

A GUIDE TO ATHENS

Places of Interest

1. The *Acropolis*
2. The ancient *Agora*. The *Agora* was the main meeting place where people talked and discussed various issues. Naturally, merchants would also go there, so the term “*agora*” came to mean “marketplace”.

The *Stoa of Attalos or Attalus* (a covered walkway or portico) was built by and named after King Attalos II of Pergamon (near the modern city of Bergama in western Turkey), who ruled between 159 BC and 138 BC. It was reconstructed in the 1950s by the American School of Classical Studies in Athens and now houses a small museum. If you visit it, notice the bronze shield on display and consider this: right after the Battle of Marathon (490 BC) between Athens and Plataea on one side and a Persian force on the other, the Persian army boarded their ships and sailed towards Athens, which was undefended. Realizing the danger, the Athenian army immediately ran (or quick marched), in full armor, some 42 Km back to the city to defend it. So, ponder whether you think you can even lift the shield (as well as the rest of the armor and weapons), let alone fight and then run 42 Km with it.

The *Thisseion or Theseio* is actually a Temple of *Hephaistus* (*Vulcan* in Roman mythology). It was originally misidentified to be dedicated to *Theseus*, a mythical king of Athens who slayed the *Minotaur* in the *Labyrinth*, and the name stuck both in the temple and the surrounding area.



The Stoa of Attalos



The Thissieon



The Shield

3. The Acropolis Museum (<http://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/>) houses archaeological artifacts from the Acropolis itself and the surrounding area. The *Caryatids* are perhaps the most identifiable statues still surviving to this day (sadly, all the superb statues that were widely admired and marveled at in antiquity have been destroyed)

On the 3rd floor of the museum you will find the *Parthenon* frieze and metopes, which depict various scenes from mythology and life in ancient Athens. The descriptions are very terse and lacking, in my opinion, especially regarding the mythology; nevertheless, do notice that the complexity of the scene, the figures (sometimes 4, one behind the other), the anatomical details (the tension and expression in the men and the horses, the tightened muscles, the protruding veins, the hair and combing of the men and the mane of the horses), as well as all the other fine details (the lightness and ripples of the garments etc), are all depicted in just a few cm of chiseled marble.



The Caryatids



The Parthenon frieze



Metope No 26

4. *Philopappou* (or *Filopappou*) Hill (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philopappos_Monument) or Hill of the Muses was dedicated to *Gaius Julius Antiochus Epiphanes Philopappos or Philopappus*, a prince from the Kingdom of Commagene (near the modern city of Samsat in south-central Turkey).

This, along with the adjoining Hills of Pnyx and the Nymphs, according to Plutarch, was where a great battle between the Athenians and the Amazons took place.

The *Pnyx* was the site of the general assembly of Athens. This was the place where every citizen could speak his mind, where the great orators delivered their inspiring and fiery speeches and where the citizenry voted on every issue.

The hill offers great views of the city, the Acropolis etc and is a great location for photographs.



The Philopappou monument



The Pnyx: Speaker's podium



View from the hill

5. *Plaka*, the Old Town of Athens. Walk the narrow streets, smell the nightflowers and try to imagine how it was before it was invaded by cafes, restaurants and tourist shops.

Also, the Roman *Agora* is located here.



6. *Monastiraki* (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monastiraki>) is a neighborhood popular for its cafes, restaurants and stores. On Sundays there is a big flea market, though merchants begin to assemble on Saturday evening (but beware of pickpockets).

If you go down to the Metro stop at the square you can see, and walk over, the antiquities that were excavated when the Metro was built. Incredibly, when the Metro was being built, it was discovered that *Ilissos*, one of the city's ancient rivers, was still running beneath the modern city, the asphalt and the so-called "development". The river can also be seen from a glass window in the square.



Monastiraki square



The flea market



Antiquities at the Metro stop

7. *Psirri/Gazi* is another neighborhood popular for its cafes, restaurants and night life.
8. Kerameikos (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kerameikos>) was one of the main cemeteries of ancient Athens; nowadays it is popular for its cafes and restaurants.
9. The old University of Athens, the Academy and the National Library.



The National Library



The old University of Athens

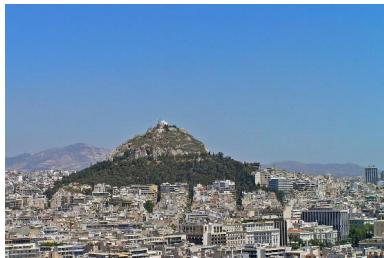


The Academy

10. Mount Lycabettus or Likavittos (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_Lycabettus) offers a great view of the city.
11. Syntagma or Constitution Square (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syntagma_Square) is the central square of Athens.
12. Right across the street from Syntagma Square is the Parliament, what used to be the Royal Palace. Also, the National Gardens (previously the Royal Gardens).
13. Four museums a couple of blocks from each other:
 - The Benaki Museum (<http://www.benaki.gr>)
 - The Byzantine and Christian Museum (<http://www.byzantinemuseum.gr/>)
 - The Cycladic Art Museum (<http://www.cycladic.gr/>)
 - The War Museum (<http://www.warmuseum.gr/>)All four are small and do not require much time. But if you can visit only one, go with the Benaki Museum. Its exhibits are not the best, but it has a little bit of everything: some ancient, some Byzantine, some modern. So in an hour or two you can get a quick tour of history. My favorite items are the folk costumes and the entire interior of old houses they have.
14. The Panathenaic Stadium (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panathenaic_Stadium) or Kallimarmaro Stadium (meaning “beautifully marbled”), where the first modern Olympics were held (1896).
15. The Temple of Olympian Zeus
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temple_of_Olympian_Zeus,_Athens)

16. The *First (old and main) Cemetery of Athens*

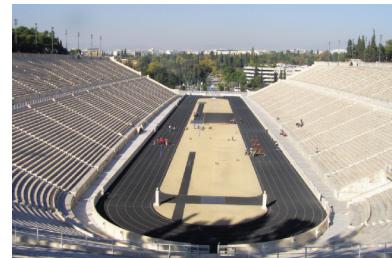
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Cemetery_of_Athens)



Mount Lycabettus



Syntagma square & Parliament in the back



The Panathenaic Stadium

Walking Tours

1. The blue arrows describe two walking tours (one shorter, one longer) around the Acropolis, into Plaka.
2. The brown arrows describe a still longer tour, starting with the blue arrows up to Thission (or the Temple of Hephaestus), through Ermou St (this used to be a major shopping street. It still is, except it has been taken over by the multinationals), past the Metropolitan Cathedral of Athens, to Syntagma square, Parliament, along the National Gardens, the Temple of Zeus.

Vista Points offer great views of the Acropolis and the surrounding area.

Also, at Syntagma square, on the opposite side of Parliament, there is a store called *Public*. At the top there is a roof garden cafe that has a great view.

Also, most of the downtown hotels have roof gardens with great views.

Maps

The first map is a general map of downtown Athens.

The second map focuses on the area around the Acropolis.

The third map focuses on *Plaka*.

