

You are Here...

Map of Greece



Peloponnese (Southern Greek Mainland)



Messinia (Area within the Peloponnese)



The Mani (Area within Messinia)



Stoupa (Area within The Mani)



You will fly into Kalamata airport, Kalamata being the closest city to Stoupa and the second most populous city of the Peloponnese. The airport is a military base airport and only open to the public on international flights throughout the summer months. It is a tiny airport in comparison to the likes of even Liverpool John Lennon. Kalamata translated 'Beautiful Eyes' is pronounced KalamATA and not Kalamarta as you may hear some of the Brits saying :-)

While in Stoupa...

Sanitary

Due to the much older sewerage system and infrastructure, the Greek sewage pipes are much narrower than British pipes, and therefore Greek plumbing can't handle paper or any other items as it will easily clog them. PLEASE DISPOSE OF TOILET PAPER IN THE BIN PROVIDED NEXT TO THE TOILET.

Drinking Water

It is NOT advised to drink the tap water, particularly if you have a sensitive tummy. However, there are a number of outdoor natural spring water drinking water taps along the roads in the village.

Beach Sunbeds

Sunbeds are available on both Stoupa and Kalogria beach to hire on a daily basis. The cost differs hugely from 'Free if you're eating at the corresponding taverna' to '5 euro's' right up to '50 euros'. The business model of the latter is by way of deducting your food / drink bill from the cost, so effectively if you're going to be eating and drinking more than 50 euros then your sunbeds are free. On Kalogria beach, it's the far left beds as you are looking to the Sea that are usually the high end beds. Alternatively, you can buy a fold up chair from the supermarket if you don't mind carrying it around with you.

Supermarkets

There are three supermarkets in the Village. One which is literally at the back of Aiolos, your accommodation, a 2 minute walk. This one is usually closed on a Sunday out of high season. The biggest is Katerina's which is on the same main road as the one behind you, just a further 5 minute walk. This one is open 7 days a week and from early morning until late at night depending on the time of year. You can literally buy anything in this supermarket from ice pops to household furniture! The third is right in the middle of Stoupa village opposite Stoupa Beach. Although you can still get a few groceries from here, it lends itself more to clothing and nik-naks these days.

Other shops

There are a few other shops and bakeries dotted around. You will find them as you're exploring the small village.

Tavernas

There is a plethora of tavernas, eateries bars etc both on the main strip and dotted around. You would need to spend at least a month in Stoupa to be able to eat at them all.

Medical

The pharmacy is just 2 minutes walk from your apartments on the main road that the supermarket is on. Turn left out of your apartment, walk up to the main road and turn right. You will see the pharmacy a few meters down on the right. It is open 7 days a week although it closes for a few hours in the afternoon and re-opens at 4pm.

There's a few doctors in the area as well as a medical centre / laboratory for testing.

The nearest hospital is in Kalamata City.

If you need medical advice, please let me know.

Banks / Cashpoint

There's a few cashpoints dotted around the village, the main one in the supermarket opposite Stoupa beach.

Bus Stops

The Bus stop to Kardamili is near the bakery past the main supermarket on the main road.

Bike Hire

There's a few places you can hire a bike. If this is something you would like to do, please let me know and I can point you in the direction.

Considerations

- The preferred method of payment amongst the local businesses here is definitely CASH
- Please be careful if you are venturing off on a walk. Untrodden areas of grass can be a safe haven for the area's wildlife such as snakes. In the 28 years of me staying in Stoupa, I have never seen a snake but you do need to be vigilant just like you would do on any holiday in a hot country.
- When crossing the road, be mindful that they drive on the other side
- There's lots of beautiful villages overlooking Stoupa that are worth a walking visit
- If you are going off on your own, please let someone know.

A little 'forward' to explain the prevailing architecture of the Mani.

In the rugged landscape of the Mani Peninsula, history weaves a tale of feudal intricacies and fierce loyalties. By the 14th century, this remote part of Greece had evolved into a complex feudal society marked by intense blood feuds among families and neighbours. The precipitous decline of the Byzantine Empire, followed by its eventual collapse, brought waves of refugees to Mani. These refugees, including remnants of Byzantine aristocracy from entities like the Despotate of the Morea, found refuge in Mani's austere terrain. They came to be known as the Nyklians, a new class of aristocrats who exerted significant influence in the region. As they settled, the Nyklians and the native clans established strongholds within tightly-knit villages, fortifying their positions against the backdrop of Mani's challenging, rocky soil which scarcely supported agriculture. This scarcity of resources fuelled continuous conflicts among the clans for over five centuries, as they fought for land, power, and prestige in an unforgiving landscape that demanded as much resilience from its inhabitants as it did from its rulers.

It is impossible to get lost geographically as there is only one road running the entire length of the Mani, but it is very easy to get lost in the majestic scenery. The journey from Kalamata to the southern-most tip of the Mani, the southern-most tip of mainland Greece, is a journey through history and mythology. The road is mountainous in many parts, narrow in even more, but delightful in all.

Julia Browne

Kalamata

Kalamata, a city that beautifully marries its rich historical tapestry with modern vibrancy, offers a unique experience to its visitors and residents alike. Kalamata is not just known for its contemporary layout and thriving cafés and shops, but also for its deep historical roots that echo through the ages. The city's Acropolis dates back to before the Trojan War, serving as a silent witness to the various epochs, including the Byzantine period and the Frankish occupation in the early 13th century. Notably, a Church dedicated to the Theotokos (Mary Mother of



Jesus) was established in the 6th century, housing an icon called 'Kalamata'—meaning beautiful eyes—which eventually lent its name to the city itself. On the modern front, Kalamata bursts into colour and life with its annual flower festival in May, the revered silk-weaving industry under the castle's watchful eye, and the international dance festival held from July 17 to August 8 each year. Additionally, the city boasts an archaeological museum with an impressive collection of artifacts and a lively open-air market every Wednesday, offering a plethora of fresh produce and local goods. Kalamata truly is a city where history and modernity coexist harmoniously, inviting all who visit to explore its past and present wonders.

Taygetos mountain range

Departing Kalamata, you are immediately greeted by the imposing presence of the Taygetos mountain range, an awe-inspiring natural fortress that dominates the landscape. Extending roughly 100 kilometres, this range is crowned by its highest summit, Mount Taygetos, also revered as Profitis Ilias—a name that refers to the Biblical Prophet Elijah. Standing tall at 2,407 meters, this peak is believed to be the same Mount Taléton mentioned by Pausanias, the ancient



geographer, in the 2nd century. The Taygetos mountains are lush with dense forests of Greek fir and black pine, adding to the range's majestic and untamed beauty. Additionally, the western slopes of Taygetos cradle the origins of the Viros Gorge. This gorge transforms seasonally, lying dry during the summer and flowing vigorously with snowmelt in the winter months, illustrating the dynamic and ever-changing nature of this spectacular region.

Kambos

The strategic importance of fortifications in the Avia district of Mani, particularly the castle of Zarnata, underscores the region's vulnerability to invasions throughout history. Positioned on a hill between Kambos and Stavropigio, the castle of Zarnata is a relic of the late Byzantine period, reflecting a rich tapestry of historical shifts in occupancy and



structural enhancements. Its significance was particularly highlighted during the Greek War of Independence, serving as a bastion against oppressors. Later, during the tumultuous times of the Greek Civil War from 1946 to 1950, the castle once again proved its strategic value as it became a refuge for the local populations of Mani and Stavropigio, sheltering them from the brutal skirmishes between communist guerrillas and Nationalist forces. This enduring legacy of the castle of Zarnata not

only illustrates the cyclical nature of conflict in the region but also the enduring human need for sanctuary and defence in times of turmoil.

Tseria

Continuing your journey through the scenic landscapes of the Peloponnese, the road from Kambos winds its way through the Taygetos foothills, unveiling breath taking vistas that stretch to Trachila. This route not only offers a glimpse of the shimmering coastline but also leads you through the charming village of Prosilio. Here, a detour marked towards Tseria, known as the 'balcony of Lefktro', presents an elevation of about 700 metres, providing awe-inspiring views over the Viros Gorge and the expansive Gulf of Messinia. Tseria itself is a quaint amalgamation of six settlements, each with its own unique character. Notably, the village of Zacharia, originally named Libochova, was renamed in the 1960s to honour the legendary Klephtic leader Zacharias. This area, rich in history and natural beauty, offers an authentic slice of Greek heritage, perfect for those seeking to explore beyond the typical tourist paths.

Kardamili

The picturesque village of Kardamili, nestled at the entrance of the Viros Gorge, holds a rich tapestry of history and natural beauty. Originally known as Skardamoula, the area was famed for its abundant cardamom plants. A striking feature of this village is the 'family complex' in Old Kardamili, which exemplifies the architectural style of the 'Outer Mani' settlements. These complexes were not just homes but fortresses, walled and fortified to safeguard the extended family clans.



They served both as protective sanctuaries and as power bases, reflecting the turbulent times and the community's need for security and resilience. This blend of natural spice cultivation and robust historical architecture makes Kardamili a fascinating destination with layers of cultural heritage to explore. Kardamili, a town steeped in mythological and historical significance, is intriguingly mentioned in Homer's Iliad as one of the seven cities that Agamemnon promised to Achilles. This offer was meant to coax Achilles back into the fray of the Trojan War after his withdrawal due to a dispute. This ancient town, not just a footnote in epic tales, also hosts sites of deep historical roots such as the purported tombs of the Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux near Old Kardamili. These tombs, while unassuming in appearance, link the town to a rich mythological past. Another notable site is the church of Agia Sofia, perched atop a hill, offering breathtaking panoramic views. The journey to this serene sanctuary is a vigorous 50-minute ascent from Old Kardamili, rewarding visitors with both spiritual and visual solace, encapsulating the enduring allure of Kardamili's landscape and its woven tapestry of mythology and history.

Patrick Leigh Fermor, a renowned British travel writer, was not only celebrated for his literary contributions but also for his valour during WWII as part of the Greek Resistance. In recognition of his efforts, he was granted honorary citizenship of Kardamili, a village where his beloved house is situated near Kalamitsi beach. This house, a beacon of historical and cultural significance, is currently managed by the Benaki Museum.

Stoupa - Your Retreat Destination

Stoupa, nestled 6km south of Kardamili along the picturesque southern coast of the Peloponnese, offers a delightful detour for those with time to explore. The main route brushes past the scenic beaches of Kalamitsi, Foneas, and Ta Delphinia, but an alternative path starting just outside Kardamili invites travellers on a more adventurous journey. This left turn off the main road meanders through the mountain villages of Proastio, Exochori, Saidona, Kastania—with its beautifully restored Dourakis Tower and lively annual chestnut festival in



October—Pyrgos, and Neochori. Each village presents a unique charm and breathtaking views, culminating in the charming coastal village of Stoupa. This route not only enriches the travel experience with cultural insights and natural beauty but also connects visitors to the heart and soul of this enchanting region.

Stoupa presents a fascinating case of historical development shaped by conflict and gender dynamics. Historically, the threat of attacks by Turks and pirates made coastal living perilous, leading to sparse settlement near the sea until the post-Greek War of Independence era. It was only after this period that it became safer to inhabit these areas. During the land divisions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a gendered distribution of property occurred. Men selected the hillside lands, which were abundant with olive groves, leaving women with what was then considered less desirable coastal plots. This historical allocation of land has had an unexpected modern outcome: many of the thriving tavernas and bars along the Stoupa seafront are now owned by women, turning what was once deemed less valuable into prosperous business ventures. This twist of fate highlights not only the resilience and entrepreneurial spirit of these women but also the changing perceptions of land value over time.

Agios Nikolaos

Agios Nikolaos, just 3km past Stoupa, offers a picturesque escape along the Greek coast, accessible both by a scenic drive and a beautiful cycle/walking path that hugs the seaside. This traditional fishing village, originally known as Selinitsa, holds deep historical roots, possibly named after the moon or the myth of Helen of Troy. Each morning, the village buzzes with activity as the local catch is freshly sold at the



harbour. Not far from the village lies Pantazi Beach, offering sandy shores between Agios Nikolaos and Agios Dimitrios. The cultural highlight of the village is the Mani Pulse Festival, celebrated annually on the first weekend in September. This vibrant festival

features exhibitions, music, dance, and a variety of activities that engage both children and adults, embodying the community spirit of Agios Nikolaos.

Agios Dimitrios

Agios Dimitrios, a quaint village nestled just 2km south of Agios Nikolaos, offers a rich tapestry of nature and mythology. Near its shores lies the small islet of Pefnos, famously home to a large, enigmatic egg. This islet holds a place in Greek mythology as the site where Zeus, transformed into a swan, appeared to Leda, the queen of Sparta. The area between Agios Dimitrios and Trachila also features the captivating Katafigio cave. This natural wonder stretches 834 meters in length and rises 12 metres high, adorned with stunning stalactites and stalagmites and complemented by a charming, naturally formed rock pool. This region, steeped in lore and natural beauty, offers a unique glimpse into both the mythical past and the breath taking landscapes of Greece.

Trachila

The journey from Agios Dimitrios to Trachila along the coastal road is an enchanting 6 km trip that culminates at a quaint, remote village steeped in history and scenic beauty. Trachila, with its dramatic past of resurrection post the bombardment by the Turkish-Egyptian fleet in 1826, offers a narrative as captivating as its landscapes. For the adventurous, a challenging coastal footpath leads from Trachila to Chotasia, and further on to a remote bakery—famed for its exceptional offerings, despite its isolation. This route, however, is not for everyone; it's a rigorous trek, unsuitable for casual attire like flip-flops. For those up to the challenge, the rewards are breath taking views and a slice of rural serenity that is hard to find elsewhere.

Trachila, with its idyllic beaches and vibrant turquoise waters, offers more than just scenic beauty. A unique local product to explore here is the sea salt, traditionally harvested by local women from the natural salt pans. Venturing from Trachila requires a journey back to Pantazi Beach before connecting with the main road leading to Cape Tainaron. This route not only reconnects you with major paths but also offers a picturesque drive through several charming villages including Pigi, Platsa, Nomitsi, Thalames, Platanos, and Langada. Each of these villages boasts distinctive characteristics, featuring traditional stone houses and historic Byzantine churches, enriching your travel experience with cultural depth and architectural heritage. This journey through the heart of the region is a perfect blend of natural beauty and cultural exploration.

Thalames

Thalames, a village steeped in history and charm, stands as a jewel among the traditional Greek settlements. Dating back to the era of Ancient Sparta, Thalames once hosted an oracle dedicated to Pasiphaë, a figure intertwined with Cretan and Spartan mythology. This village, with its quaint cobbled streets and meticulously preserved stone buildings, offers a vivid glimpse into the past, making it feel almost as if time has stood still. The local Folklore and Historical Museum adds to this ambiance, showcasing an array of tools, weapons, engravings, and documents that narrate the village's rich history. Notably, in 1316, the Byzantine emperors awarded Thalames to the renowned hagiographer (a writer who writes biographies of saints and venerated persons) Ioannis Koutifaris, whose influence led to the village being a centre for religious art and learning. The architectural heritage is further highlighted by the elegant double-arched fountain built in 1714, and the

Byzantine churches of Agios Vasilis and Profitis Ilias, along with the historic towers of Derezeas and Stavrianeas, all contribute to the enchantment that Thalames offers to both historians and visitors alike.

Diros Caves

The Diros Caves, nestled just south of Areopoli, offer a mesmerising peek into both natural and human history. The largest and most captivating of these, the Vlychada Cave, invites visitors on a gondola-like boat journey through its expansive water-filled passages. This cave, whose explored parts stretch over 14 kilometres, showcases a breath taking array of white stalactites and stalagmites that have been sculpting the cave's interior for hundreds of thousands of



years, dating back to when the sea level was significantly lower. Remarkably, at depths of up to 71 meters, explorers have discovered stalactites along with fossilized remains of hippos, panthers, and lions, pointing to a richly diverse ancient ecosystem. Additionally, human connections to the cave are evidenced by pottery fragments found at its natural entrance, suggesting early human activity. Further insights into the cave's historical significance are provided by the Diros Neolithic Museum, located on-site, which displays a range of anthropological artifacts from the Vlychada, Alepotrypa, and Katafygi caves, offering a unique window into the lives of its prehistoric inhabitants.