

↑↑ The Astraka Refuge straddles a ridge at the base of the Tymfi massif.
 ↑ The rocky wonderland of Meteora, located a 2.5-hour drive east of Monodendri.

GOOD TO KNOW

START/FINISH

Monodendri

SEASON

Late May to mid-October. Wildflowers are at their peak in June, August is the warmest month, and fall colors begin in early October, which also traditionally heralds the first snowfalls.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Indoor accommodations are available in the ancient stone villages of Megalo Papigo, Mikro Papigo, Tsepelovo, and Kapesovo. Although officially illegal, wild camping is possible along the route as long as discretion and no-trace principles are practiced. There is one mountain hut along the route at Astraka Col. It sleeps 51, serves hearty meals, and often boasts an international cast of lodgers.

HIGHLIGHTS

1. Pre-trip visit to the Holy Monastery of Saint Paraskevi
2. Vikos Gorge
3. Drakolimni (Dragon) Lake
4. Views from the summit of Gamila peak
5. Zagori bridges
6. Vradeto Steps
7. Views over Vikos Gorge from Grounia and Beloi Viewpoints (see Bonus Track)

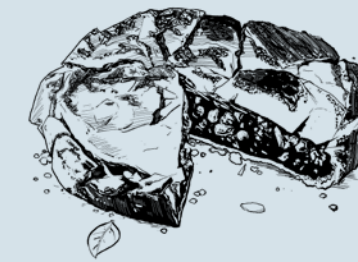
HELPFUL HINTS

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are infrequent buses that connect the regional hub of Ioannina with Monodendri. Schedules seem to change regularly, so if you don't have a vehicle, your surest (and most expensive) bet is to take a taxi (45 minutes from Ioannina).

FOOD

Kafenia are traditional Greek cafés that can be found in villages along the trail. They serve refreshments and basic food items. Guesthouses in the villages serve a variety of excellent regional fare, and packed lunches can also be



arranged. Local cuisine worth sampling during your time in Zagori includes cheeses such as galotyri, feta, kefalotyri, and vlahotyri, pasture-raised goat and lamb dishes, and, most famous of all, Zagorian pies. The latter item comes in a myriad of varieties, including cashew, meat, chicken, cabbage, lentil, pumpkin, mushroom, and *blatsaria* (wild herbs, greens, feta cheese, and homemade dough).



WATER

Potable water can be found in the villages along the route. If water is obtained from natural sources, treating or filtering is recommended due to the prevalence of grazing animals along much of the trail.

WHAT TO BRING

Recommended items include a 50–60L backpack, sleeping bag rated to -5°C (23°F), sleeping mat, three-season tent, trail running shoes or lightweight synthetic hiking boots, water bottles, small first aid kit, sun protection (hat, glasses, sunscreen), compass and/or GPS app on your smartphone, overview maps of the route, headlamp, toiletries, power bank for charging electronics, Personal Locator Beacon (optional), and trekking poles (optional).

Recommended clothing includes a synthetic and/or down jacket, rain jacket, rain pants, beanie or buff, three pairs of socks (one kept clean for sleeping), hiking pants, long-sleeved hiking shirt, fleece gloves or mittens, and medium-weight thermal underwear for sleeping.

BONUS TRACK

THE BELOI CIRCUIT

This 10-km (6.2-mi) round trip features two of the Zagori region's most notable landmarks—the Vradeto Steps and the Beloi Viewpoint. The trail starts and ends just outside the village of Kapesovo. Setting out, you'll begin with a climb of the historic stone staircase of Vradeto, constructed using dry-stone techniques and consisting of 1,200 steps and 39 turns. Until a road connection was established in 1973, it was the only connection between its namesake village and the rest of the world. Once you've negotiated the stairs, the going is much easier until you reach the turnaround point at Beloi Viewpoint, which offers a breathtaking perspective over the Vikos Gorge.

BACKGROUND

THE BRIDGES OF ZAGORI

A highlight of any visit to the Pindus region is the Zagori bridges. Like something out of Rivendell Valley in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, these striking stone overpasses date back to the 18th and 19th centuries. For many years, alongside the area's extensive system of cobblestone pathways, they represented the sole means by which some of the more remote Zagori villages could be accessed. Made by local craftsmen using regionally sourced stone, the bridges have between one and three humps or arches (*kamares* in Greek), and altogether there are over 90 of them spread throughout the region. Among the most famous examples are the three-hump Plakidas Bridge and the elegant Kokkori Bridge, both of which are located near the village of Kipoi.