

Travel

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A scenic landscape photograph of a valley. In the foreground, there are trees with sparse, light-colored foliage. In the middle ground, a church with a prominent spire is visible. The background shows a wide valley with rolling hills under a sky filled with soft, white clouds. The overall tone is peaceful and scenic.

Frugal Europe, On Foot

Foraging

ATHENS

Greece Is for Lovers

The tourist-packed streets at the base of the Acropolis in Athens are a vibrant if somewhat kitsch-laden extension of the achievements of ancient Greece. Kiosks overflow with posters and guidebooks, and the roads are jammed with shops selling everything from pricey marble busts of Athena to gaudy Parthenon refrigerator magnets.

So it might be a bit jarring to look into a shop window and see intricate beeswax replicas of the busts of two Greek gods — Hermes and Aphrodite — wearing sunglasses with candle wicks poking out of the tops of their heads next to a label reading “Hermaphrodite.” To their left is a row of coffee mugs labeled with a cheeky sentiment (unprintable here) that’s a play on the ubiquitous “I ♥ NY” logo.

Not your everyday souvenir shop, Greece Is for Lovers specializes in novel, high-quality products that put a decidedly irreverent spin on Hellenic heritage.

“Greek people tend to take their culture very seriously,” said Christina Kotsilelou, who opened the store in 2007 with two other young Athenian designers, Vasso Damkou and Thanos Karampatsos. “No one had really done something just having a laugh at it.” The sleek but modest shop carries moderately priced merchandise — like those mugs (16 euros, or \$20 at \$1.25 to the euro, each) — as well as pricier made-to-order items that playfully draw on history, like a skateboard made entirely out of white Attica marble (2,500 euros) and another lined in brown leather that incorporates Greek-style sandals into the board itself (1,800 euros).

The three designers first collaborated in 2005, when they created a Lycra wine cooler based on the structure of a women’s bikini. A wine bottle “fills out” one side; the



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other can be packed with sand or pebbles, which weigh the bottle down and keep it cool underwater. (The cooler sells in the shop for 102 euros.)

Despite its hip, winking sensibility, Greece Is for Lovers — a line now carried throughout Europe and the United States in high-end retail shops like Moss and Paul Smith — remains rooted in Greek tradition. Many of the products, like a hand-knitted iPod holder that sells for 55 euros, are made by local craftspeople using traditional tools and techniques.

“There is a lot of stuff we love about Greek culture and design, and that also comes into our work,” Ms. Kotsilelou said.

Greece Is for Lovers, 13a Karyatidon, Athens; 30-210-924-5064; greeceisforlovers.com.

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