TOUR CODE

00G

ADVENTURESABROAD

GREEK ISLANDS FAMILY TOUR

Boats, Beaches & Ruins

14 days

Updated 09/05/2013

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. 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 (rather than being trapped in Athens' horrendous traffic).

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 enter the Acropolis, near 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.

Ascending to the top of the Acropolis, we will see 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.

After our Acropolis tour, we'll descend 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 *<<coming soon>>*

Day 4 *Athens - Mykonos*

This morning we travel by local ferry from Athens' port, Pireaus, to the island of Mykonos.*

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. The sugar cube buildings are stacked around a cluster of seafront fishermen's dwellings. The labyrinth design was intended to confuse the pirates who plagued Mykonos in the eighteenth and 19th centuries. The main town has immaculately whitewashed houses concealing hundreds of little churches, shrines and chapels.

* PORTERS ARE GENERALLY NOT AVAILABLE ON THE GREEK ISLES, OR ON FERRIES BETWEEN THEM. You MUST be able to carry / wheel your baggage on and off ferries.

Overnight on Mykonos. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Mykonos: Walking Tour & Boat Trip to Delos*

This morning we'll take you on an orientation walking tour of Mykonos Chora. We wander the pirate-proof streets of town and see the Paraportiani Church near the quay, an architectural masterpiece of five chapels in one. As one of the most cosmopolitan Greek islands, Mykonos is legendary for its shopping and nightlife.

We then 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. For nearly 1,000 years this sanctuary was the political and religious centre of the Aegean. Leto, pregnant by Zeus, gave birth to the twins Apollo and Artemis on Delos. In the 18th century BC, the annual Delia Festival was established on the island to celebrate the birth of Apollo. Delos was populated during its height in Hellenistic times with wealthy merchants, mariners and bankers from as far away as Egypt and Syria.

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.

We return to Mykonos with the balance of the day at leisure.

Overnight on Mykonos. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Mykonos - Santorini*

We take a ferry or hydrofoil (depending on scheduling) to Santorini.

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.

Overnight on Santorini. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Santorini: Akrotiri & 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.

We begin with a visit to Akrotiri, where excavations have revealed a complete prehistoric Minoan city with squares, streets and two-storey houses which contained marvelous frescoes. The buildings date to the late 16th century BC. No skeletons or treasures have been found in Akrotiri, so historians think that the inhabitants were forewarned of the eruption and were able to escape. The excavations have yielded evidence what has revolutionized our knowledge of the Late Bronze Age; indeed the town has been called a "bronze-age Pompeii."

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.

Fira is the capital of the island and the most important village. Perched on the edge of an impressive cliff 260m high, the town offers great panoramic views 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, 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.

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 a snack at one of the many local cafes.

We then return to Kamari Beach (those who wish to extend their time in Oia can return to Kamari using the public bus system).

Overnight on Santorini. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Santorini: Free Day*

Today is free to enjoy Santorini. Possibilities include boat trips to the volcano's centre, shopping, or relaxing on one of Santorini's black sand beaches. You can get around using the convenient public bus system. Your Tour Leader can help plan your day.

Overnight on Santorini. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Santorini - Iraklion - Gouves*

Today we travel by ferry or hydrofoil (depending on scheduling) to Crete.

Crete is the largest and most southerly of the Greek Islands, blessed with a magnificent setting of rugged coastal scenery and warm waters. We continue by road eastward along the northern coast to the small town of Gouves where our hotel is located.

NOTE: Ferry schedules may require some adjustment to the order of our Crete sightseeing programme.

Overnight in Gouves. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Iraklion: Knossos & Archaealogical Museum*

Early this morning (to beat the crowds!) we travel to Knossos where our local guide will show us the ancient palace of King Minos, first built around 1900 BC. In 1700 BC it was destroyed by an earthquake and rebuilt to a grander and more sophisticated design. The city of Knossos consisted of an immense palace, residences of officials and priests, the homes of ordinary people, and burial grounds. The Palace, which covered an area of 22000 sq m (236,682 sq feet), consisted of royal domestic quarters, public reception rooms, shrines, workshops, treasures and storerooms around a central court. Knossos was excavated by Arthur Evans between 1900 and 1930.

We also visit the Archaeological Museum in Iraklion, one of the best museums in Greece.* The exhibits, collected from excavations carried out in all parts of Crete, come mainly from the prehistoric era and form a valuable record of the artistic, social and economic life of the island during the ancient period.

* NOTE: The museum is currently closed for renovations indefinitely. For tours that occur before this time, we will visit Archanes Village today instead of tomorrow (see tomorrow's description) and Thrapsano tomorrow with more time at the waterpark.

Overnight in Gouves. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Crete: Archanes & Thrapsano*

Today we pay a visit to the village of Archanes, a Minoan settlement in ancient times, and make a stop at the excellent museum which houses many of the interesting things that have been found there.

We then continue to the village of Thrapsano which, for centuries, has been an important pottery-making centre for all of Greece. The workshops still thrive and we have a chance to see how traditional styles of pottery are made. One very common product is the pithoi, a large jug-like container that for centuries have been used to store grains, olive oil, wine, beans, and dried bread through the winter. These pithoi are exactly the same as those used by Greeks and Minoans thousands of years ago. Villagers often use broken pithoi as decoration around their homes and gardens, using them as planters or bird baths.

Later this afternoon we will head to the huge Aquasplash water park for some fun splashing in the sun. Once settled, there is a huge array of rides to choose from including The Black Hole, The Kamikaze, The Crazy River, and many more - some laid back and relaxing, others adrenaline inducing to say the least! There is also a huge, main pool area for those just wishing to cool down.

Overnight in Gouves. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Crete: Iraklion Walking Tour - Overnight Ferry*

This morning is free to relax, enjoy the beach or pool.

Later this afternoon we travel back to Iraklion. On arrival we will have an easy walking tour of central Iraklion, including the impressive St Titus Church, Morosini Fountain and other Venetian legacies. The massive walls that surround the town of Iraklion were built by the Venetians in the mid-15th century.

Later this evening we transfer to the port for our overnight ferry to Pireaus, the port of Athens. The ferry is very comfortable with each cabin having two bunk beds and private facilities.

Overnight ferry to Athens. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Arrival in Athens*

Early this morning we arrive in Athens.* The balance of the day is at leisure to enjoy this lively city.

An excellent option today is a day trip to the beautiful archaealogical site of Delphi (for those who have not already visited on other tour options). The historical origins of the sanctuary at Delphi are obscure, but according to legend the young god Apollo superseded an older female deity, Mother Earth, and killed her son, the serpent Python. In Homer the sanctuary is called Pytho, and oracles were given by the Pythia (priestess) between the Shining Rocks (Phaidriades) on the southern slopes of Mount Parnassos long before the cult of Apollo Delphinios was established there from Crete. Your Tour Leader can help organize this full-day excursion. We also recommend a visit to the National Archaealogical Museum, accessible by subway.

* Please note that our Athens hotel rooms may NOT be ready for us this early in the day. Your large baggage will be securely stored; you might want to prepare your day pack ahead of time.

Overnight in Athens. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Departure*

Departure from Athens.

KALO TAXIDI!! Meal plan: Breakfast.