



# MOVIES

G R E E C E

## GREECE THROUGH FILM / 1

From the “A” of *Alexander the Great* to the “Z” of *Zorba the Greek*, Hollywood has made plenty of movies about Greece. To help you get ready for your journey, you might like to check out some big-budget epics about classical heroes and comedies set in the beauty of the Greek Islands. But we also recommend seeing how Greek filmmakers portray their own society. Highlighted below are powerful dramas dealing with the political violence that swept Greece during and after World War II, and an arthouse examination of contemporary love and unease.

### **A TOUCH OF SPICE (2003)**

DIRECTED BY TASSOS BOULMETIS

Greek audiences, although not US reviewers, loved this food-themed “charmer” set against the backdrop of recent Greek-Turkish relations. It’s about Fanis, who grew up in his grandparents’ spice store in Istanbul but was deported to Athens, along with many ethnic Greeks, in the 1960s. As an adult, he returns to Turkey hoping to rediscover the taste, family, and friendships of his childhood.

### **ATTENBERG (2012)**

DIRECTED BY ATHINA RACHEL TSANGARI

Part of the so-called “new weird wave” of Greek cinema, *Attenberg* is an eccentric, poignant portrayal of a withdrawn young woman obsessed with nature documentaries. She decides it’s time to get in touch with the human species and her own sexuality.

### **MAMMA MIA! (2008)**

DIRECTED BY PHYLLIDA LLOYD

Critics had their doubts, but audiences flocked to this romantic comedy full of ABBA songs and glorious scenery from the Greek islands. Meryl Streep seems to be enjoying herself as she belts out the hits and plays a once-wild single mother at the wedding of her daughter. However, *New York Magazine* rather unkindly complained that co-star Pierce Brosnan sang like a “water buffalo.”

### **NEVER ON SUNDAY (1960)**

DIRECTED BY JULES DASSIN

This mainly English-language romantic comedy is a cross between *Pygmalion* and *Pretty Woman*. It was a somewhat scandalous hit in 1960, although modern audiences may have their own ideas about its portrayal of “free-spirited” Greeks and a “happy hooker.” American writer-director Jules Dassin stars as Homer, a classical scholar from Connecticut, who tries to reform a prostitute, the radiant Melina Mercouri. The title song won the Oscar for best original song while Mercouri was awarded best actress by the Cannes Film Festival.

### **TRIUMPH OF THE SPIRIT (1989)**

DIRECTED BY ROBERT LORGIA

The first movie to be filmed in Auschwitz, *Triumph of the Spirit* tells the true story of Salamo Arouch, who survived the camp through fighting and winning over 200 boxing matches held for the sadistic entertainment of camp guards. It is a remarkable tale, and Willem Dafoe was praised for his portrayal of Arouch. But be aware that many critics thought that the film failed to do justice to the importance of the story, with *Rolling Stone* calling the movie “woefully misguided.”



# movies

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## GREECE THROUGH FILM / 2

### **THE TRAVELLING PLAYERS (1976)**

**DIRECTED BY THEODOROS ANGELOPOULOS**

A group of actors confront the effects that World War II and the resultant Greek Civil War had on their lives and their art. This movie is long (230 minutes) and not easy to watch but, according to many critics, it rewards the effort. The *Los Angeles Times* called it "one of the major neglected masterpieces of our times."

### **300 (2007)**

**DIRECTED BY ZACK SNYDER**

Many reviewers and historians didn't warm to this fictionalized retelling of the Battle of Thermopylae (480 BCE), but audiences rushed to see the comic book violence and stylish visuals. King Leonidas leads 300 Spartan warriors in a "battle to the end" against the massive, invading Persian army.

### **TROY (2004)**

**DIRECTED BY WOLFGANG PETERSEN**

Hollywood has made plenty of big-budget spectacles based on the heroes of ancient Greece. This film, very loosely based on Homer's *Iliad*, is one of the most popular. A buffed-up Brad Pitt (Achilles) leads the Greek invasion of Troy with the help of a wooden horse. Oliver Stone's *Alexander* (2004) is another, albeit critically panned, example of the genre.

### **Z (1969)**

**DIRECTED BY COSTA-GRAVAS**

A compelling drama about Greece's repressive and often violent politics of the 1960s. This is a thinly fictionalized representation of actual events in which a prosecutor and a photojournalist investigate whether the army was involved in the "accidental" death of a left-wing politician. Roger Ebert called it a "political cry of rage and a brilliant suspense thriller." It was the first foreign-language film to be nominated for the Academy Award's Best Picture.

### **ZORBA THE GREEK (1964)**

**DIRECTED BY MICHAEL CACOYANNIS**

A box-office hit and the most famous movie about Greece and the "Greek soul." Anthony Quinn drew kudos for his depiction of the lusty, life-affirming Zorba while the film also brought Greek music and dancing to an international audience.