

HYDRA DESTINATION GUIDE



Introduction

This small island, just 12 miles long, is frozen in time with its traditional stone mansions, cobble- stone streets and secluded squares. Cars, mopeds and even bicycles are prohibited on the island. The only mode of transportation: around 500 donkeys.

Hydra was a flourishing naval and commercial center in the 18th and 19th centuries. The island's powerful fleet participated in crucial sea battles against the Turks during the 1821 War of Independence. Today it is dependent on tourism and fishing. It is astonishing to think that, with a population of less than 2000, five Greek prime ministers have come from Hydra.

Hydra Town

The main town surrounds the island's major harbor in the style of an amphitheater. The harbor is often filled with large and small yachts, traditional caicques (rowboats) and fishing boats.

There are many shops, cafes and tavernas along the port. If you walk along the waterfront you will come across monuments, churches, cannons, museums, old mansions, statues of famous heroes, the old gunpowder store and many more sites of interest.

Strict building laws protect the traditional architectural style and preserve Hydra's old-world charm. The whitewashed homes with brightly colored windows mix with the Venetian-style stone mansions built in the 18th century by wealthy merchants and shipowners.

Many of the mansions house museums today. The cobblestone streets and alleyways that lead away from the harbor climb up the steep, rocky hillsides and lead to the various neighborhoods and villages.

Museums

The **Historical Archives Museum** on the waterfront houses an extensive collection of portraits and naval artifacts: reproductions of warships," "paintings, weapons, old maps etc. It focuses on the island's role in the War of Independence. In the summer, there are also con-

certs on the roof-top terrace.

The Lazaros Koundouriotis Historical Mansion sits high above the harbor. It was the home of Koundouriotis, who was an important figure in the fight for Greek independence. The mansion collection includes original furnishings, period dress, jewelry, porcelain, sabers and antique guns. The kitchen is also equipped with antique kettles and pans. The mansion operates as an annex of the National Historical Museum and displays a painting exhibition. The balcony provides great views overlooking the harbor.

Assumption of the Virgin Mary and the Ecclesiastical and Byzantine Museum are located right in the harbor. Here you can visit the church, monastery and cloisters from the 17th century as well as the marble bell tower. The church's dome is done in goldleaf. There are monuments to naval heroes and rulers of Hydra within. The museum displays vestments, holy vessels and many other decorated religious artifacts. Be sure to dress appropriately.

Churches

There are 300 churches and 6 monasteries spread throughout the island. Take any side street from the harbor and you are sure to come across one. If you're up for the hike, try Agios Konstantinos above town, with wonderful views overlooking the harbor.

Beaches

The waters around Hydra are deep and clear. Most of Hydra's swimming areas are located on the rocks lining the island's coast, though there are a few sand or pebble beaches.

Spilia and Hydronetta are the two main beaches in Hydra Town. Facing the harbor, take the seaside road to the left (west). Both of these beaches are ideal for sunbathers.

Avlaki Beach's swimming platform is only another five minutes along the coastal road. Kaminis's pebble beach is another fifteen. Continuing in that direction, you will eventually come to **Vlychos**, a pebble beach at Vlychos Holiday Resort, and then Vlychos Plakes, a sand beach.

If you head to the right (east) from Hydra's harbor, you will reach **Mandraki**. It served as a second harbor during the War of Independence, but today it functions as a beach and offers water sports facilities.

If you are up for the hike, **Limnioniza** is almost due east of Hydra Town on the other side of the island. It will take two hours to reach it, but it's worth a swim in the turquoise water. Many consider it the most beautiful beach on the island, though that may be because of the challenge to get there!

Other beaches include **Bisti** (a pebble beach with water sports) and **Agios Nikolaos** (a sandy beach), reachable by boats leaving hourly

from the Hydra's main port.

Hiking

There are plenty of paths and places to explore on Hydra. Anna Barry has put together a great website with many hiking suggestions.

Here is an example:

Hike 2 will take you through some of the interesting sites in Hydra Town and then south of town to visit the Monastery of Prophet Elias, the Convent of Saint Evpraxia and on to Mount Eros. The hike will take 2 ½ hours from the harbor to the mountain.

Check out the 12 hikes she has put together on her website: hydra-island.mondorotondo.de.

Other Activities

Not up for the hike but still want to visit the amazing sites? Take a horse instead! Harriet's Hydra Horses offers 10 different treks across Hydra, all beginning in the harbor, varying in length from 45 minutes to 8 hours.

Mule rides are also available in the harbor.

Bars and nightlife

Hydra doesn't shut down when the sun sets. If you're looking to experience the nightlife, consider Amalour, along Tombazi Lane; Omilos, west of the harbor on the road to the beaches; or the Pirate Bar, on the waterfront in the harbor.



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