



Exploring Athens

A unique experience...

*History unfolds with every
step in Athens. The
modern capital
encompasses ancient and
medieval history
interpreting it into the
contemporary era.*

Starting from Mythology ...

Long time ago the first king of Athens, King Cecrops (quite an extraordinary king himself as he was part human and part snake) set out to find a patron deity for his city state; already a prosperous and vibrant city, the crown jewel of all cities.

Olympian Goddess Athena, Goddess of Wisdom, and Poseidon, God of the Sea, both claimed the city as their own. Their rivalry was so intense that they almost went to war and as they were about to attack each other, Athena, with her typical wise approach, suggested that they should hold a contest for the city. During the contest they would both offer a valuable gift to the Athenians and Cecrops would decide which one was the best.

Poseidon lifted his trident and struck the earth with it, offering a spring of salt-water. Athena struck her spear into the ground, stood on her knees and planted an olive tree. This gift turned out to be more useful, granting the Athenians not only the olives themselves as sustenance, but also a source of oil for their lamps and for cooking their food, as well as the wood to build their boats and houses.

As the winner, Athena, named the ancient city after herself. To this day the Goddess dominates Athens' mythology and the city's great monuments are dedicated to her.



More Information...

The history of Athens began more than 3000 years ago when during the prehistoric times its first inhabitants created their first settlement on the rock of Acropolis. It took hundreds of years until the sacred rock of Acropolis became a magnificent landmark with the construction of most of its monuments like the Parthenon by the famous architects Ictinus and Kallikrates and the sculptor Phidias in the Golden age of Pericles 495 - 429 BC.

Athens became the Capital of Greece in 1834, mostly for its location and historical importance. Since then Athens grew to the city we know today, an important financial European capital. The infrastructure of Athens has been developed very fast within the last 10 years.

Since the distances to most of the main sights of Athens are not far, walking is a good idea and a good way to get to know Athens. Of course you will not be able to see Athens within just one or two days, unless, of course, you want to get some pictures of the Acropolis and pack for the Greek islands. In any case, Athens has a lot of attractions that you simply cannot miss!

Visitors are drawn by ancient monuments bathed in the famous greek light, but it's the city's influential, creative vibe that enamours and enlivens!



Best top sights of Athens

The crown jewel of Athens! An epic monument, which stands sentinel over the city. The Acropolis is the most important ancient site in the Western World. Crowned by the Parthenon, it rises over Athens, visible from almost everywhere within the city. A glimpse of this magnificent sight cannot fail to exalt your spirit!

The first temples were built during the Mycenaean era in homage to the Goddess of Athena. People lived on the Acropolis until the late 6th century BC, but in 510 BC the Delphic Oracle declared that it should be the province of the Gods. In 480 BC all the buildings of the Acropolis were reduced to ashes by Persians on the eve of the battle of Salamis. During the Golden Age of Greece, in the 5th century BC, the famous Athenian statesman Pericles (whose name means “surrounded by glory” commissioned a team of skillful architects, engineers and sculptors to build the monuments we see today.

The temples have suffered through years of foreign occupation, earthquakes, and most recently, acid rain and pollution. The worst damage was occurred when the Venetians attacked the Turks, in 1687, as they opened fire on the Acropolis, causing an explosion in the Parthenon. Major restoration programs are ongoing.

The Acropolis Area



- ❖ This monument, epitomising more than any other the glory of ancient Greece, is dedicated to Athena Parthenos, the Goddess who embodies the power and prestige of the city. The Parthenon, made of Pentelic marble and of Doric order, was designed by the architects Ictinus and Kallikrates during the period 447-432 BC. It remains the pre-eminent monument of the Acropolis and was completed in time for the Great Panathenaic Festival of 438 BC.
- ❖ The Parthenon's fluted Doric columns achieve perfect form. The eight columns at either end were ingeniously curved to create an optical illusion: the foundations are slightly concave and the columns are slightly convex making both appear straight.
- ❖ The temple's pediments were filled with elaborately carved three-dimensional sculptures. The west side depicted Athena and Poseidon in their contest for the city's patronage and the east Athena's birth from Zeus' head. See their remnants and the rest of the Acropolis' sculptures and artefacts in the Acropolis Museum

Parthenon



Across the Parthenon, at the northern end of the Acropolis hill, stands the Erechtheion, a temple of Ionic architecture. The Erechtheion, completed around 406 BC, was a sanctuary built on the part of the Acropolis that was held most sacred: the spot where Poseidon struck the ground with his trident, and where Athena, patron goddess of Athens, produced the olive tree. Named after Erechtheus, a mythical king of Athens, the temple housed the cults of Athena, Poseidon and Erechtheus. The Erechtheion was ingeniously built on several levels to counteract the uneven bedrock.

The Erechtheion is immediately recognizable by the Caryatids, the six graceful female statues that support the roof of the temple. Caryatids are modelled on women from Karyai (modern-day Karyes, in Laconia). Each maiden is thought to have held a libation bowl in one hand, and to be drawing up her dress with the other. Those you see are plaster casts. The originals (except for one, which is removed in the British Museum) are in the Acropolis Museum.

Through he didn't win patronage of the city, Poseidon was worshipped on the northern side of Erechtheion. The porch still bears the mark of his trident strike.

Erechthion and the Porch of the Caryatids





Athena Polias: The Original Statue

The Statue for which the temple was built, the Athena Polias (Athena of the City) –was considered one of the wonders of the ancient world. It was taken to Constantinople in AD 426, where it disappeared. Designed by Pheidias and completed in 432 BC, it stood almost 12m high on its pedestal and was plated in gold. Athena's face, hands and feet were made of ivory, and the eyes fashioned from jewels.



Theatre of Dionysus

Originally, a 6th century BC timber theatre was built here on the site of the Festival of the Great Dionysia (a festival in the honour of the Olympian God Dionysus). During Athens' Golden Age, the theatre hosted productions of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes (Greek tragic poets). Reconstructed in stone and marble between 342 and 326 BC, the theatre held 17,000 spectators and an altar to Dionysus in the orchestra pit.



Odeon of Herodes Atticus

The path continues west from the Asclepion to the magnificent Odeon Herodes Atticus. It was built in AD 161 by Herodes Atticus, a wealthy Roman. Performances of drama, music and dance are held here, during the Athens Festival.

Leaving the Acropolis Hill

As you leave the Acropolis Hill, you meet the Rock of Mars (Areios Pagos): a limestone hill, 115m in height, with steep sides and uneven summit. It used to be the meeting point of the aristocratic council and the courthouse of ancient Athens. According to mythology, it was there that Ares (the Olympian God of War) was tried by the Council of the Gods for the murder of Halirrhothios, son of Poseidon. The hill became the place where murder, treason and corruption trials were heard. The view of the city is excellent from this rocky hill. Here Apostle Pavlos preached Christianity in 51 AD for the first time.

The Rock of Mars





The Temple of Apteros Nike

South of the Acropolis stands the temple of Apteros Nike or Temple of Athena Nike, an example of the work of architect Kallikrates. It was built around 420 BC to honour the celebration of the victory of the Greeks over the Persians.



The Acropolis Museum

The grand new Acropolis Museum at the southern foot of the Acropolis Hill(15 Dionysiou Areopagitou Str.), recognized among the best museums in the world, has a total area of 25,000 square meters, with exhibition space of over 14,000 square meters. It took years to construct the Museum according to the "museum" interior design and the "technology".

While the Museum's collection covers the Archaic and Roman periods, the emphasis is on the Acropolis of the 5th century BC, considered the apotheosis of Greece's artistic achievement.

The heart of ancient Athens was the 6th century BC Agora, the lively focal point of administrative commercial, political and social activity. Socrates (a Greek 5th century philosopher) expounded his philosophy there. The site was occupied and devastated in all periods of the city's history. Extensive repairs and building activity occurred after the serious damage by the Persians in 480/79 B.C., by the Romans in 89 B.C. and by the Herulae in A.D. 267. From the Byzantine period until after 1834, when Athens became the capital of the independent Greek state, the Agora was developed as a residential area.

□ A useful tip: There are a number of entrances, but the most convenient is the northern entrance on Adrianou (24 Adrianou Str.), easily accessible from the Metro (Monastiraki Station) and Monastiraki's market.

Ancient Agora





Thission

Thission Square is located off the pedestrianised Apostolou Pavlou Street and is lined in one side by neoclassical buildings. On the other side you will find Thission Garden, the first of the city's public gardens, dated from 1862. The Square is full of outdoor cafes, which offer wonderful views of Acropolis.



Monastiraki

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Psyrri

Psyrri, where dilapidated facades belie the lively quarter where restaurants and bars coexist with an offbeat mix of warehouse conversions and workshops.

Plaka originates from the days of the Greek revolution. Under the Acropolis, Plaka was built by the first construction workers that came from the Cycladic Island of Anafi and built Athens main buildings. The settlement of Anafiotika was created in the 19th century. Settlers from Anafi built their houses on the steep slopes of the Acropolis Hill in their traditional cycladic island style. Thus, they created a small village with white-washed houses and narrow paths between them. The village comes complete with a tiny church dedicated to St George. A closer look will reveal that the marble used for the construction of the church was taken from an ancient temple. Today Anafiotika is one of the main touristic attractions of Athens.

Plaka's lower reaches are jammed with small museums and galleries, slews of tavernas and souvenir stores, especially on main streets like Kydathineon and Adrianou.

Plaka





The Temple of Olympian Zeus

You can't miss the striking marvel, in the centre of Athens. Also known as the Olympeion or Columns of the Olympian Zeus, it is the largest temple in Greece and, as its name suggests, it was dedicated to the supreme God of all Olympian Gods, Zeus. The building of the temple started in the 6th century on the western bank of Ilissos river, but the construction was stalled due to a lack of funds. A succession of leaders tried to fulfill what started in the 6th century, but finally it was Hadrian, who completed the task in AD 131.



Panathenaic Stadium

The grand Panathenaic Stadium, which is known as the Kalimarmaron, is a classical cultural and touristic monument of Greece and one of the most significant monuments not only for Athens, but for the whole Greece. It is one of our city's most popular touristic attractions and one of Athens' landmarks. It was originally built in the 4th century BC for the Panathenaic athletic contests. Its rich history is directly connected to the Modern Olympic Games as from their revival in 1896 until the Athens Olympic Games in 2004. It is also the place from where the Olympic flame sets up its journey to the cities of the Olympic Games, both Winter, Summer and Youth

The heart of modern Athens! Syntagma Square with its historic meeting point, political centre and transport hub, is a place of interest. The National Gardens offer a respite from the hustle and a short walk to Plaka, a district in the shadow of Acropolis, has an undeniable charm. Its paved, narrow streets pass by ancient sites, restored and crumbling neoclassical mansions, small museums, Byzantine churches, galleries and vintage stores, and ambient tavernas.

Athens central square is named for the constitution granted, after uprisings, by King Otto on 3 September 1843. Today the Square serves as a major transportation hub, the location of the seat of power and, therefore, the centre of demonstrations and strikes.

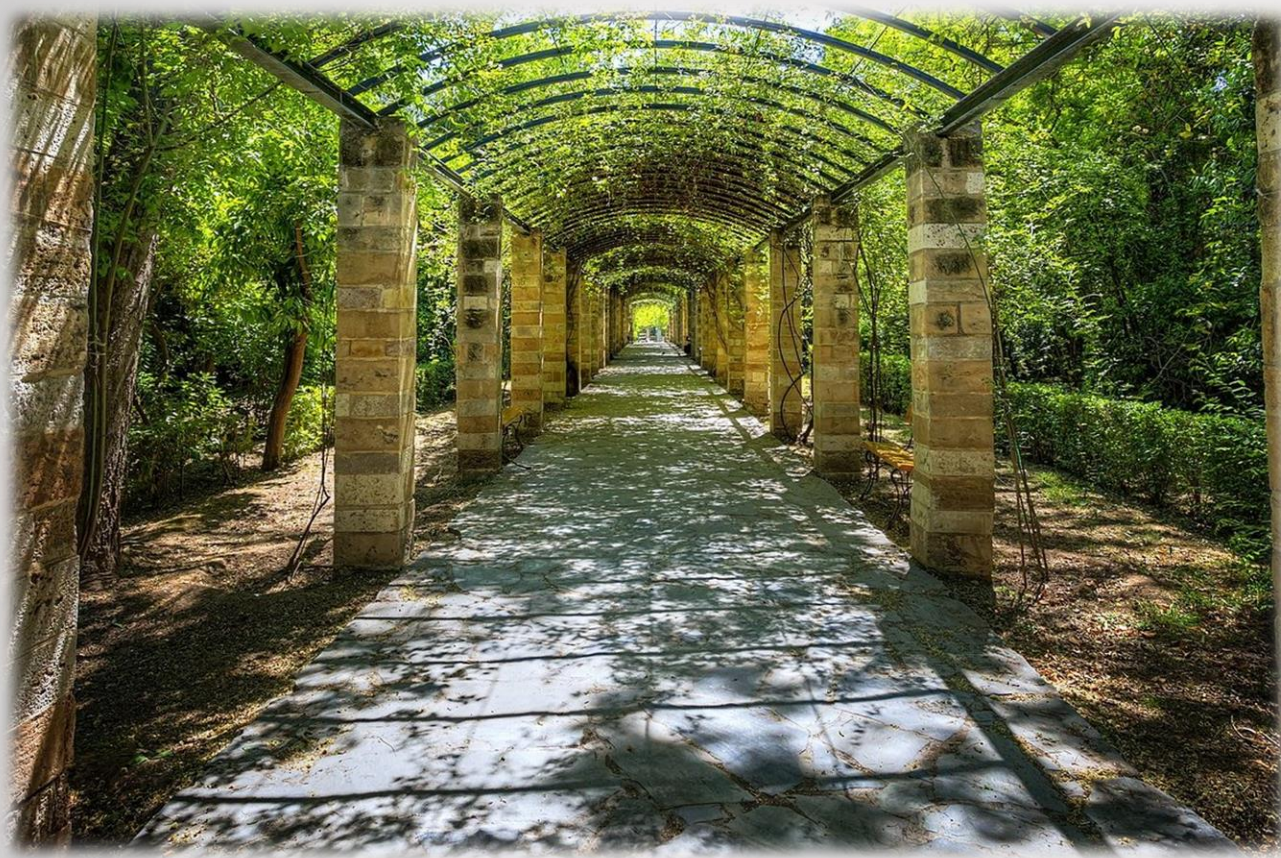
Syntagma Square



Parliament and the Changing of the Guard

The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in the forecourt of the parliament Building is guarded by the city's famous statuesque euzones. The high-kicking changing of the guard occurs every hour on the hour. Sunday at 11 am a whole platoon marches down Vasilissis Sofias to the tomb, accompanied by a band.





National Gardens

A delightful, shady refuge during summer, the National Gardens were formerly the royal gardens designed by Queen Amalia. There is also a large children's playground, a duck pond and a shady café.

The Zappeion Gardens are surrounded by the streets Irodou Attikou, Vasileos Konstantinou, Vasilissis Olgas, and Vasilissis Amalias and the National Gardens. They are laid out in a network of winding walkways around the grand Zappeion Palace, and are comprised of 83.000 square meters of planted area, 41.000 square meters of paved surfaces and 2400 square meters of atriums and patios. The first trees in the Zappeion Gardens were planted in 1857. The aim was to bring out the beauty of the idyllic and historical landscape of the Ilissos riverside area. The Zappeion Palace (Megaron) was built in the 1870's at the expense of the forerunner of the modern Olympics Evangelis Zappas. It was the first building in the world to be constructed in order to serve Olympic needs. The building, the three-arched stone bridge over the Ilissos River that had been repaired also at the expense of Evangelis Zappas, and the surrounding gardens give us a charming picture of Athens in the early 20th century.

Today the Zappeion Megaron hosts conferences, events and exhibitions and has a pleasant café-bar restaurant among the trees and an open-air cinema

Zappeion Palace and Gardens



Lycabettus Hill

Lykabettus means “hill of wolves” which derives from ancient times when the hill was surrounded by countryside and its pine-cover slopes were surrounded by wolves. Taking the Funicular Railway or teleferik from the top of Ploutarchou & Aristippou Str. in Kolonaki, would be a pleasant way to “climb” the hill. The hill can also be reached by taxi or bus. Perched on the summit is the little Chapel of St George, a large open-air theatre, which has housed many Greek and International concerts, a cafe and a restaurant.



Also called the Hill of the Muses, Filopappou Hill - along with the Hills of the Pnyx and Nymphs – was, according to Plutarch, where Theseus, an ancient Greek hero, and the Amazons did battle. Strolling up and down the hill in the morning, photographing the Acropolis, the Saronic Gulf and the mountains of the Attic basin, is something that you should try during the day. Following the stairs up the hill, you will reach the ruined Shrine of the Muses, to whom this Hill was deemed sacred. Even today grateful or hopeful artists, place offerings on a small cairn.

According to myth, the hill was a strategic bastion for Athenians defending against Amazons. In the 4th and 5th centuries BC, defensive walls – such as the Themistoclean wall and the Diateichisma- stretched over the hill. Extensive ruins still remain there.

Filopappou Hill



Keramikos

The archaeological site of the city's ancient cemetery dated from 3000BC to the 6th century AD (Roman Times)! This city's ceremonial entrance is home to the impressive Street of Tombs. Keramikos was originally a settlement for potters who were attracted by the clay on the banks of the River Iridanos. Because of the frequent flooding, the area was ultimately converted to being the city's primary cemetery, and now lies below street level due to the silt deposits.

Rediscovered by a worker in 1861 during the construction of Pireos Str., Keramikos is now a lush, tranquil site.

A nearby superb small museum including a fine collection of superior sculptural artefacts, illustrates the splendour with which the ancient Greek honoured their dead.



MUSUEMS

- ❖ *National Museum of Contemporary Art*
- ❖ *National Historical Museum*
- ❖ *City of Athens Museum*
- ❖ *Benaki Museum*
- ❖ *Museum of Cycladic Art*
- ❖ *National Art Gallery*
- ❖ *Theocharakis Foundation*
- ❖ *The National Archaeological Museum*
- ❖ *Archaeological Museum of Keramikos*

And last but not least... Shopping Districts

10 Best Shopping Streets in Athens:

Athens is a relatively small city with a big personality! Put your internal GPS on “shopping mode” and go to any of the following streets to enjoy a fabulous shopping or window-shopping experience.

- Ermou, Syntagma
- Voukourestiou, Kolonaki
- Skoufa, Kolonaki
- Tsakalof, Kolonaki
- Iphestou, Monastiraki
- Panepistimiou, Syntagma

Historic Centre: Best Neighborhood for Traditional and Contemporary Souvenirs, greek and popular art. Plaka (with main shopping streets Kydathineon and Adrianou) and Monastiraki (with its Flea Market) are certainly the places for souvenir hunters, from kitsch statues to leather sandals, handmade jewellery and antiques, is the place for more eclectic shoppers, from comics to goth clothing and vinyl.