



# Kid Friendly Athens

## **Athens, 5 Days**

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# Guide Description



**AUTHOR NOTE:** Here is a compiled list of some of the most family-friendly places Athens has to offer. There is a suggested itinerary based on location to simplify logistics and organizing transportation. Here are a few additional details:

-The Attica Zoo is very near the Venizelos Airport, making it a worthwhile visit if you have some time after arriving or before departing.

- A walk through the National Garden will produce lovely surprises. Fish, turtles, flowers, and a little reading room among the many.

-- Attending a football game at the Olympiakos, Karaiskaki Stadium might be an investment but it can also be one of the most memorable events you'll have. Ever!

- In terms of accommodations, The Ava Hotel is recommended due to it's large, apartment like rooms making them well suited to traveling families. The Baby Grand has whimsy and fun that kids will appreciate.

# Itinerary Overview

things to do  
restaurants  
hotels  
nightlife

## Day 1 - Athens



### Attica Zoological Park

Dolphins and monkeys and bears, oh my!

## Day 2 - Athens



### Athens Planetarium

Viewing Space



### Kifissia/Piraeus Railway

North to South in fifty minutes or more.



### Karaiskaki Stadium

Historical Stadium

## Day 3 - Athens



### Greek Children's Museum

The best way to keep little hands busy in Plaka.



### The Sunshine Express

The little train that could.



### Museum of Greek Children's Art

Museum of the young, gifted, and expressive.



### Ilias Lalaounis Jewellery Museum

A jewelry lovers museum



### Hard Rock Cafe Athens

A Tribute to Rock Music

## Day 4 - Athens



### Goulandris Museum of Natural History (The)

From fossils to rare plants



### Spathario Museum of Shadow Theatre

Hand-held puppets



### Goody's

Greek Food, Fast!

## Day 5 - Athens



### Hellenic Cosmos

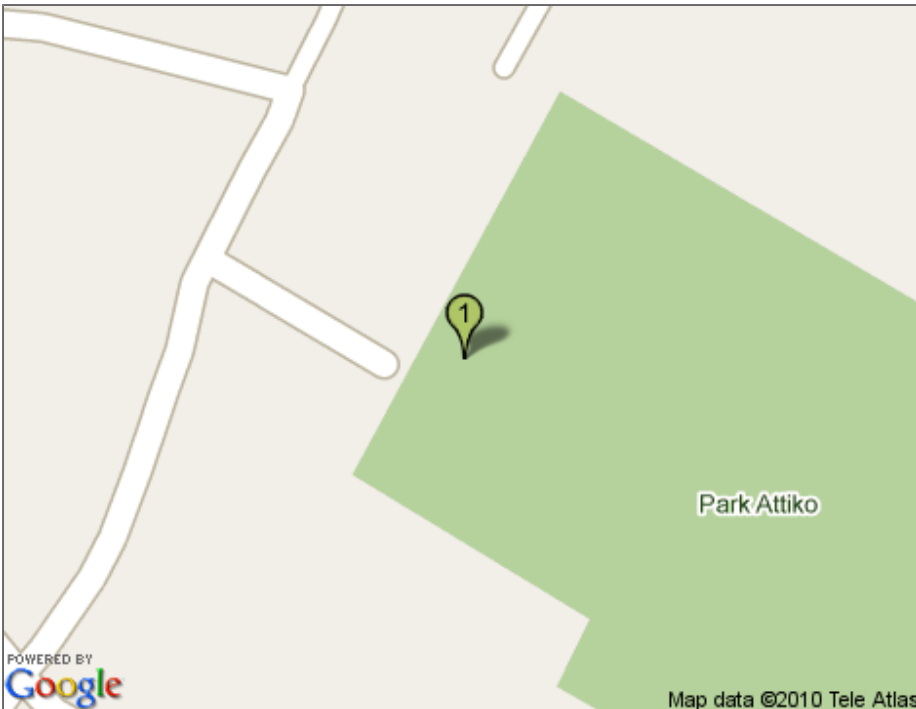
A virtual reality trip to Ancient Greece



### Allou Fun Park

When you're sick of stones and museums...

# Day 1 - Athens



## QUICK NOTE

**contact:**  
tel: +30 210 663 4724  
<http://www.atticapark.gr>

**location:**  
Yalou  
Athens Attica 190 04

**hours:**  
Daily 9a-sunset

## 1 Attica Zoological Park

### OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

The zoo is very near the airport. You can easily fit it in before a mid-afternoon to early evening flight by arranging a private transfer with a taxi or minibus.

**DESCRIPTION:** For a zoo that is only ten years old, Greece's first and only zoo sure has made a name for itself. Started by a Frenchman, Jean-Jacques Lesueur, the park's first claim to fame was their bird collection, the third largest in the world. Year by year it has grown into two thousand varieties of birds living in walk-in aviaries, a reptile house, fauna from four continents including brown bears, white tigers, giraffes, monkeys, lions, hippos, free-range rabbits, a petting zoo, an upcoming dinosaur park and aquarium of "international stature," and the newly installed dolphinarium, the only one of its kind in Greece.

Four dolphins and two sea lions are some of the latest addition to the park and are currently being trained for special shows that will take place in the near future. For now they're being studied by researchers working with the Catalanian Polytechnic and the SaveWave company, both working to better understand the dolphins' auditory perception as well as possible therapeutic relationships between dolphins and children with autism. Educational presentations in the dolphinarium are offered two to three times a day for an extra three euros on top of the park's



Attica Zoological Park

admission. Check their website or call for exact hours as they change seasonally.

Necessary information on the park:

Hours

9am to sunset, 365 days a year.

Presentation hours for the dolphinarium from 31/10/2010 until 26/03/2011

Weekdays 11:30 and 15:30 Saturday 11:00 and 13:30 and 15:30

Sunday and holidays (06/01/2011, 07/03/2011, 25/03/2011) 11:00 and 12:30 and 14:00 and 15:30

Prices:

Adults: € 15

Children under three and the disabled are offered free admission.

Children until the age of twelve get a discounted rate of € 11. Groups of twenty-five or more are also offered the discounted rate.

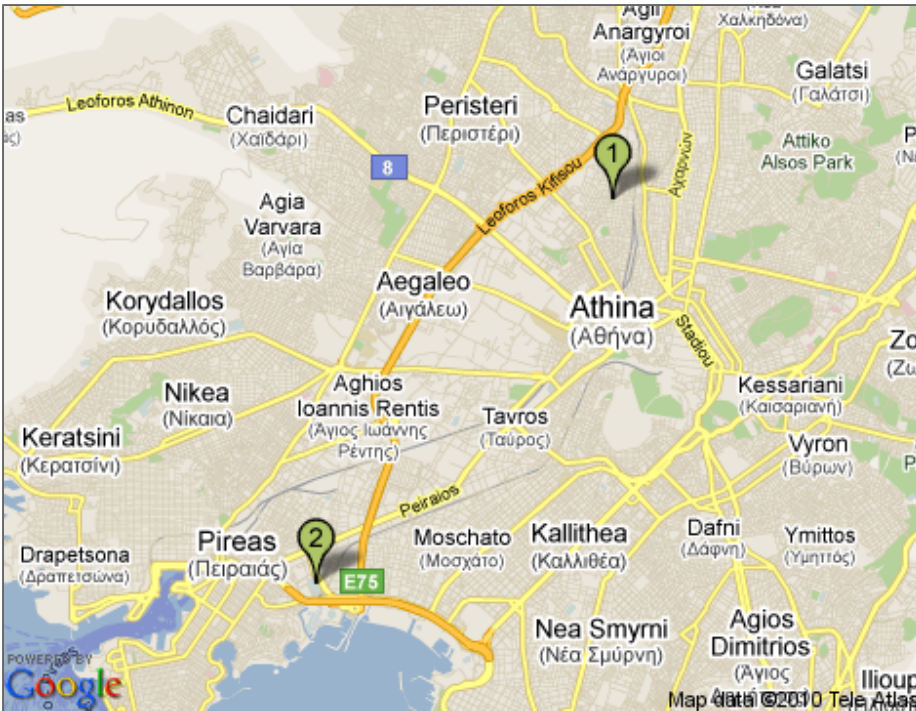
Family passes are offered at €48 and for two adults + two children

€58 for two adults + three children.

\*There are places to buy sandwiches, drinks and tiropita (cheese pies) as well as welcoming picnic places for something that you brought along with you.

© NileGuide

# Day 2 - Athens



## QUICK NOTE

### contact:

tel: +30 21 0 946 9641  
fax: +30 21 0 943 0171  
<http://www.eugenfound.edu.gr/frontoffice/portal.asp>

### location:

Singru 387  
Paleo Faliro 17564

## 1 Athens Planetarium

**DESCRIPTION:** Enjoy a 360-degree, 3D view of space at the Athens Planetarium. Located in Paleo Faliro, this 280-seat interactive digital planetarium is the biggest of its kind in the world and is equipped with the latest technology. Enjoy a closer look at space from the comfort of your chair! The high-budget IMAX and OMNIMAX film productions will also be aired here on huge screens that are ten times the average size! © wcities.com



Evgenides Foundation

### contact:

tel: 210 5194 012  
<http://www.amel.gr>

### location:

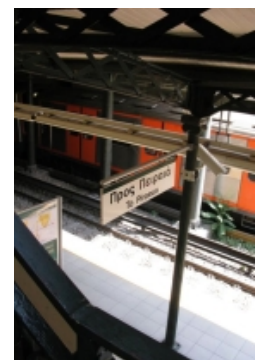
Athens Ece

## Kifissia/Piraeus Railway

### OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

Beware: certain stations are usually under construction these days and can either cause delays or interruptions that might end in being funneled out of the train and onto a bus.

**DESCRIPTION:** Part of this track is the oldest in Athens, dating back to 1869. It runs the length of the Port of Piraeus to lush and pricey Kifissia, with twenty two stops in between. Among the stops, some of the more interesting include the Faliro stop, running directly underneath home to popular Olympiakos football club, Karaiskakis stadium, the Monastiriaki and Thessiou stations that lead immediately to the Ancient and Roman agoras and popular flea markets, and the Victoria station, the nearest station to the Archaeological museum.



editor

The Piraeus Station is housed in a nineteenth century building that was restored for the Olympic Games. It gives access to the train museum and the Piraeus Archaeological Museum. The Kifissia Station gives access to the Goulandris natural museum.

© NileGuide

**contact:**

tel: +30 210 481 8440

<http://www.karaiskaki.gr/>

**location:**

Karaoli Dimitriou -  
Sophianopoulou  
Athens Attica 16675

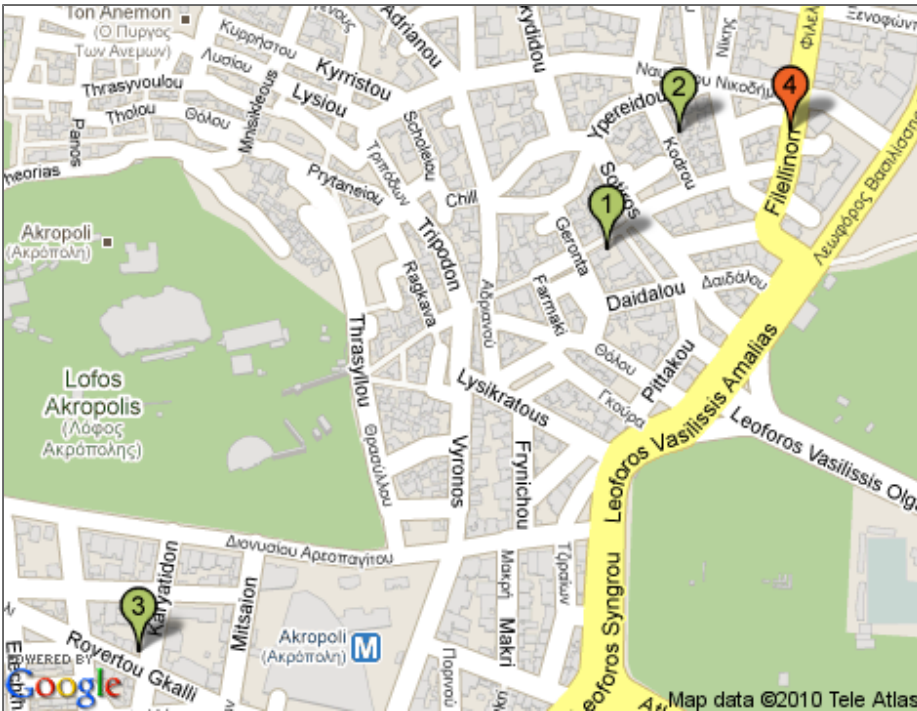
## 2 Karaiskaki Stadium

**DESCRIPTION:** The Karaiskaki Stadium, with a seating capacity of 33,000, is one of the largest football stadiums in Greece and the second largest stadium in Athens. A completely modern football stadium, it is home to one of Greece's most prestigious clubs-Olimpiacos. Karaiskaki was built in 1895 as a velodrome for the first Olympic Games that took place in 1896. The stadium is located south of the city center in Neo Faliro. Only the museum is open to visitors. © wcities.com



Paige Moore

# Day 3 - Athens



## QUICK NOTE

### contact:

tel: +30 210 331 2995

fax: +30 210 331 2995

<http://www.hcm.gr>

### location:

14 Kydathineon Street

Athens Attica 105 58

## 1 Greek Children's Museum

### OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

The large team of staff and volunteers frequently coordinate special events and educational walks throughout the year. Call or email for an up to date program.

**DESCRIPTION:** The Hellenic Children's museum was founded in 1987 by a group of experts in child development with the philosophy that direct experiences and entertainment support learning. Located in a restored neoclassical building in historic Plaka, it is dedicated to children from four to twelve years of age with a large number of hands-on interactive exhibits. While much of the written information is in Greek, there's plenty of activities that require no language at all and allow kids to play, research, think, experiment, create and observe.

\*Read the NileGuide Local Flavor Blog featuring the Hellenic Children's Museum's start of the 2010/2011 season for a more in-depth look at what they do.

© NileGuide



editor

**contact:**

tel: +30 210 8213185  
[http://www.sunshine-express.gr/Welcome\\_Page.htm](http://www.sunshine-express.gr/Welcome_Page.htm)

**location:**

Aiolou Street, Plateia Agoras

## The Sunshine Express

**DESCRIPTION:** The little blue and white "Sunshine Express" is the best way to get an overview of the historical section of Athens without ruining your Greek sandals. It runs all along Aeropagitou street, the pedestrian road circling the base of the Acropolis, through the quaint neighborhood of Plaka, the flea market of Monistiraki, past the Roman and ancient Agoras, the Acropolis and the New Acropolis Museum. Raise your hand to get on, flag the attention of the driver to get off... it's Greece. The rules are flexible. Five euros for adults for a one hour ride (hop on and off service) and free for small children (who really really love it.) Short commentary is offered over a loudspeaker in five languages. © Travelmuser



editor

**contact:**

tel: +30 210 331 2621 / +30 210 331 2750  
fax: +30 210 331 3734  
<http://www.childrensartmuseum.gr/>

**location:**

9 Kodrou Street  
Athens Attica 105 58

## 2 Museum of Greek Children's Art

**OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:**

Free admission for children.

**DESCRIPTION:** Picasso said, "It took me four years to paint like Raphael and a lifetime to paint like a child." Two museums in the world were among the first in recognizing the value of children's art to the extent of making it the focus of their collection, and one of those is in Athens, Greece. The aim of the museum is to preserve, study, and promote children's art as well as encouraging development in the young artists and art educators. Children will enjoy seeing work of other children their own age. There are also activity workshops most months of the year held every Sunday from 10am to 11:30. While most classes are in Greek, bilingual instructors can assist English speaking children. © NileGuide



editor

**contact:**

tel: +30 210 922 1044 / +30 210 922 7260  
fax: +30 210 923 7358  
<http://www.lalaounis-jewelrystore.com/>

**location:**

12 Kalisperi  
Athens Attica 11742

**hours:**

Mon and Thurs-Sat 9am-4pm;  
Wed 9am-9pm (free after 3pm); Sun 10am-4pm

## 3 Ilias Lalaounis Jewellery Museum

**OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:**

Free on Wednesdays from 3-5. Free admission ALWAYS for children under 10, teachers, journalists and members of the Diplomatic Corps.

**DESCRIPTION:** Anyone who appreciates attention to detail, artistry and craftsmanship will enjoy a visit to one of the world's only jewelry museums where 4,000 creations of its founder, Ilias Lalounis, gleam brilliantly from display cases. You'll see all of the cultural and historical points of reference from which he drew inspiration, such as earrings inspired by an ivory plaque from Samaria, decorated with the motif of the sacred tree of life, or a pendant taken from the folds of a "chiton" an ancient Greek garments. The third level is given to temporary exhibitions by local artists and the first level has a protected courtyard for refreshments, rooms for special workshops (some directed specifically toward children) and a gift shop that sells fashion books, children's books, hats, t shirts, ceramics, silk scarves, and, hm... oh yes! World class jewelry.



editor

Hours are 9-9 on Wednesday  
Thr, Fri, Sat 8:30-4  
Sunday 11-4  
closed on Mondays  
Acropolis Metro is a two minute walk. Located on Karyatidon and  
Kallisperi streets, just off of Dionysiou Areopagitou St.  
© NileGuide

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**contact:**  
tel: +30 210 325 2758  
<http://www.hardrock.com/>

**location:**  
18 Filellinon Street  
Athens 10557

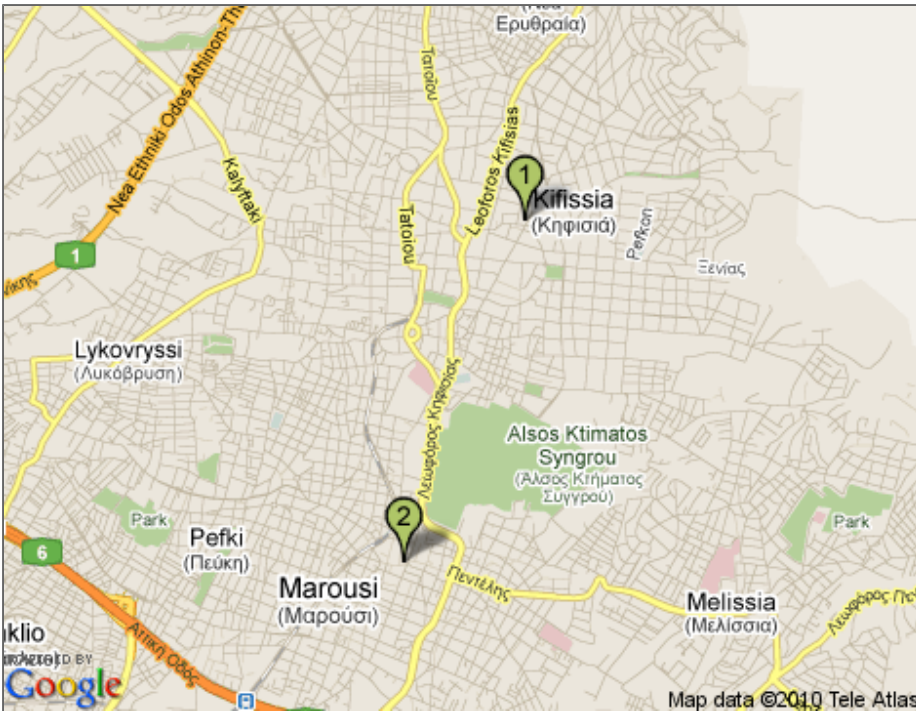
## **Hard Rock Cafe Athens**

**DESCRIPTION:** Hard Rock Cafes all over the world are well known for the style and extravagant interiors, suited for a rock cafe. Wood is an essential element in the interiors and the florid walls show off memorabilia of the legendary rock stars. It's a spacious three storeyed cafe with a restaurant and an elaborate American and Mexican fusion menu. Nachos, quesadillas, fajitas, burgers, barbecue and of course spirits and wines. The spaces are available for private parties, events and performances as well. Like every Hard Rock Cafe around the world, there's a Rock Merchandise shop where souvenirs and gifts can be bought. The restaurant is open daily from 10a.  
© wcities.com

**MY NOTE:** If you're dealing with picky eaters that need recognizable food, the Hard Rock Cafe will be a comforting delight. The hamburgers are great.

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# Day 4 - Athens



QUICK NOTE

**contact:**

tel: +30 210 801 5870 / +30 210 808 6405

fax: +30 210 808 0674

<http://www.gnto.gr/pages.php>

**location:**

Levidou Street 13  
Athens Attica 145 62

## 1 Goulandris Museum of Natural History (The)

**OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:**

Stick around in Kifissia for lunch. The cafes, restaurants and tavernas around the leafy main square provide a nice change from the busier feel of Athens.

**DESCRIPTION:** A wealth of information on the natural history of Greece can be found in this museum situated in the northern suburb of Kifissia. Its aim is not just to educate school students and adults about the evolution of life and the environmental changes observed over thousands of years but also to raise the public's ecological awareness. Most interesting is the museum's collection of fossils, mammals, birds, reptiles, insects and shells as well as the great variety of rocks and minerals on display. Among the 200,000 plant species exhibited here are 145 species which were discovered by the museum's own researchers. © wcities.com



Nikolaos S Karastathis

**contact:**

tel: +30 210 612 7245  
fax: +30 210 612 7206  
<http://www.karagiozismuseum.gr/en/index.htm>

**location:**

Kastalias Square  
Athens Attica 151 24

**hours:**

M-F 9a-2p, W 9a-2p and  
6p-8p

## 2 Spathario Museum of Shadow Theatre

**DESCRIPTION:** Greece has a long tradition of shadow theatre or Karagiozis, which is played out using transparent puppets against white screens. This art form has entertained many generations with its funny stories and political satire, with children possibly enjoying the performances the most. The museum—which is located in the northern suburb of Maroussi—features a rich collection of puppets made by members of the Spatharis family who are renowned Karagiozis players. The museum's collection also includes puppets from Indonesia, Thailand, Turkey and China—where this form of entertainment originated. Unfortunately, Karagiozis performances are not held at the museum, but it does hosts a 5-day festival every September. © wcities.com



Courtesy of true-athens.com

**contact:**

<http://www.goodysnet.com/page/default.asp>

**location:**

Athens Ece

**hours:**

11:30am-late

## Goody's

**DESCRIPTION:** Watch out, golden arches. Thanks to Goody's, the people of Greece have "fast" food that is based on their traditional diet of olive oil, vegetables, and trustworthy meat. While the menu has all of the usual suspects you would expect from a fast food restaurant, (cheeseburgers, chicken tenders, fries, kids meals) Goody's prides itself on quality. Based on the crowds at any given time of the day, it seems that it's working. Some of the best features include a self service salad bar with big blocks of feta cheese and a bottle of olive oil to use at your discretion, freshly baked bread, the aforementioned kids meals and occasionally, play areas for the kids.

There are 172 restaurants all over Greece. 72 of them are in Attica, four directly in the heart of the city center in four major squares:

Monastiraki Square on Ermou Street

Kolonaki Square on Irodotou Street

17 Stadiou Street just down from Kolokotroni Square and Omonia Square in a restored neoclassical building.

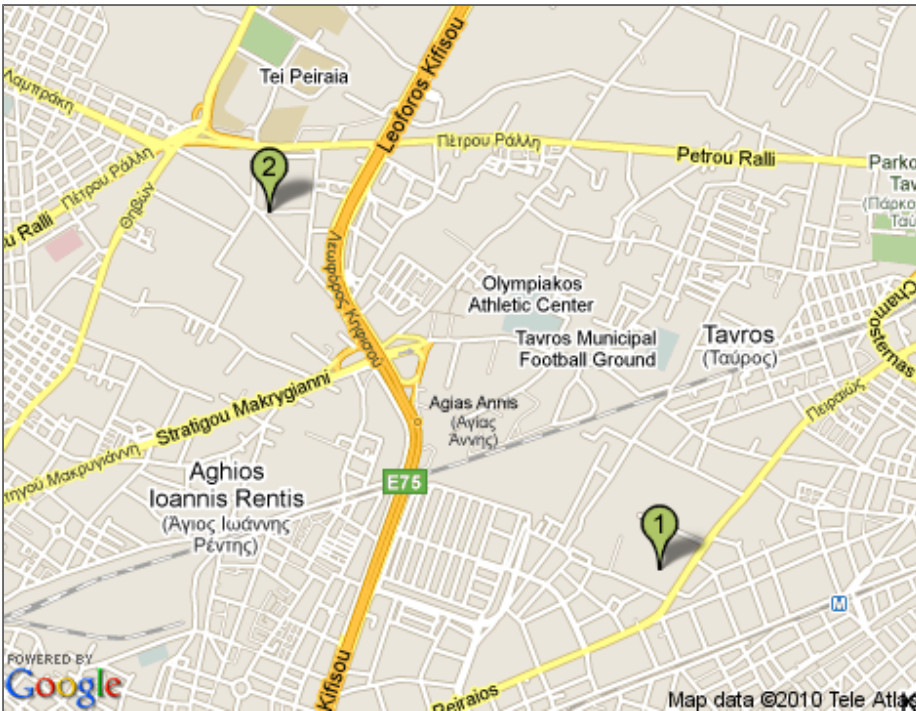
There is also one just next to the Ledra Marriott again across from the Syngrou-Fix metro station, both on Syngrou Avenue.

© NileGuide



editor

# Day 5 - Athens



## QUICK NOTE

### contact:

tel: +30 212 254 0000  
fax: +30 212 254 0123  
<http://www.hellenic-cosmos.gr/> and [http://www.fhw.gr/index\\_en.html](http://www.fhw.gr/index_en.html)

### location:

254 Pireos  
Tavros 17778

### hours:

Hours in flux. Check before visiting

## 1 Hellenic Cosmos

### OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

Check out the new virtual reality theater showing a film that brings the Ancient Agora to life.

**DESCRIPTION:** New at Hellenic Cosmos is the Tholos - a dome-shaped virtual reality theater with a 130 person seating capacity. Virtual reality technology is employed at this cultural centre to recreate scenes from antiquity. Visitors can walk through several virtual reality presentations which will take them back to cities of the Ancient World. They could choose to visit the majestic Zeus Temple in Ancient Olympia or else a Byzantine palace. Visitors can also look around exhibitions, stop by the museum shop or relax at the Internet café. Call or visit the website for show schedules. © wcities.com



Courtesy of Hellenic Cosmos

### contact:

tel: 210-4256999,  
210-4256994  
<http://www.alloufunpark.gr>

### location:

Kanapitseri Street 5, Agios Ioannis Rentis  
Athens

## 2 Allou Fun Park

**DESCRIPTION:** An amusement park, pure and simple. Go play the classics, the things that light up when you hit them with mallets, carousels, roller coasters, or go shopping in some of the name brand shops. Several franchised coffee places and eateries are there if you don't feel like leaving. There's a fantastic, super stereo, mega-huge screen featuring major films (mostly English speaking with Greek subtitles) and a special park for the kiddoes aged 3-8 called "The Kidom."



Konstantinos Efremidis

Open from 5pm until 12/1 on weekdays and 10am to same on weekends. Take the B18, Γ18 bus or 21 trolley from Omonia Square or several buses from Piraeus (420,703,801,802,803, 804, 828,831,845,909) © Travelmuser

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**contact:**

tel: +30 210 3250900  
fax: +30 210 3250920  
<http://www.classicalhotels.com/babygrandhotel/>

**location:**

65 Athinas Street  
Athens 10552

## 1 Classical Baby Grand Hotel

**OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:**

As fantastic as the hotel is, the area can be a bit sketchy in the evenings. Take precautions when walking around and don't carry all of your valuables.

**DESCRIPTION:** Ever walked into a hotel to be greeted by stuffed monkeys swinging from paper vines? What about finding the receptionist sitting behind a full size MiniCooper, retrofitted to serve as a desk? The Classical Baby Grand Hotel has a wildly unique vision, filling each of its 76 rooms with unexpected touches. The "Graffiti" rooms have original artwork painted directly on the walls by ten international Graffiti artists. Kids are made welcome with many amenities directed toward parents, including the use of Bugaboo strollers and Stokke baby cots. The colorful breakfast room and indoor swimming pool are also popular with the younger generation. There's even a Spiderman room. Classical Baby Grand is part of the Classical Chain of hotels, operated by well-established Grecotel.

**Location.**

In Athens's Omonia neighborhood, this hotel is close to Athens City Hall, Kotzia Square, and Omonia Square. Also nearby are National Archaeological Museum of Athens and Roman Agora.

© NileGuide



more photos on  
[Hotels.com](http://Hotels.com)

**contact:**

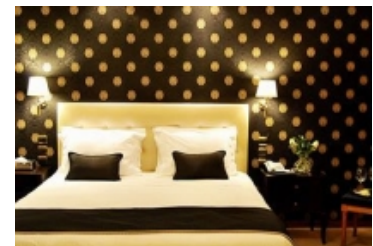
tel: +30 210 320 9000  
fax: +30 210 3259001  
<http://www.avahotel.gr/>

**location:**

9-11 Lyssikratous Street  
Plaka  
Athens 105 51

## 2 AVA Hotel, Apartments & Suites

**DESCRIPTION:** The AVA Hotel, Apartments & Suites underwent a major renovation in January 2010. Its outstanding neo-classic Greek architecture blends perfectly with the tranquil and exclusive district of Plaka and its surroundings. The hotel was built with flavour and flair for the discerning visitor to Athens, offering all the amenities, comfort and services of a deluxe hotel, plus the exclusiveness and privacy of a private home. Hotel AVA is located in the Plaka area of Athens, one of the city's most exclusive districts, just below the Acropolis and only a few steps from the Parthenon, the Temple of Zeus, Hadrian's Arch and the other exquisite monuments of Greek civilization. Only minutes away are the Greek Parliament, Old Olympic Stadium, National Gardens and Athens' top shopping areas. Popular with business and leisure travellers seeking personalized care and 'home away from home' qualities, AVA Hotel guarantees a comfortable stay in a private and discreet environment. Being self contained, all apartments and suites are ideal for pleasant short or long stays in Athens. Please note that smoking is not allowed in all public areas and that all apartments and suites are non-smoking. © Hotels.COM



more photos on [Hotels.com](http://Hotels.com)

**contact:**  
tel: +30 210 4903163

**location:**  
4 Siokou Street  
Athens Ece

### 3 Athens Railway Museum

**DESCRIPTION:** A museum for train enthusiasts, lovers of old things, clock-punk Victoriana types and anyone with a little time to kill before their ferry to the islands departs. 19th century tools, gears, uniforms and tickets, restored and stuffed into the former steel workshop of the then Peloponnese Railway in Piraeus. See old steam engines, wagons for royalty, and the impressive smoking car of the Sultan Abdul Aziz of the Ottoman Empire, a gift from a French queen and taken as a trophy by the Greeks in the Balkan Wars.

Metro: Piraeus Station

Admission Free

Tuesday-Friday: 09.00-13.00

Monday: Closed

Saturday-Sunday: 10.00-13.00 © NileGuide



K. Krallis

# Athens Snapshot

## Local Info

The warrior Goddess of wisdom, Athena, once gifted to the people an olive tree. She promised it would bring them prosperity. To thank her they named the city in her honor and dedicated temples to the virgin goddess, the "Parthenos" or "maiden" on the place known around the world as the Acropolis.

Those temples are still standing on the sacred rock high above the surrounding streets, alive with yellow cabs and honking horns, leather vendors and leathery latterna organ players, gypsy balloon sellers, ancient theatres, modern theatres, snap-happy tourists, street performers in cobblestone squares, posh cafes, souvlaki stands, evzones, flower, fish and flea markets, sweeping views from hilltops, caves of furies, fruit vendors and tri-wheeled trucks driven by "paliozits," the collector of old things...weaving in and between the towers of white concrete and neoclassical facades.

Athenians are generous, helpful souls on one side, opinionated rebels on the other, but wholly colorful. They are famous throughout the world for their intellect and hospitality. They love to share their stories of heroism and tragedy while displaying their love of simple pleasures: good food from the earth and surrounding themselves with friends and family.

No one can wonder Athens has attracted travelers for the last two millennia, or why in spite of every kind of trouble, she will continue to draw visitors throughout the next.

## Syntagma Square

"Syntagma" means "constitution" in Greek. It is the place where the citizens of the city stood outside of the palace and demanded their rights. Today, still, it is where all of the action is, always a buzz with taxis, shoppers, people sitting at cafes, and, yes, the occasional demonstration. Cross Amelias Avenue to watch the Evzones change post every hour on the hour.

Feed the pigeons or dip into the National Garden for some shade. It is home to the magnificent Hotel Grand Bretagne other five star hotels and is the starting point of the pedestrian shopping district of Ermou Street. The Syntagma Metro station is like a museum, full of archeological treasures found during construction. It provides easy access to the Acropolis Metro station and the Panepistimiou station along the red line. The blue line takes you to the airport.

## Plaka

What once was called the "Turkish Quarter" is now affectionately titled "Plaka," and is the area for wandering amidst narrow cobblestone roads, low, hundred-year-old houses, pots of basil and rosemary, traditional Greek eateries or "tavernas" and more souvenir shops than you can shake a stick of souvlaki at.

Some areas of Plaka have been inhabited for thousands of years. Walk down Tripodon Street to see the Lysicrates monument and follow it to the Theater of Dionysus, one access into the mighty Acropolis. Or head up toward Anafiotika to get lost in an island in the middle of the city. Plaka is pure romance.

## Monastiraki

Monastiraki, or "little Monastery" is always a great place for people watching. The courtyard and narrow roads that lead to the Roman Agora are always full of street performers, artists and antique vendors. Go on Sundays for treasure hunting at Avyssinias Square, or just wander around the flea market any day of the week. Buy fresh fruit from the kiosk and enjoy it while gazing at the remains of Hadrian's Library or the Tower of the Winds. Jump on the Kifissia/Piraeus railway for a nostalgic train ride to the very north or very south of Athens, respectively.

## Psirri, Thissio and Gazi

Psirri has been home to the free thinkers and Bohemians since the start of the 20th century, when sad-eyed Rembetika singers belted their woes to the accompaniment of a line of instrumentalists, all sitting in

wooden chairs while people smoked and drank beneath the stage. While it still holds a certain grungy appeal to the modern-day Bohemian, the streets are lined with trendy cafes and eateries that make it also palatable to more mainstream visitors, or even those with a dazzled eye pointed toward the "live for the day" world of the artists and non-conventionalists of Psirri.

Thissio, on the other hand, is a well sculpted garden surrounding the Ancient Agora and is well known for its posh places to enjoy a beverage for a few hours with a view on the Acropolis. The expansive pedestrian road of Apostolou Pavlou (Apostle Paul) circles around until it connects with Aereopagitou, making for lovely strolls. The pedestrian road ends at the ancient cemetery of Keramikos. From here you can see some strange metal structures puncturing the sky. This is the wildly popular area of Gazi, named for the gas factory whose buildings are now used as edgy cafes, tavernas and art centers. Organized graffiti decorates the walls and beautiful people fill the tables. The cultural center of Technopolis is where you can spy up and coming Greek talent in every field.

## Museum Mile

An exceptional collection of privately run museums can all be found along V. Sophias Avenue amidst the embassy buildings and various official ministries. The eclectic Benaki Museum shows off iconic pieces to represent several periods of Greek history spanning 8,000 years. The Museum of Cycladic Art displaying all of the neolithic artwork of the Cycladic islands. The Byzantine Museum presents the riches and religious art associated with medieval Greece, and the nearby War Museum gives a detailed history of the country through artifacts of warfare from ancient until modern times. A vast collection of art acquired from Greek collectors and by Greek artists at the National Art Gallery.

## Kolonaki

The streets around Kolonaki Square feature the most elegant boutiques in Athens. The square itself (officially named Filikis Eterias)

## Athens Snapshot continued

is the favorite meeting place of celebrities and beautiful people. They can be seen hanging out any of Kolonaki's numerous cafés after a shopping spree or in the excellent gourmet restaurants and chic bars at night. Kolonaki lies on the slopes of Lykavittos Hill, the city's best vantage point.

### Exarhia

The scenery changes just a few blocks away from elegant Kolonaki. The area around Exarhion Square is dominated by rock music bars, jazz clubs and traditional tavernas which are frequented by students and intellectuals.

### Panepistimiou and Stadiou Streets

These two streets connect Syntagma Square with Omonia Square. As well as shops and restaurants, they feature some of the city's most beautiful 19th-century buildings. Among them is the so-called Panepistimiou Street (officially named El. Venizelou Street), along with the university and National Library. The historic Iliou Melathron Mansion now houses the Numismatic Museum and the National History Museum.

### Omonia Square

Omonia is considered part of "downtown" Athens where the locals go to buy common household goods and clothing and pay less. It is now home to the majority of the immigrant population of Athens. A surge of modern hoteliers with an emphasis on design has hit Omonia and could breathe new life into this convenient location for a base in the Athens city center.

### Patission Street

Patission Street (officially named 28 Oktovriou Street) is one of the city's major thoroughfares. At No. 42 is the majestic Technical University, a splendid example of 19th-century architecture. Next door is the National Archaeological Museum, one of the world's greatest museums, housing an outstanding collection of ancient Greek art. Many fine boutiques can be found further north, past Kodringtonos Street. The best place to rest after a shopping spree is in any one of the numerous cafés and

tavernas of the Fokionos Negri pedestrian zone in Kypseli.

### Piraeus

Piraeus- the port town of Athens- is located on a peninsula, 10 kilometres southwest of central Athens. It features a busy commercial port and a Sunday flea market in the streets near the metro station. The most picturesque part of Piraeus is the Mikrolimano fishing harbor, with its row of traditional fish restaurants. Other good places for eating fish are the numerous seafood eateries of Akti Themistokleous Street, on the peninsula's eastern coast. Traces of the area's 2,500-year old history can be found at the Piraeus Archaeological Museum.

### Glyfada and Vouliagmeni

The city's southern suburbs are located along the Apollo Coast and feature a string of beaches as well as numerous restaurants and nightclubs. One of these suburbs, Glyfada, boasts a golf course, an excellent shopping area on Metaxa Street and elegant restaurants and bars. Further south lies the exclusive resort town of Vouliagmeni renowned for its luxurious hotels, sophisticated restaurants and sailing clubs. The resort also features excellent beaches and watersports facilities at the Astir Beach Club.

### Kifissia

An urban retreat for the wealthy since the times of Herodes Atticus (the mega-millionaire of ancient times responsible for the Kalimarmara Stadium and the Herodus Atticus Theater) Kifissia is a shady, upscale neighborhood full of elegant hotels, restaurants, and elite businesses. Kolokotroni Street and Argiropoulou Street are good destinations for serious shoppers as they're lined with boutiques from the biggest names in fashion and luxury. The Pentelikon hotel is an elegant place to stay to experience it, but the Semiramis Hotel, designed by Karim Rashid and part of the Design Hotel group, is a better

choice for an appreciator of modern art and design.

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## History

Athens is rightfully considered to be the cradle of Western civilization. It is the birthplace of democracy and home of the world's greatest philosophers and artists, many of whom set the foundations of modern society.

The Greek capital is the oldest continuously inhabited city in Europe, first settled during the neolithic period more than 5,000 years ago. Archaeological finds prove that a Bronze Age fortification and a palace were built on the Acropolis Hill as early as 1400 BCE.

Athens takes its name from the goddess Athena. According to Greek mythology, there was a contest between Athena, the goddess of wisdom, and Poseidon, the god of the sea, over who would become the guardian of the city. Each deity granted the citizens a gift: Poseidon opened a well on the Acropolis, while Athena made an olive tree grow on the rocky soil of the hill. The citizens considered the gift of Athena more precious and dedicated their city to her, thus gaining wealth and wisdom.

The foundations of the city's explosive economic and cultural growth were laid in the 6th century BCE, when the world's first democratic rules were introduced. The new laws relieved the poor of their debts, established the equality of all free men regardless of their wealth and gave all citizens the right to vote. A popular assembly of free citizens began to meet on Pnyx Hill to put the city's affairs to vote.

However, the world's first democracy was threatened with destruction following the Persian invasion in 490 BCE. The Athenians and their allies defended their homes with an army of 11,000 against the 100,000 Persian soldiers. Despite being greatly outnumbered, the Athenian army defeated the Persians at Marathon thanks to the innovative strategy employed by General Miltiades. A messenger was sent to Athens to inform the citizens of the victory, thereby performing the world's first marathon run. This event is commemorated worldwide with hundreds marathons held each year. One of these is the Athens Marathon which follows the original route.

## Athens Snapshot continued

A second Persian invasion with an even larger army led to the evacuation of Athens in 480 BCE. The Persian king Xerxes burnt down the abandoned city but witnessed the total destruction of his fleet by the Athenians at the naval battle of Salamis.

The two victorious battles at Marathon and Salamis established the city's position as a naval superpower and marked the beginning of a phase of unprecedented prosperity. Athens flourished and became the commercial hub and cultural centre of the Mediterranean during the 5th Century BCE. The wealth was used by the Athenian leader Pericles to rebuild the city on a grand scale. Pericles also introduced new political reforms which led to the maturity of the world's first democracy. The city's population reached 140,000, with 40,000 male citizens enjoying full political rights. It was the beginning of the Golden Age of Athens.

The destroyed temples of the Acropolis were replaced by some of the greatest architectural masterpieces of all time, such as the splendid Parthenon (dedicated to Athena) which still inspires architects all over the world. The public buildings were decorated with works by outstanding sculptors such as Phidias and Praxiteles, some of which can be seen at the Acropolis Museum and the National Archaeological Museum.

A new art form, namely theatre, was born here; plays by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes were first performed at the Dionysos Theatre which is the oldest in the world. Athens was also the place where the world's greatest philosophers: Socrates, Plato and Aristotle changed the way we think and perceive the world today. Visitors can stroll through the Agora (the ancient marketplace), retracing the footsteps of Socrates who used to walk around the once-crowded square engaging people in long discussions.

The Golden Age lasted until 404 BCE, when Athens was defeated by Sparta in the Peloponnesian Wars. The city lost its independence once again in 338 BCE when it came under the rule of the Macedonian kings, and was finally annexed by the Roman Empire in 146 BCE. Foreign rule reduced the city's political role but it remained a major cultural centre for many centuries. The Romans, who greatly admired the city's cultural heritage, built

many monuments such as the Odeon of Herod Atticus, the Roman Agora, the Temple of Olympian Zeus and Hadrian's Arch. Many Romans came to Athens to study at its renowned schools of philosophy.

The decline of Athens was caused by the first Christian emperors. Initially, in 394, Theodosius prohibited the worship of the ancient gods, to be followed by the closure of the philosophical schools in 529 ordered by Justinian.

Athens turned into a small town during the Byzantine era. Monuments from that time include the Church of Panagia Gorgoepikoos and the Kessariani Monastery. A large number of works of art from this period can be seen at the Byzantine Museum.

The Crusaders who conquered the Byzantine Empire in 1204, controlled the city until 1458- the year the Turks occupied Athens and annexed it to the Ottoman Empire. Turkish rule lasted for almost four centuries, bequeathing the city monuments such as the Tzisdarakis Mosque on Monastiraki Square and the Fethiye Mosque at the site of the Roman Agora.

A fierce war of independence broke out in 1821, leading to the proclamation of the infant Greek state in 1829. Athens awakened to a new life in 1834- the year the capital was moved to the city. Prince Otto of Bavaria, who was appointed King of Greece, brought his architects to plan the new royal city. A number of splendid buildings were constructed during this time, such as the Parliament building (the former royal palace), the university and the Academy.

Athens hosted the first modern Olympic Games, which were held at the imposing Panathenaic Stadium in 1896. The city hosted the Olympics again in 2004.

The 20th century witnessed the city's explosive growth. Its population grew from a mere 200,000 to four million, making it one of the largest and most fascinating cities in Europe despite its infrastructural and environmental problems. Great population growth in the 1920s was caused by the arrival of thousands of ethnic Greek refugees from Turkey, but the city's growth was really accelerated during the 1950s and 1960s with millions

of immigrants arriving from the Greek provinces, impoverished after years of war.

In 1941, German Nazi troops occupied the country, causing the death of hundreds of thousands of people. The liberation of Greece in 1944 didn't bring peace but instead a civil war, which ended in 1949. A period of political unrest led to a coup d'état in 1967 and the severe oppression of the Greek people. Democracy was finally restored in 1974. Greece became a full member of the European Community in 1981.

The fate of the city is best illustrated by the changes that have occurred to the Acropolis throughout the centuries: the Parthenon was built as the temple of Athena, but was subsequently transformed into an Orthodox church by the Byzantine emperors, a Catholic church by the Crusaders and a Muslim mosque by the Turks. This unique monument was severely damaged in 1687 during the Venetian bombardment of Athens, when the gunpowder stored by the Turks in the Parthenon exploded. Further damage was inflicted during the 1801 plundering by Lord Elgin, who removed its splendid sculptural decoration and sold it to the British Museum in London. A major preservation and restoration project was initiated several years ago, when the polluted air of modern Athens caused additional destruction to the marble buildings of the Acropolis.

©

### Hotel Insights

There are more than 350 hotels in the Greater Athens metropolitan area, ranging from backpackers' hostels to five-star beach resorts and from historic landmark buildings to contemporary high-rises. The most important choice you will have to make is the location of your hotel. This decision is important in such a large city, considering the traffic jams that appear in certain areas at different times of the day. If on are on a sightseeing trip, be sure to stay in a hotel in the city centre. Most sights are within easy walking distance or can be reached by metro, so you don't have to worry about traffic. Business travelers also prefer the city centre for its excellent hotels and numerous evening entertainment options.

### Syntagma Square

## Athens Snapshot continued

There are several hotel clusters in downtown Athens. The most central place to stay is Syntagma Square, the site of the majestic Grande Bretagne. This historic five-star landmark (run by Sheraton) dates back to 1842 and is the city's oldest hotel. Its old-world charm has been carefully preserved in the rooms, lounges and restaurant. Also on Syntagma Square is the stylish NJV Athens Plaza, which offers the city's most attractive hotel rooms. This five-star hotel is run by the GrecoTel group. Less expensive are the comfortable Electra, a four-star hotel located in Ermou Street's pedestrianized shopping zone, and the four-star Amalia. Plaka, the Acropolis and the boutiques of Kolonaki are just a short stroll away.

Closer to the city centre are several four-star hotels in Glyfada and Voula such as Blazer Suites and Best Western Fenix. These hotels are located near the Metaxa Street shopping and entertainment district, the Glyfada Golf Course and several beaches. Even closer to the city centre is the three-star Best Western Coral which is on Paleo Faliro beach.

### Plaka

The old town of Plaka is the site of many inexpensive hotels, with the exception of the four-star Golden Tulip Electra Palace. Located a five-minute walk from Syntagma Square, the hotel features a rooftop swimming pool commanding a view of the city and the Acropolis. Further away is another four-star hotel, the Royal Olympic- which overlooks the city's ancient monuments.

### Omonia Square

Many cheap hotels can be found in the streets around Omonia Square. The whole area was upgraded recently, with the opening of two upscale hotels on the square itself. Both the GrecoTel Athens Acropol and the Omonia Grand Hotel are four-star hotels.

### Panepistimiou and Stadiou Streets

Situated halfway between Syntagma and Omonia squares are the four-star Best Western Esperia Palace on Stadiou Street and the superior three-star Titania on Panepistimiou Street both ideally located for leisure and business travelers.

### Kolonaki

Kolonaki is one of the city's most attractive neighborhoods thanks to its upscale boutiques, gourmet restaurants and trendy nightspots. The best hotel here is the five-star St George Lycabettus Hotel, which commands spectacular views from its rooms, restaurant and rooftop swimming pool. A less expensive alternative is the cosy Athenian Inn a two-star hotel with a great location. Syntagma Square is just a fifteen-minute walk away.

### Ilissia

The opening of the imposing Athens Hilton in the Ilissia district in 1963, was followed by the construction of other five-star hotels in this part of the city, which is just a two-minute metro ride from Syntagma Square. The Divani Caravel and the Athens Holiday Inn were both opened in the 1970s, providing yet more deluxe accommodation and facilities ranging from swimming pools to large banqueting halls. The Holiday Inn recently opened the Holiday Suites- a four-star extension with 29 junior suites. A choice of restaurants and bars can be found in the immediate vicinity of these hotels.

### Syngrou Avenue

Syngrou Avenue is one of the city's major thoroughfares, connecting the city centre with Piraeus and the seaside suburbs. Among the hotels located along this avenue is the five-star Athenaeum Inter-Continental, the city's best hotel, offering guests a wealth of facilities and services. Of the same high standard is the nearby Ledra Marriott. Both of these hotels are a ten-minute drive from Syntagma Square. Closer to the city centre and within walking distance of the Acropolis is the Acropolis Select, a newly refurbished three-star hotel hidden away on a side street of Syngrou Avenue. At the far end of this avenue is the stylish five-star Metropolitan Hotel which has a swimming pool, fitness centre and many other amenities.

### Alexandras Avenue

Also within easy reach of the city centre are two hotels on Alexandras Avenue. The five-star Park Hotel- located near the National Archaeological Museum- offers a great view of the Acropolis from its rooftop swimming pool. The same holds true for the four-star Zafolia.

### Kifissia

The northern suburb of Kifissia is a popular choice for both business and leisure travelers who are drawn by its upscale boutiques, splendid restaurants and nightspots. Reviving the elegance of a bygone era are two landmark hotels from the 1920s: the five-star Pentelikon features an inviting garden swimming pool and one of the city's top restaurants while the more intimate four-star Kefalari Suites consists of just twelve individually themed rooms.

### Glyfada and Vouliagmeni

Many visitors to Athens chose to stay in one of the splendid seaside suburbs south of the city centre. The best hotels can be found in Vouliagmeni one of the Mediterranean's most elegant resorts. The five-star Astir Palace, occupying a private peninsula, offers a wealth of recreational and business amenities such as beaches, indoor and outdoor pools, watersports facilities and conference rooms. Another luxurious resort hotel is the Divani Apollon Palace which overlooks Kavouri Beach. The elegant Margi House is a more intimate five-star hotel, located just a stone's throw from Vouliagmeni Beach.

©

## Restaurants Insights

The Greeks are renowned for their hedonistic lifestyle and the long nights they like to spend eating, drinking and dancing. Few other places on earth can match the city's lively nightlife scene. Late dinners (taken at around 10p) and nightclubs that fill up after midnight are extremely typical here so don't be alarmed by the empty tables if you show up early for dinner!

Several factors make dining and partying pleasurable in Athens: there is the contagious joy shown by Athenians as they savor their food, their tendency to dance on any available surface including tables, and the endless chats. The picture perfect scenery, be it a traditional taverna located in a vine-covered backyard in Plaka or a seaside fish restaurant in Piraeus- will add to your enjoyment. Finally, the pleasant weather means that you can dine and party outdoors for most months of the year. What better way to end the day than by dining under the stars beneath the Acropolis?

### Syntagma Square

## Athens Snapshot continued

A restaurant that stands out for its great city view is the Dionysos Café and Restaurant at the foot of the Acropolis. For a romantic evening, one of the most beautiful dining rooms is G.B. Corner, which shares the old-world charm of the adjacent Grande Bretagne Hotel on Syntagma Square. A large number of nightclubs can be found all over Athens. Some feature live Greek music, while others play the latest international hits and attract the city's clubbers: Wild Rose and Kalua near Syntagma Square are both fantastic options. Symposio offers a grand view of the Acropolis as well, and has a wide selection of expertly seasoned meats that come paired with exotic sauces. While Furin Kazan, near Syntagma Square is ideal for a quick sushi lunch or dinner.

### Plaka

Classic Greek cuisine is also served in the elegant Daphne's in Plaka. Bakaliaraki is a comfortable Greek tavern with a large crowd of regulars. For delectable ham and pork dishes, try Xynou, where your meal will be accompanied by live music. There is also a backyard garden for those interested in dining outside. Eden Vegetarian Restaurant isn't just for vegetarians, they have many menu items that contain fresh seafood. For a sampling of some traditional Greek fare, try Akropol Resaturant Tavern, where there is live music from local bands. Scholarheion is a family owned and operated restaurant that focuses on serving guests quality meals at reasonable prices. Taverna Tou Psarra features a lovely rooftop garden with stunning views of Plaka. Among the numerous tavernas of the old town of Plaka are Damigos and Xynou, the latter serving food in its garden during the summer.

### Kifissia

Great alfresco dining is offered on the terrace of Ta Kioupia in Kifissia, with its splendid view of the city and the culinary cluster of around forty traditional dishes you will find on your table. For some Mediterranean food with a modern twist, try Beau Brummel. There is a large selection of cigars and cognac for those who enjoy a smoke after dinner. Cuisine of the highest quality is served at the elegant French restaurant Vardis. Souvlakia Kifissias is a popular take out restaurant where you can go to get some souvlaki on the go. Be sure to try the garlic pie, one of the

restaurants specialties. Il Salumaio di Montenapoleone represents classic Italian dishes like lasagna and risotto with truffles and foie gras. The wine list also offers selections from Italy.

### Kolonaki

Le Grand Balcon in the St George Lycabettus Hotel in Kolonaki. Kafenio in Kolonaki serves traditional Greek fare. Athens boasts a large selection of ethnic restaurants featuring cuisine from every continent. These range from informal eateries to gourmet temples such as the sophisticated Italian restaurant Boschetto, the excellent Polynesian restaurant White Elephant and Kiku, the best Japanese in town.

A major component of each dining experience is not just the food but also the excellent Greek wine, which has played an important role in the Athenian way of life for thousands of years. The Attica region is actually one of the oldest wine-growing regions of the world. Vintners have been providing Athenians with their elixir for thousands of years and wines range from the simpleretsina to excellent reds and whites. Excellent pasta and other Italian specialties are served at Casa di Pasta.

### Psirri

Eating out in one of the traditional tavernas is a must for any visitor. These serve tasty Greek dishes(made from meat, seafood and vegetables) that are preceded by mezedes. These mouth-watering appetizers are varied and can constitute an opulent meal in themselves. A good place for sampling mezedes is the Psirri district, where there are several tavernas such as Silfio, located on Taki Street, as well as Athinaikon near Omonia Square and Vlassis near Mavili Square. Fans of modern cuisine should try the innovative Kouzina Cine-Psirri. Athens also features several elegant wine bars such as Aspro in Psirri, and Thirio.

### Omonia Square

Visitors interested in a more authentic experience should opt for a club featuring rebetiko music, such as the Stoa Athanaton. Meanwhile, the cuisine of ancient Greece has been revived by Archeon Gevsi, a restaurant chain with branches near Omonia Square and in Piraeus. Neon Omonia was built inside what was once one of Athens' oldest hotels.

Serving coffee and breakfast food, it's a popular place for people in the hurry in the morning. Olive Garden shares its name with the American chain, but the food here is Mediterranean, Greek, Italian, French and Moroccan all rolled into one. For a rustic dining experience, try Athinaikon, a tavern that serves traditional, hearty Greek dishes such as stuffed spleen.

©

## Nightlife Insights

Athens- a bustling metropolis of four million inhabitants offers its visitors a huge selection of entertainment options, as well as world-class sightseeing opportunities few other places on earth can match. Athens boasts some of mankind's greatest heritage sites such as the Acropolis, the Ancient Agora and the Dionysos Theatre.

### Museums and Galleries

Of no lesser interest are the city's great museums for example the National Archaeological Museum with its splendid collection of ancient Greek art. Also worth a visit is the "Museum Mile" on Vassilissis Sophias Avenue featuring the Benaki Museum, the Museum of Cycladic Art, the Byzantine Museum, the War Museum and the National Art Gallery.

### Festivals

The city's cultural life is extremely varied. Many concerts and performances take place between May and October in numerous open-air venues such as the Lykavittos Theatre overlooking the city. The major cultural event is the Athens Festival- one of Europe's largest summer festivals held each year from June to September. Younger crowds are attracted by the three-day Rockwave Festival held each July.

### Music

The winter season includes great concerts at the splendid Athens Concert Hall as well as opera and ballet performances by the Greek National Opera. Also worth mentioning are the city's rebetiko and jazz clubs, such as the Stoa Athanaton and the Half Note Jazz Club.

### Theater

Performances at the historic National Theatre truly stand out amongst the dozens of theatrical productions which take place in the city. There are also many art exhibitions

## Athens Snapshot continued

to choose from, including those held at Gazi Technopolis Manos Chatzidakis, Athinais Cultural Centre and Artower Agora.

### Cinema

If you fancy watching the latest movie, the language barrier is no problem as all movies are featured in the original language with Greek subtitles (with the exception of some films for children). There is a huge choice of cinemas in Athens including, among others, Village Park (Europe's largest entertainment complex), Village Centre Maroussi and Athinais. Still more enjoyable though, is watching a movie under the stars at one of the city's open-air cinemas- such as the one at Aegli, in the Zappion Gardens.

### Family-Friendly

Children will also have a great time in Athens. They can explore the National Garden, visit the mystical Koutouki Cave and the world's third largest bird collection at the Attica Zoological Park. Try out the hands-on exhibits at the Greek Museum of Childhood or even see the creations of other children, exhibited at the Museum of Greek Children's Art.

### Sports

At the disposal of both children and adults are the city's excellent beaches and watersports facilities, such as the Astir Beach Club in Vouliagmeni, Schinias Beach and Karavi Beach Club in Marathon and the EOT beach clubs in Alimos and Varkiza. Other sports facilities can be found at the freely accessible Agios Kosmas sports complex in Elliniko and the Glyfada Golf Course. Hikers can head to the Mt Parnitha National Park, just north of the city.

### Shopping

The city's excellent shops present an additional recreational opportunity. Athens is a great place for clothes shopping- women in particular will appreciate both the quality and the attractive prices of clothes sold at the city's elegant boutiques. You can also shop for works of art, antiques, home accessories and exotic souvenirs.

For an up to date programme of events, art exhibitions, concerts, performances and cinema screenings, consult the pages of Athens News, a weekly English-language newspaper published every Friday. More detailed information, as well as many dining

and nightlife suggestions can be found in the Greek-language magazine Athinorama, which is also published on Fridays.

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## Things to Do Insights

The best way to explore a city is on foot. This is especially true of Athens, which has a number of sights located in close proximity to one another.

### National Archaeological Museum

World renowned museum, the National Archaeological Museum should be at the top of your list of museums to visit. Although you will face a crowd due to its popularity, it is for good reason. This museum houses artifacts that date back to the sixth millennium BCE. Art from the Aegean islands and Mycenaean art is showcased, including the funeral masks that were used to cover the deceased Mycenaean leaders. In addition, the earliest known Greek sculptures dating from 2000 BCE and an Egyptian Art collection are on display. Another must see attraction is the Benaki Museum. This classic museum was established in 1930 and is home to rare collections and hosts conservation workshops. Items from the Prehistoric period are featured as well as work from the Roman Empire. Then quench your thirst and appetite at the nearby Neon cafe, the perfect stop before continuing on. Also, don't miss the Museum of Cycladic Art which is near the Benaki Museum, and features the ancient cultures of Aegean and Cyprus (3rd millennium BC).

### Panathenaic Stadium

As you venture towards Vassileos Konstantinou Street the Panathenaic Stadium will make you stand in awe as you gaze up at this impressive structure. The Panathenaic Stadium is built on the remains of an ancient stadium dating back 330 BCE, and was host to the first modern Olympic Games in 1896 CE. Today, this 70,000-seat venue is used for concerts and other large-scale events. On nearby Vassilissis Olgas Street is the entrance to the Temple of Olympian Zeus, one of the largest temples ever constructed. Today only some of the temple's columns can be seen. In better shape is the adjacent Hadrian's Arch, built in 131 CE in honor of the Roman emperor Hadrian. For a traditional greek cuisine experience as

you tour this area try Eden Vegetarian Restaurant.

### Acropolis

The ascent to the Acropolis with its architectural masterpieces dating back to the 5th century BCE is the most famed symbol of Athens. You can reach the top of this hill by entering through the monumental Propylea in order to admire the magnificent Parthenon and the graceful Caryatid statues at the Erechthion Temple. The museum features splendid examples of ancient Greek art. Next, check out Lysicrates Monument, a cyclical tower from the 4th century BCE. From here, it is just a brief walk along Dionysiou Areopagitou Street to the southern slope of the Acropolis- the site of the Dionysos Theatre. Constructed in the 6th century BCE, it is one of the world's oldest theatres and the place where the great works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes were first performed. Walking down the street towards the entrance of the Acropolis, you will come across a more recent theatre, the Odeon of Herod Atticus from the second century BCE, which is still used for concerts and performances. A great place for Greek cuisine in the area is Taverna Xynos.

### Philopappou Hill

Opposite the entrance of the Acropolis stands Philopappou Hill. From the monument on the hilltop, built in the 2nd century CE, you can enjoy a magnificent view of the Acropolis. Nearby is Filistron, a great place to dine at while you take in the view of the Acropolis. On a lower hill lies Pnyx, the birthplace of democracy and the venue of the world's first popular assembly. Not far from here you can visit Arios Pagos a small hill that was used as the seat of court during the 5th century BCE. This is the place where the Apostle Paul preached to the citizens of Athens 2,000 years ago. The stairs next to the Arios Pagos will take you down to the Ancient Agora marketplace. Among the numerous sights in this archaeological park is the well-preserved Temple of Hephaistos and the reconstructed Stoa Attalou. A short stroll away is the more recent Roman Agora from the first century BCE and the landmark Tower of the Winds.

### Plaka

## Athens Snapshot continued

Plaka is one of the city's major attractions. Many interesting sights such as ancient monuments, Byzantine churches and beautifully restored mansions can be found in its narrow streets, most of them closed to traffic. There is also a good choice of tavernas, cafés and souvenir shops in the area, among them is Restaurant Taverna Plaka. Upon entering Kydathineon Street from the Filellinon end, you will come across the 11th Century, Agia Sotira Church, one of the few remaining Byzantine churches in Athens. Opposite the church is the Museum of Greek Folk Art. Its exhibits include a wide range of artifacts such as traditional costumes, wood carvings and pottery. Turning left at Monis Asteriou Street, you will come to the the Vlassis Frissiras Museum of Contemporary European Art, although the children would probably prefer a visit to the Greek Museum of Childhood at 14 Kydathineon Street. One of Plaka's most interesting churches is the 11th-century Agios Nikolaos Rangavas on Prytaniou Street. Down the street stands the Agii Anargyri Monastery, which was built in the 17th century, and the Museum of the History of Athens University, housed inside the stately mansion on Tholou Street. Next to the museum is the Panagia Chryssokastriotissa Church in Aliberti Street, made famous by its miraculous icon of the Virgin Mary.

With so much to see and do, Athens is best seen on wheels or by foot, just make sure to pack comfortable walking shoes.

### Walking Tours

Athens Walking Tours( +30 210 884 7269/<http://www.athenswalkingtours.gr/>)

### Car and Bus Tours

Greece Taxi( +30 694 013 1734/<http://www.greecetaxi.gr/>) Interdynamic( +30 281 030 0330/<http://www.ellada.net/>) Sightseeing Bus( <http://www.oasa.gr/>) Chat Tours( +30 210 322 3137/<http://www.chatours.gr/>) Hop-in Zion Tours( +30 210 428 5500/ <http://www.hopin.com/>)

### Bike Tours

Experience Plus!( +1 800 685 4565/<http://www.experienceplus.com/>) Cycle Greece( +30 210 921 8160/<http://www.cyclegreece.gr/>) Pame Volta( +30 210 675 2886/ <http://www.pamevolta.gr/>)

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## Travel Tips

### Getting There

#### By Air

The new Athens International Airport(+30 210 353 0000/<http://www.aia.gr/>)(ATH), located 17 miles northwest in Spata, opened in 2001 in anticipation of the 2004 Olympics. The sleek new airport has one massive main hall and a satellite terminal that looks like an architectural afterthought. Both facilities are stocked with shops and restaurants. A business center(+30 210 353 6416), numerous conference rooms and business lounges are also onsite. Major airlines include:

Air Berlin(+49 180 573 7800/<http://www.airberlin.com>) Air Canada(+1 800 776 3000/<http://www.aircanada.ca>) Air France(+1 800 871 1366/<http://www.airfrance.com>) Air Malta(+356 21 690 890/<http://www.airmalta.com>) Air Scotland(+1 44 141 222 2363/<http://www.air-scotland.com>) Air Transat(+877 872 6728/<http://www.airtransat.com>) American Airlines(+1 800 433 7300/<http://www.aa.com>) Blue1(+358 20 585 6000/<http://www.blue1.com>) British Airways(+1 800 247 9297/<http://www.british-airways.com>) Condor(+1 800 524 6975/<http://www7.condor.com>) Delta(+1 800 221 1212/<http://www.delta.com>) Easy Jet(+871 244 2366/<http://www.easyjet.com>) Finnair(+1 800 950 4768/<http://www.finnair.com>) Iberworld Airlines(<http://www.iberworld.com>) Lufthansa(+1 800 645 3880/<http://www.lufthansa.com>) My Travel(+870 238 7710/<http://www.mytravel.com>) Singapore Air(+1 800 742 3333/<http://www.singaporeair.com>) Sterling.dk Airline(+457 033 3370/<http://www.sterlingticket.com>) Sun Express(+180 595 9590/<http://server1.sunexpress.com.tr>) Thomsonfly(+870 190 0737/<http://www.thomsonfly.com>) Transavia(+312 0406 0406/<http://www.transavia.com>) Virgin Atlantic(+1 800 862 8621/<http://www.virgin-atlantic.com>) Wizz Air(+48 22 351 9499/<http://www.wizzair.com>)

The Athens Urban Transport Organization(<http://www.oasa.gr>) provides 24-hour bus service to the downtown area. Four dedicated express routes are available: Line E94 deposits passengers at the Ethniki Amaryna metro station. Rides exit every 15-30 minutes. Line E95 services Syntagma Square and departs every 15-35 minutes. Line E96 attends Pireaus Port, exiting every 20-40 minutes. Rides for all three lines take 45-60 minutes. Line E97 connects the airport with the Dafni metro station.

Taxis are easy to find outside the terminal. Rides, depending on traffic, last 30-60 minutes.

Taxi Reservations(+1 44 20 8123 3567/<http://www.taxireservations.gr>)

### Rental Car Companies

Avis(+1 800 831 2847/<http://www.avis.com>) Budget(+1 800 527 0700/<http://www.budget.com>) Europcar(+49 069 697 970/<http://www.europcar.com>) Hertz(+1 800 654 3131/<http://www.hertz.com>) National(+1 800 227 7368/<http://www.nationalcar.com>) Sixt(+30 210 353 0576/<http://www.e-sixt.com>)

Once you pick up the car(and a good street map) search out the Attiki Odos, the main thoroughfare into the city. From here you can link to most parts of town. Although it is a toll expressway and a menagerie of construction projects, it beats getting lost straight out of the gate. Toll free options are available starting with Lavirou Avenue with connects to the airport, but if you choose to go exploring, have a good map.

### By Train

Rail travel in Greece compared to the rest of Europe is extremely antiquated and limited with most service confined to the northern and eastern halves of the Greek mainland. For information on specific routes and times check with the Hellenic Railways Organization(OSE)(+30 210 529 7777/<http://www.osenet.gr>). Trains arriving in Athens from the south and west operate out of the Peloponnese Station(+30 210 513 1601). Passengers can then catch a

## Athens Snapshot continued

taxi or bus into downtown. Arrivals from the north depart at the Larissa Station(+30 210 529 8837), which conveniently connects to downtown via the metro's Line 2.

### By Bus

Greece's bus travel is handled by KTEL(Koino Tameio Eispraxeon Leoforeion), a conglomerate of privately operated companies. Its coverage is extensive, providing service to and from every town, regardless of how rural, on the mainland. Eurolines(<http://www.eurolines.com>), based out of London, also accesses Greece. Terminal A(+30 210 512 9233) handles buses from Peloponnese and northern Greece. Terminal B(+30 210 831 7096) focuses on bus traffic to and from central Greece.

### By Boat

All boat traffic arrives at the port of Piraeus(the largest in Europe), located six miles southwest of Athens. Ferries provide service to and from the Saronic Islands, Samos, Crete, Cyclades, northern Greece, and the northeast Aegean Islands. For faster service to the islands there are also hydrofoils and catamarans. However, they are also twice as expensive and dependent upon good weather. For more detailed information call the Piraeus Port Authority(+30 210 428 6842/<http://www.olp.gr>).

### By Car

Bear in mind that Greece has one of the highest car-accident rates in Europe. Drivers treat red lights as optional and passing on curves and hills seems to be the norm rather than the rare exception. If you are not deterred, Athens can be reached by E75 from the north which hugs the eastern coast, and by E65 from the west.

### Getting Around Town

The Athens Urban Transport Organization(<http://www.oasa.gr>) offers buses, trolley buses, and a subway system making it very easy to negotiate downtown and the surrounding suburbs without a car.

Its metro system(<http://www.ametro.gr>) is currently experiencing one of the biggest

transportation expansions in Europe. In direct response to the 2004 Olympics it has bloomed from one line to three lines and now handles 470,000 passengers daily. Line 1(ISAP) extends from Kifissia to the north to Piraeus harbor to the south. Major tourist stops include the National Archaeological Museum, Omonia Square, and the nightlife districts of Psirri and Thission. Line 2(Sepolia-Dafni) includes the Acropolis and Syntagma Square. And Line 3(Ethniki Amyna-Monastiraki) attends such major stops as the National Gallery and the Byzantine Museum. Stops are serviced every three minutes during rush hours, or every 10 minutes otherwise.

Blue and white buses offer more 300 routes in and around downtown Athens. Most stops are attended every 15 minutes. Service operates from 5a-12:30a. Attempting to decipher the bus routes is complicated, especially with new routes being constantly added in conjunction with the expanding metro system. Green and white buses service between Athens and Piraeus. If you are seeking comfort be aware that buses are usually packed.

There are 19 electric trolleybus routes most of which service downtown's main tourist areas.

Compared to most other European cities, Athen's taxis are inexpensive and honest. Hailing is inexplicably difficult, however, so it is best to call ahead. Some of the more noted companies are: Athina(+30 210 921 7942) Ermis(+30 210 411 5200) Ikaros(+30 210 515 2800)

Possessing a car in Athens is more of a hassle than a convenience. Traffic is frustrating and parking is so limited that locals park on sidewalks.

Most of Athens main tourist attractions are centrally located making it extremely convenient for walking. To encourage foot travel, new pedestrian zones have been added in the commercial triangle and in Plaka, the center of the old city.

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## Fun Facts

Top 12 Interesting Facts about Athens

1. The first history of Athens was recorded around 3,400 years ago making it Europe's oldest capital and one of the oldest cities of the world.
2. The city center of Athens is only 15 sq miles or 39 sq kilometers.
3. Athens is statistically one of the lowest ranking capital cities when it comes to violent crime.
4. Fun Fact: Everyfull moon in August, the Acropolis stays open until 2am with live music and theatrical performances; it is free to all.
5. Before hosting the 2004 Olympic Games, all of the street signs of Athens had to be changed to include a Latin spelling under the Greek.
6. Athens was part of the Ottoman Empire(1458-1832) while the rest of Western Europe was experiencing the Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution.
7. Weird Fact: The first modern king of Greece was a Bavarian prince and only 17 years old.
8. Athens is the second capital city of Greece. King Otto(see fact 7) changed it from the Port of Nafplio in 1834 for sentimental reasons related to the city's glorious past.
9. The oldest hotel in Athens,The Grand Bretagne, was first the royal guesthouse. During German occupation(1941-1944) it was used as Nazi HQ. Hitler and Rommel were there on the eve of the Soviet Invasion.
10. The sporting event known as the"Marathon" was created for the first Modern Olympic games set in Athens in 1896. It was a recreation of the route used by the legendary runner, Pheidippides, in 490 BC to announce the Athenian victory against the Persians at the battle of Marathon 25 miles away.
11. Athens and Greece was under a harsh military dictatorship, the"Junta" from 1967-1974.

## Athens Snapshot continued

12. Actress, activist, and Minister of Culture, Melina Mercouri, is credited

with the establishment of the institution, the "European Capital of Culture." Athens became the first in 1985.

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### Weather

Statistics	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Temperature C												
Average High	13	13	15	19	24	29	32	32	28	23	18	14
Average Mean	10	10	11	15	20	24	27	27	23	19	15	11
Average Low	7	6	8	11	15	20	22	22	19	16	12	8
Temperature F												
Average High	56	56	60	67	76	85	90	90	83	74	65	58
Average Mean	50	50	53	60	68	76	81	81	75	67	59	53
Average Low	45	44	47	53	60	68	73	73	67	61	54	48
Rainy Days	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	1	2	4	6	7
Rain Fall (cm)	3.4	2.8	3.4	2.2	0.9	0.3	0.7	0.3	0.7	2.2	6.2	5.1
Rain Fall (in)	1.3	1.1	1.3	0.9	0.4	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.3	0.9	2.4	2.0

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