


Ikaria Island

Explore and Experience

*Second Edition - **eBook** version*

A photograph of a stone archway made of large, light-colored blocks. The archway frames a view of the blue ocean under a clear sky. The ground in the foreground is sandy and rocky.

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

Includes Fournoi Islands

Ikaria Island

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by Charlene Caprio and Lefteris Tsouris

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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 boasts a complex topography of high ridgelines, steep slopes, plateaus, valleys, waterfalls, canyons, rivers, ponds, sandy and rocky beaches and other natural wonders.

But Ikaria has remained largely a secret. Not much can be described 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. Many 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 conditions with pride.

It isn't a surprise that Ikaria's secrets are now being discovered. 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. However, they are still secrets only because not many people experience Ikaria the way that Ikarians do.

We believe that the best way to understand Ikaria is by exploring the island's

footpaths, called 'monopatia' (**Gr.: μονοπάτια**). Spanning over 150km in a configuration akin to a giant spider web over the island, Ikaria's footpaths evolved over hundreds of years. Many of them connect remote villages with rivers, watermills, forests, mountain peaks, sea areas, more natural elements and other villages. The footpaths also reach areas inaccessible by vehicles and traverse the mountains' inner folds.

By exploring the footpaths, you will start to discover Ikaria's unique environment and culture. You will witness locals going about their daily lives, gathering herbs, farming, shepherding, conversing at cafes, and maybe even slaughtering a goat over a tree stump. You will smell Ikaria's air scented with fruits, spices and flowers. You will hear kids (baby goats) hurrying through the woods, honeybees buzzing around thyme bushes and rivers flowing down valleys. You will feel Ikaria's winds, mists and shrubs wrap around your body and the climate of dry, rocky plateaus. You may also encounter abandoned villages and 'anti-pirate' houses. You will undoubtedly taste local food and dine alongside Ikarians.



Ikaria's rich natural environment, observed by one of its grazers

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

Ikaria is not an island of luxury 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 and to carve out a life, using resources offered and shared amongst a small island community and its environment.



Faros (also called Fanari) beach in the early evening

WHEN ON IKARIA

- Take off your watch and bury your stress in the sand.
- Breathe the fresh air and smell the wild herbs.
- Taste Ikarian local dishes, wine and honey.
- Chat with farmers and dance at the panigiria.
- Explore the mountain plateaus of Pezi.
- Relax in quaint mountain villages like Christos and Akamatra.
- Listen to the sounds of Mother Nature.
- Search for Ikaria's 'anti-pirate' houses and lizards.
- Swim at popular beaches like Livadi, Mesakti and Faros.
- Enjoy romantic hideaways like Trapalou, Seychelles and Iero.
- Bathe in Ikaria's thermal hot springs, known since ancient times.
- Walk Ikaria's footpaths to explore how Ikaria is a world of its own.



The Ikarus Monument welcomes you at the port of Agios Kirykos

History up to the Present

Ikaria's location, climate and geography have strongly influenced the development of its history and culture, from ancient times up to the present. Ikaria is located about 57km west of the Turkish coast and 225km east of Athens. The island has an east-west orientation, extending about 40km long and 9km wide. It has limited natural harbors, rocky shorelines, and steep mountains. It experiences Mediterranean hot, sunny summers and cold, stormy winters with a good amount

Ikarian homemade chutney



Ikaria's honey making is even more popular now



the right fork. Open the gate (closing it behind you) and drive about 0.5km to park. Walking toward the end of that road, a rock has a marble plaque bearing words in ancient Greek "**ΒΙΑ ΜΗΔΕΝ ΠΡΑΤΤΕΙΝ**" probably referencing a saying of the Greek poet, Cleobulus, "If you practice violence you get nothing out of it/gain nothing out of it." Here the footpath descends scratchy terrain to the lighthouse. There are few colored (mainly red) markers. If you descend in a zig-zag pattern, you'll probably locate the faint footpath, albeit partially defined. If you hear yourself complaining on the way back about the climb, think of the guards who carry all their supplies on their backs to the lighthouse!



Look for the Agios Georgios chapel set far below, on the southern side of the lighthouse



The Kavos Papas lighthouse
as seen from the scratchy
footpath leading to it



A restored windmill used as a goat home