

CRUISE ITINERARY



Day by Day Itinerary

August 24, 2014	Depart Venice
August 25, 2014	Arrive Kotor
August 26, 2014	At Sea
August 27, 2014	Arrive Santorini
August 28, 2014	Arrive Athen (Piraeus)
August 29, 2014	Arrive Katakolon
August 30, 2014	At Sea
August 31, 2014	Venice, Disembark transfer to Airport

AUGUST 24, 2014: VENICE

Venice, Italy, is romance: a bridge arching over a canal, a gondola gliding by, the moon reflecting off water. Venice is history: the Palazzo Ducale (Doge's Palace), Piazza San Marco, the Grand Canal, great art and great museums. Venice is modern: the headline names and paparazzi of the Venice Film Festival, the buzzing excitement of Carnival in the 10 days before Lent begins.

Venice has a plethora of world-famous museums and artistic treasures. The Basilica di San Marco, with its spectacular Golden Altar; the Bridge of Sighs, where prisoners could enjoy one last glimpse of the beautiful city before entering the dark jail; the Gallerie dell'Accademia, with its collection of art of the 14th-18th centuries; the Peggy Guggenheim Collection of 20th-century art—the list is long. Pick and choose which places you'll visit in-depth, or just skim the surface and soak up the atmosphere.

Venice is set on islands connected by bridges, with the Grand Canal as its main street, and traffic moves by boats that range from the traditional gondolas to refuse barges. The absence of automobile noise means you can hear the laughter of children from your window, as well as footsteps seemingly just around the corner. But what makes Venice so unique also challenges its existence. The rising sea levels of global climate change threaten the city, and even now high tides from the Adriatic Sea can flood whole sections of the city.

Although the resident population in Venice has declined as many young people have moved to the mainland, where real-estate prices and the cost of living are lower, the city continues to draw tourists. In fact, the central areas can be packed, people may be brusque, and prices are high. Even so, Venice remains a treasure to be savored.

AUGUST 25, 2014: KOTOR

The city of Kotor, Montenegro, is one of the best preserved medieval towns in the Mediterranean. Steep cliffs surround the Bay of Kotor, inviting its nickname "Europe's most southern fjord," and the city is still surrounded by its ancient walls. Don't miss the St. Tryphon Cathedral in old town, built in the 12th century.

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AUGUST 26, 2014: AT SEA

AUGUST 27, 2014: SANTORINI

Santorini, the southernmost of the Greek Cyclades, has to be one of the world's most dramatically beautiful islands. Its unique topography is the result of a massive volcanic eruption some 3,600 years ago, which blew the middle out of the island to create a caldera, a volcanic crater filled with deep blue water from the Mediterranean Sea.

The most memorable way to approach the island is by sea. As you sail into the caldera, red-and-black sheer cliffs rise directly from the water, their tops dusted by what at first looks like a sprinkling of snow. Then, as you get closer, the snow takes the shape of Cycladic buildings hanging precariously off the hillsides. Zigzagging lines across the rock face become recognizable as roads that lead up from the sea to whitewashed houses perching on the cliffs.

These are the twin settlements of Fira and Oia, known for their quaint cobbled alleys, white cubic buildings, chic boutique hotels with infinity pools, gourmet restaurants and unforgettable sunsets. All these things add up to make Santorini an incredibly romantic holiday retreat for couples of all ages, as well as a wonderfully glamorous wedding and honeymoon destination.

It's not surprising that Santorini's spectacular setting has made it one of the most-visited islands in Greece—in peak season it receives some 60,000 visitors each day and up to five cruise ships every morning. It's also much loved by celebrities—visitors have included Beyonce, Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie.

AUGUST 28, 2014: ATHENS (PIRAEUS)

Sights in ancient Greece, and especially Athens, take on a larger importance than in most other places in the world. They are histories of democracy, Western civilization and philosophy firsthand. You can't help but walk around the Parthenon and the rest of the Acropolis and dream about the great ones who have come before you and whose footsteps you're in.

Athens is a must-see on any European tour. The ancient and modern merge in this city in ways that are fascinating and sometimes overwhelming. Pollution wreathes the golden stones of the Acropolis and obscures views of the Saronic Gulf. Cars bleat and belch among ranks of concrete high-rises. But then you turn down a cobbled lane and discover vine-swathed tavernas, tortoises trundling through ancient ruins, and bazaars teeming with dusty treasures. Or perhaps you will encounter a sleek cafe, art gallery or an outdoor cinema that serves ouzo under the stars. Greece's capital has been reinventing itself; the results could not be more charming.

The metro routes are extensive, and the stations dazzle with marble and antiquities. Congested downtown streets have been turned into pedestrian walkways, greatly reducing Athens' notorious smog and noise. Hotels, museums and archaeological sites have been revamped. Gentrified districts—such as Gazi—host cafes, clubs and chic restaurants, which even boast smoke-free sections. Athens' 19th-century Acropolis Museum has been replaced by a fine new Acropolis Museum that has brought 21st-century, high-tech architecture to the city in the form of a stunning exhibition space.

The years 2010 and 2011 brought Greece's most severe economic crisis of modern times, together with harsh austerity measures, social unrest and even talk of defaulting and leaving the Eurozone, the 17-nation group of EU countries that use the euro as their common currency. Yet there is a built-in certainty that Greece will ride this storm as it has many

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others. Greeks are proud of their Olympic history, their renovated capital city and—most of all—their proven ability to surmount obstacles with flying colors. Despite the media images of frequent demonstrations and protest marches, some of which have become violent and lead to scuffles with the police, Athens should remain firmly on the travel map, prized for both its ancient charms and its modern makeover.

AUGUST 29, 2014: KATAKOLON

Katakolon, Greece, in western Iliia, is the gateway to Olympia, which is about 30 minutes away. The price of fare to and from Olympia, including waiting time for the taxi, can be steep.

AUGUST 30, 2014: AT SEA

AUGUST 31, 2014: VENICE, DISEMBARK, TRANSFER TO AIRPORT

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