

Evia & the Sporades

Εύβοια & Οι Σποράδες



In a nation known for its magical islands, Evia and the Sporades are not exactly household names. Some would be surprised, in fact, that Evia is an island at all. Joined by a short bridge at Halkida, and separated from the mainland by a narrow gulf, it's one of those places that seem to be hidden in full view.

Only a couple of hours from Athens, Evia's busy gateway resorts get their car loads of weekend visitors. But across the island, the pace is slower and the landscape pristine for long stretches, dotted by hill-top monasteries, small farms and vineyards, and goats staring at you in the middle of the road. Small beaches dot the west and southeast coasts, many of them with no more than one or two tavernas, and crystal-clear bays that would be lined with matching umbrellas and beach bars elsewhere.

Skyros, the southernmost of the Sporades (in Greek, 'scattered ones'), retains a good deal of local character, and its unique cuisine gets a thumbs up from locals and visitors alike. Closest to the mainland is Skiathos; once a sleepy fishing port, it now sees charter flights from northern Europe, and claims the sandiest beaches in the Aegean, along with several prime diving spots. Low-key Skopelos kicks back with a postcard-worthy harbour and its share of fine bays, beaches and forest meadows laced with old walking trails. Alonnisos, the most remote of the group, anchors the National Marine Park of Alonnisos – established to protect the Mediterranean monk seal – and is a model for ecological awareness throughout Greece. Alonnisos, like much of Evia and the other Sporades, is certain to yield unexpected finds, some from the natural landscape, and others from the good-natured islanders you'll encounter at every turn.

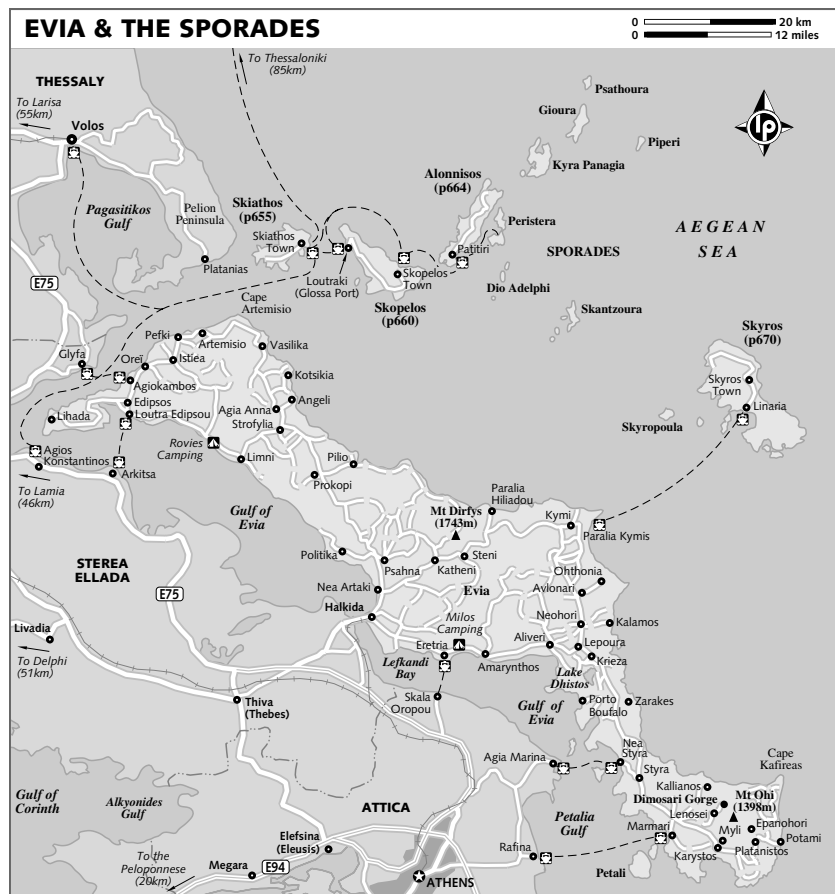
HIGHLIGHTS

- **Wine & Song** Sipping local wines at the Wine & Cultural Festival in Karystos (p653)
- **Fish Feast** Dining at the fish tavernas at Kalamakia (p668), Alonnisos
- **Wildlife Tours** Spotting young dolphins in the National Marine Park of Alonnisos (p666)
- **Guided Walks** Hiking the high meadows overlooking the neighbouring islands at Skopelos (p663)
- **Romantic Interlude** Enjoying sunset above Linaria Bay (p673) on Skyros
- **Authentic Music** Applauding the bouzouki players above the Kastro on Skopelos (p662)
- **Take the Plunge** Reef diving off Tsougria, Skiathos (p659)



■ POPULATION: 228,752

■ AREA: 4167 SQ KM



GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Skiathos airport receives charter flights from northern Europe. There are also domestic flight services available from Athens (see p654). Skyros airport also handles domestic flights to and from Athens (see p669), as well as occasional charter flights from Oslo and Amsterdam.

Bus

From Athens' **Terminal B station** (☎ 210 831 7153; Liosion 260), there are buses departing to Halkida (€5.90, 1¼ hours, half-hourly); Paralia Kymis (€13.20, 3½ hours, two daily), for Skyros; and to Agios Konstantinos (€12.90, 2½ hours, hourly), for the Sporades. From

Athens' **Mavromateon terminal** (☎ 210 880 8080), opposite Areos Park, there are frequent buses to Rafina (€2, one hour, every 45 minutes), for Evia.

Ferry

There are daily ferries to the Sporades from both Agios Konstantinos and Volos, and weekly ferries from Thessaloniki to the Sporades, as well as five ferry routes connecting Evia to the mainland.

Updated summer ferry timetables are usually available in late April from the main ferry companies: **GA Ferries** (☎ 210 451 1720; www.ferries.gr/gaferries; Akti Miaouli & Kantharou 2, Piraeus) and **Minoan Lines** (☎ 281 033 0301; www.ferries.gr/minoan/domesticmain.htm; Thermopylon 6-10, Piraeus).

FERRY CONNECTIONS TO EVIA & THE SPORADES

Origin	Destination	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Agia Marina	Evia (Nea Styra)	45min	€2.10	4-6 daily
Agios Konstantinos	Alonnisos	4hr	€36.50	2 daily (jet ferry)
	Skiathos	2½hr	€18	daily
	Skopelos	3½hr	€31.60	1-2 daily
Arkitsa	Evia (Loutra Edipsou)	35min	€1.50	10-12 daily
Evia (Paralia Kymis)	Skyros	1¾hr	€8.30	1-2 daily
Rafina	Evia (Marmari)	1hr	€6	4-6 daily
Glyfa	Evia (Agiokambos)	25min	€1.50	8-12 daily
Skala Oropou	Evia (Eretria)	25min	€1.40	hourly
Thessaloniki	Skiathos	6hr	€17.70	weekly
Volos	Alonnisos	4½hr	€18.90	2 weekly
	Skiathos	2½hr	€14.70	2 daily
	Skopelos	3½hr	€18.90	1-2 daily

Car ferry prices are roughly three times the price for one person. Some one-way prices from the main ports:

Volos–Skiathos (€60)

Agios Konstantinos–Skiathos (€65)

Skiathos–Skopelos/Alonnisos (€18-22)

Evia (Paralia Kymis)–Skyros (€25)

Hydrofoil

There are frequent daily hydrofoil links from both Agios Konstantinos and Volos to the northern Sporades (Skiathos, Skopelos and Alonnisos only). Updated summer hydrofoil timetables are usually available in late April from **Hellenic Seaways** (☎ 210 419 9100; www.hellenicseaways.gr; Akti Kondyli & Etolikou 2, Piraeus GR-185 45). The timetable is also available from local hydrofoil booking offices located in Volos (p254) and Agios Konstantinos (p247).

HYDROFOIL CONNECTIONS TO EVIA & THE SPORADES

Origin	Destination	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Agios Konstantinos	Alonnisos	3hr	€36.50	2 daily
	Skiathos	1½hr	€26	2-3 daily
	Skopelos	2½hr	€35.40	2-3 daily
Volos	Alonnisos	2½hr	€31.50	3-4 daily
	Skiathos	1¾hr	€24.50	3-4 daily
	Skopelos	2¾hr	€31.50	3-4 daily
	Glossa	1¾hr	€25.50	2-3 daily

Train

There is an hourly train service from Athens' **Larisis station** (☎ 210 524 8829) to Halkida (€5.10, 1½ hours) via Ioni. To Volos, there

are several normal trains (€11.30, 5½ hours) and one intercity train (€20.70, 4½ hours).

EVIA EYBOIA

Evia (*eh-vih-ah*), Greece's second-largest island after Crete and a prime holiday destination for Greeks, remains less charted by foreign tourists. Its attractions include scenic mountain roads, challenging treks, unusual archaeological finds and mostly uncrowded beaches. A mountainous spine runs north-south, dividing the island's precipitous eastern cliffs from the gentler and resort-friendly west coast. A number of ferry connections, as well as a short bridge over the narrow Evripous Channel to the island's capital, Halkida, connect the island to the mainland. The current in the channel reverses direction around seven times daily, an event whose full explanation has eluded observers since Aristotle.

CENTRAL EVIA

After crossing the bridge to Halkida, the road veers south, following the coastline to Eretria, a bustling resort and major archaeological site. Further on, a string of hamlets and fishing villages dot the route until the junction at Lepoura, where the road forks north towards Kymi. Several branch roads to the sea are worth exploring, and the beach at Kalamos is exceptional.

Along the coastal road south of Eretria you may still see scorched hillsides from the August 2007 forest fires, especially between

the small towns of Amarinthos and Aliveri. Inland, in the direction of Steni and Mt Dryfys, several villages were devastated by the fires, resulting in tragic loss of life.

From the hillside town of Kymi, a rough but passable mountain road leads west above the north coastline to Paralia Hiliadou (opposite).

Halkida Χαλκίδα

pop 54,558
Halkida (also called Halkis) was an important city-state in ancient times, with several colonies dotted around the Mediterranean. The name derives from the bronze manufactured here in antiquity (*halkos* means 'bronze' in Greek). Today it's a lively industrial and agricultural town, but with nothing of sufficient note to warrant an overnight stay. However, if you have an hour or so to spare between buses, have a look at the **Archaeological Museum** (☎ 22210 60944; Leoforos Venizelou 13; admission €2; ☎ 8.30am-2.30pm Tue-Sun). It displays prehistoric, Roman and Hellenic finds from Evia's three ancient cities of Halkida, Eretria and Karystos, including the torso of Apollo from the Temple of Dafniforos at Eretria.

For emergencies, call the Halkida **tourist police** (☎ 22210 77777).

ACTIVITIES

The **Sport Apollon Scuba Diving Centre** (☎ 22210 86369; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 5-9pm) in Halkida organises dives off the Alykes coast, led by dive team Nikos and Stavroula. A one-day dive costs about €40.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hara Hotel (☎ 22210 76305; www.harahotel.gr in Greek; Karoni 21; s/tr/ste €50/80/110, d 60-70; **P** ☎) Should your connections require you to stay overnight in this transport hub, head for this smart place, set on the mainland side of town, overlooking the harbour.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus

From **Halkida station** (☎ 22210 22640; cnr Papanastasiou & Venizelou), buses run to Athens (€5.90, 1½ hours, half-hourly), Eretria (€1.80, 25 minutes, hourly) and Kymi Town (€7.30, two hours, hourly), one of which continues to Paralia Kymis to meet the Skyros ferry. There are also buses to Steni (€2.60, one hour, twice daily), Limni (€6.80, two hours, three daily), Loutra Edipsou (€9.20, 2½ hours, once daily) and Karystos (€10.10, three hours, three daily).

Train

The **Halkida train station** (☎ 22210 22386) is on the mainland side of the bridge. Frequent trains make the run to Athens, via Ioni (normal €5.10, 1½ hours, hourly; intercity €9.40, one hour, three daily) and to Thessaloniki, via Ioni (normal €12.90, 5½ hours, six daily; intercity €33.10, 4½ hours, three daily).

Eretria Ερέτρια

pop 3156
Heading southeast from Halkida, Eretria is the first place of interest, with a small harbour and a lively boardwalk filled with mainland families who pack its fish tavernas on holiday weekends. Ancient Eretria was a major maritime power and home to an eminent school of philosophy. The modern town was founded in the 1820s by islanders from Psara fleeing the Turkish.

INFORMATION

For emergencies, call the Halkida **tourist police** (☎ 22210 77777). For internet access, head to **Christos Internet Cafe-Bar** (☎ 22290 61604; per hr €2; ☎ 9am-1am) on the waterfront.

SIGHTS

From the top of the **ancient acropolis**, at the northern end of town, there are splendid views over to the mainland. West of the acropolis are the remains of a palace, temple and theatre with a subterranean passage once used by actors. Close by, the **Archaeological Museum of Eretria** (☎ 22290 62206; admission €2; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun) contains well-displayed finds from ancient Eretria. A 200m walk will bring you to the fascinating **House of Mosaics**, and ends 50m further at the **Sanctuary of Apollo**.

SLEEPING & EATING

Milos Camping (☎ /fax 22290 60420; www.camping-in-evia.gr/index_en.html; camp sites per adult/tent €6/4.50) This clean, shaded camping ground on the coast 1km northwest of Eretria has a small restaurant, bar and narrow pebble beach.

Island of Dreams Hotel (☎ 22290 61224; www.dreamisland.com.gr; s/d/f incl breakfast €50/60/95; **P** ☎) Tucked away on a nearby islet connected by a 20m causeway, the palm tree and bungalow setting is ideal for kids who can play Ping-Pong and minigolf while mum and dad sip a cool one at the beach bar.

Taverna Astra (☎ 22290 64111; Arheou Theatrou 48; mains €4-9) Just past the supermarket, this

busy waterfront taverna is known for well-priced fresh fish, along with appetisers like *taramasalata* (purée of fish roe, potato, oil and lemon juice).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Ferry

Ferries travel between Eretria and Skala Oropou (€1.40, 25 minutes, hourly).

Steni Στενή

pop 926

From Halkida, it's 31km to the lovely mountain village of Steni, with its gurgling springs and shady plane trees.

Steni is the starting point for a serious climb up **Mt Dirfys** (1743m), Evia's highest mountain. The **Dirfys Refuge**, at 1120m, can be reached along a 9km dirt road. From there, it's a steep 7km to the summit. Experienced trekkers should allow about six hours from Steni to the summit. For refuge reservations, contact **Stamatiou** (☎ weekdays 6972026862, weekends 22280 25655; per person €12). For more hiking information, contact the **Halkida Alpine Club** (☎ 22210 25230, 22280 24298; Angeli Gouviou 22, Halkida). An excellent topo/hiking map of *Mt Dirfys* is published by Anavasi (No 5.11).

A rough road continues from Steni to **Paralia Hiliadou** on the north coast, where a grove of maple and chestnut trees borders a fine pebble-and-sand beach, along with a few domatia and tavernas. Campers can find free shelter near the big rocks at either end of the beach.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel Dirfys (☎ 22280 51217; s/d incl breakfast €30/40) Conveniently located 50m uphill from the bus terminal, this is the best value of Steni's two hotels. It has comfortable carpeted rooms, pine furniture and balcony views of the forest and stream.

Taverna Orea Steni (☎ 22280 51262; mains €4-8) The best and most attractive among 10 brookside eateries, this taverna offers grills and traditional oven-ready dishes like the popular roast lamb with cheese, along with salads prepared from locally gathered greens.

Kymi & Paralia Kymis

Κύμη & Παραλία Κύμης

pop 3037

The untouristy, workaday town of Kymi is built on a cliff 250m above the sea. Things

perk up at dusk when the town square comes to life. The port of Kymi (called Paralia Kymis), 4km downhill, is the only natural harbour on the precipitous east coast, and the departure point for ferries to Skyros.

The excellent **Folklore Museum** (☎ 22220 22011; ☎ 10am-1pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sun), 30m downhill from the main square, has an impressive collection of local costumes and historical photos, including a display commemorating Kymi-born Dr George Papanikolaou, inventor of the Pap smear test.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel Beis (☎ 22220 22604; fax 22220 29113; Paralia Kymis; s/d incl breakfast €40/60; **P** ☎) If you need to spend the night, try the reliable Hotel Beis, a cavernous white block with large and spotless rooms. It's conveniently opposite the ferry dock for Skyros.

In Paralia Kymi, a string of tavernas and *ouzeries* lines the waterfront. Try **Taverna Spanos** (☎ 22220 22641), near the port and popular for fresh fish and oven-ready dishes and salads.

Taverna To Balkoni (☎ 22220 24177; Kymi; mains €4-7.50) Head to this family-style eatery for good lamb grills and *pastitsio* (layers of buttery macaroni and seasoned minced lamb), just below the square in Kymi.

NORTHERN EVIA

From Halkida a road heads north to **Psahna**, the gateway to the highly scenic mountainous interior of northern Evia. The road climbs and twists through pine forests to the rambling and woody village of **Prokopi**, home of the pilgrimage church of **St John the Russian**. At Strofyliya, 14km beyond Prokopi, a road heads southwest to picturesque **Limni**, then north to **Loutra Edipsou** and the ferry port at Agiokambos.

Loutra Edipsou Λουτρά Αιδηψού

pop 3600

The classic spa resort of **Loutra Edipsou** has therapeutic sulphur waters, which have been celebrated since antiquity. Famous skinny dippers have included Aristotle, Plutarch and Sylla. The town's gradual expansion over the years has been tied to the improving technology required to carry the water further and further away from its thermal source. Today the town has two of Greece's most up-to-date hydrotherapy and physiotherapy centres. There's also a good swimming beach (Paralia

Loutron), heated year-round thanks to the thermal waters, which spill into the sea.

INFORMATION

Dr Symeonides (☎ 22260 23220; Omirou 17) English-speaking Greek-Cypriot doctor.

Lan Arena (☎ 22260 22597; internet access per hr €3; ☎ 9am-midnight) Just opposite the ferry port, in a small arcade next to the police station.

Medical Centre (☎ 22260 53311; Istia)

ACTIVITIES

The more relaxing (and affordable) of the resort's two best-known spas is the **EOT Hydrotherapy-Physiotherapy Centre** (☎ 22260 23501; 25 March St 37; ☎ 7am-1pm & 5-7pm 1 Jun-31 Oct), speckled with palm trees and with a large outdoor pool and terrace overlooking the sea. Whirlpool bath treatments start at a modest €7.

The other is the posh **Thermae Sylla Hotel & Spa** (☎ 22260 60100; www.thermaesylla.gr; Posidonos 2), with a somewhat late-Roman ambience befitting its name, and offering a wide range of health and beauty treatments, from mud baths to seaweed body wraps, from around €70.

SLEEPING & EATING

Prices here reflect the higher summer season, 15 July to 15 September; low-season rates drop about 20%.

our pick **Hotel Aegli** (☎ 22260 22215; fax 22260 22886; Paraliakis 18; s/d/tr from €25/35/45; ☎ ☎) For charm and value, you can't beat this neoclassic holdover from the 1930s. The high-ceilinged rooms are immense, and the lobby is decorated with framed autographs of luminaries who passed by, including Greta Garbo and Winston Churchill. The Aegli also offers 20-minute hydrotherapy baths.

Hotel Kentrikon (☎ /fax 22260 22502; www.kentrikon.com; 25th Martiou 14; s/d/tr €42/60/70; ☎ ☎) The friendly Kentrikon is a combination hotel and spa with old-world charm, large tiled rooms, wood ceilings and balcony views of the sea.

Thermae Sylla Hotel & Spa (☎ 22260 60100; www.thermaesylla.gr; Posidonos 2; d/site €280/500; ☎ ☎ ☎) This posh spa offers accommodation along with its beauty treatments. If you wish to stay, you'll find elegant designer rooms with high ceilings and clear views to the sea.

Captain Cook Self-Service Restaurant (☎ 22260 23852; mains €3.50-8) Fill up on oven-ready dishes like *yemista* (stuffed tomatoes and peppers), *psari plaki* (baked fish) or a hearty *psaro-*

soupa (fish soup) at this popular seaside eatery, 200m south from the port.

Taverna Aegli (☎ 22260 22215; Paraliakis 18; mains €4-8) This seaside extension of the Hotel Aegli puts together a few plates of grilled sardines, stuffed zucchini flowers and wine for about €10 per head.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus

From the **bus station** (☎ 22260 22250; Thermopota-mou), 250m up from the port, buses run to Halkida (€9.20, 2½ hours, daily at 4pm), Athens (€11.80, 3½ hours, three daily via Arkitsa) and Thessaloniki (€21.30, five hours, daily at 10am via Glyfa).

Ferry

The **ferry** (☎ 22260 31107) runs from mainland Glyfa to Agiokambos (€1.50, 25 minutes, eight to 12 daily) and from mainland Arkitsa to Loutra Edipsou (€2, 40 minutes, 10 to 12 daily).

Limni Λίμνη pop 2072

One of Evia's most picturesque ports, little Limni faces seaward, its maze of white-washed houses and narrow lanes spilling onto a busy waterfront of cafés and tavernas. The town's cultural **museum** (☎ 22270 31900; admission €2; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-1pm Sun), just 50m up from the waterfront, features local archaeological finds along with antique looms, costumes and old coins. Seldom visited, Limni is well worth a stopover.

With your own transport or a penchant for walking, you can visit the splendid 16th-century **Convent of Galataki**, 8km southeast of Limni on a hillside above the road. The fine mosaics and frescoes in its *katholikon* (main church) merit a look, especially the *Entry of the Righteous into Paradise*. The convent is generally open from 9am to 6pm daily, with a good taverna under the trees nearby.

SLEEPING & EATING

Rovies Camping (☎ 22270 71120; www.campingevia.com/evia-holidays.html; camp sites per adult/tent €6/3.50; ☎) Attractive, shaded and well-tended Rovies sits just above a lovely sand-and-pebble beach, 12km northwest of Limni.

Zaniakos Domatia (☎ 6977936698; s/d €20/25; ☎) At these humble domatia, not much English

is in evidence, but the rooms are spotless, quiet and overlook the village.

Ostria Apartments (☎ /fax 22270 32248; www.holidays.shop.gr/tapetrina; apt incl breakfast from €90; ☎ ☎ ☎) Olive trees and bougainvillea surround 10 handsome self-catering apartments across the road from a pool and good beach, 1km northwest of Limni.

Taverna Platanos (☎ 22270 31479; Plateia; mains €3.50-8) Pick an outside table at this inviting waterfront taverna and enjoy the passing parade of villagers, along with excellent Greek standards like *souvlaki*, *mousakas* and *gavros* (anchovies).

SOUTHERN EVIA

Continuing east from Eretria, the road branches at Lepoura: the left fork leads north to Kymi, the right south to Karystos. A turn-off at Krieza, 3km from the junction, leads to Lake Dhistos, a shallow lake bed favoured by egrets and other wetland birds. Continuing south, you'll pass high-tech windmills and catch views of both coasts as the island narrows until it reaches the sea at Karystos Bay, near the base of Mt Ohi (1398m).

Karystos Κάρυστος pop 4960

Set on the wide Karystos Bay below Mt Ohi, and flanked by two sandy beaches, Karystos is the best of southern Evia's coastal resorts. The town's central square, Plateia Amalias, faces the bay and boat harbour. Karystos is the starting point for treks to Mt Ohi and the Dimosari Gorge.

INFORMATION

Polihoros Internet & Sports Cafe (☎ 22240 24421; Kriezotou 132; internet access per hr €4; ☎ 9am-1am) Next to the Galaxy Hotel.

South Evia Tours (☎ 22240 25700; fax 22240 29011; set@eviatravel.gr; Plateia Amalias 7) Helps with local and island information, walking maps and excursions to Mt Ohi and Dimosari Gorge, plus bookings and accommodation.

SIGHTS

Karystos is mentioned in Homer's *Iliad*, and was a powerful city-state during the Peloponnesian Wars. The **Karystos Museum** (☎ 22240 25661; admission €2; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun) documents the town's archaeological heritage, including tiny Neolithic clay lamps, a stone plaque written in the Halkidian alphabet, 5th-century-BC grave stelae depicting

Zeus and Athena, and an exhibit of the 6th-century *drakospita* (dragon houses) of Mt Ohi and Styra. The museum sits opposite a 14th-century Venetian castle, the **Bourtzi**.

TOURS

South Evia Tours (☎ 22240 25700; fax 22240 29091; set@eviatravel.gr) offers a range of services including car hire, accommodation, maps and excursions in the foothills of Mt Ohi, trips to the 6th-century-BC Roman-built *drakospita* near Skyra, and a cruise around the Petali Islands (€30). The owner, Nikos, can also arrange necessary taxi pick-up or drop-off for serious hikes to the summit of Mt Ohi and back, or guided walks to Dimosari Gorge (€20).

FESTIVALS

Karystos hosts a summer **Wine & Cultural Festival** from early July until the last weekend in August. Weekend happenings include theatre performances and plenty of traditional dancing to the tune of local musicians, along with painting, photo and sculpture exhibits by local artists. The summer merrymaking concludes with the Wine Festival, featuring every local wine imaginable, free for the tasting. Festival schedules are available at the Karystos Museum (left).

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel Karystion (☎ 22240 22391; www.karystion.gr; Kriezotou 3; s/d incl breakfast €45/55; ☎ ☎) The Karystion's bright and well-appointed rooms with sea-view balconies are excellent value. A stairway off the courtyard leads to a sandy beach below.

our pick **Cavo d'Oro** (☎ 22240 22326; mains €3.50-7.50) Join the locals in this cheery alleyway restaurant, one block west of the main square, where tasty mains include lamb in lemon sauce along with generous plates of *garidha* (fried shrimp) and homemade *spanakopita* (spinach pie). The helpful and friendly owner, Kostas, is also a regular at the summer wine festival, bouzouki in hand.

Taverna Mesa-Exo (☎ 22240 23997; mains €3.50-8) The name of this boardwalk taverna means 'In-Out' in Greek. Locals love it for its grilled fresh fish, mezedhes (appetisers) and warm atmosphere.

DRINKING

Check out the late-night scene around the *plateia* (square) where **Bar Chroma** (☎ 22240 23085) delivers decent drinks and sounds, or

head to the swank **Club Kohili** (☎ 22240 24350), on the beach by the Apollon Suite Hotel.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus

From the **Karystos bus station** (☎ 22240 26303), opposite Agios Nikolaos church, buses run to Halkida (€10.10, three hours, two daily), to Athens (€8, two hours, four daily) and to Marmari (€1.50, 25 minutes, for ferry to Rafina). A taxi to Marmari is about €11.

Ferry

There is a regular ferry service between Marmari, 10km west of Karystos, and mainland Rafina (€6, one hour, four to six daily). There is also a **ferry service** (☎ 22240 41533, 6944982879) from Nea Styra (35km north of Karystos) to Agia Marina (€2.10, 45 minutes, four to six daily).

Around Karystos

The ruins of **Castello Rosso** (Red Castle), a 13th-century Frankish fortress, are a short walk from **Myli**, a delightful, well-watered village 4km inland from Karystos. A little beyond Myli there is an **ancient quarry** scattered with green and black fragments of the once-prized Karystian *cippolino* marble.

With your own transport, or the help of a taxi, you can get to the base of **Mt Ohi** where a 1½-hour hike to the summit will bring you to the ancient *drakospita*, or dragon houses. The discovery of these Stonehenge-like dwellings hewn from rocks weighing up to several tons has spawned a number of theories regarding their origin, ranging from slave-built temples to UFO getaways.

Hikers can also head north by car from Karystos to the **Dimosari Gorge** and **Lenosei** village with views down to the coastal hamlet of **Kallianos**. A 10km trail to Kallianos can usually be covered in four to five hours (including time for a swim).

With a local map, you can easily explore the villages and chestnut forests nestling in the foothills between Mt Ohi and the coast. For other hikes, check with **South Evia Tours** (☎ 22240 25700; fax 22240 29091; set@eviatravel.gr) for trail conditions and maps.

The **Zarka Centre** (☎ 22230 53991; Zarakas; www.zarkacentre.com) is a residential health and creativity retreat with seminars in yoga, herbal medicine and environmental awareness, all

tucked into a tranquil rural setting at Zarakas, between Kymi and Karystos.

SKIATHOS ΣΚΙΑΘΟΣ

pop 6160

The good news is that much of the pine-fringed coast of Skiathos is blessed with exquisite beaches. The bad news is that in July and August the island is overrun with package tourists and hotel prices soar. At the island's small airport, the arrival board is filled with incoming charter flights from northern Europe, not Athens. Despite the large presence of sun-starved Europeans, Skiathos remains one of Greece's premier resorts.

Skiathos Town, the island's major settlement and port, lies on the southeast coast. The rest of the south coast is a string of holiday villas and hotels, plus a number of sandy beaches with pine trees for a backdrop. The north coast is precipitous and less accessible; in the 14th century the Kastro Peninsula served as a natural fortress against invaders. Today, most people come to Skiathos for the sun and nightlife, but the truly curious will discover picturesque monasteries, hill-top tavernas and even secluded beaches.

Getting There & Away

AIR

As well as the numerous charter flights from northern Europe to Skiathos, during summer there is one flight daily to/from Athens (€67). **Olympic Airlines** (☎ 24270 22200) has an office at the airport, not in town.

FERRY

In summer there are ferries from Skiathos to Volos, Agios Konstantinos and Alonnisos via Skopelos. From June through September, there is a ferry service heading north to Thessaloniki, south to Crete and east to Limnos.

Tickets can be purchased from either **Hellenic Seaways** (☎ 24270 22209; fax 24270 22750) at the bottom of Papadiamantis, or from **GA Ferries** (☎ 24270 22204; fax 24270 22979), next to Alpha Bank.

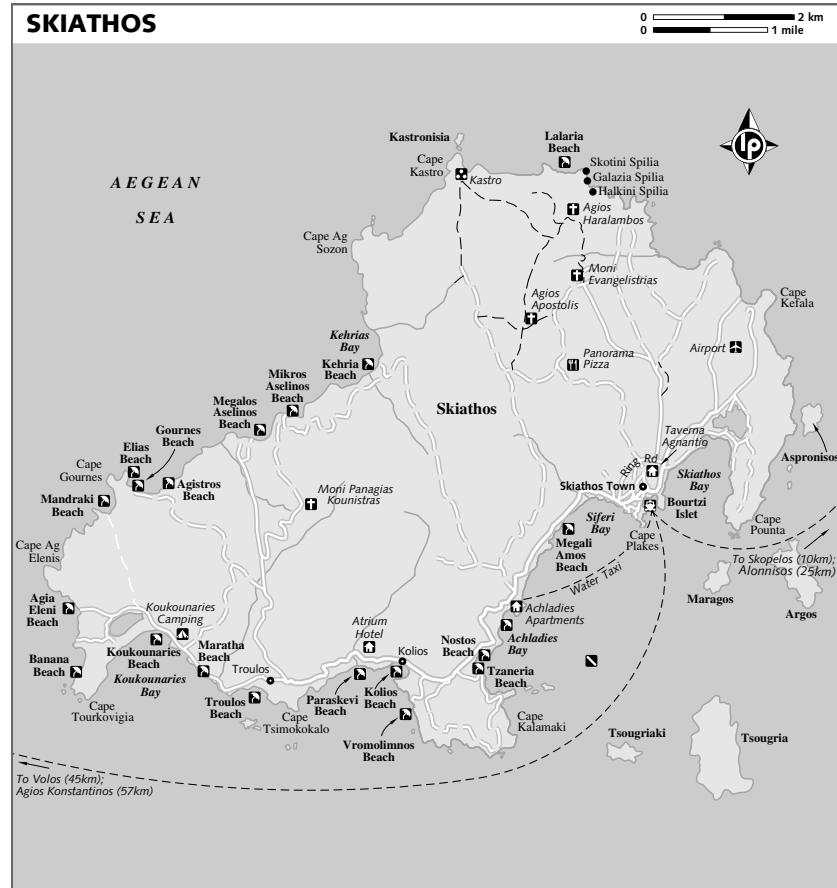
HYDROFOIL

In summer, there are hydrofoils and jet ferries from Skiathos to Alonnisos, Skopelos

FERRY DESTINATIONS FROM SKIATHOS

Destination	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Volos	2½hr	€15	2 daily Jun-Sep
Agios Konstantinos	2½hr	€18	daily Jun-Sep
Alonnisos	2hr	€8.80	daily Jun-Sep
Skopelos	1¼hr	€7.50	daily Jun-Sep
Thessaloniki	6hr	€17.70	4 weekly Jun-Sep
Tinos	10hr	€22.30	2 weekly Jun-Sep
Mikonos	11hr	€21	2 weekly Jun-Sep
Paros	13hr	€29.60	2 weekly Jun-Sep
Naxos	14½hr	€29.90	2 weekly Jun-Sep
Ios	16hr	€32.10	2 weekly Jun-Sep
Santorini	18hr	€33.50	2 weekly Jun-Sep
Iraklio (Crete)	22hr	€38.10	2 weekly Jun-Sep
Limnos	7hr	€15	weekly

SKIATHOS



Town, Glossa, Volos, Agios Konstantinos and Thessaloniki. Hydrofoil tickets can be purchased from Hellenic Seaways.

Summer Hydrofoil & Jet Ferry Connections from Skiathos

Destination	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Volos	1¼hr	€25	3-4 daily
Agios Konstantinos	1½hr	€28	2-3 daily
Thessaloniki (Flying Cat hydrofoil)	3½hr	€35.30	daily
Alonnisos	1hr	€14.70	4-6 daily
Glossa	20min	€8	4-6 daily
Skopelos Town	35min	€12.50	4-6 daily

Getting Around

BUS

Crowded buses leave Skiathos Town for Koukounaries Beach (€1.20 to €1.50, 30 minutes, every half-hour between 7.30am and 11pm). The buses stop at 26 numbered access points to the beaches along the south coast.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Reliable motorbike and car-hire outlets in Skiathos Town include **Europcar** (☎ 24270 22385) and **Heliotropio Tourism & Travel** (☎ 24270 22430) on the new port; and **Mathinos Travel** (☎ 24270 23351) on Papadiamantis.

TAXI

The **taxi stand** (☎ 24270 21460) is opposite the ferry dock. A taxi to/from the airport costs €5.

WATER TAXI

Water taxis depart from the old port for Tzaneria and Kanapitsa beaches (€3, 20 minutes, hourly) and Achladies Bay (€2, 15 minutes, hourly).

SKIATHOS TOWN

Skiathos Town, with its red-roofed, white-washed houses, is built on two low hills. Opposite the waterfront lies tiny and inviting **Bourtzi Islet** between the two small harbours and reached by a short causeway. The town is a major tourist centre, with hotels, souvenir shops, galleries, travel agents, tavernas and bars dominating the waterfront and narrow Papadiamanti St.

Orientation

The quay (wharf) is in the middle of the waterfront, just north of Bourtzi Islet. To the right

(as you face inland) is the newer small boat harbour; to the left is the curving old harbour used by local fishing and excursion boats. The main thoroughfare of Papadiamanti strikes inland from opposite the quay. Plateia Trion Ierarhon is above the old harbour, next to a large church. The bus terminus is at the northern end of the new harbour.

Information

EMERGENCY

Port police (☎ 24270 22017)

Tourist police (☎ 24270 23172; ☎ 8am-9pm)

Opposite the regular police station about halfway along Papadiamanti; open daily during the summer season.

INTERNET ACCESS

Creator Tours (☎ 24270 21384; per 30min €1;

☎ 9am-9pm) Opposite the new port, inside the Europcar office.

Enter Internet (☎ 24270 29330; per hr €3.50;

☎ 9am-2am) From the port, walk up Papadiamanti and take the first left.

Internet Zone Café (☎ 24270 22767; Evangelistrias 28; per hr €2; ☎ 10am-1am) About 30m from the post office.

LAUNDRY

Snow White's Laundry (☎ 24270 24256; ☎ 9am-8pm) Behind Alpha Bank.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Health Centre Hospital (☎ 24270 22222) At the beginning (west end) of ring road, above old port.

Pharmacy Papantoniou (☎ 24270 24515; Papadiamanti 18)

MONEY

The National Bank of Greece, Alpha Bank and numerous ATMs are on Papadiamanti and along the waterfront.

POST

Post office (☎ 24270 22011; cnr Papadiamanti & Evangelistrias)

Sights

Skiathos was the birthplace of famous 19th-century Greek novelist and short story writer Alexandros Papadiamantis, whose writings draw upon the hard lives of the islanders he grew up with. Papadiamantis' humble house is now a charming **museum** (☎ 24270 23843; Plateia Papadiamanti; admission €1; ☎ 9.30am-1.30pm & 5-8.30pm Tue-Sun) with a small collection of books, paintings and old photos documenting his life.

Tours

Excursion boats make full- and half-day trips around the island (€9 to €20, approximately four to six hours), and usually include a visit to Cape Kastro, Lalaria Beach and the three *spilies* (caves) of Halkini, Skotini and Galazia, which are only accessible by boat. A few boats also visit the nearby islets of Tsougria and Tsougriaki for swimming and snorkelling. Check out the posted daily schedules at the old harbour, or contact **Mathinos Travel** (☎ 24270 23351; Papadiamantis 18) or **Heliotropio Tourism & Travel** (☎ 24270 22430; www.heliotropio.gr) at the new port.

Sleeping

Most accommodation is booked from July to the end of August, when prices quoted here are nearly double those of low season. There's a quayside kiosk with information and pictures of rooms and domatia.

Hotel Meltemi (☎ 24270 22493; s/d/ff incl breakfast €60/70/85; ☎) Set well back behind a shaded entry, the inviting Meltemi has balconied rooms with views of the harbour, large bathrooms and homey touches like antique ceramics and traditional wooden ceilings.

Villa Orsa (☎ 24270 22430; fax 24270 21952; s/d/ff incl breakfast from €70/80/110; ☎) Perched above the old harbour, this classic cliffside mansion features very comfortable, traditionally styled rooms with balcony views. Breakfast is served on a garden terrace overlooking the sea.

Hotel Bourtzi (☎ 24270 21304; Moraitou 8; www.hotelbourtzi.gr/Bourtzi-Pothos/bhome.asp; s/d/tr incl breakfast €105/136/150; ☎) On upper Papadiamanti, the upmarket and family-friendly Bourtzi escapes much of the traffic noise of town, and features an inviting garden and two small pools (one for kids).

Also recommended:

Pension Lazou (☎ 24270 22324, 6946545713; s/d/apt-f €40/50/100; ☎) A clean and basic *pension*, a 50m walk up the steps, south of the old harbour.

Australia Hotel (☎ 24270 22488; fax 24270 22086; Evangelistrias; s/d €45/65; ☎) A clean and friendly budget option around the corner from the post office.

Hotel Pothos (☎ 24270 22694; www.hotelbourtzi.gr/Bourtzi-Pothos/phome.asp; s/d incl breakfast €80/90; ☎) A smart courtyard inn, 30m west of post office.

For last-minute accommodation in high season, try the resourceful **Georgia Avesti** (☎ 6944137377), who often meets the boats on her motor scooter; or **Sotos & Maria** (☎ 24270 23219, 6974716408; sotos-2@otenet.gr), also helpful in a pinch.

Eating

Many eateries in Skiathos are geared to the tourist trade and are expensive. The places listed here offer better value, and food, than most.

Taverna Alexandros (☎ 24270 22341; Mavrogiali; mains €4-9) Excellent lamb grills, traditional oven-roasted chicken and potatoes, and live acoustic Greek music await at this friendly alleyway eatery under a canopy of mulberry trees.

Psaradiko Ouzeri (☎ 24270 23412; mains €4-10) Fresh fish at decent prices brings locals to this snappy taverna at the far end of the old port; favourites include a hearty fish soup, and grilled or fried calamari.

Taverna Anemos (☎ 24270 21003; mains €6-14) Locals know this fine fish taverna overlooking the harbour for its generous portions of fresh cod, lobster, mussels and *kritamos* (rock samphire salad), along with several outstanding Greek wines. The cook is a diver and fisherman, and more often than not is busy grilling the morning catch.

Ourpick Maria's Pizza (☎ 24270 22292; Syngrou 6; mains €8-15) You'll find superb handmade pizza (rolled out by Maria herself), stuffed garlic bread you cannot imagine, along with several pastas and dazzling salads, all in a flower-filled alleyway setting.

Also recommended:

Main Street (☎ 24270 21743; Papadiamantis; breakfasts €2-4) Next to the post office, with bargain breakfast, wraps and fresh juices.

Dinos (☎ 24270 23738; Papadiamantis; mains €4-8) Reliable café on the main drag, open from early morning till around 11pm.

Taverna Mouragio (☎ 24270 22216; mains €6-10) Waterfront Mouragio offers *tsipouro*-friendly mezedhes, grilled calamari.

Drinking

Ourpick Kentavros Bar (☎ 24270 22980) The long-established and handsome Kentavros, off Plateia Papadiamanti, promises rock, soul, jazz and blues, and gets the thumbs up from locals and expats alike for its mellow ambience and good drinks.

Bar Destiny (☎ 24270 24172; Polytechniou) Look for the soft blue light coming from this hip and gay-friendly side-street bar, with music videos, draught beer and a bit of dancing when the mood hits.

Ice Rooftop Bar (☎ 6949096465) This is a popular place to chill above the old port, with decent drinks and the longest happy hour on the waterfront.

Rock & Roll Bar (☎ 24270 22944) Huge beanbags have replaced many of the pillows outside this trendy but pricey bar by the old port, resulting in fewer customers rolling off.

The dancing and drinking scene amps up after midnight along the club strip past the new harbour. Best DJs are at **BBC** (☎ 24270 21190), followed by **Kahlua Bar** (☎ 24270 23205), both with dancing drinkers till dawn.

Entertainment

Cinema Attikon (☎ 24270 22352; Papadiamanti; admission €7; beer & snacks €2-4) Catch recent English-language movies at this open-air cinema, sip a beer and practise speed-reading your Greek subtitles at the same time. (Greece is one of the few countries in Europe to show films with original language, not dubbed.)

Shopping

Loupos & his Dolphins (☎ 24270 23777; Plateia Papadiamanti; ☎ 10am-1.30pm & 6-11.30pm) Look for hand-painted icons, fine ceramics by Greek artists, along with gold and silver jewellery at this high-end gallery shop, next to Papadiamantis Museum.

Archipelagos (☎ 24270 22163; Plateia Papadiamanti; ☎ 11am-1pm & 8-10pm) The work of contemporary Greek artists, along with elegant traditional weavings, stands out at this intimate shop.

Galerie Varsakis (☎ 24270 22255; Plateia Trion Ieraron; ☎ 10am-2pm & 6-11pm) Browse for unusual antiques like 19th-century spinning sticks made by grooms for their intended brides, plus Greek and African textiles.

AROUND SKIATHOS Beaches

With some 65 beaches to choose from, beach-hopping on Skiathos can become a full-time occupation. Buses ply the south coast, stopping at 26 numbered beach access points. **Megali Amos** is only 2km from town, but fills up quickly. The first long stretch of sand worth getting off the bus for is the pine-fringed **Vromolimnos Beach**. Further along, **Kolios Beach** and **Troulos Beach** are also good but both, alas, are very popular. The bus continues to **Koukounaries Beach**, backed by pine trees and touted as the best beach in Greece. But nowadays its crowded summer scene is best viewed at a distance, from where the 1200m long sweep of pale gold sand does indeed sparkle.

Banana Beach, known for its curving shape and soft white sand, lies at the other side of a narrow headland. It is nominally a nudist beach, though the skinny-dippers tend to abscond to **Little Banana Beach** (which also gets the big thumbs up from gay and lesbian sunbathers) around the rocky corner if things get too crowded.

West of Koukounaries, **Agia Eleni Beach** is a favourite with windsurfers. Sandy **Mandraki Beach**, a 1.5km walk along a pine-shaded path, is just far enough to keep it clear of the masses. The northwest coast's beaches are less crowded but are subject to the strong summer *meltemi* (northeasterly winds). From Troulos (look for bus stop 19), a road heads north to **Moni Panagias Kounistras**, from where a right fork continues 300m to **Mikros Aselinos Beach** and 5km further on to secluded **Kehria Beach**.

Lalaria Beach is a tranquil strand of pale-grey, egg-shaped pebbles on the northern coast. It is much featured in tourist brochures, but only reached by excursion boat from Skiathos Town (see Tours, p657).

Kastro Κάστρο

Kastro, perched dramatically on a rocky headland above the north coast, was the fortified pirate-proof capital of the island from 1540 to 1829; an old cannon remains at the northern end. Four of the crumbling town's old churches have been restored, and the views are magnificent. Excursion boats come to the beach below Kastro, from where it's an easy clamber up to the ruins.

Moni Evangelistrias Μονή Ευαγγελιστρίας

The most appealing of the island's monasteries is the 18th-century **Moni Evangelistrias** (Annunciation; ☎ 24270 22012; ☎ 8am-8pm), poised above a gorge 450m above sea level, and surrounded by pine and cypress trees. The monastery was a refuge for freedom fighters during the War of Independence. Once home to 70 monks, it now has only two monks doing the chores, which include wine-making. You can sample the tasty results of their efforts in the museum shop. An adjacent shed of old presses and vintage barrels recalls an earlier era, long before the satellite dish was installed above the courtyard.

Also worth a visit is **Moni Panagias Kounistras** (Holy Virgin), with fine frescoes adorning its *katholikon*. It's 4km inland from Troulos.

Activities

DIVING

Octopus Diving Centre (☎ 24270 24549; www.odc-skiathos.com; new harbour) has a dive instructor team, Theofanis and Eva, who conduct half-day dives around Tsougria and Tsougriki islets for beginners and experts alike (from €40 to €50, equipment included).

Dolphin Diving (☎ 24270 21599, 6944999181; www.ddiving.gr; Nostos Beach, bus stop 12) is the oldest diving school in the Sporades. It offers single dives in the €45 to €55 range (with equipment) including a morning beginners' dive off Tsougriki Islet, which explores locations to 30m deep.

HIKING

A 6km-long hiking route begins at Moni Evangelistrias, eventually reaching **Cape Kastro**, before circling back through Agios Apostolis. Kastro is a spring mecca for bird-watchers, who may catch glimpses of long-necked Mediterranean shags and singing blue-rock thrushes on the nearby rocky islets.

Sleeping & Eating

Koukounaries Camping (☎/fax 24270 49250; camp sites per adult/tent €8.50/4; (P)) Shaded by fig and mulberry trees, this excellent site near the eastern end of Koukounaries Beach features spotless toilets and showers, cooking facilities, laundry and a nearby minimarket and taverna.

our pick **Achladies Apartments** (☎ 24270 22486; http://achladies.apartments.googlepages.com; Achladies Bay; d/tr/f incl breakfast €50/65/87, 2-night min; (P)) Look for the hand-painted yellow sign to find this welcoming gem, 3km from Skiathos Town. It offers self-catering rooms with ceiling fans, an ecofriendly tortoise sanctuary and a succulent garden winding down to a taverna and sandy beach, from where a water taxi makes 20-minute runs to Skiathos Town.

Atrium Hotel (☎ 24270 49345; www.atriumhotel.gr; Paraskevi Beach; s/d/tr €98/130/170; (P) ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Traditional architecture and modern amenities make this handsome property the best in its class. Perched on a pine-covered hillside, it offers facilities such as satellite TV, a pool bar and a game lounge with Ping-Pong and billiards.

Panorama Pizza (☎ 6944192066; pizzas €7-10; ☎ noon-4pm, 7pm-late) Up the hill (2.5km) from the ring road, excellent Panorama overlooks Skiathos Bay below.

Taverna Agnantio (☎ 2427022016; mains €6-11) Family-run Agnantio attracts both locals and tourists, who come early to catch house specialities like

slow-roasted lamb. It's 400m off the ring road, with superb terrace views down to the harbour. Reservations are a must from July to August.

SKOPELOS ΣΚΟΠΕΛΟΣ

pop 4700

Less commercialised than Skiathos, Skopelos is a beautiful island of pine forests, vineyards, olive groves and orchards of plums and almonds, which find their way into many local dishes.

Like Skiathos, the high cliffs of the northwest coast are exposed, while the sheltered southeast coast harbours several sand and pebble beaches. There are two large settlements: the capital and main port of Skopelos Town on the east coast; and the unspoilt west coast village of Glossa, 3km north of Loutraki, the island's second port.

In 1936 Skopelos yielded an exciting archaeological find, a royal tomb dating to ancient times, when the island was an important Minoan outpost ruled by Stafylos, the son of Ariadne and Dionysos in Greek mythology. The Minoan ruler Stafylos ('grape' in Greek) is said to have introduced wine-making here.

Getting There & Away

FERRY

In summer there are daily ferries between Skopelos and Alonnisos, Skiathos, Volos and Agios Konstantinos.

Tickets are available from **Hellenic Seaways** (☎ 24240 22767; fax 24240 23608) opposite the new quay; and **Lemonis Agency** (☎ 24240 22363) in Pension Lemonis towards the end of the new quay.

Summer Ferry Connections from Skopelos Town & Glossa

Origin	Destination	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Skopelos Town	Alonnisos	30min	€4.60	3-4 weekly
Skopelos Town	Skiathos	1hr	€7.50	daily
Skopelos Town	Volos	4hr	€19.50	1-2 daily
Skopelos Town	Agios Konstantinos	3½hr	€31.60	1-2 (jet ferries) daily
Glossa	Volos	3¼hr	€16.50	daily (morning)

HYDROFOIL

Skopelos has two hydrofoil ports, the main one at Skopelos Town and the other to the northwest at Glossa's port of Loutraki, both with service to Alonnisos and Skiathos.

There are also hydrofoils from Skopelos Town to Volos (€27.50, 1¼ hours, three daily) and to Agios Konstantinos (€30.50, two hours, two to three daily)

In Skopelos Town, purchase tickets from **Hellenic Seaways** (☎ 24240 22767; fax 24240 23608); in Glossa, from **Hellenic Seaways** (☎ 24240 33435; fax 24240 33042).

Summer Hydrofoil Connections from Skopelos Town & Glossa

Origin	Destination	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Skopelos Town	Alonnisos	20min	€7.70	5 daily
Skopelos Town	Skiathos	45min	€12.50	5 daily
Glossa	Skopelos Town	30min	€10.50	3-4 daily
Glossa	Skiathos	20min	€7.60	4-5 daily
Glossa	Alonnisos	55min	€12.20	3-4 daily

Getting Around

BUS

There are eight buses per day from Skopelos Town all the way to Glossa/Loutraki (€3.90, one hour), three that go only as far as Panormos (€1.90, 25 minutes) and Milia (€2.60, 35 minutes), and another two that go only as far as Agnontas (€1.20, 15 minutes) and Stafylos (€1.20, 15 minutes).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Several car- and motorcycle-rental outlets line the harbour in Skopelos Town, mostly located at the eastern end of the waterfront, including the friendly and efficient **Motor Tours** (☎ 24240 22986; fax 24240 22602) next to Hotel Eleni.



TAXI

The taxi stand is next to the bus stop along the waterfront. A taxi to Stafylos is €7, to Limnonari €12, to Glossa €25.

WATER TAXI

A regular water taxi departs late morning for Glysteri Beach (€5 one way), and returns at about 5pm.

SKOPELOS TOWN

Skopelos Town is one of the most captivating ports in the Sporades. It skirts a semicircular bay and clambers in tiers up a hillside, culminating in an old fortress and a cluster of four churches. Dozens of other churches are interspersed among dazzling white houses with brightly shuttered windows and flower-adorned balconies.

Orientation

Skopelos Town's waterfront is flanked by two quays. The old quay is at the western end of the harbour and the new quay is at the eastern end, used by all ferries and hydrofoils. From the dock, turn right to reach the bustling waterfront lined with cafés, souvenir shops and travel agencies; turn left (20m) for the bus stop. Less than 50m away is Plateia Platanos, also known as Souvlaki Sq.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

International newsstand (☎ 24240 22236; ☎ 8am-10pm) Twenty metres up from bus stop.

EMERGENCY

Police (☎ 24240 22235) Above the National Bank.
Port police (☎ 24240 22180)

INTERNET ACCESS

Blue Sea Internet Café (☎ 24240 23010; per hr €3; ☎ 8am-2am) End of the waterfront, beneath the Kastro steps.

Skopelos Internet Café (☎ 24240 23093; per hr €3; ☎ 9am-midnight) Next to the post office.

LAUNDRY

Blue Star Washing (☎ 24240 22844) Near the OTE office.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Health Centre (☎ 24240 22222) On the ring road, next to the fire station.

MONEY

There are three banks with ATMs along the waterfront.

POST

Post office South of Platanos Sq, 100m on the right.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Madro Travel (☎ 24240 22300; www.madrotravel.com) At the end of the new port, Madro can provide help with booking accommodation and ticketing, and arrange walking trips, cooking lessons, even marriages.

Thalpos Holidays (☎ 24240 29036; www.holidayislands.com) The helpful staff at this waterfront agency offer a range of services including apartment and villa accommodation and tours around the island.

Sights

Strolling around town and sitting at the waterside cafés might be your chief occupations in Skopelos, but there is also a small **Folk Art Museum** (☎ 24240 23494; Hatzistamati; admission €2; ☎ 10am-10pm) with a Skopelean wedding room, complete with traditional costumes and bridal bed.

Tours

Day-long cruise boats (€20 to €45) depart from the new quay by 10am, and usually take in the Marine Park of Alonnisos (p666), pausing en route for lunch and a swim. There's a good chance of spotting dolphins along the way. For bookings, contact **Thalpos Holidays** (☎ 24240 22947) or **Madro Travel** (☎ 24240 22300) on the waterfront.

Sleeping

Hotel prices quoted are for the July to August high season, but are often reduced by 30% to 50% at other times. The **Rooms & Apartments Association** (☎ 24240 24567; ☎ 8.30am-2pm), next to the ferry dock, can help with accommodation.

BUDGET

Our pick Sotos Pension (☎ 24240 22549; www.skopelos.net/sotos; s/d €35/50; ☎) The traditional pine rooms at this charming waterfront pension are each a bit different; an old brick oven serves as a handy shelf in one. There's an interior courtyard, a whitewashed terrace overlooking the bay and a communal kitchen which is kept well stocked by the welcoming owner, Alexandra (Alex, for short).

Hotel Regina (☎ 24240 22138; www.skopelosweb.gr/regina; s/d incl breakfast €40/55; ♿) Rooms at the vaguely Victorian and very friendly Regina have ceiling fans and small balconies. Breakfast is served on the rooftop veranda overlooking the nearby harbour.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Agnanti (☎ /fax 24240 22722; www.skopelos.net/agnanti; s/d/tr incl breakfast from €45/65/90; ♿) Theo and Eleni run the show at this inviting 12-room hotel on the far bay, with ceiling fans, traditional ceramic and wood decorations, plus a paperback lending library.

Perivoli Studios (☎ 24240 24480, 6974120450; www.skopelos.net/perivoli; d/tr €60/70; ♿) These stylish self-catering studios occupy a traditional building just off the ring road, each with a terrace overlooking an orchard of olive and fruit trees.

Hotel Dionyssos (☎ 24240 23210; www.dionyssoshotel.com; s/d/tr incl breakfast €100/120/130; ♿) The low-key Dionyssos occupies a quiet street between the ring road and the waterfront. The upper rooms offer balcony views of the harbour. Even in summer, the large lobby is cool and inviting, and a pool bar awaits just outside.

Eating

Just 100m up from the dock, Souvlaki Sq is perfect for a quick bite of *gyros* or, not surprisingly, souvlaki. Skopelos is known for a variety of plum-based recipes, and most tavernas will have one or two on the menu.

Taverna O Angelos (☎ 24240 22381; mains €5-8) The oldest taverna on the island, O Angelos sits at the end of the old quay. Ready-to-eat oven dishes include hearty staples like lamb *stifadho* and stuffed zucchini.

Taverna Englezos (☎ 24240 22230; mains €7-11) The newest restaurant on the waterfront serves great grills at good prices – half a chicken on the spit for €7, tasty foil-wrapped and oven-baked lamb (*kleftiko*) for €9. In true Greek style, your meal usually ends with fresh fruit, on the house.

our pick **To Perivoli Restaurant** (☎ 24240 23758; mains €7-12) Just up from Souvlaki Sq, Perivoli promises excellent Greek cuisine and snappy service in an elegant and vine-covered courtyard setting. Specialities include rolled pork with *koromila* (local plums) in wine sauce and seafood risotto, plus a great selection of Greek wines.

Anna's Restaurant (☎ 24240 24734; Gifthorema; mains €7-12) On Wednesday, the menu at this handsome courtyard bistro is devoted to authentic Skopelos dishes such as *tyropita* (cheese pie) or lamb in plum sauce. Look for the palm tree in the courtyard.

Also recommended:

Michalis (☎ 24240 23591; snacks & cakes €2-5; ♿) 9am-11pm) One of the best spots for traditional *tyropita*, with several variations on the theme.

Nastas Ouzerie (☎ 24240 23441; mezedhes €2.50-5, mains €6-10) Snappy *ouzerie* near the ring road, with first-rate mezedhes.

DIA Discount Supermarket (☎ 24240 24340; ♿) 8.30am-9.30pm) Will appeal to self-caterers, with its good prices and well-stocked aisles.

Drinking

Platanos Jazz Bar (☎ 24240 23661) Near the end of the old quay, this leafy courtyard bar is open for morning coffee and late-night drinks, making it the ideal place to recover from a hangover, or to prepare for one.

Oionos Blue Bar (☎ 6942406136) Cosy and cool, little Oionos draws a local crowd to its traditional Skopelean digs, where it serves up blues and soul along with 19 brands of beer and 25 malt whiskies at last count.

Le Bistro (☎ 24240 24741; Souvlaki Sq) Upmarket Le Bistro's wine and cocktail bar often exhibits the work of local painters and photographers.

Anemos Espresso Bar (☎ 24240 23564; coffees & snacks €2-4; ♿) 8am-1am) Count on excellent coffee and fresh juice at this shaded waterfront café.

Shopping

Gray Gallery (☎ 24240 24266, 6974641597) Works by island and visiting artists are featured in this low-key fine art gallery.

Archipelogos (☎ 24240 23127; waterfront) Worth a browse for the fine collection of antiques, jewellery and old icons.

Entertainment

Ouzerie Anatoli (☎ 24240 22851; ♿) 7pm-2am, summer only) For mezedhes and traditional music, head to this breezy *ouzerie*, high above the Kastro. From 11pm onwards you will hear traditional *rembetika* (blues) music sung by Skopelos' own exponent of the Greek blues, Georgos Xindaris. Follow the path up the (steep) steps past Agio Apostolis church at the northern end of the quay, or take a taxi from the port (€5).

The summer club scene livens up late along Doulidi, near the post office and the small church of Panagia Eleftherotria. **Panselinos** (☎ 24240 24488; Doulidi; ♿) 10pm-3am) mixes Greek pop sounds with live performances on summer weekends. The nearby **Metro Club** (☎ 24240 24478; Doulidi; ♿) 9pm-3am) plays mostly high-volume Greek pop.

GLOSSA ΓΛΩΣΣΑ

Glossa, Skopelos' other major settlement, is considerably quieter than the capital. Another whitewashed delight, it has miraculously managed to retain the feel of a pristine Greek village.

The bus stops in front of a large church at a T-junction. One road winds down 3km to the port of Loutraki and a few domatia and tavernas; the other leads nearby to a bank, pharmacy, bakery and a few small stores.

Sleeping & Eating

Pension Platanas (☎ 24240 33188; Glossa; s/d €20/30) Close to nothing in particular, this friendly family *pension* with views to the sea is only 3km to the ferry port at Loutraki.

Kyra Lena Bakery (☎ 24240 33688; snacks €1.50-3.50) Check out the huge brick oven at Glossa's newest bakery, with *tyropita*, *pipero-pita* (sweet peppers and feta pie) and roasted almonds among the breads and little cakes.

Flivos Taverna (☎ 24240 33856; Loutraki; mains €3-7) Perched above the rocks at the little port of Loutraki, this end-of-the-road family taverna offers fresh fish at decent prices, fresh chips, homemade *mousakas*, and traditional appetisers like *taramasalata*.

Agnanti Taverna & Bar (☎ 24240 33076; mains €7-12) Enjoy the views of Evia from swank Agnanti's rooftop terrace, along with Greek fusion dishes like grilled sardines on pita with sea fennel and sun-dried tomatoes, followed by simmered pork with plums. From July to August, book ahead.

AROUND SKOPELOS Monasteries

Skopelos has several monasteries that can be visited on a beautiful scenic drive or day-long trek from Skopelos Town. Begin by following the road (Monastery Rd), which skirts the bay and then climbs inland. Continue beyond the signposted Hotel Aegeon until the road forks. Take the left fork, which ends at the 18th-century **Moni Evangelistrias**,

now a convent. The monastery's prize, aside from the superb views, is a gilded iconostasis containing an 11th-century icon of the Virgin Mary.

The right fork leads to the uninhabited 16th-century **Moni Metamorfosis Sotiros**, the island's oldest monastery. From here a decent track continues to the 17th-century **Moni Varvaras** with a view to the sea, and to the 18th-century **Moni Prodomou** (now a convent), 8km from Skopelos Town.

Moni Episkopis rests within the Venetian compound of a private Skopelian family, about 250m beyond the ring road. Ring **Apostolis** (☎ 6974120450) for details and an invitation. The small chapel within is a wonder of light and Byzantine icons.

Beaches

Skopelos' beaches are mostly pebbled, and almost all are on the sheltered southwest and west coasts. All bus services stop at the beginning of paths that lead down to the beaches. The first beach you come to is the sand-and-pebble **Stafylos Beach** (site of Stafylos' tomb), 4km southeast of Skopelos Town. From the eastern end of the beach a path leads over a small headland to the quieter **Velanio Beach**, the island's official nudist beach and a great snorkelling spot. **Agnontas**, 3km west of Stafylos, has a small pebble-and-sand beach and from here caïques sail to the superior and sandy **Limnonari Beach**, in a sheltered bay flanked by rocky outcrops. Limnonari is also a 1.5km walk or drive from Agnontas.

From Agnontas the road cuts inland through pine forests before re-emerging at the sheltered and popular **Panormos Beach**. One kilometre further, little **Andrines Beach** is sandy and less crowded. The next two beaches, **Milia** and **Kastani**, are considered to be two of the island's best for swimming.

Tours

If you can't tell a Cleopatra butterfly from a Madonna lily or Leopard orchid, join one of island resident Heather Parson's **guided walks** (☎ 6945249328; www.skopelos-walks.com; tours €15-20). Her three-hour walk above Skopelos Town follows an old path into the hills, and offers views to Alonnissos and Evia. Her book, *Skopelos Trails*, contains graded trail descriptions and illustrated maps, and is available in waterfront stores (€16).

Sleeping & Eating

There are small hotels, domatia, tavernas and beach canteens at Stafylos, Agnontas, Limnonari, Panormos, Andrines and Milia.

our pick Mando Rooms (☎ 24240 23917; www.skopelos.net/mando; s/d/tr/f €80/90/110/150; (P) (♿)) Having its own cove on the bay at Stafylos is a good start at this welcoming and family-oriented *pension*. Other extras include free coffee, a communal kitchen, satellite TV, and a platform over the rocks to enter the water.

Limnonari Rooms & Taverna (☎ 24240 23046; www.skopelos.net/limnonari-rooms; Limnonari Beach; d/tr/ste €60/80/120; (P) (♿)) Set back on a beautiful and sandy bay, this well-managed domatia features self-catering ministudios, along with

a well-equipped communal kitchen and terrace, all about 30m from the water. The garden taverna (mains €6 to €8) serves a perfect vegetarian *mousakas*, along with the owner's homemade olives and feta.

ALONNISOS ΑΛΟΝΝΗΣΟΣ

pop 2700

Alonnisos rises from the sea like a mountain of greenery with thick stands of pine and oak, along with mastic and arbutus bushes, and fruit trees. The west coast is mostly precipitous cliffs but the east coast is speckled

with small bays and pebbly beaches. The water around Alonnisos has been declared a national marine park, and is the cleanest in the Aegean.

Lovely Alonnisos has had its share of bad luck. In 1952, the flourishing cottage wine industry came to a halt, when vines imported from California were struck with the disease phylloxera. Robbed of their livelihood, many islanders moved away. Then, in 1965, an earthquake destroyed the hill-top capital of Alonnisos Town. The inhabitants were subsequently rehoused in hastily assembled dwellings at Patitiri.

Getting There & Away

FERRY

From Alonnisos, there are ferries to Skopelos Town (€4.60, 30 minutes, three to four per week) and to Skiathos (€8.80, two hours, daily from June to September), to Volos (€18.90, 4½ hours, two weekly), to Agios Konstantinos (€36, four hours by jet ferry, daily), and to Thessaloniki (€23.20, seven hours, three per week). Outside of the summer season, service is less frequent. Check with ferry companies for current routes and schedules.

Tickets can be purchased from **Alonnisos Travel** (☎ 24240 65188) in Patitiri.

HYDROFOIL

In summer, hydrofoils connect Alonnisos to Skopelos Town (€7.70, 20 minutes, five daily), to Glossa (€12.20, one hour, four daily), to Skiathos (€14.70, 1½ hours, five daily), to Volos (€32.50, three hours, three daily) and to Agios Konstantinos (€36.50, three hours, two daily). Tickets may be purchased from **Alkyon Travel** (☎ 24240 65220) in Patitiri.

Getting Around

BOAT

lonnisos Travel (☎ 24240 65188) rents out four-person 15HP to 25HP motorboats. The cost ranges from €48 to €60 per day in summer.

BUS

In summer, one bus plies the route between Patitiri (from opposite the quay) and Old Alonnisos (€1.20, hourly 9am to about 3pm). There is also a service to Steni Vala from Old Alonnisos via Patitiri (€1.30, twice daily).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Several motorcycle-hire outlets can be found on Pelasgon, in Patitiri, including reliable **I'm Bike** (☎ 24240 65010). Be wary when riding down to the beaches, as some of the sand-and-shale tracks are steep and slippery. Also try **Nefeli Bakery & Rent-A-Car** (☎ 24240 66497) and **Albedo Travel** (☎ 24240 65804).

TAXI

The four taxis on the island (Georgos, Periklis, Theodoros, Spyros) tend to congregate opposite the quay. It's €5 to Old Alonnisos, €8 to Megalos Mourtias and €12 to Steni Vala.

WATER TAXI

The easiest way during summer to get to and from the east-coast beaches is by taking the **water taxi** (☎ 24240 65461) that leaves from the quay at 11am and returns by about 5.30pm. The main stops are Kokkinokastro (€7), Steni Vala (€9) and Agios Dimitrios (€10).

PATITIRI ΠΑΤΗΤΗΡΙ

Patitiri sits between two sandstone cliffs at the southern end of the east coast. Despite its hasty origins following the devastating 1965 earthquake that levelled the old hill-top capital (Palia Alonnisos), Patitiri is gradually improving its homely looks. The town is small and relaxed, and makes a convenient base for exploring Alonnisos. Patitiri means 'wine press' and is where grapes were processed prior to the demise of the wine industry in the 1950s.

Orientation

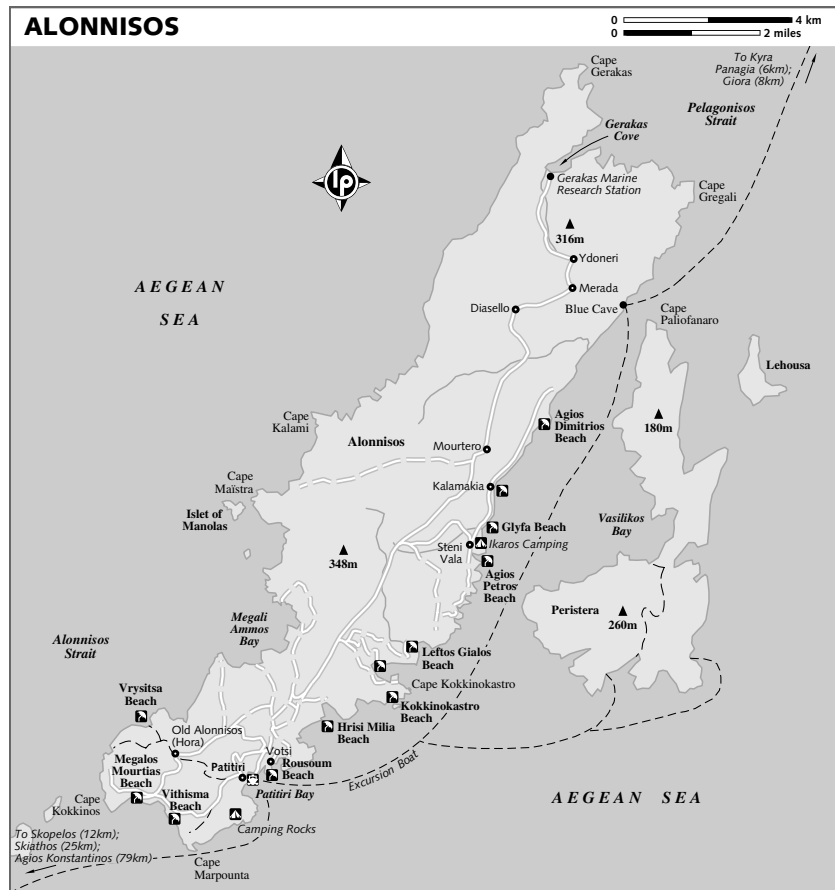
Finding your way around Patitiri is easy. The quay is in the centre of the waterfront and two roads lead inland. With your back to the sea, turn left for Pelasgon, or right for Ikion Dolopon. In truth, there are no road signs and most locals simply refer to them as the left-hand road (Pelasgon) and right-hand road (Ikion Dolopon).

Information

EMERGENCY

Police (☎ 24240 65205) At the northern end of Ikion Dolopon; there is no tourist police office.

Port police (☎ 24240 65595) On the quay at Patitiri.



INTERNET ACCESS

Play Café (☎ 24240 66119; per hr €4; ☎ 9am-2pm & 6-9pm) Across the road from the National Bank.

Techno Plus (☎ 24240 29100; per hr €3; ☎ 9am-2pm & 5-9pm) On the right-hand road, opposite the school.

LAUNDRY

Lena's Gardenia (☎ 24240 65831; Pelasgon)

MONEY

National Bank of Greece Southern end of Ikion Dolopon, with an ATM.

POST

Post office (Ikion Dolopon) 100m from the bus stop.

Sights

The **Folklore Museum of the Northern Sporades** (☎ 24240 66250; admission €3; ☎ 11am-7pm) is largely a labour of love by the Mavrikis family, and includes an extensive display of pirates' weapons and tools, a horseshoe shop and antique nautical maps. A small café sits atop the museum with views of the harbour. Take the stone stairway at the far west end of the harbour.

NATIONAL MARINE PARK OF ALONNISOS

In a country not noted for ecological long-sightedness, the Alonnisos Marine Park is a welcome innovation. Started in 1992, its prime aim has been the protection of the endangered Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*). See the boxed text (opposite).

The park is divided into two zones. The carefully restricted Zone A comprises a cluster of islets to the northeast, including Kyra Panagia. Zone B is home to Alonnisos itself and Peristera.

In summer, licensed boats from Alonnisos and Skopelos conduct excursions through the marine park. Though it's unlikely you'll find the shy monk seal, your chances of spotting dolphins (striped, bottlenose and common) are fairly good.

Activities**WALKING**

Walking opportunities abound on Alonnisos, and the best ones are waymarked. At the bus stop in Old Alonnisos a blue notice board details several walks. From Patitiri, a 2km **donkey path** winds up through shrubby and orchards before bringing you to Old Alonnisos.

The informative *Alonnisos on Foot: A Walking & Swimming Guide*, by Bente Keller and

Elias Tsoukanas, is available at waterfront shops, along with *The Alonnisos Guide* by the same authors, detailing the history of the island.

Consider a **guided walk** (☎ 6974080039; www.alonnisoswalks.co.uk; walks €15-30) with island resident Chris Browne. A half-day walk above Patitiri winds through pine forest trails, past churches and olive groves overlooking the sea.

CYCLING

The best mountain-bike riding is over on the southwest coast around the bay of Megali Ammos. There are several bicycle- and motorcycle-hire outlets on Ikion Dolopon.

Tours

Three professional travel agencies on the waterfront provide maps and arrange popular marine park excursions. Inquire at **Ikos Travel** (☎ 24240 65320; www.ikostravel.com) for popular round-the-island guided excursions aboard the *Gorgona* (a classic Greek boat captained by island native, Pakis Athanasiou), which visit the **Blue Cave** on the northeast coast, and the islets of **Kyra Panagia** and **Peristera** in the marine park, with swimming breaks along the way. **Albedo Travel** (☎ 24240 65804; www.albedotravel.com) runs regular snorkelling and swimming excursions to Skantzoura and nearby islands, and even arranges island weddings. **Alonnisos Travel** (☎ 24240 66000; www.alonnisostravel.gr) also runs marine park excursions aboard the *Planitis*.

Sleeping

Prices here are for the higher July to August season; expect discounts of about 25% or more at other times. **Rooms to Let Service** (☎ 24240 66188; fax 24240 65577; ☎ 9.30am-2pm & 6.30-10pm), opposite the quay, offers a room-finder service in July and August only.

BUDGET

Camping Rocks (☎ 24240 65410; camp sites per adult/tent €6/3) Follow the signposts in town for Camping Rocks, a rough but shaded coastal spot 1km south of Patitiri.

Pension Pleiades (☎ 24240 65235; pleiadeshotel@yahoo.gr; s/d/tr from €25/35/50; ☎ ☎) This bright and cheerful budget option offers views of Patitiri Bay, along with nine immaculate, balconied rooms, plus four family-sized studios with kitchenette. Take the stairway behind the newsstand.

Ilios Rent Rooms (☎ 24240 65451; fax 24240 65972; Pelasgon 27; d €45, 2-/3-bed studios €50/55; ☎ ☎) Owners Ilios and Magdalini give their spotless domatia

a warm and welcoming touch. Rooms and studios share a communal kitchen.

MIDRANGE

Ourpick Liadromia Hotel (☎ 24240 65521; fax 24240 65096; d/tr/ste incl breakfast €50/70/85; ☎ ☎ ☎) This welcoming and impeccably maintained hotel overlooking the harbour was Patitiri's first. All the rooms have a bit of character, from hand-embroidered curtains and old lamps to stone floors and traditional wood furnishings.

Nina Studios (☎ 24240 65242; www.ninna.gr; d/f €50/80; ☎ ☎) Take the stairs opposite the bank to these self-catering studios with stone floors, iron beds and large bathrooms, and vine-covered balcony views of Patitiri harbour.

Paradise Hotel (☎ 24240 65213; www.paradise-hotel.gr; s/d/tr €65/80/100; ☎ ☎) Wood ceilings and stone-tiled floors give a rustic feel to the balconied rooms, which overlook the bay or Patitiri harbour. Room prices include a buffet breakfast at the pool terrace.

Eating

Anais Restaurant & Pizzeria (☎ 24240 65243; mains €5-12; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Patitiri's first restaurant, opposite the hydrofoil dock, is still going strong. You'll find tasty souvlakia, hearty Greek salads and a house favourite, *kleftiko* (slow-oven-baked lamb).

To Kamaki Ouzerie (☎ 24240 65245; Ikion Dolopon; mains €5-15) Start off with a sip of ouzo and mezedhes like fresh Alonnisos tuna salad at this traditional seafood eatery, then move on to the shrimp souvlaki or blow the budget on grilled local lobster.

Also recommended:

Taverna Archipelagos (☎ 24240 65031; mains €4-8) Opposite the hydrofoil dock, and a local favourite for Greek mezedhes and grills.

Café Flisvos (☎ 24240 65307; mains €5-8) Under the canopy opposite the dock, with excellent oven-ready dishes at decent prices.

OLD ALONNISOS ΠΑΛΙΑ ΑΛΟΝΝΙΣΟΣ

Old Alonnisos (also known as Palia Alonnisos, Hora, Palio Horio or Old Town), with its winding stepped alleys, is a tranquil, picturesque place with lovely views. From the main road just outside the village an old donkey path leads down to pebbled Megalos Mourtias Beach and other paths lead south to Vithisma and Marpounta Beaches.

Sleeping

Old Alonnisos has no hotels, but there are several well-managed domatia.

Fantasia House (☎ 24240 65186; Plateia Hristou; s/d €30/40) Tucked away between the church and square, these simple rooms are good value, and there is a snack bar in the courtyard.

Pension Hiliadromia (☎ /fax 24240 65814; Plateia Hristou; d/2-bed studio €35/55; ☎ ☎) Several of the pine-and-stone-floor rooms at the Hiliadromia come with balcony views, and the studios have well-equipped kitchens.

Ourpick Konstantina Studios (☎ 24240 66165; www.konstantinastudios.gr; s/d €40/50; ☎ ☎) Among the nicest accommodations on Alonnisos, these handsome and quiet self-catering studios with traditional styling come with balcony views of the southwest coast. The owner makes it a point to fetch her guests from the dock.

Eating

Ourpick Hayati (☎ 24240 66244; Old Alonnisos; snacks & mains €2-7; ☎ 9am-2am) Hayati is both a sweets shop at the upper entrance, and a late-night taverna and piano bar below, with sweeping views of the island from either level. Morning

THE MONK SEAL

Once populating hundreds of colonies in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, as well as along the Atlantic coast of Africa, the Mediterranean monk seal has been reduced to about 400 individuals today. Half of these live in waters between Greece and Turkey.

One of the earth's rarest mammals, this seal is on the list of the 20 most endangered species worldwide. Major threats include deliberate killings by fishermen – who see the seal as a pest that tears holes in their nets and robs their catch – incidental capture in fishing gear, decreasing food supply as fisheries decline, habitat destruction and pollution.

Recognising that this seal may become extinct if not protected, Greece established the National Marine Park of Alonnisos in 1992 (see opposite), to both protect the seal and to promote recovery of fish stocks.

For more information, visit http://mofi.mom.gr/uk/fokia_alieia1.htm.

fare includes made-to-order Alonnisos *tyropita*. Later, you'll find homemade pastas and juicy souvlaki, along with the gracious hospitality of owner-cooks Meni and Angela. It's a five-minute walk from the village square.

Astrofengia (☎ 24240 65182; mains €5-12) This gracious courtyard taverna, near the bus stop, offers excellent cannelloni and fine mezedhes like *saganaki* (fried cheese) and dolmadhes. For dessert, find a way to squeeze in a slice of *galaktoboureko* (homemade custard pie).

Taverna Megalos Mourtias (☎ 24240 65737; mains €4-8; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) A stone's throw from the surf, this laid-back taverna and beach bar prepares good salads and souvlakia, plus a hearty fish soup.

AROUND ALONNISOS

Alonnisos' main road reaches the northern tip of the island at Gerakas (19km), home to an EU-funded marine research station. Six kilometres north of Patitiri, another sealed road branches off to the small fishing port and yacht harbour of Steni Vala, and follows the shore past Kalamakia for 5km. A third road takes you from Patitiri to Megalos Mourtias.

The island's east coast is home to several small bays and beaches. The first one of note, tiny **Rousoum**, is tucked between Patitiri and Votsi and very popular with local families.

Next is the sandy and gently sloping **Hrysi Milia Beach**, another kid-friendly beach. Two kilometres on, **Cape Kokkinokastro** is the site of the ancient city of Ikos, with remains of city walls under the sea. Continuing north, the road branches off 2km to **Leftos Gialos**, with a lovely pebble beach and the superb **Taverna Eleonas** (☎ 24240 66066).

Steni Vala, a small fishing village and deep-water yacht port with a permanent population of no more than 40, has two small but decent beaches; pebbly **Glyfa** just above the village and sandy **Agios Petros** just below. Steni Vala is also home to the marine park's Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre for the Mediterranean monk seal. Four tavernas overlook the small marina, with **To Farnari** (☎ 24240 66013) claiming the best views of the harbour and open from morning till midnight.

There are 30-odd rooms in domatia, as well as modest **Ikaros Camping** (☎ 24240 65772), next to the beach and decently shaded by olive trees. Try **Ikaros Café & Market** (☎ 24240 65390) for reliable lodging information and more.

Kalamakia, 2km further north, is the last village of note, and has a few domatia and tavernas. The fishing boats usually tie up directly in front of **Margarita's Taverna** (☎ 24240 65738), where the morning catch of fish and lobster seems to jump from boat to plate.

Beyond Kalamakia, the sealed road continues 3km to a wetland marsh and **Agios Dimitrios Beach**, with a canteen and domatia opposite a graceful stretch of white pebbles. Beyond this, the road narrows to a footpath heading inland.

ISLETS AROUND ALONNISOS

Alonnisos is surrounded by eight uninhabited islets, all of which are rich in flora and fauna. **Piperi**, the furthest island northeast of Alonnisos, is a refuge for the monk seal and is strictly off-limits. **Gioura**, also off-limits, is home to an unusual species of wild goat known for the crucifix-shaped marking on its spine. Excursion boats can visit an old monastery and olive press on **Kyra Panagia**. The most remote of the group, **Psathoura**, boasts the submerged remains of an ancient city and the brightest lighthouse in the Aegean.

Peristera, just off Alonnisos' east coast, has several sandy beaches and the remains of a castle. Nearby **Lehousa** is known for its stalactite-filled sea caves. **Skantzoura**, to the southeast of Alonnisos, is the habitat of the Eleonora's falcon and the rare Audouin's seagull. The eighth island in the group, situated between Peristera and Skantzoura, is known as **Duo Adelphi** (Two Brothers); each 'brother' is actually a small island, both home to vipers, according to local fishermen who refuse to step foot on either.

SKYROS ΣΚΥΡΟΣ

pop 2602

Skyros is the largest of the Sporades group, though it can seem like two islands – the small bays, rolling farmland and pine forests of the north, and the barren hills and rocky shoreline of the south. A number of expats, particularly English and Dutch, have made Skyros their home.

In Byzantine times, rogues and criminals exiled here from the mainland entered into a mutually lucrative collaboration with invading pirates. The exiles became the elite of Skyrian society, decorating their houses with pirate booty looted from merchant ships: hand-carved furniture, plates and copper ornaments from Europe, the Middle East and East Asia. Today, similar items adorn almost every Skyrian house.

In Greek mythology, Skyros was the hiding place of young Achilles. See p672 for

more information about the Skyros Lenten Carnival and its traditions, which allude to Achilles' heroic feats.

Skyros was also the last port of call for the English poet Rupert Brooke (1887–1915), who died of septicaemia on a French hospital ship off the coast of Skyros en route to the Battle of Gallipoli.

Getting There & Away

AIR

In summer there are three flights weekly (Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday) between Athens and Skyros (€38, 25 minutes). Between Thessaloniki and Skyros, there are three flights weekly on Monday, Tuesday and Saturday (€58, 35 minutes). For tickets, visit **Skyros Travel Agency** (☎ 22220 91600; www.skyrostravel.com; Agoras St).

FERRY

A regular ferry service is provided by *Achileas*, between the port of Kymi (Evia) and Skyros (€8.30, 1½ hours). On Friday and Sunday, the ferry (usually) makes two crossings; on the remaining days, just one crossing. You can buy tickets from **Achileas ticket office** (☎ 22220 91789; fax 22220 91791; Agoras; ☺ 9am-1pm & 7-10pm), near the bank on Agoras in Skyros Town. There is also a ferry ticket kiosk at the dock in Linaria, and another at the dock in Kymi (Evia).

Skyros Travel Agency also sells tickets for the Kymi–Athens bus (€13.20, 3½ hours), which always meets the ferry on arrival at Paralia Kymis (the port of Kymi).

Getting Around

BUS & TAXI

In high season there are daily buses departing from Skyros Town to Linaria (€1.20) and to Molos (via Magazia). Buses for both Skyros Town and Molos meet the ferry at Linaria. However, outside of high season there are only one or two buses to Linaria (to coincide with the ferry arrivals) and none to Molos. A taxi from Skyros Town to Linaria is €12; to the airport, it's €18.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

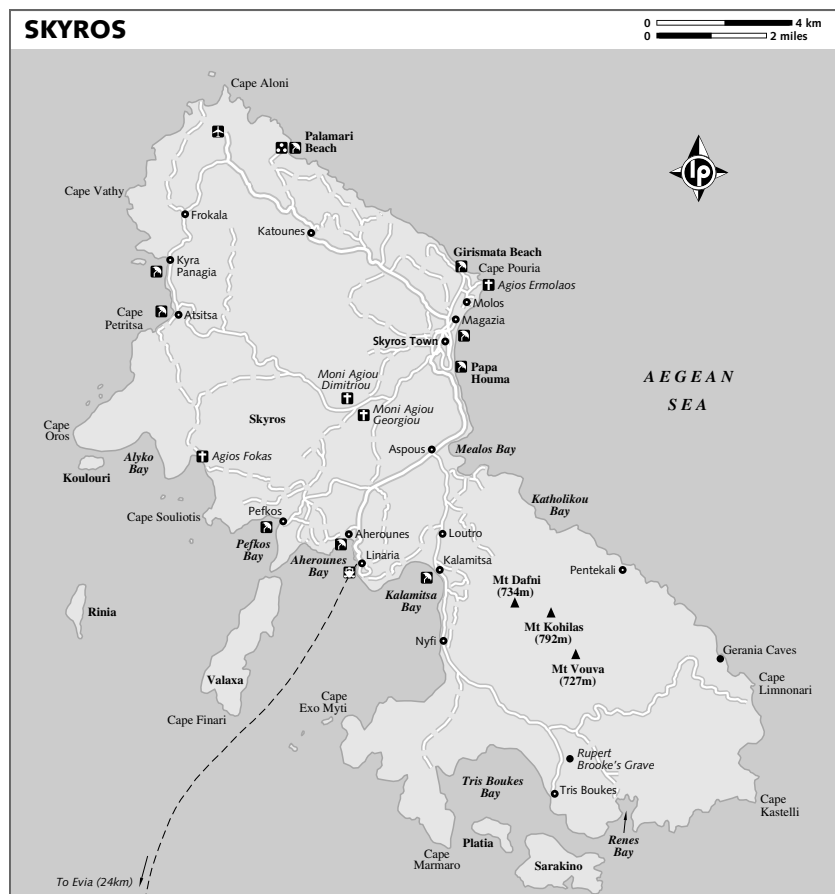
Cars, motorbikes and mountain bikes can all be rented from **Martina's Rentals** (☎ 22220 92022; 6974752380) near the police station. The reasonable **Vayos Motorbikes** (☎ 22220 92957) is near the bus stop.

THE ORIGINAL CHEESE PIE

Tyropita (cheese pie) is almost deified in the northern Sporades. The popular pie is made with goats cheese and delicate filo dough, the same flaky crust as in sweet baklava. The filled dough is rolled and coiled up, then fried quickly and served hot – a method that evolved in the wood-oven kitchens of Alonnisos. Of course, like anything with a place in folklore, the pie's origins are open to debate. One version, popular on neighbouring Skopelos, has it that when *spanikopita* (spinach pies) were slowly baking, resourceful mothers quieted hungry children by tearing off a piece of filo, throwing in a handful of cheese, and frying it quickly with a reprimand, 'Here, stop your screaming'.

Alonnisos residents tell another version and claim that history is on their side. In the 1950s, following the collapse of the cottage wine industry, many struggling Alonnisos farmers went to work on neighbouring Skopelos, picking plums. Their salty cheese pie lasted all day in the fields. Not surprisingly, it soon appeared in the country kitchens of Skopelos. In the 1990s, a popular daytime TV host touted the pie, but credited Skopelos with its origin. Predictably, frozen 'Skopelos Cheese Pie' soon showed up on mainland supermarket shelves. Today, you can even buy it in the Athens' airport departure lounge, 'the deterioration of an imitation', according to a longtime Alonnisos resident, Pakis. But don't count on the frozen pie resembling the original and superior island version. Of course, the tasty treat has evolved over the years, and you will find breakfast versions with sugar and cinnamon, and others using wild greens or lamb, especially popular in winter with red wine.

Stunned Alonnisos folk still can't get over what's happened to their simple and delicious recipe. As one Skopelos businesswoman, Mahi, confided, 'Basically, we stole it!'



SKYROS TOWN

Skyros' capital is a striking, dazzlingly white town of flat-roofed Cycladic-style houses draped over a high rocky bluff. It's topped by a 13th-century fortress and the monastery of Agios Georgios, and is laced with labyrinthine, smooth cobblestoned streets, which invite wandering.

Orientation

The bus stop is at the southern end of town on the main thoroughfare (Agoras) – an animated street lined with tavernas, bars and grocery stores and flanked by narrow winding alleyways. To reach the central *plateia*, you need to walk up the hill; the narrow road soon becomes even narrower, marking the begin-

ning of the town's pedestrian zone. Motorbikes still manage to squeeze through, but cars must park in the nearby car park.

About 100m beyond the *plateia*, the main drag of Agoras forks. The right fork leads up to the fortress and Moni Agiou Georgiou, with its fine frescoes and sweeping views. The left fork zigzags to two small museums adjacent to Plateia Rupert Brooke, where a simple bronze statue of a nude Rupert Brooke faces the sea. The frankness of the statue caused an outcry among the local islanders when it was first installed in the 1930s.

From Plateia Rupert Brooke the cobbled steps descend to Magazia Beach, located 1km away.

Information

EMERGENCY

Police (☎ 22220 91274) Take the first right after Skyros Travel Agency, and turn right at the T-junction. There is no tourist police office.

INTERNET ACCESS

Mano.com (☎ 22220 92473; Agoras St; per hr €3; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 6.30-11.30pm)

Video Club Internet (☎ 22220 92802; Agoras St; per hr €3; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 6-11pm)

MONEY

National Bank of Greece (Agoras St) Next to the central square.

POST

The post office is just west of the square.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Skyros Travel Agency (☎ 22220 91600; www.skyrostravel.com; Agoras St; ☎ 9am-2pm & 6.30-11pm) It has island maps and can help with room bookings, travel reservations, car and motorbike rentals, diving and excursions around Skyros.

Sights & Activities

Skyros Town has two museums. The **Manos Faltaits Folk Museum** (☎ 22220 91232; www.faltaits.gr; Plateia Rupert Brooke; admission €2; ☎ 10am-2pm & 6-9pm) is a one-of-a-kind private museum housing the outstanding collection of a Skyrian ethnologist, Manos Faltaits, and detailing the mythology and folklore of Skyros. The 19th-century house is packed with Skyrian costumes, antique furniture and ceramics, vintage books, photographs and a small shop.

The **Archaeological Museum** (☎ 22220 91327; Plateia Rupert Brooke; admission €2; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun) features excellent examples of Mycenaean pottery found near Magazia. Interesting too is a traditional Skyrian house interior, transported in its entirety from the benefactor's home.

Every year around September, Skyros is host to a **half-marathon** (☎ 22220 92789), which starts in Atsitsa and ends on the *plateia* in Skyros Town, with drummers welcoming the first runners across the finish line. A mini-marathon for the children sets the tone, followed by music and dancing on the square.

Courses

Reiki courses are offered by longtime island resident and reiki master **Janet Smith** (☎ 22220

93510; Skyros Town; www.simplelifefskyros.com). It's on the south edge of Skyros Town, 200m below Hotel Nefeli.

Atsitsa has the Skyros Centre (p673), which also runs courses.

Tours

A day-long boat excursion (€35) to the Gerania sea caves on the southeast coast or nearby Sarakino Islet includes lunch and a swim. Contact **Skyros Travel** (☎ 22220 91600) for details.

Sleeping

Accommodation in Skyros Town varies from conventional small hotels and domatia to individual rooms in traditional Skyrian houses. If you arrive by bus, you'll usually be met with offers on nearby domatia; prices should range from €25 to €40 for a single/double. Prices quoted here are for the summer season, mid-July to August.

BUDGET & MIDRANGE

Hotel Elena (☎ /fax 22220 91738; s/d/tr €30/45/60; ☎) The clean and renovated Elena is a good budget choice with comfortable beds, balcony and minifridge. It's just 50m past the bus stop, and easy to find after a night on the town.

ourpick Atherinis Rooms (☎ 22220 93510, 6979292976; d/apt from €45/60; ☎) Managed by Dimitris Atherinis and English transplant Janet Smith, the self-catering apartments and double rooms feature hand-tiled baths and overlook a shaded garden. Breakfast (€5) includes fresh juice and homemade scones. Atherinis is located 300m below the bus stop, towards the sea.

Pension Nikolas (☎ 22220 91778; fax 22220 93400; s/d/tr €50/60/70; ☎) Set back on a small quiet road, this comfortable and friendly *pension* is only a five-minute walk to busy Agoras. The upper rooms have air-conditioning and balconies; the lower rooms have fans and open onto a shady garden.

TOP END

Hotel Nefeli & Dimitrios Studios (☎ 22220 91964; www.skyros-nefeli.gr; d/studios/ste incl breakfast €125/190/300; ☎) This well-managed hotel on the edge of town has a minimalist-meets-Skyrian feel to it, with vintage photographs, handsome furnishings and large baths. The adjacent family-size studios are part of a remodelled

SKYROS CARNIVAL

In this wild pre-Lenten festival, which takes place on the last four weekends before Kathara Deftera (Clean Monday – the first Monday in Lent, 40 days before Easter), young men don goat masks, hairy jackets and dozens of copper goat bells. They then proceed to clank and dance around town, each with a partner (another man), dressed up as a Skyrian bride but also wearing a goat mask. During these revelries there is singing and dancing, performances of plays, recitations of satirical poems and much drinking and feasting. Women and children join in, wearing fancy dress as well. These strange goings-on are overtly pagan, with elements of Dionysian festivals, including goat worship. In ancient times, as today, Skyros was renowned for its goats meat and milk.

The transvestism evident in the carnival seems to derive from the cult of Achilles associated with Skyros in Greek mythology. According to legend, the island was the childhood hiding place for the boy Achilles, whose mother, Thetis, feared a prophecy requiring her son's skills in the Trojan War. The boy was given to the care of King Lykomides of Skyros, who raised him disguised as one of his own daughters. Young Achilles was outwitted, however, by Odysseus, who arrived with jewels and finery for the girls, along with a sword and shield. When the maiden Achilles alone showed interest in the weapons, Odysseus discovered his secret, then persuaded him to go to Troy where he distinguished himself in battle. This annual festival is the subject of Joy Koulentianou's book *The Goat Dance of Skyros*.

Skyrian house. Both properties share a beautiful saltwater swimming pool and bar.

Eating

Skyros welcomes a steady number of visiting Athenians, with the pleasant result that island cooks do not cater to touristy tongues. You can find a number of authentic Skyrian dishes in the smallest taverna, including several with goats milk or meat.

Maryetis Restaurant (☎ 22220 91311; Agoras St; mains €5-9) The local favourite for grilled fish and octopus *stifadho*, along with hearty soups and mezedhes like black-eyed beans and fava dip.

Our pick **O Pappous kai Ego** (☎ 22220 93200; Agoras St; mains €6-9) The name of this small taverna means 'my grandfather and me', and it's easy to see how one generation followed another. Mezedhes are excellent, especially fava beans with wild aniseed and onions, along with Skyrian dolmadhes made with a touch of goats milk – and a very good washing-it-down house wine.

Liakos Café (☎ 22220 93509; mains €5-10) On summer evenings, head to the rooftop terrace at Liakos, where the fusion menu includes seafood risotto, cold octopus salad and fava beans with sun-dried tomatoes.

Taverna Lambros (☎ 22220 91388; mains €4.70-8) Family-run Lambros is just 3km south of Skyros Town in Aspous. Generous-sized dishes include lamb and pork grills, fresh fish gumbo and Skyrian cheese bread.

Drinking

Nightlife in Skyros Town centres mostly around the bars on Agoras; the further north you go away from the *plateia*, the more mellow the sounds.

Kalypto (☎ 22220 92696; Agoras St) Classy Kalypto plays lots of jazz and blues, and owner-bartender Hristos makes a killer margarita, along with homemade sangria. A side room sports an internet connection.

Rodon (☎ 22220 92168; Agoras St) This smart and comfortable late-night hang-out is a mellow spot to end the evening. Bonus points for big drinks and fresh juices.

Nostos Café & Bar (☎ 22220 91797; Agoras St) Above the National Bank, this swank bar overlooking the *plateia* serves a range of mixed drinks, coffees and appetisers.

Entertainment

Skyropoula Disco (☎ 22220 91180) Don't bother showing up before midnight at this ring road hang-out, where the DJs play a danceable mix of European and Greek pop sounds till dawn.

MAGAZIA & MOLOS ΜΑΓΑΖΙΑ & ΜΟΛΟΣ

The resort of Magazia, a compact and attractive place of winding alleys, is at the southern end of a splendid, long sandy beach, situated a short distance north of Skyros Town. Skinny-dippers can leave it all behind at **Papa Houma** near the southern end of Magazia.

Quieter and more arid Molos is at the northern end of the beach. Until recently, there was little more than a windmill and the adjacent rock-hewn Church of Agios Ermolaos to mark it. Today, a number of tavernas and small domatia have opened up.

Sleeping

Georgia Tsakamis Rooms (☎ 22220 91357; gtsakamis@yahoo.gr; Magazia; d/tr €45/50; ☎) You can't get much closer to the sand and sea than at these geranium-adorned domatia 20m from the beach, opposite a handy car park.

Deidamia Hotel (☎ 22220 92008; www.deidamia.com; d/f incl breakfast from €45/70; ☎) The spacious and tidy Deidamia is on the road entering Magazia, opposite a small market. Look for the bougainvillea garden and rooftop solar panels.

Our pick **Perigiali Studios** (☎ 22220 92075; www.perigiali.com; d/tr/f incl breakfast from €68/80/90; ☎) Perigiali feels secluded despite being only 30m from the beach. The Skyrian-style rooms overlook a rambling garden anchored by a large fig tree, and English-speaking Ermelia is full of ideas for travellers.

Also recommended:

Studio Ireni (☎ 22220 91852, 6977167595; Molos; d/tr from €30/40; ☎) Welcoming bargain domatia.

Domatia & Studios Eleanna (☎ 22220 91863, 69725 22889; Molos; s/d/tr €50/70/80; ☎) Handsome Skyrian furnishings, balcony, kitchenette and large bath.

Eating & Drinking

Juicy Beach Bar (☎ 22220 933337; snacks €2-5; Magazia; ☎ 10am-1am) Escape the midday sun or chill out under the stars at busy Juicy's, with breakfasts throughout the day.

Taverna Stefanos (☎ 22220 91272; mains €4.50-8) Perch yourself on the terrace of this traditional eatery, overlooking the southern end of Magazia Beach, and choose from a range of ready-to-eat oven dishes, big portions of souvlakia and fresh fish by the kilo.

Oi Istories Tou Barba (My Uncle's Stories; ☎ 22220 91453; Molos; mains €4-10) Look for the light blue railing above the beach in Molos to find this excellent café and *tsipouradhiko* with well-prepared prawn and octopus mezedhes.

Shopping

Argo (☎ 22220 92158; Agoras St) Argo specialises in high-quality copies of ceramics from the Faltaits Museum.

Andreou Woodcarving (☎ 22220 92926; Agoras St) Get a close look at the intricate designs that distinguish traditional Skyrian furniture at this handsome shop on the main drag.

Several pottery workshops spin their wheels in Magazia without bothering to put a sign out front, but they are happy to see visitors, and some of their exceptional work is for sale. English-speaking **Amanda** and **Stathis Katsarelias** (☎ 22220 92918) run a studio on the small lane between the main road and the beach; look for the yellow Kodak sign next door. The studios of **Efrossini Varsamou-Nikolaou** (☎ 22220 91142) are in the Deidamia Hotel.

AROUND SKYROS

Linaria Λινάρια

Linaria, the port of Skyros, is tucked into a small bay filled with bobbing fishing boats and lined with tavernas and *ouzerias*. Things perk up briefly whenever the *Achilleas* ferry comes in, announcing its surreal arrival with the booming sound of Richard Strauss' *Also Sprach Zarathustra* blasting from the ship's huge speakers. The bus to Skyros Town lacks a similar sound system, but coincides perfectly with the ferry's arrival and departure.

SLEEPING & EATING

King Lykomides Rooms (☎ 22220 93249, 6972694434; soula@skyrosnet.gr; r incl breakfast €45-60; ☎) You can practically stumble off the ferry and into this efficient domatia, managed by the hospitable Soula Pappas. It has well-maintained rooms, each with balcony.

Ouzeri Maestros (☎ 22220 91995; drinks & snacks €2-4) Tasty ouzo-compatible mezedhes like grilled octopus and calamari are served up by Tasos, the welcoming owner of this port stand-by under the big plane tree.

Kavos Bar (☎ 22220 93213; drinks & snacks €2-5) This swank open-air bar, perched on the hill overlooking the port, pulls in Skyrians from across the island for drinks at sunset.

Taverna Filippes (☎ 22220 93476; mains €4-9) This busy and friendly fish taverna near the ferry dock serves traditional ready-to-eat oven dishes such as *briam* (oven-baked vegetable casserole) and *pastitsio*.

Atsitsa Ατσιτσα

The sleepy and picturesque port village of Atsitsa on the island's west coast occupies a woody setting, shaded by pines that approach

WIND FARM DEBATE

Gauging which way the wind is blowing is becoming trickier on Skyros, where a controversy is heating up between vocal residents and the Greek Orthodox Church, which quietly began negotiations in 2005 with a mainland contractor and a government regulatory authority. At stake: whether to establish a massive wind farm (at an estimated cost of €500 million) on the southern half of the island to meet the EU's request that Greece utilise renewable energy to provide 20% of its needs by 2010.

If the plan is approved, Skyros would be home to the largest wind farm in Europe, and the island's delicate breeding grounds for the rare Skyrian pony and the Eleonora's falcon would be at the mercy of 150m-high wind turbines.

No-one on Skyros is opposed to sustainable solutions to Greece's energy needs. But as one resident said, 'It's a matter of scale'. The largest landowner in southern Skyros happens to be the Church and, with so much money at stake, there's not much trust in the wind these days.

the shore. Atsitsa is also home to the holistic and secluded **Skyros Centre** (☎ 22220 92842; Atsitsa; www.skyros.com), a New Age centre that runs residential courses on a range of subjects, from yoga and massage to sailing and windsurfing. Contact the centre for detailed information. **Taverna Antonis** (☎ 22220 92990; mains €4-8) is about 20m from the small pier where the family's fishing boat ties up. The menu has several excellent fish dishes.

Beaches

Beaches on the northwest coast are subject to strong winter currents and summer *meltemi* winds.

Atsitsa has a small pebble beach shaded by pines, good for freelance camping, but too rocky for swimming. Just to the north (1.5km) is the superior swimming beach of **Kyra Panagia**, named for the monastery on the hill above. Just 1.5km to the south, the tiny and protected north-facing bay at **Cape Petritsa** is also good for swimming.

At **Pefkos Bay**, 10km southeast of Atsitsa, there is a beautiful horseshoe-shaped beach with two tavernas and domatia at the southern end. Nearby, the beach at **Aherounes** has a gentle sandy bottom, and is very nice for

children. There are two tavernas and domatia opposite the road.

To the north and near the airport, **Palamari** is a graceful stretch of sandy beach that does not get crowded. Palamari is also the site of a well-marked **archaeological excavation** of a walled Bronze Age town dating from 2500 BC.

Rupert Brooke's Grave

Rupert Brooke's well-tended marble grave is in a quiet olive grove just inland from Tris Boukes Bay in the south of the island, and marked with a wooden sign in Greek on the roadside. The gravestone is inscribed with some of Brooke's verses, beginning with the following apt epitaph:

If I should die think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign
field
That is forever England.

From coastal Kalamitsa, just east of Linaria, a road passes the village of Nyfi, and brings you to Brooke's simple tomb. No buses come here, and travel is restricted beyond this southernmost corner of the island, which is dominated by the Greek Naval station on Tris Boukes Bay.

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