

## Greece: A Jewish Odyssey Melton Travel Seminar

**Dates: April 20-30, 2020**

**Location: Greece (11 days)**

**Cost: from \$4,655 USD land only; \$1,055 USD single supplement**

### **1 PM - Monday, Day 1, Athens – WHY JEWISH GREECE?**

Note: Gil Travel will gladly assist with individual transfers to the hotel.

**Why (Jewish) Greece?** After checking in at the hotel, we will have an Introductory Session, and then visit the **Acropolis Museum** and the **Acropolis**. This UNESCO World Heritage Site and its monuments are universal symbols of the classical spirit and civilization that form the greatest architectural and artistic complex bequeathed by Greek Antiquity to the world.

Finish your first day in Athens with a welcome dinner.

### **Overnight: Athens**

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### **Tuesday, Day 2, Athens – ATHENS AND JERUSALEM AS SYMBOLS**

After breakfast at the hotel, you'll take a visit to the Ancient **Agora** of Athens. Walking through the Agora will take you back to the economic center where the wealth, reach and influence of classical Athens was visible by the wide range of goods shipped in from the nearby port of Piraeus, which ranged from wheat produced on the shores of the Black Sea to precious dyes from the Levant. An outdoor study session under the trees and among the ruins will allow for questions regarding two ancient cultures, Jewish and Greek, and the worldviews they espoused.

Emperor Hadrian wanted to create a place of academic study worthy of the reputation of ancient Athens in Letters and Science, so he built your next destination, **Hadrian's Library**, containing three floors of books, reading rooms, teaching rooms, gardens, and a pond. From there, we will proceed to his Temple of Zeus, and consider the ascendance of the Hellenistic culture that so fascinated Hadrian, a figure so despised in Jewish sources.

You'll then have time to explore the markets and other public spaces in Athens and have dinner on your own.

## Overnight: Athens

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### Wednesday, Day 3, Volos & Makrinitza – WHAT IS A ROMANIOTE JEW?

Following breakfast, we depart for **Volos**, a charming city at the foot of Mt Pelion. On the way, we will learn about some of the greatest clashes in ancient Greek history, and reach Volos by lunchtime, when we will break near the waterfront.

We will proceed to the Synagogue and meet with a member of the community, also visiting the Volos Jewish cemetery with its magnificently carved *matsevot* (gravestones).

Your day will finish with a trip to **Makrinitza** on Mt. Pelion. Known as the noble village because it was mostly inhabited by wealthy people, its houses have tall, decorated walls and windows and are truly works of art. All the climbing streets of Makrinitza are stone paved and lead to a beautiful large square, shadowed by tall plane trees. The story of the role of these mountain villages during the dark days of World War Two needs unpacking, even as the unparalleled views enchant us.

## Overnight: Volos

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### Thursday, Day 4, Meteora & Ioannina – MATTERS OF IDENTITY

After breakfast, we will hold a study session introducing the world of Greek Christianity, so different from the West European models you may be familiar with, this in the broader context of national and religious identity. We will then head to **Meteora**, one of the biggest and most important groups of monasteries in Greece. There, we will either visit St. Stephens Monastery or the Great Meteora Monastery.

St. Stephens Monastery is the most accessible monastery, where you simply cross a small bridge to reach the entrance. This monastery includes two cathedrals; the old 16th century chapel that was severely damaged during WWII and the consequent Greek Civil War, and the 18th century main cathedral, dedicated to Saint Charalambos.

The Great Meteora Monastery is nicknamed the "monastery suspended in air" because of the gigantic rock formation it was built on. Take a look inside the old refectory of the monks, where part of an original 16th century table is preserved, with the original cutlery on it. Don't forget to take a glance at the monastery's old kitchen on your way out, still black with smoke, with the original bread oven and soup hearth.

After a lunch break in nearby Kalambaka, we will travel to the lakeside city of **Ioannina**, longtime home to a Romaniote Jewish community. The natural environment, the climate and character of the town are defined by this stretch of water – the area’s trademark. In this castle town, we will visit the Jewish Quarter and the Synagogue of Ioannina, barely active today, and meet with Allegra Matsa, the life force behind the dwindling Jewish community in Ioannina.

**Overnight: Ioannina**

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### **Friday, Day 5, Thessaloniki – PORTRAIT OF A COSMOPOLITAN CITY**

We will leave bright and early for **Thessaloniki**, Greece’s second largest city. This city’s Jewish community was already famous two millennia ago, when visited by Paul. It flourished after Sephardi Jews found refuge in the Ottoman Empire after the Expulsion, and by the 20th century, Jewish life in Salonika even determined the pace of the whole city; 96 percent of the community was to perish during the years of the Holocaust.

We will visit the **Jewish Museum**, learning about the city's Jewish community, its synagogues and commercial involvement, its educational and other public institutions.

After a lunch break, we will go on a tour along the old defensive walls, including the **Citadel** and the **White Tower**, to gain an overall impression of this magnificent city, before checking in and preparing for Shabbat.

You’ll then have the chance to welcome Shabbat with a Kabbalat Shabbat service with the local Jewish community, followed by Shabbat dinner at the community center.

**Overnight: Thessaloniki**

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### **Shabbat, Day 6, Thessaloniki – JERUSALEM OF THE BALKANS**

You will have the bulk of the day free to explore the city, including its excellent museums, especially the Archaeology Museum. In the mid-afternoon, we will go on a **walking tour of the heart of the Jewish community** before the Great Fire of 1917, including the Karasso Arcade, the Modiano Market, Yahoudi Hammam, and Freedom Square, established in remembrance of the 50,000 Salonika Jews exterminated by the Nazis.

In the late afternoon, we will meet at the hotel for a study session, **Seuda Shlishit** and group discussion.

**Overnight: Thessaloniki**

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## **Sunday, Day 7, Macedonia THE CRADLE OF HELLENISM, FROM FATHER TO SON**

After breakfast at the hotel we will visit the Railway Freight Station where Jews were packed into livestock carriages and sent off to Auschwitz-Birkenau and Bergen-Belsen. Next, we head for the Old Jewish Cemetery at Aristotle University, which housed 300,000 Jewish tombs. Very few gravestones survived the Nazi assault of 1942.

Then we will head past some of the Jewish-owned villas on the East Side of Salonika, before departing for two amazing Macedonian sites: Vergina and Pella. **Vergina**, a UNESCO World Heritage Monument and one of the most important archaeological discoveries of the 20th century, is first on the list. This site holds the **tomb of Philip II**. After lunch, we will head for **Pella**, home city of **Alexander the Great**. Here, we have the ideal backdrop for our discussion on the clash between Judaism and Hellenism and its contemporary dimensions.

**Overnight: Thessaloniki**

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## **Monday, Day 8, Veroia & Larissa – IN THE SHADOW OF THE SHOAH (1)**

We depart for **Veroia/Veria**, a town where the Jewish community was important enough 1900 years ago for Paul to visit the synagogue and preach to the unconverted! Alas, there are no Jews here anymore (the last individuals left at the end of the 20th century) but there is a synagogue, and we will walk around the Jewish Quarter of the city.

Following a lunch break, we will make our way south, to **Larissa**. The views of the narrow pass between two mountains, Ossa and Olympus, are stunning. We will visit the town's synagogue and Holocaust Memorial, and meet members of the community to discuss how this small but solid community survives.

From there, we will travel to **Kamena Vourla** to end our day at this resort town.

**Overnight: Kamena Vourla**

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## **Tuesday, Day 9, Distomo, Delphi & Athens – IN THE SHADOW OF THE SHOAH (2)**

Our day will start with an educational session introducing Nazi policies regarding collective punishment. We will then depart for the site of the **Distomo** Massacre, one of the most atrocious crimes the Nazis committed against innocent women and children, only months before the German occupying forces pulled out of Greece.

We will break for lunch before visiting **Delphi** for an encounter with the most important ritual site of ancient Greece, and an outstanding museum in a spectacular location. Oracle? Urim and Thummim? Who can we ask? From there we will return to **Athens**.

On reaching Athens, we will drive by the **Panathenaic Stadium**, site of the Olympic Games both when they were revived in 1896 and in 2004.

### **Overnight: Athens**

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### **Wednesday, Day 10, Athens – WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR GREEK JEWRY?**

We will open this day with a tour of the **Jewish Museum of Athens**, and, after exploring the exhibits, meet with **Zanet Battinou**, director of the museum. We will also visit **Beth Shalom Synagogue**, the Holocaust Memorial and Jewish Cultural Center, and meet community leaders, including the young Greek-born Chief Rabbi of Athens, **Rabbi Negrin**. After lunch we'll have some free time, returning to the hotel to hold a concluding session and then continuing to our farewell dinner.

### **Overnight: Athens**

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### **Thursday, Day 11, Departure - RETURNING TO THE DIASPORAS – AND ISRAEL!**

After breakfast at the hotel, you will proceed with check out.  
Gil Travel will gladly assist with private transfers to the airport.

**Note: Itinerary subject to change. Museum visits and personal shopping time may be disrupted due to unforeseen circumstances or the many religious, state and local holidays observed in the destinations being visited.**