Goura Feneos: A Journey to the Mansions of Mountainous Corinthia



The Aristocrat of Feneos

Perched on the western slopes of Mount Ziria (Kyllini) at an altitude of approximately 950 meters, Goura stands as the largest village and the historical seat of the Feneos region in Mountainous Corinthia. Goura is far more than a mere destination for a quick weekend getaway; it is a place where time seems to have paused in the era of great revolutionaries and wealthy 19th-century merchants. A journey to this mountain village begins with the traveler’s desire to discover the authentic Greek countryside, far from the clutches of mass tourism, through a route defined by fir forests, flowing waters, and masterfully carved stone.

Goura enjoys the privilege of overlooking the Feneos plateau, a vast plain that was once a massive lake in antiquity. Today, this fertile basin, surrounded by the imposing peaks of Ziria, Helmos, and Oligyrtos, creates a landscape that many aptly describe as the "Greek Alps" or "Corinthian Switzerland." The village's architecture, characterized by heavy stone buildings and red-tiled roofs, blends harmoniously with the rugged natural environment, making Goura one of the most photogenic and evocative destinations in the entire Peloponnese.

The Historic Central Square and Taxiarches Church

The heart of Goura beats in its impressive central square, widely considered one of the most beautiful and spacious mountain plazas in Greece. Its sheer size is disproportionately large for the village’s current population, a fact that bears witness to the economic and social peak the area experienced in the past. At the center of the square stands the imposing Church of the Taxiarches (Archangels), an architectural masterpiece of the 19th century.

The church, constructed from local gray limestone, is noted for its austere yet elegant lines. Inside, visitors can admire the intricate wood-carved iconostasis and old icons maintained in excellent condition. Surrounding the square, traditional cafes and taverns offer much-needed respite under the shade of ancient trees, with the view toward the Feneos plain providing a breathtaking backdrop. This is the spot where locals gather to discuss the day’s news, keeping the tradition of Greek hospitality alive. If you are starting your

journey from the coast, a stop at Mavadda Cafe in Kiato is highly recommended to fuel up with premium coffee before heading into the mountains.

Stone Mansions: Witnesses of a Bygone Era

The most defining characteristic of Goura is its mansions. Walking through the narrow, paved alleys (kalderimia), you will encounter two-story and three-story stone houses that once belonged to the prominent families of the region. Most were built in the 19th century, and Goura itself was known from the time of the Revolution for its organised companies of master builders.

- **The Oikonomou-Goura Mansion:** This is the most emblematic building in the village. The Oikonomou family played a pivotal role in local history and the Greek War of Independence in 1821. The mansion is distinguished by its defensive structures, including arrow slits (polemistres), arched lintels, and a fortified layout necessitated by the era's turbulence.
- **The Mourtis Mansion:** Another exceptional example of local architecture, highlighting the aesthetic sensibilities of the wealthy inhabitants of Mountainous Corinthia.
- **Stone Details:** Pay close attention to the hand-carved designs around the doorways and windows, as well as the heavy iron-studded doors that once protected these grand residences.

Many of these historic buildings have been meticulously restored with respect for their original form. Today, several function as traditional guesthouses, offering visitors the unique experience of staying in a living piece of history while enjoying modern comforts like fireplaces and handmade breakfasts.

Flavors and Local Products of the Plateau

Goura and the wider Feneos area are famous for producing high-quality legumes. The microclimate of the plateau, combined with the soil composition of the former lakebed, favors the cultivation of the famous "Vanilla" Feneos beans, which have been granted Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status. Similarly, Feneos fava (made from Lathyrus sativus) is considered among the best in Greece due to its creamy texture and sweet taste.

In the village taverns, you should not miss out on tasting:

- Local grilled or slow-cooked meats, such as wild boar, lamb, and succulent pork chops.
- Artisanal cheeses sourced from the livestock units of the Ziria highlands.
- Traditional savory pies (pites) made with hand-rolled phyllo dough.
- Spoon sweets (glyka tou koutaliou) made by local women's cooperatives using seasonal fruits like cherries and walnuts.

For those returning to the coast after a long day of exploring, the local meat culture continues in Kiato. Places like Gyromachies offer authentic Greek flavors for a perfect conclusion to your Corinthian adventure.

Exploring the Surroundings: Lake Doxa and St. George’s Monastery

While Goura is a destination in itself, it also serves as the perfect base for exploring the wider Feneos region. A short drive away lies Lake Doxa, an artificial lake of incredible beauty that reflects the surrounding pine-clad mountains. In the middle of the lake, connected by a narrow strip of land, is the small chapel of Agios Fanourios.

Perched high above the lake is the historic Monastery of Agios Georgios (St. George). Rebuilt in the 18th century, the monastery played a vital role during the Greek Revolution. Visitors are often treated to "rose sugar" (triantafyllo), a traditional sweet made by the monks from the monastery’s own rose gardens. The view from the monastery’s wooden balcony over Lake Doxa is widely considered one of the most beautiful vistas in

the Peloponnese.

Practical Information and Access

Reaching Goura is relatively straightforward, though the road features the typical winding turns of a mountainous route. From Athens, the journey takes approximately 2.5 hours. The most scenic route involves taking the National Road toward Corinth, exiting at Kiato, and then following the signs for Stymphalia and Feneos. This path takes you past the mythical Lake Stymphalia, offering stunning landscapes before the final ascent toward the Goura plateau.

The best time to visit Goura depends on the experience you seek. Autumn is magical as the plane trees in the square turn golden and the smell of woodsmoke fills the air. Winter often brings snow, transforming the village into a cozy, white retreat. However, even in the height of summer, the high altitude ensures a refreshing coolness, making it an ideal escape from the heat of the coastal cities.

Travel Tips for Goura:

- **Dress in Layers:** Even in summer, evening temperatures can drop significantly.
- **Stock Up:** While there are local shops, ensure your vehicle has enough fuel before leaving the coastal highway at Kiato.
- **Hiking:** Bring sturdy shoes; there are numerous trails leading from the village into the fir forests of Ziria.
- **Photography:** The golden hour (just before sunset) provides the best lighting for capturing the textures of the stone mansions.

For those seeking an organized experience or more information regarding local business hours and travel logistics, feel free to reach out via our contact page. Goura remains one of the few places where the nobility of the past meets the rugged beauty of the Greek mountains, offering a travel experience that is both sophisticated and deeply traditional.

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