



Athens

off the Beaten Track

48 hours of insider sights and bites to help you experience Athens like a local.

Athens is chock-full of must-see sights, but it's also wonderfully unpredictable. So if you hate going by the book, venture beyond the usual tourist attractions and selfie spots and you'll find unusual museums, avant-garde galleries, offbeat neighbourhoods and underground clubs. Follow our two-day guide to uncover Athens at its most authentic and unexpected.



Day 1

Morning

Start the day in **Mets**, one of the least touristy but prettiest neighbourhoods in downtown Athens. Tree-lined **Markou Mousourou** is the drowsy main street and local life gravitates around **Odeon**, an old-fashioned café that distils the area's village vibe. Wander up the wooded trails of **Ardittos Hill** for unexpected Acropolis views—it also overlooks the **Panathenaic Stadium**, which is ringed by one of the world's most photogenic **running tracks**. The steep streets surrounding Ardittos are a patchwork of century-old cottages with hidden courtyards, neoclassical mansions brimming with bougainvillea, and Bauhaus apartment buildings.

The peaceful residential neighbourhood of Mets

Photo: Thomas Gravanis



Day 1

Lunch

The living and the dead coexist on **Anapafseos Street** (literally, the street of eternal rest). Hidden among the flower shops and funeral parlours that service the **First Cemetery of Athens** is **Olympion**, a slap-up canteen where undertakers, taxi drivers, students and pensioners all come for one of the best-value lunches in town. You can pick your dishes from the trays on display in the kitchen—comforting beef stew, stuffed tomatoes, and giant baked beans might be on the daily-changing menu.

Old-school meets delicious at this traditional hangout, Olympion

Photo: Manos Chatzikonstantis



Day 1

Afternoon

Anapafseos Street ends at the First Cemetery, one of the city's most **intriguing off-radar sights**. There's no queue and no admission fee to explore this open-air museum, with its marble tombstones and ornate sculptures dedicated to the good and the great. Wander the paths and see whether you can find the resting place of actress Melina Mercouri, architect Ernst Ziller and English author T.H. White. (**Half Note**, one of the oldest jazz clubs in Athens, is right beside the cemetery, if you want to get your groove on after your graveyard shift).

Get lost in the First Cemetery of Athens

Photo: Thomas Gravanis



Day 1

Evening

When Athenians want to eat well, they head to **Petralona**, a low-key, residential neighbourhood in the foothills of Philopappou Hill. You'll find old-time tavernas (like **Economou**), new-style **tsipouradika** (like **Rendez-vous**), and all-day cafes (like **Babouras**) all along Troon and Kydathinon Streets, and around Mercouri Square. Join the actors gossiping over Cretan cheese pies at **Aster**, a modern Greek bistro. Or go into the kitchen to inspect the catch of the day at **Therapeftirio**, where the freshest seafood is served with huge salads and piles of irresistible chips.

How about a late show after dinner? Cinemas in Athens have screenings at 10.30 or 11pm and foreign language films are subtitled. If you're here during the summer, **Zephyros** is an atmospheric open-air cinema in Petralona where stray cats wander among the aisles. In winter, catch a cult flick at **Midnight Express**, an after-hours cinema club that takes place most weekends at **Aavora** cinema in **Exarchia**.

Zephyros, screens classic art house movies under the stars

Photo: Thomas Gravanis



Day 2

Morning

Checked off the ancient classics? Athens has plenty of **unusual museums** that explore aspects of Greek culture you may not know about. Seminal Greek painter Nikos Hadjikyriakos-Ghika's own home—a stunning 1930s building in Kolonaki—is now a museum (**the Ghika Gallery**) devoted to his life and work. His studio is exactly as he left it.

The nearby **Katakouzenos Museum** is another museum in a private home. Angelos Katakouzenos and his wife Leto ran literary salons at this magnificent apartment filled with rare antiques, books, photographs and art—gifts from friends such as Picasso and Chagall. Visits are by appointment only, so call ahead.

Billed as the oldest house in Athens, the **Benizelos Mansion** is a rare example of Ottoman architecture smack in the heart of **Plaka's souvenir strip**. Entering the cloistered courtyard, complete with a wine and olive press, takes you back centuries.

Original artworks and decor at
the Ghika Gallery

Courtesy: Benaki Museum



Day 2

Lunch

The **Commercial Triangle**, the tangle of mostly pedestrian streets between Syntagma, Monastiraki and Omonia Square, is full of old-fashioned haberdasheries, hardware and fabric shops. Many of the streets are linked by **arcades full of quirky shops** so it's well worth poking around. Better yet, take a guided walkthrough of these arcades with graphic designer and urban cartographer Natassa Pappa—she'll show you places that even most locals overlook.

As well as all manner of street food joints—from sushi to falafel, noodles to empanadas—this area also has plenty of **traditional lunch spots**. They're where local shopkeepers and office workers go for a quick bite so you can rely on the food to always be good.

Athenian arcades harbour plenty of traditional restaurants

Photo: Manos Chatzikostantis

Day 2

Afternoon

Kypseli Market, a meet up spot for social enterprises

Photo: Orestis Seferoglou

Once upper-class, now working class, **Kypseli**, is an intriguing hybrid of old-time Athenians, immigrants and young artists. This up-and-coming neighbourhood is full of wonderful mid-war architecture and alternative art galleries. Dip into the local art scene at **Victoria Square Project** and **Hot Wheels** gallery, or wander along pedestrian **Fokionos Negri Street** to the **Kypseli Municipal Market** for pop-up shops by social entrepreneurs.



A photograph of the interior of the Au Revoir bar in Athens at night. The bar has a vintage, rustic feel with dark wood paneling and a textured wall. A large window on the right side of the frame looks out onto a city street with blurred lights from passing vehicles. Several patrons are seated at wooden tables, some with drinks and food. A yellow circular graphic is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text 'Day 2' and 'Evening'.

Day 2

Evening

Stop for an aperitif at the oldest bar in Athens, **Au Revoir**, a tiny, 1950s time capsule designed by a famous Greek architect, Aristomenis Provelgios. Their dry martinis are legendary. Or hang with the hipsters, Afro-Athenians, and kids tearing around on bicycles on **Agios Georgios Square**, the hub of Kypseli's regeneration. After a few drinks in one of the cafes and bars lining the square (**It's a Village** is the hottest table), you'll be grateful for the homecooked dishes at **Nostimies tis Mairis**, a late-night neighbourhood institution where actors from the theatres nearby go to refuel and wind down after the show.

Tinny Au Revoir bar is a vintage classic

Photo: Orestis Seferoglou