

# Ancient Greece: The Olympic Games

## PROGRAMME

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### **Day 1 Morning**

Swearing-in ceremony for competitors and judges in the Council House, in front of the altar and statue of Zeus.

Contests for heralds and trumpeters.

Boys' running, wrestling and boxing contests.

Prayers and sacrifices in the Altis (Zeus' sacred grove); oracles consulted.

### **Afternoon**

Speeches by well-known philosophers; poets and historians recite their work.

Sightseeing tours of the Altis.

Reunions with old friends.

### **Day 2 Morning**

Procession by all the competitors into the hippodrome (the horse track).

Chariot and horse races.

### **Afternoon**

The pentathlon: discus, javelin, jumping, running and wrestling.

### **Evening**

Funeral rites in honour of the hero Pelops.

Parade of victors round the Altis.

Everyone sings victory hymns.

Feasting and revelry.

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### **Day 3 Morning**

Procession of:

the judges; ambassadors from the Greek states (poleis); competitors;

sacrificial animals round the Altis to the Great Altar in front of the Temple of Zeus.

100 oxen, given by the people of Elis, are officially sacrificed.

### **Afternoon**

Foot races.

### **Evening**

Public banquet in the Prytaneion.

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### **Day 4 Morning**

Wrestling.

### **Midday**

Boxing and the pankration (a more violent form of wrestling).

### **Afternoon**

Race-in-armour.

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### **Day 5**

Procession of victors to the Temple of Zeus where they are crowned by the judges with wreaths of wild olive leaves.

The victors are next showered with leaves and flowers (the phyllobolia).

Feasting and celebrations.

## Lyric poem to a victorious athlete

Lyric poetry flourished in the Hellenic (Greek) world between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. It is called 'lyric' because all poetry was sung, usually to the music of the lyre.

Pindar was the most famous and celebrated male lyric poet. Sappho was regarded by the Greeks as the best woman poet.

Here is a translation of an ode by Pindar, written to a winning athlete at the Olympics.

All of a rush, we have a winner of this race.  
Richly endowed with youth, and now full of hope for the future.  
Though his pocket is empty, his heart lifts up with hope  
As he flies into manhood.

But this time of pleasure has its term, and soon fate will stop him dead.  
How short that season of delight -  
No more than a shadow in a dream.  
Yet when godly splendour is poured out  
And a youth shines like gold -  
How sweet life is!