

Zakynthos

Zante is the flower of the East.

Zákynthos (Zante) is a **verdant island** endowed with fertile valleys and a temperate climate (area: 406 sq. km; coastline: 123 km). Its landscape diversity has resulted in different types of **beaches**: there are sandy beaches in secluded coves where the tranquil waters are deep blue on the island's southeastern part; yet, if rugged cliffs and an interesting **underwater world** are to your liking, try the western part of the island.



The Venetians, who ruled Zákynthos from 1484 to 1797, called the island "**Fioro di Levante**" (flower of the East) as there are over 7,000 species of flowers on Zákynthos. The third largest island of the **Ionian Sea**, after **Corfu** and **Kefaloniá**, is internationally known as "Zante". Zákynthos is said to have been the island's first inhabitant and the ancient acropolis is attributed to him. He was the son of Dardanos who ruled the ancient kingdom of Frigia. A Venetian fort was built at later times on the site.

The Venetian architectural influence has left its stamp on Zante despite the damage sustained due to the seismic activity in the area. After the ravaging 1953 earthquake and the ensuing fire, a number of historical buildings and churches burned to the ground. Consequently, the significant treasures these buildings were housing perished. The town **was rebuilt** according to a plan where strict anti-seismic specifications applied and, to a large extent, respecting the town's former architectural structure.

On Zante, great care is taken to protect two endangered animal species, namely the **caretta caretta** sea turtle and the **monachus monachus** seal.

The city of Zakynthos is the capital of the island and at the same time the island's port.

Take a tour around the city and visit:

- The **Solomos Square** surrounded by buildings with characteristic traditional architectural features of the island, arch-shaped windows and arcades. The bust of D. Solomos national poet of Greece dominates in the centre. Here you can also find the Public Library (with 55.000 volumes), the Post-Byzantine Museum of Zante exhibiting treasures such as statues trimmed with gold, icons and art woodcuts.
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- The coastal road known as **Strata Marina** (K. Lomvardou street), which is one of the most frequented part of the city, with cafes, bars and restaurants, from the Solomos Square up to the church of the patron-saint Aghios Dionysios.
- The **Aghios Markos square**. Here, in 1797, the revolutionaries (popolaroi) burnt the Libro d' Oro and planted the tree of freedom. This paved square is the main meeting point for

locals and visitors. Here, you will find the **Museum of Solomos**, Kalvos and **Eminent Zakynthians** which also hosts the bust of the Greek national poet, created by Georgios Broutos in 1902.

- **Rouga**: Its name is Alexandros Romas street, starting at Aghios Markos Square crossing almost the whole town. This street with the impressive arcades has been the main commercial center of the city for centuries.

- The **Venetian Castle** situated on a hill overhanging the town in the place of the old acropolis named Psofis.

- The **Stranis hill**, 2 km away from the town, offering a great view. Here, the poet Dionysios Solomos inspired the 'Hymn to Liberty' (later the Greek national anthem) and the "Free Besieged" attending the siege of the city of Messolonghi.

Visit also the remarkable churches of Zakynthos

- **Aghios Nikolaos** tou Molou (Solomou Square): a church of Renaissance order (17th century) with a belfry dating back to the Byzantine period. Aghios Dionysios lived here in 1853.

- **Aghios Dionysios** (at the new pier of the port): where the relic of the patron-saint of the island is kept in a silver larnax.

- **Aghios Markos** (1516): The belfry of this catholic church situated at the Aghiou Markou Square is a copy of the one of Saint Mark's basilica in Venice.

- **Aghios Georgios**: The army commanders Kolokotronis, Nikitaras, Fotomaras as well as other fighters of the 1821 Revolution took their vows on the icon which is kept in this church.

- **Panaghia Pikardiotissa** at the outskirts of the castle.



Zakynthos is famous for its cultural life.

Some of the famous cultural Events are:

Carnival: A traditional town crier goes around the island proclaiming the program of the Carnival festivities. On the last Sunday of the Carnival is the procession of the Carnival King. The festivities end with the "Mask Funeral".

Litany and artistic events in the **memory of Aghios Dionysios** on August 24th and December 17th.

Easter: The Holy Week in Zakynthos has its own character with ancient customs and an exceptional rite as far as the religious ceremonies are concerned.

The celebration of Holy Week on Zakynthos Island is considered to be unique and unforgettable both for locals and visitors to the island. At noon, on Good Friday, crowds of worshippers take part in the procession of the Crucified through the town.

In the early hours of Holy Saturday morning and starting from the "Saint Nicolas" Cathedral

Church the epitaph procession takes place in accordance with the local ancient custom, while the Bishop announces the Resurrection at sunrise.

At the first chime of the bell, the Bishop lets white doves free while from the bell tower clay vessels are thrown onto the road just as is done by all the inhabitants of the island out of their windows.