



VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

ITINERARY

**GREECE: A CIRCUMNAVIGATION
OF THE PELOPONNESE**
Aboard Harmony G
APRIL 30–MAY 9, 2025

ATHENS PRE-TRIP
APRIL 25–MAY 2, 2025

©2024



Acropolis of Athens © Tour participant David Barton

Join us on an unforgettable voyage as we circumnavigate the beautiful Peloponnese with a focus on the history and culture of Greece, from antiquity to the present, while enjoying the country's special birds and natural history. We have chartered the *Harmony G*, a wonderful, small motor yacht, for this adventure.

A captivating itinerary showcases some of the most famous and important historical sites in the ancient Greek world while providing opportunities for quality birding and nature viewing. We will make excursions to Epidaurus, the near-perfectly preserved 2,500-year-old theater that still hosts Greek dramas today; Mycenae, the ancient domain of King Agamemnon and the famed Lion's Gate; Pylos, site of Nestor's Palace and stately Navarino Bay; Olympia, where the Olympic games started in 776 B.C.E.; and Delphi, home of the ancient Delphic Oracle and perhaps the most beautiful location of all. Other highlights include an evening on the enchanting Byzantine-influenced islet of Monemvasia, a visit to the lightly visited island of Kythira, passage through the remarkable Canal of Corinth, and a final evening on the island of Aegina in the Saronic Gulf.



Eurasian Hoopoe © Andrew Whittaker

Our travels will include opportunities for birding at several coastal locations and around the archaeological sites themselves. We should see an impressive assortment of waterbirds. Among the possibilities are Little Ringed Plover, Eurasian Curlew, Audouin's and Yellow-legged gulls, Scopoli's and Yelkouan shearwaters, European Shag, Little Tern, Gray Heron, and Little Egret. Resident and migrant landbirds should also be evident in the form of Common and Pallid swifts, Short-toed Snake-Eagle, Little Owl, Eurasian Hoopoe, Eleonora's Falcon, Woodchat Shrike, Crested Lark, Western Rock Nuthatch, Blue Rock-Thrush, Eastern Black-eared Wheatear, Western Yellow Wagtail, and many others. Early May is a prime time to enjoy spring in Greece, and we should be treated to a delightful assortment of Mediterranean wildflowers.

This cruise will be led by an excellent team of leaders representing a diversity of expertise. Along with Barry Lyon, from Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, are Peter Zika, a superb field biologist and botanist at the herbarium of the University of Washington; Jonathan Meyrav, an expert on the birds of the eastern Mediterranean region; and Anatol Klass. Anatol is a postdoctoral fellow in history at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs. Anatol will present a series of lectures on the history of Greece, from the ancient world to the present. We will also be joined by excellent local guides, who will provide expert interpretation at each of the sites we visit and throughout the trip.

The *Harmony G* is an excellent vessel for this voyage, a motor yacht featuring 22 spacious cabins, all located on the main and upper decks, with windows, lower beds, private bathroom facilities, individual temperature controls, canopied viewing deck, and indoor/outdoor restaurant serving high quality cuisine.



Harmony G © Variety Cruises

The multi-thematic approach of this cruise provides a rich travel opportunity. It is an ideal choice for those who desire a travel experience that includes more than natural history and for those with a non-birding spouse or partner.

Our optional Athens Pre-trip offers an enriching complement to the cruise. For almost a week we will explore the historical and natural history splendor of the greater Athens area of the southern Greek mainland. Our travels will take us to the famed Acropolis, battlefield of Marathon, Temple of Artemis, and other remarkable sites. On other days we will visit a range of habitats in a diversity of locations seeking a suite of special birds. Among the many birds possible are widespread species and southeastern Europe specialty birds alike including Ferruginous Duck, White Stork, European Bee-eater, Tawny Owl, Rüppell's Warbler, and Black-headed and Cretzschmar's buntings. For an added touch, we have arranged for a honey-tasting event and lunch with wine-sampling at a local farm.



April 30–May 1, Days 1–2: Departure to Athens, Greece; arrival and evening welcome. Flights from the United States bound for Athens (airport code ATH) depart on April 30 and arrive on the morning of May 1. 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 (and for those who arrive early) 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 in close proximity to the hotel. 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. Also nearby is the Museum of the Acropolis, a spectacular facility that displays a treasure trove of sculptures and carvings from antiquity.

On May 1 (Day 2) we will gather as a group in a private room of the the hote 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.



Acropolis at Sundown, Athens © Barry Lyon

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

May 2, Day 3: Touring Athens; embarkation of *Harmony G*; cruise to Epidaurus. As we do not board the *Harmony G* until later in the afternoon, we'll spend most of the day in Athens before transferring to the port of Piraeus. We will be joined by an excellent local guide for a sightseeing and interpretive tour of the Greek capital.

Highlights:

- **Participate on a sightseeing and interpretive tour of central Athens**
- **Enjoy lunch in a traditional Greek taverna**
- **Embark *Harmony G* and cruise out of the port of Piraeus into the Saronic Gulf in the late afternoon**

An overview of Athens:

Situated in the administrative region of Attica, Athens is the largest and most important city in Greece. With a population of over eight million, it is also among the largest cities in Europe. Athens is one of the oldest cities in the world. In Classical times (5th–4th centuries B.C.E.), Athens was one of the most powerful city-states in ancient Greece. Against a backdrop of military superiority and great wealth Athens emerged as a center of cultural enlightenment, where the disciplines of philosophy, science, arts, politics, and athletics

were born—elements that later earned Athens the monikers “Cradle of Western Civilization” and “Birthplace of Democracy.” It is the traditions of the Classical period, as represented by the remains of the marble monuments atop the Acropolis, that fill the imaginations of travelers to Greece. Athens today is a city of “beta-level” global importance for its significance in economics, finance, industry, maritime commerce, and tourism.

City tour of Athens:

Our trip kicks off this morning with a day in Athens prior to embarkation of our motor yacht in the afternoon. We will be joined by an excellent local guide who will lead us on a sightseeing and interpretive tour of a number of important landmarks and points of interest in the city. Our day tour will focus on a few standout locations, several of which are not necessarily on the main tourist routes. Among the places we will visit:

- **National Gardens** – The National Garden is one of the most historic and important gardens in Greece. Featuring a network of pathways and a mix of native and ornamental trees, flowers, and shrubs, the gardens are an excellent example of 19th century landscape architecture in the English style. Rechristened the National Gardens in 1927, these gardens were the original Royal Gardens of King Otto and Queen Amalia, the first monarchs of Greece following the founding of the modern state in 1830. We will spend part of the morning exploring the gardens. April is an excellent time of the year to visit. In addition to the many attractions, the grounds can be productive for a range of year-round and seasonally resident birds and passage migrants. Eurasian Magpie, Eurasian Blue Tit, European Robin, Long-tailed Tit, and Eurasian Blackcap are all likely. Early May is prime time for bird migration and a host of flycatchers, warblers, and other birds are possible including European Pied Flycatcher, Greater Whitethroat, Wood Warbler, and Eurasian Golden Oriole among others.



Eurasian Blue Tit
© Andrew Whittaker

- **Zappeion** – Adjacent to the National Garden, the Zappeion is a large, palatial building constructed in the neoclassical architectural style. Designed by Danish architect Theophil Hansen, the building was constructed as a precursor to the return of the Olympic games to Athens in 1896. Featuring a Corinthian portico and colonnaded inner courtyard, the Zappeion presents a sight of undeniable appeal. The Zappeion is considered part of the “natural heritage of Greek civilization” and today is used for a variety of cultural events. The Zappeion takes its name from Evangelis Zappas, the benefactor of the project, a supporter of art and culture who was an ardent backer



Zappeion © A. Santos/Wikimedia Commons

of reviving the ancient Olympic games.

- **Panathenic Stadium** – The Panathenic Stadium is one of the most prominent and historic attractions in Athens. Built on the site of an ancient racecourse in 400 B.C. the stadium assumed its present-day appearance following a major refurbishment in the 19th century. Open on one end, the stadium is oval in shape and features tiers of stone benches surrounding a race track. It is the only stadium in the world built entirely of marble. The Panathenic Stadium served as the venue for the opening and closing ceremonies of the first modern Olympics in 1896. When the games returned to Athens in 2004 the stadium hosted the archery event and served as the finish line for the men's and women's marathons.

After lunch at a traditional Greek taverna, we will stop by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center before continuing to the port of Piraeus for embarkation.

- **Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center** – Stavros Niarchos was a Greek shipping tycoon of the 20th century and a prominent supporter of social well-being through support of the arts and humanities. Niarchos's vision is manifested by his namesake foundation and Cultural Center. Designed by Italian architect Renzo Piano and constructed 2012–2016, the Center is considered a triumph of architectural achievement. In 2016 it was nominated for the international prize of architecture. The Cultural Center is home to the national library and the Greek national opera.

Upon arrival at the yacht, we will spend time settling into our cabins and attending mandatory orientation and safety drills. Toward late afternoon, we will depart Piraeus for the three-hour crossing of the Saronic Gulf en route to the Peloponnese. We expect a comfortable transit with pleasing views of the Greek coastline and nearby islands with Athens retreating in our wake. European Shags and Yellow-legged Gulls may be in evidence around the ship and we may even see our first Scopoli's Shearwaters.



Yellow-legged Gull © David Barton

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 G*, Epidaurus Bay

May 3, 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.

Highlights:

- **A morning tour of Epidaurus, with birding**
- **Afternoon at sea cruising to Nafplion**
- **Enjoy a lecture presentation from the VENT staff**
- **An evening in Nafplion**



Ancient Theater of Epidaurus © Variety Cruises

Reputed as the birthplace of Apollo's son Asclepius, the healer god, the ancient site of Epidaurus was known throughout the Greek world as a healing sanctuary and for its theater. The Asclepeion was the sanctuary itself, a 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 enkoimitoria, a big sleeping hall. In their dreams, Asclepius would advise them what they had to do to regain their health. Found in the sanctuary during excavations was the remains of a guest house with 160 rooms, which spoke to size of the structure.

Asclepius 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 revival 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 design. When full, the theatre seats up to 15,000 people, and, in fact, is still in use today.

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.

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, European Goldfinch, and any number of migrant birds.



Short-toed Snake-Eagle, a regular sight at Epidaurus © Ecotours wildlife Holidays

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 likely 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.

In the mid-afternoon we may join a lecture from Dr. Anatol Klass or Peter Zika.

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.



Venetian fortress, on evening approach to Nafplion © ollirg/Shutterstock

We expect to dock in Nafplion in the evening after dinner. Participants may disembark and explore the town's central plaza and sidestreets, all with inviting shops and cafés.

NIGHT: Aboard *Harmony G*, Nafplion

May 4, 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 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!

Highlights:

- **A morning-long tour of Mycenae, with birding**
- **Afternoon at sea cruising to Monemvasia**
- **Enjoy a lecture presentation from the VENT staff**
- **An evening in Monemvasia**

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 Mycenaeans 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 avenged their father by forcing 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 the tale, Helen eloped with Paris of Troy. Agamemnon then called on all the kings of Greece to go to war against Troy on behalf of 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, beehive tomb, 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. Western 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 Eastern Black-eared Wheatear, a gorgeous specialty bird of the area that is occasionally seen alongside the entrance path.



Western Rock Nuthatch © Tour participant Bob Warren

Below the perimeter wall we may see birds such as Eurasian Hoopoe, Northern Wheatear, and Cirl Bunting, In the pine trees and olive trees around the administrative buildings and museum we may find Eurasian

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.

We will return to the ship in the late morning. Depending on our timing, we should have a chance to make a short trip to the adjacent shore of the Argolic Gulf where mudflats attract a variety of waterbirds such as Gray Heron, Little Ringed Plover, Eurasian Curlew, Little Stint, Black-headed Gull, and Common Tern. Eurasian Penduline-Tit, Whinchat, and Western Yellow Wagtail have also been seen on past trips.

Early in the afternoon we'll depart for Monemvasia, located near the southeastern 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. Anatol Klass 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 Scopoli's and Yelkouan shearwaters. The larger Scopoli's is the more common and widespread of the two, but Yelkouans may be seen in local abundance in larger groups.



Scopoli's Shearwater © David Barton

Along with Yelkouan Shearwater and Eleonora's Falcon, 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 away at 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 in the late afternoon. 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 to participate, we will disembark late in the day or in the early evening 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.



Monemvasia © Natilya Nazarova/Shutterstock

Once inside the quaint town we can stroll through the narrow streets, visiting various shops, cafés, and churches or simply experience 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 G*, Monemvasia and at sea

May 5, Day 6: Morning cruising to Kythira; nighttime cruising to Pylos. Our day will begin with a full morning at sea as we continue down the length of the Peloponnese. Throughout the morning we will have opportunities for seawatching, with sightings of Scopoli's and Yelkouan shearwaters likely along with the ever-present Yellow-legged Gulls. We may also take in a presentation from Peter Zika or Dr. Klass. Our destination for the afternoon is the island of Kythira, situated in the Mediterranean a short distance to the south of the mainland.

Highlights:

- **An easy morning at sea en route to Kythira**
- **Enjoy morning and afternoon lecture presentations from the VENT staff**
- **An afternoon at Chora**

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 mid-day. We will enter the protected and attractive port of Kapsali Bay on the south side of the island.



Kapsali Bay © Georgios Tsihchlis/Shutterstock

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 6th and 5th 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 main activity will center on 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. The view from the fortress walls of the surrounding sea and picturesque Kapsali Bay below are magical. The birding opportunities are limited here, but this location is often a very good place to see Alpine and Common swifts coursing by at close range late in the day. It can also be a good place to see the lovely Eleonora's Falcon. The falcons nest on a nearby islet but come to Kythira in search of food. Much of this species's 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 and the nearby island interior.

Of special note, 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 G* will set a course to the northwest and we will find ourselves on the open sea heading toward our next destination: Pylos.



Eleonora's Falcon © Bob Warren

NIGHT: Aboard *Harmony G*, at sea

May 6, Day 7: Pylos: Dinari Lagoon, Nestor's Palace, Methoni; 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 here, 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 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 War. 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.

Highlights:

- **Early morning birding option at Dinari Lagoon**
- **A morning-long tour of Nestor's Palace, with birding**
- **Afternoon options for more birding or a visit to the Venetian site of Methoni**



Pylos © Shutterstock

An optional morning excursion (7:00 a.m.) will be offered for those interested in birding before our visit to Nestor's Palace. 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 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 landbirds. Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Crested Lark and Corn Bunting may prove reasonably common, but we'll also watch for migrating European Bee-eater, White and Western Yellow wagtails, Woodchat Shrike, and Eurasian Golden Oriole among a number of possibilities.

A variety of shorebirds are possible if water conditions are right. Historically, Dinari Lagoon was located on a rich river delta. Large irrigation projects introduced in the twentieth century 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 Plover, Little Stint,



Crested Lark © David Barton

Curlew Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, and Common and Spotted redshanks. Other possibilities include Common Kingfisher, Western House-Martin, and Red-rumped Swallow.

Following our birding activities, we'll continue up the road to Nestor's Palace. Those foregoing the morning birding will depart *Harmony G* later and will join us at the archaeological site at the time of opening.

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 modern overhang structure to prevent further damage from the elements. An elevated walkway crisscrosses the ruin, affording close views from above. The sea is visible from the western side of the palace complex and extensive olive groves throughout the area lend a rural ambience to the setting. The gardens around the site are also surprisingly good for butterflies. Several beautiful species in particular, Cleopatra, Southern White Admiral, and Two-tailed Pasha, are regularly seen here.



Southern White Admiral © Tour participant Roy John

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 and a break.

We will have the remainder of the afternoon at our disposal. For those interested in additional birding, we will offer a return trip to Dinari Lagoon. This site is typically worth a second visit, especially during the migration period when birds are on the move. Those interested in history and sightseeing will have an opportunity to visit the Venetian site of Methoni. Situated a short distance south of Pylos, Methoni is a small

coastal town whose key attraction is the remains of a castle built by the Venetians in the 13th century. Among the standout features of the site is the castle gate, featuring the Lion of St. Marc, the celebrated symbol of the Venetians. Also here is the Bourtzi, a prison tower constructed atop a nearby islet by the Turks around 1500.

Others may simply want to use the time to take a walk in Pylos and perhaps enjoy an afternoon beverage.

Late in the day we will depart Pylos for Katakolo, gateway to Olympia.

NIGHT: Aboard *Harmony G*, at sea

May 7, Day 8: Day at Olympia (archaeological site and museum; 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 half of the day to exploring this remarkable site and its museum. In the mid-afternoon we will travel north to Patras and reboard *Harmony G*.

Highlights:

- **Morning-long tour of Olympia, with birding**
- **Lunch in a traditional taverna**
- **Late afternoon and evening cruising on the Gulf of Corinth**

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 (twelfth and eleventh 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 on-site 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 the Temple of Hera, Temple of Zeus, Philippeion (circular memorial of Ionic columns honoring the family of Alexander the Great and Leonidaion (lodging place for the athletes who participated in the games).



Ruins of Olympia © Elis Greese/Shutterstock

The most hallowed 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. Middle Spotted Woodpecker, 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. Olympia is also a place where Eleonora's Falcons may be seen hunting dragonflies directly over the ruins complex.



European Greenfinch © David Barton

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 first 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 hope to stop at a large shop on the edge of town where we can enjoy an olive oil tasting and, for those who desire, do a bit of shopping before we begin the trip to Patras.

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

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

May 8, Day 9: Morning excursion to Delphi (archaeological site and museum); 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.

Highlights:

- **Morning-long tour of Delphi, with birding**
- **Afternoon cruising on the Gulf of Corinth**
- **Enjoy a lecture presentation from the VENT staff**
- **Late afternoon transit of the Canal of Corinth**

Unlike other archaeological sites in Greece, Delphi is built on the side of a mountain. First time visitors are impressed as much for the 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 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.

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.



Temple of Athena Pronaia, Delphi © Variety Cruises

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.

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. Western 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. Woodchat Shrike and Cirl Bunting are possible along with European Robin, Red-rumped Swallow, Sombre Tit, Eastern Black-eared Wheatear, and Subalpine and Sardinian warblers.

Eurasian Crag Martin and Pallid Swift, two species of localized occurrence in southern Europe, are found here as well. Short-toed Snake-Eagles and Eurasian Kestrels 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 G* 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 completed in twelve years, 1881–1893.



Cirl Bunting © Francesco Veronesi

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 G*, Aegina

May 9, 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 G* 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.**

GREECE: ATHENS PRE-TRIP APRIL 25–May 2, 2025



Acropolis of Athens © Variety Cruises

An optional pre-trip to Greece’s capital city and outlying areas provides an excellent complement to our Greece: Circumnavigation of the Peloponnese cruise. While Athens is 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 several archaeological sites and other historical locations with 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 certainly spend a full afternoon together atop the ancient citadel, touring the revered Parthenon and other structures for which the site is so justly famous. Our tour will also incorporate visits to the delicate Sanctuary of Artemis in nearby Vravra, and the battlefield site at Marathon, where in 490 B.C.E. an army of 10,000 Greek soldiers defeated an army of 20,000 Persians in one of history’s most significant military conflicts. Our sightseeing and historical excursions will include a few cultural highlights, with opportunities for wine-sampling, honey-tasting, and even an opportunity or two for shopping.

On the birding and natural history front, we'll visit a diversity of locations outside the city in pursuit of specialty nesting birds and seasonal 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 encounter are birds with limited ranges in southeastern Europe including Rüppell's Warbler and Eastern Black-eared Wheatear. Around Marathon we'll search for waterbirds and dry-country landbirds. Ferruginous Duck, Little Egret, Short-toed Snake-Eagle, Great Reed-Warbler, and Black-headed Buntings are prizes of the region. Atop fir-covered Mount Parnitha we'll seek a range of montane birds including Tawny Owl, Coal Tit, Eastern Subalpine Warbler, and the very special Cretzschmar's Bunting. For a grand finale we'll travel further afield on our last day in the rural area of Erythres, seeking White Stork, European Bee-eater, European Roller, and more.

April 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 April 25 and arrive on the morning of April 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 (and for those who arrive early) 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 in close proximity to the hotel. 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. Also nearby is the Museum of the Acropolis, a spectacular facility that displays a treasure trove of sculptures and carvings from antiquity.

On April 26 (Day 2) 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

April 27, Day 3: Morning tour of Brauron (Sanctuary of Artemis); travel to Pallini for honey tasting, lunch, and wine sampling. Our first full day in Greece will be an easy one with a diversity of offerings in store. We'll kick off our pre-trip with an excursion east of Athens to the region of Vravra and the archaeological site of Brauron (Sanctuary of Artemis). We'll spend a couple of hours at the archaeological park and onsite museum where the historical interpretation we receive is complemented by birding. In the late morning we will head for the community of Pallini where we will partake in a honey-tasting event that is followed immediately with food and and the opportunity to sample Greek wines.



Temple of Artemis, Brauron © David Barton

Vravra, 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 (circa 17th–12th centuries B.C.), 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 smaller, 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 that it receives a fraction of the visitation of Greece's larger and better-known archaeological sites. 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, Little Owl, Red-rumped Swallow, Pallid Swift, Cetti's and Eastern Olivaceous warblers, Eurasian Penduline-Tit, European Goldfinch, European Greenfinch, and Black headed Bunting among many others. Please note that we will not hesitate to interrupt the interpretation or our exploration of the site to observe birds!

After exploring Brauron, we'll head northwest to Pallini where we'll enjoy an unusual but appetizing experience: the opportunity to sample honey.

Throughout our time in the Athens area we will travel in the company of local birding guide Spyros Skareas. Although Spyros is known in birding circles as among the preeminent experts on the birds of Greece, Spyros, in his professional life, is an expert on honey and its production. In fact, Spyros is a dedicated honey expert with over two decades of experience in the realm of Greek honey. With a Bachelor's Degree in

Agronomy from the Agricultural University of Athens and a Master's in Entomology from McGill University in Canada, Spyros has been actively engaged in the honey industry since 2002 as a beekeeping consultant and honey expert. In addition to providing beekeeping advice, his interest is centered around honey sensory analysis and evaluation. Each year, he has the privilege of sampling and savoring hundreds of Greek honey varieties, developing a refined palette that detects the most unique tastes and aromas. He passionately hosts honey-tasting events for international visitors, whether in private sessions or group gatherings. He is also a honey judge for national and international honey awards.



Honey tasting event led by Spyros Skareas © Greece Bird Tours

Upon arrival, we'll enjoy a homemade welcome drink as we delve into the fascinating partnership between bees and beekeepers and explore the hidden challenges in honey production.

With Spyros leading the way, we'll put our senses to the test with over ten varieties of high-quality honey to taste. We'll sample delicate orange blossom honey from the Peloponnese, spicy thyme honey from the Aegean islands, and robust black oak honey from Mt. Olympus, among many others. Each variety offers a unique flavor profile that reflects its distinct origin.

What we'll learn:

- Explore Greek honey varieties: Taste and learn ten important Greek honeys and their floral sources
- Hone our tasting skills: Write detailed tasting notes using the honey aroma wheel
- Expand our vocabulary: Learn to describe honey like a connoisseur
- Train our taste buds: Recognize different honey flavors and develop our palate
- Understand "crystallization": Learn about honey crystallization and how to evaluate it
- Perfect pairings: Discover how to combine honey with cheeses

After our honey testing session, we will taste homemade pies made from seasonal vegetables and cheeses, paired with local wine varieties.

We'll return to the hotel in the mid- to late afternoon for a break and some free time before reconvening for dinner. Dinner will be in an open-air restaurant with views of the Acropolis.

NIGHT: Hotel Divani Acropolis, Athens

April 28, Day 4: Morning at Mount Hymettus; afternoon at the Acropolis of Athens. 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; Eurasian Sparrowhawk; Common Buzzard; Eurasian Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon, Alpine, Pallid, and Common swifts;



Ruppell's Warbler © Shutterstock

Spotted Flycatcher; Ruppell's, Sardinian, and Eastern Subalpine warblers; Sombre, Great, and Eurasian Blue tits; Long-tailed Tit, European Serin; and Cirl Bunting.

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 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.



Parthenon, Athens © Shutterstock

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.

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.

At the foot of the south face, we may dedicate time 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 Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.

NIGHT: Divani Hotel Acropolis, Athens

April 29, Day 5: Schinias National Park and Marathon. 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.



Ferruginous Duck © David Barton

The centerpiece of the park is, believe it or not, the Olympic Rowing Club, situated on the coastal plain east of Marthon. 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, Great Reed-Warbler, and Zitting Cisticola. Remarkably, this is also an excellent location to see Ferruginous Duck, a highly localized species in southeastern Europe.



Great Reed Warbler © David Barton

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.

Later in the morning, we will stop at the site of the great Battle of Marathon, where in 490 B.C.E. 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.

NIGHT: Divani Hotel Acropolis, Athens

April 30, 6: A day at Mount Parnitha. On this day, we will travel eighteen miles north of Athens to the cool heights of Mount Parnitha, where we will spend the day birding at different elevations amid various habitat types.

At over 4,600 feet, Mount 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 Grecian Fir occur near the summit. We will spend a full 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 spend time amid 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 see during the cruise. Among more widespread species, such as Common Buzzard, Eurasian Kestrel, Eurasian Jay, Eurasian Magpie, and European Goldfinch, we'll seek a range of less common birds and area specialty birds including European Honey-Buzzard, Red-backed and Woodchat shrikes, Coal and Sombre tits, Wood Lark, Eastern Subalpine Warbler, Common Firecrest, Short-toed Treecreeper, Blue Rock-Thrush, Northern and Eastern Black-eared wheatears, Common Chaffinch, Eurasian Linnet, and European Serin. Here too are Short-toed Snake-Eagle, Pallid Swift, Common Raven, European Robin, Black Redstart, European Stonechat, and Cirl Bunting, and the range-restricted Cretzschmar's Bunting.



Common Firecrest © Brian Gibbons

We will return to Athens late in the afternoon. This evening we'll enjoy another lovely meal in the city.

NIGHT: Divani Hotel Acropolis, Athens

May 1, Day 7: A day at Erythres. On this, our final day of the pre-trip we will travel further afield, to the rural region of Erythres where we'll spend time birding a variety of areas that will net us birds we are not likely to encounter elsewhere. We are especially excited to visit this area as it represents an area never previously visited on a VENT tour!

Nestled in the northern tip of Attica, about forty-five miles from the Athens city center, Erythres is affectionately known as the "Tuscany of Central Greece." This picturesque area features diverse landscapes, from cotton and corn fields to rocky hills covered with Kermes Oak and classic Mediterranean *maquis* (shrubland habitat unique to the Mediterranean). Small streams lined with willow and poplar trees add to the natural beauty, making it an ideal birding destination.

Our itinerary for the day includes stops in a number of locations. Among these:

- **The ancient tower of Oinoi:** We'll begin our journey from the heart of Athens, heading west towards Elefsis and Mandra. Our first stop will be the ancient quadrilateral tower of Oinoi, near the present-day town of Oinoe. This well-preserved tower stands at a height of forty-five feet and dates back to the 4th century B.C.E. Historically, it served a supervisory and defensive role and was part of the phryctoriae, an ancient semaphore system. Little Owls often nest in this tower, and in the surrounding almond trees and shrubs we may spot Eurasian Hoopoe, Red-



Little Owl © Bob Warren

backed and Woodchat shrikes, European Stonechat, and European Greenfinch among other birds.

- **Erythres:** After a scenic drive with some twists and turns, we'll arrive in the village of Erythres. Our first stop here will be the Annunciation Church, home to the only White Stork nest in the Attica region. During our visit, the nestlings will likely have hatched, offering a chance to see the parents feeding their young. Spanish Sparrows also breed in the stork's nest and we'll be sure to point out the differences from the ubiquitous House Sparrows. Nearby, the central square buzzes with activity from Western House Martins, Barn Swallows, and, occasionally, Red-rumped Swallows.
- **Asopos River:** Next, we'll explore the outskirts of the village, where the Asopos River creates a unique riparian habitat with willow and poplar trees. This area is within the breeding ranges of variety of birds typically more common farther north in Greece but which reach the Attica region in smaller numbers. Among the likely possibilities are Lesser Gray Shrike, Lesser Kestrel, Eurasian Penduline-Tit, Common Nightingale, and the beautiful Black-headed Bunting.
- **Agia Marina Chapel:** We'll then head to Agia Marina Chapel, offering a stunning view of the Erythres plains. The area around the monastery can be particularly rewarding. Among the many special breeding birds here are Short-toed Snake-Eagle, European Honey-Buzzard, Eleonora's Falcon, Eastern Subalpine and Eastern Olivaceous warblers, Sombre Tit, Spotted Flycatcher, and Black-headed Bunting. Because our visit coincides with the height of spring migration, we could come across a range of northbound species that stop here only briefly. Among the possibilities are European Bee-eater; European Roller; Eastern Orphean, Icterine, Willow, and Wood warblers; and Collared and European Pied flycatchers.
- **6. The Quarry:** Our final stop is an active quarry on the eastern side of the Erythres plains. This area is habitat for nesting Long-legged Buzzard, Common Raven, Western Rock Nuthatch, Eastern Black-eared Wheatear, Blue Rock-Thrush, Black-headed Bunting, Eurasian Linnet, and more.



Black-headed Bunting © Bob Warrent

We will return to the hotel in the late afternoon, but with time to rest and relax before meeting the other cruise participants this evening.

May 2: Departure from home. Those participants not continuing on the cruise may depart Athens at any time today. Transfers to Athens International Airport (airport code ATH) are provided.

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.

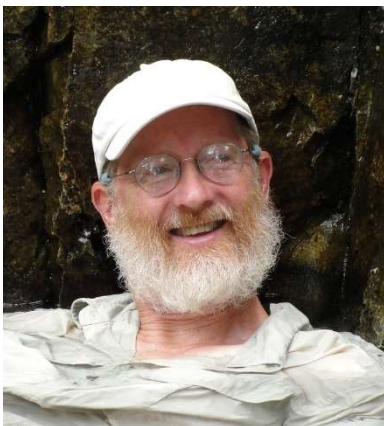
TOUR SIZE: We have chartered the 44-passenger *Harmony G* exclusively for VENT travelers; the **Circumnavigation of the Peloponnese** cruise will be limited to 34 participants; the **Athens Pre-trip** is limited to 12 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: **Barry Lyon, Peter Zika, Dr. Anatol Klass, and Jonathan Meyrav** will lead the cruise. **Barry Lyon and Peter Zika** will lead the Pre-trip.



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 administrative assistant. In 2014 he was named Chief Operating Officer (COO), reflecting his increased experience and responsibilities. In 2023

Barry ascended to the role of Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Although Barry still leads two or three trips a year, these days his work is geared almost entirely toward business, customer relations, and the management of the company. 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.



Peter Zika is a field biologist from Seattle, investigating and describing new species of plants from western North America. Working at the herbarium of the University of Washington, he is writing several chapters for new books on the plants of California, the Pacific Northwest, and the flora of North America, as well as conducting biological inventories of National Parks and Nature Conservancy preserves, studying interactions between noxious weeds and native wildlife, and researching the diet of fruit-eating birds. His interests in ecology have led him across the Tropics and into Polar Regions for the last 25 years. In addition to teaching wetland plant identification, he serves as a ship's naturalist on all oceans and continents. Peter has published more than 100 scientific notes, articles, and books, as well as occasional photographs, cards, and reviews in the

popular press.



Anatol Klass is a postdoctoral fellow in history at Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs. Before joining Columbia, he was a fellow at Harvard University’s Fairbank Center, the Harvard Kennedy School’s Belfer Center, and the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, DC. He received his B.A. from Harvard and his Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley. He began studying Ancient Greek and the classical world nearly two decades ago and also speaks Chinese and Japanese. His research focuses on the history of international relations with a particular emphasis on China’s changing role in global politics during the modern period. In addition to academic publications, Anatol’s writing about history and international affairs has appeared in venues including *The Washington Post*, *Foreign Policy*, *History Today*, and *The Los Angeles Review of Books*. Anatol also previously worked for the European Parliament, the principal legislative body of the European Union.



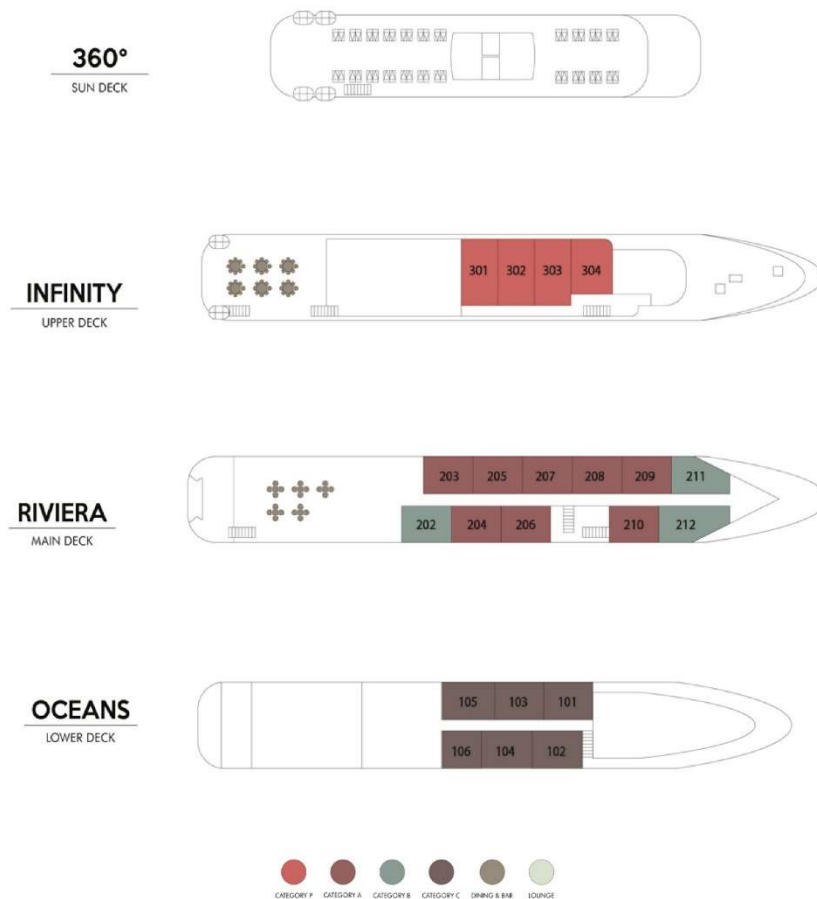
Jonathan Meyrav’s interest in birds began at the age of 10, and by age 12 he was the youngest member of a junior birders’ club. Jonathan earned his banding license at 14 and began participating in elaborate monitoring projects in Israel. As an environmental studies student at Ben Gurion College, Jonathan fell in love with the desert and desert birding, and spent entire days monitoring migrants and taking part in surveys and research programs. Jonathan has traveled the world extensively, from the African grasslands to the Amazon jungles and the Canadian tundra. To date, he has seen more than 3,500 birds across many countries. He has an intimate knowledge of southern Israel’s birds, and his ability to lead tours in English, French, Spanish, or Hebrew is incomparable. Today, Jonathan is the most experienced birding tour leader in Israel, with sharp identification skills and a keen interest in desert birds, migration, and vagrancy patterns. Jonathan worked for SPNI (The Society for the Protection of Nature) in Israel for many years, during which he and his team developed several large-scale international events: the Hula and Eilat Birding Festivals and international conferences; and in recent years he has coordinated the “Champions of the Flyway,” an international bird-a-thon that raises funds and awareness against the illegal killing of birds along the flyways. In 2022, Jonathan left SPNI and opened “Flyways Birding and Nature Tours,” a birding tour company that leads international birding tours around the world and in Israel, with conservation a key element of the company.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: Quoted prices are per person based on double occupancy. All cabins are outside cabins with windows or portholes, and fitted with individually controlled A/C, en suite bathrooms with shower. Cabins will be reserved on a first-come, first-served basis.

This ship offers no dedicated Single cabins. Singles are welcome to book any available cabin category at 1.6 times the double rate.

Category P, Suites	(Upper Deck Window: 1 double or 2 lower beds)	\$10,525
Category A	(Upper Deck Window: 2 lower beds)	\$ 9,895
Category B	(Main Deck Window: 2 lower beds)	\$ 9,295
Category C	(Main Deck Porthole: 1 double bed)	\$ 8,795

HARMONY G



Included in your cruise package:

- One night accommodation at the Divani Hotel Acropolis in Athens on day 2
- 7-night cruise aboard the 44-passenger M/V *Harmony G*
- 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 upon arrival in Athens; 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, including flights from your home to Athens and return
- 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 Pre-trip:

The fee for the **Athens Pre-trip** is **\$5,785** per person in double occupancy from Athens. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 2 (April 26) through lunch on Day 7 (May 1), 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 dinner on Day 2 or after lunch on Day 7, 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 **\$750**.

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 2, 2024). The deposit for the Athens Extension is **\$1,000** per person. The balance of the fees are due 150 days prior to departure (November 26, 2024).

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.

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
210 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$1,000
Between 209 and 151 days before departure	No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance will be refunded
Fewer than 150 days before departure date	No refund available

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. **For participants’ protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

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.

ATHENS PRE-TRIP 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.**

<u>If participant cancels:</u>	<u>Participant’s refund will be:</u>
180 days or more before departure date	Participant’s deposit minus \$500*
179 to 151 days before departure date	No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance of the tour fee will be refunded
150 days or less before departure date	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 its **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 from your point of injury or illness to your hospital of choice**; comprehensive travel insurance for trip cancellation/interruption, medical expense coverage, death of pet, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or political or security reasons, 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:
<https://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. The primary medical expense benefit is available to U.S. residents only. For this reason, non-U.S. residents will pay an adjusted premium when purchasing a comprehensive policy, which includes all of the other benefits available to U.S. residents. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

Coronavirus (COVID-19):

Concerns about COVID-19 may present uncertainty for those holding travel insurance policies or who are considering future travel and purchasing such insurance. Redpoint features a **Coronavirus FAQ page** on 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.

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

https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/.

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. Per person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: \$50 domestic; \$75 international.* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements. **Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be held responsible for any air ticket penalties.**

*An air ticket will be purchased by Victor Emanuel Travel on behalf of the traveler with the traveler’s consent. A purchase is considered final upon receipt of payment. If a ticket is subsequently reissued at the behest of the traveler (i.e. voluntary change of plans), the same fee rates apply for the reissue process, in addition to any fees that may be charged by the airline.

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: The mid-spring is an excellent time of the year to travel in Greece. The days are mild to warm with small to moderate chances for rain. On the cruise, nearly all of our time will be spent along the immediate coast, where daytime temperatures range in the 70s into the 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 upper 50s or low 60s. Around Athens, daytime temperatures could potentially reach the high 80s. If we are cruising into the wind, air temperature can seem cooler than it really is. Overall, participants should be prepared for mild mornings, cool to warm days, and cool evenings. Precipitation in the form of rain, related to a late cold front, is possible but not expected. The Athens Pre-trip will operate during the last week of April. Conditions will be similar to those we'll encounter during the cruise, but perhaps a little cooler with slightly higher chances for precipitation. Atop Mount Parnitha, temperatures will be several degrees cooler than in Athens.

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. Casual attire is generally fine for most if not all occasions. The following items are recommended:

- **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.
- **Evening Wear:** The atmosphere aboard *Harmony G* is casual, but you might consider Smart Casual attire for the evenings. For women this includes casual dresses or skirt/slacks ensembles. For men this includes khakis/slacks and open-collared shirts. The degree of dress is also in accordance with your personal preference.
- **Outerwear:** Mild to warm weather is expected on this trip, but a fleece or warm jacket will come in handy some mornings and evenings, especially in the event of wind or rain.
- **Bathing Suit:** An opportunity to swim will be available on our day at Kythira.
- **Hat:** A hat for protection from the sun is essential.

FOOTWEAR: A lightweight hiking boot or trail shoe will be appropriate 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. Dress shoes are appropriate for some evenings but are not essential.

CONDITIONS: Your trip to Greece will be a relaxing but full travel experience in which birding activities are combined with visits to 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 Pre-trip.

The ship – *Harmony G* is a motor yacht style vessel featuring 22 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 is a sun deck equipped with deckchairs and loungers; a shaded outdoor deck; and outdoor bar. Internet and email service are available.

Harmony G

Ship Type: Motor Yacht
Built: 2001 (renovated 2023)
Length: 177 feet / Beam: 23 feet / Draft: 12 feet
Crew: 17
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 Epidaurus, 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. The conditions during the cruise also apply to the Athens Pre-trip. The Acropolis of Athens requires walking up several stone stair cases.

While at sea – While cruising at sea, you’ll have options to join your leaders on the viewing decks for sea watching or 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 can be 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., depending on the day, 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 and return to the ship for lunch. Most afternoons will be reserved for cruising, seabirding, and lectures by Dr. Klass and Peter Zlka. 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 – Pre-trip: On the Athens Pre-trip, 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. 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 4 and will walk to dinner at a nearby restaurant thereafter.

Internet/Email: On the *Harmony G*, 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. Our cruise program (including the pre-trip) 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**
- **Water bottle**

BINOCULARS & SPOTTING SCOPES:

Binoculars – We strongly recommend good binoculars of at least 8x32, 8x42, or 10x42 magnification. We recommend that you do NOT bring mini-binoculars of any kind. Some people like “minis” 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 8x32 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 all necessary expenses, including all meals aboard *Harmony G*. 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 G* 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 G* 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 (September 2024), 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: We continually emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. Although VENT no longer maintains any of its COVID-era prevention protocols, we strongly recommend best practices for protecting yourself and your fellow travelers against COVID-19 illness. These measures include receiving the primary series vaccinations for those eligible, staying “Up to Date” with COVID-19 booster shots, wearing high filtration N-95 or KN-95 masks when in airports and on airplanes, and avoiding risky social settings in the lead-up to your tour.

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, 2023. Third edition. 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, with topics of theatre, art, 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.

History:

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.

Everitt, Anthony. ***The Rise of Athens: The Story of the World's Greatest Civilization***. Random House Trade Paperbacks 2017 (reprint).

"Magisterial" is a word that has been used to describe this special book. Anthony Everitt tells the story of a small city-state's rise to the most powerful civilization in the world. In recounting wars, the golden age, and a cast of timeless historical figures, Everitt explores the conditions from which Athenian enlightenment emerged—and that would shape the world of today.

Classic literature:

Aeschylus. ***Oresteia***. Peter Meineck (translator). Hackett 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. The *Oresteia* is Aeschylus' only completely surviving trilogy. It tells the tale of the Atreid dynasty, featuring the brothers Agamemnon and Menelaus of Iliad fame.

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 September 3, 2024 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.

GRI:20250430 / GRIE:20250425
Rev: 9/25/2025 – BL
P: 9/26/2025 - PS