

TOUR CODE

OAGR



THE GREEK ISLES

A non-cruising cruise through the Cyclades

13 days

Updated 10/30/2009

Day 1 *Arrival in Athens*

Today we arrive in Athens, off-and-on the capital of Greece in its many incarnations over several thousand years. The city received a major facelift for the 2004 Olympics and is looking better than ever, with buildings and monuments cleaned and renovated, and newly created pedestrian areas near the Ancient Agora and Acropolis.

Overnight in Athens. Hotel Hera, 4* (preferred). Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Athens: City Tour*

Today we enjoy a guided tour of Athens, the very heart and soul of Greece. Athens has been very nicely pedestrianized in recent years, and most sites of interest are easily and pleasantly accessed by foot or subway.

Our guided tour begins at the new Acropolis Museum, located at the foot of the Acropolis. The museum was built to house every artifact found on the rock and on its feet, from the Greek Bronze Age to Roman and Byzantine Greece. Nearly 4,000 objects are exhibited over an area of 14,000 square metres.

From here we will enter Plaka, the old town of Athens. Standing on a small square is the Lysicrates Monument, a cyclical tower from the 4th century BC. 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 BC, it is one of the world's oldest theatres and the place where the great works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes were first performed. We will also see a more recent theatre, the Odeon of Herod Atticus from the second century AD, which is still used for concerts and performances.

The Acropolis itself is adorned with magnificent buildings dating from the 5th century BC, the Golden Age of Athens. On the highest point on the Acropolis is the Parthenon, often considered the finest monument to Greek civilization. The temple was dedicated to Athena "Parthenos," the virgin and patron goddess of the city.

We'll descend the Acropolis and enter the Ancient Agora located adjacent to the Plaka. Among the numerous sights in this archaeological park are the well-preserved Temple of Hephaistos and the landmark Roman era Tower of the Winds. From here you are free to wander and explore on your own, or make your way back to the hotel with your Tour Leader's assistance.

Overnight in Athens. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Athens - Santorini*

Today we fly to the island of Santorini, also known as Thira.

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Vast geological upheavals have given this island its unique form resulting in the nickname, "Pre-Historic Pompeii." The effect of terracing makes this unlike any other island, Greece's most visually stunning. Santorini is also the island of churches, wine, and donkeys! From as early as 3000 BC the island developed as an outpost of Minoan civilization until around 1500 BC when the volcano erupted. At this point the island's history became linked with the legend of Atlantis.

This afternoon we can hike from Kamari Beach to the site of Ancient Thira, located 400m / 1,320 ft above the beach on the southeast coast of the island. Here we find the ruins of an 11th century BC Dorian settlement excavated by a German expedition in the 1860s. We can see remains from the Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine periods. The ruins are limited, but you can see evidence of temples, houses with mosaic floors, an agora, gymnasium, and a theatre with stunning and sheer views to the sea. We can also enjoy one of Santorini's finest black sand beaches.

DAY SUMMARY: 1.5 hours round trip, paved surface (switchback road).

Overnight on Santorini (Fira). Santorini Palace Hotel, 4* (or similar). Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Santorini: Island Tour*

Visually, Santorini is the most spectacular of the Cycladic islands. With its brilliant flooded caldera, high cliffs and charming villages, it is the Greek Isle of everyone's dreams. Our coach tour today will take us to Santorini's highlights.

Fira is the capital of the island and the most important village. Early in the 19th century the capital of the island was moved from Pyrgos to Fira. After the earthquake of 1956 a part of the town was destroyed (only a small part of the 18th century buildings were saved). Fira is perched on the edge of an impressive cliff 260m high and offers a great panorama over the submerged volcano. Here the small streets are filled with all kind of shops, cafes, and restaurants. After an orientation walk through the town we will visit the impressive Archaeological Museum. This museum features many pieces and exhibits specific to the Santorini site of Akrotiri (closed for refurbishment), as well as artifacts dating back to the time of the Cycladic Civilization, which can be divided into three periods: Early (3000-2000 BC), Middle (2000-1500 BC), and Late (1500-1100 BC). The most impressive legacies of this civilization are the statuettes carved from Parian marble -- the famous Cycladic figurines. Like statuettes of Neolithic times they depicted images of the Great Mother. Other remains include bronze and obsidian tools and weapons, gold jewelry, and stone and clay vases and pots.

We will also visit the hilltop village of Pyrgos, once the capital of the island and home to more than 30 churches. The village is composed of traditional houses built around the Venetian Castle and the small streets follow the shape of the hill. Climbing from the square up to the castle of Pyrgos, the stone houses crowd more densely together within the labyrinth of narrow vaulted lanes.

Our drive around the island will also take us up to the Prophet Elias Monastery built on the highest point of the island in 1711 AD. Though we will not visit inside the monastery, the view from here is breathtaking.

Oia, our last destination, is built along the rim of the caldera wall. We will walk through the village, admire the magnificent panoramic views, and perhaps enjoy lunch or a snack at one of the many local cafes.

Overnight on Santorini (Fira). Santorini Palace Hotel (or similar). Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Santorini: Free Day*

Today is a well-deserved day at leisure in a truly spectacular place. You might explore some of the excellent shopping and / or visit the museum if not accomplished earlier. A popular thing to do is to walk down to the old port and then

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return to the rim via donkey or cable car (optional expense). Full or half-day volcano boat tours are also a popular option. Your Tour Leader can help you plan your day.

Overnight on Santorini (Fira). Santorini Palace Hotel (or similar). Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Santorini - Amorgos*

Today we travel by ferry to the isle of Amorgos. The ferry likely stops at several lesser islands along the way and drops us at either Katapola, the main port of Amorgos, or Aegiali, the island's secondary port. If we must disembark at Katapola, we will travel by road to Aegiali where our hotel is located. We will likely arrive in time for dinner.

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

Overnight on Amorgos. Hotel Aegialis, 4*. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Amorgos: Chora & Chozoviotissa Monastery*

This morning we travel by road to Chora, the capital of the island. We will pause here to stroll about the village, set high above the sea protected from pirates of bygone days. We leave the village and follow a magnificent staircase going down to the Monastery of Chozoviotissa. The dazzling white building, founded in the year AD 1099, clings precariously to a cliff face. We will enter the monastery and climb into its snug interior. Hopefully the docent will be available to show us around and provide access to the tiny but fascinating museum.

We proceed to the other port on the island, Katapola. Here you can stroll the small promenade and have lunch before we head back to our hotel.

Overnight on Amorgos. Hotel Aegialis. Meal plan: Breakfast.

Day 8 *Amorgos: At Leisure*

Today is free on Amorgos.

You may join your Tour Leader on a moderate hike through the olive groves up to the picturesque village of Langada, where you can lunch under the forever blooming bouganvillia. It is also possible to continue your walk to the village of Tholaria. Amorgos also has some lovely beaches, while our hotel has a fantastic pool with expansive views.

Overnight on Amorgos. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Amorgos - Mykonos*

This morning we travel by ferry the short distance to the island of Mykonos and transfer to our hotel located a short drive away from town at Platy Yialos beach, where we can enjoy the peace and quiet away from town but still be close enough to conveniently access Chora using the frequent local buses.

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Later this afternoon we venture into town for a walking orientation tour before dinner in town. We wander the pirate-proof streets of town and see the Paraportiani Church near the quay, an architectural masterpiece of five chapels in one. From the harbour waterfront, you can watch the local fishing boats, or venture into the labyrinth of dazzling, white-washed streets to the many churches, tavernas, or shops selling artisan crafts, jewelry and the latest fashions. In the distance stand a string of windmills that once harnessed the breezes of days gone by. As one of the most cosmopolitan Greek islands, Mykonos is legendary for its shopping and nightlife.

After our walk we will have dinner at one of the many restaurants in town before sampling some of the gay nightlife. Bus or taxi back to our hotel on your own.

Overnight on Mykonos. Hotel Petinos (or similar). Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Mykonos: Free Day*

There are many beaches on Mykonos and today we can enjoy them to their fullest. You can also head back into town for more independent exploration and / or shopping. Your Tour Leader can help you plan your day.

Overnight on Mykonos. Meal plan: Breakfast.

Day 11 *Mykonos: Boat trip to Delos*

This morning we meet the boat that will take us to the tiny sacred island of Delos (30 minutes away). Delos gives the whole group of islands surrounding it their name, the Cyclades -- so named because they form a circle (kyklos) around Delos. We will see the Agora of the Competialists, Roman merchants or freed slaves who worshipped the guardian spirits of crossroads; the Sanctuary of Apollo, the three temples of Apollo and the Sanctuary of Dionysus. In the House of the Masks we are able to see a mosaic portraying Dionysus riding on a panthers back. The theatre here could seat 5,500 people. From the top of Delos Mountain we have a spectacular view of the entire island.

We return to Mykonos with the balance of the day at leisure (you may return to Mykonos at your leisure spending as much time as you like on Delos).

Overnight on Mykonos. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Mykonos - Athens*

Today we take the fast ferry back to Athens.

Time-permitting in Athens, we recommend a visit to the Museum of Cycladic Art, devoted to the study and promotion of ancient Greek art. The main exhibit, the Cycladic Collection, contains 350 objects representative of every phase or type of artifact that Cycladic islanders have left us, be that marble sculpture, pottery, or metal ware.

* IF you would like to extend your time on Mykonos, please advise as EARLY as possible so that accommodation (if required) can be booked accordingly.

Overnight in Athens. Hotel Hera, 4* (preferred). Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

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Day 13 ***Departure***

Departure from Athens.

KALO TAXIDI!! Meal plan: Breakfast.

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