

Greek Light as an Aesthetic Experience and Poetics of Travel in Tourism Marketing

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Abstract: - Greek light constitutes a central pillar of Greece's tourism marketing and represents a fundamental, intangible tourism resource. It is inextricably linked to the sensory perception of the environment, transforming the landscape into an aesthetic experience and a "poetics of travel." Acting as an "invisible stylist," it reshapes both image and atmosphere. Through visual media (photography, video, posters, and social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Tik Tok), a "poetic Greece" is projected—a synthesis of nature, history, and emotion—targeting the visitors' quest for aesthetic fulfillment and tranquility.

Greek light is not merely a climatologically characteristic but an aesthetic experience with deep cultural roots. This unique, "lucid," and intense luminosity shapes the landscape, architecture, and the perception of time, offering a holistic experience that transcends the traditional "sun and sea" model. Photographers, by mastering the interplay between light and shadow, as well as technical elements like camera angles and lens selection, photographers create idyllic representations that imbue social and cultural snapshots with renewed value. As a fundamental intangible resource, Greek light serves as a point of differentiation, enhancing the allure of the Greek landscape in promotional campaigns. In contemporary marketing, it is utilized to highlight nature and heritage, creating an atmosphere of uniqueness. Given the significant direct and indirect contribution of tourism to the national GDP, the effective management of such intangible assets is vital for the strategic development of tourism demand in Greece.

Key-Words: - Greek light, poetic Greece, photography, tourism resources, aesthetic marketing

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1 Introduction

Following a decade of economic crisis and the subsequent health crisis caused by Covid-19, the sea and the sun constitute a major factor in attracting travelers choosing a tourist destination. Tourism is a global phenomenon with socio-political as well as economic implications.

A sea sparkling with freshness, freshly whitewashed courtyards on our islands, a few pine trees, a few white marbles, and the Greek light as an aesthetic experience and poetics of travel—this is the Greece of vacations, and that is why the main

volume of tourists comes to our country. Primarily, therefore, tourists have the opportunity to come into contact with the natural environment of the area they visit, acquiring a unique experiential experience. The natural landscape bathed in light encapsulates values and memories. Greek light is one of the most powerful and timeless axes in the promotion of Greek tourism, acting as the connecting element between landscape, history, and lifestyle. Light is not only a visual element but is directly linked to improving the psychology of visitors, offering a sense of vitality and well-being, which is a central pillar of the tourism product. The "clarity" of Greek

light, especially during the autumn and winter months, is an advantage for extending the tourist season. [1] Therefore, light constitutes an intangible tourism asset that enhances Greece's competitiveness as a destination. [2]

1.1 Tourist Facilities in Greece (1950-1974)

The period 1950-1974 is a cornerstone of Greek tourism, with the re-establishment of the Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTO/EOT) in 1950 launching the construction of the "Xenia" hotels and other infrastructure, marking the modernization of hospitality. The goal was to develop mass tourism through modern, functional facilities that highlighted the landscape, with 88 new units being developed mainly in the 1960s. Key Characteristics and Facilities (1950-1974)

The "Xenia" Program: It started in 1951, with pioneering architects such as Aris Konstantinidis creating hotels with a modern character (e.g., Delphi, Andros, Mykonos).

- Infrastructure Development: Emphasis was placed on marine tourism, with the construction of organized beaches (e.g., Asteras Vouliagmenis), cruises, and investments in road networks.

- Architectural Approach: The buildings combined the international modern style with local tradition, aiming for harmony with the natural environment.

- Political Strategy: Tourism was a central pillar of economic development, often linked to the Marshall Plan and Greece's integration into the Western bloc.

- Architects & Projects: Apart from the Xenia hotels, other hotels were developed such as the "Amphitryon" in Nafplio (K. Krantonellis) and the "Leto" in Mykonos (P. Vasileiadis).

This period transformed Greece into a popular tourist destination, laying the foundations for the mass tourism that followed.

In the Greece of reconstruction, following the implementation of the Marshall Plan, tourism was one of the key priorities for the country's economic recovery. The state-run XENIA program heralded a series of hotel facilities which, together with ongoing infrastructure works and the utilization of archaeological sites, conveyed the country's image worldwide. Greece became an international tourist destination, and the international style along with local tradition defined new continuities and discontinuities in the post-war urban and natural landscape. Following a decade of military conflicts and political instability, the country presented an image of ruins, destruction, and abandonment. The restoration of the road network and transport, the

repair of railway stations and ports, and the reinforcement of expertise in crops and livestock farming would be followed by major energy programs and the first infrastructure projects in cities and regions. Schools, health and welfare facilities, social housing, and public activity buildings were erected rapidly, while the foundations were laid for the structural modernization of commerce and industry.

1.2 The Evolution of Tourism in Greece (1974-2004)

The period 1950-1974 constitutes a cornerstone of Modern Greek tourism, with the re-establishment of the GNTO (1950) launching an extensive infrastructure program. The dominant element was the construction of the "Xenia" hotels, the development of organized beaches, and the creation of new tourist hubs in the provinces, combining modernism with the enhancement of the landscape. [3]

Key Axes of Tourist Facilities (1950-1974) [4]

The "Xenia" Program: The state took a leading role in constructing high-aesthetic hotels across Greece (e.g., Thasos, Corfu, Argostoli, Tsagarada, Ypati).

Architecture & Modernism: The "Xenia" hotels were designed by leading architects (such as Aris Konstantinidis), introducing the principles of the modern movement to Greece, emphasizing free layout, the use of local materials, and connection with the natural environment.

Light as a Divine Entity Development of Holiday Villages: In the 1960s, the focus shifted from isolated hotels to integrated tourist complexes. Characteristic examples include Asteras Vouliagmenis and the Lagonissi Coast, which constituted one of the first fully integrated "holiday villages" in Europe.

GNTO Strategy: The goal was to create group tourism and highlight archaeological sites and natural landscapes, developing tourist infrastructure (beaches, restaurants) at key points.

Major Architectural Works

Xenia of Delphi (1953): Designed by Dimitris Pikionis. [5]

Leto Hotel in Mykonos (1953): Designed by Prokopis Vasileiadis. [6]

Amphitryon Hotel in Nafplio (1951-1954): Designed by Kleon Krantonellis. [7]

This period is characterized by the transition from elite to mass tourism, with architecture functioning as a tool for the country's modernization. From the research commissioned by the GNTO and carried out in the period 1999-2000 entitled "Market Study of

Greek Tourism," the conclusion was that Greece's most important advantage over other competitive Mediterranean destinations lies in its cultural resources, primarily archaeological sites and museums. The results of the research led to the proposal to highlight the culture of Greece through the triptych of sun, sea, and culture source (Association of Greek Tourism Enterprises 1999).

1.3 Development of Cultural Routes in Greece (2004-2026)

The development of cultural routes in Greece during the 2004-2026 periods presents an evolution from the fragmented utilization of monuments toward a strategic, integrated approach that connects culture with tourism, local development, and sustainability.

Key Milestones and Evolution (2004-2026):

Initial Period (post-2004): After the Olympic Games, emphasis was placed on highlighting individual archaeological sites and museums. Gradually, the idea of interconnecting monuments (cultural routes) matured as a means to extend the tourist season and disperse visitors beyond established centers.

- Institutional Framework and European Routes: Greece integrated the guidelines of the Council of Europe, participating in cross-border routes (e.g., The Routes of the Olive Tree, The Routes of Saint Paul). The goal was to highlight a shared European heritage.

- Strategic Planning & Financing (2020-2026): In recent years, utilizing resources such as the Recovery and Resilience Fund, organized projects for the "Creation of Cultural Routes" are being implemented.

Cultural Routes 2026: Routes are now designed around the visitor experience, connecting cultural monuments, intangible heritage, local gastronomy, and the environment. A characteristic example is the focus on highlighting Mycenaean monuments ("Monumental Works of Cyclopes and Humans").

Connection with the Program "All of Greece One Culture": Until 2026, this institution strengthens the development of cultural activities throughout the country, integrating live arts into archaeological sites.

Strategic Significance

Cultural routes in Greece function not only as a tourism product but also as a tool for dialogue between local communities, promoting sustainable development. The trend for 2026 indicates the integration of digital technology for guiding and promoting these routes.

In recent years, tourism has been evolving dynamically and is supported by "smart" applications

used by "new" tourists, who utilize them to select a destination and organize their trip, even in areas that a few years ago were not known as tourist destinations. The numbers of global arrivals show a rapid increase, leading to concerns about the potential "disturbance" of the tourist destination for its residents and tourism itself. This situation necessitated a shift toward a sustainable approach to the development and management of tourist destinations, which is expressed by the competent tourism bodies through the formulation of definitions, goals, and guidelines for policymakers and travelers alike.

The tourist maps provided by official bodies through their websites, judging by the findings of the relevant study, do not have the necessary characteristics to cartographically render the identity of the tourist destination qualitatively and effectively. Research was also conducted on a sample of "new" travelers, which showed that the use of maps is still a requirement for travelers, who use well-known mapping platforms, the most popular being Google (Google Maps). New travelers, who spend many hours searching for information on the internet, are interested in thematic categories of tourism, mainly cultural tourism and outdoor tourism. The purpose of their trip is primarily to get to know the destination, which is why they seek information related to local products, gastronomy, and meeting locals. Finally, at a significant rate of 50%, they are aware of the terms sustainable or responsible tourism and their meaning. Taking into account the literature and the evaluation of the current situation from the perspective of tourist destinations and visitors, it is concluded that the role of the map as a means of presenting the tourist destination has been downgraded by the competent bodies.

2 Greeks Abroad Return to the Homeland for Vacations

Another evolving tourism trend is that every year Greeks living abroad return to the homeland to see family, relatives, and friends, but also to enjoy their vacations on familiar grounds. However, this great desire of the Diaspora Greeks to travel to their country of origin often clashes with significant difficulties they face when they want to book their vacations in the homeland, to bring along their friends, relatives, and so on, besides their own families. These difficulties are focused not so much on cost but on facilitating the Greek expatriate to come to Greece more times a year.

The return of Greeks from abroad to the homeland for vacations is a stable, emotionally charged tradition, which is reinforced after periods of restrictions. Beyond summer vacations, a broader trend of "repatriation" or connection with Greece is observed, where Diaspora Greeks seek real estate properties that combine quality of life and investment opportunities.

Key Points Regarding the Return of Greeks Living Abroad:

- **Emotional Connection:** Arrival in Greece, such as in Athens, is not considered merely a trip, but a return to one's roots, starting from the very first handshake.

- **Repatriation/Investment Trend:** The Greek Diaspora does not return only for vacations but shows a keen interest in the real estate market, combining love for the homeland with investments.

Support Initiatives: There are programs, such as Brain Regain, aimed at supporting Greeks abroad who wish to return to Greece.

Special Cases (2026): In March 2026, special repatriation flights were carried out from regions such as Doha and Dubai, due to special conditions in the Middle East.

Returning to the homeland, whether for vacations or permanently, remains a strong desire for many Greeks living abroad.

In antiquity, light was not merely a natural phenomenon but a fundamental divine entity, directly connected to creation, life, and spirituality. The worship of light runs through ancient civilizations, functioning as a bridge between the perceptible (material) and the intelligible (spiritual) world. Later, in the more refined Greek world, the worship of the Sun became linked to Apollo. [8]

3 Light as a Divine Power in Ancient Greece

Sun-God: The Sun was worshipped as the supreme god, not only for its heat but primarily as the source of divine light.

Source of Life: Light was identified with life and creation. The ancients believed that light is a radiant vapor, opposite to darkness, which constituted a "black vapor."

Light and Intellect: Light is connected to consciousness and reason. In philosophical thought, light was considered to make things visible, but also intelligible, allowing humans to understand their course.

Symbolism and Philosophy

Bridge of Worlds: Light was considered the intermediate element connecting the divine world with the human world.

Philosophical Approach: From antiquity to today, light has been an object of study, symbolizing truth, higher knowledge, and spiritual clarity.

Theological Dimension

Creation: The phrase "let there be light" is the first divine command, underlining the theological character of light as an element of creation.

Divine Essence: Light, as a divine entity, determines the path of man, allowing him to choose knowledge. In summary, light in antiquity was the visible manifestation of the divine, a life-giving force that gave meaning to existence. The idea that light originates from Eros, and from Eros the gods originate, can hardly meet any objection even today. [9]

Undoubtedly, there is the Greek perception of man and the universe of the gods that changes in the face of human deeds. In the years we call Homeric, the center is divine personas, while human figures live in a state of semi-dependence; in the classical era of the fifth century in Athens, man is the citizen-warrior, who speaks and fights, appearing as an agent who shoulders his own destiny. At this time, culture changes meaning and style: tragedy, from purely religious, becomes a political ritual; comedy satirizes and exercises political criticism, while historical geography is reinforced with legendary descriptions, and mythical extensions are succeeded by landscapes and customs that are described and analyzed precisely. Events are recorded in detail, sciences such as medicine enter into the research of the causes of illness rather than the dubious sources of divination, physics changes by moving away from magical theories to the study of phenomena, and the art of speech is no longer a privilege of noble families but becomes accessible to citizens so they can have an opinion. Philosophy stops being mysterious and distant, and claims, through the game of questions and answers, its right to determine events.

4 The Platonic Vision of the World, the Theory of Senses Through Light

In antiquity, light was not merely a natural phenomenon but a fundamental divine entity, directly connected to creation, life, and spirituality. The worship of light runs through ancient civilizations, functioning as a bridge between the perceptible (material) and the intelligible (spiritual)

world. «According to Plato, a soft light due to the internal flame of the eye unites with the light of day and forms a homogeneous luminous substance. This substance constitutes the bridge that allows images of the external world to reach the soul. There is, therefore, a deeper harmony between the function of the eye and the Sun». [10]

In summary, light in antiquity was the visible manifestation of the divine, a life-giving force that gave meaning to existence.

In the history of civilization, there is no "Greek Miracle"; there is a Greek Light which constitutes a basic element for what we call spiritual culture. The fifth century in Athens, when Plato philosophizes and which culminates in the tragic trial leading to the death of Socrates, undoubtedly led us and exercised a decisive influence upon us. We must not overlook the Sophists, who gave particular importance to the study of the world based on the senses, emphasizing the process of "skepticism," while shaping the view that knowledge, truth, and values are relative concepts. According to the testimony of Plato and Aristotle, they progressively engaged in formulating sophisms through which they supported paradoxical views, covertly violating the laws of logic. [11]

5 Aristotle, Clarifying the Nature of Light

Aristotle, clarifying the nature of light, argues that it is neither a body (matter) nor an emission of particles, but is the activity (or entelechy) of the transparent. According to Aristotelian physics, light is the presence of a medium (such as air or water) which becomes active through the presence of a fire or a celestial body, enabling vision. «Essentially, the Aristotelian theory of vision provides a reference vocabulary for the function of the senses. Its virtue consists in that it forms part of a very broad system that attempted to consistently interpret the physical and spiritual world. It is, therefore, not surprising that the main characteristics of the theory are found in Aristotle's work *On the Soul* (*Peri Psyches*), which is a magnificent treatise on the whole of human nature.»[12]

Key Points of the Aristotelian Theory of Light:

- The Transparent: Light is not matter, but a property that permeates transparent bodies (air, water, ether).
- Light vs. Fire: Aristotle distinguishes light from fire. Fire is a body (element), while light is the state (the "activity") caused in the transparent medium, enabling transparency.

- Vision and Color: Light is necessary for colors to become visible. Without light, the transparent medium remains in a latent state (potentiality), while with the presence of light it becomes active (actuality).

- No Motion/Speed: Contrary to modern physics which views light as the propagation of energy at a specific speed, for Aristotle light is an instantaneous state (presence), not a motion that requires time to propagate.

Overall, the Aristotelian approach connects light with teleology and entelechy (the completion of existence), viewing it as the necessary condition for beings to fulfill the purpose of their visibility.

6 Euclid and Geometric Light

Euclid (c. 300 BC), known as the "father of Geometry," shed ample "light" on the understanding of space, organizing the mathematical knowledge of his time. His "geometric light" refers to the clarification of fundamental concepts, the proof of theorems, and the construction of a logical system that guides thought through clear vision. «The first to formulate mathematical elements regarding the behavior of light is the great geometer of antiquity, Euclid». [13]

Euclid's Contribution and «Geometric Light»:

The Elements: In his monumental work *Elements*, Euclid did not merely discover new things but organized existing knowledge, setting the foundations of geometry. This work is based on a method of "geometric light" – the use of a small set of axioms to derive a multitude of propositions.

Axiomatic Method: Euclid's method, which follows the tactic of premising the five postulates in the first book of the *Elements*, constitutes a luminous example of logic and structure.

Optics and Other Works: Beyond the *Elements*, Euclid wrote other important works, such as *Optics*, *Catoptrics* (dealing with mirrors and light), and *Phenomena*, which confirm his interest in the analysis of light.

Geometric Arrangement: Euclid is considered chiefly responsible for the arrangement (order) of the propositions and many of the proofs used to this day, offering a clear, geometric depiction.

In conclusion, Euclid and "geometric light" refer to his legacy, which illuminated the path for mathematical thought and the geometric understanding of the physical world.

7 Basic Aspects of Greek Light in Marketing

Greek light, as a central element of tourism marketing, is transformed from a simple natural phenomenon into an experiential aesthetic experience and "poetics of travel," offering visitors a sense of rebirth, purity, and connection with the landscape. Marketing Greece, through initiatives like "Good Tourism Stories," utilizes this atmosphere to highlight authenticity and personal hospitality, reinforcing the traveler's narrative.

Basic Aspects of Greek Light in Marketing:

- **Aesthetic Experience:** The light that "bathes" Cycladic landscapes, architecture, and the sea creates intense contrasts that attract travelers seeking beauty and tranquility.
- **Poetics of Travel:** Light is not merely visible but "palpable," shaping an emotive experience that inspires "good stories" and travel narratives.
- **Tourism Marketing & Branding:** Highlighting Greek light reinforces the image of the country as a destination offering quality of life and authenticity.
- **Connection with Locality:** Light is integrated into everyday life, highlighting local producers and traditions.

The use of light in marketing aims to create a lasting impression, turning the journey into a memorable and soulful experience.

8 Tourism in Greece, Financial Analysis

Tourism constitutes a fundamental driver of support and growth for the Greek economy, significantly impacting the GDP and the balance of payments. The financial dimension of the sector is characterized by a steady upward trend, particularly after 2012, with tourism demand showing increasing trends. [14]

Key Financial Data (2023-2024)

Arrivals and Revenues: In 2023, inbound tourism recorded historical highs, surpassing previous years in both arrivals and revenues.

Contribution to GDP: The tourism sector is one of the main pillars of the economy, a trend that continues and is being reinforced.

Resilience: Despite economic crises, Greek tourism has shown remarkable resilience.

Financial Implications and Analysis

Positive Impact: Tourism directly contributes to increasing business turnover, creating jobs, and generating public revenue.

Crisis Analysis: Studies have examined the impact of the economic crisis (2007-2008) on Greek tourism,

analyzing how financial instability affected the sector.

Growth and Investments: The sector attracts investments, while financial analyses are conducted to evaluate the performance of tourism enterprises.

For more detailed information and current data, you can refer to the studies of INSETE (Institute of the Association of Greek Tourism Enterprises).

9 Light Over Greece. The Case of Photographer Herbert List (1903-1975)

Herbert List, the German photographer who became known as the "Master of Metaphysical Photography," was inextricably linked with Greek light, capturing Greece in a unique, almost dreamlike way, particularly during his travels between 1937 and 1939.

The Magic of Greek Light

"Light Over Greece": List was enchanted by the Greek light, which he used to highlight the surreal and metaphysical dimension of his subjects, combining classical antiquity with the everyday life of the era.

Metaphysical Atmosphere: Influenced by *pittura metafisica* (metaphysical painting), his photographs in Greece are not simple captures, but scenes full of mystery, shadows, and a sense of eternal silence.

- **Archaic Dream:** List often staged the human body and ancient monuments, focusing on the sensual treatment of the archaic, creating a sense of a "dream."

The Work "Hellas"

- **The Edition "Hellas":** In 1937-1939 he traveled to Greece, and in 1953 he published the book *Hellas*, a masterpiece of photography that records Greek beauty with a poetic and classical gaze.

- **Themes:** He photographed landscapes, archaeological sites, and people, rendering the essence of Greek identity through the "Magic Eye."

Herbert List, through his lens, managed to transform Greek light into an art tool that bridges the past with the present. «Herbert List, after much collaboration with magazines, published jointly with his friend Vittorio De Sica many photographic albums. As a genuine traveler of countries and a citizen of the world, he would create dreamlike images, which today constitute important examples of refined and simultaneously surrealist photography, successfully balancing between existence and illusion.»[15] «Herbert List was born in Hamburg in 1903 and died at the age of 69 in 1972. In 1935 he

left Germany as National Socialism was incompatible with his lifestyle and personal values, and settled in Paris. From 1936 to 1941 he worked for long periods in Greece, creating the book *List Uber Hellas*, which was printed in 1949.»[16] Photo Imaging Group. Athens. «I photograph to send a message simultaneously inside me for approval and outward as a need for communication.»[17]

10 The Poet Tasos Leivaditis and the Greek Light

Tasos Leivaditis (1922-1988), one of the most important post-war Greek poets, was the poet of love, social sensitivity, defeat, and the search for meaning. Although his work was often linked to the darkness of exile, melancholy, and the "black" moments of history, "Greek light" plays a special, often internal or nostalgic role in his poetry.

Light as Memory and Innocence (Early Period)

In his early works, light is inextricably linked with Greek nature, the neighborhood (Metaxourgeio), and lost innocence. It is the light that illuminates dreams for a better world, despite the difficult conditions of his life (imprisonments, exiles).

Light as Counterpoint (Post-war/Mature Period)

Following the defeat of the revolution and the collapse of ideological certainties, Leivaditis turns to a more existential poetry. "Greek light" often functions as a counterpoint (contrast) to the darkness of existential anxiety. While the poet is tortured by "who am I," the light of Greece remains a symbol of an eternal, almost metaphysical truth that transcends human tragedies.

Light in Erotic/Melancholic Poetry

In his mature period, light is often the light of dusk or the light in the eyes of the beloved, connected with nostalgia and the euthanasia of memories. It is a "low-voiced" light, fitting with loneliness and the need for human warmth.

Summary

For Leivaditis, Greek light is not just the intense summer light of tourism. It is:

A companion in difficult hours.

A memory of childhood.

A counter weight to existential Loneliness.

As noted in reviews, the poet made "art out of pieces of his heart," and this light is often the light that illuminated the wreckage of his dreams.

11 Epilogue

Greek light is far more than a natural or climatic phenomenon. It constitutes a unique cultural and aesthetic asset that has shaped the country's landscape, architecture, artistic expression, and collective identity throughout history. Its exceptional quality has inspired philosophers, poets, painters, photographers, and travelers, transforming Greece into a destination where light itself becomes part of the travel experience. From a tourism marketing perspective, Greek light functions as an important intangible tourism resource, contributing to the creation of a distinctive destination brand.

Through photography, cinematography, digital media, and promotional campaigns, it reinforces the authenticity, emotional appeal, and visual identity of Greece, offering visitors memorable experiences that extend beyond the traditional "sun and sea" tourism model.

The interdisciplinary approach adopted in this study demonstrates that Greek light can be understood simultaneously as a cultural symbol, an aesthetic experience, and a strategic marketing asset. The interaction between natural landscape, cultural heritage, artistic representation, and visitors' perception creates a powerful narrative that strengthens Greece's international competitiveness as a tourism destination.

As Odysseas Elytis repeatedly suggested in his poetic work, Greek light is not merely something that illuminates the landscape; it illuminates memory, history, and human consciousness. Preserving and promoting this unique intangible heritage through sustainable tourism policies and innovative marketing strategies can further enhance the international image of Greece while contributing to the long-term development of its tourism sector.

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