

24 Hours in Athens

ATHENS IS A CITY WHERE the ancient and modern coexist seamlessly, and that's its enduring charm. Marble temples rise above bustling neighbourhoods, Byzantine chapels sit beside fashion boutiques, and excavated ruins peek from beneath glass floors in contemporary shops and the city's modern Metro system. The Greek capital may feel chaotic at first, but it's surprisingly walkable: most key sights cluster around the historic centre. In just 24 hours, this itinerary will guide you through lively markets and quiet gardens, then guide you to sea views from the Acropolis, weaving through essential landmarks and neighbourhood corners that reveal the city's hidden charms. →

8:00 a.m. ▶ Start the day at **Karamanlidika Tou Fani**, a popular deli-restaurant next to **Varvakios Central Market**. Greek coffee pairs well with a flaky filo cheese pie or eggs topped with pastourma – the spiced cured meat that's a house speciality. Afterwards, wander through the market itself for a splice of everyday Athenian life: fishmongers display the day's catch on ice while butchers, produce and spice sellers call out prices to regulars.

9:30 a.m. ▶ Head uphill to the **Acropolis and Parthenon of Athens** while temperatures are still cool. The Parthenon, built in the 5th century BC, remains one of the world's most recognisable monuments, and the views from the summit stretch across the city to the Aegean sea.

Descending toward **Plaka**, wind through **Anafiotika**. Built in the

19th century by craftsmen from the Cycladic island of Anafi, this tiny hillside neighbourhood feels like a miniature Greek island village with whitewashed houses, blue shutters and bougainvillea-lined alleys.

11:30 a.m. ▶ Visit the nearby **Acropolis Museum**, where the top-floor gallery aligns with the Parthenon above, displaying its sculpted frieze and marble figures. Pause for coffee either at the **museum's outdoor café** – where glass floors reveal excavated ruins beneath, or at **Little Tree Books & Coffee** – a cosy spot nearby with homemade cakes and a curated selection of books to browse and read as you drink.

1:30 p.m. ▶ Walk to **Syntagma Square** in time for the hourly ceremonial changing of the guard outside Parliament. The Evzone

soldiers perform slow, synchronised movements in traditional uniforms with pleated skirts and pom-pom shoes. Next to Parliament, explore the shady **National Gardens**, once the Royal Palace gardens. Palm trees, statues and wandering turtles create a peaceful oasis in the heart of the city.

2:45 p.m. ▶ For a late lunch, Athenian style, head to **Avocado** near Syntagma Square. Known for fresh, healthy Mediterranean dishes; from colourful salads and grain bowls to smoothies and excellent coffee, it's a lighter option before an afternoon of further exploration. Refuelled, stroll to the nearby **Panathenaic Stadium**, the gleaming marble arena that hosted the first modern Olympic Games in 1896. Built entirely from white Pentelic marble, it remains one of the most impressive stadiums in the world.

4:00 p.m. ▶ Cut back through the National Gardens to **Ermou Street**, Athens' busiest shopping avenue. Keep an eye on the floors: several shops display ancient walls or foundations beneath glass panels, quietly revealing fragments of the classical city beneath the modern streetscape.

5:00 p.m. ▶ Just a short walk from Ermou Street, **Monastiraki's bustling Flea Market** is filled with vintage shops, artisan stalls, and quirky souvenirs. Wander among the narrow alleys, browse colourful ceramics, leather sandals and antiques, and soak up the eclectic atmosphere of one of Athens' most famous outdoor markets.

6:30 p.m. ▶ As dusk descends, head to **Areopagus Hill**, also known as **Mars Hill**. This rocky outcrop just beneath the Acropolis entrance offers one of the most intimate views of the Parthenon, and it's free. Locals gather here at sunset to watch the monument glow in fading light. Wear solid shoes: the marble surface can be slippery.

8:30 p.m. ▶ Book a table at **Makris Athens** in Monastiraki. The Michelin-starred restaurant serves refined modern Greek cuisine using seasonal ingredients from its own farm, offering a contemporary take on traditional flavours in a beautiful neoclassical setting near the Acropolis.

11:00 p.m. ▶ Return to the four-star, independent family run boutique **Herodion Hotel** beside the Acropolis Museum. Despite its prime location and four-star rating, it remains surprisingly affordable. Head to the rooftop bar for a final drink beneath the illuminated Parthenon – one of Athens' most memorable night views.

