

# 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.*

## Olympic Festivals & Games

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The ancient Greek games were all about enriching the mind and training the body. Alongside the physical games were games which were called *musical* and which encouraged the practice of the Muse's arts – not only music but also poetry and the drama. Participants played the flute and cithara. They held competitions in music, literature, tragedy, comedy and poetry to the pleasure of the actors and the spectators.

People gathered in a desire for peace and conviviality. In early Greek games the aim was not the victory of one team over another, but the manifestation of Greek culture and the demonstration of its world view through the perpetuation of art, movement and social interaction.

This was radically different from the values of the modern Olympic Games, which glorify the super human powers of the individual and demand victory at all cost, with success measured by the number of medals won, the amount of sponsorship money banked and the size of the global viewing audience.

In the United States festivals and community events held in the halo of Olympic National Park are more reflective of the divinely inspired Olympic festivals begun three thousand years ago. Washington State's Olympic festivals are held at regular intervals in the cities and towns protected by the parthenon of gods atop nearby Mt. Olympus. Festivals are celebrated during the summer, when the days are longer, the weather is warmer and more visitors are enjoying vacations in the pretty ports strung like pearls around Olympic Park between the mountains and the saltwater bays.

Chamber music bows from a barn near Center on summer weekend afternoons at the Olympic Music Festival. Fiddle tunes and jazz jump from festivals in a fort near a Victorian port. Festivals on ocean shores and sandy straits serenade the sunsets. Gallery walks, fairs, art shows and concerts tack their welcome signs on blog posts and light posts. There are parades for marchers, marathons for runners, contests for car collectors and prizes for builders of sand castles and wooden boats.

## 5. Olympic Games and Recreation

Athletic events that took place during the festivals in the early days of the Greek festivals consisted mainly of running races and tests of physical strength and endurance. The winner of the track and field events was judged also on the skills demonstrated in the arts of music, drama and poetry. The well rounded winner, adept at speed, elocution and playing the flute was crowned with the single olive wreath for the Olympic champion.

Pilgrims to Washington's venues in Olympic Park are searching for a personal experience in the Ellysian forests that cover the Olympic Peninsula. The ultimate triumph is a climb to the glacier-covered summit of Mt. Olympus to touch the gods. Most are content to hike the temple like trails of Olympic Park and Olympic Forest. Enthusiasts arrive from near and far to fish for salmon at native villages in La Push and Neah Bay. They fish the Hoh, Queets and Quinault rivers, floating beneath the verdant canopies of the rare Olympic rain forests to catch steelhead and salmon.

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