TOUR CODE

GR7

ADVENTURESABROAD

CLASSICAL GREECE & THE GREEK ISLES

The Peloponnese, Santorini & Mykonos

15 days

Updated 11/12/2013

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, 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 9 *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 10 *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 11 *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 12 *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 13 *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 14 *Santorini - Athens*

Today we take the ferry to Pireaus (Athens). This journey will take most of the day but is scenic and enjoyable.

Overnight in Athens.

Day 15 *Departure*

Departure from Athens.

KALO TAXIDI!! Meal plan: Breakfast.