

Olympic Legacy of Ancient Greece and Washington State

Series of articles by Dan Youra, travel writer

Dan Youra compares the first Olympic Games in ancient Greece with the Olympic legacy in Washington State, where Olympic Mountains cast a spell across Olympic National Park. Ancient Greek games in Olympia were dedicated to Zeus. Washington's Olympia is shadowed by Mount Olympus, "Home of the Gods". Greek cities welcomed pilgrims to Olympic festivals 2,800 years ago. Washington towns on the Olympic Peninsula host festivals in the spirit of the original Olympic Games.

Pilgrims and Travelers

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The devotees who made the pilgrimage to Greek festivals traveled on foot and by sea around the Peloponese peninsula and across mountain ranges to arrive at the sacred destinations. In the pre-classic period of the earliest Greek Olympics the attendees were best described as "pilgrims", characterized by people making arduous trips for religious or spiritual purposes. Pilgrims had courage and deep faith to leave family and town in order to trek to a destination that was often very far from home.

To reach Olympia a pilgrim could brave a boat ride on the wind swept seas combined with a 60 or 100 mile trek over hills and across streams. Idyllic Olympia was characterized as a place of relaxation and pleasure and not of struggles in which the aim was to destroy the opponents. Faithful fans arrived to participate in the festal celebrations and witness their sacred Olympian Games.

Visitors who arrive on Washington State's Olympic shores are described more as tourists or travelers. Some might be called pilgrims, as they are on a soulful journey in search of a spiritual encounter with nature. Favorable summer weather welcomes mountain climbers, hikers and sightseers, driving along ocean beaches, through magical rain forests and up windy roads for spectacular views, which for some visitors, may be a once in a lifetime events.

Many visitors are activity seekers, such as those who brave the white rapids of fast moving rivers and those who paddle a surf board into cold, ocean waters in search of the perfect wave. But most are looking for rest and relaxation, time away from the madding crowd, for contemplation, beachcombing and the simple enjoyment of breathing fresh air, saltwater scents, and taking in the sounds of squaking seagulls and serenading loons.

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