



*The Greece Explorer Vacation:
Myths, History & Present
11 Nights*



Summary

This is the Greece of Socrates and Odysseus, the Greece of oracles and legends. It's the Greece of past wars and modern grandeur, the inspiration of the Western World, the endless wonder of antiquity. This is your chance to step into the enduring fame of the Greece you have only heard about, where you can discover the magnetic past, the alluring present, and the always-captivating future. See the ruins and the mountains, the games and the monasteries. Experience Greece. Experience splendor. Become an explorer.

Overview

Interest: group - family

Level of Comfort: 5/5

Minimum # of passengers: none

Maximum # of passengers: none

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Day 1: Athens

*Upon arrival at Athens's international airport, meet greet and transfer to the hotel
Rest of the day at leisure*

Day 2: Athens

Once inside the city the pillars of the Parthenon rise above the urban center on Acropolis Hill. The cobblestone streets of the Plaka, one of the oldest continuously used streets in Athens, are filled with vibrancy, from the luscious aroma of roasted lamb, to the ancient mansions that line the laneway. Your Grecian expedition has begun.

Day 3: Athens

Your exploration of Athenian history begins with a tour meant to take you from the ancient to the contemporary. The city virtually stands as an open-air museum; however, parts of the city's history can, should, and will be seen in the new Acropolis Museum. The entrance of the museum brings you to an elevated position above ruins of the ancient city. The air brings with it the familiar freshness of a museum mixed with the earthen history below. The foyer opens to an array of sculptures, each one a definitive study of a different person, from warrior to slave, prominent woman to politician, each face stoic, and each person distinct.

The uniqueness of ancient Athens is not just within the museum but, you have seen, also rises above the old city center onto Acropolis Hill. The famed pillars of the Parthenon were designed, with much success, to make the temple look as though it had a perfect construction from every angle. You stand within reach of the columns, the pristine white radiant in the afternoon sun. The feeling of standing within reach of such a historic image is exhilarating and almost paralyzing, knowing that this is one of the most famous temples in all of history, dedicated to the goddess Athena, overlooking one of the oldest continuous cities in the world, and you are in the middle of it all.

Day 4: Athens - Mycenae - Olympia

Today you will depart from Athens ready to explore classical Greece, where the history will unfold before you like an unmanned accordion. Venture into the stories of Homer and the acquaintanceships of Odysseus with a visit to Mycenae, the kingdom of the mythical Agamemnon. The ancient city sits between two narrow hills, atop the plateau that gave the control of the area's land and sea. The fortified walls encircle the ruins between the hills where now and again the remains of the castle or a home stand above the barriers. Lions Gate is a walkway surrounded by large bricks adorned by two grand monoliths capped with a corbelled arch. The lions pose against a pillar, an emblem of the kings. The hillsides are riddled with beehive tombs, including one said to be that of Agamemnon himself, where a gold plated mask was found during excavation. Within or outside of the encompassing fortifications of the ancient city, the treasures to be explored are splendid. Eventually you will make your way through the town of Nauplia where Byzantine castles run up the mountainside; through Epidaurus, where you will find the shrine of the ancient healer god Asclepius; and arrive in Olympia.

Day 5: Olympia – Delphi

The exploration of Greece isn't just within the ruins and the earth but also within your own imagination, the images that you have created throughout your life, from the stories you've heard and the myths you've loved, to the anticipated wonder of your holiday. One such understanding is that of Olympia where the legend holds that every four years even warring city-states would lay down their weapons and participate in the games. Your arrival at the ancient ruins of the city brings with it the grandeur of the ages and the blanket of awe and imagination.

Where the famed ancient temple of Zeus once stood now lays a large square with an impeccable pillar at its core. It is hard to imagine how large the temple could have been until you remember that the statue of Zeus was considered one of the Seven Ancient Wonders of the World. Although the remains of the temple are no longer intact, the central pillar rises almost 50 feet in the air. Over 100 lion heads were positioned around the roof to drain water. The running track remains intact where spectators didn't sit but stood, watching the rush of wind brush past each Olympian. The bricks that created the stadium wrap around the track and, in places, arch along over a 90 foot stretch of tunnel that once was called the "hidden entrance." There is a palpable allure to Olympia, its ruins, its history, and the connective wonder that keeps everyone interested in the games, both now and then. As the day starts to wind down you exit the ancient, inspiring city and arrive in Delphi.

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Day 6: Delphi

The oracle of Delphi lingers in your thoughts as much as the luscious honeyed crunch of baklava that you haven't been able to stop eating. The oracle, a priestess of Apollo, was famous for thousands of years for her consultation. The site stands along the mountaintop with a view of the surrounding summits glowing in the morning sun. The mixture of fresh grass and rugged rock lifts into the clean air. The ruins are interspersed throughout the slopes where you will find the Temple of Apollo. The foundation of the temple stretches up and across the hillside, while several columns remain at the edges of the base, above and around what is left of the stone. You can see the Tholos from almost any direction, a circular building with columns rising over 40 feet tall, and often is the pinnacle of people's exploration through the site. You can practically hear the oracle whisper to you on the back of the breeze. The opulent ruins shine bright; where once the grand temples stood, now magnificent ruins lie.

Day 7: Meteora - Kalambaka

The morning washes over the mountaintops and shines a light onto the precipices above the city. On the cliffs of the megaliths that rise over Kalambaka stand the collective monasteries of Meteora, reached through a collection of stone steps that twirl up the mountainside. It is hard and yet inspiring to imagine monks throughout the centuries carving the earth, quarrying stone, and creating such an epic collection of churches that overlook the wondrous nature below. The peaks of distant mountains pilfer the sky of its monopoly over the world.

The vast green gives way to snowcapped mountaintops. Within the garden of Saint Stephen's monastery the shrubberies give a crucifix form to the walkways but the color and circularity of the grounds give it the shape of a Celtic cross. It is impossible not to want to explore the greater reaches of each monastery. Each garden or piece of artwork that decorates the ceilings and walls is another masterpiece of innovation that spreads over the valley. When the sun starts to drift behind the precipices you return to Kalambaka.

Day 8: Dion - Thessaloniki

The day brings with it an amorous adventure to the Macedonian ruins of Dion, a once sacred town. The city sits on a narrow piece of land between the foothill of Mount Olympus and the Thermalhos Sea. Standing in the center of the ruins of Dion you can see the rising power of Mount Olympus in the background, curious as to whether the gods are still watching over Greece. The Sanctuary of Isis is located at the entrance of the ruins with decorative pillars standing tall along the flattened plain of the town. A relief of Isis holding a sheaf and scepter is carved into the marble, meant to protect young mothers. Visit the museum and surround yourself with the marvelous remains of the mystical city. Pottery and knives used in everyday life are displayed across the second floor while the first floor brings you to the marbled sculptures of sweeping beauty. The collective sculpted figures of Asklepios Daughters shows you how and where the pieces were connected, along with offering an awe-inspiring view of the detail placed into the waves of their garments, the curl of their hair, and the crux of their limbs. Eventually you will depart from Dion and arrive in the largest town in Northern Greece, Thessaloniki.

Day 9: Thessaloniki – Pella

Outside of Thessaloniki is the once grand capital of Alexander the Great's, Pella. The explorer in you is ready to jump inside the ruins and place yourself in battlements ready to fight with Alexander on his campaign through Asia. The flat lands surrounding the city make it seem as though the ruins could go on forever. Within the atrium of a home is pebble-mosaic that continues to decorate the floor in checkered diamonds, bordered in coiled waves. Ionic columns sporadically rise around the city. It is easy to be impressed, not just by the presence of these relics but how splendidly these curiosities have endured or been restored. The mosaic of a stag can be found at the House of the Abduction of Helen, depicting two men who find themselves above a stag, one man is believed to be Alexander the Great himself. Whether standing over the mosaic or strolling through the open space of the Agra, the wave of history rushes over you with ease, every second among the found city brings a breath of fresh air and marvel.

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**Day 10: Athens**

Your journey back to Athens begins with your travel through the Tempe Valley and brings you to the celebrated site of Thermopylae. The cries of Leonidas almost burst through you, excited to see the sensational battlegrounds of the Spartan feats. Although the river may have shifted after thousands of years, as rivers do, it is easy to see the narrow gap between the mountains, the foothills pressing against the sea. Where once the battle between the Spartans and Persians raged, there now stands a bronze monument to Leonidas and his brave 300 Spartans. Close by is a newer monument that honors the Thespians that fought alongside the Spartans. For many, the most exciting excursion is making the easy climb to the top of the mound where the Spartans and Thespians fought and were buried. There is a memorial atop the knoll well known for its inscription, "Go tell the Spartans passerby, that here obedient to their laws we lie." Whether ruins of temples or battlegrounds, the annals of history are always captivating. Soon Thermopylae becomes a memory as Athens welcomes your return.

Day 11: Athens

Your final day in Greece is at your desire, ready to be spent within the café's of Athens sipping on the sweet, rich flavor of Grecian coffee or wandering the diverse neighborhoods of the city. The National Gardens is a public park in central Athens where you can stroll through lush greenery at your leisure and relax in the serenity hidden within the city's bustle. Palm trees spire into the sky blocking the outside world, including the adjacent Parliament building. The vibrant plumage of peacocks promenades along the walkways. You can hear the gentle trickle of a fountain in the distance near the duck pond. A small footbridge arches over the calm waters. You can still sit within the blossoming carnations of the garden within the park's café and sip your coffee if you prefer, exploring every inch of the garden in the adventurous style you have come to love.

Day 12: Athens

Transfer to the airport for your departure flight

This is a product sheet elaborated in order to give you a quick overview of package suggestions our destination specialists can propose. Make an appointment to order to customize it as per your needs and get a detailed quotation.

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