

CIPAC Excursion - Sunday 14 June 2015



Three places out of the mists of time:

Mycenae, famous from the myths and legends of Homer and the Trojan War
Epidauros, the most remarkable Ancient Greek theatre of the classical period
Nafplion, the old capital of modern Greece, rich in history and beauty

Programme

08.00 Departure from ROYAL OLYMPIC HOTEL
09.30 – 10.15: Visit to Corinth Channel
10.15 – 12.00: Visit to Epidauros
13.30 – 15.00: Lunch in Nafplio and visit of the city
15.00 – 17.00: Visit to Mycenae
17.00: Departure for Athens
19.30: Approximate time of arrival in Athens (Hotel Royal Olympic Palace)

Payment

Confirmation of registration and payment of 80€ on Saturday 13 June at the
Hotel Royal Olympic Palace



Corinth Canal - Isthmus

Isthmus of Corinth is a narrow piece of land dividing the Saronic Gulf (Aegean Sea) from the Gulf of Corinth (Ionian Sea). The Isthmus of Corinth connects the Peloponnese with mainland Greece. It is rising almost 300 feet (90 m) above sea level.

Several rulers in antiquity dreamed of digging a cutting through the Isthmus. The first to propose such an undertaking was the tyrant Periander in the 7th century BC. The project was abandoned and Periander instead constructed a simpler and less costly overland portage road, named the Diolkos or stone carriageway, along which ships could be towed from one side of the isthmus to the other. In 67 AD the Roman emperor Nero began a canal through it. In 1893 a 3.9-mile (6.3-km) ship canal, the Corinth Canal, was opened that shortened the journey from the Adriatic Sea to Athens' port, Piraeus, by more than 200 miles (320 km). No locks are employed.

To the south of the canal is the site of the Isthmian sanctuary at which the biennial Isthmian Games were celebrated in antiquity. The Isthmian Games or Isthmia (Ancient Greek: Ἰσθμια) were one of the Panhellenic Games of Ancient Greece, and were named after the Isthmus of Corinth, where they were held. As with the Nemean Games, the Isthmian Games were held both the year before and the year after the Olympic Games (the second and fourth years of an Olympiad), while the Pythian Games were held in the third year of the Olympiad cycle. If we are to accept the traditional date of the first Olympic Games (776 BC), we can say that the first Isthmian Games would have been held in 582 BC. At least until the 5th century BC (Pindar's time) the winners of the Isthmian games received a wreath of celery; later, the wreath was altered such that it consisted of pine leaves. Victors could also be honored with a statue or an ode. Besides these prizes of honor, the city of Athens awarded victorious Athenians with an extra 100 drachmas.

Corinth is also well known to Christians since the seventh book of the New Testament of the Bible is the "Corinthians", written from Apostle (Saint) Paul to the young Christian community of the city of Corinth, after his visit there.





Epidaurus

The Asklepieion of Epidauros

The sanctuary of Asklepius, or Asklepieion as it is called, in Epidauros was a sacred healing place devoted to Asklepius, the healer god, the god who had the power to cure people from their pain and illness. Such sanctuaries were frequent in ancient Greece and in fact, they were quite popular as people from all over the Mediterranean would come to find healing. Asklepius was believed to be son of god Apollo and a mortal woman named Arsinoi, the daughter of the king of Messinia. At first, he was mortal but he had so unusual healing powers that people made him a god. It is said that Asklepius had found the cures for all diseases and that people would no longer die. Asklepios had thus disturbed the natural way of life and that is why Zeus killed him with a flash of lightning. An Asklepieion was the temple of Asklepius, where people would go with the hope to be cured. There were many such sanctuaries scattered along Greece, but the most famous one, visited by people from all over Greece and from other areas of the Mediterranean Sea, was in Epidauros, where Asklepius was born, according to the myth. To find out the right treatment for them, people spent the night in a sleeping room and the god himself would come to their dreams and tell them what to do in order to be cured. Apart from the sleeping rooms, the sanctuary had a guesthouse with 160 rooms, a stadium and mineral springs. In order to please the visitors of the temple and pay tributes to the gods, people in 340 B.C. built a theatre, which is nowadays known as the Theatre of Epidauros.

In 87 BC, the sanctuary was looted by the Roman general Sulla and in 67 BC by pirates. Excavations were held there in the 19th century by the Archaeological Institute which revealed the temple of Asklepius and some temples devoted to Artemis and Apollo. The sanctuary and the close by theatre form nowadays a popular archaeological site.

The ancient theatre of Epidauros

The ancient theatre of Epidauros has hosted top performances of ancient dramas by the most acclaimed Greek and foreign actors, directors, set designers, choreographers, composers, as well as operas, dance recitals and symphonies. The most famous of all these performances was that of the Greek National Opera when the legendary diva Maria Callas sang Bellini's 'Norma' in 1960 and, the following year, Cherubini's 'Medea'.

Built at the end of the 4th century BC, the theatre was discovered in 1870. After 23 centuries of silence and oblivion it opened its doors in 1938 with the play of Sophocles "Electra".

A Wonder of Acoustics

The theater of Epidauros is famous for its outstanding acoustics. "The smallest sound— a deep breath or the tearing of a piece of paper—can be heard clearly as high up as the last row of seats," says professor of archaeology S. Iakovidis.

When visiting this theater, many tourists like to stand in the middle of the orchestra and recite poems, sing songs, or even whisper to their friends sitting far up in the topmost tiers. They are impressed by the remarkable way in which the sound is conveyed to every corner of this large auditorium. The amphitheatric, semicircular shape of the Epidauros Theater is credited with producing such fine acoustics.



Mycenae

Following the footsteps of mythology

The charming and peaceful land of Argolida holds, within the bowels of its earth, one of the most important civilizations ever to see the light of day: the Mycenaean civilization. It is difficult today to imagine the excitement of Schliemann and Dörpfeld, who with Homer as their guide, revealed one of the greatest cradles of humankind before the eyes of the whole world. The Mycenaean civilization held dominion over this land, which was inhabited continuously since the dawn of history, and it became the leading light of the ancient known world.

Homer and other writers of ancient Greek tragedy committed their names to memories which have passed into the collective unconscious of humanity. Agamemnon and Menelaus, Danae and Perseus, Pelops and Atreus are the apparent forefathers of all of Europe, and the birthplace of all of these historical figures, is golden Mycenae.

The earliest archaeological fragments indicate that the site of Mycenae was inhabited since the 7th millennium BC, from prehistoric times. In a dominant, naturally fortified position between the tranquil sloping hills of Profitis Ilias, and Sara, with a plentiful water supply, it was an ideal place for man to settle and live a protected life.

The apogee of the Mycenaeans, with their majestic architecture, inscribed monuments and sophisticated civilization, occurred in the Late Bronze Age, between 1350 and 1200 BC. The first hegemonic factions appeared as early as 1700 BC, in a historical period for which not much is known. Around this same period, construction of the first monumental tombs began. After this, expansion developed at a dizzying speed. Palatial complexes, Cyclopean masonry which is awe-inspiring even today, the famous "Tomb of Agamemnon" (also known as the "Treasury of Atreus"), huge arches, fountains and ramparts comprise one of the greatest architectural complexes known to the ancient world. The decline of Mycenae occurred around 1100 BC, possibly due to repeated damage from earthquakes and fires. They had managed, however, to have once been a truly great empire, which has indelibly stamped its reputation on the history not only of Greece, but the entire world. The archaeological site of Mycenae is 140km from Athens.

Mycenae Archaeological Museum

The Greek Archaeologist Kyriakos Pyttakis lead the first complete excavation in Mycenae in 1841 and was able to find and restore both the Lion Gate and the Grave Circle. However, new excavations took place in the area in our days, by the British School and other archaeological groups. Many objects from these excavations were taken to the National Archaeological Museum of Athens and some reproductions can be found at the new Mycenae Archaeological Museum. The Mycenae Archaeological Museum has a splendid model of the site in Mycenae, so that the visitor can get a general grasp of what the place used to be in the past and they can relate what they will see to this model for a better understanding.

The museum has in display more than two thousand objects from Mycenae and its surroundings. Exhibits are displayed in order of the places where they were found. This makes it easier for the visitor to understand how the construction of objects evolved in certain areas. The collection is well organized, the object labels and the info about them are both in Greek and English and the reconstruction of some rooms found in Mycenae, such as the Cult Centre, depict how life used to be. The visitor will be able to understand how the people of Mycenae lived and how life in Mycenae developed until its fall, at about 2000 BC. Reproductions of some objects found in the Grave Circle are also exhibited (the original pieces were taken to the National Archaeological Museum in Athens).

This museum is not too large, and tends to get crowded especially in the high season. Moreover, many objects had to be placed on the gallery walls because there was not enough space for them to be kept in the rooms. That is why it is wise to try and avoid tour groups and decide a convenient time of the year and during the day to appreciate the display as much as possible. The Mycenae Archaeological Museum opens every day, from 8.00AM to 7.00 PM in summer.



Nafplion Magical Town

Nafplion is a special place, full of natural beauty and culture that will charm every visitor. It was the first capital of the modern Greek state. It's history is virtually the history of Greece since every occupying power has left it's mark. The city of Nafplion is like an open air museum.

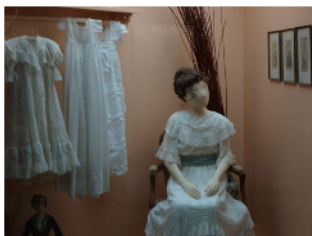
It was named after Nafplios, son of god of the saw, Poseidon (Neptune in latin) and was home of Palamidis the local hero of the Trojan war. Because of the strength of the fort that sits above the bay, the town of Nafplio became an important strategic and commercial center to the Byzantines. In 1453, the Franks, captured the city and controlled the city for 200 years and then sold it to the Venetians. The Venetians improved the fortification of the upper town and in 1470 they built a fort on the small island in the center of the harbor called the Bourtzi. To close the harbor the fort was linked by chains and the town was known as Porto Cadenza, meaning Port of Chains. Later, the town was handed over to the Turks who controlled the city for 100 years. In 1686 the Turks surrendered the city to a combined force of Venetians, Germans and Poles. Massive repairs were made to the fortress and the city including the construction of the fortress in Palamidi. But after just thirty years the Turks once again take control of the city, almost totally destroying it and building mosques, baths and the homes in the eastern style which can still be seen. In April 1821 Greek chieftains and Philhellenes surrounded the city of Nafplio and liberated it from the Turks. Naphlion became the center of activities which would result in the formation of Modern Greece. In 1823 it becomes the capital of the state until 1834.

Nafplion is among the most beautiful towns in mainland Greece. It has an intense Medieval atmosphere. A walk around the narrow paved streets of the Old Town is like a trip to the past. On top of a hill above Nafplion, there is the strong fortress of Palamidi with amazing view to the sea. At the entrance of the port, there is the Bourtzi a small islet with a fortress that used to protect the town from naval attacks. Its lovely beach resorts make it a great place for summer holidays too. Tolo is the most popular summer resort close to the town, with a long sandy beach and relaxing atmosphere.

Sightseeing

Palamidi Fortress

The fortress of Palamidi is a true architectural masterpiece. This fort was built during the Venetian occupation in the early 19th century and consists of eight bastions, each was self contained, ensuring that if one bastion was breached the others could still be separately defended. The bastions were built one on top of the other and they all connected with one wall. The Venetians named the bastions by ancient Greek names, such as Leonidas, Miltiades, Achilles, Themistocles, to give emphasis on the strenght of the castle. The beautiful chapel of Agios Andreas is built within the central bastion, which was the best equipped of all the bastions and hence was used as the main headquarters. During the Turkish occupation, Christians were forbidden to enter the fort. However, the struggle for liberation from the Turks began at Palamidi fort. Palamidi fort was seized by Greek rebels, lead by Staikos Staikopoulos on 29th of November in 1822. The first Greek among these rebels to set foot in the fort was Dimitrios Moschonisiotis, from the bastion of Achilles. The next day saw the abandoned chapel being cleared and prepared for a Service. The chapel has since then been consecrated to Apostle Andreas and 30th of November is celebrated as his feast day. Palamidi was also used as a prison for a period of time. In 1833, Theodoros Kolokotronis, one of the Revolution leaders was imprisoned there, charged with high treason. Prisoners were made to do physical labor and the 999 steps leading up to the fort were in fact built by the prisoners under the supervision of the Bavarian army.



The fortress of Bourtzi

The small island of Bourtzi in Nafplion is famous for its strong and impressive fortress. Still known by its Turkish name Bourtzi, meaning the Tower, it attracts many visitors all year round. Antonio Gambello, an architect from Bergamo, built the castle in 1471 on this tiny islet in front of the port of Nafplion, although the construction was completed by the engineer Brancalone. The design was made specifically to fit the narrow shape of the island. The entire city was fortified in 1473 by the Venetians, mainly to provide protection against pirates. The castle, with entrances to the north and south, has three floors connected by movable stairs. A small harbor on the north-eastern side offered easy and safe access between the sea and the fort. To get protected by their enemies, the Turks had laid the surrounding sea bed with a large barricade of stones that made it impossible for large ships to approach the island and the fort. Later on, after the deliberation of the town in 1821, it was turned into the residence of the executioner for the convicts of the Palamidi castle. Between 1930 and 1970, after alterations by the German architect Wolf Schaeffer, the Bourtzi Castle was used as a hotel. Today the island hosts the Summer Music Festival, providing a perfectly stunning backdrop to the gala of music. It is easily accessible by boat from the port of Nafplion and it is a must for the visitors of this beautiful town.

Archaeological Museum

The Archaeological Museum of Nafplion is housed in a renovated Venetian mansion that dates from 1715. The museum reopened in 2009 following seven years of renovations. It features fine exhibits over two light and airy floors. The oldest exhibits, fire middens, date from 32,000 BC. Another highlight is the only bronze armour from near Mycenae in existence, dating from the 12th to 13th centuries BC.

Folklore Museum

The Folklore Museum of Nafplion was established with the initiative of the stage-designer Mrs Ioanna Papantoniou. It hosts traditional costumes, jewelry, ceramics, works of paintings and sculpture and other folk items.

National Gallery – Alexandros Soutzos Museum

This arm of the Athens National Gallery is housed in a stunningly restored neoclassical building. It features works on the 1821 Greek War of Independence, including works by Greek painters Vryzakis and Tsokos, considered the most important artists of the postwar years.

The Church of Agios (Saint) Spiridon

The church of Agios Spyridon is located in the Old Town of Nafplion, along the paved streets of the town. This church was first built in 1702 with the financing of the Nafplian Brotherhood of Orthodox Greeks. This is a single-space basilica with a dome and a bell tower constructed in 1853. The interior of the church is solemn and there are many Byzantine icons and paintings around the walls. The painting that marks out for its vivid colours and its unusual theme is the large fresco of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, just opposite the entrance door. Also another unusual sign for an Orthodox church is the Star of David, a Jewish symbol that can be seen at the floor, almost in the centre of the church. This church has an important historical role for the Greeks. It was there that on September 27th, 1831, the first governor of the newly-established Greek State, Ioannis Kapodistrias, was assassinated by his political opponents, some men from the Mavrokordatos family, a wealthy and strong family that time in Greece who had contributed a lot in the Greek War of Independence. That Sunday morning, Kapodistrias was going to the Holy Mass. As usually, he preferred this church that was dedicated to Saint Spiridon, the protector of his homeland, Corfu. Few men appeared from the stairs opposite the church and shot him. In fact, some of these bullets still have their prints against the wall of the church. These prints have been framed in a glass case.

The Komboloi Museum

The unique Komboloi (worry beads) Museum is housed in an 18th century two-storey mansion in the Old Town of Nafplion. The exhibits of the museum are found on the first floor of the building, while the workshop and the retail shop are on the ground floor. The worry beads are handmade. The Komboloi Museum in Nafplion is a traditional workshop for the art of making worry beads. One side of the building is decorated with different types of worry beads while the ceiling is covered in strands of cabernet red, saffron yellow beads and amber orange. The smooth and shiny beads arouse the curiosity of the visitors. Inside the museum, there is an exhibition of rosaries and prayer beads that Aris Evangelinos, the owner of the Komboloi Museum, collected himself during the last 20 years. There you will see worry beads used by Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims and Christians in different parts of the world. All of them are displayed in four rooms upstairs. The replicas of the old worry beads are made of red and black coral, cedar and sandalwood, glass, elephant horn, silver, pearl and crystal. Some of them have as few as 19 beads while others have more than 100. All kinds of beads made in the workshop are available in the retail stores as well. Also, here you can get the unique handmade worry beads. In the gift shop, visitors can also purchase several items such as key rings and worry beads of the period 1850-1950.



Culinary delights of the Peloponnese

Peloponnesian food offers a rich variety of dishes that will tempt the most difficult palate. Greece, with a culinary tradition spanning 4,000 years, is the country which invented the symposium and which was home to the Epicurean philosophers. It was here, where the first book on cooking was written in 330 BC by Archestratus, a reminder that a country's cuisine is a measure of its civilization. Ancient Greeks were pioneers in the art of cookery; authentic Greek cuisine, unique and full of vitality, just like greek people, combines the taste and aroma of fresh products coming from Greek land and the surrounding blue seas.

Greek cuisine is characterized by frugality, based on simple ingredients, crispy fresh vegetables, virgin olive oil, honey, succulent fruit, fresh fish and, naturally, exquisite wines made with grapes ripening under the magnificent Greek sun, for decades now gaining ground on the world's vinicultural stage.

International studies have recognized the value of the Greek cuisine. Launched in the late 50's by the World Health Organization, the "Seven Countries Study" (<http://sevencountriesstudy.com>) set out to examine the eating patterns of people from seven different countries: Greece, Italy, Yugoslavia, Holland, Finland, the USA and Japan. This long-running study which lasted for 40 years showed that people living in the Mediterranean countries had lower mortality rates compared to the rest of the participating countries.

The "secretes" to Health and Longevity were documented as the combination of a simple diet and regular physical activity, dubbed as the Mediterranean Diet.

Olive Oil

One could say that for the Greek people olive oil is not just precious, but almost sacred since it is associated with the cycle of life through age-old traditions. This relationship is the expression of the vital importance of this noble liquid for healthy living. The dishes referred to as 'ladera', which are made from one or more vegetables cooked in an olive oil-based sauce usually including tomatoes and garlic, are a true banquet of colours and flavours. Pulses and beans, either fresh or dried, are cooked so as to retain their full nutritional value. Green beans, broad beans, lentils, split peas, chickpeas, peas and okra: plain ingredients converted into sensational dishes by the simple addition of onions, herbs and spices, and precious olive oil.

Products of Argolida

The prefecture of Argolida is famous for its local products. The Argolida region is famous for its citrus groves, particularly oranges, mandarins, lemons and grapefruit and, depending on the time of year, on passing through the country roads one is able to smell the wonderful aroma of orange blossom. If someone told you that somewhere in Greece there's a place called 'The Land of Artichokes', would you believe them? And yet, just a few kilometers from the center of Nafplio at the village of Iria, you'll find it. More popularly known as "Artichoke Valley", the area's farmland churns out 80% of the country's artichoke produce. One of the top priorities for any traveling foodie worth his or her salt, apart from wines and locally-produced delicacies, are those rare, raw materials which have a uniqueness all their own. One such product, for which they are prepared often to travel the world to sample, is honey. In Nafplio the fragrant hills of the Peloponnese contribute to produce honey of exceptional quality.

The area has also wonderful products such as the famous argitikes melitzanes (long, light-purple eggplants) and football-shaped argitika peponia (deep-yellow, aromatic heirloom melons). Every weekend in July the local producers in the seaside town of Epidaurus organize an Agrotourism Fair, where visitors can taste fresh produce, jams, preserves, and pickles prepared by the women of the nearby villages.