

north
aegean
islands

9 worlds... explore them all!



LESVOS

LIMNOS

AGIOS EFSTRATIOS

CHIOS

OINOUSSES

PSARA

SAMOS

IKARIA

FOURNOI

9 worlds...
explore them all!



NORTH AEGEAN REGION

1 Kountourioti Str., 81 100 Mytilini

Tel.: 0030 22513 52100

Fax: 0030 22510 46652

www.pvaigaiou.gov.gr

DIRECTORATE OF TOURISM

Tel.: 0030 22510 47437

Fax: 0030 22510 47487

e-mail: tourismos@pvaigaiou.gov.gr

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PHOTOGRAPHERS: Giorgos Depollas, Giorgos Detsis, Pantelis Thomaidis, Christos Kazolis, Giorgos Kakitsis, Andreas Karagiorgis, Giorgos Malakos, Christos Malahias, Viron Manikakis, Giorgos Missetzis, Klairi Moustafelou, Dimitris Pazaitis, Pantelis Pravlis, Giannis Saliaris, Kostas Stamatellis, Petros Tsakmakis, Giorgos Filios, Tolis Flioukas, Dimitris Fotiou, Tzeli Hatzidimitriou, Nikos Chatziakovou

Islands of the North Aegean

More than two thousand small and large islands adorn Greece, making up our country's archipelago, like invaluable lily pads resting on the sea. The northeast edge of the Aegean is dominated by the islands of Limnos, Agios Efstratios, Lesvos, Psara, Chios, Oinousses, Samos, Ikaria and Fournoi. Singular islands, with history's marks still easily discernible, they are living organisms of multifaceted cultural activity and expression, with popular events and traditions, performing and visual art forms, local products and practices, and architectural styles. The unique natural environment and variety of scenery make the islands of the N. Aegean stand out and lead visitors to trails for exploration and recreation. Wetlands with rare flora and fauna, salt marshes, waterfalls, dense forests of pine, walnut, oak, olive groves, mastic trees are just a few of the things to be enjoyed on the islands. The islands of the North Aegean, so very different from one another, like the pebbles on a beach, have something that brings them together and yet makes them stand out. They have managed to maintain their local culture and natural environment, offering visitors unique images, flavours and scents of times past.

"Anemoessa" Limnos of the rocks and Poliochne - the most ancient organized city in Europe - crowned with its vineyards and its islands, almost untouched by time. Agios Efstratios, "the green island", its untamed locals bearing the genuine borderland stoutness known to few. Lesvos, a multicoloured cultural canvas, harmoniously combining inherent contrasts of natural beauty. Indomitable Psara, with the flag of the revolution still flying in the harbour. Fragrant Chios, a theatre where powerful civilizations met, with the characteristic aroma of citrus and mastic trees. The small island complex of Oinousses, the base of the most active ship owners in the history of Greek shipping. "Pythagorean" Samos, the centre of Ionian civilization, with its natural beauty and aromatic wine. Ikaria of longevity, with its fierce beauty and the admirable quality of its people to draw visitors into a merry and relaxed pace. Fournoi, a journey of the senses to times past and flavours forgotten.

Islands of the North Aegean: 9 different worlds... explore them all!

Lesvos

hidden harmony



Aigeira (the dark one), Imerte (the desired one), Lasia (the one dense with trees), Makaria (the blessed one). Over time all of these names were connected to the fertile and truly desired - by countless conquerors and suitors - land of Lesvos, the third largest island in Greece, with eleven million olive trees and famous the world over.

Lesvos. A land that invites you to discover it. If you surrender yourself to its charm you will be richly rewarded, as surprises will come one after the other. Picturesque seaside hamlets and mountain destinations that make you forget you are on an island. A rich interchange of scenery, from the lush green of olive trees, pines, walnut trees, and oak trees, to the lunar landscape of the western side. Imposing mansions with neoclassic, baroque, neo-gothic, belle epoque, and renaissance features, as well as traditional stone-built homes and farm-houses.



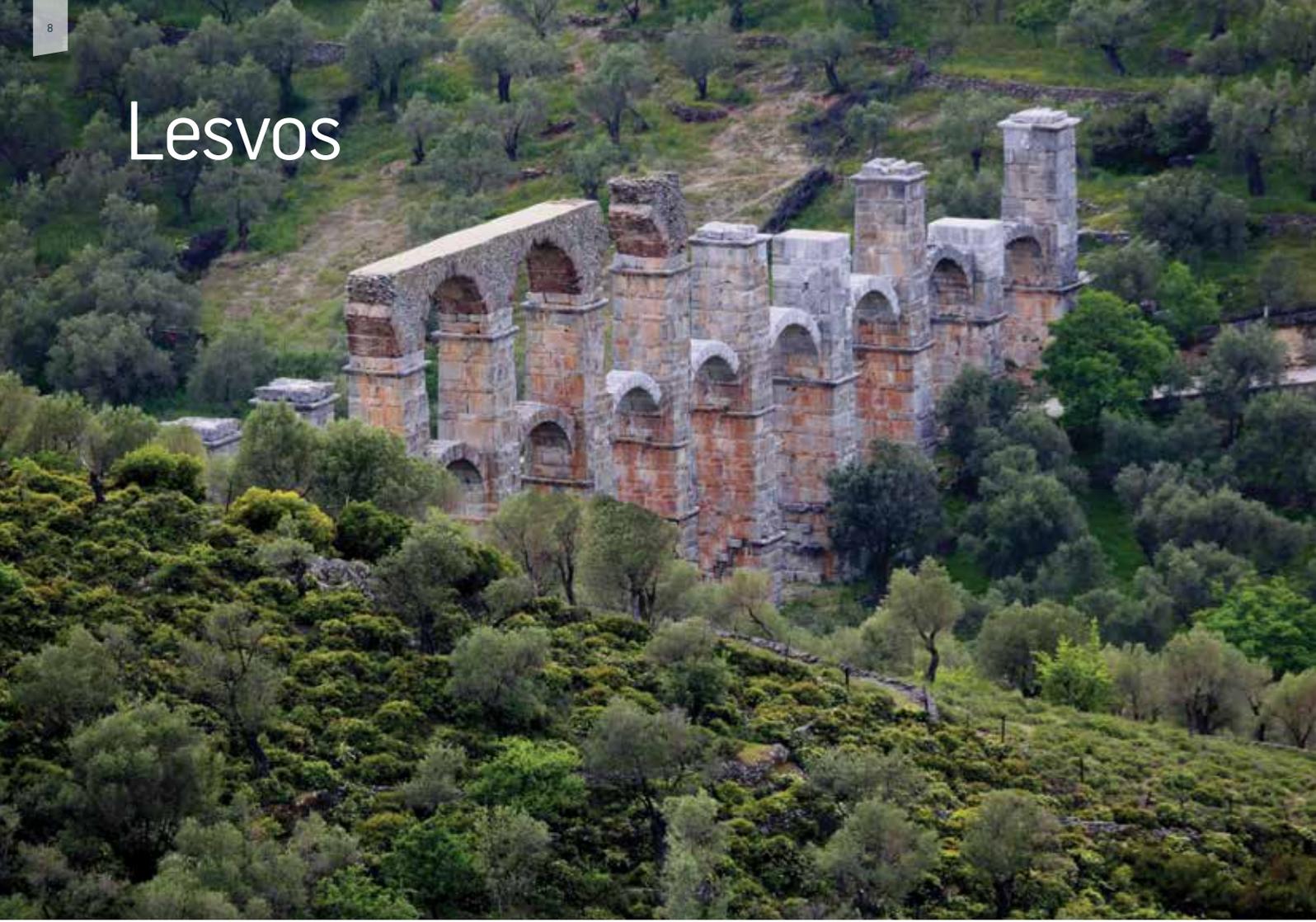
Lesvos is not a land for visitors in a rush, searching for the myth of wild night life and a hurried tour for some quick snaps on their camera. Lesvos - the beginning and end for cultures that lasted three thousand years - has a rich natural environment, unique local products, a close connection to the arts, letters and folklore. Asimakis Panselinos, a man of letters born and raised on Lesvos, wrote in his own, elegant way: "Here springs the hidden fountain that nourishes the spirit of mother Greece". Any traveler who stops to drink from this spring will realize that Lesvos is not just great in size. It is great in everything.

Lesvós





Lesvos





This is where the arts and letters have flourished since early antiquity. The two most important lyric poets of Lesbos were Alcaeus and Sappho. Alcaeus, possibly the first political poet, was better known for his pieces on love. But if he was an artist - activist, Sappho was something more. Defying all conventions of the times, which wanted women docile and humble, she, too, got involved in politics, was temporarily exiled to Sicily and returned to found a school of dance and music on Mytilene.

With such deep roots in intellectual tradition and independent thought, it comes as no great surprise that this very same island birthed men of the arts and letters such as Elytis, Myrivilis, Venezis, Panselinos, Iakovidis, Eleftheriadis, Theophilos.

With two peaks reaching almost 1000 metres, those of Mt. Lepetymno (968 m.) and, just one metre shorter, Mt. Olympus, Lesbos will easily attract both sea lovers and those who prefer, on a hot August day, to observe it from high above. However, if the mountains, forests and beaches of the island are the first temptations to invite you, it is the people and their creations that will keep you here longer than you had anticipated. The unparalleled natural beauty of Molyvos, with its traditional houses from wood and stone, the prehistoric settlements, the castle of Mythimna (perhaps to best preserved castle in Greece), the Roman aqueduct (one of the most important engineering works of its time in the Mediterranean), the Therma therapeutic hot springs at Gera Bay, Limonos Monastery (which many call a miniature of Mt. Athos) are more than mere destinations and cannot be ignored. They are marks of the history of this island that knows how to offer spiritual tranquillity and peace with the same ease that it can hand out worldly excitement to those who like the good life, however each one of us may interpret it.



Lesvos



Some want to wear down the soles of their shoes on the broad and well-signposted trail network of an island that is part of UNESCO's Global Geopark Network, while others to walk through the endless olive groves, the dense pine forests, or on the precipitous rocks leading to the waterfalls of Man' Katsa.

Others want to wander in the petrified forest of Sigri and travel back in time some twenty million years, to the time of dinosaurs and giant plants, which Homo sapiens - with a short life of 200,000 years - never saw with his own eyes; Yet, their history and beauty are still enchanting us.



Lesvos



Other visitors, still, want to see how olives are collected and oil produced at Gera, a symbol of beauty for the island. Or to set the noblest ambush in nature, in order to watch the rare birds that find a safe haven in Lesvos' wetlands; they enjoy them through their binoculars and immortalize them with their cameras.

However, everyone will discover why the proverb that speaks of happiness taking a necessary detour through the stomach finds its true meaning on this land. Aniseed from Lisvori and generations of knowledge in ouzo production have given Lesvos world renown and countless international distinctions.

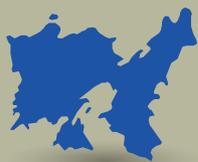
Lesvos is a true gastronomic paradise. It boasts one of the best olive oil varieties in Greece, high quality local meat, famed cheeses and, naturally, its excellent Kalloni sardines, which require an iron will to resist. And between you and us, you shouldn't. Holiday misconduct is what gives meaning to the discipline of the rest of the year. And if one were to sin for Lesvos, Lesvos will honour their sacrifice. Because, as a great Greek chef of the inter-war era once said about the local island produce and people: "In some places we cook for nourishment. Here everyone cooks for fun".

It sounds paradoxical, but all this beauty surrounding you on the island was the result of a chaotic prehistoric event. The terrible explosion of the volcano that flooded the island with lava and dramatically changed its morphology, was the beginning of the creation of all this natural abundance that made this land stand out, long before people took to the stage. Five hot therapeutic springs, the volcanic scenery with the petrified forest on the west side of the island and the fertile southeast coast, create the Lesvos of two facets: from the violence of chaos to the refinement of harmony. On Lesvos, nature is the canvas, brush and paints all at once. The people just never forgot how to be alert to it and indulge in it...



Limnos

mythical beauty



Myth and history. Beaches for the most demanding of visitors. Forthright people who consider hospitality their personal business. A chance to relax or party wildly. Scenery different to anything you have ever experienced.

This is Limnos. Volcanic in its geologic origins; even metaphorically it is an invisible volcano ready to erupt. Under its seemingly quiet surface it holds treasures to be discovered only by those tired of the obvious cosmopolitan scene on other islands of the Aegean, those in the mood to explore.

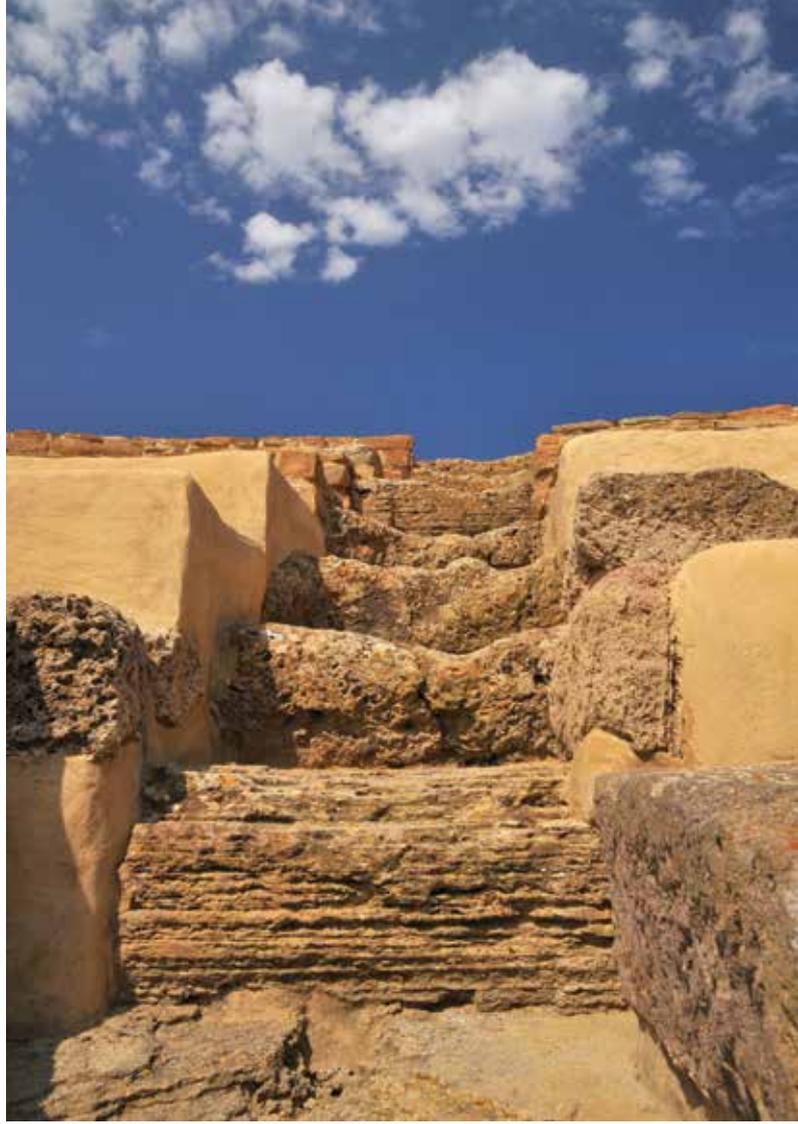
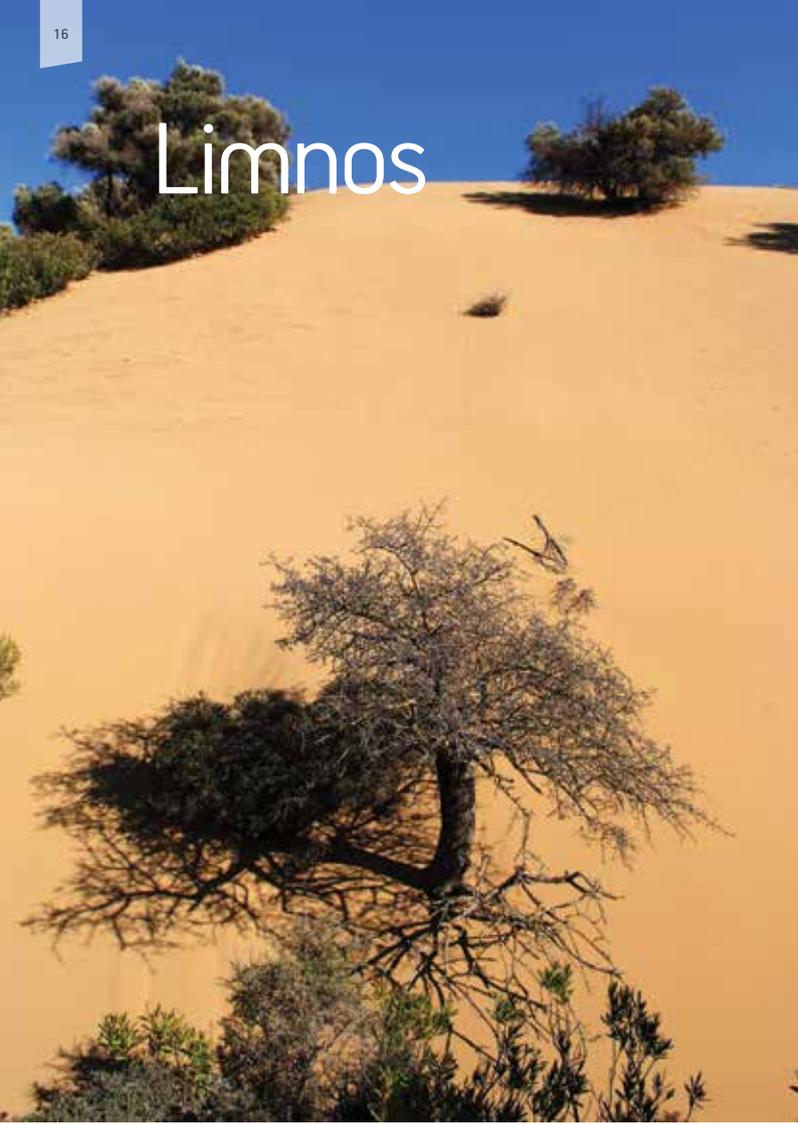
With a connection by aeroplane to Athens and Thessaloniki, and easily accessible by ship from Kavala in a few hours, this is the island on which Hephaestus found refuge, after Zeus' row with jealous Hera. Mysterious, the shadow of the Cabeiroi still cast upon it, prehistoric,



with Poliochne, the most ancient city in Europe, dating back to the fifth millennium BC, devout, with the renowned sanctum to Hephaestia, the great goddess of Limnos. Fortified, with some of the best known and well preserved castles in the Mediterranean, such as the castle of Myrina (the largest in the Aegean), Moudros and Kotsinos fortress.

More than 100 sandy beaches await you on Limnos, shady or surrendered to the merciless summer sun, with strong winds or absolute calmness. It is impossible, no matter how picky one might be, not to find your personal ideal beach among them. If you want comfort and cocktails at the beach bars, your choices are Myrina, Romeikos Gyalos and Richa Nera, Avlona beach and Nevgatis. The volcanic scenery and green waters offered by Platy, the waterfalls of Ai Giannis in Kaspakas, the sand dunes of Gomati. Keros beach is popular with holiday makers because of its sandy beach and warm sea, while summer northeast winds make it perfect for kite surfing and wind surfing lovers. If you have your own vessel or would like to rent a boat, you can tour the island or reach a more remote beach and have an unforgettable experience. And these are just your initial choices, because apart from the sea, Limnos' fierce charm lies inland.

Limnos





Limnos has no forests. Its geological conditions, extensive animal raising and strong winds hardly allowed for the growth of forested areas on any part of the island after the volcanic eruption millions of years ago. However, there are habitats of a very unique character that attract travelers from the whole world. In the island's north, at Gomati beach, the renowned sand dunes or 'thick sands' roll out, creating truly rare scenery. The minimal vegetation that composes the flora of the sand dunes consists mainly of beach lilies, vitex, thyme and oleander.

Amongst the island's hidden beauties are the hanging waters of Katsaitis Gorge in the Kaspakas area. An imposing waterfall and small pools at its base offer a haven to aquatic organisms, adapted to a Lilliputian self-sustaining habitat.

Alyki, Chortarolimni and Asprolimni are singularly beautiful wetlands that have been incorporated in the NATURA 2000 network.

Limnos





They are home to more than 250 species of rare birds, many of which are endangered and attract the interest of bird watching fanatics, an activity that is gaining ground as it combines exploring nature and the joy of discovery.

Limnos has been well known for its renowned wines since Homer's time. Its volcanic ground is ideal for viticulture and the grape varieties of Muscat of Alexandria and Kalambaki (Limnio) produce excellent white and red wines, respectively. However, Limnos fertile also produces cereals, vegetables and pulses. The pure flower honey, the sweet delight and distinct cheeses, such as kaskavali, kalathaki and traditional melichloro or melipasto, complete the feast of aromas and flavours.

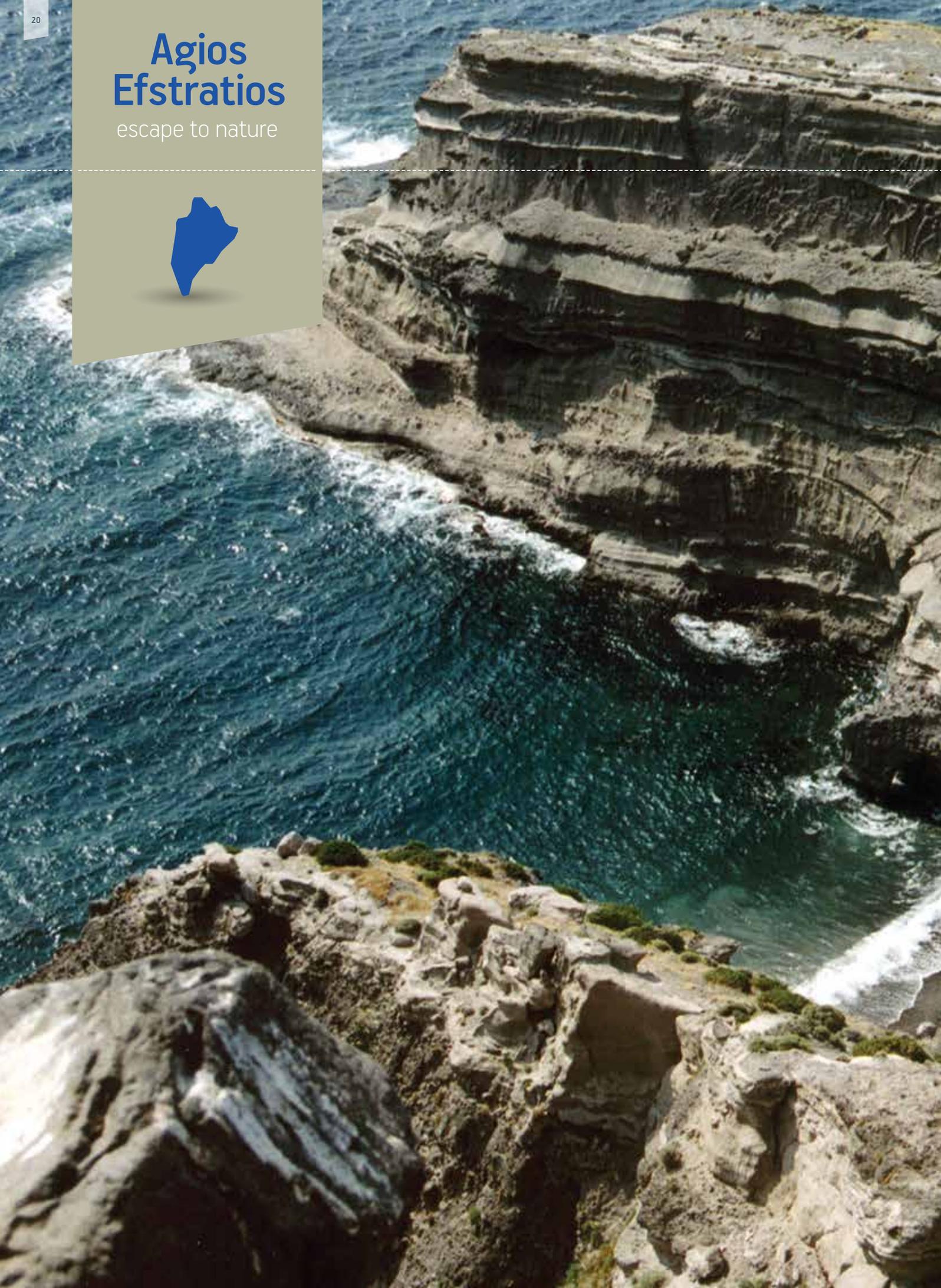
As people are now rediscovering traditional desserts, Limnos halva has once again taken its place of honour. Healthy and light, made only with tahini and honey, flavoured with vanilla or cocoa, with or without nuts. You must also try the siropiasta (pastries in syrup, like baklava and samsades), preserves, macaroons and the famous "venizelika".

At the local tavernas try flomaria (a type of square, home-made pasta), fresh fish and seafood in Moudros and free-range cockerel and rabbit at Sardes. Limnos is one of the less advertised islands of the North Aegean, which used to be considered a disadvantage. In truth, however, it has allowed the land to retain its identity, culture and virginal beauty, along with some surprises that visitors arriving at its harbour for the first time cannot possibly imagine. However, when you walk around Myrina castle at twilight on a summer evening and you notice one of the free roaming red deer watching you, quietly and peacefully, you will then appreciate the gentle tourist character of this fragrant and soulful island.



Agios Efstratios

escape to nature





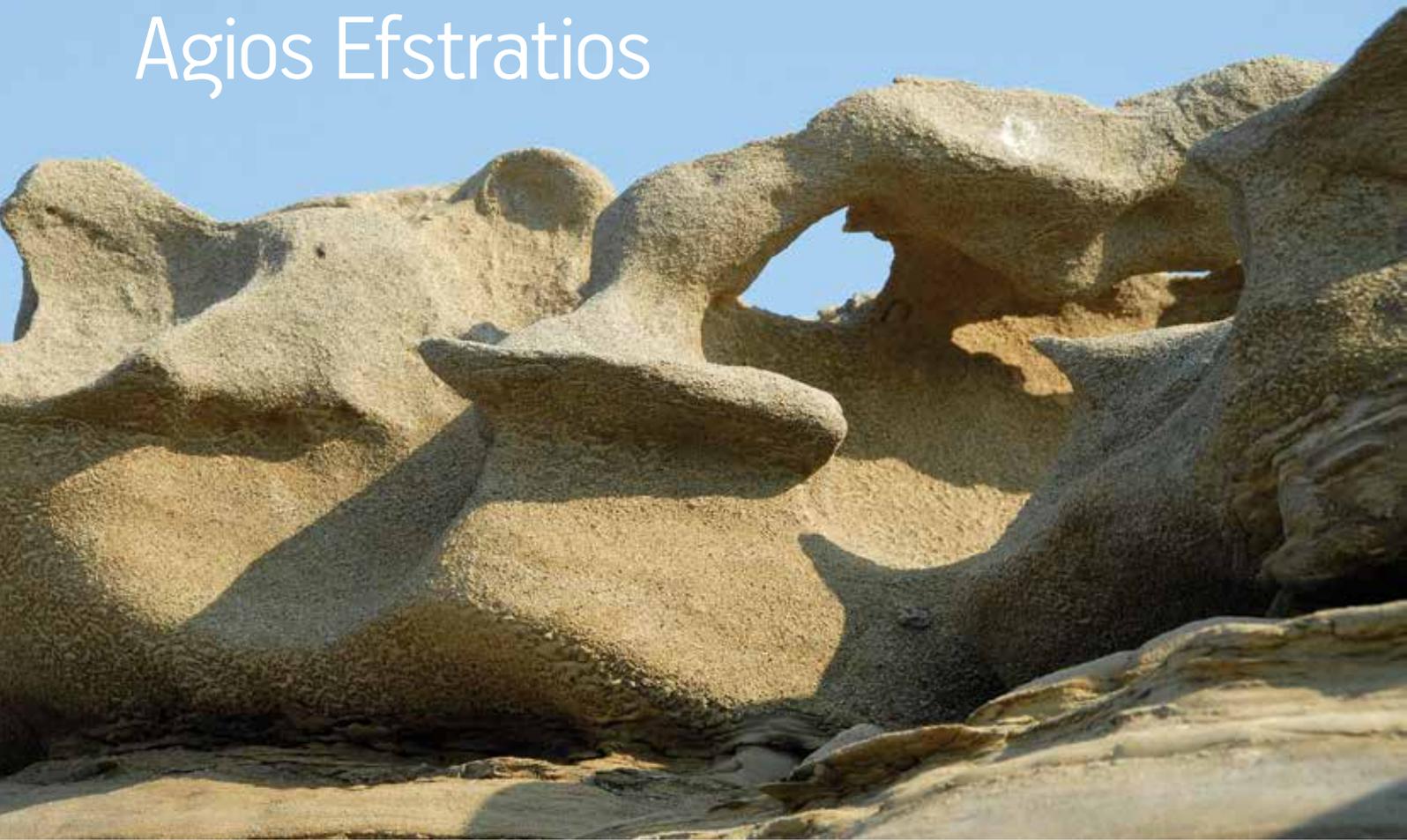
A small island on the edge of the Aegean, marked by Greece's modern political history, as it was a place of exile, Agios Efstratios – Ai Stratis to the locals – is blessed with the beauty of its landscape and, mainly, the fortitude of its people.

The only hamlet on the island lies in the valley formed by two dried river beds. Until the devastating earthquake of 1968 this is where the locals' vegetable and fruit gardens used to be. The old hamlet was perched at the top of the hill, above the harbour, with stone built, two -or three- storey traditional houses, but after '68 the few residents were forced by the military government (junta) to move to uniform homes, abandoning their old "Chora". Thankfully, some of the stone homes were saved from complete destruction; these were restored with reverence by the locals of Agios Efstratios. One of them, the Marasleios School of 1909 presently houses the Museum of Democracy.

Ai Stratis, with its 250 permanent residents, has intrigued many researchers, as it moves along at its own pace, cut off from the rest of the world by coincidence or temperament. A French director, Jean-Marie Tomasi, recorded the daily lives and stories of these islanders a few years ago, because -as she herself said- they remind her of her own island, Corsica, with its rebellious, independent spirit.

For us Greeks, however, Ai Stratis is hardly a strange place. All it takes is a few days to discover the thirst for communication, the kindness and the courtesy of the locals. Unreserved and with no shyness, ulterior motives or personal gain in mind, they will open their hearts to you just as easily as they will show you the map of their island. They will speak to you of the volcanic grey beach with its warm waters just a short distance from their homes.

Agios Efstratios





From the beautiful harbour, next to the caiques and fishing boats, you can set off in their own vessels on a tour of the island and beaches not accessible by land, such as Agios Dimitrios Trygari, Trypiti, Ftelio, Gournias, Lydario.

They will take you to Alonitsi, the retreat-beach with its islets a stone's throw away. "We used to get to the other side in one long dive", the more daring ones among them might tell you...

A retreat and a refuge, equally for people tired by daily life in the urban beehive and for our rare fauna, it is here, in the sea caves of Ai Stratis, that the Mediterranean seal, *Monachus Monachus*, finds an ideal haven. The steep cliffs are home to predatory birds and seabirds. The sea meadows of the Mediterranean seas (the locals call them *phykiades*) sprawl out on the sea bed and offer a valuable habitat for a vast number of sea creatures as well as a wall of protection against erosion to the island.

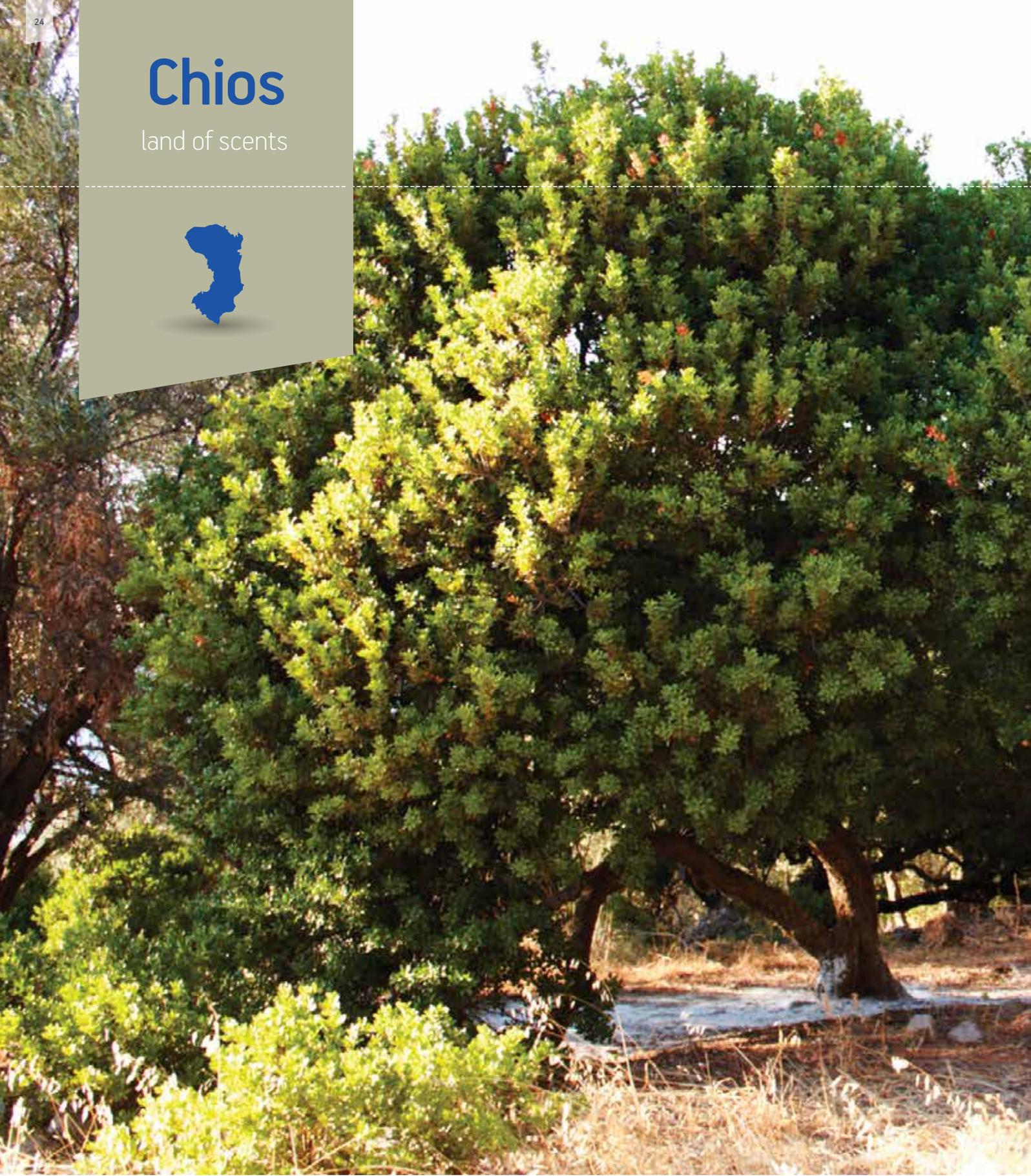
Just when you think you have found yourselves on the island in the stories of the exiled, you are in for one last surprise: in the southeast part of Ai Stratis, vegetation is dominated by a one of a kind of oak forest that gives you priceless opportunities for walks and reveries. Besides, on such a small island, a road network of 50 kilometres of patent dirt roads reveals the intention of locals to utilize every inch of their land.

You must definitely see the ruins of the ancient city on the hill of Agios Minas, the churches of Christos, Agios Nikolaos and Agios Vasileios (built in 1727) and give in to the luxury of a fresh lobster on your table. The lobsters of Ai Stratis are not just tasty. They are also extremely light on your wallet: they do not cost their weight in gold, which is the case in the rest of the cosmopolitan Aegean.



Chios

land of scents



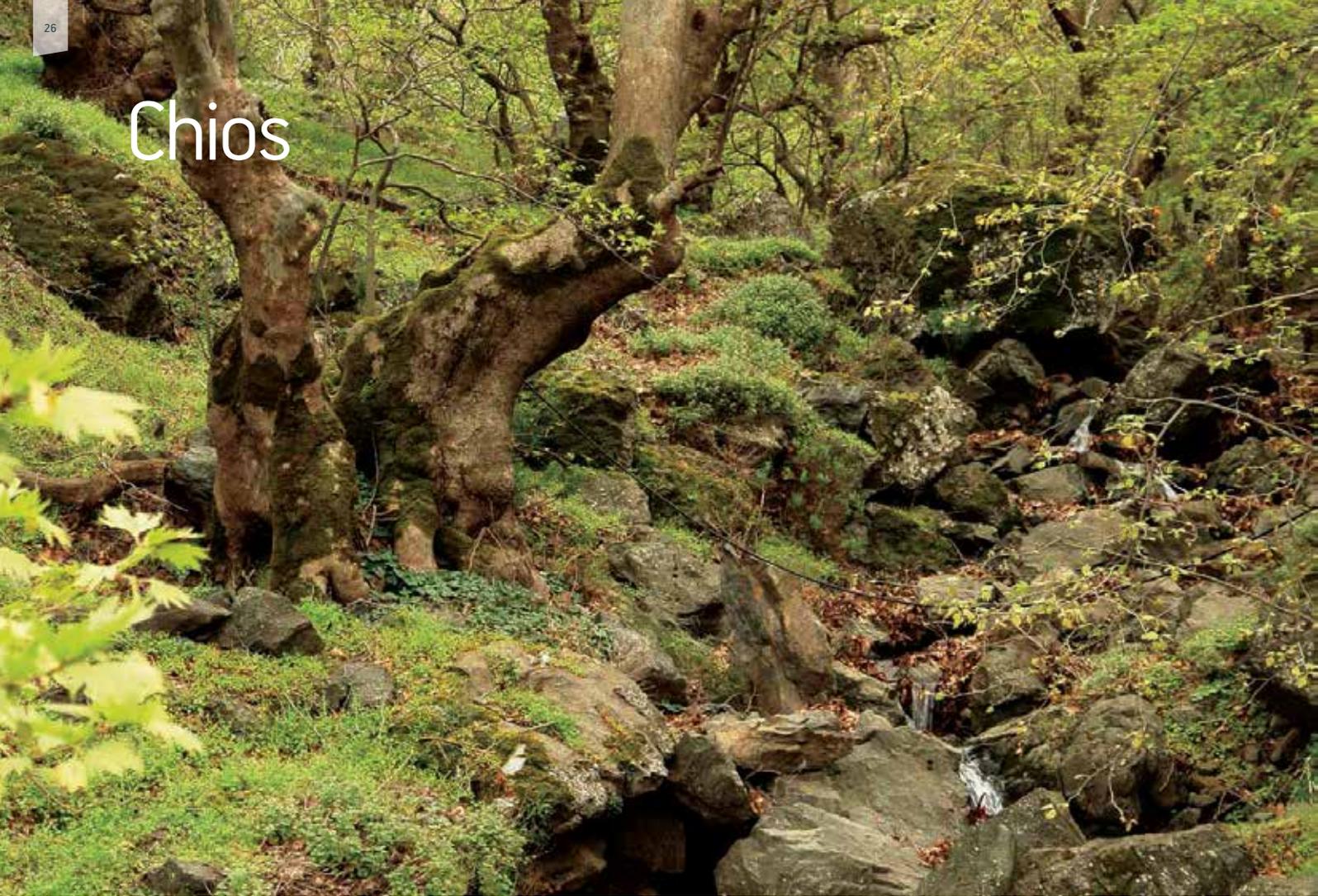
“Even its name sounds aromatic”. This phrase sealed the visit to the island of one of the most renowned travelers of the 18th century, Frenchman Pierre Augustin Guys, who was enraptured by the medieval villages, dozens of caves and unique culture of Chios.

Chios is a location that requires time for its true, multi-faceted image to grow in you. Its cosmopolitan air, combined with the refined manners of the locals and its people who sail the seven seas and travel the world is not immediately evident. The people of Chios need to be won over by those who respect their principles...



Even at the time of its great massacre in 1822, Chios was already established as the sweet-smelling island of the Aegean archipelago, with its famous Campos, its mastic and its beautiful women, which, Guys noted, 'smell as sweet as the island and hypnotise you like the sea'... Chios could be considered unique just for its mastic trees. A strictly endemic species, the famous *Pistacia Lentiscus* grow only here - in fact, not even throughout Chios, but only in a specific location of the island. The beneficial properties of mastic, known since antiquity, have been extensively studied at international biochemical laboratories and have been continuously worshipped by healthy nutrition fans. Knowledgeable visitors come to the island in late summer in order to witness the mastic production process up close and participate in the harvest of the valuable 'tears'. This is the best time to walk around Chios. There are many ways to become acquainted with the island, but in order to experience its virgin beauty, you must leave your car behind and satisfy all your senses by seeing, hearing and smelling...

Chios



If visitors to Chios did not arrive as nature lovers, they will definitely leave as such: the enticing, endless expanses of citrus trees spread sweet smells all the way to the sea when in bloom; the Kampies canyon and river, which at times is quiet as a gully and at others as fierce as a flooding ravine offers itself for a hike; the island seems like a natural botanical garden, with trees that belong to tall mountains, such as chestnut and cypress trees and serve as homes to rare birds, between the cracks of rocks and the unseen tops of oak trees; numerous natural caves, the most important being those of Olympoi and Agio Gala, at the two ends of the island. If you are lucky, you will witness the thousands of butterflies dancing at Glyky Nero -and even if you are not, you will wonder at the countless nightingales that appear in late Spring and sing at dawn throughout the island, even at town centres.

On Chios, nature lovers also become historians. They will be drawn to Apolichnon Castle and the old cobbled street that leads to the area's monastery/convent, with a view of the shores of Asia Minor. The medieval villages of Mesta and Olympoi, which have been continuously inhabited since their establishment, will keep visitors for hours and divulge their secrets. Travelers will be enchanted by Campos, a "historical and traditional settlement" protected by the Ministry of Culture, with its 14th century Genoan mansions and the villas of the island's most eminent families, with unique architectural features; the old has always served as a launching pad and inspiration for the new on Chios.





Chios





Chios



They will be moved by the monastery/convent of St. Minas, where the victims of the great slaughter still rest in its cemetery vault. And, finally, they will wonder: was Simonides right to simply refer to Homer as “the man from Chios”? Was this epic island truly the home of the most epic of ancient poets?

Like the scents of the tiny blossoms of the citrus trees mingle in the atmosphere, the images of old and new, of magnificent and humble co-exist peacefully on Chios. In order to get to know the island in depth, one has to walk throughout the refugee settlement of the city, with its lilac houses and colorful flowers. And in order to bid farewell to the day with due respect, one must walk up to the abandoned village of Anavato or the medieval village of Avgonimi to witness the most mystical sunset they will ever see.

One hundred years ago, Chios was the priceless garden of the Czars and emperors of the West, when each individual orange was wrapped in gold-coloured paper and traveled all the way from Campos to St. Petersburg, to be enjoyed at rich palace banquets and the island was reputed to be the most fertile one in the Aegean. The Czars fell, the emperors were deposed, but the reputation of Chios has grown thanks to the countless travelers who have tasted its blessing in numerous forms: stringed, sun-dried tomatoes, plums and cherry plums, sour cherries and hard cherries, sweet-smelling mandarins and lemon tree blossoms.



Chios





The people of Chios love preserved sweets and part of their inventiveness is reflected in the imaginative recipes that make traditional confectionery pale. If you left Chios without tasting rose preserve from the petals of the hundred-leave rose, it's time to book a ticket back...

After all, you may have forgotten to swim at Daskalopetra, the beach with the rock where Homer sat and taught his epic poems. You may not have discovered that Vroulidia is currently the most popular beach or may not have swum in the placid waters of Agia Fotini and Agios Emilianos. Or maybe you didn't walk on the black, smooth, volcanic pebbles of Mavra Volia beach, near Emporio. You may have been swept away by the enchanting taste of Chios ouzo and didn't taste any of the island's soft drinks. And if you started with the classics, like orange juice, mandarin juice and sour cherry juice, you may not have had time to taste the almond-flavoured soumada, which is consumed warm with cinnamon in winter and mouth-numbingly cold in the summer.

Chios overwhelms the senses. Maybe with its wine, known since antiquity as 'Arioussios Wine', maybe with its raki, tsipouro or souma, made of fig distillate, maybe with the light scent of mastic bushes and citrus trees or the lights of Turkey that can be clearly seen across the sea at night – maybe with the energy that the island itself, with its millennia-long history and passion, imbues into visitors. And if you, as a visitor, manage to feel all this within a few days, imagine what Chios people, who have lived here all their life, are made of.

If there is a place that makes people feel incredible happiness just because they're alive, this place must be Chios. Because, in the words of Victor Hugo, the man who once mourned the island, "Eyes cannot see God, either, but through tears".

And a final thing: Don't try to transport this atmosphere elsewhere. It's impossible, just like planting a Pistacia root and expecting a mastic tree to blossom anywhere other than Chios.

Oinousses

riches of the sea



The Oinousses is a cluster of nine small islands and islets, namely Oinoussa, Panagia, Vatos, Gaidouronissi, Pontikonisso, Archontonisso, Pontikoudiko, Laimoudiko and Prassonisia. At the last census, their population exceeded one thousand people. Locals are proud of their land and ancient roots.

As early as the 6th century BC, the islands were already famous for their excellent wine. In fact, it is believed that the name of the island is derived from the root of oenos, the Ancient Greek word for wine. According to another version, the name 'Egnoussa' that locals use to refer to the island to this day comes from the ancient word for the willow trees that grow everywhere on the islands.

The Oinousses is a quiet retreat for summer sojourners. A protected area, included in the NATURA 2000 Network, the Oinousses are full of beautiful small coves for swimming and beaches for those who better commune with nature when they are in its embrace alone. There is an asphalt road along the perimeter of the island, providing easy access to most beaches. One can even walk along the road on foot, as its total length is a mere 18km.



However, the true secret of the Oinousses is its desert islands. Whether you decide to sail around them on one of the islands' caiques or paddle to each one in a canoe and spend a night on one of their beaches -as an increasing number of tourists do during summer- you will discover an idyllic natural wealth, virgin fishing grounds and enchanting depths that make up the panorama of the unexplored Aegean Sea.

The Oinousses have always been considered the island of ship owners. The first commercial Greek steamboats were from the Oinousses and wrote the first chapter of the history of modern Greek shipping. It is no accident that numerous ship tycoons originate from here or that visitors are welcomed at the harbor by the statue of the Mother from Oinousses, who sees off her children when they leave on sea voyages, as well as a bronze statue of a mermaid, with a crown and a sailing ship in her left hand, an eternal companion of sailors. The island, of an area of just 15 km², has schools of all levels of education, crowned by the Maritime Lyceum and the Merchant Marine Academy, the alma mater of more than 1,500 captains who deservingly serve the world's merchant navy.

Oinousses





The Maritime Museum exhibits the blueprints of sailing ships and steamboats launched in the early 20th century on the Oinousses and became part of the international shipping world. During the summer months, ship owners, captains and immigrants who hail from the Oinousses return to their homeland, the birthplace of their parents, open up their mansions and turn this remote Aegean island into a cosmopolitan resort.

The centre of the traditional settlement with its brick-roofed houses is dominated by the magnificent Church of St. Nicholas, the patron of seafarers. Beautifully decorated with artful icons and numerous votive offerings, the Church is teeming with life on August 15 (Feast of the Dormition), when the women of the Oinousses revive the religious custom of the burial of the Madonna.

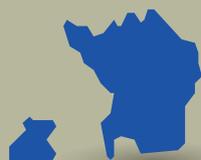
Numerous feasts take place during the summer, when the dozens of scattered chapels on the islands celebrate and welcome worshippers, who travel by caique to honour saints on their feast days. The final feast of the summer is the Dormition of the Madonna, celebrated at the Holy Convent of Evangelismos (The Anunciation) on August 28 (according to the Julian calendar), when the convent, a religious sanctuary and an architectural jewel of the island, honours its protector.

On the Oinousses, the local cuisine brilliantly combines seafood with the island's tasty and healthy wild greens, as well as the rare mushrooms that grow during winter, creating sweet-smelling greens pies and the delicious boureklikia, small pies filled with a variety of greens and cheeses. Visitors must try the excellent honey collected on the islands, the cheeses and ouzomezedes (appetizers served with ouzo) with local octopus that melts in the mouth and cannot be found anywhere else. Before leaving, purchase hand-made pasta and mastelo cheese and return next year for another dose of pure Aegean seamanship.



Psara

trails of history



When the Greek Revolution began, an island offered up its entire commercial fleet – the third largest in Greece after those of Hydra and Spetses – to the struggle for liberation. That island was Psara.

Travel guides describe the island as “a dot in the sea, far away from established tourism destinations” – but that is only half true, because on this dot, the birthplace of Konstantinos Kanaris, Dimitris Papanikolis and renowned national benefactor Ioannis Varvakis, shrewd travelers from around the world discover – or, better yet, create – their own personal paradise, with the materials offered by the untamed nature of the Aegean Sea.



The people of Psara are, first and foremost, proud of their glorious past. The revolutionary flag of 1821 – white and red, with a cross and an anchor wrapped by a serpent -welcome visitors at the harbour, reminding them that the history of this island is interwoven with the history of its untamed soul.

Continuously inhabited since the Mycenaean era, as shown by the significant archaeological finds from the cemetery excavated in Archontiki Gulf, Psara provides travelers with a precise dose of serenity and splendour -and that's not all. The residents' helpful disposition is legendary, while the island's beaches are never too crowded, whether one visits the popular beaches of Katsounis and Kato Gialos, with its local beach volley tournament, or Lazaretta, with its fine sand and seashells, Lakka or Limnos beach.

Psara

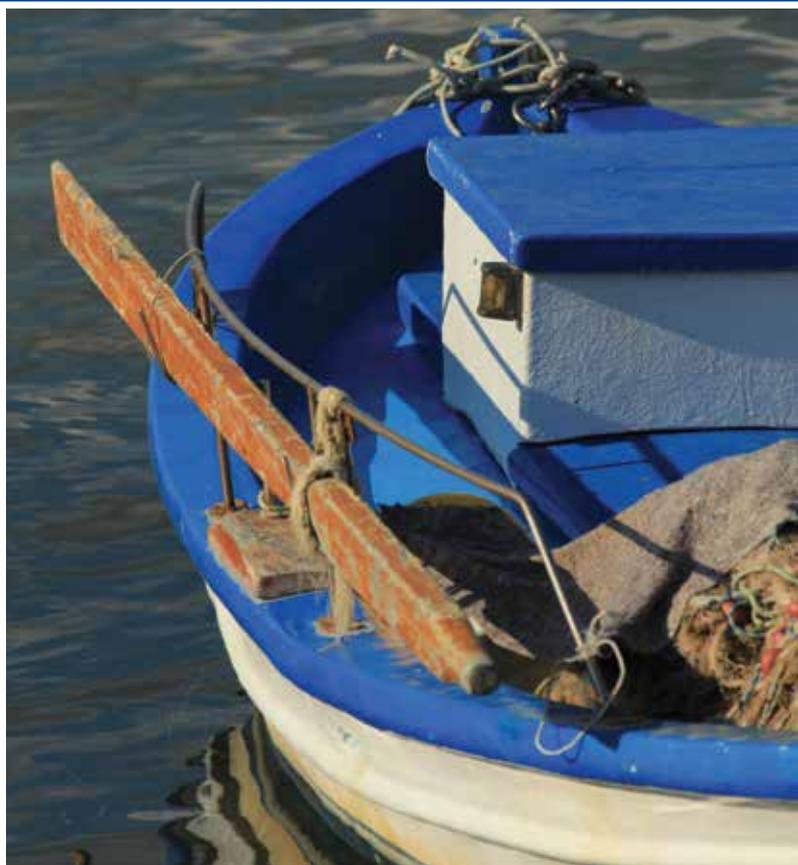




Fans of underwater fishing will discover a true submarine treasure in the countless skerries that surround the island. Hikers will appreciate the simple beauty of the Church of Agios Nikolaos, with its sixty steps, built in 1793, and the monastery/convent of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary, with its rare manuscripts and religious books preserved, books printed in Moscow and Venice. During the historic destruction of Psara, the only thing to survive was the icon of Virgin Mary crafted by El Greco, which was smuggled out to the island of Syros, where it remains to this day.

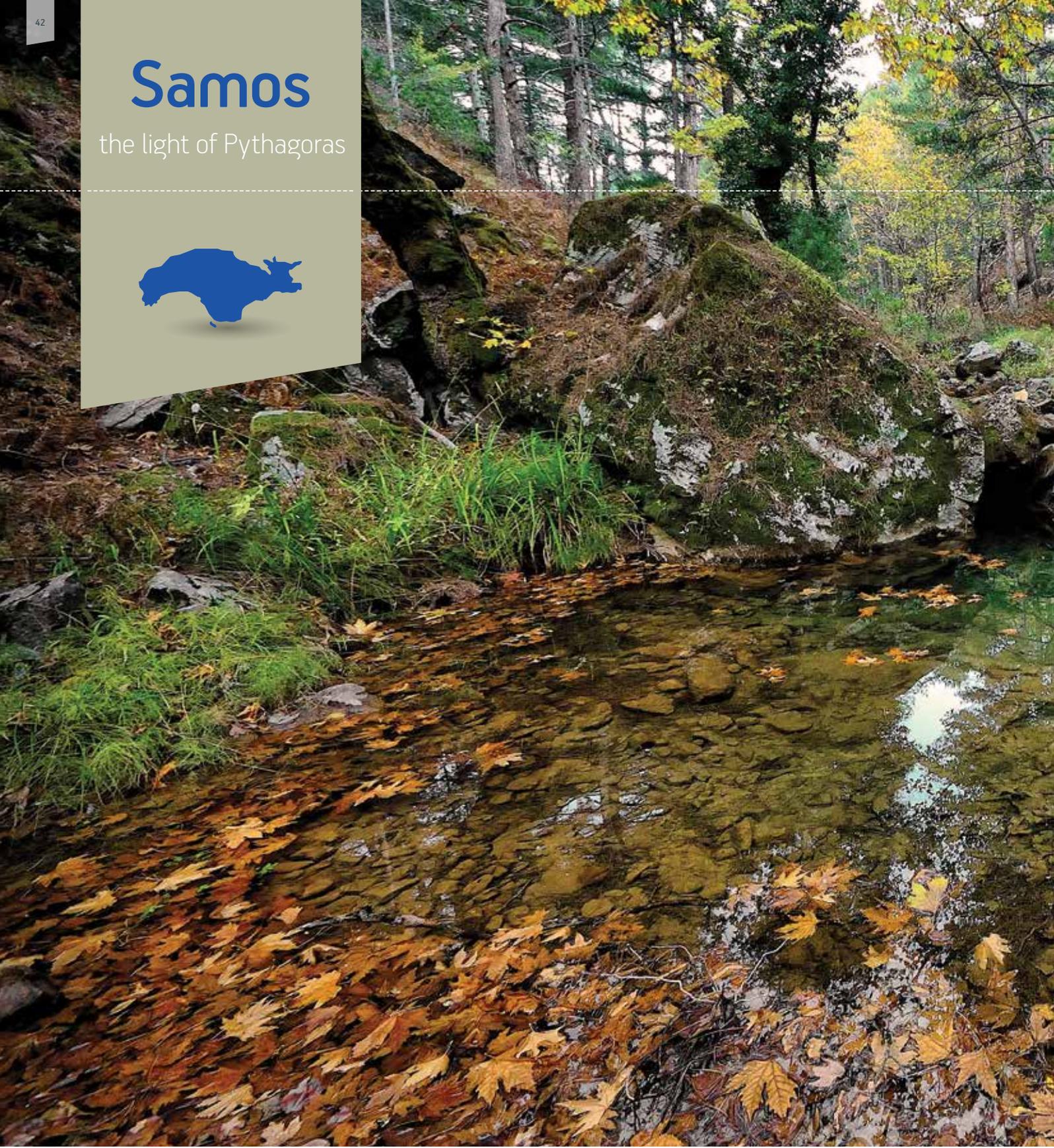
At Psara, one can sample the tastiest seafood ever, as well as the most affordable lobster pasta in Greece. You can sample local cheese produce by trying mizithra cheese and kopanisti dip and find yourself in agreement with connoisseurs who support that the thyme honey of Psara, which is only harvested once a year, is at the pinnacle of honey production in the entire Mediterranean.

After you rest and digest these delights, climb the hill of Mavri Rachi (Black Slope) in an effort to understand the concept of self-sacrifice for a greater purpose. Many Greeks may have forgotten the event in question, but the people of Psara never stopped remembering or teaching the history of the hill to those willing to listen.



Samos

the light of Pythagoras



“When drunk on Samos wine, where “I” begins and “You” ends becomes a blur...” These are the words of an old rembetiko composer of the interwar period and they hold true for anyone who has experienced Samos.

Samos is an island ruled by legend and beauty. It is the island of the father of mathematics, Pythagoras, the astronomer Aristarchus and the philosopher Epicurus. It is the home of Hera and the land that hosted Herodotus and Aesop. An important center of trade in the Aegean and a major naval force in antiquity, it came into contact with important Mediterranean cultures.

It is no accident that the great historian Herodotus considered Samos first among all Greek and barbarian cities. The centre of Ionian civilization, the island saw times of indescribable splendour, which still remains. Even today, its proximity to the coast of Asia Minor makes the island a “bridge” between the two cultures, a difference that did not hinder the co-existence, cooperation and friendship of the two peoples living across the water from each other.

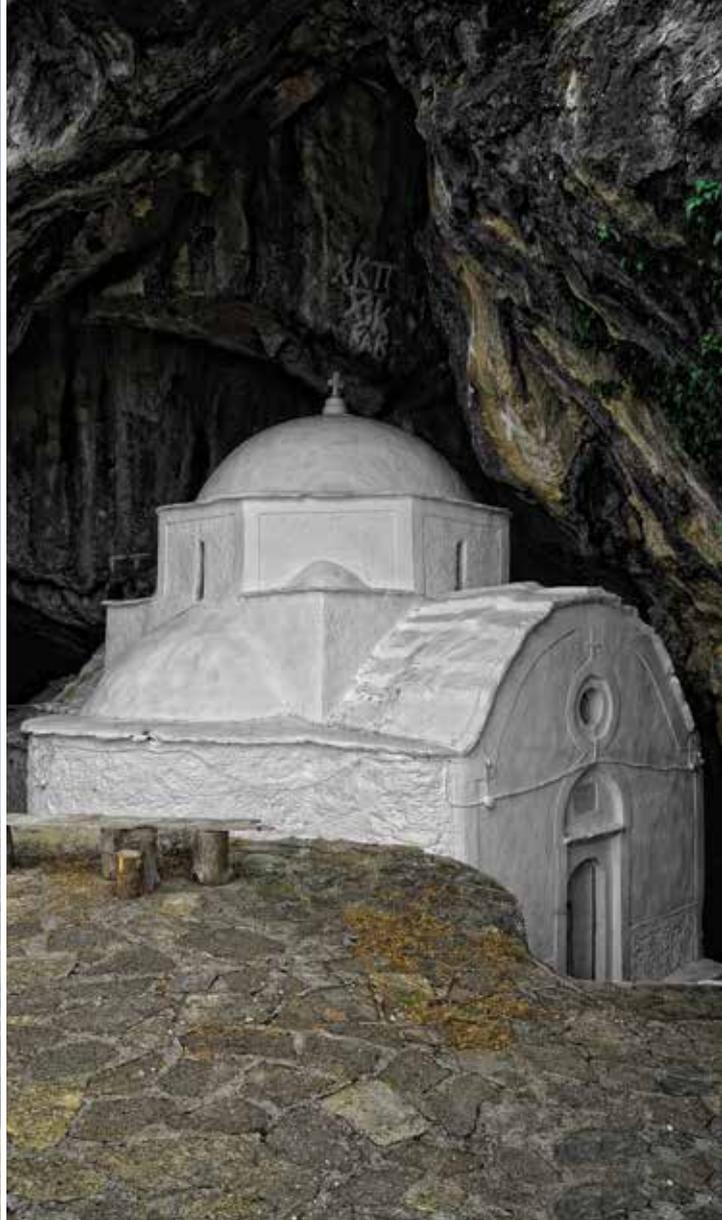
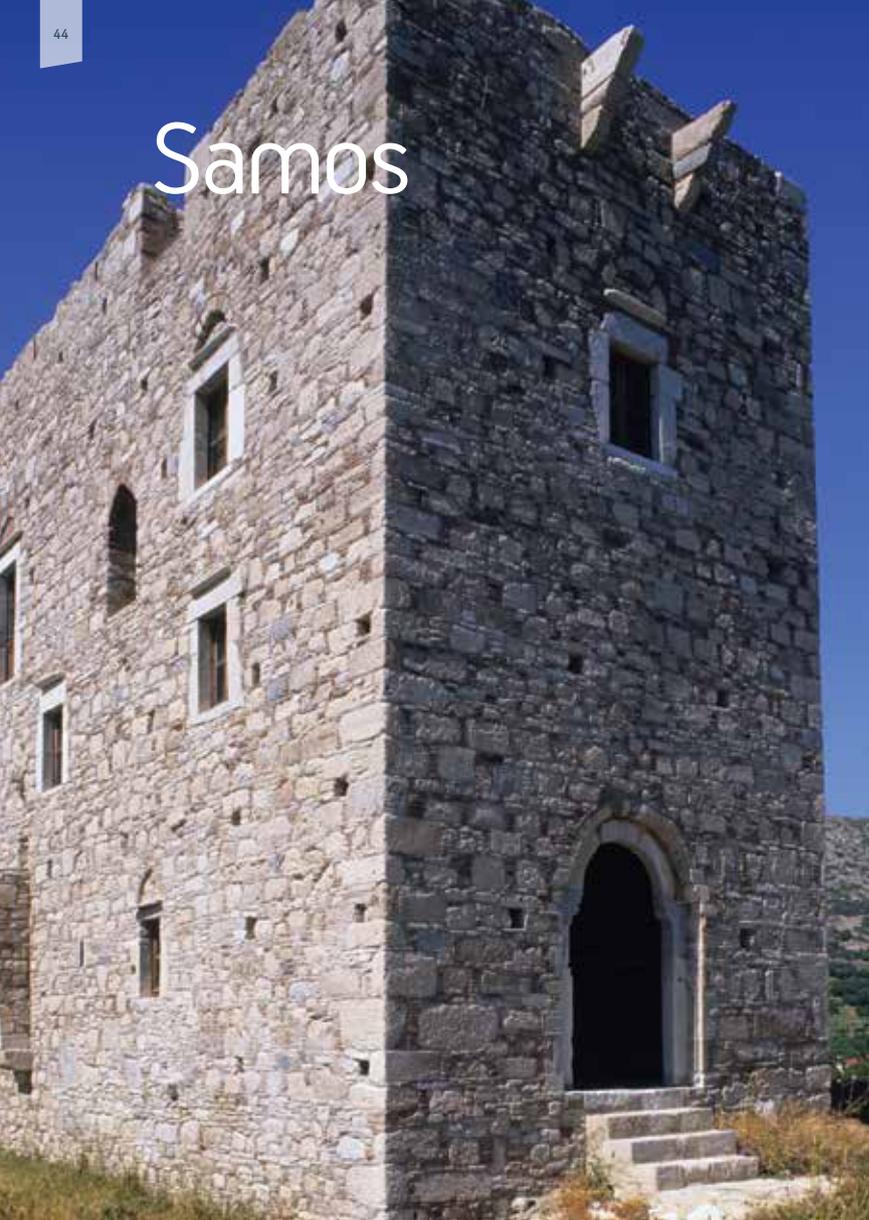


The mythical birthplace of Hera, Samos is home to the largest temple in Greece (according to Herodotus) at the seaside settlement of Heraion, dedicated exclusively to the goddess of marriage and women. Of its 155 gigantic columns, only one still stands and is indicative of the scale of this place of religious worship that includes ruins of at least three earlier temples.

Samos is a place of overwhelming vegetation. Everything around in the virgin landscape is made of colour and light. Each step one takes is a revelation. Whether in the imposing mountains, such as Mt. Kerkis and Mt. Ambelos -with alpine winter temperatures and endless rain- or in caves and canyons, the environment of Samos reminds one of the Greek hinterland in miniature.

Walk along Mt. Kerkis, from Votsalakia in Marathocampos, to its peak, Mt. Vigla, at an altitude of 1,400m. Along your hike you will see over 1,400 species of rare plants, many of which are endemic to the island, as well as dozens of species of birds of prey.

Samos



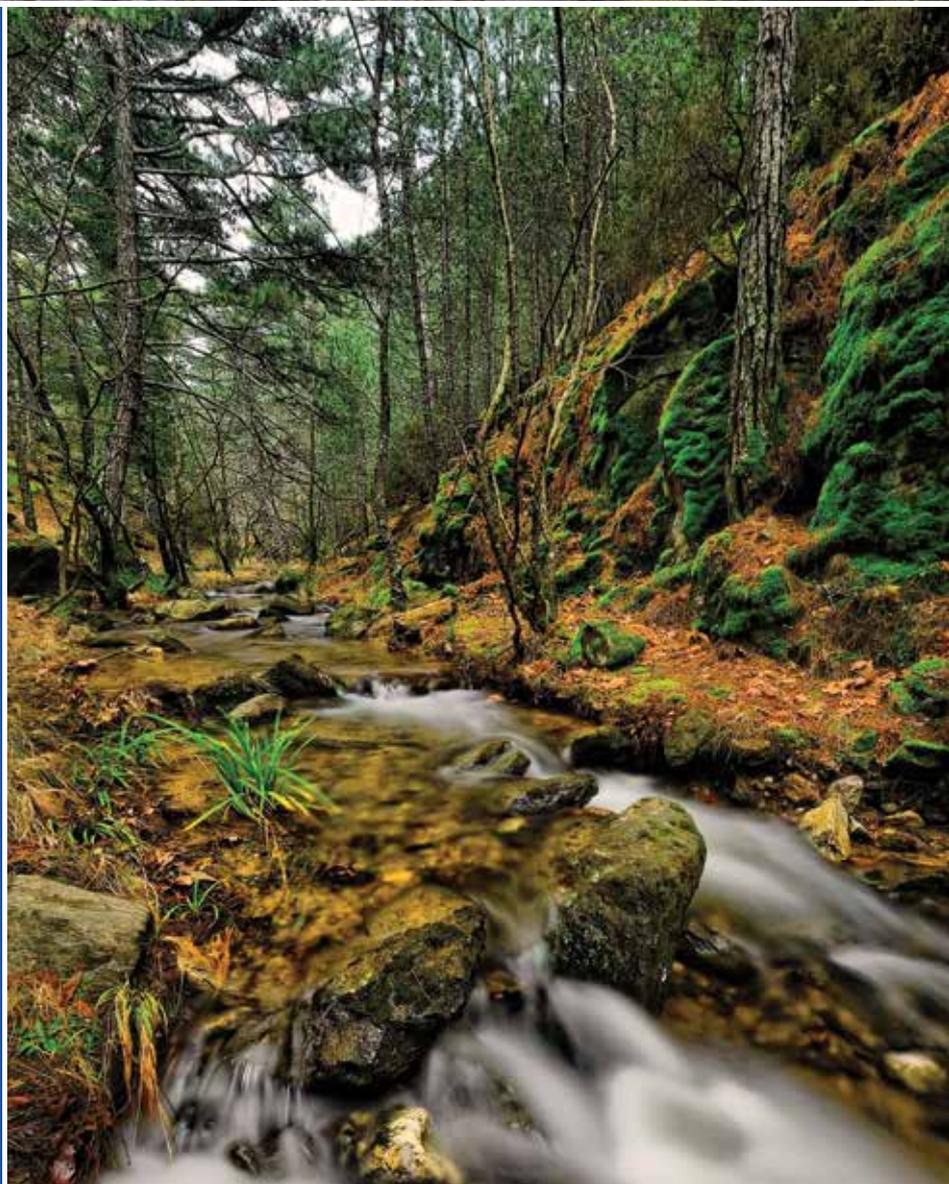


Wander around the settlements, along old cobble streets, and see Sarakinoi Tower, a magnificent structure of the 16th century, a true fort of its era. Visit the convents of Zoodochos Pigi Ailiotissa, Agia Zoni, with its splendid library, and Timios Stavros, with its impressive throne. Climb the steps to Panagia Sarandaskalioitissa, built at the entrance of Pythagoras' Cave, where the ancient Greek mathematician found refuge when being persecuted by tyrant Polycrates.

The terrain of Samos is a challenge to those who choose to ride mountain bikes on their travels. Each summer, an increasing number of cyclists, fully equipped for their adventures, visit the trail. Local cyclists meet at the architecturally innovative chapel of Agios Ioannis, at Potami, above the pebble beach of Potamos, and ride towards Karlovassi, Konstantinos and Kokkari. Birdwatchers set up near the Alyki habitat or Glyfada Lake to photograph herons, Dalmatian pelicans and pink flamingos that rest here before continuing their migration. When the flamingos ascend into the sky at dusk, their colour mingles with the red sunset, creating a visual extravagance that visitors can't forget.

When the heat covers the island like a blanket, those in the know start their journey to Karlovassi waterfalls early in the day. The larger of the two waterfalls is five meters high and one has to climb 60 wooden steps to reach the clearing offering a panoramic view of the waterfall.

Pythagoreion, built on the ruins of the ancient city of Samos, is home to what many call the eighth wonder of antiquity -and engineers agree. In 550 BC, the architect Eupalinos undertook the task of constructing a 1,036m tunnel, at the order of tyrant Polycrates, to connect the two sides of the mountain and supply water to the ancient capital of Samos.

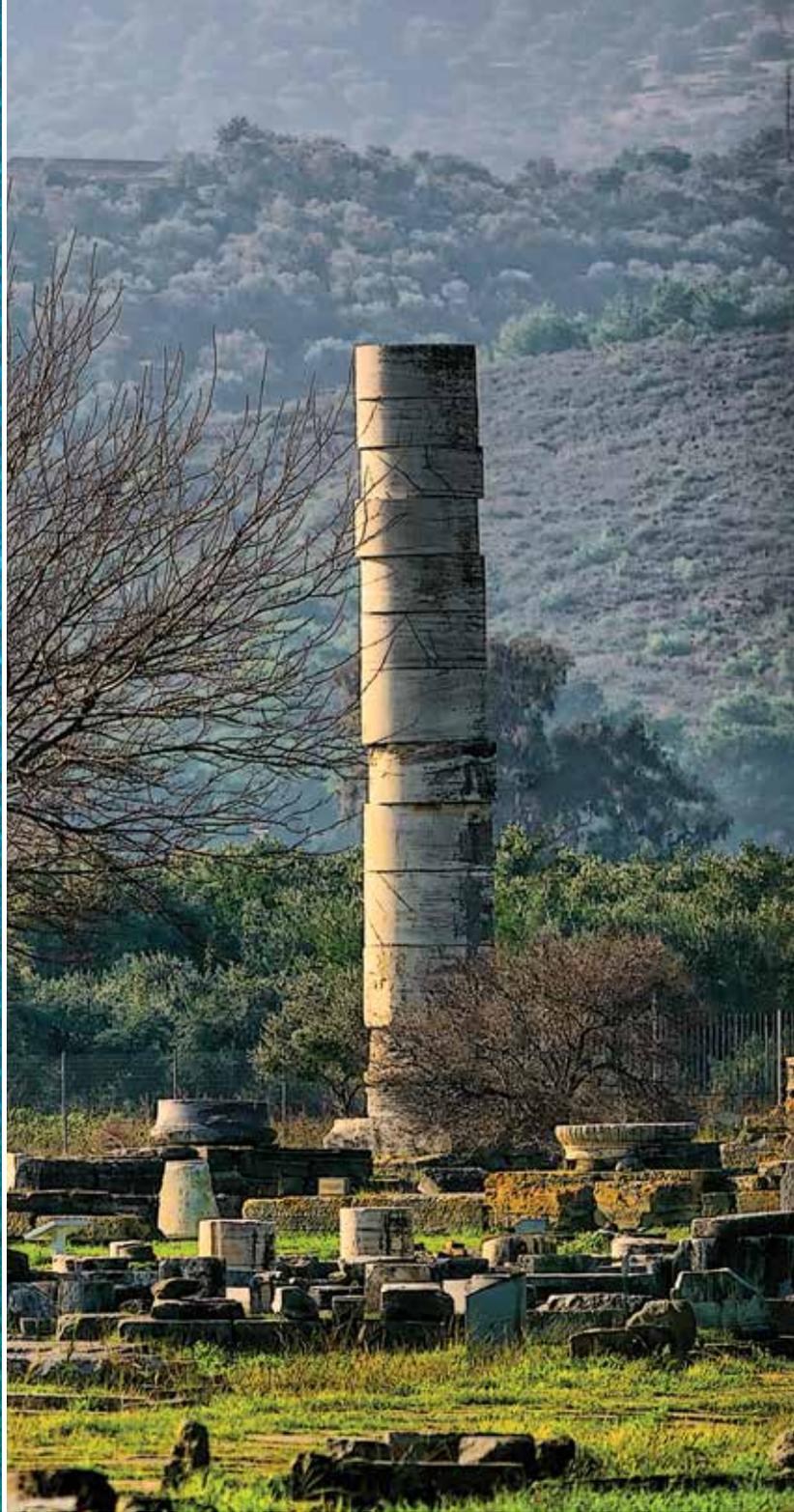


Samos





Samos

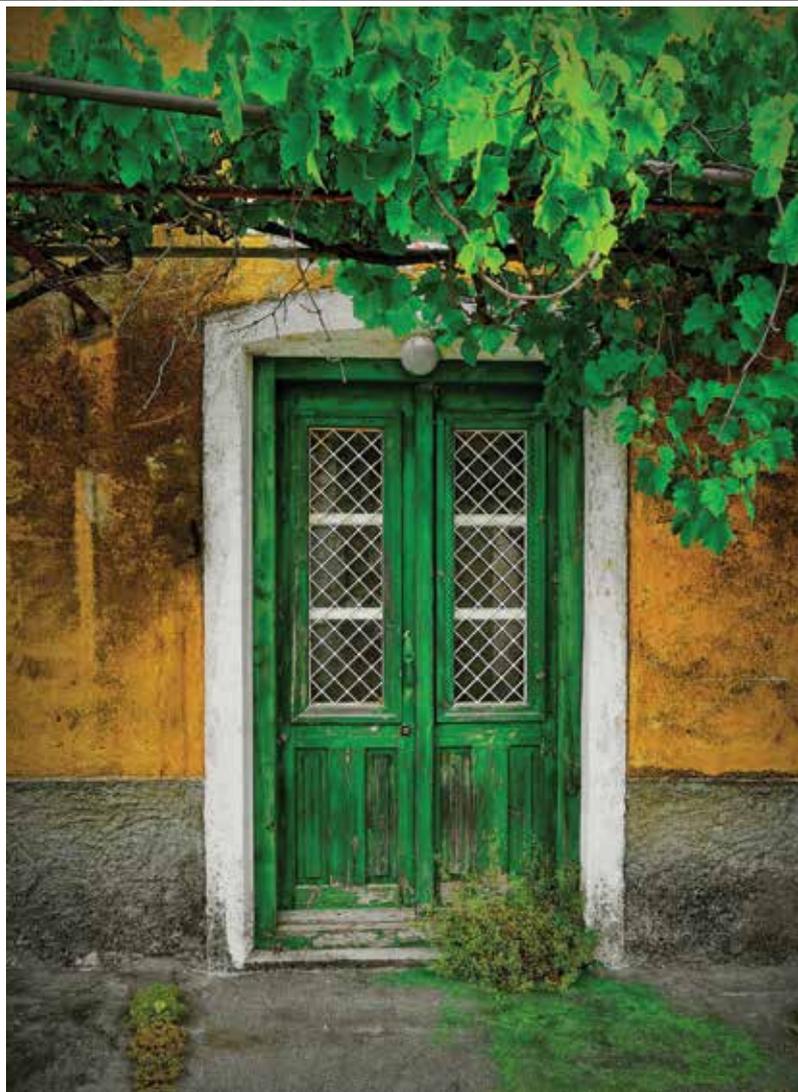


This innovative aqueduct had to be invisible to enemies, so as not to be destroyed and leave the people of Samos without water. Eupalinos was such a great engineer that, through mathematical calculations alone, he began digging this two-way tunnel on both sides of the mountain simultaneously!

A decade later, the two crews met at the middle of the mountain with no deviation whatsoever! In fact, to give the slave workers an incentive, Eupalinos made a promise, which he kept: upon completion of the work, he set the slaves free. This is indeed the work of a true engineering genius.

Samos does not only feature important monuments and historical tales, nor just mountains and hiking trails. Above all else, Samos is a modern island, with immaculately organized beaches, such as Tsamados and Lemonakia, Votsalakia in Marathocampos, Chryssi Ammos (Golden Sand), which more than lives up to its name, and Psili Ammos (Fine Sand), where, according to the people of Samos, one can hear the roosters across the water in Turkey, crow at dawn. If you are of an athletic persuasion, you can enjoy the beach volley tournaments organized every year at Livadaki beach and Potokaki at Pythagoreion. If you prefer relaxation and unobstructed contact with nature, Mikri Tsambou, Kerveli and Saitania should be your top choices.

Samos is a multi-faceted island. It's cosmopolitan if you stay at Vathy, Kokkari or Pythagoreion. It is isolated if you prefer Marathocampos, Kerveli or Mykali. It is an island of long nights and revelling, as well as a place of peace, ideal for rest, relaxation and contemplation.



Samos





If you wish to please your palate, the best opportunity to taste all iterations of Samos Muscat is the wine festival organized during the first ten days of August at Vathy, where you only pay for a glass and refill it as many times as you like – or can handle.

Samos wine has its own history. The Vatican once kept its own winery on the island and today, the Catholic Church has conceded the privilege of producing church wine for Holy Communion to the island. Samos Muscat holds a special place in the French wine market, one of the most demanding in the world, and has won numerous international accolades, while its rich, fruity aroma continues to win over an increasing number of fans.

One can only cheat on Muscat with local wine or souma, a beverage made of the same grape variety as the renowned wine. However, no one should leave Samos without a bottle of virgin olive oil and a jar of thyme honey.

This is Samos. Each turn of the road is a revelation. It is a fertile, hospitable island that knows how to follow a natural pace, but also how to satisfy the desire of people for genuine entertainment -especially in August, during 'Manolis Kalomoiris' Music Festival or 'Heraia-Pythagoreia' Festival, with numerous drama performances at the ancient theatre of Pythagoreion, from spring until autumn, the rock music festival usually organized at Heraion for a weekend each summer and, of course, the feast of the Transfiguration of Jesus, held at Pythagoreion in August, where residents and visitors enjoy the resplendent firework show over the harbour.



Ikaria

alternative... paradise



Ikarus may well be the most misunderstood hero in Greek mythology. A symbol of youthful folly, he flew -so his story goes- too close to the sun, on wings fashioned by his father out of feathers and wax. The sun melted the wax and the reckless youth crashed into the sea and drowned.

The real story probably goes like this: Ikarus was a pioneer. A pioneer of technology. And as is the fate of all bold explorers, in the quest to find their personal limits, he paid the ultimate price: his life. Or at least that's the way an Ikarian will tell you the story...



Ikaria is first and foremost its people. Beautiful, versatile, with fierce beauty and picturesque hamlets, it could look like any other Aegean island. However, here the mentality of daily life is much different. The willingness of people to help you adapt, is truly exemplary.

The concept of simplicity in life, without alarm clocks, rushing and stress is a universal law on Ikaria. Opening hours for shops are just a general indication and no one seems to take them too seriously. The thing everyone truly respects here is the need for each one of us to experience an honestly rich life, in the sense of the word used by our ancient ancestors. "Rich" is not he who has wealth, but he who has "ploun", a goal, course and destination.

Ikaria





As for the island, it is an adventure in itself: rich flora, wild vegetation, tiered pools, rivers and waterfalls, trails, lakes and secluded beaches. Ikaria has it all.

Chalari gorge, with its turbulent river, the lake, Ratsos waterfall, and the old watermills, is a hiking trail to be recommended here. In the island's south, the ancient forest of Ranti with its perennial Holm Oaks is considered by specialists as one of the most important forests in Europe. And, of course, the tour of Raches, along an easy 25 kilometre trail, that will allow you to explore the most significant sights on Ikaria; you will not believe all this can fit on such a small island.

Ikaria fanatics, those who visit it again and again, belong to two main categories. The first set off early for the ancient trails, picturesque Xylosyrtis with its rare birds, the climb up the slopes of Pounta, Karkinagri, Manganiti or Agios Isidoros for bouldering, lake Selini in Chrysostomo for canoeing and swimming. The others, set off at about the same time... for their hotel rooms. Another one of traditional sleepless nights at one of the beach bars has just ended, organized by the "grouvali" (that is what locals call free campers) in Mesakti, with surfers at tiny Ammoudaki, in Livadi with its golden sand, in Armenistis and Na or Seychelles with their enchanting sea bed. At some point the two populations meet. And they are both equally in love with Ikaria and the freedom it exudes.

Ikaria





Traditionally, visitors make sure to acquaint themselves with the island's archaeological sites, such as Tauropolation on the banks of the Chalari River, the tower of Drakanos, Therma with its hot springs, the museums of Kampos and Agios Kirikos, and the monastery of Agia Theoktisti in Pigi.

However, they do not forget the island's major point of reference: Faros, the broader area of Raches with its wild celebrations and Fournoi, the beautiful cluster of small islands just opposite.

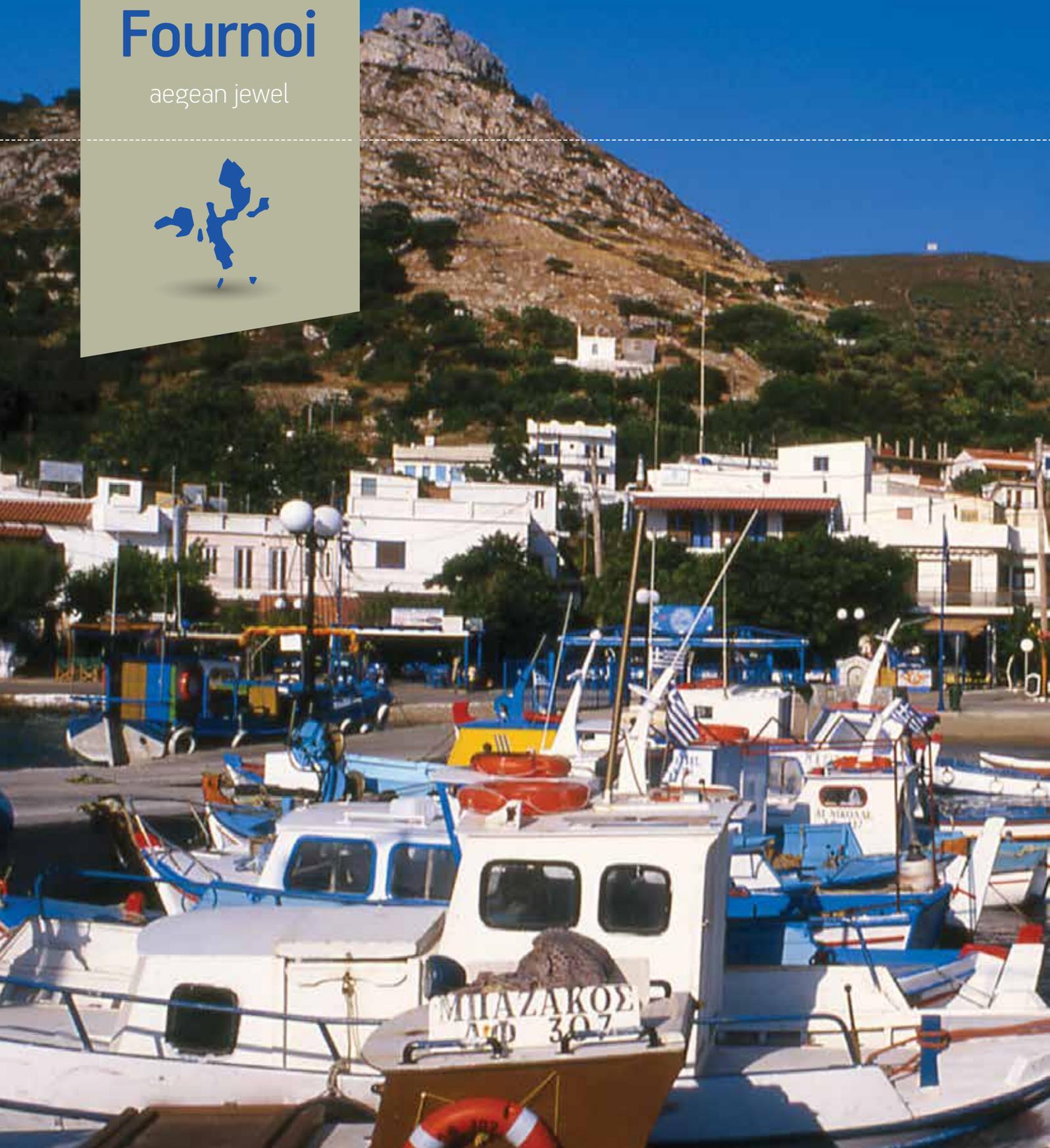
And in the afternoon, without stress or rushed orders and food on the go, they enjoy local fish, sofiko (a local delicacy of roasted vegetables), and rasko (boiled wild goat always served at festivals), along with Pramneos red wine, the pride of all Ikarians.

Ikaria is renowned for its good inexpensive food. It is also well known for its honey, its preserves (the rose preserve is a true revelation), its herbal teas, its local Rasko meat and its unique "kathoura" goat's cheese. As far as the catch is concerned, here you will truly have fresh Aegean fish, depending, of course, on the season.

A recent study has moved Ikarians to the top of the longevity chart, amongst all people in Europe, with a ten times greater chance of celebrating their 90th birthday. According to the scientific findings the secret is a healthy diet, exercise and sex. The locals themselves will tell you that you can find all of that in other parts of Greece, too. What makes them stand out is their relaxed nature. "Let life take you where it will. In any case, whether you like it or not, that's what will happen in the end". Wise words of an Ikarian, aged 94...

Fournoi

aegean jewel



There is only one way to travel back in time and experience old Greece up close. Take a ship and get off at Fournoi.

Fournoi is a formation of small islands and islets, of which only two are inhabited: Fournoi and Thymaina. Islands of fishermen and bee keepers, they provide visitors with all basic comforts.

Campos, the island's Chora, offers tavernas, patisseries, shops selling traditional products, a soft drink bottling workshop (the local orange soda is everyone's favourite refreshment here) and bakeries (fournoi) of course!



The main occupation of the locals, however, is not related to the land, but to the sea. The island has a large fishing fleet -disproportionate to its size- and has developed into one of the most important fishing centres in the Aegean. For this reason it is heaven for those who love fish in their diet, with unique opportunities to enjoy top quality fish, such as the Common Dentex, the Pink Dentex, the Common Pandora, the Dogtooth Grouper, as well as sea food and lobsters.

Fourni is a small island with a long history: there are ancient finds scattered throughout the island dating back to the Ionians, Classical and Hellenistic times. The Cyclopean wall with traces of an Acropolis on the Hill of Ai Giorgis, the ruins of the ancient temple at Kamari and the remains of homes on the sea bed, the shrine to Poseidon at Agia Triada in Chryssomilia, the ancient quarry at Petrokopio. This was an ideal base for pirates in the Middle Ages, due to the hundreds of small fjords and hidden beaches where their ships could be concealed, Fourni were once called "Corseoi Islands", after corsairs, i.e. pirates.

Fournoi





Each of the island's hamlets has its own character. In Chora, with its whitewashed mulberry trees and central square cafes, homes are still built on tiers above the harbour, with whitewashed alleys and people surrendered to a calm and peaceful pace.

In Kampi, just a kilometre away, next to the three windmills -a landmark of the island- you will see more newly erected buildings that are used as hostels or hotel apartments. The beach, with fine sand and salt cedars casting lush shadows, is an easy choice for a swim for those who have already adapted to the snoozing that is part of life on this land.

The real revelation, however, is Chryssomilia. Just 15 kilometres from Chora, it composes a paradise of peace and quiet, with many beaches all around and the most picturesque fishing boat haven in the whole of the Aegean.

The shoreline of Fournoi, with countless coves and canals that stab inland, like knives, into the island, is 120 kilometres long. Ideal moorings for all weather are Kamari, Elidaki, and Bali. Wonderful beaches for swimming are Psili ammos, Vlychada and Vitsilia.

A stroll in little Thymaina and enchanting Keramidou should not be missed by any visitor to Fournoi. A small independent island of 150 people, unaffected by the tourism development of recent decades, it generously offers images of authentic peace and serenity to anyone who chooses to explore it.

Before leaving the island where time has stopped, do not forget to take with you the coveted Fournoi honey, which owes its renown to the abundant thyme and sage that thrive on the island, as well as local cheeses "in wax" and "in brine".



Useful Information

Lesvos

Tourism Dept. of Lesvos Regional Unit: +30 22510 47437
 e-mail: tourismos@pvaigaiou.gov.gr
 Municipal Tourism Office: +30 22510 55868, 27777
www.lesvoslemnos.gr
www.travelplan.lesvos.gr
www.mobile.lesvos.gr
www.mytilene.gr

Limnos

Tourism Dept. of Lesvos-Limnos Regional Unit: +30 22510 47437
 Limnos Regional Unit: +30 22543 51200
 e-mail: tourismos@pvaigaiou.gov.gr, lemnos@lemnos.gr
 Municipality of Limnos: +30 22543 50000
www.travelplan.lesvos.gr
www.mobile.lesvos.gr
www.lesvoslemnos.gr
www.lemnos.gr
www.limnos.gov.gr

Agios Efstratios

Tourism Dept. of Lesvos-Limnos Regional Unit: +30 22510 47437
 Limnos Regional Unit: +30 22543 51200
 e-mail: tourismos@pvaigaiou.gov.gr, lemnos@lemnos.gr
 Municipality of Agios Efstratios: +30 22540 93210
www.travelplan.lesvos.gr
www.mobile.lesvos.gr
www.lesvoslemnos.gr
www.agios-efstratios.gov.gr

Chios

Tourism Dept. of Chios R.U.: +30 22710 40534
 e-mail: tourismos@chios.pvaigaiou.gov.gr
 Municipal Tourism Office: +30 22710 44389
www.chios.gr
www.chioscity.gr

Oinousses

Tourism Dept. of Chios R.U.: +30 22710 40534
 e-mail: tourismos@chios.pvaigaiou.gov.gr
 Municipality of Oinousses: +30 22710 55326, 55400
www.chios.gr

Psara

Tourism Dept. of Chios R.U.: +30 22710 40534
 e-mail: tourismos@chios.pvaigaiou.gov.gr
 Municipality of Psara: +30 22743 50100
www.chios.gr

Samos

Tourism Dept. of Samos R.U.: +30 22733 50401
 e-mail: ganti@samos.pvaigaiou.gov.gr
 Municipality of Samos: +30 22733 50101
www.culture.samos.gr
www.samos.gr
www.vathi.org

Ikaria

Tourism Dept. of Samos-Ikaria R.U.: +30 22733 50401
 e-mail: ganti@samos.pvaigaiou.gov.gr
 Ikaria Regional Unit: +30 22750 23094, 23822
 e-mail: ikaria.dioik@pvaigaiou.gov.gr
 Municipality of Ikaria: +30 22753 50400
www.ikaria-culture.samos.gr

Fournoi

Tourism Dept. of Samos R.U.: +30 22733 50401
 e-mail: ganti@samos.pvaigaiou.gov.gr
 Ikaria Regional Unit: +30 22750 23094, 23822
 e-mail: ikaria.dioik@pvaigaiou.gov.gr
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