

Day 4 - 15th February

Today we visited the archaeological site and museum in Olympia. This is the home to the first ever Olympic Games. The site was destroyed by an earthquake and then covered in mud due to floods. German archaeologists began excavating the site and uncovered various buildings and statues which are now preserved. Excavations are still happening today and new things are being discovered.

The site of Olympia was a sacred site where priests worshipped the Ancient Greek Gods. The games began in 776 BC and were held every 4 years. Only male athletes could compete in the games and they had to be of Greek origin. Women were not allowed to attend the games because the men competed naked. The athletes coated themselves in olive oil and then dust to protect themselves from the sun.



Within the site of Olympia there were several buildings. The first buildings were used for practising the events. The athletes were not allowed to stay within the buildings so created camps outside.



Next to the buildings for practising was a workshop for a local potter and artist Pheidias. Pheidias created the statue of Zeus, once one of the 7 wonders of the world.

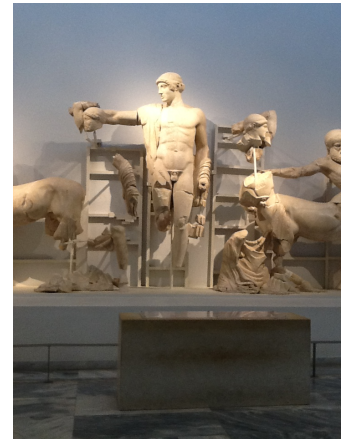






The statue was made to stand in the temple of Zeus which was in the centre of the sacred site. The statue stood 12 metres high but when the Christian Era began the gold and ivory were taken from the statue as they were more important than the pagan statue of Zeus. There are no traces or pieces of the statue left today.

The temple of Zeus was decorated with statues to educate the people visiting the site. The statues told stories and gave messages to the people. These are preserved in the museum on the site of Olympia.



There is also a temple of Hera within the site. People came to worship the God of families and fertility on the sacred site. In front of the temple is an altar where they would sacrifice animals to the gods. This is now the site where they light the flame for the modern games. It was decided in the Berlin games of 1936 that the light of Greece should be present at games around the world. Now every 2 years, for the summer and winter Olympic Games the torch is lit at this site by the sun and taken around the world before arriving at the city hosting the games. The torch burns for the duration of that games.



The pathway from the temple of Hera to the stadium was lined with marble statues of previous winners of the games to celebrate their success. However if anyone was caught cheating statues would be put on the opposite side to shame the cities and the athletes.

Also, in the Roman times Herodes Atticus built a lavish water fountain to ensure the spectators, who were out in the sun all day, remained hydrated. The fountain was decorated with statues of Herodes family and friends.



The final part of our tour was the the stadium where all of the events of the games were held expect for chariot racing. The entrance the the stadium was a tunnel leading to the open track. The children on the visit ran a race and the winner received an olive wreath, just like in the Ancient games.

