

LESVOS

«Nature & Environment»



Petrified Forest – Geopark – Trails – Hiking trails



*The Mayor of Lesvos
Spyros Galinos*

“Significant efforts aiming the touristic promotion and designation of Lesvos, such as this document, are one of the first priorities of the local Municipal Authorities. From ancient times to the present day, Lesvos has always been an island of distinct historic, intellectual and cultural significance. Lesvos is a destination that can please and satisfy every visitor. It is ideal for peaceful family vacations, visits to numerous attractions and museums, for religious and spa tourism, but also for the younger crowds. This edition makes us very happy because it aspires to make our island widely known, as an ideal destination, a natural paradise. A land where you are captivated by nature’s games with the sea and coastline, warm hospitality of the locals, unique local products, and distinct character. These publication initiatives give a very good opportunity to the reader to get to know a great island where everything is genuine, original and lively. I urge you to visit the beautiful Lesvos and discover its unique beauties.”



*The Deputy Mayor of Culture and Tourism
Konstantinos Astyrakakis*

“Through this European Program for the promotion of Lesvos, we were given the opportunity to publish three tourist guides that include a representative sample of our island’s benefits; its turbulent history, distinctive cuisine, incredible nature, and leisure options. Lesvos is an island that bedazzles visitors with its beauty, serenity and authenticity. Have a great vacation!”

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Lesvos is the third biggest island of Greece and the seventh in the Mediterranean. It spans across an area of 1636 square kilometers. The island is filled with unique and significant geological monuments and landforms, such as volcanoes, thermal springs, fossiliferous sites, large ravines, caves, waterfalls, coastal landforms that are important evidence of the geological history of the Aegean basin.

Lesvos has many areas of great ecological importance, which have been included in the NATURA 2000 network. In Lesvos, one will come across prehistoric, and historical archaeological monuments, medieval castles, Byzantine monasteries, traditional villages, and an incredible architectural heritage associated with its geological and natural environment. A number of bays are formed on the island, such as the bays of Gera and Kalloni, as well as numerous coves and capes, and significant wetlands. It has a mountainous terrain – its highest peak being Mount Olympus - as well as many fertile valleys with plenty of water mainly in the southern part of the island. The northern part is poorer in vegetation, yet with volcanic rocks, while to the east and center it has many olive groves, pines, firs, plane trees, e.t.c. To the east of the island, there are salt marshes and habitats of great importance, periodically frequented by rare birds. Since ancient times, it was considered that it was the sunniest place in Greece, and this is where Apollo, the god of light, was worshipped, as evidenced by his scattered shrines throughout the island and on the Asia Minor coast. The island has a mild Mediterranean climate with lots of sunshine and increased rainfall during the winter.



Lesvos as a UNESCO global geopark

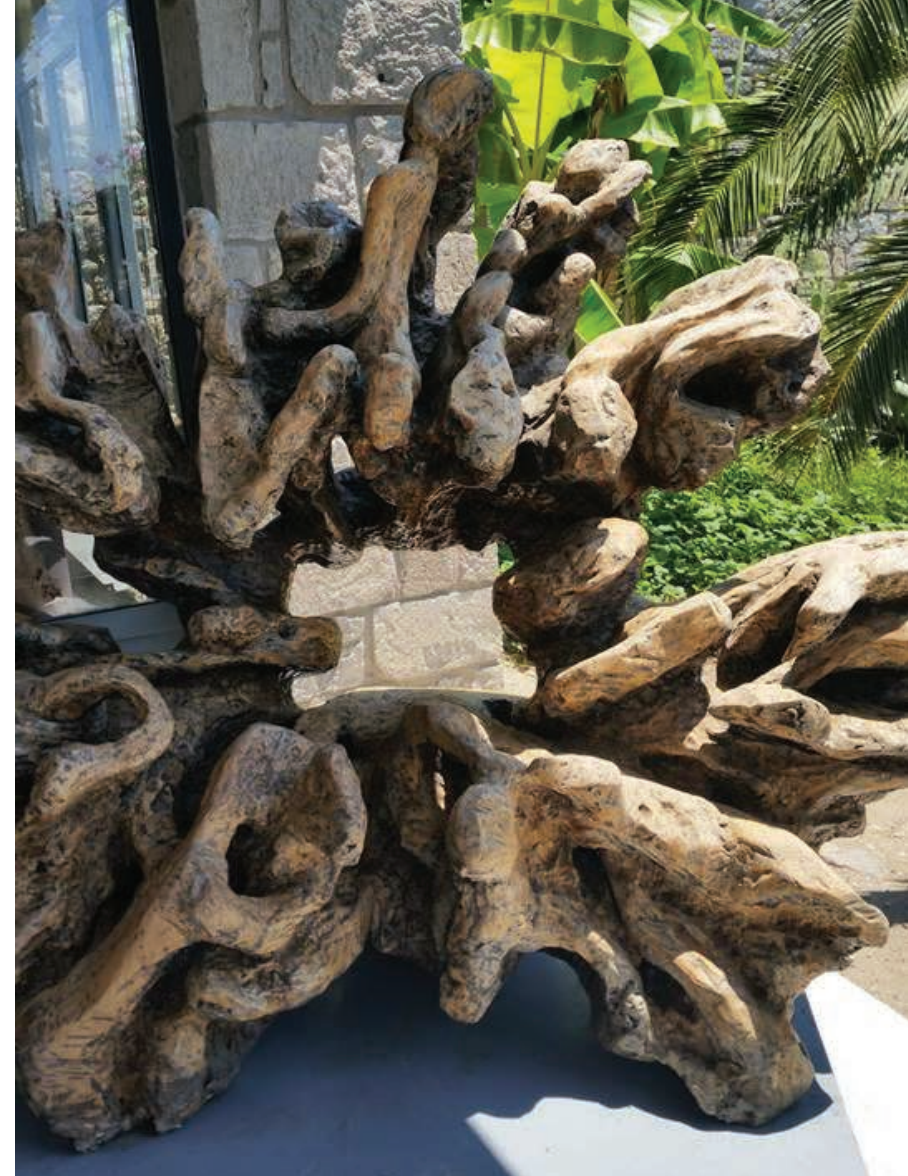
The entire island of Lesvos was included in UNESCO's Global Geopark Network and in the European Geopark Network for the years 2013 to 2016, expanding the limits of the existing Petrified Forest Geopark to the entire island. The decision to include the LESVOS GEOPARK was ratified during the meeting of UNESCO'S Bureau of Geoparks in the framework of the 11th European Conference for Geoparks, held in Arouca, Portugal from the 19th to the 21st of September 2012, during which time the cultural, archaeological and historical importance of Lesvos were acknowledged.

The characteristics of the Lesvos Geopark include the geological and geomorphological structure, the paleontological findings, the geotopes and landscapes, the natural protected areas, the cultural characteristics, as well as their management and exploitation status. Included are a number of geological monuments spread across the entire island (fossil sites, volcanoes, volcanic geotopes, caves, geothermal fields, landforms, and landscapes of outstanding natural beauty), as well as protected areas. Moreover, the current alternative tourism infrastructure and the activities that take place in Lesvos contribute to the protection of the natural and geological environment and the development of future tourism initiatives.



Geotopes and geological monuments

The Lesvos Geopark reveals important evidence of geological history of the Aegean basin for the last 300 million years. It provides us with information regarding the first stages of development in the Aegean, the period when a large ocean named Tethys existed between Europe and Africa. Tethys was an oceanic space for hundreds of millions of years, until it was completely destroyed approximately 45 million years ago. From Tethys destruction, an extensive area emerged in the space of today's Aegean, the mythical Aegeis, that occupied the area between the Asia Minor hinterland and mainland Greece. Lesvos, which was covered by tropical and subtropical forests, was part of this unified land area. About 21.5 – 16.5 million years ago, significant volcanic centers, and impressive volcanic structures emerged throughout the island (Lepetymnos). Volcanic activity led to the formation of the Petrified Forest of Lesvos





The Petrified Forest of Lesvos



The Petrified Forest of Lesvos, one of the most beautiful and rarest - on a global scale - geological monuments and the island's most important geopark dominates the western part of Lesvos. It was formed approximately 20 million years ago, when volcanic material covered and petrified the forest that covered the area at the time. It was declared a "Protected Natural Monument" in 1985.



The findings in the area of the Petrified Forest reveal that the area was part of a mixed forest comprising of coniferous and flowering trees; an indication that the flora in the area had substantially evolved. The coniferous trees are represented by genera of the Taxodiaceae, Protopinaceae, Pinaceae, and Cupressaceae families. Included in the flowering trees are many of the petrified species, such as cinnamon, laurel, poplar, walnut, beech, alder, plane, maple, many species of oak, and many more. The palm tree fossils are of particular importance since they are the first recorded petrified palms. The composition of the petrified flora proves that the Petrified Forest of Lesvos was developed in a subtropical climate. One of the main features of the Petrified Forest is its nativity since the trees were petrified in their original position. At the same time, the area of the Petrified Forest belongs to the protected areas of the NATURA 2000 network, while being protected by the Barcelona Convention and the European Landscape Convention.

Accessible Parks of the Petrified Forest

Located within the protected area of the Petrified Forest are the most important accessible areas which were turned into the following accessible parks:

- The Petrified Forest Park at Bali Alonia
- Sigrí Park next to the Museum in Sigrí village
- Plaka Park located 800 meters south of Sigrí village
- Nisiopi Marine Park

Petrified Forest Park

The Petrified Forest Park was created in 1987 and it is the first of the Petrified Forest's accessible parks. The area of the Petrified Forest Park is referred to as the "Kiria Apolithomeni" (Main Fossil site) since the 18th century. The systematic excavation being conducted at the Petrified Forest Park by the Museum of Natural History has revealed many plant fossils among which is the largest known petrified tree trunk not only in Lesvos but surely in the entire European continent. It has a height of 7.02 meters and a circumference of 8.58 meters, while it is the ancestor of the present-day Sequoia tree.



Plaka Park

A significant protected fossil bearing area can be found in Plaka, about 800 meters south of Sigri village. Significant plant fossils have been discovered in this area, including a giant petrified trunk, with a circumference of 13.7 meters and a diameter of 3.70 meters, which, according to the international literature, is the largest standing fossilized trunk in the world. This tree belongs to the laurel family.

Sigri Park

Sigri Park was created by the Museum of Natural History of the Lesvos Petrified Forest on a 30,000 square meter area of land on the southern side of the homonymous settlement. It is a "geotope" of great importance, because of the rarity and scientific worth of its plant fossils contain information not only about the volcanic rock, but also about the geological development of the region.

Nisiopi Marine Park

Nisiopi is an islet which encircles the bay of Sigri to the west. The Museum of Natural History of the Lesvos Petrified Forest has created the new Marine Park of the Petrified Forest in Nisiopi which comprises of unique standing or lying trunks, roots, root systems, and branches. One of the most impressive findings is a giant lying sequoia tree trunk which was discovered almost intact in its original position. The petrified trunk is 17.20 meters long while its circumference near the base of the trunk is 1.70 meters. An impressive ancestral form of petrified pine trunk measuring 12.44 meters in length was also found lying in the area. A large number of petrified tree trunks can also be found around the island, below sea level. The marine zone around Nisiopi is characterized by rich biodiversity, important bio-communities, and presents a great interest for divers of all levels, thanks to its biodiversity and the existence of petrified trunks at shallow depths. Visitors can access the park onboard a special glass bottom boat.



The Marine World of Lesvos: wetlands, waterfalls and rivers

At the wetland of the Kalloni bay, the sea does not have any waves or foam. This lively area is chosen by birds, and during the spring and fall it gets filled by bird-watchers. The wetland, which is part of the NATURA 2000 network, apart from the bay, has a number of salt marshes too. To the east of the island, Evergetoulas River and the Dipi swamp create yet another impressive wetland, the Dipi - Larsos wetland. Many reptiles, birds, amphibians, and insects live in its estuaries. Wild geese and ducks, kingfishers, herons and other birds in search of food end up in the estuaries of the Almyropotamos and Vourkos Rivers in the Vatera wetland.



The Caves of Lesvos

Lesvos has a great number of caves due to the island's limestone rocks. Many of those have been used as places of Christian worship. Magaras, in the community of Alyfanta, is the largest cave on the island with a length of 120 meters. The cave of Agios Vartholomeos in Taxiarchis has interesting stalactite formations. Also, there is a special archaeological interest in the cave of Agios Ioannis or Fousa in the community of Mychi, where tombs of the 5th century BC were discovered.



The natural wealth of Lesvos

The main feature of today's forestial flora in Lesvos is its close association between various types of vegetation and the island's geological structure. The geological composition of Lesvos divides the island in the following regions with the respective vegetation:

- a) Limestone section (eastern Lesvos, Hamali, Pigi, Ippeios, Karini), where olives prevail;**
- b) Slaty soil (southeastern Lesvos, Agiasos, Gera, Plomari), where the oak and chestnut trees prevail;**
- c) Serpentinous section (central Lesvos, west of Olympus "Tsamlik"), where the pinus brutia prevails;**
- d) Volcanic section (central, northern and western Lesvos), where oaks, rhododendron, black pine, Sarcopoterium spinosum from brushwood and centaurea prevail.**

The island's herbaceous vegetation is impressive. Both species of the anemone (*Anemone coronaria* and *A. pavonina*), the daisy, the red and the orange poppy, as well as the daffodil, all flourish in large areas and create a colorful view. It appears that the *Alyssum lesbiacum* is the island's only indigenous species, while *Rhododendron luteum* and *Haplophyllum megalanthum* are plants that originate from the East and as far as Greece is concerned, they exclusively appear in Lesvos. It is worth mentioning that the colchicum, a bulbous plant, also grows on the island and blooms during the first cold days of autumn. All the parts of the plant contain an active poison, called colchicine. According to tradition, Medea, daughter of the King of Colchis, killed her children with this plant; hence its name. Finally, the most fascinating part of Lesvos' flora is the numerous rare and elusive orchids, as well as the vast variety of mushrooms, mainly in the area of Achladeri.





Nikos Kazantzakis wrote :

“Happy is the man who before dying has the good fortune to sail the Aegean Sea. Nowhere else can one pass so easily and serenely from reality to dream”.

The Fauna of Lesvos

The fauna of Lesvos is as equally abundant as its flora, combining animals of the East and the West. Carnivores that can be found in the olive groves are foxes, ferrets, and weasels. The most important mammal on the island is the Persian squirrel (*Sciurus anomalus*) that lives on the coast of Asia Minor, and cannot be found anywhere else in Europe, but Lesvos. Lesvos is also home to amphibians and reptiles.

Landscapes and Biodiversity

Lesvos has a rich natural environment, and a wide variety of ecosystems. Its rugged terrain, its proximity to the coasts of Asia Minor, and its rock formations are the main factors that create the right conditions for the emergence of a wide variety of ecosystems. On the eastern part of the island, Mount Olympus and the peninsula of Amali prevail, while the graben of the bay of Gera interposes with its impressive eastern rift structured shore. There are transformed rock formations dating back 300 million years, such as marbles, and slates. A large area of eastern Lesvos is covered by extensive olive groves that expand over hills and slopes, standing on impressive dry stone terraces that divide the landscape. Mount Olympus is also home to rare crops for an island, such as the chestnut forests in Agiasos, and cherry, apple and pear orchards. On the eastern and northern side of the bay of Kalloni, there is an extensive mature pine tree forest. On the western part of the island, where the Petrified Forest is located, the climate changes, becoming drier, the rocks are volcanic, and the topography is dominated by Mount Ordymnos. Vatousa, the gigantic volcanic crater in the center of which the villages of Vatousa, Pterounta, and Hidira have been built, can also be found in the area. The vegetation in this part of the island is typically Mediterranean, with brushwood and low spherical and thorny bushes between the protruding rocks. The oak forests of the area are also impressive. In years gone by, their fruits were a marketable product, pivotal for the island's economy. The area belongs to the NATURA 2000 network.



The Avifauna of Lesvos

Lesvos is the island with the richest avifauna in the Aegean, thus an ideal place for bird watching. The diversity of its biotopes, but also its location, right in the middle of the crossroads of bird migration routes in the Eastern Mediterranean, offer the opportunity to more than 300 bird species to pass by, spend the winter or nestle on the island. The most important areas for bird watching are the areas of Mount Olympus, Kalloni (NATURA 2000 network area), the bay of Gera, Prinovouni, Akrasio, the area around Vatera, Lepetymnos, Skala Polichnitos, and more. In the coastal areas around the bay there are a total of 17 natural and artificial wetlands, such as the salt marshes that form a significant system that hosts a great number of migratory and non-migratory wader birds of international interest. The nuthatch is one of the rare bird species that chose to live exclusively in the pine forests of Mount Olympus, in Achladeri and Akrasio.

«The nuthatch»



The cinereous bunting can be found in Eresus, Mount Olympus and Agra. The Ruddy shelduck is rare in Greece and nestles in the area of Achladeri. The island is also home to a few pairs of black storks and white storks. In the bay of Kalloni, there are rare aquatic birds, such as the black-winged stilt, the avocet, the little bittern, the kingfisher, the collared pratincole, the marsh harrier, the tern, the little tern, and many more. The most common birds include the blackbird, the thrush, and the starling that nestle in the olive groves. In the mountainous olive groves, one can hear the clucking of the insular partridge, the cooing of the cuckoos, and the singing of the nightingales in the plane tree groves. The hoopoes nestle in the hollows of the olive trees.





Trails



The third experiential tourism development pillar in Lesvos includes the hiking trails that offer visitors the opportunity to get a feel of the island using all their senses: its landscape, scents, villages, people, places of history and spirituality, the sea, and the thermal springs.

Thermi

The trail from Komi and Pigi to the Tavros plateau. A trail that crosses Thermi and five other villages; Pyrgoi, Mystegna, Nees Kydonies, Pigi and Komi. This trail is of particular interest, since hikers will become acquainted with the architectural style in the area of Pyrgoi, as well as the thermal spring facilities in Thermi, the picturesque coffee shops, the houses with the gardens, and the old mansions. The presence of the Grand Mosque, the old olive mills, and the intricate fountains are definitely worth a visit. The trail through the scenic Skala Mystegna offers a unique sense of the Aegean by uniting and dividing people and land.

Mithymna

The Molyvos, Sykamia, Ai Lias, Krya Vrysi, Lepetymnos trail. This trail belongs to a magical Mediterranean landscape overlooking the eastern and northern shores of the Turkish coasts. It is probably the island's most scenic route, combining all the cultural and natural elements that characterize Lesvos. The hike through the amphitheatric village of Molyvos still inspires many artists. The medieval castle that dominates at the peak adorns a settlement of unique natural beauty.

Hiking trail in Tavros



Stone houses, mansions, and stone-paved alleys all end up at one of the most picturesque eastern Aegean ports. Near Molyvos, the coastal area of Eftalou with its thermal springs and the crystal clear waters are definitely worth a visit. Part of the route passes through Sykamia to a steep slope among plane trees and ravines. Its port, Skala, is the most beautiful place in Lesvos, with the chapel of the Virgin Mary Gorgona standing tall on the rock. This hiking trail undeniably combines recreation, relaxation, adventure, and leisure at the thermal springs.

Mithymna



Agia Paraskevi

The Taxiarchis Glebe of the Monastery of Leimon, Kremastes, the stone bridge of Kremasti, and Stivota trail. It is a trail within a protected area of archaeological interest. Around the town of Agia Paraskevi there are the most significant archaeological sites, amidst olive groves and pine trees with birds and sheep. Ancient cobblestone paths, watermills, olive mills, presses, bridges, and chapels surround ancient remnants and paleo-Christian temples (Church of Klopedi, paleo-Christian Basilica of Halinados). The bridge of Kremasti is a remarkable attraction. The seat of the former Municipality, Agia Paraskevi, is a picturesque town with neoclassical mansions, cobblestone streets, and local culture of a strong folkloric interest.

The bridge of Kremasti



Madamados

The Pedi, Mankatsa, Agios Stefanos trail. After Pedi and before Madamado, we cross over the Aspropotamos Bridge and follow the rural road to the left, to reach the waterfalls of Mankatsa. A right turn onto the paved road from Pedi takes us to Agios Stefanos, where we will find the traditional ceramics workshop and kilns, which still uses clay from the surrounding areas in accordance with an ancient technique, showcasing the island's unique ceramic art. Due to the volcanic structure of the substrate used to make the clay, the latter becomes porous, and as a result it cools the water in the Madamados clay pitchers or crock pots.

Plomari

The Sedounta and Plomaritochoria trail. This trail of exquisite natural beauty next to the ravine of the Sedountas River connects almost all the villages of Plomari. The cultural heritage of this well-known settlement in southern Lesvos is of particular importance. Furthermore, in the same area, there is also the trail from Ampeliko to Tsigko, and from Akraasi to the beach of Drota that passes through creeks, the river and the old settlement of Drota.



Plomari. Sedountas River.



Madamados. The waterfall of Mankatsa

Polichnitos

The Polichnitos and Vasilika trail.

Walking pass the villages of Polichnitos, you will see plenty of monuments of carved stone. Also, on the trail to Vasilika, the anise “paths” lead to watermills, fountains, and prehistoric sites. An important reference point is the road that leads to Ancient Pyrrha of Achladeri. On the way to Vatera, you may follow the trail of Almyropotamos, with the known wetland, the watermills, and the thermal springs.



Almyropotamos

Sigri – Eresus - Antissa

Petrified Forest trails. You can use the marked trails to discover the Petrified Forest. Hikers also have the chance to explore with a special vessel, the sea bottom in the nearby islet of Nisiopi. The Lasparna, Gavathas and Ancient Antissa trail. This beautiful trail which passes through the bay of Lapsarna on the way to the port of Gavathas, and ends up in Ancient Antissa (Ovreiokastro) is filled with cultural monuments.

Petrified forest park

Monastery of Pithari



The Eresus and Skala trail. In this trail, we find the wetland of Halandra, ancient Eresus, and the early Christian church of Agios Andreas and its stunning mosaics. In the area, there is also the monastery of Pithari with the famous lake and the amazing landscape.

Agiasos

The Karini and Stavri trail. The trail starts from the stunning naturally beautiful Karini and Patoumeni, and ends up in Stavri Agiasos, a beautiful traditional village, with the church of the Virgin Mary and the strong cultural heritage.

The Asomatos and Agioi Anargyroi trail. Starting from Asomatos, the environmental center of the island, this amazing environmental trail ends up in Agioi Anargyroi with the river, the dense vegetation, the watermills, and the homonymous chapel.



Towards Agioi Anargyroi

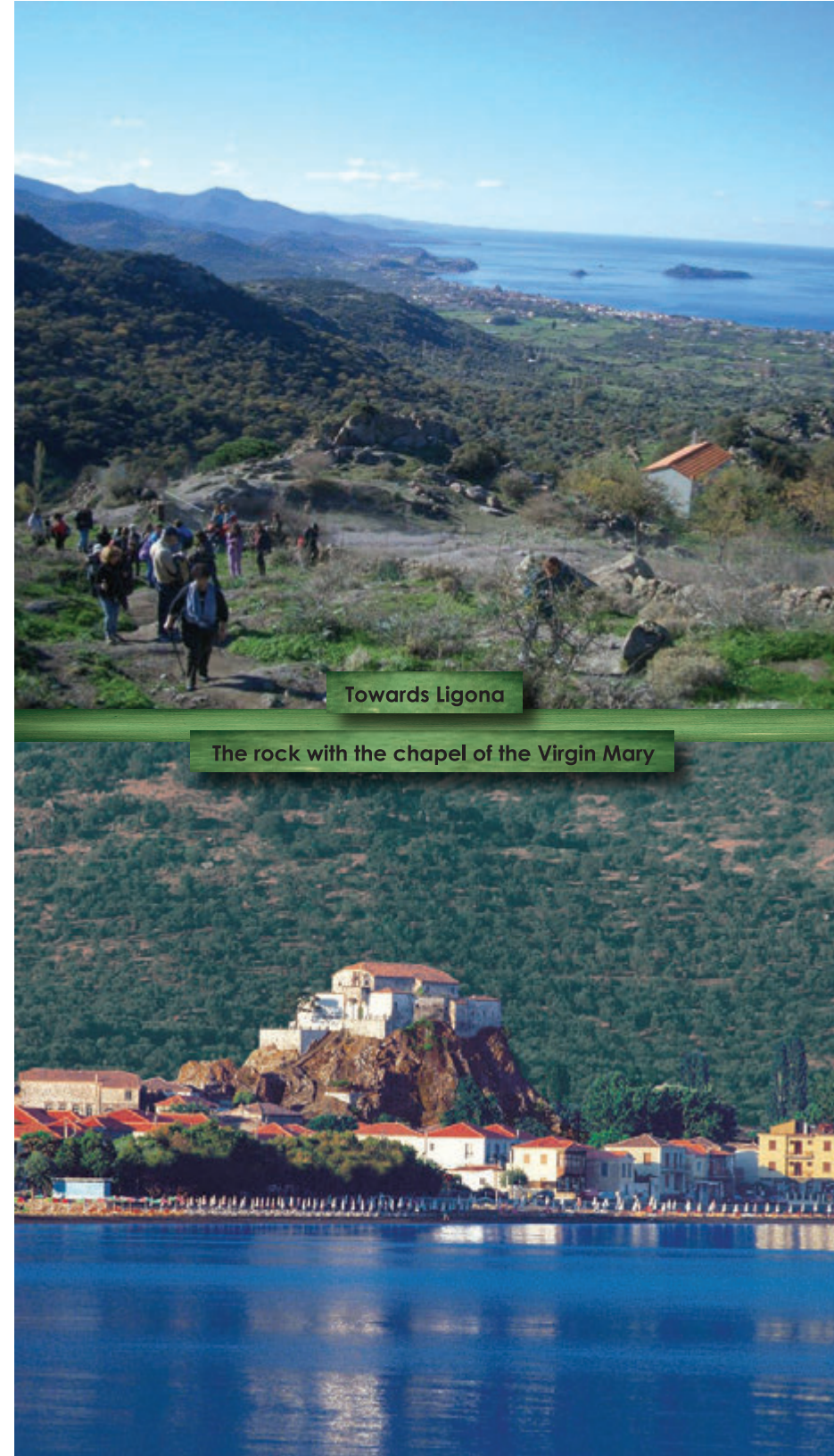


Karini

→ Petra ←

The Petra, Klapados, Lafiona and Agios Alexandros trail. First stop is the deserted village of Klapados, which was the field of the last victorious battles of the Greek army against the Turks in December of 1912 for the liberation of the island.

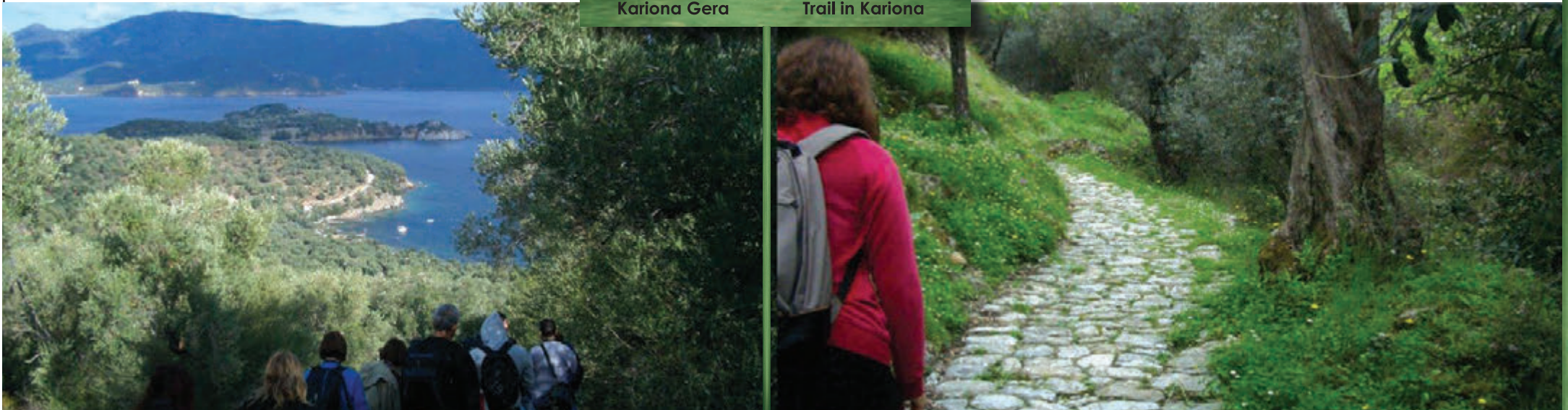
The waterfall in Klapados is well hidden in the forest that surrounds the deserted village. At a short distance, taking a left turn in the dirt road from Kalloni to Petra and before reaching the village, there is a large clearing. After parking there, there is a trail at the end that goes through the woods and ends up in the waterfall. Its height is approximately 15 - 16 meters. The view of the trail is spectacular, since through the forests, one will be able to see all the beaches and villages of the island's northern part (from the cape Peteinos – Anaxos – Petra, Mithymna – Eftalou up to Sykamia). In the southwest, we will see the bay of Kalloni, and on the east the vast plains of the olive groves of Stypsi – A gia Paraskevi. Crossing the beautiful settlement of Lafiona, which leads to Petra through a provincial road or to Anaxos through rural roads, we end up in the archaeological area of the early Christian churches and the Byzantine settlement of Agios Alexandros. Above Petra, atop the hill, there is the traditional settlement of Petri. Following the trail we end up in the ravine of Ligiona, with the 17 watermills.



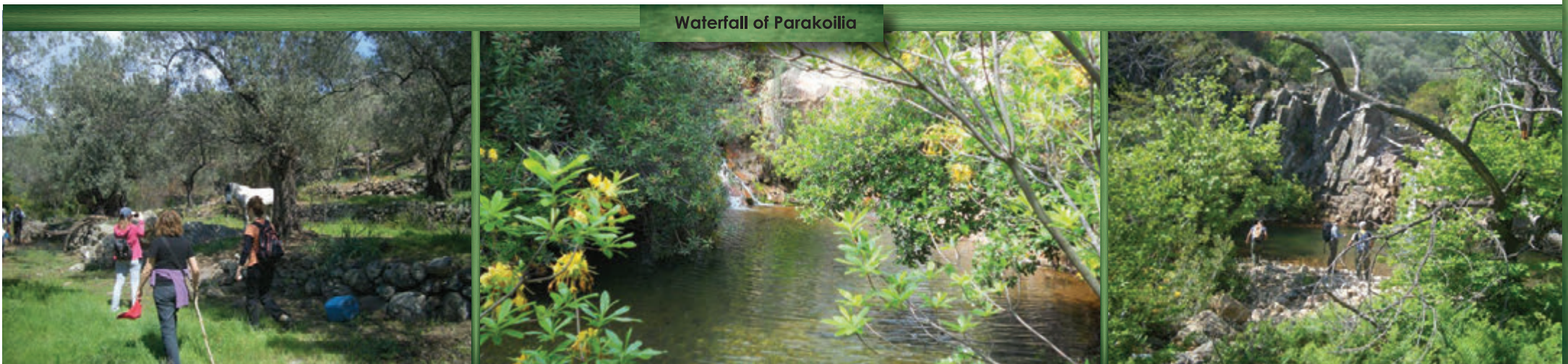
Towards Ligona

The rock with the chapel of the Virgin Mary

The Kariona, Soroko trail. On the plateau of Kariona in Gera, there is a trail from the medieval Palaiokastro towards Soroko, an area of unique natural beauty. It is an old trail from Geragotes towards Panagia Agiasos. This is where we meet the villages of Gera with the numerous cultural monuments.



There are more amazing hiking trails in the areas of Amali Mytilene and Parakoila Kalloni!





Lesvos is an island that needs to be explored on foot, in order one to enjoy its charm and the stunning beauty of the Mediterranean landscape. This is exactly why, in the recent years, a mapped network of hiking trails in Lesvos was created. In that way, the island is able to fully exploit its unique advantages in the development of experiential tourism.



Ancient Antissa. Photo: Tzeli Hatzidimitriou



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