

# OSCAR WILDE TOURS

## GREECE

*Homeland of Democracy, Philosophy...and Same-Sex Love*  
*September 7-19, 2017*

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.

### Days 1 - 2

Thursday - Friday  
September 7 - 8

**ATHENS** On the first afternoon, we meet at our hotel, in the heart of the Plaka, Athens' old city. Professor Lear takes us on a walk through the neighborhood, and we get our first glimpse of the Acropolis, with its glorious temples and dramatic setting. 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.

The next morning, we meet our archaeologist guide and set off for an exploration of the ancient city. We start with Athens' great Acropolis, crowned by the Parthenon, the great temple of the virgin goddess Athena. Afterwards, we descend the hill and visit the Agora, the ancient Athenian marketplace, where we see evidence for the central role of same-sex relations in Athenian culture—in particular, the story of Harmodius and Aristogeiton, the same-sex couple whose assassination of the tyrant's brother paved the way to the world's first democracy. We have a traditional Greek lunch in the Plaka and then set off across town to visit the National Archaeological Museum, with the world's greatest collection of ancient Greek sculpture. Our visit focuses on the glorious history of the male nude in ancient Greek art, plus a number of other fascinating artifacts that include Greek vases (Professor Lear's specialty). This evening, we eat at a rooftop restaurant with a lovely view of the Acropolis.

### Days 3 - 4

Saturday - Sunday  
September 9 - 10

**NAFPLIO** Leaving Athens, we begin our tour by crossing the Corinth canal and heading south into the Peloponnese. Our first stop is 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 (with a tasting of five different local wines) we drive to Nafplio, a lovely seaside town dominated by its massive medieval citadel, where we spend the next two nights. The next day, we continue to visit the fascinating sights in the area: Epidavros, with the best preserved ancient Greek theater, and 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. Our second evening in Nafplio is free, so you can explore the quaint streets and restaurants of this charming town.

### Days 5 - 6

Monday - Tuesday  
September 11 - 12

**MONEMVASIA** We take off to visit Sparta, Athens' great adversary—and probably the place where Greek homoeroticism (male-male relationships, nude athletics) originated in the Greek Dark Ages. After Sparta we drive south to the southernmost peninsula of the Peloponnese, Cape Malea, to the enchanting cliffside city of Monemvasia, where we spend the next two nights. We tour the walled city, and the next day we take a trip across Cape Malea to Neapolis and the beautiful island of Elaphonisos, where (weather permitting) we can swim in the crystalline waters.

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## Day 7

Wednesday  
September 13

**OLYMPIA** We drive across the Peloponnese, visiting the grand ruins of ancient Messene and the church of Aghia Theodora on our way to Olympia. After a relaxing evening, with a group dinner, we spend the morning in the ancient athletic complex, 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 the relationship between Zeus, the king of the gods, and his lover Ganymede, a Trojan prince whom he abducted.

## Days 8 - 9

Thursday - Friday  
September 14 - 15

**DELPHI/ARACHOVA** 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. We spend the next two nights at the neighboring ski resort of Arachova, perched on Apollo's sacred Mount Parnassus. In the morning, we visit a nearby but 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 warrior units composed exclusively of lover/beloved couples. We then have a lesson in traditional Greek cooking, before spending the afternoon taking a thorough look at the ruins of Delphi and the museum. Here we will 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.

## Day 10

Saturday  
September 16

**METEORA** Today we drive to Meteora, with its amazing rock pillars and monasteries, built high up on inaccessible rocks to protect the monks against Turkish attacks. Years ago, the only way to reach it was to be hoisted up in a bucket, but we will be getting there in more modern comfort! We also visit a fascinating ranch that breeds the fauna of ancient and prehistoric Greece—the animals of myth and epic. Our day features a barbecue lunch at a nearby tavern and dinner at our hotel.

## Days 11 - 12

Sunday - Monday  
September 17 - 18

**THESSALONIKI** We spend our last two days in Thessaloniki, exploring its fascinating, multi-level history. Our particular focus will be the Macedonian kings Phillip II, the conqueror of Greece, and his son Alexander the Great, conqueror of the known world—both of whom had important male-male relations. This is well-known about Alexander, but just as true of his father, who was in fact assassinated by a cast-off lover. We visit the remains of the royal Macedonian city, Pella, and the tombs of the royal family at Vergina, with their rare ancient wall paintings and fantastic gold and silver grave furnishings. Our itinerary also includes the school of Aristotle, the famous philosopher who served as Alexander's tutor. This is where Alexander learned to model himself on Achilles, the symbol for the ancient Greeks of the connection between male-male love and courage. We finish our tour with one last delicious Greek meal, at a rooftop restaurant with a view of Thessaloniki, where we can toast the ancient Greeks and the new friendships formed during the trip.

## Day 13

Tuesday  
September 19

Our tour concludes after breakfast. Please let us know if you need help with further travel plans, and note that our "Gay Italy, from Caesar to Michelangelo and Beyond" tour starts in Rome on Wednesday September 20: these two tours together give you a complete view of the Classical world and its "Gay Gods and Heroes."

## OUR HOTELS

*Our hotels are 4★ and 5★ boutique hotels, chosen for their special charm and their central locations. Please contact us for details.*