Athens on a Budget:
The Ultimate 2-Day Itinerary

No money? No problem. Here’s how to make the most of Athens in two days, if you’re on a tight budget.

Athens is home to priceless antiquities, but it’s also one of Europe’s more affordable capitals. It’s easy to explore on foot, the sun and sea don’t cost a thing, and you can find budget eats in every neighbourhood. Here’s how to spend 48 hours in Athens on a shoestring.
Day 1

Morning

Skipping one of the world’s most famous landmarks? Not an option, no matter how broke you are. The peerless Parthenon never disappoints and you can save with a multi-site Acropolis ticket that includes six other archeological sites.

If you’re only going to fork out for one museum in Athens, make it the Acropolis Museum. The Parthenon Gallery on the top floor makes an unforgettable impact. At just €10 to enter (€5 off-season), it’s one of the best value museums of its calibre in the world.

Take a scenic, ten-minute stroll to Mnisikleous Street in Plaka and unwind on the café-lined stairs that have starred in countless Instagram moments. Settle in with a coffee, milkshake, cold beer or glass of house wine (in Greece, drinks commonly arrive with complimentary nibbles like olives, biscuits or little squares of tea cake).

There’s a This is Athens with a local walk for every whim—whether you’re a classicist, urban fox, night owl or foodie.
Did someone say food? Athens is packed with great places where you can refuel on delicious cheap eats for around €5-10 a head. You’ll find everything from belly-filling street food to family-run pastry shops.

There’s nothing like Greek food and there are plenty of traditional tavernas to choose from in the city centre and beyond, where you take potluck with whatever tasty dishes are in play that day. For a moveable feast, hit up one of the regular farmer’s markets that are a staple of every neighbourhood. Or head to the lively Athens Central Market, and rustle up a locavore’s picnic of cheap seasonal produce, olives and cured meats. At cheery Karamanlidika tou Fani, just by the central market, you can purchase delicious salami and cheese to go, or eat them in-house.
Even if you’re short on funds, shopping need not be a spectator sport in Athens. While away the afternoon digging for second-hand bargains in the city’s thriving vintage shops. Monastiraki flea market has bargains galore, especially on Sunday morning when many traders sell bric-a-brac on the streets around Avissinia Square and Thissio station. Protogenous Street in hip Psirri is heaven for dedicated vintage shoppers. There’s the added bonus of the out-of-this-world ice-cream at Kokkion (try the dark chocolate with passionfruit).

Not into shopping? Take a free guided tour with a friendly Athenian. There’s a walk with a local for every whim—whether you’re a classicist, urban fox, night owl or foodie.
Evening

Sunset hour is upon you. Embark on the Athenian pastime of an early evening volta (aimless stroll). Beautiful Dionysiou Areopagitou street has it all: neoclassical mansions, Art Deco architecture, street performers and ancient monuments.

Feel like you’ve been whisked away to a Greek island in the picture-perfect lanes of Anafiotika, the hidden village underneath the Acropolis. The cats wandering the whitewashed lanes make perfect Instagram portraits. Then catch an Athenian sunset up on the Areopagus, a rocky perch below the Parthenon. Stretch your precious funds further in Romvis Street with a round of cocktails-to-go from TYCO (prices start from just €5). Sip them very slowly and spice up your night with one of their regular live DJ sets.

Set out for some extended night manoeuvres in Keramikos. This happening neighbourhood comes alive after dark and has many pocket-friendly places to experience Athenian nightlife first-hand. (Try Cabezon, where you can nosh on comfort food and dance into the small hours in a typical Greek courtyard. Or Louis Kafenio, one of the best—and best value—places in Athens to acquire a taste for ouzo and mezze). If your bank balance is running on empty, buy a beer from the nearest periptero (the ever-present Greek kiosk) and go hang out at Technopolis Square for Gazi nightlife on the cheap.
A day without bread is unthinkable for most Greeks. Grab the classic Athenian breakfast-to-go: a freshly-baked koulouri (sesame bread ring), or a warm, flaky tiropita (cheese pie), along with the city’s favourite coffee fix, the freddo cappuccino. Or settle in at a traditional kafenion for a Greek coffee and front row seat on everyday Athenian life. (Hint: it may involve a backgammon board or two).

Catch the free shuttle bus from Syntagma Square to explore the range of free activities and performances at the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Centre (SNFCC). Picnic on your bakery goodies in the park, check out the petanque players (or ice skaters in winter; the rink is free with pre-booking) beside the vast canal, play in the sound garden, or use the free work stations in the National Library. Don’t leave without taking in the splendid panoramas of city and sea from the Lighthouse.
How does lunch by the Aegean sound? Hop on an A2 bus from Syntagma Square to visit the **Athens Riviera** and its crown jewel **Vouliagmeni**, where it always feels like summer. Hit up **Tylixito Greek Wrap** or **Zaxos** on the main Vouliagmeni strip to sample Greece’s two most famous street food staples: **souvlaki and gyros**. Take your food to go and cross the road to the free pier in front of **En Plo** cafe where you can join (or watch) the **year-round swimmers** in the bay after your alfresco lunch.
Hungry for some cost-free culture? All archaeological sites and monuments in Athens are free the first Sunday of each month from 1 November to 31 March. Other leading museums, such as the Benaki Museum of Greek Culture, grant free admission weekly (read our 25 Free Things to Do in Athens to find out more).

Athens’ modern metro system is not only a super cheap way of getting around (as are buses, trams and trains for that matter), it’s also a free archaeological museum and art gallery rolled into one. Follow our art on the underground guide to see ancient artefacts unearthed during construction, along with works by modern Greek artists like Yiannis Moralis and Costas Varotsos.

Contemporary art lovers can go on a gallery walkabout with the help of our Insider’s Guide to Athens’ Art Galleries. Or stroll through the edgy downtown neighbourhoods of Psirri, Keramikos and Exarchia for a free viewing of Athens’ electric street art scene. For something more traditional, head to Syntagma Square to observe the evzones’ changing of the guard, in all their pomp (and pompoms). It takes place hourly outside the Greek Parliament.
Buckle up for a final ride with Athens’ committed barflies. Your destination is Platia Mavili (Mavili Square) in Ambelokipi, the heart of the city’s after-hours bar scene. Tuck into a top-notch pizza at Flower, or jive to funk and soul sounds at classic neighbourhood bar Briki. All Mavili Square evenings end with a visit to the legendary all-night canteen that dishes out vromiko (“dirty”) sandwiches and hot dogs to Athenian revellers until dawn.