GUIDE · CORINTHIA

Isthmia: the sanctuary of Poseidon, the Isthmian Games and the museum



About

A few minutes east of the Corinth Canal, in the village of Kyras Vrysi, lies one of the most important ancient sites in Greece, and one that most visitors drive past: the sanctuary of Poseidon at Isthmia.

One of the four Panhellenic sanctuaries

Together with Olympia, Delphi and Nemea, Isthmia was one of the four Panhellenic sanctuaries of antiquity. The Isthmian Games were held here every two years in honour of Poseidon. The prize was not money but a wreath, made, depending on the period, of pine, the tree of Poseidon, or of wild celery.

What to see on the site

At the centre of the sanctuary lie the foundations of the Temple of Poseidon. The first temple was built in the 7th century BC and was among the earliest monumental temples in Greece. It was destroyed by fire and rebuilt in the 5th century BC. Around it you will see the stadium, the theatre, the Roman baths with their mosaic floor and the sanctuary of Palaemon.

The museum and the glass panels

The Archaeological Museum of Isthmia is small but remarkably rich. Its rarest exhibit comes from nearby Kechries: decorative glass panels from the 4th century AD showing harbours, plants and figures, found still packed in crates in the sunken harbour. You will also see offerings from the sanctuary, athletic equipment from the games, sculpture and inscriptions.

Practical tips

- The sanctuary is about 10 kilometres from Corinth, next to the eastern entrance of the canal.
- The museum is on the same site and needs about an hour. Being indoors, it is a good choice on a hot or rainy day.
- Check the opening hours before you go.
- Combine it with the submersible bridge at Isthmia, which sinks into the water whenever a ship passes, and with the route The Isthmus: Diolkos and Poseidon.

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Enjoy exploring Corinthia!