



## ESSENTIAL GREECE: ATHENS, SANTORINI AND CRETE

Discover glorious Greece, as you journey from bustling Athens to the sun-drenched coasts of Santorini and Crete.

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Tailor-Made Journeys, Suggested Itineraries



Europe, Greece



11 days from AU\$15,015 pp



Private

## Journey Overview

Discover glorious Greece, a land steeped in myth and legend. Here, spirited locals celebrate modern life around staggering ruins, while the aroma of Mediterranean cuisine floats through the streets. Unlock the treasures of Athens and its mighty Acropolis, savour the city's rich gastronomy scene, and walk in the footsteps of philosophers and gods, before taking to the warm-blue of the Aegean Sea. You'll discover crystal-clear waters, whitewashed villages, archaeological marvels, and a vivacious Greek culture, all while enjoying a relaxed and whimsical pace. Discover all the good things in life, as you journey from bustling Athens to the sun-drenched coasts of Santorini and Crete.

### Journey Highlights

- Unlock the historical sagas of the Acropolis and its Parthenon, and see ancient Athenians come to life at the new, state-of-the-art Acropolis Museum
- Venture along the scenic Aegean coast to majestic Cape Sounion, and the ancient Temple of Poseidon
- Celebrate the Greek palate with a culinary journey through Athens, savouring traditional street food, desserts and local delicacies
- Uncover the intriguing history of the deserted island of Spinalonga, learning about the remarkable people who lived there
- Walk among the sprawling excavated ruins of the ancient Minoan civilisation in Santorini and Crete
- Discover the world-famous beauty of Santorini, learning about its fascinating volcanic past and sea-drowned caldera



## Itinerary

### **Day 1: Arrive Athens**

Welcome to Athens. Upon arrival, meet your Guardian Angel who will accompany you to your hotel in the heart of the city, for assisted check in. With rooftop views over the fabled Acropolis, Syntagma Square and the Parliament, your evening is at leisure.

#### ***Hotel Grande Bretagne***

### **Day 2: Athens**

Wake up in multilayered Athens, the cradle of western civilisation. Today you'll walk in the footsteps of Plato and Socrates, discover ancient monuments dedicated to the gods of antiquity, and see Athens — past and present — come to life, as you traverse the sites with your expert guide.

Begin at the Acropolis and its Parthenon, sitting proud atop the city skyline. Walk through the ruins and monuments, gaze up at the towering marble columns, and learn how archaeology, art, mythology and philosophy all came together to give us this marvel of the ancient world. Take in stunning views over the Plaka Quarter, the ancient Agora and the Theater of Dionysus, where the tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides were performed. Continue to the state-of-the-art Acropolis Museum, which deconstructs over 4000 ancient artifacts to convey what daily life was like for the ancient Athenians.

Afterwards, stroll through the Plaka, in the foothills of the Acropolis, one of Athens' oldest and most atmospheric neighbourhoods. There are plenty of cafes and tavernas from which to grab a bite, sip a coffee and admire the views. Your evening culminates with an exclusive dinner on the terrace of the Acropolis Museum, taking in sweeping panoramas over Athens and the Acropolis illuminated at night (additional cost).

#### ***Hotel Grande Bretagne | Meals: B***

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### **Day 3: Athens**

Venture along the scenic coast to majestic Cape Sounion and the Temple of Poseidon. Dating back to 444 BC, this temple is one of the most iconic sites in Greece, perched on a 60-metre rocky cliff that rises out of the Aegean Sea. Your guide will regale you with stories of the sailors and mariners who prayed here to halt impending storms, and the tragic suicide of King Aegeus. Stare up at the revered marble columns as you follow your guide through the archaic temple, discussing its fascinating roots.

This afternoon, take to the streets of Athens for a gastronomic dive into the Greek palate. Wander through vibrant neighbourhoods savouring an array of dishes, each bursting with bold Mediterranean flavours. Try a range of street foods from loukoumades (cinnamon-topped doughnut) to Souvlakis and learn time-honoured culinary secrets of Greek cooking. Top it off with creamy aromatic coffee, boiled, Greek style.

This evening, let your hair down and celebrate Athenian nightlife. In this exclusive experience, you'll join up with the locals to see how they while the night away. Explore a new side of the city as your guide reveals laid-back bars and hidden hideaways across three different neighbourhoods, all paired with meze, ouzo and traditional live music (additional cost).

### ***Hotel Grande Bretagne | Meals: B***

### **Day 4: Athens - Crete**

Journey to the island of Crete with its rugged mountains, turquoise waters and sun-drenched beaches. The largest of the Greek islands, Minoans, Hellenes, Crusaders, Venetians and Ottomans have all cruised these waters for thousands of years.

Upon arrival at Heraklion Airport, enjoy a warm welcome from your guide and driver. Depending on the timing of your flight, you'll visit the Archaeological Museum, and see the remarkable Palace of Knossos, the centre of Minoan civilisation. Walk through the courts, the royal apartments and the throne room, and learn all about the Minoan's supremacy of women, and how these advanced peoples worshipped the great goddess of fertility.

Next, explore a local winery or olive oil farm to experience some of the local Cretan produce. Immerse yourself in the aroma of olives, warm earth, wild thyme, sage and citrus, before continuing to your accommodation, with beautiful views of UNESCO-designated Spinalonga island, just off-shore. The evening is at leisure.

### ***Blue Palace | Meals: B***

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## Day 5: Crete

Rise early to catch the first boat of the day out to the beautiful and abandoned island of Spinalonga. Cobalt waters and uninterrupted silence makes gliding into the port of Spinalonga a captivating experience. As you approach, take in the beautiful scenery, the local fishing village and the impressive remains of the 16th century Venetian fortress surrounded by bright sapphire waters.

Spinalonga has an intriguing and complex history. During the Venetian occupation, a long peninsula to the mainland was destroyed for defence purposes and a sprawling fort was built; however, it's more modern history saw it become one of the last active leper colonies in Europe. Wander along the crumbling Venetian ruins, with their ramparts and watchtowers, and listen to your expert guide as they tell stories of the remarkable people who lived here. From tales of love and loss, death and survival, come away inspired by the enduring human spirit.

Back on the mainland, stroll through the quaint Plaka in Mirabello bay taking in the relaxed atmosphere of a Cretan fishing village. Take a dip in the tranquil waters, relax on the beach or potter around the handcraft shops. Perhaps savour fresh fish in a waterfront taverna, or a glass of raki. The evening is at leisure.

### ***Blue Palace | Meals: B***

## Day 6: Crete

Today, follow your guide off the beaten path to some of Crete's lesser-known gems. The mountainous interior is still wild and remote, and you'll experience some of the island's most beautiful scenery. Stop along the way for scenic strolls among wild growing herbs, take photos of the gorgeous views, and wander through one of the villages.

For history enthusiasts, there are plenty of sights to uncover from exquisitely frescoed country chapels, to ruined Minoan palaces and towns. The main attraction is one of Greece's greatest archaeological marvels, the Palace of Malia — a large settlement of 1900 BC, once surrounded by a sprawling Minoan town. Walk through the central court, the north court and the tower court, imagining what life would have been like 3,500 years ago.

This evening is at leisure. Perhaps head to your resort's fine dining restaurant curated by the celebrated Greek Chef Athinagoras Kostakos, for a seasonal Mediterranean feast.

### ***Blue Palace | Meals: B***

## **Day 7: Crete**

Today is yours to enjoy Crete at leisure. Soak up the sun by the pool, take a refreshing dip in the sea or discover vibrant marine life with a snorkel. Further afield, sink your teeth into luscious peaches, cherries and melons at Iraklio's Central Market, and sample the famed local anthotiro cheese.

For a whole day out, head to the Venetian Old Town, a maze of lively narrow streets surrounded by Venetian walls. The harbour is a hub of atmosphere, with traditional fishing boats and eateries serving up fresh seafood. For geologic drama, active types could hike the 4 km Zakros Gorge. Alternatively relax in the Kato Zakros village, where tranquillity reigns.

You may choose to sail to Crete's stunning west coast and the world-famous Balos Lagoon on your own private motor yacht. Take a dip in the azure waters at a secluded beach, and explore vibrant wrecks and reefs with a snorkel at the Gramvousa 'pirate' Island (additional cost).

### ***Blue Palace / Meals: B***

## **Day 8: Crete - Santorini**

Floating in the southern Aegean is a little slice of Greek heaven. Santorini's essence is not just in its scenery, but its extraordinary geological past. A volcanic eruption 3,500 years ago left a caldera sunken in the ocean, transforming a once circular island into a curved cluster of sheer cliffs, dotted with volcanic beaches of red, white and black sand. Today pretty villages of limewashed cubic houses creep up the flanks of towering cliffs, while the local community hosts skilled artists, outstanding wineries, stunning sunsets and some of the finest dining experiences in the country.

Sail into the heart of the caldera and prepare yourself for three perfectly paced days discovering the epic history of this picture-perfect island. Meet your Guardian Angel at the port. They will accompany you to your hotel in Oia, for assisted check-in, with the evening at leisure.

### ***Canaves Oia Suites / Meals: B***

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### **Day 9: Santorini**

Today, teleport back through history as you discover Santorini's ancient past. Begin at the must-see Akrotiri archaeological site. After the sudden evacuation of its inhabitants in the 17th century BC, the Minoan town of Akrotiri was buried under the ash of the infamous volcano. Afterward, everything within the town was naturally preserved — leading some to call this Greece's very own version of Pompeii. Wander through the impressive excavation site and listen in as your inspiring guide brings the lost city of Akrotiri to life. Continue to the Museum of Prehistoric Thira, where a wide variety of preserved artefacts point to an advanced and wealthy Minoan civilization. Your evening is at leisure.

***Canaves Oia Suites | Meals: B***

### **Day 10: Santorini**

Today is at leisure. Active types can hike from Oia to Fira (10 kms) for breathtaking views across the island, or for geological wonders visit the surreal white, red and black volcanic sand beaches for a dip in the ocean.

You might opt to discover the island's famed wine roads. Explore the magic world of Santorini's volcanic wines under the guidance of a private and experienced sommelier. Admire the stunning Aegean scenery as you visit three family-run estates, savouring unique tastings paired with Cycladic cheese and delicacies. After this immersive day, receive your own Santorini wine certificate (additional cost).

For serenity on the water, take a semi-private cruise on the magnificent Dreamcatcher catamaran. Admire superb views as you sail past the white and red beaches, the Venetian lighthouse and into the crater, where you might like to visit the hot springs. Stake a dip in the water along the way, and finish with a delicious Greek barbeque served with a selection of meze, fresh Mediterranean salads, and sundowners (additional cost).

***Canaves Oia Suites | Meals: B***

### **Day 11: Depart Santorini**

Meet your driver this morning and transfer to Santorini airport for your departure flight.

***Meals: B***

## Map





## Accommodation

### Hotel Grande Bretagne, Athens



This 18th Century landmark is unquestionably Athens most luxurious hotel. Immaculately restored to the height of its old world grandeur, it is perfectly located at Syntagma Square in the heart of the city. The hotel's palatial interior is lavishly appointed, with restored antiques and wonderful fabrics personalising each of the 320 rooms and suites. Opt for a Junior Suite with butler service to tend to your every need.

The Grande Bretagne is ideally located for exploration of the House of Parliament and National Gardens, whilst the trendy bars, cafés and boutiques of Kolonaki Square are a short walk away.

After a day of exploration retreat to the Winter Garden where the hustle and bustle of Athens is left far behind or head to Alexander's Bar for cocktails where the 18th century tapestry of Alexander the Great is the focal point.

The Grande Bretagne not only dominates the skyline around it, meaning you're looking straight at the Parthenon, but glance to your left and you're looking straight at the Greek Parliament, with the Evzones soldiers trooping around the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier every hour.

### Why we like it

- A landmark building of stunning classical architecture, the Grande Bretagne is known as the 'Royal Box' of Athens and provides excellent views of the Acropolis
- Dining options include the GB Roof Garden restaurant & Bar overlooking the Acropolis
- GB Spa with its indoor swimming pool and a fully equipped gymnasium
- The splendid outdoor rooftop pool is a welcome rest from the Athenian sun
- A&K recommends the Deluxe Suites, which provide spacious, stylish accommodation, mixing luxurious furnishings with warm décor to create a wonderful retreat in the heart of Athens

## Blue Palace, A Luxury Collection Resort & Spa, Crete



Nestled on the famed coast of Elounda on the Island of Crete, the Blue Palace Resort offers a luxurious take on island living. Using natural stone materials, blush terracotta and huge expanses of gleaming glass it draws on Minoan and Greek architecture mixing clean lines with arched doorways and domed rooflines.

The resort's bungalows, suites and private villas are immaculate, combining a stylish feel with indigenous natural materials, and open onto gardens rich with olive, locust and palm trees. Scattered around the property in several low rise buildings, they all have sea views.

The Blue Palace has a number of swimming pools, including a large complex of interconnecting pools by the sea. Other facilities include a fitness centre, a 200 metre pebble private beach with decking, and water sports.

### Why we like it

- The resort's 251 luxurious bungalows, suites and private villas with infinity pools are dotted along the shore and connected by winding stone pathways
- The Blue Palace enjoys a blessed location, overlooking the sparkling blue waters of the Cretan Pelagos and the isle of Spinalonga with its Venetian fortress
- The resort has five exquisite restaurants, Blue Door Taverna, offering traditional Cretan cuisine, Flame, with a focus on steaks, Isola & Isola Beech club, offer Italian summery salads and fresh seafood & Asia Deep Blue, offering food with a twist. Olea, is where breakfast is served overlooking Spinalonga. Isola Beach Club is where there is often themed nights with a local DJ
- The Elounda Spa & Thalassotherapy centre is a serene hideaway by the sea, where revitalising therapies are based on the properties of sea water

- A Kids Club is open to three to 12 year olds, whilst children's facilities include indoor and outdoor playgrounds, two children's swimming pools, as well as theatre, fishing, painting, and Greek dancing. For teenagers there is plenty of water sports on offer, such as fly boarding and water skiing
- Once a week enjoy complimentary Cretan wine tasting paired with local cheeses

## Canaves Oia Suites, Santorini



Prepare to have your mind blown by the real-life beauty of Santorini. Forged by a volcano some 3,500 years ago, this Cycladic Island's distinctive shape was formed when its former disc shape was blown asunder by an eruption that destroyed the Minoan civilisation, caused the Jewish exodus from Israel and rumours of Atlantis to swirl into consciousness. The disc's remnant is now famed for its clifftop white-washed villages overlooking the formed-from-calamity caldera (a flooded volcanic crater). Perched on the island's northern tip, Oia is one of the island's most spectacular spots. Views of the caldera are what a trip to Oia is all about, and those offered at Canaves Oia Suites won't disappoint.

A sophisticatedly simple hideaway, Canaves Oia Suites is all white curvilinear shapes, blue infinity pools, and orangey hues over the caldera at sunset. The hotel offers up two pools, a cave spa and an innovative restaurant. There's also a lift to whisk guests up and down stairs – unusual in a Santorini hotel property.

Canaves Oia Suites is located within easy reach of the town's boutiques, cafes and tavernas, but it feels like a haven from the town's bustle and honeymooners taking pictures at the romantic blue-domed church. You know the one we mean...

### Why we like it

- Stunning location overlooking Santorini's caldera with panoramic views from all suites
- A choice of spacious suites plus two luxury villas for larger groups
- Its luxury spa and holistic wellness approach
- **Our top tip:** visit Petra restaurant at nearby sister hotel, Canaves Oia, for fine Greek cuisine served creatively



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