

Saronic Gulf Islands

Νησιά του Σαρωνικού



The Saronic Gulf Islands pepper the great waterway south of Athens like colourful stepping stones to the wider Aegean world.

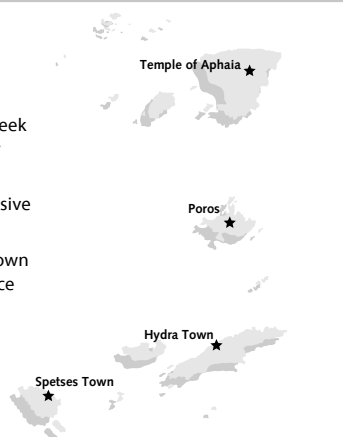
The most accessible islands of the group, Salamina, Aegina and Angistri, are just a short ferry-hop from the mainland. Salamina, the most accessible, is too easily dismissed as a mere suburb of Athens; yet this historic island boasts quiet rural areas and a few modest beaches to fit the island idyll. Next comes brash and cheerful Aegina, just an hour south from Piraeus by hydrofoil, while near-neighbour Angistri is a genuine holiday island, but with reassuring corners of tranquillity, even in high season.

Further south again is Poros, a popular weekend escape for Athenians, yet still within a few hundred metres of the Peloponnese and with a peaceful hinterland. Next comes the Saronic diva, Hydra, where tiers of pastel-hued houses rise majestically from a harbourside that is always bustling with life. Deepest south of all is pine-scented Spetses, nudged up against the mainland also, yet with an alluring sense of escape from the mainstream.

There are decent beaches on all of the Saronics, with Angistri and Spetses having the best of the bunch. The islands do not boast a great number of architectural glories, although Aegina's Temple of Aphaia is a premier site. If beaches and ancient sites are not your sole interests, then the Saronics offer authentic and rewarding Greek island experiences within easy reach of Athens.

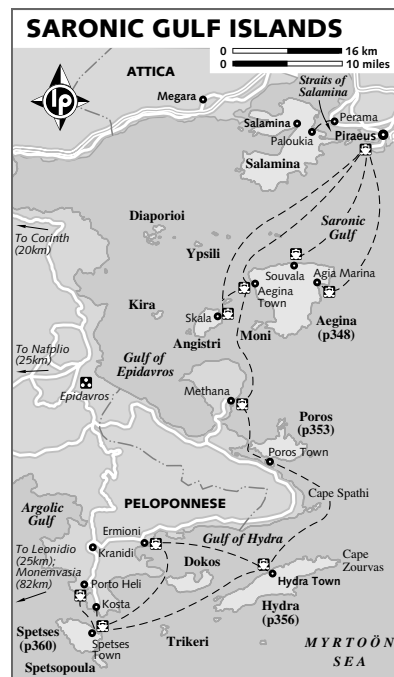
HIGHLIGHTS

- **Ancient Awe** Exploring Aegina's glorious history at the superb Temple of Aphaia (p351)
- **Tasteful Taverna** Going the € distance for modern Greek cuisine in the top-end restaurants on Hydra (p358) or Spetses (p362)
- **Dolphin Encounter** Diving near Hydra on a non-intrusive dolphin safari (p357)
- **Walk on the Wild Side** Heading inland from Hydra Town (p356) or Spetses Town (p361) for a more rustic Greece experience
- **Fictional Feast** Curling up amid the pines of Spetses (p359) with John Fowles' erotically charged *The Magus*



■ POPULATION: 45,600

■ AREA: 318 SQ KM



GETTING THERE & AWAY

Ferry

The Saronic Gulf Islands have one of the best ferry networks across Greece, with several fast hydrofoil and catamaran services racing to and from Piraeus at regular intervals every day. Slower conventional ferries operate several times a day to and from Aegina, Poros, Methana and Hydra in high season and less so in winter. There is currently one daily service to Spetses throughout the year. You should always check details close to the date of your planned trip. The following times and prices are for conventional ferries.

FERRIES FROM PIRAEUS' GREAT HARBOUR

Destination	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Aegina	1hr 10min	€8	8 daily
Angistri	2hr	€8.80	2 daily
Poros	2½hr	€11.60	5 daily
Hydra	3hr 10min	€13.20	daily
Spetses	4½hr	€15.30	daily

Hydrofoil & Catamaran

Hellenic Seaways (☎ 210 419 9000; www.hellenicseaways.gr) operates a busy schedule to the islands and the nearby Peloponnesian ports with its Flying Dolphin hydrofoils and Flying Cat catamarans. See the destination sections for full details. **Euroseas** (☎ 210 413 2105/6) runs a daily service from Piraeus to Hydra, Poros and Spetses. Recent newcomer **Aegean Flying Dolphins** (☎ 210 422 1766), whose hydrofoils have a distinctive blue and yellow livery compared with the Hellenic Dolphins red, white and blue, runs a similar service to the same destinations as Hellenic Seaways. Prices are about €1 less. All services depart from the Great Harbour at Piraeus.

Tours

Cruise ships offer daily cruises from Piraeus to the islands of Aegina, Poros and Hydra.

The cruises leave Piraeus at 9am, returning at about 7pm, and allow for about one hour on shore at each island – long enough for snaps, snacks and souvenirs.

See p129 for more information about these tours. The official price is €93, including buffet lunch, but there are bargain-deal tickets if you book through your hotel.

Introduced in 2007, **easyCruise** (www.easycruise.com) runs several Greek Island cruises, including three-night midweek minibreaks from Piraeus to Poros and Spetses and back. It costs from €51.50 per person (high season from €79.50). Longer cruises to the Cyclades and to a mix of the Saronics and Cyclades are also available.

AEGINA ΑΙΓΙΝΑ

pop 10,500

Aegina (*eh-yi-nah*) rocks with a rough-and-ready charm. It has less of a tourist sheen than most holiday islands, due in part to its substantial agricultural and commercial sectors and its proximity to the mainland. Athenian weekenders sharpen the mix.

By the 7th century BC, Aegina was the leading maritime power of the region and had amassed wealth through trade. The island made a major contribution towards the Greek victory over the Persian fleet at the Battle of Salamis in 480 BC. In spite of this generous support, Athens, grown jealous of Aegina's status and of its liaison with Sparta, invaded

in 459 BC. Aegina never regained its previous glories although in the early 19th century it played a bold part in the defeat of the Turks and was the temporary capital of a partly liberated Greece from 1827 to 1829. Today the island plays a more mundane role as Greece's main producer of pistachio nuts. The ghosts of greater days still invest Aegina with romance, however, not least at the splendid ruin of the Temple of Aphaia, built soon after the Battle of Salamis. There are modest beaches too and an enjoyable taverna and nightlife scene.

Getting There & Away FERRY

There are several ferries a day between Piraeus and Aegina Town (€7.80, one hour 10

minutes). There are also services from June to September between Piraeus and Agia Marina (€8.50, one hour) and Souvala (€7.40, one hour 35 minutes). Schedules should always be checked in advance. There are at least four boats daily to Poros (€7.30, 50 minutes) via Methana (€4.90, 40 minutes), two daily to Hydra (€9.20, two hours) and one to Spetses (€12.80, three hours).

Tickets can be bought at the departure quays at Piraeus and at Aegina Town, where there are lists of daily sailings.

A small ferry makes several trips between Aegina and Angistri's main port of Skala (€5, 20 minutes, three daily). It leaves from mid-way along the harbour front and timetables are displayed there.



A SALAMINA SAGA

The famous sea battle of 480 BC between Greeks and Persians (see p33), in the murky channel that separates the Greek mainland and the island of Salamina, has been billed as the 'Greatest Battle of the Ancient World'. The odds were certainly great. A mere 371 Greek ships (triremes) routed a Persian fleet of 1207. Thus Salamina, one of the least toured islands in Greece, can rest on its historic laurels.

If you have time to spare in Athens, it's worth making the trip to Salamina (population 23,000) by public transport, or by bike. The first part of the trip gives a vivid insight into how Athens triumphs over its urban gridlock. You begin the trail outside Monastiraki metro station by catching a Perama-bound bus (€0.50, 40 minutes). It's an entertaining dash along narrow roads jammed with traffic and overshadowed by buildings. Car ferries run all night from Perama to Paloukia, Salamina's port; but catch the smaller passenger ferry (€0.70, 15 minutes) across this historic strait for a mind's-eye view of ghostly triremes and the chaos of that ancient sea battle.

If you're biking, head off into Salamina's surprisingly green interior and quiet coastal areas with their handful of small beaches. Otherwise catch a short bus ride to the island's modest capital of Koulouri, or to the equally modest resort of Selinia, from where you can catch a ferry directly back to Piraeus. (Note, there were forest fires on Salamina during 2007. Areas affected were around Selinia – and around Batsi on the north coast.)

HYDROFOIL & CATAMARAN

There are no fast services south from Aegina to Poros, Hydra or Spetses.

Hellenic Seaways (☎ 22970 24456; www.hellenicseaways.gr) operates its Flying Dolphins (€12, 35 minutes) almost hourly from early morning to mid-evening between Piraeus and Aegina. Tickets can be bought at the departure quays at Piraeus and Aegina Town.

Aegean Flying Dolphins (☎ 210 422 1766) runs a similar schedule as Hellenic Seaways between Aegina and Piraeus, with prices being about €1 less. They continue to Angistri (€4.50, 10 minutes, two to four times daily).

Getting Around

Buses run frequently between Aegina Town and Agia Marina (€2, 30 minutes), via Paleohora and the Temple of Aphaia. Other buses go to Perdika (€1.20, 15 minutes) and Souvala (€1.40, 20 minutes). Departure times are displayed outside the ticket office on Plateia Ethnegerias and you must buy tickets at the booth.

There are numerous places in Aegina that hire cars and motorcycles. Advertised prices start at around €40 to €45 a day for a car and €15 to €20 a day for a 50cc machine. There is not much discounting, even out of season.

AEGINA TOWN

pop 7410

Aegina Town has a gritty engaging charm. Athenians visit regularly and many have holiday homes on the island. Foreign visitors are

not too common. The town is the capital and main port, and its long harbour front fizzles with life. The two-lane road is a bit of a speed-way, so take care when crossing.

Canopied cafés, packed with cheerfully voluble locals, line the inland promenade. Narrow lanes lead inland from here across streets that are more reminiscent of downtown Athens and are crammed with everyday shops. A few crumbling neoclassical buildings survive from the town's heyday as the Greek capital.

Orientation

The large outer quay, with its little church of St Nikolaos, is where the bigger ferries dock. The smaller inner quay is where hydrofoils come in. Crossing the road and heading left from the end of either quay leads to Plateia Ethnegerias, where the bus terminal and post office are located. This road then continues on to the Temple of Apollo and the north coast. Turning right from the end of the quays leads along the busy harbour front for about 500m to the Church of Panagytsa and then on to Perdika and Agia Marina.

Information

Aegina does not have an official tourist office, but you can find some useful information at www.aeginagreece.com.

Alpha Bank and the Bank of Piraeus are located opposite the end of the hydrofoil quay. The National Bank of Greece is about 300m

to the right of the ferry quays. All the banks have ATMs.

Kalezis Bookshop (☎ 22970 25956) Midway along the harbour front; has a selection of foreign newspapers and books.

Port police (☎ 22970 22328) At the entrance to the ferry quay.

Post office (Plateia Ethnegersias; ☎ 7.30am-2pm Mon-Fri)

Surf and Play (☎ 22970 29096; Afeas 42; per 30min €2; ☎ 9am-late) Hot spot with fast connections, photo printing, burning. Located several blocks inland from Hotel Pavlou (below).

Tourist police (☎ 22970 27777; Leonardou Lada) Opposite the ferry quay.

Sights

The solitary surviving Doric column of the **Temple of Apollo** (☎ 22970 22637; adult/concession €3/2; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun) stands on the hill of Coloni, and is Aegina Town's significant ancient site. The column is all that's left of the 5th-century-BC temple, once part of an ancient acropolis. Just below is the **Sanctuary Museum** (admission €3; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun), which displays artefacts from the temple. There are plans to move the exhibition to an expanded collection at the Capodistrias House, a one-time orphanage and later prison, about 1km east of the ferry quays.

Sleeping

Aegina has a fair selection of hotels and rooms, but it's advisable to book ahead, especially at weekends.

Hotel Plaza (☎ 22970 25600; s/d/tr €35/40/60) A decent budget option, the Plaza is 100m north of Plateia Ethnegersias. Its young owner took over a few years ago and has worked hard at brightening things up. Rooms are clean and are a reasonable size.

Hotel Pavlou (☎ 22970 22795; Aiginou 21; s/d/tr €35/50/60) Well run by a cheerful no-nonsense family, the Pavlou's rooms are clean, if plain. They may offer you cheaper rooms at a less salubrious place, the Hotel Athina, about 750m inland. The Pavlou is just behind the Church of Panagitsa about 500m along the main harbour front from the ferry quays.

Hotel Brown (☎ 22970 22271; www.hotelbrown.gr; s/d/tr €60/75/100; ☎) The name of this fine hotel relates to its owner, George Brown, a local who has an English grandfather. Rooms are comfortable and stylish and the bungalows are in a shaded garden. There's a generous

buffet breakfast. The hotel is right at the far end of the harbour front.

our pick Rastoni (☎ 22970 27039; www.rastoni.gr; Metriti 31; d/ste €80/110; ☎) Within easy walking distance of the harbour is this delightful hotel, styled with flair and with a relaxing atmosphere. Each room is themed with individual décor and there is a charming garden. There are discounts for several days' stay. Breakfast is €5.

Eating

The inland side of the harbour front is packed with cafés and restaurants that steal most of the promenade. They make for lazy world-watching, but are not particularly good value, unless you hit the local unvarnished *ouzerias* scattered throughout.

our pick Babis (☎ 22970 23594; mains €5-12) A few metres beyond Hotel Brown, Babis has a stylish menu and décor. Cool colours enhance the interior and there's a pleasant beachside terrace across the road. Friendly service goes with some innovative dishes such as melt-in-the-mouth chicken with pistachio and unsalted cheese.

Mezedopoleio To Steki (☎ 22970 23910; Pan Irioti 45; seafood mezeds €6-12) Seafood with attitude. This cramped, noisy, sunless, yet somehow vivid place is right behind the fish market, midway along the harbour front. Like its immediate neighbour I Agora, it's always packed with people tucking into hell-fired octopus (€6) and sardines (€5) or other mezeds (appetisers). Romantic moments are not on the menu.

Local pistachio nuts are on sale everywhere, priced from €6 for 500g.

Entertainment

Music bars and cafés along the harbour front vie with each other for the most luxurious seating.

Yes! (☎ 22970 28306; Dimokratias; ☎ 9am-3am) This modish place has easy-listening daytime sounds and sharper spins from local and visiting Athenian DJs at night and at weekends. There's a good selection of coffee, drinks, snacks and breakfasts.

Avli (☎ 22970 26438; Pan Irioti 17; ☎ 9am-3am) A favourite with a cooler, older crowd, Avli mixes '60s and Latin music and plays Greek sounds when weekenders hit town.

Aegina has three outdoor cinemas. Of these the **Akrogiiali** (☎ 22970 53675; admission €8; ☎ Jun-Aug) has the most attractive setting. It lies just outside town along the Perdika road and has a pretty garden setting.

AROUND AEGINA Temple of Aphaia

The impressive **Temple of Aphaia** (☎ 22970 32398; adult/concession/under 18yr €4/2/free; ☎ 8am-7.30pm Apr-Oct) celebrates a local deity of pre-Hellenic times and is the major ancient site of the Saronic Gulf Islands. It was built in 480 BC, soon after the Battle of Salamis.

The temple's pediments were decorated with splendid Trojan War sculptures, most of which were robbed in the 19th century and now decorate Munich's Glyptothek. The temple is a compelling site and stands on a pine-covered hill with views over the Saronic Gulf as far as Cape Sounion.

Aphaia is 10km east of Aegina Town. Buses to Agia Marina stop at the site (€1.60, 20 minutes). A taxi from Aegina Town costs about €11.

Paleohora Παλαιχώρα

The ancient town of Paleohora was Aegina's capital from the 9th century and throughout the medieval period and was only abandoned in the 1820s. It originated as a refuge from pirates who attacked vulnerable coastal settlements. The ruins of the settlement lie on a hillside 6.5km east of Aegina Town near the road to the Temple of Aphaia and Agia Marina. A side road to the site leads in about 500m from a left-hand junction with the main road about 4km from Aegina Town.

There are extensive but vestigial ruins of Paleohora's domestic buildings, but numerous small chapels, most fairly intact, are dotted around the hillside. Remnants of frescoes can be seen in some and the Orthodox faithful still revere them – as we should all do.

Buses from Aegina Town to Agia Marina stop at the turn-off to Paleohora (€1.20, 10 minutes).

Perdika Πέρδικα

The likable fishing village of Perdika lies about 9km south of town on the southern tip of the west coast. Its long seafront terrace is crammed with tavernas and bars.

Perdika is also the caique (little boat) departure point for the pleasant little island beach at Moni, a few minutes away.

Perdika's harbour inlet is very shallow and swimming is not much fun. Instead, catch one of the regular caiques (€3) from the harbour to Moni Islet. Once targeted as the site of an exclusive casino, it's now a nature reserve and has a magic tree-lined beach and summertime

café. Peacocks and deer wander about peacefully. Make sure to catch the last boat back – or you sleep with the peacocks.

There are a couple of hotels and a few rooms in Perdika. **Villa Rodanthos** (☎ 22970 61400; www.villarodanthos.gr; s/d €45/65) is a gem of a place, not least because of its charming and kindly owner. Each room has its own colourful décor and is equipped with a kitchen. There's a sunny roof patio balanced by an attractive basement lounge and bar. Villa Rodanthos is about 100m along the right-hand branch road opposite the bus stop at the edge of town.

Tavernas line the harbour-front terrace and dish up Greek staples for about €5.50 to €9. Some places are getting a touch careless about quality, especially in low season when they really need to look after occasional visitors as much as the weekend high fliers. It all buzzes with life and colour in summer all the same, and the tavernas mix it with some swaggering late-night music bars.

Buses run every couple of hours to Perdika from Aegina Town (€1.20, 30 minutes). A taxi is €10 one way.

Beaches

Beaches are not Aegina's strong point. The east-coast town of **Agia Marina** is the island's main package resort. It has a shallow-water beach that is ideal for families, but it's backed by a fairly chic-less main drag and there's some high-decibel revelling during the summer.

There are a couple of sandy beaches by the roadside between Aegina Town and Perdika, such as the pleasant Marathonas where the taverna **Ammos** (☎ 22970 28160; Marathonas; mains €5.50-12) offers excellent local dishes with an appealing international flair. Starters are imaginative, mains include specialities such as Chicken Marengo and fillet steaks in tasty sauces, and there's a great selection of seafood, and fish by the kilo.

ANGISTRI ΑΓΚΙΣΤΡΙ

pop 700

Angistri lies a tempting few kilometres off the west coast of Aegina. It's a rewarding day trip from the larger island, or a worthwhile longer escape from the mainstream, better so out of high season.

The port of **Skala** is a resort village these days, crammed with small hotels and apartment

blocks, tavernas and cafés. Its beach, the best on the island, all but disappears beneath sun loungers and a tide of tanning oil in July and August; but life, in general, still ticks along gently.

Orientation & Information

A right turn from Skala's ferry quay leads westwards to the small harbour beach and then along a paved walkway to a church on a low headland. Beyond here lies the long, but narrow, main beach. A kilometre further west takes you to **Mylos** (Megalochori), an attractive, small settlement with rooms and tavernas, but no beach. Turning left from the ferry quay takes you south in about half an hour to the pebbly and clothing-optional **Halikadha Beach**.

Above Skala, and now absorbed by it, is the old settlement of **Metohi**.

Skala Tours (☎ 22970 91228; pannek@aig.forthnet.gr) has an office in the main street, just inland from the main beach. It can help with accommodation and other services. There is a branch of Emboriki Bank just up from Skala Tours. It has an ATM, although you should bring enough cash, since it may dry up over busy holiday weekends.

Sleeping & Eating

There are dozens of sleeping places in Skala and its surroundings, but most are booked up in advance in high season and on summer weekends. If you want to stay for a couple of nights it's best to book ahead; otherwise, ask around or check through Skala Tours.

Alkyoni Inn (☎ 22970 91378; s/d/tr €35/55/65; ☎ mid-Apr–Oct) The welcoming Alkyoni Inn is a 10-minute stroll east of the ferry quay. Its seafront rooms and apartments have great views. Other rooms back onto the road. The Alkyon has a popular taverna (mains €4.50 to €9) offering such delights as tuna salad, spaghetti with shrimps, and pork and chicken dishes in spicy sauces.

There are tavernas that offer reasonable Greek standards at similar prices in Skala and at the beaches.

Getting There & Away

Two ferries a day run from Piraeus (€8.80, two hours) via Aegina, and four fast ferries run during July and August (€12.50, one hour).

A small ferry makes several trips from Aegina to Angistri's main port of Skala (€3, 20 minutes) and then on to neighbouring Mylos

(€3.20, 25 minutes). It leaves from midway along the harbour front and timetables are displayed there.

Aegean Flying Dolphins (☎ 210 422 1766) has a Piraeus to Aegina service, which continues to Angistri two to four times a day (€4.50, 10 minutes).

Another option is the **water taxi service** (☎ 22970 91387, 6972229720; per trip €30) to Aegina.

Getting Around

About four buses a day run during the summer months from Skala and Mylos to the little village of Limenaria on the southeast coast. It's worth renting a moped (€15) or sturdy mountain bike (€9) to explore the island's coastline road. You can also follow tracks from Metohi overland through cool pine forest to reach the west coast beach of Dhragonera. Take a compass with you; the tracks divide often and route finding can be frustrating.

POROS ΠΟΡΟΣ

pop 4500

Unassuming Poros lies a few hundred metres from the village of Galatas on the shores of the mountainous Peloponnese, and its main settlement feels more like a lakeside resort than an island port. Poros is a rewarding holiday island with a refreshing sense of remoteness in its sparsely populated interior, although forest fires during 2007 took their toll on the southwestern coastal and inland area of Kalavria, the larger 'island' of Poros that is separated from the town of Poros by a canal. The areas of Neorion Beach and around Russian Beach have been affected.

Poros is made up of two islands: Kalavria and Sferia. An isthmus, cut by a narrow canal and spanned by a road bridge, connects them. Most people live on tiny Sferia, which is occupied mainly by the town of Poros. Sferia projects from the southern coast of Kalavria, a large, forested island, which has most of the bigger, seasonal hotels along its southern shore.

Getting There & Away

FERRY

There are at least five ferries daily in summer and about four daily in winter, to and from Piraeus (€11.60, 2½ hours), via Methana (€3.40, 30 minutes) and Aegina (€7.30, one

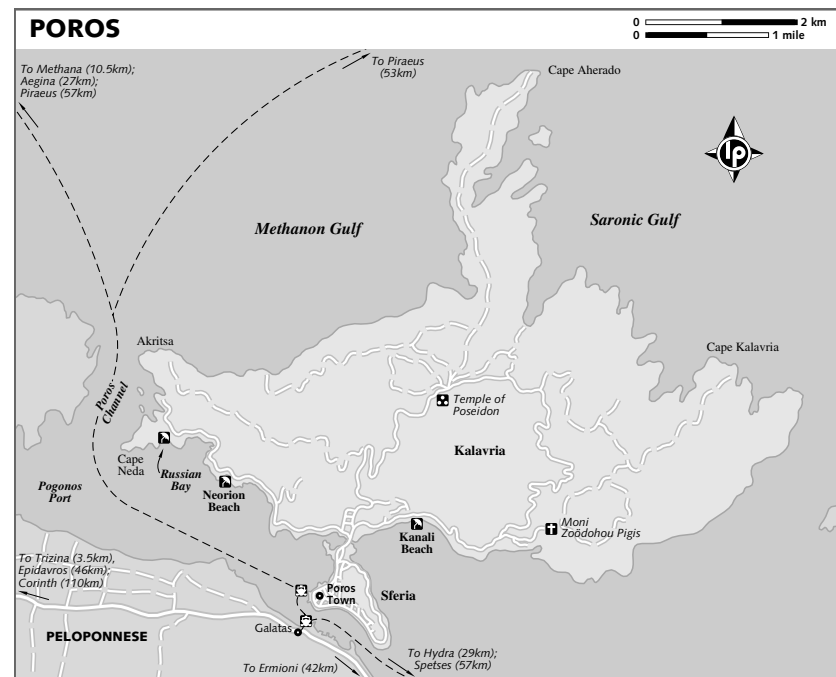
hour 15 minutes), two daily to Hydra (€6, 50 minutes), and one to Spetses (€9.60, two hours). **Family Tours** (☎ 22980 25900; www.familytours.gr) handles tickets.

Small boats shuttle constantly between Poros and Galatas (€0.70, five minutes) on the mainland. They leave from the quay opposite Plateia Iroön in Poros Town. Car ferries to Galatas leave from the dock on the road to Kalavria.

HYDROFOIL & CATAMARAN

Hellenic Seaways (www.hellenicseaways.gr) has about eight services daily to and from Piraeus (€19.30, one hour). Most outgoing ferries continue to Hydra (€9.50, 30 minutes). These include the Flying Cat/Flying Dolphin that also continue to Spetses (€15.50, one hour). **Marinos Tours** (☎ 22980 23423; Plateia Iroön) sells tickets.

Aegean Flying Dolphins (☎ 210 422 1766) runs a similar service to the same destinations as Hellenic Seaways and prices are about €1 less. **Hellenic Sun Travel** (☎ 22980 25901; www.hellenic.suntravel.com), opposite the ferry dock, is the local agent.



Galatas. Behind the harbour front, lanes and steps lead up to a maze of other lanes that link small squares and the focal points of a prominent clock tower and the cathedral. The town is a useful base from which to explore the ancient sites of the adjacent Peloponnese.

Orientation

The main ferry dock is at the western end of the town's long harbour front.

A right turn from the ferry dock takes you across the road to the triangular open space of Plateia Iroön. To either side of the *plateia* (square) the road is lined with cafés, tavernas and tourist shops. The island bus leaves from next to the kiosk at the eastern end of Plateia Iroön. Steps lead up from the inner corner of the square to the attractive lanes and squares of the upper town and to the clock tower and cathedral. A short distance south of Plateia Iroön is Plateia Karamis, set back from the harbour-front road.

A left turn from the dock leads along the extended harbour front and on to the Kalavria road.

Information

Poros does not have a tourist office, but you can find some useful information at www.poros.gr.

Alpha Bank (Plateia Iroön) ATM.

Bank Emporiki (Plateia Iroön) ATM.

National Bank of Greece (Papadopoulou) About 100m from the dock; has ATM.

Post office (☎ 22980 22274; Plateia Karamis; ☎ 7.30am-2pm Mon-Fri)

Suzi's Laundrette Service (Papadopoulou; ☎ 8am-2pm & 6-9pm Mon-Sat May-Oct, 9am-2pm Mon-Sat Nov-Apr) Next to the National Bank of Greece; €12 to wash and dry a 5kg load.

Tourist police (☎ 22980 22462/22256; Dimosthenous 10) Behind the Poros high school.

Sleeping

Villa Tryfon (☎ 22980 22215/25854; villatryfon@poros.com.gr; off Plateia Agios Georgiou; s/d €40/55; 🏠) Located high above the harbour front, Villa Tryfon has great views from the front rooms. All rooms have bathroom and kitchen facilities and the welcome is friendly. To get here, turn left from the ferry dock and after 80m turn right up broad steps next to the Family Tours office. Turn left at the top of the steps in front of the public library and after 150m you'll see the place signposted up the steps to the right.

Seven Brothers Hotel (☎ 22980 23412; www.7brothers.gr; Plateia Iroön; s/d/tr €55/65/75; 🏠 📶) A good option at the heart of the harbour front near the hydrofoil dock, this modern hotel has bright comfy rooms with small balconies and tea-and-coffee-making facilities.

Hotel Dionysos (☎ 22980 23511/22530; www.hotel.dionysos.com; Papadopoulou 78; s/d/tr €50/70/80; 🏠 📶) This restored mansion retains some of its character, although it can feel a touch gloomy. The rooms are comfortable and are a decent size. It's located a couple of hundred metres to the left of the ferry quays and opposite where the car ferry from Galatas docks. Breakfast starts at €8. There's a separate café-bar on the ground floor, which has internet access (per hour €3).

Eating

There's not much *haute cuisine* here, but there are some fine traditional tavernas with character to match the cooking.

Taverna Kyriakos (☎ 22980 22581; mains €2-6) Previously the Pantelis, this taverna is still a great calorie booster. Everything, including beer, is much cheaper than elsewhere. Greek salads are €4 and *pastitsio* (a macaroni and minced lamb dish) is €4. It's just along the alleyway between Seven Brothers Hotel and the fish market.

Taverna Karavolos (☎ 22980 26158; mains €4.50-7.40; ☎ 7pm-late) Karavolos means 'big snail' in Greek and is the nickname of the taverna's impressive owner. Small snails are a speciality of the house and are served in a thick tomato sauce (€5). There's a daily selection of main courses such as pork stuffed with garlic (€7). The home-produced wine is very persuasive. Head east from the cathedral for about 100 metres, then go left and down an alleyway towards the harbour.

Taverna Rota (☎ 22980 25627; Plateia Iroön; mains €5-14) The first of many tavernas along the harbour front where it runs northwest from Plateia Iroön, this is a reliable place that dishes up breakfast (€4 to €6.50), traditional dishes and pasta and pizzas.

our pick Dimitris Family Taverna (☎ 22980 23709; mains €4.50-20) The top-end price at this cheerful place reflects terrific meat dishes. The owners have a butcher's business, and cuts are of the very finest quality. There are tasty pork, lamb and chicken dishes on offer. 'Honeymoon' steak costs €22. Go to it. Vegetarians can still mix and match such treats as oven-baked vegetable casserole (*briam*), vegetables in olive oil, or butter beans in sauce with grilled pep-

ECO SARONICS

There are ups and downs to ecology and environmentalism in the Saronic Gulf Islands. The downs are often a genuine burning issue, as they are in many parts of Greece. Forest fires flare up accidentally, but in some parts of the country they have been caused by arsonists. Fires erupt especially in times of drought; remember the destruction of swathes of woodland on Salamina, Hydra and Poros in summer 2007 and in many other parts of Greece.

On the upside, there's the sterling work of groups such as the **Hellenic Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre** (Elliniko Kentro Perithalpsis Agrion Zoön; ☎ 22970 31338; www.ekpaz.gr; ☎ 10am-7pm) on the island of Aegina. The centre tackles the damage caused to thousands of Greece's wild birds and animals by hunting and by pollution. Some of its current projects are the release of raptors into the wilds of Crete and Northern Greece. You can pay a visit to the centre, which is about 10km southeast of Aegina Town and 1km east of Pahia Rahi on the road to Mt Oros. Admission is free, but donations are appreciated. And if you want a more hands-on commitment, the centre welcomes volunteers. Accommodation is supplied.

pers. To get here, head west from the cathedral for a couple of hundred metres.

AROUND POROS

Poros has a few beaches. **Kanali Beach**, on Kalavria 1km east of the bridge, is pebbly. **Neorion Beach**, 3km west of the bridge, has water skiing and banana boat and air chair rides. The best beach is at **Russian Bay**, 1.5km past Neorion.

The 18th-century **Moni Zoódohou Pigis**, on Kalavria, has a beautiful gilded iconostasis from Asia Minor. The monastery is well signposted, 4km east of Poros Town.

From the road below the monastery you can head inland to the 6th-century **Temple of Poseidon**. There's very little left of this temple, but the walk is worthwhile and there are superb views of the Saronic Gulf and the Peloponnese.

From the ruins you can continue along the road and go back to the bridge onto Sferia. It's about 6km in total.

PELOPONNESIAN MAINLAND

The Peloponnesian mainland opposite Poros can be explored conveniently from the island.

The ruins of ancient **Troizen**, legendary birthplace of Theseus, lie in the hills near the modern village of Trizina, 7.5km west of Galatas. There are buses to Trizina (€1.20, 15 minutes) from Galatas, leaving a walk of about 1.5km to the site.

The inspiring ancient theatre of Epidavros (p187) can be reached from Galatas. A couple of buses depart daily from Galatas for Nafplio (€7, two hours) and can drop you off at the ancient site.

Getting There & Away

Small boats run constantly between Galatas and Poros (€0.70, five minutes).

HYDRA ΥΔΡΑ

pop 2900

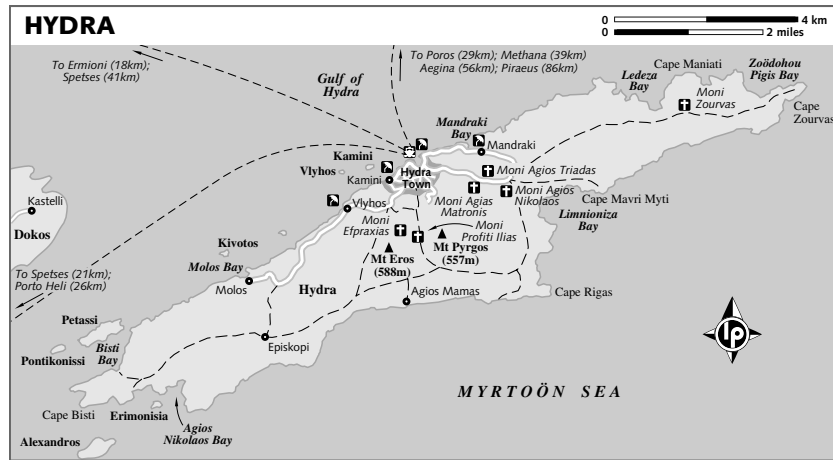
Hydra (*ee-dhr-ah*) is the showcase of the Saronics and still wears its celebrity with style. The island's picturesque harbour attracts throngs of tourists, cruise passengers, yacht crews and the occasional celebrity on their way to hidden holiday homes among the tiers of picturesque buildings that rise above the harbour. You pay for the privilege of visiting, with inflated prices throughout, but the deal is still worthwhile.

An undoubted bonus, for modern Greece, is the absence of scooters and screeching motorbikes from Hydra Town. The island has no motorised transport, except for sanitation and construction vehicles. Donkeys and mules are the main means of transport.

Hydra suffered from devastating wildfires during the scorching hot summer of 2007. Most of the area to the east of Hydra Town was affected and there has been substantial tree loss. Hydra Town itself was untouched.

History

Hydra experienced only the light hand of an overstretched Ottoman influence. Consequently the island prospered. Enterprising Greeks from the Peloponnese settled here to escape Turkish repression and taxes on the mainland. Agriculture was difficult, so these new settlers began building boats and took



to the thin line between maritime commerce and piracy. By the 19th century, Hydra had become a substantial maritime power, earning itself the ambivalent sobriquet of 'Little England'. From considerable profits, wealthy shipping merchants built most of the town's grand old mansions. During the Greek War of Independence, Hydra supplied 130 ships for a blockade of the Turks. It also supplied leaders such as Georgios Koundouriotis, who was president of the emerging Greek nation's national assembly from 1822 to 1827, and Admiral Andreas Miaoulis, who commanded the Greek fleet. Streets and squares all over Greece are named after these two.

Getting There & Away

FERRY
There is a daily ferry to/from Piraeus (€12.50, three hours 10 minutes), which also sails to Poros (€4.10, one hour), Methana (€6.10, 1½ hours), Aegina (€6.50, two hours) and Spetses (€6, one hour).

You can buy tickets from **Idreoniki Travel** (☎ 22980 54007; www.hydreoniki.gr), opposite the ferry dock.

HYDROFOIL & CATAMARAN

Hellenic Seaways (☎ 21041 99000; www.hellenicseaways.gr) has about eight services daily to/from Piraeus (€22, 1½ hours). Direct services take 1½ hours, but most go via Poros (€9.50, one hour, 50 minutes). There are also frequent services to Poros (€9.50, 30 minutes) and Spetses (€11, 30 minutes), some of which call at Ermioni on

the mainland, adding 20 minutes to the trip. Many of the services to Spetses continue on to Porto Heli (€11.50, 50 minutes). Buy tickets from **Idreoniki Travel**.

Euroseas (☎ 22980 52184; www.euroseas.com) runs two boats a day to Piraeus (€21, one hour 20 minutes), Poros (€8.50, one hour) and Spetses (€10.70, 30 minutes). Tickets are bought from **Saitis Tours** (☎ 22980 52184; saitislours@otenet.gr) on the harbour front.

Aegean Flying Dolphins (☎ 21042 21766) runs a similar service to Hellenic Seaways and prices are about €1 less. Saitis Tours sells tickets.

Getting Around

In summer, there are caiques from Hydra Town to the island's beaches. There are also **water taxis** (☎ 22980 53690), which will take you anywhere you like; examples are Kamini (€9) and Vlyhos (€12).

The donkey owners clustered around the port charge around €15 to transport your bags to the hotel of your choice.

HYDRA TOWN

pop 2526
Hydra Town's showpiece harbour is backed by an amphitheatre of red-tiled houses with whitewashed and pastel-painted walls. The harbour front is usually thronged with ambling crowds, donkeys and mules. Smart yachts line the harbour front. Behind the harbour front, narrow, stepped streets and alleyways lead to still corners and cool squares, with a tempting rise towards the rock-stud-

ded slopes beyond. The streets that lead inland have numerous craft and clothes shops and galleries.

Information

There is no tourist office on Hydra but a very useful website is www.hydradirect.com.

There is an **ATM** at Saitis Tours, on the harbour front. The **post office** (☎ 7.30am-2pm Mon-Fri) is opposite the fish market on a small side street between the Bank Emporiki and the National Bank of Greece, both of which have ATMs. The **tourist police** (☎ 22980 52205; Votsi;

☎ mid-May-end Sep) can be found sharing an office with the regular police.

There are toilets alongside the fish market.

You can check email at the **Flamingo Internet Café** (☎ 22980 53485; Tombazi; per 30 min €4; ☎ 8.30am-10pm).

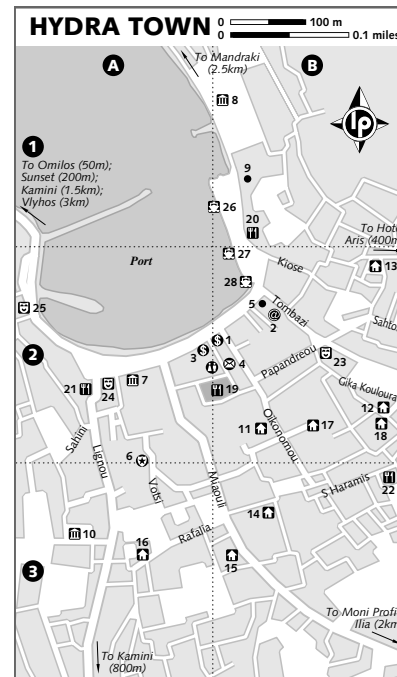
Sights & Activities

The star attraction is the grand **Lazaros Koundouriotis Historical Mansion** (☎ 22980 52421; nhmuseum@tee.gr; adult/concession €4/2; ☎ 9am-4pm Tue-Sun), former home of one of the major players in the Greek Independence struggle. It's a fine example of late-18th-century traditional architecture. The main reception rooms of the 2nd floor have been restored to their full splendour, furnished with all the finery of the period.

The **Historical Archives Museum of Hydra** (☎ 22980 52355; museumhy@otenet.gr; adult/child €3/1.50; ☎ 9am-4.30pm & 7.30-9.30pm Jul-Oct, 9am-4.30pm Nov-Jun) is close to the ferry dock on the eastern side of the harbour. It houses a collection of portraits and naval oddments, with an emphasis on the island's role in the War of Independence.

The **Ecclesiastical Museum** (☎ 22980 54071; admission €2; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct), upstairs at the Monastery of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, houses a collection of icons and assorted religious paraphernalia. The entrance is through the archway beneath the clock tower on the harbour front. The monastery courtyard, cathedral and associated buildings offer a peaceful sanctuary.

Kallianos Diving Center (☎ 2754031095; www.kallianosdivingcenter.gr) is based at the island of Kapari, south of Ermioni on the mainland. The centre offers a broad range of diving activities including a two-dive outing with full equipment supplied for €80, or €125 with instructor. Staff runs a once-monthly Diving with Dolphins



INFORMATION	Mansion.....	10 A3	Isalos Café.....	19 B1
Bank Emporiki.....	1 B2	Market.....	20 B2	
Flamingo Internet Café.....	2 B2	O Fournos.....	21 A2	
National Bank of Greece.....	3 A2	Taverna Gitoniko.....	22 B3	
Post Office.....	4 B2	SLEEPING ☎		
Saitis Tours.....	5 B2	Bahia.....	11 B2	
Tourist Police.....	6 A2	Hotel Bratsera.....	12 B2	
		Hotel Dina.....	13 B2	
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		Hotel Leto.....	14 B3	
Ecclesiastical Museum.....	7 A2	Hotel Miranda.....	15 B3	
Historical Archives Museum of		Hotel Orloff.....	16 A3	
Hydra.....	8 B1	Pension Alkionides.....	17 B2	
Idreoniki Travel.....	9 B1	Pension Erofilii.....	18 B2	
Lazaros Koundouriotis Historical		EATING ☎		
Bratsera.....	(see 12)	Bratsera.....		
		Ferry Quay.....	26 B1	
		Hydrofoils and Catamarans.....	27 B2	
		Water Taxis.....	28 B2	

trip starting at €200, with a 50% refund if the dolphins don't turn up. The centre does pick up and return to Hydra, and non-divers can also take the trip to Kapari (€15).

Festivals & Events

Hydriots celebrate their contribution to the War of Independence struggle by staging a mock battle in Hydra harbour during the **Miaoulia Festival**, held in honour of Admiral Miaoulis, in late June. Much carousing, feasting and fireworks accompany it. **Easter** is also celebrated in colourful fashion.

Sleeping

Accommodation in Hydra is of a generally high standard. You pay accordingly. These prices are for high season, which in Hydra means weekends as well as July and August. Most owners will meet you at the harbour if pre-arranged and will organise luggage transfer.

BUDGET

Pension Erofilii (☎ /fax 22980 54049; www.pensionerofilii.gr; Tombazi; s/d/tr €45/55/65; 🏠) Tucked away in the inner town, these pleasant, unassuming rooms are a decent budget deal for Hydra. The young family owners add a friendly sparkle. It also has a large family room with private kitchen.

Hotel Dina (☎ 22980 52248; Stavrou Tsipi; s/d/tr €45/60/78) An engagingly old-fashioned place, Hotel Dina has dated but reasonable rooms, several with views. It's tucked away up a steep, narrow alleyway off Sachtouri and is a Greek-speaking household.

Bahia (☎ 22980 52257, 6977462852; Oikonomou; s/d €50/60; 🏠) Located above an interesting clothes and jewellery shop called Alexander, this place has reasonable rooms with kitchen.

MIDRANGE

Pension Alkionides (☎ /fax 22980 54055; www.alkionideshydra.com; off Oikonomou; s/d/tr €60/65/80; 🏠) The Alkionides is in a peaceful cul-de-sac and has a pretty courtyard. Rooms are smart, though some are quite small, and they have tea- and coffee-making facilities.

Hotel Aris (☎ 22980 53002, 6977248599; www.aris-hydra.com; s/d incl breakfast €60/80; 🏠) Close proximity to Hydra's rock-studded slopes adds to the peace and quiet of this charming hotel. Rooms are comfortable and a good size. There's a lovely roof terrace with great views over the town.

TOP END

Hotel Miranda (☎ 22980 52230/53953; www.miranda-hotel.gr; Miaouli; s/d/tr incl breakfast €93/118/171; 🏠 Mar-mid-Oct; 🏠) Built in 1810 by a wealthy Hydriot sea captain, the Miranda was converted to a hotel in 1962. Wood beams and coved ceilings of the original construction survive and the ceilings retain the original motifs that were painted by Italian artists hired by many of Hydra's wealthy households. The mood is restrained and gracious and captures a flavour of old Hydriot life. Breakfast is enjoyed on a charming patio.

Hotel Leto (☎ 22980 53385; www.letohydra.gr; off Miaouli; s incl breakfast €109-125, d €140-160, tr from €188; 🏠 🏠) Smoothly modern and relaxing, this is one of Hydra's classiest hotels. Rooms are spacious and have subtle décor. Leto also has a fully equipped room for disabled use. The price ranges depend on such variables as room size, balconies and floor location. Buffet breakfast is included and there's a fitness studio, sauna and bar.

Hotel Orloff (☎ 22980 52564; www.orloff.gr; Rafalia; s/d incl breakfast €165/185; 🏠) Hydra history and tradition invest this beautiful old mansion with great taste and style. A Russian admiral of the 18th century gave his name to the original house. The comfortable rooms have elegant furnishings and there's a lovely garden in which buffet breakfast is served.

Hotel Bratsera (☎ 22980 53971; www.bratserahotel.com; Tombazi; d incl breakfast €154-215, ste incl breakfast €270-323; 🏠 🏠) There's a pleasingly rustic feel to the décor of this spacious hotel, which merges the best of the new with decorative antiques and period details. There's a swimming pool for guests only, but you can take a dip if you eat at Bratsera's restaurant (opposite).

Eating

Some of the cafés along the harbour front push their luck with their high prices/low service; but if you want lively people-watching you pay the price. A good bet is the **Isalos Café** (☎ 22980 53845) right by the ferry dock, offering decent snacks and drinks at reasonable prices.

Taverna Gitoniko/Manolis & Christina (☎ 22980 53615; Spiliot Haramis; mains €4-9) When a taverna is better known by the Christian names of its owners it says something about quality and family tradition. Classic Greek favourites are well prepared at Gitoniko and there's a pleasant roof garden. Try the delicious zucchini

balls and spinach pies or fresh green beans in oil with fava and tomato sauce.

Bratsera (☎ 22980 52794; Tombazi; mains €8.50-20; 🏠 1-4pm & 8-11pm Apr-Oct) There's fine Mediterranean cuisine by the pool at this restaurant, which is attached to the hotel of the same name. Starters include feta with sesame and honey, and the spinach salad, with bacon, pine nuts and olive oil and lemon dressing, is delicious. Mains include treats like veal fillet with rosemary sauce and fresh salmon, when available; there's also a selection of imaginative pasta dishes. Wine ranges from €20 for a decent Cabernet to €56 for Chardonnay.

Sunset (☎ 22980 52067; mains €9.50-22) An outstanding location on a huge terrace overlooking the sea makes this restaurant a great favourite. The food lives up to the view, with such starters as mackerel salad (€6.50) and mains such as grilled sea bream (*tsipoura*) marinated in herbs, or tagliatelli with wild porcini (mushrooms). The wine list matches the food with the likes of Boutaris white (€17) and Château Semeli red (€67).

There's a supermarket, fruit shop and fish market just inland, mid-harbour side. O Fournos is a good bakery next to the Pirate club across the alleyway.

Entertainment

Hydra's harbour front revs up at night, when daytime cafés become hot music bars. Most bars are at the far end of the harbour, where places like **Pirate** (☎ 22980 52711) and **Saronikos** (☎ 22980 52589) keep going until dawn. Most play lounge sounds by day; at night Pirate plays rock, while Saronikos goes more Greek pop.

A few blocks inland from the harbour front the cooler, celebrity-honed **Amalour** (☎ 6977461357; Tombazi) does a lively line in cocktails and smoothies to a Latin rhythm. About 100m beyond the western edge of the harbour is the waterside **Omiolos** (☎ 22980 53800), the old Lagoudera Club, which has been transformed into a chic café, restaurant and night-time dance zone with eclectic DJs.

AROUND HYDRA

Hydra's stony, arid interior, now with some regenerating pine woods, makes a robust but peaceful contrast to the clamour of the quayside catwalk, although the eastern part of the island may take some time to recover from the fires of 2007. Heading up Miaouli and

onward, there's a strenuous but worthwhile 2km walk up to **Moni Profiti Iliia**. Monks still live in the monastery, from where there are grand views down to the port. It's a short walk from the monastery to the convent of **Moni Efraxias**. Other paths and tracks lead over and down to the south coast, while you can stroll up to the top of Mt Eros (588m), the highest point in the Saronic islands.

Hydra's shortcoming – or blessing – is its lack of appealing beaches to draw the crowds. There are a few strands all the same. **Kamini**, about a 1.5km walk along the coastal path from the port, has rocks and a very small pebble beach. **Vlyhos**, a 1.5km walk further on from Kamini, is an attractive village offering a slightly larger pebble beach, two tavernas and a ruined 19th-century stone bridge.

A path leads east from the port to the reasonable pebble beach at **Mandraki**, 2.5km away. **Bisti Bay**, 8km away on the southwestern side of the island, has a decent pebble beach.

Water taxis from the port to various beaches cost about €12.

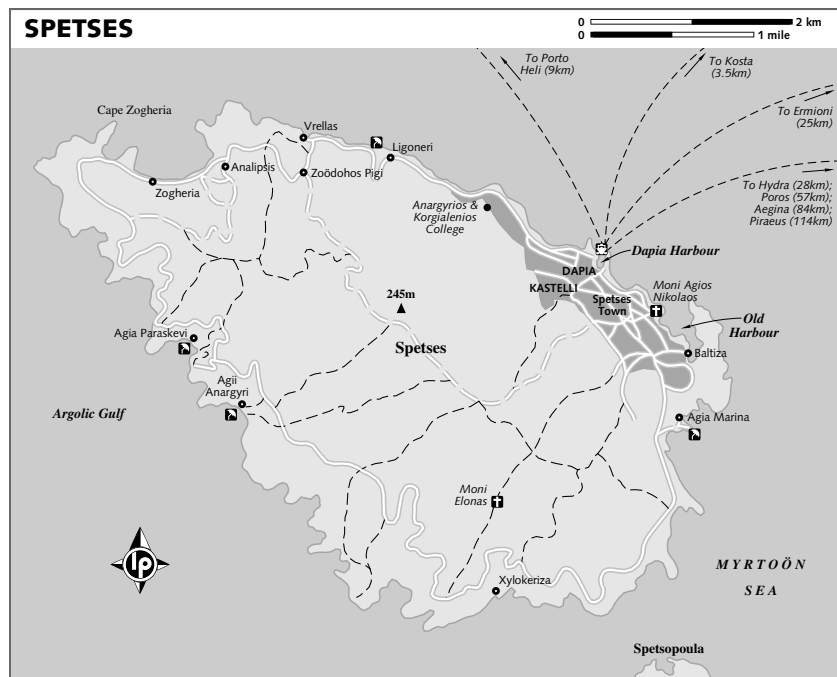
SPETSES ΣΠΕΤΣΕΣ

pop 4000

Open water runs far to the south of Spetses and, although the mainland Peloponnese is only a few kilometres away, there's a stronger sense of island Greece here than in other Saronic Gulf destinations. The novelist John Fowles used the island as the setting for his powerful book *The Magus* (1965). His portrayal of lascivious heat and pine-scented seduction probably sent many a northern European hotfooting it to the beautiful south on their first Greek island idyll.

Long before Fowles' day, Spetses, like Hydra, grew wealthy from shipbuilding. Island captains busted the British blockade during the Napoleonic Wars and refitted their ships to join the Greek fleet during the War of Independence. In the process they immortalised one local woman, albeit from a Hydriot family, the formidable Laskarina Bouboulina, ship's commander and fearless fighter (see p362).

The island's forests of Aleppo pine, a legacy of the far-sighted and wealthy philanthropist Sotirios Anargyrios, were devastated by fires in 1990 and 2001. Many trees survive, however, and the burnt areas are slowly recovering.



Anargyrios was born on Spetses in 1848 and emigrated to the USA, returning in 1914 as a very rich man. He bought two-thirds of the then largely barren island and planted the pines that stand today. Anargyrios also financed the Spetses' road network and commissioned many of the town's grand buildings.

Getting There & Away

FERRY

From June to September there is one ferry a day to and from Piraeus (€15.30, four hours). The rest of the year one ferry runs on Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday. The ferry goes to and from Hydra (€6.50, one hour), Poros (€9.10, two hours) and Aegina (€12.10, three hours). You'll find departure times on the harbour front outside **Alasia Travel** (☎ 22980 74098; www.spetses-online/aliasa.gr), which sells tickets. It's wise to check the situation regarding both summer and winter schedules for these ferries.

There are water taxis to Kosta (€16, 15 minutes), on the Peloponnese mainland. A larger ferry runs to Kosta about four times daily (€0.90, 10 minutes). There are three

buses daily from Kosta to Nafplio (€6.30, 2½ hours).

HYDROFOIL & CATAMARAN

Hellenic Seaways (☎ 21041 99000; www.hellenicseaways.gr) runs at least six services a day to and from Piraeus (€29.50, two hours 10 minutes). Most services travel via Hydra (€10, 30 minutes) and Poros (€14, 70 minutes). There are also daily connections to Ermioni (€7, one hour) and Porto Heli (€5, 10 minutes). Tickets are available from **Bardakos Tours** (☎ 22980 73141; Dapia Harbour), located opposite the water taxis.

Euroseas (☎ 21041 32105; www.euroseas.com) runs two boats to and from Piraeus (€30, two hours 10 minutes), via Hydra (€10.70, 30 minutes) and to Porto Heli (€5, 10 minutes). Tickets are bought from **Mimoza Travel** (☎ 22980 75170; mimoza-kent@aig.forthnet.gr), which is on the harbour front just past Plateia Limenarhiou.

Aegean Flying Dolphins (☎ 21042 21766) runs a similar service to the same destinations as Hellenic Seaways and prices are about €1 less. **Alasia Travel** (☎ 22980 74098; www.spetses-online/aliasa.gr) sells tickets.

Getting Around

Spetses has two bus routes that start over the Easter period, then continue, depending on demand, until the end of May. From June to September there are three or four buses daily. The routes are from Plateia Agiou Mama in Spetses Town to Agii Anargyri (€2.70, 40 minutes), travelling via Agia Marina and Xylokeriza. All departure times are displayed on a board by the bus stop. There are also hourly buses in summer (every two hours in winter) to Ligoneri (€1.20). They leave from in front of the Hotel Possidion, the monumental old building (being renovated at the time of writing) on the seafront just to the northwest of Dapia Harbour.

Only locally owned vehicles are allowed on Spetses. There are not too many of these, although the number is increasing. Hundreds of scooters and motorbikes making a racket more than make up for it. There are motorbike-rental shops everywhere; rental is around €15 to €20 per day.

For quieter pedal power, there are sturdy bikes (€7 per day) at **Mountain Bikes** (☎ 22980 74505), 100m beyond Plateia Agiou Mama. Bikes (€6 per 24 hours) to suit all ages, as well as baby seats, are also for hire from the **Bike Center** (☎ 22980 74143; ☎ 9.30am-9.30pm), behind the fish market.

Spetses' horse-drawn carriages are a more expensive way of getting around (€8 one way to Old Harbour). Prices should be displayed on a board on Plateia Limenarhiou by the port.

CAÏQUE

In summer, there are caiques from the harbour to Agioi Anargyri (€8 return), Zogheria (€6 return) and Kosta (€3 one way), per person.

WATER TAXI

Water taxis (☎ 22980 72072; Dapia Harbour) leave from the quay opposite the Bardakos Tours office. Fares are displayed on a board. Sample one-way fares include €25 to Agia Marina and €48 to Agii Anargyri, or €63 for a round trip of the island. Fares are per trip, not per person. Add 50% to the price from midnight to 6am.

SPETSES TOWN

pop 3550

Spetses Town occupies a long stretch of the northeast coast of the island and its houses rise steeply from behind the main Dapia Harbour and harbour-front area.

There's evidence of an early Helladic settlement near the Old Harbour (Palio Limani) and at Dapia. Roman and Byzantine remains have been found in the area behind Moni Agios Nikolaos, halfway between the two.

From the 10th century Spetses is thought to have been uninhabited for almost 600 years until the arrival of Albanian refugees fleeing the fighting between the Turks and the Venetians in the 16th century.

The Dapia district has a few impressive *arhontika* (old mansions). The main part of town is given over to chic tourist shops and cafés. There are some delicious ironies, not least the juxtaposition of the cheerfully whiffy fish market with fashion shops selling such fragrant lines as Danoff, Clink, Zulu and Trussardi.

A kilometre or so along the eastern harbour front takes you to the attractive Old Harbour (Palio Limani), the fine old church of Agios Nikolaos, and Baltiza yacht anchorage and boatbuilding area.

Orientation

At Dapia Harbour the quay serves both ferries and hydrofoils. A left turn at the end of the quay leads east through Plateia Limenarhiou, where the horse-drawn carriages wait, and along the harbour-front road of Sotiriou Anargyriou, past the town beach and Plateia Agiou Mama. Beyond here the seafront road continues to the Old Harbour and on to Baltiza.

From the inner, left-hand corner of Plateia Limenarhiou a narrow lane leads left to Plateia Orologiou (Clocktower Sq), which is enclosed by cafés, tavernas and shops and is overlooked by its namesake clock tower.

The narrow 'Main Street' climbs directly inland from the back of Plateia Limenarhiou.

Above Dapia Harbour is a café-crammed terrace from where the road drops down right and then bends sharply left along the harbour-front Kounoupitsa area to become the road to Ligoneri.

If you're on a day visit and fancy a swim, there's a concrete swimming platform and a little beach at the east end of the harbour front, just beyond Plateia Agiou Mama.

Information

There is no tourist office on Spetses. A useful website is www.spetsesdirect.com.

Alpha Bank at Dapia Harbour has an ATM, as does the Bank of Piraeus at the entrance to Plateia Orologiou, and there are ATMs just up to the right along the harbour terrace.

The **port police** (☎ 22980 72245), **tourist police** (☎ 22980 73100; 🕒 mid-May–Sep) and OTE all share the same building. It's crowned by a conspicuous satellite dish and is just beyond the cafés on the Dapia Harbour terrace.

1800 Net Café (☎ 22980 29498; near Hotel Possidonion; per 30min €2.50; 🕒 9am-midnight) Not the world's zippiest club.

Mimoza Travel (☎ 22980 75170; mimoza-kent@aig.forthnet.gr) On the harbour front just past Plateia Limenariou; can help with accommodation and other services.

Newsagent (☎ 22980 73028; Main St) Impressive selection of newspapers and magazines in numerous languages.

Post office (🕒 7.30am–2pm Mon–Fri) On the street running behind the seafront hotels.

Sights

The **Spetses museum** (☎ 22980 72994; adult/concession €3/2; 🕒 8.30am–2.30pm Tue–Sun) is housed in the old mansion of Hatzigiannis Mexis (1754–1844), a shipowner who became the island's first governor. The collections on view are not extensive, but are fascinating. They include traditional costumes, folkloric items and portraits of the island's founding fathers, icons, coins and archaeological items. Most items have Greek and English annotations. To reach the museum, go straight up from the top left-hand corner of Plateia Orologiou, turn left at the junction and then right, then follow signposts.

The mansion of Spetses' famous daughter, the 19th-century seagoer Laskarina Bouboulina, has been converted into a **museum** (☎ 22980 72416; www.bouboulina-spetses.gr; adult/concession/child €5/3/1; 🕒 9am–9pm Tue–Sun Jun–mid-Sep, 10.30am–4.30pm mid-Sep–May). You can only take a 40-minute guided tour. These run every 45 minutes during the Easter period and from June to mid-September, but less frequently the rest of the year. Billboards around town advertise the starting times of tours. To reach the museum, turn left at the end of the line of cafés on the Dapia Harbour terrace. There's an impressive statue of Bouboulina on the harbour front opposite the Hotel Possidonion.

The **Old Harbour** (Palio Limani), which is about a 1.5km stroll from Dapia, is usually filled with a jumble of commercial vessels. A bit further on is **Baltiza**, a sheltered inlet crammed with all types of craft, from half-

built caiques to working fishing boats, minor-league private cruisers and yachts.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Spetses has a number of pleasant sleeping options. Most places offer good discounts outside August.

our pick **Hotel Kamelia** (☎ 22980 72415; s/d/tr €45/50/65; 🕒 Apr–Sep; 📶) There's excellent value and a charming welcome at these fresh, airy rooms in a fine old house tucked away from the busy seafront. Head along the lane to the right of the kiosk in Plateia Agiou Mama for 100m, then bear right before a little bridge. In another 100m or so, go right along a narrow lane to a quiet square, where the Kamelia lies drenched in bougainvillea.

Villa Marina (☎ 22980 72646; off Plateia Agiou Mama; s/d €45/64; 📶) A charming, unfussy place with friendly owners. It's just up to the right of Plateia Agiou Mama. Some rooms look out onto a little garden full of flowers, while others front a big balcony with views to the sea. All rooms have refrigerators and there is a well-equipped communal kitchen downstairs.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Hotel Roumani (☎ 22980 72344; www.hotelroumani.gr; Dapia Harbour; s/d €70/85; 📶) Refurbished in recent years, the Roumani has an attractive and fresh décor. It's on the terrace above Dapia Harbour, right in the heart of things.

Kastro (☎ 22980 75319; www.kastrospetses.com; s/d/tr incl breakfast €90/100/120, apt €200; 📶) These fine studios and apartments are in a choice position close to the centre, yet within a private and quiet complex. Décor and furnishings combine traditional style with modern amenities and there are attractive public areas. There are good discounts in low season. Head west along the harbour front for several hundred metres and Kastro is along a short lane to the left.

Nissia (☎ 22980 75000; www.nissia.gr; apt incl breakfast €245–310; 🕒 Apr–Oct; 📶) Nissia is an exclusive oasis of peace and quiet in stylish surroundings. Apartments are arranged around a spacious courtyard, complete with swimming pool and soothing greenery. It's about 300m northwest of Dapia Harbour. The hotel has a restaurant (mains €8 to €24).

Eating

The swathe of canopied cafés overlooking Dapia Harbour offer choke-on-your-coffee

prices. For better food and better deals, veer off smartish.

Cockatoo (☎ 22980 74085; mains €1.20–14; 🕒 noon-midnight) At this cheerful budget base, you can get a souvlaki for €1.80, a Greek salad for €4 or a takeaway chicken for €14. Head left from the top of Plateia Limenariou, and then right.

Taverna O Lazaros (☎ 22980 72600; mains €5–6.50; 🕒 8pm-midnight) A steady but pleasant hike of about 400m up Main St from Dapia earns you rewards at this popular taverna, where the homemade *taramasalata* (thick purée of fish roe, potato, oil and lemon juice; €3.80) is the real thing. Other treats include young goat in lemon sauce (€8.80) and chicken in tomato sauce with spices (€7.20). Vegetarians can create their own dish and the retsina is very persuasive.

O Roussos (☎ 22980 72212; Plateia Agiou Mama; mains €6–9) A local favourite with decent traditional food and pizzas and pasta at reasonable prices, this pleasant taverna has a great view across the water, albeit with the busy harbourside road in between.

our pick **Akrogialia** (☎ 22980 74749; Kounoupitsa; mains €5–12; 🕒 9am-midnight) Winning itself a deserved reputation because of its great food, appealing décor and friendly service, this fine restaurant is on the Kounoupitsa harbour front. Starters such as shrimp and crab salad get things going well and there are other treats on a tempting menu, including steamed mussels in wine and lemon, chicken and mushroom risotto and delicious steaks. Wines include excellent Makedonikos white and red for about €12 or a pricier Lazaridi white at €20 and red at €29. Breakfast, coffee and lunch are also available.

Self-caterers will find everything they need at **Kritikos Supermarket** (☎ 22980 74361; Kentriki Agora), next to the fish market on the harbour front. The entrance is along a covered passage-way. There's also a good fruit and vegetable shop next to the newsagents in Main St.

Entertainment

Bar Spetsa (☎ 22980 74131; 🕒 8pm-late) This is one of those wonderful island bars where there's still a tradition of discerning background music that also allows great conversation in good company. The bar is 50m beyond Plateia Agiou Mama on the road to the right of the kiosk.

Balconi Wine Bar (☎ 22980 72594; Sotiriou Anargyriou; 🕒 10.30am–3am May–Oct, 7pm–3am Nov–Apr) Sophistication swirls gently round this stylish homage to cocktails, wine and impressively sourced whisky. There's a background of mainly classical music by day and subtle jazz riffs in the evening. Mop up with fine cheeses and salami, or hand-cut smoked salmon (€17). It's next to the seafront Stelios Hotel.

Socrates Bar, between Plateies Limenariou and Orologiou is big on big-screen football. Music venues are concentrated at the Old Harbour–Baltiza area and include **Fortezza** and **Mourayo**, which play pop Greek, **Tsitsiano** for traditional Greek, and the big dance venue **Baltiza**. All are open from about mid-night to the early hours, and venues like Baltiza charge about €10 for special theme nights.

AROUND SPETSES

Spetses' coastline is speckled with numerous coves with small, pine-shaded beaches. A 24km surfaced road skirts the entire coastline, so a scooter is the ideal way to explore.

The beach at **Ligoneri**, about 2.5km west of town, is easily reached by bus. The long, pebbly **Agia Paraskevi** and the more sandy **Agii Anargyri** on the southwest coast have good, albeit crowded beaches; both have water sports of every description. **Agia Marina**, about 2km southeast of Spetses Town, is a small resort with a beach that gets crowded.

The interior of the island is crisscrossed with woodland tracks, where a compass is useful.

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