

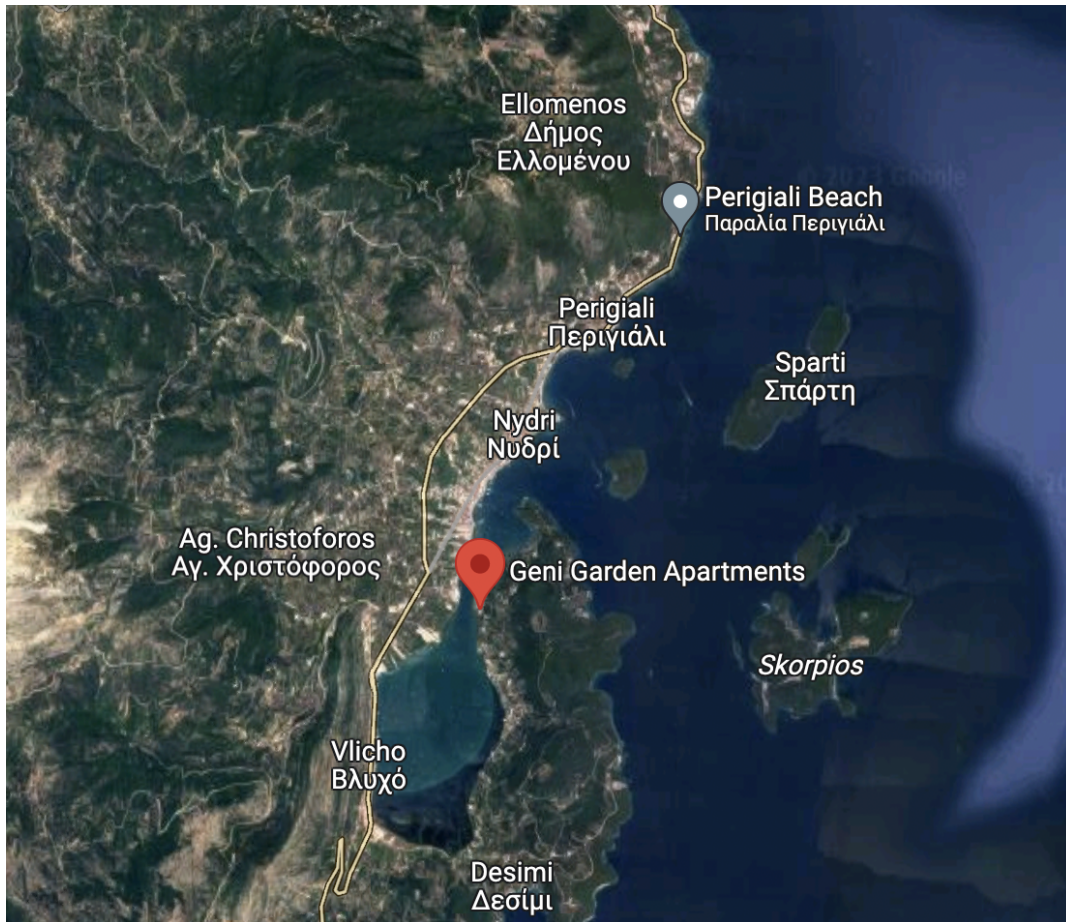
[Here is a great website with travel options for getting to Preveza.](#)

The best way to get to Preveza (PVK) is to book a flight to a destination in Europe that has direct connections to Preveza and then buy a separate ticket to Preveza from there. This is logistically much easier and more economical as well! Finding a flight to/from Preveza in the shoulder season (April/May), is more difficult than mid-summer. However, with a little research and creativity, it is still very doable.

Here is a list of some regional European airlines and connecting destinations that serve Preveza that you might consider:

- Aegean Airlines: Connecting non-stop from Athens.
- EasyJet Airlines: Connecting non-stop from Manchester and London Gatwick in England and from a couple cities in Germany
- Condor Airlines: Connecting non-stop through Dusseldorf, Frankfurt, Munich, Hamburg, and Stuttgart in Germany - schedules vary
- Thomas Cook Airlines: Connecting non-stop from Bristol and Manchester in England, only flies on Sundays.
- Transavia Airlines Connecting non-stop from Amsterdam
- Ryan Air: Connecting non-stop from London Stansted to Corfu or Kefalonia - schedules vary and you have to make your way via ferry from either of these islands to Lefkas

Please plan on arriving no later than **5 p.m.** at **Geni Garden Apartments** in Vliho Bay on **May 19th**. The instructors will meet you there and we will gather together for an orientation meeting, tapas, wine and cheese.



We recommend arriving 1-2 days early to recover from jet-lag, allow for travel delays, and deal with any luggage snafus that may arise while having an opportunity to enjoy the beautiful beaches in the surrounding areas.

From Preveza airport you can take a taxi directly to Geni Garden Apartments in Vliho Bay. There are typically taxis lined up at the airport when flights are coming in. Alternatively, you can also contact the Geni Garden Apartments staff to help you arrange a transfer from the airport. If you choose to arrive a day or so early and you stay at a hotel in or around Preveza, we suggest contacting your hotel for suggestions for transfers from the airport. Many hotels will either pick you up or connect you with a transfer service they recommend.

The Bus option from Athens

If you are struggling to find a flight, taking a bus from Athens can be pretty straight forward.

Athens has two bus terminals. The bus for Lefkada leaves from the Kifissos station at bus bay #39. The buses are typically 4 times a day from Athens to Lefkada and Lefkada to Athens (the stop to get off at Lefkada is at the main bus terminal, not the marina). Check the schedule to obtain the times. Two of the Athens departures are timed to connect with local departures that will get you to Nydri and the Vliho Bay area. You can grab a local taxi from Lefkada Town or Nydri as well.

The buses are operated by [KTEL](#). It is good to contact them to reserve your seat ahead of time as they do tend to fill up.

Lodging

Included in your tuition is lodging at the Geni Garden Apartments for 2 nights prior to the trip and the last night at the end. Please do not contact the hotel for a reservation on these nights—NOLS has already organized this. If you plan on arriving early, and would like to stay at Geni Garden Apartments prior to the start of the trip, feel free to contact them to check availability and make your own booking for any additional nights you wish to stay. There are also several other lodging options all around the area as well. Here is a link to Geni Garden Apartments for your reference.

Geni Garden Apartments
<http://www.genigarden.com/>

Storage of Personal Belongings

Personal luggage that doesn't go on the boat with you can be stored at our lodging while we are out at sea. This is reasonably secure storage, but nothing is 100 percent guaranteed. NOLS assumes no responsibility for your stored baggage, so it is best not to have too much extra luggage. That said, we have never had a problem with our stored luggage on these trips.

Phone Service

You may be able to set up a global plan for your phone during your stay in Greece. Contact your service provider to learn if service is available and for plan options.

Money/Currency

The official currency in Greece is the euro. Credit cards may be used in larger cities and many of the seaside towns and villages, but the more remote we go, the less useful they may be. At the time of year when we sail, many stores or restaurants are just starting to open up for the season. Some of these places disable their credit card service during the off season. Therefore, we recommend having a few hundred Euros in cash for any purchases you may want to make along the way.

Tipping

Tipping is common practice with the service industry in Greece. Plan on a 5-10% tip for good service in places like restaurants.

While tipping is common in the outdoor guiding culture, your NOLS Instructors are not driven to excellence by tips but rather a love for taking people outdoors. You are welcome to tip the Instructors if you choose, but many instructors are honored by [a donation in their name to the NOLS Annual Fund](#) which supports scholarships for future NOLS students.

Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is worth exploring in case unforeseen events cause you to change your plans or if NOLS has to cancel a trip for any reason. Check with your personal insurance carrier and credit card to understand what you already might have or check out cat70.com for a wide variety of options.

Carbon Footprint and Offset

Current estimates are that the Travel Industry accounts for ~8% of global emissions. This percentage includes everything from transportation to accommodation and shopping. NOLS recognizes that our business contributes to this problem but we do not have a comprehensive strategy at this point.

If you would like to offset part or all of the carbon emissions related to your Alumni trip, we recommend [South Pole](#). [Their calculator](#) can help easily calculate your footprint and choose a project to contribute to. [Here is a link to their calculator](#).

Immunizations / Vaccinations / Travel medications

International travel poses special health considerations. NOLS strongly advises that all participants traveling to international locations carefully consider what vaccinations or inoculations are required, recommended, or suggested for their specific travel itinerary. Consulting with a physician, travel medicine specialist, the [CDC](#), or other healthcare professional is strongly advised.

Covid-19 Considerations / Vaccination requirements

Current Covid-19 entry and quarantine restrictions/requirements can be found on the [U.S. Embassy and Consulate in Greece](#) website.

Visa / Passport - Attention International European travelers - **Must read... Action Required**

If your travels have you **entering or transiting (passing through or laying over in) the UK**, you will need to apply for and have an approved Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) to continue to your destination.

This [article](#) explains that starting Jan 8, 2025, US and Canadian citizens will need to apply for the ETA to enter the UK.

Here's [the link](#) for how to apply.

As well, for NOLS International Alumni trips, your **passport must be valid for a minimum of 6 months post trip**. For example, if your trip in Europe concludes on July 30, 2025, your passport must be valid through January 30, 2026.

At some point in the future (July 2025?) Europe (EU) will be requiring a travel authorization for most countries that are visa-exempt. This includes USA citizens. Once this system goes into effect, you will need to apply using this new system before traveling and pay a small fee for the authorization.

[You can read about this new program, check your requirements, and view the most up to date expected implementation date here.](#)

Electricity

While 'in town', you will have access to wall plugs or other charging ports. On the boat, there might be access to power depending on the systems onboard and when the engine is running, but please do not count on extensive charging onboard.

Trip Registration

The best way to register is through the trip information page on the [nols.edu](#) website. A non-refundable deposit secures your spot on the trip. If any issues arise, please call the NOLS Alumni Department at (800) 332-4280. Your enrollment is complete with receipt of your full tuition and your completed application forms; these are **due 60 days before the start of your trip**.

Your tuition includes all meals at the hotel and while onboard starting with our evening of tapas on the first night through breakfast on departure day. We have budgeted for a few meals out at various ports along the way, which are also included in the tuition. Lodging at the villa is also included for the 2 nights at the beginning of the trip and the last night as well.

Other snacks, treats, or alcohol that participants choose to purchase during shore excursions will be at their own expense. Museums or galleries that we find along the way might have admissions fees, which will be the responsibility of participants wanting to enter. Euros are recommended for anything extra you might want to buy, such as souvenirs.

All participants are required to submit registration materials, including a medical form. These forms highlight the intersection of your trip's anticipated physical rigor and your current health and fitness status while also providing NOLS information about things like your dietary needs.

NOLS is not responsible for additional costs incurred by late arrivals or evacuations. Those expenses are the responsibility of trip participants and we recommend purchasing travel insurance to mitigate the impact of unforeseen circumstances.

Do not book travel greater than 60 days before the start of the trip unless you have confirmed with NOLS that the trip will run. On rare occasions, we do cancel trips due to low enrollment.

Cancellation and Transfer Policy

For your reference, here is the [Alumni Trips Cancellation and Transfer Policy](#). When enrolling on a trip, you will need to agree to this policy.

Suggested Readings

- Sailing Skills Resources:
 - *RYA Competent Crew*
 - *RYA Day Skipper*
 - *US Sailing Basic Keelboat*
 - *US Sailing Basic Cruising*
 - *The Marlinspike Sailor - Book of Knots*
- Novels / Short Stories:
 - *Dove*
 - *The Ocean Almanac*
 - *The Master and Commander Series*

*Many of these resources can be found in electronic format that can be downloaded onto an e-reader or tablet for convenience.

Equipment

Gear Provided by NOLS		
Sailboat and Accessories	Charts	Navigation Tools
Emergency Communication	Cruising Guides & Books	Marine Radio
PFDs* (Personal Flotation Device)	Sailing Harness	First Aid Kits

*Large orange coast guard PFDs should be supplied on the boat. If you would like to bring your own, please feel free to do so. If conditions warrant we will wear them, otherwise they are not required to be worn while underway in moderate conditions.

“Boat” Clothing	
Minimizing weight and bulk is a priority. Prepare to dress for weather during a dry, warm tropical day to a cool, windy, rainy day.	
Equipment	Notes
Sandals / Water Shoe	Tevas, Chacos, or flip flops. Some sort of water shoe for getting out of the dinghy on rocky beaches.
Shoes: Boat, Town, and Hiking	Deck shoes or tennis shoes for use on the boat and for going ashore. Non-marking soles are important for boat shoes. Something comfortable for a good day hike.
Socks (2-3 pairs)	Wool is great
Insulating Jacket	fleece or lightweight insulating layer
Sunshirt	Short or long sleeve, any material
Underwear (3-5)	Whatever is comfortable for you
Sports Bra or Tank (2-3)	Synthetic or wool sports bra or sports tank are recommended
Rain Wear	A good waterproof rain jacket and rain pants.
Shorts/bathing suit (1-2)	Can double as swimsuit
Pants (1-2)	Lightweight pants
“Town” Clothing	
For island explorations and visiting towns	
Equipment	Notes
Shorts (1-2)	Casual shorts
Pants or Dress (2-3)	Casual pants (jeans or other) or a dress
Shirt (2-3)	A few nicer shirts for time ashore and eating out.
Miscellaneous Items	
Small/Medium duffle	Something small and lightweight to store your personal items in while on the boat. <i>Please avoid suitcase-style luggage that is bulky and hard to store onboard.</i>
Sun Hat	With a wide brim to keep the sun off your face and ears. A tie-down string is recommended!
Sunglasses	1-2 pairs with a retainer strap
Rash Guard	A long-sleeved sun shirt that can be worn while swimming
Toiletries	Toothpaste, biodegradable soap, ear plugs, etc...
Sleeping Bag	The boat will have sheets and a blanket, but if you prefer, feel free to bring a sleeping bag. One with a 40+ degree rating will be sufficient.

Personal medicines	NOLS will have a first-aid kit, but please bring any medications you normally take.
Headlamp	Durable and lightweight. Don't forget extra batteries!
Notebook/pen	Small and lightweight is great.
Water Bottle	1 - one liter bottle
Passport	Valid for 6 months after entry date
Camera	Waterproof ones are fun, but not necessary
Mask, Snorkel and Fins	Important if you want to go snorkeling!
Sunscreen	SPF 30 or greater
Sail Gloves	Some folks enjoy having these
Umbrella	Many folks enjoy these for rain or sun