TOUR CODE

GI6

ADVENTURESABROAD

GREEK ISLAND HOPPING

Santorini, Mykonos, Delos & Crete

14 days

Updated 22/11/2013

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: 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, 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 it is just a brief walk 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, the old town of Athens. 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 3 *Athens - Mykonos*

Early this morning we travel by local ferry from Athens' port, Pireaus, to the island of Mykonos.*

From the harbour waterfront, you can watch the local fishing boats, or venture into the labyrinth of dazzling, white-washed streets to the many churches, tavernas, or shops selling artisan crafts. In the distance stand a string of windmills

that once harnessed the breezes of days gone by. The sugar cube buildings are stacked around a cluster of seafront fishermen's dwellings. The labyrinth design was intended to confuse the pirates who plagued Mykonos in the eighteenth and 19th centuries. The whitewashed houses concealing dozens of little churches, shrines and chapels.

* PORTERS ARE GENERALLY NOT AVAILABLE ON THE GREEK ISLES, OR ON FERRIES BETWEEN THEM. You MUST be able to carry / wheel your baggage on and off ferries.

Overnight on Mykonos. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Mykonos: Walking Tour & Boat Trip to Delos*

This morning we'll take you on an orientation walking tour of Mykonos Chora. We wander the pirate-proof streets of town and see the Paraportiani Church near the quay, an architectural masterpiece of five chapels in one.

We then meet the boat that will take us to the tiny sacred island of Delos (40 minutes away). Delos gives the whole group of islands surrounding it their name, the Cyclades -- so named because they form a circle (kyklos) around Delos. For nearly 1,000 years this sanctuary was the political and religious centre of the Aegean. Leto, pregnant by Zeus, gave birth to the twins Apollo and Artemis on Delos. In the 18th century BC, the annual Delia Festival was established on the island to celebrate the birth of Apollo. Delos was populated during its height in Hellenistic times with wealthy merchants, mariners and bankers from as far away as Egypt and Syria.

During our walking tour of Delos, we will see the Agora of the Competialists, Roman merchants or freed slaves who worshipped the guardian spirits of crossroads; the Sanctuary of Apollo, the three temples of Apollo and the Sanctuary of Dionysus. In the House of the Masks we are able to see a mosaic portraying Dionysus riding on a panthers back. The theatre here could seat 5,500 people.

We return to Mykonos, where you wil have some free time to explore Mykonos town on your own.

Overnight on Mykonos. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Mykonos - Santorini*

Today we take a ferry or hydrofoil (depending on scheduling) to the island of Santorini.

Vast geological upheavals have given this island its unique form resulting in the nickname, "Pre-Historic Pompeii." The effect of terracing makes this unlike any other island, Greece's most visually stunning. Santorini is the island of churches, wine, and donkeys! From as early as 3000 BC the island developed as an outpost of Minoan civilization until around 1650 BC when the volcano erupted. At this point the island's history became linked with the legend of Atlantis.

Overnight on Santorini. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Santorini: Akrotiri & Island Tour*

Visually, Santorini is the most spectacular of the Cycladic islands. With its brilliant flooded caldera, high cliffs and charming villages, it is the Greek Isle of everyone's dreams. Our coach tour today will take us to Santorini's many highlights.

We begin with a visit to Akrotiri, where excavations have revealed a complete prehistoric Minoan city with squares,

streets and two-storey houses which contained marvelous frescoes. The buildings date to the late 16th century BC. No skeletons or treasures have been found in Akrotiri, so historians think that the inhabitants were forewarned of the eruption and were able to escape. The excavations have yielded evidence that has revolutionized our knowledge of the Late Bronze Age; indeed the town has been called a "Bronze-age Pompeii."

We will also visit the hilltop village of Pyrgos, once the capital of the island and home to more than 30 churches. The village is composed of traditional houses built around the Venetian Castle and the small streets follow the shape of the hill. Climbing from the square up to the castle of Pyrgos, the stone houses crowd more densely together within the labyrinth of narrow vaulted lanes.

Our drive around the island will also take us up to the Prophet Elias Monastery built on the highest point of the island in 1711 AD. Though we will not visit inside the monastery, the view from here is breathtaking.

Fira is the capital of the island and the most important village. Perched on the edge of an impressive cliff 260m high, the town offers great panoramic views over the submerged volcano. Here the small streets are filled with all kind of shops, cafes, and restaurants. After an orientation walk through the town we will visit the impressive Archaeological Museum. This museum features many pieces and exhibits specific to the Santorini site of Akrotiri, as well as artifacts dating back to the time of the Cycladic Civilization. The most impressive legacies of this civilization are the statuettes carved from Parian marble -- the famous Cycladic figurines. Like statuettes of Neolithic times they depicted images of the Great Mother. Other remains include bronze and obsidian tools and weapons, gold jewelry, and stone and clay vases and pots.

Oia, our last destination, is built along the rim of the caldera wall. We will walk through the village, admire the magnificent panoramic views, and perhaps enjoy a snack at one of the many local cafes.

We then return to Kamari Beach (those who wish to extend their time in Oia or Fira can return to Kamari using the public bus system).

Overnight on Santorini. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Santorini: Fira - Imerovigli - Oia / Free Afternoon*

This morning we will head to the small town of Oia, situated at the northern tip of the island. We start by taking the public bus to Fira, where we enjoy the stunning caldera views and dramatic setting. From here we will follow the scenic path along the vast caldera rim. Our route leads up through the village of Firostefani and brings us to the village of Imerovigi. The views are ever-changing as the perspective of the island changes minute by minute. We will look out to Skaros, the remains of a Venetian Castle built in 1207 by Marco Sanudo, the ruler of all Cyclades islands that time.

From Imerovigli we will continue by bus to Oia (pronounced "EE-ah"). Built on a steep slope of the caldera, many of Oia's dwellings nestle in the niches hewn in the volcanic rock. This was once a major fishing port but is principally known these days as perhaps the most dramatically situated towns in the whole of Greece. The peak of prosperity for this small port town was reached in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. At that time the locally based merchant fleet plied its trade in the Eastern Mediterranean, especially from Alexandria to Russia. The two-story captains' houses built on the highest part of the village are a reminder of the village's former affluence. Oia is a place where many artists have found their inspiration... and here we will wander the narrow streets and old ruins, and enjoy the stunning views of the caldera with panoramic views of the rest of Santorini and the Aegean Sea. After a break for lunch we will return back to Fira and Kamari.

The balance of your day is free to explore on your own, and your Tour Leader will assist with options. Perhaps enjoy some time on one of Santorini's famous black beaches, or hike up to the ruins of Ancient Thira.

Overnight on Santorini. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Santorini - Iraklion, Crete*

Today we travel by ferry or hydrofoil (depending on scheduling) to Crete.

Crete is the largest and most southerly of the Greek Islands, blessed with a magnificent setting of rugged coastal scenery and warm waters. On arrival we will have an easy walking tour of central Iraklion,* including the impressive St Titus Church, Morosini Fountain and other Venetian legacies. The massive walls that surround the town of Iraklion were built by the Venetians in the mid-15th century.

*NOTE: Ferry schedules may require that we have our walking tour tomorrow.

Overnight in Iraklion. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Iraklion: Knossos, Archaeological Museum & Lassithi Plateau*

Early this morning we travel the short distance to Knossos where our local guide will show us the ancient palace of King Minos, first built around 1900 BC. In 1700 BC it was destroyed by an earthquake and rebuilt to a grander and more sophisticated design. The city of Knossos consisted of an immense palace, residences of officials and priests, the homes of ordinary people, and burial grounds. The Palace, which covered an area of 22000 sq m (236,682 sq feet), consisted of royal domestic quarters, public reception rooms, shrines, workshops, treasures and storerooms around a central court. Knossos was excavated by Arthur Evans between 1900 and 1930.

We also visit the Archaeological Museum in Iraklion, one of the best museums in Greece. The exhibits, collected from excavations carried out in all parts of Crete, come mainly from the prehistoric era and form a valuable record of the artistic, social and economic life of the island during the ancient period.

This afternoon we will proceed to the Lassithi Plateau, one of the highpoints of Crete, both in altitude and atmosphere, for it is unique: a green carpet hemmed in on all sides by the Díktean Mountains, snowcapped into April and irrigated in summer by windmills. As the excavations carried out on various sites have shown, this inaccessible area has been inhabited since Neolithic times. The plateau was also farmed by the Minoans and later by the Dorians. In 1293, however, it was such a nest of resistance that the Venetians forced everyone out and demolished the villages.

Overnight in Iraklion. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Iraklion - Rethymnon - Chania*

We leave Iraklion today and travel to Chania via Rethymnon. The old town here still retains its original aristocratic appearance, with buildings dating back to the 16th century as well as Byzantine and Hellenistic-Roman remains and a small Venetian Harbour. We will have some time here to wander and explore and soak up the charming atmosphere.

We then continue to Chania via the Akrotiri Peninsula, which rises just north of the bay of Suda, one of the biggest natural harbours in Greece. This peninsula east of Chania was once called Kiamon, and today is associated with the liberation struggles of Crete. While on the peninsula we will visit the monastery of Agia Triada, originally built in the 17th century. Today it is one of the few monasteries in Crete where monastic life is practiced. After our visit we make a short drive to the tomb of Eleftherios Venizelos, one of the greatest statesmen from Greece's recent history.

From here we have a breathtaking view of the town of Chania, a former capital of the island and the site of the ancient Minoan city of Kydonia. In the 13th century, Venice was becoming the maritime master of the easter Mediterranean. At Chania they built large fortifications against pirates and the Ottoman Turks. Eventually, though, the Ottomans took Chania in the mid-17th century. Today many regard Chania as Crete's most beautiful city.

Overnight in Chania. Meal plan: Breakfast and lunch.

Day 11 *Chania: Walking Tour*

This morning we have a walking tour of Chania. During our tour of the old town of Chania, we will pay a visit to the Archaeological and Folklore museums and explore the wonderful labyrinth of narrow streets in the historic quarter. We will discover "lost" Turkish fountains and bathhouses; quaint mediaeval back streets and alleyways; Venetian and Turkish houses; mosques, churches, fortifications, old tradesmen's shops and a host of other gems that are the secrets of this Greek city. The covered food market is outstanding with many traditional products such as cheese, honey, herbs, fresh fish, meat and produce.

Your afternoon is free to enjoy Chania, one of the most picturesque cities in Greece.

Overnight in Chania. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Chania - Overnight Ferry to Athens*

Today you may choose to continue your explorations of this charming town, or rent a car (international driving permit NOT required; bring your home driver's license) and further explore the hinterland of western Crete on your own. As you drive around the island, you can turn off the main road almost anywhere and find people in agricultural villages going about their daily routine. Your Tour Leader can help you plan your day.

Later this evening we transfer to the port for our overnight ferry to Pireaus, the port of Athens. The ferry is very comfortable with each cabin having two side-by-side beds and private facilities.

Overnight ferry to Athens. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Arrival in Athens*

Early this morning we arrive in Athens.* The balance of the day is at leisure to enjoy this lively city.

An excellent option today is a day trip to the beautiful archaealogical site of Delphi (for those who have not already visited on other tour options), or to the classic Peloponnesian sites at Corinth, Epidaurus and Mycenae. Your Tour Leader can help organize these full-day excursions. We also recommend a visit to the National Archaealogical Museum, accessible by subway.

* Please note that our Athens hotel rooms may NOT be ready for us this early in the day. Your large baggage will be securely stored; you might want to prepare your day pack ahead of time.

Overnight in Athens. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Departure*

Departure from Athens.

KALO TAXIDI!! Meal plan: Breakfast.