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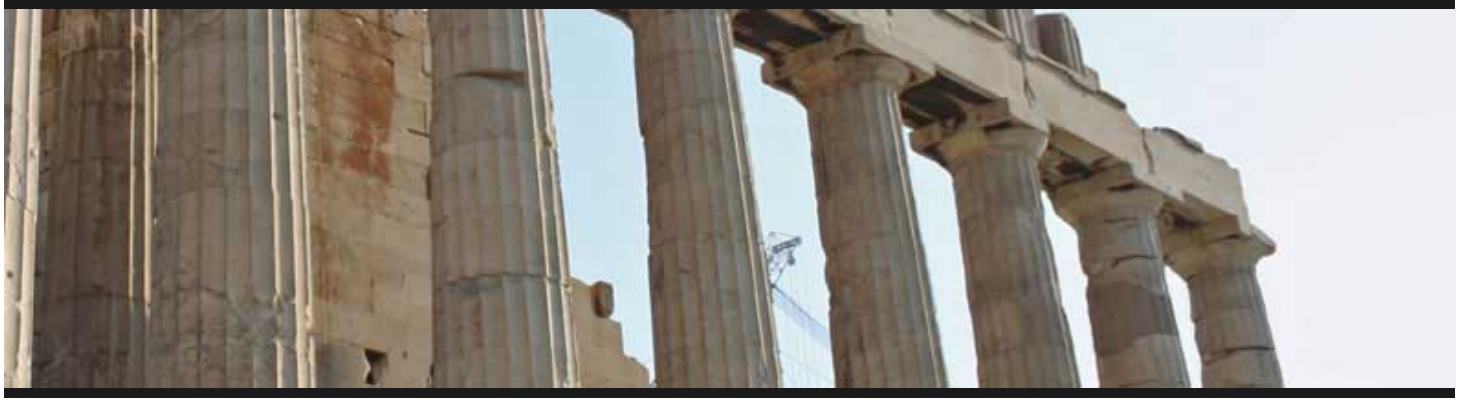

Top 10 Romantic Restaurants in Greece

Athens, Olympia, Delphi, 7 Days

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Guide Description

AUTHOR NOTE: Romantic dining is all about exquisite food and magnificent settings, and these Greek restaurants have impressive qualities that will attract hungry, romantic crowds. If you find that having a meal in a Michelin awarded restaurant is romantic (we know we do!), then make sure you don't miss the wonders of the French chef at Pil poul et Jerome Serres, or the intimate and refined Luna Rossa. However, if you care more about the view than about your plate (although this is guaranteed top notch as well), reserve a table at Epikouros Restaurant in Delphi or at Ithaki, where you will dine at one of the very best seaside locations Greece has to offer. All Mediterranean ingredients are fresh and locally sourced, so you are in for a healthy and delicious treat wherever you choose to eat.

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My List

contact:
tel: 26240/23-755
fax: 26240/22-439

location:
Olympia

hours:
Daily 8-11pm

1 Traverna Ambrosia

DESCRIPTION: This large restaurant with a pleasant outside veranda continues to attract locals, although it does a brisk business with tour groups as well. You'll find the usual grilled chops and souvlaki, stuffed tomatoes and dolmades, but the vegetable dishes are unusually good, as is the lamb stew with lots of garlic and oregano. © Frommer's

contact:
tel: 22650/82-762

location:
Delphi

hours:
Daily noon to around midnight

2 Taverna Skala

DESCRIPTION: This simple, year-round restaurant attracts locals in the summer and skiers in the winter. The menu is typical Greek taverna fare (grills and stews), but there's usually a wide variety of mezedes, and wood paneling (just about everything in Delphi that can be wood-paneled is!) makes the room cozy. © Frommer's

contact:
tel: 22650/83-250

location:
Delphi

3 Epikouros Restaurant

DESCRIPTION: Easily the best restaurant with a view in Delphi, with an astonishingly extensive and varied menu (including tasty veggie fritters, delicious local olives and formaella cheese, lamb with fresh tomato sauce, keftedes (grilled round meatballs) and sousoutakia (oval rice-and-meat-balls, stewed in tomato sauce) and, in season, wild boar, casseroled with tomatoes, onions, and herbs). If you come early, you may be one of few diners not with a tour group; come after 9pm and you may dine with Greek visitors and locals. © Frommer's

contact:
tel: 22650/83-186

location:
31 Apollono
Delphi

hours:
Daily noon to around midnight

4 Taverna Vakchos

DESCRIPTION: This small taverna gets many of its customers from the youth hostel. This means that the prices are very reasonable, the clientele casual, and the food basic (although they sometimes serve game in winter). The back room with its veranda has good views over Delphi, across the plain of olives, and to the Corinthian Gulf. The neighboring **Taverna Lekaria,** at 33 Apollonos, is a bit more ambitious and a bit more expensive and has a nice courtyard with flowering plants. The Lekaria usually has excellent local loukanika (sausages) and briam (a veggie stew steeped in olive oil) and sliced apple rounds sprinkled with cinnamon for a healthy dessert. © Frommer's

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contact:
tel: +30 210 3222839
http://www.2mazi.com/About.html

location:
48 Nikis & Kydathineon
Athens Ece

hours:
Lunch and Dinner, every day

5 2Mazi

2mazi

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:
After dinner continue down Kydathineon to enjoy a beautiful walk through Plaka. It makes for a most romantic evening.

DESCRIPTION: The 2 Mazi (two together) speaks of Yiannis Baksevanis and Elias Gogos, the executive chefs of this hidden treasure on Nikis Street. Chef Baksevanis, trained in Paris, creates a menu of fifteen dishes that changes monthly. A cozy wine bar with mezze (small appetizers to accompany the wine) offers an alternative to a long, formal meal, or just have your gourmet delivered to enjoy it in the comfort of {insert preferred environment here} Whatever your choice, you're going to enjoy some of the highest quality of food prepared in Athens.
€ 40-45 per person including wine or dessert
Or opt for the "Menu Degustation" where you can choose 9 or 12 "surpises," small, elegant dishes sized for tasting.
9 surprises: €55
12 surprises: €65
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contact:
tel: 30 210 342 3665 / 30 210 345 0803
fax: 30 210 341 3046
http://www.pilpoul.gr/contact.html

location:
51 Apostolou Pavlou and Poulopoulou Streets (corner)
Athens

hours:
M-Sa 8:30p-12:30a, Sunday closed

6 Pil poul et Jerome Serres

DESCRIPTION: Stunning three-level neoclassical mansion right on the pedestrian walk in Thissio which skirts the Acropolis. Pil Poul's Michelen star awarded French chef Jerome Serres masterfully prepares unique French dishes with Mediterranean accents. During the summer months reserve a table on the terrace and dine under the stars with the Acropolis and Lycabettus Hill as a backdrop. A real treat! Reservations recommended.

contact:
tel: 210 4137910
http://www.plous-podilatou.gr/index.html

location:
42 Koumoundourou Coach
Athens Ece 18533

hours:
Lunch and Dinner

7 Plous Podilatou

Vasilios Alvanidis

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:
Open every day, but on weekends (especially for dinner) you'll want to be sure to have a reservation.

DESCRIPTION: Tucked in a nestled cove of fantastic fisheries in romantic Microlimino is the exiting, new Plous Podilatou (Sailing Bicycle.) Made by the same creators as the fabulously successful Kitrino Podilato (Yellow Bicycle) Chef Vasilis Alvanidis employs creativity with Mediterranean seafood standards. Risotto with leek and lobster, spaghetti with steamed clams in white wine from the Aegean island of Limnos, and

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grilled Plurotis mushrooms served with smoked Graviera cheese, just as teasers.
Enjoy it all in a well designed, minimalist decor with waterfront tables.
Dresscode: Casual for lunch and casual evening for dinner
© NileGuide

contact:
tel: 30 210 896 3747
www.ithakirestaurantbar.gr/en/

location:
Apollonos Street 28
Athens 16671

hours:
Su to Sa from 12:30 PM to 01:00 AM

8 Ithaki

DESCRIPTION: Exceptional seafood in an equally exceptional location on the coast, with tremendous sea vistas and an immaculate setting. With three levels of glass and wood, the restaurant opens onto a landscaped terrace set on a cliff. Between the views and the food, this is an ideal setting for an ultra-romantic dinner -- definitely worth the 25km (15-mile) ride to the coast. © Frommer's

Photo courtesy of Ithaki

contact:
tel: 30 210 965 3563
fax: +30 210 892 5050
http://www.islandartandtaste.gr/indexen.html

location:
Limanakia Vouliagmenis
Athens 166 72

hours:
Daily 9p-1a

9 Island

DESCRIPTION: One of the city's most beautiful sites is occupied by Island, a very successful summer restaurant and nightclub attracting Athens' more fashionable crowd from May to October. The setting couldn't be more picturesque; Island is located on a seaside cliff south of the resort town of Vouliagmeni within landscaped gardens. The talented chef Yannis Geldis celebrates creative Mediterranean cuisine. His heart, though, seems to belong to seafood. Don't miss the splendid risotto with salmon and balsamic vinegar. © wcities.com

contact:
tel: +30 210 9423777
http://www.lunarossa.gr/uk/philosophy.html

location:
Sokratous 213
Athens Ece

hours:
Monday to Saturday 13:30 to 16:30 - 20:00 to 00:30

10 Luna Rossa

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:
Ideal for business lunches where you can choose from menus specially created by the chef and eat in perfect privacy.

DESCRIPTION: You would never suspect that a Michelin Star restaurant was tucked in the blue collar Athens suburb of Kallithea, and that night after night, Italian Chef Danilo Petrini was tantalizing the senses of patrons with his slow food philosophy in his home which doubles as his restaurant. There are three dining rooms, resplendent in 19th century furnishings that accompany four, ten, and sixteen persons, as well as a garden that can accompany twenty more. In short, you don't come here to feel "part of the crowd." It is an intimate place where you can develop a relationship with your dear friends or colleagues or bottle of wine, carefully chosen to accommodate porcini mushrooms or truffles, Tagliolini Al Caviale Beluga...

lunarossa.gr

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Open from the 15th of September to the 30th of July.
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Athens Snapshot

Local Info

Athens is best known for the Acropolis- the leveled hill serving as the platform for some of humanity's greatest artistic achievements; temples dedicated to the warrior goddess Athena. In spite of pushy early Christians, swords, cannons, bombs, negligence and theft, those templesare still standing on the sacred rock high above the modern city streets. The city is alive with yellow cabs and honking horns, leather vendors and leathery laturna organ players, gypsy balloon sellers, ancient theaters, modern theaters, snap-happy tourists, street performers in cobblestone squares, posh cafes, souvlaki stands, evzones, flower markets, fish and flea markets, sweeping views from hilltops, caves of furies, fruit vendors and tri-wheeled trucks driven by"paliotzis," the collector of old things... weaving in and between the towers of white concrete and neoclassical facades.

Athenians are generous, helpful souls on one side, opinionated rebels on the other, but wholly colorful.They are famous throughout the world for their intellect and hospitality. They love to share their stories of heroism and tragedy while displaying their love of simple pleasures: good food from the earth and surrounding themselves with friends and family.

No one can wonder how Athens has attracted travelers for the last two millenniums, or why, in spite of every kind of trouble, she will continue to draw visitors throughout the next.

Syntagma Square

"Syntagma" is Greek for"constitution." It is the place where the citizens of the city stood outside of the palace and demanded their rights. Today, still, it is where all of the action is, always a buzz with taxis, shoppers, people sitting at cafes, and, yes, the occasional demonstration. Cross Amelias Avenue to watch the Evzones change post every hour on the hour. Feed the pigeons or dip into the National Garden for some shade. It is home to the magnificent Hotel Grand Bretagne other five star hotels and is the starting point of the pedestrian shopping district of Ermou Street. The Syntagma Metro station is like a museum, full of archeological treasures found during construction. It provides easy access to the Acropolis Metro station and the Panepistimiou station along the red line. The blue line takes you to the airport.

Plaka

What once was called the"Turkish Quarter" is now affectionately titled"Plaka" and is the area for wandering amidst narrow cobblestone roads, low, hundred-year-old houses, pots of basil and rosemary, traditional Greek eateries or"tavernas" and more souvenir shops than you can shake a stick of souvlaki at.

Some areas of Plaka have been inhabited for thousands of years. Walk down Tripodon Street to see the Lysicrates monument and follow it to the Theater of Dionysus, one access point into the mighty Acropolis. Or head up toward Anafiotika to get lost in an island in the middle of the city. Plaka is pure romance.

Monastiraki

Monastiraki, or"little Monastery" is a great place for people watching. The courtyard and narrow roads that lead to the Roman Agora are always full of street performers, artists and antique vendors. Go on Sundays for treasure hunting at Avyssinias Square, or just wander around the flea market any day of the week. Buy fresh fruit from the kiosk and enjoy it while gazing at the remains of Hadrian's Library or the Tower of the Winds. Jump on the Kifissia/Piraeus railway for a nostalgic train ride to the very north or very south of Athens, respectively.

Psirri, Thissio and Gazi

Psirri has been home to the free thinkers and Bohemians since the start of the 20th century, when sad-eyed Rembetika singers belted their woes to the accompaniment of a line of instrumentalists, all sitting in wooden chairs, while people smoked and drank beneath the stage. While it still holds a certain grungy appeal to the modern-day Bohemian, the streets are lined with trendy cafes and eateries that make it also palatable to more mainstream visitors, or even those with a dazzled eye pointed toward the"live for the day" world of the artists and non-conventionalists of Psirri.

Thissio, on the other hand, is a well-sculpted garden surrounding the Ancient Agora and is well known for its posh places to enjoy a beverage for a few hours with a view on the Acropolis. The expansive pedestrian road of Apostolou Pavlou(Apostle Paul) circles around until it connects with Aereopagitou, making for lovely strolls.The pedestrian road ends at the ancient cemetery of Keramikos. From here you can see some strange metal structures puncturing the sky. This is the wildly popular area of Gazi, named for the gas factory whose buildings are now used as edgy cafes, tavernas and art centers. Organized graffiti decorates the walls and beautiful people fill the tables.The cultural center of Technopolis is where you can spy up-and-coming Greek talent in every field.

Museum Mile

An exceptional collection of privately run museums can all be found along V. Sophias Avenue amidst the embassy buildings and various official ministries. The eclectic Benaki Museum shows off iconic pieces to represent several periods of Greek history spanning 8,000 years. The Museum of Cycladic Art displays all of the neolithic artwork of the Cycladic islands. The Byzantine Museum presents the riches and religious art associated with medieval Greece, and the nearby War Museum gives a detailed history of the country through artifacts of warfare from ancient until modern times. A vast collection of art acquired from Greek collectors and by Greek artists is at the National Art Gallery.

Kolonaki

The streets around Kolonaki Square feature the most elegant boutiques in Athens. The square itself(officially named Filikis Eterias) is the favorite meeting place of celebrities and beautiful people. They can be seen hanging out at any of Kolonaki's numerous cafés after a shopping spree or in the excellent gourmet restaurants and chic

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bars at night. Kolonaki lies on the slopes of Lykavittos Hill, the city's best vantage point.

Exarhia

The scenery changes just a few blocks away from elegant Kolonaki. The area around Exarhion Square is dominated by rock music bars, jazz clubs and traditional tavernas which are frequented by students and intellectuals. This area should be avoided during city-wide demonstrations due to its active involvement in politics, but otherwise is a distinctly"Athens" neighborhood where you can see how the locals live.

Panepistimiou and Stadiou Streets

These two streets connect Syntagma Square with Omonia Square. In addition to shops and restaurants, they feature some of the city's most beautiful 19th-century buildings. Among them is the so-called Panepistimiou Street(officially named El. Venizelou Street), along with the university and National Library. The historic Iliou Melathron Mansion now houses the Numismatic Museum; the home has been beautifully restored and is worth a trip. Cut past Attica department store(back toward Syntagma), and you'll come upon the National History Museum, located in the old parliament building on Stadiou and Voulis.

Omonia Square

Omonia is considered part of"downtown" Athens where the locals go to buy common household goods and clothing and pay less. It is now home to the majority of the immigrant population of Athens and has seen a rise in crime, particularly petty theft and recreational drug use. A surge of modern hoteliers with an emphasis on design has hit Omonia and could breathe new life into a logistically well-located base for the city center.

Patission Street

Patission Street(officially named 28 Oktovriou Street) is one of the city's major thoroughfares. At No. 42 is the majestic Technical University, a splendid example of 19th-century architecture. Next door is the National Archaeological Museum, one of the world's greatest museums, housing an outstanding collection of ancient Greek art. Many fine boutiques can be found further north, past Kodringtonos Street. The best place to rest after a shopping spree is in any one of the numerous cafés and tavernas of the Fokionos Negri pedestrian zone in Kypseli.

Piraeus

Piraeus- the port town of Athens- is located on a peninsula, 10 kilometers southwest of central Athens. It features a busy commercial port and a Sunday flea market in the streets near the metro station. The most picturesque part of Piraeus is the Mikrolimano fishing harbor, with its row of traditional fish restaurants. Other good places for eating fish are the numerous seafood eateries along Akti Themistokleous Street, on the peninsula's eastern coast. Traces of the area's 2,500-year old history can be found at the Piraeus Archaeological Museum.

Glyfada and Vouliagmeni

The city's southern suburbs are located along the Apollo Coast and feature a string of beaches as well as numerous restaurants and nightclubs. One of these suburbs, Glyfada, boasts a golf course, an excellent shopping area on Metaxa Street and elegant restaurants and bars. Further south lies the exclusive resort town of Vouliagmeni renowned for its luxurious hotels, sophisticated restaurants and sailing clubs. The resort also features excellent beaches and water sports facilities at the Astir Beach Club.

Kifissia

An urban retreat for the wealthy since the times of Herodes Atticus(the mega-millionaire of ancient times responsible for the Kalimarmara Stadium and the Herodus Atticus Theater), Kifissia is a shady, upscale neighborhood full of elegant hotels, restaurants, and elite businesses. Kolokotroni Street and Argiropoulou Street are good destinations for serious shoppers, as they're lined with boutiques from the biggest names in fashion and luxury.

ThePentelikon hotel is an elegant place to stay to experience it, but theSemiramis Hotel, designed by Karim Rashid and part of the Design Hotel group, is a better choice for an appreciator of modern art and design.
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History

Athens is rightfully considered to be the cradle of Western civilization. It is the birthplace of democracy and home of the world's greatest philosophers and artists, many of whom set the foundations of modern society.

The Greek capital is the oldest continuously inhabited city in Europe, first settled during the neolithic period more than 5,000 years ago. Archaeological finds prove that a Bronze Age fortification and a palace were built on the Acropolis Hill as early as 1400 BC.

Athens takes its name from the goddess Athena. According to Greek mythology, there was a contest between Athena, the goddess of wisdom, and Poseidon, the god of the sea, over who would become the guardian of the city. Each deity granted the citizens a gift: Poseidon opened a well on the Acropolis, while Athena made an olive tree grow on the rocky soil of the hill. The citizens considered the gift of Athena more precious and dedicated their city to her, thus gaining wealth and wisdom.

The foundations of the city's explosive economic and cultural growth were laid in the 6th century BC, when the world's first democratic rules were introduced. The new laws relieved the poor of their debts, established the equality of all free men regardless of their wealth and gave all citizens the right to vote. A popular assembly of free citizens began to meet on Pnyx Hill to put the city's affairs to vote.

However, the world's first democracy was threatened with destruction following the Persian invasion in 490 BC. The Athenians and their allies defended their homes with an army of 11,000 against the 100,000 Persian soldiers. Despite being greatly outnumbered, the Athenian army defeated the Persians at Marathon thanks to the innovative strategy employed by General Miltiades. A messenger was sent to Athens to inform the citizens of the victory, thereby

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performing the world's first marathon run. This event is commemorated worldwide with hundreds marathons held each year. One of these is the Athens Marathon which follows the original route.

A second Persian invasion with an even larger army led to the evacuation of Athens in 480 BC. The Persian king Xerxes burnt down the abandoned city but witnessed the total destruction of his fleet by the Athenians at the naval battle of Salamis.

The two victorious battles at Marathon and Salamis established the the city's position as a naval superpower and marked the beginning of a phase of unprecedented prosperity. Athens flourished and became the commercial hub and cultural centre of the Mediterranean during the 5th Century BC. The wealth was used by the Athenian leader Pericles to rebuild the city on a grand scale. Pericles also introduced new political reforms which led to the maturity of the world's first democracy. The city's population reached 140,000, with 40,000 male citizens enjoying full political rights. It was the beginning of the Golden Age of Athens.

The destroyed temples of the Acropolis were replaced by some of the greatest architectural masterpieces of all time, such as the splendid Parthenon(dedicated to Athena) which still inspires architects all over the world. The public buildings were decorated with works by outstanding sculptors such as Phidias and Praxiteles, some of which can be seen at the Acropolis Museum and the National Archaeological Museum.

A new art form, namely theatre, was born here; plays by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes were first performed at the Dionysos Theatre which is the the oldest in the world. Athens was also the place where the world's greatest philosophers: Socrates, Plato and Aristotle changed the way we think and perceive the world today. Visitors can stroll through the Agora(the ancient marketplace), retracing the footsteps of Socrates who used to walk around the once-crowded square engaging people in long discussions.

The Golden Age lasted until 404 BC, when Athens was defeated by Sparta in the Peloponnesian Wars. The city lost its independence once again in 338 BC when it came under the rule of the Macedonian kings, and was finally annexed by the Roman Empire in 146 BC. Foreign rule reduced the city's political role but it remained a major cultural centre for many centuries. The Romans, who greatly admired the city's cultural heritage, built many monuments such as the Odeon of Herod Atticus, the Roman Agora, the Temple of Olympian Zeus and Hadrian's Arch. Many Romans came to Athens to study at its renowned schools of philosophy.

The decline of Athens was caused by the first Christian emperors. Initially, in 394, Theodosius prohibited the worship of the ancient gods, to be followed by the closure of the philosophical schools in 529 ordered by Justinian.

Athens turned into a small town during the Byzantine era. Monuments from that time include the Church of Panagia Gorgoepikoos and the Kessariani Monastery. A large number of works of art from this period can be seen at the Byzantine Museum.

The Crusaders who conquered the Byzantine Empire in 1204, controlled the city until 1458 – the year the Turks occupied Athens and annexed it to the Ottoman Empire. Turkish rule lasted for almost four centuries, bequeathing the city monuments such as the Tzisdarakis Mosque on Monastiraki Square and the Fethiye Mosque at the site of the Roman Agora.

A fierce war of independence broke out in 1821, leading to the proclamation of the infant Greek state in 1829. Athens awakened to a new life in 1834 – the year the capital was moved to the city. Prince Otto of Bavaria, who was appointed King of Greece, brought his architects to plan the new royal city. A number of splendid buildings were constructed during this time, such as the Parliament building(the former royal palace), the university and the Academy.

Athens hosted the first modern Olympic Games, which were held at the imposing Panathenaic Stadium in 1896. The city hosted the Olympics again in 2004.

The 20th century witnessed the city's explosive growth. Its population grew from a mere 200,000 to four million, making it one of the largest and most fascinating cities in Europe despite its infrastructural and environmental problems. Great population growth in the 1920s was caused by the arrival of thousands of ethnic Greek refugees from Turkey, but the city's growth was really accelerated during the 1950s and 1960s with millions of immigrants arriving from the Greek provinces, impoverished after years of war.

In 1941, German Nazi troops occupied the country, causing the death of hundreds of thousands of people. The liberation of Greece in 1944 didn't bring peace but instead a civil war, which ended in 1949. A period of political unrest led to acoup d'etat in 1967 and the severe oppression of the Greek people. Democracy was finally restored in 1974. Greece became a full member of the European Community in 1981.

The fate of the city is best illustrated by the changes that have occurred to the Acropolis throughout the centuries: the Parthenon was built as the temple of Athena, but was subsequently transformed into an Orthodox church by the Byzantine emperors, a Catholic church by the Crusaders and a Muslim mosque by the Turks. This unique monument was severely damaged in 1687 during the Venetian bombardment of Athens, when the gunpowder stored by the Turks in the Parthenon exploded. Further damage was inflicted during the 1801 plundering by Lord Elgin, who removed its splendid sculptural decoration and sold it to the British Museum in London. A major preservation and restoration project was initiated several years ago, when the polluted air of modern Athens caused additional destruction to the marble buildings of the Acropolis.
©

Hotel Insights

There are more than 350 hotels in the Greater Athens metropolitan area, ranging from backpackers' hostels to five-star beach resorts and from historic landmark buildings to contemporary high-rises. The most important choice you will have to make is the location of your hotel. This decision is important in such a large city, considering the traffic jams that appear in certain areas at different times of the day. If on a sightseeing trip, be sure to stay in a hotel in the city center. Most sights are within easy walking distance or can be reached by metro, so you don't have to worry about traffic. Business travelers also prefer the city center for its excellent hotels

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and numerous evening entertainment options.

Syntagma Square

There are several hotel clusters in downtown Athens. The most central place to stay is Syntagma Square, the site of the majestic Grande Bretagne. This historic five-star landmark(run by Sheraton) dates back to 1842 and is the city's oldest hotel. Its old-world charm has been carefully preserved in the rooms, lounges and restaurant. Also on Syntagma Square is the stylish NJV Athens Plaza, which offers the city's most attractive hotel rooms. This five-star hotel is run by the Grecotel group. Less expensive are the comfortable Electra, a four-star hotel located in Ermou Street's pedestrianized shopping zone, and the four-star Amalia. Plaka, the Acropolis and the boutiques of Kolonaki are just a short stroll away.

Closer to the city center are several four-star hotels in Glyfada and Voula, such as Blazer Suites and Best Western Fenix. These hotels are located near the Metaxa Street shopping and entertainment district, the Glyfada Golf Course and several beaches. Even closer to the city center is the three-star Best Western Coral which is on Paleo Faliro beach.

Plaka

The old town of Plaka is the site of many inexpensive hotels, with the exception of the four-star Golden Tulip Electra Palace. Located a five-minute walk from Syntagma Square, the hotel features a rooftop swimming pool commanding a view of the city and the Acropolis. Further away is another four-star hotel, the Royal Olympic, which overlooks the city's ancient monuments.

Omonia Square

Many cheap hotels can be found in the streets around Omonia Square. The whole area was upgraded recently, with the opening of two upscale hotels on the square itself. Both the Grecotel Athens Acropol and the Omonia Grand Hotel are four-star hotels.

Panepistimiou and Stadiou Streets

Situated halfway between Syntagma and Omonia squares are the four-star Best Western Esperia Palace on Stadiou Street and the superior three-star Titania on Panepistimiou Street, both ideally located for leisure and business travelers.

Kolonaki

Kolonaki is one of the city's most attractive neighborhoods thanks to its upscale boutiques, gourmet restaurants and trendy nightspots. The best hotel here is the five-star St George Lycabettus Hotel, which commands spectacular views from its rooms, restaurant and rooftop swimming pool. A less expensive alternative is the cozy Athenian Inn, a two-star hotel with a great location. Syntagma Square is just a 15-minute walk away.

Ilissia

The opening of the imposing Athens Hilton in the Ilissia district in 1963 was followed by the construction of other five-star hotels in this part of of the city, which is just a two-minute metro ride from Syntagma Square. The Divani Caravel and the Athens Holiday Inn were both opened in the 1970s, providing yet more deluxe accommodation and facilities, ranging from swimming pools to large banqueting halls. The Holiday Inn recently opened the Holiday Suites, a four-star extension with 29 junior suites. A choice of restaurants and bars can be found in the immediate vicinity of these hotels.

Syngrou Avenue

Syngrou Avenue is one of the city's major thoroughfares, connecting the city center with Piraeus and the seaside suburbs. Among the hotels located along this avenue is the five-star Athenaeum Inter-Continental, the city's best hotel, offering guests a wealth of facilities and services. Of the same high standard is the nearby Ledra Marriott. Both of these hotels are a 10-minute drive from Syntagma Square. Closer to the city center and within walking distance of the Acropolis is the Acropolis Select, a newly refurbished three-star hotel hidden away on a side street off Syngrou Avenue. At the far end of this avenue is the stylish five-star Metropolitan Hotel which has a swimming pool, fitness center and many other amenities.

Alexandras Avenue

Also within easy reach of the city center are two hotels on Alexandras Avenue. The five-star Park Hotel, located near the National Archaeological Museum, offers a great view of the Acropolis from its rooftop swimming pool. The same holds true for the four-star Zafolia.

Kifissia

The northern suburb of Kifissia is a popular choice for both business and leisure travelers who are drawn by its upscale boutiques, splendid restaurants and nightspots. Reviving the elegance of a bygone era are two landmark hotels from the 1920s: the five-star Pentelikon features an inviting garden swimming pool and one of the city's top restaurants, while the more intimate four-star Kefalari Suites consists of just 12 individually themed rooms.

Glyfada and Vouliagmeni

Many visitors to Athens chose to stay in one of the splendid seaside suburbs south of the city center. The best hotels can be found in Vouliagmeni, one of the Mediterranean's most elegant resorts. The five-star Astir Palace, occupying a private peninsula, offers a wealth of recreational and business amenities such as beaches, indoor and outdoor pools, water sport facilities and conference rooms. Another luxurious resort hotel is the Divani Apollon Palace, which overlooks Kavouri Beach. The elegant Margi House is a more intimate five-star hotel, located just a stone's throw from Vouliagmeni Beach.
©

Restaurants Insights

The Greeks are renowned for their hedonistic lifestyle and the long nights they like to spend eating, drinking and dancing. Few other places on earth can match the city's lively nightlife scene. Late dinners(taken at around 10p) and nightclubs that fill up after midnight are extremely typical here so don't be alarmed by the empty tables if you show up early for dinner!

Several factors make dining and partying pleasurable in Athens: there is the contagious joy shown by Athenians as they savor their food, their tendency to dance on any available surface including tables, and the endless chats. The picture perfect scenery, be it a traditional taverna located in a vine-covered backyard in Plaka or a seaside fish restaurant in Piraeus- will add to your enjoyment. Finally, the pleasant weather means that you can dine and party outdoors for most months of the year. What

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better way to end the day than by dining under the stars beneath the Acropolis?

Syntagma Square

A restaurant that stands out for its great city view is the Dionysos Café and Restaurant at the foot of the Acropolis. For a romantic evening, one of the most beautiful dining rooms is G.B. Corner, which shares the old-world charm of the adjacent Grande Bretagne Hotel on Syntagma Square. A large number of nightclubs can be found all over Athens. Some feature live Greek music, while others play the latest international hits and attract the city's clubbers: Wild Rose and Kalua near Syntagma Square are both fantastic options. Symposio offers a grand view of the Acropolis as well, and has a wide selection of expertly seasoned meats that come paired with exotic sauces. While Furin Kazan, near Syntagma Square is ideal for a quick sushi lunch or dinner.

Plaka

Classic Greek cuisine is also served in the elegant Daphne's in Plaka. Bakaliarakia is a comfortable Greek tavern with a large crowd of regulars. For delectable ham and pork dishes, try Xynou, where your meal will be accompanied by live music. There is also a backyard garden for those interested in dining outside. Eden Vegetarian Restaurant isn't just for vegetarians, they have many menu items that contain fresh seafood. For a sampling of some traditional Greek fare, try Akropol Resaturant Tavern, where there is live music from local bands. Scholarheion is a family owned and operated restaurant that focuses on serving guests quality meals at reasonable prices. Taverna Tou Psarra features a lovely rooftop garden with stunning views of Plaka. Among the numerous tavernas of the old town of Plaka are Damigos and Xynou, the latter serving food in its garden during the summer.

Kifissia

Great alfresco dining is offered on the terrace of Ta Kioupia in Kifissia, with its splendid view of the city and the culinary cluster of around forty traditional dishes you will find on your table. For some Mediterranean food with a modern twist, try Beau Brummel. There is a large selection of cigars and cognac for those who enjoy a smoke after dinner. Cuisine of the highest quality is served at the elegant French restaurant Vardis. Souvlakia Kifissias is a popular take out restaurant where you can go to get some souvlaki on the go. Be sure to try the garlic pie, one of the restaurants specialties. Il Salumaio di Montenapoleone represents classic Italian dishes like lasagna and risotto with truffles and foie gras. The wine list also offers selections from Italy.

Kolonaki

Le Grand Balcon in the St George Lycabettus Hotel in Kolonaki. Kafenio in Kolonaki serves traditional Greek fare. Athens boasts a large selection of ethnic restaurants featuring cuisine from every continent. These range from informal eateries to gourmet temples such as the sophisticated Italian restaurant Boschetto, the excellent Polynesian restaurant White Elephant and Kiku, the best Japanese in town.

A major component of each dining experience is not just the food but also the excellent Greek wine, which has played an important role in the Athenian way of life for thousands of years. The Attica region is actually one of the oldest wine-growing regions of the world. Vintners have been providing Athenians with their elixir for thousands of years and wines range from the simpleretsina to excellent reds and whites. Excellent pasta and other Italian specialties are served at Casa di Pasta.

Psirri

Eating out in one of the traditional tavernas is a must for any visitor. These serve tasty Greek dishes(made from meat, seafood and vegetables) that are preceded bymezedes. These mouth-watering appetizers are varied and can constitute an opulent meal in themselves. A good place for samplingmezedes is the Psirri district, where there are several tavernas such as Silfio, located on Taki Street, as well as Athinaikon near Omonia Square and Vlassis near Mavili Square. Fans of modern cuisine should try the innovative Kouzina Cine-Psirri. Athens also features several elegant wine bars such as Aspro in Psirri, and Thirio.

Omonia Square

Visitors interested in a more authentic experience should opt for a club featuringrebetiko music, such as the Stoa Athanaton. Meanwhile, the cuisine of ancient Greece has been revived by Archeon Gevsis, a restaurant chain with branches near Omonia Square and in Piraeus. Neon Omonia was built inside what was once one of Athens' oldest hotels. Serving coffee and breakfast food, it's a popular place for people in the hurry in the morning. Olive Garden shares its name with the American chain, but the food here is Mediterranean, Greek, Italian, French and Moroccan all rolled into one. For a rustic dining experience, try Athinaikon, a tavern that serves traditional, hearty Greek dishes such as stuffed spleen.
©

Nightlife Insights

Athens- a bustling metropolis of four million inhabitants offers its visitors a huge selection of entertainment options, as well as world-class sightseeing opportunities few other places on earth can match. Athens boasts some of mankind's greatest heritage sites such as the Acropolis, the Ancient Agora and the Dionysos Theatre.

Museums and Galleries

Of no lesser interest are the city's great museums for example the National Archaeological Museum with its splendid collection of ancient Greek art. Also worth a visit is the"Museum Mile" on Vassilissis Sophias Avenue featuring the Benaki Museum, the Museum of Cycladic Art, the Byzantine Museum, the War Museum and the National Art Gallery.

Festivals

The city's cultural life is extremely varied. Many concerts and performances take place between May and October in numerous open-air venues such as the Lykavittos Theatre overlooking the city. The major cultural event is the Athens Festival- one of Europe's largest summer festivals held each year from June to September. Younger crowds are attracted by the three-day Rockwave Festival held each July.

Music

The winter season includes great concerts at the splendid Athens Concert Hall as well as opera and ballet performances by the Greek National Opera. Also worth mentioning are the city'srebetiko and jazz clubs, such as the Stoa Athanaton and the Half Note Jazz Club.

Theater

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Performances at the historic National Theatre truly stand out amongst the dozens of theatrical productions which take place in the city. There are also many art exhibitions to choose from, including those held at Gazi Technopolis Manos Chatzidakis, Athinais Cultural Centre and Artower Agora.

Cinema

If you fancy watching the latest movie, the language barrier is no problem as all movies are featured in the original language with Greek subtitles(with the exception of some films for children). There is a huge choice of cinemas in Athens including, among others, Village Park(Europe's largest entertainment complex), Village Centre Maroussi and Athinais. Still more enjoyable though, is watching a movie under the stars at one of the city's open-air cinemas- such as the one at Aegli, in the Zappion Gardens.

Family-Friendly

Children will also have a great time in Athens. They can explore the National Garden, visit the mystical Koutouki Cave and the world's third largest bird collection at the Attica Zoological Park. Try out the hands-on exhibits at the Greek Museum of Childhood or even see the creations of other children, exhibited at the Museum of Greek Children's Art.

Sports

At the disposal of both children and adults are the city's excellent beaches and watersports facilities, such as the Astir Beach Club in Vouliagmeni, Schinias Beach and Karavi Beach Club in Marathon and the EOT beach clubs in Alimos and Varkiza. Other sports facilities can be found at the freely accessible Agios Kosmas sports complex in Elliniko and the Glyfada Golf Course. Hikers can head to the Mt Parnitha National Park, just north of the city.

Shopping

The city's excellent shops present an additional recreational opportunity. Athens is a great place for clothes shopping- women in particular will appreciate both the quality and the attractive prices of clothes sold at the city's elegant boutiques. You can also shop for works of art, antiques, home accessories and exotic souvenirs.

For an up to date programme of events, art exhibitions, concerts, performances and cinema screenings, consult the pages ofAthens News, a weekly English-language newspaper published every Friday. More detailed information, as well as many dining and nightlife suggestions can be found in the Greek-language magazineAthinorama, which is also published on Fridays.
©

Things to Do Insights

The best way to explore a city is on foot. This is especially true of Athens, which has a number of sights located in close proximity to one another.

National Archaeological Museum

World renowned museum, the National Archaeological Museum should be at the top of your list of museums to visit. Although you will face a crowd due to its popularity, it is for good reason. This museum houses artifacts that date back to the sixth millennium BCE. Art from the Aegean islands and Mycenaean art is showcased, including the funeral masks that were used to cover the deceased Mycenean leaders. In addition, the earliest known Greek sculptures dating from 2000 BCE and an Egyptian Art collection are on display. Another must see attraction is the Benaki Museum. This classic museum was established in 1930 and is home to rare collections and hosts conservation workshops. Items from the Prehistoric period are featured as well as work from the Roman Empire. Then quench your thirst and appetite at the nearby Neon cafe, the perfect stop before continuing on. Also, don't miss the Museum of Cycladic Art which is near the Benaki Museum, and features the ancient cultures of Aegean and Cyprus(3rd millennium BC).

Panathenaic Stadium

As you venture towards Vassileos Konstantinou Street the Panathenaic Stadium will make you stand in awe as you gaze up at this impressive structure. The Panathenaic Stadium is built on the remains of an ancient stadium dating back 330 BCE, and was host to the first modern Olympic Games in 1896 CE. Today, this 70,000-seat venue is used for concerts and other large-scale events. On nearby Vassilissis Olgas Street is the entrance to the Temple of Olympian Zeus, one of the largest temples ever constructed. Today only some of the temple's columns can be seen. In better shape is the adjacent Hadrian's Arch, built in 131 CE in honor of the Roman emperor Hadrian. For a traditional greek cuisine experience as you tour this area try Eden Vegetarian Restaurant.

Acropolis

The ascent to the Acropolis with its architectural masterpieces dating back to the 5th century BCE is the most famed symbol of Athens. You can reach the top of this hill by entering through the monumental Propylea in order to admire the magnificent Parthenon and the graceful Caryatid statues at the Erechthion Temple. The museum features splendid examples of ancient Greek art. Next, check out Lysicrates Monument, a cyclical tower from the 4th century BCE. From here, it is just a brief walk along Dionysiou Areopagitou Street to the southern slope of the Acropolis- the site of the Dionysos Theatre. Constructed in the 6th century BCE, 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. Walking down the street towards the entrance of the Acropolis, you will come across a more recent theatre, the Odeon of Herod Atticus from the second century BCE, which is still used for concerts and performances. A great place for Greek cuisine in the area is Taverna Xynos.

Philopappou Hill

Opposite the entrance of the Acropolis stands Philopappou Hill. From the monument on the hilltop, built in the 2nd century CE, you can enjoy a magnificent view of the Acropolis. Nearby is Filistron, a great place to dine at while you take in the view of the Acropolis. On a lower hill lies Pnyx, the birthplace of democracy and the venue of the world's first popular assembly. Not far from here you can visit Arios Pagos a small hill that was used as the seat of court during the 5th century BCE. This is the place where the Apostle Paul preached to the citizens of Athens 2,000 years ago. The stairs next to the Arios Pagos will take you down to the Ancient Agora marketplace. Among the numerous sights in this archaeological park is the well-preserved Temple of Hephaistos and the reconstructed Stoa Attalou. A short stroll away is the more recent Roman Agora

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from the first century BCE and the landmark Tower of the Winds.

Plaka

Plaka is one of the city's major attractions. Many interesting sights such as ancient monuments, Byzantine churches and beautifully restored mansions can be found in its narrow streets, most of them closed to traffic. There is also a good choice of tavernas, cafés and souvenir shops in the area, among them is Restaurant Taverna Plaka. Upon entering Kydathineon Street from the Filellinon end, you will come across the 11th Century, Agia Sotira Church, one of the few remaining Byzantine churches in Athens. Opposite the church is the Museum of Greek Folk Art. Its exhibits include a wide range of artifacts such as traditional costumes, wood carvings and pottery. Turning left at Monis Asteriou Street, you will come to the the Vlassis Frissiras Museum of Contemporary European Art, although the children would probably prefer a visit to the Greek Museum of Childhood at 14 Kydathineon Street. One of Plaka's most interesting churches is the 11th-century Agios Nikolaos Rangavas on Prytaniou Street. Down the street stands the Agii Anargyri Monastery, which was built in the 17th century, and the Museum of the History of Athens University, housed inside the stately mansion on Tholou Street. Next to the museum is the Panagia Chryssokastriotissa Church in Aliberti Street, made famous by its miraculous icon of the Virgin Mary.

With so much to see and do, Athens is best seen on wheels or by foot, just make sure to pack comfortable walking shoes.

Walking Tours

Athens Walking Tours(+30 210 884 7269/ http://www.athenswalkingtours.gr/)

Car and Bus Tours

Greece Taxi(+30 694 013 1734/http://www.greecetaxi.gr/) Interdynamic(+30 281 030 0330/http://www.ellada.net/) Sightseeing Bus(http://www.oasa.gr/) Chat Tours(+30 210 322 3137/http://www.chatours.gr/) Hop-in Zion Tours(+30 210 428 5500/ http://www.hopin.com/)

Bike Tours

Experience Plus!(+1 800 685 4565/ http://www.experienceplus.com/) Cycle Greece(+30 210 921 8160/http://www.cyclegreece.gr/) Pame Volta(+30 210 675 2886/ http://www.pamevolta.gr/)

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Travel Tips

Getting There

By Air

The new Athens International Airport(+30 210 353 0000/http://www.aia.gr)(ATH), located 17 miles northwest in Spata, opened in 2001 in anticipation of the 2004 Olympics. The sleek new airport has one massive main hall and a satellite terminal that looks like an architectural afterthought. Both facilities are stocked with shops and restaurants. A business center(+30 210 353 6416), numerous conference rooms and business lounges are also onsite. Major airlines include:

Air Berlin(+49 180 573 7800/http://www.airberlin.com) Air Canada(+1 800 776 3000/http://www.aircanada.ca) Air France(+1 800 871 1366/http://www.airfrance.com) Air Malta(+356 21 690 890/http://www.airmalta.com) Air Scotland(+1 44 141 222 2363/http://www.air-scotland.com) Air Transat(+877 872 6728/http://www.airtransat.com) American Airlines(+1 800 433 7300/http://www.aa.com) Blue1(+358 20 585 6000/ http://www.blue1.com) British Airways(+1 800 247 9297/http://www.british-airways.com) Condor(+1 800 524 6975/ http://www7.condor.com) Delta(+1 800 221 1212/http://www.delta.com) Easy Jet(+871 244 2366/http://www.easyjet.com) Finnair(+1 800 950 4768/http://www.finnair.com) Iberworld Airlines(http://www.iberworld.com) Lufthansa(+1 800 645 3880/http://www.lufthansa.com) My Travel(+870 238 7710/http://www.mytravel.com) Singapore Air(+1 800 742 3333/http://www.singaporeair.com) Sterling.dk Airline(+457 033 3370/http://www.sterlingticket.com) Sun Express(+180 595 9590/http://server1.sunexpress.com.tr) Thomsonfly(+870 190 0737/http://www.thomsonfly.com) Transavia(+312 0406 0406/http://www.transavia.com) Virgin Atlantic(+1 800 862 8621/http://www.virgin-atlantic.com) Wizz Air(+48 22 351 9499/ http://www.wizzair.com)

The Athens Urban Transport Organization(http://www.oasa.gr) provides 24-hour bus service to the downtown area. Four dedicated express routes are available: Line E94 deposits passengers at the Ethniki Amyna metro station. Rides exit every 15-30 minutes. Line E95 services Syntagma Square and departs every 15-35 minutes. Line E96 attends Pireaus Port, exiting every 20-40 minutes. Rides for all three lines take 45-60 minutes. Line E97 connects the airport with the Dafini metro station.

Taxis are easy to find outside the terminal. Rides, depending on traffic, last 30-60 minutes.

Taxi Reservations(+1 44 20 8123 3567/ http://www.taxireservations.gr)

Rental Car Companies

Avis(+1 800 831 2847/http://www.avis.com) Budget(+1 800 527 0700/http://www.budget.com) Europcar(+49 069 697 970/http://www.europcar.com) Hertz(+1 800 654 3131/http://www.hertz.com) National(+1 800 227 7368/http://www.nationalcar.com) Sixt(+30 210 353 0576/http://www.e-sixt.com)

Once you pick up the car(and a good street map) search out the Attiki Odos, the main thoroughfare into the city. From here you can link to most parts of town. Although it is a toll expressway and a menagerie of construction projects, it beats getting lost straight out of the gate. Toll free options are available starting with Lavirou Avenue with connects to the airport, but if you choose to go exploring, have a good map.

By Train

Rail travel in Greece compared to the rest of Europe is extremely antiquated and limited with most service confined to the northern and eastern halves of the Greek mainland. For information on specific routes and times check with the Hellenic Railways Organization(OSE)(+30 210 529 7777/ http://www.osenet.gr). Trains arriving in Athens from the south and west operate

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out of the Peloponnese Station(+30 210 513 1601). Passengers can then catch a taxi or bus into downtown. Arrivals from the north depart at the Larissa Station(+30 210 529 8837), which conveniently connects to downtown via the metro's Line 2.

By Bus

Greece's bus travel is handled by KTEL(Koino Tameio Eispraxeon Leoforeion), a conglomerate of privately operated companies. Its coverage is extensive, providing service to and from every town, regardless of how rural, on the mainland. Eurolines(http://www.eurolines.com), based out of London, also accesses Greece. Terminal A(+30 210 512 9233) handles buses from Peloponnese and northern Greece. Terminal B(+30 210 831 7096) focuses on bus traffic to and from central Greece.

By Boat

All boat traffic arrives at the port of Piraeus(the largest in Europe), located six miles southwest of Athens. Ferries provide service to and from the Saronic Islands, Samos, Crete, Cyclades, northern Greece, and the northeast Aegean Islands. For faster service to the islands there are also hydrofoils and catamarans. However, they are also twice as expensive and dependent upon good weather. For more detailed information call the Piraeus Port Authority(+30 210 428 6842/http://www.olp.gr).

By Car

Bear in mind that Greece has one of the highest car-accident rates in Europe. Drivers treat red lights as optional and passing on curves and hills seems to be the norm rather than the rare exception. If you are not deterred, Athens can be reached by E75 from the north which hugs the eastern coast, and by E65 from the west.

Getting Around Town

The Athens Urban Transport Organization(http://www.oasa.gr) offers buses, trolley buses, and a subway system making it very easy to negotiate downtown and the surrounding suburbs without a car.

Its metro system(http://www.ametro.gr) is currently experiencing one of the biggest transportation expansions in Europe. In direct response to the 2004 Olympics it has bloomed from one line to three lines and now handles 470,000 passengers daily. Line 1(ISAP) extends from Kifissia to the north to Piraeus harbor to the south. Major tourist stops include the National Archaeological Museum, Omonia Square, and the nightlife districts of Psirri and Thission. Line 2(Sepolia-Dafni) includes the Acropolis and Syntagma Square. And Line 3(Ethniki Amyna-Monastiraki) attends such major stops as the National Gallery and the Byzantine Museum. Stops are serviced every three minutes during rush hours, or every 10 minutes otherwise.

Blue and white buses offer more 300 routes in and around downtown Athens. Most stops are attended every 15 minutes. Service operates from 5a-12:30a. Attempting to decipher the bus routes is complicated, especially with new routes being constantly added in conjunction with the expanding metro system. Green and white buses service between Athens and Piraeus. If you are seeking comfort be aware that buses are usually packed.

There are 19 electric trolleybus routes most of which service downtown's main tourist areas.

Compared to most other European cities, Athen's taxis are inexpensive and honest. Hailing is inexplicably difficult, however, so it is best to call ahead. Some of the more noted companies are: Athina(+30 210 921 7942) Ermis(+30 210 411 5200) Ikaros(+30 210 515 2800)

Possessing a car in Athens is more of a hassle than a convenience. Traffic is frustrating and parking is so limited that locals park on sidewalks.

Most of Athens main tourist attractions are centrally located making it extremely convenient for walking. To encourage foot travel, new pedestrian zones have been added in the commercial triangle and in Plaka, the center of the old city.
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Fun Facts

1. The first history of Athens was recorded around 3,400 years ago making it Europe's oldest capital and one of the oldest cities of the world.

2. The city center of Athens is only 15 sq miles or 39 sq kilometers.

3. Athens is statistically one of the lowest ranking capital cities when it comes to violent crime.

4. Fun Fact: Everyfull moon in August, the Acropolis stays open until 2am with live music and theatrical performances; it is free to all.

5. Before hosting the 2004 Olympic Games, all of the street signs of Athens had to be changed to include a Latin spelling under the Greek.

6. Athens was part of the Ottoman Empire(1458-1832) while the rest of Western Europe was experiencing the Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution.

7. Weird Fact: The first modern king of Greece was a Bavarian prince and only 17 years old.

8. Athens is the second capital city of Greece. King Otto(see fact 7) changed it from the Port of Nafplio in 1834 for sentimental reasons related to the city's glorious past.

9. The oldest hotel in Athens,The Grand Bretagne, was first the royal guesthouse. During German occupation(1941-1944) it was used as Nazi HQ. Hitler and Rommel were there on the eve of the Soviet Invasion.

10. The sporting event known as the"Marathon" was created for the first Modern Olympic games set in Athens in 1896. It was a recreation of the route used by the legendary runner, Pheidippides, in 490 BC to announce the Athenian

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victory against the Persians at the battle of Marathon 25 miles away.

11. The Athens metro currently has twenty-eight stations, all of which exhibit artwork by contemporary Greek artists. Six display archaeological treasures uncovered during the metro's construction.

12. Actress, activist, and Minister of Culture, Melina Mercouri, is credited with the establishment of the institution, the"European Capital of Culture." Athens became the first in 1985.

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Olympia Snapshot

Local Info

Introduction

With its shady groves of pine, olive, and oak trees; the considerable remains of two temples; and the stadium where the first Olympic races were run in 776 B.C., Olympia is the most beautiful major site in the Peloponnese. When you realize that both the archaeological museum and the new museum of the ancient Games are among the finest in Greece, you'll see why it's wonderful to have more than just 1 day here, especially if your hotel has a swimming pool!

A Look At The Past-- There's really no modern equivalent for ancient Olympia, which was both a religious sanctuary and an athletic complex where the Games took place every 4 years from 776 B.C. to A.D. 393. Thereafter, the sanctuary slipped into oblivion, and buildings were repeatedly toppled by earthquakes and flooded by the Alfios and Kladeos rivers. When the English antiquarian Richard Chandler rediscovered the site in 1766, most of Olympia lay under 3m(10 ft.) of mud and silt. The Germans began to excavate here in 1852 and are still at it today.

Reports of the rediscovery of Olympia prompted the French Baron de Coubertin to work for the reestablishment of the Olympic Games in 1896. The first modern Games were held in Athens in 1896, and since then the Olympic torch has always been lit here at the beginning of the Olympic Games, wherever they are held. In 2004, Athens hosted the 2004 Olympics, with the shot put finals taking place in Olympia's ancient stadium.

The Ancient Olympic Games-- The 5-day Olympic festival was held every 4 years between 776 B.C. and A.D. 393 at full moon in mid-August or September, after the summer harvest. Participants came from as far away as Asia Minor and Italy, and the entire Greek world observed a truce to allow athletes and spectators to make their way to Olympia safely. During all the years that the Games took place, the truce was broken only a handful of times.

By the time the Games opened, literally thousands of people had poured into Olympia; and much of the surrounding countryside was a tent city. Women were barred from watching or participating in the Games, although they had their own Games in honor of Hera, Zeus's wife, in non-Olympic years. Any woman caught sneaking into the Olympic Games was summarily thrown to her death from a nearby mountain.

No one knows precisely what the order of events was, but the 5 days included footraces, short and long jumps, wrestling and boxing contests, chariot races, the arduous pentathlon(discus, javelin, jumping, running, and wrestling), and the vicious pankration(which combined wrestling and boxing techniques).

The 3rd-century-A.D. writer Philostratos recorded that participants in the pentathlon"must have skill in various methods of strangling." The most prestigious event was thestade, or short footrace, which gave its name to the stadium. Each Olympiad was named after the winner of the stade, and athletes like the 2nd-century-B.C. Leonidas of Rhodes, who won at four successive Olympics, became international heroes. In addition to the glory, each victor won a crown made of olive branches and free meals for life in his hometown. In the Athens 2004 Summer Olympics, the shot put finals were held in Olympia's ancient stadium, which you can visit.

Olympia Today-- The straggling modern village of Olympia(confusingly known as Ancient Olympia) is bisected by its one main street, Leoforos Kondili. The town has the usual assortment of tourist shops selling jewelry, T-shirts, and reproductions of ancient pottery and statues, as well as more than a dozen hotels and restaurants. Two things worth visiting in town: the small **Museum of the Olympic Games** and the excellent **Galerie Orphee bookstore**.

The ancient site of Olympia is an easily walkable 15 minutes south of the modern village, but if you have a car, you might as well drive: The road teems with tour buses and the walk is less than relaxing.

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Hotel Insights

Hotels

Olympia has more than 20 hotels, which means that you can almost always find a room-- although if you arrive without a reservation in July or August, you probably won't get your first choice. As is often the case in major tourist centers, hotels here often raise or lower rates depending on the kind of season they're having. In winter, many hotels are closed. If you want to have the best of both worlds and stay by the sea, you can, but you will have to do some nasty driving on truck-infested main roads to get back and forth to Olympia. If this does not deter you, try the elegant **Grecotel Olympia Riviera Resort**(www.grecotel.gr) 45 minutes away on its own beach in Kyllini, with three hotel complexes(Mandola Rosa is the fanciest), 500 acres of gardens, six restaurants(one entirely organic), seven pools, and just about everything else you'd want.

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Restaurants Insights

Restaurants

Olympia has almost as many restaurants as hotels. The ones on and just off the main street with large signs in English and German tend to have indifferent food and service; the **Aegean, Zeus,** and the **4 Epoxei(4 Seasons),** are consistently better than average. The two restaurants of the Hotel Europa are far superior to most restaurants in town, but check to see if the excellent **Kladeos** restaurant has reopened. If you have a car, the family-operated **Taverna Bacchus,** some 5km(3 miles) outside Olympia in the village of Miraka, has long served up excellent country cooking. Phone first(tel.

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26240/22-498) to make sure the Bacchus is open the night you want to go.
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Things to Do Insights

Attractions

Shopping

Galerie Orphee, Antonios Kosmopoulos's shop on the main street in Ancient Olympia(tel. 26240/23-555), has a wide selection of books, an extensive range of cassettes and CDs of Greek music, plus frequent displays of contemporary art. What a pleasant contrast to Olympia's other shops, which have all too many T-shirts, museum reproductions, and machine-made rugs and embroideries sold as"genuine handmade crafts."
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Travel Tips

Planning a Trip

Getting There

By Train-- There are several trains a day from Athens to Pirgos, where you change to the train for Olympia. Information on schedules and fares is available from the Stathmos Peloponnisou(train station for the Peloponnese) in Athens(tel. 210/513-1601).

By Bus-- There are three buses a day to Olympia from the Stathmos Leoforia Peloponnisou(bus station for the Peloponnese) in Athens, 100 Kifissou(tel. 210/512-4910;www.ktel.org). There are also frequent buses from Patras to Pirgos, with connecting service to Olympia. In Patras, KTEL buses leave from the intersection of Zaimi and Othonos(tel. 2610/273-694). For general schedule information for Athens-Peloponnese service, try 210/512-4910 or www.ktel.org.

By Car-- Olympia is easily a 6-hour drive from Athens, whether you take the coastal road that links Athens-Corinth-Patras and Olympia, or head inland to Tripolis and Olympia on the new Corinth-Tripolis road. Heavy traffic in Patras means that the drive from Patras to Olympia can take 2 hours.

Visitor Information

Olympia is basically a one-street town; the few things you do not find on **Praxitelous Kondili** will be just off it. The **tourist office,** on the way to the ancient site near the south end of the main street, is officially open daily, in summer from 9am to 10pm, and in winter from 11am to 6pm. Ask here for maps of the site and town, and for information on accommodations(tel. 26240/23-100 or 26240/23-125).

Fast Facts

The **National Bank of Greece,** on Praxitelous Kondili(the main drag), exchanges currency and has an ATM. The **health clinic**(tel. 26240/22-222) is signposted in town. The **police**(tel. 26240/22-100) are at 6 Ethnossinelefseos. The **tourist police**(tel. 26240/22-550) are handily located on a street behind the tourist office. Both the **post office**(on the main street) and the **telephone office**(just off the main street) are signposted.
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Delphi Snapshot

Local Info

Introduction

178km(110 miles) NW of Athens

Delphi is the big enchilada of Greek sites. Even more than Olympia, this place has everything: a long and glorious history, spectacular ancient remains, a superb museum, and a heartbreakingly beautiful location on the slopes of Mount Parnassus. Look up and you see the cliffs and crags of Parnassus; look down, and Greece's most beautiful plain of olive trees stretches as far as your eyes can see, toward the town of Itea on the Gulf of Corinth.

Delphi is especially magical in the spring, when there are both snow and wildflowers on Parnassus-- and relatively few tourists tramping around the site. But whenever you visit, you'll understand why the ancient Greeks believed that Delphi was the center of the world, the spot Apollo chose as the home of his most famous oracle.

As for the modern village of Delphi, the main drag is usually clogged with herds of tour groups migrating from hotel to restaurant to the generally indifferent souvenir shops; it's the side streets, clinging to the slopes of Parnassus, that give a sense of village life.

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Hotel Insights

Hotels

Delphi has no shortage of lodgings; you can usually find rooms even in July or August. When tourists are few, you may be able to improve on the rates below. Still, if you want to be sure that you get a room in a specific price category(or with a view or a pool), it's best to make a reservation in high season. With the growing popularity of skiing Parnassus, fewer and fewer of Delphi's hotels close for part of the winter, but summer is still high season here.

In addition to the following options, we've had good reports of **Apollo Hotel,** 59b Frederikis(tel. **22650/82-244;** fax 22860/82-455), and its sister hotel, **Villa Filoxenia-Apollo**(tel. **22650/83-114;** fax 22650/82-455); **Hermes Hotel,** 29 Vasileos Pavlou and Frederikis(tel. **22650/82-318;** fax 22650/82-639); **Pan Hotel,** 53 Vasileos Pavlou and Frederikis(tel. **22650/82-294**), and its annex, the **Artemis,** 53a Vasileos Pavlou and Frederikis(tel. **22650/82-793;** fax 22650/82-780). The little **Odysseus Pension,** 1 Isea(tel. 22650/82-235) has a garden and is a good budget choice(most rooms with shared bathroom).

Tip: If you want a main street room with a view, be sure to ask for a back room with a balcony that faces the Gulf of Corinth. You may not always see the water, but from your balcony you will almost always see the magnificent valley of olive trees that leads down to the Gulf-- and avoid the traffic noise of the main street.

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Restaurants Insights

Restaurants

The problem with most of the Delphi restaurants that cater to tourists(and that includes most of the restaurants in town!) is that the restaurateurs know that they probably will never see you again. This does not inspire good service or loving food preparation. A happy exception to this general rule is the excellent **Epikouros Restaurant**. If you like music, try the **Iniochos,** on the main drag, which serves goodmezedes(appetizers), and where a piano player sometimes turns up after 10pm and gets a singalong going with guests both local and foreign. One other suggestion: If you have a car, consider eating in Arachova, 10km(6 miles) east of Delphi, where the restaurants cater to a more local crowd-- or to the Athenians who come here to ski in winter and enjoy the mountain air in summer-- and who know their Greek food. Especially at night, the drive to and from Arachova, along a switchback mountain road, is best takensiga, siga(slowly, slowly), as the Greeks say.

A Special Moment-- If you are an early riser, sniff deeply, follow your nose, and take a sunrise tour of Delphi's bakeries as the first loaves are coming out of the ovens. Then, climb up to the Sikelanos Museum and enjoy some fresh bread and the view over the ancient site in the early morning light. Bliss.

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Things to Do Insights

Attractions

There's little in the modern village to tempt you away from the site, but stopping at the museum first can help you put flesh on the bones of the sanctuary's remains. After all, in antiquity Apollo's sanctuary was something of an unofficial outdoor museum, crammed with goodies from around the world. As at Olympia, begin your visit here as early as possible and hold onto your 9€($12) ticket; it's good for admission to both the museum and the site. **Tip:** Both site and museum can be relatively uncrowded an hour before closing time or during the midday lunch break.

The Festival of Delphi-- Each summer(usually in June), the European Cultural Center of Delphi sponsors a festival featuring ancient Greek drama and works inspired by ancient drama. Tickets and schedules are usually available at the center's Athens office at 9 Frynihou, Plaka(tel. **210/331-2781**), and at the center's Delphi office(tel. **22650/82-731** to-732), just out of town set back from the Itea road in a grove of trees.

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Travel Tips

Planning a Trip

Getting There

By Bus-- There are usually five buses daily to Delphi from the Athens bus station at 260 Liossion(tel. **210/831-7096** or 210/831-7179 in Athens, or 22650/82-317 in Delphi).

By Car-- Take the Athens-Corinth National Highway about 74km(46 miles) west of Athens to the Thebes turnoff. Continue west to Levadia. If you wish to stop at the monastery of Osios Loukas, take the

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Distomo turnoff and continue 9km(5 1/2 miles) to Osios Loukas(be prepared to meet tour buses thundering along this road). Return to Distomo and continue via Arachova 26km(16 miles) to Delphi. If you are approaching Delphi from the Peloponnese, the drive from the town of Itea to Delphi(65km/40 miles) takes a spectacular winding road that climbs higher and higher until it finally comes to Delphi.

By Organized Tour-- Athens-based companies such as **CHAT,** 4 Stadiou(tel. **210/322-3137;** www.chatours.gr) and **Key**(tel. **210/923-3166;** www.keytours.com) offer 1- and 2-day trips to Delphi. If possible, take the 2-day trip. Most tours leave Athens by 8am and arrive at Delphi by 3pm after a stop at Osios Loukas. On the second day, you leave Delphi around 3pm, arriving back in Athens about 7pm. The price(including transportation, site and museum admissions, guide, hotel, and most meals) is about 150€($195) for one person in a shared double room; sometimes, it is possible to get a single room at the same rate, but there is usually a 50€($65) supplement. An exceptionally well-traveled friend who was leery of the inevitable regimentation of a group tour had nothing but praise for her recent 2-day CHAT excursion.

Visitor Information

Most services, such as the post office, tourist office, and banks, are in the village of Delphi(pop. 2,500), on the obvious main street. The street is named after King Paul and Queen Frederika, although no one seems to use the name. The **tourist office**(tel. **22650/82-900**), in the town hall, is open Monday through Friday from 8am to 2:30pm, and sometimes reopens from 6 to 8pm in summer. If you are here in June or July, check here for information on the Delphi Festival of ancient Greek drama. Performances are held either in the ancient theater or at the European Cultural Center of Delphi. The museum and ancient site(signposted) are about 1km(1/2 mile) out of town, on the Arachova Road. If you want an English-speaking taxi driver for a tour of the area, inquire at the tourist office.

Getting Around

Parking spots are at a premium both in the village and at the site. If you can, park your car near your hotel and walk everywhere. If you have to drive to the site rather than walk the 5 to 10 minutes from town, be sure to set off early to get one of the few parking places. Whether you walk or drive, keep an eye out for the enormous tour buses that barrel down the center of the road. Traffic on the lower main street heads toward the site and Arachova; traffic on the upper main street heads out of Delphi toward Itea and the Gulf of Corinth.

The Delphi Tram-- Be sure to hop on the free new tram that leaves from the Hotel Vouzas and gives 30-minute rides around the village of Delphi nightly from about 8 to 11pm in the summer and on some off-season weekends.

Fast Facts

Everything you need, including the **post office, telephone office,** and several banks with **ATM**s, including the **National Bank of Greece,** is on the main street. The **police**(tel. **22650/82-222**) are in the town hall. For **first aid,** call tel. **22650/82-307.** In addition to normal weekday hours(Mon-Fri 8am-2pm), the post office and OTE are sometimes open Sunday from 9am to 1pm in summer.

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