**Astoria, Queens: History, Contemporary News, & Prominent Ethnic Groups**

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**INTERESTING FACTS**

Astoria, located in northwestern Queens just fifteen minutes from Manhattan, is home to a wide variety of ethnicities from all around the globe. In Astoria, you can discover the historic Kaufman Astoria Studios which until 1932 was Paramount’s East Coast production facility and now serves as a stage for TV shows. Guess what! Even your favorite childhood show, *The Cosby Show*,was filmed here. Astoria is also home to the oldest beer garden in New York City, the well-known Bohemian Beer Hall and Garden, and the adjacent award-winning and vigorous Studio Square. On Astoria’s West end, you can take a stroll through the famous Astoria Park, which in addition to extraordinary views of Upper Manhattan and the Queensboro and Hell Gate Bridges, exhibits the largest outdoor pool in all of New York City. Keep reading to discover more about this remarkable neighborhood!

**HISTORY**

**Early History**

Astoria began in the 1640s as Dutch farmland and supported Dutch families for nearly 200 years.  During this time in history, the Dutch were a prominent influence on what would eventually become the northeast US.  However, it wasn’t until 1839 that Astoria appeared as a village. In honor of John Jacob Astor, Stephen Halsey founded the village, which became part of Long Island City during the 1870s with several other villages.  This was the beginning of the various convoluted neighborhoods with no truly definable boundaries that exist today.

**Recent History**

More recently, Astoria has served as an ethnically rich part of New York City.  During the 1890s the Czechs became a major presence, although the neighborhood evolved quickly.  Varying waves of immigrants from varying corners of the globe have resulted in a constantly shifting landscape.  In the past decade, Astoria has become a hub of real estate and restaurants.  While there are definitely regions with concentrations of one group or another, the trend has recently been to blur even those boundaries; it is not uncommon to see an Egyptian restaurant next to a traditional Greek restaurant.

Astoria has served as a sort of suburban escape from the city, but it has become largely urban itself.  Still, it is generally viewed as out-of-the-way, which has made it much more attractive to newly started families.  Housing is generally affordable and is varied, from apartments to spacious condos.  This has also made it attractive to individuals from the upper class of society, especially if they can trace any cultural roots to one or another of the groups present.

**PROMINENT ETHNIC GROUPS**

**Greeks**

The Greeks have been a prominent presence in Astoria since the early 1920s and their first wave of immigration to the area.  The population of Greeks within the neighborhood has fluctuated due to changing economic conditions in Greece (which prompted some immigrants to return home) and the outward movement of members of the younger generation.  In total, there have been three large waves of Greek immigrants to the region: the 1920s, the late 1960s through 1980 (followed by a reversal due to improved conditions in Greece), and most recently within the past decade or so.  For the most part, Greek immigrants gain access to the US via the Visa Waiver Program, which is a temporary 3-month visa program.  Others arrived as students or professionals (physicians, teachers, and academics), resulting in a “brain drain” out of Greece and into the US.  Many of these individuals, however, do not find employment in their field.  They often have to begin as taxi drivers or in some other job until they can become properly certified to work in their field in the US.

Because of the economic conditions in Greece (especially in the past decade), it is very common for one or two members of a family to come to the US to find work.  They then send money  home.  In addition, they work to bring over other non-family Greeks and members of their own family.  Interestingly enough, the Greek population within Astoria has somewhat conflicting views.  Several organizations exist to promote and preserve Greek culture, especially the language and the Greek Orthodox Church.  However, it is not the “promised land” some think it to be.  Some who come to the US, specifically Astoria, return to Greece and vow never to return.  To them, the Greek culture present in Astoria is phony and forced, and many of them lament the changes the younger generations make as  part of the assimilation process.  Others, however, see just the opposite effect.  They find that their culture and heritage flourishes in Astoria, and they are proud to share it with the world.  In general, however, it seems that these are first generation immigrants.  As more generations are born within the US, the trend shifts to the former view, with the younger generations gradually giving up parts of the culture.  This has created somewhat of a divide in the Astoria Greek population, making some reluctant to travel there to live and others more excited to do so in an attempt to embrace an entirely new life.

**Italians**

In the former half of the 20th century Italian immigration was booming in America, and they were flooding into New York. By the end of WWII Italians were the most dominant ethnic group in Astoria. They kept a strong loyalty to their roots, and shaped the character of the neighborhood. Italians made up a working class population and did some blue collar work. They also made a lot of food. Some of the things that can be found in Astoria today that show off the Italian culture are the delis, butcher shops and bakeries. You can stop at a butcher shop and purchase that huge cut of meat hanging in the window, and move on to a bakery to get some delicious cannoli for dessert. The Italians continued to flourish and by 1965 (after the Hart-Cellar Act), alongside the Greeks. By the end of the latter half of the century they began to decline. Immigration from Italy came almost to a halt, and many Italian families have been moving out to the suburbs. What were once clusters are now dispersing, but their culture has still left its mark on the neighborhood, and the green, white and red flag can be seen commonly throughout it.

**LANDMARKS**

The Socrates Sculpture Park is perhaps the best-known landmark of Astoria.  It is an outdoor exhibition space featuring all manner of art forms from all kinds of artists.  It also serves as an endeavor to involve the community by hosting events that allow community members to create their own art or learn about various historical artforms and artists.

Founded in 1988, the Museum of the Moving Image is a dynamic and integral part of Astoria.  It occupies one of 13 buildings that once housed Paramount Studios.  It is devoted entirely to the history of film and all of the art and technology surrounding it and includes a variety of hands-on activities.

Continuing a rich history with film and television, Astoria also boasts the Astoria Studios, which was also once part of Paramount.  It is still used as a stage for various local and national television shows.

**ITINERARY**

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| **Time** | **Activity** | **Location** |
| **9:00** | Leave Hotel | ? |
| **9:33** | Take the Subway - Q Northbound | 57 St-7 Av |
| **9:43** | Arrive at Queensboro Plaza | Near 21st street |
| **10:30** | Museum of the Moving Image and Kaufman Astoria Studios | 34-12 36th St, Long Island City, NY 11106 |
| **11:30** | Socrates Sculpture Park | 32-01 Vernon Blvd, Long Island City, NY 11106 |
| **12:00** | Latin American stores and cafes | Broadway St |
| **1:00** | Middle Eastern stores and cafes | Steinway St (Little Egypt) |
| **2:00** | Lunch at Il Bambino | 34-08 31st Ave, Astoria, NY 11106 |
| **3:00** | Explore Greek/Cypriot/Italian stores and cafes | Ditmars and 30th Ave |
| **4:30** | Visit Immigration Advocacy Services | 24-40 Steinway Street, Astoria, NY 11103 |
| **5:00** | Astoria Park, View of Manhattan and Hell Gate Bridge | West Queens |
| **7:10** | Take the Subway - Q Southbound | Astoria-Ditmars Blvd |

**SOURCES CONSULTED**

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