

# A Guide to the Aegean Islands

2012

## The Dodecanese



Lindos, Rhodes, The Castle of the Knight Templars

The Dodecanese is marked by the Order of the [Knights Templars](#) who replaced the Byzantines in Rhodes in 1309. They built the town of Rhodes and survived the Fall of Constantinople until 1522 when Rhodes fell to a large army under [Suleiman the Magnificent](#). Henceforth the Ottomans controlled the Dodecanese for 400 years. In 1911 after the Italian–Turkish (Lybian) War and the demise of the Ottoman empire the Italians occupied the islands. Italian colonists were settled in the Dodecanese in the 1930s by the Fascist government of Benito Mussolini. By 1940 the number of Italians settled in the Dodecanese was almost 8,000, concentrated mainly in Rhodes. In 1947, after the Second World War, the islands came into the possession of Greece: as a consequence most of the Italians were forced to leave and all of the Italian schools were closed. However, their architectural legacy is still evident, especially in Leros and Rhodes.

# Patmos

[Google-Maps](#)



For most visitors Patmos is a spiritual Island

Pilgrims of all Christian denominations come to Patmos to pray at the places of St. John's Apocalypse. They arrive in droves at Skala and hike up the steep hill to the Cave where John had his vision of the End of Time and on to the fortified castle of his Monastery in the Chora. Skala and Chora are crowded, but there are a few beaches in the north and extreme south of the island where one can find cheap rooms and solitude (Livadi, Petra, Grikos)



Bay of Skala, the harbor of  
Patmos



The Chora with the Monastery  
of St. John



Entry to the Cave of the  
Revelation

## The Apocalypse of John

Still the Apocalypse, its interpretation, authorship and history are a multifaceted subject, which should interest anyone, if only for the influence it had on Christian imagination and art since very early times.

Traditional theory holds that John the Apostle—considered to have written the Gospel and the Epistles of John—was exiled to Patmos during the reign of Domitian (90–100 AD), and there wrote his Revelations. Not everyone agrees, some modern scholars consider John the Apostle, John of the Epistles, and John of Patmos three different persons and that the Apocalypse was written in 60 AD.

[Wikipedia](#)





St. John receiving (upper right) and writing the Apocalypse (Russian Icon, 17th cent)

In addition East and Western Christian doctrines look at the text in radically different ways. Eastern Orthodoxy treats the text as describing present day events as a prophecy of events to come, for which the contemporaneous events were a form of foreshadow. It rejects attempts to determine, before the fact, if the events of Revelation are occurring by mapping them onto present-day events, taking to heart the Scriptural warning against those who proclaim "He is here!" prematurely. Instead, the book is seen as a warning to be spiritually and morally ready of the end of time, whenever they may come ("like a thief in the night"), by God's choosing, not something that can be precipitated nor trivially deduced by mortals.

The Book of Revelation is the only book of the New Testament that is not read during regular services by the Eastern Orthodox Church. The whole Book of Revelation is read on "Apocalypse Night" on *Bright Saturday* (6 days after Easter).

This and gnostic interpretations of the Apocalypse are discussed in an interesting article in [Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Revelation)

# Lipsi–Lipsoi

[Google–Maps](#)



The harbor of Lipsi

Lipsi is one of the small islets between Patmos and the coast of Turkey. Despite it being relatively unknown there is some package tourist activity there and just showing up because you assume you will find a room may be unwise in July or August. There is really only one town which is the port. With a number of good tavernas in town, a few hotels and a dozen beaches within walking distance and a few ouzeries on the waterfront, this may be the quiet island you are looking for – if you can get there.

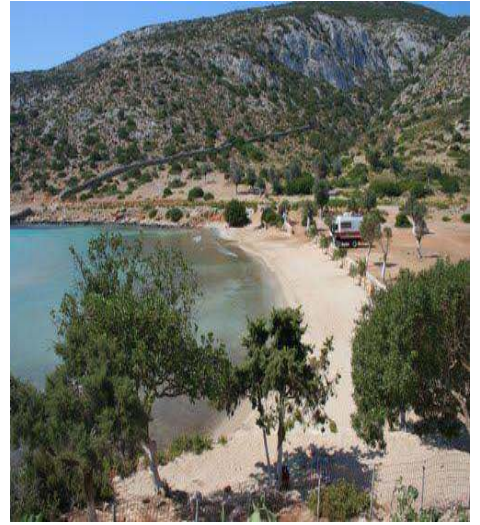




Chochlakura Beach, Cave shelter at the Beach



Church at Kouselio is built on an early Christian church.



Platys Gialos, Camping by the beach

## Astypalea

[Google-Maps](#)



Astypalea should really be a Cycladic island, craggy, bare and bone dry.

It looks like two separate islands connected by a narrow isthmus. Most of the visitors are Greeks. The island is more like a Cycladic island than the Dodecanese chain which it is a part of. A labyrinth of white geometric houses in a village crowned by a Venetian castle. Many coved beaches. It is remarkable that the island does not attract more tourists. Named Stampalia by the Italians, it is a true Greek island with 1,238 residents in 2001.

During the Middle Ages Astypalea belonged to the Byzantines until 1207, when – in the aftermath of the Fourth Crusade – it became, until 1522, the fiefdom of the Querini, a noble Venetian family. The Querini built a castle that is still in place and added the name of the island to their family name: Querini Stampalia.

Astypalea became Turkish in 1522, and the Ottomans kept it until 1912, with only two interruptions: from 1648 until 1668, during the War of Crete, when it was occupied by Venice, and from 1821 to 1828 when it joined the insurgents during the Greek War of Independence.

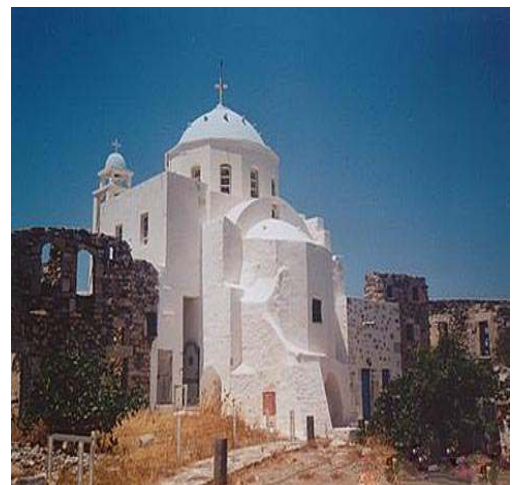
It was occupied again by the Ottomans in 1828. On April 12, 1912, (during the Libyan War) a detachment of the Italian Regia Marina landed on Astypalaia, which thus became the first island of the Dodecanese to be occupied by Italy. From there the Italians landed on Rhodes. The island remained under Italian governance until World War II (1943) when – in a last operation – the Germans threw the Italians and British out! In 1947, together with the whole Dodecanese, it joined Greece



Astypalea Chora with the Querini  
Castle



On the way to the castle



Ag. Georgios church in the  
castle

# Leros

[Google-Maps](#)



Leros, Yacht harbor Panteli

Leros is the Greek base for sailing trips along the coast of Turkey and the Dodecanese islands. There is a daily boat from Pireaus which makes an overnight trip and then continues on to the other larger Dodecanese islands. There is also a daily flight from Athens in the summer.



## Lakkoi–Lakki, Portolago



Main Street of Portolago

The main port of Lakki is one of the best examples of Rational Art Deco Architecture. It was designed by Mussilini's architects in 1923– (though in defiance of the dictator, the capital was moved to the village of Aghia Marina).

The Italian regime actively attempted to Italianize the Dodecanese, by making the Italian language compulsory, giving incentives to locals to adopt the Italian nationality, and clamping down on Greek institutions. In the 1930s a new model town, Portolago, was built by the Italian authorities. It is one of the best examples of Italian Rationalist architecture. The Greeks later renamed it Lakki.



Aghia Marina, the capital of Leros from the Venitian castle

During the 31 years that the Italians remained in Leros, they set up a great plan to build and fortify the island, since its strategic position and its large natural harbours (the largest of which, Lakki, is the largest deep water harbour in the Mediterranean Sea), made it an ideal naval base. The naval base at Lakki, ensured that the Italians had control over an area of vital interest to the Allies (the Aegean, the Dardanelles and the Near East). Mussolini, who called Leros "the Corregidor of the Mediterranean", saw the island as a crucial base for the Italian domination of the eastern Aegean Sea, and even built a mansion for himself in the town of Portolago, today a heroic ruin.

More, especially about its infamous post-WWII history in [Wikipedia](#)

# Kalymnos

[Google-Maps](#)



Pothia the harbor of Kalymnos

Kalymnos is the spongefishermen's island. The main port of Pothia is lined with cafes and is, as home to Greece's spongefishing fleet, a working town. There is a sponge museum there too. There are resort beaches around the island and several other small ports and towns worth visiting. There are small excursion boats from Pothia to the small islands of Nera and Pserimos and from the resort town of Myrties to Telendos where there are rooms to rent, tavernas and beaches.





Emboreios, remote fishing village with beach and good swimming. Very laid back.



Tiny fishing village on the other side of the island. Best approached from the sea.



Telendos Island from Masouri Beach

People who visit regularly rave about Kalymnos. Kalymnos is connected by an almost daily boat from Pireaus to the other major islands of the Dodecanese chain and also a ferry and hydrofoil to Samos. There may even be an airport there by the time you read this. It takes around 12 hours by ferry from Pireaus and a little less on the Blue Star Lines. See [Gill Collins' review of Kalymnos](#)

# Nysiros

[Google-Maps](#)



The Caldera of Nysiros Island (Google-Earth)

The island of Nysiros is – like Santorini, Milos, Kos, Methana, Giali – a dormant volcano. They are all a result of the collision of the African and the Anatolian with the Eurasian [tectonic plate](#). The volcano attracts many visitors, it has created some bizarre landscapes.

The best illustration of the Caldera is actually the above satellite image taken from Google Earth. The caldera is large (4 km diameter) so that surface photographs only show part, most often the white, lowest Stefanos Crater.

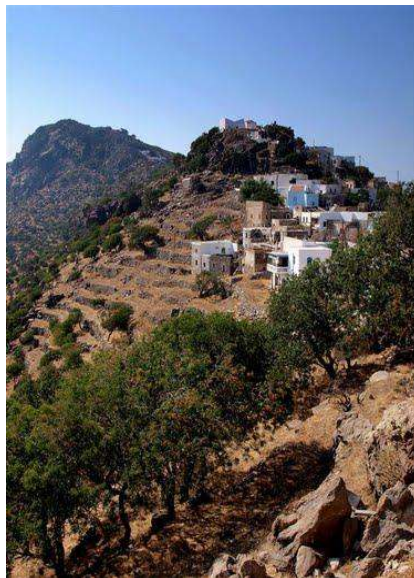




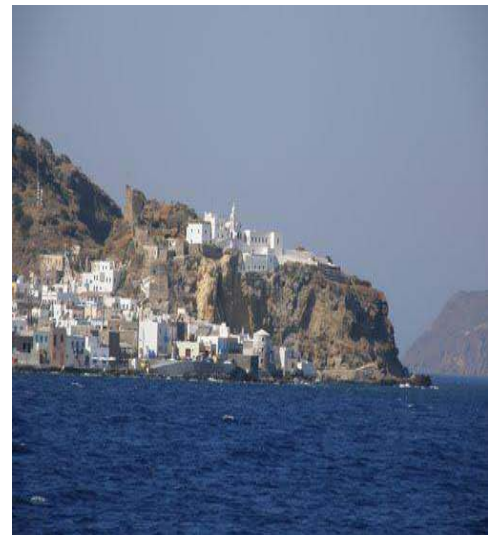
The bottom of the Stafanos Crater



Paloi the harbor and the island of Giali in the background



Emporeios on the north-rim of the crater



Mandraki with the monastery and the fortress of the Knights above it.

An excellent island for hiking. The colorful port of Mandraki is host to an ancient acropolis, a monastery and a black stone beach. There is a thermal spa at Loutra. The villages of Nikea and Emporeios sit on the rim with spectacular views of the caldera.



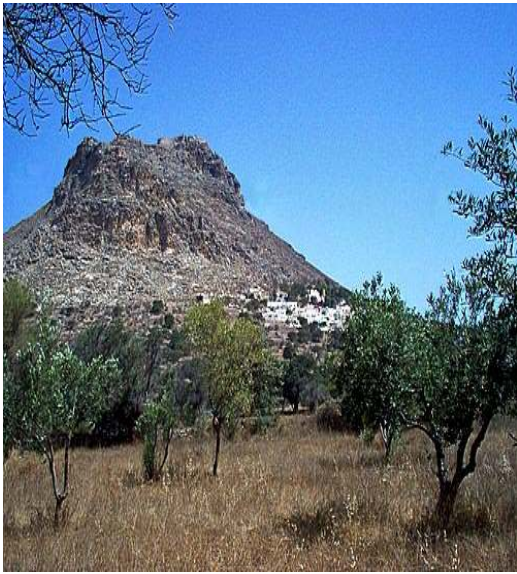
# Tilos

[Google-Maps](#)



Tilos, Aghios Antonios the old harbor seen from the castle above Megalo Chorio

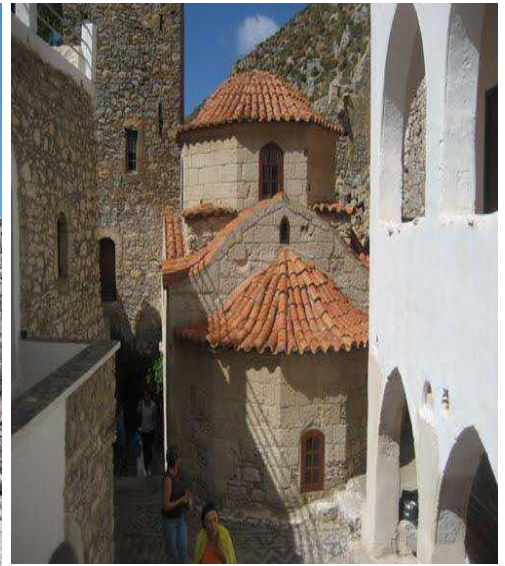
Another forgotten island with great hikes, deserted villages, dramatic landscapes, a spectacular monastery, a medieval castle and uncrowded beaches. There are plenty of places to stay in Livadia and camping is permitted on the beaches. There are several ferries a week to Kalymnos, Kos, Kastellorizo, Rhodes and Simi as well as a hydrofoil twice a week. For the past 16 years, Tilos, has banned hunting and has as a result become a paradise for birds, some of them rare or endangered. [Matt Barnett](#).



Megalo Chorio and the Knight's castle



Entry to the castle



Moni Panteleimon in the northwest of Tilos

Pottery and stone tools discovered in Kharkhadió indicate human activity on Tilos in the early Neolithic period 8000 BC–7000 BC, along with a large caché of dwarf (1.20–1.60 m tall) elephant (!) bones, carbon dated to 4000–7000 BC (some now in the museum). Masseti (2001) suggests coexistence of these animals with humans, possibly into the historic period.

The island flourished during the classical era, minting its own coinage and being famed for clothing and perfumes. In the 7th century BC, colonists from Tilos and Lindos settled in Sicily and founded the city of Gelas. From the turn of the 4th century BC, for the next 200 years, Tilos was subject to the Seleucid Empire, Caria and then Ptolemaic Egypt under the influence of Rhodes, until in 200 BC, the island was incorporated in to the Rhodian confederacy. The island was conquered by the Romans in 42 BC. Archaeological finds from Roman and early-Christian times demonstrate the prosperity of the island until the great earthquake of 551 AD.

The Knights of Saint John took control of Tilos from 1309, restoring the Byzantine castles, and building new ones in order to defend against pirate raids. It was evacuated in 1470 as the Ottomans began the Siege of Rhodes and control passed to Suleiman I in 1522 when Rhodes fell. In 1523, Tilos was occupied by the Ottoman Empire and the island was put under the privileged administrative and tax system known as "maktou." Ottoman rule lasted until May 12, 1912, when Italian sailors landed in the bay of Eristos during the Italo-Turkish War. Tilos then became part the Italian possession of the "Isole Italiane dell'Egeo." After the Italian Armistice in September 1943, Tilos was occupied by German troops, and in 1948 it joined Greece together with all the

Dodecanese islands. Since 1948, the population of the island has declined rapidly, as many Tilians migrated to the United States or Australia. [Wikipedia](#)

## Symi

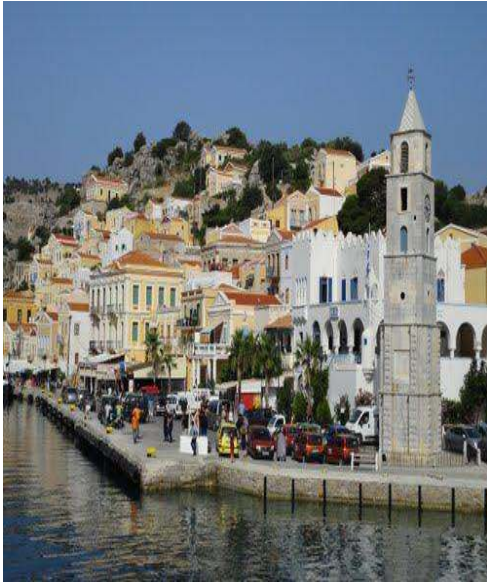
[Google-Maps](#)



Symi Island from Datca on the Turkish coast

Beautiful bays and pebbled beaches, best reached by small boats that ply frequently between Symi and Rhodes. Many people come for the day to wander around the beautiful town. There are several ferries a week to Kalymnos, Kos, Rhodes and Tilos as well as a hydrofoil twice a week. There are a couple ferries a week to Pireaus. [Matt Barrett](#).





Symi harbor



Panormitis, Ag. Archan.  
Michailos



Marathouna Beach

# Kos

[Google-Maps](#)



Tourist map of Kos

After Mykonos and Santorini Kos is touristically the highest developed island in the Aegean: It boasts 9 Five Star and 12 Four Star hotels in addition to numerous Three Stars, night clubs, discos, bars, and restaurants.... Hyppokrates was born here, international, medical conventions are therefore a major business on Kos.

With its long sandy beaches, a balmy climate and many historical sites it should be a heaven for foreign tourists. There are 5 flights to Athens and to a number of international destinations: Frankfurt, Rome, Moscow.

Unfortunately this boom was supported by international bulk tour operators whose business collapsed during the 2008–2010 crash. Many of the hotels went broke, are empty, or for sale.

Read the full 2010 review of Kos by [Marc Dubin](#)



Aktis Art Hotel\*\*\*\*, Kos  
(photo tripadvisor)



Kos, Aqua Blue Boutique  
Hotel\*\*\*\*\*



Hotel Palazzo Del Mare\*\*\*\*\*  
Marmári

Here is a sampling of hotels, all three charge less than \$200/double in the Spring of 2012 – so maybe you are tempted.....



# Rhodes

[Google-Maps](#)

Rhodes the city of the Knights



Minaret seen from the ruins of the Castle of the Knights

Rhodes is a major tourist attraction for the seekers of sunny beaches. While many of its beaches are gravel, not sand; the island can boast 300+ sun days in a year. Consequently, you will stumble into tourists and hotels and beaches full of deck chairs for rent, into shops and restaurants that cater to these tourists. It can be overwhelming at times. *If this bothers you, Rhodes is probably not for you.* Still, there are some areas where mass tourism has not yet penetrated too much. And there are advantages too, accommodation on Rhodes itself can be purchased for relatively low prices, and most of the locals speak at least English and German and often some other languages, like Swedish, French, Turkish, Italian or even Finnish. Look for bays, beaches frequented by Greeks and areas at or beyond Lindos

From [Wiki Travelguide](#) More about Rhodes city and its history: [Matt Barrett](#)

## Lindos



Lindos and its acropolis

Lindos is the tourist capital of the island. Often described as a quaint island village, in reality it is a resort with a small village at its center. The beach is excellent but crowded during a summer that seems to last around 8 months.

The village itself is cycladic in style and the home to many famous and not so famous artists, musicians and normal people who were lucky enough to be here early.

The Acropolis of Lindos is the most well known of all ancient sites in the Dodekanese and can be as crowded as the Acropolis of Athens sometimes.

Lindos was the original capital of the island, established around 2000 BC and has been home to everyone from the ancient Greeks, the Byzantines, the Franks and the Turks, including Saint Paul and the Knights of Saint John who reformed the castle. The village itself is closed to automobiles and is a labyrinth of tiny streets and alleys.

There are several large self-contained luxury hotels on the outskirts of town, with more on the way.

From [Matt Barnett](#)



Monolithos Castle



Athena Temple on the Lindos  
Acropolis



Prasonissos Beach in Winter

Rhodes town, Lindos, Kameiros, and Monolithos are the main archeological attractions (see Google Maps). Prasonissos, the most western point of Rhodes is as far away as you can get from the international bustle. Try kite surfing there.

### Kameiros Archeological Site



Overview of the excavation site from the Acropolis hill.

The site is well visible in Google Maps

During the prehistoric period the area was inhabited by Mycenaean Greeks. The city itself was founded by Dorians. The temple foundations were begun at least as early as the eighth century BC. The earthquake of 226 BC destroyed the city and the temple.



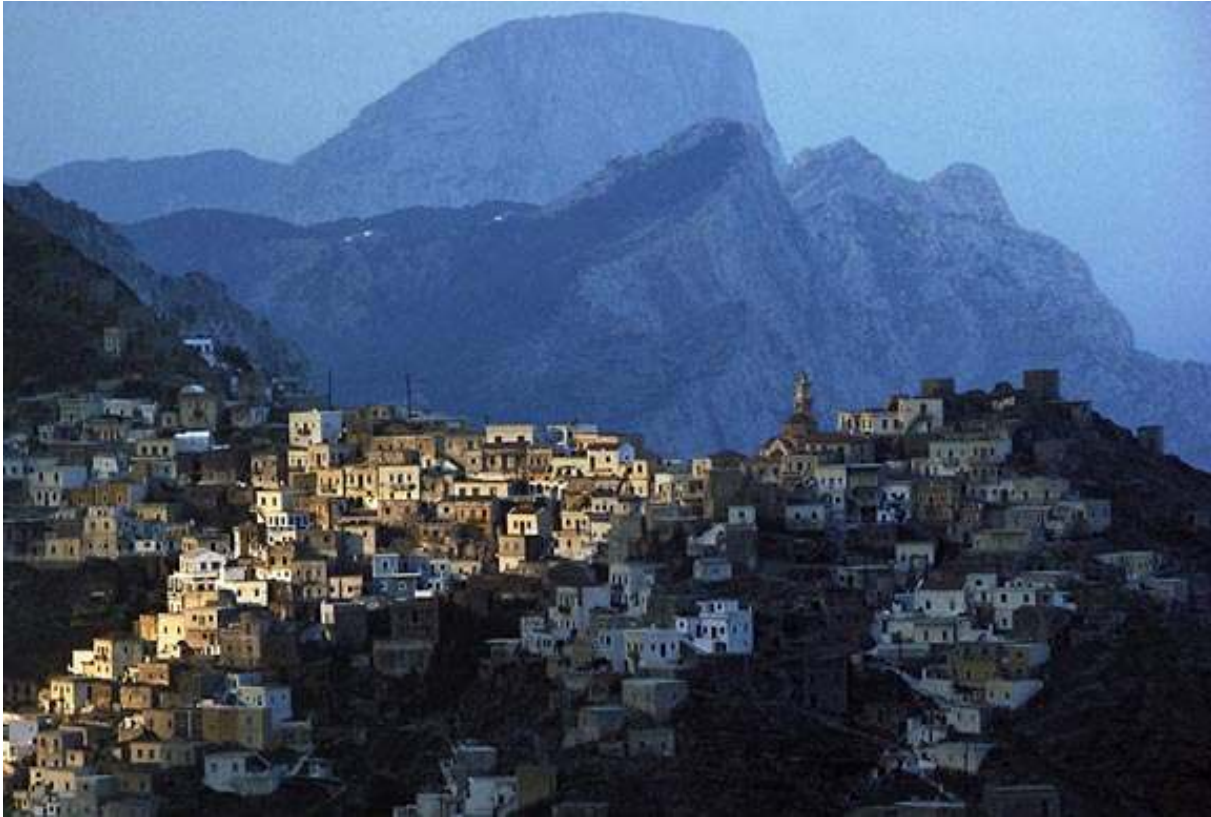
The earthquake of 142 BC destroyed the city for the second time.

The Greek city was built on three levels. At the top of the hill was the Acropolis, with the temple complex of Athena Kameiras and the Stoa. A covered reservoir having a capacity of 600 cubic meters of water—enough for up to 400 families—was constructed about the sixth century BC. Later, the Stoa was built over the reservoir.

The main settlement was on the middle terrace, consisting of a grid of parallel streets and residential blocks. On the lower terrace are found a Doric Temple, probably to Apollo; the Fountain House, with the Agora in front of it; and Peribolos of the Altars, which contained dedications to various deities. From [Wikipedia](#)

# Karpathos

[Google-Maps](#)



Karpathos, The Mountain Village of Olympos  
photo James Stanfield, Nat. Geographic, 1983

Karpathos is a very special island. A wild, wooded mountain range nearly separates the northern and southern half. 140 km from Rhodes or 180 km by air from Crete, it once upon a time was the most inaccessible island in the Aegean. Now there are two harbors and a new airport.

Conventionally counted among the Dodecanese Islands – although the Italians seem not have liked this rocky place and left few traces. It has long been famous for its northern very traditional mountain village of Olympos, which was isolated for centuries.

Do come here to watch, listen and learn. – The local tourism organization, [Karpathos.org](http://Karpathos.org) maintains an informative website – not very elegant, but with a gallery of photos and many comments critical of the frivolous, young Karpathian generation and the tourists who together threaten the island's conservative lifestyle.....

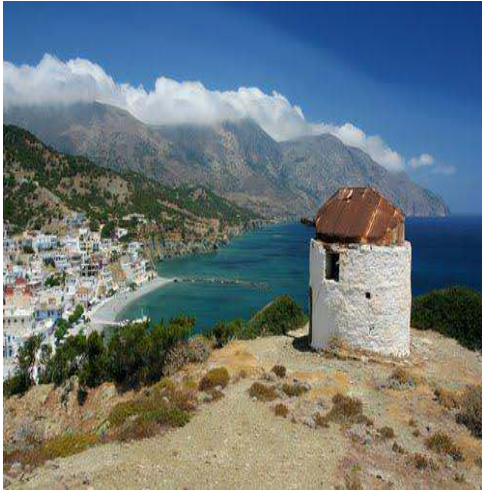
The western side of the island is rocky while the other is more fertile and green. The mountains separate the two sides. Many nice beaches some with hotels and

restaurants but tourism has not gotten out of hand...yet.

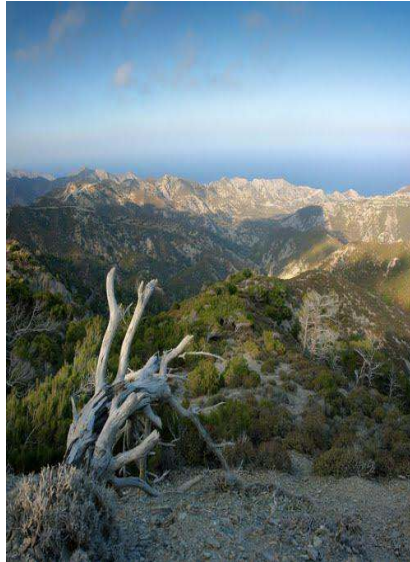
There are two ports Karpathos–Pigadia (south) and Diafani in the north. Pigadia is the island's despoiled capital. It has now numerous hotels, restaurants and cafes on a noisy waterfront run by repatriated American–Karpathians.

There are only a couple of ferries a week from Pireaus and perhaps one or two a week to Rhodes, Crete, Santorini, Milos, Kassos, Halki, Paros, and Naxos. There is now an airport (Olympic Airways), and most people come here that way.

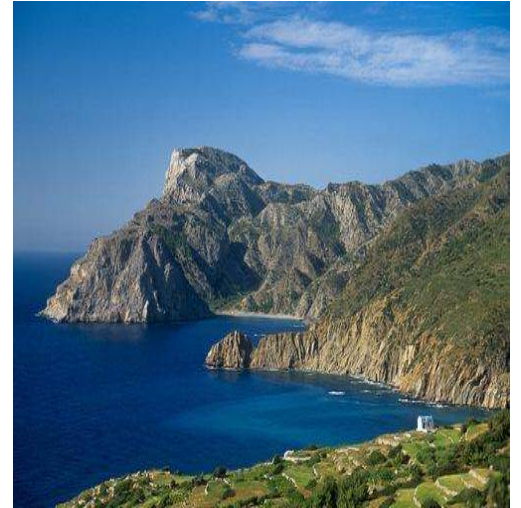
## The North



Diafani the northern harbor

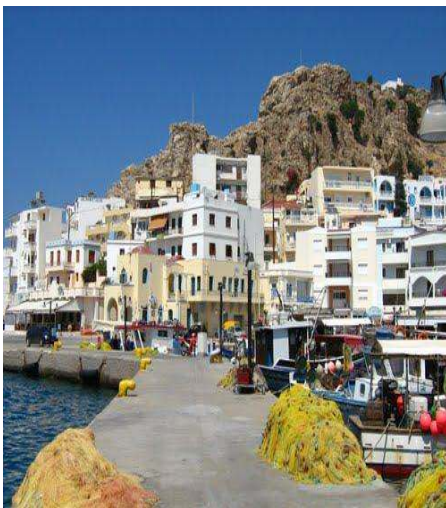


The wild mountain interior



Church on promontory near  
Mesochori

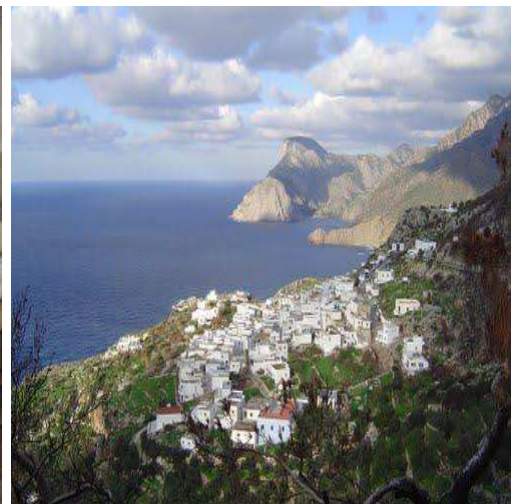
## The South



Pigadia, the main harbor



Cave house near Kato Lefkas



Kato Lefkas



