



Solo Travel in Athens: What to Know and Where to Go

Athens can seem like an intimidating place to tackle solo. But in reality, it's a fantastic city to enjoy alone. You'll see the city in a whole different light, and will strike up conversations—even friendships—with locals wherever you go.

The first time I really fell in love with Athens was on one of these solo trips. It was a Sunday, and a good friend recommended I go to Diporto, just a short walk from the Athens Central Market—if you can find it. This 150-year-old restaurant is one of Athens' famous koutoukia, or basement tavernas. It's where fishmongers, butchers and other market vendors and patrons go for a good meal. I had only a vague idea of where I was going, but I was happy to spend a few hours wandering between fish stalls and cheese vendors in the Central Market.

When I finally stumbled into Diporto—literally; those stairs are steep—it was almost 4 in the afternoon, and the restaurant was nearly full except for a small table in the back. I was next to a huge group of Greeks celebrating a birthday, and there was live music, dancing, and plenty of alcohol. One of the Greeks pulled my table next to theirs, and I became part of the party. While not every solo travel experience is quite like this one, there are still many great ways to eat, drink, and get lost (safely) alone in Athens. Here are some suggestions

A woman with a blonde braid, wearing a dark jacket and blue jeans, is looking at a table of antique goods at a flea market. The table is covered with a white cloth and displays a variety of items including glassware, ceramics, and a small wooden horse figurine. The scene is outdoors on a sunny day, with shadows cast on the ground.

Morning

The best reason to travel by yourself is the freedom that comes with it—you can do whatever you want, whenever you want to. Apprehensive about exploring by yourself? I'd suggest taking a guided tour of a few downtown neighbourhoods—**Psirri** or **Koukaki** would be great places to start—just to familiarise yourself with the different flavours of Athens. You can make friends with other tour goers, or just enjoy the experience on your own.

Cafés are perfect for an inconspicuous solo meal with a side of people-watching. **Ohh Boy** in Pangrati has excellent yogurt parfaits, croque madames, and a huge selection of vegan cakes and snacks. If you're a bruncher, you might also try **Rabbit Punch** in Pangrati—they're known for their coffee, but they also serve up massive scrambles on toast for not a lot of money. If you're staying in Koukaki, pull up a stool at **Morning Bar**, a light-filled coffee shop that specialises in cakes and pastries that change daily. Expect pretty, raspberry-swirled pastries and red velvet cakes (and get at least one of chef Ianthi Michalaki's amazing chocolate chip cookies).

If you're in the city on a Sunday, don't miss **Monastiraki**. The flea market is a lively source of souvenirs, sandals, and **vintage clothes** throughout the week. But on Sundays, antique dealers bring everything from furniture to jewellery to sell on the street. If you have a discerning eye, you might find a treasure or two.

Explore the Monastiraki flea market.

Photo: Thomas Gravanis



Lunch

If you're interested in sampling seasonal Greek food, head to one of the city's many neighbourhood **farmers' markets**. They're a good opportunity to snap up local products, from the summer's freshest tomatoes and figs to salt-cured fish and bouquets of greens in the winter. The **Central Market (Varvakios Agora)** is a bigger option—you could easily spend an entire day in the market and wandering around the surrounding streets lined with food shops.

Athens is a great city for street food, like **souvlaki** and gyros. Either grab a table and enjoy your wrap with a beer, or get one to go as you make your way around the city. My favourites are **Lefteris O Politis** for a spicy version of the meaty classic and **Cookoomela Grill**, which does vegan souvlaki. (Pro tip—if you crave something sweet post-souvlaki, **I Cake You** is just down the street from Cookoomela, and their cookies are perfection).

Fish lovers can try **Zisis**, which specialises in little paper cones of takeaway fried squid, shrimp, sardines, and more. If you prefer to have a seat, enjoy your fish on pasta or in a soup.

Lefteris o Politis is where you can get a mouthwatering beef patty wrapped in pita bread with all the usual souvlaki toppings.

Photo: Eleni Veziri





Afternoon



Athens' many museums are perfect to enjoy at your own pace. Art lovers should make sure to stop at **Pireos 138**. This beautifully designed outpost of the **Benaki Museum** focuses on contemporary art, architecture, and photography. There's a great café and gift shop too.

Hop on the A2 or B2 buses from Syntagma or take a taxi down to the **Stavros Niarchos Cultural Foundation** Centre, where you can enjoy free concerts, the opera, or open-air exercise classes, depending on what time of day you visit. It's a very safe place to be after dark, too, so catch the sunset from the rooftop **Lighthouse** or have a sundowner beside the seawater canal.

The canal at the Stavros Niarchos Cultural Centre.

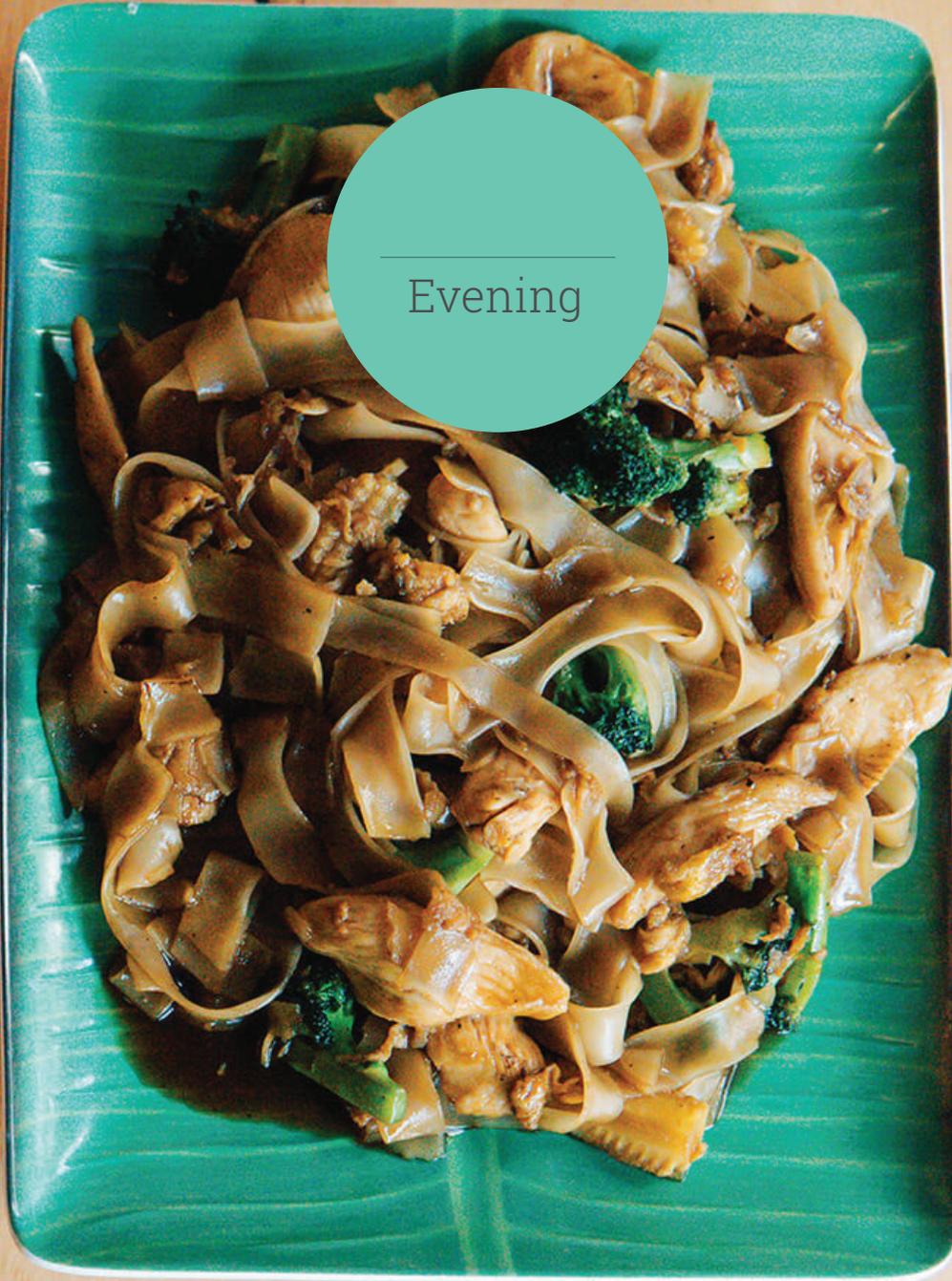
Photo: Amalia Kovaïou

Restaurants in Greece are usually a communal experience, where a group of people share several dishes. So traditional **mezedopolia** may not be the ideal place to eat by yourself. If you decide that there's a specific dish you have to try, go for it—one person can easily handle two or three mezedes on their own.

Another of my favourite places to eat alone is **Tuk Tuk** in Koukaki, a Thai restaurant that takes its inspiration from Andy Ricker's Pok Pok. Pull up a stool by the open kitchen: it never gets old watching the chefs at work behind the counter. This place gets packed quickly, but if you're there by yourself, you'll almost definitely snag a seat in reasonable time. Try the steamed dumplings, the wontons, and definitely don't skip the som tum (papaya) salad. When I need something extra spicy, I go straight for the red and green curries.

Grab some delicious Thai food at Tuk Tuk.

Photo: Amalia Kovaiou



Evening



Nighttime

Nightlife in Athens can be a touch more tricky if you're on your own. The key is to find a bar that actually has a bar with stools, not just clusters of tables and outdoor seating. Wine bar **Heteroclitto** satisfies that criterion, as does Exarchia's **Alexandrino**; both have wonderful wines by the glass. If you're in a beer mood, head to **Lazy Bulldog Pub** in Gazi and try a craft beer from Athens or one of the islands.

When I'm in a cocktail mood, I always head to **Birdman**. The space is tiny and fills up fast, especially on weekends, but if you're going solo, you have a much better shot at scoring a seat at the bar. They have great mixed drinks and a fantastic selection of Japanese whiskies. Bar snacks are several notches up from the average: they specialize in yakitori, and the menu features other small bites, from spicy edamame to wagyu nigiri (and don't skip the potato salad).

Only a quick walk from Birdman, **Barro Negro** is a tequila bar with a small menu of Mexican-inspired bites. They have their own fermentation lab (only one of two in the city), so do not—I repeat, do not—skip the Bloody Maria, made from their own fermented tomato juice. The surrounding streets in the **Historic Centre** are packed with little bars where you'll find locals drinking and chatting at all hours of the day and night.

Sample a glass or two of Greek wine at Alexandrino.

Photo: Orestis Seferoglou

GENERAL TIPS

- Generally, Athens is quite safe at night, but don't take any unnecessary risks: if in any doubt, take a taxi. They are pretty cheap and you can always hail a taxi on the street, or use an app like Beat to find a ride.
- Know where you're going, and how you're going to get back, especially if you're going somewhere at night. The Athens metro stops running at 12.30 am, except on Fridays and Saturdays, when it runs until 2 am. Buses can run a modified service or stop altogether late at night and on the weekends.
- In the city centre, the streets wind and change names without any warning, and not all street signs are in English. If you're really lost, ask a local for help—even if they don't speak English, chances are that they will try to help you.
- Most shopkeepers and restaurant employees speak at least a little English, but do try to learn some Greek before you go to Athens. Even if it's just epharisto (thank you) or kalimera (good morning).
- If you're travelling in Athens by yourself, it's very likely that someone will try to talk with you. Don't be shy. People in Athens are generally friendly, so strike up a conversation—you might learn even more about this fantastic city.

Take a leisurely stroll through the National Garden.

Photo: Thomas Gravanis

