



The Perfect Weekend on the Athens Riviera

You don't need to head to the islands to have the perfect beach weekend. Athens has a glittering coastline where you can swim six months of the year.

Did you know that less than 30 minutes from the Acropolis there's a coastal playground of blue-flag beaches, barefoot fish tavernas, and unspoiled coves? It's called the Athens Riviera. Add five-star resorts and spas, glamorous seaside clubs, great shopping—plus summers that stretch for six months—and it's little wonder that this 50km coastline is now a destination in itself. Follow our Athens Riviera itinerary and you'll be left asking: "Can this really be Athens?"



Friday
Evening



Cine Akti, playing a classic film under the stars

Photo: Manos Chatzikonstantis

CINEMA UNDER THE STARS

Begin your Athens Riviera immersion with a quintessentially Greek summer tradition: outdoor cinema. **Cine Ria**, a cheery picture house with a retro vibe in the seaside suburb of Varkiza, screens new Hollywood releases in English with Greek subtitles. **Cine Akti** is an equally picturesque open air cinema in **Vouliagmeni**. The acoustics may not always triumph. But the heady scent of jasmine and orange blossom mingling with the aroma of the fresh popcorn you couldn't resist will more than make up for it.

Poolside dining

Your post-movie dinner date is ten minutes' away in Vouliagmeni at the Margi Hotel's classy **Malabar** restaurant. Distinctive green and white striped awnings lend this elegant bolthole the air of the iconic Beverly Hills Hotel. But Malabar is pure Mediterranean Paradiso. Olive trees float on platforms over the pool near bright wisps of bougainvillea, while softly-lit lanterns hang above your table. On your plate: unfussy contemporary Greek cuisine (such as lamb with aubergine, coriander and yoghurt), prepared with seasonal ingredients sourced from the hotel's own Margi Farm. The **Margi bar** is also an enduring classic for a glam pre-dinner cocktail or nightcap.

Dreamy poolside dining at Malabar at the Margi Hotel

Courtesy: Margi Hotel



Saturday

Morning



SHOPPING AND LUNCHING IN GLYFADA

Shiny happy. Materialistic. The Riviera's retail and social hub, **Glyfada**—home turf to Greek pop stars and affluent foreigners—is an essential part of the coastal scene. It's a great place to spend your morning shopping and lunching à la mode. Avoid the main Metaxa drag, with its fast food chains and high-street staples (except for Zayiana, which has a fine line of gifts inspired by the mati, or 'evil eye'). You'll find the real Glyfada in the leafy side streets and up-and-coming pockets, such as Kiprou, Laodikis and Espiridon Square.

Kiprou is colonised by boutiques championing Greek designers alongside international labels (Pinko, Zilly, Soho-Soho, Zadig & Voltaire), as well as Greek contemporary jewellers like Zerteo. Over on Laodikis, you'll find vibey street bars and cafes like **Holy Spirit** and **Soleto**. Make a detour to Giorgia P for foxy essentials and floaty maxi-dresses at more affordable prices. Lunch is served at **Sea Spice**, Glyfada's current 'it' restaurant. This fashionable spot ignites in the evening, with live DJ sets and Georgina who sings on the bar. During the day, Sea Spice is still an excellent spot to enjoy top-notch sharing plates out on the pavement, while indulging in that favourite Glyfada pastime: people watching.

Seafood delights with a side order
of people watching at Sea Spice

Courtesy: Sea Spice



Saturday

Afternoon

DIVE OFF THE ROCKS AT LIMANAKIA

Time to discover a true Riviera treasure. Many drive straight past this stretch of paraliaki (coastal road), none the wiser that just below it—a short scramble down an unsigned path—is one of Athens’ most alluring coves. For locals, leaping off the boulders into the deep, crystalline waters of **Limanakia Vouliagmenis** is a rite of passage. A wooden sundeck, spartan snack shack and Ibiza-style tunes add to the joyful languor. There’s a bus stop right outside.

Swim with the locals at Limanakia Vouliagmenis

Photo: Manos Chatzikonstantis

Saturday

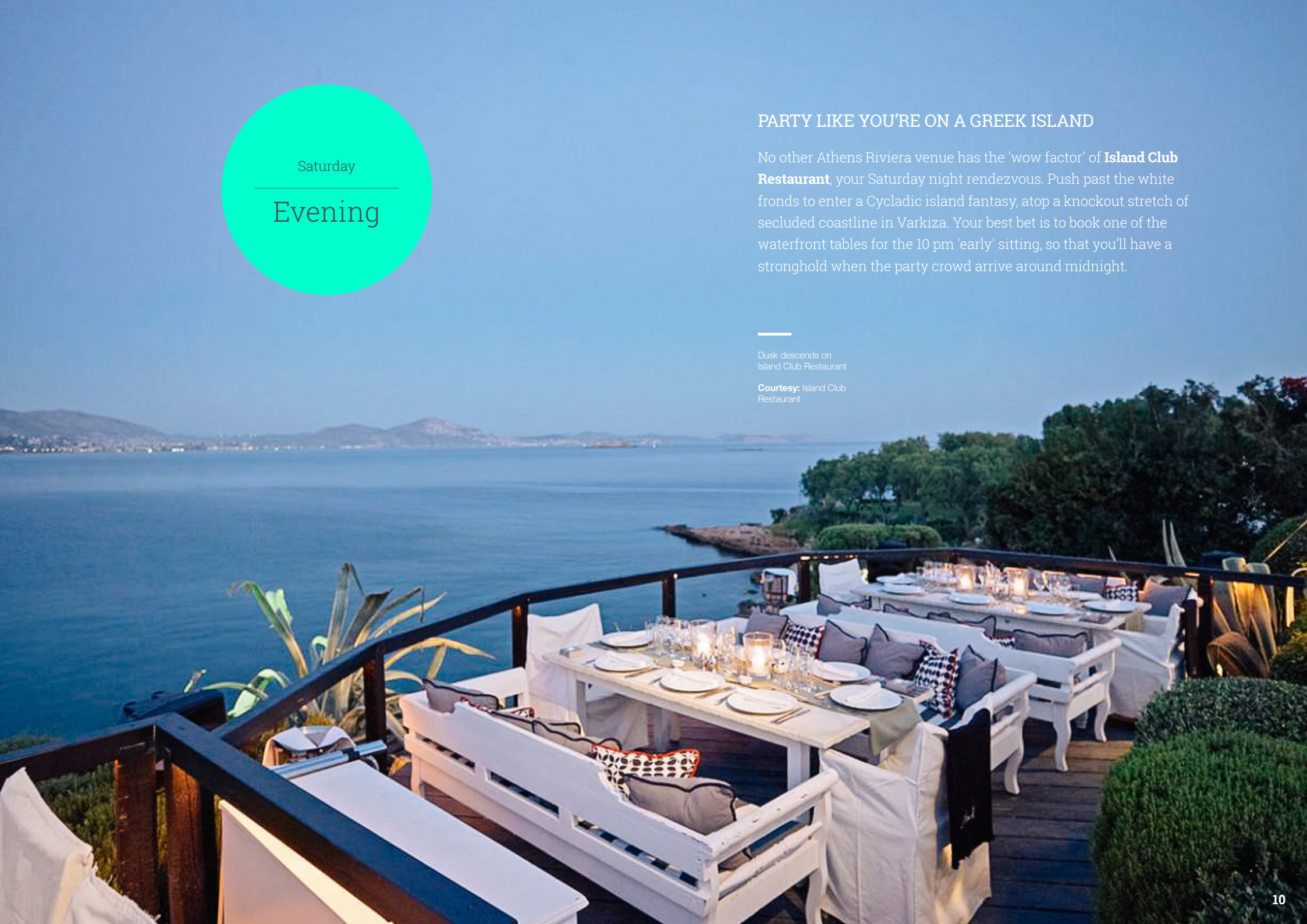
Evening

PARTY LIKE YOU'RE ON A GREEK ISLAND

No other Athens Riviera venue has the 'wow factor' of **Island Club Restaurant**, your Saturday night rendezvous. Push past the white fronds to enter a Cycladic island fantasy, atop a knockout stretch of secluded coastline in Varkiza. Your best bet is to book one of the waterfront tables for the 10 pm 'early' sitting, so that you'll have a stronghold when the party crowd arrive around midnight.

Dusk descends on
Island Club Restaurant

Courtesy: Island Club
Restaurant





Sunday

Morning

The Astir peninsula in Vouliagmeni

Photo: Christos Pastalidis

ICED COFFEE BY THE BEACH

With its palm-lined boulevards and private marinas, Vouliagmeni is to Athens what Cannes is to the Cote d'Azur. Kick off your perfect Athenian Sunday with a frappe coffee at **Moorings** in Marina Vouliagmenis, as you admire the azure sweep of Vouliagmeni bay with its cargo of luxury yachts. (If you're staying in the city centre, do set out early to avoid the Sunday convoy heading to the Riviera on summer weekends.)

PHOTO: CHRISTOS PASTALIDIS
COURTESY: ASTIR BEACH

TAKE A DIP IN THE SEA

Depending on your budget, hit **Astir Beach**—the fairest (and priciest) Athens beach of them all. (Top tip: it's cheaper midweek.) Once the summer hideout of Jackie Onassis, Astir offers manicured sands, waiter service to your lounge, upscale boutiques and hairdryers in the bathrooms. There are even ancient ruins unearthed by children at play in 1924. Or simply plant your towel five minutes down the road and dive for free off the rocky pier outside lively **En Plo café**. The swimming is just as lovely.



Sunday

Afternoon

FRONT ROW DINING

For a long Sunday lunch by the sea, head to **Blue Fish** (underneath En Plo), which specialises in finessed Mediterranean-Japanese seafood. Top tastes are the sea bream carpaccio and scorpion fish linguine. Or settle in at local's favourite **Garbi** on the Kavouri seafront promenade. The fish croquettes and shrimp saganaki are consistent crowd-pleasers. Between courses, take a dip in the enticing shallow waters out front.

Walk off lunch with a gentle **hike on the Mount Ymittos** trail above Vouliagmeni's café strip. You'll be rewarded with hypnotic views of Athens and the Saronic islands, only an hour or two by ferry. Or refresh yourself in the mineral waters of **Lake Vouliagmeni**, a sunken cavern fed by underground currents that are a constant 24° C. Brace yourself for the small black fish, kalogries, that nudge your toes when you climb in.

Blue Fish: Any closer to the sea and you'd be swimming

Photo: Manos Chatzikonstantis

Sunday

Evening

A GLORIOUS SUNSET OVER THE RUINS

Lord Byron's cherished **Temple of Poseidon** at Cape Sounion beckons: a photogenic, one-hour drive down the coastal road from Glyfada. Erected during the Golden Age of Pericles (around 440 BC) and perched nearly 60 metres above sea, Sounion combines the drama of the Acropolis with one of the most rousing seascapes imaginable.

Swoon over a Cape Sounion sunset

Photo: Thomas Gravanis