



JOYSTERS

Our World...
Yours to discover

Tailor-made travel experiences
in the unexplored Northern Greece



JOYSTERS

Joysters believe in the magnitude of the little experiences that make up the fabric of our lives. For us, a travelling experience is all about exciting your senses, exploring new places, venturing into exciting activities and indulging in exquisite local delicacies.

We have always been moment collectors, true believers in time well spent and we felt it was about time to give you access to our corner of the world and its best kept secrets.

An authentic world only locals with in-depth local knowledge would be able to reveal.

We are passionate about revealing authentic local life moments to Noble Travellers.

We are on a mission to show you Northern Greece, that other Greece, that wider, more varied, more unexpected and more authentic Greece.

With JOYSTERS

- You are guided by locals who care, by people who recommend only what they have actually experienced themselves and bring an insight and level of service that nobody else can match in the area.
 - You enter doors closed to the public, you gain insider insights and have the chance to taste true aristocratic 19th century Greek dishes.
 - You enjoy the owners' full-hearted engagement in the services provided and meet locals who love their country and want to share the authenticity of living in it.
 - You contribute to the sustainability and promotion of local communities and forge everlasting friendships.
 - You discover a world you wouldn't believe existed.
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Nymfaio village

LOCATION

The setting of your story

North-western mainland Greece is the least touristy part of the country, yet the most intriguing one. A world of picturesqueness only a couple of hours away from the main airport in Thessaloniki. The aristocratic **Nymfaio** village, the Byzantine lakeside town of **Kastoria** and the three-million-year-old **Prespa** lakes set the scene for a lifetime experience.

Built at 1350 m. above sea level, far from the madding crowds, **Nymfaio** is surrounded by dense forests of beech and oak trees and meadow pastures. A protected traditional settlement at a breathtaking location, Nymfaio sits just a stone's throw away from Lake Prespa, the highest tectonic lake in the Balkans and the picturesque town of Kastoria.

Nymfaio knows how to create a fairy tale setting. Fireplaces, halls with high ceilings, embroidered rugs, dreamy four-poster beds, antiques, porcelain dinnerware and elegant furniture can all be found in Nymfaio's guesthouses and grand mansions of the 1930s and earlier.





Kastoria city and lake

From a distance, **Kastoria** looks like an Impressionist painting. Come closer and you'll see impressive aristocratic lakeside mansions surrounded by clusters of tall trees, sprinkled with Byzantine churches. Kastoria is a city of unique beauty. Kastoria has had an ongoing human presence ever since 5000 BC, while the modern city was founded by Emperor Justinian. It is thought that its name originates from "kastro" (castle).

From 927 until 1912 (when it was liberated during the Balkan wars), the city fell consecutively into the hands of the Normans, Albanians, Bulgarians and Ottomans, thus acquiring a multicultural character. Today, the city's population is about 17.000.



Prespa lake
St. Achillios
island

Retreating glaciers and a series of seismic phenomena have created a magical world of unmatched beauty, **Prespa lakes** (Great Prespa & Small Prespa), the two highest tectonic lakes in the Balkans. Greece shares Great Prespa with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania, and the Small Prespa with Albania.

The Prespa lakes are considered to be a paradise for migratory birds; hundreds of bird species, many of them endangered, nest and breed here, among them the Dalmatian pelican (the world's largest colony), the cormorant and the heron.

No visitors were allowed near this area until the 1970s, as the border with Albania was considered highly sensitive from a political point of view. Advance permission and an army escort was required to visit it. Consequently, the region is much less well-known than other parts of Greece, although it is a unique and breathtakingly beautiful part of the country.

GUESTHOUSES

Authenticity meets homely luxury

Staying in authentic guesthouses lets you sink into a more leisurely pace of life, as you soak up the ambience of these aristocratic mansions.

La Moara, in Nymfaio Village, and Orologopoulos Mansion, in Kastoria are two of the carefully chosen guesthouses for our noble guests.

La Moara is a member of the Historic Hotels of Europe and an imposing mansion with unique characteristics, such as its "mesandra" bathrooms. The guesthouse is characteristic of the renowned old mansions in all their splendour and authenticity. Its interior combines the glittering tradition with the most modern comforts. It is surrounded by a large alpine meadow, gardens and spruces.

Orologopoulos mansion



The old mansion of **Orologopoulos** family (first elected mayor of Kastoria), built in the 19th century, has been lovingly restored with special materials, construction methods and morphological features. Located in the historical district of Doltso with its paved alleys, elaborate mansions and stone-built houses This mansion will take you on a journey back in time.







HISTORY - CULTURE ARCHITECTURE

Legacy etched into minds

The Greek word *Historia* (History) means “inquiry”, the act of seeking knowledge, as well as the actual knowledge that is gained from inquiry. And from there to the accounts of events that a person might put together from making inquiries- what we call stories.

Stories about the Royal burial cluster of Philip II (father to Alexander the Great) and the most lavish funeral ceremony of the historic times held in Greece. About the museum of the tumulus of Philip II that was built over the tombs leaving them in situ and showing the tumulus as it was before the excavations - a most impressive museum indeed!

Stories about... the “waymen”, guardians of the most important Imperial (Roman) road, Via Egnatia, who turned into the most prominent silversmiths and goldsmiths in the Balkans, and later on into tobacco merchants, leaving their mark on the finely decorated mansions, the magnificent Saint Nickolas Church and the monumental Nikeios School, the likes of which could very rarely be found in the whole of Greece.

Stories about the natural, historic and architectural secrets of the “lake’s byzantine princess”, Kastoria.

Stories that will take us from the Neolithic era, through the classical antiquity, the Byzantine era and, finally, to modern day Kastoria, a city, which according to the Belgian historian Henri Grégoire, “would be enough to recover the Byzantine tradition if it were ever to be lost”.





Alpha Estate



Domaine Karanika



WINE TASTING & UNIQUE AMBER SPIRITS

Bottled Poetry



The reputation of Greek wines has been growing with leaps and bounds over the last years and very rightly so. The rugged landscape of Northern Greece provides the perfect terroir for red, white, rose and especially sparkling wines. If you are a true wine and special spirits “explorer”, you are in for one of the most pleasing surprises of your lives. And that is a promise.

Alpha Estate is the biggest winery in Greece and broadly represents “the new beginning”, the “birth” of a new era in the world of Greek wine. Our VIP wine tasting session will give you the chance to sample more than 14 different wines. Angelos Iatridis (the winemaker) was nominated for Winemaker of the Year 2014 by Wine Enthusiast Magazine!



Domaine Karanika is a small winery that relies on gravity instead of pumps and filters, true to Karanika’s winemaking philosophy of following nature rather than trying to control it. Domaine Karanika produces the finest quality sparkling wines in its organic/ biodynamic vineyards in total harmony with nature without any concession to the health of people and the earth. In Evan Turner’s own words, “It’s just glorious. Line it up, next to Champagne, or anything sparkling; I’d put it up against whatever you got.”

In 1888, Spyros Metaxas, a pioneer looking ahead of his time, embarked on a quest to create a one-of-a-kind amber spirit. Legend has it that when Spyros Metaxas was building his distillery in Piraeus, he found an ancient medallion depicting the “Salamina Warrior”. The Battle of Salamina took place in 480 BC in the waters near Piraeus. The Salamina warrior became a symbol of risk-taking and courage - the perfect emblem/logo for Spyros Metaxa’s venture. Although it was first compared to a Cognac, and later to a Brandy, **METAXA** is impossible to classify. Today it is recognized for what it is - a unique amber spirit.



GASTRONOMY

Smell it - sip it - savour it

Food for Northern Greeks has always been a means of communication, a way of connecting people and building lasting memories.

The smell of freshly baked bread and the distinct taste of village eggs, accompanied by heavenly nettle pie, local goat milk yogurt, rice pudding made with rose water and apple pie made with local wild apples will forever be imprinted on your memory and associated with authentic Greek breakfasts.

You will be able to taste the exquisite local mushrooms and truffles (season dependent), light up your taste buds with flaming red peppers, try one of the best varieties of saffron (Kozani saffron/crocus) in the world and savour the delicious beans and pulses of Kastoria and Prespa lakes area.

The area around Nymfaio village also boasts two of the best taverns-restaurants (“Kontosoros” and “Thomas”) in the country, where you can taste unique 19th century Greek dishes, all made with locally sourced produce, and discover family recipes that have been passed down by word-of-mouth through generations.

Nikos Kontosoros, the owner and chef, has been running one of the best restaurants in Greece, off the tourist trail, but just a stone’s throw away from where we will be staying. His unique approach in re-inventing traditional Greek recipes makes for a truly unforgettable tasting experience.

At “Thomas”, the expression “spoilt for choice” is taken to a whole different level. With more than 40 different dishes daily, and a selection of more than 30 cheeses and 520 different wines, you will definitely get to taste what will become your favourite Greek dish.

At the end of your gastronomic journey, you will have developed a most discerning palate.





MIDDAY BREAKS

Re-fueling our senses

Midday breaks are a dear ritual among Northern Greeks but unlike an afternoon siesta, they are more like stops, life pit-stops aimed at refueling your senses. Tsipouro with meze or Greek coffee with a spoon sweet is all you need to replenish your energy and revive your spirits.

A midday break - under the shade of a tree in the summer or in a cozy place in the winter - accompanied by high quality Tsipouro (strong distilled spirit, usually offered as an aperitif and accompanied by olives, fresh onions, cucumbers and various local meze - nibbles) is an old Greek tradition that can be traced back to the 14th century.

Greek coffee with a spoon sweet. Spoon sweets are sweet preserves, served on a spoon as a gesture of hospitality in Greece. They can be made from almost any fruit, though sour and bitter fruits are especially prized. Spoon sweets, which have no fat, are one of the Mediterranean's healthiest sweets, the confection that even Greek dieticians recommend for anyone with a sweet tooth who is trying to lose weight.



WORKSHOPS

The hands-on approach

“Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.”
Benjamin Franklin

Ask any traveller passionate enough about learning new knowledge/skills and they will tell you that the only way to quench their incessant thirst for discovery is a hands on experience.

Food workshops will teach you how and why those scrumptious local pies (pittes) and freshly baked bread taste so delicious. After all, the bread you personally bake smells and tastes better, as with all things you put a little effort into.

Depending on the season you may be able to go truffle or mushroom foraging in the nearby forests and then explore the best ways to use them and learn how to cook with those regional delicacies.

A visit in our part of the world wouldn't be complete until you discover the highly beneficial use of local saffron (crocus) and learn how to draw out the maximum flavour, colour and aroma - even from a tiny little amount - in order to use it in your recipes.





OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

In the lap of Nature



The beauty and tranquillity of the natural environment in Northern Greece is such that you can't resist venturing into exciting activities.

What's more, the greatest thing about those outdoor activities is that they provide the best ways of experiencing the landscape you're travelling through.

Visiting **Arcturos sanctuary** and seeing brown bears and wolves in forested enclosures, where bears rescued from poor captive conditions can spend their remaining years in a natural environment, is a rare and fulfilling experience.

Up in the mountains, with almost non-existent light pollution, **stargazing** can be quite an experience. With the help and guidance of the local Stargazing club, wishing upon a star, while sipping your wine, could potentially make some of your dreams come true.

Mountain biking around the lakes or on trails under a tree canopy on Flampouro mountain (2193m), right next to Mount Olympus, the mountain of Greek Gods is a must for mountain biking lovers.

White water rafting in some of the cleanest rivers in Europe, **horse riding** on the breathtaking slope of Verno mountain and, of course, **trekking** on Varnountas, Verno and Pindos mountains are literally unmissable.

Last, but not least, going **birdwatching** around the Prespa Lakes with the 272 bird species, 172 butterfly species, 60 mammal species and 49 habitat types can only be classified as birdwatching at its best.







M.I.C.E. - BLEASURE (Business & Pleasure)

Joyless business turned into memorable experience

To be productive you need to have a sense of freedom, to feel refreshed and cared for.

People want to live a holistic life - no matter where they are.

They want experiences.

There is a limit to the amount of precious time people are willing to give up. And if a business trip eats that time up, people want freedom to also live a little in exchange for that sacrifice.

We cater for exclusive, small scale and innovative international corporate meetings in full privacy.

We guarantee: Comfort - Convenience - Memorable experiences - High professional standards.

Balancing business and pleasure far from the madding crowds and with the level of service few agencies can match is what we do best.



SAMPLE ITINERARY

The following sample itinerary has taken into account the needs of a mildly active group of travellers, interested in exploring new places; venturing into exciting activities and indulging in exquisite local delicacies and is based on our best recommendation, in order for our travellers to make the most out of it.

However, where we excel at is putting together exclusive tailor-made experiences.

Day 1

- Pick up from Thessaloniki Airport
- Visit the Royal burial cluster of Philip II (father to Alexander the Great)
- Arrival at our destination, Nymfaio - La Moara guesthouse
- Settle in at the guesthouse - familiarisation

Day 2

- Traditional breakfast with locally sourced produce
- Learning the history-culture of the Nymfaio village game
- A break for Tsipouro
- Visit Arcturos and Agrapidies bear and wolf sanctuaries
- Outdoor dinner on the mountains

Day 3

- Traditional breakfast with locally sourced produce
- Local herbs & spices workshop
- Greek coffee with spoon sweet break
- Visit Alpha Estate winery & VIP wine tasting
- Dinner at “Kontosoros” Restaurant/Tavern
- Star gazing night

Day 4

- Traditional breakfast with locally sourced produce
- Bread making workshop
- Visit Domaine Karanika winery & wine tasting
- Dinner at “Thomas” restaurant/tavern
- Greek traditional dance lessons

Day 5

- Traditional breakfast with locally sourced produce
- Transport to Kastoria - Orologopoulos guesthouse
- Byzantine Kastoria - Guided Tour
- Dinner by the lake
- Kastoria by night

Day 6

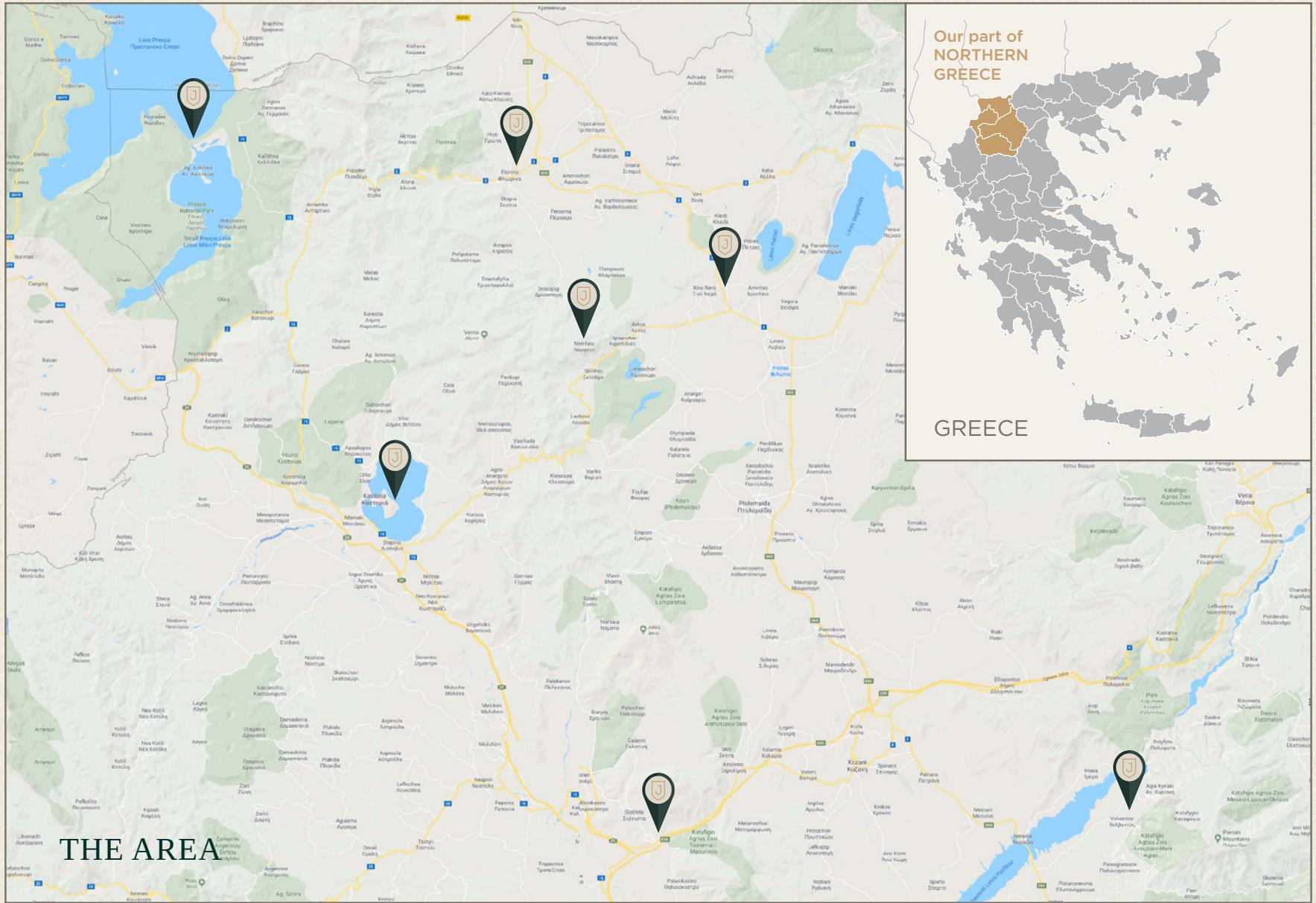
- Traditional breakfast with locally sourced produce
- Visit Prespa lakes
- Agios Achilleios - traditional pie (pita) making workshop
- Visit Psarades (protected settlement) - Boat tour
- Dinner in Mikrolimni, a small Prespa lake village
- Free time in Kastoria

Day 7

- Traditional breakfast with locally sourced produce
- Transport to Thessaloniki
- Thessaloniki city secrets tour
- Farewell dinner
- Drop off at Thessaloniki airport

Every proposed tailor-made programme will always be accompanied by a detailed breakdown, in order for our travellers to get the full scope of their daily itineraries.





THE AREA

Our part of
NORTHERN
GREECE

GREECE



YOUR JOURNEY IS ABOUT TO BEGIN

Imagine there was a hidden world that could be unveiled at the touch of a button. Would you press it? Of course you would! Who wouldn't?

As a matter of fact we do so repeatedly, joyfully, the way a familiar but unexpected smell triggers a fond memory.

We just can't get enough. But that's just us.

After all, we know that our part of the world is an authentic noble gem but you don't; Not yet.

Let us show you what an authentic local travel experience looks like in our neck of the woods.





JOYSTERS

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Greek National Tourism Organization (GTNO) licence number

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