

# TILOS

## MYTHS AND HISTORY

According to Greek mythology, the island was named after **Tilos**, the youngest son of Alia, sister of Helios (the Sun-god). Myth has it that Tilos came to the island to pick medicinal herbs for his ailing mother; when she recovered, he returned to the island to build an altar in honor of Helios—Apollo and Poseidon, thus expressing his gratitude.

Paleontologic findings from **Harkadio cave** indicate that deer lived on the island 140,000 years ago, as did an indigenous species of **pygmy elephant**, which lived on the island 50,000 years ago and disappeared only 4,000 years ago. Furthermore, stone tools found in the cave place the island's first human habitation in the **Neolithic period** (8000–7000 BC). Archaeological research has brought to light numerous tokens of the island's contact with the Minoan and Mycenaean civilizations, as well as the presence of Pelasgians and Dorians.

The island's peak was in the 7th century and the Classical era. Herodotus reports that the residents of Tilos, created the city of Gelas in Sicily. In the Classical period, Tilos was especially renowned for its therapeutic, aromatic herbs. In the 5th century the island joined the

Athenian Alliance and then passed to the influence of the Rhodians, where it remained until it came under Roman rule in 42 BC.

The famous lyrical poetess **Erinna** is believed to be born on this island on the 4th century BC. A number of archaeological findings dating to the Classical, Hellenistic and early-Christian periods indicate that the island continued to thrive at least until the earthquake of AD 550. In the Byzantine years, Tilos was repeatedly pillaged by Saracens and Venetians and was fortified with castles, which were repaired and fortified by the **Knights of St. John**, who imposed their rule on the island in the early 14th century (1309). In 1522 the island came under Turkish rule with the rest of the Dodecanese. 16th-century wanderers refer to it as **Piscopia**, like Venetians—who had their eye on the island at the time—deliberately called it, after **Piscopei** in Cyprus. Thru the 18th century, Tilos was tried and tested often by the invasions of Algerians and other pirates. In 1912 it was occupied by the **Italians** and in 1948 it was incorporated into the Greek state.



Η παραλία Σταυρός στη δυτική ακτή | Stavros beach, on the west coast

## GEOGRAPHY AND NATURE

Tilos is located between Nisyros and Halki, on the SE corner of the Aegean, and it is 12 nm from Rhodes and 222 nm from Piraeus. It is a small (61.5 sq km), mountainous and rocky island, its tallest peak being **Profitis Ilias** (654 m) on the NW edge. The island's coastline is 63 km long, with a large number of coves and beaches, with many rocky islets and reefs scattered around the island. The most fertile area on the island unfolds between the bay of Aghios Antonios (north) and the cove of Eristos (south). Familial agricultural businesses operate here, and they supply the entire island with vegetables, legumes and fruit. The island's port is **Livadia**.

The entire island is a **Special Protected Area (SPA)** according to the EU Directive for Birds, since it is home to numerous rare species of fauna and flora. Some 400 species of plants and more than 100 species of birds live and thrive scattered in 16 different types of ecosystem, making Tilos an immensely important place for the wider area from an ecological perspective. Bonelli's eagle, Eleonora's falcon, the Common Shag, Audouin's Gull, the Long-legged Buzzard and the European Roller are standout birds in the island's ornithofauna, as they are protected species. Thanks to its geographic position, Tilos is a migration station for several species of bird including the European Bee-eater, the Grey Heron, the Halcyon, the Kingfisher, the Marsh Harrier and the Little Egret. Furthermore, upon local residents' initiative partridge hunting has been prohibited since 1987; a fact attesting to the islanders' heightened sensitivity towards

the environment's constant degradation. The municipality of Tilos is implementing the program **LIFE - Nature**, which is the European Commission's funding tool to protect and manage SPA's in Greece. In 2003 residents, scientists, local government representatives, universities and research centers throughout Greece, as well as international environmental organizations formed the non-for-profit society **Tilos Park** (tilospark@yahoo.com); thus they contribute ideas, initiatives and action in the development of a wider environmental conscience and make an effort to protect, conserve and showcase the natural and cultural environment of Tilos.

Depending on season, but especially in the spring, the island 'explodes' in a frenzy of colors and fragrances when hundreds of species blossom, living up to its ancient reputation which had it praised, even in myth, for its medicinal and aromatic herbs. Thyme, chamomile, sage, twelve species of orchid, sea daffodils, Jerusalem sage, the dwarf-shrubs Genista acanthoclada and Sarcopoterium spinosum, oregano, rock-roses, and also oaks, almond trees and terebinths create a veritable wildlife refuge in Tilos, offering shelter and food to birds, insects, reptiles and small mammals. Sadly, most of the island's trees are aged, since the young trees cannot survive the stubborn goat attacks. As for marine environment, the gorgeous seabed near the coast features extended *Posidonia oceanica* seagrass meadows, which are home to large numbers of fish.



Το Μεγάλο Χωριό και η ακρόπολη της αρχαίας Τήλου. Megalo Horio, at the foot of the ancient acropolis of Tilos.



Το μοναχικό ομορφιάς μονοπάτι από Αγιο Ιωάννη προς Γερά. The beautiful footpath from Aghios Ioannis to Gera

## SIGHTS

**Megalo Horio** (Big Village) was the capital of Tilos even since antiquity. It is built amphitheatrically, at the foot of the steep hill of Aghios Stefanos, on the island's north side. Atop the hill, ruins from the **Castle of the Knights** survive, underneath which the ancient acropolis is located. Thru the 18th century the city was restricted inside the walls and then began to expand to the periphery, until it was ultimately transferred to its current location. Inside the castle's boundaries survive foundations from various buildings, water cisterns, as well as the half-abandoned church of **Taxiarchis** (Archangel Michael – 14th century), built in the position of the temple of Zeus Polieus and Athena Poliadia, who were worshipped in antiquity. The old temple's silver-adorned icons have been moved to the new church (1827) which was built adjacent to the ancient wall. In the temple, some murals from the 16th century survive. Inside the settlement, but around it as well, there are several chapels from the 15th century with interesting murals, like the Presentation of Georgaras, Aghios Ioannis of Logothetis and Aghios Vasiliou.

On a hill, approximately 2 km southeast from Megalo Horio, is the **castle of Misaria** and at the foot of the hill is the **cave of Harkadio**, where excavations revealed a number of Neolithic tools, bones from 30 pygmy elephants having lived between 50,000 and 4,000 years ago, and deer bones from 140,000 years ago. On the hill opposite the cave, ruins from a Byzantine settlement survive, as do the chapels of Taxiarchis and of Aghios Nikolaos, with fragments of 13th-15th century murals.

The **Monastery of Aghios Panteleimonas** was built circa 1470-80 and it is located on the island's deserted northwest corner. It is a fortress monastery, with a stone enclosure and a tower on the southwest side. It is situated in a lush green landscape with a looming

cypress tree planted in 1800. The temple features built-in architectural members of an older temple. 15th century murals and a wood-carved iconostasis carved in 1714. On July 25th the monastery's courtyard becomes the venue for a large festival, attracting visitors from Tilos and nearby islands.

The abandoned village **Mikro Horio** was a settlement organized in the 15th century by the Knights and it was abandoned permanently in the 60s. The village looks truly enchanted now, as the deserted stone houses, old churches with murals and the ruins of the small medieval castle create a stunning and strange atmosphere, transporting you to a different era like a gate through time. During summer, a bar operates in Mikro Horio, while every August 15th festivals with food and traditional music take place here.

The 15th century **castle of Agriositykia** nestled in the northeast side of Gerondas hill, south of Livadia, is worth a visit.

Tilos features more than 30 beaches, 5 of which are accessible by road; the others are accessible by trail or by boat. **Eristos** is a 2 km-long sandy beach, with plenty of tents set up every summer in the shadow of the dense salt cedars, since islanders and local authorities are positively inclined towards free camping. On the western edge of **Aghios Antonios** bay there is **Plaka**, a lovely pebbled beach with salt cedars and free campers again. **Lethra** stands out amongst the island's more inapproachable beaches; it is opposite the islet of **Galdaros**, on the east, with the reddish pebbles. Just as beautiful with red pebbles are **Kokkini** (Armochostis), on the east, and **Skafi** on the north. Quiet and gorgeous clear waters can also be found in **Aghios Sergios**, **Tholos**, **Stavros** and **Limenari**.



Όρμος Αγίου Ζαχαρία | Aghios Zacharias bay



## HIKING ROUTES

The hiking routes described here are marked on the map with their numbers so that you can follow them easily.

### 1 MEGALO HORIO – SKAFI BEACH 0.9 km | 20' | EASY

This trail constitutes the main approach to a beautiful beach north of Megalo Horio. Follow the dirt road which heads north from the village, all the way to its end, where you park your vehicle. A pleasant trail starts here, parallel to the ravine and with mild inclines. It is brief,

clean and marked with red marks. It is one of the most pleasant routes on the island and ultimately leads to the twin beaches of Skafi with the distinctive red sand.

### 2 AGHIOS ANTONIOS – MEGALO HORIO 1.1 km | 20' | EASY

This is the old route connecting Megalo Horio with its seaport, Aghios Antonios. The trail's starting point is by the dirt road beginning at the coast, more or less at the village center. Walk parallel

to the fences of some houses, on a trail marked by cairns. The entire length of the trail is wide and smooth.

### 3 PANAGIA KAMARIANI MONASTERY - AGHIOS PANDELEIMON MONASTERY 3.6 km | 1h30' | MODERATE

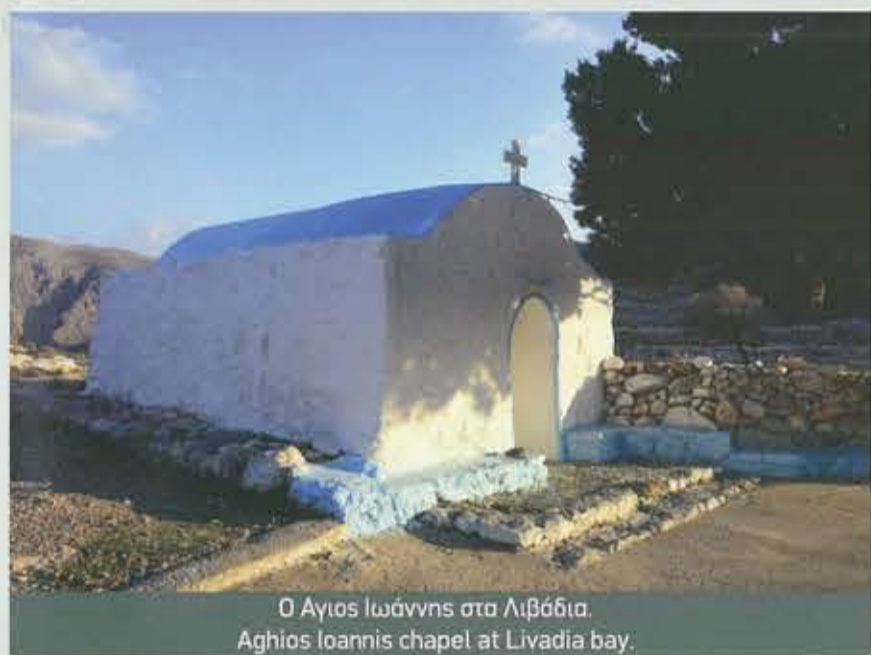
This is a clearly signposted hiking route in Tilos, and one of the most picturesque hikes on the island. Its distinct starting point is located just 50 m west of the monastery of Panagia Kamariani. There are quite many along the trail, ideal resting points under the shadow of the trees. You will pass by a place called **Paradisi** (Paradise) where you can fill up your

bottle with fresh cool water from the spring. Further up the trail you will come to another resting point, the chapel of "Kyrie Doxa Si" ("Glory to You, our Lord"). Water and shadow are also available at the end of the route, at Aghios Panteleimon monastery.

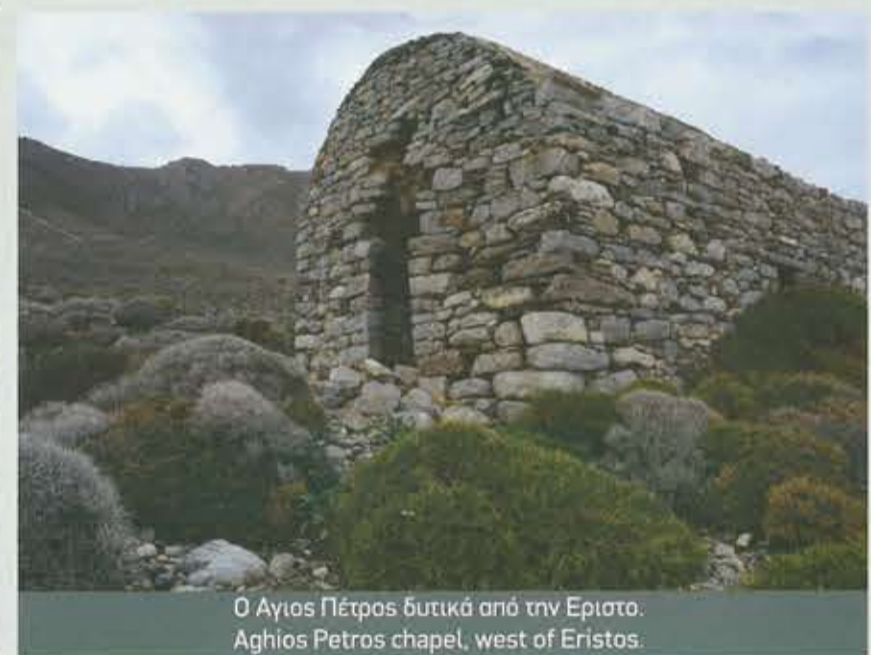
### 4 HELIPOINT – ITALIAN MILITARY POST 2.3 km | 2h | DIFFICULT

Though it is not too long, the elevation (+400 m) of this route makes it suitable only for the fit and courageous! The trail begins at the end of the dirt road which heads west of the heliport. The road forks after the first few meters; follow the right branch. At its end you will see the beginning of the trail, defined by rows of rocks leading you to a signpost with information about the island's history. The trail continues right of the ravine, which it crosses and then heads toward the chapel of Taxiarchis. From the chapel you begin ascend-

ing on a mild incline for approximately 1km, until you come to a second signpost about Tilos' wild nature. Thereon the terrain becomes steeper. Pass a water spring in a ridge of the rock on your right, and follow a spiraling path until you reach the Italian military post. A bit further up you come to the trigonometric point and the final wooden signpost about the island's geomorphology; a clever idea, since the view of the island from this vantage point is panoramic.



Ο Άγιος Ιωάννης στα Λιβάδια. Aghios Ioannis chapel at Livadia bay.



Ο Άγιος Πέτρος δυτικά από την Ερίστο. Aghios Petros chapel, west of Eristos.

### 5 AGHIOS PANDELEIMON MONASTERY – ERISTOS 7.8 km | 1h30' | DIFFICULT

This is the island's longest and most demanding trail. It begins at Tilos' most renowned monastery, where there is a divine water spring, and terminates near the island's most popular beach, Eristos. Start on the left, before the main entrance to the Monastery of Aghios Panteleimonas, following the trail which runs parallel to the monastery's enclosure. Walk below the inaccessible peak of Profitis Ilias on a clear, marked trail. Pass the col between Profitis Ilias and Kefala peak. Then, descend following the red marks until you are above the ravine which goes to Limenari beach. The trail seems to disappear at this point; if you

keep to the left, though, soon you will see the chapel of Panagia - where you are headed - on your right below. Descend into the ravine, pass by the chapel, and brace yourself for a challenging ascent on an unclear trail, which leads you to the col between Patela peak and Theridia area. Once you reach the route's highest point, where you have a view of Eristos bay, you will manage to see some crains and faded red marks which will guide you safely to a livestock pen, above the beach of Aghios Petros. From there you may go down to the beach of Aghios Petros, or go on to Eristos following the dirt road.

### 6 MEGALO HORIO – ANCIENT ACROPOLIS 0.7 km | 20' | EASY

This is a short and visible trail, even though it is rather uphill, which will lead you to the ancient acropolis and the Byzantine buildings on the peak above Megalo Horio. It is best to hike during the late afternoon hours, just before the sunset. To find the starting point, follow the concrete road leaving N-NE from the village parking lot; the road will soon turn into a dirt road. At its end 100m further, you will see a wire fence. The improvised gate features a handwritten sign "Towards Kastro" in several different languages. This

is where the trail starts. The route is uphill, mainly on stone steps, within the boundaries of the ancient settlement's enclosure. Pass the remains of homes and temples until you get to the highest point, where the archaeological site and the church of Taxiarchis are. This spot offers sweeping views of the entire western side of the island and the bay of Eristos.

### 7 AGHIOS PETROS BEACH 0.6 km | 15' | PIECE OF CAKE!

This brief trail starts at the end of the dirt road which heads SW of Eristos and terminates above the beach of Aghios Petros. It is densely marked with cairns which guide you through the bushes and herbs that cover the southern slopes of Paleokastro hill. The pebbled

beach is deserted and beautiful, though you may find it littered with plastic washed up by the waves. A few meters away from the beach stands the beautiful stone-built church of Aghios Petros, now serving as shelter to the goats...

### 8 AGHIOS IOANNIS – GERA – KOUTSOUMBAS PEAK 5.5 km | 2h30' | MODERATE

The most beautiful hike on Tilos island and possibly one of the best in the whole Aegean! Its first part, from the chapel of Aghios Ioannis (east of Livadia) to the abandoned village Gera, 3 km in length, is a delightful old road as they used to build them in the old times, 2 meters wide, with a stonebuilt wall anchoring it to the lower side of the slope, dug into the hill slope which is covered with thyme and sage bushes, and with a magnificent view

to the bay of Aghios Zacharias! After 2 km you see the trail leading to the lovely desert beaches of Despoti Nero and Aghios Zacharias and a handful more. Gera is a ghost village, abandoned many decades ago. The stonebuilt houses are still standing, although roofless, while the remains of a once alive village are scattered everywhere. The only living element here is the fountain next to the two tall palm trees, cool water still dripping from it.

### 9 LIVADIA – RED BEACH – LETHRA BEACH – MIKRO HORIO - LIVADIA 8.4 km | DAY TRIP | MODERATE

The trail begins at the end of the small concrete road on the NE edge of the harbor, above "ILIDI ROCK" hotel; there is also a gate for the goats there. The trail is wide and slightly ascending, with a lovely sea view. After 1.8 km you will see the Red Beach (Kokkini Paralia) on your right, which you can access in 10' from the fork by following the cairns. Continuing on the left branch, after 500 m you will see on your left the trail (marked with a cairn) that ascends towards Mikro Horio, which you will follow later, after your swim at Lethra beach. This beautiful and deserted beach is only 10 minutes away from this fork, and is really worth visiting.

are red marks, but the trail is not in very good condition. 20 minutes later you arrive at Mikro Horio, just before the parking lot.

After visiting Mikro Horio, follow the dirt road heading south of the village. About 150m further a trail goes left, between ruins next to an electric power pole. It starts as a goat path and a bit further it is marked by cairns. After 700 m you reach the concrete road and continue directly across it (see the cairn). The trail continues downhill and 100m further there is a fire hydrant. Descend a bit further until you reach the main paved road. Cross it, further to the right there is a gate, on your left-hand side, which you open in order to go past the fence. The trail continues parallel to the pavement, inside of the wire fence. After 250-300m you will see another gate, which you open and continue to the next gate, which takes you to the peripheral paved road behind the first houses of Livadia village.

### 10 THOLOS BEACH 1.3 km | 25' | EASY

The starting point is on the main paved road, south of Agriositykia castle, where there is a sign "to THOLOS". Pass the wire fence and follow the visible trail with the red marks. After 5 minutes you will pass through a small threshing floor and shortly thereafter you

will descend towards the left bed, the beach now within view. Red marks are regular. In 20 minutes you will come to the ravine bed and continue along it. In a few minutes you will arrive at the beach.

### 11 AGHIOS SERGIOS BEACH 1.5 km | 50' | MODERATE

Continuing further south on the paved road after Tholos beach, there is a junction with a dirt road. About 100m after the junction you see the trail's starting point; there is also a sign reading "Aghios Sergios". The trail, essentially, is a goat path marked with cairns.

Head SE between the two peaks and, after you pass the col, you will see the beach of Aghios Sergios. The goat path descends steeply and becomes indistinguishable, but the cairns will direct you. Descend along the slope over the west side of the beach.

### 12 MIKRO HORIO – HARKADIO CAVE 2.9 km | 1h45' | MODERATE

From the small castle at the edge of Mikro Horio, follow the trail descending north, among abandoned properties. Its trace gets often entangled with the many goat-trails in this area, however it continues on smooth ground heading north and slightly downhill. 1.6 km later you come to a plateau, a few meters higher than the main road, where you follow the most convenient trail to the north, through abandoned lots and a sparse forest

of acorn trees. You go past the foot of the slope on which stands the Misaria castle, then the old chapel of Aghios Nikolaos, and you finally come to the asphalt road, right at the Paleontological Museum. From here, a visit to the Charkadio cave and the Misaria castle are both highly worth it. To get to the castle go through the opening in the fence a few meters north of the cave.

### 13 LIVADIA – AGRIOSYKIA CASTLE 3.2 km | 1h45' | MODERATE

A steady uphill hike which takes you to the greatest viewpoint in mainland Tilos. The old trail is overgrown with wild bushes and in many spots ruined by the many dirt roads, however it is still worth walking. Follow the paved road to Panagia Politissa, and at the junction with the paved road to Aghia Anna, you see on your right the start of the cobbled path ascending southwards, in parallel and a few meters higher than the paved road. 600 m later the path ends in a dirt road, which you follow (south) till you get to the

paved road. Right at this point, you see the old wooden signs marking the path which ascends north, goes past two ruined byzantine chapels, and then ends at the impressive Agriositykia castle with the magnificent view. To get back you can follow the same way backwards, but you may also go down the slope heading northwest, following a rather unclear trail often lost in vegetation or confused with goat-trails, and - with a bit of luck - after 900 m you will come to the byzantine church of Aghia Anna.