

# DEANNA DICKINS

FOOD. BEAUTY. TRAVEL.

## The Essential Travel Guide to Tinos, Greece

Tinos is a beautiful island that is, in my opinion, underrated among international tourists. Located in the Aegean Sea between *Andros* and *Mykonos*, it shares the beauty of the Cycladic islands without the high price tag and pretentiousness that sometimes exists.

Tinos is probably most well-known for the **Church of Panagia Evangelistria** - a popular site for religious pilgrimage all year round. The largest festival on the island, however, takes place August 15th for the **Dormition of the Virgin Mary** ("Dekapentavgoustos") where pilgrims crawl up to the spectacular church on their hands and knees from the wharf as a sign of devotion.

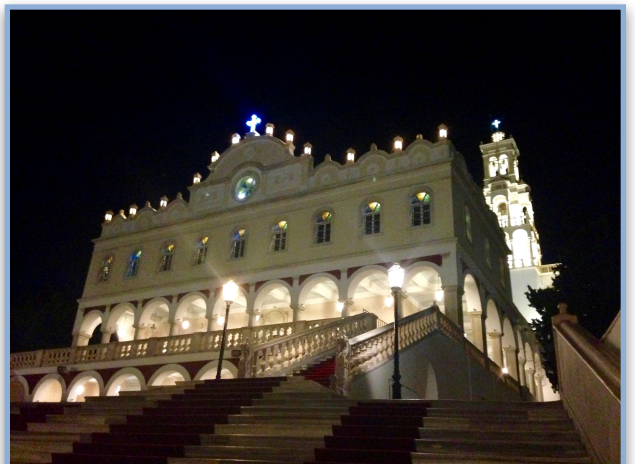
I visited Tinos late summer 2015. At the time, refugees were already being taken in by the Greek Dodecanese islands (near Turkey) and the media was reporting stories that made me feel less than settled. As a young woman who was going to be travelling alone, I decided that it would be best to visit an island close to **Rafina Boat Port** (near my HQ in Greece) and where I would feel safe.

I knew that Tinos would offer stunning views and beaches, but I was not expecting to have enjoyed my stay on the island as much as I did. Staying in *Tinos Town* was the right decision - the people were friendly and kind; the tourists were well-behaved; and the food was incredible.

There are lots of bars and nightclubs on the island, but if you are looking for a low-key place to enjoy a scenic evening walk, a delicious dinner, and a couple glasses of wine, this is your place.



The *Church of Panagia Evangelistria* is a must-see for everyone travelling to Tinos. Visit during the day and at night for different experiences.



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I enjoyed my time on Tinos by going to bed early (11 pm or 12 am); waking up just before sunrise, and walking up to the *War Memorial*. From there, I could take in the view of the sun slowly enveloping the Town beneath me with the street lamps still illuminated. They looked like tiny twinkling stars caught in a cotton candy sky.

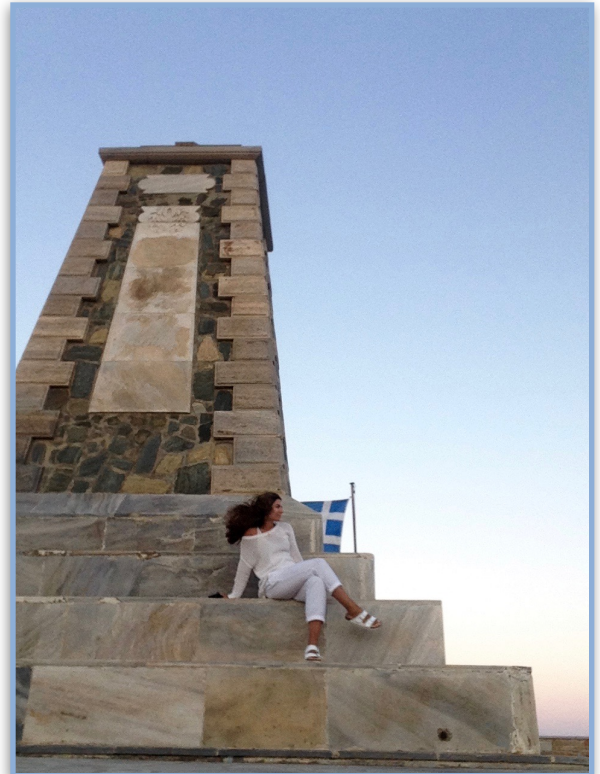
This is my ***Essential Travel Guide to Tinos***.

### Planning Your Trip

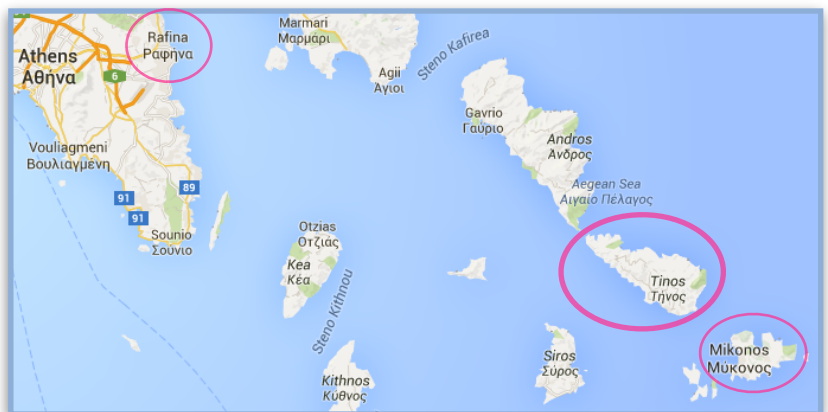
If you are island hopping or only spending a few days on Tinos without access to a car, I recommend staying in **Tinos Town**, near the marina.

*Tinos Town* is filled with different accommodations from luxury hotels, to apartment style, or even rooms for those wanting to see the sights without breaking the bank. While you can certainly find last minute accommodations, planning trips to the Greek islands in advance will help save you money and aggravation so you can relax from the moment you arrive.

Staying in *Tinos Town* for short term vacations will make it easier to explore the island without needing a car. Pretty much everything in the Town is within walking distance to the bus stop, the boat port, restaurants, bakeries, a large grocery store, and the **Panagia Church**.



An early morning photo shoot with the Tinos War Memorial, overlooking the town as the sun rose over it.



Tinos does not have an airport. Fly into Athens International and take a boat from *Rafina Port*, or fly into *Mykonos* and take a boat from there.



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FOOD. BEAUTY. TRAVEL.

## The Essential Travel Guide to Tinos, Greece

### Getting There

There is no airport on Tinos Island. The closest airports are **Athens International Airport**, or **Mykonos Island Airport**. Whichever you choose, you will have to take a boat to Tinos island.

#### Travelling from Athens

The closest boat port to Tinos from Athens is **Rafina Port**. Tinos is about 2.5 hours from Rafina and on the popular route of Andros - Tinos - Mykonos (Mykonos is one of the most beloved vacation destinations for the rich and famous).

#### Travelling from Mykonos

If you are island hopping or flying in to *Mykonos Island Airport*, you have to take a short ~30 minute boat ride to Tinos.

#### Finding a Ferry Boat

The website *FantasticGreece.com* is a great resource for planning your trips around Greece and is especially helpful for researching and booking Ferry tickets. Some of the major boat companies in Greece include *Blue Star Ferries*, *SeaJets*, *Hellenic Seaways*, *Fast Ferries* and *Golden Star Ferries*.

Travelling by boat is an excellent way to explore and experience Greece. Many of the routes use large, luxurious ocean liners that can fit thousands of people, pets, cargo and cars. Newer ships, like those used by *Blue Star Ferries*, also contain cafes and restaurants that make longer rides more comfortable.

When booking your Ferry tickets, you can often choose between Economy seating, Premium Economy (or similar) and Business. All ships generally have assigned seating - the difference being the seat comfort and location on the ship. In my experience travelling in Economy and Premium Economy, there is very little difference in seat comfort. Consider the distance you have to travel and your budget when deciding which area best suits your needs (refer to the *Money Saving TIP* on page 4).



The boat port in Tinos is relatively quiet and surrounded by crystal clear water.

If you are only here for a few days, I recommend staying in Tinos Town, only 500m away from the port.

If you are travelling light, save time and money by walking to your hotel instead of waiting for busses and taxis. The route is a smoothly paved boardwalk.

## The Essential Travel Guide to Tinos, Greece

Take advantage of your time at sea and feel free to explore the ship, regardless of which cabin you are in. They are well-designed to allow passengers to roam. Large ships also feature outdoor decks with seating where you can enjoy the view and the fresh sea breeze. If you look closely, you may even see *dolphins* swimming and playing near by!

I recommend travelling lighter when island hopping. Regardless of what ship you are on, passengers are often requested to leave large suitcases in a designated space on the ship. There is typically only room for passengers to carry one large bag, like a carry on luggage, or two smaller bags like a purse and a beach bag. Each company and each boat has a different policy, so confirm baggage allowance at the time of booking.

### ***Tinos Island Transportation: Busses, Taxis, Rental Cars***

Most people swear that a rental car is needed for travelling in Greece, especially on large islands like Andros, Tinos and Crete. My concern with driving, however, is not to do with my own abilities, but with tourists that decide to drink and drive, and with locals who know their routes and whip around steep mountain roads at alarming speeds.

In my experience, if you plan ahead and you understand the transit situation on an island, you can safely enjoy your vacation without worrying about the responsibilities of a car. Additionally, if you are only staying somewhere for a few days, chances are that you want to see the main attractions usually accessible by public transit.

### **TIP: Saving Money when Travelling by Ferry**

When booking Ferry tickets, find out the length of the trip you are planning.

For shorter trips - up to 5 hours or so - you might be happy sitting in an Economy or Premium Economy section.

For longer trips - like overnight travel to or from far islands like Crete - consider the cost and benefit of staying in a cabin or the Business section.

Think about the length of time you have on the island. If it takes a long time to get there and you have an uncomfortable seat, you may feel tired upon arrival, without energy to explore. In a case like that, it might be worth it to spend the extra money for your comfort.

You will feel your time on boats fly by - by the time you get a frappe, watch the dolphins jump around from the top deck of the boat, and have a nap, you have usually arrived at closer destinations.

### **TIP: OTE Phone Cards**

If you are travelling around Greece without a local mobile phone or sim card, consider buying a local branded phone card, like OTE, and keeping the number for a taxi company and your hotel front desk handy at all times.

### **TIP: Picking Up Boat Tickets**

If you ordered your boat tickets online, you can either print the tickets at home or visit the company kiosk. In Tinos Town, the travel kiosks are located *across from the Marina* (not Port). Travel kiosks are often right at the boat port, or on a popular street within walking distance.



# DEANNA DICKINS

FOOD. BEAUTY. TRAVEL.

## The Essential Travel Guide to Tinos, Greece



The picturesque village of **Pyrgos** in Tinos is easily accessible by bus from Tinos Town. Pyrgos is home to a well-known marble workshop and museum and has many cafes and restaurants. It is a great place to spend a few hours walking around and taking photos en route to **Panormous** beach (must take a bus, taxi or car from Pyrgos).

Spend your time at the most important sites, and do not rush through them in an effort to pack in the most activities. Take your time, relax and enjoy.

When taking public transit on an island like Tinos, plan the areas that you would like to visit. Get a copy of the bus schedule, or take a photo of it on your phone, and refer to it to make sure you do not miss your ride.

If you are exploring a small village like *Pyrgos*, set a timer for one hour, and another for half an hour (for example) before the bus is set to depart. This way, you can start making your way back in time and will not miss the (infrequent) bus.

If you miss the last bus, try to find a nearby hotel and ask if they can call you a taxi or a private shuttle back to Town. Private shuttles are premium services, so expect to pay at least 10 Euros per person for a trip.

### TIP: Busses and Greek Island Transit

Most Greek Islands are very small and public busses are the best method of transit (unless you are renting a car). Depending on the island and the time of year, busses may have different frequency.

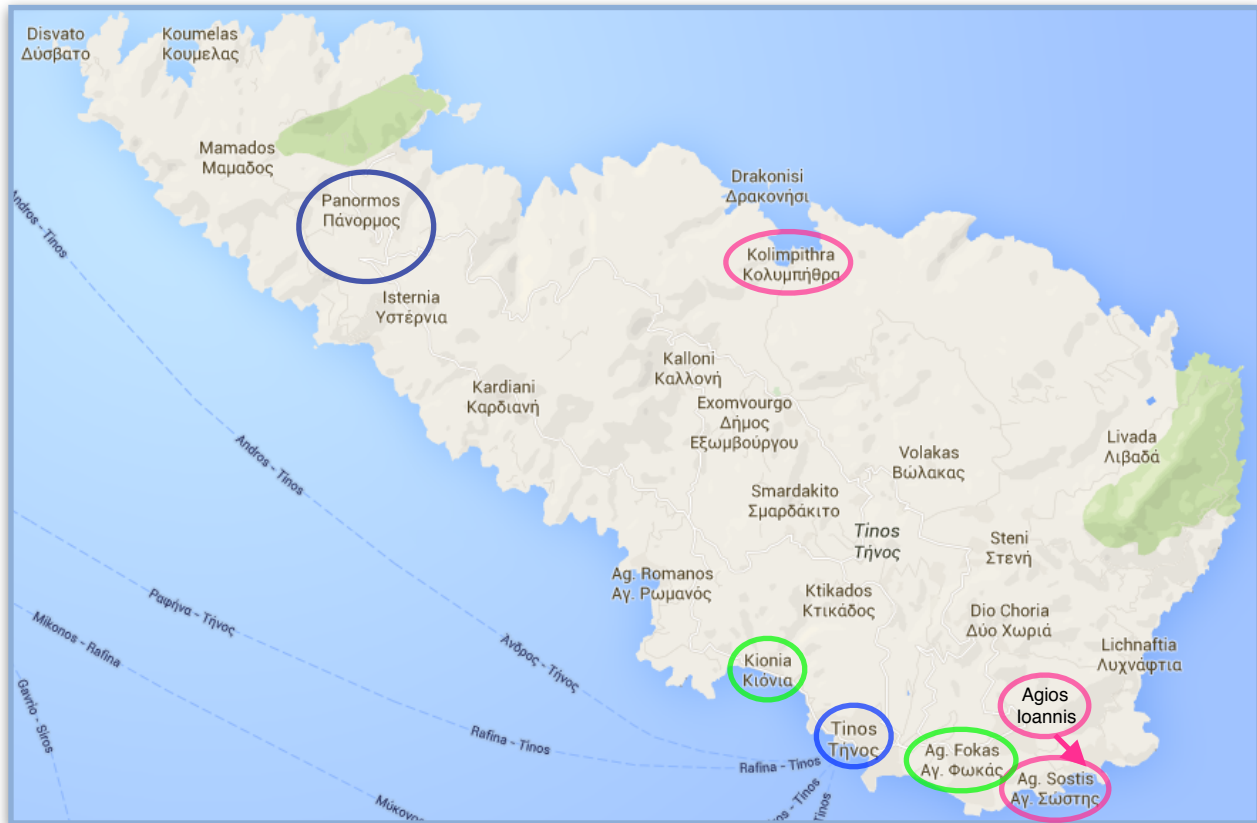
Hotel managers are a great resource - they want you to enjoy your stay and chances are they are a local and know how the island operates. Ask them about the bus system and if it is reliable.

If you are concerned about taking the bus to catch a boat or a flight, they can also arrange a taxi to help you.

# DEANNA DICKINS

FOOD. BEAUTY. TRAVEL.

## The Essential Travel Guide to Tinos, Greece



Tinos has plenty of beautiful, sandy and clean beaches that are perfect for families, friends, or couples looking to relax. Agios Ioannis, Agios Sostis and Kolimpithra are some of the most recognized on the island, and all accessible by bus.



The beaches on Tinos have soft sand (even the “pebbled” beaches), and crystal clear, clean, warm water.

### TIP: Tinos Beaches

Tinos, like the Greek Cycladic islands, experiences very strong, seasonal winds. Speak to your hotel manager to find out the best beach for the season, or even for the day!

Agios Fokas (pictured left) and Kionia are both short and frequent bus rides from town. Spend your mornings at the further “destination beaches” on the island, and check out the closer ones in the late afternoon if you have time.



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FOOD. BEAUTY. TRAVEL.

## The Essential Travel Guide to Tinos, Greece

### ***Prepare for Your Adventure***

#### **DAY CLOTHING:**

*Greek Islands are a little more casual than the main land (excluding beach towns). Many tourists are visiting sites and landmarks on their way to the beach, so you often see people wearing smart beach wear around towns, on busses and in restaurants.*

Women: Bathing suits with clothing-like cover ups (sun dresses, shorts and tank tops, sandals) can be worn around the island. If you are going into churches, cover your shoulders and upper legs (longer shorts or skirts are perfect).

Men: Swim trunk-style bathing suits with t-shirts and sandals can be worn wandering around the island. Tank tops should not be worn in the churches.

#### **EVENING CLOTHING:**

*Evenings on the Greek Islands are a special time. People choose to get a little more dressed up, go for walks ("voltas"), and sit down at a taverna for a relaxing dinner. Dress in something you are comfortable in, whether that is smart-casual or business casual.*

Women: Wear whatever feels comfortable. That being said, Tinos is a very windy island, so longer skirts and dresses are better than minis. Some of the best island looks include long, flowing maxi dresses, long skirts, and anything linen. White and light colours look striking against bronzed skin with the illuminated evening sky in the background.

I also advise women to wear flats or sandals. Many of the streets in Greece have hills and cobblestone - save your feet and leave the heels at home.

Men: Long shorts are acceptable evening attire on the islands, but dress them up with loafers and a button down, or linen shirt. If you are attending a special event like a Greek Night, wear long pants or dressed up shorts.



Follow your nose to find the nearest bakery. They are full of savoury and sweet treats to satisfy any craving. If you have a sweet tooth, look for a Zaharoplastia (a shop dedicated entirely to desserts).

Tinos' main streets are packed with dessert bars, restaurants and souvenir shops.

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FOOD. BEAUTY. TRAVEL.

## The Essential Travel Guide to Tinos, Greece

### **SPF: Essential.**

Apply sunscreen before leaving your hotel, and bring a small bottle with you. Sunglasses are essential, and a sun hat or baseball cap are very handy.

Note that Tinos is a very windy island, so wear hats and caps that are secure, or hold on tight while exploring high hill tops!

### **MONEY: Use Euros.**

In 2015, many Greek vendors, restaurants, shops and hotels stopped accepting credit cards. Make sure you have lots of Euros handy - account for enough to pay for your accommodations, meals, and any extras.

Be aware of your wallet and your valuables at all times. I would advise that men carry a small zippered cross-body bag that they can hold in front of them. Women should also carry secure zippered hand bags that they can hold in front of their body.

### **DO NOT FORGET: Water.**

Have a bottle of water with you and drink often. The risk of dehydration is a serious concern while travelling in Greece.

### **THE GREEK EXPERIENCE:**

*Ride the Boats; See the Sights; Try the Food.*

Tinos specializes in their own type of **Loukaniko** (seasoned sausage, marinated in wine and sun dried), local **Graviera Cheese**, and **Tirokrokates** (fried cheese balls). See what local restaurants are cooking up and try a few **Mezes** (small-plate appetizers) for dinner, instead of ordering an entree. If you are travelling by yourself, make some new friends and enjoy a Meze-style dinner together. It is the best way to try the most local specialties!



Bakeries can be found all over Greece - on side streets, and main streets. Look out for a sign like this reading "Fournos"...or simply follow your nose. Few pleasures in life compare to the smell of a Greek bakery.

This Fournos was found on one of my morning walks through the tiny side streets of Tinos. I ordered a *Koulouri* (giant sesame bread ring) for the road.



# DEANNA DICKINS

FOOD. BEAUTY. TRAVEL.

## The Essential Travel Guide to Tinos, Greece

### **GPS MAPS... No Data Required**

Directionally-challenged travellers are in luck! First of all, turn off the “Roaming” option on your smart phone to avoid charges. When you have wifi, open your “Maps” app and locate the area in which you are going to be exploring (ex: Scroll around Tinos Town).

If your smart phone has GPS, it will stay active and show you where you are without using data - just make sure you keep the map open without refreshing it! This is guaranteed to work on an iPhone.

### **Start Your Adventure**

Of all the islands I have visited, Tinos has the most notably laid-back island feeling. Things move there - restaurants are bustling; transit is moving; and people are going places - but the atmosphere has a very tranquil feeling.

When planning your daily travel itineraries, I recommend choosing one beach to enjoy for the day. If you are taking the bus, see if there are any stops between the Town (main bus station) and your beach destination. Explore one of the little villages on the way to the beach, or on your way back from it so you can see what the island is like.

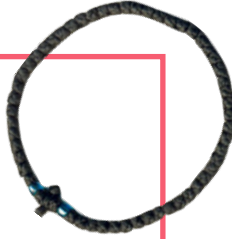
Take a nap on the beach, or return to your hotel for an afternoon siesta. The best part about staying in Tinos Town is that you are close to *Kionia Beach* and *Agios Fokas Beach* and can take a bus to either of them for a late afternoon swim.

### **What is a Komboskini?**

Almost every shop on Tinos sells them, and nearly every person on Tinos wears one.

Komboskini - or prayer ropes - are knotted bracelets used to count prayers. They are typically made from wool to symbolize the flock of Christ, and traditionally black to reflect mourning of one's sins.

While they are available in different thicknesses, they are meant to have 33 knots symbolizing each year of Christ's life.



### **TIP: Hidden Gems**

I spent my nights on Tinos wandering around the main streets of *Leof. Megalocharis* and *Evangelistras* (the two main streets leading up to the ***Panagia Evangelistrias***).

There is a labyrinth of small side streets between the buildings, intended for pedestrians only, filled with cafes, restaurants, shops, and apartments. Also try accessing these streets through the ***Courtyard*** off the main street (noted on the map on page 10).

Take your time wandering and exploring these hidden gems. There are beautiful restaurants filled with locals and tourists, alike, having dinner on the busy patios.

You should always be aware of your surroundings, but there is an overwhelming feeling of safety and community on Tinos - even in busy areas like this.

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FOOD. BEAUTY. TRAVEL.

## The Essential Travel Guide to Tinos, Greece





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### **The Church of Panagia Evangelistria**

The *Church of Panagia Evangelistria* is built around its ***Evangelismos Icon***, which depicts the Virgin Mary, or “Theotokos” (God-bearer), receiving the message from the Archangel Gabriel that she would bear Christ. It has been said to be the source of numerous miracles.

The icon is covered in gold, silver and jewels - many of which are gifts from pilgrims who have themselves experienced miracles. Some of the miracles include cures from blindness and illnesses; ships escaping from trouble; and the elimination of the Plague.

Cameras are not allowed inside the church, so take your time walking through to digest all the precious metals, stones and ornamentation that decorate the room.

Men and women should be dressed respectfully (men should not wear tank tops, short shorts or bare feet; and women should not wear short shorts or mini-dresses, and must their cover shoulders.) I carried a light t-shirt with me while exploring Tinos so I could pop into churches around the island, and stay cool during the rest of my sight-seeing.



A rendition of the ***Evangelismos Icon*** in the *Panagia Church* that is said to be the source of miracles.

#### TIP: Experiencing Local Culture through Religion

In cities where religion is an integral part of the culture, attending a church service can be an educational and unforgettable experience.

Whether it is Sunday Mass at the *Notre Dame Cathedral* in Paris, France; Sunday at the ***Panagia Evangelistria*** in Tinos, or the *Panagia Ekatontapiliani* (the Church with the Hundred Doors) in Paros, Greece, traditional church services are rich in culture and history.

On an island like Tinos, attending the August 15th church service for the Feast Day of the Virgin Mary would give you a real feel for Greek Orthodox Culture and how people on the island live. The Virgin Mary is considered the protector for all of Greece, so it is quite a large event for the island.

This festival is celebrated all over Greece - the service in the *Ekantontapiliani* in Paros is among the largest in the country and is broadcast on Greek television.

If you are planning to attend a church service, dress in smart-casual or semi-formal attire - no beach wear - and cover shoulders, legs, and anything else you see locals covering.

# DEANNA DICKINS

FOOD. BEAUTY. TRAVEL.

## The Essential Travel Guide to Tinos, Greece

The *Church of Panagia Evangelistria* is a sacred place for people from all over the world. Be respectful of those around you, especially when in line to venerate the icons. The pilgrimage to Tinos can be quite emotional for some who are seeking miracles. Give people space and let them have their moment with the icons. Once you have venerated the *Evangelismos* icon, you can wander around the church and break away from the line.

### ***Taste the Island***

The main Bus Depot (see the map on Page 10) is conveniently located next to a small pop-up farmers market. Take the opportunity to pick up some delicious and fresh local produce and fruit for your adventures or beach snacks.

Many other shops in town carry some of the specialty local delicacies including artichoke, capers, figs, creamy cheeses, olive oil and *tsipouro* fire—water liqueur. Shop owners are prepared for travellers and often sell items vacuumed sealed for easy packing.

### ***Marco the Pelican***

If you are lucky, *Marco* may join you for dinner. He typically hangs out near the fish market behind the *Courtyard*, and swims in the sea.

There are plenty of excellent restaurants on that strip so you can enjoy a relaxing end to your day with some traditional Mezes while waiting for him to strut by. If you do not see him, look inside the *Fish Market* - he could be sleeping inside with some local cats!

Have dessert at any shop on *Megalocharis* or *Evangelistrias* as the perfect end to an unforgettable day.

#### **TIP: The Church of Panagia Evangelistria**

The *Panagia Church* is an essential thing to see on your trip. I recommend seeing it at least twice - once during the day, and once at night for very different experiences and photo-ops.

If there is a long line during your day visit (note the tourists holding umbrellas to avoid the hot sun), take your photos and enjoy your time in the courtyard. Return in the early evening when there is little or no line so you can thoroughly enjoy your time inside the church.



#### **TIP: Eat Greek Produce**

Any North American in Europe will tell you how much more delicious, succulent, and flavourful the produce is compared to back home.

Some of the tastiest vegetables in Greece include their tomatoes, cucumbers, onions, and potatoes. Once you try them, you will find yourself ordering Greek Salads and French Fries at every meal.

