Tour Code
GR14

ADVENTURESABROAD

CYCLADIC CLASSIC - Island Hopping in Greece

A Journey Through Greece's Timeless Islands

13 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: 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 3 Athens - Ferry to Naxos

Today we travel by ferry to Naxos which, as the main hub for the Cyclades island group, will serve as a convenient and charming base for the coming days' activities. This will be the longest ferry ride on the trip, approximately 4-5 hours depending on ferry type and the number of stops en route. The stops are actually an interesting part of the journey, allowing for a glimpse of islands we do not visit, as well as to witness the organized chaos involved in the loading and unloading of Greek ferries.

Green, fertile, largely self-sufficient, Naxos has not needed to go all out to attract tourists. This wealthy agricultural island exports an abundant harvest of olives, grapes, and potatoes throughout the Aegean, and has only recently (since the early 2000's) begun to cater to tourists.

On arrival we have a walking tour of Naxos Chora, the main town and capital of the island. On our stroll you will note the architecture of Naxos, distinct from that of any other Cycladic isle. The Venetians ruled this island from 1207 until the island fell to the Turks in 1566. Some descendants of the Venetians still live here and the influence of Venetian architecture is obvious in the Kastro and the fortified Venetian towers. Also specific to Naxos is the remarkable abundance of small Byzantine chapels, many of which contain exceptional frescoes dating from the 9th to the 13th centuries.

Our walk ends at the Portara, the big marble gate that stands high on the island of "Bacchus" and is the remains of the ancient temple of Apollo. The ruins of the temple are called "Palace" implying the palaces of Ligdami the ancient tyrant of Naxos (6th century BC). The legend says that Theseus abandoned Ariadne there when he passed through Naxos after he slew the mythical minotaur on Crete.

Overnight on Naxos.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Naxos: Island Touring

Today we have a tour of the highlights of Naxos, a fertile and mountainous island. Many visitors concentrate only on the main town/port and the coast of this beautiful island -- what a shame! Our tour inland reveals a charming landscape dotted by thousands of citrus and olive trees and many quiet villages that feel like the Greece of days gone by.

We stop in the village of Chalki, which has many Byzantine Churches. We see the 12th century church of Protothronos and the Venetian-era Frangopoulos castle. We'll drive through Filoti where the landscape is covered by farm terraces. Soon we'll have a good view of Mt. Zeus (Zas), 1010 metres/3,313 ft, the highest point in the Cyclades.

We arrive in Apiranthos, which has a unique atmosphere with Venetian mansions and a small museum of prehistoric artifacts. Next is Apollonas where we see the 10.5 metre/34 ft 'kouros' (fallen statue) of Apollo from the 7th century BC, followed by a break for lunch. There are a number of cafes/restaurants with indoor/outdoor seating alongside the harbour.

After some time for a break we depart Apollonos, arriving back at our hotel in the late afternoon.

Naxos is famous for its delicious dishes. As a relatively well-watered and fertile island, Naxos boasts a wide variety of local ingredients that make for one of the most varied cuisines in the Cyclades, with many meat-based specialities, seafood dishes, cheeses, and local herbs and vegetables, including Naxian potatoes for which the island is famous. Naxos is also famous for “kitron” (pronounced “kee-tron”), a liqueur made from the fruit and leaves of the citron tree, similar to a lemon but stronger and slightly different in taste.

Overnight on Naxos.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Naxos - Day Trip to Paros

This morning we hop on one of the frequent regular ferries that stops at Paros (+/- 30 min), Naxos's laid-back and idyllic neighbour to the west, best known for its high-quality white marble, its quaint capital, attractive villages, and some important sites of interest.

We'll explore the main town Parikia on foot, with a visit to the famous church of Katapoliani, one of Greece's most important Byzantine monuments. We also include the Venetian castle and the Archaeological Museum with its exhibits from the ancient history of Paros and Antiparos.

Farther afield, Paros has many beautiful sandy beaches and tiny bays, enclosed by extraordinarily "sculptured" rocks; others are long and wide. The countryside features terraced hills and magnificent rock formations, endless vineyards, olive groves and fruit trees. There is a large number of attractive villages in the traditional Cycladic style -- glowing white houses along labyrinth-like streets, decorated with arches, pretty balconies, bright flowers, and fragrant herbs. Using the local bus system or flagging a taxi allows one to explore as you like and according to your interests and energy level (your Tour Leader can help you plan).

After our leisurely explorations and a chance for a relaxing lunch, we return to Naxos in the mid-afternoon. Foodies – while on Paros, keep you eyes open for black-eyed beans with celery, snails with myrtzeli (handmade barley), cod with spinach, cuttlefish with fennel, hare stew – just a few of the specialties for which Paros is known.

Overnight in Naxos.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Naxos - Day Trip Delos & Mykonos

Today we have a full-day boat excursion to the sacred island of Delos and the adjacent island of Mykonos.* The boat journey is shared with the general public, but our guided tour on Delos and time on Mykonos will be private.

Delos gave the surrounding island group its name — the Cyclades, so called because they form a circle (kyklos) around it. For nearly 1,000 years this was the political and religious centre of the Aegean, birthplace of the twins Apollo and Artemis, and at its Hellenistic height a cosmopolitan hub of merchants, mariners and bankers from as far away as Egypt and Syria.

Our guided walking tour of Delos lasts approximately three hours — come prepared, as the site is large and hilly with very little shade. Highlights include the Sanctuary of Apollo, the three temples of Apollo, the Sanctuary of Dionysus, and the House of the Masks with its celebrated mosaic of Dionysus riding a panther. The island's theatre once seated 5,500.

We then continue to Mykonos for about three hours of independent exploration — the harbour waterfront, the dazzling whitewashed labyrinth of streets (deliberately designed to confuse pirates), the iconic windmills, and the many churches, tavernas and craft shops. Try the local Kopanisti cheese, Mykonian sausages, or an Amygdalota almond cookie before we return by boat to Naxos.

* If you're wondering why we don't overnight on Mykonos: despite its enduring romantic reputation, today's Mykonos is crowded, expensive and firmly geared toward cruise passengers and the party-going jet set. It's well worth a few hours, but we much prefer the laid-back quiet of Naxos as our base.

Overnight on Naxos.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Naxos - Ferry to Amorgos

Today we take a local ferry to Amorgos, the easternmost island of the Cyclades and the nearest to the neighbouring Dodecanese island group. There are fewer ferries to choose from for Amorgos, a less-visited out-of-the-way destination. As such, our total journey time can range from 1.5-3 hours depending on the vessel and scheduling.

Amorgos's timeless monastery, scattered churches and pleasant beaches offer both respite from tourists on the other islands and a taste of traditional Greece. For many, Amorgos has become the highlight of the tour, accurately described as "the soul of Greece." The locals are extremely friendly, the mountains surrounding the port majestic, and the sunsets stunning. It has been the location of several movies and is a stunning place for casual walks through idyllic olive groves.

Our hotel is located at the eastern end of the island associated with the port of Aegiali.

Overnight on Amorgos.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Amorgos: Chozoviotissa & Chora

This morning we travel by road to medieval Chora, the capital of the island. Looking at a map, you'll see that Amorgos is a long island, which is

also very mountainous. Before the road was built connecting its full length, the only way to access both east and west was by sea, hence the two ports at either end. We will pause here to stroll about Chora, set high above the sea protected from pirates of bygone days, surrounded by windmills. At the top of the hill one may see the Venetian Castle of the 13th century that dominates the village as well as the church of Kira Leousa, dedicated to Mother Mary.

We leave the village and follow a dramatic road going down to the Monastery of Chozoviotissa.* The monastery is home to the revered icon of the Virgin from the Holy Land. The dazzling white building, founded in the year AD 1099, clings precariously to a cliff face. The icon was found in the sea below the monastery, having arrived here unaided from either Asia Minor, Cyprus or Jerusalem. We will enter the monastery and climb into its snug interior. Hopefully the docent will be available to show us around and provide access to the tiny but fascinating museum.

We then continue down the road to Katapola, the other port of Amorgos, where we can explore the village and have a break for lunch before heading back to Aegiali. Amorgos is a well-grazed island with herds of cows, sheep, and goats, which means that meats dominate most menus. It also means that there is a delicious selection of cheeses! Non-meat options include fava beans boiled with onion, capers, oil, and lemon, and pies traditionally made with wild chard and local herbs.

* PLEASE note that our visit comes with a dress code. Women must wear a long loose-fitting skirt or sarong -- something light and wrap-around is easiest -- over your shorts/pants for our visit. Men should wear long pants.

Overnight on Amorgos.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Amorgos: Walk Tholaria to Langada

Today you can join your Tour Leader on a moderate hike along the old cobbled donkey path that was once the only way to access these two remote villages high above the sea. Our route takes us past a tiny old chapel and the ruined village of Stroumbos. We pause in the picturesque village of Langada (Lagada), where, depending on our timing, you can lunch, no doubt surrounded by forever blooming bougainvillea. Langada is a genuine Greek village with narrow alleys, traditional whitewashed houses, and small churches.

From Langada one can continue walking down the old mule path down to Ormos Aegiali (the port area) and catch the local bus from there back to our hotel, or hop on the local bus from Langada.

Balance of the day at leisure for some shopping/exploring in and around the port, or to enjoy the beach for which this area is known.

Overnight on Amorgos.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Amorgos - Ferry to Santorini

Today we take a ferry or hydrofoil (depending on scheduling) to the island of Santorini (likely with a brief stop at Naxos) -- once again trip duration can vary depending on scheduling and vessel type. This island will be a bit of a "shift of gears" after the relative quiet of Amorgos, but we will always include it for its spectacular one-in-a-lifetime uniqueness, and because it has an airport ;)

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.

At some point in our visit, we'll stop in at the The Museum of Prehistoric Thera. It was built on the site of the old Ypapanti Church, destroyed in the 1956 earthquake. The museum houses a very large number of ancient artifacts from various excavations on Santorini, such as at Akrotiri and at the nearby Potamos site.

Overnight on Santorini.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 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 for a thorough guided tour. 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, you might choose to visit the impressive Archaeological Museum in your spare time (optional). This museum features many 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 depict images of the Great Mother. Other remains include bronze and obsidian tools and weapons, gold jewelry, and stone and clay vases and pots.

Return to Kamari Beach (those who wish to extend their time in Fira can return to Kamari using the public bus system).

Overnight on Santorini.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Santorini: Fira - Imerovigli - Oia / Free Afternoon

This morning (to beat the crowds) we will head to the small town of Oia (pronounced "EE-ah"), situated at the northern tip of the island.*

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 our visit we will double back by road toward Fira, hopping off at a caldera-side district called Imerovigli from where we will walk (downhill) along the rim enjoying the stunning caldera views and dramatic setting. Our route leads through the suburb of Firostefani, with ever-changing views as the perspective of the island changes minute by minute. En route we will look out to Skaros, the remains of a Venetian Castle built in 1207 by Marco Sanudo, the ruler of all Cyclades at that time.

Once we arrive in central Fira, the balance of the day is free to explore on your own. Your Tour Leader is available to assist with options -- perhaps extend your time in Fira, shopping, strolling, soaking it all in, or head down to one of Santorini's famous black beaches or hike up to the ruins of Ancient Thira.

* PLEASE NOTE that the sequence events described above may vary at the Tour Leader's discretion depending on a number of variables, including cruise ship arrivals, weather etc. One constant - to avoid crowding in Oia - will remain a priority. Your Tour Leader will keep you apprised ahead of time.

Overnight on Santorini.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Departure

Departure from Santorini.

KALO TAXIDI/BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast