

# Athens

## Rediscovering a timeless city

The ancient city is evolving into one of the most modern metropolises in the world.



**Minister of Culture  
Giorgos Voulgarakis**  
explains why no other city offers such a unique combination of attractions and activities

Surrounded by seas and mountains, the ancient city of Athens is reinventing itself as an outgoing and lively global capital. A new transportation network, including a state-of-the-art metro system, new highways in and around Athens and the internationally-recognised Athens International Airport, ensures that the city is more accessible and cleaner than it has been for many years. Transformed ar-

chaeological sites and museums, modern art galleries, concert halls, operas and live music, luxury hotels and spas, chic boutiques, restaurants, tavernas and bars, street markets and ancient theatres make up a unique city.

Georgios Voulgarakis, an Athenian and Greece's Minister of Culture has witnessed the transformation of the city firsthand. "Athens is rapidly developing into a metropolis with an overwhelming dynamism and an intense cultural present. All of these things are intertwined with a rich historical past amid

the mild Attica scenery and climate. Some view Athens' urban landscape as chaotic and mind boggling, but within it you can find many hidden gems and the delights of a contemporary city," he comments.

The living museum that is downtown Athens is looking better than ever. With Athens' classical sites now unified into a giant archaeological park you can stroll along Dionysiou Areopagitou – a beautiful cobbled boulevard - as the central causeway in a 2.5 kilometre long walk through 3,500 years of history. Once rundown areas such as Plaka, Psiri and Thission have become the nocturnal heart of the city and blend seamlessly into the walkways and parks surrounding its cultural sites, incorporating this heritage into the body of modern Athens. "Efforts to showcase the monu-

ments within these archaeological sites allows visitors to grasp the original form and function of the ancient monuments, as well as the landscape of antiquity and journey into histo-

**'Within Athens you can find many hidden gems'**

**GEORGIOS VOULGARAKIS**  
Minister of Culture

ry. One result is to revitalize the experience of the sites and to make our vision of ancient Athens and its civilization more intimate," explains Minister Voulgarakis.

From trekking in the forests of Mount Parnitha to lazing on a beach enjoying Attica's 300 days of sunshine a year, no other city offers such a unique combination of attractions and activities. ■

Project directed and coordinated by:  
Barbara Jankovic and  
Daniel Storey



Anna Vissi, a well-known pop artist, will represent Greece in the competition.



FEEL THE RHYTHM



## Athens steps into the spotlight with famous Eurovision contest



**CHRISTOS PANAGOPOULOS**  
Chairman of ERT

**Once again, people are flocking to Athens. But not only to bask in the sun on the islands and take advantage of its rich cultural heritage—this time the masses are heading to the capital for Eurovision**

The Olympic Games in Athens transformed international perceptions of the capital showcasing the incredible transformation of the city in the last five years. It also showed that the Greek tradition of *philoxenia* or hospitality is alive and well and that the Greek appetite for celebration is as keen as ever.

From May 11 through the semi-finals on May 18 and on to the finals on May 20 at the Olympic Indoor Hall, the eyes of Europe will once again turn to Athens as the festive Eurovision party rolls into town.

Greece's national broadcaster, ERT, will be acting as host for the event. Christos Panagopoulos, chairman and managing director of ERT elaborates, "The contestants will arrive a week prior to the actual event, meaning that Athens will host an international party every night before Eurovision even

begins. The spectators that came to the Olympics had the chance to see a new and modern Greece that is more than the seat of ancient civilization, the Acropolis and the Parthenon. We mean to confirm these new perceptions throughout the broadcast by putting on an incredible party."



ERT is looking forward to organising a large-scale event for the first time.

Maria Menounos, a Greek-American performer, and Sakis Rouvas, a Greek singer, will present Eurovision this year.



After the highly successful Olympic Games, Athens is more than prepared to host another high profile event.



Greeks are hoping that the contest will reconfirm the public's perception of Athens: as a modern and safe city with a lot to offer.

ERT's ambition is to raise the benchmark for Eurovision by creating a new image for the whole contest. Mr Panagopoulos promises a fresh and spectacular approach to the event and ERT is also working closely with the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) in order to upgrade the production values of the broadcast. He is also focused on broadening the vision and the appeal of the contest by having presenters that are known not only in Greece but also internationally. "We chose the Greek-American performer Maria Menounos and Sakis Rouvas, a popular Greek singer, to reach out to more people and give the event a new edge."

The Mayor of Athens, Theodoros Bechrakis is hoping that the contest will reconfirm people's perceptions of his city. "During the Olympic Games the whole world recognised that Athens was not just the Parthenon and Sounio. It is a modern city that offers its visitor entertainment, relaxation, and the opportunity to get in touch with Greek cultural heritage and hospitality in a safe environment," he says, adding, "There are not that many cities in the world where you can be out at four in the morning and move around and feel completely secure no matter where you are."

Greece also has designs on retaining the Eurovision crown. Without suggesting that a serious political message can be taken from Eurovision, last year's winner, Helena Paparizou, inspired an unprecedented display of regional solidarity with Turkey and Albania amongst others awarding her full points. It is perhaps an indication of Greece's increased standing in the re-



gion that Anna Vissi, its contestant this year, has been installed as the favourite - that and a great song, of course.

Ms. Vissi has recorded countless hits and albums and in 2004, the pop diva performed at the Olympic Games closing ceremony, singing numerous of her best-loved songs. She also performed in her native Cyprus, at the celebration for Cyprus' entry into the EU. Currently, Ms. Vissi is touring 12 European countries performing her melodic ballad "Everything" and the response has been very positive.

Mr Rouvas, who represented Greece in the contest before, comments, "Given her strength, talent and energy I know that Anna will represent Greece in the best possible way."

However, beyond all the glitz and glamour, it is ERT's hope that a much older lady, Athens herself, will take the starring role. Mr Panagopoulos says, "We invite the readers of the Telegraph to not only watch Eurovision but to travel to Greece. Athens is a fantastic city-break destination and a beautiful and modern metropolis that has a diverse range of interesting attractions for everybody." ■

**'Athens offers entertainment, relaxation, and hospitality'**

**THEODOROS BECHRAKIS**  
Mayor of Athens

## Bringing the **National Gardens** back to life



**This beautiful tropical oasis is also one of Athens' most charming spots, and the perfect place to escape the chaos of the city**

A leafy oasis of calm right in the heart of the bustle and clamour of modern Athens, many tourists remain unaware of the refuge from city life provided by the National Gardens. As the sounds of traffic melt away, you can easily spend a happy few hours in its shaded pathways, admiring the exotic fauna and animals or enjoying a frappe in the small cafe near the Irodou Atikou entrance to the park.

Neglected for a few years, the Gardens are now in the hands of the City of Athens and are undergoing a process of rehabilitation. The discovery of letters written by the founder of the gardens, Queen Amalia, to her father-in-law, King Ot-

to of Bavaria, enable a clearer picture of the original plans for the National Gardens to emerge.

"Queen Amalia envisioned the National Gardens in a certain way so today we are working towards restoring them with landscape architects. We hope to fulfil her dream as she did not live to see it become a reality," says Yannis Costopoulos, Chairman of the Board of the National Gardens.

Like many people of his generation, Mr. Costopoulos spent many hours playing in the park with his friends. "It is amazing how many people who live in Athens are willing to help out and want to maintain the gardens, which is a wonderful thing," he adds. ■



**"It is the quintessence of a park, the thing one feels in looking at a canvas or dreaming of a place one would like to be in and never finds." Henry Miller, 1939**

## **Acropolis Rally** really sets pulses racing

**This year's rally, to be held in June, is gaining momentum, as car lovers and race enthusiasts turn up for one of the biggest rallies in the world**

The BP Ultimate Acropolis Rally will take place this year from the 1st-4th June. Organised by ELPA, the Automobile and Touring Club of Greece, the event has really taken off in the last few years and last year was named the World Rally Championship's Rally of the Year once again.

The rally will run through the roads of Attica, Corinth and Viotia in a bid to improve upon last year's success. Both the start and the finish will be held in the Athens Olympic Stadium for the first time since 1997.

Alex Maniatopoulos, vice president of ELPA and head of sports, has overseen the transformation of the rally in the past few years and explains why the route has been changed. "We moved it to Athens because after the capacity crowd attendance at last year's



**People will come from all over the globe to attend the rally, and will be impressed to see the ceremonial finish in the Olympic Stadium.**

Olympic Stadium Superspecial, we wanted to do something innovative again. By concluding the rally in the Olympic Stadium, we will make a ceremonial finish in an imposing atmosphere."

The first Rally Acropolis was organised by ELPA in 1953, but in recent years has been joined by the Historic Acropolis Rally, part of the FIA European Historic Sporting Rally Championship. Now in its fifth year, it is rapidly

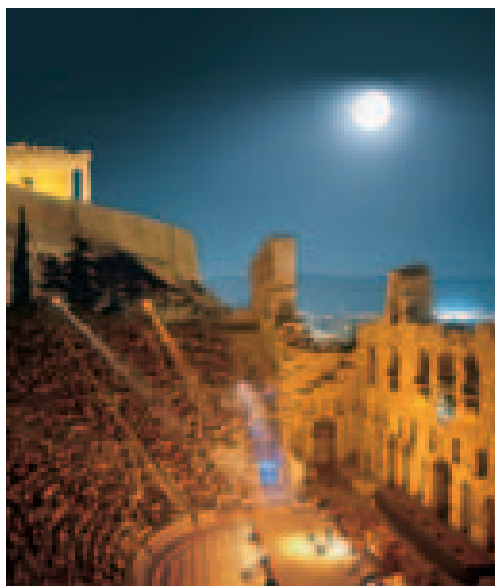
gaining in popularity. "It is a sporting experience but also a social event that attracts car collectors from all over Europe," explains Mr. Maniatopoulos. "These vintage car rallies are still a relatively new concept, but they are certainly becoming more and more popular."

Both rallies also provide the opportunity for visitors and viewers alike to get a glimpse of the rich cultural his-

tory and archaeological sights and monuments of Greece, allowing supporters, friends and visitors to visit such famous sites as Epidaurus, Corinth, Mycenae, Marathon and Sounio.

Mr. Maniatopoulos, a ten-time Greek rally champion who works in the automobile industry, still participates in the rallies whenever he can, feeling the same excitement at 68 years old. Explaining his love affair with cars, he reflects, "It is a combination of many things. I'm interested in the mechanics of a car, how it functions, the whole set up. The time and energy you invest in restoring and maintaining a car is another part of it because you develop a sentimental attachment to it. Then driving the car is a completely different experience. It's a rush that goes beyond adrenalin, a constant adventure."

He is determined that both rallies continue to go from strength to strength, adding, "I would sincerely like to invite all fans of classic cars to come to Greece and experience our historic rally. It is a must for all car lovers and we will be more than happy to offer them our hospitality and do everything we can to ensure that they enjoy their stay." ■



Ancient ruins and the 16,000 km coastline provide an extraordinary backdrop for all kinds of water sports, not to mention spectacular views.

## Surprise yourself in Attica

**With 300 days of sunshine a year and sights such as the peaceful Saronic islands' virginal beaches to the mainland's mountains, Attica is a must-see**

Seen from the vantage point of the Acropolis looking across the plains of Attica – once covered with enormous olive groves and vineyards – now a vast urban sprawl crackling with a chaotic and youthful energy – the location of Athens makes sense. With the Saronic Gulf glistening before you and islands basking in the sun, you begin to understand why the ancients thought themselves so blessed to live within the wide expanses of the Attica plains.

Despite their proximity to Athens, many people forget that the Greek capital is on the coast and that it is often less than an hour's journey by boat to get to one of

Attica's many distinct and beautiful islands. The verdant tranquillity of the Saronic isle of Aegina is just thirty-five minutes away by hovercraft. One of island's many remarkable walks will bring you to an extraordinary and little-known classical monument. The beautiful temple of Aphaia sits on top of a pine-covered hill and is wonderfully preserved.

If beaches are more your style, then Halikiada, on Agistri island, is just forty-five minutes by hovercraft from Athens and is a great spot to visit. Situated in the island's biggest bay, the waters hugging this pebble beach are a pristine turquoise.

"Our region is the only one in Eu-

rope where the visitor can combine a visit to a modern city, and at the same time find himself within minutes of a resort destination either on the Attica mainland or the nearby islands," points out Haralambos Maniatis, General Secretary of the Region of Attica.

The variety of modern marinas and the recent upgrade of the port of Piraeus mean that the Athens-Attica coastline provides a perfect point of departure to begin a sailing trip or explore over 16,000 kilometres of coastline on Greece's mainland and thousands of islands and islets.

Turning inland presents completely different scenery, a true testament to the natural diversity that Greece holds. The Attic landscape is dramatic, dominated by mountains and at points achingly beautiful, particularly between the months of March and June, when the uplands burst into a riot of wild fauna and colour. Standing on top of Mount Parnitha, a National Park and fir forest just outside Athens feels as if you have been suddenly transported to Switzerland.

It is this range of landscapes and experiences, of ancient heritage and intense and chaotic modernity that makes Athens and the surrounding region such a fascinating and surprising place to visit. ■

**'Here visitors can combine a modern city with resort destinations'**

**HARALAMBOS MANIATIS**  
General Secretary of the Region of Attica



**INTERVIEW WITH HARALAMBOS MANIATIS, General Secretary of the Region of Attica**

**Athens 2004 was a spectacular Olympic Games. Please share how the Games were used as a catalyst to transform the city.**

The day after the Olympic Games found Athens with a new transportation network, new or refurbished city and resort hotels with magnificent views and quality services. The entire area has changed completely. All of us, from the Attica Regional Authority down to the last inhabitant, wanted to see a new city. The 2004 Games were a catalyst not only for the further development of the city's tourism, but also for the improvement of everyday life of Athenians.

**The number of people organizing their own holidays is growing along with the demand for more activities. The Athens Attica region has a wide range of attractions. Do you feel you are well positioned to take advantage of these changes in the tourism model?**

Today tourists have specific motivations and needs when they look for a holiday destination. Athens-Attica offers a unique blend of history and culture through numerous archaeological sites and cultural events. But, we also offer much more: picturesque islands minutes from the Attica region, sports activities such as yachting and sailing on the Saronic islands, great beaches along the Attica coastline, not to mention our gastronomy and world-renowned night life. Since the number of people organizing their own holidays is growing, we have created the website [www.athensattica.com](http://www.athensattica.com), where the traveller can find all the useful information on Athens-Attica.

**Henry Miller wrote, "One's destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things" Can you describe how the Athens and Attica region offers, "a new way of seeing things"?**

Henry Miller spent time wandering around Greece, the Athens-Attica region and its nearby islands whilst writing his book, "The Colossus of Marousi" where he praised Greece for its nature and way of life. He writes, "No country I have visited has given me such a sense of grandeur. It is a world of illusion." He even wrote about the Athens-Attica region, saying, "bending over to pick a flower from the bare soil of Attica the whole Greek world, past, present and future, rises before me".

## OPAP extends its gaming offer

**As gambling in Greece tends to grow annually at a rate of 20%, the country's top gaming company is expanding its empire**

OPAP has long been the leader of the leisure and entertainment industry in Greece. After a year of rapid-expansion in 2005, the gaming company is now branching out and offering betting on major non-sporting events for the first time. In February 2006, OPAP accepted bets on the outcome of the Oscars in a move seen as the beginning of a shift into major non-sporting events. The next opportunity for gamers to predict the outcome of a major non-sporting event will be the Eurovision Song Contest.

With revenues up 16.3 per cent last year to almost €3.7 billion, these new lines of business will only add to the ongoing performance of the company.

New opportunities are also being opened up by the modernisation of OPAP's technological capacities with



Last year Greece's Helena Papanicolaou won the Eurovision Song Contest. This year, OPAP will allow for betting on the international competition.

the company offering an international tender to completely replace its current IT system with a new one that will accommodate all forms of betting. Basile Neiadas, CEO of OPAP, says that by mid-2007, the company will be operating with one of the most modern IT betting systems in the world. "We are also looking at improving rapid transactions and are

including provisions for the system to support other types of betting, like interactive TV, mobile phone and Internet betting," he says.

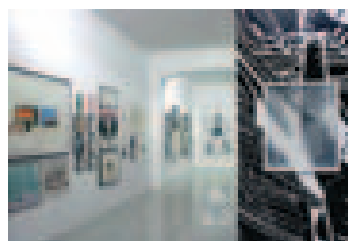
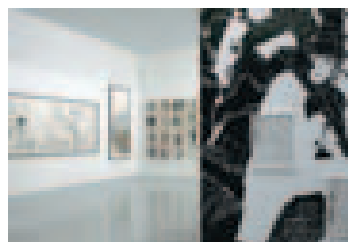
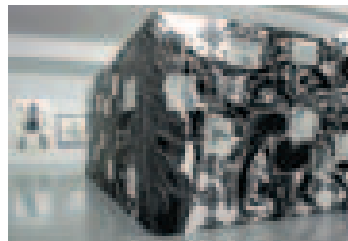
For now, the company's GPRS network will be used for connectivity to lottery machines on cruise ships and ferries, widening the entertainment offer for those visiting the Greek islands. ■

## Art foundation changes its focus

**Deste Foundation is branching out from its typical exhibitions, now featuring an interesting variety of up-and-coming American artists**

Dakis Ioannou's Athens-based Deste Foundation is at the centre of the international contemporary art scene. Exhibitions of international significance such as 2004's *Monument to Now* have showcased and interpreted his collection - one of the most important in the world - but now Mr Ioannou is changing his focus.

This is demonstrated by its new exhibition, "Panic Room," which consists exclusively of drawings by emerging artists, many of them from the US. These small, intimate and often witty works are a departure from the major artists and pieces of *Monument to Now*, and are indicative of a desire to move back into the artistic underground and play a more active role in explor-



"Panic Room" reflects the culture of graffiti, comics, psychedelia, music and fantasy.

ing Greek contemporary art.

The exhibition's central work is done by Assume Vivid Astro Focus, a US-based artistic collective that works on collaborative projects. Covered in black and white motifs, it contains a large compartment filled with drawings by artists who have worked with the group.

After being approached by various European museums about travelling exhibitions, Mr Ioannou is considering collaborations that provide a new and interesting interpretation of his collection. "I decided to re-engineer my ideas and my attitude. I am now focusing on drawings, on younger artists and in parallel I am looking into new contexts of showing the collection as it expands and develops. I hope that the dialogue and the energy between these two will be connected." ■

### DESTE FOUNDATION CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

11 Filellinon  
& Em. Pappa Street  
N. Ionia Athens

[www.deste.gr](http://www.deste.gr)

## Staying over in style in the Greek capital

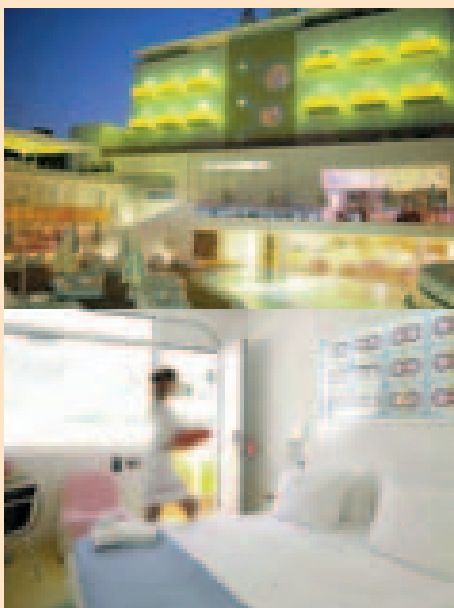
**Athens has no shortage of luxury hotels which offer world-class facilities and remarkable panoramas**

The Olympic Games swept through Athens to great fanfare but left behind many important legacies when, after weeks of competition and celebration, the droves of athletes, tourists and vast media circus rolled out of town. One of the most important was the complete renovation of its hotel product.

As Alex Galinos, Managing Director of Athens Tourism and Economic Development Agency points out, "All of the hotels were refurbished and many new hotels were essentially rebuilt from scratch and today, Athens is cleaner, more accessible and a much more pleasant place to live and visit than it was even three or four years ago."

However, it's not just an upgrade in the tourist product, but an indication of the new modern and extrovert Athens is bringing cutting-edge design to the hotel offer. The 130-year-old Grande Bretagne was recently restored to its turn of the century glory and its vintage elegance, while daring properties such as the Semiramis Hotel, with its curving glass in pink, lime and orange and a rotating selection of contemporary art taken from one of the world's most important private collections, are reinventing the hotel sector.

For those that are more familiar with Greece's islands, Athens is now an increasingly attractive destination.



**Semiramis Hotel**

**A BURST OF COLOUR  
LIVENS UP ATHENS**

Located in the heart of the hip, leafy suburb of Kifissia, Semiramis Hotel is the candy-coloured fantasy of renowned designer Karim Rashid. Owner Dakis Ioannou, one of the world's foremost collector's of modern art and an architect, commissioned Rashid to create the hotel. The result is a playful building where lime green translucent balconies hover over an amoeba shaped pool and works from the *enfant terribles* of the modern art world rub shoulders in the lobby. Flat-screen TVs, goose-down duvets, huge opaque-green desks with all the necessary connections and 24-hour room service offer its guests the amenities of a five-star hotel whilst the attentive service from its youthful staff ensure a pleasant stay.

Semiramis offers an airy alternative. As General Manager Takis Paspaspiro points out, "People think of Athens as a grey city. Here it is the opposite. We are located in one of Athens' most beautiful areas. We have trees and plants, fresh air, and a lot of colour. Here you can really mix business and pleasure at the same time!" ■

[www.semiramisathens.com](http://www.semiramisathens.com)



**Intercontinental Hotel**

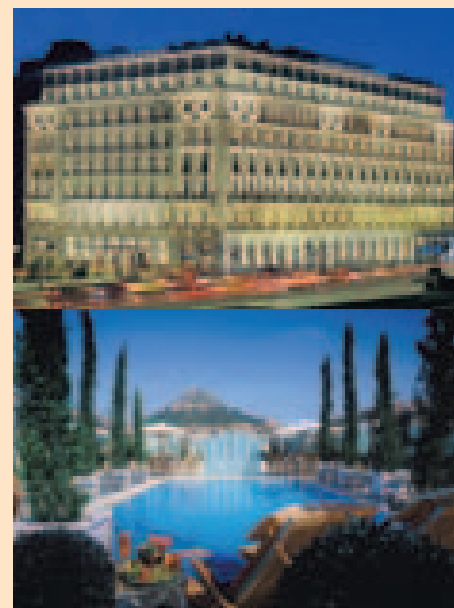
**INSPIRING ENVIRONMENT  
FOR BUSINESS**

Recognised as Greece's Leading Hotel at the World Travel Awards in London, the Athenaeum Intercontinental combines international standards with Greek characteristics. Modern Greek artists are displayed throughout the hotel, from renowned sculptor George Lappas' 'Blue Man' in the lobby to Eleni Christodoulou's visual experiments in perspective and perception in the Premiere restaurant.

Athens is a city of illuminating juxtapositions and contrasts which is reflected in the hotel's colourful and charming design. "From the modern restaurant on the 10th floor you can see the Acropolis whilst being surrounded by modern Greek art," explains Panos Panayotopoulos, General Manager of the hotel.

The hotel's principal business in conference and convention tourism and Mr. Panayotopoulos is focused on turning the hotel into the leading convention hotel in the region. "We offer multiple facilities and can accommodate up to 3,500 delegates at one time." ■

[www.intercontinental.com](http://www.intercontinental.com)



**Grande Bretagne Hotel**

**AFFORDABLE LUXURY  
IN THE CITY CENTRE**

Situated in the centre of the city across from the National Parliament, the recently restored 130-year-old Hotel Grande Bretagne is a vital part of Athens' vibrant social life and an escape from the bustle of the city. No other hotel in Greece exudes the same air of elegance and luxury.

The hotel's change of management and restoration has added a modern service ethos and new facilities. The hotel also boasts a knowledgeable and friendly staff and a new and stunning urban spa with E'Spa products.

"We promote luxury that is affordable and discreet. We designed our rooms and the public areas to feel welcoming, rather than just representing a high-end impersonal hotel," explains Timothy Ananiadis, the hotel's general manager.

Grand but not forbidding, the award-winning Alexander's Bar is the social heart of the hotel where you enjoy a coffee, a drink, or a meal any time of the day. The popular Roof Garden offers excellent cuisine and a breathtaking panoramic view of the Acropolis and the city. ■

[www.grandebretagne.gr](http://www.grandebretagne.gr)



**Hilton Hotel**

**CHIC, MODERN, MINIMAL**

One of the many hotels renovated for the Olympics, the Hilton Athens has undergone a complete makeover. The once traditional lobby is now a modern and vast expanse of white marble punctuated by sleek seating. The chic rooftop Galaxy Bar serves a range of delicious cocktails and the views of the Acropolis make it one of the hot spots for

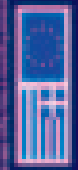
Athens' jet set while the largest outdoor pool in Athens provides the perfect place to atone for any nights of excess. Facilities are also strongly business-oriented, with a stylish executive check-in lounge and 14 newly designed meeting rooms, a business centre and a vast exhibition space, making the Hilton Athens an obvious choice for conference organisers and corporate clientele. ■

[www.athens.hilton.com](http://www.athens.hilton.com)



[www.athensattica.com](http://www.athensattica.com)

Have you ever seen the city of Athens sun-kissed?  
Have you ever felt, when up, stirred through ancient days? Have you ever felt on the warm sand and  
dried into the open-blue waters? Have you ever enjoyed, about, stirred with a feeling of liberation as the sun  
is pulling you towards it? Then you have to come with us.



SURPRISE YOURSELF IN

