Acropolis Tour Stops and Information

**Stop #1: The Pylons/Front Gate**

1. Before visitors enter the Acropolis, they first go through the pylon, or the front gate.
2. Notice that the pylon is made up of two towers, joined together by a lower section in the middle that includes the entrance to travel through the pylon.
3. The word “pylon” is the Greek term to refer to a monumental gateway that leads to an Egyptian temple. Usually the two towers in pylons have cornices, or decorative moldings, at their tops. Also, the lower section that connects the two towers, is generally about half the height of the towers.

**Stop #2: The Central Ramp**

1. Here, we see a central ramp in between two staircases. The stairs were for pedestrians while the central ramp was used for processions.
2. The building up ahead is called the Propylaea. Notice that the Propylaea is at a difficult location, since it sits atop this steep slope.

**Stop #3: Introduction of the Propylaea**

1. This building is the Propylaea. In general, the word “Propylaea” refers to huge entranceways that will lead into another space. Just like the Propylaea of the Acropolis, propylaeas in general usually lead to temples or religious parts of a city. The Propylaea of the Acropolis of Athens is the most famous and best preserved example of a propylaea.
2. Athens’ Propylaea is made up of a huge, grand hall, which we can enter through the front six pillars here.

**Stop #4: The Propylaea’s Ceiling and Pillars**

1. The ceiling of the Propylaea was painted in order to depict a heavenly scene, with gold stars on a dark blue background.
2. We also see that the roof of the Propylaea is supported with two rows of Ionic columns, one row on the left and one on the right of this pathway. Each row consists of three columns.
3. Unfortunately, much of the Propylaea today is damaged. In the mid 17th century CE, the gunpowder stored in the Propylaea may be have been ignited via either a canon shot or perhaps a lightning strike, which caused an explosion and heavily damaged the building that we see today.

**Stop #5: The Pinakotheke**

1. The area to the left side of the Propylaea is known as the Pinakotheke, which means “picture gallery.” The Pinakotheke initially functioned as a banquet hall, but was then converted into a gallery area for paintings and frescoes. The walls were once decorated with painted compositions, which may have been frescoes or hanging pictures. Interestingly though, ancient manuscripts indicate the Pinakotheke housed separate easel works instead of frescoes.
2. Additionally, the content of these images were created to honor the gods. One artwork from the Pinakotheke that survived is the “Achilles on Sykros,” painted by Polygnotus.

**Stop #6: The Right side/South wing**

1. The right side, or the south wing of the Propylaea is smaller than the left wing, since the Temple of Athena Nike was also built on the right side.
2. It is likely that the right wing was constructed only to maintain symmetry in the Propylaea.

**Stop #7: The Pedestal with the Four-Horse Chariot**

1. Here, in front of the Propylaea, we see this huge pedestal made up of grey Hymettus marble. Atop this 29 feet, or 10 meter high pedestal, sits a sculpture of a four-horse chariot. This sculpture is also called a “quadriga sculpture” and was built to honor the king of Pergamon, Eumenes II, after he won the Panthenaic Games in 178 BCE.
2. Later, during the 1st century CE, this pedestal was re-purposed to hold the statues of Anthony and Cleopatra. After these sculptures collapsed during a hurricane in 31 CE, in 35 CE, the monument was re-dedicated to Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa. Agrippa was considered as a very important benefactor to Athens.

**Stop #8: Introduction of the Athena Nike**

1. On the southwest corner of the Acropolis, right next to the Propylaea, is the Temple of the Athena Nike. This temple was built with two main purposes in mind. One, to honor Athena Nike, the goddess of victory, and second, to display as a symbol Athens’ political and military power. This temple also replaced a smaller temple which was previously destroyed during the Persian wars.
2. The Athena Nike saw the completion of its construction in 420 BCE, during the High Classical Period. Interestingly, Athena Nike’s architect is Kallikrates, the same architect who designed the Parthenon.

**Stop #9: About the Location of the Athena Nike**

1. Notice that the Temple of Athena Nike is located at the edge of a very high cliff.
2. Although this position is highly susceptible to attacks, it is also placed well in order to strengthen the defense around the Acropolis. As a result, the location of this temple is also very suitable for worshiping the goddess of victory, Athena.
3. The location of the Athena Nike is also significant in that even before the temple was constructed, archaeological evidence shows that the location was already utilized during the Mycenaean age, to conduct religious rituals. At the time, Mycenaeans has also built the first defensive bastion at this location, the remaining fragments of which are preserved in the temple’s basement.

**Stop #10: The Inside of the Athena Nike**

1. Just like all other Greek temples, the inside of the Temple of Athena Nike would have held a cult statue. The Temple of Athena Nike once stored a wooden statue of Athena. One interesting thing is that although Greek mythology often depicts Nike deities as having wings, the statue of Athena does not have wings. The ancient Greek writer Pausanias explains that this was done so that Athena could never leave Athens. As a result, the statue of Athena in this temple is nicknamed “wingless victory”.

**Stop #11: The backside of, or exiting the Propylaia**

1. Here, you could exit the Propylaea from the back, through five possible openings. The widest of these openings was used during the Panathenaea procession. This procession was held during Panathenaic Games, which were conducted every four years in Athens.
2. As we exit the Propylaea, visitors would first be greeted by the “Athena Promachos”, a 9 meter bronze statue that was created to celebrate Athen’s victories against the Persions. This statue is so tall that sailors could actually see it from Cape Sounion, which is about 45 miles away from the south east. Today, the Athena Promachos no longer exists, as Emperor Justinian from the 6th century had ordered for the statue to be taken to the city Constantinople. The statue was then destroyed in a fire.