

Turkey & Greece . . .

*1 unusual journey for
Giampoli Family & Friends*



24-August: United States Overnight travel from the U.S.

Overnight: in flight

25-August: Istanbul, Turkey

On arrival in *Istanbul*, we are met and driven to our hotel. Settle into your room. The remainder of the day is at leisure.

Overnight: [Four Seasons Sultanahmet](#)

26-August: Istanbul

The Byzantines first called the city Constantinople; the Ottomans would later rename it Istanbul. For 1,500 years it was the capital of first one and then the other empire. Although Ankara became the capital of the newly proclaimed Turkish Republic in 1922, Istanbul is

still considered its chief metropolis, a monument to the great empires and conquerors that built it. It is divided by the [Bosphorus](#); half of the city is on the continent of Europe, the other in Asia.

The Bosphorus is a strait that connects the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmara. In the Turkish language, the strait is called Bogazici (from bogaz, which means throat, and ici, inside or interior). Together the two terms mean within the strait.

Each of the city's rulers added another layer to this collage of history. The Romans laid out the street plan and imported artifacts from all over the world to complement it. The Byzantine built great churches and imposing castles to guard the Bosphorus straits. The Ottomans added vast palaces, mosques, and bazaars.

After breakfast this morning, we set off on a walking tour. First to the [Sultanahmet Mosque](#), also known as the



Blue Mosque, built between 1609 and 1616 to rival the Christian-built Aya Sofya. Constructed on the site of Byzantine palaces, it is a breathtaking architectural achievement as awe-inspiring inside as out. Built in classical Ottoman design, with domes and semidomes painted in graceful arabesques, it is named after the blue tiles that line the walls.

Emperor Justinian had artisans from all over the world construct the greatest church in Christendom, the Church of the Divine Wisdom, or [Aya Sofya](#). Built on the site of earlier churches, the vast Aya Sofya was consecrated in 537. On entering the completed edifice for the first time, Justinian raised his arms to heaven and exclaimed, "Glory to God who has deigned to let me build so great a work. O Solomon, I have outdone you!"

On entering almost 1,500 years later it is easy to see why he was so moved. Built about a millennium before St. Peter's in Rome, it is still the fourth largest church in the world and a masterpiece of engineering. The huge dome—180 feet high and 120 feet wide—dominates the interior, and its revolutionary design struck awe in the Byzantine faithful. When Constantinople fell to the Ottomans, Aya Sofya was stripped of much of its decoration and turned into a mosque. Before entering the church, Mehmet the Conqueror, equally awed, sprinkled earth on his head in a symbol of humility. It remained a mosque for almost 500 years until 1935, when [Kemal Ataturk](#) designated it a museum.

We won't miss one of Byzantium's more unusual and intriguing structures, the [Yerebatan Saray](#), a cistern built in A.D. 532 by Emperor Justinian. As we see elsewhere in Istanbul, this was a man who could do nothing on a small scale. Pieces of older ruins were incorporated into this structure to dress up its 336 columns

(take note of the upside-down Medusa head supporting one of them).

Next we'll drive towards the edge of Old Town to view the [Walls of Constantinople](#) and to take in the views along the Golden Horn. Time permitting;

we'll stop at the [Chora Church](#).



Don't let the muted brick exterior fool you: Inside is a collection of fourteenth-century Byzantine mosaics and frescoes, so splendidly restored and radiant— all the gold tiles of the Middle Ages seem to have been used here— that even the most ardent non-believer may fall into a holy rapture. Not so easily moved? Consider the mosaic of the church's builder, Theodore Metochites, kneeling in his voluminous turban before Christ, offering up his church. Metochites, one of the Byzantine noblesse, spent his considerable fortune restoring the church and its mosaics only to be run out of town by a newly throned emperor. He eventually returned, penniless, and died in the monastery next door.

Our next stop, [Galata Tower](#). Built as a lookout by Genoese traders in the fourteenth century, the 200-foot stone tower delivers an even more spectacular view than the one from the bridge. From the outdoor observation deck, you can see straight across the Golden Horn to the Old City, beyond the Bosphorus to Asia, and over the tangled streets of Galata.

We'll then make our way toward [Istiklal Caddesi](#), the pedestrian- only shopping street that buzzes night and day. You're now in Beyoğlu, the heart of modern Istanbul, The European roots of this area are clearly evident, from the architecture to the cluster of taverns in Çiçek Pasajı (Flower Passage). Istiklal continues all the way to teeming Taksim Square

Overnight: Four Seasons Sultanahmet (breakfast)

27-August: Istanbul

This morning we head straight to the [Kapalı Carsi](#) (pronounced *kapallah charshe* and meaning "covered bazaar"), in the heart of the Old City. The first iteration of the sprawling souk— which shelters upwards of 3,600 small shops— was established in the mid-1400s by [Mehmet the Conqueror](#) soon after he captured Christian Constantinople. The city was a major trading center; all it needed was a major shopping mall. . . . A few repairs and renovations notwithstanding, the bazaar looks much as it did when the veiled Ottoman women came to shop for velvet slippers and flirt with the merchants. Notice the antediluvian street names, each representing the artisan guilds that once occupied the row—among them pearl and

fur merchants, handkerchief sellers, turban makers. These days, some might be more aptly named for the scores of designer knockoff and lewd T-shirt merchants, but this isn't just a tourist market. Discerning Turks and international fashion heavyweights shop here too.

Next we'll walk to the [Mosque of Suleyman the Magnificent](#).



We'll then be just a stone's throw from the [Spice Market](#), a treat for your senses. Also known as the Egyptian Market, this L-shaped covered structure, together with the mosque next door, were built for the mother of Mehmet IV, a powerful woman who ruled the harem and, some would say, much of the empire. Savor the aroma of ginger, cardamom, pepper, saffron, and more in vibrant, colorful piles. You also see plenty of *lokum* (Turkish delight), flavored teas, and other local delicacies.

Outside the bazaar on the [Galata Bridge](#) end, one can find the best selection of olives sold from huge barrels. We'll stroll along the bridge and take time out for lunch at a local restaurant.

Return to the hotel early this afternoon to freshen-up and, possibly, to take advantage of the spa,

This evening we'll visit [Hippodrome Square](#). This area was the center of Byzantine life for 1,000 years and of Ottoman life for another 400. Septimus Severus originally laid out the square in A.D. 203, and Emperor Constantine enlarged and embellished it in 325 to resemble the Circus Maximus in Rome. For a time, it was used principally for horse races and is also known as At Meydani, meaning Plaza of the Horses.

The square has also seen its share of bloodshed. In A.D. 532, an army of Justinian's mercenaries massacred 30,000 people who were trapped in the Hippodrome, and in 1826 it was the scene of the execution of 30,000 Janissaries (palace soldiers and retainers) who opposed the rule of Sultan Mahmud II. In 1909,

rioting here by Sultan Abdulhamid II's disgruntled subjects led to his downfall and the rewriting of the constitution. The square is home to monuments and trophies from all over the world, moving St. Jerome to point out, "the splendor of Constantinople is inaugurated by despoiling other cities." We see the [Obelisk of Theodosius](#), carved in Egypt about 3,500 years ago; the Kaiser Wilhelm fountain, presented to the Sultan in 1895; the Serpentine column from the temple of Apollo in Delphi; and Constantine's obelisk, whose bronze plates were torn off during the Fourth Crusade.

Tonight is also the last day of [Ramadan](#). We'll see what that means as we are positioned in the midst of the festivities.

Overnight: Four Seasons Sultanahmet (breakfast)

28-August: Istanbul

Our first destination this morning? [Topkapi Palace](#) covers one of the seven hills of Istanbul on a commanding site overlooking the Sea of Marmara and the Golden Horn. Built over 16 years and completed in 1478 by Mehmet the Conqueror, it served as the official residence of Ottoman sultans for almost three centuries. All areas of the palace are well preserved and of great interest.

The Treasury houses the Sultan's priceless jewels (including an 88-carat diamond) and the golden Throne of Nadir, covered in gold and set with emeralds, rubies, and pearls. The Harem was the private residence of the Sultans. This is where the women of the palace lived—the sultan's mother, his sister, his wives, and in one case almost 300 concubines. A corps of as many as 200 Abyssinian eunuchs oversaw the Harem.

Now, *board a private boat for a tour along the Bosphorus*, one of the world's great waterways. We can see palaces and castles from the sea. Lunch today is at a seafood restaurant on the water.

Return to the hotel mid-afternoon to relax in preparation for our last night in Istanbul.

Overnight: Four Seasons Sultanahmet (breakfast)

29-August: Istanbul, Cappadocia

After breakfast, we head to the airport for our flight to [Cappadocia](#), once the heart of the Hittite Empire and later a vast Roman province. The geographical history of Cappadocia began with volcanic eruptions, which spread a layer of ash over the region. The ash hardened into a stone called tufa. Over time, eroded by wind and rain, the tufa turned into columns or cones, often with boulders perched on top.

Early inhabitants used primitive tools to carve the volcanic rock. First they fashioned caves and then more sophisticated houses. When invaders arrived, the Cappadocians went underground and built elaborate, multilevel subterranean cities.

Upon arrival in the town of Goreme, we sit down to a traditional meal at a local restaurant.

The [Goreme Open Air Museum](#) is a collection of chapels, churches, monasteries, and living spaces carved from local rock during the early years of Christianity. Our visit helps us understand life in the valley during this era.

Overnight: [Anatolian Houses](#) (breakfast)

30-August: Cappadocia

You'll be tempted to ignore the alarm clock this morning, but the pre-dawn call to prayer sounds—loudly—about this time, with the

muezzin chanting his usual appeal: "It's better to pray than to sleep." By daybreak you'll be wide



awake, standing in a wicker basket floating about 800 feet above the ground, watching the sun slowly illuminate the Gaudí-esque landscape. While we won't see herds of elephants on this flight, the scenery will be breathtaking.

After breakfast, it's time for a hike. We walk through the [Rose Valley](#) where cave entrances lead to multi-storey, ornately decorated churches with columns that are two or three stories high. Roman graves, now unreachable, are adorned with Christian crosses and sit high

upon fairy chimneys. At the end of our hike, we end up at [Pasabagi](#), a settlement of monolithic fairy chimneys.

Back to Goreme for lunch and some leisure time.

Late this afternoon we drive to [Kaymakli](#), a fascinating farming village whose underground town is still intact. Tens of thousands of people lived in this four-story maze of caves, tunnels, and rooms deep in the earth. There are numerous passageways between rooms, and paths and levels above and below. Signs of past residents' lifestyle are everywhere: storage jars for oil, wine, and water; communal kitchens blackened by smoke; stables; mangers; and incredibly deep wells.

Overnight: Anatolian Houses (breakfast)



31-August: Cappadocia

The town of [Zelve](#) is in a region particularly rich in the eroded volcanic rock

columns known as fairy chimneys. These natural formations are so unusual that ancient legend held that fairies capable of casting spells inhabited them. Later, Zelve was a Christian monastic retreat and a place of refuge from the Muslims. Like those in other towns nearby, the rock dwellings in Zelve are still somewhat of a mystery. No one is sure when they were first inhabited, but it is known that Zelve had become an important settlement and religious center between the ninth and 13th centuries.

After lunch, we walk around the former Greek village of Sinasos, renamed [Mustafapaşa](#) in the 1920s in honor of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Turkey. The graceful homes with their ornate stonework and wood carvings, a striking contrast to the jumble of medieval caves in the hills just above, are the main attraction here. But equally appealing is the glimpse we'll get of Anatolian village life: packs of men in wool caps and blazers playing backgammon at the outdoor teahouses, students rushing into the handsome Ottoman *madrasa* in the town square (now a coed secular

university), women in harem pants leading donkeys through the backstreets.

On our way back to our hotel, on the banks of the River Kizilirmak, lies the town of [Avanos](#), which dates back to the Bronze Age. The old village has lovely stone homes, some of them decorated with ancient motifs. Avanos is most famous for its pottery. We visit a workshop that still turns out vessels and utensils molded from the red clay of the Kizilirmak (Red) River.

Overnight: Anatolian Houses (breakfast)

1-September: Cappadocia, Istanbul, Athens

This morning we transfer to the airport for our flight to Istanbul, and then onward to Athens.

Upon arrival in Athens, we are met and transferred to our hotel, the *Grande Bretagne*. Built in 1862 to accommodate visiting heads of state, this is—and has always been—the place to stay in Athens. The Nazis thought so, too; they used it as their local headquarters during World War II.

Dinner tonight is at the Grande Bretagne's Roof Garden overlooking the antiquities we'll be visiting during our stay.

Overnight: [Grande Bretagne](#) (breakfast)

2-September: Athens

We'll begin our walking tour just outside our hotel, in [Syntagma Square](#). The "Times Square" of Athens is named for Greece's historic 1843 constitution prompted by demonstrations right on this square. As we walk towards Parliament (the former palace of King Otto) we will see the colorfully costumed guards standing at attention in front of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Extending south from Parliament is the National Garden. Covering an area of approximately 40 acres, it was planted in 1839 as the palace garden, created for the pleasure of Queen Amalia.

The [Arch of Hadrian](#) marks the entrance to what was once "Hadrianopolis", a new suburb of ancient Athens built by the Roman Emperor Hadrian in the second century A.D..

Started by an overambitious tyrant in the sixth century B.C., the [Temple of Olympian Zeus](#) was not completed until Hadrian took over, seven centuries later. Today, 15 (of the original 104)

Corinthian columns stand over a ruined base in a field.

As we walk through [Plaka](#), we pass by Lysicrates Square and [the Lysicrates Monument](#). Erected in 334 B.C., it is the sole survivor of many such monuments that lined this ancient street.



We are now in [Anafiotika](#), a maze of white-washed houses. Originally built by people from the Cycladic island of Anafi, they are homes for the wealthy who wish to keep an “island cottage” in the busy city.

Next the [Roman Agora](#)...not to be confused with Ancient Agora. This agora, or commercial center, was built by the Romans in 150 B.C. and stayed in use for centuries. Nearby is the [Tower of the Winds](#) with carved reliefs depicting winds as winged humans who fly in bringing the weather.

On our way to Ancient Agora, we pass what remains of the Library of Hadrian...four columns of what was once a cultural center (library, lecture halls, garden and art gallery).

[Ancient Agora](#)...not to be confused with Roman Agora...was the real heart of Athens. For some 800 years, from its founding in the sixth century B.C. to its destruction by barbarians in A.D.267, it was the hub of all commercial, political and social life in Athens as well as home to much of its religious life. While little remains, it is a field of ruins-nestled in the shadows of the Acropolis-where you can wander and get a feel for the ancients.

After our visit, we'll look for a café along Apostolou Pavlou (named for the Apostle Paul) where we can sit, relax and enjoy lunch.

After lunch, we head back to our hotel via [Ermu Street](#), a pedestrianized thoroughfare packed with international shops.

On our way to dinner this evening in the Kolonaki district, you can stop at the top of

[Lycabettus Hill](#) (the highest point in Athens) and watch the sunset.

Overnight: Grande Bretagne (breakfast)

3-September: Athens

After breakfast, we will hop on the Metro to begin the day's activities. On our way through the station, we'll see well preserved Roman baths dating between the 5th and 3rd centuries B.C.

Our first stop is the [Central Market](#), Athens' modern-day version of Ancient Agora.

Up the road from the market is the [National Archaeological Museum](#). Strolling through the chronologically displayed collection-from 7,000 B.C. to A.D. 500-is like watching a time-lapse movie of the evolution of art.

Today's lunch will be around Plateia Iroon in the Psiri District.

Next, we'll do more shopping along [Kalamiotou, Kolokotroni, and Lekka streets](#). While just a block North of the upscale Ermou shopping area, this is the place for authentic

hole-in-the-wall shopping.

Now, the reason we've



come to Athens...the Acropolis. But first, the recently opened [New Acropolis Museum](#). This world-class museum was custom-built to showcase the Parthenon sculptures along with truckloads of other artifacts. This museum is also intended to lure the famous [Elgin Marbles](#) away from London's British Museum. For years, the Greeks have asked for the Marbles back and for years the Brits have responded with claims that the Greeks can't give them a suitable home. Only time will tell.

First we will pass the [Theater of Dionysus](#). The very scant remains of this theater are scattered southeast of the Acropolis. During Roman times, the theater was connected to the Odeon of Herodes Atticus by a long, covered stoa, creating an ensemble of inviting venues. But its illustrious history dates back well before that: During Athens' Golden Age, this was the theater where Sophocles and others watched their plays performed. Originally just grass, with a circular

dirt area as the stage, the theater was expanded to accommodate 17,000 in 342-326 B.C., during the time of Alexander the Great.

Next, the [Odeon of Herodes Atticus](#). This grand venue huddles under the Acropolis' majestic Propylaea entrance gate. While tourists call it a "theater," locals stress that it's an *odeon*, used for musical rather than theatrical performances.

This *Odeon* was built in A.D. 161 by Herodes Atticus in



memory of his wife. Atticus was a Greek with Roman citizenship, a legendary orator, and a friend of Emperor Hadrian. Destroyed by the invading Herulians a century after it was built, the *odeon* was reconstructed in the 1950s. Still spectacular today, the "Herodion" (as it's also called) has a Roman-style stage with the stage wall intact. It's open to the public only during performances.

Even in this age of superlatives, it's hard to overstate the historic and artistic importance of the Acropolis. Crowned by the mighty [Parthenon](#), the Acropolis (literally, "high city") rises above the sprawl of modern Athens, a lasting testament to ancient Athens' glorious Golden Age in the fifth century B.C.

The [Acropolis](#) has been the heart of Athens since the beginning of recorded time (Neolithic era, 6800 B.C.). This limestone plateau faced with sheer, 100-foot cliffs and fed by permanent springs was a natural fortress. The Mycenaeans (c. 1400 B.C.) ruled the area from their palace on this hilltop, and Athena-the patron goddess of the city-was worshipped here from around 800 B.C. on.

But everything changed in 480 B.C., when Persia invaded Greece for the second time. As the Persians approached, the Athenians evacuated the city, abandoning it to be looted and vandalized. All of the temples atop the Acropolis were burned to the ground. The Athenians fought back at sea, winning an improbable naval victory at the Battle of Salamis. The Persians were driven out of Greece, and Athens found itself suddenly

victorious. Cash poured into Athens from the other Greek city-states, which were eager to be allied with the winning side.

By 450 B.C., Athens was at the peak of its power and the treasury was flush with money...but in the city center, the Acropolis still lay empty, a vast blank canvas. Athens' leader at the time, Pericles, was ambitious and farsighted. He funneled Athens' newfound wealth into a massive rebuilding program. Led by the visionary architect/sculptor Pheidias, the Athenians transformed the Acropolis into a complex of supersized, ornate temples worthy of the city's protector, Athena.

The four major monuments-the Parthenon, [Erechtheion](#), [Propylaea](#), and [Temple of Athena Nike](#)-were built as a coherent ensemble (c. 450-400 B.C.). Unlike most ancient sites, which have layer upon layer of ancient ruins from different periods, the Acropolis we see today was started and finished within two generations-a snapshot of the Golden Age set in stone.

Overnight: Grande Bretagne (breakfast)

4-September: Athens, Thira (Santorini)

This morning we head for the only inhabited volcanic caldera in the world, Santorini a.k.a. Thira. While the volcano is still active, it hasn't erupted since well before we were all born, back in 1950. (One of the biggest volcanic eruptions in history, the one that some say sank Atlantis, occurred 3,500 years ago.)

Upon arrival in Thira, we head to our hotel perched on a thousand-foot cliff overlooking one of the most spectacular views in the Mediterranean. The mansion that forms the nucleus of the Tsitouras Collection was built in 1780. Over the centuries, it has served as a school, post office, and private home prior to becoming a luxury boutique hotel in 1985.

After lunch, we wander the streets of [Firostefani](#) and, maybe, walk to [Fira](#) the capital of Santorini.

Tonight, we watch the sunset from the most beautiful location on Santorini, Firostefani.

Overnight: [Tsitouras Collection](#) (breakfast)

5-September: Santorini

This morning we explore the southern end of the island. First stop, the small village of [Pyrgos](#).

Next to the highest point of the island, the top of the mountain of Profitis Ilias to admire the fantastic view of the Caldera and take some panoramic pictures of the whole island. Then we head to the black sand beaches of [Perivolos and Perissa](#). If we're up for it, and if it's open, we can visit the excavation site of a Minoan Bronze Age settlement [Akrotiri](#). Dubbed the "Minoan Pompeii," the flourishing town was at once destroyed and preserved around 1450 BC by a volcanic eruption. Finally, on our way back to Firostefani, we can stop at a [winery](#) to sample some on the local varieties.

This afternoon we are free to enjoy our hotel or to continue exploring.

Tonight, we watch the sunset from the most beautiful location on Santorini, Oia.

Overnight: Tsitouras Collection (breakfast)

6-September: Santorini

This morning we transfer to our private boat and head on a caldera cruise. First, we depart to the quaint port of Nea Kammeni and walk to the rim of the volcano to admire the views. Back in our boat, we cruise to the hot springs where we have opportunity to bathe in volcanic waters.

To the isle of Thirassia, the second largest of the caldera cluster, where we enjoy lunch at a local restaurant. As we head back to Santorini, we admire the views of the island as we look up to the towns clinging to the cliffs.

Tonight, we watch the sunset from the most beautiful location on Santorini, wherever that might actually be.

Overnight: Tsitouras Collection (breakfast)

7-September: Santorini

This morning we...do whatever we feel like doing. Maybe we'll walk to the village of [Imerovigli](#), known as the "balcony to the Aegean". And then, maybe, continue on to [Oia](#), one of the most photographed places in Greece. Or maybe we just hang around the hotel. Or maybe...

This afternoon, some will transfer to the airport for their return home via Athens while others will transfer to the port of Athinios to catch their hydrofoil to Crete.

Overnight: [Edlounda Mare Hotel](#) or [Sofitel Athens Airport](#) (breakfast)

8-September: Elounda, Crete

Today, we do nothing.

Overnight: [Edlounda Mare Hotel](#) (breakfast)

9-September: Elounda, Crete

Today, just like yesterday. But maybe a visit to the [spa](#) is in order.

Overnight: [Edlounda Mare Hotel](#) (breakfast)

10-September: Elounda, Crete

Once again, today, just like yesterday. But, if we tire from doing nothing, we might head out to explore authentic Crete and a few of its untouched villages.

First to the small village of [Kalamafka](#). Nestled among pine trees and small waterfalls, this village sets quite a traditional scene. Next to [Ierapetra](#), a tiny town on the Ierapetra Bay. It enjoys the most rain-free days in Crete, and sits on the longest blue Flag beach on the island.

After lunch in Ierapetra, we return to our hotel to relax and do nothing.

Overnight: [Edlounda Mare Hotel](#) (breakfast)

11-September: Elounda, Crete, Athens

This morning begins our last day on holiday so we'll make the most of it by relaxing at the pool.

This afternoon, we transfer to the airport for our return home via Athens

Overnight: [Sofitel Athens Airport](#) (breakfast)

12-September: Athens; Home

Today, we head to the airport for our return flight home. Some of us will use that time wisely in planning the next adventure.