TOUR CODE

GR2

ADVENTURESABROAD

GREECE & TURKEY

'Lands of Legend'

20 days

Updated 01/11/2013

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 - Santorini***

Today we travel by ferry from Athens' port, Pireaus, to the island of Santorini. The island is considered by many to be the fairest of the Cyclades islands. Vast geological upheavals in prehistoric times have given this island its unique form, resulting in the nickname "Prehistoric Pompeii". The effect of natural terracing makes this unlike any other island. On arrival we transfer to our hotel.

* Greek ferry schedules tend to change without notice; some itinerary adjustments may be necessary at the discretion of your Tour Leader. Uncontrollable factors such as weather may result in delays; a flexible attitude will enhance the enjoyment of your adventure. 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 Santorini. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Santorini: Akrotiri & Island Tour*

This morning we have a bus excursion for a look at Santorini, including 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 what has revolutionized our knowledge of the Late Bronze Age; indeed the town has been called a "bronze-age Pompeii."

We stop at the charming village of Pyrgos with its colourful architecture and commanding views. We then ascend to the highest point on the island and the nearby Monastery of Profitas Ilias (view from the outside) for great views of the entire island and caldera.

Descending again we head to the main town of Fira where we disembark our bus for a visit to 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, which can be divided into three periods: Early (3000-2000 BC), Middle (2000-1500 BC), and Late (1500-1100 BC). The most impressive legacies of this civilization are the statuettes carved from 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.

Your Tour Leader will then take you on an informal orientation walking tour of Fira. A popular thing to do after the tour is to walk down to the old port and then return to the rim via donkey or cable car (optional expense). The energetic can walk along the caldera rim to Oia (3+ hours), or you can travel there by public bus. Your Tour Leader will help you plan your day.

Overnight on Santorini. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Santorini - Crete*

This morning you can enjoy wandering and exploring the stone whitewashed streets of village clinging to the cliffsides.

Later we take the ferry from Santorini to Crete, the largest and southernmost of the Greek islands blessed with a magnificent setting and rugged coastal scenery. Crete has been inhabited since Neolithic times, yet the most famous civilization associated with the island is the Minoan. Minoan culture left a rich history of art, particularly frescoes, which indicate a powerful, wealthy and optimistic culture. We arrive in Iraklion and transfer to our hotel.

Overnight in Iraklion. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Iraklion: Walking Tour*

This morning 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: The order of our activities in and around Iraklion may vary depending on our incoming ferry time and the timing of our flight to Rhodes. It is possible that we will visit Knossos and the museum today and fly to Rhodes tomorrow morning.

Overnight in Iraklion. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Crete: Knossos - Rhodes*

After breakfast we travel 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 in 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 22 000 sq m (8456 sq miles), consisted of royal domestic quarters, public reception rooms, shrines, workshops, treasures and storerooms around a central court. Here we see the remnants of this golden Minoan period with its wonderful theatrical staircase, the throne room, many impressive frescoes (including the famous "Lily Prince"), as well as the first flush toilets in Europe, dating back to the 14th century BC. 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 evening we fly from Crete to the island of Rhodes.

NOTE: As per the note on Day 6, if we fly to Rhodes earlier on this day, the Crete sightseeing will be accomplished the day before, and on arrival in Rhodes we will visit the Castle (aka Palace of Grand Masters) this afternoon. The Palace of the Grand Masters has turreted towers as perfect as they were back in the 14th century. Destroyed when an arms store in the nearby Church of St. John exploded in 1856, it was rebuilt by the Italians and was the summer retreat of King Victor Emmanuel and Mussolini. The Knights of St John was a religious order of the church of Rome founded in Amalfi in the 11th century. They went to Jerusalem initially to minister to the needs of the pilgrims who arrived there and soon extended their duties to tending the poor and sick of the Holy Land. Over the years they became increasingly militant, joining forces with the Knights Templars and the Teutonic Knights of St Mary in battles against infidels.

Overnight on Rhodes. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Rhodes*

Today we will accomplish any remaining Rhodes sightseeing that may have been deferred from earlier due to flight and ferry schedules. It is likely that you will have a free afternoon for independent exploration.

Overnight on Rhodes. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Rhodes, Greece - Marmaris, Turkey - Bodrum*

Today we ferry from Rhodes to Marmaris, Turkey.

Marmaris's situation, with pine forests reaching right down to the sea, has been described as fjord-like for the huge bay in which it sits is almost landlocked. Nelson's entire fleet sheltered in this anchorage in 1798 prior to sailing for Egypt where it destroyed the French fleet in the Battle of the Nile. In the old quarter on a hillock jutting out into the bay stand the remains of an Ottoman castle built in 1522 by Suleyman the Magnificent, with a cluster of crumbling houses roofed in red tiles huddled within its walls.

After clearing Turkish customs, we will be met by our coach driver and escorted to our air-conditioned motor coach. We then proceed via the Gulf of Gokova to Bodrum, a beautiful seaside town where there once stood one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World--the Mausoleum. In around 1000 BC, Dorians from Troezene in the Peloponnese set foot in south-west Asia Minor in the area around present-day Bodrum peninsula. A few centuries later, Halicarnassus (now Bodrum) became a member of the Dorian league of cities that included places on today's Turkish mainland, on Creek islands and on the island of Rhodes, such as Cnidos, Cos, Kamiros, Lindos and Ialyssos. However, because of its alliance with the Ionians of Caria, the town was later expelled from the league.

The city was conquered by Alexander the Great in 334 BC and was ruled respectively by Philip V of Macedonia, the Seljuks and the Byzantines, before being annexed in AD 1300 by the Emirate of Menteshe. At the beginning of the 15th century, Halicarnassus was occupied by the Knights Hospitaller of St. John who were crusaders from Rhodes. They built a fortress on the end of the peninsula. However, when Sueyman the Magnificent took control of Rhodes in 1522, he confiscated all the Knights' possessions and Bodrum became part of the Ottoman Empire.

Today the Castle of St Peter rises impressively above twin bays dotted with small white houses, forming what is known as Turkey's Saint-Tropez.

Overnight in Bodrum. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Bodrum: Castle of St Peter*

Bodrum is the most "Aegean" town in Turkey, with whitewashed houses scattered on the hillside overlooking the perfect natural harbour. It is delightful to wander along the palm-lined marina in the evening and marvel at the anchored yachts.

Today we will visit the Crusader Castle of St Peter which dominates Bodrum Bay. The castle was built by the Knights Hospitaller in the early 15th century. Today the castle houses an excellent museum, mainly dedicated to the artifacts retrieved from the many ancient shipwrecks discovered off the Turkish coast. Many of the pieces have been excavated from below the seabed by teams of archaeologists.

Overnight in Bodrum. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Bodrum - Didyma - Kusadasi*

After a free morning in Bodrum, we travel northward along the Aegean coast, on winding roads through fields and olive groves, toward Kusadasi, a beautiful port city with a small island fortress. En route we stop at Didyma, an ancient Ionian shrine and the most renowned oracle of the Hellenic world, containing a temple and an oracle of Apollo.

Kusadasi has rapidly developed into one of the most popular seaside resorts of the coast and was most probably founded on the ancient site of Neopolis. Because of its beautiful location and its excellent hotels, it is an ideal base for Ephesus.

Overnight in Kusadasi. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Kusadasi: Ephesus*

Today we visit Ephesus, one of the highlights of any visit to Turkey. During its Golden Age, the city was adorned with splendid monuments, theatres, agoras and libraries. The protectress of the city was the goddess Artemis whose temple, dating back to 1300 BC, was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World. As a prosperous trade and banking centre, Ephesus had a cosmopolitan population. It has been recorded that St John brought the Virgin Mary to Ephesus where she spent her last days after the death of Christ. On our tour of Ephesus we see a 24,000 seat amphitheatre, the Library of Celsus, and the marble-paved Arcadian Way. We also include the special Terrace Houses section, which provides fascinating insight into family life during the Roman period.

In addition to the main site of Ephesus we will visit the superb Ephesus Museum. We also visit the traditional town of Selcuk with its many beautiful buildings, including the Isa Bey Mosque (built in 1307), remains of old Turkish baths, and a hill crowned by the Ayasoluk Fortress.

Overnight in Kusadasi. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Kusadasi - Aphrodisias - Pamukkale*

After breakfast we leave the Aegean coast and drive along the winding Menderes River Valley, which gives its name to the geographical term referring to a winding, or meandering river.

We visit the impressive Roman site of Aphrodisias, named after Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love. Much of the site's excavation has been funded by the National Geographic Society. Aphrodisias is the location of one of the greatest schools of sculpture in antiquity; the museum here contains some magnificent pieces.

We continue to Pamukkale where mineral-rich water breaks through the earth's surface and cascades down the hillsides creating terraces of white chalk-like stone. We visit the ruins of Hierapolis before checking in to our hotel.

Overnight in Pamukkale. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Pamukkale - Konya*

We have a morning departure for the mystical city of Konya, birthplace of the Whirling Dervishes and capital of the Seljuk Empire. En route we pass by Lake Egirdir. Two islands, connected by a causeway to the mainland, extend the town of Egirdir far out into the lake's fish-filled waters.

During the sightseeing tour of Konya we will visit the Mausoleum and Museum of Mevlana, home of the famous Whirling Dervishes; as well as the ceramics museum of Karatay, once an Islamic school, built in 1251.

Overnight in Konya. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 15 *Konya - Cappadocia*

Today we drive across the flat Anatolian Plateau to Cappadocia. Along the way we visit the caravanserai of Sultanhani. Caravanserai were fortified, medieval inns located one day's journey apart, for the protection of travelling merchants. This encouraged merchants and their caravans of silks and spices travelling the "Silk Route" to trade in Turkish lands, thus promoting commerce.

Overnight near Cappadocia. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 16 *Cappadocia Area*

Today we will spend a full day exploring this unique and fascinating lunar landscape with its fairy chimneys and conical towers topped with huge, delicately balanced rocks. Here the elements have weathered layers of volcanic dust into giant cones and mushrooms 9m (30 feet) high! Most of the chapels date from the Byzantine period of the 10th and 11th centuries.

In the Goreme Valley we will see the many churches carved into this landscape with their wonderful paintings and frescoes. This monastic complex of rock chapels covered with frescoes is one of the best known sites in Central Anatolia. We will visit the underground city of Kaymakli one of the many cities dug into the soft rock of Cappadocia. At Kaymakli there are at least eight levels in the underground city, four of which are currently open to the public. The city is an elaborate network of tunnels, stairways and chambers hollowed out of the rock. It served as a safe haven during times of unrest and protected its citizens from marauding armies.

This evening, those who wish may attend a performance of Turkish traditional dances from Turkey's many regions (optional).

Overnight near Cappadocia. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 17 *Cappadocia - Tuz Golu - Ankara & Museum of Anatolian Civilizations*

Our drive today takes us to a salt lake called Tuz Golu. We travel through the village of Uchisar, clustered around the Uchisar Fortress, and the village of Urgup which was, according to documents found in the Middle Ages, a bishop's residence.

We continue to Ankara, Turkey's modern capital. Ankara was an ancient trading town before the Romans arrived; its name is derived from the angora wool of the goats sold here. Ataturk, founder of the Turkish Republic, made Ankara the capital rather than Istanbul to break with the discredited Ottoman Empire after World War I.

We visit the Mausoleum of Ataturk before our visit to one of the best museums in the world -- the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations. The museum contains a superb collection dating back to the settlement at Catal Huyuk in 7500 BC and includes pieces from the Phrygian, Urartian, Assyrian and mighty Hittite Empires.

Overnight in Ankara. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 18 *Ankara - Istanbul: Topkapi Palace*

Today we travel by road to Istanbul (an early start!).

On arrival we will visit the Topkapi Palace, the great palace of the Ottoman sultans from the mid-fifteenth to the early nineteenth century. It was from this vast complex of buildings that the mighty Ottoman Empire was organised. Today it

is a huge museum containing ceremonial robes in silk and gold thread, Japanese and Chinese porcelain, European clocks, miniature paintings depicting Ottoman courtly life and one of the largest jewelry collections in the world. You may choose to end your visit with a look at the Topkapi Harem, where the sultans' many "wives" were kept in isolated splendour, before leaving the palace (optional approx +/-9 USD entrance fee).

Overnight in Istanbul. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 19 *Istanbul: Hippodrome & Agia Sophia*

We start our day with a panoramic drive around the Golden Horn and the great walls of Constantinople. The first recorded bridge over the Golden Horn was built during the reign of Justinian the Great in the 6th century at the western end of the city, and today we will pass the famous Galata Bridge and the Ataturk Bridge. As we drive along the Byzantine city gates and walls we will view the towering minarets of Suleyman's Mosque and the Galata Tower before arriving in Sultanahmet Square.

We'll begin the walking component of today's tour at the legendary Blue Mosque, built between 1609 and 1616 by Mehmet Aga. The inside is covered by more than 20,000 Iznik tiles. At the adjacent Hippodrome you will see the remains of the great sports stadium where chariot races were held in Roman and Byzantine times. We will also see an Egyptian obelisk, a giant needle of stone carved for the Pharaoh Tutmoses III around 1500 BC and brought to Constantinople by the Byzantine Emperor Theodosius in AD 390.

We continue to the church of Agia Sophia (St Sophia), built by the Emperor Justinian in 548 BC. It was the largest church in the Christian world for nearly 1,000 years. When the Ottoman Turks conquered the city in 1435 one of the first things they did was to convert St Sophia into a mosque. Today it is a museum featuring many beautiful Christian mosaics.

Outside Agia Sophia we descend underground to the gigantic cisterns that contained the vast water supply that allowed Constantinople to withstand so many long sieges. Here the many columns are reflected in the water while classical music plays quietly.

Balance of the day at leisure.

Overnight in Istanbul. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 20 *Departure*

Departure from Istanbul.

BON VOYAGE! Meal plan: Breakfast.