Culture is the memory, the souvenir of loveliness. We carry it around with us, sharing it with our friends and acquaintances. For this land is captivating. Each nook and cranny a surprise, a bewitching image. Constantly something different rises before you. Lush or stark, Serene or harsh, Unruly or harmonious. That’s how our book began. Its purpose? To delight you with each page.

The pictures of Greek culture, one after another one, are as dazzling as golden forins. Topped columns, statues, ruins of ancient temples. In these lands Agamemnon and Clytemnestra walked. Electra waited for Orestes. Myths, customs, stories, art, Island and mainland Greece. Mosaics and frescoes. Charms, dreams, tales. Byzantine domes that stare doggedly at the heavens. Again the sea, and again golden sand to walk on. Shady archways, windmills, tall proud towers. The sun scatters its bounty with an open hand. Sunshine is free of charge. Take a plunge into blue and white. “Kalimera” - you can almost feel the freshness of it on your lips. Each picture taken straight from Greek nature and culture. What more could a person hope for. An old crane sits in the street embroidery. The balcony of a house strewn with tomatoes left to dry. The images conceal themselves, disappear, pop up again. They keep you company in a lane on Athos or in a shadowed arcade.

Beauty defined Greece’s cultural course through the ages. It has conscientiously followed the path carved by Ancient, Byzantine and Modern Greek civilisation. This beauty is constantly evoked by Greek tradition and the warmth offered by the celebrated Greek hospitality.

Greece, Classical and modern, has been a magnet attracting foreign travelers, men of letters and intellectuals. Peraginations in pictures and words, all taken from the voluminous and varied accounts of the European travelers who visited this country in ever increasing numbers from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. The wave of travelers touring Greece is attributed to the curiosity of the discovery and the thirst for knowledge. Antiquity was the magnet that drew the visitors from the West. Thus it was the archaeologists and the antiquaries, the lovers of Classical philosophy, history and letters, who began to come to Greece and expressed their admiration for the world of ancient Greece.

Let us introduce you in the splendor of the Greek culture.

“We are all Greeks.”
Percy Shelley (1792-1822)
The Greek heritage

Greeks treasure their culture. It gives them a sense of belonging, of partaking in a common identity, molded over more than 3,500 years of recorded history. The Greek heritage is embedded in the Greek psyche, yet open to all. More than 5,000 years of cultural riches—from Neolithic finds to striking examples of contemporary art—have found a hospitable home in more than 300 national and private museums. From the small everyday items to the grand sculptures, the Greek spirit is everywhere on display.

Whatever you go, whatever you do, a true cultural experience awaits you. The country is scattered with UNESCO designated “World Heritage Sites” (Acropolis, Olympia, Aigai, Delphi, Delos, Epidaurus, Bassae, Samos, Mount Athos, Meteora, Mystras, Mycenae, Troy, Patras, Thessaloniki, Delfi, Chios, Rhodes, Old Town of Corfu), bequeathing to the world exquisite works of art, stunning archaeological discoveries, icons of rare beauty and grandiose buildings. Take the tour and come to “know thyself”, as the renowned philosopher Socrates would have you. Climb up the “Sacred Rock”, the Acropolis, which embodies the very idea of world heritage. A symbol of the enduring achievements of the human spirit.
Holy Places and Folk Tradition,

Every neighborhood has its church and every church has its flock. Lighting a candle, saying a prayer, or making the sign of the cross in the air are typical rituals for a people that historically—during consecutive and harsh foreign occupations—turned to the Orthodox Church for guidance.

From small chapels to large cathedrals, Greece’s holy places tell an interesting story of spirituality, of beautiful architecture, and unsurpassed works of art, inscribed on the Unesco World Heritage List. Scent the incense that burns in one of the majestic Byzantine churches that adorn Thessaloniki. Start with the grandiose 5th Century Church of Ayios Dimitrios, named after the city’s patron saint, and make the long Ayios, Panagialemion. Church of the Meteora, the world-famous, monasteries perchched atop 1 000-foot-high inaccessible rocks, “hang in mid-air”. Observe silence as you enter the Monastery of St. John the Theologian in Patmos. Not far away is the bleak, dark Cave of the Apocalypse, where he wrote the last of the Revelation. Visit the Monastery of Hosios (Saint) Loukas, the hermit, who was canonized for his healing and prophetic powers. Feel the tranquility, as you marvel at some of Greece’s finest Byzantine frescoes.

Travel back in time to the third peninsula of Halkidiki. Mount Athos, the spiritual home to twenty monasteries, smaller dependencies (sketes) and hermitages, became Ayios Oros (Holy Mountain) with a gold shrine encrusted with imperial Aquilae (Cormorants). Many of the monasteries hide unimaginable treasures, including priceless illuminated books, and rare icons.

Customs and traditions whose roots trace back into time immemorial, religious feasts and historic anniversaries, sometimes of local significance and at others a more general character, provide occasion for celebrations which break the monotony of daily routine and create opportunities for feasting, fun and entertainment. Any visitor to this country will enjoy being a spectator at these popular celebrations and, without realizing, will find himself drawn into them. Running through the calendar and traveling through Greece, there will be chances to see. Saint's names are celebrated throughout the year in small and big panigyna (open-air festivities the day before and on the feast day of the saint) - participate in the celebration with pump and circumstance. Growing all religious festivities are the celebrations for Greek Easter. From the procession of the Eisalaphon (epilation) of Christ, to Holy Saturday and the priest's Christos Anesti (Christ is risen), watch the Greeks as they partake eagerly in the commemoration and reenactment of events leading up to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. On Easter Sunday, feasting is finally broken; tables are set with manytro (Easter soup), roast lamb, red- dyed egg-boiled eggs, and glasses of red wine. Chances are that someone will invite you for a slice and a drink. The major Byzantine Museum in Athens, Thessaloniki, Veria, Ioannina and Kastoria will enthral you with their splendid exhibits. The life and times of the Greek people, their artworks of jewellery, wood-carving, needlework and weaving are exhibited along with traditional costumes, wooden farming tools and period furniture in Folk and Ethnological Museums. Do not miss the drawings by native artist Theophilos at the Greek Folk Art Museum.
A Fountain of Inspiration and Creation

Greece has been a spectacular attraction for authors and artists, satisfying the highest sensitive and aesthetic demands; drawings and writings, visual records and descriptive texts, symbolic monuments of the age of the land of Hellas. The diversity of natural landscape, the omnipresence of the sea, the amazing colour palette, the distinct elements of tradition, the specific features of the people have enchanted painters and poets. An unspoil outdoor paradise emerges vividly from the works of these visitors, while there are frequent references to the hospitable inhabitants they encountered as they moved around. Here, you truly set eyes on the "big blue"- the Aegean, Ionian and Mediterranean waves, all crash upon the Greek shores.

The natural light of Greece, in its unrivaled impidity and luminosity, was undoubtedly a fertilizing element and a definitive condition for intellectual and artistic climates. Enhanced as a high aesthetic value, it has been hymned over the centuries by great poetic voices, from Homer to Byron. Hugo von Hofmannsthal to Dionysios Solomos, and by the Greek Nobel laureates Georgios Seferis and Odysseas Elytis. This light astonished foreign travellers and visitors, heightening their senses. Under the sun, "the sovereign sun" praised by Elytis, everything becomes clear. As it falls on all things Greek, old and new, it reveals the aesthetics of the Greek culture, forever mixing, absorbing, renewing the Doric rhythm, the Hellenistic detail, the Byzantine fresco, the medieval element. It is a unique light, imparting a certain joie de vivre to the Greek people, imbued with the age-old virtue of filoxenia (hospitality, welcome, shelter).

"...It lies bathed in a light such as the eye has never yet beheld, and in which it rejoices as though for first awakening to the gift of sight. This light is indescribably keen yet soft. It brings out the smallest details with a clarity, a gentle clarity that makes the heart beat higher and endorses the nearer view in a transforming veil, can describe it only in these terms. Once can compare it to nothing excel Spirit.

Hugo von Hofmannsthal, "Womem in Greece"

"...Here the light penetrates directly to the soul, opens the doors and windows of the heart, makes one naked, exposed, isolated in a metaphysical bliss which makes everything clear without being known.

Henry Miller, "The Colossus of Maroussi"
"It was a flapping of wings over azure shining waves, a sparkle of the sun on the rocks, we heard the sound of the footsteps of the nomadic waters on sibs the color of embers."
Octavio Paz, “Kostas Papioanou”

Greece has been a major source of inspiration for the art movements during 18th and 19th centuries. Classicism and Neo-classicism were deeply influenced by the Ancient Greek art; they both borrowed forms and motifs of the ancient Greek imagery and architecture through Palladio’s interpretation of Classical architecture.

Influence of Greece, Ancient and Modern, is clearly traced on the Romanticism (Goethe, Hölderlin, Hugo, Chateaubriand).

Furthermore, Romanticism and Philhellenism became inseparable sides of the intellectual movement in Europe, which mobilizes European public opinion when the War of Independence broke in 1821 (Lord Byron, Shelley, Delamotte). On the other hand, numerous romantic poets and men of letters (Lamartine, Nerval, Gautier et al.) travelled in Greece and they transubstantiated their impressions into enthusiastic texts where they celebrate the Greek landscape, the Greek light, the big blue, „Happy land of the Greeks, you house of them all, of the Heavenly. So it’s true what we have heard then, in the days of our youth? Festive hall, whose floor is ocean, whose tables are mountains.”

Friedrich Hölderlin, “Bread and Wine” (transl. by Michael Hamburger)

“Truly, in time out of mind built for a purpose unique”

Lord George Gordon Byron, “Don Juan” (Canto III)

Since ancient times the foreign travellers when baring Greece always stopped at Athens and paid their homage to the city that symbolized the Classical Greek civilization. Their impressive eye-witness accounts still ravish the modern reader with the passion and the emotion that they convey.

“Look once more, as we leave this specular mount!
Westward, much nearer by south-west, behind
Where on the Aegean shore a city stands,
Black rosy, pure the air and light the scal-Athens, the eye of Greece, mother of Arts
And Eloquence, native to famous wits”

John Milton, “Paradise Lost” (4th book, 235-244)

“A diviner word! Athens, divine yet,
Glorious with its crest of columns, oh the wise
Of man, as on a mount of diamond, sat.
For thou, wise, and thy all-creative skill
Peopled, with forms that mock the eternal dead,
In marble immortality; that hill
Which was thine ancient throne and latest oracle”

Percy Shelley, “Ode to Liberty,” (V, 69-78)
It was at Athens, in 1865, that I first felt a strong backward impulse, the effect being that of a fresh and bracing breeze coming from afar. The impression which Athens made upon me was the strongest which I had ever felt. There is one and only one place in which perfection exists, and that is Athens, which outdid anything I had ever imagined.”

Ernest Renan, “Prayer on the Acropolis”

The senses also dominate in Flaubert’s diary of his travel impressions. Nature, the sea, the sun, love are the recurrent themes. When he climbs up to the Parthenon, he writes: “It was very winy, the sun regnated, the sky was bright red-over Aegina, behind the columns of the Propylaea the sky soared in a golden yellow colour...”

G. Flaubert, “The Journey to Greece”

Typical is the case of the Italian painter Giorgio de Chirico, founder of the “metaphysical” art movement. His work is inspired by the influence of Greek culture and the recollections of his childhood at his native town, Volos. As surrealists they recur in his paintings the steam-powered train of Pelion, Jason and the Argonauts, the Centaur Chiron and many other mythological themes (Orpheus, Hector and Andromache, Orestes etc.).

The emblematic Cycadic idols fascinated, with their simplicity of structure and potency of form, the great artists Picasso, Modigliani, and Brancusi.

The famous architect and urbanist Le Corbusier literally discovered the classical symmetry when visiting the archaeological sites of Greece, especially the Parthenon, which would later praise in his book “Towards a new architecture”. Also, the vernacular architecture offered him a repertoire of geometric forms and taught him the treatment of light and the utilisation of landscape as an architectural frame.

During the 20th century the seventh art, the art of cinema, does not cease to draw inspiration from Greece. Filmmaking in Hollywood and “Cronista” had a marked preference for scripts inspired from the ancient Greek mythology and history. The Greek environment is very often selected to serve as a filming location, when it is not the subject of a film. As early as 1942 the pioneering and mainly known for his documentaries about sharks Oscar award winner Hans Hass completed the filming of his second underwater movie called “Men among Sharks” which was produced in the Aegean Sea (Pompeii Gulf, Sporades, Crete). Many are the films that followed and tried to imprint on the lens of the camera the Greek landscape, the Greek soul and way of life.

“The Boy on the Dolphin”, “The Guns of Navarone”, “America, America”, “The Deep Blue”, “Captain Corelli’s Mandolin”, “Mama Mia”: There are only some of the films that established Greece in international film scene and made known the Greek cultural identity. At the same time, they have been an indirect but effective publicity of Greek tourist destinations all over the world helping in the blossoming of Greek inbound tourism in the passed decades.
Sights and Tastes to Explore

Wherever you visit, you will be spoiled for choice. You may enjoy a great experience with body, mind and soul. Relax and have fun all day long.

Walk on the "Grand Parnassos" in the Athens historic centre and stroll down history, the Acropolis, the Ancient Agora, the Theatre of Dionysos, the Roman Agora, the Temple of Olympian Zeus, and the Kerameikos cemetery form the core of ancient and Roman Athens. Up on the hill, the Areopagus and the Acropolis are the main points of interest. Sip a coffee at Plaka, the oldest neighborhood of Athens. Pick up some great bargains in the Monastiraki flea market. Sit on a bench at the city’s Green Park, the National Garden.

Seafood dishes in a warm traditional setting. Climb up to the imposing Palamidi castle that dominates the city of Nauplia; don’t miss the picturesque fortress of Bourtzi that rises from the sea. Absorb the exotic mix of Venetian and Ottoman buildings, as you stroll about in one of the delightful streets of Chania’s Old Town. Visit the Archaeological Museum of Herakleion, one of the most important museums in Greece; it features almost all the unique treasures of the Minoan civilization unearthed at Knossos, Phaistos, Malia and other sites.

Enough with sightseeing! Simply enjoy the good life. Party hard with the locals at the annual Patras Carnival. Wear a costume, climb up a colourful float, and join the Great Sunday Parade. Tread hidden trails and uncover nature-made marvels at the Vikos-Aoos National Park in Epirus. In Kastoria, follow the lakeside road and enjoy the breathtaking view. Boating in the lake of Kastoria is an unpretentious experience. Hang about the waterfront towards Thessaloniki’s emblematic White Tower.

Smell the aroma of exotic spices in the open-air meat and vegetable market, then go for a coffee at Ano Poli, the old quarter of the city. Dine out - a simple meal often divulges a real gastronomic experience. Olive oil, the protagonist of the Greek diet, elevates every dish. Ask for feta cheese in your ubiquitous Greek salad; it has gained the same protocoll status as Parmesan and champagne. Taste the avgotaraha of Messolonghi (a distinctive fish roe), the organic red saffron grown in Kozani, or the mastic, the aromatic resin which thrives in Chios. Sip the great wine from one of Greece’s twenty "Appellations of Origin of Superior Quality". The unique local tastes guarantee that you are in for many culinary surprises during your stay in Greece.
The Night is Young

The starlit sky forms the perfect backdrop. Follow the Greeks, as they express their undeniable zest for life and pursue their passion for music, drama, dance, and the silver screen. Whatever you do, don’t miss the annual Hellenic Festival. Just below the floodlighted Acropolis, the Odeon of Herodes Atticus (Odeon), host to the Festival, showcases a top line-up of local and international music, dance and theatre. From La Divina Maria Callas, to Herbert von Karajan and Leonard Bernstein, from Rudolph Nureyev and Margot Fonteyn, to Maurice Béjart and Sylvie Guillem, from José Carreras, Plácido Domingo, and Luciano Pavarotti to Elton John, Diana Ross and Jean Michel Jarre, anyone launched into superstardom has performed in the stage formed beneath the theatre’s Roman arches. For the young and the young at heart, there is always something going on. Bob Dylan, Ray Charles, Deep Purple, Sarah Vaughan, and Massive Attack have all performed at the Lycabettus Theatre.

Catch a concert or an opera at the Athens Concert Hall (Megaro Moussikis), where world-class Greek and international artists perform at its state-of-the-art stage. The Greek National Opera has produced and hosted many an acclaimed performance at the Olympics and Acropolis Theatres. A true artistic palace, the Pallas Theatre has become an inviting home for music and dance lovers. Up north, the Thessaloniki Concert Hall, matches the international and local repertoire of its Athens twin. Catch a theatre play. From Athens, host to more than 200 theatres, to Thessaloniki and its overarching National Theatre of Northern Greece, to the Regional and Municipal Theatres all over the country you are bound to see everything, from Sophocles and Beckett, to Karygozía shadow theatre (a puppet and fictional character of Greek folklore) and political revue. A more discreet yet no less impressive accomplishment of ancient Greek drama and modern theatre is presented in the world-renowned Theatre of Epidaurus, second home of the Hellenic Festival. In case you are sitting up on the last 50th row, do not worry. Its acoustics remain unparalleled. The Little Theatre of Epidaurus, with its Musical July Festival and its curiosity stage productions, has acquired quite a following.
Greek film has picked up pace. Thessaloniki’s international Film Festival has gained recognition as Southeast Europe’s pre-eminent forum for the screening of new films; more than 150 films compete for the prestigious awards every year. With a tradition that spans from the Oscar-studded performance of Kostas Papadopoulos in “For Whom the Bell Tolls” to Elia Kazan’s Hollywood reign, to Kostas Gavras’ Oscar-winning “Z” and Michalis Kakogiannis’ Oscar-nominated “Zorba the Greek”, Greeks dazzled America and Europe alike.

From Arias to Byrones (an Athens’ suburb), to Corfu, Thessaloniki, Philippi, Folegandros, Xanthi, Nafpilio, Samothrace, Volos, Crete, Festivals abound, especially during the long Greek summer. In Kos, the Castle of Knights and the Odeon open their doors to the Hippocrates Festival, named after the father of modern medicine who was born on the island. Put on your dancing shoes even if you won’t take part in the Kalamata International Dance Festival. Get up to the evocative sounds of kinaro (clarinet) and dance, in a circle, the traditional pogonostis (dance from the Epirus region) at the Ioannina International Folk Festival. Wherever you go, listen to the music play, robotika (referred to as the Greek blues), and laika (urban folk music), in tavernas, dimotika and musicia (regional folk music of the mainland and the islands) in parrainia, R&B in funky restaurants, jazz, Latin, alternative rock in clubs and venues around the country. Greeks swear by the music of outstanding composers Mikis Theodorakis, the late Ninos Katsoyannis, and the antheo (artistic) tradition that they generated. While Nana Mouskouri and Demis Roussos became international icons, the Oscar winner Vangelis wrote the inspiring film score for the “Chariots of Fire”. Take it easy or pump up the volume. The nightclub scene welcomes night owls, with celebrated DJs regularly setting the dance board on fire. Watch the latest blockbuster or art house flick in an open-air under the stars, cinema, an only in Greece summer joy. Feel the breeze on your face and smell the fuchsia-colored bouganvillaea climbing up the projection screen. Whatever you do, stay up. Do not miss a night out for the world.
The Future is now

The Greek spirit, a force of creativity and renewal throughout Greece's long history, has yet again transformed the cultural landscape. Athens itself is a city transformed. The 2004 Athens Olympic Games, the widely acknowledged "unforgettable, dream games" left a crucial legacy. Transport infrastructure of a new era, green parks and squares, world-class sports facilities, and a gleaming, Calatrava-inspired Olympic Sports Complex. The Olympic cities, Thessaloniki, Patras, Iaklio, and Volos revamped, refurbished, cleaned up. The Rio-Antirrio Bridge, an engineering masterpiece, is celebrated as the world's second longest cable-stayed bridge. A new architectural aesthetic took off the ground, with versatility and diversity of elements at its core. From the neoclassical renovation surge to the well-designed face-lift of grey and graying facades to the creation of post-modern structures, the new aesthetic has sprawled from the centre to the periphery.

The future now is in showcasing Greece's rich cultural heritage in evolutionary buildings: a fine example of which is the new Acropolis Museum, juxtaposing the age-old tradition with the modern architecture for its display. Take a virtual trip down the ancient agora at the futuristic cultural centre of the Foundation of the Hellenic World. The trend now is in urban revitalising places from the sea of cement and transforming them into new and vibrant exhibition spaces. Situated in "Gazi" (district of Athens), named after the old gas factory next to Kerameikos, "Technopolis" stands amidst chimneys, enormous cauldrons, funnels and disused ovens. A "factory" for the arts, it regularly furnishes out exhibitions, open-air jazz, rock and theater performances, club nights and parties. No space is off-limits. The National Glyptothek houses its vast collection in Goudi, in one of the renovated buildings of the old royal stables. Every space is accessible. The National Bank's Headquarters were redesigned to include a glass ground floor, where the archaeological mattlock unearthed the Acharnai gate of the Athenian wall.
Embrace the visual richness of four centuries of Greek art in the National Art Gallery-Museum Alexandros Soutzos. Take notice of the gallery's prized El Greco paintings and immerse in the inspiring work of 20th century Greek masters. Gika, Pantheos, Lytras, Meleas, Vekarakis and Moralis. Go to the Benaki Museum, Greece's oldest and finest private collection. Its exquisite displays will transport you from prehistoric times to the formation of the modern Greek state.

A newfound confidence has given a harmonious tempo; a new generation of dynamic galleries is becoming visible abroad, exporting homegrown talent. "Art-Atene", the art fair organized by the Hellenic Art Galleries Association, has become a stable and crowd-attracting institution. The former Fix Brewery, a tribute to 60's industrial architecture, is soon to house the extensive collections of the National Museum of Contemporary Art. Thessaloniki has not stayed behind; the State Museum of Contemporary Art organized its own biennial, biennale:1 art buffs regularly head to the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art and to the State Museum's autonomous branch, the Contemporary Art Centre of Thessaloniki for their dose of new-media art and video installations. Photography is aptly represented in the dynamic exhibitions organized by the Thessaloniki Museum of Photography.

Everything is falling into place. Here is a country preserving its legacy, both symbolic and real, in a modern, fresh way. The diverse and often compelling forces at work within Greek culture are finding new, original mediums for expression; this is a heritage for the future and therein lies Greece's future. Partake in Greece's culture and embrace the true experience.