



what do you want to do first?

[a sneak preview of Ioannina city, Greece]

Ioannina stands as one of the best offbeat escapes in Europe because of its lake. Whether it's strolling hand in hand on its banks, birdwatching, riding a bike in the sunset or enjoying your wine and good spirits by the serene waters, the turquoise lake (a National Park and Pamvotis by name -a riddle for the literature aficionados) will offer the perfect backdrop for romance, family holidays, congresses and city breaks.

The island of Ioannina lake is home to seven monasteries (the third largest group after Mount Athos and Meteora), one of Europe's few inhabited islands (pop 250) and the only one in the world without a name of its own! The 10min crossing to the island and a 30min walk on its cobblestone alleys will send you picking up echoes of folk songs and psalms of Christians, Jews and Muslims who lived on this land peacefully for centuries.



A CENTURIES OLD TOWN
BY A BEAUTIFUL LAKE
IN A RING OF HIGH MOUNTAINS
BY THE SUNNY BEACHES
OF THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA



The town is built on the Egnatia Road that spans two millennia connecting Europe to Asia. With the road aging and the region's traditional rural economy losing pace, Ioannina stayed off-radar for decades despite its rich history as a melting pot of traditions and cultures. Today Egnatia is a state-of-the-art European highway and Ioannina is a proud host of modern hotels, convention centres, hospitals and one of the country's most prestigious universities -the 20.000 strong academic community puts some vivid color strokes on the town canvas. Besides its laid-back, indulging atmosphere, Ioannina is the perfect base for great outdoors in a diverse landscape of coasts, mountains, rivers, valleys and lakes -an excellent value for family vacations, congress & events and thrill-seekers.



This is a good place for food fans with an appetite for genuine Mediterranean cuisine and home cooking. The local gastronomy you can sample almost everywhere in town and in nearby taverns includes cheese and meat from hilltop farms (don't miss the smoked Metsovone, semi-hard PDO cheese), herb flavored pies, fish and game, fine local wines and tsipouro.

With the world famous baklava you are in for a real treat: the local genre bridges the oriental dessert traditions with the less-sweet-tooth Europeans: **an icon of the Ioannina culture.**

Look for the authentic silverworks, buy from the craftsmen and you shall own a fine piece of jewelry or an elegant ornament any state officer of some stature would be proud to bring back home and offer as a precious present in the 18th century.



The town's natural environment is the perfect setting for sports or relaxation in equal measures. The lake is ideal for rowing, waterskiing or even ship modeling. Around it you can hike, bike, rock climb or unwind on the 8km paved promenade from the Castle to the estuary's info kiosk (watch out for the lake's rich birdlife). Recharge in a spa or over a cup of tea and plan your next day's expedition to the coastline or the mountains. If you like to compete, the 30km flat race held here every autumn, Ioannina Lake Run, fits the bill.



From the Stone Age, the ancient Greek civilizations, the Roman magistrates and the Byzantine despots through to the Ottoman pashas and the modern Greek democracy, the history trail leads to the unmissable attractions of today's multicultural Ioannina: six amazing museums, a unique primordial cave, art galleries, twelve churches, one synagogue, sixteen monasteries, twelve well preserved Muslim monuments, and an array of townhouses and public buildings of architectural interest.





SIVOTA
/ Village / Ionian Pelago
39°24' N 20°15' E
89 min

Coastline to the west, mountains to the east. Simple. Drive west on Egnatia Road, set sail from Syvota to find a secluded cove and some privacy, drive further south to Mikri Ammos (if you don't mind swimming to the rythms of the popular beach bar) or the emerald waters of the picturesque Sarakiniko, to name only but a few of the Ionian gems. Parga is cosmopolitan and a destination in its own right, but the trip there from Ioannina won't take you more than an hour and it's certainly worth the drive.



Discover estuaries teeming with wildlife, cross dense woodlands and brave deep gorges in off-the-beaten-track adventures; marvel at the stone-built bridges, churches and cottages, taste good wine and delicious roasted casseroles in age old village squares, camp for the night stargazing over towering rock formations before the next morning's punishing push for the alpine lakes; go skiing or 4X4 riding, take the trails up to the rugged Pindos and Tzoumerka mountain ranges or down to the rivers Aaos, Viodomatis, Arachthos and Kalamas for canoe-kayak, rafting and horse-back riding, then relax in a mountain resort for a bit of glitz... You are just a 1-2h drive from Ioannina and it seems hard to find the limit of your choices.

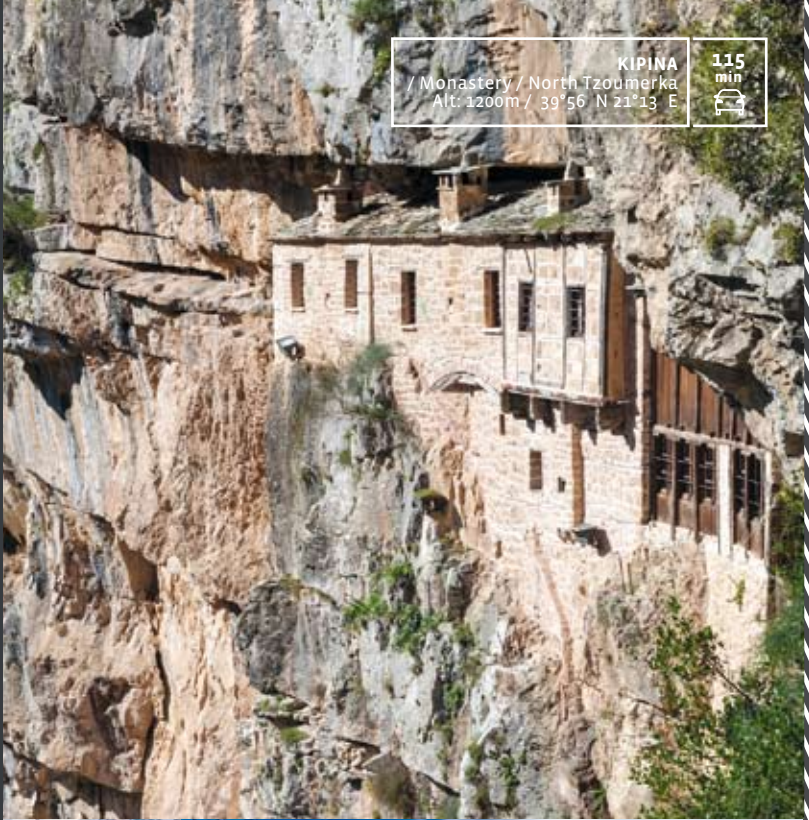
Metsovo, Papigo, Aristi, Tsepelovo, Pyrsogianni, Konitsa, Kalarrytes, Syrrako, Bourazani are among the villages where your camera has to be fully charged. Your page will definitely sport some great selfies with friends or family, on or under one of the amazing arched stone bridges. For your experience of Vicos gorge, one of the largest, deepest and most impressive canyons in the world (in the Vicos-Aaos National Park) you'll have to write a book!



METSOVO
/ Village / Pindus Mountains
Alt: 1160m / 38°10' N 21°11' E
43 min



DODONI
/ Archeological site / Epirus, Ioannina
39°33' N 20°46' E
27 min

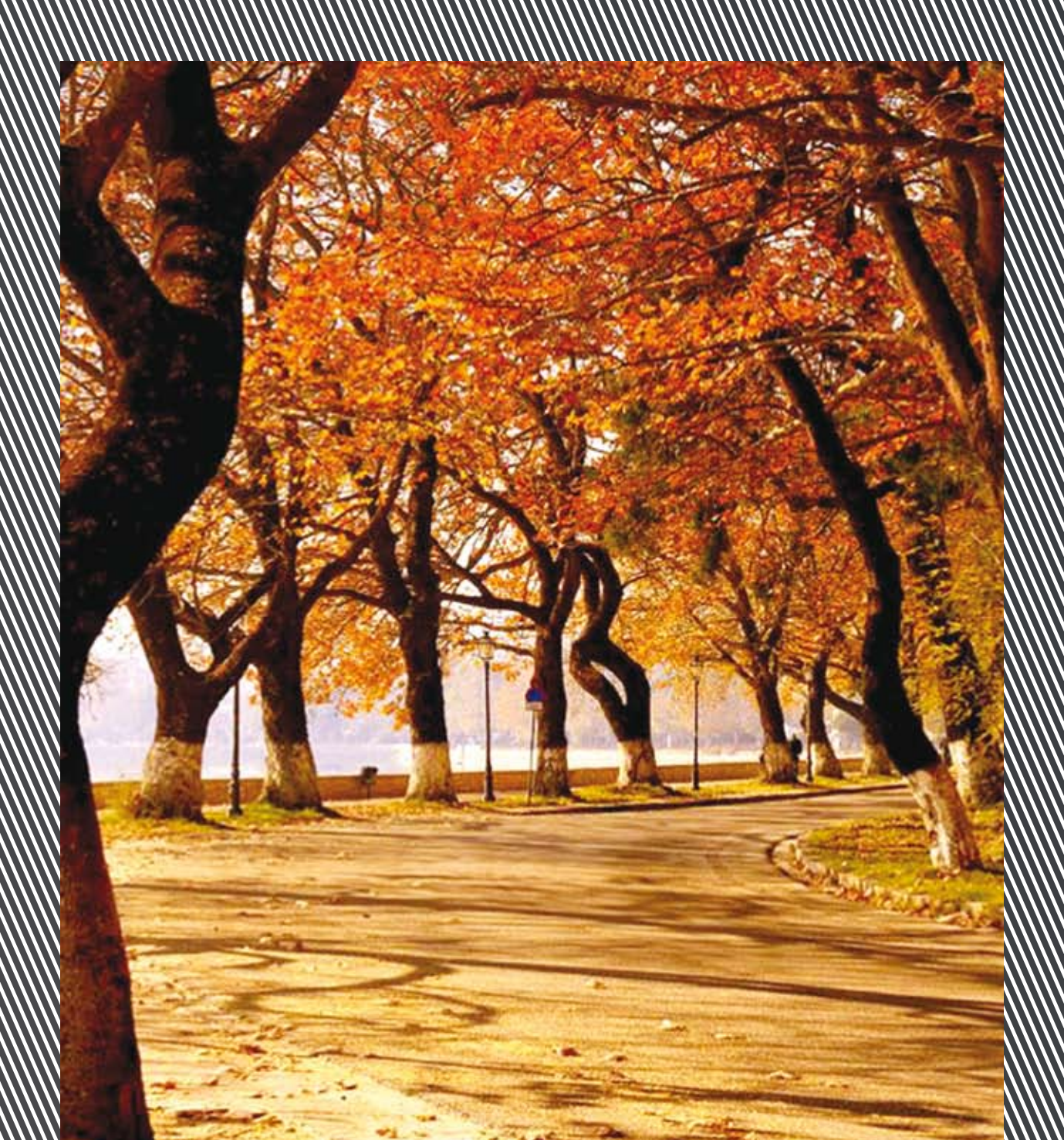


KIPINA
/ Monastery / North Tzoumerka
Alt: 1200m / 39°56' N 21°13' E
115 min



PAPIGO
/ Village / Vicos - Aaos National Park
Alt: 980m / 39°58' N 20°44' E
72 min

Imagine a sold-out drama (-tic) performance 2300 years ago in a theatre seating 18.000 spectators! What kind of cultural life do you think they had back then? What kind of economy could afford the biggest theatre of its time? You may ponder on these questions on the way from Ioannina to Dodoni (22km) and one of the most significant archaeological sites in Greece. When there, you'll go "aw".



WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO FIRST?

You can lose track of time in Ioannina. Easy. Be it a three day visit or a ten day vacation, any season of the year, there is always something exciting to see and do. Enjoy the lake view sipping Greek coffee, walk the narrow corridor over a staggering 900m deep gorge, take a tour in a prehistoric cave or a medieval castle, set sail in the Ionian Sea or share a bottle of wine and a fine cheese platter with friends. So what do you want to do first?



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