

# Our town in 1 hour

## Guided tour by 2<sup>nd</sup> General Lyceum's Junior Ambassadors

### 1. The Byzantine Church of Panagia Chalkeon

The Church of Panagia Chalkeon, (Our Lady of the Coppersmiths) splendid cruciform and dome is a masterpiece of Byzantine art, is an ornament to the city.



According to a marble inscription, over the western entrance, the monument was built in 1028. Its name could be related to the coppersmiths' workshops that were found in the vicinity. Same can still be found to the west of the monument.

Architecturally, the church, which follows faithfully the architectural tradition of Constantinople, belongs to the type of four-columned cross-in-square church with a dome.

Of particular interest are the external parts of the church, with the successive carved arches and apses, conches and semi-circular columns, as it is usual in the monuments of Constantinople. The church is built exclusively by bricks, something that indicates that it is a rather expensive construction.

There are some Christological scenes at the main church (Nativity, Hypapante, Adoration of the Magi, Pentecost) and functional at the bema, where there is the Platytera praying. However, they are the most important wall paintings as a whole, which according to the inscription is identified with the foundation of the church.

After the occupation of Thessaloniki by the Ottomans in 1430 the church was converted into a mosque. With the liberation of the city in 1912 it became once again an Orthodox church.

### 2. Archaeological Museum of Ancient (Roman) Forum, Thessaloniki

The Ancient Forum, the administrative centre of ancient Thessaloniki, occupied an area about two hectares in the heart of the city. Its construction began at the end of the 2nd century A.D. on the site of an older forum dating from early Imperial times.



The complex was arranged around a rectangular paved square. There were stoas on three sides, each of which consisted of a double row of columns and provided direct access to a surrounding zone of public buildings. The southern stoa stood on a vaulted substructure (cryptoporticus) - a double arcade which lay partly underground, making use of the natural slope of the land. To the south, along the whole of the cryptoporticus, lay a row of shops fronting the ancient shopping street which ran along the north side of present-day Philippou St. Off this street lay minor entrances to the square, while the latter opened north, to the present-day Olympou St. In the middle of the east wing, on the site of an earlier council - chamber, a building for public performances was erected, which, on the basis of the inscription and the statues of Muses found there, must have functioned as an odeon.

The history of the area where the ancient forum is located in downtown Thessaloniki, and the most important events that have taken place in the metropolis, are reconstructed through the exhibits on display in the new Roman Forum Museum.

The underground museum is a continuation of a hidden stoa (gallery) and features findings from the Hellenistic era, when vessel and statuette workshops thrived in the area, as well as from the "golden age" of the Roman Forum up to the 4th century when it ceased being a regional administrative centre and the

pottery workshops reappeared. The museum also features exhibits from the Ottoman period until the 1917 fire that destroyed most of the city.

### 3. Church of Agios Dimitrios

This is the city's largest church (UNESCO World Heritage) and the main sanctuary dedicated to its patron saint, Agios Dimitrios; it stands on the presumed site of his martyrdom c 306. Restored after the fire in 1917, in line with the original architectural plans, the church has retained some features that are of incomparable historical and artistic interest: the 7C Byzantine mosaics decorating the pillars on either side of the entrance to the apse are remarkably delicate and refined.



In ancient times, the life of Saint Demetrios was commemorated with celebrations that lasted for months. These celebrations were accompanied by many events such as the famous market named "Demetria". Traders and business people from Europe, Egypt, Arabia and Libya came to deal and trade. The festivities were also attended by philosophers, learned men of the time and artists. To this day, Thessaloniki hosts Greece's largest international trade exhibition each year.

The monument is a five-aisled basilica, with a narthex and a transept. Under the sanctuary and the transept there is the crypt. A chapel of Saint Euthymios is attached to the south-east corner of the church. Very few fragments of the sculptural and pictorial (mosaics, wall paintings) decoration of the church, survived the disastrous fire of 1917 but they are representative of the successive phases of the monument's history.

The first church was a small oratory, built shortly after 313 A.D. on the ruins of a Roman bath. In the 5th century A.D., the eparch Leontios founded on the same site a large, three-aisled basilica which was burnt down in 626-634. Shortly thereafter, the five-aisled basilica was erected. It was converted into a mosque in 1493, it was restored to Christian worship in 1912 but it was again destroyed in the great fire of 1917. It was rebuilt and started to function again in 1949.

### 4. Church of Agios Georgios (Rotunda)

The Rotunda of St. George is located just north of the junction of the two main axes of the city where the Arch of Galerius can be found. It is now one of the 15 Paleochristian and Byzantine Monuments of Thessaloniki that were included in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1988.



The name Rotunda came from its round shape. It is one of the oldest and more impressive monuments in Thessaloniki. It was built in the first years of Roman tetrarchy, when Caesar Galerius (250-311 AD) was based in Thessaloniki. It was part of the imperial complex, probably in one theory built as Galerius' mausoleum, but was never used since his mausoleum was found in Romuliana, in Serbia.

During the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Theodosios the Great (379-395 AD) it was converted into a Christian church. It was then that a rectangular area with a semicircular apse was added in the eastern

side in order to serve as the sanctuary of the church dedicated to the Archangels, while it took its present day name (Church of Agios Georgios) from a nearby chapel of Agios Georgios.

Of particular interest are the mosaics, of exceptional quality, which are considered the most beautiful of the early Christian years. From the decoration of the dome that still survives we understand that it depicts Christ's Second Coming. Better preserved on the lower part are the saints, who are in front of an architectural setting. At the arches of the conches various decorative themes can be seen.

In 1591, the Turks converted it into a mosque. When Thessaloniki was liberated in 1912 and until 1920 it was used again as a place for Christians. Today the church of Agios Georgios, the Rotunda, is one of the most important archaeological sites of the city.

## 5. Arch of Galerius “Kamara”

The Arch of Galerius (known today as “Kamara”), is perhaps the most distinctive and interesting roman structure of Thessaloniki. It is also one of the most popular destinations of the city along with the White Tower for both locals and tourists.



It was built to honor the Roman Emperor Galerius who returned victorious to Thessaloniki (about 306 AD) after the wars against the Persians. The triumphal arch was placed vertically on ancient Roman Egnatia Road, passed through the city and was part of the Roman palace which stretched further southwest, and where Navarinou and Ippodromiou squares stand today.

The structure was originally an eight-pillared gateway that formed a triple arch faced with brick and marble panels with sculptural relief. Only three of the eight pillars and parts of the masonry cores survive. The two pillars that flank the central arched passageway retain their marble sculptures that depict Roman soldiers fighting against the Persians.

The sculptured panels hold the interest of history buffs and art lovers alike. One panel shows Galerius attacking the Persian general Narses. Another depicts the imperial family, including Galerius' wife, Valeria. The arch asserts the glory of the Roman tetrarchy and Galerius' dominance and is located within the ruins of Galerius' palace.

## 6. Galerian Complex-Arched Hall

The Galerian Complex, the most important monumental group in Thessaloniki, was built at the turning-point of two worlds, the Roman and Byzantine. Its erection began in the late 3rd century-early 4th century AD, when the Caesar Galerius Valerianus Maximianus.



Significant building remains of the complex came to light in excavations carried out during the second half of the 20th century. Some of these, like the Apsidal Hall and the buildings at the archaeological site in Navarinou Square, are visible and open to the public, though most have been buried due to the reconstruction of the historic city center.

In 2008, the archaeological site received an award from the European Union and Europa Nostra for the exceptional and exemplary restoration and conservation of its ruins, as well as the totality of

interventions which transformed an abandoned site into a well-organized, educational one which functions as a pole of attraction in the heart of the contemporary city.

## 7. The White Tower of Thessaloniki

The White Tower is a monument and museum on the waterfront of the city of Thessaloniki, capital of the region of Macedonia in northern Greece. The present tower replaced an old Byzantine fortification, known to have been mentioned around the 12th century, that the Ottoman Empire reconstructed to fortify the city's fortress some time after Sultan Murad II captured Thessaloniki in 1430. During the period of Ottoman rule, White tower became a notorious prison and scene of mass executions.



In 1912, as Greece gained control over the city, and the White Tower was substantially remodeled and its exterior was whitewashed. White Tower has been adopted as the symbol of the city.

## 8. Thessaloniki Holocaust Memorial

Since 1997, a monument in the centre of Thessaloniki commemorates the city's murdered Jews. Only a few hundred members of what was once the largest Jewish community in Greece lived to return home after the deportations to Auschwitz-Birkenau, which took place in a matter of just a few months in 1943.



### Useful information

**Contact person (in case someone gets lost):** George Giannikis, **What's Up – Viber:** +30 6972 684 000

**Restaurant:** Ladadika Lykourgou 4 & Pindou GPS: 40°38'7.49"N, 22°56'10.31"E / 40.635529° 22.936225°

In case someone gets lost, **please stay there and contact Mr George Giannikis**, stating the exact address where you are. Immediately someone will come and pick you up.