

SELF-GUIDED TOUR

# Looking to Unwind?



ANCIENT NEAR EAST

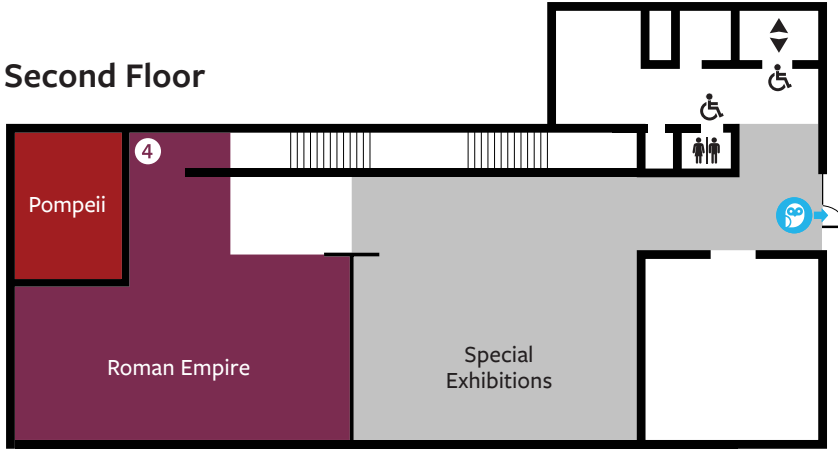


CYPRUS, GREECE, ETRURIA

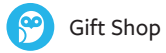
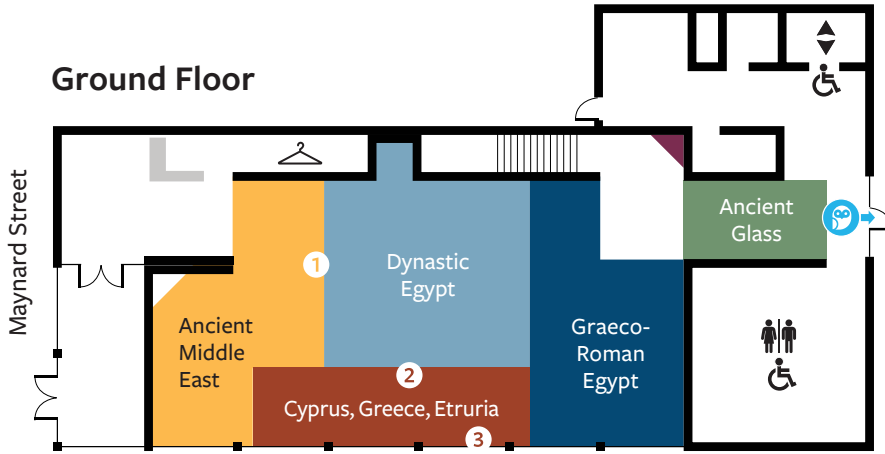


ROMAN EMPIRE

## Second Floor



## Ground Floor



Gift Shop



Restroom



Accessible



Coatroom



Elevator

## SELF-GUIDED TOUR:

# Looking to Unwind?

How do you unwind? People in ancient Greece and Rome relaxed by playing games, hosting and going to parties, and meeting up with friends. Let's look at some of the artifacts that these leisure activities left behind.

Let's begin at the "Mudbrick Mysteries" case near the main entrance, **1** on the map.

Find object 3 (KM 33676). It is a mudbrick. Mesopotamia is a region with very little stone, and in ancient times mudbrick was the most common building material. Making them was easy: just form mud mixed with a little straw into rectangular blocks and leave them in the sun to dry. Mesopotamians used mudbricks to build everything from houses to palaces and temples.

Look closely at the mudbrick in this case. Do you see the lines scratched into the surface? This brick had a second life as a **game board**. The ancients played many different types of board games. We know they played chasing games similar to Parcheesi, racing games like Chutes and Ladders, games of strategy like checkers, and games of chance like dice. We don't know what was played on this board; it could have been used for a variety of games. What kind of game do you think was played on it? Why do you think so?

Speaking of games of chance, look at object 4 (KM 18789), to the right of the brick. Have you ever seen anything like this before? The ancient Greeks called it an *astragalos*. Today we call it a **knucklebone**. It is in fact the ankle bone from a sheep or a goat and it was used in games of chance and for telling fortunes. This example was also carved with the name of its owner, Demetrios. Each of the object's four long sides would have been assigned a numeric value, similar to modern dice. When tossed with other knucklebones during a game or fortunetelling session, the numbers on the upper surfaces would be added together. The total number would have some significance to the person reading the fortune.

Let's now see another way people in the ancient Greek world relaxed. Please proceed to the Greek case, **2** on the map. We'll be looking at objects 12

(KM 2596), 15–18 (KM 2595, 2591, 2592, 2608), and 21–22 (KM 1970.1.1 and 2601).

One way elite men in ancient Greece, especially Athens, would unwind in the evenings was at a ritual drinking party called a *symposium*. The vessels you see in this case are all types used at such parties. Symposia were held in a special room of the house called an *andron*, where the master of the house and his guests would recline on couches (like Herakles does in object number 12). After dinner, the drinking party would begin with an offering of wine to the gods. A master of ceremonies, chosen by lots from among the guests, enforced the rules of conduct. During the symposium there would be singing, poetry recitations, entertainment by musicians and dancers, and various games.

Kottabos was a popular game played at symposia. Holding their wide-rimmed drinking cups in a particular way, players would fling the dregs of their wine at a target set up in the middle of the room. Objects 16–17 and 21–22 are examples of this type of cup, called a *kylix*. These cups seem like they would be difficult to use, but the wide opening was actually very easy to drink from. Decorations on kylixes usually relate to myths, daily life, and wine. Number 21 shows a man stomping grapes in a large vat.

Ancient Greeks always mixed their wine with water. Only gods and uncivilized barbarians drank unmixed wine. The master of ceremonies determined the proportion of water to wine to keep the party lively and congenial. Object 3 (KM 28809) in the South Italian case behind you (**3** on the map) is an example of a *krater*, used to mix water and wine. Slaves ladled the watered wine from the krater into the drinking cups of the party guests.

Like the Greeks, Romans enjoyed board games and elaborate parties, but they were also fond of relaxing at public baths. Please head to the Roman Baths display at the top of the stairs, **4** on the map.

Public baths were found in just about every town in the Roman empire. A unique feature of these buildings was the raised floor, which you can see here in reconstruction. Hot air from a furnace flowed under the floors and into pipes in the walls, heating the rooms quite nicely. A room called the *caldarium*, or hot room, was closest to the furnace. The *tepidarium*, or warm room, was a little farther away. The *frigidarium*, or cold room, was not connected to the furnace at all. The order in which one visited these rooms is not known; maybe it was a personal choice. What we do know is that Romans enjoyed going to the baths and did so often. They went to meet friends, exercise, get clean, make deals, have a snack, hear a lecture, or get a massage. Like today's health spas or gyms, baths came in a range of qualities. Some were sponsored by wealthy citizens and free for anyone to use. Others required a small fee, making them less accessible.

Look in the case to the left. Find object 76 (KM 80676), a curved metal blade with a bent handle. This is called a *strigil* and it was an important tool used for bathing. After working out, Romans would scrub their sweaty skin with olive oil mixed with a little sand, like we would use soap and a loofah. They would then use the strigil to scrape off the oil, sand, and sweat before heading to the baths.

Romans also enjoyed public games and spectacles, especially chariot races and gladiatorial contests. If you look above the strigil, you'll see two items related to public games, objects 67 and 69 (KM 2835 and 1971.2.233). The first is a piece of a **wall painting depicting a horse**. Two- and four-horse chariot races took place on a large oval track called a *circus*. Race teams had financial backers and used professional charioteers (although they were also slaves). Victorious charioteers were celebrities and could even win their freedom. Fans were often devoted to one team, betting on them heavily and defending them violently. The most famous teams in the city of Rome were the Blue Team and the Green Team.

The second object is an **oil lamp decorated with two battling gladiators**. Gladiatorial contests took place in amphitheaters, like the Colosseum in Rome.

Gladiators were also slaves and they lived in very harsh conditions. They were forced to train daily to fight other gladiators, criminals, and wild animals. Contrary to what is shown in many modern films, gladiators did not usually fight each other to the death. Typically, only wild animals and criminals died in the arena. But it was also all about the spectacle, so the most entertaining as well as the most victorious fighters would have been the most celebrated. Although they were slaves, gladiators had avid fans, admirers, and even wealthy patrons.

In recognition of our multicultural society we have chosen to use the more inclusive BCE (Before the Common Era) and CE (Common Era) in our printed materials, although our galleries still employ the designations BC and AD.