

The Greek Alphabet

The Greek alphabet is based on the ancient Phoenician alphabet and has influenced the Latin and Cyrillic Russian alphabets. The Greek alphabet consists of 24 letters most of which can be read by a foreigner, but quite often have a different pronunciation. The following list presents all the Greek capital and small letters along with a simple pronunciation guide.

Letter capital/small	English letter equivalent	Pronunciation
A α	A	Father
B β	V	Victory
Γ γ	Gh	Yes
Δ δ	Dh	The
E ε	E	Elephant
Z ζ	Z	Zebra
H η	I	Knee
Θ θ	Th	Theatre
I ι	I	Knee
K κ	K	Kilo
Λ λ	L	Love
M μ	M	Mother
N ν	N	Net
Ξ ξ	X	Box
O ο	O	Ox
Π π	P	Pope
P ρ	R	Room
Σ σ ζ	S	Simply
T τ α	T	Table
Y υ	I	Knee
Φ φ	F	Fox
X χ	Ch	Loch
Ψ ψ	Ps	Upside
Ω ω	O	Ox

There are a number of tones that are used in the Greek language but are not represented by single letters. In those cases, these tones are represented by a combination of letters. You might also realise that a number of all those combination letters have the same sound, but while this is the case in modern Greek, in ancient Greek the tones were pronounced differently in the same way as the umlaut operates in German. The list that follows contains all the combination letters used in the Greek language:

Combination letter	English letter equivalent	Pronunciation
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Eι	I	Knee
Oι	I	Knee
Aι	E	Bed
Oυ	U	Room
Eυ	Ev	Level
Aυ	Av	Average
Hυ	I	Knee
Mπ	B	Book
Γκ	G	Grammar
Γγ	G	Grammar
Γξ	Ks	Monks
Nτ	D	Drive
Tζ	j	Jam

The Greek language has an accent system. A lot of words that are written in exactly the same way, may have a different pronunciation and a different meaning, depending on where the accent is placed e.g. *άλλα* (**alla**, different) and *αλλά* (**alla**, but). When a combination letter consists of two vowels and the accent is placed on top of the first letter, then they are pronounced separately e.g. *άυλο* (**ailo**, transparent). The only symbol used in Greek whose meaning is different than in English is the semicolon, which in Greek functions as a question mark. Please note that in Greece the road signs are usually in Greek first, then about 50 yards later in English, so if you haven't managed the Greek in time, you have a fall-back.

If you want to learn more than just the alphabet, we recommend you buy a Greek phrase book or learning kit (the BBC's, *Greek Language and People*, seems to have the highest success rate).

Useful Vocabulary

Here are a few words and phrases that you may find useful during your stay.

Do you speak English?	Milate Anglika?	Μιλάτε Αγγλικά;
Good Day	Kalimera	Καλημέρα
Good Evening	Kalispera	Καλησπέρα
Good Night	Kalinichta	Καληνύχτα
how are you	Ti kanete?	Τι κάνετε;
yes /no	Ne/ Ochi	Ναι/ Όχι
please / thank you	Parakalo/ Efcharisto	Παρακαλώ/ Ευχαριστώ
Today	Simera	Σήμερα
Tomorrow	Avrio	Αύριο
Yesterday	Echtes	Εχθές
I don't understand	Den Katalaveno	Δεν Καταλαβαίνω
Very	Poli	Πολύ
How much does it cost?	Poso kostizi?	Πόσο κοστίζει;
Do you accept credit cards?	Decheste pistotikes kartes?	Δέχετε πιστωτικές κάρτες;
I need a doctor!	Chriazome giatro!	Χρειάζομαι γιατρό!
Can you take to the hospital?	Borite na me pate sto nosokomio?	Μπορείτε να με πάτε στο νοσοκομείο;
I want	Tha Ithela	Θα Ήθελα
when / where	Pote/ Pou	Πότε/ Που
how much	Poso	Πόσο

Greeks are such intensive travellers, sailors and migrants that you will find at least one person in every village with a smattering of English. An easy way out we agree, but learning a few words or phrases of your host country could be fun and is certainly appreciated by the locals. Here are a few words and phrases that you may find useful during your stay.

Shopping Vocabulary:

Cheese	Tiri	Τυρί	Wine	Krasi	Κρασί
Sugar	Zachari	Ζάχαρη	White	Lefko	Άσπρο
Butter	Voutiro	Βούτυρο	Red	Kokkino	Κόκκινο
Ham	Zambon	Ζαμπόν	Bread	Psomi	Ψωμί
Eggs	Avga	Αυγά	Kilo	Kilo	Κιλό
Water	Nero	Νερό	Half	Miso	Μισό
Salt	Alati	Αλάτι	Grapes	Stafilia	Σταφύλια
Milk	Gala	Γάλα	Melon	Peponi	Πεπόνι
Oil	Ladi	Λάδι	Peaches	Rodakina	
Ροδάκινα					
Beer	Birra	Μπύρα	Onions	Kremmidia	Κρεμμύδια
Apples	Mila	Μήλα	Tomato	Domata	Ντομάτα
Hot	Zesto	Ζεστό	Cold	Krio	Κρύο
Coffee	Kafes	Καφές	Tea	Tsay	Τσάι

Do not be confused by the Greek gestures expressing yes and no. To indicate 'no' Greeks tilt their head upwards and backwards, simply raise their eyebrows or tut. For a 'yes' the head is inclined downwards and slightly to one side.