

GREECE Family Tour

NEW TOUR!

11 days

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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.

Overnight in Athens.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Athens: City Touring

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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Athens - Corinth - Nafplio

We board our coach and drive to ancient Corinth for a visit of the site and the site museum. 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 Nafplio (sometimes spelled "Nauplia"). Upon arrival, after check-in, we can explore this charming seaside town, at one time the capital of Greece.

We have time this afternoon to climb up to Paladimi Castle, which looms above Nafplio. Nestled on the crest of a 216-metre high hill, the fortress was built by the Venetians during their second occupation of the area (1686-1715). The fortress commands an impressive view over the Argolic Gulf, the city of Nafplio and the surrounding country. There are 857 steps in the winding stair from the town to the fortress. However, to reach the top of the fortress there are over one thousand. Locals in the town of Nafplio will say there are 999 steps to the top of the castle, and specials can be found on menus that incorporate this number to catch a tourist's eye.

You may also choose to visit one of the town's nearby beaches.

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Overnight in Nafplio.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Mycenae & Epidaurus

Today's full-day excursion take us first to the site of Mycenae, an ancient citadel that 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. Epidaurus 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'll visit the museum and the spectacular theatre before returning to Nafplio.

Overnight in Nafplio.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Nafplio - Galaxidi - Delphi

We drive across the Rio-Antirrio Bridge en route to Delphi, via the pleasant seaside town of Galaxidi, a national treasure which has preserved its unique look and old ways. It is a joy to wander its authentic streets, with mansions of the ship captains scattered around the hilltops. One can imagine what it was like with hundreds of sailing ships in Galaxidi's tiny harbour.

After some time to explore and for lunch, we continue to Delphi. 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.

Overnight in Delphi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Delphi: Site Tour - Rafina - Tinos

This morning we have a guided tour of the site of Delphi. Our tour visits the Ancient Sanctuary of Apollo and the Delphi Museum, where one can see among other archaeological treasures, the unique bronze charioteer. This is one of the most spectacular sites in Greece, located high on the slopes of Mount Parnassus.

We depart Delphi and begin the island portion of our tour with a drive to Rafina, one of the main ports of Athens. From here we travel by scheduled local ferry to the Cycladic island of Tinos where, on arrival (time permitting - we may accomplish this tomorrow), we can have a leisurely stroll about Tinos town. We'll take in the Panagia Church, Greece's most important pilgrimage centre for Orthodox pilgrims. Note the carpeted strip along the main road leading to the church, put in place for pilgrims who demonstrate their piety by crawling the distance from the main waterfront square up the hill to the church.

According to mythology, Tinos was the home of Aeolus, God of the Winds. The Ionians came to Tinos around 1000 BC; in the 6th century BC

Tinos was ruled by Eretria, while in 490 BC the island was seized by the Persians, regaining its freedom after the battle of Marathon. In 1207 Tinos was conquered by the Venetians. Venetian rule in Tinos island lasted longer than on any other island of the Cyclades. In 1715, Tinos was taken by the Turks, to be liberated by the Greeks in the War of Independence of 1821. The year 1822 was an important one for Tinos, for it was then that the famous icon of the Blessed Virgin was discovered, after a nun in the Kechrovouni convent saw it in a dream.

While on Tinos we will have a hands-on demonstration of traditional Greek cooking and cuisine.

* 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 Tinos.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Tinos Island Walking

After breakfast we'll travel by taxi to the village of Falatados from where our leisurely hike begins. We head uphill to the ruined fortress of Exombourgo to admire a stunning view of the Aegean. Mt Exombourgo is a steep-sided granite cone 553m (1,814 ft) high that features a ruined Venetian castle and the remains of three churches and a fountain-house. This was the medieval capital of the island of Tinos until the town was devastated by the Turks.

We continue to the village of Koumaros where we can make a short break and try a traditional Greek coffee before continuing to the village of Volax, almost hidden in the middle of rounded, granite boulders, a geological phenomenon that sets it apart from the rest of Greece. Volax is also noted for its traditional handmade woven baskets. A footpath winds down the valley to Agapi, the finishing point of today's hike. Look for examples of the island's famous "dovecotes," built long ago for pigeons but today considered works of art. In the old times pigeons were sold to seafarers who came to the island to stock up with supplies.

DAY SUMMARY: 3-4 hours leisurely walking on undulating, mostly unshaded terrain with uneven / cobbled surfaces.

Overnight on Tinos.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Tinos: Pyrgos - Mykonos

This morning, still on Tinos, we will visit Pyrgos, a village of traditional architecture historically linked with marble carving, for which Tinos is well-known. There are numerous small carving studios in the village, along with many cafes and small shops. The central square has a beautiful old plane tree and a marble spring. A School of Fine Arts is located in the village and two beautiful churches. Relatively new to the village is the Museum of Marble Crafts, which has a unique and fascinating exhibition of the history of marble from antiquity to the present day.

Later today we ferry the short distance to the neighbouring 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, jewelry and the latest fashions. 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 main town has immaculately whitewashed houses concealing hundreds of little churches, shrines and chapels.

Our hotel is located a short distance from the main town, near a beach for which Mykonos is famous.

Overnight in Mykonos.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Mykonos & 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. As one of the most cosmopolitan Greek islands, Mykonos is legendary for its shopping and nightlife.

We then meet the boat that will take us to the tiny sacred island of Delos (30 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.

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 for free time.

Overnight on Mykonos.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Mykonos - Athens

Today we travel by ferry back to Athens and the port of Piraeus. Ferry schedule-permitting, you will have time at leisure either in Mykonos or in Athens. This evening we enjoy a farewell dinner and some time for last minute shopping in the Plaka.

Overnight in Athens.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Departure

Departure from Athens.

KALO TAXIDI!!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast