

## SERBIAN STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF GREEK CULTURAL TOURISM

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**Abstract:** *Cultural Tourism is the subset of tourism concerned with a country or region's culture, specifically the lifestyle of the people in those geographical areas, the history of those people, their art, architecture, religion(s), etc. Tourism of Greece traces its roots to the ancient times. Purpose of this paper is to represent cultural landmarks of Greece, putting its focus on Athens as its capital city, and one of the most visited destinations of Greek cultural tourism.*

**Key words:** *Greece, Athens, tourism, culture*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural tourism has a long history, and with its roots in the Grand Tour is arguably the original form of tourism, and it's also one of the forms of tourism that most policy makers seem to be betting on for the future.

Greece has been a major tourist destination and attraction in Europe since antiquity, for its rich culture and history, which is reflected in large part by its 18 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, among the most in Europe and the world as well as for its long coastline, many islands and beaches. Tourism in Greece traces its roots to the ancient times. Cultural exchange took place between the Greek colonies of Magna Graeca and the young Roman Republic before Rome's rise to dominance of the Western Mediterranean. The heritage of the classical era is still evident in Athens, represented by ancient monuments and works of art, the most famous of all being the Parthenon, considered a key landmark of early Western civilization. The city also retains Roman and Byzantine monuments, as well as a smaller number of Ottoman monuments.

Greece enjoys the reputation of the tourist Mecca in every sense. The Mediterranean climate, warm sea, a beautiful coast, developed infrastructure and numerous of sights, represent the perfect set of a complete and varied tourist destination, in which everyone can find something interesting and fulfilling for themselves. On top of that, it should be noted that Greece preserves the roots of the entire European culture, and as such, it inspired us to write a paper on this topic.

### 2. CULTURAL TOURISM

Cultural tourism is focused on cultural attractions and activities as the main reasons for the tourist trip. Richards (2007) notes that cultural tourism does not only include "consuming" cultural products of the past, but also the contemporary culture or lifestyle of some nation or areas. Cultural tourism, therefore, covers not only "tourism of heritage", which is related to products of the past, but also "art tourism" which refers to contemporary art.

It is generally agreed that cultural tourists spend substantially more than standard tourists do. This form of tourism is also becoming generally more popular throughout the world, and a recent OECD report has highlighted the role that cultural tourism can play in regional development in different world regions.

A recent study of the cultural consumption habits of Europeans (European Commission 2002) indicated that people visited museums and galleries abroad almost as frequently as they did at home. This underlines the growing importance of cultural tourism as a source of cultural consumption. The generalisation of cultural consumption on holiday, however, points to one of the main problems of defining cultural tourism. What is the difference between cultural visits on holiday (cultural tourism) and cultural visits undertaken during leisure time at home? Much of the research undertaken by the Association for Leisure and Tourism Education (ATLAS) on the international cultural tourism market (Richards 1996; 2001) has in fact underlined the high degree of continuity between consumption of culture at home and on holiday.

In spite of these problems, policy makers, tourist boards and cultural attraction managers around the world continue to view cultural tourism as an important potential source of tourism growth. There is a general perception that cultural tourism is 'good' tourism that attracts high spending visitors and does little damage to the environment or local culture while contributing a great deal to the economy and support of culture. Other commentators, however, have suggested that cultural tourism may do more harm than good, allowing the cultural tourist to penetrate sensitive cultural environments as the advance guard of the mass tourist.

## GREECE

Greece is located in the eastern Mediterranean, at the crossroads of 3 continents: Asia, Africa and Europe. The area of Greece is 132 000 km<sup>2</sup>. According to the 2011 census, Greece had less than 11 million residents, and almost half of the population lived in the country's three largest urban agglomerations – Athens, Thessaloniki and Patra. Greece consists of the mainland and around 1000 islands. The largest of them are Crete, Euboea (Evia), Ios, Corfu (Kerkira), Lesbos (Lezvos), Rhodes and others. Most of the islands are uninhabited. Eighty percent of Greece consists of mountains or hills, making the country one of the most mountainous in Europe. Mount Olympus, the mythical abode of the Greek Gods, culminates at Mytikas peak 2,918 meters, the highest in the country. Western Greece contains a number of lakes and wetlands and is dominated by the Pindusmountain range. The Pindus, a continuation of the Dinaric Alps, reaches a maximum elevation of 2,637 m at Mt. Smolikas (the second-highest in Greece). Haliacmon is the longest river in Greece with a total length of 322 kilometers. Greece primarily has Mediterranean climate, with mild, wet winters and warm, dry summers.

Greece is a member of numerous international economic, political and military organizations. Greece was one of the founders of the United Nations (UN) in 1945, part of the NATO Pact since 1952 and the European Union since 1981, and since 2001, part of the Eurozone. In economic terms, Greece is considered as a highly developed country with a high standard of living for the population.

The culture of Greece has evolved over thousands of years, beginning in Mycenaean Greece and continuing most notably into Classical Greece, through the influence of the Roman Empire and its Greek Eastern continuation, the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire. Other cultures and nations, such as the Latin and Frankish states, the Ottoman Empire, the Venetian Republic, the Genoese Republic, and the British Empire have also left their influence on modern Greek culture, although historians credit the Greek War of Independence with revitalizing Greece and giving birth to a single, cohesive entity of its multi-faceted culture.

The religion of Greek people is an important aspect of the Greek culture. The Greek population in mainland Greece and the Greek islands is Christian Orthodox per 98%. The religion of rest of the population is Muslims, Catholic and Jewish

## 3.TOURISM IN GREECE

Tourism in Greece traces its roots to the ancient times. Cultural exchange took place between the Greek colonies of Magna Graeca and the young Roman Republic before Rome's rise to dominance of the Western Mediterranean. When Greece was annexed by the Roman Empire centuries later, the cultural exchange that started between the two civilization triggered as a result a large number of Romans visiting the famous centers of Greek philosophy and science, such as Athens, Corinth and Thebes, partly because Greece had become a province of the Roman Empire and Greeks were granted Roman citizenship.

Tourism in modern-day Greece started to flourish in the 1960s and 1970s, in what became known as mass tourism. During that time, large-scale construction projects for hotels and other such facilities were undertaken and the country saw an increase in international tourists over the years. International events such as the 2004 Summer Olympic Games and

the Eurovision Song Contest 2006, both held in Athens, greatly helped to boost tourism in the country, while large-scale nationally-funded cultural infrastructure such as the New Acropolis Museum also contributed to the flow of tourists in the country. Tourism in Greece has been a key element of the economic activity in the country, and is one of the country's most important sectors. Greece has been a major tourist destination and attraction in Europe since antiquity, for its rich culture and history, which is reflected in large part by its 18 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, among the most in Europe and the world as well as for its long coastline, many islands and beaches.

Greece has attracted 26.5 million visitors in 2015 (taken from: <http://www.topontiki.gr/article/141547/istoriko-rekor-gianton-toyrisma>) and is projected to attract 30 million visitors more each year, 6 contributing 18% to the nation's Gross Domestic Product, with its capital city Athens, as well as Santorini, Mykonos, Rhodes, Corfu, Crete and Chalkidice being some of the country's major tourist destinations.

In recent years, Greece has also promoted the religious tourism and pilgrimages to regions with a significant historical religious presence, such as the monasteries in Meteora and Mount Athos, in cooperation with other countries.

Greek tourism is going strong, marking some 30 million tourist arrivals in 2016, according to tentative figures released by the Greek Tourism Confederation (SETE) in January this year. A total of 16.87 million passengers went through Greece's main airports in 2016, up by 9 percent compared to 15.47 million in 2015, and much higher than SETE's initial estimates of 5-6 percent, with tourism professionals citing increased air traffic as the leading cause. December was a crucial month recording growth by 14.6 percent in the number of arrivals through the airports of Athens, Thessaloniki, Heraklion, Chania and Rhodes. Road arrivals also increased in the last three months of the year, up by 0.6 percent to 12.05 million against 11.97 million in 2015. Together with road arrivals the total number of incoming traffic comes to 29 million against 27.5 million a year before.

Greece is a country of rich cultural and historical heritage, tradition, and specific language. Culture is very important for the Greek national identity. In Greece, there is a close connection between tourism and the cultural heritage of this country. In one hand, cultural heritage can serve as tourist attractions, while tourism can lead to a financial and political support of country. The Hellenic Republic was one of the first countries in Europe to adopt laws in the field of cultural and historical heritage. In 1834, the Law (10/22 May) read: "All antiquities within Greece are part of the Greek ancestors, and considered to be national property belonging to all Greeks", and further states that: "all the ruins and other antiquities found on the national land or under it, on the seabed, in lakes or wetlands, are owned by the state." The law was renewed in 2002 under Law 3028/2002 "About Protection of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage in General", which refers to ancient movable and immovable monuments and other protected cultural objects that date from prehistoric, ancient, Byzantine and post-Byzantine times. Greek history and cultural identity have been built on ancient patterns, but modern Greece has to offer both modern art and intangible cultural heritage. Live Greek music and original sounds conjure up the true atmosphere of this Mediterranean country. The foreigners are especially enthusiastic about it and they like to enjoy the so-called Greek evenings with dancing, music, a traditional bouzouki instrument, and there is also a traditional Greek drink, which is a frequent souvenir. The act of breaking the plate and spreading flowers has left a striking and beautiful impression about this temperamental people.

Other than sea, sand, and ancient heritage, Greece is also known for its Mediterranean cuisine, mountain areas and language that was the basis for the development of many savory languages, unique music and dance. Greece certainly deserves its material and immaterial cultural tourism to be shaped into a special tourist offer. In the next chapters, we have chosen our favorite landmarks of Greek cultural tourism.

## 5. ATHENS

**Athens** is the capital and largest city of Greece. Athens dominates the Attica region and is one of the world's oldest cities, with its recorded history spanning over 3,400 years, and its earliest human presence starting somewhere between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> millennia BC. Classical Athens was a powerful city-state that emerged in conjunction with the seagoing development of the port of Piraeus, which had been a distinct city prior to its 5th century BC incorporation with Athens. A centre for the arts, learning and philosophy, home of Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum, it is widely referred to as the cradle of Western civilization and the birthplace of democracy, largely because of its cultural and political impact on the European continent, and in particular the Romans. In modern times, Athens is a large cosmopolitan metropolis and central to economic, financial, industrial, maritime, political and cultural life in Greece. In 2015, Athens was ranked the world's 29<sup>th</sup> richest city by purchasing power and the 67<sup>th</sup> most expensive in a UBS study.

Athens is recognized as a global city because of its location and its importance in shipping, finance, commerce, media, entertainment, arts, international trade, culture, education and tourism. It is one of

the biggest economic centers in southeastern Europe, with a large financial sector, and its port Piraeus is both the largest passenger port in Europe and the second largest in the world. The municipality (city) of Athens had a population of 664,046 (in 2011, 796,442 in 2004) within its administrative limits, and a land area of 39 km<sup>2</sup>. The urban area of Athens (Greater Athens and Greater Piraeus) extends beyond its administrative municipal city limits, with a population of 3,090,508 (in 2011) over an area of 412 km<sup>2</sup>. According to Eurostat in 2011, the Functional urban areas (FUA) of Athens was the 9th most populous FUA in the European Union (the 6th most populous capital city of the EU), with a population of 3,828,000, having lost almost 300.000 inhabitants, probably due to the serious economic crisis that affected Greece in recent years. Athens is also the southernmost capital on the European mainland.

The heritage of the classical era is still evident in the city, represented by ancient monuments and works of art, the most famous of all being the Parthenon, considered a key landmark of early Western civilization. The city also retains Roman and Byzantine monuments, as well as a smaller number of Ottoman monuments.

Athens is home to two UNESCO World Heritage Sites, the Acropolis of Athens and the medieval Daphni Monastery. Landmarks of the modern era, dating back to the establishment of Athens as the capital of the independent Greek state in 1834, include the Hellenic Parliament and the so-called "architectural trilogy of Athens", consisting of the National Library of Greece, the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and the Academy of Athens. Athens was the host city of the first modern-day Olympic Games in 1896, and 108 years later it welcomed home the 2004 Summer Olympics. Athens is also home to several large museums, such as the National Archeological Museum, featuring the world's largest collection of ancient Greek antiquities, the Byzantine and Christian Museum and the new Acropolis Museum.

The following locations are just some of many cultural hotspots you should visit when you're in Athens: The Acropolis, Plaka street, National archaeological museum, the Zappeion, Ancient agora, The Hellenic Parliament, Monastiraki, Syntagma square, Roman agora, olympieion and Hadrian's Arch, Panathenaic Stadium, National garden, and many more.

The Acropolis of Athens and its monuments are universal symbols of the classical spirit and civilization and form the greatest architectural and artistic complex bequeathed by Greek Antiquity to the world. In the second half of the fifth century bc, Athens, following the victory against the Persians and the establishment of democracy, took a leading position amongst the other city-states of the ancient world. In the age that followed, as thought and art flourished, an exceptional group of artists put into effect the ambitious plans of Athenian statesman Pericles and, under the inspired guidance of the sculptor Pheidias, transformed the rocky hill into a unique monument of thought and the arts. The most important monuments were built during that time: the Parthenon, built by Ictinus, the Erechtheon, the Propylaea, the monumental entrance to the Acropolis, designed by Mnesicles and the small temple Athena Nike.

A visit to the Acropolis is a unique experience. Following the pathway (Peripatos) on the north slope of the Acropolis rock, you will first meet a structure containing a fountain, known as Hourglass. Going further, there is the grand entrance of the Acropolis – The Propylaea, built by Pericles. Also, another interesting thing before reaching the Propylaea is the Bele gate, part of the Roman fortifications of the Acropolis. The temple of the Athena Victory is situated on the south from there, in 420 B.C. in commemoration of the victory of the Greeks against the Persians. The Parthenon is an architectural masterpiece of great renown. This unique temple, dedicated to the goddess Athena, was built of Pentelic marble. The Erechtheon was built at the most holy site of Acropolis, where goddess Athena planted the olive tree, her sacred symbol. The figures of the maidens supporting the roof of the southern balcony of the temple are Caryatids. Five out of six Maidens that once adorned the temple are displayed in the Acropolis Museum, while the sixth is displayed in the British museum.

The Acropolis is symbol of Athens, and probably main location that every cultural tourist should visit on their trip to Greek capital. For tourists that want to see and learn more about the Acropolis, perfect place to do so is to visit the Acropolis museum. The Acropolis Museum is an archaeological museum focused on the findings of the archaeological site of the Acropolis of Athens. The museum was built to house every artifact found on the rock and on the surrounding slopes, from the Greek Bronze Age to Roman and Byzantine Greece. It also lies over the ruins of a part of Roman and early Byzantine Athens. The museum is settled nearby Acropolis itself, only 300 m away. Its total area covers 21.000 square meters, and it consists a couple of levels. Museum is modern equipped, offering visitors complete picture of Acropolis through its complete history, not only with its archeological display and free prospects, but also documentary that is played on the third floor of museum. This is also very important fact for the ones that want to be informed and lectured about the Acropolis, but in the same time save their budget, considering that the ticket for this museum is four times cheaper than the ticket for the entrance to the Acropolis.

One of the best and economical ways to see the most of the cultural attractions of this amazing city, if you're running out of money or time is taking a drive by an opened tour bus. Bus has a couple of routes by which it goes, and stops on every station. It goes on every 30 minutes, and you can go in and out on any station that's marked, which are mostly tourist attractions. Ticket lasts for two days, so you have enough time to see all locations, and there is discount if you're going with a group of people, and for the children. Roof of the bus is convenient for enjoying the view and of course, taking the pictures.

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## 6. THESSALONIKI

Thessaloniki is the capital of northern Greece, the second largest city in the country after Athens. In 1997, Thessaloniki won the title of the European Capital of Culture, and is considered as the pearl of Greece, which reflects the burning history, tradition and culture of antiquity. Its colorful boulevards are brightened by shimmering sun that seems to glow in endless blue. For centuries this cosmopolitan destination is strewn with streets with a variety of ancient monuments that have defied time attracting an increasing number of tourists. In the last few years, this city has experienced a staggering economic and industrial expansion. It represents an administrative and trading center, and at the same time a cultural and spiritual center. It has one of the largest universities in the Balkans, including Aristotle University as well as several cultural associations. Thessaloniki was founded by Cassandar, whose city is named after his wife. In the Byzantine period, it was the second most important city of the Byzantine Empire, immediately after Constantinople. Some of the cultural and historical heritage that adorns this city are: White Tower, Rotunda, Archaeological Museum, St. Dimitrios church, as well as the Arch of Galerius, Upper town, Church of a holy wisdom, Aristotle square, Square of Liberty, Zeintelik, and many more cultural landmarks.

## 7. RHODES

Everyone who found themselves during their visit to Greece a little toward the Turkish coast, should make sure to visit Rhodes. Rhodes is one of the largest and most beautiful Greek islands.

According to the ancient myth, the island was named after nymph who gave birth to an island in connection with Helios, the god of the Sun. The same name also carries the type of hibiscus that grows on this island. Historically, the city is famous for Colossus from Rhodes, a giant statue, a symbol of the unity of the people that settled Rhodes and one of the Seven Wonders of the Old World. The medieval city of Rhodes is protected by UNESCO, and many buildings, most fortifications, have been preserved to this day. With 300 days of sunshine per year, Rhodes island is mostly famous for the Old Town and the amazing beach resorts. The Old Town is among the best-preserved Medieval Towns of Europe, with strong walls, an impressive castle, paved paths and elegant stone mansions.

## 8. CORFY

Corfu is the second largest, of the seven major Ionian Islands, and at the same time one of the most beautiful Greek islands. Corfu lies in the Ionian Sea, which is part of the Mediterranean Sea, and connects with the Adriatic Sea on the north. Corfu island is the gateway of Greece to those tourists who come from Europe. The island's great cultural development was experienced under the Venetian Republic and the French occupation, when a library with rare manuscripts and books, an art school, and a drama theater was established there. The city of Corfu has a pronounced Venetian character and countless monuments dating back to the 15th and through to the end of the 18th century and from this era, most of the monuments that he inherited from the Venetians were preserved.

Corfu played a major role in recent history during the First World War, in which Serbian soldiers have found refuge when they retreated across Albania. What can be seen today is the "Serbian House" which testifies about the whole event, as well as Vido Island.

## 9. CRETE

Crete is an island in the Mediterranean Sea, located in the southern Greece. With an area of 8,331,231 km<sup>2</sup>, Crete is the largest Greek island and the fifth largest in the Mediterranean. The length of the coast is 1,040 kilometers.

Remains of history are scattered on the island, dating from the time of the formation of the Cretan and Minoan culture. Through the centuries, the island was conquered by the Arabs, the Venetians, and finally by the Turks. The largest cities of Crete are Iraklion, Rethimino, Hanja and Agios Nikolaos.

The largest tourist attraction of Crete is Knossos, located at a distance of 5 kilometers from the capital. What needs to be seen is certainly a reconstructed palace called "Labyrinth", also known as the Palace of King Minos. The most famous frescoes of this palace are "Bull-leaping", "Little Parisian", and "Prince among the lilies". The popularity of this site is also supported by various myths in which the main characters were: Thesis, Daedalus, Icarus, Minos, etc.



## 11. SANTORINI

Santorini is the island of colorful legends, splendid multicolored beaches (red, black and white), wild volcanic terrains, powerful cliffs, picturesque towns and villages. Tourist interest for Santorini is growing every year and tourism infrastructure is rapidly developing. Because of its strangeness and special features, this island attracts archaeologists and geologists from all over the world. These are the arguments and reasons why this island is the closest to the most beautiful and most interesting in the world. 3500 years ago the largest volcano was activated, which led to major changes and the birth of new islands. This powerful natural disaster caused the death of the Minoan civilization on the island of Crete, 100 kilometers from Santorini.. The volcano made a catastrophe, changed the environment and destroyed one civilization, and on the other hand, since then, it is the most enigmatic and at the same time the most interesting and most visited site for visitors and tourists, many famous personalities in the world, statesmen, artists and other celebrities who want to experience and see "something unusual". For those who walk along the stone streets of the capital of Santorini, Fira, they will come across a mix of Venetian and Cycladic architecture. Santorini has a large developed tourist infrastructure perfectly aligned with the nature with small romantic and large luxury hotels, nightlife, gastronomic cuisine, pebble beaches, archaeological sites.

## 12. PELOPONNESSE

The Peloponnese Peninsula is located in the south of Greece, south of the Corinth Canal. The Peloponnese is divided into seven administrative districts. The major cities are Patra, Tripoli, Sparta, Pirgos, Kalamata, Corinth and Nafplion. Important archaeological monuments, the atmosphere of the ancient city, interesting festivals, cultural events, modern roads, mountains, rivers, beaches are a real magnet for tourists from all over the world. Important archaeological monuments, the atmosphere of the ancient city, interesting festivals, cultural events, modern roads, mountains, rivers, beaches are a real magnet for tourists from all over the world. Monuments from every period of the eventful Peloponnesian history, great archeological sites such as ancient Olympia, Epidaurus, Mycenae and Tirynth, Byzantine churches, unique settlements and amazing castles, natural beauties such as mountains, forests, rivers and caves surrounded by the sea, beautiful beaches, sandy and smooth coasts on the west – rocky on the east, make this part of Greek land ideal for any type of tourist.

Mycenae is an archaeological site, located around 90 kilometers southwest of Athens, in the northeastern part of Peloponnese. In the second millennium B.C. Mycenae was one of the most important centers of Greek civilization, a military fortification dominated by the great work of southern Greece. Period of Greek history from 1600 B.C. up to about 1100 B.C. is called the Mycenaean period. It is believed that the Acropolis or "high city" of Mycenae was established in the early 15th century B.C., based on one found grave from that period. About 1350 B.C. the fortifications of the acropolis and the surrounding hills were rebuilt in a " cyclopean " style because the blocks of the rock were so huge that in the later centuries it was believed that they were built by a one-eyed titans known as Cyclops. The most famous memorial monument of Mycenae is the Lions Gate, built around 1250 B.C. The memory of Mycenaean power was sustained in Greek thought in later centuries, commonly known as the "Dark Age of Greece". In the Greek epic poems, especially Homer's Iliad and Odyssey, memories of the Mycenaean period have been preserved. In Homer's epic poem, Agamemnon, King of Mycenae, was the leader of the Greeks in the Trojan War. Today, Mycenae presents an unavoidable location when it comes to visiting the cultural hotspots of Greece, and it's certainly a destination that we highly recommend.

Epidaurus, the most interesting archeological site of Argolida is a world-known amphitheater with perfect acoustics, whose secret are yet to be discovered. The "zero" point is in the middle of the stage, it is marked with a white round stone, from which to the last seat in the last row is heard the most silent whisper. Polikleitos younger, definitely, did a great job. Scientists are trying to discover the secret of acoustics, and one of the possible solutions is that the seats are in the shape of an ear shell. The amphitheater was built in the 4th century BC and has received 15,000 people. Today it is used for the festival of ancient drama, theater performances, classical works of Aristophanes, Sophocles, and Shakespeare. The Greek amphitheater is different from Roman in the shape of the stage. Greek is round, and Roman semicircular.

Historian Tucidides predicted 2,500 years ago that Sparta will remain only a particle that will resemble its size. The city that once was the center of the Peloponnese League and the home of the greatest warriors of the ancient world, almost disappeared. The local museum shouldn't be bypassed. Among the objects, there is the famous archaeological sculpture of Leonid, the hero of the battle at Thermopile.

### 13. MOUNT ATHOS

Mount Athos, or Agio Oros, is the monastic center of the Greek Orthodox Church, a state-within-a-state and a living museum and spiritual center of Greece. Mount Athos has been inhabited since ancient times and is known for its nearly 1,800-year continuous Christian presence and its long historical monastic traditions, which date back to at least 800 A.D. and the Byzantine era. Today, over 2,000 monks from Greece and many other countries, including Eastern Orthodox countries such as Romania, Moldova, Georgia, Bulgaria, Serbia and Russia, live an ascetic life in Athos, isolated from the rest of the world. The Athonite monasteries feature a rich collection of well-preserved artifacts, rare books, ancient documents, and artworks of immense historical value, and Mount Athos has been listed as a World Heritage Site since 1988. There is a prohibition on entry for women, called Avaton (Ἀβάτων) in Greek, to make living in celibacy easier for men who have chosen to do so. Monks feel that the presence of women alters the social dynamics of the community and therefore slows their path towards spiritual enlightenment. The ban was officially proclaimed by several emperors, including Constantine Monomachos, in a chrysobull of 1046.

### 14. METEORA

Meteora is an area that covers few square kilometers, where an ancient monastic community and a rare geological phenomenon of huge rock pillars coexist in absolute harmony. Located at the northwest tip of the plain of Thessaly, Meteora today has become one of the most popular destinations of mainland Greece. It's a UNESCO World Heritage Site, an archeological site and an officially declared holy place. At the foothills of the rocks, there are two segments, the town of Kalabaka and the village of Kastraki. These immense, solid rocks, split by earthquakes, weathered by water and wind over millions of years, are nature's authentic masterpiece. Emerging about 25 million years ago as the elevated seabed material that was the outcome of strong tectonic movements, the Meteora rocks became a shelter of humankind. The first hermits arrived in this area to seek spiritual isolation and inhabited the caves of the rocks, with the sole aid of ropes and ladders. Common existential needs and strong religious faith compelled them to live united in the first monastic communities, their common drive of faith guiding them towards the unrepeated construction of monasteries of highest architectural and artistic value. The 24 monasteries emerged on the countless summits of the rocks from the 14th until the 16th century, 6 of them remaining to be explored and admired by all. These monasteries became the centers of the Orthodox creed in the Byzantine era, having produced some of the best pieces of religious art and craft and still possessing a collection of precious manuscripts, which today are on display in their museums. The Meteora monasteries have been included in the UNESCO World Heritage List and the Meteora-Antichassia region has been officially declared a Natura 2000 Ecological Zone by the Greek Ministry of Environment, for the protection of rare species of birds and flowers.

### 15. DELPHI

At the foot of Mount Parnassos, within the angle formed by the twin rocks of the Phaedriades, lies the Pan-Hellenic sanctuary of Delphi, which had the most famous oracle of ancient Greece. Delphi was regarded as the centre of the world. According to mythology, it is here that the two eagles sent out by Zeus from the ends of the universe to find the navel of the world met. The sanctuary of Delphi, set within a most spectacular landscape, was for many centuries the cultural and religious centre and symbol of unity for the Hellenic world. The archaeological site of Delphi includes two sanctuaries, dedicated to Apollo and Athena, and other buildings, mostly intended for sports. To the northwest of the sanctuary of Athena Pronaia lay the gymnasium, a place for exercise and learning, the palaestra and the baths. Further up the slope was the Castalian spring, the sacred spring of Delphi, where travelers quenched their thirst after a long voyage and purified themselves before consulting the oracle. The central, most important part of the site was the sanctuary of Apollo, which was surrounded by the usual peribolos, or enclosure wall, with a main gate at its southeast corner. Scattered among these buildings and along the Sacred Way were numerous votive monuments dedicated by Greek cities or wealthy individuals on the occasion of socio-political events, or simply to express gratitude to the god and his oracle. Outside and around the two sanctuaries are the remains of the settlement and cemeteries of Delphi, which developed mainly in the Classical and Roman period.

## CONCLUSION

Greece has been a major tourist destination and attraction in Europe since antiquity, for its rich culture and history, which is reflected in large part by its 18 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, among the most in Europe and the world as well as for its long coastline, many islands and beaches. No wonder Greece enjoys the reputation of the tourist Mecca in every sense. The Mediterranean climate, warm sea, a beautiful coast, developed infrastructure and numerous of sights, represent the perfect set of a complete and varied tourist destination in which everyone can find something interesting and fulfilling for themselves.

Traces of a centuries-old and important history is etched in every corner of Greek land, which attracts more and more cultural tourists every year: findings from the Prehistoric and Archaic Periods, unique works from Classical, Hellenistic, Medieval and Byzantine monuments, creations from folk art cultures, traces from the passing eons of other civilizations and different religions, that coexist with current creations, constructions and modern works of art.

In Greece, there is a close connection between tourism and the cultural heritage of this country. In one hand, cultural heritage can serve as tourist attractions, while tourism can lead to a financial and political support of the country. The crucial thing about so well-preserved historic places lies in the fact that Hellenic Republic was one of the first countries in Europe to adopt laws in the field of cultural and historical heritage, for its protection, which shows how appreciative and aware Greeks are when it comes to their cultural heritage and its importance, not just for Greeks themselves, but for the whole Europe and European's history.

Rich cultural heritage of the capital didn't leave us indifferent. Athens is the perfect example of cosmopolitan city, and in our opinion highlight of the Greek cultural tourism. The view on the whole city from majestic Acropolis, down the crowded Plaka street, and scenic path through the National Garden are just parts of the wide puzzle of Athens' amazing tourist offer. This amazing city offers many unique opportunities to go off the beaten path and to discover, and rediscover Greek culture in new and engaging ways.

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