

## Vassar Travel Program

Educational Excursions for Alumnae/i, Family, and Friends

# From Helen to Alexander



**Monday, May 25th.** Departure from your chosen US gateway city. **Overnight: Plane**

**Tuesday, May 26th.** Your morning arrival in Athens will be met for the transfer to our city-center hotel. Time permitting, this afternoon there will be a short walk around the Plaka, at the base of the Acropolis, right outside our hotel, to orient you to the city. Later, after time to unpack and rest up from the overnight flight, there will a reception followed by dinner. **(D) Overnight: Athens**

**Wednesday, May 27th.** Our day will start with a visit to the Acropolis, the main site of Classical Athens crowned by the Parthenon and with wonderful views over the ancient center of the city. From here we will visit the fabulous new Acropolis Museum – both are a short walk from our hotel. The afternoon is free to take a leisurely lunch and to wander through the Plaka, the old part of the city with narrow winding streets bursting with stores and cafes. This evening we can attend a dance performance at the Dora Stratou garden theatre on neighboring Philopappou Hill (schedule permitting). **(B) Overnight: Athens**

**Thursday, May 28th.** This morning we will have a guided visit to the National Archaeological Museum, repository of many of the treasures from the Mycenaean and Classical periods. It's a short drive along the coast of the Saronic Gulf, passing the island of Salamis to ancient Corinth. We'll break for lunch and then gather again to tour the excavations of what was once called "the wickedest city on earth," and see the spot where St. Paul was arrested! Heading south from Corinth, through Nemea, we arrive in the Argolid and our hotel in the beautiful city of Nafplion, the first capital of modern Greece. Dinner is included this evening. **(B, D) Overnight: Nafplion**

**Friday, May 29th.** This morning we visit Mycenae, excavated first in 1876 by Schliemann, who found the fabulously rich royal graves. This was the home of Agamemnon, of Trojan War fame, and his Lion Gate is still here, just as Homer described it. We'll also make a brief stop at Tiryns, traditionally the home of Heracles, before returning to Nafplion for a free afternoon. You can wander the pedestrian streets with their exquisite Venetian architecture or perhaps explore Nafplion's Venetian fortress, the Palamidi. Late this afternoon we will visit the beautiful site of Epidavros. The ancient theatre was excavated about 100 years ago and is still in regular use for Classical Drama. The rest of the large site forms the Aesclepium, the world's first hospital, and the museum has a collection of some of the early medical instruments. We'll stop for dinner on the way back to our hotel. **(B, D) Overnight: Nafplion**

**Saturday, May 30th.** From Nafplion we continue south through the Peloponnese and the region of Arcadia to Sparta, the legendary home of Helen. Here we will visit the excavations of a recently discovered Mycenaean-era palace just to the west of the modern city. After a break for lunch, we'll continue to the Byzantine monastery of Mistras for a visit. We then drive to the west coast of the Peloponnese to our beachfront hotel at Kalo Nero. Dinner is included this evening. **(B, D) Overnight: Kalo Nero**

**Sunday, May 31st.** Unfortunately we will not be able to visit the Palace of Nestor today, as it is closed for renovations. Professor Olsen and your tour guide will provide an alternative visit. We will then head to the picturesque port of Methoni. We'll have time for lunch and then a visit to the Venetian castle that dominates the harbor. We'll return to Kalo Nero for a free evening. **(B) Overnight: Kalo Nero**

**Monday, June 1st.** An excursion today inland brings us to Olympia, in the ancient region of Elis. The sanctuary here is famous as the site of the original Olympic Games, first recorded in 776 BCE and held almost continuously every 4 years for 1000 years. We'll explore the site and then return to Kalo Nero mid-afternoon for free time to enjoy the beach. **(B) Overnight: Kalo Nero**

**Tuesday, June 2nd.** This morning we follow the coast north along the Ionian Sea to the city of Patras. We'll cross the Gulf of Corinth on the new suspension bridge and continue along the north side of the Gulf and on up into the mountains to Delphi, where dinner awaits us at our hotel. On the way we'll stop as serendipity and circumstance allow – perhaps at Kastro with its Venetian fortress, Chlemoutsi Castle, or the beautiful little town of Nafpaktos, site of the battle of Lepanto. Dinner is included in Delphi this evening. **(B, D) Overnight: Delphi**

**Wednesday, June 3rd.** This morning we explore Delphi, home of the famous Oracle, and considered by the ancient Greeks to be the center of the world. This is a large site covering part of the hillside and down into the valley. Our local guide will introduce the main site and the museum, and the energetic can explore the lower sites at their leisure. This afternoon and evening are free. **(B) Overnight: Delphi**

**Thursday, June 4th.** Leaving Delphi, we cross Mount Parnassos heading north to the plains of Larisa. Our destination is Meteora, site of the second largest group of monasteries in Greece and by far the most spectacular - "perched" on the tops of enormous rock pillars. We'll visit the Great Meteoron, the oldest and largest of the monasteries, before repairing to our local hotel for dinner. **(B, D) Overnight: Meteora**

**Friday, June 5th.** Continuing our journey north, we'll pass by the city of Larisa, and head towards the Aegean coast. Skirting around the base of Mount Olympus, we reach the village of Dion. In the shadow of Olympus, Dion was a major sanctuary dedicated to Zeus, as well as having major temples dedicated to Demeter and Isis. Dion was where Alexander assembled his army before making the great march to the east. The archaeological park here also contains the remains of a large Roman bath complex. This afternoon we continue on to Thessaloniki, Greece's second-largest city. Dinner is included this evening. **(B, D) Overnight: Thessaloniki**

**Saturday, June 6th.** Our morning tour of the city with a local guide will begin at the White Tower, now the symbol of the city. We'll see the Agia Sophia, the Roman Forum and the Arch of Galerius and end with a visit to the Archaeological Museum. The afternoon is free for individual exploration and in the evening you are also free to sample a local restaurant. **(B) Overnight: Thessaloniki**

**Sunday, June 7th.** A day in search of Alexander the Great, takes us first to Pella, the city where Alexander was born. We'll visit the archaeological sites and the small but truly remarkable museum. Next we continue on to Vergina, the first capital city of Alexander's Kingdom (founded in the 7th century BCE). Here we'll visit the royal tomb of King Philip II, Alexander's father; a site of such major historical importance that it has been designated as a Unesco World Heritage Site. We return to Thessaloniki for a farewell dinner. **(B, D) Overnight: Thessaloniki**

**Monday, June 8th.** Morning transfers to Thessaloniki Airport for returning flights to the U.S. via Athens. **(B) Overnight: Home**