

Greece

There *is* something magical about Greece. It's the alluring combination of the magnificent archaeological sites that vividly recall Greece's rich past and the magnetism of more than 1400 islands harbouring breathtaking beaches that guarantee you a deep tan while soaking up a chilled-out vibe. It's a combination that makes for guilt-free travel – a slice of history served alongside a healthy slice of hedonism – and that makes Greece one of the most popular destinations on the planet.

However, travellers with more adrenalin-focused activities in mind can mountain climb and windsurf to get that heart rate up. No matter what your aspirations, you cannot wander far without stumbling across a broken column, a crumbling bastion or a tiny Byzantine church, each perhaps neglected and forgotten but retaining an aura of former glory.

Perhaps, though, the true allure of Greece is due to less-tangible attributes – the dazzling clarity of the light, the floral aromas that permeate the air, the spirit of places – for there is hardly a grove, mountain or stream that is not sacred to a deity, and ghosts of the past still linger everywhere.

Among the myriad attractions, travellers to Greece inevitably end up with a favourite site they long to return to – get out there and find yours.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 131,944 sq km
- **Capital** Athens
- **Currency** euro (€); A\$1 = €0.60; ¥100 = €0.67; NZ\$1 = €0.50; UK£1 = €1.48; US\$1 = €0.78
- **Famous for** ancient ruins, beautiful beaches
- **Official Language** Greek
- **Phrases** *yasas* (hello); *andio* (goodbye); *parakalo* (please); *efharisto* (thank you); *ne* (yes); *ohi* (no)
- **Population** 11 million
- **Telephone Codes** country code ☎ 30; international access code ☎ 00; reverse-charge code ☎ 161



HIGHLIGHTS

- In Athens, savour your first glimpse of the **Acropolis** (p346), the most important monument of the ancient world.
- Meander through the atmospheric streets of the largest inhabited medieval town in Europe, **Rhodes** (p389).
- Dash off a quick 100m at ancient **Olympia** (p362), the evocative birthplace of the games.
- Experience the dramatic **volcanic caldera** (p378) of incomparable Santorini, arguably the most spectacular Greek dot on the map.
- Sip sunset drinks on the seafront in the beautiful Venetian town of **Nafplio** (p358), one of Greece's most romantic destinations.

ITINERARIES

- **One week** Explore Athens' museums and ancient sites on day one before spending a couple of days in the Peloponnese visiting Nafplio, Mycenae and Olympia, followed by four days in the Cyclades.
- **One month** Give yourself some more time in Athens and the Peloponnese, then island-hop through the Ionians for a few days. Explore the Zagoria villages before travelling back to Athens via Meteora and Delphi. Take a ferry from Piraeus to Chios, then island-hop through the northeastern Aegean Islands, the Dodecanese and the Cyclades over a couple of weeks.

HOW MUCH?

- **Local telephone call** €0.25 per min
- **Minimum taxi fare** €3
- **International Herald Tribune newspaper** €2
- **Coffee** €2.50-3.50
- **Can of soft drink** €1

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** €1-1.20
- **1L bottled water** €1.30
- **Bottle of beer** €2.50
- **Souvenir T-shirt** €13
- **Gyros** €2

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Greece's climate is typically Mediterranean with mild, wet winters followed by very hot, dry summers. Spring and autumn are the best times to visit – the weather is fine and the beaches uncrowded. Winter is quiet; the islands are in hibernation between late November and early April. Easter is when Greece starts repainting and rolling up the shutters, and from late June until mid-September it's sheer summer madness – while party people will enjoy this, vacant rooms and stretches of sand are rare.

HISTORY

With its strategic position at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Greece has endured a long and turbulent history. During the Bronze Age (3000–1200 BC in Greece), the advanced Cycladic, Minoan and Mycenaean civilisations flourished. The Mycenaean civilisations were swept aside in the 12th century BC by the warrior-like Dorians, who introduced Greece to the Iron Age. The next 400 years are often referred to as the dark ages, a period about which little is known.

By 800 BC, when Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad* were first written down, Greece was undergoing a cultural and military revival with the evolution of the city-states, the most powerful of which were Athens and Sparta. Greater Greece, Magna Graecia, was created, with southern Italy as an important component. The unified Greeks repelled the Persians twice, at Marathon (490 BC) and Salamis (480 BC). Victory over Persia was followed by unparalleled growth and prosperity known as the classical (or Golden) age.

The Golden Age

During this period, Pericles commissioned the Parthenon, Sophocles wrote *Oedipus the King* and Socrates taught young Athenians to think. The Golden Age ended with the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC), when the militaristic Spartans defeated the Athenians. They failed to notice the expansion of Macedonia under King Philip II, who easily conquered the war-weary city-states.

Philip's ambitions were surpassed by those of his son, Alexander the Great, who marched triumphantly into Asia Minor, Egypt, Persia and what are now parts of Afghanistan and India. In 323 BC he met

an untimely death at the age of 33, and his generals divided his empire between themselves.

Roman Rule & the Byzantine Empire

Roman incursions into Greece began in 205 BC. By 146 BC, Greece and Macedonia had become Roman provinces. After the subdivision of the Roman Empire into eastern and western empires in AD 395, Greece became part of the eastern (Byzantine) Empire, based at Constantinople.

In the centuries that followed, Venetians, Franks, Normans, Slavs, Persians, Arabs and, finally, Turks took turns chipping away at the Byzantine Empire.

The Ottoman Empire & Independence

After the end of the Byzantine Empire in 1453, when Constantinople fell to the Turks, most of Greece became part of the Ottoman Empire. Crete was not captured until 1670, leaving Corfu as the only island not occupied by the Turks. By the 19th century the Ottoman Empire was in decline. The Greeks, seeing nationalism sweep through Europe, fought the War of Independence (1821–32). The great powers – Britain, France and Russia – intervened in 1827, and Ioannis Kapodistrias was elected the first Greek president.

Kapodistrias was assassinated in 1831 and the European powers stepped in once again, declaring that Greece should become a monarchy. In January 1833, Otho of Bavaria was installed as king. His ambition, called the Great Idea, was to unite all the lands of the Greek people to the Greek motherland. In 1862 he was peacefully ousted and the Greeks chose George I, a Danish prince, as king.

During WWI, Prime Minister Venizelos allied Greece with France and Britain. King Constantine (George's son), who was married to the Kaiser's sister Sophia, disputed this and left the country.

Smyrna & WWI

After the war, Venizelos resurrected the Great Idea. Underestimating the newfound power of Turkey under the leadership of Atatürk, he sent forces to occupy Smyrna (the present-day Turkish port of İzmir), with its large Greek population. The army was heavily defeated and this led to

a brutal population exchange between the two countries in 1923.

In 1930 George II, Constantine's son, was reinstated as king and appointed the dictator General Metaxas as prime minister. Metaxas' grandiose ambition was to combine aspects of Greece's ancient and Byzantine past to create a Third Greek Civilisation. However, his chief claim to fame is his celebrated *ohi* (no) to Mussolini's request to allow Italian troops into Greece in 1940.

Greece fell to Germany in 1941 and resistance movements, polarised into royalist and communist factions, staged a bloody civil war lasting until 1949. The civil war was the trigger for a mass exodus that saw almost one million Greeks head off to places such as Australia, Canada and the USA. Entire villages were abandoned as people gambled on a new start in cities such as Melbourne, Toronto, Chicago and New York.

The Colonels' Coup

Continuing political instability led to the colonels' coup d'état in 1967. King Constantine (son of King Paul, who succeeded George II) staged an unsuccessful counter-coup and fled the country. The colonels' junta distinguished itself with its appalling brutality, repression and political incompetence. In 1974 they attempted to assassinate Cyprus' leader, Archbishop Makarios, and when he escaped the junta replaced him with the extremist Nikos Samson, prompting Turkey to occupy North Cyprus. The continued Turkish occupation of Cyprus remains one of the most contentious issues in Greek politics. The junta had little choice but to hand back power to the people. In November 1974 a plebiscite voted against restoration of the monarchy. Greece became a republic with the right-wing New Democracy (ND) party taking power.

The Socialist 1980s

In 1981 Greece entered the European Community (now the EU). Andreas Papandreu's Panhellenic Socialist Movement (Pasok) won the next election, giving Greece its first socialist government. Pasok promised the removal of US air bases and withdrawal from NATO, but delivered only rising unemployment and spiralling debt.

GREECE



See Crete Map

See Rhodes Map

See Santorini (Thira) Map

See Mykonos Map

See Samos Map

See Naxos Map

See Ios Map

See Paros & Antiparos Map

Forced to step aside in 1989 during a scandal involving the Bank of Crete, an unprecedented conservative and communist coalition took over. Papandreou and four ministers were ordered to stand trial, and the coalition ordered fresh elections in October 1990.

The 1990s

The elections brought the ND party back to power with a slight majority. Tough economic reforms introduced by Prime Minister Konstantinos Mitsotakis soon made his government unpopular and corruption allegations forced Mitsotakis to call an election in October 1993.

Greeks again turned to Pasok and the ailing Papandreou, who was eventually cleared of all charges. He had little option but to continue with the austerity programme begun by Mitsotakis, quickly making his government equally unpopular.

Papandreou stood down in January 1996 due to ill health and the party abandoned its leftist policies, electing economist and lawyer Costas Simitis as leader. Simitis romped to a comfortable majority at a snap poll called in October 1996.

The New Millennium

Simitis' government focused strongly on further integration with Europe and in January 2001, admission to the euro club was approved; Greece duly adopted the currency in 2002.

Simitis was rewarded with a further four-year mandate in April 2000, but after suffering a serious popularity slump he announced an election as well as his retirement. Greece tilted to the right and in March 2004 elected the ND party led by Costas Karamanlis. This new broom was fortuitous, as the Olympic preparations were running late and suffering budget problems. While the Olympics were successful, Greece is still counting the cost.

Greece's foreign policy is dominated by its sensitive relationship with Turkey. Relations were strained between the two countries in May 2006 when a mid-air collision between Greek and Turkish fighter planes over the Aegean sea resulted in the death of the Greek pilot. Regardless, Greece is expected to support Turkey's bid to join the EU.

PEOPLE

Greece's population exceeded 11 million in 2004, with around one-third of the people living in the Greater Athens area and more than two-thirds living in cities – confirming that Greece is now a primarily urban society. Less than 15% live on the islands, the most populous being Crete, Evia and Corfu. Officially there are more than 200,000 foreigners with residency permits and immigrants make up 10% of the population, with the majority coming from neighbouring Albania.

SPORT

In 2004 the Greek sporting scene was in the world spotlight, as Athens hosted the Olympics and the national football (soccer) team won the European Cup. The domestic football season runs from September to mid-May, and the most popular teams are Olympiakos of Piraeus and Panathinaikos of Athens. The aforementioned clubs are also the main players in Greece's other main sport, basketball. These teams fare well in European competition, and the national team won the European championships in 2005.

RELIGION

About 98% of the Greek population belongs to the Greek Orthodox Church. The remainder are split between the Roman Catholic, Protestant, Evangelist, Jewish and Muslim faiths. While older Greeks and those in rural areas tend to be deeply religious, most young people are decidedly more secular.

ARTS

The arts have been integral to Greek life since ancient times, with architecture having had the most profound influence. Greek temples, seen throughout history as symbolic of democracy, were the inspiration for architectural movements such as the Italian Renaissance. Today, masses of cheap concrete apartment blocks built in the 20th century in Greece's major cities belie this architectural legacy.

Thankfully, the great works of Greek literature are not as easily besmirched. The first and greatest Ancient Greek writer was Homer, author of *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Little is known of Homer's life; where or when

he lived, or whether, as it is alleged, he was blind.

Pindar (c 518–438 BC) is regarded as the pre-eminent lyric poet of ancient Greece and was commissioned to recite his odes at the Olympic Games. The great writers of love poetry were Sappho (6th century BC) and Alcaeus (5th century BC), both of whom lived on Lesbos. Sappho's poetic descriptions of her affections for women gave rise to the term 'lesbian'.

The Alexandrian, Constantine Cavafy (1863–1933), revolutionised Greek poetry by introducing a personal, conversational style. Later, poet George Seferis (1900–71) won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1963, as did Odysseus Elytis (1911–96) in 1979. Nikos Kazantzakis, author of *Zorba the Greek* and numerous novels, plays and poems, is the most famous of 20th-century Greek novelists. Contemporary novelists' works are rarely translated into English.

Greece's most famous painter was a young Cretan called Domenikos Theotokopoulos, who moved to Spain in 1577 and became known as the great El Greco. Famous painters of the 20th century include Konstantinos, Partenis and later, George Bouzianis, whose work can be viewed at the National Art Gallery in Athens.

Music has been a facet of Greek life since ancient times. When visiting Greece today, your trip will inevitably be accompanied by the plucked-string sound of the ubiquitous bouzouki. The bouzouki is one of the main instruments of *rembetika* music – which is in many ways the Greek equivalent of the American blues and has its roots in the sufferings of the refugees from Asia Minor in the 1920s. Alongside the bouzouki, *rembetika* music is accompanied by guitar, violin and accordion.

Dance is also an integral part of Greek life. Whether at a wedding, nightclub or village celebration, traditional dance is widely practised. If you don't see any on your travels, try to catch the Dora Stratou Dance Company (p351) in Athens.

Drama continues to feature in domestic arts, particularly in Athens and Thessaloniki. In summer, Greek dramas are staged in the ancient theatres where they were originally performed.

Greek film has for many years been associated with the work of filmmaker Theo

Angelopoulos, who won Cannes' Palme d'Or in 1998 with *An Eternity and One Day*. Since the late '90s, Greek cinema has witnessed a minor renaissance, with films such as *Safe Sex* (2000) luring Greek movie-goers back to the cinema.

Greek TV is dominated by chat shows, sport and foreign movies, only to be interrupted by localised versions of the latest American 'reality TV' hit.

ENVIRONMENT The Land

Greece sits at the southern tip of the Balkan Peninsula. Of its 1400 islands only 169 are inhabited. The land mass is 131,944 sq km and Greek territorial waters cover a further 400,000 sq km.

Around 80% of Greece is mountainous. The Pindos Mountains in Epiros are the southern extension of the Dinaric Alps, which run the length of former Yugoslavia. The range continues through central Greece and the Peloponnese, and re-emerges in Crete. Less than a quarter of the country is suitable for agriculture.

Greece lies in one of the most seismically active regions in the world; it recorded more than 20,000 earthquakes in the last 40 years – most of them very minor. The activity occurs because the eastern Mediterranean lies at the meeting point of three continental plates: the Eurasian, African and Arabian.

Wildlife

The variety of flora in Greece is unrivalled in Europe, with a dazzling array of spectacular wild flowers best seen in the mountains of Crete and the southern Peloponnese.

You won't encounter many animals in the wild, mainly due to hunting. Wild boar, still found in the north, is a favourite target. Squirrels, rabbits, hares, foxes and weasels are all fairly common on the mainland. Reptiles are well represented by snakes, including several poisonous viper species.

Lake Mikri Prespa in Macedonia has the richest colony of fish-eating birds in Europe, while the Dadia Forest Reserve in Thrace counts such majestic birds as the golden eagle and the giant black vulture among its residents.

The brown bear, Europe's largest land mammal, still survives in very small numbers

in the mountains of northern Greece, as does the grey wolf.

Europe's rarest mammal, the monk seal, once very common in the Mediterranean Sea, is now on the brink of extinction in Europe. There are about 400 left in Europe, half of which live in Greece. About 40 frequent the Ionian Sea and the rest are found in the Aegean.

The waters around Zakynthos are home to Europe's last large sea turtle colony, that of the loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*). The **Sea Turtle Protection Society of Greece** (@ /fax 21052 31342; www.archelon.gr) runs monitoring programmes and is always on the look-out for volunteers.

National Parks

While facilities in Greek national parks aren't on par with many other countries, all have refuges and some have marked hiking trails. The most visited parks are Mt Parnitha, north of Athens, and the Samaria Gorge on Crete. The others are Vikos-Aoös and Prespa national parks in Epiros; Mt Olympus on the border of Thessaly and Macedonia; and Parnassos and Iti national parks in central Greece. There is also a national marine park off the coast of Alonnisos, and another around the Bay of Laganas area off Zakynthos.

Environmental Issues

Greece is belatedly becoming environmentally conscious but, regrettably, it's too late for some regions. Deforestation and soil erosion are problems that go back thousands of years, with olive cultivation and goats being the main culprits. Forest fires are also a major problem, with an estimated 25,000 hectares destroyed every year. Epiros and Macedonia in northern Greece are the only places where extensive forests remain.

General environmental awareness remains at a depressingly low level, especially where litter is concerned. The problem is particularly bad in rural areas, where roadsides are strewn with aluminium cans and plastic packaging hurled from passing cars.

FOOD & DRINK Staples & Specialities

SNACKS

Greece has a great range of fast-food options. Foremost among them are the gyros

and the souvlaki. The gyros is a giant skewer laden with seasoned meat that grills slowly as it rotates, the meat being steadily trimmed from the outside. Souvlaki are small cubes of meat cooked on a skewer. Both are served wrapped in pitta bread with salad and lashings of tzatziki (a yogurt, cucumber and garlic dip). Other snacks are pretzel rings, spanakopitta (spinach and cheese pie) and *tyropitta* (cheese pie).

STARTERS

Greece is famous for its appetisers, known as *mezedes* (literally, 'tastes'; meze for short). Standards include tzatziki, *melitzanosalata* (aubergine dip), taramasalata (fish-roe dip), *dolmades* (stuffed vine leaves), *fasolia* (beans) and *oktapodi* (octopus). A selection of three or four starters represents a good meal and makes an excellent vegetarian option.

MAIN DISHES

You'll find moussaka (layers of aubergine and mince, topped with béchamel sauce and baked) on every menu, alongside a number of other taverna staples. They include *moschari* (oven-baked veal and potatoes), *keftedes* (meatballs), *stifado* (meat stew), *pastitsio* (baked dish of macaroni with minced meat and béchamel sauce) and *yemista* (either tomatoes or green peppers stuffed with minced meat and rice).

Kalamaria (fried squid) is the most popular (and cheapest) seafood, while *barbouni* (red mullet) and *sifias* (swordfish), sold by the kilogram, tend to be more expensive than meat dishes.

Fortunately for vegetarians, salad is a mainstay of the Greek diet. The most popular is *horiatiki salata*, normally listed on English-language menus as Greek salad. It's a delicious mixed salad comprising cucumbers, peppers, onions, olives, tomatoes and feta cheese and is perfect on a hot day.

DESSERTS

Most Greek desserts are Turkish in origin and are variations on pastry soaked in honey, such as baklava (thin layers of pastry filled with honey and nuts). Delicious Greek yogurt also makes a great dessert, especially with Greek honey – easily the best in the world.

DRINKS

Bottled mineral water is cheap and available everywhere, as are soft drinks and packaged juices. Greece is traditionally a wine-drinking society. Retsina, wine flavoured with pine tree resin, is somewhat of an acquired taste. Fortunately, Greece also produces an increasingly good range of wines from traditional grape varieties.

Mythos, in its distinctive green bottle, is the most common Greek beer, but in many places the choice is either Amstel or Heineken. You can expect to pay about €1 for a can in a supermarket or kiosk, €2 in a restaurant and from €5 for a glass in a club. The most popular aperitif is the aniseed-flavoured ouzo, which is mixed with water to taste.

Where to Eat & Drink

The most common variety of restaurant in Greece is the taverna, traditionally an extension of the Greek home table. *Estiatorio* is Greek for restaurant and often has the same dishes as a taverna but with higher prices. A *psistaria* specialises in charcoal-grilled dishes while a *psarotaverna* specialises in fish. *Ouzeria* (ouzo bars) often have such a range of *mezedes* that they can be regarded as eateries.

Kafeneia are the smoke-filled cafés where men gather to drink 'Greek' coffee, play backgammon and cards, and engage in heated political discussion. Every Greek town you'll visit now has at least one café-bar where Greece's youth while away hours over a Nescafé Frappé.

Buying and preparing your own food is easy in Greece – every town of consequence has a supermarket, as well as fruit-and-vegetable shops.

ATHENS ΑΘΗΝΑ

pop 3.7 million

Ancient Athens, named after the goddess of wisdom, Athena, is up there with Rome for its archaeological treasures, classical mythology, sense of history and grandeur, and its lasting influence on Western civilisation. It's just as well it wasn't named after the god of love, Eros, as, until its 2004 Olympics facelift, it was a city few fell for.

The Olympics, while putting a huge dent in the city's bank balance, showed the world that Athens was a city of style and culture, and worthy of more attention than most gave it. Although much of Athens was given a makeover, she's still no beauty, and increasingly suffers from traffic congestion, pollution and urban sprawl.

Take the time to look beneath her skin and you will discover a complex city full of contradictions as only a place with such a long history as hers can be. Funky new cafés sit beside atmospheric neighbourhood *ouzeria*, stylish Michelin-star restaurants sit next door to traditional family tavernas, and *rembetika* is performed at one bar while at a club across the street a DJ spins trance.

Athens is worth visiting just as much for its ancient wonders and splendid artefacts as it is for its contemporary style and buzzy social life.

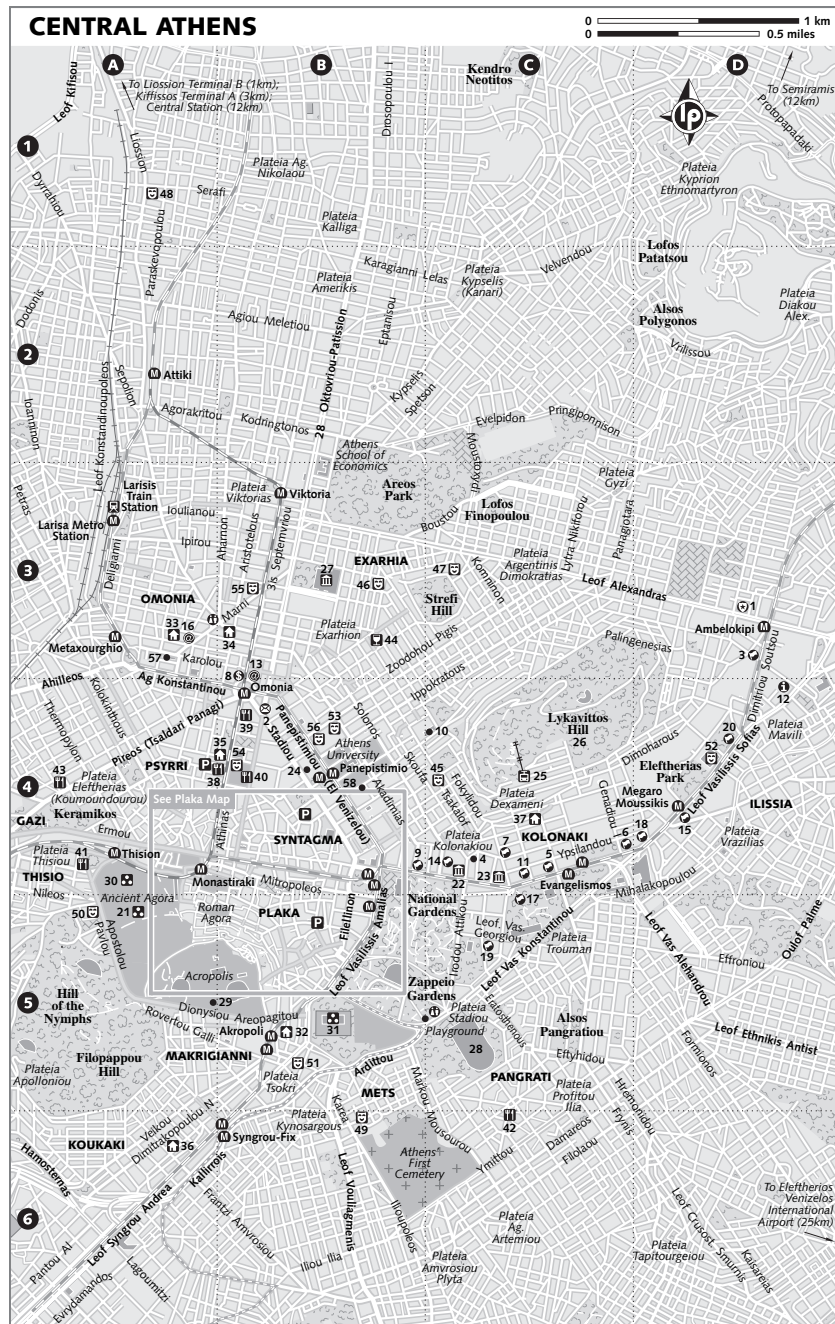
ORIENTATION

Athens is a sprawling city but most sights are within a manageable distance. Syntagma Sq, or Syntagma (*syn*-tag-ma), is the city's heart. Surrounded by luxury hotels, banks, and airline and travel offices, it's dominated by the Greek parliament building. Omonia Sq (Plateia Omonias) is to the north of Syntagma; Gazi, Psyrri and Monastiraki Sq (Plateia Monastirakiou) are to its west; the Plaka district borders it to the south; and Kolonaki is at its east.

ATHENS IN TWO DAYS

Head to the **Acropolis** (p346) early to beat the crowds before exploring the atmospheric Plaka district. Have lunch at **Byzantino** (p350) on the leafy square, before spending the heat of the afternoon at the **National Archaeological Museum** (p347). Enjoy Parthenon views over dinner at **Pil Poul** (p350) or have gyros at **Viasos** (p349).

On the second day, visit the wonderful **Benaki Museum** (p348) or **Museum of Cycladic Art** (p348). Lunch at **Eat** (p350) before shopping Plaka, then rest up for a night out drinking (try **Brettos**, p351), eating (**Taverna tou Psara**, p350) and dancing (hit **Lava Bore**, p351).



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The city's major landmarks, the Acropolis and Lykavittos Hill, serve as good reference points as they're visible from most places.

Omonia is home to pickpockets, prostitutes and drug dealers. Spruced up for the Olympics, its central square is surrounded by commercial franchises and fast-food joints. All of Athens' major central streets meet here. Panepistimiou (El Venizelou) and Stadiou run parallel southeast to Syntagma, while Athinas heads south to the market district of Monastiraki and the nightlife area of Psyrri.

Monastiraki is linked to Syntagma by the pedestrianised shopping street Ermou and Mitropoleos, which skirts the northern edge of Plaka. Plaka, a charming old neighbourhood of labyrinthine streets (now dominated by souvenir shops and tavernas) is nestled on the northeastern slope of the Acropolis with most ancient sites nearby.

INFORMATION Bookshops

The bigger *periptera* (kiosks) stock a good range of English-language magazines and international newspapers.

Compendium Books (Map p352; ☎ 210 322 1248; Nikis 28, Plaka) Specialises in English-language books and offers an excellent selection of Greek history and literature.

Eleftheroudakis Books Plaka (Map p352; ☎ 210 322 9388; Nikis 20); Syntagma (Map p352; ☎ 210 325

8440; Panepistimiou 17) English-language books. At the Plaka branch, travel guides (including Lonely Planet) are downstairs.

Cultural Centres

These centres hold arts and cultural events, run language courses and screen films. Check the *Kathimerini* supplement in the *International Herald Tribune* for detailed listings.

British Council (Map p344; ☎ 210 369 2333; www.britishcouncil.gr; Plateia Kolonaki 17, Kolonaki)

French Institute of Athens (Map p344; ☎ 210 362 4301; www.ifa.gr; Sina 31, Kolonaki)

Goethe Institut (Map p352; ☎ 210 366 1008; www.goethe.de/athen; Omirou 14-16, Kolonaki)

Emergency

Athens police station (Map p344; ☎ 210 725 7000; Syntagma Sq, Syntagma)

Fire brigade (☎ 199)

First-aid service (☎ 166)

Police emergency (☎ 100)

Tourist police (☎ 171; ☎ 24hr) General tourist info and emergency help.

Internet Access

Internet cafés in Athens charge anything from €1.50 to €4 per hour.

Arcade Internet Café (Map p352; ☎ 210 321 0701; Stadiou 5, Syntagma; per hr €3; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-10pm Sat) Wide range of services and dedicated ADSL laptop connections.

Internet Cyberzone (Map p344; ☎ 210 520 3939; Sotavriandou 7, Omonia; per hr €2.50; 🕒 24hr) Prices drop after midnight.

Mocafé (Map p344; ☎ 210 522 7717; cnr Marni & Veranzerou 49, Omonia; per hr €3, laptop per hr €2; 🕒 8am-1am) Handily placed near the Youth Hostel Victor Hugo (p348), with wireless.

Laundry

Plaka Laundrette (Map p352; ☎ 210 321 3102; Angelou Geronta 10, Plaka; 5kg wash & dry €9; 🕒 8am-7pm Mon-Sat, to 1pm Sun)

Left Luggage

Most hotels store luggage free for guests but this may mean leaving your bags unsecured in a hallway, so check ahead if you need to leave luggage long-term. Facilities are available at the airport and train station.

Medical Services

The *Kathimerini* supplement in the *International Herald Tribune* gives details for hospitals and pharmacies.

Ambulance (☎ 166)

Duty doctor (☎ 105; 🕒 2pm-7am)

Duty hospitals (☎ 1434)

Duty pharmacy (☎ 107)

SOS Doctors (☎ 1016; 🕒 24hr) Call-out service with multilingual doctors.

Money

Most banks have branches around Plateia Syntagmatos. Both banks and currency exchanges change travellers cheques.

Acropole Foreign Exchange (Map p352; ☎ 210 331 2765; Kydathineon 23, Plaka; 🕒 11.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat) Also offers Western Union services and has an ATM.

Post

Athens' Central Post Office (Map p344; Eolou 100, Omonia; 🕒 7.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) All poste restante is sent here unless specified otherwise.

Parcel post office (Map p352; Stadiou 4, Syntagma; 🕒 7.30am-2pm Mon-Fri) Parcels over 2kg going abroad must be taken here, unwrapped for inspection.

Syntagma post office (Map p352; ☎ 210 331 9500; cnr Mitropoleos & Plateia Syntagmatos, Syntagma; 🕒 7.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat, 9am-1.30pm Sun) If staying in Plaka, get poste restante sent here.

Telephone

Public phones are everywhere and take phonecards, readily available from kiosks. See p412 for card denominations.

Toilets

Public toilets are thin on the ground, but fast-food outlets have toilets and you can test the hospitality of tourist-tired Athenians by trying bars or cafés.

Tourist Information

City of Athens Info Line (☎ 195) Info booths are set up in Syntagma Sq during summer.

Greek National Tourist Organisation/EOT Head office (Map p344; ☎ 210 870 7000; www.gnto.gr; Tsoha 7; 🕒 9am-2pm Mon-Fri); EOT info desk (☎ 210 353 0445; Arrivals Hall, Eleftherios Venizelos International airport; 🕒 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat & Sun); EOT tourist office (Map p352; ☎ 210 331 0392; Amalias 26; 🕒 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat & Sun)

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Like any big city, Athens has its irritations. Many footpaths are marble, which get slippery when wet – ridged rubber soles work best.

Pickpockets are a problem. Be on your guard on the metro, around Omonia, and at the Sunday market. Don't keep valuables in the outer pocket of your day-pack. Better still, don't use a day-pack: they scream 'tourist'!

When taking taxis, establish whether the driver's going to use the meter or negotiate a fair price before you get in. Always ignore drivers' stories that the hotel you've directed them to is closed or full – they're angling for a commission from another hotel that you'll end up paying for. Insist on going where you want.

Bar scams are commonplace, particularly in Plaka and Syntagma. They go something like this: friendly Greek approaches solo male traveller, discovers traveller is new to Athens, and reveals that he, too, is from out of town. However, friendly Greek knows a great bar where they order drinks and equally friendly owner offers another drink. Women appear, more drinks are served and the crunch comes at the end of the night when traveller is hit with an exorbitant bill.

SIGHTS Acropolis

Athens' most iconic symbol, the **Acropolis** (Map p352; ☎ 210 321 0291; sites & museum adult/concession €12/6, free Sun; 🕒 8am-7.30pm Apr-Oct, 8.30am-3pm Nov-Mar) is arguably the most important

CHEAPER BY THE HALF-DOZEN

The €12 admission charge at the Acropolis includes entry to the other significant ancient sites: Ancient Agora, Roman Agora, Keramikos, Temple of Olympian Zeus and the Theatre of Dionysos. The ticket is valid for four days.

ancient monument in the Western world – something not lost on the multitudes of tourists who converge on it every day, so visit early morning or late afternoon.

Pericles commissioned most of its buildings in the 5th century BC, Athens' Golden Age. The entrance is through the **Beule Gate**, a Roman arch added in the 3rd century AD. Beyond this is the **propylaea**, the monumental gate that was the city's entrance in ancient times. Damaged in the 17th century when lightning set off a Turkish gunpowder store, it's since been restored. South of the propylaea is the small, graceful **Temple of Athena Nike** (not accessible).

It's the **Parthenon**, however, that epitomises the glory of ancient Greece. Completed in 438 BC, it's unsurpassed in grace and harmony. To achieve perfect form, its lines were ingeniously curved to counteract optical illusions. The base curves upward slightly towards the ends, and the columns become slightly narrower towards the top – effects that make them look straight. Above the columns are the remains of a Doric frieze, partly destroyed by Venetian shelling in 1687. The best surviving pieces are the controversial Elgin Marbles, carted off to Britain by Lord Elgin in 1801.

To the north is the **Erechtheion** and its much-photographed Caryatids, the six maidens who support its southern portico. These are plaster casts – the originals (except for the one taken by Lord Elgin) are in the **Acropolis Museum** (Map p352; 🕒 11am-4.30pm Mon, 8am-4.30pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 11am-2.30pm Mon, 8.30am-3.30pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar).

South of the Acropolis

The importance of theatre in the everyday lives of Athenians is evident from the dimensions of the enormous **Theatre of Dionysos** (Map p352; ☎ 210 322 4625; adult/concession €2/1; 🕒 8am-7pm Apr-Oct, to 3pm Nov-Mar); enter via Dionysiou Areopagitou and Thrasillou Sts.

Built between 340 BC and 330 BC on the site of an earlier theatre (dating to the 6th century BC), it held 17,000 people. The **Stoa of Eumenes**, built as a shelter and promenade for theatre audiences, runs west to the **Theatre of Herodes Atticus**, built in Roman times. It's used for performances, but is closed at other times.

Ancient Agora

The **Ancient Agora** (Map p344; ☎ 210 321 0185; Adrianou 24; adult/concession €4/2; 🕒 8am-7pm Apr-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Mar) was the marketplace of ancient Athens and the focal point of civic and social life. Socrates spent time here expounding his philosophy. The main monuments are the well-preserved **Temple of Hephaestus** (Map p344), the 11th-century **Church of the Holy Apostles** (Map p352) and the reconstructed **Stoa of Attalos** (Map p352), which houses the site's museum.

Roman Agora

The Romans built their **agora** (Map p352; ☎ 210 324 5220; cnr Pelopida Eolou & Markou Aureliou; adult/concession €2/1; 🕒 8am-7pm Apr-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Mar) just east of the ancient Athenian Agora. The wonderful **Tower of the Winds** was built in the 1st century BC by a Syrian astronomer, Andronicus. Each side represents a point of the compass and has a relief carving depicting the associated wind.

Temple of Olympian Zeus

Begun in the 6th century BC, Greece's largest **temple** (Map p344; ☎ 210 922 6330; adult/concession €2/1; 🕒 8am-7pm Apr-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Mar), behind Hadrian's Arch, took more than 700 years to build, with Emperor Hadrian overseeing its completion in AD 131. It's impressive for the sheer size of its 104 Corinthian columns – 17m high with a base diameter of 1.7m. East of the temple, the **stadium**, built in the 4th century BC as a venue for the Panathenaic athletic contests, hosted the first modern Olympic Games in 1896.

National Archaeological Museum

One of the world's great museums, the **National Archaeological Museum** (Map p344; ☎ 210 821 7717; www.culture.gr; 28 Pattission 44; adult/concession €6/3; 🕒 12.30-7pm Mon, 8am-7pm Tue-Fri, 8.30am-3pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct, 11am-5pm Mon, 8am-5pm Tue-Fri, 8am-3pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar) contains important finds

from major archaeological sites around the country. The crowd-pullers are the exquisite gold artefacts from Mycenae and spectacular Minoan frescoes from Santorini. There are also wonderful collections of sculpture and intricate Cycladic figurines.

Benaki Museum

This superb museum (Map p344; ☎ 210 367 1000; www.benaki.gr; cnr Leof Vasilissis Sofias & Koubari 1, Kolonaki; adult/concession €6/3; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon, Wed, Fri & Sat, to midnight Thu, to 3pm Sun) houses the sumptuous collection of Antoine Benaki, the son of an Alexandrian cotton magnate. The splendid collection includes ancient sculpture, Persian, Byzantine and Coptic objects, Chinese ceramics, icons, El Greco paintings and a fabulous collection of traditional costumes.

Goulandris Museum of Cycladic & Ancient Greek Art

This wonderful private museum (Map p344; ☎ 210 722 8321; www.cycladic-m.gr; Neofytou Douka 4; adult/concession €5/2.50; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon & Wed-Fri, to 3pm Sat) was custom-built to display its extraordinary collection of Cycladic art, with an emphasis on the early Bronze Age. It's easy to see how the graceful marble statues influenced the art of Modigliani and Picasso.

Lykavittos Hill

Pine-covered Lykavittos (Hill of Wolves; Map p344) is the highest of the eight hills dotted around Athens. From the summit, there are stunning views of the city, the Attic basin and the islands of Salamis and Aegina (pollution permitting of course) that are enchanting at sunset. The open-air Lykavittos Theatre is used for concerts in summer.

The main path to the summit starts at the top of Loukianou, or you can take the **funicular railway** (Map p344; one way/return €2/4; 🕒 9.15am-11.45pm) from the top of Ploutarhou.

Changing of the Guard

The traditionally costumed *evzones* (guards) guarding the **Tomb of the Unknown Soldier** (Map p352), in front of the parliament building on Syntagma, change every hour on the hour. On Sundays at 10.45am, a whole platoon marches down Vasilissis Sofias to the Tomb, accompanied by a band.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The annual **Hellenic Festival** (www.greekfestival.gr) is the city's most important cultural event, running from mid-June to August. It features a line-up of international music, dance and theatre at venues across the city. The programme is available online and tickets can be booked at the **festival box office** (Map p344; ☎ bookings 210 327 2000, information 210 928 2900; info@greekfestival.gr).

SLEEPING

Athenians go out late and like to party, so most of these sleeping options are close to the action but quiet. Plaka is popular due to its proximity to the sights, but Omonia's cheap sleeps are still close enough to keep budget travellers happy. Book well ahead for July and August. Most hotels give good discounts in the off season and for longer stays.

Budget

Athens International Youth Hostel Victor Hugo (Map p344; ☎ 210 523 2049; fax 210 523 2540; Victor Hugo 16; large dm/q €8/15) While it's no longer a member of HI (Hostelling International), this hostel (undergoing renovations) is still popular. The dodgy location is a drawback – women shouldn't walk alone here at night.

Student & Travellers' Inn (Map p352; ☎ 210 324 4808; www.studenttravellersinn.com; Kydathineon 16, Plaka; dm €15, 4-person dm/d €28/70, 4-person dm/d with shared bathroom €24/65; 🕒 📺 📺) Travellers like to chill in the courtyard of this well situated hostel. Rooms may be spartan, but extras (breakfast/snacks, laundry, left luggage, travel service and tours) make up for this.

Athens Backpackers (Map p344; ☎ 210 922 4044; www.backpackers.gr; Makri 12, Makrigianni; dm €18-25, 2-/4-person studio with kitchen €100/120; 🕒 📺 📺) Athens' most popular hostel has a rooftop party bar with Acropolis views, a sports bar, a café, a kitchen, daily movies, and its Aussie management hosts (free!) barbecues. Breakfast and nonalcoholic drinks are included, and long-term storage, airport pick-up and tours are also available.

Marble House Pension (Map p344; ☎ 210 922 8294; www.marblehouse.gr; Zini 35, Koukaki; s/d/tr €42/48/55, d/tr with shared bathroom €42/49; 🕒) This is a long-standing Athens favourite, located on a quiet cul-de-sac just 10 minutes' walk

from Plaka. All rooms have fridges, ceiling fans and safety boxes. Breakfast costs €5.

Tempi Hotel (Map p352; ☎ 210 321 3175; www.travelling.gr/tempihotel; Eolou 29, Monastiraki; d/tr €60/75, s/d with shared bathroom €40/54) This quiet, friendly, family-run hotel, on the pedestrian part of Eolou, overlooks Plateia Agia Irini. A communal kitchen and nearby markets make it ideal for self-caterers.

Midrange

Hotel Adonis (Map p352; ☎ 210 324 9737; www.hotel-adonis.gr; Kodrou 3, Plaka; s/d from €59/86; 🕒) This spotlessly clean hotel is one of the best deals around. Guests return for the friendly welcome, great location and super Acropolis views from the rooftop breakfast room-cum-bar. Rooms have satellite TV and include breakfast.

Hotel Cecil (Map p352; ☎ 210 321 7079; www.cecil.gr; Athinas 39, Monastiraki; s/d €63/89; 🕒) Looking rather worn around the edges these days, this hotel, in a fine old classical building with high ceilings and wooden floors, is close to the Psyrri nightlife and sights. Rooms come with TV and breakfast.

Elysium Design Hotel (Map p344; ☎ 210 523 4601; info@elysium-hotels.com; Aristotelous 3, Omonia; s/d €68/73; 🕒) This 'cheap and chic' boutique hotel may be Best Western-branded, but it has style – including Philippe Starck Kartell chairs and other funky features. Rooms are tiny, but come with free wi-fi and ADSL, coffee makers, TV and fridge.

Hotel Acropolis House (Map p352; ☎ 210 322 2344; hotel@acropolishouse.gr; Kodrou 6-8, Plaka; s/d/tr from €78/83/107, d with shared bathroom €72; 🕒) This well-situated hotel in a 19th-century house feels more *persian* (guesthouse) than hotel, with communal areas and hospitable management. Rooms are clean and come with TV.

Central Athens Hotel (Map p352; ☎ 210 323 4357; www.centralhotel.gr; Apollonos 21, Plaka; s/d €99/121; 🕒 📺 📺) This is one of the best midrange deals around: spacious stylish rooms have satellite TV, fridge, breakfast included, balconies (many with Acropolis views) and internet access. There are wonderful vistas from the rooftop where you can sunbake and relax in the Jacuzzi.

Hotel Hermes (Map p352; ☎ 210 323 5514; www.hermeshotel.gr; Apollonos 19, Plaka; s/d €120/145; 🕒 📺 📺) Next to the Central, this hotel has a similar level of style and services (breakfast included, minifridge, satellite TV etc).

Top End

Periscope (Map p344; ☎ 210 729 7200; www.periscope.gr; Haritos 22, Kolonaki; r from €150; 🕒 📺 📺) A hip hotel with a cool edgy look (and Mini Cooper seats for chairs in the ground floor café-bar), this place has comfortable minimalist rooms with all the mod cons and a quiet location in chic Kolonaki.

Fresh (Map p344; ☎ 210 524 8511; www.freshhotel.gr; Sophocleous 26; d incl breakfast from €158; 🕒 📺 📺) The rooftop lounge-bar and lap pool with Acropolis views are the highlight at this funky hotel, with white light-filled interiors, lots of dark wood, and orange and fuchsia features. The minimalist rooms are small but comfortable and the buffet breakfast expansive.

Semiramis (☎ 210 628 4400; www.semiramisathens.com; Char Trikoupi 48, Kifissia-Kefalari; d from €200; 🕒 📺 📺) While the upmarket Kifissia location, overlooking leafy Kefalari park, might not suit first-time visitors to Athens, design hotel fans will love this contemporary hotel by designer Karim Rashid. The retro, hi-tech, candy-coloured rooms with DVD library and wi-fi; the curvaceous swimming pool with sundeck; and the cosmopolitan restaurant are hard to leave.

EATING

For travellers, eating in Athens has been traditionally associated with a taverna meal in Plaka, yet the city's eating scene is now more diversified and sophisticated. While every visitor should experience the traditional taverna or *ouzeria* meal, there's also some wonderful fine dining and Asian food on offer. Athens also has plenty of places where you can eat and run. Locals in a hurry tend to grab a gyros or a coffee and snack from the ubiquitous Flocafé. Note that some restaurants don't accept credit cards.

Monastiraki & Thysio

Savas (Map p352; ☎ 210 324 5048; Mitropoleos 86-88, Monastiraki; gyros €2) Without a doubt, this place serves the tastiest gyros (pork, beef or chicken) in Athens. You can take away or sit down in what becomes one of the city's busiest eat streets late at night. The souvlaki, kebabs and grilled-meat plates are enormous.

Viasos (Map p352; ☎ 210 321 2256; Adrianou 19, Monastiraki; gyros €2) Popular with a young local

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Spondi (Map p344; ☎ 210 752 0658; www.spondi.gr; Pyrronos 5, Pangrati; mains €20-35; 🍷 8pm-midnight) While there are now other highly fancied fine-dining restaurants in Athens, Spondi is the only Athenian restaurant that could offer a money-back guarantee. Dining in its vaulted cellar or in its courtyard in summer is quite a relaxed affair, however the staff is clearly working hard to give you an experience worthy of its Michelin star. The chef uses local Greek ingredients and imported produce to create a cuisine that stays true to French technique but embodies Greek flavours. And for those who still sneer at Greek wines, the wine list is a revelation – as are the sublime desserts.

Greek crowd that comes here to socialise over juicy gyros and generous serves of *mezedes*, salads, mixed grills and ouzo, this place is on what has become one of Athens' most atmospheric pedestrian areas, particularly late at night with the glorious ruins glowing near you.

Pil Poul (Map p344; ☎ 210 3423 665; Apostolou Pavlou 51, Thissio; mains €30; 🍷 closed Sun) While the Franco-Mediterranean menu and service here sometimes fail to match the sublime Acropolis views, this is still arguably the most romantic dinner spot in Athens.

Psyrri & Gazi

Pica Pica Tapas Stories (Map p352; ☎ 210 325 1663; Ag Anargyron, Psyrri; mains €2.50-20) If you're tired of Greek food, head here for tasty authentic Spanish tapas, including tortilla, *patatas bravas* (spicy potatoes), *gambas* (prawns), *pulpo* (octopus) and the like. While you can wash it down with sangría, we suggest a delicious Peloponnese chardonnay instead.

Taverna tou Psiri (Map p352; ☎ 210 321 4923; Eshylou 12, Psyrri; mains €5-12) This atmospheric taverna is popular with locals who come for the daily specials menu. It's tucked away off Plateia Iroon; look for the apt mural of a drunk leaning against a lamppost.

Varoulko (Map p344; ☎ 210 522 8400; Pireos 80, Gazi; mains €22-30; 🍷 closed Sun) This Michelin-starred seafood restaurant has remained popular with Athenian celebrities and food tourists since moving from Piraeus. While dishes such as the squid-ink soup

and smoked swordfish are sublime, it gave us the distinct impression of a restaurant simply going through the motions.

Plaka

Byzantino (Map p352; ☎ 210 322 7368; Kydathineon 18, Plaka; mains €3-16) If you must eat in the heart of Plaka (everyone wants to do it once), this is one of the better choices for hearty traditional cuisine and a good range of daily specials. It's also in a pleasant shady spot that's great for people-watching.

Eden Vegetarian Restaurant (Map p352; ☎ 210 324 8858; Lyssiou 12, Plaka; mains €4-10) This long-standing favourite serves up vegetarian versions of Greek classics and organic wine and beer.

Taverna tou Psarra (Map p352; ☎ 210 321 8734; Eretheos 16, Plaka; mains €5-18) On a path leading up towards the Acropolis, this gem of a taverna is one of Plaka's best, serving scrumptious *mezedes* and excellent fish and meat classics on a terrace under the plane trees.

O Platanos (Map p352; ☎ 210 322 0666; Diogenous 4, Plaka; mains €7; 🍷 noon-4.30pm & 7.30pm-midnight Mon-Sat, noon-4.30pm Sun) Laid-back O Platanos (Plane Tree) serves tasty, home cooked-style Greek cuisine. The lamb dishes are delicious and we love the leafy courtyard.

Noodle Bar (Map p352; ☎ 210 331 8585; Apollonos 11, Plaka; mains €8) The pick of several Asian restaurants around Plaka, Noodle Bar serves up tasty noodles and soups (we love the laksa) at honest prices.

Eat (Map p352; ☎ 210 324 9129; Adrianou 91, Plaka; mains €8-17) A sleek alternative to the endless traditional tavernas, Eat serves interesting salads and pastas and modern interpretations of Greek classics.

Self-Catering

You'll find the best selection of fresh produce at the **fruit and vegetable market** (Map p344) on Athinas, opposite the **meat market** (Map p344), where some wonderful stores sell delicious olives in barrels. In the surrounding streets, pastry shops sell delicious *pitras* (pies). Decent supermarkets in central Athens include **Marinopoulos** (Map p344; Athinas 60, Omonia) and **Vasilopoulou** (Map p352; Stadiou 19, Syntagma).

DRINKING

Athens has more than its fair share of drinking establishments, from casual, grungy student hang-outs to Irish pubs for

expats. Outside summer, the bars of Psyrri are the most popular, although during summer most of the action heads to the islands. Some bars open from morning until late, while others (noted below) don't open until late.

Bars & Pubs

Brettos (Map p352; ☎ 210 323 2110; Kydathineon 41, Plaka) This distillery, bottle shop and bar is dark and dingy, but once the sun goes down, its eye-catching, back-lit collection of coloured bottles gives the place a certain magic. Watch those shots of Brettos-brand spirits – they're lethal.

Mooi (Map p352; ☎ 210 321 2624; cnr Miaouli & Themidos, Psyrri; 🍷 closed Mon) Formerly known as Bee, cool Mooi is mellow by day but late at night attracts a party crowd that spills out onto the street.

Sobar (Map p352; ☎ 210 322 2205; Navarhou Apostoli 5, Psyrri; 🍷 10pm-3.30am Sun-Thu, to 6am Fri & Sat) This funky bar is low-key until around 1am when it goes off, while weekends frequently see some dancing on the bar.

Wonderbar (Map p344; ☎ 210 381 8577; Themistokleous 80, Exarhia) Relaxed by day, packed by night, this lounge bar attracts hip young Athenians who come for some of Athens' best DJs.

Cafés

Athens' cafés have some of the highest prices for coffee in Europe, yet if you do what the locals do and sit on a frappé (frothy ice coffee) all day, you can do the café scene relatively cheaply. Kolonaki has a mind-boggling array of cafés off Plateia Kolonakiou, on Skoufa and Tsakalof Streets.

ENTERTAINMENT

The *Kathimerini* supplement inside the *International Herald Tribune* has daily event listings and a cinema guide.

Nightclubs

Athensians don't head to clubs until after midnight. Cover charges apply late and when there's a guest DJ, and drinks are more expensive than at bars.

Decadence (Map p344; ☎ 210 882 3544; cnr Pouliherias & Voulgaroktonou 69, Lofos Strefi; admission €6-8) For indie and alternative music lovers, Decadence has two levels, with a quieter

bar scene on the lower floor and a club located upstairs.

Lava Bore (Map p352; ☎ 210 324 5335; Filellinon 25, Plaka; cover varies) This fun dance club is popular with a young international globetrotting crowd.

Live Music**POP, ROCK & JAZZ**

Get tickets for concerts at **Ticket House** (Map p344; ☎ 210 360 8366; Panepistimiou 42). Popular venues:

Rodon Club (Map p344; ☎ 210 524 7427; Mairi 24, Omonia; 🍷 from 10pm) You'll either love or hate this grungy club – the city's main venue for rock and metal – but die-hard fans and visiting rock musos swear by it.

Gagarin 205 Club (Map p344; ☎ 210 854 7601; Liosion 205; 🍷 from 9.30pm) The city's coolest space attracts the most interesting international and local acts, along with Athens' most interesting people.

Half Note Jazz Club (Map p344; ☎ 210 921 3310; Trivonionou 17, Mets; 🍷 from 10.30pm) Jazz buffs won't be disappointed – this dark, smoky club is the main venue for serious jazz.

REMBETIKA

Traditional *rembetika* is hard to catch during the summer months when most of the authentic venues close, but you can see a popularised version at some tavernas in Psyrri.

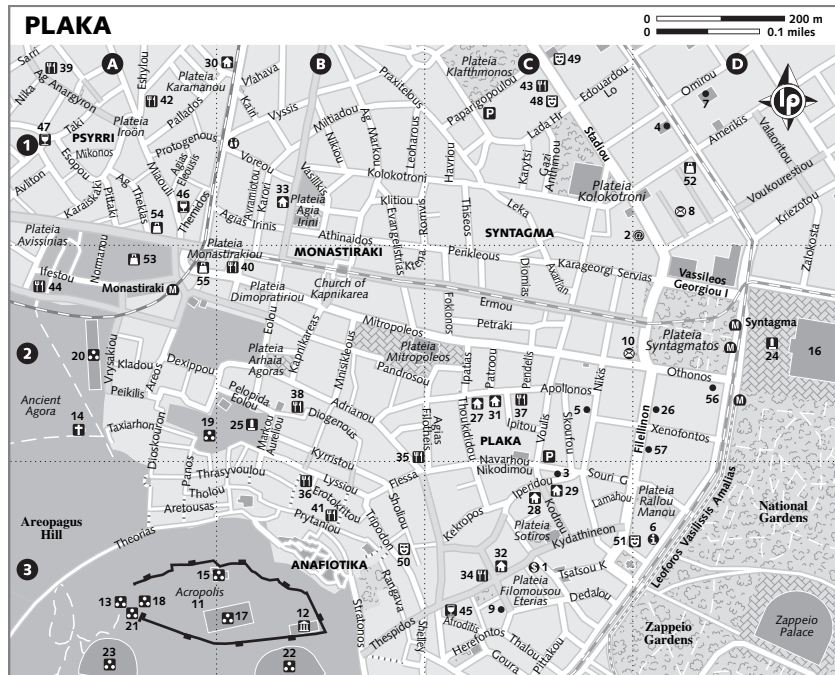
Rembetika Stoa Athanaton (Map p344; ☎ 210 321 4362; Sofokleous 19; 🍷 3.30-7pm & 11pm-late Mon-Sat Oct-May) Located in the meat market, this is still *the* place to listen to *rembetika*.

Classical Music, Opera & Dance

Dora Stratou Dance Company (Map p352; ☎ 210 921 6650; www.grdance.org; Filopappos Hill; tickets €15; 🍷 from 9.30pm Tue-Sat & 8.15pm Sun May-Sep) This traditional folk-dancing show features more than 75 musicians and dancers.

Megaron Mousikis (Athens Concert Hall; Map p344; ☎ 210 728 2333; www.megaron.gr; Leof Vasilissis Sofias; tickets €10-60) Tickets can be purchased online for performances by local and international artists at this superb concert venue.

Olympia Theatre (Map p344; ☎ 210 361 2461; www.nationalopera.gr; Akadimias 59, Exarhia; tickets from box office €20-52; 🍷 9am-9pm) The Greek National Opera season of classical opera, ballet and orchestral concerts runs from November to June.



Cinemas

Most cinemas show recent releases in English and admission prices are around €8. Two of the major cinemas in central Athens are **Apolon** (Map p352; ☎ 210 323 6811; Stadiou 19) and the **Astor** (Map p352; ☎ 210 323 1297; Stadiou 28).

Gay & Lesbian Venues

You'll find the greatest number of gay bars in Makrigianni, south of the Temple of Olympian Zeus, and Exarhia. Most don't get moving until midnight. Check out www.gay.gr.

Alekos' Island (Map p344; ☎ 210 381 9615; Tsamadou 15, Exarhia) Athens' most popular lesbian dance club plays both mainstream and Greek music.

Aroma (Map p344; ☎ 210 381 9615; Tsamadou 15, Exarhia) Athens' most popular lesbian dance club plays both mainstream and Greek music.

Kirkis (Map p344; ☎ 210 346 6960; Apostolou Pavlou 31, Thsio) Head to this hip gay and lesbian hang-out to find out what's hot in Athens when you're visiting.

Lamda Club (Map p344; ☎ 210 942 4202; Lembesi 15, Makrigianni) Athens' best gay dance club gets crowded late.

SHOPPING

Athens is the place to shop for cool jewelry, hippy-chic clothes and leather shoes, as well as some great souvenirs, such as backgammon sets, hand-woven textiles, traditional cross-stitched blouses, olive soap and olive oil skin products, worry beads and colourful ceramics. You'll find boutiques on Ermou; designer brands in Kolonaki; and souvenirs, folk art and leather in Plaka and Monastiraki.

Attica department store (Map p352; ☎ 211 180 2600; Panepistimiou 9) This store has several floors of funky fashion from around the globe, including Greek designers, along with accessories, cosmetics and travel goods.

Stavros Melissinos' Store (Map p352; ☎ 210 321 9247; Aghias Theklas 2, Monastiraki) Sandal wearers should head here for some custom-made sandals and poetry from the poet sandal maker.

If you are in Athens on a weekend, it is obligatory to visit the **Sunday market** (Map p352; ☎ 7am-2pm) near the **Monastiraki flea market** (Map p352), which starts at Plateia Monastirakiou.

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GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Athens is serviced by **Eleftherios Venizelos International Airport** (ATH; ☎ 210 353 0000; www.aia.gr) at Spata, 27km east of Athens. Facilities are excellent, with a good selection of reasonably priced cafés and decent duty-free shopping, including local products. For phone numbers for international airlines in Athens, see p413.

The majority of domestic flights are handled by Greece's much maligned national carrier, **Olympic Airlines** (code OA; Map p352; ☎ 210 926 4444; www.olympicairlines.com; Filelinton 15, Syntagma).

Crete-based **Aegean Airlines** (code A3; Map p352; ☎ 210 331 5502; www.aegeanair.com; Othonos 10, Syntagma) offers flights to many of the same destinations as Olympic.

Bus

Athens has two main intercity **KTEL** (www.ktel.org) bus stations, about 5km to 7km north of Omonia. KTEL timetables are online. **EOT** (www.gnto.gr) also has online schedules for both stations.

Kifissos Terminal A (☎ 210 512 4910; Kifissou 100) has buses running to the Peloponnese, Ioumenitsa, Ionian Islands, Haldiki, Florina, Ioannina, Kastoria, Edessa and Thessaloniki, among other destinations. Get here on bus 015 from the junction of Zinonos and Menandrou, near Plateia Omonia.

Liossion Terminal B (☎ 210 831 7153; Liossion 260)

has departures to Trikala (for Meteora), Delphi, Larissa, Thiva, Volos and other destinations. To get here take bus 024 from outside the main gate of the National Gardens on Amalias. Get off the bus at Liossion 260, turn right onto Gousiou and you'll see the terminal.

Car & Motorcycle

Syngrou Rd, south of the Temple of Olympian Zeus, is packed solid with car-rental firms. National Rd 1 is the main route north from Athens, starting at Nea Kifissia: take Vasilissis Sofias from Syntagma and follow the signs. National Rd 8, which begins beyond Dafni, is the route to the Peloponnese: take Agiou Konstantinou from Omonia.

Ferry

See p414 for information on ferries travelling to and from the islands.

Train

Larissa Station is Athens' main train station. Suburban and intercity train services pass through here. Timetables are available from www.isap.gr.

More information on services is available from **OSE offices** (Omonia Map p344; ☎ 210 524 0647; Karolou 1; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat; Syntagma Map p344; ☎ 210 362 4402; Sina 6; ☎ 8am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat). Both offices handle advance bookings.

GETTING AROUND

The metro system makes getting around central Athens and to Piraeus easy, but Athens' road traffic is still horrendous. A 24-hour travel pass (€2.90) is valid for all forms of public transport.

To/From the Airport

BUS

Bus X94 (25 minutes, every 10 minutes 7.30am to 11.30pm) operates daily between the airport and metro Line 3 at Ethniki Amaryna.

Bus X95 (60 to 90 minutes, every 30 minutes over 24 hours) operates between the airport and Plateia Syntagma. The Syntagma stop is on Othonos St.

Bus X96 (60 to 90 minutes, every 20 minutes over 24 hours) operates between the airport and Plateia Karaiskaki in Piraeus.

Tickets for all these services cost €2.90.

METRO

Line 3 of the metro links the airport to the city centre in around 30 minutes; it operates from Monastiraki from 5.50am to 10.50pm, and from the airport from 6.30am to 11.30pm. Tickets cost €6.

TAXI

Taxi fares vary according to the time of day and level of traffic, but you should expect to pay from €20 to €30 from the airport to the city centre, and from €20 to €25 from the airport to Piraeus, depending on traffic conditions. Both trips can take up to an hour.

Bus & Trolleybus

Blue-and-white suburban buses operate every 15 minutes from 5am to midnight. Route numbers and destinations are listed on the free EOT map. Timetables can be obtained from the **GNTO** (www.gnto.gr), at EOT tourist offices, or at the **Athens Urban Transport Organisation** (OASA; ☎ 210 883 6076; www.oasa.gr). The EOT map identifies the routes of the yellow trolleybuses too, which also run from 5am to midnight.

Special buses to Piraeus operate 24 hours, running every 20 minutes, from 6am to midnight, and then hourly until 6am. Bus 040 leaves from the corner of Syntagma and Filellinon, and bus 049 leaves from the Omonia end of Athens.

Tickets for all services cost €0.45 and must be purchased before boarding from a ticket booth or a *periptero*. The same tickets can be used on either buses or trolleybuses and must be validated as you board.

Metro

The metro operates from 5am to midnight. Trains run every three minutes during peak periods and every 10 minutes at other times. For metro timetables visit www.ametro.gr. Travel within one section costs €0.60 and a journey covering two or more sections costs €0.75. Tickets must be validated before travelling.

Taxi

Athenian taxis are yellow. The flag fall is €0.75 and there's an additional surcharge of €0.80 from ports and train and bus stations, as well as a €3 surcharge from the airport. After that, the day rate (tariff 1 on the meter) is €0.28 per kilometre. The rate doubles between midnight and 5am (tariff 2 on the meter). Baggage is charged at the rate of €0.30 per item over 10kg. The minimum fare is €3.

AROUND ATHENS

Piraeus Πειραιάς

pop 175,697

Greece's main port, Piraeus, is the hub of the Aegean ferry network. It takes around 25 minutes to get here from the centre of Athens by metro (avoid taking a bus or taxi – the streets are even more clogged than they are in Athens), so there's no reason to stay in shabby Piraeus. However, a trip to tranquil Mikrolimano (Small Harbour), with its cafés and fish restaurants, reveals another side to Piraeus.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

Piraeus consists of a peninsula surrounded by harbours. The largest of its three harbours is the Megas Limin (Great Harbour) on the western side, where all the ferries leave from, along with hydrofoil and catamaran services to Aegina and the Cyclades. Zea Marina (Limin Zeas) and Mikrolimano, on the eastern side of the peninsula, are for private yachts. **Internet Center** (☎ 210 411 1261; Akti Poseidonos 24; per hr €2.50; ☎ 10am-11pm) is an internet café on the main road, across from the main harbour.

EATING

If you're in Athens for more than a few days, a seafood meal on the harbour at Mikrolimano is a must.

Jimmy & the Fish (☎ 210 412 4417; Koumoundourou 46; mains €16; ☎ 1pm-1am) This is the most reliable of the harbour-front restaurants, serving up excellent seafood in stylish surroundings. There is also a couple of good cafés along this strip. Trolleybus 20 runs past the harbour.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

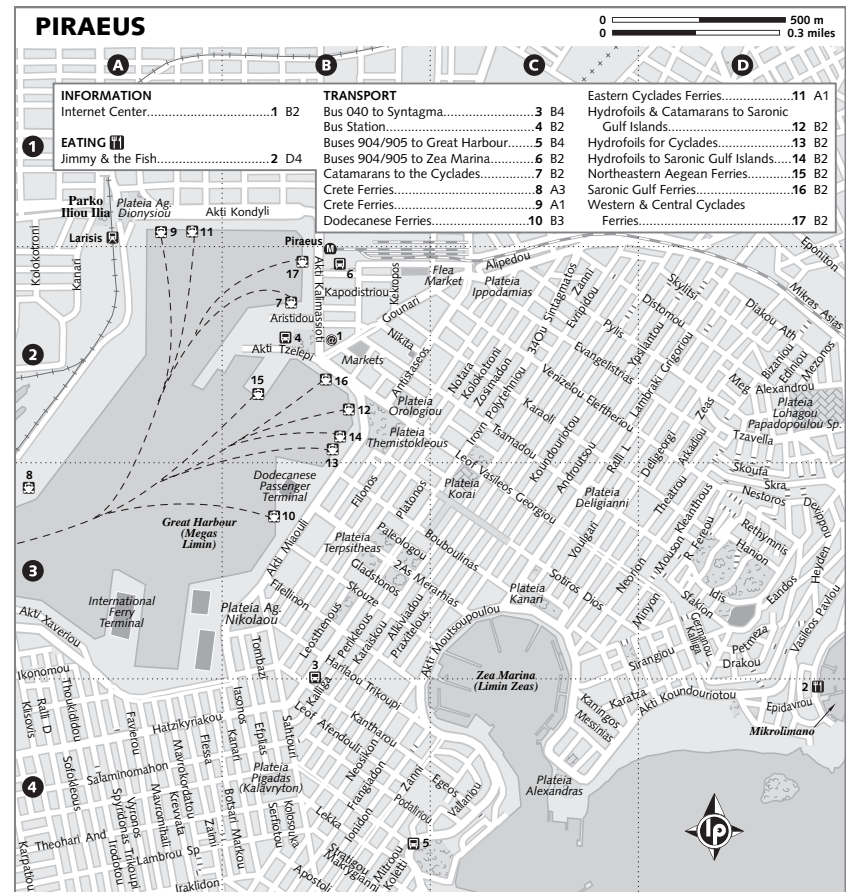
Bus

Two 24-hour bus services operate between central Athens and Piraeus. Bus 049 runs from Omonia to the bus station at the

Great Harbour, and bus 040 runs from Syntagma to the tip of the Piraeus peninsula. Bus 040 is the service to catch from Athens for Zea Marina (get off at the Hotel Savoy), though the trip can take well over an hour in bad traffic. The fare is €0.45 for each service.

Ferry

The following information is a guide to ferry departures between June and mid-September. There are fewer ferries running in April, May and October, and they are radically reduced in winter – especially to smaller islands. The main branch of EOT in Athens (p346) has a reliable schedule, updated weekly. All ferry companies make



timetables available online (see p415). The departure points for ferry destinations are shown on the Piraeus map (see p355). When buying your ticket, confirm the departure point. See the Getting There & Away sections for each island for more details.

Crete There are two boats a day to Hania and Iraklio, a daily service to Rethymno, and three a week to Agios Nikolaos and Sitia.

Cyclades There are daily ferries to Amorgos, Folegandros, Ios, Kimolos, Kythnos, Milos, Mykonos, Naxos, Paros, Santorini, Serifos, Sifnos, Sikinos, Syros and Tinos; two or three ferries a week to Iraklia, Shinoussa, Koufonisi, Donoussa and Anafi; and none to Andros or Kea.

Dodecanese There are daily ferries to Kalymnos, Kos, Leros, Patmos and Rhodes; three a week to Karpathos and Kassos; and weekly services to the other islands.

Northeastern Aegean Islands Daily ferries to Chios, Lesvos (Mitylini), Icaria and Samos; twice weekly to Limnos.

Saronic Gulf Islands Daily ferries head to Aegina, Poros, Hydra and Spetses year-round.

Hydrofoil & Catamaran

Hellenic Seaways (www.hellenicseaways.gr) operates high-speed hydrofoils and catamarans to the Cyclades from early April to the end of October, and year-round services to the Saronic Gulf Islands. All services to the Cyclades and Aegina leave from Great Harbour. Some services to Poros, Hydra and Spetses also leave from here, but most leave from Zea Marina.

Metro

The fastest and most convenient link between the Great Harbour and Athens is the metro (€0.60, 24 minutes). The station is close to the ferries, at the northern end of Akti Kalimassioti. There are metro trains every 10 minutes from 5am to midnight.

Train

At the time of research, all services to the Peloponnese from Athens started and terminated at the Piraeus train station, although this could change.

GETTING AROUND

Local buses 904 and 905 run between the Great Harbour and Zea Marina. They leave from the bus stop beside the metro at Great Harbour, and drop you by the Maritime Museum at Zea Marina.

THE PELOPONNESE ΠΕΛΟΠΟΝΝΗΣΟΣ

The Peloponnese is ruggedly beautiful, breathtaking at its best. Home to Olympia, birthplace of the Olympic Games; the ancient archaeological sites of Mycenae, Epidavros and Corinth; the ruined Byzantine city of Mystras; and ancient Sparta; it has played a significant role in Greek history.

Two of Greece's most gorgeous towns grace its shores – Venetian-style Naflio and romantic Monemvasia. The isolated Mani Peninsula is blanketed with spectacular wildflowers in spring and dotted with striking stone tower settlements.

PATRA ΠΑΤΡΑ

pop 185,670

Greece's third-largest city, Patra is the principal ferry port for the Ionian Islands and Italy. Despite its 3000 year history, ancient sites and vibrant social life, few travellers linger longer than necessary.

Orientation

Laid out on a grid stretching uphill from the port to the old *kaстро* (castle), Patra is easy to negotiate. The tourist office, ports, train and bus stations, and other services for travellers, are all along the waterfront on Othonos Amalias, in the centre of town, and within easy walking distance of each other.

Information

Main post office (☎ 26106 20644; cnr Zaimi 23 & Mezonos; ☎ 7.30am–8pm Mon–Fri, 7.30am–2pm Sat, 9am–1.30pm Sun)

Netp@rk (☎ 26012 21553; Gerokostopoulou 36; per hr €1.50, cheaper from 1–7am; ☎ 9am–7am) There are several 'gaming' cafés on this street, but the helpful staff here let you plug in your laptop.

Tourist office (☎ 26104 61741; infopatras@hol.gr; Othonos Amalias 6; ☎ 8am–10pm) The friendly multilingual staff easily runs the best tourist office in Greece, with their plentiful information on transport and free stuff to do in town, free bicycles and internet access.

Tourist police (☎ 26104 55833; Gounari 52; ☎ 7am–9pm)

Sights

Patra's Byzantine **kaстро** (☎ 8am–5pm Tue–Sun), built by the Emperor Justinian, has good

views to the Ionian Islands. Patra's **museum** (☎ 26102 75070; Mezonos 42; ☎ 8.30am–3pm Tue–Sun) has a small archaeological collection from the Mycenaean, Hellenic and Roman eras. The impressive **Roman Odeon** (cnr Germanou & Sotiriadou; ☎ 8am–3pm Tue–Sun) is a magical spot to see a performance.

Sleeping

Pension Nicos (☎ 26106 23757; cnr Patreos & Agiou Andreou 121; s/d/tr €20/35/45, d/tr with shared bathroom €30/40) This place is spotlessly clean and the best budget choice.

Hotel Saint George (☎ 26102 25092; Agiou Andreou 73; s/d €50/75) With a central location, you'll find clean rooms here, some with port views.

Eating & Drinking

Scores of stylish cafés and fast-food eateries lie between Kolokotroni and Ermou, while Aghios Nikolaos and Radinou (off Riga Fereou) are the places for drinking. Pedestrianised Trion Navarhon is lined with tavernas.

Europa Centre (☎ 26104 37006; Othonos Amalias 10; mains €4–8; ☎ 7am–midnight) Convenient to all transport, this place serves Greek standards and also has a left-luggage service.

Mythos (☎ 26103 29984; cnr Trion Navarhon 181 & Riga; mains €5–12; ☎ 7pm–late) Settle into this atmospheric taverna for a range of good home-cooked Greek classics.

Dia Discount Supermarket (Agiou Andreou 29) This supermarket is ideally located for travellers wanting to purchase provisions for their journey.

Getting There & Away

From **Patras train station** (☎ 26106 39108; Othonos Amalias 27) there are seven trains a day to Athens via Corinth, terminating at Piraeus or the airport. Four are InterCity express trains (€12, 3½ hours), while three are slow trains (€6, four to seven hours). Between four and eight trains run south daily to Pyrgos (for Olympia, €6, two hours) and Kalamata (€8, five hours).

The **KTEL Achaia bus station** (☎ 26106 23886; cnr Zaimi 2 & Othonos Amalias) has regular services to Athens (€13, three hours, half-hourly) via Corinth, with less frequent services to Ioannina (€18, 4½ hours, two daily), Thessaloniki (€33, 10 hours, four daily), Pyrgos (€8, two hours, nine to 10 daily), Tripoli

(€12, 3½ hours, two daily) and Kalamata (€17, four hours, two daily). There are 10 buses daily to Pyrgos (for Olympia). Buses to the Ionian islands, via the port of Kyllini, leave from the **KTEL Zakynthos bus station** (☎ 26102 20993/22224; Othonos Amalias 47) or nearby **KTEL Kefallonia bus station** (☎ 26102 74938; Othonos Amalias 58).

Ionian Ferries depart for Zakynthos (€6, 1½ hours, four to five daily). Strintzis and Ionian Ferries head to Kefallonia (€7 to €12, 1½ to 2½ hours, nine daily). Strintzis also goes to Ithaki (€12, 3½ hours, two daily), and Minoan Lines and ANEK Lines sail to Corfu (€26 to €30, seven hours, two daily). For services to Italy see p414. The tourist office (opposite) can provide you with timetables. Numerous ticket agencies line the waterfront.

DIAKOFTO–KALAVRYTA RAILWAY

ΔΙΑΚΟΦΤΟ–ΚΑΛΑΒΡΥΤΑ

This spectacular rack-and-pinion line crawls up the deep gorge of the Vouraikos River from the small coastal town of Diakofto to the mountain resort of Kalavryta, 22km away. It's a thrilling one-hour journey, with dramatic scenery best viewed from 1st class (€5) rather than 2nd (€4). There are five trains a day in each direction. Diakofto is one hour east of Patra on the main train line to Athens. It can be tough to get a ticket, so buy in advance from any train station in Greece.

CORINTH ΚΟΡΙΝΘΟΣ

pop 29,787

Modern Corinth (*ko-rin-thoss*), 6km west of the Corinth Canal, is an uninspiring town, largely due to devastating earthquakes, but it makes a convenient base for visiting ancient Corinth.

At Lecheon, about 4km west of Corinth, **Blue Dolphin Camping** (☎ 2741025766; www.camping-blue-dolphin.gr; per adult/tent €6/6; 🗺️) is close to the ancient Corinth turn-off. It has a beach and decent facilities and it offers tours. Buses from Corinth to Lecheon stop here.

Hotel Apollon (☎ 2741022587; www.hotelapollongr.com; Damaskinou 2; s/d €50/60; 🗺️) is handily situated near the bus and train stations and offers good discounts; it is the best accommodation option in town. Well-equipped rooms come with minibar and TV (some also have DVD players).

Buses to Athens (€6, 1½ hours, half-hourly) and Lecheon and ancient Corinth (€0.90, 20 minutes, hourly) leave from the **KTEL Korinthos bus station** (☎ 27410 75425; Dimocratias 4) opposite the train station, while buses to Nafplio leave from **Argolis bus station** (cnr Ethnikis Antistaseos & Aratou).

It's more convenient to take the train to Patra and Athens. There are 14 daily, four of which are InterCity services. Trains also head to Kalamata (€6, 4½ hours, three daily) via Argos (for Nafplio, €2, one hour, five daily) and Tripoli (€3, 2½ hours, three daily).

ANCIENT CORINTH & ACROCORINTH ΑΡΧΑΙΑ ΚΟΡΙΝΘΟΣ & ΑΚΡΟΚΟΡΙΝΘΟΣ

The ruins of **ancient Corinth** (☎ 27410 31207; site & museum €6; ☎ 8am-7.30pm Apr-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Mar) lie at the edge of the village of ancient Corinth, and 7km southwest of Corinth's modern town. It was one of ancient Greece's wealthiest cities, but earthquakes and invasions have left little standing. The only ancient Greek monument remaining is the imposing **Temple of Apollo**; the others are Roman. Towering over the site is **Acrocorinth**, the ruins of an ancient citadel built on a massive outcrop of limestone.

The great-value digs at **Tasos Taverna & Rooms** (☎ 27410 31225; fax 27410 31183; centre of town, 200m from museum; s/d/q €25/35/50; 🍷) consist of spotlessly clean rooms above an excellent taverna serving home-style Greek classics. Rooms have TV and most have a fridge, balcony and views. Breakfast is available for €6. There are discounts during the low season.

NAFLIO ΝΑΥΠΛΙΟ

pop 14,500

With majestic Palamidi Fortress presiding over it, and breezy lanes lined with elegant Venetian houses and neoclassical mansions dripping with crimson bougainvillea, atmospheric Nafplio is one of Greece's prettiest towns. Add to that one of the liveliest waterfront café scenes – sublime for sunset watching – along with a vibrant nightlife and you've got a great place to spend a few days.

Information

Kasteli Travel & Tourist Agency (☎ 27520 29395; 38 Vass Konstantinou; ☎ 9am-2pm year-round & 6-8pm

summer) The friendly English-speaking staff here books rooms, rents cars and sells air and ferry tickets.

Municipal tourist office (☎ 27520 24444; 25 Martiou; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 4-8pm) Unhelpful, providing more information about other Greek destinations rather than Nafplio.

Odyssey Bookshop (☎ 27520 23430; Plateia Syntagmatos) Excellent range of international papers, magazines and novels.

Posto Café (☎ 27520 21508; Sidiras Merarhias; per hr €3; ☎ 10am-late) Has an upstairs internet café with fast connections. Plug in your laptop for an extra €0.50.

Tourist police (☎ 27520 28131; Kountouridou 16)

Sights

There are spectacular views of the town and surrounding coast from the magnificent hilltop **Palamidi Fortress** (☎ 27520 28036; admission €4; ☎ 8am-6.45pm summer, to 5pm at other times), built by the Venetians between 1711 and 1714. The **Vasilios Papantoniou Museum** (☎ 27520 28379; 1 Vas Alexandrou St; adult/concession €4/2; ☎ 9am-2.30pm year-round & 6-9pm summer) is one of Greece's best small museums, with its displays of vibrant regional costumes. The museum shop is worth a peek for its quality souvenirs.

Sleeping

The old town is *the* place to stay, with plenty of *pensions*, but limited budget options. Midweek prices are significantly lower than weekend rates (Friday to Sunday). In the high season it's necessary to book ahead. While cheaper rooms can be found on the road to Argos and Tolo, you'll have transport costs into town.

Hotel Economou (☎ 27520 27721; Argonafton 22; dm/d/tr €10/30/35) Nafplio's only budget hotel may be quite a walk from the old town, but backpackers appreciate its clean rooms and accommodation management.

Kapodistrias (☎ 27520 29366; www.hotelkapodistrias.gr; Kokinou 20; s/d €50/75, breakfast €5; 🍷) These beautiful rooms, many with elegant canopy beds, come with sea or old-town views.

Hotel Victoria (☎ 27520 27420; fax 27520 27517; Spiliadou 3; s/d €65/80; 🍷) This characterless but clean hotel in an excellent location offers good discounts when it's quiet. Some rooms have citadel views.

Andromeda (☎ 27520 96480; www.andromeda-pension.com; Ipsilantou 13; s/d incl breakfast €80/100; 🍷) This stylish family-owned *pension* has spacious rooms equipped with ADSL, flat-

screen TV, minibar, fresh flowers, polished floorboards and Korres products. It offers discounts of up to 30% midweek and in the off season.

Hotel Grande Bretagne (☎ 27520 96200; www.grandebretagne.com.gr; Filellinon Sq; s/d incl breakfast €160/220) In the heart of Nafplio's café action and overlooking the sea, this splendidly restored hotel, built in 1878, is Nafplio's most luxurious, with high ceilings, antiques and chandeliers.

Eating

Nafplio's old-town streets are full of restaurants; the tavernas on Staikopoulou and those overlooking the port on Bouboulinas get jam-packed on weekends.

To Kenitrikon (☎ 27520 29933; Plateia Syntagmatos; mains €3-10) This is *the* place to head for breakfast. Relax under the shady trees on this pretty square and enjoy the expansive 'Kenitrikon breakfast'.

Taverna O Vassilis (☎ 27520 25334; Staikopoulou 20-24; mains €4-8.50) The busiest taverna on this atmospheric eating strip is equally as popular with locals as it is with tourists, who all come for the delicious home-style classics.

Taverna Aeolos (☎ 27520 26828; V Olgas 30; mains €4-11) This busy taverna with outdoor seating is always packed with locals who share the generous mixed-grill plates for €8.50. It has great live music during summer.

Shopping

Nafplio shopping is a delight, with jewellery workshops, boutiques and wonderful regional products, such as honey, wine and handicrafts.

Metallagh (☎ 27520 21267; Sofrani 3; ☎ 10am-3pm & 6-10pm summer, 8am-5pm autumn-spring) Here, young jeweller Maria Koitsoidaki handcrafts her wonderful organic jewellery from silver and fine metals, gems and stones.

Komboloi Museum (☎ 27520 21618; Staikopolou 25; ☎ 10am-8pm) This is actually a shop specialising in beautiful worry beads, including the owner's antique worry bead collection.

Getting There & Away

The **KTEL Argolis bus station** (☎ 27520 27323; Syngrou 8) has hourly buses to Athens (€10, 2½ hours) via Corinth. It also has services to Argos (for Peloponnese connections) and Mycenae and Epidavros; these all cost

from €1 to €2 and take around 30 to 45 minutes.

EPIDAVROS ΕΠΙΔΑΥΡΟΣ

World Heritage-listed **Epidavros** (☎ 27530 22006; admission €6; ☎ 8am-7pm Apr-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Mar) was the sanctuary of Asclepius, god of medicine. The **theatre** is spectacular, but don't miss the peaceful **Sanctuary of Asclepius**, once a flourishing spa and healing centre. Epidavros is best visited by bus as a day trip from Nafplio (€2, 40 minutes, four daily).

MYCENAE ΜΥΚΗΝΕΣ

Although settled as early as the 6th millennium BC, **Ancient Mycenae** (☎ 27510 76585; admission €8; ☎ 8am-7pm Apr-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Mar) was at its most powerful from 1600 to 1200 BC. Mycenae's entrance, the **Lion Gate**, is Europe's oldest monumental sculpture. Described by Homer as being 'rich in gold', excavations of **Grave Circle A** by Heinrich Schliemann in the 1870s uncovered magnificent gold treasures, such as the Mask of Agamemnon, now on display at the National Archaeological Museum (p347).

Most people visit on day trips from Nafplio, but the historic **Belle Helene Hotel** (☎ 27510 76225; fax 27510 76179; Christou Tsounta; s/d €35/50) on the main street, is where Schliemann stayed during the excavations.

There are three buses daily to Mycenae from Argos (€1.50, 30 minutes) and Nafplio (€2, 45 minutes).

SPARTA ΣΠΑΡΤΗ

pop 19,550

Modern, laid-back Sparta (*spar-tee*) is at odds with its ancient Spartan image of discipline and deprivation. Although there's little to see, the town makes a convenient base from which to visit Mystras.

Sparta's street grid system sees Palaeologou running north-south through the town, and Lykourgou running east-west.

Hellas Net (☎ 27310 21500; Palaeologou 34; ☎ 8.30am-11pm) is located above a DVD/games store on Palaeologou. The **tourist police** (☎ 27310 20492; Theodoritou 20) can provide information. The **post office** (Archidamou 10; ☎ 7.30am-2pm Mon-Fri) is at Archidamou.

Camping Paleologou Mystras (☎ 27310 22724; fax 27310 25256; per adult/tent €4/3.50; ☎ year-round; 🍷), 2km west of Sparta on the road to

Mystras, has good facilities, and buses travelling to Mystras will drop you there.

Hotel Cecil (☎ 27310 24980; fax 27310 81318; Palaologou 125; s/d €35/45; 🏠) has long been popular with travellers who come for its clean rooms with balcony and TV, decent breakfasts, and parking.

Refurbished **Menelaion Hotel** (☎ 27310 22161/5; www.menelaion.com; Palaologou 91; s/d/tr €79/106/135; 🏠 🚿) is in an elegant neoclassical building and has a welcome courtyard swimming pool. The rooms, while comfortable, are characterless. Ask for discounts in the low season.

Restaurant Elyse (☎ 27310 29896; Palaologou 113; mains €4.50-10), run by a friendly Greek-Canadian family, serves up good Greek standards and a few Lakonian specialties, although next-door's **Café Ouzeri** (☎ 27310 081565; mains €2.50-10) has more character.

Sparta's **KTEL Lakonias bus station** (☎ 27310 26441; cnr Lykourgou & Thivronos) services Athens via Corinth (€14, 3½ hours, 10 daily), Gythio (€4, one hour, five daily), Monemvasia (€7, two hours, three daily) and other destinations. Frequent buses to Mystras take 30 minutes (€0.90).

MYSTRAS ΜΥΣΤΡΑΣ

Magical **Mystras** (☎ 27310 83377; adult/concession €6/3; 🕒 8am-7.30pm Apr-Oct, to 3.30pm Nov-Mar) was once the effective capital of the Byzantine Empire. Today its streets are lined with ruins of palaces, monasteries and churches, most of them dating from between 1271 and 1460.

Allow half a day to explore the site. While only 7km from Sparta, staying in the village nearby allows you to get to the site early before it heats up. **Hotel Byzantion** (☎ 27310 83309; byzanhtl@otenet.gr; s/d €40/60; 🏠 🚿), near the main square, has rooms with views, satellite TV and a swimming pool.

GEFYRA & MONEMVASIA ΓΕΦΥΡΑ & ΜΟΝΕΜΒΑΣΙΑ

pop 1,320

The atmospheric Byzantine walled village of Monemvasia occupies one side of a great rock, dramatically rising from the sea, which was separated from mainland Gefyra by an earthquake in AD 375.

While mass tourism blights the town during the day, it hasn't lessened the thrill of arriving – you enter a narrow tunnel on

foot, from where you emerge in the magical town of cobblestone streets and stone houses. Signposted steps lead up to the ruins of a **fortress** built by the Venetians in the 16th century, and the Byzantine **Church of Agia Sophia**, perched precariously on the edge of the cliff. The views are spectacular.

Sleeping & Eating

To truly appreciate Monemvasia, stay overnight and explore after the day-trippers leave or before they arrive. If you're on a tight budget it's best to stay in Gefyra.

Hotel Aktaion (☎ 27320 61234; fax 27320 63026; s/d €30/40) This modern hotel, on the Gefyra end of the causeway, is popular with budget travellers for its clean rooms with balconies and views of the sea and 'the rock'.

Hotel Malvasia (☎ 27320 61113/61160; fax 27320 61722; d from €80, apt €160; 🏠) The best 'hotel' in Monemvasia, this place has a variety of atmospheric, traditionally decorated rooms and apartments (most with sea views) scattered in stone buildings around the old town.

To Kanoni (☎ 27320 61387; Monemvasia; mains €6-12) While the interior here is charmingly decorated, on a balmy night the small terrace is the spot to eat excellent seafood and Greek classic meals.

Taverna O Botsalo (☎ 27320 61491; Gefyra; mains €6-23.50) O Botsalo serves up tasty meals overlooking the port in Gefyra.

Getting There & Away

Buses stop at the friendly **Malvasia Travel** (☎ 27320 61752) where you can buy tickets for buses and ferries. Four daily buses travel to Athens (€23, 5½ hours) via Corinth and Sparta (€8).

GYTHIO ΓΥΘΕΙΟ

pop 4489

Gythio (*yee-thih-o*) was once the port of ancient Sparta. Now it's a picturesque fishing town on the Lakonian Gulf and is the gateway to the rugged Mani Peninsula.

Pretty **Marathonisi islet**, linked to the mainland by a causeway, is said to be ancient Cranae, where Paris (prince of Troy) and Helen (the wife of Menelaus of Sparta) consummated the love affair that sparked the Trojan War. You'll find the **Museum of Mani History** (☎ 27330 24484; admission €1.50; 🕒 9am-7pm) here in an 18th-century tower.

Sleeping & Eating

Camping Meltemi (☎ 27330 22833; www.campingmeltemi.gr; per adult/tent €5/4.50; 🕒 year-round; 🏠) This camping ground is situated behind silver olive groves on the beach 3km south of Gythio, and has a big swimming pool, bungalows and summer beauty contests! The Areopoli bus stops here.

Xenia Karlaftis Rooms to Rent (☎ 27330 22719; s/d/tr €25/35/40) Clean rooms and kitchen access make this a good budget option opposite Marathonisi, but there are a dozen places nearby of similar quality if you can't get in here.

Hotel Aktaion (☎ 27330 23500/1; fax 27330 22294; Vassilis Pavlou 39; s/d €40/60; 🏠) While the interior of this elegant neoclassical building had a charmless renovation in 1995, the clean rooms have TV and phone, but better yet, balconies with sea views.

The waterfront areas on the harbour and port are lined with fish tavernas and cafés.

I Gonia (☎ 27330 24024; Vassilis Pavlou; mains €3-7; 🕒 10am-late) This is a cheap option for tasty taverna standards and tables on the sea. It's on the corner, opposite the port.

Isalos (☎ 27330 24024; Vassilis Pavlou; mains €4.50-22; 🕒 11am-late) This place, close to Hotel Aktaion, has won awards for its quality seafood and pasta, and creative flair.

Getting There & Away

The **KTEL Lakonias bus station** (☎ 27330 22228; cnr Vasileos Georgios & Evrikleos) has buses to Athens (€18, 4½ hours, five daily), Sparta (€4, one hour, four daily), Areopoli (€2, 30 minutes, four daily) and the Diros Caves (€3, one hour, one daily). **ANEN Lines** (www.anen.gr) runs five ferries weekly to Kissamos, Crete (€21, seven hours), via Kythira (€10, 2½ hours) in summer. The schedule changes so check first with **Rozakis Travel** (☎ 27330 22207) on the waterfront.

THE MANI Η ΜΑΝΗ

The beautiful Mani occupies the central peninsula of the southern Peloponnese and is divided into two regions: the Lakonian (inner) Mani in the south and Messinian (outer) Mani in the northwest near Kalamata. The area is best explored by car.

Lakonian Mani

The wild and remote Lakonian Mani is dotted with striking stone-tower houses, and is

loveliest in spring when the barren countryside bursts into life with a spectacular display of wildflowers.

Areopoli, some 30km southwest of Gythio, has a number of lovely towers on the narrow, cobbled streets of its old town. Nearby are the stunning **Diros Caves** (☎ 27330 52222; adult/concession €12/6; 🕒 8am-5.30pm Jun-Sep, to 3pm Oct-May), where a subterranean river flows. **Gerolimenas**, 20km further south, is a tranquil fishing village on a sheltered bay.

Tsimova Rooms (☎ 27330 51301; Kapetan Matepan, Areopoli; s/d €35/50, apt €65) has cosy rooms in a renovated tower tucked behind the Church of Taxiarches, while **Pyrgos Kapetanakas** (☎ 27330 51233; fax 27330 51401; access off Kapetan Matepan, Areopoli; s/d/tr €50/70/90; 🏠) is another comfortable option in a splendid tower house, built by the powerful Kapetanakas family at the end of the 18th century.

Nicola's Corner Taverna (☎ 27330 51366; Plateia Athanaton, Areopoli; mains €4-9), on the central square, is a longstanding favourite for its delicious Greek classics.

The **bus station** (☎ 27330 51229; Plateia Athanaton) services Gythio (€2, 30 minutes, four daily), Itilo (for the Messinian Mani, €1, 20 minutes, three daily) and the Diros Caves (€1, 15 minutes, one daily).

Messinian Mani

The Messinian Mani runs along the coast from Kalamata to Itilo and has some of Greece's most dramatic countryside: beautiful aquamarine swimming coves surrounded by silver olive groves and set against the Taygetos Mountains.

The enchanting seaside village of **Kardamyli**, 37km south of Kalamata, was made famous by travel writer Sir Patrick Leigh Fermor, who wrote about his rambles in *Mani: Travels in the Southern Peloponnese*. Trekkers come for the magnificent **Vyros Gorge**. Walks are well organised and colour-coded.

Kardamyli has a good choice of small hotels and *domatia* (rooms usually in private homes) to suit all budgets: all are well signposted and easy to find, but book ahead for summer.

Olympia Koumounakou Rooms (☎ 27210 73623; s/d €25/30) is basic but clean and popular with backpackers who like the communal kitchen.

Notos Hotel (☎ 27210 73730; www.notoshotel.gr; studio €100, apt €125-150; 🏠) is really a boutique

hamlet of individual stone houses, furnished in a contemporary rustic style, with fireplaces, fully equipped kitchens, and verandas and balconies with fab sea views.

Lela's Rooms (☎ 27210 73541/73730; fax 27210 64130; s/d/f €50/60/70; ☺), run by Lela, former housekeeper to Patrick Leigh Fermor, who lived in Kardamyli for many years, has basic charming rooms, while **Lela's Taverna** (☎ 27210 73541) serves up tasty home-style Greek cuisine with sublime sea views.

Kardamyli is on the main bus route from Itilo to Kalamata and two to three buses stop daily at the central square. The hotels above will help with tickets and flagging the busses down.

OLYMPIA ΟΛΥΜΠΙΑ

pop 1475

In ancient times, Olympia was a sacred place of temples, priests' dwellings and public buildings, as well as being the venue for the quadrennial Olympic Games. The first Olympics were staged in 776 BC, reaching the peak of their prestige in the 6th century BC. The city-states were bound by a sacred truce to stop fighting for three months and compete. The site of ancient Olympia lies 500m beyond the modern town of the same name.

You can check email at the excellent wireless **Ep@thlon Café** (☎ 26240 23894; Stefanopoulou; per 30min €2; ☺ 10am-late); use its laptops or take your own.

Ancient Olympia (☎ 26240 22517; adult/concession €6/3, site & museum €9/5; ☺ 8am-7.30pm May-Oct, to 3pm Nov-Apr) is dominated by the immense ruined **Temple of Zeus**, to whom the games were dedicated. Don't miss the statue of **Hermes of Praxiteles**, a classical sculpture masterpiece, at the **museum** (adult/concession €6/3; ☺ 12.30-7.30pm Mon, 8am-7.30pm Tue-Sun).

Camping Diana (☎ 26240 22314; fax 26240 22425; per adult/tent €6/4; ☺ year-round; ☺) is the best situated of Olympia's camping grounds (250m west of town); it has lovely leafy grounds with good facilities.

Pension Achilleys (☎ 26240 22562; Stefanopoulou 4; s/d/tr €25/35/40) is rather worn around the edges but **Pension Posidon** (☎ 26240 22567; Stefanopoulou 9; s/d/tr €30/40/50) is a sparkling clean, family-run place.

Best Western Europa (☎ 26240 22650/23850; www.hoteleuropa.gr; Drouva 1; s/d €85/125; ☺ ☺) is an excellent family-ran hotel on a hill over-

looking town with a wonderful large swimming pool – perfect after a tiring Olympics. Ask for one of their fab split-level rooms, but all come with satellite TV, minibar and buffet breakfast.

Taverna Gefsis Melathron (☎ 26240 22916; ant.xri@yahoo.gr; George Douma 3; mains €3-7) is by far the best place to eat in town. This friendly family-run taverna (mum is chef, daughter handles the floor and dad provides the organic wines) serves delicious traditional cuisine, including scrumptious vegetarian options, such as fried baby zucchini balls.

There are four buses a day to Athens (€23, 5½ hours) and regular buses to Pyrgos (€1.60, 30 minutes) and Tripoli (€10, 2½ hours) that leave from the centre of town. Two InterCity trains run daily to Corinth (€12, two hours) via Pyrgos (€3, 30 minutes) and Patra (€12, 45 minutes).

CENTRAL GREECE ΚΕΝΤΡΙΚΗ ΕΛΛΑΔΑ

This dramatic landscape of deep gorges, rugged mountains and fertile valleys is home to the magical mountaintop monasteries of Meteora and the ruins of ancient Delphi, where Alexander the Great sought advice from the Delphic Oracle.

DELPHI ΔΕΛΦΟΙ

pop 1500

The setting of Delphi, overlooking the Gulf of Corinth from the slopes of Mt Parnassos, is stunning, making ancient Delphi a very special place to visit.

The bus station, post office, OTE, banks and **EOT** (☎ 22650 82900; Vasileon Pavlou 44; ☺ 7.30am-2.30pm Mon-Fri) are all on modern Delphi's main street, Vasileon Pavlou.

By the 6th century BC, **ancient Delphi** (☎ 22650 82312; site or museum €6 year-round, combined adult/concession €9/5 year-round, free Sun Nov-Mar; ☺ 7.30am-7.30pm Apr-Oct, 8.30am-7pm Tue-Fri, 8.30am-2.45pm Sat, Sun & holidays Nov-Mar) had become the Sanctuary of Apollo. Thousands of pilgrims flocked there to consult the (middle-aged female) oracle, who sat at the mouth of a fume-emitting chasm. After sacrificing a sheep or goat, pilgrims would ask a question, and a priest would translate the oracle's response made incoherent by her

writhing and shuddering. Wars, voyages and business transactions were undertaken on the strength of these prophecies. From the entrance, take the **Sacred Way** up to the **Temple of Apollo**, where the oracle supposedly sat. From here the path continues to the **theatre** and **stadium**.

Opposite the main site and down the hill some 100m is the **Sanctuary of Athena** and the much-photographed **Tholos** – a 4th-century-BC columned rotunda of Pentelic marble.

Apollon Camping (☎ 22650 82762; apollon4@otenet.gr; per adult/tent €5/3.50; ☺) is 1.5km west of town; it has good facilities, including a restaurant, minimarket and barbeque.

The welcoming **Hotel Hermes** (☎ 22650 82318; www.delphihotels.gr; Vasileon Pavlou-Friderikis 27; s/d €55/70; ☺) in the town centre has spacious rooms with balcony, stunning valley views and breakfast included.

Taverna Epikouros (☎ 22650 83250; Vasileon Pavlou-Friderikis 33; mains €4-12) has wonderful valley views, unobtrusive service and serves up scrumptious *mezedes*, such as cheese croquettes, imaginative salads and generous portions of tasty regional dishes (try the lamb with eggplant purée).

From the **bus stop** (☎ 22660 82317) on the main road there are six buses a day to Athens (€12, three hours).

METEORA ΜΕΤΕΩΡΑ

Magical Meteora (meh-*teh*-o-rah), with its magnificent late-14th-century monasteries perched atop enormous rocky pinnacles, is one of Greece's most extraordinary sights.

While there were once monasteries on all 24 pinnacles, only six are still occupied: **Megalou Meteorou** (Grand Meteoron; ☺ 9am-5pm Wed-Mon), **Varlaam** (☺ 9am-2pm & 3.20-5pm Fri-Wed), **Agiou Stefanou** (☺ 9am-2pm & 3.30-6pm Tue-Sun), **Agias Triados** (Holy Trinity; ☺ 9am-12.30pm & 3-5pm Fri-Wed), **Agiou Nikolaou Anapafsa** (☺ 9am-3.30pm Sat-Thu) and **Agias Varvaras Rousanou** (☺ 9am-6pm). Admission is €2 for each monastery and strict dress codes apply (women must wear skirts below their knees, and men long trousers and sleeves).

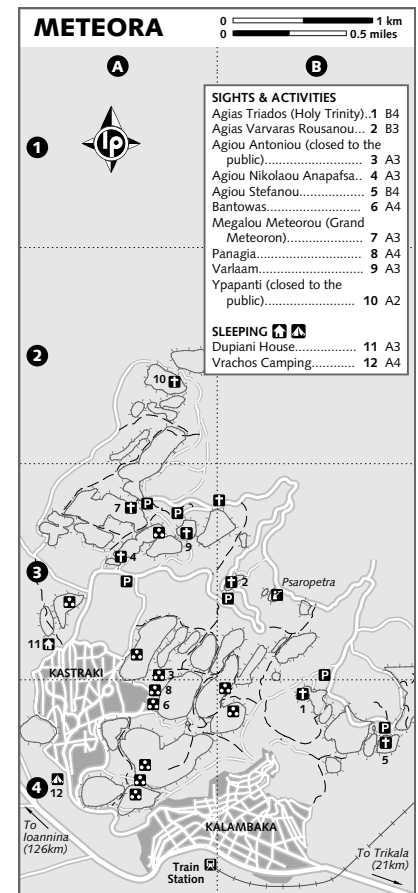
The tranquil village of **Kastraki**, 2km from Kalambaka, is the best base for visiting Meteora.

Vrachos Camping (☎ 24320 22293; camping-kastraki@kmp.forthnet.gr; per adult/tent €5/5; ☺)

has great views, a good taverna, a barbeque and a pool, and is a short stroll from Kastraki.

While the rooms at gregarious hosts Thanassis and Toula Nakis' **Dupiani House** (☎ 24320 75326; dupiani-house@kmp.forthnet.gr; s/d/tr €30/45/55), 500m from town, are simple, travellers book well ahead for the panoramic views (ask for a room with a balcony, and reconfirm your booking). Skip the underwhelming €5 breakfast.

Taverna Gardenia (☎ 24320 22504; Kastrakiou St; mains €3-8) serves up the freshest Greek food, along with excellent service; the splendid views of Meteora and fragrant scent of gardenias here are a bonus. The owners also have good-value and spacious rooms



(some with views) at **Plakjas** (☎ 24320 22504; s/d/tr €30/45/55), behind the restaurant.

Local buses shuttle between Kalambaka and Kastraki. Hourly buses from Kalambaka go to the transport hub of Trikala (€1.50, 30 minutes), from where there are buses to Ioannina (€9, three hours, two daily) and Athens (€21, 5½ hours, eight daily). From Kalambaka, there are also express trains to Athens (€20, five hours, two daily), and Thessaloniki (€11, four hours, two daily) via Paliofarsalos.

NORTHERN GREECE ΒΟΡΕΙΑ ΕΛΛΑΔΑ

Northern Greece is stunning, graced as it is with magnificent mountains, thick forests, tranquil lakes and archaeological sites. Most of all, it's easy to get off the beaten track and experience aspects of Greece noticeably different to other mainland areas and the islands.

IGOUMENITSA ΗΓΟΥΜΕΝΙΤΣΑ

pop 9104

One of the least interesting towns in the region, this west-coast port is little more than a ferry hub.

If you must stay the night, look for *domatia* signs around the port. Try the aptly named **Rooms to Let** (☎ 26650 23612; Xanthou 12; s/d €35/42), which is handy for the ferry and has decent enough rooms.

Alekos (☎ 26650 23708; Ethnikis Andistasis 84; mains €3-6) is a reliable eatery near the Corfu ferry quay that does good Greek taverna staples.

From the **bus station** (☎ 26650 22309; Kyprou 29), there are buses to Ioannina (€7, two hours, nine daily) and Athens (€30, eight hours, five daily).

Several companies operate ferries to Corfu (€5.10, 1½ hours, nearly every hour) between 5am and 10pm, while there are international services to the Italian ports of Ancona, Bari, Brindisi, Trieste and Venice. Ticket agencies are opposite the port.

IOANNINA ΙΩΑΝΝΙΝΑ

pop 75,180

Attractive Ioannina (ih-o-ah-nih-nah) on the western shore of Lake Pamvotis, was a major intellectual centre during Ottoman

rule. Today it's a thriving university town with a lively waterfront café scene.

The main streets meet in the town centre, around Plateia Dimokratias. There's internet access at the **Web** (☎ 26510 26813; Pysinella 21; per hr €2.50; ☎ 24hr) and regional tourist information at **EOT** (☎ 26510 41142; Dodonis 39; ☎ 7.30am-2.30pm).

Sights

The pleasant **old town** sits on a small peninsula jutting into the lake. Within its impressive fortifications is the **kale**, an inner citadel with lovely grounds and lake views, and home to the **tomb of Ali Pasha** and splendid **Fetiye Cami** (Victory Mosque), built in 1611. The **nisi** (island) sits serenely in the middle of the lake, with four monasteries set among the trees. Ferries (€1, half-hourly summer, hourly winter) to the island leave from near the waterfront cafés.

Sleeping & Eating

Limnoupola Camping (☎ 26510 20541; fax 26510 38060; Kanari 10; per adult/tent €5/3; ☎ Apr-Oct) This shady camping ground must have one of the nicest spots of any in Greece; it's right on the edge of the lake 2km northwest of town.

Hotel Kastro (☎ 26510 22866; www.epirus.com/hotel-kastro; Andronikou Paleologou 57; s/d incl breakfast €65/75; ☎) This charming restored hotel is in a traditional building across from the Kale.

Kale (☎ 26510 64206; Kastro; mains €3-7) While scores of cafés line the waterfront, there are few lovelier places to sit with a cold beer on a sunny day than at atmospheric Kale, in an old stone building in the kale. It serves up good sandwiches, salads and pastas.

Taverna To Manteio (☎ 26510 25452; Plateia Georgiou 15; mains €3-9) The deliciously simple, fresh Greek *mezedes*, salads and grills ensure this place is always packed with locals, particularly on weekends when families come to linger over lunch.

Getting There & Away

Aegean Airlines (code A3; ☎ 26510 64444) and **Olympic Airlines** (code OA; ☎ 26510 26518) fly twice a day to Athens, and Olympic has a daily flight to Thessaloniki.

The **main bus station** (☎ 26510 26404; Zossimadon), 300m north of Plateia Dimokratias, services Athens (€27, 7½ hours, 10 daily), Igoumenitsa (€7, 2½ hours, nine daily),

Thessaloniki (€22, seven hours, five daily) and Trikala (€10, 3½ hours, two daily).

ZAGORIA VILLAGES & VIKOS GORGE ΤΑ ΖΑΓΟΡΟΧΩΡΙΑ & ΧΑΡΑΔΡΑ ΤΟΥ ΒΙΚΟΥ

The spectacular Zagoria region, with its deep gorges, raging rivers, dense forests and snow-capped mountains, covers a large expanse of the Pindos Mountains north of Ioannina. Some 46 charming villages, famous for their grey-slate architecture, and known collectively as the Zagorohoria, are sprinkled across the mountains.

Delightful **Monodendri** is a popular departure point for treks through dramatic **Vikos Gorge**, with its sheer limestone walls. It's a strenuous 7½-hour walk along well-marked paths from here to the atmospheric twin villages of **Megalo Papingo** and **Mikro Papingo**. Get information on the walks from Ioannina's EOT office (opposite).

In Monodendri, the atmospheric **Archontiko Zarkada** (☎ 26530 71305; www.monodendri.com; s/d incl breakfast €35/45) is one of Greece's best (and best-value) small hotels, with friendly service and spacious, comfortable rooms including TV, DVD/CD player, minibar, spa-showers and valley views. Its taverna serves delicious regional specialities.

In Megalo Papingo, **Lakis** (☎ 26530 41087; fax 26530 41120; d €50) is a *domatia*, taverna and store all in one, while Mikro Papingo's rustic **Xenonas Dias** (☎ 26530 41257; s/d €50/65) also has a restaurant that serves tasty meals.

There are buses from Ioannina to Megalo and Mikro Papingo (€5, two hours, three weekly) and to Monodendri (€3, one hour, twice daily).

THESSALONIKI ΘΕΣΣΑΛΟΝΙΚΗ

pop 800,764

Thessaloniki (thess-ah-lo-nee-kih), also known as Salonica (Saloniki), was the second city of Byzantium and is the second city of modern Greece with countless Byzantine churches, a smattering of Roman ruins, engaging museums, shopping to rival Athens, fine restaurants, a lively café scene and a vibrant nightlife.

Orientation

Laid out on a grid system, the main thoroughfares of Tsimiski, Egnatia and Agiou Dimitriou run parallel to Leaf Nikis, on

the waterfront. Plateias Eleftherias and Aristotelous, both off Leaf Nikis, are the main squares.

Information

Bianca Laundrette (Panagias Dexias 3; per 6kg load €6; ☎ 8am-8.30pm Tue, Thu & Fri, 8.30am-3pm Mon, Wed & Sat)

First-aid centre (☎ 23105 30530; Navarhou Koundourioti 10) Near the port.

In Spot: the Internet Place (☎ 23109 68173; Patriarchou loakim 28; per hr €2.50, unlimited hr midnight-noon €6; ☎ 24hr)

Main post office (Aristotelous 26; ☎ 7.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-2.15pm Sat, 9am-1.30pm Sun)

Tourist information office (☎ 23102 21100; the-info_office@gnto.gr; Tsimiski 136; ☎ 8am-2.45pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat)

Tourist police (☎ 23105 54871; 5th fl, Dodekanisou 4; ☎ 7.30am-11pm)

Sights

The award-winning **Museum of Byzantine Culture** (☎ 23108 68570; Leoforos Stratou 2; admission €4; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Mon, 8.30am-3pm Tue-Fri) is one of Greece's best, with splendid sculptures, mosaics, ceramics, jewellery, icons and other intriguing artefacts beautifully displayed. The **Archaeological Museum** (☎ 23108 30538; Manoli Andronikou 6; admission €4; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Mon, 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun) houses some finds from Northern Greece, including splendid Macedonian gold from Alexander the Great's time. The compelling **Thessaloniki Centre of Contemporary Art** (☎ 23105 46683; admission free; ☎ 11am-7pm) and small **Museum of Photography** (☎ 23105 66716; admission free; ☎ 11am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 9pm Sat & Sun) beside the port, are worth an hour of your time.

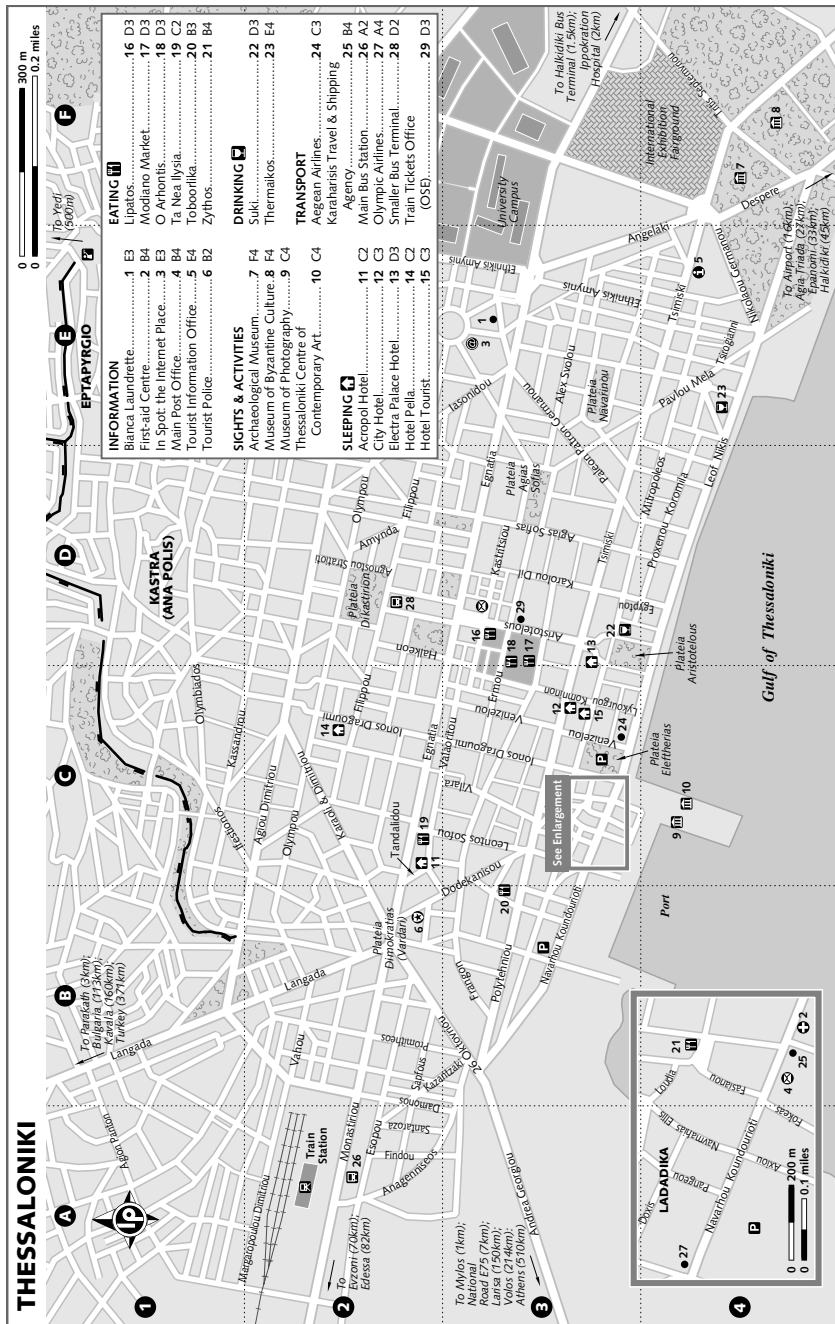
Sleeping

Acropol Hotel (☎ 23105 36170; fax 23105 28492; Tandalidou 4; s/d with shared bathroom €18/26) The best budget option in town has spartan but clean rooms.

Hotel Pella (☎ 23105 24221; pellahot@otenet.gr; Ionos Dragomiri 63; s/d with shared bathroom €35/50) This family-run hotel has spotless rooms with TVs, and breakfast is included.

Hotel Tourist (☎ 23102 70501; fax 23102 26865; Mitropoleos 21; s/d incl breakfast €55/70; ☎) In an old neoclassical hotel, Hotel Tourist has comfortable rooms with TV and air-con.

City Hotel (☎ 23102 69421; www.cityhotel.gr; Komnion 11; s/d €85/105; ☎) This contemporary,



stylish hotel, in an excellent central location, has comfortable rooms with wireless internet and a buffet breakfast.

Electra Palace Hotel (☎ 23102 32221; www.electrahotels.gr; Plateia Aristotelous 9; s/d from €120/150; ♿) This luxurious five-star hotel is Saloniki's finest, with impeccable service, plush rooms, a rooftop bar, indoor and outdoor swimming pools, and a *hammam* (Turkish bath).

Eating & Drinking

O Arhontis (☎ 23102 80202; Ermou 26; mains €4; 🍷 10am-8pm) Eat delicious grilled sausages, potatoes and salads off butcher's paper at this popular working-class eatery at Modiano market.

Ta Nea Ilyssia (☎ 23105 36996; Leontos Sofou 17; mains €6) This no-nonsense taverna serves enormous portions of traditional dishes to a local clientele.

Toboorlika (☎ 23105 48193; Naomahia Limbou 14; mains €6) This authentic *ouzeri*, decorated with musical instruments, gets packed with locals who come for the fresh seafood and to watch the two owners (cousins) perform *rembetika*.

Zythos (☎ 23105 40284; www.zythos.gr; Katouni 5; mains €8) Popular with locals, the friendly staff at this excellent taverna serves up delicious traditional Greek food, interesting regional specialities, good wines by the glass and beers on tap.

Suki (☎ 23102 34027; Plateia Aristotelous 4; 🍷 noon-3am) Of all the funky bars on Plateia Aristotelous this is the most interesting, with its friendly androgynous staff, whimsically decorated interior (think pink chandeliers and lace broly lamps), and dance music.

Thermaikos (☎ 23102 39842; Leof Nikis 21; 🍷 noon-late) This retro-cool bar is the most bohemian of the many Leof Nikis bars, playing funk, jazz and alternative music, and attracting a young arty crowd.

Head to Modiano market for fresh fruit and vegetables, olives and bread; **Lipatos** (☎ 23108 55866; Plateia Aristotelous 23) has the best selection of pitta bread, breads and biscuits hot out of the oven.

Getting There & Away

The train station is on Monastiriou, the westerly continuation of Egnatia beyond Plateia Dimokratias. Thessaloniki's **Makedonia airport** (SKG; ☎ 23104 73700) is 16km

southeast of the centre. **Olympic Airlines** (code OA; ☎ 23103 68666; Koundourioti 3) and **Aegean Airlines** (code A3; ☎ 23102 80050; Venizelou 2) have several flights a day to Athens. Between them they fly to Ioannina, Lesvos, Limnos, Corfu, Iraklio, Mykonos, Chios, Hania, Samos, Crete, Rhodes and Santorini.

The **main bus station** (☎ 23105 95408; Monastiriou 319) services Athens (€32, seven hours, 12 daily) and Ioannina (€23, six hours, five daily) among other destinations. Buses to the Halkidiki Peninsula leave from the smaller **bus terminal** (☎ 23109 24445; Karakasi 68).

Weekly ferries go to Limnos (€21, eight hours), Lesvos (€32, 13 hours) and Chios (€32, 18 hours) throughout the year. **Kararhisis Travel & Shipping Agency** (☎ 23105 24544; fax 23105 32289; Navarhou Koundourioti 8) handles tickets for all ferries and hydrofoils.

From the **train station** (☎ 23105 17517; Monastiriou) there are seven daily express services to Athens (€28, six hours) and two fast trains to Alexandroupolis (€17, 5½ hours). All international trains from Athens (to Belgrade, Sofia, Istanbul etc) stop at Thessaloniki. Get schedules from the **train tickets office** (OSE; ☎ 23105 98120; Aristotelous 18) or the train station.

Bus 78 plies the airport bus route (slowly), while a taxi to/from the airport costs around €15 and takes about 20 minutes.

MT OLYMPUS ΟΛΥΜΠΟΣ ΟΡΟΣ

Greece's highest mountain, Mt Olympus, was the ancient home of the gods. The highest of its eight peaks is Mytikas (2918m), popular with trekkers, who use Lithoro (5km inland from the Athens-Thessaloniki highway) as their base. The **EOS office** (☎ 23520 84544; Plateia Kentriki; 🍷 9.30am-12.30pm & 6-8pm Mon-Sat, Jun-Sep) has information on various treks. The main route to the top takes two days, with a stay overnight at one of the refuges (open May to October). Good protective clothing is essential, even in summer. If you trek outside the official season, you do so at your own risk.

Olympos Beach Camping (☎ 23520 22111/2; www.olympus-beach.gr; Plaka Lithoro; per adult/tent €6/7; 🍷 Apr-Oct) is an excellent camping ground, with decent bungalows, a good taverna, a funky waterfront lounge bar and disco, and a pleasant beach.

An atmospheric old hotel, **Hotel Aphroditis** (☎ 23520 81415; fax 23520 83646; Plateia Kentriki; d/tr

incl breakfast €30/40) has four-poster beds, balconies with views of Olympus, and a cosy bar with a fireplace.

Gastrodromio El Olympio (☎ 23520 21300; www.gastrodromio.gr; Plateia Kentriki; mains €4-11) One of Greece's best country restaurants, with specialities such as *soutzoukakia* (minced meat with cumin and mint), and delicious wild mushrooms, an impressive list of regional wines, and lovely views of Olympus.

From the **bus stop** (☎ 23520 81271) there are 18 buses daily to Thessaloniki (€7, 1½ hours) via Katerini, and three to Athens (€25, 5½ hours).

HALKIDIKI ΧΑΛΚΙΔΙΚΗ

Beautiful pine-covered Halkidiki is a three-pronged peninsula that extends into the Aegean Sea, southeast of Thessaloniki. It has splendid sandy beaches around its 500km of coastline. The middle **Sithonia Peninsula** is the most spectacular, with pine forests and pretty beaches (and rooms to rent everywhere) and is more suited to independent travellers than the overdeveloped **Kassandra Peninsula**. You'll need your own wheels to explore the Halkidiki properly.

Mt Athos Άγιος Όρος

Halkidiki's third prong is occupied by the all-male Monastic Republic of Mt Athos (known in Greek as the Holy Mountain), where monasteries full of priceless treasures stand amid an impressive landscape of gorges, wooded mountains and precipitous rocks. While the process for obtaining a four-day visitor permit is becoming easier, only 10 foreign adult males may enter Mt Athos per day, so the summer waiting list is long. Start by contacting the **Mt Athos Pilgrims' Office** (☎ 23102 52578; fax 23108 22424; gikastheo@yahoo.gr; Egnatia 109, Thessaloniki; ☎ 8.30am-1.30pm & 6-8pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri) to make a booking. Fax your passport copy and, if you are Orthodox, certified evidence of your religion. Once the reservation is confirmed, visit the office to collect your visa (adult/student €35/25). If it's confirmed two weeks in advance, you can proceed straight to the port of Ouranoupolis (the departure point for boats to Mt Athos) and collect the permit there. You can visit 20 monasteries on foot, but you can only stay one night at each of the monasteries you've booked.

ALEXANDROUPOLIS ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥΠΟΛΗ

pop 49,176

Alexandroupolis has very few sights, but its lively student atmosphere makes for a pleasant stopover on the way to Turkey or Samothraki.

Hotel Mitropolis (☎ 25510 26443; fax 25510 89608; Atanasίου Diakou 11; s/d €35/40) is the best budget option, with spotlessly clean rooms that have a TV and fridge. The 4th-floor rooms have enormous terraces. Discounts are offered end of season.

To Nisiotiko (☎ 25510 20990; G Zarifi 1; mains €3-12) is an atmospheric taverna/*louzeri* with traditional blue-and-white décor and fresh flowers. Specialising in seafood, it serves up some of the tastiest food in Greece – try some flaming feta (€3), a plate of grilled octopus (€6) and a bottle of chardonnay from Drama and you'll be in heaven.

Locals seem to do more drinking than eating. A young crowd frequents the scores of café-bars on Leof Dimokratias between Ionos Dragoumi and Mitropolitou Kaviri, the university students hang out at the bars on Nikiforou Foka, while the older folk like the waterfront places.

Head to **Vatitsis Shipping Agency** (☎ 25510 26721; a_vati@otenet.gr; Kyprou 5) for local ferries and tickets to Samothraki and Limnos. **Sever Travel** (☎ 25510 22555; sever1@otenet.gr; Megalou Alexandrou 24) handles long-distance and international ferries, along with airlines. There are a few flights a day to Athens. To Thessaloniki, there are trains (€10, seven hours, six daily) and buses (€20, six hours, six daily). To Istanbul (Turkey) there's a daily train (€22, 10 hours) and a daily OSE bus (€16, five to seven hours), while to Svilengrad (Bulgaria) there's a daily train (€5, four to six hours).

SARONIC GULF ISLANDS ΝΗΣΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΣΑΡΩΝΙΚΟΥ

These islands are scattered about the Saronic Gulf, named after the mythical King Saron of Argos, a keen hunter who drowned while chasing a deer that had swum into the gulf to escape. They are the closest island

group to Athens and their proximity to the congested capital makes them a popular escape. Accommodation is scarce between mid-June and September, and at weekends year-round.

AEGINA ΑΙΓΙΝΑ

pop 13,500

Once a major player in the Hellenic world, thanks to its strategic position at the mouth of the gulf, Aegina (*eh-yee-nah*) is close enough to Athens for workers to commute. A popular destination for day trips, the island also enjoys its position as Greece's premier producer of pistachios.

Bustling **Aegina Town**, on the west coast, is the island's capital and main port. There is no official tourist office, but there are plenty of booking agencies along the waterfront that will be keen to help you out. Further information can be gleaned at www.aeginagreece.com. **Nesant Internet Café** (☎ 22970 24053; Afeas 13; per 10min €1; ☎ 10am-2am) provides internet access.

Lovely **Temple of Aphaia** (☎ 22970 32398; adult/concession €4/2; ☎ 8am-6:30pm), a well-preserved Doric temple 12km east of Aegina Town, served as a model for the construction of the Parthenon. Standing on a pine-clad hill with imposing views out over the gulf, it is well worth a visit. Buses from Aegina Town to the small resort of Agia Marina can drop you at the site.

In Aegina Town, **Hotel Plaza** (☎ 22970 25600; s/d €30/40) is a popular budget choice. More up-market is **Aeginitiko Archontiko** (☎ 22970 24968; www.aeginitikoarchontiko.gr; s/d €60/70; ☎) in a 19th-century sandstone building. Book ahead, especially at weekends.

A flotilla of ferries (€5.90, 70 minutes) and hydrofoils (€10, 35 minutes) plies the waters between Aegina and Piraeus with great regularity. There is a good public bus service on the island.

HYDRA ΥΔΡΑ

pop 2700

Considered the most stylish destination of the group, Hydra (*ee-drah*) has a fine natural horseshoe-shaped harbour with gracious white and pastel stone mansions stacked up the rocky hillsides that surround it. Since the 1950s the island has been a haven for artists, celebrities and writers.

Hydra's main attraction is its tranquility. There are no motorised vehicles – apart from sanitation and construction vehicles – and the main forms of transport are by foot and donkey.

Hydra Town is on the island's north coast. There is no tourist office, but check out www.greeka.com/saronic/hydra for more detailed information. **Satis Tours** (☎ 22980 52184) on the waterfront has a helpful free guide called *Holidays in Hydra*, while just around the corner on Tombazi, **Flamingo Internet Café** (☎ 22980 53485; per 15min €3; ☎ 11am-midnight) has internet access.

Pension Erofilii (☎ 22980 54049; www.pensionerofilii.gr; Tombazi; s/d/tr €40/50/60; ☎) is a popular place to stay, with clean, comfortable rooms, including TV and fridge, and a sizeable inner courtyard. It's about 300m from the harbour. **Hotel Miranda** (☎ 22980 52230; www.mirandahotel.gr; Miaouli; s/d/tr incl breakfast €80/110/165; ☎) is worth a splurge. Originally built in 1810 as the mansion of a wealthy Hydriot sea captain, this stylish place retains much of its historical character.

There are two ferry (€9.80, 3½ hours) and six hydrofoil (€18.10, 1½ hours) services daily between Hydra and Piraeus. The ferries go via Aegina (€6.50, two hours), while the hydrofoils mostly go via Poros (€7.90, 30 minutes).

SPETSES ΣΠΕΤΣΕΣ

pop 4000

Spetses is an attractive island that is packed with visitors in summer. Known in antiquity as Pityoussa (meaning 'pine-covered'), the original pine forests disappeared long ago. The island's present attractiveness is largely thanks to Spetses-born philanthropist Sotirios Anargyrios, who made a fortune in the US after emigrating in 1848. Anargyrios returned in 1914, bought two-thirds of the then-barren island, planted Aleppo pines, financed the island's road system, and commissioned many of the town's grandest buildings.

Spetses Town, the main port, sprawls along half the northeast coast of the island. The **old harbour**, ringed by old Venetian buildings and filled with colourful boats of every shape and size, is a delightful place to explore. The island's coastline is speckled with coves and small, perfect pine-shaded beaches.

There is no tourist office, but **Mimoza Travel** (☎ 22980 75170) on the waterfront in Spetses Town can help with accommodation and other services. Take a look at www.spetsesdirect.com for more information. **1800 Net Café** (☎ 22980 29498; per hr €3; ☎ 9am-midnight) provides Internet access.

Villa Marina (☎ 22980 72646; s/d €40/56; 🍷), located just off Plateia Agios Mamas, beyond the row of restaurants, is a small place with tidy rooms containing a fridge, and there's also a well-equipped communal kitchen.

A daily ferry connects Spetses to Piraeus (€13.50, four hours) via Hydra (€4.90, one hour) and Aegina (€10.10, three hours). There are at least six hydrofoils daily to Piraeus (€23.90, 2½ hours). There are also boats to Kosta, Ermioni and Porto Heli on the Peloponnese mainland.

CYCLADES ΚΥΚΛΑΔΕΣ

The Cyclades (kih-*klah*-dez) are the islands you picture in your mind's eye when you think of the Greek Islands. Named after the rough *kyklos* (circle) they form around the island of Delos, they are rugged outcrops of rock in the azure Aegean, speckled with white cubist buildings and blue-domed Byzantine churches. Throw in sun-blasted golden beaches and a fascinating culture and it's easy to see why many find the Cyclades irresistible.

Some of the islands, such as Mykonos, Ios and Santorini, have seized tourism with great enthusiasm, so you should prepare to battle the crowds if you turn up at the height of summer. Others are little more than clumps of rock, each with a village, secluded coves and a few curious tourists. Ferry services rarely run in winter, while from July to September the Cyclades are vulnerable to the *meltemi*, a fierce northeasterly wind that can cull ferry schedules.

History

The Cyclades enjoyed a flourishing Bronze Age civilisation (3000–1100 BC), more or less concurrent with the Minoan civilisation. Between the 4th and 7th centuries AD, the islands, like the rest of Greece, suffered a series of invasions and occupa-

tions. During the Middle Ages they were raided by pirates – hence the labyrinthine character of their towns, which was meant to confuse attackers. On some islands the whole population moved into the mountainous interior to escape the pirates, while on others they braved it out on the coast. Consequently, the *hora* (main town) is on the coast on some islands, while on others it is inland.

The Cyclades islands became part of independent Greece in 1827. During WWII they were occupied by the Italians. Before the revival of the islands' fortunes by the tourist boom that began during the 1970s, many islanders lived in poverty and many more headed for the mainland or emigrated to America and Australia in search of work.

MYKONOS ΜΥΚΟΝΟΣ

pop 9300

Sophisticated Mykonos shamelessly survives on tourism, but it does it well. The island has something for everyone with marvellous beaches, romantic sunsets, chic boutiques, excellent restaurants and bars, and its long-held reputation as a mecca for gay travellers. The maze of white-walled streets in Mykonos Town were designed to confuse pirates, and they certainly manage to captivate and confuse the crowds that consume the island's capital during the summer.

Orientation & Information

Mykonos Town has two ferry quays. The old quay, where most of the conventional ferries and some fast ferries dock, is 400m north of the town waterfront. The new quay is 2.5km north of town, where buses meet arriving ferries.

There is no tourist office, but at the old port, the same building houses the **Hoteliers Association of Mykonos** (☎ 22890 24540; www.mykonosgreece.com; ☎ 8am-midnight) and the **Association of Rooms, Studios & Apartments** (☎ 22890 26860; ☎ 9am-10pm). Both can book accommodation. **Island Mykonos Travel** (☎ 22890 22232; www.discovergreece.org), on Taxi Sq, where the port road meets the town, is helpful for travel information.

Angelo's Internet Café (☎ 22890 24106; Xenias; per hr €3.50) is on the road between the southern bus station and the windmills.

Sights & Activities

A stroll around Mykonos Town, shuffling through snaking streets with blinding white walls and balconies of flowers is a must for any visitor. **Little Venice**, where the sea laps up to the edge of the restaurants and bars, and Mykonos' famous hilltop row of **windmills** should be included in the spots-to-see list.

The island's most popular beaches are on the southern coast. **Platys Gialos** has wall-to-wall sun lounges, while nudity is not uncommon at **Paradise Beach**, **Super Paradise**, **Agrari** and gay-friendly **Elia**. The less-squashy beaches, further from town, are **Kalo Livadi** and **Kalafatis** in the southeast, and **Panormos** on the northern coast. All can be accessed by bus or *caiques* (small fishing boats).

Sleeping

Rooms in town fill up quickly in the high season. Outside July and August though, they are as cheap as chips.

Mykonos has two camping areas, both on the south coast. Minibuses from both

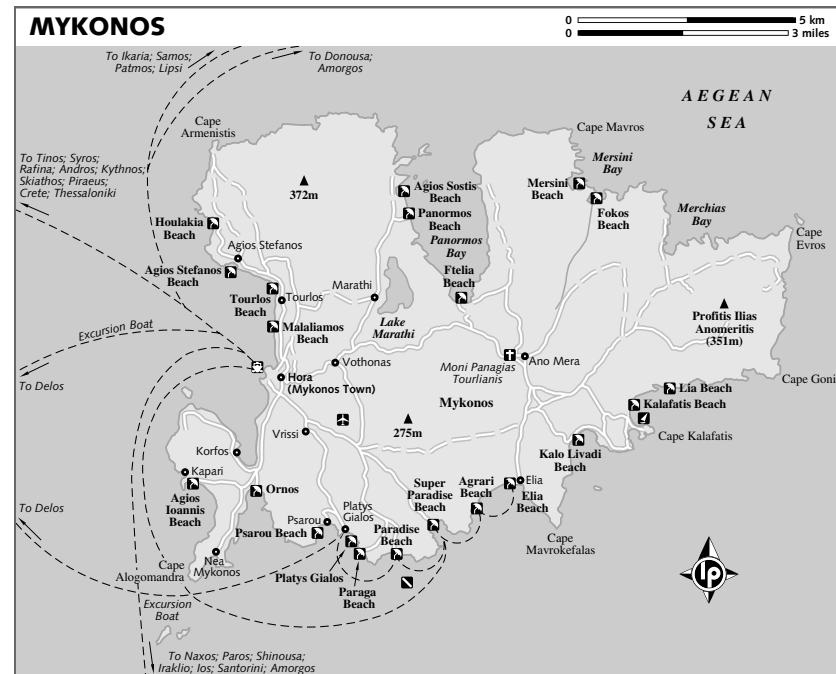
meet the ferries and buses go regularly into town.

Paradise Beach Camping (☎ 22890 22852; www.paradisemykonos.com; per person/tent €8/4; 🏕️) There are lots of options here, including beach cabins and apartments, as well as bars, a swimming pool, games etc. It is skin-to-skin mayhem in summer with a real party atmosphere.

Mykonos Camping (☎ 22890 24578; www.mykonoscamp.gr; per person/tent €8/4) This place, right on Paraga Beach, also has plenty of options, ranging from tents to dorm rooms to apartments. There's a minimarket, self-service restaurant and bar.

Hotel Apollon (☎ 22890 22223; fax 22890 24237; Paralia, Mykonos Town; s/d with shared bathroom €50/65) Prepare for some old-world Mykonian charm in the middle of the main waterfront. Rooms are traditional and well-kept, and the owner is friendly.

Hotel Philippi (☎ 22890 22294; chriko@otenet.gr; 25 Kalogera, Mykonos Town; s/d €60/75) In the heart of the *hora*, Philippi has spacious, bright, clean rooms that open onto a railed veranda overlooking a lush garden. An extremely pleasant place to stay.



Eating & Drinking

There is no shortage of places to eat and drink in Mykonos Town.

Antonini's (☎ 22890 22319; Taxi Sq; dishes €3.50-12.50) A local hang-out with standard, but reliable Greek food, Antonini's offers a different view from its terrace overlooking Taxi Sq.

Madupas (☎ 22890 22224; Paralia; dishes €5-12) On the waterfront, Madupas serves a mean Mykonian sausage and is a great spot to chill out with a Mythos and watch the parade of passers-by.

Katerina's Bar (☎ 22890 23084; Agion Anargion) In Little Venice, this place has superb views from its balcony and water lapping below your feet.

Cavo Paradiso (☎ 22890 27205; www.cavoparadiso.gr; admission from €20) For those who want to go the whole hog, this club 300m above Paradise Beach picks up around 2am and boasts a pool the shape of Mykonos. A bus transports clubbers from town in summer.

Long feted as a gay travel destination, Mykonos has plenty of gay-centric clubs and hang-outs. In Little Venice, **Kastro** (☎ 22890 23072; Agion Anargion) is the spot to start the night with cocktails as the sun sets. **Pierro's** (☎ 22890 22177), just near Taxi Sq, is a popular dance club for rounding off the night.

Getting There & Around

There are daily flights connecting Mykonos airport (JMK) to Athens (€94). **Olympic Airlines** (code 0A; ☎ 22890 22490; Plateia Remezzo) is by the southern bus station, or call **Aegean Airlines** (code A3; ☎ 22890 28720; airport). **Sky Express** (code SEH; ☎ 28102 23500; www.skyexpress.gr) flies to Iraklio (Crete), Santorini and Rhodes with varying regularity.

Daily ferries arrive from Piraeus (€23.60, six hours). From Mykonos, there are daily ferries and hydrofoils to most major Cycladic islands, regular services to Crete, and less-frequent services to the northeastern Aegean Islands and the Dodecanese. Head to Island Mykonos Travel (p370) for details and tickets.

The northern bus station is near the old port. It serves Agios Stefanos, Elia, Kalafatis and Ano Mera. The southern bus station, a 300m walk up from the windmills, serves Agios Ioannis, Psarou, Platys Gialos, Ornos and Paradise Beach. In summer, *caiques*

from Mykonos Town and Platys Gialos putter to Paradise, Super Paradise, Agrari and Elia beaches.

DELOS ΔΗΛΟΣ

Southwest of Mykonos, the island of **Delos** (☎ 22890 22259; sites & museum €5; ☎ 9am-3pm Tue-Sun) is the Cyclades' archaeological jewel, and the opportunity to wander among the ruins shouldn't be missed.

According to mythology, Delos was the birthplace of Apollo – the god of light, poetry, music, healing and prophecy. The island flourished as an important religious and commercial centre from the 3rd millennium BC, reaching its apex of power in the 5th century BC.

Ruins include the **Sanctuary of Apollo**, containing temples dedicated to him, and the **Terrace of the Lions**. These proud beasts were carved in the early 6th century BC using marble from Naxos to guard the sacred area. The original lions are in the island's museum, with replicas on the original site. The **Sacred Lake** (dry since 1926) is where Leto supposedly gave birth to Apollo, while the **Theatre Quarter** is where private houses were built around the **Theatre of Delos**.

The climb up **Mt Kynthos** (113m), the island's highest point, is a highlight. The view of Delos and the surrounding islands is spectacular, and it's easy to see how the Cyclades got their name.

To appreciate the site, pick up a guidebook or take a guided tour. Take a sunhat, sunscreen, sturdy footwear, food and drinks. Overnighting on Delos is forbidden and the island's cafeteria is no more.

Numerous companies offer excursions from Mykonos to Delos (€10 return, 30 minutes) between 9am and 12.50pm. The return boats leave Delos between noon and 3pm. Boats also operate to Delos from Tinos (€25) and Paros (€40).

PAROS ΠΑΡΟΣ

pop 12,850

Paros is an attractive laid-back island with an interesting main town, good swimming beaches and terraced hills that build up to Mt Profitis Ilias (770m). It has long been prosperous, thanks to an abundance of pure almost-translucent white marble from which the *Venus de Milo* and Napoleon's tomb were sculpted. Paros is the ferry hub

for the Cyclades, so you may pass through, even if you're not intending to stay.

Orientation & Information

Paros' main town and port is Parikia, on the west coast. Opposite the ferry terminal, on the far side of Windmill roundabout, is Plateia Mavrogenous, the main square. Agora, also known as Market St, the main commercial thoroughfare, runs southwest from the far end of the square.

There is no tourist office, but travel agencies such as **Santorineos Travel** (☎ 22840 24245; bookings@santorineos-travel.gr), on the waterfront near Windmill roundabout, oblige with information. Check also www.parosweb.com. Opposite the ferry quay, to the left, is **Memphis.net** (☎ 22840 23768; per 15min €1; ☎ 9am-midnight), which provides internet access.

Sights & Activities

Panagia Ekatonapyliani (Our Lady of the Hundred Gates; ☎ 22840 21243; ☎ 7.30am-9.30pm), known for its beautiful ornate interior, is one of the most impressive churches in the Cyclades, dating from AD 326. Within the

church compound, the **Byzantine Museum** (Parikia; admission €1.50; ☎ 9.30am-2pm & 6-9pm) has an interesting collection of icons and other artefacts.

A great option on Paros is to rent a scooter at one of the many outlets in Parikia and ride around the island. There are sealed roads the whole way around, and the opportunity to explore villages such as **Naoussa**, **Marpissa** and **Aliki**, and swim at beaches such as **Logaras**, **Punda** and **Golden Beach**. Naoussa is a cute little fishing village on the northeastern coast that is all geared up to welcome tourists.

Less than 2km from Paros, the small island of **Antiparos** has fantastic beaches, which have made it wildly popular. The chief attraction is its **cave** (admission €3.50; ☎ 10.15am-3pm Jun-Sep), considered to be one of Europe's best.

Sleeping

The **Rooms Association** (☎ 22840 22722; ☎ 9am-1am) has a helpful kiosk on the quay. There's loads of camping around Paros, with charges of around €6 per person and €4 per tent.



Koula Camping (☎ 22840 22081; www.campingkoula.gr) At Livadia beach, this campground is about 500m north of Parikia's waterfront. There is a restaurant and a minimarket here.

Naoussa Camping (☎ 22840 51595; http://campingnaoussa.parosweb.com) On the north coast at Kolimvythres Beach near Naoussa, this place provides free transport from the port or airport.

Rooms Mike (☎ 22840 22856; roommike@otenet.gr; s/d/tr €25/35/45) A popular place with backpackers, Mike's offers good value, a shared kitchen, a roof terrace and friendly local advice. Walk 100m east from the port and it's next to Memphis.net.

Rooms Rena (☎ 22840 22220; www.cycladesnet.gr/rena; Epitropakis; s/d/tr €25/40/50; ♿) One of the top choices in town, the quiet and well-kept rooms here are excellent value. To get here, turn left from the pier then right at the ancient cemetery.

Hotel Argonauta (☎ 22840 21440; www.argonauta.gr; s/d/tr €57/68/81; ♿) On the main square of the old town, the recently renovated Argonauta has a more traditional feel than Rena. The rooms are sunny with balconies, and the hotel's excellent restaurant is right out front.

Eating & Drinking

Happy Green Cows (☎ 22840 24691; dishes from €5; ☎ 7pm-midnight) Just off the back of the main square, this place is popular with vegetarians. The menu and meal names are both creative, and the bar stays open after the kitchen closes.

Porphyra (☎ 22840 22693; dishes from €5) A family-run place, Porphyra serves excellent fresh seafood next to the ancient cemetery.

Café Micro (☎ 22840 24674; Market St) This bright spot in the heart of the old town has filling breakfasts (€4), coffee, fruit and vegetarian juices by day, and drinks and music by night.

Pebbles Bar (☎ 22840 22283) Perched above the waterfront, Pebbles has stunning views, and plays classical music by day and jazz in the evenings.

Getting There & Around

Paros' airport (PAS) has daily flight connections with Athens (€72); contact **Olympic Airlines** (code OA; ☎ 22840 21900; Plateia Mavrogenous, Parikia) for details.

Parikia is a major ferry hub with daily connections to Piraeus (€23.40, five hours) and frequent ferries and catamarans to Naxos, Ios, Santorini, Mykonos and Crete. The fast boats generally take half the time but are more expensive, eg a fast boat to Piraeus costs €39.10. The Dodecanese and the northeastern Aegean Islands are also well serviced from here. Head to Santorineos Travel (p373) for tickets.

From Parikia there are frequent bus services to the entire island. In summer there are hourly excursion boats to Antiparos from Parikia port, or you can catch a bus to Pounta and ferry it across.

NAXOS ΝΑΞΟΣ

pop 18,200

Naxos, the biggest and greenest of the Cyclades, enjoys its reputation as a family destination. Deeply fertile, Naxos produces olives, figs, citrus, corn and potatoes, and, unlike many of its neighbouring islands, could probably survive without tourism. The island is well worth taking the time to explore with its fascinating main town, excellent beaches and striking interior.

Orientation & Information

Naxos Town, on the west coast, is the island's capital and port. The ferry quay is at the northern end of the waterfront, with the bus terminal out front. The island website is www.naxos-greece.net.

Naxos Tourist Information Centre (NTIC) (☎ 22850 25201; www.naxostownhotels.com; ☎ 8am-midnight), a privately owned organisation just opposite the port offers help with accommodation, tours, luggage storage and laundry. Next door, **Zas Travel** (☎ 22850 23330; ☎ 8am-midnight) sells ferry tickets and offers internet access for €4 an hour.

Sights & Activities

Behind the waterfront in Naxos Town, narrow alleyways scramble up to the spectacular hilltop 13th-century **kastro**, where the Venetian Catholics lived. The *kastro* looks out over the town, and has a well-stocked **archaeological museum** (☎ 22850 22725; admission €3; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun).

The beach of **Agios Georgios** is a 10-minute walk south from the main waterfront. Beyond it, wonderful sandy beaches stretch as far south as **Pyrgaki Beach**. **Agia Anna Beach**, 6km

from town, and **Plaka Beach** are lined with accommodation and packed in summer.

A rental car or scooter will help reveal Naxos' dramatic landscape. The **Tragaea region** has tranquil villages, churches atop rocky crags and huge olive groves. **Filoti**, the largest inland settlement, perches on the slopes of **Mt Zeus** (1004m), the highest peak in the Cyclades.

In **Apollonas** there's the mysterious 10.5m **kouros** (naked male statue), constructed c 7th century, lying abandoned and unfinished in an ancient marble quarry.

Sleeping

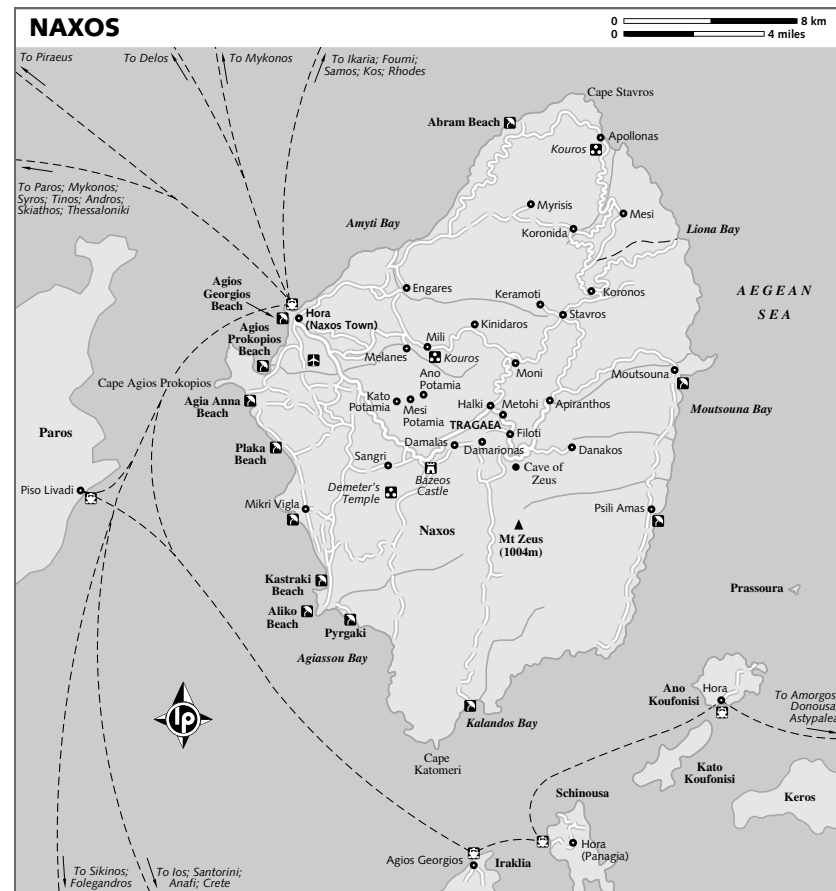
Owners of *domatia* and camping grounds meet ferries, picking up those with a

booking and competing for those without. There are good beachside camping grounds south of town, charging around €5 per person.

Camping Maragas (☎ 22850 42552; www.maragascamping.gr/naxos-camping.htm) On Agia Anna Beach, this place has all sorts of options, including camping, rooms and studios, and there is a restaurant and minimarket on site.

Plaka Camping (☎ 22850 42700; www.plakacamping.gr) At Plaka Beach (8km from town), this camping ground is on a long beautiful sandy white beach and offers a restaurant, internet access and a minimarket.

Hotel Grotta (☎ 22850 22215; www.hotelgrotta.gr; s/d ind breakfast €50/70; ♿) Overlooking



Grotta Beach at the northern end of town, this modern hotel has comfortable and immaculate rooms, and offers great sea views.

Pension Sofi (☎ 22850 23077; www.pensionsofi.gr; d & tr €30-60) and **Studios Panos** (☎ 22850 26078; www.studiospanos.com; Agios Georgios Beach; d & tr €30-60; 🍷) are both in town and run by members of the friendly Koufopoulos family. All guests are met with a glass of family-made wine or ouzo, and rooms are immaculate and have bathroom and kitchen. Highly recommended; rates at both places halve out of the high season.

Eating & Drinking

Naxos Town's waterfront is lined with eating and drinking establishments.

Meze 2 (☎ 22850 26401; Paralia; dishes €2.50-9) An excellent old-style *mezedopoleio-ouzeri* (restaurant specialising in appetisers and ouzo), this place is popular with locals and serves superb seafood dishes.

Picasso Mexican Bistro (☎ 22850 25408; dishes from €5) This is a stylish and popular place that does sensational Tex-Mex 20m off Court Sq, a few minutes' walk south of the main waterfront.

Lemon (☎ 22850 24734; Protospadaki) A great spot right in the middle of the waterfront, relax with a drink here and watch the world go by.

Ocean (☎ 22850 26766; admission €5-8; 🍷 from 11:30pm) At the southern end of the waterfront, this place goes wild after midnight, featuring guest DJs and some modern Greek music.

Getting There & Around

Naxos airport (JNX) has daily flight connections with Athens (€56), and Olympic Airlines is represented by **Naxos Travel** (☎ 22850 22095). There are daily ferries (€23.10, five hours) and catamarans (€39.10, 3¾ hours) to Piraeus, and good ferry and hydrofoil connections to most Cycladic islands and Crete. There are also ferries to Thessaloniki (€34.50, 15 hours, weekly) and Rhodes (€22.80, 14 hours, twice weekly). Zs Travel (p374) can provide details and sell tickets.

Buses travel to most villages regularly from the bus terminal in front of the port. Car and motorcycle rentals are available off Court Sq.

IOS IOΣ

While some would like to see Ios shake off its tag of 'Party Island', for others partying is the prime reason for going there. There are wall-to-wall bars and nightclubs in 'the village' (Hora) that thump all night, and fantastic fun facilities at Milopotas Beach that entertain all day.

But there's more to Ios than just hedonistic activities. British poet and novelist Lawrence Durrell thought highly of Ios as a place of poetry and beauty, and there is an enduring claim that Homer was buried on Ios, with his alleged tomb in the north of the island.

Orientation & Information

Ios' three population centres are all close together on the west coast. Ormos is the port where ferries arrive. Two kilometres inland and up from the port is the capital, Hora, while 2km down from Hora to the southeast is Milopotas Beach. The young tend to stay in 'the village' or Milopotas, and the others at Ormos.

There is no tourist office, but **Acteon Travel** (☎ 22860 91343; www.acteon.gr) has offices in Ormos, the village, and Milopotas and is helpful. It also has internet access (per hour €5). Check out www.iosgreece.com.

Sights & Activities

The village has an intrinsic charm with its labyrinth of white-walled streets, and it's very easy to get lost, even if you haven't had one too many.

Apart from the nightlife, it's the beaches that lure travellers to Ios. While **Gialos Beach** near the port is crowded, **Koubara Beach**, a 1.3km walk west of Gialos, is less so and is the official nudist beach. **Milopotas** has everything a resort beach could ask for and parties hard. Isolated **Manganari** on the south coast has four sandy beaches that are reached by bus or excursion boat in summer.

Sleeping

Far Out Beach Club (☎ 22860 91468; www.faroutclub.com; Milopotas; camping per person €7, bungalow €15, r €25-60; 🍷 🍷) Right on Milopotas Beach, this place has tons of facilities, including camping, bungalows and hotel rooms, and its four pools are open to the public. Details are on the website.

Francesco's (☎ 22860 91223; www.francescos.net; Hora; dm/s/d €11/30/40; 🍷) A lively meeting place in the village with superlative views from its terrace bar, Francesco's is convenient for party-going and rates halve out of the high season. The party spirit rules here.

Hotel Nissos Ios (☎ 22860 91610; www.nissosios hotel.gr; Milopotas; dm/s/d €25/45/65; 🍷) This bright, cheerful place is on Milopotas Beach. Rooms feature massive colourful wall murals, and there is a good restaurant on site.

Hotel Poseidon (☎ 22860 91091; www.poseidon hotelios.gr; Ormos; s/d/tr €65/75/95; 🍷) Near the ferry quay in Ormos, the Poseidon offers superb views, spacious rooms and a refreshing pool for a quieter stay on Ios.

Eating & Drinking

There are numerous places to get cheap eats such as gyros in the village.

Porky's (☎ 22860 91143; Hora) Just off the main square, this place is legendary for its good-value tasty toasts and hamburgers.

Susana (☎ 22860 51108; Ormos; dishes from €2.50) Down at the port, Susana is regularly full of

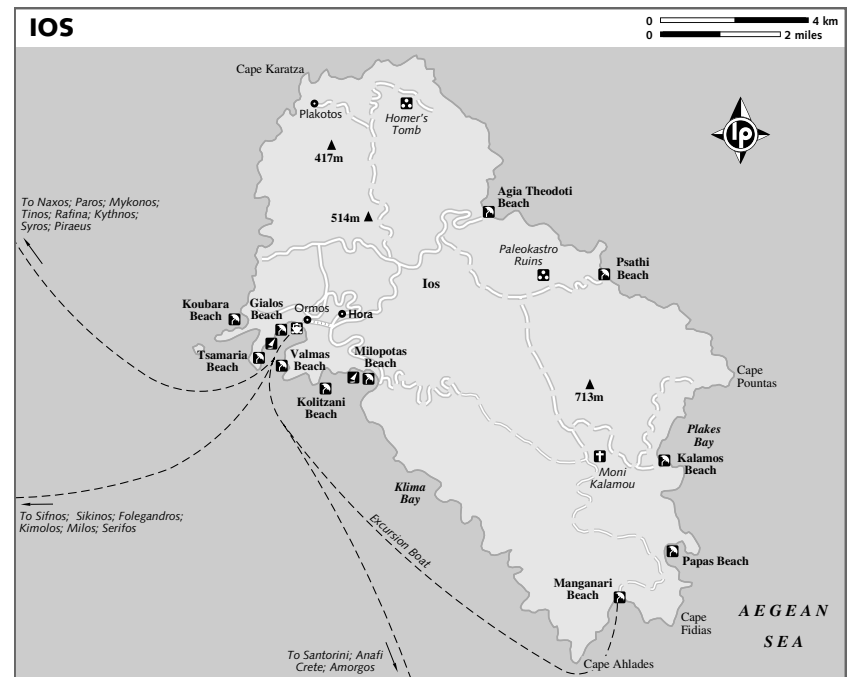
locals. Its pastas and pizzas are particularly popular.

Ali Baba's (☎ 22860 91558; Hora; dishes €6-10) Long an Ios favourite, Ali Baba's parties until late. Upbeat service complements the funky ambience. The meals are of humungous proportions, especially the Dinosaur Ribs.

At night, the compact little village erupts with bars. Its tiny central square gets so packed that by midnight you won't be able to fall over even if you want to. Perennial favourites include **Red Bull** (☎ 22860 91019), **Slammers** (☎ 22860 92119) and **Blue Note** (☎ 22860 92271).

Getting There & Around

Ios has daily ferry connections with Piraeus (€21, seven hours) and there are frequent hydrofoils and ferries to the major Cycladic islands and Crete. There are buses every 15 minutes between the port, the village and Milopotas Beach until early morning, and two to three a day to Manganari Beach (€6, 45 minutes). Head to Acteon Travel (opposite) for details and tickets.



SANTORINI (THIRA) ΣΑΝΤΟΡΙΝΗ (ΘΗΡΑ)

pop 13,400

Stunning Santorini, shaped like a doughnut with a bite taken out of its south-western side, is unique and should not be missed. Viewed from a boat in the doughnut's hole, the startling sight of the submerged caldera almost encircled by sheer lava-layered cliffs – topped off by cliff-top towns that look like a dusting of icing sugar – will grab your attention and not let it go. If you turn up in the high season though, be prepared for relentless crowds and commercialism because Santorini survives on tourism.

Orientation & Information

Santorini's capital, Fira, perches on top of the caldera on the west coast, with the new port of Athinios, where most ferries dock, 10km south by road. The old port of Fira Skala, used by cruise ships and excursion boats, is directly below Fira and accessed by cable-car (adult/child €3/1.50 one way), donkey (€3; up only) or by foot (588 steps).

The bus station and taxi station are located just south of Fira's main square, Plateia Theotokopoulou.

Dakoutros Travel (☎ 22860 22958; www.dakoutros.travel.gr; ☎ 8.30am-10pm), opposite the taxi station, is extremely helpful, and there is a batch of other agencies around the square. Internet access is available at **PC World** (☎ 22860 25551; Central Sq; per 30min €2.10). The post office is one block south of the taxi station.

Sights & Activities

FIRA

The stunning caldera views from Fira are unparalleled.

The exceptional **Museum of Prehistoric Thira** (☎ 22860 23217; admission €3; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun), which has wonderful displays of artefacts predominantly from ancient Akrotiri, is two blocks south of the main square.

Megaron Gyzi Museum (☎ 22860 22244; admission €3; ☎ 10.30am-1.30pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-4.30pm Sun), behind the Catholic cathedral, houses local memorabilia, including photographs of Fira before and after the 1956 earthquake.

SANTORINI'S BIG BANGS

Santorini, officially known as Thira, is regarded by many as the most spectacular of all the Greek islands. Its violent volcanic past is visible everywhere, and through the centuries eruptions have regularly changed the shape of the island.

Always unstable, Santorini was once part of a series of volcanoes over a million years ago. First inhabited around 3000 BC, the island was circular and known as Strongili (the Round One). Human settlers arrived to take advantage of the island's fertile soil during a period of volcanic dormancy, and from evidence found at Akrotiri on the southern coast, it seems that they led idyllic lives and fashioned a highly sophisticated culture.

About 1650 BC, a massive volcanic explosion – speculated to be the biggest such explosion in recorded history – caused the centre of the island to sink, producing a caldera that the sea quickly filled in. The explosion generated a huge tsunami that caused havoc around the Aegean, and it is widely believed that the catastrophe was responsible for the demise of Crete's powerful Minoan culture.

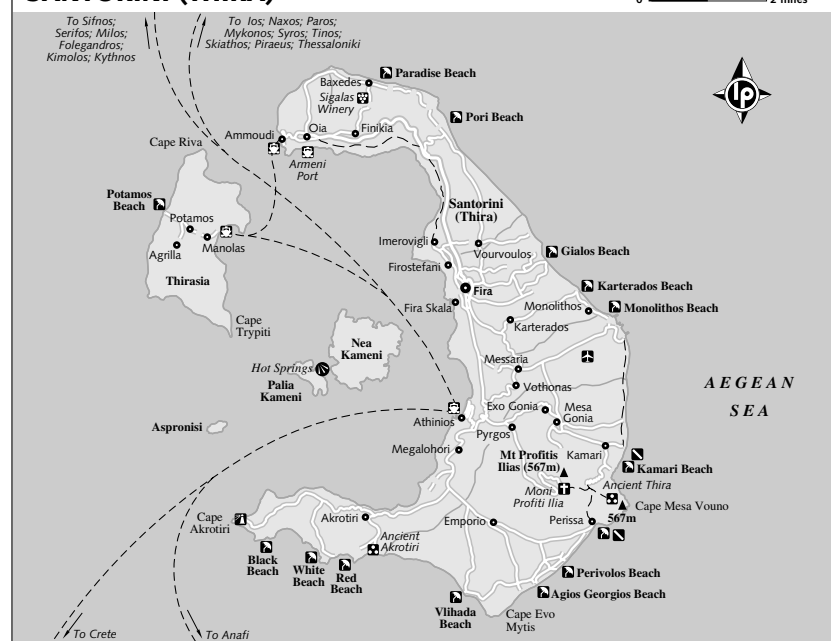
In 236 BC further volcanic activity separated Thirasia from the main island. The islet of Palia Kameni appeared in the caldera in 197 BC, and in AD 726 a major blast catapulted pumice as far as Asia Minor. The island's south coast collapsed in 1570, taking the ancient port of Eleusis with it, while an eruption created the islet of Nea Kameni in 1707.

In 1956 a savage earthquake measuring 7.8 on the Richter scale pummelled the island, killing scores of people and destroying most of the houses in Fira and Oia.

One thing is for certain – it isn't over yet. Minor tremors are fairly common. Santorini is incomparable when it comes to a sense of impermanence and precariousness.

Those wishing to play in the volcanic wonderland can bake on Santorini's sizzling black-sand beaches, clamber around on volcanic lava on Nea Kameni or swim in the warm sea at Palia Kameni.

SANTORINI (THIRA)



AROUND THE ISLAND

Santorini's black-sand beaches of **Perissa** and **Kamari** sizzle – beach mats are essential. It's a strange feeling to walk over black sand then out onto smooth lava when going for a dip.

Excavations in 1967 uncovered the remarkably well-preserved Minoan settlement of **Akrotiri** at the south of the island with its remains of two- and three-storey buildings. A section of the roof collapsed in 2005 killing one visitor, and at the time of research, the site's future as a visitor attraction was up in the air.

On the north of the island, the flawless village of **Oia** (ee-ah), famed for its postcard sunsets, is less hectic than Fira and a must-visit. Its caldera-facing tavernas are superb spots for brunch. There's a path from Fira to Oia along the top of the caldera that takes about three hours to walk.

Of the surrounding islets, only **Thirasia** is inhabited. Visitors can clamber around on volcanic lava on **Nea Kameni** then swim into warm springs in the sea at **Palia Kameni**; there are various excursions available to get you there.

Sleeping

Decide where you want to stay before the aggressive accommodation owners who meet the boats try to decide things for you. Fira has spectacular views, but is miles from the beaches. Perissa has a great beach but is on the southeast coast, away from the caldera views.

Santorini Camping (☎ 22860 22944; www.santorini.camping.gr; Fira; per person €8; (P) (C)) This place, 500m east of Fira's main square, is the cheapest option. There is a restaurant, bar, minimarket and swimming pool, but no caldera views.

Maria's Rooms (☎ 22860 25143; Agiou Mina, Fira; d €60; (C)) On the southern edge of town, Maria's has small but immaculate rooms, and stunning caldera views from its terrace.

Stelio's Place (☎ 22860 81860; www.steliosplace.com; Perissa; d/tr/q €60/75/100; (P) (C) (A)) Stelio's is an excellent option just back from Perissa's black-sand beach on the south-east coast. There's a refreshing pool, very friendly service, and free port and airport transfers. Rates more than halve out of the high season.

Hotel Ketí (☎ 22860 22324; www.hotelketi.gr; Agiou Mina, Fira; d/tr €75/97.50; 🏠) Just to the north of Maria's Rooms, with caldera views to die for, Hotel Ketí has satellite TV and refrigerators in each of its immaculate rooms.

Eating & Drinking

Cheap eateries are in abundance around the square in Fira.

Taverna Lava (☎ 22860 81776; Perissa; dishes €3-8) On Perissa's waterfront, this island-wide favourite has a mouth-watering menu. You can visit the kitchen and pick what looks good.

Naoussa (☎ 22860 24869; Erythrou Stavrou, Fira; dishes €3-20) This restaurant serves excellent-value Greek classics.

Nikolas (☎ 22860 24550; Erythrou Stavrou, Fira; dishes €5-10) This long-established traditional place serving Greek cuisine in the heart of Fira receives rave reviews from diners. From the main square, head straight up the pedestrian mall (Danezi) and take the first right.

Most of the more popular bars and clubs in Fira are clustered along Erythrou Stavrou.

Kira Thira (☎ 22860 22770) Opposite Nikolas restaurant, Kira Thira is Fira's oldest bar and plays smooth jazz, ethnic sounds and occasional live music.

Full Moon Bar (☎ 22860 81177; 🌙 9pm-late) On the main street in Perissa, this lively night-spot goes off until the wee hours.

Getting There & Around

Santorini airport (JTR) has daily flight connections with Athens (€94). Call **Olympic Airlines** (code OA; ☎ 22860 22493) or **Aegean Airlines** (code A3; ☎ 22860 28500) for details. **Sky Express** (code SEH; ☎ 28102 23500; www.skyexpress.gr) has connections with Crete, Mykonos and Rhodes with varying regularity.

There are daily ferries (€27.80, nine hours) and fast boats (€45, 5½ hours) to Piraeus; daily connections in summer to Mykonos, Ios, Naxos, Paros and Iraklio; and ferries to the smaller islands in the Cyclades. Large ferries use Athinios port, where they are met by buses (€1.20) and taxis. Get your tickets from Dakoutros Travel (p378).

Buses go frequently to Oia, Kamari, Perissa and Akrotiri from Fira. Port buses usually leave Fira, Kamari and Perissa one to 1½ hours before ferry departures. A rental car or scooter is a great option on Santorini.

CRETE ΚΡΗΤΗ

pop 540,000

Greece's largest and most southerly island, Crete, with its dramatic landscape and unique cultural identity, is a delight to explore. Its size and distance from the rest of Greece gives Crete the feel of a different country.

The island is split by a spectacular chain of mountains running east to west. Major

towns are on the more hospitable northern coast, while most of the southern coast is too precipitous to support large settlements. The rugged mountainous interior, dotted with caves and sliced by dramatic gorges, offers rigorous trekking and climbing.

While Crete's proud, friendly and hospitable people have enthusiastically embraced mass tourism, they continue to fiercely protect their traditions and culture – and it is the people that remain a major part of the island's appeal.

For more detailed information, snap up a copy of Lonely Planet's *Crete*. Good websites on Crete include www.interkriti.org, www.infocrete.com and www.explorecrete.com.

History

Crete was the birthplace of Minoan culture, Europe's first advanced civilisation, which flourished between 2800 and 1450 BC. Very little is known of Minoan civilisation, which came to an abrupt end, possibly destroyed by Santorini's volcanic eruption in around 1650 BC. Later, Crete passed from the warlike Dorians to the Romans, and then to the Genoese, who in turn sold it to the Venetians. Under the Venetians, Crete became a refuge for artists, writers and philosophers who fled Constantinople after it fell to the Turks. Their influence inspired the young Cretan painter Domenikos Theotokopoulos, who moved to Spain and there won immortality as the great El Greco.

The Turks conquered Crete in 1670. In 1898 it became a British protectorate after a series of insurrections and was united with independent Greece in 1913. There was fierce fighting during WWII when a German airborne invasion defeated Allied forces in the 10-day Battle of Crete. A fierce resistance movement drew heavy German reprisals, including the slaughter of whole villages.

IRAKLIO ΗΡΑΚΛΕΙΟ

pop 131,000

Iraklio (ee-rah-klee-oh; often spelt Heraklion), Crete's capital, is a bustling modern city and the fifth-largest in Greece. It has a lively city centre, an excellent archaeological museum and is close to Knossos, Crete's major visitor attraction. The city has undergone a significant makeover in recent years, partly due to being chosen as an Olympic city, but mostly because of increasing prosperity.

Orientation & Information

Iraklio's harbours face north into the Sea of Crete. The old harbour is instantly recognisable as it is protected by the old Venetian fortress. The new harbour is 400m east. Plateia Venizelou, the main square, is the heart of the city, 400m south of the old harbour, up a main drag called 25 Avgoustou.

There is no official tourist office, but there is good information at www.heraklion-city.gr. **KTEL** (www.ktel.org), which runs the buses on Crete, has useful tourist information inside Bus Station A.

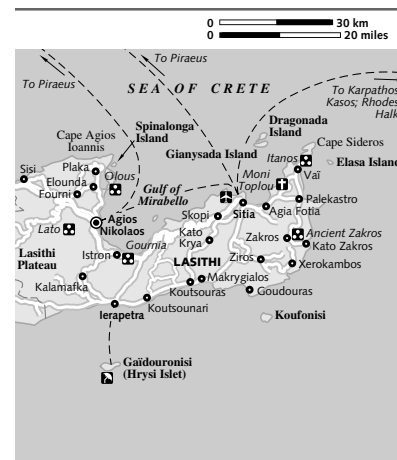
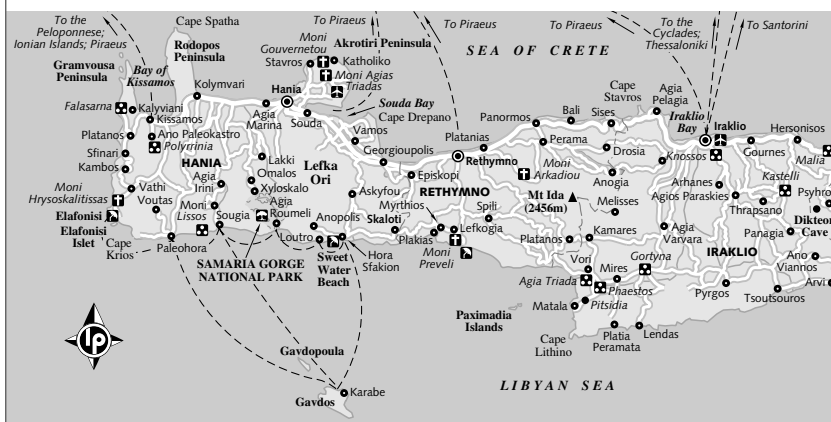
Skoutelis Travel (☎ 28102 80808; www.skoutelis.gr; 25 Avgoustou 20), between Plateia Venizelou and the old harbour, handles airline and ferry bookings, and rents cars. **Gallery Games** (☎ 28102 82804; www.gallerygames.net; Korai 14; per hr €1.50; 🌙 24hr) has high-speed internet access.

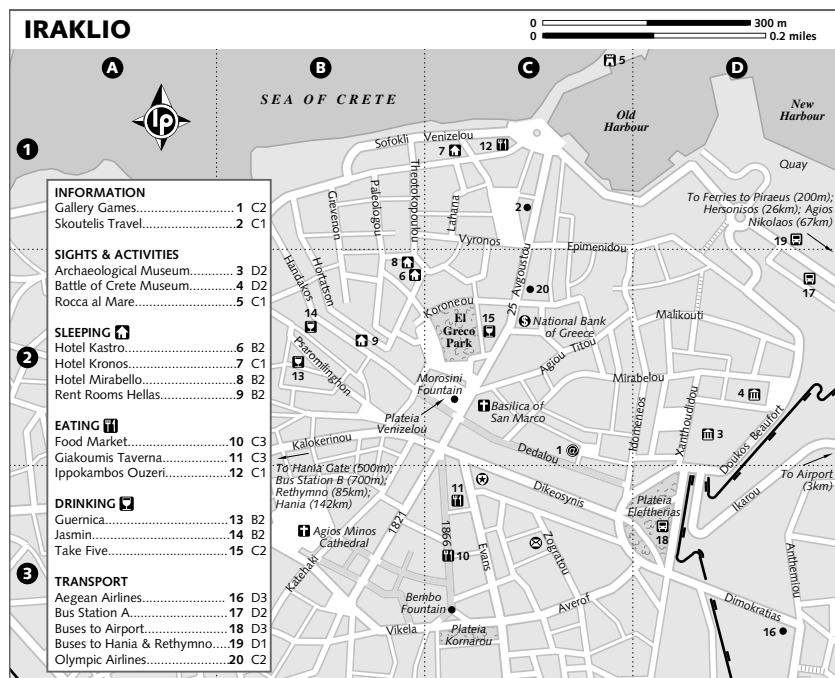
Sights

Iraklio's **archaeological museum** (☎ 28102 26092; Xanthoudidou 2; adult/student €6/3; 🌙 12.30-7pm Mon, 8am-7pm Tue-Sun) has an outstanding Minoan collection, second only to the national museum in Athens.

Protecting the old harbour is the impressive fortress **Rocca al Mare** (☎ 28102 46211; adult/student €2/1; 🌙 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun), which, like

CRETE





the city walls, was built by the Venetians in the 16th century.

The **Battle of Crete Museum** (☎ 28103 46554; cnr Doukos Beaufort & Hatzidaki; admission free; ☞ 8am-3pm) chronicles the historic WWII battle with photographs, letters, uniforms and weapons.

Sleeping

Rent Rooms Hellas (☎ 28102 88851; Handakos 24; dm/d/tr with shared bathroom €10/30/40) A popular budget choice, this place has a lively atmosphere, packed dorms, a rooftop bar and a bargain breakfast (€2.50).

Hotel Mirabello (☎ 28102 85052; www.mirabello-hotel.gr; Theotokopoulou 20; s/d €37/40; ☞) A pleasant, relaxed budget hotel on a quiet street in the centre of town, this place is run by an ex-sea captain who has travelled the world. Check out the excellent website.

Hotel Kronos (☎ 28102 82240; www.kronoshotel.gr; Sofokli Venizelou 2; s/d €49/65; ☞) Down by the old harbour, this well-maintained older hotel has large, airy rooms that come with phone and TV. Ask for a room with a sea view.

Hotel Kastros (☎ 28102 84185; www.kastro-hotel.gr; Theotokopoulou 22; s/d €110/135; ☞) Next to Hotel Mirabello, this upmarket place has large rooms with fridges and satellite TV. A 35% discount is offered for internet reservations.

Eating & Drinking

There's a congregation of cheap eateries in the Plateia Venizelou and El Greco Park area, as well as a bustling, colourful market all the way along 1866. Pedestrianised Dedalou is the heart of the café and dining scene.

Giakoumis Taverna (☎ 28102 80277; Theodosaki 5-8; dishes €2.50-8; ☞ closed Sun) With its full menu of Cretan specialities, Giakoumis is the best of a bunch of cheap tavernas in the market area.

Ippokambos Ouzeri (☎ 28102 80240; Mitsotaki 2; dishes €3.50-8) On the waterfront, this place serves up a popular, well-priced menu. Enjoy eating at a pavement table or on the promenade across the road.

Take Five (☎ 28102 26564; Akroleondos 7; ☞ 10am-late) On the edge of El Greco Park,

this gay-friendly place has low-key music and ambience. The outside tables fill up after sundown.

Jasmin (☎ 28102 88880; Handakos 45; ☞ noon-late) A soothing spot for herbal teas and hot chocolate by day, and alcohol and world music by night, Jasmin has a pleasant back terrace.

Guernica (☎ 28102 82988; Apokoronou Kritis 2; ☞ 10am-late) In a rambling old building with a delightful terrace garden, Guernica combines traditional décor and contemporary music exquisitely.

Getting There & Around

There are many flights daily from Iraklio's Nikos Kazantzakis airport (HER) to Athens (€83) and, in summer, regular flights to Thessaloniki and Rhodes. Get your tickets from **Olympic Airlines** (code OA; ☎ 28102 44824; 25 Avgoustou 27) or **Aegean Airlines** (code A3; ☎ 28103 44324; Leaf Dimokratias 11). **Sky Express** (code SEH; ☎ 28102 23500; www.skyexpress.gr) has connections with Santorini, Mykonos and Rhodes with varying regularity.

Daily ferries service Piraeus (€29.50, seven hours), and most days boats go to Santorini and continue on to other Cycladic islands. Head to Skoutelis Travel (p381) for schedules and tickets.

Iraklio has two bus stations. Bus Station A is just inland from the new harbour and serves eastern Crete (Agios Nikolaos, Ierapetra, Sitia, Malia and the Lasithi Plateau). The Hania and Rethymno terminal is opposite Bus Station A.

Bus Station B, 50m beyond the Hania Gate, serves the southern route (Phaestos, Matala and Anogia). Check out www.ktel.org for long-distance bus information.

Bus 1 travels between the airport and city centre (€0.70) every 15 minutes from 6am to 1am. It stops at Plateia Eleftherias, across the road from the archaeological museum.

KNOSSOS ΚΝΩΣΣΟΣ

Five kilometres south of Iraklio, **Knossos** (☎ 28102 31940; admission €6; ☞ 8am-7pm Apr-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Mar) was the capital of Minoan Crete, and is now the island's major tourist attraction.

Knossos (k-nos-os) is the most famous of Crete's Minoan sites and is the inspiration for the myth of the Minotaur. According to legend, King Minos of Knossos was

given a magnificent white bull to sacrifice to the god Poseidon, but decided to keep it. This enraged Poseidon, who punished the king by causing his wife Pasiphae to fall in love with the animal. The result of this odd union was the Minotaur – half-man and half-bull – who lived in a labyrinth beneath the king's palace, munching on youths and maidens.

In 1900 Arthur Evans uncovered the ruins of Knossos. Although archaeologists tend to disparage Evans' reconstruction, the buildings – incorporating an immense palace, courtyards, private apartments, baths, lively frescoes and more – give a fine idea of what a Minoan palace might have looked like.

A whole day is needed to see the site and a guidebook is essential. Arrive early to avoid the jam. From Iraklio, local bus 2 goes to Knossos (€0.95) every 10 minutes from Bus Station A.

PHAESTOS & OTHER MINOAN SITES ΦΑΙΣΤΟΣ

Phaestos (☎ 29820 42315; admission €4; ☞ 8am-7pm May-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Apr), 63km southwest of Iraklio, is Crete's second-most important Minoan site. While not as impressive as Knossos, Phaestos (fes-tos) is still worth a visit for its stunning views of the surrounding Mesara plain and Mt Psiloritis. The layout is similar to Knossos, with rooms arranged around a central courtyard. Eight buses a day head to Phaestos from Iraklio's Bus Station B (€4.50, 1½ hours).

Other important Minoan sites can be found at **Malia**, 34km east of Iraklio, where there's a palace complex and adjoining town, and **Zakros**, 40km southeast of Sitia, the last Minoan palace to have been discovered in 1962.

RETHYMNO ΡΕΘΥΜΝΟ

pop 29,000

Rethymno (reth-im-no), Crete's third-largest town, is one of the island's architectural treasures, due to its stunning fortress and mix of Venetian and Turkish houses in the old quarter. A compact town, most spots of interest are within a small area around the old Venetian harbour.

The old quarter is on a peninsula that juts out into the Sea of Crete; the fortress sits at the head of the peninsula, while the

Venetian harbour, ferry quay and beach are on its eastern side. El Venizelou is the main strip along the waterfront and beach. Running parallel behind it is Arkadiou, the main commercial street.

The **municipal tourist office** (☎ 28310 29148; Eleftheriou Venizelou; ☎ 9am-2pm Mon-Fri), on the beach side of El Venizelou, is convenient and helpful. **Ellotia Tours** (☎ 28310 24533; ellotia@ret.forthnet.gr; Arkadiou 161) will answer all transport, accommodation and tour inquiries. **Galero Café** (☎ 28310 54345; per hr €3), beside the Rimondi fountain with its spouting lion heads, has internet access.

Rethymno's 16th-century **Venetian fortress** (fortezza; ☎ 28310 28101; Paleokastro Hill; admission €3; ☎ 8am-8pm) is the site of the city's ancient acropolis and affords great views across the town and mountains. The main gate is on the eastern side of the fortress, opposite the interesting **archaeological museum** (☎ 28310 54668; admission €1.50; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun), which was once a prison.

Happy Walker (☎ 28310 52920; www.happy-walker.com; Tombazi 56) runs an excellent programme of daily walks in the countryside (€25 per person), and also longer walking tours.

Elizabeth Camping (☎ 28310 28694; www.camping-elizabeth.com; per person/tent €6.50/4.50) is situated on Mysiria Beach, 4km east of town, and is accessible by the bus that goes to and from Iraklio. It has a taverna, snack bar and minimarket. **Rethymno Youth Hostel** (☎ 28310 22848; www.yhrethymno.com; Tombazi 41; dm €8) is a well-run place with crowded dorms, free hot showers and no curfew. **Sea Front** (☎ 28310 51981; www.rethymnoatcrete.com; Arkadiou 159; s/d €30/35; ☎) has all sorts of options and is ideally positioned with beach views and spacious rooms. **Hotel Fortezza** (☎ 28310 55551; www.fortezza.gr; Melissinou 16; s/d incl breakfast €57/69; ☎) is more upmarket; with a refreshing pool, it's in a refurbished old building in the heart of the old town.

There are plenty of eating options, but **Samaria** (☎ 28310 24681; El Venizelou 39; mains €3.50-8) is one of the few waterfront tavernas where you'll see local families eating. The soups and grills are excellent. **Restaurant Symposium** (☎ 28310 50538; www.symposium-kriti.gr; dishes from €3.50), near the Rimondi fountain, takes its food seriously (check out the website) but has good prices. Near the same fountain, **Mona Liza** (☎ 28310 23082; Paleologou 36) is

legendary for its '*crema*' ice cream made from sheep's milk.

There are daily ferries between Piraeus and Rethymno (€24, nine hours). Buses depart regularly to Iraklio (€5.90, 1½ hours), Hania (€5.55, one hour) and Agia Galini.

HANIA XANIA

pop 53,500

Hania (hahn-yah; often spelt Chania) is the former capital of Crete and the island's second-largest city. It is also Crete's most romantic and alluring town, with a rich mosaic of Venetian and Ottoman architecture, particularly in the area of the old harbour which lures tourists in droves. Modern Hania retains the exoticism of a city caught between East and West. Hania is an excellent base for exploring nearby idyllic beaches and a spectacular mountainous interior.

Orientation & Information

Hania's bus station is on Kydonias, two blocks southwest of Plateia 1866, one of the city's main squares. From Plateia 1866, the old harbour is a short walk up Halidon.

The **tourist information office** (EOT; ☎ 28210 36155; Plateia 1866 16-18; ☎ 8am-2.30pm) is helpful and provides practical information and maps. The city's website at www.chania.gr is worth a look for more information and upcoming events. **Tellus Travel** (☎ 28210 91500; Halidon 108; ☎ 8am-11pm) can help with schedules and ticketing, and also rents out cars. **Manos Internet Cafe** (☎ 28210 94156; Zambeliou 24; per hr €4), at Hotel Manos, provides internet access.

Sights & Activities

A stroll around the **old harbour** is a must for any visitor to Hania. It is worth the 1.5km walk around the sea wall to get to the Venetian **lighthouse** at the entrance to the harbour.

The **archaeological museum** (☎ 28210 90334; Halidon 30; admission €2; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun) is in a 16th-century Venetian Church that the Turks made into a mosque. The building became a movie theatre in 1913, then was a munitions depot for the Germans during WWII.

Hania's covered **food market**, in a massive cross-shaped building, is definitely worth a wander.

If you're interested in activities such as trekking or mountain biking in Crete's rugged Lefka Ori (White Mountains) south of Hania, contact **Trekking Plan** (☎ 28210 60861; www.cycling.gr), located 8km west of Hania in Agia Marina, or **Alpine Travel** (☎ 28210 50939; www.alpine.gr; Boniali 11-19; ☎ 9am-2pm Mon-Fri).

Sleeping

There is a swath of sleeping options around the old harbour, many in restored Venetian buildings.

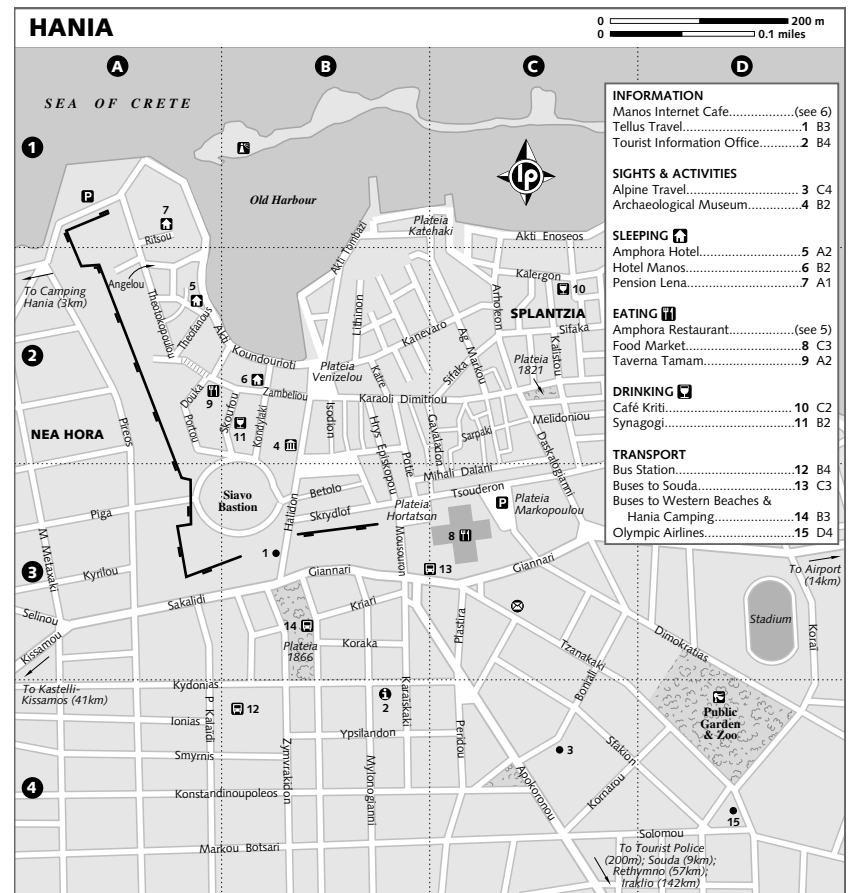
Camping Hania (☎ 28210 31138; per person/tent €5/3.50) Take the Kalamaki Beach bus from the east corner of Plateia 1866 (every 15 minutes) to get to this camping ground, which is located 3km west of town on the

beach. There is a restaurant, bar and mini-market.

Pension Lena (☎ 28210 86860; www.travelling-crete.com/lena; Ritsou 5; s/d €32/50; ☎) A friendly pension in an old Turkish building near the mouth of the old harbour, Lena's has an old-world feel and a cosy atmosphere. Help yourself to a room if Lena isn't there.

Hotel Manos (☎ 28210 94156; www.manoshotel.gr; Zambeliou 24; s/d €45/55; ☎) One of the oldest small waterfront hotels, Manos has great views from its harbour-facing rooms. The rooms are clean and spacious, and there is an internet café.

Amphora Hotel (☎ 28210 93224; www.amphora.gr; Parodos Theotokopoulou 20; s/d €75/90; ☎) Hania's most historically evocative hotel, Amphora



is in an immaculately restored Venetian mansion with elegantly decorated rooms around a courtyard.

Eating & Drinking

The entire waterfront of the old harbour is lined with restaurants and tavernas, many of which qualify as tourist traps. Watch out for touts trying to reel you in.

For cheap traditional cuisine, the tavernas in the food market offer excellent quality and prices.

Taverna Tamam (☎ 28210 58639; Zambeliou 49; mains €4-6.50; ☎ 1pm-12.30am) A taverna in an old converted Turkish bathhouse, this place has tasty soups and a superb selection of vegetarian specialities.

Amphora Restaurant (☎ 28210 93224; Akti Koundourioti 49; mains €4.50-7) On the waterfront and under the hotel of the same name, Amphora serves Cretan specialities, excellent pasta dishes and has a fine reputation.

Café Kriti (☎ 28210 58661; Kalergon 22; ☎ 8pm-late) Also known as Lyrakia, Café Kriti is the best place in Hania to hear live Cretan music. It's rough-and-ready, but a fine place to have a drink.

Synagogi (☎ 28210 96797; Skoufou 15) In a roofless Venetian building that was once a synagogue, this atmospheric spot offers up juices and coffee by day, and is a popular lounge bar by night.

Getting There & Away

There are several flights a day between Hania airport (CHQ) and Athens (€86) and five flights a week to Thessaloniki (€110). Contact **Olympic Airlines** (code 0A; ☎ 28210 58005; Tzanakaki 88) or **Aegean Airlines** (code A3; ☎ 28210 63366). The airport is 14km east of town on the Akrotiri Peninsula.

Daily ferries sail between Piraeus (€22, nine hours) and the port of Souda, 9km southeast of Hania. Get your tickets at Tel-lus Travel (p384).

Frequent buses run along Crete's northern coast to Iraklio (€11.50, 2½ hours, 21 daily), Rethymno (€6, one hour, 21 daily) and Kastelli-Kissamos (€3.70, one hour, 14 daily); buses run less frequently to Paleohora (€5.80, our hour 50 minutes, four daily), Omalos (€5.20, one hour, four daily) and Hora Sfakion (€5, 1¼ hours, three daily) from the main bus station on Kydonias.

Buses for Souda's port (€0.90) leave daily from outside the food market. Buses for the beaches west of Hania leave from the eastern side of Plateia 1866.

SAMARIA GORGE

ΦΑΡΑΓΓΙ ΤΗΣ ΣΑΜΑΡΙΑΣ

The **Samaria Gorge** (☎ 28250 67179; admission €5; ☎ 6am-3pm May-mid-Oct) is one of Europe's most spectacular gorges and a 'must-do'. Walkers should take rugged footwear, food, drinks and sun protection for this strenuous five- to six-hour trek.

You can do the walk as part of an excursion tour, or do it independently by taking the Omalos bus from the main bus station in Hania (€5, one hour) to the head of the gorge at Xyloskalo (1230m) at 6.15am, 7.30am, 8.30am or 4.30pm. It's a 16.7km walk out (all downhill) to Agia Roumeli on the coast, from where you take a boat to Hora Sfakion (€5, 1¼ hours, three daily) and then a bus back to Hania (€5.40, two hours, four daily). You are not allowed to spend the night in the gorge, so you need to complete the walk in a day.

There are daily Samaria Gorge excursions from Hania and other cities that do the whole route from Xyloskalo, and shorter ones that walk about 4km into the gorge from Agia Roumeli. Check out the travel agencies in Hania and other cities for information.

PALEOHORA & THE SOUTHWEST COAST

ΠΑΛΑΙΟΧΩΡΑ

Paleohora (pal-ee-o-hor-a) has a sleepy at-the-end-of-the-line feel about it. Isolated and a bit hard to get to, the village is on a peninsula with a sandy beach to the west and a pebbly beach to the east. On summer evenings the main street is closed to traffic and the tavernas move onto the road. If you're after a relaxing few days, Paleohora is a great spot to visit.

Walking south from the bus stop on Eleftheriou Venizelou, the main street, there's a welcoming **tourist office** (☎ 28230 41507; ☎ 10am-1pm & 6-9pm Wed-Mon May-Oct), but take the opening hours listed as indicative only! Over the road, **Notos Rentals/Tsiskakis Travel** (☎ 28230 42110; notosgr@yahoo.gr; ☎ 8am-10pm) handles everything including tickets, rental cars/scooters, laundry and internet

BEAT THE CROWDS

The Samaria Gorge walk is extremely popular and can get quite crowded, especially in summer. Most walkers are on a day trip from Hania and other northern-coast cities, and are heading back there that day.

If you've got a bit of time on your hands, an excellent option is to let the sprinters go and to take your time trekking through this stupendous gorge. When you hit the coast at Agia Roumeli, down a cool beer, take a dip in the refreshing Libyan Sea, savour the tasty Cretan specials at **Farangi Restaurant & Rooms** (☎ 28250 91225; s/d/tr €18/30/35; ☎) and stay the night in the tidy rooms above the restaurant. There are plenty of other eating and sleeping options in this seaside village should Farangi be full. The next day you can take a ferry either west to Sougia or Paleohora, or east to Loutro or Hora Sfakion.

access (€4.40 per hour). The **ferry quay** is a tad further south, two blocks left, at the end of the pebbly beach.

The ruins of the 13th-century **Venetian castle** are worth clambering over, although there's not much left after the fortress was destroyed by the Turks, the pirate Barbarossa in the 16th-century and then the Germans during WWII.

Camping Paleohora (☎ 28230 41120; per person/tent €4/2.50) is 1.5km northeast of town, near the pebble beach. There's a taverna and nightclub here. **Homestay Anonymous** (☎ 28230 41509; www.anonymoushomestay.com; s/d/tr with shared bathroom €22/25/28) is a great option with its warm service and communal kitchen. Manolis, the owner, is an excellent source of local information. Across the road from the sandy beach, **Poseidon Hotel** (☎ 28230 41374; www.interkriti.net/hotel/paleohora/poseidon; s/d/apt €30/35/40; ☎) has a mix of tidy double rooms, studios and apartments. There is also a good café on site.

There are plenty of eating options on the main street. Vegetarians rave about **Third Eye** (☎ 28230 41234; mains €4-6), just inland from the sandy beach. Specialities include a tempting range of Greek-Asian fusion dishes. On the pebble beachside, **Calypso** (☎ 28230 83019; dishes €5-8; ☎) has tasty daily specials, and runs alternative-cuisine theme nights, with everything from Indian to Mexican.

Further east along Crete's southwest coast are **Sougia, Agia Roumeli** (at the mouth of the Samaria Gorge; see the boxed text, above), **Loutro** and **Hora Sfakion**. No road links the coastal resorts, but a daily boat from Paleohora to Sougia (€4.30, one hour), Agia Roumeli (€6.80, two hours), Loutro (€7.50, 2½ hours) and Hora Sfakion (€8.50, three hours) connects the villages in sum-

mer. The ferry leaves Paleohora at 9.45am and returns from Hora Sfakion at 1pm.

There are at least five buses daily between Hania and Paleohora (€5.40, two hours). A bus for Samaria Gorge hikers (see opposite) leaves for Omalos (€8.10, 1½ hours) each morning at 6am.

LASITHI PLATEAU

ΟΡΟΠΕΔΙΟ ΛΑΣΙΘΙΟΥ

The impressive mountain-fringed Lasithi Plateau in eastern Crete is laid out like an immense patchwork quilt. At 900m above sea level, it is a vast flat expanse of orchards and fields, which was once dotted with thousands of stone windmills with white canvas sails. There are still plenty of windmills, but most are now of the metal variety.

There are 20 villages around the periphery of the plain, the largest being Tzermiadi (population 750), Agios Georgios (population 550) and Psyhro (population 210). The perimeter of the plateau is a popular bike route, though cycling up to the plateau is not an easy matter.

The **Dikteon Cave** (☎ 28440 31316; admission €4; ☎ 8am-6.30pm) is where, according to mythology, Rhea hid the newborn Zeus from Cronos, his offspring-gobbling father. The cave is 1km from the village of Psyhro, which is the most convenient place to stay. **Zeus Hotel** (☎ 28440 31284; s/d €25/30) is near the start of the Dikteon Cave road. On the main street, **Stavros** (☎ 28440 31453; dishes €5-8) serves tasty home-style Cretan dishes with produce mostly from the family farm.

There are daily buses to the area from Iraklio (€5, two hours) and Agios Nikolaos (€6.30, 2½ hours), though having your own wheels would make life a lot easier.

AGIOS NIKOLAOS**ΑΓΙΟΣ ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΣ**

pop 11,000

Agios Nikolaos (*ah-ye-e-os nih-ko-laos*) is a cute former fishing village on Crete's northeast coast. Most of the action is around the picturesque **Voulismeni Lake**, about 200m north from the main square Plateia Venizelou. The lake is ringed with cafés and tavernas, and is linked to the sea by a short canal. The ferry port is 150m past the canal.

The very helpful **municipal tourist office** (☎ 28410 22357; www.agiosnikolaos.gr; ☎ 8am-9.30pm Apr-mid-Nov) is on the north side of the bridge over the canal and does a good job of finding sleeping options. **Polyhoros Internet Café** (☎ 28410 24876; 28 Oktovriou 13; per hr €4; ☎ 9am-2am) has internet access just up from the canal.

The two nice little beaches in town, **Kytoplatia Beach** and **Ammos Beach**, get a bit crowded in summer. **Almyros Beach**, about 1km south, gets less so. Agios Nikolaos acts as a base for excursion tours to **Spinalonga Island**. The island's massive fortress was built by the Venetians in 1579, but taken by the Turks in 1715. It later became a leper colony, but nowadays is a fascinating place to explore. Tours run for around €20.

Afrodite Rooms (☎ 28410 28058; Korytsas 27; s/d with shared bathroom €18/25) is a convenient comfortable budget option. There's a tiny communal kitchen. **Pergola Hotel** (☎ 28410 28152; Sarolidi 20; s/d €25/35; ☎) is a friendly family-run place out near the ferry port, with clean rooms, balconies and sea views.

Finding a place to eat will not be a problem. **Itanos** (☎ 28410 25340; Kyprou 1; mains €3-10), tucked away on a back street off the main square, is superb and has reasonable prices. **Migomis** (☎ 28410 24353; N Plastira 20; mains €8-15) overlooks the lake from high on the south side, providing superb ambience and views.

Ferries depart for Rhodes (€25.80, 11 hours) via Sitia, Kasos, Karpathos and Halki three times a week. There are also three weekly ferries to Piraeus (€27, 12 hours). Buses to Iraklio run every 30 minutes (€5, 1½ hours) and to Sitia (€5.50, 1½ hours, six times daily). Catch them from the bus station at the southern end of Sofias Venizelou.

SITIA ΣΗΤΕΙΑ

pop 8500

Sitia (*si-tee-a*) is a lovely little town in the northeastern corner of Crete that has escaped much of the tourism frenzy along the north coast. It is on an attractive bay flanked by mountains, and is an easy place to unwind.

The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 28430 28300; Karamanli; ☎ 9.30am-2.30pm), on the waterfront, has town maps. The main square, Plateia Iroon Plytehniou, is in the corner of the bay, recognisable by its palm trees and statue of a dying soldier. The ferry port is about 500m to the northeast. Internet access is available at Itanos Hotel (below).

Porto Belis Travel (☎ 28430 22370; www.portobelis-crete.gr; Karamanli Aven 34; ☎ 9am-8.30pm), on the waterfront just before the start of the town beach, is a one-stop shop, handling ticketing, rental cars and scooters, and accommodation bookings in town. It also runs **Porto Belis House** (☎ 28430 22370; d/q €34/57; ☎) above the travel agency. These rooms are immaculate, have kitchens and look straight out onto the beach. Check out the website.

Hotel Arhontiko (☎ 28430 28172; Kondylaki 16; s/d with shared bathroom €28/32), two blocks uphill from the port, has spotless rooms in a beautifully maintained neoclassical building. **Itanos Hotel** (☎ 28430 22900; www.itanoshotel.com; Karamanli 4; s/d incl breakfast €35/60; ☎ ☎) is an upmarket establishment next to the square. There's a 10% discount if you book on the internet and, if you're staying in the hotel, it includes a drink with dinner if you eat at its excellent **Itanos Taverna** (dishes €3-12), on the waterfront outside the front door.

The waterfront is lined with tavernas. Popular with locals is **Gato Negro** (☎ 28430 25873; dishes €6-12), serving Cretan specialties using produce from the owner's farm. It's the closest taverna to the ferry quay. **Kali Kardia** (☎ 28430 22249; Foundalidou 22; mains €4-6), a couple of streets back from the waterfront, is also excellent.

Sitia airport (JSH) has four flights a week to Athens (€66) with **Olympic Airlines** (code 0A; ☎ 28430 22270; 4 Septemvriou 3). There are regular ferries from Piraeus to Sitia (€27.50, 14 hours), and three ferries per week via Kasos, Karpathos and Halki to Rhodes (€23, 10 hours). Porto Belis Travel (above) has details and sells tickets. There are five buses

daily to Iraklio (€10, 3½ hours) via Agios Nikolaos (€5.50, 1½ hours).

DODECANESE
ΔΩΔΕΚΑΝΗΣΑ

Due to their geographic proximity to the coast of western Turkey, the 18 islands of the Dodecanese have suffered a turbulent past of invasions and occupations that has endowed them with a fascinating diversity.

In 1291, the Knights of St John, having fled Jerusalem, came to Rhodes and established themselves as masters of the Dodecanese. In 1522, Süleyman I staged a massive attack and took Rhodes Town, claiming the Dodecanese for the Ottoman Empire. In 1912 it was the Italians who ousted the Turks, and in 1944 the Germans took over. The following year Rhodes was liberated by British and Greek commandos. In 1947 the Dodecanese became part of Greece. These days, tourists rule.

The islands themselves range from the verdant and mountainous to the rocky and dry. While Rhodes and Kos host highly developed tourism, the more remote islands await those in search of traditional island life.

RHODES ΡΟΔΟΣ

pop 98,000

Rhodes (Rodos in Greek) is the largest island in the Dodecanese. According to mythology, the sun god Helios chose Rhodes as his bride and bestowed light, warmth and vegetation upon her. The blessing seems to have paid off, for Rhodes produces more flowers and sunny days than most Greek islands. Thrown in an east coast of virtually uninterrupted sandy beaches and it's easy to understand why sun-starved northern Europeans flock here.

Rhodes Town

pop 56,000

Rhodes' capital is Rhodes Town, on the northern tip of the island. Almost everything of interest lies in its World Heritage-listed Old Town, the largest inhabited medieval town in Europe, enclosed within massive walls. The New Town to the north is a monument to package tourism.

The main port, Commercial Harbour, is east of the Old Town, and north of here is Mandraki Harbour, the supposed site of the Colossus of Rhodes, a 32m-high bronze statue of Apollo built over 12 years (294-282 BC). The statue stood for a mere 65 years before being toppled by an earthquake. There are no remains and no tangible evidence that it actually existed, but these days you will see it on a lot of souvenir T-shirts.

INFORMATION

For information about the island, visit www.rodosisland.gr.

Mango Café Bar (☎ 22410 24877; www.mango.gr; Plateia Dorieos 3, Old Town; per hr €5; ☎ 9.30am-midnight) Has internet access.

Tourist information office (EOT; ☎ 22410 35226; cnr Makariou & Papagou; ☎ 7.30am-3pm Mon-Fri) Has brochures, maps and *Rodos News*, a free English-language newspaper.

Triton Holidays (☎ 22410 21690; www.tritondmc.gr; 1st fl, Plastira 9, Mandraki) In the New Town, this place is extremely helpful, handling accommodation bookings, ticketing and rental cars.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The Old Town is reputedly the world's finest surviving example of medieval fortification, with 12m-thick walls. The Knights of St John lived in the Knights' Quarter in the northern end of the Old Town.

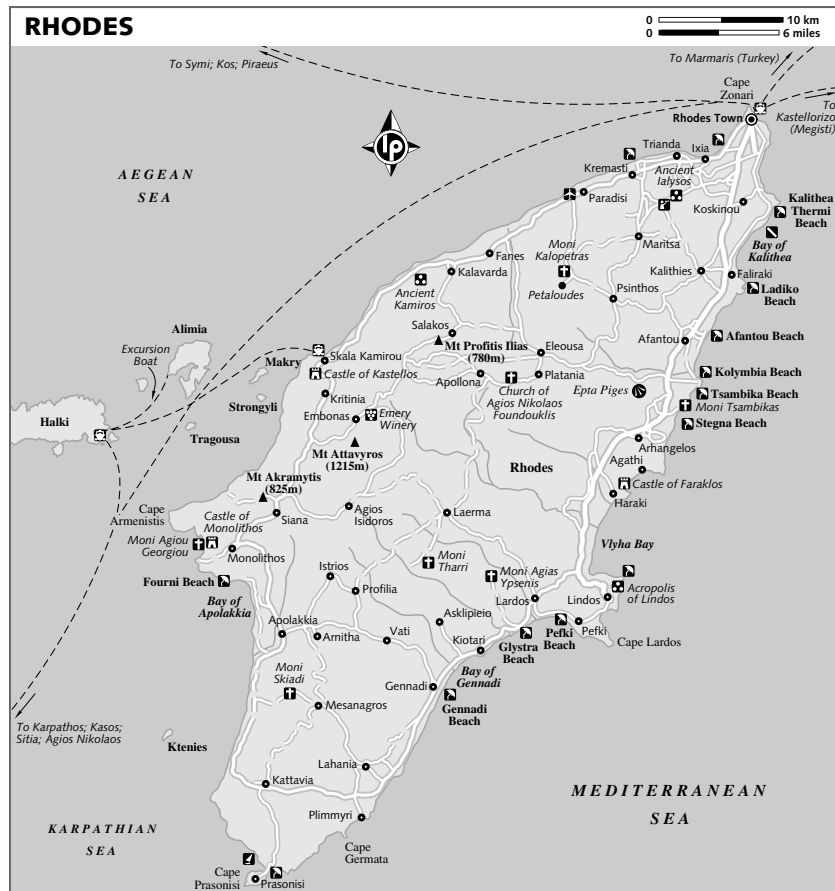
The cobbled **Odos Ippoton** (Avenue of the Knights) is lined with magnificent medieval buildings, the most imposing of which is the **Palace of the Grand Masters** (☎ 22410 23359; admission €6; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm Tue-Sun), which was restored, but never used, as a holiday home for Mussolini.

The 15th-century Knight's Hospital now houses the **archaeological museum** (☎ 22410 27657; Plateia Mousiou; admission €3; ☎ 8am-4pm Tue-Sun). The splendid building was restored by the Italians and has an impressive collection that includes the ethereal marble statue *Aphrodite of Rhodes*.

The pink-domed **Mosque of Süleyman**, at the top of Sokratou, was built in 1522 to commemorate the Ottoman victory against the knights, then rebuilt in 1808.

SLEEPING

Mango Rooms (☎ 22410 24877; www.mango.gr; Plateia Dorieos 3, Old Town; s/d €30/45; ☎ ☎) Mango has a restaurant, bar and internet café down



below, six well-kept rooms above, and a superb sun terrace on top. This is a good-value one-stop-shop near the back of the Old Town.

Pink Elephant Pension (☎ 22410 22469; www.pinkelephantpension.com; Timakida 9, Old Town; d €30-50) Down a side street at the back of the Old Town, this *pension* has cosy, compact and clean rooms around a communal courtyard.

Hotel Spot (☎ 22410 34737; www.spohotelrhodes.com; Perikleous 21, Old Town; s/d/tr incl breakfast €35/60/80; 🍷) Convenient and exceptionally clean, the Spot offers a small book exchange, left-luggage facilities and tastefully decorated rooms.

Hotel Andreas (☎ 22410 34156; www.hotelandreas.com; Omirou 28d, Old Town; s/d €50/60; 🍷) This

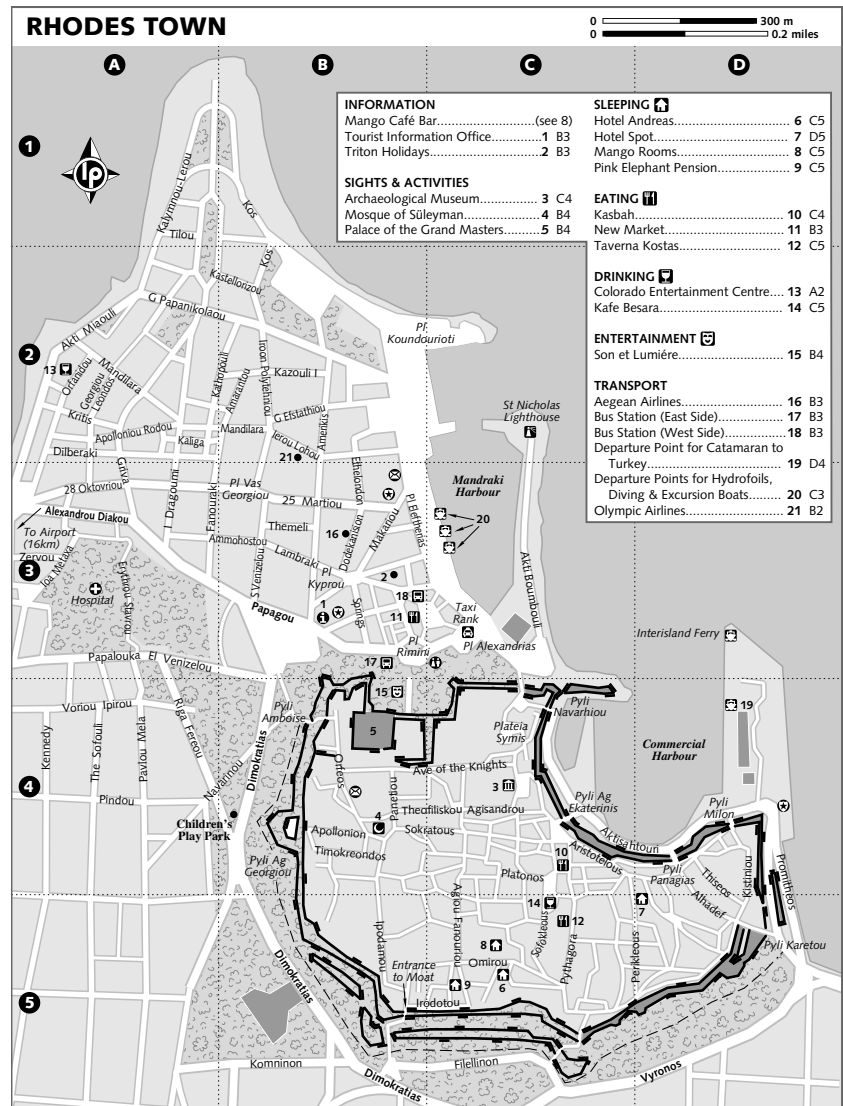
place has individually decorated rooms and terrific views from its roof-terrace. The price changes by the room, all of which can be checked out online. Choose your room before you go.

EATING & DRINKING

There is food and drink every way you look in Rhodes. Outside the city walls, there are a lot of cheap places in the New Market, at the southern end of Mandraki Harbour.

Taverna Kostas (☎ 22410 26217; Pythagora 62, Old Town; mains €5-10) This good-value spot has stood the test of time and can't be beaten for its quality grills and fish dishes.

Kasbah (☎ 22410 78633; Platonos 4-8; mains from €11; 🍷 dinner) If you want a break from Greek



food, try Kasbah, which serves Moroccan-influenced meals in a refined atmosphere.

Kafe Besara (☎ 22410 30363; Sofokleous 11, Old Town) This Aussie-owned establishment is one of the Old Town's liveliest bars and a great spot to hang out.

Mango Café Bar (☎ 22410 24877; Plateia Dorieos 3, Old Town) If you're staying at Mango Rooms,

you've only got to climb the stairs to get home. Mango claims to have the cheapest drinks in town and is the preferred haunt of local expats and die-hard travellers.

Colorado Entertainment Centre (☎ 22410 75120; www.coloradoclub.gr; Orfanidou 57) This enormous palace of hype has six venues in one in the northwest of the New Town. Orfanidou is

also known as 'Bar Street' and there's a bar for every nationality.

ENTERTAINMENT

Son et Lumière (Sound & Light Show; ☎ 22410 21922; www.hellenicfestival.gr; admission €6; 🗓 Mon-Sat) The impressive Son et Lumière takes place by the walls of the Old Town off Plateia Rimini. English-language events are staggered, but are generally at 9.15pm or 11.15pm.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are plenty of flights daily between Rhodes airport (RHO) and Athens (€75), two daily to Karpathos (€28) and one daily to Iraklio (€65). Call **Olympic Airlines** (code 0A; ☎ 22410 24571; Ieru Lohou 9) or **Aegean Airlines** (code A3; ☎ 22410 24400; Ethelondon Dodekanisio 20). In summer there are regular flights to Kastelorizo. **Sky Express** (code SEH; ☎ 28102 23500; www.skyexpress.gr) connects with Crete, Mykonos and Santorini with varying regularity.

Rhodes is the main port of the Dodecanese and there is a complex array of departures. There are daily ferries from Rhodes to Piraeus (€38, 15 to 18 hours). Most sail via the Dodecanese north of Rhodes, but at least three times a week there is a service via Karpathos, Crete and the Cyclades.

Excursion boats (€22 return) and hydrofoils (€12.50 one way) travel daily to Symi. Ferries (€8 one way) travel less often. Similar services also run to Kos, Kalymnos, Nisyros, Tilos, Patmos and Leros.

Between April and October, there are daily boats from Rhodes to Marmaris in Turkey (one way/return €45/60).

For details on all your options, contact Triton Holidays (p389).

GETTING AROUND

There are frequent buses between the airport and Rhodes Town's west-side bus station (€1.50, 25 minutes).

Rhodes Town has two bus stations. The **west-side bus station**, next to the New Market, serves the airport, Kamiros (€4.10, 55 minutes) and the west coast. The **east-side bus station** (Plateia Rimini) serves the east coast, Lindos (€4.60, 1½ hours) and the inland southern villages.

Around the Island

The **Acropolis of Lindos** (☎ 22440 31258; admission €6; 🗓 8.30am-6pm Tue-Sun), 47km from Rhodes

Town, is an ancient city spectacularly perched atop a 116m-high rocky outcrop. Below is the town of **Lindos**, a tangle of streets with elaborately decorated 17th-century houses.

The extensive ruins of **Kamiros** (admission €4; 🗓 8am-5pm Tue-Sun), an ancient Doric city on the west coast, are well preserved, with the remains of houses, baths, a cemetery and a temple, but the site should be visited as much for its lovely setting on a gentle hillside overlooking the sea.

Between Rhodes Town and Lindos the **beaches** are packed. Venture further south to find good stretches of deserted sandy beach.

KARPATHOS ΚΑΡΠΑΘΟΣ

pop 6000

The elongated, mountainous island of Karpathos (*kar-pah-thos*), midway between Crete and Rhodes, is a scenic, hype-free place with a cosy port, numerous beaches and unspoilt villages. It is a wealthy island, reputedly receiving more money from emigrants living abroad (mostly in the USA) than any other Greek island.

The main port and capital is **Pigadia**, on the southeast coast. Karpathos has lovely beaches, particularly **Apella** and **Kyra Panagia**, both north of Pigadia, **Lefkos** on the west coast, and **Ammoöpi**, 8km south of Pigadia. The northern village of **Olymbos** is like a living museum. Locals wear traditional outfits and the façades of houses are decorated with bright plaster reliefs, though with more and more tourists arriving, the village is becoming less and less 'traditional'.

In Pigadia, a booth on the harbour serves as **municipal tourist office** (☎ 22450 23835; 🗓 Jul & Aug). For more information on the island, check out the websites www.inkarpathos.com and www.karpathos.com. **Possi Travel** (☎ 22450 22148; possitvl@hotmail.com; Pigadia) on the waterfront can suggest local tours and handles air and ferry tickets. **Pot Pourri** (☎ 22450 29073; Apodimon Karpathion, Pigadia; per hr €3; 🗓 7am-1am & 6pm-1am), on the western side of the harbour, offers internet access.

Elias Rooms (☎ 22450 22446; www.eliasrooms.com; Dimokratias Pigadia; s/d €20/25) is an excellent accommodation option. Owner Elias is a mine of information and his rooms have great views while being in a quiet part of town. **Hotel Titania** (☎ 22450 22144; www.titania

karpathos.gr; Dimokratias, Pigadia; s/d €38/48; 🗓) is in the centre of Pigadia and has spacious rooms with fridge, phone and TV.

Try the Karpathian goat *stifado* at **To Heliniko** (☎ 22450 23932; Pigadia; dishes €3-8) on the waterfront. Head for **Taverna I Orea Karpathos** (☎ 22450 22501; Pigadia; mains €4-6) near the quay for traditional Karpathian dishes.

In summer, Karpathos airport (AOK), 13km southwest of town, has daily flights to Rhodes (€28) and Athens (€79). The **Olympic Airlines** (code 0A; ☎ 22450 22150) office is on the central square in Pigadia. There are three ferries a week to Rhodes (€18.50, four hours) and four to Piraeus (€33, 19 hours) via Crete and the Cyclades. The ferries between Rhodes and Crete stop at Pigadia and the small northern port of Diafani on Karpathos. In summer there are daily excursion boats from Pigadia to Apella and Kyra Panagia beaches.

There are also excursions from Pigadia to Diafani that include a bus trip to Olymbos. Local buses drop you at Lefkos and Ammoöpi beaches.

SYMI ΣΥΜΗ

pop 2600

Symi is an inviting, rocky, dry island 24km north of Rhodes. The port town of Gialos is a Greek treasure, with pastel-coloured mansions heaped up the hills surrounding the protective little harbour. Symi is swamped by day-trippers from Rhodes, and it's worth staying over to enjoy the island in cruise control. The town is divided into Gialos, the port, and the tranquil *horio* (village) above it, accessible by taxi, bus or 360 steps from the harbour.

There is no tourist office. The best source of information is the free, widely available monthly English-language *Symi Visitor* (www.symivisitor.com), which includes maps of the town. **Kaloudoukas Holidays** (☎ 22460 71077; www.symi-greece.com) handles accommodation bookings, ticketing and has a book of walking trails on the island. For internet access head to **Roloï Bar** (☎ 22460 71595; per hr €4; 🗓 9am-3am), a block back from the waterfront.

Budget accommodation is scarce. **Rooms Katerina** (☎ 22460 71813, 69451 30112; d €25-30) is excellent, but get in quick as there are only three rooms. There is a communal kitchen with breathtaking views down over

the port. **Pension Catherinettes** (☎ 22460 72698; marina-epe@rho.forthnet.gr; d €32-50) has airy rooms on the north side of the harbour. It's where the treaty surrendering the Dodecanese to the Allies was signed in 1945. Located back from the excursion boats is **Hotel Albatros** (☎ 22460 71707; www.albatrosymy.gr; d incl breakfast €50), a small family-run place where breakfast is served in the friendly lounge.

Taverna Neraida (☎ 22460 71841; mains from €5), back from the waterfront by the square, serves solid Greek dishes and features intriguing old photos of Symi on its walls. **Vapori Bar** (☎ 22460 72082) is open all day. Drop by to use the internet (per hour €4) or read the free newspapers by day, or for drinks and cruising at night.

There are frequent ferries and hydrofoils between Rhodes and Kos that stop at Symi, as well as daily excursion boats from Rhodes. Small taxi boats visit inaccessible east-coast beaches daily in summer, including spectacular **Agios Georgious**, backed by a 150m sheer cliff.

KOS ΚΩΣ

pop 17,900

A long, fertile island with a mountainous spine, Kos is only 5km from the Turkish peninsula of Bodrum. Hippocrates, the father of medicine, was born on Kos, but that's as Greek as this place gets. Package tourists turn up in droves, and with its palm-lined streets, neon cafés, pulsing clubs and tourist trains, Kos Town, the main town and port, exudes a mini-Las Vegas aura.

Orientation & Information

Kos Town is based around a circular harbour protected by the imposing Castle of the Knights on its southeastern side. The ferry quay is north of the castle. Akti Koundourioti is the main drag around the harbour.

The **municipal tourist office** (☎ 22420 24460; www.kosinfo.gr; Vasileos Georgiou 1; 🗓 8am-2.30pm & 3-10pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) is on the waterfront directly south of the port and provides maps and accommodation information. **Exas Travel** (☎ 22420 28545), near the archaeological museum in the heart of town to the southwest of the harbour, handles schedules, ticketing and excursions.

Café Del Mare (☎ 22420 24244; www.cybercafe.gr; Megalou Alexandrou 4; per half-hr €3; 🗓 9am-1am)

is a well-equipped internet café near the harbour.

Sights & Activities

The focus of the **archaeological museum** (☎ 22420 28326; Plateia Eleftherias; adult/student €3/2; ☎ 8am-2.30pm Tue-Sun) is sculpture from excavations around the island.

The **ancient agora**, with the ruins of the **Shrine of Aphrodite** and **Temple of Hercules**, is just off Plateia Eleftherias. North of the agora is the **Hippocrates Plane Tree**, under which the man himself is said to have taught his pupils.

The **Castle of the Knights** (☎ 22420 27927; admission €4; ☎ 8am-2.30pm Tue-Sun), built in the 14th century, protected the knights from the encroaching Ottomans, and was originally separated from town by a moat. That moat is now Finikon, a major street.

On a pine-clad hill, 4km southwest of Kos Town, stand the extensive ruins of the renowned healing centre of **Asklipieion** (☎ 22420 28763; adult/student €4/3; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Tue-Sun), where Hippocrates practised medicine.

Sleeping

Kos Camping (☎ 22420 23275; per adult/tent €4.50/2.50) This camping ground, 3km along the eastern waterfront, has good shade and a minimarket. Hop on any bus to Agios Fokas from the harbour Kleopatra 2.

Pension Alexis (☎ 22420 28798; fax 22420 25797; Irodou 9; s/d €25/30; ☎) This highly recommended place has long been a budget favourite with travellers. It has large rooms and shared facilities. Try the legendary feta omelette for breakfast. It's back behind Dolphin Sq.

Hotel Afendoulis (☎ 22420 25321; afendoulis@kos.forthnet.gr; Evripilou 1; s/d €35/50; ☎) In a pleasant, quiet area about 500m south of the ferry quay, this well-kept hotel won't disappoint. Run by the charismatic English-speaking Alexis, this is a great place to relax and enjoy Kos.

Eating & Drinking

Restaurants line the central waterfront, but you might want to hit the backstreets for value. There are a dozen discos and clubs around the streets of Diakon and Nafklirou, just north of the agora.

Barbas (☎ 22400 27856; Evripilou 6; mains €3-5) Opposite Hotel Afendoulis, Barbas spe-

cialises in grills and has a mouth-watering chicken souvlaki. Sit at the streetside tables and watch the locals pass by.

Olympiada (☎ 22420 23031; Kleopatra 2; mains €3.50-4) Back in the ruins area, behind the Olympic Airlines office, Olympiada serves up reliable unpretentious Greek dishes.

Fashion Club (☎ 22420 22592; Kanari 2) Off Dolphin Sq, this monster establishment has three bars and is a long-time favourite.

Kalua (☎ 22420 24938; Akti Zouroudi 3) Head around to the beach to the north of the harbour where there is no shortage of bars. An outdoor venue with a swimming pool, Kalua is popular.

Getting There & Around

There are daily flights to Athens (€93) from Kos' **Ippokratis airport** (KGS) with **Olympic Airlines** (code 0A; ☎ 22420 28330). The airline runs buses (€3) to the airport, which is 28km southwest of Kos Town.

There are frequent ferries from Rhodes to Kos that continue on to Piraeus (€38, 12 to 15 hours) via Kalymnos, Leros and Patmos. Less-frequent ferries head to Nisyros, Tilos, Symi and Samos. In summer, ferries depart daily for Bodrum in Turkey (€34 return, one hour). Get details and tickets at Exas Travel, near the archaeological museum (left).

Buses for Agios Fokas leave from opposite the town hall on the harbour; all other buses leave from the bus station on Kleopatra, near the ruins at the back of town.

Next to the tourist office is a blue minitrain for Asklipion (€3 return, hourly) and a green minitrain that does city tours (€3, 20 minutes).

PATMOS ΠΑΤΜΟΣ

Patmos is a great place to unwind, and for the religiously motivated it is a place not to be missed. Orthodox and Western Christians have long made pilgrimages to Patmos, for it was here that St John wrote his revelations.

Orientation & Information

The main town and port of Skala is about halfway down the east coast of Patmos, with a protected harbour. Towering above Skala to the south is the *hora*, crowned by the immense Monastery of St John the Theologian.

The **tourist office** (☎ 22470 31666; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri Jun-Sep), post office and police station are in the white building at the port in Skala. For further information on the island, visit www.patmosweb.gr or www.patmos-island.com. **Apollon Travel** (☎ 22470 31324; apollontravel@stratas.gr), on the waterfront, handles schedules and ticketing. **Blue Bay Internet Café** (☎ 22470 31165; per hr €5; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-8pm) is 200m south from the port in the Blue Bay Hotel.

Sights & Activities

The **Cave of the Apocalypse** (☎ 22470 31234; admission free, treasury €3; ☎ 8am-1.30pm daily & 4-6pm Tue, Thu & Sun), where St John wrote his divinely inspired *Book of Revelations*, is halfway between the port and *hora*. Take a bus from the port or hike up the **Byzantine path**, which starts from a signposted spot on the Skala-*hora* road.

The **Monastery of St John the Theologian** (☎ 22470 31398; admission free; ☎ 8am-1.30pm daily & 4-6pm Tue, Thu & Sun) looks more like a castle than a monastery and tops Patmos like a crown. It exhibits all kinds of monastic treasures.

Patmos' coastline provides secluded coves, mostly with pebble beaches. The best is **Psili Ammos**, in the south, reached by excursion boat from Skala port. **Lambi Beach**, on the north coast, is a pebble-beach-lover's dream come true.

Sleeping & Eating

Stefanos Camping (☎ 22470 31821; per person/tent €6/3) On the pleasant tree-shaded Meloi Beach, 2km northeast of Skala, this spot has a minimarket and café-bar.

Hotel Australis (☎ 22470 31576; www.patmosweb.gr/australishotel; d incl breakfast €40-60) This place, at the northern end of Skala, has private facilities, a family church on site and an oasis-like garden that has featured in *Garden Design* magazine. Australis also has apartments in town.

Blue Bay Hotel (☎ 22470 31165; www.bluebay.50g.com; s/d/tr €72/109/135; ☎) At the quieter southern end of Skala, this waterfront hotel has superb rooms, internet access, and breakfast included in its rates (which tumble out of the high season).

Grigoris Taverna (☎ 22470 31515; mains €3-5) Opposite the port gate, this is a popular spot with tasty *mayirefta* (precooked, oven-baked dishes) and grills.

Kipos Garden Restaurant (☎ 22470 31884; dishes €3-8) Head into the heart of Skala for home-grown vegetable dishes such as fried aubergines.

Getting There & Away

Patmos is well connected, with ferries to Piraeus (€30.50, eight hours, two weekly) and south to Rhodes (€27, 7½ hours, two weekly). In summer, daily Flying Dolphin hydrofoils head south to Kos and Rhodes, and north to Samos. Apollon Travel (left) has details and tickets.

NORTHEASTERN AEGEAN ISLANDS ΤΑ ΝΗΣΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΒΟΡΕΙΟΥ ΑΝΑΤΟΛΙΚΟΥ ΑΙΓΑΙΟΥ

One of Greece's best-kept secrets, these far-flung islands are strewn across the northeastern corner of the Aegean, closer to Turkey than mainland Greece. They harbour unspoilt scenery, welcoming locals, fascinating independent cultures, and remain relatively calm even when other Greek islands are sagging with tourists at the height of summer. Turkish influence is barely visible, despite the islands being part of the Ottoman Empire until 1912. Island-hopping isn't as easy as in other islands groups due to distances and a relative scarcity of ferries.

SAMOS ΣΑΜΟΣ

pop 32,800
A lush mountainous island only 3km from Turkey, Samos has a glorious history as the legendary birthplace of Hera, wife and sister of god-of-all-gods, Zeus. Samos was an important centre of Hellenic culture, and the mathematician Pythagoras and storyteller Aesop are among its sons. The island has beaches that bake in summer, and a hinterland that is superb for hiking. Spring brings with it pink flamingos, wildflowers, and orchids that the island grows for export, while summer brings throngs of package tourists.

Samos has two main ports: Vathy (Samos Town) in the northeast and Pythagorio on

the southeast coast. Those coming from the south generally arrive in Pythagorio. Big ferries use Vathy. Once you're on Samos and have onward tickets, double-check where your boat is leaving from. Buses between the two take 25 minutes. **By Ship Travel** (☎ 22730 25065; www.byshiptravel.gr) has offices at both ports that handle schedules and ticketing.

Pythagorio Πυθαγόρειο pop 1370

Pretty Pythagorio, where you'll disembark if you've come from Patmos, is small and enticing. The town stands on the site of the World Heritage-listed ancient city of Samos. Although the settlement dates from the Neolithic era, most of the remains are from Polycrates time (around 550 BC).

The cordial **municipal tourist office** (☎ 22730 61389; deap5@otenet.gr; ☹ 8am-9.30pm) is two blocks from the waterfront on the main street, Lykourgou Logotheti. **By Ship Travel** is next door. Across the street, **Digital World** (☎ 22730 62722; per hr €4; ☹ 11am-10.30pm) provides internet access. The bus stop is two blocks further inland on the same street, next to the post office.

The 1034m-long **Evpalinos Tunnel** (☎ 22730 61400; adult/student €4/2; ☹ 8.45am-2.45pm Tue-Sun), built in the 6th century BC, was dug by political prisoners and used as an aqueduct to bring water from the springs of Mt Ampelos (1140m). In the Middle Ages, locals used the tunnel as a hideout during pirate raids. Part of it can still be explored. It's a 20-minute walk north of town. If you feel like reminiscing about maths study, there's an excellent **statue of Pythagoras** and his triangle on the waterfront opposite the ferry quay.

Hotel Evripili (☎ 22730 61096; Konstantinou Kanari; s/d €45/60), just back from the waterfront, is a friendly hotel in a stone building with cosy rooms, some with balcony. On the waterfront, **Polixeni Hotel** (☎ 22730 61590; d €65; 🍷) is a homely place with nicely furnished, clean and comfortable rooms; it's a good option.

At **Espirides Garden-Tavern** (☎ 22730 61767; Pythagora; mains from €5) 'Mama's Plate of the Day' is the stuff legends are made of, while the food at **Poseidonas Neptune Taverna** (☎ 22730 62530; mains from €5), on the small town beach, past the jetty with the Pythagoras statue on it, is superb.

Vathy (Samos) Βαθύ Σάμος pop 2025

Busy Vathy, 25 minutes north of Pythagorio by bus, is an attractive working port town. Most of the action is along Themistokleous Sofouli, the main street that runs along the waterfront. The main square, Plateia Pythagorou, in the middle of the waterfront, is recognisable by its four palm trees and statue of a lion.

The rarely open and hard-to-find **tourist office** (☎ 22730 28530; ☹ Jun-Sep) is in a side street one block north of the main square. **ITSA Travel** (☎ 22730 23605; www.itsa.travel.com), opposite the quay, is helpful with travel inquiries, excursions, accommodation and luggage storage. To get to Vathy's bus station, follow the waterfront south and turn left onto Lekati, 250m south of Plateia Pythagorou (just before the police station). **Diavlos NetCafé** (☎ 22730 22469; per hr €4; ☹ 8.30am-11.30pm), near the bus station, offers internet access.

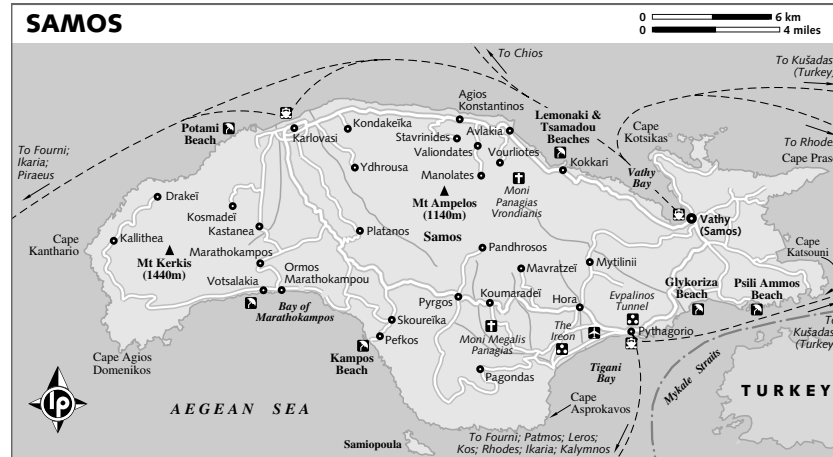
The **archaeological museum** (☎ 22730 27469; adult/student €3/2; ☹ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun), by the municipal gardens, is first rate. The highlight is a 5.5m *kouros* statue.

Pythagoras Hotel (☎ 22730 28601; www.pythagoras.hotel.com; Kallistratou 12; dm/s/d €15/20/35; 🍷) is a friendly, great-value place with a convivial atmosphere run by English-speaking Stelio. There is a restaurant, bar, satellite TV and internet access on site. Facing inland, the hotel is 400m to the left of the quay. Call ahead for free pick up on arrival. **Pension Dreams** (☎ 22730 24350; Areos 9; d €30), back up to the left behind the main square and overlooking the harbour, is another good option.

Garden Taverna (☎ 22730 24033; Manolis Kalomiris; mains €4-9) serves good Greek food in a lovely garden setting; it's also up to the left behind the main square. **Ovaga** (☎ 22730 25476; Kefalopoulou 13) is an excellent waterfront bar with outstanding views; it's to the north of the port on the way to Pythagoras Hotel.

Around Samos

Ireon (☎ 22730 95277; adult/student €3/2; ☹ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun), the legendary birthplace of the goddess Hera, is 8km west of Pythagorio. The temple at this World Heritage site was enormous – four times the Parthenon – though only one column remains.



The captivating villages of **Vourliotes** and **Manolates**, on the slopes of imposing Mt Ampelos, northwest of Vathy, are excellent walking territory and have many marked pathways.

Choice beaches include **Tsamadou** on the north coast, **Votsalakia** in the southwest and **Psili Amos** to the east of Pythagorio.

Getting There & Around

There are daily flights to Athens (€73) from **Samos airport** (SMI), 4km west of Pythagorio, and five weekly to Thessaloniki (€149) with **Olympic Airlines** (code 0A; ☎ 22730 27237; cnr Kanari & Smyrnis, Vathy).

There are daily ferries for Piraeus (€26, 13 hours), but only four a week head north to Chios (€11.70, four hours). Others head west to the Cyclades. Daily hydrofoils ski south to Patmos (€13.50, 1¼ hours), carrying on to Leros, Kalymnos and Kos (€23, 3½ hours). There are daily ferries to Kuşadası (for Ephesus) in Turkey (€47 return plus €10 port taxes). Day excursions are also available from April to October.

You can get to most of the island's villages and beaches by bus. Rental cars and scooters are readily available around the island.

CHIOS ΧΙΟΣ pop 54,500

Due to its thriving shipping and mastic industries (mastic produces the resin used in chewing gum), Chios (*hee-os*) has never

really bothered much with tourism. If you are an off-the-beaten-track type of Greek Island traveller, you'll find Chios all the more appealing.

One great attraction lies in exploring the island's inland villages, including some 20 *mastihoria* (mastic villages) that were spared during an 1822 Turkish massacre because of the sultan's fondness for chewing gum.

Orientation & Information

Chios Town, on the island's eastern coast, is a working port and home to half the island's inhabitants. A main street runs in a semicircle around the port, with most ferries docking at its northern end. The *kastro* (old Turkish quarter) is to the north of the ferry quay, and Plateia Vounakiou, the main square, is just south and inland from the quay.

The **municipal tourist office** (☎ 22710 44389; infochio@otenet.gr; Kanari 18; ☹ 7am-10pm Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar) is on the street that runs inland to the main square. It is extremely helpful and provides information on accommodation, schedules and rentals. The publication *Hiking Routes on Chios* is available there.

Aegean Travel (☎ 22710 41277; aegeantr@otenet.gr; Leof Aigaiou 14) on the waterfront handles ticketing, while **Enter Internet Café** (☎ 22710 41058; Leof Aigaiou 48; per hr €3.50), in an impressive upstairs place on the southern waterfront, has internet access.

Sights & Activities

In Chios Town, **Philip Argenti Museum** (☎ 22710 23463; Korais; admission €1.50; 🕒 8am-2pm Mon-Thu, 8am-2pm & 5-7.30pm Fri, 8am-12.30pm Sat) contains the treasures of the wealthy Argenti family.

World Heritage-listed **Nea Moni** (New Monastery; admission free; 🕒 8am-1pm & 4-8pm) is 14km west of Chios Town and reveals some of the finest Byzantine art in the country, with mosaics dating from the 11th century. The mosaics survived, but the resident monks were massacred by the Turks in 1822. Those in the ghost village of **Anavatos**, 10km from Nea Moni and built on a precipitous cliff, preferred a different fate, hurling themselves off the cliff rather than being taken captive by the Turks.

Pyrgi, 24km southwest of Chios Town, is one of Greece's most unusual villages. The façades of the town's dwellings are decorated with intricate grey-and-white geometric patterns and motifs. The tiny medieval town of **Mesta**, 10km from Pyrgi and nestled within fortified walls, has four entry gates, two ornate churches and cobbled streets connected by overhead arches.

Sleeping & Eating

Chios Rooms (☎ 22710 20198; www.chiosrooms.gr; Leoforos Aigaiou 110, Chios Town; s/d/tr with shared bathroom €25/35/45) A top location to stay, this place is upstairs in a restored neoclassical house on the waterfront at the southern end of the harbour. It has bright, airy rooms and is lovingly being restored by its Kiwi owner Don.

Hotel Kyma (☎ 22710 44500; kyma@chi.forthnet.gr; Evgenias Chandris 1, Chios Town; s/d/tr incl breakfast €61/78/97; 🍷) Around the corner from Chios Rooms, this place occupies a charismatic century-old mansion and has helpful owners. Ask for a room overlooking the sea.

To Meliotiko Ouzeri (☎ 22710 40407; Chios Town; dishes from €4) On the waterfront to the right of the ferry quay, this is a place to bring a healthy appetite as the servings of Greek classics are massive.

Getting There & Around

There are daily flights from Chios airport (JKH) to Athens (€69) and five per week to Thessaloniki (€110) with **Olympic Airlines** (code 0A; ☎ 22710 20359). The airport is 4km south of Chios Town.

Ferries sail daily to Piraeus (€22.50, eight hours) and Lesvos (€12, three hours), and weekly to Thessaloniki (€34.20, 18 hours). There are four ferries a week to Samos (€11.70, four hours) from where there are connections south.

Boats to Turkey run all year from Chios, with daily sailings from July to September to Çeşme (one way/return €22/25). For details, check out **Miniotis Lines** (☎ 22710 24670; www.miniotis.gr; Neorion 24, Chios Town).

Chios Town has two bus stations. Blue buses go regularly to local villages and Karfas Beach, and leave from the local bus station at the main square. Buses to Pyrgi (€2.20) and Mesta (€2.70) and other distant points leave from the long-distance bus station on the waterfront near the ferry quay.

LESVOS (MYTILINI) ΛΕΣΒΟΣ (ΜΥΤΙΛΗΝΗ)

pop 93,500

The third-largest of the Greek islands after Crete and Evia, fertile Lesvos is mountainous and presents excellent hiking and bird-watching opportunities. Lesvos has always been a centre of philosophy and artistic achievement and to this day is a spawning ground for innovative ideas in the arts and politics. Spoil yourself with a taste of the island's prized olive oil, ouzo and sardines, or relax in its therapeutic hot springs. An excellent source of information on the island is www.greeknet.com.

The two main towns on the island are the capital of Mytilini on the southeast coast, and attractive Mithymna on the north coast.

Mytilini Μυτιλήνη

pop 27,250

The capital and main port, Mytilini, is built between two harbours (north and south) with an imposing fortress and forest of pines on the promontory to the east. All ferries dock at the southern harbour, and most of the town's action is around this waterfront. With a large university campus, Mytilini is a lively place, even out of season.

The **tourist office** (☎ 22510 42511; 6 Aristarhou; 🕒 9am-1pm Mon-Fri), 50m up Aristarhou inland from the quay, offers brochures and maps, but its opening hours are limited. The **tourist police** (☎ 22510 22776) are at the en-

SAPPHO, LESBIANS & LESVOS

One of Greece's great ancient poets, Sappho, was born on the island of Lesvos during the 7th century BC, in the town of Eresos. Her poetry became famous for its lyrically evocative style and richly sumptuous imagery. Most of Sappho's work was devoted to love and desire, and the objects of her affection were often female. Owing to this last fact, her name and birthplace have come to be associated with female homosexuality.

These days, Lesvos is visited by many lesbians paying homage to Sappho. The whole island is very gay friendly, in particular the southwestern beach resort of Skala Eresou, which is built over ancient Eresos. The village is well set up to cater to lesbian needs and has a 'Women Together' festival held annually in September. Check out www.sapphotravel.com for details.

There is an excellent statue of Sappho taking pride of place in the main square on the waterfront in Mytilini.

trance to the quay and are helpful if you're outside tourist-office hours. **Samiotis Tours** (☎ 22510 42574; samiotistours@hotmail.com; Kountourioti 43) on the waterfront, handles flights, boat schedules, ticketing and excursions to Turkey.

Sponda (☎ 22510 41007; Komnina; per hr €3) has impressive internet access a block back from the waterfront in a pool bar.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Mytilini's excellent neoclassical **archaeological museum** (☎ 22510 22087; 8 Noemvriou; adult/child €3/2; 🕒 8am-7.30pm) has a fascinating collection from Neolithic to Roman times. Follow the signposts from the ferry.

A superb place for a stroll or a picnic is the pine forest surrounding Mytilini's impressive **fortress** (adult/student €2/1; 🕒 8am-2.30pm Tue-Sun), which was built in early Byzantine times and enlarged by the Turks.

Theophilus Museum (☎ 22510 41644; admission €2; 🕒 9am-2.30pm & 6-8pm Tue-Sun), 4km south of Mytilini in Varia village, is a shrine to the prolific folk painter Theophilus.

Five kilometres from Mytilini, on the Gulf of Yera, are the **Therma Yera hot springs** (☎ 22510 24575; admission €2.50; 🕒 8am-6pm), where you can bathe in a steamy white room overlooking the water and mountains. The experience is highly recommended.

SLEEPING

Pension Thalia (☎ 22510 24640; Kinikou 1; s/d €25/30) This *pension* has clean, bright rooms in a large house. It is about a five-minute walk north of the main square, up Ermou, the road that links the south and north harbours. Follow the signs from the corner of Ermou and Adramytiou.

Pension Iren (☎ 22510 22787; Komnina 41; d/tr incl breakfast €30/35) One block back from the waterfront, rooms here are simple but clean. It's easy to find and not far from the ferry quay should you be arriving late at night.

Porto Lesvos Hotel (☎ 22510 41771; www.portolessos.gr; Komnina 21; s/d €60/90; 🍷 📺) This is a stylish hotel with superb rooms and service – right down to robes and slippers – in a restored building one block further north from Pension Iren.

EATING & DRINKING

Restaurant Averof (☎ 22510 22180; Ermou 52; mains from €4) Greek staples such as *patsas* (tripe soup) are dished up at this no-nonsense traditional place just back from the main square.

Kalderimi (☎ 22510 46577; Thasou 3; mains from €6) Popular with locals, Kalderimi has an excellent ambience with tables in a vine-covered pedestrian street just back from the Sappho statue on the main harbour.

Ocean Eleven Bar (Kountourioti 17) In the corner on the waterfront, this is a superb spot to relax with a drink and partake in some Mytilini people-watching.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Written up on flight schedules as Mytilene, Lesvos' Odysseas airport (MJT) has daily connections with Athens (€78) and Thessaloniki (€88), and two a week to Chios (€28) with **Olympic Airlines** (code 0A; ☎ 22510 28659) and **Aegean Airlines** (code A3; ☎ 22510 61120).

In summer, there are daily boats to Piraeus (€27.90, 12 hours), some via Chios and Mykonos, and one boat a week to Thessaloniki (€30.20, 13 hours). There are four ferries a week to Ayvalik in Turkey (one

way/return €30/45). Stop by Samiotis Tours (p399) for ticketing and schedules.

Mytilini has two bus stations. For local buses, head along the waterfront to the main square, where buses leave regularly for Therma Yera. For long-distance buses, walk 600m from the ferry along the waterfront to El Venizelou and turn right until you reach Agia Irinis park, which is next to the station. There are regular services in summer to Mithymna, Petra, Agiasos, Skala Eresou, Mantamados and Agia Paraskevi.

Mithymna Μίθυμνα

pop 1500

The gracious, preserved town of Mithymna (known by locals as Molyvos) is 62km north of Mytilini. Cobble streets canopied by flowering vines wind up the hill below the impressive castle. The town is full of cosy tavernas and genteel stone cottages.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

From the bus stop, walk straight ahead towards the town for 100m to the helpful **municipal tourist office** (☎ 22530 71347; www.mithymna.gr; ☎ 8am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7pm Sat & Sun), which has good maps. Some 50m further on, the cobble main thoroughfare of 17 Noemvriou heads up to the right. Going straight at this point will take you to the colourful fishing port. There are three internet cafés along the port road. **Panatella Holidays** (☎ 22530 71520; www.panatella-holidays.com) handles bookings and local trips.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The noble **Genoese castle** (☎ 22530 71803; admission €2; ☎ 8am-7pm Tue-Sun) sits above the town like a crown and affords tremendous views out to Turkey.

Pebbley **Mithymna Beach** sits below the town and is good for swimming. Don't forget to stroll down to the harbour.

Eftalou hot springs (☎ 22530 71245; public/private bath per person €3.50/5; ☎ public bath 10am-2pm & 4-8pm, private bath 9am-6pm), 4km from town on the beach, is a superb bathhouse complex with a whitewashed dome and steaming, pebbled pool. There are also private baths where you don't need a bathing suit.

SLEEPING & EATING

Nassos Guest House (☎ 22530 71432; www.nassosguesthouse.com; Arionis; d & tr €20-35) An airy,

friendly place with shared facilities and a communal kitchen, this guesthouse is in an old Turkish house oozing with character. With rapturous views, it's highly recommended. To get there, head up 17 Noemvriou and take the second right (a sharp switchback).

Hotel Sea Horse (☎ 22530 71630; www.seahorse-hotel.com; d incl breakfast €75; ☎) Down at the old harbour, this hotel in a renovated old stone building is right on the water. The rooms are clean and comfortable, and the Sea Horse Café is open daily from 8am until late.

Betty's Restaurant (☎ 22530 71421; Agora; mains from €5) Betty's has superb home-style Greek food, views and atmosphere in a building that was once a notorious bordello. Ask Betty about the old photos on the wall. Take the downhill fork after passing through the uphill tunnel on 17 Noemvriou.

GETTING AROUND

In summer, buses go regularly to Petra Beach and Eftalou. Buses to Mytilini (€5) take 1¼ hours. Car- and scooter-hire outlets line the port road.

Around the Island

East of Mithymna, the traditional picturesque villages surrounding Mt Lepetymnos (**Sykaninia**, **Mantamados** and **Agia Paraskevi**) are worth a visit if you have time.

Southern Lesvos is dominated by **Mount Olympus** (968m) and the very pretty day-trip destination of **Agiasos**, which has good artisan workshops making everything from handcrafted furniture to pottery.

Western Lesvos is known for its petrified forest, with petrified wood at least 500,000 years old, and for the gay-friendly town of Skala Eresou, the birthplace of Sappho (see p399).

SPORADES ΣΠΟΡΑΔΕΣ

Scattered to the southeast of the Pelion Peninsula, to which they were joined in prehistoric times, the 11 islands that make up the Sporades group have mountainous terrain and dense vegetation. Skiathos has the best beaches and a throbbing tourist scene, while Skopelos is more relaxed, with a postcard waterfront, sandy bays and lush forest trails. Alonnisos is far less visited and

retains more local character. The National Marine Park of Alonnisos, encompassing seven islands, is aimed at protecting the Mediterranean monk seal, and many island residents are dedicated to preserving the region's delicate ecology.

The main ports for the Sporades are Volos and Agios Konstantinos on the mainland.

SKIATHOS ΣΚΙΑΘΟΣ

pop 6150

Lush and green, Skiathos has a beach-resort feel about it. An international airport has brought loads of package tourists, but the island still oozes enjoyment. Skiathos Town and some excellent beaches are on the hospitable south coast, while the north coast is precipitous and less accessible.

Orientation & Information

Skiathos Town's main thoroughfare is Papadiamanti, running inland opposite the quay. There's a **tourist information booth** (☎ 24270 23172) to the left as you leave the port, but it opens irregularly. The helpful **tourist police** (☎ 24270 23172; ☎ 8am-9pm), about halfway along Papadiamanti next to the high school, can provide information and maps.

Heliotropio Travel (☎ 24270 22430; helio@skiathos.gr), opposite the ferry quay, handles ticketing. It also has rental cars, and runs excellent excursions, including full-/half-day trips around the island (€17/12), and a day trip that takes in Skopelos and Alonnisos (€20). **Internet Zone Café** (☎ 24270 22767; Evangelistrias 28; per hr €4.40; ☎ 9am-1am) is 30m from the post office.

Sights

Skiathos has superb beaches, particularly on the south coast. **Koukounaries** is popular with families. A stroll over the headland, **Big Banana Beach** is stunning, but if you want an all-over tan, head a tad further to **Little Banana Beach**, where bathing suits are a rarity.

Sleeping

The **Rooms to Let** (☎ 24270 22990) bookings kiosk on the waterfront opens when ferries and hydrofoils arrive. *Domatia* owners also meet incoming ferries. Accommodation is scarce in July and August, but prices can as much as halve out of the high season.

Camping Koukounaries (☎ 24270 49250; per person/tent €7/3) This place, 30 minutes away from town by bus at Koukounaries Beach, has good facilities, a minimarket and a taverna.

Pension Pandora (☎ 24270 24357, 69791 56019; Paleokastro; s/d/q €30/45/60; ☎) Run by the effervescent Georgina, this family-run place is 10 minutes' walk north of the quay. The spotless rooms have TV, kitchens and balconies. Georgina also has two exceptional apartments just off Papadiamanti.

Villa Orsa (☎ 24270 22430; s/d incl breakfast €70/80; ☎) Perched above the old harbour, this mansion features traditionally styled rooms and a courtyard terrace overlooking the sea.

Eating & Drinking

Skiathos Town is brimming with eateries. Nightlife sprawls along Polytehniou; to find it, turn left off Papadiamanti at Evangelistrias and walk 100m.

Psaradika Ouzeri (☎ 24270 23412; Paralia; mains €3.50-10) By the fish market at the far end of the old port, Psaradika is the seafood winner, specialising in fresh fish at decent prices.

Taverna Dionysos (☎ 24270 22675; Panora; menus from €7) Heading up Papadiamanti, turn right opposite the National Bank to find this place, which has tasty three-course menus. Taverna Dionysos presents you with an ouzo before dinner, and a *metaxa* (Greek brandy) with coffee to finish. Bring your appetite.

Maria's Pizza (☎ 24270 22292; Syngrou 6; mains €8-12) Above the old port, this popular hole-in-the-wall place offers tasty handmade pizzas, pastas and salads.

Kahlua Bar (☎ 24270 23205; Polytehniou) On the club strip at the eastern waterfront end of town, Kahlua is popular and pulses with mainstream DJ sets and dancing drinkers.

Entertainment

Cinema Attikon (☎ 24270 22352; admission €7) On Papadiamanti, this excellent open-air cinema features recent English-language movies that you can watch while sipping a beer.

Getting There & Around

In summer, there is a daily flight from Athens to Skiathos (€53). There is an **Olympic**

Airlines office (code 0A; ☎ 24270 22200) at Skiathos airport (JSI).

There are frequent daily hydrofoils to/from the mainland ports of Volos (€21.10, 1½ hours) and Agios Konstantinos (€23.20, 1½ hours), as well as cheaper ferries. The hydrofoils head to and from Skopelos (€10, 35 minutes) and Alonnisos (€14.20, one hour). In summer, there is a daily hydrofoil to Thessaloniki (€35.30, 3½ hours).

Crowded buses ply the south-coast road between Skiathos Town and Koukounaries every 30 minutes between 7.30am and 11pm year-round, stopping at all the beaches along the way. The bus stop is at the eastern end of the harbour.

SKOPELOS ΣΚΟΠΕΛΟΣ

pop 4700

A mountainous island, Skopelos is covered in pine forests, vineyards, olive groves and fruit orchards. While the northwest coast is exposed with high cliffs, the southeast is sheltered and harbours pleasant pebbled beaches. The island's main port and capital of Skopelos Town, on the east coast, skirts a semicircular bay and clambers in tiers up a hillside, culminating in a ruined fortress.

Velanio Beach on the south coast is the island's nudie spot. On the west coast, pebbled **Panormos Beach**, with its sheltered emerald bay surrounded by pine forest, is superb. The 2km stretch of **Milia Beach**, a few kilometres further on, is considered the island's best for swimming.

In Skopelos Town, there is no tourist office, but **Thalpos Leisure & Services** (☎ 24240 22947; www.holidayislands.com), on the waterfront between the ferry quay and the excursion-boat quay, is handy for accommodation and tours. Head 50m up the road opposite the port entrance to find Platanos Sq. Along Doulidi, the street to the left after Gyros.gr, is the **Skopelos Internet Café** (☎ 24240 23093; per hr €3.50), post office and a stack of popular nightspots. The bus station is next to the port.

Pension Sotos (☎ 24240 22549; www.skopelos.net/sotos; s/d €25/50; ☺), in the middle of the waterfront, has big rooms in an enchanting old Skopelete building. There's also a communal kitchen, terrace and courtyard. Check out individual rooms and their different prices online before you go. **Perivoli Studios** (☎ 24240 58022; www.skopelos.net/perivoli;

d/tr €60/70; ☐ ☺) are studio-apartments in what used to be a traditional stone building used for roasting plums. About 100m from the new quay, each studio has a well-equipped kitchen and terrace.

Head to Souvlaki Sq, 100m up from the dock, for cheap eats such as gyros and souvlaki. The top spot in town to chill out is under the huge plane tree at **Platanos Jazz Bar** (☎ 24240 23661), opposite the excursion-boat quay. It's open all day, serves a mean omelette (€3) for breakfast, and plays wicked jazz and blues until the late hours. It's the ideal place to recover from, or prepare for, a hangover. Next door is **Taverna Ta Kimata O Angelos** (☎ 24240 22381; mains from €4), a traditional taverna that is the oldest one on the island.

On Doulidi, there is a clutch of popular bars, including **Panselinos** (☎ 24240 24488; ☺ 10pm-3am), which mixes Greek pop sounds with live performances.

In summer, there are daily ferries to Volos (€16.90, 3½ hours) and Agios Konstantinos (€31.60, 3½ hours) that also call at Skiathos. Flying Dolphin hydrofoils dash several times a day to Skiathos (€10.30, 45 minutes), Alonnisos (€7.70, 20 minutes), Volos (€26.30, 2¼ hours) and Agios Konstantinos (€27.40, 2½ hours). Most hydrofoils also call in at Loutraki, the port below Glossa on the northwest coast of the island. For schedules and tickets, visit **Skopelos Ferry Office** (☎ 24240 22767), opposite the port. There are frequent buses from Skopelos Town to Glossa (€3.20, one hour) stopping at all beaches along the way.

ALONNISOS ΑΛΟΝΝΗΣΟΣ

pop 2700

Green, serene, attractive Alonnisos is at the end of the line and is thereby the least visited of the Sporades' main islands. The west coast is mostly precipitous cliffs, but the east coast is speckled with pebble-and-sand beaches. The seas surrounding the island have been declared a marine park and reputedly have the cleanest waters in the Aegean.

The port village of Pattitiri isn't particularly attractive. Its concrete buildings were slapped together in 1965 after an earthquake destroyed the hilltop capital of Alonnisos Town. There are two main thoroughfares; facing inland from the ferry quay, Pelasgon

is to the left and Ikion Dolopon is to the far right.

There is no tourist office or tourist police, but the post office, police and internet access at **Techno Plus** (☎ 24240 29100; per hr €3; ☺ 9am-2pm & 5-9pm) are on Ikion Dolopon. On the waterfront itself, **Alonnisos Travel** (☎ 24240 65188; www.alonnisotravel.gr) handles boat scheduling and ticketing. **Ikos Travel** (☎ 24240 65320; www.ikostravel.com) runs a popular round-the-island excursion. The bus stop is on the corner of Ikion Dolopon and the waterfront.

The tiny *hora*, **Old Alonnisos**, is a few kilometres inland. Its streets sprout a profusion of plant life, alluring villas of eclectic design and dramatic vistas.

Alonnisos is ideal for walking. Waterfront travel agencies offer guided tours or there's an excellent trail guide called *Alonnisos on Foot: A Walking & Swimming Guide* by Bente Keller & Elias Tsoukanas, which is available at newsstands for €9.

The **Rooms to Let service** (☎ 24240 66188; fax 24240 65577; ☺ 9.30am-2pm & 6.30-10.30pm), opposite the quay, books accommodation all over the island. **Camping Rocks** (☎ 24240 65410; per person €5) is a shady, basic camping ground. It is a steep hike about 1.5km from the port; go up Pelasgon and take the first road on your left. **Pension Pleiades** (☎ 24240 65235; pleiades@internet.gr; s/d €35/50; ☺) looks out over the harbour and is visible from the quay. The rooms are immaculate, balconied, bright and cheerful. **Paradise Hotel** (☎ 24240 65213; www.paradise-hotel.gr; s/d/tr €63/80/99; ☐ ☺ ☺) is an excellent-value place featuring a swimming pool and including a buffet breakfast in its prices. Follow the stairway opposite the National Bank.

To Kamaki Ouzeri (☎ 24240 65245; Ikion Dolopon; mains €4-10) is a traditional island eatery. Check the ready-to-eat dishes out in the kitchen. **Café Flisvos** (☎ 24240 65307; mains from €5) is the pick of the waterfront restaurants, under the canopy opposite the dock.

There are ferries with varying regularity connecting Alonnisos to Volos (€14.80, 4½ hours) and Agios Konstantinos (€31.30, four hours) via Skopelos and Skiathos. Flying Dolphin hydrofoils provide the most regular schedules between the islands. They travel several times a day to Skopelos Town (€7.70, 20 minutes), Skiathos (€14.70, 1½

hours), Volos (€27.80, 2½ hours) and Agios Konstantinos (€31.30, 2¾ hours).

The local bus (€1) runs to the *hora* every hour. Car- and scooter-hire outlets are on Pelasgon and Ikion Dolopon, but only one main road spans the island!

IONIAN ISLANDS ΤΑ ΕΙΤΤΑΝΗΣΑ

The idyllic cypress- and fir-covered Ionian islands stretch down the western coast of Greece from Corfu in the north to Kythira, off the southern tip of the Peloponnese. Mountainous, with dramatic cliff-backed beaches, soft light, and turquoise-coloured water, they're more Italian in feel, offering a contrasting experience to other Greek islands.

CORFU ΚΕΡΚΥΡΑ

pop 109,540

Corfu is the second-largest and most important island in the group and many consider it to be Greece's most beautiful island.

Corfu Town

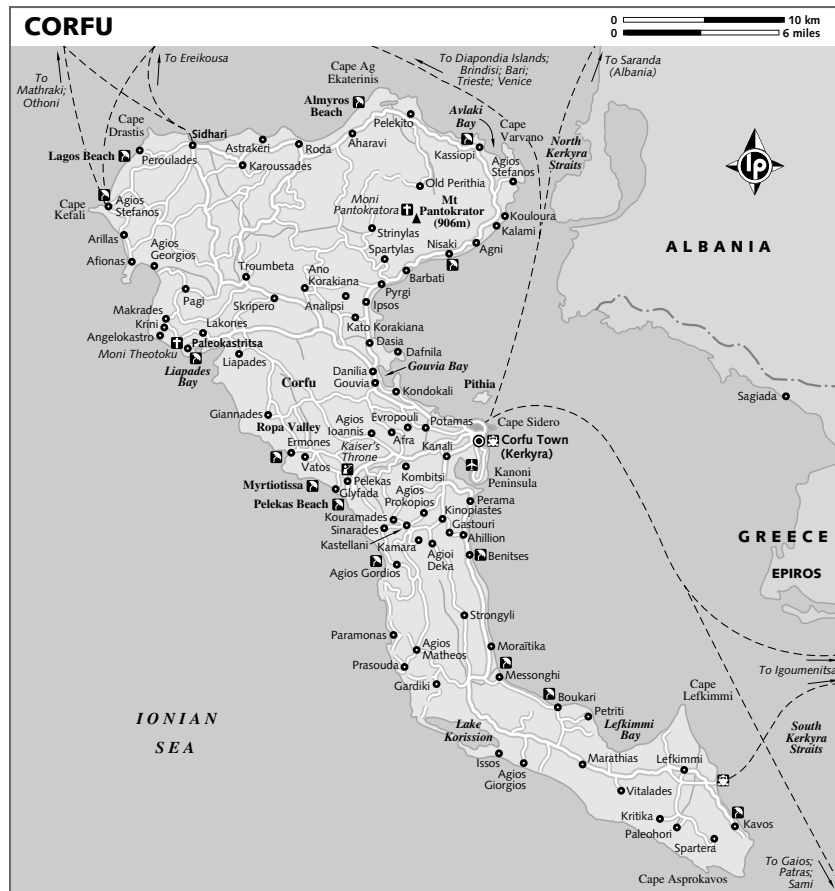
pop 39,048

Built on a promontory and wedged between two fortresses, Corfu's old town is a tangle of narrow alleyways of shuttered Venetian buildings. The elegant Liston, in the centre of town, is a row of arcaded buildings inspired by the Rue de Rivoli in Paris.

The town's Palaio Frourio (Old Fortress) stands on an eastern promontory, separated from the town by parks and gardens known as the Spianada. The Neo Frourio (New Fortress) lies to the northwest. Ferries dock at the new port, just west of the Neo Frourio. The **long-distance bus station** (Avrami) is inland from the port. The **tourist police** (☎ 26610 30265; 3rd fl, Samartzi 4) provide helpful info. Check email at **On Line Internet Café** (Kapodistria 28; per hr €4).

SIGHTS

The **archaeological museum** (☎ 26610 30680; P Vraïla 5; admission €3; ☺ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun) houses a collection of finds from Mycenaean to classical times. The **Church of Agios Spiridon** (Agios Spiridonos) has a richly decorated interior and displays the remains of St Spiridon, paraded through town four times a year.



SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel Hermes (☎ 26610 39268/39321; fax 26610 31747; G Markora 14; s/d €30/40, with shared bathroom €20/30) While this hotel has seen better days, it's one of the best deals in town and is popular with backpackers who hang out in the cool lobby to escape the summer heat.

Hotel Konstantinoupolis (☎ 26610 48716; www.konstantinoupolis.com.gr; K Zavitsianou 1, Old Port; s/d/tr €70/98/116; 🍷) The breezy rooms at this well-maintained old hotel are clean and come with TV, minibar and wi-fi. Book a front room overlooking the lovely harbour. Prices drop by €20 out of the high season.

To Tsipouzadiko (☎ 26610 82240; mains €3-8; 🍷 dinner) This big atmospheric place, with old 45 *rembetika* records on its walls, serves

up generous portions of fresh (cheap) Greek food. Its lovely garden terrace hums till late with the chatter of locals. It's on the lane behind courthouse and Hotel Konstantinoupolis in Old Port.

La Famiglia (☎ 26610 30270; Maniariisi Arlioti 16; mains €6-14; 🍷 8pm-late) Unusual for Greece, as it's equally popular with tourists (who eat around 8pm) and locals (who pack the place late). This Italian eatery has authentic pastas, buzzy atmosphere and great music.

To Dimarchio (☎ 26610 39031; Plateia Dimarchio; mains €7-20) One of the city's best restaurants on an attractive square, this place serves high quality (and occasionally inventive) Italian and Greek dishes, prepared with the freshest ingredients.

Café Liston (☎ 26610 45514; Eleftherias 10) There's nothing like starting the day with an espresso under the arcades of the Liston. This is our pick for quality and people-watching, although local frappé-drinking teens prefer roadside **Libro d'Oro** (The Liston).

Around the Island

The main resort on the west coast is **Paleokastritsa**, set around a series of gorgeous cypress-backed bays. Further south, there are good beaches around the small village of **Agios Gordios**. Between Paleokastritsa and Agios Gordios is the hilltop village of **Pelekas**, a good place to watch the sunset.

Sunrock (☎ 26610 94637; www.geocities.com/sunrock_corfu; Pelekas Beach; per person with shared bathroom/full board €18/24; 🍷 🍷) is a resort popular with backpackers because of its great facilities, activities and pick-up service.

Getting There & Away

Corfu's **Ioannis Kapodistrias airport** (CFU; ☎ 26610 30180) is 3km from Corfu Town. **Olympic Airlines** (code OA; ☎ 26610 38694; Polila 11, Corfu Town) and **Aegean Airlines** (code A3; ☎ 26610 27100) offer several flights daily to Athens, while Olympic also flies to Thessaloniki a few times a week. There are hourly ferries to Igoumenitsa (€6, 1½ hours), a daily ferry to Paxi, and in summer there are daily services to Patra (€21 to €25, six hours) on the international ferries (see p414 for more details). Daily buses to Athens (€30, 8½ hours) and Thessaloniki (€29, eight hours) leave from the Avrami terminal.

Getting Around

Buses for villages close to Corfu Town leave from Plateia San Rocco. Services to other destinations leave from Avrami terminal. A taxi from the airport to the old town costs around €10.

LEFKADA ΛΕΥΚΑΔΑ

pop 22,500

Joined to the mainland by a narrow isthmus, fertile Lefkada with its pine forests and olive groves, also boasts many pretty bays, splendid beaches, and one of the hottest windsurfing spots in Europe.

Lefkada Town

Most travellers' first port of call, laid-back Lefkada Town is popular with yachties and

windsurfers heading south. The town has an earthquake-resistant corrugated-iron style of architecture that's quite unique, an attractive marina, pleasant waterfront areas and a vibrant pedestrian thoroughfare with some very funky jewellery and fashion boutiques.

SLEEPING & EATING

Pension Pirofani (☎ 26450 25844; Marina Dorpfeld; d/tr €70/85) This great-value *pension* with balconied clean rooms is in prime people-watching territory.

Hotel Ianos (☎ 26450 22217; Marina Lefkada; www.ianoshotel.gr; s/d/tr €100/130/150; 🍷 🍷) While the décor of this hotel was dated before it opened, rooms have minibars and TV, there's a swimming pool, and the marina location is unbeatable. Prices drop considerably outside of the high season.

Gustoso (☎ 26450 24603; Agelou Sikelianou, western seafront; mains €6-20) This attractive Italian pizzeria is the pick of a dozen eateries and cafés lining the waterfront for its delicious salads and best wood-fired-oven pizzas outside of Napoli.

Around the Island

With its lovely bay and pleasant waterfront, **Nydri** is somewhat blighted by tacky souvenir shops and touristy tavernas. Tiny **Agios Nikitas** is a typically atmospheric Greek town with a laid-back ambience, but gets very crowded in summer.

Eucalyptus-scented **Vasiliki**, with its pretty village, relaxed style, seaside eateries and long beach, is just the place to spend a few days. Popular with windsurfers, it's possible to organise windsurfing lessons (and book hotels) through **Club Vass** (☎ UK 01920 484121; www.dubvass.com) or guided treks, sea kayaking and other outdoor activities through **Trekking Hellas** (☎ 26450 31130; www.trekking.gr). Overlooking the bay, **Pension Holidays** (☎ 26450 31426; d €55; 🍷) has great-value rooms near the village centre.

Getting There & Around

Four Island Ferries operates daily ferries between Nydri, Frikes (Ithaki), Fiskardo (Kefalonia) and Vasiliki. Most trips take about 90 minutes and tickets cost €5 per person and €27 per car. Get times and tickets from **Borsalino Travel** (☎ 26450 92528; Nydri) or **Samba Tours** (☎ 26450 31520; Vasiliki).

ITHAKI ΙΘΑΚΗ

pop 3052

Odysseus' long lost home in Homer's *Odyssey*, Ithaki, or ancient Ithaca, is a verdant island blessed with cypress-covered hills and beautiful turquoise coves for swimming.

Kioni

The tiny village of Kioni has a laid-back vibe, a magical waterfront location and is a wonderful place to chill for a few days. It's possible to walk to nearby coves to swim, but it's best to explore the island with your own wheels.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hamilton House (☎ 26740 31654; marina waterfront; r €40) Although it has a shabby charm, the cluttered interior of this traditional stone house, right on the village waterfront, won't be to everyone's taste. For the price, the location and sea views are unbeatable.

Captain's Apartments (☎ 26740 31481; www.captains-apartments.gr; studio/apt €45/65; 🍷) Owned by an affable former merchant navy captain, these clean, spacious apartments are well-equipped for self-catering, and have satellite TV and balconies overlooking the valley and village. Well-signposted, it's easy to find.

Kalipso (☎ 26740 31066; mains €5-35) If the yachts are anchored at the marina, head here early for a waterfront table and hearty traditional Greek dishes, as it's liable to run out of food – although the well-meaning staff might make it up to you with a night-cap on the house!

Around the Island

The tiny relaxed port of **Frikes**, where the ferries dock, is a cheaper alternative to Kioni and there are rooms to rent – ask at the waterfront tavernas and shops. While the capital **Vathy** is attractive with elegant mansions rising from around its bay, it has a big-town feel after Kioni.

Getting There & Around

Four Island Ferries operates daily ferries between **Frikes**, **Fiskardo** (Kefallonia), and **Nydri** and **Vasiliki** (Lefkada). Tickets can be purchased at the **Frikes** dock just before departure. Most trips take an average of 90 minutes and tickets cost €5 per person and €27 per car. Call **Delas Tours** (☎ 26740 32104;

www.ithaca.com.gr; Vathy) for times. You really need a car to explore the island.

KEFALLONIA ΚΕΦΑΛΛΟΝΙΑ

pop 45,000

Tranquil cypress- and fir-covered Kefallonia has fortunately not succumbed to package tourism to the extent the other Ionian islands have, despite being thrust under the spotlight following its starring role in *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*. The largest Ionian island is breathtakingly beautiful in parts and remains low-key outside the resort areas.

Fiskardo

Pretty **Fiskardo**, with its pastel-coloured Venetian buildings set around a picturesque bay, was the only Kefallonian village not to be destroyed by the 1953 earthquake. Despite its popularity with European yachters and upmarket package tourists, it's still laid-back enough to appeal to independent travellers, and is a sublime spot to chill for a few days. There are lovely walks and sheltered coves for swimming.

SLEEPING & EATING

Regina's Rooms (☎ 26740 41355; www.myrtoscorp.com; d €50-60) On the car park, this is a budget bargain and ideal for self-caterers. All of its colourful breezy rooms have TV, fridge and balconies, some with gorgeous bay views, and some with kitchenettes or access to a communal kitchen. Friendly **Regina** gives good discounts for long stays and when it's quiet.

Faros Suites (☎ 26740 41355; d from €120; 🍷 🍷 🍷) A super-comfortable family-owned boutique hotel successfully fusing Greek and African style, the hospitable South African-Greek owners here make you feel at home. The spacious suites are more like apartments with fully equipped kitchens and balconies with sea views.

Café Tselenti (☎ 26740 41344; mains €5-20) This is the most elegant dining option in town, and while the focus is Italian, it also serves some superb Greek classics.

Vasso's (☎ 26740 41276; mains €6-25) Vasso's waterside location, with sailing boats bobbing up and down beside your table, is romantic. It's the place to head for exceptional seafood, whether it's fresh grilled fish or pasta with crayfish.

Around the Island

Straddling a slender isthmus on the north west coast, the petite pastel-coloured village of **Assos** watches over the ruins of a Venetian fortress perched upon a pine-covered peninsula. Popular with upmarket package tourists, there are several tavernas on the waterfront, but little else to interest independent travellers. Splendid **Myrtos Beach**, 13km south of Assos, is spellbinding from both above, where the postcard views are breathtaking, and below, where you'll think you've discovered the perfect beach – until you try to clamber across the painful pebbles that is!

A car is best for exploring Kefallonia. **Pama Travel** (☎ 26740 41033; www.pamatravel.com; waterfront, Fiskardo) rents cars and boats, books accommodation, sells tickets and has internet access. Across the bay, **Nautilus Travel** (☎ 26740 41440; fax 26740 41470) sells tickets for ferries.

Getting There & Around

There are daily flights to Athens (€65) from **Kefalonia airport** (EFL; ☎ 26710 41511), 9km south of Argostoli. Four Island Ferries operates daily ferries between **Fiskardo**, **Frikes** (Ithaki), and **Nydri** and **Vasiliki** (Lefkada). Get tickets from **Nautilus Travel** or the dock before departure. Most trips average 90 minutes and cost €5 per person and €27 per car. In the high season, there are ferries from **Pesada** to **Agios Nikolaos** (Zakyntos). Daily ferries operate from **Sami** to **Patra** (€11.50, 2½ hours), and from **Argostoli** and **Poros** to **Kyllini** (the Peloponnese).

ZAKYNTHOS ΖΑΚΥΝΘΟΣ

pop 39,000

The beautiful island of Zakyntos, or Zante, has stunning coves, dramatic cliffs and laid-back beaches, but unfortunately is over-run by package tourist groups, so only a few special spots warrant your time.

Zakyntos Town

The island's capital and port is an attractive Venetian town that was painstakingly reconstructed after the 1953 earthquake. Its elegant arcades and lively café scene make it the best base from which to explore the island.

Along the waterfront, **Lombardou** and its surrounding streets are home to tour-

isty tavernas, travel agencies and car-rental agencies. **Plateia Agiou Markou** is the buzzy main square, off which runs **Alexandrou Roma**, the main pedestrian shopping street, with everything from fashion boutiques to souvenir shops (with a mind-boggling array of loggerhead turtle souvenirs). Look out for the traditional sweet stores on and around **Eleftheriou Venizelou** selling *mandolato*, the local soft nougat.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel Strada Marina (☎ 26950 42761; www.strada-marina.gr; Lombardou 14; s/d €75/120; 🍷 🍷) The rooms may be uninspiring and the rooftop swimming pool filled only in summer, but this hotel is well situated, and portside rooms have balconies with sea views. Rates can drop by half when it's quiet.

Avoid eating on the touristy **Plateia Agiou Markou** and do what the locals do – hit **Alexandrou Roma** for cheap eats.

2D (☎ 26950 27008; Alexandrou Roma 32; gyros from €2.50) Owned by two guys called **Dionysus**, **2D** does the most delicious gyros and juicy roast chickens in town, and they even home deliver!

Arekia (☎ 26950 26346; Krioneriu 92; mains €3-10) Take a short stroll north of the centre along the waterfront for a memorable night out at this atmospheric taverna. The exuberant musical entertainment, delicious Greek food, and warm friendly service make for one of the most memorable experiences you'll have in Greece.

Around the Island

Most people head to Zakyntos for the famous **Shipwreck Beach** in the northwest. While Zakyntos is best explored by car, for a sea-level look take a boat from **Cape Skinari** near **Agios Nikolaos**, **Porto Vromi** or **Alykes**.

Continue south to gorgeous **Limnionas** where you can swim in crystal-clear turquoise coves. Arrive early as there's barely enough space for a few people to sunbathe on the rocks. The only eatery at the cove, **Taverna Porto Limnionas** (☎ 26950 48650; mains €3-12) serves up delicious Greek classics (try the excellent *mezedes* plate) in a sublime setting overlooking the sea.

Cape Keri near the island's southernmost point has spectacular views of sheer cliffs and splendid beaches. It's possible to swim

at pleasant **Keri Beach** nearby, but it's nothing to write home about. The **Bay of Laganas** has been declared a national marine park by the Greek government in order to protect the endangered loggerhead turtles that come ashore to lay their eggs in August – the peak of the tourist invasion. While the pleasant beaches are worth a look, it's best not to risk one more beach umbrella piercing an unborn baby turtle's shell, and soak up some sun elsewhere.

Zakynthos' **airport** (ZTH; ☎ 26950 28322) is 6km from Zakynthos Town. **Olympic Airlines** (code OA; ☎ 26950 28322; airport) has daily flights to Athens and other Ionian Islands. There are hourly ferries to Igoumenitsa (€6, 1½ hours), including car ferries (€27 per car), and several daily bus-ferry services to Patra (€5, 3½ hours). As bus services are poor, to explore the island it's best to hire a car. Try **Europcar** (☎ 26950 41541; Plateia Agiou Louka, Zakynthos Town).

GREECE DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Greece has a wide range of accommodation options from excellent camping grounds to flashy designer hotels and everything in between. However, if you're travelling extensively you'll find that in some towns you might have to move up or down a category for a night or two. Prices quoted in this book are for the high season (many destinations from June to September, but always July to August) and include an attached bathroom, unless otherwise stated. Budget rooms cost up to €60, midrange from €60 to €150, while top-end rooms start at €150. Prices are about 40% cheaper between October and May, but note that some towns virtually board up during winter. Greek accommodation is subject to strict price controls, and by law a notice must be displayed in every room stating the category of the room and the seasonal price. If you think there's something amiss, contact the tourist police.

Greece has around 340 camping grounds, many of them in wonderfully scenic locations. They're generally open from April to October. The **Panhellenic Camping Association** (www.panhellenic-camping-union.gr) has detailed information on camping grounds around

Greece. Standard facilities include hot showers, kitchens, restaurants and minimarkets – and often a swimming pool. Prices vary according to facilities, but reckon on €5 to €7 per adult, €3 to €4 for children aged four to 12, €4 for a small tent, €5 for a large one and €6 upwards for a caravan.

Greece has more than 50 mountain refuges, which are listed in the booklet *Greece Mountain Refuges & Ski Centres*, available free of charge at EOT and EOS (Ellinikos Orivatikos Syndesmos, the Greek Alpine Club) offices.

You'll find youth hostels in most major towns and on some islands. Most hostels throughout Greece are affiliated with the **Greek Youth Hostel Organisation** (☎ 21075 19530; y-hostels@otenet.gr), including hostels in Athens, Olympia, Patra, Thessaloniki, and on the islands of Crete and Santorini. Most charge €8 to €11 for a dorm bed, and you don't have to be a member to stay.

Domatia are the Greek equivalent of a bed and breakfast – minus the breakfast. Initially consisting of little more than spare rooms rented out in summer, *domatia* nowadays are often purpose-built additions to the family house, but can still represent good value. Expect to pay about €25 to €35 for a single and €40 to €50 for a double. Don't worry about finding them – owners will find you as they greet ferries and buses shouting 'room!'.

Hotels in Greece are classified as deluxe, or A, B, C, D or E class. The ratings seldom seem to have much bearing on the price, but expect to pay about €18/25 for singles/doubles in D and E class, and anything from €35/45 to €60/80 for singles/doubles with a private bathroom in a decent C-class place. Some places are classified as *pensions* and are rated differently. Both hotels and *pensions* are allowed to levy a 10% surcharge for stays of less than three nights, but they seldom do.

ACTIVITIES

Diving & Snorkelling

Snorkelling can be enjoyed just about anywhere along Greece's magnificent coastlines. Corfu, Mykonos and Santorini are just some of the good areas to snorkel. Diving, however, must take place under the supervision of a diving school to protect the antiquities still in the deep.

Skiing

Greece offers inexpensive European skiing with more than a dozen resorts dotted around the mainland, mainly in the north. It's no Switzerland, however, and the resorts are basic, catering mainly to Greek skiers. The main areas are Mt Parnassos (195km northwest of Athens) and Mt Vermio (110km west of Thessaloniki). A good season starts in early January and goes through to April. Take a look at www.snowreport.gr for snow reports and web cams.

Trekking

Greece could be a trekkers' paradise if trekking organisations received better funding. Outside the main popular routes, the trails are generally overgrown and poorly marked. Several companies run organised treks; the biggest is **Trekking Hellas** (Map p352; ☎ 210 331 0323; www.outdoorsgreece.com; Filellinon 7, Athens).

Windsurfing

Greece is a fantastic windsurfing destination and sailboards are widely available for hire, priced at €12 to €15 per hour. The top spots for windsurfing are Hrysi Akti on Paros, and Vasiliki on Lefkada, which is a popular place to learn.

Yachting

Set aside your prejudices about deck shoes and cardigans knotted around necks: yachting is a brilliant way to see the Greek Islands. All you need is a couple of certified sailors in your group and you can hire a 28ft bare boat (no crew) that sleeps six for around €1000 per week, although hiring a skipper will nearly double that price.

BUSINESS HOURS

Banks are open from 8am to 2pm Monday to Thursday, and to 1.30pm Friday. Some banks in the larger cities and towns are also open from 3.30pm to 6.30pm and on Saturday (8am to 1.30pm). Post offices are open from 7.30am to 2pm Monday to Friday; in major cities they're open until 8pm and also open from 7.30am to 2pm on Saturday.

In summer, shops are generally open from 8am to 1.30pm and 5.30pm to 8.30pm on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, and 8am to 2.30pm on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday. Shops generally open 30 minutes

later during winter. *Periptera* will often be your saviour: open from early morning to late at night, they sell everything from beer to bus tickets.

Restaurants in tourist areas generally open at 11am and stay open through to midnight; normal restaurant hours are 11am to 2pm and from 7pm to midnight or 1am. Cafés tend to open between 9am and 10am and stay open until midnight. Bars open around 8pm and close late, and while discos might open at 10pm, you'll drink alone until midnight. Nightclubs generally close around 4am, but many go through to dawn during summer.

CHILDREN

Greece is an easy destination to travel through with children. Hotels and restaurants (plenty of kids' menus) are used to having children around and the Greeks, being so family-oriented, are very welcoming. However, the summer heat can be challenging, and running around poorly maintained tourist sites (such as ruins), requires a watchful eye – as does crossing any road in Greece!

CUSTOMS

You may bring the following into Greece duty-free: 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars; 1L of spirits or 2L of wine; 50g of perfume; and 250mL of eau de Cologne.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Greece has the lowest crime rate in Europe, however, you might doubt that statistic if you head down the wrong street in Omonia, Athens. See the Athens section (p346) for more information on this as well as a common con that travellers fall for.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Greek Embassies & Consulates

Greek diplomatic missions abroad include the following:

Australia (☎ 02-6273 3011; 9 Turrana St, Yarralumla, ACT 2600)

Canada (☎ 613-238 6271; 76-80 Maclaren St, Ottawa, Ontario K2P 0K6)

Cyprus (☎ 02-680 670/1; Byron Blvd 8-10, Nicosia)

France (☎ 01-47 23 72 28; www.amb-grece.fr/presse; 17 Rue Auguste Vaquerie, 75116 Paris)

Germany (☎ 30-20 62 60; www.griechische-botschaft.de; Jaegerstrasse 54-55, 10117 Berlin-Mitte)

Italy (☎ 06-853 7551; www.greekembassy.it; Viale G Rossini 4, Rome 00198)

Japan (☎ 03-3403 0871/2; www.greekemb.jp; 3-16-30 Nishi Azabu, Minato-ku, Tokyo 106-0031)

New Zealand (☎ 04-473 7775; 5-7 Willeston St, Wellington)

South Africa (☎ 12-430 7351; 1003 Church St, Arcadia, Pretoria 0083)

Spain (☎ 01-564 4653; Av Doctor Arce 24, Madrid 28002)

Turkey (☎ 312 448-0647; Ziya-ul-Rahman Caddesi 9-11, Gaziosmanpasa 06700, Ankara)

UK (☎ 020-7229 3850; www.greekembassy.org.uk; 1a Holland Park, London W11 3TP)

USA (☎ 202-939 1300; www.greekembassy.org; 2221 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington, DC 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in Greece

All foreign embassies in Greece are in Athens and its suburbs.

Australia (Map p344; ☎ 210 645 0404; Dimitriou Soutsou 37, GR-115 21)

Canada (Map p344; ☎ 210 727 3400; Genadiou 4, GR-115 21)

Cyprus (Map p344; ☎ 210 723 7883; Irodou 16, GR-106 75)

France (Map p344; ☎ 210 361 1663; Leaf Vasilissis Sofias 7, GR-106 71)

Germany (Map p344; ☎ 210 728 5111; cnr Dimitriou 3 & Karaoli, Kolonaki GR-106 75)

Italy (Map p344; ☎ 210 361 7260; Sekeri 2, GR-106 74)

Japan (Map p344; ☎ 210 775 8101; Athens Tower, Leoforos Messogion 2-4, GR-115 27)

New Zealand (Map p344; ☎ 210 687 4701; Kifissias 268, Halandri)

South Africa (Map p344; ☎ 210 680 6645; Kifissias 60, Maroussi, GR-151 25)

Turkey (Map p344; ☎ 210 724 5915; Vasilissis Georgiou 8, GR-106 74)

UK (Map p344; ☎ 210 723 6211; Ploutarhou 1, GR-106 75)

USA (Map p344; ☎ 210 721 2951; Leoforos Vasilissis Sofias 91, GR-115 21)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

In Greece, it is probably easier to list the dates when festivals and events are *not* on! Some festivals are religious, some cultural and others seemingly just an excuse to party. It is worth timing at least part of your trip to coincide with one festival or event, as you will be warmly invited to join in the revelry. The following list is by no means exhaustive and more details can be found at www.cultureguide.gr.

January

Epiphany (Blessing of the Waters) Christ's baptism is celebrated on the 6th when seas, lakes and rivers are blessed. The largest ceremony occurs at Piraeus.

February

Carnival Season The three-week period before the beginning of Lent is celebrated all over Greece with fancy dress, feasting and traditional dance.

March

Independence Day On 25 March, parades and dancing mark the anniversary of the hoisting of the Greek flag that started the War of Independence.

April

Easter The most important festival of the Greek Orthodox religion. The emphasis is on the Resurrection rather than the Crucifixion so it's a celebratory event. The most significant part of the event is midnight on Easter Saturday when candles are lit (symbolising the Resurrection) and a fireworks and candle-lit procession hits the streets.

May

May Day The celebrations on 1 May see a mass exodus from towns to the countryside to picnic and gather wildflowers, with which to make wreaths for adorning homes.

June

Hellenic Festival The most important of summer festivals, events are staged throughout Greece; however, the Theatre of Herodes Atticus in Athens and the Theatre of Epidavros, near Nafplio, are venues for traditional events.

July

Feast of Agia Marina (St Marina) This feast day is celebrated on 17 July in many parts of Greece, and is a particularly important event on the Dodecanese island of Kosos.

August

Feast of the Assumption Greeks celebrate this day (15 August) with family reunions and many expats head back to their home town for the festivities.

Samothraki World Music Festival The northeastern Aegean island of Samothraki plays host to Greece's biggest rave party for a week starting at the end of August.

September

Genesis tis Panagias The birthday of the Virgin Mary is celebrated on 8 September with religious services and feasting.

October

Feast of Agios Dimitrios This feast day, on 26 October, is celebrated in Thessaloniki with much revelry.

Ohi (No) Day Metaxas' refusal to allow Mussolini's troops free passage through Greece in WWII is commemorated on 28 October with parades, folk dancing and feasting.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

In a country where the church plays a significant role in shaping society's views on issues such as sexuality, it's not surprising that homosexuality is generally frowned upon. While there is no legislation against homosexual activity, it is wise to be discreet and to avoid open displays of togetherness. Greece is a popular destination for gay travellers. Athens has a busy gay scene that packs up and heads to the islands for summer. Mykonos has long been famous for its bars, beaches and hedonism and a visit to Eresos on Lesbos has become something of a pilgrimage for lesbians.

HOLIDAYS

New Year's Day 1 January.

Epiphany 6 January.

First Sunday in Lent February.

Greek Independence Day 25 March.

Good Friday/Easter Sunday March/April.

Spring Festival/Labour Day 1 May.

Feast of the Assumption 15 August.

Ohi Day 28 October.

Christmas Day 25 December.

St Stephen's Day 26 December.

INTERNET ACCESS

Greece still lags behind the rest of Europe for travellers looking for internet access, however, we've listed cafés under the Information heading for cities and islands where available. Charges differ wildly (as does the speed of access) – from €1.50 per hour in big cities to up to €10 per hour on some of the islands. Some midrange and most top-end hotels offer some form of internet connection (occasionally wi-fi), but laptop-wielding visitors will often find this a frustrating and expensive business.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Culture Guide (www.cultureguide.gr) Plenty of information about contemporary culture and the arts.

Greek Ferries (www.greekferries.org) Get all your ferry information from the source. Covers international and domestic ferries.

Greek National Tourist Organisation (www.gnto.gr) Concise tourist information.

LonelyPlanet.com (www.lonelyplanet.com) Has postcards from other travellers and the Thorn Tree bulletin board, where you can pose those tricky questions or help answer other travellers' questions on your return.

Ministry of Culture (www.culture.gr) Information on ancient sites, art galleries and museums.

LANGUAGE

Greeks are naturally delighted if you can speak a little of their language, but you don't need Greek to get around the major tourism sites. Many Greeks have lived abroad, usually in Australia or the USA, and English is widely spoken, but venturing to remote villages can prove more of a challenge.

MONEY

Banks will exchange all major currencies, in either cash or travellers cheques and also Eurocheques. Post offices charge less commission than banks, but won't cash travellers cheques. For a country with so many tourists, credit cards are not as widely accepted as you'd expect in Greece. Always check that an establishment accepts cards and always have cash handy. ATMs are located everywhere except the smallest villages.

Greece is still a cheap destination by northern European standards, but it's no longer dirt-cheap. A daily budget of €40 would entail staying in youth hostels or camping, staying away from bars, and only occasionally eating in restaurants or taking ferries. Allow at least €80 per day if you want your own room and plan to eat out regularly and see the sights. If you really want a holiday (comfortable rooms and restaurants all the way) you'll need closer to €120 per day.

Your money will go a lot further if you travel in the quieter months, as accommodation is generally much cheaper outside the high season when there are more opportunities to negotiate better deals.

Greece adopted the euro in 2002, and the Greek drachma disappeared after a two-month period of dual circulation. Value-added tax (VAT) varies from 15% to 18%. A tax-rebate scheme applies at a restricted number of shops and stores; look for a Tax Free sign. You must fill in a form at the shop and then present it with the receipt at the airport on departure. A cheque will (hopefully) be sent to your home address.

In restaurants the service charge is included on the bill, but it is the custom to leave a small tip – just round up the bill. Accommodation is nearly always negotiable outside peak season, especially for longer stays. While souvenir shops will generally bargain, prices in other shops are normally clearly marked and non-negotiable.

POST

Tahydromia (post offices) are easily identified by the yellow sign outside. Regular post boxes are yellow; red post boxes are for express mail. The postal rate for postcards and airmail letters within the EU is €0.60, to other destinations it's €0.65. Post within Europe takes five to eight days and to the USA, Australia and New Zealand, nine to 11 days. Some tourist shops also sell stamps, but with a 10% surcharge.

Mail can be sent *poste restante* to any main post office and is held for up to one month. Your surname should be underlined and you will need to show your passport when you collect your mail. Parcels are not delivered in Greece – they must be collected from a post office.

SOLO TRAVELLERS

Greece is a great destination for solo travellers, particularly during summer when the islands are full of travellers meeting and making friends. Hostels, as well as other backpacker-friendly accommodation, are excellent places to meet other travellers. Solo women are quite safe – which is not to say that problems don't occur, but violent offences are rare.

TELEPHONE

The Greek telephone service is maintained by Organismos Tilepikoinonion Ellados, a public corporation always referred to by its acronym OTE (*o-teh*). Public phones are easy to use and pressing the 'i' button brings up the operating instructions in English. Public phones are everywhere and all use phonedcards.

For directory inquiries within Greece, call ☎ 131 or ☎ 132; for international directory inquiries, it's ☎ 161 or ☎ 162.

Mobile Phones

Mobile phones have become the must-have accessory in Greece. If you have a com-

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- Ambulance ☎ 166
- Fire ☎ 199
- Police ☎ 100
- Roadside Assistance (ELPA) ☎ 104
- Tourist Police ☎ 171

patible GSM phone from a country with a global roaming agreement with Greece, you will be able to use your phone there. Make sure you have global roaming activated before you leave your country of residence. There are several mobile service providers in Greece; **Cosmote** (www.cosmote.gr/) has the best coverage. You can purchase a Greek SIM card for around €20 and cards are available everywhere to recharge the SIM card.

Phone Codes

Telephone codes are part of the 10-digit number within Greece. The landline prefix is 2 and for mobiles it's 6.

Phonedcards

All public phones use OTE phonedcards, sold at OTE offices and *periptera*. These cards are sold in €3, €5 and €9 versions, and a local call costs €0.30 for three minutes. There are also excellent discount-card schemes available that offer much better value for money.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist information is handled by the Greek National Tourist Organisation (GNTO), known as EOT in Greece. There is either an EOT office or a local tourist office in almost every town of consequence and on many of the islands. Popular destinations have tourist police who can also provide information.

Tourist Offices Abroad

- Australia** (☎ 02-9241 1663-5; hto@tgp.com.au; 37-49 Pitt St, Sydney, NSW 2000)
Canada (☎ 416-968 2220; grnto.tor@on.aibn.com; Suite 102, 1500 Don Mills Rd, Toronto, Ontario M3B 3K4)
France (☎ 1-42 60 65 75; eot@club-Internet.fr; 3 Ave de l'Opéra, Paris 75001)
Germany Berlin (☎ 30-217 6262; Wittenbergplatz 3a,

10789 Berlin 30); Frankfurt (☎ 69-236 561; info@gzf-eot.de; Neue Mainzerstrasse 22, 60311 Frankfurt); Hamburg (☎ 40-454 498; info-hamburg@gzf-eot.de; Neuer Wall 18, 20254 Hamburg); Munich (☎ 89-222 035/6; Pacellistrasse 5, 2W 80333 Munich)

Italy Milan (☎ 02-860 470; Piazza Diaz 1, 20123 Milan); Rome (☎ 06-474 4249; Via L. Bissolati 78-80, Rome 00187)

Japan (☎ 03-350 55 917; gnto-jpn@t3.rim.or.jp; Fukuda Bldg West, 5th fl 2-11-3 Akasaka, Minato-ku, Tokyo 107)
UK (☎ 020-7495 9300; www.gnto.co.uk; 4 Conduit St, London W1R 0DJ)

USA Chicago (☎ 312-782 1084; www.greektourism.com; Suite 600, 168 North Michigan Ave, Chicago, IL 60601); Los Angeles (☎ 213-626 6696; Suite 2198, 611 West 6th St, Los Angeles, CA 92668); New York (☎ 212-421 5777; Olympic Tower, 645 5th Ave, New York, NY 10022)

TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

If mobility is a problem, the hard fact is that most hotels, museums and ancient sites are not wheelchair accessible. While facilities in Athens are steadily improving – such as at the Acropolis (p346), which now has a wheelchair lift – elsewhere the uneven terrain is an issue even for able-bodied people.

Useful information on travelling with disabilities is available on the internet at www.sath.org and www.access-able.com.

VISAS

Visitors from most countries don't need a visa for Greece. The list of countries whose nationals can stay in Greece for up to three months include Australia, Canada, all EU countries, Iceland, Israel, Japan, New Zealand and the USA. For longer stays, apply at a consulate abroad or at least 20 days in advance to the **Aliens Bureau** (Map p344; ☎ 210 770 5711; Leoforos Alexandras 173, Athens; ☒ 8am-1pm Mon-Fri) at the Athens Central Police Station. Elsewhere in Greece, apply to the local authority.

TRANSPORT IN GREECE

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

There are more than a dozen international airports in Greece, but most of them handle only summer charter flights to the islands. **Eleftherios Venizelos airport** (ATH; ☎ 210 353 0000; www.aia.gr), near Athens, handles the

vast majority of international flights, including all intercontinental ones, and has regular scheduled flights to all the European capitals.

Thessaloniki is also well served by **Macedonia airport** (SKG; ☎ 23104 73700), and there are scheduled flights to/from Iraklio (Crete) from **Nikos Kazantzakis airport** (HER; ☎ 28102 28401).

Airlines that fly to and from Greece include the following:

Air France (code AF; ☎ 2109 601 100; www.airfrance.com)

British Airways (code BA; ☎ 8011 156 000; www.britishairways.com)

Delta Airlines (code DL; ☎ 00 800 4412 9506; www.delta.com)

easyJet (code EZY; ☎ 2103 530 300; www.easyjet.com)

Emirates (code EK; ☎ 2019 333 400; www.emirates.com)

Japan Airlines (code JL; ☎ 2103 248 211; www.jal.com)

KLM (code WA; ☎ 2109 110 000; www.klm.com)

Lufthansa (code LH; ☎ 2106 175 200; www.lufthansa.com)

Olympic Airlines (code OA; ☎ 8011 144 444; www.olympic-airways.gr)

Virgin Express (code TV; ☎ 2109 490 777; www.virgin-express.com)

Land

BORDER CROSSINGS

From Albania

There are four crossing points between Greece and Albania. Kakavia, 60km northwest of Ioannina, is the main one. Others are Sagiada (near Igoumenitsa), Mertziani (near Konitsa) and Krystallopigi (near Kotas).

From Bulgaria

There are two Bulgarian border crossings: one at Promahonas (109km northeast of Thessaloniki) and the other at Ormenio (in northeastern Thrace).

From Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)

There are three border crossings here: Evzoni (68km north of Thessaloniki); Niki; and Doirani.

From Turkey

The crossing points for Turkey are at Kipi, 43km east of Alexandroupolis, and, less

conveniently, at Kastanies, 139km north-east of Alexandroupolis.

BUS

The Hellenic Railways Organisation (OSE) operates an overnight bus between Athens (500m west of the Larisis train station) and Tirana, Albania (€35.20, 16 hours, daily) via Ioannina and Gjirokastra. To Bulgaria, the OSE operates an Athens–Sofia bus (€45.50, 15 hours, daily except Monday), as well as a Thessaloniki–Sofia service (€19, 7½ hours, four daily). To Turkey, the OSE operates from Athens to Istanbul (€67.50, 22 hours, daily except Wednesday). This stops at Thessaloniki (€44) and Alexandroupolis (€15).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

You can drive or ride through the border crossings listed (p413) with your own transport, but if you are in a hire car, make sure that your insurance can cover this, and find out whether the car-hire company has roadside assistance coverage in these countries.

TRAIN

There are three daily trains from Sofia to Athens (€30.65, 18 hours) via Thessaloniki (€17.90, six to seven hours), where you need to change trains. There are daily trains between Istanbul and Thessaloniki (€42.50, around 14 hours). To the FYROM, there are two trains daily from Thessaloniki to Skopje (€14.50, three hours).

Sea

You'll find all the latest information about ferry routes, schedules and services online. For an overview try www.greekferries.gr. Most of the ferry companies have their own websites, including the following:

Agoudimos Lines (www.agoudimos-lines.com)

ANEK Lines (www.aneke.gr)

Blue Star Ferries (www.bluestarferries.com)

Fragline (www.fragline.gr)

Hellenic Mediterranean Lines (www.hml.gr)

Minoan Lines (www.minoan.gr)

Superfast (www.superfast.com)

Ventouris Ferries (www.ventouris.gr)

The following ferry services are for the high season (July and August), and prices are for one-way deck class. Prices are about 30% less in the low season.

ALBANIA

Corfu-based Petrakis Lines has daily ferries to the Albanian port of Saranda (€15, 25 minutes), plus a weekly service to Himara (€25, 1¼ hours).

CYPRUS & ISRAEL

Passenger services from Greece to Cyprus and Israel have been suspended indefinitely.

ITALY

There are ferries to the Italian ports of Ancona, Bari, Brindisi, Trieste and Venice from Patra, Igoumenitsa, Corfu and Kefallonia. If you want to take a vehicle across, it's a good idea to make a reservation beforehand.

Ancona

Blue Star Ferries and Superfast Ferries run two boats daily to Patra (€60 to €70, 19 hours or 21 hours via Igoumenitsa). Tickets are available through **Morandi & Co** (☎ 071-20 20 33; Via XXIX Settembre 2/0). Superfast accepts Eurail passes. **ANEK Lines** (☎ 071-207 23 46; Via XXIX Settembre 2/0) does the trip daily (€70) in 19½ hours via Igoumenitsa.

Bari

Minoan Lines (☎ 080 52 10 266; Via Latilla 14) and **Superfast Ferries** (☎ 080 52 11 416; Corso de Tullio 6) have daily sailings to Patra via Igoumenitsa. **Ventouris Ferries** (☎ 080 521 7609) has daily boats to Corfu (10 hours) and Igoumenitsa (11½ hours) for €45.

Brindisi

The trip from Brindisi operates only between April and early October. **Hellenic Mediterranean Lines** (☎ 0831-548001; Costa Morena) offers services to Patra (€50), calling at Igoumenitsa, Corfu, Kefallonia, Paxi and Zakynthos on the way. **Agoudimos Lines** (☎ 0831-550180; Via Provinciale per Lecce 29) and **Fragline** (☎ 0831-54 85 40; Via Spalato 31) sail only to Igoumenitsa.

Trieste

ANEK Lines (☎ 040-32 20 561; Via Rossini 2) has boats to Patra (€68, 32 hours) every day except Thursday, calling at Corfu and Igoumenitsa.

Venice

Minoan Lines (☎ 041-24 07 177; Stazione Marittima 123) has boats to Patra (€75, 29 hours) every

day except Wednesday, calling at Corfu and Igoumenitsa. **Blue Star Ferries** (☎ 041-277 0559; Stazione Marittima 123) sails the route four times weekly for €64.

TURKEY

Five regular ferry services operate between Turkey's Aegean coast and the Greek Islands. Tickets for all ferries to Turkey must be bought a day in advance. For more information about these services, see Rhodes (p392), Chios (p398), Kos (p394), Lesvos (p399) and Samos (p395).

GETTING AROUND

Greece is a relatively straightforward destination to travel around thanks to its comprehensive transport system. On the mainland, buses travel to just about every town on the map and trains offer a good alternative where available. Island-hopping is what most people think of when travelling within Greece and there are myriad ferries that crisscross the Adriatic and Aegean Seas. If you are in a hurry, there is also an extensive and well-priced domestic air network. Note that timetables are seasonal and change in at least some way every year.

Air

The vast majority of domestic flights are handled by Greece's much-maligned national carrier, **Olympic Airlines** (code 0A; ☎ 801 114 4444; www.olympicairlines.com).

Crete-based competitor **Aegean Airlines** (code A3; ☎ 80111 20000; www.aegeanair.com) is the sole survivor of the deregulation of domestic air travel. It offers flights to many of the same destinations as Olympic, and has the same fares, but Aegean often has great discount fares as well as youth and senior discounts.

Bicycle

Given Greece's hilly terrain, stifling summer heat and rather wayward four-wheeled friends, cycling is not that popular a form of transport. You can hire bicycles at most tourist centres, but these are generally for pedalling around town rather than for serious riding. Prices generally range from €5 to €12 per day. If you wish to do a cycling tour of Greece, bicycles are carried for free on ferries.

Boat

CATAMARAN

High-speed catamarans have become an important part of the island travel scene. They are just as fast as hydrofoils, if not faster, and are much more comfortable. They are also much less prone to cancellation in rough weather and the fares are generally the same as hydrofoils. The main players are Hellas Flying Dolphins and Blue Star Ferries.

FERRY

Every island has a ferry service of some sort, although in winter these are pared back. Services pick up from April, and during July and August Greece's seas are a mass of wake and wash. The ferries come in all shapes and sizes, from the state-of-the-art 'superferries' that run on the major routes to the ageing open ferries that operate local services to outlying islands.

The main ferry companies operating in Greece include:

ANEK (☎ 21041 97420; www.aneke.gr)

Blue Star Ferries (☎ 21089 19800; www.bluestarferries.com)

GA Ferries (☎ 21041 99100; www.gaferries.com)

Hellenic Seaways (☎ 21041 99000; www.hellenicseaways.gr)

LANE Lines (☎ 21042 74011; www.lane.gr)

Minoan Lines (☎ 21041 45700; minoan.gr)

NEL Lines (☎ 22510 26299; www.nel.gr)

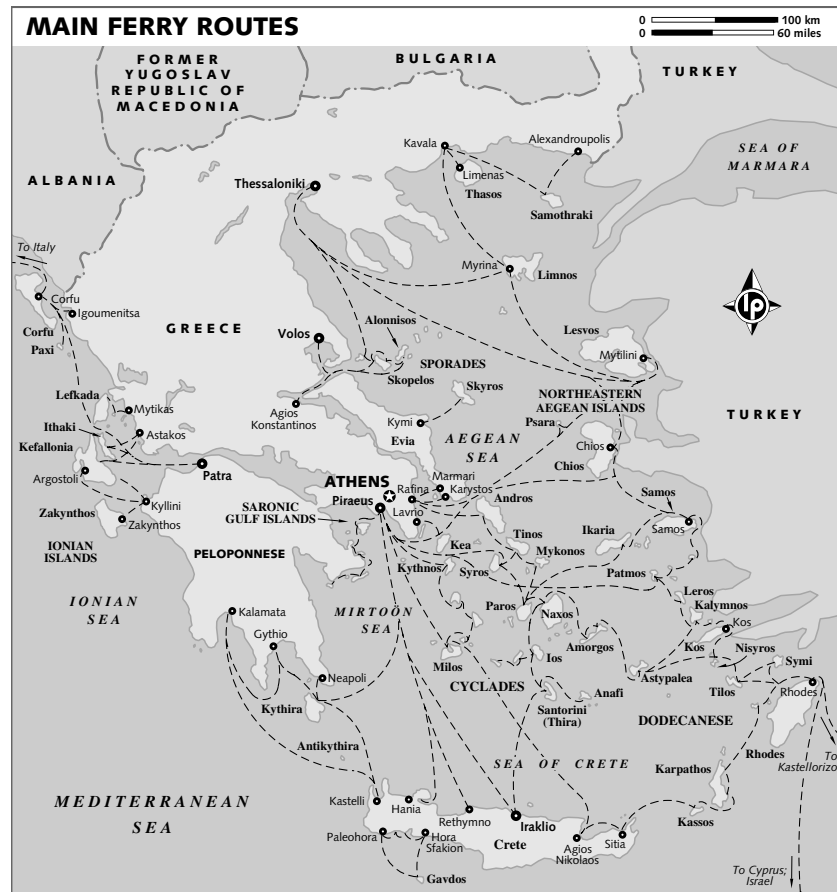
Classes

Large ferries usually have four classes: 1st class has air-con cabins and a decent lounge and restaurant; 2nd class has smaller cabins and sometimes a separate lounge; tourist class gives you a berth in a shared four-berth cabin; and the last class, 3rd, is 'deck', which gets you a seat, restaurant, lounge/bar and (drum roll) the deck.

Deck class is an economical way to travel and is the class that most travellers use; 1st class is almost the same price as the equivalent air fare on some routes. Children under four travel free, those between four and 10 years pay half-fare. Children over 10 pay full fare. When buying tickets you will automatically be given deck class.

Costs

Fares are fixed by the government. The small differences in price you may find



between ticket agencies are the result of some agencies sacrificing part of their designated commission to qualify as a discount service. The discount offered seldom amounts to much. Tickets can be bought at the last minute from quayside tables set up next to the boats.

Routes

The hub of the vast ferry network is Piraeus, the main port of Athens. It has ferries to the Cyclades, Crete, the Dodecanese, the Saronic Gulf Islands and the northeastern Aegean Islands. Patra is the main port for ferries to the Ionian Islands, while Volos and Agios Konstantinos are the ports for the group of islands called Sporades.

HIGH-SPEED FERRY

High-speed ferries are slashing travel times on some of the longer routes. **NEL Lines** (☎ 22510 26299; www.nel.gr), for example, does Piraeus to Chios in 4½ hours – nearly half the time of a normal ferry (and twice the price).

HYDROFOIL

Hydrofoils offer a faster sea-based alternative to ferries on some routes, in particular on those running to/from the islands closest to the mainland. They take half the time, but cost twice as much. Most routes will operate only during the high season. **Hellenic Seaways** (☎ 21041 99000; www.hellenicseaways.gr) travels from Piraeus to the Saronic Gulf Is-

lands and the ports of the eastern Peloponnese, as well as to the Sporades from Agios Konstantinos and Volos. **Aegean Hydrofoils** (☎ 22410 24000), based in Rhodes, serves the Dodecanese and provides connections to the northeastern Aegean Islands of Icaria and Samos as well as other routes.

Tickets for hydrofoils must be bought in advance and there is often seat allocation.

Bus

All long-distance buses on the mainland and the islands are operated by regional collectives known as **KTEL** (Koino Tamio Eispraxeon Leoforion; www.ktel.org). Fares are fixed by the government and service routes can be found on the company's website. (We've rounded fares up to the nearest euro.)

Greece's buses are comfortable, they run on time and there are frequent services on all the major routes. The buses are reasonably priced, with journeys costing about €4 per 100km. Fares and journey times on a couple of the major routes are Athens–Thessaloniki (€31, 7½ hours) and Athens–Patra (€14, three hours). Tickets should be bought at least an hour in advance to ensure a seat. Buses don't have toilets and refreshments, but stop around every three hours for those needs.

Car & Motorcycle

A great way to explore areas in Greece that are off the beaten track is by car. However, it's worth bearing in mind that Greece has the highest road-fatality rate in Europe. The road network has improved dramatically in recent years and places that were little more than a one-lane dirt track masquerading as a road have now been widened and asphalted. Driving from Athens to Thessaloniki, you'll rack up about €24 in freeway tolls.

Almost all islands are served by car ferries, but they are expensive. For example, the cost for a vehicle from Ioumenitsa to Mykonos is €76. Petrol in Greece is expensive at around €1 per litre in the big cities, but you'll pay up to €0.20 more in remote areas.

The Greek automobile club, **ELPA** (www.elpa.gr), offers reciprocal services to members of other national motoring associations. If your vehicle breaks down, dial ☎ 104.

You can bring a vehicle into Greece for four months without a Carnet – provided you have a Green Card (international third party insurance).

HIRE

Rentals cars are available just about anywhere in Greece. The major multinational companies are represented in Athens and in most major tourist destinations. You can generally get a much better rate with local companies. Their advertised rates are about 25% lower and they're often willing to bargain. Make sure to check the insurance waivers on these companies closely and check how they can assist in case of a breakdown.

High-season weekly rates with unlimited kilometres start at about €280 for the smallest models, dropping to €200 in winter – and that's without tax and extras. Major companies will request a credit-card deposit. The minimum driving age in Greece is 18, but most car-hire firms require a driver of 21 or over.

Mopeds and motorcycles are available for hire everywhere, however, regulations stipulate that you need a valid motorcycle licence stating proficiency for the size of motorcycle you wish to rent – from 50cc upwards.

Motorcycles are a cheap way to travel around Greece. Mopeds and 50cc motorcycles range from €10 to €15 per day or from €25 per day for a 250cc motorcycle. Outside the high season, rates drop considerably. Ensure the bike is in good working order and the brakes work well.

If you plan to hire a motorcycle or moped, check that your travel insurance covers you for injury resulting from motorcycle accidents.

ROAD RULES

While it sometimes appears that there aren't any road rules in Greece, you are apparently supposed to drive on the right and overtake on the left. No casual observer would ever guess that it is compulsory to wear seat belts in the front seats of vehicles, and in the back if they are fitted.

The speed limit for cars is 120km/h on toll roads, 90km/h outside built-up areas and 50km/h in built-up areas. For motorcycles up to 100cc, the speed limit outside

built-up areas is 70km/h and for larger motorbikes, 90km/h. Drivers exceeding the speed limit by 20/40% receive a fine of €60/160, however, most tourists escape with a warning.

Drink-driving laws are strict; a blood alcohol content of 0.05% incurs a fine of around €150 and over 0.08% is a criminal offence.

Public Transport

BUS

Most Greek towns are small enough to get around on foot. All major towns have local bus systems, but the only places that you're likely to need them are Athens, Kalamata and Thessaloniki.

METRO

Athens is the only city large enough to warrant a metro system – and it finally has one. See p354 for details.

TAXI

Taxis are widely available in Greece and they are reasonably priced. Yellow city cabs are metered. Flag fall is €0.75, followed by €0.28 per kilometre in towns and €0.53 per kilometre outside towns. The rate doubles

from midnight to 5am. Additional charges are €3 from airports; €0.80 from ports, bus stations and train stations; and €0.30 per luggage item over 10kg.

Taxi drivers in Athens are gifted in their ability to make a little extra with every fare. If you have a complaint, note the cab number and contact the tourist police. In rural areas taxis don't have meters, so make sure you agree on a price before you get in – drivers are generally honest, friendly and helpful.

Train

The main problem with train travel in Greece is that there are only two main lines: north to Thessaloniki and Alexandroupolis, and to the Peloponnese. In addition there are a number of branch lines, such as the Pyrgos–Olympia line and the spectacular Diakofto–Kalavryta mountain railway. There are two distinct levels of service: the painfully slow, dilapidated trains that stop at all stations, and the faster, modern inter-city trains.

Inter-Rail and Eurail passes are valid in Greece, but you still need to make a reservation. In summer, make reservations at least two days in advance.