

1)The Parthenon



It is *the* temple that dominates the hill of the Acropolis in Athens. It was built in the mid-5th century BCE and dedicated to the Greek goddess Athina Parthenos (“Athena the Virgin”). The temple is generally considered to be the culmination of the development of the Doric order, the simplest of the three Classical Greek architectural orders. Directed by the Athenian statesman Pericles, the Parthenon was built by the architects Ictinos and Callikratis under the supervision of the sculptor Phidias. Work began in 447 BC, and the building itself was completed by 438 BC. In the same year, a great gold and ivory statue of Athena, made by Phidias for the interior, was placed in the Parthenon. Work on the exterior decoration of the building continued until 432 BC. Although the rectangular white marble of the Parthenon has suffered damage over the centuries, including the loss of most of its sculpture, its basic structure has remained intact. The Parthenon remained essentially intact until the 5th century, when Phidias’s colossal statue was removed and the temple was transformed into a Christian church. By the 7th century, certain structural alterations in the inner portion had also been made. The Turks seized the Acropolis in 1458, and two years later they turned the Parthenon into a mosque, without material change except for the raising of a minaret at the southwest corner. During the bombardment of the Acropolis in 1687 by Venetians fighting the Turks, explosives located in the temple blew up, destroying the centre of the building. In 1801–1803 a large part of the sculpture that remained was removed, with Turkish permission, by the British nobleman Thomas Bruce, Lord Elgin, and sold in 1816 to the British Museum in London. Other sculptures from the Parthenon are now in the Louvre Museum in Paris, in Copenhagen, and elsewhere, but many are still in Athens.

2) Meteora



The Meteora is a rock formation in central Greece hosting one of the largest and most precipitously built complexes of Eastern Orthodox monasteries, second in importance only to Mount Athos. The six monasteries are built on immense natural pillars and hill-like rounded boulders that dominate the local area. The rocks are composed of a mixture of sandstone and conglomerate. The conglomerate was formed of deposits of stone, sand, and mud from streams flowing into a delta at the edge of a lake, over millions of years. About 60 million years ago during the Paleogene period a series of earth movements pushed the seabed upward, creating a high plateau and causing many vertical fault lines in the thick layer of sandstone. The exact date of the establishment of the monasteries is unknown. By the late 11th and early 12th centuries, a rudimentary monastic state had formed called the Skiti of Stagoi and was centered around the still-standing church of Theotokos (mother of God). By the end of the twelfth century, an ascetic community had flocked to Meteora.

In 1344, Athanasios Koinovitis from Mount Athos brought a group of followers to Meteora. From 1356 to 1372, he founded the Great Meteoro Monastery on the Broad Rock, which was perfect for the monks. They were safe from political upheaval and had complete control of the entry to the monastery. The only means of reaching it was by climbing a long ladder, which was drawn up whenever the monks felt threatened.

At the end of the fourteenth century, the Byzantine Empire's reign over Northern Greece was being increasingly threatened by Turkish raiders who wanted control over the fertile plain of Thessaly. The hermit monks, seeking a retreat from the expanding Turkish occupation, found the inaccessible rock pillars of Meteora to be an ideal refuge. More than 20 monasteries were built, beginning in the fourteenth century. Six remain today.

3)Vergina



An Unesco World Heritage Monument and a region of particular natural beauty: one of the most important archaeological discoveries of the 20th century. The ancient site of Aigai or 'goats', the curiously named first capital of the kingdom of Macedon, lies on the southwest edge of the plain of Macedonia in Northern Greece, in the foothills of Mt Pieria. Although there are open-air ruins, you can see the extraordinary subterranean museum of Vergina and the tombs of the Macedonian dynasty. Here you'll witness the grandeur of Ancient Greece; one of the most important archaeological finds in the country, and the most important in Macedonia, is ready to reveal its secrets. Like everyone else, you enter the raised mound or tumulus through an ominously dark passage, leaving daylight behind, only to emerge in an open circular space where wonderful lighting illuminates some of the most extraordinary finds ever discovered. You feel a bit like archaeologist Manolis Andronikos, when he unearthed treasures emblazoned with the golden star of Macedon and knew he had stumbled upon the untouched tomb of Philip II, father of Alexander the Great. This shell was erected over the tombs and the other invaluable finds to protect them from the elements in 1997. They represent one of the most astonishing archaeological discoveries in 20th century Europe.

The tomb of Philip II in Vergina: Manolis Andronikos' discovery of the tombs of the Macedonian kings Philip II and Alexander IV in 1977 rocked the archaeological community and the world at large. Philip's tomb is large, double-chambered and its facade resembles a Doric temple, with columns, a frieze and metopes carved in relief. The chamber concealed its famous

golden larnax with the bones of the dead king intact for more than two millennia.

The awe-inspiring museum of the royal tombs:The Great Tumulus that covered the circle where the tombs were found was reconstructed to create the impression of an ancient grave monument. Maintaining constant temperatures and humidity, the subterranean construction shelters and protects these priceless finds. Apart from the royal tombs, you'll see the brilliant frescoes depicting the Abduction of Persophone and the Royal Hunt, which are the only examples of the great artists of the Hellenistic period that have survived.

In this darkened space, the beautifully illuminated ancient objects stir a multitude of emotions; awe in the face of death, wonder at the power of the royal dynasty that inspired such creativity and admiration for the modern wizards who designed such a magnificent repository for these invaluable exhibits.

The gold larnax and the oak leaf wreath:One of the museum's most important exhibits is the gold larnax, which held the bones of the dead king. It weighed 11kg. Emblazoned on its lid is the Macedonian sun or star and on its sides floral motifs and rosettes. The gold wreath is the most valuable crown we have from antiquity. It consists of 313 oak leaves and 68 acorns linked with unimaginable artistry by a master jeweller.

The Prince's tomb:In the last section of the museum, you'll witness finds from tomb III, which is thought to have contained the remains of Alexander IV, the son of Alexander the Great and Roxane, who was murdered by Kassander in 310 BC. At its centre lies the silver urn that held the cremated bones of the young prince, surrounded by exquisite ivory reliefs decorating the bier.

The birthplace of the kings of Macedon:Aigai, where the Macedonian kings originated, was the heartland of the Temenides, the dynasty that ruled Macedonia for four centuries and gave the world Philip II and his son Alexander the Great. The ancient city included the outer walls with a tower and entrance gate, the palace, a theatre, the agora with a shrine to Eukleia, the sanctuary of Cybele, mother of the gods, public buildings and private houses. The archaeological site lies close to the tumulus of Vergina and is a Unesco World Heritage Monument and a region of particular natural beauty.

The Vergina Sun:Discover the mystical symbolism contained in the rays of the Vergina Sun, depicted on the golden larnax found in the famous royal tomb of Philip II and other members of Alexander the Great's family. There are 16 rays in all. Four of them represent the natural elements – air, fire, earth and water – and the remaining dozen are the 12 Olympian gods.

4) Mystras



Mystras Greece used to be the most powerful Byzantine town in the Peloponnese from the 13th to the 15th century. It was a fortified town lying on the northern slopes of Mt Taygetos, at about 8 km to the west of Sparta. The castle was built in 1249 by William de Villehardouin, the Frank conqueror of the Peloponnese but it was given to the Byzantines ten years later, who turned Mystras into the capital of the "Despotate of Moreas". The castle went through the dominations of the Turks and the Venetians and was finally abandoned in around 1832 when its inhabitants moved to the close by city of Sparta. Today the only inhabitants of Mystras are some nuns in the Monastery of Pantanassa. The whole other area is full of ruins and remains of its glorious past. These remains include a fortress, some cisterns and towers, a small palace, some stone-built mansions as well as wonderful Byzantine churches and monasteries, such as the cathedral of Agios Demetrios, the monastery of our Lady Perivleptos and the church of our Lady Hodegetria. Most of these churches are well-restored and have nice frescoes, representing scenes from the Bible. Regarding the predominant architectural style, in spite of all the other different cultures Mystras was exposed to along centuries, the deepest historical traces were left by the Byzantine empire. In fact, Mystras is considered one of the best exponents of the Byzantine culture, visited by hundreds of tourists all year round. A few meters away from the castle, there lies Neos Mystras, a small village whose inhabitants descend from the residents of the old castle. Another beautiful village close by is Trypi, where the famous Ceadas Cavern is found. The Byzantine town of Mystras is a popular tourist attraction and has been declared by UNESCO as a World Heritage Monument. However, apart from a gorgeous ancient site, Mystras also offers a lovely nature to discover. Hiking among lush greenery, gorges, and small villages can be a delightful opportunity.

5)Delphi



Delphi is located in upper central Greece, on multiple plateaux along the slope of Mount Parnassus, and includes the Sanctuary of Apollo (the god of light, knowledge and harmony). It is the ancient sanctuary that grew rich as the seat of Pythia, the oracle consulted about important decisions throughout the ancient classical world. The ancient Greeks considered the centre of the world to be in Delphi, marked by the stone monument known as the omphalos (navel). Zeus determined the site of Delphi when he sought to find the centre of his "Grandmother Earth" (Gaia). He sent two eagles flying from the eastern and western extremities, and the path of the eagles crossed over Delphi where the omphalos, or navel of Gaia was found. Delphi is perhaps best known for its oracle, the Pythia, the sibyl or priestess at the sanctuary dedicated to Apollo, who spoke through his oracle. She had to be an older woman of blameless life chosen from among the peasants of the area. Alone in an enclosed inner sanctum (Ancient Greek *adyton* - "do not enter") she sat on a tripod seat over an opening in the earth (the "chasm"). According to legend, when Apollo slew Python its body fell into this fissure and fumes arose from its decomposing body. Intoxicated by the vapours, the sibyl would fall into a trance, allowing Apollo to possess her spirit. In this state she prophesied. The oracle could not be consulted during the winter months, for this was traditionally the time when Apollo would live among the Hyperboreans (a race of Giants). Dionysus would inhabit the temple during his absence. The Charioteer of Delphi, also known as Iniochos is one of the best-known statues surviving from Ancient Greece, and is considered one of the finest examples of ancient bronze sculptures. The life-size (1.8m) statue of a chariot driver was found in 1896 at the Sanctuary of Apollo in Delphi. It is now in the Delphi Archaeological Museum.

6)Agion Oros (Holy Mount Athos)



Mount Athos is a mountain and peninsula (Chalkidiki) in northeastern Greece and an important centre of Eastern Orthodox monasticism. It is autonomous within the Greek Republic. Mount Athos is home to 20 monasteries under the direct jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. Mount Athos has been inhabited since ancient times and is known for its nearly 1,800-year continuous Christian presence and its long historical monastic traditions, which date back to at least 800 A.D. and the Byzantine era. Today, over 2,000 monks from Greece and many other countries, including Eastern Orthodox countries, live an ascetic life in Athos, isolated from the rest of the world. The Athonite monasteries feature a rich collection of well-preserved artifacts, rare books, ancient documents, and artworks of immense historical value, and Mount Athos has been listed as a World Heritage site since 1988. Although Mount Athos is legally part of the European Union like the rest of Greece, the Monastic State of the Holy Mountain and the Athonite institutions have a special jurisdiction. This empowers the Monastic State's authorities to regulate the free movement of people and goods in its territory. In particular, only males are allowed to enter. Homer mentions the mountain Athos in the Iliad. Herodotus writes that, during the Persian invasion of Thrace in 492 BC, the fleet of the Persian commander Mardonios was wrecked with losses of 300 ships and 20,000 men, by a strong North wind while attempting to round the coast near Mount Athos. Herodotus mentions the peninsula, then called Acte, telling us that Pelasgians from the island of Limnos populated it.

7)Olympia



Olympia is an ancient site on Greece's Peloponnese peninsula that hosted the original Olympic Games, founded in the 8th century B.C. Its extensive ruins include athletic training areas, a stadium and temples dedicated to the gods Hera and Zeus. The Archaeological Museum of Olympia exhibits finds from the site, including a statue of Hermes attributed to the sculptor Praxiteles. The site was primarily dedicated to Zeus and drew visitors from all over the Greek world as one of a group of such "Panhellenic" centres which helped to build the identity of the ancient Greeks as a nation. Despite the name, it is nowhere near Mount Olympus in northern Greece, where the Twelve Olympians, the major deities of Ancient Greek religion, were believed to live.

The Olympic Games were held every four years throughout Classical antiquity, from the 8th century BC to the 4th century AD. The Olympic flame of the modern-day Olympic Games is lit by reflection of sunlight in a parabolic mirror in front of the Temple of Hera and then transported by a torch to the place where the Games are held. When the modern Olympics came to Athens in 2004, the men's and women's shot put competition was held at the restored Olympia stadium.

Hermes and the Infant Dionysus, also known as the Hermes of Praxiteles or the Hermes of Olympia is an ancient Greek sculpture of Hermes and the infant Dionysus discovered in 1877 in the ruins of the Temple of Hera, Olympia, in Greece.

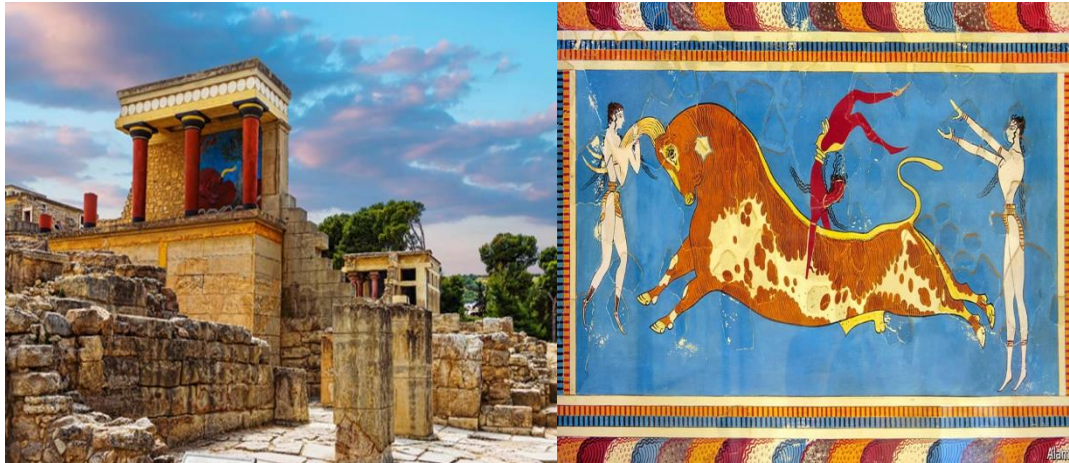
8)Delos Island



Delos is a Greek island and archaeological site in the Aegean Sea's Cyclades archipelago, near Mykonos, the birthplace of Apollo. It was a major religious center and port during the 1st millennium B.C. The island's ruins encompass Doric temples, markets, an amphitheater, houses with mosaics and the iconic Terrace of the Lions statues. Thucydides identifies the original inhabitants as piratical Carians who were eventually expelled by King Minos of Crete. By the time of the Odyssey the island was already famous as the birthplace of the twin gods Apollo and Artemis.

The Terrace of the Lions, also dedicated to Apollo by the people of Naxos shortly before 600 BCE. It originally had nine to twelve squatting, snarling marble guardian lions along the Sacred Way; one is inserted over the main gate to the Venetian Arsenal. The lions create a monumental avenue comparable to Egyptian avenues of sphinxes. (There is a Greek sphinx in the Delos Museum.) Today only seven of the original lions remain.

9)Knossos



Knossos, on the island of Crete, is the heart of the Minoan civilization, according to tradition the seat of the legendary king Minos and the birthplace of thrilling stories, such as the myths of the Labyrinth with its Minotaur and of Daidalos and Icaros. It is grander, more complex, and more flamboyant than any of the other palaces known to us, and it is located about twenty minutes south of the modern port town of Iraklio.

According to Greek mythology, the palace was designed by famed architect Dedalos with such complexity that no one placed in it could ever find its exit. King Minos who commissioned the palace then kept the architect prisoner to ensure that he would not reveal the palace plan to anyone. Dedalos, who was a great inventor, built two sets of wings so he and his son Ikaros could fly off the island, and so they did. On their way out, Dedalos warned his son not to fly too close to the sun because the wax that held the wings together would melt. In a tragic turn of events, during their escape Ikaros, young and impulsive as he was, flew higher and higher until the sun rays dismantled his wings and the young boy fell to his death in the Aegean sea. The Labyrinth was the dwelling of the Minotaur in Greek mythology, and many associate the palace of Knossos with the legend of Theseus killing the Minotaur. According to legend, king Minos ruled Athens and forced the Athenians to deliver seven youths and seven maidens every nine years.

They became prey of the Minotaur in the labyrinth, and Athens escaped further sanctions through their obedience. The Minotaur was a terrible monster with the body of a man, and the head of a bull, born from the union of Pasiphae and the bull offered as a gift to Minos by Poseidon.

The sacrifices of the Athenians ended only when Theseus, son of Aegean ruler of Attica, traveled to Crete as part of the youths to be sacrificed, but once in the labyrinth he killed the Minotaur and managed to find his way out of the labyrinth with the aid of Ariadne, the daughter of Minos. Ariadne fell in love with Theseus as soon as he arrived, and gave him a ball of thread which he unraveled behind him as he walked through the labyrinthine corridors. Exiting then became a simple matter of following the thread backwards towards his freedom.

In a tragic turn of events, Theseus sailed back to Athens forgetting in his elation to replace the black sails with white ones as a signal of victory. His father Aegean who

was watching for the returning ships from the Sounio rock saw the black sail, and in despair for what he thought was a failed mission that resulted to the death of his son, ended his life by jumping into the sea. The sea henceforth is named Aegean sea in his memory.

10)Mycenes



Mycenae is an ancient city located on a small hill between two larger hills on the fertile Argolid Plain in Peloponnese, Greece. The Bronze-age acropolis, or citadel built on a hill, is one of the great cities of the Mycenaean civilization that played a vital role in classical Greek culture. Mycenae was also prominent in Greek mythology and inspired poets, writers, and artists throughout the centuries, though it was ultimately abandoned more than 2,000 years ago. According to Greek mythology, Perseus—son of the Greek god Zeus and Danae, who was the daughter of Acricio, the king of Argos—founded Mycenae. When Perseus left Argos for Tiryns, he instructed Cyclopes (one-eyed giants) to build the walls of Mycenae with stones no human could lift.

Perseus named the city Mycenae after the cap (myces) fell off his scabbard at the site, which he saw as a sign of good omen, or after finding a water spring to quench his thirst when he picked up a mushroom (myces) from the ground. The Perseid dynasty ruled Mycenae for at least three generations and ended with the rule of Eurytheus, whom legends claim commissioned Hercules to perform the 12 labors. When Eurytheus died in battle, Atreus became king of Mycenae. Mycenae is perhaps best known in mythology as the city of Agamemnon, the son of Atreus. King Agamemnon led the expedition against Troy during the Trojan War, which Homer accounted in his epic poem the Iliad.

The story of the Trojan War—the Bronze Age conflict between the kingdoms of Troy and Mycenaean Greece—straddles the history and mythology of

ancient Greece and inspired the greatest writers of antiquity, from Homer, Herodotus and Sophocles to Virgil. Since the 19th-century rediscovery of the site of Troy in what is now western Turkey, archaeologists have uncovered increasing evidence of a kingdom that peaked and may have been destroyed around 1,180 B.C.—perhaps forming the basis for the tales recounted by Homer some 400 years later in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. According to classical sources, the war began after the abduction (or elopement) of Queen Helen of Sparta by the Trojan prince Paris. Helen's jilted husband Menelaus convinced his brother Agamemnon, king of Mycenae, to lead an expedition to retrieve her. Agamemnon was joined by the Greek heroes Achilles, Odysseus, Nestor and Ajax, and accompanied by a fleet of more than a thousand ships from throughout the Hellenic world. They crossed the Aegean Sea to Asia Minor to lay siege to Troy and demand Helen's return by Priam, the Trojan king. The siege, punctuated by battles and skirmishes including the storied deaths of the Trojan prince Hector and the nearly-invincible Achilles, lasted more than 10 years until the morning the Greek armies retreated from their camp, leaving a large wooden horse outside the gates of Troy. After much debate (and unheeded warnings by Priam's daughter Cassandra), the Trojans pulled the mysterious gift into the city. When night fell, the horse opened up and a group of Greek warriors, led by Odysseus, climbed out and sacked the Troy from within.

11)Patmos



Patmos, an Aegean island in the north of Greece's Dodecanese island group, is a significant Christian pilgrimage site. Its Cave of the Apocalypse is where John of Patmos (St. John the Theologian) is said to have written the Book of Revelations. A fortresslike, 11th-century monastery dedicated to the saint overlooks the whitewashed houses of the hilltop capital, Hora.

The myth tells that Patmos existed as an island at the bottom of the sea. Artemis frequently paid visits to Caria, the mainland across the shore from Patmos, where she had a shrine on Mount Latmos. There she met the moon goddess Selene, who cast her light on the ocean, revealing the sunken island of Patmos. Zeus agreed, and the island emerged from the water.

Patmos is mentioned in the Book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible. The book's introduction states that its author, John, was on Patmos when he was given (and recorded) a vision from Jesus. Early Christian tradition identified this writer John of Patmos as John the Apostle. For this reason, Patmos is a destination for Christian pilgrimage. Visitors can see the cave where John is said to have received his Revelation (the Cave of the Apocalypse), and several monasteries on the island are dedicated to Saint John.

12)Thessaloniki



Thessaloniki was founded in 315 BC by King Cassander of Macedonia. It got its name from Thessaloniki, wife of Cassander and half-sister of Alexander the Great, who, in turn, was named like that after her father, king Phillip II of Macedonia, to commemorate his victory over the Phocians with the help of Thessalian horsemen. It rapidly became a very important center and one of the major cities of the kingdom during the Hellenistic Era with limited political autonomy.

After the fall of the Kingdom of Macedon in 168 BC it became part of the Roman republic and was further developed into an important trade center actually connecting Europe with Asia through the Roman Via Egnatia.

Many of the most imposing and well decorated structures were built during the Roman Era of its history as Thessaloniki was one of the capitals during the Tetrarchy period, while it also served as capital of all the Greek provinces for a period of time. During the 1st century AD and afterwards, the city became one of the first early Christian centers after Paul the Apostle preached here and laid the foundations for a new religion.

During the Byzantine era the city was further developed and became even bigger, being the second most important city of the empire after Constantinople itself. Wonderful churches and other buildings were built in several areas while extended defensive constructions took place.

In 1204 AD during the fourth crusade the city fell into the hands of the Crusaders and thus the "Kingdom Of Thessalonica" was created. In 1246 though, the Byzantines managed to recover the entire area.

The White Tower of Thessaloniki is a landmark monument and museum on the waterfront of the city of Thessaloniki, capital of the region of Macedonia. The White Tower was built in the fifteenth century after the fall of Thessaloniki to the Ottomans in 1430. At its location there had been an older tower belonging to Thessaloniki's Byzantine fortifications, where the eastern wall met the sea wall. The Tower was the eastern end of the sea wall; there was another at the western end, and a third in between. The Arch of Galerius or Kamara and the Rotunda are neighboring early 4th-

century AD monuments in the city. The 4th-century Roman Emperor Galerius commissioned these two structures as elements of an imperial precinct linked to his Thessaloniki palace. Archeologists have found substantial remains of the palace to the southwest. These three monumental structures were connected by a road that ran through the arch, which rose above the major east-west road of the city. The Rotunda was a massive circular structure with a masonry core that had an oculus like the Pantheon in Rome. It has gone through multiple periods of use and modification as a polytheist temple, a Christian basilica, a Muslim mosque, and again a Christian church (and archaeological site). A minaret is preserved from its use as a mosque, and ancient remains are exposed on its southern side.