

Turkey and Greece

August 21 - September 1, 2026

Viking

Friday and Saturday, August 21 - 22

Leisurely leave the house about 5:15 pm. Worry about the traffic over the bridge, but it is not a problem. We slow down but never stop. We get to the airport in plenty of time. Check in, go through Security (Jan gets stopped because of her Theracare), and get to the B Terminal. Have a glass of wine plus a butcher's tray there. Get wine, dinner, and breakfast on the plane.

At Heathrow, we have a three hour layover. Thinking we would get something on the flight to Istanbul, we don't get anything to eat there. On the flight we get water and cookies. When the food for purchase cart comes by, it is sold out of sandwiches. No dinner (or lunch as it may be).

In Istanbul, we have a long walk to passport control. The line at passport control moves amazingly quickly. Get to the baggage carousel and can't find our luggage. The Viking representative has taken it off for us (even though we have red Road Scholar tags instead of red Viking tags). Finally find our bags and we are taken to the bus to the hotel. The hotel is the Four Seasons at the Bosphorus. A beautiful hotel with orchids everywhere including in our room. Despite being very tired, we go down to the ground floor restaurant right by the straight and have a glass of wine and a cheese tray. Then go to bed.

Sunday, August 23 - Istanbul

Randy sets the alarm wrong and we oversleep. Go without breakfast but make it to the bus on time. Go to a restaurant on the Asian side of the straight and get a huge brunch. Then to the Beylerbeyi Palace, the Summer Palace of the sultan. We tour the rooms. The palace was built in the early 19th century and mimicked the French style of architecture. It is splendid but not too ornate. Return to Istanbul's old town (Constantinople) and



go to the cistern. Then on to the Blue Mosque. On the outside it looks like an "official" building, but, on the inside, it has lovely blue tiles and beautiful stained glass. Vote to go back to the hotel and take a nap. Happy hour and dinner by the straight. Back to the room to journal and to get to bed early. Hopefully, we have set the alarm clock correctly this time.

Monday, August 24

We get very little sleep. Jet lag and time change probably. Have breakfast in the hotel restaurant. Our guide gets us going 15 minutes ahead of schedule. He is aware of a cruise ship coming in today and wants us to get ahead of the crowds. We bus into old town and walk to Hagia Sophia by the Hippodrome. The mosque is quite a disappointment. It is under renovation with much of the outside draped with coverings and massive support on the inside. Can't see the dome or get a good view of the center portion. Lots of the mosaics have been removed (stolen?) from the walls. Get to see a number on the ones that are (partially) remaining: the Virgin Mary, Christ with Emperor Constantine IX Monomachos and Empress Zoë, a panel with Christ, the Virgin Mary and John the baptist, and one of the Virgin with Christ, Emperor Justinian I and Emperor Constantine the Great. There are no line for viewing any of these. Go to a rug dealer and get some Turkish coffee. Have a demonstration about making these rugs with the double tie method and get a viewing of their rugs. They are beautiful but we don't even think about getting one. Shop at a jewelry shop on the way out. Find a uniquely Turkish stone, zultanite, which changes color depending on the intensity and direction of the incoming light. Get a ring with that stone for Jan. Go to the Topkapi Palace with its four courtyards. Quickly go through the first three and into the Treasury. There are lots of objects encrusted with jewels: swords, flintlocks, pendants, daggers, etc. The biggest emeralds that you have ever seen. Big rubies and diamonds too, but not as big as many of the emeralds. In the middle of the walk through the treasury is a balcony with a beautiful view of old town. Also go through the section with the robe collection. They all have the same shape but are made of different materials.

Walk to lunch. Wine and beer. Many, many dishes; they just keep coming out.

Get on the bus and go to the spice market. Taste some Turkish delight (sweet candies) and have various types of tea.

Go back to the hotel and nap. Get up; decide not to go to dinner; and go back to bed.

Tuesday, August 25 - Boarding day

Get up rather late (8:00 am) and go down to breakfast. Have a table by the straight. Catch the 11:00 bus to the ship. Tag our luggage for our room upgrade. Rooms are not ready when we arrive. So we go to lunch. In the middle of lunch, they announce that all of the rooms are ready. We finish and go up to our upgraded room. It is much bigger than our previous rooms (no suitcase under the bed). Take a nap until the "Port Talk". Go to dinner and see the movie "Gallipoli" after dinner.



Wednesday, August 26

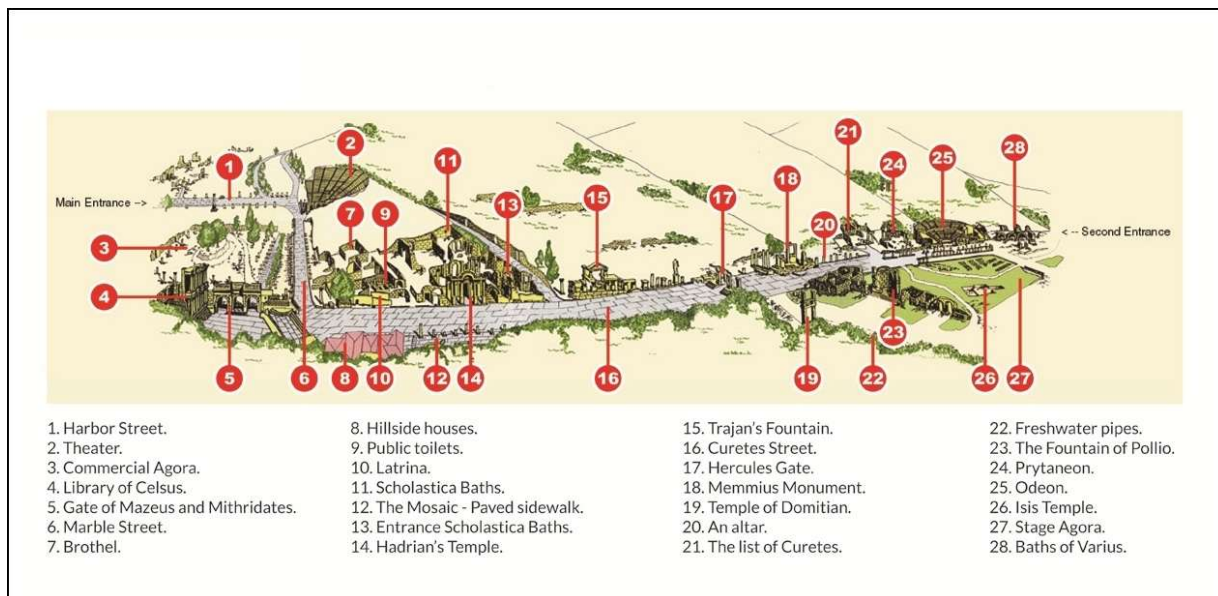
Small boat cruise. Go up the Bosphorus through two Istanbul bridges and past two forts on the narrowest part of the straight. Have another "breakfast" but this time served on individual boards. The restaurant was on the Asian side at the point closest to the Black Sea (but not within sight of it). Sail back down on the opposite side. Drive to the university and visit the used book seller area. Find a physics book in Turkish. Go into the Beyazit mosque where the imam was giving a sermon before prayers. Back to the boat through the traffic. Listen to the port talk on the television in the room. Randy showers and we dress for dinner. After dinner, we try out the various music options first at poolside (too loud) and then in the Explorer's Lounge. Go down and take a quick tour through the gift shop. Go into the theater for the captain's reception and the introduction of the crew (with a champagne toast) followed a show of Beatles tune. Great! Back to the room and to bed.

Thursday, August 27 - Troy

Up early (6:00 am) for the tour of Troy. Breakfast and our on the bus at 8:15. Two buses are going to Gallipoli and 23 to Troy. Ruins are very confusing. There are inhabitation layers, one built on top of another. Various city walls and villas. Layers 6-7 were built during the period of the Trojan war. Troy's wealth came from its seaport which gradually got filled with silt and turned into farmland (its still in use today). With the loss of the seaport (and subsequent river port), Troy died and became covered in dirt. The stages are very jumbled and sorting them out is today's research. There was a big Trojan horse right at the entrance. There is a wooden pathway through the site. Go past the eastern entrance to the city and up to the temple ruins at the highest point. Then past the neolithic pit houses (level 1). Around to the eastern entrance is where the castle of

Priam sits. Achilles and Hector battled in front of this gate and the Trojan horse was brought in here. The norther gate was in the Roman area. Go into Canakkale (the present port) and walk to the second Trojan horse, the one from the movie "Troy". Then back to the boat for lunch. Down time in the afternoon. Enjoy the bottle of wine that the stewards brought in to our "upgraded" suite. Explorer Society reception (supposedly for those wh had been on a previous Viking cruise but everyone was invited) with more champagne. Dinner (we missed the lecture this evening). The concert this evening is "Southern Sounds".

Friday, August 28 - Ephesus



Breakfast and set out. First go to the house where St. John the Evangelist brought Mary after the crucifixion (and after Ephesus got too dangerous for them) and from which she ascended into heaven. House has been rebuilt and now it is a church. Some people believe that the ascension occurred in Jerusalem but the Catholic faith believe it is here (and the pope has blessed that idea). There is a wall where people have left notes.

From there we go to Ephesus. Ephesus is situated in a valley between two mountains. We start at the top where there is a small Roman theater, the Odeon. Then along the street to the Temple of Domitian, mostly in ruins. Then, walk down the central street (residential housing is further up the hill). Stop at the Temple of Hadrian. Walk through the latrine. Next came the façade of the library. Behind it was the large open air market. Finally, the huge amphitheater which had a capacity of 24,000 people. Back to the bus.

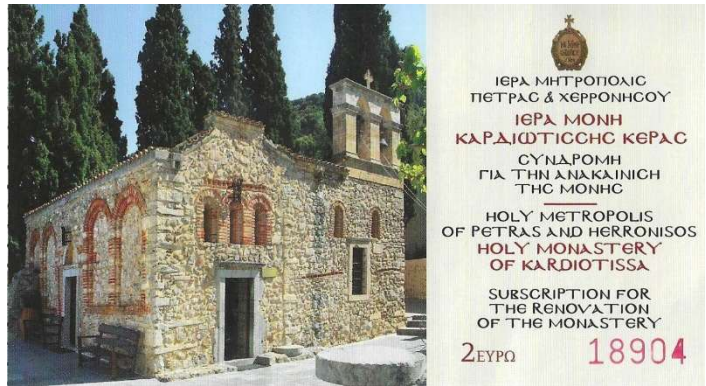
We are given the option to see a rug weaving demonstration, but we opt to walk back to the boat. Lunch and a nap. A barbecue dinner by the pool and a video of the London Symphony playing a concert commissioned by Viking rounds out the day.

Saturday, August 29 - Rhodes but no Rhodes

Get up to tour Rhodes, but the captain announces that the waves are too high and we cannot dock resulting in an unexpected sea day. Spend the morning playing games and napping. Then lunch and the movie "Mama Mia". Wine and a port talk. Dinner and a musical show by the cruise director.

Sunday, August 30 - Crete

Our tour takes us around the island rather than to the Knossos Palaces which we saw last time here. First go to the Kera Monestary, a fortified Monestary upon the hillside of Mt. Dikti. Walk through the chapel and then through the museum. Go up to the Lasithi Plateau and stop to picture the windmills. These pump water for irrigation. Bus around the edge of the plateau and stop for lunch at the far side. Again, many appetizers followed by a main dish. After lunch, continue the ride around the edge of the plateau and back to the boat along the seashore. After dinner is the Farewell Reception. The ABBA songbook is the evenings entertainment.



Monday, August 31 - Athens

We decided not to take any of the standard tours in Athens (since we had seen most of those sights on our first trip here), but rather took the tour around the Attic Peninsula (the area south of Athens). The first stop is a photo stop at the Corinth Canal, a canal cut through a limestone cliff which makes the trip from the Aegean Sea to the Adriatic Sea much shorter. Next stop was the ruins of the Sanctuary at Epidaurus, a healing center. We walked by the apartments where people stayed during their treatments and the hospital where they received those treatments. There was a small museum of some of the sculptures found at the site. We walked past the hippodrome where they held athletic events (part of the healing process) and to the grand theater, the place of incredible acoustics (which modern research does not seem to confirm). Jan has seen these two sites on our first trip here but, now, Randy has caught up. On to lunch with six appetizers and a pork chop for lunch. Also local red and white wine. Next we visit "Agamemnon's Tomb", a beehive tomb officially known as the Treasury of Atreus. There is no direct link to the mythical king. Final stop was Mycenae and Agamemnon's castle. Again, we walk through a small museum. The castle is up on top of a hill and it is hot! Jan and many others stay down in the shade. Randy walks through the lions gate and up to the first layer of ruins to the circular pit where they found the remains of 19 people and the famous Agamemnon golden mask. He doesn't get all the way to the top though where the

castle is. Then it is back to the ship to end a 9½ hour tour. Next, a quick dinner, finish packing and to bed since we have to be up at 4:00 tomorrow morning.

Tuesday, September 1 - Going Home

Flight was scheduled for 11:15 am and Viking put us on a 6:15 am coach to the airport. In the middle of the night, we get message that our flight will be delayed by two hours. We call guest services and get our bus departure delayed by two hours. Sleep a bit more and get a leisurely breakfast. We have to take our own bags out because the "official" bags out was at 10:00 last night and we still had things to put in them. Got the 8:15 bus to the airport only to find out that the flight was delayed some more. We got two luncheon coupons when we checked in. Finally, at about 3:00 pm our plane arrives at Athens and we get on about 3:30. Plane takes off a little after 4:00, about 5 hours late. Flight is 11 hours long. Get in to ORD about 8:00 pm and zip through passport control with Global Entry. They don't stamp our passport exiting Greece or entering the US. Our flight from Chicago to Cincinnati has maybe a dozen passengers on it. Get to CVG about 12:30 on the September 2. Bus to the car and drive home. We are dead and get into bed without taking our suitcases up.