

LESVOS

«Unique vacations»



Pilgrimages



Thermal Springs



Gastronomy



*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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Experiential tourism in Lesvos is one of the most privileged parameters of local development and promotion of the particularities of the island's various regions, since it can satisfy the modern visitors' principal need for authenticity and a deeper connection with nature, the local communities and its people.

Its environment, the therapeutic properties of its thermal springs, the magical powers of water that runs through the timeless landscapes and historical architectural structures, as well as the materialities of the past that was shaped through the constant contact and flows of people between east and west, place Lesvos on the map as an alternative holiday destination in Greece. At the same time, locals and their beliefs, religious rituals, pilgrimages to monasteries and churches are powerful tourist attractions, since they constitute a motive for Greeks and foreigners to gain a global sense of spirituality and connection with the "sacred". Lesvos open-handedly gives visitors the chance to connect with their inner self, while getting a feel for the island, either as pilgrims, or as bathers at the thermal springs, or as hikers of mainland or coastal locations for which so much has been written in literature and history. The locals and local authorities continuously develop this special sense with their hospitality, warmth, and kindness. Lesvos is known for its great ecological worth, its unique cultural heritage, its exceptional products, and its gastronomy.





Thermal springs



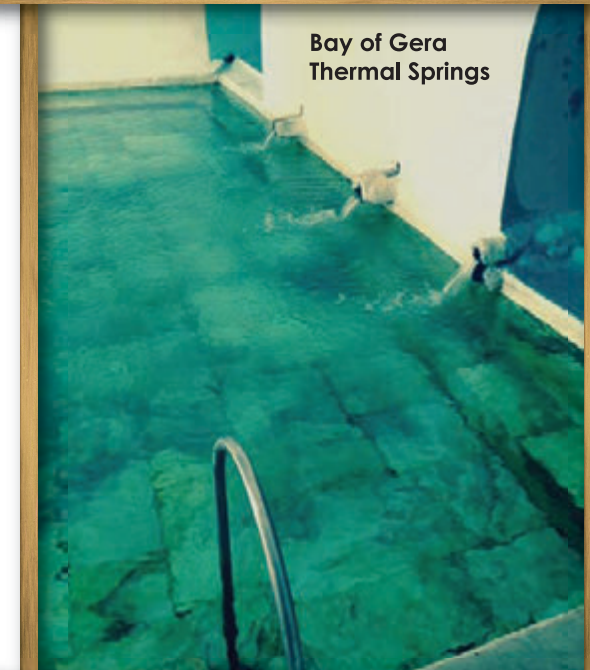
The first experiential tourism development pillar in Lesvos is related to the activities chosen by visitors based on the therapeutic thermal springs and baths that are located all over the island among the olive groves, inviting visitors to a unique journey of relaxation and “purification” of the body and soul. Thermal springs have been used for therapeutic purposes since antiquity.

The oldest thermal spring is situated in Thermi, where the great sanctuary of Artemis Thermia referred by the physician Claudius Galen, was also located. The modern baths are built next to the older facilities. The water is ferrous and reddish in color; it has a temperature of 45.9°C (0.8 units of radioactivity) and is beneficial for rheumatism, arthritis, and gynecological diseases. It is also considered to have an effect on diabetes, liver, kidney, blood and circulatory system conditions.

Bay of Gera Thermal Springs. Located on the eastern coast, near the town of Mytilene. The water contains chlorine, it has a temperature of 39.7°C (1.8 units of radioactivity), and gushes in two baths (male – female). The water is considered beneficial for gynecological conditions, rheumatism, arthritis, and neurasthenia. Furthermore, it is considered to have an effect on nephrolithiasis, gallstones, bronchitis, and intestinal diseases.

Lisvorio Thermal Springs. It is estimated that they operated during the Roman era. There are two separate baths. The water contains chlorine and has a temperature of 69°C (2.5 units of radioactivity). They are recommended for the same diseases as those of Polichnitos.

Eftalou Thermal Springs. The old baths and the modern facilities are located near Mithymna. The water contains chlorine and has a temperature of 46.5°C (14.6 units of radioactivity). They are beneficial for chronic rheumatism, arthritis, lumbago-sciatica, gynecological conditions, nephrolithiasis as well as respiratory problems.

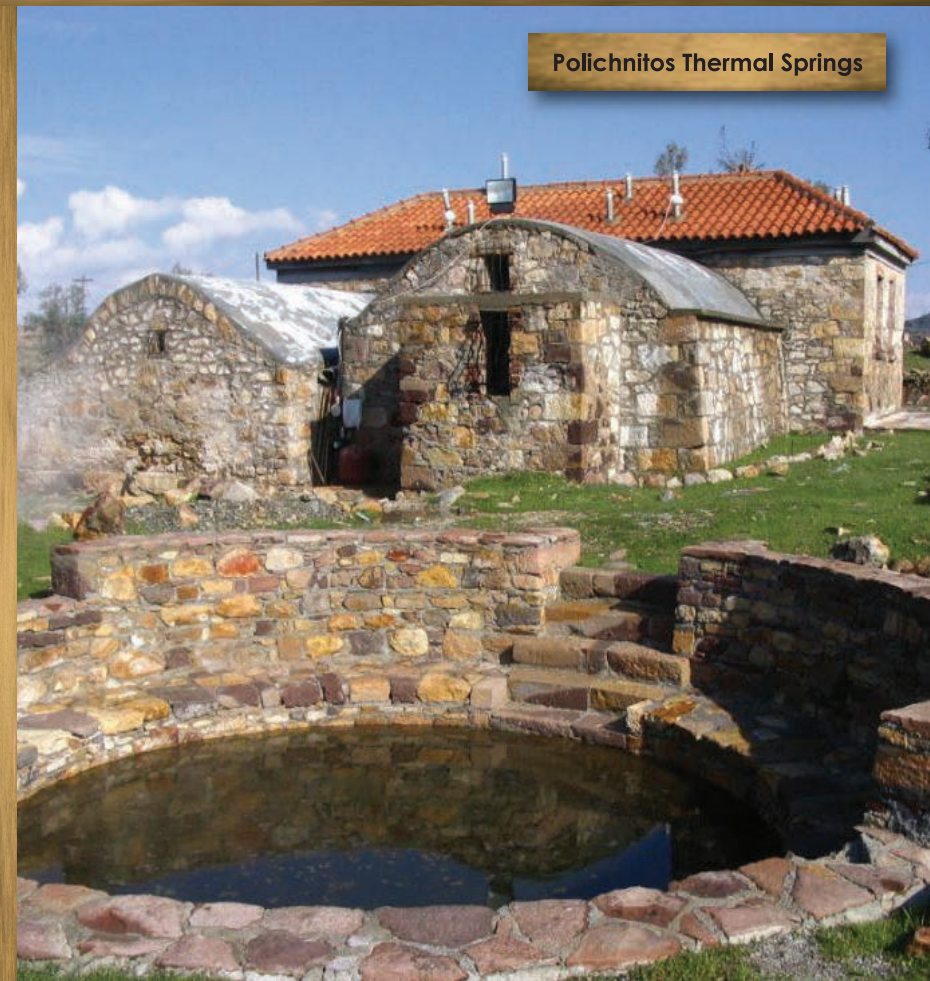


Polichnitos Thermal Springs. The Polichnitos thermal baths date back to Turkish occupation. Following Lesvos' liberation, they were taken over by the Municipality of Polichnitos, which constructed the second bath in 1953, currently used as a pool for women. Nowadays there are modern baths. The water contains chlorine. One bath has a temperature of 81.4oC (6 units of radioactivity), while the other has a temperature of 76.1o C (1.6 units of radioactivity). They are beneficial for sciatica, muscle pain, and rheumatism.

Unexploited thermal waters gush in various locations around the island, which were used by locals in improvised pools. For instance, Kryfi Panagia in Plomari, Kalamos in Nea Kydonia, Vromonero in Agia Paraskevi, Zesta in the bay of Gera, the Thermal waters of Argenos beach (the hottest on the island), as well as in Stypsi, and Agia Melani at the bay of Gera, the only drinkable thermal water.



Eftalou Thermal Springs



Polichnitos Thermal Springs

Pilgrimages

Pilgrimages are the second experiential tourism development pillar in Lesvos, and mainly conducted in the rural areas of Lesvos and in the city of Mytilene.

Lesvos has many remarkable sacred sites. They form a pilgrimage network that is characterized by its significance and influence. In the mind of the pilgrims, the island is a privileged place that can reveal the invisible spiritual world in its sacred forms, where the divine interacts with the human element.

The sacred, religious, pilgrimage sites and the associated rituals are linked to Lesvos' micro - communities, the people's routine, their finances, and activities. Lesvos' most famous pilgrimages are:

Church of Agios Therapontas in Mytilene



The church of the Virgin Mary in Agiasos

This is one of the most important pilgrimages and is celebrated on August 15th in Greece. A big fair is organized, and people flock to Agiasos from all over the island, even on foot. The church of the Virgin Mary houses the icon of the Virgin Mary holding Jesus, which according to tradition was crafted by Luke the Evangelist with mastic and wax, while it was transferred from Jerusalem to Agiasos by the iconophile monk Agathon from Ephesus, who had been exiled to Palestine. The Byzantine icon of the Virgin Mary, measuring 0.56 x 0.62, had the inscription "Mother of God Holy Zion".



It is not known when Agathon came to Lesbos (perhaps in 803). However, it is known that he died in 830. In the year 1170, the first church was founded in the current location. In 1173, the church was inaugurated and preserved until 1806. The erection of the second church was initiated by Bishop Ieremias of Mytilene, the subsequent Ecumenical Patriarch, and the provosts of the Agiasos community. However, on the night of August 6, 1812, it was destroyed by a fire. Fortunately, the icon of the Virgin Mary was saved, like most icons. The construction of the present-day church began in 1815.

The Monastery of Taxiarchis (Archangel Michael) in Madamados

The monastery of Taxiarchis (Archangel Michael) celebrates on the Sunday of the Holy Myrrhbearers. A big religious and commercial festival takes place on this day, culminating with the slaughter of a bull and the preparation of the traditional dish "kiskek" (meat with wheat) which is offered to the pilgrims. Taxiarchis (Archangel Michael) is the patron saint of the island. The fame of his miracles is spread all over the world. According to the dreams and visions of believers, he wears iron shoes and runs everywhere to protect believers. The monastery is built on the northeastern part of the island at a short distance from Madamados village. The small original church was erected on the 17th century; however, it was rebuilt in 1879 as a three-aisle basilica. Located in its interior, an encased embossed icon of Taxiarchis (Archangel Michael) can be seen between the older icons on the temple. According to tradition, this icon was made of clay and the blood of the monks who lived in the monastery and were killed following the invasion by Saracen pirates. Taxiarchis of Madamados is the only embossed icon in the entire Orthodoxy.

The Monastery of Taxiarchis



The Monastery of Saint Raphael in Karyes Thermi

Celebrated two days after Easter

Saints Raphael, Nicholas and Irene are among the newly - appeared martyr saints. We know very little about their lives. Following an excavation in the area of Thermi, Lesvos, archaeologists discovered the grave of an unknown person that it is said to belong to the Martyr Saint Raphael, who was tortured along with Martyr Saint Nicholas and Saint Irene. The tomb and relics of Saint Nicholas were discovered on June 13, 1960. Saint Raphael was born in Myloi, Ithaca in 1410. Before becoming a priest, he was in the Byzantine army. Saint Nicholas was the subordinate of Saint Raphael at the time. Nicholas became a monk and then was ordained a deacon. After the fall of Istanbul, Saint Raphael and his entourage arrived in Mytilene after setting off from the port of Alexandroupolis. Together with other monks, he settled into the old monastery of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, once a convent, which was built on Karyes hill, near Thermi. Saint Raphael became the abbot of the monastery. Years later, in 1463, Lesvos fell into the hands of the Turks, who raided the monastery, and detained Saint Raphael and Saint Nicholas. Harsh and merciless tortures followed. Both Saint Raphael and Saint Nicholas were cruelly tortured. The 12-year-old

Irene, daughter of the community provost of Thermi, Vassileios, was also martyred together with the saints. After a series of miracles worked by Saint Raphael, Nicholas and Irene, the existence of their relics became known. The monastery was then reconstructed and dedicated to the three Martyr Saints Raphael, Nicholas and Irene, and ultimately became a major monastic community. The monastery is a convent.

The Monastery of Saint Raphael



The Monastery of Leimon in Kalloni

It is celebrated on October 14, on Saint Ignatius' feast day. It was established, or rather reestablished, - according to tradition it was built on the remnants of a Byzantine monastery - by Saint Ignatius Agallianos, Archbishop of Mithymna in 1526. The male Patriarchal and Stavropegic Monastery of Leimon dominates in Lesvos' ecclesiastical history over the last five centuries. During this time it played a pivotal spiritual and educational role, having contributed in the financial and social development of central and western Lesvos. It features a library full of manuscripts and printed books (approximately 5,000), as well as an archive of Greek and Ottoman documents. It houses the folklore - geological museum, as well as a nursing home.



The Monastery of Ipsilos in western Lesvos

The Monastery of Saint John the Theologian is built at the peak of Mount Ordymnos, on the way to Sigri, standing as a sleepless sentinel over western Lesvos. Due to its location, it is known since the 18th century as the Monastery of Ipsilos (high/tall). Architecturally it takes the form of a fortress. It is said that the monastery existed during the Byzantine period; however, it hasn't been possible to determine the exact date of its erection. The monastery has a remarkable library that includes 59 handwritten codices, 2 liturgical scrolls, ledgers and numerous antiquarian books. Its archive also includes patriarchal and bishop letters, firmans, contracts of sales, wills, agreements, dedications, distributions and other documents. The monastery's museum, which also exhibits valuable artifacts, is equally remarkable.



The Church of the Virgin Mary Glykofilousa in Petra

One of the most beautiful and original religious monuments and pilgrimages being conducted around August 15 not only in the town of Petra, but also on the island of Lesvos. Reference is made to the holy and historical church of the Virgin Mary Glykofilousa (sweet kiss). It is a significant attraction for thousands of Greek and foreign visitors who climb its 114 stone-carved steps each year, to pray before the holy icon of the Virgin Mary at the top the sacred rock that has an altitude of about 40 meters. The chapel is located in a fortified and unassailable position which was a small fortress, during the years of during Gataluzo's rule.



The Chapel of the Virgin Mary Kryfti in Plomari

The chapel is located about 3 kilometers from Melinda and 10 kilometers from the Plomari center. Taking a path that only locals would know well, you can reach the chapel of the Virgin Mary Kryfti (hidden). The chapel is completely hidden in a large cave. Tradition has it that a girl hid there with her child, after being chased by horse-riding Turks (this is why the locals of Palaiochori usually ride their horses to the fair). The girl was saved and made a vow to build a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary in this cave. The best way to visit the church is by sea. The residents of Plomari and the surrounding areas visit the chapel to venerate the icon and to be cured of rheumatism in the therapeutic waters that gush out in the area.

The Chapel of the Virgin Mary Gorgona in Skala, Sykamnia

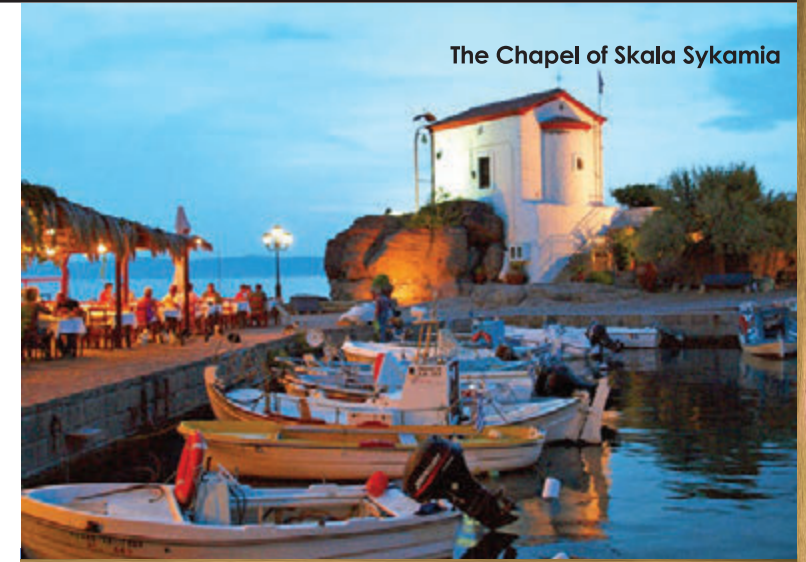
The chapel of the Virgin Mary Gorgona (mermaid) is perched on a cliff in Skala, a picturesque seaside village and port of Sykamia on Lesvos' northern coast. The island's older folk call the cliff "The sea cliff of Virgin Mary". Tradition has it that this chapel owes its unique name to a fresco that depicted the Virgin Mary with a mermaid's tail. According to Myrivilis, the famous Greek novelist, this Virgin Mary, the work of an unknown folk painter, "is the most bizarre in Greece and in Christian world".

The Monastery of Pithario in Eresus

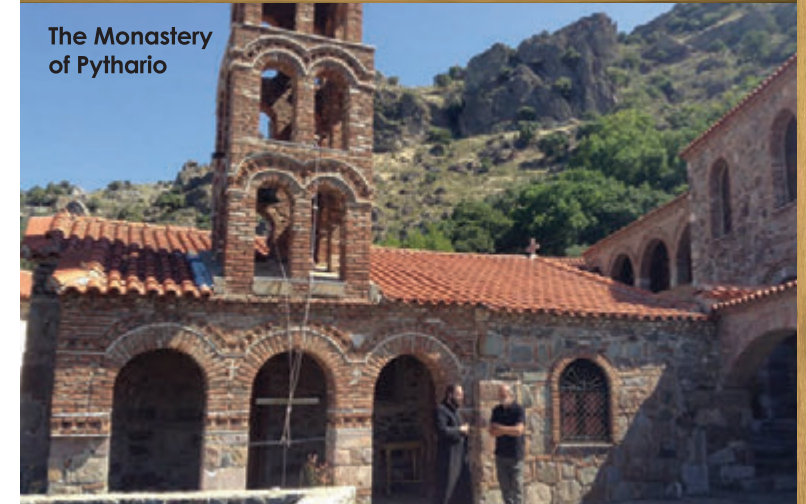
After a half-an-hour drive through meadows northeast of Eresus, one arrives at an evergreen valley, where the male monastery of Pithario is built. It is situated in a deep ravine to the northeast of the town of Eresus and at a distance of 3 kilometers of the town. It offers beautiful and rare scenery with plane trees and poplars next to the river Halandra. It was given its name because of the natural shape of the location it is built in. It is dedicated to the Taxiarches (Archangels) and dates back to medieval times, while its first reconstruction took place during the Ottoman rule. It is a Byzantine monastery that houses a plethora of priceless icons, ecclesiastical vessels, and murals.

Furthermore, in the region of Kalloni, there is the Monastery of the Virgin Mary Myrsiniotissa, which was reconstructed by Saint Ignatius (1523), in honor of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. It houses priceless portable Byzantine icons. Finally, it is worth visiting the lovely churches of Saint Therapon, Saint Athanasius, and the Metropolis of Mytilene, which are small architectural wonders.

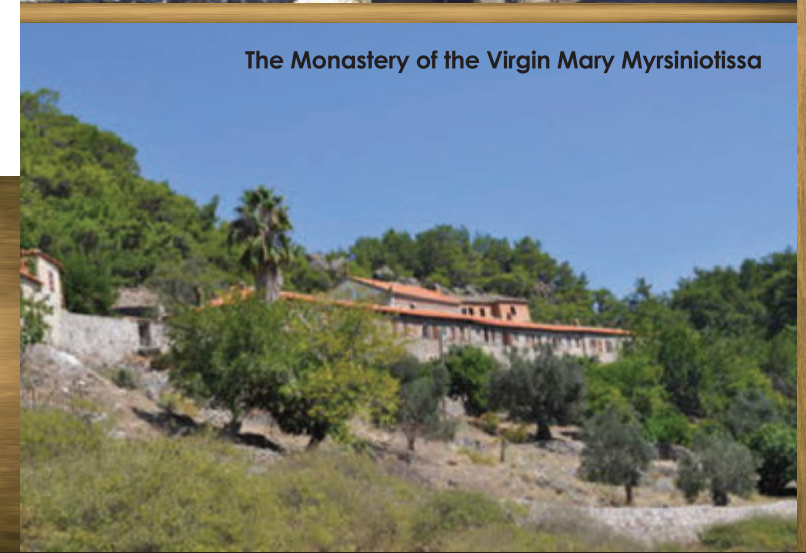
The Chapel of Skala Sykamia



The Monastery of Pythario



The Monastery of the Virgin Mary Myrsiniotissa



The holy relics of Saint Valentine permanently kept at the Church of Metastasis of Virgin Mary in Mytilene

Priscilla and Aquila, Pontiac Greeks, lived in Rome in the early Christian years. Persecuted they decided to settle in Corinth, where they met Paul the Apostle. Fervent students, they returned to Rome to teach the word of God, and probably martyred by order of Nero. The Greek Christian community of Rome used the catacombs of Saint Priscilla for religious purposes; hence the priceless hagiographies that have been preserved. From the 2nd century AD, the catacombs were used for Christian burials. It is where Saint Valentine's grave was found. He was buried here after being tortured and beheaded on February 14th, 268 AD (or 269 AD) by Emperor Claudius II. His lifeless body was collected by Christians and buried in the catacombs of Saint Priscilla. His name was written on the grave in Greek. This is the strongest evidence that Saint Valentine was

Greek, a fact that is believed among many prominent personalities and researchers. The oldest depiction of the Saint that bore the inscription ΑΓΙΟC ΒΑΛΕΝΤΙΝΟC in Greek is located in the church of Santa Maria Antiqua, the parish of the Greeks in Rome, which dates back to the 6th century AD. This is where Greek Saints were honored, especially those from the East.



Beyond the historical evidence, the connection between Saint Valentine and the protection of people who are in love is accompanied by many legends, such as the one with the couple that was arguing intensely; the Saint cut a rose, offered it to them, and after blessing them their love was reinstated. Another legend suggests that Saint Valentine disobeyed the command of the Emperor to forbid the marriage of men who hadn't fulfilled their military obligations, having blessed the marriage of young soldiers with their loved ones. In 1815, the relics of Saint Valentine were donated by the Pope to a noble Italian priest, named Giovanni-Battista Longarini di San Costanzo.

According to the book "The Historical Chronicle of the Catholic Church of Lesvos", the relics were given to the catholic church of Mytilene in March 1893 as a gift from Elizabeth Bargigli after the death of her beloved Theodor Bargigli, the Austro-Hungarian Diplomat in Mytilene. The Catholic Church of Lesvos was served by capuchins at the time. The fruit of their love was their heir Natale Barzili, followed by their daughter Lucia who was married to Theofanopoulos from Mytilene. The old family tomb is located in Kratigos, Mytilene. In 1907, the Catholic Archbishop Domenico Raffaele Francesco Marengo of Izmir (Smyrna) validated their authenticity.



According to Catholic Church documents, the relics remained in Mytilene until 1990, when they were transferred to Athens by the vicar of the Catholic church of Mytilene at the time, the Franciscan monk Father Morini and placed in the chapel of Saint Francis and Clara in Victoria Square. On February 12, 2009, after the continuous pleads of the local authorities and the Catholic Church of Mytilene, parts of the relics were separated by the Archbishop of Athens, Nikolaos, in order to be transferred to the Church of



Metastasis of Virgin Mary in Mytilene. Instead, these holy fragments roamed the island of Tinos until 2011 and were then transferred to the church of Agios Nikolaos in the Catholic Diocese of Chios. Finally, at the initiative of Konstantinos Astyrakakis, Deputy Mayor of Culture and Tourism of Lesvos and Simeon Argyropoulos, civil engineer and designer of the renovation of the Catholic Church of Metastasis of Virgin Mary in concert with the Catholic Church and the Catholic Archbishop Nikolaos, who was kind enough to agree, the relics were permanently transferred to Mytilene on August 3, 2014. The relics were transferred to the centrally located Church of Metastasis of the Virgin Mary in Mytilene with grandeur, accompanied by the Municipal Philharmonic Orchestra. A mass took place in the presence of the Catholic Archbishop Nikolaos and Orthodox priests, representatives of the Eminent Archbishop of Mytilene, Iakovos. Since then, the relics are permanently kept on the island of Lesvos and on February 14, 2015 each year, a mass and procession of the relics is conducted around the central market and pier of Mytilene. It is a weird, yet appropriate coincidence that the relics of the Saint Valentine are in Lesvos – the island of harmony and love- in this random, strange and almost metaphysical way, where love was praised by Sappho, Alkaïos and Nobel Prize winner Elytis.

Local products

Self-sufficient, with a deep tradition for beauty and the good life, Lesvos developed a fine cuisine with truly balanced combinations of flavors and aromas.

It also has exceptional local products. Women's agro-tourism cooperatives prepare local traditional recipes with high quality ingredients. The most famous local products are olive oil and dairy, such as ladotyri (oil cheese). In recent years it also produces exceptional wine. Salted fish, such as the Kallon i sardines, are also quite famous. Naturally, Lesvos' fresh fish and seafood go hand in hand with its renowned ouzo!

Fish and salted fish of Lesvos

Since ancient times, fresh fish and shellfish, caught daily by local fishermen, play an important role in the island's gastronomy. Fresh or salted in various ways, they are the ideal meze (delicacy) for ouzo. Scallops, clams, and salted Kalloni sardines or papalina are items of high gastronomic value.



Lesvos' gourmet olive oil

There are more than 11,000,000 olive trees on the island. To the south and east of the island, the “kolovi” variety is cultivated, while to the north and northeast the “adramitini” variety is cultivated along with a few “ladolia” trees. Lesvos' olive oil and the entire process related to this blessed product bequeathed unique buildings, such as olive mills, storage plants, packaging premises, soap making facilities, e.t.c. to the island. Some of these provide valuable information regarding the otherwise limited industrial and artisanal history of our country. One of these buildings, the old communal oil mill of the Municipality of Agia Paraskevi was turned into the Museum of Industrial Olive Oil Production, where visitors can see the entire olive oil production process. The old olive storage areas, known as “bates”, exhibits the human element involved in oil production. The oil mill in Papados, Gera is a characteristic monument of Lesvos' industrial architectural heritage.



Lesvos' dairy products

The unique taste and quality of Lesvos' dairy products have made them famous worldwide. It is worth mentioning that out of the 20 Greek cheeses with PDO status, 3 are made in Lesvos: ladotyri, Eresus kasseri and feta.

Wine of Lesvos

The popularity of the wines of Lesvos dates back to antiquity, with the poet Aristarchus praising the “sweet and fragrant” wine of the island, and calling it “ambrosia”. Both quality and quantity of the wine were impressive, until the gradual replacement of vines with olive trees, mainly due to the catastrophic Phylloxera crisis. To this day, exceptional wine is produced by local producers, while an organic wine production unit, which is open to the public, can be found in the volcanic region of western Lesvos.

The Famous Mytilene Ouzo

Ouzo is a perfect match for the island's food and culture, and creates a special dining experience.

On the island, the history of ouzo starts from the mid-19th century with the first distillation taking place in Plomari. This tradition continues to this day. Many distilleries with a long history, tradition and expertise produce ouzo, using seven different aromatic plants, differentiating their distillation from other Greek regions. Anise (*Pimpinella anisum*) plays a key role in the production of Mytilene ouzo.

This is a small annual plant that flourishes on the island and is the main ouzo ingredient. Ouzo usually accompanies savory dishes, such as salted fish (sardines, anchovies, mackerels, etc.), grilled octopus, throubes (savory olives) and more. Ripe sweet tomatoes sprinkled with coarse salt, fried cheese - stuffed zucchini blossoms, marinated anchovies, small pickled eggplants and oil cheese. The locals established a museum to honor ouzo. The Ouzo Museum in Plomari houses copper cauldrons, made in Istanbul at the end of the 19th century, and a complete replica of a distillation system.

Besides these basic products there are also other delicious products, such as jams, honey, sesame seed bars, almond sweets, traditional spoon sweets, and fresh pasta, which are produced by the various women's cooperatives. Furthermore, thanks to their experience and secrets, the women create mouthwatering recipes for desserts, and delicious pies!





Local ouzomezedes





Skala Eressou



REGION OF
NORTH AEGEAN
REGIONAL UNIT
OF LESVOS



European Union
European Regional Development Fund



Co-financed by Greece
and the European Union

Municipality
of Lesvos

