

# RHODES<sub>TO</sub> RICHIES

With a swathe of hotel openings this summer, the Dodacanese island is reaching new heights in Greek chic, **says Rachel Howard**

PHOTOGRAPHY **JAMES BEDFORD**

OLD MEETS NEW  
Rhodes is steeped in  
history but welcomes  
a little modernity in  
its new hotels



churches, mosques and minarets – intersect. It's like several movie sets rolled into one. Indeed such classics as *The Guns of Navarone*, *Escape to Athena* and *Pascali's Island* were shot here.

History oozes from every inch of porous limestone, yet this is very

**RHODES TOWN**  
No wonder the area has played host to so many film sets

much a living monument. Laundry flutters, cats scuttle and mopeds sputter along the cobbled lanes.

The island is famous for its School of Rhetoric, attended by legendary orators Cicero and Caesar. And the souvenir sellers who line the main drag, Sokratous Street, seem to have inherited the gift of the gab.

After strolling around the city walls – up to 12 metres thick and four kilometres long – I head for the Turkish baths, Yeni Hamam, where an hour of steaming leaves me feeling like a sultan. The hamam is on Arionos Square, the hub of local nightlife. But I prefer the secluded garden at Marco Polo where the spirited manager, Effi Dede, tells me what to order: seared tuna in a sesame crust; spinach, feta, orange and pomegranate salad; and panna cotta. She chooses well – it's Greek with a big, chi chi twist.

Most of my fellow diners are Italians – perhaps a legacy of the Italian occupation that spanned from 1912 until 1947. The impressive Kallithea Springs, >

## CHIC GREEK EATS

**Marco Polo** Agiou Fanouriou 40–42, Old Town (+30 22410 25562, marcopolomansion.gr) Savour flash-fried calamari and pork fillet with manouri cheese and fig jam in an enchanting garden. It's worth booking ahead.

**Alexis 4 Seasons** 33 Aristotelous Street, Old Town (+30 22410 70522, alexis4seasons.com) Serving expensive but excellent seafood to the likes of Winston Churchill and Jackie Onassis since 1957.

**Mavrikos** Lindos (+30 22440 31232) Brothers Michalis and Dimitris Mavrikos have won countless awards and loyal fans with this Greek food like you've never tasted before: sautéed calamari in beetroot and saffron sauce, bulgar and octopus ragout, and slow-roast goat with chickpeas.

**Melenos Lindos:** Lindos (+30 22440 32222, melenoslindos.com) Enjoy sublime views from this rooftop restaurant nestled below the Acropolis of Lindos. Like the arabesque décor, chef Gogo Nikolopoulou's menu is influenced by Asia Minor.

**Five Senses:** Lindos Blu hotel, (+30 22440 32110, lindosblu.gr) Exceptional food for very special occasions: tuna and lagoustine tartare, scorpion fish in bouillabaisse sauce, and steak smothered in truffle cream.

**Broccolino:** Lindos, (+30 22440 31688) When you tire of Greek salad, tuck into delicious homemade pasta at this trattoria with just a handful of tables in a pretty cobbled courtyard.

**Ambrosia:** Lindos (+30 22440 31804, lindostreasures.com) George Katsaras has turned his home into an elegant restaurant with a vaulted courtyard.

**Plimiri Beach:** Plimiri (+30 22440 46003) The quintessential Greek taverna: bamboo awning, blue and white checked tablecloths, octopi hanging out to dry. Bliss.



**B**LESSED WITH OVER 300 days of sunshine each year, an east coast lined with sandy beaches, a mountainous interior ideal for ramblers, and a medieval citadel as its capital, it's little wonder Rhodes draws copious crowds of holidaymakers.

This former outpost of the Roman, Byzantine, Venetian and Ottoman empires today depends on the legions of tourists who descend on the buzzing beach

resorts and high-rise hotels. The mass tourism of the 70s and 80s may have deterred some, but Rhodes has undergone a sea change and is now appealing to a new kind of traveller.

Local and international hoteliers have started to create a new brand of luxury tourism that capitalises on the island's rich cultural heritage. Sheraton Rhodes Resort (hotels4u.com), where I stayed, is one example; it



**REGIME CHANGE**  
Rhodes' revamped piles – like the Sheraton (pictured) – are drawing visitors with more discerning appetites

is planning to renovate 401 rooms in time for next summer. On my visit, after feasting on tomato fritters and grilled monkfish, I set out to explore the Old Town, four kilometres away. The Knights of St John converted the capital into a monumental fortress where layers of history – medieval battlements, Gothic turrets, Byzantine >



paved with pebble mosaics of doves, peacocks and flowers. I follow the donkeys laden with lazy tourists up the hill to the acropolis, where the views are as magnificent as the ruins.

“Southern Rhodes is where locals go to unwind,” says Sofia Mailli, at the lovely Lindian Village (elegantresorts.com), right on Lardos beach. Set in 25 hectares of gardens, many of the low-slung bungalows and sexy suites have private pools. After plying me with irresistible courgette croquettes with tzatziki, Sofia suggests the eponymous cocktails at Mojito beach bar on Lachania beach.

For me, the real surprise is the island’s interior, which is virtually

SHINE A LIGHT  
Greek charm at the  
Melenos Lindos hotel;



untouched by any sign of human life, let alone tourism. Deep in the mountains at Profitis Ilias, I stumble upon Elafos and Elafina (Deer and Doe), a pair of hunting lodges built by the Italians in 1929 with a café that is open to the public. The surrounding pine forests seem to have inspired an architecture more suited to Grindewald than Greece.

It seems that from ancient temples to thermal baths,

woodland trails to watersports, the cosmopolitan capital of the Dodecanese really does have something for everyone. ■

The writer and photographer stayed as guests at the Sheraton Hotel (hotels4u.com). Car hire with Avis was provided courtesy of the Rhodes Tourist Board

#### GETTING THERE

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TO INFINITY  
AND BEYOND  
But there are no  
children allowed  
at this infinitely  
peaceful pool at  
the Lindos Blu hotel

alfresco baths built in the 1920s, are unmistakably Italian. However, the mineral waters are supposed to have a laxative effect, so I give it a miss. Instead, I seek out a host of resorts in nearby Faliraki where the lavish spas have less alarming side effects. Try the Elysium (hotels4u.com) or the brand new Kresten Royal Villas (+30 22410 03240, [thekrestenroyal.gr](http://thekrestenroyal.gr)).

Most luxury hotels are clustered around Lindos, Rhodes’ prettiest, best preserved village. Sculpted into the hillside above Vlycha bay is Lindos Blu (+30 22440 32110, [lindosblu.gr](http://lindosblu.gr)), an adults-only hotel where the service is as immaculate as the gleaming marble and glass interiors. Two infinity pools spill seductively over the cliff – the perfect setting for watermelon martinis as the sun drops behind distant hills. Meanwhile the big draw at the newly opened Aquagrand on Navarone Bay (+30 22440 49100, [aquagrand.gr](http://aquagrand.gr)), is the state-of-the-art AquaSenses spa.

Since the 1960s, Lindos has been a magnet for rock stars (Pink Floyd) and pop royalty (Barbra Streisand). Every courtyard is >

TOP SPOT  
Lindos is the best  
preserved village  
on the island