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Michael Scott *on* …

Greece's relationship with travel, adventure and tourism has been shaped by more than just mythology.

The ancient Greeks were immersed in tales of travel. At the heart of their epic tradition, Homer's *Odyssey* is a story about voyaging around the world. Their mythology too is littered with adventures to mystical lands in a quest for hidden wonders (think of Jason and his search for the Golden Fleece). But what about travel in daily life? Did the ancient Greeks go on summer holidays? And if so, where?

Socrates, the famously intransigent philosopher of ancient Athens, was no traveller. In one of Plato's *Dialogues*, Socrates seems to poke fun at himself: "You never went out from the city to a festival, or anywhere else, except on military service, and you never made any other journey, as other people do, and you had no wish to know any other city or other law but were content with us and our city."

Inherent in this self-critique is the idea that it's good to expose oneself to different cultures, systems and ways of doing things. And in ancient Greece that wasn't hard to do. Rather than one country, ancient Greece was a patchwork quilt of more than 1,000 city-states, each with its own laws, political systems and traditions. As a result, going from one to another was like going from country to country today. Indeed, in ancient Sparta, even someone from the next village was considered a *xenos* (foreigner), meaning that international travel started on leaving the city boundary.

But in ancient Greece, travelling further afield than the next city or two was not that easy. There were no tour wagons to leap on or ancient cruise ships to join. Instead, you had to buy your passage on a trading vessel that was criss-crossing the Aegean or wider Mediterranean to get around (hardly the ideal start to a holiday). And sailing was not without its perils. Death at sea from drowning was considered the most ignominious fate an ancient Greek could suffer. And then there were the pirates that cruised the Med, particularly around Magna Graecia (southern Italy and Sicily), always looking to raid a trading vessel and rob those on board.

But some things did tempt Greeks to make the effort, particularly trips to important religious festivals and major religious sanctuaries. Most months at Delphi, people came to consult the Oracle; and every four years to take part in its athletic and musical competitions. But they also came to sight-see Delphi's ornate, monumental Sanctuary of Apollo. Euripides' tragic play, *Ion*, written in the 5th-century BCE, opens with a group of tourists at Delphi, agog at the statues inside the sanctuary. "Look! come see," says one. "The son of Zeus is killing the Lernean Hydra with a golden sickle. My dear, look at it!" In later times, there were even tour guides, just like today, hanging around the sanctuary, offering to take visitors on a tour of the monuments. (It's thought the most important monuments were marked with numbers in case you only had time for a whistle-stop tour.)

> The Olympic Games were probably the largest congregation of ancient Greeks, with about 40,000 making their way to Olympia. Not that it was exactly a stress-free holiday

Cultivating its mythology as the centre of the entire world, Delphi increasingly became a meeting point for travellers coming from different directions. Plutarch, a philosopher and priest of the temple at Delphi in the 1st century CE, records his meeting with other philosophers, one coming from the UK on his way to Tarsus in Asia Minor and another from the Red Sea en route to Sparta.

Travelling to the Olympic Games was probably the largest congregation of ancient Greeks, with about 40,000 making their way to Olympia. Not that it was exactly a stress-free holiday. Taking place in August under the fierce Greek sun, these tourists had to bring with them – or hire there – everything they needed, including animals to sacrifice to the gods, food and tents to sleep in. Imagine the din caused by these people and their animals, camped on the dusty, dry ground around Olympia for a week. Add to the mix no drainage or sanitation and a wide range of sweaty running, wrestling and boxing competitions. Then there was the barbecuing of more than 100 oxen for divine and human consumption. This was the Glastonbury of ancient Greece.

Plato went to the Olympics and famously could not find a tent to hire. The philosopher Epictetus wrote of the experience of being at Olympia: "Are you not scorched? Are you not pressed by a crowd? Are you not without comfortable means of bathing? Are you not wet when it rains? Have you not abundance of noise, clamour and other such disagreeable things?" Perhaps grumpy Socrates was right after all: staying at home was the better bet. — (M)

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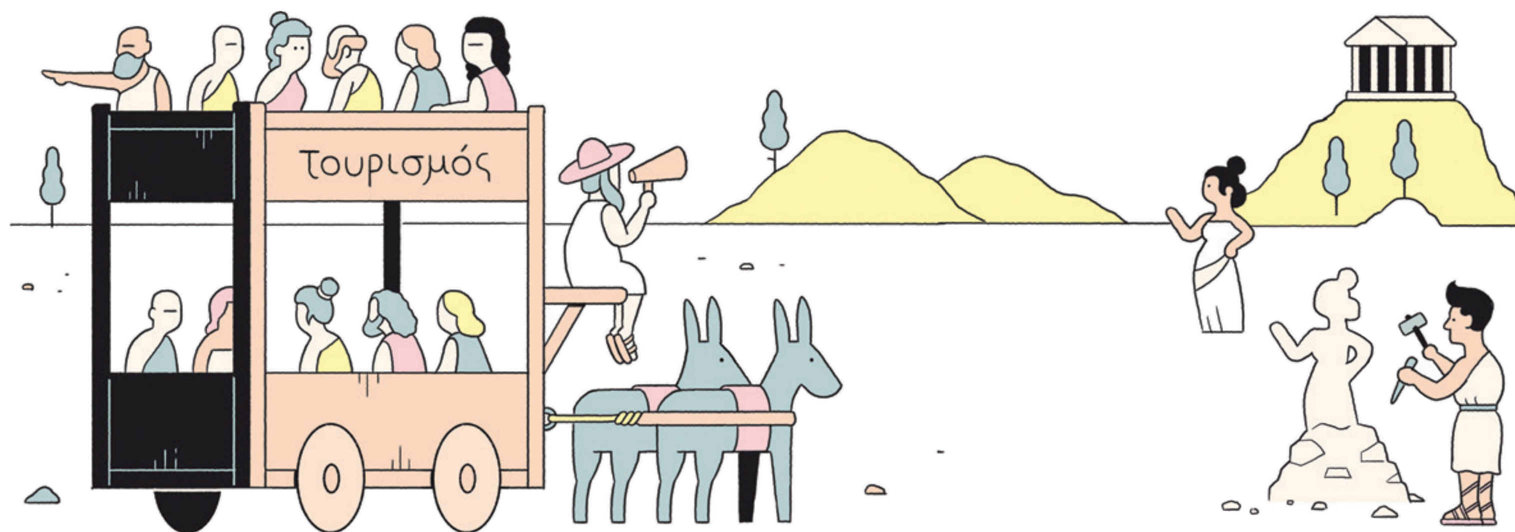

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Tyler Brûlé *on* …

Why it is crucial to recognise the importance of social capital when gauging quality of life.

Very often it's the little things that remind us why life is a bit better in other places. These tiny events or established customs can stop traffic as visitors from afar come to a juddering halt and look around in amazement. Anyone who's been to Japan and wandered the streets of Fukuoka or Sapporo in the early morning will be familiar with the sight of six and seven-year-olds walking to school on their own. For parents from places where this daily exercise in self-sufficiency vanished long ago there's often a sense of bewilderment ("How can children so young be allowed to roam free in one of the world's biggest cities?"), envy ("I wish I could send my kids out the door on their own and gain a headstart on my workday or an hour in bed") and loss ("Well, that'll never happen"). And therein lies the problem: maintaining or restoring social capital is not only a dying political art, it also comes with unpalatable costs and confronting some unfashionable though necessary truths.

When gauging liveability in cities big and small it's easy to be seduced by the number of independent cinemas, amount of green space, quality of healthcare or investment in infrastructure. But it's also easy to forget that daily pleasures come with having a social climate where, for instance, children are given a degree of autonomy and there's little appetite for interference from newcomers. These are places where a shopkeeper can leave pots of flowers out overnight with little fear of theft or a bicycle can be rested against a shop window and the owner can be quite sure it'll be there when he comes out with his groceries. In much of Japan this is standard; in parts of Switzerland, Finland and Denmark it's still the norm and in rural areas, where there's often a high degree of trust and easy accountability, social capital still runs high.

But what has happened elsewhere? Why has social capital eroded in so many otherwise-liveable cities? Could it be that citizens of entire nations have been conditioned to shun responsibility for themselves and others? Is there discomfort or fear that comes with explaining how things are done because one might be branded a bully or racist? Cities that rank highly in social capital tend to be places

> In rural areas, where there's often a high degree of trust and easy accountability, social capital still runs high. But what has happened elsewhere?

where there's not only a respect for rule of law but also unwritten codes of conduct for specific communities. In simple terms it's about "reading the room" and behaving accordingly. Of course, this is easier said than done – especially when the codes have all but vanished and half of society feels done wrong while the other half is constantly looking for cause of offence or outrage. The good news is that there are benchmarks and behaviours that point us in the right direction. A visit to our winning cities offers up a few clues. — (M)

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