Preliminary Itinerary

June 26-July 6, 2020

While Greece attracts large numbers of visitors every year from all over the world, there are areas in this ancient land that remain “undiscovered.” Such an area is Epirus, the focus of our unique journey, a place that is not familiar even to most avid travelers. Located in the northwest corner of the country, nature has blessed Epirus with abundant gifts: green mountains and thick forests, an inviting shoreline facing the Ionian Sea, rivers and lakes. Spread around this very beautiful place are picturesque towns, authentic traditional villages and magnificent ancient sites.

Our journey will begin in Athens, the cosmopolitan and dynamic capital of Greece and the oldest city in Europe, where we will visit some of its most important landmark sites, including the Agora, ancient Athens’ civic center, and the ageless monuments of the Acropolis. We will then fly to Ioannina, the main city of Epirus. Built on an idyllic spot, a promontory facing a lake, Ioannina has a long history, a beautifully preserved old town, and is home to an important university. From here, we will explore other magnificent places, including awe-inspiring Meteora, the monasteries “in mid-air,” the ancient oracular site of Dodoni; and the idyllic island of Corfu.

From Ioannina, we will continue to the southern part of Epirus, where we will stay at the lovely seaside town of Preveza. This part of Epirus is home to several important ancient sites, which we will tour. Among them is Nikopolis, founded by Augustus after his victory over Antony and Cleopatra at nearby Actium in 31 BC.

We have timed our visit in Epirus to coincide with the Epirus Chamber Music Festival. Organized by Chamber Music Hellas, a New York-based non-profit organization that puts together high-quality chamber music festivals in places in Greece that remain outside the country’s frequented tourist destinations, the Festival will present five concerts in venues of exceptional beauty, mostly in ancient Greek theaters. The ancient Greeks believed that music was a gift from the gods. In fact, the word “music” comes from Muses, the nine mythological daughters of Zeus and patron goddesses of the arts. To explore magnificent historic sites during the day and then attend a concert of sublime music at an outdoor ancient Greek theater in the early evening will surely feel like a gift sent by the gods.

This unique and unusual journey is certain to appeal to first-time travelers to Greece as well as to those who have visited the country before. We hope you will join us to discover a different face of Greece.
Friday, June 26: Depart the US
Depart the United States, generally on an evening flight. Fly to Athens, Greece.

Saturday, June 27: Athens, Greece
Arrive in Athens and transfer to the elegant Hotel Grande Bretagne, located on Constitution Square, the center of the city. In the evening, enjoy a welcome dinner.
HOTEL GRANDE BRETAGNE (D)

Sunday, June 28: Athens
One of the world’s most venerable cities, Athens is the oldest city in Europe. Its ancient monuments stand as testimonials to its glorious past that gave birth to democracy and many other ideas and concepts that form an integral part of the Western tradition. In the morning, visit the Agora, the civic center of Athens. In the afternoon, tour the Acropolis, with the incomparable Parthenon and other temples and structures built in the 5th century BC. Also, visit the new Acropolis Museum. Built at the foot of the Acropolis, it houses an outstanding collection of sculpture and other artifacts. In the evening, attend a performance at the magnificent Herodes Atticus theater, or the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center (subject to program availability).
HOTEL GRANDE BRETAGNE (B)

Monday, June 29: Athens/Ioannina and Dodoni, Epirus
Transfer to the airport for the morning short flight to Ioannina. Built on a rocky promontory that projects into a lake, the attractive university town of Ioannina first came into prominence in the 13th century. Since that time, it remains the commercial and learning center of northwest Greece. After lunch, tour the quaint old section, which is still enclosed within fortifications. Continue to Dodoni, an archaeological site of great beauty and importance. An early oracular site dedicated to Zeus, Dodoni’s dominant landmark is its superb 3rd-century BC theater, where we will attend the opening concert of the Epirus Chamber Music Festival. Dinner will be served at a nearby taverna. Our hotel in Ioannina will be the lovely Grand Serai.
HOTEL GRAND SERAI (B,L,D)

Tuesday, June 30: Corfu Island and Gitana
Leave the hotel in the morning for the port of Igoumenitsa, where we will board a boat to sail across the strait to Corfu Island, perhaps the loveliest in the group of islands known as the Ionian. Corfu is notable for its superb landscape and wealth of historic landmarks. Identified as the green and fair island of the Phaeacians, where Odysseus landed after ten years of wandering in the Mediterranean, Corfu was colonized by Corinthians in the 8th century BC, becoming a prosperous city-state. From the 14th to the 18th centuries, Corfu was the prized possession of Venice. The Venetian influence survives today in the town’s characteristic architecture. Explore this delightful place, including the historic center, with its two prominent fortresses; the church of the Metropolis, with its splendid iconostasis; the Archaeological Museum, which houses the Gorgon pediment from the Temple of Artemis, among other artifacts; and the iconic islets of Vlaherna and Pondikonissi. Return to Igoumenitsa, and after dinner at a local taverna, drive to the seldom-visited ancient site of Gitana, where we will attend the second concert of the Epirus Chamber Music Festival, held at its theater.
HOTEL GRAND SERAI (B,L,D)

Wednesday, July 1: Meteora and Metsovo
Leave the hotel in the morning for Meteora, driving through what is arguably the most spectacular scenery in Greece. In Meteora we are presented with a most extraordinary sight. Rising abruptly from the valley of central Greece are gigantic precipitous rocks on top of which hermits built monasteries (the monasteries in “mid-air”) some 600 years ago. At this
celebrated UNESCO World Heritage Site, we will visit the Monastery of St. Varlaam, whose interior is covered entirely with frescoes. The view from the monastery of the surrounding rocks and their monasteries is stupendous. After lunch at Kalambaka, the town just below Meteora, return to Ioannina, stopping on the way at Metsovo, a pretty alpine village built on the side of a ravine.

**HOTEL GRAND SERAI (B,L,D)**

**Thursday, July 2: Ioannina, Ephyra, Parga, Cassope, Preveza**

Leave Ioannina in the morning for the southern part of Epirus. Reach the Necromanteion of Ephyra, the site that marked the entrance to the Underworld, and the sanctuary of Persephone and Hades. One of the most famous visitors here was Odysseus, as mentioned by Homer in the Odyssey. After visiting the site, drive to nearby Parga. Situated on the lush Ionian Sea coast, Parga’s position on the neck of a headland and against slopes clad with olive and other trees makes it a most attractive place. Settled since antiquity, Parga prospered in the middle ages when it came under the domination of Venice. Enjoy lunch in this lovely place, and then explore ancient Cassope. Founded in the 4th century BC, Cassope occupies an attractive position below its acropolis. Large public buildings were built, including two theaters, and private houses have been excavated. Near Cassope is the seaside town of Preveza, where we will stay at the Hotel Dioni for the next three nights. After checking in and enjoying dinner at a town taverna, we will return to Cassope’s ancient theater to attend a concert of the Epirus Chamber Music Festival.

**HOTEL DIONI (B,L,D)**

**Friday, July 3: Preveza, Arta**

Located at one end of the narrow opening that leads to a spacious gulf, Preveza is built on the site of the ancient Berenikia, which was founded in 290 BC. In 1499, it was occupied by the Venetians, who held it for 200 years. It was off Preveza that the decisive Battle of Actium took place in 31 BC by the fleet of Octavian and the much larger combined fleet of Antony and Cleopatra resulting in the victory of Octavian’s forces and his becoming Roman Emperor Augustus. Spend the morning at leisure to explore Preveza on your own. In the afternoon, drive to the town of Arta, which occupies the site of Ambracia, an ancient town that was founded at the end of the 7th century BC. After exploring the town, including the remains of the ancient city and the remarkable Bridge of Arta, a stone packhorse bridge dating from the Ottoman period, enjoy

**TOUR LEADER BARRY STRAUSS**

Barry Strauss is a classicist, military and naval historian, and consultant. As the Series Editor of the Princeton History of the Ancient World and author of eight books on ancient history, Professor Strauss is a recognized authority on the subject of leadership and the lessons that can be learned from the experiences of the greatest political and military leaders of the ancient world, including Caesar, Hannibal, Alexander, among many others.

An expert on military strategy, Strauss is a former chair of Cornell’s Department of History. He is currently director as well as a founder of Cornell’s Program on Freedom and Free Societies, which investigates challenges to constitutional liberty at home and abroad. He holds fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the German Academic Exchange Service, the Korea Foundation, the MacDowell Colony, the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, the American Academy in Rome, among others and is the recipient of Cornell’s Clark (now Russell) Award for Excellence in Teaching. In recognition of his scholarship, he received he received the Lucio Colletti Journalism Prize for literature and he was named an Honorary Citizen of Salamis, Greece.

His *Battle of Salamis: The Naval Encounter That Saved Greece—and Western Civilization* (Simon & Schuster) was named one of the best books of 2004 by the Washington Post. His *Masters of Command: Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar and the Genius of Leadership* (Simon & Schuster) was named one of the best books of 2012 by Bloomberg. His 2015 *The Death of Caesar: The Story of History’s Most Famous Assassination* (Simon & Schuster) was called “clear and compelling” by TIME, “brilliant” by the Wall Street Journal, “engrossing, exhaustive yet surprisingly easy to read” by Barrons, and “an absolutely marvelous read” by The Times of London. His new *Ten Caesars: Roman Emperors from Augustus to Constantine* (Simon & Schuster) has been hailed as “lively,” “captivating,” and “essential reading for Romanophiles and for everyone who seeks to understand the most formidable personalities of the Roman Empire.”
dinner at a local restaurant and attend a concert in the splendid Church of the Parigoritissa, built in 1282-89.

HOTEL DIONI (B,D)

Saturday, July 4: Preveza, Lefkada Island, Nikopolis
In the morning, explore Lefkada, one of the Ionian Islands that line Greece’s west coast. Only 17 miles from Preveza, and connected to the mainland by a causeway, the island has been coveted since antiquity for its strategic position as the gateway to western Greece. Lefkada is known for its beautiful landscape and coastline. After touring the island’s main town and enjoying lunch, return to the mainland to visit Nikopolis. Located close to Preveza, Nikopolis (“Victory City”) was founded by Octavian/Augustus to commemorate his victory at Actium. After dinner, attend the closing concert of the Epirus Chamber Music Festival, held at the imposing ancient theater of Nikopolis.

HOTEL DIONI (B,L,D)

Sunday, July 5: Preveza, Ioannina, Athens
Drive from Preveza to Ioannina’s airport for the flight to Athens. Upon arrival, check-in at the Hotel Sofitel, conveniently located across the street from the airport’s terminal.

HOTEL SOFITEL (B)

Monday, July 6: Athens, US
Walk across from the hotel to the departures terminal for the return flight home.

PROGRAM INCLUSIONS
- Two nights in Athens at the Hotel Grande Bretagne; three nights in Ioannina at the Hotel Grand Serai; three nights in Preveza at the Hotel Dioni; one night at the Hotel Sofitel, Athens airport.
- American breakfast each morning at the hotels.
- Five lunches and seven dinners at local select restaurants, with wine or beer.
- Round trip airfare from Athens to Ioannina.
- Tours and excursions as described in the itinerary by air-conditioned, Wi-Fi equipped motor coach and professional English-speaking guide.
- The concerts of the Epirus Chamber Music Festival.
- Lectures and discussions by Barry Strauss, Professor of History and Classics at Cornell University.
- Airport/hotel transfers and handling of luggage in Greece.
- Entrance fees to archaeological sites and museums.
- Gratuities to porters, guides and drivers.
- The services of an experienced tour manager.
- Complete pre-departure material.

NOT INCLUDED: International airfare; travel insurance, expenses of a personal nature; any items not specified in the Itinerary and Program Inclusions.

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OPTIONAL EXTENSION
VIKOS GORGE, ZAGORI VILLAGES, JULY 5-8, 2020
Extend your exploration of Epirus by visiting the quaint villages of Zagori and the magnificent UNESCO-protected Vikos Gorge. Located north of Ioannina, near the Greek-Albania border, the Vikos Gorge features the steepest walls of any gorge in the world. Vikos has been compared favorably to the Grand Canyon in scale and grandeur. As one 19th-century traveler observed, it’s a sight “beyond words.” In this extraordinarily impressive mountainous country are scattered old villages that have preserved their traditional stone architecture. During our stay, we will have ample opportunities to view the gorge, explore the surrounding area and the villages, and taste the delicious local cuisine. Accommodations for three nights will be at the superb Aristi Resort and Spa, a boutique hotel that is a featured property of National Geographic’s Unique Lodges of the World.