



Spetses, the southernmost island of the Saronic Gulf, has a great history and the honour of national recognition for its vital and incalculable contribution during the War of Independence against the Ottoman Empire.

The highest point of the island is 'Profites Elias' with a height of 291 metres, while the ring road is 24 kilometres long. The population of the island is 4,100, mainly living in the town of Spetses.

In ancient times the island was called 'Pityoussa' which means 'pine-clad'. This name was probably used for 3,000 years until the first centuries of the Byzantine Empire. The current name originates from the Venetians, who named the island 'Isola de Spezzie' - fragrant island - because of the many herbs that grew on its mountains. The name Spetses was later derived from this description.

At a timewhen tourism was more or less unknown in the rest of Greece, Spetses already had an excellently organised hotel, the renowned 'Possidonio'. This hotel was built by the national benefactor, Sotirios Anargyros and entertained both Greek and foreign visitors throughout the summers and also at weekends during the winter months.

Spetses is today one of the favourite islands of both Greek and foreign tourists, maintaining its cosmopolitan style with visits from V.I.P.s. from all parts of the world. Its location (2 hours by road or sea from Athens), regular connections with Piraeus, and the proximity of the Peloponnesian coast (1.3 miles) make the island easily accessible.

Archaeological discoveries indicate that Spetses was first inhabited during the first Hellenic era, at about 2,300 B.C. On account of its geographical location in the Argolic Gulf and its numerous springs, the island was used as a provision station by ships heading to the Peloponnesian

coast.

In recent years, numerous excavations have been carried out in several areas and have brought to light significant historical findings, such as:

- >Pottery of the first Hellenic period 3rd millennium B.C. in the area of Aghia Marina.
- >Early Byzantine basilicas in the area of Baltiza.
- >Byzantine settlement in Zogeria

In addition there are important findings of marine archaeology, such as:

The bronze-age shipwreck of 'Dokos' (2,200B.C.), considered to be the oldest known shipwreck in the world. The findings of the shipwreck are in the process of being cleaned and restored - a difficult and long-term procedure that requires great patience and takes place in specially converted rooms of the Museum of Spetses - the most organised museum in the region and that with the highest level of security.

The Mycenaean shipwreck of 'Iria', dated approximately 1,200B.C. The findings of this shipwreck have been restored at the Museum of Spetses and today are exhibited on the ground floor. This exhibition consists of stone anchors, large earthen jars from Cyprus, false-necked amphora from Crete, Mycenaean pottery, and much more.

From the 17th century, the population of the island increased, with settlers coming from the Peloponnesian regions of Lakonia, Kynouria and Hermionida. From reports and discoveries, we know that the first medieval settlement of Spetses was built on the northwest side of the island in the area called 'Kastelli', which means 'the island castle'. Walls surrounded the settlement and the acropolis was on the hill where the church of St. Basil stands today.

The golden era of the island began in the 18th century and continued until the beginning of the War of Independence in 1821. During this period, there were significant developments in navigation methods, and a powerful fleet was built and maintained until 1854. After the War of Independence, the island retained its prosperity for several years but at the dawn of the 20th century, Spetses began to decline, mainly because of the transfer of merchant development and activity to Syra and Piraeus. The two World Wars brought poverty and many inhabitants were forced to leave the island. At the end of the Second World War, Spetses started to overcome these years of decline and developed quickly due to the wave of tourism that deluged Greece from the mid-fifties onwards, always though, maintaining its traditions and habits. Spetses is a small island, which has been honoured for its important contribution to the War of Independence in 1821 and the liberation of Greece from the Otto-man occupation.

In 1769, the people of Spetses took part in the revolution of the Peloponnese, ('Orlof's revolt') and suffered the consequences of their participation when the Ottomans destroyed the town in

a punitive expedition. The Spetsiots once again showed their patriotism in 1790, helping Lambros Katsonis, and again suffered Ottoman persecution.

When the War of Independence broke out in 1821, Spetses was the first of the three important naval islands (Hydra, Spetses, and Psara) to respond to the call of the revolution. These three islands raised revolutionary flags from the very beginning.

On April 3rd 1821, after the church service at St. Nicholas, the Spetsiots took over the chancellery of the island and formed a local administration in order to advise Hydra and Psara. At the outset, the Spetsiot ships, under the command of G.Panou and Laskarina Bouboulina, succeeded in cutting off the coastal forts of Monemvassia and Nafplion respectively. These two Ottoman strongholds were impregnable by land and the only way to make them surrender was a naval blockade, in order to cut off supplies provided by the Turks and their allies. Influenced by the actions of the Spetsiots, the islands of Hydra and Psara joined the Revolution. The Spetses fleet seized and sank Ottoman vessels throughout the Aegean Sea, and supported the struggle of the nation by blockading important harbours and carrying arms and munitions. In July 1821, ships from Spetses fought with a squadron of the powerful Ottoman fleet near the island of Samos and managed to destroy a number of enemy vessels, and then succeeded in repelling the Turks at the bay of Mani.



During the naval blockade of Nafplion, the Spetsiots displayed unrivalled heroism, fighting under the command of Bouboulina and the other captains. Under a hail of fire, they were trying, with small boats, to reach and take the impregnable forts of Nafplion. They also played an important role in the conquest of Tripolitsa, where they took part in the siege of the town from the beginning, and on the day of its fall, on September 23rd they were the first to reach the town walls. In July 1822, the Spetsiot fleet was sent to Souda, in Crete, to fight the Egyptian fleet, which was allied with the Turks, and which they chased to the entrance of the Dardanelle Straits. That same year the Spetsiots fought against General Dramalis, who was invading the Peloponnese, managing to repulse the attack of the Ottoman fleet on their island, and also fought at Messolong.

The figure that dominated the naval operations of the 1821 War of Independence was Laskarina Bouboulina. She became a member of the 'Filiki Etairia', an underground organisation originating in Europe, which, for many years, made preparations for the revolution. She also built the 'Agamemnon', which was her flagship, and three other, smaller ships, at her own expense. She used her fortune for the provision of food, arms and ammunitions for her sailors and soldiers.

Hatzigiannis-Mexis, the leading Spetsiot of the time, as well as the fire raiser Cosmas Barbatsis, and the captains Lambrou, Koutsis, Panou and Tsoupas, were significant figures that decisively helped the contribution of Spetses to the revolution.

The visitor has the chance to learn about the events of that period at the many historic places, which are carefully maintained by the Spetsiots.