

Leros

Leros is an island with an amazing landscape. Although its surface is only approximately 55 square kilometres, Leros gives the visitor a variety of different places to explore consequently, the island is an ideal place for hiking. With a good network of roads and lanes it is perfect for exploring the island by motor scooter or car.

The most popular places and beaches to visit are Partheni and Blefouti in the north, Gourná, Kokali and Ayia Isidoros on the west side of the island and the big bay of Alinda in the central east part of the island, with Panagias and Crithoni beaches. Travelling further southeast, lies the pretty port of Agia Marina which is ten minutes walk to Platanos, the heart of the island. From Platanos you can climb the steps to the top of the hill and visit the famous Byzantine castle of Panagia, built by the Emperor, Alexius Komninos in the 11th century AD. Five minutes walk, south of Platanos will bring you to the picturesque fisherman's village of Panteli, famous for its tavernas where you can sample fish caught by the locals. Moving further south you will reach the beautiful beach of Vromolithos. At a distance of approximately 2km further south, you will come to the main port of Leros, Laki. From here the ferry boats link to Piraeus, Patmos, Kalymnos, Kos, Symi, Nyssiros, Rhodes and other islands of the Dodecanese. 3 km south of Laki, you reach the most southern point of Leros, the bay of Xirokampos with a nice beach shaded by tamarisk trees and the famous small church of Maria of the Crabs which is built in a cave.



Ancient monuments and sites of archeological interest

Platanos - Aghia Marina - Panteli. The Brouzi fortress, construction of roman inspiration built on the ruins of an ancient town that once raised right at the mouth of the port of Aghia Marina.

Lakki. The Monument on the seafront is there to commemorate the sinking of Greek Navy destroyer "Queen Olga" as of a blitz of the Nazi air force on the 26th of September 1943.

Partheni. The vestiges of what is believed was the ancient temple of Diana (Artemis) on a promontory raising to the west, near the airport - a shrine often quoted both in literature and in inscriptions. There have been no systematic excavations so far although several Hellenist era stele have to this day been unearthed.

Fortresses

Situated in a predominant location eastwards from the town, on the barren hilltop of Apityki, at a 300 meter altitude , there lies the Fort of Leros, also known as the Fort of Virgin Mary. The fort was built sometime during the Byzantine era, on the remains of an ancient Leros fortification. Excavations in this site unearthed an ancient tomb, dating back in the 7th century B.C.

The fortress upon the hill was meant to protect the population that took refuge within its walls in times of pirate raids and pillage. In times of peace, the inhabitants dwelled in houses scattered around the fort - the vestiges of some 180 such houses still visible. Within the walls of the fortress, one comes across the Monastery of Panagia Kyra (our Lady of the Fortress), ornamented with numerous Byzantine frescoes, also featuring an interesting collection of archaeological and Byzantine - ecclesiastical objects - icons, manuscripts, baptistery basin and a mortuary shroud for the Holy Week services. There seems to be no end to the local lore and beliefs about the miraculous powers of the icon of the Virgin.



Monasteries and Churches

The churches of Christ and Stavros (The Holy Cross) in the Platanos area are quite old and very interesting. Not to miss: the church of Aghia Pasaki, once the island's Greek Orthodox Cathedral.

In Lakki, look for the church of Saint John the Evangelist (Aghios Ioannis Theologos), one of the most interesting of its kind in the whole Dodecanese, featuring some excellent 11th century A.C. mosaics.

Within the wider area of Partheni, there lies the church of Aghios Georghios (St. George), built in the 10th century A.C. with ancient material - possibly remnants of the ancient temple of Diana.

On the seafront, northwards, there lies the church of Aghia Kioura or Matrona, definitely worth visiting for a closer look at the beautiful frescoes, created by political convicts in exile during the dictatorship years (1967 - 1974) but also at the older icons kept in the church. Past Kokkali, within short distance, one comes across the miniscule church of Aghios Isidoros, built on a rock protruding out of the sea. Access to that church is obtained through a narrow concrete-made, 50-meter long pathway. On the seabed, right next to the rock featuring this church, one can see the vestiges of an ancient shrine.

More to the south, right along the seafront road going past Gournas, one comes across the small church of Panaghia Gourolomata (literally, the Virgin with the Bulging Eyes), featuring some remarkable frescoes and built here, near Drymonas, in the 14th century A.C, of materials taken from the ruins of an ancient construction nearby.

Close to the settlement of Xirokampos, there lies the picturesque church of Panaghia Kavouradena (literally, The Virgin of the Crabs), righteously considered as one of the most beautiful construction of its kind in Leros.

The church was actually built on the rocks of the coast, on a location where - tradition has it - a fisherman looking for crabs accidentally came across the icon of Holy Mary, hidden in a fissure of the rock. Hard to get to at first sight, the church may actually be accessed through the many steps carved in and amongst the rocks.

