



ATHENS

“The city where democracy was born”

The city with the most glorious history in the world, a city worshipped by gods and people, a magical city. The enchanting capital of Greece has always been a birthplace for civilization. It is the city where democracy was born and most of the wise men of ancient times. The most important civilization of ancient world flourished in Athens and relives through some of the world's most formidable edifices. Athens was named according to the Greek mythology from competition that the goddess Athena had with Poseidon about who will become protector of the city. The myth says that Poseidon gave a spring with sea water whilst Athena offered an olive tree as she touched the ground of the sacred rock of the Acropolis. The people of Athens choose Athena as their protector and so the city was named after the goddess of wisdom.



Who hasn't heard of the Acropolis of Athens? Photos and history of the most famous archaeological monument in Europe have made the world tour causing feelings of admiration by thousands of people. Acropolis is nominated to be one of the 7 wonders of modern world. In fact the trademark of Athens is one of the favorites. The Holy Rock of Acropolis dates back to the 5th BC, the famous Golden Age of Periklis. Athens met times of bloom and decline, but still shines under the Attic sky gazing the future. Still sparkling like the marbles of Parthenon and the limpid white of Pentelic marble. Athens is situated in the prefecture of Attica and extends to the peninsula that reaches up to Central Greece. It is surrounded by mountains Ymmytos, Pendeli and Parnitha, northwards and eastwards, and the Saronic Gulf southwards and westwards. The sun is shining over Athens all year round. The climate is one of the best in Europe, with mild winters and very hot summers, ideal for tourism. It is located just a few kilometers from the port of Piraeus, the central commercial port of the capital, and the shores of southern Attica. Athens is constantly inhabited since Neolithic Age. The 5th century was the time of its ultimate bloom, when moral values and civilization surpassed city limits and became the mother land of western civilization. In the centuries that followed, many conquerors tried to take over Athens. In 1834 Athens was chosen to be the capital of the newly established Greek State. Today it is the political, social, cultural, financial and commercial center of Greece. The city that now hosts more than 4,5 million people, was constructed around the Acropolis walls.



ATTRACTIONS and SIGHTS:



Syntagma "Syntagma" means "constitution" in Greek. It is the place where the citizens of the city stood outside of the palace and demanded their rights. Today, still, it is where all of the action is, always a buzz with taxis, shoppers, people sitting at cafes, and, yes, the occasional demonstration. Cross Amelias Avenue to watch the Evzones change post every hour on the hour. Feed the pigeons or dip into the National Garden for some shade. It is home to the magnificent Hotel Grand Bretagne other five star hotels and is the starting point of the pedestrian shopping district of Ermou Street. The Syntagma Metro station is like a museum, full of archeological treasures found during construction. It provides easy access to the Acropolis Metro station and the Panepistimiou station along the red line. The blue line takes you to the airport.



Plaka What once was called the "Turkish Quarter" is now affectionately titled "Plaka," and is the area for wandering amidst narrow cobblestone roads, low, hundred-year-old houses, pots of basil and rosemary, traditional Greek eateries or "tavernas" and more souvenir shops than you can shake a stick of souvlaki at. Some areas of Plaka have been inhabited for thousands of years. Walk down Tripodon Street to see the Lysicrates monument and follow it to the Theater of Dionysus, one access into the mighty Acropolis. Or head up toward Anafiotika to get lost in an island in the middle of the city. Plaka is pure romance.



Monastiraki Monastiraki, or "little Monastery" is always a great place for people watching. The courtyard and narrow roads that lead to the Roman Agora are always full of street performers, artists and antique vendors. Go on Sundays for treasure hunting at Avyssiinias Square, or just wander around the flea market any day of the week. Buy fresh fruit from the kiosk and enjoy it while gazing at the remains of Hadrian's Library or the Tower of the Winds. Jump on the Kifissia/Piraeus railway for a nostalgic train ride to the very north or very south of Athens, respectively.



Psirri, Thissio and Gazi Psirri has been home to the free thinkers and Bohemians since the start of the 20th century, when sad-eyed Rembetika singers belted their woes to the accompaniment of a line of instrumentalists, all sitting in wooden chairs while people smoked and drank beneath the stage. While it still holds a certain grungy appeal to the modern-day Bohemian, the streets are lined with trendy cafes and eateries that make it also palatable to more mainstream visitors, or even those with a dazzled eye pointed toward the "live for the day" world of the artists and non-conventionalists of Psirri. Thissio, on the other hand, is a well sculpted garden surrounding the Ancient Agora and is well known for its posh places to enjoy a beverage for a few hours with a view on the Acropolis. The expansive pedestrian road of Apostolou Pavlou (Apostle Paul) circles around until it connects with Aereopagitou, making for lovely strolls. The pedestrian road ends at the ancient cemetery of Keramikos. From here you can see some strange metal structures puncturing the sky. This is the wildly popular area of Gazi, named for the gas factory whose buildings are now used as edgy cafes, tavernas and art centers. Organized graffiti decorates the walls and beautiful people fill the tables. The cultural center of Technopolis is where you can spy up and coming Greek talent in every field.



Keramikos: The ancient Greek cemetery Cemeteries have always been an object of human curiosity. This may explain the mystic charm of Keramikos, the city's ancient cemetery dating back to the 12th century BC. Walking around this site, you will come across many beautiful tombstones with depictions of the dead or scenes from mythology. You will also notice the ancient city walls as well as the Dipylon Gate and the Sacred Gate, built in the 5th century BC. Great processions - during the city's major religious festivals - have passed through these gates on the way to the Acropolis and the sanctuary of Eleusis. The museum of Keramikos features a splendid collection of sculptures and pottery, some of them bearing rather indecent depictions.



Kolonaki The streets around Kolonaki Square feature the most elegant boutiques in Athens. The square itself (officially named Filikis Eterias) is the favorite meeting place of celebrities and beautiful people. They can be seen hanging out any of Kolonaki's numerous cafés after a shopping spree or in the excellent gourmet restaurants and chic bars at night. Kolonaki lies on the slopes of Lykavittos Hill, the city's best vantage point.



Panepistimiou and Stadiou Streets These two streets connect Syntagma Square with Omonia Square. As well as shops and restaurants, they feature some of the city's most beautiful 19th-century buildings. Among them is the so-called Panepistimiou Street (officially named El. Venizelou Street), along with the university and National Library. The historic Iliou Melathron Mansion now houses the Numismatic Museum and the National History Museum.

Omonia Square considered as part of "downtown" Athens where the locals go to buy common household goods and clothing and pay less. It is now home to the majority of the immigrant population of Athens. A surge of modern hoteliers with an emphasis on design has hit Omonia and could breathe new life into this convenient location for a base in the Athens city center.

Patission Street (officially named 28 Oktovriou Street) is one of the city's major thoroughfares. At No. 42 is the majestic Technical University, a splendid example of 19th-century architecture. Next door is the National Archaeological Museum, one of the world's greatest museums, housing an outstanding collection of ancient Greek art. Many fine boutiques can be found further north, past Kodringtonos Street. The best place to rest after a shopping spree is in any one of the numerous cafés and tavernas of the Fokionos Negri pedestrian zone in Kypseli.



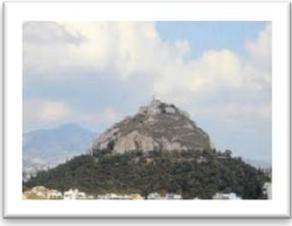
Piraeus The port town of Athens - is located on a peninsula, 10 kilometres southwest of central Athens. It features a busy commercial port and a Sunday flea market in the streets near the metro station. The most picturesque part of Piraeus is the Mikrolimano fishing harbor, with its row of traditional fish restaurants. Other good places for eating fish are the numerous seafood eateries of Akti Themistokleous Street, on the peninsula's eastern coast. Traces of the area's 2,500-year old history can be found at the Piraeus Archaeological Museum.

Glyfada and Vouliagmeni The city's southern suburbs are located along the Apollo Coast and feature a string of beaches as well as numerous restaurants and nightclubs. One of these suburbs, Glyfada, boasts a golf course, an excellent shopping area on Metaxa Street and elegant restaurants and bars. Further south lies the exclusive resort town of Vouliagmeni renowned for its luxurious hotels, sophisticated restaurants and sailing clubs. The resort also features excellent beaches and watersports facilities at the Astir Beach Club.

Kifissia An urban retreat for the wealthy since the times of Herodes Atticus (the mega-millionaire of ancient times responsible for the Kalimarmara Stadium and the Herodus Atticus Theater) Kifissia is a shady, upscale neighborhood full of elegant hotels, restaurants, and elite businesses. Kolokotroni Street and Argiropoulou Street are good destinations for serious shoppers as they're lined with boutiques from the biggest names in fashion and luxury. The Pentelikon hotel is an elegant place to stay to experience it, but the Semiramis Hotel, designed by Karim Rashid and part of the Design Hotel group, is a better choice for an appreciator of modern art and design



Areopagos Hill While having rather nefarious beginnings as the site of Murder trials, Areopagos Hill has become a lively place in the evenings where you can sit high above the glimmer of city lights and stare at the moon. Eucalyptus and Olive trees scent the air, the Acropolis gleams golden to the right, and distant music from the old city provides the soundtrack, should you have come without your own.



Lycabettus (Lykavittos) likewise, is a high place (the highest, in fact) with a gorgeous view. On the tippy top is the pretty white church of St. George, but we're aiming a bit lower, near the cavey shrine of Agii Isidori, where there are a few lonely benches that gaze outward over the city. Whether you get a positive or negative response, both are occasions for a followup drink in a Kolonaki establishment.

Apostolou Pavlou or Areopagitou street This one might require a bit of planning, but Apostolou Pavlou and Areopagitou streets, the cobblestone roads that lead around the Acropolis and from Thissio to lower Ermou, are full of talented street musicians in the evening. Give a few coins, request something special, and enjoy the performance. Alternatively take a ride on the Sunshine Express and ask the driver beforehand to blend the question in with the other bits of important information announced over the train's loudspeaker.



The Acropolis The greatest and finest sanctuary of ancient Athens, dedicated primarily to its patron, the goddess Athena, dominates the centre of the modern city from the rocky crag known as the Acropolis. The most celebrated myths of ancient Athens, its greatest religious festivals, earliest cults and several decisive events in the city's history are all connected to this sacred precinct. The monuments of the Acropolis stand in harmony with their natural setting. These unique masterpieces of ancient architecture combine different orders and styles of Classical art in a most innovative manner and have influenced art and culture for many centuries. The Acropolis of the fifth century BC is the most accurate reflection of the splendour, power and wealth of Athens at its greatest peak, the golden age of Perikles.

Flisvos Park Take a stroll along the water, sit along the harbor and watch the yachts pass by. Or be on one yourself. Whatever your budget, sunset at Flisvos puts the mind at ease and stirs the soul.

Athens museums: Athens is loaded with museums. It seems like there are new museums and branches of old museums opening every week. You can check the Athens News for traveling exhibits and this page will give you information on the main museums that should not be missed.



National Archaeological Museum The National Archaeological Museum is the largest museum in Greece and one of the world's great museums. Although its original purpose was to secure all the finds from the nineteenth century excavations in and around Athens, it gradually became the central National Archaeological Museum and was enriched with finds from all over Greece. Its abundant collections, with more than 20,000 exhibits, provide a panorama of Greek civilization from the beginnings of Prehistory to Late Antiquity.

The Acropolis Museum The new Acropolis Museum was designed to offer the best conditions for the exhibition of its exhibits. A walk through its galleries is a walk through history between the masterpieces of the Archaic and Classical periods, but also in the ancient neighborhoods of Athens whose city streets and buildings you can see below when you look through the glass floors of the museum. It was hoped that by building the Acropolis Museum, the British Museum would return the Elgin Marbles, but don't hold your breath. In the meantime there are copies of those pieces to go along with the thousands of ancient stones and statues that finally have a home, worthy of them. Don't miss this museum. And at least for this year you can't beat the price.



Museum Mile An exceptional collection of privately run museums can all be found along V. Sophias Avenue amidst the embassy buildings and various official ministries. The eclectic Benaki Museum shows off iconic pieces to represent several periods of Greek history spanning 8,000 years. The Museum of Cycladic Art displaying all of the Neolithic artwork of the Cycladic islands. The Byzantine Museum presents the riches and religious art associated with medieval Greece, and the nearby War Museum gives a detailed history of the country through artifacts of warfare from ancient until modern times. A vast collection of art acquired from Greek collectors and by Greek artists at the National Art Gallery.

Museums in the city:

Kerameikos Museum
Museum of Greek Folk Art
Jewish Museum
National Gallery
National Historical Museum
Museum of the Ancient Agora (Stoa of Attalos)

SHOPS AND MARKETS

There are three Agoras in downtown Athens. One is the ancient Agora where the Thission building is, below the Acropolis and the hill of Areospagos. Then there is the Roman Agora near the Tower of the winds in the Plaka. Both have been closed for centuries. But the Agora on Athinas Street, otherwise known as the Athens Central Market is the favorite of the three. Central Market is the most exciting place in Athens.



GREEK FOOD, ATHENS EATING OUT

Eating out in Greece is a national pastime and a leisurely pleasure. Whether dining at a local tavern or an elegant restaurant, Greeks take their time over food. The native cuisine is delightfully uncomplicated and quite different from what's found in Greek restaurants abroad. Much of the cooking relies on simple seasonings and fresh meat and vegetables.

For food in Athens you are in the right place, all kind of restaurants with local, international and ethnic cuisine, grill houses, Greek souvlaki shops, pizzerias, hamburger, you name it, are to be found everywhere in Athens.

There are loads of restaurants in Plaka, Psiri and surrounding area. If you try these out you will know what a good restaurant should look, taste and feel like, and be less likely to get a disappointing meal in one of the tourist joints.

Restaurant - on Thespidos - fine dining, wonderful fish and seafood. A psarotaverna is a good place to dine on fish dishes, but these eateries are often quite expensive and resemble restaurants rather than typical tavernas. The best place for seafood in Athens is in Piraeus, in particular, down by the little harbour of Mikrolimano.



	INDIVIDUALS	GROUPS (OVER 25 PAX)
INCLUDE:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3 overnights in selected hotel - Transfer airport – hotel – airport - Half Day City Tour - All taxes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3 overnights in selected hotel - Transfer airport – hotel – airport - Half Day City Tour - All taxes
OPTIONAL:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 DAY CRUISE (Poros, Hydra, Aegina) (include transfer and light lunch on board) - Half day Sounio - Corinth – Mycenae – Epidaurus - Ancient Corinth - Delphi 	