



MYSTAKIDIS TOURS
ORTHODOX PILGRIMAGES SINCE 1959

Greece of the Saints

A pilgrimage to the relics, the monasteries, and the holy ones of the Greek Church, ending within sight of the Holy Mountain.

DURATION

9 Days · 8 Nights

ROUTE

Athens · Meteora · Thessaloniki

SEASON

Spring and autumn departures

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WHY THIS PILGRIMAGE

A land kept by its saints

Greece is not only the country of ancient temples. It is a land kept by its saints, where the relics of Apostles rest in great churches, where monasteries crown the rocks and the mountains, and where the faith has been prayed without interruption for two thousand years. This pilgrimage is built around the saints themselves, and it visits them at home.

You will venerate the skull of the Apostle Andrew at Patras, in the basilica raised over the place of his cross. You will stand beneath the eleventh-century mosaics of Hosios Loukas at the tomb of Saint Luke of Steiris, climb to the hanging monasteries of Meteora, and pray before the icon of Panagia Soumela, carried out of Pontus by the refugees of 1922. In Thessaloniki you will descend into the crypt where Saint Demetrios was martyred and venerate his myrrh-streaming relics, and on the last full day the boat from Ouranoupoli carries you along the coast of Mount Athos itself, the monasteries of the Holy Mountain rising from the sea one after another.

Three bases, Athens, Kalambaka, and Thessaloniki, keep the road time honest, and every day ends at a proper table. It is the Greece that package tourism never sees.

WHO THIS PILGRIMAGE IS FOR

Orthodox parishes of every jurisdiction, Greek-American communities returning to the faith of their grandparents, and any pilgrim who wants relics, monasteries, and living monasticism rather than beaches. Moderate walking, with steps at Meteora; the Athos cruise is restful by design.

THE JOURNEY

- **ATHENS**
3 nights: the Areopagus and Christian Athens
- **CORINTH & PATRAS**
Day pilgrimage: the Apostle Andrew
- **KALAMBAKA**
2 nights: Hosios Loukas and Meteora
- **PANAGIA SOUMELA**
The icon of Pontus, en route north
- **THESSALONIKI**
3 nights: Saint Demetrios and the Holy Mountain

Three bases and one long golden road north: Attica, Thessaly, Macedonia, the geography of Greek holiness.

THE PILGRIMAGE, DAY BY DAY

Greece of the Saints: the days

DAY 1 Arrival in Athens

Arrival at Athens International Airport, where our pilgrimage director meets the group in the arrivals hall. The coach runs the Attiki Odos into the city with a first panorama of Hymettus and the Saronic Gulf, and, as we reach the center, the Acropolis standing above the rooftops. After check-in and time to rest, an evening orientation walk through the Plaka, the old quarter beneath the Acropolis, passes the little eleventh-century church of the Metamorphosis and ends at a viewpoint below the sacred rock, lit gold against the night sky. Your director walks the group through the shape of the days ahead over dinner: which monasteries ask for skirts and sleeves, where the long drives fall, and when the church of Saint Demetrios will be quietest for veneration. Dinner at the hotel and an early night after the flight.

OVERNIGHT Athens

MEALS D · 4-star hotel

DAY 2 Christian Athens and the Areopagus

Christian Athens, read in the right order. We begin on the Areopagus itself, the bare rock below the Acropolis where the Apostle Paul stood in the year 51 and preached the Unknown God to the philosophers; your guide reads Acts 17 aloud on the spot, with the agora Paul walked spread below. We then climb the Acropolis, where the Parthenon served for nearly a thousand years as the church of the Panagia Atheniotissa, the Mother of God of Athens. Descending into the old city we visit the Byzantine churches that survive among the shops: Kapnikarea in the middle of Ermou street, the little Panagia Gorgoepikoos built of ancient marbles, and the Metropolitan Cathedral, where we venerate the relics of Saint Philothei of Athens and the Patriarch-martyr Gregory V, hanged at the Phanar in 1821. Afternoon free in Plaka; dinner at the hotel.

OVERNIGHT Athens

MEALS B, D · 4-star hotel

DAY 3 Corinth and Patras, the Apostle Andrew

Out of Athens along the Saronic coast to the Corinth Canal, the great cut through the isthmus, then into ancient Corinth, where the Apostle Paul lived and worked for eighteen months. We stand at the bema, the judgment seat where Paul was brought before the proconsul Gallio, walk the Lechaion road he walked, and read from the Epistles to the Corinthians in the city that received them. From Corinth the coach follows the Gulf shore west to Patras, to the great Basilica of Saint Andrew the First-Called, built where the Apostle was crucified on his X-shaped cross. We venerate the precious skull of Saint Andrew and relics of the cross of his martyrdom, kept in the basilica's reliquary shrine. Return to Athens along the northern Peloponnese in the evening, with the Gulf of Corinth beside the road most of the way.

OVERNIGHT Athens

MEALS B, D · 4-star hotel

DAY BY DAY, CONTINUED

DAY 4 Hosios Loukas and the Road to Meteora

North out of Athens through Boeotia to the Monastery of Hosios Loukas, the finest surviving Byzantine monastery of the eleventh century, a UNESCO site still under the Church. In the katholikon we stand beneath mosaics that survived a thousand years, gold still bright in the dome light, and venerate the incorrupt relics of Saint Luke of Steiris, the healer-ascetic around whose tomb the monastery grew. After time in the crypt and the monks' shop, the road climbs past Parnassus and descends into the plain of Thessaly. Late in the afternoon the pinnacles of Meteora appear ahead of the coach, grey stone towers six hundred feet high with monasteries visible on their summits, one of the great first sights of the Orthodox world. We settle into our hotel in Kalambaka directly beneath the rocks, with dinner at the hotel.

OVERNIGHT Kalambaka, below Meteora

MEALS B, D · 4-star hotel

DAY 5 The Monasteries of Meteora

The full day at Meteora, the monasteries in the air. In the morning we ascend to the Great Meteoron, the highest and oldest of the monasteries, founded by Saint Athanasios the Meteorite in the fourteenth century, by the modern staircase built into the rock; time in the katholikon of the Transfiguration and the old refectory, and at the ossuary of the departed fathers. We continue to Varlaam across its stone bridge, venerating in the katholikon of All Saints beneath frescoes by Frangos Katelanos, and pausing at the windlass tower where monks and provisions were once hauled up in nets. After a lunch stop we visit the Roussanou convent, gentler steps and the nuns' garden, with the whole valley below. In Kalambaka an icon workshop shows how the egg-tempera tradition is kept today. Dress modestly: skirts for women, covered shoulders for all; wraps are lent at the doors.

OVERNIGHT Kalambaka, below Meteora

MEALS B, D · 4-star hotel

DAY 6 Panagia Soumela and the Road to Thessaloniki

North through the Thessalian plain and over the passes into Macedonia. On the slopes of Mount Vermion above Kastania we visit the shrine of Panagia Soumela, where the wonderworking icon of the Mother of God, painted by the hand of Saint Luke by tradition and carried from the Soumela Monastery of Pontus, has been enthroned since the Pontic Greeks brought it out of Asia Minor. Pilgrims from across the world venerate here each August fifteenth; on a quiet day the church is nearly ours alone. We continue across the plain, passing Pella, the birthplace of Alexander, and arrive in Thessaloniki toward evening: the second city of Byzantium, the city of Saint Demetrios and of Saint Gregory Palamas, and our base for the rest of the pilgrimage. Dinner at the hotel.

OVERNIGHT Thessaloniki

MEALS B, D · 4-star hotel

DAY BY DAY, CONTINUED

DAY 7 Thessaloniki, the City of Saint Demetrios

The day of Saint Demetrios's city. We begin at his great basilica, rebuilt after the fire of 1917 around its surviving mosaics, and descend into the crypt, the Roman bath where the saint was imprisoned and speared in 306, where his tomb ran with myrrh for centuries; we venerate his relics in their silver reliquary before the morning crowds. We then walk the city's Byzantine spine: the Rotunda with its early mosaics of the martyrs, the Panagia Chalkeon of the coppersmiths' quarter, and the Cathedral, with the relics of Saint Gregory Palamas, archbishop of this city. In the upper town, inside the Byzantine walls, we visit Vlatadon Monastery, founded by disciples of Palamas, with its view over the whole gulf to Mount Olympus. Late afternoon free on the paralia, the seafront promenade, before dinner.

OVERNIGHT Thessaloniki**MEALS** B, D · 4-star hotel**DAY 8** The Holy Mountain from the Sea

East across Chalkidiki to Ouranoupoli, the last village before the border of the Holy Mountain, where women have not set foot in a thousand years by the avaton of the Mother of God. From the harbour our cruise boat runs south along the western coast of Athos, keeping the 500-meter line the monastic authorities set, and the monasteries come down to the water one after another: Docheiariou and Xenophontos at the shore, the vast Russian Saint Panteleimon with its green domes, and high above the sea the towers of Simonopetra, seven storeys hanging over the drop. The boat's commentary and your guide name the monasteries and their saints, and monks sometimes meet the boat at Dafni selling incense and prayer ropes. It is as close as most pilgrims, and all women, will ever come to the garden of the Panagia. Return to Thessaloniki by evening.

OVERNIGHT Thessaloniki**MEALS** B, D · 4-star hotel**DAY 9** Departure from Thessaloniki

A final morning in Thessaloniki. Those who wish return early to Saint Demetrios for a last veneration at the relics, or walk the seafront to the White Tower while the city is quiet. Your pilgrimage director accompanies the group to Makedonia Airport in good time for departure formalities, and remains until the group is checked through. You leave Greece having venerated the First-Called Apostle at Patras, the healer of Steiris at his tomb, the myrrh-streaming Demetrios in his own city, and the Mother of God of Pontus on her Macedonian mountain, and having seen with your own eyes both Meteora at dawn and the Holy Mountain from the sea. Most groups are home the same evening; ask us about group air from your nearest gateway when you book.

OVERNIGHT None, departure day**MEALS** B

YOUR PILGRIMAGE, PLAINLY STATED

What is included, and what is not

INCLUDED IN THE PRICE

- ◆ Eight nights in 4-star hotels: three in Athens, two in Kalambaka, three in Thessaloniki
- ◆ The Mount Athos coastal cruise from Ouranoupoli
- ◆ Half-board throughout: breakfast and dinner at the hotel daily
- ◆ All land transportation in a modern air-conditioned coach
- ◆ Licensed English-speaking guide, briefed in the Orthodox tradition, throughout
- ◆ Entry fees to every site, monastery, and museum named in the itinerary
- ◆ Divine Liturgy and veneration arrangements at the shrines named in the itinerary
- ◆ Airport transfers on the group arrival and departure days
- ◆ All road tolls, parking, and portorage of one case per pilgrim

NOT INCLUDED

- ◆ International airfare to and from Greece; group air quoted separately on request
- ◆ Single room supplement, quoted on request
- ◆ Travel insurance, strongly advised
- ◆ Tips to guides and drivers; we suggest \$8 to \$10 per day for the guide and \$4 to \$5 per day for the driver
- ◆ Lunches, taken at leisure on the road
- ◆ Alcoholic beverages with dinner
- ◆ Optional excursions offered locally
- ◆ Passport fees; US citizens do not require a visa for Greece for stays under 90 days
- ◆ Items of a personal nature: laundry, telephone, minibar

Hotels are named in your final documents; we contract 4-star houses in Athens and Thessaloniki and the best available pilgrim-class hotels in the mountain towns. Prices are per person, twin share, land only, in US dollars.

BOOKING YOUR PILGRIMAGE

Terms, plainly stated

RESERVING YOUR PLACE

A deposit of \$400 per pilgrim confirms your reservation. Places are assigned in the order deposits are received, and each departure is limited to forty pilgrims.

BALANCE OF PAYMENT

The balance of the pilgrimage price is due 90 days before departure. Prices are per person in US dollars, sharing a twin or double room. A single room is available for a supplement, quoted on request.

CANCELLATION

More than 90 days before departure	Deposit only
89 to 60 days before departure	50% of the price
59 to 30 days before departure	75% of the price
Inside 30 days of departure	No refund

TRAVEL INSURANCE

Travel insurance is not included and is strongly advised. We recommend a policy covering trip cancellation, medical care abroad, and baggage, purchased within days of paying your deposit.

GROUP SIZE

A minimum of 15 pilgrims is required for the pilgrimage to operate. Maximum 40 pilgrims per departure, so that veneration at the holy places is never rushed.

A FAMILY COMPANY

Mystakidis Tours has led pilgrims to the holy places since 1959, a family company in its third generation. Your group travels with one experienced pilgrimage director from arrival to departure.



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Every itinerary can be adjusted for your parish. Ask us about preferred dates, group air from your nearest gateway, and a visit from our team to present the pilgrimage to your community.