
JRNY
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Adventures in South America
TRAVEL TALES FROM AN EXTRAORDINARY CONTINENT
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• TRACKING BEARS IN SPAIN • SARDINIA'S HIDDEN HISTORY • A TASTE OF CAMBODIA
• GOING WILD IN COSTA RICA • THE BIG TRIP: TENNESSEE



THIS SPREAD: Aristoteleous Square.



Thessaloniki

THE CITY BENEATH THE CITY

Under the streets of Thessaloniki, layers of the city's ancient history are coming to light.

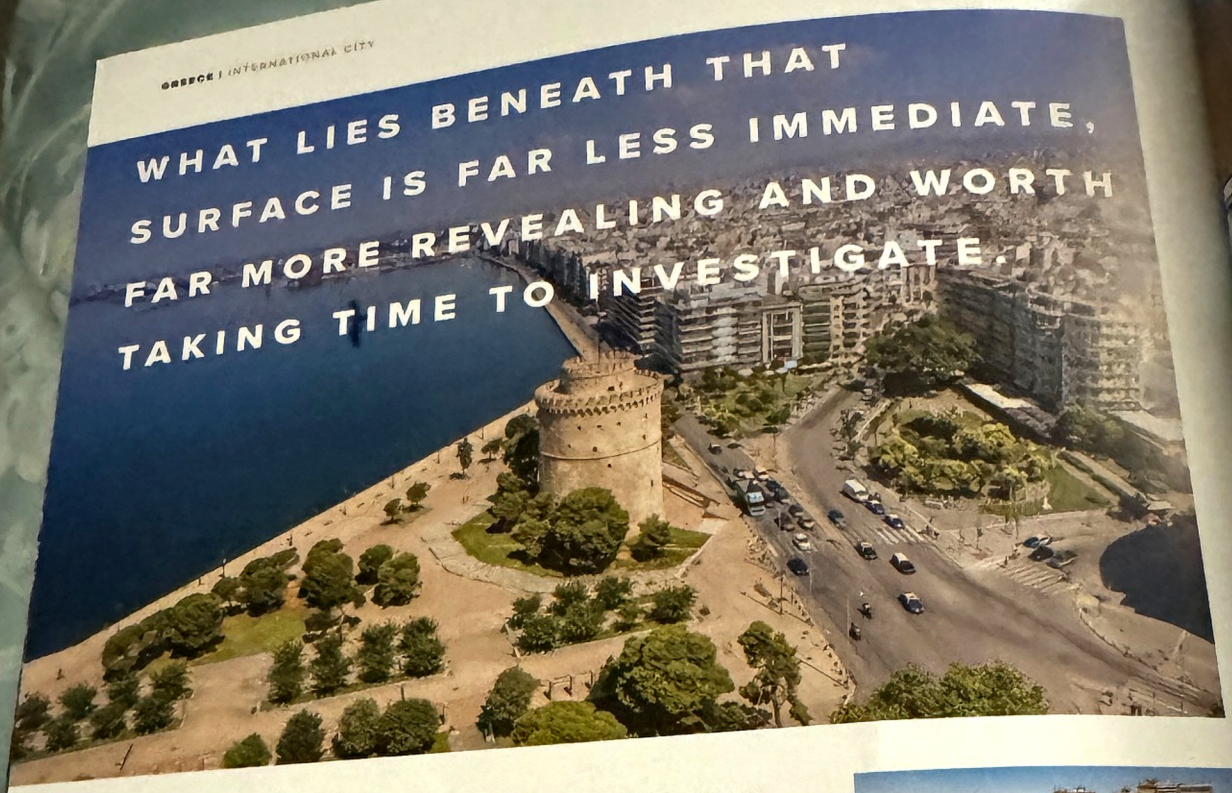
WORDS: REBECCA HALL

Greece's second city is often overlooked in favour of Athens. Many travellers arrive by sea, with Thessaloniki a popular stop on cruise itineraries, rather than a destination chosen to visit in its own right. Ships dock at the port at the western edge of the city, and passengers step directly into a centre that appears compact and easy to navigate. Yet what lies beneath that surface is far less immediate but far more revealing, and worth taking time to investigate.

The extent of the hidden side of Thessaloniki only became apparent during the construction of its metro. Work began in 2006, but progress slowed immediately as excavations uncovered Roman roads, Byzantine streets and successive phases of human settlement. Archaeological work became inseparable from engineering, forcing redesigns, route adjustments and long delays. In several cases, entire sections of the planned line had to be reconsidered to accommodate what had been found below ground. Over time, the project changed in scope, turning construction into excavation, with more than 300,000 artefacts recorded and catalogued. What emerged was not a series of isolated discoveries, but a continuous record of urban life.

The most substantial remains are now visible at two stations in the centre. At Venizelou Metro Station, a section of the city's main east–west street, dating from the Roman period and later used during Byzantine times, has been preserved *in situ*. The paving remains intact, with drainage channels running alongside it, and the dig showcases foundations of adjoining

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buildings, marking where shops and workshops once stood. Inside the station, raised glass walkways pass above the archaeological remains, offering commuters a free glimpse into an ancient world.

More sections of this network are visible at the entrance to Agias Sofias Metro Station. Here, a sixth-century semicircular marble-paved square has been uncovered, alongside an earlier fountain structure from the late Roman period. The remains show how the area developed into a commercial centre, with shops forming part of the Byzantine marketplace. Taken together, the two stations offer a rare view of Thessaloniki's historic centre as a functioning urban space.

In both locations, stone paving, brickwork and structural foundations have been retained at their original level and incorporated into the design of the stations. Smaller finds uncovered during excavation, including pottery and other artefacts, have been transferred to the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki.

Above ground, the relationship between past and present is less concentrated, yet still evident in specific sites. Take the Roman Agora, located a short walk from Venizelou Metro Station. The remains of the Roman civic centre extend across a large open area with colonnades, corridors and underground chambers still visible. Its layout reflects its original use for administration, trade and public gatherings. Today, residential buildings and cafés border the site, placing it directly within the modern city.

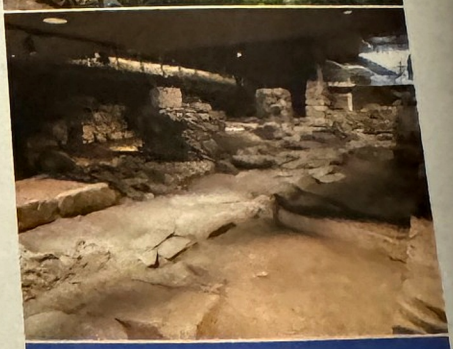
Nearby, the city's markets continue long-established patterns of use. At Modiano Market, traders operate from fixed stalls beneath a covered structure dating from the early 20th century, restored but still functioning as a central market. A short distance away, Kapani follows a more traditional layout, with narrow lanes and open-fronted shops selling produce, spices and household goods. Both markets occupy areas historically associated with trade, maintaining continuity of function over time.

In the Ladadika district, former warehouse buildings once used for storing oil and grain have been adapted for contemporary use. Their façades and proportions remain intact, while the buildings have been repurposed as bars and tavernas.

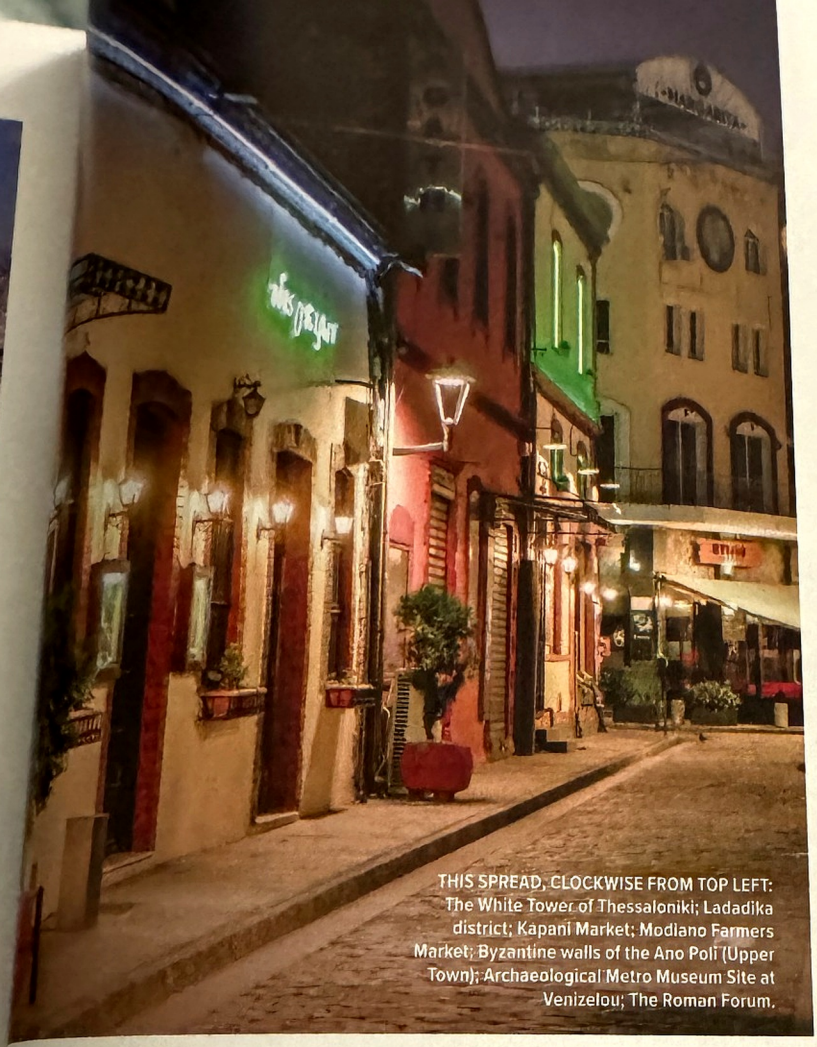
Further uphill in Ano Poli, the earlier form of the city becomes more apparent. Sections of Byzantine walls remain in place, forming boundaries that continue to define streets and properties. The layout shifts as the ground rises, following routes that predate the grid of the lower city and remain in use.

Along the waterfront, a different perspective of Thessaloniki comes into view.









THIS SPREAD, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The White Tower of Thessaloniki; Ladadika district; Kapani Market; Modiano Farmers Market; Byzantine walls of the Ano Poli (Upper Town); Archaeological Metro Museum Site at Venizelou; The Roman Forum.



...ching from the port, Leoforos Nikis ...y Avenue – marks Thessaloniki's ...ion into Greece in 1912. Cafés and ...erlook the Thermaic Gulf, and on ... Mount Olympus is visible across ... The road leads to the White Tower, ... most recognisable symbol. ... Thessaloniki isn't defined by a ... mark in the way Athens is by the Parthenon. Instead, its past is encountered across its districts: in the historic hillside neighbourhood of Ano Poli, in the preserved streets at Venizelou and Agias Sofias Metro Stations, at the Roman Agora and the markets of Modiano and Kapani, in lively Ladadika and along the waterfront of Leoforos Nikis. Together, these layers of history shape the city.

Need to Know

GETTING THERE
Ryanair (*ryanair.com*) and easyJet (*easyjet.com*) offer year-round direct flights from the UK to Thessaloniki. BA (*britishairways.com*), Jet2 (*jet2.com*) and TUI (*tui.co.uk*) also offer seasonal flights (usually from June to September).

GETTING AROUND
Thessaloniki is easily explored on foot. A taxi from Thessaloniki Airport, about nine miles from the city centre, takes 25 minutes; apps like Uber are widely used. Public buses run regularly to the centre, taking around 45 minutes.

BEST TIME TO GO
From April to June and September to October, temperatures are warm but comfortable, with little rain.

WHERE TO EAT
Olympos Naoussa (*onresidence.gr*) serves refined Northern Greek dishes, while Trofi in Ladadika focuses on small plates using seasonal and organic ingredients. A Withlocals Thessaloniki Food Tour (*withlocals.com*) heads to the Kapani Market and Modiano Market for specialities including *bougatsa* (a flaky custard or cheese pastry) and *koulouri* (a sesame bread ring).

WHERE TO STAY
MonAsty Thessaloniki Autograph Collection offers a calm, design-led stay (*monastyhotel.com*). ON Residence, part of the Small Luxury Hotels of the World collection, overlooks the Thermaic Gulf (*slh.com*) and has a rooftop cocktail bar. The Excelsior, another Small Luxury Hotels of the World member, has 34 rooms and suites in the historic and cultural heart of the city (*excelsiorhotel.gr*).

FURTHER INFO
Explore Thessaloniki in more detail at *discovergreece.com*.

Photos: Discover Greece; Dreamstime