

Seriously Entertaining Travel

A Guide to visiting Meteora, Greece



The
land of
floating Monasteries

Mesmerising Meteora

A Guide to making the most of your visit by The Motoroamers

Meteora is one of those places in the world that is difficult to put into words - it's a sight that you really have to see with your own eyes. My pictures really don't do it justice. You see, Meteora is more than just a tourist hot spot; it's a natural and spiritual canvas and you feel it as soon as you approach the sandstone monoliths, from the bland agricultural plains of Greece's Thelassy region. For some people it is just part of their package tour that they tick religiously off the agenda; for others it's a pilgrimage. For the rest it's an incredible sanctuary that transports you into a different world. Picture the movie Avatar and the scene where the dragons are bonded with their riders; this is how I feel about Meteora. Monasteries that seem to float up above the valley floor on fingers of rock, enticing you learn about their ancestral heritage and give you a sneak preview of the chosen life of monks, nuns and hermits, dating back to 10th century.

Meteora is an experience not a visit and because of our experience here, I felt compelled to put together a Guide that will help you plan for and appreciate this very special place. If and when you come, bring walking boots, cameras and an open heart to see how Mother Nature and Spirituality have fused in a partnership of brilliance for those willing to see it.

Our Guide to experiencing Meteora

1. **Duration.** Stay in the area for two days so you can see Meteora by sunrise and sunset. There's so much walking in the area, you'll not be bored. And the early morning light is quite lovely. Thunderstorms prevented the sunset experience for us although I saw the place to see it and can imagine how spectacular it would be.



2. **Avoiding the crowds.** Meteora is not a pleasant experience between 1000 - 1500 as even in June when we visited, the Monasteries are strewn with coach tours. If you go at 0900 or after 1500, then you will have these palaces pretty much to yourselves.

3. **Accessibility.** Many of the Monasteries are accessed by steep pathways and staircases, so you need to be fit. They are not disabled friendly unfortunately. Wear good shoes and take plenty of drinking water with you. There are vendors outside 4 of the 6 Monasteries if you need more sustenance.

4. Whilst on the subject of clothing, there is a **dress code** that requires skirts and covered shoulders for the girls and trousers and shirts for the boys. I didn't see anyone get turned away, although many of the ticket offices are up a 100 metre climb, so it's not worth risking. That said, there are wrap-over skirts and trousers on loan at the ticket offices, so that you can dress appropriately. So if the thought of being covered up all day in scorching temperatures doesn't appeal, then there are solutions at the Monasteries to honour their "Modesty" code.

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5. **Opening hours.** During the main season, which is from 1 April to 31 October, each Monastery is open at 0900 although each one has different closing time. There is also

one day of the week that each Monastery is shut for the whole day. To ensure you are not disappointed, see the table over the page for more information.



6. **Taking photos.** If like me, you're a keen photographer, then the light is so different on the Monasteries from the morning to afternoon, so getting the right shot with the right lighting may require two visits. That way you can stay fresh enough to experience each one at their best.

7. Each Monastery charges €3 per person **entrance fee**.

8. **Roads.** The roads are very easy to drive so do not be put off by blogs that say it's dangerous. We took our 7.5m motorhome up and there are plenty of places to park as long as you time it right with the onslaught of coaches.

9. **Accommodation.** There are plenty of hotels and guest houses if you're coming under your own steam. Kalabaka is the main town and Kastraki is the 'gateway' village about 2km away where you have lots of options to choose from. Public buses go from Kalabaka on the main road into Meteora, through Kastraki, a number of times in the day and costs around €1.60 per person (@ June 2017).

Monastery Opening Hours

Monastery	Closed	Best photo light	Opening hours Summer 1/4 - 31/10 Winter 1/11 - 31/3
Great Meteoron Metamorphosis	Tuesday (Tues/Wed in winter)	Morning light	Summer 0900 - 1700 Winter 0900 - 1500
Varlaam	Friday (Thurs/Fri in winter)	Morning light and sunset	Summer 0900 - 1600 Winter 0900 - 1500
Holy Trinity	Thursday (Wed/Thurs in winter)	Morning light and sunset	Summer 0900 - 1700 Winter 0900 - 1600
St Nikolaos	Friday	Morning and afternoon light	Summer 0900 - 1530 Winter. 0900 - 1400
Roussanou	Wednesday	Afternoon light	Summer 0900 - 1745 Winter 0900 - 1400
St Stephanos	Monday	Sunrise and sunset	Summer 0900 - 1330 1530 - 1730 Winter 0900 - 1300 1500 - 1700

Correct information @ June 2017

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10. **Camping options.** There are also camping options if you have a tent, caravan or camper. We stayed at **Camping Vrachos** in Kastraki, which has the Meteora view from most vantage points - especially the swimming pool. This site is perfect as it's only a five minute drive to the first Monastery. (Co-ordinates are **39.713493 21.615812**) and accepts the ACSI discount card. It has a good restaurant and is a five minute walk to the village where you will find petrol, bakeries and eateries. Other camping opportunities are offered by local Taverna entrepreneurs who will search you out whilst on your visit and tout for your business, offering a "free" night's camping in return for a meal.



11. **Shopping.** The main town Kalabaka has all the amenities that you need including supermarkets, banks, ATM and car hire. There is also a station here if the train is your preferred travel style.

12. **Off the beaten track.** If you fancy getting off the beaten track and retreat away from the hoards, then take the road on the eastern side of Meteora towards Vlachava. Follow this road for 7.5km and you will find two tavernas waiting to whet your whistle. We stopped at Monaxia where we had the most gorgeous, homemade Zucchini Balls for €3.50. Tourists rarely come up to this vantage point and the views across the valley are incredible.

13. **Take your time.** Experiencing this wonderland and all the Monasteries is likely to take you a good four to six hours, if you decide to do it all in one day. Given that the entrances have steep ascents, allow plenty of time - rushing is not an option here. We chose to visit two Monasteries to get a feel for their inner world, many of which are still living religious sanctuaries.

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14. **Hiking and cycling.** Finally, if you fancy a stretch, why not hike through the gorges to get up close and personal, as the whole area is littered with walking paths to help you explore on foot. Alternatively you could cycle the route. I did it with my mountain bike and albeit had the aid of occasional electric assistance, I found it very doable and I'm not at my peak fitness right now. Stopping at each of the Monasteries (not going into each one I hasten to add) took me two hours, leaving from Camping Vrachos, with a few photo opportunities and chats with fellow visitors. The total journey is about 19km. You get to see and feel so much more and really feel like you're in it.

For a glimpse of Meteora from the skies, check out our drone video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCihfKdHWSk>

I hope that our Guide to experiencing Meteora has whetted your appetite and that it hastens your visit. It is a spectacle not to be missed. Do feel free to email us at themotoroamers@gmail.com for any more information on travelling through Greece and Europe.

Karen and Myles
The Motoroamers

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The Motoroamers are inspired to share their seriously entertaining travel experiences as they explore all that Europe has to offer.

They live and work as full-time digital nomads, having left their UK corporate lives behind them in March 2016. They swapped stress for happiness and now hope to inspire you to do the same.

Together, in their motorhome Scoobie, they write about, film and photograph what they see, hear and feel. For more information on their adventures check out <https://www.motoroaming.com>

