

Olive tree routes on the “golden island”

Nestled in an enticing corner of the Northeastern Aegean, vast olive groves, reaching out to where the sea kisses the sand, presides over the landscape.

The golden olive oil produced on the island of Lesvos has been a major source of income for decades and a contributor to drastic economic and social changes that have determined the character of the island. The small industrialization miracle made possible in Lesvos in late 19th c. brilliantly unfolds in the two Olive Oil Museums of the island.

Visit the old municipal oil mill in the Municipality of Agia Paraskevi, currently housing the Museum of Industrial Oil Production, and Vranas Oil Mill restored by the Archipelagos society in Papados, Gera for a voyage through the history of olive oil and the folks behind it.

Olive tree routes on the “golden island” also include a whole host of yet more “small miracles”. Industrial buildings refurbished into small museums or multi-purpose culture centres boasting collections of significant historical traces and threads are scattered all across the island. Dozens of disused oil mills mark the island’s landscape and murmur whispers of tales attesting to prosperity, inspiration and creativity.

Olive Oil Museum - Vranas Oil Mill, Papados, Gera



Salted fish, fresh seafood and sun-dried products

The most renowned sardines in the country come from Lesvos and grow in the Gulf of Kalloni. Apart from sardines, the island’s manufacturers process and standardize chub mackerels, *gavros* or anchovies, as they’re internationally known, and bonitos (*lakerda*) preserved in salt or vegetable oil.

These delicacies are sealed in engraved tin boxes of high aesthetic standards that have a rightful place on the shelves of every grocery shop on the island. Make sure you treat yourselves to a modest supply of these products prior to your departure so as to secure a tasty sample of the island in your luggage.

In the island’s tavernas, you can relish grilled octopus, shellfish and sun-dried fish - *liokafta*, literally meaning scorched in the sun, coupled with local ouzo. Liokafta are usually made of fatty fish hanging from their tails in the sun to dry for a couple of days. The only required addition to this much-loved fishermen appetizer is minimum grilling and a moderate amount of olive oil and lemon dressing.

Sun-dried octopuses in Skala Sykamias



Traditional coffee shops

“Cafés in Lesvos look as if they’d always been here.

As if they’re timeless.

They come from both the antiquity and the yesterdays.

They are bathed in showering light. The light of Mytilene...

An aura of tranquility pervades their every corner.

Water, spoon sweets and countless cups of coffee make up their weapons.

Their chairs are just like the ones in Theophilos’s and Tsarouchis’s works.

Their tables like those sketched in Elytis’s and Ritsos’s poems.”

Excerpt from a text by Giorgos Chronas in Gelie Chatzidimitriou’s “39 Cafés and a Barber Shop”.

Tavernas and grocery shops

Seek for them in the mainland villages, their seaports, the capital’s alleys. They ideally afford a glimpse of all that makes up the distinctive culture and philosophy of an island that combines oriental resourcefulness with western efficiency.



One of the legendary cafés on the mainland of the island

A bakery boasting works by Theophilos!

In the quaint village of Messagros, a bakery surprisingly boasts authentic works by Theophilos. An entire wall is painted by the brush of the legendary artist, depicting scenes of cereal farming, bread kneading and baking under the eyes of goddess Demeter holding a sheaf of hay.

Sample fresh- baked bread in the island’s bakeries, buy anise or Chios mastic-flavoured rusks in its old-school grocery shops and pay a visit to the flour mill displayed in the Museum of Industrial Oil Production in Agia Paraskevi, tracing back the history of production of an island which supplied Hermes with bread for the gods.

“The best one can get, the finest of all, cleanly hulled from good ripe ears, is the barley from the sea-washed breast of famous Eresus in Lesbos - whiter than airborne snow. If the gods eat barley, this is where Hermes goes shopping for it.”

Archestratus, ap. iv (Athenaeus, 111f)

Where did Lucullus use to eat?

Well, in Lesvos, of course!

In fact, not only did he eat there, but he also set up home on the island, acknowledging its gastronomic ...potential.

Roman general Lucius Licinius Lucullus, widely-known for his famed feasts, occupied the island in 84 B.C. and, appreciating its gastronomic delights, had his mansion built in Lesvos. What’s more, in order to indulge in guaranteed fresh fish, he had a fish tank constructed which was supplied with sea water. The New Archaeological Museum of Mytilene hosts exquisite finds related to the culinary culture of the antiquity. Embossed representations of symposia, dozens of wine and oil amphorae, oenochoi and lagynoi for serving wine, platters, the forerunners of modern dishes, clay cooking pots, kettles and frying pans, clay portable cooking burners - reminiscent of contemporary ovens and a host of other finds recount culinary stories and bear witness to the multitude of small private moments experienced by the people who lived 20 centuries ago in this beguiling corner of the Northeastern Aegean.



Ouzo of Lesvos, probably the finest ouzo in Greece

Routes of ouzo and indulgence

“The miracle took place in Lesvos!”

Though there are several places around the globe claiming authorship over ouzo, the fact is that it is Lesvos that provided ouzo with the right people and the ideal conditions to grow roots and develop to such an extent that the island came to produce the most distinct and sought-after ouzo labels in Greece.

Many distilleries on the island receive guests and unravel the secrets of ouzo to both its initiated and unversed friends. Most of them can be found in the Plomari region, where the Museum of Ouzo is located. Copper cauldrons manufactured in Istanbul in the 19th c., amphorae and glazed jars for the transportation of ouzo manufactured in Adramyti in Asia Minor, newspaper clips and historical letters take visitors through the history of the people behind ouzo and across Lesvos.



Work by Theophilos on the wall of a now disused bakery in Messagros

When taste goes festive

In Lesvos people have select products and one-of-a-kind recipes coupled with boundless zest for life and feasting skills. In July and August ouzo is the order of the day and is celebrated in the central square of Plomari, in the island's capital and in seaside Nyphida, in the Gulf of Kalloni.

Fishing Nights in Plomari and Fishermen's Fest in Panagiouda are scheduled in late July. In August, the sardine is celebrated in Skala Kallonis, in quaint Petra and in Pigadakia. During the opening days of the same month, Trawler Festivals are held in Skala Polychnitou and Octopus Fests in Nees Kydonies.

In the Agrotourism Festival, hosted in the Museum of Natural History in Sigri, local producers and artists bring together tastes, flavours and small works of art.

During the Trahana Fest, traditional *trahanisma* (stirring of steaming trahana in a cauldron) takes place in Parakoila, in early August, amidst a background of music and dancing.

Agiassos gets all red during the Cherry Festival held in mid June, while in the closing days of October the Chestnut Festival provides the village with ample excuse to entertain yet more guests.



Glendistades in Messotopos

Soul food

Religious fetes in Lesvos are an institution in the social and religious life of the island.

Up to 1922, the island's major village fetes attracted swarms of visitors from the Christian communities of Asia Minor, mainly Smyrna and Ayvalik. Even today, in Agiassos on 15th August and in Mandamados during the festival dedicated to Taxiarches (Archangel) Michael held on the Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing Women, thousands of pilgrims walk for miles and spend the night in the church yard.

In these fetes, as well as in those in honour of St. Charalambos or the "Bull" in Agia Paraskevi, of St. Ignatius in the Limonas Monastery, of St. Raphael and of the Candlemas in Mytilene, cauldrons are solemnly set up in the church yards for the preparation of keskek or kishkak, a ceremonial stew containing meat, wheat and ground peas, which is served to the pilgrims.



Ouzo festival in Plomari

Fruits and vegetables, nuts and honey

The Ottomans dubbed it "the empire's garden" at a time when caique boats loaded with fruit and vegetables set sail from the ports of Lesvos and supplied the markets of Istanbul and Odessa.

To date the island remains a gastronomic heaven.

Cherries, figs, pears, grapes, apples, pomegranates... Dozens of fruit varieties oozing with flavours and juices are transformed into spoon sweets, sauces, jams and liqueurs, marking the taste map of this gastronomic heaven. *Bachtsedelia* and *xothyria*, that is vegetable plots, supply the Lesvian table with raw ingredients ready to make sumptuous culinary delicacies.

An ever-rolling blooming cycle of a multitude of flowers provides the island's beehives with the nectar needed to produce high-quality chestnut honey, heather honey and top-notch flower honeys. Scattered with chestnuts, walnuts and almonds they make mouthwatering sweets.

Wild and farmed mushrooms top off the island's blessed table.



Fig, grape and melon, the best treat in Lesvos

Vines and wine

The words of taste

Chidirirotiko or Kalloniatiko.

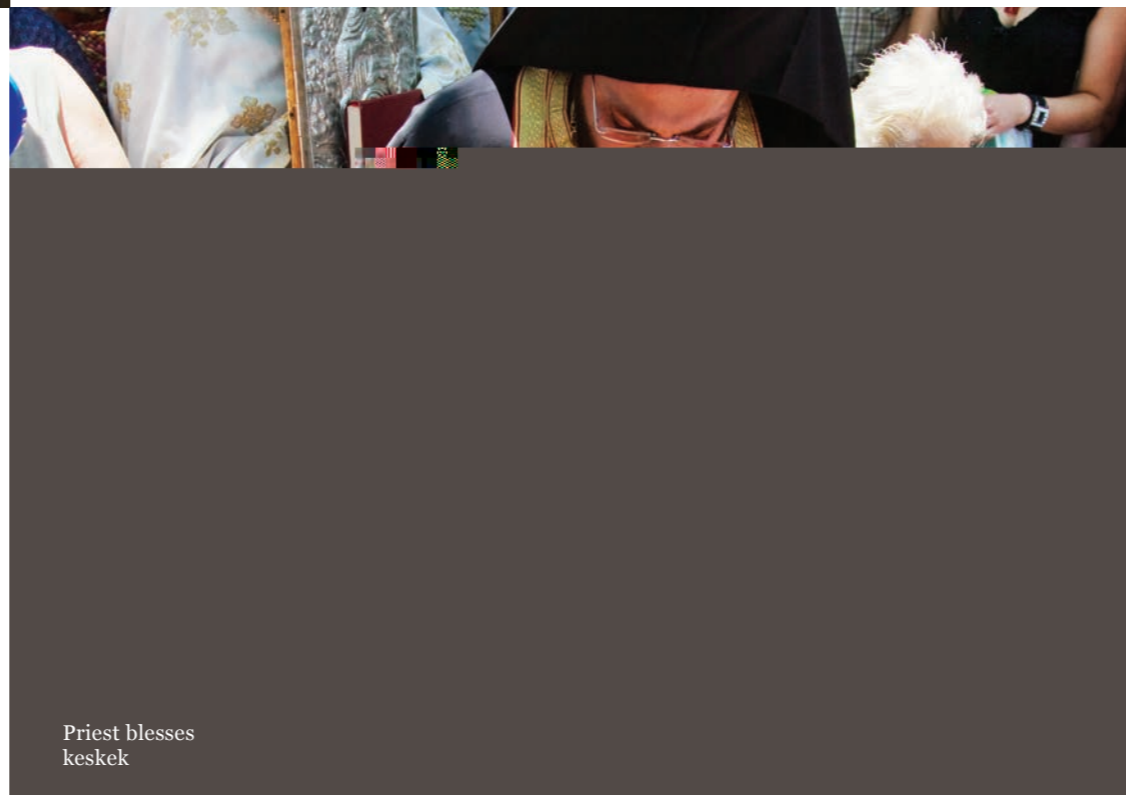
Fokiano or Rikara or Eri Karas, meaning "black prune".

Mandilaria, Gdoura or Vapsa, due to its vivid colour.

Muscat of Alexandria & white Muscat.

Athyri, Assyrtiko and Begleri.

Magical words, unprecedented flavours, intoxicating tastes and gorgeous vineyards caressed by the Aegean Sea breeze. Explore the magnificent landscape fashioned by the island's vineyards and sample the wines of Lesvos on the premises of the two wineries of the island that are open to guests, one of them located just off the town of Mytilene and the other in the volcanic region of western Lesvos. Cool cellars full of oak barrels and hospitable wine producers will initiate you to the secrets of wine and the unparalleled universe of Lesvos.



Priest blesses keskek

Salt of the earth

The two salt ponds of the island, in the Gulf of Kalloni and in Skala Polychnitou, make up two singular wetlands giving shape to a landscape of awe-inspiring beauty.

The salt mountains, the huge white heaps of unprocessed salt, are teamed up with hundreds of birds that can be spotted and photographed from specially designed observatories.

The geometries shaped by the "furnaces" and the "pans" of the salt ponds, with their combination of colours produced from salt drying, contrast with the mosaic formed by the agricultural cultivations in the Plain of Kalloni, fashioning a landscape of dazzling beauty, further enhanced by brooks flowing out of the surrounding hills and into the sea.

The region defined by the salt ponds of Kalloni is one of the most important wetlands in Greece and one of the 10 major wetlands in Europe in terms of biodiversity.



Fokiano in a vineyard of Lesvos

Homer's cheeses

Ladotyri, kasseri, feta, touloumotyri, tyrovolaki, kefalotyri, graviera, myzithra...

The taste routes in Lesvos go through its numerous cheese-making factories mainly in the northern section of the island. Fresh or ripe cheeses, matured in olive oil, have encapsulated taste since Homer's times. Enjoy them straight-up, accompanied by a glass of ouzo, rolled in layers of phyllo dough in giouslemedes (crunchy cheese pies), grated in borek, fried or drizzled with local heather honey.



Lesvos's famed ladotyri

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