



By Elizabeth Tzagournis

Reflections from the Heritage Greece® Program

In May 2017, I was a recent college graduate who planned on moving to Los Angeles to pursue a career in documentaries and journalism. Yet what I was most excited for, following graduation, was the Heritage Greece® Program.

In June 2017, I joined over 50 young Greek-Americans as we returned to our roots on the two-week adventure.

The National Hellenic Society (NHS) developed the Heritage Greece® Program (HG) to preserve Greek culture, language and history for future generations of Greek-Americans. NHS sponsors a bulk of the program costs, so students can fully enjoy the experience without worrying. The American College of Greece (Deree) also contributes to the experience by providing housing, Greek language classes, and their own Greek students as leaders during the program. Pairing the Greek-

American students with the Greek students at Deree is one of the best and most unique elements of HG. The Deree peers were not only our leaders and planners, but they quickly became our friends.

Here are some of my favorite memories from HG 2017.

Morning Runs and Farmers Markets

Sometimes before class, my flatmates and I would go on morning runs. Jogging through the streets, we watched the little town of Agia Paraskevi come to life. The smell of Greek kafés and tiropita would waft through the air, while the markets opened their doors and the street stands began selling their daily newspapers.

Heritage Greece 2017 group in front of The Parthenon (Photo Courtesy of John Voutsas)



ABOVE: Morning runners in front of Deree (L to R Nicole Simos, Christina Hanos, Elizabeth Tzagournis, Maddee Vourlitis, and Alexa Simos). LEFT: Maroutsis, Tzagournis, and Simos get ready to race on the Olympic track (L to R Demetri Maroutsis, Elizabeth Tzagournis, Alexa Simos).



We started our day enjoying Greek kafés on the beach, while we ended it by exploring the historic Temple and hearing its compelling story.

Trip to Olympia

Visiting Olympia put us all in a time capsule of sorts. The ancient grounds are the origins of the world's most revered games, The Olympics. We toured through the stadiums, Temple, and training grounds and heard stories of their glory. However, the coolest aspect to the visit was racing on the first Olympic Track. The track may have seemed unexciting, as it was unmarked and made of dirt, but the fun came in knowing it was where the first ever track and field events were held thousands of years ago. Following the events, we all held an Olympic Awards Ceremony and sang both the Greek and American National Anthems. Although most of us were probably off-key, it was still my best memory from our trip to Olympia.

One morning, we discovered a Farmers Market. The fresh, bright colored fruits and veggies were enticing. The barrels of Greek Kalamata olives reminded me that I really was in the land of the olive tree. Yet, I was most touched by our encounter with the locals. Whenever we tried to pay for our fruit or bag of nuts, they would simply smile and tell us to keep our money and enjoy. This gesture was never forgotten and further emphasized why the Greek people are known for their kindness and generosity.

Beach Days and the Temple of Poseidon

One of my favorite days was one spent both on the beach and above it. Perched atop Cape Sounio sits the Temple of Poseidon. There are few cliffs with such a view – ancient ruins dating back to c. 440 BC against the backdrop of crystal blue waters. The HG program was informative and immersive, while still offering fun experiences and activities.

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Learning to Cook with Diane Kochilas

Cooking is one of my favorite pastimes, and the opportunity to learn from **Diane Kochilas** (host of the show *My Greek Table*) struck a chord. **Kochilas** explained the importance of eating in season and why the Greeks are known for their fresh and flavorful produce. Following the demonstration, we enjoyed sampling the different types of Greek salads **Kochilas** had created. Food really does bring people together.

These are just a few of the countless memories and moments experienced during my trip. HG is an incredible opportunity to explore Greece and make friends from all places and walks of life.

Visit the website for current application requirements. The 2019 trip dates are June 6 to 23.

Interested students can apply now through March 18. The application is available via <https://www.nationalhellenicsociety.org/application.html>

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reflectively paused, before providing his response. He started, "Each glendi and workshop has been unique, but the best part about hosting these events is that every time we have a great turnout, it reinforces that there is a desire and a demand. It is inspiring to see that our youth really love to dance." Nick describes, "Whether that is a Sunday workshop, a Koinonia forum on how to become a better director, or an all ages night event with live music; where dancers can come with their friends and families, and even hold up *papoudes* during a *tsamiko*. They have a smile on their face the entire time."

In closing, Nick said, "having the opportunity to groom and mentor the next generation of leaders in our communities, who are eager to help coordinate and organize our events is a real honor." Koinonia hopes that with their community engagement, exciting educational opportunities, and being a place for developing relationships, that they can continue to serve as a great resource during the year. Koinonia's next Glendi featuring Diesi# is May 4, 2019 in Los Angeles, CA, and they will be releasing a schedule of spring workshops.

For more information on Koinonia Seminars, visit their official website www.koinoniaseminars.com. To follow on Instagram: @koinoniaseminars Facebook: Koinonia Seminar or Koinonia Seminars Live for live video streaming. To contact: letsdance@koinoniaseminars.com

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