

Castles

.....

# Castles



## Castles

.....

## Castles

As a result of intense pirate activity in the seventh to ninth centuries AD and the activities of the Knights of St John, the island has a remarkable number of castles and fortresses of which many have survived. The seven principal ones are at Rodos Town, Archangelos, Feraklos, Lindos, Asklipion, Monolithos and Kritinia.

Defence against the infidel Moslems was an ongoing concern of the Knights which spurred them into almost constant building and reinforcing. Twelve fortresses were known to exist under Grand Master E.B. Degli Orsini in 1479 which had to serve 44 settlements but the full total was thought to be around 16. Each settlement was instructed on evacuation procedures and assigned to the various castles. Settlements at Gennadion, Kalathos and Lardos were assigned to Lindos castle for example. Other castles mentioned in these instructions were located at Apolakia, Lahania, Katavia, Apollonia, Salakos, Fanai and Villanova as well as the fortifications at Filerimos. In addition to these, there are castle remains found at Lardos and Mesanagros. Towers, *pyrgoi*, were also built around coastal regions, especially on the west coast as an integral part of the elaborate defences. Some of these are still in good condition, especially the one at Pyrgos.

Apart from the medieval castles, there are a number of other castle ruins, especially nearby the village of Kalithies: The Erimocastro castle with ruins dating back to Classical and Hellenistic times, Mesovounos with ruins dating back to Prehistoric and Classical times, and Sarantapichos with the ruins of a nekropolis.

## Palace of the Grand Master

The palace of the Grand Master, or Castello, is built at the highest point of the medieval city, to the north-west, and its volumes dominate the city and its harbour. It was a strong structure, indissolubly linked with the fortifications, and played an active role in the defence of the city, forming the last refuge of the population in the event of the city boiling to the enemy.

The palace of the Grand Master is a roughly square building (dim: 80x75 m) designed around a large courtyard (dim: ca. 50x40 m). Built at the end of the 7th c., to act as the citadel of the Early Byzantine "fortress", it continued to play this role throughout the Byzantine period and the period of the Knights of St. John (1309-1522). The building was modified before the Knights established themselves on the island; from the first quarter of the 14th c. the Knights began to repair the Byzantine citadel and convert it into the residence of the Grand Master and administrative centre of their state.

The main entrance is in the south facade, flanked by two imposing towers. The west facade is pierced by a gate, in front of which rises a tall, square tower, probably the work of the Grand Master Pierre d'Aubusson (1476-1503). On the north side there are underground rooms that served as storerooms; and it was probably in these that part of the civilian population took refuge in the event of an enemy attack. The ground floor was occupied by small and large vaulted rooms, set around a square courtyard, which were used as ancillary rooms.

In about the middle of the 19th c., the first floor collapsed completely, and very little of it survived until 1937, and the beginning of "restoration" work.

On the first floor were various official rooms, such as the "Great Council Chamber" and the dining room, as well as the private quarters of the Grand Master, which were commonly known as "Margaritae". During the period of Italian rule, a chapel was built to the right of the monumental marble staircase leading up to the first floor. In it was erected a bronze statue of Saint Nicholas, a copy of the work of that name by Donatello, in Bari.

Floor mosaics of late Hellenistic, Roman and Early Christian times have been laid in many of the rooms on the first floor, most of them taken from buildings on Kos.

During the period of Turkish rule, the palace was used as a prison, and it continued to have this function under the Italians, until the decision was taken to "restore" the building.

Two major permanent exhibitions may be visited in the ground-floor rooms: on the north side, the exhibition entitled "The city of Rodos from its foundation (408/7 BC) to the Roman period" and on the south-west side, next to the chapel, the exhibition "Rodos from the 4th c. AD to its capture by the Turks (1522)".

Open Daily except Mondays 08:30 – 15:00

## Lindos Castle

The Lindos Castle is found on the top of a 116m rock and serves as an entrance point to the Acropolis and the temple of Athena and once was used as the administrative building of the Knights. Today, the ascent to the acropolis is still by the same steep road as in antiquity. After the first outer entrance to the medieval fortress, and before beginning to climb the large stairway that leads up to the Administrative Building of the Knights, we encounter two important monuments on our left a semicircular Hellenistic exedra, and, next to it, a depiction of the prow of an ancient ship carved in relief in the rock, which formed the base of a statue of Agesandros son of Milkion, the work of the sculptor Pythokritos in the early 2nd c. BC

The fortification of Lindos by the Knights goes back to the 14th-15<sup>th</sup> c AD. Passing through the ground - floor of the Knights Administrative Building, we emerge into a large square, which occupies the lowest level of the acropolis and was full of votive offerings in ancient times.

## Monolithos Castle

Monolithos village slumbers at the foot of Akramitis and is little disturbed even when the coaches thunder through en route to Monolithos castle which is firmly on the tourist agenda. The road runs alongside the village so, unless an effort is made to get out and walk around, little is seen of the way of life there.

The road down to the castle is good but drive slowly so the view point from above is not missed. Monolithos castle sits astride Monopetra, a blunted needle of grey rock rising precipitously to 774ft (236m). This is no fairy tale castle, but a real life impregnable fortress built by the Grand Master d'Aubusson. The thick walls thread around the top and inside is the white church of Ag Panteleimon. Steps lead up from the car park below the castle to an area enclosed by the walls. From the top the views are absorbing both along the coastline and of the offshore islands including Halki.

## Kritinia Castle

Perched on a rock (430ft/131m), it is not too much of a climb to enter the castle. Another castle built by the Knights of St John originally on three levels with each level assigned to a different Grand Master. Apart from remnants of the chapel, it is interesting to wander around.

## Asklipios Castle

Above the village of Asklipios, after a 15 minute walk, visitors will find the ruins of a medieval Crusader castle.

After an impressive entrance, there is little to see inside the castle except for good views over the countryside but care needs to be taken for uncovered wells. As the story goes, there was at one time a tunnel from one of the houses to the castle so that villagers could secretly gain refuge from raiding pirates.

## Archangelos Castle

Visitors may wander ahead from main square of the village and then left heading up towards the castle. Built by the Crusaders under Grand Master Orsini in 1467 as part of a chain of defences against the Turks the outer walls are the only significant remains. Tucked away inside, occupying a corner position, is a little

## Feraclos Castle

A castle actually used by pirates before the Knights of St. John ousted them, reinforced the castle than used it as a prison. Reached from the track by a footpath leading to steps It is a good climb and fairly rough underfoot. Make a mental note of the entry point into the castle since this is much less obvious on the return. Like many of these fortifications on the islands, the walls are the only significant remains. This one is no exception and the inside is overgrown with shrubs and other vegetation. Narrow footpaths lead around the enclosure and there are excellent views from the walls down to Agathi beach and to Haraki in the other direction.