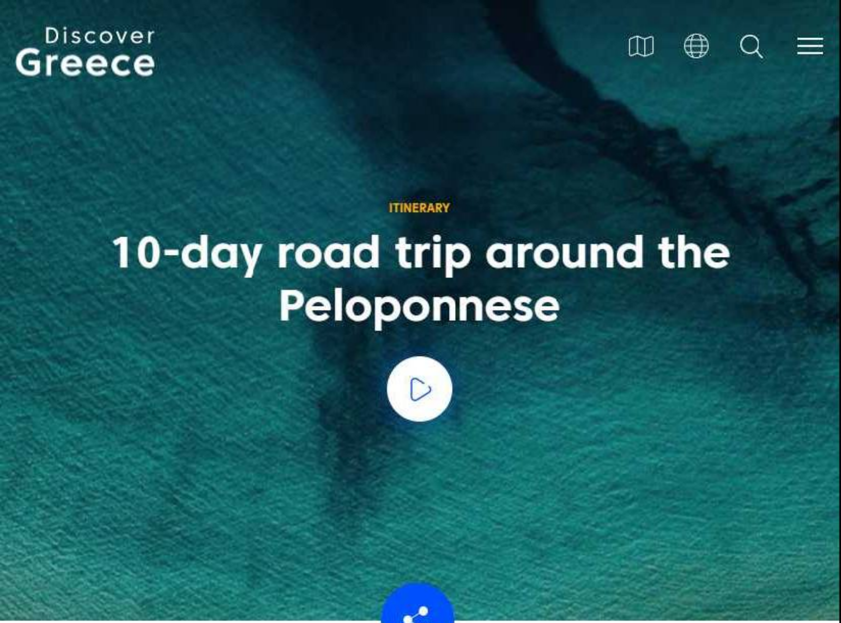

ITINERARY

10-day road trip around the Peloponnese

An astonishing array of history, culture and natural wonder awaits as you explore the mythical Peloponnese.

Heading out from Athens, you can cherry-pick the towns and villages you'd like to include in your itinerary around the Peloponnese. It doesn't matter which direction you choose, or the length of your trip. Just prepare for a journey of culture, history, nature and great food in an extraordinary corner of Greece. Here's a 10-day road trip that will whet your appetite for more.

SHOW ROUTE ON MAP

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Start point - End point
Athens - Ancient Olympia

Distance
830 km (515 miles)

Means of transport
Airplane, Car, Foot

Duration
10 days

Highlights
Ancient Epidaurus, Nafplio's Old Town, the castle town of Monemvasia, the Diros Caves, Methoni Castle, Voidokilia beach, Ancient Olympia

DAY 1 • OVERVIEW

Ancient Epidaurus

160 km **Car, Foot** **2**

On a journey characterised by time travel, start as you mean to go on. Just 2½ hours from Athens, over the Corinth Canal and down the northeastern shoreline of the Peloponnese, you reach Ancient Epidaurus, the archaeological site that's done more than any other to bring the ancient world back to life. Welcome to the 4th century BC.

Stop 1
The Theatre of Ancient Epidaurus ⊖

The Theatre of Ancient Epidaurus

Epidaurus' theatre **shows off its striking acoustics** each summer by hosting **ancient comedies and tragedies as well as modern concerts**. Around it are the remains of one of the most complete sanctuaries of the ancient world, dedicated to Asclepius, the god of healing. You'll walk through the foundations of a hospital that helped transform the treatment of illnesses, from remedies based on divine intervention to scientific methods.

Ancient Epidaurus, the original deluxe healing centre →

Stop 2
Seafood in Nea Epidaurus

Seafood in Nea Epidaurus

After a full first day, you'll have worked up quite an appetite. So we're sending you for some **seafood in the picturesque port town** of New Epidaurus (as the name translates). But before you do, how about a swim? The water is refreshing and clean.

DAY 2 • OVERVIEW

Nafplio

39 km Car, Foot 3

You're off to Nafplio today. A 40-minute drive will take you to one of Greece's most romantic towns. The country's first capital after independence in the early 19th century, it's also famous for Venetian fortifications and a waterfront promenade. So get ready to do some walking.

Stop 1

Nafplio's romantic Old Town ⊖

Nafplio's romantic Old Town

With neoclassical buildings, boutique hotels and quaint shops selling local products, Nafplio is a favourite weekend escape of Athenians. It's the scene of **pivotal events in Greek history**, housing the country's first parliament and the church where Othon, Greece's first king, was crowned. But most of all, you'll love the island feel of the alleyways, the warm colours and inspiring tastes. **Top tip**: The gelatos are out of this world.

Experience Nafplio's romantic Old Town

Stop 2

The view from Palamidi Fortress

The view from Palamidi Fortress

Nafplio was the Venetians' **'Naples of the East'** and they certainly left their cultural mark. Nowhere more so than Palamidi Castle, built in the early 18th century, from which you have panoramic views of the town and the Argolic Gulf. You can drive or **climb the 999 steps to the top**. The fortress was famously stormed in one night by Greek troops in 1822, prompting its Turkish garrison to surrender.

Experience Palamidi Castle in Nafplio

Stop 3

Stroll along the promenade

Stroll along the promenade

After all that history, it's time for a leisurely stroll along the promenade. Take your time to amble the 1km to **Arvanitias Square**. You'll reach a pretty little chapel (**Virgin Mary of the Cave**), where you can sit and admire the sea views.

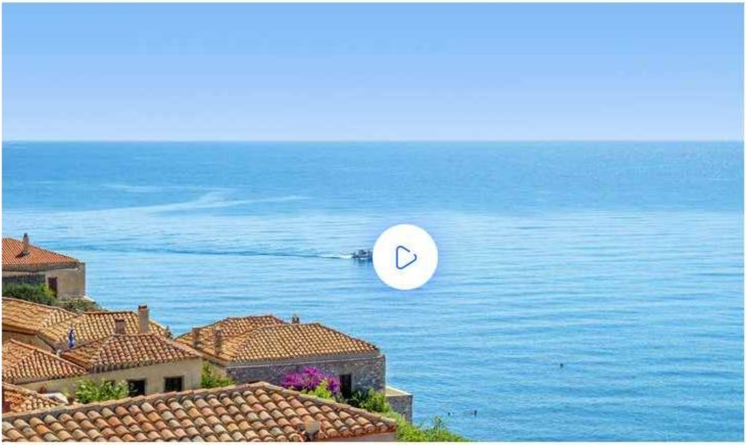
DAY 3 • OVERVIEW

Monemvasia

210 km **Car, Foot** **3**

You head deeper into the Peloponnese today, to the iconic castle town of Monemvasia, on the southeastern coast. A medieval citadel, hidden from view from both the mainland and sea, it's a natural fortress that's been claimed the Byzantines, Franks, Venetians and Ottomans. The atmosphere is one of cobblestone wonder.

Stop 1
A fairy tale Old Town



A fairy tale Old Town

The **romanticism and majesty** of Monemvasia's Old Town are almost overwhelming. It's raw yet refined, with a main street and small tavernas, cafes and shops. There's a fairy tale charm throughout, with striking Byzantine churches and two excellent folklore museums. But mostly, this is a place for strolling with **wonderful sea views**. At twilight, the stones turn lavender, giving it the nickname '**the Violet City**'.

Stop 2
Monemvasia's medieval castle ⊖

Monemvasia's medieval castle

As soon as you walk through the gate of the castle, you step into the heart of a medieval citadel. **Arched alleyways**, crumbling churches and **artisan workshops** are found next to **cafes & tavernas**, shops and quaint homes. What was once the location of the Byzantines' central avenue, the Venetians' market and the Ottomans' bazaar is now where you'll enjoy a coffee and take it all in.

Stop 3
Try and resist the smells ⊖

Try and resist the smells

Little shops selling **local products** are everywhere. If you fancy something sweet, you'll be drawn by the aromas of the almond-based *amygtholata* wafting from confectioners' stores. Or perhaps the *samousades*, filled with almonds, walnuts and thyme-honey. And for later in the evening, set yourself for **cocktails and dinner with views** that make you feel like you're on a balcony overlooking a sea that's just for you.

DAY 4 • OVERVIEW

Gythio

67 km   Car, Foot   3

We're heading west now, to the largest town of the region of Mani. Gythio boasts a picturesque harbour and an array of 19th-century pastel houses that give it a distinctive coastal charm. Whilst you're here, prepare for some excellent seafood meze and a glass or two of ouzo.

Stop 1
The picturesque harbour ⊖

The picturesque harbour

You could spend a long time just walking up and down the **Gythio waterfront**. The little fishing boats and the harbour life of a town that's built its existence around the sea are the perfect aperitifs before settling down to a meal in one of the waterfront **tavernas**.

Stop 2

Mansion houses and stately charm

Mansion houses and stately charm

It's worth stepping into the town to explore the neoclassical buildings and narrow streets. The Old Girls' School, designed by famed architect Ernst Ziller, is now a museum that will give you an insight into the famously proud people of the Greater Mani region. It also houses manuscripts by the renowned poets Yiannis Ritsos and Nikiforos Vrettakos.

Stop 3

The Agios Dimitrios Shipwreck

The Agios Dimitrios Shipwreck

Around 5km north of Gythio, you'll find Selinitsa, a long sandy beach that you can't miss because **there's a shipwreck sitting on it**. It's an unusual backdrop to an afternoon swim. Or there's Gythio's most popular beach, **Mavrovouni**, with golden sand and excellent water. It's also a nesting ground of the endangered caretta-caretta sea turtles.

DAY 5 • OVERVIEW

Mani

52 km Boat, Car, Foot 3

Time to head into Mani – the land of tower house, castles, Byzantine chapels and hard, nuggety locals who smile from their eyes. This is a region of Greece famous for its rugged countryside and equally wild and wonderful history. And its eternally welcoming coastal towns.

Stop 1

Into the harbour town in Limeni

Into the harbour town in Limeni

The colourful little fishing town of Limeni greets you with tavernas and cafes set along a waterfront that has an amazing way of reflecting the sun, whether at midday or during **a golden sunset**. It's also the ideal place for a swim... right from the waterfront.

Stop 2

The tower houses of Areopoli

The tower houses of Areopoli

On to the impressively preserved historical town of Areopoli, with its **tower houses and stone paths**. This is the historic heart of Mani, in which stands the tower of the **Mavromichalis family** (among the leaders of Greece's 1822 War of Independence). There's something timelessly welcoming about Areopoli: all those coffee shops with bougainvillea, the heart-melting bakery smells and the warmth of the locals.

Stop 3

The extraordinary Diros Caves

The extraordinary Diros Caves

A vast underground cavern stretching 15km into the rock, the Diros Caves not only contain a seemingly endless network of inland waterways but were also one of Europe's most important Neolithic burial sites. A **40-minute boat tour into Vlychada**, the biggest cave of the complex, will take you 2.5km inland, past **incredible stalactites and stalagmites** and otherworldly formations.

DAY 6 • OVERVIEW

Kardamyli

45 KM **Car, Foot** **3**

The old fortress town of Kardamyli is also one of Mani's prettiest settlements and offers the perfect place to refuel. On one side are the calming waters of the Gulf of Messinia and, on the other, Mt Taygetos, standing tall and proud as a Maniot town house.

Stop 1

The perfect place to unwind ⊖

The perfect place to unwind

Kardamyli's principal beach, **Ritsa**, extends down the main road, offering a great setting in which to relax. The long pebbly beach has shade and numerous tavernas and hotels, with everything you need on your doorstep. The water's clear and deep, **so enjoy the swim**. You've earned it.

Stop 2
Patrick Leigh Fermor's house ⊖

Patrick Leigh Fermor's house

Mani is synonymous with Patrick Leigh Fermor – Paddy or Kyrie Michalis, as he was lovingly known – the British author, scholar and soldier who fought in the Cretan resistance during the Second World War. He also lived to the ripe old age of 96 in Kardamyli and his house has been preserved in his honour. You can visit it upon request.

Stop 3
A meal in the shade of the trees

A meal in the shade of the trees

To fully feel the charms of life in Kardamyli, there's one more thing you need to do. Eat in the shade of the area's famous tree-lined streets. There are numerous options. You'll see what we mean.

DAY 7 • OVERVIEW

Kalamata

36 km   Car, Foot

A short hop northbound brings you to Kalamata, the capital of the region of Messinia. There's an airport (so you could easily stop or even start your road trip here) and a great collection of hotels and cafes & restaurants that attract a young crowd. Combining classic seaside charm with a great vibe right through the year, Kalamata's energy is palpable.

Stop 1
A waterfront stroll or an afternoon on the beach

A waterfront stroll or an afternoon on the beach

Start with **a stroll along the waterfront**, just taking it all in. It's bound to whet your appetite for a swim. So just 12km down the coast, you'll find **Santova**, a sandy beach with a lively beach bar scene. Or nearby **Mikri Mantinea**, with its beautiful bays with lush greenery and Blue Flag-awarded beach.

Stop 2
A one-stop cultural shop ⊖

A one-stop cultural shop

Right in the heart of Kalamata, you'll find the city's **archaeological museum**. It's a great one-stop-shop to understand the cultural development of the region, from Prehistoric times through to the Mycenaean period and up to Byzantine and later years. Even better would be to include a visit the **Archaeological Site of Messinia**, so you can put it all into context.

Experience Ancient Messene

Stop 3

Make the Gulf of Messinia your own

Make the Gulf of Messinia your own

Nothing captures the atmosphere of Kalamata quite like a drive up to **Verga**, a village in the foothills of Mt Taygetus, where the Gulf of Messinia becomes your very own. Perfect for sundowners or **dinner with views** of the twinkling lights of Kalamata.

DAY 8 • OVERVIEW

Koroni & Methoni

87 km Car, Foot 3

Onwards to two castle towns that were once the prize jewels of the Venetians. Strategically positioned on the southwest peninsula of the Peloponnese, Koroni and Methoni were important stops for merchant ships travelling from the West to the East, as well as pilgrims heading to the Holy Land.

Stop 1
Castle views from the beach

Castle views from the beach

With its well-preserved old stone houses and sloping streets, there's an air of southern Italy about Koroni. From the main beach, called **Zanga**, you have the bonus of gazing up at the imposing castle, which you'll enjoy visiting before or after a cooling dip. You'll also find a monastery here.

Stop 2

Sheltered and welcoming Finikounta

Sheltered and welcoming Finikounta

On your way to Methoni, you'll pass through the welcoming town of Finikounta. The waters here are shallow and the beaches are sandy, making them **ideal for families** with small children. You can laze on the beach and enjoy a taverna lunch. Take your time. The pace here is slow.

Stop 3

Explore the rich history of Methoni Castle

Explore the rich history of Methoni Castle

This is **a castle experience you're not going to miss**. The 13th-century Methoni castle is one of the most important Venetian fortresses in Greece and certainly one of the most imposing. Just entering is impressive, with its stone causeway and gates, and there are various important buildings inside, including a church and Ottoman baths.

DAY 9 • OVERVIEW

Pylos

11 km Car, Foot 3

A very short drive north brings you to Pylos, a town whose calm belies a turbulent history. With the largest natural harbour in the Peloponnese, it's famous for the Battle of Navarino, a decisive naval conflict in Greece's liberation from the Turks. It's also the point of departure for some extraordinary attractions.

Stop 1

Voidokilia: Every Instagrammer's dream ⊖

Voidokilia: Every Instagrammer’s dream

Voidokilia is **a landmark of the Peloponnese** and with good reason. Not only does the horseshoe-shaped beach boast white sand but its crushed seashells turn the water an otherworldly turquoise. For the full Instagrammable majesty, climb to **Paleokastro Castle**. Each year, **the beach is part of the Navarino Challenge**, a run aimed at raising awareness for the Mediterranean diet.

Experience Voidokilia beach

Stop 2

A castle with a view ⊖

A castle with a view

Located on a hill west of Pylos, **Neokastro** is one of the best-preserved castles in Greece, housing a small museum and a mosque converted into a church. Invisible from the sea, it played a key role as a lookout during **the Battle of Navarino**. It's also a great vantage point to take in the views of the Gulf of Messinia and beyond.

Stop 3

Stroll the alleyways of Pylos ⊖

Stroll the alleyways of Pylos

Back we head to Pylos for an evening stroll through the little alleyways of a town that feels like an island hamlet. There are traditional cafes and shops selling local products before reaching the coastal road, where you can settle down to **dinner in a seaside taverna**.

DAY 10 · OVERVIEW

Ancient Olympia

123 km Car, Foot 2

Last – but absolutely not least – comes Ancient Olympic, a name synonymous with one of the great ideals of the modern world. The birthplace of the Olympic Games, this is where the Olympic Flame is lit every four years. It's also an impressively preserved monument to the original Olympics.

Stop 1

The Ancient Olympics brought to life ⊖

The Ancient Olympics brought to life

Just by walking through **the vaulted entrance of the ancient stadium** you can hear the 20,000 fans raucously cheering their heroes. The legacy of the Ancient Olympics, staged here **every four years** for more than a 1,000 years, is everywhere: In the **hippodrome** for chariot races; the **gymnasium** and running track; the **baths** and villas; and the 5th-century-BC Doric **Temple of Zeus**.

Feel the spirit of Ancient Olympia

Stop 2

An archaeological site that keeps giving ⊖

An archaeological site that keeps giving

The **god Hermes** leans gracefully against a tree trunk, cradling the infant **Dionysus** in his left arm: beauty and grace in perfect harmony. This is the effect of one of the **sculptor Praxiteles**' greatest works of art, housed in the **Archaeological Museum of Olympia**. Do you need much more reason to visit?

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Kalamata

Filoxenia hotel in southern Peloponnese is the pride of Kalamata luxury beach spa hotel. Under the shadow of Mount Taygetos and bordering the Messinian G...

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