

FULL DAY TOUR METEORA

1) MONASTERIES OF METEORA

- The Meteora is a rock formation in central Greece hosting one of the largest and most precipitously built complexes of Eastern Orthodox monasteries, second in importance only to Mount Athos.
- The six (of an original twenty-four) monasteries are built on immense natural pillars and hill-like rounded boulders that dominate the local area. Between the 13th and 14th century, the twenty-four monasteries were established atop the rocks.
- Meteora is located near the town of Kalabaka at the northwestern edge of the Plain of Thessaly near the Pineios river and Pindus Mountains.
- The name means "lofty", "elevated", and is etymologically related to *meteor*.
- Caves in the vicinity of Meteora were inhabited continuously between 50,000 and 5,000 years ago. The oldest known example of a built structure, a stone wall that blocked two-thirds of the entrance to the Theopetra cave, was constructed 23,000 years ago, probably as a barrier against cold winds – the Earth was experiencing an ice age at the time – and many Paleolithic and Neolithic artifacts of human occupation have been found within the caves.

2) KALABAKA TOWN

- Kalabaka is a town and seat of the municipality of Meteora in the Trikala regional unit, part of Thessaly in Greece. The population was 12,000 at the 2011 census, of which 8,330 in the town proper.
- The Meteora monasteries are located near the town. Kalabaka is the northwestern terminal of the old Thessaly Railways.
- A Greek inscription on the wall of one of the town's oldest churches (Saint John the Baptist) testifies to the existence of an ancient Greek settlement under the name Aiginion.
- In the 10th century A.D., it was known as Stagoi, a Byzantine fortress and bishopric (the name is still in use for the town by the Greek Orthodox Church). Stagoi is first mentioned in *Diatyposis* written by the Byzantine Emperor Leo VI the Wise (886-912). In 1163 there was a reference to the castle of Stagoi. In 1204 Stagoi fell under the Despotate of Epirus. At the end of the 13th century they fell under the Duchy of Neopatria. In 1334, they were taken over once more by the Despot of Epirus, John II Orsini, and shortly thereafter they came once more under the control of the Byzantine Empire. In 1348, they were conquered by the Serbs of Stephen Dushan.
- When the Ottomans conquered Thessaly, Kalabaka was placed under the administrative rule of the Pasha of Larisa and later on of the Sanjak of Trikala.

3) THERMOPYLAE (HOT GATES)

- Thermopylae ("hot gates") is a place where a narrow coastal passage existed in antiquity. It derives its name from its hot sulphur springs. In Greek mythology the Hot Gates is one of the entrances to Hades. The hot springs from which the pass derives its name still exist close to the foot of the hill.
- In one variation of the story of the Labours of Heracles, it was said that the waters at Thermopylae became hot because the hero Heracles tried to cleanse himself of Hydra poison in them.
- Is primarily known for the battle that took place there in 480 B.C., in which an outnumbered Greek force probably of 7,000 (including 300 Spartans, 500 warriors from Tegea, 500 from Mantinea, 120 from Arcadian Orchomenos, 1,000 from the rest of Arcadia, 200 from Phlius, 80 from Mycenae, 400 Corinthians, 400 Thebans, 1,000 Phocians, 700 Thespians, and the Opuntian Locrians) held off a substantially larger force of Persians under Xerxes.
- For three days they held a narrow route between hills and the sea against Xerxes' vast cavalry and infantry force, before being outflanked on the third day via an obscure goat path named the Anopaea Pass. According to the Greek legend, a traitor named Ephialtes of Trachis showed the path to the invaders.