

**GREECE: A CIRCUMNAVIGATION OF
THE PELOPONNESE**
A History & Nature Cruise Aboard *Harmony V*
MAY 25–JUNE 3, 2022

**NORTHERN GREECE PRE-TRIP:
BIRDS & HISTORY**
MAY 14–26, 2022

**GREECE:ATHENS EXTENSION:
BIRDS & HISTORY**
JUNE 3-7, 2022

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Parthenon, Athens © Shutterstock

Splayed like the great hand of Poseidon, Greece's multi-fingered Peloponnesian Peninsula thrusts south into the navy-blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea. Here, where southeastern Europe reaches its terminus at the doorsteps of Asia and Africa is a landscape seemingly bathed in endless light, where hills of jumbled limestone, fertile plains, and ancient olive groves forever stoke the irresistible allure of Greece.

In May 2022, VENT is returning to Greece for a fabulous History and Nature cruise. The event, a Circumnavigation of the Peloponnese, will delve into the country's illustrious history and culture while observing the region's special resident and migrant birds and other aspects of the natural world. We have chartered the Harmony V, an elegant motor yacht, for a trip offering an abundance of beautiful scenery, visits to timeless archaeological sites and extraordinary museums, historical interpretation, quality birding, and cruising along the dramatic Greek coastline.

While the white walled, blue-domed roofs of the tourist friendly Aegean islands figure preeminently in the plans of many visitors, it is the Peloponnesian Peninsula and nearby Athens where the heart of ancient Greece lies. From this largely rugged terrain, inhabited by ancient peoples, came words and thoughts never before conceived, ideas that together formed the basis of Western Civilization. History, philosophy, politics, theater, and athletics all made their debut here. Characterizing the varied country are the names of the city states which competed for dominance in this region between 2,200 and 3,500 years ago: Mycenae, Argos, Corinth, Sparta, and, certainly, Athens. Here also are Delphi, Olympia, and Epidauros—places eternally linked with the ancient Greeks and the gods they worshipped.



In undertaking a complete circuit of the Peloponnese, our exciting itinerary includes excursions to some of the most famous and important sites in the ancient Greek world, many of which are situated in pastoral settings and hold tantalizing birding and wildflower possibilities. Among the places we'll visit are:

- *Epidauros – containing a near-perfectly preserved 2,400-year-old theater and the remains of the ancient Asclepeion, the greatest center of healing in the Greek classical world.*
- *Mycenae – seat of power of a mighty state in the second millennium B.C.E. and governed by kings whose genealogy exists in an inextricably linked swirl of mythology and fact. The renown of the archaeological site was forever sealed by Homer, who vividly described the citadel and its most famous inhabitant, King Agamemnon, during the time of the Trojan War.*
- *Nestor's Palace – a small site belonging to Nestor, king of Pylos, during the time of the Trojan War.*
- *Olympia – the most revered Pan-Hellenic sanctuary of ancient Greece, dedicated to worship of Zeus, is best known as the birthplace of the Olympic Games.*
- *Delphi – set amid marvelous natural scenery, it was first among all Classical sites in reputation and wealth; home of the legendary Delphic Oracle and greatest place of worship of the god Apollo.*



Short-toed Snake-Eagle © Ecotours Wildlife Holidays

Our time at each of the archaeological sites and at nearby natural areas should produce an impressive assortment of migrant and resident birds. Among the possibilities are a range of Eurasian waterbirds, swifts, tits, wheatears, warblers, buntings, and more. Little Ringed Plover, Short-toed Snake-Eagle, Alpine Swift, Spotted Flycatcher, Long-tailed Tit, Black-eared Wheatear, Blue Rock-Thrush, Rock-Nuthatch, Woodchat Shrike, and Cirl Bunting are all species we have a good chance of finding. While at sea, careful watching from the ship's viewing decks may present

opportunities to see a variety of southeastern Europe's special birds including Cory's and Yelkouan shearwaters, Eleonora's Falcon, and Yellow-legged and Audouin's gulls.

For added measure, the trip will begin with a visit to the highly regarded Acropolis Museum. We will have a full morning to explore the museum's three floors and behold some of the most exquisite sculptures, carvings, and artifacts dating from antiquity.

Joining VENT leaders Victor Emanuel and Barry Lyon for this special departure is Dr. Paul Woodruff, a professor of philosophy and classics at the University of Texas. Paul's specialty is Plato, whose works he has translated, in addition to those by Sophocles and Euripides. He is well-versed in the history and culture of ancient Greece and will present several lectures that incorporate the dominant themes of ancient Greek civilization, namely history, philosophy, and theater

Greece is an extraordinary destination in many regards, and we are confident that the multi-thematic approach embodied in this program will provide a rewarding and memorable trip. It is an ideal choice for those who desire a travel experience that includes more than natural history.

Conditions aboard Harmony V are very comfortable, featuring 25 cabins, all located on the main and upper decks, with windows, lower beds, private bathroom facilities, and individual temperature controls. The public areas include a lounge, an ample Sun Deck equipped with deckchairs and a shaded outdoor area, and outdoor bar. Internet and email service are available.

For those seeking a more complete Greece experience, we offer optional pre- and post-cruise extensions to Northern Greece and the Athens area, respectively. The optional Northern Greece Pre-trip will travel the length of the country exploring other of Greece's top historical and cultural sites in addition to premier areas for birding and nature. Cultural highlights include a visit to the Byzantine site of Meteora; Pella, historical capital of the ancient kingdom of Macedonia; and a city tour of Thessaloniki. On the birding front, we'll travel to some of the country's premier birding locations, including Lake Kerkini and the Nestos and Evros river deltas. The History and Nature theme continues with the optional Athens Extension which incorporates visitation to the Acropolis and the Agora, the two monumental sites that reached their zenith during the Classical era. Birding trips to nearby Mount Hymettus and to the coast near Marathon round out a marvelous several days in the Greek capital.

NOTE: Information about the Northern Greece Pre-trip is available separately.

May 25-26, Days 1-2: Departure to Athens, Greece; arrival and evening welcome. Flights from the United States bound for Athens (airport code ATH) depart on May 25 and arrive on the morning of May 26. Upon arrival in Athens, you will be met outside the baggage claim area by a representative of our ground agent and transferred to the Hotel Divani Acropolis where a room has been reserved in your name. After check-in you will have the remainder of the day to yourself, where options include relaxing in the privacy of your room or exploring some of the city's many historical and cultural attractions.

Athens, Greece's capital city, contains a wealth of museums and places of interest. Among the many ways to spend an afternoon we recommend a visit to the National Archaeological Museum, one of the great museums of the world. Located northwest of the Acropolis, the museum houses an extraordinary collection of art and artifacts from the ancient Greek world. Within the rooms, chambers, and halls are a profusion of exhibits containing ancient sculptures in marble and bronze from the Archaic (650–480 B.C.E.), Classical (480–338 B.C.E.), Hellenistic (338–146 B.C.E.), and Roman periods (146 B.C.E.–330 C.E.), along with dazzling examples of pottery, figurines, weapons, and other artifacts dating from antiquity. Among the many treasures is the “Mask of Agamemnon,” which was unearthed at Mycenae by Heinrich Schliemann, the discoverer of Troy.

Another option is a visit to the Plaka, an area of shops and restaurants on the east side of the Acropolis. Wandering among the narrow streets and alleys, you may choose from a variety of restaurants and bars if you are hungry, or step in and out of myriad shops and stores with gifts, clothing, and a variety of other objects for sale.

On Day 2 (May 26) we will gather as a group in the hotel lobby at 6:00 p.m. for a trip introduction and welcome. This evening we will have dinner at an open-air restaurant that features unobstructed views of the Acropolis.

NIGHT (Day 1): Aboard Aircraft
NIGHT (Day 2): Hotel Divani Acropolis, Athens



Acropolis at Sundown, Athens © Barry Lyon

May 27, Day 3: Morning at Acropolis Museum; afternoon embarkation of *Harmony V*; cruise to Epidaurus.

After breakfast, we will walk the short distance to the Acropolis Museum. This stunning museum, thirty years in the planning, opened in early 2009. It is located at the foot of the famed Acropolis and houses thousands of ancient works and artifacts recovered from the ancient hilltop site.

The Acropolis Museum has been hailed as an outstanding contribution to the historical and cultural attributes of Athens. Owing to its spaciousness and large glass windows, the exquisite sculptures and other carvings can be viewed in natural light without the claustrophobic atmosphere of its antiquated predecessor (which sat on the Acropolis near the Parthenon).

Interestingly, while plans for a new museum were first announced in the 1970s, the discovery of a large urban settlement (Makriyianni site) dating from Archaic to Early-Christian Athens was discovered at the selected construction site and the entire project was put on hold. It was agreed that the discovery needed to be integrated into the new museum, and the design was subsequently awarded to American architect, Bernard Tschumi, working in collaboration with Greece's, Michaelis Photiadis. Its construction cost approximately \$400 million dollars.



Lion Devouring a Bull, Acropolis Museum © Arteuphoric

As a significant side note, the inspiration for a new museum stemmed from Greece's desire to recover the Elgin Marbles. From 1801-1812, Lord Elgin, with permission from the Ottoman rulers of Greece, removed intact architectural sculptures and inscriptions from the Parthenon and had them shipped to England, where they are on display in the British Museum. One of the arguments against returning the marbles was that Greece had no proper place to house and display them. The new museum was intended to address that problem; however, England has shown no indication of changing its position, despite the museum's undeniable modernity, beauty, and appeal.

After a morning-long tour of the museum, we will travel a short distance to the port town of Piraeus. We will have lunch at a seaside restaurant before boarding *Harmony V* in the afternoon.

Once aboard, we will spend time settling into our cabins and attending mandatory orientation and safety drills. Toward mid-afternoon, we will depart Piraeus for the three-hour crossing of the Saronic Gulf en route to the Peloponnese. We expect a lovely crossing with delightful views of the Greek coastline and nearby islands. European Shags and Yellow-legged Gulls should be in evidence around the ship and we may even see our first Cory's Shearwaters ("Scopoli's" race).



Little Owl © J Need/shutterstock

Our arrival at Epidaurus Bay on the northeast coast of the Peloponnesian Peninsula is timed for the early evening. Densely vegetated limestone hills protect the bay on three sides, creating a tranquil and scenic setting.

NIGHT: Aboard *Harmony V*, Epidaurus Bay

May 28, Day 4: Morning excursion to Epidaurus (archaeological site and museum); afternoon cruising to Nafplion. We will disembark the ship after breakfast and travel by bus to the archaeological site of Epidaurus.

The ancient site of Epidaurus was independent of Argos (adjacent city state) and not included in Argolis (today, one of 51 Greek prefectures that in ancient times was defined as a collection of city states that had grown up around the vast, fertile Argolid plain) until the time of the Romans. With its supporting territory, it formed the small region called Epidauria. Reputed to be the birthplace of Apollo's son Asclepius, the healer, Epidaurus was known throughout the Greek world as a healing sanctuary and for its theater.

The Asclepeion at Epidaurus was the most celebrated healing center of the Classical world, the place where ill people went in the hope of being cured. To find the right cure for their ailments, "patients" spent a night in the enkoimित्रια, a big sleeping hall. In their dreams, the god himself would advise them what they had to do to regain their health. Found in the sanctuary was a guest house for 160 guestrooms, which spoke to size of the structure.

Asclepius, the most important healer god of antiquity, brought prosperity to the sanctuary. In the fourth and third centuries B.C.E., an ambitious building program commenced for enlarging and reconstructing the original monumental buildings. Fame and prosperity continued throughout the Hellenistic period until the arrival of the Romans. In 87 B.C.E. the sanctuary was looted by the Roman general Sulla, and in 67 B.C.E., it was plundered by pirates. In the second century C.E., the sanctuary enjoyed a new upsurge under the Romans, but in 395 C.E. a

Gothic invasion largely destroyed the place. Today, the expansive site lies mostly in ruins, yet it is easy to appreciate the ingenuity and intelligence of the people that built these once grand edifices.

The prosperity brought by the Asklepeion enabled the residents of Epidaurus to construct civic monuments, including a huge theater (approximately 300 B.C.E.) renowned for its symmetry and beauty. The theater was designed by Polykleitos the Younger in the fourth century B.C.E. The original 34 rows were extended in Roman times by another 21 rows. As is typical of Greek theaters, panoramic view of a landscape beyond the stage is an essential aspect of the theater design. When full, the theatre seats up to 15,000 people, and, in fact, is in use again today.



Ancient Theater of Epidaurus © Variety Cruises

As it was during the time of the ancient Greeks, the theater is still marveled for its exceptional acoustics, which permit almost perfect perception of spoken words from the stage floor to all spectators, regardless of their seating. Tour guides demonstrate the acoustical perfection of the theater using different means, such as singing a song or even striking a match, whereby anyone seated anywhere in the theater can easily hear the sounds.



Eurasian Jay © Andrew Whittaker

As the archaeological site sits in a natural setting, we might observe a number of interesting resident and migrant bird species in adjacent groves of pine and oak. Among the possibilities are Short-toed Snake-Eagle, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Common Wood-Pigeon, Eurasian Kestrel, Blue and Great tits, Spotted Flycatcher, Eurasian Magpie, Eurasian Jay, Sardinian and Wood warblers, Cirl Bunting, Common Chaffinch, and European Goldfinch.

After a full morning at Epidaurus we will return to the ship for lunch. We will spend the afternoon cruising to Nafplion. Our route takes us all the way around the “Argolid” Peninsula in what should be a highly scenic journey. The birding will probably be light, with little more than Yellow-legged Gulls for travel companions, but this afternoon, and almost any time we are at sea, we have chances of encountering the Eleonora’s

Falcon, a dazzling predator that occupies seaside cliffs and islands of the Mediterranean Sea. It is difficult to predict our chances of encountering this special bird, but we will stay ever-vigilant.

Nafplion is a well preserved old town stemming from an ancient Greek settlement. Situated at the head of the Argolic Gulf it contains Neoclassical architecture, pedestrian-friendly marble streets, and a spectacular island-fortress dating from the second Venetian occupation of 1686-1715. It was a key site in the struggle between the Ottomans and the Venetians from the fifteenth century onward. After Greece became independent in 1829, Nafplion served as its first capital.

We expect to dock in Nafplion in the evening after dinner. Anyone who wishes may disembark and explore the town.

NIGHT: Aboard *Harmony V*, Nafplion

May 29, Day 5: Morning excursion to Mycenae (archaeological site and museum); afternoon cruising to Monemvasia; evening in Monemvasia. We will disembark after breakfast and travel to the ancient site of Mycenae. For anyone interested in ancient Greece, especially those who have read *The Iliad*, the chance to see the site where King Agamemnon lived and died and where the Trojan War began is very thrilling indeed. Surely today will be one of the high points of our time in the Peloponnese. Mycenae is one of the most renowned sites in the ancient world and was a tourist destination even in Roman times!

Mycenae is a particularly ancient site with roots dating to the Neolithic age (early third millennium at least). In the second millennium B.C.E. (Bronze Age, or Helladic periods) Mycenae was one of the major centers of Greek civilization, a military city state which dominated much of southern Greece. The period of history from about 1600 B.C.E. to about 1100 B.C.E. is called Mycenaean in reference to Mycenae, the period when Mycenaean power and influence reached its zenith.

It is believed that the earliest Mycenaean were Indo-European settlers who practiced farming and herding. At that time, the dominant power in the ancient Greek world rested with the Minoans, who, on the island of Crete, developed a very complex civilization that interacted with Mycenae.



Ruins of Mycenae © Shutterstock

The decline of the Minoan civilization more or less corresponded to the rise of Mycenae. At its peak, the Mycenaean civilization dominated trade routes, possessed some of the finest military might, served as the seat of government for much of Argolis (eastern Peloponnese), forged critical alliances with other city states, and

contained much of the wealth. By 1200 B.C.E. however, the power of Mycenae was declining. Challenges to its dominance over Argolis arose from such nearby civilizations at Argos, Tiryns, Nauplion (Nafplion), and other powerful Greek city states such as Sparta. With its lines of great kings ended, trade lines cut, catastrophic fires destroying parts of the city, and invading forces to contend with, Mycenae collapsed as Greece's most powerful civilization. Although nothing like its former self, the site remained inhabited beyond the end of the Bronze Age all the way into the early Classic period (480s B.C.E.). Mycenaeans even participated in the Persian Wars of the early fifth century B.C.E.

With all things concerning ancient Greece, history and mythology are inevitably intertwined. In the case of Mycenae, much of the history surrounding the place is defined by internecine power struggles, vengeance, assassination, and even interference by the gods.

A perfect example is the story of the Atreid dynasty. According to the legend, the most famous rulers of Mycenae were kings of the Atreid dynasty. The people of Mycenae had received advice from an oracle that they should choose a new king from among the Pelopids. The two contenders were Atreus and his brother, Thyestes. The latter was chosen at first. At this moment nature intervened. The sun appeared to reverse direction and set in the east. Because the sun had reversed direction, the argument was made that the election of Thyestes should be reversed. Atreus subsequently became king. His first move was to get rid of Thyestes and all his family, but Thyestes managed to escape Mycenae.

Atreus went on to sire two sons, Agamemnon and Menelaus, who would later cement their fame in the Trojan War. Aegisthus, the son of Thyestes, killed Atreus and restored his father to the throne. With the help of King Tyndareus of Sparta, the sons of Atreus forced Thyestes from the throne. For his part, Tyndareus had two daughters, Helen and Clytemnestra, whom Menelaus and Agamemnon married, respectively. Agamemnon inherited Mycenae and Menelaus became king in Sparta.

Continuing with the famous Homeric tale of the Trojan War, Helen eloped with Paris of Troy. Agamemnon then called on all the kings of Greece to go to war against Troy to get her back for his brother Meneleaus. The war was a grueling affair that lasted 10 years, and although the Greeks were victorious, the war took a heavy toll, with Mycenae in a resulting state of anarchy and ruin. Agamemnon's return from war precipitated his own assassination, which in turn triggered another round of vengeance slayings.

Arriving when the archaeological site opens, we will take our time exploring the ruins, excavations, and on-site archaeological museum. Among the attractions are the famed Lion's Gate, the tholos (shaft) tombs, and the remains of the ancient citadel.

Mycenae is a hilltop site set in a semi-arid environment. Hills of limestone rise to the east while to the north and south are the vast fertile plains of Argolis. Vegetation around the ruins complex consists of scattered bushes and grasses. The general area provides surprisingly good birding opportunities and we will likely interrupt the interpretation on occasion to point out birds. The area around the entrance is typically very productive early in the day and is where a number of special European birds are easily found. Rock Nuthatches are common and their loud chattering calls are heard frequently. Blue Rock Thrushes may also be seen here and are known to sing from atop the ancient stone walls. A real prize is the Black-eared Wheatear, a gorgeous specialty bird of the area that is occasionally seen alongside the entrance path.

Below the perimeter wall we may see birds such as Cirl Bunting, Northern Wheatear, and Eurasian Hoopoe. In the pine trees and olive trees around the administrative buildings and museum we may find Blue Tit, European Robin, and Sardinian Warbler while the sparse vegetation away from the ruins may hold a few migrant landbirds including Spotted Flycatcher and Whinchat.



"Western" Rock Nuthatch © Shutterstock

We will return to the ship in the late morning. Depending on our timing, we may have a chance to make a short trip to the shore of the bay where mudflats attract a variety of waterbirds such as Gray Heron, Little Ringed Plover, Eurasian Curlew, Little Stint, Black-headed Gull, and Common Tern.

Early in the afternoon we'll depart for Monemvasia, located near the southern tip of the Peloponnese. Our cruise down the eastern coast of the peninsula will take about six hours and should be a relaxing and scenic transit. Dr. Woodruff may present a lecture this afternoon. We will position ourselves on the viewing deck in an effort to spot seabirds and to enjoy the long afternoon at sea. This stretch of water can be particularly productive for both Cory's (Scopoli's) and Yelkouan shearwaters. The larger Cory's is the more common and widespread of the two, but Yelkouan's may be seen in local abundance in larger groups.

Along with Eleonora's Falcon and Yelkouan Shearwater, the other prize bird of the region is Audouin's Gull, a lovely bird of the Mediterranean region. Once considered highly endangered, this species has made an impressive recovery and can be found nesting in scattered locations from southern Spain to the north coast of Africa, and to Greece and Turkey. As May is clearly in the breeding period, most of the birds will be around their nesting colonies; however, the bay at Monemvasia seems to attract at least a few birds at any time of the year. With a snow-white head, deep red bill, and olive-green legs, Audouin's Gull presents an exciting find anywhere one is fortunate to see it.

We expect to arrive at the dock at Monemvasia around sunset. Adjacent to the small town is the offshore rock bearing the same name, known as the Gibraltar of Greece. Lying 400 meters from land, the rock was separated from the mainland by an earthquake in 375 C.E. A fortress and town was founded here by the Byzantines in the sixth century and remained in Byzantine possession for almost seven hundred years until it was captured by the Franks in 1249 after a three-year siege. Between 1460 and 1715 it went back and forth from the Turks to the Venetians. In the Greek war of independence, Monemvasia was the first major Turkish fortress to fall to the Greeks, August 1, 1821, after a four- month siege.

For those who wish, we will disembark in the evening (around 7:00) and take a short bus ride up to the city gate. While optional, this activity presents a wonderful opportunity to experience an ancient Byzantine settlement, an infusion of Greek culture, and a serene seascape surrounding the island. Contributing to the uniqueness of the experience is that this is the only site-visit on our itinerary that deviates from our focus on ancient Greece.



Monemvasia at Night © Shutterstock

Once inside the quaint town we can stroll through the narrow streets, visiting various shops and churches or simply experiencing the close confines of centuries-old red-tiled roofs, plaster walls, and hidden staircases. Participants can return to the ship at their leisure, but we will want everyone back on board by 10:00 p.m.

Very early the next morning, will depart for our next stop, the island of Kythira, located beyond the southern terminus of the peninsula.

NIGHT: Aboard *Harmony V*, Monemvasia and at sea

May 30, Day 6: Morning cruising to Kythira; nighttime cruising to Pylos. Waking up this morning, we will find ourselves at sea rounding the southernmost tip of the Peloponnese. Emerging on deck, we may sight Cory's (Scopoli's) and Yelkouan shearwaters around the boat along with the ever-present Yellow-legged Gulls.

Our destination for the day is the island of Kythira, situated in the Mediterranean a short distance to the south of the mainland. Unlike better known Greek islands such as Crete, Rhodes, Santorini, Mikonos, and others, Kythira exists in comparative seclusion, tucked away at the bottom of the Peloponnesian Peninsula. This is an island frequented mainly by "locals" and has escaped the transformations that result as a consequence of mass tourism.

We will arrive in the vicinity of the island around 8:00 a.m. Prior to entering the harbor, we'll deviate to an islet a short distance to the south where Eleonora's Falcons reside during the summer. Much of the falcons' prey base consists of birds and dragonflies, and the falcons, spectacular fliers and adept aerial hunters, are constantly on the watch for their unsuspecting prey as they hunt over open water as well as over the nearby interior of Kythira. We'll loop around the island a time or two before heading into the attractive harbor.

Given its location in the Mediterranean, Kythira was occupied at one time or another by many of history's powerful empires, including Spartans and Athenians in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E. followed by the Romans, and, much later, by invading armies of the crusades, and ultimately the Venetians. The island fell under Greek control in 1864. The lack of a quality deep water port limited the viability of the island in terms of its ability to function as a major center of trade or government. In ancient times, the island capital, Chora, held a particularly devout cult of Aphrodite.

Kythira offers a dynamic landscape marked by a scalloped coastline, beautiful beaches, seaside cliffs, and rocky, rolling hills. The villages and towns dotting the island are home to centuries-old forts and cathedrals. Our activities will include a morning trip into the interior for a walk in a quaint village and a birding stop or two, an afternoon swim off an inviting beach, and a late-afternoon trip into Chora. Chora, the very small capital of the island (600 people) epitomizes quaintness with its traditionally narrow streets and old churches. The Venetian fort that dominates the skyline has existed for many centuries and provides an interesting and picturesque attraction. There is an archaeological museum here as well.

We emphasize that Kythira presents the best opportunity of the trip for swimming. Our ship will tie up in Kapsali Bay adjacent to a sandy beach from which anyone interested in getting into the water can indeed experience the pleasures of a dip in the Med.

After dinner in the harbor, *Harmony V* will set a course to the northwest and we will find ourselves on the open sea heading toward our next destination: sandy Pylos.

NIGHT: Aboard *Harmony V*, at sea

May 31, Day 7: Pylos: (Dinari Lagoon, Nestor's Palace); afternoon cruising to Katakolo. We will arrive early this morning in Pylos, a picture-perfect seaside town on the southwest corner of the Peloponnese. It is small wonder why the ancient Greeks, and anyone else who has ever been there, were so attracted to Pylos. The town sits on the south side of stately Navarino Bay and is nestled between the waterfront and hills of limestone rising fairly abruptly to the rear. The bay, meanwhile, is undeniably one of Greece's most beautiful locations, and is formed as a result of an already protected circular scallop in the coastline further guarded by lengthy Sphacteria Island extending down from the north. An opening at the bay's southwest corner provides its only access to the open sea.

Navarino Bay is also the site of two famous battles between the Spartans and Athenians during the Peloponnesian conflict. At the battle of Pylos, and subsequent battle of Sphacteria in 425 B.C.E., Athenian soldiers scored successive defeats of Spartan armies for control of the bay. The capture of hundreds of Spartan soldiers on Sphacteria led to the Peace of Nicias in 421 B.C.E. In 1827 a fleet of Venetians and other city states defeated an Ottoman fleet in one of the most important naval battles in history. This defeat led to the independence of Greece, which occurred in 1829.

An early disembarkation (7:00) will be offered for those interested in birding this morning. North of Pylos, Dinari Lagoon is a wildlife preserve consisting of brackish ponds, salt pans, and a large lake that attracts an array of migrating shorebirds and wading birds. The distance from the ship to the preserve is short and we will want to arrive early to take advantage of the cool morning temperatures. There is



Pylos © Shutterstock

potential for finding a high diversity of birds, but our success will depend on water levels. The road to the lagoon wraps around the north side of Navarino Bay and runs adjacent to small pastures dotted with a mixture of introduced and native grasses and plants. This is perfect habitat for ground-loving landbirds. Eastern Olivaceous

Warbler, Crested Lark and Corn Bunting may prove reasonably common, but we'll also watch for migrating European Bee-eater, Western Yellow wagtail and Woodchat Shrike.



Eurasian Hoopoe © Super Prin/shutterstock

A variety of shorebirds are possible if water conditions are right. Historically, Dinari Lagoon was located on a rich river delta. Large irrigation projects of questionable wisdom were introduced in the twentieth century which inevitably led to the wetlands being deprived of their former water supply. The establishment of the preserve allowed for conservation voices to be heard so that the wetlands are at least flooded at different times during the year to provide food and shelter for migrating birds. A collection of herons and egrets are possible, including Gray Heron, Black-crowned Night-Heron, and Little Egret, while a number of shorebird species are regular at this time of year as well. Among the possibilities are Black-winged Stilt, Little Ringed and Common

Ringed plovers, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, and Common and Spotted redshanks. Other possibilities include Common House-Martin, Red-rumped Swallow, and Common Kingfisher.

Following our birding activities, we'll continue up the road to Nestor's Palace. Those opting to forego the morning birding will depart *Harmony V* later and will join us at the archaeological site.

The remains of Nestor's Palace occupy a scenic hilltop setting north of Pylos. Though most of the palace is long gone, the foundation remains surprisingly intact and the entire site is covered by a tastefully designed overhang structure to prevent further damage from the elements. Fine views of the sea are had from the western side of the palace complex and extensive olive groves throughout the area lend a pastoral ambience to the setting.

We know about old king Nestor thanks to Homer, who wrote of him in the *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Nestor was an Argonaut king who, along with his sons Antilochus and Thrasymedes fought on the side of the Greeks during the Trojan War. He was perhaps best known for giving advice to younger warriors and for his attempts to mediate differences between Agamemnon and Achilles at a time when the tide of war had turned against the Greeks.

The palace at Pylos belonged to Nestor and was discovered in 1939 by the American archaeologist Carl Blegen. Highlights include the well-preserved royal apartments and a bathtub that archaeologists have speculated belonged to the old king himself. The palace, with its central courtyard, was originally two stories high and richly decorated with frescoes.

We will return to the ship in time for lunch. In the afternoon, we will depart Pylos for Katakolo, gateway to Olympia.

NIGHT: Aboard *Harmony V*, at sea

June 1, Day 8: Day at Olympia (archaeological site and museums; overland transfer to Patras; cruising to Itea. We will disembark the ship around 7:00 a.m. in the port town of Katakolo and travel by bus to Olympia, one of the most famous and important sites in the ancient world. The drive should take about 40 minutes. We will dedicate most of the day to exploring this remarkable site and its museums. In the late afternoon we will travel north to Patras and reboard *Harmony V*.

Olympia is revered as the birthplace of the Olympic Games. In the ancient Greek world, it was also the greatest Pan-Hellenic sanctuary for the worship of Zeus. Although the first recorded Olympics took place in 776 B.C.E., evidence indicates that some type of games or athletic contests were held as early as Mycenaean times (eleventh and twelfth centuries B.C.E.). Remarkably, from 776 on, the games were held uninterrupted for the next 1,000 years. From their inception as a one-day event attended only by Greek athletes, the games evolved to a multi-day endeavor that eventually included Roman athletes. So important were the games that their arrival, every four years, heralded the cessation of hostilities between warring parties throughout ancient Greece.

Of the many temples constructed here from the seventh through third centuries B.C.E., the magnificent temple of Zeus stood without peer. As the most powerful of all Olympian gods, Zeus was revered throughout the Greek world. In the aftermath of battles, men from all over Greece made the journey to Olympia to honor the great Zeus, depositing innumerable weapons, armor, tools, and figurines as tribute.

Olympia persisted well into Roman times until its demise in the third century C.E. when fires, earthquakes, and invading tribes from the north left the ancient site in ruins. Massive flooding of the Alpheios River eventually covered the site with mud. From 1875 onward, excavation work, spearheaded primarily by the German government, revealed the fantastic treasures from antiquity that sit today in the marvelous archaeological museum.

We will arrive at the site when it opens and embark on a morning-long interpretive tour. Professional local guides will identify and discuss the most important sites within the ruins complex including:

- Temple of Hera
- Temple of Zeus
- Philippeion – circular memorial of Ionic columns honoring the family of Alexander the Great
- Leonidaion – lodging place for the athletes who participated in the games



Ruins of Olympia © Shutterstock

The most thrilling site at Olympia is the stadium, which looks much like it did more than 2,000 years ago. Gazing at the elongated construction, it is easy to imagine the slopes above the field filled with 45,000 spectators who had traveled from all over the ancient world to see the games. At times those spectators included Aristotle and Plato. They waited in anticipation for the athletes, all Greeks, to walk onto the field and for the competitions to begin.

Like the other sites we've visited to this point, Olympia sits in a natural setting. Pine trees and an abundance of other vegetation offer a sanctuary of their own for birds. We may interrupt the historical interpretation from time to time to point out birds as they appear. Common Buzzards and Eurasian Kestrels hunt over the surrounding hills and are often sighted from the ancient stadium. Long-tailed and Eurasian Blue tits and European Goldfinch and European Greenfinch are occasionally found in the trees right around the ruins, and migrants such as European Pied Flycatcher and Willow Warbler may be found in areas of denser vegetation.

The museum located on the site is one of the most beautiful museums in all of Greece. It is filled with treasures unearthed from the mud that covered Olympia after a flood in about 400 C.E. These treasures include the largest collection in the world of ancient armaments, vases, pottery, friezes, and statues. These objects are beautifully displayed and we will spend the last part of the morning wandering among the rooms and chambers admiring the extraordinary artifacts. Among the many astonishing exhibits are the bronze helmet of Miltiades, worn by the Greek general at Marathon in his victory over the Persians at Marathon in 490 B.C.E.; and the statuary from the east and west pediments of the temple of Zeus.

In exquisite design, the pediments (all carved in Parian marble) tell two mythical stories. The scene from the temple's east pediment tells of the mythical chariot race between Oinomaos, king of Pisa, and the young hero Pelops, that would determine whether Pelops would marry the king's daughter and fulfill the prophecy of killing the king if he won. The west pediment features a wilder scene in which drunken centaurs ruined the wedding feast of Peirithous, king of the Lapiths, and Deidameia.

Following lunch in the town of Olympia, we'll visit the museum of the History of the Olympic Games of Antiquity. Unlike the main archaeological museum, this building houses statuary and a host of artifacts specifically related to the ancient Olympic Games. Moving from room to room we'll be able to trace the evolution of the Olympics from its earliest years up to the time of the Romans, when the emperor Theodosius ended the games because he saw them as an act of paganism.

In the late afternoon, we will travel overland to Patras on the north coast of the peninsula, where we will reboard *Harmony V* and depart for Itea in the Gulf of Corinth.

NIGHT: Aboard *Harmony V*, at sea/Itea

June 2, Day 9: Morning excursion to Delphi (archaeological site and museum); cruising to Corinth; Canal of Corinth; cruising to Aegina. Scenic Itea is situated on the Greek mainland at the midway point of the Gulf of Corinth. It is located at the mouth of a fertile plain at an especially deep indentation of the Gulf. Soaring cliffs of limestone rise behind the town. Despite its picturesque coastal location, Itea is best known as the gateway to Delphi, one of the most revered sites from the ancient world. We will disembark the ship early this morning and proceed to the ruins complex.

Unlike other archaeological sites in Greece, Delphi is built on the side of a mountain. First time visitors are awed as much for the stunning natural beauty that surrounds the ruins as for the ancient buildings themselves. Behind the site, the bare limestone cliffs of the Phaidriades thrust several thousand feet up, towering over the archaeological site and museum, while to the south runs a deep and fertile river valley. The panoramic views from the road are truly inspiring.

In its prime, Delphi was revered for its wealth and reputation, attributes which grew from the site's location as hosting the most important oracle in the classical world. Indeed, because everything in Greece is connected to mythology, Delphi became the premier site for the worship of the god Apollo. Briefly, after he slew the Python, a female serpent who guarded the spring of Kassotis, Apollo, in an effort to redeem himself, built the first temple on the site and gave voice to the legendary oracle. The oracle had the ability to prophecy the future and give advice. Visitors from across the Greek world traveled here to consult with the oracle, and responded by offering thanks to Apollo in the form of treasure.



Ruins of Delphi © Variety Cruises

As a primary means for paying homage to the great god, every four years, starting in 586 B.C.E., athletes from all over the Greek world competed in the Pythian Games. These games were one of the four Pan-Hellenic games that were the precursors of the modern Olympics, although they never achieved the same exalted level as the games at Olympia.

The history of Delphi is both rich and complicated. At the center of attention of so many regional powers, the site was the subject of conquest and plunder on many occasions. What remains today is a well-preserved ruins complex that for many visitors is the highlight of the sites of ancient Greece.



Blue Rock-Thrush © Shutterstock

We will have a full morning to walk around the ruins complex and visit the adjoining museum. Some of the standout sites are the Sanctuary of Athena Pronaia, the Gymnasium, the Temple of Apollo, the Treasuries (built by various Greek city states to commemorate victories), and the stadium.

The birding possibilities at Delphi are compelling. Rock Nuthatches and Blue Rock Thrushes inhabit the remains of the ancient buildings, their calls heard all over the archaeological site. The heavily wooded periphery allows birds to enter the ruins complex. Cirl and Rock buntings are all

possible along with European Robin, Red-rumped Swallow, Black-eared Wheatear, and Subalpine and Sardinian warblers.

Crag Martins and Pallid Swifts, two species of localized occurrence in southern Europe, are found here as well. Short-toed Snake-Eagles and Eurasian Kestels are occasionally seen in the morning hours soaring over the high cliffs of the Phaidriades.

After leaving the museum, we will return to Itea, reboard *Harmony V* and proceed east to the head of the Gulf of Corinth. At the town of Korinthos we'll transit the Canal of Corinth, a nearly 4-mile cut through the Isthmus of Corinth that connects the Gulf of Corinth with the Saronic Gulf. The remarkable engineering accomplishment was achieved between 1881 and 1893.

Our final act for the day will be a late afternoon cruise to the island of Aegina where we'll spend the night. After a final dinner on board the ship, participants may choose to disembark and stroll around the charming port town.

NIGHT: Aboard *Harmony V*, Aegina

June 3, Day 10: Early morning cruise to Piraeus; disembarkation; transfer to airport for departing flights.

This morning marks the conclusion of our birds and history cruise. *Harmony V* will depart Aegina early this morning for the 17-mile transit to Piraeus. We have scheduled an arrival in port at 7:00 a.m. followed immediately by disembarkation. All participants departing Greece today will be transferred to the Athens International Airport (airport code ATH) for flights home. **Please do not schedule your flight to depart prior to 12:00 p.m.**

Those continuing on the Athens Extension will be met by our ground agents upon disembarkation.

EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS: Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive in Athens early or extend your stay in Greece, please contact the VENT office at least two months prior to your departure date. We can make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.



M/Y Harmony V © Variety Cruises

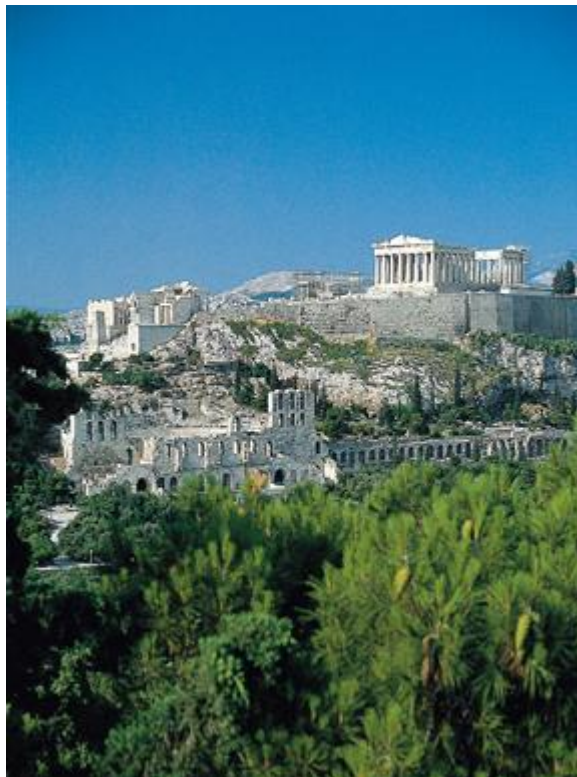
GREECE: ATHENS EXTENSION

JUNE 3–7, 2022

This optional extension to Greece's capital city provides an excellent complement to our ship-based exploration of the Peloponnese. While Athens today is clearly Greece's largest and most important city, it was also the wealthiest and most influential city state in Classical times (fifth-fourth centuries B.C.E.). Our program combines visits to two of the country's most revered archaeological sites and other historical locations with several birding field trips to destinations outside of the city.

For first time visitors, a trip to Athens is highlighted by the pilgrimage to the Acropolis, the most instantly recognizable landmark in Greece. We will spend our first afternoon together at the ancient hilltop citadel meandering among the remains of the magnificent structures for which the site is so justly famous. A guided interpretive walk will focus on the timeless monuments constructed to honor the Olympian gods worshipped by the ancient Greeks. Our tour will also incorporate a visit to the Theater of Dionysus Eleutheris, which is considered the first theater in Greece. On another day we'll make our way to the Agora, the primary site of public assembly in ancient Athens and the center of administrative, judicial, and social activity during the Classical era, including during the times of Socrates and Plato.

Complementing our focus on the iconic historical sites, we'll visit a variety of habitats and ecosystems north and east of the city in pursuit of specialty nesting birds and late-season migrants. We will head to the slopes of Mount Hymettus, a 3,000 ft. limestone massif offering superb views of the Athens city center as well as habitat for nesting dry-country birds. Among the many possible species we'll seek are an array of birds with limited ranges in far southeastern Europe including Rueppell's Warbler; Woodchat Shrike; Black-eared Wheatear and many others. We'll travel to the low-lying coastal community of Marathon to search for waterbirds and dry-country landbirds. Ferruginous Duck, Little Egret, Short-toed Snake-Eagle, Gray Heron, Common Buzzard, Eurasian Kestrel, Black-winged Stilt, Blue Rock-Thrush, and Cretzchmar's and Black-headed buntings are all prized species that occur in the region. An added bonus is a visit to the famous battlefield where the Athenian army defeated the Persians at the Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C.E.



Acropolis, Athens © Variety Cruises

On still another day, our time in the field blends birding and history along the east and south coast of Attica. At Vravrona we'll view the Temple of Artemis, seeking special birds such as Squacco Heron, Long-legged Buzzard, European Turtle-Dove, Red-rumped Swallow, and Eastern Olivaceous Warbler among others, while a day-ending trip to Cape Sounio features the dramatic Temple of Poseidon and chances for Eleonora's Falcon and Alpine Swift.

June 3, Day 1: Travel from Piraeus to Cape Sounio; afternoon at Vravrona (Brauron) archaeological site.

For travelers joining the Athens Pre-trip only:

Those not taking the cruise but joining the short land-based tour only, will be picked up at the hotel *The Alex* in Piraeus, the port town of Athens, on the morning of June 4. Those joining only the land tour will need to depart the USA on June 2 for flights bound for Athens (airport code ATH), arriving on the morning of June 3. Upon arrival, you will be met outside the baggage claim area by a representative of our ground agent and transferred to the hotel *The Alex* in Piraeus, where a room will be reserved in your name. Upon check-in you will have the remainder of the day and evening for rest and relaxation following the long international flight. **NOTE:** Because your tour leaders and many of the other tour participants will not be arriving in Piraeus until early on June 4, there will be no group activities planned for June 3. As such, the transfer from the airport to the hotel, and reservations at *The Alex* on June 3 are not included in the tour fee, with the cost (approximately \$395) added to your invoice. Also note, you are on your own for all meals until the group lunch on June 4.

For travelers continuing from the cruise: Greece: A Circumnavigation of the Peloponnese:

The *Harmony V* will arrive in Piraeus this morning around 7:00 a.m. following a very early departure from Aegina. Disembarkation will occur by 8:00 a.m. at which time we will be met by our local guide and board a bus to meet the rest of the group at a nearby hotel before working our way south.

Our first day in the greater Athens area offers a blend of birding and historical activities along the coast of Attica from Cape Sounio to Vravrona. Highlights include coastal scenery, birding, and visits to the beautiful Temple of Poseidon at Cape Sounio and the Sanctuary of Artemis at Vravrona.



Temple of Poseidon, Cape Sounio © Shutterstock

To reach Cape Sounio, we will travel south from Piraeus along the west side of the Attica Peninsula for a morning of birding and sightseeing around the archaeological site.

Marking the southern tip of mainland Greece, Cape Sounio is a limestone promontory that affords dramatic views of the Aegean Sea sprawling away to the south, east, and west. The scenery here is beautiful and evokes images of the ancient past, of a time when these same waters were plied by fishermen, traders, and war ships of the Athenian navy. In addition to its breathtaking vistas, the chief attraction at Cape Sounio is the Temple of Poseidon, a beautiful colonnaded marble structure erected in Classical times to honor Poseidon, the god of the sea.

We will take time to walk around the cliff tops and explore the archaeological site. One of the more curious attractions here is the signature of Lord Byron, of English poetry fame, who traveled here in 1810-1811 and inscribed his signature into the base of one of the columns.

Birds are here as well and we will stay alert for anything that might come our way. Chukars were introduced here years ago and can be common, while Common and Pallid swifts course over the cliff tops. Even Peregrine and Eleonora's falcons are possible.

In the late morning we will travel up the eastern side of the Attica Peninsula to the community of Vravrona where we will have lunch at a wonderful outdoor restaurant featuring fresh seafood and pleasing sea views. We will spend part of the afternoon visiting the nearby archaeological site.

Vravrona, perhaps better known as Brauron, is an ancient and sacred site constructed in honor of Artemis, goddess of the hunt, wilderness, childbirth, and virginity. Although the present day archaeological site was inhabited as early as Mycenaean times, it wasn't until the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E. that it reached its peak as a significant sanctuary for worship of fertility and childbearing. The original temple of Artemis was destroyed by the Persians in 480 B.C.E., but a later, and likely inferior, temple was constructed in 420 B.C.E., the platform of which is still easily visible.

Centered on the Sanctuary of Artemis, this very attractive site is remarkable in at least one way in that it receives a fraction of the visitation of Greece's larger and historically more important places. Still, Brauron is known for several significant structures including the remains of the temple; the stoa, which still partly stands; a dining room; and an unusual stone bridge. The archaeological museum, located nearby, contains an extensive and important collection of votive offerings and dedication objects from the site throughout its period of use.

Brauron sits amid open surroundings seemingly far from the large metropolis of Athens. An abundance of native vegetation supports a number of breeding species. Among the birds possible here are Long-legged Buzzard, Short-toed Snake-Eagle, Eurasian Moorhen, Red-rumped Swallow, Pallid Swift, Cetti's and Eastern Olivaceous warblers, Eurasian Penduline-Tit, European Goldfinch, and Black headed Bunting among many others.

In the last afternoon we will make the one-hour drive to our hotel, located in Athens near the Acropolis. Dinner will be in the open-air restaurant atop the hotel.

NIGHT: Hotel Divani Acropolis, Athens

June 4, Day 2: Morning at Mount Hymettus; afternoon at the Acropolis & Theater of Dionysus. This day in Athens will be rewarding for its immersion into Greek birding and history. Our day will begin on the east side of the city with a birding excursion to Mount Hymettus, while the afternoon will be dedicated exclusively to a visit to the venerable Acropolis.

Despite the sprawl of the greater Athens metropolitan area, there are some excellent natural areas close to the city center that offer high quality birding. One of these is Mount Hymettus.

Covering 20,000 acres, Hymettus is a long and narrow ridge of a mountain that is a favored destination for a variety of recreationalists and outdoor enthusiasts. This is largely due to the fact that it lies within easy reach of the city center, but it is also the opportunity to experience a variety of terrain, abundance of scenic beauty, and fabulous panoramic views of the Greek capital that endear it to so many. With its summit reaching 3,200 feet, Hymettus is the second highest mountain in the Athens area after Mt. Parnitha. Of interest to birders is the opportunity to experience an array of distinct habitat-types in such a relatively small area. A paved road runs the length of the mountain from the base to near the top while a system of foot and bike trails offers even greater access.

We will depart the hotel this morning for a half-day field trip to Mount Hymettus. This excursion promises superb chances for finding a suite of permanent and seasonal resident species. Our strategy for birding the mountain will be determined in the morning, but one approach will be to start part way up the road in the Kesariani area where we can walk and bird in a mosaic of pine and cypress forest, olive orchard, and Mediterranean shrub. Making our way towards the top of the mountain, the landscape becomes steep and rocky, and we'll experience a vegetation zone where a variety of aromatic plants such as thyme and oregano occur.

The amount of time we actually spend at the higher elevation will depend on weather conditions and the quality of the birding, but an enticing collection of avian possibilities means that we may well spend most of the morning up here. Among the species that occur here are Chukar; Common and Long-legged buzzards; Red-rumped Swallow; Alpine, Pallid, and Common swifts; Rueppell's, Eastern Orphee, and Subalpine warblers; Sombre and Great tits; European Serin; and Cretzschmar's and Cirl buntings. Other possibilities include are Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Spotted Flycatcher, and Peregrine Falcon.



Ruppell's Warbler © Shutterstock

After a tasty lunch in Athens and an afternoon break at the hotel, we will spend the latter part of the day at the famed Acropolis, the landmark that for many is the face of Greece. Most likely we will make the short walk to the entrance gate where our local guide, along with Dr. Woodruff, will lead an interpretive tour of Greece's most famous and beloved archaeological site.

Although the term Acropolis literally means fortified height, or fortified raised citadel of an ancient Greek city, the Acropolis of Athens is so monumental, and so well known the world over, that its name carries a singularity that requires no further explanation. Rising nearly 500 feet above sea level and flat topped, with commanding views in all directions, it is small wonder that the Greeks located their iconic monuments to the gods here.

Archaeological evidence indicates that the site was inhabited remarkably early, by the sixth millennium B.C.E., but it wasn't until Mycenaean times (1600-1100 B.C.E.) that the first structures of considerable size were erected, though only scant evidence of the early buildings remains. Little is known of what the Acropolis looked like until the arrival of the Archaic period (seventh-sixth centuries B.C.E.). This was a time of unrest for the Athens city state as political instability, marked by uprisings and coups, allowed for control of the region to change hands on a number of occasions. A series of temples was built at the site, one after another through the period, and it is likely that most of these temples were dismantled as newer, more grandiose designs took their place.

The late sixth century marks the start of the Classical period, a time when the last Athenian tyrant was deposed and Greek culture began to flourish. Following the Greek victory over the Persians at Marathon in 490 B.C.E., the first Parthenon was partially constructed on the site before the Persians returned in 480 B.C.E., overran much of Greece, and sacked and burned the Acropolis.

Under the leadership of Pericles during the Golden Age of Athens (460-430 B.C.E.), the hilltop was cleared of debris, the temples rebuilt, and the Acropolis, as we know it today, took its final shape. Ictinus and Callicrates, two of the best known architects from the time, along with the great sculptor Phidias, designed and shaped the temples and their friezes using the beautiful Pentelic and Parian marbles that we identify so readily with the gleaming temples and statuary from the Classical period. While the main buildings are in various stages of decay and restoration, all are protected by law. We will hear of the history of the construction of the buildings as they relate to the history of the period and the Olympian gods to whom they were dedicated. Meandering among the columns and pediments that remain as vestiges from antiquity allows one to fully appreciate the creative power of the ancient Greeks.



Parthenon, Athens © Shutterstock

The four structures that comprised the bulk of the Acropolis were the Parthenon, Athena Nike, Propylae, and Erechtheum, constructed in that order. In their time, the collective sight of the buildings of the Acropolis must have been breathtaking, yet today, without question, it is the Parthenon, with its massive foundation and towering Doric columns that remains the enduring emblem of Athenian democracy. Remarkably, the Acropolis is a good place to view Alpine and Common swifts in the late afternoon before they return to night roosts within the ruins complex.

Flanking the south face, we will dedicate an hour or so to visiting the ancient theater of Dionysus Eleutheris. Considered the oldest theater in Greece, it is believed constructed around 500 B.C.E. and dedicated to Dionysus, the god of wine, festival, and fertility. The theater is known to have hosted dramas and tragedies from the leading Greek playwrights of fifth century Athens, including Sophocles, Euripides, and Aeschylus.

NIGHT: Divani Hotel Acropolis, Athens

June 5, Day 3: Schinias National Park and Marathon; late afternoon at the Agora of Athens. This morning we will depart the hotel for Marathon, located approximately 26-miles to the northeast of Athens. Our destination is Schinias National Park, a large area of wetlands, canals, ditches, watery impoundments, and rocky hillsides where a variety of waterbirds and landbirds occur. The numbers of birds and diversity of species is always difficult to predict at this site as everything depends on the amount of water present.

The centerpiece of the park is, believe it or not, the Olympic Rowing Club, situated on the coastal plain east of Marathon. Designed for the rowing activities during the 2004 Summer Olympics, the club provides an abundance of open water surrounded by lush grasses, and, farther out, dry scrubland and marsh. Improbable as it may seem, this area has become a premier birding site in the Athens area. We may find a variety of nesting waterbirds as well as some late migrants including Gray Heron, Squacco Heron, Little Egret, Black-winged Stilt, Little Ringed Plover, Common Sandpiper, Pallid Swift, and Great Reed-Warbler. Remarkably, this is also an excellent location to see Ferruginous Duck, a species that has declined precipitously across southeastern Europe.

Lying nearby, a diversity of other habitats including agricultural lands, limestone hills, and reed beds may hold a fine variety of other species including Short-toed Snake-Eagle, Common Buzzard, Western Marsh-Harrier, Eurasian Kestrel, Little Owl, Common Kingfisher, Woodchat Shrike, Blue Rock-Thrush, Crested Lark, Western Yellow (Black-headed) Wagtail, and Black-headed Bunting.



Black-headed Bunting © Shutterstock

Later in the morning, we will stop at the site of the great Battle of Marathon, where an army of 10,000 hoplite warriors, under the command of Miltiades, decisively defeated an army of 20,000 Persians under the rule of king Darius the Great. In the aftermath of victory was born the marathon. According to the often-recited legend, the Athenian messenger, Pheidippides, ran the entire 26 miles back to Athens without stopping to inform the assembly of the sensational victory, before promptly dropping dead. Though the legend is much in doubt among historians, it is a great story that ultimately led to the marathon's inclusion as an event in the first modern Olympics in 1896. The chief sight here is the large oblong tumulus that houses the remains of the Greek soldiers who perished during the conflict.

After lunch we will return to Athens for a visit to the famed ancient Agora of Athens, situated northwest of the Acropolis.

A central component to the Greek city state, the agora, or "public assembly place," appeared possibly as early as 900 B.C.E. The agora was the place where people gathered to hear public announcements by a king or council, or for men to conduct military business. In Athens, the agora actually served as a marketplace and a place of residence before these practices were ended in the sixth century B.C.E.



Temple of Hephaestus, Ancient Agora, Athens © Shutterstock

It was during the Golden Age, under Pericles, when the agora reached its zenith, reflecting the maturation of Athenian democracy and the cultural emphasis on government, politics, debate, current events, and philosophy. It was during this period when the site was beautified with trees, fountains, an advanced drainage system, and temples of Pentelic marble erected in honor of the Olympian gods. We will have the late afternoon to explore the grounds with our local guide, who will provide interpretation of the rich historical and cultural significance of the site.

For many, the highlight is seeing the Temple of Hephaestus (Hephaestion). One of the largest and best preserved of ancient Greek temples, this structure was built to honor Hephaestus (god of metal working) and Athena Ergane (goddess of pottery and crafts). It was designed of Pentellic marble and supported by a network of 34 fluted colonnades in the conservative Doric style. This site is decorated with the ruins of other buildings, some remarkably intact, that were constructed for administrative or legal purposes or to honor other gods of the ancient Greek tradition.

The trees and gardens adorning the property are the continuance of a tradition established more than 2,500 years ago. Here, in this lush sanctuary it is easy to imagine oneself walking in the footsteps of Socrates and Plato. It is also possible to see birds here, and our tour of the archaeological site is paced slow enough to allow ourselves the distraction of birding the grounds. As the city around us holds little sanctuary for migrating birds, the grounds of the Agora are an oasis of sorts where almost anything is possible. A short list of species we might turn up includes Little Owl, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Eurasian Jay, Spotted Flycatcher, Common House-Martin, Eurasian Hoopoe, Eurasian Blackbird, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Sardinian Warbler, lackcap, European Greenfinch, and European Goldfinch.

Dinner tonight will be at an open-air restaurant offering fine views of the Acropolis.

NIGHT: Divani Hotel Acropolis, Athens

June 6, Day 4: Spata Fields and Mount Parnitha. Our final day in Greece will be dedicated entirely to birding. By this time in the season, the spring migratory period will have ended, the breeding birds are all on territory and summer is fast approaching. Having experienced numerous historical and cultural highlights, our last day in Greece will be dedicated purely to birding and natural history. We have a wonderful day in store sure to produce a variety of species and habitat-types not previously encountered. We'll begin with a visit to the Spata fields, northeast of Athens, before we continue to the cooler heights of Mt. Parnitha, due north of the city.

On the east side of Athens, the small community of Spata anchors a rural zone of fields, grasslands, and scattered woodland. Due to its relative close proximity to the airport, the area is precluded from development in perpetuity in order to keep the air traffic flights paths clear. Thus exists a significant tract of open space adjacent to Greece's largest metropolitan area. Driving roads through pastures and fields, past old homesteads, and irrigation ditches, we are likely to encounter a suite of alluring resident birds. Common Buzzard, European Turtle-Dove, Little Owl, Great-spotted Cuckoo, Woodchat Shrike, Zitting Cisticola, and Corn and Black-headed buntings are all possible this morning. We'll place special emphasis on locating Black-headed Bunting in particular, a specialty species of

of southeastern Europe. Featuring a black helmet-like head pattern, glowing yellow breast and nape, rust back, and gray wings, these gorgeous birds may often be seen perched atop trees and bushes through the morning hours. From Spata, we'll continue to Mt. Parnitha, a national park situated 18 miles north of Athens.

At over 4,600 feet, Parnitha is the highest mountain in the Attica region of Greece. It is a rugged and scenic landscape characterized by distinct habitat types ranging from open, rocky slopes to dense stands of Aleppo Pine, scrub hills, and grassy swales. Pockets of stately Greek Fir occur near the summit. We will spend the remainder of the day exploring birding sites from middle elevation up to the summit, known as Karavola. Our trip up Parnitha presents a variety of benefits, not least of which is the opportunity to escape the warm lowlands for the cooler temperatures of the mountains. Another benefit of our time here is the chance to see a suite of birds we will not likely have seen during the cruise. Among more widespread species such as Common Buzzard, Eurasian Kestrel, Eurasian Jay, Eurasian Magpie, and European Goldfinch, we'll seek are less common birds like Eurasian Honey-Buzzard, Red-backed Shrike, Woodlark, Northern and Black-eared wheatears, Coal and Sombre tits, Common Firecrest, Short-toed Treecreeper, Common Chaffinch, Eurasian Linnet, and Eurasian Serin. Here too are Pallid Swift, Common Raven, European Robin, European Stonechat, and Cirl Bunting. Parnitha also yields another chance to see Short-toed Snake-Eagle and Cretzschmar's Bunting, the latter undergoing apparent decline in southern Greece.

We will return to Athens late in the afternoon. This evening we'll gather atop the hotel for a final field checklist session and farewell dinner.

NIGHT: Divani Hotel Acropolis, Athens

June 7, Day 5: Transfer to airport for departing flights. All participants departing Greece today will be transferred to the Athens International Airport (airport code ATH) for flights home. Flights can be scheduled for any time today.

TOUR SIZE: We have chartered the 49-passenger *Harmony V* exclusively for VENT travelers; the **Circumnavigation of the Peloponnese** cruise will be limited to 46 participants; the **Athens Extension** is limited to 20 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: **Victor Emanuel, Barry Lyon** and **Dr. Paul Woodruff** will lead the cruise. Dr. Woodruff will serve as a staff expert on the history of ancient Greece. **Victor Emmanuel** and **Barry Lyon** will lead the extension.



Victor Emanuel started birding in Texas 71 years ago at the age of eight. His travels have taken him to all the continents, with his areas of concentration being Texas, Arizona, Mexico, Panama, and Peru. He is the founder and compiler for 50 years of the record-breaking Freeport Christmas Bird Count and served a term as president of the Texas Ornithological Society. Birds and natural history have been a major focus throughout his life. He derives great pleasure from seeing and hearing birds, and sharing with others these avian sights and sounds, both the common ones and the more unusual ones. He initiated the first birding camps for young people and considers that one of his greatest achievements. Victor holds a B.A. in zoology and botany from the University of Texas and an M.A. in government from Harvard. In 1993, he was the recipient of the Roger Tory Peterson Excellence in Birding Award, given by the Houston Audubon Society in recognition of a lifetime of dedication to careful observation, education, and addition to the body of avian knowledge. In 2004, he received the Roger Tory Peterson Award from the American Birding Association, and the Arthur A. Allen Award from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. He is a past board member of the Nature Conservancy of Texas, the National Audubon Society, the American Bird Conservancy, and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. In May 2017, the University of Texas Press published his memoir, *One More Warbler, A Life with Birds*.



Barry Lyon's passion for the outdoors and birding has its roots in his childhood in southern California. During his teenage years, he attended several VENT/ABA youth birding camps, which ultimately led to his future involvement with Victor Emanuel Nature Tours. He holds a B.A. from the University of Arizona at Tucson where he studied history and political science, with an emphasis on environment and development politics. Barry joined the VENT team as a tour leader in 1995 and embarked on a travel-based career that has taken him to an array of worldwide destinations. He has lived in Austin, Texas since 2004 when he joined our office staff as an assistant to company president Victor Emanuel. In 2014 he was named Chief Operating Officer (COO), reflecting his increased experience and responsibilities. These days, his work is geared primarily toward the company's business side and management, although he continues to lead a few tours annually. Barry's background and his knowledge of natural history have provided him with a strong interest in conservation. He is a former board member and past president of Travis Audubon Society, which emphasizes conservation through birding and outdoor education for children. Barry resides in South Austin with his wife, Brooke Smith.



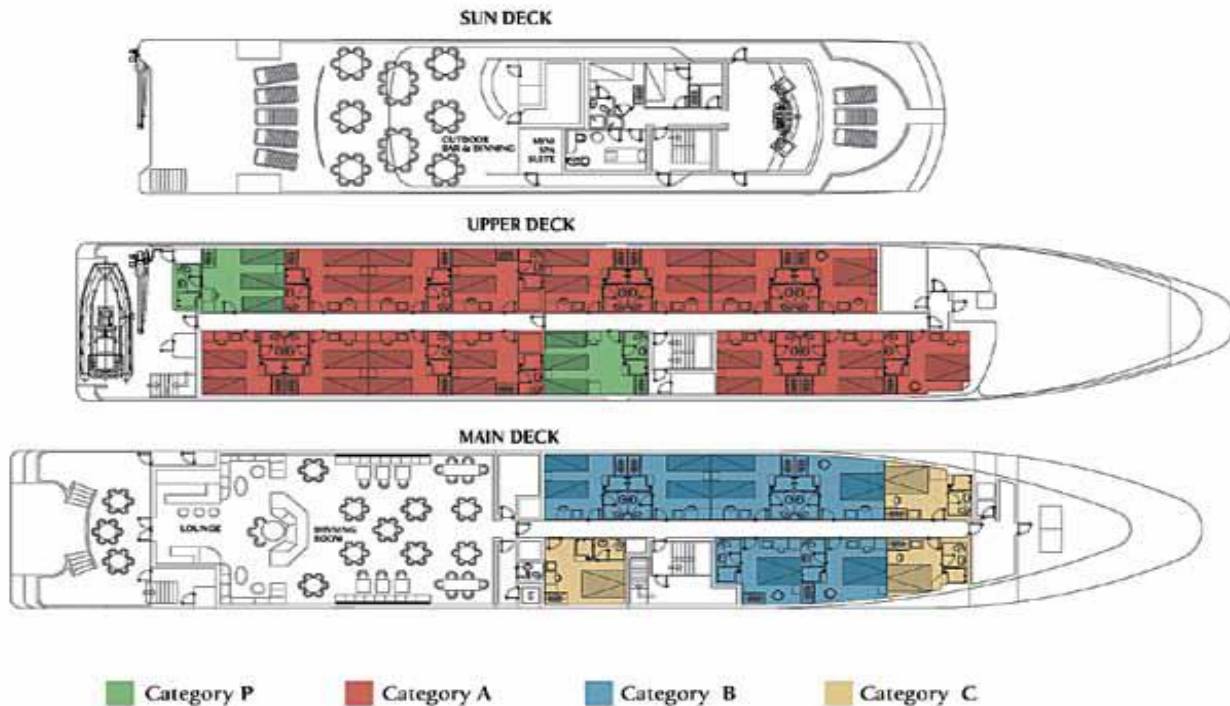
Paul Woodruff is an experienced guide to the intellectual landscape of ancient Greece. He has published translations of works by the philosopher Plato, the historian Thucydides, and the playwrights Sophocles and Euripides. He has written three books that present ancient Greek ideas for modern use—*Reverence: Renewing a Forgotten Virtue* (2001), *First Democracy: The Challenge of an Ancient Idea* (2005), and *The Ajax Dilemma: Justice and Fairness in Rewards*. His latest manuscript, on education for leadership, is called *The Garden of Leaders*. He teaches philosophy and classics at the University of Texas at Austin.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: Quoted prices are per person based on double occupancy. All cabins are outside cabins with windows and fitted with individually controlled A/C, en suite bathrooms with shower, piped music, mini safe, mini fridge, hair dryer and internal telephones. Cabins will be reserved on a first-come, first-served basis.

A limited number of single cabins (2) are available in Category C. After those cabins are reserved, singles are available at 1.6 times the double rate.

Category P, Suites	(Upper Deck: 1 double or 2 lower beds)	\$10,270
Category A	(Upper Deck: 1 double or 2 lower beds)	\$ 9,640
Category B	(Main Deck: 1 double or 2 lower beds)	\$ 8,965
Category C	(Main Deck: 1 double bed)	\$ 8,430
Category C, Single	(Main Deck: 1 double bed)	\$11,445

Harmony V Deck Plan



Included in your cruise package:

- One night accommodation at the Divani Hotel Acropolis in Athens on day 2
- Welcome cocktail reception
- 7-night cruise aboard the 44-passenger M/V *Harmony V*
- Welcome and farewell cocktail receptions aboard the ship
- All tours and shore excursions as described in the itinerary
- All non-ship meals in Athens beginning with dinner on day 2 and ending with lunch on day 3
- All shipboard meals beginning with dinner on day 3 and ending with breakfast on day 10
- Beverages including bottled water, coffee and tea
- All land transfers, including from the airport to the hotel on day 2; from the hotel to the ship on day 3; and transfers from the ship to the airport upon disembarkation on day 10
- VENT leaders and local guides (including gratuities for local guides)
- Entrance fees to archaeological sites and museums
- Gratuities to the ship staff and crew

Not included in the cruise program:

- All air travel
- Passport fees
- Hotel accommodations prior to Day 2 and after Day 9
- Meals prior to dinner on Day 2 and after breakfast on Day 10
- Alcoholic beverages and soft drinks
- Laundry, postage, telephone calls, internet usage, or other items of a personal nature
- Travel insurance
- Fuel or exchange rate surcharges
- Excess baggage charges
- Airport departure taxes (if applicable)
- Gratuities to VENT leaders (optional)

Athens Extension:

The fee for the optional **Athens Extension** is **\$4495** in double occupancy from Athens. This includes all meals from lunch on Day 1 (June 4) to breakfast on Day 5 (June 7), accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, entrance fees to museums and archaeological sites, and guide services provided by the tour leaders and local guides. It does not include meals prior to lunch on June 4 or after breakfast on June 8, hotel accommodations other than those mentioned in the itinerary, any air travel, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for the **Athens Extension** is **\$725**.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSITS: A deposit of **\$2,000** is required to reserve a space on the Circumnavigation of the Peloponnese cruise with a second deposit of **\$3,000** due 210 days prior to departure (October 27, 2021). The deposit for the Athens Extension is **\$1,000** per person. The balance of the fees are due 150 days prior to departure (December 26, 2021).

If you prefer to pay the initial deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your initial deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at <https://ventbird.com>) should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

This cruise is designed for persons in reasonably good health. By forwarding the expedition deposit, you certify that you do not have a physical condition or disability which would create a hazard to you or other passengers. VENT reserves the right to decline to accept or retain you or other passengers should your health, actions, or general deportment impede the operations of the expedition or the rights, welfare, or enjoyment of other passengers.

PAYMENTS: All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 150 days prior to the tour departure date.

CRUISE CANCELLATION POLICY: **\$1000** of your initial deposit is non-refundable if cancellation occurs up to 210 days prior to the departure date. For cancellations that occur between 209 and 151 days, both deposits are non-refundable; cancellations within 150 days of the departure date are 100% non-refundable whether previously paid or not. Any refunds will be reduced by applicable airline cancellation penalties. No refunds will be made in the event of “no shows” or cancellations made on the day of sailing.

If you cancel:

210 days or more before departure date
Between 209 and 151 days before departure
Fewer than 150 days before departure date

Your refund will be:

Your deposit minus \$1,000
No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance will be refunded
No refund available

ATHENS EXTENSION CANCELLATION POLICY: Refunds, if any, for any cancellation by a participant are made according to the following schedule: If participant cancels 180 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$500** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made between 179 and 151 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the tour fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 150

days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre- and post-tour extensions. **For participants' protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

If participant cancels:

180 days or more before departure date

179 to 151 days before departure date

150 days or less before departure date

Participant's refund will be:

Participant's deposit minus \$500*

No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance of the tour fee will be refunded

No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person. To qualify, cancellation must occur 180 days or more before departure date; deposit transfers must be made at the time of cancellation; and one transfer per deposit.

Upon cancellation of the transportation or travel services, where you, the customer, are not at fault and have not cancelled in violation of the terms and conditions of any of the contract for transportation or travel services, all sums paid to VENT for services not received by you will be promptly refunded by VENT to you unless you otherwise advise VENT in writing. This policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside the services described in the tour itinerary.

CANCELLATION BY VENT: If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant.

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A "**Force Majeure**" event means any act beyond VENT's control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

This VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside of the services described in the tour itinerary.

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

TRAVEL INSURANCE: To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. VENT has partnered with Redpoint Travel Protection as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend their **Ripcord** plan. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most comprehensive travel protection programs available.

Critical benefits of Ripcord include a completely integrated program with a single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims; **medical evacuation and rescue services** from your point of injury or illness to your **hospital of choice**; comprehensive travel insurance for **trip cancellation/interruption**, primary

medical expense coverage, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as security evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or other security events, **waiver for pre-existing medical conditions exclusion**, and a “**Cancel for Any Reason**” benefit. Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.*

For a price quote, or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: ripcordtravelprotection.com/ventbird; or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help and Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600. Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 14 days of making your tour deposit. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour fee at the time of deposit or in segments as individual tour payments are made (deposit, mid-payment, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The “pay as you go” approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium is in proportion to the amount paid toward the full tour fee. If you choose to “pay as you go,” you must cover each deposit or payment within 14 days in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

Coronavirus (COVID-19):

The coronavirus pandemic has brought uncertainty for many people currently holding travel insurance policies or who are considering future travel and purchasing such insurance. Redpoint has added a **Coronavirus FAQ page** to its website that addresses questions and concerns regarding its travel insurance and the impact of COVID-19. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of topics such as policy coverage and limitations, policy modifications, cancellation, refunds, and more. Among the most important points: 1) Trip cancellation solely for concern or fear of travel associated with COVID-19 is not covered; 2) Should you request cancellation of your policy, a full refund of your premium is available only under a limited set of conditions; and 3) Should you request cancellation, you may be eligible to receive a pro-rated refund of the unused portion of your premium or a travel insurance credit. Travel insurance credit (“Premium Credit”) is for the value of the policy purchased and may be applied to future policies. Premium Credits have no expiration dates. Rules and regulations apply.

Please visit the **Coronavirus FAQ** page at the following link:

https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/

Additionally, as countries begin opening up for travel, many are instituting an array of COVID-19 entry requirements, including mandates to purchase travel insurance covering medical expenses due to COVID-19 illness and accommodation in case of quarantine. Ripcord’s comprehensive travel insurance plans are designed to satisfy the various country-specific travel insurance entry requirements. Those who purchase a Ripcord policy will receive a “letter of confirmation” that affirms that the policy satisfies such requirements.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. All internal flights will be booked through our local operator. ***Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour(s) is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be responsible for any air ticket penalties.***

BAGGAGE: The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. As a precaution against lost luggage, we suggest that you pack a change of clothes, essential toiletries, medications, a change of clothing, important travel documents, optics, and any other essential items in your carry-on bag.

Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government's attempts to improve airport security we recommend that you check the websites of your airline and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for the most updated information regarding checked baggage and carry-on items: <http://www.tsa.gov/>.

CLIMATE & WEATHER: May is one of the better months to travel in Greece. The hot days that characterize the Mediterranean summer have not yet appeared in force while the likelihood of a late cold front is small. Nearly all of our time will be spent along the immediate coast, where daytime temperatures range into the upper 80s (°F). Sea-breezes have a cooling effect and keep the coast about 10 degrees cooler than in the interior regions. Night and morning temperatures may dip to the mid-60s. Around Athens, daytime temperatures could reach into the 90s. If we are cruising into the wind, air temperature can seem colder than it really is. Overall, participants should be prepared for mild mornings, warm-to-hot days, and cool evenings. Precipitation in the form of rain, related to a very late cold front, is possible but not expected.

CLOTHING: As this trip combines birding with interpretive walking tours and leisure cruising, you will want to pack a mix of clothing that prepares you for all activities. The following items are recommended:

- **Shoes:** A lightweight hiking boot or trail shoe for birding outings and when walking in archaeological sites; you may also prefer sandals and/or athletic shoes for walking tours and time on board the ship; For those who desire, dress shoes will be appropriate for some evenings.
- **Pants and Shorts:** A couple pairs of pants and shorts each are recommended. Many people prefer lightweight pants made of cotton or other material, but denim, though not as comfortable, is certainly acceptable. Shorts will be desirable for warmer times of the day and when cruising.
- **Field Clothing:** Outdoor stores such as Cabela's and REI carry field clothing that many birders find appealing. Pants and shirts made of lightweight, yet durable materials with multiple pockets and ventilated seams are popular and more reasonably priced than in the past.
- **Shirts:** Several t-shirts, (long and short-sleeved), in addition to other comfortable styles suitable for warm weather.
- **Bathing Suit:** An opportunity to swim will be available on our day at Kythira.
- **Hat:** A hat for protection from the sun is essential.
- **Evening Wear:** The atmosphere aboard *Harmony V* is casual, but you might consider Smart Casual attire for the few "dressier" occasions such as the Captain Welcome and Farewell dinner. For women this includes casual dresses or skirt/slacks ensembles. For men this includes khakis/slacks and open-collared shirts. Men may choose to wear a sports jacket. The degree of dress is also in accordance with your personal preference.
- **Sweaters and Coats:** Warm weather will be the rule on this trip, but a sweater or light coat will come in handy some mornings and evenings.

CONDITIONS: Your trip to Greece will be a relaxing but full travel experience in which birding activities are combined with visits to famous archaeological sites, guided tours, and cruising the Mediterranean Sea. **This trip offers an abundance of cultural, historical, and anthropological experiences in addition to being a birding trip, and participants should strongly consider this point before registering.**

Note that the birding portions of the trip are optional. Participants whose main interest is the history and culture of Greece do not need to be birders to enjoy this trip or to participate in the birding portions of the itinerary.

Our time off the ship includes walking tours and visits to major historical sites and at least one nature reserve. Physical demands will be easy to moderate, but please bear in mind that our land excursions will involve a moderate amount of walking and standing. We emphasize that no one will be subjected to physical demands that exceed their capabilities. All walking will be done at a slow pace. This information also applies to the Athens Extension.

The ship – *Harmony V* is a motor yacht style cruising ship featuring 25 cabins with lower beds, private bathroom facilities, and individual temperature controls. The public areas include a spacious lounge and bar with large windows for optimal viewing. Outside an ample sun deck equipped with deckchairs and loungers; a shaded outdoor deck; and outdoor bar. Internet and email service are available.

Harmony V

Ship Type: Motor Yacht

Built: 2009

Length: 180 feet / Beam: 27 feet / Draft: 9 feet

Crew: 16-18

Flag: Greece

Dining – The sizeable dining room comfortably seats all passengers in single seating for all meals, with tables unassigned. The chefs can prepare food according to special dietary needs, provided we receive sufficient notice. **Please advise of any special needs at the time of registration.**

While on land – **Walking conditions on the cruise and the extension are generally not difficult, yet a lot of walking is involved in this program. Participants must be able to walk at least one-half mile, unassisted (other than by cane or walking stick) to ably participate in this program.** For almost all shore excursions we will visit several of Greece's most famous archaeological sites including Epidauros, Mycenae, Olympia, and Delphi. All of these sites are well-developed with established paths and walkways providing access to the most important ruins and museums. Delphi sits at the base of a mountain and the paths leading to the higher parts of the ruin complex are moderately steep and may not be suitable for everyone. Participants should take into consideration that a lot of walking and standing will be required at all of the archaeological sites and museums. On the extension, our visit to the Acropolis will require walking up and down ramps and staircases. We will move at a reasonable pace; however, this excursion entails much time on our feet. Otherwise, the conditions for the cruise also apply to the extension.

While at sea – While cruising at sea, you'll have options to join your leaders on the viewing decks for sea watching or remain below decks and relax in the passenger lounge or your cabin. As we will not be far from shore most of the time, we expect smooth, easy seas throughout. Wind is an unpredictable variable. The mornings are typically calmer and the afternoons breezy to windy. If we are cruising into the wind, participants should be prepared for rougher seas than what is expected.

The Program – Cruise: Our routine for most days will involve breakfast on board between 6:00-7:00 a.m., followed by disembarkation of the ship for land transfer to the archaeological sites. We want to arrive at the sites at the time of opening, typically 8:00, to beat the crowds and the warmest daytime temperatures. We will tour the sites and associated museums for a full morning (except at Olympia, where we will have almost a full day) and return to the ship for lunch. Most afternoons will be reserved for cruising, seabirding, and lectures by Dr. Wolff. Dinner will be at 7:00 p.m. most nights. Birding opportunities, remarkably, are best around the ruins sites. We will visit a small nature reserve at Dinari Lagoon, located north of Pilos.

The Program – Extension: On the Athens Extension, our activities will be divided between birding and historical/cultural pursuits. At times the emphasis will be on either birding or history while at other times the circumstances of the moment will incorporate elements of both. Participants should expect full days in the Athens area. In particular, our activities on day 5 may necessitate a long day, with a 7:00 a.m. start, and possibly not returning to the hotel until 6:30 p.m. Concerning our visit to the Acropolis, our visit is scheduled for the afternoon, when we will likely have it to ourselves. In past years, we have visited the Acropolis in the morning, but this is no longer as enjoyable an event as the site is now completely overwhelmed in the morning hours by thousands of cruise ship tourists bussed up from the port of Piraeus. We will visit the Acropolis on the afternoon of day 3 and will walk to dinner at a nearby restaurant thereafter.

Internet/Email: On the *Harmony V*, internet and email services are available and Wi-Fi is available for a fee. At the Hotel Divani Acropolis, complimentary Wi-Fi is available.

Extra time in Athens – Athens is a large metropolis that serves as the jumping off point for other parts of Greece and even other countries in Southern Europe, North Africa, and the Near East. Our cruise program (including the extension) will provide exposure to many of Greece's top archaeological and historical sites and many of its wonderful birds. However, because there is so much to see and experience on mainland Greece and its Aegean islands, participants with an interest in enjoying other activities outside the stated program should come early or stay afterwards.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Limited laundry services is available aboard the ship. Laundry is handled by the crew with charges posted to your ship board account. Dry cleaning is not available.

EQUIPMENT: One of the most important aspects of having an enjoyable travel experience is being prepared with proper equipment. The following items will come in handy during your trip to Greece:

- **Backpack** – Good for carrying extra clothing, field guides, supplies, and optical equipment during all land excursions
- **Notebooks and pens**
- **Travel alarm clock**
- **Polarized sunglasses with good UV protection**
- **Sunscreen, lip balm, skin lotions**
- **Personal toiletries**
- **Cameras, lenses, film, memory cards, and extra batteries**
- **Collapsible walking stick** – A highly recommended item for those who need more stability when walking
- **Tissue packs**

BINOCULARS & SPOTTING SCOPES:

Binoculars – We strongly recommend good binoculars of at least 7x35, 8x42, 10x40, or 10x42 magnification. We recommend that you do NOT bring mini-binoculars of any kind. Some people like them because they are small and lightweight; but they have an extremely small field of view and very poor light gathering power. Trying to find a bird in your binoculars using minis is like trying to read a book through a keyhole. You will be very frustrated, and even if you do manage to get the bird in your binoculars before it flies, you will have a poor view. You will find that 7x35 or 8x42 binoculars are compact and light enough.

Spotting Scopes – Given the ship-based nature of the program and that most of our land-birding will take place around the archaeological sites, it is not necessary for you to bring a spotting scope. Your tour leaders will have scopes available for group use throughout the trip.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS:

PASSPORTS - A valid passport is required for United States citizens to enter Greece and all European nations. Please check the expiration date on your passport. **If it is not valid for at least six months after your trip return date, you will need to get it renewed.** You will also want to make sure that you have at least two blank pages in your passport for stamps.

If you need a passport, you should get it well in advance of your trip departure date. For additional fees, a passport can be issued on an expedited basis. In the United States this can be done at the nearest passport office, most post offices, or the county clerk's office. You may also visit **www.state.gov/travel/** for information on how to get or renew a passport.

As a safety measure, photocopy the first two pages of your passport. Keep the photocopies in a safe place, so if your passport is lost you will have proof of identification. Your passport should be signed and easily available at all times. You will need it for check-in at the airport on your first day of departure, so **do not pack it in your checked luggage**.

On board ship, it is customary for the purser to hold all passports for clearance with port authorities. Your passport will be collected upon embarkation, and returned prior disembarkation.

VISAS - Citizens of the United States and Canada do not need to obtain a tourist visa to enter Greece. Rules and regulations pertaining to non-U.S. and Canadian citizens may vary; please check with the consulates or embassy of Greece.

CURRENCY & MONEY MATTERS: Your trip to Greece includes most necessary expenses, including all meals aboard *Harmony V*. While U.S. dollars MIGHT be accepted in large cities and shops, it is always convenient to have a supply of Euros for such items as taxi rides, gifts, non-meal-time and off-ship refreshments, laundry tips, meals on your own, gratuities for the ship's staff and crew, and any personal items.

The official currency onboard the *Harmony V* and in Greece is the Euro (EUR).

Upon embarkation, a shipboard account will be opened for your convenience. Credit cards, including Visa, MasterCard, and American Express, are accepted for expenses on board that may be paid/settled at the end of the cruise. The purser would appreciate the use of Euros in small denominations if paying by cash for settlement of your shipboard account. Personal and traveler's checks are not generally accepted, or you may find hard to exchange. ATM's are available in the major ports.

There is no facility on board for exchanging U.S. dollars into Euros. It is best to acquire Euros either before leaving the U.S. or at the airport or a bank in Athens. Small denominations of cash are always best as it is easier for individuals and businesses to provide change. Should you extend your vacation in Greece beyond what is offered in this program, you should strongly consider obtaining local currency. ATM machines can be found in large cities and in some towns; you shouldn't have any problems using major cards in hotels, restaurants, and shops. Please check with your bank and credit card issuer for more information regarding banking and the use of ATM and credit cards overseas.

You can check the latest currency conversion rate by visiting "XE-The World's Favorite Currency Site" at: <http://www.xe.com/>.

ELECTRICITY: Power on board the *Harmony V* is 220V, with the recessed outlets of the round, two-pronged European type. If you plan to use American standard 110V equipment with the flat-pronged plugs, you will need to bring an all-purpose transformer to convert the current for 110V use, in addition to a round European-type adapter plug.

HEALTH: As of this writing (June 2021), no major shots or inoculations are required for entry into Greece. VENT follows The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over-the-counter, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line (800) CDC-INFO (800-232-4636). You can check the CDC website at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html> (click on Travel Health).

Motion Sickness – Given the near-shore nature of this cruise, we expect mild sea conditions from start to finish. If you are especially sensitive to motion sickness, we recommend that you consult your physician on an appropriate medication.

Sun Exposure – The sun's ultraviolet rays are dangerous under prolonged exposure (sometimes only a matter of minutes). Anytime you are outdoors you will want to protect your skin, including your lips, eyes, nose, and ears. A severe sunburn is potentially very painful and will affect your level of enjoyment. Always protect yourself when outdoors and be sure to bring an ample supply of high SPF sunscreen and lip balm. We strongly recommend the use of ultra-violet blocking, polarized sunglasses.

COVID-19: The world has been in the grip of a pandemic since early 2020, a result of the uncontrolled spread of SARS-CoV-2, the novel coronavirus that causes the illness COVID-19. COVID-19 is transmitted through person-to-person contact, almost always through inhaling respiratory aerosols or droplets exuded from an infected person. Common signs of COVID-19 illness include fever or chills, fatigue, shortness of breath, cough, loss of taste or smell, and more. Based on what is known about the disease, COVID-19 is far more serious than seasonal flu. Few places in the world have been unaffected. The impact on travel has been substantial, as demonstrated by the fact that VENT did not operate a tour between late March 2020 and late April 2021. The development and deployment of COVID-19 vaccines, particularly in the United States, has allowed VENT to return to tour operations. We emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. **With this in mind, VENT instituted a COVID-19 vaccination requirement.** All tour participants and tour leaders must be fully vaccinated in order to travel with us while we are still in a declared public health emergency. In accordance with the latest guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), full vaccination is defined as an individual being 14 days beyond having received the required amount of vaccine for reaching full immunity to the degree specific vaccines confer. In the United States, so far, this means either the two-shot sequence for the Moderna or Pfizer vaccines or the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine. Proof of vaccination must be provided to our office at least one week before the start of the tour and kept with you while on the tour. Because the world is a very different place than it was before the pandemic, we've made a number of important adjustments to our processes to ensure that our tours can operate as safely as possible. Please visit the **Coronavirus Travel Update** page of our website <https://ventbird.com/covid-19>, where you may view our **COVID-19 Protocols for VENT Tours** document, which details the guidance VENT will follow in the operation of its tours in the time of pandemic. Our decision and policy are firmly rooted in the latest CDC guidance regarding recommendations for avoiding COVID-19. As we move forward, VENT will continue to follow the latest information from the CDC and will update our policy accordingly. Please visit the CDC website for the most up to date information about COVID-19 and associated guidance for proper health and hygiene: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>.

LANGUAGE: Greek is the official languages of Greece. English is the primary language spoken on board the ship and throughout our tour.

TIME: Greece is on Eastern European Summer Time (EEST) and is 7 hours ahead of Eastern Daylight Time (EDT).

SUGGESTED READING: A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend www.amazon.com which has a wide selection; www.buteobooks.com and www.nhbs.com which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and www.abebooks.com for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

Birds

Mullarney, Killian and Lars Svensson and Dan Zetterstrom. *Birds of Europe*. Princeton Field Guides. Princeton University Press; Princeton, NJ, 1999. This is the most important natural history book for this trip. It is probably the best all-around field guide to the birds of Europe.

History, Philosophy & Culture

Ancient Greece is a subject widely written about. A great many books have been published addressing that country's illustrious history; theatre, art, and architecture; philosophy and culture; and wars. Although a person could research the topic indefinitely, the following list highlights some of the best material available for preparing oneself for this program.

General:

Cahill, Thomas. *Sailing the Wine Dark Sea: Why the Greeks Matter*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group: New York, NY, 2004. An outstanding book that chronicles the contribution of the ancient Greeks, as it relates to modern civilization, to the development of politics, thought, warfare, and civilization. An excellent overview of ancient Greece.

Classic literature:

Aeschylus. *Oresteia*. Peter Meineck (translator). Hacket Publishing Company: Indianapolis, IN, 1998.

Product description (Source: Amazon.com); Aeschylus, the earliest of the great Attic tragedians, presented his *Oresteia* at Athens' City Dionysia festival in 458 BCE. Born in the last quarter of the sixth century, Aeschylus had fought with the victorious Greeks in one and probably both of the Persian Wars (490 and 480-79). He died around 456 at about seventy years of age in Gela, Sicily. His epitaph records his role as a soldier at Marathon, not his artistic achievements, but these were many. The author of more than seventy plays, he won his first of thirteen tragic victories in 484. Of these plays, only seven remain. The *Oresteia* is Aeschylus' only complete surviving trilogy; the satyr play with which it was first performed, *Proteus*, is lost. Peter Meineck provides what is considered an excellent translation.

Homer. *The Iliad & The Odyssey*

These epic poems are integral to the foundation of the western literary tradition. *The Iliad* is Homer's masterwork that recites the events of the Greek-Trojan war, and is as much a study of the human condition as a book on warfare. One of the heroes of the Trojan War was Odysseus, who left his homeland to fight for the Greeks in distant Troy. *The Odyssey* tells the story of Odysseus's attempts to return home, and chronicles the bewildering series of events that obstruct his progress. *The Odyssey* is a tale of endurance and perseverance in the face of seemingly overwhelming challenges, a canvas against which Homer explores human emotion under great strain. Many translations of both poems are available, but we recommend the translations by **Robert Fagles** and **Stanley Lombardo**.

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that tips are not expected and are entirely optional. Tips should be given directly to your tour leader; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, "**VENT**") act only as agents for the participant in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category, or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary that are deemed necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e. railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, etc.).

VENT reserves the right to substitute leaders or guides on any tour. Where VENT, in its sole discretion, determines such substitution is necessary, it will notify tour participants.

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure with or without cause or good reason. See the VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy set forth above.

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on August 24, 2021 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

VENT reserves the right to decline any participant's Registration Form and/or refuse to allow any participant to participate in a tour as VENT deems reasonably necessary, in its sole discretion. VENT also reserves the right to remove any tour participant from any portion of a tour as VENT deems necessary, in its sole discretion, reasons for such removal include but are not limited to, medical needs, injury, illness, inability to meet physical demands of a tour, personality conflict or situations in which such removal is otherwise in the best interest of the tour, the tour group and/or such participant. A participant may also voluntarily depart from a tour. If a participant is removed from a tour or voluntarily departs from a tour, such participant will be responsible for any expenses associated with such removal or departure, including but not limited to, transportation, lodging, airfare and meals, and VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any such removed or departed participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by such participant.

Baggage is carried at the participant's risk entirely. No airline company, its employees, agents and/or affiliates (the "**Airline**") is to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time participants are not on board the Airline's aircraft. The participant ticket in use by any Airline, when issued, will constitute the sole contract between the Airline and the purchaser of the tickets and/or the participant. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for VENT tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airlines Reporting Corporation.

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