

# ANTIQUITY TO BYZANTIUM

2024 SHORE EXCURSIONS

FROM/TO ATHENS INCLUDING CANAL CROSSING •





DAY 2

## EPIDAUROS

### EPIDAUROS ANCIENT THEATRE

- Duration approx. 4 hours
- Incl. Bus/Guide/Entry fee
- Per Person: Euro 75

We leave our ship early in the morning to drive to **Ancient Epidauros**. Epidauros was known throughout the Greek world as a **healing sanctuary** and considered by many to be the birthplace of modern medicine. It was reputed to be the birthplace of Apollo's son Asclepius and for its famous theatre, which is once again in use today. The **Asklepion at Epidauros** was the most celebrated healing centre of the Classical world, the place where ill people travelled long distances to be blessed by the deity. Over the years the holy men in the site began using herbs, cleansing rituals and other techniques that transformed the treatment from divine to scientific. The theatre was designed by Polycleitus the Younger in the 4th century B.C. The original 34 rows were extended in Roman times by another 21 rows. When full, the theatre seats up to 15,000 people. As it did during the time of the ancient Greeks, the theatre is still marvelled for its exceptional acoustics, which permit almost perfect perception of spoken words from the stage floor to all spectators, regardless of their seating. We will return to our ship after completing our visit to all sites and enjoying time at leisure.



DAY 3

## NAFPLION – MYCENAE

### NAFPLION & MYCENAE

- Duration approx. 4 hours
- Incl. Bus/Guide/Entry fee
- Per Person: Euro 75

After a short drive through the colorful city of **Nafplion** and the beautiful fertile countryside of Argolis arrive at **Mycenae**, a major center of Greek Civilization. The importance of the city, which Homer calls “**rich in gold**” begins in 1650 B.C and ceases around 1100 B.C. with the fall of the civilization to which it gives name. Visit the remains of the **glorious ancient city** now a **UNESCO World Heritage site**, including the **Cyclopean walls**, the **famous Lion’s Gate**, the **Palace** – home to the Kingdom of mythical Agamemnon, the so-called **Agamemnon Tomb** and the **museum**. Mycenae in legend was the royal seat of the ill-fated **House of Atreus**, and from Mycenae **Agamemnon**, “**king of men**”, went off as leader of the Achaean expedition to war against Troy. The name of Mycenae was given to one of the greatest civilizations of Greek prehistory, the Mycenaean civilization, while the myths related to its history, its rulers and their family members (such as Clytemnestra, Iphigeneia, Electra, Orestes) have inspired poets, writers and artists continuously from the ancient to the contemporary times. At the end of the tour, we will have a short, guided walk in the historical center of **Nafplion**, **first Capital of modern Greece** with its dominating castle walls, old houses and picturesque narrow streets.



DAY 4

## GYTHION

### MANI & DIROS CAVE

- Duration approx. 6 hours
- Incl. Bus/Guide/Entry fee
- Per Person: Euro 88

**Ancient Gythion** was inhabited during prehistoric times and later the Spartans used as a port, enlarging the natural harbour they made Gythion their naval base. Leaving Gythion we will cross the scenic **Mani Peninsula** to reach **Diros** and visit the **spectacular caves**, discovered around the 60s, which are perhaps among the most important natural sites of Greece. The **Paleolithic and Neolithic findings**, many in display at the **museum**, mean that the caves were one of **the earliest inhabited places in Greece**. The human skeletons are those of unburied dead, a fact which has led the Head of Antiquities to suggest that at the end of the Neolithic period or at the beginning of the Bronze Age, a severe earthquake shook the area blocking the mouth of the cave, so that its inhabitants were walled up and died of starvation. The cave entrance remained sealed for about 4.500 years. The cave today is partially filled with water so we will board **small fishing boats** and explore the cave which is full of **stalactites** and **stalagmites**.

After visiting the cave, we will drive to nearby **Areopolis** for a short stroll through the town. Mani is at the tip of the Peloponnese, a distinctive area unlike any other area in Greece. A desolate region of underground lakes and rivers, windswept landscapes and towers who is strangely beautiful. The **Maniots** are known in Greece for their traditional **dwellings**, built three or four stories high with flat roofs and tiny openings for windows. At one time there were over 50 such villages made up of these extraordinary houses. The spirit of the warriors that once lived and fought here continues to live on making Mani one of the most enigmatic regions in Greece.



DAY 5

## PYLOS

### NESTOR'S PALACE

- Duration approx. 4 hours
- Incl. Bus / Guide / Entry fee/ Refreshment
- Per Person: Euro 75

Pylos town sits on the backside of stately Navarino Bay the site of several famous naval battles: In Antiquity between the Spartans and Athenians during the Peloponnesian conflict. In 1827 a fleet of Venetians and other city states defeated an Ottoman fleet in one of the most important naval battles in history. This defeat led to the independence of Greece, which occurred in 1829. After stopping to admire the scenery, we will continue up the road to Nestor's Palace. The remains of the prehistoric Palace occupy a scenic hilltop setting north of Pylos. Though most of the palace is long gone, the foundation remains surprisingly intact, and the entire site is covered by a large shed-like structure to prevent further damage from the elements. We know about old king Nestor thanks to Homer who wrote of him in the Iliad and the Odyssey. The palace at Pylos belonged to Nestor and was discovered in 1939 by the American archaeologist Carl Blegen. Highlights include the well-preserved royal apartments and a bathtub that archaeologists have speculated belonged to the old king himself. Following our visit to the remains of the palace, we will make the short trip to the town of Hora where the archaeological museum (optional visit) holds thousands of artefacts recovered from the site. Among the 3,000-year-old treasures are beautifully carved statues, pottery, and weapons.



DAY 5

## PYLOS

**ALTERNATIVE EXCURSION ONLY IN CASE NESTOR'S PALACE SITE CANNOT BE VISITED DEPENDING CLOSURE DATE VS SHIPS ARRIVAL**

### METHONI-KORONI

- Duration approx. 4 hours
- Incl. Bus/Guide/Entry fee/Refreshment
- Per Person: Euro 75

**Pylos town** sits on the backside of stately **Navarino Bay** the site of several famous naval battles: In Antiquity between the Spartans and Athenians during the **Peloponnesian conflict**. In 1827 a fleet of Venetians and other city states defeated an Ottoman fleet in one of the most important naval battles in history. This defeat led to the independence of Greece, which occurred in 1829. After stopping to admire the scenery, we will continue along the coast of Western Peloponnese, crossing the Messenian countryside between **Methoni** and **Koroni** which is ravishing. We will have a brief stop in **Methoni** which is a charmingly picturesque little town with the imposing **Medieval Castle** being the central attraction. There is a graceful structure known as the **Bourtzi (fortified islet)** at the castle's outermost point. It looks and is a little gem of architecture, but has a dark history, for the Ottomans built it as a place of imprisonment and execution. Even if you don't know of this history, the vibrations emitted from the solid stone are disturbing.

Our next destination is **Koroni**, once a **Venetian naval fortress**. It is a delightful town, clustered on a hillside. Its narrow, cobbled streets and stairways lead up to the Venetian castle which protected the waterways. Visiting the old town in the **Castle** we will discover little gems of architecture being well preserved such as iron balcony railings, arched windows and doors, forgotten mansions and some modest cottages still alive offering unique views and garden scents. A convent, **Aghia Sophia Byzantine Chapel** and a few cemeteries surrounded by beautiful wild flowers and perfect solitude. Sip your refreshment at the colourful port and enjoy some free time before returning to our ship.



DAY 6

## KATAKOLO

### OLYMPIA

- Duration approx. 8 hours
- Incl. Bus/Guide/Entry fee/Lunch
- Per Person: Euro 127

We will disembark the ship early morning in the port town of **Katakolo** and travel by bus to Olympia, one of the most famous and important sites in the ancient world. **Olympia** is revered as the **birthplace of the Olympic Games**. In the ancient Greek world, it was also the greatest **Pan-Hellenic sanctuary for the worship of Zeus**. Although the first recorded Olympics took place in 776 B.C., evidence indicates that some type of games or athletic contests were held as early as Mycenaean times (11th-12th centuries B.C.). Remarkably, from 776 on, the games were held uninterrupted for the next 1,000 years. From 1875 onward excavation work, spearheaded primarily by the German government, revealed the fantastic treasures from antiquity that sit today in the marvellous archaeological museum. The most thrilling site at Olympia is the stadium, which looks much like it did more than 2,000 years ago. You will also explore the **Temple of Hera**, the magnificent **temple of Zeus the Philippeion** – circular memorial of Ionic columns honouring the family of **Alexander the Great** and the **Leonidion** – lodging place for the athletes who participated in the games. We later visit the **Olympia Museum**, one of the most beautiful museums in the world. It is filled with treasures unearthed from the mud that covered Olympia after a flood in about 400 AD. Among the many astonishing exhibits are the bronze helmet of Miltiades, worn by the Greek general at Marathon in his victory over the Persians at Marathon in 490 B.C.; and the statuary from the east and west pediments of the temple of Zeus. Following **a traditional lunch in the town of Olympia**, we'll visit the **museum of the History of the Olympic Games of Antiquity**. Unlike the main archaeological museum, this building houses statuary and a host of artefacts specifically related to the ancient Olympic games. (The History Museum visit is optional provided it is open in the afternoon). After having time at leisure we will return to the ship.



DAY 7

ITEA

## DELPHI

- Duration approx. 3,5 hours
- Incl. Bus/Guide/Entry fee
- Per Person: Euro 75

**Itea** is best known as the gateway to **Delphi**, one of the most revered sites from the ancient world. We will disembark the ship early this morning and proceed to the ruins complex. Unlike other archaeological sites in Greece, Delphi is built on the side of a mountain. First time visitors are awed as much for the stunning natural beauty that surround the ruins as for the ancient buildings themselves. Behind the site, the **bare limestone cliffs of the Phaidriades** thrust several thousand feet up, towering over the archaeological site and museum, while to the south runs a deep and fertile river valley. The panoramic views from the road are truly inspiring. In its prime, **Delphi was revered for its wealth and reputation**, attributes which grew from the site's location as hosting the most important oracle in the classical world. Indeed, because everything in Greece is connected to mythology, Delphi became the **premier site for the worship of the god Apollo**. The oracle had the ability to prophecy the future and give advice. Visitors from across the Greek world travelled here to **consult with the oracle, and responded by offering thanks to Apollo in the form of treasure**. We will have a half day to walk around the ruins complex and visit the adjoining museum. Some of the highlights include the **Sanctuary of Athena Pronaia, the Castalian Spring, the Gymnasium, the Temple of Apollo, the Treasuries** (built by various Greek city-states to commemorate victories), and the **stadium**.





## REMARKS:

The tours are exclusively run for our Variety small groups and are led by expert licensed guides. Operation and prices require a minimum of 14 guests.

They are subject to changes due to site restorations, weather, heavy traffic or other conditions. Should sites or museums be closed on our visiting days, alternative visits will be offered instead.

The tours are quite active and require good physical condition. Due to slippery sites we recommend comfortable shoes, sun tan lotion, a hat and water. Dress code for Church and Monastery visits.

Gratuities for drivers and guides are not included.

**[WWW.VARIETYCRUISES.COM](http://WWW.VARIETYCRUISES.COM)**

