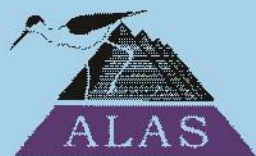


ALAS

ALAS

All About Salt



In the same ALAS leaflet series:

- Traditional saltworks in southern Europe: historical development and operation
- The salter's profession: weather and sweat
- Traditionally produced salt: a high quality product
- Traditional production of salt: an age-old cultural heritage
- *Discovering traditional saltworks: a short guide for tourists and amateurs*
- Traditional production of salt and its culture: your region benefits from it

The ALAS Project is an initiative that aims the safeguard of traditional salinas. It is carried out within the framework of an ECOS-Overture Programme. More information on this project can be obtained at www.alas.gr and www.aegean.gr/ alas/general.htm

With the financial support
of the European Commission



Text - Theodora Petanidou / Renato Neves • Photos/map - Hjalmar Dahm • Design - João Ricardo • Layout - Filipe Dias • Coordination - Sónia Pinto / Figueira da Foz City Council

Discovering traditional saltworks: a short guide for tourists and amateurs



Cover photo: Salinas and wind-driven pumps in Marsabiti, Sicily

Discovering traditional saltworks: a short guide for tourists and amateurs

Salinas for tourism

Scattered along the Mediterranean coasts and the nearby regions, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Black Sea, salinas are very special places not just because of the salt produced there, but also because of their landscape: particular, even extreme, to the edge of earth, sea and air. Few of them are still operating in the *traditional* way, employing an enormous human labor and equipment like in the old times. The most charismatic of them are those characterized as *artisanal*, small-scale salinas normally operated by one salter working hard on a daily basis.

Located on sites of exceptional natural interest, salinas are endowed with attributes offering many possibilities for *alternative tourism*. *Ecotourism*, perfectly compatible with nature preservation even in Nature Reserves and Protected Areas, is considered as an important alternative economic resource contributing to the revitalization and development of these areas. Following a general trend to diversify tourism activities, and also probably as a result of recognition of the values of the salinas, the tendency to exercise ecotourism in salinas has been increasing the last years. Such values are of historical, cultural, geological, technological, as well as of ecological character.



A salina landscape from Castro Marim, Portugal

In the above context, the idea of using the concept of *Salt Routes*, along which salt was traded in the Mediterranean, appears appealing and interesting. Such routes existed as early as in the early Bronze Age in the East Mediterranean. Among the most famous in history are the terrestrial *viae salariae* of the Romans, and the marine routes of the Venetians and Genoese, justifying the metaphor *white gold* referring to the economic importance of this commodity. Recapturing and put forward this idea, in the frame of rediscovering salinas and salt places in the Mediterranean can be a good example of exploring the “*Routes*” issue.

What can tourists enjoy when exploring salinas? Among the different sectors that may catch public attention, we mention:

Bird watching: Either as nesting or as hosting sites of several conspicuous and noisy species, salinas are privileged sites for observing birds. The most emblematic of the species nesting in the salinas is the black-winged stilt, appearing also on the ALAS logo. Because salinas are part of extent Mediterranean wetlands, they constitute important migratory passage for waterfowl from Northern Europe. During winter it is possible to observe a plethora of species, sometimes in impressive population numbers and under excellent conditions for bird watching.



Bird watching in the salinas of Piran, Slovenia



Black-winged Stilt, a typical salina bird

such as cheironomids and wasps, a special microflora varying from salt bacteria to algae, make the salinas special areas for studying or just for a simple recreational visit.

Recreation: Traditional salinas and salt landscapes constitute a nice and very relaxing environment encompassing a variety of very diverse elements: technical (walls, canals, ponds), architectural (lines, shapes and water planes), natural (marshes, sand dunes). The combination of natural and built elements together with the reflections on the water in the open space not only contribute to the recreational values of the area, but they also create a chromatic and geometric landscape, unique for photography, painting or even a simple walk.

Cultural heritage: The art of salt making carried out for hundreds of years in the salinas, the tools, buildings, boats, wind pumps, traditions and legends, as well as the salt as a technical product, form a vast culture potential. All these are subjects promoted and exposed in Salt Museums working already in several Mediterranean salinas. Such Museums may be used as the future instruments for promoting salinas-related tourism in the whole Basin.

Flora and fauna: Although not extremely high, the biological diversity in the salinas is impressive and the species interestingly typical. A characteristic halophytic flora, a distinguishing group of fishes, copepods, shrimps, insects,



Salicornia europaea, a typical annual halophyte of the European salinas



Salt museums and information centres in Europe

Gastronomy: Located near the sea, usually with excellent seafood, salinas are very often connected with eating specialities found nowhere else. On the other hand, probably it was the vicinity of salt making and availability of huge quantities of salt that allowed the development of culinary salty traditions within the salt producing regions. Such salted specialities are the fish-roe (*avgotaraho*) of Messolonghi, the freshly salted sardines of Kalloni (Lesvos), the famous salted fish (*tárichos*) of the ancient Black Sea, the *gáros* of the ancient Klazomenes in Asia Minor and the Roman *garum*, a salted relish prepared with small fish and the insides of big fish. Today the use of some renowned traditional salts is often linked to high standards of cooking and requiring cuisine, like the salt of Guérande in Brittany.



People enjoying salty baths at Kitros salinas, Central Greece

Health tourism-baths: Not only as a habit of the people living in the surrounding areas, but even as a medical recommendation or, simply, as a body cure or beauty care, the brine or *bittern*, especially the *mud* of salinas are used almost everywhere in the Mediterranean. The tendency, therefore, is not only to combine such an activity with salt production, but also to diversify tourist services offered in the area.

Instructions to visitors

Salinas constitute very fragile habitats like their surrounding areas often classified as Specially Protected or Reserve areas, where visitors must be attentive not to disturb nesting or feeding birds, nor to tremble on plants.

Further, special care should be taken for the delicate work of the salters, considering that a traditional salina is sculptured manually and laboriously for months in order to work, but it may be easily destroyed by careless visitors.