Greece: Athens, Delphi & Meteora

Air Package Itinerary

Standing trailside above Delphi's Temple of Apollo, with the sweep of Mount Parnassus as a backdrop, there's no better stage for appreciating the ancient Greeks' dramatic flair. Fortunately, your guides are experts at weaving history, myth, and tradition into a captivating mosaic that brings these places to life. You've experienced this while surveying the Peloponnese Peninsula from Acrocorinth's fortress gates and riding the rails through the magnificent Vouraikos gorge. Soon you'll be strolling through green forest and massive sandstone pillars to the dizzyingly perched medieval monasteries of Meteora. Greece isn't just antiquities, however—you've savored its vibrant culture during a visit with a local chef at his restaurant in Kalavrita and a private wine tasting in Polydrosos. *Yiamas*



Highlights

- Hike among the medieval monasteries of Meteora, the astonishing UNESCO World Heritage site of sacred sanctuaries perched on towering sandstone pillars.
- Explore the archaeological site of Delphi, taking in its ancient ruins and magnificent mountain setting.
- Enjoy a refreshing Mythos beer in Galaxidi, once a thriving maritime community, then stroll cobbled streets past pretty 19th-century sea captains' stone houses.
- Follow footpaths in and around Acrocorinth, one of the finest surviving fortifications in Greece, and gaze upon panoramas of the Isthmus of Corinth.
- Take a historic cog railway journey through the Vouraikos Gorge—into the deep-cut canyon past

roaring waterfalls and through tunnels burrowed into mountainsides, with spectacular views of dramatic landscapes all around.



Activity Level

This tour is one of our Guided Walking Adventures, rated easy to moderate (with challenging sections), and an average of 3 to 5 miles per day, with limited options. There are some ascents and descents, with maximum elevation gains (and losses) of 600-1,600 feet. Some of the slopes are short and steep (5-15

minutes), while others are sustained (30-90 minutes). The terrain includes cobblestone and paved streets, gravel roads, packed dirt trails and hiking trails, with stretches of rocks and loose gravel. The days on this tour are quite full to allow for the inclusion of diverse regions of cultural and historical importance.

FLIGHT DAY

Depart from the United States or Canada

Your vacation is about to begin! Spend your first night aloft and arrive ready for an unforgettable trip.

ARRIVAL DAY

Arrive in Athens, Greece

Start off your first day in Athens right by having a Country Walkers representative greet you at the airport. A complimentary car service will whisk you to your centrally located hotel. From here, you are perfectly positioned to explore this charming city at your leisure.

DAY 1

Join your Greece: Athens, Delphi & Meteora tour. Corinth Canal and Acrocorinth. Travel to Kalavrita

1-2 miles, easy to moderate

After enjoying an included breakfast at your hotel meet your guides at 8:00 a.m. in the lobby of your Athens hotel. They'll be wearing Country Walkers shirts.

Your destination this morning is the Acropolis of Corinth, but first you stop after about an hour to admire the Corinth Canal, linking the Gulf of Corinth to the Aegean Sea. This engineering marvel was completed in 1893, though it was first proposed by the mighty ruler Periander in the 7th century BCE. As you gaze down into its deep canyon, consider that a swim race is held each year here across its entire length. There

is no tide, but the alternating currents pose quite a challenge to the swimmers!

After, continue onto the legendary Peloponnese Peninsula and the nearby Acropolis of Corinth, also known as Acrocorinth, or “Upper Corinth.” By some accounts, this 7th-century BCE fort built upon a spectacular hulking monolithic hill is the most impressive fortress-like structure on mainland Greece. It served as the last line of defense for invaders approaching over the Peloponnese Peninsula during ancient and medieval times. Your walk highlights the low-shrub terrain; a rich medley of Roman, Byzantine, Frankish, Venetian, and Ottoman ramparts; the preserved remains of Byzantine chapels, Ottoman houses and mosques; remarkably preserved walled gates; and stunning seaside mountains. If you wish, you can climb to the castle or fortress ruins crowning the summit. Then follow the packed-dirt pathway, taking in sweeping coastal views and stopping to visit the Church of St. Dimitrios.

Later, drive to Sykia Beach on the northern coastal border of the Peloponnese. Here, a casual lunch of typical Greek specialties: savory classic dips like *tzatziki* (yogurt, cucumber, and garlic), *melitzanosalata* (eggplant) and grilled fish refuels you for the afternoon. (You may wish to have your bathing suit and quick dry towel in your backpack so that you can enjoy a pre-lunch swim.) Then you continue to Kalavrita, a charming, off-the-beaten-path alpine town nestled among fir-covered slopes. Famously, its historic rack-and-pinion railway cuts through a vertiginous gorge. You will experience this journey during your stay here. For now, you settle in to your hotel and gather later for an orientation meeting and welcome dinner at the restaurant of a local chef. You may even assist in the preparation of the meal by picking mushrooms or gathering local herbs before sitting down for a dinner of delicious local fare, accompanied by a fine regional wine.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 2

Chelmos-Vouraikos National Park. Cave of the Lakes and Planitero. Independent exploration of Kalavrita

5 miles, easy to moderate, 1,000-ft. elevation loss

After a leisurely breakfast, drive about 30 minutes to the nearby Cave of the Lakes, an impressive subterranean system of lakes and unusual rock formations. Enjoy a guided visit, walking through the galleries and chambers along a boardwalk, admiring curiously shaped stalactites and stalagmites

shimmering in a surreal light, some resembling ribbon-like curtains. The 13 stepped “lakes” you pass, each a stone basin created by mineral deposits, formed over the bed of an underground river. Remarkably, fossils reveal that the hippopotamus once passed through, and humans are believed to have inhabited the caves as early as 6000 BCE.

Directly from the Cave of the Lakes, your route takes you on foot along the E4, the European long-distance walking path that begins in Spain and culminates in Greece. You follow a rocky trail that descends steadily through a unique landscape of pine, pear, walnut, and plane trees as the waters rushing toward the Aroanios River provide a soft and gentle soundtrack. Arrive in Planitero around midday, strolling past the area’s springs, and settle in at a family-run restaurant for lunch, sampling specialties like onion pie with mizithra cheese, *saganaki planiteros* (a mix of cheese, peppers, tomatoes, parsley, and potatoes), and local trout for which the region is known. After a satisfying meal, return to Kalavrita and enjoy an independent afternoon and evening. Relax at your hotel or explore the town, perhaps shopping for delicious locally made souvenirs like preserves, honey, olive oil, and teas or popping into the Folklore and historical museum. Enjoy dinner at one of the many casual restaurants that dot the main street offering traditional fare.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 3

Kato Zachlorou and travel to Arachova via Nafpaktos and Galaxidi

3 miles, easy to moderate

Rise this morning for an early breakfast. Then travel by minibus to the trailhead for an easy morning walk through beautiful alpine scenery to the train station at Kato Zachlorou to catch the first departure of the unique cog rail that cuts through the stunning Vouraikos Gorge. Your magnificent journey descends through the deep-cut canyon past roaring waterfalls and through tunnels burrowed into mountainsides, with spectacular views of dramatic landscapes all around. Your destination is the seaside town of Diakopto, where you meet your shuttle and driver. Bidding the Peloponnese Peninsula farewell, you continue north to Galaxidi (stopping en route for an independent lunch, and perhaps a swim, in charming Nafpaktos), crossing over the Gulf of Corinth on the beautiful Rion-Antiron Bridge. Stretching 9,450 feet (about a mile and a half), it is one of the world’s longest multi-span cable-stayed bridges. You arrive in the seaside fishing village of Galaxidi, once home to brave mariners, in time to for a late afternoon stroll.

This cozy village of red-roofed houses and narrow, cobbled streets boasts plentiful cafés along a lovely waterfront. Choose one for a refreshing drink or ice cream on your own. Then take a little time to walk the century-old pine woods that were planted by schoolchildren along the harbor or meander the inviting neighborhoods dotted with captains' mansions, legacies to the time when this was a prosperous maritime port.

Later, continue the drive for about another 30 minutes to Arachova. Dubbed the "Mykonos of the Mountains," this posh alpine resort's name is actually of South Slavic origin and denotes a place graced with walnut trees. Situated at almost 3,200 feet, it is popular among wintertime skiers for its location on the steep slopes of Mount Parnassus, which was named for a son of Poseidon who could tell the future by observing the direction that birds flew. Settle in to your comfortable room, and gather together later for another memorable meal in town.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 4

Mount Parnassus. Ancient pilgrimage route of Delphi

5 miles, moderate, 1,610-ft. elevation loss

Rise to the sound of birdsong and stunning views over the valley and a "sea of olive trees" stretching toward the Gulf of Corinth. Indulge in a copious buffet of local specialties to fuel up for your morning walk: cured meats, local cheese, yogurt, piping hot coffee, fresh fruit, eggs, bread, along with sweet cakes and pastries. Towering over Arachova is the imposing Mount Parnassus, home to the oldest continuously used footpath in the world—the Archaio Monopati—which was constructed in antiquity to link the legendary sanctuary at Delphi with the Corycian Cave, sacred to nymphs and the Muses and the winter dwelling place of the god Pan.

A 15-minute drive brings you to the trailhead where your route begins on the lower slopes of the mighty mountain. You follow the E4 path—the cross-continent route you were on two days ago—through one of Greece's largest olive groves towards the ancient port of Kirra, dating to at least 3000 BCE. Spectacular views of the valley and the Gulf of Corinth reward your effort.

Afterward, arrive by minibus in the town of Delphi midday, pausing for lunch on your own at one of the many tavernas. After, there'll be ample time to peruse the shops and galleries of Delphi, or return to your

hotel where you may wish to relax with a book, swim in the indoor pool, or indulge in a spa treatment before an independent evening of exploring and dining. Arachova is famous for its shops selling local *flokati* (shaggy wool rugs), *formaela* cheese, and honey; a great spot to pick up some souvenirs.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 5

Archaeological site of Delphi and travel to Kastraki

1-2 miles, easy to moderate

After another hearty, fresh breakfast, you head to the magnificent archaeological site of ancient Delphi, a UNESCO-preserved World Heritage site. For over a thousand years throughout antiquity, priests, leaders of city-states and pilgrims wound their way up dangerous mountain passes to seek cryptic messages and guidance from the Delphic Oracle. You walk in their footsteps this morning as you explore the museum and archaeological site with a private guide. You enter via the Sacred Precinct, then pass the remains of memorials, treasuries and the remarkable Polygonal Wall, soon arriving at the impressive remains of the Temple of Apollo. After time to take it all in, travel north, skirting the base of Mount Parnassus to Polydrosos aboard your dedicated minibus. On arrival to the village, savor a light lunch and wine tasting. Enjoy a personal introduction and sample a few of the wines produced at our friend, Despina's, nearby estate. Among the nine varieties, the vintners emphasize the cultivation of forgotten grapes**.** Afterward, continue about 2.5 hours to Kastraki, dramatically located in the shadow of the spectacular rocks of the Meteora, one of the largest and most important complexes of Eastern Orthodox monasteries…and certainly the most lofty!

After settling in to the hotel, gather in the restaurant for dinner, savoring thoughtfully prepared cuisine and stunning views of the dramatic landscape.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 6

Monasteries of the Meteora: Dormition of the Virgin Mary to Holy Trinity and Great Meteoron to Kastraki

2 miles, moderate, 600-ft. elevation gain and 3-4 miles, moderate with challenging sections, 850-ft.

elevation loss

Precipitously perched between heaven and earth above the Peneas Valley on the Thessalian plain, the monasteries of the Meteora (meaning “in midair”) are at once astonishing architectural accomplishments and testaments to the will of the faithful. Your walks among these exalted and inspirational monastic dwellings are highlights of your adventure. But you begin at ground level, at the beautiful Kalabaka Byzantine Church of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary, one of the few buildings in the Old Town not destroyed by Germans during World War II. Built in the 4th or 5th century, it boasts 11th- and 16th-century Byzantine frescoes as well as a beautiful mosaic floor. Though its setting may not be as dramatic as its loftier cousins, it is highly revered because it is 1,000 years older.

Continue upward as you get your first up-close glimpse of the famed monasteries of Meteora, a UNESCO World Heritage site. It is believed that Greek Orthodox monks built a small church at the base of these pillars in the 12th century. The political strife of the 14th century prompted them to build on top of the inaccessible rock columns that were such a prominent part of the landscape. Soon, 24 of them soared above the unstable fray below. Today, six remain. You follow a well-established trail and 140 steps for about an hour to the Holy Trinity (Agia Triada) monastery, featured in the James Bond film, *For Your Eyes Only*. Enjoy the views from this unique perch, visiting its small, fresco-filled circular church and 15th-century main cathedral.

After, drive the short distance just past the Great Meteoron Monastery, also known as the Holy Monastery of the Metamorphosis or Transfiguration of Christ, the largest and oldest monastery, built on the greatest rock of the complex. Its founder, the monk Saint Athanasios, is credited with establishing the monastic movement here. Your walk continues along a lesser known hiking trail just beyond the monastery. As you descend back down to Kastraki, take in more breathtaking vistas of the remarkable rock formations, and pause to savor a picnic lunch in the shade of the Ypapanti Monastery.

After lunch, continue on foot towards Kastraki and then shuttle back to your hotel, where you may relax poolside with a well-deserved refreshment. (Guests who prefer to skip this more challenging trail may opt to picnic in front of the Great Meteoron Monastery and pop in on your own to explore its religious icons, stunning frescoes and splendid views and catch a ride back to the hotel with the driver afterward). This evening, head to a local restaurant for a festive farewell dinner accompanied by Greek wine and some traditional music featuring the long-necked mandolin known as the bouzouki.

Please note: Exposed shoulders and knees are not permitted when visiting most churches as well as the monasteries at Meteora. Convertible zip-off pants are a good option for both men and women on days that combine walking and church/monastery visits. Sleeveless t-shirts or sleeveless shirts are strictly forbidden (for both men and women), but short-sleeved collared shirts are allowed. Women should carry a long scarf, sari, or shawl in lieu of a skirt for entry to the monasteries. (Due to Covid restrictions, monasteries are no longer lending skirts, but rather charging a few euros to provide skirts with which women may cover themselves. However, they do not provide any covering for men.) Anyone who does not adhere to the dress guidelines will be denied entry. A good option for women is to wear capri length (or full length) pants and to bring a sari or long scarf in your daypack for use as a long skirt to put over them.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 7

Varlaam Monastery to Kastraki. Your Greece: Athens, Delphi & Meteora tour concludes

1.5 miles, easy to moderate, 725-ft. elevation loss

After breakfast, you travel by minibus to the Holy Monastery of Varlaam, the second largest of the monasteries of Meteora, named after the monk who first built a tiny chapel on this promontory in the 14th century. Take time to peruse the museum of monastic history, to check out an original rope-basket used until the mid-19th century to haul monks and provisions, and admire the late-Byzantine frescoes, as well as sweeping panoramic views. Depart the monastery on foot (or opt for a ride down to town with our dedicated driver and minibus), arriving to Kastraki mid-morning. Bid farewell to Meteora and drive south (2.5 hours) to Kamena Vourla on the scenic south coast of the Malian Gulf. Enjoy a final meal of fresh seafood and raise a glass of ouzo, the local anise-flavored aperitif, to toast the week’s adventures before you continue to Athens (arriving by 5:30 p.m.), where you settle in to your hotel for a post-tour overnight stay.

The rest of the evening is yours to enjoy at your leisure—perhaps explore the city, rest up in the hotel, or select a local restaurant for dinner. We provide detailed city information to help you plan the remainder of your day.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DEPARTURE DAY

Departure

After an included breakfast this morning, complimentary transportation will be provided to Athens International Airport, based on your departure time.

Included Meals: Breakfast

What's Included	Air Package	Tour Only
Exceptional boutique accommodations	✓	✓
15 on-tour meals: 6 breakfasts, 5 lunches and 4 dinners	✓	✓
Local guides with you throughout tour	✓	✓
Local wine and/or beer with dinner	✓	✓
Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary	✓	✓
Telescopic walking sticks provided on tour	✓	✓
Roundtrip airfare	✓	
Two extra nights in Athens	✓	
Airport car service for arrival and departure	✓	
Pre- and post-tour breakfasts	✓	
Business-class upgrades available	✓	