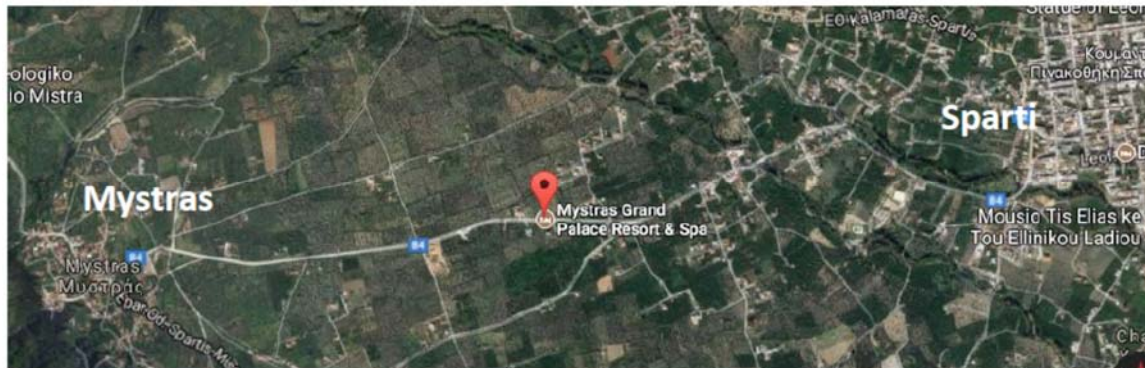


## A Brief History of Sparta

The workshop will take place in a new Hotel, **The Mystras Grand Palace Resort & Spa**, which is situated in the middle of the road that connects the city of Sparta and Mystras and close to the foothills of mountain Taygetus (2,404 m high).



**The Mystras Grand Palace Resort & Spa**



**Laconia Prefecture**

**Sparta** is a town and municipality in Laconia. It is located at the site of ancient Sparta and in the Evrotas River valley. The municipality was merged with six nearby towns in 2011. It had a total population (as of 2011) of 35,259, of whom 17,408 lived in the city. **Mystras** is a place that was developed in the middle ages, during the occupation by Franks at around 1200 AD and later as the centre of Byzantine power in southern Greece. Today Mystras constitutes a Byzantine complex of churches and buildings with distinct and well preserved architectural elements. The stunning natural beauty of the area of Lakonia and the wide range of cultural and tourist attractions make this part of Greece a very interesting and attractive place to explore and enjoy.

Other places of particular interest and beauty in Lakonia include Taygetus, Mani, Diros Cave, Monemvasia, Elafonisos and Gytheio.

	
<b>Taygetus</b>	<b>Mani</b>
	
<b>Diros Cave</b>	<b>Monemvasia</b>
	
<b>Elafonisos</b>	<b>Gytheio</b>

Sparta is associated with many historical events from the depths of the past where truth and myth are tangled. In Greek mythology, the Trojan War was carried out against the city of Troy by the Achaeans (Greeks) after Paris of Troy took Helen (a very beautiful woman) from her husband Menelaus, King of Sparta. Menelaus, under the leadership of his brother Agamemnon, King of Argos, took part with other Kings of Peloponnesian cities in the military campaign against Troy. Helen was offered to Paris by the Greek Goddess of beauty and love Aphrodite, because Paris had judged Aphrodite as the most beautiful Goddess among Hera, Athena and her in front of Zeus. This judgement and the abduction of Helen have inspired many artists around the world (see below). The Paris-Helen love affair is the mythological basis for the beginning of the Trojan War.

Ancient Athens was famous for its intellectual culture, but Sparta was glorified for some interesting social and ethical characteristics which had made it unique in the ancient world and strong enough to dominate Greece in the fifth century B.C. The Spartans' culture and social organization were based on physical strength and waging war. The Klingons, on the Star Trek TV series, are said to be based on the Spartans. Thus, Sparta never produced philosophers (unlike Athens) except Lykourgos, a



**The Judgment of Paris**

Francois-Xavier Fabre (1808)

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:François-Xavier\\_Fabre\\_-\\_The\\_Judgment\\_of\\_Paris.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:François-Xavier_Fabre_-_The_Judgment_of_Paris.jpg)



**The Abduction of Helen**

Paris Giovanni Francesco Susini (1627)

<http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/1202/giovanni-francesco-susini-the-abduction-of-helen-by-paris-italian-1627/?dz=0.5000,0.7080,0.40>

The J. Paul Getty Museum

semi-mythical figure in the 8th century BC who had set the strict rules for the social organization of Sparta. The young boys in Sparta would live with their families until the age of 7. Only healthy children were allowed to survive, whereas weak or 'defective' children were thrown into the gorge of Keadas. The boys followed a strict military education making them brave and excellent soldiers - they slept on the floor, ate crude food, and wore light clothes even during winter. When talking with other people, they used short, precise phrases, making famous the apothegm: "To Lakonizein esti philophin " which means "brevity is a type of philosophy". Spartan girls followed an analogous education based on strict rules. In addition to housekeeping, their mission in Spartan society was to grow strong sons for the city and its army. The famous phrase "I tan I epi tas" was spoken by mothers to their sons before wars, meaning "come back with your shield, or on it". The Spartans were dedicated to war, to a strict and disciplined environment, and they would not marry until the age of 30, thus devoting their best years to the state. This dedication was extremely strong and they were educated never to surrender. As all citizens of Sparta were associated with military activities, farm work and other such duties were carried out by slaves, named Helots.

The most important event in the history of Sparta is the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 BC, when King Leonidas of Sparta and his 300 crack soldiers (plus 7,000 or so support troops from other cities) held the enormous Persian army at a narrow coastal pass for 7 days (including 3 full days of battle), giving the other Greek states precious time to mobilize their armies to defend Greece (you must see the film "300" before you come to the workshop!). On the last day of battle, Leonidas realized a traitor had revealed a mountain path that was allowing the Persians to outflank them, and so he dismissed the bulk of the Greek army and remained to guard their retreat with his 300 Spartans, 700 Thespians, and 400 Thebans, fighting to the death in the historically famous last stand. They knew they had two choices - return home as winners or die - and they knew there was no going home.

The longstanding rivalry between Sparta and Athens climaxed during the long Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC). In the early stages of the war, the Spartans were losing, but when an epidemic took hold within the walls of Athens, the Spartans began to get the upper hand. In 404 BC, the Spartans crushed the Athenian fleet, destroyed the walls of the city, and established a tyrannical regime in the

former democratic city. However, their victory was soon followed by a crushing defeat in their own homeland, when the Theban army, under the leadership of Epameinondas, attacked the Peloponnese in 369 BC. In the war that followed, the Spartans were defeated and all the Helots were set free. After this war, things in Sparta began to change dramatically. All Spartan men now had to take care of their own farmlands and spend less time in military training. As a result, the power of Sparta gradually declined and it became just another small Greek state. Later, King Phillip II of Macedonia, who came to the throne in 359 BC, unified all the Greek city states into a nation. The Romans conquered Sparta in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, and gradually the town followed the fate of all Greece (for more details, see: [www.greeka.com](http://www.greeka.com) and <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/archaeology-and-history/magazine/2016/11-12/sparta-military-greek-civilization/>)

In Byzantine times, Sparta declined during the growth of Mystras, a nearby fortified town. In late 1248 AD, William II of Villehardouin, a Frankish successor of those who had conquered and controlled Achaia (north-west part of Peloponnese, around the area of Patras) during the fourth Crusade, captured Monemvasia, the last remaining Byzantine outpost on the Morea (the name of the Peloponnese during the middle-ages). The young prince examined the area of Lakonia during the winter of 1248–49, touring the countryside and selecting sites for fortification, and finally he built the fortress that came to be known as Mystras, near ancient Sparta. After a century of conflicts between the Franks and Byzantines, until its surrender to the Ottoman Turks in 1460, Mystras became the residence of a 'Despot' (Christian religious leader) in 1348. The Despot ruled over the Byzantine Morea, and the region became known as the "Despotate of the Morea". This was the city's golden age: according to the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, Mystras "witnessed a remarkable cultural renaissance, including the teaching of Plethon, and attracted artists and architects of the highest quality".



(left) Dome fresco (<https://hiveminer.com/Tags/fresco%2Cmystras/Timeline>) (right) Perivleptos Monastery ([http://www.religiousgreece.gr/peloponnese/-/asset\\_publisher/J4zsS00HIAz5/content/mone-peribleptou-mystra](http://www.religiousgreece.gr/peloponnese/-/asset_publisher/J4zsS00HIAz5/content/mone-peribleptou-mystra)) at Mystras.

Sparta remained a small town until the middle of the 19th century, when King Otto decided for historical reasons to restore it with a decree in 1834 and to create a modern architectural plan for the town. In 1989 the ruins, including the fortress, palace, churches and monasteries, were named a UNESCO World Heritage Site.