

Samos

The island of Hera and Pythagoras

Samos is an **island** ruled by legend and beauty. It is the island of the father of mathematics, **Pythagoras**, the astronomer **Aristarchus** and the philosopher **Epicurus**. It is the home of **Hera** and the land that hosted Herodotus and **Aesop**. An important center of trade in the Aegean and a major naval force in antiquity, it came into contact with important Mediterranean cultures.

It is no accident that the great historian **Herodotus** considered Samos first among all Greek and barbarian cities. Centre of the Ionian civilization, the island saw times of indescribable splendour, which still remains. Even today, its proximity to the coast of Asia Minor makes the island a 'bridge' between the two cultures, a difference that did not hinder the co-existence, cooperation and friendship of the two peoples living across the water from each other.

The mythical **birthplace of Hera**, Samos is home to the largest temple in Greece (according to Herodotus) at the seaside settlement of **Heraion**, dedicated exclusively to the goddess of marriage and women. Of its 155 gigantic columns, only one still stands and is indicative of the scale of this place of religious worship that includes ruins of at least three earlier temples.



Something new to explore at every step

Samos is a place of **overwhelming vegetation**. Everything around the virgin landscape is made of colour and light. Each step one takes is a revelation. Whether in the imposing mountains, such as Mt. Kerkis and Mt. Ambelos – with alpine winter temperatures and endless rain – or in caves and canyons, the environment of Samos reminds one of the Greek hinterland in miniature.

Walk along Mt. Kerkis, from Votsalakia in Marathocampos, to its peak, Mt. Vigla, at an altitude of 1,400m. Along your hike you will see over 1,400 species of rare plants, many of which are endemic to the island, as well as dozens of species of birds of prey.



Wander around the settlements, along old cobble streets, and see **Sarakini Tower**, a magnificent structure of the 16th century, a true fort of its era.

Visit the convents of **Zoodochos Pigi Aliotissa**, **Agia Zoni**, with its splendid library, and **Timios Stavros**, with its impressive throne.

Climb the steps to the church of **Panagia Sarandaskaliotissa**, built at the entrance of Pythagoras' Cave, where the ancient Greek mathematician found refuge when being persecuted by tyrant Polycrates.

The terrain of Samos is a challenge to those who choose to ride mountain bikes on their travels. Each summer, an increasing number of **cyclists**, fully equipped for their adventures, visit the island's trails. Local cyclists meet at the architecturally innovative chapel of Agios Ioannis, at Potami, above the pebble beach of Potamos, and ride towards Karlovassi, Konstantinos and Kokkari. **Birdwatchers** set up near the Alyki **habitat** or **Glyfada Lake** to photograph herons, Dalmatian pelicans and **pink flamingos** that rest here before continuing their migration. When the flamingos ascend into the sky at dusk, their colour mingles with the red sunset, creating a visual extravagance that visitors can't forget!

When the heat covers the island like a blanket, those in the know start their journey to **Karlovassi waterfalls** early in the day. The larger of the two waterfalls is five metres high and one has to climb 60 wooden steps to reach the clearing offering a panoramic view of the waterfall.

Bearing witness to a century-old culture

- **Pythagoreion**, built on the ruins of the ancient city of Samos, is home to what many call the eighth wonder of antiquity – and engineers agree. In 550 BC, the architect Eupalinos undertook the task of constructing a 1,036m tunnel, at the order of tyrant Polycrates, to connect the two sides of the mountain and supply water to the ancient capital of Samos. This innovative aqueduct had to be invisible to enemies, so as not to be destroyed in case of attack to the island. **Eupalinos** was such a great engineer that, through mathematical calculations alone, he began digging this two-way tunnel on both sides of the mountain simultaneously. A decade later, the two crews met in the middle of the mountain with no deviation whatsoever! In fact, to give the slave workers an incentive, Eupalinos made a promise, which he kept: upon completion of the work, he set the slaves free. This is indeed the work of a true engineering genius.



- According to tradition, the Goddess **Hera** was born and raised here. For this reason her Temple in Heraion is the biggest in the whole ancient world. The most significant archaeological site of the island includes the enormous (109m long, 55m wide and 25m high) Ionian style **Temple of Hera** (commonly known as **Kolona**= "column", due to the one and only surviving column still standing), the big **Altar** and the **Sacred Road** (the road leading from the city of Pythagoreion, to the Temple). Both Pythagoreion and Heraion were designated as **UNESCO World Heritage Sites** in 1992.
- In the **Archaeological Museum**, amongst other things are exhibited finds from Heraion and the Colossal Kouros by Lefkias (5m high), 580BC.
- **Mytilinioi**, 14km SW of the capital, is one of the largest and most active villages on Samos. It was named after the residents of Mytilini, who settled here in 1700, following the devastating earthquake on Lesbos. It used to have many significant tobacco plantations, but Mytilinioi is known worldwide for the significant palaeontology finds in the area. During prehistoric times, the island was inhabited by Megatherions, Samotherions (enormous giraffes probably coming from Asia Minor) and by rare animal species. Their bones were found here and are exhibited in the showcases of palaeontology museums in Europe and the US. Some of them are exhibited on the island, in the **Mytilinioi Palaeontology Museum**.

A multi-faceted island

Samos does not only feature important monuments and historical tales, nor just **mountains** and **hiking trails**. Above all else, Samos is a **modern island**, with immaculately organized **beaches**, such as **Tsamados** and **Lemonakia, Votsalakia** in **Marathocampos, Chryssi Ammos** (= "golden sand"), which more than lives up to its name, and **Psili Ammos** (= "fine sand"), where, according to the people of Samos, one can hear the roosters across the sea in Turkey crow at dawn.

But Samos is also **cosmopolitan** if you stay at **Vathy, Kokkari** or **Pythagoreion**. It is **isolated** if you prefer Marathocampos, Kerveli or Mykali. It is a place of late-night revels, as well as a place of **peace**, ideal for rest, relaxation and contemplation.



If you are of the **athletic persuasion**, you can enjoy the **beach volley** tournaments organized every year at Livadaki beach and Potokaki at Pythagoreion. If you prefer relaxation and unobstructed contact with nature, Mikri Tsambou, Kerveli and Saitania should be your top choices.

Wine culture and...culture

If you wish to please your palate, **the best opportunity to taste all varieties of Samos Muscat** is the **wine** festival organized during the first ten days of August at Vathy, where you only buy one glass and refill it as many times as you like – or can handle. Samos wine has its own history.



The Vatican once kept its own winery on the island and today, the Catholic Church has conceded the privilege of producing church wine for Holy Communion to the island. Samos Muscat holds a special place in the French wine market, one of the most demanding in the world, and has won numerous **international accolades**, while its rich, **fruity aroma** continues to win over an increasing number of fans. One can only cheat on Muscat with local **ouzo** or **souma**, a beverage made of the same grape variety as the renowned wine. However, no one should leave Samos without a bottle of virgin **olive oil** and a jar of thyme **honey**.

Samos is a fertile, hospitable island that knows how to follow a natural pace, but also how to satisfy the desire of people for genuine **entertainment**. Especially in August, during '**Manolis Kalomoiris' Music Festival** or 'Heraia-Pythagoreia' Festival, one can attend numerous drama performances at the ancient theatre of Pythagoreion. There is also a **rock music festival** usually organized at Heraion for a weekend each summer and, of course, the feast of the Transfiguration of Jesus, held at Pythagoreion in August, where residents and visitors enjoy the resplendent firework show over the harbour.

Getting to Samos

By air

By boat from Piraeus and elsewhere