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## PROMOTING HERITAGE - AND CULTURE - BASED EXPERIENTIAL TOURISM IN THE BLACK SEA BASIN

Project No BSB-1145



# ANASTENARIA

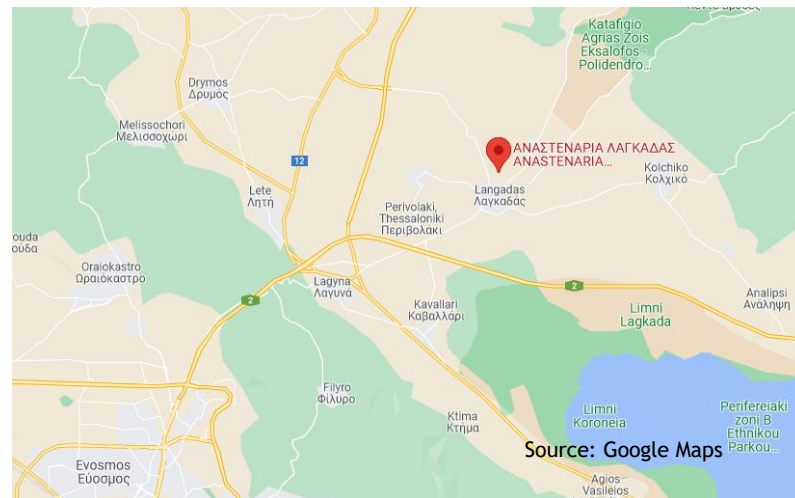
*(Traditions and Celebrations)*

Common borders. Common solutions.

## BASIC INFORMATION

## WHERE:

Lagadas (a village about half an hour outside Thessaloniki)



## SCHEDULE:

The custom revives three (3) times a year: on January 17, 18 and 20 (the winter Anastenaria, in honor of the celebrating Saints), on July 27 (in honor of Saint Panteleimon) and on May 21, 22 and 23, the 21st being the celebration day of Saint Constantine and Saint Helen. The last one is the most widespread, the culmination of the custom.



## ORGANIZER AND CONTACT INFORMATION:



‘Anastenaria Lagkada’ Association, A. Sarri 13 57200 Lagadas, Thessaloniki (Place Papakiriazis), Anastasios Gaintatzis (archianastenaris) and Sotiris Gaintatzis (son of archianastenaris), Telephone: 6908689002, email: [anastenarialagkadas@gmail.com](mailto:anastenarialagkadas@gmail.com)



**DESCRIPTION**

The custom of Anastenaria is a special and distinct part of the Greek tradition and one of the most characteristic parts of our cultural heritage, brought by the refugees of Eastern Rumelia of Thrace (Eastern Roman Thrace). The custom is faithfully passed down from generation to generation. It is one of the most important customs that take place today in Greece and worldwide.

The origin of the custom lies in a fire which took place at Kosti (a Greek village with 3,000 inhabitants in Eastern Rumelia near the Black Sea that now belongs to Bulgaria). The church of St. Constantine and Helen in Kosti caught fire. As the temple was burning, the voices of the saints from the icons were heard through the flames,



desperately calling out for help. Villagers entered the flaming building to rescue the saints' icons and when they came out neither them nor the icons were harmed. They believed they had been protected from the fire by the saints and since then the custom revives every year. In 1923, after the compulsory exchange of population between Greece and Turkey, the inhabitants of this region of Thrace settled in Macedonia, bringing with them their traditions, such as Anastenaria.

The Association 'Anastenaria Lagkada' started organizing this custom in 1994. Anastasios Gaintatzis is the 'archianastenaris' (i.e.



chief anastanaris) in Lagkada and he is the only one who can 'fire-standing' (pirostantia), meaning he is standing on

the coals while the others cross them, that is they are ('fire-walking') (pirovasia).



## KEY MESSAGE

The key message to the public is faith. Although faith is mostly an experience and is approached by each individual differently, we could say that faith is a sacred tradition, a morality, a way of life, participation, hope, effort and a constant struggle for the good.

## KEY ACTIVITIES

Musicians, artists participate in the event and present their new works. Concerts with participation of musical performers invited from various parts of Georgia are held within the framework of the festival. Traditionally, the national choreographic ensemble "Sukhishvilebi", the group "Chveneburebi", "Niaz Diasamidze and 33a", "Prani" etc. participate in "Art-Gene" festival. However, this festival is not only a concert. Creative pieces of art are exhibited and sold, Georgian wine and traditional dishes are tasted at "Art-Gene" festival.

## EXPERIENTIAL AND INTERACTIVE ACTIVITIES

The custom is not performed in the same way in the three periods. Its full implementation is in May, which is the culmination of the custom. The essence of the custom is not the fire-walking. The fire-walking is what attracts people and constitutes the final stage of the custom and. The essence of the custom lies in the ritual and in faith.

The preparation of the ritual starts with vigilance at the 'konaki', a special shrine dedicated to the saints, where the icons are placed among the 'amanetia' (red handkerchiefs that are considered sacred by the fire walkers and they walk on the fire only when they wear or hold them), other tributes and the musical instruments. The next night, a procession starts from the 'konaki' to the area where the fire-walking will take place. Participants carrying the icons of the saints and wearing the 'amanetia', dance over the glowing coals, following the rhythm of the musical instruments (lyre, gaida and tambourine). The ceremony lasts until the fire is extinguished. After the celebration, the icons return with a procession to the 'konaki', where the members of

the Association (fire walkers) gather. Throughout the custom (before the fire-walking, at the beginning and at the return from the fire-walking), the dance is also a key element of the custom.

The whole process of the custom is an experiential activity since the custom is inextricably linked to faith. There were cases of spectators that walked on the coals. In relation to preparation it is not something you can explain or characterize. It is spontaneous, you participate with respect, love and humility and if you feel that you are ready to enter the fire, you enter. It is a matter of faith and not something that could be taught.

### INNOVATIVE ELEMENTS

There are no technological innovations.

### MAIN FEATURES AND SERVICES THAT ATTRACT PUBLIC

The custom is distinctive and special, it includes mystery and divinity. Apparently, the fire-walking is the main attraction for the public

### KEY PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS

Unfortunately, there are no key partners or supporters and sponsors for the organization of this custom, which puts pressure and jeopardizes the implementation of the custom every year, due to the costs. The event takes place under the auspices of the Region of Central Macedonia and the Metropolitan Unit of Thessaloniki (the goal of the auspices is the formalization of the custom and the wider acquaintance of the public with the custom) but there is no other help.

### PARTICIPANTS, LOCAL COMMUNITY AND CUSTOMER SEGMENT

The custom attracts visitors to the village of Lagkada, both from Greece and from abroad. Apart from tourists/visitors, it also attracts historians, folklorists and

academics. It also attracts media channels, newspapers and magazines. Students from France and Tokyo have also attended as the custom was part of their research.

#### COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION CHANNELS

Promotion of the custom is mainly made through social media, mostly through the pages maintained by the Association (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest and the blog: <https://anastenarialagkada.blogspot.com/>) and through oral communication by people who have attended. There is, also, coverage by various channels, local newspapers and radio stations. Recently there was an article in New York Times (<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/01/travel/greece-firewalking-ritual.html>) about the custom, by a person who attended it in 2021. The Association is trying to promote the custom in various ways, such as through leaflets of airline companies.

### *SPECIFIC ELEMENTS AND FEATURES*

#### MANAGERIAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL SPECIFICS

There is no specific model of organization and management.

#### ACCESSIBILITY

There is a good road connection and by city buses.

#### LIAISON WITH OTHER ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS OF THE BLACK SEA BASIN REGION

The custom is performed in other countries but for different purposes. In Greece, the custom is also performed in other areas such as Agia Eleni and Kerkini in Serres, Meliki in Imathia and Mavrolevki in Drama. But there is no official connection.



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