

Heritage Greece gets young people in touch with their roots



Washington -- The National Hellenic Society (NHS), a foundation established to promote and preserve Hellenic heritage and culture through programs that enrich the community at large, will provide fully funded educational first-time visits to Greece for students via its Heritage Greece program from June 8-24, Timothy Maniatis, executive director of NHS, has announced.

This year, 20 collegiate students from across the United States will participate in the program, which is patterned after "Birthright Israel," a Jewish Israeli registered charity that sponsors free 10-day heritage trips to Israel. The students will experience Greece for the first time in their lives as part of an immersion program designed to fortify their respective knowledge, understanding and appreciation of Greek language, culture, and history.

"Our hope for these young Greek Americans is that they will connect with their Greek identity, discover the importance of Greek heritage, and share that experience with each other and with their student peer group in Greece," said Theophanis Economidis, chair of the NHS Program Committee.

NHS sponsors Heritage Greece in collaboration with DERE -- The American College of Greece, Europe's largest and oldest American college. Because of its partnership with the university, which is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, participants will receive three academic credits that are readily transferable to the student's home institution.

"DERE -- The American College of Greece is proud to collaborate with the National Hellenic Society to create a unique cultural and educational program connecting Greek-American college students to their Hellenic heritage," said Dr Kathleen Cross, dean of Studies Abroad at the university. «We look forward to welcoming the 20 selected Greek-American students to our campus and Greece this month."

"Together with the university we are committed to transforming Heritage Greece into a comprehensive, large-scale program that will enable thousands of young Greek Americans to visit Greece for the first time, strengthening their ties to their ancestral land as well as relations between Greece and the United States," said NHS Chairman George Marcus.

NHS funds the two-week trip as a gift to the deserving participants. The only cost they will bear is travel to and from Washington, DC, the city from where the group departs for Greece. Eligibility for the program is open to college or university students of Hellenic ancestry between the ages of 18-26 with excellent academic credentials.

The program's itinerary includes visits to important archaeological and religious sites, tours of the Greek countryside, spending time with a host Greek family, and visits to other Greek sites and participation in many cultural activities.

"We have created a very special program this year designed to immerse Greek-American students in Hellenic culture," stated Cross. "Selected students will travel with Greek students to the Peloponnese, a Greek island, traditional villages and archaeological sites. They will take a Greek cooking class, learn Greek dancing, experience an insider's tour of the Greek Parliament, and much more."

Heritage Greece is the only Greek-American program that conducts a pre- and exit survey of its participants to measure the program's effectiveness and impact on the students' appreciation and understanding of their heritage and modern Greece.

Follow the Heritage Greece blog at <http://www.acg.edu/heritagegreece2011blog/> or visit the NHS website (<http://www.nationalhellenicsociety.org>) for more details.

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