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ISLANDS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN - 15 DAYS FROM GIBRALTAR TO ATHENS

The seas between Gibraltar and Greece offer access to a wealth of ancient sites, unspoiled islands and traditional towns and during this delightful itinerary we will, in the main, focus on the islands spending time on Mallorca, Menorca, Sardinia, Sicily and Ithaca. These island calls will be combined with time exploring Gibraltar and Malaga along with discovering the magnificent sites of Olympia and Delphi on mainland Greece. A fitting end to our remarkable voyage, before we reach Athens, is our transit of the Corinth Canal, a feat only possible aboard a small ship. We have ensured that each day has an enjoyable mix of culture with some time at leisure to explore under your own steam or time relaxing at sea. Added to our fascinating itinerary we have the pleasure of cruising aboard the MS Hebridean Sky. From time to time we may pass a huge cruise liner and at moments like this we can be thankful that with just over 100 fellow, like minded travellers, we are able to visit atmospheric ports and towns which the big ships cannot access. We will discover timeless islands with their aura of history, unique island lifestyles and spectacular beauty which will capture our hearts as we travel a less well trodden path across the Mediterranean. Late September is the perfect time for our voyage when the crowds of August have dispersed and the weather is ideal for touring and whether you are interested in ancient history, Greek myths or simply the joy of cruising aboard a small ship and experiencing new places and islands in this beautiful region, our voyage has something for everyone.



ITINERARY

Day 1 London to Gibraltar.

Fly by scheduled flight. On arrival transfer to the MS Hebridean Sky and enjoy welcome drinks and dinner as we moor overnight.

Day 2 Gibraltar.

Today we discover this strategic British outpost in the Mediterranean. After taking in the views from Europa Point, where the Atlantic meets the Mediterranean, we continue to the Great Siege Tunnels, a labyrinth of tunnels built to defend Gibraltar from Spanish and French attacks between 1779 and 1783 and revered as one of the finest defensive systems. Also see the Gibraltar Museum where we can learn more about the Great Siege, the geological origins of the rock and also the area's natural history. The afternoon is free to explore at your own pace and maybe take the cable car up the famous rock,

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see the Botanic Gardens or visit the Garrison Library.

Day 3 Malaga, Spain.

Spend the day in the historic city of Malaga. A morning tour will take us to the 14th century Castillo de Gibralfaro, built on a hill overlooking the city and once considered the most impregnable fortress in Iberia. Continue to La Merced Square where we see the birthplace of Pablo Picasso before we visit the impressive 16th century cathedral which was built on the remains of a mosque. With its mix of Renaissance and Gothic styles it has been declared a national landmark. This afternoon is free to explore at your own pace from our central berth, you may wish to head to the market, visit the botanical gardens or, for the art lovers, visit the Picasso Museum.

Day 4 At Sea.

Spend a relaxing day at sea as we head to the Balearic Islands.

Day 5 Palma de Mallorca, Mallorca.

Mallorca, the largest of the Balearic Islands, has a rich history dating back to the Phoenicians when it was under the control of Carthage, the principal North African city at that time, before flourishing under Roman rule. From our berth in Palma we will take the beautifully maintained vintage train that connects Palma with the pretty town of Soller on the island's west coast and enjoy splendid mountain views of the Serra de Tramuntana, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Over the course of just seven kilometres the railway rises 199 metres, runs through 13 tunnels and crosses several bridges. There will be some time to explore Soller before taking a scenic drive to the village of Valldemossa, a quiet and traditional town with narrow streets and lanes. We will take a walk around the town followed by lunch at a local restaurant before returning to Palma where we will have time to

explore at our own pace and perhaps take the opportunity to visit the impressive Gothic style cathedral.

Day 6 Mahon, Menorca.

Over breakfast we arrive in Menorca, the most northerly of the Balearics and the least dedicated to tourism. The island offers pastoral countryside, historic towns and superb beaches. This morning choose to join an island drive including the mysterious rock mounds (talayots) and megalithic stone monuments which were erected some 4,000 years ago before making our way to aristocratic Ciudadella, the architectural showpiece of Menorca. Situated at the head of a long channel from the sea, the city has had its share of disputes over sovereignty, and its character reflects the influence of Moorish, Turkish and Spanish rule. Alternatively, enjoy a few hours exploring the pretty harbour town of Mahon at your own pace before we sail in the early afternoon.

Day 7 Cagliari, Sardinia.

In the late morning we berth in the Sardinian capital of Cagliari where we have a choice of activities this afternoon. Maybe drive along the southwestern coast to reach Nora which was founded by the Phoenicians but also has Carthaginian and Roman ruins. After a period of Roman prosperity, there was a decline and in the 3rd century AD the city was engulfed by the sea. Still visible today are the remains of a Carthaginian warehouse and various Roman buildings including the baths with splendid mosaics and the theatre. Alternatively, explore the Sardinian capital of Cagliari, an ancient city which dates back to the Phoenicians and Romans. On a walking tour we will stroll around the old town with its narrow streets running along a steep hillside. See the terraced Piazza del Palazzo and the 14th century Cathedral of St Cecilia.

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Day 8 Palermo, Sicily.

Spend the morning at sea before we arrive in the Sicilian capital of Palermo at lunchtime. This afternoon you can choose to explore the city, famous for its jumbled and picturesque streets punctuated with ornate Baroque churches, domed Arab mosques and glittering Byzantine mosaics that reveal a unique and diverse heritage. We visit the impressive 12th century cathedral which houses the royal tombs of Henri VI and King Ruggiero. Alternatively, join an excursion to Monreale Cathedral, said to be the most beautiful Norman Church in Italy, designed and completed by William the Good in 1174. With its thick walls and powerful towers, the exterior looks like an austere fortress yet it is the interior of this great cathedral which is its crowning glory. Here the large nave, with its side aisles and grey granite columns set off the exquisite Byzantine mosaics on the walls above the arches.

Day 9 Messina for Taormina.

From the nearby port of Messina we will visit Taormina, a walled town lying in the shadow of Mount Etna, Europe's highest volcano. The town has been a popular tourist destination since the 19th century and our guided tour will include walking the characteristic alleys before visiting the 15th century Palazzo Corvaja and the impressive Greek Theatre from where there are marvellous views over the town and coast. Those who wish to spend longer here will be able to take lunch independently in one of the local restaurants and enjoy an afternoon exploring at leisure before our coach returns to Messina. Alternatively, return to the ship for lunch and enjoy free time in Messina before we sail this evening.

Day 10 Syracuse & Noto.

Syracuse was founded by the Greeks in 734 BC and by the 5th century was a political and military power throughout the Mediterranean which rivalled Athens as the largest and most beautiful city in the Greek world. There will be a choice of excursions this morning. You may choose to visit the Neapolis Archaeological Park where we will find a well preserved Greek theatre with seats carved from limestone. Paradise Quarry, now an attractive garden and orange grove, was the primary source of that limestone and is the site of the curious 'Ear of Dionysius' a vast grotto with an amplifying resonance. Alternatively, explore the Baroque village of Noto. Built in 1703, Noto is a picturesque city located on the terraced slopes of Mount Iblei among olive groves and almond trees. A guided walk along the central streets will reveal the 18th century Palazzo Ducezio and some Baroque churches: San Francesco Immacolata, the cathedral, San Carlo, Santa Chiara and the imposing Palazzo Nicolaci di Villadorata, built in 1737. The afternoon is free to explore independently before we meet this evening for a private concert in one of the town's palazzos accompanied by local food and wine.

Day 11 At Sea.

After a busy few days take the chance to relax on board as we spend the day cruising.

Day 12 Katakolon for Olympia, Greece.

The fame of Olympia rests upon the Olympic Games. During the celebrations that accompanied the Games, competitors, while not forgetting that they were Athenians, Spartans or from other city states, remembered that they were Greeks and regarded an Olympic victory as the highest honour. We will see the gymnasium, the stadium and the palestra or wrestling school. We will also explore the Altis, or sacred precinct of Zeus, which

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houses structures including the Temple of Zeus, one of the largest temples on the Greek mainland and the Archaeological Museum which houses some fine sculptures and artefacts from the site. After our visit we drive the short distance to a nearby farm where we will taste some of the local wine and olive oils accompanied with local snacks. Return to the ship for some free time in Katakolon before we sail this evening.

Day 13 Ithaca.

Ithaca, one of the most legendary of all Greek islands is unspoiled by tourism yet has a fascinating history. Relics date back to 4000 BC and by Mycenaean times it was the capital of a kingdom that included surrounding islands and part of the Peloponnese coast. It was under Odysseus that this kingdom reached its zenith, sending 12 ships to the Trojan War. During a scenic drive of the island we will visit the village of Stavros and the Monastery of Panagia Katharon which is located on Mount Neritos and offers wonderful views of the island below. After lunch on board the afternoon is free to enjoy the delightful town of Vathy at leisure.

Day 14 Itea for Delphi & Corinth Canal.

Spend the morning at the sacred site of Delphi, one of Greece's most important sites of antiquity. The hillside ruins here are exceptional and we will explore the Sanctuary of Apollo, the site of the sacred Delphic Oracle and walk along Delphi's Sacred Way, visiting the Treasury of the Athenians and the 5,000 seat theatre dating from the 4th century BC. In the late afternoon we will transit the narrow Corinth Canal. Completed in 1893 and only 6.4 kilometres long and 21.5 metres wide, it is only small ships like ours which can now make this journey. Arrive into Piraeus this evening and moor overnight.

Day 15 Athens to London.

Disembark this morning and transfer to the airport for our scheduled flight from Athens to London.

Please Note:

Itineraries are subject to change.

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VESSEL TYPE:

LENGTH:

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Hebridean Sky has always been known for its effortless elegance, impeccable service and atmosphere of charm and camaraderie. Now we add increased adventure options and an on-site Passenger Service Representative. Hebridean Sky is the perfect blend of luxury and adventurous exploration. Is it a luxury ship? An adventure ship? It's both! The vessel underwent a multi-million pound refurbishment in Sweden in Spring 2016. **ONBOARD DINING** Great expeditions require great food! We are pleased to offer daily changing breakfast, lunch and dinner menus with an emphasis on providing well balanced and nutritional cuisine. Our team of international chefs has boat loads of creativity and you are sure to experience a variety of interesting dishes throughout your voyage. The restaurant is located on Deck 2 and our service team looks forward to providing a memorable dining experience. **IMPECCABLE SMALL-SHIP AMENITIES** Returning from excursions, passengers enjoy complimentary refreshments, afternoon tea and all-day coffee in The Club, a gracious space for relaxation, surrounded by panoramic windows. Other Sea Explorer features include: Library with Internet access Lounge with audiovisual facilities Dining room Wraparound sun deck with Jacuzzi Exercise room

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plan may vary.

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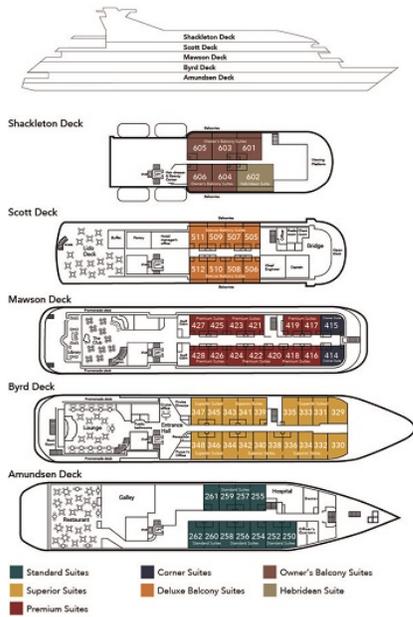
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20-Sep-2024 to 04-Oct-2024

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