

DELPHI DESTINATION GUIDE



Delphi Introduction

In ancient times, Delphi was considered the center of the known world, where heaven and earth met. According to Greek mythology, Zeus released two eagles, one from the east and one from the west, and they met here. The spot was marked as “the navel of the world” by the omphalos stone. For many centuries, the city prospered as a cultural and religious center and it was a symbol of unity for the Hellenic world.

The Oracle at Delphi

The Oracle originally belonged to Gaia, the earth goddess, and was guarded by her child Python, the serpent. The god Apollo killed Python and dedicated Delphi as his sanctuary.

As far back as the late 8th century BC, people visited the site to worship and seek advice from the god. Delphi rose politically in the 6th century BC, entering a golden age that lasted until the arrival of the Romans in 191 BC.

At the height of its prestige (in 582 BC), the Oracle at Delphi was consulted by everyone, for everything ranging from private matters to affairs of state. The Oracle had a powerful influence and could sway public policy. Two Sacred Wars were waged for control of the site.

People believed that the Oracle had existed since the dawn of time. It is believed to have successfully predicted events relating to the Argonauts' expeditions and the Trojan War. However, there is evidence that the Oracle influenced the founding of Greek colonies.

The Delphic Oracle was delivered by the pythia, the priestess, and then interpreted by the priests of Apollo. The priestess sat on a tripod and muttered incomprehensible words that were interpreted by the priests of Apollo, who claimed they foretold the future.

According to Plutarch, who served as a priest at Delphi, the oracles were always open to interpretation and often had dual and sometimes opposing meanings.

All who consulted the oracle brought lavish gifts and its fame spread around the world.

Foreign dignitaries, heads of state, Greek politicians, even common folk made the pilgrimage to Delphi. Those with money paid heavily to bypass the long lines of pilgrims.

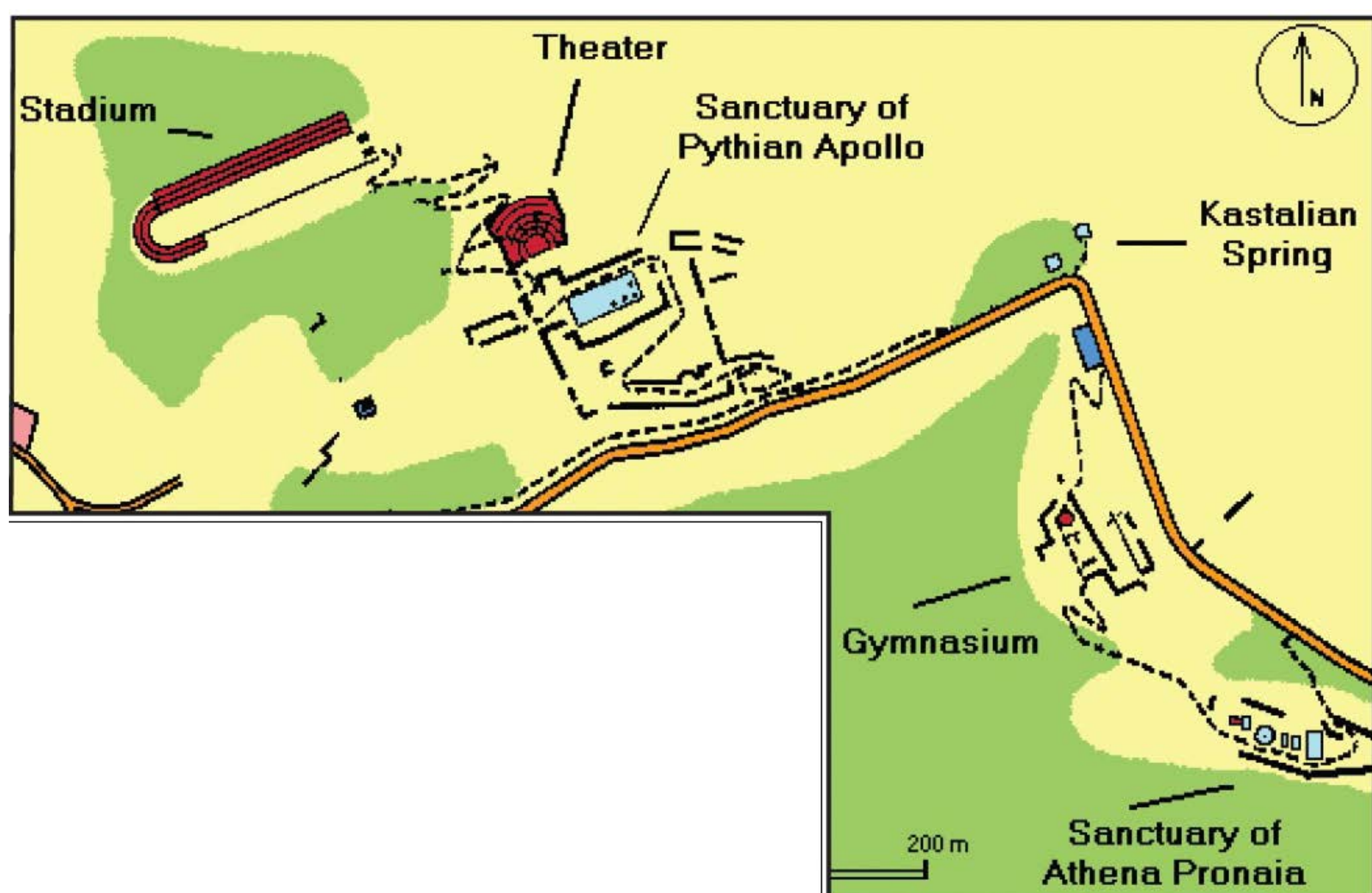
In 2001, a team of scientists discovered that there was ethylene gas in the region, which was once used as an anesthetic and can produce a trancelike state. Their findings explain ancient accounts of vapors rising from the temple floor—and the gibberish uttered by the priestess!

History

Archaeological excavations reveal that Delphi was first inhabited as early as the 15th century BC. The Romans captured Delphi in the early 2nd century BC. The city was frequently pillaged, mostly to finance wars. The Delphic Oracle was abolished with the spread of Christianity and permanently closed by the Decree of Theodosius around 390 AD.

In the 7th century, a new village called Kastri was built at the site. In 1891 the village was relocated to allow the Great Excavation to take place. Delphi was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987.

The Site



The Sanctuary of Athena Pronaia

Located in the Marmaria Precinct, or marble quarry. The most remarkable monument is the Tholos, dating from the 4th century BC. The purpose of this circular structure, originally surrounded by 20 columns, remains a mystery.

Gymnasium

This is where athletes trained for the Pythian Games, celebrated to commemorate Apollo's victory over Python. The games were held in Delphi every four years beginning in 582 BC. It was a cultural, religious and athletic festival with games much like the Olympics.

Though the games were dedicated to Apollo, the gymnasium was founded in honor of Odysseus. According to Homer, he was hunting at this location when he was gored by a boar. The gymnasium was also a place to pursue higher

learning in subjects like philosophy.

Castelian spring

North of the gymnasium is the Castelian spring. This is where pilgrims would wash themselves before consulting the Oracle.

The Sanctuary of Apollo

The road then leads to the Sanctuary of Apollo, also known as the Sacred Precinct. It was surrounded by an enclosure wall. From the sanctuary entrance, visitors would follow the Sacred Way, which was once lined with 3000 statues and treasures, contributed by various Greek cities.

Though many of the monuments are now gone, the bases are still in place. The Sacred Way leads 650 feet uphill to the Temple of Apollo.

The Temple of Apollo

A temple has stood at this location since the 6th century BC. The remains visible today date from the 4th century BC.

A 6th century BC polygonal wall supports the platform on which the Temple of Apollo stands. The stones are carved with ancient inscriptions and the main face stretches 650 feet.

The Treasury of the Athenians

The original building is now in the Delphi Museum. It was built around 510 BC with marble from the island of Paros. It too housed offer-

ings to Apollo. The Doric temple replica that now stands at the location was built in 1903.

Theater

The theater stands at the north corner of the Sacred Precinct. The present structure dates from 4th century BC and was modified in Roman times. Most of the seating is still intact today. It could hold 5000 spectators on 35 rows of stone benches.

Musical contests in connection to the Pythian Games were held here. The theater provides a good vantage point overlooking the entire site.

Stadium

The stadium sits 1600 feet above the theater at the highest point in the site. It was built in the 5th century BC and renovated by the Romans in the 2nd century AD. It held 500 spectators and the athletic contests were held here.



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