



zákynthos

walks, drives and nature notes



5 DRIVES

79 WALKS/GPS

ONLINE UPDATES

This is a sample from the
PDF edition of

Zákynthos

'the jewel of Greece'
Sixth edition



Gail Schofield
updated by Sunflower Books

This shorter sampler includes some of the introductory text, and an example car tour and walk. There is a total of 192 pages, plus a pull-out island map, in the full book.



SUNFLOWER BOOKS



Introduction

Zákynthos, with an unprecedented ratio of visitors to locals — nearly 150 to 1 — is the third largest of the Ionian Islands off the western coast of Greece. The Ionian Sea constitutes the southern part of the Adriatic, separating Greece and Italy. It has seven main islands, often called the 'Eptánissa' (literally 'Seven Islands') — Kérkyra (Corfu), Paxoí (Paxos), Lefkáda (Levkas), Itháki (Ithaca), Kefaloniá (or Kefalloniá/Cephaloniá), Zákynthos (also called Zante), and Kýthira — far to the south, off the coast of the Peloponnese.



There are also many smaller islands, many of them inhabited seasonally or not at all. The islands are mostly hilly (up to 500m/1650ft) or, in the case of Kefaloniá, Ithaca and Levkas, mountainous (over 1000m/3300ft). The land is covered with pine forests, *maquis* (dry shrubs) and fir forests, surrounded by cultivated olive, vine and cypress groves. Their coastlines are very indented and largely rocky, with small sandy/shingly coves tucked in amongst the cliffs.

Geography

Zákynthos (longitude 20° 52' E; latitude 37° 43' N; 406 sq km) is the second most southerly Ionian Island and the eleventh largest island in Greece. It is 9.5 nautical miles west of the Peloponnese, 8.5 nautical miles south of Kefaloniá and approximately 300 kilometres west of the Greek capital, Athens.

The island is approximately 40km long and 17km wide, with about 154 kilometres of coastline. Forty percent of the land is mountainous, primarily covered with Aleppo pine forests, while the rest is alluvial flood plains. The highest peak is Mount Vrachíonas at 756m. There are numerous beaches along the south and east coasts, while the north and west coasts are charac-



terized by precipitous cliffs. The population numbers approximately 41,000 inhabitants. The Prefecture of Zákynthos covers the whole island, and includes six municipalities (see opposite) comprising some 50 villages and settlements. The prefecture is responsible for economic development, tourism, administration, public health, labour and citizenship.

Climate and weather

This is one of the sunniest places in Greece, and its geographical location is responsible for its typical Mediterranean climate of mild winters and warm summers cooled by seasonal breezes called the *meltémia*. Due to the high level of rainfall in winter, Zákynthos is considerably greener than many other Greek islands and has a climate favourable for the cultivation of olives, citrus fruits and vines. Leaving aside climate change, the island's temperature varies from an average of 11°C to 26°C — with extremes of 1°C in January

	Monthly averages			
	tempera- tures air	days of sun	rain- fall (mm)	
	sea*			
Jan.	11°C	13°C	18	158
Feb.	12°C	13°C	20	104
Mar.	13°C	14°C	25	90
Apr.	15°C	16°C	29	49
May	19°C	19°C	31	21
Jun.	23°C	23°C	30	7
Jul.	25°C	25°C	31	6
Aug.	26°C	26°C	30	10
Sep.	24°C	24°C	28	35
Oct.	20°C	22°C	23	136
Nov.	16°C	19°C	20	159
Dec.	13°C	15°C	18	195

*near the shore

to 38°C in July. There are, on average, 105 dry days, with from about 810-970mm rainfall annually.

The tourist resorts are generally 'open for business' from May until mid-October, when the charter flights operate. Expect visitor facilities to be closed outside these months (and at minimal operation in May and October). April, May, September and October are the best months to visit; July and August can be very hot ... and crowded.

There's more detailed information for walkers (and independent travellers) and on page 83.

Geology

Zákynthos lies between the Hellenic Trench, the deepest marine valley in the Mediterranean, and the Hellenides mountain range, covering most of mainland Greece. Both were created as a result of the sideways and downward movement of the African tectonic plate under that of the Eurasian. The Ionian Islands were formed as a result of the convergence and underthrusting of two geotectonic zones from the Hellenides — the pre-Apulian Zone and the Ionian Zone. The pre-Apulian Zone consists of pelagic and detrital limestones formed from marine sediment deposition



10 Zákynthos

during the Cretaceous and Eocene, while the Ionian Zone is made up of Miocene evaporates and gypsum, Pliocene sea clays and Pleistocene sandstone conglomerates. The Quaternary alluvial landscapes and sedimentary substrates formed as a result of intense salt and compressional tectonics and uplift of evaporates and carbonates.

The island is still seismically active, as indicated by the presence of sulphur and bitumen springs, with many epicentres along the Hellenic Trench to the west of the island and the sea canyon system to the east.

Economy

On Zákynthos 40% of the land is farmed, 35% is grazed and 18% is forested. Of the cultivated land, 42% is covered in olive groves and 18% in vineyards.

Agriculturally, Zákynthos is a productive island and is famous for its olives and wine — in particular the semi-dry *masteládo* wine. Other produce includes grapes, raisins, citrus fruits, almonds, wheat, maize, fodder, pulses, melon, potatoes, cabbages, cauliflowers, onions, and tomatoes. Keep an eye out for the 'Zákynthos melon', the 'Zákynthos water onion', round courgettes, local olives and the red *Avgoustiáitis* grapes.

Livestock is kept on the island primarily for domestic needs rather than for commercial exploitation— sheep, goats, pigs, cattle, rabbits and chickens. Dairy products include milk, meat and hard cheeses; honey is collected from the local beehives.

There is also a domestic **fishing industry**. The boats are generally small, and their owners are

careful about their fishing methods, hence the fish stock is not subject to intensive exploitation.

The island also has a major **limestone quarrying** industry, as you will see from the scars on many of the mountains. However, the **tourism industry** is the main source of income on the island, making up to 97% of the island's GDP. From 232,520 in 1994 it is estimated that there are now at least 800,000 to 1,000,000 visitors per year, due not only to an increase in international and charter flights, but more hotel beds, and the encouragement of mass tourism by 'influencers'.

Tourism was introduced by the Greek government in the 1970s as a way of stemming emigration from island and rural communities due to increasing economic difficulties. The government did not anticipate the potential success of this industry, which has given rise to overtourism, with increasing environmental conflicts and damage similar to that experienced by other touristic 'hotspots'.

Ecology

Since 2000 the EU has made a dedicated effort to protect the wild flora and fauna throughout the member states, hence the formation of the **Natura 2000 habitats network**.

Greece has some of the most varied and unique ecosystems in Europe, making conservation of its habitat and species biodiversity essential.

Zákynthos has three Natura 2000 Specially Protected Areas:

GR2210001: extending along the west coast to the northern tip of the island;



View over Sekánia Beach, an area only open to researchers with a park permit

GR2210002: within Laganás Bay in the National Marine Park of Zákynthos;

GR2210003: at the Strophádes Islands, 22 nautical miles south of Zákynthos (but within the boundaries of the National Marine Park).

Zákynthos is covered in a combination of settlements, farmland and typically Mediterranean semi-natural habitats.

The vegetation is xerophytic, meaning that it has developed a tolerance to water shortages in the hot, dry summer months. Mediterranean vegetation is divided into five altitude-based 'life zones', of which Zákynthos encompasses two — the 'thermo-Mediterranean' and 'meso-Mediterranean', with Mount Vrachíonas as the highest peak at 756m/2480ft and Mount Skopós in the National Marine Park at 491m/1610ft.

The terrestrial habitats of Zákynthos include

- sandy and stony beaches
- coastal sand dune systems

with interesting plant species (particularly those at Laganás, Banána Beach, Alikés)

- a natural wetland with reeds and rushes (Lake Kerí)
- a man-made salt flat (Alikés)
- a drained lake (near Laganás)
- vast flood plain (extending up to Alikés)
- permanent and seasonal flowing rivers
- cliffs and caves with rare and endemic chasmophytic plants (especially on the west coast)
- broadleaved evergreen oak and coniferous pine and cypress forests
- *mattoral* (*maquis* of wild olive and carob, *garrigues* of rosemary, rock roses, heather and broom and *phryganas* of thorny burnet and thyme)
- human settlements
- viticulture and agricultural land (orchards, olive groves, hay meadows, vegetables and wheat fields) which, when managed organically, encourage an incredible wealth of annual flowering species.



The island's farmlands, especially when organically maintained, sustain a wealth of flora.



Wildlife and plant life

Within the National Marine Park of Zákynthos, a total of 1228 species (approximately 800 flora and 400 fauna) have been recorded. Of these species, 124 currently receive international protection status (89 species of reptiles, amphibians, mammals and birds; 35 plants).

Across the entire island land-mass, there are at least 500 more species of flora and maybe a few unidentified mammals, reptiles and amphibians.

The number of terrestrial, marine and flying invertebrates and marine vertebrates found on and around the island is at present unknown.

Of prime importance to the

island is the conservation of the most important loggerhead sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*) nesting beaches in the Mediterranean (concentrated in Laganás Bay), a population of resident Mediterranean monk seals (*Monachus monachus*) and over 200 species of resident and migratory birds. Furthermore, by protecting the National Park ecosystems, other threatened wildlife and plants also receive protection.

Threats

As with many other protected areas, the NMPZ and wider area of Zákynthos is subject to a number of economic pressures and human conflicts. The most obvious of these is mass tourism. In addition to the conflicts encountered when protecting sea turtles in the marine area and on the nesting beaches, other pressures include:

- uncontrolled development
- illegal dumping of rubbish and sewage
- arson
- agricultural encroachment into important habitats
- off-road vehicle use on beach, dune and scrub habitats
- contamination of water by chemicals from agriculture and olive processing
- illegal bird-hunting during the migratory seasons.

European Law, under the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, protects Natura 2000 habitats, and any threat to these habitats must therefore be taken very seriously.

Car tour 1: THE SOUTH

Zákynthos town • Argássi • Vassilikós • Cape Ágios Nikólaos to Pórtο Róma • Cape Géarakas area • Kalamáki • Laganás • Ágios Sóstis • Lithakiá • Lake Kerí and Marathoníssi Islet

This tour takes in Laganás Bay and the area's golden sandy beaches and dunes covered with aromatic sea daffodils. You'll enjoy stunning sea views from both the hilly Vassilikós peninsula and, later, the precipitous limestone cliffs of the mountainous Kerí peninsula.

Argássi to the Ksirocástello area

This is *the* tourist centre on the Vassilikós peninsula, full of package-holiday hotels, bars and supermarkets, but lacking in character. Attracts the young set, with plenty of nightlife.

Buses: up to 8 a day to/from Zákynthos town.

Taxis: rank on the main road 200m east of the bridge.

Tourist train to Solomós Square in Zákynthos town.

Parking: free parking near the church of Ágios Státhi.

Places of interest

Panagía Skopiótissa: This church and monastery is located near the top of **Mount Skopós** (only accessible by 4WD or on foot; see Walk 5, pages 104-107). The original buildings rose in the 1400s over the ruins of an ancient temple dedicated to the goddess Artemis; the monastery, now in ruins, was fortified by the Venetians as a military outpost. The whole area has been renovated, with pleasant walkways and seating; one can really get a feel for the past.

The interior of the church holds frescoes, marble carvings, 17th-century murals and an unusual stone-carved altar screen. A twin-headed eagle, the symbol of the Byzantine Empire, is depicted on the floor. But what attracts

pilgrims is the famous silver icon of the Virgin Mary holding Jesus, brought to the island from Istanbul when the Byzantine Empire fell. The church is the only one on Zákynthos with a central Byzantine-style octagonal dome, more common to the Aegean.

Ágios Nikólaos Megalomáti: On the hillside below Panagía Skopiótissa, this post-Byzantine church was built over the remains of a sacrificial temple of justice. Sections of the mosaic flooring and some of the hanging arches of the southern and central walls still remain. Some of the 12th/13th-century décor is now on display in the Post-Byzantine Museum in Zákynthos town. Access as for Skopiótissa.

Panagía Evangelístria: This monastery-fort, built by the Venetians on **Peloúso Islet** (see pages 94-95), was abandoned after the 1893 earthquake, after which it was looted and its irreplaceable library lost. Since the 1953 earthquake only a couple of walls remain standing. There is a good view to the ruins on Walk 2. It can only be seen up close by boat but, as it is in the Marine Area Protection Zone B, mooring is prohibited.

Venetian ruins: The remains of the churches of St. Constantine and St. Spirídon are literally sinking into the sea off Argássi

Suggested car touring route

60km/37mi

Walks en route: 1-12

First explore the **Vassilikós peninsula** between Argássi and Gérakas. After **Ksirocástello**, make a first swim-stop to admire the fossil-filled rocks at the southern end of **Pórtο Zórrο Beach**, and be sure to take in the dune and forest system of **Banána Beach**. Visit the eponymous chapel at **Cape Ágios Nikólaos**. Take a walk along the rocky coastline of **Pórtο Róma** and visit the sea turtle nesting beach of **Gérakas** (16km), with its stunning Pliocene-Pleistocene rock formations and Mediterranean Marine Life Centre (also called the Turtle Centre).

Then return to **Argássi** (28km) and, at the local church (Ágios Státhis), turn left and drive into the hills to see the British-built aqueduct of **Vrysákia** (sign-posted 'Water Bridge of Argassi'). Then continue along the road leading into the hills where you can take in views of Laganás Bay

and drive down to **Kalamáki** (36km). Stop for a swim along the 3km protected nesting beach and admire the dune system, covered in sea daffodils in summer.

At **Laganás**, just north of the Go Karts, follow signs up to the ruins of the **Sarakína Mansion**, then drive down to the natural harbour at **Ágios Sóstis** (43km). Continue to **Pórtο Koúkla** and through the ancient olive groves. Turn left when you return to the main road for **Kerí** (48km) and, after crossing the **Ávyssos Gorge** (created by the earthquake of 1633), visit **Lake Kerí** (54km), to see the natural bitumen springs. If you have time, take a boat trip to the Kerí sea caves and natural arches or over to **Marathoníssi Islet**. Visit **Marathiá Beach** (56km) for a swim — or a 30 minute walk along the peninsula. End the day at **Kerí** (60km), on the southernmost tip of the island — enjoying the sunset from the lighthouse, looking at the ancient tombs, the dancing 'Mizíthres' rocks and the limestone cliffs.



Beach. In the sea near the old harbour in the town centre are the ruins of a watchtower.

'Venetian' bridge: There is also a well-preserved three-arched bridge by Argássi harbour. It once carried the old main road, but now stands in the sea, due to coastal erosion. Although it is dated 1885, it is usually referred to as the 'Venetian' bridge and is similar to the Venetian bridge at Alikés, thus the date may refer to its refurbishment.

Vrysákia Aqueduct: This 15m-high bridge on the road above Ágios Státhis was built during British rule to supply Zákynthos town with water. Legend has it that Theódoros Kolokotrónis, founder of the Hetaeria, used to ride his horse over the bridge.

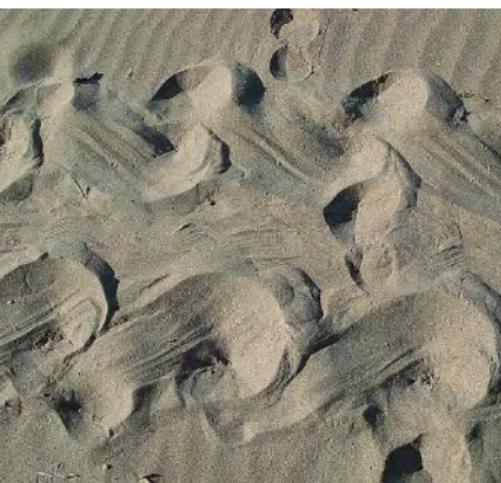
Beaches

Argássi Beach: a narrow, dark strip of sand runs the length of the resort; there's hardly room to put down a beach towel in summer. All facilities.

Kamínia Beach: a golden-sand beach backed by a lawn area, reached from Ksirocástello by a narrow winding road. Ample facilities, including snack bar. Good for children.

Dáphne Beach (also called Mélá Beach): a sand-and-pebble beach within the NMPZ, visited

Loggerhead tracks



on Walk 2 and an option on Walk 3. The same rules apply as at Gérakas, and there is the same danger from rockfalls if you sit below the cliffs. This is a fine snorkelling beach, fronted by reefs rich in sea life. There is an unofficial naturist section at the far eastern end of the beach. Facilities, but the restaurants/bars are only operational during daylight hours.

Sekánia Beach: guarded beach in the core area of the National Marine Park; access allowed only for park-permitted research. This is the most densely-nested sea turtle beach in the Mediterranean (about 700 nests per year). You would have a good view of the beach, shown on page 11, from Walk 3. No facilities.

Pórtó Zórro/La Mare Beach: a small sandy cove with picturesque rocky outcrops — excellent for snorkelling. The shore slopes gently, so it's good for children. Ample facilities.

Peloúso Islet: There are two small, pebbly beaches on the islet, near the monastery ruins.

Accommodation

Sea View Village: 4-star hotel resort in the hills above Ksirocástello. 37 rooms of different sizes, studios and suites, all with balconies and pool or sea views. Some accommodation built in maisonette style. Bathroom with robes/hair dryer, safes, air-conditioning, satellite TV, WIFI, daily maid service, kitchenettes. Outdoor jacuzzi, pool with children's area, restaurant, bar/snack bar open all day, room service, mini-market. €€€
Open 1st May-31st Oct.
www.seaviewvillage.gr

Zante Fiore Studios: Just off the main road at Kamínia Beach. 12 studios and 2 apartments, all with sea views. Nearby beach bar and restaurant (at Kamínia Beach). €€; Open all year. www.zantefiorestudios.gr.

Food and drink

Portokáli: on the main road in Argássi village. This restaurant/bar has an interesting selection of nouvelle cuisine dishes; good décor both indoors and out on the veranda. A favourite. Open for dinner and drinks all year; €€.

Taverna Agnádi: on the main road from Argássi to Vassilikós. Clifftop setting with view to the Peloponnese. Grills and oven roasts, meat and fish. Family-run. Unfortunately, service is sometimes slow. Open for lunch and dinner in season; €€.

Peppermint Fresh Kitchen: on the road into the hills opposite Ágios Státhis church. Garden setting with banana trees and oleanders, quiet; white tablecloths! Zakynthian dishes and pastas, meze, tapas, vegetarian and gluten-free options. Open for lunch and dinner all year; €€.

Ristorante Papillon: in the heart of Argássi, with a large terrace and a wide range of Italian, Greek and 'international' dishes, including pizzas, burgers; large selection of starters; vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free. Very attentive service. Only open for dinner; €€.

Vassilikós village area

This long village, set amid woods and olive groves, has some of the island's finest sandy beaches.

Buses: up to 4 a day to/from Zákynthos town (stop on the main road in the lower village).

Taxis: rank at the turn-off to Ágios Nikólaos.

Place of interest

Bridges: The arched bridges of the Vassilikós area were built during British rule and still form an essential part of the island road network.

Beaches

Banána Beach: several kilometres long, this beach is one of the island favourites. The eastern part has deep white sand (where some turtles nest); the western part (called **Ionian Beach**) has more pebbly sections, with jetties to access the water. Facilities along most of the beach, with the greatest concentration behind the Ionian Beach section.

Accommodation

Logothétis Farm Houses: at the southern exit from Vassilikós, an organic farm where you can stay in traditionally built houses — very romantic. The smallest holds two people, the largest seven. Air-conditioning, WIFI, kitchens, some with washing machines. Each property has a veranda with sun-loungers. Free bikes or you can book horse riding. In their shop they sell organic olives, honey, oil, wine, marmelade and cheese. Prices according to size and season; see website: www.logothetisfarm.gr.

Armonia Villas: 3 drystone hillside villas in traditional style (including a windmill and tower), on a road inland from Vassilikós village church. Each is set in its own garden, with an east-facing veranda for the sea

and the sunrise. Fresh vegetables and eggs, local honey and wines available from the owners' farm. Open all year. €€€. www.armonia-villas.com

Food and drink

Kostas Brothers Taverna: Set in a stone building in Vassilikós village, in a beautifully landscaped garden. A wide range of local dishes, both fish and meat. Home-made wines — and super bread (baked in the stone oven outside). Live music some evenings. One of my favourites; open for dinner Fri-Sun in Jun/Sep, every evening in Jul/Aug; €€.

Taverna Pórto Iónio: a lovely, old-fashioned place set above a stretch of Banána Beach, with seating indoors and out (nice walled terrace under tamarisks). The chicken dishes are especially good. Another favourite; open for lunch and dinner in summer; €€.

Cape Ágios Nikólaos to Pórto Róma

Buses: up to 4 a day to/from Zákynthos town to Ágios Nikólaos and on to Pórto Róma. In high season there is also a **shuttle bus** from Ágios Nikólaos to Kalamáki, Laganás and Argássi (departs 10.00, returns 17.00).

Taxis: rank at the turn-off to Ágios Nikólaos from the main road.

Parking: large car park at the end of the narrow 1km-long road to Ágios Nikólaos Beach.

Places of interest

Ágios Nikólaos Chapel: Set on a rocky outcrop between Ágios Nikólaos Beach and Pláka Beach, this pretty tiled-roof chapel is an oasis in the busy resort.

Beaches

Ágios Nikólaos Beach: This sandy beach, on the south side of the eponymous cape, is the busiest on the eastern side of the peninsula. Plenty of facilities; excellent water sports; diving school. In high season it can get a bit boisterous, to say the least. Two beaches on the north side of the cape (Pláka and Golden Bay) are somewhat quieter.

Koúkis Beach: This is a small sandy section of Ágios Nikólaos Beach, also with ample facilities.

Pláka Beach: A small sandy cove backed by a lawn area, just north of the cape; facilities include a taverna.

Golden Bay Beach: A bit west of Pláka, also sandy, and set within a hotel complex. Ample facilities.

Mavrátσis Beach: a sandy beach just south of Ágios Nikólaos, surrounded by steep rocks. Mostly used by guests from the surrounding luxury hotel complex. Facilities include a taverna.

Pórto Róma Beach: An enchanting small sand-and-shingle cove with a tiny harbour, south of Ágios Nikólaos. Facilities include a taverna.

Accommodation

Dáphnes Villas and Apartments: Set in a large olive grove just above Pórto Róma Beach. Lovely garden, buildings designed in the traditional Zakynthian country style with exposed beams, large private verandas and tiled roofs. Accommodation ranges from one-room apartments sleeping two people to two-bedroom villas for 6-7 people. Air-conditioning; shared barbecue. €€. Open mid-May till mid-Oct. www.daphnes-zakynthos.com.

Lithies Houses: Situated off the road between Ano and Kato Vassilikós, the six houses (some in traditional stone) have sea views and are set in an organic farm run by the Gianoylis family. Their olive groves, vineyards and vegetables are freely available to guests. All houses with air-conditioning. Open all year. A favourite; €€. www.lithieshouses.gr.

Food and drink

Lithies Taverna, adjacent to Lithies Houses and run by the same family. Outdoor patio. Grills and oven roasts, meat and fish. Produce from their organic farm. Open for lunch and dinner in summer; €.

De Camillo Trattoria Pizzeria: on the main road in Ano Vassilikós, close to the turn-off for Mavrásis Beach. Authentic Italian restaurant run by an Italian couple; in an old building, with a welcoming atmosphere. The menu includes delicious pizzas with plenty of vegetarian options. Open daily for lunch and dinner from May to Oct.; €€.

Nikos Beach Bar Restaurant: , Yianna's home-made oven specialities and food from the grill; fish and meat. Good collection of starters (the cheese patties are especially tasty), super-fresh salads and sweets. Wonderful ambiance and setting, great view of the sea. Open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Signedposted on the left off Porto Roma road just above the beach. €€-€€€.

Cape Gérakas area

Access: There are no buses or taxis; the nearest place to alight

from a bus and find a taxi is the junction for Gérakas and Pórtο Róma on the main road (taxis can also be ordered from the Gérakas bars and tavernas).

Parking: both free and paid parking on privately owned land.

Places of interest

Mediterranean Marine Life

Centre: Just above Gérakas Beach (starting point for Walks 1 and 2), this centre was established by the Vardakastánis family to provide information about the island's various conservation and wildlife organisations through photographic and written displays. Run by volunteers and usually open from April to early Oct. from 09.00-20.00. Free admission. www.zanteturtlecenter.com.

A little closer to the beach is an **National Park information**

kiosk, where they make a note of how many turtle eggs have been laid and on which beaches.

Kanónia: This area contains the concrete remains of Nazi cannon bunkers (maybe even a few unexploded bombs...). Only accessible on foot (Walk 1).

Beach

Gérakas Beach: a beautiful arc of golden sandy beach with a pebbly section to the west. This is a protected loggerhead sea turtle nesting beach (about 80 nests), with 24-hour guards, thus there are no water sports. Facilities include sunshades and sunloungers, but no taverna on the beach itself (bars and tavernas on the access road). You must keep within 3-5m/yards of the sea and, in July and August, you are requested to stay no longer than two hours (to relieve pressure on the nesting beach). The cliffs

running the whole length of the beach are subject to rockfalls, so don't sit below them. Unofficial naturist section at the far western side of the beach.

Accommodation

Logothétis Farm Houses: on the road to Gérakas, 1km above the beach. Surrounded by olive groves and pine forests. See description on page 53.

Food and drink

Gérakas Taverna: just above the beach, a shady taverna with a wooden roof. As well as Greek classics, they offer Zakynthian rabbit *stifado*, chicken in red wine. Also tasty starters and salads. Children's play area. €€.

Taverna Nikos: a family-run restaurant on the road to Gérakas Beach, specialising in grilled meat dishes such as *souvláki*. One of my favourites; open for lunch and dinner in summer; €.

Taverna Galini: signposted just west of the junction of the Pórtο Róma/Cape Gérakas roads. Seating indoors and out; several terraces with wide-ranging views over the cape and to the Peloponnese (now marred by new buildings). Grills and oven roasts, fish and meat. Sometimes the service is a bit slow. Open for lunch and dinner in summer; €€.

Kalamáki

After Laganás itself, this resort straddling the main road is the main tourist centre in Laganás Bay, much quieter and more 'up-market' than Laganás.

Buses: up to 8 a day to / from Zákynthos town, up to 4 a day to / from Laganás; all buses stop at the central crossroads and at

other stops on the main road (blue signs).

Taxis: rank at the main crossroads near the bus stop.

Parking: easiest on the road to the beach.

Places of interest

Ágios Élipos: Stop to visit this small church on your way to Kalamáki from Argássi (see the map). Set on a hill, the little church rises above olive trees; the blue and white bell tower has two small bells and a cross on top. There is a fine view from here over Zákynthos town and the sea. Part of the original church still remains.

Beaches

Vrondónero Beach: a dark sand/pebble beach covered in seagrass, with amazing cliff geology (photograph below). Visited on Walk 6 (see pages 108-111). A few turtle nests each summer. No facilities; (unofficially) naturist.

Kalamáki/Crystal Beach: a protected golden sand beach with about 50-100 loggerhead turtle nests annually (24-hour guards). Visited on Walk 6. Not commercialised, but some facilities and very busy. Bar and taverna at the adjacent Crystal Beach Hotel.

Laganás/Kalamáki Beach: a protected (24-hour guards) golden sand beach at the quieter, eastern end of Laganás Bay, which extends from Hipsolíthos Rock (with World War II cannon bunker) as far as the Zante Park Resort fence. There are about 150 nests annually — and an additional 10-15 nests in front of the Zante Park Resort itself. The sea here is very shallow and warms up during the day. Some

facilities, but not along the entire 3km length. Walk 7 explores this area in depth (pages 112-115).

Laganás

The island's largest resort, attracting primarily the younger set. Hotels, bars and nightclubs cheek-by-jowl.

Buses: up to 15 a day to/from Zákynthos town, up to 4 a day to/from Kalamáki, and once a day to Vassilikós, Pórto Róma and Ágios Nikólaos. Bus stops on the main roads have blue signs.

Taxis: ranks opposite the Hotel Majestic and at the beach.

Parking: is a big problem, as all the places near the beach are full up from early morning, so you are likely to park quite far away.

Places of interest

Sarakína Mansion: Signposted from Laganás, this estate, which belonged to the Loúntzi family, once controlled all the land as far as the neighbouring hills. The baroque-style family residence and servants' quarters were ruined in the 1953 earthquake. (See also 'Culture', pages 118-119).

Vrondónero Beach (Walk 6)

Beaches

Laganás Beach: a hard-packed, golden sand beach full of sunburned tourists packed in like sardines. It's a good place to go on a turtle-spotting trip, otherwise there is nothing of interest. Ample facilities (plenty of bars and tavernas, but no motorised water sports). A coastal path runs from here to Ágios Sóstis Port and beach (see Walk 8).

Ágios Sóstis

A small resort not far from Laganás, with none of the hustle and bustle of the latter. Natural harbour with colourful fishing port atmosphere. For an overview of the beaches, see the walk sketch on page 117 (Walk 8).

Beaches

Ágios Sóstis Port Beach: a hard-sand beach next to the harbour, with good snorkelling. Facilities available in nearby bars and restaurants.

Cameo Islet: small stony beach in a little cove, good for snorkelling. The islet broke away from the mainland in the 1633 earthquake;



60 Zákynthos

tarring ships — as cited by Herodotus back in the 5th century BC. During the 1880s, tar was commercially exported and traded as a shipbuilding product. By the 1900s, however, the cost of export exceeded the profit, and this resource became limited to local use. See Walk 9, page 120-123.

Beaches

Límni Kerioú (Lake Kerí) Beach: a long, narrow yellow sand-and-pebble beach backed by the lake/marsh and an additional small strip of yellow sandy beach by the harbour. Facilities. Walk 9.

Marathiá Beach: a white-pebble beach with beautiful deep (cold) blue waters — a great place for snorkelling. There are natural bitumen and sulphur sea springs along this peninsula. Facilities nearby. Walk 10, pages 124-127.

Point Marathiá: Only accessible in 4WD, by boat, or on foot (see Walk 10, pages 124-127). The 'beach' is actually a slab of rock from which you can swim, near one of the Marathiá arches and sea cave. There are sulphur springs here. No facilities.

Marathoníssi Islet: There are three beaches on the islet. The white sandy beach on the north side is a protected sea turtle nesting beach (Maritime Zone B), and it is illegal to beach or moor a boat here. The stony beaches on the west (with cave) and north coasts are in Maritime Zone C, and mooring/beaching of boats is allowed. No facilities.

Accommodation

Villas Cavo Marathiá: Located in 1.5 ha of land, right on the sea, overlooking Marathoníssi. Villas with studios and apartments for 2-5 people. German-Greek

ownership. Satellite TV, WIFI, large well-equipped kitchenettes, air-conditioning, fitness room, 'dream path' with lovely viewpoints, path down to small beach with good snorkelling. Welcome pack of shopping available. Highly recommended; €€. Open May-Oct. www.villas-cavo-marathia.com.

Argastares Villas: 100m up the road from Marathiá Beach, these stone houses in traditional style have fine views of Laganás Bay, Marathoníssi Islet and the sunrise. Each house with two bedrooms, large sitting room with open fireplace. Barbecue. Nearest facilities are at Lake Kerí, 1km away. Open all year; €€. www.argastares-villas-marathias.hotelsinzakynthos.com.

Athenea Villas: also on the road to Marathiá Beach. Eight traditional drystone villas with wonderful views of Marathoníssi and Laganás Bay. Each villa is suitable for 4-6 people; some villas with private pool. Large bathrooms with hairdryer; kitchen or kitchenette; large balconies; air-conditioning (at extra charge). Maid service three times a week. Shared barbecue/outdoor oven. Open May to Oct; €€. www.atheneavillas.com.

Dolphins Studios: in the heart of Lake Kerí village, 150m from the harbour and beach, overlooking the lake (an ideal location for watchers of migratory birds in Apr, May and Sep). 7 studios and 5 apartments. Kitchenettes with fridge and oven. BBQ, TV, parking available. Open all year; €. No website; just key in Dolphins Studios.

Right: view from Cape Marathiá (Walk 10, Alternative route A)

Food and drink

Taverna Botsalo: in Marathiá village, with covered outdoor veranda and spectacular view to Marathoníssi and Laganás Bay. The whole building is decorated with inset stones and shells. The meat and fish dishes are wide-ranging — and the setting *is fantastic*. Open for lunch and dinner in summer; €€.

Lighthouse Taverna: overlooking sheer chalk cliffs and the deep blue sea by Kerí Lighthouse. You can walk up to the lighthouse —

the most popular place to watch the sun set, but in July and August it's *very* crowded. Grills and oven roasts, meat and fish. Open for lunch, dinner and coffees in summer; €€.

The Windmill: in a replica windmill on the main road to Kerí (past Lithakiá and before Lake Kerí, just after the Ávyssos Gorge), with a veranda overlooking Laganás Bay and Lake Kerí. Grills and oven roasts, meat and fish. Open for lunch, dinner and coffee in summer; €.



Walk 1: Gérakas headland trail (Municipality of Zakynthíon)

Distance/time: about 4km/2.5mi; about 2h.

Grade: moderate; ascent of about 100m/330ft between points (1-6) and corresponding *eroded* descent between points (6-9).

Equipment: see pages 85-86.

Travel: The walk is about a 30-minute drive (16km/10mi) out of Zákynthos town. Take the road via Argássi and Vassilikós village. At the crossroads for Pórtο Róma continue straight on for Gérakas. Park along the road or opposite the Mediterranean Marine Life Centre ($37^{\circ} 42.539'N$, $20^{\circ} 59.169'E$).

Suggested time of year: any, but between June and August only attempt as an early morning (after the protected beach opens at 07.00) or late evening walk (before the beach closes at 19.00).

Protection status: National Marine Park: F1 Protected Natural Landscape of Mount Skopós and Vassilikós; P2 Nature

Protection Site of Gérakas. Natura 2000 Specially Protected Area: Site code GR2210002.

Alternative routes

- 1) At the first T-junction (3), turn left; follow the track under 200 m to a viewpoint over Gérakas.
- 2) About 20 m after turning right at the first T-junction (3), turn left on a path. Follow this up the hill for 200 m, then head west for 30 m on an overgrown path. Once on the ridge, turn left for 50 m to the cannon bunker.
- 3) At the right of the well (4), turn left (ducking under a fence) on a small path to explore a cypress and stone pine woodland.

Additional suggestions: The sandy sea turtle nesting beach of Gérakas is worth a visit. Remember to sit within 3-5 metres of the sea to avoid disturbing the incubating nests under the sand. You can sunbathe, cover yourself in clay, or swim and explore the submerged reefs full of sea life.

Walking notes

From the **parking area/NMPZ guard station**, follow the tarmac road 50 m, to the top of **Gérakas Beach**, and turn right on a motorable track (1). This heads through bushy *garrigue* habitats bordering cultivated land and after about 400 m leads past an amazing

view (2) to a cluster of weathered sea clay pinnacles. Continue a further 500 m, up to a T-junction (3), where you can explore the two **cannon bunkers** in the area to enjoy panoramic views of the Peloponnese, open ocean or Laganás.

The white and red cliffs at Gérakas





From here turn right along a cobbled track, after 250 m passing an old **well** (4) on the left. Some 320 m past the well, turn right on the tarmac road (5) and then, after a further 200 m, turn right again at the **crossroads** (6). Now follow this road 1.1 km back down to (1).

GEOLOGY

The white and red Ionian Zone sea cliffs of Gérakas were created as a result of tectonic processes and worldwide sea level changes. During the Pleistocene, about six million years ago, Gérakas was part of an open marine, relatively deep sea clay basin, on top of which a sedimentary cover of calcareous sandstone strata was laid during the subsequent Pliocene. Increasing tectonic

Then walk down the wooden walkway to **Gérakas Beach** (7) and turn right. Walk about 300 m along the shore, to the point from where you can divert right (8) to have a closer look at the **sea clay pinnacles** (9).

After exploring this area, retrace your steps back to (1) or your car.

instability during the Holocene caused rotation, repeated uplift, and erosion activity — leading to the formation of the terraces that you see today.

HABITATS

Scattered stone pine trees tower above the typical Mediterranean *maquis* and bushy *garrigue* habitat bordering the track and paths. The area of 'Kanónia' is primarily a *garrigue* habitat with

many flowering annuals in spring. The coastal cliffs are comprised of a degraded olive-carob (*Olea-Ceratonia*) habitat; look out for the striking carob bean pods. Gérakas forest is a unique habitat on the island for its combination of cypress and stone pine trees.

PLANTS

Spring

Kanónia is an amazing place to visit between March and May, when it is full of flowering plants, including several orchids such as bee, bumblebee, early spider, yellow ophrys, eastern yellow ophrys, sawfly, bug and tongue orchids. The tongue orchids can be found flowering under bushes lining the track in early May. There are also Barbary nuts, Spanish and black widow irises. Rock roses dominate the



From top to bottom, left to right:
weathered sea clay pinnacles; hillside cypress and stone pine forest backing Gérakas Cove; heather; stone pine cones; early spider



landscape until early June, producing pink and white flowers, with each flower lasting for just one day.

Summer

Only a few species flower in the dry summer heat, with thistles and rock roses being prevalent in early summer. Thyme flowers throughout the region in August, while sea lavender can be found flowering among the clay pinnacles.

Autumn

In September the towering sea squill and mullein are in flower. October is full of the heady scent of heather (pink) and common smilax blooms (yellow-white), contrasting with the berries of the lentisc (red), myrtle (blue) and wild strawberry (red) trees. The discoid fruit of the wild pear tree is also ripe at this time.

Winter

From mid-October onwards, cyclamen flower under bushes and throughout the Gérakas forest. Other flowering plants include *Romulea*, field marigolds and chamomile. All sorts of mosses, lichen and fungi also thrive in the forest. During this period you can collect the falling stone pine cones to extract the edible pine nuts.

CULTURE

Kanónia derives its name from the Nazi occupation during the Second World War. Several cannon bunkers were built in these hills, which could fire cannons up to a distance of 20 miles. The cobbled track running along the base of Gérakas forest was built during the Second World War to access the cannons

and German living quarters. The roadside well at point (4), built in the 1930s, was once a flowing watercourse which ran down to Gérakas and was an essential part of local living, providing water for drinking and cleaning.

AGRICULTURE

This region has been subject to frequent burning to clear land for crops and the cultivation of olive trees. Even Gérakas forest is not natural — the cypresses and stone pines are believed to have been planted in the 16th century during the Venetian occupation of the island as a source of resin and building materials. The region would have been previously forested by Aleppo pines, similar to those found in the western region of the island.

WILDLIFE

Invertebrates

Kanónia is a haven for invertebrate species, due to the regularity at which the region is burnt, which in turn creates a host of additional habitat niches for occupation. Praying mantis are regularly sighted here, in addition to rose chafer and cockchafer beetles and a variety of butterflies and moths.

Reptiles and amphibians

During the morning and early evening it is easy to spot lizards, especially Balkan lizards (green and brown). Four-lined snakes are very common to this region, and in spring Hermann's tortoises can be observed in the grassy knolls below the road adjoining Gérakas forest. Green marsh frogs can be found in damp areas.

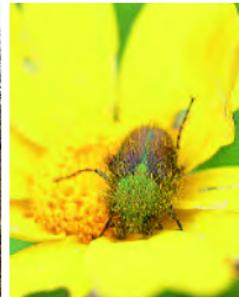
Birds

The contrasting habitats of the open scrub and closed forest canopy mean that a huge range of birds can be sighted — including golden orioles, turtle doves, rollers and blackbirds, as well as a range of warblers, finches and swifts. Raptors that frequent the area include kestrels and buzzards. Owls are very common to this region, especially barn, tawny and scops owls (the last easily recognised by its 'toot'-like call).

Mammals

Rabbits, hares, rats and mice are the most common mammals you are likely to see evidence of between Gérakas forest and the pinnacles. The eastern hedgehog (white belly) is also a resident, as are sand martens. Pipistrelle and myotis bats may be encountered.

From top to bottom, left to right: the old well at point (4); wild pear tree in a ploughed field; cockchafer beetle; Hermann's tortoise; whinchat



Zákynthos

Sixth edition

This **complete guide** introduces an island many tourists never see — a paradise for anyone passionate about wildlife, plants, geology and culture. The author, a conservation biologist working with the National Marine Park, has devised a series of **mostly easy walks** to give you a closer understanding of the wealth of natural life to be seen — from the famous protected loggerhead turtles to the island's 50 different orchid species. But even if you're not a walker, the **car tours** will take you closer to the real Zákynthos.

- all the sights and practical information
- recommended hotels and restaurants, with price guides
- 22 main walks, plus variations (79 routes in all), illustrated with 3D drawings
- free downloadable GPS tracks for all the walks
- island culture, geology, habitats, flora, fauna, and land use covered in detail, with hundreds of photographs
- fold-out topo island map
- online update service

