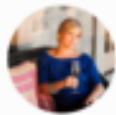


## Going Greek And Boutique: Two New Small Hotels For Your Next Trip To Athens



**Lauren Mowery** Contributor ©

**ForbesLife**

*I cover drinks, travel and food, and the intersection of all three.*

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Views of the Acropolis from a room at A77 Suites by Andronis A77 SUITES

My first trip to Athens was a doozy. Young, with a Kraft Macaroni & Cheese budget, I snagged a \$400 flight deal from New York direct to Greece. I spent the flight curled into a back-wrenching ball trying to sleep in a cramped economy seat. Upon arrival at the budget hotel we booked online, I collapsed atop the flimsy bed until dusk. While hunting for dinner, jet-lagged and unfamiliar with the dark tangle of streets, an older man approached me and my travel companion with an invitation to “eat some of Athens’ best baby lamb chops” somewhere near the Acropolis. Too tired to appreciate this seemingly quintessential Greek experience would be an actual quintessential tourist trap, we went along for the walk to a scruffy taverna for scorched meat. It was an ignoble death for that young animal, setting the tone for the rest of our meals that week. My experiences in this storied city have come a long way—from finding third wave coffee shops, trendy clothing designers, and fantastic food at thoughtful wine bars—but most of my hotel stays remained underwhelming until now. Since the economic crisis of 2008, Athens has undergone a creative rebirth, with hoteliers on a tear, rejecting the outdated aesthetic of the Grand Tour Grand Dames to reimagine antique and mid-century buildings into one-of-a kind properties.

Here’s where to stay on your next trip to this ancient city on a modern streak.



One of the elegant rooms at A77 Suites by Andronis A77 SUITES

## **A77 Suites by Andronis**

Down the famous pedestrian street of Adrianou in the busy tourist neighborhood of Plaka, a ground-floor women's boutique lures in fashion-forward shoppers. The rest of us, huddled inside the store-cum-lobby with luggage (I recognized two Americans from my United flight out of Newark), browsed finely woven hats, summer sandals, and silk gowns by Greek and international designers while waiting to check in. The A77 Suites by Andronis boutique hotel sat directly above the shop. Nearby, a slender, energetic woman from the hotel's small team of staff, stood sentry over our bags.

After getting our key card and providing our breakfast-in-bed wishes for a "Greek omelet, yogurt and fruit, black coffee" we took the petite elevator up to the third floor to meet the guest-relations-bell-hop-concierge at our door.

As I would conclude two weeks later, traveling in Greece during the pandemic felt no different from being home in New York City. If anything, the hospitality industry adhered far more rigidly to the country's safety guidelines than almost anywhere in the US. As such, hotel staff always wore masks and never entered your room to point out functional details like lights switches and thermostats, a change in service my husband heartily welcomed as a permanent practice.

After the abbreviated explanation of the interior, we closed the door and pondered the bed, its easy curves and plush pillows beckoning. First, I needed a few photos before we trashed the room with clothes and laptops, simply to remember its lovely details.

Decorative wall molding and tall shuttered windows spoke to the building's 19<sup>th</sup> century neoclassical European heritage. A leather chair, a velvet bed, and other sumptuous textiles offered a soothing palette in rose, sand, and sky. Brass and marble touches, globe sconces, artistic black and white photos, and other details like a potted olive tree and a curvy desk reminiscent of neo-deco meets Scandi design, accomplished the difficult feat of creating warm luxurious minimalism. A feat accomplished by the local design studio Mutiny.

Another way to describe a stay at A77: borrowing your chic Athenian friend's flat while she holidays as a verb in Santorini with a Greek shipping empire heir.

Those used to resort-style properties, take note: A77's small footprint restricts amenities—no restaurant, no gym—but that's perfectly fine. Athens demands your attention.

We napped a few hours, then flung open the windows for a thrilling glimpse of the Acropolis illuminated in the afternoon sun. Between the bustle in the street below and the object of my grade school antiquity obsession in sight, I trembled, hit like a bolt of lightning, a figurative *coup de foudre*, as the French might say. I had returned to Europe for the first time since the pandemic via Greece. This ancient continent, forever irresistible to Americans, always drew me back for at least one reason: the thousands of years of human history visible in each city's architectural palimpsest.

In a recent interview with Patrick McGovern, a biomolecular archaeologist, I asked why we humans yearn to know our past and what we learn from doing so. Whether that means recovering an ancient pottery shard that held humankind's earliest expression of wine or attempting to reconstruct a temple to the goddess Athena Nike.

"An ancient pottery shard might look nondescript and meaningless, but...by even holding it in our hands, we are sharing our common humanity with our ancestors from millennia ago, essentially sharing their trials and tribulations as well their *joie de vivre*" said McGovern.

A77 by Andronis offers 12 rooms including room 10, the pinnacle of the property. Called the Iconic Suite with Acropolis View & Private Jacuzzi, rates start at \$500 a night. If you can splurge, do it.

*A77 Suites by Andronis, Adrianou 77, Athina 105 56, Greece*