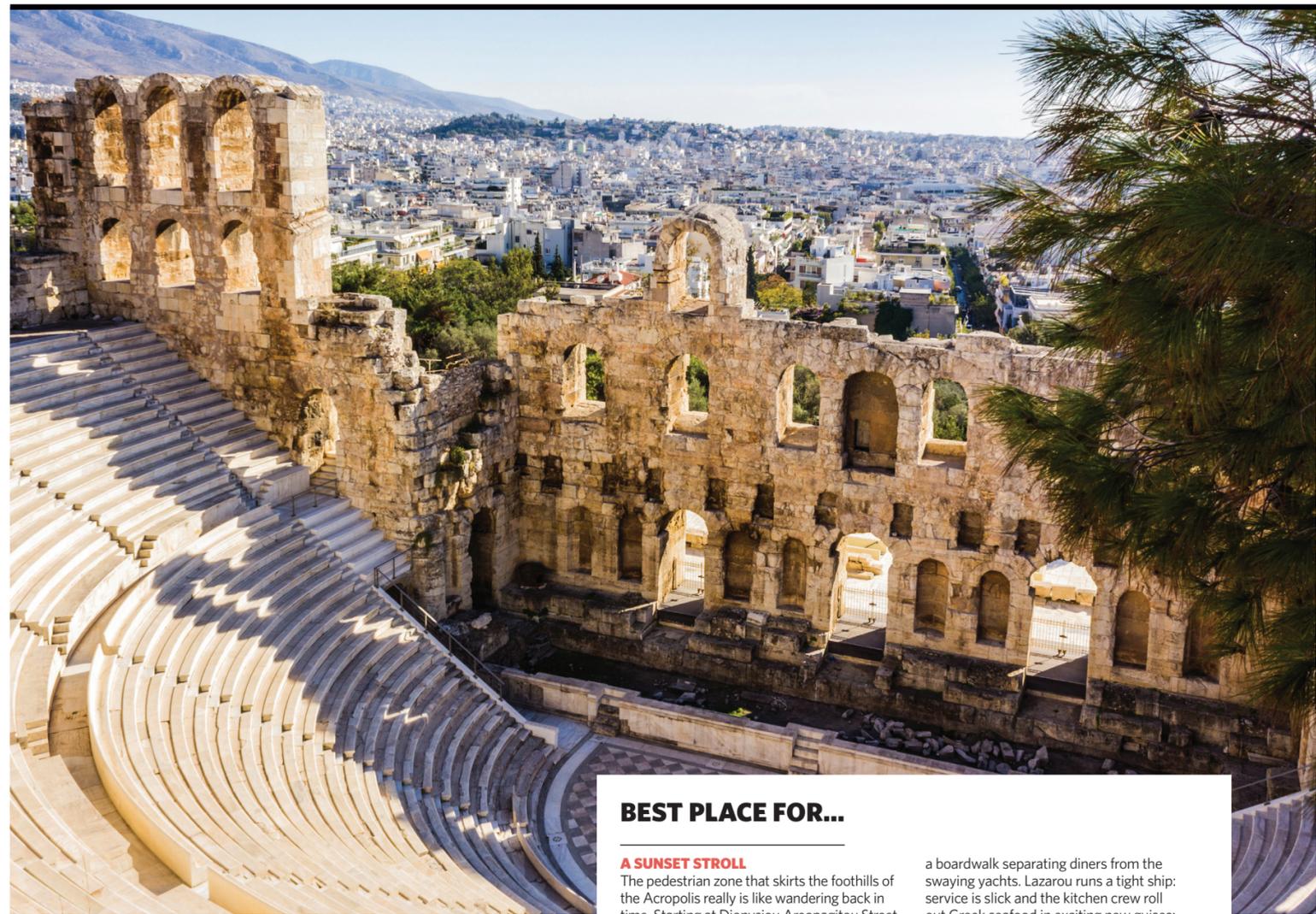


GUIDE TO ATHENS



BEST PLACE FOR...

A SUNSET STROLL

The pedestrian zone that skirts the foothills of the Acropolis really is like wandering back in time. Starting at Dionysiou Areopagitou Street, you can cover all the greatest ancient hits: The Theater Of Dionysus, where drama originated, and the Roman theater of Herodeion, still in use every summer; the Pnyx, where the first very democrats debated public affairs; the ancient cemetery of Kerameikos, a moving panoply of marble tombstones; the Agora, where Plato and Socrates held court; and of course, the *pièce de resistance* — the Parthenon itself. For tailor-made tours with expert guides, we recommend Original Senses. **Contact Sofi Hatzivassiliou, sofih@orginialsenses.gr**

A SEASIDE LUNCH

Varoulko
Floor-to-ceiling windows open up to Mikrolimano marina at Lefteris Lazarou's Michelin-starred restaurant, with only

a boardwalk separating diners from the swaying yachts. Lazarou runs a tight ship: service is slick and the kitchen crew roll out Greek seafood in exciting new guises: crayfish moussaka, squid couscous with amaretto sauce, sea bass carpaccio with ozo jelly. The lunch menu is fresh and unfussy — perfect for sharing on a summer afternoon. **varoulko.gr**

COCKTAILS AFTER HOURS

Consistently voted one of the world's 50 best bars, Baba au Rum is, predictably, known for its exhaustive rum list (over 150 labels and counting). Almost too pretty to drink, the cocktails slip down dangerously fast. Try the Spicy Baby No 7 (aged rum with ginger, berries and lime) or a negroni garnished with grated tonka beans. The vibe is sultry but unstuffy, with tiki paraphernalia, tropical wallpaper and an animated crowd brimming onto the pedestrian street. **babaurum.com**

With Mandarin Oriental lined up to acquire the Athens Hilton and Four Seasons tipped to take over the revamped Astir Palace resort in 2018, the Athens hotel scene is looking up. Once a quick stopover to dash around the ruins en route to the Greek islands, Athens is now Europe's hottest city break. With a pristine coastline, heady cocktail culture and vibrant arts scene that spans the ancient and avant-garde, it's a wonder Athens has been overlooked for so long. The laidback Mediterranean lifestyle is offset by an edgy, urban vibe: Bauhaus apartment blocks swathed in graffiti, open-air cinemas where everyone smokes and marble piazzas where the bars never seem to close.

by Rachel Howard



TOP STAYS

CASA PLAKA

A peaceful oasis in the heart of Plaka, Athens' most beautiful residential district (known as the "Neighborhood of the Gods") this 18th-century mansion has been meticulously restored by its owners, who are both art collectors. Full concierge service makes this boutique residence for six to eight people a fabulous alternative to a hotel. On a quiet cul-de-sac, the jasmine-festooned garden walls end at the perimeter of the Acropolis, where the picturesque ruins lie. **From \$4,100 per night. Contact Ileana von Hirsch, ileana@fivestargreece.com, +44 208 422 4885, fivestargreece.com**

ROYAL SUITE

The Grande Bretagne
This landmark overlooking Parliament has welcomed countless heads of state and Hollywood stars since opening in 1874, and the 320 rooms and suites still ooze old world glamour. The 4,300 sq ft Royal Suite, decked in period gilt, brocade and crystal, comes with a wine cellar, humidor, gym and marble steam room. There's a private dining room, or mingle at GB Roof Garden restaurant (above), with prime Parthenon views. **From \$18,300 per night. Contact Maria Panagiotidou, reservations.gb@luxurycollection.com, +30 210 3330 824, grandebretagne.gr**

VIP SUITE

The Margi
Tucked away in Vouliagmeni, the most exclusive neighborhood on the Athens Riviera, The Margi feels more like a mini-resort than a city hotel. Decorated in elegant neutrals, the VIP Suite features expansive views of the Aegean from the glass-walled living room and a Jacuzzi overlooking pine forests. Guests get priority booking at Patio, a nine-table restaurant with two mind-blowing tasting menus sourced mainly from the hotel's organic farm. **From \$1,600 per night. Contact Vicky Angeli, reservations.manager, reservations@themargi.gr, +30 210 892 9128, themargi.gr**

TAKE THREE/// CULTURAL LANDMARKS

1. ACROPOLIS MUSEUM

Bernard Tschumi's modernist landmark caused controversy when it opened in 2007. A decade later, it's much admired for its reinforced glass floors, revealing ancient excavations underfoot, and transparent walls, creating a constant dialogue with the Acropolis. Free-standing exhibits, diffused with natural light, allow visitors to explore artifacts from every angle, and digital displays bring the antiquities vividly to life. The restaurant, with an angular

terrace jutting towards the Parthenon, has the best view in Athens. On Fridays, the restaurant is open until midnight, an unforgettable setting for dinner. **theacropolismuseum.gr/en**

2. STAVROS NIARCHOS FOUNDATION CULTURAL CENTER

Renzo Piano's bold new home (right) for the Greek National Opera and Library is a triumph. Covered with a green roof of aromatic herbs, the soaring buildings are

surrounded by a thoughtfully landscaped park where you can watch movies under the stars, take an alfresco yoga class or learn to sail on the 1,300ft canal. The views of the city and out to sea from The Lighthouse — a viewing platform under a giant floating solar canopy — are sensational. **snfcc.org**

3. CYCLADIC MUSEUM

This beautifully curated museum is dedicated to the haunting marble figurines and ceramics handcrafted in

the Cyclades in the early Bronze Age. Connected to the main building by a sky-lit corridor, the neoclassical wing is devoted to temporary exhibitions of contemporary heavyweights such as Ai Weiwei and Cy Twombly. The plant-filled café and gift shop epitomize the museum's minimalist chic. Smooth marble doves, Waks 'Cycladic Light' candles and Color Athens (travel guides you color in yourself), make stylish souvenirs. **cycladic.gr**



TOP TABLES

Vezené

Ari Vezenes describes himself as a chef/butcher, which gives you an idea of what to expect from his tremendous carnivorous restaurant. Goat tartare, wafer-thin wagyu sashimi, and fantastic dry-aged steaks materialize from an open kitchen overlooking the clubby, wood-paneled dining room. An alumnus of Milos and a native of the Ionian islands, Vezenes is equally skillful with fish: his sea urchin and pink pepper fettuccine is an unadulterated delight. **vezene.gr**

Nolan

Greco-Japanese chef Sotiris Kontizas has created a stir with his boundary-pushing, culture-clashing dishes: soba noodles with smoked salmon and tahini, lamb donburi and NFC (Nolan Fried Chicken) are all knockouts. Tables are squeezed onto the sidewalk and into the pale, boxy dining room, with the kitchen suspended in a glass booth above the thrum of contented diners. Open for lunch and dinner, it's an oasis of refined taste in the hectic, historic center. **nolanrestaurant.gr**

Cafe Avissinia

There may be newer, trendier contenders for best Athenian rooftop restaurant, but this family-run institution in Monastiraki flea market wins on local color and authenticity. More eclectic bistro than fancy restaurant, everything from the floral wallpaper to the wild boar meatballs with red pepper relish is cheerily homespun. There's live Greek music every weekend, with accordion and bouzouki players weaving between the marble-topped tables that spill onto the square. **Kinetou 7, Monastiraki, +30 210 321 7047**