

"Rough Guide to The Dodecanese and East Aegean Islands", June 2005

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workers maintain this huge, rambling complex, comprising three storeys of cells around a vast, plant-filled courtyard; the north wing, where Ignatios' cell is preserved as a shrine, is the oldest section. The eighteenth-century *katholikón*, with contemporary frescoes, an elaborately painted carved-wood ceiling and archways, is built in Asia Minor style and is traditionally off limits to women. A sacred spring flows from the church's south foundation wall; men can request a look at the church interior when they visit the ecclesiastical collection.

A former abbot established a museum (daily 9.30am-6pm, may close 3pm low season; €1.50) on two floors of the west wing. The ground-floor ecclesiastical collection is, alas, the only wing open as of writing, with the more interesting upstairs ethnographic gallery off limits indefinitely. Content yourself with an overflow of farm implements stashed in a corner storeroom below at the northwest corner of the compound, next to a chamber where giant *pithária* (urns) for grain and olive oil are embedded in the floor. Just west, through a gateway, the pilgrims' inn and an old-age home share space with peacocks and an aviary.

Crowds of Greeks at Limónos can get overwhelming in season; for a contrasting experience, stop in at the nearby monastery of Myrsiniotissis (8am-1pm & 3pm-sunset) just down the road, with its own access drive from the Kalloní-Mólyvos highway leading up a pine-fringed hillside site. There's nothing in particular to see - the *katholikón* was rebuilt in 1912 - just well-kept buildings and carefully tended gardens; the resident nuns do embroidery and distill rosewater.

Hill villages of the west

Beyond Limónos, the road heading west passes through FÍLIA, with its truncated minaret and pre-1923 mosque, where you can turn off for a broad, paved short cut to Skoutáros and the north of Lésvos. Most traffic continues through to the unusually neat village of SKALOHÓRI, with another battered minaret and houses stacked in tiers at the head of a valley facing the sea and the sunset. You can get up close to the water by following a dirt track from the north edge of the village about 3km to Kálo Limáni, meaning "Good Harbour", precisely that to the east side of an isthmus-hamlet; to the west, there's a somewhat exposed, limited sandy beach and a cult *taverna*-bar, *Tá Kokkina*, with a good menu of Greek music.

From Skalohóri you can alternatively head on to VATOÚSSA, the most landlocked but also the most beautiful of the western settlements. Its upper quarter - away from the through-road, with a few *kafenía* for refreshment - can offer a folk museum (no set hours) in the ancestral mansion of Grigorios Gogos, with exhibits ranging from old books and archival photos to ethnographic items.

From the edge of Vatoússa a paved, narrow road continues 7km to HÍDHIRA, remarkable mainly for its Methymneos Winery (daily July-Sept 9am-6pm, otherwise by appointment on ☎22530 51518; 🌐www.methymneos.gr). Lesvian wines were highly esteemed in antiquity, but the local *krassostífyo* grape succumbed to phylloxera between the world wars and was only revived by the Lambou family in 1985. Because of the altitude (300m) and sulphur-rich soil (you're in the caldera of Órdhymnos volcano), their velvety, high-alcohol, oak-aged red can be produced organically. Proprietor Ioannis Lambou gives a highly worthwhile twenty-minute tour of the state-of-the-art premises, in English.

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THE EAST AEGEAN ISLANDS

Western Lésvos