

Family Adventures worldwide

Greece

Islands of Atlantis

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JOINING INFORMATION

Please consult your agent for flights to reach the joining point of this trip.

When a booking has been made a separate 'joining instructions' voucher will be forwarded to you giving details of our joining hotel and where to rendezvous with the Tour Leader. **NB You must bring a copy of your insurance policy with you to show to the tour leader at the start of the tour.**

NB The joining information is occasionally subject to change and must be checked with your agent immediately prior to departure.

JOINING TOUR ABROAD

**15 days/14 nights Land Only
Athens back to Athens**

**Join Athens on Wednesday (day 1)
End Athens on Wednesday (day 15)**

Clients booked on 'Land Only' arrangements should make their own way to the joining point in Athens. Please refer to separate 'Joining Instructions' for name and address of hotel and time of rendezvous with tour leader.

SPECIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Among the many highlights featured on this tour, we particularly mention:

- * **ATHENS** Walking tour of Plaka
- * **SYROS** Capital of the Cyclades chain; scenic coastal walk
- * **PAROS** Quaint fishing villages; optional Byzantine road walk
- * **SANTORINI** Stunning volcanic scenery; Optional walks to ancient Thira & Oia
- * **NAXOS** The Cyclades largest island; Optional excursion by bus and foot to summit of Mount Zeus

We take to the 'wine-dark' Aegean for an island-hopping trip to find the legendary island of Atlantis, swallowed up by the sea 3500 years ago. Sailing by ferryboat along the necklace of Cycladic islands, we stop over for several days on Syros, Naxos, Paros and Santorini, with accommodation at small hotels. A relaxed trip, its free-form style is designed to make the most of the local scene, potent wines and delicious seafood, classic sites, picturesque towns, blue sky and clear waters. There are plenty of opportunities for exploring on foot. All walks are optional, so you can do as much or as little as you wish. Once on each island our itinerary is very flexible allowing you to join group activities or follow your own interests.

Walking Grades and Fitness:

Grading is a somewhat difficult topic as much depends on the individuals own perception of his or her abilities. The following is intended as a **general guide to our walking grades**. This is rated **Grade A**.

Grade A walks (Easy): tend to be short day walks and rambles at low altitudes which are suitable for people of all ages. They can be enjoyed by anyone who leads a reasonably active life and no special preparation is required. Many of the walks in this category are optional.

LAND ONLY ITINERARY

Note: While our intention is to adhere to the day-to-day route published below, a degree of flexibility is built into the itinerary. The Greek ferry network can be somewhat chaotic, so overnight stops may vary from those suggested and travelling times between the islands may be affected by re-scheduling of local ferry departure times.

Day 1. Wednesday. Join tour Athens
Arrive Athens and check-in to hotel. **2 nights hotel and breakfast. H+.**

Day 2. In Athens
Athens has been the capital of Greece for less than 200 years but it has grown rapidly in size. It is part of the Plain of Attica, an area of amazingly varied scenery, of high mountains and pine forests with a stunningly beautiful seacoast and myriad harbours. We include a walking tour of Plaka and soak up the atmosphere of this old town. You may stroll around the shops, try the freshly caught fish and seafood, listen to bouzouki music in an outdoor cafe. You'll notice the contrast between the modern capital and the old one – the well-heeled inhabitants of Kolonaki on the one hand and the clustered Plaka quarter on the other. Time is also left for personal sightseeing, so your tour leader will suggest things to see and do – a tour of the Acropolis, climbing the winding path to the top of this sacred rock (used since neolithic times) is a particular favourite. Here are the majestic ruins of the Athens of Pericles: the Propylaea (or marble entrance hall), the Parthenon (built by Ictinos 2500 years ago), the Temple of Athena Nike (the Wingless Victory) and – the monument most venerated by the ancient Athenians themselves – the Erechtheion. Tradition relates that gods Athena and Poseidon quarrelled here. The sea-god struck the rock with his trident, causing salt water to gush out, while Athena struck it with her spear and brought forth an olive tree. As olives were deemed to be more useful, the other gods let her take the city under her protection.

Days 3 & 4. Sail to Syros; on Syros
We transfer from our hotel to Piraeus and board the ferryboat for Syros. The ferry voyage takes about 4 hours. We disembark at Syros harbour and transfer to our hotel. Syros is the capital of the Cyclades and has an area of about 35 square miles. Ermopouli, the capital, is situated on the east of the island, its port a bustling centre of inter-island commerce. We plan to explore the coastline along the south of the island or you may prefer to make your way through old Ano-Syros, a maze of tiny unspoiled streets affording great views of the coast. On the second day on the island we may take a walk along coastal trails (3 hours). Pherekidēs, the teacher of Pythagoras, was born on Syros. The island also produces 'loukoumia' (Turkish Delight). **2 nights hotel and breakfast. H+.**

Days 5 to 7. Sail to Paros; on Paros
Leaving Syros we sail to Paros (approx 2 hours) and transfer to our hotel. Paros is one of the most attractive of all the Cycladic islands, with an area of 64 square miles. Its capital is Paroikia, on the west coast. Dominating the interior is Mount Profitas Ilias (770m) on the slopes of which are the famous marble quarries. The island was the birthplace of the poet Archilochos, the inventor of iambic verse. Among the many places of interest are the marble quarries, the fishing villages and a Venetian Fortress.

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Especially interesting is the church, Ekatontapiliani (Church of 100 Doors), about which legend says that when the 100th door is discovered the Greeks will take back Constantinople (Istanbul). You may choose to take a walk along one of the well preserved Byzantine paths that cross the island using public transport to reach the trailhead. You may also choose to take an excursion by small craft to the nearby island of Andiparos (optional). Whilst there, head for the southerly end of the island, to an interesting stalactite cavern. You may choose to take an optional boat trip out to the islands of Delos and Mykonos. **3 nights hotel and breakfast. H+.**

Days 8 to 10. Sail to Santorini; on Santorini
We sail from Paros usually via the island of Ios to Santorini (approx 4 hours) which lying some 128 nautical miles southeast of Piraeus, is the most southerly of the Cycladic Islands. Formerly a huge volcano, its centre disappeared in an enormous explosion around 1630 BC and now forms a lagoon. The eruption overwhelmed the Minoan settlements at Akrotiri (which can be visited) as well as those on Crete. As you sail through the centre of this crater towards the harbour Athinios, the views that meet you are spectacular. Whitewashed towns cling to the edge of the crater and in the middle of the lagoon you will see the volcanically active Kameni islands. The island is largely waterless and the mining of pumice ash was once one of the main industries. Two walks are available on Santorini; one day we plan to take the coastal path to Oia. Situated on the west of the island, it is one of the best spots to watch the sunset into Homer's wine dark sea. We also plan to walk to the ruins of the former capital Thira. Its 6th century BC site is of much interest with its temples and spectacular views. Santorini (or Thira, as the island is also known) is one of the most picturesque areas in the Aegean and the familiar images of whitewashed churches with blue-domed roofs adorn this beautiful landscape.



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Days 8 to 10. (contd)

It is also an area of particular interest to those keen on the Lost Atlantis legend (see note below). There are good beaches of black sand at Kamari and Perissa and plenty of time for personal explorations. **3 nights hotel and breakfast. H+.**

Days 11 to 13. Sail to Naxos; on Naxos

After our voyage from Santorini (approx 3 hours) we disembark at Naxos harbour and walk to our hotel. The island of Naxos itself is the largest and some would argue the most beautiful of the Cyclades. The god Dionysus is believed to have lived on the island and taught the inhabitants to cultivate wine. Indeed, Naxos white wine today has a good reputation. Myth also has it that Theseus deserted Ariadne at Naxos on his way back to Athens from Crete. Over the years, the island has been subjugated by many nations, including the Corsair Barbarossa. The interior is divided by fertile and well-watered valleys. There are many places of interest on the island, linked by a good road network. Naxos town is not architecturally recommended but the Kastro, just above and behind the town, encloses an area of picturesque though decaying houses, Venetian in style and with coats of arms. Besides wine, the island also exports olive oil, corn, fruits of many kinds and marble which is comparable in quality to that of Paros. On one of our days on Naxos, there is an option to walk to the summit of Mount Zeus. Taking a local bus inland we shall walk for about 1 to 2 hours to reach the peak, which offers excellent views back over the island. The path taken is good but gets rocky towards the summit, so walking boots or shoes with good ankle support are recommended. For individual sightseeing there are regular buses and taxis available. Good beaches are St. George, St. Prokopios and St. Anna. **3 nights hotel and breakfast. H+.**

Day 14. Ferry to Athens

We take the ferry back to mainland Greece today sailing through the Aegean sea, (approx 7 hours). The journey takes us through the Cyclades islands and the boat pulls into Piraeus harbour in the late afternoon. On arrival we transfer to our hotel to enjoy our last night in Greece's bustling capital. **Overnight hotel and breakfast. H+.**

Day 15. Wednesday. Tour ends Athens

PERSONAL EXPENSES

You'll also need some extra money to cover meals not included in the tour price, other sightseeing, airport taxes and souvenirs.

Meal Plan

Local Food and Drink: Meals other than those included in the itinerary are paid for separately by the traveller.

Note: typically, hotel breakfasts in Greece are fairly simple – bread, jam, honey, coffee and possibly cheese. Should you want a more substantial breakfast in a local cafe, or in the hotel (where possible) please allow for approx GBP2 per breakfast. You should calculate for buying 14 evening meals and 13 lunches.

Some examples of comparative costs are given below:

	UK	Greece
Coffee/tea	£0.70	£0.90
Soft drink	0.80	0.75
Bottle water	0.70	0.50
Beer	1.00	1.20
2 Course Meal*	7.50	7.00
3 Course Meal**	15.00	9.00
Bottle wine	7.00	6.00

*Cheap local fare in a small cafe or restaurant

**Typical food in a simple, reasonably comfortable mid-range restaurant

Other Sightseeing

The following tours and excursions are usually available and may be booked and paid for through the tour leader during your trip. Estimated costs are provided.

ATHENS Acropolis Entrance fee £7.00

SYROS Sunset and island tour £9.00

PAROS Andiparos island by local bus/ferry

£8.00; Full day boat trip to Delos and

Mykonos £20.00 (plus £4.00 entry to Delos)

SANTORINI Half day excursion to Therasia and the Volcano £8.00; Minoan relics at Akrotiri £7.00

LOCAL BUSES & TAXIS For island walks please allow £12.00

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Seasonal Climate

The climate is Mediterranean and summers in the south are hot, temperatures reaching over 30°C although in the Cyclades this is freshened by the 'Meltemi', strong north winds. The Spring and Autumn months are best, and of course the islands are decidedly less crowded. Rocky, bare, yet generally beautiful, the Cycladic islands are a tonic for the soul. The dry climate, limpid atmosphere and rainbow light effects of heat against the rocks, makes them an ideal place for wanderers.

Visa Requirements

Entry visas NOT required by UK, AUS, NZ, USA, CAN. citizens – other nationalities should consult their travel agent or consular office.

Vaccinations & Protection

Nothing compulsory. Tetanus recommended.

Special Note: Visa and Vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed before departure.

PACKING FOR YOUR TRIP

A complete list of clothing and personal gear is contained in Explore's '**General Information Booklet**', available only after a booking has been accepted. Here we make a few specific recommendations with regard to your tour.

Luggage: One main piece of luggage and a daysac. **Total allowance: 44lbs/20kgs.** Remember, porters are not always available, so don't overload yourself. You will have to carry your own luggage on and off ferries.

Clothing: Pack essentially for '**All Tours**' plus '**Hot Conditions**'. Shorts and T-shirts are ideal in July and August. Early and late in the season, bring a light plastic raincoat and a thick warm sweater to help fend off the unexpected chilling wind that races across the open deck of a ferryboat between the islands.

Footwear: Lightweight walking boots or stout shoes with good ankle support for island walks and sandals/trainers for relaxing

Equipment: We recommend a waterbottle, sunhat, suncream and insect repellent.

The Mystery of Lost Atlantis:

Did the lost continent of Atlantis ever exist, or is it a figment of the imagination?

The tale first appeared in Plato's 'Dialogues' some 400 years BC, as a parable to show how heaven punishes those who worship false Gods. He located the lost city in the Great Ocean beyond the Pillars of Hercules (Gibraltar) – and hinted that it was true. So was it the stuff of legend and folklore or should it be taken literally? Atlantis has since been sited in the Bahamas, the Azores, the Cape Verde Islands, the Canaries and Madeira.

However, excavations begun in 1967 at Akrotiri on Santorini reveal an ancient city buried under layers of ash from a cataclysmic explosion 3500 years ago – perhaps the best claim to it being the site of the idyllic city. The same eruption contributed to the downfall of Minoan Crete.



Unexpected travelling companions

EXPLORE ACCOMMODATION RATINGS : The following key is intended as a guide to the type of accommodation listed for each night stop. We stress that standards may vary and reserve the right to make changes as necessary without warning.

Hotels / Pensions / Lodges

H+ : Usually twin bedded rooms, normally with private facilities. Local grading 2/3/4 star.

H : Usually twin bedded rooms, sometimes 3-4 bedded rooms may have to be used. Normally with shared facilities. Local grading 1/2/3 star.

ROOMING : We would also stress that unlike resort-based family holidays, we use a variety of accommodation on any one tour. This means that although we will always do our best to find rooms that suit your family, the choice of accommodation in some places may be limited.

To help us with your rooming arrangements, please detail any preferences on the Booking Form (page 27 of the brochure). **For further details on Rooming, please see p.9.**

Local Style Accommodation

L+ : Usually twin bedded rooms, may be some 3-4 bedded. Normally shared facilities.

L : Could be twin bedded but more usually multiple share or dorm style sleeping arrangements. Normally shared facilities.

Camping – under canvas or bivouac

C+ : Designated campsite, usually with fixed WC/shower. Possibly with fixed pre-erected tents.

C : Natural/Rough/Wild/Bush Camp. Limited or no facilities. Temporary WC. Usually need to pitch own tents.

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