Tour Code
GC2

ADVENTURESABROAD

CLASSICAL GREECE

with the Monasteries of Meteora

9 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Athens

This vibrant metropolis pulses with 5,000 years of history, from its Neolithic origins to its golden age when Athenian values shaped Western civilization. In 1834, Athens became the capital of modern Greece, transforming into an attractive metropolis that seamlessly blends archaeological treasures with contemporary European energy.

Tonight we gather with fellow travellers for our first evening meal, beginning our shared journey through the cradle of democracy and philosophy.

Overnight in Athens.

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 2 Athens - Mycenae & Epidaurus - Nafplio (Nauplia)

This morning we board our coach toward Mycenae, where massive stone fortifications crown a triangular hilltop between two dramatic gorges. Here stood the most powerful kingdom in Greece for 400 years (1600-1200 BC), its rulers building with enormous unworked stones in a style that awed even the ancient Greeks.

We enter through the famous Lion Gate, constructed in the 13th century BC, and explore the Great Court where legend claims Agamemnon met his tragic end. The Mycenaeans' mastery of this cyclopean architecture influenced fortifications across the ancient world.

Next we travel to Epidaurus, sanctuary of Asklepios, the healing god. These ancient "health farms" combined medicine with worship, drawing pilgrims seeking cures from across the Mediterranean. This prestigious centre flourished in the Classical period, receiving splendid 4th-century BC buildings. Epidaurus gained prominence when Athens adopted the cult in 420 BC, with tragedian Sophocles serving as its priest.

We then continue toward the charming seaside town of Nafplio.

Overnight in Nafplio

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Naflplio - Mystra - Sparta

This morning we explore charming Nafplio's seaside character before embarking on a dramatic winding mountain drive toward Sparta.

We visit Sparta's unique Museum of the Olive and Greek Olive Oil, highlighting the culture and technology that remains inextricably linked with Greek and Mediterranean identity. Located in the heart of Laconia, one of Greece's premier olive-producing regions, this museum celebrates the liquid gold that has sustained civilizations for millennia.

We then continue to Mystra, an impregnable fortress built by Guillaume de Villehardouin in 1249. When Byzantines reclaimed the Morea from the Franks, Emperor Michael VIII Palaeologus made Mystra his capital, drawing refugees from the surrounding plains seeking protection from invading Slavs.

During the despots' rule, while the Byzantine empire crumbled elsewhere, Mystra experienced a remarkable renaissance. The city thrived under Venetian rule with 40,000 inhabitants and a flourishing silk industry, only to face repeated destruction by Russians (1770), Albanians (1780), and Ibrahim Pasha (1825). Since the 1950s, extensive restoration has revealed its former glory.

Back in Sparta, those interested may visit the archaeological remains of ancient Sparta, including the 2nd-century BC theatre - the site's most discernible ruin.

Overnight in Sparta

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Sparta - Olympia: Site Tour

Today we travel to Olympia, arriving in the early afternoon for an extraordinary encounter with antiquity's greatest sporting spectacle.

After lunch we tour ancient Olympia, where rival Greek states laid down their weapons and gathered in sacred peace to honour the gods through athletic competition. The Temple of Zeus once dominated this complex, housing the 13-metre (43-foot) gold and ivory statue considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

We explore the Stadium where ancient athletes competed, and the Temple of Hera - the site's most intact structure and oldest building. Originally dedicated to both Zeus and Hera, this temple evolved from wood to stone construction, its mud-brick walls supporting a traditional tiled roof.

The Olympic Games represented the most prestigious athletic event in Greece, held in conjunction with festivals honouring Olympian Zeus. Three heralds announced dates to all Greek states, declaring universal truces that suspended hostilities. These sacred competitions ended in AD 393 when Emperor Theodosius banned all pagan festivals, with the temples destroyed in AD 426.

Overnight in Olympia

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Olympia - Delphi Touring

We drive across the impressive Rio-Antirrio Bridge en route to Delphi, arriving in the early afternoon for a guided tour of this spectacular archaeological site and its excellent museum.

Nestled dramatically on Mount Parnassus's slopes, Delphi was far more than a geographical location to ancient Greeks - it was the "navel of the world." Zeus released two eagles from opposite ends of the earth, and their convergence here symbolized Delphi's central cosmic importance.

Initially revered by deities like Earth goddess Gaia, Themis (justice), Demeter (agriculture), and Poseidon (sea), this sacred site eventually became synonymous with Apollo after he slayed the serpent Python who guarded the oracle. This marked a shift toward reason, order, and the pursuit of excellence.

The Delphic Oracle wielded enormous influence throughout the Greek world. Here, the Pythia delivered prophetic pronouncements believed inspired by Apollo himself. These enigmatic utterances influenced political decisions, personal choices, and even colonial foundations.

Beyond prophecy, Delphi hosted the Pythian Games, a Pan-Hellenic festival predating the Olympics that celebrated athletic prowess and artistic expression, fostering unity among competing city-states.

Overnight in Delphi

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Delphi - Kalambaka & the Monasteries of Meteora

Today we drive across central Greece's fertile plains, witnessing a landscape that testifies to the region's agricultural bounty. As we journey northward, rolling hills give way to increasingly rugged terrain, culminating in the awe-inspiring sight of Meteora's monolithic rock formations rising dramatically from the plain.

Later this afternoon, we embark on a panoramic drive around these "Rocks of the Air," marvelling at the sheer audacity of medieval monks who chose to build their monasteries atop these precarious peaks. The afternoon light casts golden hues across this extraordinary landscape, creating magical photographic opportunities that capture one of Greece's most breathtaking sights.

PLEASE NOTE: Depending on timing and logistical considerations, we may accomplish some monastery visits today and tomorrow morning. Your Tour Leader will advise in advance. Men must wear long trousers for monastery visits, while women must wear long wraps or skirts - available for purchase at sites for just a few euros.

Overnight in Kalambaka

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 The Monasteries of Meteora - Athens

Today we delve deeper into Meteora's mystique. This extraordinary complex, second only to Mount Athos in Eastern Orthodox importance, represents human ingenuity and unwavering faith. Perched precariously atop towering sandstone pillars, these monasteries offer breathtaking spectacles against the Thessalian plain's backdrop.

Due to periodic closures, we explore monasteries not visited yesterday, allowing nuanced understanding of this unique monastic community. We wander through ancient cloisters, admire Byzantine frescoes, and perhaps glimpse monks who continue inhabiting these sacred spaces.

Later, we journey toward Athens, stopping at Thermopylae - a site forever etched in Greek legend and history. Here, at this narrow mountain pass, King Leonidas and his 300 Spartans made their heroic last stand against Xerxes' overwhelming Persian army in 480 BC. This poignant stop serves as a powerful reminder of courage, sacrifice, and the unwavering human spirit of resistance.

This historic battlefield, where "the few" faced "the many," represents one of history's most celebrated examples of valor against impossible odds, inspiring generations with its message of duty and honour.

Overnight in Athens

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Athens: City Touring

Today we enjoy a guided tour of Athens, the heart and soul of Greece.* A large part of the town's historic centre has been converted into a 3-kilometre pedestrian zone (one of the largest in Europe), leading to the major archaeological sites, reconstructing -- to a large degree -- the ancient landscape, thus allowing us to avoid the city's horrendous traffic. As such, much/most of our tour today will be conducted ON FOOT at a leisurely pace.

We start at the Acropolis (with hopes to beat the heat/crowds), 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 by foot 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.

Our guided tour ends with a guided visit of the 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. After our tour you are free to wander and explore on your own or make your way back to the hotel with your Tour Leader's assistance.

* The exact order of our sightseeing in Athens may be altered by your Tour Leader depending on several variables and their judgement on

how best to run today's tour.

Overnight in Athens.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Departure

Departure from Athens.

KALO TAXIDI/BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast