Tour Code
**GD2**

ADVENTURESABROAD

# DODECANESE ISLANDS & CLASSIC ATHENS

## From Isolation to Empire

**16 days**

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### Day 1 Arrival on Rhodes

Rhodes announces itself as a medieval fortress city — not with beaches or resort hotels, but with walls. The Knights Hospitaller wrapped this island in massive stone ramparts in the 14th century and built them to last. They did.

Although Rhodes is the Dodecanese capital today, it wasn't one of the original twelve islands that gave the archipelago its name. The Dodecanese — literally twelve islands — scatter across the southeastern Aegean, closer to Turkiye than to mainland Greece.

We transfer to our hotel; tomorrow we begin our touring in the heart of Rhodes' medieval old city — the labyrinth of narrow streets, arched gateways, and limestone walls that have held human life for seven centuries.

Overnight in Rhodos.

Included Meal(s): Dinner

### Day 2 Rhodes Touring

The Palace of the Grand Masters rises above the old town -- gothic towers, crenellations, the architecture of serious medieval defence. The Knights built it not to impress but to repel. In 1856 an accidental explosion in a nearby church destroyed the palace. Italian occupiers later rebuilt it, and Mussolini used it as a summer retreat. History keeps arriving in Rhodes and leaving its layers behind.

The Knights of St. John began as a religious order in 11th-century Amalfi, shifted toward military action, and eventually became something closer to a maritime mercenary outfit. By the time they arrived in Rhodes they were warrior-monks with money and intent. They held the island for two centuries before the Ottomans took it — a long, expensive commitment to a piece of stone in a difficult sea.

Our walking tour traces the old town — UNESCO World Heritage site, the largest preserved medieval city in Europe. The streets are intentionally narrow and confusing. Defence strategy. The walls are thick enough to withstand cannonfire. Every spatial decision reflects the assumption that enemies would arrive by water without notice.

Overnight in Rhodes.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 3 Rhodes: Acropolis of Lindos

Lindos sits on the eastern coast, the Acropolis of Athena Lindia crowning a hilltop 116 metres above the village below. Bronze Age sanctuary, 4th-century temple, St. Paul arriving in the bay in 58 AD — one empire replacing another in slow geological time.

The village itself reveals what happens when trade produces prosperity but geography enforces constraint. The streets are narrow, steep, paved in stone. Whitewashed houses, blue doors — not a design choice but a response to heat, wind, and what local stone could provide. Traditional island architecture develops because of limits, not despite them.

Our return journey crosses Rhodes from east to west, the landscape shifting from coastal resort development to interior villages to moorland. Filerimos Mountain gives us the view that explains Rhodes politically: three ancient city-states — Lindos, Ialysos, Kamiros — each controlling their own territory because the island's scale and terrain made unified rule impractical. They competed, cooperated, and eventually faded into the larger Roman structure.

We return to Rhodes town mid to late afternoon.

Overnight in Rhodes.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 4 Rhodes - Ferry to Nisyros

This morning we ferry to Nisyros — a volcano rising from the sea, still steaming. The crossing takes roughly two and a half hours, arriving with the afternoon ahead.

Nisyros sits atop an active volcano. Greece's youngest volcano. Population approximately 1,000. The island features one of the world's largest hydrothermal craters, natural hot springs with waters ranging from 30 to 60 degrees Celsius. The oldest rock formations date 160,000 years back; the youngest are approximately 15,000 years old. The island is, geologically speaking, a teenager.

In Homer's Iliad, Nisyros contributed ships to the Greek force sailing against Troy. Later it joined the Athenian alliance. Today the economy runs on fishing, agriculture, tourism, and mineral extraction — pumice and perlite quarried from volcanic deposits and shipped worldwide. The island is literally being mined, slowly disassembled, a resource base rather than an agricultural one.

Our hotel sits near Mandraki, the island's small port and capital. Narrow lanes wind through a medieval castle district. Whitewashed houses, traditional architecture — the island has resisted major development, partly because it's less accessible, partly because tourism never arrived at scale.

During our stay we'll explore Mandraki's Archaeological Museum, displaying artifacts revealing the island's long history. At the Folklore Museum we'll see photographs and objects from recent centuries.

Local specialties include pythia — a chickpea-based dish — and koukouzina, a traditional spirit distilled from grapes and figs.

NOTE: Ferry schedules are subject to change based on weather, vessel availability, and seasonal variations. The sequence of islands visited and specific sightseeing activities may vary for your chosen departure date.

Overnight on Nisyros.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 5 Nisyros Touring

We begin at the Volcanological Museum in Nikia, 400 metres above sea level, which provides essential context before we descend into the volcano itself. From here it's a short drive to the crater of Stefanos — 260 to 330 metres across, 27 metres deep, its floor perforated with steam vents and crusted in ochre and rust-coloured mineral deposits. Grey mud, sulphur, geometry that suggests the moon more than the Mediterranean. We walk the crater floor before continuing to Emporios, a half-abandoned hillside village with sweeping views back over the caldera — once a working farming community, now home to only a handful of year-round residents, its terraces and stone houses left to the same forces that built the volcano below.

Back in Mandraki, this afternoon's touring is on foot. A well-marked path climbs past the Monastery of Panagia Spiliani to Paleokastro, the island's ancient acropolis — 4th century BC, built from black volcanic slabs weighing three to four tonnes apiece, fitted with a precision that still holds eight standing towers and 230 metres of wall. The full route is about 3.8 km out and back with 100 metres of elevation gain, an easy 1 to 1.5 hours. A shorter, steeper direct path (20 minutes uphill) is also available, or you're welcome to stay in Mandraki and explore the village's narrow lanes and volcanic stone houses instead.

Overnight on Nisyros.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 6 Nisyros - Ferry to Symi

We depart very early this morning for Symi — a crossing that tests the commitment but rewards it. The ferry takes three hours across open

water. We arrive mid-morning with the afternoon ahead.

Yialos — Symi's main harbour — presents itself as something genuinely unusual. Neoclassical merchant mansions cascade down a hillside in pastel hues, amphitheatre-style, each one facing the water where everyone could see it. We walk the waterfront, orienting ourselves to the town's geometry and energy. This is architecture as economic statement — the moment when maritime wealth knew exactly what to build.

The afternoon is deliberately unstructured. This is rest and settling-in time. Swimming in the harbour if the mood strikes. A taverna lunch at your own pace. Exploring the steep lanes at leisure without a schedule. The island's fishing heritage remains visible: boats depart daily, nets are hauled, the rhythm of the place reveals itself when you're not rushing through it.

Local tavernas serve garides — small sweet prawns caught in surrounding waters, traditionally eaten whole because the shells are delicate enough to be edible. The island hasn't fully pivoted to tourism, so you still eat what the sea provides.

Overnight on Symi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 7 Symi Touring

We visit Chorio, the upper village perched 200+ metres above Yialos harbour. Rather than climbing the 500 stone steps of Kali Strata, we travel by road through the upper town — passing neoclassical houses in various states of preservation, some lovingly restored, others standing as ruins, which is their own kind of honesty about what happened when the merchant economy shifted elsewhere.

The elevated position provides views across the harbour and surrounding sea. An ancient acropolis occupied this ridge in antiquity. The Knights of Saint John constructed a castle here in the 15th century, designed to protect against pirate raids. The Ottomans conquered it in 1522. Today there's not much left — the stone was repurposed, the strategic value evaporated — but the elevated position still says what it always said: control the high ground, command the harbour, manage the sea approaches.

We visit the 18th-century Panormitis Monastery, the Archangel Michael. Church, bell tower, two small museums displaying ecclesiastical artifacts and folk traditions. For those with energy after the monastery, your Tour Leader can lead you on one of Symi's most satisfying walks: a gentle descent from the Chorio neighbourhood down to the small seaside village of Pedi, about an hour each way on a well-marked path. The route trades the famous harbour bustle for quiet lanes, lizards on stone walls, and a fishing village that hasn't reconfigured itself for visitors.

Those who'd rather linger over a coffee in Yialos are equally well-placed. Along the waterfront, merchants sell Symi sponges — natural sea sponges, silica and calcium formations, harvested from surrounding waters, cleaned and dried. The sponge trade shaped the eastern Mediterranean economy for centuries.

Overnight on Symi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 8 Symi - Ferry to Kalymnos: Cape Trachilas Walk

Today we ferry to Kalymnos — roughly two hours across open water. The crossing is time well spent: your Tour Leader can walk you through what you're about to encounter on an island that had to bury one identity and build another from scratch.

Kalymnos built its entire civilization around sponge diving. For generations, nearly every man on the island worked the sponge waters — dangerous, seasonal, defining work that shaped the culture down to its rituals and music. In 1986, a viral disease killed most of the sponge beds. The economic foundation vanished in a single season. The island didn't fade. It adapted. Rock climbing arrived, drawing athletes from across Europe to its limestone cliffs. Tourism followed. The old identity became heritage. The sponge boats became museum pieces, the diving songs became folklore.

We arrive and transfer to our hotel. Those with energy after settling in are in luck — the afternoon holds one of the island's best easy walks. The coastal path from Kantouni village to Cape Trachilas and the whitewashed chapel of Agios Fotios runs about 6.5 km along the southwestern shoreline, with open sea views and a picturesque chapel perched above the water as your reward. Roughly two hours at a comfortable pace, and your Tour Leader can arrange taxis to the trailhead. Those preferring a slower arrival can explore Pothia's waterfront

lanes on foot, or find a taverna table and let the island come to them.

Overnight on Kalymnos.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 9 Kalymnos Touring

The Archaeological Museum documents Kalymnos's long presence in the Aegean — not as a dominant power, but as a consistently inhabited, consistently resourceful place that absorbed Mycenaean, classical, Byzantine, and Ottoman influence without losing its own character. The collection is modest in scale but specific in detail: what it shows, it shows well.

We visit Agios Savvas, a church on the mountainside with views over Pothia and the harbour below — the island's topography laid out in one glance, the relationship between the steep interior and the productive sea suddenly obvious.

The sponge processing facility visit closes the loop on yesterday's ferry conversation. Watching the cleaning, trimming, and grading process — even in a diminished industry — makes the economic collapse of 1986 viscerally real in a way that prose can't quite achieve. Some operations still serve niche markets; others are quietly winding down. Either way, the craft is visible.

The afternoon is yours. Pothia rewards slow walking — it's a working town, not a resort, and the difference is palpable. The harbour, the backstreets, a coffee at a table where the locals actually sit.

If lunch beckons, this is the moment to find it: fila — the island's stuffed grape leaves, small and cylindrical, made with no herbs so the grape leaf itself carries the flavour — appear on almost every Kalymnian table and most menus. Mermizeli is the local salad, built on dried barley rusk with tomato, cheese, and olive oil. Octopus dried in the sun then grilled over charcoal is the other constant. And if you find the thyme honey, made from wild thyme on the island's limestone mountains, buy some to take home.

Overnight on Kalymnos.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 10 Kalymnos - Ferry to Leros

Today we ferry to Leros — a short crossing arriving at Agia Marina. According to mythology, the goddess Artemis came to Leros seeking solitude. The island maintains this character — hidden beaches and bays scattered along its coastline, traditional and neoclassical houses in settlements, a rhythm of life that remains deliberately unhurried.

Leros is different from the islands we've visited. Founded as Porto Lagos in the 1930s during Italian occupation, the island's main port — Lakki — represents a distinctive moment in European urban planning: rationalist architecture, wide streets lined with eucalyptus trees, art deco and Italo-Mediterranean buildings arranged with geometric precision. It's an open-air museum of 1930s idealism, preserved not by nostalgia but by geography. Tourism never arrived at scale, so the architecture never needed updating.

We transfer to our hotel and settle in. Depending on our arrival time, your Tour Leader may suggest/lead an informal orientation walk in the port area to observe the distinctive architecture and get a sense of the island's unhurried pace.

Overnight on Leros.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 11 Leros: Pantelio Castle & Leisure Time

This morning your Tour Leader leads an optional walk to Pantelio Castle and the island's famous windmills — a gentle climb from Platanos along a well-marked trail, rising through the ridge to six large stone windmills standing in a row above the town. The path continues to the Byzantine Castle of Pantelio, 11th century, occupying a rocky outcrop at the hill's summit with sweeping views over the bays of Agia Marina

and Panteli and the surrounding sea. The loop covers 2.6 km with about 128 metres of elevation gain — comfortably manageable at a relaxed pace in under two hours. Those who'd rather stop at the windmill ridge and wait for the group are equally well-placed; the views from there are already excellent.

The afternoon is yours entirely. Your Tour Leader can help arrange (in advance) a boat trip from Agia Marina harbour to the neighbouring island of Lipsi — a small, almost car-free island of about 700 people, white chapels, clear water, and a pace of life that makes Leros feel metropolitan.

Closer to home, the Military Museum occupies Italian-built tunnels from the Second World War, focused on the 1943 Battle of Leros — a fierce, largely forgotten engagement in which British and German forces fought for control of the island's deep-water harbour.

The Historical and Folklore Museum in Bellenis Tower displays wartime photographs, traditional instruments, and manuscripts. If the afternoon calls for nothing more ambitious than a waterfront taverna and a plate of whatever came off the boat this morning, that's also Leros doing its job.

Overnight on Leros.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 12 Leros: Lakki Bay & Castle Sightseeing

No visit to Leros is complete without the island's castle — the Castle of the Virgin, atop Pityki Hill 200 metres above sea level, a Byzantine fortress built on an ancient site. It houses the Monastery of the Virgin Mary, whose icon, according to legend, appeared from the sea and is believed to possess healing powers. Rather than climbing the 500 steps from Platanos, we drive up, arriving to sweeping views over the bays of Agia Marina and Panteli.

The coastal town of Agia Marina has grown to merge with Platanos, forming Leros's largest settlement. We walk its cobblestone streets past neoclassical mansions — some showing Egyptian influences from the island's maritime trade connections — alongside traditional houses and bougainvillea-filled courtyards, evidence of the prosperity certain families built through commerce, a pattern repeated across the Dodecanese. We visit the Archaeological Museum, its collection tracing Leros's history from antiquity through the medieval period.

Lakki Bay holds the island's most striking architecture: a church, school, hospital, theatre, navy barracks, hotel, and circular agora with clocktower, all built in the distinctive Italo-Mediterranean rationalist style under Mussolini's vision for the town as Nea Polis — a planned settlement for Fascist Italy's Mediterranean navy. The occupation ended; the architecture remains.

Our tour also includes a visit to Domaine Hatzidakis, the only winery currently operating on Leros — a small, family-run estate producing just a few thousand bottles a year under the Lokallis label: a cabernet sauvignon-merlot blend, a white blend, and a rosé, grown on steep hillside vines shaped by the island's wind and sun. The tasting is accompanied by fresh, hyper-local additions from the family's own garden — vegetables, olives, and cheese — the kind of unhurried hospitality that makes this one of the most quietly memorable stops on the island.

This evening we gather for our final dinner in the Dodecanese.

Overnight on Leros.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 13 Leros - Fly to Athens

Today we fly to Athens, the capital of Greece and the historical capital of Europe. Upon arrival we transfer to our central hotel.

Athens has a long history dating from the first settlement in the Neolithic age; in the 5th Century BC, the city’s values and civilization acquired a universal significance. In 1834, it became the capital of the modern Greek state and an attractive modern metropolis with unrivalled charm.

Flight schedule permitting, we may be able to achieve some informal introductory sightseeing upon arrival.

Overnight in Athens.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 14 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 15 Athens: Archaeological Museum & Exarhia

This morning we'll be transferred (by bus) to the extraordinary Archaeological Museum of Athens, a mandatory visit for any tour of Greece! We'll enjoy a guided tour through the museum and then check out some lesser-visited corners of the city on foot and experience the vibe and energy of modern Athens.

While our morning thus has focused on the distant past -- the birth of democracy in ancient Greece and the institutions that came from this -- the balance of our day (on FOOT) reveals what is happening in modern Athens. Our walk will take us first to the Athens Central Market -- one of the liveliest places in the city, this is where many Athenians come to buy fresh vegetables and fruit, sea food, meat and poultry, nuts, grains, herbs and spices. It is also a good place to stop and have a drink, no matter the hour.

Our walking tour through the city also takes us to a district of the city known as Exarhia. Although no one would ever call it beautiful, and it certainly is not included on most tourist itineraries, Exarhia is steeped in recent history. In 1973, the student uprising which was crushed by the ruling junta of the time, eventually led to the fall of the much-hated military dictatorship. In the last couple of years, it was this Bohemian university district that often played a leading role in the uprisings against the police and the state. Anarchy and democracy – both words of Greek origin, and both playing a role in the making of tomorrow's Greece.

We return to the hotel for a bit of a break before our farewell dinner.

Overnight in Athens.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 16 Departure

Departure from Athens.

KALO TAXIDI/BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast