

alternative  
island touring

> visiting  
the greek islands  
off-the-beaten track



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## extra tips

Town of Zakynthos: pale coloured manor houses, Venetian arcades, loggias and a cobblestone road that leads to Bohali district at the **Venetian Castle**, where medieval Zakynthos lay. The Lions of Agios Markos, sleepless guardians at the castle gate welcome visitors. Excavations have brought to light a plethora of churches built between 11th and 18th c. as well as ruins from the Byzantine period and the English rule.

asian Hoopoes (*Upupa epops*) and wild swans (*Cygnus*). Alykes are the resting grounds for many herons, little egret (*Egretta garzetta*) and collared pratincoles (*Glareola pratincola*).

The rich fauna of the island is complemented by colourful butterflies. Clouded Yellow butterflies (*Colias croceus*), also known as **Ionian butterflies**, with yellow wings, the brownish Freyer Grayling butterflies (*Neohipparchia fatua*), but also Spotted Fritillary butterflies (*Melitaea didyma*) with their intense orange-coloured wings are a colourful note.

### Zakynthos' Marine Park

Zakynthos' Marine Park is unique in its kind in the entire Mediterranean Sea and was created in 1999. It was the first Marine Park in Greece with its own management agency and it became a model for other areas in Greece. Its importance for the survival of the now famous but still threatened by extinction *Caretta caretta* sea turtle is great. In the Mediterranean and in Greece, in particular, there are also other sea turtle nesting beaches, such as in the western Peloponnese, in the gulf of Lakonia, on Crete, Cephalonia, Rhodes and elsewhere, but the bay of Laganas is the animals' largest and most important refuge. Egg-laying beaches are those of Laganas, Sekania, Daphni, Kalamaki, Gerakas and on the small islands of Marathonissi and Pelouzo, all located around Laganas Bay. In fact the park covers a sea area of 89.2km<sup>2</sup>, land

area of 14.2km<sup>2</sup>, and a peripheral zone of 31.2km<sup>2</sup>.

For this reason almost the entire bay is a protected area, which is divided in zones where different restrictions to human activity apply, depending on the time of year.

Once the eggs are laid, it will take 50 to 75 days and nights for the baby turtles to hatch and start running to the sea, orientated by light. This is why it is important that there should be few lights around the sand, so that baby turtles will not be disoriented. Those who make it to the sea and survive difficulties and marine predators will return to the same place where they hatched to lay their own eggs. The sex of the newly born turtle is determined by the temperature at which their eggs are incubated. Thus, more male turtles are born on Marathonissi, where temperatures are lower!

Turtles are reptiles and can reach up to 1.25m in length and 180kg in weight; they have a brown-reddish shell and large head. The most interesting piece of information that we have about them is that the species appeared on the earth approximately 150 million years ago and has managed to survive until today. This alone is reason enough for us to protect it. Finally, it should be noted that Zakynthos' Marine Park attracts ecotourists from all over the world.

### Strofades

The Strofades, otherwise known as *Plo-*

*toi Nissoi* (floating islands), is a group of small islands off the bay of Laganas. They belong to the National Zakynthos' Marine Park and are included in the important Bird Area (IBA) list.

The largest island is **Stamfani**, with an area of 2.5km<sup>2</sup>, and the second largest is Arpyia, a mere 1.5km<sup>2</sup>.

About 200 flora species have been recorded on the Strofades; 35% of Stamfani is covered by a cedar forest, one of the largest in Western Greece in regard to area, tree size and natural propagation.

The entire group of islands is an important passage and resting stop for numerous **migrating birds** and, therefore, an ideal spot for bird-watching. Approximately 146 bird species have been recorded here!

Some of the birds that fly by the Strofades islands are the black and white spotted flycatchers (*Muscicapa striata*), nightingales (*Luscinia megarhynchos*), Cory's shearwaters (*Calonectris diomedea*), and turtledoves (*Streptopelia capicola*).

### Water sports

A classic destination for Greek and international sailing enthusiasts alike, the island has six **marinas** to choose from, depending on wind direction during one's stay on Zakynthos.

### Diving

An organised diving centre and numerous diving spots offer divers the oppor-





## extra tips

A short urban hike of special cultural value that is worth taking, starts at the city of Zakynthos and goes to Akrotiri, on Strani Hill, where Dionyssios Solomos, the Greek national poet, sitting in the shade of a tree and overlooking Messolongi, was inspired and wrote the Greek national anthem. This is a green hill affording a wonderful view!

cave with the impressive stalactites and stalagmites and its two entrances that make it extraordinary.

On the east side, verdant **Katastari** is a starting point for the neighbouring **Alykes**.

To the north, **Orthonies** is built on the slope of Mount Vrachion, among vineyards and olive groves. In the neighbouring village of Ano Volimes, one of the most traditional hamlets of the island will impress visitors with hand-made embroidered works, true artworks created by local women.

## Churches and monasteries

Church architecture of Zakynthos, although deeply wounded by the catastrophic 1953 earthquake, stands out when compared to the architecture of the rest of the Ionian Islands. Byzantine as well as strong western influences in conjunction with local craftsmen have created stunning basilicas with high bell towers, fortified monasteries, as well as simple chapels.

At the church **Agios Dionyssios**, patron saint of Zakynthos, with a high bell tower, the relics of the saint are still preserved. The temple is a three-aisled basilica with a beautifully carved wooden iconostasis and icons by Doxaras.

The church of **Agios Nikolaos** of Molos, dating back from 1561, is a single aisle basilica and it is the only Venetian building that didn't collapse in the town after the 1953 earthquake.

At **Lady of the Angels** church dating to 1687, notice the interesting relief adornments on the exterior and the icons painted by Doxaras in the interior.

At **Agios Georgios Filikon**, a construction dating back to the 17th century, supporters were initiated into the *Filiki Etairia* (Association of Friends), a secret revolutionary organization, and took their vows of serving the cause of the Revolution and fighting the Turks. Theodoros Kolokotronis was initiated and joined the Association here.

The **Monastery of Madona Anafonitria**, at the village Skoulikado, is a beautiful church made of stone in the 15th century, built on a natural balcony with a view over the whole area. Agios Dionyssios led an ascetic life here for many years.

The Byzantine and Post-Byzantine icons in **Agios Georgios of Gremon** church built in 1535 AD are of special interest. Agios Gerassimos also led an ascetic life here, and later became the patron saint of Cephalonia. The amazing tower was built in 1561 to protect the monks from the pirates.

**Faneromeni** church, in Chorfa, was rebuilt exactly as it used to be before the earthquake; it is a typical example of Zakynthos church architecture. Its carved wooden iconostasis is exquisite.

The monastery of **Agios Ioannis Prodromos** (St. John the Baptist), near Katastari village, built on an observa-

tion spot, survived the earthquake and maintains significant icons and unique icon stands made of carved wood.

In the monastery of **Panagia Skopiotissa**, at Vassilikos, one can admire its amazing frescos.

The impressive church of **Agia Mavra** at the village of Mahairado, with the Venetian bell tower, the sound of which is said to be the most melodic in Greece, has some amazing icons. The church was destroyed by fire on December 8, 2005 and it is being restored according to its original plan.

**Panagia Keriotissa** church, built at Keri, one of the most beautiful spots of the island, is famous for its architecture, its wooden carving works and its icons.

**Yperagathou Monastery**, a dependency of Mt. Sina Monastery, is built near Anafonitria village, next to a beautiful forest of pine and century old oak trees. It is a small monastery established in the 17th century and it is dedicated to Panagia.

Finally, Strofadon Monastery is of outstanding beauty and importance; it is dedicated to the Transfiguration of the Saviour or **Panagia Panton Chara**, due to the icon of Panagia with the same name found in the monastery. According to historical records, the monastery was established in the 13th century by Irini, daughter of Theodoros Laskaris; it was renovated in the 15th century by Ioannis Palaiologos VII. It is





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