

Greece: Zagoria Villages

Tour code: JZV

Revised: Nov 08

By western European standards Zagoria is a relatively wild and remote area, and there are no maps available to the public comparable to the British 1:25,000 Pathfinder or 1:50,000 Landranger series. However we have successfully run escorted tours over this itinerary for many years and 6 years ago we introduced a self-guided tour. The footpaths have been marked and we have prepared route notes, which read in conjunction with the map we provide will enable you to find your way. The walk includes a traverse of the magnificent Vikos Gorge (sometimes referred to as the Greek Grand Canyon), as well as treasures of vernacular architecture. Many of the late 18th century stone-built villages, which we visit, are within what is today a Conservation Area. Maintenance grants assist house owners to repair and renovate using traditional materials.

Five nights of the tour are spent in Zagorian villages, one night in a mountain refuge, and one night at a hotel in Ioannina on the shores of Lake Pamvotis. Transfers from and to the airport at Preveza are included in the tour price, as are baggage transfers between the villages.



Travel Information

Season: May to early October. Start any Sunday from May to early October if flying from Gatwick to Preveza. Other starting days may be possible for land-only customers flying via Athens to Ioannina, or to Corfu. However land-only customers must make their own way to and from Ioannina. It is normally possible for those on the full package with charter flights from UK to fly back one week later, but this must be requested on your booking form. This would enable you to spend some time at a resort such as Parga or Lefkas or to visit Corfu.

Arrival: The most convenient access point to Zagoria is the small airport at Preveza on the west coast of the Greek mainland. Our full package includes flights from UK to Preveza airport where you are met and transferred via Ioannina to the first night's stop at Tsepelovo. 'Land only' clients can also be met at Ioannina, which is reached by a twice a day scheduled internal flight from Athens as well as by express bus from Athens and from Igoumenitsa (the mainland port opposite Corfu). Tsepelovo is about 1 hour drive from Ioannina. Buses are infrequent. Our local agent will meet passengers at Preveza or Ioannina airport.

End of Tour: After breakfast on day 8 at the hotel in Ioannina. You will then be transferred either to Ioannina airport or to Preveza airport. There are also regular express bus services from Ioannina to Athens and to Igoumenitsa.

Level of Difficulty

Grade: The tour is graded 'moderate to challenging'. The paths are rough and stony but reasonably well defined. There are ascents/descents of up to 900m/3000ft per day but the walking need not be seen as particularly strenuous as the days are not long. However, it is necessary to have some experience of map reading and route finding from written descriptions. This tour is best suited to hill walkers who are experienced at route finding in all weathers, in

places like the English Lake District, Snowdonia or the Scottish Highlands. Because of the remote and rugged terrain this self-guided tour is not available to singles.

Fitness: The tour should present no difficulty to anyone in good general health who is accustomed to hill walking. Day stages range from 6km/4hours to 17km/8hrs. These walking times are generous as they allow for the steep gradients and rocky footpaths of the route.

Waymarks: Much of the route is on the official O3 long distance trail, which is marked with occasional distinctive red and white waymarks. Elsewhere, notably on Day 6, other colour-coded marks are used, e.g. distinctive blue yellow marks. Our local rep. and Mountain Guide, Konstantinos, has checked and recently re-waymarked the route.

General Information

Baths: it is not normal for your room to have a bath, the main reason being that it takes up a lot of space, some hotels/guesthouses may have a separate room in the house where a bath is available to guests, but in the main it is showers.

Breakfast: in Greece usually consists of coffee and bread, yoghurt and honey, if you want more for breakfast then we would suggest you purchase some food the night before. It is important for you to tell us if you have any dietary requirements when you book your holiday so that we can inform everyone that you are staying with.

Language: Note that you will not necessarily come across people speaking English. Remember you have left home to find things different bring a phrase book, try to learn a bit of Greek!

Luggage: When staying in hotels, sometimes your luggage will have been taken to your room awaiting your arrival. However don't be surprised if your luggage is waiting for you to take it up to your room.

Accommodation & Meals

Village pensions for 5 nights, mountain refuge (dormitory) one night, hotel one night. Full board throughout except for lunches on days 1,7 and 8 and dinner on day 7. Rooms with en-suite facilities (shower/bath and WC) where available.

- ❑ **Night 1:** The first night is spent in a comfortable small pension in the typically Zagorian village of Tsepelovo, where a lot of the houses are built of stone in the traditional style of the region.
- ❑ **Night 2:** Again in Tsepelovo.
- ❑ **Night 3:** On the second night we stay in the village of Vitsa, which has marvellous views over the Vikos gorge.
- ❑ **Night 4:** Comfortable pension in Vikos village.
- ❑ **Night 5:** The twin villages of Megalo (Big) and Mikro (Little) Papingo huddle below the great limestone buttresses called the "Towers of Papingo" on the north side of the Vikos Gorge. We stay at a small pension in Mikro Papingo.
- ❑ **Night 6:** Astraka Hut.
- ❑ **Night 7:** You walk back to Papingo, from where you will be transferred to Ioannina. Your hotel is normally in the old walled part of the town, formerly the Turkish citadel. On occasion we may use another hotel (The Palladion) in the town centre.

Outline Itinerary

- ❑ **Day 1:** Fly from UK to Preveza and transfer by road to Tsepelovo, via Ioannina. (150km/3hrs). Clients can also be transferred from Ioannina to Tsepelovo. (50km/60mins).
- ❑ **Day 2: Tsepelovo - Vradeto -Beloi - Tsepelovo.** From Tsepelovo (1050m) we start with an uphill path towards the highest village in Zagoria called Vradeto (1450m) from where the beautiful path at the edge of the Vikos gorge leads to a great viewpoint at Beloi (1650m). From here you can look right over the Vikos in all its splendour and see the paths that we will be following tomorrow. Return to Vradeto village continuing downhill to Kapesovo village heading down the famous steps of Vradeto – a stone path built in the 16th Century on the slopes of the Vikos. Transfer back to Tsepelovo and overnight in a traditional pension there. (Walking for 4-5 hours).
- ❑ **Day 3: Tsepelovo – Kipi – Koukouli – Vitsa.** An easy descent to where the Vikos gorge starts, which is marked by a stone bridge dating back to 980 called the "Paliojefira." Continue through a forest of beech and pine trees, where you might see evidence of bear pugmarks on the path. We end up in the village of Kipi. From here we walk up the "Koukouli Steps" (more stone steps) and visit

the center of this picturesque village. We walk down into the Vikos gorge again crossing the "Misiou" bridge and climb the Vitsa stairs and reach the villages of Vitsa and Monodendri that are built at the edge of the gorge.

- ❑ **Day 4: Vitsa –Vikos.** Early in the morning we descend the old Vitsa stairs into the Vikos ravine. Traversing the ravine you can do a bit of bird and flower watching, as there are quite a number of rare species that have taken refuge into the gorge. Early in the afternoon we will arrive in Vikos village where you will overnight in a pension. (7 hours of walking).
- ❑ **Day 5: Vikos – Papingo (also called Papigo).** Following the old up-hill path, you traverse the beautiful ravines to Papingo Village. Above the Towers of Papingo skyrocket inaccessibly into the sky. At the village's natural swimming pool, you will have time for a dip and a break, before overnighing in a traditional pension. (4 hours of walking).
- ❑ **Day 6: Papingo – Astraka hut – Dragonlake – Astraka hut.** Head on uphill, up Mount Astraka. After 3-hour ascent you will come to the Astraka hut (1950m). From here optional ascent to Dragon Lake at 2100m, before returning to overnight at Astraka hut. (6 hours of walking if Dragon Lake is included).
- ❑ **Day 7: Walk back to Papingo,** and then transfer to Ioannina (44km/1.5hrs), where there is time for sightseeing. A tour of Ioannina old quarter and citadel is worthwhile. Out-of-town excursions could include the huge limestone cave system at Perama, discovered in the 1940's, or the 3rd century BC theatre of Dodoni, and nearby ancient oracle with its whispering oaks, 15km from Ioannina and accessible in an afternoon by public bus. For those who want to take home souvenirs or gifts, a local speciality is silver and filigree jewellery.
- ❑ **Day 8:** Depending on your flight times, there may be time for further sightseeing or souvenir buying before your transfer by taxi/ minibus to Ioannina airport for flights to Athens or Preveza (2 hours) for flights to Gatwick.

What's Included

For UK based full package clients, charter flights from Gatwick to Preveza and return, together with road transfers from Preveza to Tsepelovo at the start of the tour, from Papingo to Ioannina on day 7, and from Ioannina back to Preveza airport at the end of the tour. Meals included: 7 nights bed and breakfast with packed lunches on days 2 to 6 inclusive and evening meals on days 1 to 6 inclusive. Also included are baggage transfers between each new night stop. Plus, for self-guided clients only, route descriptions and maps.

Joining points. You have a choice of joining the tour at the following points:- On the start date at Preveza Airport on arrival of charter flight from UK, at Ioannina Airport on arrival of midday or evening flight from Athens, or even at the first hotel at Tsepevol.