



## In Search of Alexander

Classical sites in northern Greece

**10–16 June 2025 (ML 718)**

7 days • £3,610

Lecturer: Professor Lloyd  
Llewellyn-Jones

Classical, Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine heritage in the ancestral homelands of Alexander the Great.

The history of ancient Macedonia and the rule of the great Temenid kings, extended forward to the end of Byzantium.

Fertile pastures and mountainous landscapes in a culturally rich, little-visited part of Greece.

To many Classical Greeks the Macedonians were barbarians. Hailing from beyond Mount Olympus, only relatively recently had they abandoned nomadism for settled agriculture and life in cities, and they persisted with the system of hereditary kingship that city-state Greeks considered politically primitive.

But military monarchy served the Macedonians well. In three dramatic decades in the fourth century BC which changed the ancient world, Philip II subdued most of the southern Balkans and his son, the legendary conqueror Alexander the Great, extended Macedonian rule through Anatolia, the Middle East and into Central and South Asia.

Mainstream Greeks had previously gained several footholds on the islands and coastline on the fringes of Macedonia in order to exploit the region's rich natural resources, and these settlements succumbed to the Macedonians early in this extraordinary tale of conquests. After Alexander, Macedonian kings based at Pella maintained a flourishing kingdom until they were toppled by the legions in the second century BC, when the whole area became part of the Roman Empire.

Athenian snobbishness notwithstanding, the Macedonians embraced Greek culture (Euripides and Aristotle, among others, graced the royal court). The treasures from the Royal Tombs at Vergina and elsewhere are among the most accomplished and beautiful artefacts to have survived from the ancient world.

Macedonia flourished under the Pax Romana, with important centres at Philippi and Thessalonica (Salonica). The latter went on to become a cultural and religious bastion of the medieval Byzantine empire, second only to Constantinople itself.



*Thessaloniki, wood engraving c. 1880.*

### Itinerary

**Day 1.** Fly at c. 6.10am from London Gatwick to Thessaloniki (British Airways). From there drive eastwards via the recently constructed Egnatia motorway to the harbour town of Kavala. First of two nights in Kavala.

**Day 2: Thasos, Kavala.** Reached by ferry, Thasos is a very attractive island, rugged and densely forested. The remains of the ancient city include one of the best-preserved agora complexes in Greece. The old part of Kavala, crowned by a Byzantine castle, sits on a promontory above the port joined to hills behind by a massive Ottoman aqueduct.

**Day 3: Philippi, Amphipolis.** Philippi is known for the battles in 42 BC that led to the victory of Octavian and Antony over Brutus and Cassius, and as the place where St Paul established the first Christian community in Europe. Striking ruins of a theatre, forum and Early Christian basilicas are situated in an attractive valley. Amphipolis was an important and prosperous city from its founding as an Athenian colony in 437 BC until its demise in the 8th–9th centuries. The Hellenistic gymnasium is the best preserved in Greece. First of four nights in Thessaloniki.

**Day 4: Thessaloniki.** Start the day with a walk in the upper town along the ramparts, the Vlattadon Monastery and the little church of Hosios David with its early-Byzantine mosaics. The Archaeological Museum is an excellent, extensive and well presented collection. Free afternoon or an optional visit to three great Byzantine churches.

**Day 5: Pella, Lefkadia, Vergina.** Pella was the luxurious capital of Macedonia, birthplace of Philip II and his son Alexander the Great. The extensive but only partly excavated site has outstanding floor mosaics, and there are excellent finds in the attractive new museum. A Macedonian tomb at Lefkadia has rare, high-quality paintings. Vergina is the site of the tombs of Philip II and members of his family. Only fairly recently discovered, the astonishing grave goods are among the finest survivals from the ancient world.

**Day 6: Dion.** One of the most important religious centres of ancient Macedonia, dedicated to Zeus. The site is known for its well-preserved ruins, including temples dedicated to the father of the Olympian gods and other deities, theatres, and Roman baths. It is located at the foot of Mount Olympus, which has lush vegetation and abundant water sources. Back in Thessaloniki, the award-winning Museum

## In Search of Alexander continued

of Byzantine Culture displays artworks and artefacts dating from the 2nd to the 20th centuries. Most of the significant Roman remains date to the city's time as an Imperial capital under Emperor Galerius (AD 305–311): parts of his palace, the Arch of Galerius and the impressive bulk of the Rotonda, which was probably built as his mausoleum.

**Day 7: Thessaloniki.** Fly from Thessaloniki (British Airways), arriving at London Gatwick at c. 3.30pm.

### Lecturer

**Professor Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones.** Chair of Ancient History at Cardiff University and a specialist in the history and culture of the ancient Near East and Greece. Lloyd has published widely on the history of Iran, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece, and other times and cultures in global history. His books include *Creating a Hellenistic World, King and Court in Ancient Persia*, *The Hellenistic Court*, *Persians: the Age of the Great Kings*, *Ancient Persia and the Book of Esther*, and *The Cleopatras: the Forgotten Queens of Egypt*. His next publication is about the great city of Babylon and he is currently engaged in a research project on the royal harem in ancient Egypt and the Near East. Lloyd has contributed to TV documentaries for the BBC, Netflix and others and is a regular guest on podcasts including 'The Ancients and Empires' Podcast. He is an ordained minister in the Church in Wales.

### Practicalities

**Price, per person. Two sharing:** £3,610 or £3,350 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £4,190 or £3,930 without flights.

**Included:** flights (economy class) with British Airways (Airbus A320); private coach travel throughout; accommodation as described below; breakfasts, 4 lunches and 5 dinners with wine, water and coffee; all admissions; all tips for waiters, drivers and guides; all state and airport taxes; the services of the lecturer, tour manager and a local guide.

**Accommodation. Egnatia Hotel, Kavala** (egnatiahotel.gr): modern hotel, well located with fine views. **Electra Palace Hotel, Thessaloniki** (electrahotels.gr): traditional 5-star hotel with views of Aristotelous Square and the Mediterranean.

**How strenuous?** You will be on your feet for lengthy stretches of time in some cases on exposed sites and walking over rough terrain. Sure-footedness and agility are essential. Average distance by coach per day: 60 miles.

**Group size:** between 10 and 22 participants.