

Ancient City, Modern Lifestyle

Athens isn't only about old temples. It's a modern city whose inhabitants live, work and play alongside the city's ancient past. You can visit the Plaka, the oldest part of modern Athens, which lies in the shadow of the acropolis and where you will find the best restaurants, cafes and entertainment.

Just around the corner is the Monastiraki flea market where you can buy everything from antiques to CDs to sandals. If flea markets aren't for you, check out Kolonaki, Athens's answer to Rodeo Drive, where you'll find the ritziest shops and cafes in town.

When you are worn out from shopping, wind down in the National Gardens, a cool sanctuary in the heart of this bustling city. Once you're revitalised, take a look at the National Archaeological Museum which boasts the finest display of Greek **antiquities** you'll find anywhere. And no visit to Athens is complete without a tour of Syntagma Square where you'll find the Parliament and *evzones* (royal guards) wearing *foustanela* (pleated skirts) and *sarouchi* (pom pom) shoes. If all this sounds exhausting, don't worry. You won't have to walk all the way – take the **metro**.

Olympic Connection

The Olympic Games were first held at a town called Olympia in 776 BC. According to legend, it was a festival begun by Zeus, king of the gods. Many of the original events are still included in the modern Games, such as wrestling, pentathlon, javelin and discus, although chariot racing has fallen out of fashion!

Ancient athletes competed not for gold but for the glory of winning, and an olive wreath to wear on their heads.

A statue of Athena, protector of Athens.

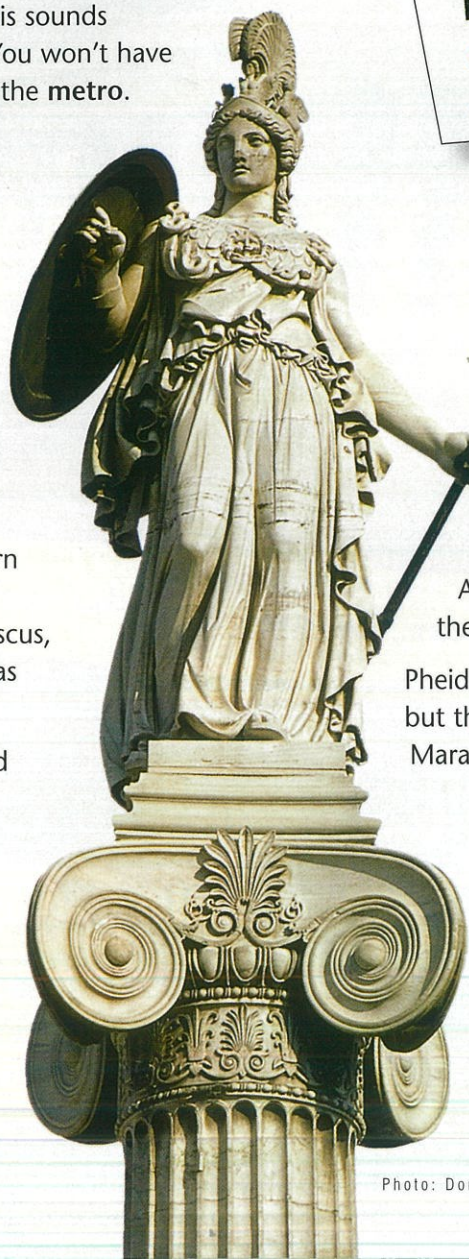


Photo: Dorling Kindersley

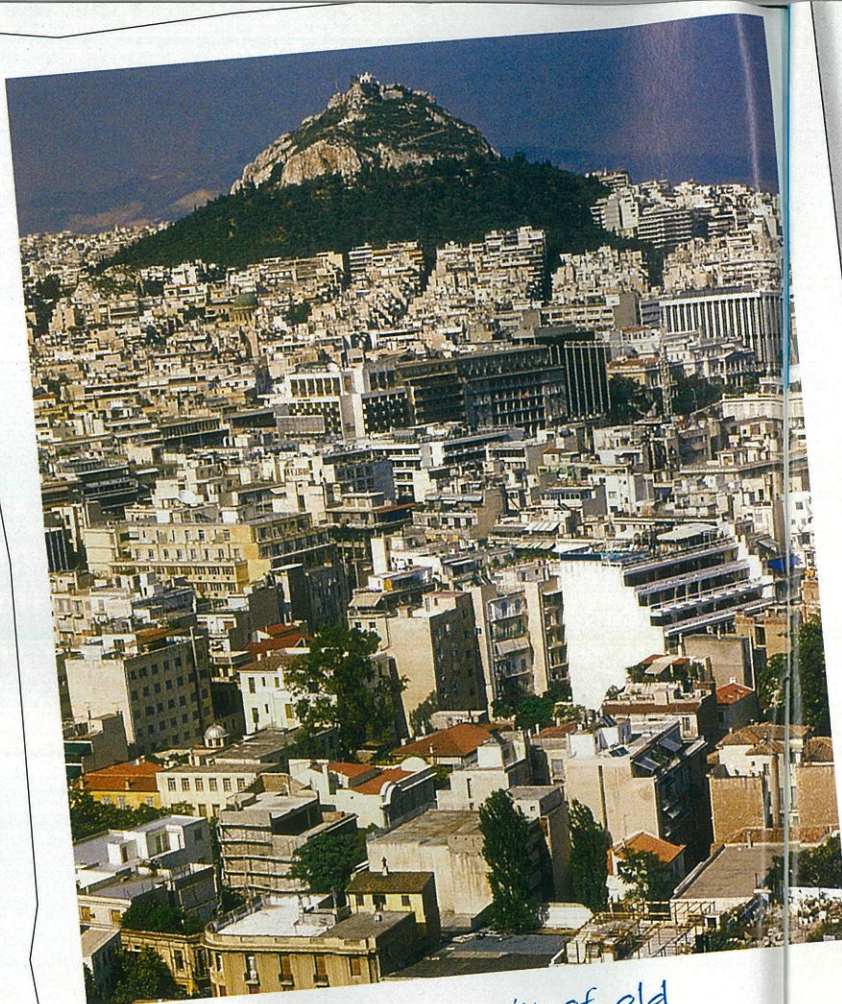


Photo: Photolibary.com

Modern Athens is a mix of old and new.

Marathon Effort

One event that no modern Olympics would be complete without is the marathon, though that race was never part of the ancient Games.

In 490 BC Athens faced invasion by the Persians who were preparing to land at Marathon, a town just north of Athens. The Athenians sent Pheidippedes (Fie-dip-e-dees) to beg the Spartans, the toughest fighters in Greece, for help.

Pheidippedes ran the 225-kilometre journey in 36 hours but the Spartans wouldn't come. He ran back to Marathon, delivered his message and dropped dead.

Glossary

antiquities	articles from ancient times
democracy	government by the people
metro	underground railway

Long distance races have been called marathons ever since – maybe they should have been called Pheidippedes!

Many new Olympic venues are ready to go, while builders are racing against the clock to have the rest ready on time. The Olympic Stadium at Maroussi holds 55 000 spectators and will host the opening and closing ceremonies.

The shot put will be held at the ancient stadium at Olympia, where the Olympic flame is lit every four years. The stadium is in its original state – no seating, electronic scoreboards or modern alterations of any kind have been made.



Photo: AAP

Athens's main Olympic stadium in May 2004.



Photo: Photolibary.com

The centre of Athens with ancient landmarks.

Did you know?

- ◆ There are over 10 000 stray dogs in Athens.
- ◆ While building the metro, thousands of antiquities were dug up during the excavations.
- ◆ Nike shoes take their name from the Athenian goddess of victory, Athena Nike.
- ◆ The mascots of the 2004 Athens Games are a pair of ancient Greek dolls called Phevos and Athena. The mascot of the Paralympics is a seahorse called Proteas.

Try this!

It's all Greek to me!
Try these Greek phrases:
iyasou – hello/goodbye
ti kannis? – how are you?
parakalo – please
ef haristo – thank you
Boro na eho ena isitiria yia ta Olympic Games sas parakalo?
 – Can I have one ticket to the Olympic Games, please?