

12 Best Hidden Mediterranean Archaeological Sites



ISSUE No 01

GO DEEP.

GO LOCAL.

GO BACK IN TIME.

From the Editor

Imagine descending into an underground city built to shelter thousands or floating above a Roman palace now sleeping beneath turquoise waves. Picture yourself among Greek temples whose massive Doric columns catch Mediterranean light while wildflowers bloom between ancient stones. These twelve archaeological sites offer experiences distinct from Europe's crowded forums: the chance for personal discovery among historically significant ruins that span from Malta's megalithic temples (c. 3600–3200 BCE) to a Turkish fortress where Roman soldiers worshipped in underground chambers. Each destination tells its own story, from the genuinely remote to the surprisingly uncrowded.

Some sites hide in plain sight—like Sicily's Valle dei Templi, a UNESCO World Heritage Site where well-preserved temples from the 5th century BCE stretch along a dramatic ridge. Others require detective work: finding the frozen-in-time quarry at Cave di Cusa, where massive column drums lie exactly where Greek stonecutters abandoned them in 409 BCE. This guide provides the practical details about what you'll actually encounter at each location. Whether you're drawn to dive through Baia's submerged mosaics, explore Derinkuyu's multi-level underground passages, or trace the hero tombs of mythical Calydon, you'll find the precise information that transforms curiosity into adventure.

At Take Me To Europe Tours, we chase the moments when ancient stones reveal their stories—when you notice the worn surfaces where countless hands touched temple walls, or when you stand in Ancient Messene's vast stadium, imagining the competitions once held there. These twelve sites embody our approach: seeking places where archaeology offers intimate encounters with the past. While this guide arms you for independent exploration, we also lead small groups to many of these locations, for those who want expert insights into the history these ruins preserve. Discover more at [takemetoeuropetours.com](https://www.takemetoeuropetours.com).



CEO, TAKE ME TO EUROPE



The Med's best hidden archaeological sites





1. Valle dei Templi, Sicily

Walk a ridge where Greek temples have stood for 2,500 years, their columns rising against the sky. The Temple of Concordia remains remarkably intact, preserving ancient architectural proportions. The site's 1,300-hectare expanse allows for exploration across a large archaeological park.

Key Facts:

- Constructed between the 6th and 5th century BCE as a tribute to the Greek gods.
- UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1997 for its outstanding preservation.
- Temples date from c. 510–430 BCE.
- Rarely crowded despite its size.

Location & Access:

- Just outside Agrigento in southern Sicily.
- About 2 hours' drive south from Palermo or 2 hours west from Catania. Regular trains/buses from Palermo to Agrigento (2 hours), with a short local bus or 3km walk to the site.

Best Things to See at This Site:

- The Temple of Concordia (one of the best-preserved Greek temples worldwide)
- The colossal Temple of Zeus
- Almond trees blooming in spring
- Panoramic views over olive groves to the sea



2. Volubilis, Morocco

Stand where Rome met Africa in this remarkably preserved city, where grand mosaics still gleam in the floors of ancient mansions. The Triumphal Arch of Caracalla frames views across wheat fields to the holy town of Moulay Idriss, while storks nest atop Corinthian columns. Unlike many Roman sites reduced to foundations, Volubilis preserves entire streetscapes where you can trace daily life from bakeries to brothels.

Key Facts:

- Capital of Mauretania Tingitana (3rd century BCE–3rd century CE).
- Mosaic floors mostly from the 2nd–3rd centuries CE.

- Critical in Roman trade/admin until the 3rd century CE.

Location & Access:

- 33km north of Meknes in northern Morocco.
- Reachable by taxi/car from Meknes (30–40 minutes) or organized tour from Fez (1.5 hours).

Best Things to See at This Site:

- House of Orpheus mosaics
- Triumphal Arch of Caracalla
- Forum and Basilica
- Expansive countryside views



3. Baia Submerged City, Italy

Explore a Roman resort town that slipped beneath the waves, where emperors' villas now shelter schools of fish. Through glass-bottom boats or diving gear, peer into rooms where geometric mosaics remain perfectly preserved under water, and marble statues stand guard in their underwater palace. This unique site offers archaeology as adventure—the only Roman city you can swim through.

Key Facts:

- Destroyed by volcanic activity around the 4th century CE.
- Mosaics/statues: 1st–3rd centuries CE.

- Luxurious Roman resort during the Imperial era.

Location & Access:

- Near Pozzuoli, north of Naples.
- 30–40 minutes by car/train from Naples; tours depart local marinas.

Best Things to See at This Site:

- Glass-bottom boat or diving view of mosaicked floors
- Sunken domed nymphaeum
- Statues scattered beneath the water
- Ruins of private Roman villas



4. Carthage, Tunisia

Just the name gives me goosebumps – such a significant city of Antiquity! Touch the foundations of Hannibal's homeland, where Phoenician harbors once launched a thousand ships, and Roman baths later rivaled those of the capital. Though centuries of quarrying have scattered the ancient stones across modern Tunis, what remains tells an epic tale: massive cisterns, reconstructed Punic neighborhoods, and the haunting outline of circular military ports that once challenged Rome itself.

Key Facts:

- Founded c. 814 BCE.
- Punic Wars (264–146 BCE).

- Vast remains from both Punic and Roman periods.

Location & Access:

- 15km northeast of Tunis.
- 40 minutes by TGM light rail or by car/taxi.

Best Things to See at This Site:

- Antonine Baths (Roman)
- Punic port harbors
- Byrsa Hill (cathedral and museum)
- Roman amphitheater



5. Ancient Messene, Greece

Experience a complete Greek city where you can walk the ancient stadium's stone seats, explore city gates, and trace 9 kilometers of walls across mountainous terrain. Founded as a symbol of freedom from Spartan rule in 369 BCE, Messene preserves temple complexes, marketplaces, and fortifications across its expansive site.

Messene is on the UNESCO World Heritage tentative list and is as expansive as nearby Ancient Olympia.

Key Facts:

- Founded 369 BCE.
- Stadium/theater: 3rd century BCE.

- 9km circuit of ancient walls.

Location & Access:

- Near Mavromati, western Peloponnese.
- 30 minutes from Kalamata, 3 hours from Athens by car. (You can also fly directly now to Kalamata in summer).

Best Things to See at This Site:

- Ancient stadium (fully walkable)
- Theater and agora
- City gates and walls
- Asclepeion sanctuary



6. Paestum, Italy

Encounter three Greek temples remarkably preserved after 2,500 years, their massive columns creating dramatic architectural views. These structures survive largely intact—a rarity that allows you to experience ancient Greek architecture in its monumental scale.

Don't just see Pompeii and Herculaneum if you're holidaying on the Amalfi Coast – take the train to Paestum and see the best preserved Greek temples in Italy.

Key Facts:

- Founded c. 600 BCE.
- Temples: c. 550–450 BCE.
- Greek/Roman remains, city walls.

Location & Access:

- 40km south of Salerno.
- 1.5 hours by train from Naples; 10-minute walk from Paestum station.

Best Things to See at This Site:

- Temple of Hera ("Basilica")
- Temple of Neptune
- The painted Tomb of the Diver
- Museum with archaic Greek finds



7. Selinunte & Cave di Cusa, Sicily, Italy

Witness ancient ambition interrupted: massive temples lie toppled like giants' toys across a coastal plateau, while 12 kilometers away, the quarry tells the story's other half—column drums abandoned mid-carving when the city fell in 409 BCE. This paired site offers archaeology in motion, from half-finished stones to fallen magnificence, all set against Mediterranean cliffs where wild herbs scent the air.

Key Facts:

- Selinunte flourished from the 7th–5th century BCE; quarry stones stopped abruptly in 409 BCE.

- Thousands of abandoned columns at Cave di Cusa.

Location & Access:

- Near Castelvetrano, 1.5-hour drive south of Palermo.

Best Things to See at This Site:

- The impressive Temples E, F, and G
- Wildflower-filled acropolis
- Abandoned columns at Cave di Cusa
- Sweeping sea views from hilltops



8. Derinkuyu Underground City, Türkiye

Descend multiple levels into an underground labyrinth with carved stone chambers that once served as living spaces, workrooms, and worship areas. This engineering marvel includes stables, storage areas, chapels, and ventilation systems—a complex underground city. Navigate narrow passages between levels through this remarkable subterranean refuge.

Key Facts:

- In use from as early as the 8th century BCE, expanded in Byzantine period.

- Hittite to Byzantine occupation

Location & Access:

- Derinkuyu, Cappadocia, 40km south of Nevşehir; 45 minutes by car/bus.

Best Things to See at This Site:

- Multi-level tunnels and stairways
- Communal kitchens, wine cellars, stables
- Stone "rolling doors" for security
- Church carved into the rock



9. Zerzevan Castle & Mithras Temple, Türkiye

Discover where Roman soldiers guarded the Empire's eastern frontier and descended into darkness to worship a mystery god. The underground Mithras temple preserves altars where secret initiation rites unfolded, while above, fortress walls command views across the Mesopotamian plain. Active excavations continually reveal new finds, making each visit potentially different from the last.

Key Facts:

- Roman settlement, 3rd–5th centuries CE.

- Well-preserved Mithraic temple from the 3rd century CE

Location & Access:

- 45km southeast of Diyarbakir, a 45-minute drive by car/taxi

Best Things to See at This Site:

- Castle's panoramic ramparts
- Underground Mithraic temple
- Secret tunnels and cistern
- Ongoing archaeological excavations



10. Ancient Calydon, Greece

Walk the ground associated with Greek myth, where the legendary Calydonian Boar hunt was set. The site preserves the layout of temples and hero shrines where ancient Greeks honored their legendary past. Set among olive groves with mountain views, Calydon connects mythology with archaeological remains.

Key Facts:

- Temples to Artemis/Apollo: c. 5th century BCE.
- Classical period ruins, hero tombs (5th–4th century BCE)

Location & Access:

- Near Evinochori, 10km east of Missolonghi (15min by car), or 50km NW of Patras

Best Things to See at This Site:

- Sanctuary of Artemis
- Square Theatre
- Large Agora (marketplace)
- Hero tombs
- Ridges with valley and mountain views



11. Kalavassos-Tenta, Cyprus

Step back 7,000 years to see how Mediterranean peoples first built permanent homes—circular stone dwellings with plaster floors where families gathered around central hearths. A modern protective canopy creates an intimate viewing experience, while reconstructed walls help visualize daily Neolithic life. This small but significant site offers rare insight into humanity's transition to settled existence.

Key Facts:

- Site from c. 5200–4500 BCE, excavated since 1977

- Neolithic circular stone houses

Location & Access:

- Near Kalavassos, 40km (30min) SW of Larnaca by car; 2.5km off the Nicosia-Limassol motorway.

Best Things to See at This Site:

- Domed house reconstructions under a protective roof
- Original walls and floors
- Site's educational displays
- Quiet, rural setting



12. Ta' Haġrat Temples, Malta

Touch stones raised before Egypt's pyramids were imagined—megalithic temples built by a civilization that left no written records, only these massive limestone monuments. The two connected temples, though modest in size, preserve doorways and altars that have stood for over 5,000 years. Set in rural Malta, away from tourist routes, they offer a profound connection with humanity's earliest architectural ambitions.

Key Facts:

- Temples built c. 3600–3200 BCE
- Outstanding megalithic facades

Location & Access:

- Mgarr village, 26km (30min drive) northwest of Valletta; bus routes 44, 238, 101

Best Things to See at This Site:

- Two stone temples with detailed doorways
- Megalithic altar features
- Atmospheric village location
- Nearby countryside walking trails

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