

# Global Geotourism Perspectives

15

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## **Geotourism in Greece**

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# 15

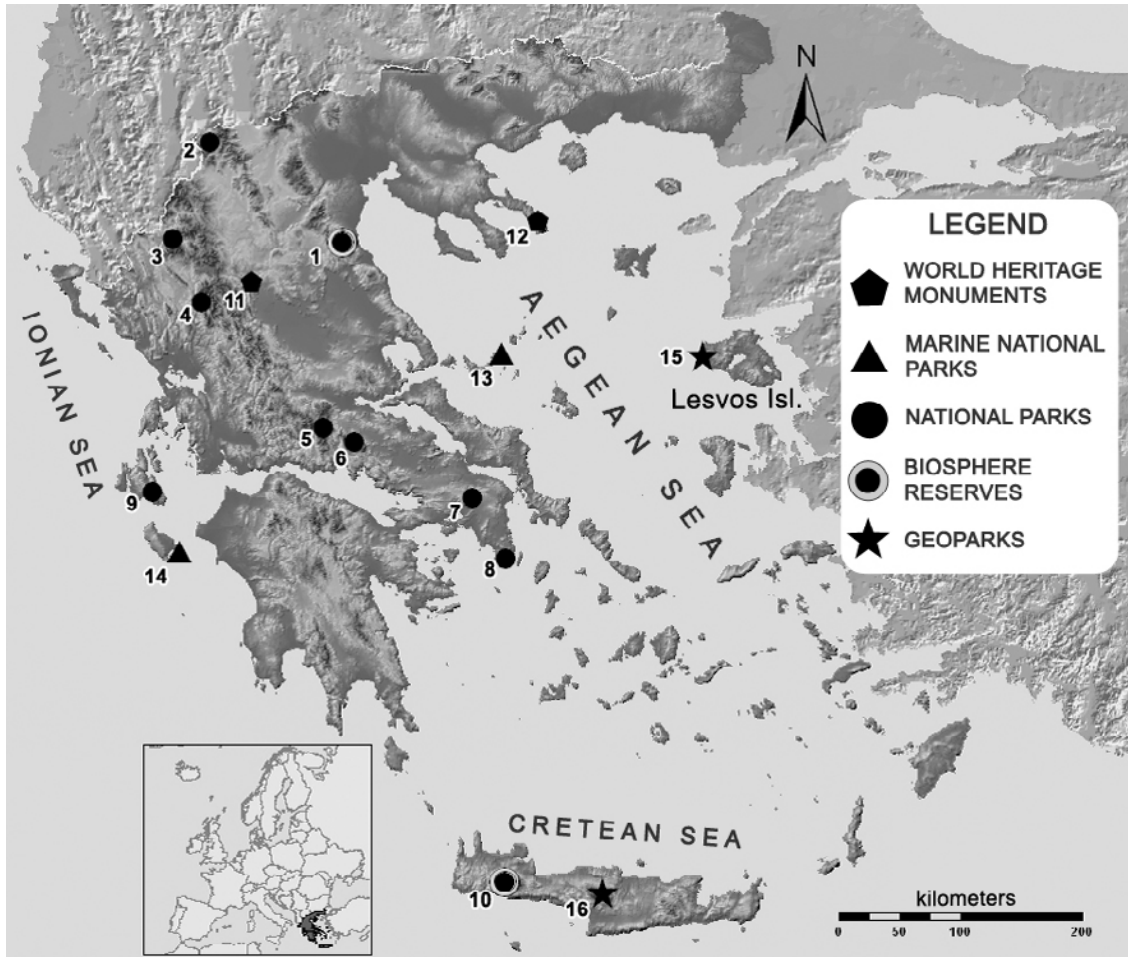
## Geotourism in Greece: A case study of the Lesvos Petrified Forest Geopark

Nickolas C. Zouros

### Introduction

Greece with its complex geological and geomorphological setting and evolution, the great variety in climatic conditions and the numerous islands and convoluted coastline presents a great diversity of natural scenery. The abiotic diversity and the 'mosaic' of micro-climatic types, is reflected in the presence of a highly diverse flora and fauna and a great variety of ecosystems. Greece is primarily a mountainous country, with 70 per cent of its territory covered by mountains (42 summits over 2000 m) and a very long coastline, with a plethora of peninsulas and islands.

The complex geological and geomorphological setting and evolution of the Greek orogen, the Hellenides, resulted to the presence of a high geodiversity. The Hellenides (Phillipson, 1898) are the continuation of the Alps and Dinarides to the south, along the Greek peninsula, consisting of a variety of imbricated tectonic napes. As a result, a large number of spectacular landscapes and geosites are present in the country. Some of the most important Greek geosites such as the Meteora (World Heritage site), the Olympus mountain (first Greek National Park), the Samaria gorge in Crete, the Lavrion ancient mines included in the Sounion National Park, the Petrified forest of Lesvos (declared as a Natural Monument), the Vicos and Aaos gorges in Epirus (recognized as national parks), the Diros Caves in Peloponnesus and the Santorini volcanic caldera are established attractions with thousands of visitors each year (Figure 15.1). However, although the intrinsic value of the above mentioned geosites of Greece is broadly recognized, their protection and management is related mainly to the conservation of habitats and ecosystems or with the protection of their cultural value, as they lie within national parks (Figure 15.1) or archaeological sites.



**Figure 15.1:** Protected areas in Greece hosting significant geosites. (1 – Olympus Mountain National Park, 2- Prespes Lakes National Park, 3- Vikos – Aaos National Park, 4 – North Pindos National Park, 5 – Gkiona National Park, 6 – Parnasos National Park, 7 - Parnitha National Park, 8 – Sounion National Park, 9 – Aenos National Park, 10 – Samaria National Park, 11 – Meteora World Heritage Site, 12 – Mount Athos World Heritage Site, 13 – Sporades Marine National Park, 14- Zakynthos Marine National Park, 15 – Lesvos Petrified Forest Geopark, 16 – Psiloritis Geopark).

An attempt to define the most significant geosites of the Greek archipelago was made by the Natural History Museum of the Lesvos Petrified Forest, in collaboration with the Departments of Geology of the Universities of Athens and Thessaloniki and the Department of Geography of the University of the Aegean (1998–2001). This research project, aiming at the selection, description and assessment of geosites in the broad Aegean area, was financed by the Greek Ministry of the Aegean. The result was the creation of the atlas of the geological monuments of the Aegean (Velitzelos *et al.*, 2003; Zouros *et al.*, 2004), which is the first inventory of geosites in Greece. The need for conservation and appropriate

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