

Athens & Attica

Αθήνα & Αττική



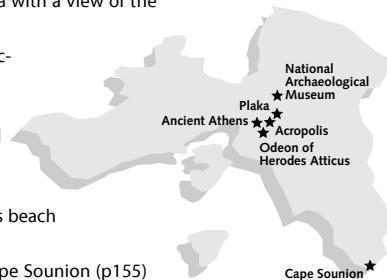
The Greek capital is undergoing a radical period of urban renewal that did not stop with the 2004 Olympics. The magnificent Acropolis, crowned by the iconic Parthenon temple, rises above the city, watching the sprawling modern metropolis evolve. Athens is now a conspicuously wealthier, more sophisticated cosmopolitan city. The shift is evident in a gradual gentrification and the new art and leisure precincts around town, and in the lifestyles of the hedonistic, trend-conscious Athenians. Stylish new restaurants, shops and revamped hotels continue to open.

Perhaps the most significant change is in the historic centre, virtually unrecognisable since cars were banished, with most significant ancient sites linked in what has become Europe's longest and arguably most stunning pedestrian promenade. This huge archaeological park has reconciled past and present, with the city's cultural and social life once again taking place around the ancient monuments and surrounding neighbourhoods. Athens remains a city of contradictions, as frustrating as it is seductive. It is the oldest city in Europe, yet still in a state of transition. It's one of Europe's safest and liveliest cities – a heady mix of grunge and grace with an undeniable urban soul.

Most visitors will leave impressed with its vibrant street life and relaxed lifestyle, where people take time out for endless coffees and evening strolls, dine out until late and enjoy the city's nightlife, long after the rest of Europe has gone to bed. Athenians are the first to debate and lament their city's many shortcomings – but most wouldn't live anywhere else.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Ancient Splendour** Glimpsing the awe-inspiring Acropolis rising above the city for the first time (p111)
- **Historic Trails** Strolling through ancient Athens along the grand pedestrian promenade (p115)
- **Feast for the Eyes** Dining in Thisio or Plaka with a view of the floodlit Acropolis (p137)
- **Greek Treasures** Viewing the superb collection of antiquities at the National Archaeological Museum (p120)
- **Ancient Stage** Catching an Athens Festival show at the Odeon of Herodes Atticus (p130)
- **Magic Nights** Visiting lively bars, glamorous beach bars or moonlight cinema (p141)
- **Take Time Out** Watching the sun set at Cape Sounion (p155)



■ POPULATION: ATHENS 3.4 MILLION; ATTICA 4 MILLION

■ AREA: 3808 SQ KM

ATHENS ΑΘΗΝΑ

HISTORY

Early History

The early history of Athens is inextricably interwoven with mythology, making it impossible to disentangle fact from fiction. What is known is that the hill-top site of the Acropolis, with two abundant springs, drew some of Greece's earliest Neolithic settlers. When a peaceful agricultural existence gave way to the war-orientated city-states, the Acropolis provided an ideal defensive position.

By 1400 BC the Acropolis had become a powerful Mycenaean city. It survived the Dorian assault in 1200 BC but didn't escape the dark age that enveloped Greece for the next 400 years. Little is known of this period.

After its emergence from the dark age in the 8th century BC, a period of peace followed, during which Athens became the artistic centre of Greece, excelling in ceramics. The geometric vase designs from the dark age evolved into a narrative style, depicting scenes from everyday life and mythology (known as the Proto-Attic style).

By the 6th century BC, Athens was ruled by aristocrats and generals. Labourers and peasants had no say in the functioning of the city until the reform-oriented Solon became *arhon* (chief magistrate) in 594 BC and improved the lot of the poor. Regarded as the harbinger of Athenian democracy, Solon's most significant reforms were the annulment of debts and the implementation of trial by jury. Continuing unrest over the reforms created the pretext for the tyrant Peisistratos, formerly head of the military, to seize power in 560 BC.

Peisistratos built up a formidable navy and extended the boundaries of Athenian influence on land. A patron of the arts, he inaugurated the Festival of the Great Dionysia, the precursor of Attic drama, and commissioned many splendid sacred and secular buildings – most of which were destroyed by the Persians.

Peisistratos was succeeded by his tyrant son Hippias in 528 BC. Athens managed to rid itself of this oppressor in 510 BC with the help of Sparta. Hippias went to

Persia and returned with Darius 20 years later, only to be defeated at the Battle of Marathon.

Athens' Golden Age

After Athens finally repulsed the Persian Empire at the battles of Salamis and Plataea (again, with the help of Sparta), its power knew no bounds.

In 477 BC Athens established a confederacy on the sacred island of Delos and demanded tributes from the surrounding islands to protect them from the Persians. It was little more than a standover racket because the Persians were no longer much of a threat. The treasury was moved to Athens in 461 BC and Pericles (ruler from 461 to 429 BC) used the money to transform the city. This period has become known as Athens' golden age, the pinnacle of the classical era.

Most of the monuments on the Acropolis today date from Athens' golden age. Drama and literature flourished in the form of the tragedies written by such luminaries as Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. The sculptors Pheidias and Myron and the historians Herodotus, Thucydides and Xenophon also lived during this time.

Rivalry with Sparta

Sparta did not sit back and let Athens revel in its new-found glory. The jockeying for power between the two led to the Peloponnesian Wars (see p34) in 431 BC, which dragged on until 404 BC, when Sparta gained the upper hand. Athens was never to return to

ATHENA & THE OLIVE TREE

According to mythology, Kekrops, a Phoenician, came to Attica and founded a city on a huge rock near the sea. The gods of Olympus proclaimed that the city should produce the most valuable legacy for mortals. Athena (goddess of wisdom) produced an olive tree, symbol of peace and prosperity. Poseidon (god of the sea) struck a rock with his trident and a horse sprang forth, symbolising the qualities of strength and fortitude. The gods judged that Athena's gift would better serve the citizens of Athens than the arts of war personified by Poseidon's gift.

its former glory. The 4th century BC did, however, produce three of the West's greatest orators and philosophers: Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. The degeneracy into which Athens had fallen was perhaps epitomised by the ignominious death sentence passed on Socrates for the crime of corrupting the young with his speeches.

In 338 BC, along with the other city-states of Greece, Athens was conquered by Philip II of Macedon. After Philip's assassination, his son Alexander the Great, a cultured young man, favoured Athens over other city-states. After Alexander's untimely death, Athens passed in quick succession through the hands of several of his generals.

Roman & Byzantine Rule

Athens continued to be a major seat of learning under Roman rule, when many wealthy young Romans attended Athens' schools. Anybody who was anybody in Rome at the time spoke Greek. The Roman emperors, particularly Hadrian, graced Athens with many grand buildings.

After the subdivision of the Roman Empire into east and west, Athens remained an important cultural and intellectual centre until Emperor Justinian closed its schools of philosophy in 529. The city declined into an outpost of the Byzantine Empire.

Between 1200 and 1450, Athens was continually invaded – by the Franks, Catalans, Florentines and Venetians, all opportunists preoccupied with grabbing principalities from the crumbling Byzantine Empire.

Ottoman Rule & Independence

Athens was captured by the Turks in 1456, and nearly 400 years of Ottoman rule followed. The Acropolis became the home of the Turkish governor, the Parthenon was converted into a mosque, and the Erechtheion was used as a harem.

In the early stages of the War of Independence (1821–27), fierce fighting broke out in the streets of Athens, with the city changing hands several times between Turks and Greek liberators. In 1834 Athens superseded Nafplio as the capital of independent Greece and King Otho set about transforming the sparsely populated, war-scarred town into something worthy of a capital. Bavarian architects created a city of imposing neoclassical buildings, tree-lined boulevards, flower

gardens and squares. Sadly, many of these buildings have been demolished. The best surviving examples are on Leoforos Vasilissis Sofias and Panepistimiou.

The 20th Century

Athens grew steadily throughout the latter half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, and enjoyed a brief heyday as the 'Paris of the eastern Mediterranean'. This ended abruptly in 1923 with the Treaty of Lausanne, which resulted in nearly a million refugees from Turkey descending on Athens – an event that marked the beginning of its much-maligned concrete sprawl.

Athens suffered appallingly during the German occupation of WWII, during which time more Athenians were killed by starvation than by the enemy. This suffering was perpetuated in the civil war that followed.

The industrialisation programme launched during the 1950s, with the help of US aid, brought another population boom as people from the islands and mainland villages moved to Athens in search of work.

The colonels' junta (1967–74), with characteristic insensitivity, tore down many of the old Turkish houses of Plaka and the neoclassical buildings of King Otho's time. But the junta failed to tackle the chronic infrastructure problems resulting from such rapid and unplanned growth. The elected governments that followed in the late 1970s and 1980s didn't do much better, and by the end of the 1980s, the city had developed a sorry reputation as one of the most traffic clogged and polluted in Europe.

The 1990s were a turning point, with politicians finally accepting the need for radical solutions. Inspired initially by the failed bid to stage the 1996 Olympics, authorities embarked on an ambitious programme to drag the city into the 21st century. The 2004 Olympics deadline fast-tracked projects that had been on the drawing board for years and forced many more changes across the public and private sectors. Key elements were a major expansion of the road and underground metro network, and the construction of a new international airport.

As Athens absorbed more than 600,000 migrants, legal and illegal, the city's social fabric was also changing, presenting a new set of challenges.

Post-Olympics Athens

After a frantic, suspense-filled period of construction and doomsaying, Athens surprised much of the world by pulling off a successful Olympic Games in 2004. Billions of euros were poured into the city's redevelopment, from transport infrastructure and stadiums to pedestrian zones around the historic centre. Major beautification projects removed ugly billboards, paved footpaths, redeveloped the city's parks and squares, and mass-planted trees and plants. The Olympics legacy is that Athens today is a radically different city – a more attractive, cleaner, greener and more efficient capital, though it is still a work in progress and still battling with basic infrastructure issues like waste management.

ORIENTATION City Centre

Athens is a sprawling urban mass but the historic centre and most major sites are located within walking distance of Plateia Syntagma (Syntagma Sq).

The city's two major landmarks, the Acropolis and Lykavittos Hill, can be seen from just about anywhere and are useful for getting one's bearings. Major streets are generally clearly signposted in Greek and English.

Downtown Athens is a city of distinct neighbourhoods, each with its own individual character.

ATHENS IN PRINT

Athens (2004), by Michael Llewellyn Smith, is an excellent cultural and literary history, while John Freely's *Strolling Through Athens* (2004) explores the city through walks around Athens. In the novel *Euridice Street* (2004), anthropologist Sofka Zinovieff makes some interesting observations of contemporary Athens society, albeit through the privileged perspective of a diplomat's wife moving to Greece. Other worthy publications include *Athens by Neighbourhood* (2001), written by local resident Diane Shugart, and Patricia Stora's popular novel *Dinner With Persephone* (1996), written during a year in Athens. For a glimpse into Athens, underbelly, try *The Late Night News* (2004) for crime fiction by Petros Markaris.

SYNTAGMA ΣΥΝΤΑΓΜΑ

Plateia Syntagma (Constitution) is the heart of modern Athens, dominated by the Parliament and surrounded by major hotels, the central business district, shopping precincts and the National Gardens. With pleasant shady benches, central fountain, cafés and the Syntagma metro station nearby, it is a popular meeting place. Syntagma is the main focal point for public rallies and civic events, while the changing of the guard ceremony outside the Parliament is one of the city's most popular spectacles.

PLAKA ΠΛΑΚΑ

South of Syntagma, Plaka is the old Turkish quarter and virtually all that existed when Athens was declared capital of independent Greece. Its paved, narrow streets nestle into the northeastern slope of the Acropolis and pass by many of the city's ancient sites.

Plaka is touristy in the extreme, but it is still the most attractive and atmospheric part of Athens. The main streets, Kydathineon and Adrianou, are packed solid with restaurants and souvenir shops, but elsewhere its virtually car-free streets, with restored neoclassical mansions, can be a peaceful oasis. The quaint labyrinthine Anafiotika quarter above Plaka is a narrow maze of whitewashed, island-style houses built by stonemasons from the island of Anafi, brought in to build the king's palace.

MONASTIRAKI ΜΟΝΑΣΤΗΡΑΚΙ

Centred on busy Plateia Monastirakiou (Monastiraki Sq), the area just west of Syntagma is the city's somewhat grungier but nonetheless atmospheric market district. The famous Athens flea market (p144) is southwest of the square, while the central market (p136) is to the north on Athinas.

PSYRRI ΨΥΡΡΙ

The once clapped-out neighbourhood of Psyrrri (psee-ree), just north of Monastiraki, still looks pretty grungy from the outside, but the 'Soho' of Athens is brimming with stylish restaurants, bars, theatres and hip art galleries. The slick warehouse conversions and restored neoclassical houses compete with a hotchpotch of stores, bakeries, workshops and dilapidated buildings, giving the area an interesting edge. Psyrrri comes alive after dusk and it is the place to go to hear live Greek

ATHENS IN...

Two Days

First stop is the **Acropolis** (p111), then wind your way down to the **Ancient Agora** (p116) and the Plaka district, where its Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman pasts coexist with modern city life. Have a late lunch in a **Plaka taverna** (p137). In the late afternoon take a long walk around the Acropolis promenade, starting at the **Temple of Olympian Zeus** (p118), then around to **Filopappou Hill** (p124) and Thsio, and end the evening with dinner at a restaurant with a view of the Parthenon. On day two, watch the **changing of the guard** (p125) at Syntagma before heading to the **National Archaeological Museum** (p120) for the morning and/or the **Benaki Museum** (p121). Spend the afternoon exploring downtown Athens. Try to catch a show at the **Odeon of Herodes Atticus** (p130), one of the world's most historic venues, or head to the Psyrri or Gazi neighbourhoods for dinner and nightlife.

Four Days

If you've got a couple more days, you can add the following activities to your Athens itinerary.

On the third day, walk through the gardens to the old Olympic stadium, then head to the **Byzantine & Christian Museum** (p121) or **Goulandris Museum of Cycladic & Ancient Greek Art** (p121) before lunch and some shopping in **Kolonaki** (p143). Take a trip to Cape Sounion in the afternoon to see the **Temple of Poseidon** (p155) at sunset or go to the lovely Mikrolimano harbour in Piraeus (p154) for dinner, and then get a taste of summer nightlife at one of Athens' beach bars.

On the fourth day, go to Monastiraki's **flea market** (p144) for some last-minute souvenirs, then have lunch in a traditional taverna in the **central market** (p136). Take the *teleferik* (funicular railway) to the peak of **Lykavittos Hill** (p124) for a panoramic view of Athens, then catch a movie by moonlight at **Aigli** (p141), Athens' oldest outdoor cinema.

music at one of the tavernas, particularly on Sunday afternoon.

THSIO ΘΗΣΕΙΟ

The areas west of Monastiraki underwent a remarkable transformation during the 1990s. The pedestrianisation of the area around the Acropolis has made the former traffic-clogged, noisy thoroughfare of Apostolou Pavlou one of the most serene parts of the city. It's now a lovely green zone and a thriving area full of bars and cafés.

KOLONAKI ΚΟΛΩΝΑΚΙ

The posh residential district of Kolonaki, east of Syntagma, is undeniably chic. Tucked beneath Lykavittos Hill, it has long been the favoured address of Athenian socialites. Its streets are full of classy boutiques and private art galleries, as well as dozens of up-market cafés and trendy restaurants. Plateia Kolonakiou (Kolonaki Sq) and the cafés along Milioni are prime positions for people-watching and fashion victim-spotting.

Leoforos Vasilissis Sofias is one of Athens' most imposing streets. Its neoclassical

buildings now house museums, embassies and government offices.

MAKRYGIANNI & KOUKAKI ΑΚΡΥΓΙΑΝΝΗ & ΚΟΥΚΑΚΙ

Despite their proximity to the historic centre, the quiet neighbourhoods south of the Acropolis are refreshingly untouristy.

Makrygianni, a trendy residential suburb between Filopappou Hill and Leoforos Syngrou Andrea, has a few upmarket hotels and restaurants, and is also home to one of the city's gay precincts (between Stratigou Makrygiannji and Leoforos Syngrou Andrea; see p139). South of Makrygianni is the low-key residential district of Koukaki, which runs along the foothills of the Acropolis and has some excellent neighbourhood tavernas.

AROUND OMONIA ΟΜΟΝΟΙΑ

Omonia, north of Syntagma, was once one of the city's smarter areas, but despite ongoing efforts to tart it up, it is still seedy. The square itself is cut off by traffic and has become a popular meeting point for the city's undesirable elements. South of the square is the hub

of an emerging ethnic district, with an Asian quarter and several Bangladeshi shops in the streets behind Omonia and west of Plateia Eleftherias (Koumoundourou). Some of the clapped-out apartment blocks are now hostels and makeshift mosques for the city's increasing refugee and illegal-immigrant population. It makes an interesting backdrop for the trendy art galleries and boutique hotels that have sprouted in the area.

The area to the northwest of Plateia Omonias (Omonia Sq) probably rates as the sleaziest part of Athens, particularly the streets around Plateia Vathis – notorious for prostitutes and drug addicts.

EXARHIA ΕΞΑΡΧΕΙΑ

Just south of the National Archaeological Museum is the Athens Polytechnio (Technical University), the tertiary institution with a long tradition of radical thinking and alternative culture – it led the infamous student sit-in of 1973, in opposition of the junta.

Squashed between the Polytechnio and Strefi Hill is the rather bohemian residential area of Exarhia, popular with students, artists and intellectuals. It's a lively neighbourhood with graffiti-covered walls and lots of good-value restaurants, cafés, bars and alternative book, comic, music and clothing stores.

GAZI ΓΚΑΖΙ

The revival of the Gazi neighbourhood started with the transformation of the historic gasworks into a cultural centre. The red chimney stacks now brightly illuminate the surrounding streets, which have sprouted trendy restaurants and bars. It has also become the most gay-friendly neighbourhood of Athens, with a host of gay bars and clubs. The area is still gritty, though the urban renewal is spreading to nearby Metaxourghio and along busy Pireos, which now boasts one of the fanciest restaurants in Athens (see Varoulko, p139), a boutique hotel and the Benaki Museum's new wing (p121).

METS & PANGRATI ΜΕΤΣ & ΠΑΓΚΡΑΤΙ

To the east of the Acropolis, opposite the Zappeio Gardens, is the district of Mets, which is characterised by some delightful old Turkish houses. Mets runs behind the imposing old Olympic Stadium, built into Ardettos Hill. Leoforos Vasileos Konstantinou leads to the National Art Gallery (p122), while east of Mets is Pangrati, another pleasant residential

neighbourhood with interesting music clubs, cafés and restaurants.

Outer Athens

GLYFADA ΓΛΥΦΑΔΑ

Once Attica's principal beach-resort town, these days Glyfada (off Map p100), 12km southeast of Athens, is a chic seaside suburb popular with ex-pats. In summer, half of Athens descends on Glyfada, drawn by its beaches, bars and restaurants – and sea breezes. Glyfada marks the beginning of a stretch of coastline known as the Apollo Coast, which has a string of fine beaches running south to Cape Sounion.

KIFISIA ΚΗΦΙΣΙΑ

Leafy Kifisia (off Map p100) was once a cool northern retreat where rich Athenians had their villas. The rich and famous still monopolise what is now essentially an elite suburb. Its lovely tree-lined streets, mansions and gardens couldn't be further from the hustle and bustle of downtown Athens. Kifisia has some of the city's best shopping, fine restaurants and some of the most chic hotels in town. It is the last stop on the metro Line 1.

Maps

The free map handed out by the tourist office is fine for central Athens. To seriously explore beyond the centre, buy a copy of the Athens-Piraeus street directory (in Greek), available at most bookshops and stationery stores.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Compendium (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 322 1248; Navarhou Nikodimou 5 & Nikis, Plaka) Specialises in books in English, and has a popular secondhand section.

Eleftheroudakis Syntagma (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 331 4180; Panepistimiou 17); Plaka (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 322 9388; Nikis 20) The seven-floor Panepistimiou store is the biggest bookshop in Athens, with a level dedicated to English-language books.

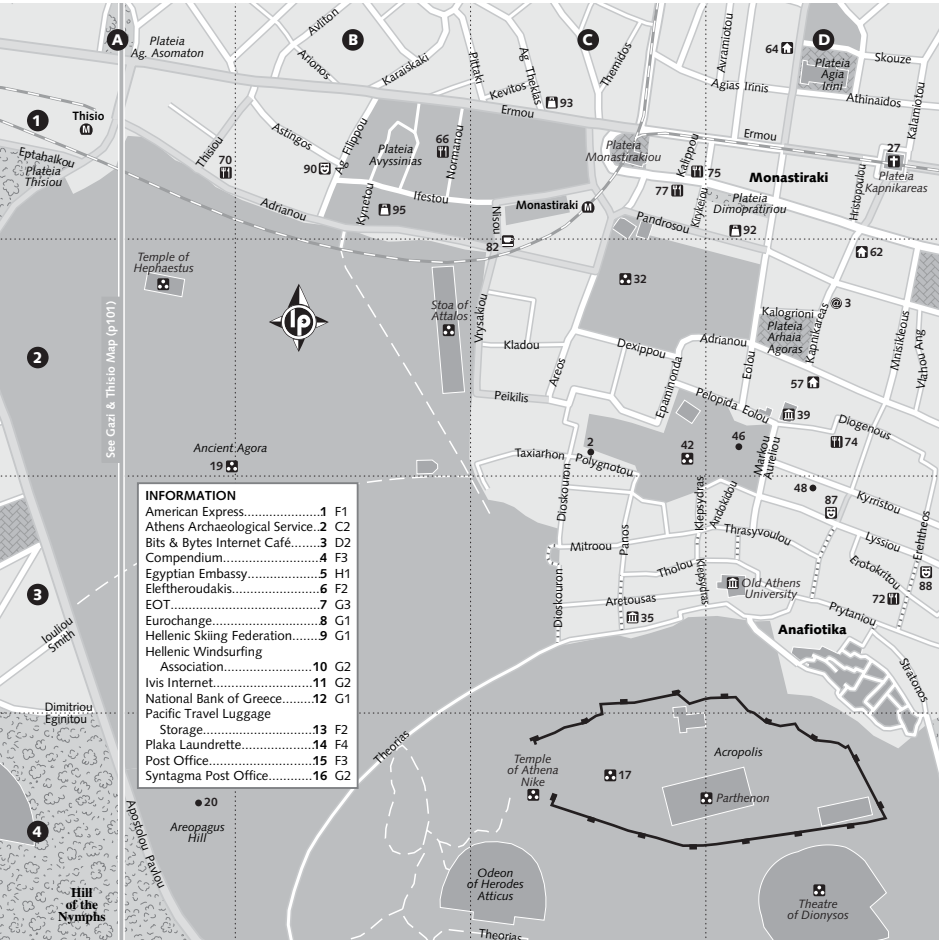
Road Editions (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 361 3242; www.road.gr; Solonos 71, Exarhia) A wide range of travel literature and all the Road Editions maps.

Emergency

Athens Central Police Station (Map pp106-7; ☎ 210 770 5711/17; Leoforos Alexandras 173, Ambelokipi)
ELPA Road Assistance (☎ 10400)

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Police (☎ 100)
Tourist police (Map p108; 24hr ☎ 171, 210 920 0724; Veikou 43-45, Koukaki; ☎ 8am-10pm)
Visitor Emergency Assistance (☎ 112) Toll-free 24hr service in English or French.

Internet Access
 Most midrange and top-end hotels have in-room internet access. There are free wireless hot spots at Plateia Syntagma, Gazi and the Port of Piraeus (more neighbourhoods were coming online), as well as in Starbucks cafés and some McDonald's. Internet cafés around the city centre charge €2 to €4 per hour.
Bits & Bytes Internet Café (Map pp102-3; Kapnikareas 19; per hr €3; ☎ 24hr)
Cyberzone (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 520 3939; Satovriani-dou 7, Omonia; per hr €2; ☎ 24hr) Cheaper rates of €1.50 per hour apply between midnight and 8am.
Ivis Internet (Map pp102-3; Mitropoleos 3, Syntagma; per hr €3; ☎ 24hr)
Museum Internet Café (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 883 3418; 28 Oktovriou-Patision 46, Omonia; per hr €4.40; ☎ 10am-2am Mon-Fri, 11am-2am Sat & Sun) Next to the National Archaeological Museum.

Internet Resources
www.athenstourism.gr A handy site from the Athens Tourism and Economic Development Agency.
www.cityofathens.gr City of Athens site with walks, events and other useful information.
www.culture.gr The revamped Ministry of Culture guide to museums, archaeological sites and cultural events around Greece.

Laundry
Plaka Laundrette (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 321 3102; Angelou Geronta 10, Plaka; wash & dry 5kg €9; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat, 8am-1pm Sun)

Left Luggage
 Many hotels will store luggage free for guests, although most do no more than pile the bags in a hallway. You'll find left-luggage facilities at the airport and at the metro stations at Omonia, Monastiraki and Piraeus.
Pacific Travel Luggage Storage (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 324 1007; Nikis 26, Syntagma; per day €2; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat)

Media
Athens News (www.athensnews.gr) Published every Friday; provides entertainment listings.

Insider Monthly magazine aimed at visitors and foreigners living in Greece.
Kathimerini (www.kathimerini.com) The *International Herald Tribune* publishes an eight-page English-language edition of this Greek daily, with news, arts, cinema listings and daily ferry schedules.
Odyssey (www.odyssey.gr) Bimonthly Greek diaspora magazine; publishes an annual summer guide to Athens.

Medical Services
Ambulance/First-Aid Advice (☎ 166)
Duty Doctors & Hospitals (☎ 1434 in Greek) Published in *Kathimerini*.
Pharmacies (☎ 1434 in Greek) Check pharmacy windows for notice of nearest duty pharmacy. There is a 24-hour pharmacy at the airport.
SOS Doctors (☎ 1016, 210 821 1888; ☎ 24hr) Pay service with English-speaking doctors.

Money
 Most major banks have branches around Syntagma and there are ATMs all over the city. Standard bank opening hours are 8am to 2.30pm Monday to Thursday and 8am to 2pm on Friday, though some private banks open certain branches until 8pm weekdays and on Saturday.

American Express (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 324 4979; Ermou 7, Syntagma; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Mon-Fri)
Eurochange Syntagma (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 322 0155; Karageorgi Servias 2, Syntagma; ☎ 8am-9pm); Omonia (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 552 2314; Kotopoulou 1) Exchanges Thomas Cook travellers cheques without commission.
National Bank of Greece (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 334 0500; cnr Karageorgi Servias & Stadiou, Syntagma) Has a 24-hour automatic exchange machine.

Post
Athens Central post office (Map pp104-5; www.elta.gr; Eolou 100, Omonia; ☎ 7.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-2pm Sat) Unless specified otherwise, all poste restante is sent here.
Parcel post office (Map pp102-3; Nikis 33, Syntagma; ☎ 7.30am-2pm Mon-Fri) Parcels weighing over 2kg must be taken here, unwrapped, for inspection.
Syntagma post office (Map pp102-3; Plateia Syntagma; ☎ 7.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-2pm Sat)

Telephone
 Public phones all over Athens allow local, long distance and international calls. They only take phonecards, which are available at kiosks.

Toilets
 Public toilets are relatively scarce in Athens and keep inconsistent hours, though there

are 24-hour portable, self-cleaning pay toilets (€0.50) around the centre. Fast-food outlets are also handy and cafés will normally let you use their facilities. Big hotels are also a safe bet.

Tourist Information

EOT Syntagma (Greek National Tourist Organisation; Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 331 0392; www.gnto.gr; Amalias 26a, Syntagma; 🕒 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun); Airport (☎ 210 353 0445-7; Arrivals Hall; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat & Sun) Has a handy free map of Athens, weekly ferry timetables and public transport information. You can also pick up a free copy of the glossy *Athens & Attica* booklet.

Tourist police (☎ 171; 🕒 24hr) General tourist information and emergency help.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Athens has its fair share of the problems found in all major cities but is considered one of the safest capitals in Europe. Violent street crime remains very rare, but travellers should be alert to the traps listed here.

Pickpockets

The favourite hunting grounds for pickpockets are the metro system and the crowded streets around Omonia, particularly Athinas, and the Monastiraki flea market.

Scams

BAR SCAMS

Many unsuspecting travellers have been taken in by the various bar scams that operate around central Athens, particularly around Syntagma.

One scam runs something like this: friendly Greek approaches solo male traveller and asks for the time or where he is from; friendly Greek then reveals that he, too, is from out of town or does the old 'Ah, I have a cousin in Australia' routine and suggests they go to a bar for a drink. Before they know it women appear and more drinks are ordered and the conman disappears. The women are not prostitutes, but the traveller is left to pay an exorbitant bill, which is when the smiles disappear and the atmosphere turns threatening. Other bars lure intoxicated males with talk of sex and present them with outrageous bills.

TAXI TOUTS

Taxi drivers working in league with some of the overpriced C-class hotels around Omonia are another problem, though it's not wide-

spread. The scam involves taxi drivers picking up late-night arrivals and persuading them that the hotel they want to go to is full – even if they have a booking. The taxi driver will pretend to phone the hotel, announce that it's full and suggest an alternative. Ask to speak to the hotel yourself, or simply insist on going where you want to go.

TRAVEL AGENTS

Some travel agents in the Plaka/Syntagma area employ touts to promote 'cheap' packages to the islands. These touts hang out at the bus and metro stops hoping to find naive new arrivals, who they take back to the agency, where slick salespeople pressure them into buying outrageously overpriced packages. There is no need to buy a package; you will always be able to negotiate a better deal yourself when you get to the island of your choice. If you are worried that everywhere will be full, select a place from the pages of this guide and make your own booking.

Slippery Surfaces

Many of Athens' pavements and other surfaces underfoot are made of marble and become incredibly slippery when wet, so tread carefully if you are caught in the rain.

Spiked Drinks

Some bars and clubs in Athens serve what are locally known as 'bombes', adulterated drinks that have been diluted with cheap illegal imports resembling brand-name spirits. These drinks can leave you feeling very worse for wear the next day. One way to avoid the risk is to drink beer and alcoholic drinks that are bottled, or ensure that you ask for a drink with a distinctive taste, or name your brand.

Taxi Drivers

Athenian taxi drivers have an awful reputation and it is certainly not entirely undeserved – most locals and tourists alike will have horror rip-off stories to report. The standards of the city's taxis and their driver's manners have improved dramatically overall. However, it is still a bit of a toss-up whether you get polite, efficient and honest service or one of the nasty ones. Beware, it's often the friendly ones that are the worst offenders.

Most (but not all) rip-offs involve taxis picked up late at night from the taxi ranks at the airport, the train stations, the bus termi-

nals and the port of Piraeus. Some drivers at these ranks don't like to bother with the meter and demand whatever they think they can get away with – and refuse to take you if you insist on using the meter. Only negotiate a set fare if you have some idea of the cost, but you are better off finding another taxi and getting the driver's details to report them to the tourist police. At Piraeus, avoid the drivers at the port exit asking if you need a taxi – it's better to hail one off the street further away.

In extreme cases, drivers have accelerated meters or switch them to night rate (tariff 2 lights up) during the day. Some will also often add their tip to the price they quote. Check the extra charges for airport pick-ups and tolls, which are set and must be displayed in every taxi.

The best way to protect yourself is to record the taxi's number plates and ask for a receipt – they are obligated to provide one and most have electronic receipt machines installed (though many do not work). If you do have a dispute, call the police (☎ 100), insist the driver takes you to the local police station to sort it out, or take the driver and taxi's registration number and report them to the tourist police.

SIGHTS

The Acropolis

The **Acropolis** (Map p112; ☎ 210 321 0219; adult/concession €12/6; 🕒 8am-7pm Apr-Oct, 8am-5pm Nov-Mar; 🇬🇧) is the most important ancient site in the Western world. Crowned by the Parthenon, it stands sentinel over Athens, visible from almost everywhere within the city. Its monuments of Pentelic marble gleam white in the midday sun and gradually take on a honey hue as the sun sinks, while at night they hover above the city brilliantly illuminated. The sudden glimpse of this magnificent sight cannot fail to lift your spirits.

Inspiring as these monuments are, they are but faded remnants of Pericles' city. Pericles spared no expense – only the best materials, architects, sculptors and artists were good enough for a city dedicated to the cult of Athena. The city was a showcase of colossal buildings, lavishly coloured, and of gargantuan statues, some of bronze, others of marble plated with gold and encrusted with precious stones.

There are several approaches to the site. The main approach from Plaka is along the

path that is a continuation of Dioskouron. From the south, you can walk along Dionysiou Areopagitou to the path just beyond the Odeon of Herodes Atticus to get to the main entrance or you can go through the Theatre of Dionysos entrance near the Akropoli metro station, and wind your way up from there. Anyone carrying a backpack or large bag (including camera bags) can only enter from the main entrance, where you must leave your bags at the cloakroom.

Get here as early as possible, or go late in the afternoon, as it gets incredibly crowded. Wear shoes with good soles because the paths around the site are uneven and slippery. The Acropolis is now accessible to people in wheelchairs, with a cage lift rising vertically up the rock face on the northern side. People needing assistance should present at the main entrance.

The Acropolis admission includes entry to other sites (see boxed text, p117).

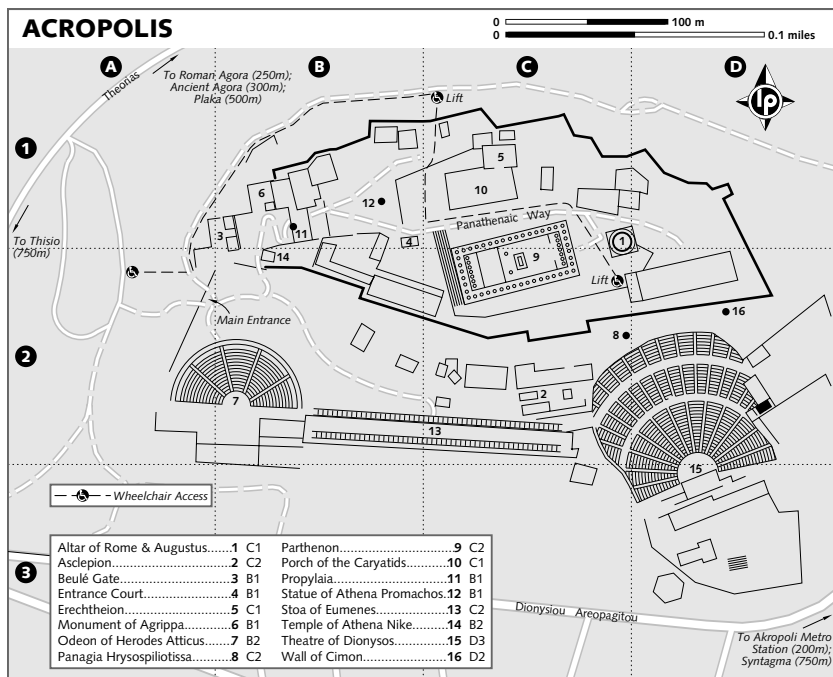
HISTORY

The Acropolis (high city) was first inhabited in Neolithic times. The first temples were built during the Mycenaean era in homage to the goddess Athena. People lived on the Acropolis until the late 6th century BC, but in 510 BC the Delphic oracle declared that it should be the province of the gods.

After all the buildings on the Acropolis were reduced to ashes by the Persians on the eve of the Battle of Salamis (480 BC), Pericles set about his ambitious rebuilding programme. He transformed the Acropolis into a city of temples, which has come to be regarded as the zenith of classical Greek achievement.

Ravages inflicted upon them during the years of foreign occupation, pilfering by foreign archaeologists, inept renovations following Independence, visitors' footsteps and earthquakes have all taken their toll on the surviving monuments. The worst blow was in 1687 when the Venetians attacked the Turks and opened fire on the Acropolis, causing an explosion in the Parthenon, where the Turks were storing gunpowder. The resulting fire blazed for two days, damaging all the buildings.

The most recent menace is acid rain, which is caused by industrial pollution and traffic fumes, which is dissolving the very marble of which the monuments are built. Major



restoration programmes are continuing in an effort to save the monuments for future generations. The Acropolis has World Heritage Site status.

BEULÉ GATE & MONUMENT OF AGRIPPA

Once inside the site, a little way along the path, on your left you will see the **Beulé Gate**, named after the French archaeologist Ernest Beulé, who uncovered it in 1852. The 8m pedestal on the left, halfway up the zigzag ramp leading to the Propylaea, was once topped by the **Monument of Agrippa**, a bronze statue of the Roman general riding a chariot. Now destroyed, it was erected in 27 BC to commemorate victory in a chariot race at the Panathenaic games.

PROPYLAEA

The **Propylaea** formed the towering entrance to the Acropolis in ancient times. Built by Mnesicles between 437 BC and 432 BC, its architectural brilliance ranks with that of the Parthenon. It consists of a central hall, with two wings on either side. Each section had a gate, and in ancient times these five

gates were the only entrances to the 'upper city'. The middle gate (which was the largest) opened onto the Panathenaic Way. The western portico of the Propylaea must indeed have been imposing, consisting of six double columns, Doric on the outside and Ionic on the inside. The fourth column along has been restored. The ceiling of the central hall was painted with gold stars on a dark-blue background. The northern wing was used as a *pinakothiki* (art gallery) and the south wing was the antechamber to the Temple of Athena Nike.

The Propylaea is aligned with the Parthenon – the earliest example of a building designed in relation to another. It remained intact until the 13th century, when various occupiers started adding to it. It was badly damaged in the 17th century when a lightning strike set off an explosion in a Turkish gunpowder store. Archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann paid for the removal of one of its appendages – a Frankish tower – in the 19th century. Reconstruction took place between 1909 and 1917, and there was further restoration after WWII.

PANATHENAIC WAY

The **Panathenaic Way**, which cuts across the middle of the Acropolis, was the route taken by the Panathenaic procession – the climax of the Panathenaia festival held to venerate the goddess Athena. There were actually two festivals: the Lesser Panathenaic Festival took place annually on Athena's birthday, and the Great Panathenaic Festival was held on every fourth anniversary of the goddess's birth.

The Great Panathenaic Festival began with dancing, followed by athletic, dramatic and musical contests. The Panathenaic procession, which took place on the final day of the festival, began at Keramikos and ended at the Erechtheion. Men carrying animals sacrificed to Athena headed the procession, followed by maidens carrying rhytons (horn-shaped drinking vessels). Behind them musicians played a fanfare for the girls of noble birth who followed, proudly holding aloft the sacred *peplos* (a glorious saffron-coloured shawl). At the rear were old men bearing olive branches. The procession's grand finale was the placing of the *peplos* on the statue of Athena Polias in the Erechtheion.

TEMPLE OF ATHENA NIKE

The exquisitely proportioned little **Temple of Athena Nike** once stood on a platform perched atop the steep southwest edge of the Acropolis, to the right of the Propylaea. It may well be there by the time you read this, but the temple was dismantled piece by piece in 2003 in a controversial move to restore it offsite. It was supposed to be back in time for the Olympics, but only parts had reappeared at the time of research.

Designed by Callicrates, the temple was built of Pentelic marble between 427 BC and 424 BC. The building is almost square, with four graceful Ionic columns at either end. Only fragments remain of the frieze, which had scenes from mythology on the east and south sides, and scenes from the Battle of Plataea (479 BC) and Athenians fighting Boeotians and Persians on the other sides. Parts of the frieze are in the Acropolis Museum (p115), as are some relief sculptures, including the beautiful sculpture of Athena Nike fastening her sandal. The temple housed a statue of the goddess Athena.

This is the third time the temple has been dismantled. The Turks took it apart in 1686 and put a huge cannon on the platform. It

was carefully reconstructed between 1836 and 1842, but was taken apart 50 years later because the platform was crumbling.

STATUE OF ATHENA PROMACHOS

Continuing ahead along the Panathenaic Way you will see, to your left, the foundations of pedestals for the statues that once lined the path, including one that held Pheidias' 9m-high **statue of Athena Promachos** (*promachos* means 'champion'). Symbolising Athenian invincibility against the Persians, the helmeted goddess held a shield in her left hand and a spear in her right. The statue was carted off to Constantinople by Emperor Theodosius in AD 426. By 1204 it had lost its spear, so the hand appeared to be gesturing. This led the inhabitants to believe that the statue had beckoned the crusaders to the city, so they smashed it to pieces.

PARTHENON

The **Parthenon** is the monument that more than any other epitomises the glory of ancient Greece. *Parthenon* means 'virgin's apartment'. This is the largest Doric temple ever completed in Greece, and the only one built completely (apart from its wooden roof) of Pentelic marble.

Built on the highest part of the Acropolis, the Parthenon had a dual purpose – to house the great statue of Athena commissioned by Pericles, and to serve as the new treasury. It was built on the site of at least four earlier temples dedicated to the worship of Athena. It was designed by Ictinus and Callicrates, under the surveillance of Pheidias, to be the pre-eminent monument of the Acropolis. Building began in 447 BC and was completed in time for the Great Panathenaic Festival of 438 BC.

The temple consisted of eight fluted Doric columns at either end and 17 on each side. To achieve perfect form, its lines were ingeniously curved to create an optical illusion – the foundations are slightly concave and the columns are slightly convex to make both look straight. Supervised by Pheidias, the sculptors Agoracritos and Alcamenes worked on the pediments and the sculpted sections of the frieze (metopes), which were brightly coloured and gilded. There were 92 metopes, 44 statues and a frieze, which went all the way around.

The metopes on the eastern side depicted Athenians fighting *gigantions* (giants), and on the western side they showed Theseus leading

the Athenians into battle against the Amazons. Those on the southern side represented the contest of the Lapiths and Centaurs at the marriage feast of Pierithoös. An Ionic frieze 159.5m long ran all around the Parthenon. Much of it was damaged in the explosion of 1687, but the greatest existing part (over 75m) consists of the much-publicised Parthenon Marbles, now in the British Museum in London. The British government continues to scorn Greek requests for their return.

The ceiling of the Parthenon, like that of the Propylaea, was painted blue and gilded with stars. At the eastern end was the holy cella (inner room of a temple), into which only a few privileged initiates could enter.

Here stood the statue for which the temple was built – the Athena Polias (Athena of the City) – considered one of the wonders of the ancient world. Designed by Pheidias and completed in 432 BC, it was gold plated over an inner wooden frame, and stood almost 12m high on its pedestal. The face, hands and feet were made of ivory, and the eyes were fashioned from jewels. The goddess was clad in a long dress of gold with the head of Medusa carved in ivory on her breast. In her right hand, she held a statuette of Nike (the goddess of victory) and in her left a spear; at the base of the spear was a serpent. She wore a helmet, on top of which was a sphinx with griffins in relief at either side.

In AD 426 the statue was taken to Constantinople, where it disappeared. There is a Roman copy (the Athena Varvakeion) in the National Archaeological Museum (p120).

ERECHTHEION

Although the Parthenon was the most impressive monument of the Acropolis, it was more of a showpiece than a sanctuary. That role fell to the **Erechtheion**, built on the part of the Acropolis held most sacred. It was here that Poseidon struck the ground with his trident and where Athena produced the olive tree (see p95). Named after Erichthonius, a mythical king of Athens, the temple housed the cults of Athena, Poseidon and Erichthonius.

The Erechtheion is immediately recognizable by the six larger-than-life maiden columns that support its southern portico, the much-photographed **Caryatids**. They are so called because the models for them were women from Karyai (modern-day Karyes) in Lakonia. Those you see are plaster casts. The originals

(except for one removed by Lord Elgin) are in the Acropolis Museum (opposite).

The Erechtheion was part of Pericles' plan, but the project was postponed after the outbreak of the Peloponnesian Wars, and work did not start until 421 BC, eight years after his death. It is thought to have been completed in 406 BC.

The Erechtheion is architecturally the most unusual monument of the Acropolis, a supreme example of Ionic architecture. Ingeniously built on several levels to counteract the unevenness of the ground, it consists of three basic parts – the main temple, northern porch and southern porch – all with different dimensions.

The main temple is of the Ionic order and is divided into two cellae – one dedicated to Athena, the other to Poseidon – representing a reconciliation of the two deities after their contest. In Athena's cella stood an olive-wood statue of Athena Polias holding a shield on which was a gorgon's head. The statue was illuminated by a golden lantern placed at its feet. It was this statue on which the sacred *peplos* was placed at the culmination of the Great Panathenaic Festival.

The northern porch consists of six graceful Ionic columns; on the floor are the fissures supposedly cleft by Poseidon's trident. This porch leads into the **Temenos of Pandrosos**, where, according to mythology, the sacred olive brought forth by Athena grew. To the south of here was the **Cecropion** – King Cecrops' burial place.

Southern Slope of the Acropolis THEATRE OF DIONYSOS

The importance of theatre in the Athenian city-state can be gauged from the dimensions of the enormous **Theatre of Dionysos** on the southeastern slope of the Acropolis.

The first theatre on this site was a timber structure erected sometime during the 6th century BC, after the tyrant Peisistratos introduced the Festival of the Great Dionysia. Everyone attended the contests, where men clad in goatskins sang and performed dances, which were followed by feasting and revelry.

During the golden age in the 5th century BC, the annual festival was one of the major events on the calendar. Politicians would sponsor dramas by writers such as Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, with some light

relief provided by the bawdy comedies of Aristophanes. People came from all over Attica, with their expenses met by the state.

The theatre was reconstructed in stone and marble by Lycurgus between 342 BC and 326 BC, with a seating capacity of 17,000 spread over 64 tiers, of which about 20 survive. Apart from the front row, the seats were built of Piraeus limestone and were occupied by ordinary citizens, although women were confined to the back rows. The front row had 67 thrones built of Pentelic marble, which were reserved for festival officials and important priests. The grandest was in the centre and reserved for the Priest of Dionysos, who sat shaded from the sun under a canopy. His seat can be identified by well-preserved lion-claw feet at either side. In Roman times, the theatre was also used for state events and ceremonies, as well as for performances.

The reliefs at the rear of the stage, mostly of headless figures, depict the exploits of Dionysos and date from the 2nd century BC. The two hefty, hunched-up guys who have managed to keep their heads are *selini*, worshippers of the mythical Selinos, the debauched father of the satyrs, whose chief attribute seems to have been an oversized phallus. His favourite pastime was charging up mountains in lecherous pursuit of nymphs. He was also Dionysos' mentor.

ASCLEPION & STOA OF EUMENES

Directly above the Theatre of Dionysos, wooden steps lead up to a pathway. On the left at the top of the steps is the **Asclepion**, which was built around a sacred spring. The worship of Asclepius, the physician son of Apollo, began in Epidavros and was introduced to Athens in 429 BC at a time when plague was sweeping the city.

Beneath the Asclepion is the **Stoa of Eumenes**, a colonnade built by Eumenes II, King of Pergamum (197–159 BC), as a shelter and promenade for theatre audiences.

ODEON OF HERODES ATTICUS

The path continues west from the Asclepion to the **Odeon of Herodes Atticus**, built in 161. Herodes Atticus was a wealthy Roman who built the theatre in memory of his wife Regilla. It was excavated in 1857–58 and completely restored between 1950 and 1961. There are performances of drama, music and dance here during

the Hellenic Festival (p130). The theatre is open to the public only during performances.

PANAGIA HRYSOSPILIOTISSA

Above the Theatre of Dionysos, you will see an indistinct rock-strewn path leading to a grotto in the cliff face. In 320 BC Thrasyllus turned the grotto into a temple dedicated to Dionysos. The tiny **Panagia Hrysoepiliotissa** (Chapel of our Lady of the Cavern) is now a poignant little place with old pictures and icons on the walls. Above the chapel are two Ionic columns, the remains of Thrasyllus' temple.

Acropolis Museum

The long-awaited new **Acropolis Museum** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 321 0219; Makrygianni 2-4; 🕒 8am-7pm Apr-Oct, 8am-5pm Nov-Mar) was to open by 2008 on a massive site at the southern base of the Acropolis.

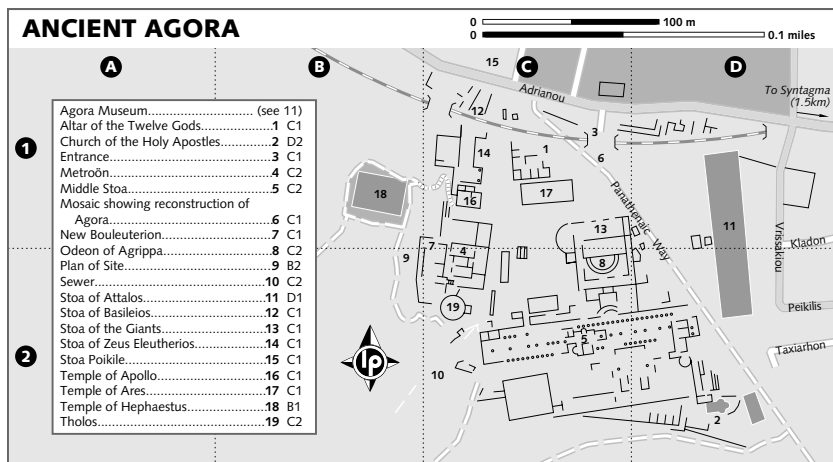
Construction of the museum was plagued by legal action and delays after the excavation uncovered the remains of an Athenian city dating back to prehistoric times. The impressive ruins have been incorporated into the design, with around 2000 sq metres of the old city on display in the basement through a series of elevated walkways and glass floors.

Designed by leading architect Bernard Tschumi, the museum will bring together all the surviving treasures of the Acropolis, including

ANCIENT PROMENADE

The once traffic-choked polluted streets around Athens' historic centre have been transformed into a spectacular 3km pedestrian promenade connecting the city's most significant ancient sites. Locals and tourists alike delight in an evening *volta* (walk) along the grand promenade – one of Europe's longest pedestrian precincts – under the floodlit Acropolis.

Ancient Athens is also seen in a new light, thanks to the brilliant illumination of the Acropolis and key monuments by French designer Pierre Bideau. The grand promenade starts at Dionysiou Areopagitou, opposite the Temple of Olympian Zeus, and continues along the southern foothills of the Acropolis, all the way to the Ancient Agora, branching off from Thisio to Keramikos and north along Adrianou to the Roman Agora, Monastiraki and Plaka.



those transferred from the old museum up on the Acropolis, as well as pieces from other Athenian museums and storage facilities.

The top-floor Parthenon Gallery has been designed to showcase the temple's frieze, sculptures and metopes. There are empty spaces for the missing pieces – the controversial Parthenon Marbles currently residing in the British Museum – that were hacked off by Lord Elgin in 1801. The pieces that escaped Lord Elgin's clutches depict the Olympians at the Panathenaic procession.

A glass atrium will allow you to see the Acropolis while you view the exhibits, though the latest controversy involved the demolition of two historic buildings to make this view unobstructed.

The museum collection (formerly in the on-site museum) includes finds from the temples predating the Parthenon and destroyed by the Persians, notably the pedimental sculptures of Heracles slaying the Lernaian Hydra and of a lioness devouring a bull.

Prize exhibits are the 6th-century-BC *Kore* (maiden) statues, uncovered from a pit on the Acropolis, where the Athenians buried them after the Battle of Salamis. The statues were votives dedicated to Athena, each one holding an offering to the goddess. The earliest of these *Kore* statues are quite stiff and formal in comparison with the later ones, which have flowing robes and elaborate headdresses.

Other highlights include the relief of Athena Nike adjusting her sandal, as well as four of

the five surviving Caryatids, from the Erechtheion. The fifth is in the British Museum.

Ancient Agora

Athens' meeting place in ancient times was the **Agora** (Map p116; ☎ 210 321 0185; Adrianou; adult/concession €4/2). It was the focal point of administrative, commercial, political and social activity. All roads led to the Agora, and it was a lively, crowded place. Socrates spent a lot of time here expounding his philosophy, and in AD 49 St Paul disputed daily in the Agora, intent upon winning converts to Christianity.

The site was first developed in the 6th century BC. It was devastated by the Persians in 480 BC, but a new agora was built in its place almost immediately. It was flourishing by Pericles' time and continued to do so until AD 267, when it was destroyed by the Herulians, a Gothic tribe from Scandinavia. The Turks built a residential quarter on the site, but this was demolished by archaeologists after Independence. If they'd had their way, the archaeologists would have also knocked down the whole of Plaka, which was also Turkish. The area has been excavated to classical and, in parts, Neolithic levels.

The main monuments are the Temple of Hephaestus, the Stoa of Attalos and the Church of the Holy Apostles.

The site is bounded by Areopagus Hill in the south, the Athens–Piraeus metro Line to the north, Plaka to the east and Apostolou Pavlou to the west. There are several

entrances, but the most convenient is the northern entrance from Adrianou.

STOA OF ATTALOS

The **Agora Museum**, in the reconstructed **Stoa of Attalos**, is a good place to start to make sense of the site. The museum opens later on Monday (11am) and has a model of the Agora as well as a collection of finds from the site.

The original stoa was built by King Attalos II of Pergamum (159–138 BC). Two storeys high with two aisles, it housed expensive shops and was a popular stamping ground for wealthy Athenians. People also gathered here to watch the Panathenaic procession.

It was authentically reconstructed between 1953 and 1956 by the American School of Archaeology. The reconstruction deviates from the original in only one detail: the façade has been left in natural Pentelic marble, but it was originally painted red and blue. The stoa has a series of 45 columns that are Doric on the ground floor and Ionic on the upper gallery.

TEMPLE OF HEPHAESTUS

This **temple** on the western edge of the Agora was surrounded by foundries and metalwork shops, and was dedicated to Hephaestus, god of the forge. It was one of the first buildings of Pericles' rebuilding programme and is the best-preserved Doric temple in Greece. Built in 449 BC by Ictinus, one of the architects of the Parthenon, it has 34 columns and a frieze on the eastern side depicting nine of the Twelve Labours of Heracles. In AD 1300 it was converted into the Church of Agios Georgios. The last service held here was on 13 December 1834 in honour of King Otho's arrival in Athens.

Unlike the Parthenon, the monument doesn't evoke a sense of wonder, but it's impressive enough nonetheless.

To the northeast of the temple are the foundations of the **Stoa of Zeus Eleutherios**, one of the places where Socrates expounded his philosophy. Further north are the foundations of the **Stoa of Basileios** and the **Stoa Poikile** (Painted Stoa), both currently inaccessible to the public. The Stoa Poikile was so called because of its murals, which were painted by the leading artists of the day and depicted mythological and historical battles.

To the southeast of the Temple of Hephaestus was the **New Bouleuterion** (Council House), where the Senate (originally created by Solon)

met, while the heads of government met to the south at the circular **Tholos**.

CHURCH OF THE HOLY APOSTLES

This charming little **church**, which stands near the southern entrance, was built in the early 10th century to commemorate St Paul's teaching in the Agora. Between 1954 and 1957 it was stripped of its 19th-century additions and restored to its original form. It contains some fine Byzantine frescoes.

Keramikos

The city's cemetery from the 12th century BC to Roman times was **Keramikos** (Map p101; ☎ 210 346 3552; Ermou 148, Keramikos; adult/concession incl museum €2/1; ☎ 8am–7.30pm Apr–Oct, 8am–5.30pm Nov–Mar). It was discovered in 1861 during the construction of Pireos, the street that leads to Piraeus. It is one of the most green and tranquil of Athens' ancient sites.

SACRED & DIPYLON GATES

Once inside the site, head for the small knoll ahead and to the right, where you'll find a plan of the site. A path leads down to the right from the knoll to the remains of the **city wall**, which was built by Themistocles in 479 BC, and rebuilt by Konon in 394 BC. The wall is broken by the foundations of two gates. Tiny signs mark each one.

The first, the **Sacred Gate**, spanned the Sacred Way and was the one by which pilgrims from Eleusis entered the city during the annual Eleusian procession. The second, the **Dipylon Gate**, to the northeast of the Sacred Gate, was the city's main entrance and where

SIX FOR THE PRICE OF ONE

The €12 Acropolis admission includes entry to the main ancient sites: Ancient Agora, Roman Agora, Keramikos, Temple of Olympian Zeus, and the Theatre of Dionysos. The ticket is valid for four days; otherwise individual site fees apply, though this is not enforced. The same opening hours (8am to 7pm April to October, 8am to 5.30pm November to May) apply for all of these sites, but it pays to double-check as sometimes winter hours and summer hours can vary. There is free entrance to the sites on the first Sunday of the month (except for July and August).

the Panathenaic procession began. It was also the stamping ground of the city's prostitutes, who gathered there to offer their services to jaded travellers.

From a platform outside the Dipylon Gate, Pericles gave his famous speech extolling the virtues of Athens and honouring those who died in the first year of the Peloponnesian Wars – stirring many more to battle and ultimately their deaths.

Between the Sacred and the Dipylon gates are the foundations of the **Pompeion**, used as a dressing room for participants in the Panathenaic procession.

STREET OF TOMBS

Leading off the Sacred Way to the left as you head away from the city is the **Street of Tombs**. This avenue was reserved for the tombs of Athens' most prominent citizens. The surviving stelae are now in the National Archaeological Museum (p120), and what you see are replicas. The astonishing array of funerary monuments, and their bas reliefs, warrant more than a cursory examination.

Ordinary citizens were buried in the areas bordering the Street of Tombs. One well-preserved stele shows a little girl with her pet dog. You will find it by going up the stone steps on the northern side of the Street of Tombs. The site's largest stele, that of sisters Demetria and Pamphile, is on the path running from the southeast corner of the Street of Tombs.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM OF KERAMIKOS

The site's small **museum** was established by its benefactor, Gustav Oberlaender, a German-American stocking manufacturer. It contains stelae and sculptures from the site, as well as a good collection of vases and terracotta figurines.

Roman Athens

TOWER OF THE WINDS & ROMAN AGORA

The entrance to the **Roman Agora** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 324 5220; cnr Pelopida & Eolou; adult/concession €2/1; ☎ 8am-7.30pm Apr-Oct, 8am-5.30pm Nov-Mar) is through the well-preserved **Gate of Athena Archegetis**, which is flanked by four Doric columns. It was erected sometime during the 1st century AD and financed by Julius Caesar.

The rest of the Roman Agora appears to the layperson as little more than a heap of rubble. To the right of the entrance are the

foundations of a 1st-century public latrine. In the southeast area are the foundations of a propylon and a row of shops.

The well-preserved **Tower of the Winds** (Map pp102-3) was built in the 1st century BC by a Syrian astronomer named Andronicus. The octagonal monument of Pentelic marble is an ingenious construction that functioned as a sundial, weather vane, water clock and compass. Each side represents a point of the compass, and has a relief of a figure floating through the air, which depicts the wind associated with that particular point. Beneath each of the reliefs are the faint markings of sundials. The weather vane, which disappeared long ago, was a bronze Triton that revolved on top of the tower. The Turks allowed dervishes to use the tower.

HADRIAN'S ARCH

The Roman emperor Hadrian had a great affection for Athens. Although he did his fair share of spiriting its classical artwork to Rome, he also embellished the city with many monuments influenced by classical architecture. Grandiose as these monuments are, they lack the refinement and artistic flair of their classical predecessors.

Hadrian's Arch (Map pp102-3) is a lofty monument of Pentelic marble that stands where busy Leoforos Vasilissis Olgas and Leoforos Vasilissis Amalias meet. It was erected by Hadrian in AD 132, probably to commemorate the consecration of the Temple of Olympian Zeus (below). The inscriptions show that it was also intended as a dividing point between the ancient city and the Roman city. The northwest frieze bears the inscription 'This is Athens, the Ancient city of Theseus', while the southeast frieze states 'This is the city of Hadrian, and not of Theseus'.

TEMPLE OF OLYMPIAN ZEUS

This is the largest **temple** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 922 6330; adult/concession €2/1; ☎ 8am-7.30pm Apr-Oct, 8am-5.30pm Nov-Mar) in Greece. The temple was begun in the 6th century BC by Peisistratos, but was abandoned for lack of funds. Various other leaders had stabs at completing the temple, but it was left to Hadrian to complete the work in AD 131. It took more than 700 years to build.

The temple is impressive for the sheer size of its 104 Corinthian columns (17m high with a base diameter of 1.7m), of which 15 remain –

the fallen column was blown down in a gale in 1852. Hadrian put a colossal statue of Zeus in the cella and, in typically immodest fashion, placed an equally large one of himself next to it.

HADRIAN'S LIBRARY

To the north of the Roman Agora is this vast 2nd-century-AD **library** (Map pp102-3), the largest structure erected by Hadrian. It included a cloistered courtyard bordered by 100 columns and there was a pool in the centre. As well as books, the building housed music and lecture rooms and a theatre. Restoration works were completed in 2005.

ROMAN BATHS

Excavation work to create a ventilation shaft for the metro uncovered the well-preserved ruins of a large **Roman bath complex** (Map pp102-3). The baths, which extend into the National Gardens, were established near the Ilissos river after the Herulian raids in the 3rd century AD; they were destroyed and repaired again in the 5th or 6th century.

PANATHENAIC STADIUM

The **Panathenaic Stadium** (Map p100), which lies between two pine-covered hills between the neighbourhoods of Mets and Pangrati, was originally built in the 4th century BC as a venue for the Panathenaic athletic contests. A thousand wild animals are said to have been slaughtered in the arena at Hadrian's inauguration in AD 120. The seats were rebuilt in Pentelic marble by Herodes Atticus.

After hundreds of years of disuse, the stadium was completely restored in 1895 by wealthy Greek benefactor Georgios Averof to host the first modern Olympic Games the following year. It is a faithful replica of the Panathenaic Stadium, comprising seats of Pentelic marble for 70,000 spectators, a running track and a central area for field events. It made a stunning backdrop to the archery competition and the marathon finish during the 2004 Olympics.

Byzantine Athens

Byzantine architecture in Athens is fairly thin on the ground. By the time of the split in the Roman Empire, Athens had shrunk to little more than a provincial town. The most important Byzantine building is the World Heritage-listed, 11th-century Moni Dafniou

(p156) at Dafni, 10km northwest of Athens, which has been closed since it was damaged in the 1999 earthquake.

The 12th-century **Church of Agios Eleftherios** (Little Metropolis; Map pp102-3; Plateia Mitropoleos, Plaka) is considered one of the city's finest. It is built partly of Pentelic marble and decorated with an external frieze of symbolic beasts in bas relief. It was originally dedicated to the Panagia Gorgoepikoos (meaning 'Virgin swift to answer prayers') and was once the city's cathedral, but now stands in the shadows of the much larger new **cathedral** (Map pp102-3).

The small 11th-century **Church of Kapnikarea** (Map pp102-3; Ermou, Monastiraki; ☎ 8am-2pm Tue, Thu & Fri) stands smack in the middle of the Ermou shopping strip. It was saved from the bulldozers and restored by Athens University. Its dome is supported by four large Roman columns.

The 11th-century **Church of Agii Theodoroi** (Map pp104-5; off Plateia Klafthmonos on Stadiou, Syntagma) has a tiled dome and walls decorated with a pretty terracotta frieze of animals and plants.

The lovely 11th-century **Agios Nikolaos Rangavas** (Map pp102-3; Plaka) was part of the palace of the Rangavas family, who counted among them Michael I, emperor of Byzantium. The church bell was the first installed in Athens after liberation from the Turks (who banned them), and was the first to ring in 1833 to announce the freedom of Athens.

The unique 11th-century **Church of Sotira Lykodimou** (Map pp102-3), now the Russian Orthodox Cathedral, is the only octagonal Byzantine church and has an imposing dome.

One of the oldest churches in Athens is the 10th-century Church of the Holy Apostles (p117) in the Ancient Agora. Other churches worth seeing are the 11th- to 12th-century **Church of Agia Ekaterini** (Map pp102-3) in Plaka near the Lysikratou monument, and the 15th-century Church of Agios Dimitrios Loumbardiaris (p124) on Filopappou Hill.

The lovely Byzantine monastery, Moni Kaisarianis (p125) is also worth a visit.

None of these sites keeps regular hours, so it's a case of popping in if they are open.

Neoclassical Athens

Athens boasts a large number of fine neoclassical buildings dating from the period after Independence. Foremost are the celebrated **neoclassical trilogy** on Panepistimiou, halfway between Omonia and Syntagma.

The centrepiece is the splendid **Athens University** (Map pp104–5), designed by the Danish architect Christian Hansen and completed in 1864. It still serves as the university's administrative headquarters. On its left is the **Athens Academy** (Map pp104–5), designed by Hansen's brother Theophile and completed in 1885. The Ionian-style entrance mimics the eastern entrance to the Erechtheion. Neither is open to the public.

The trilogy is completed by the **National Library** (Map pp104–5; ☎ 210 338 2541; www.nlg.gr; Panepistimiou 32, Syntagma; admission free; ☎ 9am–8pm Mon–Thu, 9am–2pm Fri & Sat). Its main feature is the corridor leading to the reading room, which is flanked by a row of Doric columns influenced by the Temple of Hephaestus (p117) in the Ancient Agora.

National Archaeological Museum

One of the world's great museums, the **National Archaeological Museum** (Map pp104–5; ☎ 210 821 7724; www.culture.gr; 28 Oktovriou–Patision 44, Athens; adult/concession €7/3; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon, 8am–7.30pm Tue–Sun Apr–Oct, 8.30am–3pm Nov–Mar) houses the most important finds from Greece's archaeological sites.

The museum, which was damaged in the 1999 earthquake, was totally overhauled and reopened in 2004. The collection has been rearranged thematically and is beautifully presented, with information in English and Greek. Hundreds of pieces held in storage are now on display, while galleries that were closed for many years have reopened. The final two galleries, with the Egyptian and Statuatos collections, were temporarily closed.

With 10,000 sq metres of exhibition space, it could take several visits to appreciate the museum's vast holdings, but it is possible to see the highlights in a half-day.

Ahead of you as you enter the museum is the **Prehistoric collection**, showcasing some of the most important pieces of Mycenaean, Neolithic and Cycladic art.

The fabulous collection of **Mycenaean antiquities** (Gallery 4) is the museum's *tour de force*. The first cabinet you come to holds the celebrated **Mask of Agamemnon**, unearthed at Mycenae by Heinrich Schliemann, along with key finds from Grave Circle A, including bronze daggers with intricate representations of the hunt. The exquisite **Vaphio gold cups**, with scenes of men taming wild bulls, are regarded as among the finest surviving examples of Mycenaean art. They were found in a *tholos*

(Mycenaean tomb shaped like a beehive) at Vaphio, near Sparta.

The **Cycladic collection** in Gallery 6 includes the superb figurines of the 3rd and 2nd century BC that inspired artists such as Picasso.

Backtrack and enter the galleries to the left of the entrance, which house the oldest and most significant pieces of the **Sculpture collection**. Galleries 7 to 13 exhibit the museum's fine examples of Archaic Kouros dating from the 7th century BC to 480 BC, including the colossal 600 BC **Sounion Kouros** (Room 8), found at the Temple of Poseidon in Sounion. Made of Naxian marble, the statue was a votive offering to Poseidon and stood before his temple.

Gallery 15 is dominated by the 460 BC bronze **statue of Zeus or Poseidon**, found in the sea off Evia, which depicts one of the gods (no-one really knows which one) with his arms outstretched and holding a thunderbolt or trident in his right hand.

In Gallery 21 you will see the striking 2nd-century-BC statue of a **horse and young rider**, recovered from a shipwreck off Cape Artemision in Evia. Behind the horse is the lesser-known **statue of Aphrodite**, showing a demure nude Aphrodite struggling to hold her draped gown over her private parts.

From Gallery 21, head left and up the stairs to the museum's other big crowd-puller, the spectacular **Minoan frescoes** from Santorini (Thira). The frescoes – *the Boxing Children*, the *Spring* wall painting showing red lilies and a pair of swallows kissing in mid-air and the *Antelopes* – were uncovered from the prehistoric settlement of Akrotiri (p431), which was buried by a volcanic eruption in the late 16th century BC.

The Thira Gallery is the most high-tech of the museum's displays, with videos showing the 1926 volcanic eruption, the Akrotiri excavation and preservation work on the vases and frescoes.

Also on the 1st floor is the extensive and superb **pottery collection**, which traces the development of pottery from the Bronze Age through the Protoegeometric and Geometric periods, to the emergence of the famous Attic black-figured pottery of the 6th century and the red-figured pottery from the late 5th to early 4th century. The other uniquely Athenian vessels are the Attic White Lekythoi, the slender vases depicting scenes at tombs.

In the centre of Gallery 56 are six **Panathenaic amphorae**, presented to the winners of the Panathenaic Games. Each amphorae contained oil from the sacred olive trees of Athens and victors might have received up to 140 of them. They are painted with scenes from the relevant sport (in this case wrestling) on one side and an armed Athena Promachos on the other.

In the centre of Room 50, you can see the obscure 7th-century **clay doll** (cabinet 20) from the Boetian Geometric period that was the inspiration for the odd-looking Athens 2004 Olympic mascots, Athena and Phivos. The female figure with movable large legs (one has six toes) has a bell-shaped body and a birdlike face.

Heading back to the ground floor, turn right into Gallery 36 for the **Bronze collection**. Some of the galleries on this floor were closed for 20 years. One of the significant additions to this collection is the large 2nd-century-BC statue of the **Lady of Kalymnon** in Gallery 39. This larger than life-size figure, wearing a long draped tunic, was found in bad shape by a fisherman off the island of Kalymno in 1994. Next to the statue are photos and details of its restoration.

Many of the smaller bronzes are masterpieces from the leading bronzesmithing workshops of Ancient Greece. The 200-BC statue of **Athena Varvakeion** is the most famous copy – much reduced in size – of the statue of Athena Polias by Pheidias that once stood in the Parthenon.

The museum is a 10-minute walk from Viktoria metro station, or catch trolleybus 2, 4, 5, 9 or 11 from outside St Denis Cathedral on Panepistimiou and get off at the Polytechnio stop.

Other Museums & Galleries

With its wealth of history, it is not surprising that Athens has more than 130 museums, highlighting the city's history, art, culture and obsessions.

BENAKI MUSEUM

Greece's finest private **museum** (Map pp106–7; ☎ 210 367 1000; www.benaki.gr; Leoforos Vasilissis Sofias & Koumbari 1, Kolonaki; adult/concession €6/3, free Thu; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon, Wed, Fri & Sat, 9am–midnight Thu, 9am–3pm Sun) contains the vast collection of Antonis Benakis, accumulated during 35 years of avid collecting in Europe and Asia. In 1931 he turned the

family house into a museum and presented it to the Greek nation. The collection includes Bronze Age finds from Mycenae and Thessaly; two early works by El Greco; ecclesiastical furniture brought from Asia Minor; pottery; copper, silver and woodwork from Egypt, Asia Minor and Mesopotamia; and a stunning collection of Greek regional costumes.

The **Benaki Museum Pireos Annexe** (Map p101; ☎ 210 345 3111; www.benaki.gr; Pireos 138, cnr Andronikou, Rouf; ☎ 10am–6pm Wed, Thu & Sun, 10am–10pm Fri & Sat) hosts regular visual arts, cultural and historical exhibitions as well as major international shows. The impressive former industrial building has a café and excellent gift store.

GOULANDRIS MUSEUM OF CYCLADIC & ANCIENT GREEK ART

This private **museum** (Map pp106–7; ☎ 210 722 8321; www.cycladic.gr; cnr Leoforos Vasilissis Sofias & Neofytou Douka, Kolonaki; adult/concession €5/2; ☎ 10am–4pm Mon & Wed–Fri, 10am–3pm Sat) houses a collection of Cycladic art second in importance only to that displayed at the National Archaeological Museum (opposite). The museum was custom-built for the collection, and the finds are beautifully displayed and well labelled. Although the exhibits cover all periods from Cycladic to Roman times, the emphasis is on the Cycladic era from 3000 BC to 2000 BC. The exhibits include the marble figurines with folded arms that inspired many 20th-century artists with their simplicity and purity of form.

The 19th-century mansion next door is used for temporary exhibitions.

BYZANTINE & CHRISTIAN MUSEUM

This outstanding **museum** (Map pp106–7; ☎ 210 721 1027; www.culture.gr; Leoforos Vasilissis Sofias 22; adult/concession €4/2; ☎ 8.30am–7.30pm Tue–Sun May–Sep, 8.30am–3pm Tue–Sun Oct–Apr; ☎) presents a priceless collection of Christian art, dating from the 4th to 15th centuries, which sheds light on Byzantine and post-Byzantine culture – a part of Greek history that is often ignored in favour of its ancient past. The collection is exceptionally presented with themed displays in a multilevel underground gallery. Housed in the pretty grounds of the former Villa Ilissia, the museum is a welcome break from the city hubbub.

KANELLOPOULOS MUSEUM

This excellent **museum** (Map pp102–3; ☎ 210 321 2313; Theorias 12, cnr Panos, Plaka), in an imposing

ART UNDERGROUND

The Athens metro is an underground network of veritable museums and contemporary art galleries. Construction of the city's subway turned into Greece's biggest archaeological dig. Graves, foundations of ancient structures, wells and thousands of artefacts were found in the process and many of these finds are exhibited in metro stations around Athens, with the most impressive displays at Syntagma, Akropoli and the recently opened Egaleo station, where a 30m-long section of the 5th-century Sacred Way and other finds are displayed beneath a glass walkway.

All stations also incorporate art installations by leading Greek artists, such as Alekos Fassianos' work at Metaxourghio station, Yiannis Gaïtis' trademark little men at Larisis, and New York-based artist Stephen Antonakos' neon installation at Evangelismos.

1884 mansion on the northern slope of the Acropolis, houses the Kanellopoulos family's extensive collection, donated to the state in 1976. The collection includes jewellery, clay-and-stone vases and figurines, weapons, Byzantine icons, bronzes and *objets d'art* dating from every period of Greek history. It was due to reopen by 2008 after a major refurbishment.

NATIONAL ART GALLERY

Greece's premier **art gallery** (Map pp106-7; ☎ 210 723 5857; Leoforos Vasileos Konstantinou 50; adult/concession €6/5; ☎ 9am-3pm Wed-Sat, 6-9pm Mon & Wed, 10am-2pm Sun) presents a rich collection of Greek art spanning four centuries from the post-Byzantine period. A new wing housing its permanent collection explores the key art movements chronologically. The 1st floor hosts works from the post-Byzantine period, the gallery's prized El Greco paintings, including *The Crucifixion* and *Symphony of the Angels*, and works from the Ionian period until 1900. On the 2nd floor are works by the country's leading 20th-century artists, including Parthenis, Moralis, Maleas and Lytras. The gallery also has works by European masters, including paintings by Picasso, Marquet and Utrillo, and hosts major international exhibitions.

The gallery's significant sculpture collection is now housed in Goudi at the **National Glyptoteque** (off Map pp106-7; ☎ 210 770 9855; Army Park, Katehaki; adult/concession €6/3; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun).

NUMISMATIC MUSEUM

This magnificent neoclassical mansion is worth a visit, even if you have little interest in coins. The **museum** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 364 3774; Panepistimiou 12, Syntagma; adult/concession €3/2; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun) comprises 400,000 coins from ancient Greek, Hellenic, Roman and Byzantine times. The building was once the home of the celebrated archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann.

MUSEUM OF GREEK FOLK ART

An excellent collection of secular and religious folk art, mainly from the 18th and 19th centuries, is housed in this **museum** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 322 9031; Kydathineon 17, Plaka; adult/concession €2/1; ☎ 9am-2pm Tue-Sun). The 1st floor has embroidery, pottery, weaving and puppets. The 2nd floor has a reconstructed traditional village house with paintings by the primitive artist Theophilos of Lesvos (Mytilini). Greek traditional costumes are displayed on the 3rd and 4th floors.

NATIONAL HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Specialising in memorabilia from the War of Independence, this **museum** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 323 7617; Stadiou 13, Syntagma; adult/concession €3/1, admission free Sun; ☎ 9am-2pm Tue-Sun, closed Mon in winter) has Byron's helmet and sword. There is also a series of paintings depicting events leading up to the war, Byzantine and medieval exhibits, and a collection of photographs and royal portraits.

The museum is housed in the old parliament building at Plateia Kolokotroni. Theodoros Deligiannis, who succeeded Trikoupis as prime minister of Greece, was assassinated on the steps of the building in 1905.

CITY OF ATHENS MUSEUM

Occupying the palace where King Otho and his consort Amalia lived for a few years in the 1830s, this **museum** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 323 1397; Paparigopoulou 7, Syntagma; adult/concession €3/2; ☎ 10.30am-6pm Mon, 9am-4pm Wed-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat & Sun) contains some of the royal couple's furniture, costumes and personal mementos, as well as paintings, prints and models of Athens in the 19th century.

ISLAMIC ART MUSEUM

A rarity outside the Islamic world and an unexpected find in Greece given the country's history, this **museum** (Map p101; ☎ 210 325 1311; www.benaki.gr; Agion Asomaton & Dipyliou; adult/concession €5/3, free Thu; ☎ 9am-3pm Tue & Thu-Sun, 9am-9pm Wed) showcases one of the world's most significant collections of Islamic art, the bulk of which was assembled by Antonis Benakis in the 19th century. Opened by the Benaki Museum in 2004 in two restored neoclassical mansions near Keramikos, the museum exhibits more than 8000 items covering the 12th to 19th centuries, including weavings, carvings, prayer carpets, tiles and ceramics. There is a 17th-century reception room with an inlaid marble floor from a Cairo mansion on the 3rd floor. A very pleasant rooftop café overlooks Keramikos and you can see part of the Themistoklean wall in the basement.

JEWISH MUSEUM

Housed in a 19th-century mansion, this **museum** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 322 5582; Nikis 39, Plaka; adult/concession €5/2; ☎ 9am-2.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sun)

traces the history of the Jewish community in Greece back to the 3rd century BC through an impressive collection of religious and folk art, and documents. It includes a reconstruction of a synagogue.

FRISSIRAS MUSEUM

This private **art museum** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 323 4678; www.frissirasmuseum.com; Moni Asteriou Tsangari 3, Plaka; adult/concession €6/3; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun) is housed in two beautifully restored neoclassical mansions in Plaka. It showcases more than 3000 works of contemporary European painting, focusing mainly on the human figure, and hosts regular temporary exhibitions. There is a pleasant museum café.

TURKISH BATHS

This beautifully refurbished 17th-century bathhouse (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 324 4340; Kyristou 8, Plaka; admission €2; ☎ 9am-2.30pm Wed-Mon) is the only surviving public bathhouse in Athens and one of the few remnants of Ottoman times. A helpful free audio tour takes you back in time to the bathhouse days.

FREE MUSEUMS

Athens has some interesting free museums. The **Museum of Greek Popular Instruments** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 325 4119; Diogenou 1-3, Plaka; ☎ 10am-2pm Tue & Thu-Sun, noon-6pm Wed) has displays and recordings of a wide selection of traditional instruments and has live music in the courtyard on weeknights in summer.

The most significant collection of Greek inscriptions can be seen at the **Epigraphical Museum** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 821 7637; Tositsa 1; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun), a veritable library of stone tablets next to the National Archaeological Museum.

The **War Museum** (Map pp106-7; ☎ 210 725 2975; cnr Leoforos Vasilissis Sofias & Rizari 2, Athens; ☎ 9am-2pm Tue-Sun) is a relic of the colonels' junta as well as an architectural statement of the times. All periods from the Mycenaean to the present day are covered, and displays include weapons, maps, armour and models.

Aspiring thespians can visit the **Theatre Museum** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 362 9430; Akadimias 50, Syntagma; ☎ 9am-2.30pm Mon-Fri) to see memorabilia from the 19th and 20th centuries, including costumes, props and reconstructions of the dressing rooms of Greece's most celebrated 20th-century actors.

The **Centre of Folk Art & Tradition** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 324 3987; Hatzimihali Angelikis 6, Plaka; ☎ 9am-1pm & 5-9pm Tue-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat & Sun) has good displays of costumes, embroideries, pottery and musical instruments.

The **Museum of the History of Greek Costume** (Map pp106-7; ☎ 210 362 9513; Dimokritou 7, Kolonaki; ☎ 10am-2pm Mon-Fri) has rotating exhibitions of traditional costumes from different regions of Greece.

The **Technopolis** (Map p101; ☎ 210 3467 322; www.technopolis.gr; Pireos 100, Gazi; ☎ 10am-3pm Mon-Fri) also houses the Maria Callas Museum, a small museum dedicated to the revered opera diva. This innovative cultural centre in the superbly converted Athens gasworks complex also hosts multimedia exhibitions, concerts and special events.

Hills of Athens

The Athens basin is surrounded by mountains, bounded to the north by Mt Parnitha, the northeast by Mt Pendeli, the west by Mt Egaleo and the east by Mt Ymittos. Downtown Athens is dominated by the much smaller hills of Lykavittos (277m) and the Acropolis (156m), which are a pleasant escape from the traffic-congested streets.

LYKAVITTOS HILL

The name Lykavittos means 'hill of wolves' and derives from ancient times when the hill was surrounded by countryside and its pine-covered slopes were inhabited by wolves. Today, the hill (Map pp106–7) is no longer surrounded by countryside nor inhabited by wolves, but rises out of a sea of concrete to offer the finest views in Athens. The dreaded *nefos* (pollution haze) permitting, there are panoramic views of the city, the Attic basin, the surrounding mountains, and the islands of Salamina and Aegina. A path leads to the summit from the top of Loukianou. Alternatively, you can take the **funicular railway** (Map pp106–7; ☎ 210 721 0701; return €5.50; 🕒 9am–3am, half-hourly), referred to as the *teleferik*, from the top of Ploutarhou.

There is a café halfway up the path and another at the top, as well as a fancy restaurant (see Orizontes, p139) with spectacular views. Also on the summit is the little **Chapel of Agios Giorgios** (Map pp106–7), which is floodlit at night and looks like a vision from a fairy tale from the streets below. The open-air Lykavittos Theatre (p130), northeast of the summit, is used for concerts in summer.

WEST OF THE ACROPOLIS

Filopappou Hill (Map pp102–3), also called the Hill of the Muses, is identifiable to the southwest of the Acropolis by the Monument of Filopappos (Map p108) at its summit. The monument was built between 114 and 116 in honour of Julius Antiochus Filopappos, who was a prominent Roman consul and administrator.

There are small paths all over the hill, but the paved path to the top starts near the *periptero* (kiosk) on Dionysiou Areopagitou. The pine-clad slopes are a pleasant place for a stroll, and offer good views of the plain and mountains of Attica and of the Saronic Gulf, and also offer some of the best vantage points for photographing the Acropolis. After 250m,

the path passes the **Church of Agios Dimitrios Loumbardiariis** (Map pp102–3), which contains some fine frescoes.

North of here is the rocky **Hill of the Pnyx** (Map p101), the meeting place of the Democratic Assembly in the 5th century BC. Among the great orators who addressed assemblies here were Aristides, Demosthenes, Pericles and Themistocles. The site offers great views over Athens.

To the northwest is the **Hill of the Nymphs** (Map p101), on which stands the old **Athens observatory** built in 1842.

The low **Areopagus Hill** (Map pp102–3) lies between the Acropolis and the Ancient Agora. According to mythology, it was here that Ares was tried by the council of the gods for the murder of Halirrhothios, son of Poseidon. The council accepted his defence of justifiable *deicide* (the act of killing a god) on the grounds that he was protecting his daughter, Alcippe, from unwanted advances.

The hill became the place where murder, treason and corruption trials were heard before the Council of the Areopagus. In AD 51, St Paul delivered his famous 'Sermon to an Unknown God' from this hill and gained his first Athenian convert, Dionysos, who became patron saint of the city.

There are good views of the Ancient Agora from the summit. Areopagus Hill can be climbed by slippery marble steps cut into the rock, opposite the entrance to the Acropolis, or the new stairs.

Parks

The area around Syntagma is relatively green, but Athens is sadly lacking in parks. The best walks are around the base of the Acropolis and around Filopappou Hill and the Pnyx.

NATIONAL GARDENS

The **National Gardens** (Map pp102–3; entrances on Leoforos Vasilissis Sofias & Leoforos Vasilissis Amalias, Syntagma; 🕒 7am–dusk) are a delightful, shady refuge during summer. They were formerly the royal gardens designed by Queen Amalia. There's also a large children's **playground**, a duck pond and a lovely shady café.

ZAPPEIO GARDENS

Laid out in a network of wide walkways around the grand **Zappeio Palace** (www.zappeion.gr), these **gardens** (Map pp102–3; entrances on Leoforos Vasilissis Amalias & Leoforos Vasilissis Olgas) were built

in the 1870s with money donated by the wealthy Greek-Romanian benefactor Konstantinos Zappas. Until the 1970s, the Zappeio was used mainly as an exhibition hall. It was used for Council of Europe meetings during Greece's presidency of the EC and as a media centre during the Olympics. There's a pleasant café and restaurant next to the palace, as well as an open-air cinema and a chic bar.

Other Attractions

PARLIAMENT

Greece's **Parliament** (Map pp102–3) was originally the royal palace designed by the Bavarian architect Von Gartner and built between 1836 and 1842. In 1935 it became the seat of the Greek parliament and it was from the palace balcony that the syntagma (constitution) was declared on 3 September 1843. The royal family moved to a new palace, which became the presidential palace upon the abolition of the monarchy in 1974. Only the library is open to the public.

The war memorial in the forecourt, known as the **Tomb of the Unknown Soldier**, is guarded by the city's famous statuesque *evzones*, the presidential guards whose uniform of short kilts and pom-pom shoes is based on the attire worn by the klephts (the mountain fighters of the War of Independence). The changing of the guard takes place every hour, while every Sunday at 11am the *evzones* perform an extended **changing of the guard ceremony** in full ceremonial dress, accompanied by a military band.

ATHENS OLYMPIC STADIUM (OAKA)

Athens' newest landmark is the massive **Athens Olympic Complex** (Map p155; ☎ 210 683 4777; www.oaka.com.gr; Marousi). The showpiece stadium where the main action took place in 2004 is crowned by the striking glass and steel roof designed by Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava. The vast complex includes numerous stadiums and futuristic design elements, such as the shimmering Wall of Nations. You can only visit on an organised tour (minimum 15 people; per person €3, additional fees for afternoon or weekend tours). If you are travelling independently, you can send a request to join another tour (fax 210 683 4021; oakaprel@otenet.gr). Take Metro Line 1 (Irini stop).

MONI KAISARIANIS

Nestled on the slopes of Mt Hymmetos, 5km from the city, the 11th-century **monastery of Kaisariani** (Map p155; ☎ 210 723 6619; Mt Hymmetos; admission €2; 🕒 buildings 8.30am–2.45pm Tue–Sun, grounds 8.30am–sunset) is a peaceful sanctuary.

Built on the foundations of an ancient temple, the dome of the church is supported by four columns from the ancient temple. The walled complex has a central court surrounded by the kitchen and dining rooms, the monks' cells and the bathhouse. The domed *katholikon* (main church) is built in cruciform style. Most of the well-preserved frescoes date back to the 17th and 18th centuries. Avoid weekends, when it's swarming with picnickers.

Take bus 224 from Plateia Kanningos (at the north end of Akadimias), or from the junction of Akadimias and Sina, to the terminus. From here it's about 30 minutes' walk to the monastery – or just get a taxi.

ATHENS' FIRST CEMETERY

This **cemetery** (Map p108; Anapafseos, Trivonianou, Mets; 🕒 7.30am–sunset) is the resting place of many famous Greeks and philhellenes, and while it may seem a quirky thing to do, it is a fascinating and peaceful place to explore.

Most of the tombstones and mausoleums are lavish in the extreme. Some are kitsch and sentimental; others are works of art created by the foremost 19th-century Greek sculptors, such as Halepas' *Sleeping Maiden* on the tomb of a young girl.

Among the cemetery's famous residents is the archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann (1822–90), whose mausoleum is decorated with scenes from the Trojan War.

HELLENIC COSMOS

If ruins and museums aren't enough insight into the ancient world, you can take a virtual reality trip to Ancient Greece at the futuristic **Foundation for the Hellenic World** (off Map p100; ☎ 212 254 0000; www.fhw.gr; Pireos 254, Tavros; adult €6–10, child €3.90–8 depending on session; 🕒 9am–9pm Mon–Tue & Thu–Fri, 9am–9pm Wed, noon–6pm Sat, 11am–3pm Sun Jun–Sep; check for winter hr), about 2km from the city centre. The new high-tech **Tholos** domed virtual reality theatre takes you on an interactive tour of the Ancient Agora (€10) while the **Kivotos time machine** has 3D floor-to-ceiling screens featuring ancient Miletus, Olympia and the world of Greek costumes.

PLANETARIUM

Athens claims to have the world's largest and most technologically advanced digital **Planetarium** (off Map p100; ☎ 210 946 9600; www.eugenfound.edu.gr; Syngrou 387, Palio Faliro; adult €4-8, concession €5-6; 🕒 5.30-8.30pm Wed-Fri, 10.30am-8.30pm Sat & Sun). The 280-seat planetarium, with a 950-sq-metre hemispherical dome, offers 3-D virtual trips to the galaxy, as well as IMAX movies and other high-tech shows about Ancient Greece. There is simultaneous narration in English (€1). The planetarium is part of the Eugenides Foundation, a progressive scientific and educational institution. Enter from Penteli.

Take the metro to Syngrou-Fix, then the No 550 or B2 bus to the Onassio stop and take the underpass across the road.

Beaches

Many tourists forget that Athens is a coastal city, but there are some decent beaches within easy distance of the city centre. The closest are along the coast towards Glyfada (p99), though the best of these are organised and charge admission (between €4 and €15 per adult). They're usually open between 8am and dusk, later during heatwaves, and include sun beds, umbrellas and facilities like changing rooms, children's playgrounds and cafés. The fancier ones have watersports and private cabanas.

There are free beaches at Palio Faliro (Edem), Kavouri and Glyfada.

The closest beaches to Athens are at **Alimo** (Akti Tou Iliou; ☎ 210 985 5169; Mon-Fri adult/child €5/4, Sat & Sun adult/child €7/4) and **Agios Kosmas**, while the better (and pricier) beaches are just south of Glyfada, including **Asteras Beach** (☎ 210 894 1620; www.balux-septem; Mon-Fri €6, Sat & Sun €10) and **Varkiza** (☎ 210 897 2414; www.yabanaki.gr; Mon-Fri adult/child €5.50/3.50, Sat & Sun adult/child €6.30/3.50).

These beaches can be reached by tram and then buses travelling south from Glyfada.

There is also good (free) swimming at Shinias, Marathon and Vravrona in the north, though these take much longer to get to and are best reached by car.

You can swim year-round at **Limni Vouliagmenis** (☎ 210 896 2239; www.limnivouliagmeni.gr; adult/child under 5yr €7/free; 🕒 7am-8pm), a part-saltwater/part-springwater lake whose temperature never falls below 21°C and is known for its therapeutic mineral qualities. It is set dra-

matically against a huge jutting cliff, just off the coast, and has a quaint old-world atmosphere thanks to the regular clientele of elderly citizens dressed in bathing caps and towelling gowns.

ACTIVITIES

Diving

The **Aegean Dive Centre** (☎ 210 894 5409; www.adc.gr; cnr Zamanou & Pandoras, Glyfada; beginners course from €400, day/night dives €35/40) organises dives at a variety of sites between Vouliagmeni and Cape Sounion. Prices include all diving equipment.

Golf

Athens' only course is the international standard 18-hole, par 72 **Glyfada Golf Club** (☎ 210 894 6820; www.athensgolfclub.com; off Konstantinos Karamanli; 9-/18-hole green fees €40/52.50). Clubs and buggies are available for hire. Bookings are required for weekends and public holidays.

Skiing

The nearest ski fields to Athens are at Mt Parnassos (p237), three hours northwest, and Kalavryta (p170) in the Peloponnese. The season usually lasts from mid-January to March. Day excursions to the Parnassos and Kalavryta are organised by Trekking Hellas (p130) and **Klaoudatos** (Map p100; ☎ 210 825 6840; www.klaoudatos.gr; Patision 52).

WALKING TOUR

This walk takes in most of the main sites in Athens. It involves just over one hour's walking, but can take up to four hours allowing for lingering at various sites and a few detours.

The walk begins at the fountain at Plateia Syntagma. The square has been a favourite place for protests and rallies ever since the rally that led to the granting of a constitution on 3 September 1843, declared by King Otho from the balcony of the royal palace. In 1944 the first round of the civil war began here after police opened fire on a communist rally, while in 1954 it was the location of the first demonstration demanding the *enosis* (union) of Cyprus with Greece.

Standing facing the metro station, to your left is the historic **Hotel Grande Bretagne** (1; above), the grandest of Athens' hotels. Built in 1862 as a 60-room mansion for visiting dignitaries, it was converted into a hotel in 1872 and became the place where

the crowned heads of Europe and eminent politicians stayed. The Nazis made it their headquarters during WWII. The hotel was the scene of an attempt to blow up the British prime minister Winston Churchill on Christmas Eve 1944.

To the left of the metro entrance you can see a section of the **ancient cemetery** and the **Peisistratos aqueduct** (2), which was unearthed during metro excavations.

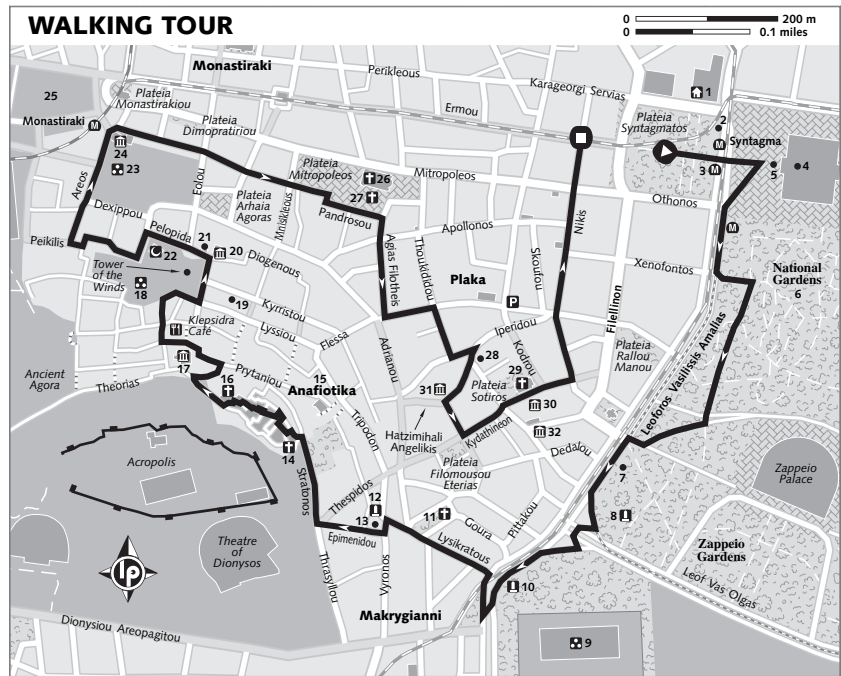
Take the metro underpass to cross from the square to the Parliament, stopping en route at the upper hall of **Syntagma metro station** (3; p122), showpiece of the city's swish metro system. Glass cases at the southern end of the huge marble hall display finds uncovered during construction, while the western wall has been preserved like a trench at an archaeological dig.

WALK FACTS

Start Syntagma

Finish Syntagma

Duration Three to four hours



The underpass emerges to the right of the former royal palace, now the **Parliament building** (4; p125). Backtrack to the forecourt of the Parliament, where you will see the much-photographed *evzones*, the presidential guards. They stand sentinel under the striking Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, which depicts a slain soldier and has inscriptions with excerpts of Pericles' epitaph. Time your visit to catch the **changing of the guard** (5; p125), every hour on the hour.

Duck into the lush **National Gardens** (6; p124) to escape the traffic and exit near the well-preserved ruins of the **Roman Baths** (7; p119), uncovered during metro excavation works. Continue along Leoforos Vasilissis Amalias to Vassilissis Olgas. To your left is the **statue** (8) of Lord Byron being embraced by Hellas, who seems to be plucking a feather from his head.

Crossing the road, you will see the striking columns of the **Temple of Olympian Zeus** (9; p118), while ahead of you teetering on the edge of the traffic, is **Hadrian's Arch** (10; p118), the ornate gateway erected to mark the boundary of Hadrian's Athens.

Cross over Leoforos Vasilissis Amalias and head right towards Lysikratous, where you will make a left turn into Plaka. Ahead on your right you will see the ruins of a roman monument in the forecourt of the 11th to 12th century **Church of Agia Ekaterini (11)**.

Continuing ahead you will reach the **Choric Monument of Lysikrates (12)**. This monument was built in 334 BC to commemorate a win in a choral festival. The reliefs on the monument depict the battle between Dionysos and the Tyrrhenian pirates, whom the god had transformed into dolphins. It is the earliest known monument using Corinthian capitals externally. It stands in what was once part of the **Street of Tripods (13)**; Modern Tripodon), where winners of ancient dramatic and choral contests dedicated their tripod trophies to Dionysos.

In the 18th century, the monument was incorporated into the library of a French Capuchin convent, in which Lord Byron stayed in 1810–11 and wrote *Childe Harold*. The convent was destroyed by fire in 1890.

Facing the monument, turn left and then right into Epimenidou. At the top of the steps, turn right into Stratonos, which skirts the Acropolis. Just ahead you will see the **Church of St George of the Rock (14)**, which marks the entry to the **Anafiotika quarter (15)**. The picturesque maze of little whitewashed houses is the legacy of the stonemasons from the small Cycladic island of Anafi who were brought in to build the king's palace after Independence. It's a peaceful spot, with brightly painted olive-oil cans brimming with flowers bedecking the walls of the tiny gardens in summer.

Following the narrow path that winds around the houses, hand-painted signs pointing to the Acropolis lead you to the tiny **Church of Agios Simeon (16)**. It looks like a dead end but persevere and you will emerge at the Acropolis road. Turn right and then left into Prytaniou, veering right after 50m into Tholou. The yellow-ochre building at No 5 is the **old Athens university (17)**, built by the Venetians. The Turks used it as public offices and it housed Athens University from 1837 to 1841.

A few metres along, turn right on Klepsidras down some narrow steps that lead to the little Klepsidra Café, where you can have a rest stop or continue down to the ruins of the **Roman Agora (18)**; p118).

To the right of the Tower of the Winds, on Kyrristou are the **Turkish Baths (19)**; p123),

while the **Museum of Greek Popular Instruments (20)**; p123) is just ahead on Diogenous. As you turn onto Pelopida you will see the **Gate of the Muslim seminary (21)**, built in 1721 and destroyed in a fire in 1911, and the **Fethiye Mosque (22)** on the site of the Agora.

Follow the road around the Agora, then turn right into Peikilis and right again into Areos. Ahead on your right are the ruins of **Hadrian's Library (23)**; p119). Next to it is the **Museum of Traditional Greek Ceramics (24)**; ☎ 210 324 2066; Areos 1, Monastiraki; adult/concession €3/2; ☎ 10am–2pm Wed–Mon), housed in the 1759 Moskos of Tzistarakis. After Independence it lost its minaret and was used as a prison.

You are now in Monastiraki, the colourful, chaotic square, teeming with street vendors. To the left is the metro station and the **flea market (25)**; p144), and you won't fail to notice the souvlaki aromas wafting from Mitropoleos.

Turn right at the mosque into Pandrosou. This relic of the old Turkish bazaar is full of souvenir shops. The street is named after King Cecrops' daughter, Pandrosos, who was the first priestess of Athens. Pandrosou leads to the **Athens Cathedral (26)**. The cathedral has little architectural merit, which isn't surprising considering that it was constructed from the masonry of over 50 razed churches and from the designs of several architects. Next to it stands the smaller, more appealing and significant **Church of Agios Eleftherios (27)**; p119). Just past this church turn right into Agias Filotheis, which is lined with buildings belonging to the Greek church. The mansion with the elaborate gold doors is the residence of the Archbishop of Greece.

Turn left into Flessa, then right to reach the peculiar junkyard landmark that is **Tom's Recycled Garden (28)**. You might even catch a glimpse of the eccentric Irishman working on one of his wacky political artistic statements.

Follow the pedestrian street to busy Kydathineon, and Plateia Filomousou Eterias, which is packed with cafés and outdoor tavernas. Turn left and a little way along you will come to the **Church of Metamorfofis (29)**, opposite the **Museum of Greek Folk Art (30)**; p122). If you've got the time, you could also squeeze in a visit to the nearby **Centre of Folk Art & Tradition (31)**; p123), on Hatzimihali Angelikis, or take in some European art at the **Frissiras Museum (32)**; p123).

Alternatively, continue along Kydathineon and turn left into Nikis, head all the way to

Ermou, where you can turn left into Athens' main shopping drag, or right to return to Syntagma.

COURSES

If you are serious about learning Greek, several places offer intensive courses for beginners and various levels of proficiency.

Athens Centre (Map p100; ☎ 210 701 2268; www.athenscentre.gr; Arhimidou 48, Mets) Occupying a fine neoclassical building in a quiet residential suburb, the centre's immersion courses (€640) pack 60 hours of classes into three or four weeks. It also runs cheaper conversation, grammar and business courses.

Hellenic Cultural Centre (Map pp104–5; ☎ /fax 210 523 8149; www.hcc.edu.gr; Halkokondyli 50, Omonia) Ideal for people without a lot of time, the centre squeezes 40 hours of class time and 20 hours of excursion time into two weeks (€650). In August, classes are held on an island.

Hellenic-American Union (Map pp106–7; ☎ 210 368 0900; www.hau.gr; Massalias 22, Kolonaki) This well-regarded centre runs courses that last three to 10 weeks (from €400).

For information on language courses on the islands, see p721.

ATHENS FOR CHILDREN

Athens is short on playgrounds but there are activities to keep kids amused. Stroll through the shady **National Gardens** (p124), where there is a playground, duck pond and minizoo, or go to the **War Museum** (p123), where the kids can climb into the cockpit of a WWII plane and other aircraft in the courtyard. There is also a fully enclosed shady playground in the **Zappeio Gardens** (p124).

The **Hellenic Children's Museum** (Map pp102–3; ☎ 210 331 2995; Kydathineon 14, Plaka; admission free; ☎ 10am–2pm Tue–Fri, 10am–3pm Sat & Sun) is more of a play centre than a museum. It has a games room and a number of 'exhibits', such as a mock-up of a metro tunnel, for children to explore. Parents must supervise their children at all times.

The **Museum of Children's Art** (Map pp102–3; ☎ 210 331 2621; Kodrou 9, Plaka; admission free; ☎ 10am–2pm Tue–Sat, 11am–2pm Sun, closed Aug) has a room set aside where children can let loose their creative energy. Crayons and paper are supplied. A €1 fee applies only to children attending special programmes.

Further afield, the enormous **Allou Fun Park & Kidom** (off Map p100; ☎ 210 425 6999; Leoforos Kifisou 5 & Petrou Rali, Renti; admission free, rides €2–4; ☎ 5pm–1am Mon–Fri, 10am–midnight Sat & Sun) is Athens' biggest

amusement park complex. Kidom is aimed at younger children. It's a pricey but sure way to keep kids entertained for a while.

The **Attica Zoological Park** (off Map pp106–7; ☎ 210 663 4724; www.atticapark.gr; Yalou, Spata; adult/child 3–12yr €11/9; ☎ 9am–sunset) isn't one of the world's great zoos but you can see lions, zebras, apes, birds, reptiles and other animals if you make the trek out to Spata, near the airport. To get there take bus 319 from Doukissis Plakentias metro station.

You can always escape the heat and amuse the kids with a virtual-reality tour of ancient Greece at the **Foundation for the Hellenic World** (p125) or check out the latest digital technology at the impressive **Planetarium** (p126).

TOURS

Athens Sightseeing Public Bus Line (☎ 185; www.oasa.gr; fare €5), bus route 400, covers 20 key locations in Athens, from the Archaeological Museum to the markets and ancient sites. Buses run half-hourly between 7.30am and 9pm; tickets can only be purchased on board. Tickets are valid for 24 hours and can be used on all public transport, excluding the airport services.

Four main companies run similar pricey organised city tours around Athens:

CHAT (Map pp102–3; ☎ 210 323 0827; www.chatours.gr; Xenofontos 9, Syntagma);

GO Tours (Map p108; ☎ 210 921 9555; Athanasiou 20)

Hop In Sightseeing (☎ 210 428 5500; www.hopin.com) Tour bookings are only taken over the telephone.

Key Tours (Map p108; ☎ 210 923 3166/266; www.keytours.com; Kalirrois 4, Makrygianni)

Tours include a half-day sightseeing tour of Athens (€65), usually doing little more than pointing out all the major sights and stopping at the Acropolis; and an 'Athens by Night' tour (€78), which includes a taverna dinner in Plaka with folk dancing.

These companies also run half-day trips to Ancient Corinth (€53) and Cape Sounion (€50); day tours to Delphi (including lunch €120), the Corinth Canal, Mycenae, Nafplio and Epidavros (similar prices); and rather overpriced cruises to Aegina, Poros and Hydra (including lunch €122).

Hotels act as booking agents for at least one company and often offer substantial discounts.

Hop In Sightseeing offers a hop-on/hop-off city tour option, which allows you to get

off at specific points on a set route as many times as you like.

Scoutway (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 729 9111; www.scoutway.gr; Ptolemon 1, Pangrati), run by the Scouts Association of Greece, offers alternative activities for tourists, from hiking trips and visits to mines to schooner sailing trips and themed walks around ancient Athens accompanied by actors.

Trekking Hellas (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 331 0323; www.outdoorsgreece.com; Filellinon 7, Plaka) runs activities ranging from Athens walking tours (€40) to bungee jumping in the Corinth Canal (€60).

Historian and archaeologist Andrew Farrington leads **Athenian Days** (☎ 210 689 3828; www.atheniansdays.co.uk; per hr from €50), private tailor-made themed tours around Athens for up to six people.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Hellenic Festival

The annual Hellenic Festival, really a collection of festivals, is Greece's most important cultural event, running from late May to October. It features a top line-up of local and international music, dance and theatre.

The major events in the **Athens Festival** take place at the superb Odeon of Herodes Atticus (p115), one of the world's most historic venues. Set against a floodlit Acropolis, patrons sit on cushions on the worn marble seats that Athenians have been entertained on for centuries. The festival, which celebrated its 50th year in 2005, has been going from strength to strength and presents a diverse programme of international standing, ranging from ancient theatre and classical music to contemporary dance and world music. Events are held in venues around town.

The Hellenic festival incorporates the **Epidavros Festival**, which presents ancient Greek drama, as well as modern theatre, at the famous Ancient Theatre of Epidavros (p187) in the Peloponnese, about two hours west of Athens. Performances are held every Friday and Saturday night during July and August.

The **Musical July** festival takes place at the lovely 3rd-century-BC Little Theatre of Ancient Epidavros (p187), set among the olive groves and pine trees in the seaside village of Epidavros. Performances are held on Friday and Saturday and range from Greek music to classical offerings. The theatre is a 15-minute walk from the port.

The festival programme should be available from the beginning of February on the festival website and at the **Hellenic Festival box office** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 327 2000; www.hellenicfestival.gr; arcade, Panepistimiou 39, Syntagma; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat). Tickets are not available until three weeks before the performance and sell out quickly. Tickets may also be bought on the day of the performance at the theatre box offices, but queues can be very long. There are half-price student discounts for most performances on production of an ISIC card.

Special buses to Epidavros, departing from bus terminal A, are run by **KTEL** (☎ 210 512 2516; return €20) on Friday and Saturday, returning after the show.

You can also take a **dinner cruise** (Little Epidavros adult/concession €55/30, Epidavros incl bus adult/concession €60/35). Coaches leave from Syntagma and Plateia Klawthmonos around 5pm. The boat arrives at Epidavros at 7.30pm. Little Epidavros is a short walk from the port, while the Epidavros theatre is a 15-minute bus ride away. Supper is served on the return leg. Book through the festival box office.

Lykavittos Summer Theatre & Concerts

The Hellenic Festival box office also takes bookings for the summer theatre and concert series held at the **Lykavittos Theatre** (Map pp106-7; ☎ 210 722 7233). The hill-top theatre provides a spectacular setting for an eclectic annual programme.

Rockwave Festival

The annual international **Rockwave Festival** (☎ 210 882 0426; www.rockwavefestival.gr) has been growing in stature and popularity and is now held at Terra Vibe, a huge parkland venue on the outskirts of Athens. Rock fans can expect to see some of the world's top acts – the 2007 line-up included Robert Plant and Metallica. Tickets are available from **Tickethouse** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 360 8366; Panepistimiou 42). Terra Vibe is in Malakassa, at the 37th km on the Athens–Lamia Hwy. Special buses are put on by organisers and there is also a cheap camp site for ticketholders.

August Moon Festival

Every August on the night of the full moon, musical performances are held at key historic venues, including the Acropolis, the Roman Agora and other sites around Greece. De-

tails are normally announced last-minute so check the local English-language press.

Other Festivals & Events

A range of cultural events takes place at the **Technopolis** (Map p101; ☎ 210 346 7322; www.cityofathens.gr), the funky former Gasworks complex turned cultural centre, including the six-day **European Jazz Festival** at the end of May/early June and the two-week **International Dance Festival** in July.

Both events come under the auspices of the **City of Athens** (☎ 195; www.cityofathens.gr), which also organises **free concerts** and music and dance performances across the city throughout the summer.

The three-day international **Synch Electronic Music & Digital Arts Festival** (☎ 210 628 6287; www.synch.gr) is held in July at Technopolis in Gazi. Tickets are available from the **Hellenic Festival box office** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 327 2000; www.hellenicfestival.gr; arcade, Panepistimiou 39, Syntagma; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat).

Greece's leading artists and international acts can be seen during the summer at two stunning venues in former quarries: the **Vyronas Festival** (☎ 210 760 9340; www.festivalbyrona.gr) held at the Theatro Vrahon in the suburb of Vyronas; and the **Petras Festival** (☎ 210 506 5400; Petroupoli) in western Athens. Programmes and tickets for both are available from Metropolis Music stores (p144).

Popular rock venue Gagarin 205 runs the **Gagarin Open Air Festival** (☎ 210 854 7600; www.gagarin205.gr), a summer music concert series, at the former Olympic baseball venue at Elliniko.

In September, the annual **Athens International Film Festival** (☎ 210 606 1413; www.aiff.gr) takes place at the **Apollon & Attikon cinemas** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 323 6811; Stadiou 19, Syntagma).

SLEEPING

Hotels in Athens received a much-needed overhaul as a consequence of the Olympics. Older hotels were totally reconstructed, others were refurbished, new chic boutique hotels opened and even the shabbier places were given a coat of paint. Though prices have skyrocketed as a result, you can expect a higher standard of accommodation.

Athens is a noisy city and Athenians keep late hours, so we've mostly selected hotels in quiet areas, pedestrian precincts or side streets. Prices quoted here are for the high

season, but most places offer considerable discounts, especially in low season and online.

Most of the top city hotels are around Syntagma. Plaka is the most popular place for travellers to stay and has a choice of accommodation across the price spectrum.

There are also some good *pensions* and midrange hotels south of the Acropolis, around the quiet neighbourhoods of Makrygianni and Koukaki.

Around Monastiraki and Omonia, many of the area's run-down hotels have been upgraded, with some bold attempts to transform them into hip boutique hotels, but there is still a general seediness that detracts from the area, especially at night. Omonia has a plethora of largely unattractive accommodation, mostly characterless modern C-class places or cheap bordellos, where you won't get a wink of sleep.

The best rooms in Athens fill up quickly in July and August, so it's wise to book ahead to avoid a fruitless walk in the heat.

If you arrive in the city late at night and can't find a place to stay, don't sleep out. It is illegal and could be dangerous.

Budget HOSTELS

Athens International Youth Hostel (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 523 2540; www.aiyh-victorhugo.com; Victor Hugo 16; dm €10; ☎) Under new management, this hostel was refurbished in 2006. As well as dorms, there are double and four-bed rooms with air-con. The same management has new budget rooms and hostel-style accommodation in Omonia's **Athens Easy Hostel** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 524 3211; www.athenseasyhostel.com; Satovrianidou 26), which was going to get a much-needed upgrade.

Youth Hostel No 5 (Map p100; ☎ 210 751 9530; www.athens-yhostel.com; Damareos 75, Pangrati; dm €12) These dorms are very basic and dated, but it's a cheery place in a quiet residential neighbourhood. Owner Yiannis is something of a philosopher, and visitors are encouraged to add their jokes and words of wisdom to the hostel notice boards. Facilities include coin-operated hot showers (€0.50), communal kitchen, TV room and laundry. Take trolleybus 2 or 11 from Syntagma to the Filolaou stop on Frinis.

Hostel Aphrodite (Map p100; ☎ 210 881 0589; www.hostelaphrodite.com; Einaridou 12, Stathmo Larisis; dm €13-15, d/tr without bathroom €45/60, d with bathroom €50; ☎) If you are prepared to be less central, this

well-run hostel is a good cheap option. It's a 10-minute walk from the Larisis train and metro stations or five minutes to Viktoria. It has clean, good-sized four- and eight-bed dorms, some with en-suite bathrooms, as well as double rooms with and without private bathrooms – many with balconies. Facilities include internet access, laundry and a travel agency. Breakfast costs from €3.50.

Student & Travellers' Inn (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 324 4808; www.studenttravellersinn.com; Kydathineon 16, Plaka; dm €15-18, d/tr without bathroom €55/70, s/d/tr with bathroom €50/60/81; 🏠 📶) This popular and well-run place in the heart of Plaka has a mixture of dorms and simple rooms for up to four people, with or without private bathroom and air-conditioning. It has a cheery yellow and blue colour scheme and some rooms have fine old timber floors. Facilities include a pleasant shady courtyard with large-screen TV, internet access and a travel service. Breakfast costs from €3.50 and rooms are heated in winter.

Athens Backpackers (Map p108; ☎ 210 922 4044; www.backpackers.gr; Makri 12, Makrygianni; dm incl breakfast €25; 🏠 📶) This friendly Australian-run hostel right near the Acropolis metro station has six-bed dorms with en-suite bathrooms and lockers, and rooms for families. No curfew, a barbecue in the courtyard, full kitchen and laundry facilities, high-speed internet access, and a great rooftop bar with cheap drinks and Acropolis views make it a popular place. Rates include bedding, but towels cost €2. The same management has dorms (€27) and excellent studio accommodation (doubles €100 to €120) in another building nearby.

HOTELS

Plaka & Syntagma

John's Place (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 322 9719; Patrou 5; s/d/tr without bathroom €35/55/75; 🏠 📶) This small, old-style, family-run place is ideally situated just west of Syntagma and the timber staircase, old doors and high ceilings give it some charm. The furniture and bathrooms have been updated, and each room has a hand basin. Some have air-conditioning, but bathrooms are all shared.

Adonis Hotel (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 324 9737; fax 210 323 1602; Kodrou 3; s/d incl breakfast €55/89; 🏠 📶) This comfortable, if bland, *pension* on a quiet street represents one of the best deals around. The rooms are neat and come with TV. There are great views of the Acropolis from the 4th-floor rooms, and from the rooftop bar.

Adams Hotel (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 322 5381; adams@otenet.gr; Herofontos 6, Plaka; s/d €65/80, f €140-150; 🏠 📶) A decent budget option in Plaka, this place has simple old-fashioned rooms with TV, as well as larger family rooms.

Monastiraki & Thisio

Tempi Hotel (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 321 3175; www.tempihotel.gr; Eolou 29, Monastiraki; d/tr €60/75, without bathroom s/d €40/54; 🏠 📶) This friendly, family-run place on pedestrian Eolou has front rooms with balconies overlooking pretty Plateia Agia Irini, with its flower market and church, and side views of the Acropolis. The popular bar next door may make it noisy at night. The rooms have satellite TV, but the bathrooms are still basic and the top-floor rooms are small and quite a hike. There is a communal kitchen.

Hotel Erechthion (Map p101; ☎ 210 345 9606; fax 210 346 2756; Flammarion 8 & Agias Marinis, Thisio; s/d/tr incl breakfast €50/71/90; 🏠 📶) The pedestrian grand promenade around Thisio has boosted the appeal of the area's budget hotels, though surprisingly few have bothered upgrading their facilities. This hotel is slowly refurbishing its rooms, many of which have great Acropolis views. They are clean and all have air-con and TV. The glass cabinet of kitsch in the foyer sets the tone for this place.

Koukaki

Marble House Pension (Map p108; ☎ 210 923 4058, 210 922 8294; www.marblehouse.gr; Zini 35a, Koukaki; d/tr without bathroom €44/51, s/d/tr with bathroom €44/50/57; 🏠 📶) This pension in a quiet cul-de-sac is one of Athens' better budget hotels, though it is a fair way from the tourist areas. Rooms have been updated, with new pine beds and linen. All rooms have a fridge and ceiling fans and some have air-con (€9 extra). Breakfast costs an extra €5.

Hotel Tony (Map p108; ☎ 210 923 0561; www.hoteltony.gr; Zaharitsa 26; s/d/tr €45/60/75; 🏠 📶) This clean, well-maintained pension has been upgraded, with all but one of the rooms having en-suite bathrooms. Air-con costs €9 extra. All have fridges. Tony also has roomy, well-equipped studio apartments nearby, which are similarly priced and excellent for families or longer stays.

Omonia & Surrounds

Hotel Exarchion (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 380 0731; www.exarchion.com; Themistokleous 55, Exarchia; s/d/tr €40/50/60; 🏠 📶) Right in the heart of bohemian Ex-

archia, this rather bland 1960s high-rise hotel offers cheap and clean accommodation with washing and internet facilities. Bathrooms were being renovated at the time of research. There's a rooftop café-bar from which you can watch the action below or you can venture out to explore one of Athens' most interesting neighbourhoods. It's a 10-minute walk from Omonia station.

CAMPING

There are no camping grounds in central Athens. The EOT's *Camping in Greece* booklet lists sites in the Attica region.

Athens Camping (☎ 210 581 4114; www.campingathens.com.gr; Leoforos Athinon 198, Haidari; camp sites per adult/tent €7/5; 🏠 year-round) This unattractive place, 7km west of the city centre on the road to Corinth, is the nearest camping ground to Athens. It has reasonable facilities.

Good camp sites can be found at Shinias Beach (p158), east of Athens, and near Cape Sounion (p155).

Midrange

PLAKA & SYNTAGMA

Acropolis House Pension (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 322 2344; htlacls@otenet.gr; Kodrou 6-8, Plaka; d €51-79, s/d/tr incl breakfast €60/87/113; 🏠 📶) This atmospheric family-run *pension* is in a beautifully preserved, 19th-century house, which retains many original features and has lovely painted walls. There are discounts for stays of three days or more. Some rooms have bathrooms across the hall.

Niki Hotel (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 322 0913; www.nikihotel.gr; Nikis 27, Syntagma; s/d/q incl buffet breakfast €80/97/200; 🏠 📶) This small hotel bordering Plaka has undergone one of the more stylish makeovers in the area, with a contemporary design and furnishings. The rooms are well appointed and there is a two-level suite for families, with balconies offering Acropolis views.

Athens Cypria Hotel (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 323 8034; www.athenscypria.com; Diomias 5, Syntagma; s/d €80/110; 🏠 📶) Tucked in a side street off Ermou, this small, friendly hotel is a little characterless, but it is modern and comfortable, with good facilities and a very handy location. There are also family rooms (including breakfast €195) and discounts for children. There are small balconies but no great view.

Central Hotel (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 323 4357; www.centralhotel.gr; Apollonos 21, Plaka; s/d/tr incl buffet breakfast

from €99/121/165; 🏠 📶) This stylish hotel has been tastefully decorated in light, contemporary tones. It has comfortable rooms with all the mod cons and decent bathrooms. There is a lovely roof terrace with Acropolis views, which has a small Jacuzzi and sun lounges. Central is in a handy location between Syntagma and Plaka.

Hotel Achilles (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 323 3197; www.achilleashotel.gr; Leka 21, Syntagma; s/d/tr incl breakfast €100/125/145; 🏠 📶) From the sleek lobby to the rooms, the Achilles has been tastefully renovated. The rooms are large and airy with TV and fridge, and those on the top floor open onto garden balconies. There are large family rooms (€165).

Hotel Adrian (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 322 1553; www.douros-hotels.com; Adrianou 74, Plaka; s/d/tr incl buffet breakfast €110/135/150, s/d with view €125/150; 🏠 📶) This small hotel is conveniently located off Plateia Arhaia Agoras in the heart of Plaka. Breakfast is on a lovely shady terrace with Acropolis views. The well-equipped rooms have been refurbished, are pleasant enough and have free tea and coffee. The 3rd floor rooms are the best, with large balconies overlooking the square.

Plaka Hotel (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 322 2096; www.plakahotel.gr; Kapnikarea 7 & Mitropoleos, Monastiraki; s/d/tr €120/145/165; 🏠 📶) It's hard to beat the Acropolis views from the rooftop garden at this refurbished hotel, which you also enjoy from the top-floor rooms. Rooms have light timber furniture and floors, and satellite TV, though the bathrooms are on the small side. There's probably better value elsewhere if you can't get a room with a view.

MONASTIRAKI & THISIO

Hotel Attalos (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 321 2801; www.attaloshotel.com; Athinas 29, Psyrri; s/d/tr €72/89/106; 🏠 📶) Though décor has never been its strong point, this nonetheless comfortable place has an Olympic makeover. Its best feature is the rooftop bar that offers wonderful views of the Acropolis by night, and the rooms at the back with Acropolis views from the balconies. All rooms have TV.

Hotel Cecil (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 321 7909; www.cecil.gr; Athinas 39, Monastiraki; s/d incl breakfast €75/104; 🏠 📶) This charming old hotel has beautiful high, moulded ceilings, polished timber floors and an original cage-style lift. The rooms are tastefully furnished and equipped with TV, but no fridges. There are two connecting

rooms with a shared bathroom for families or friends (€145).

Arion Hotel (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 324 0417; www.arionhotel.gr; Agiou Dimitriou 18, Psyri; s/d/tr €100/125/145) This three-star hotel overlooking Agiou Dimitriou Sq has the standard mod cons and is simply furnished with marble bathrooms. It's in a handy location, a short walk to Monastiraki station and the nightlife of Psyri.

Magna Grecia (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 324 0314; www.magnagreciahotel.com; Mitropoleos 54, Monastiraki; s/d incl breakfast €115/130; ☎ ☑) This historic building, on busy Mitropoleos opposite the cathedral, has great Acropolis views from the front rooms and rooftop terrace. There are 12 individually decorated rooms with painted murals, named after Greek islands. The rooms have Cocomat eco-mattresses and furniture, DVD, internet access and minibar.

MAKRYGIANNI & KOUKAKI

Acropolis View (Map p108; ☎ 210 921 7303-5; www.acropolisview.gr; Webster 10, Makrygianni; s/d/tr incl buffet breakfast from €55/80/100; ☎ ☑) This small, friendly hotel has one of the quietest settings around, just south of the Odeon of Herodes Atticus. There are indeed views of the Acropolis from some of the rooms, although the best vistas are from the roof terrace. Other rooms look out towards Filopappou Hill. Rooms are plainly decorated but are well equipped and have new bathrooms.

Art Gallery Hotel (Map p108; ☎ 210 923 8376; Erethiou 5, Koukaki; s/d €90/105; ☎) This small, family-run, friendly place is full of personal touches and artwork by an artist from the family who once had her studio upstairs. Some rooms are a little small but all have been refurbished, with new bathrooms. Original furniture from the '60s has been retained in the communal areas. There is a balcony with Acropolis views where you can have a generous breakfast (€7). There are a few cheaper double rooms with shared bathrooms.

Philippos Hotel (Map p108; ☎ 210 922 3611; www.philipposhotel.com; Mitseon 3, Makrygianni; s/d incl breakfast €107/139; ☎) This smart, modern, popular hotel has been spruced up. The rooms are small but well appointed and there is a small double on the roof, which has a private terrace.

Hera Hotel (Map p108; ☎ 210 923 6682; www.herahotel.gr; Falirou 9; s/d incl breakfast €120/135, ste from €200; ☎) This elegant boutique hotel was totally rebuilt but the interior design is in keeping with the lovely neoclassical façade. There's

lots of brass and timber and stylish classic furnishings with a modern edge, along with all the expected amenities. The rooftop garden, restaurant and bar have spectacular views and it is a short walk to the Acropolis and Plaka.

AROUND OMONIA

Baby Grand Hotel (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 325 0900; www.classicalhotels.com; Athinas 65, Omonia; s/d incl buffet breakfast €110/120; ☎) The reception desk created out of two old Mini Coopers sets the tone for this funky revamped hotel with graffiti art in the rooms and free internet. There's a decent, if unfortunately named, restaurant. Though it's on busy Athinas, it's in a handy location.

Fresh Hotel (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 524 8511; www.freshhotel.gr; Sofokleous 26 & Klithenous, Omonia; d/ste incl buffet breakfast from €150/350; ☎ ☑) This designer hotel led the trend for hip hotels in the gritty Omonia area. Once inside, the seediness gives way to chic rooms and suites with individual colour schemes, clever lighting and all the mod cons. The fantastic rooftop – with pool, bar and restaurant with Acropolis views – couldn't be further from the world below.

Top End

There are some lovely luxury hotels in Athens, offering the odd discount in low season.

Herodion (Map p108; ☎ 210 923 6832; www.herodion.com; Rovetou Galli 4; s/d incl breakfast €145/182; ☎ ☑ ☎) This elegant four-star hotel is geared towards the well-heeled traveller. The rooms are small but well appointed, with super-comfortable beds. There is a lovely atrium restaurant and laptops with high-speed internet connection in the foyer.

Periscope (Map pp106-7; ☎ 210 729 7200; www.periscope.gr; Haritos 22, Kolonaki; r €155-195, ste incl breakfast from €270; ☎) Right in chic Kolonaki overlooking Lykavittos, Periscope is a smart, modern hotel with industrial décor and many clever gadgets and design features, including the lobby slide show, the sea-level measure on the stairs, travelling TVs and aerial shots of the city on the ceilings. The penthouse's private rooftop Jacuzzi has sensational views.

St George Lycabettus Hotel (Map pp106-7; ☎ 210 729 0711/19; www.sglycabetus.gr; Kleomenous 2, Kolonaki; d from €180; ☎ ☎ ☎) It's a bit of a hike up the hill to this boutique-style hotel at the foot of Lykavittos Hill, in chic Kolonaki. But you can look forward to cooling off in the rooftop pool and enjoying the spectacular view from the bar (and many of the rooms). The rooms are

individually decorated and recently renovated. A luxury spa centre opened in 2005.

Semiramis Hotel (off Map pp106-7; ☎ 210 628 4400; www.semiramisathens.com; Trikoupi 48, Kefalari; d/pool bungalow/ste incl breakfast from €180/260/350; ☎ ☎ ☎) This designer hotel with a striking lollipop-coloured façade is the hippest place to stay if you don't need to be downtown (it's 15km northeast of town). Renowned industrial designer Karim Rashid has bold interior showcases for the owner's contemporary art collection, while the amorphous-shaped pool and high-tech gadgets in the rooms are impressive.

Hilton (Map pp106-7; ☎ 210 728 1000; www.athens.hilton.com; Leoforos Vasilissis Sofias 46, Ilissia; r/ste from €206/421; ☎ ☎ ☎) The Athens Hilton is a vast concrete edifice that looks more like a 1950s housing project than a luxury hotel, but inside, no expense has been spared. It has lashings of marble and bronze, enormous chandeliers and somewhat giddy designer carpets. The excellent but pricey Milos restaurant is downstairs and there is a lovely pool.

Electra Palace (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 337 0000; www.electrahoteles.gr; Navarhou Nikodimou 18, Plaka; d/ste incl breakfast from €190/560; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Plaka's smartest hotel was completely refurbished and extended in 2003 and given a new neoclassical façade. You can have breakfast under the Acropolis on your balcony in the front rooms (from €325). The design is classic, the rooms well appointed and there is an indoor swimming pool and gym as well as a rooftop pool with Acropolis views.

Hotel Grande Bretagne (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 333 0000; www.grandebretagne.gr; Vasileos Georgiou 1, Syntagma; r/ste from €280/420; ☎ ☎ ☎) If you are wealthy, the place to stay in Athens is – and always has been – the deluxe Hotel Grande Bretagne on Plateia Syntagma.

Built in 1862 to accommodate visiting heads of state, it ranks among the grand hotels of the world. No other hotel in Athens can boast such a rich history. Completely renovated in 2002, it still retains an old-world grandeur. There is a divine spa, and the rooftop restaurant and bar is a treat.

EATING

Plaka is where most visitors wind up eating, at least one night. Its atmospheric streets under the floodlit Acropolis are lined with countless restaurants, tavernas and cafés. With a few exceptions, however, the food in Plaka is

generally ordinary and overpriced, particularly at the outdoor restaurants around Plateia Filomousou on Kydathineon, where waiters tout tirelessly for trade.

The city's best restaurants are scattered around the centre and in the suburbs.

Athens' dining scene has become increasingly sophisticated. You'll find modern tavernas serving new-style Greek cuisine as well as anything from fancy French restaurants to cheap Indian food.

Psyri is full of restaurants and *ouzeries* (mezes-style eateries), though it is getting touristy and expensive. Some fine and trendy restaurants have sprouted around the former Gasworks at Gazi. Most places in these neighbourhoods only open for dinner, and many places in Psyri shut in summer.

Monastiraki is great for souvlaki and cheap eats, while fancier restaurants line Adrianou along the rail line.

Exarhia has lots of small *ouzeries* and tavernas to choose from, and prices are tailored to suit the pockets of the district's student clientele, while trendy new restaurants are opening along Benaki. Chic Kolonaki has some of the city's most expensive restaurants, though you can find some good-value eateries too.

Overall, eating out in Athens is no longer cheap, but you can still find decent value in old-style tavernas. We've stuck largely to downtown Athens restaurants and a few further afield worth the trek. Unless stated otherwise, all the restaurants listed here are open daily for lunch and dinner.

Budget

SYNTAGMA

Ariston (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 322 7626; Vouli 10; pies €1-1.50; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri) If you are after a snack on the run, you can't go wrong with traditional *tiropites* (cheese pies) and their various permutations. This place has been around since 1910, serving the best range of tasty, freshly baked pies with all manner of fillings.

Noodle Bar (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 331 8585; Apollonos 11, Syntagma; mains €5.60-7.90; ☎ 1pm-1am, closed Sun) This low-key noodle café has decently priced Asian noodle and rice dishes as well as some soups and salads.

Vasilopoulos (Map pp104-5; Stadiou 19, Syntagma) is one of the big supermarket chain branches in central Athens.

PLAKA

Glykis (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 322 3925; Angelou Geronta 2; mezedhes €3.50-7) In a quiet corner of Plaka, this casual *mezedhopoleio* (mezedhes restaurant) with a shady courtyard is mostly frequented by students and locals. It has a tasty selection of mezedhes, including traditional *mayirefta* such as *briam* (oven-baked vegetables) and cuttlefish in wine.

Paradosiako (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 321 4121; Voulis 44a; mains €4-10) For great traditional fare at very fair prices you can't beat this inconspicuous, no-frills taverna on the periphery of Plaka, with a few tables on the footpath. There's a basic menu but it's best to choose from the daily specials, which include fresh and delicious seafood. Get there early before the locals arrive.

Vizantino (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 322 7368; Kydathineon 18; specials €5-9.50) This taverna is the best of the restaurants around Plateia Filomousou Eterias. Vizantino's menu is realistically priced and it's popular with locals year-round. The daily specials are good value, with dishes like stuffed tomatoes, *pastitsio* and its excellent fish soup (with fish served on the side, €6.80).

Platanos (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 321 8734; Diogenous 4; mayirefta €6.50-8; ☎ closed Sun) This age-old Plaka taverna is in a pleasant setting away from the main tourist drag, with tables outside in the courtyard under a giant plane tree. It is popular among locals and tourists for its reliable, delicious home-style fare, such as oven-baked potatoes with lemon and oregano.

SOUVLAKI HEAVEN

There are several contenders for Athens' best souvlaki, the undeniably delicious national snack – the best value meal under €2.

In Monastiraki, the end of Mitropoleos has become Souvlaki Central, with musicians adding to the area's, at times, festive atmosphere. **Thanasis** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 324 4705; Mitropoleos 69, Monastiraki) is renowned for the kebab-style souvlaki, wrapped in pitta, or served on pitta with grilled tomato and onions. Directly opposite, **Savvas** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 324 5048; Mitropoleos 86, Monastiraki) specialises in *gyros* (Greek version of döner kebab) and has more Middle Eastern dishes like *pastourmali*, a tasty pastrami and cheese pie.

For traditional pork skewers in pitta, there's the hole-in-the-wall **Kostas** (Map pp102-3; Adrianou 116, Plaka; ☎ 8am-2.30pm Mon-Fri), which continues the tradition of his grandfather and namesake; while **Souvlaki tou Hasapi** (Map pp102-3; Apollonos 3; Plaka; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) does a roaring trade, with tasty skewers or *bifteki* (meat rissoles) served with crusty bread.

Night owls can find 24-hour souvlaki at Exarhia's popular **Kavouras** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 383 7981; Themistokleous 64, Exarhia; ☎ 24hr), although after much research the author swears by the souvlaki at **Hristos** (Map p100; ☎ 210 756 2400; Ymittou 129, Pangrati), a busy neighbourhood place near Youth Hostel No 5.

MONASTIRAKI & OMONIA

Diporto Agoras (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 321 1463; cnr Theatrou & Sokratous; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, closed Aug 1-20) This quirky old taverna is one of the dining gems of Athens. There's no signage, only two doors leading to a rustic cellar where there's no menu, just a few dishes that haven't changed in years. The house speciality is *revythia* (chickpeas), usually followed by grilled fish and washed down with wine from one of the giant barrels lining the wall. The often erratic service is part of the appeal.

Athens central market (Map pp104-5; ☎ closed Sun) This colourful market has the widest range of whatever is in season. The **fruit and vegetable market** (Map pp104-5) is on the western side of Athinas, and the **meat market** (Map pp104-5) is opposite, on the eastern side. The meat market section might sound like a strange place to go for a meal but the tavernas (such as the Epiros and Papandreou taverns) inside it are an Athenian institution, turning out huge quantities of tasty, traditional fare. The clientele ranges from hungry market workers, to elegant couples emerging from nightclubs at 5am in search of a bowl of hangover-busting *patsas* (tripe soup).

The supermarket chain **Marinopoulos** (Map pp104-5; Athinas 60, Omonia) has a couple of branches in the centre of town.

PSYRRI

Taverna tou Psyrri (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 321 4923; Eshylou 12; mains €6-8.50) This cheerful place is a local favourite, turning out good, traditional tav-

erna food at prices well below the Psyrri norm. It's tucked away off Plateia Iroön. Look out for the colourful murals – the drunk leaning against a lamp post outside and the androgynous women inside.

Telis (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 324 2775; Evripidou 86; pork chops with chips €8; ☎ 8am-2am Mon-Sat) You can not get more basic than this fluoro-lit, bare-walled, paper-tablecloth *psistaria* (restaurant serving grilled food). Telis has been slaving over the flame grill, cooking his famous pork chops since 1978. There's nothing else on the menu – just meat and chips, Greek salad and house wine or beer.

EXARHIA

Food Company (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 380 5004; Emmanuel 63-65; dishes €4.50-6.50; ☎ 10am-2am) This Kolonaki favourite has found a new cheery home in Exarhia. The good-value casual café-style eatery serves a range of healthy salads, wholesome dishes and hot and cold pasta and noodle dishes. The cheesecake is delicious.

Barba Gianni's (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 330 0185; Emmanuel 94; mains €4.50-7.50) A classic Exarhia haunt, Barba Gianni's is a popular place for traditional cooking. You can choose from the trays of *mayirefta* (ready-cooked meals) and daily specials at the counter. There are delicious soups and classic meat dishes such as beef in red sauce and baked pork in lemon, washed down with barrel wine by the litre.

Rozalia (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 330 2933; Valtetsiou 58; mains €4.50-11) This old-style Exarhia favourite taverna on this busy pedestrian strip is a family-run affair with a standard traditional menu. The large courtyard garden is popular in summer, when they have fans spraying water to keep you cool.

Also recommended is the unassuming Cretan-style *kafeneio* (coffee house), **Meintani** (Map pp104-5; Themistokleous 63; mezedhes €3-4.50 ☎ dinner only), for excellent-value mezedhes and drinks in a tiny neighbourhood hang-out with tables on the sloping pedestrian street in the heart of Exarhia.

KOLONAKI & PANGRATI

Kotopoula Valsamakis (Map pp106-7; ☎ 210 360 6725; Plateia Kolonakiou 3; ¼ chicken & chips €6.50; ☎ 8am-11pm, closed Sun) This busy taverna specialising in grilled chicken is a Kolonaki institution. It's right opposite the square – look for the ro-tisseries outside and the diners tucking into plates piled with chicken and chips.

Oikeio (Map pp106-7; ☎ 210 725 9216; Ploutarhou 15; specials €7-12; ☎ 8am-11pm, closed Sun) With excellent home-style cooking, this modern taverna lives up to its name (homey). Oikeio is cosy on the inside and the tables on the pavement allow you to people-watch without the normal Kolonaki bill.

There are traditional dishes as well as pastas and salads but try the *mayirefta* specials like the excellent stuffed zucchini.

Vyrinis (Map p100; ☎ 210 701 2021; Arhimidou 11, Pangrati; dishes €8-10; ☎ lunch & dinner) Just behind the old Panathenaic stadium, this popular and relaxed neighbourhood taverna has had an impressive face-lift but has maintained its essence and prices.

At Vyrinis you'll find a lovely courtyard garden, friendly waiters, simple traditional fare and decent house wine. The beef *kokkinisto* (type of stew in red sauce) and vegetable imam are recommended.

Midrange**PLAKA & SYNTAGMA**

To Kafeneio (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 324 6916; cnr Tripodon & Epipharmou 1; mezedhes €3.60-6.60) To Kafeneio is a cosy little place with stone walls and exposed timber ceilings.

This place offers an interesting assortment of mezedhes from different regions of Greece, including Cretan cheese pies and aubergine croquettes.

Tzitzikas & Meringas (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 324 7607; Mitropoleos 12-14, Syntagma; mezedhes €5.50-9.40) Following the success of its two suburban restaurants, this bright, cheery, modern *mezedhopoleio* opened in downtown Athens.

There are walls of shelves lined with Greek products, and the great range of delicious and creative mezedhes puts a spin on traditional dishes.

Palia Taverna tou Psara (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 321 8734; Erethteos 16, Plaka; seafood dishes €10-12.50) Hidden away from the main hustle and bustle of Plaka, this fish tavern is a cut above the rest. At Palia Taverna tou Psara there is a choice of mezedhes but it is known as the best seafood tavern in Plaka.

Furin Kazan (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 322 9170; Apollonos 2; sushi €20; ☎ 11.30am-11pm Mon-Sat) Regularly and reassuringly full of Japanese visitors, Furin Kazan is one of the best and most affordable Japanese eateries in town. It's a casual place with a good selection of rice and noodle dishes

(€6.50 to €8) and tempura, but it's the sashimi and sushi that steal the show.

AKROPOLI & THISIO

Filistron (Map p101; ☎ 210 346 7554; Apostolou Pavlou 23, Thisio; mezedhes €4.50-14; ☹ closed Mon) You may be hard pressed finding a table for dinner at this excellent *mezedhopoleio*, which serves an interesting range of reasonably priced, tasty mezedhes in a prized setting – a rooftop terrace overlooking the Acropolis. Try the baked potato with smoked cheese and pepper or the *mastelo*, a fried cheese from Chios in a tomato sauce.

Strofi (Map p108; ☎ 210 921 4130; Rovertou Galli 17, Akropoli; mezedhes €4-13.50; ☹ 7pm-2am Mon-Sat) Strofi's greatest attractions are the Acropolis view from the rooftop terrace, and old-style ambience. Prices have crept up in recent years and the traditional taverna fare is still decent. It's best to share a selection of entrées and mains.

To Steki tou Iliia (Map p101; ☎ 210 345 8052; Eptahalkou 5; chops per portion/kg €8.50/28; ☹ 8pm-late) This *psistaria* specialising in tasty grilled lamb chops has achieved celebrity status. There are tables outside on the pedestrian strip opposite the church. For those who don't eat lamb, there are pork chops and steaks, as well as dips, chips and salads.

PSYRRI & MONASTIRAKI

Oineas (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 321 5614; Esopou 9, Psyri; mezedhes €5-18) This cheery place on a pedestrian street in Psyri stands out for the walls of kitsch Greek ads and retro paraphernalia. There are some creative dishes on the menu and excellent generous salads, best shared. Try the *kataifi* (cheese pie made with angel-hair pastry).

Café Avyssinia (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 321 7407; Kyne-tou 7, Monastiraki; mains €8.50-14.50; ☹ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch only Sun) Hidden away on the edge of grungy Plateia Avyssiinias in the middle of the Flea Market, this *mezedhopoleio* gets top marks for atmosphere and the food is not far behind. It specialises in regional dishes and there is often live music on weekends. The *gavros* (marinated small fish) is a favourite dish.

Kuzina (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 324 0133; Adrianou 9, Thisio; mains €8.50-16.40) A classy newcomer on Adrianou, with tables outside next to the Temple of Haphaestus, Kuzina serves 'creative' Greek cuisine with largely successful results. The interior design is superb, as is the view from the terrace bar.

OMONIA & EXARHIA

Viantes (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 330 1369; Valtetsiou 44, Exarhia; mains €8.80-15.50) This modern taverna set in a lovely garden courtyard is next to an open-air cinema. It is considered pricey for Exarhia, superb and made with largely organic produce. Try the goat cooked in a clay pot.

Arheon Gefsis (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 523 9661; Kodratou 22, Metaxourghio; mains €10-20; ☹ Tues-Sat) This gimmicky but fun place turns the clock back 2500 years to ancient Greece. The waiters dress in flowing robes and there are no glasses – the ancients used earthenware cups and spoons instead of forks. The menu derives from ancient times; roast meats and fish dominate, served with purées of peas or chickpeas and vegetables.

GAZI & ROUF

Kanella (Map p101; ☎ 210 347 6320; Konstantinoupoleos 70, Gazi; dishes €5.60-9.50; ☹ noon-late) Homemade village-style bread, retro mismatched crockery and brown-paper tablecloths set the tone for this trendy taverna opposite the train line. There are daily one-pot and oven-baked specials and grills, some done with a modern twist, and an excellent zucchini and avocado salad.

Skoufias (Map p101; ☎ 210 341 2252; Vasiliou Megalou 50, Rouf; mains €7-10; ☹ 9pm-late) This gem of a taverna at the tail end of Gazi is a little off the beaten track but is worth seeking out. There are tables outside opposite the church. The menu has Cretan influences and an eclectic selection of regional Greek cuisine, including many dishes you are unlikely to find in any tourist joint. Meat eaters will love the tender *kotsi* (pork shank; €15), which is best shared.

ourpick Sardelles (Map p101; ☎ 210 347 8050; Persefonis 15, Gazi; fish dishes €9.50-15) As the name (Sardines) suggests and the novel fishmonger paper tablecloths confirm, this modern fish taverna specialises in seafood mezedhes. It's a friendly place with tables outside, opposite the illuminated gasworks, excellent service and nice touches such as the souvenir little pots of basil. Try the grilled sardines and *ta-ramasalata*.

Mamacas (Map p101; ☎ 210 346 4984; Persefonis 41, Gazi; grills €13.40-15.40; ☹ 8pm-late) This Gazi trailblazer was one of the city's first modern tavernas, with its Greek island-meets-grunge look and upmarket (and consequently more

expensive) takes on the classics. There are trays of *mayirefta* inside and a range of grills and appetisers. It has expanded across the road and added a trendy bar.

Top End

There are plenty of upmarket, blow-the-budget dining options in Athens. Reservations are essential.

Plous Podilatou (Map p153; ☎ 210 413 7910; www.plous-podilatou.gr; Akti Koumoundourou 42, Piraeus; mains €12-20) Dining by the Mikrolimano harbour is a delight, and the food at this slick restaurant will not disappoint either. The year-round sister restaurant of pioneering Nuevo-Greek Kitrino Podilato has a Mediterranean menu with an emphasis on fresh fish and seafood.

Varoulko (Map p101; ☎ 210 522 8400; Pireos 80, Gazi; mains €20-30; ☹ dinner Mon-Sat) For a magical Greek dining experience, you can't beat the winning combination of Acropolis views and delicious seafood by celebrated Greek chef Lefteris Lazarou. He moved to these slick premises from Piraeus, where he earned his Michelin rating – the only Greek chef with the honour. The restaurant has a superb rooftop terrace. Lazarou specialises in fish and seafood creations, though there are also meat dishes on the menu. The service is faultless and the wine list most agreeable.

Orizontes (Map pp106-7; ☎ 210 722 7065; Lykavittos Hill; dishes €23-38) For a special night out, you can take the cable car up to the peak of Lykavittos and watch the sun set over Athens. The menu at this upmarket restaurant is Mediterranean/international and the food and service are excellent, as is the wine list.

GAY & LESBIAN ATHENS

Athens has a relatively low-key gay and lesbian scene, though it is gaining prominence. A new breed of gay and gay-friendly clubs has opened around town, predominantly around Gazi and Psyri. The more established gay bars and clubs are located around Makrygianni, including the veteran **Granazi** (Map p108; ☎ 210 924 4185; Lembesi 20, Makrygianni) and the busy three-level **Lamda Club** (Map p108; ☎ 210 942 4202; Lembesi 15, Makrygianni), on the corner of Syngrou.

The best place to start the night in Gazi is **Blue Train** (Map p101; ☎ 210 346 0677; www.bluetrain.gr; Konstantinoupoleos) along the railway line, which has a club upstairs. **Sodade** (Map p101; ☎ 210 346 8657; www.sodade.gr; Triptolemu 10, Gazi) attracts a young clubbing crowd. **Alekos' Island** (Map pp104-5; Sarri 41, Psyri) attracts a more sedate crowd. Limanakia, below the rocky coves of Varkiza, is a popular gay **beach**. Take the tram or A2/E2 express bus to Glyfada, then take 115 or 116 to the Limanakia B stop.

Check out www.athensinfo.com/gay.htm or the limited English information at www.gay.gr, or look for a copy of the *Greek Gay Guide* booklet at *periptera* (street kiosks) around town.

Papadakis (Map pp106-7; ☎ 210 360 8621; Fokylidou 15; mains €16-50; ☹ closed Sun) Up in the foothills of Lykavittos, this understatedly chic restaurant is an offshoot of the owner's successful restaurant on Paros. Seafood is the speciality, with creative dishes such as the stewed octopus with honey and sweet wine, the delicious *salatouri* (fish salad) with small fish, and sea salad (type of green seaweed/sea asparagus).

Spondi (Map p100; ☎ 210 752 0658; Pironos 5, Pangrati; mains €37-55; ☹ 8pm-late) This superb restaurant has been consistently voted Athens' best and the accolades are totally deserved. Spondi offers Mediterranean *haute cuisine*, with heavy French influences, in a relaxed, classy setting. There is a lovely garden terrace draped in bougainvillea in summer. This is definitely a special-occasion place. There is a range of set dinner and wine menus.

DRINKING Cafés

Athens seems to have more cafés per capita than virtually any other city and most of the time they are packed with Athenians sipping the ubiquitous frappé, prompting many a visitor to wonder if anyone ever works in this city. More recently, the burning question is why they have Europe's most expensive coffee (between €3 and €5). One unconvincing justification is that you actually hire the chair, not just pay for coffee, as people sit on a coffee for hours.

In chic Kolonaki, **Da Capo** (Map pp106-7; Tsakalof 1, Kolonaki) has excellent coffee, but it is also a prime people-watching spot. It's self-serve if you can find a table.

Another café-thick area to head to includes Adrianou, along the Ancient Agora, where you'll discover students and young people filling the shady tables at **Dioskouri** (Adrianou 39). Further along the pedestrian promenade along Apostolou Pavou, you'll get great Acropolis views from **Athinaion Politeia** (Map p101; Akamandos 1).

Bars

In Athens the line between café and bar is often blurred, as you can drink just about anywhere and any time; some bars are also restaurants that become clubs late at night. There are very few pubs and the few beer houses are normally expensive.

As every neighbourhood has its fair share of bars, Athens offers endless bar-hopping opportunities. It is best to head to one of the city's bar hot spots and explore the field until you find the bar of your liking.

In Gazi, you will find people spilling out into the street from the bars, including the trailblazer **Gazaki** (Map p101 Triptolemu 31), which has a great rooftop bar. Or you can get some fresh air on the terrace of the rock bar **45 Moires** (Map p101; Iakou 18 & Voutadon), overlooking the old gasworks chimney stacks, or join the cool crowd at **Hoxton** (Map p101; Voutadon 42).

Psyrri has many lively bars. You could try the mainstream **Fidelio** (Map pp104-5; Ogygou 2), which has a retractable roof, or head to the cool **Soul** (Map pp104-5; Evripidou 65), which has a dance club upstairs.

The latest trend is the funky bars popping up in obscure alleys and formerly deserted backstreets of downtown Athens. A spate of new places have opened in the same lane where people were spilling out of **Kinky** (Map pp104-5; Avramiotou 6-8). **Bartessera** (Map pp104-5; Kolokotroni 25) is at the end of a narrow arcade, while another safe bet downtown is **Magaze** (Map pp104-5; Eolou 33), which has bonus Acropolis views.

In Kolonaki, the two main drinking haunts are the strip of bars at the top end of Skoufa, where **Rosebud** (Map pp106-7; Skoufa & Omirou 6) is a good start, or you can join the crowds squeezing into the tiny bars on Haritos, such as **City** (Map pp106-7; Haritos 43).

Exarhia is a good bet for lively bars with marginally cheaper drinks. **Wunderbar** (Map pp104-5; Themistokleous 80), on Exarhia Sq, is a decent place to start, while a new cheap bar precinct is emerging on nearby Mesologiou.

In Thissio, the multizoned **Stavlos** (Map p101; Iraklidon 10) is a veteran of the string of cafés and bars along Iraklidon's pedestrian precinct. It plays mainly alternative music inside and more mellow sounds in the garden.

You won't find any happening bars in Plaka, but **Brettos** (Map pp102-3; Kydathineon 41, Plaka) is a delightful old bar with a stunning wall of colourful bottles and huge barrels lining one wall. You can sample shots of Brettos' home brand of ouzo, brandy and other spirits as well as the family wine.

ENTERTAINMENT

The best source of entertainment information is the weekly *Athinorama* (€1.50), but you'll need to be able to read some Greek to make much sense of it.

English-language listings appear daily in the *Kathimerini* supplement in the *International Herald Tribune*, while the *Athens News* has an entertainment guide.

Cinemas

Athenians are avid cinema-goers. Most cinemas show recent releases in English (they don't dub them) but arthouse foreign films have Greek subtitles. In summer, Athenians prefer outdoor cinemas (see opposite). Admission costs around €7.

The following cinemas are in central Athens:

Apollon & Attikon (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 323 6811; Stadiou 19, Syntagma)

Astor (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 323 1297; Stadiou 28, Syntagma)

Asty (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 322 1925; Korai 4, Syntagma)

Ideal (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 382 6720; Panepistimiou 46)

Classical Music & Opera

In summer the main cultural activity takes place at the historic Odeon of Herodes Atticus and other venues under the auspices of the Hellenic Festival (p130).

Megaron (Athens Concert Hall; Map pp106-7; ☎ 210 728 2333; www.megaron.gr; Leoforos Vasilissis Sofias & Kokkali 1, Ilissia; ☎ box office 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) The city's state-of-the-art concert hall presents a rich winter programme of operas and concerts featuring world-class international and Greek performers.

The **Greek National Opera** (Ethniki Lyriki Skini; ☎ 210 360 0180; www.nationalopera.gr) season runs from November to June. Performances are usually held at the **Olympia Theatre** (Map pp104-5;

MOONLIGHT CINEMA

One of the delights of warm summer nights in Athens is the enduring tradition of open-air cinema, where you can watch the latest Hollywood or arthouse flick under the moonlight. Many original outdoor cinemas are still operating in gardens and on rooftops around Athens, with refurbished facilities and modern sound systems.

The most historic outdoor cinema is the refurbished **Aigli** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 336 9369) in the verdant Zappeio Gardens, where you can watch a movie in style with a glass of wine. Try to nab a seat with Acropolis views (seats on the right) on the rooftop of Plaka's **Cine Paris** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 322 0721; Kydathineon 22, Plaka) or meander around the foothills of the Acropolis to **Thission** (Map p101; ☎ 210 342 0864; Apostolou Pavlou 7, Thissio).

☎ 210 361 2461; Akadimias 59, Exarhia) or the Odeon of Herodes Atticus in summer.

Greek Folk Dancing

Dora Stratou Dance Theatre Map p101; ☎ 210 921 4650; www.grdance.org; Filopappou Hill; adult/concession €15/10; ☎ performances 9.30pm Tue-Sat, 8.15pm Sun May-Sep) Every summer the Dora Stratou company performs its repertoire of folk dances from all over Greece at its own open-air theatre on the western side of Filopappou Hill. Formed to preserve the country's folk culture, it has gained an international reputation for authenticity and professionalism. It also runs folk-dancing workshops through the summer months.

The theatre is signposted from the western end of Dionysiou Areopagitou. Take trolleybus 22 from Syntagma and get off at Agios Ioannis.

Live Music

ROCK

Athens has a healthy rock music scene and is on most European touring schedules. In summer check Rockwave and other festival schedules (p131), as you may be able to see your favourite band perform in open-air theatres around town.

Gagarin 205 Club (Map p100; Liosion 205) The Gagarin 205 Club is primarily a rock venue, with gigs on Friday and Saturday nights featuring leading rock and underground music bands. Tickets are available from Ticket House (p130).

AN Club (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 330 5056; Solomou 13-15, Exarhia) The small AN Club hosts lesser-known international bands, as well as some interesting local bands.

Mike's Irish Bar (Map pp106-7; ☎ 210 777 6797; www.mikesirishbar.gr; Sinopis 6, Ambelokipi; ☎ 8pm-4am) A longtime favourite of the city's expatriate

community, who come here to play darts and sip pints of Guinness or Murphy's stout. There's live music Wednesday to Saturday from 11.30pm. Beers are expensive.

JAZZ & WORLD MUSIC

All the places listed here have a cover charge depending on the performances. Note that they are normally closed during July and August.

Half Note Jazz Club (Map p108; ☎ 210 921 3310; Trivonianou 17, Mets) The stylish Half Note, opposite the Athens cemetery, is the city's principal and most serious jazz venue. It hosts an interesting array of international names.

Alavastro Café (Map p100; ☎ 210 756 0102; Damareos 78, Pangrati) The Alavastro features an eclectic mix of modern jazz, ethnic and quality Greek music in a casual and intimate venue, with regular appearances by talented local Armenian Haig Hazdjian.

Small Music Theatre (Map p108; ☎ 210 924 5644; Veikou 33, Koukaki) This small venue hosts an interesting assortment of bands, often jazz and fusion.

Palenque (Map pp106-7; ☎ 210 775 2360; www.palenque.gr; Farandaton 41, Ambelokipi; ☎ 9.30pm-late) A slice of Havana in Athens, Palenque presents regular live music, with artists from around the world, salsa parties and flamenco shows. You can take free tango lessons early in the evening.

Greek Music

REMBETIKA CLUBS

Athens has a good number of clubs playing *rembetika* (the Greek blues) but most close down from May to September. Most play a combination of *rembetika* and *laika* (urban popular music). Performances start at around 11.30pm; most places do not have a cover charge but drinks are expensive.

Rembetiki Stoa Athanaton (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 321 4362; Sofokleous 19, Syntagma; ☎ 3-6pm & midnight-6am Mon-Sat Oct-May) The almost legendary Stoa Athanaton occupies a hall above the central meat market. It is a popular venue where you can hear classic *rembetika* and *laika* from a respected band of musicians – from mid-afternoon. Access is by a lift in the arcade.

Perivoli Tou Ouranou (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 323 5517; Lysikratous 19, Plaka; ☎ 9pm-late Thu-Sun, closed Jul-Aug) A favourite Plaka music haunt in a rustic old-style venue where you can have dinner and listen to authentic *laika* and *rembetika* by leading exponents.

Mousikes Skies (Map p100; ☎ 210 756 1465; Athanasias 4, Pangrati; ☎ 8pm-late, closed Aug) This cosy music venue is run by the charming singer Katerina and her bouzouki-playing husband, who lead a talented ensemble of young musicians. You will hear a range of *rembetika* and *laika* played by people who clearly love what they do. You can also enjoy mezedhes and an outdoor courtyard in summer.

Kavouras (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 381 0202; Themistokleous 64, Exarhia; ☎ 11pm-late, closed Jul-Aug) Above Exarhia's popular souvlaki joint, this lively club usually has a decent line-up of musicians playing *rembetika* and *laika* until dawn.

You can also hear *rembetika* in summer on a lovely restaurant terrace at **Stoa Pilkilis** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 321 0431; Ag Fillipou 14, Thisio), though the music outshines the food.

TRADITIONAL MUSIC TAVERNAS

Mostrou (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 322 5558; Mnisikleous 22, cnr Lyssiou, Plaka; ☎ 9pm-late Sun-Thu, 10.30pm-late Fri & Sat) A classic Plaka taverna, popular for its live music (Thursday to Sunday). It has a full-sized stage and dance floor and gets very lively. A good place for traditional music and dancing if you can't face a nightclub or *rembetika* club. In summer, there's more-sedate live music on the terrace.

Palea Plakiotiki Taverna Stamatopoulos (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 322 8722; Lyssiou 26, Plaka; ☎ 7pm-2am Mon-Sat, 11am-2am Sun) Stamatopoulos is something of a Plaka institution, with reasonable food and live music nightly. It's popular with locals and can get extremely busy later in the evening, so you'll need to get in early to be assured of a table.

Nightclubs

Athens is known for its nightlife and has clubs to suit all musical tastes. Admission

to some clubs ranges from €10 Monday to Thursday to €15 on Friday and Saturday nights. The price usually includes one drink. Expect to pay about €5 for a beer and €7 to €8 for spirits. Clubs get busy around midnight. Most of the top clubs close in summer or move to outdoor venues by the beach.

Envy (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 331 7801; Agias Eleousis & Kakourgodikiou, Psyri; ☎ Wed-Sat) The name changes at this popular club, but the venue seems to be fixed. It plays the latest dance music in Psyri during winter and in summer moves the partying to the ever-changing beachside venues.

Kalua (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 360 8304; Amerikis 6, Syntagma) This established downtown club plays mainstream music and the odd Greek disco hit and usually rocks till dawn. Don't bother getting there before midnight.

Lava Bore (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 324 5335; Filellinon 25, Plaka; ☎ 10pm-5am) The central Lava Bore is by no means one of the city's *in* clubs, but it stays open all year, and caters largely to tourists. The formula remains much the same: a mixture of mainstream rock and dance music and (relatively) cheap drinks. It's far more casual than most Athenian clubs.

Summer Clubs

There are some great open-air city venues, but in summer the city's nightlife also moves to flashy clubs on the seafront. Many clubs are on the tram route, which runs 24 hours on weekends. Admission at most places is the same as the clubs (left). Dress up if you want to ensure you get in the door.

Akrotiri (☎ 210 985 9147; Vasileos Georgiou B 5, Agios Kosmas; admission €10; ☎ 10pm-5am) This popular beach club is massive, with a capacity for 3000, and bars and lounges over different levels. It hosts great party nights with top resident and visiting DJs.

Balux (☎ 210 894 1620; Leoforos Poseidonos 58, Glyfada; admission €15; ☎ 10pm-late) This glamorous club right on the beach has to be seen to be believed. There is a huge pool surrounded by lounges and four-poster beds with flowing nets, and a top line-up of local and guest DJs.

Vitrine (Map p108; ☎ 210 924 2444; Markou Mousourou 1, Mets; admission Fri-Sat €15; ☎ 10pm-late) The name of this venue may keep changing but

the superb Acropolis and city views from the top never do.

On the Road (Map p108; ☎ 210 347 8716; Ardittou 1, Zappeio; admission Thu-Sat €12; ☎ 10pm-late, closed Mon) A classic summer haunt – literally in the middle of the road – where you might get a dance.

Lallabai Garden (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 336 9340; Zappeio; admission €12; ☎ 10pm-late) Right in the middle of the Zappeio Gardens, this place oozes cool in every sense. The setting is superb, the music relatively mainstream and there's pricey finger food.

Other beach bars worth seeking out are Club 22 in Faliro and if you can make the trek, the dreamy Island, past Vouliagmeni.

Sport

The Athens 2004 Olympics left a legacy of world-class sports stadiums, and Athens has begun attracting some major international and European sporting and athletic events. The most popular local sports are soccer and basketball. Sports fans should contact local clubs or sporting bodies directly for match information or check the English-language press or www.sportinggreece.com.

The **Greek Secretariat for Sport** (www.sport.gov.gr) has information on sports organisations and stadiums.

SOCCER

Greece's top teams are Athens-based Panathinaikos, AEK and Piraeus-based Olympiakos, all three of which are in the European's Champions league. Olympiakos has dominated on the domestic front; its 2006-07 Greek championship win was its 10th in the last 11 seasons. Panathinaikos, however, has enjoyed greater success on the European stage.

Generally, tickets to major games can be bought on the day at the venue. Big games take place at the Olympic Stadium in Maroussi and the Karaiskaki stadium in Piraeus, the country's best soccer stadium. Information on Greek soccer and fixtures can be found on club websites or www.greeksoccer.com.

BASKETBALL

The biggest basketball games in Athens take place at the **Stadium of Peace and Friendship** (☎ 210 489 3000; Ethnarhou Makariou) in Palio Faliro.

Basketball receives little pre-match publicity, so you'll need to ask a local or check the website of the **Hellenic Basketball Association** (www.esake.gr).

ATHLETICS

The annual **Athens Marathon** is held on the first Sunday in November and finishes at the historic marble Panathenaic Stadium (p119). More than 3000 runners from around the world tackle the 42km event, following the historic route run by Pheidippides in 490 BC from the battlefield at Marathon to Athens to deliver the news of victory against the Persians (before collapsing and dying from exhaustion).

Theatre

Athens has more theatres than any city in Europe but, as you'd expect, most performances are in Greek. Theatre buffs may enjoy a performance of an old favourite if they know the play well enough. There is the occasional performance in English. The **National Theatre** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 522 3243; Agiou Konstantinou 22-24, Omonia) is one of the city's finest neoclassical buildings.

SHOPPING

Athens' main central shopping street is Ermou, the pedestrian strip that runs from Syntagma to Monastiraki. Most mainstream clothing and footwear stores can be found along Ermou, which must take the prize for the number of shoe shops per square kilometre.

Top-brand international designers and jewellers are located around Syntagma and the Citylink complex, all the way up pedestrian Voukourestiou, which leads to Kolonaki – the place for designer boutiques.

Plaka and Monastiraki are where most tourists shop for their souvenirs. There are excellent gift shops at the Benaki Museum (p121) and the Goulandris Museum of Cycladic and Ancient Greek Art (p121). Jewellery stores are rife in Plaka and around Mitropoleos, though most of the more interesting ones are hidden away in the backstreets.

The big department stores are found on Stadiou, stretching from Syntagma to Omonia.

Kifisia and Glyfada also have excellent high-end shopping opportunities.

Flea Markets

Athens' traditional **Monastiraki Flea Market** (Map pp102-3) has a festive atmosphere, with the nearby cafés and restaurants brimming on weekends. The permanent antique, furniture and collectables stores have plenty to sift through and are open all week, while on Sunday the streets around the station and Adrianou are lined with vendors selling mostly jewellery and handicrafts.

The big **Sunday Flea Market** (Map p101), however, now takes place at the end of Ermou, towards Gazi, where traders peddle their stuff from the crack of dawn and you can find some bargains, interesting collectables and kitsch delights among the junk. This is the place to test your haggling skills. It winds up around 2pm.

Speciality Foods

You can find a delectable array of food at the colourful Central Market (p136).

Mesogaia (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 322 9146; cnr Nikis & Kydathineon, Plaka) This small shop boasts a wonderful array of the finest produce from around the country, including delicious cheeses, herbs, honey, jams, olive oil and wine.

To Pantopoleion (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 323 4612; Sofokleous 1, cnr Aristidou, Omonia) This expansive store sells traditional food products from all over Greece, from Santorini capers to boutique olive oils and Cretan rusks. There are jars of sweets and goodies for edible souvenirs, a large range of Greek wines and spirits, and a fresh deli if you can wait until you get home.

Traditional Handicrafts

Amorgos (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 324 3836; Kodrou 3, Plaka; ☎ 11am-3pm & 6-8pm Mon-Fri) This charming store is crammed with Greek folk art, trinkets, ceramics, embroideries and wood-carved furniture made by the owner, while his wife runs the store.

Centre of Hellenic Tradition (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 321 3023; Pandrosou 36, Plaka; ☎ 10am-7.30pm) Upstairs from the arcade are great examples of traditional ceramics, sculptures and handicrafts from around Greece. There is also a great *ouzerie* and a gallery on the 1st floor.

Melissinos Art (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 321 9247; www.melissinos-art.com; Agias Theklas 2, Psyrri; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat 10am-6pm Sun) Artist Pantelis Melissinos

continues the sandalmaking tradition of his famous poet-sandalmaker father Stavros, who names the Beatles, Rudolph Nureyev, Sophia Loren and Jackie Onassis among his past customers. But fame and fortune have not gone to Stavros' head; he still makes the best-value sandals based on ancient Greek styles in natural leather, a tradition continued by artist son Pantelis.

Music

Metropolis Music (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 383 0804; Panepistimiou 64, Omonia) This music haven is well stocked with Greek and international CDs, with extensive specialist sections. Its bigger Greek selection is in the dedicated Greek music store a few doors down and it sells tickets to many shows around town.

Xylouris (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 322 2711; www.xylouris.gr; arcade, Panepistimiou 39) This music treasure trove is run by the son and widow of the Cretan legend Nikos Xylouris. Yiorgos is a font of knowledge and can guide you through the comprehensive range of traditional and contemporary Greek music, including select and rare recordings. There's a big world music section and, of course, plenty of Cretan music.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Athens is served by **Eleftherios Venizelos International Airport** (Map p155; ☎ 210 353 0000; www.aia.gr) at Spata, 27km east of Athens.

The state-of-the-art airport, named in honour of the country's leading 20th-century politician, has all the standard facilities like cafés, restaurants and banks, great shopping and a transit hotel. If you have time to kill, it is worth visiting the small archaeological museum on the 1st floor above the check-in hall. The airport website has real-time flight information.

See p149 for information on public transport to/from the airport.

DOMESTIC FLIGHTS

The majority of domestic flights are operated by **Olympic Airlines** (Map p108; ☎ 801 144 444, 210 926 9111; www.olympicairlines.com; Leoforos Syngrou 96). Olympic takes credit card bookings online, by phone and also has branch offices at **Syntagma** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 926 4444; Filellinon 15, Syntagma) and **Omonia** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 210 926 7218; Kotopoulou 1, Omonia).

Olympic Airlines has several daily flights to Thessaloniki, Iraklio, Mykonos and Santorini, Rhodes and all Greek airports. Average one-way fares range from €76 to €120, but vary dramatically depending on the season you're travelling, so check for specials and book in advance if you can.

Aegean Airlines (reservations ☎ 801 112 0000, 210 626 1000; www.aegeanair.com; Syntagma Map pp102-3; ☎ 210 331 5522; Othonos 15, Syntagma) competes with Olympic on the most popular domestic routes. Aegean has the best earlybird specials and bookings can be made online. Aegean has daily flights to Thessaloniki, Iraklio, Rhodes, Mykonos, Santorini and Hania, as well as several flights weekly to key destinations around Greece.

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS

For information on international services from Athens, see p733.

Boat

Most ferry, hydrofoil and high speed catamaran services to the islands leave from Athens' massive port at Piraeus (p152). Piraeus is the busiest port in Greece, with a bewildering array of departures and destinations, including daily services to all the island groups, except the Ionians and the Sporades. The departure points for ferry destinations are shown on Map p153.

There are also ferry and high-speed services for Evia and the Cyclades from the smaller ports at Rafina (right) and Lavrio (right).

You can pick up a weekly ferry schedule from the EOT tourist office (p110) in Athens; check the daily schedules in the *International Herald Tribune* or search online at www.openseas.gr, www.gtp.gr or www.ferries.gr. See the Getting There & Away sections for each island for specific details, and p740 for general information about ferry travel.

Note that there are two departure points for Crete. Ferries for Iraklio leave from the western end of Akti Kondyli in Piraeus, but ferries for other Cretan ports occasionally dock there as well. It's a long way to the other departure point for Crete on Akti Miaouli, so check where to find your boat when you buy your ticket.

Most hydrofoil and high-speed catamaran services from Piraeus to the Saronic Gulf

Islands, the Peloponnese and a growing range of destinations in the Cyclades are run by **Hellenic Seaways** (Map p153; ☎ 210 419 9000; www.hellenicseaways.gr; cnr Akti Kondyli & Elotikou, Great Harbour).

Other operators include **Aegean Speedlines** (☎ 210 969 0950; www.aegeanspeedlines.gr).

For additional information on ferries, contact the **Piraeus Port Authority** (☎ 1441).

TICKETS

To book a berth in a cabin or take a car on board a ferry, it is advisable to buy a ticket in advance in Athens. Otherwise, agents selling ferry tickets are thick on the ground around Plateia Karaïskaki in Piraeus and at the Rafina and Lavrio ports. You can also normally purchase tickets at the quay next to each ferry. Contrary to what some agents might tell you, it costs no more to buy tickets at the boat.

It is advisable to book ahead for all high-speed services, especially for travel on weekends.

For more information about ferry and high-speed services and companies, see p743 and the Getting There & Away sections of the island chapters throughout this book.

RAFINA

Rafina, on Attica's east coast, is Athens' main fishing port and the second-most important port for passenger ferries. The port is far smaller than Piraeus and less confusing – and fares are about 20% cheaper – but it does take an hour on the bus to get there.

Rafina port police (☎ 22940 22300) occupies a kiosk near the quay.

Blue Star Ferries (☎ 210 891 9800; www.bluestarferries.com) is the main operator of catamarans from Rafina to the Cyclades.

There are frequent buses between Athens and Rafina from the Mavromateon bus terminal (€1.90, one hour) between 5.45am and 10.30pm.

LAVRIO

Lavrio, an industrial town on the east coast of Attica, is the port for ferries to Kea and Kythnos and high-season catamarans to the western Cyclades.

It's scheduled to become a major container port, with a rail link to Athens. Buses

FERRY & HIGH-SPEED SERVICES FROM ATHENS & ATTICA

Crete

Destination	Port	Service	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Agios Nikolaos	Piraeus	ferry	14hr	€34	3 weekly
Hania	Piraeus	ferry	10hr	€24.50-30	1 daily
Hania	Piraeus	catamaran	4½hr	€53	daily
Iraklio	Piraeus	ferry	10hr	€32-37	1 daily
Rethymno	Piraeus	ferry	10hr	€29	1 daily
Rethymno	Piraeus	catamaran	5hr	€55	4 weekly
Sitia	Piraeus	ferry	14½hr	€34	3 weekly

Cyclades

Destination	Port	Service	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Anafi	Piraeus	ferry	11hr	€32.50	3 weekly
Andros	Rafina	ferry	2hr	€11.50	2 daily
Folegandros	Piraeus	ferry	6-9hr	€23.50	3 weekly
Ios	Piraeus	ferry	7½hr	€32.50	4 daily
Ios	Piraeus	catamaran	3¾hr	€47	1 daily
Kea (Tzia)	Lavrio	ferry	1hr	€5	daily
Kimolos	Piraeus	ferry	6hr	€28.60	2 weekly
Kythnos	Piraeus	ferry	2½hr	€12.10	2 weekly
Kythnos	Piraeus	catamaran	1¾hr	€27	5 weekly
Milos	Piraeus	ferry	7hr	€28.60	2 weekly
Milos	Piraeus	catamaran	4¾hr	€42	daily
Mykonos	Piraeus	ferry	5½hr	€28.50	2 daily
Mykonos	Piraeus	catamaran	3½hr	€46	2 daily
Mykonos	Rafina	ferry	4½hr	€19	2 daily
Mykonos	Rafina	catamaran	2hr 10min	€39.50	2daily
Naxos	Piraeus	ferry	6hr	€30	4 daily
Naxos	Piraeus	catamaran	4hr	€48.50	3 daily
Paros	Piraeus	ferry	5hr	€29.50	4 daily
Paros	Piraeus	catamaran	3hr	€45.50	4 daily
Paros	Rafina	catamaran	3hr	€40.50	1 daily
Santorini	Piraeus	ferry	9hr	€34	4 daily
Santorini	Piraeus	catamaran	5¼hr	€52	daily
Serifos	Piraeus	ferry	4½hr	€15.20	2 daily
Serifos	Piraeus	catamaran	2¼hr	€33	2 daily
Sifnos	Piraeus	ferry	5½hr	€28.60	2 daily
Sifnos	Piraeus	catamaran	2¾hr	€37	2 daily
Syros	Piraeus	ferry	4hr	€24.50-26.50	4 daily
Syros	Piraeus	catamaran	2½hr	€39	2 daily
Tinos	Piraeus	ferry	4½hr	€26.50	3 daily
Tinos	Piraeus	catamaran	3hr	€42	daily
Tinos	Rafina	catamaran	1¾hr	€35	4 daily
Tinos	Rafina	ferry	3¾hr	€18	1 daily

run every 30 minutes to Lavrio from the Mavromateon terminal in Athens.

Lavrio Port Authority (☎ 22920 25249) has ferry information.

Goutos Lines (☎ 210 985 2992) is the main operator for ferries from Lavrio to Kea.

Bus

Athens has two intercity **KTEL** (www.ktel.gr) bus terminals. Terminal A, 7km northwest of Omonia, has departures to the Peloponnese, the Ionians and western Greece. Terminal B, 5km north of Omonia, caters to central and

Dodecanese

Destination	Port	Service	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Astypalea	Piraeus	ferry	12hr	€34.50	4 weekly
Kalymnos	Piraeus	ferry	10-13hr	€32-42.50	daily
Karpathos	Piraeus	ferry	20hr	€31.50	3 weekly
Kasos	Piraeus	ferry	20-29hr	€31.10-35.30	3 weekly
Kos	Piraeus	ferry	12-15hr	€34-44.50	2 daily
Leros	Piraeus	ferry	11hr	€25	daily
Lipsi	Piraeus	ferry	13hr	€38.40	weekly
Nisyros	Piraeus	ferry	13-15hr	€44.50	1 weekly
Patmos	Piraeus	ferry	9½hr	€25	daily
Rhodes	Piraeus	ferry	15-18hr	€42-51.50	2-3 daily
Symi*	Piraeus	ferry	15-17hr	€32.60	2 weekly
Tilos	Piraeus	ferry	15hr	€44.50	2 weekly

*via Rhodes

Northeastern Aegean Islands

Destination	Port	Service	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Chios	Piraeus	ferry	6-8hr	€23-29	daily
Fourni	Piraeus	ferry	11hr	€30	3 weekly
Ikaria	Piraeus	ferry	10hr	€30	daily
Lesvos	Piraeus	ferry	8-12hr	€27-36	daily
Limnos	Piraeus	ferry	20hr	€27	1 weekly
Samos	Piraeus	ferry	12hr	€33	1-2 daily

Saronic Gulf Islands

Destination	Port	Service	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Aegina	Piraeus	ferry	1hr	€8	hourly
Aegina	Piraeus	hydrofoil	40min	€12	hourly
Hydra	Piraeus	ferry	3½hr	€13.20	1 daily
Hydra	Piraeus	hydrofoil	1hr 40min	€21	8 daily
Poros	Piraeus	ferry	2½hr	€11.10	4 daily
Poros	Piraeus	hydrofoil	1hr	€19	8 daily
Spetses	Piraeus	ferry	4½hr	€18.20	daily
Spetses	Piraeus	hydrofoil	2hr	€29.50	4 daily

Peloponnese

Destination	Port	Service	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Ermioni	Piraeus	hydrofoil	2hr	€24.50	8 daily
Porto Heli	Piraeus	hydrofoil	2hr	€30	4 daily

Evia

Destination	Port	Service	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Evia (Marmari)	Rafina	ferry	1hr	€6	5 daily

northern Greece, and to Evia. The EOT office (p110) gives out an intercity bus schedule.

MAVROMATEON TERMINAL

Buses for destinations in southern Attica leave from the **Mavromateon terminal** (Map p100;

☎ 210 880 8000; Alexandras & 28 Oktovriou-Patision, Pedion Areos), about 250m north of the National Archaeological Museum.

Buses to Rafina and Marathon leave from the terminal 150m to the north on Mavromateon.

BUS SERVICES FROM MAVROMATEON**TERMINAL**

Destination	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Cape Sounion (coast road)	1½hr	€4.50	hourly
Lavrio port	1¼hr	€3.80	half-hourly
Marathon	1¼hr	€2.90	hourly
Rafina port	1hr	€1.90	half-hourly

TERMINAL A

Terminal A (☎ 210 512 4910; Kifisou 100) is not a good introduction to Athens – particularly if you arrive after midnight when there is no public transport. See p150 for details of fares, and p110 for information on taxi rip-offs. Bus 051 goes to central Athens (junction of Zionos and Menandrou, near Omonia) every 15 minutes from 5am to midnight. A taxi from the terminal to Syntagma should cost no more than €6.

KEY BUS DESTINATIONS FROM TERMINAL A

Destination	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Corfu*	9hr	€44.20	3 daily
Epidavros	2½hr	€10.40	2 daily
Igoumenitsa	7hr	€38.20	4 daily
Kalavryta	3hr	€14.40	daily
Lefkada	5hr	€29.00	4 daily
Nafplio	2½hr	€11.30	hourly
Olympia	5hr	€25.60	2 daily
Patra	3hr	€16.20	half-hourly
Zakynthos*	6hr	€28.50	6 daily

*includes ferry ticket

TERMINAL B

Terminal B (off Map p100; Liosion 260, Kato Patisia) is less chaotic and much easier to handle than Terminal A, although again there is no public transport from midnight to 5am. The terminal is in Gousiou, a side street off Liosion 260. Take bus 024, from outside the main gate of the National Gardens (Map pp102–3) on Leoforos Vasilissis Amalias and ask to get off at Praktoria KTEL. A taxi to Syntagma should cost no more than €6.

KEY BUS DESTINATIONS FROM TERMINAL B

Destination	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Agios Konstantinos	2½hr	€12.90	hourly
Delphi	3hr	€13	6 daily
Halkida	1hr	€5.90	half-hourly
Karpenisi	5hr	€21.50	3 daily
Trikala	4½hr	€22	8 daily
Volos	4¼hr	€23.50	10 daily

Car & Motorcycle

Getting in and out of Athens is significantly easier thanks to the new Attiki Odos, and the upgraded National Rd (Ethniki Odos) as well as various ring roads around the city.

The top end of Leoforos Syngrou, near the Temple of Olympian Zeus, is lined with car-rental firms. Local companies tend to offer better deals than the multinationals, so it pays to do the rounds to get the best price. The average price you can expect to pay for a small car for a day is €60, and much less for three or more days.

Avis (Map p108; ☎ 210 322 4951; Leoforos Vasilissis Amalias 48)

Budget (Map p108; ☎ 210 921 4771; Leoforos Syngrou 8)

Europcar (Map p108; ☎ 210 924 8810; Leoforos Syngrou 43)

Hertz (Map p108; ☎ 210 922 0102; Leoforos Syngrou 12)

Sixt (Map p108; ☎ 210 922 0171; Leoforos Syngrou 23)

You can rent mopeds and motorcycles if you have a licence and the nerve to take on Athens traffic. **Motorent** (Map p108; ☎ 210 923 4939; www.motorent.gr; Rovertou Galli 1, Makrygianni) has a choice of machines from 50cc to 250cc (high-season prices start at €16 per day).

Train

Intercity trains to central and northern Greece depart from the central **Larisis train station** (Map p100), located about 1km northeastwest of Omonia Sq (metro Line 2).

For the Peloponnese, take the suburban rail to Kiato and change for other OSE services there. A new rail hub (SKA) is going to be located about 20km north of the city.

OSE (☎ 1110; www.ose.gr; ☎ 24hr) offices at **Omonia** (Map pp104–5; ☎ 210 529 7005; Karolou 1; ☎ 8am–3pm Mon–Fri) and **Syntagma** (Map pp104–5; ☎ 210 362 4405; Sina 6; ☎ 8am–3pm Mon–Sat) handle advance bookings. See p736 for information on international train services.

TRAINS FOR NORTHERN GREECE & EVIA

Destination	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Alexandroupoli	13hr 50min	€25.00	daily
(Intercity)	10½hr	€51.50	2 daily
Halkida	1½hr	€5.10	17 daily
Thessaloniki	6hr	€15.10	4 daily
(Intercity)	5hr 10min	€35.30	6 daily
(Intercity Express)	4¼hr	€48.80	3 daily
Volos	5hr 15min	€12.90	daily
(Intercity)	4hr 40min	€20.70	1 daily

TRAINS FOR PELOPONNESE

Destination	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Corinth (suburban rail)	1hr 20min	€6.00	13 daily
Kiato (suburban rail)	1hr 35min	€6.00	13 daily
Kiato-Diakofto* (Intercity)	3hr min	€2.60	2 daily
Diakofto-Kalavryta**	2½hr	€4.40	2 daily
Kiato-Patra (Intercity)	1hr 5min	€1.60	
(Intercity)	2hr	€42.80	5 daily
Kiato-Pyrgos (Intercity)	1hr 40min	€6.00	4 daily
Pyrgos-Olympia	4hr	€4.70	2 daily
	3hr 20min	€9.40	3 daily
	30min	€0.70	2 daily

*from Kiato, you can change to slow or intercity services

**check, as service was temporarily suspended

GETTING AROUND**To/From the Airport**

Getting to/from the airport has never been easier or faster since the metro and suburban rail began operating. The cheapest alternative is the bus. You can also take the suburban rail to Piraeus.

BUS

Express buses operate between the airport and the city centre, Piraeus and KTEL bus terminals.

Bus X92 operates between the airport and the suburb of Kifisia (about 55 minutes), departing every 45 minutes to one hour all day.

Bus X93 operates between the airport and the Terminal B (Kifisos) bus station (about 35 minutes), departing every 30 minutes all day.

Bus X94 operates between the airport and Ethniki Amynta metro station (about 25 minutes), departing every 10 minutes between 7.30am and 11.30pm.

Bus X95 operates between the airport and Syntagma 24 hours (every 30 minutes). The journey takes about an hour, depending on traffic. The Syntagma bus stop is on Othonos St.

Bus X96 runs 24 hours between the airport and Plateia Karaïskaki in Piraeus, with services every 20 minutes.

Bus X97 operates between the airport and Dafni metro station (about 25 minutes), departing every 30 minutes all day.

Tickets (€3.20) are not valid for other forms of public transport.

METRO

The metro operates an airport service from Monastiraki, though it is not express so you can pick it up at any station along Line 3. Just check that it is the airport train (displayed on the train and platform screen). Otherwise you can take any train to the Doukissis Plakentias metro station, where you can connect to the airport train. If you have not already purchased a ticket, you can also change at Doukissis Plakentias for Nerantziotissa station and take the more comfortable and less crowded suburban rail train.

Trains run every 30 minutes, leaving from Monastiraki between 5.50am and 10.50pm and from the airport between 5.30am and 11.30pm.

The metro airport ticket costs adult €6 one way or €10 return (but the return is only valid for 48 hours). Note that the fare for two or more passengers works out at €5 each, so make sure you purchase tickets together (this is also the case with the suburban rail). The airport ticket is valid for all forms of public transport for 90 minutes. If you are still in transit before the 90 minutes is up, revalidate your ticket on the final mode of transport to show you are still on the same journey.

SUBURBAN RAIL

You can take the suburban rail from the Larisis or Doukissis Plakentias metro station and from Nerantziotissa, on the ISAP Line. Trains to the airport run from 4.30am to midnight, while trains from the airport to Athens run from 5am to 1.20am. The trip takes 38 minutes and trains run every 15 minutes from Nerantziotissa until 9.30pm, then half-hourly. The suburban rail has the same pricing as the metro but the return ticket is valid for a month.

The suburban rail services also go from the airport to Piraeus (change trains at Nerantziotissa) and Kiato in the Peloponnese (via Corinth).

TAXI

Unfortunately, catching a taxi from the airport can often involve an argument about the fare (see p110 for the full run-down).

Check that the meter is set to the correct tariff. You will also have to pay a €3.20 airport surcharge and a €2.70 toll for using the toll road, as well as €0.32 cents for each piece of luggage over 10kg. Fares

vary depending on traffic, but expect to pay from €25 to €30 from the airport to the city centre, and €30 to Piraeus. Most drivers will add the tip, so check the breakdown before adding any extra. Both trips should take no longer than an hour. If you have any problems, do not hesitate to threaten to involve the police.

Car & Motorcycle

While the metro, the Attiki Odos and a new network of ring roads have helped ease Athens' notorious traffic congestion, it can still be a nightmarish city to drive in. Heavy traffic, confusing signposting, impatient drivers and one-way streets in the city centre make driving a challenge.

Drivers have a cavalier attitude towards road laws and parking restrictions. Athens' kerbs and car parks are insufficient for the number of cars in the city (more than two million in Attica), prompting Athenians to develop ruthless and creative parking techniques. Contrary to what you will see, parking is actually illegal alongside kerbs marked with yellow lines, on pavements and in pedestrian malls and there are now paid parking areas, with tickets available from kiosks.

For details of rental agencies in Athens, see p148.

Public Transport

Athens has an extensive and inexpensive integrated public transport network of buses, metro, trolleybuses and a tram line.

Athens Urban Transport Organisation (☎ 185; www.oasa.gr; ☎ 6.30am-11.30pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-10.30pm Sat & Sun) can assist with most inquiries.

A €1 ticket can be used on the entire Athens urban transport network, including the suburban rail. It is valid for 90 minutes but excludes services to the airport. There is also a daily €3 ticket valid for 24 hours and a weekly €10 ticket with the same restrictions on airport travel. You have to be doing a fair bit of travel to make these tickets worthwhile.

BUS & TROLLEYBUS

The blue-and-white local express and regular buses operate every 15 minutes from 5am until midnight.

Buses run 24 hours between the centre and Piraeus – every 20 minutes from 6am until midnight – and hourly at other times. Trol-

leybuses operate from 5am until midnight. A free OASA map shows most of the routes.

Tickets for buses and trolleybuses (€0.50) must be purchased at a transport kiosk or at most *periptera* and validated on board. Plain-clothed inspectors make spot checks. The penalty for travelling without a validated ticket is 60 times the ticket price.

METRO

The gradually expanding metro (www.ametro.gr) system has transformed travel around central Athens. Journeys that once took more than an hour above ground now take a matter of minutes. The stations are an attraction in their own right, displaying finds from the excavation works (p122). Trains and stations can be stifling in summer as limited (or no) air-conditioning was installed. All have wheelchair access.

Ticket pricing still distinguishes between the metro (Lines 2 and 3 €0.80) and the old network (Line 1 – ISAP), which is split into three sections: Piraeus–Monastiraki, Monastiraki–Attiki and Attiki–Kifisia (one section €0.70; two or more sections €0.80).

Tickets must be validated at the machines at platform entrances. The penalty for travelling without a validated ticket is 60 times the ticket price.

Trains operate between 5am and just after midnight. They run every three minutes during peak periods, dropping to every 10 minutes at other times.

Line 1 (Green)

The old Kifisia–Piraeus line has transfer stations at Omonia and Attiki for Line 2; Monastiraki is the transfer station for Line 3. Nerantziotissa connects with the suburban rail. There's also an hourly all-night bus service (bus 500) along this route, with bus stops located outside the train stations.

Line 2 (Red)

Line 2 runs from Agios Antonios in the northwest to Agios Dimitrios in the southeast (check the boards so you don't confuse your saints). Attiki and Omonia connect with Line 1, while Syntagma connects with Line 3.

Line 3 (Blue)

Line 3 runs northeast from Egaleo to Doukissis Plakentias, with the airport train con-

ATHENS METRO SYSTEM



tinuing from there. Syntagma is the transfer station for Line 2.

SUBURBAN RAIL

A fast and comfortable suburban rail (☎ 1110; www.proastiakos.gr; ☎ 24hr) connects Athens with the airport, Piraeus, the outer regions and the Peloponnese. It connects to the metro at Larisis and Doukissis Plakentias stations and spans from the airport to Kiato (1¼ hours, €10). The network will eventually span 281km, connecting Athens to Thiva, Lavrio, Rafina and Halkida.

TRAM

Athens' single tram service (www.tramsa.gr) makes for a scenic coastal trip to Faliro and Glyfada, but it is not the fastest means of transport.

It has services running from Syntagma to Faliro, Syntagma to Glyfada and Faliro to Glyfada. The tram operates from 5am to 1am Monday to Thursday, then 24 hours from Friday night to Sunday, servicing revellers travelling to the city's beach bars.

The trip from Syntagma to Faliro takes about 45 minutes, while Syntagma to Glyfada takes around 55 minutes. The central terminus is on Amalias, opposite the National Gardens. Tickets (€0.60) are purchased at platform vending machines.

A tram extension to Piraeus and Voula is in the pipeline.

Taxi

If you see an Athenian standing on the road bellowing and waving their arms, chances are they are trying to get a taxi at rush hour. Despite the large number of yellow taxis caressing around the streets, it can be difficult to get one.

To hail a taxi, stand on the pavement and shout your destination. If it is going your way the driver may stop even if there are already passengers inside. The fare is not shared: each person is charged the fare on the meter (note where it is at when you get in).

Make sure the meter is switched on when you get in. The flag fall is €1, with a €1 surcharge from ports, train and bus stations,

and a €3.20 surcharge from the airport. After that, the day rate (tariff 1 on the meter) is €0.30 per kilometre. The night tariff (tariff 2 on the meter) increases to €0.60 per kilometre between midnight and 5am. Baggage is charged at a rate of €0.30 per item over 10kg. The minimum fare is €2.65, which covers most journeys in downtown Athens. For more information about Athens' taxi drivers, see p110.

Booking a radio taxi costs €2.50 extra.

Athina 1 (☎ 210 921 7942)

Enotita (☎ 801 11 51 000)

Ikaros (☎ 210 515 2800)

Kosmos (☎ 18300)

Parthenon (☎ 210 532 3000)

PIRAEUS ΠΕΙΡΑΙΑΣ

pop 175,697

Piraeus is the main port of Greece and one of the Mediterranean's major ports. The city is the hub of the Aegean ferry network, centre of Greece's maritime export-import and transit trade, and base for its large merchant navy. While Piraeus was a separate city, nowadays it virtually melds imperceptibly into the expanded sprawl of Athens. The road linking the two passes through a grey, urban sprawl of factories, warehouses and concrete apartment blocks.

Piraeus can be as bustling and traffic-congested as Athens, though the proximity to the sea gives it a different feel. Central Piraeus is not a place where many visitors linger; most come only to catch a ferry. Beyond its façade of smart, new shipping offices and banks, much of Piraeus today is a hotchpotch of rejuvenated pedestrian precincts with shopping strips, restaurants and cafés and more grungy areas with run-down buildings or industrial zones.

The most attractive part of Piraeus is the eastern quarter around Zea Marina, and the lovely, albeit touristy Mikrolimano harbour, where the seafront is lined with restaurants, bars and nightclubs. The charming residential neighbourhood of Kastella on the hill above Mikrolimano and the swanky seaview apartment blocks around Freatida are where the money is. Piraeus' waterfront was started up before the Olympics, creating a tree-lined promenade along the ancient walls surrounding the harbour.

HISTORY

Piraeus has been the port of Athens since classical times, when Themistocles transferred his Athenian fleet from the exposed port of Phaleron (modern Faliro) to the security of Piraeus. After his victory over the Persians at the Battle of Salamis in 480 BC, Themistocles fortified Piraeus' three natural harbours. In 445 BC Pericles extended these fortifying walls to Athens and Phaleron. The Long Walls, as they were known, were destroyed as one of the peace conditions imposed by the Spartans at the end of the Peloponnesian Wars, but were rebuilt in 394 BC.

Piraeus was a flourishing commercial centre during the classical age, but by Roman times it had been overtaken by Rhodes, Delos and Alexandria. During medieval and Turkish times, Piraeus diminished into a tiny fishing village, and by the time Greece became independent, it was home to fewer than 20 people.

Its resurgence began in 1834 when Athens became the capital of independent Greece and by the beginning of the 20th century, it had superseded the island of Syros as Greece's principal port. In 1923 its population swelled with the arrival of 100,000 Greek refugees from Turkey. The Piraeus that evolved from this influx had a seedy but somewhat romantic appeal with its bordellos, hashish dens and *rembetika* music – all vividly portrayed in the film *Never on a Sunday* (1960).

ORIENTATION

Piraeus is 10km southwest of central Athens. The largest of its three harbours is the Great Harbour (Megas Limin), on the western side of the Piraeus peninsula, which is the departure point for all ferry, hydrofoil and catamaran services. Zea Marina (Limin Zeas) and the picturesque Mikrolimano (Small Harbour), on the eastern side, are for private yachts.

The metro and train lines from Athens terminate at the northeastern corner of the Great Harbour on Akti Kalimassioti. Most ferry departure points are a short walk over the new footbridge from here. A left turn out of the metro station leads after 250m to Plateia Karaiskaki, the terminus for buses to the airport. A block to the right is the suburban rail station.

INFORMATION

There are lots of places to change money along the Great Harbour, as well as plenty of ATMs.



There are luggage lockers at the metro station (24 hours €3).

There is free wi-fi access around the port, and at McDonald's and Starbucks.

Bits & Bytes Internet (☎ 210 412 1615; Iroon Polytehnou 2, Monastiraki; per hr €2; ☎ 24hr)

Emporiki Bank (cnr Antistaseos & Makras Stoa) Has a 24-hour automatic exchange machine.

National Bank of Greece (cnr Antistaseos & Tsamadou) Near the Emporiki Bank.

Post office (cnr Tsamadou & Filonos; ☎ 7.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-2pm Sat).

SIGHTS

If you have time to spare, the **Piraeus Archaeological museum** (☎ 21045 21598; Harilaou Trikoupi 31; adult/concession €3/2; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun) is a good place to spend it. It's well laid out and contains some important finds from classical and Roman times. These include some very fine tomb reliefs dating from the 4th to 2nd century BC. The star piece of the museum, however, is the magnificent statue of Apollo, the *Piraeus Kouros*. It is the oldest larger-than-life, hollow bronze statue yet found. It dates from about 520 BC and was discovered in Piraeus, buried in rubble, in 1959. It was temporarily closed for renovation in 2007.

The **Hellenic Maritime Museum** (☎ 210 451 6264; Akti Themistokleous, Plateia Freatidas, Zea Marina; adult/concession €3/1.50; ☎ 9am-2pm Tue-Sat, 9.30am-2pm Sun) brings Greece's maritime history to life, with models of ancient and modern ships, seascapes by leading Greek 19th- and 20th-century painters, guns, flags and maps as well as part of a submarine on the museum grounds. There is also a small **Museum of the Electric Railway** (admission free; ☎ 9am-2pm & 5-8pm) in the metro station.

SLEEPING

There's no need to stay at any of the shabby cheap hotels around Great Harbour when Athens is so close (they're aimed more towards accommodating sailors than tourists). The better hotels are geared for the business market. Don't attempt to sleep out – Piraeus is probably the most dangerous place in Greece to do so.

You could try the budget **Hotel Triton** (☎ 210 417 3457; Tsamadou 8).

EATING & DRINKING

There are dozens of cafés, restaurants and fast-food places along the waterfront at Great Harbour but the better restaurants are in the

backstreets or further afield at the Mikrolimano harbour, Marina Zea and along the waterfront promenade at Freatida.

Flying Pig Pub (☎ 210 429 5344; Filonos 31; ☎ 9am-1am) Run by a friendly Greek Australian, the Pig is a popular bar with a large range of beers. It also serves decent food, including a generous English breakfast.

You can stock up on supplies before a ferry trip, in the area just inland from Akti Poseidonos. The **markets** (☎ 6am-4pm Mon-Fri) are on Dimosthenous. **Piraeon supermarket** (☎ 210 417 5764; Ippokratous 1; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat) is opposite the markets.

SHOPPING

Flea Market (cnr Alipedou & Skylitsi Omiridou; ☎ 7am-2pm Sun) The Piraeus flea market rivals its famous counterpart in Athens. As well as stalls selling junk, there are small shops selling jewellery, ceramics and antiques. The market is near Plateia Ippodamias, behind the metro station. Antique hunters are better off scouring the stores in the streets around the market.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus Nos 040 and 049 operate 24 hours a day between Piraeus and central Athens; they run every 20 minutes from 6am until midnight and then hourly (€0.50). Bus 040 runs between Akti Xaveriou in Piraeus and Filellinon in Athens. Bus 049 runs between Plateia Themistokleous in Piraeus and Omonia in Athens.

The X96 Piraeus–Athens Airport Express buses leave from the southwestern corner of Plateia Karaiskaki.

See p146 for information on bus services to the rest of Greece.

Metro & Suburban Rail

The metro is the fastest and easiest way to get from Piraeus to central Athens (see p150). The station is at the northern end of Akti Kallimassioti. Travellers should take extra care as the section between Piraeus and Monastiraki is notorious for pickpockets.

Piraeus is now connected to the suburban rail, whose terminus is opposite the metro station. To get to the airport or the Peloponnese you change trains at Nerantziotissa.

GETTING AROUND

Piraeus has its own network of buses but the services likely to interest travellers are buses

904 or 905 between Zea Marina and the metro station.

ATTICA ΑΤΤΙΚΗ

Greater Athens and Piraeus account for the bulk of the population of the prefecture of Attica. The plain of Attica is an agricultural and wine-growing region, with several large population centres. It has some fine beaches, particularly along the Apollo Coast and at Shinas, near Marathon.

Until the 7th century, Attica was home to a number of smaller kingdoms, such as those at Eleusis (Elefsina), Rammous and Brauron (Vravrona). The remains of these cities con-

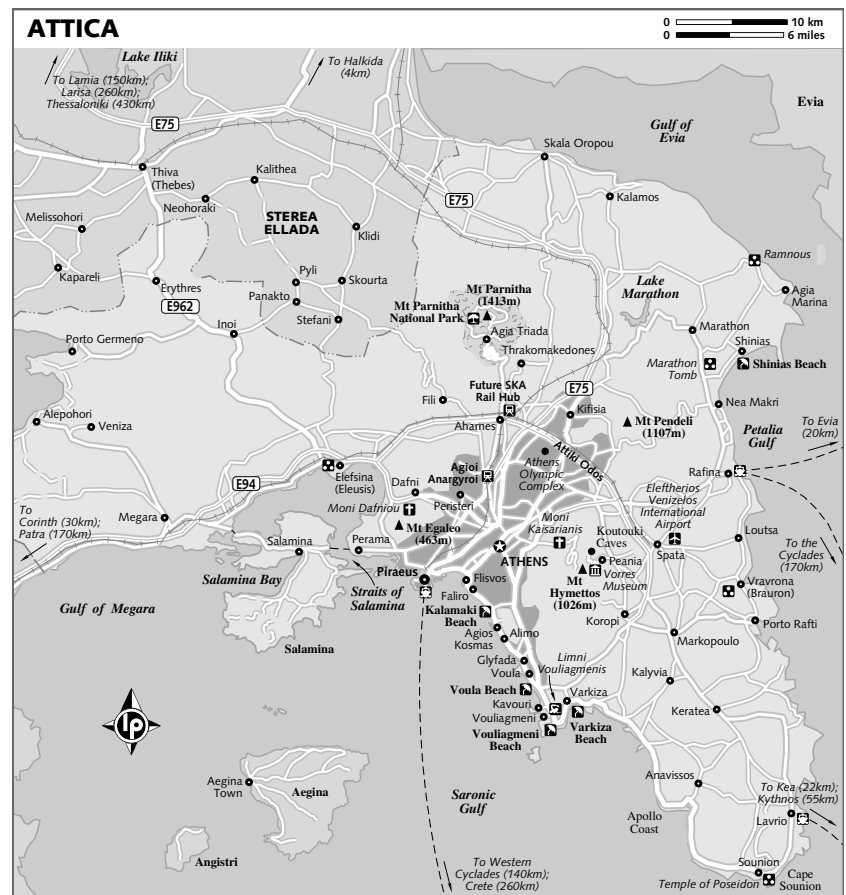
tinue to be among the region's main attractions, although they pale alongside the superb Temple of Poseidon at Cape Sounion.

Many of these places can be reached by regular city buses; others can be reached by KTEL services from the Mavromateon bus terminal.

CAPE SOUNION ΑΚΡΩΤΗΡΙΟ ΣΟΥΝΙΟ

Temple of Poseidon

Ναός του Ποσειδώνα
The ancient Greeks knew how to choose a site for a temple. Nowhere is this more evident than at Cape Sounion, 70km south of Athens, where the **Temple of Poseidon** (☎ 22920 39363; adult/concession €4/2; ☎ 9.30am-sunset) stands on a craggy



spur that plunges 65m down into the sea. Built in 444 BC at the same time as the Parthenon, it is constructed of local marble from Agrileia and its slender columns – of which 16 remain – are Doric. It is thought that the temple was built by Ictinus, the architect of the Temple of Hephaestus in Athens' Ancient Agora.

The temple looks gleaming white when viewed from the sea and is discernible from a long distance. It gave great comfort to sailors in ancient times; they knew they were nearly home when they saw it. The views from the temple are equally impressive. On a clear day, you can see Kea, Kythnos and Serifos to the southeast, and Aegina and the Peloponnese to the west. The site also contains scanty remains of a *propylon*, a fortified tower, and, to the northeast, a 6th-century temple to Athena.

Try to visit early in the morning before the tourist buses arrive – or head there for the sunset – if you wish to indulge the sentiments of Byron's lines from *Don Juan*: 'Place me on Sunium's marbled steep, Where nothing save the waves and I, May hear our mutual murmurs sweep...'

Byron was so taken by Sounion that he carved his name on one of the columns – sadly many others have followed suit.

There are a couple of tavernas just below the site if you want to combine a visit with lunch and a swim.

You can take either the inland or the more scenic coastal bus to Cape Sounion from Athens. The coastal buses leave Athens hourly, on the half-hour (€4.50, 1½ hours), from the Mavromateon bus terminal. See p147 for details. These buses also stop on Filellinon, on the corner of Xenofontos, 10 minutes later, but by this time they're usually very crowded.

ELEFSINA (ELEUSIS) ΕΛΕΥΣΙΝΑ

The ruins of **Ancient Eleusis** (☎ 21055 46019; adult/concession €3/2; ☎ 8.30am–3pm Tue–Sun) lie surrounded by oil refineries and factories beside the industrial town of Elefsina, 22km west of Athens.

It's hard to imagine Eleusis in ancient times, but nestled on the slopes of a low hill close to the shore of the Saronic Gulf, ancient Eleusis was built around the **Sanctuary of Demeter**. The site dates back to Mycenaean times, when the cult of Demeter, one of the most important cults in ancient Greece, began. By classical times it was celebrated with a huge annual festival, which attracted

thousands of pilgrims wanting to be initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries. They walked in procession from the Acropolis to Eleusis along the Sacred Way, which was lined with statues and votive monuments. Initiates were sworn to secrecy on punishment of death, and during the 1400 years that the sanctuary functioned, its secrets were never divulged. It was closed by the Roman emperor Theodosius in the 4th century AD.

The site's **museum** helps make some sense of the scattered ruins, with models of the old city.

Take bus A16 or B16 from Plateia Eleftherias (Koumoundourou), north of Monastiraki. Buses run every 20 minutes and take about 30 minutes in reasonable traffic.

DAFNI ΔΑΦΝΙ

Moni Dafniou Μονή Δαφνίου

The 11th-century **Dafni monastery** (☎ 21058 11558; Leoforos Athinon), 10km northwest of Athens along the busy road to Corinth, is Attica's most important Byzantine monument, and is on Unesco's World Heritage list. The monastery was badly damaged by the 1999 earthquake and it was still unclear at the time of research when it would reopen.

The monastery stands on the site of an ancient Sanctuary of Apollo along the route of the Sacred Way that ran from ancient Eleusis to the Acropolis. The temple was destroyed by the Goths in AD 395, although a single Ionic column survives in the narthex of the church. The church contains some of Greece's finest **mosaics**.

Bus A16 from Plateia Eleftherias can drop you outside the monastery.

AROUND PEANIA

Koutouki Cave Σπηλιά Κουτούκι

Although the facilities here are run-down, this two-million-year-old **cave** (☎ 210 664 2910; www.culture.gr; Peania; adult/concession €5/3; ☎ 9.30am–3.45pm Mon–Fri) is one of the finest in Greece, covering 3300 sq metres and containing stalagmites and stalactites. It is well lit and guided tours end with a quirky sound-and-light finale with classical music.

The cave is best visited by car. Buses 125 and 308 from outside Ethniki Amyna metro station can take you as far as Peania; from there you can take a taxi about 4.5km to the cave.

Vorres Museum Μουσείο Βορρέ

This impressive private modern art and folk **museum** (☎ 210 664 2520; www.culture.gr; Parodos Diadohou Konstantinou 4, Peania; adult/child €5/2.50; ☎ 10am–2pm Sat, Sun & August, by appointment Sep–Jul) is on the lovely 2.5-hectare estate that is the home of Ion Vorres. Vorres migrated to Canada as a young man but built his home here in 1963 and began collecting art (housed in a modern gallery), furniture, artefacts, textiles and historic objects from around Greece to preserve the national heritage.

Take bus 308 to Koropi-Peania from Ethniki Amyna metro station.

VRAVRONA ΒΡΑΥΡΩΝΑ

The **Sanctuary of Artemis** (☎ 22990 27020; adult/concession €3/1.50; ☎ 8.30am–3pm Tue–Sun) was a revered site for worshippers of the goddess of the hunt, protector of women in childbirth and newborns. The temple is one of several monuments from this Neolithic settlement. The museum (temporarily closed at the time of research) houses exceptional finds from the sanctuary and excavations in the area.

Take the metro to Ethniki Amyna, then bus 304 to Loutsas. It's a 10-minute taxi ride from there, with a nice stretch of beach on the way.

MARATHON & AROUND

Marathon Μαραθώνας

The plain surrounding the unremarkable small town of Marathon, 42km northeast of Athens, is the site of one of the most celebrated battles in world history. In 490 BC an army of 9000 Greeks and 1000 Plataeans defeated the 25,000-strong Persian army, proving that the Persians were not invincible. The Greeks were indebted to the ingenious tactics of Miltiades, who altered the conventional battle formation so that there were fewer soldiers in the centre, but more in the wings. This lulled the Persians into thinking that the Greeks were going to be a pushover. They broke through in the centre but were then ambushed by the soldiers in the wings. At the end of the day, 6000 Persians and only 192 Greeks lay dead. The story goes that after the battle a runner was sent to Athens to announce the victory. After shouting '*Enikesame!*' ('We won!') he collapsed in a heap and never revived. This is the origin of today's marathon race.

Four kilometres before the town of Marathon is the 10m-high tumulose or burial

mound that is the **Marathon tomb** (☎ 22940 55462; 350m from Athens-Marathon rd; site & museum €3; ☎ 8.30am–3pm Tue–Sun Jun–Oct). In ancient Greece, the bodies of those who died in battle were returned to their families for private burial, but as a sign of honour the 192 men who fell at Marathon were cremated and buried in this collective tomb. The site has a model of the battle and historical information.

Nearer to the town is the excellent **Marathon museum** (☎ 22940 55155; admission ind site €3), which has local discoveries from various periods, including neolithic pottery from the Cave of Pan and finds from the tomb of the Athenians. New finds from the area include several well-preserved larger-than-life statues from an Egyptian sanctuary. Next to the museum is one of the area's prehistoric grave circle sites, which has been preserved under a hangar-like shelter, with raised platforms and walkways over the site. There is another hangar containing an early Helladic cemetery site on the way to the museum.

About 8km west of Marathon is **Lake Marathon**, a massive dam that was Athens' sole source of water until 1956. The dam wall, completed in 1926, is faced with the famous Pentelic marble that was used to build the Parthenon. It's an awesome sight, standing over 50m high and stretching for more than 300m.

Hourly (half-hourly in the afternoon) buses depart from Athens' Mavromateon terminal to Marathon (€2.90, 1¼ hours). The tomb and the museum are within a short walking distance of bus stops (tell the driver where you want to get off). There are no bus services to Lake Marathon.

Ramnous Ραμνούς

The ruins of the **Ramnous ancient port** (☎ 22940 63477; admission €2; ☎ 8am–5.30pm) are about 10km northeast of Marathon. It's an evocative, overgrown and secluded site, standing on a picturesque plateau overlooking the sea. Among the ruins are the remains of the Doric **Temple of Nemesis** (435 BC), which once contained a huge statue of the goddess. Nemesis was the goddess of retribution and mother of Helen of Troy. There are also ruins of a smaller 6th-century temple dedicated to Themis, goddess of justice.

Another section of the site was recently opened to the public, leading 1km down a picturesque track to the relatively well-preserved

fortress on the cliff top near the sea, with the remains of the city, a temple, gymnasium and theatre. The site is well off the beaten track and consequently one of the least spoilt. You need your own transport to get there.

Shinias Σχοινιάς

The long, sandy, pine-fringed beach at Shinias, southeast of Marathon, is the best in this part of Attica and also very popular, particularly at weekends. Shinias was the controversial location chosen for the rowing competition in the 2004 Olympic Games, despite concerns about its susceptibility to strong winds and its proximity to significant wetlands.

Camping Ramnous (☎ 22940 55855; www.tggr.com/camping-ramnous-athens; Leoforos Poseidonos 174; camp sites per adult/tent €6.50/7) on the way to the beach has a children's playground and waterslide.

The bus to Marathon stops at the entrance to the camp site and within walking distance of Shinias beach.

MT PARNITHA ΠΑΡΝΗΘΑ

Mt Parnitha National Park, just 20km north of the city centre, is a popular weekend escape for Athenians, though, tragically, thousands of hectares of century-old fir forest were razed during the 2007 fires. It will take decades to recover from what experts are calling an environmental disaster.

Mt Parnitha comprises a number of smaller peaks, the highest of which is Karavola at 1413m – high enough to get snow in winter. The park is crisscrossed by numerous walking trails, marked on the Road Editions trekking map of the area. Most visitors access the park by cable car from the outer Athens suburb of Thrakomakedones. The cable car drops you below **Casino Mt Parnes** (☎ 21024 21234; www.mont-parnes.gr; 🕒 24hr), a gaming and hotel complex.

The casino runs a free bus service from various locations in Athens, including outside the Hilton. You can get to the cable car station on bus 714 from the south end of Aharnon, near Plateia Omonias.