

We live on a blessed island.  
The only place in the world  
where **mastic** is produced.  
A natural product with great  
flavour and healing qualities  
that has been shaping the  
**culture** of the island for ages.

By revealing this culture  
to visitors we have  
managed to provide  
**a fresh idea for responsible  
Aegean island vacations.**



**masticulture**  
ecotourism activities

# About Chios Island

Chios is one of the largest islands in the Aegean Sea. The island lays claim as the birthplace of Homer but it is mostly famous for its unique mastic gum. The island's vibrant local culture, deeply rooted in tradition, ritual and folklore, is very much alive to this day. For centuries under the rule of the Byzantine Empire and later a possession of the Republic of Genoa, the island boasts architectural reminders of its rich and varied history.

Chios today is an unforgettable travel destination because of its warm and welcoming islanders. They deserve praise for keeping the villages and countryside alive, and they will welcome you with open arms and a glass of ouzo or souma, the local spirit distilled from figs.

## **A LIST OF JUST A FEW OF THE ISLAND'S UNIQUE FEATURES**

- Medieval fortress villages built to elude pirates and red stone mansions with walled citrus groves built by the Genovese.
- The unique village of Pyrgi renowned for the decorated facades of the buildings and the house of Christopher Columbus.
- Byzantine treasures, like the renowned mosaics of Nea Moni Monastery, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- Natural beauty of fertile plains and rolling hills filled with olive and mastic trees.
- Rare flora with aromatic herbs, spices, stunning wild tulips and over 70 kinds of orchids.
- Local products and traditional Mediterranean cuisine such as mastic, olives, wine, vegetables, fruits, cheeses and seafood.
- Secluded beaches and deep blue Aegean waters.
- Mediterranean climate—warm summers and mild winters.
- A fragrance of the old Greece, in the historical little island of Psara.
- Proximity and convenient connections to additional travel destinations in Greece or Turkey.

# About the mastic gum

Chios mastic is a unique agricultural product harvested exclusively in a small area in the south part of Chios. The settlements of the mastic producing region are called "mastic villages". It has been used for ages in several remedies for its medicinal properties and in cuisine for its unique taste as a spice. Today it is widely used in food, cosmetics and other industries.

## **HISTORY**

Mastic is the product of the mastic tree, prospering only in south Chios. There is evidence that the cultivation and exploitation of mastic originated in ancient years during the Hellenistic period. Despite competition from other species of mastic at that time, the superior quality of Chios' mastic established it as a unique product with significant commercial value and exclusivity.

The Byzantine Empire delivered the island to the Republic of Genoa in the 14th century. The Genovese systemized the production and trading of mastic and mandated special taxes on the islanders to be paid in mastic. Part of this system is the mastic villages. Entire villages built like fortresses from scratch, to protect the farmers from the pirate raids. They also built castles, and a line of watchtowers on the West coast to monitor the sea and alert the people in case a pirate ship was approaching.

The Ottomans that succeeded the Genovese ruled the island for four centuries. The harem in Istanbul loved mastic so much that the sultan allowed special privileges to the people of Chios.

After World War I, mastic production declined and its value dropped. The establishment of the "Mastic Growers' Cooperative" resulted in an increase in production despite adverse conditions and World War II.

During recent years systematic research, development and promotion have not only increased sales and its reputation, but also the income of the mastic producers whose interest has been revived considerably.

## **PRODUCTION PROCESS OF THE CHIOS MASTIC**

Little has changed in the mastic production process from ancient times until today. The extraction of mastic gum starts from the fifth year of a tree's life. Harvesting occurs from July until the beginning of October. Once harvested, mastic has to be cleaned by the mastic producers and their families through a tedious process that typically lasts throughout the winter.



Mastic cleaning in the Mastic Villages. © Massimo Pizzocaro.

Instead of being passive observers, our visitors are encouraged to actively participate in a village's activities and endeavours, thus gaining the opportunity to truly experience the authentic life and culture of Chios.



Experiencing mastic tree cultivation practices. © Klairi Moustafellou.

We offer environmentally-conscious travellers a wealth of rewarding activities related to the nature and culture of the Greek Island of Chios.

Masticulture is a locally-owned and operated travel bureau in the mastic village of Mesta on Chios island in the Aegean Sea. It works under an official Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTO) license as a travel agency and is the first and only tourism company specialising in ecotourism on the island. It provides a broad variety of both natural and social environmental activities inspired by the island's culture. Masticulture puts together ecotourism packages that combine hospitality and outdoor activities related to all the things that compose the culture of Chios: its customs and traditions, popular arts and crafts, agricultural labour and produce, architecture and much more. All this takes place on an island that has remained broadly untouched by the tourism development of the last few decades. Chios has also managed to keep its rural societies present because of its active agricultural sector, which to this day continues to be the chief source of employment for many of the villagers on the island, while also functioning as a prime factor in Chios' sustainable development.

### **WHAT WE DO**

Masticulture organizes and carries out ecotourism-based activity programmes combined with the provision of accommodation on various parts of the island to meet

and satisfy all standards. We offer independent visitors and groups tailor-made programmes or accommodation, or a combination of both, such as our full ecotourism package tours. We also organize professional meetings, conferences, workshops, etc. integrated with ecotourism features.

On one of our excursions our visitors may find themselves riding in a vehicle, on a bicycle, a donkey or a boat. However, walking is our favourite option.

### **TYPES OF ACTIVITIES**

- Organized tours showcasing traditional agricultural methods in the great outdoors and in family-run workshops and small factories.
- Lessons in local traditions and folk arts and crafts of Chios such as dancing, weaving, religious icon painting, sculpture, ceramics, etc.
- Educational and entertainment programmes for children through which they can discover agricultural cultivation processes, the island's flora and fauna, folk art and other traditions of Chios.



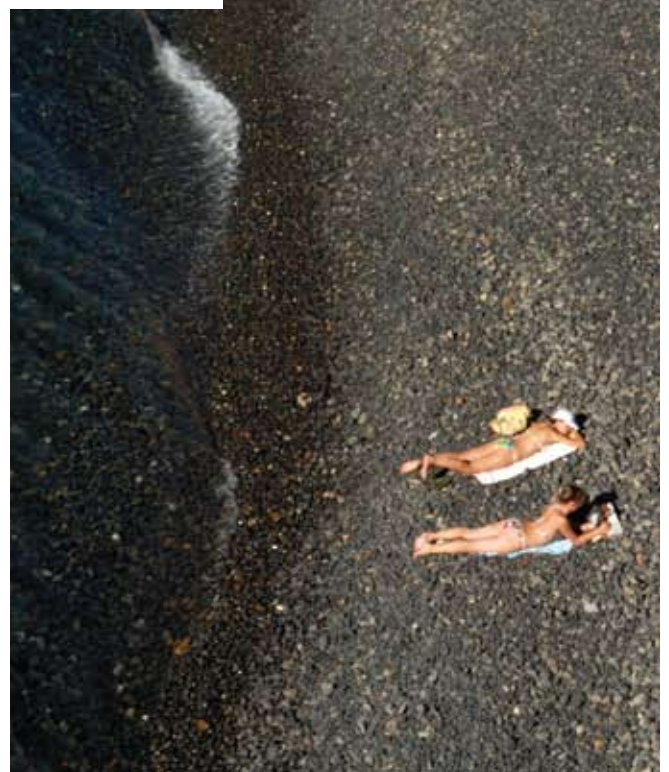
Rappelling off the Anavatos Gorge.  
© Konstantinos Christophoratos.



Chios has remained broadly untouched by the tourism development of the last few decades.



Folk festival in the medieval town of Mesta. © Klairi Moustafellou.



Mavra Volia, a unique beach of a volcanic nature. © Massimo Pizzocaro.

Our clients,  
whether they know  
it or not, contribute  
to the sustainable  
future of Chios.

Masticulture's services address people who are interested, aware and caring towards the environment and sustainable development. Many such individuals are part of a new generation of sensitized and responsible travellers whose holidays are not limited to the "sea and sun" range. These can include:

- Families: many villages on Chios are ideal destinations for families as car circulation is limited or completely forbidden. Also, outdoor activities offer city children a great opportunity to get a taste of life in the countryside and to discover how basic resources and food products are made.
- Couples: romantic rooms in medieval towns, secluded beaches, a colourful array of activities and the intoxicating smells of Chios will enchant every couple.
- Groups of friends: thanks to the wide-ranging and contrast-filled nature of Chios there are enough places on the island to suit a diverse range of tastes.
- Individual travellers: the diverse landscapes, a broad array of activities, the flavours, the warm-hearted locals and other characteristics of Chios' geography and culture incite the visitor to face the constant dilemma of, "Should I hang out here a bit longer, or continue my exploration..."

Of course, Chios Island also attracts visitors who are not necessarily tourists, such as:

- Associations: cultural, athletic, scientific and other clubs can significantly enrich their visit to Chios by coming in contact with people who share common interests on the island.
- Academics: economists and professors interested or involved in regional development, or researchers and historians, especially those interested in the Byzantine Empire and Genovese rule.
- Schools: every cultural, athletic and educational excursion can be enriched in a variety of ways owing to Chios' many living traditions.
- Businesses: Chios provides an alternative proposal for company outings, product presentations and other business programmes.
- Advertising or TV and film production companies: Greece, the Aegean Sea, medieval villages, folk art, ancient sites, beautiful and unique landscape ranging from all-green to moonscape, the mastic phenomenon and tradition make up just a few of the many fascinating elements that the island holds and represents.

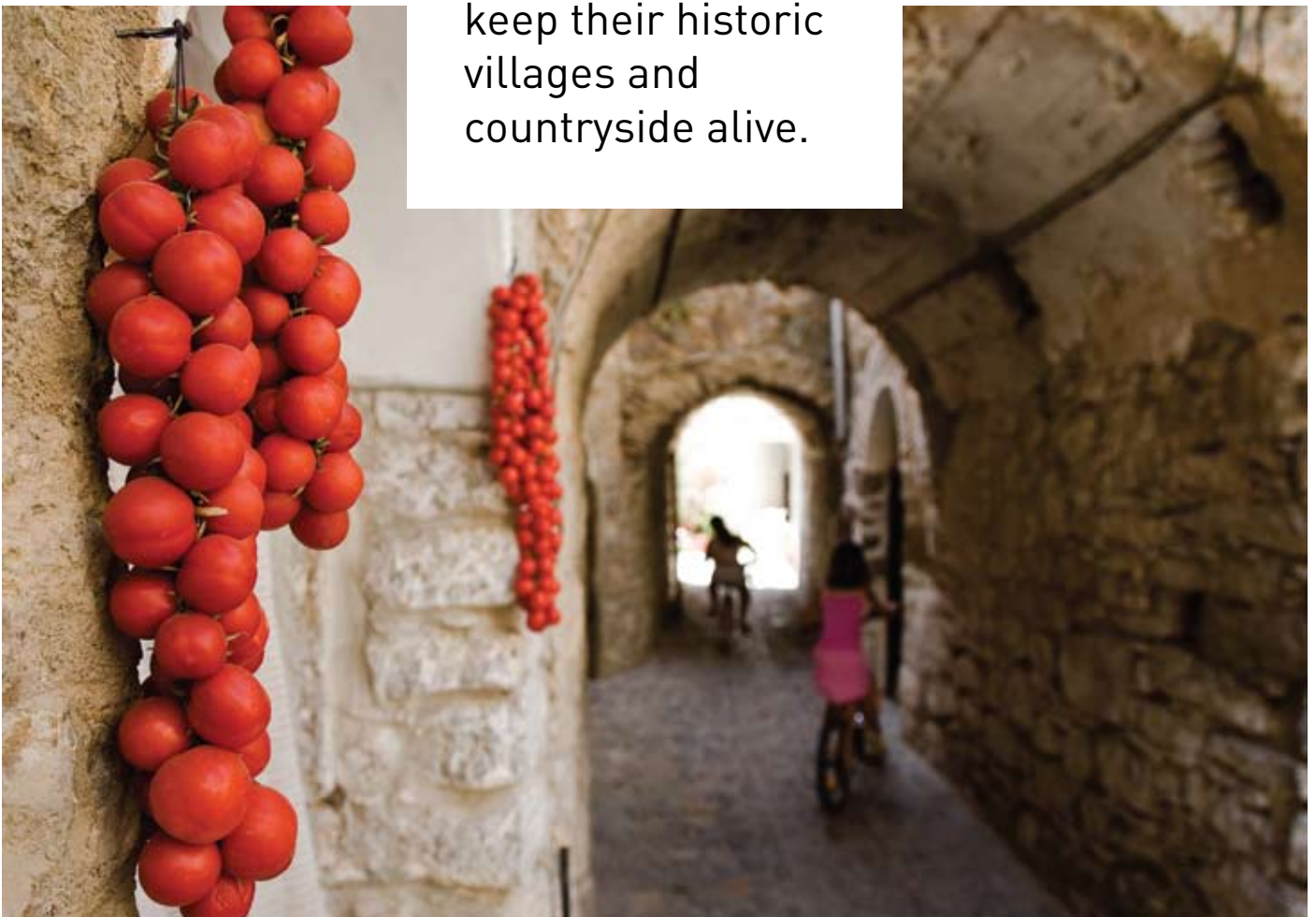


Weaving with a hand loom in Mesta.  
© Klairi Moustafellou.



Preparing fish soup for the fiesta.  
© Klairi Moustafellou.

A travel destination  
with warm and  
welcoming  
islanders that  
keep their historic  
villages and  
countryside alive.



A typical street in the Medieval Mastic Villages. Traffic is prohibited allowing children to play safely. © Uluc Kecik.

We organize themed tours, for groups or individuals, lasting from a couple of hours to a couple of weeks, all filled with experiential activities.



April is the best month for a flora discovery tour. © Masticulture.

Masticulture strives to offer visitors on the island the opportunity to combine their holiday with a discovery tour that enables them to become acquainted with Chios' natural splendour, whilst experiencing the joy of natural life in the countryside: a game of backgammon at the local coffee house, gathering nets on a fishing boat or a solitary walk along the old cobblestone paths that lead to secret mastic groves and orchards.

Masticulture encourages every visitor to take initiative and personally seek out all the things that contribute to Chios' culture. Many times, however, people's tentativeness and sense of discretion prevents them from creating a direct or warm contact with the locals. In other cases a lot of interesting local goings-on are kept under wraps by inhabitants and are difficult to discover.

We make access to all these and other interesting aspects of the island easier through our agritourism and culture tourism programmes. Activities that address everybody and have been designed to be entertaining, educational, mind opening and safe.

### **DAYLONG ACTIVITIES FOR INDEPENDENT TRAVELLERS**

With a duration that is ranging from two to eight hours, these programmes are designed for all people visiting the island independently. We run them on a weekly

schedule from April to November and on an on-demand or made-to-order basis during the rest of the year. They always take place during comfortable hours so that they don't interfere with our visitors' time at the beach during the summer or demand that they wake up at the crack of dawn to accompany farmers and fishermen in their work.

To list just a few: demonstration of the mastic tree harvest, walking tours, cooking lesson, folk dance lesson, grape stomping, pottery class and more.

We also have the flexibility to create private programmes tailored to the personal profile and interests of our guests providing a complete, unique and authentic experience to suit every interest, requirement and taste.



It's not unusual to encounter donkeys while on a walk in the Chian countryside.



Travellers of all ages participating in the Mastic tour. © Rachael Pettus.



A young boy practicing mastic harvesting techniques. © Rachael Pettus.

### **PACKAGE TOURS**

Our package deals offer a combination of accommodation, tours, meals, transportation and other travel services, relieving the travellers of the process of organizing all the details of their trip. Again these tours are themed and they incorporate special guided tours and experiential activities.

### **SEMINARS**

Our seminars are addressed to those wishing to combine a visit to Chios with a more intensive educational experience. These seminars are inspired by or related to the islands culture, landscapes and people. Photography, folk dancing, pottery, Mediterranean diet, organic farming, are just some of the themes. The seminars are led by resident or visiting experts and they may be addressed to professionals or hobbyists.

### **SHORE EXCURSIONS**

For cruise ship passengers, we organize shore excursions ranging from typical sightseeing to special interest walking or culture tours. Holding a Port Agent License we can act as both an agent for ships that berth at the port of Mesta and as a ground operator for the tours.

## Style and themes

We consider ourselves lucky. Authenticity is a key factor for a successful programme and we feel surrounded by it. The themes for our programmes, from the simplest walk to the most demanding tour, are inspired by the islands nature, history and living culture.

### **THE LAND**

Rare diversity in landscapes. Forests, rocky moon-like plateaus, mountain tops, Aegean Sea deep blue waters, secluded beaches, medieval towns, Byzantine treasures, rolling hills covered with terraces that host mastic trees, olive trees, wild tulips and rare orchids. A perfect place for walking, nature discovery and sightseeing.

### **...AND ITS PEOPLE**

Food, vibrant music and dances, agricultural practices and folk art, traditions and rituals... All these often provide a theme for our classes, seminars and special excursions.

## Accommodation

We have a growing list of traditional locally-owned hotels, rooms and vacation villas in Chios ranging from simple, 300-year-old village houses to state-of-the-art luxury rooms.

We cooperate with choice hotels and rooms for rent on all of Chios with emphasis on locally-owned and -operated, small-scale traditional accommodation units. We give preference to hotels that have retained its traditional architectural style and belong to people who share common concerns related to the island's sustainable tourism development.

The range of accommodation we provide varies depending on budget, style, geographic area and our guests' particular desires.

Different areas on Chios will change the range of choices in terms of beaches, type of settlement, surrounding sights, activities and recreation. Our list is counting hundreds of rooms in areas like the Mastic Villages, Volissos, Kampos, Kardamylla, Avgonyma, Psara Island and others.



Hotel in Kampos. © Uluc Kecik.



Hotel in Kardamylla. © Spilia.



Hotel in Kampos. © Vaggelis Ksydas.



Hotel in Kampos. © Massimo Pizzocaro.



Hotel in Avgonyma. © Giorgos Missetzis.



Hotel in Kampos. © Fernando Arias.



Hotel in Kampos. © Massimo Pizzocaro.

We are working with the most charming and unique hotels on Chios; places where hospitality is an experience of its own.



Hotel in Mesta. © Medieval Castle Suites.



Hotel in Mesta. © Medieval Castle Suites.

## Why work with Masticulture?



Mastic cleaning in the alleys of Mastic Villages. © Klairi Moustafellou.

Our goal is building sustainable communities – and you can help us to do so.

For us, offering responsible travel is not just the provision of green services and products and the support of local economies. One has to adopt a responsible attitude towards the environment, partners and fellow citizens.

Running a travel agency based in a village of 300 year-round inhabitants, we acknowledge our unique social responsibility. Except for high summer, Chios sees few visitors; our goal is to help expand the tourism season by offering alternative tourism activities year round. In doing so we can provide new green job opportunities to our fellow citizens while also facilitating the development of partners working for the sustainable future of Chios.

### OUR PRINCIPLES

Our dedication to preserving the environment characterises our tours and other activities.

- Our tours are mainly walking tours; vehicles are used sparingly.
- We volunteer regularly to maintain and 'rediscover' Chios' walking trails, and for projects that help protect the island's biodiversity.

- We cultivate our land using organic farming practices.

Our business is 100% local.

- We work exclusively with locally-owned and operated hotels.
- We use local tour leaders and guides for our tours whenever possible.
- We encourage local restaurants to use local produce, and especially organic whenever possible.
- Our Web site and all printed material are created in-house in Mesta, while our printer is located just down the road in Chios Town.

We are currently running the only local business focused specifically on ecotourism in Chios, and we continue to improve our environmental performance, our understanding of rural development and our skills as ecotourism practitioners.

- We hold a special certificate in Eco-responsibility Principles and Business Practices from the Environmental Laboratory of the University of the Aegean.
- We work systematically to create awareness among our partners and fellow citizens for issues such as



Sharing the secrets and the tools of mastic production.



The dance class of the Cultural Association of Mesta. © Massimo Pizzocaro.

sustainable development, quality tourism, cultural heritage preservation, environmental protection.

- We are attending lifelong learning classes and seminars related to rural development, culture and tourism, organic farming and more.
- We are a member of “Sustainable Aegean Network”, a project ran by “The Hellenic Society for the Protection of the Environment and the Cultural Heritage”.

We are a responsible company, run by conscientious and caring professionals.

- We go the extra mile in providing traveller support services, such as logistics and arrival information within Greece, personalized information and tips and any assistance in our power that can make a trip more enjoyable and relaxing.
- We take feedback to heart, and are eager to communicate with clients past, present and future to ensure that each and every visit will be as rewarding, fun and exciting as possible for all.

**SUPPLEMENTARY SERVICES TO MAKE THE TRIP TO CHIOS EASIER**

Masticulture operates under the Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTO) license as a travel agency. It is our desire to provide complete services and to facilitate our partners functioning as their sole point of reference, their Destination Management Company for Chios. Thus, to make the travel experience easier we also commit to the following services:

- Booking ferry tickets for all Greek Islands and for the Chios – Cesme (Turkey) line.
- Booking air tickets for all domestic and international flights.
- Car, motorbike and bicycle rentals through select partners.
- Arranging leisure boats, buses and taxis for transfers and organized tours on Chios.
- Providing Port Agent services for all short of passenger ships that berth at the Port of Mesta.

We have been reviewed and recommended by such publications as Lonely Planet, Fodors, and Guide du Routard, and have received flattering comments from institutes, the press, partners and a number of travellers from all parts of the globe.

### TRAVELLERS

This afternoon made my trip to Chios complete...

Bonnie and Michael, **USA**, April 2008

Interesting, good humour, inspiring.

Maya, **May 2008**

This excursion should be mandatory for all visitors of Chios... Thanks to our enthusiastic guide.

Johan and Rien, **The Netherlands**, June 2008

It has been my dream to come to Chios and see this unique product, Mastiha, and I could not have found a guide better than you to show me around....

Helen, Perth, **Australia**, July 2008

Thank you for all you have done for our group, for your kindness and for making our time in Mesta unforgettable.

Cecile, **France**, July 2008

What you do here in Mesta is very interesting and useful for the sustainable development of this area.

Gianni Ballette, Brussels, **Belgium**, September 2008

Seriously Amazing! Experience I will never forget.

Lauren, Los Angeles, **USA**, September 2008

Back to Nature.

Isamu Kitajima, **Japan**, September 2008

Masticulture was so helpful and thoughtful. I felt like a person instead of an outsider. All places should be so open.

Arianne, **USA**, April 2009

We have experienced Living Cultural Heritage today in a wonderful presentation by a competent guide. Good luck for the future for this important aspect of international understanding.

Peter, **Finland**, April 2009

One of the best experiences we've had in Europe... ever!

The Pegg Family, Sydney, **Australia**, July 2009

Truly enjoyed this direct encounter with Nature and outdoor adventure in the fields on an idyllic Greek Island. The mastic plantation is simply unforgettable. We're impressed with the Greek traditions and culture.

Anthony NG and Family, **Hong Kong**, July 2009

Thank you so much for creating the highlight of our trip to Chios.

Jane Clark Chermayeff, **New York**, June 2008

I wish there was an office like yours in every village.

Maro, Zurich, **Switzerland**, July 2009

A brilliant tour accompanied by the best of services! I can not thank you enough.

Kevin Mamalis, **Switzerland**, August 2009

Thank you so much for arranging our stay in Mesta which has been the most unexpectedly incredible experience – unlike any vacation that we've ever had. It has been an experience as well as the perfect honeymoon.

Bash and Katie, New York, **USA**, August 2009

You made a dream of mine come true. Thank you so much for sharing the story of Mastic with us. Your help in arranging our stay in Mesta was above and beyond.

Keith and Paula, **Canada**, September 2009

Absolutely the best picnic I have experienced... A piece of heaven on earth that will live in my memory!.

Greg and Christine, **Canada**, September 2009

How can we express how perfect our day in Chios was thanks to you!

Doug, **Canada**, October 2009

A perfect day! A perfect spot! A perfect guide! Thank you for a beautiful tour of Chios. All of it was wonderful, especially the picnic in the Mastica field.

Ross and Debora, Charlotte, North Carolina, **USA**, October 2009



In one of Masticulture's picnics people get the chance to taste locally produced, high-quality products under the shade of the mastic trees. © Klairi Moustafellou.

#### PARTNERS

"Masticulture is a pleasure to work with. Efficient, friendly, totally reliable and absolutely passionate about what they do — an inspiration".

MARTIN RANDALL TRAVEL

"Chios is like a mystery, preserved from mass tourism and yet very accessible from Athens. It is the ideal place to develop an activity around responsible travel mixing its cultural wonders and a stress free resting holiday. [...] Masticulture is representing a new form of tourism, some call it "slow tourism", with reference to slow food, but Roula and Vassilis do it with sincerity and creativity which makes the difference".

Philippe Romero, Directeur Général Adjoint, VOYAGEURS DU MONDE

#### TRAVEL BOOKS

Lonely Planet recommends Masticulture as "an offbeat, environmentally friendly travel service that encourages visitors to get their hands dirty by participating in the traditional livelihood of southern Chios."

#### THE PRESS

"[Masticulture owners Vassilis and Roula] a young couple who, perhaps, represent the island's future"

Helen Anderson. "My Big Fat Greek Holiday", The Sydney Morning Herald, November 2007.

"Vassilis and Roula are the faces of a new kind of tourism in Greece. Their programs are for people who are not satisfied with lying out on a beach like lizards,"

Aliza Green quotes Greek travel expert Matt Barrett. "Mastic Mystique" article appeared in the summer 2009 issue of Nuvo Magazine.

#### INSTITUTES

Our innovative ideas and efforts for sustainable development have been recognized and awarded by the Greek public and private sector. Some examples:

- In January 2008, after just nine months of operation, Masticulture was awarded **Company of the Year** by the **Chios Chamber of Commerce** for its innovative programmes, business approach and green practices.
- Masticulture was recognized for its successful business practices in rural communities, winning an award from the **Greek Ministry of Labour and Social Care** in October 2008.



## **μasticulture** ecotourism activities

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A member of HATTA, the Hellenic Association  
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