

Travel

THE BIG WEEKEND

Gritty, graffitied yet graceful, Athens is an intoxicating mix of old – very old – and new. Bougainvillea streams from neoclassical buildings, street art coats the walls, and ruins dot the city. Old men sit in retro coffee houses clutching their worry beads and puffing on cigarettes while, next door, in hip bars, the younger, more optimistic people who are driving the post-crisis creative scene sip drinks and ... puff on cigarettes. Athens is a very walkable city but there's a vast amount to see, so book an early Friday flight, taxi in from the airport (£33), dump your bags at the hotel and go straight to lunch.

FRIDAY

Afternoon

Souvlaki is said to be the oldest fast food in the world – Homer even mentioned it in *The Iliad*. Try it at **Kostas**, a tiny joint that's been going since 1946. You can demolish this pork and spicy tomato sauce-drenched pitta at a high table outside (from £2; Agia Irinis Square 2).

The **Acropolis** towers over the city; it's busy in the morning, but the coachloads disperse by 4pm. Avoid the steps and instead take the stall-lined **Apostolou Pavlou**, leading to the **Acropolis Museum** (£4; theacropolismuseum.gr). Buy a multi-site ticket at the less busy second entrance opposite, which covers 10 other sites (£26; valid five days).

Most people slog straight up the hill to the **Parthenon** temple, but don't miss the **Odeon of Herodes Atticus**, an ancient steep-sloped theatre turned modern concert venue with spectacular city views. Climb **Areopagus Hill** for a selfie, then take the stone steps past the colourful houses in **Plaka**. Locals fill up on coffee and orange cake on the pretty, plant-filled terrace of **Yiasemi** (from £2; yiasemi.gr).

Evening

Order cocktails at an outdoor table at **Mask** (from £7; maskathens.com) – once the summer quarters of the 19th-century King Otto – before dinner, a short walk away in edgy, bar-crammed **Psiri**. Try **Zampano** for plump meatballs with yoghurt, paired with *tsipouro*, a liquor made with wild grapes from Epirus (mains from £7; zampano.gr). Finish your night on the pavement at **Old Fashioned** (beers from £3; Miaouli Street 16).

SATURDAY

Morning

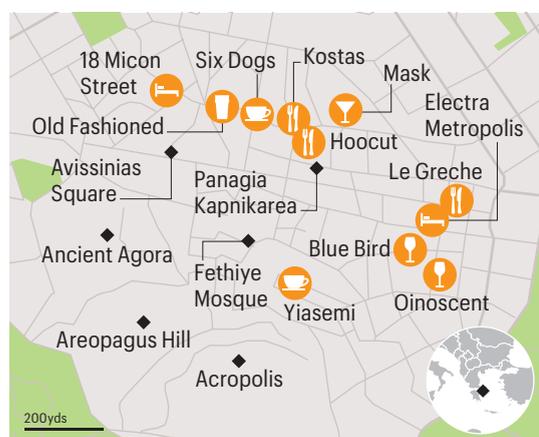
Start the day with the old fellas sipping Greek coffee – warmed in copper cups in hot sand – at **Mokka** (from £2; mokka.gr), before making the most of your multi-site ticket with a wander round the **Ancient Agora**, once the commercial centre. See the **Temple of Hephaestus** up close – you'll have spotted its columns from the Acropolis – grab a picture of the headless statue of Hadrian, who visited the city when he was emperor of Rome, then pop into the museum, filled with sculpture, coins, weaponry and pottery. Nearby stands the 17th-century **Fethiye Mosque**, a 17th-century Ottoman building that opened to the public last year. Inside its creamy yellow walls is an exhibition dedicated to Hadrian (until July 31).

Afternoon

Mingle with teenagers on first dates in busy **Monastiraki Square**, then step down – this is a city built on layers of history – into the tiny, fresco-filled 11th-century **Church of Panagia**



Morning: 3,500-year-old relics. Evening: cutting-edge cuisine. *Hannah Summers* on the capital of contrasts



GETTING THERE

Wizz Air flies from Luton from £74 (wizzair.com). Or try Aegean, British Airways, easyJet or Ryanair.

WHERE TO STAY

18 Micon Street is a trendy new hotel in an abandoned warehouse in Psiri with feature walls (exposed brick, prints of blown-up watch cogs) and handmade furniture

(doubles from £86, B&B; 18miconstr.com). The downtown **Electra Metropolis** has a rooftop pool and bar with Acropolis views (doubles from £145, B&B; electrahoteles.gr).

Hannah Summers was a guest of *Discover Greece* (discovergreece.com), *Culinary Backstreets* (culinarybackstreets.com), the hotels mentioned above, and Wizz Air

Kapnikarea on Ermou Street. Now head to **Hoocut**, a casual new cafe where some of the city's top (and most tattooed) chefs serve a modern twist on souvlaki, with thinly sliced meat and just-baked pitta (from £2; Plateia Agias Irinis 9).

Skirt along the side of **Syntagma Square** – the city's main square, where the eternal flame burns over the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, patrolled by the presidential guard – and get some energy with a scoop (or several) of all-natural lemon-mint sorbet, or fig and mascarpone gelato, from **Le Greche**, Athens's hippest dessert spot (from £3; Mitropoleos 16).

Nearby **Dia Touta** sells moisturisers and soap made with olive oil and donkey milk. Sounds odd, smells icky, but you won't be complaining when (or if) you look decades younger (Mitropoleos 32).

Evening

Walk through the peaceful **National Garden** towards the **Panathenaic Stadium**, which dates back to AD144. It hosted athletics and wrestling during the first modern Olympic Games in 1896.

Cab it (about £5) to the **Hilton** neighbourhood, named after the hotel there. It's the city's newest foodie hotspot. Here, you'll find elderly ladies sipping cheap Alfa beers and tackling crosswords in cafes next to glitzy new bars. Swanky **Vassilenas** started as a simple restaurant on the coast in the 1920s. Its tasting menu – featuring jazzed-up family recipes such as fish soup, orzo with prawns, cod fritters – is excellent value, and the wine pairings will bring you the best retsinas around (tasting menu from £35; vassilenas.gr).

But first, a glass of *mastika*, a sweet liquor you can sample at **Blue Bird** (from £2; Ipitou 4). Wine bars are big here: for another glass, 20 yards away you'll find chilled-out **Oinoscent**, where you can also try Se Fonto Rosé, the world's only rosé retsina (from £4; oinoscent.com).

SUNDAY

Morning

Ease your foggy head at **Six Dogs**, where you'll find the city's hippest drink (iced coffee) served at its hippest hangout, a tiered garden filled with trees, festoon lighting and shades-wearing Athenians recovering from last night's 5am finish (from £3; sixdogs.gr).

Next up is a rummage through the dusty antiques at the flea market on **Avisinias Square**. You'll see everything from midcentury dressers to gold lion-head door knobs – a bargain at £26.

A 25-minute stroll south takes you to the **National Museum of Contemporary Art** in its new home, a former brewery. Temporary exhibitions include the work of the Greek artist Costas Tsoclis until July 1 (£4; emst.gr).

Outside, catch the number 10 bus (£1; buy a ticket at a metro station) to the **Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center**, a shiny new arts hub and home to the Greek National Library and Opera, designed by Renzo Piano. The sloping grass of the adjoining lavender-scented park is a popular new space in the city – grab some shade beneath a pine tree and indulge in the classic Athenian pastime of people-watching.

Afternoon

Jump in a cab (£8) and loosen your belt for one final meal. **Seychelles**, in the boho **Metaxourgeio** neighbourhood, is where the city's in-the-know foodies obsess over dishes such as tomato fritters, elegant salads and beef tongue pappardelle (mains from £5; Keramikou 49).