

# A BEAUTIFUL JOURNEY IN HISTORY AND NATURE

THESPROTIA - VLORE



Institute of  
Public and Private  
Initiative





## A beautiful journey in history and nature

### Thesprotia - Vlorë Region

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## **A beautiful journey in history and nature**

Vlorë - Thesprotia Region

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## Foreword

*Dear Visitors, Dear Friends,*

*The Prefecture of Thesprotia, in the Northwestern end of Greece, after the completion of the EGNATIA ODOS motorway and the upgrading and modernisation of the Port of Igoumenitsa, is a fast and easily accessible, safe and attractive tourist destination. It welcomes visitors to a dreamy holiday, as it combines mountain and sea, with small trips, where mountainous and seaside sceneries alternate in a fantastic sequence.*

*Visitors can enjoy idyllic shores, rivers, caves, the water-lily lake, canyons, habitats and visit ancient, Byzantine and Roman monuments, Monasteries and Churches, the historic Souli, the modern Museum of Igoumenitsa, folklore museums and collections.*

*It addresses families and separate visitors and provides the option of organised stay and a multitude of events and activities, such as rafting, canoe, kayak, horse riding, biking, hang gliding, sea sports and, in the summer, traditional feasts and festivals. Furthermore it can be the basis for day trips to the neighbouring areas of Corfu and Paxoi, of Parga, Ioannina, Arta and the southern part of Albania. With this Tourist Guide Book we would like to introduce you to a small part of the rich Historical, cultural, nature-loving and artistic reserves of our area.*

*We invite you to our hospitable place, Thesprotia.*

*Come to discover it.*

**Alexandros Paschos**

*President of the Chamber of Thesprotia*

# GET

## Thesprotia Region

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# GET *Inside*

 *Ancient Period*

 *Medieval Period*

 *Modern Period*

 *Natural monument*

# 1<sup>st</sup> route

CORFU

IOANIAN SEA





Gate Bote *Ancient Sagiada*

*Sagiada*  
*Mastilitza's Acropolis*

*Ancient Gitana*

*Monastery of Ragio*

*Fortress of Igoumenitsa*

*Archaeological Museum*

IGMENITSA

*Folklore Museum*

*Plataria*

*Vrachonas*

*Polynery Castle*

VOTA

*Nikolaos*

*Perdika*

*Karavostasi beach*

*Arillas Beach*

*Dymokastro*

*Kalodiki Wetland*

PARGA

## Kalodiki Wetland (Water lilies Lake)



The Kalodiki Wetland is located at the southern end of the R.U.<sup>1</sup> of Thesprotia, where it borders with the R.U. of Preveza, on a plateau created at an altitude of approximately 100m., between the mountains of Parga and Margariti. It is a lake area, the level of which varies from season to season.

It is considered as one of the most important and particular wetlands in Greece with great ecological and special aesthetic value.

*1) Regional Unit of Thesprotia, one of the regional units of Greece, part of the Epirus region*

Its importance derives from the ensemble of its characteristics, the bird fauna that it hosts mainly as a station of the network of migratory stations of birds in Western Greece, its rich vegetation especially with the presence of water lilies, the fact that it is a freshwater wetland and many others

It has been designated as a “Special Area of Conservation (SAC)”, included in the European Ecological Network Natura 2000. Along with other wetlands in the wider area, it has also been designated as a Special Protected Area (SPA). Finally, the wetland of Kalodiki has been characterized as a “Nature protection area” due to its great ecological and biological value. It is an inland wetland with 7 habitat types, 5 of which are included in Directive 92/43 / EU. Of these, the habitat “Lime swamps with *Cladium mariscus* and *Carex davaliana*” is a priority. 301 species of plants, 120 species of birds, 20 mammals, 11 reptiles and 5 amphibians have been recorded in the area.<sup>2</sup>

The wetland of Kalodiki, also known as the lake with *water lilies*, was named after the queen of Thesprotia Kalodiki.

### *Suggested activities*

- \_ In the Kalodiki wetland there is no particular path designed for taking a walk, however there are carved rural roads on the perimeter, on which you can walk and enjoy the view from different locations, between the reeds and other aquatic plants and observe with binoculars, wonderful wading birds and coypus (myocastors) sunbathe, graze or swim.*
- \_ You can also stop in the village of Pyrgi and walk on the west side of the lake to the intersection of the road leading to Parga. You can also rest in the small park, set up by the forestry department in the north, next to the road from which you can also have a view to the lake, reach the wooden observatory, have an outdoor meal on the wooden benches and of course enjoy the scenery*
- \_ Remarkable monuments of the area that are also worth visiting as well are the ancient tower in the settlement of Pyrgi, at the crossroads of the provincial road of Igoumenitsa-Athens to Eleftheri, the settlement of Karteri for the Hellenistic buildings and the Byzantine cemetery - church in the center of the village, Margariti for its Venetian castle, the minaret of a damaged mosque and the old mansions in the traditional settlement (Management Body Kalamas – Acherontas – Corfu, n.k.).*

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2) Management Body Kalama - Acheron – Corfu, n.k.

The historical name of the community of Perdika is Arpitsa. This name, according to tradition, was taken from an Arab woman who travelled to the area to convert Christians to Islam. It was renamed Perdika in 1927. Two versions of how it got its name exist. One because the settlement from above had the shape of a flying partridge (in Greek “*perdika*”), and the other because the surrounding area fed abundant partridges.

Suggested activities:

- *Visit the Holy Monastery of St. Athanasios and the folklore museum of the area.*
- *Important cultural events are being organized every summer by the Local Community of Perdika. Among these and in collaboration with the local olive growers, takes place the Oil and Olive Festival,*

*and in the kiosks set up for the festival, all the olive products are being presented. The goal is to promote their production and improve the quality of their products.*

- *Come and experience the Carnival and the festival of “Koulouma” (Clean Monday) • Walk the path to Dymokastro. (it starts near Karavostasi and ends up to Dymokastro Castle). Either you go hiking or by car, you will be rewarded with the amazing view of Corfu, Paxos and Antipaxos that color elaborately the Ionian Sea.*
- *Visit the surrounding areas (specifically Margariti, Polyneri, Mazarakia, Plataria and Sivota).*
- *Finally, it is worth taking a dip in the beaches of Prapa Mali, Karavostasi, Stavrolimenas, Arillas, Sofas, Kamini, Agali, Agia Paraskevi and Mega Drafi.*

## Dymokastro

*Also called Erimokastro, Elinokastro, Elimokastro or D(i)yomokastro.*

The archeological site of Dymokastro is located on a hill south of Karavostasi bay in Perdika. It is a walled coastal settlement, which has been identified by N. Hammond and S. Dakari with ancient Elina, which is mentioned in a lead inscription from Dodoni. The name is a derivative of the ethnic name Elinoi, a thesprotian tribe, that is considered to have lived in the area of Margariti - Plataria - Perdika.

The walled settlement was established during the late classical period. Most of the walls were built in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century BC (perimeter 1,600 m.), at the same time as those of the other large

ancient settlements of Thesprotia, Elea, Gitani and Fanoti (Doliani). During this period, the extent of the fortified settlement was about seventy acres.

The settlement flourished during the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BC. In 167 BC it was destroyed after the attack of the Roman legions of Aemilius Paulus, however, in contrast with the other fortified settlements of Thesprotia due to its key position for the control of the Ionian sea routes- it was not abandoned, but continued to be inhabited during the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and up to the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.



The location of the fortified settlement is excellent, next to Karavostasi bay, which in antiquity should have penetrated deeper into the valley creating a large natural harbor, in accordance with its contemporary name. From the settlement itself, which seems to have been facing the sea, one has excellent view to the southern part of Corfu, Paxos, Antipaxos and Lefkas. A particular feature of the settlement are the three rock-cut, circular tanks for the collection of rainwater. The habitation picture completes a burial tumulus, part of an ancient cemetery at the foot of the hill outside the walls.

The area is accessible by car, through a provincial road that leads to the beach Karavostasi of the Perdika Community of Thesprotia, from which it is about 5 km and then via a passable dirt road. Alternatively, a trek trail leads from Karavostasi beach to the archeological site. This is an open-air space, permanently open to the public space. (*Ephorate of Antiquities of Thesprotia, 2020*).

## Arillas Beach

The beach of Arillas is a windless organized one, with fine sand and crystal-clear waters. It is ideal for and preferred by families with children, as it is very shallow. It is a picturesque landscape, a large bay that with the existence of the small fishing port attracts many visitors. Rooms to let and hotels surround the beach.



## Karavostasi beach

Karavostasi beach is a very long, organized beach, with white sand and clear blue cool waters. It is no coincidence that many people identify the Perdika's settlement with the image of this beach. It has an amazing landscape and that is why it has been selected several times for the shooting of movies and commercials.

It is considered as a cove - anchorage of the ships due to its location, suitable for coverage / protection from the winds and proximity to the ancient settlement .



## Sivota

Sivota is one of the most popular resorts in Epirus, considered comparable to the Caribbean, given its natural landscape that combines small islands, green to the coastline and turquoise, crystal clear waters, but are also considered comparable to Monaco, given their cosmopolitan character, provided by the vessels that flock to the area .

Sivota is an area with a rich history, starting from 433 BC, with the naval battle of Sivota, between Corinth and Corfu, taking place in the context of the Peloponnesian War, near the area and the small islands of Sivota to be identified as the corresponding ones in the history of Thucydides. During the Greek Revolution it functioned as an Ottoman naval base. It finally passed to the Greek state during the Balkan Wars.



In August 1944, a clash took place in the area between the guerrillas of EDES and the Occupation forces, which led to the occupation of two German petrol ships.

During the Turkish occupation the village was named Mourtos, as it took its name from the Military Commander during the period of Ali Pasha, while the name Sivota was adopted in 1959.

Suggested activities:

- *Some of the important cultural attractions of the area such as the monastery of Agia Paraskevi, the lighthouse of the island of Mavro Oros built in 1884 as well as the ancient settlement of Vrachonas, but also Polyneri (Koutsis) definitely worth a visit.*
- *As for the natural beauties, their shoreline and specifically the beaches of Mikri and Megali Ammos, Bella Vraika, Zavia, Pisina, Zeri and Gallikos Molos are all special and are connected to each other through an idyllic landscape with orchards and wooded green hills. In fact, the so-called path of lovers ends at Gallikos Ormos beach.*
- *Many opportunities are provided to visitors for sea tours. The small islands (Agios Nikolaos, Mavro Oros & Mourtemeno), as well as the secluded beaches of the area are ideal, considering that access is provided through boat trips. Depending on the desires and possibilities one can enjoy from a private cruise, to a ride on a sailboat, skiff or boat with or without a driver / skipper. There are organized, semi-organized and completely unorganized beaches thus ask the locals before you start your journey and equip yourself accordingly.*

– *The area is also suitable for diving. Experts promise beginners and advanced divers a unique experience. This is an area where the greatest depth reaches 120-140 meters, the visibility reaches 25-35 meters and there are no particular currents, while the water temperature is usually between 19 degrees Celsius in May and 25-26 on July-August.*

*The deep sea in Sivota is worthy of the wealth of the Mediterranean, indicatively blue damsel fish, slugs (mainly Pink Flabellina and Spotted), epinephrine, pike, Mediterranean moray, octopus, squid, sea bream, wrasse, sea bass, eels, seaborbes, rockfish, red mullets, Mediterranean parrotfish, as well as dolphins and sea turtles can be found.*

*Even if you have not been enchanted yet, the sponges and the starfish will not leave you indifferent. In general, a dive is good enough to convince you! All you have to do is choose the location, with the Lighthouse, the Kamares and the Alcatraz being excellent choices. And if nature is not your "cup of tea", then maybe the wreck of the British minesweeper H.M.S.*

*REGULUS (J 327) which sank during the Second World War close to Sivota in Thesprotia and is one of the shipwrecks attributed to the diving community by the Ephorate of Marine Antiquities.*

– *You will be amazed by the landscape of Sivota which you may admire while horse-riding.*

– *Finally, it is a good choice for food and cocktails, especially at the sunset.*





## Vrachonas

The settlement of Vrachonas is located on a plateau that extends along the ridge of Mount Vrachonas to the southeast of the modern settlement of Sivota. It consists of about 50 deserted houses, which are being preserved. The houses are made out of small coarsely carved stones from the area, two-storied with vaulted structures on the ground floor and date to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The houses blend harmoniously with the imposing rocky landscape, while the few olive and almond trees, although not enough to soften the dry outline of the plain, harmoniously highlight the landscape. In 1993 the settlement, in order to be protected from newer interventions, was declared as a historical monument (*Government Gazette* 752 / B / 27.09.1993).

## Island of St. Nikolaos of Sivota

The second largest out of the eight islands of Syvota is overgrown in vegetation. Due to that, it is not easily crossed, which is why rumors are circulating that the ruler of the greater region, fearing sea attacks and unable to advance at the inland, built a small hidden fortress. Nowadays only few ruins survive that are now harmoniously hidden by the wild vegetation of the area. From these it is estimated that its area does not exceed 50 m<sup>2</sup> and is probably from the Byzantine era.

The island is accessible only by boat; however, it is worth visiting for its homonymous beautiful beach with transparent, turquoise waters that resemble to a swimming pool.



## Plataria

Built in the deepest point of the homonymous gulf, between the capes of Agionisi and Erimonisi (Cheronisi) and between the ports of Igoumenitsa and Syvota, is located the seaside village of Plataria.

In this location it is estimated that either the ancient Kalamini, Kalamonia of Stefanos Byzantios or “Almini” according to Ptolemy pre-existed. It seemingly began to be inhabited in 1300 AD, while in 1730 it was an organized Christian community, which resisted on Islamification. After the war, many residents immigrated to Germany, without forgetting their place of origin, a fact that benefited the village in the long run. The earthquakes of the period 1979-80 stimulated the relocation of many residents from the mountains to the lower parts of the village, evolving it into a modern seaside village, which also has a Yacht Reception Marina.

There are 2 versions of how it got the name “Plataria”: The first one says that the name comes from the existence of the plain, that is, a wide part (“plati”), hence “Plataria”, while according to the second one, it is related to the existence of a large plane tree, from which a small part is still preserved.

Suggested routes:

- You can walk at the coastline of the port of Plataria. In addition to the nice walk, you can taste fresh fish and enjoy a glass of wine by the sea.
- Walk the path “Corner (“gonia”) of Igoumenitsa - Old Plataria”. It is a panoramic route which initially follows the ridge and then crosses the mountain slope of “Velanidia”.



- This is the path that in earlier times connected Graikochori, Ladochori and Agia Marina to Plataria. The walker has on his left a panoramic view of the city and on his right the Port of Igoumenitsa and the bay of Plataria. In the middle of the route a new church can be found and in front of it a very old threshing floor and a house from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A characteristic point of the course is the old well named: “pousi tou arap” that is, the well of the “Arap” (a Greek word insinuating a black person) .*
- *Every July, as part of the festival called “Varkarola”, the icon of St. Paraskevi is transferred by boat to the bay of Plataria, accompanied by a philharmonic, followed by a feast with traditional.*
  - *On the day of the feast of St Georgios, in the same named church located on the road from Plataria to Syvota, residents of the area carry his image alongside horses.*
  - *You could visit one or more of the different beaches of the area and specifically Plataria, Kokkino Vrachio, Kalami and Gata.*

## Polynery Castle

The fortified settlement in Koutsí according to its old name, currently referred as Polyneri of Sivota, is located on the eastern slope of Mount Vrachonas at an altitude of 288m, in a naturally fortified position that controls the plain of Plataria, providing visibility up to the sea. Polyneri represents nowadays the only ancient, fortified settlement that is inhabited and expands within the walls of the fortress.

There are no historical data or sources that inform us about the historical development of the fortified settlement over the centuries.

Its origins are probably defined, when most of the settlements of Thesprotia were created, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. It survives during the Hellenistic period and was probably destroyed along with the rest of the continental cities in 167 BC by the Romans, after the defeat of Perseus in Pydna.

During this period or later in the northwest corner of the ancient settlement, a small castle of triangular top view was constructed, which seems to have been used during the Byzantine times. In recent years the settlement expands outside the walls. Precisely because of its continuous habitation over time, except for the fortification, few remains of ancient times have been preserved inside the settlement and are limited - for the most part - to simple foundation carvings on the natural rock.

The settlement was further developed during the Byzantine and modern times. It is located 22 km south of Igoumenitsa through the National Road Igoumenitsa - Preveza and about 3km after Plataria. The visitor should turn right in order to approach the modern settlement and the archaeological site. It is an open-air constantly site.



## Folklore Museum of Plataria

The Folklore Museum of Plataria was founded on the initiative of the local Cultural Association in 2007 and has since been housed in the old primary school of the village. The valorization and promotion of the popular culture, the organization, recording and preservation of objects, their exhibition to the public and the enrichment of the collection are the main purpose of the museum's existence.



It is worth noting that the collection resulted from the donation and borrowing of objects, mainly from the residents of Plataria but also the surrounding areas, which were recorded and evaluated and a selection of them consists the museum's exhibits.

The exhibition was designed based on the particularities of all the selected objects and specifically their usability, functionality, rarity and aesthetic value.

The exhibition "illustrates" life before industrialization and is considered as a "representative sample of popular culture of the era".

The first section concerns outdoors work that is mainly related to traditional professions such as in the production and / or acquisition of raw materials and goods and the second refers to items of household equipment, mainly related to personal and family life (preparation and consumption of food, production of individual and household clothing, furniture and home lighting).

# Igoumenitsa

It is the Capital of Thesprotia, from the formation of the administrative unit in 1936 until today. It has about 10,000 residents and is one of the largest ports in the country.

The name Igoumenitsa (*Goumenitsa* or *Gkoumenitsa*) came from the neighboring area of Goumani or Goumeni, when residents of the settlement or nomads settled there. The increase in population and the flocks in Goumani led many, mainly breeders to move to the current city of Igoumenitsa which was then a rich uninhabited pasture. Consequently, to maintain ties with their settlement of origin, they named the new one with the first one's diminutive (Kitsos, 1977).







### *Suggested activities:*

- \_ Visit the Archaeological Museum of the area.*
- \_ Visit the House of Rena, to get to know the cultural, folklore traditions and arts of the area*
- \_ There are several places that can be visited by bicycle in the area. Visitors can rent bicycles in several points.*
- \_ It is worth noting that the Mediterranean route – route 8 of EUROVELO, passes through Igoumenitsa (EUROVELO, 2021).*
- \_ “Head to the small forest downtown. You will go through the market where you can shop fresh fruits and vegetables. In the heart of the forest at the top of the hill lay the ruins of a medieval castle overlooking the bay of Igoumenitsa”.*
- \_ Visit the Roman Villa in Ladochori of Igoumenitsa (aq neighboring settlement)*
- \_ Visit Ruins of a windmill in Graikobori (Greek Village – another neighboring settlement)*
- \_ Take a swim in the beautiful beaches of the area.*
- \_ At the entrance of the Bay of Igoumenitsa, visit, by boat, the pine-covered Agionisi (Sacred-Island) and the katholikon of the Monastery of Zoodochos Pigi, share of the Monastery of Giromeri of Thesprotia, which is hosted there.*
- \_ Big Carnival events take place in Igoumenitsa, be sure not to miss them!.*

## Archaeological Museum

The Archaeological Museum of Igoumenitsa is a modern regional museum that has been operating since the end of 2009 in a newly built building at the northern entrance of the city.

The permanent exhibition of the Archaeological Museum of Igoumenitsa, entitled “Thesproton Chora” (Thesprotian country) covers the archaeological periods from the Middle Paleolithic (100,000 BC) to the times of Ottoman rule (19<sup>th</sup> century AD), presenting through selected findings and accompanied by rich information material, the most important stations in the history of the Thesprotian area. The main interest is focused on the Hellenistic era, a period of great prosperity and which is representative of the region of Epirus in general.

The exhibition is developed on three levels and is structured in five sub-thematic units: archaeological - historical background, settlements of historical times, public life, private life, and burial customs. With the help of technology (video projection) in various parts of the exhibition, visitors are given the opportunity to explore additional information and data.

The museum also has a multipurpose room, a video projection room, a patio - a small amphitheater and an open terrace, which hosts occasional exhibitions, educational programs and various cultural events throughout the year. An access ramp can be found at the entrance, while the tour of the exhibition and the museum is supported by a lift.

Special arrangements have been made in the sanitary areas (Ministry of Culture and Sports, 2012). In general, in the indoor and outdoor areas of the museum, the necessary works have taken place to ensure the safe and autonomous movement of all people with mobility disabilities, mobility difficulties and disabled people. It is open Wednesday to Monday, 8:30-15:30 (Tuesday: Closed) (Ephorate of Antiquities of Thesprotia, 2021). However, prior communication is recommended to confirm the above mentioned information (Ephorate of Antiquities of Thesprotia, 2021).





## Fortress of Igoumenitsa

The fortress of Igoumenitsa was built on a pine-covered hill in the place of an ancient fortress. Its foundation dates to the late Roman era and is probably associated with the late Roman - early Christian settlement of Ladochori founded by Roman settlers in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. During the Venetian occupation, in the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and onwards, Igoumenitsa is referred to as a Venetian hub and its port is again used as a berth and safe haven for ships. At the same time the Fortress changes shape and is strengthened with towers, fortifications, gates, arched openings and cannon windows.

Igoumenitsa is justly one of the “most advanced” outposts of Venice in western Greece until 1540 when it was finally occupied by the Ottomans. In 1685, however, the then Turkish fortress of Igoumenitsa was blown up by Admiral Morosini of the Venetian fleet. After the overthrow of the Venetian Republic and the occupation of its fortress by Ali Pasha of Ioannina, at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, an attempt was made to repair it without much success.



## Pyrgos Ragiou (Tower of Ragio)

The archeological site of Pyrgos Ragiou is located 10 km NW of the city of Igoumenitsa. It's located at the top of a low hill in the middle of the Ragio-Kestrini plain, near the old estuary of the river Kalamas. The site's location has a long history from the Middle Paleolithic period to the times of Ottoman rule.

In the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC the hill was fortified with a strong wall, which is still kept in significantly good condition, enclosing an area of three acres. For its biggest part, the wall was built according to the isodomonic system of masonry (use of rectangular boulders), which is also a way of dating its construction to the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. From research so far, it is considered that the fortress was part of the "Kerkyraiki Perea", the military base that -according to the historian Thucydides- was established by the Corfiots on the Thesprotian coast at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, ensuring control of the sea passage between Corfu and Epirus as well as the supervision of several kilometers of the hinterland.



During the Ottoman period the area was inhabited systematically, as indicated by the large number of compounds and dry stone walls. During the same period, on the northern tower of the ancient fortification, a two-storey building was built, the so-called Tower, to which the modern name of the place is due.

The Tower belongs to the architectural type of “kula”, which like that of the tower house, was very widespread in the wider Balkan area during the Ottoman period. It is a military building, which served as an observatory and as residence to the garrison of the Agha (commander during the Ottoman Empire) of the region.

Findings from the excavations at the archeological site of Pyrgos Ragiou are exhibited at the Archaeological Museum of Igoumenitsa. These include tools from the Middle Paleolithic and Neolithic era from flint, pottery from the Bronze Age, clay figurines from the Archaic period, pottery, coins, and other small objects (arrowheads, lead missiles, slingshots, etc.) from the Classical, Hellenistic and Roman era, as well as daily used objects from the modern period of inhabitation of the area.

The place can be visited after consultation with the Ephorate of Antiquities of Thesprotia: Monday-Friday (09:00-14:00) (tel:26650.29177/8, e-mail: efathe@culture.gr). It is located 9km NW of the city of Igoumenitsa and access is possible by car up to its entrance by the asphalt road to Drepano-Makrigiali at the northern exit of Igoumenitsa to Ioannina. Unfortunately, there is no infrastructure for people with disabilities, thus it is not accessible to people facing mobility issues (*Ephorate of Antiquities of Thesprotia, 2021*).



## Lygia Peninsula

The fortified settlement of Lygia extends to the eastern half of the same named peninsula of the Municipality of Igoumenitsa, in the old estuary of the river Kalamas. The settlement is possibly identified with the ancient city of Toroni, part of the “Kerkyraiki Perea” . It consists of three successively fortified sections, conventionally called Castles A, B and C and have strong -mostly- isodomic fortifications of the 5<sup>th</sup> and early 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. The walled settlement covers a total area of about 580 acres. Traces of violent destruction are evident. The traces of the westernmost, largest castle (360 acres) are preserved in fragments. This is an outdoor area, constantly open to the public. The archeological site is accessible by road from Igoumenitsa, from which it is about 10 km, through an asphalt paved and then passable dirt road, which starts near the northern exit of the city to Ioannina and leads to the beach of Drepanos.

### *Suggested activities*

- *Walk the route “Lygia Peninsula, cave - beach”. All shores are located on the Lygia peninsula, which in addition to being part of the NATURA 2000 network has great archaeological value, according to a report by Thucydides in the “Kerkyraiki Perea”.*
- *The Lygia peninsula is located 8km. west of Igoumenitsa. Adequate clothing and equipment is necessary in order to provide you comfort during underwater swimming.*
- *The cave has a small opening with sufficient water surface and a height of about 20m. In the front a small beach with pebbles about 10m long can be found. The water purity, it's large number of hychthyogenic and the image that the stalagmites and the crashing waves paint in the dim light is enchanting.*



## Monastery of Ragio

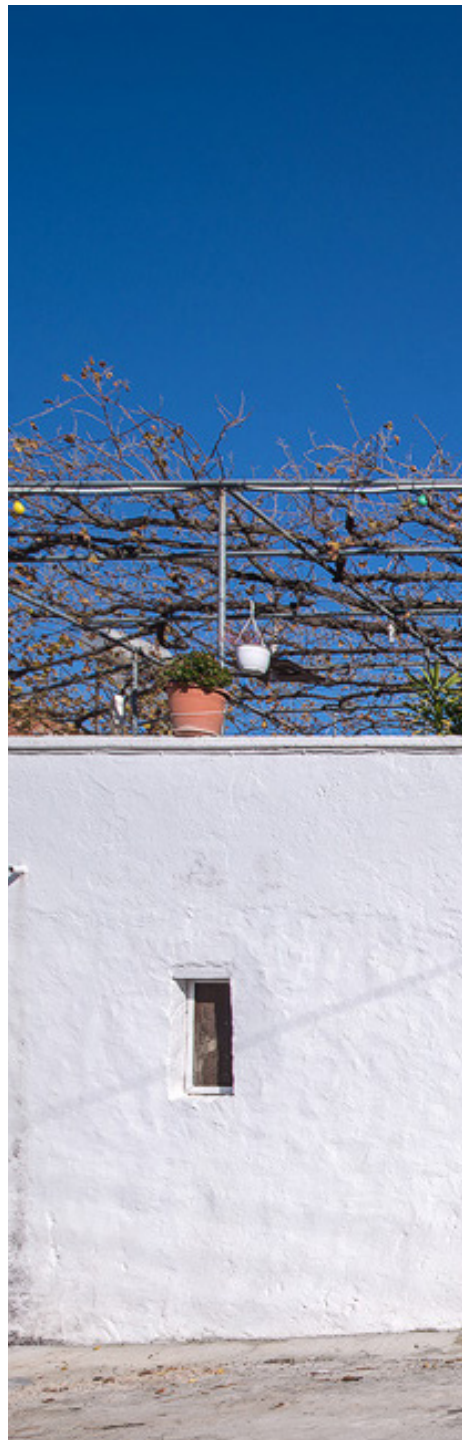
Historical monument, former Monastery, the year of construction is unknown, whereas its current form probably belongs to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It was last renovated in 1865. The monastery is built on the left side of the road from Igoumenitsa to Sagiada, near the homonymous village, dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary and it was founded - probably - during the Byzantine Empire. According to research by the Ephorate of Antiquities, the exact date of foundation of the monastery remains unknown.

Various traditions are preserved that place it in 920, according to the inscription that exists above the outer door of the church or during the reign of Manuel Komnenos (1143-1180) or in the years of Michael Paleologos (1261-1282). It was looted many times during the Ottoman Empire. According to Michailidis, it experienced the greatest destruction in the middle of the 16th century, while Mouselimis describes the massacre of the abbot and the monks in 1725. However, it was a rich monastery, which during its peak possessed significant relics and large real estate, including the fertile plain in the delta of the river Kalamas, while maintaining about 150 monks, many schools and included a rich library. A manuscript of 1703 defines its borders, while in 1865-1866 one of its last renovations is dated by the abbot of the monastery of Souvlasi Nathaniel from Povlas Filiates.

Nowadays only the Katholikon of a special architectural type is being preserved, with a pronaos, “dances” (the place where the cantors stand) and the main temple, which has a small dome.

The interior is covered with murals, which have suffered significant damages from the last fire that hit the temple. The story of the mural decoration in the katholikon follows the established types of painting of the first half of the 17th century. It can be visited throughout the day.

With Ministerial Decision it has been nominated historical monument.







## Ancient Gitana

Gitana, the second -in chronological order- capital of ancient Thesprotia and seat of the Koinon of the Thesprotians, are identified with the ruins of a fortified settlement on the southwestern slope of the mountain of Vrysella, at the confluence of Kalpakiotiko with the river Kalamas (ancient Thyamis). From their privileged position they controlled the exit of the then navigable river to the sea. In its approximately 150 years of existence since its foundation in 335/330 BC., until its occupation by the Romans in 167 BC, the city was one of the most important political, administrative and economic centers of the wider Ionian Sea region.

The epigraphic testimonies and literary sources, combined with the findings of recent research, allow the identification of the aforementioned place with Ancient Gitana. The oldest information about the existence of Gitana as the seat of the Koinon of the Thesprotians is testified by the content of a liberation resolution found in the area of the agora, which dates between 350 and 300 BC, while it is also confirmed by the ancient written tradition (Livios, Polybios). The last written testimony about the city (Livios) dates to the autumn of 172 BC, the year when Roman envoys arrived in Epirus occasioned by the preparation of the organization of military operations in view of the imminent start of the Third Macedonian War.



The finding of 3,000 clay seals, on which the name “GITANA” is inscribed in the Doric dialect, during the excavation of a large public building, which is identified with the Prytaneion of the city, confirms the identification of the name with the one preserved by literary tradition.

The ancient settlement is surrounded on three sides by the river Kalamas. To the northeast, the mountain range of Vrysellas, where the citadel of the Gitana, dominates the interior of the delta plain, formed by riverwashes and provides additional natural protection to the ancient city. The privileged -in terms of beauty and fortification- position in combination with the direct access to natural resources of the area contributed to the early habitation of the area already from prehistoric times, as it provided self-sufficiency and security to the inhabitants.

In ancient times, the river was navigable from its estuary in the Ionian sea until at least the height of the Gitana, playing a key role in the subsequent development of the settlement as a significant commercial center. Through this waterway and the riparian roads, people and goods were transported - in an otherwise inaccessible landscape - and the access to the sea was ensured, as well as to the fertile river valley, where the important settlements of Lygia and Mastilita were located. At the same time, there was direct communication with the other major cities along the river (ancient Fanoti, settlement in Raveni etc.) but also those located on the coast of Thesprotia (Elina etc.).


As evidenced by the extensive layers of destruction of the excavated buildings, it seems that the ancient settlement was destroyed in 167 BC and was sporadically inhabited up to the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, when it was permanently abandoned.

The relatively luxurious living of the inhabitants of the city, shortly before its destruction in the 2<sup>nd</sup> BC. century, is reflected in the quality of construction of public buildings that have been excavated and the wealth of movable finds.

Near the settlement, to the west of its walls there is an ancient theater, a venue for theatrical performances, but also events of a political nature, with a capacity of 4-5,000 spectators. The site can be visited Wednesday to Sunday. However, it is advisable to get information by the competent Ephorate, since opening hours may change (tel: 26650.29177/8, e-mail: efathe@culture.gr) (Ephorate of Antiquities of Thesprotia, 2021).

Access to the archeological site, until its entrance, is possible through asphalt road from the national road Igoumenitsa-Sagiada. From the entrance, using the ramp, it is possible for people on wheelchairs and visual impairments to reach the guard / ticket office, where an exhibition is hosted with informative and photographic material on the history and the works of promotion of the settlement. It is also possible to approach the area of the ancient theater by car, through the existing dirt road .



An aerial photograph of a river valley. In the upper part, a large concrete dam spans across a river. Below the dam, the river flows through a lush green valley. The surrounding hills are covered in dense forest with some autumn-colored trees. The overall scene is a mix of natural beauty and human-made infrastructure.

*Suggested activities:*

- *You can take a stroll along the irrigation dam of the river Kalamas, which is 1.5 km away.*
- *You can also walk the complete route “Gitana - Phoiniki” or part of it. A small cave filled with tombs from the classical period can be found next to the road close to a bridge from the 19th century. Both sites showcase the timelessness of the field. During the summer period the route can be done through the waterbed since it is dry.*

*In about an hour you will reach the bridge of Kalpakiotiko.*

*After a short break, continue for two more hours to reach the Mesochori (village) of Phoiniki. There, you can see the exhibition of everyday professional and personal instruments, items and habits at the folklore museum.*

- *Visit the small hydroelectric station of Gitana – Ragio.*

## Kalamas River Delta



The mountains and hills that existed around the Kalamas River Delta were once islands of estuaries. The sedimentation of the river over the centuries, along the area of Thesprotia, covered the sea around them and formed the present fertile plain that extends above the triangle Igoumenitsa-Ragio-Sagiada.

The area, located at the core of the Natura 2000 network of protected areas, is one of the most important wetlands in the country with rich fauna and flora. Due to the unspoiled quality of the environment, the wider area attracts many visitors who are interested in waterfowl.

Just a few kilometers from the border with Albania, one of the most important wetlands in Western Greece and Europe, the Delta of the river Kalamas, includes the estuaries of the old and new bed of the river, the lagoons of Reho, Vatatsa, Loutsa Papadia, Vontas, etc. The area of the protected area of the Kalamas Delta amounts to 8,531 hectares.

The area is important due to its rich biodiversity, but also its geographical location which is important as it is an integral part of the Western migration route of birds.

In the Delta of the river Kalamas we find a complex mosaic of vegetation consisting of 16 types of habitats. The 14 of them are included in the Directive 92/43 / EU while the habitat “Lagoons” is a priority. This priority is due to the large number of fish and birds that find shelter there, more than 174 species of birds, many of them rare and endangered (wintering place of herons, also hosts more than 1% of the population of *Egretta alba*) of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea, a significant number of the population of *Platalea leucorodia*, *Plegadis falcinellus*, white egrets, but also silver pelicans (which in recent years have appeared throughout the year), 30 species of fish of which the small fish *Valencia letourneuxi* is a rare and protected species, 16 species of reptiles (5 species of turtles, two freshwater, 2 terrestrial and one marine, 4 species of lizards, 7 species of snakes), 22 species of mammals (some of

which are *Neomys anomalus*, *Talpa stankovici*, *Felis silvestris*, *Myocastor coypus*), 5 species of amphibians (2 toads-*Bufo bufo*, *Bufo viridis*, *Hyla arborea*, *Rana epeirotica* & *Rana balcanica*) and 29 species of invertebrates).

Suggested activities:

- \_ *Walk the Kalamas Delta, enjoying the natural habitat.*
- \_ *Walk the path “Boliara Bridge - Spyropigadia”.*
- \_ *The landscape, the vegetation and the view along the Kalamas River are magnificent. It is worth taking the time to walk at least in one part of it.*
- \_ *It is worth trying canyoning (gorge descent) in the “Straits” of the river Kalamas .*

## Mastilitsa's Acropolis

The hill of Mastilitza dominates the plain of South Kalamas between the bay of Sagiada and the mountain “Mavronoros” (Black Mountain), ensuring the control of the whole area and direct supervision of a large part of the sea roads of the northern Ionian”

The fortified settlement on the hill of Mastilitza or Masklinitza occupies the top of the hill and is perhaps the oldest fortified settlement of the Thesprotian area, since its foundation is placed at least at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC.

On the edge of the hill, in the plain next to the almost modern estuaries of Kalamas, a salvage excavation revealed a Roman villa, which was built in the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and seems to have survived until the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD .



It is located 14 km NW of Igoumenitsa. The visitor can get there via a rural road that connects with the provincial road Igoumenitsa - Sagiada, crossing the plain of Kestrini. It is pointed out that there is no access road to the top of the hill, where the archeological site is located.

### Suggested activities

*– Walking on the hill of Mastilitza: There is no distinctly created path. However, walking on the smooth slope is easy. Although the hill of Mastilitza is low, it offers a spectacular view of the neighboring wetland and the medieval salt marshes of Sagiada. Both the wetland and the estuary located nearby are very good points for bird watching. It is a one-kilometer easy uphill route.*



## Sagiada

The coastal area in the northwest of R.U. Thesprotia, from the old estuary of Kalamas to the Greek-Albanian border occupies the area of the village Sagiada. This is an area that is famous for the fish farms of sea bream and sea bass, while its fish catches are also famous. You should not leave the area without trying grey mullets and shrimps at Paralia Skaloma, while the sunset in the area is amazing.

Sagiada is a quiet seaside village. From there the view to the port is magnificent. The old Sagiada, although it is abandoned today, is worth a visit. It was built on the slope of the mountain and unfortunately was burned in 1943 from the Germans. Today, only the ivy-wrapped ruins remind of the past.

Suggested activities:

– *Walk through the picturesque gorge of Kalamas. At the entrance and exit of the gorge, the two ancient citadels of Osdina and Ravehi are timeless as their rugged walls and the churches with lead slate stand like guards for centuries. The gorge is easily accessible from Sagiada. On the way to Igoumenitsa, turn left onto the old highway to Ioannina and go to Plakoti and Five Churches. Before entering the village, follow the road that leads to “Paleochora” as the locals call the ancient settlement. Continue until you reach the old Beley Bridge in Kalamas. On the northeast side of the bridge is the citadel of Osdina with its ancient castles, Byzantine fortresses and post-Byzantine churches and monasteries.*

– *Walk to the route “Kotsika – old Sagiada”. On this route, the hike follows the border line between Greece and Albania. The walker has a panoramic view of the Kalamas Delta. We pass near the abandoned village of Liopsis and end up in the designated “traditional settlement” of old Sagiada (also abandoned). In the middle of the route at the location “pyramid” the walker has a unique panoramic view of the lagoon of Vouthroto (Albania) and the delta of the river Kalamas”.*

– *Visit the city of Filiates.*

– *Visit the village of Tsamantas.*

– *Visit the church of Agios Georgios*

– *Visit the village of Phoiniki, built on the slopes of the hill overlooking the surrounding plantations, with very well-preserved traditional architecture, currently protected through national legislation. Do not forget to visit both the folklore museum and the stone arched bridge of the area.*

– *Do not forget to try original local products, such as cheese pie, sour milk, yogurt and honey, frumenty – in Greek “Trachanas”, a short of traditional Greek pasta etc. for breakfast, along with a nice traditional coffee. At the port of Sagiada, you can enjoy fresh fish or drink your coffee and relax. It is suggested to try shrimps, which are a local specialty.*



- *In the seaside Municipality of Sagiada on August 6th of every year, the Sea Bream Festival is organized in collaboration with the Association of fish farmers of the region. Every summer usually in August, an international festival of polyphonic singing takes place with the participation of bands from Greece and the Balkan countries. The events take place mainly in Filiates, Palia Sagiada, Fanoti Parapotamos and the villages of Mourgana. Do not miss it!*
- *Come for the Carnival and the koulouma (Clean Monday)*
- *Relax on one of the beaches of the area (Keramidi & Strovili)*
- *Visit the Monastery of Sotiros Plakotis*

## Old Sagiada

Old Sagiada, although abandoned nowadays, it is worth a visit. It was built on the slope of the mountain and unfortunately burned in 1943 by the German troop. Only the ivy-wrapped ruins are reminiscent of the past. Although it is in ruins, it is a picturesque village with paved streets and old mansions. In the central square the picturesque church of St. George with its unique frescoes still stands proudly.

The path “Grigorios Tsogas” connects the new and old Sagiada, do not neglect walking it. Due to its strategic position, Old Sagiada was a village full of life. Due to its geographical position, it experienced the flourishing of trade, especially during the Venetian occupation of the Ionians. The port was a large freight station for Ioannina, Larissa, and Trikala.



For this reason, in the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a war broke out between the Turks and the Venetians for its sovereignty. The newspaper “VOICE OF EPIRUS”, dated on 26-1-1901, reports that in the port of Sagiada, since 1893, a steamer boat of an Austrian shipping company, which was on a leisure cruise, approached weekly, while a naval agent had also been installed on the coast. The transportation of tourists from the steamboat to the coast was carried out by boats, and the cruises continued until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Transportation to the area of the settlement can be done by car up to a point and from that hiking is suggested. The view from this point to the delta of Kalamas and Sagiada is spectacular. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of July, the traditional festival of St Paraskevi takes place in the old village.

# 2<sup>nd</sup> route

CORFU

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IGOUMENITSA

SIVOTA

IOANIAN SEA





## Gliki

Gliki is a lowland village in the municipality of Souli. It is located at an altitude of 80m, southeast of the road Paramythia-Preveza. At the east of the village rise the Paramythia Mountains, while to the west flows the river Acheron.

The population is engaged in small livestock and agriculture, mainly rice cultivation. In parallel, important alternative tourism activities start developing in the area, given its rich natural wealth. According to tradition, the name Glyki (sweet) was given when St Donatos killed the dragon that nested in the springs of Acheron and blessed the water that was once deadly.



One of the most important surviving monuments of the area is the ruins of a Byzantine Basilica. The location of the settlement was of strategic importance because not only did it control the crossing of the river Acheron, but the eastern part of the international Roman road Apollonia-Vouthroto-Nikopolis also passed through it.

Suggested activities:

*\_The celebrations of the River Acheron: Next to the mythical river Acheron in the village of Glyki, a series of events are organized every summer on the initiative of the local authorities, with the participation of many artists, as well as a demonstration of horse riding and paragliding flights.*

*\_A relatively easy route to Acheron is the famous path used by the Souliotes during the Turkish occupation. It is worth a stop at the Cave of the Dragon with its gurgling springs.*

*\_Starting similarly from Skala Tzavelenas, the visitor can end up in the village of Samoniva. Here the visitor will be enchanted by the different landscapes and will feel awe in front of towering rocks known according to mythology as the “Gate of Hades”.*

*\_But let's not forget its springs, which are located just 2 km from the village. These are really landscapes of unique natural beauty, it is no coincidence that the ecosystem of Acheron is protected by the Natura 2000 network.*

*\_Walk the path “Skala tis Tzavelainas – Pigadia Souli” (Stairs of Tzavelaina – Souli Wells), a beautiful path that starts outside the village of Glyki in Acheron and ends at the Castle of Kiafa in Souli or a beautiful variation of the Glyki - Skala Tzavelaina - Dallas bridge and return through the gorge of the river.*

## Acheron River

*In recent years, extreme sports schools have also been organized in Glyki, such as rafting, mountaineering skiing, hot dogging, hydro speeding, kayaking, mountain climbing, canyoning, river biking, mountain biking, horse riding and much more.*

*A stop at a local tavern, tasting local specialties is also a must.*

*Also visit the Church of Panagia Glyki (Church of Agios Donatos Glykis)*

In the south-east of the R.U. of Thesprotia, where it borders with the R.U. of Preveza, between the mountains of Paramythia and partly, is the gorge, the so-called “Straits of Acheron”, which crosses the homonymous river. Acheron exits near the village Glyki, and then enters the plain of Fanari, where it forms a delta at its mouth, in the bay of Ammoudia of Preveza. It is an area of rare aesthetics and particular biological value that is worth walking. The river Acheron is characterized as the river of myths, with stories and references that are lost in the depths of millennia. The mythological, but also generally historical, importance of Acheron is enormous. In particular, the particularly wild landscape of the gorge has been tied to the ancient Greek mythology that identifies the area with the gates of Hades, as shown by references to Homer’s Odyssey, Euripides’ “Alkistis” and the Poetry of Sappho. The river is of course connected with the traditions of modern times, with the legend of St. Donatos, but also the history of our country primarily through the struggles of the Souliotes for the defense of freedom, while traces of the presence of man have been identified even from the Paleolithic era.

The total number of plant species in the region is 509 species. This rich vegetation is an ideal place of living and breeding for the 196 species of birds that have been recorded in the area, many which are protected by international conventions, since this wetland is a migratory corridor for birds.

In particular, the area of the Straits and Estuaries of Acheron is one of the 18 physical areas that have been recognized as the most remarkable in the whole of Epirus.

### *Mythological elements and traditions*

“The name of the river Acheron comes from the word “Achos” which means sorrow referring to the sorrow of death. Acheron is the river without joy, the river of sorrow. According to popular tradition, the waters of the river Acheron were bitter as a “ghost” (monster) that lived in its springs poisoned the waters. Saint Donatos, patron saint of the metropolis of Paramythia, killed the “ghost” and the waters of Acheron became sweet. This is how the village of Glyki (sweet) took its name”.

It is also found with the name Mavropotamos (Black River), because according to mythology, the Titans drank water from Acheron to quench their thirst and angry Zeus turned its waters black and bitter. This river has put its stamp on two historical periods and has associated its name with the dual existence of man. Material and soul, life and death. In modern history, its waters gave life to the Souliotes, while in antiquity it was the antechamber of the Underworld. It was the last route for human souls.

At that time there were three rivers: the Acheron, the river of sorrow, the Kokytos or Mavros and the Pyriflegethontas or Vovos which was also a place of promenade for the dead. The three rivers formed a huge marshy area on the outskirts of a lake, which in some places had enough depth and according to Thucydides reached the sea.

This was lake Acherousia. It had secret caves and marshes covered by the mist. Also known as the Aorno lake, a lake that gives off poisonous fumes, dangerous even for the birds flying over it - something that was probably due to the rotted plants inside the marshes.

Rightly, therefore, the locals spoke in awe of the lake that was part of the route to the Underworld. The psychotransmitter Hermes took the souls of the dead to the river Acheron and handed them over to the macabre boatman, who was none other than Charos. He, for a monetary reward, sailed the river Acheron and lake Acherousia leading the souls of the dead to Hades, the kingdom of the Underworld. The entrance of the gorge of Acheron was considered as the Gates of Hades and - according to many people - the bowels of lake Acherousia are the Underworld.

Suggested activities:

- *A suggested activity in the area in order to admire the landscape from above is the “flying fox”. As usually, the 2 banks of the Acheron River are joined with this system. The visitor has the opportunity with the help of this pulley to run through the rope that connects the 2 banks and thus admire the view a little differently.*
- *You can also go horseback riding by the river, while admiring the view.*
- *Water lovers can cross the river while doing rafting or canoe-kayaking. The waters are extremely calm, so this activity takes place all year round.*
- *Enjoy nature by walking in the bowels of the river or the Path through the Straits of Acheron.*





## Souli

73km from Igoumenitsa, is the heroic village of Souli. The struggles of its inhabitants during the Turkish occupation have gone down in history. Part of the history of the village, it is revived every year in the events that take place, culminating in the representation of the explosion of the monastery of Kougi by the Monk Samuel.

It should be noted, of course, that Souli is often considered as a wider area. Together with “Kiafa”, Avariko and Samonida, they formed the original Soulian tetrakomo that with its fortifications dominated the continuation of the peculiar confederation from the period of the Ottoman Empire until the Greek Revolution of 1821. The whole area will be known in history for its legendary struggles. In the period that followed and until 1803 it will be a symbol of “bravery, heroism and resistance” resulting to refer even today with admiration to the “Soul of Souli”.

It is perhaps the only region of Greece that resisted so much the Ottoman conquerors and in fact with the dynamic assistance of the female population that not only acted as an aid but literally took up arms whenever necessary. In Kougi of Souli, inside the fortified area is the small church of Agia Paraskevi. (its story follows at the relevant paragraph).

In 1963, excavations were carried out at the site and the church of St Paraskevi was rebuilt. Every year, as part of the Souli festivities, which take place on the last Sunday of May, there is a representation of the departure of the Souliotes as well as the explosion of Kougi. The act of Samuel and the others went down in history as an act of self-sacrifice and heroism and its representation constitutes every year the culmination of the relevant celebrations.



Suggested activities:

- *In the municipality of Souli, there is the largest zip line in Greece with a length of 320m and speeds exceeding 45km.*
- *Attend the Souli celebrations. This is a two-day event in memory of the struggles of Souli for Freedom on the last weekend of May. Apart from cultural events in the city of Paramythia, a representation of the blowing up of Kougi by the monk Samuel is organized at the holy site of Souli (R.U. of Thesprotia, 2021), on the last Sunday of May. The representation is visible from St Donatos, a chapel about 500 meters from the village*
- *If one wishes a quick acquaintance with the mountainous region of Souli, without much effort, one can easily approach the villages of Souli, Kougi and Kiafa, admiring the panoramic view of Glyki and the Straits of Acheron, by car, through the paved road that leads to Samoniva. It is an uphill route of paved road of 20 km. with several turns, reaching 500m. altitude.*
- *An uphill path awaits visitors who wish to walk on old historical roads, the one that connected the area of Souli with the plain. This path offers a nice view of the Straits of Acheron, passes through old arched bridges, the famous Skala of Tzavelena and next to ruined watermills and ends at the old castle of Kiafa which was the main fortress of Souli. It is an easy route, through a well-engraved path, with an ascent from 40 to 500m. altitude and duration about 1 hour and 30 minutes.*
- *Walk a beautiful variation of the well-known path of “Skala Tzavelenas”, usually preferred by mountaineering and nature clubs. It is the “Souli - Dalla Bridge - Glyki”. The route is considered easy to moderate and its duration is about 3-4 hours.*
- *Walk the “Skala Tzavelenas”, a path named by Tzavelena, the Souliotissa, wife of the heroic leader of the Lambros Tzavellas, the legendary Moscho, who like most members of her family actively participated in the struggles and contributed greatly. Her exploits are described in several folk songs. The route that belongs to the NATURA 2000 network and there are endemic and rare species of flora and fauna. The beginning becomes riparian in the “mythic” river Acheron and then on the path that she followed while riding. Going uphill we observe modern interventions (tunnel, opening of a road to Souli in the 70s) and even more modern construction, a gazebo, where there is a small respite. The upward course continues and ends up at the castle of Souliotes, the famous “Kiafa”. Its duration is about 2 hours and 30 minutes”*
- *Stop for a while at wells and watermills in the area. The wells were the only way of water supply in the area and according to testimonies, they date back at least to 1772 and were rendered useless by the Souliotes themselves so that their enemies could not use them.*
- *Visit the town of Paramythia, the capital of the Municipality of Souli (about 34 kilometers).*

## Church of St. Paraskevi (Kougi of Souli)

Within the fortified area of Kougi of Souli, is the chapel of St Paraskevi. According to tradition, the monk Samuel had built the chapel in 1793. After the capitulation with Ali Pasha and while the rest of the Souliotes had left, the monk along with five other Souliotes set themselves on fire in the powder keg of the fort on December 16, 1803, to destroy food and ammunition, but also not to fall into the hands of Ali Pasha themselves. After the fall of Souli, Ali Pasha built and used there a summer villa, until the return of the persecuted Souliotes in 1820.



## Gardiki

Gardiki is a village of the Municipality of Souli and is the headquarters of the Municipal unit of Acheron. It is located at an altitude of 200m, on Mount Gorilla, while to the west flows the river Kokytos. It is a semi-mountainous village, the inhabitants of which are mainly engaged in agriculture and livestock .

The village is 40 km from Igoumenitsa, 61 km from Preveza, 14 km from Paramythia and 437 km from Athens. Visitors should visit the village with its beautiful, picturesque houses, arbors, and flowerpots full of flowers and worship at St. Kyriaki's church.

## Monastery of St. Kyriaki

The monastery is in the village of Gardiki Paramythias and only the Katholikon dedicated to St. Kyriaki survives. The construction of the Monastery is placed in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It is a one-room church, with an arch that was replaced by a gabled roof, and with an interesting element, the rich brick exterior decoration, which in some places resembles to letters of the alphabet.

St. Kyriaki monastery is in the permanent catalog of the declared archeological sites and monuments of Greece, as an important example of the architecture of the years of the Despotate of Epirus .





The 105-hectare fortified settlement of Elea, also known as “Castle (Kastri) of Veliani”, is located east of the modern village of Chrysavgi in the Municipality of Souli, on the mountains of Paramythia and 500 meters above the sea level. From this spot it was possible to control almost the entire valley of Acheron - Kokytos, which was the territory of the ancient city. The identification of the ruins as the city of “Elea” mentioned in the ancient sources was done by the professor and researcher of the history of Epirus Sotiris Dakaris.

The settlement was founded in the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, when Thesprotians are settled for the first time in organized cities.

The oldest known bronze coins with the symbols of the city and of the Eleats of Thesprotia are dated on that period. The correlation of the coins with Persephone and Hades, suggests that the well-known “Necromancer” at the mouth of Acheron, where the “Eleas port” in the present bay of Ammoudia, that was under the influence of Elea. For some time, until the transfer of the political center of the tribe to Gitana, it seems that it was the seat of the “Koinon of Thesprotians”. The city flourished during the Hellenistic period (3<sup>rd</sup> ~ 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC) and was destroyed in 167 BC., from the Roman legions of Emilius Pavlos

Two main gates, one to the east and one to the west, ensured the seamless communication of the settlement, while a third gate is located on the north side.

The area is accessible by road, through the asphalt provincial road from Chrysavgi, about 5 km from the city of Paramythia and can be visited Saturday to Monday from 8:30-15:30 (Tuesday-Friday: closed). However, your prior communication with the Ephorate of Antiquities is recommended as its opening hours may vary depending on the availability of the site's personnel (tel.: 26650.29177 / 8, e-mail: [efathe@culture.gr](mailto:efathe@culture.gr))

The area can be accessed by people with mobility problems (with assistance) up to the ticket office, through a ramp with a gentle slope. It hosts an exhibition with information material highlighting its history and the works undertaken for its valorization, while at the same time - due to the location of the building – it provides an overview of the most important monuments in the area. The site also has restroom facilities for people with disabilities.



## Suggested activities:

- \_Walk the path that connects “Ancient Elea – Stavros”. The path of Stavros, as it is called since 1779, was the main road that connected Paramythia with Skapeta (“Souliotohoria” / Villages of Souli).*
- \_Walk the second and comparatively much more difficult path that leads to the cave / hermitage of Agios Arsenios Chrysavgis. The beauty of the wild landscape enchants even the most demanding visitor. The view is literally breathtaking and is unobstructed as the Ionian Sea and the islands of Corfu and Paxos can be seen on a clean wind. The area offers other attractions such as Ancient Elea and before you leave you can enjoy a rich meal in the taverns of the area” (Municipality of Souli, 2021).*
  - \_Visit Polyneri (Koutsi).*
  - \_Visit the Holy Monastery of John the Baptist (or Monastery of Vellianis), a listed historical monument.*
  - \_Visit the Early Christian church (Panagia sto Chalasma) also listed as a historical monument.*





## Cave / Hermitage of St. Arsenios Chrysavgis (Velliani)

Above the Monastery of Prodromos Vellianis, in a very steep location of Mount Gorila of Paramythia, at an altitude of about 1,200 m. is the Hermitage of St. Arsenios, who is particularly honored by the residents of the surrounding area. It is a large natural cave, where in an earlier era lived ascetics. The cave where the Hermitage is located is of great interest as from various points fall drops of crystal-clear water while a little further inside there is an iron staircase that leads high up to a plateau where the flow of a spring is clearly heard. The chapel dedicated to him, is housed to the right of the cave as we see it from the outside and is separated by an iron door from its wooden balcony. Tradition says that Saint Arsenios lived there. Every year at the beginning of May, at his nameday, a priest with a crowd of believers celebrate it there with a liturgy. Many of them even stay overnight in tents inside the cave. In any case, it is worth visiting St. Arsenios's cave as it is a unique experience and the incredible view from there will reward you.

Suggested activities:

- *The spot is ideal for naturalistic tourism and the view of the valley of Paramythia with its scattered villages (Chrysargi, Kariotti, Dafnoula, Pagrates, Karvounari, Rachouli, Sevasto and others) enchanting.*
- *Two paths lead there: The first and easiest starts from the location Kariotti just after the newly built observatory on the slopes to the left of the cave. (Serious maintenance work was carried out on the trail in 2014). The second and more difficult is located 600 meters from the archaeological site of Elea and you encounter it if you follow the dirt road immediately after the parking lot located there. The path is suitable for experienced walkers or groups with specialized mountain guides and good physical condition as in many places the slope of the rocks is quite steep and the ground is not solid.*
- *In the same area you can also visit Ancient Elea and other attractions that you may find interesting, but also enjoy a traditional meal in the taverns of the area.*



## Paramythia

It was built around 1,000 BC. and is located between the two historic rivers, Acheron and Kalamas. 10km away from the Egnatia Odos Motorway, on the southern slopes of the enchanting scenery of the rocky mountain Gorilla and seems imposing in the whole area.

Suggested activities:

- *Visit the local sights, the Tower of Koulia and then use the designated path for an uphill route to the Castle of Paramythia (Castle of St. Donatos). Also pass by the Holy Metropolitan Church of St. Donatos, which dominates majestically the city's center. Part of the Holy Relic of St. Donatos, patron saint of Thesprotia, is preserved there.*
- *Visit the Byzantine Baths located within the city of Paramythia.*
- *Visit the church of the Assumption of the Virgin*
- *Finally visit the Clock Tower. It is located at the top of a tower in Paramythia and dates to 1750. It was built by Opus Credum De Poliz̄. Instead of using a metal spring, its movement is based on the uniform unwinding of a thin rope whose end is tied to a hanging stone. The clock has no hands, it just rings a bell when the time is right, corresponding to the time times. It is unique, in its kind, there is no other similar.*
- *Do you have an appetite for walking in nature? If so, the view from various points on the path "Neochori - Pestiani" will excite you. "A special route, with "notes" from the past but also many natural elements. Start from the support leg of the bridge of the Egnatia road, in Neochori. Right and left you can find villages where only the mention of the names is needed to show the mosaic created by past tribal passages and mixtures. Climb to the top of "Kliadi", 956m. in the middle of the R. U. of Thesprotia where you can enjoy the view of the lakes Vrontani and Hotkova which belong to the NATURA 2000 protection zone and in the background the mountains of Mourgana, north and east the mountains of Paramythia, areas also included in the NATURA 2000 network. There is also a view to all the cities of the R.U. and the Ionian Sea. Short break. Then after the descent through the areas Nana - Kiafa Sokoli - Ai Lia and Kronia we reach the end, in Damari. Total distance 25km. and duration around 7 hours "(Chamber of Thesprotia, 2013).*
- *Another alternative proposal / stop for rest is to visit the Kika Cave. East of the Kliadi peak, in the middle of the mountaineering route Neochori - Pestiani. It is a large cave with impressive stalactites and stalagmites. According to Mr. Mouselimis, during the Stone Age it was a burial ground. Scattered throughout the area, various bounties have been found there.*

- *A large traditional bazaar - trade fair, probably the largest in Epirus, is held every year from the first Sunday of October and for a week, in Paramythia, Thesprotia. The so-called Lambovos gathers exhibitors from all over Greece and numerous visitors .*
- *In Sevasto Paramythias, “Aloniada feast” takes place every August. This is a series of events on the subject of life in the countryside, thus relevant thematic exhibitions are being organized, e.g. of old agricultural objects, folklore material and agricultural products, revival of agricultural works such as threshing and many other events.*
- *Every first week of July, the environmental and mountaineering association of Paramythia organizes the “Tea Road”. That is, climbing the Gorilla Mountain, to collect tea. Those who participate, if they wish, can collect tea, without of course destroying the plant and on the way back to the Castle of Velliani cold water, tsipouro, local bread (plastari), olives and cheese are traditionally waiting them.*
- *Come for the Carnival and the Clean Monday holiday.*
- *In Paramythia, overlooking the Acheron River, a Paragliding flight is a worth trying experience not only by the adventure lovers but all the visitors. There are of course tracks exclusively for experienced users.*

## Holy Monastery of Panagia of Paramythia

The name of the city of Paramythia probably came from the Holy Monastery of Virgin Mary of Paramythia, also known as the “Great Church” (or Holy Monastery of Virgin Mary Paramythiotissa). It was constructed in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, southwest of the city, with newer additions (narthex, exonarthex, arcades on the north side, bell tower, etc.) during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The church is decorated according to the brick-surrounded system with tile decoration on the facades and two built-in inscriptions, one of which informs us about the renovation of the church in 1858, Mosaics do not exist, since it is rumored that they were covered in order not to be destroyed by the conquerors during the Turkish occupation and later the second world war. According to tradition, the relics of St.

Spyridon and St. Theodora were preserved for a while, on their way from Constantinople to Corfu, just before the Fall of Constantinople.

There, was also buried the relic of St. Anastasios the New Martyr of Paramythia (1750), while until the 60s it functioned as the Cathedral of the Metropolis. Many patients flocked there for consolation, hence its name, as the term “paramythia” in ancient Greek has the meaning of consolation, relief, support. Today, the building complex of the monastery, around the church, is not preserved, only a few ruins remain. Two fountains were preserved, and from the relics an ancient Gospel and a gold-embroidered Epitaph, built in a workshop of Meteora in 1587, by the Monk Arsenios, while in the same place is located and operates until today the cemetery of Paramythia. It still receives many visitors and constitutes a point of reference for the city.



## Koulia Paramythias or Kouli of Bonolate

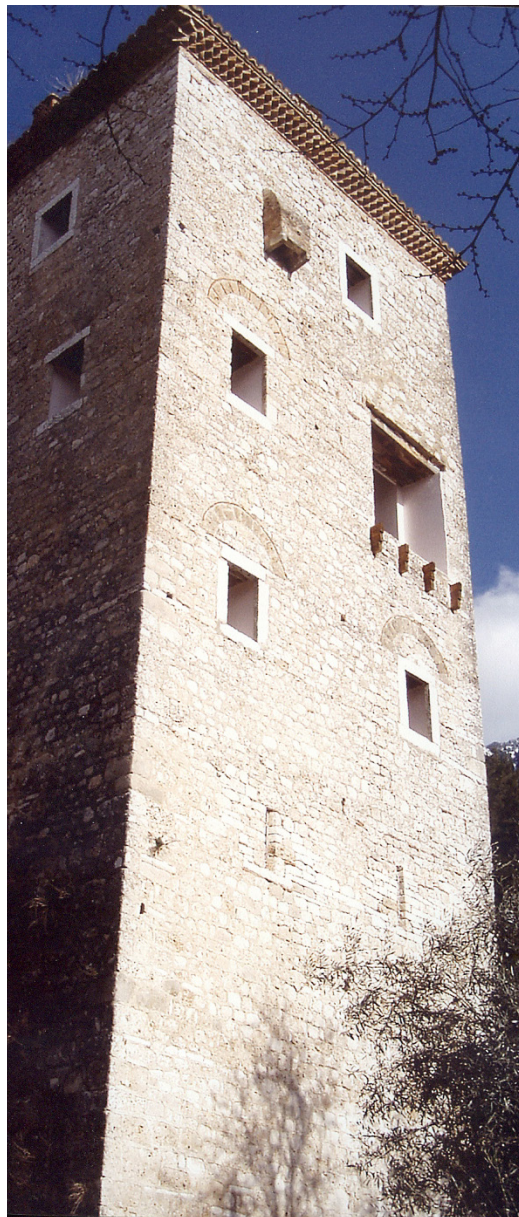
It is one of the best-preserved fortified residences / towers, in Northwestern Greece and is located northwest of Paramythia, in the district “Pronoitika”.

It is a fortified tower-shaped house that was constructed in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup>, early 19<sup>th</sup> century. As far as its morphology and architecture is concerned, such fortified residences are found during the Turkish occupation both in Epirus and in Albania. It was built exclusively for defense and contributed accordingly with the rest of same type buildings, to the safety of the rulers and landowners in cases of attacks.

It is a five-storey structure in the shape of a tower, built at the foot of the hill of the castle of Paramythia in a strategic position, that ensured unobstructed view to its entire plain and the surrounding area so as to control it. It also served as a stronghold of the castle of Paramythia as well as the residence of Ali Pasha during his travels in the area, the period of the Turkish occupation.

It can be visited through appointment with the Ephorate of Antiquities of Thesprotia: Monday-Friday (09:00-14:00) (tel.: 26650.29177/8, e-mail: [efathe@culture.gr](mailto:efathe@culture.gr))

The site does not offer infrastructure for people with disabilities and is not easily accessible to people with physical disabilities and mobility difficulties, due to its location and difficult access.



## Ancient Photice

An important city of the Roman and Early Christian period was the ancient Photice, located in the place Limponi but also in the cavity between Psilorrachi, Maroutsis, the hill of the Castle of St. Donatos and the plain of Paramythia. It was located on the western axis of the highway that passed through the plain of Paramythia leading to ancient Nikopolis. Very close to the springs of the Kokytos river, the now dried up lake Hotkova and Mount Gorilla, it flourished due to its location. It was probably founded by Julius Caesar in the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. with the status of the Roman colony, however, no significant data have been found for its route in the respective period.

It is recognized as an important center of the area during the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, where in the city there was a Parliament, while it flourished more during the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> AD century and is mentioned as one of the most important cities in the province of old Epirus. It was in parallel the seat of a diocese. The emperor Justinian, due to the unsuitability of its soil, fortified in the 6<sup>th</sup> century a neighboring area located in the castle of St. Donatos.



## Fortress of Eleftherochori

It was built by Ali Pasha of Ioannina at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to control the natural passage from the Ionian coast to the mainland, leading to the ports between Parga and Preveza. During this time, the area of Eleftherochori was the border between the lands of Pasha of Ioannina and the “beys” (Pasha and Beys were titles of Turkish officials) of Paramythia and Margariti.

During the first months of 1801, after the agreement of the Souliotes with the local Beys, Ali will try to control the passage of Eleftherochori, constructing the fort. A customs house and lazaretto are built in the same place to deal with the plague in the lands of Pasaliki..

The fortress of Eleftherochori seems to have been abandoned after the fall of Souli and the subjugation of the Beys of Paramythia in 1807 or its abandonment gradually began, as its defensive importance for the guarding of the passage decreased.



## Holy Monastery of Paganies

In a dominant position, in a verdant area, near the village of Kallithea of Paramythia, the Holy Monastery of Paganies, dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, is located. The offer (donations and contribution) of the Monastery in Thesprotia was great as long as it was prosperous. The first owner, as it is written on the door of the katholikon, was the monk Joachim (1652). It was a rich monastery and actively participated in the National Struggle for independence. Its history is not known because the heirlooms and documents were lost during the German Occupation (after they were hidden by the Priest Papa-Christos in 1944).

The iconography (religious paintings) are of different eras, 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century and of excellent style, older in the sanctuary (16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> century). It is accessible from the Ioannina-Igoumenitsa highway, via a 3km bypass, just after Neraida.





## Pente Ekklesies

The original name of the community that was established in 1919 was Osdina, as well as the ancient Byzantine settlement that was destroyed by the Turks in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In 1927 the community was renamed Pente Ekklesies (Five Churches), thus declaring the intense religious activity of the inhabitants of the settlement.



## Uzdina or Osdina

It is a fortified settlement, south of the modern village of Pente Ekklesies of the Municipality of Souli, which is also known as Osdini or Paliosdini or Paliochora. The settlement, covering an area of about 7 acres, is protected by a strong fortification enclosure, 450m long, on all sides, except the western one which was naturally fortified. Built on a sloping rocky hill, it was ideal for the control of the valley of the river Kalamas.

In fact, due to its location, as evidenced by architectural remains, it has been continuously inhabited from the classical-Hellenistic to the post-Byzantine period. A special flourishing is probable in the Byzantine times, but more “during the late Byzantine period and especially during the first years of the Ottoman rule, when the bridge that ensured the communication of the settlement with the opposite plain was repaired.

During the same period, several temples were built, the most important of which date back to the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup>. According to the written sources, the family of Apsarades already owned from the 14<sup>th</sup> century extensive estates in the area, while two centuries later the monks Nektarios and Theofanis Apsaras, owners (on the sense of “ktitor” aka the ones that built them-funded their construction) of the monastery of Prodromos on the Island of Ioannina (1506/7) and the monastery of Barlaam of Meteora (1517), reportedly maintained private olive groves and vineyards in the area. At the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the settlement seems to have been abandoned for an unknown reason.

During the Byzantine period, the walls of the settlement were repaired, and additions were made, with at least two repair phases evident, while ancient building material seems to have been reused in many parts of the walls.

According to tradition, in the settlement of Uzдина there were a total of ten temples, of which today are located eight and one hermitage. Of these, the “Assumption of the Virgin Mary”, the “Taxiarches” (Brigadiers), St. Athanasios, St. Dimitrios and Prophet Elias are in good condition. The churches of St. Ioannis, St. Nikolaos and St. Georgios are preserved at their foundation level.



## Raveni (Archaeological Site)

On the right bank of Kalamas, 7 km west of Vrosina, at the top of a hill south of the homonymous modern village, is the ancient settlement of Raveni. The absence of excavation data and archaeological research does not allow estimated assumptions about the period of habitation of the site, its extent, and the exact nature of the site. The river Kalamas, a large waterway since antiquity, which ensured the communication of the coastal areas with the mountainous hinterland, seems to have played an important role in the establishment of the fortified settlement of Raveni.

Based on the characteristics of the fortification, dating of the settlement to the late classical-Hellenistic times is generally accepted. The few data we have seem to testify to the existence of a small settlement, which must have been walled after 350 BC. However, in the absence of excavation data, a more accurate dating cannot be made.

This period, from the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. and then, is an important milestone in the history of Thesprotia: the small walled “comes” (small cities/villages) are inhabited together, and the first cities are founded, and fortified with strong walls. It should also be noted that the establishment of both Raveni and a series of similar fortified settlements probably coincides with the territorial rearrangements that took place in Epirus during the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. and, consequently, with the changes in the limits of influence of the continental races, mainly of Thesprotians, Molossians and Chaonites.

The creation of fortified enclosures intensifies around 300 BC. All of them, however, did not always form the core of real cities, as many remained mere fortresses, to which the populations of the wider area resorted during hostile invasions. The walled settlement of Raveni seems to be included in this category. In the surrounding area and specifically in the areas of St. Paraskevi in the west and St. Marina, in the place “Anavrystika”, in the northwest ancient tombs can be found. This is an outdoor, constantly open space, which can be accessed through the provincial road Filiates - Ioannina, through Keramitsa.

## Keramitsa

Keramitsa is a mountain village in the municipality of Filiates. It is built at an altitude of 580m. on the slopes of Morgana, 20km northeast of Filiates, the municipality's capital.

South of the current village, the ruins of the Hellenistic and possibly Roman times have been pointed out. The village was built on a low limestone ridge, which rises next to the water sources of the stream of Daphne (or Tryphon).

The wider area of Keramitsa was a battlefield both during the Greek-Turkish and in the Second World War, but also during the civil war.

A stroll in Mesochori, the central part of the village with the church of St. Dimitrios, the former community hall, traditional houses, cafe, and the old plane tree promise to seduce you. It is worth wandering around the surrounding churches that combine natural landscape and “notes of tradition”: Panagitsa (Holy Mary), St. Athanasios and the Prophet Elias. Near St. Athanasios is also the archeological site of Keramitsa. The area has not yet emerged, but the view to both the village and Kalamas is wonderful. The path of Langaris, finally, is also one of the “must see” ones.



## Holy Monastery of St. Marina at Haravgi

The monastery is located between the villages of Leptokarya and Haravgi near Lagavitsa (tributary of river Kalamas). According to an inscription it was built in 1827, but its foundation definitely dates to an earlier era, since among the heirlooms found, is a seal from 1731. According to the tradition of the area, its owners were a couple named Primikyris and Marina, who lived in Vlachia and were rich.

They were severely tested by the death of their children and returning to their homeland they built the Monastery of St. Marina and lived as monks. Today, the spacious single-aisled Katholikon with the magnificent wood-carved

iconostasis is preserved in good condition without mural decoration while the rest of the building complex is in the process of restoration. The small part of the relic of St. Marina, which is kept in the Monastery, is also a valuable sacred relic.

Today, a small monastic fraternity has already been established and can be visited after previous agreement. The Monastery celebrates in memory of St. Marina on July 17<sup>th</sup>.







## Holy Monastery of St. Minas of Kokkinolithari

The “Meteora of Epirus”, a natural monument and at the same time human contribution to the worship of God, is in the village of Kokkinolithari in the Filiates Municipality, on the road that connects Filiates with Ioannina, through Keramitsa, and is one of the most picturesque attractions, and pilgrimages of the Thesprotian area. Its history is lost in the depths of the centuries and its foundation is covered by legends, which have been preserved from generation to generation until today. Historical sources suggest that it has existed since at least since the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Traditional tales of the area refer to many miracles, which from time to time were performed with the grace of St. Minas, due to which it gathers a multitude of pilgrims. It is one of the oldest dependencies of the Monastery of Giromeri, since it is already mentioned by name in a document of 1667. It is celebrated with great participation of people on November 11<sup>th</sup> and can be visited all year round .

## Church of St. Georgios of Kamitsiani

The Holy Monastery of Kamitsiani (or Kamytziani) is located on the left side of the road that leads to Tsamantas from Kamitsiani, 32km from Filiates. The initial year of foundation of the Monastery is unknown. According to a surviving inscription in the katholikon, it was rebuilt in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (1758-1773) by the monk Paisios, at the urging of the Bishop of Vellas and Konitsis, on the ruins of the pre-existing monastery which had been destroyed - unknown how - in an older era.

Until the 17<sup>th</sup> century it seems that there was a monastery school inside the premises. The dominant figure was the last abbot Damianos Peschos, whose bust adorns the entrance.

The monastery was the episcopal church of the settlement and the abbot was in parallel bishop of Kamitsiani, Vouthrotou and Glykeos.

It was one of the richest monasteries in Greece owned forests, fields, vineyards and large olive groves, pastures, flocks of sheep and goats, mills and much more and its presence in the area was important.

Today, only the most elegant Katholikon survives, which belongs to the type of the complex cruciform with a dome. Unfortunately, at the end of the cleaning works of the murals (2019), issues of the building's stability were identified and was deemed inaccessible. Since then, even its celebration is held in the courtyard.





# Tsamantas



The traditional village of Tsamantas, which presents well-preserved traditional architecture, is in the northern part of Thesprotia, near the border with Albania. To the north of the village is Mount Mourgana, part of the sierra of Akrokeravnia. It is a very rough area, containing a series of peaks with mainly Slavic names. Divided by two streams, Stera and Platanaki that divide the village into three areas, but in parallel it provides at the same time these characteristics provide the area unsurpassed natural beauty. The climate is very pleasant and around the village visitors can find plenty of springs with clean water.

The defensive potential of the site was identified by the first inhabitants of Epirus in prehistoric times. The settlements were built on the plateau and were surrounded by huge stone cyclopean walls. The process of moving and the location of the large boulders used in the construction show that the prehistoric ancestors of the village were extremely capable people with relative specialization. There is also a folklore museum that must be visited by all).

According to Nikolaos Nitsos, a local folklorist, Tsamantas owes its name to the Byzantine family of the Tsamantouras, to whom the area was given (13<sup>th</sup> century) as a manor.

## Suggested activities

- *Visit the church of St. Georgios*
- *Every year in autumn, usually in October, the calf festival takes place in Tsamantas. In the village square, beef is auctioned, and then cooked in a traditional way, usually with pasta in large cauldrons. Wine and tsipouro flow abundantly. Dances and songs certainly accompany the celebration.*
- *Visit Lia, a neighboring village, to admire and get photographed with the centuries-old plane tree that has been designated as a natural monument.*
- *Visit the bridges of the area (“bridge of Kenos”, “bridge tis ekkelias”, bridge of church)*

## Tsamantas Folklore Museum

The Tsamantas Folklore Museum was founded in 1983 by the folklorist Costas Zoulas from Tsamanta. It is housed in the old stone-built school of the village and the collection includes over 3,000 exhibits, photographic documents, folk art items, wooden representations, and other objects, most of which are offered by the villagers.

# 3<sup>rd</sup> route

CORFU

Butrint

Castle of Kasne

Maromati

Gate Bete

IGOUMENITSA

SIVOTA

IOANIAN SEA





## Margariti

A mountainous village, located at an altitude of 171 m. It was founded in 1430 by the Venetians. At a distance of 25 km. from Igoumenitsa, it is built near Ancient Eleatida and specifically between Paramythia, Parga and the river Acheron. Apart from its significant natural wealth, the village has a rich history, as it is evidenced by the castle, the minaret, the old mansions, the watermills, and the chapels, as well as the minaret in Katavothra.

Mesovouni is also a community of Margariti which is ideal for mountaineering at 1000m altitude, horseback riding, walking, and collecting aromatic plants. The visitor will also be able to buy organic products (olives, oil, honey, almonds, etc.) there.

The first inhabitants of the village were Christians, the Ottoman registers mention eight christian families in 1530 , but with the establishment of the Ottoman Empire, most of them were Islamized in exchange of tsiflikia, large fertile areas, thus gaining power or some place in the garrison of the castle. Margariti was Christianized again early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, the agades maintained their power until the Second World War, where gradually part of the tsiflikia passed to the public and / or to individuals.

Suggested activities

- *Visit the famous Watermills of the area.*
- *Visit the Fortress of Margariti.*

## Fortress of Margariti

Margariti Castle stands majestically on a hill, south of the modern settlement and it is accessible via a path about 150 m long. It is an Ottoman castle that began to be built in 1549, on the ruins of a pre-existing ancient fortress. Its purpose was to strengthen the defense of the newly conquered territories by Ottomans against the coastal Venetian possession, mainly in Parga.

In 1571, 6000 Venetians, Corfiots and local forces from Parga and Paramythia, under the leadership of Paolo Orsini, retaliated the offensive action of Margariti's Guard against the Venetian conquest of Parga, with a combined attack in order to occupy the Castle of Margariti. Three successive attacks were needed to occupy it.

After the peace agreement in 1573, Parga remained under Venetian possession and Margariti under Ottoman possession, while the fortress was repaired by the Ottomans of the area.

Margariti remains in the 17<sup>th</sup> century an important fortress of the area. In 1669 it is reported to have had 8 topciyan (gunners) and a guard between 40-50 janissaries.

In 1811 the area came under the rule of Ali Pasha Tepelenlis. Although there are no clear reports, it is considered that the castle continued to play a role in the historical events and the ongoing wars in the area, mainly as a base against Parga, and later until 1913, when the area was integrated into the Greek state, it was used as a prison, as barracks of the Turkish army and as the headquarters of the military commander of the area.

The current form of the castle in Margariti is due to the extensive repairs which it underwent in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and has the characteristics of a large, fortified military residence, developed around an inner courtyard.



## Mazarakia

South of Igoumenitsa and north of Margariti, is the village of Mazarakia, which is, the seat of a local community in the municipal unit of Margariti. The village of Mazarakia is at an altitude of 154 meters above the sea level.

### Mazarakia Cemetery

The cemetery near the modern settlement of Mazarakia is a unique case of an organized and extensive cemetery of the Roman period in Thesprotia. A total of about 200 tombs have been excavated, of different categories: tiled, pit-covered with stone, stone-enclosed as well as erected burial monuments, dating from the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC until the beginning of almost the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. This is an open air, always open / accessible site.



## Folklore Museum of Neochori

The “Folklore Museum of Neochori” was founded in 1999 with the aim of presenting the history, life and art of the village. It is housed in a two-storey building in which the Primary School operated. The exhibits, donated by the villagers, refer to traditional costumes, coins, textiles, tools, utensils, and general objects used by the villagers in their daily lives.

## Neraida

The village of Neraida, the old Menina, is located at an altitude of 71 meters and according to the Kallikratis Plan belongs to the municipality of Souli. This is an ideal destination for nature lovers.

## Ancient Fanoti

The archeological site of Doliani extends to a single limestone hill west of the modern settlement of Geroplatanos, on the borders of the Municipality of Igoumenitsa with the Municipality of Filiates. It is the largest fortified settlement in the area of central Kalamas and is identified with ancient Fanoti, the center of origin of the Fanotians of Thesprotia since its founding in the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> c. e.g. Its prosperity is placed during the Hellenistic period and its habitation continues almost uninterruptedly until recent years.

The hill of Doliani is scattered with archeological remains that cover a very wide chronological range from antiquity to the post-Byzantine (Ottoman) times. In the post-classical and Hellenistic period (4<sup>th</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC) the settlement extends mainly at the top of the hill, within the inner fortification of the “acropolis”, while less systematic habitation seems to have existed in the area between the two fortifications.

This is an organized area, accessible by road, through the asphalt provincial road that leads from National Road Igoumenitsa - Ioannina to Geroplatanos of the Municipality of Igoumenitsa. The distance that separates it from the Provincial Road is about 3 km

The place can be visited after consultation with the Ephorate of Antiquities of Thesprotia: Monday-Friday (09: 00-14: 00) (tel.: 26650.29177 / 8, e-mail: [efathe@culture.gr](mailto:efathe@culture.gr)). For more information you can contact the competent Ephorate.

The area is accessible (with assistance) to people with mobility issues up to the ticket office building, through a ramp with a gentle slope. It hosts an exhibition with information material on the history and promotion of the settlement, offering at the same time - due to its location - an overview of the most important monuments in the area. Bathroom facilities are also available.





## Tomb of Parapotamos

In Tsifliki, north of the village Parapotamos in the Municipality of Igoumenitsa, there is a low tumulus with an ancient cemetery. The mound, 5m high, was surrounded by a circular enclosure, traces of which are preserved mainly along its southwestern side. A total of 88 graves have been discovered throughout the mound, mainly cists, while there were still seven pit tombs and one vase burial (vessel). Few of the burials contained gifts, mainly jewelry and coins.. Based on these few findings, the use of the cemetery seems to have extended over an extremely long period of time from the Hellenistic to the post-Byzantine period. This is an open air, always open / accessible site.



## Filiates

The city of Filiates is the capital of the homonymous Municipality, with over 3,000 inhabitants extends to 965 acres and is located 17 km NE of Igoumenitsa (Municipality of Filiates, 2020). It is built on a small plateau, its altitude ranges from 190m to 250m, above the sea and is surrounded by a pine forest.

The current urban form of the city, at least in the center of the city, is in general, a result of the existence of buildings from the era of Ottoman rule but also of the special morphology of the land. The urban area is mostly developed on the hills that surround its center. It is an old, important town, due to its role in the area, as it served as an observatory or road “passage” and sometimes as an administrative center.



## Center of historical studies of Thesprotia (KIMETHE)

The Center Of Historical Studies Of Thesprotia (KIMETHE) is an association that aims to research the history of Thesprotia. Thousands of documents have been scanned and are in its online library, which is accessible to any researcher . KIMETHE is housed in an old neoclassical two-storey building that belongs to the Filiates Hospital and is located in the city center.

## Phoiniki

At about 9 km from the National Road Ioannina - Igoumenitsa, 5 km north - NW of Filiates is the settlement of Phoiniki. There, people, and nature coexist harmoniously, as the natural landscape blends beautifully with the traditional architecture of the place, its stone houses, alleys, and wood carved arched gates. In 1976 it was characterized as an area of special natural beauty, as it is the best-preserved traditional settlement of Thesprotia. The settlement is developed on the southeast slope of the hill Mavrostani with a height of 593m and spreads amphitheatrically overlooking the West and the South to the plain of Filiates and the Kalpakiotiko river. The steep slope on which the settlement develops, the view as well as its good orientation are its main characteristics.



The Folklore Museum of Phoiniki is housed in a two-storey four-room building. It was built during the Turkish occupation (two rooms with their cellars called “katoyia”)s to house the Turkish tax collectors during their stay in the village. Later it functioned as a community office and hostel. The four (4) rooms of the Museum house mainly household items in four thematic categories (agricultural and livestock activities, kitchen area, living room and finally jewelry, church items, documents, costumes (clothing apparel) and household items. The exhibits belong mainly to the period 1840-1970. An auxiliary space of the museum operates in “Liotrivi”, where the processing of the olive fruit is represented.

The Hermitage, where according to the tradition the Holy Nile (Osios Neilos), the one behind the construction of the Monastery of Giromeri, lived in, is located on the left side of the road, which leads from Filiates to Tsamanta. It consists of a small set of natural pits in rock, with carvings and traces of construction activity. On the outside side of the wall, located at the entrance of one of the caves, a fresco of Archangelos from the 14th century is preserved, while others are also preserved inside the cave.. There is a possibility of easy access, to a transformed to temple cave where one can worship at the basis of the rock.



## Giromeri Monastery

The Holy Monastery of the Virgin Mary of Giromeri is located in the northern part of Thesprotia, in the province of Filiates, at an altitude of 300 meters on the western slopes of the stony Farmakovouni mountain range, near the Greek-Albanian border. It was founded at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century (1310-1320), during the heyday of the Despotate of Epirus, by Osios Nilos the Erichiotis and was one of the most important monastic centers in Epirus. It served as the seat of a Patriarchal Exarchate and Diocese with twelve villages of the province and the city of Filiates under its jurisdiction and at its peak, in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, according to Theodosios Zygomalas, it numbered about 300 monks.

Great was the contribution of the Monastery in the area of Thesprotia throughout its long history, contributing to the preservation of the national and religious conscience of the inhabitants. Characteristic was the operation of the Hidden School and the Theological School, inside the Monastery. Furthermore, with the actions of some Exarchs and at the expense of the Monastery, schools were operating in some of the villages of the area. The Katholikon is a four-column cruciform church inscribed with a dome, built in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and renovated in the 16<sup>th</sup> (1568). It is decorated with excellent Byzantine frescoes of the 16<sup>th</sup> and folklore of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The gilded iconostasis, an excellent example of wood carving is made in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many relics are preserved, such as icons, manuscripts, antiquaries, etc.



## Plaisio

The largest settlement of those characterized as traditional in the area is Plaisio which is located in a mountainous location at an altitude of 400m, at a distance of about 10 km NW of Filiates, between the imposing mountains of the area. It is a picturesque village and an important commercial center of the past that stretched to a total of 12 neighborhoods (machalades). Formerly known as Plesivitsa, it was a capital village of the area.

Many tanneries, traditional Greek shoe shops and tailor shops, but also intense commercial traffic was observed there, in fact it even had a mint. The main professional activity of the inhabitants remains to this day livestock, while the traditional manufacture of carpets and rugs with goat wool from the tapestry of Epirus continues to this day.

Kyra Vasiliki, wife of Ali Pasha of Ioannina and a woman symbol for the period of Ottoman rule and the Greek revolution originated here, but also Aristotle Petinos, benefactor of Plesivitsa, whose statues adorn the village square. A special feature of the square is the cross that indicates the point where missionary Kosmas Aetolos preached in the period 1775 – 1777.

The first building that can be seen in the settlement is the church of Prophet Elias that adorns the western part of the square, on a hill with stunning views, since 1859.

Beyond the main square, in Plaisio you will see cobbled alleys, buildings with traditional arched doors and windows, two-story and three-story mansions, old fountains with drinking, cool water and picturesque churches. It is also worth visiting the Church of St Paraskevi, the oldest in the village, with well-preserved frescoes dating from the 15th century and the Church of St Georgios, with its wonderful and rare decorations of the iconostasis.

All the above make Plaisio a unique, well preserved traditional settlement that is worth visiting.

