Ancient Greece—birthplace of democracy, philosophy, history and theater. And also a society in which same-sex relations lay at the center of social and political life. The remains of ancient Greece fascinate us still today, and in its art and ruins we can trace the origins of Western culture and the beginnings of gay and lesbian history.

On this tour we will return to our roots—both as heirs of the glorious tradition that is Western civilization, and as gay men and women who recognize ourselves in the Greek past. And as always with Oscar Wilde Tours, we’ll do it in style! With splendid hotels, superb dining in some of Greece’s finest restaurants, and expert guides to lead us every step of the way. This is truly an enchanting journey that will create memories for a lifetime.

After time to rest following your flight, Professor Lear takes you on a walk through the center of Athens. We get our first glimpse of the Acropolis, with its glorious temples and dramatic setting—as well as of the Agora below. Gay history is all around us: we see the Ilissos—the river where Socrates discourses on male-male love in Plato’s dialogues; the remains of the vast temple built by the Roman Emperor Hadrian (the first great fan of Greek homosexuality); the statue of Lord Byron, the bisexual English rake whose heroic death dramatized the Greek revolution against the Ottoman Empire; and several other sites that underscore the gay theme that runs through ancient Greek history. After a fascinating lecture on same-sex love in ancient Greece, it’s time to eat! We celebrate the beginning of our tour with a delicious meal of traditional Greek food in the heart of Athens.

Today we spend the morning exploring the Acropolis with our archaeologist guide: first the hilltop itself and then the excellent new museum at its base. After lunch at the museum’s lovely restaurant, we take off across Athens to visit the National Archaeological Museum, with the world’s greatest collection of ancient Greek sculpture. Our visit focuses on the amazing history of the male nude in ancient Greek art, plus a number of other fascinating artifacts that include Greek vases (Professor Lear’s specialty). The evening is free for your own explorations—but we are always ready with advice about where to go and what to do.

In the morning we explore some lesser known parts of Classical Athens: the Agora, which served as the city’s central marketplace; the Pnyx, where the city’s men assembled to debate its government; and the Kerameikos, or main cemetery, where Pericles delivered his immortal funeral oration. We learn about the glory of classical Athens, while focusing on the central role of same-sex relations in Athenian culture—in particular, two stories: that of Harmodius and Aristogeiton, the same-sex couple whose assassination of the tyrant’s brother paved the way to the the world’s first democracy; and that of Timarchus, a politician convicted of having been a prostitute in his youth, and consequently stripped of his right to participate in city government—showing the Greeks’ complex attitudes toward same-sex love.

The afternoon is free for further exploration of the city’s museums, tavernas and shopping areas. In the evening we offer an optional lesson in traditional Greek cooking with a prominent local chef, where we will enjoy the results of our cooking.
Leaving Athens, we begin our tour of the mainland by heading south into the Peloponnese. On the way, we stop at Nemea, the site of one of the ancient Greek world’s four great athletic competitions. Less well known than Olympia, Nemea is of special interest to us for the astonishing homoerotic graffiti from 2500 years ago preserved on its walls. After lunch we visit the mysterious ruins of Mycenae, center of the world of the *Iliad*—where we will discuss both the fascinating relationship of the hero Achilles and his friend (and possibly lover) Patroclus, and Oscar Wilde’s visit to Mycenae thousands of years later, during his formative Oxford years. At the end of the day we arrive in Nafplio, a center of Venice’s medieval empire and one of Greece’s most beautiful towns, where we leave you an evening free to dine, stroll and take in the charming atmosphere.

We drive across the Peloponnese to visit Olympia, where athletes competed in the nude for the Olympic laurel crown for over 1000 years—celebrating athletic prowess and male beauty together. The site is exceptionally well-preserved: due to flooding that covered it with mud in the Middle Ages, it was protected in much the same way that Vesuvius’ ash protected Pompeii. Here we can see the ruins of ancient stadiums and temples, and visit the splendid museum. This is the perfect place to consider the Greeks’ tradition of nude athletics and its relationship to their custom of same-sex relations; the temple decorations also introduce us to the relationship between Zeus, the king of the gods, and his lover Ganymede, a Trojan prince whom he abducted. Lunch is included en route.

From Olympia, we drive to another one of Greece’s most famous sites, the vast temple complex of Delphi. Here the ancients came to consult the oracles of Apollo, which they received from the ravings of a drugged priestess. As at Olympia, we take a thorough look at the vast site and the museum, and pay special attention to the cult statue of the divine Antinous, the emperor Hadrian’s deified lover—and pagan competitor for Jesus Christ! Statues of Antinous have been found throughout the Greco-Roman world, but as we will see, the statue in Delphi seems to have been worshipped with special zeal. Lunch is included en route.

On our way to Athens airport, we stop at a rarely visited site that is rich in gay history: the lion monument of Chaironeia. Built to commemorate the Sacred Band, the crack regiment of later classical Greece, the monument honors a warrior unit composed exclusively of lover/beloved couples. From Athens we then fly to Mykonos, a hotspot of modern gay beach culture (a kind of European Fire Island). Your evening is free to enjoy the twisting alleys of Mykonos and its intense nightlife.

In the morning, we visit the magnificent ruins on the nearby island of Delos—the best-preserved ancient Greek town—with the remains of grand houses and temples (including the famous alley of phallus statues at the temple of Bacchus). Delos was home to the Delian League, the military alliance led by Athens after the Persian Wars, and housed its famous treasury. The afternoon and evening are free to enjoy Mykonos, with its charming town and lovely beaches.
We return to Athens at mid-day for a last free afternoon, followed by a sumptuous Greek farewell dinner. On a rooftop with a splendid view of the illuminated Acropolis, we can reflect on our new, deeper understanding of ancient Greece and its role in Western and gay identity—as well as celebrate new friendships formed along the way.

Our tour of Greece ends with breakfast this morning, but please do consider our three-day extension to Istanbul, featuring one of Istanbul’s last male belly-dancers and a special visit to the Harem at the Topkapi Palace.

**HOTELS**

(This tour stays in five-star hotels, where available. The hotels listed are our accommodations of choice; when they are not available for booking, we provide accommodations of equivalent level.)

**ATHENS—Electra Palace Athens**
Set in the historic Plaka neighborhood, this is a hotel of great charm and superb service—not to mention a stunning view from the rooftop bar, a gorgeous swimming pool and an excellent restaurant!

**NAFPLIO—Amphitryon Hotel**
Perched on a hill by one of Nafplio’s great medieval fortifications, this supremely elegant hotel is a five-minute walk from the beach and the charming town center, while also offering lovely views over the island Bourzi castle and the harbor from every room.

**OLYMPIA—Arty Grand Hotel**
A comfortable hotel set on the hill above the town of Olympia, notable for its excellent breakfast buffet and its lovely gardens. Have a glass of wine, and relax by the pool.

**DELPHI—Santa Marina Arachova Resort**
On the way to the ski resort of Arachova, on holy Mt. Parnassus, the Santa Marina offers spectacular views over the mountains surrounding Delphi from every room.

**MYKONOS—Belvedere**
This plushly luxurious hotel is on a slight rise at the edge of the town, offering stunning views of the glistening white town and the Aegean. You are right in the town of Mykonos, yet removed enough for absolute peace and quiet.