



# Hiking Northern Greece

**June 4-12, 2012**

**Plan your arrival in Ioannina, Greece for June 3**

**Plan your departure from Thessaloniki, Greece for June 13 or later**

Join us on this journey to discover the mountains of northern Greece! In the “hidden” region of Zagori you’ll discover a landscape filled with lovely mountain villages connected by a network of stone-tiled pathways and bridges. Here also you’ll find high country meadows ablaze with crocus and ringed by towering limestone peaks along with one of the deepest gorges in the world. Thrill to the spectacle of the monasteries of Meteora perched precariously atop towering sandstone pinnacles. You’ll also have an opportunity to climb to the summit of Mount Olympus, legendary home of the Greek gods and the highest point in Greece.

**Day 1:** Begin the day with a walk in Ioannina’s old town before traveling to visit the sanctuary of Dodona, the oldest Hellenic oracle, devoted to the god Zeus. The impressive amphitheater known as the Theatre of Pyrrhus dominates the site. Following the visit, continue into the Zagori region where stone-tiled paths and humpbacked bridges link isolated mountain villages filled unexpectedly with *archontikons* (“mansions”) built in the 19th century during the region’s heyday. Zagori (whose name comes from the Slavic words meaning “behind the mountain”) is one of the least densely populated regions of Greece and boasts a “showstopper” landscape whose centerpiece is the Vikos Gorge, the jewel of Greece’s Vikos-Aoos National Park and one of the deepest gorges in the world! This evening, enjoy a welcome dinner. You’ll spend the next three nights in a lovely traditional inn in Kipi village, one of the prettiest in the Zagori region.

**Day 2:** A short transfer by vehicle will bring you to Tsepolovo village where today's hike begins. Descend the trail from Tsepolovo to the Paliogefira stone bridge. Cross the bridge and continue through pine and beech woodlands to return to Kipi where you'll enjoy lunch. If you desire, an afternoon hiking option presents an opportunity to tackle the Koukouli Steps which will bring you to the peaceful village of the same name. Return to Kipi for the evening.

**Day 3:** Return by vehicle this morning to Tsepolovo village from where a trail leads to the Beloi viewpoint which offers an outstanding view over the Vikos Gorge. Continue to the village of Vradheto, the highest village in the Zagori region (4,400 feet above sea level). In the afternoon, descend the 17th century Vradheto Steps to the village of Kapésovo. The hike along the Vradheto Steps is one of the highlights of a visit to the Zagori region! Return to Kipi village for the evening.

**Day 4:** Today you'll have the chance to hike the full length of the Vikos Gorge! In the morning, travel by vehicle from Kipi to the village of Monodendri. From Monodendri, a trail drops steeply into the spectacular Vikos Gorge descending all the way to the Voidhomatis River. A well-graded footpath then parallels the river through woodlands and leads to the Voidhomatis Spring, a great place for a picnic lunch! After lunch, ascend to the stone village of Pápigo, your base for the next two nights.

**Day 5:** From the village of Mikro Pápigo, hike up to the Astráka Refuge in the Pindos Mountains at an elevation of 6,400 feet above sea level. The refuge is situated in a broad “col” between the peaks of Astraka, Lapatos and Gamila. Energetic hikers can continue higher into the mountains to reach high country pasturelands and the Dragon Lake (*Dhrakolimni*) nestled on the flanks of the Gamila massif. Retrace your steps to return to Pápigo for dinner and overnight.

**Day 6:** Depart Pápigó and the Zagori region bound for Meteora, well known for its monasteries built atop impressive sandstone rock pillars. (*Meteora* means "suspended in the air.") En route, pause at the village of Metsovo for lunch before continuing to the town of Kastraki set at the foot of the rock towers of Meteora. A short hike will lead you past the sight of the ruined Saint George Monastery (built in a cleft of a sheer rock face above Kastraki) and introduce you to the spectacular World Heritage landscape of Meteora!

**Day 7:** Enjoy a full day at Meteora! From Kastraki, follow old paths to the dramatically-situated Monastery of St. Barbara. Continue to the *Agia Triada* (Holy Trinity) Monastery which crowns a massive rock pinnacle. Descend by footpath to the lively bustle of the town of Kalambaka for lunch. In the afternoon continue your exploration of Meteora with a visit to the Grand Meteora or Varlaam Monasteries. Dine this evening in Kalambaka and overnight once again in quiet Kastraki.

**Day 8:** In the morning, travel by vehicle to Prionia (3,600 feet above sea level), site of a former 15th century monastery on the slopes of Mount Olympus. The climb of Mount Olympus begins from here. Ascend steadily through a forest of hardwoods that eventually gives way to Bosnian pine woodlands to reach the Spilio Agapitos Refuge at 7,200 feet. Enjoy a tasty meal—which may include *fasolatha* (bean soup), Greek salad, feta, olives—and settle in for a two-night stay.

**Day 9:** An early morning start will be required for those choosing to attempt the summit of Mount Olympus. The hike to the Mount Olympus summit is straightforward, but quite steep as you approach the summit ridge. Mount Olympus's summit ridge is crowned by three high points. You have a chance to reach two of these—the peaks of Skala and Skolio. The thrill of reaching the "home of the gods" at over 9,500 feet above sea level—not to mention the wide-ranging views—is compensation enough for the effort! After the hike to the summit return to the Spilio Agapitos refuge and continue the descent to Prionia trailhead. A short transfer by vehicle brings you to the town of Litochoro at the base of Mount Olympus where you'll celebrate the conclusion of your Greek hiking adventure at a farewell dinner. Overnight in Litochoro. Tomorrow, your breakfast and a morning transfer to Thessaloniki or Thessaloniki airport is provided.

## **Other Details about this Trip**

**Dates:** June 4-12, 2012

**Price:** \$3,695

**Single room for entire trip: \$350.** Please note that single rooms are not available on the evening of Day 8 at the Spilio Agapitos Refuge.

**Lodging:** 10 nights in hotels and inns. Note: Your hotel in Ioannina on the evening of June 3 is included. Accommodations on Day 8 at the Spilios Agapitos Refuge are in shared rooms with shared bathing facilities (WC). A cold water shower is sometimes available depending on the snow/water conditions.

**Meals:** 10 breakfasts, 9 lunches, 9 dinners included

**Trip Begins** at hotel in the northwestern Greek city of Ioannina on the morning of June 4. Convenient air connections are available to Ioannina from Athens on Olympic Air. Your hotel in Ioannina for the evening of June 3 is included in the trip price.

**Trip Ends** at a hotel in Litochoro on June 12, but a transfer to the Thessaloniki airport (1.5 hours distant) on the morning of June 13 is included in the trip price. Aegean Airlines flights connect Thessaloniki to Athens.