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“You Only Live Once”

Love James Bond? Consider yourself one of the happy billions who’ve enjoyed 007’s exploits since 1962, when Ian Fleming’s 1958 novel, *Dr. No*, was made into a film starring Sean Connery. According to Nigel Cawthorne, author of *A Brief Guide to James Bond*, “half the population of the world has seen at least one Bond movie.” This number should increase exponentially next year when *Bond 25*, starring blond Bond Daniel Craig, arrives in theaters.

Want to be James Bond? Then you’ll need to talk to Shane Mahoney, an intrepid traveler and entrepreneur whose luxury, executive tour company, Lugos Travel, will offer a brand-new travel product later this summer, “Experience 007,” an entirely immersive, interactive experience in which you are Bond.

A cinephile, Mahoney is a lifelong Bond fan who wanted to create a role-playing adventure that would give his clients a chance to play Bond in a cinematic but real-life experience, one along the lines of classic films such as David Fincher’s *The Game* and Michael Crichton’s original *Westworld*. Mahoney was also inspired after seeing Steven Spielberg’s film about virtual reality, *Ready Player One*.

“I started thinking about how the future of travel is really going to change,” Mahoney says. “I was thinking about virtual reality, and I wondered, ‘once you can put on a pair of goggles and stroll along the Seine, how do you make *actual* travel experiences real? Unforgettable?’” Experience 007 gives each client the license to be Bond by creating an utterly realistic milieu that takes the interstice between fantasy and reality and serves it shaken, but not stirred.

Experience 007 begins in Florida with three days of training – with a former Navy SEAL and ex-CIA officer – in the essentials of spy craft, which include performance driving, shooting (on the ground and from helicopters), SWAT incursion and surveillance detection routes (how to tail someone and, more importantly, how to not be tailed). At the end of the three days, the client receives custom, in-house gadgets designed and built by a team of in-house engineers, who serve as Q in Experience 007.

Ideally, Mahoney would like to send clients home following the training and then, after a few weeks, inform them the assignment begins in 24 hours, bringing them even closer to Bond's experience, since 007 never actually plans a mission. Mahoney feels this short notice will enhance the verisimilitude of the experience, and that separating the training and the mission heightens the client's anticipation. This idea is still being developed, however, and in the current iteration of Experience 007 the client begins his or her mission right after spy training.

What is the mission? We can't tell you, of course, but each client is flown business class to Northern Italy and billeted in a suite in a five-star hotel where, upon arrival, a master tailor delivers a wardrobe of handmade suits and leisure wear like those in which the impeccable Bond is always attired. "At some point we'll also stock the suite with the client's favorite toiletries, so all he or she has to do is board the flight," Mahoney says. "I've never seen Bond carry a suitcase."

With clothing, gadgets, setting and transportation all in place, the mission begins. Mahoney has worked with top shelf Hollywood screenwriters to craft the Experience 007 storylines, but what makes this truly cinematic experience feel real is the "interactors" who participate in the client's mission.

"I wanted to figure out how I could employ actors who could accomplish what Deborah Unger's character, Christine, does in *The Game*, which is to pull Michael Douglas's character, Nicholas Van Orton, back into the story whenever he goes off script." This led Mahoney to Simu-Life, a company that creates fictional stories, centered around one or more participants, that play out over several days, in real-world locations, with a full cast and crew.

The cast of Experience 007 is given a psychological profile of the client during a six-to-eight-week deep dive prior to the mission: the client controls the experience, with the interactors responding in real-time to each decision he or she makes as the mission progresses. What helps make the experience so believable is the client never knows who's an interactor and who isn't, who's a friend, who's a foe. Stopping for an espresso at a chic Milanese café? Your barista may be part of your experience. Or not.

"This is what makes Experience 007 magic," says Mahoney. "We give our client 100 percent free reign during the experience. There are no wires, no nets...it's not enough to put the client through training, to give him or her the cars, the clothes...I want to touch each client at the deepest level. I want each client to feel as if he or she is, literally, Bond."

Throughout Experience 007 a surveillance team films the proceedings with a variety of different cameras, including buttonhole and infrared cameras. Sometime after the mission is complete, the client receives a professionally-compiled film of the experience.

Once Bond has again saved the world and vanquished evil, Experience 007 honors the tradition of the ending of most Bond films, where 007 finds himself with “the girl” on an island or on a boat, usually somewhere tropical and lovely, thus the final five days of Experience 007 are spent at GoldenEye, near Ocho Rios, Jamaica, where Fleming wrote his Bond novels. GoldenEye is now an exquisite all-inclusive resort where the client and the person he or she loves most can spend nearly a week relaxing and, of course, parsing the events of Experience 007 in the lush splendor of northeastern Jamaica. You finish where it all began.

“I watched every single Bond movie when I got this started,” Mahoney says. His favorite? “*Thunderball*. Because of the jet pack. I remember as a kid thinking, ‘Oh my God! There’s a jet pack.’”

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February 2014

Kalimera Limassol

The island's second largest city, [Limassol](#) is the busiest port in Cyprus, the center of the Cypriot wine industry and a lively holiday resort. The city is a melting pot of Greek Cypriots and emigrants from Lebanon and Russia. You'll find a pedestrian-friendly old town here packed with cafes and traditional tavernas, as well as a seafront esplanade and sculpture garden. This most cosmopolitan of Cypriot cities is also home to the [Limassol Zoo](#) and a great playground for kids, one with a view of the Mediterranean, and a number of luxury resort hotels. If you're a fan of the Mediterranean, Limassol is your kind of town – you can pair it with every meal, every coffee, every excursion...it keeps you company everywhere you go in this exciting harbor town.

The sun-kissed southern slopes of the Troodos Massif, green and golden, rise behind the city and are where you'll find the delightful wine villages, known collectively as the "Krassochooria," where traditional viticulture produces some of the best dry red wines in Cyprus.

Looking for sandy beaches? Freshly-prepared, delicious meals that last the entire evening? Some of the best nightlife in the Mediterranean? Limassol has a heady bouquet – come pour yourself a glass. Here in Cyprus we say "kopiaste" – come join us.

History

The town of Limassol was established between the ancient towns of Amathus and Curium. Richard the Lionheart destroyed Amathus in 1191, and Limassol was most likely founded after Amathus had been leveled, although some graves found here date to the 4th century B.C. The sack of Limassol was a fatal blow to Byzantine dominion over Cyprus. For the next three centuries, Limassol enjoyed a period of tremendous prosperity, which ended when the Ottoman Empire conquered Cyprus in 1570. Following the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974, Famagusta, one of the most popular beach resorts in the Mediterranean, was occupied by the Turkish Army, and many of its residents left the city for Limassol. Today the city is the commercial capital of Cyprus and home to important theaters and cultural institutions.

Highlights

Kolossi Castle

Kolossi Castle is a monument to the rule of the Knights of St John in the 13th century. The Knights started producing wine and processing sugar cane at a commandery here, and the result was Commandaria, the famed dessert wine of Cyprus. The castle dates from 1454 and was most likely built on top of an older fortified building. Visit the roof for a wonderful view of the surrounding countryside.

Kourion – An Ancient Amphitheater with a View of the Sea

One of the most awe-inspiring archaeological sites on the island of Cyprus, Kourion was an important city-kingdom. Famed for its masterpiece Greco-Roman theater, originally constructed during the 2nd century B.C., the site is also home to stately Roman villas with

incredible mosaic floors and an early Christian basilica. The theater has been fully restored and hosts concerts and other performances throughout the summer.

The Sanctuary and Temple of Apollo Hylates at Kourion

The Sanctuary of Apollo Hylates was one of the principal religious centers of Cyprus – it was here that Apollo was worshipped as Hylates, god of the woodlands. The Archaic Sanctuary developed during the 7th century B.C., the Ptolemaic Sanctuary belongs to the 3rd century B.C., and the Roman Sanctuary was in use during the 1st century.

Limassol Fort – In the Heart of the Old Town

Limassol Fort can be found amongst the cafes and tavernas of the old town, just above the harbor. According to tradition, this is where Richard the Lionheart married Berengaria of Navarre and crowned her Queen of England in 1191.

Kalimera Chania (Crete)

The second-largest town on Greece's largest island, Chania is the lively capital of the western half of Crete. Much of Chania, the capital of Crete until 1971, bears the stamp of the centuries the island was under the dominion of La Serenissima. Stroll down Venetian streets that survived the Nazi bombardment of the island during World War II, and visit the Venetian arsenals near the harbor, where you'll also find the Mosque of the Janissaries – built in 1645, it is the oldest Ottoman building on Crete. Chania's modern city center, just beyond its old ramparts, is an energetic island capital, home to authentic bars, cafes, shops and tavernas. From Chania, the alluring beaches of western Crete are a short drive by car or bus along a seaside highway that underlines the lush, rolling foothills and high, wrinkled peaks of the surrounding countryside.

History

Four millennia ago, Chania was known as Kydonia and founded by Kydonas, son of the nymph, Akakalida, a daughter of King Minos, and Hermes or Apollo. Homer described Kydonia as one of Crete's greatest cities. The Romans conquered Kydonia in 69 B.C., taking the entire island after this key victory. Following the dissolution of the Roman Empire, the Arabs controlled the island until 961, when Nikoforos Fokas and his army liberated Crete, uniting the island with the Byzantine Empire for 250 years. During the Venetian occupation of Crete, from 1204-1669, Kydonia, now known as Chania, became the second city of "the Kingdom of Crete" and the headquarters of the Rector and of the Latin Bishop. Western Crete became a breadbasket for the Venetians, which bolstered Chania's relationship with Venice, a relationship that lasted until the Ottomans wrested control of the island from Venice after their 25-year siege of Crete. The Turks converted the Catholic churches of Chania into mosques, built new mosques and founded public baths. The city became the headquarters of the Pasha.

In the mid-1800s, Chania was made the capital of Crete, and this designation spurred the development of the city. New neoclassical buildings were constructed – the city took on a more European flavor and expanded beyond its walls. Following a brief period of Cretan

independence, Crete was unified with Greece on 1 December 1913, and the flag of the Hellenic Republic was raised above Fort Firca, the Venetian fortress in the harbor.

Highlights

Fort Firca – Welcome to Chania

The Venetians built Fort Firca (from “firka,” Turkish for “barracks”) to protect the entrance to the harbor. The fortress was the headquarters of the city’s army commander – its interior comprised barracks and storage areas for ammunition. There is an inscription in Latin on the first floor: ALOYSIUS BRACADEUS PROVVISOR CYDONIAE M.DCXX. The first modern Greek flag on Crete flew here in 1913 in celebration of the unification of Crete with Greece.

The Monastery of Agia Triada Tsagarolon – The Monastery with the Cypresses

The Patriarchal and Stavropegic Monastery of Agia Triada Tsagarolon was known during the Ottoman occupation of Crete as “The Monastery with the Cypresses.” This small monastery was renovated after the Greek revolution of 1821.

The Akrotiri Peninsula – The Heart of Western Crete

Traditional villages, secluded beaches, sacred monasteries...you’ll also meet the Cave Bear, Arkoudiotissa, here. Other key sites include the village of Stavros, where *Zorba the Greek* (1964), based on the novel by Cretan author Nikos Kazantzakis, was filmed. Akrotiri is also the final resting place of Eleftherios Venizelos, one of Greece’s most important political figures.

Maritime Museum of Crete – The History of a Great Seafaring Island and Nation

One of the many attractions in the Old Town of Chania, the [Maritime Museum of Crete](#) is the second-largest maritime museum in Greece. The museum hosts 2,500 permanent exhibits from the Bronze Age to the 20th century that illuminate the maritime history of Crete and of Greece – its most significant exhibit is an authentic reconstruction of a Minoan ship! Begin an educational visit to this renowned institution with a movie about the history of Crete in a theater on the first floor. The view from the museum of the harbor and the lighthouse is unforgettable.

The Monastery of Gonia and the Orthodox Academy of Crete

The Monastery of Panaghia Odigitria (the official name of the Monastery of Gonia), dedicated to the Virgin Mary, was founded in the 9th century in honor of St. George and in a different location. Home to significant resistance against the Ottomans, who destroyed the monastery several times, it was moved in the early 17th century to its present location. Nearby, the [Orthodox Academy of Crete](#) is a modern religious and spiritual educational and charitable foundation established by the Archdiocese of Crete. Inspired by the platonic tradition of symphilosophein (co-philosophizing), the academy is cultivates the spirit of dialogue between Orthodoxy and other confessions and religions, and also between faith, science and culture. It is home to a botanical garden and to the Museum of Cretan Wild Plants.

Kalimera Corfu

May we bestow upon you the gift of evergreen Corfu? Thanks to its strategic location at the crown of the Ionian archipelago, between the boot heel of Italy and northwestern Greece, delightful Corfu has been a prize for numerous empires and has been in the grasp of the Byzantines, the Venetians, the French and the British all of whom made extant contributions to the island's built environment, which is today a haven for lovers of architecture. Corfu's choice spot also spared it the massive destruction the tremendous earthquake of 1953 wreaked upon its Ionian neighbors. The capital, Kerkyra, underwent a major renovation in the 1990s and has become one of the most elegant island capitals in all of Greece – the Liston, Kerkyra's colonnaded square, is immensely popular among urban wanderers, people-watchers and coffee lovers, both from Corfu and abroad. Home to more than 30 Blue Flag beaches, the island was described by writer Laurence Durrell, author of *The Alexandria Quartet*, as a "delectable landscape" in Prospero's Cell, and was the setting for Gerald Durrell's memoir of his adolescence on Corfu, *My Family and Other Animals*, which was made into a beloved Masterpiece Theater film. Welcome to delectable Corfu.

History

Once part of mainland Greece, there has been settlement on this verdant, hilly island for about 50,000 years. The Eretrians, mainland Greeks who landed on Corfu around 750 B.C., were conquered by Greeks from Corinth, who built Corfu into a walled city and a powerful city-state. A major sea power, Corfu provided the second-largest fleet, after Athens, during the Persian Wars of the 5th century B.C., and fought alongside the Athenians against the Spartans during the Peloponnesian War. The Romans took control of the island in 229 B.C. and held it for about 150 years. In the 4th century, Corfu was folded into the Byzantine Empire, where it remained for eight centuries, until the Venetians captured the island, in 1386 – it was the Venetians whose building projects were the cornerstone of Kerkyra as we know it today. Napoleon Bonaparte defeated Venice in 1797, and La Serenissima was forced to surrender Corfu and its other Ionian holdings to the French who, even though they only held the island for 17 years, undertook a number of development projects, including the Liston, which is modeled after the Rue di Rivoli in Paris. The British occupation of Corfu began in 1814 and was also significant for a number of buildings, including the Palace of SS George and Michael. British dominion of the island was also brief, a scant 50 years that ended in 1864 when Queen Victoria returned the island to Greece. Both the Italians and the Germans occupied Corfu during World War II, when a quarter of Kerkyra was destroyed by Nazi airstrikes.

Highlights

The Achillion Palace – A Hapsburg Villa

The Achillion Palace, built in 1890 by two Italian architects after the famed villas of Pompeii, is one of the most famed royal villas in Europe. Queen Sissy of the Hapsburgs needed a home in a sunny locale, on account of her fragile health, and she commissioned what has become an architectural monument. Sissy devoted the villa to Achilles and had

its courtyard decorated with statues from Greek mythology, including The Seven Muses and The Dying Achilles.

Cosmopolitan Canoni – Famous Sunsets

Cosmopolitan Canoni is famed for its sunsets and for its spectacular views of the small island of Pontikonisi, home to the Monastery of Panagia Vlacherna.

Kerkyra – One of the Loveliest Capitals in the Greek Islands

The Old Town of Corfu, [a UNESCO World Heritage Site](#), is home to enchanting parks, plazas and buildings, all of which bear the imprint of the many empires that called Corfu their own over the centuries. Spaniada or Esplanade Square (the largest square in the Balkans), the colonnaded Liston, the palaces of saints Michael and George, the Kapodistrias mansion and the Church of St. Spyridon are just a few of the architectural treasures packed into cosmopolitan Kerkyra. Take some time to stroll the city's cobbled streets and discover it for yourself. If you can select your favorite square, sit down and linger over a coffee.

Paleokastritsa – The Capri of Greece

Nestled amongst the green hills and glittering bays and olive groves of northwestern Corfu is Paleokastritsa, one of the most beautiful villages on an island full of beautiful villages. Known as the Capri of Greece, some scholars believe it was here that Nausicaa found a drenched and exhausted Odysseus, who had washed ashore. The capital of the former municipality of Faiakes, Paleokastritsa was popularized by High Commissioner Sir Frederic Adam during the British occupation of Corfu.

The Monastery of Zoodohou Pigis Dates to the 11th Century

Perched atop a small hill, the Monastery of Zoodohou Pigis, a lovely Byzantine structure dating to 1228, is still home to a cloister of monks. Dedicated to the Virgin Mary, the monastery is home to a traditional mill and a small museum featuring 15th century icons and jewel-encrusted, silver-bound bibles. Its paved gardens are the perfect spot for quiet contemplation and a splendid view of the Ionian.

Kalimera Gythion

Welcome to the “sunward” eastern shore of the southern Peloponnese, the Inner Mani. Gythion is the gateway to this stunning peninsula where, south of its tranquil harbor, you'll find villages nestled in crags overlooking the sea. Stroll through the heart of this picturesque harbor town, Plateia Mavromichali (Black Michael), and along its docks for an up-close view of its lovely, pastel-tiled 19th century homes. Linked to the docks by a causeway, the Tzanetbey Grigorakis Tower is a crenellated 18th century fortification. Today it houses the Museum of the Mani, which includes exhibits devoted to the history of Gythion and to medieval explorations of the Mani. Away from the waterfront you'll find antique Turkish homes and winding streets climbing a forested hill. Look north of town for a view of Mt. Taygetos, the highest mountain in the Peloponnese.

History

According to mythology, tranquil pine-shaded Marathonisi, near Gythion, is ancient Cranae, where Paris, the Prince of Troy, seduced Helen of Troy, the wife of King Menelaus, igniting the Trojan War. Gythion was a Spartan naval base and an important city during the Roman occupation of the Peloponnese, when purple mollusks were exported from Gythion to Rome for the dyeing of imperial togas. Gythion was also known for its acorns, which were harvested in its hinterlands and exported for leather tanning. Today the city is home to approximately 5,000 residents.

Highlights

The Remnants of Ancient Gythion

You'll find a small ancient theater at the northern edge of Gythion, adjacent to an army camp. Follow Ermou, along Arheou Theatrou and turn right at the post office. The ancient acropolis, which is now mostly overgrown, is at the crest of the hill behind the ancient theater. Much of the ancient city is now found across the bay, to the east, beneath the Lakonian Gulf.

The Hassanako Shadow Theater Museum

Greek shadow puppet theatre, a 16th century tradition inherited from the Ottoman Turks, is still active in Greece today. Shadow puppeteers enact moral tales that include satirical observations about the social and political issues of the day. Run by friendly local artist Giorgos Hassanako, the [Hassanako Shadow Theater Museum](#) is a gallery and working studio celebrating traditional shadow puppets. It features a historical overview of shadow puppetry and a collection of the artist's own creations, including satirical puppets of Greek politicians.

Kalimera Igoumenitsa

Almost at the Albanian border and surrounded by mountains, Igoumenitsa is a picturesque, bustling port is the third-busiest in Greece and the key gateway for travel by ferry to Corfu and Italy. Igoumenitsa is the capital of the Prefecture of Thesprotia, one of the most mountainous and isolated in northwestern Greece, and the terminus of the Egnatia Highway, which traverses northern Greece. Artifacts and monuments dating from the Paleolithic Era have been found throughout the prefecture. Ancient Igoumenitsa was known as Titani and was one of the most important towns of the Kingdom of Thesprotis during the 4th century B.C. The circumference of the walls of Titani was 2.4 kilometers, entered via four gates, while the city's internal walls, in the shape of a sickle, bisected the city. Excavations in Igoumenitsa revealed the ruins of two temples and an ancient theater which held 2,500 seats. There's a lively marina near the Corfu dock where yachts drop anchor – the stylish promenade here is home to a number of authentic fish tavernas and ouzeris. Why not linger here with a glass of local wine while the sun eases itself down into the deep blue Ionian?

History

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The city was a meeting place for the Epirote League, an ancient commonwealth of Epirote communities. The Romans destroyed the city in 167 B.C. before annexing it. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the city was part of the Byzantine Empire before it was taken by the Ottoman Turks. In 1909, toward the end of the Ottoman Era, Igoumenitsa was renamed "Reşadiye" in honor of Sultan Mehmet V.

In 1912, Thesprotia was liberated from the Turks and integrated into the Greek state, with its provinces shared between the prefectures of Ioannina and Preveza. After the liberation of the region from Ottoman rule during the Balkan Wars in 1913, the city was renamed Grava, which means "cave" in ancient Greek. New arrivals gradually arrived throughout the following decades, and by 1936 Grava was home to 750 people. In 1938 Grava was renamed Igoumenitsa and made the capital of the Prefecture of Thesprotia.

Highlights

The Archeological Museum of Igoumenitsa – A History of the Region

The [Archeological Museum of Igoumenitsa](#) houses exhibits from the Paleolithic Period through the late Byzantine Period, around the 17th century, including metalwork, metalwork, stonework, architecture, sculpture, pottery, coinage, jewelry and glass found throughout Thesprotia.

Kalimera Kalymnos

Dive deep into Kalymnos, the third-largest island in the Dodecanese. For centuries this has been the island of sponge divers. Its steep cliffs, beloved of climbers the world over, and its deep blue seas will stir you. The island is home to both sandy and pebble beaches – try the turquoise waters of Arginontas for swimming or Platis Gialos for seclusion. The exquisite pebble beaches of Vathi, Agios Petros and Vlychadia are some of the finest in the Aegean. Surprisingly green, the island's roads are lined with oleanders of crimson and pink – they seem to cheer you on your way as you explore this Dodecanese gem.

If you come to Kalymnos, bring your appetite! Try the barley breads and local cheeses, like mirmizeli, mizithra and copanisti, and a Greek salad with sardines! The island's tavernas will cook you fresh fish and seafood, particularly grilled octopus and rarer fare like sea urchins and the meat of spinialo shells harvested from the sea bed by local divers. Be sure to ask for a carafe of Anama, the local sweet wine, the perfect complement to a groaning table of fresh seafood.

Lively Kalymnos is home to the Festival of Tsabouna, in July, when visitors and locals alike dance until dawn to traditional bagpipe and violin music. During Chora's Honey Festival,

you can stuff yourself with traditional fried donuts drenched with local honey. It doesn't get any sweeter than Kalymnos.

History

The Carians were the first inhabitants of Kalymnos, which was dependent upon nearby Kos throughout Antiquity and shares much of that island's history. Kalymnos passed from the Byzantine Empire to the Venetian Republic, who made the island a naval base. The Knights of Rhodes took control of Kalymnos in 1310 and, following a number of Ottoman sieges, particularly in the middle of the 15th century, the island came under Ottoman dominion in 1522. There was no Turkish immigration to the island during this period. On 12 May 1912, during the Italo-Turkish War, Italy's Regia Marina captured the island and held it until 1947, when the Dodecanese were ceded to the Hellenic Republic.

Most Kalymnians are Greek Orthodox, but the island is part of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, not the Church of Greece.

Highlights

Chora – The Centuries-Old Capital of Kalymnos

Found a mere three kilometers from the harbor at Pothia, picturesque Chora has been the capital of Kalymnos for centuries, established at such a distance to keep it safe from marauding Aegean pirates. This lovely village is dominated by two fortresses constructed by the Knights of St. John and home to the lovely churches of Panagia Haritomeni and Hristou tis Ierousalim, both erected with marble taken from the Sanctuary of Delian Apollo.

The Sanctuary of Delian Apollo – Ancient Temples and Medieval Churches

The Sanctuary of Delian Apollo was the political and religious center of ancient Kalymnos, the site of temples of Apollo and Aesculapius and a cluster of administrative buildings. Two major churches, the Church of Christ in Jerusalem and the Church of St. Sophia, were built here in the 5th and 6th centuries, respectively, replacing the ancient temples.

Damos of Kalymnos

North of the main road from Chora to Elies, the archeological site of Ancient Kalymnos includes a number of houses and workshops alongside stone wells and some well-preserved tombs.

Archaeological Museum of Kalymnos

Recently opened, the [Archaeological Museum of Kalymnos](#) exhibits an impressive collection of artifacts from the Neolithic, Minoan, Mycenaean, Classical and Hellenistic periods, as well as a reconstructed interior of one of the island's 19th century mansions. Don't miss the immense, bronze Maiden of Kalymnos and another bronze of Asclepius.

Museum of Maritime Findings at Vlichadia

This small, intensely interesting museum on the Bay of Vlichadi showcases a private collection of antique diving equipment and other sponge fishing tools, as well as ancient amphorae and ammunition used during the Second World War. The museum comprises about a dozen galleries, and photography is permitted.

Kalimera Kastelorizo

Would you like to have an Aegean island all to yourself? Precious Kastelorizo, also known as “Megisti”, is the easternmost part the European Union – it’s about 9 square kilometers and home to only 300 official residents. The island’s name was bestowed upon it by the Italians, who called it Castello Rosso (Red Castle) in reference to the fortifications built on the island by the Knights of St. John. You’ll find history everywhere on this tiny island just one-and-a-half nautical miles from the Turkish coast, particularly along its picturesque streets which are lined with brightly-painted homes, many of them unique examples of Dodecanese architecture. Feel free to wander wherever, whenever – there are no cars on Kastelorizo, save for a few taxis and an airport shuttle bus. [Mediterraneo](#), a wonderful Italian film about the occupation of a small, fictional Greek island by a group of eccentric Italian soldiers, and winner of the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film in 1992, was filmed here.

For a refreshing swim, simply dive from the rocks near the harbor. Plakes and its pristine waters are accessible only by boat, as are the incredible waters of Stroggyli Island, also home to a splendid lighthouse. The unforgettable Blue Cave, also known as the Cave of Parasta or Fokiali, is home to a small pod of Monk Seals.

Kastelorizo traditional cuisine is as irresistible as its turquoise waters. The island’s taste sensations, in addition to fresh fish and seafood, include chickpea pie, giouvarlakia (meatballs in sauce) and breadcrumb-stuffed goat’s meat. For dessert, you won’t be able to resist spoon halva, fig spoon sweet, baklava and “katoumaria”, delicate thin pies sprinkled with sugar and clove.

Kastelorizo’s main religious festival, on the 20th of July, honors the Prophet Elias. The people of the island celebrate the prophet by diving into its waters fully-clothed. Kastelorizo tends to do that to you.

History

Ancient Kastelorizo was home to the Dorians and later served as a Roman naval base. Following the fall of the Roman Empire, the island came under Byzantine control for four centuries until it was conquered by the Sultan of Egypt. Kastelorizo flourished under the Ottomans, when it was an important center for trade. The British and the Italians both occupied the island, which was completely destroyed during World War II and officially unified with Greece in 1947.

Near Kastelorizo lies the tiny island of Rho. Now deserted, it was home to Despina Ahladioti, the “Lady of Rho.” The last inhabitant of the island, Ahladioti raised the Greek flag in her front yard every day beginning in 1947 until her death in 1982. Her efforts are commemorated by a monument on the island.

Highlights

Palaiokastros – The Island’s Most Important Archaeological Site

Kastelorizo’s most important ancient settlement is found on the western side of the island. The Doric acropolis here dates from the 3rd century B.C. and features an inscription bearing the name “Megisti.” The remains of some buildings and water cisterns are still visible, while the remnants of giant Mycenaean fortifications can be found at nearby Limenari.

Castle of the Knights

The 14th century Castello Rosso gives the island its name. Built at the edge of a small slope above the port, today only sections of its exterior walls remain. Nearby stand the ruins of a Turkish hammam and some windmills, one recently restored by the municipality.

Lycean Tomb

The Lycean Tomb, carved in stone at the foot of the Castle, has been perfectly preserved. The term “Lyceans” was used to describe the people of ancient Asia Minor because of their worship of Apollo Lykos (Apollo Slayer of Wolves).

Museum of Megisti

The [Museum of Megisti](#), near the remains of the Castello Rosso, exhibits artifacts from all of the island’s historical periods alongside a number of impressive 17th century frescoes.

The Blue Cave

One of the most impressive grottos in the Mediterranean, the Blue Cave is a cool paradise famed for its majestic beauty and awesome stalagmites. A mere 20 minutes by boat from the harbor, a swim here will be one of the highlights of your Aegean sojourn.

Kalimera Katakolon

A picturesque harbor town in western Ionia, Katakolon looks toward the deep silver-blue Ionian Sea. Situated on a peninsula famed for its lighthouse, which began operating in 1865, this sleepy port is home to just over 600 people. Katakolon is the gateway to Ancient Olympia, a [UNESCO World Heritage site](#), where ancient Greeks flocked every four years for over a millennium to celebrate the sacred athletic events consecrated to Zeus. The Altis – the sanctuary to the gods – has one of the highest concentrations of masterpieces from the ancient Greek world. In addition to temples, there are the remains of all the sports structures erected for the Olympic Games, which were held in Olympia every four

years beginning in 776 B.C. The site's modern Archeological Museum, which houses the ancient artifacts found at the site, is a treasure trove of Archaic, Classical and Roman sculptures, including the legendary Niki Winged Victory.

History

Katakolon has been a working harbor for many centuries, but its grandest era was at the end of the 19th century, after the construction of its lighthouse and the completion of the Pyrgos-Katakolon railway, which was finished ten years prior to the construction of the railway line, funded by the Greek state, linking Athens and Lamia. The port at Katakolon was originally built to transport goods from western Greece to the rest of Europe. Today the old Katakolon is still alive, thanks to the restoration of many of the town's old warehouses.

Highlights

Pyrgos Invites You for a Visit

The capital of the Elis regional unit, green and friendly [Pyrgos](#) is only 13 km east of Katakolon and a great way to see how the people of Greece live. Pyrgos is home to some lovely neoclassical buildings and an assortment of traditional bakeries and cafes and tavernas. Enjoy a refreshing stroll through one of its parks, browse some of the town's unique shops, then sit down for an alfresco coffee.

Ancient Olympia

Found at the intersection of the Alfeios and Kladeos rivers, the sanctuary of Olympia was an important center of worship and athletics for more than ten centuries. A significant site during the Mycenaean era, it gained tremendous importance throughout the ancient Hellenic world thanks to the arrival of the Dorians, who worshipped Zeus. The Dorians built elaborate temples and secular buildings: key structures include the Temple of Hera, begun in the 7th century B.C. and one of the oldest in Greece; the arcaded stadium entrance, whose vaulted ceiling was built in the 3rd century B.C., and the Palestra, where wrestlers, boxers and long-jumpers trained – many of its incredible columns are still standing.

Established in 776 B.C., the Olympic Games were originally a short footrace. Additional events were added over the next few centuries, and the elite from many Greek city-states traveled to the western Peloponnese to compete. The games were banned by the Byzantines, beginning with Emperor Theodosius I in 393 A.D.

The Olympia Archeological Museum

Established in 1982, the [Olympia Archeological Museum](#) houses one of the most outstanding archaeological collections in the world. Built to exhibit the incredible finds from the Ancient Olympia archaeological site, its central hall showcases the pediment and metopes sculptures from the Temple of Zeus. Its other galleries are arranged chronologically, from prehistoric to Olympic. You'll find weapons used during the Persian Wars, a 5th century terra cotta of Zeus and Ganymede, fragments of a 5th century Nike, a

statue of Hermes by Praxiteles, a series of statues of Roman emperors, a bronze discus, part of a starting block, a bronze statuette of a runner and a marble bull dedicated by Regilla, the wife of Herodes Atticus.

Kalimera Kefalonia

The largest of the Ionian Islands, rugged, mountainous Kefalonia rises from the Ionian at the outlet of Patraikos Bay, between its neighbors, Zakynthos and Lefkada. More than 900 square kilometers, it offers beach lovers and explorers 250 kilometers of coastline. Renowned for its natural beauty, Kefalonia is home to Mt. Aenos, one of the highest mountains in western Greece and a national park since 1962.

Following the dissolution of the Byzantine Empire, Kefalonia was conquered by the Normans, the Franks the Venetians and the Ottoman Turks, ultimately joining Greece with its Ionian sisters on 21 May 1864. The people of Kefalonia fought long and hard against the Italians and the Germans, as depicted in the Louis de Bernières's novel *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* and in the 2001 film based on the novel, starring Nicholas Cage and Penelope Cruz, which was filmed entirely on the island. Argostoli is the capital of the island and of the Ithaka Prefecture. Built amphitheatrically with a splendid view of the Koutavous Lagoon, a crossing for the area's migratory birds, Argostoli is a modern town that has taken great care to preserve its many neoclassical buildings, town squares and beautiful churches. Sami is the island's ferry port and the only remaining settlement of Kefalonia's four original city-states – its hinterlands are home to underground caves, traditional villages and breathtaking beaches. Fiskardo, to the north, is one of the lucky villages left intact by the 1953 earthquake, and its beautiful old mansions from the late 19th and early 20th centuries await you and your camera. Coming to Kefalonia? Lucky you.

History

Kefalonia has been settled for over 50,000 years. The island was once blanketed by indigenous fir trees, and some wood from these trees has been discovered in the Minoan Palace at Knossos, on Crete. The Athenians conquered Kefalonia during the Peloponnesian War, only to lose it to Sparta. Under the Byzantines Kefalonia became the administrative district of the Ionian Islands, then passed through Ottoman, Venetian, French and Russian hands until the British took control of the island in 1809, only to cede it to Greece in 1864. Kefalonia was taken by the Italians, then by the Germans, during World War II and was devastated by the massive earthquake of 1953.

Highlights

Lake Melissania – A Geological Marvel

Lake Melissani Cave, also known as the Melissani Lake, is a geological marvel unique to Kefalonia. Lying 20 meters below the ground, this underwater lake is at least 30,000 years old. A prehistoric shrine to Pan, the 1953 earthquake that rocked the Ionian Islands

collapsed the roof of the cave above the lake, and sunlight now illuminates the surface of the lake. Some of its extraordinary, oddly-shaped stalactites are 20,000 years-old.

The Monastery of St. Gerasimos – The Hermitage of St. Gerasimos

Dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, the Monastery of St. Gerasimos is found on the plains of Kefalonia in the shadow of mighty Mt. Aenos. Home to a small garden and the relics of St. Gerasimos, the monastery is also noteworthy for the two caves at the bottom of a stairway where the saint would meditate for hours. The main church houses a spectacular creation scene at the lower section of its dome.

Robola Winery

Robola wine is a Protected Designation of Origin white wine produced exclusively in the Omala Valley of Kefalonia. [Robola Winery](#) offers a tour of its vineyards and free tastings of this beloved wine, which is famed for its aroma of citrus flowers.

Myrtos – One of the World’s Most Heavenly Beaches

Voted the best beach in Greece 12 times and named one of the most heavenly beaches on earth, Myrtos is an exquisite curve of bright white sand sparkling in the sun beneath a wall of sheer cliffs. One of the most photographed beaches in the region, its waters are stunning, a turquoise invitation impossible to decline.

The Lighthouse of St. Theodore

In the Lassi area the beautiful Lighthouse of Saint Theodore stands sentinel. A small Doric rotunda built in 1828 by Charles Napier, the governor of the island, it was rebuilt according to the original plans after it was leveled by the earthquake of 1953.

The Monastery of St. Andrew Milapideas and Ayios Yioryios

The cozy, quiet village of Peratata is home to about 500 people. The Monastery of St. Andrew Milapideas is one of the village’s most important sites, as is the 16th century Venetian castle, Ayios Yioryios. The monastery, named for Apostle Andrew, is home to an ecclesiastical museum whose treasures include the Archiepiscopal sakkos embroidered by the Nun Theodora Kanali between 1715 and 1721; the hieratic scepter and the Communion Cup (Pastoral Staff and Chalice) of his Holiness Nicodemos II Metaxas and Archbishop of Kefalonia, the founder of the first Greek printing press in Constantinople in the 17th century; and the Shroud of the National Martyr and Patriarch of Constantinople Gregorios the Fifth. The name "Milapidea" comes from a hybrid apple-pear tree that grows here.

Kalimera Kythira

Spectacular Kythira awaits between the southern Peloponnese and Crete. Also known as “Cirigo,” Kithira’s unique topography comprises steep hills, forested gorges and sparkling sandy beaches. Home to perfect beaches and charming villages, Kithira, one of Greece’s

best-kept secrets, is a treat for the senses. Settled since the Neolithic Era, the island has been under the dominion of a number of empires, and today you'll find the fingerprints of the Ancient Greeks, the Byzantines, the Venetians, the Ottomans and the British upon it – even legendary pirate Hayreddin Barbarossa swash buckled his way across the island.

Chora, the capital of Kithira, stands proudly on a hill at the north of the island. An eclectic mix of Venetian mansions, imposing British Protectorate buildings and quaint churches, a walk along its cobblestone streets will take you to the Belvedere neighborhood, where the view of the setting sun will leave you breathless. From here, commit yourself to climbing to the 13th century Venetian fortress on the hill above you. Beyond Chora you'll find more than 60 authentic villages – don't miss Agia Pelagia, Avlemonas, Kalamos, Karavas, Livadi, Logothetianika and Potamos. At the extreme northern tip of Kythira, on the Spathi Peninsula, visit the 75-foot lighthouse built by the British, the largest structure they built in Greece.

Kithira's best beaches lie along the island's east and south coasts and easily accessed. Kapsali and the shallow waters of Diakofti are perfect for families with children, as is Venus' Beach in Avlemonas. You'll love the beautiful, crystal-clear bays of Chalkos and Melidoni, while the two red sand beaches at Fyri Ammos can only be reached by an all-terrain vehicle.

After you drench your skin with sun and sea, why not treat your taste buds to the island's famous oil rusks, from Potamos, and to other local delights, including thyme honey, olive oil, white wine, herbs and Mitato cheese. Make sure your table includes the island's famed cinnamon biscuits and a few glasses of "fatourada", a homemade liqueur of raki and tangerines.

Kithira is home to the semprevives, a yellow flower that grows exclusively on the island and lives forever. Your memories of your time on this singular island will take root in your mind, where they will remain in perpetual blossom. Raise a glass of fatourada to it!

History

Kythira's strategic location has been the prize of empires since ancient times, when Sparta and Athens vied for control of the island. Following the demise of these once mighty empires, the island remained inhabited by Hellenes, then by Romans, coming under the control of the Byzantine Empire after the fall of Rome. In the 7th century, Emperor Constantinos gave the island to the Pope, who then presented it as a gift to the Patriarchate of Constantinople. During the 10th and 11th centuries, many churches and monasteries were built on the island, which had achieved significant importance.

The Venetians were enamored of Kythira's strategic location and occupied the island until the French took it from them in 1797; the French then lost the island to the Russian, backed by the Ottoman Empire, the following year. In 1815 the Treaty of Paris established the Ionian State, and the British occupation of the island commenced and endured until

21 May 1864, when the Ionian Islands were united with Greece. During the Second World War both the Germans and the Italians occupied Kythira, driving many of its residents to Athens and Australia – today there are approximately 60,000 people of Kythirian origin living in Australia.

Highlights

Chora – Kythira’s Hilltop Capital

Chora, the capital of Kithira, stands proudly on a hill at the north of the island. An eclectic mix of Venetian mansions, imposing British Protectorate buildings and quaint churches, a walk along its cobblestone streets will take you to the Belvedere neighborhood, where the view of the setting sun will leave you breathless. From here, commit yourself to climbing to the 13th century Venetian fortress on the hill above you.

Paleochora – Destroyed by Barbarossa

This abandoned fortified town was once the capital of the island. Built at the edge of the Kakia Skala gorge, it was sacked in 1537 by Hayreddin Barbarossa and deserted by its residents. The remnants of some of its buildings and some of the frescoes in its churches are still visible today. A stroll through this ghost town is a journey back to the Middle Ages.

The Archaeological Museum of Kithira

The [Archaeological Museum of Kithira](#) showcases Prehistoric and Classical exhibits from excavations at Palaeopolis, including ancient coins, Minoan vases and a marble lion carved in the 6th century B.C.

Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Art at the Church of the Ascension

The Church of the Ascension, in Kato Livadi, is home to a sumptuous collection of Byzantine and post-Byzantine art. The exhibition also features pieces of an important early Christian floor mosaic from the ruined church of Agios Ioannis in Potamos.

The Agia Sophia Cave – One of the Most Beautiful Caves in Greece

First explored in 1930 and mapped completely 40 years later, the Agia Sophia Cave, in Kokala Bay on the west coast of the island, is a place of unique natural beauty. Blessed with many colorful stalagmites and stalactites, the cave’s anteroom features a stone iconostasis carved in the 11th century. The church of Aghia Sophia, built in the 18th century, stands at the entrance to this beautiful, sacred spot.

The Inspiring Church of St. John

Built within a small cave at an altitude of 100 meters, near Kapsali, the small church of St. John is where, according to tradition, St. John began writing the *Apocalypse* before departing the island for Patmos. The view is incredible.

Mylopotamos – Gateway to the Famous Fonissa Waterfall

Green, picturesque Mylopotamos is the gateway to a lush Mediterranean paradise. Follow the sign to the “Water Nymph” to reach the most idyllic spot on the island, a small lake where you’ll delight in the famous Fonissa waterfall, which rises 60 feet above the lake. Take a dip in its chilly, refreshing waters before returning to Mylopotamos for a coffee under the plane trees in the village square.

English Bridge – The Largest Stone Bridge in the Balkans

Found near Katouni Village, English Bridge is a monument to British engineering. Built in the 19th century and comprising 13 arches, it’s the largest stone bridge still in use in the Balkans. It was supposedly built for a young woman who lived in Katouni.

Kalimera Kotor (Montenegro)

The Montenegrin port of Kotor is found on the world’s southernmost fjord. The setting? Blue water, a stony shore, evergreen mountains...the sweet perfume of lemons, oranges, mimosas and camellias upon the air. Shoehorned between defiant mountains and the bay, the sturdy walls of Kotor – begun in the 9th century, completed in the 18th century – lean into the slopes behind the city, almost camouflaged in daylight, but at night they are lit, reflected in the water of the bay to gift the city with a golden halo...it’s truly splendid and must be seen. Within the mighty walls of Kotor, a [UNESCO World Heritage City](#), lie a labyrinth of marbled lanes that seem as if they were built just to delight you with their chic shops and cozy restaurants, their lively bars and delicious restaurants, their hidden piazzas...

A former naval power, Kotor is a popular destination during July and August, when its streets are busy with visitors and its marina seems like a parking lot for the yachts of Europe’s rich and famous. It’s understandable – with so much romance, history and architectural grandeur, it’s impossible to resist calling at Kotor.

History

Kotor, a natural harbor on the Adriatic coast of what is today Montenegro, was first mentioned in 168 B.C. Under the Romans it was known as Acrvium, Ascrivium, or Ascrvium as part of the Roman province of Dalmatia. The city has been fortified since the about 535, when Justinian built a fortress above the city after expelling the Ostrogoths. The Saracens plundered the city in 840.

In the Middle Ages Kotor was an important artistic and commercial center with renowned schools of iconography and masonry. One of the more influential city-states of Romanized Illyrians during the Middle Ages, Dalmatian was spoken here until the 11th century. While under Venetian rule, from 1420 to 1797, Kotor was besieged by the Ottoman Empire (1538 and 1657), endured the plague (1572), and was nearly destroyed by earthquakes (in 1563 and 1667). The city passed from the Hapsburgs to the French to the Italians to the British and back to the Hapsburgs until World War I, which sounded the death knell for the Empire. After 1945 Montenegro became the Socialist Republic of Montenegro within Yugoslavia and was part of Serbia following the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

The earthquake of 1979 that rocked the Montenegrin coast caused major damage to a number of Kotor's monuments, but the city has been largely restored, with UNESCO funding much of the restoration. It is still the seat of the Croatian Catholic Bishopric of Kotor. Welcome to a treasure trove of history with a view of the Adriatic. You'll want to linger here.

Highlights

Sea Gate – The Venetian Entrance to the City

The Sea Gate, the main entrance to Kotor, was constructed by the Venetians in 1555. You'll see the winged lion, the symbol of Venice, here and on other structures in Kotor. Above the gate a star and a quote from Tito above the gate commemorate the city's liberation from the Nazis. Passing through the gate, look for the 15th century stone relief of a Madonna and Child attended by saints Tryphon and Bernard. Beyond the gate lies Trg od Oružja, Weapons Square, where you'll find an odd stone pyramid, once used as a pillory to shame citizens for improper behavior, directly in front of the clock tower.

The Catholic Cathedral of Kotor

The city's exquisite Catholic Cathedral was originally erected in the 12th century and has been reconstructed after a series of strong earthquakes. Its Romanesque interior houses a group of Corinthian columns and pillars of pink stone that seem to hoist the vaulted roof of the church toward the heavens. Its gilded silver bas-relief altar screen is the city's great treasure, while the reliquary chapel exhibits icons, a crucifix from 1288 and, behind the grill, relics of the saints, including St. Tryphon, the city's patron.

The Maritime Museum of Montenegro – Three Stories of History

Montenegro's proud history as a naval power is celebrated in three stories of displays at [The Maritime Museum of Montenegro](#), which is housed in the early-18th-century baroque palace, Grgurin. Take the free audio guide and enjoy a detailed tour of the museum's incredible collection of photographs, paintings and portraits, uniforms, navigational instruments, exquisitely decorated weapons and model ships.

St. John's Hill – 1,350 Steps to the Top!

One of the lower peaks of the Lovćen massif, St. John's Hill rises above Kotor. The fortification of Kotor began to climb toward the top of the hill in earnest beginning in the 9th century, and a protective loop was in place within 500 years. If you're looking for a vigorous way to look out over lovely Kotor and its beautiful bay, you've got a 1,200-meter climb, via 1,350 steps, to enjoy, one that will take you 260 meters above sea level. Start your trek near the North Gate or behind Trg od Salate (Salad Square) – make sure to have plenty of water with you.

Perast – The Defender of the Bay

Formerly a city of sailors, Perast's reputation for mariners was known throughout the region, and many of the famed stone houses of the captains are still standing. Today

Perast is home to 16 preserved palaces, including the baroque palace of Bujovic at the entrance to the city. Other significant palaces include Balovic, Bronza, Sestokrilovic, Mazarovic, Viskovic, Pavlovicini, Martinovic and Zmajevic. Today Perast is referred to as one of the quietest towns in Boka. It's the perfect place for a quiet stroll, one that takes you deep into its former grandeur. Just off the coast of Perast you'll find two magical islands, one natural and one, The Lady of the Rock, entirely manmade. According to legend, The Lady of the Rock was built over centuries by seamen bound by an ancient oath: on his return from each successful voyage, each sailor laid a rock in the bay and, over the centuries, The Lady of the Rock emerged from the sea.

Budva – One of the Oldest Cities in the Balkans

According to Greek mythology, Budva, one of the oldest towns in the Balkans, was founded in the 5th century B.C. by Cadmo, the son of the Phoenician king, Agenon. Two millennia later, Budva stands proudly on a small peninsula. The city is surrounded by 15th century ramparts and home to a number of fascinating monuments worth searching for along its narrow alleys and picturesque squares: the Church of St. Sava the Sanctified, with the remnants of frescoes and inscriptions from mid-12th century; the Church of the Holy Trinity; the Church of Santa Maria in Punta and the Citadella. In the Stari Grad (Old town) you'll find charming shops, cozy cafes, delicious restaurants serving traditional meals and art galleries. You'll also want to visit the Stanjevici, Podostrog, Rezevici and Gradiste monasteries.

Kalimera Livorno (Florence, Lucca and Pisa)

Welcome to the coast of Tuscany, also known as the Etruscan Coast for the many Etruscan artifacts found here. The Province of Livorno stretches along the coast of central Tuscany, from Piombino to Livorno, home to the Italian Naval Academy. The beneficiary of a series of Medici family building projects during the 16th and 17th centuries, Livorno still preserves the work of the Medicis – this includes its pentagonal defensive wall (surrounded by navigable moats), Antonio da Sangallo's Fortezza Vecchia, the Cathedral and the Via Grande portico. You'll also love the Venezia Nuova district, a charming model of La Serenissima built during the 17th century – densely veined with canals and bridges, it's home to chic bars and outstanding restaurants – and Livorno's lovely belle Epoque seafront. Continue south if you want to stroll its pebbled beaches. Sophisticated and authentic, seaside Livorno is the perfect gateway to Tuscany – from here your visit to the classics of Tuscany continues at three of Europe's cultural treasures, Florence, Lucca and Pisa. Bongiorno, Toscana!

History

During the Italian Renaissance the Medicis designed Livorno as an ideal town, and architect Bernardo Buontalenti made numerous contributions to the Livorno townscape toward the end of the 16th century. During this, its grandest era, the port was defended by towers and fortresses that lead welcome visitors to the center of the city. A century

later another period of town planning and expansion commenced, and the town walls were erected. A new fortress was built beside the old fortress, and a navigable canal system was created. The port of Pisa ultimately silted up, and Livorno became the most significant port in Tuscany. Some of the European powers built trading houses here, particularly the British, who established the Levant Company in Livorno, bolstering British contact with the city and the region. The French took Tuscany in 1808, only to lose it 60 years later to the Kingdom of Italy during the Italian wars of unification. Since the early 1900s, Livorno has been the home of the Orlando Shipyard, where the armored cruiser, the Georgios Averof, was built in 1911 – this ship was flagship of the Greek Navy during its victorious battles against the Turks in the Balkan Wars and during World War I. The city was extensively bombed during World War II.

Highlights

Florence

The Romans named Florentia, the florid city, in the first century when it was a settlement along the Arno River near Fiesole, an Etruscan city whose ruins are still visible on the hill above modern Florence. A cultural and commercial powerhouse since the 13th century, the city reached its zenith during the 15th century under the stewardship of the Medicis, the Grand Dukes of Tuscany, who held the city in their cultivated grasp until the close of the 18th century.

The cultural richness of Florence is astonishing. Some eight million tourists visit the florid city every year to stand agape in the Palazzo Vecchio, before the Duomo and its tower, both designed by Giotto, and in every gallery of the legendary [Uffizi Museum](#). If the art and architecture don't make you swoon, the food and wine will. Try a Florentine steak, on the bone, and a bottle of Chianti. There's plenty of shopping, too, particularly at the jewelry shops at Ponte Vecchio, the only bridge to survive the bombing of the city during World War II – if you're shopped out, take a refreshing stroll through the Boboli Gardens across the river or through Piazzale Michelangelo, an esplanade overlooking the city.

The entire historical center of Florence is a pedestrian zone, a [UNESCO World Heritage site](#) and yours to explore. At the Piazza della Signoria you'll find the Gothic Old Palace, home to a lavish courtyard. Continue on to the Loggia dei Lanzi, an open-air museum where you'll marvel at the masterpieces of sculpture on display. The Palazzo Vecchio, "the Old Palace," was the home of the Priori delle Arti, of the Signoria, and a ducal residence. Now the town hall of Florence, its large collection of paintings and sculpture will enchant you, as will the replica of Michelangelo's David, more than four meters in height, which awaits you just outside the palace. If you're looking for the original David, it's been in the [Accademia Gallery](#) in Florence since 1873.

The mighty Cathedral S. Maria del Fiore is a gothic cathedral crowned by a spectacular Brunelleschi dome. One of the most significant landmarks in a city that seems built entirely of landmarks, you'll find Giotto's Bell Tower to the right and, opposite the entrance to the Cathedral, the Baptistery of S. Giovanni. Don't miss the Piazza di Santa

Croce and the Basilica of Santa Croce, which was rebuilt for a Franciscan order in 1294 by Arnolfo di Cambio. The principal Franciscan church in Florence and a minor basilica of the Roman Catholic Church, Santa Croce is also the final resting place of Michelangelo.

Lucca

As it is in Florence, the entire historic center of lovely Lucca is a [UNESCO World Heritage site](#). The Roman imprint is obvious in the regular street plan, in place-names such as San Michele al Foro (Forum) and in the very particular Piazza del Mercato, built in the early 1800s. The existing buildings here, erected over the centuries on the ruins of the Roman amphitheater, were knocked down, and new structures were built along the ancient monument's elliptical perimeter. A walk along the narrow streets and through the quiet piazzas of Lucca takes you past stone towers, tower houses and arcaded brick houses. It is a medieval city that seems designed to make you swoon.

During the 12th and 13th centuries, silk trade and banking activities in the city expanded, making Lucca an international commercial center. During this period the city a new structure based on towers and tower houses for wealthy families, was introduced in the city – beyond the city, several boroughs developed, all of them home to lower buildings, gardens and parks. Between the 14th and 15th centuries, brickwork was introduced in the city, as a companion to traditional stonework – the Palazzo Guinigi and its wooded tower and Villa Guinigi are among the great achievements in brickwork that date to this period. Villa Guinigi, built on parkland just beyond the ancient medieval walls, is now home to [the Museo Nazionale di Villa Guinigi](#).

The third circle of city walls was begun in the early 1500s and took more than a century to complete. While not crucial to the defense of Lucca, this circle of walls was a declaration of the authority and independence of the city-state. Designed by Flemish and Italian designers and engineers, the walls – twelve curtains, with earthworks, connect eleven brickwork fronted ramparts – are twelve meters high, thirty meters deep at the base with a perimeter of slightly more than four kilometers. Today these walls are a vast urban park with century-old plane trees, horse chestnut trees and red oaks, a charming entrance to this lovely city.

Via Fillungo, home to aristocratic buildings and ancient towers, particularly the famed Torre delle Ore, is the main thoroughfare through Lucca. The Cathedral di S. Martino, the Duomo, is the most important cathedral in the city. Against its entrance wall is the original 13th-century statue of St. Martin dividing his cloak to give to a beggar – you'll also find a Last Supper from 1591 by Tintoretto and his assistants inside is a replica). Among the fine baroque works in the right aisle is (third altar) a Last Supper (1590-91) by Tintoretto and his assistants and Civitali's octagonal Tempietto (1482), built of white Carrara and red porphyry marble, with a St. Sebastian on the backside.

Other outstanding examples of religious architecture include the Church of San Michele in Foro, a unique example of Pisan-Lucchese architecture, and the splendid Basilica of San Frediano. Some of the city's beautiful civil buildings include Palazzo Mansi, the former

mansion of a wealthy Lucca merchant and the current home of the [Palazzo Mansi Museum](#), and the 17th-Century Palazzo Moriconi-Pfanner, a magnificent example of Lucchese Baroque, replete with a splendid garden. And don't miss the house where Puccini was born – it's now the [Puccini Museum](#), where you'll find his documents and the Steinway piano on which he composed *Turandot*, his final opera. You'll love Lucca! It's a small city, but it's operatic in its richness.

Pisa

The Leaning Tower of Pisa. You have to see it, right? The tower or campanile is the most famous monument in the large green expanse of the Piazza dei Miracoli (formerly the Piazza del Duomo), a [UNESCO World Heritage site](#) and home to the Cathedral, the Baptistery and the cemetery. These four masterpieces of medieval architecture exerted a tremendous influence on monumental Italian art between the 11th and 14th centuries.

Pisa was an Etruscan settlement, then a Roman town. At one time it was a maritime power to rival Genoa and Venice, but it is education that's powered the Pisan economy since the 13th century – students from all over Italy still compete for admission to its university and research schools. Thanks to the students, the center of Pisa is renowned for an affordable café and bar scene that never stops percolating. You'll be delighted to find your way here after a tour of the city's well-preserved Gothic churches, Romanesque buildings and Renaissance piazzas, many still undiscovered by tourists. Stroll the lungarni (the embankments), then wander through the Botanic Gardens, recently restored and one of the oldest in Europe.

The Campo dei Miracoli is indeed miraculous, one of the most beautiful squares in the world. The Baptistery, dating to the 12th century, is one of the largest in Italy. Construction commenced in 1152, to be remodeled and continued more than 100 years later by Nicola and Giovanni Pisano; the Baptistery was finally finished during the 1300s. The lower level of arcades is Pisan-Romanesque, while the pinnacled upper section and dome are Gothic. Be sure to visit first thing in the morning, so you can experience its amazing acoustics.

The Cathedral is a showpiece of Romanesque architecture – its cladding of alternating bands of green and cream marble became a blueprint floor for Romanesque churches in the region. Its vast interior is held aloft by 68 classical granite columns, while the wooden ceiling, decorated with 24-carat gold, a legacy from the years the city was under the Medicis.

Construction of the Leaning Tower of Pisa (the campanile or “Torre Pendente”) began in 1173 but was halted ten years later when the tower's first three tiers began to tilt. Work commenced again in 1272, but the foundations could not be bolstered, so artisans and masons adjusted for the lean by building straight up from the lower stories. 70 tons of earth were recently removed from the northern side, which permitted the tower to sink to its 18th century level, which rectified the lean by almost 50 centimeters. Experts believe this will guarantee the tower's future for another 300 years.

The Campo Santo is a fascinating walled cemetery and museum: it is believed the soil here was shipped from Calvary by the Crusaders. During WWII, Allied artillery destroyed many of the cloister's frescos, but some were salvaged and are now on exhibit in the Sala Affreschi (Frescoes Room). Don't miss the Triumph of Death, a depiction of Hell attributed to 14th-century painter Buonamico Buffalmacco

Did we mention it's the birthplace of Galileo? Spend some time in Pisa – you'll have stars in your eyes.

Kalimera Marmaris

Glittering at the top of a magnificent fjord, Marmaris has evolved from a quaint fishing village on the Turkish coast of the Aegean into one of the most popular resorts in Turkey. The center of town is still quite small, and the old quarter, behind the marina, welcomes strollers to the charming bustle of its bazaars. Welcome to some of the best shopping in the Aegean. Get ready to bargain!

The rich and famous of Turkey make the marina at Marmaris their own during the summer, which means you'll have the chance to rub elbows with them at some of the outstanding restaurants and unique shops beside the harbor. During the high season there may be 10,000 boats anchored in the exquisite Bay of Marmaris, considered one of the world's finest. There are precious little beach villages to the north and south and great walks and hikes in the green mountains outside of town. For a beautiful view of the Bay of Marmaris, visit Suleiman the Magnificent's castle in the Old Town. You can walk from Marmaris to the resort of Içmeler, just a few miles away, entirely along a sugar-sand beach. Feel free to stop along the way to try some windsurfing or to rent a jet ski. Or just find a sunbed and drop anchor.

History

By the 6th century B.C. present-day Marmaris was known as Physkos and was part of Caria – Herodotus claimed there was a castle in Physkos as early as 3,000 B.C. In 334 B.C. Alexander the Great invaded Physkos, whose inhabitants burned their possessions in the castle and fled to the hills. Alexander's soldiers repaired the castle, and a few hundred of them were stationed there until the main army returned home. Physkos was renamed Marmaris during the period of the Beylik of Menteşe, when it played an important role in the trade of marble. The name comes from the Turkish word, mermer and the Greek word, marmaron (marble), so given to the city on account of the considerable marble deposits in the area.

Highlights

One of the Best Bazaars in the Aegean

Visiting Marmaris is an immersion in another world, one resplendent with Eastern charm. You'll find mosques, wooden boats tied to the city's docks...and some of the best bazaars in the Aegean! There are bargains to be had, both local and international clothing, house

wares and jewelry. Maybe you're looking for the perfect bag or just a few great souvenirs for your loved ones back home. Whatever you fancy, get ready to haggle. After you're done, stroll back to the marina, treasures in hand, for a quayside coffee.

The Castle of Suleiman the Magnificent

Built in 1522, the hilltop castle of Suleiman the Magnificent was the assembly point for the Sultan's siege of Rhodes, held at the time by the Knights Templar. 200,000 soldiers began their attack on the nearby island from the castle. Today it houses the Marmaris Museum, where you'll find amphorae, glassware, coins and artifacts from Knidou and Hisarönü. Take a tour of the castle walls and enjoy the view down to the marina, but please refrain from firing the medieval cannon!

Dalyan and Kaunos – Untamed Scenery, Mud Baths and Ancient Tombs

Travel east from Marmaris along the exquisite Lycian Coast to the Dalyan River, about 80 kilometers from Marmaris through cool pine forests, past rolling orange plantations and cotton fields, to the Dalyan River and the incredible rock tombs at Kaunos. Pack yourself in restorative clay at the river, then continue on to the tombs at Kaunos, where you'll also have a chance to inspect the remnants of the city's walls, Roman baths and theater, all very well-preserved.

Kalimera Marseilles

Welcome to France's greatest harbor! Beloved home of writers, sailors and fishmongers, cosmopolitan Marseilles, one of the world's largest and busiest ports, has been inhabited for 26 centuries. Alexandre Dumas, author of *The Count of Monte Cristo*, called it "the meeting place of the entire world," thanks to its varied cultures. A melting pot of different races and cultures, and a gateway to southern Europe and North Africa, the city remains dependent on the port for its revenue. As it has been for centuries, daily life in this harbor town is dominated by fishing boats and their catch.

The possibilities here are endless: enjoy the silky drawl of Provencal fishmongers in the Vieux (Old) Port, then treat yourself to a spree at the smart designer boutiques on rue de la Tour, also a great spot for watching the sun set over white cliffs. As evening arrives, this most culinary of destinations grows even livelier. Head for dinner in a laid-back café or pick a sea-view restaurant to your liking for a fresh fish feast. Try a cool glass of Pastis, the French answer to ouzo, to cleanse your palette before sitting down for a generous bowl of bouillabaisse. There's terrific alfresco dining at the bohemian cafes of chic Cours Julien and exciting North African flavors in the Old Port. It's a moveable feast.

Marseille is cut in half by one of its main shopping streets, La Canebière, which runs west to east from the Vieux Port, while narrow medieval stairwells in steep le Panier, the Montmartre of Marseille, lead to the [Centre de la Vieille Charité](#) and its baroque chapel and archaeological collections. Climb to the gold-topped Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde

basilica for stunning views of the Mediterranean, or stroll south to sands of Prado, the best beach in Marseille, three kilometers in length.

Edmond Rostand, the author of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, was born here in 1868. Like *Cyrano*, Marseille is never without its panache, its “plume blanche.” Let us lay the most singular city in France at your feet. The mistral will do the rest.

History

Ancient Greek mariners founded Massilia, a trading post, at what is now the Vieux Port in 600 B.C. The city backed Pompey the Great in his contest with Julius Caesar in the 1st century B.C., so Caesar’s forces captured Massilia in 49 B.C. and directed Roman trade elsewhere. Massilia remained a free port and the last Western center of Greek thought until it fell into ruin. In the early tenth century, the counts of Provence brought the city back to life.

The city became part of France in the 1480s, but its citizens supported the revolution, with 500 of them marching to defend Paris in 1792. The song they sang as they marched north, *La Marseillaise*, is now the national anthem of La France. The city’s importance as a commercial port increased exponentially after the French occupation of Algeria in 1830 and again in 1869 after the inauguration of the Suez Canal. The Italians and the Germans bombed the city in 1940, as did the Allies during 1943-44.

Highlights

Abbaye Saint Victor – The Oldest Cathedral in Marseille

[Abbaye Saint Victor](#) is Marseille’s oldest church and the birthplace of Christianity in the city. Founded by a monk, St. Cassian, in the 5th century in honor of St. Victor, it stands upon the remains of a necropolis from the 3rd century B.C. Its crypts contain sarcophagi, catacombs and the Cave of St. Victor.

Musée des Docks Romains – A Roman Docks Warehouse

[Musée des Docks Romains](#) is a Roman docks warehouse discovered after World War II. The impressive artifacts on display, including large storage urns used by the Romans for grain, oil and wine, were discovered as the harbor was being rebuilt.

La Corniche – A Romantic Seaside Promenade

La Corniche takes you along the sea, where you’ll enjoy stunning views of Câteau d’If, in the harbor, and les Calanques, the astonishing Mediterranean fjords found along the Mediterranean coast of France.

Basilique Notre-Dame de la Garde – The Symbol of Marseille

A neo-Byzantine cathedral built in the 19th century, the Basilique Notre-Dame de la Garde is the defining symbol of Marseille. Standing on a hilltop 154 meters above the city, you can see it from every vantage point in Marseille. Its campanile is crowned by a 9.7 meter gilded statue of the Virgin Mary on a 12 meter pedestal. The bullet scrapes and shrapnel

scars on the Basilique's northern façade date to Marseille's Battle of Liberation in August 1944.

Château d'If – Frances's Very Own Alcatraz

A barren island visited only by fisherman until a prison was built here in 1527, Chateau d'If was the inspiration for the Alexandre Dumas novel *The Count of Monte Cristo*. In 1516 the first rhinoceros to be brought to Europe was first brought ashore here – its portrait was drawn by Albrecht Durer! It served as a prison from 1540 until WWI.

Aix-en-Provence

An envelope of left-bank Parisian chic deep in Provence, Aix-en-Provence's leafy boulevards and public squares are lined with 17th- and 18th-century mansions and punctuated by 101 moss-covered fountains. Haughty stone lions guard its grandest avenue, Cours Mirabeau, home to the city's most posh cafes. In the winding streets of the old town, on the pediments of its immaculate mansions or in the lush Provence countryside beyond the city, the grande past of this former capital has been exquisitely preserved.

In 123 BC the Roman military camp here was named Aquae Sextiae (Waters of Sextius) for the thermal springs that still flow today. In the 12th century the counts of Provence proclaimed Aix their capital, which it remained until the Revolution, when it was supplanted by Marseille. The city became a center of culture under arts patron King René (1409–80), who founded the university here in 1409. Aix-En-Provence is also the town of the tempestuous politician Mirabeau and famous painter Paul Cézanne, who designed his own [studio](#) here; it remains today much as he left it at the time of his death in 1906. Another of the city's famous sons is novelist Émile Zola, a childhood friend of Cezanne's.

How to explore a city so dense with treasures? Start at University Square and Saint Saviour Cathedral: founded in the 4th century and built on the forum square, you'll find a nave from the 12th century in its southern aisle, chapels dating to the 1300s and 1400s and, in the apse, a sarcophagus from the 5th century. A bit further on stands the spectacular Aix-en-Provence Town Hall and the 16th century Clock Tower with its splendid astronomical clock. The immaculate Hotel de Ville, completed in 1670, now shares the square of its residence, and its view of the clock tower, with a flower market.

Continue on to elegant Cours Mirabeau and its shaded café terraces. Mirabeau is the beginning of the Mazarin Quartier, Aix-en-Provence's aristocratic neighborhood, where flamboyant mansions stand upon enormous grounds behind high walls, finely-chiseled statues at the pediments of the buildings. It's a feast for the eyes.

"The landscape is magnificent, and so is the light. There are 300 days of sunshine a year. The wines are good, and getting better. And I like the people. What more could one want?"

- Peter Mayle, Author of *A Year in Provence*

Kalimera Mytilini

Home to pristine golden beaches, Mytilini, also known as Lesbos, is Greece's third-largest island, after Crete and Evia. A topographical marvel, the island is home to breathtaking landscapes, including its arid western plains and the salt marshes at its center. To its east, the mountains of Mytilini are draped with thick forests. Immensely popular with tourists, Agriculture is still king on this sunny island. Mytilini is home to about 11 million olive trees, and olive oil is one Mytilini's chief exports, as is ouzo: half of the ouzo consumed worldwide is distilled on the island. Mytilini is also known for its wines, and for the warmest therapeutic hot springs in Europe. This is the birthplace of Odysseus Elytis and Sappho, one of the greatest poets of ancient Greece.

The island's imposing monasteries and churches and picturesque chapels have welcomed pilgrims for centuries. Some of the most popular of Mytilini's holy sites include the Monastery of Saint Raphael in Thermi, Taxiarches Monastery in Mantamados, Limonos Monastery, the Monastery of Ypsilos, the Church of St. Mary the Virgin in Agiasos and the Church of St Mary the Virgin in Petra. There's poetry in the air on this immaculate island. We invite you to take a deep breath.

History

Mytilini's cultural legacy reaches back to the 7th century B.C. and the work of the poet Arion and the composer Terpander – the island is also the birthplace of Nobel Prize-winning poet Odysseus Elytis (1979) and primitive painter Theofilos. The great ancient philosophers Aristotle and Epicurus also led an exceptional philosophical academy here, but the island's most famous native is Sappho, one of the greatest poets of ancient Greece. In the 14th century, the entire island was given as a dowry to a Genoese prince of the Gattilusi clan following his marriage to the sister of one of the last Byzantine emperors.

Highlights

The Cathedral of St. Raphael

The famous two-storey church of St. Raphael, built on the "Karyes" hill, is unique on the island of Mytilini. Erected as a convent in honor of St. Raphael, it is still active today. Adorned with frescoes, it is home to a spectacular tiled floor, handwritten Bible pages and exquisite liturgical items.

The Monastery of the Archangel Michael

Found in the village of Mantamada, this is one of the most important pilgrimage sites on the island, home to a unique icon of the Archangel. Inside the church are Holy Bibles and other religious books dating to the 16th century.

The Traditional Stone Houses of Mithymna and the Church of the Virgin Mary

Mithymna (also known as Molyvos) is a traditional village near Petra. Built atop a hill beneath a medieval castle, the stone houses of Mithymna are exceptionally well-

preserved. There are 114 steps carved rock leading to the castle where you'll find the Church of the Virgin Mary. Built in the 15th century, the interior of the chapel is adorned with a painted chancel and a bishop's throne. A number of rare Byzantine icons are exhibited here.

The Petrified Forest

The entire island of Mytilini is a protected park, the [Lesvos Global Geopark](#)! The island is famed for its rare fossilized tree trunks. Some 15 to 20 million years ago, due to intense volcanic activity, the trees were subsumed by lava and ashes, followed by heavy rainfall, which brought about massive mudflows of pyroclastic material. These flows moved west and engulfed the trees in the western part of the island: today some of the trunks can still be seen in their upright position with intact roots of up to seven meters in length. This ancient forest included towering trees similar to those of the Sequoia family found today in North America, alongside cinnamon trees, conifers, oaks and pines.

Mighty Agios Therapon and the Byzantine Museum

The bulbous dome of Agios Therapon rises above Mytilini Town. Its **exquisite interior** includes a mighty chandelier, an intricately carved iconostasis, a priest's throne and an incredible frescoed dome; within the church courtyard stands the Byzantine Museum and its rich collection of icons.

Kalimera Nafplion

One of the most beautiful towns in Agrolis, the Eastern Peloponnese, and one of Greece's most romantic cities, elegant, architecturally-homogenous Nafplion, the capital of the First Hellenic Republic from 1823 until 1834, is a palimpsest upon which its many conquerors have written their turbulent stories over the centuries: the Franks, the Venetians and the Ottomans all contributed to the incomparable mien of this lovely port, which greets its many visitors with its ancient city walls, its castles, its Ottoman fountains, its Venetian houses and its neoclassical mansions. Plateia Syntagmatos, the lively heart of the city, is much as it was in the 1700s. Other important buildings include two Turkish mosques, the [Archaeological Museum of Nafplion](#), which houses artifacts found in the area from the Prehistoric and Mycenaean eras, and the Municipal Gallery, an arm of the [Athens National Gallery](#). Near downtown you'll find the Church of Agios Spyridonas and the Church of Agios Georgios, which is home to a number of important murals, including a copy of Da Vinci's "The Secret Dinner."

Summertime is a sweet dream in Nafplion. Enjoy a refreshing swim at its wonderful beaches, particularly Arvanitia, Karathonas, Kiveri, Miloi and Nea Kios. When the sun sets, you and your beloved will enjoy a romantic stroll around the so-called "Arvanitia Promenade", the most popular walk in town – the promenade is dominated by the rocky landscape of Akronafliathe, the historic rock at the bottom of Palamidi Hill. Come write your own story.

History

According to mythology, Nafplion was founded by Náfplios, the son of Poseidon and Danaus (Danaida) Anymone. The town's history begins in prehistory, when its soldiers took part in both the Argonautic expedition and the Trojan War. A major port since the Bronze Age, Nafplion endured a long decline under the Roman Empire, but grew and thrived as part of the Byzantine Empire, when it was a key commercial and strategic port. In 1203 Leon Sgouros, the ruler of Nafplion, conquered Argos and Corinth, and Larissa to the north.

The city saw many fierce battles between the Ottomans and the Venetians, who built most of its medieval quarter between 1686 and 1715. From 1829 until 1834 it was the first capital of liberated Greece.

Highlights

Palamidi Hill – Home to Three Castles

Inhabited since prehistoric times, Palamidi Hill is home to three castles. Start at Akronafplia, the historic rock at the foot of the hill and also known by its Turkish name, Its Kale (inner castle). From here, your next stop is Palamidi Castle, 216 meters above the Argolic Gulf – you can only reach it by climbing the 999 stone steps carved into the hillside. Its battlements were named for ancient heroes Achilles, Fokion, Epaminondas, Leonidas, Miltiades and Themistocles, and it seems they still protect Nafplion today. During the Greek Revolution, Theodore Kolokotronis was imprisoned here. Continue your climb to the Agios Andreas battlement, built by the Venetians, at the top of the hill, and enjoy the stunning views of the Gulf and the Mycenaean Plain.

Bourtzi – The Most Photographed Spot in Nafplion

The small Venetian fortress on the rocky islet of Agioi Theodori is the most photographed spot in Nafplion and its point of reference. During Venetian rule it was connected to Akronafplia by a massive metal chain that secured the port against enemy ships. During the latter half of the 19th century, prisoners held in Palamidi Castle were executed here. You can reach Bourtzi by boats departing regularly from the port.

Ancient Nemea – Site of the Nemean Games and the First Labor of Heracles

A scenic drive through Nafplion and past the ancient sites of Tiryns and Argos will bring you to the ruins of Nemea, which lie at the northeastern edge of modern Nemea. Similar to Olympia, Nemea was a sanctuary and the venue for the biennial Nemean Games, which honored Zeus. Hosted in nearby Kleonai, the Nemean Games were one of the great Pan-Hellenic festivals. Three original columns of the 4th-century-BC Doric Temple of Zeus survive, and two other columns have been reassembled – other ruins at the site include a bathhouse and a hostel. The stadium is 500m back along the road, and was once connected to the sanctuary by a sacred road. The starting line is still here, as are the distance markers. In a slightly hidden tunnel used by the athletes, see if you can find some ancient graffiti. The games have been revived, and the Sixth Nemead will take place in June 2016.

The [Archaeological Museum of Nemea](#) has two models of the sanctuary on exhibit: the first shows what it would have looked like in 573 B.C., the second as it would have been the 5th century. The centerpiece of the museum's collection is the Gold of Aidonia, an incredible assortment of gold rings, beads and seals from Aidonia, a site near Ancient Nemea. It was nearby that Hercules executed the first of his 12 labors, slaying the Nemean lion, which Hera had sent to crush the city. The lion became the constellation, Leo.

Epidaurus – An Ancient Therapeutic and Religious Center

Famed for its spectacular theater and known throughout the Hellenistic world for its unique medical facilities, the Sanctuary of Epidaurus, a [UNESCO World Heritage site](#), was a therapeutic and religious center dedicated to Asklepios. Epidaurus was active from the 2nd century B.C. until at least the 2nd century A.D., when Pausanias, the traveler and historian, spent some time here, when the city was filled with curative spas. Its principal monuments – the temple of Asklepios, the Tholos and the Theatre, which all date from the 4th century B.C. – are considered some of the purest masterpieces of Greek architecture. The theater, whose acoustics are extraordinary, was designed by Polykleitos the Younger. It is marvelously intact and is still used regularly for performances throughout the Peloponnesian summer – the late Maria Callas once performed here. The Propylaia, the massive gateway to the Asklepieion, still stands at its northern entrance. Visitors will also find sections of the Sacred Way beneath their feet and a Classical stadium: many of its benches are still standing, and its starting line is still visible.

Mycenae – A Fortified Bronze Age Palace

“Well-built Mycenae, rich in gold...” So said Homer of this ancient city, one of the greatest of the Mycenaean civilization, a civilization that dominated the Eastern Mediterranean from the 15th to the 12th century B.C. and played a vital role in the development of classical Greek culture. Both Mycenae and nearby Tiryns, [UNESCO World Heritage sites](#), are indissolubly linked to *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann, who discovered Troy, the remains of which serve as the factual basis for *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, discovered this fortified Bronze Age Palace in 1874. One of the earliest examples of sophisticated citadel architecture, it was a hilltop enclave inhabited solely by aristocrats, with artisans and merchants residing outside the city walls. It was abandoned around 1100 B.C. Of the royal palace, only the floors remain. The tholos (“beehive”) tombs, outside the palace walls, were built with successive rings of masonry, each level creeping inward to reduce the diameter of the tomb until it could be closed at the top with a single stone. The entire structure was then buried with earth. Much like the Egyptian Pharaohs, Mycenaean kings were buried with weapons and provisions for their journey to the underworld. You’ll feel as if you’re beginning your own journey to the underworld when you enter the massive Treasury of Atreus, also known as the Tomb of Agamemnon, which dates from the 14th century B.C. It is one of the only two-chambered tombs in Greece.

Panagia tou Malevi – A Miraculous Icon

The monastery of the Dormition of the Virgin, or Malevi, is an important monastery in the Kynouria province, to the west of Nafplion. It stands upon Mount Parnon, which is known as "Second Mount Athos" and "Mount Athos of Southern Greece" because Christians from Mount Athos immigrated here during the reign of Emperor Constantine IV (668-685) and because no other mountain in Greece is home to so many monasteries. More than 900 meters above sea level amongst fir trees, the monastery was named for Malevos, Mount Parnon's highest peak, gradually becoming known as "Panagia tou Malevi," then simply "Malevi." One of the most popular monasteries in the Peloponnese, thousands of pilgrims from Greece and abroad visit Malevi every year to worship the miraculous, fragrant icon of the Virgin, which was transferred from Mount Athos in the tenth century and is traditionally attributed to the evangelist Luke.

Kalimera Palermo

Welcome to sweet Sicily and its historic capital, Palermo. Over the course of its turbulent 2,700-year history, this busy port has seen three golden ages – the Carthaginians, the Arabs and the Normans all made this ancient city toward the northwest of Sicily a core component of their mighty empires. A sometimes cacophonous festival of contrasts, a short time in the hurly burly of Palermo takes you past palatial villas and beneath laundry hung on lines between medieval buildings. The rich and varied history of this fascinating city has bestowed upon it innumerable architectural treasures. Interested in seeing Baroque churches? A Norman cathedral? Doric temples? Mosques? Andiamo!

Where to start? Try Piazza Bellini in the old city center. Climb the steps to the Church of San Cataldo, best appreciated from the outside, where you can take in its three Saracen cardinal-red domes, then visit the Church of Santa Maria Dell'Amiraglio, La Martorana, right next door – La Martorana is a quintessential blend of Arab-Norman architecture, home to well-preserved frescoes and mosaics, and a campanile dating to 1143. The sumptuous Loggia district will spoil you with the density of its Baroque buildings, which include the Oratorio del Rosario del San Domenico, a 16th-century chapel with a Van Dyck altarpiece and a ceiling frescoed by Novelli. In the magnificent rococo Oratorio del Rosario di Santa Citta, adjacent to Via Roma, come face to face the Virtues and the Mysteries, as represented by 15 statues.

After indulging in such visual splendor, treat your taste buds to sfinciuni, a Sicilian focaccia variation rich with olive oil, bread crumbs, onions, sheep's milk cheese and sun-dried tomatoes, and a glass of Sicilian wine. Then it's time for coffee! The Palermitanos are very particular about their coffee, and they are willing to travel for it. They know which place serves the best granita al caffè, frozen ice with coffee and whipped cream, and the best cup of gran caffè, cappuccino without milk. Ciao, Palermo! We promise whatever your beverage of choice, in Palermo your cup runneth over.

History

Palermo's history begins in tandem with civilization in the Mediterranean. The Phoenicians founded Palermo as a commercial port in 700 B.C. The Carthaginians

conquered the city, then the Greeks, then the Romans, who named it Panhormus. The Vandals took Panhormus, then surrendered it to the Byzantines, in 535, when the Byzantine general Belisarius invaded the port as part of Justinian I's program of re-conquering Italy. Byzantine rule lasted until 831, when the Aghlabid Arabs, disembarked in Mazara del Vallo and captured Palermo after a year-long siege. The Arabs made Palermo the capital of their Sicilian emirate, and it was during their rule of Sicily that Palermo evolved into a magical city of markets, mosques and minarets. Its beauty was said to rival that of Cairo and Cordoba.

During the crusades Sicily came under the dominion of the Normans, but they preserved the Arabian legacy of enlightenment and tolerance. The Norman era is known as "the Golden Years." Sicily became part of the new Kingdom of Italy in 1861. During World War II, Palermo was untouched until the Allies invaded Sicily in 1943. In July of that year, the city endured heavy Allied bombing that nearly destroyed entirely the harbor and the surrounding neighborhoods. Today almost 750,000 people make this incredible city their home.

Highlights

Santa Caterina Church – A Masterpiece of Sicilian Baroque

Found at Piazza Bellini's northern edge, this ornate baroque church was built between 1566 and 1596, though much of its gilded stucco and many of its whirling frescoes and smooth white statues were added during the 1700s. Don't miss the marble presbytery, the silver angels on the altar and Antonello Gagini's statue of St. Catherine, carved in 1534, in the right transept.

Teatro Massimo – The Lyrical Temple of Palermo

Teatro Massimo in Piazza Verdi is a Neoclassical masterpiece! Ernesto Basile's six-tiered art nouveau masterpiece is Europe's third-largest opera house and one of Italy's most prestigious, alongside La Scala, La Fenice and San Carlo in Naples. Begun by Basile in 1875 and completed by his son, Ernesto, in 1897, lions flank its grand columned entrance and its interior gleams in red and gold. Recently restored, operas, ballets and concerts are staged here from September to June.

Palazzo dei Normanni – Norman Grandeur in the Heart of Palermo

Built in 1130, the year of the coronation of Roger II, the Palazzo dei Normanni is one of Palermo's most famous landmarks. Home to the Sicilian Parliament, the palace is covered with stunning Byzantine mosaics. When the Sicilian Parliament is not in session, visitors can visit several upstairs rooms: the exquisite blue Sala Pompeiana and its Venus and Eros frescoes; the Sala dei Venti, which is adorned with mosaics of geese, leopards, lions, papyrus and palms, and the Sala di Ruggero II, King Roger's mosaicked bedroom.

San Giovanni degli Eremiti (St. John of the Hermits) – Founded in the 6th Century

The origin of San Giovanni degli Eremiti dates to the 6th century. After the Arab conquest of Sicily it was converted to a mosque, only to be returned to the Christians of Sicily by Roger II, who entrusted it to the Benedictine monks of Saint William Vercelli in 1136. Over

the following centuries the church underwent extensive modifications until the late 19th century, when a comprehensive restoration was undertaken to restore the church's medieval appearance. San Giovanni degli Eremiti is famed for its brilliant crimson domes, the architectural expression of the persistence of Arab influences in Sicily during the Norman period.

Catacombe dei Cappuccini – Spend Some Time with the Dead

The Catacombs of the Cappuccini Monastery have fascinated visitors for centuries. Why? How about the 8,000 mummified former residents of Palermo who currently line its walls? If you're looking to add a macabre element to your cruise, drop into the Catacombe dei Cappuccini. The fully dressed corpses here were preserved in a variety of ways between the 16th century and the beginning of the 20th century. There's a special section for virgins.

Monreale – Home to the Largest Medieval Building in Italy

Beautiful Monreale, home to 30,000 people and picture-postcard vistas, is found in the mountains southwest of Palermo. The Norman Cattedrale di Monreale, Italy's largest medieval building, at 6,000 square meters, houses a massive collection of Byzantine art, while the town's 12th century Duomo, in Piazza Guglielmo il Buono, is home to an astonishing exhibition of Greek and Byzantine mosaics. You'll find 200 finely carved columns in the adjoining cloisters and mosaic of Christ, 65 feet high, glowing like a sun from the central apse.

Kalimera Rome

Bella Roma. Even a brief visit to the Eternal City gives one an unforgettable taste of "la dolce vita," the sweet life. This is one of the world's most thrilling and seductive cities. Throughout history, Rome has been the center of the world, first as caput mundi, the capital of the world, when it was the center of the mighty, nearly immeasurable Roman Empire. It then became the throne of the Roman Catholic Church, which it remains to this day. There's no denying its importance, then and now, and Rome seems as if it wants to remind you of its past and present glories at every turn – martial ruins harken back to ancient triumphs, masterpiece palazzi whisper of Renaissance intrigues, massive basilicas serve as extant testimony to centuries-old artistic ambition and papal power. And this is all just at street level! Below the city are myriad underground temples, labyrinthine catacombs and buried houses.

Art? Rome, one of the world's greatest cities for art, enjoys an artistic heritage that dates to the Etruscans. Throughout history it has contributed, again and again, to major upheavals in Western art. This is a living museum, home to awesome baroque churches, exquisite classical sculpture and frescoes that defy belief. A stroll through the center of this incredibly alive city brings you up close to masterpieces by artistic deities such as

Bernini, Caravaggio, Michelangelo, Raphael, Titian...Each of the city's neighborhoods offers up innumerable treasures.

Sure, it's home to one of the world's finest collections of art and architecture, both within its museums and basilicas and along its grand avenues, but a visit to Rome is also about living *la dolce vita*, and that experience begins on your tongue and continues to your stomach. Food and wine are core to life in Rome – lose yourself in any of the innumerable pizzerias, trattorias, restaurants and gelateria. Try a wood-fired pizza, or dine *al fresco* at a charming piazza. There's excellence at every table, on every plate, in every glass.

In [*Spartacus*](#) (1960), Crassus (Laurence Olivier) tells Caesar (John Gavin), "Rome is an eternal thought in the mind of God...If there were no Rome, I'd dream of her," and American writer, critic and *New York Times* editor Anatole Broyard once said of the Eternal City, "Rome was a poem pressed into service as a city." Join us in *Bella Roma* for a close reading of this magnificent poem. We promise you'll dream of her, eternally, after you depart from her seven glorious hills.

History

The most famous myth of Rome is the story of Romulus and Remus, the mythical twins, raised by a she-wolf, who founded Rome in 753 B.C. It is believed the ancient city was actually the result of the unification of Etruscan, Latin and Sabine settlements on the Palatino (Palatine), Esquilino (Esquiline) and Quirinale (Quirinal) hills. Archaeologists have confirmed a settlement existed on the Palatino as early as the 8th century B.C.

The Roman Empire was the world's first superpower – at its height, between 98 and 117 A.D., it covered most of the known world, from Hispania in the west to Palestina and Syria in the east, from what is now North Africa, in the south, to Britannia, in what was then the far north of the world. Rome was the capital of this empire, a mighty city draped in the vestments of imperial grandeur, and its 1.5 million residents lived amongst magnificent marble temples, busy public baths and majestic theaters. It was truly, inarguably, the *caput mundi*.

In the 5th century Germanic tribes began to prey upon a failing Rome, and the sack of the city by the Goths in 410 A.D. sounded its death knell. Pope Leo I convinced Attila the Hun not to destroy the city, but 15 years later it was plundered by the Vandals. In 476, Romulus Augustus, the last emperor of the Western Empire, was deposed.

Rome returned to glory during the Renaissance, particularly during the 15th and 16th century, when a series of ambitious popes transformed the city into a modern, showpiece capital. Pope Nicholas V (1447-55) is considered to have ignited the Roman Renaissance: it was under his successors that such luminaries as Botticelli, Bramante, Donatello, Fra Angelico, Michelangelo and Raphael lived and worked in Rome, engraving the city with their genius. Pope Sixtus IV (1471-84) commissioned the frescoing of the Sistine Chapel and presented the people of Rome with a collection of bronzes that became the first

Capitoline Museum exhibits. Julius II (1503-1513) opened the Via del Corso Via Giulia and commanded Bramante to rebuild St. Peter's Basilica.

Highlights

Ostia – Harbor City of Ancient Rome

Founded by King Marco Anzio at the mouth of the Tevere, [Ostia](#) was a flourishing commercial port and a military base for the defense of Rome. A truly multicultural municipality, its citizens, many of them from abroad, were craftsmen, laborers, sailors, ship-owners and traders, and even today we find ruins of temples dedicated to local, Egyptian and Oriental gods – even a synagogue has been discovered here. During the Dark Ages Barbarian tribes invaded Ostia, and soon thereafter, thanks to the prevailing winds and the river, the city disappeared beneath. Excavations began here in earnest in the 19th century, and today Ostia is an excellent example of the organization of private and public life in the Roman Empire.

The Coliseum – The Largest Amphitheater in the Ancient World

The Coliseum is one of the world's most famous arenas and one of the most impressive sights in Rome. Emperor Vespasian began the building, which was completed by his son, Titus, in 80 A.D. The inauguration of the Coliseum was a celebration and spectacle lasting for 100 days in 80 A.D. – it was completed by his son Titus, in 80 A.D. Inauguration lasted one hundred days – about 9,000 animals and 2,000 gladiators were killed during the event. At its peak the Coliseum held up to 87,000 spectators. Its design was repeated throughout the ancient world.

Fontana di Trevi (Trevi Fountain)

Designed by Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini, this magnificent fountain in the center of Rome was completed by Nicola Salvi in 1762 – it became famous all over the world when Anita Ekberg and Marcello Mastroianni frolicked about here in Fellini's [La Dolce Vita](#) (1960). The fountain, at 26 meters high and 20 meters wide, is the largest baroque fountain in Rome. Two giant Tritons, one blowing a conch shell, appear to drive Neptune's horse-drawn chariot through the water. Visiting Trevi Fountain is an absolute must: according to tradition, you should throw a coin over your shoulder into the fountain and it will bring you happiness. Hopefully as much happiness as you'll experience when you first set eyes on this incredible monument.

The Pantheon – Built By Angels

There is nothing else like standing beneath the massive dome of the Pantheon. Built by order of Hadrian more than two millennia ago, this was the first temple in Rome to be Christianized. Since the Renaissance it has been used as a grave church – Raphael, who died in 1520, is interred here. Michelangelo said the Pantheon was built by angels. After your visit, enjoy a coffee or gelato in lively Pizzeria della Rotonda.

The Forum Romanum

One of the most popular tourist attractions on earth, the Forum, found between the Capitoline and Palatine hills, is home to temple ruins, basilicas and marble streets. Beginning in the second century B.C. the Forum was the commercial, political and religious center of Rome, home to courts and temples and grand public edifices, including law courts. After the fall of Rome the Forum was forgotten. It was used as a pasture during the Middle Ages – the excavation of the site commenced in the 18th century and continues today. Landmark structures include the Arco di Settimia Severo and the Curia, seat of the Roman senate.

The Vatican

[Vatican City](#), the world's smallest independent city-state, is the world's smallest, is the administrative and spiritual center of the Catholic Church. It is home to St. Peter's Basilica, a Renaissance masterpiece, and the [Vatican Museums](#), which house one of the world's greatest art collections. You can visit 11 different museums here, as well as Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel, the Vatican Gardens and Saint Peter's Basilica, the largest, richest, most spectacular cathedral in Italy. You'll find three indisputable masterpieces here: Michelangelo's Pietà, his breathtaking dome, and Bernini's baldachin (canopy) over the papal altar.

Piazza Navona – Rome's Most Celebrated Square

Famed for its ornate fountains and baroque palazzo, beloved Piazza Navona is Rome's most celebrated square. Built over the ruins of the 1st-century Stadio di Domiziano, it is the setting for Bernini's Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi, the Fountain of the Four Rivers, which is topped with an obelisk and festooned with a horse, a lion and a palm tree. The 19th century Fontana del Nettuno stands at the northern end of the piazza, while the Fontana del Moro, at the southern end, was designed in 1576. The largest building here is the Brazilian Embassy, the Palazzo Pamphili, originally built in the 17th century for Pope Innocent X.

The Spanish Steps

Named after the nearby Spanish Embassy to the Holy See, Rome's most famous staircase was financed by a French diplomat and designed by Italian Francesco De Sanctis. It was completed in 1725. Start at the top with a visit to Chiesa della Trinità dei Monti, then walk down the staircase to visit the lovely boat-shaped Barcaccia Fountain on Piazza di Spagna, built in 1627.

Kalimera Sitia (Crete)

Continuously inhabited since the Minoans established the first European civilization on the island of Crete, picturesque Sitia is the gateway to the lovely, untamed Lassithi Prefecture of Eastern Crete. If you're looking for luxurious resorts, pristine wilderness, ancient settlements, medieval towns, lush gorges and glittering beaches...start here. Terraced Sitia climbs a hill overlooking its lovely harbor, whose promenade is home to outstanding fish tavernas and delightful cafes. Stroll through town for a good glimpse of

its Venetian architecture, both new and old. Don't miss the Sitia Archaeological Museum, the Folklore Museum and the remains of the Venetian fortress, "Casarma" (from "casa di arma").

The Sitia hinterlands are home to a number of important archaeological sites, including the Minoan Palaces at Zakros and Petros, the Minoan settlement at Mochlos and the city of Praisos, which dates to the Hellenistic period. Toplou Monastery dates from the 15th century and has been lovingly restored and includes a museum and landscaped grounds. Other nearby religious sites include Agio Pantes, almost hidden in a deep Lassithi valley, Faneromeni Monastery, dating from the 15th century, and Agios Ioannis Theologos, which is found in a cave near Piskokefalo. Also worth a visit is Agios Nikolaos in Rousa Ekklesia, whose foundation is host to a fresh water spring.

Make sure to spend some time in Sitia's market, where you can purchase the authentic, local products for which Crete is famed the world over: olive oil (Cretan olive oil is the world's best), wine, raki, honey and herbs, all certified by the Union of Agricultural Cooperative of Sitia. We welcome you to the delicious splendor of Sitia.

History

Sitia has been inhabited since the time of the Minoans. It was built upon the site of ancient "Itia" or "Sitea." It was the home of Myson, one of the seven sages of Antiquity. As part of the Byzantine Empire, the city flourished as a commercial port. After the Venetian conquest of the island, Sitia became the largest city in eastern Crete, but it was leveled by a tremendous earthquake in 1508 – in 1538 the Barbarossa demolished much of Sitia after years of raids. The Venetians, forced to surrender Sitia to the Ottoman Turks, destroyed the city's fortifications in 1651. In the late 19th century the city was largely rebuilt and is today home to approximately 10,000 people.

Highlights

Casarma – The Venetian Garrison

Sitia's Venetian garrison, Casarma, dates to the late Byzantine period. Thanks to earthquakes, pirate raids and peasant revolts against the Venetians, it was partially destroyed by the time the Ottomans took Sitia and added to the battlements. Restored and open to the public, concerts and performances are held here during the summer. Casarma also boasts incredible panoramic views of Sitia and its harbor.

The Archaeological Museum – Minoan Treasures

The [Sitia Archaeological Museum](#) houses an important collection of local finds from between 3,500 B.C. and 500 A.D., with an emphasis on the Minoan civilization. Divided into five chronological sections, the museum's most significant exhibits include a collection of vases, clay tablets in Linear A script found in the archives at Zakros, a Hellenistic wheat mill, a wine press from the neo-palatial period and a male figurine of hippopotamus tusks and gold found at Roussolakkos, near Palekastro.

Folk Art Museum – Experience Life in a Traditional Sitian House

The [Sitia Folk Art Museum](#) exhibits embroidery, examples of traditional weaving, wood carvings, local dress, furniture, household items and icons from the 19th and early 20th centuries. The museum interior replicates a Sitian home from the period.

The Palace of Zakros

Discovered in 1961, the Minoan settlement of Kato Zakros is the smallest of the three Minoan palaces excavated in Crete and one of the Minoans' four main administrative centers. Its protected harbor made it a hub for eastern trade. The Palace of Zakros was originally built around 1900 B.C., rebuilt in 1600 B.C. and destroyed, along with other major Minoan settlements, in 1450 B.C. Its remains dominate this fascinating archaeological site.

The Monastery of Toplou – The Grand Monastery

This famous 15th century monastery is also called "The Grand Monastery", thanks to its massive grounds. Toplou played an important role during the Turkish occupation of Crete and during the Nazi occupation of the island during World War II. Dedicated to the Virgin and to St. John the Theologian, it is the only surviving monastery in the region.

Vai – A Rare Palm Forest

Vai is a protected natural area which is home to a rare palm forest – among the species here is an endemic Cretan palm tree first identified by the Minoans. The palms line the water's edge at Vai's Blue Flag beach, which is beloved by Cretan and visiting beachgoers for its pristine waters and fine-grained sands. According to legend, the forest grew from date pits spat upon the beach by Roman legionnaires.

Kalimera Spetses

The southernmost Saronic Island, pine-scented Spetses boasts a long naval tradition and a rich history. Famed for its contribution to the Greek War of Independence, the flag of the revolution was first raised on this beautiful island, on 3 April 1821. A favorite of Athenian weekenders for more than a century, Spetses lies just a few kilometers from the shores of the Peloponnese. The old town of Spetses is the island's only village, and its narrow cobbled streets are home to 19th century captains' mansions fronted by pebble-mosaic courtyards. Maybe you'd like to see it from a horse-drawn carriage? Beyond picturesque Dapia Harbor, Spetses is encircled by a simple road that takes you through rolling green hills and along crystal-clear coves where you'll find fantastic places to take a cool dip. On your return to town, bring your appetite – Spetses is home to some of the best restaurants in the Saronic. Author John Fowles lived here in the early Fifties, and Phraxos, the setting for his epic novel, *The Magus*, is a thinly-disguised Spetses. Spend a little time here – we're sure you'll be inspired.

History

Spetses has been inhabited since the Early Bronze Age (also called first Hellenic Era, about 2500 B.C. During the 1400s, the island's population increased significantly, thanks to people leaving villages along the Peloponnesian coast for Spetses. Frequent pirate attacks made the formation of permanent settlements impossible until the 17th century. The first

medieval settlement on the island was Kastelli, a fortified village in the northwest. The 18th century saw the beginning of the island's golden era. This is when shipbuilding commenced in earnest on the island, and Spetses became home to a powerful fleet of merchant ships. These ships were converted to warships and played an important role during the Greek Revolution. Spetses contributed ships to Orlov's Revolt, in 1769, during the Peloponnesian War, only to be punished for it by the Ottoman Turks, who demolished Kastelli. During the War of Independence, in 1821, Spetses dedicated its entire fleet to the war.

Highlights

Bouboulina's Museum – She Was a Heroine of the War of Independence

Bouboulina was a heroine of the War of Independence. The widow of a wealthy naval captain who fought pirates off the coast of Spetses, during the war the patriotic Bouboulina had her own private army of Spetsiots. On 13 March 1821, twelve days before the official commencement of war, Bouboulina raised the first revolutionary flag on the main mast of her warship, the Agamemnon. Built near the end of the 1600s, Bouboulina's house is shaped like the Greek letter pi, "Π," which at the time indicated the owner of the house was an important figure. Now the home of [Bouboulina's Museum](#), the house features a carved wood Florentine ceiling, furniture from the 1700s and 1800s, a collection of weapons from the period and rare books.

The House of Hatzigiannis Mexis – The Spetses Museum

Completed in 1798, the House of Hatzigiannis Mexis, now a museum, was donated to the Hellenic Republic by the Mexis family in 1938. A magnificent traditional villa, the house once belonged to the first governor of Spetses. It is now the [Spetses Museum](#), which houses traditional costumes, weaponry, household artifacts and a bust of Mexi by sculptor Byron Kesse. Other exhibits include pottery from the Early Helladic period to the 18th century, sculpture and tombstones from the Roman period, Russian and post-Byzantine icons and important artifacts from the War of Independence, including weapons, the flag of the revolution, ecclesiastical objects, a collection of local costumes, the bones of Bouboulina, historical manuscripts and pictures of Greek freedom fighters.

Cathedral of Ayios Nikolaos

The Greek flag of independence flew was raised at the Cathedral of Ayios Nikolaos in Spetses on 3 April 1821. It was also here that the body of Paul Bonaparte, a nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte who came to Greece to fight on for the revolution, was kept in a barrel of rum for three years.

Panayia Armata

Panayia Armata is a beautiful rural church built between 1824 and 1830 to honor the victory of Greek seamen over the Ottoman fleet.

Kalimera Thessaloniki

Greece's "Second City" is a thriving, cosmopolitan port on the Thermaic Gulf and the gateway to spectacular northern Greece. It is known for its multicultural tapestry of unique neighborhoods, its great food, its vibrant cultural life, its fantastic shopping and its important religious sites, including Agios Dimitrios, the largest church in Greece, and many other exquisite Byzantine chapels. You'll love the city's paralia, a waterfront promenade and park, where the breeze comes off the Gulf and whispers through the trees. Among the city's Christian monuments, some on the UNESCO World Heritage List, are its beautiful churches, a few built on the Greek cross plan and others on the three-nave basilica plan, all of them built between the 4th and 15th centuries. Agios Dimitrios, the largest church in Greece, was rebuilt after it was destroyed in the fire of 1917.

Thessaloniki is as rich in museums and cultural treasures as it is in holy sites. The Museum of Byzantine Culture, winner of the "European Museum Prize" from the Council of Europe in 2005, exhibits more than 2,900 pieces, including icons from the 15th to the 19th centuries and fine jewelry. The four-storey Folklife and Ethnological Museum of Macedonia-Thrace, in the art nouveau-influenced Old Government House, is home to more than 20,000 items from the pre-industrial age in the regions of Macedonia and Thrace – it is one of the richest collections of its kind in Greece. The Archeological Museum of Thessaloniki, near the Museum of Byzantine Culture, contains significant area finds, including crowns and armor belonging to Philip II of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great; the Statue of Harpocrates; the Derveni Krater; a head of Serapis; a Roman marble sarcophagus, and detailed floor mosaics of marine mythology. The exhibits are arranged in chronological order, so you can follow history as you progress through the galleries.

In addition to its sacred sites and fascinating monuments, the historical center of Thessaloniki is home to a number of inviting, well-groomed city squares, particularly Ancient Agora Square, Aristotelous Square and Navarinou Square, all of them perfect for shopping, and for people-watching and impromptu "sunbathing" at their bustling cafes. If shopping is your passion, you'll be thrilled to cross the threshold of [Mediterranean Cosmos](#), a massive mall and outlet center.

So is this splendid city a place where the present accommodates the past, or vice versa? We invite you to give yourself to the "Bride of the Thermaic" and decide for yourself.

History

The "co-capital" of Greece, Thessaloniki, or "Salonica," was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia Prima, from 146 A.D. until 395 A.D., when it became part of the Byzantine Empire. The Ottomans took control of the city in 1430, which was reunited with Greece in 1912. This is a holy city, first visited by St. Paul in the winter of 49-50 A.D. He preached here and founded the area's first Christian church, whose ruins lie nearby the Arch. St. Paul wrote two epistles to the ancient Thessalonians during his sojourn here, and these letters are some of the first texts of the New Testament. Two of Thessaloniki's churches, Agios Dimitrios and the Church of the Acheiropoitos, date to the 5th century.

Highlights

The Vision of Ezekiel

“The Vision of Ezekiel,” in Osios David, built in the late 5th or early 6th century, was hidden beneath plaster until 1921. It is unique for its depiction of Christ without a beard.

Agia Sofia

Agia Sofia was built in the mid-8th century and, after spending a number of centuries as a mosque, it was reconsecrated in 1912. Its mosaics date to the 9th and 10th centuries. The portico formerly at its entrance was destroyed during an Italian air raid in 1941.

Agios Dimitrios

5th century Agios Dimitrios is the largest church in Greece. The patron saint of the city, Dimitrios was a Roman soldier killed around AD 303 at this former Roman bath site on orders of Galerius, who was infamous for his persecution of Christians. Agios Dimitrios was rebuilt after it was destroyed in the fire of 1917. Five 8th century mosaics span its altar.

The Kamara – the Triumphal Arch of Galerius

Galerius, then Caesar of the East, left his mark upon the city with the Triumphal Arch of Galerius, the “Kamara,” and the Rotonda. The Arch was built in 303 to commemorate the victory of Galerius over the Persians in 297 A.C., and it’s chiseled with scenes of the battle; it is found at the end of Via Egnatia, which was also built by the Romans.

The Rotonda – A Mausoleum for Galerius

Just north of the arch stands the massive Rotonda, which historians believe was constructed as a mausoleum for Galerius. Now closed, it has been used as a mosque and was for a time the Church of Agios Georgios.

The White Tower – Thessaloniki’s Most Famous Monument

The city’s most famous monument, the White Tower, along the paralia, was built in 1430 and today houses Byzantine icons and historical displays on its several floors – ascend to the top floor for a wonderful view of the paralia.

Kalimera Tunis

Tunis, a sprawling maze of ancient streets and alleyways, is a national treasure and perhaps the most European of North African cities. Its back streets are busy with working artisans, its cavernous souks sell everything from slippers to shisha pipes, and its residential quarters welcome you with grand doors painted with bright colors. Like a wild board game, the most significant pieces – its hammams, medersas, mosques and palaces – are scattered across it, as if tossed here and there. Start your day when the call of the muezzins is a clarion sound across the early morning: make your way to a breakfast stall or café and, as you and this mesmerizing city slowly wake, marvel at the patina of empires upon it.

The medina is a dervish of mosques, shuttered town houses, souqs and squares delimited by the straight colonial lines of the Ville Nouvelle. The center of “French” Tunis is wide, tree-lined Avenue Habib Bourguiba – the heart of the Jasmine Revolution, it is once again busy with chic shoppers and coffee lovers.

Beyond the city proper, the Carthage National Museum and the Bardo National Museum house treasures from three millennia of history. For beaches, make your way to the beautiful northern suburbs. Ever-photogenic, scenes from [Monty Python’s Life of Brian](#) (1979) and from Anthony Minghella’s Oscar-winning film, [The English Patient](#) (1996), were filmed here. Travel with us to complex, fascinating Tunis – we’ll bring it into perfect focus for you.

History

Founded by the Phoenicians in Tunisia circa 1000 B.C., Carthage, close to major shipping routes, was a major power in the ancient world. The Carthaginians battled Rome in the Punic Wars until they were defeated in 146 B.C. Following its conquest, Carthage was a Roman province for over five centuries. Both Carthage and Tunis were destroyed during the Third Punic War, but Tunis was rebuilt and became increasingly Romanized, although it remained much smaller than Carthage. The city was eventually Christianized and later became a bishopric. Today Carthage is a residential district of Tunis.

The Arabs invaded Tunisia in the 7th century, bringing Islam to the area – today approximately 99% of the people of Tunisia are Muslim. Tunisia remained a cultural center of the Arab world and became part of the Ottoman Empire in the 1500s. Three centuries later, the French took Tunisia and held it until it gained its independence in 1956.

In the 7th century the Arabs invaded Tunisia and brought with them the religion of Islam. Today nearly 99 percent of Tunisians are Muslim. Tunisia remained a center of Arab culture and became part of the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century. Then in 1881, the French took control and remained in control until Tunisia became an independent country in 1956. The Arab Spring began on the streets of Tunis in 2011.

Highlights

The Cathedral of St. Vincent de Paul – A Wonder in the Ville Nouvelle

The custard-colored Cathedral of St. Vincent de Paul was built in the Ville Nouvelle in 1883. Famed for its mélange of Byzantine, Gothic and Moorish elements, the church holds regular masses in French and Italian. Opposite the cathedral stands a statue of Ibn Khaldun, the great Tunis-born Islamic teacher and philosopher.

The Roman Baths of Antonius Pius

The remains of the Roman Baths of Antonius Pius date to the 2nd century. Found near the coast, the preserved segments of the baths, the third-largest in Roman Europe, include

the heating, personal and resting rooms. Beside the baths is an open-air museum where an early Christian basilica, mosaic floors, Punic tombs and sarcophagi are on exhibit.

Sidi-Bou-Saïd

This picturesque blue-and-whitewashed Tunisian village 10 kilometers from Tunis overlooks the Bay of Tunis and is famed for its ornate window grills, all painted a deep Mediterranean blue. The colorful arched doorways of its homes give way to courtyards overflowing with bougainvillea and geraniums. Wander through its cobbled alleys and up and down its stone staircases to find the best deals on local handicrafts.

The Old City-Medina

The old city of Tunis, the Medina, dates to the end of the 7th century, shortly after the conquest of Tunis by Arabs, and it was the center of the city until the French occupation of Tunisia began in 1881. Its narrow streets and alleys are crowded with cafes and shops selling brass and copperware, carpets, clothing and shoes, leather goods, perfumes, spices and other handicrafts. It's an experience for all five senses! Come ready to bargain in the souks, and be on the lookout for medieval palaces and mosques.

The Carthage National Museum

The [Carthage National Museum](#) houses artifacts from ancient Carthage, including monumental statues, mosaics, and household items like kohl pots and razors. An excavated quarter of the Punic city, the Byrsa Quarter, once home to 400,000 people, is on the grounds of this outstanding museum. The Byrsa Quarter, an excavated quarter of the Punic city, once home to 400,000 people and surrounded by 13m-high walls, is also in the grounds of the museum. The panoramic view of Tunis from the museum is extraordinary.

The Mosque of Sidi Mahres – The Finest Mosque in the Medina

The Mosque of Sidi Mahres was built in 1692 and named for the patron saint of Tunis, who saved the city after its capture by Abu Yazd during a the 944 rebellion against Fatimid rule – his tomb is found opposite the entrance to the mosque. Sidi Mahres is one of the finest Ottoman buildings in Tunis: its cluster of white domes appears like a pile of eggs, but there's no minaret.

The National Bardo Museum

Just four kilometers northwest of the center of Tunis, the [National Bardo Museum](#) is housed in the 19th century Huessenite Palace of the Beys of Tunis, an impressive building with beautiful tiled walls and wooden ceilings. The Bardo is renowned for its incredible collection of mosaics, rare Phoenician artifacts from Carthage, early pagan objects and important Christian and Muslim relics – don't skip the Virgil room and its spectacular Roman mosaic from Sousse.

Kalimera Valletta (Malta)

Malta is an archipelago just less than 100 kilometers south of Sicily – only its three largest islands, Malta Island (Malta), Gozo (Għawdex) and Comino (Kemmuna) are inhabited. Often described as an open-air museum, the baroque capital of Malta, Valletta, is inextricably linked to the history of the military and charitable Order of St John of Jerusalem. Ruled successively by the Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs and the Order of the Knights of St John. Valletta's 320 monuments, all within an area of 55 hectares, have made it one of the most concentrated historic areas in the world and a [UNESCO World Heritage site](#). You'll find plenty of urban bustle at Triq il-Merkanti and Triq ir-Repubblika, but don't skip the glimpses you'll get of everyday life along the quiet side streets in this elegant gem of a city. After a baroque stretch of sightseeing, find great fresh fish or traditional rabbit stew, paired with the perfect local wine, in one of Malta's exuberant restaurants. Valletta, the world's biggest little city? Come go back in time.

History

Malta was ruled successively by the Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs and the Order of the Knights of St John. It was the Knights of St. John who built Valletta during the 1500s and 1600s. The British made the island a crown colony of the British Empire in 1814. During World War II the Luftwaffe and the Aeronautica Militare bombed Malta repeatedly, in an attempt to destroy its Allied bases. Great Britain awarded the people of Malta the George Cross for their defense of the island during the war, then granted Malta its independence in 1964. Four decades later, in 2004, Malta was the smallest of the ten countries to join the EU – its membership in the Eurozone began in 2008. Today Malta is home to just over 400,000 people.

Highlights

The Three Cities of Cottonera – Historic Fortified Towns

South of Valletta, across the Grand Harbor, lie the historic fortified towns of [Vittoriosa](#), Cospicua and Senglea, the three cities of Cottonera. Vittoriosa is home to Fort St. Angelo, which was rebuilt and strengthened by the Knights of St. John in 1530 – it was the residence of the Grand Master of the Order until 1571 and the headquarters of la Valette during the Great Siege. Vittoriosa is also home to the Inquisitor's Palace, which was built in the 1530s – it served as law courts until the 1570s, when it became the tribunal and prison of the Inquisition. Don't miss the former prison cells, upon whose walls you'll find elaborate carvings by former prisoners.

Mdina – The Old Capital of Malta

Mdina, the old capital of Malta, is found on one of Malta's highest hills. A typical medieval town, the "Silent City" is one of the few remaining Renaissance fortified cities in Europe, and its narrow streets are impossible to resist – make sure to visit its palazzos and the cathedral before finishing your tour at the Ramparts for a breathtaking panoramic view of the island.

St. John's Co-Cathedral and Museum

Architect Gerolamo Cassar designed St. John's Co-Cathedral, Malta's most impressive church. Built between 1573 and 1578, it was the cathedral wherein the Knights of St. John met for communal worship. A papal decree in 1816 raised its stats to equal to that of St. Paul's in Mdina, the official seat of the Archbishop of Malta, and St. John's has been a "co-cathedral" ever since. Every wall of this colorful treasure trove is covered with rich ornamentation. Its nave is long and low, and its floor is comprised of marble slabs of different colors. The vault is covered with Mattia Preti paintings illustrating the life of St. John the Baptist, but the cathedral's most famous painting is The Beheading of St John the Baptist by Caravaggio.

Marsaxlokk – Fish Market as Spectacle

Malta's main fishing village erupts on Sunday morning when the docks of Marsaxlokk become a massive fish market. It's a true spectacle and not to be missed. Follow it with a delectable lunch of fresh seafood in one the village's picturesque restaurants.

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BROCHURE TEXT

Travel Journal

Louis Cruises

July 2013

Day One – Morning

It's a thrill when the ship's horn blasts and the Olympia pulls away from her dock in Piraeus and begins her restrained, steady progress across the harbor. Even here, barely out of port, the blue before and beyond us is staggering, glazed with a sunlight more brilliant than any I've seen before. This part of the Mediterranean has been traversed for millennia. By now these routes have seen millions of passengers – sailors, soldiers, fishermen, merchants, crusaders, pleasure-seekers...today, however, the surface of the sea looks brand new, a shimmering gift, a mirror held up to the sun which seems to pause a bit, high above us in the azure Grecian sky. An invitation. My wife and I climb the stairs to Deck 9 and stand at the prow. I feel like I've been waiting for this breeze all summer.

"This is perfect!" my wife says. "I could sleep up here!"

We park ourselves at a table near the Pool Grill and wait for it to open. We're pretty beat up after a rather overheated morning spent racing from Venizelos Airport to Piraeus, but we're not too tired to pull two chairs up to one of the windows and slide it open. Either on Deck 9 or below, it doesn't matter, that breeze is still miraculous. I watch a gull glide beneath the bow of the ship, inches above the surface of the water. I feel like a clock that's let itself stop for a moment. I look over at my wife and she smiles.

"You look like a kid," she says. Like the Olympia *Daily News* says, happy cruising. I ask my wife what she wants to do before we arrive at Mykonos.

"There's aqua-aerobics at 2:00 PM, and at 2:30 you have a choice, an origami lesson or a Greek language lesson. There's also a Greek mythology quiz at 3:30."

"Let's start with lunch," my wife says, and we do. It's perfect. I treat myself to a double cheddar cheeseburger with slices of fresh tomato as red as strawberries while my wife tucks into a plate she's piled with salads and fresh bread. We sit beside our open window, accompanied by our breeze and a selection of songs played by a guitarist and a keyboardist who have set up between the buffet and the pool – they play The Beatles, Jobim, Bob Marley...it's a perfect summer vacation soundtrack. I order a cold Mythos, a Greek lager I've never tried before, and it's delicious, cold and smooth. We stuff ourselves and stumble off to our cozy cabin on Deck 5, where our window looks out to the sea. We sleep through some of the exquisite, sunny miles between Piraeus and Mykonos, which means, unfortunately, that we miss a Zumba class, a cocktail demonstration and Name That Tune in the Oklahoma Lounge. I wish we could do it all.

Day One – Evening

I wake before my wife and sneak over to Sana Spa and Beauty Salon, which is between the Fiesta Casino and the Oklahoma Lounge. There's a fifteen percent discount today on all spa services, including massages, and I hand over my magnetic card to the lovely girl at the desk and purchase a 20 minute massage for my wife. I can use the card for

everything – drinks, snacks and toiletries in the shop next door to the Duty Free Shop, to purchase portraits...there's actually a professional photographer on board.

The Olympia is a grande dame, regal and charming. Some of the larger cruise ships seem like floating cities, but this feels like a floating hotel – it reminds me of some of the places I stayed with my parents when I was a kid, mirrored elevators and the quiet roar of a vacuum cleaner from somewhere down a carpeted hallway. The wooden decks and railings evoke the glamour and grandeur of a bygone era, when you booked passage on a steamship, when travel was elegant and luxurious, something beyond the everyday. That's how it feels on the Olympia, singular.

When I get back to the cabin my wife is awake, unpacking our clothes. It's amazing that we'll visit six islands, but we only have to unpack once.

"Where've you been?" she asks me.

"Why don't you pop up to Sana and find out?"

"You're kidding!" She kisses me. "Can I shower? Do I have enough time? When do we land at Mykonos?" Yes, yes and yes, I tell her. She jumps into the shower while I finish unpacking. "The water pressure is fantastic!" she calls from the bathroom.

The cocktail of the day is a Mediterranean Greek Mojito, which is Skinis, soda, basil and lemon wedges, and I am again standing on the prow of the ship, now with a Mediterranean Greek Mojito in each hand, waiting for my wife to join me as we approach Mykonos. She walks toward me looking refreshed and lovely. She takes her Mojito.

"I feel like a different person," she says. We sip our drinks and watch the Olympia dock. The island is splendid, bare rock save for its white buildings climbing the hills like steps. From the deck they are bright and brittle icons, daring to defy the sun which, even at 6:00 PM, seems to drench every inch of the world. We disembark and board the bus to Mykonos Town as scooters zip by us and up the hills.

How can a place visited by so many people be so quiet? We find a small taverna on the outskirts of town right on the water with a view of the harbor and the setting sun, which turns a fleshly pink as it bids us "kali nichta" and disappears into the sea. On the small beach beside the taverna, within arm's length of our table, I find a few pieces of beach glass. I used to collect it when I was a kid, walking along the beach with my mom, and I remember a line from ee cummings, "it's always ourselves we find in the sea." After a plate of grilled octopus, we leave the taverna and stroll toward the center of town, where it seems a magic switch has been flicked and every light has come up at once. My wife and I walk the narrow streets, past shoebox ice cream parlors and jewelers, beneath boughs of bougainvillea, then along the placid harbor and back to the buses, the final pink sheen of sunset fading from the surface of the sea.

We return to the Olympia so tired we are bleary. Our bed has been turned down, and our beach towels have been folded into the shape of a lily. Our bathroom is spotless and now home to a small platoon of shampoos, bath gels and skin creams, which are standing in formation beside our sink. Even the end of each roll of toilet paper has been folded into a triangle, like a sail, and tucked beneath the bottom of the roll. Kali nichta.

Day Two – Morning

These guys are serious about showing us everything. We're up at 6:30 AM to shower and dress – we have to be in the Can Can Lounge by 7:10 am. "I love this shower!" my wife says in the bathroom. "The water is so hot!" I sit up in bed and look out the window – blue sky, blue sea. I'm reminded of a poem by Cavafy, the great Greek poet, "Morning Sea": "Here let me stop. Let me too look at nature...the morning sea and cloudless sky." We arrive at Kusadasi, on the Turkish coast, within the hour.

Today's *Daily News* has already been slipped under our door. It includes a concise description of each excursion, the schedule for the gym, the pool, the sauna, the hours for each restaurant and every activity on the ship between 7:10 am and midnight (Latin line dancing in the Oklahoma Lounge). I'm starting to feel torn between the excursions and the onboard activities, and we've barely been at sea for 24 hours. Today there's an afternoon tea at 4:00 pm, and the recipe of the day is spanakopita – I'm saving all of the recipes, so my wife and I can attempt them back home. We are of course going to try to make it to the Greek cooking demonstration in the Lido Bar, at 1:45, and there's also a 2:00 pm Greek Dance class in the Oklahoma Lounge. Since we're off to Ephesus, once the mightiest city in Asia Minor, we won't be able to participate in the 9:00 am walkathon, on Deck 9, nor will we be able to make it to "Wake-Up and Stretch" in the Oklahoma Lounge. Our excursion to Patmos, to see the Cave of the Apocalypse and the Monastery of St. John, begins at 4:15 pm, so we have some time on the ship this afternoon. My plan is to send my wife to the Greek Cooking demonstration while I sneak off to the Clipper Bar for Team Trivia and an ice-cold Mythos, my new favorite lager.

We leave the room with just enough time to pick up some "Grab & Go" coffee at the Clipper Bar. Our cabin steward and stewardess, who seem to be patrolling our hallway at all hours of the day and night, greet us with a bright "kalimera!" I have no idea how anyone can be so sunny and genuinely cheery at this hour, especially since they've probably been up since dawn.

We sit down with our coffees on a banquette in the Can Can Lounge and await our bus assignments. The Shore Excursion team has the entire disembarkation process completely organized, and we soon descend to Deck 1 to get on our buses to Ephesus. It's another glorious morning.

Kusadasi is a lovely little beach town. It seems to be rousing itself from sleep as drive away from the port toward the ancient city of Ephesus. My wife turns to me and says, "I can't believe we're in Turkey." It's the first time we've ever set foot in Asia.

Ephesus is a stunning marvel in the hills above the Aegean coast. It was founded by the ancient Greeks and became the first and most significant city in the Roman province of Asia and one of its key ports. At one time home to a quarter-million people, it is believed the Virgin Mary lived and died here, and that Paul wrote his Corinthian letters here. Millennia ago the Aegean receded west, stranding the city on its sun-seared hillsides.

Our guide, an affable, charming local, does his best to keep us in the shade as much as possible as we begin our tour. Many of the city's columns are still standing, as

are the terrace houses and the magnificent Library of Celsus which, along with the 25,000-seat amphitheater built by the Greeks, is the centerpiece of the site. We stroll down the Arcadian road through the center of the city; we run our fingers over the ancient Greek inscriptions on the columns as we pass.

In the Terrace Houses we climb every staircase to the top of the structure, stopping to peer agape into homes from centuries ago – the mosaic of a lion on the floor of one of the houses, still in perfect condition, is worth every flight of steps. From the Terrace Houses we approach the Library. We climb the stairs and spend some time inside the structure, for a bit of shade and to wonder at how so much of it – including its façade, two stories of columns – has remained intact for so many centuries. I have never seen anything like this, with the exception of the Coliseum, the Forum and the Parthenon – these are the only ruins that rival Ephesus in terms of scale and preservation. I am again reminded of Cavafy: “If there’s something more you seek, then simply look. The city is our teacher, the acme of what is Greek, of every discipline, of every art the peak.”

Day Two – Afternoon

Welcome to the Dodecanese. I hate to leave the air conditioned splendor of the Olympia, but we are now on our way to Patmos to visit the Cave of the Apocalypse and the Monastery of St. John the Evangelist, both important pilgrimage sites, and the tender boats are waiting to take us to the port at Skala. From there our bus wends its way up the pine-blanketed mountain high above Skala, toward the Cave, where it is believed St. John, the Theologian, wrote the Book of Revelation after the risen Christ appeared to him. Looking through the rear window of our air conditioned bus, Skala occupies an isthmus connecting the two larger, mountainous segments of Patmos – you can walk east from the harbor at Skala to the beach at Hokhlakás Bay. It’s funny how Patmos, so far, has been an experience in varying scale – it appears on the horizon, massive and imposing, then shrinks to the harbor at Skala, with its quaint tavernas and cafes and souvenir kiosks, then expands again, filling the frame as our bus climbs toward the Cave. As we park and leave the bus to walk down the path toward the Cave, I think this might be a decent explanation of faith, and perhaps of love: it’s an endless variation of scale, a journey back and forth between the miniature and the immeasurable.

The Cave is at the bottom of a long, twisting stairway. It was certainly a beautiful place to write anything, even the Book of Revelations – it’s now a chapel with a view down to Skala and the sea. I’m convinced Greece is so beautiful it must be blessed, and that we humble travelers, awed by her splendor, are the lucky beneficiaries of her largesse. Regardless of our faith we are all pilgrims, here to surrender ourselves to her dazzling beauty, her pine-scented breezes, her blazing sun, the sweet blue hues of her seas...

We leave the Cave for Chora, the walled city at the island’s highest point and home to the St. John Monastery, founded by Ioannis “the Blessed” Christodoulos in 1088. We again climb, this time up a cobblestone path with a view down to Skala, past boutiques and souvenir shops and galleries toward the monastery. We enter its courtyard, which houses the Chapel of the Virgin and a museum. I walk behind the Chapel to a smaller courtyard, lured to repose for a few moments by the quiet, which has a sweetness to it.

Day Two – Evening

Tonight we finally make it to the Seven Seas, the a la carte restaurant on Deck 4. Outside the entrance there's a small band, five members of the Olympia staff, one of them with an acoustic guitar, and they're serenading the diners with their rendition of The Beatles' "You've Got to Hide Your Love Away." This is another thing I love about this cruise, there's music everywhere. The maitre d'hôtel greets us with a warm "Kalispera!" and shows us to our table which, like every other table, is laid with crisp white linen and sparkling silverware and, best of all, has a view of the Aegean. My wife, a committed oenophile, picks up the wine list straightaway.

"Wow!" she says. "They have so many Greek wines, it's amazing. They have wines from Santorini, from the Peloponnese, from western Greece, from Macedonia...let's try the Roditis." We have left the harbor at Skala. "I'll read you the description." My wife loves menus and, when ordering a dish, she likes to read the entire menu entry to our waiter or waitress. "As the name implies, this is a rose colored grape that produces an elegant dry white and light wine with citrus flavors and a pleasant aftertaste."

"Order us two glasses," I say. Fresh bread arrives, and glasses full of ice water, both wonderful after such a hot and hectic day. I pour some of the Greek olive oil on our table into a dish and push a piece of bread through it. It's delicious, golden and sweet. We order our wine and open our menus. I don't know where to start. The inside covers of the menu provide descriptions of the core ingredients of Greek cuisine and how they are used: olives and olive oil, onions and garlic, artichokes, tomatoes, eggplant and, of course, feta cheese. It turns out, according to my menu, that saffron was used by the ancient Greeks. "I'm learning something new every day."

"What are you having? There are so many Greek dishes I've never had before, and they all sound delicious. I'm going to try the fasolia mavromatika."

"What is it?" The light and healthy dishes are designated as such – I'm trying to sail around them. Come on, I'm on vacation.

"It's black-eyed peas with herbs and a mint vinaigrette. For my main dish I'm going to have the psari plaki, fish fillet baked in a white wine broth topped with onion, celery and tomatoes. What about you?" I swallow a mouthful of oil-drenched bread.

"Kotopoulo Arachova!" It's chicken stuffed with cheeses, tomatoes and herbs.

"I figured as much."

After such an adventurous day we are ready to eat, and we do. The appetizers appear and, almost immediately after, the plates on which they arrived disappear. This might have something to do with how hungry we are, but it also seems as if there are about ten people waiting on us. My water glass is always full, more fresh bread arrives...we feel like royalty. Our main courses arrive, and we tuck in.

"This is lovely," my wife says. "I have to find this recipe online."

"Can you find this one online, too?" My chicken is incredibly rich – it says 'stuffed' with cheeses in the menu, and they're not kidding. We devour our meals. Our dessert arrives, something called "galaktobourekko," milk and semolina pudding with zest of lemon. The maitre d'hôtel seats an American gentleman at our table, and we of course ask him where he's from and how he's enjoying his cruise, what he does for work. He tells us he's just retired from his second career as a certified Lexus mechanic.

"I used to manage restaurants and nightclubs," he tells us. "I retired and moved to Florida, but I couldn't just sit around, so I went through the Lexus training program. At fifty!" It's only the end of the second day, but our cruise is starting to feel like a floating party, one at which we know all the other guests.

There's a show called "A Capella" in the Can Can Lounge at 10:00 PM featuring performances of classic Greek songs. "Disco! Disco!" starts at the same time in the Oklahoma Lounge, and there's Latin Line Dancing at 11:30, and Happy Hour, but I just can't do it. I'm sun-baked and stuffed like...well, like a Kotopoulo Arachova. My wife obliges me.

"It's hard getting old," she says. "I understand." We return to our cabin, where our beach towels have been folded into the shape of a snake. I shuck my clothes and fall into bed. I can't keep my eyes open.

"I love all the stories," I mumble to my wife, and I fall asleep. We sail toward Rhodes.

Day 3 – Morning

We are gently prodded awake as the crew ties the Olympia to the dock in the harbor at Rhodes Town, which is good, since we have to be in the Can Can Lounge at 7:15 AM. Another quick shower, another hot Grab & Go coffee from the Clipper Lounge, and we're seated in the Can Can Lounge, ready to roll. Our cruise director greets us with a hearty "Kalimera!" She gives us our bus assignments, and we're off to Deck 1 to disembark, the walled medieval city beckoning from across the harbor.

Our bus whisks us south to Lindos with our guide, another informative and gracious host. Like our previous guides, she lives here, and her knowledge of Rhodes is evident within moments of our departure. As with our other guides, it's like she's taking us on a tour of her home, which she is.

Ancient Lindos was one of world's great cities, a harbor on a peninsula on the southeastern coast of Rhodes. We park and walk down to the entrance to the village of Lindos, a series of winding and, thankfully, shaded alleys that ribbon their way, seemingly without rhyme or reason, between the whitewashed walls of the village's myriad cafes, jewelers, juice bars and t-shirt shops. Lindos is delightfully free of cars, but there are donkeys for hire, should you decide you're not up for the climb to the Acropolis. My wife and I decide to challenge ourselves, and we hoof it up the mountain, more than 120 meters. Our guide tells us the original temple at Lindos was built in 1100 BC, but the ruins we will visit today date from the sixth century BC.

It's a serious climb, and just before we arrive at the entrance to the Knights' Castle we find a snack bar with a view up the coast. We take a table beneath an umbrella beside a low retaining wall. Far below us a few isolated yachts sit motionless upon the surface of the Aegean. My wife orders a frappe for herself and a fresh-squeezed orange juice for me. I take a mouthful of it and close my eyes. I listen to my wife sip her frappe, the song of the crickets beyond the wall, the soft hum of the snack bar's freezer.

Refreshed, we tackle the innumerable steps leading up to the Temple of Athena at the summit. It's a steep ascent, and hot, and I'm happy we have water with us. The *Olympia Excursion Magazine* describes the view as "breathtaking," and I can't disagree.

"It is breathtaking," my wife says. As with Ephesus, it's incredible how much of the Temple is still intact. We wander amongst the magnificent columns, down the stone staircase...we take a few moments to hide from the sun in the shadow of one of the columns, which tower into the sky, and look out at an endless sea. I wonder if the ancient Greeks felt the way up here that I do. Stilled. Unconquerable. On top of the world.

After Lindos we spend some time in the Old Town of Rhodes, where we find ourselves amidst quaint pedestrian streets lined with jewelers and ceramics shops. The main square is surrounded by busy cafes, but the side streets, where the locals live, are quiet and lightly-trafficked. We walk by an elderly woman enjoying a coffee on her veranda, and she invites us up to join her. She speaks very little English, but she pours us two strong Greek coffees and nods, again and again, as we tell her, at an ever-increasing volume, how much we love Rhodes.

We tour the Palace of the Grand Masters at the top of the Street of the Knights, Ippoton, which is home to a number of foreign consulates. My wife loves the Palace, particularly the juxtaposition of the Hellenistic and Roman mosaics on its floors with its 18th century furniture. The massive grand staircase is dark and cool beneath a long vaulted ceiling.

"It reminds me of the Beast's castle in *Beauty and the Beast*," my wife says. We return to the courtyard, which comprises long rows of gray squares with thick wheat-colored borders. The squares have been laid equidistantly from each other, giving the impression of a giant, somewhat monochromatic checkerboard on which the squares have paused in a synchronized separation from each other. The entire courtyard is flooded with sunlight.

We may be far more technologically advanced than our medieval forebears, but I'm not certain our world is better designed.

Day 3 – Afternoon

It's bright and hot and we're ready to spend some time swimming in the Aegean, as opposed to sailing upon it, and we take a cab from Rhodes Town to Tsampika for lunch and a swim. On the way, our cab driver tells us Rhodes is one of seven cities claiming to be the birthplace of Homer.

Tsampika Beach is a small crescent of sand beneath rocky sun-scorched cliffs and rolling hills. Our driver leaves us near a taverna across from the beach, where we pick up two gyros to go and some cold sodas and a bottle of water. We rent two sun beds and an umbrella, unwrap our gyros, and settle in for a long afternoon of absolutely nothing.

The water at Tsampika is impossibly clear, a blue I've only seen unwrapping a hard candy, and I spend most of the afternoon simply lolling in it. My wife walks into the water and kisses me on the cheek.

"This is absolutely splendid," she says. She looks back toward the cliffs to the north, toward the low hills behind the car park. "I love it." I'm reminded again of Cavafy poem, "Voice from the Sea": "The sea exhales a hidden voice – a voice that enters into our heart and gladdens it." We spend the next few hours in the water, listening to that hidden voice, letting it gladden our hearts.

Day 3 – Evening

Just about 6:00 PM, as we're sailing from Rhodes, we're racing through the casino. The whole room seems to chime behind us as we roll past Sana, where the girl who booked my wife's massage gives us a quick wave. We step into the Oklahoma Lounge for a classical concert with Stan and Yuri on piano and violin, respectively. What a perfect way to start the evening, with a cold Mythos and an hour of live, uninterrupted classical favorites. My wife orders the cocktail of the day, a Cosmopolis, which is Skinis, vodka, cranberry juice and fresh-squeezed lemon juice. The bar menu explains everything, and includes color photographs.

"I love this mastiha stuff," she says. Unfortunately we're missing Bingo in the Clipper Bar and "Sail-away music" with the Plug N' Play Duo on the Lido Pool Bar Deck, but you can only ride one donkey at a time.

The staff at the Seven Seas makes us feel like we're regulars the moment we show up for dinner. The boys out front are tearing through The Beatles' "All My Loving," and we stop so I can harmonize with them at the chorus.

"Why don't you try some fish, Honey," my wife says, "since we're at sea." Tonight's menu is fantastic, as expected, and includes a number of Greek dishes I've never tried.

"Sorry to disappoint you, but I'm going to start with the savory boureki, move on to the Pork Cordon Bleu, then I'm going to finish with Greek yogurt with honey and walnuts." The boureki is filo dough stuffed with mince meat and chopped vegetables and deep fried, and the Pork Cordon Bleu is pan fried tenderloin stuffed with Anthotyro cheese and smoked bacon!

"Why don't you have some meat with your meat?" Our water glasses are full, again.

"Come on, Baby! I'm on vacation." My wife smiles. She turns to the waiter, who has just set a fresh loaf of bread on our table. "Good evening, sir."

"Good evening, madam. How was your day on Rhodes?"

"Fantastic!"

"I'm very happy to hear it. What can I get for you?"

"I'll have the variety of cold Greek appetizers, tzatziki, stuffed grape leaves, olives, fava and white taramosalata, followed by the Mpouredeto of Corfu, Corfu style sole fillet in a light spicy tomato and paprika sauce with the krokos kozanis rice pilaf." Our waiter grins at my wife.

"Does it actually say all that?" he says.

"I was thinking the same thing," I say. He laughs. "I'll have the boureki and the pork, please," I tell him.

"Very good, sir." He takes our menus. My wife picks up her water glass.

"Do you think the kids are having a good time with your parents?" she asks me. I reach for another piece of bread.

"We have kids?"

After dinner we are more stuffed than bourekis. We stroll out of the Seven Seas, completely sated.

“Let’s get our picture taken,” my wife says. “Come on. We don’t have any pictures of the two of us together from this trip.” We walk over to the photographer, who’s got a small studio, replete with a backdrop and professional lighting, set up just outside the Seven Seas. He greets us with a warm smile and positions us in front of the backdrop.

“What a beautiful couple,” he says.

“That’s thanks to my gorgeous wife,” I tell him. “Without her, we’re not so easy on the eyes.”

Later, as night arrives in the Aegean, we walk up to the top deck. The waning moon glitters on the surface of the sea. We put our fingers, still wrinkled from so many hours in the water at Tsampika, to the stars.

Day 4 – Morning

Today is our final day at sea. We will spend the morning on mighty Crete, the afternoon on Santorini. It’s just after 6:00 AM, God help me, and we’ve already docked in Heraklion – I have no idea how the staff does it. Why am I awake so early? We have to be in the Can Can Lounge at 7:00 AM for our excursion to the Minoan Palace of Knossos, and my wife wants breakfast. I pull back the curtains and wish the sun “Kalimera.”

Writer Laurence Durrell spent a number of years in the Hellenic Mediterranean, in Alexandria, Athens, Corfu, Cyprus and Rhodes – this is what he wrote about morning in this part of the world: “...you rise each morning to a new day, a new world, which has to be created from scratch. Each day is a brilliant improvisation with full orchestra – the light on the sea, the foliage, the stabbing cypresses, the silver spindrift olives...” I drag myself out of bed for a quick shower. I ready myself for a new day, a new world, created from scratch.

Standing at the beginning of the breakfast buffet at the Seven Seas, which seems about a mile long, I want to kick myself for not making it out of bed for this sooner on Tuesday and Wednesday. It starts with fresh bread, croissants and pastries, including the pastries with a circle of jam at the center, which are my favorite. There are eggs, sunny-side up and scrambled, piles of bacon, sausages, a pantheon of cereals, yogurt, vanilla French toast and cooked-to-order waffles! A storm of waiters has just finished refilling our coffee mugs and our water glasses as I sit down at our table. My wife has already procured orange juice for me – there’s a constellation of three full glasses beside my place setting. She looks at my plate.

“We’re touring Knossos today, my love. We’re not laying siege to it.”

Our brilliant improvisation with full orchestra on Crete begins as we leave behind the bustle of Heraklion, the city of Hercules and the resting place of Nikos Kazantzakis, Crete’s most famous son and the author of *Zorba the Greek*. It’s a short, air-conditioned bus ride to Knossos, the capital of the Minoan civilization, the first in Europe. The hill of Kephala, which hoists the Palace above a valley of pines a few miles outside Heraklion, has been continuously inhabited since 7000 BC. We park outside the site and enter through the

West Court, the ancient ceremonial entrance to the Palace, which was the grandest in the Minoan world. Our guide leads us to a shady spot beneath a pine bough, heavy with pine cones, to introduce us to Knossos.

The Minoan civilization, which endured for about 2000 years, was one of the most advanced in the ancient world, and Knossos is one of the instances in which Greek mythology might dovetail with archeological fact. According to *Bullfinch's Mythology*, Minos, a legendary king and lawgiver of Crete, was one of Europa's three sons, all born after her tryst with Zeus, who appeared to Europa as a white bull and carried her off to Crete. The frescoed Palace at Knossos, which comprises more than 1500 rooms, may have been the mythical labyrinth designed by Daedalus wherein Minos imprisoned the Minotaur, a monstrous half-bull, half man born to his wife, Pasiphaë, who was impregnated by a bull sent by Poseidon. The bull had been bequeathed to Minos, who was supposed to sacrifice it in Poseidon's honor, but Minos thought the bull so exquisite he couldn't part with it, so Poseidon punished him with a hideous, man-eating stepson. Theseus, the prince of Athens, slew the Minotaur and escaped from the labyrinth thanks to the "sword and the clew of thread" given him by Ariadne: one of the daughters of Minos, a princess of Crete and the Minotaur's half-sister, she had fallen in love with Theseus soon after he arrived on the island.

"I love the stories," I tell my wife. Thanks to our guide we don't need Ariadne's clew to find our way beneath the pines to the Hall of the Royal Guard, the Hall of the Double Axes, the Queen's Apartment, and the King Chamber and its alabaster throne, the oldest throne in Europe, which our guide tells us is the model for the seat of the President of the International Court of Justice at the Hague. We stroll through the Palace for a short while after our tour concludes, admiring the massive columns which, unlike the columns at Ephesus and Lindos, are perfectly smooth and slightly attenuated toward their bases.

A Portuguese poet, Affonso Romano De Sant'Anna, once wrote that every generation believes it lives at the summit of history, and this is what I think of our cruise so far, that we are traveling from our current summit, the summer of 2013, to those far more ancient and, perhaps, far more lasting. We stop at the bookstore, where my wife purchases a single postcard of the Dolphins Fresco.

"It's from 1600 BC," she says. "I'd love to see the original. It's in the Heraklion Museum."

"We can only ride one donkey at a time," I tell her.

"We'll have to come back," she says.

Day 4 – Afternoon

It seems as if the entire ship is leaning against the railing on the foredeck and quite abuzz as we approach magnificent Santorini. We are all braving the wind to gaze in awe at its sheer cliffs, which tower above the deep blue Caldera. The wind racing over the bow is powerful, and a bunch of kids are running at the wind, pausing, letting it push them backwards, laughing, their hair blown back. The houses upon the highest ridges look like fistfuls of white chalk, like snow. We are sailing into a postcard.

Our afternoon thus far has been packed, of course. On our return from Crete we attended a disembarkation meeting in the Can Can Lounge, and we're all set for

tomorrow, when we return to the bustle of Piraeus. The cruise director explained the entire procedure, including customs and cab fare to Athens and Venizelos Airport. All we have to do is tag our bags and leave them outside the door to our cabin before we fall asleep. Following the meeting I raced over to the gym, which is brand new and air conditioned. I treated myself to an hour on an elliptical trainer, with a view of the Aegean to my right, followed by a sauna, while my wife attended the Greek dance class in the Oklahoma Lounge, in preparation for "Spotlight on Greece" in the Can Can Lounge tonight. Opa!

Our tour guides are waiting for us as the tender boats arrive at the dock in Athiniós, each of them holding up a bright yellow sign in the shape of a circle with the number of each bus in the middle. High above us the cliffs seem to scrape against the blue sky. As we board our bus I watch a few buses and trucks creep along the narrow roads that thread their way up toward Fira, the largest village on Santorini. We follow a semi, slowly, up the mountain, higher and higher above the Caldera, its surface silvered by the late afternoon sun. This is hands-down one of the most incredible places I've ever seen.

"It's unbelievable, isn't it?" my wife says. We are on our way to Oia Village, where we arrive after a drive over the rolling hills inland from the rim of the Caldera. As soon as we step off the bus, some shopkeepers from the village approach us with samples: a basket of pastelaki, peanuts coated with honey and sesame seeds, and small plastic cups of mastiha. Welcome to Oia.

It is as we imagined, white buildings with blue shutters and doors lined up along the edge of the cliff, staring back at the blazing sun. We have two hours to stroll, shop, drink coffee, dream...we fall into a café and sit down for a coffee on the veranda, which juts out over the Jacuzzis and sun beds and kidney-shaped pools of the villas beneath us like a playing card trying to flee its deck. It feels like we are in mid-air. We can see the Olympia off in the distance. It is so beautiful I am silenced, humbled. My wife orders a frappe and looks out toward the Caldera. "This is jaw-dropping," she says.

On our way back to Athiniós we drive south, toward Fira, through the valleys of northern Santorini on the island's eastern slope. They are flooded with white houses, as if they had been poured there, like syrup. Here and there they are punctuated by the cerulean domes of small churches.

We make it to Athiniós after a careful crawl down from Fira. The tender boats are waiting for us, and my wife and I sit up on the top deck of our boat for the short ride back to the Olympia, which waits for us below Oia, which I now see is home to a number of brown, pink and sand-colored buildings, some of them folded into its clusters of bright white houses. There is perhaps an hour of daylight left. I take my wife's hand and close my eyes for a moment. I surrender to the fading sunlight upon the Caldera.

On our return to the ship we purchase a bottle of olive oil, oregano, and a copy of the Louis Cruises DVD, "Jewels of the Aegean."

"So we don't forget any of it," my wife says.

"We won't," I tell her. When we arrive at our cabin, to shower and dress for dinner, and to pack, we find our beach towels folded in the shape of an elephant.

Day 4 – Evening

It's Greek night tonight, and the Can Can Lounge is packed. The stage is set like a taverna, and the burgundy curtain at the back of the stage is dotted with little blue lights, like stars. After a performance of traditional Greek dances, a blond girl, resplendent in heels and a white miniskirt, takes the stage and starts singing, to the accompaniment of a rather skillful bouzouki player, and the Olympia entertainment team begins pulling people from the audience to dance, even the kids, who join the singer on stage, and pretty soon the Can Can Lounge dance floor is full. It's the music of the islands, bright and lively. Is that dry ice? Yes, it is. They don't hold back on the Olympia. Not in the least.

The atmosphere is absolutely festive. A few male singers take the stage and tear into a series of Greek songs. The Greeks in the audience know every word, and they sing along, while the rest of us clap our hands, tap our feet and bob our sunburned heads up and down. The Can Can Lounge, where we have been receiving our bus assignments, is now a raucous Greek taverna, and as of 11:00 PM passengers of all ages are still pouring into the room. My wife loves it. She leans over and tells me, "this is the most fun I've ever had on a vacation!" The night ends, of course, with Mikis Theodorakis and "Zorba's Dance" from *Zorba the Greek*. Opa!

Later that evening, as we fall into bed in our cabin, our four very intense days upon the historic waters of the Aegean come to an end. We are the richer for them.

Kali nichta.

TRADE ANNOUNCEMENT

Louis Cruises

August 2014

Look to the Stars: Louis Cruises Launches a New Brand, Celestyal Cruises

Today's travelers want an authentic experience when they travel. They want unique destinations and a true taste of the culture, gastronomy and history of a place. And, as modern life becomes more hectic, they want a travel experience that dissolves their cares from the moment they depart. They want a temporary home in the stars...

Since 2013, Louis Cruises has kept this idea at the forefront of its efforts, particularly with the inauguration of the "Kalimera!" experience. . Throughout the 2013 season we gave our passengers the best of the Aegean's "Iconic" destinations, such as Mykonos, Patmos, Rhodes and Santorini, along with revised bar and restaurant menus, new themed programs, peerless onboard entertainment and personalized service that defines Greek hospitality. Thousands of Louis passengers are saying "Kalimera!" to the real Greek experience in 2014 with itineraries that take them to nine new "Idyllic" Aegean destinations, undiscovered gems such as Chios, Ios, Kos, Milos, Samos, Symi, Syros and the "Turkish Riviera" ports of Bodrum and Cesme.

"Kalimera!" is more than a greeting – it's a promise, and we're bolstering our commitment with even more outstanding Greek food and wine, and with themed programs that take our passengers deeper into the archaeology, gastronomy, history and music of Greece. In 2015 we'll continue to build on the promise of "Kalimera!" when we sail to incredible new ports of call in the Ionian and Adriatic seas and along the Dalmatian coast.

In September 2014 we will give a name to this promise: Celestyal Cruises. Celestyal stems from celestial," which means "pertaining to the stars" and "heavenly" or "divine." By launching Celestyal, we are expanding the Louis Cruises portfolio thereby reflecting the divine, real Greek experience that one enjoys when sailing with us. We've also chosen this name to honor our ancestors, the Ancient Greeks, who were among the first peoples to use celestial navigation – by the third century BC; Greek mariners were using the Little Bear to navigate their ships.

This fall, say "Kalimera!" to Celestyal Cruises. Say "Kalimera!" to the real Greek experience.

BROCHURE TEXT

Louis Hotels

US Market

July 2010

Welcome to the Hellenic Mediterranean. 10,000 years of paradise, brought to you by Louis Hotels.

Louis Hotels, all set beside the cool, glittering sea in Corfu, Crete, Cyprus, Mykonos, Rhodes and Zakynthos, are renowned for clean, beautiful rooms, hearty, exquisite meals and our expert, English-speaking staff. Planning some family time beside one of our infinity pools with a tour of archeological sites and Byzantine churches? Looking to ride a mountain bike deep into our mountain woods, or perhaps to scuba dive in our cerulean waters? Just hoping for a chaise longue on the beach with your favorite book? Start here, at Louis Hotels – quite simply the best places to stay in the most beautiful places in the world.

Corfu

The most Italianate of the Ionian Islands, where you can enjoy the Greek version of la dolce vita. Corfu Town still bears the seal of its Venetian residents, right down to its historic center, where cafes, restaurants and unique shops line the narrow, winding streets of its palm-dotted historic center. Beyond this small, elegant harbor town, olive groves and lush forests blanket the hillsides, and small stone churches perch on cliffs above the sea. Our staff will help you find that perfect, sun-drenched, secluded beach or the best place to watch Corfu Town's legendary Easter procession. One of the most family-friendly destinations in Greece, there's even a water park near the center of the island.

Crete

With 600 miles of pristine coastline, finding your favorite beach on Crete might be almost as challenging as finding your way out of the Labyrinth. Greece's largest island is a wonderland of perfect, empty beaches, challenging hiking trails, secluded campsites and bustling harbor towns like Heraklion and Chania, with its Venetian old city. Hike into Samariá Gorge, the Grand Canyon of Crete, an 8.5 mile gorge that descends more than half a mile to sea level, but save some steps for archeological sites like Phaistos and Knossos, a Minoan palace built during the apex of Minoan civilization. Crete is also known for legendary meals, most of them prepared with Cretan olive oil, the finest in the world and quite plentiful on this magical island, where olive trees outnumber people by 500 to one. Summertime visitors will enjoy fresh apricots and watermelon, both perfect treats with a glass of local wine at a table beside the Mediterranean.

Cyprus

Welcome to the crossroads of history. Cyprus, an independent republic, is the largest of the Greek islands and home to remnants of all of the civilizations that have landed upon its sun-kissed shores, including the Phoenicians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Lusignans,

the Venetians, the Turks and the British. The island's archeological sites are as plentiful as its sugar-sand beaches. Looking for 14th century churches and mountaintop monasteries? Year-round windsurfing and kite surfing? Ancient amphitheaters that host performances every summer? Long, cool drives through citrus and olive groves? Wine tours? Hiking and mountain biking in the pine forests of the Troodos, a mountain range rising almost 6000 feet into the bluest sky you've ever seen? Freshly-prepared, delicious meals that last the entire evening? Some of the best nightlife in the Mediterranean? Here we say "kopiaste" – come join us.

Mykonos

The island's famous windmills and its white, sun-bleached jewel-box houses – replete with painted wooden doors and flowered balconies – are just the beginning in Mykonos. The chicest and most cosmopolitan of the Cycladic Islands, Mykonos is world-renowned for its legendary nightlife and for its beaches, many of which will make you feel as if you stepped into a dream. The Ibiza of the Eastern Mediterranean, Mykonos is the perfect getaway – spend your days swimming in the aquamarine waters of the Aegean Sea, dine at a harbor-side taverna in Mykonos Town after the sun slips into the sea (try the grilled octopus and a cold glass of ouzo), then dance until sunrise in one of the island's posh discotheques. Louis Hotels' Mykonos Theoxenia Deluxe, inspired by the design of the 1960s, is an award-winning boutique hotel and a stone's throw from the windmills.

Rhodes

The Palace of the Grand Master, on the coast of Rhodes, will make you think you have stepped back in time. Today, the entire city of Rhodes, once home to the Colossus of Rhodes, is a UNESCO World Heritage site. The island is still one of the wonders of the world, with lovely hillside villages, some of them made famous by *The Guns of Navarone*. The waters of Rhodes, so beautiful they seem to mirror the sky, are impossible to resist, and the lights of Lindos will take your breath away when they come up on another perfect night in the South Aegean. Rhodes is dotted with archeological sites, including the Apollo Temple at the Acropolis of Rhodes and the ancient city of Kameiros, and the Valley of the Butterflies, in the northwest of the island, is home to thousands of Kalimorfa butterflies in June, July and August.

Zakynthos

The southernmost of the Ionian Islands, Zakynthos – also known by its Italian name, Zante – is a mountainous green jewel with a view of the Peloponnese and some of the world's most breathtaking sunsets. The island's silvered waters beckon day and night, whether you've hiked down to swim in a sandy cove or if you're having fresh grilled seafood beside the water in Zakynthos Town. Some of the best swimming, diving and dining in the Greek Islands will keep you busy day and night, as will a growing club scene (mostly in Laganas, on the south coast), but leave yourself time to visit the Marine Park of Zakynthos, home to the protected Loggerhead Sea Turtle, and the island's churches, many of which look like confections built in a patisserie. Shipwreck Bay, a sandy beach on the west coast of the island, and the Blue Caves, near its northern tip, are accessible only by boat.

ARTICLE

Action Global Communications

Prepared for British Airways

January 2009

Beyond the Sea

British Airways Brings You Valentine's Day along the Pacific Coast Highway

In the US, cars and romance are often intertwined in a steamy, high-octane embrace. Why not try love, American style, along one of the world's most beautiful roads? Almost as famous as Route 66, the drive along the Pacific Coast Highway, from Los Angeles to San Francisco, is one of the most romantic and relaxing stretches of pavement on Earth, and February in California is cool, dry and delicious. British Airways can fly you and your Valentine direct to LAX from Heathrow, then back to Heathrow from San Francisco International Airport.

Warm up for shopping along Rodeo Drive and in San Francisco's Union Square with a Valentine's splurge in some of the shops in British Airways' new home at Heathrow, Terminal 5. Start with a coffee at Soho patisserie Amato, or with authentic British fare at Huxley's, then stroll through some of the world's finest shops, including Bulgari, Coach, Gucci and David Clulow, where you can shop for a pair of exclusive designer sunglasses. They'll help you blend in with the Angelenos.

Give your heart to LA before you drive it to San Francisco – spend at least a day or two in the City of Angels. BA Holidays can help you find a swank hotel like the Millennium Biltmore, in downtown LA, or the Portofino Hotel and Yacht Club in nearby Redondo Beach. BA Holidays can also arrange a fully narrated city tour, which includes the historic Hollywood Bowl, Grauman's Chinese Theatre and the Walk of Fame, the fabulous Sunset Strip, and Beverly Hills, the poshest neighborhood in the USA. Tours include shopping on Rodeo Drive, which features exclusive shops such as Bijan, Chanel, Fred Hayman and Gucci. For more information, visit www.baholidays.com (you can also book a tour of the stars' homes).

An important rule of thumb in Los Angeles: traffic is fierce and omnipresent, so leave yourself enough time between destinations, and be sure to travel with a good map and plenty of patience. Grab lunch in Venice Beach, home to artists and street performers (don't miss the Jim Morrison mural), unique shopping and Muscle Beach, the famous open-air gym, then spend an afternoon in Santa Monica on the Third Street Promenade, a pedestrian thoroughfare lined with restaurants, shops and movie theaters (and dinosaur topiary fountains!). Santa Monica is also home to the Getty Museum, one of the finest art collections on the West Coast. High upon a hillside in the Santa Monica Mountains, the museum's collection is housed in a complex of buildings and gardens built around a beautiful piazza. *Captured Emotions: Baroque Painting in Bologna, 1575–1725*, is on exhibit at the Getty through 3 May 2009. For a romantic dinner, and a warm-up spin, drive your date up into the Hollywood Hills for Mexican cuisine at Beso.

With your lover beside you and the top down, start north from Los Angeles the following morning – wake up *early*, you’ve got miles to go and a lot to see before you sleep. The drive should take you about two days. Stop in Santa Barbara for a walk on the pier and a visit to Mission Santa Barbara, built in 1786. North of Santa Barbara, Highway One takes you through Solvang, a Danish village tucked into the hills of northern Santa Barbara County. From there, Route One twists through the hills of Central California until it reaches the sea at Pismo Beach. Enjoy the splendor of Pismo with a walk along the beach, or visit nearby Oceano Dunes Beach, where you can actually drive your car onto the sand.

Finish the first day on Pacific Coast Highway in San Luis Obispo, a quiet hillside town a short drive north from Pismo and the unofficial capital of the Central Coast wine region. Downtown San Luis Obsipo, also known as SLO, is packed with galleries, shops and restaurants, including the Mission Grill, where you can dine under the stars beside the San Luis Obispo Creek on produce from local farms. Nighttime should find you ready for a wild night at the Madonna Inn, a San Luis Obispo landmark. The décor in each of its 110 rooms is unique – for Valentine’s Day, check into “Love Nest,” “Romance” or “Vouz”, the only room with a round king bed. The next morning, treat your Valentine to an hour or two at the Spa at Madonna Inn before you hit the road again.

Start your second day on the road in Morro Bay, a picturesque harbor town just north of SLO and home to Morro Rock, a massive dormant volcano located in the center of the Bay. Fuel your engines with a classic American pancake breakfast and a view of Morro Rock at the Otter Rock Café or at the Outrigger Restaurant, both along the Embarcadero. After breakfast it’s onward to San Simeon and Hearst Castle, the former vacation home of William Randolph Hearst, immortalized as Xanadu in Orson Welles’s masterpiece, *Citizen Kane*. There are tours throughout the day, the first at 8:20 am.

After you tear yourselves away from the ornate majesty of Hearst Castle, you will soon find yourself in the heart of the Central Coast, driving along cliffs high above the Pacific Ocean, deep blue and sun-kissed, toward Big Sur and its dense forests. Stop for lunch at Nepenthe, a family-owned restaurant built at the edge of a cliff overlooking the Pacific. The restaurant provides benches and blankets for its guests, so feel free to linger with a glass of wine and enjoy a stunning view of the ocean. After lunch, continue north, through Carmel and into Monterrey, where you can hear sea lions barking as you enjoy an ice cream cone during a romantic stroll along the pier. Evening should find you driving into San Francisco, sparkling like a jewel at the tip of the Peninsula.

Spend a few days in America’s loveliest city – you can book a room through baholidays.com at the Monaco, a restored 20th century hotel that features original art in its lobby and in every room, or at the San Francisco Clift, Phillippe Starck’s Union Square destination hotel – the lobby bar is Starck’s plush, sophisticated take on a hunting lodge. Ride the cable cars up and down California Street, and take a walk down 24th Street between Mission and Potrero for a tour of some of the city’s best murals and some of its

best burritos. Hayes Valley, just behind City Hall and within walking distance of Union Square, is packed with one-of-a-kind shops – browse for antiques, try on shoes, or head straight to Alla Prima and shop for lingerie (it is Valentine’s Day, after all).

With apologies to New York, San Francisco may be America’s best city for dining. Try Belden Lane, a short walk across Union Square, for romantic al fresco dining at Café Bastille, Plouf, Café Tiramisu or B44, the city’s only Catalan restaurant – the alley is closed to traffic from lunchtime and strung with lights after dark. For gustatory adventures further afield, how about some of the best Asian food in the world? Visit the Inner Sunset, particularly Ninth Avenue below Irving, for incredible Thai at Marnee Thai and some of the city’s best sushi at Ebisu. For Vietnamese or Burmese, try Mai’s and Burma Superstar, both on Clement Street at Third. After dinner, browse the massive selection of new and used books at Green Apple on Clement at Sixth in the Inner Richmond, a San Francisco institution and one of the largest independent bookstores in the US.

For nightlife, catch some live music at the Great American Music Hall – this former bordello, built in 1907, is one of the most beloved theaters on the West Coast, with floor and balcony seating – or at Café DuNord, a former speakeasy on Market Street. Finish the evening with a nightcap at Harry Denton’s Starlight Room in the Sir Francis Drake Hotel on Powell, “where the cable cars meet the stars”. With the City by the Bay glittering beneath you, you and your Valentine may remember this as the moment when you left your hearts in San Francisco. San Francisco poet Aaron Shurin once wrote, “beautiful things are necessities.” Come find out why so many people the world over find California so necessary.

Sad as you’ll be to leave the Golden State, you can fly direct to Heathrow from San Francisco. If you have to leave California, you may as well do it in style and comfort. Visit ba.com to book your flights, and find out why the West is the best this Valentine’s Day.

ARTICLE

Action Global Communications

Prepared for British Airways

November 2008

I Love London

Singer, songwriter, bandleader and “Boy about Town” Bobby H.W. Edgington is the former lead singer of Café Amitay, a synth-pop combo from Brighton – the band briefly troubled the upper middle of the charts toward the end of the Eighties with their lone hit single, “Starlight through the Rafters”. Brighton-born, Edgington has been “haunting” a flat on Charing Cross Road since 1989. He is one of the hottest cabaret singers in London’s burgeoning jazz standards scene, and is currently on tour in Europe with his 24-piece orchestra, “The Big Whigs”. “I consider myself a male chanteuse,” he says.

“London in twenty-four hours? May as well make it to the moon in day,” he sighs. “Okay, here’s my list. It’s a mix of a lot of the can’t-miss stuff you know and a few of the haven’t-seen stuff you shouldn’t miss. What can I say? I’ve got a soft spot for the standards...”

“Do the big stuff first, because you must. Take a boat trip along the Thames, from the Tower of London to Westminster, which takes in all the sights of the old city, including the tower itself, Tower Bridge, St Paul’s Cathedral, and the sweep of the river round to the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben. The Tower of London is the mighty guardian at the entrance to the City of London, the center of downtown –Traitor’s Gate is here, which is where St. Thomas More was beheaded in 1535, as are the Crown Jewels.”

“Trafalgar Square is legendary among Londoners and tourists. Skip the pigeons, doff your cap to Admiral Nelson – who earned immortality by defeating the combined French and Spanish fleet off Cape Trafalgar in 1805 – and head straight to the National Gallery, the world’s greatest collection of European paintings, including works by da Vinci, Michelangelo, Botticelli, Titian, Velasquez, Goya, Rembrandt, Monet, Renoir, Turner and Van Gogh. Be still my heart! No time for such a massive undertaking? Whizz through the National Portrait Gallery. The great and the good of British culture are represented here in visual form. It’s free, it takes no time to walk through it, and it’s a feast for the eyes.”

“Don’t skip Brick Lane in East London. Start with a bagel from the famous 24 hour Bagel Bake Brick Lane Bakery, which should keep you going while you traverse this long street, where you can find beautiful Asian silk saris and other unique clothing stores. The Lane is also famous as home to more Indian and Bangladeshi restaurants than anywhere else in London. There are so many quirky cafes and bars here it’s hard to pick just one, but I especially love the classic Bird Cage pub. The Bird Cage is popular for its lock-ins and its bizarre décor, which hasn’t changed in decades – thick flock wallpaper galore, true East Ender folk, and umpteen bird cages (yes, with birds in them, but they won’t be singing...)”

“Explore your expressive side by sashaying and cavorting through the bohemian centre of Soho – where the gay (in every sense) come to cruise, drink, sip Italian coffee, jaywalk and be risqué (it’s also infamous for its erotica stores and kinky dance venues). Sit down for breakfast, brunch, lunch, dinner or just a snack in one of the many mouth-watering delicatessens. Soho has a great buzz – it’s always alive and kicking.”

“If you’re *really* addicted to books, there’s no better place than Charing Cross Road – there are more bookshops on this long street than anywhere else in London. Firsthand, secondhand, antiquarian, art house, spiritual, graphic novels, crime stores...You name it. Charing Cross Road caters to all literary tastes.”

“Want an insight into the life of children in 19th century London? The Foundling Museum tells the story of the Foundling Hospital, London's first home for abandoned children the city’s first public art gallery. It’s in beautiful Bloomsbury, near the British Museum, which displays artifacts from ancient Egypt, from the Roman Empire, and, most contentiously, the Elgin Marbles, part of the frieze of the Parthenon set in Athens’ Acropolis. Unlike the song says, the British Museum *never* loses its charm. God bless the old warhorse...”

Whatever old warhorses are on your list this year, your holidays are precious. Life is short, which means you should travel often. But you should also travel well. Visit ba.com.