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by Rachel Howard

# Insidier's Greek Isles

6 classic islands reveal their secrets in the voices of the islanders who love them most.

.Photographs by Tino Soriano

A

n Island in Greece is a moment in time. A string of islands, moment after moment is life itself. Greece has more than 2,000 islands—each unique. Folegandros, the balcony to the Aegean,

is a tiny island with no more than 600 souls, living on the edge of a cliff. The port in Sikinos, with its weathered fishermen and their golden bundles of net, hasn't changed since the 1950s.

The thyme-covered hills of Serifos are dotted with small, single-room homes called cells. The pine trees on the bright-green island of Skopellos reach right up to the shore. Skiathos, next door, has a beach made of large, round stones. The beach is named Lalaria, a local told me, because, when the water licks the stones, they answer "La, La, La."

The islanders on Chios measure their words like Midwesterners. "Oh yes, she's a good girl," a local might say, but if he lifts the inflection on the last word and shakes his head up and down, it means a good girl she ain't.

My memory is filled with Greek island moments. One night on Patmos I sat on a bench in the Chora and stared down at the port. I felt like I was floating in the sky, with the starlit boats at my feet. Behind me the monastery brooded in the dark like a spurned lover.

On the lush island of Zakynthos I once exchanged three slices of *fitoura* (fried cream-of-wheat fritters) for three poems recited by children. Tilos, close to Turkey, has the tallest walnut trees I've ever seen and reminds me of Jurassic Park. The mayor, a doctor, calls the island "nature's pharmacy." He kneels and pulls from the earth sage, rosemary, and something

that smells like cilantro.

They say the island of Nissiros, not far from Rhodes, was created when Poseidon battled the giant Polivotis. Poseidon bashed the giant's head with a chunk of earth torn from the neighboring island of Kos. The chunk then fell into the sea, and Nissiros was born. Locals call it the "breathing island" because it has a volcano that sometimes groans.

Many islands, many memories. On these pages, to offer a taste of the feast that awaits you, we present six Greek isles, selected with assistance from the staffs of the Greek editions of NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC and TRAVELER magazines, based in Athens. We cover three well-traveled islands—Rhodes, Corfu, and Santorini (which are a bit *too* popular in July and August)—and three lesser-known islands—Zakynthos, Patmos, and Chios. In each case, locals recommend restaurants, hotels, and activities to help you make the most of your island moments.

—by Nicholas Papandreou

London-based freelance writer **RACHEL HOWARD**, who grew up in Greece, wrote "Night in Athens" in the April 2000 issue. **NICHOLAS PAPANDREOU**, a Greek journalist and scholar, chose the Greek Isles as his place of a lifetime in our October 1999 issue. Photographer **TINO SORIANO**'s "Italian Pleasures" appeared in the March 2001 issue. He makes his home in Barcelona, Spain.



# Patmos

"Patmos has a magic you can't quite put your finger on," muses Ellen Sutton, a British writer who ran away to Patmos 20 years ago and never looked back. For centuries, Patmos has lured spiritual pilgrims. With over 50 churches, chapels, and monasteries, the aroma of sacred incense lingers on the sea breeze.

But Patmos also attracts exclusive designers and reclusive rock stars. While fishermen in colorful caiques whisk sun-worshippers to far-flung beaches, black-robed monks go about their devotions. It is this combination of glamour and spirituality that keeps converts faithful to Patmos.

"It's a very small island, which is both good and bad," says Kostas Fosteris, a metalwork designer who has been a Patmos regular for longer than he remembers. "You keep bumping into the same people, so there's a family atmosphere, but regulars love to gossip about each other."

## WHAT TO SEE

The **Monastery of Saint John** is the island's top attraction (Tel: 0247 31234. Open 8 a.m.-1:30 p.m. and 2-6 p.m., but advisable to check). "The Monastery has become a tourist site as

much as a place of worship," Sutton says. "The saving grace is that the church has kept a restraining hand on bars and discos, so Patmos remains relatively unspoiled."

Hike the 400-year-old path from Skala to the holy **Cave of the Apocalypse** (Tel: 0247 31234. Opening hours erratic), where God spoke to St. John. Light a candle, and pray that the end of the world isn't nigh. "Wear sturdy shoes when hiking because the rocks are very sharp," cautions Fosteris. "And always drive carefully—the island's intoxicating atmosphere makes for distracted drivers."

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Challenge a local to a game of backgammon at **Houston** (info TK), the last traditional *kafeneion* (café) in Skala. “It’s run by two sisters who brew a mean Greek coffee,” says Fosteris, who urges first-timers to sample their denture-busting spoon sweets (fruits preserved in syrup).

Even remote Patmos can get crowded. Locals escape to **Marathi**, a one-beach island an hour’s sail from Skala. Home-baked bread, fresh salads, and just-caught fish at **Pandelis** restaurant (Tel: 0247 31609. June-Oct., \$TK) are enough to make you miss the last boat home and sleep under the stars.

#### WHERE TO STAY

Fosteris recalls, “I must have spent 15 summers at the Skala hotel” (Tel: 0247 31343; Fax: 31747; skalahtl@12net.gr.

*www.skalahotel.gr*. April-October. 62-93 Euros). “It’s close to the action, but you can chill out around the pool under the giant bougainvillea.” Fosteris now stays in Hora, which has rental houses but no hotels. “Prices range from GDR 15,000 for a double room to a whopping GDR 200,000 for the choicest villas favored by visiting aristocracy,” he says. Contact the Tourist Office in Skala (Tel: 0247 31666. Open June-Aug. 9 a.m.- 10 p.m.) or the Tourist Police (Tel: 0247 31303).

Elina Scoutari’s attention to detail has won her a regular clientele at **Porto Scoutari**. Its spacious bungalows ooze secluded elegance (Meloï. Tel: 0247 33123-5; Fax: 31175; elinas@12net.gr; *www.12net.gr/scoutari*. April-October. GDR 32-49,000 doubles; GDR 34-78,000 suites).

#### WHERE TO EAT

“**Lambi** has the freshest fish on the island, though service is slow because it’s always packed,” says Fosteris (Lambi beach. Tel: 0247 31490. May-Oct., lunch and dinner, \$TK.) Seconding the choice is Elina Dallas, an Athenian architect who owns a holiday home on Patmos. “Don’t miss the flambé cheese,” she says, “and try to meet owner Captain Leonidas, a typical Greek guy with a fat and carefully stylized moustache.”

With only a dozen tables, Benetos Matthaïou has the jet-set clamoring for reservations at his classy, waterfront restaurant, **Benetos** (Sapsila. Tel: 0247 33089. June-Sept., evenings, \$TK.). Food is Mediterranean-fusion, like sweet and sour swordfish served with organic vegetables. “Ask for



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a table at the front, and book well in advance,” advises Dallas. She also recommends the grilled fish and *yaourtlou* (mixed vegetables with yoghurt dressing) at **Aspri** (Geranos Cape. Tel: 0247 32240. June-Sept., evenings, \$TK) with “wonderful views of Chora and the Monastery, spectacular at night when the boat sails into port. Sometimes the tide comes in and makes your feet wet!”

#### BEST BEACHES

**Psilli Ammos** is a half-hour trek from the village of Diakofti. “The long walk is worth it for the great taverna. It’s also far enough from the monastery to be the only (unofficial) nudist beach,” notes Fosteris. Beyond busy Grikos, relax beneath the bamboo umbrellas of **Petra**, where the water is absurdly blue. “It’s always mysteriously quiet, no matter how many people there are,” Fosteris says.

Take a floating taxi to the pebble bays of **Vagia** or **Livadi Geranou** and watch fishermen disappear over the horizon to catch your dinner. “The southern part of Patmos is quiet and rural,” Sutton says.

## The Mystical Isle

**Population:** 3,500; **Capital:** Hora; **Main Towns:** Skala, Kambos, Grikos; **Size:** 78 sq.km; **Coastline:** 63 km; **Annual visitors:** 180,000; **Hotels:** 40; **Calendar Highlights:** *Easter:* On Holy Thursday, the Abbott bathes 12 monks’ feet at the Niptiras ceremony, a re-enactment of Christ washing his disciples’ feet before the Last Supper.; **When to Go:** Easter, for a full-blown Greek Orthodox experience; May and June, for beaches to call your own. **Getting There:** No airport. Daily ferry from Piraeus (nine

# Rhodes

“Rhodes combines everything the other islands offer—fabulous beaches, historic monuments, and surprising natural beauty,” says political cartoonist Vangelis Pavlides, a lifelong resident. “From classical concerts to ancient temples, woodland trails to watersports, there’s something for everyone, with

a good climate year-round. “That may be why Rhodes is Greece’s top travel destination.

Rhodes is both medieval and modern, the arches and alleyways of its walled capital leading to swanky cafés and restaurants. With both high-rise hotels and unspoiled villages, Rhodes has accommodated the package-tour storm without losing its identity. “Every time I stroll out of my apartment and wander barefoot to the beach, I still thank my lucky stars I live here,” Pavlides says.

#### WHAT TO SEE

In Rhodes City, advises Pavlides, walk the **medieval walls** enclosing the Old Town (tours start at the Palace of the Grand Master, 3 p.m. Tues. and Sat.). Then venture down Old Town’s twisting lanes and shop the busy squares.

In Lindos, go early to the hilltop **Acropolis**—a medieval citadel

surrounded by slate cliffs and green coves—to beat the hot sun and cruise ship crowds, says Effie Dede, manager of Marco Polo Mansion in Rhodes City.

At the tip of the island, stroll across the sand dunes to **Prasonisi Islet**, a windsurfer’s paradise linked to Rhodes by a thread of powdery sand. One side is always dead calm, the other always wavy, making Prasonisi popular with surfers of all aptitudes.

Sample Sette Herbe liqueur from **Filerimos Monastery** (Tel: 0241 92202 Tuesday-Sunday, times vary seasonally), a 2,000-year old sanctuary hidden among cypress groves in Filerimos. In Embonas, the wine capital of Rhodes, Dede recommends

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stopping for a lunch of lamb chops and red wine at **I Baki** (Tel: 0244 41168), then making your way to the **Castle of Monolithos**, perched 235 meters above the sea, in time for sunset.

To wash away the day's cares, soak in the vaulted marble baths lit by skylights at the **Yeni Hamam** (Plateia Arionos, Old Town. Tues.-Sat. 11 a.m.-7p.m. Tel: 0241 27739), suggests Ilias Barbikas, author of a [BOOK TITLE TK], a guide to Rhodes. A few hours here will leave you feeling like a sultan.

Along the gentle, [tk-mile] trek from **Salakos** to **Mount Profitis Ilias**, visit springs and the Fatni cave. "Beyond the cave is a farmhouse where a jovial shepherd will invite you to taste his homemade wine and cheese," says Barbikas. "And don't miss the 15th-century icons in Foundoukli chapel."

#### WHERE TO STAY

"Big Spenders can stay in the luxurious suites attached to **Rhodes Casino** [address, contact info TKTKTK], an attraction in its own right," says Lambis Platsis, a computer expert who returned to his native Rhodes from the United States eight years ago. "But there are cheaper options right in the Old Town." Your best bet is **Marco Polo Mansion** (42 Agiou

Fanouriou St, Rhodes Town. Tel/Fax: 0241 25562; [marcopolo-mansion@hotmail.com](mailto:marcopolo-mansion@hotmail.com). April-Oct. GDR 24-35,000). Sumptuous fabrics, original Oriental features, and a courtyard ringed by minarets make this guest-house a great escape in the heart of the medieval city.

In Lindos, most hotels serve tour groups, but local restaurateur Michalis Mavrikos suggests a more authentic alternative: "Ask around in the village square and you should find a quiet room in a family home." Or check into the **Lindos Memories** (Psaltos, Lindos. Tel: 0244 35000; Fax: 48156; [lindosme@otenet.gr](mailto:lindosme@otenet.gr). April-Oct. Doubles GDR 41,000-76,000; maisonettes GDR 41,000-90,000; <http://users.otenet.gr/~lindosme/>), a glitzy marble extravaganza with a small private beach. In Salakos, stay at **Nymphi** (Salakos. Tel: 0246 22206/22130. Year-round. 14,000 [?] euros), where four rooms furnished with antiques overlook a palm-shaded garden. This neoclassical mansion makes a cozy base for exploring the interior.

#### WHERE TO EAT

"Customers have kissed me for recommending **Fotis Melathron**

[Sokratous Street, Old Town. Tel: 0241 24272. Year-round, evenings]," says Effie Dede, manager of Marco Polo Mansion. Sample gourmet Greek fare in a garden swathed in white linen.

In Lindos, "most restaurants have lovely roof gardens with Acropolis views, but serve mediocre food," warns Barbikas. A noteworthy exception is **Mavrikos** (Lindos Square. Tel: 0244 31232. April-Oct., lunch and dinner \$TK) where brothers Dimitris and Michalis Mavrikos use simple ingredients to maximum effect. Spicy cheese with arugula and grilled peppers is prelude to delicate cuttlefish risotto, finished with homemade ice cream and lemon liqueur.

Barbikas also recommends **To Stolidi tis Plinthou** (Plinthos Square. Tel: 0241 50009. Year-round \$TK). "The suckling pig ribs are worth a pilgrimage," he says. Wherever you eat, he adds, "strike up a conversation with the owner. If you show an interest in local history, they'll be a good source of information—and may refuse to let you pay for your meal."

#### BEST BEACHES

Rhodes has so many beaches that you could enjoy a different beach every day for two weeks. "Every local has their personal favorite," says Platsis. "Mine is **Agia Agathi**, sheltered by Archangelos and Charaki capes, because there's a castle buried beneath the sand [can you see it??? TK]."

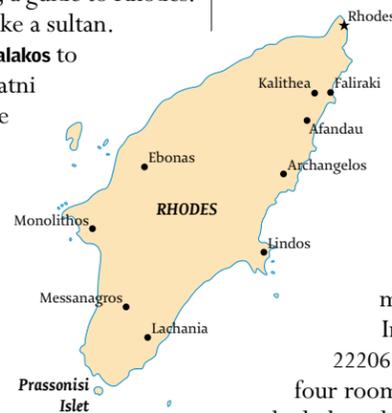
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Pavlidis likes the endless stretch of empty beaches along the island's southeast coast. His favorite? "From Lachania, take the dead-end road to **Plymyri**, a wonderful bay with a fish taverna." The west coast has Barbikas's favorite, **Fourni Beach**. "It's on a quiet bay," he says. "To get there, follow the dirt road below Monolithos."

#### WHAT TO TAKE HOME

### The Medieval Isle

**Population:** 98,181; **Capital:** Rhodes City; **Main towns:** Lindos, Messanagros, Faliraki, Archangelos, Ialysos, Kalithea, Embonas, Afandou; **Size:** 1398 sq. km.; **Coastline:** 220 km.; **Annual visitors:** 1.5 million; **Hotels:** 500+; **Calendar highlights:** Last Sunday in May: Anthestiria flower festival, Rhodes City; July 29-30: floats and parades; Sept. 8: Horseracing and folk dancing at Agios Soulas festival; date TK: Festival of Saint Tsambika, in which women hoping to get pregnant crawl to the hilltop church. **When to Go:** Year-round. **Getting there:** Several flights daily from Athens and regular flights also from Thessaloniki, Crete, Mykonos, Santorini,



# Santorini

Your first reaction to Santorini—perhaps the most beautiful of all the isles—is a sense of awe. Cruising into the island's half submerged, cliff-rimmed volcanic crater, open to the sea, is like floating into a Viewmaster scene of deep blues, bright whites, and eerie calm. “The moment you enter the caldera,

everything feels unfamiliar and otherworldly,” says Chrysanthos Karamolegos, chef at Santorini's celebrated Domata restaurant. But Santorini is more than a geological spectacle: Its stark mystique is the ultimate setting for seduction. The wild volcanic landscape is a backdrop for classic island villages, archaeological treasures, and resorts where honeymooners canoodle in pools suspended between sky and sea. “Santorini has such an intense energy,” Karamolegos says. “You've got to see it at least once.”

## WHAT TO SEE

Unearthed by archaeologists in 1967, preserved under volcanic ash, the 3,500-year-old city of **Akrotiri** (Tel: 0286 81366. Tues.-Sun. 8:30-3:30) is one of the best archaeological sites in Greece. “Eventually, the site will be covered by a glass



roof, so visitors can view the entire city from above,” says Anastasia Devetzi, an archaeologist who has been excavating the site for 20 years.

The rituals and pleasures of the island's earliest settlers are brought to life in the 32 frescoes discovered at Akrotiri. “The frescoes are so fresh, they might have been painted in the 20th century,” says Ilias Kainadas, an environmentalist and author. Gazelle-like women gather saffron and lithe fishermen display their tackle in brilliantly executed 3-D reproductions of the frescoes at the **Petros Nomikos Foundation**, a cultural center in Fira. (Tel: 0286 23016-9).

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Ready for adventure? Take a boat trip to the islets within the caldera. “The cliffs are like an open-air geological museum, encrusted with fossilized olive and palm trees,” Kainadas says. Climb the charred crater of **Palia Kammeni**, wallow in the bubbling hot springs of **Nea Kameni**, then shin up the steep islet of **Thirassia** for sweeping views, grilled octopus, and iced ouzo. Low-key Thirassia, adds chef Karamolegos, “is like Santorini was 40 years ago.”

Santorini, blessed with volcanic soil, has many wineries that welcome visitors [correct?]. Karamolegos recommends the **Yannis Paraskevopoulos winery** on Monolithos beach for its crisp white Thalassitis or the old-school **Argyros winery** in Mesa Gonia village for aged Vinsanto dessert wine. Or sip a champagne cocktail as you watch the sun set at **Franco's** bar, a local institution in Fira (Tel: 0286 22881).

## WHAT TO STAY

The island's architecture is dominated by cliff-hugging dwellings overlooking the caldera. “Houses were literally dug out of the volcanic rock face to shield inhabitants from the elements,” says archaeologist Devetzi. “Protection was more important than privacy, so buildings are jumbled together, with one person's roof serving as his neighbor's terrace.”

If the Flintstones had money, they'd stay at **Perivolos**, a grotto of domed vaults whose minimalist décor makes for cool seclusion (Oia. Tel: 0286 71308; Fax: 0286 71309; [www.perivolos.gr](http://www.perivolos.gr); [perivolos@san.forthnet.gr](mailto:perivolos@san.forthnet.gr). April-mid Oct. Studios 312-360 euros, junior suites 364-424 euros, superior suites 400-458 euros).

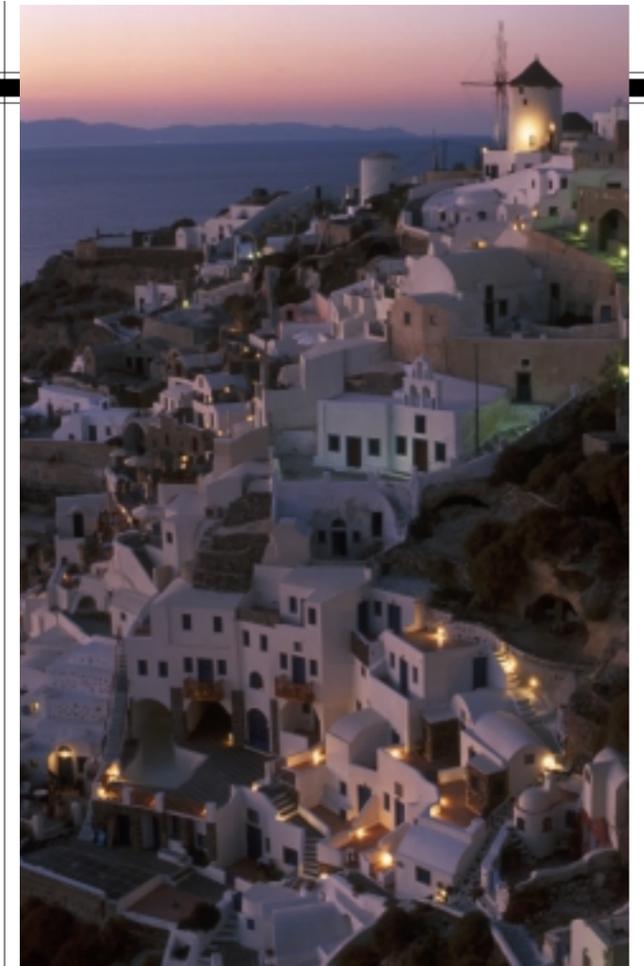
Karamolegos' business partner, Georgia Papaioannou, sends her friends to **Cori Riga**, an 18th-century mansion in Fira decorated and run by sculptor Evangelos Rigas (Tel: 0286 25251; fax: 25625. [info@rigas-apartments.gr](mailto:info@rigas-apartments.gr) [www.rigas-apartments.gr](http://www.rigas-apartments.gr); GDR 50,000. April-Oct.).

Should you decide to get hitched on Santorini, check into **Astra**, a cluster of suites and studios honeycombed into the cliff (Imerovigli. Tel: 0286 23641; Fax: 24765. [astrae@otenet.gr](mailto:astrae@otenet.gr); [www.astra.gr](http://www.astra.gr). April-mid-Nov. Doubles 160-205 euros; suites 195-250 euros). Manager George Karayannis can arrange everything from bridal bouquets to docile donkeys.

## WHERE TO EAT

From jazzed-up Santorinian specialties like *fava* (split-pea puree with capers and sun-blushed tomatoes) to inspired seafood—think char-grilled sweet and sour prawns—the food at **Domata** is more Pacific Rim than Greek grill-house—and it's all delicious (Monolithos beach. Tel: 0286 32069. May-mid-Sept., evenings, \$TK).

When Domata chef Karamolegos is off-duty, he heads to **O Paradisos** (Exomytis. Tel: 0286 82052. April-Oct., lunch and



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dinner, \$TK), a no-frills seaside taverna run by Kyria Roula. Don't miss her addictive *domatokefedes* (tomato croquettes with a hint of mint), deep-fried squid, and sausages flavored with aniseed and cloves.

Papaioannou suggests you zigzag down the path from Oia village to the postcard-pretty harbor of Ammoudi, lined with fish tavernas. “Both **Dimitri's** [info TK] and **Katina's** (Tel: 0286 71820, April-Oct., lunch and dinner, \$TK) are masters of the classic Greek island meal—exquisitely grilled fish [try the sea bream, red mullet, or sea bass] and Greek salad.”

## BEST BEACHES

### Honeymoon Heaven

**Population:** 9,360; **Capital:** Fira; **Main towns:** Imerovigli, Firostefani, Oia, Akrotiri, Emboreio, Megalochori. **Size:** 76 sq.km. **Coastline:** 69 km; **Annual visitors:** 400,000; **Hotels:** 215; **Calendar highlight:** *Late Aug./Sept.:* Classical Music Festival, Fira; **When to Go:** May, early June, late Sept., or Oct. “It's still warm enough to swim in October,” says chef Karamolegos. “By December, it's so quiet all you can hear is the wind whistling through the telephone wires.” **Getting there:** Daily flights from Athens. Twice-daily ferry from Piraeus (9 hours). 4 hours by catamaran from Piraeus in high season.

# Corfu

Corfu is for poets and painters. With lush hills and emerald coves, every turn suggests a sonnet or watercolor. “People just seem to fall in love with Corfu,” says Hilary Paipeti, editor of *The Corfiot* magazine. “For some it’s a gradual process, for others it happens in a moment.” From one-donkey hamlets

to chic boutiques, hilltop fortresses to karaoke bars, cosmopolitan Corfu has it all. Laundry flutters between the peeling pastel villas of the Venetian-influenced Old Town. Suddenly, a brass band marches into view, dressed in scarlet and black.

Corfu’s age-old culture flourishes alongside its modern hospitality industry. “Locals haven’t sold out to tourism,” notes Ilias Barbikas, author of [BOOK NAME TK], a guide to Corfu. “They take pride in their past and are happy to preserve their traditional way of life, away from the coastal resorts.”

One such tradition is the love of music. Besides Greece’s first opera house, Corfu boasts 15 philharmonic orchestras—brass bands that parade through the streets at festivals and on public holidays. “The rivalry between bands is stronger than between football teams,” Barbikas says.

## WHAT TO SEE

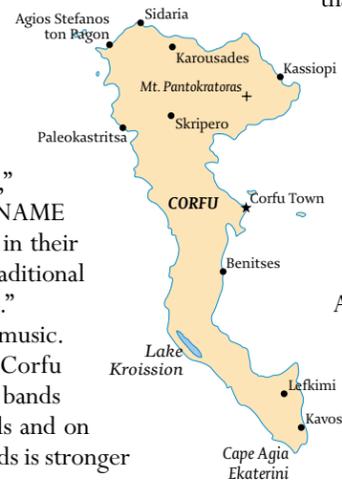
To get acclimated, Barbikas mingles with the café society on

the elegant **Liston arcade**, Corfu Town’s people-watching hub. “Afterwards, stroll across the Spianada, the vast square that was once a Venetian firing range, to watch a cricket match or an alfresco chamber music concert.”

Magazine editor Paipeti offers a more energetic option: hike the **Corfu Trail**, a 220-kilometer footpath running from southernmost Arkoudillas to Cape Agia Ekaterini.

“Hikers will visit Lake Korission with its cedar-covered sand dunes, the wildlife sanctuary of the Ropa Valley, and the Byzantine castle of Angelokastro,” she says. The hike takes ten days. (Order the Corfu Trail guidebook by contacting [corfiotm@otenet.gr](mailto:corfiotm@otenet.gr) or at [www.travelling.gr/corfutrail](http://www.travelling.gr/corfutrail).)

Hiking too arduous? Then drive the hair-pin turns of ‘Almighty’ Mount Pantokratoras as far as **Palia Perithia**, another of Paipeti’s favorites. “This Byzantine village hidden in a mountain valley is one of Corfu’s finest monuments,” she says. “Visit it before it gets on the map.”



## WHERE TO STAY

Film producer Susie Pugh-Tasios, who scouted the entire island for the movie *Captain Corelli’s Mandolin*, describes **Casa Lucia** as “an oasis of calm.” Its ten cottages, each unique, are tucked away amid gardens surrounding a pool (near Paliokastritsa. Tel: 0661 91419. Yearround. 40-106.50 euros per 2-5 bed cottage. Weekly or monthly rates on request off season).

For a resort-based holiday, Pugh-Tasios recommends the **Grecotel Daphnila Bay** for its “immaculate attention to detail.” This self-contained resort on its own bay boasts “a thalassotherapy and aromatherapy spa.” (Tel: 0661 90321-4; fax: 91026; [grecotel@hol.gr](mailto:grecotel@hol.gr); April-November; GDR 35,000-75,000). “For those wishing for the simple life,” Paipeti recommends **Katikia**, a working farmhouse that sleeps six. (Arillas. Tel: 0663 – 64494; Fax 0663 – 99047. [lucorfu@otenet.gr](mailto:lucorfu@otenet.gr). [www.welcometocorfu.com](http://www.welcometocorfu.com); GDR 35,000-60,000 per week.) “Guests are supplied with organically produced breakfast,” she says, “and there are lots of good tavernas in the nearby, low-key resorts of Arillas and Agios Stefanos.”

## WHERE TO EAT

Taste Corfu’s colonial history in its cooking. The Botrini family presides over Corfu’s finest Italian restaurant, **Etrusco**

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(Kato Korakiana. Tel: 0661 93342. April-Oct., evenings, \$TK.) “Prime Minister Costas Simitis dines here whenever he’s in town,” says Pugh-Tasios. “The food is a tour de force and presentation is exquisite.” Don’t miss the *timpano parpadellas* (fresh pasta with duck and truffles).

Hard to find, but definitely worth a detour, Agni, a tiny cove on Corfu’s northeast coast, boasts two superb seafood tavernas, each with a loyal following. **Nikolas** (Tel: 0663 91243, \$TK) is known for its grilled fish and **Toula** (Tel. 0663 91350, \$TK) for its prawn pilaf, “a dish to die for,” Paipeti says. “You can get to Agni by car, boat, or along the coastal footpath between Kaminaki and Kalami. By car, turn off the main road just after Nissaki Beach Hotel.”

Paipeti is also a regular at **Rex** (66 Kapodistrias Street, Corfu Town. Tel: 0661 27127; yearround, all day, \$TK), an old-fashioned *estiatorio* (restaurant) serving Corfiot specialties like swordfish bourdetto (spicy stew) and *pastitsada* (macaroni and cockerel pie). The chicken in kumquat “sets the standard of what can be achieved using local ingredients in unexpected ways, Corfiot nouvelle cuisine,” she says.

## BEST BEACHES

“Every bit of coastline is crowded in summer,” warns Barbikas. “Avoid Dassia, Glyfada, Cavos, and Benitses, with their Irish pubs and wet T-shirt contests; instead, head for the quieter bays in the northeast. **Agios Stefanos ton Pagon** is great if the north wind isn’t blowing.”

Paipeti adds: “[Novelist] Lawrence Durrell called Corfu’s

## The Cosmopolitan Isle

**Population:** 108,000; **Capital:** Corfu Town (Kerkyra); **Main Towns:** Sidari, Skripero, Kassiopi, Paleokastritsa. **Size:** 635 sq.km; **Coastline:** 217 km.; **Annual visitors:** 1,100,000; **Hotels:** 400; **Calendar highlight:** For three weeks in Feb. and March: Carnival, including the satirical ritual of Petegoletsa (“gossip”) on the middle Thursday. **When to Go:** In spring, when wild strawberries ripen. **Getting There:** Three flights daily from Athens (40 mins); three flights weekly from Thessaloniki. Daily ferry from Patras (seven hours). Bus from Athens to Igoumenitsa, followed by 1-2 hour ferry ride, or 30 minutes by hydrofoil in high season.

# Zakynthos

"Zakynthians are naturally cheerful and optimistic," says Iphigenia Tsantili, a local journalist. "They have a great sense of humor and mischief. They'd rather be out in the sunshine, playing their guitars or writing poetry." Zakynthos was a sleepy hollow of olive groves and vineyards until beach lovers

discovered its pure shores in the 1980s. Its white sands, reputedly the softest in Greece, are the principal nesting grounds of the endangered Mediterranean loggerhead sea turtle. With its clear waters, soft contours, and gentle climate, Zakynthos is equally popular with divers, hikers, and families. "It's a place to take it easy," says Tsantili says. "As long as you stay away from the three loud resorts—Laganas, Alykes, and Kalamaki." Listen for the local minstrels who love regaling strangers with *kantades*, or folk ballads. "Zakynthos has a quiet authenticity that makes you feel instantly at home."

## WHAT TO SEE

Go turtle-watching in a glass-bottomed boat. "Anchor off

**Marathonisi**, a tropical island covered in trees and wild goats, and swim ashore to the white-sand beach," suggests Harikleia Minotou, a founder of the National Marine Park of Zakynthos, established in July 2000 to protect endangered sea turtles and to develop sustainable tourism. Or head for **Strofadia islets**, a stopover for migrating birds 20 miles south of Zakynthos. "Getting to Strofadia isn't easy," Minotou says. "The sea can be choppy and the islands are so flat they're easy to miss. But there's a crumbling monastery with a very courteous hermit."



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Environmentalist Yorgos Chronopoulos, who owns Liuba Holiday Houses, recommends an outing to **Bohali Hill**, where Dionysios Solomos wrote the national anthem in [date TK]. Follow the walls of the ruined Venetian fort (Daily 8:00-7:30) for panoramic vistas, or lounge under the pines with a picnic and a volume of poetry.

Tsantili opts for history and culture: "With their chubby cherubs and voluptuous Madonnas, the amazing icons in the **Museum of Post-Byzantine Art** are straight out of the Italian Renaissance." (Plateia Solomou, Hora. Tel: 0695 42714. Tues.-Sun. 8:30-2:30.) Afterwards, Tsantili suggests sunset from the cliffs at Keri. Follow the footpath from Keri village to the lighthouse. At **Fanari tou Keriou** (Tel: 0695 33384, \$TK) indulge in *tsipouro* (distilled spirit) and roast lamb cooked over a wood fire.

## WHERE TO STAY

Tsantili recommends **Strada Marina** (Lomvardou 14, Hora. Tel: 0695 42761-3; Fax: 28733. Year-round. GDR 15-26.000) "You can't beat the handy waterfront location, and there's a pool on the roof garden," she says. Despite a facelift in 2001, this reliable hotel remains appealingly dated.

Minotou sends nature lovers to **Liuba Holiday Houses** (Vassilikos. 0695 35372; Fax: 35481. April-Oct. GDR 25-50.000 for 2-4 person bungalows). Scattered among ten acres of trees and flowers overlooking Yerakas bay, these well-kept stone houses offer comfort and privacy.

For unusual, isolated lodgings, rent the converted windmill at **Faros** (Cape Skinari. Tel: 0695 31132; 31031. Year round. 15.000 low season, 25.000 July-Aug., sleeps 2), on the northern tip of Zakynthos. Steps lead to your own bathing rocks within swimming distance of the famous Blue Caves (see "Best Beaches," below).

## WHERE TO EAT

For hearty Zakynthian fare and rollicking *kantades*, city councilor Kostas Kapodistrias recommends **Alitzerini** (Kiliomeno. Tel: 0695 48552. June-Sept., evenings. Oct.-May, Fri., Sat., Sun. only. \$TK) "It's about as far as you can get from a tourist resort, and well worth the [TK-mile] drive from [TK]," he assures. Meaty delicacies include

## The Beachcomber's Isle

**Population:** 32,556; **\*Capital:** Hora; **Main towns:** Vassilikos, Katakastari, Keri, Kiliomeno, Volimes; **\*Size:** 407 sq. km. **Coastline:** 123 km; **\*Annual visitors:** 450,000; **Hotels:** 187; **\*Calendar highlights:** *Late Aug.:* three-day festival of patron saint Agios Dionyssos, Anafonitria Monastery. *Late Aug.-mid Sept.:* wine festival; *Sept.:* Environmental Documentary Festival (Tel: 0695 29781-2); **When to go:** spring, to see the 2,000 species of indigenous wildflowers; **Getting There:** Daily flight from Athens. Bus from Athens to Killini in the Peloponnese, followed by a 1.5-hour ferry ride.

## culturewise

### Live Like a Local

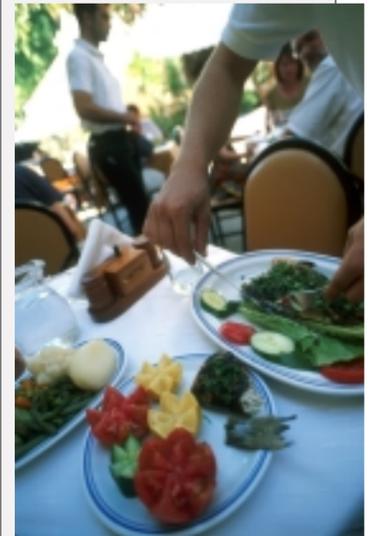
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**E**xpert tips to help you better understand and enjoy your stay in the Greek isles.

■ **It's All Greek to Me.** To the English speaker, the Greek word for "yes" (*neh*) sounds like "no," and the Greek word for "no" (*okeh*) sounds a little like "OK." When a Greek nods his head up and down (especially if accompanied with a tongue click, and what might appear to be a smile), they are expressing displeasure, not agreement. Confused yet? Take it easy, go for a stroll along the beach, and when you run into your new Greek friend, remember never to raise your hand, palm up and out, in greeting. This is a hostile gesture in Greece (instead shake hands or embrace).

■ **Café Society.** Greek island life is outside: on the sea, in the garden, in the café. Relax with family and friends, sip another *ouzo*, the Greek version of the ubiquitous anise-based Mediterranean liquor. Or try the Greek coffee—never call it "Turkish" coffee—and don't gulp it, unless you want a mouthful of coffee grinds. Sample the popular *retsina*, a white wine made with a resin additive, which is usually an acquired taste for new visitors. If you're not quite ready for it, ask for white wine *aretsina*, or "without resin."

■ **Ode to A Grecian Urn.** Compliment your Greek friend, and he may puff air through his lips (to ward off evil spirits); praise him and he will dismiss the compliment; admire that vase in the corner, and it might turn up at your door. *Philotomo*, or self-pride and honor, is vital to the Greeks, and is demonstrated in every daily activity. Relationships are not taken lightly—beyond the



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welcoming smiles, you will need to earn your friendship, which, once proven, should last.

■ **Flying Saucers.** Greeks celebrate the moods of life expressively: joy, anger, frustration, resignation. Go ahead and dance when the music plays (but never applaud the lone Greek dancer, who dances for personal satisfaction). Disagree if you differ (challenging each other in *kouvenda*, or conversation, may sometimes seem like part of the fun). And yes, as an occasional expression of exuberance first demonstrated by others, smash a plate or glass against the wall (and be prepared to pay for it). —Dean Foster, founder of Berlitz Cross-Cultural Services Worldwide, www.learn-aboutcultures.com.

## Traveler Online

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# Chios

“Locals have a tradition of welcoming strangers, because many arrived as refugees from Asia Minor,” explains local historian Dimitris Melachrinoudis. Indeed, Turkey is within squinting distance of this prosperous isle, long known for its production of mastic—an aromatic resinous gum that grows

nowhere else. These days tourism is gaining ground, an industry that fits perfectly with the islanders’ innate hospitality.

Although visitor facilities are still relatively low-key, Chios holds surprises around every corner. Wherever you go, layers of history intersect: in the mosque reinvented as a Byzantine museum, the icons and mosaics of Nea Moni monastery, the 19th-century estates of Kambos, nuzzled among citrus orchards. The port capital is a lively city that makes no pretense at being picturesque. But the trademark mastic villages, their medieval lanes fortified with walls and watchtowers, exude authenticity.

## WHAT TO SEE

The 24 mastic villages are all worth a wander. Best preserved are **Pyrgi**, with its dazzling black-and-white facades etched with *xysta* (geometric designs), and **Mesta**.

“Mesta’s maze of dead-end lanes were deliberately designed to confuse invaders,” notes historian Melachrinoudis. The connecting rooftops were used as an escape route from marauders.

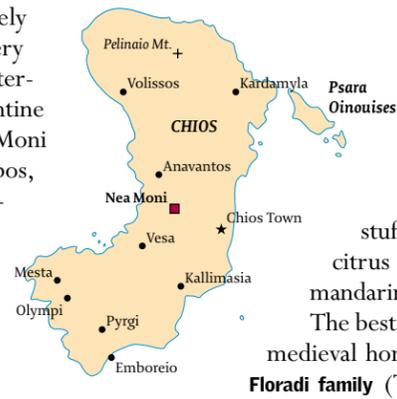
Chios native Vicky Argiroudi, who now works at the Athens Opera House, loves getting lost in enchanted **Kambos**. Hidden behind high walls decorated with coats of arms are 230 mansions, some converted into guesthouses and restaurants.

“Chios has a remarkable number of historical monuments, including 14 Byzantine churches,” says Melachrinoudis. Most remarkable is 11th-century **Nea Moni** monastery (Daily 8am-1pm and 4-8pm), on a mountain plateau fringed by pine forests. Also visit the ghost town of **Anavatos**. Melachrinoudis suggests: “Climb through the ruins to the drop where 400 inhabitants plunged to their deaths to escape massacre by the Turks.” In summer, locals vacation on the

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satellite islets of **Psara** and **Oinousses**; Argiroudi says they’re worth a day trip for their “sea captain’s mansions and countless chapels.”



## WHERE TO STAY

For a romantic escape in Kambos, Argiroudi recommends **Perleas** (Vitiadou Street, Kambos. Tel: 0271 32217; Fax: 0271 32364. Year-round.

GDR 25-30.000) a manor house stuffed with antiques and surrounded by citrus groves. Wake up to fresh-squeezed mandarin juice and homemade preserves.

The best lodging in Mesta, Argiroudi says, is the medieval home converted into a guesthouse by the **Floradi family** (Tel: 0271 28891; fax: 0271 76455. Year-round. GDR11-14.000). Rooms upstairs open onto an alfresco den perfect for stargazing.

Crowned by a castle, the village of Volissos is ideal for bird-watching or exploring the craggy peaks of northern Chios. **Stella Tsakiri’s** snug and stylish rental homes have well-equipped kitchens and woodstoves for winter. (Plateia Pirgos, Volissos. Tel: 0271 21421, 21413; Fax: 21521. [volissos@otenet.gr](mailto:volissos@otenet.gr). Year round. Studio: 35-45.5 euros; 2-bed house: 42-63 euros; 4-bed house: 65-82 euros.)

## WHERE TO EAT

Argiroudi frequents **Kostallos** (Avgonyma. Tel: 0271 42206.

April-October, \$TK) for its “view of endless blue and excellent home cooking. Try the spinach fritters, peppers stuffed with goat’s cheese, and wonderful *loukoumades* (donuts) with walnuts and cinnamon.” Another favorite is **O Makellos** (Pitios. Tel: 0272 23364. June-Sept., all day; weekends only in winter, \$TK), a temple to traditional cuisine at the foot of Pelinaio mountain. Try the fiery *souma* and *kopanistopita* (filo triangles stuffed with spicy cheese).

Few visitors discover



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**Oinomageirion tou Iakovou** (Agiou Georgiou 20, Kastro. Tel: 0271 23858. Year-round, evenings; closed Sun., \$TK), an atmospheric ouzeri in the ramshackle Ottoman quarter. Tiny tables are piled high with peppery prawns, herbed whitebait, and other itsy-bitsy temptations, washed down with local Tetteri ouzo.

For dessert, try the mastic-flavored ice cream from **Kronos** (2 Philipos Argenti Street, Chios Town. Tel: 0271 22311), made to the same family recipe since 1930.

## BEST BEACHES

In the south, **Mavra Volia** and neighboring **Emboreio** are famous for their black pebbles and green waters. Argiroudi recommends nearby **Vroulidia**, “a cove of white sand sheltered by cliffs.” The best sandy beaches lie in the northwest, and are rarely busy; Argiroudi cools off at **Managros** and **Agia Markella**.

## WHAT TO TAKE HOME

**O Varias** (Venizelou 2, Chios. Tel: 0271 22368) stocks 36 varieties of pickles, including *kritamo*, pickled rock sapphire that adds punch to Greek salads. Indulge in *masourakia* (filo cigars stuffed with syrup and nuts) and a bottle of mastic liqueur from Avgoustakis patisserie (Psychari 4, Chios. Tel: 0271 44480). Embroidered linens from the Women’s Cooperative at Kallimasia (Tel: 0271 51180) make great gifts.

## The Mastic Isle

**Population:** 55,000; **Size:** 904 sq. km.; **Coastline:** 213 km.; **Capital:** Chios Town; **Main towns:** Mesta, Pyrgi, Olympi, Vessa, Kambos, Kallimasia, Vrontado, Kardamyla; **Annual visitors:** 50,000; **Hotels:** 41.; **Calendar highlights:** *Easter:* ‘Rocket War’, Vrontado. At midnight, the churches of Agios Markos and Panagia Erythiani, built on opposite hills, fire missiles at each other. “Residents have to repair their windows and repaint their houses every year!” says Argiroudi; *July 22:* Festival of patron saint Agia Markella, Volissos.; *New Year’s Eve:* Naval Contest, Chios Town. Life-size model boats are paraded through town then tossed into the sea. **When to go:** Spring or late summer; **Getting There:** Up to four flights daily from Athens. Daily ferry from Athens (8-9 hours). Daily ferry to Lesbos (3 hours). Less frequent ferry connections to Thessaloniki, Samos, Limnos, and Syros.