

# HYDRA

a car-free island





**Αγαπητοί επισκέπτες,**

A very warm welcome awaits you on Hydra as you will see from the following pages. Hydra is all islands rolled into one. It is the essence of islands. It is the essential island. The friendly people of Hydra are looking forward to meeting you. We hope that you will enjoy your stay and we will do our best to make you feel at home.

**Με θερμούς χαιρετισμούς,  
Ο Δήμαρχος της Ύδρας,  
Δρ Γεώργιος Ε Κουκουδάκης**

**Hydra**

*Your eyes, watching, would be beautiful,  
your arms, reaching out, would glow,  
your lips would come alive, as they used to,  
at such a miracle: that's what you were looking  
for...*

**George Seferis:** Nobel Prize for Literature, 1963

“This rock is a living rock, a divine wave of energy suspended in time and space, creating a pause of long or short duration in the endless melody. Hydra was entered as a pause in the musical score of creation by an expert calligrapher”.

**Henry Miller:** The Colossus of Maroussi (1941)

## About the Island

To visit the Greek island of Hydra is to discover a hidden paradise.

Cars and even bicycles are forbidden. Apart from a few utility vehicles, all land transport is undertaken by donkeys, mules, horses, and hand driven carriages.

A journey of less than two hours by hydrofoil from Piraeus harbor does not just take you back in time, it places you outside time altogether!

Alternatively, in less than 3 hours driving from Athens, through Corinth and Epidaurus you come to Metohi in the Peloponnese, which is facing Hydra across the gulf. From there, by sea taxi, or passenger boats that cross the bay every hour, you cross over to Hydra within 15 minutes.

This feeling of timelessness is strengthened by the architecture which is entirely traditional and ranges from huge mansions to simple houses. It is almost impossible for the eye to encounter disharmony on Hydra.

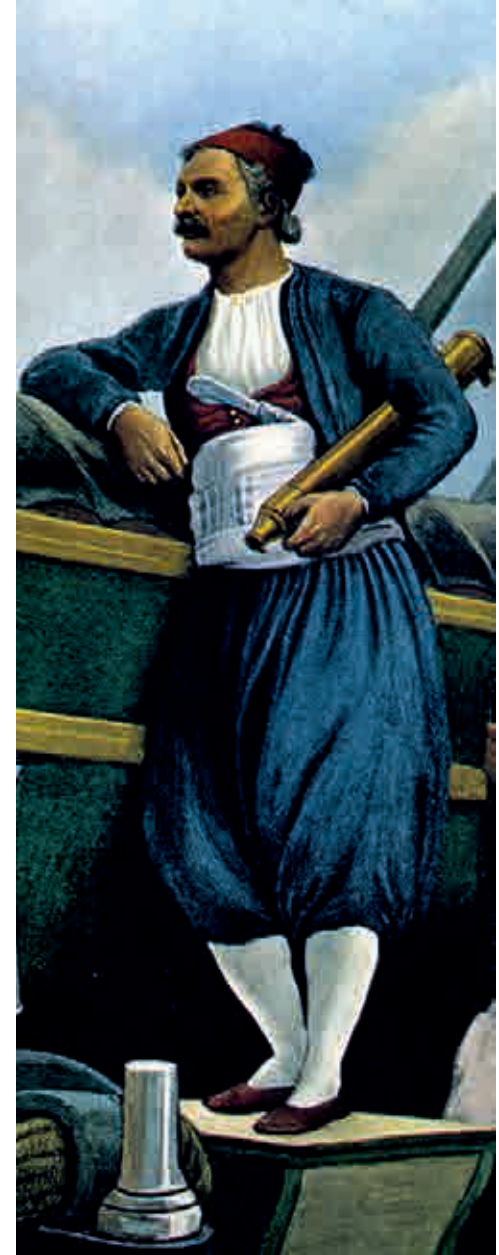
## History

Hydra's glorious history starts in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. During this period she built ships, produced admirals and captains, became a naval power and played an important part in the War of independence against the Ottoman Empire. Hydra was called Little England at the time. Here was founded the first Merchant Marine Academy in the world, in 1749, still operating today! It is rather impressive that such a tiny island is the birthplace of five Greek Prime ministers and of the first President of the Hellenic Republic.

In the 1930s, foreigners began to discover Hydra. Many of them stayed at the rambling mansion (destroyed by fire in 1960) of the painter Nikos Hadzikyriakos-Gkikas. One such was the American writer, Henry Miller, who has fine passages about Hydra in his **The Colossus of Maroussi** (1941).

In the 1950s and 60s, foreign writers like the Australian George Johnston, the Swede Axel Jensen and the Canadian Leonard Cohen bought houses here and laid the foundations of a foreign community that still exists today. Practically every celebrity in the world has set foot on Hydra at some time or other. For Hydra that's no big deal. Celebrities and anonymous visitors have equal status here.

It also worth to be mentioned that Hydra became famous all over the world thanks to the film "Boy on a Dolphin," shot on the island in 1957 with Sophia Loren leading the starring role.





## **Holiday**

Hydra is ideal for every kind of peaceful, leisurely and fun holiday. Whether you are alone, with friends, family, or on a romantic honeymoon trip, whether you can afford to splash out or you are on a budget, Hydra can give you the holiday of a lifetime. This is demonstrated by the number of people who return here year after year.

We urge you to explore the island's beaches and its tasteful nightlife, and be amazed by its magnificent scenery. Live the summer romance in Hydra and create moments, you will treasure for a lifetime.

## **Accommodation**

For such a small island, Hydra offers a huge range of hotels and pensions, all of a high standard. Most Hydra Hotels are in traditional premises and historic buildings restored with great attention to detail. Guests get a warm, personal greeting and a sense of finding home away from home.

## **Life Style**

In Hydra you will find chic restaurants and typical tavernas offering Greek and Mediterranean cuisine, prepared with local products, fresh fish, squid, octopus and herbs from Hydra mountains. Don't miss the local sweet delicacies «amygdalota» an ancient recipe made with almonds and rose water!

Restaurants are located in picturesque little alleys or on waterfront spots with beautiful views of the unique Hydra sunset, the sun diving across the bay and behind the mountain ranges of the Peloponnese.

If you should tire of eating and drinking, the shopping opportunities are limitless- from expensive hand- designed jewelry to affordable souvenirs. There are many amazing little shops for clothes, sandals, hats and handicrafts.

Small night clubs, cafes and bars line up the port and offer chill out moments and a tasteful night life from sunset on.

### **Beaches-Family Vacation**

Hydra is surrounded by crystal clear waters. In or near the town there are beaches and swimming-places, some of them ideal for children for whom Hydra is an exceptionally safe place. You can also take taxi-boats to various more remote beaches whose beauty and solitude take the breath away. Spilia, Avlaki, Vlychos, Plakes, Bisti, St. Nicholas, Mandraki and more spots that you will discover on your own!

### **City Break**

The longer anyone can spend on the island, the greater the benefits. But it is worth pointing out that, even for somebody with little time to spare (someone in Athens on business, for example), an escape to Hydra is a wonderful way of recharging the batteries.







## **Yachting Destination**

Hydra is also a famous yachting destination, as every summer stunning sailing boats moor at the harbor, where they are joined by dozens of sensational motorboats and yachts. Twice a year, in Spring and Autumn, the Hydra Nautical Club, organizes regattas with sailboats flooding the port with colorful sails. The Nautical Club has a first class water Polo team and a Dance group which performs Traditional Dances on festive occasions.

Glamour and simplicity, yachts, tycoons, donkeys and fishermen, add to the unique island life experience.

## **Conferences**

Some large international companies and groups have already discovered that Hydra is a perfect place for holding conferences and seminars, for mixing business and pleasure. A large hall has been converted into a state-of-the-art conference area within the precincts of the main Cathedral. Meetings, conferences and various events can also be arranged in the Hydra Archive Museum, and in some of the Hotels.





## **Weddings**

The island features over 300 churches and 6 monasteries making it the ideal choice for an exquisite religious wedding ceremony. Civil weddings can also be arranged.

A romantic destination for your dream wedding, Hydra offers all necessary services for the preparation of a tailor-made event. All amenities required for a perfectly organized wedding are available on the island upon request. An event planner who can arrange all travel accommodations for the guests, the venue, the photographer, bridal hair & make up, is just a phone call away.

The options are numerous:

- 1.** Civil wedding at the Historic Town Hall with a panoramic view of the beautiful port
- 2.** Civil Wedding by the sea, at sunset in one of the Traditional stone mansions, followed by Cake cutting and champagne on the beach
- 3.** Orthodox Wedding ceremony at the Greek churches all over Hydra town or in smaller chapels by the sea or a more private event at the islets nearby Hydra
- 4.** Transportation of the bride and guests to the venue, with traditional folklore caique.
- 5.** Traditional violin players accompanying the bride to the venue by foot, or on donkeys
- 6.** The local dance group, in traditional costumes can attend the reception and offer a unique experience, even teach the steps to the wedding guests!

## Walking on Hydra

Hydra is a walker's paradise. Apart from the town itself and a small coastal strip, the rest of the island is virtually uninhabited, consisting of wild, rocky, hilly terrain crisscrossed by countless mule- paths. You can take a gentle walk of an hour or so, or a more arduous one of several hours. Whatever you choose, you can be sure of two things, one: that you will see beauty wherever you look, and two: that you will hardly see another human being.

The island is about 14 miles long, yet it offers a variety of landscapes and seascapes that seem infinitely vast. If you decide to go east- perhaps as far as the old Lighthouse or the nunnery of Zourva- you will find hills that are apparently bare. But especially in the spring (which comes early on Hydra), grass sprouts everywhere as well as gorse and all kinds of wild flowers, including rare orchids and fritillaries.

If you go west- maybe as far as the secluded beach of Bisti, or even beyond where you can stand beside a shrine of St. Nicolas and gaze across the sea towards the island of Spetses with the mountains of the Peloponnese behind it- you will spend time in forests of beautiful old pine trees which used to be valued for their resin which flavored retsina wine.

Alternatively, you can just go up. Up from the town on the recently paved path to the monastery of the Prophet Elijah, and up from there, on a well-marked path, to the highest point, (almost 600m) on the island, the top of Mount Ere (Albanian for “wind”) whose name has been corrupted into Eros. On clear days the views are spectacular.

What especially distinguishes walking on Hydra from walking at world-famous beauty spots is the lack of people and the intense silence.

The walker always has the feeling that he or she is a pioneer, an explorer, discovering the place for the first time. It is a life-changing experience. These are the only journeys completed with GPS throughout Greece.







## Religious Tourism

Hydra is the seat of a Bishop responsible for several islands and an area on the Peloponnese. The island possesses more than 300 churches, and 6 monasteries. Celebrations, processions and pilgrimages take place on specific religious Holidays and when a church celebrates its patron Saint.

It is a must to visit the beautiful 17<sup>th</sup>-century cathedral in the port as well as the nearby Ecclesiastical Museum, along with some of the monasteries on the hills.

On the hills, there are nunneries and monasteries which, although today have few nuns or monks, are still well worth visiting for their architecture, their icons, and the spiritual feelings they inspire.

At the same time Life on Hydra is very much governed by the rhythm of the church's seasons. On January 5<sup>th</sup> priests circulate blessing people's houses. On January 6<sup>th</sup> (Epiphany) the Bishop blesses the harbor and youths dive for a cross which he throws into the icy water. Also on this day, the wells in the interior of the town are blessed in a picturesque ceremony.

## **Museums**

The Historical Archive-Museum of Hydra on the port houses a fascinating collection of items relating to the history of Hydra and of Greece, including, in a silver urn, the embalmed heart of the hero of the War of Independence, Admiral Miaoulis. The Museum also stages temporary exhibitions.

The mansions of Lazaros Kountouriotis and Pavlos Kountouriotis, up a few steps behind the port, are also well worth a visit. They contain all sorts of beautiful costumes, porcelain, pictures, furniture etc. But most striking is the actual architecture and the details of the floors and ceilings.



ΕΙΣΗΓΗΤΗΣ  
ΚΑΙ ΔΙΕΥΘΥΝΤΗΣ  
ΚΑΘΗΜΕΡΙΝΟΣ  
ΙΣΤΟΡΙΚΟ  
ΑΡΧΕΙΟ  
ΜΟΥΣΕΙΟ  
ΥΔΡΑΣ



HISTORICAL  
ARCHIVES  
MUSEUM  
OF HYDRA



## Events

The major secular event is the Miaoulia when, on the last weekend of June, the victories over the Turks of Admiral Miaoulis with his fire ships, are celebrated with music, drama, fireworks and the symbolic burning of a boat outside the harbor.

Throughout the year various other events take place including regattas, hill - running, concerts and even a biennial conference on the topic of mules and donkeys.

Hydra's steep paths and amazing sea views, make it an ideal location for trail running. For years, locals, as much as visitors, have taken advantage of this one-of-a-kind, graphic island and have explored its mountains. On April 5th & 6th 2014 at the first Hydra's Trail Event, it was time for the rest of the world to be introduced to Hydra's trails.

On Good Friday, three or four of the parishes decorate with flowers wooden representations of the bier of Christ. These are carried round the town, finally converging on the port. The one from Kamini is actually carried a little way into the waters of Kamini harbor to bless the fishing for the coming year.

Easter itself is a time of bells and explosions (to drive away evil spirits). The people light candles from the flame specially flown from Jerusalem and use them to make sooty crosses on the lintels of their homes. August 15th, the Dormition of the Virgin Mary, is another big festival.

A quieter celebration, but one of great significance for the island, is held on November 14th, the feast day of Saint Constantine of Hydra, the island's patron saint who was martyred in the 19th century. His large modern church overlooks the whole town.

## **The Arts**

Hydra has a strong tradition of producing its own painters and writers. Panayiotis Tetsis, Greece's greatest living painter, was born here and still lives here. On the harbor, the School of Fine Arts encourages young talent. Many Greeks and foreigners carry on producing work in traditional styles.

Now is a new trend in the visual arts, backed by wealthy individuals and foundations, to exhibit projects, happenings, installations etc. produced by people who have little or no connection to Hydra. A yacht, gaudily and wittily decorated by the American artist Jeff Koons is often to be seen in the port. Through the summer months there are exhibitions for all tastes.

Many Greek writers have lived on Hydra or written about Hydra, from the Nobel-prize-winning George Seferis downwards. Very few foreign writers have actually lived here, but there is an astonishingly long list of books (mainly novels) wholly or partly set on the island by writers from all over the world. Many films have been shot here as well. What seems to attract their creators particularly is the island's sense of mystery and untold secrets.

### **DESTE Foundation on Hydra**

The DESTE Foundation for Contemporary Art was established in 1983 by international art collector Dakis Joannou and is based in Athens, Greece. Through its exhibition and publishing program, the DESTE Foundation aspires to act as a host to innovative expressions, and operate as an open space for the redefinition of the current artistic production and emergent cultural realities. Since 2009, DESTE Foundation's operates a second project space. This space is situated on the Greek island of Hydra, a place known for welcoming artists and inspiring artistic and cultural endeavors. The space used to be the island's slaughterhouse, and now works, as a project space of the DESTE Foundation with annual exhibitions that open every June and last till the end of September. Every summer the Foundation hosts a series of contemporary art exhibitions on the island, including the assignment of the space to a single artist or team invited to stage a unique, site-specific exhibition. -



### **Information**

**Hydra Municipality:**

**e-mail:**

**Hydra Hotels Association:**

**e-mail:**

**Hydra Holy Cathedral:**

**Museum Archives of Hydra:**

**Mountain running:**

**Pathways of Hydra:**

[www.hydra.gr](http://www.hydra.gr)

[ydra@ydra.gov.gr](mailto:ydra@ydra.gov.gr)

[www.hydra-hotels.gr](http://www.hydra-hotels.gr)

[hydrahotelassociation@gmail.com](mailto:hydrahotelassociation@gmail.com)

[www.imhydra.gr](http://www.imhydra.gr)

[www.iamy.gr](http://www.iamy.gr)

[www.hydrastrail.gr](http://www.hydrastrail.gr)

[www.pezoporia.gr](http://www.pezoporia.gr)

**HYDRA**  
GREECE

[www.hydra.gr](http://www.hydra.gr)