



How to Green Up your Stay in Athens

From the best green cuisine and eco-friendly lodgings to up-cycled souvenirs and car-free explorations, here's how to up your sustainable traveler score on your next Athens visit.

Up until recently, first-time visitors to Athens could have been forgiven for assuming that Athenians existed solely on souvlaki, freddo iced coffees (in single-use cups) and exhaust fumes. True, Athens still has some catching up to do with its more environmentally-conscious European cousins. But as entrepreneurs, activists and local government join forces to develop big and small ways of becoming more sustainable, the Greek capital is making great strides towards its goal of evolving into a green and global metropolis. From where to enjoy the best vegan souvlaki in town to eco-friendly hotels and up-cycled shopping, here's our guide to making your stay in Athens as green as can be.

Where to go for green bites

In short, everywhere. Greeks will always love their meat, but sticking to a plant-based diet in Athens is surprisingly simple. Most tavernas serve hearty vegetarian staples such as pites (pies with fillings like spinach, horta wild greens or mushroom) and ladera (veggies cooked in fresh tomato sauce and olive oil). Go for delicious classics like fasolakia (green beans and potatoes) or yemista (stuffed tomatoes and green peppers) and throw in a horiatiki (Greek salad), along with zucchini fritters (kolokithokeftedes), and some traditional dips. Melitzanosalata (eggplant); tirokafteri (spicy whipped feta); and tzatziki (cucumber, garlic and yoghurt) are popular picks.

Want a break from tavernas?

Menus are greening up all over Athens with an ever-increasing number of terrific **vegan** and **vegetarian** options, for all budgets (click on the links to read our drilled-down guides). Worth an extra shout out for their excellent mushroom souvlaki wraps and sustainable ethos (i.e. ecological suppliers and biodegradable/recyclable packaging) is **Cookoomela Grill** in Gizi, Athens' first vegan steakhouse. For a light and healthy feed, **Peas Vegan cafe** in Koukaki has a tasty range of pretty vegan dishes, accompanied by locally-sourced ingredients and a zero-waste policy. Are you a vegan sweet tooth? Run (don't walk) to **Cats & Monsters** in **Exarchia** for next-level homemade vegan ice cream with soy, oat or rice milk.





Where to food shop sustainably

Great news for the self-catering crowd. Most Athenian supermarkets now stock plant-based milks, vegan cheeses and meat substitutes like tofu. Shopping for more than just the basics? Stock up at **Bamboo Vegan** in Exarchia, a pioneering mini-market and café with a wide range of locally-sourced and imported vegan produce. There's everything from meat substitutes such as tofu, seitan and tempeh to organic cereals, pulses and other health foods, as well as vegan cosmetics, detergents and cleaners (and a handy café to get your fair trade brew).

Nearby, **Bioway** is another mini-market catering primarily to vegans and other health-conscious shoppers, with many ingredients that are tricky to find elsewhere, such as pomegranate molasses or the more obscure plant-based milks (such as pea milk).

Play the stock market

To source ingredients for a plant-based meal with zero compromise on flavour, the impressive **Varvakios Agora** (Athens Central Market) in the historic centre is your one-stop shop for the freshest of seasonal produce. Fruit and veggies sorted? Now walk around the corner to the aromatic spice markets of **Evripidou Street**, and choose from some of Greece's finest herbs and spices to ramp up your cooking.



Unlike many European cities, where overpriced farmer's markets attempt to roll back the dominance of supermarkets, Greeks have never lost their connection with where their food comes from. The **laiki agora (people's market)** remains the best place to pick up fruits, vegetables and herbs, usually sourced from farms around Athens or across Greece, at incredibly reasonable prices (though you'll need to push back against the tendency of stall owners to put everything into plastic bags). Every Athenian neighbourhood has a weekly laiki, so just ask a local when and where. For a buzzy atmosphere with street musicians, venture to the Kallidromiou Street laiki (every Saturday morning in Exarchia).

At the **Kypseli Municipal Market**, a social enterprise hub in the **multicultural Kypseli neighbourhood**, you can interact every Wednesday with a new model of community-supported agriculture. Eco-minded **Bostani** sells weekly fruit and vegetable baskets to help small independent farmers reduce wastage and plan their crops more effectively, while also educating consumers on seasonal produce and how to use lesser-known local vegetables. You can order boxes online and pick them up from the market each week. Or buy direct from the producers themselves, who turn up at Kypseli Municipal Markets to sell their wares every Wednesday, 4-8pm.

Get around without the guilt

There's no excuse to lean on taxis or rental cars to get around town. **Athens' public transport system** is affordable, reliable and covers most of the city and suburbs—while the metro (underground) ranks among the best in the world and is pretty simple to work out.

To get to grips with Athens' buses and trolley buses, you can download **the handy OASA Telematics app**. There's an English option and you'll also find useful maps, route planning, ticket info and live vehicle locations.

Prefer your own electric wheels? In Athens, where the goal is for every third new vehicle to be electric by 2030, there's a growing network of electric car charging points—some of which are free. Additionally, all municipalities are now required to provide EV charging points.



Explore Athens on two wheels

Naturally, cycling is another top eco-friendly way to experience Athens—especially if you're not afraid of a few hills. Cycling infrastructure still lags behind other major European cities but new bikeways are popping up everywhere and there some great traffic-free cycling routes where you can sightsee on the fly. To stay on message, start from **the historic neighbourhood of Thissio** and glide down the coastline to check out Renzo Piano's cutting-edge beacon to sustainability, **the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Centre**, in Faliro. Check out our in-depth guide to cycling in Athens for more suggested scenic routes and tips on your best bike rental options in Athens.

Want to amp up the challenge? Embark on a thrilling two-wheel conquest of the spectacular **Mount Parnitha National Park**—the closest national park to a capital city anywhere in Europe—with **GR Cycling**, who offer kick-ass road, mountain and e-bike rentals and experiences.



Walk the talk

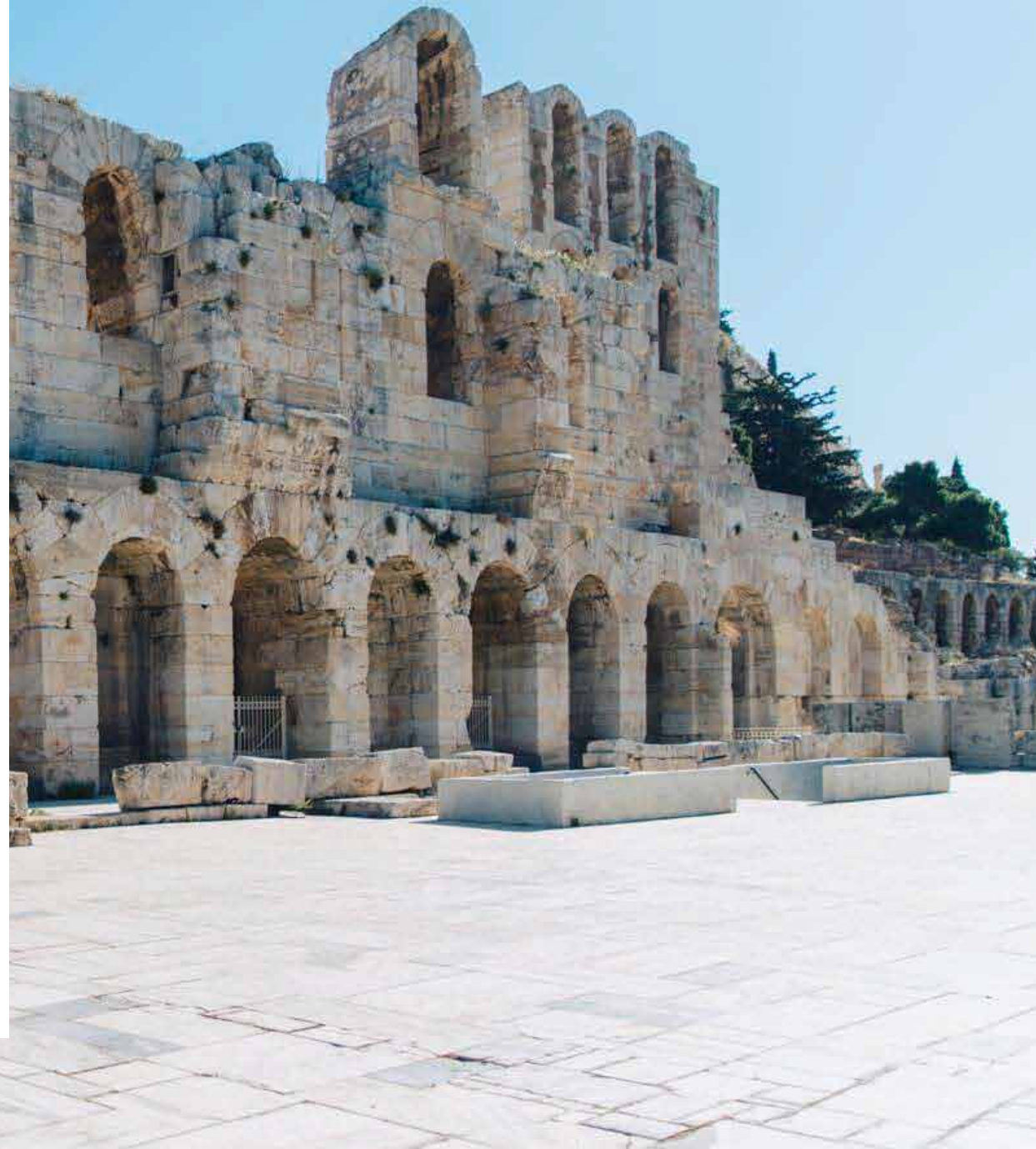
But, of course, the most sustainable mode of transport will always be your own two feet. Central Athens is compact, easily-walkable and much has been done in recent years to make the city more **appealing to walkers**. Large areas have been pedestrianised, such as the **Commercial Triangle** and the **Great Athens Walk**, while the 'pocket parks' initiative is reclaiming formerly neglected corners of the city to create new green spaces. Overall, Athens is gunning for a less car-centric future with more greenery and plant life, to improve the air quality and city experience for all.

Shop for sustainable fashion, art and design souvenirs

Up-cycling has caught a strong tailwind in Athens as **environmentally-aware designers** find ways to turn all types of discarded items into chic clothing and household objects. Those sun-bleached coloured awnings you see everywhere on city apartment blocks? To stop them all ending up in landfill, brother and sister duo, John and Garyfalia Pitsaki, founded **3Quarters** and are transforming them as stylish backpacks and bags.

Take home some Posidonia Oceanica seagrass harvested in the Peloponnese in the form of a funky phone cover or beach racquet, thanks to **PHEE**, who transform the expired seagrass into a versatile bio-material. Or snap up some of their seaweed sunglasses (designed with the help of Greek eyewear brand Zylo).

At **Shedia Home**, in cool Kolokotroni Street, you can throw love at the homeless and marginalised of Athens, as well as the planet. This innovative social business comprises a cheery restaurant and café, where you can shop art made from recycled copies of Shedia's magazine (sold by homeless vendors on the streets of Athens), as well as homewares and jewellery made from recycled materials by elderly people who were previously unemployed.





Wage a war on plastics

When Spanish-Greek couple, Daphne Marneli and Francisco Vargas-Bianchi, opened their plastic recycling-come-creativity lab in 2017, neighbours warned them that a shop telling people not to buy things would never survive. But survive **Plastikourgeio** has, because—as Francisco says—“we sell only things that people need.”

Built entirely from reclaimed objects (such as sea shells) and materials sourced locally from other neighbourhood businesses in Exarchia, Plastikourgeio specialises in sustainable products that enable people to move away from single-use items. You'll find everything from bread bags and bottle brushes, to zero waste bathroom and cleaning products and wheat straws.

Plastikourgeio also has a lab devoted to finding creative uses for recycled plastic, using modified 3D printers and other techniques. If you're in town for awhile, join in one of their workshops and watch them transform your trash into re-usable treasures.

Sleep with a clean eco-conscience

At **Coco Mat's** hotels in Koukaki and Kolonaki, you will slumber soundly on the eco-focussed company's famous mattresses made from all-natural materials, such as seaweed and coconut fibres. You can refuel from their healthy locavore menus and wherever you go in the hotel you'll be surrounded by wood, beautiful wood—even the bikes parked outside are wooden (built by Coco Mat at their Athens' factory). Borrow one to whizz around the city.

Green Suites Hotel in Ano Patisia is another sustainable option just outside the city centre (about 5km from the Acropolis). Inside, you'll experience soothing contemporary design with none of the wasteful practices that can come with high-end hotels. The property's striking facade looks almost as if it's built from bamboo poles but this all conceals high-tech features like solar mirrors, rainwater recovery and photovoltaic systems, which work together to make the building energy-neutral.