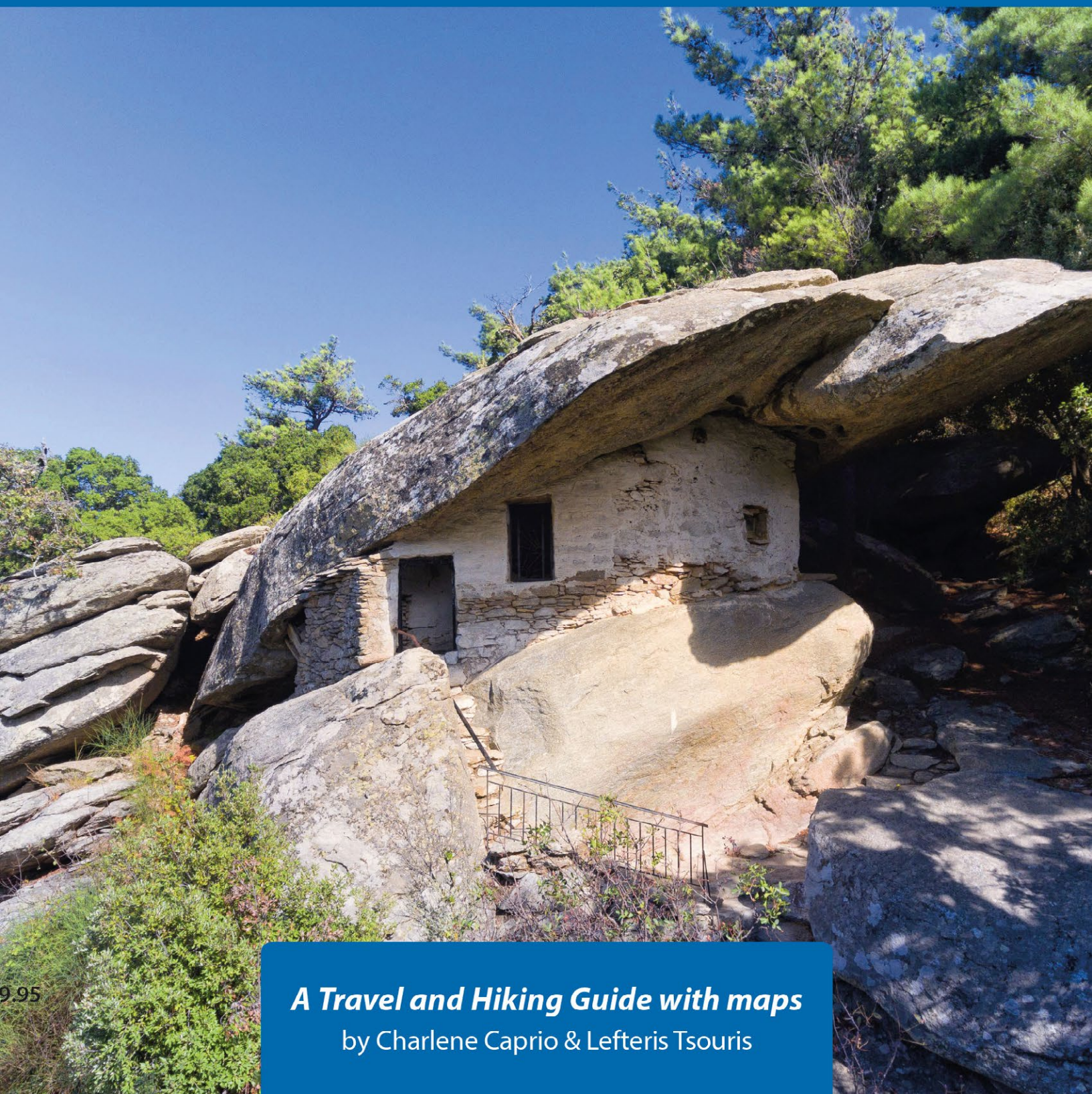




# Ikaria Island

## Explore and Experience

*Third Edition*



9.95

***A Travel and Hiking Guide with maps***

by Charlene Caprio & Lefteris Tsouris

# **Ikaria Island**

## ***Explore and Experience***

A Travel and Walking Guide with maps  
by **Charlene Caprio** and **Lefteris Tsouris**

Editor: Selene Hellström

Third Edition, eBook version

**A Wooden Hull Press edition 2024**

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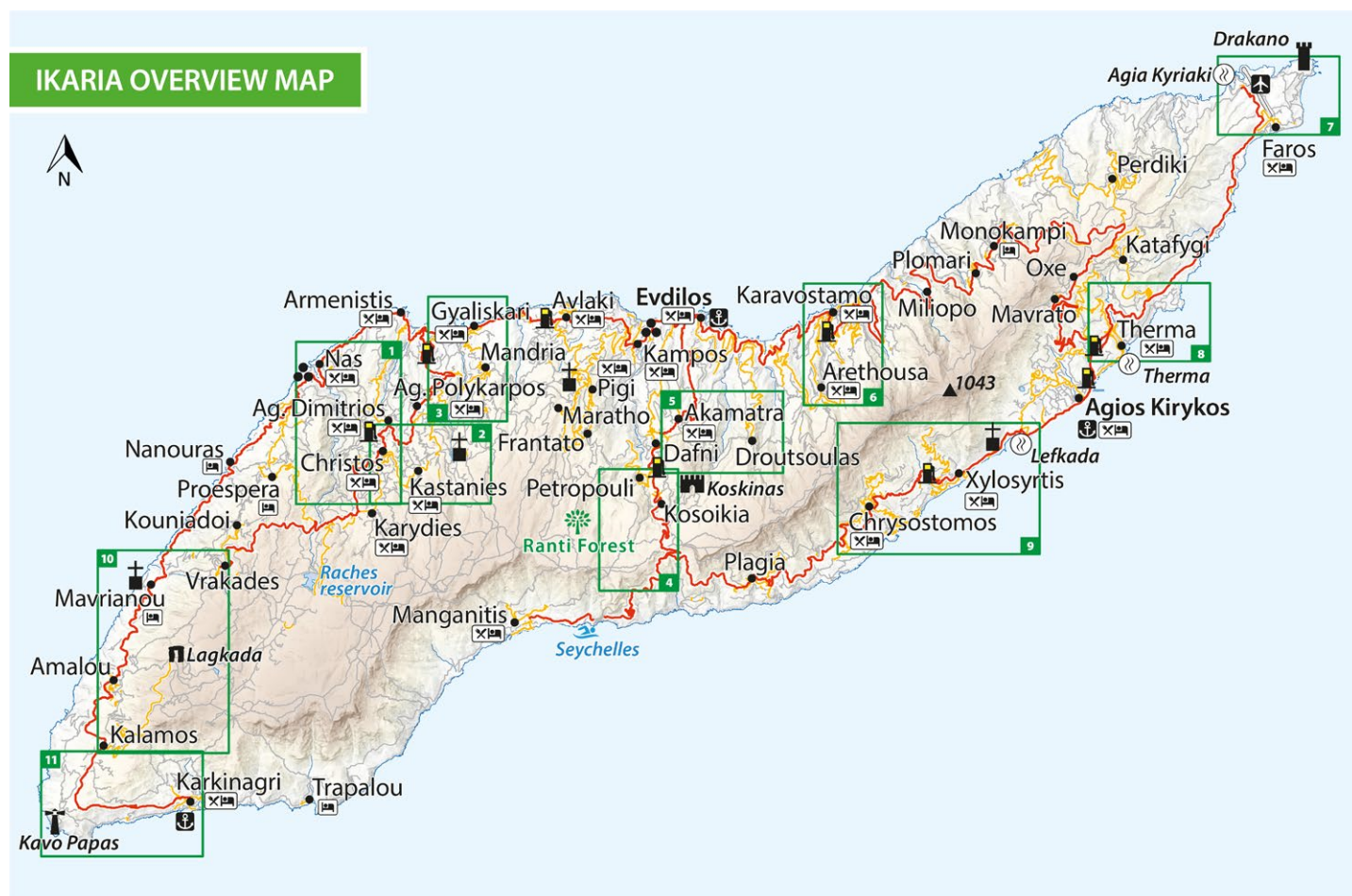
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## Note on this edition

This Third Edition contains exciting updates and additions. Ikaria's growing popularity has increased its visibility. The list of great restaurants, places to stay, and island activities keeps expanding. To help you learn what makes this island truly tick, we've also added a new chapter that dives deeper into Ikaria's elusive masterful design, and additional hiking routes to explore more villages, seaside paths, old ruins, and fascinating areas. We've highlighted Ikaria's old 'kalderimi' stone paths, more cultural attractions, watermills, caves, and other points of interest. Our aim is to help you gain a deep awareness of Ikaria. Put simply, there is still so much more than meets the eye. By knowing what exists and is scattered around the island, you'll undoubtedly link more pieces of Ikaria's puzzle–web together to understand how and why Ikaria developed the way it did, making it an incredible place of longevity and wonder.



# Introduction

Ikaria Island, also spelled 'Icaria' (**Gr.: Ικαρία**), located in Greece's Eastern Aegean region, is a world of its own. Craggy mountains reach across its elongated spine, giving Ikaria the shape of a stretched out peanut. This relatively small island has a complex topography of ridgelines, slopes, plateaus, valleys, waterfalls, canyons, rivers, ponds, sandy and rocky beaches and other natural wonders.

But Ikaria throughout history remained largely a secret. Not much could be detected when gazing up from Ikaria's shores. For centuries Ikaria's population lived deep in the mountains, carving out homes in scattered hamlets, often to hide from pirates and other invaders. As centuries progressed, Ikaria stayed relatively isolated due to its lack of natural harbors and its rugged terrain.

In turn, Ikaria's natural environment flourished with relatively little interference. Today, Ikaria is home to a wide variety of flora and fauna (including some rare and endangered species), spreading over a dramatic landscape of microclimates. Hot and sunny summers give way to cold, rainy winters, supporting lush vegetation and rich seasonal varieties. An abundance of flowers (orchids, larkspurs, cyclamen, oleanders, bell flowers, etc.) grow wild on the island. Ikaria's local population, depending largely on subsistence farming, communal ties and stout individualism, has adapted to the island's rugged conditions with pride.

It isn't a surprise that Ikaria's secrets are now highly sought-after. Locals celebrate their 100th birthday more frequently than in most places in the world, and people want to know why. Ikaria indeed has secrets on how to live long with a simplicity that surmounts any wealth. Many people come to Ikaria to try to experience Ikaria the way that Ikarians do.

We believe that the best way to understand Ikaria is by exploring the island's footpaths, called 'monopatía' (**Gr.: μονοπάτια**). Spanning over 300km in a

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Most Ikarians know basic English and are happy to answer your questions. However, here is a short list of survival Greek phrases in case you find yourself in a bind. The plural form is generally used for addressing elders and strangers.

## Metric Conversions

Measurements in this Guide are given in meters (m) and kilometers (km).

1km = 0.62 miles (mi)

5km = 3.1mi

1m = 1.09 yards (yd), or 3.28 feet (ft)

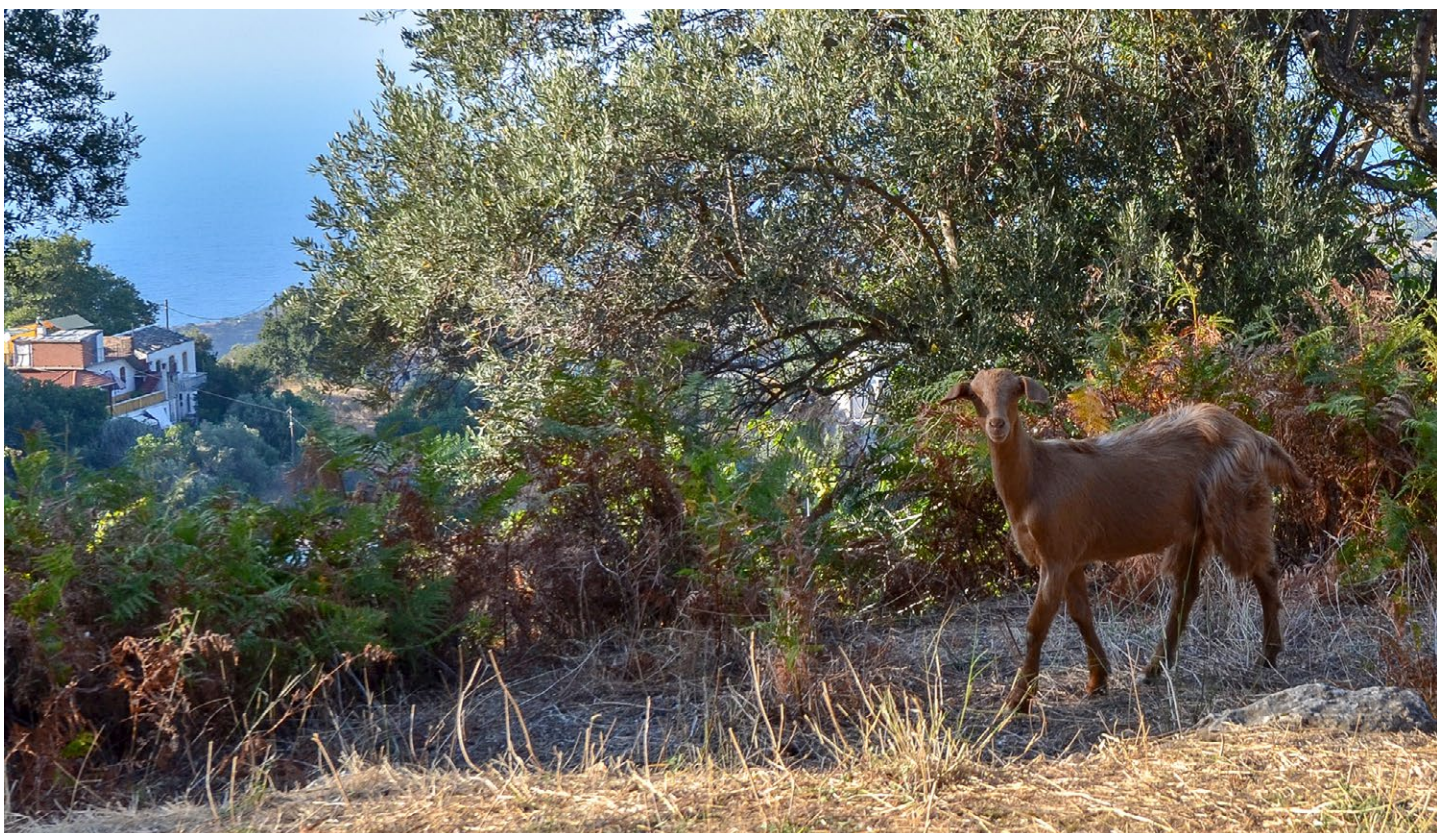
For example: Ikaria's highest Mountain Peak = 1,037m (about 3,402 ft)

## Greek Survival Phrases

English	Greek	Pronounced
Hello	s/pl. Γεια σου / Γεια σας	Yá-sou / Yá-sas
Thank you	s/pl. Ευχαριστώ / Ευχαριστούμε	Ef-ha-ri-stó / Ef-ha-ri-stoú-me
Do you speak English?	Μιλάτε Αγγλικά?	Mi-lá-te Ag-li-ká?
Excuse me!	Συγγνώμη!	Si-gnó-mi!
I don't understand	Δεν καταλαβαίνω	Den ka-ta-la-vaí-no
Can you help me?	Μπορείτε να με βοηθήσετε?	Mpó-rei-te na me vo-i-thí-se-te?
Where is the (x)?	Που είναι το (x)?	Poú eí-nai to (x)?
Where is the footpath to (x)?	Που είναι το μονοπάτι για (x)?	Poú eí-nai to mo-no-pá-ti ya (x)?
Is it far / close?	Είναι μακριά / κοντά?	Eí-nai ma-kri-á / ko-ntá?
Do I turn left / right?	Στρίβω αριστερά / δεξιά?	Strí-vo a-ri-ste-rá / de-ksi-á?
Is there a restaurant / pharmacy / store nearby?	Υπάρχει εστιατόριο / φαρμακείο / μαγαζί εδώ?	I-pá-rxei e-sti-a-tó-ri-o / far-ma-keí-o / ma-ga-zí e-dó?
How do I get to (x)?	Πως θα πάω στο (x)?	Pós tha pá-o sto (x)?



A walk between two mountain villages (See Route 5)



An Ikarian local enjoying the land



# PART 1: Brief History of Ikaria

Before setting out to explore Ikaria, it is helpful to know a bit about its history. Understanding Ikaria Island starts with the ancient Greek myth of Icarus, also spelled 'Ikaros' (**Gr.: Ίκαρος**).

## From Myth to Reality: *Do not fly too close to the Sun*

Ikaria Island takes its name from the famous ancient Greek myth of Icarus. The father of young Icarus was Daedalus, the famous mythical architect of the labyrinth at Knossos on Crete, who trapped the deadly Minotaur (half bull, half man) at the center of the labyrinth. Ironically, Daedalus and Icarus were later imprisoned inside the labyrinth by Crete's King Minos.

Devising a way to escape, Daedalus constructed giant wings out of wax and feathers. He and his son strapped the wings to their waists and flew north, away from Crete. Daedalus warned his son not to fly too high, but Icarus got excited and forgot his father's warnings. He flew too close to the sun and his wax wings melted, causing Icarus to fall into the sea and wash up onto the craggy shore of the island now called Ikaria.

This is the myth that supposedly gives Ikaria its current name (its former names included Dolychi, Ichthyoessa and Nicaria). A monument to Icarus rises from a jetty in Ikaria's capital village, **Agios Kirykos**. The 'Rock of Ikaris' located in the sea near Vaoni village symbolizes where Icarus fell after losing his wings.

The myth of Icarus represents the well-known adage: *Do not fly too close to the sun*, warning ancient Greeks against hubris toward the gods. This still resonates in how Ikarians live today. Ikaria is known as a place of simple, rustic living. Respect for nature, moderation, mountain walking, fresh air and locally grown foods are thought to contribute to Ikarian longevity.

Ikarians also enjoy a peculiar mix of seclusion and openness. They stubbornly beat to the rhythm of their own drum, speak Greek with an eccentric dialect, and prefer to solve problems their own way, while keeping their stress levels low.

Ikaria is not an island of flashy resorts (leave formal attire and high heels at home). It is a place where the people and food are genuine, keeping to traditional living and communal ties. Butchers provide fresh meat from local farms. Spices and herbs like oregano, rosemary and 'mountain tea' are picked from the wild. Figs, apples, grapes, lemons and chestnuts grow along roads and footpaths. Olive oil is locally made, and Ikaria's strong wine is said to be related to the Pramnian wine mentioned in Homer's *Iliad*.

In short, Ikarians do not try to rise above their own modest fate of what it means to be human. They carve out a life using resources offered and shared amongst a small island community and its environment.



A happy kid at Seychelles beach



Koskinas Castle ruins, perched high in Ikaria's Mountains

During the Middle Ages, pirates were common pests in the Aegean Sea. Ikarians developed villages far up in the mountains, away from accessible shores, in sparsely constructed, hard to reach villages that utilized anti-pirate stone architecture to help conceal the inhabitants. At times the island was thought to be abandoned. For centuries, Ikarians wove the island's natural protective characteristics into their agricultural and architectural building styles. (See Part 5) Villages such as Akamatra and Lagkada are strong landmarks of the island's anti-pirate history.

On May 29, 1453, Constantinople (present-day Istanbul), the capital of the Byzantine Empire, was conquered by the Ottomans. Subsequently, every part of the Byzantine Empire fell under Ottoman rule, including Ikaria, after the Knights retreated. During Ottoman rule, pirates and privateers still roamed the Aegean Sea and pillaged the Aegean islands. Ikarians continued to hide in the mountains for protection. When the Ottoman administration established itself on Ikaria, it oversaw the island's population with a relatively loose local command.

Throughout its history, Ikaria's population was known for being poor, hard to reach and hard to count. The island wanted to remain reclusive and enigmatic to

## What to Bring

Make sure to pack sunscreen, a hat and sunglasses, insect/mosquito repellent, a windbreaker and good walking shoes, electrical adapters (if needed), a water bottle, and whatever else you like to use for activities on your holidays.



You will notice many hand-painted hiking signs that locals make to help guide visitors

## For Walking and Hiking

If you plan to walk routes in Part 6, be weather smart and prepare to handle a wide variety of microclimates and trail conditions. The sun can be stronger than you think. Winds and storms can surprise you in any season. We've compiled the following extended packing list, in part from observing how some people have experienced fatigue or turning back earlier than they anticipated along Ikaria's footpaths.

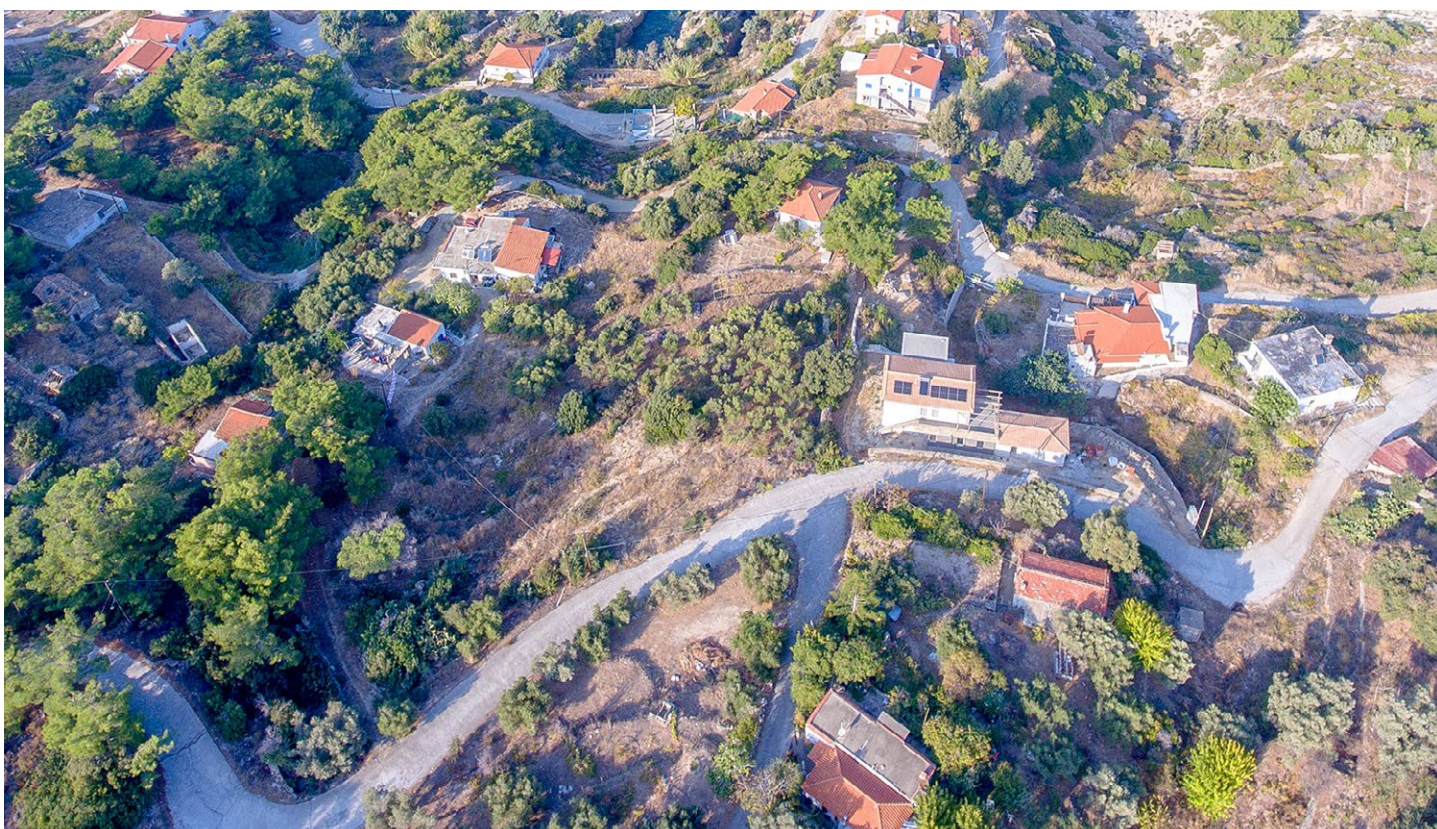
goes back and forth between Ag. Kirykos and Therma. Inquire at a travel agency in Ag. Kirykos for the up-to-date routes and schedules. (You can also reach these villages by car and Seychelles beach by a footpath that requires steady feet and some rock climbing.)



A water taxi arriving at the secluded Seychelles beach

## Spotlight: The Ikarian Road Network Paradox

Ikarian roads are a messy paradox. Some still look like an experiment. Drive slowly and stick to the primary roads colored red and thick orange on the maps in this Guide. You will quickly notice how roads are shared with trucks, farming vehicles, carts, scooters and goats. At times traffic slows down to a halt to share a lane with oncoming traffic or livestock. It is Ikarian etiquette to let other vehicles, carts and goats pass first.



Ikaria's roads near Avlaki village

Also, roads can twist over the mountains without guardrails in some places and test the nerves of vertigo-prone passengers. Take your time and locals will appreciate your carefulness. There are few traffic lights on the island. Keep aware of your location and always look ahead to check live conditions. A wrong road can lead you astray for hours, and might splinter off to impenetrable chunks of earth.

try the microbrewed **Ikariotissa** beer or stop in to the **Slow Down Brewing** tap room. The Ikarian lemon flavored soda tastes great after a long hike.



A special tea is the 'mountain tea' made from a mixture of herbs (usually wild sage). Try this with a spoonful of Ikarian 'thyme' honey. Also try some local lemonade, made with delicious Ikarian lemons.

## Wild Fruits and Nuts

While walking and exploring Ikaria, you will probably marvel at fruits and nuts dangling off of trees. (We think of Ikaria as an extended Garden of Eden.) Ikaria has pears, plums, lemons, figs, apricots, oranges, pomegranates, chestnuts, almonds and other seasonal delights. Even if not yet ripe, their scents will woo you. Remember that they may not have been sprayed. Ask local farmers for a taste, and check for little critters hiding in them first.

## Restaurants and Tavernas

Restaurants and tavernas are located all around Ikaria and most serve local Ikarian dishes. The variety of dishes has certainly increased, while the quality stays true to Ikarian farm-to-table traditions. Expect to pay 15€-25€ per person for dinner, more or less, depending on the size of appetites and number of drinks.

A wide variety of birds enjoy Ikaria's peaks and valleys. Ikaria hosts rare and endangered species of eagles, falcons, seagulls, ravens, and bats. Many birds use Ikaria as a migration stop. Also look out for raptors, egrets, stilts, herons and buzzards. Common warblers and kingfishers hang out around the villages. The collared dove has added its koo-KOO-koo to Ikaria's morning calls.

The air is also buzzing with honeybees, wasps, butterflies (look for swallowtails and monarchs), tiger moths, and also pesky mosquitoes. You will hear cicadas during the daytime and crickets during the nighttime. Damselflies, dragonflies and freshwater species (including rare freshwater crabs) claim river pools, while froghoppers and grasshoppers lurk in grasses and trees. Look out for centipedes and other crawlers; scorpions and biting spiders may show up too.

Like most places in Greece, Ikaria hosts a feral population of cats that roam around villages and hang around dinner tables in search of scraps. The dog population is unfortunately in need of better care, as many puppies end up homeless. Cat and dog sterilization programs are developing on the island.



Cat camouflage colors in action





Hopefully you'll catch sight of Ikaria's prized beauty (*Stellagama Stellio*)

in good walking condition. The island's paths composed of kalderimi sections and other traditional stone masonry feats, contribute to a fascinating network that still remains part of Ikaria's hidden life and culture.



## ROUTE 5: Akamatra - Alama - Droutsoulas

**Route Time:** 1 - 2hrs, one way

**Distance:** 3.2km

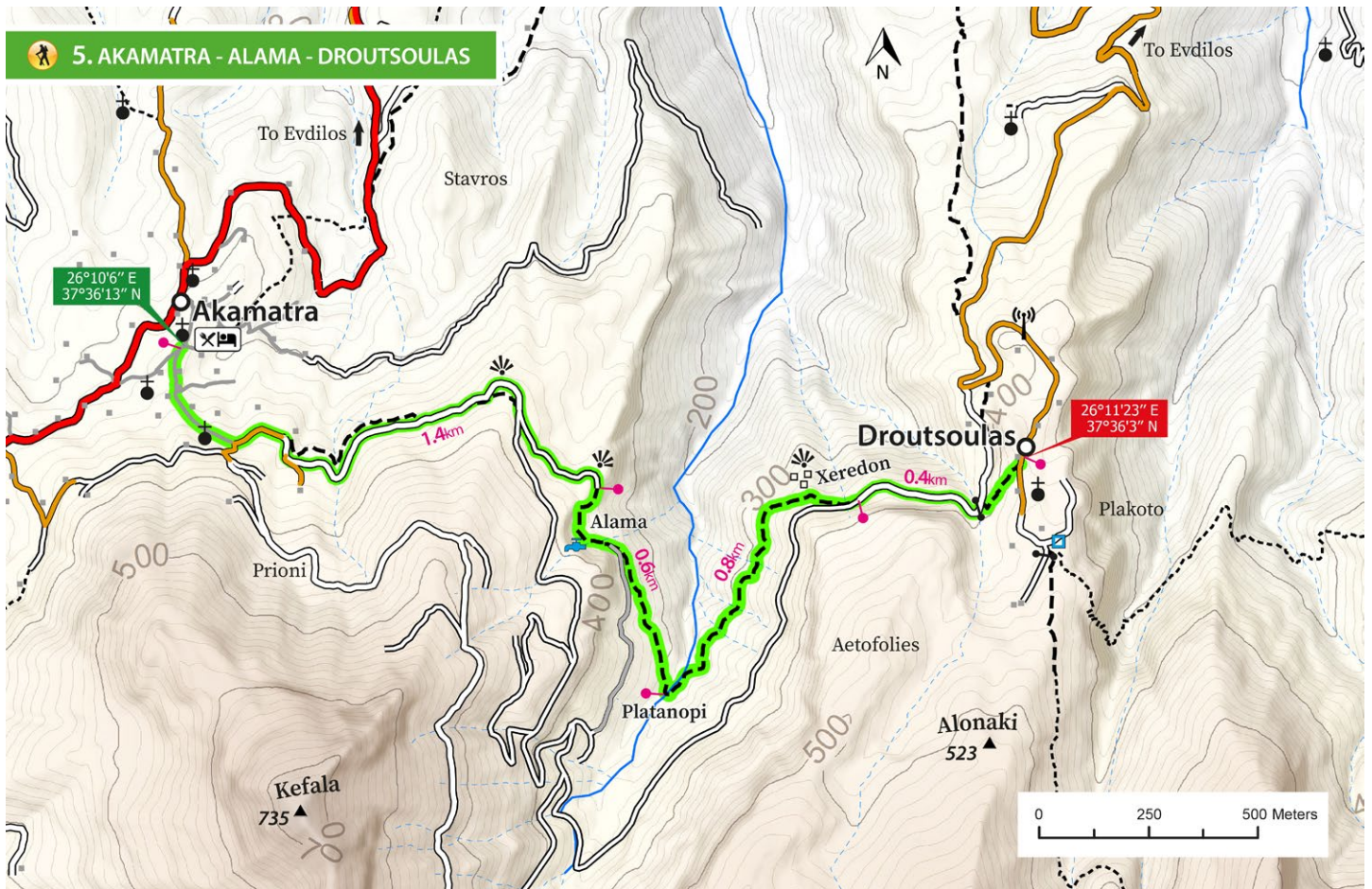
**Elevation Low / High:** 300m / 420m

**Difficulty level:** Easy

One of Ikaria's **most amazing walks** connects two remote mountain villages: Akamatra and Droutsoulas. On this walk history enchants us through nature and stone ruins, exposing chunks of old roads and terraces. It offers incredible views over the Messaria valley and shows us how Ikarians built water conduits, mastered slopes for agriculture, and laid down paths in places that look monastic in their isolation and majestic in their beauty.

**Akamatra** was officially designated a traditional settlement on Ikaria. It is gracefully perched high in the mountains at an elevation of 320m and is home to a couple hundred residents. It is the larger of the two villages on this walk and serves as a social community center for the Messaria region, hosting panigiri and other festivals. In Akamatra, you can see Ikaria's traditional architecture. There is a large church grounds overlooking the valley, a delicious bakery, cafes and tavernas. Outdoor tables invite visitors to take in the serene atmosphere. A 500-year old oak tree standing in the center square is famous for the darker side of Ikaria's history - executions during the Greek Civil War.

**To Start:** From Akamatra's center square, walk the road that leads up the back end of the village. The road will pass a small village church (with a beautifully restored stone facade), as it narrows and winds upward. Stay on what a sign calls the 'cycling road'. Soon you'll see a hiking sign that points into the valley toward **Droutsoulas** village (**Gr: Δρούτσουλας**). The path unravels into a delightful journey. A stone staircase leads you into the valley. This staircase, whose stones are long warped and chipped away, pressing into an uneven slope, showcases



Make room for the old tree



The abandoned village of Xeredon



# IKARIA GUIDEBOOK