



Greeks in the New York Metro Area

QUICK FACTS:

Place of Origin:
Greece, Cyprus

Location in Metro New York:
Queens (Astoria, Malba, Auburndale, Bayside, Flushing, Whitestone, Jackson Heights, Fresh Meadows); Brooklyn (Fort Hamilton, Bay Ridge); New Jersey (Edgewater)

Population in Metro New York:
127,268 (ACS 2010 Single Ancestry); 40,104 (ACS 2010 Born in Greece)

Population in New York City:
58,406 (ACS 2010 Single Ancestry); 23,040 (ACS 2010 Born in Greece)

Primary Religion:
Christianity (Greek Orthodox)

Status of Christian Witness:
Less than 2% evangelical. Some evangelical resources available, but no active church planting within the past two years.

Primary Languages:
Greek, English

Registry of Peoples Code:
103480

Significant Notes:
Over 500 students are enrolled in the St. Demetrios School in Astoria, making it the largest Greek-American Orthodox school in America.

Astoria, Queens, has the largest concentration of Greeks in America.²

ALL PEOPLES INITIATIVE

LAST UPDATED: 2 / 2 0 0 8

In the surprisingly successful 2002 movie *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, the Greek-centric character Gus Portokalos claimed, “There are two kinds of people—Greeks, and everyone else who wish they was Greek.” While this sentiment is not representative of all Greek-Americans, there is nevertheless an exceptional pride that almost all Greeks have in their culture, language, food, religion, history, and country. While the Western world has certainly been shaped historically by Greek philosophy and language, the modern-day Greeks have also left a cultural imprint on the ever-evolving city of New York. As of 2010, there were 127,268 people in the New York Metro area that claimed a single Greek ancestry, with 58,406 of these being in the city itself. A significant number of Greek New Yorkers—40,104 in Metro New York and 23,040 in New York City—were actually born in their beloved country (ACS 2010).

When Did They Come to New York?

The Greek people came to the US in great numbers just before and after the fall of the Ottoman Empire (1922) and the economic crisis following the two world wars and the Greek civil war of the late 1940s. The 1960s also saw an increase of Greek immigration to New York. However, when Greece joined the European Union in the 1980s, emigration fell drastically as the economy surged and people found less reason to venture to America. Today, reverse migration back to Greece is slightly more prevalent than immigration into Metro New York.

Where Do They Live?

Over the years, the neighborhood of Astoria in Queens has earned the title “Little Greece.” Although the neighborhood has diversified with an influx of Egyptians, Bangladeshis, Brazilians, Colombians, Ecuadorians, and Peruvians, the neighborhood is still known as the Greek epicenter of America. As second- and third-generation Greeks become upwardly mobile, though, many are lured away by the more lush surroundings and abodes in Malba, Bayside, and Flushing, Queens, as well as in areas like Edgewater, New Jersey, and Fort Hamilton-Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. No matter where Greeks end up living, Astoria is such a prominent center of the Greek population that it often becomes a weekend destination for people living as far away as New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, DC.¹

What Do They Believe?

When the non-Greek Ian falls in love with the Greek Toula in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, Ian decides to become Greek Orthodox in order to win over Toula’s family. In reaction, Gus Portokalos exclaims, “It is *your lucky day* to be baptized into the Greek Orthodox Church!” The Greek Orthodox Church is practically synonymous with being Greek. Baptisms, weddings, and funerals are linked with the Church as major Greek cultural and social events, affirming the Church’s role as the hub of Greek social networking. The churches run large private schools and act as cultural centers for such activities as Greek language education. Despite many Greek-Americans’ being second or third generation, a remarkable number still retain the language due to the influence of the Church. Although some Greek-Americans have become atheists or nonreligious, they almost exclusively retain ties to the Church in which they were raised.

What Are Their Lives Like?

Toula Portokalos tried to explain her people to Ian. “So, you have two cousins, I have 27 first cousins..And my whole family is big and loud. And everybody is in each other’s lives and business. All the time!...we’re always together, just eating, eating, eating! The only other people we know are Greeks, ‘cause Greeks marry Greeks to breed more Greeks”. While certainly retaining some dominant cultural traits, many Greeks work professional jobs, have a high degree of education, and are fully integrated into American life.

How Can I Pray?

∞ Pray that the one Greek evangelical church in New York City will be a light to the Greeks who are not followers of Jesus Christ.

∞ Pray for a Bible-focused renewal to take place within the Orthodox Church.

∞ Pray for more churches to be started among the Greeks in Astoria, Flushing, and Bay Ridge.

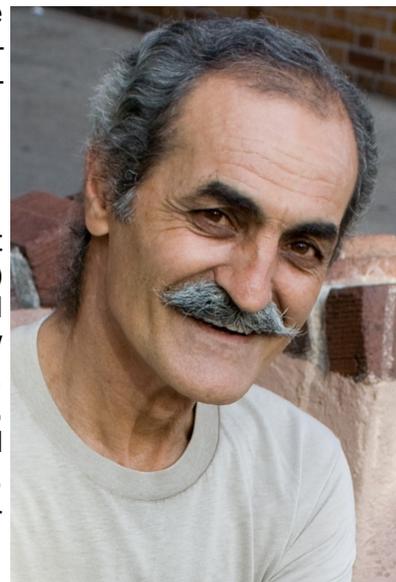


Photo by Joanna Johnson

1. Ivar Ekman, “Neighborhood Report: Astoria; Less a Greek Neighborhood, More a Greek Destination,” *The New York Times*, July 7, 2002, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/07/07/nyregion/neighborhood-report-astoria-less-a-greek-neighborhood-more-a-greek-destination.html?pagewanted=1> (accessed February 26, 2010).

2. Jane Jurgens, “Greek Americans,” in Robert Dassanowsky and Jeffrey Lehman, eds., *Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America*, vol. 2 (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale Group, 2000), 735.