SIGHTSEEING IN ATHENS

ATHENS INFO GUIDE: http://www.athensinfoguide.com/index.htm
For complete information on: history of Athens, general information, transportation in Athens, maps, hotels, restaurants, entertainment, cultural agenda, shopping, sports, local customs, traveling with children, beaches, off the beaten path, walks in the city, traps and warnings, excursions, car rental, travel agents, photo gallery, and much more…

General information on Athens: www.cityofathens.gr.

Plus, depending on how you plan your trip you may have a day for walking around or even visiting couple of nearby islands. Below are some links you may find useful.

Hellenic Tourist Organization: http://www.visitgreece.gr
City of Athens: http://www.cityofathens.gr

MUSEUMS IN ATHENS (for more museums and contact information): http://www.greece-museums.com/athens-museums.php;
http://www.athensguide.com/museum.html

MUSEUMS

The Museum of the Acropolis
Contains masterpieces found during the excavations of the Acropolis dating back up to 480 B.C. It is considered as one of the most important museums in the world although in the past, a lot of masterpieces were and remain stolen. Situated on top of the Hill, the Acropolis at the level of the Parthenon. www.theacropolismuseum.gr

The National Archaeological Museum.
Is considered as one of the most important museums in the world and the richest museum in artefacts of Greek art. Its artefacts cover all civilizations that flourished in from Greece. Naturally, it is one of the world's biggest and finest collections of Greek antiquities, covering almost 3000 years of Greek civilization.
You will see the famous "kouros", statues of nude youths, impressive for their vigour and perfect anatomy. Famous statues found in the museum include the bronze statue of Poseidon of Artemision, the Youth of Marathon, the Kouros of Milos and the Ephebos of Antikythera (to name a few). A major attraction is also the Hall of the Mycenaean Antiquities. The unique Mycenaean treasure alone, unearthed by Schliemann, including the most famous golden Mask of Agamemnon and the Warrior Vase, is worth the visit. Other collections of interest are the Cycladic, the Neolithic, the Archaic, a pottery collection and the exhibition of Thira, with fascinating Minoan frescoes found in Thira (Santorini).
The Byzantine and Christian Museum.
Contains very interesting and important artefacts from the Byzantine empire. Including icons, wall paintings, mosaics, prints and sculpture.

The Greek Folk Art Center.
Collection of Ceramics, wood carvings, pottery, and metal objects illustrating all forms of Greek art from 1650 to today.

The Museum of Greek Musical Instruments.
History of Greek Traditional Musical Instruments since 1750.

The Benaki Museum.
Contains a collection of Holy Icons, Greek and Roman antiquities and a reach photographic archive covering the image culture and customs of Greece. This eclectic museum has a great variety of treasures to exhibit: Ancient, Byzantine, Coptic, Chinese, Islamic, neo-Hellenic, even ecclesiastical art - all have a place here.

Lalaounis Jewelry Museum
The museum is a centre for international jewelry studies. On permanent display are the creations by Ilias Lalaounis, a famous Athenian jeweler and goldsmith. More than 3000 pieces of jewelry are displayed and micro-sculpture from 45 collections designed by Lalaounis in the period 1940-1992. They include jewelry inspired by prehistoric art, Bronze Age Greece, Greek jewelry from the Classical and the Hellenistic periods, Byzantium, the art of Persia, the Ottoman Empire and the Far East, as well as creations marking developments in technology and science, from breakthroughs in biology to space travel.

Cosmos - The Foundation of the Hellenic World FHW.
The Virtual Reality Areas offer a unique experience. Ancient cities and monuments that have been completely destroyed, with the help of technology come to life before your very eyes exactly as they were in the past. The exhibition areas also include, a selection of Hellenic traditional costumes, a projection room, an internet Café and a chronological display of Greek History.
The Museum of the Ancient Agora.
Exhibits findings of the excavations of the Agora most closely connected to the Athenian Democracy and public life. Housed in the Portico of Attalos II on the Ancient Agora Site.

The National Historical and Ethnological Museum.
Dedicated to the Greek War of Independence since the fall of Constantinople to the Turks up to and including the Greco-Italian War in 1940.

The National Gallery or Alexandras Soutsos Museum.
Houses paintings engravings and sculptures of Greek and European artists and is devoted to the history of Greek and Western European art. Alexandros Soutzos, a lawyer and art lover, donated all his property and his collection of works of art, for the creation of a Museum of painting. The initial nucleus of paintings, was enriched by donations, particularly of works of western European art, which had belonged to wealthy Greeks of the diaspora. Today, the National Gallery possesses a collection of 9500 paintings, sculptures and engravings as well as miniatures and furniture.
The most important collections of the National Gallery are:
Greek Painting (19th - 20th century)
European Painting
Famous paintings exhibited include: the "Concert of the Angels" by Domenicos Theotokopoulos (El Greco), Lorenzo Veneziano's "Crucifixion" and many works of great Greek masters like Nikos Hadjikyriakos-Ghikas, Nikolaos Gyzis, Nikiforphos Lytras, Yannis Moralis and Yannis Tsarouchis.

The Museum of Eleftherios Venizelos.
Contains a library, photographs, and personal belongings of the greatest Greek Politicians.

The War Museum.
Exhibits the struggles for freedom of the Greek nation from the ancient times until today. Collection includes weapons uniforms, flags, maps paintings and sculptures.

The Goulandris Museum of Cycladic Art
Collections of artifacts from the Cycladic islands and includes artifacts from the Bronze Age 2000 B.C. through to the late Roman period 4th Century AD. One of the most important collections, this private museum mainly exhibits - beautifully - Cycladic art from 3000-2000 BC.

Kerameikos Museum.
Exhibits dating back to 840 B.C. displayed by chronological order including Mycenaean to Roman times.
The Numismatic Museum.
Exclusive exhibition of over 2500 coins covering all the periods of the Greek History.

Kanellapoulos Museum.
A private collection of Greek Art dating back to 2500 B.C.

The Jewish Museum of Greece.
Exhibits the Life and traditions of Greek Judaism

SITES OF INTEREST

Philopappou Hill
Also known as the Hill of the Muses, the Pnyx where the Ancient Greeks used to debate politics, the Philopappos Monument, the Tomb of Gaius Julius Antiochus Philopappos, the Agios Dimitrios Loumbardiaris Church.

The Acropolis
The Acropolis is the monument which represents the perfection of Greek architecture and spirit. The hill was first inhabited in the Neolithic period and the walls were built in the 13th cent.BC. The Temple of Wingless Niki built by Kallikrates, the Parthenon built by Iktinos and Kallikrates between 447 and 432 BC, dedicated to Goddess Athina, the Erechthon, built by Philocles, Temple shared by Erectheus and Athina, the roof is supported by the Karyatides, six female statues, the Propylaia, the Temple of Zeus dedicated to the God Polios, the Theatre of Erodus Atticus built in 161BC that can receive 5000 spectators, the Theatre of Dyonisos, erected in the 5thcent.BC consisting in 78 rows of seats.

South slope of Acropolis
The entrance to the south slope is separate, on Dionysiou Areopagitou. The south slope of the Acropolis played a significant role in the artistic, spiritual and religious activity of ancient Athens. Important public buildings were erected in the area: the Odeion of Perikles, the
sanctuary and Theatre of Dionysos, the choregic monuments, the Asklepieion, the stoa of Eumenes and the Odeion of Herodes Atticus.

The Ancient Agora
Political, financial and religious center of Ancient Athens, ancient market. The Temple of Hephaistos and Athena “Theseion”, the Arcade “Stoa of Attalos”, the Byzantine Church Agii Apostoli, the Mars Hill “Areos Pagos”, Court in the Ancient times. The market of the city, which was the center of public life. Most impressive is the Thission, the doric Temple of Hephaestus. The frieze depicts the exploits and adventures of Theseus (the hero who in mythology killed the Minotaur of Crete). Constructed in the 5th century BC by Ictinos (the architect of the Parthenon), it is probably the best-preserved Greek temple with its 34 columns almost intact. In the Agora area, the restored Stoa of Attalus, which is part of this visit, houses a fascinating small museum, with everyday artifacts found in the area. In the middle of Agora is also the Agioi Apostoloi church, built in the 2nd century AD, with Byzantine frescoes and wall paintings.

The Roman Agora & the Tower of Winds
The four pillared gate was built by the Emperor Augustus. The 1st century BC Tower of Winds had a hydraulic clock with a sundial and weather vane. The form of the marble octagon corresponds to the eight winds whose symbolic winged figures are represented on the frieze.

The Kerameikos
Most significant cemetery of Ancient Athens. A cemetery, which was the official cemetery of the city, is the main sight. Also: part of the Themistoclean wall, the Dipylon (the greatest gate of the city of Athens), the Pompeion building, the Sacred Gate, the marble bull statue and the museum of Kerameikos.

The Temple of Olympian Zeus
Dedicated to Zeus, Father of the Gods, the city’s biggest sanctuary, consisted of 104 Corinthian columns. The temple was completed in 131 AD by Roman emperor Hadrian (took over 700 years to build) and 15 of the more than 100 immense columns of this temple now remain, with their Corinthian capitals.

The Adrian’s Arch
Facing the Temple of Zeus, it marked the border between the old and new city of Athens, and was dedicated to the Roman Emperor Adrian. The triumphal marble arch lies on an ancient street that led from the old city of Athens to the new Roman section, built by Hadrian. It was constructed by the Athenians in A.D. 131, in honor of their benefactor emperor. Two inscriptions are carved on the architrave, one on each side: the first, on the side towards the Acropolis reads "This is Athens, the ancient city of Theseus"; the second, on the other side, facing the new city reads "This is the city of Hadrian and not of Theseus".
National Park
Nice walk along the trees, flowers, little ponds and zoo of the National Park that once was the private gardens of the Royal Family Residence, leading to the congress center of Zappeion. Behind and to the south of the Parliament building, bordered by Amalias Street, are these extensive gardens - housing the Zappeion Exhibition hall and providing semi shaded walking, away from traffic, amongst trees and shrubs. Walk through the gardens to get to the Kalimarmaro Stadium.

The Kalimarmaro Stadium
Marble stadium built in the 4thc BC with a capacity of 70,000 spectators where the first Olympic Games were held in 1896. Known also as the Olympic Stadium, it was re-built in 1896 for the revival of the Olympic Games. The stadium was built in Pentelic marble, the design based on that of the original stadium built by Herodes Atticus 4th century BC.

ATHENS

Plaka: The area is at the foot of the Acropolis and more or less between Monastiraki and Syntagma, with Athens' older buildings dating back two or more centuries, narrow and largely pedestrian streets lined with cafes, restaurants, tavernas, gift shops (some with original gift items!) As fresh and oasis-like a feeling, especially early on a sunny morning, as you can get in a city, especially the normally noisy and buzzing Athens. It's enjoyable to walk, discover small exhibits on the way through and small museums such as the Museum of Children's Art, The Museum of Greek Folk Art, Museum of Musical Instruments. At night it comes alive, socializing over an evening coffee Frappe and then eventually, numerous shared plates of food at its tavernas, and Acropolis-hillside-clinging restaurants. Though this is a tourist magnet, it contains some desirable homes and many live and work here; a few of the oldest homes still remind one of an era void of creature comforts. There is also a summer cinema in Plaka square: Cine Paris. It has wonderful plants and a view of the Acropolis, competing with the movie for your attention.

Monastiraki: This area skirts the park around Thission and the Ancient Agora, at the end of the shopping street Ermou. There is the flea market where items ranging from off-brand winter jackets, to army knives, to antique items. Many gift shops and most notably antique, junk and collectors corners of every sort. This is touristic, but it's mixed in with the sort of old shops, that are gems and one of a kind. If you walk just down from the station away from the flea market to Kirikou street and you'll find the busiest and most popular after-work Gyros places - if a Gyros is good anywhere, it is here!
**Psirri:** North of Monastiraki you'll find old warehouse buildings, mid-age office and industrial buildings presenting a new face. This is the area of intriguing restaurants in novel settings with original interior and exterior design, benefiting from the character and nature of the original use of these industrial buildings. Art galleries and artists' workshops and studios, experimental theatres and cafe/bars. Find what you like here by wandering around during the day and return for the prize pickings (the places you choose to dine in and have a drink at) later that night.

**Art and archaeology at the Metro stations:** Even if you don't actually need to travel by Metro, it's worth visiting the Syntagma station. There is a permanent exhibition of archaeological remains found during the construction. At other stations, works of important Greek artists, modern or classic, are displayed. The Metro goes pre- retro!

**Lykavittos:** Bit of a steep walk uphill to the viewing area and church of Agios Georgios, rewarded by excellent views. The Lykavittos theatre is actively used for performances. There is a restaurant and a cafe at the top. You can take the funicular to the top, or grab a taxi if the climb is just too much. On the way to Lykavittos, at Dexameni (beyond Kolonaki square), there is a summer cinema - movies shown in the open air, worth a try if it's a new experience for you.
**Kolonaki**: Located at the foot of Lykavittos. To the north of the Parliament buildings and the National Gardens, across the wide Vasilissis Sofias street (home to the Benaki Museum and many of the major national embassies), is the smart district of Kolonaki. Boutique clothing stores, pricier antiques, furs, jewelry and kiosks which sell a better cigar and great selection of foreign press, magazines and newspapers! This is where the pricier apartments are in the centre of Athens, unless you prefer Plaka or a "loft" in Psirri. The cafes around Kolonaki Square, with a row of tables out on the pavement - are a great source of gossip and people watching!
SYNTAGMA (Constitution) SQUARE

The name Syntagma means Constitution. The Square has a long history. It seems every major event in Greece has either been mourned or celebrated here. It has held some of the biggest political pep-rallies.

It is a large public square with tree shaded walkways and benches and cafes and the scene of the largest political rallies, holiday concerts and festivals. During the Christmas season the square is bejeweled in lights.

At the top of Syntagma is the Parliament Building, formerly the King's Palace, built between 1836 and 1840 by King Otto and financed by his father Ludwig I of Bavaria. The original idea was to put the king's palace on the Acropolis. The classical style of architecture, known as neo-classical which originated in Greece and is the dominant style of all the old public buildings, houses and mansions of Athens, was actually re-imported into Greece in the late 1800s from Europe and then modified (improved) by Greek architects.

From the top of Syntagma Square to the right if you are looking at the Parliament is the terminal for the Athens Coastal Tram where you can ride to the beaches. Across the street at the entrance to the National Gardens is where you can take the trolley buses to the National Archaeological Museum. It is also the beginning of Ermou Street, closed to auto traffic and Athens’ main shopping district which leads down to the flea market at Monastiraki, and the areas of Plaka and Psirri.

The tomb of the unknown soldier is guarded by Evzones, the Presidential Guard. Evzones and has a royal position, in front of the impressive neoclassical Parliament building, once the royal palace. Here, the tomb is placed at the bottom of a high wall, on which a relief depicts a fallen soldier, surrounded by quotations from Pericles' funeral oration. Further inscriptions, left and right, tell of historic battles where Greek soldiers took part, the most recent one in Cyprus in 1974. Two sentry boxes, on either side of the tomb, have small canopies to protect the guards against the sun.
The Evzones: Originally the name of the historical elite light infantry and mountain units of the Greek army in 1867. Today, it refers to the members of the Presidential Guard, a ceremonial unit that guards the Greek Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the parliament and the Presidential Mansion.

The Evzones undergo very exclusive and rigorous training and are expected to be on constant alert. Each soldier mounts guard for one hour at a stretch, 3 times every 48 hours. They work in partners in order to perfect the coordination of their movements. They are not permitted to talk, move or react to anything. Their ceremonial steps during the changing of the guard are specifically designed to stretch their muscles. When on duty they are not allowed to move unless the accompanying soldier gives them the order.

Their Uniform

The unit is famous around the world for its unique traditional uniform which is designed to be similar to the outfits worn by the klephts (mountain guerillas) who fought the Ottoman occupation of Greece. The most visible item of this uniform is the fustanella (skirt). Their proven valor and peculiar dress turned them into a popular image for the Greek soldier.

The Evzones have uniforms suited to the season. The red clogs with black pompoms and rivets underneath are standard equipment, and so are the white woolen stockings and the red caps with a waist long black tassel. The summer uniform is a khaki colored with a short skirt pleated behind, also including a belt and golden buttons, plus a collar and shoulder straps trimmed with blue bands. In winter, the uniform is blue-black. The uniforms are hand made by special craftsmen in workshops within the barracks and take 80 days to make. The skirt has 400 pleats (one for each year of the Ottoman occupation). The leather clogs with black pompoms weigh 3 kg and have 60 nails studded into the soles so the Evzone does not slip.

The Parade

A full dress uniform is worn on special occasions, such as the grand changing of the guard on Sundays at 11 o’clock. The full dress is a white shirt with very wide sleeves and a short white skirt, a belt and a black waistcoat with golden embroideries and a collar. The spectacular parade starts from the Evzone camp in the street of Irodou Attikou behind the Parliament, moves down Vasilissis Sofias towards Syntagma Square; the marching band if followed by the entire Presidential Guard.

There is actually a more frequent and smaller changing of the guard which takes place every hour on the hour, day and night, the year round. Three guards march from the camp; they are accompanied by a soldier in regular military uniform. A little ceremony at the tomb marks the actual changing. Each guard is on duty one hour every six hours, which means four times in a twenty-four-hour watch. Midway, after half an hour, they perform another ceremony at the tomb and finally change positions. Otherwise, they stand motionless outside their sentry boxes, except for occasionally kicking their rifle butts against the marble.

The Evzones are billeted in the George Tzavellas Barracks (in the National Garden), on Herodes Atticus Street (behind the Parliament building) and opposite the Presidential Mansion.
SHOPPING IN ATHENS

Besides the areas of Plaka and Monastiraki which are well known to travelers for their large variety of tourist shops in all of central Athens - a shopper's Mecca. Streets that were once choked with traffic have now been closed to all motor vehicles and this diverse shopping area has become a walking shopper’s paradise with every kind of shop you can imagine, and some you never imagined existed. The clothing shops have quality men and women's apparel from all over the world and the shoe stores make you wonder why your choices at home are so limited.

The two other main shopping streets of Eolou and Agiou Marcou are the streets where you can find incredible bargains in clothes, fabrics, yarn, shoes, and cafes where you can catch your breath after a period of furious shopping. There are old women from Russia and young men from Persia, selling silk shirts, socks, and underwear on the street. In August-September and January-February everything is on sale. You can literally go to Greece and replace your wardrobe and the money you save will pay for your ticket. There is always something going on at Eolou and Ermou streets.

Generally shops are closed on Sundays, but that's the day to go to the Flea Market in Monastiraki. Keep your eyes open when shopping in Athens. Not every shop has a big glass window with their goods displayed on the sidewalks. Some shops are hidden away in alcoves, atriums, basements and even the backs of apartment buildings. In fact many of the true craftsmen have shops that seem like they are hidden, either because they have a circle of customers that keep them busy enough or because they are artists happy with the way things are and don't seek more business.

The first area you will normally be recommended to shop in is Ermou Street, the pedestrian street that runs off Syntagma at McDonald's. All the latest boutiques and houses of fashion can be found on Ermou Street. If you like big shops or to buy brands, head for the Town Hall (Kotzia square) where you will find the Notos Galleries department store and which will reward you with beautiful views from its roof top cafe.
Shop hours are:

Tuesday, Thursday, Friday: 09:00-13.30 & 17.30-20.30
Monday, Wednesday, Saturday: 09:00-15.00
Sundays: All shops are closed, except some Sundays during the year.

Some large department stores are open everyday from 09:00 to 21.00 without a break. Tourist and other shops in tourist areas (Plaka, Monastiraki) are usually open for longer hours and on Sundays.

**Bookshops**

Worth a visit is also the six-storey, oldest bookstore “Eleftheroudakis” on Panepistimiou (between Syntagma and Omonia) (also has a coffee shop), which carries a great variety of books in Greek, English and other languages.

Further down there is another bookshop with a smaller selection of English books, called Papasotiriou.

Behind Eleftheroudakis, on Stadiou Street, there is another bookshop with an average selection of English books called Ianos (also has a coffee shop)

*Enjoy your visit to Athens!!!*