

# Greek national day

## Cultural similarities shine through

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AMBASSADOR OF GREECE



On March 25, Greece celebrates its independence and the beginning of the modern Greek state. The 25th of March is also a religious holiday, the Annunciation — “Evangelismos” in Greek — whereby Archangel Gabriel informed the Virgin Mary that she will give birth to

Jesus Christ. Thus, it is a day of good news.

In the global economic crisis of today every Greek looks back to the past glories and finds reasons for hope. Our long history has taught us that we always bounce back after having gone through hard times. We are inspired by the splendor of our antiquity, by our myths and heroes such as Hercules, Achilles and Alexander the Great, the uniqueness of the Byzantine Empire that lasted 11 centuries, but also by the achievements of modern Greece,

which always fought for freedom, resisted invasions and organized the splendid 2004 Olympic Games, exactly 40 years after the famous 1964 Olympics in Tokyo. It is Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, etc., with their philosophies and Democritus, Hippocrates, Solon and Thucydides, among others, with their scientific and political genius that contributed decisively to our modern Western civilization. And it is those others who moved to Western Europe after the fall of Constantinople that made possible the Renaissance movement on the old continent.

In the East, Japanese civilization and culture have left a distinct mark on world history with an unprecedented uniqueness and grace that touches our soul every time we encounter a haiku or a samurai blade. A great number of intellectuals, among which was Lafcadio Hearn — Yakumo Koizumi — have praised Japanese traditions and people to an extent that is difficult to surpass. Lafcadio derived his name from the Greek island of Lefkada in the Ionian Sea, where he was born from a Greek mother and an Irish father, and who, after wandering in Ireland and the United States, finally chose to settle for life in the country of the Rising Sun, married a Japanese woman and was blessed

with a family. His descendants, a splendid mixture of Greek, Japanese and Irish, often visit Greece. In his poems we witness not only his ability to capture Japanese splendor and perfection but also the revelation that the spirits of ancient civilizations are indeed so alike in spite of geographical distance.

Certainly geography played a great role in shaping common features. We are both sea nations. We are also both very mountainous. From the beginning of time we had to struggle with the forces of nature, which certainly contributed to our ability to face difficulties and be always alert.

In our days strong ties between our peoples are, for example, forged through the traditional shipbuilding of Greek ships in Japanese shipyards. I have repeatedly noticed the spirit of mutual respect among our people, shipbuilders and shipowners, who share the same profound values, love for their country, love for nature, honor, bravery, etc. Bushido rules can be found in the teachings of Chilon of Sparta. Greek drama finds its equal in Noh theater; the similarities are astonishing when we consider the role of the chorus and the profoundness of the approach to mysterious human nature.



White and blue: A view of the famed buildings on the Cycladic archipelago of Santorini. EMBASSY OF GREECE



Skyward: The Meteora monasteries, situated in Thessaly, central Greece, are some of the largest and most important of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Japanese visitors to Greece will day after day discover common architectural, artistic and even political brilliances that stem from the past. On the foot of the Parthenon the Japanese guest will see the new Acropolis Museum, the proof of the coexistence of past and present, harmoniously cohabiting, which is an absolute must in the beginning of

the 21st century.

There are so many different places to see. Northern Greece is so different from the southern part, while every island keeps its own character and cuisine. One can discover monasteries built harmonically on rocky peaks in Meteora, Cycladic white houses mix in a miraculous manner with the blue of the sea and sky and

Olympia gives as from ancient times a feeling of superbness. The Olympic spirit is manifest in the unparalleled Greek hospitality and warm welcome for every visitor.

Last year we celebrated the 110th anniversary of diplomatic relations between our countries. This provided us with an opportunity to cherish our friendship with cultural

events organized by the Embassy of Greece in Tokyo and the Embassy of Japan in Athens. The emphasis we put on culture is by no means random. Two ancient civilizations different indeed at first but at the same time profoundly alike can always communicate beyond language barriers and play a leading role in ecumenical affairs.

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the People of Greece  
on Their National Day**

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