

Jewels of Greece and Aegean Islands

8 Days | Starts/Ends: Athens



SEMI INDEPENDENT TOUR:

Combine classic Greek history with sun-kissed islands on this 8-day group tour which takes in the key sites of the mainland and includes a 3-night island hopping cruise. Discover the legendary Acropolis in Athens, marvel at the cliff-top monasteries of Meteora and relax on the beaches of Mykonos. Cross into Turkey to see the ruins of Ephesus and wander the streets of white-washed Oia and Fira on Santorini.

HIGHLIGHTS AND INCLUSIONS

Trip Highlights

- Athens - discover some of the world's most famous architecture, from the Panathenaic Stadium to the legendary Acropolis
- Meteora - marvel at the magical and sacred cliff-top monasteries in one of the most beautiful regions of Greece
- Santorini - wander the streets of the pretty whitewashed towns of Oia and Fira or relax on the volcanic black sand lava beaches
- Kusadasi - hop into Turkey for an excursion to the incredible ruins of

Ephesus and marvel at the Library of Celsus

- Delphi - follow in the footsteps of ancient pilgrims along the Sacred Way and admire the Temple of Apollo
- Mykonos - relax on the Greek island's famous beaches and enjoy a glass of wine in one of the town's many bars
- Crete - enjoy an included excursion to the Minoan Palace of Knossos which was the home of the Minotaur in Greek mythology
- Thermopylae - visit the site where King Leonidas made his infamous final stand against the Persians in 480BC

What's Included

- 7 breakfasts, 3 lunches and 4 dinners
- 4 nights 4 star hotels
- 3 nights Greek island cruise aboard a Celestyal Olympia Cruise ship - inside cabin with all meals, daily drinks package (alcoholic and non-alcoholic), port taxes and service charges, tips onboard
- One Airport arrival on Day 1 and one departure transfer on day 8 per booking
- Guided sightseeing in Athens, Delphi and Meteora & included excursion to Ephesus and the Minoan Palace of Knossos
- Services of an English-speaking tour guide for all scheduled sightseeing from days 1 - 4 and services of local guides for included sightseeing
- Entrance fees for all included sites

- All transfers and transportation in modern air conditioned vehicles
- Note: Touring is operated in conjunction with other tourist groups, not solely On The Go. You will join travellers who booked through other operators for sightseeing each day, some staying in different hotels, and spend your evenings at leisure. The group can vary in size from 20 - 45 persons. Guiding may be in an additional language to English.

What's Not Included

- International flights and visas
- Tipping - an entirely personal gesture (tipping is included on the cruise from days 5 - 8)
- A hotel tax of €3.00 per room per night to be paid directly to the hotel at time of check in. Please budget Euro 12, for days 1 - 4. The hotel tax is not applicable on the cruise. See Trip Notes for details.

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1 : Welcome to Athens!

Welcome to Greece! On arrival in Athens, you will be met and transferred to our hotel. The rest of the day is free to head out and explore the city, an incredible contrast of the ancient and the modern. **Overnight - Athens**

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Day 2 : Athens sightseeing



Today we embark on a guided coach tour of Athens. We take in important highlights of the city including the Temple of Olympian Zeus, the Zappeion and the Panathenaic Stadium, which is the only stadium in the world built entirely from marble. We also see the Greek Parliament and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Later we head to Athens' most iconic attraction - the legendary Acropolis. The Acropolis is an ancient citadel built atop a rock overlooking the city. As well as the amazing view, we take in the highlights of the site, including the Temple of Athena Nike, the Propylae and the most famous of all ancient Greek architecture, the Parthenon. We visit the excellent Acropolis Museum and the afternoon is at leisure to wander the streets of the picturesque Plaka district. **Overnight - Athens (B)**

Day 3 : The Delphi Sanctuary



Athens - Delphi - Kalambaka. Leaving Athens, we head north towards Delphi, which was once one of the world's most sacred sites and an important pilgrimage destination. We admire the UNESCO-listed Sanctuary of Apollo and follow the footsteps of ancient Greeks on the Sacred Way. Admire the remains of the Temple of Apollo, home of

the legendary Pythian Oracle. After our visit, we cross the mountains of Central Greece to Kalambaka. **Overnight - Kalambaka (B, D)**

Day 4 : Meteora & Thermopylae



Kalambaka - Meteora - Athens. Today we visit Meteora, where tiny sacred monasteries perch atop incredible towering rock formations. Meteora is considered one of the most beautiful regions in the whole of Greece and the view from the cliffs is breathtaking.

After our visit to Meteora, we begin to make our way back to Athens. We stop at Thermopylae, where King Leonidas and 300 Spartans made a famous last stand against the Persians in 480 BC. A statue now stands here in the Spartan king's honour. After a quick photo opportunity, we continue to Athens, where the evening is at leisure. **Overnight - Athens (B)**

Day 5 : Cruising to Mykonos



Athens - Mykonos. Enjoy a final breakfast in Athens before we transport you to Piraeus Port where you board your boat for a four day Greek island cruise. Your tour is independent from here. Settle in onboard before you depart for Mykonos, the island famous for its pristine white sand beaches and

busy nightlife. There's free time to explore Mykonos town and relax with a glass of wine in one of the islands many bars. **Overnight - Mykonos (onboard) (B, L, D)**

Day 6 : Ephesus & Patmos



Mykonos - Kusadasi (Turkey) - Patmos. Today we have a trip into Turkey as we dock at Kusadasi and visit the legendary marble ruins of Ephesus on an included excursion. Highlights of these famous ruins include the Temple of Serapis and the colossal Library of Celsus.

After our visit, the ship sets sail for the small Greek island of Patmos. Here you can join an optional visit to the famous monastery of St John and the Grotto of the Apocalypse. This site is believed to be where John of Patmos had the visions that he recorded in the Book of Revelation. **Overnight - Patmos (onboard) (B, L, D)**

Day 7 : Crete & Santorini



Patmos - Crete - Santorini. Early this morning we dock at Heraklion, Crete. Enjoy an included visit to the Minoan Palace of Knossos. Legend has it this is where King Minos dwelt, and kept his son, the Minotaur, hidden in a labyrinth beneath the city.

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We sail to the enchanting island of Santorini this afternoon. Santorini is considered one of the prettiest islands in the world, with black sand lava beaches and pretty whitewashed towns. There's free time to explore the island and you may opt to ride the cable car up to Fira town or join an optional excursion to Oia village, perched on the rim of a volcanic caldera. **Overnight - Santorini (onboard)** (B, L, D)

Day 8 : Athens

Santorini - Athens. Today we cruise back to Athens. Enjoy breakfast onboard before disembarkation and an included transfer to the airport. (B)

HOTELS

Highlighted below are some of the hotels which we frequently use on this tour, though we reserve the right to substitute these hotels to ones of a similar standard.

Please refer to your Tour Voucher for your confirmed arrival hotel and further arrival information.

Polis Grand

In the heart of Athens, the Polis Grand is a contemporary hotel with excellent facilities. Guest rooms are well appointed with elegant furniture and all modern conveniences. Some rooms are equipped with a balcony with fantastic views over to the Acropolis. The hotel benefits from a number of eateries which serve up an array of Greek and international cuisine as well as tasty coffee and delicious pies. Definitely head for a cocktail in the evening at the roof garden bar for amazing views across the city.



Titania Hotel

Nestled in the historic centre of Athens, the Titania offers beautiful accommodation all classically designed. The ensuite guest rooms are furnished to a high standard with

neutral tones and wooden flooring. Breakfast is served in the impressive rooftop Olive Garden restaurant which affords amazing views across the city including the Acropolis. The hotel also benefits from complimentary Wi-Fi and a fitness centre.



Hotel Amalia

Hotel Amalia is embedded on 14 acres of beautiful greenery. Built from traditional materials to match its surrounds, the hotel features extensive gardens, a large swimming pool and distant views of the Meteora Rocks. Guestrooms are spacious and fully equipped with the latest facilities. In the dining area, a rich American buffet breakfast is served with both local and international cuisine available for lunch and dinner. Relax by the fireplace in the hotel's cosy lounge bar and listen to piano music as you sip a cocktail.



Hotel Divani Meteora

Offering the chance to enjoy traditional Greek hospitality within a contemporary setting is the Hotel Divani Meteora. Surrounded by natural beauty, the hotel is set in front of the World Heritage-listed Meteora sandstone monasteries. The fully renovated hotel has a welcoming decor, with warm shades and a luxury wooden floor. A tranquil restaurant offers delicious Mediterranean cuisine and there is an outdoor and indoor pool. You can also unwind after a day of exploring in the sauna steam bath or bubbling Jacuzzi.



Our Partners

This tour is operated in conjunction with our trusted partner and you will join travellers who booked through different operators, not solely On The Go.

Style of Tour

This is an semi independent tour, which combines escorting touring in mainland Greece, with a 4 day Greek Island Cruise.

The tour of mainland Greece is modular, meaning that more people may join the group midway through the tour and the people you are with on your Athens city tour will not be the same people that you will travel with to Delphi and Meteora. This also means that the group size can vary during your tour from 15 to 45 people. You will enjoy guided sightseeing during the daytime and spend your evenings at leisure, staying in 4 star (First Class) hotels. There will some people on your tour who booked through different operators and will be staying in a lower standard of (Tourist Class) hotels. Please note that dependent upon the group demographic, the guiding sightseeing may be in French as well as English.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Greece Country Guide

Greece Visas

UK, AUS, NZ, USA and CAN passport holders do not require a visa at present to enter Greece for touristic purposes, for a stay of up to 90 days in any 180-day period.

For passport holders of other nationalities not included here, please check the <http://www.projectvisa.com/visainformation/Greece> website for more information.

South African Residents

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Greece is part of the borderless region known as the Schengen Area and South African passport holders require a Schengen visa in order to enter Greece. A passport valid for at least three months from your departure is required and a visa will only be issued if blank pages are available.

Requirements for the procurement of a visa are subject to change but application requirements include round-trip travel itinerary specifying entry and exit dates from the Schengen state and proof of funds to support yourself during your stay, ask your bank for this, it should include your name too. R600 per person per day is required with a minimum of R3600

You'll need to contact the consulate general in Johannesburg directly for inquiries and questions regarding visa regulations and passport requirement at <http://www.mfa.gr/johannesburg>.

Greece Hotel Tax

From January 2018, a new "overnight stay" tax has been imposed by the Greek government. This tax amounts to €1.50 per room per night for 3 star hotels, €3.00 per room per night for 4 star hotels and €4.00 per room per night for 5 star. This tax cannot be included in our tour price and you will need to pay this upon check in at each hotel so please budget accordingly.

Airport Transfers

An arrival transfer is included on day 1 and a departure transfer on the final day of your tour. Please note that only one complimentary transfer is offered per booking so if you are on different flights to your travelling companions a supplement will apply.

Climate

Summer in Greece

The climate in Greece is typical of the Mediterranean climate with two seasons - a warm and dry summer, and a mild and wet winter. Summer is a long season with temperatures climbing to a pleasant degree as early as late February. March and even April can be somewhat unpredictable months with the occasional rain shower and windy conditions though at this time of year the

landscapes are decorated with beautiful wild flowers.

The shoulder months between May and June still offer lovely weather conditions but without the crowds. It's warm on the islands and the waters are nice enough for a swim. Peak tourist season doesn't start until mid-June and lasts until early September. During this time the islands are buzzing with people, both travellers and locals alike. If you're visiting during this time it's best to book hotels, flights and local ferries as far as in advance as possible to avoid disappointment and secure better prices.

Between September and mid-October the soft light and delicate colours are particularly suited to photography. The sea water retains the heat of the mid-summer months so swimming is definitely still on the cards.

Winter in Greece

By late-October many parts of Greece begin to experience stormy conditions with more frequent cloud cover and rain showers. The tourist season comes to an end and prices drop off considerably. Few international travellers visit the Greek islands between November and February so crowds are thin.

Time & Voltage

Greece lies in the Eastern European Time Zone, which is 2 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT +2).

During summer, daylight-saving is observed in Greece, where the time is shifted forward by 1 hour so it becomes 3 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT +3). After summer the time in Greece is shifted back by 1 hour to Eastern European Time. In 2017, daylight savings takes place between 26th March and 29th October.

Standard voltage is 220-240 volts. Primary sockets generally require European plugs of the two round-pin variety. We recommend that you pack a universal travel adaptor. You will need a voltage converter and plug adaptor in order to use U.S. appliances.

Health Requirements

You should seek medical advice from your local health practitioner before travelling to Greece and ensure that you receive all of the appropriate vaccinations. Just make sure you're up to date for recommended vaccinations for your home country, including measles, mumps and polio. Other vaccines to consider are Tetanus and Tick-borne Encephalitis. Visit the NHS Fit to Travel page or the CDC Traveler's Health Page for more information.

Currency & Holiday Money

The official currency in Greece is the Euro. Check OANDA for latest exchange rates.

British Pounds, US Dollars and other major currencies can be easily exchanged locally in banks or bureau de change prior to departure. Credit cards such as Visa and Mastercard are widely accepted in most major hotels, restaurants and shops, but keep some cash on hand, especially on the islands and in smaller towns. Use of American Express is not as common.

Traveller's Cheques are not recommended as they're often difficult to exchange and incur high fees

Although Greece has become a hugely popular tourist destination in recent years, it remains relatively affordable. We recommend if you are on a budget that you avoid the often overpriced restaurants and cafes that line the main squares and chose places to eat a few streets back. A meal in an inexpensive restaurant with drinks will cost around USD \$12, and a pint of domestic beer costs about USD \$4.10, while a one way ticket on public transport will only set you back about USD \$1.65.

Shopping

Greece is a cultural haven, and you will find a wide range of arts and crafts wherever you go. Locally hand-crafted ceramics, textiles, wood carvings, and jewellery make for wonderful souvenirs, especially from the Greek islands. Many destinations pride themselves on specific products – for instance, the monasteries at Meteora are famed for hand-painted religious icons. If you

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are shopping for antiques, do beware of fakes and stick to reputable traders.

In Athens, the ancient tradition of the agora (public forum) continues today in spaces such as the Monastiraki market, where you will find souvenirs for all tastes, ranging from tailor-made leather sandals to mass-produced Parthenon replicas. Another popular shopping option nearby is Ermou Street, which offers a wide selection of local and international brands. The island of Thessaloniki also caters to shoppers with its boutique-filled main square and a variety of malls near the city centre.

If you are looking to bring a taste of Greece home with you, olive oil from the Peloponnese, honey from Attica, and wines from Santorini are excellent products to look out for.

Is bargaining acceptable in Greece?

Bargaining is generally not accepted in Greece - in most shops there will be a fixed price for goods on sale. In the flea markets and with street vendors, a bit of bargaining may be more appropriate.

Greek Cuisine

Greek food has a venerable history dating back to antiquity. Although the country's rocky terrain limits its agricultural output, cooking and cuisine are essential to its culture. Olives, cheese, and wheat are integral parts of the local diet, appearing in salads, stews, and breads. Seafood at restaurants – often squid, octopus, mussels, and fish - is likely to come fresh from the Mediterranean, especially on the Greek islands.

Greek cuisine is simple but incredibly varied. In terms of popular dishes, you will find moussaka (aubergine & lamb casserole), souvlaki (spit-roasted meat), and dolmades (vine leaves stuffed with meat & herbs) in many tavernas and restaurants, sometimes with regional variations. Meat-free options include briam (roasted vegetables in tomato sauce), and of course, Greek salad with olives & feta cheese. For indulging your sweet tooth, pastry shops serve delicacies such as Turkish-inspired baklava (filo pastry layered with honey and chopped nuts). Ice cream and

honey with yogurt are also common sweet snacks.

Drinks are a major part of the traditional dining experience. Ouzo, an anise-flavoured spirit distilled from pressed grapes, is Greece's most popular alcohol, usually served as an aperitif with iced water and some small appetizers. Be careful not to drain your glass too quickly – it is a strong drink, meant to be enjoyed over a period of time.

Drinking Water

In the major cities, it's generally safe to drink water from taps and also from drinking fountains. However, it is strongly recommended to stick to bottled water on most islands and in rural areas.

Tipping

Tipping customs in Greece vary widely. Service charge may be included in the bill, but tipping remains a common practice, especially in popular tourist destinations. Your tip should reflect the service so if it was excellent, 10% is an added bonus. At some restaurants, a small mandatory 'cover charge' for bread & water is also included in the bill (usually about one Euro per person). Taxi drivers usually expect tips and it is also standard to tip hotel porters and local tour guides. If the concierge is particularly helpful, people often tip 1 to 2 Euros.

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