TOUR CODE

GC2

ADVENTURESABROAD

CLASSICAL GREECE

with the Monasteries of Meteora

9 days

Updated 06/01/2013

Day 1 *Arrival in Athens*

Today we arrive in Athens, off-and-on the capital of Greece in its many incarnations over several thousand years. The city received a major facelift for the 2004 Olympics and is looking better than ever, with buildings and monuments cleaned and renovated, and newly created pedestrian areas near the Ancient Agora and Acropolis.

Overnight in Athens. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Athens - Mycenae - Nauplia*

We board our coach to drive to ancient Corinth for a brief visit. Back in ancient times Corinth was one of the three major powers in Greece, and took part in all the battles against the Persians. It was from one of the richest cities and this is quite evident by its remains, including the huge Agora (market place) and Apollo's Temple (6th c BC).

We continue to Mycenae. The citadel occupies the triangular summit of a low hill between two gorges. The Mycenaeans excelled in this style of building using large, unworked stones. These massive fortifications were begun in the 14th century, followed by Tiryns and Dendra, Argos and Athens, as well as a host of subsidiary forts and eventually, a huge wall across the Corinthian isthmus. The famous Lion Gate, and similar constructions at Gla and Tiryns, were built in the 13th century BC.

Here we will see vestiges of a kingdom that, for 400 years (1600-1200 BC), was the most powerful in Greece. We enter through the Lion Gate and see the Great Court where Agamemnon is believed to have been murdered in one of the chambers.

Later we travel to Epidaurus, a sanctuary of Asklepios, the God of Medicine. The sanctuaries of Asklepios, the healer god, were as much sanatoria, health farms or spas, as places of worship. This was the most prestigious centre of the cult in the Classical period and received a galaxy of splendid buildings spanning the whole of the 4th century BC.

Epidauros came into prominence only in the later 5th century, when the cult was received at Athens in 420 BC and the tragedian Sophocles became its priest. There was a revival at the sanctuary in the 2nd century AD, and worship on the site continued in the form of a Christian basilica.

We continue toward Nauplia.

Overnight near Nauplia. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Nauplia - Mystra - Sparta*

This morning we spend a bit of time exploring the charming seaside town of Nauplia before joining we a dramatic winding mountain drive toward Sparta, arriving mid-morning.

We visit the Museum of the Olive and Greek Olive Oil in Sparta, which aims to highlight the culture and technology of the olive and olive production, which is inextricably linked with the Greek and Mediterranean identity. Unique in Greece, the museum is located in the heart of Laconia, one of the main olive producing locations in Greece.

We continue to our tour of Mystra, an impregnable fortress built by Guillame de Villehardouin in 1249. When the Byzantines won back the Morea from the Franks, Emperor Michael VIII Palaeologus made Mystra its capital and seat of government. It soon became populated by people from the surrounding plains seeking refuge from invading Slavs.

During the rule of the despots, while the empire plummeted into decline elsewhere, Mystra experienced a renaissance, but then declined under Turkish rule. It was captured by the Venetians in 1687 and it thrived once again with a flourishing silk industry and a population of 40,000. It was recaptured by the Turks in 1715, and from then on it was downhill all the way. It was burned by the Russians in 1770, the Albanians in 1780 and Ibrahim Pasha in 1825. Not surprisingly, at the time of Independence it was in a very sorry state, virtually abandoned and in ruins, though since the 1950s much restoration work has taken place.

Back in Sparta, you may choose to visit the archaeological remains of ancient Sparta (optional), including the 2nd century BC theatre, the site's most discernible ruin. There is not much remaining of this once mighty civilization, but those interested in Spartan history may find the visit rewarding.

Overnight in Sparta. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Sparta - Olympia*

Driving from Sparta to Olympia, we arrive in the early afternoon. After lunch we will have a tour of the site of ancient Olympia and the excellent on-site museum. This was a place in ancient Greece where rival states shed their protective armour and congregated in peace to enjoy the ancient games and make offerings to the Gods. The temple of Zeus once dominated the entire complex and housed the 13 m (43 foot) statue of Zeus, considered by the Greeks to be one of the original Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

We will also see the Stadium as well as the Temple of Hera, which is the site's most intact structure. This is the oldest structure in the precinct, originally dedicated to Zeus as well as Hera, and gradually rebuilt from wood into stone. The walls were of mud-brick with a tiled roof.

The games, which were the most prestigious athletic event in Greece, were held in conjunction with a festival to Olympian Zeus. Three heralds were sent to all the Greek states to announce their date and declare the universal truce, under which all hostilities were suspended for one week. The games were brought to an end in AD 393, under an edict of the Emperor Theodosius that banned all pagan festivals. The temples were destroyed in AD 426.

Overnight in Olympia. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Olympia - Delphi*

We drive across the Rio-Antirrio Bridge en route to Delphi, arriving in the early afternoon. On arrival we will have a guided tour of this spectacular site and its excellent museum.

According to mythology, Zeus released two eagles at opposite ends of the world and they came to rest at Delphi, the 'navel of the world.' Delphi is known as the center of worship for the God Apollo, son of Zeus who embodied moral discipline and spiritual clarity. But even before the area was associated with Apollo there were other deities worshipped

here including the earth goddess Gea, Themis, Demeter and Poseidon, the well known god of the sea. By the end of the Mycenaean period Apollo had displaced these other deities and became the guardian of the oracle.

Delphi was the site of the Delphic oracle, most important oracle in the classical Greek world, and it was a major site for the worship of the god Apollo. His sacred precinct in Delphi was a Pan-Hellenic sanctuary, where every four years athletes from all over the Greek world competed in the Pythian Games, the precursor to the Olympic Games.

Overnight in Delphi. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Delphi - Kalambaka - Monasteries of Meteora*

Today we drive from Delphi to Kalambaka. Our route takes us through the central plains, a rich agricultural land often referred to as the "bread basket" of Greece.

Later this afternoon we have a panoramic drive around the Monasteries of Meteora, built upon rocks that rise vertically from the plains below. These "Rocks of the Air" are visible for miles around and are crowned with old monasteries that cling to their summits. The afternoon light provides ideal conditions for photography. Making our roadside photo stops today allow us to spend more time on the sites tomorrow when we visit the monasteries.

Overnight in Kalambaka. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *The Monasteries of Meteora - Athens*

The Meteora is one of the largest and most important complexes of Eastern Orthodox monasteries and is second only to Mount Athos. The monasteries are built on natural sandstone rock pillars, at the northwestern edge of the Plain of Thessaly.

This morning we visit several monasteries (usually 3 in total; periodic closures determine which ones we visit), including the Metamorphosis (Grand Meteora), built on the highest rock at 613 m (2,030 ft) above sea level. Its striking series of frescoes depict the persecution of Christians by the Romans.

Later today we return by road to Athens, visiting Thermopylae, where the great historical battle between the Spartan King Leonidas, the ultimate soldier-king, and the huge army of Persians took place.

Overnight in Athens. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Athens: City Tour*

Today we enjoy a guided tour of Athens, the very heart and soul of Greece. Athens has been very nicely pedestrianized in recent years, and most sites of interest are easily and pleasantly accessed by foot or subway (rather than being trapped in Athens' horrendous traffic).

Our guided tour begins at the new Acropolis Museum, located at the foot of the Acropolis. The museum was built to house every artifact found on the rock and on its feet, from the Greek Bronze Age to Roman and Byzantine Greece. Nearly 4,000 objects are exhibited over an area of 14,000 square metres.

From here we will enter Plaka, the old town of Athens. Standing on a small square is the Lysicrates Monument, a cyclical tower from the 4th century BC. From here, it is just a brief walk along Dionysiou Areopagitou Street to enter

the Acropolis, near the site of the Dionysos Theatre. Constructed in the 6th century BC, it is one of the world's oldest theatres and the place where the great works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes were first performed. We will also see a more recent theatre, the Odeon of Herod Atticus from the second century AD, which is still used for concerts and performances.

Ascending to the top of the Acropolis, we will see magnificent buildings dating from the 5th century BC, the Golden Age of Athens. On the highest point on the Acropolis is the Parthenon, often considered the finest monument to Greek civilization. The temple was dedicated to Athena "Parthenos," the virgin and patron goddess of the city.

After our Acropolis tour, we'll descend and enter the Ancient Agora located adjacent to the Plaka. Among the numerous sights in this archaeological park are the well-preserved Temple of Hephaistos and the landmark Roman era Tower of the Winds. From here you are free to wander and explore on your own, or make your way back to the hotel with your Tour Leader's assistance.

Overnight in Athens. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Departure*

Departure from Athens.

KALO TAXIDI!! Meal plan: Breakfast.