



Short of time?

If you only have 30 minutes, make sure you don't miss these three objects:

**1 Discus thrower:
The Townley Discobolus**

Great Court
The iconic symbol of the 1948 London Olympic Games.

2 Victorious athlete

Room 23
A Roman copy of an original by the Greek sculptor Polykleitos.

**4 Victorious charioteer:
The Motya Youth**

Room 18
A very rare surviving example of an original Greek victory statue.

This statue is on special loan for the Olympic victory trail, courtesy of the Regione Siciliana and the Italian Cultural Institute in London.

Free display in Room 3

Sui Jianguo's discus thrower

1 June – 9 September 2012

The world-famous sculpture of the discus thrower has been adapted many times. This display features contemporary Chinese artist Sui Jianguo's interpretation.

The Asahi Shimbun Displays

Books

The Ancient Olympic Games

Judith Swaddling £9.99

Power Games: Ritual and Rivalry in the Ancient Olympic Games

David Stuttard £9.99

Objects in Focus: The Discobolus

Ian Jenkins £5

How The Olympics Came To Be

Helena East and Mehrdokht Amini £6.99

These and other titles about the ancient world are available in the Museum shops and at britishmuseum.org/shop

The British Museum

Great Russell Street,
London WC1B 3DG
🚶 Tottenham Court Road,
Holborn, Russell Square
+44 (0)20 7323 8000
britishmuseum.org

© The Trustees of the British Museum 05/2012

Related events

Colloquium: Sport and competition in Greece and Rome

Thu 14 and Fri 15 Jun, 10.00–17.30

£80, students and Members £60, includes refreshments and buffet lunch

Olympic lectures: double bill

Fri 15 Jun, 18.30

Nigel Spivey, Emmanuel College, Cambridge, presents *Olympia: the fruits of excavation*. Mary Beard, University of Cambridge, presents *More than a mascot? Wenlock and the Greeks*.

Free, booking required

Family activities: Ancient sports day

Sat 16 Jun, 11.00–16.00

Meet gladiators and experience the thrill of gladiatorial combat, explore the ancient games at Olympia, marvel at statues of victorious athletes, listen to tales of heroic feats and find out about the Olympic dark ointment. Suitable for all ages.

Free, just drop in

Colloquium:

The Roman Olympic Games

Sat 16 Jun, 14.30–17.00

Join the Roman Society to celebrate the Olympics in London.

Free, booking advised

Study day: The Olympic Games and sport across ancient cultures

Sat 23 June, 10.30–16.30

Curators and specialists discuss the role and form of sporting competitions across diverse ancient cultures.

£35 Members and concessions £28

The British Museum

Follow the ancient Olympic victory trail

1 June –
9 September 2012

Free



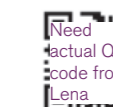
The ancient Olympic Games

The Olympic Games – still the world's main sports festival – started over 2,500 years ago in ancient Greece.

The Games were held every four years, as they are now, at Olympia in honour of the god Zeus. Athletes competed as individuals, but a victory would also bring great honour to their home city.

In the first 13 Olympics the only event was the foot race. Later, more events were added including the pentathlon, combat sports and chariot racing. Winning the Olympic crown was the greatest achievement possible for an athlete in the ancient world and over the thousand-year history of the ancient Games, vast numbers of athletes were immortalised by statues and songs written in their honour.

Follow this free trail around the Museum to discover objects whose stories will tell you more about the Olympic Games in the ancient world.



You can also scan this QR code with your phone to find out more about the objects on the trail.



1 Discus thrower: the Townley Discobolus

Great Court
The ancient technique of discus throwing seems to have been quite different from that of today's athletes. There is no evidence for anything more than a three-quarter turn, rather than the two-and-a-half turns used by modern athletes.



2 A victorious athlete: the Vaison Daidoumenos

Room 23
Winners in the ancient Olympics were allowed to set up statues of themselves at Olympia. If they won three times they could set up specially commissioned portrait statues which could cost up to ten times the average yearly wage.

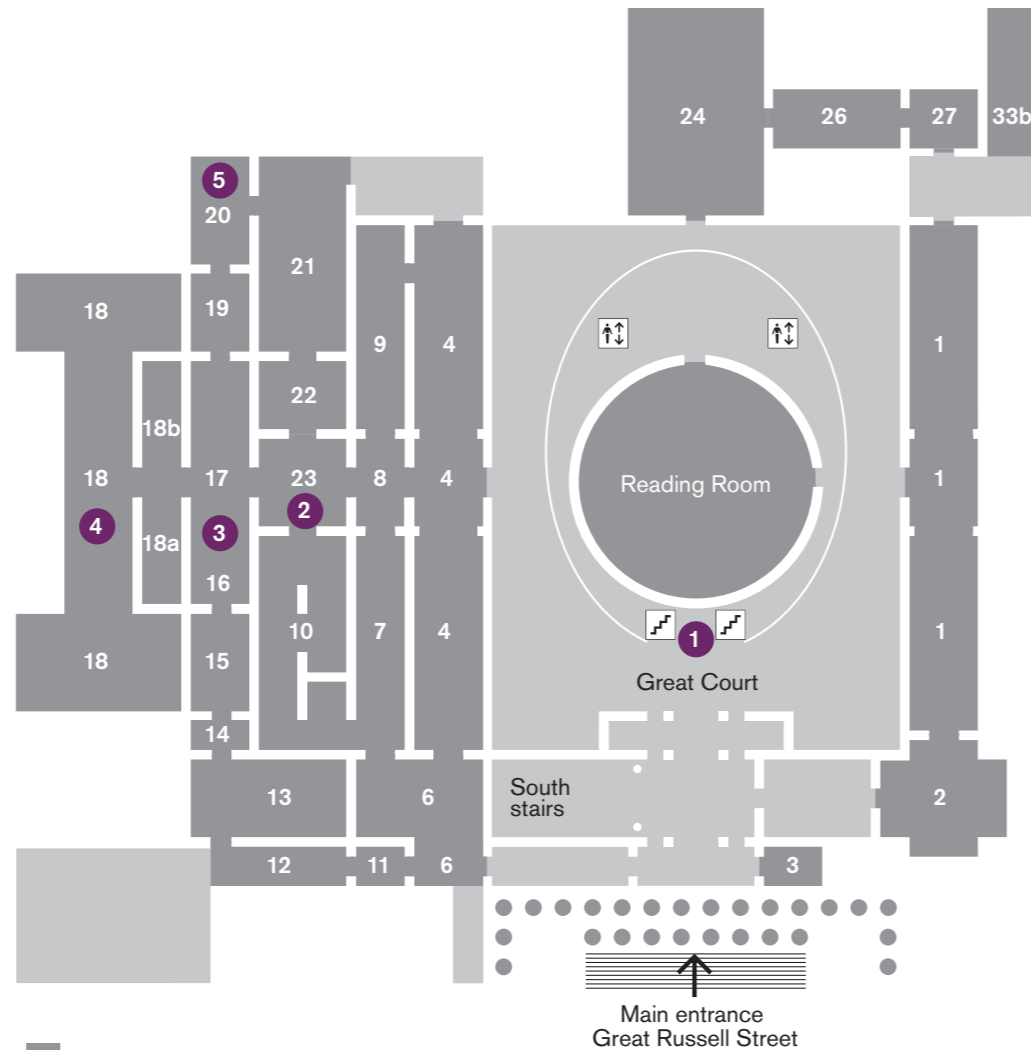


3 Model of ancient Olympia

Room 17
The ancient Olympics were always held at Olympia in western Greece. The site was sacred to Zeus, patron god of the Games. Here religion blended with sport, and temples, altars and statues stood side by side with the stadium, race course and swimming pool.

Ground floor

Level 0



1 Room numbers

1 Trail stop number

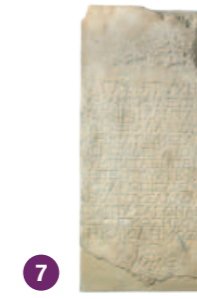
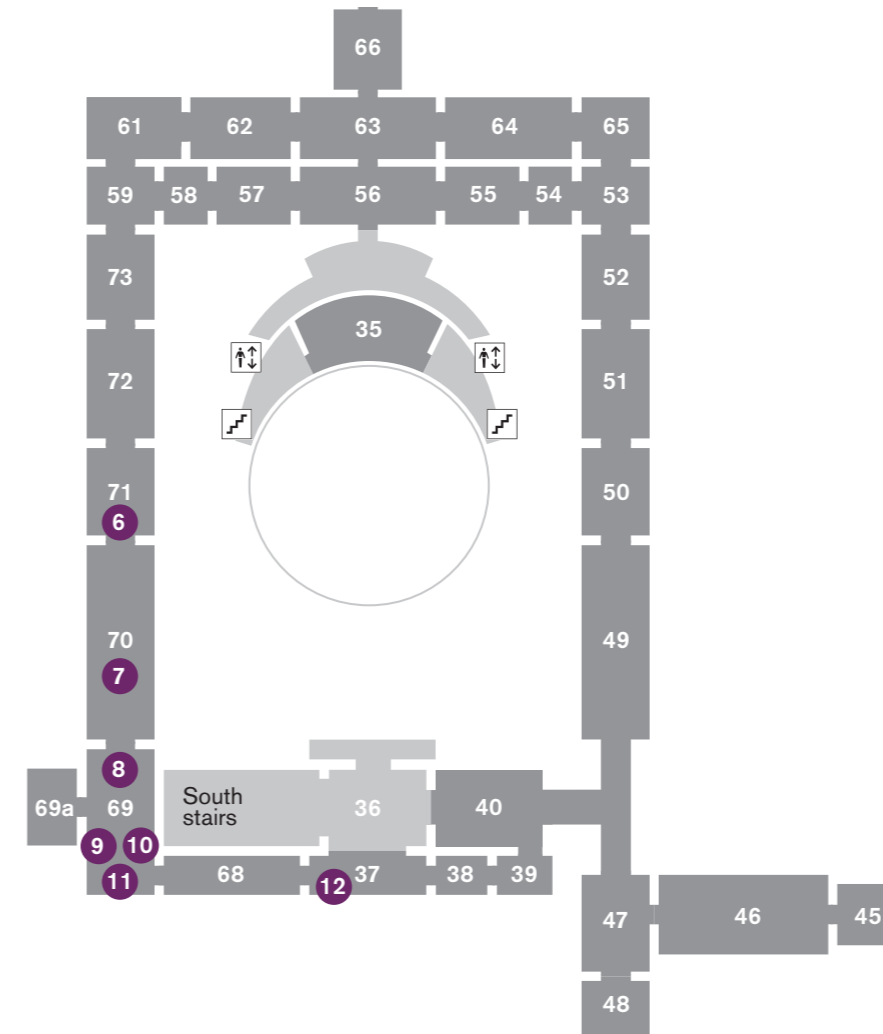
Stairs

Lift

A map of the whole Museum is available at the Information Desk. Suggested donation £1.

Upper floor

Level 3



7 Stele of Lucius who 'competed in a manner worthy of victory'

Room 70
In the ancient Olympics, it was only coming first that mattered. Second and third places were not even recorded. Lucius didn't actually win at the Olympics, but exceptionally he was recorded as having competed in a manner worthy of doing so.



8 Sprinter on a vase from Rhodes and a bronze running girl

Room 69
The greatest Olympic runner of all was Leonidas of Rhodes who won all three running events at each of the four successive Olympiads between 164 and 152 BC. Women competed in foot races at Olympia, but these were not part of the Olympic Games.



9 Mosaic showing Hercules, legendary founder of the Olympic Games

Room 69
According to legend, Hercules inaugurated the first Olympic Games to celebrate the success of one of his 12 labours – the cleaning of the stables of King Augeas. The length of the stadium, just over 192 metres, was said to be the distance that he could run in one breath.

Image to come from Judith



4 The Motya Charioteer

Room 18
Chariot-racing was a hugely popular sport in antiquity, much like Formula One nowadays. The owners of the teams of horses generally employed charioteers rather than risk their own lives in this immensely dangerous sport.



5 Panathenaic vase of a chariot race

Room 20
Chariot-racing was the only Olympic sport in which women could take part, as owners of teams of horses. Kyniska, a princess of Sparta, was the first woman to win the Olympic crown in this sport.

This statue is on special loan for the Olympic victory trail, courtesy of the Regione Siciliana and the Italian Cultural Institute in London.

Use the stairs or lifts in the Great Court to continue the trail on the Upper floor.



6 A competitor in the long jump, cheered by bystanders

Room 71
The long jump was the only type of jumping contest in the ancient Olympics. It differed vitally from our long jump in that athletes used pairs of weights or *halteres*, swung forward on take-off and back just before landing, probably as a handicap.



10 The victory of a cheating pankratiast

Room 69
The *pankration* was a brutal form of wrestling where anything went except biting and gouging. Sostatos, a pankratiast from Sikyon, was famous for breaking his opponent's fingers at the beginning of the contest. Because of this habit he became known as 'Mr Finger-Tips'.



11 The goddess Nike crowning an athlete

Room 69
Nike was the personification of victory. This winged goddess is often seen presenting victory crowns to athletes and battle heroes alike. A figure of Nike was poised in the palm of the right hand of the great gold and ivory statue of Zeus in his Temple at Olympia.



12 Gold medal from the London 2012 Olympics

Room 37
There were no medals for winners in the ancient Olympics, only crowns made from branches of the sacred olive tree at Olympia. Unlike all other olive trees, this one was special as it was said to have golden leaves.

David Watkins: Medal of the London 2012 Olympic Games. Struck by the Royal Mint. © LOCOG.

The British
Museum

**Celebrate
the art of
winning**
**Follow the
ancient
Olympic
victory trail**

Free

1 June –
9 September 2012

