



Travel: live like a local in this boutique Athens hotel

Stay at A77 Suites for a taste of city life the Greek way, says Siobhan Grogan

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Often overlooked by tourists passing through to the Greek islands, Athens is more than a match for Barcelona or Rome when it comes to city breaks. It's a little further to fly, at three and a half hours, but has more sun than its European neighbours, and has beaches on the doorstep – not to mention 4,000 years of history.

Athens is not a city stuck in the past, though. You're as likely to see street art as much as preserved mosaics in this very modern, buzzing capital where rooftop bars overlook ancient temples, and Byzantine chapels are squeezed between tourist-tat shops. Musicians play on every corner while locals whizz past on motorbikes and Greek chatter rings from pavement cafés until late into the night.

Staying in a big-name faceless hotel would feel like cutting yourself off from the beating heart of this gloriously hectic city. A stay at A77 Suites by Andronis, on the other hand, makes you feel like you're a local. The hotel group is best known for its game-changing hotels in Santorini, but opened this sleekly luxurious property in Athens in late 2019. Smack bang in the centre of the historical district of Plaka, at the foot of the Acropolis, it's located in a 19th-century neoclassical listed-building on a pedestrian street lined with artisanal gelato stalls and boutiques selling leather sandals and pottery.

Home away from home

Taking the boutique hotel concept to its almost inevitable conclusion, A77 Suites is above an actual fashion boutique selling pricey pieces from Greek and international designers, and 12 chic suites are spread over four floors, reached via a staircase or lift at the back of the shop. Once you're through the shop floor, it feels more like staying in an (exceptionally chic) house than a hotel. Breakfast is served in the bedrooms and there are no communal areas or restaurant; there are crystal jars of help-yourself sweets in hallways and everything from ouzo to Greek chocolate is available in the minibar – entirely complimentary.



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Rooms look as if they are straight from the pages of a glossy magazine, with soaring ceilings, blush pink accents, sleek brass light fittings and glossy white marble at every turn. There are gypsum ceilings with cornice detailing, tactile velvet furnishings and art work from Katerina Messini. Many rooms even have prized views of the Acropolis itself over the rooftops; one has a private outdoor terrace with an Acropolis-facing Jacuzzi. The hotel's real trump card, though, is its fantastic location. The shops and restaurants of Plaka are right on the doorstep and the Acropolis is just ten minutes' walk away.

Fabulous views over Athens

So many big-ticket tourist attractions are a disappointment once you actually make it there, but here is one that never fails to impress: the grand Parthenon, Athens' crowning glory for the last 2,500 years. The panoramic views over the city towards the sea alone make it worth the climb. Afterwards, take time pottering through Anafiotika, a hidden hotpotch of a Cycladic-style village, often overlooked by tourists marching upwards to the Acropolis.

Anafiotika first emerged when islanders from Anafi, located in the Cyclades island group southeast of the mainland, travelled to the capital to construct King Otto's palace in the 19th-century, building their own houses in the image of the ones they had left behind. Now, steep steps weave between ramshackle, white-washed cottages with bougainvillea spilling from windows and locals stringing up washing in lanes so narrow I felt I might step right inside someone's kitchen at any minute.



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Watching the world go by

Once you've found your way back to the traditional tavernas and souvenir shops of Plaka, head straight to the fascinating Acropolis Museum (theacropolismuseum.gr/en). This houses the sculptures of the Parthenon and archaeological finds unearthed on the Acropolis slopes, from the Archaic period to Roman times. The entire building is raised on concrete pillars to reveal the extraordinary ruins of an ancient Athenian neighbourhood – complete with drainage system and bathhouses – which were uncovered during the museum's construction and opened to the public in 2019.

It's possible to lose days wandering the rest of the capital's museums, from the Jewish Museum of Greece to the Museum of Contemporary Greek Culture. But to truly appreciate this city as an Athenian, grab a table outside a taverna in the shade of the Acropolis and watch the world go by – perhaps feeling more than a little smug that you didn't head straight for an island-bound ferry after all.

Siobhan was a guest of A77 Suites. Rooms start from £200 per night, including breakfast. Book at a77suitesbyandronis.com.

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