

Athens

History of Greece (The Hellenic Republic)(GR)

Around 2000 BC Greek-speaking peoples moved into the Greek peninsula from the north. The resulting Mycenaean civilization lasted until overtaken by the Dorians at the end of the 12th century BC. Then came the so-called 'dark age' of Greek history followed by the phenomenon of the city state or *polis* which afforded the development of richly diverse mini civilizations simply because there were no successful outside threats. This cradle circumstance shook in the early 5th century with hungry invasions by Persia. The several defeats of the Persians were followed by inter-*polis* wars, in particular a bitter struggle between Athens (a sea power) and Sparta (a land power). By 404 BC Sparta prevailed with the Athenian trading empire destroyed. Thebes, which had also become a successful military land power, then broke Sparta in further conflict. In the 4th century the Theban influenced Philip II of Macedonia created a formidable military machine which sacked Thebes, after destroying her previously undefeated army, and gained hegemony over the whole of the Greek mainland. Assassinated, he was replaced by his son, Alexander, later 'the Great'. Alexander's empire, which briefly stretched from the Eastern Mediterranean to the north of India, faded, and within a couple of centuries Greece and her culture was absorbed in the west by the growing Roman Empire. With the passage of time, and Rome, the Greek states and kingdoms became part of the Byzantine Empire but by 1460 the territories fell under the control of the Ottoman Turks. This jurisdiction was briefly interrupted during the Venetian/Turkish clashes of the 16-17th centuries. Thus to an extent there is no significant Greek history throughout the middle ages, the Renaissance and pre-twentieth century, though the people of the time might not have thought so. During the growing enlightenment of the 19th century Greece became a centre of irritating unrest as far as the Turkish empire was concerned. The Greek War of Independence (1821-33) resulting in the final emergence of an identifiable Greek state. Duke Otto of Bavaria was the new state's first king. Deposed in 1862 he was replaced by a Danish prince, William, confusingly taking the title George I of the Hellenes (1863-1913). This dynasty remained in

power until a military coup established a republic (1924-35). A monarch, George II, was restored in 1935. Following an inept invasion by the Italians in 1940 which was repulsed, the then invincible *Wehrmacht* rushed to the rescue and the king fled the country. Fighting between communist and royalist factions was bitter both during the German occupation and closely following the end of the war. George II was restored to the throne by British intervention in the vicious Greek civil war of 1946. These terrible disturbances lasted until 1949, when the communists were defeated. Aid packages from the USA provided a basis for recovery and reconstruction. A democratic system was put in place with King Constantine II as a constitutional monarch with a prime minister and elected government. There followed a period of political instability and another military coup took place in 1967. King Constantine II fled to Rome and government by a military junta (the 'Colonels') lasted until 1974. The monarchy was abolished in 1973. A civilian republic was established in 1974. Konstantinos Karamanlis (Prime Minister 1955-63) returned from exile to form a provisional government and the first elections for ten years took place. A referendum for the restoration of the monarchy was lost and Greece was created a democratic republic in 1974. In the 1981 general election Andreas Papandreou became the first socialist prime minister, remaining in office until 1989. Greece joined the European Community in 1981. Greece has been advantaged by the EU agricultural policies which boosted its economy but a series of financial crises followed. Recent history has also been marred by differences with Turkey over the question of Cyprus and concern regarding the naming of the 'new' republic of Macedonia, a name shared, even 'owned' by Greece's northern province. This issue and economic problems led to the fall of the right-wing government of Constantine Mitsotakis in June 1993. Andreas Papandreou was subsequently returned to power. Problems over Macedonia continued and a further dispute over territorial waters in the Aegean threatened war with Turkey in late 1994. Meanwhile Greece sensibly rejected a Serbian proposal for a confederation between Greece, Macedonia, and Serbia. Relations between Greece and Turkey further deteriorated in June 1995. In 1996, Costas Simitis became Prime Minister, replacing Papandreou, who had resigned due to ill-health. Shortly afterwards

Papandreou died. Presently the desire for Cyprus to become a member of the EU, and the wish of Turkey to do the same has become a driving force for the re-unification of Cyprus. The burying of the hatchet between Turkey and Greece has great potential for an improvement in their economy. The outbreak of peace in the region owes much to the influence of the EU and its human rights stance, together with the economic standards and requirement for justice and democratic freedoms which membership of the community demands. However Greece the greedy became catastrophically involved in the financial chaos of the second decade of the 21st century.

History of Athens – (Capital City; population approx. 3,700,000 – including Piraeus)

Historically one of many '*polis*' or city-states. Originally there was a settlement, pre-Neolithic, on the hill of the Acropolis, settlement being encouraged by local springs and a fine defensive position. By 1400 BC a powerful Mycenaen town was established. This ancient 'Athens' was formed as a result of the unification of a number of small villages in the territory known as Attica. A so-called dark age, which will not have been viewed as such by the people of the time, but about which we know very little dominated matters from about 1200 BC through to the 8th Century by which time Athens was already a centre for the arts. It was first under the rule of hereditary kings, then monarchy was followed by a long-lived aristocracy, first successfully challenged by Solon in 594 BC. An hereditary tyranny was established by Pisistratus, temporarily in 561 and more permanently in 546, until his son Hippias was driven out in 510 with the help of Sparta. Then, within a few years Cleisthenes had put the Athenian democracy on a firm footing. In 490 and 480-479 the city-state enjoyed success in the Greek-Persian wars. Subsequently its rulers transformed the Delian League into the Athenian empire. This was the golden age of Athens and the Athenians, with the building of the Acropolis monuments and temples and the treading of its glorious pavements by Pericles, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, to say nothing of the historians Herodotus and Thucydides and the soldier-writer Xenophon. What a time and place to be a part of, with Plato, Aristotle and Socrates giving voice to those who would listen. The city thus supported brilliant artistic activity, attracting artists and thinkers from throughout the Mediterranean. Those giants upon whose shoulders our

concept of 'Western Civilisation' stands gazed upon and actually used the Parthenon, thought by some to be the most beautiful item of architecture in the whole of history. However, greed and politics intervened and Athens (a sea power) fell into catastrophic war (Peloponnesian) with Sparta (a land power), losing by 404 its empire, almost all its fleet, together with its infamous city walls being destroyed – externally enforced disarmament on, for its time, a massive scale. Even so Athens recovered remarkably in the 4th century and was able to lead briefly a confederation of resistance to Philip II of Macedonia. The city remained a centre of philosophy, science, and the arts, centered on the Academy even though Athens was prey to the successors of Alexander the Great, losing its independence in 262, though regaining it in 228. After supporting Mithridates, King of Pontus, (120-63 BC) against Rome, Athens was successfully besieged by his antagonist, Sulla, and crushingly sacked (87-86). Athens' talent for survival had to move up a further gear and she became important as a university city in Roman times, attracting talented young men, particularly from Rome – a kind of imperial finishing school. This apart, the city underwent a prolonged period of historical obscurity and economic decline. The schools closed in the 6th century and Athens fell under the messy control of Franks, Florentines, Venetian and others equally venial. Athens faced further misery when captured by the Turks in 1456 – and they stayed for over 400 years. But even the Turks were not left alone and Athens suffered during the Venetian siege of 1687. Then during the Greek War of Independence (1821-27) its streets ran with blood as first one faction then another gained supremacy. Eventually the Turks lost, and in 1834 Athens was declared the capital of newly independent Greece. More recently a kind of ethnic cleansing took place, following the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), with an exchange of population between Greece and Turkey and the consequent doubling of the numbers living in Athens. Athens shared the horrors of Nazi occupation during World War II but benefited from the dollar aid and rebuilding after the civil war. The unstable and undemocratic run of events in the 50s and 60s were played out in the political centres of Athens but with the return of democracy the ancient city has seen a close alliance with the rest of Europe bring prosperity. On the world stage, failure of an application to stage the 1996 Olympics came as a shock to the local government but a boost to building with an eye on the Games in 2004. With the incentive of the successful bid Athens has become one of the most vibrant cities of Europe with the ancients

no doubt stirring in their graves in anticipation of a new but different glory as we move in the 21st Century.

National Fundamentals:

Greece Today: An increasing standard of living across the nation, but still one of the least developed of the older members of the EU countries, lacking an efficient industrial sector. In the countryside there is a dichotomy in what still seems to be an old style of agrarian activity cut through with modern roads and support systems. With the incentive of the EU's concept of providing opportunity for an upward leveling of wealth Greece is benefiting and becoming an ever more important partner in the Community. She has embraced the Euro and made large-scale improvements in attitudes toward human rights and democracy, particularly following criticism of her judicial processes.

Land Mass: 50,960 sq. miles; 131,980 sq. km

Location/Position: Peninsular and archipelago to the south of the Balkan States and on the northern seaboard of the Mediterranean Sea; three quarters of its territory is occupied by massifs and mountain ranges, largely towards the west. An extensive and rugged coastline with numerous islands.

National Population: 10,623,000; **density** 81 per sq km

Principal City Population (including Piraeus): 3,100,000

Major Cities: Thessaloniki (Salonika) 750,000; Patras 175,000; Heraklion (Crete) 130,000; Larissa: 115,000

Time Zone: GMT + 2 (GMT + 3 from last Sunday in March to Saturday before last Sunday in October). **Telephone and**

International Dialing: 00 30 then City 1 for Athens; Piraeus 1; Kalamata 721; Larissa 41; Thessaloniki (Salonika) 31; Patrai (Patros) 61; Rhodes 241; Corfu (City) 661; Irakion (Crete) 81

Currency: Euro

GNP: £84,164m (£7,930 per cap)

GDP: £80,769m (£7,600 per cap)

GDP Growth Rate: 3.8%

GDP Spending on: Education: 2.3%; Defence 4.9%; Health 4.7%

Total Military: 160,000; Conscription > 21 months

Principle Trading Activities: Agriculture (20% of population; 9% GDP); wide range of minerals; tourism: approx 14 million visitors (8% GDP)

Trade with UK: Imports from UK: £1,100M; **Exports to UK:** £430M

Inflation Rate: 3.5% **Unemployment Rate:** 10%

Corruption: 5.8. **Tourism:** 12,500 visitors spend 3,037m p.a. (big

rise in 2004)

Life Expectancy: Whole: 78.5 Male: 76 Female: 81

Population Growth Rate: 0.4

Literacy Level: Whole: 95%; Male: 97.6%; Female: 89.1%

Principle Religions: Greek Orthodox (State Religion): 98%; 1% Catholic/Protestant; 1% Muslim

Major Ethnic Groupings: Greek

Languages: Greek

National Day/Holidays: 7th February (Independence Day); Dec 25-26 Christmas. Jan 1 New Year's Day; Jan 6 Epiphany; Feb 23 Orthodox Shrove Monday (varies); **Mar 25 Independence Day**; Apr 9 Orthodox Good Friday (varies); Apr 12 Orthodox Easter Monday (varies); May 1 Labour Day; Jun 16 Day of the Holy Spirit (varies); Aug 15 Assumption; Oct 28 Ochi Day.

National Anthem: *Imnos Eis Tin Eleftherian* (Hymn to Freedom)

Political Structure/Government: Parliamentary Republic

Suffrage: Universal at 18.

How Safe is it? (per cap): Murder: 0.01; Rape: 0.01; Car Theft: 0.80; overall: 9.66

Athens

City Fundamentals: Population, including outer city and environs (The Port of Piraeus): 3,500,000. **Location:** South East finger of the peninsular; **Status:** Capital City. **Weather:** Mediterranean climate, can be very hot and traffic polluted during the summer. **Average temp Jan:** 9.5°C (49°F); **Jul:** 27.5°C (81.5°F) – but can go beyond 40°C (100°F); **Annual rainfall:** 371mm (14.6 inches). **Electricity:** 220 volts AC, 50Hz; round two- or three-pin plugs are standard. **In an Emergency:** In the EU anywhere 112 reaches emergency services. Additional Local: Police 100; Fire 199; Ambulance: 166. In addition the Tourism Police is an integral part of the Hellenic Police (ELAS), consisting of men and women especially trained and competent to offer tourists information and help, You can recognise them by the shoulder flash *Tourism Police* on their uniforms. Tourism Police operate an emergency telephone line on a 24 hour basis (just dial 171 any day, any time, from all over Greece). Tourist police will act as interpreters over the phone!

Business and Travel Contacts

British Embassy: 1 Ploutarchou Street, 10675 Athens. Tel: Athens 723 6211

Greek Embassy in London: 1A Holland Park, London W11 3TP

Tel: 020 7229 3850

Central Bank: Bank of Greece, 21E Venizolos Ave, GR-102 50 Athens. Tel: 0030 210 320 1111; Fax: 0030 210 323 2239

Stock Exchange: Athens Exchange, 10 Sophocleous Street, 105 59 Athens, Greece. Tel: (00 302) (10) 33 66 800; Fax: (00302) (10) 32 12 938

Chamber of Commerce and Industry: 7, Academias str., 10671, Athens

Tel : 210 360 4815-9, Fax : 210 361 6408, E-mail : info@acci.gr.

British Chamber of Commerce: British Hellenic Chamber of Commerce, 25 Vas., Sophias Avenue, 106 74 Athens, Greece. Tel: ++30 210 721 0361; Fax: ++30 210 721 2119; Email: info@bhcc.gr www.bhcc.gr

British Council: Director, 17 Plateia Philikis Etairas, Athens GR-10673. Email british.council@britishcouncil.gr

Athens Business Club, Saroglion Building, Rigilis Square, Athens

Greek National Tourist Organisation (EOT) can provide all kinds of useful information to the traveller: information on Tel: 301 331 0565

National Sensitivities Customs and Courtesy and Business Tips

Athens Dress Code: In summer, due to the heat and the Greeks' relaxed attitudes towards formality, dress code is informal and casual dress is acceptable except at official gatherings.

Greeting Someone in Athens: Punctuality is considered a very important factor of Greek business life. Shaking hands is the standard international business greeting.

Athens Business Hours and Banking: Greek office hours are generally between the hours of 08:00 to 14:30 pm, and later from 17:30 to 20:30, Monday to Friday. Banking hours are generally 08:00 to 14:00 Monday to Thursday and 08:00 to 13:30 on Friday. Some of the larger banks may open on Saturday morning also.

Athens Smoking: In Athens, smoking is prohibited where notified and on public transport and in some public buildings. **It is always advisable to take your cue from those around.**

Tipping: Usually 15%, sometimes inclusive, get into the habit of checking every time. Miserly tipping to be avoided.

Getting Around

Car Rentals: (Valid license required) **Swift Car Rentals:** Nikis street in the Plaka, close to Syntagma Square. Low prices plus delivery to your hotel, the airport, anywhere. Tel: (0030) 210 322 1623 Fax:

325-0671. Beware! Traffic in Athens is plentiful, but parking is widely available.

Buses and Trams: Extensive system of buses for whole of the area. The system is colour coded: **Yellow Trolleys** and **Blue Buses** can take you anywhere in the city and in the suburbs. The Trolleys run on electricity and the stops are yellow. The Blue bus-stops are blue. Tickets (at printing).75 Euros, individual or in 10s, and must be bought from a kiosk or at special stands in main squares and at some main bus terminals, they must be validated on the bus. Times are 10 to 30 minutes and are stopped by a hand wave. **Orange Buses** go to the countryside of Attiki and the suburbs of Athens. Join at Pedhion Area on Alexandras Ave for Marathon, Oropos, Lavrion, Sounion and Rafina (for ferries to Cyclades). Tickets sold on board. Prices vary according to destination. Orange bus-stops are orange with the initials KTEL. Destination shown on the front of bus. **Green buses** leave from Filellinon Street near Syntagma for the Pireaus and Kalithea -24 hours at 6 minute intervals during the day. Buy a day ticket for 2.90 Euro – lasting 24 hours - any bus/tram can be used like the Travel Card in London – but better value!

Rail: Run by *Hellenic Railways Organisation (OSE)*, Karolou 1 (tel: 21052 97777 (international services); website: www.osenet.gr). First- and second-class accommodation and there are luxury sleeper trains on selected routes. Service limited to the northern and eastern mainland and parts of the Peloponnese. Trains are cheaper than buses but generally much slower. The main railway stations in Athens are *Larissis* (tel: 21052 98837) and *Pelopónnisos* (tel: 21051 31601)

Underground/Subway/Metro: Metro runs from 5 am to midnight and is the newest (except for Bangkok) and the most beautiful metro on the globe – use it for the experience. Quite extensive. One eye on being an Olympic City, again.

Taxis: Radio cabs can be reserved over the phone for a €2 charge. *Athina 1* (tel: 210 921 7942), *Ermis* (tel: 210 411 5200), *Hellas* (tel: 210 645 7000) and *Ikaros* (tel: 210 515 2800). Official yellow taxis with red-on-white number plates can also be hailed on the street. During rush hour 1300-1500, not unusual to share the ride (but not the fare) with other passengers. Tipping is not customary, although taxi drivers may expect to ‘keep the change’ when handed a note. Taxis probably cheaper than in any other European capital but beware drivers may occasionally try to overcharge naïve tourists, so it is wise for travellers to ensure that the meter is switched on and functioning before departure. The meter starts at €0.74 and is non-negotiable. Within the city the rate is €0.24 per kilometre, outside the city the rate

is €0.40 and there is a minimum charge of €1.50. Extra charges for baggage, trips to the airport and late-night journeys are explained in English on charts inside the taxis. Can be exciting on hills when the drivers may slip out of gear or even turn off the engine to cruise by gravity, sensibly on the way down only.

Ports: The Pireus – not to be missed, train (an old original electric), metro and bus, 15 minute journey. Sounion and Rafina for ferries to the islands

Airports: New Airport in Spata (ATH) area, has taken 30 years to construct - about one hour from town, reducing to an estimated 40 minutes when new fast roads completed. Buses to and from the airport, at the time of going to print, are outside exit doors 4-5, the lines are: **Line E94** (Ends before midnight/20 minutes) connects the Ethniki Amina Metro Station with the Airport. Outward bound passengers transfer from the Metro to the Airport Bus here. **Line E 95** (24 hours/20 minutes/ 40 after midnight) Syntagma Square-Airport Express departure point at the centre of Athens (Syntagma Square) and via Vas. Sofias Avenue, Mesogion Avenue and Attiki Odos. **Line E96** (24 hours/20 minutes/40 after midnight) Pireaus-Airport Express starts from the centre of Pireaus (Karaiskaki Square) and via Posidonos Avenue, Varis-Varkizas, and Varis-Koropiou Roads terminates at the airport.

Airport Hotels: Sofitel, Athens International Airport, Spata, Athens 19019, Greece

Athens City Accommodation – Some Central Hotels

Budget: Attolos Hotel, 29 Athinas Street, Monastiraki Area, 10554 Athens. Tel: 0030 210 321 2801-2-3; Fax: 0030 210 324 3124.

Medium: Art Gallery Hotel, Erechthiou 5, Tel: 21092 38376. Fax: 21092 33025. E-mail: ecotec@otenet.gr

Luxury: The Grande Bretagne, Vassilissis Georgiou 1, Syntagma Square. Tel: 21033 30000. Fax: 21032 28034. E-mail: info@grandebretagne.gr Website: www.grandebretagne.gr

Principle City Relaxation – Cultural sites and museums. This is Athens! A wealth of things to see of international treasure status, but do not miss the ‘Should See’ items and: The National Archaeological Museum – a world class museum – but note, this was closed for a ‘year’ in 2002 and thus is unlikely to open before 2004.

National Dishes/Where to eat – comments and areas – the opportunities are without end. Greek food is excellent and generally not spicy. Eat where the Greeks eat. It is unfair to select a specific area

because eating places abound, **but the Athens Plaka is not to be missed. The Plaka** is the oldest part of Athens in the shadow of the Acropolis with many streets closed to traffic. Keep an eye open for a magazine – free and bilingual – **OZON** – which gives listings for food and nightlife, displays and cultural events.

The Vibrant Zone: Monastiraki Flea Market *on Sundays*; The Athens Market; Syntagma Square; antique market on Sunday in **Abysinia Square; Psiri area** – working place in the day, wild but safe at night, a kind of Soho

Should see: The Pireaus and eat squid and take a ferry to one of the small islands. The Acropolis and dream on the past – and look at the view. Attica Zoological Park – 2nd largest collection of birds in the world. The First Cemetery - astonishing tributes to those on whose shoulders we stand. National Gardens and Zappion and across the way the curious stadium re-built for the new ‘first’ Olympic Games in 1996. Find an outdoor cinema, an experience.