



Rising from the ruins

A CITY BUILT ON A CITY, MODERN ATHENS ENFOLDS A HOST OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES WITHIN ITS ALLEYS AND AVENUES. FROM THE ACROPOLIS TO THE FIRST MODERN OLYMPIC STADIUM, THERE'S A HISTORY LESSON AROUND EVERY CORNER

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9am

Hit the ground running at the Panathenaic Stadium, the site of the first modern Olympic Games in 1896. Reconstructed from the remains of an ancient Greek stadium, this is the only major arena in the world built entirely of white marble. Listen hard and you can almost hear the roar of the crowd. Or is that just the passing traffic? You can't enter, so walk past the 132AD Arch of Hadrian, resembling a Roman triumphal arch, to the site of the Temple of Olympian Zeus. The ticket here gives entry to a number of sites including the Acropolis. Take a stroll around the 15 remaining Corinthian columns. The 16th blew down in a storm in 1852 and still lies in place. The other 88 from the original construction are long gone.

11pm

From here it is one kilometre up to the Acropolis, looming over the city. Hike, or save energy and grab a cab, but start at Areopagus Hill diagonally opposite the main entrance, climbing the stairs carved into the side of the rock. This white rock-hill offers commanding

views over Athens (and will give you time to catch your breath if you walked). The major sites of the Acropolis are the Odeon of Herodes Atticus, the Parthenon and the Erechtheion, but there's plenty more to see depending on your enthusiasm for ancient ruins.

2pm

Exit the Acropolis on the north-western side and munch on a *gyro*; hunks of spit-roasted meat wrapped in pita-bread with tomato, onion, and tzatziki sauce, at any of the cafés near the entrance to the Ancient Agora. This was the heart of ancient Athens, the focus of political, commercial, administrative and social activity, the religious and cultural centre, and the seat of justice. Now, it's an open grassy area dotted with ruins, flanked by the Stoa of Attalos, converted into a museum, and at the other end, the Hephaisteion, a well-preserved Doric temple. Wander between the two, stopping at the restored Byzantine church of Agioi Apostoloi.

4pm

Swing by the ruins of Hadrian's Library on your way to Syntagma Square. Cross the

square to The Greek Parliament, immediately across Amalias Avenue to the east. The extensive National Gardens here are open to the public; the Parliament is not. Make sure you arrive close to the hour to see the changing of the guard ceremony. Conducted by the Presidential Guard in front of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier between the square and parliament, this fascinating ritual is performed rain or shine with incredible precision. The young guards wear full ceremonial dress including short kilts and pom-pom shoes.

6pm

Reward your efforts with a quick cab ride to the funicular rail car which, for three Euros, groans its way up to the summit of Lykavittos Hill. This panoramic viewpoint is the perfect place to watch the sun sink over Athens. Relax over dinner at Orizontes Lycabettus on top of the hill. Bag a seat on the terrace for the best views of the Acropolis glittering below, and savour French and Asian twists on Mediterranean classics. The food is pricey, but the views are priceless. ☺