

Top 10 Things to Do in Athens

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Greece's capital, Athens, is mostly equated with the Acropolis and Parthenon. It's true that you shouldn't miss out on visiting those sites, but there's so much more to Athens. Here, we look at the top 10 things to see and do in Athens and how to get around the city.

Note: To get a true Athenian experience, go into the city center; it's about a nine-mile, 20-minute, €17 taxi ride away from the cruise terminal at Piraeus. How to reach other areas will be discussed throughout the article.

1 Acropolis and Parthenon

A trip to Athens is not complete without visiting this ancient rock and agora in the city center. Looming over the Plaka/Monastiraki district, the Acropolis is open from 8 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. daily in the summer, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. daily in the winter. Entry fee, at time of writing, is €12, although it is possible to wander the base of the Acropolis for free. At 6:30 a.m., you can see the raising of the Greek flag at the east corner, performed daily by the Greek military and on Sundays by the Evzone soldiers. At sunset the flag-lowering ceremony is performed, but by then you'll be cruising on to your next European port.



Credit: Life Beyond Borders Blog

2 Areopagus – The Hill of Ares

Just opposite the entrance to the Acropolis sits a huge white rock. Named after the Greek God of War, Ares, it's thought that many murder trials were held here, including the trial of Ares himself for the murder of Alirrothios, the son of Poseidon. Climb either the marble stairs carved into the side or take the modern steel stairs (which is the best option to avoid slipping) and sit and admire the vista; Athens sprawls out below you with views of the sea and islands nearby. It also showcases Ancient Agora and Acropolis.



Credit photo by AJ Aflert-Crispin | CC BY

3 Treasure Hunt

[Athens Insiders](#) provides a four-hour experiential tour for families. As you wander around the city, you'll have a task to solve by visiting sites and shops, and you'll have the opportunity to sample food and drinks that Athenians enjoy. Your personal guide ensures an interesting way to learn about the ancient culture of this city. The tour starts in the center of Athens and can be tailored to suit your group, small or large.



Credit: Athens Insiders

4 Anafiotika

Under the northeastern side of the Acropolis lies a hidden "island village.". In the early 1900s, many people came to Athens from the island of Anafi to build the king's palace. They built themselves their own neighborhood, called Anafiotika, to remind them of their island homes. Today, only 45 of the original houses remain, but it's amazing to wander through the winding streets and discover an island village that almost looks out of place within the heart of a city.



Credit: Life Beyond Borders Blog

5 Shopping and Coffee in Kolonaki District

If it's luxury and unique goods you're after, Kolonaki is the place to be. This district's close proximity to the former royal palace and parliament building in Syntagma Square means that you'll find Grecians shopping in the high-end boutiques that dot the streets of this historic area. The shops include both Greek and international designers. If it's jewelry you're after, head to Voukourestiou Street. It's a great area to grab a coffee and people watch, either on the streets or in one of the nearby museums, such as Benaki Museum or the Museum of Cycladic Art.



Credit photo by Ed | CC BY

6 Vouliagmeni Lake

Visit the brackish waters of Vouliagmeni Lake, a natural lake formed many years ago from a cave collapse and surrounded by a natural pine forest. The lake is a mixture of warm fresh water and cold seawater and contains the garra rufa fish that nibble at your skin as you swim. Now made into a natural outdoor spa, the average temperature of the water is 75F, making year-round swimming possible. Located on the Athenian Riviera, it's about a 19-mile, 40-minute, €25 to €30 taxi ride from your cruise port. The entry fee is €11.



Credit: Life Beyond Borders Blog

7 National Garden

Located behind the parliament building in Syntagma Square and designed by Queen Amalia in 1840, you'll find a plethora of plant, bird and animal species at the National Garden. Open to the public, locals spend their afternoons here drinking coffee in the small cafes dotted around the garden and older men play tavli (Greek backgammon). You'll also see busts of important Greek poets and politicians.



Credit photo by Sharon Mollerus | CC BY

8 Climb Lycabettus Hill

Just slightly up from the Kolonaki area is the pine-covered hill of Lycabettus Hill. You can take the funicular to the top, or a winding walk through the trees will reward you with the small church of Agios Georgios and magnificent views across the city. Sit, eat or drink coffee in [Orizontes restaurant](#).



Credit photo by Erik Drost | CC BY

9 Day Trip to Cape Sounion

The Temple of Poseidon at Cape Sounion makes a perfect day trip from Athens. It's 42 miles southeast of Athens and is about an hour's taxi ride (€50 to €60), but it's worth it. The many ancient myths about the temple and the site date back to 700BC. For €4, you can wander around the monument, which is surrounded on three sides by the Aegean Sea, and admire the breathtaking views across the water. Afterwards, relax on the beach below. Day-trippers can utilize the facilities at the [Aegean Beach Hotel](#). It's nestled along the waters of the Aegean Sea, which are reputed to be the clearest and cleanest in Athens.



Credit: My Greece My Travels

10 The House Project Balux Café

The House Project [Balux Cafe](#) is the perfect place to relax by the beach or in the beach house. Frequented by many locals, it includes a large restaurant with a variety of cuisines, a large living area where one can read or catch up over a frappé (the famous Greek coffee), and it also has a children's play area outside. This makes it a perfect beach place for families, couples and solo travelers alike. Located on the northern part of Athens (about a 12-mile, 30-minute, €20 taxi ride away from the port), you can literally spend your entire day there.



Credit: Balux House Project

Getting Around Athens:

Once in Athens, it's possible to get around by foot, but the metro is easy for visitors. It's €1.40 for a ticket per journey (no matter how far you're traveling). Buy your ticket from the machines in the Metro station and your ticket will get punched with a date and time as you enter the Metro (similar to taking the subway in New York City).

It is possible to take a metro from Piraeus (the port) to the center of town (Monastiraki), but it takes about 30 minutes and there tends to be quite a few pickpockets on that line (because it's a popular route for tourists).

At one time, the Metro system was just the green line (see map), but in preparation for the 2004 Olympics, the Metro was expanded. It is incredibly clean for public transportation and even has classical music playing in all stations. Some stations display ancient artifacts that were dug up during the building of the Metro, making it feel like a little museum. The red line has a copy of the Elgin Marbles frieze in it, and Syntagma Metro stop (on the blue line) offers a mini museum in its lobby of artifacts that were found when the Metro station was being dug/created. You cannot bring food or drinks in the Metro areas.

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