

Three Ancient Wonders in Turkey/Greece

This is a report on a visit to Turkey and Greece in June/July of 2015. KLM flew from LAX via Amsterdam to Istanbul, Turkey for an eighteen day trip to Turkey and Greece. The trip was inspired by the board game 7 Wonders, which casts each player as having one of the 7 Wonders of the Ancient World. The Pyramids of Giza and the site of the Lighthouse of Alexandria in Egypt were visited previously. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon are currently inaccessible. The site of the Statue of Zeus at Olympia is on the list.

Kusadesi: This is the port for ancient city of Ephesus in Turkey, the location for the Temple of Artemis. The original river access to Ephesus had silted up two thousand years ago and is now farmland. The guide stopped there for the best nectarines and peaches ever. There are many spectacular ruins in Ephesus, especially the library and the amphitheater. The ruins of the Temple of Artemis had been scavenged for building materials. The ruins of the Basilica of St. John were very extensive and included a hilltop fortress.

Bodrum: This Turkish city is the location of the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus. The ruins are now a multi-level complex in the middle of town. There is also the Castle of St Peter guarding the port that was attacked during World War I. It is now an archeological museum. The town has grown into a boating resort over the last 60 years and has a very interesting bazaar along the coastline.

Rhodes: The currently Greek island had the Colossus of Rhodes over the port entry. The old town area is still surrounded by a substantial fortress wall, and vehicles are mostly excluded from the old town area. The tour started near the port, and headed out to the recommended beach at Tsambika which was great since it was long beach with a long parking lot adjacent with no hotels there. Umbrellas were for rent on the beach. The water was clear but somewhat cold. Small fish were present that matched the color of the white sand or brown rocks nearby. The next stop down the coast was the old medieval fortress at Lindos.

Santorini: The classic island pictures of whitewashed buildings with blue domes on a high ridge are here. The ship tenders went to the base of a cliff with a funicular tramway to the top where the main town was located. Donkey rides to the top are available. There is a volcano and in the middle of the bay with hot springs warming up the ocean. I took a boat ride to the little port of the picturesque hilltop town of Oia and then a bus back to the town above the tramway which was a long, troublesome walk from the bus stop.

Athens: The capital of Greece since ancient times, and the place of the hilltop Acropolis which has the Parthenon temple. This is also the birthplace of the modern Olympic games in 1896 as well as the bankrupting games in 2004. The stadiums for both these games are prominent in the city. I was there just before the vote on the financial problems, but that situation is complex. The guide complained that rich Greeks pay no taxes in Greece, and then took us all to lunch in a Greek café with Greek music.

Mykonos: This arid island is the home of parties and crowded beach resorts. There seem to be houses everywhere and the roads are lined with three foot rock walls. The destination here was the Super Paradise beach resort. It had a very nice restaurant and the beach was crowded with umbrellas for rent. Boat and bus shuttles from the main city dropped off many beachgoers. The big party starts everyday at 4PM. The Greeks (or maybe it was the tourists) know how to dance, drink, and have a good time.

Crete: This is the fifth largest island in the Mediterranean. There are many different beaches all around the island. The pink sands and sunset at Elafonisi are exceptional. The trip started in Chania/Souda and then traveled the two hours to the Palace at Knossos near Heraklion. This large palace was built by the ancient Minoan civilization that dominated trade in the eastern Mediterranean. Much of the palace had been rebuilt over the last ten years. On the way back, we stopped at the aptly named Bali beach area.

Istanbul: The city is located on the Bosphorus strait between the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmara which leads to the Dardanelles and then the Mediterranean. This location is the traditional trade center of civilizations in the area. A new city was founded by Emperor Constantine in 330 AD as Constantinople. The capital of Turkey was moved to the more central Ankara by Kemal Ataturk in 1923. The renamed Istanbul connects the cultures of Europe and Asia. It has one of 7 Wonders of the Medieval World: Haga Sophia, which was a Church 537-1453, a Mosque 1453-1931, and a Museum 1931-present. It was the largest cathedral in the world 537-1520. Touring included a boat ride up the Bosphorus, the Big Bus around town, and many subway/tram/ferry rides with Metro Pass. Topkapi Palace and the Blue Mosque are mandatory.