

SPANIKOPITA



A GREEK'S GUIDE
TO GREECE

TONY GAITATZIS 2018

To Jeremy, for getting me started

SECTION 1

CONTENTS

SECTION 2

INTRODUCTION

First of all, congratulations on your trip to Greece.

I'm Tony Gaitatzis, the creator of the Greek Heritage Tour, a tour that reunites Greek Americans with their home culture, heritage, and religion.

I'm a Greek American who has lived in Greece many times. Each time I do, I discover more amazing and nuanced things that cause me to fall deeper in love with the Greek people and their culture and heritage.

Many people who visit Greece focus on Athens and the Cyclades Islands, especially Santorini and Mykonos. They conceptualize Greece a bit like this:



This view to some problems for Greece and its tourists.

1. Most of the tourist money is made by Mykonos and Santorini but isn't recycled into the mainland Greek economy.

2. Mykonos and Santorini can't handle their massive tourism demand, leading to high prices and low availability, even when booking months or years in advance.
3. Tourists are frustrated with the cramped accommodations and expensive food and lodging of these islands
4. Tourists never see the rest of Greece, leading them to believe that island life is the one and only Greek experience
5. Because tourists never leave the party island bubble, they tend to think that Greeks are lazy gluttons, having never seen how the rest of Greece works under the recession.

Greece is a small country that has been shaped by half a dozen empires over tens of thousand years of human development. It has substantially much to offer than blue domes of Santorini and the marble columns of Athens. Mainland Greeks are joyously generous, social, and hospitable; traits that lead them to be excellent hosts to wandering tourists.

The Greece I will show you is more like this:



More than that, I will tell you a bit about Greek culture in this book, so that no matter where you decide to go, you'll be prepared to make the most of your journey.

I hope this book will inspire you to journey away from the beaten path to discover and share some of the other amazing experiences available in Greece.



1

GETTING AROUND

Greece is filled with farmers and retirees, many of whom barely speak English. Signs feature long Greek words, and much of Greece's rich culture has never become mainstream in the West

Being able to look up words, get directions, and translate text can be incredibly helpful to get around.

SECTION 1

LANGUAGES

English

Your mileage may vary when speaking English in Greece.

People in cities are forced to take English in high school, so young people (mid-20s) usually speak reasonably good English, depending on some factors such as shyness or age or practice.

Outside major cities, young people have less access to education or western media such as TV or Internet, so they have less practice hearing and speaking English. Many times, young people still know simple words and phrases anyway.

Basically, you'll get by with simple words almost anywhere. Many people don't understand complex sentences or long words except in touristy areas.

Many restaurants have English menus, especially in cities. Since the names for the foods are Greek, waiters will understand what you are ordering from an English menu. Most modern conveniences and electronics were invented in English speaking countries and therefore have English names, so you'll be fine when asking for WiFi, SIM cards, or smartphone accessories.

Greek

Greeks are very impressed if a westerner speaks or understands even a little Greek. They know Greek is hard and they know it doesn't have much relevance outside Greece, so it's a big compliment to speak basic Greek with Greeks.

Knowing literally **any** Greek will impress Greeks. Useful phrases to know include:

ENGLISH	GREEK	PRONOUNCIATION
Hello	Τι Καννησ	tee KA-niss
Thank you	Ευχαριστώ.	ef-GAH-ree-sto
Please	παρακαλω	pah-rah-kah-LO
Where is the bathroom	Πού είναι το μπάνιο	poo EE-nay tow BAH-nio
Do you speak English?	Μιλάς αγγλικά?	mee-LAHS eh-glee-KAH?
I don't understand	Δεν καταλαβαίνω	then kah-tah-lah-VEY-no
I want to go to ...	Θέλω να πάω στο ...	theh-low nah pow stoh ...
How do you say... ?	Πώς λέγεται ... ?	Pohs leh-geh-teh ... ?
Help!	Βοήθεια!	voh-ee-thee-AH!
Yes	Ναι	nay
No	Οχι	OH-hee
Do you have WiFi?	'Εχετε WiFi;	EH-heh-teh WEE-fee?
Excuse me	Συγνώμη	sig-NOH-mee

Other Languages

Many Greeks also speak German - it's a favorite second language in schools. Almost no one understands French, Italian, Spanish, or Chinese.

Body Language

Greeks use different gestures than people in the USA. This handy table will help avoid any confusions:

GESTURE	WESTERN MEANING	GREEK MEANING
Hand open, palm facing out, fingers up	Wait a minute	(expletive)
Fingers open, hand facing down, waiving back and forth	Go away	Come here
Head nod down	Yes	Yes
Head nod up	Yes	No
Palm down, Fingers flick out	No real meaning	(expletive)

SECTION 2

INTERNET

WiFi

Most major cafes have free WiFi, as do McDonald's and many hotels. Even a lot of shops, like hair salons and pastry shops sometimes have it.

To ask if a place has WiFi, you can say, “eh-HEES wee-fee?” “Neh” means yes, and “oh-hee” means no.

Mobile Data

Mobile data is available for little money if you bring your passport and an unlocked smartphone. Greeks call mobile data by the term “WiFi.” rather than by the terms 3G, 4G, or LTE.

You can also pick up a \$10 internet only SIM card from Cosmote, Vodafone, or Wind Mobile if your phone is unlocked. In the summer, many mobile providers have promotions that offer several gigabytes of high-speed data for \$10 or \$15.

Electricity



Greece uses a standard EU power plug - cheap adapters can convert US style adapters into EU style adapters - no power conversion is necessary. Converters can be purchased from most travel accessory stores or convenience stores in the USA.

SECTION 3

PRICES

Prices are similar to most mid-western cities in the United States and Canada. If you have bought food, clothing, or flights around Chicago, Cincinnati, St. Louis, or Cleveland, you'll have a reasonable expectation of the prices in Greece.

Food & Drink

Food prices vary from city to city but typically range between \$5 and \$20.

	TOWN	CITY
APPETIZERS	\$3-\$7	\$5-\$10
MEALS	\$7-\$15	\$10-\$20
COFFEE	\$1-\$2	\$3-\$5
ALCOHOL	\$2-\$5	\$5-\$7

Clothing

Clothing is very, very inexpensive, similar prices to LA. Dresses are as low as \$3-\$4. Shirts can go for \$10-\$30, Shoes are anywhere between \$20-\$100, Suits can be found between \$50-\$200.

Travel

Travel costs vary depending on where you are going but are still relatively cheap compared with the rest of Europe. The only exception is gasoline, which is as expensive as in Switzerland.

Many Greek highways have tolls, so make sure to have cash handy if you are driving between cities across the country.

	PRICE
GAS	0.5 \$/L - \$2.0 \$/L
TAXIS	\$2-\$3 to start, ~\$1/km after
BUSESSES	\$5-\$50 based on the destination
TRAINS	\$5-\$50 based on the destination
FERRIES	\$5-\$50 based on the destination
LOCAL FLIGHTS	\$20-\$100 based on the destination
INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS	\$50-\$400 based on the destination
TOLLS BETWEEN CITIES	\$2-\$20 depending on the road
CAR RENTAL	\$8-\$20 per day

SECTION 4

TRANSPORTATION

Cars and Roads

Driving is a great way to see Greece. The mountain views are spectacular, especially when coming down to the water, and some of the most beautiful towns are only accessible by car.

Greece has many car rental companies, especially at airports in major cities. Familiar companies such as Hertz and Enterprise are everywhere.

Motorbiking is another option. The road will feel very open, and you'll be able to catch the salty sea breeze on your face as you drive along the beach.

Motorcycle rentals are available online:

<https://motogreece.gr/>

Busses and Trains

Busses and trains are a fun way to get between cities, especially overnight. It is even possible to get a bed in some trains.

Trains are operated nationally, so there is a single system for buying tickets, which can be accessed in-station or online:

<http://www.trainose.gr/en/>

Busses are operated by independent companies, so each one has its own system for scheduling and purchasing tickets. A list of bus operators can be found at:

<https://www.greeka.com/greece-travel/buses/>

Ferries

Ferries go to nearly every island. Nearby islands have ferries that go several times a day, and distant islands may only have ferries that go overnight. Many of these ferries have space for cars or other large items, so it's possible to take your car and drive around the larger islands.

Ferry schedules and prices can be found online:

<https://www.go-ferry.com/greek-ferries.html>

SECTION 5

TOILETS

Toilet Types

Most places have sit-down (western-style) toilets.

Except in villages, most toilets are sit down and have toilet paper.

Villages and old neighborhoods sometimes have squat toilets.



Maybe you are weirded out by using the bathroom in new ways. I get it. You are used to doing things a certain way and you've spent your whole life blocking out how gross it is. Doing it a new way forces you to realize all over again how disgusting it is to take a dump.

However, If you have the opportunity to try a squat toilet, I highly recommend it for a few reasons:

1. You don't have to touch your bare butt against something that just cradled someone else's.

2. Things come out a lot smoother once you figure out how to not shit all over your pants.
3. No splash-back.
4. Dress-wearers: if you do it right, you may not even have to take off your dress.

Toilet Paper

In many places, toilet paper must be thrown in the trash instead of in the toilet. Toilet paper can clog the drains and cause major problems, especially in homes.



It is a reflex to toss the toilet paper in the toilet when done wiping - breaking this habit is very, very difficult. Hilariously, when after you get used to this change, you'll have just as much trouble remembering to throw toilet paper into the toilet when you come back home.



2

DESTINATIONS

Greece offers an unbelievable diversity of scenery in 5 hours of driving. Every city in Greece has its own history and culture, cuisine, temperament, and climate. Beach towns offer fresh fish, pastel buildings, and comfortable living. Mountain towns provide a gregarious charm with a side of roasted meats and rice and stone architecture.

SECTION 1

TOWNS

In mountain towns such as Karditsa, Ionnana and Panteleimon, you will find preserved thousand-year-old homes and buildings. It's everything you love about Bruges or other preserved medieval towns in Western Europe but without the crowds.

Karditsa

Karditsa is a small, spacious town in the middle of the country that's got beautiful hiking trails, shops, and restaurants, and it's conveniently on the way to Ioannina or Lefkada from Athens. The plaza in the middle of the city is worth a look also.



Ionnana

Ionnana is a beautiful mountain town that encloses a lake. Historically it's a silver producing region. so there are amazing craftsmen that produce knick knacks, art, and tools.





Panteleimon

Panteleimon is a beautiful mountain town at the foot of Mount Olympus. It's got lots of magnificent stone and stucco houses with clay rooftops and cherrywood balconies. The plazas are small and winding around the mountain, giving it the nickname, “the balcony of Mt. Olympus.” You can hike around the town and explore the shops, then eat at one or more of the fantastic restaurants around the central plaza.



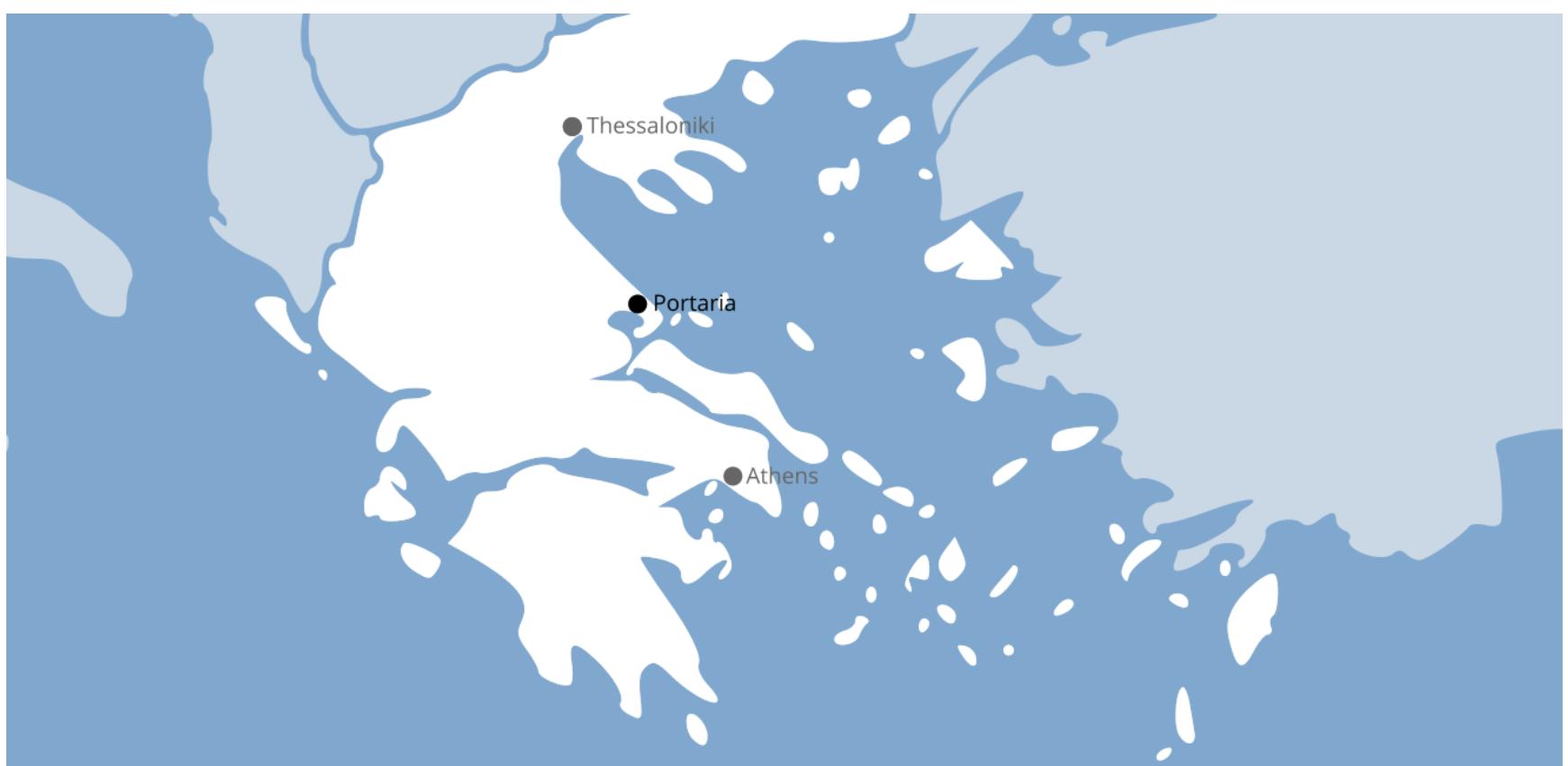
Naoussa

A major wine producing region, Naoussa is about an hour from Thessaloniki by car. Noussa downtown looks like this:



Portaria

Potaria is another excellent place to visit. The beach where Mama Mia was filmed is there, it's got a monastery on top of the mountain and some fantastic hiking. My favorite thing is the Alchemist bed and breakfast at the end of town where the owners make their own cheese, butter, bread, and jams.



SECTION 2

BEACHES

Greece has one of the longest coastlines in the world and many islands. As a result, it has many beaches each with its own charm.

Island Beaches

Pretty much any island will have fabulous beaches. Many tiny islands have a ferry that goes back and forth several times a day from a nearby city, and many are only 10 or 20 minutes away.

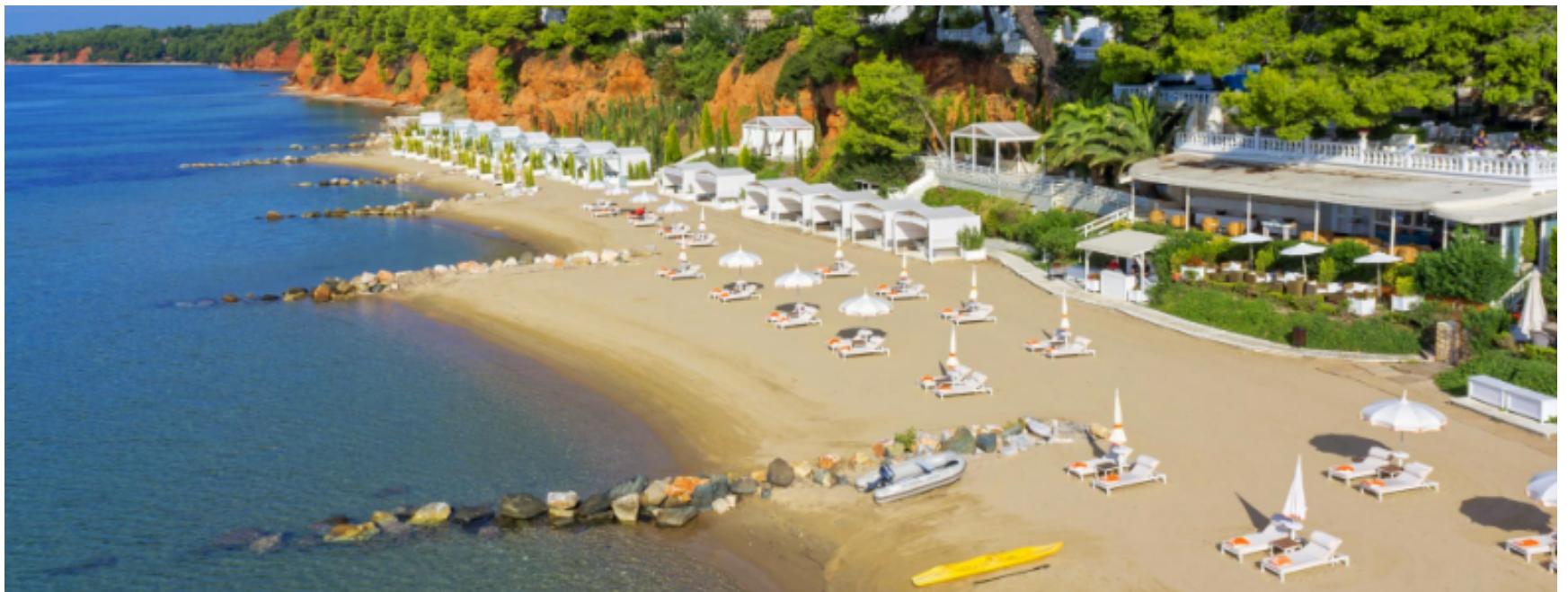
Honestly, wherever you are on the coast of Greece, it is worth asking if a ferry goes to a nearby island. There are too many to enumerate in a book, and they are all gorgeous.

Halkidiki

The middle of the 3 peninsulas of Halkidiki is famous for beautiful white sand beaches and crystal clear water. They are all about 30 minutes to an hour southeast of Thessaloniki.



One excellent stop on Halkidiki is Nikiti. It's a beach town with little houses and restaurants at the edge of the sand. You can grab a drink or a bite to eat and enjoy it at the edge of the clean turquoise waves.



Katerini

Katerini is a town about an hour south of Thessaloniki with a beautiful beach with warm, shallow, clear water that faces east so you can watch the sun or the moon rise off the edge of the water.

In Katerini is a resort hotel called The Mediterranean Village. It features an outdoor cafe that doubles as an entrance to the beach. It is the perfect place to sit and relax in the shade between dips in the sea.

There are parasols and beach chairs for rent, and sometimes a bouncy castle and slide on the water which I personally know is a lot of fun to play on.



Kalamata

Kalamata is a beautiful beach town with a university and some of the most beautiful people in the world. It feels somewhat like San Diego. It's packed with sexy, fun people who are keeping a vibrant, fun nightlife. It is a must go! It's got ice cream shops, dance clubs, hip restaurants, perfect weather, and more.



SECTION 3

HISTORIC SITES

Athens

Athens has most of the most historic sites that people know about, most notably the Parthenon, the birthplace of democracy, and some of the oldest theatres. It's also got a restaurant and bar scene.

Definitely check out the Monastiraki district, between Syntagma and the Acropolis. It's a hip district with great shops and restaurants and eons of history.

If you want a Parthenon-like experience without all the tourists, check out the Temple of Hephaestus just north of the Acropolis.





Delphi

Delphi was home to an oracle who was consulted about important decisions by emperors for thousands of years. The Greeks considered Delphi to be the navel of the world, which is represented by a massive stone sculpture called the Omphalos.



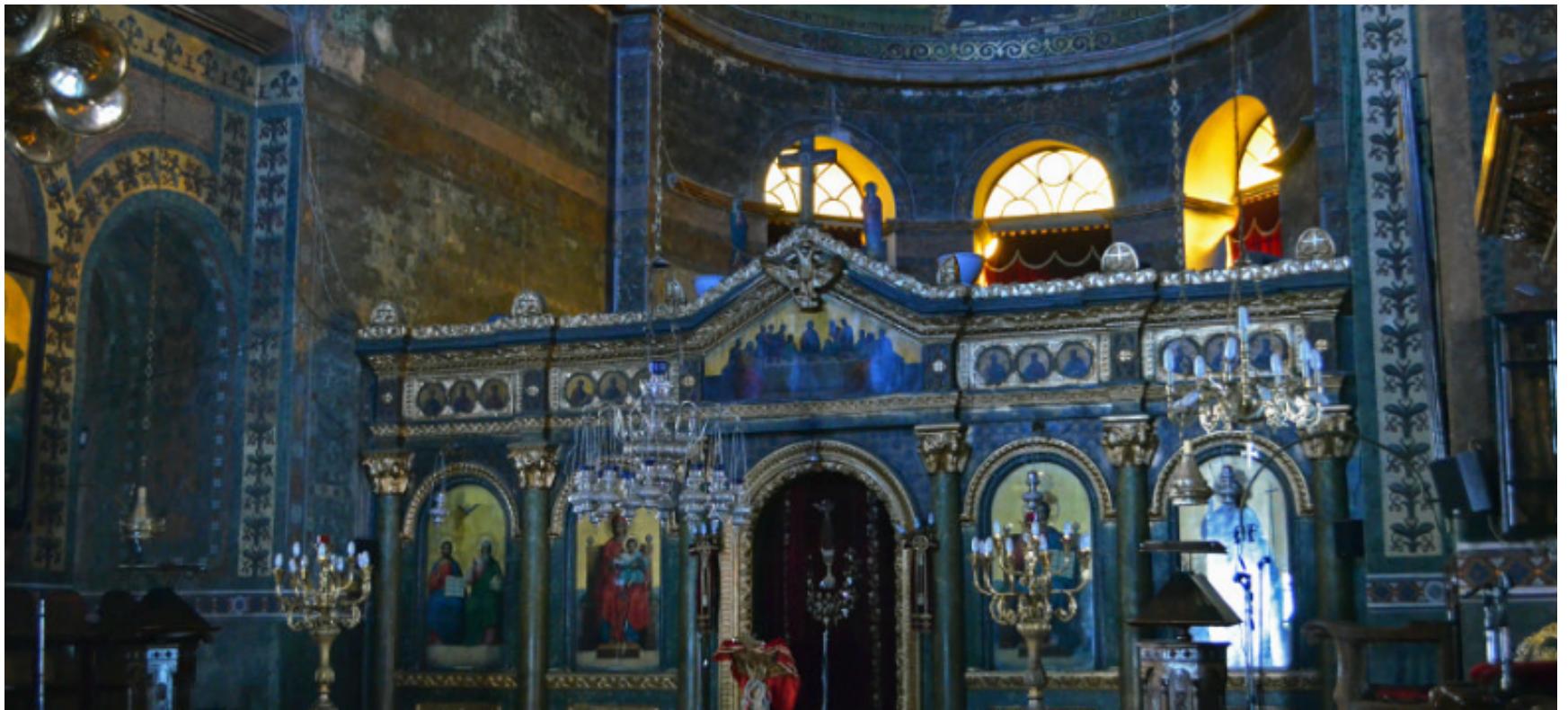
Knossos

Knossos is the site of the Minoan civilization, one of the earliest and most advanced in the world. Many of their lost technological advancements were not re-invented for another 3000 years. Today they leave us with the legend of the Minotaur, an enchanted bull that lived in a labyrinth underground.



Thessaloniki

Thessaloniki has been a city since the times of Alexander the Great. It was the second largest city in the Byzantine Empire and features a replica of the Hagia Sophia church from Constantinople.



Vergina

Vergina is about an hour from Thessaloniki - this is where the tomb of Philip of Macedon is - the first ruler to build an empire in Greece and the father of Alexander the Great.



Monemvasia

Monemvasia is located on the eastern tip of the Peloponnese. It is a former Venetian and Ottoman fortress city that's built up over the centuries, and turned into a living museum. Famous Greek musicians and poets are from here, and the entire place is a beautiful, medieval city. Hotels are around \$60 including a homemade breakfast feast.



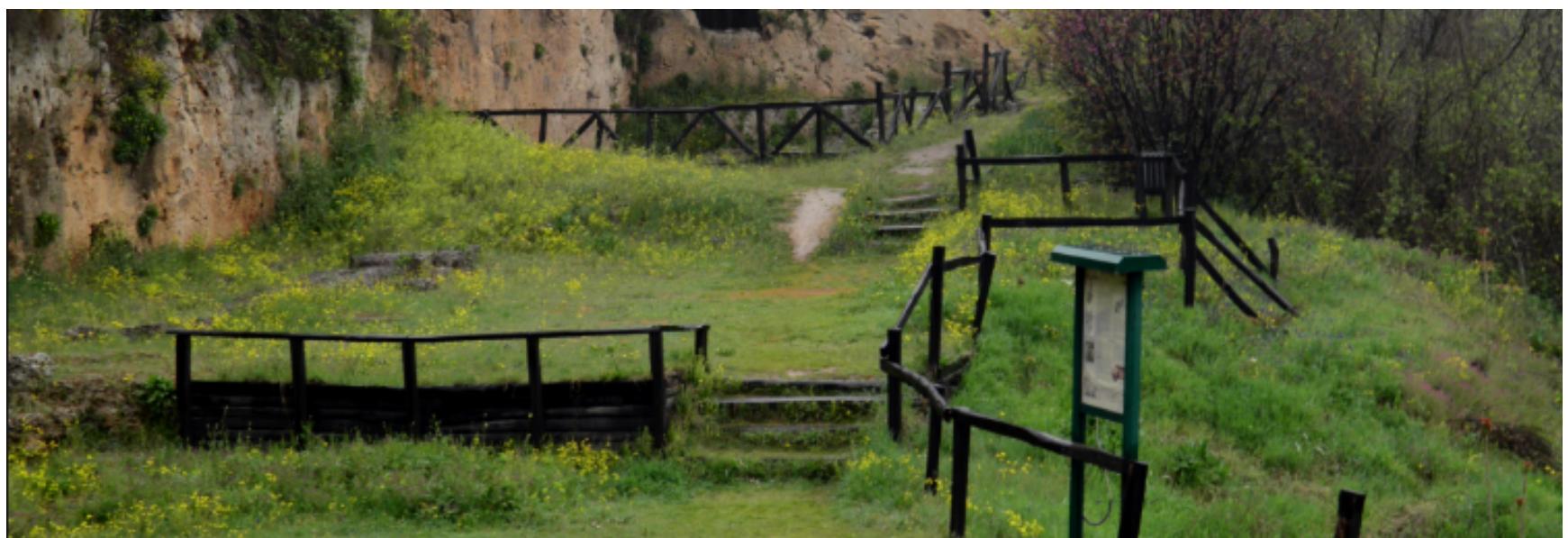
Ioannina

In addition to being a cute mountain town filled with artisanal metalwork, Ioannina played an important role in both during Ottoman Empire and the civil war.



Naossa

In addition to being a wine producing region, Naossa is home to the School of Aristotle, where Alexander the Great and others learned from the last great Greek philosopher.



Veria

Veria was a prominent trade city during the Byzantine Era, leading St. Paul to visit twice. Today, the Church of St. Paul stands as an outdoor commemoration to his visit and the impact he and Veria played in the

spread of Christianity.



Meteora

Meteora features a set of monasteries perched on top of towering rock formations, similar to the kind found in Utah. Visitors can hike to the

precipice and into the monasteries to view how the monks worship and live.



SECTION 4

ISLANDS

Lefkada, Corfu, Kefalonia

Lefkada, Corfu, and Kefalonia are Venetian islands off the coast of Western Greece. They have the color and quaint charm of southern Italy. Lefkada is accessible from the mainland via car, and a \$20 cruise will bring you around to the other islands, including Skorpio (Onassis' island) and tiny beach island that has nothing but a church on it. The cruise will drop you off in the water so you can swim to the church.





Hydra

Hydra is a tiny island off the southern tip of the Peloponnese. There are no cars - only donkeys. Like many of the southern and western islands, it's got Venetian and Ottoman roots, giving it a healthy mix of medieval Italian and Ottoman architectures and culture, blended with carefree island life.



Mykonos

Once a destination for free love and hippies, Mykonos has become one of the top tourist destinations in Greece. Its colorful foliage and white windmills have become almost synonymous with the idea of Greek

islands.



Santorini

Santorini is what people think of when they think of Greek islands. It's beautiful whitewashed buildings, blue domed roofs, and dark stone streets make it a striking and attractive tourist destination.



Krete

Krete has incredible towns and historic ruins. Including the palace of King Minos (who kept a Minotaur in an underground labyrinth), and the last leper colony, decommissioned in the 1950s. It also remnants of Neolithic settlements in the form of stone huts, wells, and farm dividers.

Culturally, it's a little wilder than mainland the mainland, and this plays out everywhere - the music, the food, the culture. It's a bit like the Texas of Greece.



Other Islands

There are so many other islands around the coast that you can take a ferry to. Many of the boats are around \$20, run every hour, and take 20-30 minutes to go to the island. Most of these islands have small towns, gorgeous white sand beaches, and clear water.





3

CULTURE

Greek culture has evolved over thousands of years. It has both shaped and been shaped by the rest of the world.

SECTION 1

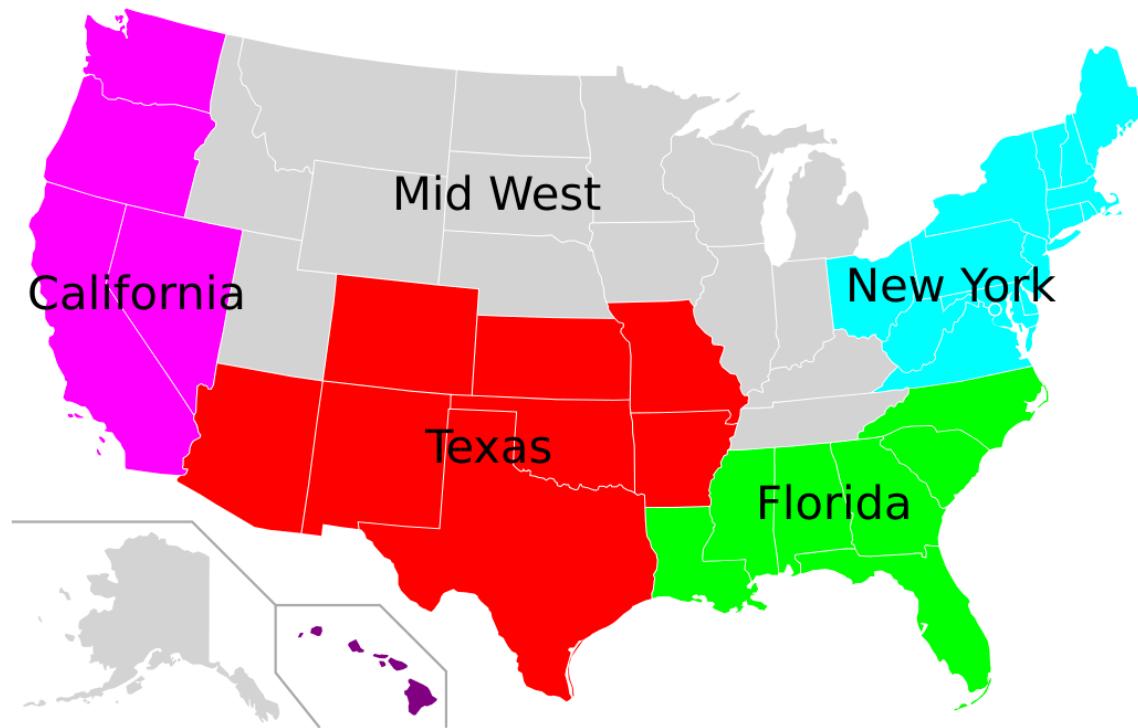
ABOUT AMERICA

To Greeks, America represents economic and social freedom as well as military oppression and greed. It's a complicated relationship that lets them both love and hate America at the same time.

They are fascinated by American culture, especially what they see in the movies. New York City is of particular interest, and thanks to startups, now so is San Francisco. They don't like the military and economic control imposed by America, nor are they a fan of having to spend the last 50 years trying to play catch-up to 1000 years of Western economic development, just to stay afloat.

Most Greeks have a limited understanding of America. They learn from what they see in the movies, most of which are about New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

They tend to think it's possible to drive across America in a day or two, and conceptualize the country like this:



In fairness, this is probably more than most Americans know about Greece.

SECTION 2

CHURCH AND RELIGION

Many older Greeks go to church at least once a day. They grew up during a time before electricity, cars, phones, or industrial machines. Until the 1960s, many Greeks lived entirely off the land, spun their own wool, sewed their own clothes, and build their own houses. Many were paid in corn or wheat instead of money and rode donkeys from place to place. To them, the church is the only place they can come together to get answers to difficult questions and to spend time with their community.

Their parents saw the church as the only way to preserve Greek culture. They fought hard to keep the church and for their independence. Being Greek meant nothing without Christianity.

Younger Greeks feel more disillusioned about the church. They romanticize their classical roots and associate the church with resistance to adapt to a rapidly changing world.

SECTION 3

FOOD AND COFFEE

Greeks worship food. They have coffee and biscuits in the morning, followed by increasingly heavy foods all day until late in the night.

It is not uncommon for families to come together and eat nonstop from 10am to 10pm or later.

This behavior comes from generations of soldiers coming through to steal food and burn the leftovers. This nonstop food scarcity caused the Greeks to develop the sense that every bite of food could be their last.

When they are not eating, they are drinking coffee. Frappes are a favorite drink, which in Greece consists of foamed milk paired with sweetened coffee.

SECTION 4

ADDRESSING ELDERS

You can address elders by their first names. Greeks are typically very relaxed. Sometimes at different times of the year, there are specific greetings, but they don't really expect non-Greeks to know that.

In the Greek Language, there's a concept like in French where “superior” people are talked to in a different style of language. This doesn't apply when speaking in English or with family.

SECTION 5

COMMUNICATION

Talk

Greeks are extremely social. Don't be surprised if you are sucked into a conversation with someone you don't know, even if you don't understand anything they say.

They tend to ask questions that are considered personal in the West.

Family and tribe are the primary ways people understand each other's relationship in society, so questions like "are you married" or "how many brothers and sisters do you have" or "where do you live" are the Greek equivalent of "What do you do for work."

Nearly every new person I meet asks if I am married, how many kids I have, where I am from, who my mother is, how she's doing, what the weather's like where I am from, they have a cousin who lives in New Yorkie. Or Chicago. Is San Francisco close to New Yorkie? How many hours drive is it? Maybe I can visit their cousin? We will get along. They know a girl for me. They can come to visit me in San Francisco on their way to New Yorkie.

This happens with family and complete strangers. All with a hand on my knee or stroking my hair or holding my hand.

Touch

Greeks are super touchy. They might touch your face or your hair, or elbow your arm, grab your knee, or hit your chest while talking with you.

Even a handshake in Greece is a sensual experience. You'll say hello to someone you've never met, and they'll hold your hand and not let it go for the entire time they talk to you. This is entirely normal and might be challenging to Americans/British or others who aren't accustomed to physical contact, but touch is an essential part of communication in Greece.

SECTION 6

YOUR TOWN

Visiting the town where your family comes from is a surreal experience.

In rural areas, people have almost a tribal mentality. By knowing a face, accent, or last name, they can identify which village a person is from in much the same way that Americans can know what country a person is from by hearing their accent.

Families are also typically large and tightly knit. Grandparents, parents, cousins, uncles, and aunts all contribute to the care and parenting of children, and groups of cousins tend to go out in the evening to socialize the way classmates in the United States do.

Your family and your town are two of the most important things to rural Greeks.

If you go to your home town, people are likely to recognize you by your face alone and welcome you as if you are a well-known member of the family.

Greeks are also incredibly hospitable. They are almost forceful in their attempts to feed, clothe, and entertain guests. Saying “no” is sometimes not an option.

Visiting your village or town will make you feel like a returning hero who’s been loved, honored, and missed. You will get to meet generations of people with frighteningly similar quirks as you. And you will get to see

a whole community of people who have the same odd mannerisms as your family in the United States.

I highly recommend taking the trip to visit your long-lost relatives in their town.



4

HISTORY

Greece has an extraordinarily long and storied history. Over the last 5000 years, Greece gave rise to the roots of all modern civilization, including cornerstones like Democracy, theatre, and Christianity.

The story of Greece is the story of our shared humanity.

SECTION 1

PRE-HISTORY

Archeological evidence suggests that humans may have been living in Greece for as much as 1.4 million years as hunter/gatherers.

The Neolithic revolution reached Greece sometime between 7000 and 6500 B.C. when sea-faring agriculturalists entered Greece through modern-day Turkey. These agriculturalists brought the first wave of farming techniques including domestication and selective breeding of plants, property ownership, division of land, increased trade, and more structured societies. These people also worked with clay and bread.

By 3200 B.C. as Greece entered the Bronze Age, Greek-speaking tribes had begun to settle, laying the foundation for a unified Greece. Greeks at this time started using metal to build lighter, stronger tools and learned to ferment wine from fruits.

Greeks were so fond of wine that they dedicated an entire God to it. Dionysus was the Greek god of wine, ritual craziness, and fertility.

The artifacts of Neolithic and proto-Greeks can still be found in Crete, particularly on the island of Kalydon off Crete. Stone homes and walls are all over the island.



SECTION 2

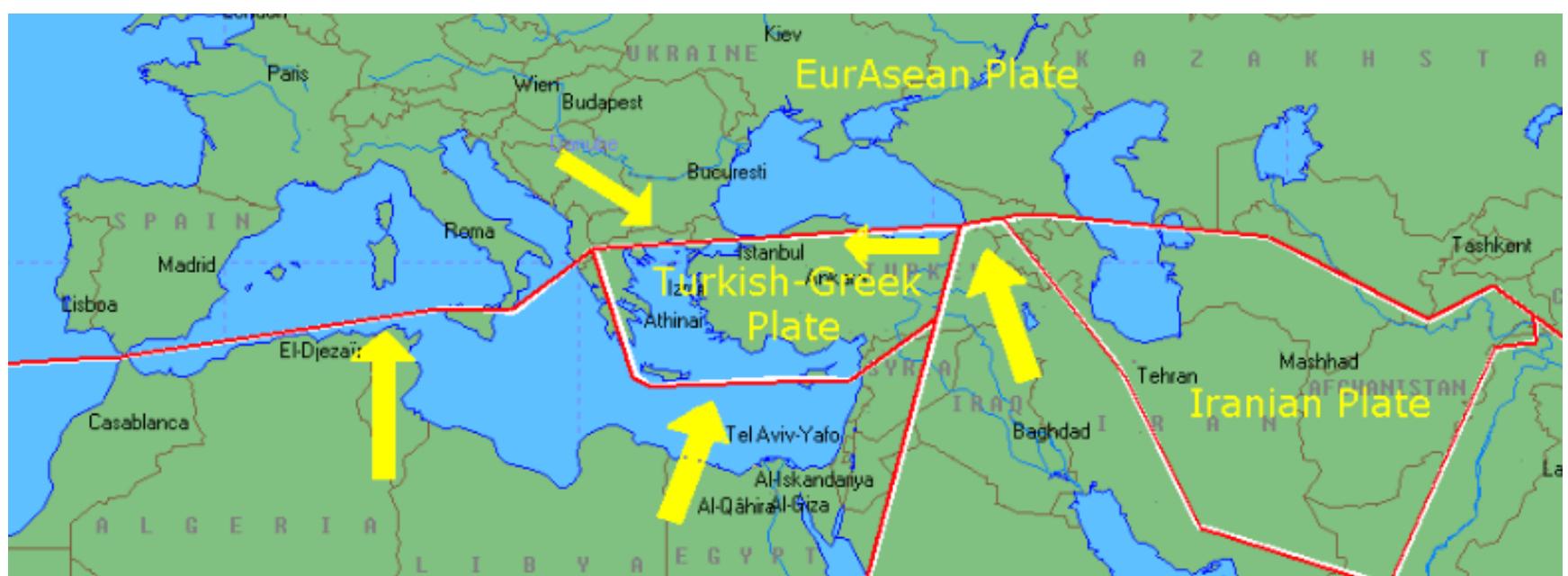
THE MINOANS

One of the earliest civilizations to appear in Greece was the Minoan, which appeared around the beginning of the Bronze age, 3200 B.C.

The Minoans are famous for the legend of King Minos and the Minotaur.

The Minotaur was a creature that was born from the unholy union of a white bull and King Minos' wife. It grew to become a monstrous beast that ate people. Minos sought advice from the Oracle at Delphi, who told him to build an underground labyrinth so vast and complex that the Minotaur could never find its way out.

Crete sits just north of a fault line between the African and Turkish-Greek tectonic plates. The origins of the Minotaur are a possible explanation for earthquakes that Cretans experienced as a result of the shifting plates. A giant, angry half-god, half-bull that runs into walls underground would undoubtedly cause the earth to shake.





The Minoan civilization is also famous for several developments as a result of being a highly organized, technologically advanced society. They developed a still-undeciphered writing system called Linear-A and built some of the earliest monumental architecture in the world.

They were also experts at moving water. They developed toilets, irrigation, plumbing, sewers, and heated floor tiles that took the rest of the world nearly 5000 years invent.

You can see some of this early architecture, art, and plumbing technology today in Europe's oldest city, Knossos in Crete.



SECTION 3

CLASSICAL HELLENISM

A lot is known about the Classical Hellenist period between the 5th and 4th centuries B.C., especially from the Athenian perspective. Thanks to writing and a focus on intellectual and creative pursuits such as philosophy, we have a clear picture about the nature of life at that time compared to what happened for thousands of years before or after.

Classical Greece gave birth to Western civilization and, though Greece experienced a very different historical path than the rest of Europe, it is used as a justification for Western supremacy through its ancient legacy. We project many of our values onto ancient Greece due to their apparent similarity, especially when compared to anything else happening in Europe for the next 1500 years.

Greece during the classical era had many prominent cities sharing mostly the same religion and language, but each with its own political system. Each city, therefore, acted as an independent self-governing state, so we call them city-states.

Some cities such as Athens and Sparta had military and/or economic power over nearby city-states, but they were not empires or countries. Athens produced most of the literature, philosophy, science, theatre, and political systems that we know about today so we will focus on that.

Society

Athens had a population of up to half a million people. Of these, around 400,000 were slaves, 10,000 were resident aliens, and 20,000 were citizens - white men born in Athens. Slaves were mainly used as farm labor and concubines and women could not be citizens. Women, slaves, and immigrants could participate in many of the activities of city life but could not engage in politics or represent themselves in court.

Women were so repressed that not only are there several Greek tragedies about women going on murderous rampages after being told what to do, but the laws of Athens legally classified being a woman alongside physical and mental disabilities.

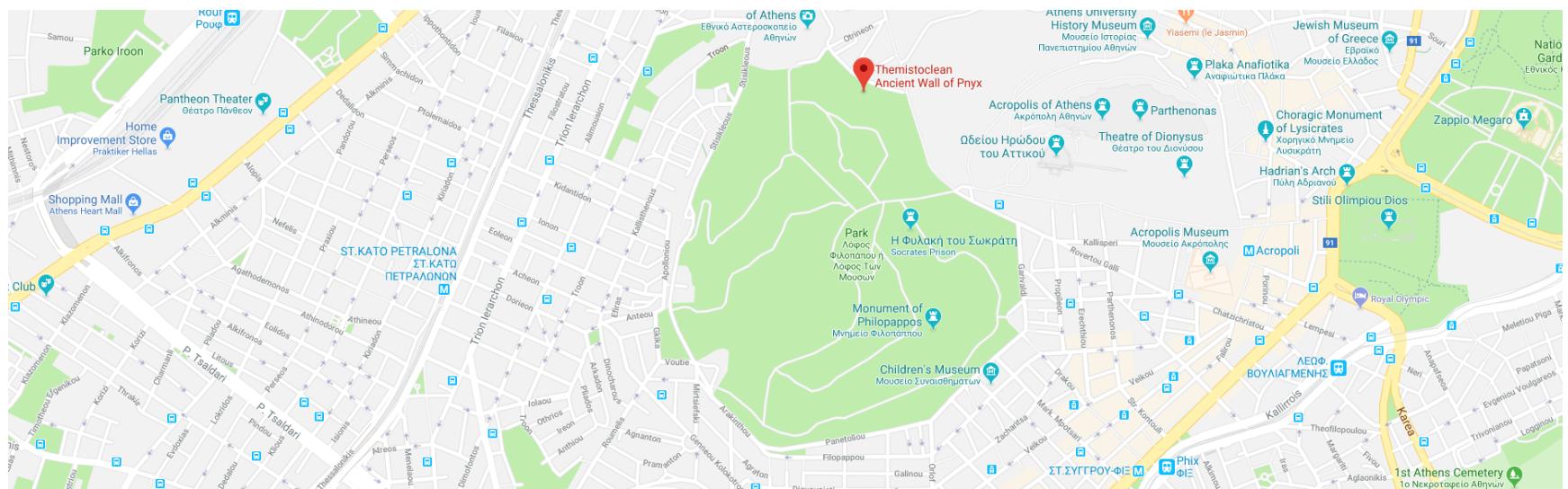
The economic model at the time was based heavily on land ownership and labor, so city-states were motivated to gain power through military campaigns. This contributed to Athens, Sparta, and the Persians being nearly always at war. Eventually, Sparta joined forces with the Persians to destroy Athens, plunging all of Greece into the dark ages in the process and losing to the Persians a short time after.

Politics

Athenians pioneered democracy. All citizens over the age of 30 had the opportunity to go to the Pnyx near the Acropolis to suggest action that Athens should take, such as going on military campaigns. There were no political parties, so bills passed by a voting majority.

This government was in charge of judging crimes, executing military campaigns, and public works projects among other things.

The site of this first democracy is still around today. It lives in a park just west of the Acropolis.



Science

Many scientific discoveries and technological inventions were made around this time. Technologies that aided in construction, transportation, astronomy, irrigation, and medicine are still in use today. Some examples include roads, lighthouses, odometers, cranes, gears,

clocks, calipers, plumbing, vending machines, automatic doors, cannons, cartography, and showers were all invented by Greeks during this 200 year period.

Medical advancements saw the distinction between veins and arteries, as well as the role of the brain as the source of thought and intelligence.

Philosophy

Philosophers and scientists pushed the limits of human understanding. They defined much of how we see relationships between people and society, the mind and body, humanity and nature, and more.

Aristotle formalized logic, a system of thought that today is the backbone of all science, mathematics, and critical thinking. This method of problem-solving is so reliable that the church essentially held all of Aristotle's beliefs as Truth, even after Aristotelian logic proved some of his other beliefs wrong.

The Hippocratic oath, developed by ancient doctors is still taken by doctors today. Aristotelian logic and philosophy are the not only the backbone of critical thinking, science, and mathematics, and is held with nearly as high regard as the word of God by western religions.

You can visit the school of Aristotle just outside the beautiful wine producing region of Naoussa, 45 minutes west of Thessaloniki.



Theatre

One of the Greeks' most exceptional contributions to society was theatre. Theatre requires architecture, technology, storytelling, critical thinking, and community to all come together in into a single interactive art form that reflects the human condition.

Theatre began as a public religious ceremony that featured an animal sacrifice. Donors would invest in playwrights to bring stories to life. Later, the theatre was professionalized, and patrons could each pay a small fee to see a play.

Plays used tragedy and satire to highlight real issues in Athenian society., in particular, foreshadowed the downfall of Athenian society.

Building theatres was a technological achievement. It required masonry and stonework that not only allowed for the movement and placement of hundreds or thousands of people at a time but also projected the voices of the actors into the audience entirely through the resonant properties of the stone background.

Many ancient city-states built such theatres, and many of them are still in use today. You can not only see ancient theatres, but you can attend actual plays and concerts in them all over Greece.

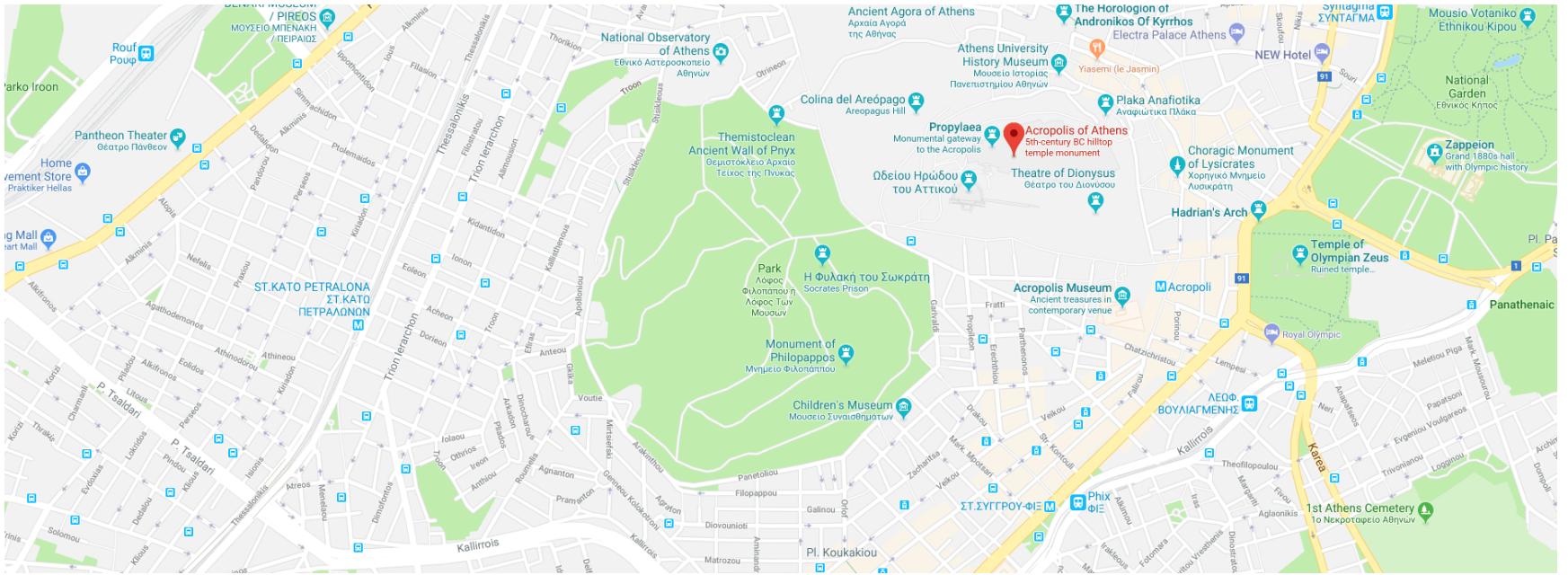


Religion

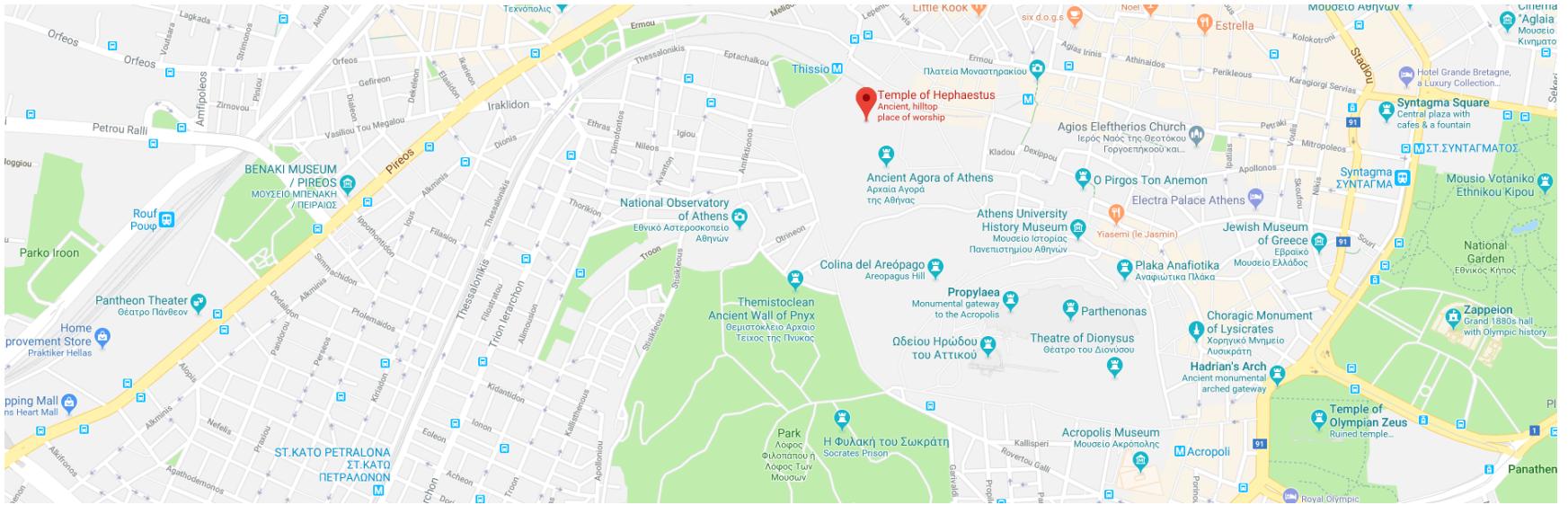
Ancient Greeks were very religious. Most families had an altar to at least one god, typically Hera. At this time, public works projects were orchestrated to build buildings in honor of a god or goddess that also acted as a government building or public meeting place.

One example of this is the Parthenon at the Acropolis of Athens. This building was constructed in 447 B.C. and still looks over Athens today. The Parthenon and surrounding complex is a popular destination for tourists who come to Athens. After the train from the airport, it is a few metro stops and is a straight walk from Constitution Square, the modern seat of government in Athens.





As monuments to the gods, these buildings were towering works of art with large, open spaces and tall columns that framed the area. Though many were destroyed by militaries and Christians zealots, there are a few that remain in excellent condition. The Temple of Hephaestus, built to honor the god of craftsmanship is one such example. It rightly sits just north of the ancient market, not far from the Acropolis.



SECTION 4

MACEDONIAN KINGDOM

Before the 4th century B.C., the Macedonian kingdom was a small one just outside the area controlled by Athens. Its small size and distance from Athens gave it enough autonomy that Philip II was able to expand the army and extend the kingdom to the rest of mainland Greece by mid 300s B.C.

Phillip II's son, Alexander the Great was born in Vergina, near modern-day Thessaloniki. While he was king, Philip II hired Aristotle to be Alexander's tutor at the School of Aristotle. Alexander the Great took over the throne at the age of 20 after his father's assassination, then proceeded to expand the empire as far east as India and as far south as Egypt. It laid the foundation for the Roman empire that followed.



Using a devastating military technique that effectively surrounded the enemy and attacked from all sides, he never lost a battle. This technique

relied on a cultural transition from low-harm warfare to military campaigns. Since the development of farming, fewer people were needed to gather food for all of society, so the value of human life diminished compared to hunter-gather societies. Having more land became desirable to lessen the risk of local crop failures.

Greece had been developing military tactics for some time, and when they were applied to the mostly hunter-gather and isolated tribes to the East by a brilliant young king educated by one of history's greatest thinkers, these tactics were virtually unstoppable.

Philip II unified Greek city-states under one government for the first time, paving the way for the idea of a unified sense of Greek identity. Alexander the Great expanded on that, creating a continuous territory that primed the area for the creation of the silk road, the Roman Empire, and the spread of Christianity.

Some traditions from this era survive in Greece today, for example, the traditional wedding clothing for women in northern Greece including a feather and fur headdress and a metal waist plate.



The tomb of Philip II was discovered in the 1970s and is now a UNICEF world heritage site in Vergina, 45 minutes west of Thessaloniki. There you can see ancient artifacts from his kingdom and his life, including crowns, armor, and his bones.



The School of Aristotle is nearby. It sits just outside Naossa, a beautiful wine producing region in Greece today that's worth a visit on its own.



SECTION 5

EARLY CHRISTIANITY

During the time of early Christianity, Greek traditions included theatre, rituals, and philosophy. Greece elaborated on the teachings of Christianity by incorporating beautiful rituals, art, music, theatrics, and Aristotelian philosophy. These additions created the Orthodox church as we know it today.

You can see the beginnings of the Church today in Greece. The Church of St. Paul is an outdoor monument to St. Paul in Veria, 30 minutes west of Thessaloniki by car. It honors the spot where he shared Jesus's teachings with Greeks in 56 A.D.





It features beautiful mosaic work and statues depicting St. Paul and his pupils. The stone steps in the center date back to the 1st century as sort of Roman soapbox for politicians and thought leaders to come to share their ideas with the community.

By 300 AD, Christianity was becoming a dominant religion in the Roman empire, and Constantine the Great made it the official religion of the empire. During this time, local temples were converted into Christian churches, resulting in fascinating non-traditional churches including ones that sport public baths and gardens.

SECTION 6

THE ROMAN EMPIRE

The Romans conquered northern Greece 168BC and southern Greece 20 years later. Although this marked the end of Greek sovereignty, day to day life seems to have remained unchanged. Romans collected taxes but left the local administration in the hands of the Greeks.

There is an old saying that “Rome conquered Greece, but Greece conquered Rome.” Apparently, the Romans were so impressed by Greek philosophy, technology, and architecture that they adapted it to their own culture and spread it around the world.

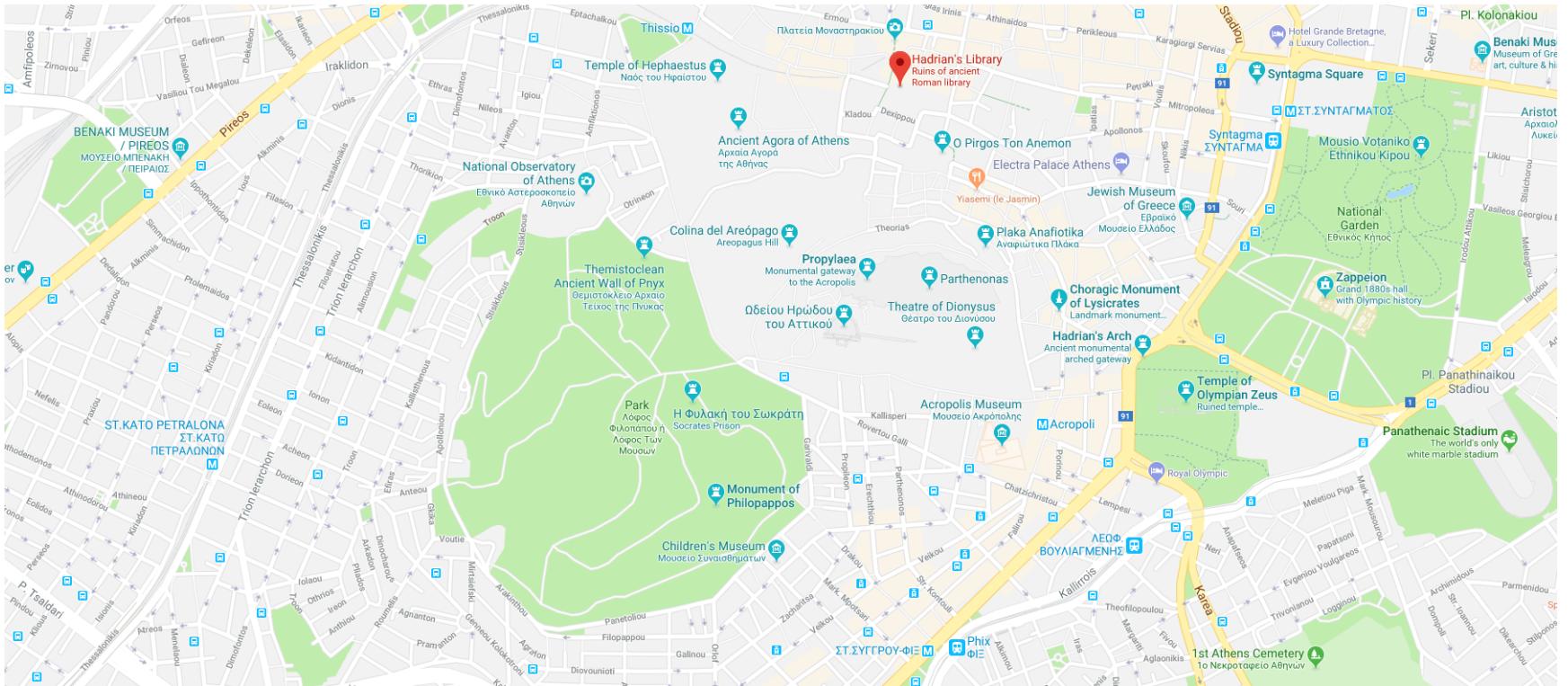


Rome's influence was ubiquitous across Europe, and many of the technological, legal, and social advances were implemented across the

empire, which leaves behind an astonishing legacy to this day. A 3-branch government, modern legal systems, Romance languages, Christianity, the fact that railroads are a specific width, and all of the food culture in Europe, Africa, and the middle east can be attributed to Roman legacy.

Because Rome and Greece were geographically close and culturally similar, Rome invested a lot into the renovation of Greek cities. It is possible to see some of that work today.

Hadrian's Library is one such example. Built between 125 and 132 A.D., it once held over 17,000 books, manuscripts, scrolls, documents, and papyri. It is in the Monastiraki district of Athens, between Syntagma square and the Acropolis.

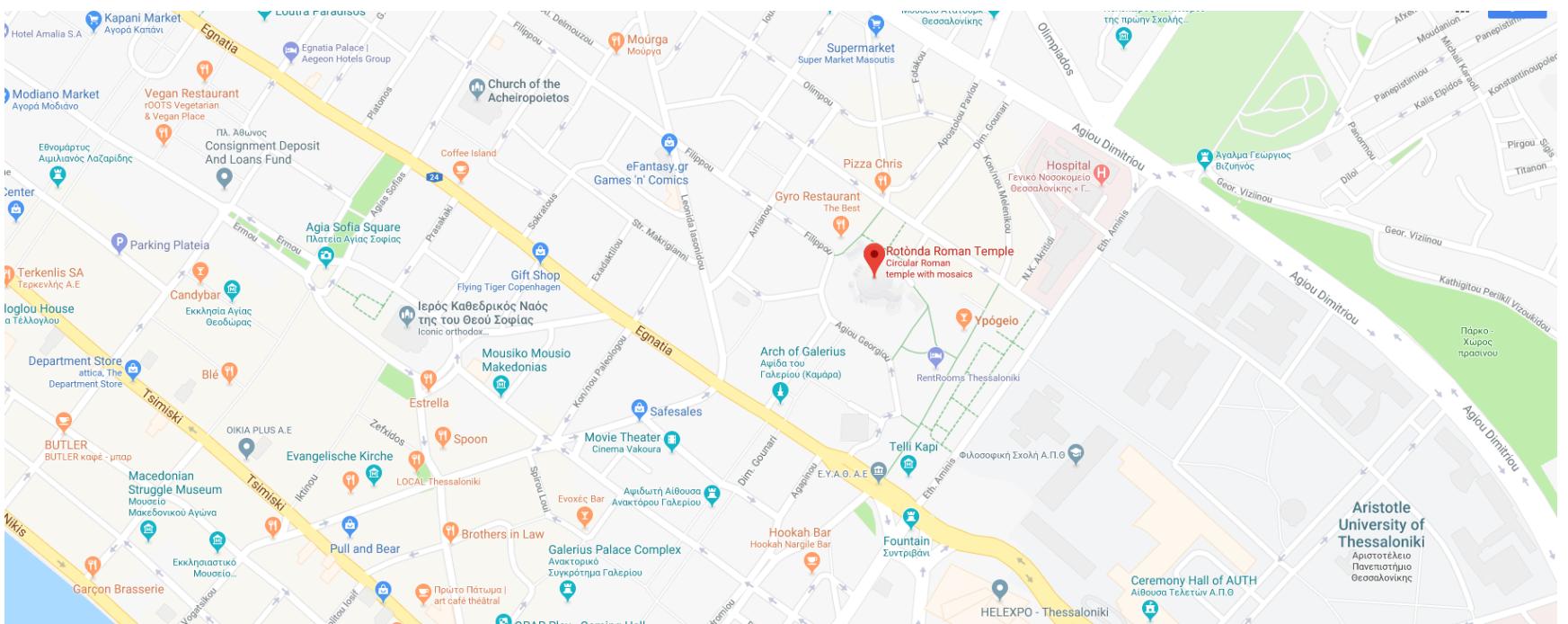


Thessaloniki has several of these sites. Two iconic ones include The Arch of Galerius and the Rotonda of Galerius, both built by emperor Galerius around 300 A.D.

The Arch of Galerius was built to celebrate a victory against the Persians. The brown stone and red brick look beautiful against the pale blue sky and stands over a bustling street, showing the page of change of the last 1700 years. It sits in downtown Thessaloniki just a few blocks from the water, by an open plaza surrounded by cafes and restaurants where street performers, locals, and tourists wander around day and night.



The Rotunda of Galerius sits about a block north and is one of the earliest of the earliest religious sites in the city. Though initially a Roman temple, it was converted to a church during the Christian era. The inside is lined with faded frescoes of saints and angels and scenes of city life.



It is historically significant that Emperor Constantine the Great moved the capital of the Roman Empire to Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul) in 324 AD. The eastern empire at this point was more culturally similar than the western and was much wealthier, so he was incentivized to move the capital closer to the wealth and communities he protected.

Constantine the Great also converted the entire empire to Christianity, unifying church and state. This is why the Orthodox church has a double-headed eagle on their flag. The double-headed eagle symbolized the all-seeing Roman empire with two capitals. Since church and state are one

and the same, technically each church is to this day a public government institution of the Holy Roman Empire.



Technically, the Holy Roman Empire still exists in the form of Agion Oros or the Holy Mountain in the Halkidiki. It is a tiny peninsula packed with 20 Orthodox monasteries. It has been a holy place with active monasteries since 800 AD. The monks sometimes even refer to Agion Oros as “Agios Visantium” or Holy Byzantium.

Women are prohibited from entering, but if you are a man, you can visit to see how the monks live in the last surviving land of the Roman Empire.



During the Christian conversion, all pagan temples were retrofitted as churches or outright destroyed. Some temples fit naturally, such as the Rotunda of Galerius. It had tall walls and a domed roof and several chambers, making it ideal for the rituals of Christian worship. Many of the open-air temples in Athens didn't fare so well.

He also happened to operate Constantinople in Greek, effectively preserving the Greek language and identity.

SECTION 7

THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE

What we call the Byzantine Empire is actually the name given to the Roman empire by western Europeans centuries after its collapse.

Western European tribes sacked Rome and plunged the Western Roman Empire into the dark ages, while the Eastern half of the Roman empire continued to flourish for another 1000 years.



However, this doesn't fit the narrative that western Europe has a singular and distinct cultural history from Africa and the Middle East, so it's more comfortable to label the Roman empire as Byzantine after the collapse of Rome.

Germans sacked Rome in 476 A.D., marking the end of organized culture in Western Europe for the next 1000 years. Fortunately, there was a

second capital in the East, so inhabitants of the now Byzantine empire were mostly unaware of any changes. Greco-roman culture continued to prosper for another thousand years. Christianity matured.

In 534 A.D., Emperor Justinian I created a set of laws called “The Justinian Code.” Before that, many of the laws in the empire conflicted with each other, probably as a result of 1000 years of integrating tribal law from various regions.

Justinian sought to unify the laws of the empire, making it easier to govern. To this end, these laws further integrated church and state, making the worship of Orthodox Christianity a requirement for citizenship and made certain pagan rituals illegal.

The church teaches a single system of ethics, social order, and style of reasoning. Since most people went to church every week for their entire lives, the church was like a proto-public school. By using the church as a way to educate people in the empire in a single system of ethics, he made it much simpler for people to create and enforce laws.

Justinian also re-conquered much of the former territories of the Western Roman Empire, which is why the entire Western world uses Justinian law as the foundation of their legal systems to this day.

Having one religion across the country also makes it easier to convince everyone that the emperor is appointed by God. People who believe in different gods aren’t that impressed by another god’s choice in leaders, especially if those leaders aren’t particularly competent.

Greece flourished during the Byzantine period, and there are many, many examples of Byzantine architecture and inventions that still exist.

Besides Judeo-Christian laws, Orthodox-style Christianity and icons, water mills, and the hospital were all developed by the Byzantines.

Veria, about 30 minutes west of Thessaloniki, was a prominent trade city during the Ottoman empire. It's a beautiful old town still has the same architecture and streets from that period.



Karditsa is a beautiful mountain town in the middle of the country that features Byzantine architecture and breathtaking hikes.



Ioannina is a great place to visit for many reasons. It's got lots of beautiful Byzantine houses in the mountains surrounding large, open plazas around a lake.



Panteleimon is a beautiful mountain town at the foot of Mount Olympus. It's got lots of magnificent stone and stucco houses with clay rooftops and cherrywood balconies. The plazas are small and winding around the mountains, earning it the nickname, "the balcony of Mt. Olympus."



SECTION 8

THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

The Ottoman Empire conquered Greece in the mid-1400s and essentially expanded on the Byzantine Empire.



Like the Christian Roman Empire, the Ottomans had a unified church and state, but theirs was a Muslim one. When they first arrived in Greece, they killed all the priests and converted all churches and temples into mosques. This allowed them to remove community leaders from power and encourage residents to follow the state-imposed system of ethics.

Due nearly 2000 years of unified language and cultural identity and 1500 years of Christianity, Greeks were resistant to that change. Strangely, since the Ottoman Empire had no legal way of distinguishing between religion and governance, they created unique governance structures for Christians and Jews that enabled Greeks to keep much of their laws, language, customs, and culture through Christianity.

If it weren't for Christianity, Greeks today would be Turks.

However, Ottoman's racism and bigotry prevent them from managing their empire effectively. Their religious ideologies prevented the practical need to provide equal rights or equal access to education and wealth to non-Turks in the empire. As a result, they struggled with constant revolts from ethnic minorities. This fueled stricter laws and punishments to deal with these revolts and increased racism and bigotry against ethnic and religious minorities, such as mass imprisonment, executions, and property destruction.

On top of all that, the Greeks had been at war with the Turks for at least 2000 years, which may have contributed to even worse treatment. It was not uncommon for Ottoman soldiers to sack Greek villages as recently as the 1930s, the effects of which can still be felt today. Many older Greeks grew up with stories about their grandparents fleeing when the Turks burned their villages to the ground and slaughtered their livestock.

The Turks even dabbled in genocide. Their extermination of the Armenians was so effective that it inspired Hitler's to carry out the Holocaust. To this day, there are Armenians are living in Greece whose families fled the Turks.

Greeks are rightfully still a bit sore about all this.

Greeks spent 500 years fighting for independence from the Ottomans and finally succeeded in 1821.

There are many, many sites in Greece that locals can point and say things like, “This is where my great-grandfather was killed by the Turks,” or “This is where my family’s priest was executed,” or “That used to be our village, but we had to move here when the Turks burned everything down.”

One such example is a cliff in Naossa where Turkish soldiers marched thousands of men, women, and children to their death. Most churches have olive trees outside, where the local priest was hung when the Turks came.

These areas serve as dark reminders of both the fragility and strength of the Greek identity and the importance of having one’s own country.

That being said, the Ottomans were astounded by how advanced Byzantine society was. They translated and preserved much of Ancient and Classical Greek plays and literature, astronomical texts, and medicine. Had it not been for their translations, this knowledge would have never survived the end of the Byzantine empire, making the Renaissance impossible.

It is important to note that the rest of Europe and America at this time were entering the Industrial revolution, developing nation states with separation of church and state, and advancing medicine. Greece did not experience this transition.

The Ottomans were at their peak when Europe was in the middle of the Dark Ages. When Europe was burning witches, the Ottomans were busy

inventing steam power, mechanical clocks, and advancing physics, astronomy, and medicine.

Many of the Ottoman architecture and infrastructure that exists today in Greece comes in the form of fortresses and military barracks. Many churches have towers attached from when they were converted into mosques.

A fantastic place to see Ottoman history is Monemvasia. This island just off the Peloponnese has an entire town that used to be a fortress and military barracks for Ottoman soldiers. It's about a 3-hour drive south from Athens, and it's one of the most beautiful places you'll ever see. You can hike up to the top of the mountain in 30 minutes and see beautiful architecture, historic ruins, and infinite sea in all directions.



Another beautiful town that has fascinating Ottoman ruins is Ioannina. It's got an Ottoman castle and barracks, plus a beautiful winding downtown with silver shops and cafes.



SECTION 9

THE VENETIAN EMPIRE

During the Middle Ages, the Venetians in northern Italy became extremely wealthy through the control of shipping routes between the Byzantine Empire and Western Europe. Venice is a city that consists of 118 islands, whose inhabitants get around entirely on boats. They were sort of destined to become a naval power.

When the Ottomans took over, the Venetians gained independence and formed a sort of land owner's democracy, where aristocracy could vote for policies and wars and had to answer to each other.

The Venetians wanted to maintain trade with former trading partners who had fallen under Ottoman rule, which was a political challenge as Venice and Western Europe were Christian, and the Ottomans were Muslim.

The Christians were interested in military campaigns against the Ottomans to take over former Roman/Christian land, but the Venetians realized there was greater wealth to be had by trading goods and ideas than in church-sanctioned murder. The Christians thought that doing business with the Ottomans was basically the same as doing business with the devil.

So the Venetians sailed to Egypt, a former Byzantine/Christian state, then governed by the Ottomans and smuggled the body of St. Mark back to Venice on one of their trade expeditions. Knowing touching pig meat goes against the teachings of Islam, the Venetians hid the body in a crate

of pork. This story is permanently frescoed into the walls of St. Mark's Basilica in Venice today.



They used the theft as an excuse to go to Egypt and come back with a fortune in traded items.

Venice became so wealthy during this period that literally all their buildings were made of marble.

This wealth led to more trade, more trade routes, and more contact with the Ottomans. Through contact with the Ottomans Greek, Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman ideas spread through Western Europe, ultimately leading to the Renaissance.

Venice colonized Crete and some of western Greece as it gained power, but most of Greece remained under the control of the Ottoman Empire.



There are some places in Greece that have been beautifully transformed by the Venetians. One of those places is Lefkada, an island about 5 hours west of Athens. It's got a relaxed island lifestyle, beautiful pastel buildings, and amazingly fresh seafood.



SECTION 10

THE MODERN ERA

The Greeks gained independence from the Turks in 1821, and since then have had a roller-coaster ride through history.

Independence

Greeks gained their independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1821 with the help of the British Empire. Initially, Greece was a democracy but after the assassination of the first president, Bavaria and later Denmark installed monarchies.

Slowly, Greece acquired more territory from the Ottomans containing ethnic Greek populations.

Modernization

In the late 1800s, the population of Greece doubled rapidly. Food production didn't increase at the same speed, so food scarcity drove many to leave. Over 250,000 moved to the United States by the early 1900s. Many of these entrepreneurial Greeks made good money as retailers and restaurant owners in American cities, and some returned home to buy farmland or businesses in their home villages.

During this time, the population of Athens grew from 6,000 to 167,000 about 30 years.

During this time, it became fashionable for businessmen to adopt western fashion.

World War I

When World War I broke out, the king of Greece wanted to remain neutral while Prime Minister Venizelos wished to fight with the Allies.

The resulting political divide resulted in open fighting warfare. The Allies won and forced the king and his family out. His then infant son Prince Philip was one of those exiled.

The Ottoman Empire collapsed at the end of World War I, and the Great Powers agreed to put ethnically Greek land under the control of Greece, including the city of Smyrna. However, Turkish Nationalists staged a coup and tried to take Greece back, resulting in a several year long war including Turking troops burning Smyrna to the ground, killing many Greeks and Armenians. The Ottoman Turks killed up to a million Greeks between 1919 and 1922, leading scholars to classify it as a genocide.

In the end, the two agreed on a population exchange where Orthodox Christians living in Smyrna would be moved to Greece.

There are elderly Greeks alive today who survived this and moved from Turkey to Greece during the population exchange, especially in northern Macedonia near Thessaloniki. They carry with them the stories of their parents and grandparents about the horrors they survived at the hands of the Turks.

The movie *Rosa of Smyrna* tells of this story.

To this day, Greeks are distrustful of the politics and people of Turkey.

World War II

Having a close relationship with the British from World War I and having recently experienced genocide at the hands of the Turks, Greeks were sympathetic to the Greeks were eager to help the Allied forces during World War II.

As a small, rural country, Greece didn't last long against the combined forces of Italy, Germany, and Bulgaria. Greece was overrun, and the Greek government regrouped in Crete.

The Germans launched a paratrooper assault on Crete but suffered heavy casualties. It was the last time they attempted a paratrooper attack and the time they spent in Greece delayed their entry into Russia, possibly contributing to their eventual loss.

During the occupation, many Greek villages and towns were burned to the ground, and an estimated 8% of Greeks were killed. Many died of starvation as farms and food were destroyed by the Germans.

The movie Captain Corelli's Mandolin is a period movie about Greece during World War II. Corelli is the captain of the Italian forces occupying a small town in Cephalonia just before the Italians surrender to the Allies.

The Germans decimated the local Jewish populations. Initially, they loaded Jews on trains departing Greece. Having just done their own population exchange with the Turks, many Greeks assumed the Jews

would be reunited with their people to live in a new country, something similar to Isreal.

When it became clear that the Germans were torturing and executing Jews, Greeks tried to smuggle Jews into safe houses without much luck. The Germans were thorough, meticulous, and exacting.

In 1940, Jews made up 40% of the population of Thessaloniki. By 1945, 0.3% remained.

In some cities, entire sections of cities that were once home to Jewish residents remain empty to this day. Varia, once home to the oldest continuous Jewish population in Europe, is an example of this. The Jewish quarter sits inside the Byzantine fortress wall has beautiful architecture, stone streets, and an active synagogue. No Jews live there today, and no Greek dares move into the homes they were robbed from.





After being attacked twice by Germany in the last century and having lost 40% of the population to the Holocaust, Some Greeks are astonished that Europe has allowed Germany to twice become a world power after nearly wiping a people off the map for eternity and twice losing a war they started.

Some older Greeks even refuse to buy German products for this reason.

Greek Civil War

After World War II, there was a political split between communist and democratic idealists. This resulted in a 5-year guerilla civil where soldiers burned villages, executed civilians, and captured political prisoners.

Funded by Britain and the USA, the democrats won, pushing the communists out of Greece. Communist Greeks offered the opportunity to surrender and go to prison for a year or remain exiled. Many lived in

exile in Yugoslavia and Bulgaria until they were re-integrated in the 1980s.

Many Greeks fled to the United States, Germany, and Australia at this time, and most families in Greece today have stories of a grandfather or great-grandfather who spent time in political prison.

The movie Eleni is the story of a Greek American who discovers that his mother's murderer, a former communist insurgent is being welcomed back to Greece. He learns about the last days of his mother and goes to confront the now elderly man that murdered her.

In 1967 there was a military coup resulting in 10 years of dictatorship, which the Turks used as an excuse to invade Cyprus.

Dictators killed several students in an Athenian university during a political demonstration which led to the downfall of the dictatorship and to a law preventing the military from ever entering a university campus.

Many Greeks left during this time to the United States, Germany, and Australia. Lack of jobs and political oppression led to Greeks choosing to become educated and work in other countries.

Ioannina is a famous city in this fight. It was a significant conflict area between the democrats and the communists. It was a communist stronghold and later was the point of surrender for many communists.



Contemporary Greece

Democracy was restored when the military regime fell in 1974, the same political system in place today. Greece rejoined NATO and joined the European Union in the early 1980s, and adopted the Euro in 2001.

Not long after, the Great Recession hit Greece and has been struggling ever since. Greece's economy is mainly agrarian, and most of its working-age population has left to find work in other countries.

With an estimated 7 million Greeks living abroad, Greece has one of the largest diasporas in the world.

Many who are remain work a seasonally, as farmers or bureaucrats, or are retired or in school. Greece's lack of infrastructure and industry, lack of experience in sustainable governance, lack of working-age labor force, and cultural distrust of government have led to systemic issues that prevent economic growth.

Europe has imposed stiff austerity measures in an attempt to limit wasteful government spending and encourage better integration into modern banking practices, but this has cut jobs and lowered wages, further pushing Greece into recession.

The exception to this is tourist islands such as Mykonos, Santorini, and Rhodes. These islands enjoy income from summer tourists, which trickles back into coastal cities by way of seasonal workers.

Greece may be ready to bounce back. Some reports claim that there is a cultural resurgence happening in Athens and Thessaloniki. New restaurants, cafes, art galleries, and technology startups are helping to pave the way for a future where Greece is once again the center of significant thought and social progress.

Wandering around downtown Athens or Thessaloniki in the afternoon or evening will reveal dozens of cute alleys, plazas, and neighborhoods with shops, restaurants, and bars worth exploring.



5

CUISINE

Greece has many beautiful foods and a highly unusual food culture that comes from generations of scarcity and uncertainty.

Greece has suffered through a few hundred years of war, a genocide, and some economic exploitation. This comes out in their food culture.

Only one or two generations ago, a person's wage for a whole year was a bag of wheat or corn. Everyone had their own farm that they worked with their families and people were at the mercy of nature, and whoever invaded Greece next. Turks burned villages as a hobby and slaughtered sheep until the early 1920s, then the Germans came and industrialized destruction.

Older Greeks still see food as a luxury that can be taken away at any moment. As a result, they sit together and eat huge meals that span for hours. It's not uncommon for older Greeks to eat for 7 or 8 hours at a time, day after day. The idea that someone would refuse food is incomprehensible to them. You will honestly have to get into a fight with people over your right to not overeat because saying "no" to food will result in them trying to give you different food and sneaking more food on your plate. Although leaving food on your plate is not impolite, saying "no" to food is met with hostility.

Younger Greeks have to leave Greece to get jobs, so they are more or less sheltered by this, but you will see children who are quite heavy because they've grown up being force-fed by people who don't realize food will be available tomorrow.

Today, Greece is in a deep economic recession. Many able-bodied and educated Greeks have left to find work in other countries, leaving their homes empty. Stiff austerity measures have raised taxes, reduced pensions and other government spending, leading to complete economic standstill. Many Greeks make so little money they can't afford to buy food, resulting in the collapse of major grocery stores outside of major cities.

Today's retirees were once farmers. They use their knowledge of the land to grow food in the yards of abandoned homes. The land they use hasn't been used for farming in half a century, and the food they grow can only grow locally and in season. The result is that most of the cuisine outside cities is exceptionally fresh, extremely local, and delicious.

SECTION 1

SALADS

I believe that Greece is one of two cultures on earth that understand raw foods - the other is the Vietnamese.

Greece is a largely agrarian society with warm weather. Fresh fruit and vegetables grow year round, so they don't have the need to cook and refrigerate cuisines derived from other regions. Greeks live very close to the land, and because of the mountains, the history, and the types of foods grown, industrial farming is nearly impossible. Therefore Greeks have a keen sense of the quality of their food.

As a result, Greeks have some of the most amazing salads anywhere in the world. They know how to combine cheese, vegetables, fruits, meats, and nuts with simple dressings to create beautiful textures and flavors from very simple ingredients.

Typical Greek Salads include:

Olives and Feta - This is basically a staple at every meal.



Horiaktaki Salata - Onions, cucumber, tomato, sometimes peppers with olive oil and vinegar. (with olives and feta, known in the USA as Greek Salad).



Salata Kritiki - Olives, lettuce, Kasseri cheese, Paximadia bread, olives, tomatoes, olive oil, and vinegar. This is often served like Bruschetta but the bread is more like a cruton.



Horta - Steamed spinach, lemon, and salt, sometimes with butter and dried berries.



Lahanosalata - Shredded cabbage, salt, and lemon.



SECTION 2

CHEESES AND YOGURTS

Greece has as much variety of cheeses as anywhere else in Europe.

Greek cheeses are made from sheep or goat milk so have a more sour or rich flavor than the cheeses available in the United States.

Greece also has a rich culture of yogurt. They treat yogurt the way San Franciscan's treat sourdough.

Cheeses

Typical Greek Cheeses include:

Tiri Horiatiki - Like Chevre. Typically less than a week old.

Feta - Sweet, creamy, crumbly, salty cheese - the standard cheese served in most dishes. Aged 1-2 weeks and typically less than 1 month old.

Kasseri - Like Provolone. Aged 6-24 months.

Yogurts

Two popular yogurts are;

Plain Yogurt - Eaten as a garnish with meals or as a dessert with jams or honey. Greeks typically make a thick, custardy yogurt for eating.

Labneh - A thin, sour, salty, yogurt drink that's made from straining the yogurt liquid from the custard. This is a drink that people have in the

morning or sometimes if it's sweltering out. Once you get over how sour and salty it is, it's super refreshing in the heat.

SECTION 3

BREADS

During the classical era of Greece, bread-making was high-technology, and Greeks were very creative in bread-making at the time. They did for bread what the Italians did for pasta.

Typical greek breads include:

Pita - Flat bread. It is used to make pizzas, gyros, and eaten alone.



Paximadia - A bread similar to a biscotti that is made in tropical regions. The Cretan variety has a rich nutty flavor and is served like a crouton in salads or eaten with meals by dipping it in water like a cookie.



Chureki - A sweet egg bread d that has the texture of cotton candy. Sometimes it's made with chocolate or marzipan. It's very light and sugary. Some shops will fill it with Nutella or jams and glaze it in chocolate, making it something like a doughnut.



Psomi - Regular leavened bread, comes in many varieties, from buns to loaves to baguettes.



Phyllo - A pastry dough similar to puff pastry that's usually prepared with a filling such as stew, cheese, or custard.



SECTION 4

FISH AND SEAFOOD

Despite its size, Greece has the 10th largest coast in the world. As a result, Greece has a wide array of seafood and fish. Greeks cook their fish light, typically only with lemon, salt, and very few spices.

Amazing seafood dishes include:

Fried Smelt - A salty, crunchy treat. The fish are small enough that each one can be eaten in a single bite, bones and all.



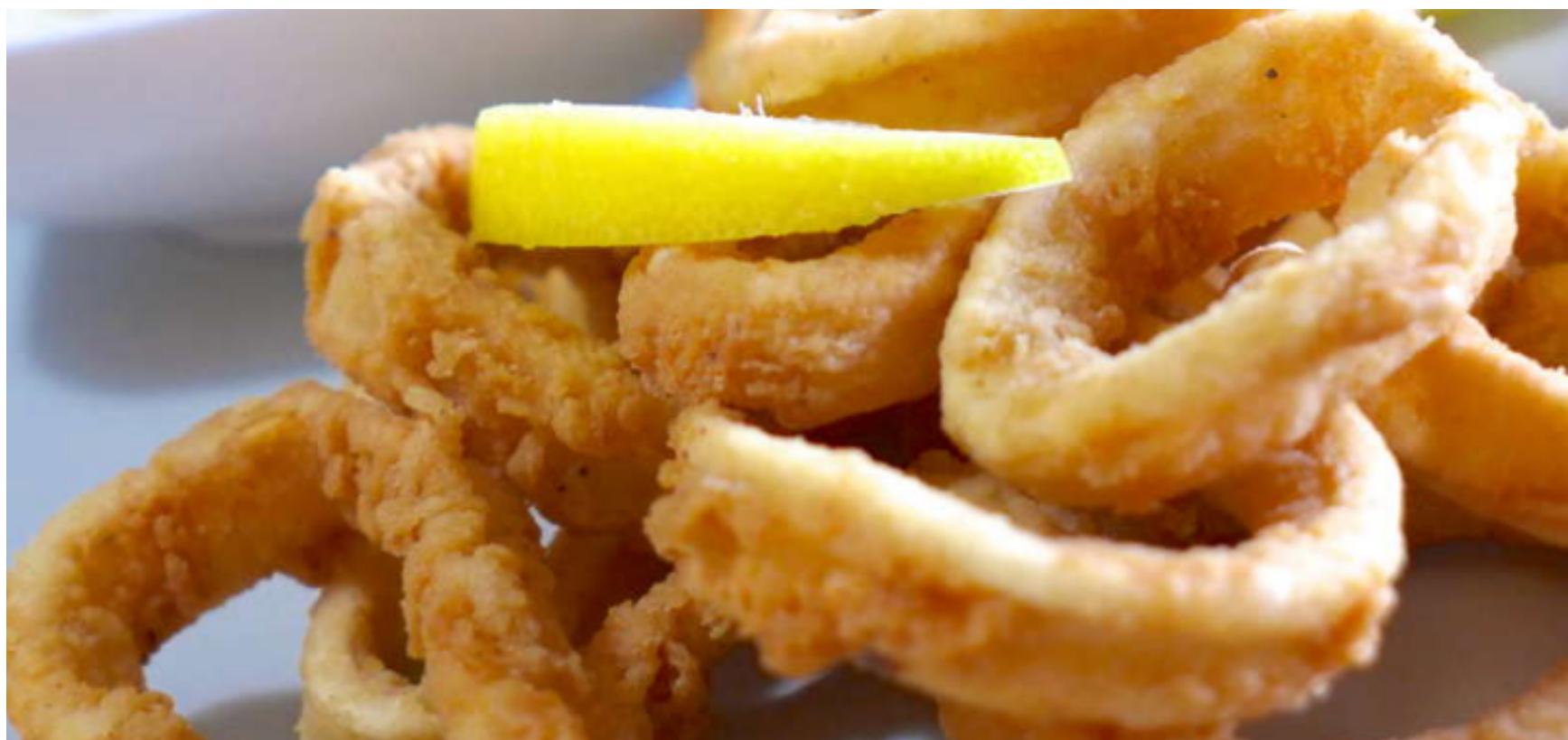
Snapper - This mild flavor fish is lightly seasoned with lemon and pepper to give it a juicy, delicious flavor and beautiful aroma.



Grilled Octopus - Seasoned with oil, vinegar, and herbs. When done right, the octopus starts sweet and melts in your mouth, while the olive and vinegar leave mild bitter and sour notes behind.



Fried Calamari - This classic is well known around the world. The Greeks know how to fry the calamari so that it is firm without being chewy.



Stuffed Squid - Giant squid is stuffed with tomatoes, cheese, and rice to make a rich, filling meal wrapped in a delicate savory exterior.



Shrimp - Giant shrimp are grilled, fried, or stewed to perfection in Greece.



SECTION 5

SOUPS

Greeks have an incredible variety of soups, probably due to their miserably rainy winters and historical lack of refrigeration. These soups will fill your soul during the winter.

Some more traditional soups include:

Fakehs - A lentil soup. Usually made thin with lots of oil and carrots. Typically served with vinegar.



Navy Bean Soup - A hearty stew similar to potato leek soup but with navy beans, carrots, and onions.



Youvarlakia - A rice and meatball soup with egg lemon sauce. If you like meatballs and lemon, you'll like this.



Kotopoulo Avgolemono - Greek chicken soup, made with rice, chicken, cloves, garlic, and thicken with an egg-lemon sauce that gives it a rich sour/savory flavor and a creamy texture.

My mother used to make this soup for me only when I was sick. I liked it so much I would pretend to be sick, not to get out of going to school but to eat this soup.



SECTION 6

MEATS

Greeks love roasting and frying foods.

Lamb - These are a specialty in Greece. They roast it for hours with garlic, onions, and rosemary over low heat to keep it juicy. It will fall off the bone and melt in your mouth when done right.



Kefthedes - Fried meatballs. It's everything you love about meatballs and everything you love about fried food together.



Roasted pork - Like the lamb, it will fall off the bone.



Kotopoulo - Roasted chicken, typically served with lemon and potatoes. The greeks cook these in such a way that the potatoes form a little crust. With the salt and lemon, it's a crunchy, savory, warm dream.



Souvlaki - Grilled meat on a skewer. Like bite-sized steak or pork chops, the quality is entirely dependent on the quality of the meat.



Kokoretzi - This is a uniquely Greek delicacy that features liver and intestines wrapped around a spit and roasted. It's super heavy and salty, but once you get the taste for it, you'll find yourself desperately craving it at random times.



SECTION 7

APPETIZERS

Other foods that exist in Greece that defy classify are these:

Dolmades - Rice and mint wrapped in grape leaves. Sometimes served with lemon and oil.



Cabbage rolls - Meat and rice wrapped in cabbage usually served with egg-lemon sauce. Very filling



Cheese and Potato Croquettes - Kasseri cheese and mashed potato rolled in batter and fried. Honestly, I think these are phenomenal.



Kolokitha - Battered, fried zucchini. Lightly sweet and crispy.



Roasted Feta - Another phenomenal food - it's just oil and cheese baked in the oven until it's gooey.



Saganaki - Fried kasseri cheese that's drenched in Metaxa (sweet alcohol similar to Brandy), set on fire and extinguished with lemon juice. Usually served with leavened bread. It's salty and sour and sweet and sharp all at the same time.



Spanikopita - Spinach and feta cheese wrapped phyllo and baked. It's savory with a mild bitter flavor, sometimes a slightly sour.



Tiropita - Feta and kasseri cheese wrapped in phyllo and baked. Savory, a little sweet, and sometimes a little sour.



SECTION 8

PLATES

Moussaka - A rich, layered casserole made with eggplant, lamb, and thick cream sauce.



Pastitsio - The Greek version of macaroni and cheese, but made with cream sauce.



Gyro - The famous street sandwich featuring cuts of grilled meat, tomatoes, tzatziki sauce, and french fries wrapped in warm, soft pita bread.



Pizza - Traditional “village” pizza is made from red onions, prosciutto, and yellow peppers is uniquely Greek. It can be a little spicy, a little salty, very cheesy, and very satisfying.



Pasta - There are many varieties of pasta, but one classic is thick spaghetti with marinated meatballs in a tomato sauce that has just a hint of cinnamon.



Stuffed Tomatoes - A classic soul-food dish featuring rice, meat, lemon, and any number of other things depending on the recipe.



SECTION 9

DESSERTS

Greek desserts are a fascinating combination of Mediterranean, European, and Arab confections. Many Greek desserts include Phyllo, ice cream, or biscuits. Typical Greek desserts include:

Pagoto - Ice cream, traditionally served plain with jam.



Trigono - A thick custard inside baked, honey-glazed phyllo. Similar to cannoli, but better.



Bougatsa - English Creme custard wrapped in phyllo, dusted with cinnamon and powdered sugar.



Koulouria - A small, crumbly egg and sugar cookie that's served in the morning with coffee. Similar to lady fingers, but more like a cookie. Sometimes these are dipped in chocolate.



Pasteli - Toasted almonds and sesame in a brittle honey toffee, often dipped in chocolate. Something similar to a florentine or cracker jack.



Halva - A Tahini and Honey paste that when fresh has the consistency of clay. It is often made with chocolate, nuts, or dried fruit. It's sweet and nutty and melts in the mouth yet because of the high fat content, feels very filling. It's considered the healthiest dessert in the world due to its high protein, fiber, and nutrients.



Baklava - Baked phyllo, toasted pistachios or almonds, and honey. Sometimes dipped in chocolate.



Meringue cookies - Baked whipped egg whites and sugar. Very light flavor, sometimes dipped in chocolate or flavored with extracts such as vanilla or lavender.



Tiramisu - A cake made from soft cheese, lady fingers, coffee, chocolate, and alcohol. It's deceptively light.



Galaktoboureko - Shredded phyllo with custard and honey. Sometimes served with ice cream.



Profiteroles - Cream or custard stuffed donut holes, sometimes served with chocolate or inside chocolate pudding.



Wafers - Thin wafer sandwiches stuffed with flavored ganache. Sometimes dipped in chocolate.



Biscoff - Thin cinnamon biscuits, sometimes served with a layer of chocolate. These often come with coffee.



Nougat - A chewy, white caramel made with toasted almonds and cherries. The tantalizing combination of sweet and sour dance in your mouth as each chewy bite causes you to salivate more and more.



SECTION 3

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Tony Gaitatzis is a Greek American and the creator of the Greek Heritage Tour, a tour that reunites Greek Americans with their home culture, heritage, and religion.

He is deeply passionate about sharing Greek culture and history with his fellow Greek Americans.

He has lived in Greece several times, where he has learned how to blend the quick thinking and innovative solutions offered in America with the dedication and care available in Greece.

SECTION 4

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book is a quick introduction to the Greece no one talks about.

Most people know the islands. They know about the ancient Athenians and a little bit about the Romans. That's where it typically ends.

Those stories only scratch the surface of the story of Greece and what it has to share. Greece is a tiny country filled with incredible beauty, history, joy, and experiences. It created the Western world yet grew utterly independent of it.

Those similarities and differences make Greece both familiar and foreign, and I want to share them all with you.

I hope this book will inspire you to journey away from the beaten path, to discover and share some of the other amazing experiences available in Greece.