

Central Greece

Κεντρική Ελλάδα



It's no coincidence that the rugged terrain of central Greece was the setting for heroic struggles among the gods and mortals. Journeys to this region provide glimpses of the essential character of the Greek people, along with plenty of outdoor adventures and unforgettable landscapes. The ruins at Delphi, where Alexander the Great sought the advice of the famous oracle of Delphi, remain one of Greece's most inspiring archaeological sites and are also the starting point for hikes that follow ancient footpaths. The northern region of Thessaly is home to the monastery-topped pinnacles of Meteora, with buildings dating from the 14th century. The spectacular columns of rock are not only a mecca for Greek Orthodox pilgrims, but also home to world-class rock climbing, with over 100 sandstone peaks and towers to choose from.

To the east lies the Pelion Peninsula, crisscrossed with old cobblestone donkey paths that link lush mountain hamlets with seaside coves and fishing villages. Sandy beaches rival the best of the Aegean islands, but without the crowds. According to Greek mythology, it was in nearby Volos that Jason and the Argonauts set sail in search of the Golden Fleece, in a boat made from timbers of the Pelion forests.

Overlooking the Gulf of Corinth, the steep slopes of Mt Parnassos invite modern-day hikers to retrace ancient walking trails. River-rafting opportunities abound in the South Pindos ranges, and the high alpine meadows are perfect for breezy summer hikes. To the south, nearer to Athens, are the Byzantine frescoes of Osios Loukas, the most famous in Greece. And to the southwest, natural wetlands and wildlife sanctuaries stretch from the Corinthian Gulf west to the Ionian Sea.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Live Music** Dancing in the bouzouki clubs in the old Palaia district of Volos (p253)
- **Go with the flow** White-water river rafting in the Tria Potamia (p264) region
- **Walking Haven** Following the cobblestone village trails of the Pelion Peninsula (p254)
- **Don't Look Down** Climbing the Tower of the Holy Ghost rock pinnacle at Meteora (p267)
- **Meditative Moment** Seeking a sunrise at the Sanctuary of Athena (p234) in Ancient Delphi
- **Photo Op** Spotting great cormorant and egret seabirds diving into Klisova Lagoon (p242)
- **Historical Experience** Standing where 300 Spartans bravely defended Thermopylae (p246)



■ POPULATION: 1.9 MILLION

■ AREA: 37,042 SQ KM

STEREA ELLADA ΣΤΕΡΕΑ ΕΛΛΑΔΑ

Wherever you go in Sterea Ellada, the mythology and history of Greece seem to mingle in the rugged and scenic landscape. On the slopes of Mt Parnassos, overlooking the Gulf of Corinth, sits Delphi, regarded by the ancient Greeks as the centre of the world. Beyond Delphi, the lands stretch east to Attica, where legendary King Oedipus met his fate, and west to Messolongi, where British bard Lord Byron died of fever during the Greek War of Independence. In fact, the region acquired the name Sterea Ellada (Mainland Greece) in 1827, as part of the newly formed Greek state.

Sterea Ellada is bordered by the narrow gulfs of Corinth and Patra in the south, and Epiros to the north. This mountainous region is known as the 'Agrafa' or 'unrecorded', so named during the Turkish occupation, when the hard-to-reach mountain villages were written off for tax purposes as uncollectable. Today, these same mountains are prized for their beauty, and explored by hikers and river rafters alike.

THIVA (THEBES) ΘΗΒΑ

pop 22,100

Thiva, the birthplace of Hercules and Dionysos, was a powerful city-state in 400 BC during Greece's golden age, occupying a strategic position between northern Greece and the Peloponnese. The tragic fate of its royal dynasty, centred on the myth of Oedipus, rivalled that of ancient Mycenae. Present-day Thiva has few vestiges of its past glory, except those that can be viewed within the Archaeological Museum (see right).

After the Trojan War in the 12th century BC, Thiva became the dominant city of the Boeotia region. In 371 BC the city was victorious in battle against once-invincible Sparta. Thiva's glorious run ended abruptly in 335 BC, when it was sacked by Alexander the Great for rebelling against Macedonian control and siding with Persia. Alexander spared the temples, but not 6000 Thebans who died in the bloody battle. Another 30,000 were taken prisoner.

Archaeological Museum

In keeping with its history, Thiva has an impressive **Archaeological Museum** (☎ 22620 27913; admission €2; 🕒 8am-2.30pm Tue-Sat) documenting its place in Greek history and mythology. However, the museum is closed for renovations and not scheduled to reopen until 2009.

The collection includes tablets of Linear B script and jewellery found in the Mycenaean palaces, along with terracotta masks and decorated sarcophagi, unique to mainland Greece.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Niovi (☎ 22620 29888; www.hotelniovi.gr; Epaminonda 63; s/d incl breakfast €38/43; 🏠 📺) Look for the red-and-black sign at the well-managed Niovi, adjacent to the *plateia* (square). Rates include buffet breakfast, free wi-fi and satellite TV.

Dionysos Restaurant (☎ 22620 24445; mains €4-7.50) Friendly owner and host Kyriotakis boasts of his oven-ready dishes such as lamb in lemon sauce, and *pastitsio* (layers of buttery macaroni and seasoned minced lamb) made 'in the old Greek way' at this welcoming eatery on the square.

Getting There & Away

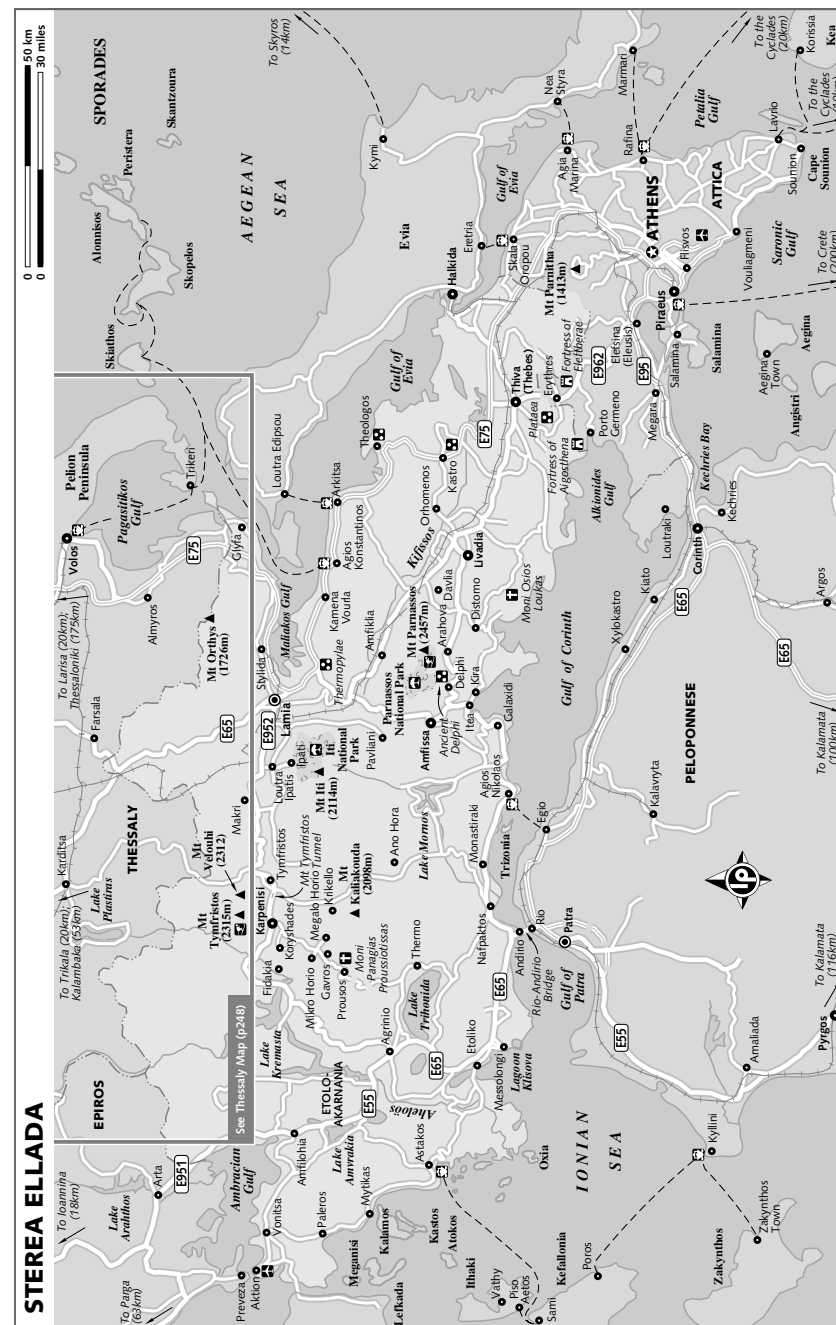
Bus routes operate to Athens (€7, 1½ hours, hourly) and Livadia (€3.90, 45 minutes, five daily) from Thiva's central **bus station** (☎ 22620 27512), 500m north of the central *plateia*.

Trains from **Thiva station** (☎ 22620 27531) depart for Athens (normal/express €3.50/9.20, 75/60 minutes, 10 daily), and Thessaloniki (normal/express €12.60/32.50, four/5½ hours, four daily).

AROUND THIVA

The well-preserved 4th-century **Fortress of Elefthera**, guarding the Kaza Pass over Mt Kythairon, stands between Athens and Thiva. According to mythology, baby Oedipus was left to perish on this mountain bordering ancient Attica before being rescued by a shepherd. History buffs can also inspect the ruins near Erythres, where the **Battle of Plataea** (479 BC) took place, marking the end of the Persian Wars. A road branching off to Porto Germeno leads to 4th-century-BC **Aigosthena**, with the best-preserved fortress walls in all Greece.

If you want to travel here en route from Athens to Delphi, the best way is via the national highway, with a turn-off that takes



you west through Thiva and Livadia. However, with your own transport and a yen for history, you can also reach Thiva by means of a winding mountain road, which begins 2km west of Elefsina (Eleusis).

LIVADIA ΛΙΒΑΔΕΙΑ

pop 20,600

Livadia is on the Athens–Delphi road, 45km northwest of Thiva. The town flanks both sides of a gorge through which the River Erkyinas flows. A 14th-century Frankish castle overlooks the town, and the shaded Kryes (cold) **springs** grant Livadia worthwhile-stopover status on the road to Delphi.

Livadia's two springs are associated in mythology with the oracle of Trophonios. Pilgrims seeking advice were required to first drink from the Fountain of Lethe (Forgetfulness) and then from the Fountain of Mnemosyne (Memory). Both springs are still bubbling away, on either side of a smart café-bar where the River Erkyinas begins, a 1km walk from the town square (*plateia*).

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Livadia (☎ 22610 23611; www.levadiahotel.gr; s/d/tr incl breakfast €60/75/95; ♿) Should you need to linger, the Livadia is reliably old-fashioned, clean and friendly. The hotel faces the central *Plateia Kotsioni*.

Several attractive cafés and restaurants overlook the river. For a touch of history, try **Neromylos** (☎ 22610 26928; mains €4–10; ♿ diner), set in a restored 19th-century flour mill, with a small stream running through the restaurant. Kitchen favourites include *klefthiko* (slow-oven-baked lamb) and grilled pork. Nearby, the popular **Cafe Xenia** (☎ 22610 29729; snacks €2–4) sports a piano bar and sits directly over the springs.

Getting There & Away

There are frequent buses travelling between Livadia and Athens (€10.60, two hours, hourly). From Athens, take the bus from **Terminal B** (off Map p100; ☎ 21083 17173; Liosion 260, Kato Patisia). In Livadia, the Athens-bound station (☎ 22610 28272) is on the east side of the *plateia*. On the south side of the *plateia* is the station (☎ 22610 28336) for Delphi (€3.60, 40 minutes, nine daily), Amfissa (€5.40, 70 minutes) and Distomo (for Moni Osiou Louka; €2.20, 35 minutes).

THE OEDIPUS CROSSROADS

A traveller can still see the spot 'where three roads meet', as described by the ancient playwright Sophocles. This fateful junction was where proud Oedipus encountered his father, King Laius, thus fulfilling the powerful Delphic oracle's tragic prophecy that he would unknowingly murder his father and marry his mother.

To find the actual Oedipus crossroads (heading west from Livadia towards Delphi), look first for the road sign to Distomo, and 1km on for a sign to Davlia. Proceed uphill another 1.5km to the carpark (P) on the right. Look down and to the right to glimpse visible traces of an ancient crossing, perhaps the narrow meeting of roads and fate.

Although there are 10 trains travelling to/from Athens daily (normal/express €4.10/8.10, 95/75 minutes), the bus is a much more popular option, given the 6km gap between the out-of-the-way station and Livadia's main *plateia*.

DELPHI ΔΕΛΦΟΙ

pop 2800

If the ancient Greeks hadn't chosen Delphi as their navel of the earth and built the Sanctuary of Apollo here, someone else would have thought of a good reason to make this eagle's eyrie village a tourist attraction. Its location on a precipitous cliff edge is spectacular and, despite its overt commercialism and the constant passage of tour buses through the modern village, it still has a special feel. Modern Delphi is 178km northwest of Athens and is the base for exploring one of Greece's major tourist sites.

History

Delphi's renown reached its height between the 6th and 4th centuries BC, when multitudes of pilgrims came to ask advice of its oracle, who was believed to speak for Apollo (see the boxed text on p235).

Although Delphi was protected by the Amphictyonic League, a federation of Greek states, the surrounding territory belonged to Krisa. The first of several territorial disputes over Delphi led to the First Sacred War (595–586 BC), in which the league destroyed the port of Krisa, and then took control of the

sacred sanctuary, making Delphi an autonomous state that enjoyed great prosperity from numerous benefactors, including the kings of Lydia and Egypt, and Hadrian.

In 191 BC, Delphi was taken by the Romans, and in 86 BC, the Roman Sulla plundered the sanctuary. But other emperors, fascinated by its reputation, kept the rituals at Delphi alive, well into the 2nd century AD, when the oracle's influence began to dwindle for issues ranging from religious and political to personal. The sanctuary struggled along until it was abolished by the Christian emperor Theodosius in the late 4th century AD.

Orientation & Information

Almost everything you'll need in Delphi is on Vasileon Pavlou & Friderikis. Delphi's other through roads are Apollonos, which runs north of and parallel to Vasileon Pavlou & Friderikis, and Filellinon, which runs south and parallel to the main drag. Four steep stairways transverse all three roads.

The small bus station is on Vasileon Pavlou & Friderikis next to Taverna Gargadas on the Itea side of town. The post office, Organismos Tilepikinonion Ellados (OTE) and banks are also on this street. Ancient Delphi (comprising the Archaeological Museum and site) is 500m along the pine-shaded main road to Arahova.

You'll find information at the **Municipal tourist office** (☎ 22650 82900; ☎ 7.30am–2.30pm Mon–Fri), toward the Arahova end of Vasileon Pavlou & Friderikis. There are internet facilities at **Delphiko Internet Café** (Vasileon Pavlou & Friderikis 54; per hr €3.50; ☎ 6.30am–2am) and **Parnassos Café** (Vasileon Pavlou & Friderikis 32; per hr €4; ☎ 7.30am–midnight).

Sights

ANCIENT DELPHI

Of all the archaeological sites in Greece, **Ancient Delphi** (www.culture.gr) is the one with the most potent 'spirit of place'. Built on the slopes of Mt Parnassos, overlooking the Gulf of Corinth and extending into a valley of cypress and olive trees, this World Heritage-listed site's allure lies both in its stunning setting and its inspiring ruins. The ancient Greeks regarded Delphi as the centre of the world; according to mythology, Zeus released two eagles at opposite ends of the world and they met here. In summer, try to visit the site early to avoid the crowds and the heat.

READ ON

For an entertaining rundown on the complex relationships (marital and extramarital) of the ancient Greek gods, read Harold Newman's *A Genealogical Chart of Greek Mythology* (2003). In *Ruins: A Journey Through History, Art, and Literature* (2003) by Christopher Woodward chronicles the human love affair with all things broken, starting with Greek archaeological finds.

Sanctuary of Apollo

The Sanctuary of Apollo is on the left of the main road as you walk towards Arahova. Just to the right of the entrance, notice the brickwork of the **Roman agora**.

From the main entrance, the steps on your right lead to the **Sacred Way**, which winds gradually up to the foundations of the Doric **Temple of Apollo**. Entering the site, you pass several stone bases. The first is the pedestal which held the **statue** of a bull dedicated by the city of Corfu (Kerkyra). Just beyond it, on the right, are the remains of the **Votive Offering of Lacedaemon**, commemorating a battle victory. The next two semicircular structures on either side of the Sacred Way were erected by the Argives (people of Argos). On the right was the **Kings of Argos Monument**.

In ancient times the Sacred Way was lined with treasuries and statues given by grateful city-states – Thiva (Thebes), Siphnos, Sikyon, Athens and Knidos – in thanks to Apollo. To the north of the reconstructed Athenian treasury are the foundations of the **bouleuterion** (council house).

The remains of the 4th-century-BC Temple of Apollo dominated the entire sanctuary with a (possibly) gold statue of Apollo and a hearth where an eternal flame burned. On the temple vestibule were inscriptions of Greek philosophers, such as 'Know Thyself' and 'Nothing in Excess'.

Above the temple is the well-preserved 4th-century-BC **theatre**, which was restored by the Pergamenon kings in the 1st century BC, yielding magnificent views from the top row. Plays were performed here during the Pythian Festival, held, like the Olympic Games, every four years. From the theatre the path continues to the **stadium**, which happens to be the best-preserved in all of Greece.

Check out the sprinters' etched-stone starting blocks.

From the Sanctuary of Apollo, the paved path towards Arachova runs parallel to the main road and leads to the **Castalian Spring** on the left, where pilgrims cleansed themselves before consulting the oracle.

Between the Castilian Spring and the Sanctuary of Athena, you will find the remains of an ancient **gymnasium**. Two running tracks occupied an upper terrace here; on a lower terrace, boxers and wrestlers practised their art and then cooled off in the large, spring-fed circular **pool**, which is still visible among the ruins.

Sanctuary of Athena

Opposite the Castalian Spring is the Sanctuary of Athena, the site of the 4th-century-BC **tholos** (rotunda), the most striking of Delphi's monuments. This graceful circular structure comprised 20 columns on a three-stepped podium – three of its columns were re-erected in the 1940s. (The white portions of each column are the original marble; the darker portions are new material.)

Delphi Museum

Ancient Delphi managed to amass a considerable treasure trove, and this is reflected in its magnificent **museum** (☎ 22650 82312; www.culture.gr/war/index_en.jsp; adult site or museum €6, adult/student site & museum €9/€5, free Sun Nov-Mar; 📄 museum 7.30am-7.30pm daily Apr-Oct, 8.30am-6.45pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-3pm Sat, Sun & public holidays Nov-Mar; site 7.30am-7.30pm Apr-Oct, 8am-5pm Nov-Mar).

Upon entering the museum, in Room 3 you'll first notice parts of the **frieze** from the Siphnian treasury, which depicts not only the battle between the gods and the giants, but also the Judgment of Paris, who was called upon to decide which goddess was most beautiful (he chose Aphrodite). Also residing in this room is the **Sphinx of the Naxians**, dating from 560 BC. In Room 4 are two fine examples of 6th-century-BC **kouroi**, the 'twins of Argos'.

In the rooms to the left are fragments of **metopes** (figures within the frieze) from the Athenian treasury depicting the Labours of Hercules, the Exploits of Theseus and the Battle of the Amazons. Further on you can't miss the tall **Acanthus Column of Dancers**, with

THE DELPHIC ORACLE

The Delphic oracle, the most powerful in Greece, sat on a tripod at the entrance to a chasm that emitted intoxicating vapours. A popular story proposes that the earliest oracles were young women who regularly ran off with their advice-seeking pilgrims, leaving the post temporarily vacant. Hence it became customary for the appointed seer (Pythia) to be at least 50 years of age.

When she was consulted for divine advice, the priestess inhaled the fumes and entered a trance. Her inspired, if a little vague, answers were translated into verse by a priest. In fact, the oracle's reputation for infallibility may have rested with the often ambiguous or cryptic answers. Wars were fought, marriages were sealed and journeys begun on the strength of the oracle's visions.

Legend holds that one oracle suffered for her vagueness, whether vapour-induced or not. When Alexander the Great visited, hoping to hear a prophecy that he would soon conquer the ancient world, the oracle refused direct comment, instead asking that he return later. Enraged, he dragged her by the hair out of the chamber until she screamed, 'Let go of me; you're unbeatable'. He quickly dropped her, saying 'I have my answer'.

three women dancing around its top. Next to it is the **omphalos**, a sculpted cone that once stood at what was considered the centre of the world. In the end room is the celebrated life-size **Bronze Charioteer**, which commemorates a victory in the Pythian Games of 478 or 474 BC.

SIKELIANOS MUSEUM

Fans of Greek drama should head to the intimate **Sikelianos Museum** (☎ 22650 82175; admission €1; 📄 9am-3pm Thu-Mon) in an old mansion overlooking Delphi. The small museum is dedicated to Greek poet Angelos Sikelianos and his American-born wife Eva Palmer, who together established Delphi as a modern centre for drama and the arts.

Tours

English-language tours of Delphi are offered by Dutch guide **Anna Kourtidou** (☎ 6936619668), and Greek guide **Georgia Hasioti** (☎ 6944943511, 22550 82722) who also speaks Japanese, French and Italian.

Sleeping

Accommodation is plentiful and high quality in Delphi, but it's advisable to ring ahead in peak season (April to May and September to October) and on public holidays.

BUDGET

Hotel Sibylla (☎ 22650 82335; www.sibylla-hotel.gr; Vasileon Pavlou & Friderikis 9; s/d/tr from €20/26/35) An excellent budget choice, the Sibylla has very

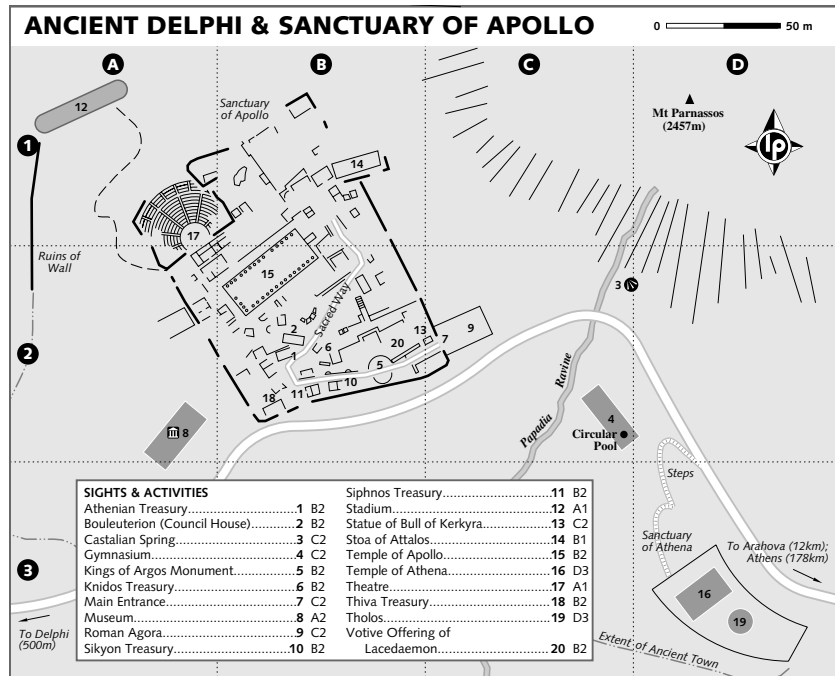
helpful staff, along with simple, clean rooms, all with fans and several with views to the Gulf of Corinth.

Hotel Sunview (☎ /fax 22650 82349; Apollonos 84; s/t incl breakfast €30/50, d incl breakfast €35-45; 📄 📄 📄) This excellent small hotel commands a stunning location in upper Delphi. Its sparkling rooms offer great value, and the friendly family owners treat it like their own home, which it happens to be!

Rooms Pitho (☎ 22650 82850; www.pithorooms.gr; Vasileon Pavlou & Friderikis 48; s/d/tr/q incl breakfast €35/45/65/70; 📄 📄) This hotel, with eight sparkling rooms and excellent service, is a top budget choice. Breakfast is served on the terrace with views to the gulf.

Hotel Kouros (☎ 22650 82473; www.kourosotel.com.gr; Vasileon Pavlou & Friderikis 58; s/d/tr €35/45/60; 📄 📄) The cosy Kouros is managed by the welcoming Asimina, who gets credit for the room artwork, and for arranging breakfast on the veranda.

An hourly shuttle bus (ticket €1) runs between Delphi and two excellent camping grounds nearby. **Apollon Camping** (☎ 22650 82762; fax 22650 82888; camp sites per person/tent €7.50/4; 📄 📄), which is Delphi's nearest camping ground, 2km west of modern Delphi, boasts first-rate facilities including a restaurant, minimarket and barbecue. **Delphi Camping** (☎ 22650 82209; www.delphicamping.com; camp sites per person/tent €6/4; 📄 📄), 4.5km from Delphi along the Delphi-Itea road, is another excellent camping choice, with its own taverna and market, along with views over the Gulf of Corinth.



MIDRANGE

Hotel Leto (☎ 22650 82302; Apollonos 15; www.letodelphi.gr; s/d/tr incl breakfast €45/60/75; ☒ ☑ ☒) This new hotel is friendly, smartly decorated and, surprise, even offers nonsmoking rooms. Designed to please the eye and the budget, Leto is among the best value places in Delphi.

Hotel Hermes (☎ 22650 82318; fax 22650 82639; Vasileon Pavlou & Friderikis 27; s/d/ste incl breakfast €45/50/80; ☑) The welcoming family-run Hermes is very good value, with large and tasteful wood-trimmed rooms, most with balcony views.

Varonos Hotel (☎/fax 22650 82345; www.hotel-varonos.gr; Vasileon Pavlou & Friderikis 25; s/d/tr/ste incl breakfast €42/62/70/120; ☑ ☒ ☒) The lobby of the charming Varonos is filled with greenery and antiques, along with pink walls to round out the homey theme. Rooms are large and spotless, and a suite sleeps four to six people with room to spare.

Hotel Acropole (☎ 22650 82675; fax 22650 83171; Filellinon 13; s/d/tr incl breakfast €56/72/90; ☑ ☒) The modern and well-appointed Acropole is on quieter Filellinon St, with large comfortable rooms and balconies, many with great views of the gulf.

TOP END

Hotel Appolonia (☎ 22650 82919; apolloniadelphi@yahoo.gr; s/d/tr/ste incl breakfast €80/120/160/220; ☐ ☑ ☒) Unlike many larger high-end hotels, the swank Appolonia has an intimate feel to it. Rooms are modern with dark-wood furnishings, and balcony sea views.

Delphi Palace (☎ 22650 82151; www.delphi-hotels.gr; s/ste incl breakfast €100/200, d incl breakfast €120-140; ☑ ☒ ☐) The Delphi Palace has been an upscale standby for years, with in-room fireplaces, a spa and pool bar. Walk 100m uphill from the bus station to reach the hotel.

Eating

Eating in Delphi can find you waiting in crowded restaurants for so-so food. The places listed here are worthy exceptions.

Taverna Gargadous (☎ 22650 82488; Vasileon Pavlou & Friderikis; mains €4-7) Easily the local favourite for grilled meats and good value as well. The house speciality is slow-roasted lamb (*provatina*; €6.50). You can also tuck into a combo of pasta, souvlaki (cubes of meat on skewers), salad and fruit for a modest €9.50.

Taverna I Skala (☎ 22650 82442; Isaia 11; mains €4-10) Climb the steps above the National Bank to reach this small and unpretentious wood-panelled hideaway, midway between Delphi's two main roads. The menu features a range of tasty *mayirefta* (ready-cooked meals) like *stifadho* (veal stew) with orzo pasta and onions, and delicious mezedhes such as eggplant salad and fried cheese.

Taverna Vakhos (☎ 22650 83186; Apollonos 31; mains €4.50-11) Take the steps to this excellent taverna featuring traditional local fare, like goats cheese with lemon for an appetiser, followed by rooster in wine sauce. Wash it down with one of the Greek wines, including an unusually good house wine made by the family. There are great views down to the Gulf of Corinth.

Taverna To Patrikomas (☎ 22650 82150; Vasileon Pavlou & Friderikis; mains €8-15) A new eatery, this taverna is set in a 19th-century stone building overlooking the Gulf of Corinth. The décor is decidedly upscale, and the food keeps its end of the bargain. You'll find generous mezedhes, great grills and salads, along with a fine all-Greek wine list.

There are plenty of café-bars along Vasileon Pavlou & Friderikis. The best for veranda views and superb pizza is **Café Agora** (☎ 22650 83116; breakfast, snacks & pizza €2-7). Nearby **La Vista** (☎ 22650 82777) has decent views, along with two internet computers. Stop by **Café Melopoleio** (☎ 22650 83247; snacks €1.50-4; ☒ 7am-11pm) for excellent coffee, juices and breakfast *pites* (pies).

Entertainment

While the rest of Delphi sleeps, two main-street clubs provide plenty of dancing into the wee hours. **Club Katoi** (☎ 6932526578; admission €6) is opposite the BP petrol station on Vasileon Pavlou & Friderikis, and nearby **Downtown** (☎ 6946502043; admission €6) is next door to the Hermes Hotel. Both clubs feature DJs and throw in a free drink with the price of admission.

Getting There & Away**BUS**

Buses depart from the **bus station** (☎ 22650 82317) at the Itea end of Vasileon Pavlou & Friderikis. Note: travellers to Meteora will find better connections via Lamia and Trikala, rather than Larisa.

Buses from Delphi

Destination	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Amfissa	30min	€1.80	8 daily
Arahova	20min	€1.20	8 daily
Athens	3hr	€13	6-7 daily
Galaxidi	45min	€3	3-4 daily
Lamia	2hr	€7.80	2-3 daily
Larisa	4hr	€18.60	daily
Livadia	40min	€3.60	5-6 daily
Nafpaktos	3hr	€9.30	3-4 daily
Patra	4hr	€11.50	daily
Thessaloniki	5hr	€29.90	daily
Thiva	1½hr	€6.80	5-6 daily
Trikala	4½hr	€13.80	2 daily

AROUND DELPHI

Olive groves and clear skies mark the road south from Delphi, which stretches 18km to the Gulf of Corinth where it branches east to **Kira** (2km). This was ancient Kirrha, the port of Delphi, now a quiet suburb of the market town of **Itea**, with a long sand-and-pebble beach, very clean sea and good beachside camping.

The town of **Amfissa** sits in the foothills 20km northwest of Delphi on the road to Lamia. Sacked in 338 BC by Phillip of Macedon, it's better known today among Greeks for its marvellous green olives, a beautiful and well-preserved Byzantine church, **Agios Sotiras** (Church of the Saviour), and the excellent **Archaeological Museum** (☎ 22650 23344; admission €2; ☒ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sat) featuring a collection of early pre-coin money, as well as 5th-century-BC finds from ancient Kirrha.

Heading west from Delphi toward Amfissa and Itea, the beautiful 19th-century convent of **Moni Profiti Iliia** (☎ 22650 82002; ☒ 8am-noon & 4-7pm) rests on a hillside overlooking the Gulf of Corinth. The turn-off is marked with a small cross and a '3km' sign.

MT PARNASSOS ΠΑΡΝΑΣΣΟΣ ΟΡΟΣ

Established in 1938, the 3600-hectare **Parnassos National Park** (www.oreivatein.com; www.routes.gr), to the north of Delphi and Arahova, has three peaks over 2300m: Liakoura, the highest (2459m), Gerontovrakhos (2307m) and Kouvelos (1881m), a popular rock-climbing destination. With the rambling Parnassos ski centre gracing its northeastern edge, it's hardly a remote wilderness. Mt Parnassos (2457m) is also part of the very elaborate Trans-European E4 international footpath (*orivatiko monopati*) from Gibraltar to Sweden, also known as the

European Rambler Path. See the European Ramblers' Association website (www.era-eww-ferp.org) for more information or jump on www.pezoporiora.gr (in Greek only).

Between 800m and 1800m, the slopes of Parnassos support Kefallonian fir, spruce and juniper, interspersed with yellow-flowered shrubs and the rare purple-flowered *Daphne jasminea*. Above the tree line are meadows of fescue grass and wild plum trees. Spring flowers including crocuses, squills, tulips, orchids and irises sprout from the limestone rocks. Greece's most common mammals – foxes, hares, squirrels and jackals – may be seen, as well as hawks, passerines and vultures.

Activities**HIKING**

The most popular ascent on Parnassos is to **Liakoura Peak**. The route begins at the Greek Alpine Club's Parnassos refuge at 1900m, 20km north of Arahova and 25km south of Amfiklia. For information, contact well-regarded local guide **Stathis Samartzis** (☎ 22670 31525, 6932566206).

Two popular **day hikes** start and end at Delphi. The first connects two ancient sites, the **Temple of Apollo** and **Korikio Antro**, a sacred mountain shrine for Pan and Dionysos. Many hikers first hire a taxi (€15) as far as Kalyvia, hike to the cave (half a kilometre), and return to Delphi via a well-marked path in under four hours. Along the way, there are awesome views of Delphi, the Amfissa plain and Galaxidi.

A second hike of similar length meanders through the shady olive groves that stretch from Delphi to Ancient Kirrha on the Gulf of Corinth. After lunch or a swim, return by bus (€2) to Delphi.

SKIING

The **Parnassos Ski Centre** (☎ 22340 22694; www.parnassos-ski.gr/en; ☒ Nov-May) handles ski and snowboard operations for the most popular slope on the mountain, **Kelaria** (1950m). At last count, there were 14 lifts covering 20 ski runs. The centre is 24km from Arahova and 17km from Amfiklia. There are complete holiday facilities with accommodation, restaurants, swank cafés, a medical centre and baby-sitting service, along with ski and snowboarding schools. Adjacent to Kelaria are the steeper slopes of Fterolakkas, popular with extreme skiers.

For more information, contact DETPA municipal tourist office (below) in nearby Arahova. For ski instruction, find the reliable **Papos & Baldoumis** (☎ 22670 31552, 6932106933).

Getting There & Away

There is public transport on winter weekends between Arahova and the ski centre on Parnassos, free with the price of a lift ticket. A taxi runs to about €20.

ARAHOVA ΑΡΑΧΩΒΑ

pop 4000

Arahova (ah-*ra*-ho-vah) is built on a rocky spur of Mt Parnassos at an altitude of 960m. Arahova is primarily a winter resort for skiers, and for Greeks it is very much the place to be during the skiing season. Prices in winter reflect this trend and some restaurants close in summer.

It's only 12km from Delphi, and a good alternative base from which to visit Ancient Delphi. The main street of Arahova is flanked by shops selling embroidery, hand-woven goods, flokati rugs and various other souvenirs. The town is also noted for its cheese, honey, *hilopites* (fettuccine-style pasta) and red wine.

Despite this overt flaunting of its assets to passing tourists, Arahova is essentially a rugged mountain town, and to appreciate its charm you need to explore its stepped alleyways.

Orientation & Information

The town's main thoroughfare is Delphon, which snakes its way through three squares: Pappaiouannou, the central Lakka and Xenias. Delphon doubles as the main Athens–Delphi road, and the police are constantly reminding locals not to double-park. The bus station is opposite Plateia Xenias.

The helpful **DETPA municipal tourist office** (☎ / fax 22670 31630; detpa@arahova.gr; ☎ 8am–9pm Nov–Apr, 8am–8pm May–Oct), on Plateia Xenias, can assist in finding accommodation and information on visiting Mt Parnassos. The **post office** is also on Plateia Xenias. Nearby on Delphon are three banks with ATMs.

Festivals

The **Festival of Agios Georgios** is held in town around 23 April (if this date falls during Lent, the festival is postponed until the following Easter Tuesday). It's a joyous three-

day celebration with dancing and singing, a tug-of-war contest and on the last day, feasting on roasted lamb, all compliments of the town.

Sleeping

Room prices in Arahova jump about 50% on winter weekends and holidays, from November to April.

Hotel Arahova Inn (☎ 22670 31353; fax 22670 31134; Delphon; s/d/tr €50/60/70; ☑) Well managed and spotless, this stone-trimmed inn, east of town, features a cosy lobby bar to warm up in come winter. The hotel benefited from a thorough renovation in 2007.

Hotel Likoria (☎ 22670 31180; www.likoria.gr in Greek; s/d/tr incl breakfast from €55/75/100; ☑ ☑ ☑) Off the main road, 300m north of town, the low-key Likoria feels more like a country inn. Rooms are quite traditional, with carpeting and huge beds. The friendly English-speaking staff is a plus.

Pension Nostos (☎ 22670 31385; www.nostosp.gr; d/tr incl breakfast €75/105) Aside from the plastic grass at the entrance, the handsome Nostos is attractive and comfortable, and includes a bit of history as well: the Beatles slept here in 1967.

Other recommendations:

Pension Petrino (☎ 22670 31384; s/d €30/45; ☑) Attractive and spotless budget choice, just off the main road.

Pension Alexandros (☎ 22670 32884; s/d €45/60; ☑ ☑) A classic mansion with mountain views, antique wood stoves and large murals painted by the owners. Near Plateia Lakka.

Eating

Taverna Panagiota (☎ 22670 32735; mains €5–12) Unless you drive here, it's a mere (!) 263 steps up to this cosy taverna, behind Agios Georgios (the town church). Tasty traditional Greek oven dishes fill the tables, and in winter there's always a fire going.

Taverna Agnandio (☎ 22670 32114; mains €6–10) This handsome and traditional Greek eatery, just east of Plateia Lakka, serves traditional oven-ready dishes and tasty lamb and chicken grills, along with the family's own red house wine.

Taverna To Kalderimi (☎ 22670 31418; mains €6–11; ☎) closed mid-Jul–mid-Aug) Stop by this small family taverna off the main drag for excellent lamb stews, pork in tomato sauce and fresh mezedhes.

Other recommendations:

Taverna Karathanasi (☎ 22670 31360; mains €3.50–7.50) Excellent grills and salads. Opposite the steps to Agios Georgios church on the main road.

Restaurant Parnassos (☎ 22670 32569; mains €3.50–7.50) Popular for bean or goat soup, tasty grills. On Plateia Xenias.

Getting There & Away

The five daily buses that run between Athens and Delphi (€12.60, 2½ hours) stop in Arahova at Plateia Xenias. In addition there are hourly local buses to Delphi (€1.50, 20 minutes).

AROUND ARAHOVA

Moni Osios Loukas Μονή Οσίου Λουκά

The **Moni Osios Loukas** (Monastery of St Luke; ☎ 22670 22797; admission €3; ☎ 8am–7pm, closed 2–4pm Easter–mid-Sep) is 8km east of the village of Distomo, which lies 3km south of the Athens–Delphi road. Its principal church contains some of Greece's finest Byzantine frescoes. Modest dress is required (no shorts).

The monastery is dedicated to a local hermit who was canonised for his healing and prophetic powers. The monastic complex includes two churches. The interior of **Agios Loukas**, the main one, is a glorious symphony of marble and mosaics. There are also icons by Michael Damaskinos, the 16th-century Cretan painter.

In the main body of the church, the light is partially blocked by the ornate marble window decorations, creating striking contrasts of light and shade. Walk around the corner to find several fine frescoes which brighten up the crypt where St Luke is buried.

Nearby, the smaller **Agia Panagia** (Church of the Virgin Mary), built in the 10th century, has a colourful but less impressive interior as none of its original frescoes have survived.

This World Heritage-listed monastery is in an idyllic setting, with breathtaking vistas from its terrace, where **Café Bar Yannis** (☎ 22670 21255) sells local sweets and serves good coffee – just in case you're one of those people who can't go anywhere outside hissing distance of an espresso machine.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

From Delphi, you can take the Livadia/Athens bus as far as the Distomo crossing (€2.20, 35 minutes, hourly), then walk 2km to the town of Distomo. Without your own transport, you

can also reach the monastery by taking a taxi from Distomo (€24 return), Livadia (€25 return) or Delphi (€35 return); in all cases, the taxi will wait one hour at the monastery.

Distomo Δίστομο

pop 3823

The only thing of note in Distomo is the **war memorial**, which commemorates the 200 villagers slain by the Nazis in June 1944 in reprisal for a guerrilla attack. The white-marble slab, erected in 1996 with inscriptions in both Greek and German, is the German government's apology for the atrocity.

GALAXIDI ΓΑΛΛΑΞΙΔΙ

pop 1900

Galaxidi is the prettiest of the low-key resorts on the north coast of the Gulf of Corinth. The town is graced with narrow cobblestone streets and two small harbours, and makes a pleasant base from which to visit Delphi. Galaxidi is reasonably tranquil except during summer and holiday weekends, when its charm is tested by car loads of Athenians. Galaxidi's most prosperous period was between 1830 and 1910 when it was a major *caïque*-building centre.

Orientation & Information

Galaxidi's central square is Plateia Manousakia, from where the main street of Nikolaou Mama leads to the larger of Galaxidi's two harbours. Kammenoi St leads to the smaller harbour of Hirolakas. The post office and a bank are on Nikolaou Mama. A forested headland, opposite the waterfront, is fringed by pebbled coves popular with local swimmers.

You can access the internet at **To Steki Café** (☎ 22650 42430; per hr €1.80; ☎ 9.30am–midnight) on the waterfront opposite Porto Restaurant.

Sights

The sparkling **Nautical Historical Museum** (☎ 22650 41795; Plateia Manousakia; adult/child €5/1; ☎ 10am–1.30pm & 5.30–8.30pm Jun–Sep, 10am–4pm Oct–May) documents Greece's maritime history and Galaxidi's unique ship-building lore, which flourished during the days of commercial sailing ships.

The **Folklore Museum** (☎ 22650 41910; Plateia Hirolaka; adult/child €2/1; ☎ 9.30am–1.30pm Wed–Mon) displays traditional embroidery and costumes.

The carved-wood iconostasis in the **Church of Agios Nikolaos** is one of Greece's finest.

Follow the English signs for the museums and church.

The little 13th-century **Moni Metamorfosis** stands amid olive groves and cypress trees, 7km inland from Galaxidi. From this vantage point there are terrific views down to the Gulf of Corinth. To reach it, go under the flyover and take the road opposite.

Sleeping

In summer, several of the waterfront cafés have rooms to let, though they're often pricey, given the noisy location.

our pick **Hotel Ganimede** (☎ 22650 41328; www.ganimede.gr; Nik Gourgouris 20; s/d/tr €37/58/65; ♿) This delightful courtyard hotel in a 19th-century captain's house offers pastel-shaded rooms with wood-panelled ceilings. Owner Chrisoula Papalexis's homemade breakfasts (€8.50) include jams, cheeses, fresh juices and breads from the nearby family bakery. The captain's original living room is now a spacious split-level suite that sleeps five (€170), and there are three modern apartments (€65 to €130).

Hotel Galaxa (☎ 22650 41620; fax 22650 42053; s/d/f €65/75/110; P ♿) Families will like the big rooms and the garden at the recently renovated Galaxa, 200m from Plateia Hirolaka, and 100m to a good swimming spot.

To Spitaki (☎ 22650 41257, 6977512238; d/find breakfast from €90/150; ♿ P) Its name meaning 'little house' in Greek, this converted 1850s stone *ouzerie* is one of three adjacent properties, each complete with kitchen and flower garden, and halfway between the port and main square. Owner Stella stocks the kitchen with breakfast basics.

Other recommendations:

Pension Votsalo (☎ 22650 42292, 6977994227; Plateia Hirolaka; d/tr €40/60; ♿) Three rooms, each with its own traditional personality, opposite the bay.

Pension Hirolakas (☎ 22650 41170; fax 22650 41371; Plateia Hirolaka; d/studio/apt €40/70/90; P ♿) Split-level rooms, minifridges and sea views.

Eating

Albatross (☎ 22650 42233; Konstadinou Sathia 36; mains €4-9; ☎ 8am-midnight) You could write the menu of this sweet six-table taverna, near the Church of Agios Nikolaos, on the back of a postage stamp, but the generous offerings of mezedhes along with a few ready-made dishes like baked cod or roasted pork are always tasty and cheap.

Art Cafe Liotrivi (☎ 22650 41781; mains €4-10; ☎ Jul & Aug) You might spot the owner-artist George's paints and brushes on the counter at this handsome 200-year-old seaside café on the old harbour. Half taverna and half museum, its excellent dishes range from simple olives and dolmadhes to shrimp *flambé* and mussels in tomato sauce.

Taverna Kavouras (☎ 22650 42003; mains €5-12) Kavouras gets a thumbs-up from locals who like the fresh fish caught by the owner. Standouts include fish risotto and grilled shrimp, along with fine mezedhes and good wine.

Porto Restaurant (☎ 22650 41182; mains €5.50-9) Opposite the waterfront *plateia*, this excellent family eatery serves up reliable *mayirefta* like veggie *mousakas* (sliced eggplant arranged in layers and baked), lamb with pasta and baked cod.

Other recommendations:

Taverna Tasso (☎ 22650 41291; Akti Oianthis 51; mains €4-12) Usually packed, offering tasty mezedhes, fresh fish and lobster.

Taverna Maritsa (☎ 22650 41059; Akti Oianthis 71; mains €8-15) Excellent seafood risotto and grilled octopus in an upscale atmosphere.

Shopping

Ostria (☎ 22650 41206/41063) You can browse for jewellery, icons and handmade pottery at this attractive waterfront shop, 100m past the port kiosk. The nearby family workshop and studio opens to summer visitors.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (☎ 22650 42087) is on Plateia Manousakia. There are buses to Delphi (€3, 45 minutes, five daily), Patra (€8.50, one hour, twice daily) and Athens (€16, three hours, five daily).

NAFPAKTOS ΝΑΥΠΑΚΤΟΣ

pop 13,000

West of Galaxidi, the coastal highway winds in and out of a number of seaside towns and villages, including the picturesque **Monastiraki**, 12km east of the bustling market town of Nafpaktos. Opposite the village of Spilia, look for Trizonia, the only inhabited island in the Gulf of Corinth.

Nafpaktos spreads out from a handsome circular-walled harbour, dotted with plane trees, trendy cafés, a good swimming beach (Psani) and a well-preserved fortress and Venetian castle, the latter protected by a series

of terraced stone walls built by a succession of conquerors (Doric, Roman, Byzantine, Venetian and Turk). Nafpaktos was known as Lepanto in medieval times, and it was here on 7 October 1571 that the naval battle of Lepanto took place between the Ottoman Empire and the combined navies of the Vatican, Spain and Venice. The overwhelming victory over the Turks temporarily ended their naval domination of the Mediterranean. Look for a small bronze statue of battle hero **Miguel de Cervantes**, below the harbour wall.

Information

Hobby Club (☎ 26340 22288; Psani Beach; internet access per hr €1.50; ☎ 9am-3am) Opposite Psani Beach.

Sleeping

In Nafpaktos, expect prices quoted here to drop by about 20% outside the high summer season (mid-July through to the end of August).

Camping Dounis Beach (☎ 26340 31665; fax 26340 31131; camp sites per adult/tent €7.50/4) Towards the Rio-Andirio bridge, 8km west of Nafpaktos, this shady beachside camping ground comes with a minimarket and small taverna.

Plaza House (☎ 26340 22226; fax 26340 23174; Navmahias 37; s/d/ste incl breakfast €45/60/110; ♿) On the waterfront at Psani Beach, the modern and friendly Plaza has spacious and smartly decorated rooms. Request a room facing the sea.

Hotel Nafpaktos (☎ 26340 23788; www.hotelnafpaktos.gr; Grimbovo Beach; s/d/tr incl breakfast €47/75/95; P ♿) Look for the blue balcony railings, just opposite Grimbovo Beach. The hotel has a modern look, with large and comfortable rooms, along with attentive staff.

Hotel Regina (☎ 26340 21555; fax 26340 21556; s/d/tr from €50/60/70; ♿) The Regina is a great deal for families, with handsome two-room studios,

all with kitchenettes and balconies, and only 50m from Psani Beach.

Eating

Taverna O Stavros (☎ 26340 27473; Grimbovo Beach; mains €3.50-9) This reliable boardwalk eatery is popular for its prices and excellent *spanakopita* (spinach pie), oven-cooked dishes like *youvetsi* (orzo with veal in tomato sauce), stuffed capsicum and tomatoes and rabbit *stifadho* (cooked in a tomato sauce), along with grilled fresh fish (by the kilo or the dish).

Christakis Restaurant (☎ 26340 29446; Navmahias 48; mains €4-10; ☎ 10am-midnight) Christakis' welcoming owner, Dimitris, serves tasty taverna fare such as stuffed pumpkin leaves with rice, *taramasalata* (fish-rice puree) with potato and lemon juice, and grilled calamari. The beachfront location is a plus.

Getting There & Away

Nafpaktos has two bus stations. The **Manassi station** (☎ 26340 27224; cnr Manassi & Botsari) is behind the large Church of Agios Dimitrios. The **KTEL Fokida station** (☎ 26340 27241; cnr Kefalourisou & Asklipiou) is 400m further east from the Manassi station.

The striking Rio-Andirio suspension bridge, completed in 2004 by a French consortium, now connects mainland Andirio and Rio on the Peloponnese, a crossing formerly only made by ferry. Despite the steep toll (€10.90 each way) the bridge is catching on, and getting to places like Patra couldn't be easier.

MESSOLONGI ΜΕΣΣΟΛΟΓΓΙ

pop 12,000

From a distance, Messolongi's flat landscape is hardly appealing. But the closer you get, the better it looks. Harilaou Trikoupi, which runs from the handsome central square; Athanasiou

BUSES FROM NAFPAKTOS

Station	Destination	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Manassi	Athens via Andirio-Rio	3hr	€17.70	2 daily
Manassi	Thessaloniki	6hr	€33	2 daily
Manassi	Agrinio	1½hr	€7.40	2 daily Mon-Fri
Manassi	Patra	30min	€2.80	7 daily Mon-Fri
Manassi	Lamia	3½hr	€12.50	2 daily
Manassi	Messolongi	50min	€4.20	3 daily Mon-Fri
KTEL Fokida	Athens via Delphi & Thiva	5hr	€22.20	4 daily
KTEL Fokida	Galaxidi	1¼hr	€6.30	4 daily
KTEL Fokida	Itea	1¾hr	€7	5 daily

Razikotsika, which is parallel to it, and the lively pedestrian lanes between them are lined with good bars and tavernas.

The town skirts the motionless **Klisova Lagoon**, the largest natural wetland in Greece, and a favourite winter stopover for thousands of migrating birds as well as an important breeding ground for the endangered Dalmatian pelican – not to mention a pilgrimage site for photographers and bird-watchers.

History

During the War of Independence, the strategically important town of Messolongi was chosen by Mavrokordatos as the Fanariot western outpost. Britain's philhellenic bard Lord Byron arrived there in 1823 with the intention of organising the troops and supporting the Greek war effort. After months of vain attempts, Byron contracted a fever and died on 19 April 1824, his immediate aims unfulfilled.

But Byron's death was not in vain – it spurred international forces to hasten the end of the War of Independence, making him a Greek national hero. Many men, now in their 70s, bear the name Byron (Vyronas in Greek) and most Greek towns have a street named after him.

In the spring of 1826, under the helm of Egyptian general Ibrahim, Messolongi was cap-

tured by the Turks. Their year-long siege drove 9000 men, women and children to escape on the night of 22 April 1826 through what is now called the **Gate of Exodus**. Most took refuge on Mt Zygos, only to be caught and killed; many others jumped to their death rather than face capture. This tragic exodus was immortalised in Dionysios Solomos' epic poem 'I Eleftheri Poliorkimeni' ('The Free Besieged').

Orientation & Information

Messolongi is the capital of the prefecture of Etolo-Akarnania. The town is laid out in a roughly rectangular grid with the main square, Plateia Markou Botsari, in the middle. The square is dominated by the town hall on its eastern side.

Challenger Internet Services (Petropoulou 7; per hr €1.50; ☎ 11am-11pm) Fifty metres north of the central *plateia*.

Post office (Spyrou Moustakli) Just east of the central *plateia*.

Tourist police (☎ 26310 27220; Spyrou Trikoupi 29)

Sights

Just beyond the Gate of Exodus is the **Garden of the Heroes** (☎ 9am-8pm), translated incorrectly as 'Heroes' Tombs' on the road sign. This memorial garden was established on the orders of the first governor of Greece following independence, Yiannis Kapodistrias, who issued the following decree:

...within these walls of the city of Messolongi lie the bones of those brave men, who fell bravely while defending the city...it is our duty to gather together, with reverence, the holy remains of these men and to lay them to rest in a memorial where our country may, each year, repay its debt of gratitude.

You will find the Greek text of this decree on the marble slab to the right as you enter the garden. A small **statue of Lord Byron** features prominently in the garden. When Byron died, the Greeks were heartbroken at the loss of a British nobleman who had given his life for their freedom. At the end of a national 21-day mourning period, Byron's embalmed body was returned to England, but his heart was kept by the Greeks and is buried beneath the statue. The English authorities at the time refused Byron's burial at Westminster Abbey.

The **Museum of History & Art** (☎ 26310 22134; Plateia Markou Botsari; admission free; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 4-7pm) is dedicated to the revolution and has a collection of Byron memorabilia. Bone up on your War of Independence history (see opposite) beforehand in order to get a feel for the full importance of these historic events.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotels in Messolongi are limited; let location be your guide.

Avra (☎ /fax 26310 22284; Harilaou Trikoupi; s/d €28/45; ☎) The Avra is tidy and comfortable, but you'll get a better night's sleep in the rooms towards the rear, to avoid the evening din of adjacent Plateia Markou Botsari.

Theoxenia (☎ 26310 22493; Tourlidou 2; s/d €65/80; ☎) Rambling and comfortable, most of the hotel's large and carpeted rooms overlook Klisova Lagoon, 3km from the town centre.

Radio Megaro Restaurant (☎ 26310 23468; Stavropoulou 16; mains €4-10.50) Grills and oven-ready dishes including baked fish, are mainstays at this popular eatery midway between the *plateia* and the bay.

Ouzerie Dimitrouka (☎ 26310 23237; Razikotsika 11; mains €5-9) If you'd like to try Messolongi's speciality – *petali* (eels from the lagoon) – head for this handsome little *ouzerie*; look for the eels hanging on display in the window.

Getting There & Away

The **KTEL bus station** (☎ 26310 22371; Mavrokordatou 5) is just off the central square. There are regular services to Athens via Rio-Andirio (€19.80, 3½ hours, 10 daily), Patra (€4.80, 50 minutes, seven daily), Agrinio (€3.30, 35 minutes, hourly), Nafpaktos (€4.20, 50 minutes, three daily), Amfissa (€11.30, 2½ hours, twice daily) and Mytikas (€7.40, 1½ hours, daily).

AROUND MESSOLONGI

Tourlida ΤΟΥΡΛΙΔΑ

With your own transport, you can drive across Klisova Lagoon via the 5km-long causeway to visit Tourlida, with a couple of decent tavernas and domatia (rooms for rent) at the end of the sandy road.

Northwest to Mytikas & Astakos

ΜΥΤΙΚΑΣ & ΑΣΤΑΚΟΣ

Of the scattered seaside villages facing the Ionian Sea, only Astakos and Mytikas merit a second look. In summer, it's a lovely coastal

drive, and buses make daily runs from Messolongi.

A sleepy charmer on the Ionian coastline, **Mytikas'** water's edge (63km from Messolongi) is lined with palm trees and houses. The beach is pebbly and uncommercialised, and the water crystal clear. There are only a couple of hotels, a few domatia and a scattering of tavernas. You can take a local caïque to the isolated islands of **Kalamos**, looming over Mytikas, or **Kastos**, tucked away on the other side.

Astakos (49km from Messolongi) lacks Mytikas' cosiness, but it's a convenient stepping stone for access to the Ionian Islands, via the daily ferry to/from Ithaki (Piso Aetos) and Kefallonia (Sami) in summer.

KARPENISI ΚΑΡΠΙΝΗΣΙ

pop 6456

Karpensisi lies in the well-wooded foothills of Mt Tymfristos (2315m), 82km west of Lamia and 48km east of Lake Kremasta. Not surprisingly, given its home in the mountainous prefecture of Evritania, the town has an alpine-village feel to it, with chalet-style lodgings mixed in among its churches, tavernas and bakeries. Opportunities abound for hiking, rafting and mountain-biking to mountain villages and historical monasteries. In winter, a nearby ski centre is popular with Greeks.

Orientation

The thoroughfares of Zinopoulou, Athanasiou Karpensisioti and Spyridonos Georgiou Tsitsara run downhill from the central square; Ethnikis Andistasis runs northwest from it.

Information

EMERGENCY

Hospital (☎ 22370 80680; Ethnikis Antistasis 9)
Police (☎ 22370 89150, 22370 23666; Pavlou Bakogianni 2)

INTERNET ACCESS

Phoenix Internet Café (☎ 22370 23696; Kosma Aitolou; per hr €2; ☎ 11am-3am)

LAUNDRY

Ariston Laundry (Athanasiou Karpensisioti 25) Next to Commercial Bank.

MONEY

Six banks around the central square have ATMs.

STREET-SIGN HISTORY

Three major dates in Greek history are remembered in street names around the country.

'25 March 1821', or Greek Independence Day, commemorates the end of centuries of rule by the Ottoman Empire.

'17 November 1973' marks the massacre by government troops of 21 unarmed students at Polytechnio University in Athens who had barricaded themselves within the traditional sanctuary of the school's gates.

'28 October 1940' marks the day when Greeks shouted 'No!' to the Italian Fascists who demanded surrender without a fight. The fierce resistance finally weakened the Nazis, who were forced to move troops to Greece from the all-important Russian front. Referred to as 'No-Day' throughout the country, many Greeks use rather more colourful language for this day.

POST

Post office (Agiou Nikolaou Karpenisiotou) Near the corner, 150m down Athanasiou Karpenisioti.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎/fax 22370 21016; www.karpenisi.gr; ☎ 9am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) The English-speaking staff can give you area maps and information on accommodation options and adventure activities around Karpenisi. It's found opposite the central square and next to the taxi stand.

Activities

The Karpenisi **Ski centre** (☎ 22370 23506; www.snowreport.gr) on Mt Velouhi operates seven lifts from November to March. Karpenisi is a mecca for hikers, skiers, mountain-bikers and rock climbers.

Three friendly competitors in town boast extreme-sports offerings including white-water rafting, snowboarding and canyoning. Prices average €30 to €40 per day, including equipment and transport.

F-Zein (☎ 22370 80150; info@zein-evryt.gr; Zinopoulou 61) specialises in mountain-biking and graded rafting trips to three rivers: Aheloös (easy), Tavropos (moderate) and Krikelopotamos (advanced; white water), with acrobatic 'hot dogging' lessons thrown in.

The well-run **Trekking Hellas** (☎ 22370 31789; www.trekking.gr; Kosma Aitolou 1) is the oldest outdoor-activity company in town and organises hikes on the Trans-European E4 trail between Karpenisi and Krikello, along with horse riding, canoeing, rock climbing and canyoning.

Mountain Action (☎/fax 22370 22940, 6972706177; www.mountainaction.gr in Greek; Oikonoumou 9) specialises in exploring the nearby canyons of Evrytania, along with mountain-biking excursions and canoeing around Lake Kremasta.

For child-friendly horse riding near town, check out the **Saloon Park** (☎ 22370 24606; riding per hr adult/child €20/10), a combination bar-restaurant and stable. The unmistakable theme here is the American Old West, with a Jack Daniels-meets-ouzo ambience.

Sleeping

Koutsikos Domatia (☎ 22370 21400; s/d €20/30) These attractive and simple domatia are high (51 steps) above the town square, opposite the tourist office. The marble-floored rooms are on the small side, but are spotless and very comfortable.

Hotel Galini (☎ 22370 22914; fax 22370 25623; Riga Fereou 3; s/d €25/40) The side-street Galini is a great budget choice, with simple wood furnishings, spotless rooms and friendly owners. From the *plateia*, walk 100m up Spyridonos Georgiou Tsitsara.

Hotel Elvetia (☎ 22370 22465; www.elvetiahotel.gr; Zinopoulou 17; s/d incl breakfast €40/65) Overlooking the central square, the Elvetia features carpeted, cosy rooms and a massive marble and wood lobby.

City Hotel Apollonion (☎ 22370 25001; www.hotelapollonion.gr; Athanasiou Karpenisioti 4; s/d/tr/ste incl breakfast from €50/60/70/120; ☎) The handsome Apollonion is efficient and good value. Rooms feature wood and marble touches. Look for the giant mural on the wall facing the central square.

Eating

Three Star Restaurant (☎ 22370 24800; Athanasiou Karpenisioti 35; mains €3.50-7; ☎ 8am-4am Wed-Mon) Featuring big Greek-American-style dishes, Karpenisi's cheapest eatery is a hit with the local night owls. Choose from cholesterol-raising ham-and-egg breakfasts, well-prepared pasta dishes, pizza and soups, or tuck into a generous plate of pork chops.

Taverna Panorama (☎ 22370 25976; Riga Fereou 18; mains €4-8) Locals like the family feel of Panorama, 100m past Hotel Galini, with its leafy outdoor terrace. There's a comprehensive menu featuring traditional Greek fare, grilled meats and a hearty goat and potato soup.

Taverna Esi Oti Peis (Whatever You Say; ☎ 22370 24080; Plateia Agiou Georgiou; mains €4-9; ☎ dinner) This is a handsome taverna serving fine grills and salads, along with patio views of the town and mountains.

Taverna En Elladi (☎ 22370 22235; Kotsidou 4; mains €4.50-7.50) Look for the red and white tablecloths at this smart family-run taverna, just above the main square. There's always a hearty homemade soup of the day, along with well-prepared oven-ready dishes like chicken and rice and mixed vegetables.

Entertainment

If you're in town during the busier winter months, you might want to catch some late-night, authentic live Greek music at **Notes Live** (☎ 6973780885; Kosma Etolou 9; ☎ Sep-Jun). Things don't get going until after midnight. And it's roughly the same at **Nefelis** (☎ 22370 25200), opposite Agiou Georgiou church.

Getting There & Away**BUS**

Karpenisi's **bus station** (☎ 22370 80013; Harilaou Trikoupi) is 2.5km southeast of town. Buses run to Athens (€21.50, five hours, four daily), Lamia (€6, 1½ hours, four daily) and Agrinio (€9.20, 3½ hours, once daily). Local buses depart for Megalo Horio, Mikro Horio, Gavros (€1.20, 25 minutes, one or two daily) and Prousos (€3, 50 minutes, Friday only).

TAXI

From the central *plateia* it's about €12 to Gavros, Megalo Horio and Mikro Horio; to Prousos, it's about €25 each way.

AROUND KARPENISI

From Karpenisi, a scenic mountain road leads south for 37km to the village of **Prousos**. Along the way you'll pass several picturesque villages. The restored village of **Korshades**, 5km southwest of Karpenisi, has well-preserved mansions and is reached by a right turn-off along the Prousos road.

Twelve kilometres beyond Korishades is **Megalo Horio**, with many traditional stone houses. One of these is the well-signposted **Folklore Museum** (☎ 22370 41502; admission free; ☎ 10.30am-3pm Fri-Sun Oct-May, 10am-2pm & 6-8pm Jun-Sep). Megalo Horio is also the starting point for the hike up **Mt Kaliakouda** (2098m), with a **refuge** (1450m) for overnight hikers; inquire at the Karpenisi **tourist office** (☎/fax 22370 21016; www.karpenisi.gr). If you fancy something more sedate, you can take a pleasant stroll along the banks of the River Karpenisiotis on a footpath that begins opposite the village bus terminal.

Moni Panagias Prousiotissas (☎ 22370 80705), just before the village of Prousos, claims a miracle-working icon and ecclesiastical ornaments in the monastery's 18th-century church. There are several resident monks, and pilgrims flock here in August for the Feast of the Assumption.

Another panoramic road leads 25km southwest from Karpenisi to the quaint village of **Fidakia**, with magnificent views to Lake Kremasta.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Dryas (☎ 22370 41131; fax 22370 41133; r incl breakfast €60; ☎) Megalo Horio has a number of well-appointed domatia on or near the square, including the welcoming Dryas

with stylish rooms and balcony views of the valley.

Agathidis Pension (☎ 22370 80813, 6974027680; s/d €35/50; ☎) If you want to linger overnight in Prousos, this welcoming nine-room pension located in the central square offers traditional comforts.

Nearby Gavros attracts Karpenisi families in search of a good meal in the countryside. Try the riverside **Taverna To Spiti tou Psara** (☎ 22370 41202; mayirefta & grills €5-8).

LAMIA ΛΑΜΙΑ**pop 47,246**

Lamia is the capital of the prefecture of Fthiotida, built in the foothills of Mt Orthys at the western end of the Maliakos Gulf. Lamia rarely figures on travellers' itineraries, but it deserves a look-in. Like most towns that are not dependent on tourism for their livelihood, Lamia is a vibrant and lively place year-round. It is famous for its *kokoretsi* (grilled lamb offal), *kourabiedes* (almond shortcake) and *xynogala* (sour milk).

Orientation

Life in Lamia revolves around Plateia Eleftherias, Plateia Laou and Plateia Parkou. There are five bus terminals, all serving different destinations.

Two squares are near one another: Plateia Eleftherias, with swank cafeterias, attracts a younger set, whereas Plateia Laou, shaded by large plane trees, kicks back with traditional *kafeneia* (coffee houses), bakeries and tavernas.

There's a bustling street market on Riga Fereou and its side streets every Saturday morning.

Information

Six banks, all with ATMs, encircle Plateia Parkou.

Battle Net (☎ 22310 67424; Rozaki Angeli 40; internet access per hr €1.50) Opposite Athina Hotel.

Police station (☎ 22310 22431; Patrokliou)

Post office (Athanasiou Diakou) Opposite the *plateia*.

Sights

Lamia's **frourio** (fortress) is worth the hike just for the views. Within it is the **Archaeological Museum** (☎ 22310 29992; admission €2; ☎ 8.30am-2.30pm), which displays finds from Neolithic to Roman times, including some Hellenistic children's toys.

The original **Gorgopotamos Railway Bridge**, 7km from Lamia, was blown up by a coalition of Greek Resistance forces, aided by the British, on 25 November 1942. This was done in an attempt to delay the German advance, and is considered one of the greatest acts of sabotage of the time. The reconstructed bridge spans a deep ravine, just beyond the main train station.

About 20km southeast of Lamia is the narrow pass of **Thermopylae**, where, in 480 BC, Leonidas and a band of 300 brave Spartans managed to temporarily halt the invading Persian army of Xerxes. A statue of Leonidas honours the heroic battle site where the Spartans ultimately perished against overwhelming odds.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Athina (☎ 22310 27700; fax 22310 37722; Rozaki Angeli 41; s/d €35/45; 📶) The newly renovated and well-managed Athina is centrally located, and the tile-floored rooms are large, comfortable and good value.

Taverna Ilysia (☎ 22310 27006; Kalyva Bakogianni 10; mains €2.50-7.50) This large, no-frills taverna serves a huge range of tasty, oven-made point-and-eat dishes.

Ouzerie Trata (☎ 22310 43883; Androutsou 14; mains €3-7) One of a cluster of bright *ouzeries* (places that serve ouzo and light snacks) around Plateia Laou, with outdoor eating under a canopy of greenery.

Fitilis Restaurant (☎ 22310 26761; Plateia Laou 6; mains €4.50-8) Next to a sweets shop, upmarket Fitilis serves classic dishes in a modern setting. The house claim to fame is slow-

cooked lamb wrapped in paper with cheese and potatoes.

Central Greece's proclivity for grilled meats reaches the point of deification in Lamia. The southern end of Karaïskaki is a vegetarian's nightmare, full of *psistarias* (restaurants serving grilled food) with whole lambs, goats and pigs in their windows.

Getting There & Away

BUS
There are four long-distance bus terminals in Lamia, along with one regional station.

From **Papakyriazi station** (☎ 22310 51345; cnr Satovriandou & Papakyriazi), buses depart for Athens (€16.80, three hours, hourly) and Thessaloniki (€22.50, four hours, two daily, three on week-ends). The Athens-bound bus stops at Agios Konstantinos (€3.90, 50 minutes).

From the **Agrafon station** (☎ 22310 22802; Agrafon 41), opposite Halliopoulos Sport Centre, buses go north to Trikala (€8, 2½ hours, six daily) for Meteora and Kalambaka. Buses head south to Amfissa (€6.10, 1½ hours, three to four daily) and Delphi (change in Amfissa; €7.80, two hours, three to four daily). There is one direct bus a day for Patra (€16.10, three hours).

From the **Markou Botsari station** (☎ 22310 28955; Markou Botsari 3) buses depart for Karpenisi (€6, 1¾ hours, five daily).

From the **Rozaki Angeli station** (☎ 22310 22627; Rozaki Angeli 69) you'll find buses for Volos (€10.50, two hours, two daily, one Saturday).

The **regional bus station** (☎ 22310 51348; Konstantinoupoleos 6) has buses for western Fthiotida province, including Loutra Ipatis (€1.50, 30

minutes, four to five daily) near Iti National Park, and Pavliani (€3.60, 90 minutes, two per week).

TRAIN

Lamia's main train station is 6km west of the town centre at Lianokladi. Train tickets should be purchased in Lamia from the **OSE ticket office** (☎ 22310 23201; Averof 28). For all long-distance trains, a special OSE bus links the main Lianokladi train station and the local train station, located 200m southeast of the ticket office, at the corner of Konstantinoupoleos and Satovriandou. (Note that no long-distance trains connect with the local train station.)

Intercity trains run to Athens (€15.20, 2½ hours, six daily) and Thessaloniki (€19.50, three hours, six daily). Slower trains make both runs for half the price, and take an extra hour.

ITI NATIONAL PARK ΕΘΝΙΚΟΣ ΔΡΥΜΟΣ ΟΙΤΗΣ

Iti is one of Greece's most beautiful but least developed national parks. There's very little infrastructure, and it's never crowded. In fact, trails are not well marked and a refuge (Trapeza at 1850m) near the summit (2114m) has fallen into disrepair. For information about hikes in Mt Iti, contact the **Alpine Federation** (☎ 210 364 5904) in Athens. For current hiking routes in Iti, pick up Anavasi topo map No 7, *Central Greece: Fokidha*.

The bordering village of **Ipati**, located 22km west of Lamia and 8km south of the Karpenisi-Lamia road, has the remains of a fortress and is (along with Pavliani to the south) a starting point for hikes on Mt Iti. It is a verdant region with forests of fir and black pine. According to mythology, Mt Iti was the place where the dying Hercules built his own funeral pyre. While the mortal elements in Hercules perished, the immortal Hercules joined his divine peers on Mt Olympus.

Ipati is mostly untouched by tourism. The hub of the village is the tree-shaded, central square Plateia Ainianon, flanked by traditional *kafeneia*.

The shady village of Loutra Ipatis is home to a summer sulphur **spa**, and is close to both Lamia and Ipati for hikes on Mt Iti. With your own transport, this is an ideal base for exploring the region. Loutra Ipatis is prefer-

able for hotels, while Ipati's busy square is home to the best eateries near Mt Iti. Try the welcoming and spotless **Hotel Alexakis** (☎ 22310 59380; fax 22310 59372; Loutra Ipatis; s/d incl breakfast €30/40; 📶). Modest **Ouzerie Eleni Karyampa** (☎ 22310 98335; Ipati; mains €4-7; 🍷 dinner) serves souvlaki and *kokoretsi* in the evening.

AGIOS KONSTANTINOS ΑΓΙΟΣ ΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΣ

pop 2657

Agios Konstantinos, which is on the main Athens-Thessaloniki route, is one of the three mainland ports (along with Volos and Thessaloniki) that serve the islands of Skiathos, Skopelos and Alonnisos, which make up the northern Sporades.

With judicious use of buses between Athens and the port, you will not need to stay overnight before catching a Sporades-bound ferry or hydrofoil. However, if you get stranded, try the well-managed **Hotel Amfitryon** (☎ 22350 31702; fax 22350 32604; Eivoilou 10; s/d incl breakfast €45/65; 📶) between the harbour and central square. Several tavernas keep company with the ferry ticket offices, including the reliable **Taverna Kaitsas** (☎ 22350 33323; mains €4.50-8.50).

Getting There & Away

BUS

From the **bus station** (☎ 22350 32223), next to the Galaxias supermarket about 200m south of the ferry landing, there are hourly buses to Athens' Terminal B bus station (€13, 2½ hours), and buses to Lamia (€3.90, one hour, hourly), Thessaloniki (€24.60, four hours, two daily) and Patra (€18.60, 3½ hours, daily).

FERRY

Fast ferries make daily runs from Agios Konstantinos to Skiathos (€28, 2½ hours), Skopelos (€36, 3½ hours) and Alonnisos (€36, four hours). Contact **Bilalis Travel Agency** (☎ 22350 31614; Karaïskaki 4) for tickets.

HYDROFOIL

Hydrofoils depart one to two times daily for Skiathos (€27, 1½ hours), Skopelos (€36.50, two hours) and Alonnisos (€36.50, 2½ hours).

Ferry and hydrofoil tickets may be purchased from either **Alkyon Ferry Co** (☎ 22350 32444; Karaïskaki 2) or **Bilalis Travel Agency** (☎ 22350 31614; Karaïskaki 4), between the square and the quay.

THE LONG & WINDING ROADS

There are three mountainous routes travelling south from Karpenisi – each distinctive, each a bit harrowing in its own way. The first route initially heads west from Karpenisi and crosses a long bridge over **Lake Kremasta**, a spectacular drive through some remote and beautiful countryside. The road seems to climb and twist forever, eventually winding its way down through small farm holdings into Agrinio. Two buses daily ply this tortuous road in about 3½ hours.

A second and shorter route requires your own transport, and winds south from Karpenisi past the village of **Prousos**, continuing to the town of **Thermo** in the hills above **Lake Trihonida**, Greece's largest natural lake. This is a beautiful drive, passing through several small villages and a few herds of goats along the way.

A third route, also requiring your own transport, passes the striking farming villages of **Krikello** and **Ano Hora**.

Each route crosses the mountains and villages of the Agrafa territory. During the *Tourkokratia* (Turkish occupation of Greece), the villages of this region were considered too remote to be recorded for taxation purposes, so they were classified as *agrafa* (unrecorded).

THEOLOGOS ΘΕΟΛΟΓΟΣ

Halfway between Agios Konstantinos and Thiva, and roughly 125km north of Athens, this picturesque fishing village and Athenian beach getaway is home to a rare excavated example of an ancient Neolithic town, complete with detailed and colourful display boards. For information, visit its website (halai.arts.cornell.edu) or contact the on-site archaeologist, Cornell University's **John Coleman** (☎ 6972359601), who conducts impromptu tours of the site for visitors. There are several tavernas and domatia nearby.

THESSALY ΘΕΣΣΑΛΙΑ

The region of Thessaly occupies much of east-central Greece between the Pindos Mountains and the Aegean Sea, bordered by Sterea Ellada to the south and Macedonia to the north. It boasts two of Greece's most extraordinary natural phenomena: the monastery-capped rock forests of Meteora, and

the lush Pelion Peninsula, home to restored pensions and cobbled trails. The mountains and alpine meadows around Elati and Peroutli are year-round destinations for hikers, skiers and river rafters.

LARISA ΛΑΡΙΣΑ

pop 130,946

Larisa is a major transport and service hub for the vast agricultural plain of Thessaly. Despite its workaday feel, it is a vibrant university town, as the bustling cafeterias around Plateia Makariou testify. Larisa is also home to an important military air base. Perhaps because Larisa can heat up in the summertime, as any Greek will tell you, there is a hopeful sign on the outskirts pointing to the 'Beach of Larisa', a mere 40km away.

Larisa has been inhabited for over 8000 years, and its fascinating past is only gradually being revealed. An ongoing archaeological excavation of a 3rd-century ancient theatre in the city centre, near the corner of Papanastasiou and Eleftheriou Venizelou, has yet to be opened to the public.

Orientation

Larisa occupies the east bank of the River Pinios, which eventually flows through the Vale of Tembi to the sea. The train station is on the southern side of town and the main bus station is on the northern side. Its main square is Plateia Laou, 200m south of the main bus station along Olympou.

Kyrou and Nikitara run across the southern end of Plateia Laou, with Eleftheriou Venizelou and 31 Avgoustou running across the town's northern end. Plateia Ethnarhou Makariou and Plateia Mihail Sapka are the other two main squares. The streets around these squares are mainly pedestrianised.

Information

EMERGENCY

Hospital (☎ 24102 30031; Tsakalof 1)

Police station (☎ 24106 83137; Papanastasiou 86)

INTERNET ACCESS

K-Net (☎ 24105 39355; Rouzvelt 24; per hr €2;

☎ 8am-midnight)

MONEY

There are ATMs at the train station and several banks on Plateia Mihail Sapka.

POST

Post office (cnr Papanastasiou & Athanasiou Diakou)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Hotel Association of Larisa (☎ 24105 37161; Hotel Metropole, Rouzvelt 14) Ask here for general information about the town.

Municipal Tourism Office (☎ 24106 18189; fax 24105 37076; Ipirou 58; ☎ 7am-2.30pm Mon-Fri)

Sights & Activities

The **acropolis** on Agios Ahillios Hill has archaeological evidence that proves this area has been settled since the Neolithic Age (6000 BC), and that it was used as the ancient settlement's acropolis during classical times. More recently, it was home to the medieval **kastro** (castle).

The **Archaeological Museum** (☎ 24102 88515; 31 Avgoustou 2; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun), opposite Plateia Laou, contains Neolithic finds and grave stelae from the region.

The **Municipal Art Gallery of Larisa** (Pinakothiki Katsigra; ☎ 24106 16266; cnr Papandreou & Kliou Patera; admission free; ☎ 10.30am-2.30pm & 5-8.30pm Tue-Thu, 10.30am-2.30pm Sat & Sun) houses a superb private

collection of contemporary Greek art that's second only to the National Art Gallery in Athens.

Relax and cool down at **Alkazar Park**, across the river. Larisa, along with Agrinio, shares the unenviable record of being the hottest place in Greece. The grand marble **fountain** on Plateia Ethnarhou Makariou gushes and splashes all day long, a refreshing sight on a hot day.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Pantheon (☎ 24102 34810; Plateia OSE 4; s with/without bathroom €25/30, d €30/40; ☎) This hotel is the pick of three budget hotels opposite the train station, and has clean rooms and helpful staff.

Hotel Metropole (☎ 24105 37161; www.hotelmetropole.gr; Rouzvelt 14; s/d/f incl breakfast €45/65/80; ☎ ☎ ☎) Should you linger in Larisa, try this family-managed hotel, found between Plateias Laou and Ethnarhou Makariou. The large and attractive rooms are decorated with the owner's paintings.

Dozens of decent eateries are bunched together around Larisa's lively squares. Near Plateia Ethnarhou Makariou, stop by reliable **Restaurant Syndrivani** (☎ 24105 35933; Protopapadaki 8; mains €4.50-8), one of those long-established, no-nonsense restaurants that every sizable Greek town seems to have. It's open all day and is always packed. Excellent roast lamb and veggie **mousakas** are among the favourites.

Getting There & Away

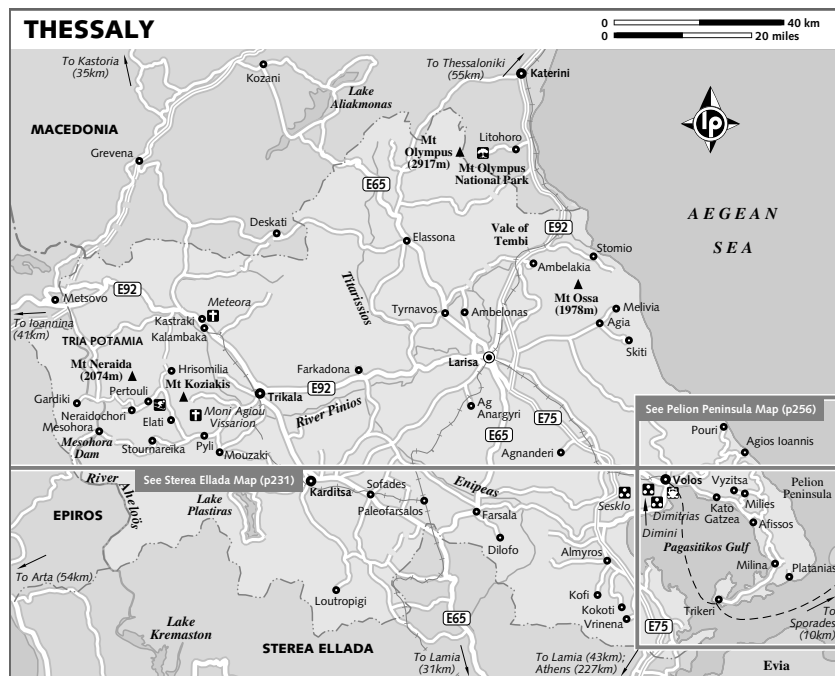
BUS

Buses leave Larisa's **main bus station** (☎ 24105 37777; cnr Georgiadou & Olympou) for Athens (€25, 4½ hours, six to seven daily), Lamia (for Delphi; €11.30, 2½ hours, six to seven daily), Thessaloniki (€12.50, two hours, 13 daily), Volos (€4.80, one hour, 12 daily) and Ioannina (€15, four hours, two daily).

From a **branch bus station** (☎ 24106 10124; Iroön Polytehniou) near the junction with Gazi Anthimou, buses run regularly to/from Trikala (€5.30, one hour, hourly) and Kalambaka (€6.40, 1½ hours, two daily).

TRAIN

Seven Intercity trains pass daily through Larisa **train station** (☎ 24105 90143) to/from Thessaloniki (€13, 80 minutes) and Athens (€24, 3½ hours, three daily). There are also hourly local trains to Volos (€2.10, 50 minutes). You



JASON & THE ARGONAUTS

A famous Greek myth tells of Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece and of his subsequent journey with a ram-bowed vessel called the *Argos*, constructed of wood taken from the forests of the Pelion Peninsula. The *Argos* was built to sail from Volos (Ancient Iolkos) to Colchis on the Black Sea, passing present-day Turkey, Georgia and Russia along the way.

In the summer of 2008 a replica version of the *Argos* is set to sail along this same ancient seaway. Doing the rowing will be 50 oarsmen from the EU, sailing only by daylight, and never far from shore. Interestingly, because Turkey is not yet a member of the EU, a Greek security vessel is scheduled to join the expedition as a precaution in case of demonstrations or disruptions by politically minded opponents of the decision to use the EU-only crew.

can buy tickets at the **OSE office** (☎ 24105 90239; Papayriazi 35) opposite the town hall.

AROUND LARISA

The **Vale of Tembi**, a historical and scenic valley cut by the River Pinios between Mt Olympus and Mt Ossa, was sacred to the gods in ancient times. Throughout history the valley has been a pathway into Greece for merchants and invaders, from Persian King Xerxes in 480 BC to the Germans in WWII. The latest invaders seek out souvenirs at the riverside shops. Tembi, 25km northeast of Larisa, is also popular with walkers and cyclists.

VOLOS ΒΟΛΟΣ

pop 85,394

Volos is a large and bustling city on the northern shores of the Pagasitikos Gulf. The waterfront area is dotted with shady trees and, though not a holiday destination in its own right, the lure of the Pelion Peninsula or the Sporades draws travellers to the city. The town has an inviting boardwalk lined with tavernas, *ouzeries*, small hotels, churches and cafés. The city is also home to the University of Thessaly, whose students live up the Volos café scene.

Orientation

The waterfront street of Argonafton is, for half its length, a pedestrian area; running parallel to it are the city's main thoroughfares of Iasonos, Dimitriados and Ermou. Ermou and its side streets make up a lively pedestrian precinct, anchored by the church at Plateia Agiou Nikolaou. Heading northeast out of the town centre towards the hills and at right angles to the main thoroughfares are K Kartali and Eleftheriou Venizelou (known locally as Iolkou). Plateia Riga Fereou is at the northwestern end of the main waterfront area, near the train station. The bus station is 500m further

along Grigoriou Lambraki, opposite the tourist information centre. If you have a car, you'll appreciate the public car park at the quay.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Papasotiriou Books (☎ 24210 76210; Dimitriados 223) Has a good collection of English titles, newspapers and maps.

EMERGENCY

Tourist police (☎ 24210 76987; 28 Octovriou 179) Locals also refer to the street name for 28 Octovriou as Alexandras.
Volos General Hospital (☎ 24210 72421; Polymeri 134) Near the Archaeological Museum.

INTERNET ACCESS

Network (☎ 24210 30260; Iasonos 41; ☎ 24hr) Volos' largest internet café.

MONEY

There are several banks with ATMs on Argonafton and Iasonos Sts.

POST

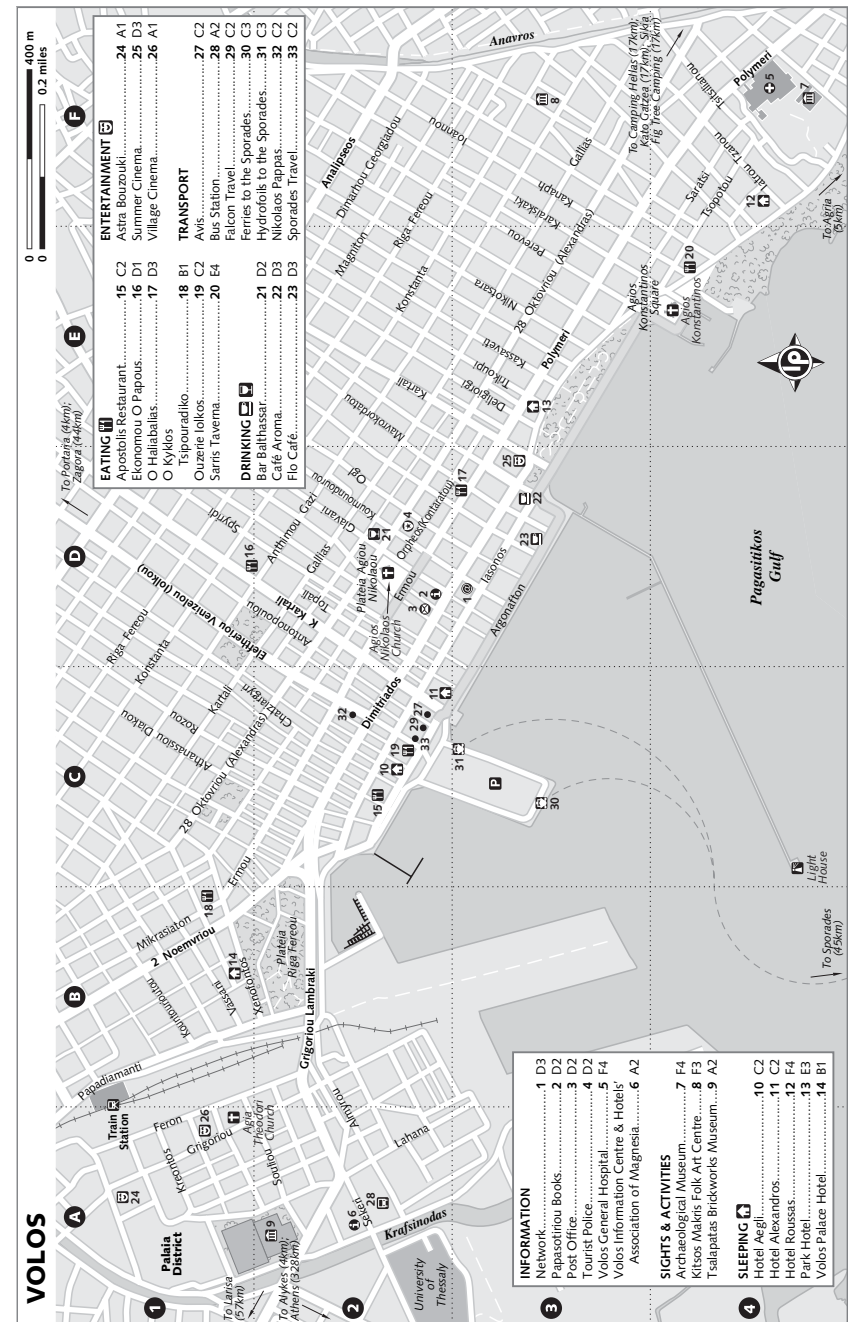
Post office (cnr Dimitriados & Agiou Nikolaou) Near Agios Nikolaos church.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Volos Information Centre & Hotels' Association of Magnesia (☎ 24210 20273; www.travel-pelion.gr; cnr Grigoriou Lambraki & Sekeri; ☎ 8am-9pm mid-Apr-mid-Sep, 8am-8pm mid-Sep-mid-Apr; P) Just opposite the bus station. The helpful multilingual staff at this modern facility has hotel information, town maps and bus, train and ferry schedules along with travel tips for the Pelion Peninsula.

Sights

The excellent **Archaeological Museum** (☎ 24210 25285; Athanasaki 1; admission €2; ☎ 8.30am-3pm) houses a comprehensive collection of area finds. Es-



pecially impressive is the large collection of painted grave *stelae* (pillars) from the nearby Hellenistic site of Dimitrias.

Housing the superb collection of late folk art historian Kitsos Makris, the **Kitsos Makris Folk Art Centre** (☎ 24210 37119; Afendouli/Kitsou Makri 38; admission free; 🕒 8.30am–12.30pm Mon–Fri, 10.30am–2pm Sun) is an intimate house-museum that also features 25 paintings by **Theophilos Hatzimichael**, mostly small murals that were carefully removed from buildings around the Pelion Peninsula. The museum is maintained by the University of Thessaly.

Tsalapatas Brickworks Museum (☎ 24210 29844; South Gate; admission €3; 🕒 10am–6pm Wed–Mon 1 Mar–15 Oct, 10am–5pm 16 Oct–28 Feb) From 1926 until 1975, the Tsalapatas Rooftile and Brickworks was part of the cultural fabric of Volos. In 2006, the restored plant opened as a handsome historical museum with brick-making machinery, grinding mills and massive kilns on display, complete with museum café and shop.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Hotel Roussas (☎ 24210 21732; fax 24210 22987; Iatrou Izanou 1; s/d €29/35; 🍷) This small and friendly no-frills waterfront hotel near the Archaeological Museum has 15 spotless rooms with balcony. Street-side rooms, however, will catch weekend traffic noise.

The nearest camping grounds to Volos are side by side at Kato Gatztea, 17km away, on the west coast of the Pelion Peninsula. The buses

to Milies and Platania pass both grounds. **Sikia Fig Tree Camping** (☎ 24230 22279; fax 24230 22720; camp sites per adult/tent €5.50/3.60) is a well-managed facility with a decent restaurant, minimarket and beach bar. Book ahead if you plan to come in July or August. **Camping Hellas** (☎ 24230 22267; fax 24230 22492; camp sites per adult/tent €5.50/3.60) shares the same beach as its neighbour and is equal in most respects.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Alexandros (☎ 24210 31221; fax 24210 31224; Topali 13; s/d/tr €45/65/80; 🍷) The well-maintained Alexandros is one of the best-value waterfront hotels. Large rooms feature wooden floors, desks and small bathtubs. The quietest rooms are towards the front, away from busy Iasonos St.

Hotel Aegli (☎ 24210 24471; www.aegli.gr; Argonafton 24; s/d incl breakfast €60/80; 🍷) Swank Art Deco touches extend from the lobby to the well-appointed and spacious rooms. Best of all, the Aegli is 100m from the port, and is surrounded by waterfront cafés and tavernas.

Park Hotel (☎ 24210 36511; fax 24210 28645; Deligiorgi 2; s/d/tr incl breakfast €75/120/135; 🍷) The upmarket waterfront Park has stylish rooms with balcony, along with a modern lobby bar facing the bay. An information desk has travel tips for the Pelion Peninsula.

Volos Palace Hotel (☎ 24210 76501; www.volospalace.gr; cnr Xenofontos & Thrakon; s/d/tr/ste incl breakfast €90/120/140/175; 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷) The new and

THE TSIPOURADHIKA

Volos is famous throughout Greece for the quality and quantity (over 500) of its *ouzeries* and *tsipouradhika*. If you have not already come across one, an *ouzerie* (strictly speaking, called a *tsipouradhiko*) is a type of small restaurant where you eat from various plates of mezedhes and drink tiny bottles of *tsipouro*, a distilled spirit that's similar to ouzo but is a bit stronger. You can dilute it with water if you prefer it weaker, or want it to last a little longer. When you've finished one round of mezedhes or *tsipouro*, you just keep ordering until you've had your fill or can't stand up. Try any one of these faves:

- O Kyklos Tsipouradiko (below)
- Taverna O Petros (p257)
- Taverna Diachroniko (p263)
- Taverna Bakaliarakia (p270)
- Ouzerie Dimitrouka (p243)

luxurious Volos Palace Hotel faces Plateia Riga Fereou, just 200m from the waterfront. The capacious rooms here are handsomely decorated, and most have sweeping balcony sea views.

Eating

Since Volos is considered the *ouzerie* capital of Greece (see the boxed text, above), it would be a shame not to eat and drink as the locals do. Typical mezedhes include *spetsofai* (stewed pork sausages), *ohtapodi* (octopus) and fried calamari.

O Kyklos Tsipouradiko (☎ 24210 20872; Mikrasiaton 85; mezedhes €1.50–6) Flagstone floors and wood-beamed ceilings lend plenty of atmosphere to this popular student hang-out. The speciality is potatoes baked in a traditional wood-fired oven.

Sarris Taverna (☎ 24210 33227; Kanari 1; mains €4–8.50) Local families head for this reliable waterfront eatery at sunset for grilled calamari and sautéed red peppers, and then let the children romp at the sandy playground opposite.

Ouzerie Iolkos (☎ 24210 35227; Argonafton 32; mains €4–11) Come to this bustling and breezy Iolkos for seafood mezedhes and fresh grilled fish. A plate of fresh mackerel, salad and wine costs about €10.

O Haliabalias (☎ 24210 20234; Orpheos 8; mains €4.50–10) Tucked away on a pedestrian side street near Agios Nikolaos church, O Haliabalias is known for good variations on traditional dishes like chicken with orzo pasta and *briam* (mixed veggies). The kitchen adjoins the cosy dining room, decorated with the owner's and former ship captain's seafaring mementos.

Other good options:

Apostolis Restaurant (☎ 24210 26973; Argonafton 15; mains €3–5) Traditional eatery opposite the quay, with takeaway lunches for the ferry to the Sporades.

Ekonomou O Papous (☎ 24210 34606; Anthimou Gazi 135) Charming shop with only one item for sale: a very traditional and all-natural confection called *loukoumi* (jelly-like sweets with confectioner's sugar on top and often filled with walnuts or almonds; €4 per kilogram).

Drinking & Entertainment

For a night of music, drinking and dancing, head for the revitalised old industrial district known as the Palaia. Between the converted factory buildings and narrow alleys there are a number of good music and drinking dives waiting to be discovered.

In the downtown area, around the corner of Koumoundourou and Ermou, there are numerous music bars and *ouzeries*. In the summer, much of the action moves to the outdoor clubs at Alykes, a breezy beach suburb 4km southwest from the city centre.

Bar Balthassar (☎ 6949383200; Oikonomaki 76; mezedhes €5–10) In the heart of Volos' café district, Balthassar is a popular beer-and-mezedhes hang-out, where the music theme changes nightly.

Café Aroma (☎ 24210 24568; Filellinon 2; snacks €2–4) Near the western edge of Plateia Yeoryiou, this breezy outdoor summer café puts gravel at your feet and a cool drink or iced coffee in your hand.

Flo Café (☎ 24210 39283; Argonafton 63; 🕒 8am–2am; 🍷 🍷) At the end of the waterfront, this hip café offers free wi-fi and cold drinks.

BROKEN ENGLISH FIXED

You can work on your Greek all you want, but you may discover that many Greeks love language, and that English is near the top of their list (after Greek!). Nor are Greeks shy about speaking English, regardless of their ability. This wonderful feature of the Greek character convinced one Greek English teacher, Anastasia, to open her own small school in Volos, in a charming high-ceilinged building in the city centre.

'I wanted to teach the way I wish, in a small establishment where the student was the priority,' says Anastasia, a Volos native who has lived and worked in the UK for several years. She returned to her hometown in 1995 and started the school. 'I continue to do what I do because of the relationship I have with my students, which I often keep well after they've completed their studies.'

She recalls one student, a timid girl named Irini who wanted to be a doctor but never managed to enter medical school. 'She came to the school, and she really gained confidence. All her potential came out! Now she is doing a PhD at Edinburgh in Biology. I am very proud of her.'

'I want them to think for themselves and to appreciate the chance to study abroad.' But ask anyone – learning a language isn't easy. Her students only speak English at the school. 'The difficult part,' Anastasia explains, 'is to get them to forget all the bad English they've acquired.' So remember, just as you're trying to order dinner in Greek, there's probably a Greek at the next table just waiting to chat with you.

Astra Bouzouki (☎ 24210 20004; Pagathon 38; drinks €2-5) In the old Palaia district, Astra features live bouzouki music, drinks and dancing, but don't bother showing up before midnight.

For movies, check out the Volos **summer cinema** (☎ 24210 29946; Dimitriadou 263; admission €6.50) series near the waterfront at the corner of Kartali, or the **Village Cinema** (☎ 24210 94600; Giannitson 29; admission €6.50) in the old Palaia District.

Getting There & Away

BUS

From the **bus station** (☎ 24210 24056; cnr Zachou & Almyrou), buses depart for Athens (€23.50, 4½ hours, 11 daily), Larisa (€4.80, one hour, 10 daily), Thessaloniki (€15.80, 2½ hours, nine daily), Trikala (€11.80, 2½ hours, four daily) and Ioannina (€20.30, five hours, three daily).

FERRY

You can buy ferry tickets from **Sporades Travel** (☎ /fax 24210 23415; Argonafton 33) and **Falcon Travel** (☎ 24210 39299; Argonafton 34; ☎ 7am-10pm).

Ferries from Volos to the Sporades

Destination	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Alonnisos	4hr	€19.50	2 daily
Glossa (Skopelos)	3½hr	€16.50	1 daily
Skiathos	2½hr	€15	2 daily
Skopelos Town	4hr	€19.50	2 daily

HYDROFOIL

In summer there are daily hydrofoils to Skiathos, Glossa (Skopelos), Skopelos Town and Alonnisos. Service from Volos to Trikeri and Palio Trikeri, however, is sporadic. Tickets and information are available from **Sporades Travel** (☎ /fax 24210 23415; Argonafton 33) or **Falcon Travel** (☎ 24210 39299; Argonafton 34; ☎ 7am-10pm).

Hydrofoils from Volos to the Sporades

Destination	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Alonnisos	2½hr	€32.50	2-3 daily
Glossa (Skopelos)	1¾hr	€27.50	2-3 daily
Skiathos	1¼hr	€25	2-3 daily
Skopelos Town	2¼hr	€32.50	2-3 daily

TRAIN

The Volos **train station** (☎ 24210 24056) is on Papadiamanti, about 200m northwest of Plateia Riga Fereou. There are 15 trains daily to Larisa (€2.10, one hour). Trains run to Athens (Intercity €23.90, five hours, three daily; normal €12.80, six hours, six daily) and Thessaloniki (both via Larisa - Intercity €20.20, 2½ hours, three daily; normal €7.10, three hours, three daily).

Getting Around

Cars can be rented from **Nikolaos Pappas** (☎ 24210 70009; Iolkou 93b) and **Avis** (☎ 24210 22880; fax 24210 32360; Argonafton 41).

AROUND VOLOS

Just west of Volos are two major archaeological sites, both dating from early Greek civilisation in Thessaly. The first is **Dimini** (☎ 24210 85960; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Tue-Sun), a late Neolithic site (4800-4500 BC) complete with traces of neatly arranged streets and houses. The second is **Sesklo** (☎ 24210 95172; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Tue-Sun), with remains of the oldest acropolis in Greece (6000 BC). The architecture at both sites typifies the complex agrarian communities that could sustain much larger populations than those of their Paleolithic hunter-gatherer ancestors.

PELION PENINSULA ΠΗΛΙΟΝ ΟΡΟΣ

The Pelion Peninsula lies to the east and south of Volos. It consists of a mountain range, of

which the highest peak is Mt Pliassidi (1651m). The largely inaccessible eastern flank consists of high cliffs that plunge dramatically into the sea. The gentler western flank coils round the Pagasitikos Gulf. The interior is a green wonderland where trees heavy with fruit vie with wild olive groves and forests of horse chestnut, oak, walnut, eucalyptus and beech trees to reach the light of day. The villages tucked away in this profuse foliage are characterised by whitewashed, half-timbered houses with overhanging balconies, grey slate roofs and winding cobbled paths.

The Pelion is a hiking mecca today, but long ago walking was simply how people went from one village to another. A network of frequently restored *kalderimia* (cobbled donkey pathways) connect most mountain and seaside villages. A detailed booklet in English, *Walks in the Pelion* by Lance Chilton, is available from **Marengo Publishers** (www.marengo-walks.com/Pilion_bk.html) and from the **Old Silk Store** (☎ 24260 49086, 6937156780) in Mouressi. The other useful guide is the detailed (1:50,000) Road Editions *Map of Mt Pilion*, available in most Greek bookshops.

Many of the places to stay in the Pelion are traditional mansions known in Greek as *arhontika*, tastefully converted into pensions. They are wonderful places, but are often pricey. The Pelion has an enduring tradition of regional cooking, often flavoured with mountain herbs. Local specialities include *fasolada* (bean soup), *kouneli stifadho* (rabbit stew), *spetsofai* and *tyropsomo* (cheese bread).

History

In mythology the Pelion was inhabited by *kentavri* (centaurs) - creatures, half-man and half-horse, who took delight in drinking wine, deflowering virgins and generally ripping up the countryside. Not all were random reprobates, however; Chiron, considered the wisest of the group, was renowned for his skill in medicine.

The Turkish occupation did not extend into the inaccessible central and eastern parts of the Pelion, and as a result the western coastal towns were abandoned in favour of mountain villages. In these remote settlements, culture and the economy flourished; silk and wool were exported to many places in Europe. The Orthodox church at the time was instrumental in maintaining *Kryfa Scholia* (Hidden Schools). Like other remote areas in

Greece, the Pelion became a spawning ground for ideas that culminated in the War of Independence.

Getting There & Away

Buses to the villages of the Pelion leave from the Volos bus station (opposite).

Northwest Pelion

VOLOS TO MAKRINITSA

ΒΟΛΟΣ ΠΙΠΟΣ ΜΑΚΡΙΝΙΤΣΑ

Taking the northeastern route from Volos to Makrinita, the road climbs 6km to the village of **Ano Volos**, where you'll find the delightful **Theofilos Museum** (☎ 24210 47340; Anakasia; admission free; ☎ 8am-3pm Tue-Sun). This is a mansion museum that was once home to native artist Theofilos (1866-1934), who wandered the Pelion region trading food for murals. The upstairs wall murals speak of local scenes and personal visions.

Portaria, the next village, is 12km north-east of Volos. True to form, its *plateia* has a splendid old plane tree, and the little 13th-century **Church of Panagia of Portaria** has fine frescoes. A fork to the left in the village leads to Makrinita.

MAKRINITSA ΜΑΚΡΙΝΙΤΣΑ

pop 650

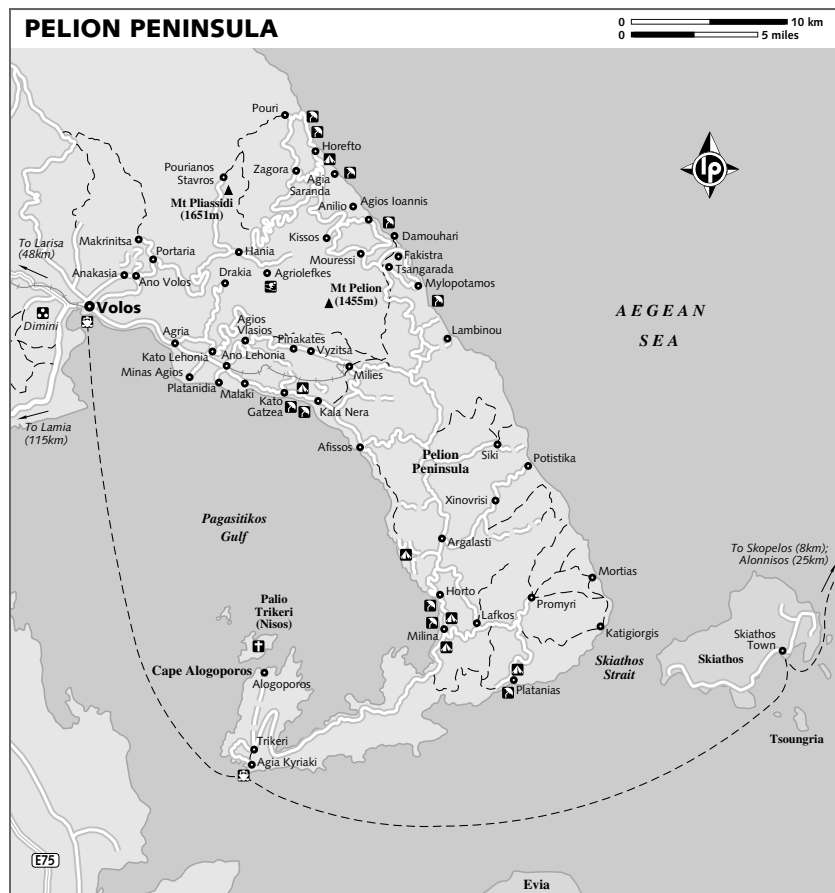
Clinging to a mountainside, Makrinita is aptly called the Balcony of Pelion. From a distance, the traditional houses give the impression that they are stacked on top of one another. Up close, the whitewashed structures are threaded with steep stairs crowded with potted geraniums, hydrangeas and roses. It is one of the loveliest of the Pelion villages, and also the most visited. The square is anchored by a very old plane tree with a hollow that invites kids to explore, a marble fountain and the little church of **Agia Panagia**. Makrinita is a great place to shop for camomile, oregano, mint and other local herbs.

The village is a pedestrian zone; a bus terminus and car park mark the entrance. The central square is about 150m along the cobbled main street of 17 Martios 1878. Above it, cobblestone trails and dirt paths lead to over 50 stone water fountains.

Stop by the **Museum of Folk Art** (☎ 24280 99505; admission €2; ☎ 10am-2pm, 6-9pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-5pm Oct-May) to see if you can find the 'secret' water fountain that's built into one of the thick stone walls here. The museum is a

BUSES FROM VOLOS TO THE PELION PENINSULA

Destination	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Agios Ioannis	2hr	€5.70	2 daily
Kala Nera	50min	€1.50	12 daily
Makrinita (via Portaria)	45min	€1.30	9 daily
Milina (via Argalasti and Horto)	1½hr	€3.90	4 daily
Platanias	2hr	€5.50	2 daily
Trikeri	3hr	€6.50	1-2 daily
Tsangarada	1½hr	€4.40	2 daily
Vyzitsa (via Milies)	1hr 10min	€2.40	4-5 daily
Zagora (via Hania)	1½hr	€3.70	2 daily



restored 1844 mansion where the Makrinitza of old is proudly on view. Take the winding steps leading down from the *plateia* about 25m to the museum. A nearby shop, **Ilios** (☎ 24280 99228; ☹ 10am-8pm), features locally made jewellery and pottery.

Sleeping & Eating

There are several hotels and domatia within 200m of the town square. Prices listed here generally increase by 50% on winter weekends. There are several good cafés around the main square; choose your favourite view and have a seat.

Arhontiko Theodora (☎ 24280 99179; www.theodora-pelion.com; s/d/tr incl breakfast from €35/45/60) With views over the village square, this eight-room,

traditionally styled and welcoming mansion offers excellent value, with bonus points for the canopied beds.

Kentavros Hotel (☎ 24280 99075; fax 24280 90085; r from €45) You'll have to squeeze past a few flowerpots as you climb the steps to the welcoming Kentavros, with large and spotless balconied rooms overlooking the *plateia* and surrounding countryside.

Taverna Leonides (☎ 24280 99071; mains €4-7.50) This friendly hole-in-the-wall is just above the village church. A house speciality is a locally made sausage stuffed with rice and herbs.

Taverna A-B (☎ 24280 99355; mains €4-8.50) A basic out-of-the-way eatery, the A-B makes the most of strictly local produce and meat

in dishes like roast pork in wine, lamb soup and a mountain favourite – rabbit in red wine sauce. Follow the signs 150m along the ridge path from the central square.

our pick **Kritsa Hotel Restaurant** (☎ 24280 99121; www.hotel-kritsa.gr; Portaria; mains €4-16) Head to the Portaria *plateia* to find this welcoming family taverna serving creative Pelion favourites like slow-roasted lamb, or roasted greens with egg. Owner Eleni Karaiskou's menu includes appetisers like grilled feta, tomato and peppers, made only with local ingredients. Kritsa also doubles as a small hotel with eight rooms (€40 to €55), each traditionally furnished with four-poster beds, lace curtains and woven rugs. The best part: you can wake up to an excellent breakfast downstairs, included in the room rate.

Also recommended:

Achilles Hotel (☎ 24280 99177; fax 24280 99986; Makrinitza; s/d €40/50) Over the central *plateia*, simple and comfortable.

Skalakia Taverna (☎ 24280 99212; Portaria; mains €4-9) Great for mountain stews and lamb grills. Down the steps by the village kiosk in Portaria.

MAKRINITSA TO HANIA

ΜΑΚΡΙΝΙΤΣΑ ΠΡΟΣ ΧΑΝΙΑ

Back on the main Volos–Zagora route, the road continues another 15km to the modern village of **Hania**, with views to both the Aegean and the Pagasitikos Gulf. About 3km uphill from here is the ski resort of **Agriolefkas** (☎ 24280 73719; lift day passes per weekday/weekend €10/16). This small resort (elevation 1350m) sports two ski lodges and is open, snowfall permitting, from late December to mid-March. In addition to a 5km cross-country track, there are three downhill ski runs and two lifts.

Northeast Pelion

ZAGORA ΖΑΓΟΡΑ

From Hania, the road zigzags down through chestnut trees to a junction leading to **Zagora**, the largest of the Pelion villages and a major fruit-growing centre – it's the apple capital of Greece. Until a blight ruined the silk industry in 1850, the town produced fine silk for export. Zagora is a long, rambling village, as the approach along the main road testifies, and is not as dependent on tourism as other villages in the area. The very successful Zagora agricultural cooperative was founded in 1916 and has been instrumen-

tal in promoting a sustainable agricultural economy in the village region.

Stop by the **Elliniko Museum** (admission €2; ☹ 10am-2.30pm & 5.30-9pm), dedicated to War of Independence hero Rigas Feraios. It was once home to a small classroom where a lone priest taught children in secret, hidden from the Turks who banned schools of any sort among the rebellious Greeks. The museum is just past the turn-off to Horefto.

With your own transport, you can reach the remote and laid-back **Pouri**, which spills down a steep mountain-side to a small bay with a few domatia and tavernas.

Back at the road, the right turn takes you through a series of villages to Tsangarada. This route is one of the most scenically spectacular in the Pelion.

The flower-draped village of **Kissos**, less than 1km off the main road, is built on steep terraces surrounding the 18th-century **Church of Agia Marina**, whose frescoes are considered the finest in the Pelion. From Kissos, a 6km road leads past Agios Dimitrios down to the coastal resort of Agios Ioannis. The main road continues on to the agricultural village of **Mouressi** and its seaside neighbour Damouhari.

Sleeping & Eating

Arhontiko Dhrakopoulou (☎ 24260 23566; fax 24260 23460; Zagora; r incl breakfast €60) Don't expect to find room numbers at this refurbished Pelion mansion on the main *plateia* of Zagora. Instead, the name of a local flower designates each of the five simply furnished rooms. The pension is managed by the local Women's Association, whose favourite flowers would seem to include gardenias, hydrangeas and roses. Take your pick.

Arhontiko Stamou (☎ 24260 23880; d/ste incl breakfast from €70/100; ☐) manages to combine fine traditional décor with modern touches like long beds, big showers and satellite TV. There's a mellow music café next door called Anemella, which is Greek for silkworm – a reference to Zagora's agricultural roots.

Two good tavernas occupy the main square of Zagora's Agios Georgios: **Taverna O Kiriazis** (☎ 24260 22993; mains €4.50-7), with plenty of grills and oven-ready dishes; and **Taverna O Petros** (☎ 24260 23666; mains €4.50-7), where you can start with a complimentary shot of *tsipouro* (distilled spirit) before sampling village fare, including several veggie dishes.

HOREFTO ΧΟΡΕΥΤΟ

Eight kilometres downhill from Zagora, Horefto is a low-key resort with palm trees and a long sandy beach. It's also the mythical home of Chiron, a roving centaur who healed the sick in the days when doctors still made house calls. The main beach is quite decent, but more-isolated beaches are within walking distance, north and south of the main village. Pretty and isolated **Agia Saranda** beach is 2km south, with three simple and comfortable beach domatia available, in addition to both a nearby taverna and weekend-only club.

Sleeping & Eating

Camping ground (☎ 24260 34885; camp sites per adult/tent €5/3) Shaded by plane trees, this basic ground at the main beach caters mostly to caravans.

Hotel Hagiatu (☎ 24260 22405; www.pelion.com.gr/hagiatu.htm; s/d €40/50; P) Spacious tile-and-wood rooms, balconies and overhead fans make the reliable Hagiatu good value. It's opposite the beach as you enter Horefto.

Maribou Hotel (☎ 24260 23710; www.maribouhotel.gr; s/d/ste €48/65/100; P) Renovated in 2007, the welcoming and efficient Maribou sits on a hillside overlooking the sea. A 250m path brings you to the beach (1km away by road).

Try the friendly and always reliable **Taverna O Petros** (☎ 24260 23585; mains €4-7.50), featuring fish grills and a good variety of veggie dishes (*ladhera* – fasting food; baked or stewed with plenty of olive oil), including a tasty local favourite, *hortopites* (pies made with wild greens and cheese).

AGIOS IOANNIS ΑΓΙΟΣ ΙΩΑΝΝΗΣ
pop 659

The once-sleepy coastal resort of Agios Ioannis is now the busiest of the eastern resorts, but there's still plenty of room, and the nearby beaches are very good. Small hotels and busy tavernas line the waterfront, and two sandy beaches lie just north (Plaka) and south (Papa Nero) of town.

Les Hironelles Travel Agency (☎ 24260 31181; www.holidays-in-pelion.gr), in the middle of the village boardwalk, is a good source of information about accommodation as well as car and motorbike rental. It offers trail maps of the cobbled pathways and can organise small hiking tours, water sports and horse riding,

boating, sea kayaking and mountain-biking excursions.

Sleeping

You can expect the higher July and August rates quoted here to drop by about 25% at other times.

Pension Katerina (☎ 24260 31159, 6945762183; s/d/f from €25/30/45; ☺) A narrow lane off the waterfront leads to this welcoming gem. Rooms are light, tidy and charming. Families will like the three apartments that have kitchenettes.

Hotel Kentrikon (☎ 24260 31232; www.bungalows-kentrikons.gr; s/d €50/60; P) This place goes back to 1937, when it was the village's first tourist hotel, a modest six-room affair. Today, 22 traditionally furnished, wooden-shuttered rooms overlook the sea.

Anesis Hotel (☎/fax 24260 31123; s/d incl breakfast €50/70/80; ☺) The very welcoming Anesis is set back from the street, and features large and comfortable pastel-toned rooms. Breakfast is served on a vine-shaded terrace overlooking the sea.

Sofokles Hotel (☎ 24260 31230; www.sofokleshotel.com; s/d incl breakfast from €60/90; ☺) The newest hotel in town, the swank Sofokles features modern, well-appointed rooms with wood and marble touches, and sea views from 14 of its 20 balconied rooms.

Also recommended:

Camping ground (☎ 24260 31319; fax 24260 32159; camp sites per adult/tent €5/5) Basic and pine-shaded, just south of the waterfront.

Hotel Kelly (☎ 24260 31231; www.hotel-kelly.gr; s/d incl breakfast €35/45; ☺) Friendly, modern and good value, with a lobby bar opposite the beach.

Harikeleia Paniou Apartments (☎ 24260 31730; s/d/tr/f from €40/60/80/100; P) Kitchenettes and satellite TV, opposite Papa Nero beach.

Eating

Taverna Orea Ammoudia (☎ 24260 32126; fax 24260 49444; mains €4-7) At the end of Papa Nero beach, this family taverna serves excellent Greek dishes and good breakfasts. Try the unusual *kritama* (tomatoes with sea herbs), or choose from traditional oven-ready dishes, fresh fish and lamb grills.

Taverna Poseidonas (☎ 24260 31222; mains €4-8) The owners of Poseidonas are proud of their local reputation for serving only their own catch. In addition to the usual by-the-kilo offerings, you can always sample daily stand-bys like *mousakas* and roasted lamb.

Akrogiali Apostolis (☎ 24260 31112; mains €5-9) Among the waterfront tavernas, Apostolis serves up generous portions of Greek taverna basics like lamb in lemon sauce or stuffed tomatoes and peppers.

Pizza Venezia (☎ 24260 31093; pizza €7-8.50) This place has excellent, fresh pizza and friendly service. Find it upstairs, on the waterfront.

DAMOUHARI & MOURESSI

NTAMOYXAPH & MOYPEI

The picturesque hamlet of Damouhari is next to a rambling grove of olive trees that borders a pebble beach and protected cove, perfect for swimming. In the old days, the trees shielded the buildings from passing pirate ships. According to local lore, the village got its name from the expression '*dos mou hari*' (give me grace). The little church of **Agios Nikolaos** contains several fine frescoes. Damouhari is also the starting point for a beautiful 3km walk to Fakistra Beach. Just 4km southwest of Damouhari (2km on the path) is the low-key farming village of **Mouressi**, nestled off the main road, 3km north of Tsangarada.

Sleeping & Eating

Domatia Marika (☎ 24260 49475; s/d €40/50; ☺) Friendly, clean and cosy, this domatia sits above the minimarket.

Domatia Victoria (☎ 24260 49872; s/d €45/55; ☺) One of two very decent domatia in Damouhari, this place has views of the bay.

Old Silk Store (☎ 24260 49086, 6937156780; www.pelionet.gr; Mouressi; d €65) Housed in a 19th-century neoclassical building with personality to spare, this place is a Mouressi landmark and features traditional-style rooms in a garden setting. It's gracefully managed by British transplant Jill Sleeman, who offers a daily homemade breakfast (€10) as well. The pension is home to Mulberry Travel (☎ 24260 49086), which can take care of travel details, organise guided walks in the Pelion and even arrange cooking lessons in the kitchen of a local taverna.

Hotel Damouhari (☎/fax 24260 49840; r €85; P) Rooms here are often booked far in advance – however, stop to check out the nautical antiques in the lobby, or to have a drink in the Kleopatra Miramar bar, named after the owner-ship captain's first wife.

Taverna Karagatsi (☎ 24260 49841; Damouhari) Operated by the same family as at Hotel Damouhari. You can count on traditional taverna fare (with

fresh salads and tasty mezedhes), overlooking the small and picturesque harbour below.

Taverna Bastounis (☎ 24260 49207; Damouhari) Down the lane from Karagatsi, this more basic place has excellent fish grills cooked, served and caught by the owner of the same name.

Taverna O Vangelis (☎ 24260 49609; Mouressi; mains €4-7.50) Follow the locals here for good grills and rich stews. It's 1km from Mouressi's Old Silk Store.

TSANGARADA ΤΣΑΓΚΑΡΑΔΑ
pop 710

Tsangarada (tsang-ah-rah-dah), nestling in oak and plane forests, is a rambling and spread-out village comprising the four separate communities of **Agio Taxiarches**, **Agia Paraskevi**, **Agios Stefanos** and **Agia Kyriaki**. The largest is Agia Paraskevi, which is just north of the main Volos–Milies–Tsangarada road. The bus stops 200m from the central square of Plateia Paraskevis. The plane tree in this square is said to be one of the largest and oldest in Greece. There is an ATM next to the post office.

Sleeping & Eating

There are several domatia and roadside tavernas near Plateia Paraskevis and on the way to Mylopotamos.

Villa Ton Rodon (☎ 24260 49201; www.villatonrodon.gr; Agia Paraskevi; s/d/tr incl breakfast €50/60/65) This friendly and tidy 10-room pension with upper balcony views to the coast is surrounded by the family garden and orchard, offering great value and a quiet location.

Lost Unicorn Hotel (☎ 24260 49930; www.lostunicorn.com; Agia Paraskevi; s/d incl breakfast €80/110) Persian carpets, slow-swirling fans and antique-outfitted rooms grace this exquisite and well-appointed 19th-century mansion. The Greek and English owners, Christos and Claire, put together a garden breakfast worthy of the scenery, which, believe it or not, often includes singing nightingales.

Taverna To Kalivi (☎ 24260 49578; mains €5-8) Look for the small sign on the road at Plateia Taxiarchon to find this well-regarded old-fashioned taverna, known for meat stews, grills and wild greens in season.

Paradisos Restaurant (☎ 24260 49209; Agia Paraskevi; mains €6-10.50) Roast goat, *tyropita*, stuffed zucchini flowers, homemade preserves and local retsina are top-notch at this roadside eatery across from the post office.

MYLOPOTAMOS ΜΥΛΟΠΟΤΑΜΟΣ

Scenic Mylopotamos is divided by a rocky outcrop, with a natural tunnel connecting two small pebble beaches. It's 6km along the road from Tsangarada's Agia Paraskevi.

Sleeping & Eating

Diakoumis Rooms (☎ 24260 49203; www.diakoumis.gr; s/d/tr from €50/70/80; 📍 🚻) Just 500m before the village, Diakoumis features spacious cliff-side rooms with wooden floors and clear views of the small bay and beyond, as well as three self-catering apartments (from €90).

Taverna Angelika (☎ 24260 49588; mains €4-7.50) Angelika gets a thumbs-up from local Pelion residents for the well-prepared food and good wine, not to mention the harbour view from the outdoor terrace. Stuffed calamari for two, local greens with sea herbs, a plate of olives and feta and plenty of local wine is about €20. There are also a few domatia available.

West-Central Pelion

VOLOS TO MILIES & VYZITSA ΒΟΛΟΣ ΠΙΡΟΣ ΜΗΛΙΕΣ & ΒΥΖΙΤΣΑ

From Volos, the west-coast road heads south through the touristy villages of **Agria**, **Kato Lehonía** and **Ano Lehonía**. A left turn on a branch road to **Agios Vlasios** makes a lovely detour. A right turn leads to the seaside resorts of **Platanidia**, **Malaki** and **Kato Gatzea**. After the tortuous and narrow roads of the eastern Pelion villages, this stretch of road is a blessing.

With your own transport, **Kala Nera** can be a great alternative to crowded Volos as a base for exploring the Pelion. The friendly **Hotel Victoria** (☎ 24230 22219; fax 24230 22615; s/d €35/40; 📍 🚻) is just opposite **Kala Nera beach**, the only decent beach on this crowded coast.

Further along the coast road, just past Kala Nera, about 22km from Volos, there is a turn-off to the left for **Tsangarada**. A little way along here, another turn-off to the left leads through apple orchards on the way to the picturesque villages of **Milies** and **Vyzitsa**.

MILIES ΜΗΛΙΕΣ

pop 636

Milies (mih-lih-ess) played a major role in the intellectual and cultural awakening that led to Greek independence. It was also the birthplace of Anthimos Gazis (1761–1828), who organised the revolutionary forces in Thessaly in 1821, and toured the mountain

villages of the Pelion inspiring local resistance and leadership.

On the central square is **Agios Taxiarchis**, a church with beautiful 16th-century frescoes. Just 100m beyond the central square, **Milies Museum** (☎ 24230 86602; admission free; 🕒 10am-2.30pm & 6-9pm) houses a display of local crafts and costumes. Nearby **Library of Milies** (☎ 24230 86936; 🕒 10am-2.30pm; 📖) is home to handwritten books from the time of the War of Independence, but it keeps things modern with internet use for visitors.

Sleeping & Eating

Locals will tell you the rule of thumb is 'stay in Vyzitsa, eat in Milies', and the number of choices in each village confirms the advice.

Korbas Bakery (☎ 24230 86219; pies €1.50-4) Gastronomic highlights of Milies include the scrumptious *tyropsomo* and *eliopsomo* (olive bread) at this popular bakery on the main Volos–Tsangarada road.

Anna Na Ena Milo (☎ 24230 86889; snacks €2-4; 🕒 9am-10pm) The name of this crepe-and-jam café derives from a famous children's reader called *Anna Have an Apple*. It's opposite the police station, 50m from the *plateia*.

Panorama Psistaria (☎ 24230 86128; mains €5-7) Beyond the central square on the road to Vyzitsa, this friendly grill offers a range of local dishes including zucchini pie, pork chops in wine, and roast sausages.

VYZITSA ΒΥΖΙΤΣΑ

pop 277

Just 2km beyond Milies is the handsome village of Vyzitsa. Its cobbled pathways wind between traditional slate-roofed houses. To reach Vyzitsa's shady central square, walk up the cobbled path by Thetis Café, near the main parking area.

Sleeping & Eating

As in much of the Pelion, accommodation in Vyzitsa can be pricey.

Thetis Hotel (☎ 24230 86111; s/d incl breakfast €35/45) For basic but comfortable rooms with views, check out this very friendly pension near the car park. The rustic café nearby serves a simple breakfast on the terrace, where the cats await your scraps.

Hotel Stoikos (☎ 24230 86406; fax 24230 86061; s/d/tr €60/75/95) The well-managed 16-room Stoikos offers very good value, with wood floors, beamed ceilings and stained glass

THE LITTLEST TRAIN

In 1895, a 13km railway line was built between Volos and Ano Lehonía. By 1903, the narrow-gauge line was extended to Milies, making the town a prosperous centre of commerce. **To Trenaki** (☎ 24210 24056; adult/child €12.90/8.50), the steam train that used to chug along this route, retired formally in 1971, but was revived in 1997 as a weekend and holiday tourist attraction. The popular four-carriage train leaves Ano Lehonía at 11am and returns around 5pm, leaving you time to stroll around Milies. A restored Belgian coal-burning locomotive pulled the train when the route first reopened. But in 2000, a new diesel engine went into service after the train operators grew tired of following the smoke-belching original with a water tanker to put out the frequent grass fires started by airborne sparks. Despite the environmental upgrade, To Trenaki is still called '*Moudzouris*', an affectionate term meaning 'the smudger'.

on the spacious upper-floor rooms, all with great views.

Rooms Aphrodite Dimou (☎ 24230 86484; fax 24230 86091; s/d/tr incl breakfast from €60/80/100; 🚻) A 50m path from the *plateia* will bring you to one of the best-value places in Vyzitsa. The Aphrodite is small, charming and very private. Rooms are light and comfortable, and come with balcony views.

Georgas Restaurant (☎ 24230 86359; mains €5-11) In the evening you can enjoy unusual Greek dishes at this comfortable inn on the Vyzitsa–Milies road, including stuffed pork with orange sauce, and rabbit in red-wine sauce.

South Pelion**SOUTH TO TRIKERI**

The southern part of the Pelion has a wide-open feel to it, with sparsely forested hills and countless olive groves. Before heading inland after Kala Nera or Tsangarada, the road skirts the little coastal village of **Afissos**, winds upwards through to the large, inland farming community of **Argalasti**, and then forks – the left fork continues inland, the right goes to the coastal resorts of **Horto** and **Milina**. From Milina the road branches southeast towards Platánias and southwest to Trikeri. From Volos, a bus leaves twice daily for Trikeri.

HORTO & MILINA ΧΟΡΤΟ & ΜΗΛΙΝΑ

Milina is the slightly larger of these two coastal villages, and caters to package tourists. Both are on a quiet part of the peninsula with pristine water and a few inviting pebble beaches. There are tavernas and domatia facing the harbour at both villages, and two camping grounds nearby, both dominated by caravans. **Milina Holidays** (☎ 24230 65020; www.milina-holidays.com) on the waterfront can help with accommodation, as well as arranging bike and boat

rentals; horse riding at **Katigiorgis** (a small fishing port on the southeast point of the peninsula); and walks to the inland mountain village of **Lafkos**.

TRIKERI ΤΡΙΚΕΡΗ

pop 1182

There is an end-of-the-world feel about this part of the Pelion, as the road from Milina to Trikeri becomes more and more desolate. Donkeys outnumber cars in Trikeri, and the residents pride themselves on their tradition as seafarers, fighters against the Turks in the War of Independence, and upholders of traditional customs and dress. The week following Easter is one of constant revelry as dancing takes place every day and women try to outdo each other in their local costume finery.

AGIA KYRIAKI ΑΓΙΑ ΚΥΡΙΑΚΗ

This is the last stop on the Pelion Peninsula, a winding 5km drive down the hill from Trikeri, or a quick 1km walk down a cobblestone path. This fishing village sees few tourists, and the bright, orange-coloured boats are put to good use by a hard-working population of around 200. There is one domatia and a couple of fish tavernas next door, facing the opposite shores of Evia.

PALIO TRIKERI ΠΑΛΙΟ ΤΡΙΚΕΡΗ

If you really must go that one step further to get away from it all, then head for this little island with a year-round population of less than 50, just off the coast and inside the Pagasitikos Gulf; it's often called Nisos (Island) for short. To reach tiny Nisos from the fishing village of **Alogoporos**, a five-minute boat ride away, telephone Nikos at **Taverna Diavlos** (☎ 24230 55210, 6976851056) on Nisos. There are a couple of

domatia at the taverna. Wild camping is possible as well. But the main activities on Palio Trikeri are explaining to locals why you're there, and then explaining to yourself why you're leaving.

PLATANIAS ΠΛΑΤΑΝΙΑΣ

Platanias (plah-tah-nih-ahs) was a popular resort until the hydrofoil service stopped in 2001, allowing it to return to its low-key roots. There's a good sand-and-pebble beach, a camping ground and a few tavernas and domatia.

From roughly early June through to the end of August, an excursion boat, the **Africana** (☎ 24230 71273), makes daily runs between Platanias and the island of Skiathos (adult/child €35/20). The 100-passenger boat departs Platanias at 9.30am and returns at around 5.30pm. Tickets can be purchased at the dock kiosk in Platanias.

TRIKALA ΤΡΙΚΑΛΑ

pop 49,809

Trikala (*tree-kah-lah*) sits 66km west of Larisa, between Karditsa and Kalambaka. It was originally Trikki, as mentioned by Homer, and the reputed birthplace of Asclepius, the god of healing. It's an attractive and bustling agricultural town through which flows the River Litheos, and it's a major hub for buses. While provincial Trikala's attractions hardly warrant a special trip, it boasts a lively nightlife and serves as a gateway to the South Pindos mountain resorts to the west.

Orientation

The River Litheos bisects the town. Near the two squares, the river is more of a landscaped channel with a narrow bridge separating them – the plane tree–shaded central square of Plateia Iroön Polytechniou is on the northeast bank, and rambling Plateia Riga Fereou sits on the southwest bank. Trikala's main thoroughfare, Asklipiou, begins here as a pedestrian precinct and then runs south 700m to the train station. The bus station is on Othonos on the west bank of the river, 200m from Plateia Riga Fereou.

Information

EMERGENCY

Police station (☎ 24310 76100; Sidiras Merarhias) A left turn off the Larisa road, 1km from the town centre.

INTERNET ACCESS

In Spot (☎ 24310 20739; Vyronos 26; per hr €2.50)

K-NET (☎ 24310 74854; Asklipiou 11; per hr €2;

☎ 24hr)

Web (☎ 24310 76851; cnr Asklipiou & Garivaldi; per hr €1.80; ☎ 24hr)

MONEY

Six banks ring the squares on either side of the river.

POST

Post office (Saraf 13) Just west of Plateia Riga Fereou.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Poulianiti Travel Services (☎ 24310 36140; fax

24310 36130; Vironos 37) Can help with accommodation, travel bookings and area tours.

Sights

It is worth a wander up to the gardens surrounding the restored Byzantine **Fortress of Trikala**. An adjacent café-bar overlooks the town. Walk 400m up Sarafi from the central square and look for the sign pointing right. Just before the turn for the fortress are the remains of the **Sanctuary of Asclepius**. More interesting is the old Turkish quarter of **Varousi**, just east of the fortress. It's a fascinating area of narrow streets and fine old houses with overhanging balconies. Another 200m up the hill from Varousi, you'll find the **Chapel of Profitis Ilias**.

On the other side of town is the **Koursoun Tzami**, built in the 16th century by Sinan Pasha, the same architect who built the Blue Mosque in Istanbul. The mosque was restored in the mid-1990s with EU funding. From the bus station head south and follow the river for 300m. The station is on your right.

Sleeping

Hotel Palladion (☎ 24310 28091; Vyronos 4; s/d without bathroom €22/30) Trikala's only budget option, next to Plateia Riga Fereou, has small and Spartan rooms.

Hotel Panellinio (☎ 24310 73545; www.hotelpanelinio.com; Plateia Riga Fereou 2; s/d incl breakfast €40/55; ☎) Dating from 1914, this welcoming and restored neoclassical hotel facing the river offers spacious rooms with elegant and traditional furnishings. Breakfast is served in the adjacent café.

Hotel Divani (☎ 24310 27286; fax 24310 20519; Dionysiou 13; s/d incl breakfast €42/58) The Divani

BUSES FROM TRIKALA

Destination	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Athens	4½hr	€22	8 daily
Delfhi (via Amfissa)	4hr	€15.50	4 daily
Elati	1hr	€2.90	1-2 daily
Ioannina	3½hr	€12.30	2 daily
Kalambaka	30min	€1.90	20 daily
Lamia	2hr	€8	8 daily
Larisa	1hr	€5.30	half-hourly
Neraidochori	1½hr	€4.40	1-2 daily
Pertouli	1¼hr	€4.10	1-2 daily
Thessaloniki	3½hr	€15	6 daily
Volos	2hr	€11.80	4 daily

hotels around Greece are usually top-end affairs, but this B-class version opposite Plateia Kitrilaki is friendly and good value. It has smartly furnished rooms, most with balcony and bathtub.

Eating

The café life in Trikala is centred on the northern end of Asklipiou and across the river in the old Manavika district. You'll find traditional *kafeneia* are mostly in the little streets to the north of 25 Martiou. For cheap eats, head east from Plateia Riga Fereou about 100m to the smaller Plateia Kitrilaki, where you'll find €1.50 plates of sizzling souvlaki.

Kebob Karthoutsos (☎ 24310 38084; Ioulietas Adam 5; mains €3-6) It's worth waiting for a table at this busy eatery near Plateia Riga Fereou, where a table full of lean pork souvlaki, *horta* (wild greens), feta and cold beer costs less than €10 per head.

Taverna Palia Istoria (Old Story; ☎ 24319 77627; Ypsilanti 3; mains €3.50-8) This intimate eatery specialises in mezedhes with a twist, like the *feta psiti* (baked feta with tomatoes, potatoes, ham and grilled onions), a bargain at €4.

Taverna Diachroniko (☎ 24310 21480; Manavika district; mains €4-8) Small and traditional, this snappy alleyway *tsipouradhiko* (a place that serves ouzo and light snacks) serves up excellent salads and grills.

Peri Yefseon Restaurant (All About Taste; ☎ 24310 32720; Hadzipetrou 23; mains €8-15) This upscale addition to Trikala's old Manavika district features a modern open kitchen and a menu and wine list that range across the Mediterranean.

Drinking & Entertainment

On weekend nights, the trend in Trikala seems to be to tank up on coffee along Asklipiou, then after midnight cross the bridge for drinks, mezedhes and music.

Trikala's nightlife revolves around the Manavika district, a three-block maze of narrow passageways and outdoor tables crammed with tavernas, lamp-lit music bars, small *ouzerie* and all-night cafés.

Head to **Corte Cafe** (☎ 24310 24302; Asklipiou 12) under the striped awning for good coffee, drinks, cold beer and snacks. For authentic Greek *rembetika* (blues music), follow the locals to **Aparhes Bar** (☎ 24310 38486; Amalias 8; ☎ Thu-Sat), along the riverbank.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Buses depart from Trikala's **KTEL bus station** (☎ 24310 73131; cnr Othonos & Garivaldi).

TRAIN

From Trikala **railway station** (☎ 24310 27214) there are trains to Kalambaka (€1.20, 20 minutes, eight daily), Larisa (€3.30, one hour, four daily), Athens (Intercity €20, four hours, two daily; normal €10.60, five hours, two daily) and Thessaloniki (€8.40, 2½ hours, two daily).

AROUND TRIKALA

Pyli Πύλη

About 18km from Trikala is the village of Pyli, which means 'gate' – just west of Pyli is a spectacular gorge leading into one of Greece's more attractive wilderness areas.

At the gorge's entrance is the 13th-century **Church of Porta Panagia**, with an impressive pair

A FIGHT FOR THE RIVER

Conservationists, industrialists and villagers are waging a debate over the government's construction of a 135m-high hydroelectric dam near Mesohora village on the upper River Aheloös in the South Pindos range. The EU-funded irrigation project has been stalled in the Greek courts for years. The government built the dam first, then did the environmental studies. As a result, the Greek courts have denied permits.

If the already constructed dam is allowed to begin operation, the ecological effects would be felt as far south as the wetland wildlife sanctuaries around Messolongi. In Greek mythology, Aheloös is god of the river – his mother Tethys is crying now because, as one local put it, 'Her son is being cut into pieces for money and power'.

ACTIVITIES

Kayaking enthusiasts come to the beautiful Tria Potamia area, 30km north of Mesohora, to ride the waters of the River Aheloös. The popular sport attracts white-water jockeys from across Europe. **Hiking** trails crisscross the region; a popular hiking path begins at the end of Pertouli and reaches a summit at Neraida (2074m).

There is a small but locally popular **skiing centre** (☎ 24340 91385) 2km before Pertouli on the road from Elati. Skis and snowboards can be hired (€10 to €15 per day) and the centre has a cosy family atmosphere.

Contact Mr Thanasis Samouris, the Trikala representative of **Trekking Hellas** (☎ 6977451953, 24310 36140; gptravel@otenet.gr), for information on rafting, canoeing, hiking, mountain-biking, horse riding and rock climbing. Half-day trips begin at about €25.

SLEEPING & EATING

Koziakas Hotel (☎ 24340 71270; fax 24340 71106; Elati; s/d incl breakfast €35/50) For a bit of wood-beamed Greek Swiss-chalet ambience, try the Koziakas on Elati's main road, with huge and comfortable rooms. The hotel restaurant is popular for boar chops and venison stew among its gamey offerings (€6 to €8).

Hotel Papanastasiou (☎ 24340 71280; fax 24340 71153; Elati; s/d/studio incl breakfast €40/72/100) This well-managed hotel, on the main road, is Elati's largest, with 35 well-appointed rooms. The attached taverna, O Hondros, specialises in grilled liver and other organ delicacies (€5 to €7).

METEORA ΜΕΤΕΩΡΑ

Meteora (meh-*teh*-o-rah) is an extraordinary place, and one of the most visited in all of Greece. The massive pinnacles of smooth rock are ancient and yet could be the setting for a futuristic science fiction tale. The monasteries atop them add to this strange and beautiful landscape.

Each monastery is built around a central courtyard surrounded by monks' cells, chapels and a refectory. In the centre of each courtyard is the *katholikon* (main church). Meteora is listed as a World Heritage Site.

History

The name Meteora derives from the Greek adjective *meteoros*, which means 'suspended in the air'. The word 'meteor' is from the same

of mosaic icons and a marble iconostasis. To reach the church, cross the footbridge over the river and turn left.

The 16th-century **Moni Agiou Vissarion** stands on a slope of Mt Koziakas, 5km from Pyl. To get here, cross the bridge over the river and follow the sign uphill for 500m.

Elati & Pertouli Ελάτι & Περτούλη

With your own transport, you can explore the once-remote mountainous areas west and north of Elati, including the beautiful **Tria Potamia** (Three Rivers) area. A scenic half-day circular drive brings you to Kalambaka. Forty-nine kilometres southwest of Elati, towards Arta, is the controversial **Mesohora Dam** (see the boxed text, above). About 10km of this scenic road is unsealed, but is passable by car. Buses (usually) cover this route as far as Gardiki, which is 5km past the Alexi Bridge.

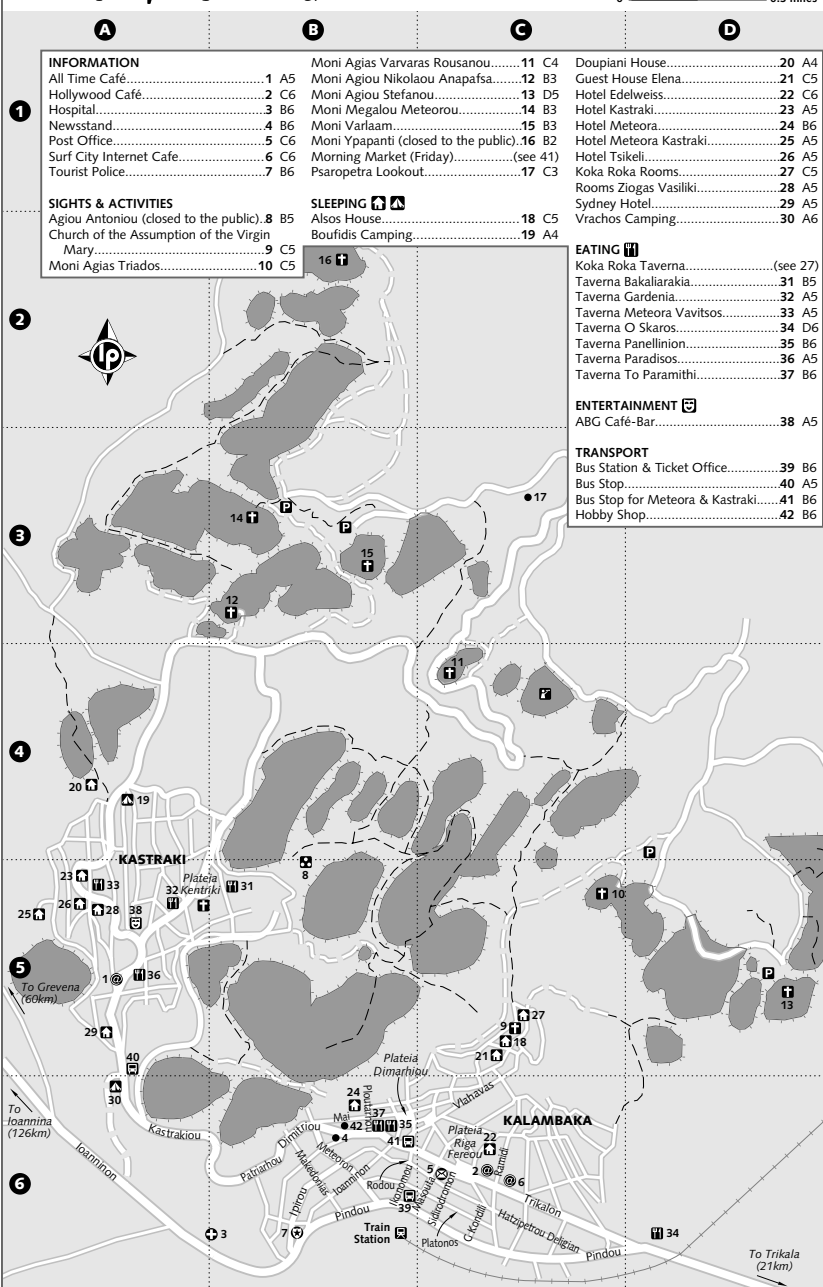
From Pyl, the 40km road north to the village of **Neraidochori** climbs steadily through breathtaking alpine scenery, passing the villages of Elati and Pertouli.

Elati is something of a hill station for Trikala and has grown into a thriving resort with 1000 beds. It was called Tierna before the Germans burned it to the ground for harbouring Greek resistance fighters in WWII.

Pertouli is a low-key version of Elati, and the University of Thessaloniki maintains a forest research station here.

METEORA, KASTRAKI & KALAMBAKA

0 500 m
0 0.3 miles



root. Popular theories about the origin of the Meteora are often more mystical than factual (see the boxed text, opposite).

From the 11th century, hermit monks lived in the scattered caverns of Meteora. By the 14th century, Byzantine power of the Roman Empire was on the wane and Turkish incursions into Greece were on the rise, so monks began to seek safe havens away from the bloodshed. The inaccessibility of the rocks of Meteora made them an ideal retreat.

The earliest monasteries were reached by climbing removable ladders. Later, windlasses were used so monks could be hauled up in nets. A story goes that when apprehensive visitors asked how frequently the ropes were replaced, the monks' stock reply was 'when the Lord lets them break'.

These days, access to the monasteries is by steps that were hewn into the rocks in the 1920s, and by a convenient back road. Some windlasses can still be seen (you can have a good look at one at Agia Triada), but they are now used for hauling up provisions – and an occasional Greek Orthodox priest from abroad.

Sights MONASTERIES

The monasteries are linked by asphalt roads, but it's possible to explore the area on foot on the old *monopatia* (paths). Before setting out, decide on a route. If you start early, you can see several *mones* (monasteries), perhaps all in one day; the road from Kastraki to Moni Agiou Stefanou is about 10km. An alternative route involves the bus (€1.20, 20 minutes), which picks up passengers in Kalambaka and Kastraki in the morning and returns from Moni Megalou Meteorou in the afternoon, giving you about four hours to explore several monasteries – usually Moni Megalou, Moni Varlaam and the convent of Moni Varvaras Rousanou. A third choice is the middle way: take the bus to the top and work your way down on foot.

Walking and climbing around the rocks can be thirsty work, but there are mobile canteens selling drinks and snacks at some monastery car parks. Be mindful of opening hours; the monks are an independent lot, and no two monasteries keep exactly the same hours. Opening hours in winter are slightly limited.

Entry to each monastery is €2. Strict dress codes are enforced: no bare shoulders are allowed, men must wear trousers and women must be covered to below the knee (baggy skirts with elastic waistbands are generally provided).

Moni Agiou Nikolaou Anapafsa (Monastery of St Nikolaou Anapafsa; ☎ 24320 22375; ☞ 9am–3.30pm Sat–Thu) is the nearest *moni* to Kastraki; it's 2km from the village square to the base of the steep steps leading to the *moni*. The monastery was built in the 15th century, and the superlative frescoes in its *katholikon* were painted by the monk Theophanes Strelizas from Crete. Especially beautiful is the 1527 fresco *The Naming of Animals by Adam in Paradise*.

The best known of the monasteries, **Moni Megalou Meteorou** (Grand Meteora Monastery; ☎ 24320 22278; ☞ 9am–5pm Wed–Mon) is an imposing form built on the highest rock in the valley, 613m above sea level. Founded by St Athanasios in the 14th century, it became the richest and most powerful monastery thanks to the Serbian emperor Symeon Uros, who turned all his wealth over to the monastery and became a monk. Its *katholikon* has a magnificent 12-sided central dome. Its striking series of frescoes entitled *Martyrdom of Saints* depicts the graphic persecution of Christians by the Romans. To reach Moni Megalou from Moni Agiou Nikolaou, look for a chevron-shaped white arrow on a blue signboard along the paved road heading uphill, indicating the start of a partly cobbled path that zigzags northwest to the *moni*.

About 700m down from Moni Megalou, **Moni Varlaam** (☎ 24320 22277; ☞ 9am–4pm Fri–Wed) has a small museum and fine late-Byzantine frescoes by Frangos Kastellanos. The mural *The Blessed Sisois at the Tomb of Alexander the Great* shows the great conqueror as a humble skeleton. Look just above the door, past the candles.

Access to **Moni Agias Varvaras Rousanou** (☎ 24320 22649; ☞ 9am–6pm Thu–Tue) is via a small wooden bridge. The beautiful coloured glass-illuminated *katholikon* is the highlight here, with superb frescoes of the Resurrection and Transfiguration. The imposing steep structure of Rousanou is itself a stunning accomplishment, and is today home to an order of nuns. To reach Moni Rousanou from Moni Varlaam, walk to the signposted fork in the road and bear right.

Of all the monasteries, **Moni Agias Triados** (Holy Trinity Monastery; ☎ 24320 22220; ☞ 9am–5pm

THE METEORA: GEOLOGY OF A ROCK FOREST

The jutting pinnacles and cliffs of the Meteora were once sediments of an inland sea. About 10 million years ago vertical tectonic movements pushed the entire region out of the sea at a sloping angle. The same tectonic movements caused the flanking mountains to move closer, exerting extreme pressure on the hardened sedimentary deposits. The Meteora developed netlike fissures and cracks. The weathering and erosion that followed formed the towering outcrops of rock that now vault heavenwards. The rocks were conglomerates of many types: limestone, marble, serpentinite and metamorphic, interspersed with layers of sand and shale.

By the dawn of human civilisation, the rocks had weathered and eroded into fantastic shapes; the sandstone and shale washed away, isolating blocks of rock and cliffs. Where erosion was less extreme, caves and overhangs had appeared in the rock face.

As early as the 11th century AD, these awesome natural caves had become the solitary abodes of hermit monks. Eventually, 24 monasteries were built on these pinnacles. Today, six are active religious sites, occupied by monks or nuns and visited by the faithful and tourists alike.

Fri–Wed) has the most remote feel about it, along with the longest approach. It was featured in the 1981 James Bond film *For Your Eyes Only*. The views here are extraordinary, and the small *katholikon* is beautiful. A well-marked 1km *monopati* leads back to Kalambaka, ending near the Koka Roka Taverna.

After the austere Moni Agias Triados, **Moni Agiou Stefanou** (☎ 24320 22279; ☞ 9am–2pm & 3.30–6pm Tue–Sun) resembles a return to civilisation, with efficient nuns selling souvenirs and DVDs of Meteora. Among the exhibits in the museum is an exquisite embroidered picture of Christ on his *epitafios* (bier). The monastery is at the very end of the road, 1.5km beyond Agias Triados.

For a panoramic break, walk 300m east of the signposted fork northeast of Moni Varlaam to the **Psaropetra** lookout, along the road to the Agias Triados and Agiou Stefanou monasteries.

Activities

ROCK CLIMBING

Meteora has been a mecca for European rock climbers for several years. Climbers of various skill levels can choose routes from over 100 peaks and towers with names like the Tower of the Holy Ghost, the Corner of Madness and the Iron Edge.

There are about 700 routes in all, covering 120 sandstone towers of the Meteora. The style is clean or traditional face climbing, and rates a '5' on the UIAA international scale. Best times weather-wise are roughly mid-March to mid-June and mid-August to mid-November.

A typical climb averages three hours, and costs range from about €30 to €50 per person, depending on routes and the degree of difficulty. Most climbs reach heights between 60m and 140m. A beginner's route takes about 1½ hours on the rocks and costs only €30. (All equipment is included in prices, including harness, shoes and helmet.)

There are two excellent **climbing guides** in Kastraki, both friends and both experienced. Contact either licensed mountain guide **Lazaros Botelis** (☎ 24320 79165, 6948043655; www.meteoracimbing.gr; Kastraki) or mountaineering instructor **Kostas Liolos** (☎ 6972567582; kliolios@kalampaka.com; Kalambaka). For detailed information and graded routes, check out www.kalampaka.com.

KALAMBAKA ΚΑΛΑΜΠΑΚΑ pop 8138

Kalambaka, the gateway to Meteora, is almost entirely modern, having been burned to the ground by the Nazis in WWII. It takes at least a day to see all of the monasteries of Meteora, so you'll need to spend the night either in Kalambaka or the village of Kastraki (p269), which is closer to the rocks.

Orientation

Plateia Dimarhiou is the main square in town, and the main thoroughfares of Rodou, Trikalon, Ioanninon, Kastrakiou and Vlahavas radiate from it. Most incoming buses stop on Plateia Dimarhiou, arriving by the fountain, but departing across the road behind the taxi stand. Kalambaka's other large square is Plateia Riga Fereou – Trikalon connects the two. The bus station is on Ikonou.

Information

Six banks with ATMs surround the central Plateia Riga Fereou on Trikalon. There is also a currency exchange window next to the post office.

Hollywood Café (☎ 24320 24964; Trikalon 67; internet access per hr €4; ☎ 9am-1am) Only a few computers, but low-key compared with the game-heavy shops nearby.

Hospital (☎ 24320 22222; Pindou)

Surf City Internet Cafe (☎ 24320 75366; Trikalon 73; internet access per hr €3; ☎ 24hr)

Post office (Trikalon 24)

Tourist police (☎ 24320 76100; cnr Ipirou & Pindou)

Sights & Activities

First-time visitors to Kalambaka will be amazed at the vertical rocks that guard the northern edge of the town. Apart from the rocks, the only other thing in Kalambaka worth a glance is the seventh-century cathedral, the **Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary** (admission free; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-5pm), a three-aisle basilica with frescoes that date back to the 14th century. There is a busy **morning market** every Friday, next to the fountain and bus stop.

Sleeping

Rooms are plentiful in Kalambaka, though anything on Trikalon is subject to considerable traffic noise.

our pick **Koka Roka Rooms** (☎ 24320 24554; kokaroka@yahoo.com; Kanari 21; s/d €20/40; P) Fringed by mulberry trees in a tranquil spot below the rocks and near the path to Moni Agias Triados, the family-run Koka Roka is an institution among travellers. The five immaculate rooms are well furnished, and laundry service is available.

Alsos House (☎ 24320 24097; www.alsoshouse.gr; Kanari 5; s/d/f €30/40/70; P) Next to Koka Roka, the well-managed and very comfortable Alsos House also has a communal kitchen, laundry and wi-fi for guests.

Guest House Elena (☎ 24320 77789; www.elena.guesthouse.gr; Kanari 3; s/d/tr incl breakfast €40/50/60; P) Tasteful and inviting, this traditional five-room guesthouse is immaculate. Three rooms include a Jacuzzi bath. English, Italian and French are spoken.

Other good options:

Hotel Meteora (☎ 24320 22367; gekask@otenet.gr; Ploutarhou 14; s/d incl breakfast €25/35) Under new management, cosy and good value, on a quiet cul-de-sac below the rocks.

Hotel Edelweiss (☎ 24320 24811; www.kalampaka.com/edelweiss; E Venizelou 3; s/d/tw incl breakfast €45/60/80; P) Well managed, with views from top floors.

Eating

our pick **Taverna To Paramithi** (☎ 24320 24441; Patriarhou Dimitriou 14; mains €4-7) Along with very good grills and fresh pasta, low-key Taverna To Paramithi brings in fresh seafood daily from Volos. A few local musicians often end the night here, with guitar or bouzouki in hand.

Taverna O Skaros (☎ 24320 24152; Trikalon; mains €4-7.50) Locals tout the lamb and pork souvlakia as the best in Kalambaka, and for good reason; Kostas, the owner and cook, was a butcher in town years before opening O Skaros.

Taverna Panellinion (☎ 24320 24735; Plateia Dimarhiou; mains €5-7.50) Panellinion serves first-rate mezedhes (such as roasted feta) and oven-ready dishes such as chicken in lemon sauce, which are always with fresh local ingredients. Panellinion is just opposite the fountain and bus stop.

Koka Roka Taverna (☎ 24320 24554; Kanari 21; mains €5-8) Situated below Koka Roka Rooms (left), the informal taverna kitchen includes a fireplace where, most nights, succulent lamb is grilled and served with a tasty house wine.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Buses arrive by the fountain, and depart from the kiosk and taxi stand opposite the roundabout (across the road from the arrival point).

Buses from Kalambaka

Destination	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Delphi (via Amfissa)	4½hr	€16.60	2-3 daily
Athens	5½hr	€23	7 daily
Ioannina	3hr	€10.50	2 daily
Lamia	2½hr	€9.90	4 daily
Metsovo	1½hr	€8.50	2 daily
Thessaloniki	4hr	€16	6 daily
Trikala	35min	€1.90	hourly
Volos	3hr	€13.60	4 daily

TRAIN

Trains depart from the Kalambaka **train station** (☎ 24320 22451). Trains to Thessaloniki and Volos change at Paliofarsalos.

Trains from Kalambaka

Destination	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Athens (Intercity/normal)	4½hr/5½hr	€20.30/10.90	3/2 daily
Thessaloniki (express/normal)	3/4hr	€16.80/8.90	3 daily
Volos	1½hr	€5.10	2 daily

Getting Around

Buses for Kastraki (€1.20) leave about every 45 minutes from the Plateia Dimarhiou fountain, and two of these (9am and 1.30pm Monday to Friday, and 8.20am and 1.20pm Saturday and Sunday) continue on to Meteora's Moni Megalou Meteorou (p266).

Taxis (opposite the fountain) go to Kastraki (€3) and all the monasteries (for example, Moni Megalou Meteorou for €6). Some drivers speak English, German or French, and you arrange a taxi tour for about €20 per hour.

Bikes and motorcycles (€6 to €18) can be hired from the **Hobby Shop** (☎/fax 24320 25262; Patriarhou Dimitriou 28), opposite Rex Hotel.

KASTRAKI ΚΑΣΤΡΑΚΙ

pop 1203

The village of Kastraki is about 2km from Kalambaka. Its impressive location right under the rocks gives it an otherworldly feel. If you want a base for exploring the Meteora monasteries, or for climbing the rocks themselves, Kastraki is a good choice.

An excellent map (available at the newsstand in Kalambaka) is the *Panoramic Map with Geology Meteora* (€6.50). A detailed booklet and map in English, *The Footpaths of Meteora* by Andonis Kalogirou (Kritiki Publishers), is available from the same shop (€12).

Kastraki has its own internet shop, **All Time Café** (☎ 24320 23930; per hr €3; ☎ 9am-2am), on the main road opposite Taverna Paradisos.

Sleeping

Vrachos Camping (☎ 24320 22293; www.camping.meteora.gr; camp sites per adult/tent €6/2; ☎) Located on the Kalambaka-Kastraki road, this outstanding and well-shaded camping ground features spotless toilet and shower blocks, a small market, a taverna, and a barbecue for self-caterers.

Rooms Ziogas Vasiliki (☎/fax 24320 24037; s/d/tr €25/40/50; P) These sparkling and spacious domatia, especially those facing the rocks, are great value, and a homemade lunch or

dinner is available upon request from the family owners.

Hotel Tsikeli (☎ 24320 22438; fax 24320 77872; s/d/tr incl breakfast €30/50/60; P) Two hundred metres past All Time Café, this welcoming 15-room lodging features simple wood-furnished rooms, along with a pleasant front garden, and even a few nonsmoking rooms.

our pick **Doupiani House** (☎ 24320 75326; doupi.ani-house@kmp.forthnet.gr; s/d/tr incl breakfast €40/50/60; P) Incomparably set just outside the village, 500m from the town square. The spotless and balconied rooms are tastefully furnished, and breakfast is served on a garden terrace overlooking the village and rocks.

Hotel Meteora Kastraki (☎ 24320 78180; s/d/ste incl breakfast from €80/110/180; P) Kastraki's newest upscale hotel offers a swank lobby bar, very handsome rooms and outstanding views of the rocks, but expect tour groups.

Other good options along the Kalambaka-Kastraki road:

Boufidis Camping (☎/fax 24320 24802; camp sites per adult/tent €4.50/3; ☎) More basic than Vrachos Camping, but location and pool bar redeem it. Some domatia available.

Hotel Kastraki (☎ 24320 75336; fax 24320 75335; s/d €40/50) Good value, but often full with package groups.

Sydney Hotel (☎ 24320 23079; fax 24320 77861; s/d/tr incl breakfast €40/45/55; P) Friendly digs, but choose the rooms away from the road.

Eating

There is no shortage of good tavernas to be found in Kastraki.

our pick **Taverna Paradisos** (☎ 24320 22723; mains €4-7.50) Look for outstanding traditional meals at the roomy Paradisos, along with spectacular views of the Meteora from the large terrace. Grilled lamb and *mousakas* are among the kitchen favourites, along with tasty mezedhes and a choice of good Greek wines. The restaurant was the recent recipient of a Greek cuisine award, noting its fresh and traditional ingredients.

Taverna Meteora Vavitsos (☎ 24320 22285; mains €4-7.50) Just opposite Hotel Kastraki, this popular local taverna is set back in a shaded terrace, and features excellent lamb grills, souvlakia and pasta dishes, always in hearty portions.

Taverna Gardenia (☎ 24320 22504; Kastraki; mains €4-8) Gardenia gets good marks locally for tasty taverna standards, such as lamb grills and stuffed tomatoes and peppers. Look for

the patio shaded by two plane trees, just 20m south of the big church on the square.

Taverna Bakaliarakia (☎ 24320 23170) Sitting on a terrace below the church, this popular eatery is known for its fried cod with garlic, and its mild retsina and excellent local *tsipouro*.

Entertainment

ABG Café-Bar (☎ 24320 75627) Kastraki's only night-spot (and a mellow one at that) is just past the turn-off to the Meteora. This combination jazz bar and gelateria has dark red terrace walls, a welcome sight in low-key Kastraki.