

Ionian Islands

Τα Ιόνια Νησιά



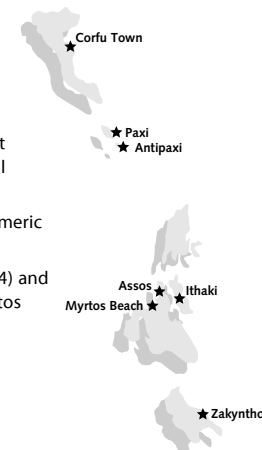
It's hard not to fall for the Ionian Islands, an archipelago that sweeps down the west coast of mainland Greece and includes Corfu, Paxi, Lefkada, Ithaki, Kefallonia and Zakynthos. Discovering these islands is a tantalising odyssey. Their natural beauty embraces the visitor – the vast olive groves, intriguing mountainscapes and iridescent waters of the Ionian Sea offer something for adventure seekers, culture vultures and beach bums alike.

Each island boasts a distinct tradition, cuisine and architecture – the remaining influences of former invading forces such as the Venetians, French and British. These influences are obvious in Corfu Town, where you can watch a cricket match on the Spianada, drink under Parisian-style arcades and wander through the town's Venetian-style alleyways. Elsewhere in the Ionians – in the traditional fishing or mountain villages – you can stroll through central plazas shaded by bougainvilleas and plane trees, or relax under a taverna's vine-covered canopy with the soporific scent of jasmine. Less-tasteful encounters exist, in the form of invasive, package-tourist beach developments, but these can be avoided. It's easy to get off the beaten track: find your own isolated swimming coves in a boat, wander through olive groves, or stumble across an authentic *kafeneio* (coffee house). Cultural adventurers can explore fortresses, Byzantine churches and Homeric sites. Adventure addicts can trek, cycle, windsurf and scuba dive, and anyone can try bird-watching or golf.

The culinary experience rounds off an Ionian journey: indulge in fresh, generous helpings of local dishes, served with a huge dollop of local *filoxenia* (hospitality).

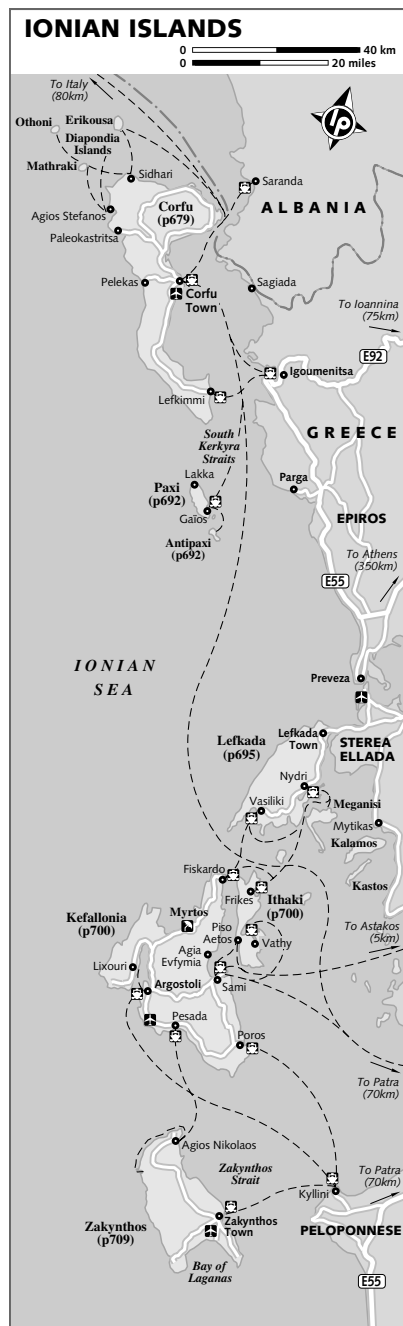
HIGHLIGHTS

- **Architecture** Wandering the narrow streets of Corfu's old town (p681), pausing for a frappé under one of many Venetian buildings
- **Getting Away From It All** Walking through the ancient olive groves of Paxi (p691) and swimming in the crystal waters of nearby Antipaxi (p694)
- **Scenic Splendour** Cruising along the lofty spine of Homeric Ithaki (p705)
- **Beauty Spot** Exploring the pretty village of Assos (p704) and swimming in the iridescent blue waters of nearby Myrtos Beach (p704) on Kefallonia
- **Food Frenzy** Following your taste buds around Zakynthos to discover local treats (p711)



■ POPULATION: 221,890

■ AREA: 2432 SQ KM



HISTORY

The origin of the name 'Ionian' is obscure, but it's thought to derive from the goddess Io. As yet another of Zeus' paramours, Io fled the wrath of a jealous Hera (in the shape of a heifer), and happened to pass through the waters now known as the Ionian Sea.

If we are to believe Homer, the islands were important during Mycenaean times; however, no magnificent palaces or even modest villages from that period have been revealed, though Mycenaean tombs have been unearthed. Ancient history lies buried beneath tonnes of earthquake rubble – seismic activity has been constant on all Ionian islands.

By the 8th century BC, the Ionian Islands were in the clutches of the mighty city-state of Corinth, which regarded them as stepping stones on the route to Sicily and Italy. A century later, Corfu staged a successful revolt against Corinth, which was allied to Sparta, and became an ally of Sparta's archenemy, Athens. This alliance provoked Sparta into challenging Athens, thus precipitating the Peloponnesian Wars (431–404 BC). The wars left Corfu depleted, as they did all participants, and Corfu became little more than a staging post for whoever happened to be holding sway in Greece. By the end of the 3rd century BC, Corfu, along with the other Ionian Islands, fell under Roman rule. Following the decline of the Roman Empire, the islands saw the usual waves of invaders suffered by Greece. After the fall of Constantinople, the islands became Venetian.

Corfu was never part of the Ottoman Empire. Paxi, Kefallonia, Zakynthos and Ithaki were variously occupied by the Turks, but the Venetians held them longest. The exception was Lefkada, which was Turkish for 200 years.

IONIAN KYTHIRA?

The island of Kythira (and its satellite, Antikythira) dangles off the southern tip of the Peloponnese between the Ionian and Aegean Seas. Historically, Kythira is considered part of the Ionian Islands, and today is administered from Piraeus. Due to its location and suitable ferry connections, visitors are most likely to visit Kythira from the Peloponnese. Thus its placement in the Peloponnese chapter (p224).

Venice fell to Napoleon in 1797. Two years later, under the Treaty of Campo Formio, the Ionian Islands were allotted to France. In 1799 Russian forces wrested the islands from Napoleon, but by 1807 they were his again. The all-powerful British couldn't resist meddling, and in 1815, after Napoleon's downfall, the islands became a British protectorate under the jurisdiction of a series of Lord High Commissioners.

British rule was oppressive but, on a positive note, the British constructed roads, bridges, schools and hospitals, established trade links, and developed agriculture and industry. However, the nationalistic fervour throughout the rest of Greece soon reached the Ionian Islands, and a call for unity was realised in 1864 when Britain relinquished the islands to Greece.

In WWII the Italians invaded Corfu as part of Mussolini's plan to resurrect the mighty Roman Empire. Italy surrendered to the Allies in September 1943 and, in revenge, the Germans massacred thousands of Italians who had occupied the island. The Nazis also sent some 5000 Corfiot Jews to Auschwitz.

The islands saw a great deal of emigration after WWII, and again following the earthquakes of 1948 and 1953 that devastated the region. But while Greeks left the islands, the foreign invasion has never really stopped, and these days takes the form of package tourism from northern Europe.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Corfu, Kefallonia and Zakynthos have airports; Lefkada has no airport, but Aktion airport, near Preveza on the mainland, is about 20km away. These four airports have frequent flights to/from Athens. **Olympic Airlines** (www.olympicairlines.com) has introduced a useful service linking the Ionians: three times a week there are return flights from Corfu to Zakynthos, stopping en route at Kefallonia.

From May to September, many charter flights come from northern Europe and the UK to Corfu, Kefallonia, Zakynthos and Preveza.

AirSea Lines, a seaplane service, runs flights between changing destinations. At the time of research, these included Corfu, Paxi and Lefkada.

WWW.PLANNING YOUR TRIP.COM

There are loads of websites devoted to the Ionians – here are some of the best we've found:

Corfu www.kerkyra.gr, www.kerkyra.net
Kefallonia www.kefalonias.gr, www.kefalonias.net.gr
Lefkada www.lefkada.gr, www.lefkas.net
Ionian Islands www.greeka.com/ionian
Ithaki www.ithacagreece.com
Paxi www.paxos-greece.com, www.paxos.tk
Zakynthos www.zakynthos-net.gr, www.zanteweb.gr

Bus

KTEL (www.ktel.org) long-distance buses connect each major island with Athens and Thessaloniki, and usually also with Patra and Kyllini in the Peloponnese. Buses to Corfu, Lefkada, Kefallonia, Ithaki and Zakynthos depart from Athens' Terminal A bus station.

Ferry DOMESTIC

The Peloponnese has two departure ports for the Ionian Islands: Patra for ferries to Corfu, Kefallonia and Ithaki; and Kyllini for ferries to Kefallonia and Zakynthos. Epiros has one port, Igoumenitsa, for Corfu (island) and Paxi; and Sterea Ellada has one, Astakos, for Ithaki and Kefallonia (although this service is limited to high season). A useful website is www.ferries.gr.

The following table gives an overall view of the scheduled domestic ferries to the Ionians from mainland ports in high season. Note: prices change regularly.

It is not possible to island hop directly between the northern and southern islands. Corfu and Paxi are connected by ferry and hydrofoil, but unfortunately there are no services from either Corfu or Paxi to Lefkada.

Within the southern Ionians, Lefkada, Kefallonia and Ithaki are well connected by ferry, and there's a twice-daily service between southern Kefallonia and northern Zakynthos (an alternative is to sail from Argostoli to Kyllini in the Peloponnese, and from there to Zakynthos Town).

Further details can be found under each island entry.

DOMESTIC FERRY CONNECTIONS TO THE IONIAN ISLANDS

Origin	Destination	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Astakos	Sami (Kefallonia)	3hr	€10	daily
	Piso Aetos (Ithaki)	2½hr	€8	daily
Igoumenitsa	Corfu Town	1¼hr	€6.50	16 daily
	Lefkimmí (Corfu)	1hr	€4.50	6 daily
Igoumenitsa	Gaios (Paxi)	1½hr	€7.60	daily
Kyllini	Zakynthos Town	1hr	€6.50	5-7 daily
	Argostoli (Kefallonia)	2½hr	€12.50	daily
	Poros (Kefallonia)	1½hr	€8.10	2-5 daily
Patra	Corfu Town	6-7½hr	€33	1 daily
	Sami (Kefallonia)	2½hr	€14.50	daily
	Vathy/Piso Aetos (Ithaki)	4hr	€14.50	daily

INTERNATIONAL

Corfu has regular connections with three ports in Italy (Brindisi, Bari and Venice), operated by a handful of ferry companies sailing between Italy and Igoumenitsa and/or Patra. (Travellers can also sail between Ancona and Igoumenitsa, then transfer to a local ferry.) Crossings are most frequent in July and August, but there are year-round services at least weekly between Corfu and Brindisi, Bari and Venice.

From Corfu it's also possible to cross to Albania, or to visit on a day trip. Recommendations:

Agoudimos Lines (www.agoudimos-lines.com) From Brindisi to Corfu and Igoumenitsa, and Bari to Kefallonia, Igoumenitsa and Patra.

ANEK Lines (www.aneke.gr) From Venice to Corfu.

Blue Star Ferries (www.bluestarferries.com) From Bari to Corfu, Igoumenitsa and Patra.

Hellenic Mediterranean Lines (www.hml.it)

From Brindisi to Corfu, Igoumenitsa, Kefallonia and Patra.

Minoan Lines (www.minoan.gr) From Venice to Igoumenitsa, Corfu and Patra.

SNV (www.snav.it) High-season, high-speed catamaran services between Brindisi, Corfu and Paxi.

Superfast Ferries (www.superfast.com) From Bari to Corfu, Igoumenitsa and Patra.

Ventouris (www.ventouris.gr) From Bari to Corfu and Igoumenitsa.

Note: the only ferry companies that accept Eurail and Inter-rail passes are Bluestar, Superfast and Agoudimos. All international ferry companies also have special offers and concessions for seniors, families and last-minute tickets.

CORFU ΚΕΡΚΥΡΑ

pop 114,000

Corfu – or Kerkyra (*ker-kih-rah*) in Greek – is the second-largest and the greenest Ionian island. It is also the best known. It was Homer's 'beautiful and rich land', and Odysseus' last stop on his journey home to Ithaki. Shakespeare reputedly used it as a background for *The Tempest*. In the 20th century, writers the Durrell brothers – among others – extolled its virtues.

With the nation's highest rainfall, scores of vegetables and herbs thrive here, especially in spring. With its beguiling landscape of wildflowers, and cypress trees rising out of shimmering olive groves, Corfu hangs in there as one of Greece's most beautiful islands. Sadly, areas are suffering from blatant and unheeded over-development.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Olympic Airlines (☎ 26610 22962; www.olympicairlines.com) is based at the airport. The national airline has two flights to/from Athens daily (from €30 if booked extra early), and four flights a week to/from Thessaloniki (€70). You can also fly three times weekly to Preveza (€35), Kefallonia (€35) and Zakynthos (€47). Prices exclude changeable taxes.

Aegean Airlines (☎ 26610 27100; www.aegeanair.com) has two to three flights a day between Athens and Corfu (from €29). Its office is located at the airport and, if closed, calls will be diverted to its office in Athens.

AirSea Lines (Map p682; ☎ 26610 49800, 26610 99316; www.airseelines.com; Ethnikis Antistasis, Corfu Town) is a

seaplane service that runs in high season to a schedule that seems to change annually. Check the website for the current permutations and combinations. At the time of research there were services between Corfu and Paxi (€40 to €50) and Corfu and Lefkada (€55 to €70). In Corfu, purchase tickets from the AirSea Lines office on Ethnikis Antistasis (near the new port). A minibus will take you from here to the departure point at Marina Gouvia, 8km away. Baggage weight allowances apply.

BUS

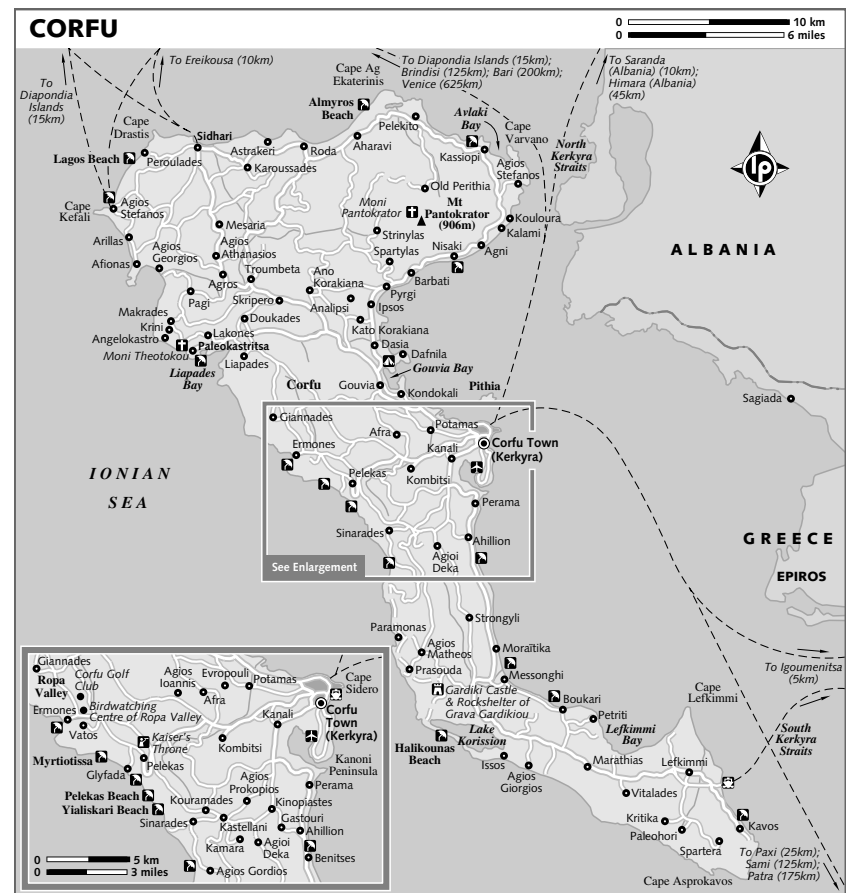
KTEL (☎ 26610 28898) runs buses three times daily (and another three per week via Lefkimmí in the island's south) between Corfu Town and Athens (€44.20, 8½ hours). There's also

a daily service to/from Thessaloniki (€42, eight hours); for both destinations budget another €6.50 for the ferry between Corfu and the mainland. Long-distance tickets should be purchased in advance from Corfu Town's long-distance bus station (p680) on I Theotoki, between Plateia San Rocco and the new port.

FERRY

Domestic

Hourly ferries travel daily between Corfu and Igoumenitsa (per person/car €6.50/26, 1¼ to two hours). Car ferries go to Paxi (per person/car €7.60/55.60, three hours) two or three times weekly, and daily in high season (but the hydrofoil is a more frequent option). In high



season you can travel to/from Patra on one of the international ferries that call at Corfu (€33, six to 7½ hours) en route to/from Italy.

There are also six ferries daily between Lefkimmi in the island's south and Igoumenitsa (€4.50, one hour).

International

Corfu is on the Patra-Igoumenitsa ferry route to Italy (Brindisi, Bari and Venice), although ferries to/from Ancona don't stop at Corfu (passengers need to disembark at Igoumenitsa and cross to Corfu on a local ferry).

Ferries go to Brindisi (€56, eight hours, two daily), and in summer usually once daily to Bari (€64, 10 to 12 hours) and Venice (€74, 24 to 26 hours). Fares listed here are for deck (not airline seats or cabin berths), one-way passage in high season; there are sizable reductions in the low and mid-seasons, and for return tickets. An additional tax may also apply. See Igoumenitsa (p345) and Patra (p166) for more details.

SNAV (www.snv.it) operates daily high-speed catamaran services between Corfu, Paxi and Brindisi from July to early September (four hours, €85 to €150).

Shipping agencies selling tickets are found in Corfu Town near the new port, along Xenofondos Stratigou and Ethnikis Antistasis. **Man-can Travel & Shipping** (p684; ☎ 26610 32664; Eleftheriou Venizelou 38) and **Agoudimos Lines/GLD Travel** (Map p682; ☎ 26610 80030; tickets@gld.gr; Ethnikis Antistasis 1) have helpful staff who will point you in the direction of the relevant international shipping lines; the assortment of companies, routes and prices can be confusing.

For more information regarding Italian ferries to Corfu, see p678.

HYDROFOIL

Domestic

Petrakis Lines (see Tours, p683) operates passenger-only hydrofoils between Corfu and Paxi from May until mid-October. One to two services daily run between Corfu and Paxi (€15, one hour). Be sure to book one day prior; places fill quickly.

International

Hydrofoil services connecting Corfu and Albania are operated by Petrakis Lines (see Tours, p683). Daily sailings go to/from the town of Saranda (one way €15, 25 minutes). Travellers also pay €10 to obtain a temporary visa for Albania.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

There is no bus service operating between Corfu Town and the airport. Buses 6 and 10 from Plateia San Rocco in Corfu Town stop on the main road 800m from the airport (en route to Benitses and Ahillion). A taxi between the airport and Corfu Town costs around €10.

BUS

Long-distance KTEL buses (known as green buses) travel from Corfu Town's **long-distance bus station** (Map p682; ☎ 26610 28927/30627; I Theotoki).

Fares cost €1.70 to €3.30. Printed timetables are available at the ticket kiosk. Sunday and holiday services are reduced considerably, or don't run at all.

Long-distance (Green) Buses from Corfu Town

Destination	Duration	Frequency
Agios Gordios	45min	7 daily
Agios Stefanos	1½hr	5 daily
Aharavi (via Roda)	1¼hr	6 daily
Arillas (via Afionas)	1¼hr	2 daily
Barbati	45min	4 daily
Ermones	30min	4 daily
Glyfada	30min	7 daily
Kassiopi	45min	6 daily
Kavos	1½hr	10 daily
Messonghi	45min	5 daily
Paleokastritsa	45min	6 daily
Pyrgi	30min	7 daily
Sidhari	1¼hr	8 daily
Spartera	45min	2 daily

Local buses (blue buses) depart from the **local bus station** (Map p684; ☎ 26610 28927; Plateia San Rocco) in Corfu Old Town.

Local (Blue) Buses in Corfu Town

Destination	Via	Bus	Frequency
Agios Ioannis	Afra	8	13 daily
Ahillion		10	7 daily
Benitses		6	12 daily
Evropouli	Potamas	4	11 daily
Kanoni		2	half-hourly
Kombitsi	Kanali	14	4 daily
Kondokali & Dasia	Gouvia	7	half-hourly
Kouramades	Kinopiastes	5	14 daily
Pelekas		11	7 daily

Tickets are either €0.75 or €1.10 depending on the length of journey, and can be pur-

chased from the booth on Plateia San Rocco (although tickets for Ahillion, Benitses and Kouramades are bought on the bus). All trips are under 30 minutes.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Car- and motorbike-rental outlets are plentiful in Corfu Town and most of the resort towns on the island. Prices start at around €45 per day (less for longer-term rentals). Most international car-rental companies are represented in Corfu Town and at the airport. Most local companies have offices along the northern waterfront.

Recommended agencies:

Budget (Map p682; ☎ 26610 22062; Ioannou Theotoki 132)

Easy Rider (Map p682; ☎ 26610 43026) Opposite the new port; rents out scooters and motorbikes.

Ocean (Map p684; ☎ 26610 32351; Eleftheriou Venizelou 22)

Sixt (Map p684; ☎ 26610 35237; www.sixt.gr; Eleftheriou Venizelou 12)

Sunrise (Map p682; ☎ 26610 26511/44325; www.corfusunrise.com; Ethnikis Antistasis 6) A reliable choice along the waterfront near the new port.

CORFU TOWN

pop 28,200

Nicknamed 'Kastropolis' because of its position between two fortresses on a peninsula, Corfu Town can be summed up in three words: sophistication, beauty and charm. The town's architecture, culture and cuisine are a harmonious blend of Italian, French and British, with a contemporary Greek feel. Pink and ochre Venetian mansions dominate the old town, Parisian-style arcades line a majestic promenade – together known as the Liston, and an English-style cricket ground-cum-village green) graces the Spianada. The town's cosmopolitan old and new sections merge seamlessly. Linger over a frappé (Greek-style iced coffee) and crowd-watch from one of the many restaurants or bars found in historic plazas and near Byzantine churches and museums.

Orientation

The town is separated into northern and southern sections. The old town is in the northern section between the Spianada and the Neo Frourio (New Fortress). To the east, the Palaio Frourio (Old Fortress) projects out to sea, cut off from the town by a moat. The southern section is the new town where you'll find most services and shops.

The old port is north of the old town, and the new port is to the west, with the hulking New Fortress between them. The long-distance bus station is on I Theotoki (formerly known as Avramiou) between Plateia San Rocco and the new port. The local bus station is on Plateia San Rocco.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Tourmoussoglou (☎ 26610 38451; Nikiforou Theotoki 47) This excellent bookshop has a wide range of guide-books and paperbacks in English.

EMERGENCY

Tourist police (Map p684; ☎ 26610 30265; 3rd fl, Samartzi 4) Off Plateia San Rocco.

INTERNET ACCESS

The going rate for internet access is around €3 per hour.

Edenet (Map p684; Plateia San Rocco) In the basement of Café Eden.

Netoikos (Map p684; Kaloheretou 14) Good connection, near the Church of Agios Spyridon. Also has a bar on site.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Corfu General Hospital (Map p682; ☎ 26610 88200; Loulias Andreadi)

LAUNDRY

Laundry Self Service (Map p682; ☎ 26610 34857; Morkiki; per load €11; ☎ 8.30am-2pm Mon-Sat, plus 6-8pm Wed-Fri) Around the corner from Petrakis Lines.

MONEY

There are banks and ATMs around Plateia San Rocco, on Georgiou Theotoki and by both ports.

Alpha Bank (Map p684; Kapodistriou) Found behind the Liston.

National Bank of Greece (Map p684; Voulgareos)

POST

Post office (Map p682; Leoforos Alexandras)

TELEPHONE

Public telephones can be found on most major streets and squares. Prepaid telephone cards (from €6) are available from kiosks.

TOURIST INFORMATION

There is still no official tourist office in Corfu Town, despite past attempts to open one.



During high season, a **tourist kiosk** (Map p684) may operate in Plateia San Rocco itself. At the very least you'll get a map of the town – produced mainly for day trippers from cruise ships – and information about what's on. English-speaking staff at **All Ways Travel** (Map p684; ☎ 26610 33955; www.corfuallwaystravel.com; Plateia San Rocco) happily receive disoriented tourists. Many hotels stock free Corfu maps. Definitely buy a copy of the *Corfiot* (€2), an English-language newspaper with listings, available from kiosks.

Sights & Activities

The **Archaeological Museum** (Map p682; ☎ 26610 30680; P Vraïla 5; adult/concession €3/2; ☎ 8.30am–3pm Tue–Sun) displays a diverse collection of items from the island's archaeological heritage. The massive Gorgon Medusa sculpture, one of the best-preserved pieces of Archaic sculpture found in Greece, was part of the west pediment of the 6th-century BC Temple of Artemis at Corcyra (the ancient capital), a Doric temple that stood on the nearby Kanoni Peninsula. The fascinating coin collection reveals the circulation of foreign coins (and thus trade) on the island since ancient times.

Just north of the cricket ground is the **Museum of Asian Art** (Map p684; ☎ 26610 30443; adult/concession €3/2; ☎ 8.30am–7pm Tue–Sun May–Oct, 8.30am–3pm Tue–Sun Nov–Apr), containing 10,000 objects donated from private collections. Items include Chinese and Japanese porcelain, bronzes, screens and sculptures. It's housed in the Palace of Sts Michael & George, built between 1818 and 1824 as the British Lord High Commissioner's residence.

At the eastern side of the building, up the staircase behind the Art Café (p685) is the **Municipal Art Gallery** (Map p684; admission €2; ☎ 9am–5pm Tue–Sun). This lovely collection features Corfiot painters and 15th-century Byzantine icons. Of particular interest for their Italian influence are the paintings by the father and son Prosalendis, and Byzantine icons by the Cretan Damaskinas.

Inside the 15th-century Church of Our Lady of Antivouniotissa is the **Antivouniotissa Museum** (Byzantine Museum; Map p684; ☎ 26610 38313; admission €2; ☎ 8am–7pm Tue–Sun Apr–Oct, 8.30am–2.30pm Tue–Sun Nov–Mar). This exquisite aisleless and timber-roofed basilica, located off Arseniou, has an outstanding collection of Byzantine and post-Byzantine icons and artefacts dating from the 13th to the 17th centuries. The collection extends into the restored sacristy.

Solomos Museum (Map p684; ☎ /fax 26610 30674; admission €1; ☎ 9.30am–2pm Jun–Aug, 9.30am–1pm Sep–May) is housed in a charming building and is dedicated to Greece's famous poet Dionysios Solomos, who wrote Greece's national poem (see Museum of Solomos, p711) and lived in Corfu for 30 years. The display includes some of his poems and letters, his desk and old book editions.

It's worth wandering through the two fortresses, Corfu Town's most dominant landmarks. The hilltop on which the **Neo Frourio** (New Fortress; Map p684; admission €2; ☎ 9am–9pm May–Oct) stands was first fortified in the 12th century. It's considered an engineering marvel. The views alone are worth the visit. The **Palatia Frourio** (Old Fortress; Map p682; ☎ 26610 48310; adult/concession €4/2; ☎ 8.30am–3pm Nov–Mar, 8.30am–7pm May–Oct) was constructed by the Venetians on the remains of a 12th-century Byzantine castle on a natural headland. The moat later became notorious as the site of romantic suicides. Further alterations were made by the British but the buildings are now mainly ruins.

In Corfu, locals joke that if you call out 'Spyros', half the island's males will come running. Indeed, it seems that many lucky fellows are named after the island's saint, St Spyridon. The sacred relic of the town's patron saint lies in an elaborate silver coffin in the 16th-century **Church of Agios Spyridon** (Map p684; Agiou Spyridonos). The church is also important for its distinctive campanile.

On the southern outskirts of Corfu on the Kanoni Peninsula, the villa and garden at **Mon Repos Estate** (off Map p682; ☎ 8am–7pm May–Oct, 8am–5pm Nov–Apr) are magical oases for an overheated traveller. The residence was commissioned by the second British Commissioner of the Ionians for his Corfiot wife. It was also the birthplace of the UK's current Duke of Edinburgh (Queen Elizabeth II's husband). The restored residence houses the recreational **Museum of Palaepolis** (☎ 26610 41369; adult/concession €3/2; ☎ 8am–7.30pm Tue–Sun May–Oct), with eclectic displays including archaeological finds and a Period Room. The sprawling gardens and grounds boast two **Doric temples**. Take a picnic and plenty of water – there's no nearby shop or kiosk.

Tours

Petrakis Lines (Map p682; ☎ 26610 31649; Ethnikis Antistasis 4) and **Sarris Cruises** (☎ 26610 25317;

Elfeitheriou Venizelou 13) both organise day trips from Corfu Town, including an excursion to ancient ruins (Butrinti) in Albania; a boat trip taking in Paxi (and the Blue Caves) and Antipaxi. Prices for all tours range between €30 and €40 (including transfers, plus €10 for port taxes). Passports are required for trips to Albania.

Sleeping

Few real good-value budget options exist in the old town – these are found in the town's newer area. The nearest camping ground is Dionysus Camping Village (p688), 8km away. Book ahead in high season. If you can squeeze extra from your purse, the boutique hotels provide a great stay.

We list high-season prices here (July and August, and at Easter), but note that for most hotels, low- and mid-season prices (October to June) are *drastically reduced* and many hotel owners are willing to negotiate. Many hotels are open year-round.

style. Features a fabulous rooftop bar that is also open to nonguests.

Bella Venezia (Map p684; ☎ 26610 46500; www.bellaveneziahotel.com; N Zambeli 4; d €170; ☒ ☑ ☐) This recently renovated place has tasteful and contemporary rooms.

Eating

Corfu's cuisine has been influenced by the many cultures that have been part of its history, particularly Italian. Meat eaters mustn't go past local specialities like *sofrito* (veal with garlic, vinegar and parsley), *pastitsada* (meat in red sauce) or a *bourdeto* (fish casserole spiked with paprika). Vegetarians can enjoy selections of mezedhes (appetisers) and tasty morsels from bakeries. The *gelateria* (ice-cream shop) experience around the island shouldn't be missed, either.

CAFÉS

A true Corfu experience is to indulge in people-watching on the Liston – you'll pay around €3 to €5 for a coffee or fresh juice here. The locals partake in their *volta* (evening walk) at around eleven.

Other cafés are perfect for lingering over a frappé or snack, especially in the heat of the day and to rest weary sightseeing bones. The views, especially from waterside locations, are further sensual feasts. Good watering holes include the pretty Art Café (Map p684), in gardens to the east of the Museum of Asian Art; the Old Fortress Café (Map p682), inside the Old Fortress complex; En Plo (Map p684), at the corner of Arseniou and Kapodistriou (you need to go down a sloping road at St Nikolas Gate); **Aktaion** (Map p684; Agoniston Polytehnioi); and Stabulus (Map p684), in the New Fortress.

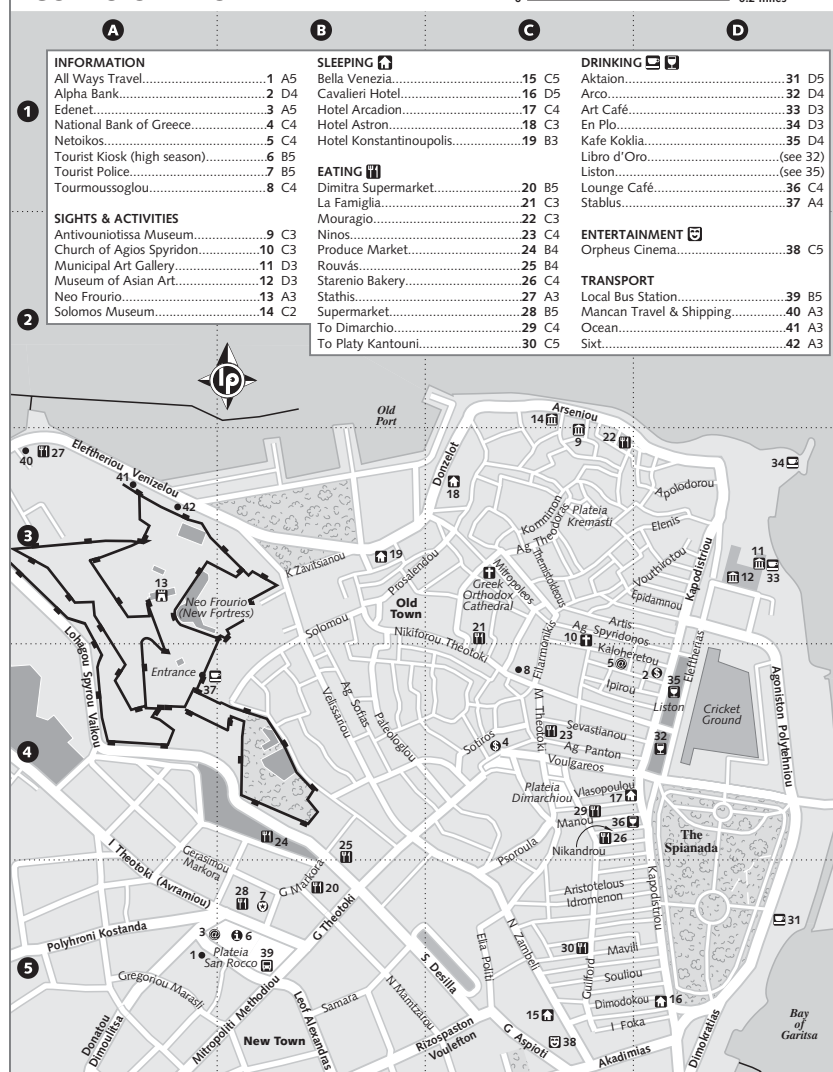
For a great coffee (at non-Liston prices) head to **Café Gioia** (Map p682; Xenofondos Stratigou 46) near the new port.

Whatever you do, don't miss the taste sensations at **Starenio Bakery** (Map p684; ☎ 26610 47370; Guilford 59; snacks under €2), including a huge selection of homemade gourmet pies, breads and the *best* of best cakes. Sweet indeed.

RESTAURANTS

Stroll around pretty Plateia Dimarchiou (Town Hall Sq; northeast of the Spianada) and along Guilford or Kapodistriou – and the latter's off-shoots – for traditional and contemporary eateries and mezedhes.

CORFU OLD TOWN



BUDGET

Hotel Bretagne (off Map p682; ☎ 26610 30724; www.hotelbretagne.gr; K Georgaki 27; s/d/tr €50/70/80; ☒) Don't overlook this because of its close proximity to the airport and its distance from the old town. It has adequate motel-style rooms; those at the back face onto a small grassy garden, which buffers air and street-noise pollution.

Hotel Astron (Map p684; ☎ 26610 39505; hotel_astron@hol.gr; Donzelot 15; s €60-70, d €70-80, tr €80-90) The foyer and corridors have as much personality as a disused hospital, but don't let this (nor the kitsch paintings) deter you. The rooms are surprisingly light and pleasant and management is friendly and helpful.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Konstantinoupolis (Map p684; ☎ 26610 48716; www.konstantinoupolis.com.gr; K Zavitsianou 11; s/d/tr incl breakfast €88/98/117; ☒) Former groupies of this old fave may be disappointed; it can be hard to get a booking here as groups occasionally block-book accommodation. Lucky guests will get light and breezy rooms, some with balcony and ye olde worlde Corfiot charm at better prices than other renovated hotels. Faithfuls should book ahead.

Hotel Atlantis (Map p682; ☎ 26610 35560; www.hotelatlantis.gr; Xenofondos Stratigou 48; s/d €86/100; ☒) This nondescript monolith doesn't ooze personality, but is handily located opposite the new port, so it's useful for ferry access. It has friendly staff and adequate rooms.

TOP END

The following options are almost identical smartly refurbished boutique hotels, outfitted with tasteful Corfiot furniture (with the exception of Bella Venezia). Prices are for high season (reduced considerably at other times) and include breakfast.

Hotel Arcadion (Map p684; ☎ 26610 37670; www.arcadionhotel.com; Vlasopoulou 2; s/d/tr €105/130/160; ☒) A charming hotel incongruously situated above a McDonalds, but right in the Liston's action.

Cavaliere Hotel (Map p684; ☎ 26610 39041; www.cavaliere-hotel.com; Kapodistriou 4; d €140-160; ☒) Another good choice with tasteful old-world

Mouragio (Map p684; ☎ 26610 33815; Arseniou 15; mains €6-14) The definite pick of this strip, despite the neighbouring (touristy) restaurants hogging the ocean view. This 'local's location' and good-value place serves massive portions of well-cooked grills and seafood.

Rouvás (Map p684; ☎ 26610 31182; 5 Desilla 13; mains €8-14; 🍴 lunch) Just like Ma used to make. The Greek American chef here does magic with traditional dishes, so much so that he was recently filmed with UK celebrity chef Rick Stein for a TV cooking programme.

La Famiglia (Map p684; ☎ 26610 30270; Maniarizi Arlioti 16; mains €8-18; 🍴 dinner) Check out the contemporary gingham tastes at this Greek-Italian eatery. A delectable range of pastas provides relief from the usual Greek square meal. Perfect for an Italian fix and faster than a ferry trip to Italy. It's a bit tricky to find – on a tiny laneway halfway along Nikiforou Theotoki.

our pick Tavern Tripa (off Map p682; ☎ 26610 56333; www.tripas.gr; set banquet €35) Calling all foodies, but with a warning: you'll need to fast for two days to make the most of this experience – 10 top-quality local dishes including cheese, antipasto, chicken and beef and everything in between. Oh, and they're just the appetisers. The main dishes (yes, plural), are yet to come. You can always burn off the calories on the dance floor, to the live music and dance performers. Not surprisingly, the tavern hosts hungry world presidents to (non-anorexic) film stars. In Kinopiastes, 7km from Corfu town. Book ahead.

Also recommended:

To Platy Kantouni (Map p684; ☎ 26610 32330; Guilford 16; plates €4-7) You can make a meal of these tasty traditional mezedhes plates – they add up in every sense.

Stathis (Map p684; ☎ 26610 25994; Elefteriou Venizelou 36; mains €6-12) Not the fanciest location in town (although handy for the ferry), but by far one of the best for price and taste – try the calamari.

Ninos (Krisi; Map p684; ☎ 26610 46175; Sevastianou 44; mains €8-14) Started in 1920, this family concern is as authentic as Zorba. Back-to-basics takeaways are available.

To Dimarchio (Map p684; ☎ 26610 39031; Plateia Dimarchiou; mains €9.50-25) Upmarket menu and a beautiful setting.

SELF-CATERING

North of Plateia San Rocco is the bustling **produce market** (Map p684; 🍴 closed Sun), open morning to early afternoon and selling fresh fruit, vegetables and fish. For groceries try **Dimitra supermarket** (Map p684; G Markora), or try

other supermarkets (Map p682) by the long-distance bus station, in the old town (Map p684), and on Theotoki I opposite the main plaza (Map p684).

Drinking

All the bars along the Liston are the places to be and be seen. The line-up includes (all on Map p684): Libro d'Oro, Arco, Liston and Kafé Koklia. Also recommended are Lounge Café (Map p684) and the classy rooftop bar at the Cavalieri Hotel (p685).

Entertainment

To hang out with the cool crowds in the high-tech – and very-late-night – scene, head to Corfu's bar-cum-disco strip, 2km northwest of the new port, along Ethnikis Antistasis (off Map p682; take a taxi). Recommended spots are the hip and classy Privilege and more local Au Bar (Ω in Greek), which caters to the locals. The €10 admission fee includes one freebie drink.

For visual entertainment, the old town's **Orpheus cinema** (Map p684; ☎ 26610 39768; G Aspioti) screens English-language films with Greek subtitles. Look around town for signs detailing music performances. Occasional folk festivals – music, dance and cultural – are held in Corfu. Check www.kerkyra.gr for further information.

Shopping

Numerous sweet shops and tourist haunts cram the streets of the tourist-oriented old town. Some reasonable fashion shops – for shoes, swimwear and dress items – are located in the new town, especially along G Theotoki.

NORTH OF CORFU TOWN

Much of the coast just north of Corfu Town is saturated by tourist mobs and tacky developments, though beyond **Pyrgi** the winding, scenic road reveals some of Corfu's delights.

However, before reaching Pyrgi, head to the quaint village of Kato Korakiana (near Dassia), to visit the **National Art Gallery – Alexandros Soutzos Museum, annex of Corfu** (☎ 26610 93333; 🍴 10am-2pm & 6-9pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 10am-2pm, Thu, Sat & Sun, closed Tue). This restored building, known as the Castellino Building, features permanent and temporary art exhibitions. Works are from the country's National Art Gallery, and include Greek masters and art-

ists of the Ionian School. The village alone is worth visiting for its authenticity.

Just beyond Pyrgi, take a detour to **Mt Pantokrator** (906m), the island's highest peak. On your way, wind your way around the many hairpin bends and through the picturesque villages of **Spartylas** and **Strinylas**. At Strinylas, most pause under the greenery at **Taverna Oasis**, but **Taverna To Steki** opposite is renowned for its tasty good-value local cuisine (open evenings only). From here a road climbs through stark terrain with wonderful wildflowers, to the mountain's summit, the **Moni Pantokrator**. If you can ignore the presence of a massive telecommunications tower in the middle of its grounds, you can enjoy stupendous, if sometimes hazy, views.

Heading northeast from Pyrgi around the winding coastal road, the first decent place is **Nisaki**, little more than a tiny cove with a pebble beach, a couple of tavernas and some rooms. **Agni** is renowned for its three competing tavernas – **Taverna Toula** (☎ 26630 91350), **Taverna Nikolas** (☎ 26630 91243) and **Taverna Agni** (☎ 26630 91142), all of which serve excellent fare. The village of **Kalami** is famous for the White House, home to writer Lawrence Durrell and perched near water. The base of the building houses an inevitably touristy restaur-

ant, while the house itself can be rented (see p688). Just round the next headland is the pretty fishing harbour and beach of **Kouloura**, which affords a good view of the neighbouring coast of Albania. **Agios Stefanos** is pretty in two respects – pretty upmarket (popular with British villa vultures) and with a beautiful harbour and small shingle beach. **Avlaki**, a bay further around the coast, reveals a lovely long beach and a couple of tavernas, including the atmospheric **Cavo Barbaro** (☎ 26630 81905; mains €7-15), and is a relaxing place surprisingly without touristy hordes (yet).

Kassiopi is worth considering for a night's stopover. Ignore the blow-up beach paraphernalia dominating the modern part of town and head to the attractive harbour. Opposite the church on the main street a small track leads to the town's castle ruins, and you can walk over the headland to the nearby Battaria and Kanoni Beaches. The main road continues inland to the overdeveloped and ultratouristy resorts of Aharavi, Roda and Sidhari.

Agios Stefanos in the island's west (not to be confused with the village of Agios Stefanos in the northeast) is pleasant, more for its long sandy beach and high sand-cliffs than for the rather plain and uninteresting village. Regular boat excursions and a local ferry service leave

CORFU ACTIVITIES

Naturally enough, the best activities in this part of the world relate to water. If you're not fortunate enough to be sailing in the region on a private yacht, several companies offer yacht charter services, flotilla holidays or sailing lessons, including **Corfu Sea School** (☎ 26610 99470; www.corfuseaschool.com; Marina Gouvia). For exploring coastal coves, renting a **motorboat** is the only way to go. Many places such as Marina Gouvia, Paleokastritsa and Kalami rent out boats.

You can **dive** in the crystal-clear waters off Corfu; diving operators are based in Kassiopi, Agios Gordios, Agios Giorgios, Ipsos, Gouvia and Paleokastritsa.

For landlubbers, **walking** here is superb. You can experience the countryside (with its wildflowers) and unspoilt villages. Keen walkers should tap into www.corfutrail.org. The Corfu Trail traverses the island and takes between eight and 12 days to complete. For help with coordinating accommodation along the trail, contact **Aperghi Travel** (☎ 26610 48713; www.travelling.gr/aperghi/). The book *In the Footsteps of Lawrence Durrell and Gerald Durrell in Corfu* (Hilary Whitton Paipeti, 1999) is great for lovers of the writing duo, and for keen explorers.

Given Corfu's hilly terrain, **mountain-biking** is popular. **Corfu Mountainbike Shop** (☎ 26610 93344; www.mountainbikecorfu.gr) is based in Dasia and rents out bikes for independent exploration, as well as organising day trips and cycling holidays.

Not far from Ermones on the island's west coast is the **Corfu Golf Club** (☎ 26610 94220; www.corfugolfclub.com), one of the few such courses in Greece. Or you can go horse riding through olive groves with **Trailriders** (☎ 26630 23090), based in the village of Ano Korakiana. Bird-watchers should pigeon the **Birdwatching Centre of Ropa Valley** (☎ 26610 94221), who meet regularly at the Golf Club. Wine-lovers can try a drop or three at **Triklino Vineyard** (☎ 6945890285; www.triklinovineyard.gr), on the Pelekas road near Karoubatika.

from its small harbour to the **Diapondia Islands**, a cluster of little-known satellite islands. For organised day excursions, contact **San Stefano Travel** (☎ 26630 51910; www.san-stefano.gr). Alternatively, contact the **Port Authority** (☎ 26610 32655) in Corfu Town for the ferry schedules to the islands.

Head inland to experience verdant landscapes plus hairpin bends that make the Monaco Grand Prix circuit seem like an airstrip. You'll pass through delightful hilltop villages including **Mesaria**, **Agios Athanasios** and **Agros**.

Sleeping & Eating

Dionysus Camping Village (☎ 26610 91417; www.dionysuscamping.gr; camp sites per adult/car/tent €5.40/3.30/3.80, huts per person €10; 📍) The closest camping ground to Corfu Town, signposted between Tzavros and Dasia and well served by bus 7 and good facilities. Olive terraces serve as the camping area, or you can opt for simple pine-clad huts with straw roofs; tents can also be hired.

Bounias Apartments/Villa Alexandra (☎ 2660 24333; studio €45, 3-/4-person apt €47-95) Welcoming owner, Alexandra, enjoys hosting her guests as much as they enjoy their stay. The damp-smelling bottom-floor studios aren't as pleasant as the slightly dated, but clean and spacious apartments above. Located about 2km from Kassioپی, near Avlaki Beach.

Manassis Apartments (☎ 26610 34990; diana@otenet.gr; Kassioپی; 4-person apt €100) It's hard to pick what's more pleasant – the friendly Greek-Irish owner, or her homely bougainvillea- and vine-covered two-bedroom apartments. The location, at the end of Kassioپی's picturesque harbour, makes a lovely base.

White House (☎ 26630 91040; www.white-house-corfugr; Kalamı; house per night €160) Lawrence Durrell fans can stay in the writer's former residence, which sleeps up to eight people. The interiors are nothing to write a book about, but the position, right on the water, and the wonderful outlook are novel. For meals, head below to the White House Taverna (☎ 26610 91251, mains €7 to €16.50).

Tassos Boat Hire & Accommodation (☎ 26630 91040; Kalamı; apt per week from €500) If White House is full, Tassos can accommodate you in some pleasant studios near the waterfront. Rates can halve outside July and August.

Ice Dream Gelateria (☎ 26630 98200) Five minutes drive north of Kassioپی, opposite an EPKO petrol station, is this obligatory stop.

Authentic, creamy *gelati* (ice cream) made on the premises. Worth every lick.

SOUTH OF CORFU TOWN

The coast road continues south from Corfu Town with a turn-off to well-signposted **Ahillion Palace** (☎ 26610 56245; adult/concession €7/5; 🕒 8.30am-3pm Nov-Mar, 8am-7pm Apr-Oct), near the village of Gastouri. In the 1890s it was the summer palace of Austria's Empress Elizabeth (King Otho of Greece was her uncle). The beautifully landscaped garden is guarded by some elaborate statues of mythological heroes. Be sure to climb the stairs to the right of the villa to the marbled terrace for a view through the window of the fresco depicting Achilles, to whom she dedicated the villa.

The narrow winding streets of the old village are the only things that save the suburban-feel resort town of **Benitses**. That, and a decent taverna, **O Paxinos** (☎ 26610 72339), which, despite its multilingual menu and credit card stickers on the window, is popular with Greeks for its excellent fish (€46 to €56 per kilogram). Off the beaten track along the winding coastal road south of Messonghi is the spread-out **Boukari**. It ain't for the action-traveller, but it's tranquil and pretty. The non-intrusive tavernas under oleander trees on the edge of the water are a great place to unwind.

In Boukari you can stay at the **Golden Sunset Hotel** (☎ 26620 51853; www.korfusunset.de; d incl breakfast €55-60, tr incl breakfast €60). Although 'motel modern' in character, the rooms are bright and some have massive balconies with sea views. A restaurant is attached.

A stopover in the region's administrative town, **Lefkimmi**, just over 10km from Boukari in the southern part of the island, reveals one of the island's most authentic towns. Fascinating churches are dotted throughout the older section, and a rather quaint, but sometimes odorous, canal flows (or doesn't) through it. The best accommodation is the pleasant **Maria Madalena Apartments** (☎ 26620 22386; d €30). Eat at the **River Restaurant** (☎ 6972542153; mains €8-15), where UK celebrity chef Rick Stein reportedly filmed a segment for a TV cooking show. A basic alternative is **Taverna Maria** (dishes of the day around €6) on the canal.

WEST COAST

Some of Corfu's prettiest countryside, villages and beaches are situated on or around the west coast. The beautiful and popular town of **Pale-**

okastritsa, 26km from Corfu Town, is set along a 3km stretch of road. Small coves are hidden between tall cliffs, and cypresses and olive trees appear through the lush green mountain backdrop. You can venture to nearby grottoes or one of the 15 nearby beaches by small excursion boat (per person €8, 30 minutes), or water taxis can drop you off at a beach of your choice. There's a range of water-boat activities available. Cool sun-seekers can hang out at café-bar **La Grotta** (☎ 26630 41006; Paleokastritsa), which is set in a stunning rocky cove with café, sunbeds and diving board. To enter, descend the long flight of steps opposite the driveway up to Hotel Paleokastritsa on the main road.

Perched on the rocky promontory at the end of Paleokastritsa is the interesting and icon-filled **Moni Theotokou** (admission free; 🕒 7am-1pm & 3-8pm), a monastery founded in the 13th century (although the present building dates from the 18th century). Just off the monastery's garden – with ivy, vines, roses and pot plants – is a small **museum** (admission free; 🕒 9am-1pm & 3-6pm Apr-Oct). Most interesting is the olive mill exhibition under the museum, with a small shop selling oils and herbs.

From Paleokastritsa a path ascends to the unspoilt village of **Lakones**, 5km inland by road. Be sure to check out the town's only *kafeneio* (Kafeneio Olympia) and the village's growing photographic archive (see boxed text, p690). Quaint **Doukades** has a historic square and excellent tavernas. The 6km road west to **Krini** and **Makrades** meanders at elevated heights; many restaurant owners have capitalised on the vistas. Be sure to visit Krini's miniature town square and nearby Angelokastro, the ruins of a Byzantine castle and the most western bastion on Corfu. If you have time, tackle the winding mountain pass to **Pagi** and onto the resort of **Agios Georgios**

for an eating experience at the Fisherman's Taverna (see p691).

South of Paleokastritsa, the pebbly beach at **Ermones** is dominated by tasteless development, but is near the **Corfu Golf Club** (☎/fax 26610 94220; Ropa Valley; per 18 holes €50), if you're craving a round. Hilltop **Pelekas**, 4km away, is a good base for beach bums. This friendly village has a reasonable infrastructure yet attracts more independent travellers than 'package people'.

The attractive, traditional mountain village of **Sinarades** has old buildings, narrow streets, a beautiful clock tower and several excellent tavernas. Its fascinating **Folkloric Museum** (adult/concession €1.50/0.60; 🕒 9am-2pm Mon-Sat) is housed in a former farmhouse. The curator, Tasa, can tell you more about Greek history than Homer himself.

Near Pelekas village are two sandy beaches, **Glyfada** and **Pelekas** (marked on some maps as Kontogialos, and also a resort in its own right), with water sports and sunbeds galore. These are quite developed, backed by large hotels and accommodation options. A free bus service runs from Pelekas village to these beaches. Further north is the popular, but dwindling (due to erosion) **Myrtiotissa** beach; the former unofficial nudist 'colony' has more or less merged with the happy families section, save for some giant boulders in between. Warning: it's a long slog down a steep, unsealed road before you see a bottom of any kind (drivers should park in the parking area on the hilltop).

Agios Gordios is a popular beach-bum hangout south of Glyfada. The long sandy beach can cope with the crowds. Its backdrop is a sparse and exposed flat landscape, appealing to travellers interested primarily in a serious sun scene.

A CUT ABOVE THE REST

Male travellers who may have 'let their hair down' during their vacation should razor on down to the small village of Kouramades, 5km southeast of Pelakas. This tiny place is home to a highly respected (and dare we say eccentric) barber, Mr Yiangos Hytiris (☎ 26610 54258). Since 1949 Mr Hytiris has been servicing hirsute clients who come not only from around the island, but as far away as Athens. He is well known for his quirky barber's shop, which is housed in a distinctive rust-coloured building with green shutters. It's a tribute to the bygone era of the barber's art – cut-throat razors and other manual and technical gadgets are mounted on the walls, along with a collection of hundreds of ornaments and mirrors. If you decide to pay him a visit, be respectful and dress appropriately – he's a proud and skilled artiste from the old world, and would not appreciate clients rocking up in beach gear.

While there's not much to see other than the cave itself, the ancient **Rockshelter of Grava Gardikiou** has a fascinating history: it dates from the Upper Palaeolithic period of 20,000 BC when Corfu was part of what is now mainland Epiros. Hunter-gatherers used such shelters during hunting trips – stone tools and animal bones have been found here. Turn off the main road to Halikounas Beach (and then to Gardiki Castle). Look for the faded roadside sign. The site is 400m uphill through olive groves (follow the orange arrows on the trees).

Sleeping & Eating

Paleokastritsa has many hotels, studios and a few domatia (rooms, usually in private homes) spread along the road.

Paleokastritsa Camping (☎ 26630 41204; Paleokastritsa; camp sites per adult/car/tent €4.80/2.90/3.40) On the right of the main approach road to town is this shady and well-organised camping ground, set on historic olive terraces.

Hotel Zefiros (☎ 26630 41088; www.hotel-zefiros.gr; Paleokastritsa; d incl breakfast €70-80, tr incl breakfast €80-100) It's hard to beat this perfect place. It's been recently refurbished, without losing its former friendly atmosphere or good prices. The 11 stylish rooms are contemporary yet comfortable, and some have a massive terrace. Hospitable owner Johnny clearly loves his job.

Rolling Stone (☎ 26610 94942; www.pelekasbeach.com; Pelekas Beach; r €30-40, apt €98) This atmospheric '70s throwback comes with laid-back hosts, clean and spacious apartments and double rooms, and the odd hippy touch – including that of its 'wellness' person (relaxation treatments €10 to €30). The terrace – with bar, funky bright stools and sofa – provides the perfect chill pad.

Jimmy's Restaurant & Rooms (☎ 26610 94284; jimmyspelekas@hotmail.com; d/tr €40/50; ☺) No-nonsense rooms with rooftop views, plus restaurant (mains €6 to €11). Near the intersection of the roads to Pelekas Beach and Kaiser's Throne.

Yialiskari Beach Studios (☎ 26610 54901; d studio €50; Yialiskari Beach; ☺) Studios with great vistas, and perfect for those who want their own patch away from neighbouring Pelekas Beach. The studios are run by the owner of Yialiskari Beach's only taverna, 150m away.

Levant Hotel (☎ 26610 94230; www.levanthotel.com; s/d/f €50/95/160; ☺) The oh-so-slightly shabby exterior of this neoclassical hotel hides luxury and elegance. Located near Kaiser's Throne lookout above Pelekas village, it has all the mod cons, a swimming pool set in gardens, and a restaurant (mains €6 to €12), plus a terrace with awesome views of the Adriatic and beyond.

Fisherman's Taverna (☎ 6942585550; Agios Georgios; mains per 2 people €25-30) A sign says, 'Dear Customer. We are sorry but we cannot serve you if you are in a hurry.' The eatery is tucked in to the right, 1.1km up a dirt road from the southern end of Agios Georgios Beach, northwest of Pagi. Ignore the first taverna visible from the road, whose sign also says 'Fish Taverna'. Go hungry and with time to spare.

Frequented by younger travellers for the all-in hostel experiences are **Pink Palace** (☎ 26610 53103; www.thepinkpalace.com; Agios Gordios Beach; r per person incl breakfast & dinner €18-25; ☺). This huge, garish complex, south of Sinarades, is considered the must-do hassle-free activity and party palace by those on the backpacker circuit. **Sunrock** (☎ 26610 94637; www.geocities.com/sunrock_corfu; Pelekas Beach; r per person incl breakfast & dinner €18-24; ☺) also offers the all-inclusive deal.

PAXI ΠΑΞΟΙ

pop 2500

Don't let the 10km by 4km size fool you: the tiny, alluring island package of Paxi offers a big – and possibly the best – Ionian experience. The smallest of the main islands, Paxi has three intimate harbour towns – Gaïos, Loggos and Lakka. All feature pretty waterfronts with Venetian-style pink-and-cream storeyed buildings, set against hilly backdrops of lush greenery. Their nearby coves can be reached by motorboat, if not by car or on foot. The dispersed inland villages sit by centuries-old olive groves, winding stone walls, ancient windmills and olive presses. On the less accessible west coast, sheer limestone cliffs plunge hundreds of metres and are punctuated by

grottoes. The old mule trails are a walker's delight. An obligatory purchase is the visually instructive and charming *Bleasdale Walking Map of Paxos* (€10 to €15), available from the island's travel agencies. Paxi has escaped the mass tourism of Corfu and caters to discriminating tour companies (mainly British) and Italians who arrive en masse in August. Its slow pace makes for a relaxing stay.

Accommodation mostly consists of pre-booked apartments and villas; all the island's agencies can help with bookings. For independent travellers, there are a few 'rooms for rent' signs around.

Getting There & Away

AIR

AirSea Lines (www.airsealines.com), a seaplane service, promotes several flights a day between Corfu and Paxi (one way €40 to €50). On Paxi, purchase tickets at **Bouas Tours** (☎ 26620 32245; www.bouastours.gr; Gaïos). Ask about the strict baggage weight allowance.

BUS

There's a twice-weekly direct bus service between Athens and Paxi (€45, plus €6.80 for ferry ticket between Paxi and Igoumenitsa, seven hours). On Paxi, tickets are available from Bouas Tours (above). The bus leaves from Plateia Karaiskaki in Athens (note: the terminal changes, so always check with Bouas beforehand).

FERRY

Domestic

Two car ferries operate daily services between Paxi, Igoumenitsa on the mainland, and Corfu. The Paxi-Igoumenitsa (per person/car €7/40) trip takes 1½ to two hours. Most island travel agents sell tickets. For connections to Corfu ring the information office in Igoumenitsa (☎ 26650 26280).

Ferries dock at Gaïos' new port, 1km east of the central square. Excursion boats dock along the waterfront.

International

You can reach Corfu and Igoumenitsa from the major ports in Italy, then transfer to a local ferry for Paxi.

SNAV (www.snnav.it) operates a high-speed catamaran between Brindisi and Paxi (€90 or €140 depending on date of travel, 4¾ hours), via Corfu, daily from July to early September.

MR VASSILIS MICHALAS – SEPIA SNAPSHOT

As a local taxi driver, based out of Lakones, Vassilis Michalas ferries tourists and Corfiots around the island. That, he says, is a secondary focus: he's also part of a tourist accommodation association, is involved in local politics and sings in Lakones' choral group. Then, there's his role as a drummer in the village band and performer in the *barcarole* (the recreation of *Odyssey*, an annual event in Paleokastritsa).

More recently, however, he's zoomed in on a passion of a different kind – as the unofficial village archivist. He asked the people from his tiny village to donate photographs for safe-keeping and display. The response was overwhelming and he has passionately set about the arduous task of photocopying and hand-framing hundreds of photos.

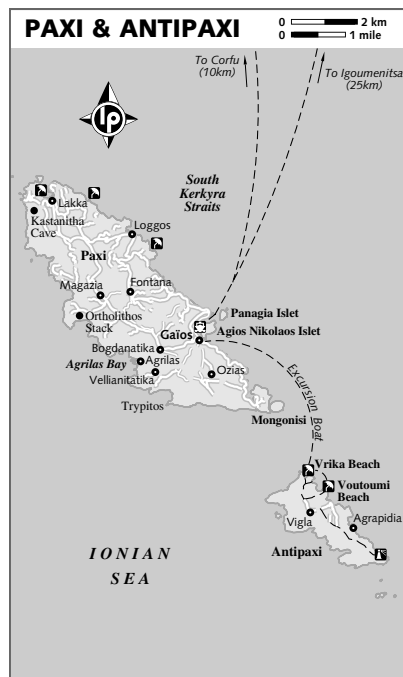
His reasons are simple. 'People are losing sense of our history!' he exclaims. 'The young people especially need to know their history. For example, why is our village called Lakones? Some older people know, but now the young people, they look after [are only concerned about] the football. I want to preserve old traditions. It's also good for outside people to know about the village.'

He points to a 1950 photograph of women in traditional dress, their hands on their hips and massive 100kg boulders on their head. 'This is very important. People need to know about this photo. These ladies built the first path between Paleokastritsa and Lakones. They received no money – nothing! – they had no machines. They alone decided to do this.'

Other photos reveal festivals and wedding groups, padres and floods. Then there are special events – the village's water connection in 1958 and (the irony isn't lost on him) a B&W photo of the very first tourists taking photos of local people in 1960.

As Vassilis points to the photo of the village's first choral group (the very same that he is currently a member of), he breaks into song. He smiles. 'I have been in a music group since I was 12 years old. Everybody goes to music groups – it's a natural part of our upbringing. Traditions are so important.'

It's well worth singing Vassilis' praises. Lakones' not-for-profit photographic archive is housed in the choral group's practice room in Lakones' municipal building. Interested visitors can phone ahead (☎ 26630 41771-3).



See Paxos Magic Holidays (right) in Gaïos for reservations.

HYDROFOIL

Popular passenger-only hydrofoils link Corfu and Paxi (and occasionally Ioumenitsa) from May until mid-October. There are one to two services daily (more on Mondays), between Corfu and Paxi (€15.10, 1¼ hours).

For information contact **Arvanitakis Travel** (☎ 26620 32007, Paxi), or Petrakis Lines (p683) in Corfu.

SEA TAXI

Sea taxis can be a fast and effective way of travel, especially if there are other people on board. The going rate between Corfu and Paxi is around €180 per boat, shared among the passengers. Try Nikos – from Gaïos – on ☎ 6932232072 (or try www.paxosseataxi.com); or Andreas – from Lakka – on ☎ 6977623033.

Getting Around

The island's bus links Gaïos and Lakka via Loggos up to four times daily in either direc-

tion (€1.80). Taxis between Gaïos and Lakka or Loggos cost around €10; at the time of research, the taxi rank in Gaïos was temporarily located at the bus stop (normally it's at the waterfront).

Daily car hire varies between €45 and €115 in high season. Reliable **Alfa Hire** (☎ 26620 32505) in Gaïos offers car rental, as does **Fougaros** (☎ 26620 32373; www.fougarostravel.com). **Rent a Scooter Vassilis** (☎ 26620 32598), opposite the bus stop in Gaïos, has a good range of scooters and mopeds, ideal for zipping around the island. Many travel agencies rent out small boats – this is a great way to access beach coves.

GAÏOS ΓΑÏΟΣ

pop 560

Gaïos, on a sweeping, east-coast bay, is the island's small and well-equipped capital. Its pink, cream and whitewashed buildings line the bay, and the town's main Venetian square, swamped with the inevitable bars and cafés, abuts the waterfront. The island is cosseted from the open sea by the nearby fortified islet of Agios Nikolaos. Panagia Islet, named after its monastery, lies at the northern entrance to the bay.

The main street (Panagioti Kanga) runs inland from the main square towards the back of town, where you'll find the bus stop. Banks and ATMs are near the square and you'll find an internet room on the waterfront **Bar Pío Pío** (per hr €6). There isn't a tourist office, but the helpful and efficient staff at **Paxos Magic Holidays** (☎ 26620 32269; www.paxosmagic.com) will happily direct you. They organise island excursions, including boating trips and wonderful walks. They can also arrange villa accommodation in advance.

The **Cultural Museum** (admission €2; ☎ 10am-2pm & 7-11pm), in a former school on the southern waterfront, has an eclectic collection of local historical artefacts, including a 17th-century sex aid.

Sleeping

Thekli Studios (Clara Studios; ☎ 26620 32313; d €70; ♿) Thekli, the local fisher-diver and energetic personality about town, runs these immaculate and well-equipped studios. They're centrally located upstairs behind the museum, and overlook the village and sea. Thekli will meet you at the port – call ahead.

San Giorgio Apartments (☎ 26620 32223; d/tr €70/90) Pink, blue and white are the colours

of these dated, but airy and clean, studios, and they boast the basic 'kitchen' facilities. Head towards town from the port by the lower (pedestrian) harbour road, and follow the signposted steps. Cheaper 'rooms only' are also available (€55).

Paxos Beach Hotel (☎ 26620 32211; www.paxosbeachhotel.gr; s/d/tr incl breakfast & dinner from €93/108/140; ♿) The rather worn bungalows of this hillside complex, 1.5km south of Gaïos, are set a lobster claw apart, but they sprawl down to the sea, and have a range of rooms from standard to superior. There's a private jetty, tennis court, beach, bar and restaurant.

Eating

Capriccio Café Creperie (☎ 26620 32687; crepes €3-6; ☎ breakfast-late) For a cheap and filling sweet or savoury experience, head past the museum to this creperie. Tables are under large brollies near the seafront. Don't miss the Shepherd's Crepe, the fruit and yogurt choice (€5).

Taverna Vasilis (☎ 26620 32596; mains €6-14) The owner of this eatery is a former butcher, and this place makes the cut. Wrap your own chops around the tasty spit-roasts or other delicious meaty servings.

Karkaletzos (☎ 26620 32729; mains €7-10) This cheap and cheerful grill house is the overwhelming locals' choice, 1km behind town. The menu states (in English) that the proprietors will accept criticism or observations 'without any hysterical reaction'. As hospitable as this is, we suggest you just go with the flow.

Taka Taka (☎ 26620 32329; mains €8-20) This up-market seafood experience behind the main square will leave you positively floating. As well as high-quality seafood (€40 to €75 per kilogram), the reputable Italian chef prepares pasta dishes. The *frutti di mare* (spaghetti marinara) will set you back €20.

The supermarket is west of the central square. Two excellent bakeries, one on the waterfront, the other near the main square, serve Paxiot delights.

LOGGOS ΛΟΓΓΟΣ

Loggos is 5km northwest of Gaïos. The hub of this small fishing village is the intimate quay, which is lined with chic bars and restaurants. At one end of the quay is an old, abandoned olive-soap factory. The town has a steep lush

backdrop and some wonderful coves and pebble beaches nearby. **Café Bar Four Seasons** (per hr €6) has internet facilities.

Sleeping & Eating

Studio (☎ 26620 31397, 26620 31030; d €55) This somewhat bohemian studio is owned by, and sits above, the gift shop Marbou, and it's a quaint bougainvillead option. Best to book in advance.

Arthur House (☎ 26620 31330; studio €75, apt €110) While the name implies an English-style villa, these modest but spotless studios are above the owner's house, a two-minute walk from the waterfront. Julia's boat and bike hire is part of the family deal.

O Gios (☎ 26620 31735; mains €6-14) The ugly duckling of the strip, with one of the best-value seafood and grill dishes.

Vasilis (☎ 26620 31587; mains €8-14) This classy terracotta-coloured family-run restaurant – running since 1956 – is headed by the quiet achiever and chef, Kostas. As well as the regular dishes, he conjures up daily specials – anything from octopus in red wine sauce to lamb casserole.

Drinking

Kafeneio Burnaos (Magazia; ☎ no set hrs) Don't blink or you'll miss this delightful 60-year-old *kafeneio*, located in Magazia, several kilometres southwest of Loggos. Locals gather here to play cards and backgammon (there's even a set from 1957). Third-generation owner Kosta has maintained its original feel; attractive jars and produce line the shelves. Well worth the stop – Kosta makes a great Greek coffee, too.

Chill out over one of Spyros' megafresh fruit cocktail sundowners with the bohemian crowd at To Taxidi, or try the friendly and upbeat Roxy Bar, with a crowd and music to match. You can move with your mood between the myriad of terraces.

LAKKA ΛΑΚΚΑ

The picturesque, tranquil and unspoiled harbour of Lakka lies at the end of an almost circular bay on the north coast. It's a yachties' haven, with many good bars and restaurants. There are small, but decent, beaches around the bay's headland, including Harami Beach, and pleasant walks nearby.

Routsis Holidays (☎ 26620 31807; www.forthnet.gr/routsis-holidays) and **Planos Holidays** (☎ 2662031744;

planos@otenet.gr) are helpful agencies responsible for well-appointed apartments and villas for all budgets.

Routsis will accommodate people for shorter-term stays at **Lefkothea** (d without bathroom €35), the nearest thing you'll find to a hostel here. Don't do the white glove test on the communal kitchen and bathroom, but the rooms themselves are clean and it's cheap and central.

The trendiest outlook for a drink, internet access (€7.50 per hour), or an upmarket meal is **Akis Bar** (☎ 26620 31665; snacks €3-11 & mains €9-17; ☑). Try the 350g swordfish souvlaki (€17.50). The skewer itself cuts its own style; it hangs from a funky metal stand. An oldie but a goodie, **Nionios** (☎ 26620 31315) is the oldest taverna in Paxi (or so they claim – open since 1945), and it produces extra-tantalizing traditional dishes – and thankfully, not much has changed.

ANTIPAXI ΑΝΤΙΠΑΞΙΟΙ

pop 10

The stunning and diminutive island of Antipaxi, 2km south of Paxi, is covered with grape vines, olives and small hamlets. Caiques and tourist boats run daily from Gaïos and Lakka, and pull in at two beach coves, the small, sandy **Vrika Beach** and the pretty, pebbly **Voutoumi Beach**. Floating in the water here – with its dazzling clarity – is a sensational experience.

An inland path links the two beaches (a 30-minute walk), or if you are more of an energetic person you can walk up to the village of **Vigla**, or as far as the lighthouse at the southernmost tip (you should refer to the Bleasdale map and take plenty of water – allow 1½ hours minimum each way). Voutoumi Beach has two eateries – Bella Vista and a taverna on the beach. Vrika Beach also has two good competing tavernas – Spiros and Vrika. Main meals at both cost between €7 and €15. Check the price when offered the daily fish specials, or you could net a large catch in more ways than one. Both tavernas have designated areas with free use of beach umbrellas and sunbeds.

Accommodation is available through one or two of the beach tavernas. Ask the water-taxi drivers and taverna owners. Boats to Antipaxi (from €6 return) leave Gaïos at 10am and return around 5.30pm – there are more services in high season.

LEFKADA ΛΕΥΚΑΔΑ

pop 22,500

Lefkada (or Lefkas) is the fourth-largest island in the Ionians. Non-islanders tend to scorn its status as an island; it was once joined to the mainland by a narrow isthmus until the occupying Corinthians dug a canal in the 8th century BC. The 25m strait is now spanned by a causeway.

Lefkada's mountainous peaks exceed 1000m, and the island's fertile fields include olive groves, vineyards, and fir and pine forests. There are 10 satellite islets off the heavily developed east coast, and the less populated west coast boasts spectacular beaches.

Lefkada's beauty is also in its proud people. In the villages, look out for the older women in traditional dress.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Lefkada has no airport, but the airport near Preveza (Aktion) on the mainland is about 20km away. Flights operate daily between Athens and Preveza (€90 to €110), and three times a week between Corfu (€40) and Kefallonia (€35). Contact **Olympic Airlines** (☎ 26450 22881; Filippa Panagou 10, Lefkada Town) for bookings and information.

BUS

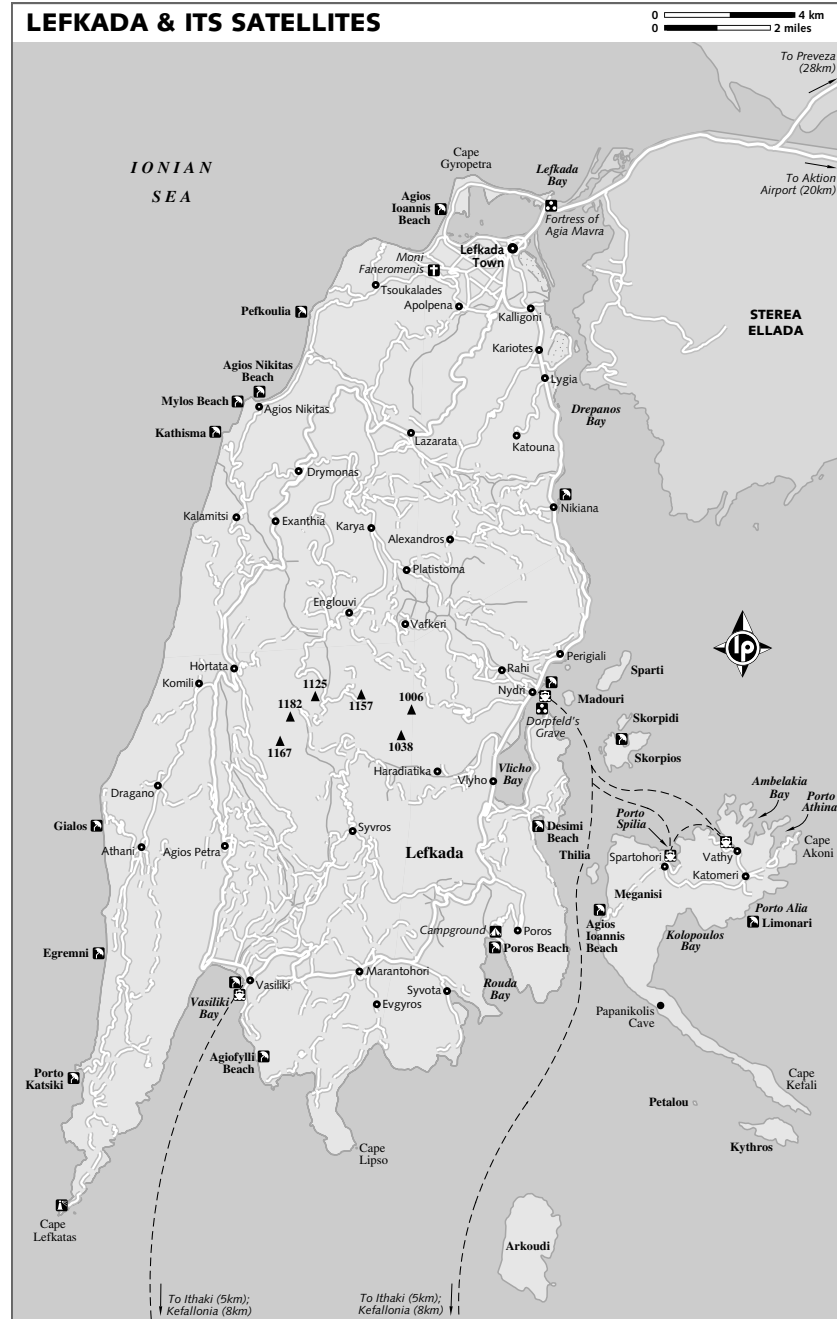
From Lefkada Town's **KTEL bus station** (☎ 26450 22364; Golemi) on the main waterfront road, buses head to Athens (€29, 5½ hours, four or five daily), Patra (€14, three hours, two to three weekly), Thessaloniki (€36, eight hours, one to two weekly and more in high season), Preveza (€2.60, 30 minutes, six to seven daily) and Igoumenitsa (two hours, daily).

FERRY

Four Islands Ferries runs a daily ferry service that sails to an ever-changing schedule (and with ever-changing prices) between Nydri (Lefkada), Frikes (Ithaki), Fiskardo (Kefallonia) and Vasiliki (Lefkada). Trips include Nydri to/from Frikes (per person/car €5.30/26.50, 1½ hours), Nydri to/from Fiskardo (via Frikes; €6.40/27.50, 2½ hours) and Vasiliki to/from Fiskardo (per person/car €6.40/27.50, one hour).

Information and tickets can be obtained from **Borsalino Travel** (☎ 26450 92528; borsalino@otenet.gr)

LEFKADA & ITS SATELLITES



in Nydri and from **Samba Tours** (☎ 26450 31520; www.sambatours.gr) in Vasiliki.

Getting Around

There's no reliable bus connection between Lefkada and Aktion airport, near Preveza. Taxis are relatively expensive (around €35); a cheaper option is to take a taxi to Preveza and then a bus to Lefkada.

From Lefkada Town, frequent buses ply the east coast, with up to 20 services daily to Nydri and Vlyho in high season, and four daily to Vasiliki. There are regular buses to Agios Nikitas, and two limited high-season services to Kalamitsi and Athani. Around six daily services head to the inland village of Karya. Other villages are served by one or two buses daily. Sunday services are reduced.

Car hire starts at €35 per day, depending on season and model. Cars can be hired from reliable **Europcar** (☎ 26450 23581; Panagou 16, Lefkada Town), next door at **Budget** (☎ 26450 25274) or from **Aris** (☎ 26450 22027; Iroon Polittechniou 32). Rent a bike or moped from **Santas** (☎ 26450 25250), next to the Ionian Star Hotel. There are countless car- and bike-rental companies in Nydri and several in Vasiliki.

LEFKADA TOWN

pop 6900

The island's main town is built on a promontory at the southeastern corner of a salty lagoon. Earthquakes are a constant threat here and the town was devastated by one in 1948 (but unaffected in 1953), only to be rebuilt in a distinctively quake-proof and attractive style with upper floors in brightly painted corrugated iron.

The town has a relaxed feel, with a vibrant main thoroughfare, a pleasant plaza and exquisite churches with separate bell towers to withstand seismic activity. The yachting crowd is serviced by a smart marina.

Orientation & Information

The town's vibrant main pedestrian strip, Dorpfeld, starts south of the causeway. The street is named after 19th-century archaeologist Wilhelm Dorpfeld, who postulated that Lefkada, not Ithaki, was the home of Odysseus. Dorpfeld leads to Plateia Agiou Spyridonos, the main square, and continues as Ioannou Mela, which is lined with modern shops and cafés. ATMs and the post office are on Ioannou Mela. There's

no tourist office. The bus station is on the southern waterfront.

Internet Cafezinho (Golemi 14; per hr €3) near the bus station offers internet access, plus superlative coffee. **Internet Café** (Koutroubi; per hr €2.40), just off 8th Merarchias, also has internet.

Sights

Housed in the modern Cultural Centre at the western end of Agelou Sikelianou is the **Archaeological Museum** (☎ 26450 21635; adult/concession €2/1; 🕒 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun). It has four well displayed and labelled rooms containing island artefacts spanning the Palaeolithic Age to the Late Roman periods. The prize exhibit is a 6th-century-BC terracotta figurine of a flute player with nymphs.

Works by icon painters from the Ionian school and Russia dating back to 1500 are displayed in an impressive **collection of post-Byzantine icons** (☎ 26450 22502; Rontogianni; admission free; 🕒 8.30am-1.30pm Tue-Sat, 6-8.15pm Tue & Thu). It's in a classical building and also houses the **public library** off Ioannou Mela.

The 14th-century Venetian **Fortress of Agia Mavra** (🕒 9am-1.30pm Mon, 8.30am-1pm Tue-Sun) is immediately across the causeway. It was first established by the crusaders but the remains mainly date from the Venetian and Turkish occupations of the island. **Moni Faneromenis**, 3km west of town, was founded in 1634, destroyed by fire in 1886 and later rebuilt. It houses a new **museum** (🕒 9am-1pm, 6-8pm, closed Sun) with ecclesiastical art from around the island. The views of the lagoon and town are also worth the ascent.

In the old town, look out for the attractive churches, with their separate iron **bell towers**.

Sleeping

Hotel Santa Maura (☎ 26450 21308; s/d/tr incl breakfast €50/70/80; 📶) 'With potential' is how a real estate agent might describe this charming, but tired, place. There's need for a lift (in every respect) and some rooms are better than others – those onto Dorpfeld are bright, but noisy.

Pension Pirofani (☎ 26450 25844; Dorpfeld; d/tr €75/90; 📶) Ignore the faded photo out the front, as these are well-appointed, great-value rooms with decent-sized superhygienic bathrooms. The balconies overlooking Dorpfeld are fun for crowd-watching, but rooms at the back will ensure a better night's kip.

Ionian Star Hotel (☎ 26450 24762; s/d/tr incl breakfast €100/115/130; 📶 📶 📶) The foyer's elaborate

Greek statue promises special things. In reality, this pleasant five-star place has predictable offerings, but with enough trimmings to ensure a comfortable stay. There's even a good old '70s-style kidney-shaped pool. All the rooms are light and have good views.

Eating

Regantos (☎ 26450 22855; Vergiotti 17; mains €5-12) The bright yellow and blue hues of this popular place seem a bit contrived – however, the food (such as fish, €35) at this family-run taverna is genuine and traditional. Everyone from Swedes to Greeks flocks here, but we found the service a bit surly.

Ey Zhn (Rontogianni 7; mains €8-17) 'Ease in', indeed. The food – a deliciously contemporary take on Greek food – isn't cheap, but the quality is outstanding.

Stylish bars and cafés line the western side of the waterfront; **Karma** (Dorpfeld), at the start of Dorpfeld, is the place to see and be seen. Plateia Agiou Spyridonos is crammed with cafés and crowds. The marina offers alternative options for a more-tranquil sundowner with the yachties.

Self-caterers can pick up supplies from the **supermarket** (Golemi) next to the bus station or from the well-stocked **bakery** (Ioannou Mela 182).

EAST COAST & SURROUNDS

To its detriment, the east coast is mainly associated with Nydri, once a fishing village but now an unattractive strip of tourist junk shops with a questionable beach. The coastal areas around Nydri have been affected by insensitive development, but it doesn't take much to avoid this; venture inland and you're in another world – scattered villages, local tavernas and good walks. Nydri is unavoidable if you want to access the islets of **Madouri**, **Sparti**, **Skorpidi** and **Skorpios**, plus **Meganisi**. Numerous **excursions** go to Meganisi and stop for a swim near Skorpios (€15 to €28), and some visit Ithaki and Kefallonia as well (€20). To go it alone, hire a motorboat from **Trident** (☎ 26450 92978) on the waterfront drag. Helpful **Borsalino Travel** (☎ 26450 92528; borsalim@otenet.gr) on the main street can organise the travel gamut.

The privately owned islet of Madouri, where Greek poet Aristotelis Valaoritis (1824-79) spent his last 10 years, is off limits. So too is Skorpios, where members of the Onassis family are buried in a cemetery, but cruise boats pause off a sandy beach

on the northern side of the island for a swim stop.

Amblers might enjoy the lovely walk to **waterfalls** 3km out of Nydri (and another 400m past the tavern). The walk follows a path through a ravine; be careful of the slippery rocks.

Yachties have caught wind of the small harbour of **Syvota**, 15km south of Nydri. Thankfully, it isn't to the detriment of the local fishermen, who anchor at harbour and fix their brightly coloured nets. It's a tranquil option for a base, although you'd need transport to explore, and there's no beach to speak of.

Sleeping & Eating

Ionian Paradise (☎ 26450 92268; 📶) At the time of research the Ioanian Paradise (formerly Gorgona Hotel), was being fully refurbished (prices unavailable), but judging from its former status, it should be a pleasant – if slightly pricier – option if you do stay in Nydri. It's down a side street diagonally opposite the Avis car-rental office.

Pinewood (☎ 26450 92075; mains €6-16.50) Okay, so Nydri does have something going for it. Locals highly recommend this efficiently run grill room, where meat is meat and they know how to cook it to perfection. It's signed to the right at the northern end of the main street.

Poros Beach Camping & Bungalows (☎ 26450 95452; www.porosbeach.com.gr; camp sites per adult/car/tent €8/4/5, studio €75-90; 📶) Twelve kilometres south of Nydri is this unpretentious complex overlooking pretty Poros Beach/Mikros Gialos. It has studio apartments and shady camping, plus restaurant, minimarket, bar and swimming pool.

Apartments Sivota (☎ 26450 31347; r €45, 2-person studio €55, 3-person apt €80-90). In Syvota, try these pleasant apartments. They're set slightly back from the beachfront, but have balconies and views, and there's a range of accommodation combinations.

Pavlos (☎ 26450 95296; mains €6.50-11; Haradiatika) 'Once upon a time, on the main square of a tiny village, stood a very special restaurant. It was basic, but it served food that all the people on the island spoke about...' This is no fairy tale; the reality is that it serves olde-style foods including *kokoretsi*, *frigadeli*, and *splinandero* (best you don't ask – think offal and innards). Eat here with the locals and you'll live happily ever after.

VASILIKI ΒΑΣΙΛΙΚΗ

Two types of people come to Vasiliki: the tanned and toned, and the sedate. Vasiliki is the centre of watersports and is considered the windsurfing location in Europe, due to distinct thermal winds. But it's not all fast sailing; the winding waterfront, with the eucalyptus and canopy-covered eateries, provides a tranquil environment in which to relax, unlike the unpleasant stony beach. Caiques take visitors to the island's better beaches and coves including Agiofylli Beach, south of Vasiliki.

Along the beach, windsurfing and sailing (catamaran) companies have staked their claims with flags, equipment and their own hotels for their package guests. If they have spare gear, some will willingly rent it to the independent enthusiast for a day or two.

Helpful **Samba Tours** (☎ 26450 31520; www.sambatours.gr) can organise car and bike hire, and answer most queries regarding the region. Other car rental places are **Christo's Alex's** (☎ 26450 31580) near the bus stop, and **GM Rentals** (☎ 26450 31650) in the main street.

Sleeping & Eating

Vassiliki Beach Camping (26450 31308; campingk@otenet.gr; camp sites person/tent/car €7.50/5/6) A neat and compact camping option with easy access to the beach.

Pension Holidays (☎ 26450 31426; d €60; 🍷) Delightful Spiros offers Greek hospitality, breakfast on the balcony with harbour vista, and simply furnished but well-equipped rooms. Above the ferry dock. Prices vary according to length of stays.

Vasiliki Bay Hotel (☎ 26450 31077; www.hotel.vassilikibay.gr; s/d incl breakfast €60/70; 🍷) If you don't mind being away from the water, you can't go too far wrong in this stylish and friendly place, up behind Alexander Restaurant. Prices enormously reduced outside August.

Delfini (Dolphin; ☎ 26450 31430; mains €6.50-13) The best of a ho-hum harbour haul; this eatery gets the most recommendations and it's open all year. Indeed, the food (including fish) is fresh and cooked to order.

WEST COAST & AROUND

Serious beach bods should skip Lefkada's east coast and head straight for the west. The sea here actually lives up to the clichéd brochure spiel; it's an incredible turquoise blue and most beaches are sandy. The best beaches include the long stretches of **Pefkoulia** and

Kathisma in the north (the latter beach is becoming more developed and there are a few studios for rent here), and remote **Egremni** and breathtaking **Porto Katsiki** in the south. You'll pass by local stalls selling olive oil, honey and wine.

Word is out about the picturesque town of **Agios Nikitas**, and people flock to enjoy the holiday village's pleasant – if claustrophobic – atmosphere, plus the lovely **Mylos Beach** just around the headland (to walk, take the path by Taverna Poseidon. It's about 15 minutes up and over the peninsula, or for €2 you can take a water taxi from tiny Agios Nikitas beach).

The town's accommodation options are plentiful, and include **Camping Kathisma** (camp sites per person/tent/car €7/5/6), 1.5km south of town. Or try the modest, but very friendly, Greek Canadian-run **Olive Tree Hotel** (☎ 26450 97453; www.olivetreelefkada.com; Agios Nikitas; s/d incl breakfast €70/90) – ask a local for directions. **Hotel Agios Nikitas** (☎ 26450 97460; www.agiosnikitas.com; Agios Nikitas; d incl breakfast €120, 4-person apt €100; 🍷), a stylish hotel with tasteful rooms and apartments in a secluded complex, is bordered by jasmine and bougainvillea and is on the coastal road just north of the village. For the quintessential fish-by-the-turquoise-sea restaurant experience, don't swim past the terrace at **Sapfo** (☎ 26450 97497; Agios Nikitas; fish per kilo €40-60), Agios Nikitas' established fish tavern. It's right on the waterfront.

Beach bums can base themselves in the village of Athani in the no-frill rooms of **Panorama** (☎ 26450 33291; d/tr without bathroom €35/50), on top of hospitable Thomas' buzzing taverna of the same name. A beer or home-style meal (mains €5 to €9.50) on the taverna terrace are the perfect sunburn cure.

Further south near the turn-off to Porto Katsiki is **Taverna Oasis** (☎ 26450 33201; mains €6.50-9), a sprawling outdoor taverna set within an established pine grove. The taverna also offers free camping for those with campervans and tents.

CENTRAL LEFKADA

The spectacular central spine of Lefkada, with its traditional farming villages, lush green peaks, fragrant pine trees, olive groves and vines – plus occasional views of the islets – is well worth seeing if you have time and transport. The small village of **Karya** is a bit of a tourist haunt but it boasts a stunning square with plane trees, around which are tavernas

and snack bars. Karya is famous for its special embroidery, introduced in the 19th century by one-handed local woman, Maria Koutsouchero. Visit the **museum** (admission €2.50; 🕒 hrs vary) for an interesting display of embroidery paraphernalia and local artefacts.

For food, **Taverna Karaboulis** (☎ 26450 41301; Karya main plaza; mains €6-13) is recommended for its meals, including *kokkinisto*, a beef, wine and tomato stew. For accommodation options ask British Brenda Sherry at **Café Pierros** (☎ 26450 41760; Karya) who can arrange all (as well as a cup of tea and signature toasted sandwich).

The island's highest village, **Englouvi**, is renowned for its honey and lentil production and is only a few kilometres south of Karya.

MEGANISI ΜΕΓΑΝΗΣΙ

pop 1090

Meganisi has the largest population of Lefkada's three inhabited satellite islets. The verdant landscape and deep bays of turquoise water, fringed by pebbled beaches, attract yachters and day visitors and, more increasingly, British 'villa fillers'. Try to spend a night; if not, a day trip is obligatory, either independently or on one of the excursion boats from Nydri (p697).

Meganisi has three settlements, including quiet and neat **Spartohori**, with narrow laneways and pretty, bougainvillea-bedecked houses, all perched on a plateau above Porto Spilia (where the ferry docks; follow the steep road or steps behind). **Vathy** is the island's second attractive harbour, and 800m behind it is the village of **Katomeri**. Those with more time up their sleeve can visit remote beaches such as **Limonari**.

Helpful **Asteria Holidays** (☎ 26450 51107), at Porto Spilia, is in the know for all things relating to the island, including trips, villas and real estate – just in case you get the urge to splurge.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Meganisi (☎ 26450 51240; Katomeri; d incl breakfast €100; 🍷 🚗) This simple but modern hotel in Katomeri has sunny rooms with balconies and expansive outlooks to the country and sea, as does the generous-sized pool and terrace. Its restaurant also comes recommended. Follow the signs once you get to Katomeri.

Worthy dining options around the island include **Taverna Porto Vathy** (☎ 26450 51125; mains €7-14), the undisputed favourite fish taverna

(fish €30 to €55 per kilo) cast out on a small quay in Vathy; **Tropicana** (☎ 26450 51486), which serves excellent pizzas in Spartohori; or **Laki's** (☎ 26450 51228), your archetypal Greek taverna, also in Spartohori.

Getting There & Away

The Meganisi ferry boat runs about six times daily between Nydri and Meganisi (per person/car €2/14, 25 to 40 minutes). It calls at Porto Spilia before Vathy (the first ferry of the day stops at Vathy, then Porto Spilia).

A local bus runs five to seven times per day between Spartohori and Vathy (via Katomeri) but it's worth bringing your own transport, as there was no island car rental at the time of research.

KEFALLONIA ΚΕΦΑΛΛΟΝΙΑ

pop 39,500

Kefallonia, the largest of the Ionian Islands, shouldn't be underestimated. It hides secrets and surprises below its rugged, towering mountain range: sprawling vineyards, stunning cliffs and beaches and unclassified Roman ruins. Kefallonia was devastated in the 1953 earthquake, so much of the island's architectural aesthetics are modern. Yet there's plenty for the traveller to discover, including beautiful harbours, walking trails and the local cuisine.

Kefallonia's capital is Argostoli, the main port is Sami, and ferry services also run from Fiskardo and Poros.

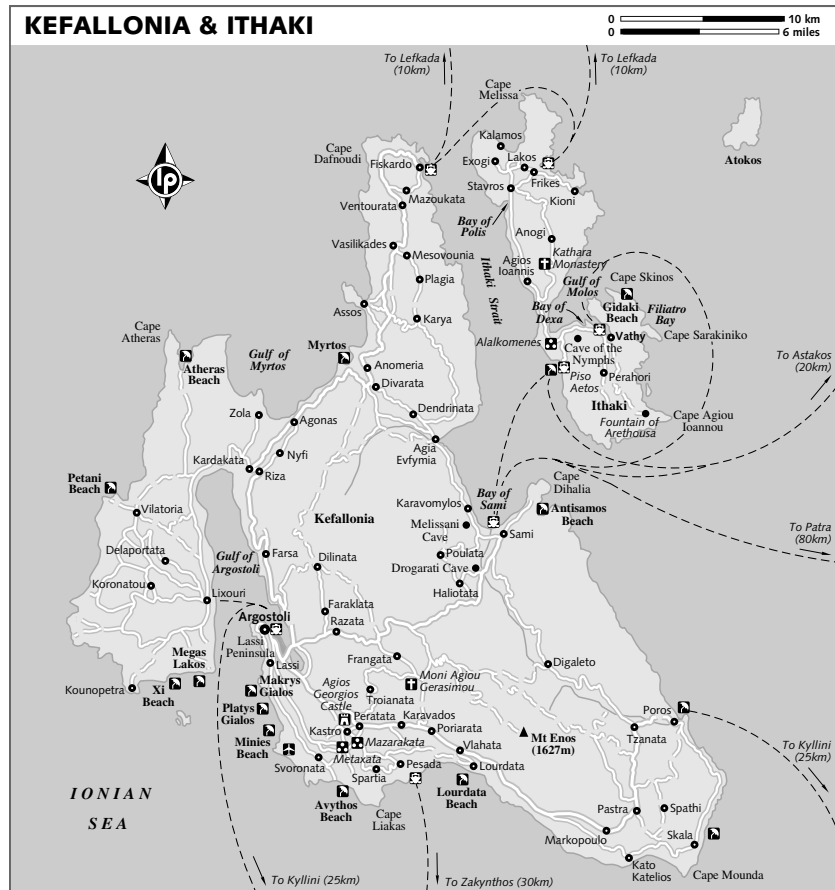
Getting There & Away

AIR

There are at least two daily flights between Kefallonia and Athens (€75), and connections to other Ionian Islands, including Zakynthos (€28) and Corfu (€35). **Olympic Airlines** (☎ 26710 28808; www.olympicairlines.com; Rokou Vergoti 1, Argostoli) can help with information and bookings.

BUS

Four daily buses connect Athens and Kefallonia (via Patra) using the various ferry services (to/from Argostoli, Sami and Poros) to the mainland. All cost around €35 and take about seven hours (prices include ferry tickets). For information contact the **KTEL bus**



station (☎ 26710 22276/81; kefaloniakteltours@yahoo.gr; A Tristi 5) on the southern waterfront in Argostoli. The office produces an excellent printed schedule.

FERRY Domestic

There are frequent ferry services to Kyllini in the Peloponnese from both Poros (per person/car €8.10/38.10, 1½ hours, two to five daily) and Argostoli (per person €12.50, three hours, one daily). One ferry links Sami with Astakos via Piso Aetos on Ithaki (€10, three hours). In August there are direct ferries from Sami to Astakos (€10, 2½ hours) on alternate days.

Strintzis Lines (www.ferries.gr/strintzis) has two ferries daily connecting Sami with Patra (per

person/car €14.50/55, 2½ hours) and Vathy (per person €5.10, one hour) or Piso Aetos (per person/car €2.20/14.50, 30 minutes).

Sailing from Fiskardo to/from Frikes (per person/car €3.40/14) takes just under an hour; Fiskardo to/from Vasiliki (per person/car €6.40/27.50) takes one hour. Information and tickets for these routes can be obtained from **Nautilus Travel** (☎ 26740 41440; Fiskardo), on the waterfront.

From the remote port of Pesada in the south there are two daily high-season services to Agios Nikolaos (€6, 1½ hours), on the northern tip of Zakynthos. Getting to and from both islands' ports without your own transport can be difficult (and costly if you rely on taxis). To get to the ferry point

in Pesada from Argostoli, you can catch one of two daily buses (in high season only and except Sundays). On Zakynthos, there are two buses per week to and from the port of Agios Nikolaos to Zante Town (via villages).

International

In high season there are regular ferries between Sami, Igoumenitsa, and Brindisi in Italy (Kefallonia–Brindisi including taxes €70, 14 hours). To get to other ports in Italy, take the ferry first from Sami to Patra.

Tickets and information can be obtained from **Vassilatos Shipping** (☎ 26710 22618; Antoni Tristi 54, Argostoli), opposite the port authority, and from **Blue Sea Travel** (☎ 26740 23007; Sami), on Sami's waterfront.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

The airport is 9km south of Argostoli. There isn't an airport bus service; a taxi costs around €15.

BUS

From Argostoli's **bus station** (☎ 26710 22281, 26710 25222) on the southern waterfront there are 11 buses daily heading to the Lassi Peninsula (€1), with four buses to Sami (€2.50), two to Poros (€4.50), two to Skala (€4.50) and two to Fiskardo (€5). There's a daily east-coast service linking Katelios with Skala, Poros, Sami, Agia Evfymia and Fiskardo. No buses operate on Sunday.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The major resorts have loads of car- and bike-rental companies. Lassi, a 20-minute walk up the hill from Argostoli, has the best choices around including **Avis/Libertas** (☎ 26710 29112; www.libertatosrentacar.com; Lassi), which is also based at the airport. **Greekstones Rent a Car** (☎ 26710 42201; www.greekstones-rentacar.com) has a good reputation and will deliver to you within a 15km radius of Svoronata (7km from Argostoli, near the airport).

FERRY

Car ferries run hourly (more frequently in high season) from 7.30am to 10.30pm between Argostoli and Lixouri, on the island's western peninsula. The journey takes 30 minutes, and tickets cost €1.60/4/1 per person/car/motorbike.

ARGOSTOLI ΑΡΓΟΣΤΟΛΙ

pop 8900

Argostoli was not rebuilt to its former Venetian splendour after the 1953 earthquake, but it's an attractive and lively place with a pleasant, authentic Greek feel. It offers plentiful sleeping and eating options, plus shopping and nightlife. The whole town seems to gather in the evenings in the central plaza.

Orientation & Information

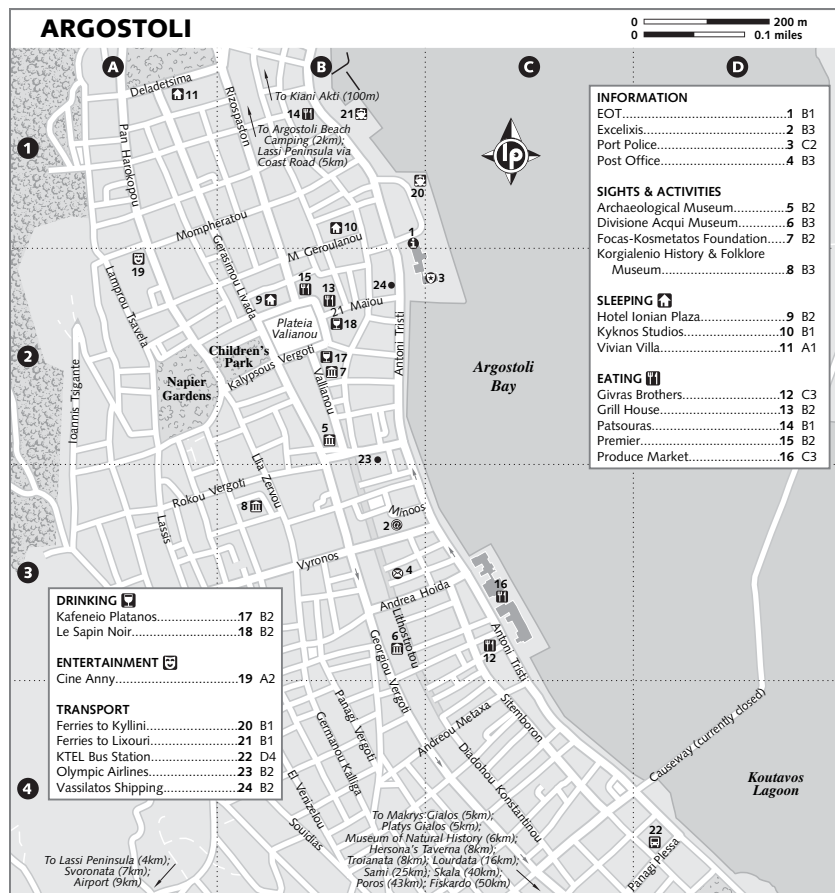
The main ferry quay is at the waterfront's northern end, and the bus station is on the southern waterfront. The centre of Argostoli's social and culinary activity is Plateia Valianou, the large palm-treed central square up from the waterfront off 21 Maiou, and its nearby surrounds. Other hubs are pedestrianised Lithostrotou, lined with smart shops, and the waterfront (Antoni Tristi, sections of which were formerly known as Ioannou Metaxa).

The **EOT** (Greek National Tourist Organisation; ☎ 26710 22248; ☹ 8am–2.30pm Mon–Fri) is on the northern waterfront beside the port police. There are banks with ATMs along the northern waterfront and on Lithostrotou. The post office is on Lithostrotou, and internet is available at **Excelixis** (cnr Minoos & Asklipiou; per hr €4).

Sights & Activities

The **Korgialenio History & Folklore Museum** (☎ 26710 28835; Iliia Zervou 12; admission €4; ☹ 9am–2pm Mon–Sat) and **Focas-Kosmetatos Foundation** (☎ 26710 26595; Vallianou; admission €3; ☹ 9.30am–1pm & 7–10pm Mon–Sat) provide interesting insights into Argostoli's cultural history – the former more general, the latter delving into the world of the nobility. The town's **Archaeological Museum** (☎ 26710 28300; Rokou Vergoti; admission €3; ☹ 8.30am–3pm Tue–Sun) has a collection of well displayed and labelled island relics, including Mycenaean finds. The one-room **Divisione Acqui Museum** (☎ 6945776294; Lithostrotou; admission free; ☹ hrs vary), to the left of the Catholic church, details the disturbing history of the Italian 'Acqui Division' during their occupation of Kefallonia (and of their slaughter by the Germans).

Six kilometres from Argostoli in Davgata is the **Museum of Natural History** (☎ 26710 84400; admission €2.50; ☹ 9am–3pm), with fascinating exhibits on the geological and natural phenomena of the island, and an excellent topographical model of the island in relief.



The town's closest and largest sandy beaches are **Makrys Gialos** and **Platys Gialos**, 5km south. Regular buses serve the area.

Lourdata, 16km from Argostoli on the Argostoli–Poros road, has an attractive long beach set against a mountainous green backdrop.

Those wanting more physical exertion should contact **Monte Nero Activities** (☎ 6934010400, 6932904360; www.monte-nero-activities.com). Staff organise environmentally friendly sea kayaking (day tours €55 with lunch and snorkelling gear), cycling and hiking tours in the island's coastal regions.

Tours

KTEL (☎ 26710 25222/22281; kefaloniakteltours@yahoo.com; tours €15–35) runs excellent-value day tours of

Kefallonia, visiting several towns and villages around the island (including a folkloric tour to monasteries). It also takes tours to other islands (Ithaki and Zakynthos). Bookings can be made at the KTEL bus station building.

Sleeping

A string of shampoo-and-sewing-kit-style hotels line the waterfront and Plateia Valianou, with prices to suit most budgets. **KTEL Tours** (☎ 26710 23364; kefaloniakteltours@yahoo.com) has a selection of apartments and hotel options available and will organise these via email.

Argostoli Beach Camping (☎ 26710 23487; www.argostolibeach.gr; camp sites per adult/car/tent €7.50/3.50/4) This pleasant camping spot is away from the

humdrum, near the lighthouse on the northernmost point of the peninsula.

Kyknos Studios (☎ 26710 23398; P-Krousos@otenet.gr; M Geroulanou 4; d €50) An historic well sits in front of these seven bright, if a little faded, studios, each with small veranda. But you don't need to dig too deep to enjoy the surrounds and attractive, well-kept garden.

Vivian Villa (☎ 26710 23396; www.kefalonias-vivianvilla.gr; Deladetsima 9; r/studio/apt €60/70/130; ☎) Highly recommended for its squeaky-clean bright rooms and bubbly owners. There are even tea-making facilities in each room, and prices are discounted for longer stays.

Hotel Ionian Plaza (☎ 26710 25581; www.ionianplaza.gr; Plateia Valianou; s/d/tr €82/119/155; ☎) Argostoli's smartest hotel has a marble-decorated lobby, stylish public areas and well-appointed rooms with balconies. Prices can be significantly reduced outside high season, as can (some of) the plaza noise, thanks to the window's double-glazing.

Eating

Grill House (gyros €2) This popular and cheap place is found among the pricey cafés on Plateia Valianou, next to Hotel Aeon.

Givras Brothers (☎ 26710 24259; Vasili Vadorou 1; mains €4–7) One of Argostoli's most traditional family-run restaurants and favourite old haunt of locals. Basic rooms (double with bathroom €30) can be found upstairs.

Patsuras (☎ 26710 22779; Antoni Tristi 32; mains €5–10) A great range of authentic dishes from which to choose. Locals think it's good value, and so should you.

Kiani Akti (☎ 26710 26680; mains €8–13) Posh and for those with dosh. This seafood restaurant serves top quality fish (€60 to €80 per kilo) in a nautical environment. It's located on the Argostoli quay opposite the merchant marine academy. The razor clams are sourced from secret locations by an Italian diver.

Premier (☎ 26710 23280; Plateia Valianou) The premier place to be seen, especially for mature locals with a bit of spare cash and a penchant for sweets and *gelati* that truly are *numero uno*.

Eight kilometres southeast from Argostoli, in the village of Troianata, **Hersona's Taverna** (☎ 26710 69940; mains €3–9) is a carnivore's dream. Fresh carcasses hang on display in the kitchen, a kitchen that produces superlative meaty delights.

You can pick up a range of self-catering supplies from the waterfront produce mar-

ket and from bakeries and supermarkets nearby.

Drinking

Plateia Valianou is a barfly's delight, with both crowds and music upbeat until late. Cool cats chill at Le Sapin Noir or Kafeneio Platanos.

Entertainment

The outdoor cinema **Cine Anny** (☎ 26710 25880; Pan Harokopou 54; admission €8) shows films between June and August.

SAMI & SURROUNDS ΣΑΜΗ pop 2200

Sami, 25km northeast of Argostoli and the main port of Kefallonia, was also flattened by the 1953 earthquake. Its exposed long strip is made up of tourist-oriented cafés, but beyond this it's an attractive place, nestled in a bay and flanked by steep hills. It promotes itself as the gateway to Kefallonia. Indeed, it provides an enjoyable introduction or stopover; it has several monasteries, ancient castle ruins, caves, walks and nearby beaches that reflect the region's ancient and rich history. All facilities, including a post office and banks, are in town. Buses for Argostoli usually meet ferries, and car hire is available through **Karavomilos** (☎ 26740 23769). Sami's **tourist office** (☎ 9am–8pm May–Oct) is at the northern end of town. An informative website is www.sami.com.

Sights & Activities

The Municipality of Sami has published a simple brochure called *Walking Trail*, which outlines wonderful walks through the local area. Trails encompass the acropolis of ancient Sami (around 500 BC), Roman ruins and churches, plus nature: pine forests, olive groves, streams and beaches. The brochures are available from the tourist office.

Don't miss **Antisamos Beach**, 4km northeast of Sami. The long, stony beach is in a lovely green setting backed by hills. The drive here is also a highlight, offering dramatic views from cliff edges.

The rather overrated **Melissani Cave** (admission incl boat trip €5; ☎ 8am–8pm), a subterranean sea-water lake that turns an extraordinary blue, is only worth visiting when the sun is overhead between noon and 2pm. It's 2.5km west of Sami. The extraordinary **Drogarati Cave** (☎ 26740 22950; admission €3.50; ☎ 8am–8pm) is a massive (natural) chamber with stalactites.

But be aware that tourism is taking its toll – hot lights, bodies and seasonal concerts within the area are increasing the temperatures in this two-million-year-old cave (stalactites grow at the rate of 1cm every 100 to 150 years), causing a speedy and ultimately detrimental meltdown.

Sleeping

Karavomilos Beach Camping (☎ 26740 22480; www.camping-karavomilos.gr; camp sites per adult/car/tent €7.50/3.50/5.50; 📍) A large, green, award-winning camping ground in a glorious beachfront location, with all the facilities zipped up, too.

Hotel Melissani (☎ 26740 22464; d/tr €65/75) Sixties-cum-'70s, hip, hop and happenin'. Although built in the early '80s, a Maxwell Smart/Austin Powers morph would feel at home here, especially in the bar – an eclectic décor of swivelling vinyl bar stools, retro lights, marble floors and groovy tiles. Small-ish rooms with balconies have good views of mountains or sea.

Hotel Kastro (☎ 26740 22656; www.kastrohotel.com; s/d/tr €67/96/115) If Hotel Melissani is full, try this place in the town centre, but expect it to be your average modern(ish) hotel experience.

Eating

Dining out in Sami tends to be a repetitive experience, with little to distinguish the menus or settings of the restaurants that line the waterfront. If you have your own wheels, you're better off following your tummy rumbles in the direction of village tavernas, or heading west to the tranquil Agia Evfymia.

Rombolis (☎ 0674023323; Poulata; 🍷 dinner) This is very much a local joint – the owner raises an animal herd for his eatery. While vegetarians might not appreciate the wholesome-beast-on-a-spit experience, this place is not to be missed by those who can gratefully stomach generous fillings and Greek hospitality. Located 5km from Sami, in Poulata village opposite the church.

Paradise Beach (☎ 26740 61392; mains €6.50-13, fish per kg €48-52; Agia Evfymia) Stavros, the charismatic owner of this place, is sentimental about serving Penelope Cruz and cast when they were on the island filming *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*. The movie cast may be long gone from the island, but his delicious dishes live on. Try the chocolate soufflé (€8.50). The location has a star-studded view of the natural kind.

ASSOS ΑΣΟΣ

Tiny Assos is an upmarket gem of whitewashed and pastel houses, straddling the isthmus of a peninsula on which stands a Venetian fortress. The fortress is a pleasant place to hike to and around, with superlative views and a great historical ambience.

For accommodation, try the **Pension Gerania** (☎ 26740 51526; www.pensiongerania.gr; d inc breakfast €80; 📍). True to its name, geraniums are the feature of this lush, shady garden, and the light and appealing rooms afford pleasant views. Follow the *pension* (and parking) sign as you enter town.

Così's Inn (☎ 26740 51420, 6936754330; www.cosisinn.gr; 2-/3-person studio €100/115; 📍) is not typically 'Greek' but has the marks of the young and hip interior designer owner: iron beds and sofas, frosted lights and white décor feature strongly.

Another favourite for quality and views is **Linardos Studios** (☎ 26740 51563; d €80, 4-person apt €95).

For eating, **Platanos** (☎ 6944671804; mains €6-13) is in an attractive shady setting near the waterfront. It has good vegetarian choices and even better meaty ones, including roast suckling pig.

AROUND ASSOS

One of Greece's most breathtaking and picture-perfect beaches is **Myrtos**, 8km south of Assos along the hair-raising stretch of road that goes north to Fiskardo. From the safety of a designated viewing area, you can admire and photograph the white sand and exquisite blue water set between tall limestone cliffs. The beach has minimal facilities – just a basic taverna and sunbed hire. Be aware that the beach drops off quickly and sharply, but once you are in the water it's a heavenly experience. Think clichéd turquoise and aqua water.

FISKARDO ΦΙΣΚΑΡΔΟ

pop 225

Fiskardo, 50km north of Argostoli, was the only Kefallonian village not devastated by the 1953 earthquake. Framed by cypress-mantled hills and with fine Venetian buildings, it has a delightful, if slightly sanitised, Disneyland-style feel. It's a favourite port-o'-call for yachters with attitude. Recently, ancient ruins have been uncovered in the village.

Prices in Fiskardo are as high as a mainsail. **Pama Travel** (☎ 26740 41033; www.pamatravel.com) on

the harbour front can help with travel services including car and boat hire, plus it has internet access (per hour €4).

The **Fiskardo Nautical and Environmental Club** (☎ 26740 41081; www.fnec.gr; 🕒 10am-2pm, 5-7.30pm Mon-Sat May-Oct) is an excellent not-for-profit organisation that runs a small local museum and environmental information centre (up the stairs next to the church). It also takes scuba diving and runs dolphin-, turtle- and monk seal-spotting research activities. Volunteers are welcome for short- or long-term projects.

Sleeping & Eating

Regina's Rooms (☎ 26740 41125; d/r €50/70) Friendly Regina runs a popular place that has colourful rooms dotted with plastic flowers. Some rooms have kitchenettes and/or balconies enjoying views over the water. Enter from the main car park.

Stella Apartments (☎ 26740 41211; www.stella-apartments.gr; d €90, apt €190; 📍) This Greek version of Fawlty Towers – in that it resembles an English-style guesthouse – has immaculate, spacious studios with kitchen, TV, phone, air-con and balcony, and a communal dining area. It's about 800m from the main car park.

Faros Suites (☎ 26740 41355; www.myrtoscorp.com; ste €105-160; 📍 🍷) For your fluffy bathrobe-type experience, head to these apartments, where *Out of Africa* comes to Greece. With a luxury safari lodge feel (teak furniture and cotton linens) in a local setting (turquoise water views and bougainvillea), plus the hospitality of the Greek-South African owners, you'll have trouble moving from the tasteful rooms, relaxation areas, or swimming pool.

Café Tseleniti (☎ 26740 41344; mains €6.50-22) Housed in a 19th-century building that survived the 1953 earthquake, the international dishes here are sublime, as is the romantic outdoor setting, which features spotlighted brollies. Inside, be sure to view the fresco on the side wall, drawn by some wishful Greek patriots.

Also recommended:

Villa Romantza (☎ 26740 41322; www.villa-romantza.gr; r/studio €50/70, apt €80-110; 📍) An excellent budget choice with simple and clean rooms. It's found next door to Regina's rooms on the car park. Cheaper out of season.

Emelisse Hotel (☎ 26740 41200; www.arthotel.gr; r/ste from €245/285; 📍 🍷) Chic and luxurious (plus,

we found, a little standoffish and snobby), this is the place for those who want the lot.

Uta & Toni's (☎ 26740 41022; utarose2@yahoo.gr; per week studio/apt/cottage €350/400/580) Regular guests may be wiffed that the word's finally out. This old restored whitewashed Greek farmhouse – with a selection of rooms – provides isolation in a stunning setting. Not to mention the owners' personality on tap.

Getting There & Away

You can get to/from Fiskardo by ferry to/from Lefkada and Ithaki or by bus to/from Argostoli. The ferry is at one end of the waterfront; ask the bus to drop you at the turn-off, or it's a 10-minute walk from the car park to the ferry.

ITHAKI ΙΘΑΚΗ

pop 3700

Diminutive Ithaki is the diamond of the Ionians. It is believed to be the mythical home of Homer's Odysseus, where his loyal wife Penelope patiently awaited his homecoming. This tranquil island is two large peninsulas – joined by a narrow isthmus – with sheer cliffs, precipitous mountainous passages and pockets of cypresses and olive groves. Nestled around this compact gem are beautiful fishing hamlets (tastefully rebuilt after the 1953 earthquake) and discreet pebbly coves. Monasteries and churches offer Byzantine delights and splendid views. The locals here are rightfully proud of their island.

Getting There & Away

Strintzis Lines (www.feries.gr/strintzis-ferries) has two ferries daily connecting Vathy or Piso Aetos with Patra (per person/car €14.50/55, four hours), via Sami on Kefallonia (per person €5.10 to/from Vathy, one hour, or to/from Piso Aetos €2.20, 30 minutes).

Ionian Pelagosruns a daily ferry (sometimes twice a day) in high season between Piso Aetos, Sami and Astakos on the mainland (per person/car €8/33, 2½ hours direct from Piso Aetos to Astakos, three hours from Astakos to Piso Aetos via Sami).

Other ferries run to ever-changing schedules from Vasiliki and Nydri (Lefkada) to Frikes (Ithaki) and Fiskardo (Kefallonia). The Frikes-Fiskardo trip takes just under an hour (per person/car €3.40/14) and Nydri-Frikes

takes 1½ hours (€5.30/26.50). Frikes–Vasiliki goes via Fiskardo and takes two hours.

Information and tickets for these routes can be obtained from Delas Tours (right) on the main square in Vathy.

Getting Around

Piso Aetos, on Ithaki's west coast, has no settlement; taxis often meet boats, as does the municipal bus in high season only. The island's one bus runs twice daily (weekdays only, more often in high season) between Kioni and Vathy via Stavros and Frikes (€3.50), and its limited schedule is not well suited to day-trippers. Taxis are relatively expensive (about €25 for the Vathy–Frikes trip), so your best bet is to hire a moped or car (or a motorboat) to get around. In Vathy, **Rent a Scooter** (☎ 26740 32840) is down the lane-way opposite the port authority. For cars, try **Happy Cars** – contact Polyctor Tours (right) or **Alpha Bike & Car Hire** (☎ 26740 33243) behind Alpha Bank.

VATHY ΒΑΘΥ

pop 1820

Ithaki's pretty main town sprawls along its elongated seafront. Compact museums are situated in its twisting streets, while cafés and restaurants line the attractive central square, the centre's social hub.

The ferry quay is on the western side of the bay. To reach the central square (Plateia Efstathiou Drakouli), turn left and follow the waterfront.

ODYSSEUS & ITHAKI

Ithaki has long been identified as the home of the mythical hero Odysseus (Ulysses); it was the island home he left so that he could fight in the Trojan War. According to Homer's *The Iliad*, and more specifically *The Odyssey*, the hero Odysseus took 10 long years to return home to Ithaki from Troy on the Asia Minor coast.

Odysseus survived tempestuous seas, sea monsters and a cunning siren, until finally he was helped by friendly Phaeacians and was returned to Ithaki. Here, disguised as a beggar, he – along with his son Telemachus and his old swineherd Eumaeus – slayed the conniving suitors who'd been trying to woo Penelope, Odysseus' long-suffering wife who'd waited 20 years for him to return.

No mention of Ithaki appears in writings of the Middle Ages. As late as 1504, the island was almost uninhabited following repeated depredations by pirates, so the Venetians convinced settlers from neighbouring islands to repopulate it. Yet – as enthusiasts point out – the island appears to be described in *The Odyssey*; it matches in many respects the physical nature of the island today. These sites include the 'Fountain of Arethousa' and the 'Cave of the Nymphs' (currently closed under controversial circumstances). However, many Homerists have been hard-pressed to ascribe other locales described in *The Odyssey* – particularly Odysseus' castle – to actual places on the islands, because of scant archaeological remains.

Ithaki has no tourist office. Helpful Stavros at **Delas Tours** (☎ 26740 32104; www.ithaca.com.gr) and business-focused **Polyctor Tours** (☎ 26740 33120; www.ithakiholidays.com), both on the main square, can help with tourist information. The main square also has banks with ATMs; the post office; and internet access – try **Net** (per hr €4).

Sights & Activities

Behind Hotel Mentor is an excellent **archaeological museum** (☎ 26740 32200; admission free; ☎ 8.30am–3pm Tue–Sun). Of note are ancient coins depicting Odysseus. The informative **nautical & folklore museum** (admission €1; ☎ 10am–2pm & 5–9pm Tue–Sat) is housed in an old generating station one block behind the plaza. The interesting displays include traditional clothing, household items and shipping paraphernalia.

Boat excursions leave from Vathy harbour in the summer months and include day trips around Ithaki and to Fiskardo (€30); Lefkada (€35); and 'unknown islands' that include Atokos and Kalamos (€35). There's also a water taxi to **Gidaki Beach**. Note: the only way to access this beach on foot is to follow the walking track from Skinari Beach.

Sleeping

Grivas Gerasimos Rooms (☎ 26740 33328; d/tr €70/84) Pot plants, small balconies and a seaside vista are all pleasant features of this spacious studio budget option. Turn right at the Century Club on the waterfront and first left at the road parallel to the sea. The studios are 50m on

your right. Prices are negotiable depending on your length of stay.

Odyssey Apartments (☎ 26740 33400; www.ithaki-odyssey.com; apt €100–160; ☎ ☎) It seems a bit of an odyssey to get here – 1.5km east of town – but those with a car or strong legs should consider this excellent option. There are light, breezy studios and apartments with balconies, and a magical view of the yacht harbour and beyond.

Hotel Perantzada (☎ 26740 33496; www.arthotel.gr/perantzada/; Odissea Androutsou; d €176–365, ste €260–585; ☎ ☎) Part of the Emelisse chain, this upmarket boutique hotel gets full marks for originality. Each room in this light-blue, neo-classical building (designed by 19th-century German architect Ernst Schiller) has been individually decorated with Italian-style flair and fabrics, including contemporary nautical and botanic themes. At the time of research the hotel was expanding; an adjoining building was being renovated, complete with breakfast area and infinity pool.

Eating & Drinking

Eating at the restaurants along the western waterfront is a *Groundhog Day* experience; identical menus in similar settings on the same patch. Distinct culinary sensations can be found within a 1km radius of the centre.

For a sweet experience, try *rovani*, the local speciality made with rice, honey and cloves, at one of the patisseries on or near the main square.

Café Karamela (☎ 26740 33580; snacks €2–6) The western quay is home to this welcoming place, where a massive window literally frames the bay view. Linger with the locals over the café's board games, books and TV, plus home-made snacks such as cake and pastries.

Drosia (☎ 26740 32959; mains €6–15) Ask a Vathy local where to eat, and the response is overwhelmingly consistent. This authentic taverna serves good hearty food at reasonable prices. The grilled meat includes chicken skewers (€6.50) and lamb chops (€8.50). You might catch the patrons spontaneously dancing to a bouzouki-playing friend. It's 1km up the hill on the road to Filiatro.

Also recommended:

Para thin'alos (☎ 26740 33567; snacks €7) A great bar serving French wines plus delicious light meals with an international twist. The owner-chef has *savoir-faire*.

Gregory's Taverna/Paliocaravo (☎ 26740 32573; www.paliocaravo.sphosting.com; mains €7–19) This long-

standing family concern serves fish and tasty specialities to yachties and gourmands. It's 1km east of town on the waterfront.

Piccolo (☎ 26740 33626; meals €7–10) Head here for an Asian fix. It's nestled in behind the main square.

AROUND ITHAKI

Ithaki proudly claims several sites associated with Homer's tale, *The Odyssey* (see boxed text, opposite). Finding the hyped-up locations can be an epic journey – signage is a bit scant. Many seem to be myths themselves, so vague are their locations, but there's no questioning the spirit of this island. The **Fountain of Arethousa**, in the island's south, is where Odysseus' swineherd, Eumaeus, is believed to have brought his pigs to drink. The exposed and isolated hike – through unspoiled landscape with great sea views – takes 1½ to two hours (return) from the turn-off; this excludes the hilly 5km trudge up the road to the sign itself. Take a hat and water.

The **Bay of Dexa**, 1km west of Vathy, is thought to be ancient Phorkys, where the Phaeacians safely delivered Odysseus home. (Note: despite the sign, Cave of the Nymphs is closed and unsafe to visit).

The location of Odysseus' palace has been much disputed and archaeologists have been unable to find conclusive evidence; some present-day archaeologists speculate it was on **Pelikata Hill** near Stavros, while German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann (p31) believed it to be at **Alalkomenes**, near Piso Aetos. Also in Stavros visit the small **archaeological museum** (☎ 26740 31305; admission free; ☎ 9am–2.30pm Tue–Sun), where minder Fotini Couvaras is almost an exhibit herself, so committed is she to this site.

To move away from Homeric myths, head 14km north of Vathy to sleepy **Anogi**, the old capital. Its restored church of **Agia Panagia** (claimed to be from the 12th century) has incredible Byzantine frescoes and a Venetian bell tower. You can obtain the keys from Nikos, at the neighbouring *kafeneio*.

The tiny, understated village of **Frikes** is set in among windswept cliffs. It has several good accommodation options and waterfront restaurants, a popular bar and a relaxed ambience. It's the ferry departure point for Lefkada.

Sleeping & Eating

Mrs Vasilopoulos' Rooms (☎ 26740 31027; Stavros; d/apt €50/70) These homely studios are in a lane

HOT HIKES IN ITHAKI

Walking is a great way to explore Ithaki and Homeric sites, and keen ramblers will not be disappointed. Ithaki's compact size allows walkers to experience dramatic scenery changes in relatively short walks, including 360-degree views of the ocean and surrounding islands. Thanks to the single-handed efforts of islander Denis Skinari and his band of helpers, around 10 cleared and marked trails exist around island. These include Kalamos to Exogi, Exogi to Stavros, Anogi to Kathara Monastery (Moni Katharon), and Aetos to Alakomenae Castle. Mr Skinari has prepared brief notes and maps; if they are not available at the Town Hall, ring him direct on ☎ 26740 31080. Wear sturdy footwear, cover up against strong sun (as well as prickly bushes) and take plenty of water.

diagonally off to the right-hand side of Soris' Ways Café on the square, below the owner's house. The pretty garden overlooks olive and cypress groves. A great base from which to explore and visit the nearby Bay of Polis.

Fatouros Taverna (☎ 26740 31385; Stavros; mains €5-12) The faux-brick exterior of the building hides a homely interior and popular eatery; at the entrance there's a spit for roasting delicious meats. Not surprisingly, the house specialities include lamb on the spit (€7.50) and eggplant rolls (€5).

Kioni Κίονι

Kioni is a small village draped around a verdant hillside and spilling down to a miniature harbour where yachties congregate. Lining the quay are tavernas, a bar or two and flower-covered buildings (some of the houses survived the 1953 earthquake). Swimmers can access a small beach at the cove's far-eastern end, or the bays between Kioni and Frikes.

Mrs Karatzis' Rooms (☎ 26740 31679; studio €50) Despite the white buildings' distinctive cherry-red shutters, you'll see blue before you – 'the sea, the beautiful sea' view from the balcony of these simple but pleasant studio rooms is stupendous. Situated on the hill-peak on the approach into Kioni, behind the village itself.

Captain's Apartments (☎ 26740 31481; www.captains-apartments.gr; d €65, 4-person apt €90) The Captain's studios and apartments are worth berthing at. Each well-maintained room is shipshape, with satellite TV and terrace or balcony. Good navigational signs show you the way.

Several tavernas are lined up like yachts along the harbour – each claims to serve better food than at the others, but in reality, most serve the same reasonable meals at the same reasonable(ish) prices (mains €7 to €13).

ZAKYNTHOS ZAKYNTHOΣ

pop 38,600

Zakynthos (*zahn-in-thos*), also known as Zante, has a split personality. Its geography is mountainous and rocky in the west, with a fertile plain in the east. While the island's west remains largely unspoiled, its eastern coastal areas are the victim of the worst manifestations of package tourism. Tourism is also endangering the loggerhead turtle (see boxed text, p712). Yet the island has inspired many other descriptions. The Venetians called it Flower of the Orient; the poet Dionysios Solomos wrote that 'Zakynthos could make one forget the Elysian Fields'. Indeed, on the whole, Zakynthos has exceptional natural beauty, welcoming locals and great cuisine. To enjoy a relaxing holiday here avoid high season, especially in resorts such as Laganas.

Getting There & Away

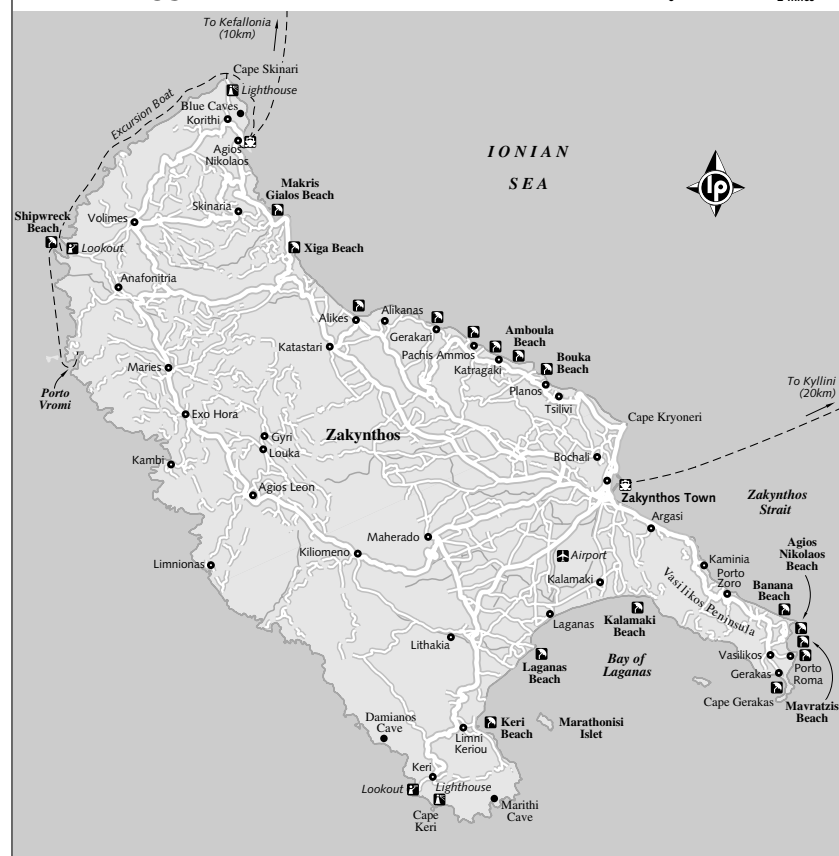
AIR

There are at least one or two daily flights between Zakynthos and Athens (€76), and connections to other Ionian Islands including Kefallonia (€32) and Corfu (€51). **Olympic Airlines** (☎ 26950 28611/28322; Zakynthos Airport; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Fri) can help with information and bookings.

BUS

KTEL (☎ 26950 22255; Filita 42, Zakynthos Town) operates four buses daily between Zakynthos Town and Patra (€5.20, 3½ hours), and four daily connections to/from Athens (€22.10, six hours) via Corinth Canal (€15.80, five hours). There's also a twice-weekly service to Thessaloniki (€42.20). Budget an additional €6.50 for the ferry fare between Zakynthos and Kyllini.

ZAKYNTHOS



FERRY

Domestic

Depending on the season, between five and seven ferries operate daily between Zakynthos Town and Kyllini in the Peloponnese (per person/car €6.50/31.50, 1¼ hours). Tickets can be obtained from the **Zakynthos Shipping Cooperative** (☎ 26950 22083/49500; Lombardou 40) in Zakynthos Town.

From the northern port of Agios Nikolaos a ferry service shuttles across to Pesada in southern Kefallonia twice daily from May to October (€6, 1½ hours). In high season, there are two daily buses from Pesada to Argostoli (Kefallonia), and two per week to Agios Nikolaos, making crossing without your own transport difficult. An alternative

is to cross to Kyllini and catch another ferry to Kefallonia.

International

Hellenic Mediterranean Lines (www.hml.gr) has July and August services once or twice a week between Brindisi and Zakynthos (one way €69 to €82, about 18 hours).

Getting Around

There's no bus service between Zakynthos Town and the airport, 6km to the southwest. A taxi costs around €10. Frequent buses go from Zakynthos Town's **bus station** (☎ 26950 22255; Filita 42), one block back from the waterfront, to the developed resorts of Alikes (€1.50), Tsilivi, Argasi, Laganas and Kalamaki

(all €1.20). Bus services to other villages are infrequent. Several useful local buses take the upper or lower main roads to Katastari and Volimes. Ask at the bus station.

Car- and moped-rental places are plentiful in the larger resorts. Zakynthos Town is also well serviced. The best option is **Hire-Auto** (☎ 26950 24808; Lombardou 92), run through BesTour. Other reliable companies include **Europcar** (☎ 26950 41541; Plateia Agiou Louka), which also has a branch at the airport (☎ 26950 22853), and **Hertz** (☎ 26950 45706; Lombardou 38).

ZAKYNTHOS TOWN

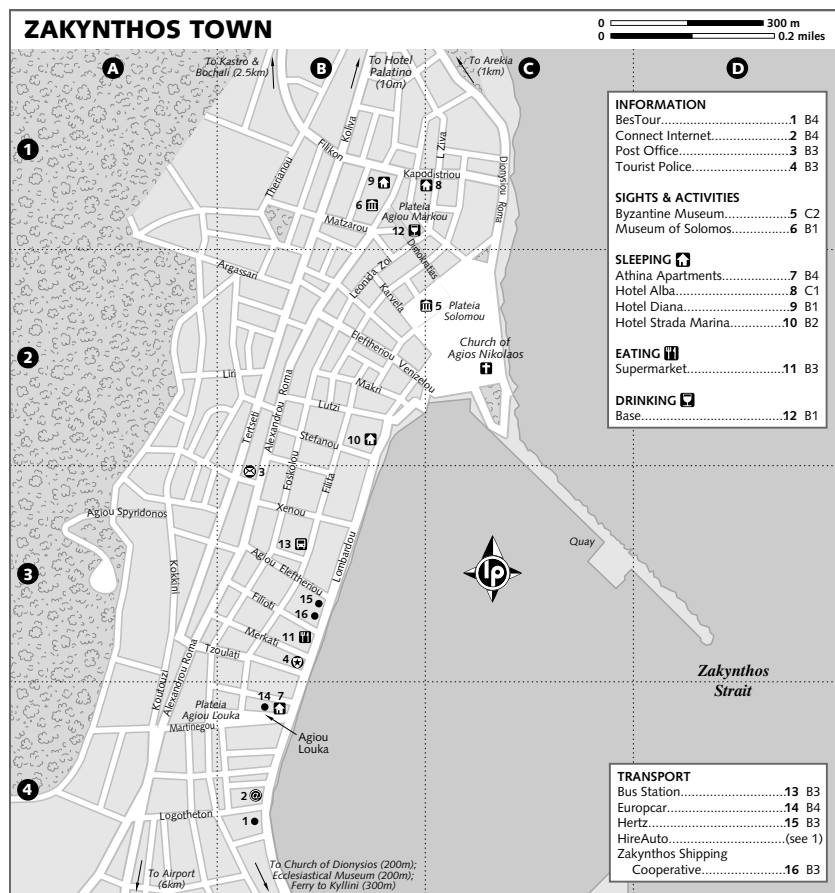
pop 11,200

Zakynthos Town is the capital and port of the island. The town was devastated by the 1953

earthquake, but was reconstructed to its former layout with arcaded streets, imposing squares and gracious neoclassical public buildings. A Venetian fortress on a hill provides an attractive backdrop to the town. Despite its strung-out feel, Zakynthos Town features a semblance of Greekness, when compared with many of the overtouristed parts of the island. The northern area (around Plateia Agiou Markou) is of most interest to visitors, with hotels, restaurants and museums clustered around here.

Orientation & Information

Plateia Solomou is on the northern waterfront of Lombardou, opposite the ferry quay. Plateia Agiou Markou is behind it. The bus station is on Filita, one block back from the waterfront



and south of the quay. The main thoroughfare is Alexandrou Roma, running several blocks inland, parallel to the waterfront.

Zakynthos Town has no tourist office. The **tourist police** (☎ 26950 27367; Lombardou 62) has dated brochures for visitors – if the room is open, that is. Your best bet is to head to the ‘nothing’s-a-problem’, professional staff at **BesTour** (☎ 26950 24808; www.bestour.gr; cnr Lombardou & Logotheton), who can answer queries and arrange accommodation and trips.

There are banks with ATMs along Lombardou and just west of Plateia Solomou. The **post office** (Tertseti 27; ☎ 7am-2pm) is one block west of Alexandrou Roma. **Connect Internet** (Lombardou 84; per hr €3; ☎ 9am-1am) offers good internet access.

Sights & Activities

The **Byzantine museum** (☎ 26950 42714; Plateia Solomou; admission €3; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun) houses two levels of fabulous ecclesiastical art, rescued from churches razed in the earthquake. It’s all displayed in a beautiful setting overlooking the main plaza. Within, the St Andreas Monastery has been artfully ‘replicated’ to house its restored frescoes. The nearby **Museum of Solomos** (☎ 26950 28982; Plateia Agiou Markou; admission €3; ☎ 9am-2pm) is dedicated to Dionysios Solomos (1798–1857), who was born on Zakynthos and is regarded as the father of modern Greek poetry. His work *Hymn to*

Liberty became the stirring Greek national anthem. The museum houses his memorabilia and archives.

The peaceful, shady and pine tree-filled **kastrolia** (☎ 26950 48099; admission €3; ☎ 8.30am-6pm), a ruined Venetian fortress high above Zakynthos Town, makes a pleasant visit. It’s 2.5km from town in the quaint village of Bochali (take Dionysiou Roma north and turn left at Kapodistriou; it’s signed from here). Enjoy the bird’s-eye view with an ice cream, or dine at one of Bochali’s well-sited restaurants. The **Church of Dionysios**, the patron saint of the island, in Zakynthos Town’s south has some amazing gilt work and notable frescoes. Behind the church is an **ecclesiastical museum** (admission €2; ☎ 9am-1pm & 5-9pm). It contains intriguing icons from the Monastery of Strofades, home to Dionysios, plus speech scrolls from the 13th and 14th centuries and a 12th-century book in Ancient Greek.

Sleeping

The newest sleeping options are netted by tour groups, but the following are safe bets for independent travellers.

Hotel Alba (☎ 26950 26641; www.albahotel.gr; L Ziva 38; s/d/tr incl breakfast €60/70/116; ☎) This friendly place, with a slightly old-fashioned feel, is a good budget option (the prices are slashed outside August). The views are a bit wire-ridden, but it’s clean and adequate.

EXPLORING WITH YOUR TASTE BUDS

Gourmands may be surprised to know that Zakynthos boasts some excellent local cuisine, and any small village taverna serves a fine meal. Searching for the hidden eateries is a great way of discovering the island. Many are nondescript from the outside, but serve high-quality, delectable food to a mainly local clientele. Others are lovely for their location, in tiny villages or high above cliff-tops. Following are some popular places to get you exploring.

Dennis Taverna (☎ 26950 51387; mains €6-12; Lithakia; ☎ lunch & dinner) Meat-lovers mustn’t miss this busy place, renowned for its quality meat cuts and grills. Half-serves might be adequate for a non-Greek – the servings are brontosaurus-size (there’s even a kid’s menu).

To Litrovou (☎ 26950 55081; mains €6.50-14; Lithakia; ☎ lunch & dinner) You’ll be impressed by this attractive option, which is built around an olive oil stone presser and features related oddments. It’s a more touristy, yet extremely appealing, experience with out-of-this-world local fare. Go with an appetite; servings are plentiful.

Louha’s Coffee Shop (☎ 26950 48426; mains €4-7; Louka; ☎ lunch & dinner) The type of place even a guidebook writer wants to keep secret: this is one of the most genuine experiences around. You sit in the host family’s garden, enjoying their local specialities. This gem is hidden in the village, opposite the church. Ask here about the monastery walk.

To Pelagaki (☎ 6977633542; Xiga; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Situated on a sharp bend just before the odorous Xiga Beach (the waters have sulphuric properties, popular for health reasons), this serves basic, and OK, fare in a glorious cliff-top setting.

AT LOGGERHEADS

The Ionian Islands are home to the Mediterranean's loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*), one of Europe's most endangered marine species. The turtles prefer large tracts of clean, flat and uninhabited sand, as do basking tourists, and this has led to the imminent extinction of the turtle.

Zakynthos hosts the largest density of turtle nests – around 1100 along the 5km Bay of Laganas. During hatching time (July to October), surviving hatchlings emerge after a 60-day incubation period in the sand. Many of the nests are destroyed by brollies and bikes, and the surviving young don't make it to the water – they are often disoriented by sunbeds, noise and lights.

Conservation lobbyists have clashed with local authorities, tourist operators and government, and in 1999, following pressure from the EU, the Greek Government declared the Bay of Laganas area a national marine park. Strict regulations were put in force regarding building, boating, mooring, fishing and watersports in designated zones.

All designated nesting beaches are completely off-limits between dusk and dawn during the breeding season (May to October). Despite this, dozens of illegal bars and tavernas operate in the area, illegal umbrellas and sunbeds are rented out to tourists, and boats cruise through protected waters.

The Greek Government is accused of having its head in the sand; it has been condemned by the European Court of Justice for failing to implement EU nature protection legislation. Meanwhile, WWF (Worldwide Fund for Nature), Archelon (the Sea Turtle Protection Society of Greece) and Medasset (Mediterranean Association to Save the Sea Turtles) continue their lobbying efforts. Volunteers from Archelon (www.archelon.gr) and National Marine Park provide informal beach wardens and run excellent education and volunteer programmes. For further information, visit the wildlife information centre at Gerakas Beach.

Visitors can also do the following:

- Avoid using umbrellas on dry sand (use the wet part of the beach).
- Do not enter nesting beaches between dusk and dawn, and avoid visiting Daphni beach.
- Be aware of boating trips – where they go and what's on offer.
- Seek information on the area's sea turtle conservation efforts and protective regulations.

Hotel Palatino (☎ 26950 27780; www.palatinohotel.gr; Kolokotroni 10; s/d €70/90; ♿) The marble floors, arched windows and plants provide an overall '80s experience, and many businesspeople choose to stay in these well-appointed rooms; they have an eye for great value.

Hotel Strada Marina (☎ 26950 42761; hotel@stradamarina.gr; Lombardou 14; s/d incl breakfast €85/130; ♿) This is your no-surprises, standard-style hotel with well-equipped rooms including TV and fridge. The inviting rooftop area has a small pool.

Also recommended:

Athina Apartments (☎ 26950 26809; athina_apts@yahoo.gr; 2 Agiou Louka; studio €50; ♿) Travellers have reported these basic, reasonably-priced studios, near the bus station.

Hotel Diana (☎ 26950 28547; Plateia Agiou Markou; s/d/tr incl breakfast €60/80/95; ♿) Dated, but comfortable and well-appointed in a central location.

Eating & Drinking

Argostoli's sweet shop windows entice with their range of the tooth-dissolving local nougat, *mandolato*. This is especially so along Alexandrou Roma, home also to some good cafés and *gyros* (Greek version of döner kebab) places. Touristy – and overpriced – restaurants line Plateia Agiou Markou. If you have transport, you're better off heading to one of the nearby villages (see boxed text, p711).

Arekia (☎ 26950 26346; mains under €10) Munch to the melodies of live *kantades* (serenades) and *arekia* (folk songs) at this entertaining place, a 1km walk north of Plateia Solomou along the waterfront. The spritely 80-something-year-old band member dallies with ditties to aid digestion (Greek-speakers will get a kick). Gargantuan portions of traditional Greek fare hit the right note.

Base (☎ 26950 42409; Plateia Agiou Markou; cappuccino €3.50) This hip place just gets hipper; it's the

alfresco hang-out among the younger Zantiot 'it' crowd.

There's a well-stocked supermarket on the corner of Filioti and Lombardou.

AROUND ZAKYNTHOS

Whether you're a culture vulture or sun-seeker, the best way to see the island is to hire a car and go exploring. Loggerhead turtles (see boxed text, opposite) come ashore to lay their eggs on the golden-sand beaches of the huge Bay of Laganas, a National Marine Park on Zakynthos' south coast, whereas party animals frequent Laganas, the highly developed, somewhat tacky resort. **Keri Beach** at Limni Keriou (not to be confused with Keri village further south) is a more attractive option, but the beach is narrow and stony. You'll find boat hire and a scuba diving centre here.

The **Vasilikos Peninsula** is the pretty green region southeast of Zakynthos Town, but it's being increasingly exploited by developers. It offers a number of ever-expanding settlements off the main road, with tavernas and accommodation. For beach bums, **Kaminia** is the first half-decent beach to consider. **Banana Beach**, a long and narrow strip of golden sand, offers plenty of action: crowds, watersports and umbrellas. Zakynthos' best beach is the long, sandy and much-coveted **Gerakas**. It's on the other side of the peninsula, facing Laganas Bay. This is one of the main turtle-nesting beaches, and access to the beach is forbidden between dusk and dawn during May and October (see boxed text, opposite).

With your own transport, you can semi-escape from the tourist hype by visiting the accessible west coast coves, such as **Limnionas** or **Kambi** (the latter has some popular, but

tacky, tavernas ideally positioned for the sunsets). The most peaceful option is the quieter northeast coast around **Agios Nikolaos**, where development is proceeding slowly. Known primarily as the ferry point, this tiny place has a few food and drink dwellings, a small stretch of beach with clear water, free sunbeds and a pretty islet.

The inland areas in the island's north and west make for a fun and interesting visit, and provide a touch of rural tranquillity and great food (see boxed text, p711). Villages and settlements – some of which survived the 1953 earthquake – are scattered through the scrub and pines; here, the welcoming locals have maintained their cultural traditions and sell honey and other seasonal products. Churches and monasteries feature highly along this village route: **St Nikolaos** in **Kiliomeno** features an unusual roofless campanile; the bell tower of **Agios Leon** (in the village of the same name) was formerly a windmill. The small and charming hamlet of **Exo Hora** has a fascinating congregation of dried wells, and what is reputed to be the oldest olive tree on the island. **Volimes** is the unashamed sales centre for all traditional products.

Sleeping

Tartaruga Camping (☎ 26950 51967; www.tartaruga-camping.com; camp sites per adult/car/tent €5/3/3.60, r per person €20-45) A great place for happy campers – amid terraced olive groves, pines and plane trees that sprawl as far as the sea. It has a small store and a café, and rooms for rent. Well-signed on the road from Laganas to Keri.

Anna's Villas (☎ 6977236243, 6977236243; d €60-90; Limni Keriou) Two good-value studio apartments, in a garden setting. They're set a block or so back from Limni Keriou's main drag, but are close to the action.

SHIPWRECK BEACH & BLUE CAVES

The famous Shipwreck Beach (Navagio), whose photos grace virtually every tourist brochure about Zakynthos, is at the northwest tip of the island. It is a tad overhyped, if splendid, beach, and it's downright unappealing when round-the-island excursion boats from Zakynthos Town bring trippers en masse. Your best bet is to take a small-boat trip to see Shipwreck Beach and/or the Blue Caves (in the island's northeast). The northeastern coastal road is lined with hawkers offering the 'same-trip-better-boat' deals. **Potamitis Trips** (☎ 26950 31132) offers good glass-bottom boat trips at Cape Skinari, 3km beyond Agios Nikolaos (Blue Caves only, €7.50; Shipwreck Beach and Blue Caves, €15).

In any case, for a bungee-jump-style adrenalin rush, visit the precariously perched lookout platform over Shipwreck Beach on the west coast (signposted between Anafonitria and Volimes).

Seaside Apartments (☎ 26950 22827; www.seaside.net.gr; 2-/4-person studio €70/90) These excellent-value bright and artistic rooms are also in Limni Keriou.

Revera Villas (☎ 26950 27524, 6974875171; www.revera-zante.com; d €75, studio €85, 4-/6-person villa €145/200; ♿) This delightful complex of Italian-feel villas is located 4km southwest of Limni Keriou village (and 500m southwest of Keri village), just off the road to the lighthouse. The individually decorated, luxury rooms incorporate old-style stone elements. There are Jacuzzi baths, a recently installed pool and a private patch of forest to amble in.

Earth Sea & Sky (through Ionian Eco Villagers – www.relaxing-holidays.com, ☎ 0871 711 5065 in the UK) can arrange short- or long-term stays in villas and cottages around

the Vasilikos Peninsula. Alternatively, you could try your luck for a spontaneous booking with the same company at its wildlife information kiosk in Gerakas.

In the north, stop for a night at Cape Skinari, 3km north of Agios Nikolaos. Two **windmills** (☎ 26950 31132; 2-/4-person windmill €90/120; ♿) are an accommodation novelty, with great views. A nearby snack bar–café and a lovely swimming area (down steep steps) serve visitors. It's the departure point for boat trips to the Blue Caves and shipwreck beach (see boxed text, p713).

In Agios Nikolaos, near Cape Skinari, the friendly, English-speaking hosts at **Panorama Studios** (☎ 26950 31013; www.gozakynthos.gr/studios/panorama; d €45) offer basic studio accommodation on the main road 600m uphill from the port.