

Destination guide NAFPLION

“ The 5,500-year-old city of Nafplion ”



OLD TOWN OF NAFPLION

Nafplion, set in a magnificent natural landscape in the shadow of a rocky peninsula and a high steep on the innermost east side of the Argolic Gulf, seems to rise out of the surrounding sea. This magnificent place lies just 125 km from Sparta and 145 km from Athens, this magic city whose every spot overwhelms its visitors with memories – unaltered memories that come from the depths of the centuries and slide into the present, whispering their old song. This area has been famous ever since antiquity for the

glorious civilisation its inhabitants developed so many centuries ago. The impressive remains they left behind are evidence of their existence and cannot fail to stir the imagination of anyone who sees them. A pilgrimage to Mycenae, to Lerna, to Tiryns and, a bit further away, to Epidaurus will fill our souls with memories. The dream knows no barriers when our soul remains open to emotion. No matter how many times we do the journey, each time is like the first.

HISTORY

By Eftychia Vlachou Batsi



Mythology has it that Poseidon saw **Amymone**, Danaus' daughter, with her hair hanging loose over her shoulders and was dazzled by her beauty. The child of this union was **Nauplius**, who was born somewhere on the coast of Euboea. When he became a man, though, he sailed his boat to the Gulf of Argolis which, according to philosopher Apollodorus of Rhodes, he 'built and inhabited'. Archaeological research has proved that Nafplio has been inhabited ever since the first-Mycenaean period. The story continues to unfold until this very day. In 1823, Nafplio became the **first capital of Greece**, following the war of independence of 1821. Over the centuries, the remains of various civilisations left marks that fused together, tied in with each other, and balanced aesthetically, as happens in all eternal cities.

NAFPLION



The magic of the city starts from its narrow alleys, where you can easily get lost and drift into a unique trip through time. We let the Venetian breeze caress our face and discover every little nook and cranny. In this contemporary city of 10,000 inhabitants the beauty looks like a painting.

The **OLD CITY** with the historic buildings was not only the capital of Morea during the 16th and 17th centuries, but also the **first capital of contemporary Greece**. Walking around the picturesque streets, we can see Turkish fountains next to Venetian balconies as well as elegant neo-classical houses, like the first high school, which was established by King Otto in 1833. Reaching **Syntagma Square**, which reminds us of an Italian piazza, we will see two traditional Turkish mosques – one, which is now a cinema, housed the first Mutual-Teaching school and the other was where the first Greek Parliament convened and was thus called the Parliament (Vouleftiko). We must not leave here without visiting **St. Spyridon's Church**, which was built in 1702 and became famous because of the assassination of Kapodistrias, the first governor of Greece, in 1831. The lethal bullet is kept in a glass case in the church wall. As the images carry you away to other times you begin to feel that just around the corner, you will meet Kapodistrias, strolling in his familiar imperious way. This place exerts such an influence on you that, if you walk about a little, you become totally immersed in the past – a past at once unique and enticing.

Also important is **St. George's Church**, which was built by the Venetians at the beginning of the 16th century and was decorated with murals, icons and reproductions of paintings by great Italian masters, of which a reproduction of Da Vinci's Last Supper still remains. It is also worth visiting **St. Nicolas' Church**, which was built by Augustus Sagredo in 1713, the **Nativity Church of the Virgin Mary** (Gennisis Theotokou), which is just behind the museum, and the Transfiguration (**Metamorphosis**) or Frangkoklissia Church, which was a monastery church during the Frankish occupation, was then converted into a mosque and was finally given to the Catholics of Nafplio by King Otto. The names of the Philhellenes that fell during the War of

Independence of 1821 are inscribed on a wooden arch on the façade of the church. The monuments of the city also include **Viceroy Armansberg and Maurer's houses, the Military School of Cadets, the first Ministry of Defence, and the impressive lion** which stands in the quarter of Pronoia and which was ordered by King Otto and sculptured by Siegel in remembrance of the Bavarians that died in Greece during the plague epidemic of 1833-34. It was in Pronoia Square that the National Assembly convened in 1832 and approved the election of King Otto.

We can also visit the **Municipal Gallery** with its rich collection of exhibits and the **first House of Parliament**, and see numerous monuments and statues of the leaders of the Greek War of Independence. In the Archaeological Museum, which is housed in a beautiful 1713 building, we can admire some rare findings from the Mycenaean period. We must not leave before visiting the **Peloponnesian Folklore Museum**, which has been given an awarded as the most comprehensive museum of folklore in Europe. Furthermore, in the **Worry Bead Museum** we can admire many different kinds of bead, each with its own silent history. Nafplio is not just history. It is a culture city – the area around Nafplio, Nafplia and the county of Argolis is one of the most famous tourist destinations in Greece and receives visitors all year round.

Nafplio is also ideal for entertainment. Its stone-paved streets are lined with traditional cafés and confectionery stores as well as by picturesque tavernas. Going towards the harbour, we will find many restaurants and fish tavernas.



A WALK AROUND THE CASTLES



THE CASTLE OF AKRONAFPLIA

Although our stroll around the city has finished, we cannot, even for a moment, forget Palamede since every narrow street reminds us of it. It is a unique place which stirs up weird and extraordinary feelings. The past and the present march together towards a new future, which turns into the present, and then becomes the past, and the history of this place is being continuously woven.



THE PALAMEDE CASTLE OVERLOOKS THE OLD TOWN OF NAFPLION AND THE SEA

PALAMEDE

While it's still daylight, unless we take the easy option and go by car, we can climb the 999 steps that lead to Palamede. The old city and the new one, as well as the whole of Argolis, all stretch out beneath us in a riot of beautiful colours. The more we step on this ground the more the memories become alive and the stories unfold like fairy tales. The renowned castle towers above the city of Nafplio giving it a medieval atmosphere. The precipitous cliff, which gave its name to the castle, was fortified by the Venetians. The fortifications in their current form belong to the second period of Venetian occupation. The French La Salle was commissioned by the Venetians to construct them. On top of the hill, at a height of 216m and on the vestiges of a prehistoric fortress stand the ruins of seven fortresses, six of which were named after ancient warriors (Themistocles, Miltiades, Achilles, Fokion, Epaminondas, Leonidas). If you

climbs the 999 abrupt steps – they are said to have been 1000 but one was broken by Kolokotronis – that lead to Palamede, you may well get tired but you will discover the wonderful sea views that form the background to Nafplio as you go through the successive gates. **The historic St. Andrew's Church**, which dates back to Venetian times, still stands at the top of the castle. The Venetian crest, 'St. Mark's Lion' can be seen in many parts of the castle. The cells, which served as prisons, are still preserved, and indeed, Kolokotronis was imprisoned in one of them. Palamede was considered to be impregnable, and this is why its conquest by the Greeks in 1822, after months of siege, amazed the whole world. Climbing down from Palamede, let your gaze and soul drift into another unique castle that will leave no one unmoved – the castle of Akronafplia, which lies at the foot of Palamede.



AKRONAFPLIA - A MAGNIFICENT FORTRESS BUILT BY THE ROMANS AND VENETIANS, WHERE THE HISTORICAL NAFPLIA PALACE HOTEL & VILLAS IS NOW LOCATED.

AKRONAFPLIA

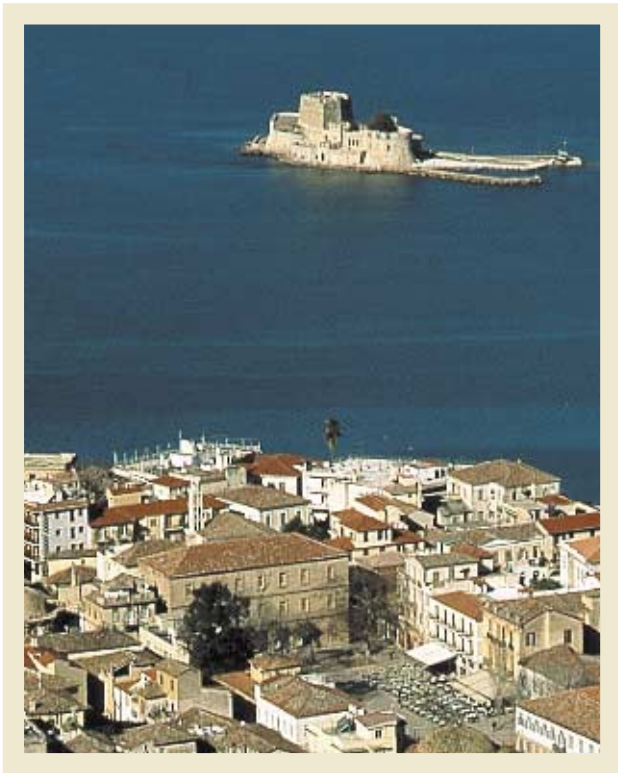
It has been established that the hill of Akronafplia had been inhabited since the end of the 3rd millennium BC. It was the location of the ancient city of Nafplia, which was later subjugated by Argos (7th century) and became its harbour and naval port. Around 300 BC walls were built around the city. However, it declined during the Roman occupation and almost all its inhabitants left. By 270 AD the city seems to have been developing again and this growth accelerated during the Byzantine period. In 879 it became the See of a Bishop and in 1189 the See of an Archbishop. In 1180 Byzantine emperor Manuel Comnenus appointed Sgouros as ruler of Nafplio. Sgouros was succeeded by his son, Leon Sgouros, who fought successfully against the Franks and established his hegemony as far as Larisa. In 1210 Godfrey Villardouinos conquered the whole city, except for one of its quarters known as the 'Greek' (romeiko) quarter. Two years later he ceded it to the Frankish ruler of Athens. After being governed by a succession of feudal overlords, Nafplio was ceded to the Venetians in 1388. After 1460, many Greeks took refuge in Nafplio and the size of the city quadrupled. Built at the foot of Palamede, it communicated with it through a secret passage. Geographically, Akronafplia is on three different levels, each of them with a separate castle. The most ancient is the west one, where the Acropolis used to stand fortified by a colossal polygonal wall. According to Pausanias, the city had been fortified by the 2nd century BC, but only the ruins of this fortress remain. When the Venetians conquered the city, Akronafplia had two fortresses, the East or Frankish one, and the West, or Greek (Romeiko). The Venetians built their own walls on the east side and reinforced them with five canons, which were called 'Five Brothers'. When the Turks conquered

Akronafplia, they repaired the fortifications. Only a few buildings from these four fortresses that co-exist in Akronafplia still remain, like the ruins of the Greek castle of the ancient Acropolis, which we mentioned before, with Roman and Byzantine extensions. The '**Castle of the Greeks**', a Byzantine ruin built on a Mycenaean Acropolis, dominates the south side of the peninsula of Nafplio.

To its west lies the '**Castle of the Franks**' – built by the French Dukes De La Roche – which features a gun emplacement and battlements with embrasures, while sadly nothing remains of the Venetian castle – known as 'Toro fortress' to the locals – as the Xenia Hotel was built on it. Other very impressive sights include the Venetian fortifications with the inlaid bas-reliefs of St. Mark, the **Grimani rampart**, built in 1706, and its contemporary (1701-1704) **Daniel Dolphin Fortress**. Containers dating from the prehistoric Acropolis, carved into the rock on the west side of Akronafplia, are still preserved. An asphalt-surfaced road leads up from Nikitara Square in the old city, helping us to explore the fortress of Akronafplia, while a coastal road encircles the fortress and leads to the **little church of Virgin Mary** with its atmosphere of devout worship. And, as our walk around Akronafplia is over, we stroll leisurely towards the waterfront.



ARVANITIA BEACH & PALAMEDE CASTLE



OLD TOWN OF NAFPLION AND BOURTZI ISLE

BOURTZI

A small, barren islet-fortress – at the entrance of the harbour, just 450m from the pier – used to be joined to Akronafplia by a chain which, in Venetian times, stopped undesirable ships from entering the harbour. Initially, the islet was called ‘Agii Theodori’, named after the church that stood on it. Later it was called ‘Passage’ by the Europeans and nowadays it is called Bourtzi. It was fortified by the Venetians in 1471 and was a strong strategic point. Later, the Turks added one more tower to the enclosure. We can reach Bourtzi by boat and enjoy a panoramic view of the magic of the city’s castles. It’s worth waking up early to enjoy the colours of the dawn and watch the sun rise and caress the three castles, which are unique the world over.

MYCENAE

Mycenae lies on a small hill that was inhabited during the Neolithic Age as well as during the Later Bronze Age. The civilisation there reached a peak from 1350-1200 BC, giving its name to a culture that spread all over Greece and all around the known world. Enormous grand walls surround the acropolis, except for its south side where a steep gorge offers a natural defence. The walls were built in three phases (1350 BC, 1250 BC and 1225 BC). On the hill stands the palace, with a throne room in the palace mansion on the southwest side, the **Lion Gate**, the **Religious Centre** with its important murals, monumental steps and propylaea, as well as the **First Burial Cycle** with the pit graves, where objects now exhibited in the **National Archaeological Museum of Athens** were unearthed. Apart from shops, a tunnel with huge walls was constructed in the southeast side of the hill around 1225 BC and led to an

underground spring.

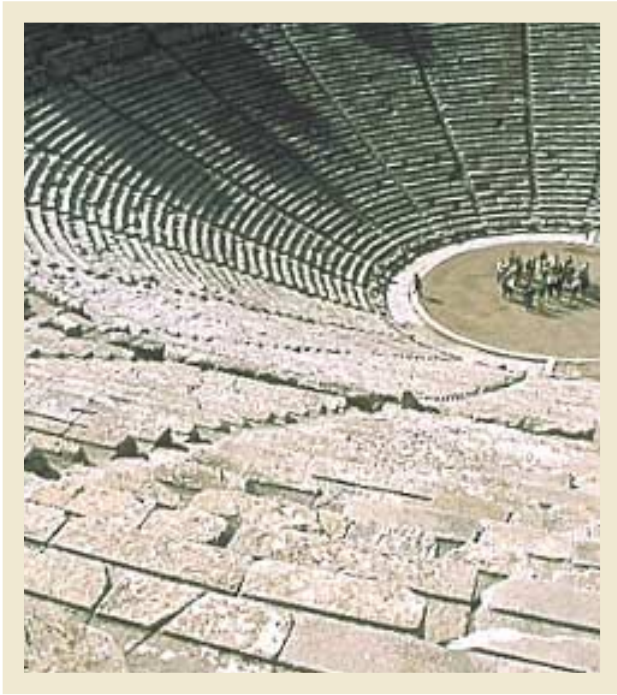
The remains of houses, the **Second Burial Cycle**, as well as immense beehive tombs were unearthed outside the walls. Mycenae was inhabited until 468 BC, when the Argeans conquered it and drove out its population. The acropolis was re-inhabited for a while in the 3rd century BC, but the area had been abandoned since the 2nd century BC when Pausanias visited it. In 1841, K. Pittakis cleaned the Lion Gate and in 1876 Heinrich Schliemann started excavating five tombs from the first Burial Cycle under the supervision of P. Stamatakis, who continued the excavation and unearthed the sixth grave. From 1864 to 1902, H. Tsountas examined the ruins of the palace, of the underground fountain and of many beehive tombs, while brief excavations were performed by D. Evangelides in 1909, G. Rodenwald in 1911, and A. Keramopoulos in 1917. More excavations were undertaken by A. Wace of the British Archaeological School of Athens, first in the Acropolis and the tombs, from 1920 to 1923 and then in houses and tombs in 1939 and from 1950 to 1957.

LERNA

We turn right at the crossroads and a little further down the road we step onto the turf of Ancient Lerna. This low-lying stretch of land on the west coast of the Gulf of Argolis remains one of the most important prehistoric sites in Greece. It is located at the foot Pontikos, a large hill south of the Myli, near the famous swamp lake of **Lerna**, where, according to mythology the **Hydra** lived and Hercules performed one of his famous labours. In the part which has been excavated (south and southeast section), the deeper strata showed traces of long-term habitation during the Neolithic Age (around 5500 to 3500 BC). A shiver runs down our spines as we walk the ground that great men trod 5,500 years ago. As we head back to Nafplio, a road sign invites us to follow it. Tiryns – another voice from the depths of the centuries.

TIRYNS

According to mythology, Tiryns was founded by the Cyclops. It initially belonged to Danaus and later to Hercules’ descend dants. Excavation findings show that it was first inhabited during the Neolithic Age. However, its peak period began during the Proto-Hellenic period (2500 BC) and continued into the Mycenaean period when the citadel assumed its monumental form. Despite the Dorian invasion it remained inhabited until the Geometric Age, during which a settlement was even created outside the acropolis. Its decline began after the development of Argos, which destroyed Tiryns in about 468 BC. The inhabitants abandoned the area and some of them settled in Argos, while others went to present day Porto Heli. However, it was re-inhabited during Byzantine years. The contemporary village, a beautiful calm place, is built near the ruins of the ancient city, 7 km north of Nafplio. And, since we have travelled so far, it would be a great mistake not to visit ancient Epidaurus, a place which was renowned in the whole of the ancient world and still remains so.



ANCIENT THEATER OF EPIDAYRUS

EPIDAUROS

Twenty-five kilometres further down the road, on the east coast of Argolis, we can tread the sacred ground where our ancient poets, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides as well as other spiritual masters once walked. The present has embraced the past with such harmony and in such a dream-like landscape that the visitor is left speechless. In the middle stands the theatre of Epidauros, the best preserved of all the ancient theatres and, as a result, a major tourist destination. 2,400 years after its construction, the theatre is still in use today and ancient tragedies and comedies as well as concerts are staged here almost every weekend during July and August as part of the Greek Festival. The ancient sanctuary of Epidauros, which includes the theatre, was built much earlier than the theatre itself and had been

dedicated to goddesses of fertility by the Mycenaean period. It was later dedicated to Apollo and, finally, after the 7th century BC, to Asclepius, the god of medicine. Apart from the theatre, the archaeological site of Epidauros includes the remnants of the sanctuary, which consisted of the temple of Asclepius, Greek and Roman baths and the stadium, all of them situated west of Xenia Hotel and the spacious local parking area. The theatre is considered to be an architectural miracle. It was built in the 4th century BC and was extended in the 2nd century. It can hold **12,000 spectators** and its acoustics are astounding. When it is absolutely quiet, whispers from the orchestra and the stage can be heard right back as far as the last seats in the 54th row. The site is open from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. in the summer and from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. in the winter. It has a spacious parking area. The performances staged in Epidauros are excellent and should not be missed. It is a unique cultural experience, in the country where theatre was born. The programme of the annual Festival of Epidauros, under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture, is usually announced in May. A smaller theatre, also in the area of Epidauros, has been restored recently. It is a small jewel on the hollow hill, with excellent acoustics, and many performances are staged there every summer. The existence of two theatres in this area gives us an idea of the unique civilisation which existed in that era.

TOLO

This is a seaside village, built on a picturesque bay. The area is full of citrus trees and is just 10 km away from Nafplio. The ruins of the Venetian castle in Vivari stand against the backdrop of one of the most fascinating Peloponnesian coasts and the site is certainly worth visiting. Tolo is a charming village ready to offer its visitors rich traditional hospitality as well as modern entertainment. Boat trips to the islands Hydra, Spetses and Poros are available during the summer season.



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