Acropolis

The term “acropolis” means “high city” in Greek and can refer to one of many natural strongholds constructed on rocky, elevated ground in Greece, but the Acropolis of Athens is the best known.

Made of limestone rock that dates to the Late Cretaceous period when dinosaurs still roamed the earth, the Acropolis is located on the Attica plateau of Greece and includes four hills:

* Likavitos Hill
* Hill of the Nymphs
* The Pynx Hill
* Philapappos Hill
* The Acropolis’ flat top is the result of thousands of years of construction beginning as far back as the [Bronze Age](https://www.history.com/topics/bronze-age).
* There’s no recorded history of what happened at the Acropolis before the [Mycenaeans](https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-greece/mycenae) cultivated it during the end of the Bronze Age. Historians believe the Mycenaeans built a massive compound surrounded by a great wall (almost 15 feet thick and 20 feet high) on top of the Acropolis to house the local ruler and his household.
* Years later, the Athenians built a Doric temple made of limestone, known as Bluebeard Temple, on the northeast side of the hill in honor of the goddess Athena in the sixth century B.C. It was named after a sculpture that adorned the building that depicted a man-serpent with three blue beards.
* Another temple dedicated to the Athena was also erected in the same century, as was a shrine to Artemis Brauronia, the goddess of expectant mothers in [Greek mythology](https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-history/greek-mythology).

In 480 B.C., the Persians attacked again and burned, leveled and looted the Old Parthenon and almost every other structure at the Acropolis. To prevent further losses, the Athenians buried the remaining sculptures inside natural caves and built two new fortifications, one of the rock’s north side and one on its south.

## Golden Age of the Acropolis

If the Acropolis was impressive during the Mycenaean Civilization, it was nothing short of spectacular during the Golden Age of Athens (460 B.C. to 430 B.C.) under the rule of [Pericles](https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-history/pericles) when Athens was at its cultural peak.

Determined to bring the Acropolis to a level of splendor not seen before, Pericles initiated a massive building project that lasted 50 years. Under his direction, two well-known architects, Callicrates and Ictinus, and renowned sculptor Phidias helped plan and execute the Pericles’ plan.

Pericles didn’t live long enough to see his entire Acropolis vision come true, but temple builders and architects continued working until they completed the project. The southern and northern walls were rebuilt and some of the most iconic structures in the world were constructed such as:

**The Parthenon:** An enormous Doric-style temple that remains the star attraction of the Acropolis. It featured ornate sculptures and housed a spectacular statue of the goddess Athena.

**The Propylaea:** A monumental entryway to the Acropolis that included a central building and two wings, one of which was covered with elaborately painted panels.

**The Temple of Athena Nike:** A small Ionic-style temple located to the right of the Propylaea built as a shrine to Athena Nike.

**The Erechtheion:**A sacred Ionic temple made of marble which honored Athena and several other gods and heroes. It’s best known for its porch supported by six Caryatid maiden statues.

**The Statue of Athena Promachos:**A gigantic (almost 30 feet tall) bronze statue of Athena that stood next to the Propylaea.

After the Greek War of Independence in 1822, the Acropolis was returned to the Greeks in disrepair. They began investigating the condition of their crown jewel and meticulously excavated the entire site in the late nineteenth century. At the turn of the twentieth century, restorations began.

In 1975, the Committee for the Conservation of the Monuments on the Acropolis was established which includes architects, archaeologists, chemical engineers and civil engineers. The Committee, along with the Acropolis Restoration Service, works to document and conserve the history of the Acropolis and restore its structures as closely to their original state as possible.

They also work to minimize environmental damage caused by pollution and weathering and identify ways to limit future damage. The restorations of the Erechtheion and the Temple of Athena Nike are complete.

The Acropolis is open to tourists year-round and is located in a busy area of the city of Athens. Tickets are available at the entrance, but be prepared to wait. To miss the crowds and the summer heat, arrive early in the morning or after 5:00 p.m.

Most importantly, bring comfortable shoes and water because exploring the Acropolis requires a lot of walking. Keep in mind that some buildings may be inaccessible due to renovations.

# 12 Facts About the Acropolis of Athens

## IT’S THE MOST FAMOUS OF MANY ACROPOLEIS.

While the Athenian Acropolis is often what comes to mind when people hear the word acropolis, it is one of many acropoleis built across Greece.

Based on the ancient Greek words ákros for high point and pólis for city, acropolis [means roughly](https://books.google.com/books?id=054RAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA52&lpg=PA52#v=onepage&q&f=false) “high city,” and can refer to any similarly situated citadel. High fortresses and temples known as acropoleis can also be found in the Greek cities of Argos, Thebes, Corinth, and others, each constructed as a center for local life, culture, and protection.

## ITS HUMAN HISTORY IS NEOLITHIC.

Humans have inhabited the limestone slopes of what became the Acropolis for centuries; they were likely drawn to the water from its natural springs. There's evidence of habitation in the area dating back to the [Neolithic period](https://www.jstor.org/stable/43824553) between 4000-3200 BCE, with both a house and a grave [identified](https://books.google.com/books?id=v1B9TUtZLHYC&lpg=PA70&ots=DCdWgetPEb&dq=neolithic%20graves%20acropolis&pg=PA70#v=onepage&q=neolithic%20graves%20acropolis&f=true) from around this era.

A series of shafts have also been discovered, with several vessels found in their deep chasms. One theory is that the shafts were once wells, while another is that they were a site of ritual burial, since human bones were found among the objects buried within.

## . ITS FIRST STRUCTURES WERE BUILT FOR DEFENSIVE PURPOSES.

From its central position above Athens, the Acropolis is perfectly positioned for strategic military defense—and its major initial structures were in fact focused on preparing for war.

The ancient Mycenaeans built its first defensive wall in the [13th century](https://www.jstor.org/stable/43824553) BCE (a structure so strong that fragments still survive today), which was the primary defense of the Acropolis for around [eight centuries](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/acropolis). Eventually the site would gain religious significance, with temples being added to the area.

After an April 1941 invasion by Nazi Germany to support Fascist Italy, the entirety of Greece was occupied by the Axis Powers. A German War Flag emblazoned with a swastika was raised over the Acropolis [that month](https://greece.greekreporter.com/2018/05/30/the-day-two-teenage-greeks-took-down-the-nazi-flag-from-acropolis/), replacing the Greek flag.

Then, on the night of [May 30](https://greece.greekreporter.com/2018/05/30/the-day-two-teenage-greeks-took-down-the-nazi-flag-from-acropolis/), 1941, two young Athenians—Manolis Glezos and Apostolos Santas, carrying a knife and a lantern between them—climbed to the top of the limestone hill.

They pulled down the German flag, and [slashed it](https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/06/world/europe/since-nazi-occupation-a-fist-raised-in-resistance.html) to pieces. The defiant act was a visible statement of Greek pride against fascism, and inspired the country's resistance during occupation.

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| **Acropolis, Athens** | |
| [**UNESCO World Heritage Site**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Heritage_Site) | |
| The Acropolis of Athens, seen from the Hill of the Muses | |
| [**Location**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_of_World_Heritage_Sites_by_country) | [Athens](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athens), [Attica](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attica_(region)), [Greece](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greece) |
| [**Criteria**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Heritage_Site#Selection_criteria) | Cultural: i, ii, iii, iv, vi |
| **Reference** | [404](https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/404) |
| **Area** | 3.04 ha |
| **Buffer zone** | 116.71 ha |